

Featured Felines: Cats in Wartime (2006)

(page checked July 2026)

including

The *Animals in War* Memorial at Park Lane, London
Australian *Animals in War* Memorial, Canberra
Woodbank Memorial Park, Stockport, UK
and brief notes of other tributes to animals in wartime

The *Animals in War* Memorial Park Lane, London

A striking memorial has been erected in London, England, to all the animals and other creatures that have been caught up in humankind's wars and have served, suffered and perished as a result. The idea for it came from author [Jilly Cooper](#) and some of her friends, a group of influential personalities in their own right, who in 1996 started the 'Animals in War' Memorial Fund with Anne, HRH The Princess Royal, as patron. Jilly herself donated to the fund all the royalties from her successful book *Animals at War*.

After a long and challenging nationwide fundraising operation to raise the £1 million or so needed, the Portland stone and cast-bronze memorial — designed by David Backhouse, one of Britain's leading sculptors — was unveiled on 24 November 2004 by Princess Anne, on its grassy site in central Park Lane, London. The fund will provide for its maintenance in perpetuity.

There's a cat to be seen among the animal silhouettes (*included in the images below*), and a mention on the memorial of the PDSA's Dickin Medal for valour.



The inscription carved on the front or inside of the memorial reads:

ANIMALS IN WAR

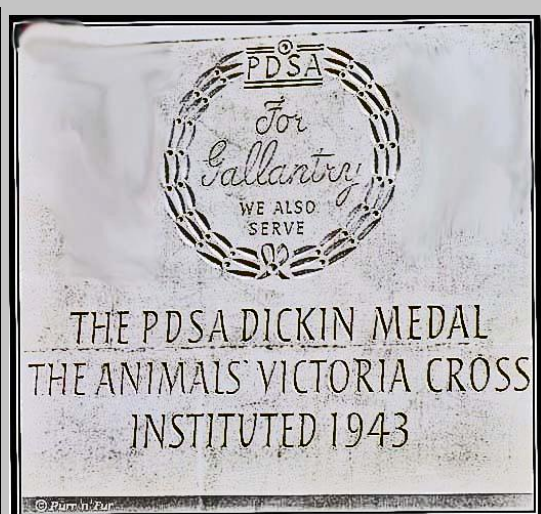
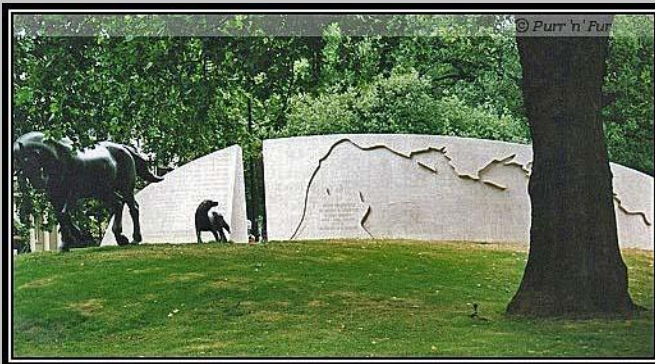
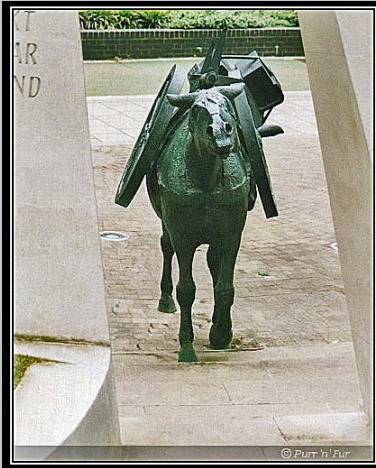
This memorial is dedicated to all the animals that served and died alongside British and Allied forces in wars and campaigns throughout time.

They had no choice.

Upon the rear, or the outside, of the memorial are these words:

Many and various animals were employed to support British and Allied Forces in wars and campaigns over the centuries, and as a result millions died. From the pigeon to the elephant, they all played a vital role in every region of the world in the cause of human freedom.

Their contribution must never be forgotten.



As can be seen from the photo (*above right*), the PDSA's Dickin Medal is featured on the *Animals in War* memorial. Twelve recipients of the medal are buried at the PDSA Animal Cemetery at Ilford, including Simon of HMS *Amethyst*, the only cat to have been awarded the medal. At a ceremony in December 2007 the cemetery was reopened after extensive refurbishment, and an account and photographs of the event can be found at [this separate page](#). Simon's own story is [here](#).

