



Salisbury Cathedral

World War 1 Wooden Crosses

**Salisbury Cathedral Cloisters house a
number of wooden crosses, originally grave
markers from World War One battlefields**



It has long been a British military convention to give the war dead a decent burial. During World War I casualties sustained in battle were typically collected by night and buried behind the lines. Sometimes, when casualties were appallingly high or it was too dangerous, this was not possible.

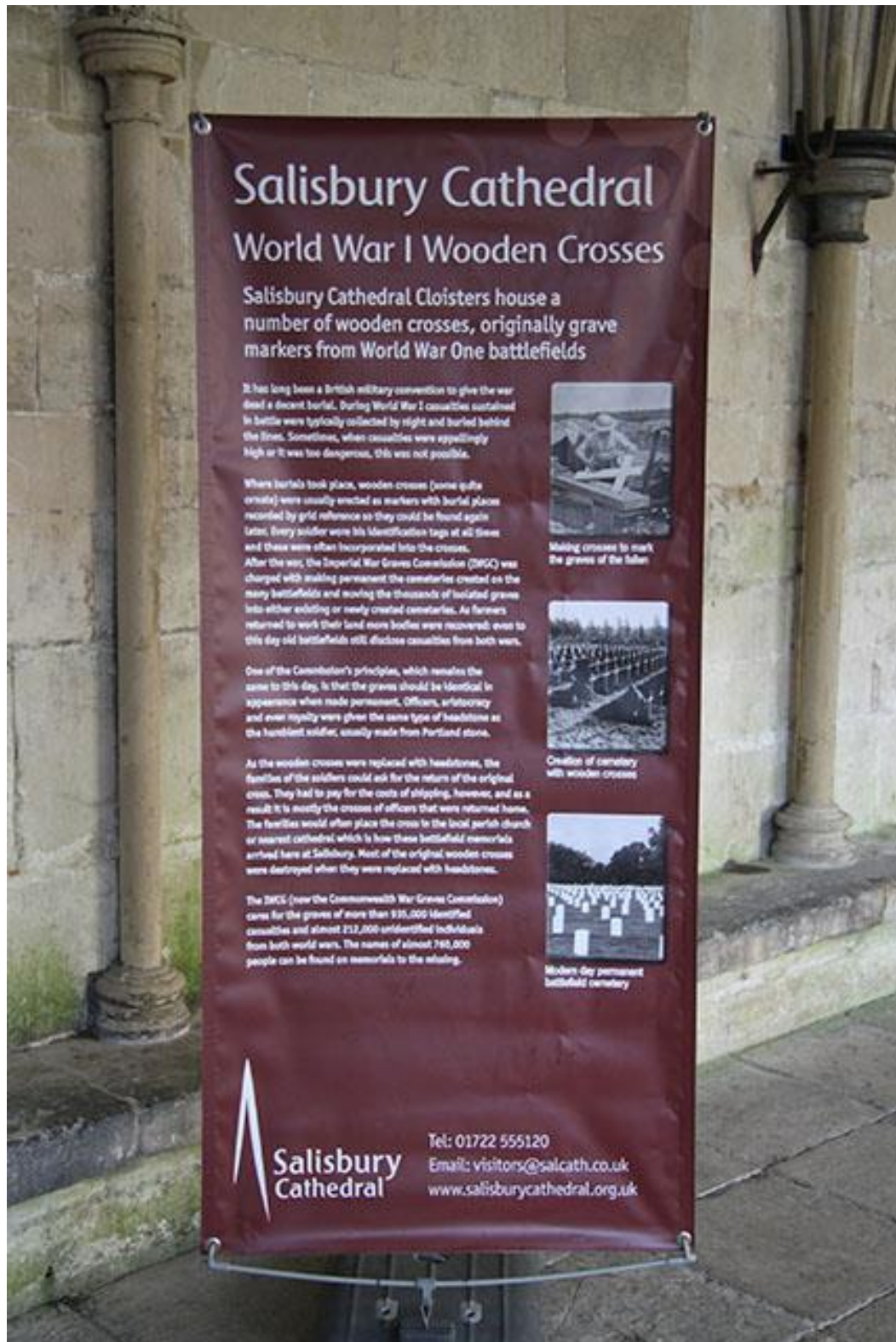
Where burials took place, wooden crosses (some quite ornate) were usually erected as markers with burial places recorded by grid reference so they could be found again later. Every soldier wore his identification tags at all times and these were often incorporated into the crosses.

After the war, the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) was charged with making permanent the cemeteries created on the many battlefields and moving thousands of isolated graves into either existing or newly created cemeteries. As farmers returned to work their land more bodies were recovered: even to this day old battlefields still disclose casualties from both wars.

One of the Commission's principles, which remains the same to this day, is that graves should be identical in appearance when made permanent. Officers, aristocracy and even royalty were given the same type of headstone as the humblest soldier, usually made from Portland stone.

As the wooden crosses were replaced with headstones, the families of the soldiers could ask for the return of the original cross. They had to pay for the costs of shipping, however, and as a result it is mostly the crosses of officers that were returned home. The families would often place the cross in the local parish church or nearest cathedral which is how these battlefield memorials arrived here at Salisbury. Most of the original wooden crosses were destroyed when they were replaced with headstones.

The IWGC (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) cares for the graves of more than 935,000 identified casualties and almost 212,000 unidentified individuals from both world wars. The names of almost 760,000 people can be found on memorials to the missing. *(Information from World War I Crosses banner)*



(Photos by David Milborrow 2014)

