

6-1-2016

# To Whom Does the Body of the Dead Soldier Belong?: An Examination of British Imperial Strategy and the Making and Meaning of World War I Memorials

Hannah M. Jeruc

Lawrence University, hannahjeruc@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lux.lawrence.edu/luhp>

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

© Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

---

## Recommended Citation

Jeruc, Hannah M., "To Whom Does the Body of the Dead Soldier Belong?: An Examination of British Imperial Strategy and the Making and Meaning of World War I Memorials" (2016). *Lawrence University Honors Projects*. 87.  
<https://lux.lawrence.edu/luhp/87>

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by Lux. It has been accepted for inclusion in Lawrence University Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of Lux. For more information, please contact [colette.brautigam@lawrence.edu](mailto:colette.brautigam@lawrence.edu).

# To Whom Does the Body of the Dead Soldier Belong?: An Examination of British Imperial Strategy and the Making and Meaning of World War I Memorials

Hannah Jeruc  
Lawrence University

4 May 2016

Advisors: Professor Monica Rico  
and Professor Paul Cohen

## Introduction

World War I was a devastating period in twentieth century British history, not only for the soldiers who fought and died in battle, but also for their families and communities back at home, many of whom were haunted by the missing status or unknown cause of death of their loved ones. With over a million British and Commonwealth deaths, nearly 3.2 million total British casualties and many unknown, missing, or presumed dead soldiers, the postwar memorialization effort in Britain became central to political, social and economic activity. An immense outpouring of national effort contributed to the making of and mourning at some of Britain's most historically prolific and important memorials, such as the Cenotaph at Whitehall and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey. Nearly every town and city in the United Kingdom is home to at least one WWI memorial; even almost every borough in London has its own specific memorial to the dead or missing of WWI. The Western Front is sprinkled with British and Commonwealth cemeteries and memorials; some are discreet cemeteries nested on top of obscured hills in northern Belgium, commemorating the deaths of just a few soldiers from a little known battle, and some are massive works of architectural innovation, like the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, which commemorates some 70,000 missing British and Commonwealth soldiers from the Battle of the Somme. Overall, the body of architecture that comprises the British WWI memorialization effort is an imposing and identifiable collection of cemeteries, monuments of various types, parks, statues and headstones that are integrated throughout the United Kingdom, the Western Front, battle sites throughout continental

Europe, and beyond Europe, in places like India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and all of the nations that comprised the British Commonwealth forces.

The intense domestic and international presence of British WWI memorials was truly a nationally inclusive effort, as it resulted from a combined national contribution of the British government, bereaved family members and communities, sculptors, architects, and individual political figures. Historical research into the details of the memorialization process, the components of the memorials themselves, the politics behind the making of the memorials, and the social effects of the memorials has raised the question: for whom or what was this immense memorialization effort done? This question is especially relevant when looking at the postwar economic, social and political state of the Empire, as the devastation and losses of the war disrupted British social and political life and weakened the appearance of the Empire as a confident and strong international presence. Certainly the memorialization effort allowed the nation to recognize and respect the sacrifice of the dead and mourn the tragedy of the war; however, when we take a closer look at the intricacies of this process, we discover that those who contributed to the process, namely Fabian Ware, the Imperial War Graves Commission and its supporters within the government, were not simply trying to provide the nation and the bereaved with memorials or to honor the dead and the memory of the war. They sought to reunify the British public and its sense of national identity, rebuild the nation's conviction in the Empire, and reestablish the British Empire as an international power.

The Imperial War Graves Commission (now known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) was a crucial component to the larger imperial effort to project an

image of strength and unity, and thus the history of the Commission warrants an introduction. Founded in 1915 by Fabian Ware as a military initiative to ensure proper identification and burial of British and Commonwealth soldiers, the Commission began its work in the midst of battle as a temporary unit called the Graves Registration Commission and eventually became recognized by the British government as the official body responsible for commemorating war deaths.<sup>1</sup> As the Imperial War Graves Commission gained momentum, funding and governmental support, it was able to reach an unparalleled standard of memorialization for the Empire and set new precedents for recognizing, naming and burying dead soldiers, not only from Britain, but from the Empire's Commonwealth nations as well. The memorialization of the dead in wars prior to WWI is simply incomparable to the efforts made during and after WWI. As David Crane explains, after wars like the Crimean and the Boer War,