Links

- [Animals in War Memorial](#) home site, with excellent photos throughout.
- [Wikipedia](#) has some more images
- *Daily Telegraph* 1 Nov 2004: [They served and suffered for us](#) – an interesting account of the memorial and the Princess Royal's views (*archived copy*)
- *Daily Telegraph* 25 Nov 2004: [War memorial for all brave creatures great and small.](#) (*archived copy*)
- *Daily Telegraph* (Comment) 25 Nov 2004: [Salute the dogs of war](#) (*archived copy*)

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Australian *Animals in War* Memorial Canberra



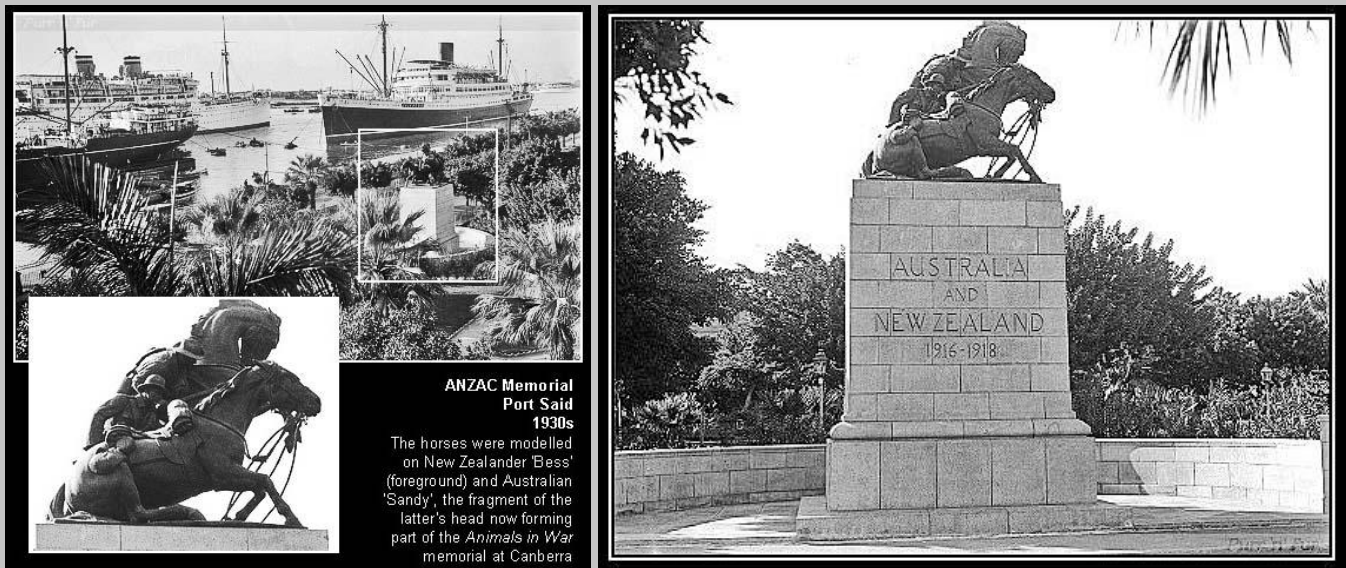
Animals have played myriad vital roles in Australia's armed forces, from faithful companions to trusted guards and early-warning systems, and since 2009 Australia has had its own memorial to those animals. The statue, of a bronze horse's head mounted on a tear-shaped granite plinth, is placed in the Australian War Memorial's (AWM) sculpture garden in Canberra, the capital city. The bronze horse head was originally a part of an ANZAC memorial dedicated to the Australian Light Horse Brigade (ALHB) and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles (NZMR) in Port Said, Egypt in 1932, where it was unveiled on behalf of both governments by Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes. Charles Web Gilbert won the design competition for the original memorial in 1923, along with a prize of 250 guineas, but died before it was completed. The statue was attacked and destroyed by Egyptian rioters in December 1956 during the Suez conflict; later the remaining pieces were returned to Australia and became part of the AWM's collection.



It's said that the model for the original sculpture was Sandy, General Sir William Bridges' charger from World War I, who was the only one from the thousands of Australian horses in that war to make it back home. Now the sculpture forms the upper part of the new memorial, designed by Canberra artist Steven Holland. The missing parts are evident and deliberately so, giving an emotive and poignant reminder of war.

The Australian RSPCA, which lobbied for 10 years for such a memorial to the contribution of animals in war, said it 'believes the Memorial to Animals in War cements in stone the significance of animals in our society and pays homage to a bond between man and beast that no war could fracture'.

Notes: As seen in the images here (from the US Library of Congress), two horses and troopers formed the sculpture of the original Port Said memorial, representing both ANZAC nations and losses sustained in Palestine and Syria 1916–18 by the ALHB and NZMR of the Desert Mounted Corps. Also remembered were the Imperial Camel Corps and the Australian Flying Corps.



