



PARIS HERITAGE SIGHTS AND INSIGHTS

42 PARIS IN THE GREAT WAR

The Paris heritage strolls



A JOURNEY OF MEMORY

>>> In August 1914, the French were feeling resigned to war, although they believed it would be short. The more optimistic among them were shouting "To Berlin!" Paris did not feel under threat. The advance of German troops as far as the Marne was to plunge the capital into war, however, with General Gallieni standing ready to defend the city. After the first success of the Battle of the Marne, when the Paris taxi cabs drove their way into history, Paris saw its role as capital restored. Regiments heading for the front would pass through the city, soldiers on leave would come there in search of a good time and the boulevards provided venues for military processions organised to boost the population's morale.

>>> Gradually, the hustle and bustle of Paris life resumed as before, although with women now centre stage, driving trams and trucks, delivering the mail... and sitting on café terraces.

>>> Paris was to be relatively spared by the war until 1918. The situation changed, however, with the shelling of the capital by German artillery in March 1918, causing considerable destruction and civilian losses. "Big Bertha" left a profound mark in people's memories, not just on the urban landscape.

>>> Finally, Paris was the setting of major festivities to mark the end of the conflict: the Armistice of 11 November 1918, the signature of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919 and the Victory Procession of 14 July 1919. And it was under the Arc de Triomphe that the most poignant symbol of the war was to find its place.

>>> In the following years, the City of Paris was to give pride of place to statues of the great men of the war, as well as putting up memorials to the fallen in district town halls.



>>> (8th) >>> Place Charles de Gaulle

1 Arc de Triomphe. Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

The idea of the Unknown Soldier first appeared at the end of 1916 and the decision was made in 1919 to bury the mortal remains of an anonymous soldier in the Pantheon. War veterans were unanimous in their rejection of the choice, and insisted that he should be buried under the Arc de Triomphe. A body was chosen on 10 November 1920, in a fort in Verdun, and brought to Paris where, after a ceremony at the Pantheon, it was provisionally interred in one of the pillars of the Arc de Triomphe. The body was placed in its final resting place on 28 January 1921. The date of 11 November, the Armistice, was made a national holiday in 1922 in memory of all those who had lost their lives in the Great War. The following year, the idea was put forward of an eternal memorial flame to symbolise this remembrance. It was lit for the first time on 11 November 1923 and has been rekindled every evening since then.



>>> (8th) >>> on the corner of Avenue des Champs-Élysées and Avenue Winston Churchill

2 Statue of Clemenceau

At the initiative of the City of Paris, the project for a monument was put forward in 1930 after the death of the great man who had always refused any form of glorification during his lifetime. It was entrusted to François Cogné who chose to portray the man in action during the war. The statue, placed on a block of sandstone from the Forest of Fontainebleau, expresses the unflinching determination that was to lead to victory. The sculptor drew inspiration for his design from the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, with his scarf blowing in the wind taking the place of the wings in the ancient stature, and the folds of his greatcoat evoking those of the drapery. After some hesitations, the final location was settled upon and the monument was inaugurated unofficially on 23 May 1932, in the wake of the assassination of President Paul Doumer. The official inauguration was held on 24 November 1932, the anniversary of the death of the "Tiger", in the presence of President Albert Lebrun.



>>> (8th) >>> Place de la Concorde, at the start of Cours la Reine

3 Statue of Albert I

Albert I of the Belgians was venerated among war veterans, and his accidental death on 17 February 1934 stunned public opinion. Marshall Lyautey chaired a national committee in charge of raising the necessary funds to put up a monument. The subscription received the backing of veterans' associations and was a success. The City of Paris chose a location fit for a king, on Place de la Concorde at the start of Cours-la-Reine. The following year, in a national competition open to all French sculptors, Armand Martial was chosen. The equestrian statue of the King stands on a pedestal adorned with two bas-reliefs portraying the martyrdom of the cities of Belgium in 1914 and the victory of 1918. On account of the International Exposition of 1937, the inauguration was postponed. It was held on 12 October 1938 in the presence of Leopold III, King of the Belgians.



>>> (8th) >>> Place de la Concorde

4 Statues of Strasbourg and Lille

During the war of 1870, the statue symbolising the city of Strasbourg under siege attracted genuine worship. After the annexation, it embodied the ideal of the patriot striking back. During the First World War, the statue of Lille, another occupied city, received the same attention. For the National Liberation Loan, on 20 October 1918, the statues were shown in front of the Place de la Concorde covered with the trophies of war: Lille, which had been freed by the English, was set out with flags and flowers, while Strasbourg was still in mourning. They were illuminated in December 1918.