The graves of Britain's soldiers were not the sacred places of a burgeoning British mythology, but symbols of national humiliation, exploitation and desecration. And then, out of nowhere, all that changed. In 1914 the number of surviving British war graves from Portugal to the Ionian Isles could be counted in their handfuls. Four years later they numbered in their hundreds of thousands.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the Commission continued its work through WWII, and by the end of that memorialization period, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was responsible

---

<sup>1</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (London: William Collins, 2013), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Crane, 9.

for 2,500 war cemeteries and plots and 200 memorials.<sup>3</sup> However, not only the scale of memorialization increased, but the attention to detail and specific memorialization of individual soldiers became a newly important component of British memorialization. Thomas Laqueur asserts, quoting from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, "'none else of name' in fact largely sufficed to efface the overwhelming majority of dead soldiers from public memory from ancient times...until the fall and early winter of 1914, when all of this changed."<sup>4</sup> Laqueur is talking about the fact that, until the beginning of WWI, the nation did not attempt to locate or identify remains, and only private citizens paid attention to the individual identities of the soldiers who died in war. Before 1914, the war dead were buried in mass graves, "shoveled into the ground and so forgotten;" thus, the individual graves created by the Imperial War Graves Commission were truly a new concept in British war memorialization.<sup>5</sup>

The shift in tactics during World War I was a significant development in the history of British war memorialization, as it signaled a new national emphasis on commemorating individual sacrifice. The Commission's dedication to memorialization clearly illustrated the nationally recognized need to individually commemorate those who served in the war and to remember the legacy of the war in general. Yet, the ideology, methods and policies of the Commission, along with Fabian Ware's and Frederick Kenyon's political backgrounds, put into question the true intentions of the

---

<sup>3</sup> T. A. Gibson, *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945* (London: H.M.S.O., 1989), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 150.

<sup>5</sup> Laqueur, 151.

Commission. Therefore, in Chapter 1, I investigate this question by discussing the foundations and background of the IWGC and analyzing its policies and political motivations.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 1 also includes background information on the general state of British political and social life in the early twentieth century and the historical relationship between Christianity and the Empire, which will lay the groundwork for a discussion of the symbolism within the memorials in Chapter 2. I also supplement my analysis of the symbolism and characteristics of IWGC memorials and cemeteries with an examination of the symbolism of memorials that were publicly commissioned and were not associated with the IWGC. The two most prevalent and identifiable categories of symbolism within the memorials, both IWGC and non-IWGC, are Christian symbols and symbols that venerate British imperialism. Thus, in Chapter 3, I further explain the origins of these symbols within the memorials in order to emphasize how they imbue the memorials and cemeteries with an imperialistic image. In examining the religious symbolism of the IWGC cemeteries and memorials, as well as the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, along with the political discourse that surrounded the creation and unveiling of these seminal memorials, I will assert that the IWGC and its supporters within the government were attempting to instill national religious unification. I will argue that these memorials came to serve as a beacon of national religion that would supersede divisions between specific Christian denominations. Ironically, however, there also existed an identifiable disunity within the British public sphere as a result of certain memorialization policies and tactics, specifically the IWGC's equality policy. An analysis of the resulting public debate exposes an important paradox that

---

<sup>6</sup> "IWGC" and "Commission" will be used interchangeably as abbreviations for Imperial War Graves Commission.

existed within the British WWI memorialization process; that is, how could the British government and the IWGC claim to care about individualized memorialization while symbolically subordinating the sacrifices of individuals to the collective sacrifice for the Empire? Thus, in the fourth and final chapter, I assess how this ideological contradiction manifested itself within a momentous public debate concerning the equality policy between 1918 and 1920, and analyze the result and implications of this debate.