- Sandy, already mentioned above and said to have been the model for the Australian equine representation, was first embarked to Gallipoli, where General Bridges died from wounds received. Sandy, probably never put ashore there, was transferred to Alexandria and thence to France, but it had been Bridges' dying wish that his favourite charger be sent home at the end of the war, and in 1917 the Minister for Defence instigated his return. After a spell of quarantine in England, he arrived in late 1918 to spend his last years near Melbourne but, increasingly debilitated and going blind, he was put down in 1923. His head and neck were preserved and became part of the AWM collection.
- The second horse, of which nothing survives from the 1956 incident, was apparently modelled on Bess, the mount of Lt Col Guy Powles of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles. Of all the horses sent from New Zealand, just four returned, and of these only Bess had left with the earliest contingent of the NZEF in 1914 – she's also believed to be the only NZ horse to have remained with the same master throughout her service. At war's end she accompanied Powles to France, Germany and England (where it's understood she took part in the victory parade), before finally returning to her homeland in 1920. She collapsed and died aged 24 in 1934 while out with Powles. His faithful mare was buried where she fell, and a cairn was erected at the spot. It still stands at Bulls, North Island and has latterly become a focus of remembrance and recognition of the contribution made by all New Zealand horses to the war effort — since about 2005 memorial events have been held there on Anzac Day.
- Though not entirely faithful to the original, replicas of the Port Said memorial were erected at Albany, Western Australia and on ANZAC Parade in Canberra ACT in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Links

- ABC News, May 2009: [War memorial honours animals great and small](#) - with audio clip.
- Australian War Memorial: [Animals in war memorial](#)
- Military History and Heritage Victoria: [And only one came home](#) (Sandy). *(archived copy)*
- New Zealand Mounted Rifles website: [Bess and the ANZAC Memorial](#) *(archived copy)*
- Western Front Association: Bess the horse: [A true war horse](#). *(archived copy)*
- Heritage New Zealand: [Memorial to Bess](#).
- [Australian RSPCA](#).



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The Purple Cross

The Australian RSPCA has its own bravery awards for animals, the highest of which is the Purple Cross. It's been awarded ten times, most recently in 2015 to Smoky, a WW2 Yorkshire terrier;. See [this link](#) for some more details about the award; also [Wikipedia](#).



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Woodbank Memorial Park

Stockport, UK

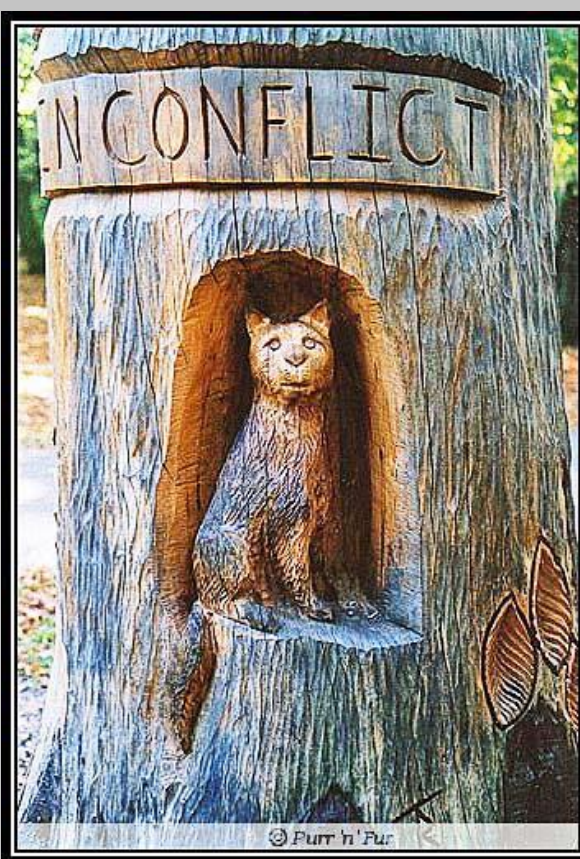
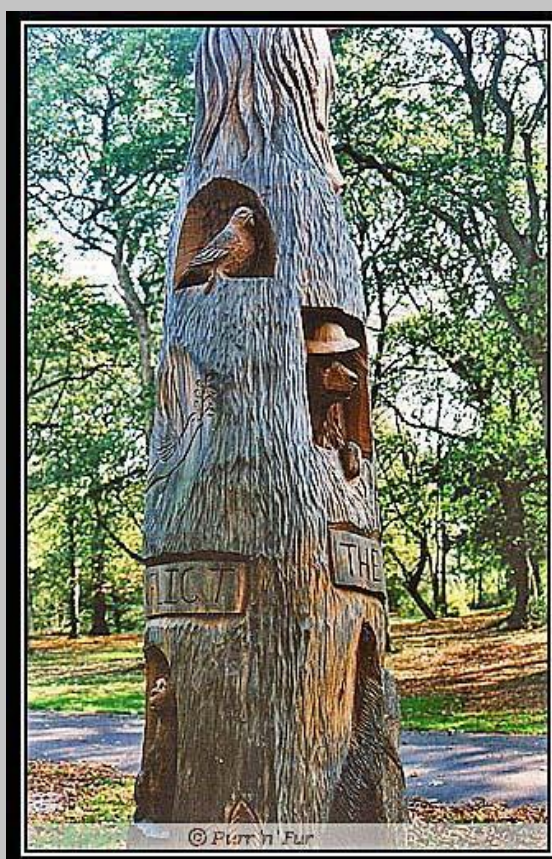
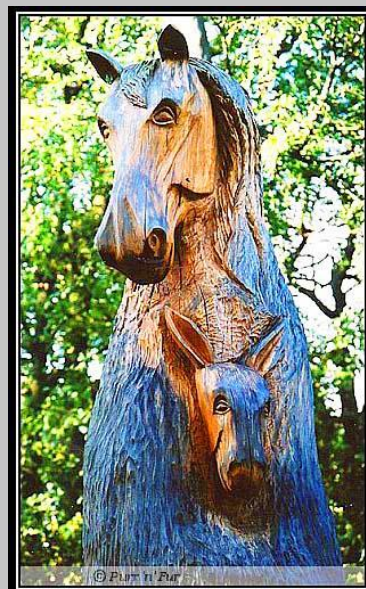
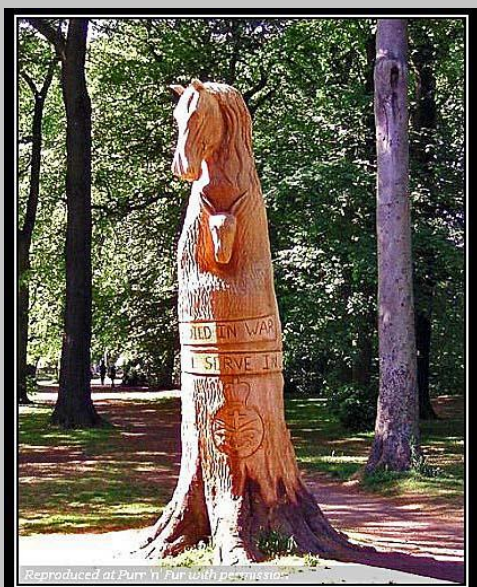


