

POSTMAN'S PARK

Postman's Park is a small public garden in the former churchyard of St Botolph, Aldersgate, very near St Paul's Cathedral. The garden was given its name because the General Post Office was on an adjacent site and the employees used to use the garden for recreation and lunch breaks. The original garden was added to in 1887 and 1890 to commemorate the many very brave deeds performed by ordinary civilians that had always been largely unnoticed by the general public. The distinguished artist George Frederick Watts OM, RA (1817-1904), offered to pay for the construction of a small memorial cloister (15m long and 2m high). This was built by J. Simpson and Son at the cost of £402 and consisted of a tiled roof supported at the back on an existing wall and at the front on seven timber columns with a seating bench against the wall.

The commemorative tablets are attached to the wall, protected from the weather by the lean-to roof. It would have been too expensive for Watts to have had the tablets carved in stone, so he approached William De Morgan (1839-1917), the ceramic artist, to design and make the tablets. De Morgan was the obvious choice for the commission as he had already advised Watts' wife, Mary Seton Watts (1849-1938), on the setting up of a kiln for the pottery she organised at Compton, Surrey.

There are in all, 53 ceramic tablets. 13 were installed between the opening in 1900 and Watts' death in 1904; they were made by De Morgan & Co. who made a further 11 tablets in 1905. In 1906 a further 24 tablets were requested but De Morgan could not undertake the work so near the closure of his pottery in 1907 so the work was given to Doulton & Co. In 1917 Doulton & Co. provided one new tablet and in 1930 the last four were installed (one of these was a replacement for an old, factually incorrect one).

The tablets vary in size but most are about 12" x 18". Each one consists of a name and date and a brief description of the heroic act (e.g. rescue from fire, drowning) using an elegant lettering in a greenish-grey with small decorative motifs appropriate to the deed (e.g. shipwreck). The panels are separated by either an Italian Renaissance-style panel (De Morgan & Co.) or a stylised flower (Doulton & Co.).

The park is open to the public (free) but is better visited at the weekend when there is less traffic and parking is easy.

The best accounts of the commissioning of the tablets are (i) the article by John Price called *Everyday Heroes* (ii) the *Memorial Tablets of Postman's Park* in the *Journal of the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society*, Volume 10 2004 (iii) a book by the same author entitled *Postman's Park: G.F. Watts's Memorial to Heroic Self-Sacrifice*. 2008.