Essentially, through an examination of the imperialistic symbolism within British WWI memorials and cemeteries, the motivations behind the making of these memorials and cemeteries, and the surrounding public political activity, I maintain that the Imperial War Graves Commission and its supporters within the British government used the memorialization process as a means to project a strengthened, unified and internationally superior image of postwar imperial Britain. My argument attempts to unify some of the various historiographical investigations of different components of British WWI memorialization. Historians like Jay Winter, Thomas Laqueur and David Wharton Lloyd have incorporated the story of British WWI memorialization into broader discussions of memory, mourning and memorialization. Julie Summers, T.A. Gibson and David Crane have focused specifically on the Imperial War Graves Commission and its role in the British WWI memorialization process. There are also historians, such as Jonathan Black and Tom Lawson, who have included the narrative of the British war graves in their investigations of imperialism and nationalism in postwar memory, politics and architecture. While the different works collectively tell the story of British WWI memorialization, few historians have yet to weave together the various threads of the story—the national and imperial politics of the time period, the role of the Imperial War



Graves Commission, the influence of specific parliamentary and public figures, the symbolism and meaning of the memorials, and the relationship between government and subjects. Thus, this study attempts to combine these various subtopics into one cohesive discussion. Further, my argument culminates in examining the greater significance of this period of British postwar memorialization: the disunity it created within the general social fabric of Great Britain and the tension it instilled between ordinary citizens and members of the government and the IWGC. Those responsible for creating and executing the official plans for burying, commemorating and portraying the sacrifice of the dead firmly believed that all must be commemorated equally, and that their deaths were primarily suffered in sacrifice for the good of the Empire. However, some citizens, especially grieving wives and mothers, strongly opposed the imperialistic position of the IWGC and believed they, not the Empire, claimed the right to decide how their deceased should be remembered. Thus, the lack of consensus concerning the methods of memorialization in the post-WWI period in Britain forces us to consider a question of great historical and ethical significance: how far does the authority of the state extend over the body of the citizen? Is the state responsible for the lives it placed into battle for its own cause, or does authority finally rest with the living individuals who actually knew and loved these soldiers, to whom their death was of truly tragic consequence? Essentially, to whom does the body of the dead soldier belong?

## Chapter 1: Background and Context

### The History of Christianity and the Empire

We cannot discuss the development of the British Empire without understanding its historical relationship with Christianity. Since the Reformation, when Henry VIII brought the Anglican Church within the English government's control, the activities and legislation of the two bodies have been inextricably linked. Benedict Anderson actually argues that Christianity is essential to imperialism, and that the ideas that built imperialism and nationalism in Britain are born out of earlier medieval notions of "Christendom and the dynastic realm."<sup>7</sup> Edward Said also argues that imperialism and Christianity are interconnected; he defines imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory," which coincides closely with the Christian values of missions and widespread conversion.<sup>8</sup> With this comparison in mind, it is no surprise that the Church, meaning the Church of England, has historically provided "important ideological support for imperial expansion" and that it "regarded the empire as a force for good," with the extension of its boundaries and territories partially facilitated by Christian missionaries.<sup>9</sup> As the Empire expanded throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, imperial and religious responsibility grew closer together in meaning and action. By the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the non-European world, British missionaries inherited an ideal of imperial duty that echoed the sentiments elicited by Kipling's famous imperialist poem

---

<sup>7</sup> Hilary Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Carey, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Carey, 14.

“The White Man’s Burden.”<sup>10</sup> Hilary Carey claims that “at the height of the imperial age,” this union between Christianity in England and the expansion of the British Empire gained prominence, as religious visions of imperial growth contributed to the idea that “imperialism was no longer justified as a pragmatic political expansion...but as a spiritual enterprise through which the blessing of the British rule would bring order and morality to the world.”<sup>11</sup> This linking of Christianity and imperial expansion also served to unify British citizens and provide them with a clear doctrine with which to identify, especially as territorial expansion continued and British colonists inhabited more and more land outside of Britain. Carey explains that the reinforcing of Christian ideology within Britain’s settler colonies generated the notion that the community of colonists “formed part of a wider Christian realm...that both transcended and reinforced other, more political bonds.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, for British citizens both in Britain and in the colonies, a strong association with Christianity was a unifying aspect of their national identity. The unification of British identity, imperialism and Christianity continued to intensify throughout the nineteenth century and, as John Wolffe explains, “the merging of religion and nationalism reached its climax in the early twentieth century as the United Kingdom engaged in a major war.”<sup>13</sup>

It is important to recognize that by this time, the definition of Christianity in Britain extended beyond Anglican. By the mid-nineteenth century, several Nonconformist, meaning non-Anglican, Christian denominations emerged in Britain. These

---

<sup>10</sup> John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), 215-216.