In 1921 Sir Thomas Rowbotham, a former mayor of Stockport — then in Cheshire but now part of Greater Manchester — donated Woodbank Memorial Park to the townspeople in honour of the Stockport men who fell in World War 1, but although the park is registered with the UK National Inventory of War Memorials as a memorial park, there was nothing in the park itself to acknowledge its purpose. As with other, similar sites in the country, most local people had forgotten, or never knew about, its history.

When a council officer located a sum of money from which the interest could be used only in the park, the group known as the official 'Friends of Woodbank Park' was asked how the money should be spent. A tree had been cut into a totem a couple of years earlier in the hope that funding might become available for a sculpture, but at the time it wasn't a priority and nothing further happened. When the new money was offered it was insufficient for other, larger projects and so it was decided to develop the sculpture. It didn't take the animal lovers in the group long to decide that the subject should be animals that had died in humankind's wars; that would be something unique to the park, while recognising its memorial status and acknowledging the sacrifice made by the innocents who did not volunteer to die.

The memorial takes the form of a chainsaw carving, situated on the park's main drive, not far from the entrance. The principal animal shown is a horse, at the top, but there are also a mule, a pigeon — and a cat. The cat is the least successful rendition, unfortunately; we were told it was 'supposed to look more like [Simon](#)'! Inscriptions carved around the trunk read 'They died in war' and 'They still serve in conflict'. As can be seen from the images, some were taken shortly after the carving was completed, the others after some months of weathering. There were plans to add a flowerbed at the base in due course, as well as an information board.

(With thanks to Anne Forester, Chair of the Friends of Woodbank, for contacting us and supplying the information.)



See [this link](#); also [here](#) for later photos showing deterioration.

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Animals remembered elsewhere . . .

'The greatness of a nation consists not so much in the number of its people or the extent of its territory as in the extent and justice of its compassion.'

— inscription on a memorial in Port Elizabeth, South Africa,
to the thousands of animals that died in the Boer War, 1899–1902

'For animals, there is no Geneva Convention and no peace treaty — just our mercy.'

— Ingrid Newkirk, president of PETA
(People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)

Hear our prayer, Lord, for all animals;
May they be well fed and well trained
and happy.
Protect them from hunger and fear and
suffering
And, we pray, protect specially, dear
Lord,
The little cat who is the companion of
our house.
Keep her safe as she goes abroad
And bring her back to comfort us.

— *Russian prayer*

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