

A garden for the Commonwealth: the landscape vision for the Queen Elizabeth II Memorial

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Queen Elizabeth II served as Head of the Commonwealth for over 70 years. As the world marks Commonwealth Day, we offer a first look at the landscape vision for her proposed memorial in St James's Park - revealing gardens, and a sculpture by artist Yinka Shonibare CBE that draws on her enduring relationship with the Commonwealth.

- The proposed memorial gardens feature plants from across the Commonwealth
- The South Garden has been designed around Commonwealth connections, with a sculpture by Yinka Shonibare CBE
- Final plans to be announced in April 2026, coinciding with what would have been Queen Elizabeth II's hundredth birthday year

The proposals, developed by Foster + Partners alongside landscape designer Michel Desvigne and horticulturalist Professor Nigel Dunnett, draw on the existing character of St James's Park while reflecting Queen Elizabeth II's seven-decade relationship with the Commonwealth. The memorial's location carries its own significance: St James's Park sits close to Marlborough House, headquarters of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The overall design extends John Nash's 1820s picturesque landscape into a contemporary commemorative setting, introducing open meadows planted with species from across the four nations of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, positioned to create moments of colour and storytelling that reveal themselves gradually as visitors move through the space.

The South Garden sits at the heart of the memorial's Commonwealth vision. Designed as the largest garden within the scheme, it is conceived to accommodate group gatherings and quiet individual reflection. From this spot, visitors will be able to enjoy views of Buckingham Palace and the Queen Victoria Memorial.

It is here too that artist Yinka Shonibare CBE's proposed Commonwealth Wind Sculpture will offer a vivid expression of the same themes. A British-Nigerian artist whose work has long explored questions of cultural identity and the connections between nations, Shonibare brings a deeply personal resonance to this commission.

Inspired by Queen Elizabeth II's coronation gown, the work uses colour, movement and form to reflect how the Queen brought together the diverse nations of the Commonwealth. The bronze sculpture billows upward as though frozen in mid-air, its surface embossed with the national flowers and plants of Commonwealth nations, while patinas of gold, turquoise and maroon evoke the sun, sea and earth of those countries.

Yinka Shonibare CBE has said of the project:

"As a champion of the Commonwealth and the arts, particularly through her involvement with the Royal Academy, this project feels especially close to my heart."

The sculpture is one of three figurative works proposed for the memorial. A statue of Queen

Elizabeth II and an additional statue of Prince Philip by Martin Jennings FRSS would greet visitors at Marlborough Gate, with a further sculpture by Karen Newman MRSS planned for the Birdcage Walk entrance, each forming part of a unified vision for the memorial as a whole.

The final design will be formally announced in April 2026, to coincide with what would have been Queen Elizabeth II's hundredth birthday year.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/a-garden-for-the-commonwealth-the-landscape-vision-for-the-queen-elizabeth-ii-memorial>