<sup>11</sup> Carey, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Carey, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Wolffe, 19.

denominations included Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Unitarians and Quakers, and within these major denominations existed many more sub denominations.<sup>14</sup> While the “official” religion in Britain was Anglican, these other Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, also held a significant position in British society. Despite the diversity of denominations, faith in general came to play a crucial role for British people in enduring the daily uncertainty, peril, anxiety and tragedy of the war. Previous wars, like the Crimean War and the Boer War, had resulted in the garnering of support for the British war effort from the English Church and most Nonconformist churches, thus by 1914, Christian support for the British to go to war “was but the final link in the chain of Christian readiness to foster militaristic values and to countenance armed conflict.”<sup>15</sup>

Christian sentiment and faith thus pervaded the front lines and the home front during wartime. It was common for soldiers to receive blessings from the Church before going out into battle, and the Church encouraged the soldiers’ sacrifice as “just,” “holy” and contributive to the moral mission of the British Empire in the war.<sup>16</sup> Christian sentiment influenced wartime poetry, and the language of war and sacrifice permeated Christian hymns and prayers.<sup>17</sup> Spirituality was highly involved in the portrayal of the sacrifice of the soldier, as it was commonly compared to the sacrifice of Christ. First, in that the death of the soldier for the good of the Empire resembled the death of Christ for the good of humanity, and second, in that the British comforted themselves by applying spiritual meaning to the death of their loved ones. If it could be said that soldiers died in

---

<sup>14</sup> Wolfe, 55-60.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe, 234.

<sup>16</sup> Geoff Archer, *Public Sculpture in Britain: A History* (Norwich: Frontier, 2013), 211.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfe, 239-241.

battle because it was God's will, or because they were giving their lives for the salvation of the Empire, then it meant that no one died in vain and the loss contributed to a meaningful cause; this significantly facilitated the grieving process for many British citizens. Wolffe explains that by the late nineteenth century, the majority of Christians in Britain from all denominations advocated for the Empire and the British war effort. This fact reinforces the same idea espoused by mid-nineteenth century missionaries: sacrifice for Christ and sacrifice for Empire went hand in hand.<sup>18</sup>

As the official literary advisor to the Imperial War Graves Commission, Rudyard Kipling embodied the perfect union between imperialist ideology and Christianity. He grew up grappling with multiple identities—while he felt connected to the land and the people of India, he recognized that he was part of the “colonizer” group, and therefore also had an interest in maintaining India as the “jewel in the Crown” of the British Empire.<sup>19</sup> However, it was not until adulthood that Kipling's imperialistic convictions grew, as he “saw that the realities of the Empire at work were unknown to the people at home” and it thus became “part of his artistic purpose to give a voice to the administrators, the soldiers, and their women who made the empire function.”<sup>20</sup> He carried this mission into his work as the literary advisor to the IWGC, and thus his role in shaping the Christian imperialist message and image of the Imperial War Graves and memorials is crucial, as he had sole power to choose the language used in the cemeteries and memorials. Kipling drew major inspiration from Christian biblical verse

---

<sup>18</sup> Wolffe, 221.

<sup>19</sup> Zoreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Pinney, “Kipling, (Joseph) Rudyard (1865-1936),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed April 24, 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34334?docPos=1>.

and chose many of his favorites as the inscriptions that would mark the IWGC cemeteries and memorials. He also penned several influential wartime and postwar poems that incorporated themes of Christian faith and the soldiers' sacrifice for the good of the Empire, such as "My Boy Jack?" and "The King's Pilgrimage," a poem that serves as a preface to the text of *The King's Pilgrimage*, a 1922 publication about the King's visit to the war graves. Kipling's ability to influence the image of the IWGC cemeteries and memorials also stems from his own experience with loss in the war, as his son Jack went missing in battle and was presumed dead. English Baptist pastor and writer John Clifford admired Kipling for his imperialistic fervor and quoted Kipling's verse to support his own agenda that the whole world might be unified "through the redeeming power of Jesus Christ in the British Empire."<sup>21</sup> Kipling's role in the creation of the British WWI memorials reflects these same sentiments, as I will discuss further in Chapter 2.

