Hundreds of thousands of mourners lined the streets of London and all that could be heard was gentle weeping, stifled sobs and the sound of horses’ hooves. All around Britain everything came to a standstill.

Trains stood motionless, hospitals called off operations and one pilot in mid-air from Manchester to London even turned off his engines and glided for two minutes as his four passengers removed their hats and stood to attention.

It happened on November 11, 1920, exactly two years after the end of the First World War. It was, and still is, the greatest outpouring of grief the country had ever known. And at the centre of it all was [a man with no name: The Unknown Warrior.](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/the-unknown-warrior)

His body was recovered from an unmarked grave in France and escorted to London with the pomp and circumstance reserved for royalty. Then it was laid to rest at Westminster Abbey in the company of kings and queens. More than 10,000 people applied for a seat inside Westminster Abbey for the burial, so many that places were allocated by a ballot to mothers who had lost both husbands and sons or an only son.

Over the next week 1.5million people filed past the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, an endless procession of black clothing and pale faces.

Many queued for five hours or more for a glimpse of the grave and 500,000 left wreaths or flowers. Today it’s hard to imagine such a fuss for a complete unknown. But to many of those who stood in silence or who made the pilgrimage to Westminster, he was not unknown at all. He was the husband, son or father who never came home after the war. And they could cling to the belief it could be the body of their loved one. This was a sentiment shared at every level of society.

Everyone had a family member or friend who had been killed or went missing. For them the tomb became the tombstone of their own lost loved ones.

After the war the authorities were inititally reluctant to create a permanent memorial to the fallen.

But they bowed to popular pressure and seized on an idea by an army chaplain, The Rev David Railton, who had spotted a grave in France with a rough wooden cross and the pencilled epitaph: An Unknown British Soldier.

Four bodies were taken to the British HQ at Saint Pol and waited under armed guard until British commander Brigadier General LJ Wyatt arrived at midnight on November 8, 1920, and chose one at random to be sent back to Britain.

Placed in a coffin made of oak taken from a tree in Hampton Court, the Unknown Warrior, along with six barrels of earth from the fields of Flanders, it was taken across the Channel on board destroyer HMS Verdun.

In Dover it was greeted with a 19-gun salute and a band playing. At Victoria Station a guard of honour kept an overnight vigil. And a service of commemoration is still held there every year on the eve of Remembrance Day.

On November 11 the coffin was put on a gun carriage and taken through the crowded, almost silent, streets to the Abbey, where the aisle was lined with 100 Victoria Cross winners.

Later that day, after the burial, the Daily Mirror reporter saw a mother standing by the tomb, flowers in hand.

Today the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior has lost none of its potency. Many other countries followed suit with similar tributes to their own unknown fallen.

And last month a memorial project was launched inviting the public to send a Letter to an Unknown Soldier.

In just two weeks 14,000 letters were sent, including one from a girl of nine whose father was killed in Afghanistan last December.