

# Promenade De Verdun history

Promenade de Verdun is a road, with a wide grass verge planted with an avenue of trees and a tall obelisk at the south eastern end, and as such is quite different from all the other parks and open spaces in Croydon.

The road was created by Mr William Webb, a chartered surveyor in Purley who created the "Garden First Estate" at Woodcote. The road, which is a third of a mile long, is the only straight road on the Woodcote Estate. On one side of the road there is a wide grass verge almost the same width of the carriageway and dividing the two is an avenue of tall straight Lombardy Poplars. At the end of the road is an obelisk 19 foot tall.

Mr Webb conceived the idea of creating an Anglo-French memorial as a tribute "to our fallen neighbours", and he hoped that the tribute would cement the friendship between the two nations. He referred to the year 1923 when differences of opinion between France and England were acute and some of the French papers mentioned the Promenade de Verdun as evidence that public opinion in England was more sympathetic to France than the utterances of Britain's best known politicians of the time would lead them to believe.

At the end of the sweeping avenue on a crescent shaped piece of grass is the monument of Cornish granite, which is dedicated to the French soldiers who died in Petains stand against the Germans in 1916. The inscription "Aux soldats de France mort glorieusement pendant la Grand Guerre" is a reminder of the alliance. The obelisk was carved in a Cornish quarry by The London Granite Co. Ltd, from a single piece of stone. To ensure that the monument was safely transported to Purley a representative of the company accompanied it all the way.

Verdun is situated between Germany and Paris and during the first world war Battle of Verdun it was razed to the ground by the Germans in a desperate attempt to reach Paris.

The Lombardy Poplars are growing in a mixture of French and English soil. About ten tons of French soil was transported to Purley from the "Field of Explosion" near Armentieres after the First World War. The soil was so laden with shrapnel and bullets that to prevent the trees being damaged by souvenir hunters the soil was sifted and two sacks of missiles extracted.

Responsibility for the maintenance of the grass walk, Lombardy Poplars and the Monument was vested in Council in 1925.