### **Postwar Political, Social and Economic Atmosphere**

While the war did not cause the Empire to immediately lose territory or significant international presence, it marked the beginning of the slowing of its imperial expansion and growth. Compared to what Timothy Parsons calls "the British Imperial century," which is the century preceding WWI, the interwar period in the twentieth century was a time of major social, political and economic changes that eventually culminated in the downfall of the Empire.<sup>22</sup> Some of these changes began to take shape immediately upon the end of WWI. Although there always existed some overlap between the values

---

<sup>21</sup> Carey, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A World History Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 1.

of Conservatives, Liberals and Labourites, their ideologies became even less distinguishable after the war. The Conservatives were generally known as the party that demonstrated the most consistent support for imperial politics. However, this distinction dissipated after the war, as divisions based on support for Britain's role in the war developed within parties. Further, the Conservative party was no longer the only party in support of Empire, and thus, further ambiguities between the ideals of each party arose as well. The coalition government that formed in 1916 also helped generate these postwar changes within British party politics.<sup>23</sup> Political tensions arose between Ireland and Britain when Sinn Fein, the Irish militant nationalist party, took power in 1918—this event resulted in a civil war, which was initially aimed at Britain, but then became localized within Ireland. These tensions were echoed in other imperial territories such as Persia, India, Egypt and Palestine—the war seemed to have caused Empire-wide dissatisfaction with Britain's politics. Now, not only was the Empire at political odds with its opponents in the war, but with itself as well.<sup>24</sup>

Economically speaking, the Empire's greatest challenge after the war was its loss of some international trade opportunities and the acceleration of a "hostile global economic environment." Simply put, the international market did not need or could not afford to trade with Britain for certain goods on which Britain's export economy depended.<sup>25</sup> Labor demographics in Britain changed as well—the women's labor movement increased in influence when, due to the amount of men serving in the war and the resulting labor shortage, women became necessary participants in Britain's

---

<sup>23</sup> Keith Robbins, *The British Isles, 1901-1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47-48.

<sup>24</sup> Robbins, 48-49.

<sup>25</sup> Robbins, 176.

work force. Prior to the twentieth century, women mostly held conventional roles in the home, but during and after the war, the traditional gendered labor hierarchy was no longer feasible. Women also began to truly break into the political sphere, as the suffrage movement gained recognition and progress; in 1918, women over the age of 30 who either owned property or were married to a property owner acquired the vote.<sup>26</sup> However, although some of these changes marked social and political progress, there existed an anxiety among British people; their world was transforming rapidly. The gender demographic changed due to the “lost generation” of young men, population fluctuated in new ways, emigration increased, and the emotional devastation of loss permeated the whole of society.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, despite the thorough political, social and economic upheaval that followed the war, Britons still largely maintained their conviction in the Empire, and pro-imperial attitudes permeated social and political life. These attitudes actually became more dominant in the British public sphere than they had been before the war, as “the mass electorate was no longer the opponent of traditionalist values, but its champion.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, it was not radical at this time for a citizen or a member of parliament, no matter their party, to favor imperialist politics. Alongside this mass public support for Empire existed a patriotism based on the deeply rooted belief held by many British subjects that they belonged to the superior race, or as Colin Cross puts it, they believed that “they were the best nationality in the world.” Yet, Cross also explains that it is difficult to actually

---

<sup>26</sup> Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1996), 90-97; Robbins, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, 80-81.

