When Barbara Hallows watched television footage of the service to mark the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele, something really hit home for her – the value of a name.

‘People were talking about seeing the names of relatives who had died, and how much it meant to them,’ says the retired nurse. ‘It’s quite right that the men are remembered and that their names should be there. But more than 1,500 nurses also gave their lives in the two world wars, and they should have a memorial too. Their relatives ought to be able to see their names.’

Ms Hallows chairs the Nursing Memorial Appeal, which is raising £100,000 to create a national memorial to nurses who died while serving in the first and second world wars. Importantly, it will commemorate the professional nurses who served as well as the many more women who were members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and offered their services in the second world war as well as the first.

The appeal is now entering its final stages, and with about three quarters of the money committed, the organisers hope that a sculpture commemorating the nurses’ sacrifice will be dedicated on 4 June next year. Plans are also under way to set up scholarships for...
nurses to support the study of conflict and humanitarian aid in nursing.

**Lessons of war**

‘The NHS has always learned lessons from war,’ says Ms Hallows, who began her nurse training in 1951. She gives the example of the ‘golden hour’ – the recognition that if you could treat wounded soldiers quickly, you had a better chance of avoiding gangrene. ‘They still talk about the golden hour today,’ she says.

‘The living memorial [the scholarships] is just as important as the stone one,’ says Sonja Curtis, an appeal trustee. ‘We want to raise as much money as possible so that this valuable education and research can continue.’

Ms Curtis has been involved with much of the research to track down and verify details of nurses who died. ‘First world war records weren’t very well kept, but I’m confident there are about 1,200 names,’ she says.

The idea of the memorial came from the former New Cavendish Club, which was set up in central London after the first world war as a meeting place for VAD volunteers.

Ms Curtis, a former club membership secretary, says it is important the volunteer and professional nurses are commemorated together. ‘Their stories are equally important – they worked side by side,’ she says.

‘It’s a story that’s got to be here for children today, so that they can realise how awful war is. The horrors these nurses saw – some of the volunteers, who were often from wealthy families, had never even been alone with a man before, yet they were facing horrendous wounds and amputations in dreadful conditions.’

Ms Hallows points out that the wealthy backgrounds of the VADs meant many of them could drive, and they were soon deployed as ambulance drivers. ‘There was a change in the way women were viewed,’ she adds. ‘That is bound to have had an impact on women’s history – on the right to vote, for example.’

The memorial appeal committee believes that the sculpture, which is being created by sculptor Georgie Welch, will do these nurses justice when it is dedicated at the National Memorial Arboretum, the UK’s centre of remembrance in Staffordshire.

As well as a striking design of hands in bronze holding a globe, it will incorporate the names of those who died, carved in stone as a permanent recognition of their sacrifice and achievement.

[www.nursingmemorialappeal.org.uk](http://www.nursingmemorialappeal.org.uk)

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