Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

# WESTFIELD WAR MEMORIAL VILLAGE, LANCASTER

**Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 19**



*A soldier helps a comrade. Sculpture - Jennie Delahunt (Lancaster, Storey Institute), unveiled 1926*

Every town has its war memorial to the casualties who died. There is a separate leaflet on *Lancaster War Memorial* (No. 18 in this series). Very few towns have a memorial to those who survived but found it hard to return to family life and their community. In Lancaster the Westfield War Memorial Village helps some of these survivors.

Soon after Armistice Day in November 1918 a committee in Lancaster met to raise funds to build a new settlement for Lancaster's ex-servicemen with such severe disabilities that it would be difficult for them to earn a living on their own.

Thomas Mawson (the renowned town planner and landscape designer, 1861–1933) had advocated such villages in his book *An Imperial Obligation* (1917). His own son had been killed at Ypres. There is a Guide to *Thomas Mawson of Lancaster* (No 46 in this series).

The critical link was between Mawson and Herbert Storey (of the wealthy Lancaster industrial family) that had started when Mawson redesigned the west gardens at the Storeys' house at Bailrigg (now part of Lancaster University). The Storey family (with many military connections and a son who returned safely) gave the 16-acre Westfield Estate and House to the venture and then public donations flowed in.

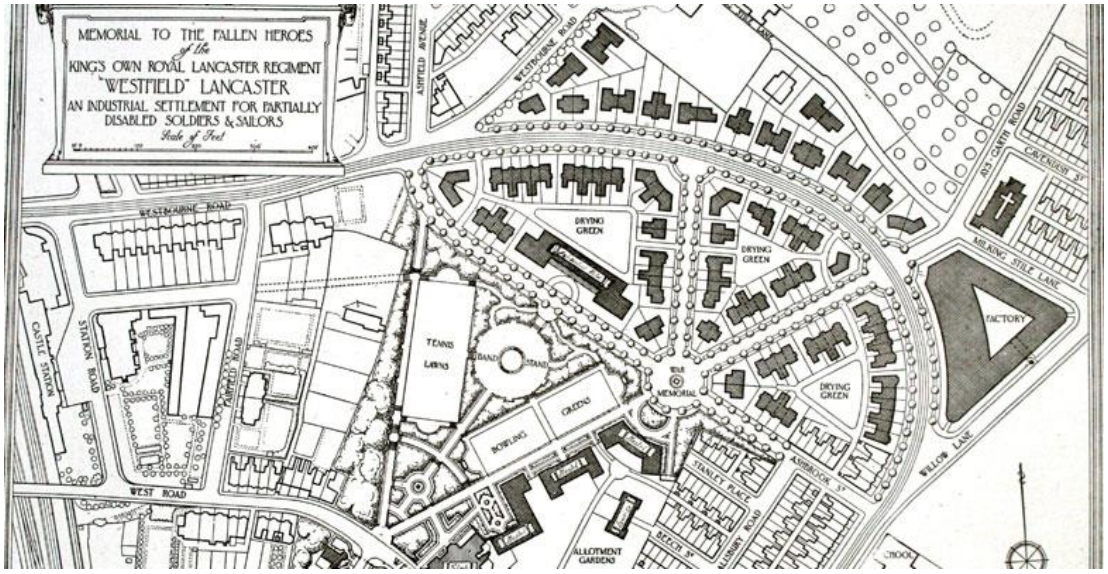
Building started in 1919 and the village was opened by Field Marshal Earl Haig in 1924. Some families paid for a whole house. Thirty-one others resulted from many small donations. The Leyel Golden Ballot (a charitable lottery) raised enough to build 21 cottages.

The scheme united the town's major philanthropists (including Storey and Williamson money) and numerous small donors. It united the families whose sons never returned and those whose sons did. Priority for the new houses was given to those from the local regiment (The King's Own Royal Regiment) and then others from the Lancaster area.




*Old Pals Cottage*

By 1943 there were 68 houses and cottages. Others were added after the Second World War and in the 1990s. Some sales of houses were required in the 1980s. Westfield House (parts of it demolished) has variously been a hostel, part of the training centre and the recreational hub of the village where the Village Council meets. A church and factory were unrealised aims. Since 1982 Northern Counties Housing Association has managed the houses.




*Mawson's original plan for the Village*

The housing provision has been very successful – semi-detached houses and cottages, many named after battles including the Falklands campaign, are immaculate and near the heart of town. There were houses for married couples and a hostel for the unmarried. The overall design is partly garden city (e.g. Letchworth) and partly model village (e.g. Port Sunlight). There is plenty of space and light, a bowling green, tree-lined avenues and gardens. Mawson was a friend of Raymond Unwin, one of the pioneers of the Garden City Movement.



*Entrance to the Memorial Village*

The provision of employment and training for disabled ex-servicemen was a more difficult task, yet it was important for Mawson that there should be help for those who, because of their injuries, could not return to their former trades.

Which skills or trades would suit those with different physical and mental impairments? Clock making and repairing, tailoring, pipe making and repairing, and making umbrellas were all tried for a time.  A training centre and workshop were set up.

Unfortunately, the Government did not favour such war memorial villages. Their priority was to subsidise council housing nationally. The Ministry of Pensions supported those with disabilities wherever they lived. The Ministry of Labour set up general training centres across the country. Lacking government support, the employment side of the Village was less successful. Trade unions objected to what they saw as competition from subsidised workers and some local firms were hostile on similar grounds.












A war memorial village in Derby was set up in 1947 but Mawson's dream really did not catch on nationally. The preference, in 1919 as now, has more often been to support and integrate those with particular needs within the wider community rather than to create a separate community specially tailored for them. Arguably the most important effect of Westfield has been invisible and unrecorded – not the 113 houses, open space or workshops. It is the quiet caring for those in difficulty, comrade to comrade, as in Delahunt's sculpture. Westfield War Memorial Village has been meeting its residents' needs for over 90 years.

The Village is on West Road about 200 metres from the Platform 3 exit from Lancaster Railway Station. For satnav use LA1 5PE; parking nearby is scarce.

The Village's extensive website is at https://westfieldmemorialvillage.co.uk

**Text – Gordon Clark. Photgraphs – Gordon Clark, except for the Mawson plan from the Village's website. Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2022).**
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