<sup>28</sup> Robbins, 47.



define how prominently this racist ideal existed within the Empire as a whole, or how much of the British population actually held this belief.<sup>29</sup>

Alfred Milner is one of the most notable advocates for British race-patriotism in the twentieth century, as he actually put this ideal into action. Milner was born in 1854 in Hesse, Germany to a family of moderate wealth and success. They moved to Chelsea, London while Milner was still quite young, thus, he grew up in England and identified as a British subject. After a successful education at Oxford, Milner began to develop a serious conviction in the essentiality of loyalty to the Empire; he pursued this sense of imperial duty through public service and social reform. He took leadership roles within the Liberal Unionist Association and was eventually appointed director-general of accounts in Egypt, his first major position as an international public servant within the Empire. After working in Egypt and further developing his conviction in imperial loyalty, he was offered governorship of Cape Colony and high commissionership of South Africa. At this point, Milner became fully entrenched in imperial politics and served in several different educational and welfare related positions in South Africa. He worked to consolidate imperial loyalty within the colonies and bolster economic growth for the Empire. Milner returned to Britain, exhausted from public service in the colonies, several years before the war broke out. Then, from 1916 to 1918, he served in the War Office under Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and in 1918 he went on to serve in the Colonial Office.<sup>30</sup> Throughout his various roles as a public servant and politician, Milner

---

<sup>29</sup> Colin Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire: 1918-1968* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1969), 25.

<sup>30</sup> Colin Newbury, "Milner, Alfred, Viscount Milner (1854-1925)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed April 24, 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35037?docPos=1>.

continuously advocated for loyalty to and growth of the Empire. In the introduction to his collection of speeches, he states, “my public activities have been dominated by a single desire—that of working for the integrity and consolidation of the British Empire.”<sup>31</sup> He discusses the conflict between domestic and imperial interests and problems and insists that imperial issues should always take precedence. However, Milner’s ideals of imperial loyalty transcended his desire to serve and strengthen the Empire politically and economically; his belief in the racial superiority of the British motivated his desire to educate the subjects of the British colonies in order to promote imperial consolidation. Milner’s race-patriotism is not to be confused with racism; his beliefs did not directly translate into hatred and oppression, but rather, the promotion of the strength of the British Empire. Ultimately, he believed that it was the Empire’s and the British race’s responsibility to cultivate international cooperation; this was the reason he focused so intensely on unifying and educating what he considered to be the inferior races of the Empire’s dominions.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Alfred Milner, *The Nation and the Empire: Being a Collection of Speeches and Addresses* (London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), xi, Hathitrust.

<sup>32</sup> Milner, *The Nation and the Empire*, xi-xxvii.

### **The Role of the Imperial War Graves Commission**

Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware was primarily an educator and a journalist who maintained an unwavering interest in British politics. Born in Clifton, Bristol in 1869 into a Calvinist family, Ware eventually broke from the religion and went on to pursue an education. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in the sciences from the Universities of London and Paris in 1894, Ware spent ten years teaching at secondary schools, and then began a career as a journalist at the right wing publication the *Morning Post*, first writing articles and eventually ascending to editorship. However, where he truly gained momentum in developing his political ideas was during his service as Director of Education on the Transvaal Legislative Council in the Orange River Colony in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the leadership of none other than Alfred Milner.<sup>33</sup> He served as a proponent of education reform and supported Milner's "Anglicization" program here, which drew from Milner's conviction in British racial and imperial superiority.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it was "under the influence of Milner's 'race-patriotism'" where Ware learned "his sense of Britain's global destiny" and "the virtue of public service that would be his own lodestar."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Ware eventually applied the values he learned from Milner to his own dreams for social reform. In a letter to Milner, which served as the preface to his book *The Worker and His Country* published in 1912, just three years before the founding of the Imperial War Graves Commission, Ware

---

<sup>33</sup> A. J. A. Morris, "Ware, Sir Fabian Arthur Goulstone (1869–1949)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36741>; Crane, 13-21.

<sup>34</sup> John Lack and Bart Ziino, "Requiem for Empire: Fabian Ware and the Imperial War Graves Commission," in *Empires in World War I*, ed. Andrew Jarboe and Richard Fogarty (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 355; Crane, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Crane, 20-21.

expresses his explicit belief in the importance of British imperial power and the superiority and duty of the British race:

The gravity of the responsibilities thus incurred needs no emphasizing; they will be accepted calmly by a race which has brought so large a portion of the earth within its rule...so long as patriotism is the controlling force, dominating all classes, the supreme instinct in the hour of crisis, no renunciation and no sacrifice will be too great in the cause of unity.<sup>36</sup>

