

Introduction

Each year, on the 11th of November normally, the Republic of Mauritius observes the Armistice Day together with Remembrance Day, in tribute to the combatants of the First and Second World Wars at the War Memorial of Curepipe (also known in French as the “*Monument aux Morts*” or the “*Monument des Soldats Inconnus*”). This bronze sculpture in front of the Royal College Curepipe, both designated as National Heritage, represents two soldiers: a ‘Tommy’ and a ‘Poilu’ holding together, a wreath of laurels and olives. It is mounted on a concrete pedestal on which are affixed 3 plates, the first one bearing the Coat of Arms of Mauritius while the two others are both engraved with the names of 48 Mauritians who died in the First World War.

Mauritius and the First World War

- **28 July 1914:** Start of First World War (the Great War).
- **5 August 1914:** Proclamation confirming that war has broken out between United Kingdom and Austria and Hungary, which led to many Mauritians volunteering for enlistment in the British and French armies.
- **September 1914:** The first Mauritian casualties were reported.
- **11 November 1918:** At around 9 p.m., a dispatch from the Reuters agency was displayed in front of the police station, announcing the End of the War, that is, the Armistice.
- **As at 1918:** Approximately 2,220 Mauritians participated in the First World War, with the number of casualties estimated to be around 100.

The War Memorial

- **2 August 1916:** Even before the Armistice, some personalities from Port-Louis mentioned the need to erect a monument in memory of the deceased and a call for designs was made to local artists.
- **September 1916:** Sir Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell, Governor of Mauritius, expressed his wish to erect a monument in memory of former students of the Royal College Curepipe who died in the War, during the Prize Giving ceremony of the establishment.
- **29 December 1916:** Sir Hesketh Bell wrote a letter to an eminent artist in London, James Alexander Stevenson (also known as Myrander) requesting him to erect a monument in bronze inspired by a caricature representing two Allied soldiers, a French Poilu and an English Tommy.
- **8 November 1917:** Letter from J.A. Stevenson to Sir Hesketh Bell accepting the offer. A detailed description of the monument was also provided therein, with the project then estimated at 1575 pounds.
- **1920s:** J.A. Stevenson started to work on the monument after his discharge from army duty and finished it only in 1922. In the meantime, the price of bronze and other materials had increased considerably and, in the end, the project cost the colony 2241 pounds.
- **15 April 1922:** The War Memorial was unveiled in front of the Royal College Curepipe in presence of Sir Hesketh Bell, the Consul of France, heads of the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant Church, members of the legislative assembly, the rector of the Royal College and many other dignitaries.

Post 1922

- Impressed with the War Memorial of Mauritius, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission awarded J.A. Stevenson contracts for 4 memorials in Nairobi, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam and Abuja, which he built respectively in **1924, 1926, 1927** and **1931**.
- A field gun, more precisely a 7.7 cm Feldkanone (FK) 96 neuer Art, bearing the inscriptions “*GERMAN WAR TROPHY Captured on the western front during THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1916 presented to the COLONY of MAURITIUS by the wAR OFFICE*”, was at some point in time placed before the War Memorial.
- **15 April 2012:** The 90th Anniversary of the War Memorial was celebrated on a national level.
- **13 May to 21 May 2016:** The exhibition “*Bleuets et Coquelicots*”, part of the project “*L’île Maurice et la Grande Guerre*” initiated by l’École du Centre-Collège Pierre Poivre and Le Lycée Labourdonnais since 2014, was held at l’Institut Français de Maurice which comprised a mobile « *Monument du Centenaire* », an exhibition and a collage in tribute to the engagement of Mauritians in various allied armies.
- **1 November 2018:** The book “*Les Mauriciens dans la Grande Guerre (1914-1918)*” was launched, wherein the authors, Christine Champton-Ahnee and Christine Renard, highlighted the deliberate omission from the War Memorial of several names of volunteers, particularly men of colour.
- **11 November 2018:** The 100th anniversary of the end of World War I was observed on national level with a laying of wreath ceremony at the War Memorial of Curepipe and several other activities.
- **15 April 2022:** 100th Anniversary of the War Memorial.