

How and why we remember those who have built up Britain

Background Information

From the 17th century onwards just over 600 tombs and other substantial monuments, and more than 300 memorial stones and stained glass windows have been installed to commemorate Britons of the past who have built up our country. An early guide book of 1723 claims that no other church has so many notable burials and that the visitor is led 'to contemplate those glorious British heroes, to whose lasting Honour most of these monuments were erected'. Some of these 'heroes' are not now so well-known as they once were yet the process of commemorating in the Abbey those who have made a particular contribution to national life continues. The vast majority of those remembered are men but over the last 30 years 14 women have been individually commemorated.

The decision as to who may receive a memorial in the Abbey rests with the Dean, who consults widely. The last full body to be buried in the Abbey was that of the Unknown Warrior in 1920. Professor Stephen Hawking's ashes were buried next to Sir Isaac Newton in June 2018 – this is an extremely rare event. In addition to graves and tombs, memorials take many different forms: statues, tablets on the wall, floor stones, plaques, stained glass windows and bronze medallions.

British Values

The Abbey is the resting place of more than 3000 great Britons: what better place to explore the concept of British Values?

- How Christianity has motivated many of those remembered for their contribution to our country.
- How attitudes to 'the Great and the Good' may change over time.
- Pupils are prompted to link the stories of those commemorated to the five 'British Values' of democracy, individual liberty, rule of law, respect and tolerance.

How it works

This flexible tour can be approached in a variety of ways to suit your learning objectives. Discussion points are built into the 18 'hotspots' marking key burials or commemorations. Links to further individual or paired activities, to be completed online, support selected 'hotspots'.

Your pupils can:

1. Click on 'hotspots' as they explore, free-style, to discover famous Britons of the past buried or remembered in the Abbey.
2. Use the menu to select individuals buried or remembered in key locations in the Abbey: the Great West Door, Nave, Quire, Crossing, North Transept, Lady Chapel and Poets' Corner.
3. Research those buried or remembered under the following themes:

Democracy – Dame Millicent Fawcett, Grave of Unknown Warrior, William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli

Rule of Law – Lord Mansfield, Sir Robert Peel

Individual Liberty – Martin Luther King Jr, Lord Shaftesbury, Unknown Warrior, Winston Churchill, David Livingstone, Olaudah Equiano, William Wilberforce, George Eliot, Charles Dickens

Respect – Unknown Warrior, Charles Darwin, Nelson Mandela, Ben Jonson

Tolerance – Queen 's Seat , Oscar Wilde, Poets' Corner

OR

Statesmen and Abolitionists:

- Winston Churchill 1874 – 1965 memorial stone in the Nave
- William Wilberforce 1759 – 1833 – burial and statue off the North Transept
- Olaudah Equiano 1745 – 1797 – memorial tablet in St Margaret's Church
- William Murray Lord Mansfield 1705 – 1793 (Lord Chief Justice of England) – burial and statue in the North Transept

Victorians:

- Anthony Ashley Cooper 7th Earl of Shaftesbury 1801 – 1885 – statue in the Nave
- Angela Burdett-Coutts 1814 – 1906 – burial in the Nave
- Dame Millicent Fawcett 1847 – 1929 – bronze memorial in a Nave chapel
- David Livingstone 1813 – 1873 – burial (heart left in Africa) in the Nave
- Sir Robert Peel 1788 – 1850 – statue in North Transept
- William Gladstone 1809 – 1898 grave and statue in North Transept
- Benjamin Disraeli 1804 – 1881 statue in North Transept

Scientists:

- Newton 1642 – 1747 – burial in the Nave
- Darwin 1809 – 1882 – burial in the Nave
- Stephen Hawking 1942 – 2018 – burial of ashes in the Nave

Armed Forces:

- Unknown Warrior – burial in 1920 in the Nave
- General James Wolfe 1727 – 1759 – statue off the North Transept
- Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson 1758 – 1805 – wax effigy off the North Transept

Writers:

- Chaucer c.1343 – 1400 – burial in Poets' Corner
- Ben Jonson 1574 – 1637 – buried upright in the Nave; monument on wall in Poets' Corner
- Charles Dickens 1812 – 1879 – burial in Poets' Corner
- George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) 1819 – 1880 memorial stone in Poets' Corner
- Oscar Wilde 1854 – 1900 memorial window in Poets' Corner
- Lewis Carroll 1832 – 1908 – memorial stone in Poets' Corner