>>> (9th) >>> 12, Boulevard des Capucines

5 Café de la Paix

The Café de la Paix was initially the café of the Grand Hôtel, inaugurated in 1862, with its name echoing the slogan of the times,

"L'Empire c'est la paix" (the Empire is peace). Pre-1914, it saw a chic, cosmopolitan clientele and all those who counted in the arts in Paris. During the war, it was the ideal spot from which to watch the military processions going up the boulevards. In these years, its terrace was frequented by women and by officers of all nationalities: "The Society of Nations would already seem to have been created in this little corner of Paris. The Italian and the Belgian, Portuguese and Serb, Russian and Canadian, the citizen of London and of New York, the Scotsman and the Japanese, the Algerian infantryman and the hussar, the cavalry corps and the artillery, the aviator and the mountain commando, all races, all armies and all languages mixed together fraternally." (*L'illustration*, 26 January 1918) Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau is said to have watched the festivities marking the signature of the Versailles Treaty on 28 June 1919 from the window of a first-floor lounge.



>>> (4th) >>> 13, Rue des Barres

6 Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais Church

In the early years of the war, Paris suffered sporadic bombing from planes or zeppelins, causing few victims and limited damage. The attacks intensified in the course of 1918, however, and became much more murderous, with the installation of the "Big Bertha" long-range canons which started shelling Paris from 23 March 1918 onwards. During the service on Good Friday, 29 March, a shell

fell on Saint-Gervais Church, killing 90 and injuring many others, including a large number of women and children. Almost half a million Parisians left the city to seek refuge in the provinces. A committee decided to erect a commemorative monument in one of the chapels, which was inaugurated in March 1922.

On 11 April 1918, a shell fell on the maternity ward of Baudelocque Hospital (125, Boulevard de Port-Royal, 14th arrondissement), killing twenty. A commemorative plaque was placed on the outside wall of the hospital on the corner with Rue du Faubourg Saint-Jacques.



>>> (5th) >>> 21, Place du Panthéon

7 Town Hall of the 5th Arrondissement

The decoration of the Memorial Hall was ordered in 1933 by the City of Paris from Émile Aubry who created his *Homage to the War Dead*. The painting won the Medal of Honour at the 1934 Salon des Artistes Français. The painting combines two symbolic references, the religious and the patriotic: "the stiff body of a soldier propped up by a woman in a modern-day *pietà*, framed on either side by muddied soldiers with resigned expressions and anguished, innocent young girls." The two soldiers are infantrymen, one from 1914 with his cap and the other from 1918 with his helmet, against a backdrop of ruins and a devastated landscape evoking the Front.



>>> (7th) >>> 12, Place du Président Mithouard

8 Saint-François-Xavier Church, Chapel of the Dead

In response to the secular tributes put up in the town halls of the arrondissements of the city, certain Paris parishes chose to honour their fallen. At Saint-François-Xavier, for example, a Roll of Honour was kept of the heroes who had fallen for their country. It was then decided to install it permanently in the Chapel of the Dead of the church. In 1920, the vault was decorated in the style of a triumphal arch by painter and decorator G. L. Claude. The walls were entrusted to Henri Pinta, winner of the 1884 Prix de Rome and a member of the parish. The first of his compositions shows a soldier dying in the arms of a nurse, likening his sacrifice for the homeland to the Passion of the Christ. The landscape is reduced to just the bare earth with a few stakes rising up from it, referring to the desolation of the battlefields. Above him, surrounded by clouds, Christ carrying his cross looks back with compassion at the dead man. In the other composition, the resuscitated hero carried by angels and draped in the French flag is welcomed by Christ. Four angels frame the two compositions, symbolising the years of conflict.



>>> (7th) >>> Place Vauban

9 Gallieni Statue

Having died in 1916, it was only natural that the Defender of Paris should be commemorated after the war. A subscription launched in 1920 raised a large sum to be used to build a monument designed by sculptor Jean Boucher, composed of a full-length statue of the general carried high on a shield, as in traditional iconography, by four caryatids representing his four victorious campaigns: Tonkin, Sudan, Madagascar and Paris. The City of Paris had it installed in 1926 on the Esplanade des Invalides. It was transferred to Place Vauban on the occasion of the 1937 International Exhibition, where it faces the monument dedicated to Marshall Fayolle, also by Jean Boucher.



>>> (10th) >>> Place du 11 Novembre 1918

10 Gare de l'Est

When the time came for mobilisation, on 2 August 1914, the Gare de l'Est saw its strategic importance restored for the full duration of the conflict. Over the years, artist Maximilien Luce portrayed the hustle and bustle of life in and around the station, with civilian refugees, recruits headed for the front, the injured, soldiers on leave... Today, the station has kept a reminder of this activity in the form of a painting by Albert Herter, *August 1914*, hung high up in the Departure Lounge. It was the work of an American artist, dedicated to the memory of his son, a volunteer killed on 13 June 1918. The painting was installed on 7 June 1926 in a ceremony attended by Marshall Joffre.



>>> (14th) >>> 36, Rue Guilleminot

11 Notre-Dame-du-Travail Church, Chapel of the Dead

Located in a working-class district, Notre-Dame-du-Travail Church was built at the initiative of Father Soulange-Bodin, a key figure of Social Catholicism. His successor, Father Chaptal, was to be particularly active during this period. The church was hit hard by the conflict, with three of its curates dying on the front. In 1919, Chaptal ordered two large paintings from painter Lucien Simon, *The Sacrifice* and *L'Apothéose*, both composed of two registers and painted with a spirited, vibrant touch. In the first of the paintings, there is the familiar association between the death of the soldier and the Christ's martyrdom, but the scene here shows the harsh reality of the trenches and the young lives cut short there. *L'Apothéose*, meanwhile, shows the collateral victims of the conflict, widows, orphans and the elderly, during a church service, while above them, the fallen warrior is welcomed to Paradise and crowned with laurels by Christ.



>>> (15th) >>> 31, Rue Péclet

12 Town Hall of the 15th Arrondissement. War Memorial

Launched in 1931, the war memorial project was entrusted to sculptor and architect Charles Yrondi who chose to extol the courage of the soldiers: his vision embraced not only the soldiers of the Great War, but also those of 1712 and 1792 who, like in 1914, had saved the country from disaster in the face of invasion. On the left can be seen Marshall Villars, the victor of Denain, with Louis XIV, Danton and Vergniaud of the Convention with the troops of Valmy behind them; in the centre, the Great War soldier leans on the Wall of the Homeland with the home he defended symbolised on the right by the woman and child. The monument was inaugurated on 17 June 1934 in the presence of General Gouraud, Military Governor of Paris, and of the President of the Municipal Council.



>>> (12th) >>> 45 bis, Avenue de la Belle-Gabrielle

13 Tropical Garden (Bois de Vincennes). Colonial War Memorials

The contribution to the war effort of troops from the colonial empire was acknowledged by the nation in commemorative monuments set in a site already dedicated to the colonies. A Monument to Colonial Soldiers and an Indochinese Memorial Temple (1920), a Monument to the Christian Indochinese and a Monument to the Cambodians and Laotians Fallen for France (1921), a Monument to the Madagascar Soldier (1925) and a Monument to the Black Soldiers (undated) were built and inaugurated. The garden is currently being renovated.

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ALSO WORTH SEEING:

- >>> (4th) >>> 12, Rue de Rivoli commemorative plaque of the shelling of 12 April 1918
- >>> (7th) >>> Place-Joffre Monument to Marshal Joffre, Maxime Réal del Sarte, 1939
- >>> (7th) >>> Place du Président-Mithouard Monument to General Mangin, Raymond Martin, 1954
- >>> (8th) >>> Place de la Reine Astrid Monument of the Gratitude of Belgium to France, Isidore De Rudder, 1923
- >>> (12th) >>> Sainte-Marguerite Church >>> 36, Rue Saint Bernard anonymous stained-glass windows surrounding the war memorial
- >>> (16th) >>> Place des Etats-Unis Monument to the American Volunteers, Jean Boucher, 1923
- >>> (16th) >>> Place du Trocadéro et du 11 Novembre Monument to Marshall Foch, equestrian statue, Robert Wlérick and Raymond Martin, 1951
- >>> (16th) >>> Place du Trocadéro et du 11 Novembre Monument to the Glory of the French Armies of 1914-1918, Paul Landowski, 1956
- >>> (16th) >>> Place de Colombie Monument to Alexander I of Yugoslavia and Peter I of Serbia, Maxime Réal del Sarte, 1936
- >>> (17th) >>> Saint-Michel-des-Batignolles Church >>> 3, Place Saint-Jean stained-glass window by Henri-Marcel Magne, Saint Michel weighing the souls of the soldiers, 1929
- >>> (18th) >>> Clignancourt Church >>> 2, Place Jules Joffrin Chapel of the Souls in Purgatory, paintings by Charles Louis Kratke, 1917

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- 1 Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- 2 Statue of Clemenceau, François Cogné
- 3 Statue of Albert I, Armand Martial
- 4 Statues of Strasbourg and Lille, James Pradier
- 5 Café de la Paix
- 6 Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais church, commemorative chapel
- 7 City Hall of the 5th arrondissement, Souvenir Room
- 8 Saint-François-Xavier Church, Chapel of the Dead
- 9 Statue of Maréchal Gallieni, Jean Boucher



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