His pre-war emphasis on sacrifice, British patriotism and the responsibility and superiority of the Empire and the British race—which echoes Milner’s values—prefaces the ideals that come to generate his founding of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

In 1914 Ware took up the most patriotic and sacrificial role he could imagine—serving in the war. He began working as commander of the Red Cross Mobile Ambulance Unit in France and quickly realized he could put to use his keen organizational and leadership skills and unbending motivation to serve his country. By the end of 1914, hardly five months after the British entered the war, the battlefield casualties were already immense. 16,200 officers and men had been killed, 47,707 were wounded, and 16,746 were missing or had been captured.<sup>37</sup> The work of the Mobile Unit seemed unending, and on top of that, battle forged on and the death toll rose constantly. However, Ware’s Mobile Unit worked diligently to locate and identify as many British and Commonwealth soldiers as possible, and not one year into their work, they were already making an unprecedented difference in the way British dead were

---

<sup>36</sup> Crane, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Crane, 30-39.

recorded.<sup>38</sup> Eventually, Ware created an entirely unique process for recording the names and marking the graves of the dead and soon after beginning work, he split from the Mobile Unit to create the Graves Registration Commission. It appears that Ware became increasingly attached to controlling the graves registration process, and in 1915, he initiated a regulation that would eventually culminate in the strict enforcement of the Imperial War Graves Commission's equality policy. In the Law of 29 December, Ware secured himself and the Graves Registration Commission sole control over the care of the British dead by preventing private exhumations and burials of individual soldiers' bodies.<sup>39</sup> This event forever changed the process of recording and burying the British war dead and greatly influenced the future of the entire burial and memorialization process for the British in WWI. David Crane suggests that "it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this provision and difficult to imagine what Britain's war cemeteries would have looked like without it, because [...] Ware had secured control over every detail of their future."<sup>40</sup> Truly, this had become Fabian Ware's project, and although he clearly cared about recognizing the sacrifice of the dead, it may not have been his primary motivation. Crane claims that "for Ware the work was a means to a political end, with every detail of it subordinated to this overarching imperial vision," the vision of a functional social-imperialistic Britain, in which the individual worked for the good of the Empire and the Empire supported its people and took responsibility for solving national crises.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Crane, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Crane, 50-65.

<sup>40</sup> Crane, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Crane, 78.

With the knowledge of Ware's political values and how they most likely influenced his strategic maneuvers in securing further and further control over the memorialization process, we can see the British memorialization of WWI, or at least the cemeteries and memorials created by the IWGC, through the lens of Ware's political objectives. Yet, we must consider that Ware was not the only influential figure in the creation of the war graves and memorials. Had the IWGC progressed as an independently financed, private organization, it would be easier to pinpoint Ware as the sole influence over the imperialistic appearance and message of the war graves. Yet, with the granting of the royal charter in 1917 the Commission officially became financially dependent on the British government, and thus, we must consider that Fabian Ware's political views are just one part of the makeup of the IWGC's political image and the image of the memorials.

Although less influential in the actual foundation and origins of the IWGC, Frederic Kenyon played a crucial role in presenting and reinforcing the policies and plans for how the cemeteries and memorials should be created and ultimately, for carrying out Ware's ideals and underlying political agenda through the process. Kenyon was born in 1863 in Piccadilly, London to an upper class family. He was always academically oriented and was particularly learned in Greek and Biblical studies. He became the director of the British Museum after working in the collections for a number of years, and also served as a primary founder and eventually the president of the British Academy.<sup>42</sup> He was appointed as advisor to the Imperial War Graves

---

<sup>42</sup> H. I. Bell, "Kenyon, Sir Frederic George (1863-1952)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed January 25, 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34292?docPos=1>.

Commission in 1917 and wrote the official report on the projected design of the IWGC cemeteries in 1918. This report is of crucial significance in tracing the development of the policies and work of the Imperial War Graves Commission, especially the development and reinforcement of what became known as the equality policy.

Essentially, Ware, Kenyon and the members of the Commission believed strongly that, first, it would be too costly and difficult to repatriate bodies from the Western Front back to Britain, and second, that every soldier should be given equal treatment in death, meaning that all of the headstones would be nearly identical and the Commission would make the decisions regarding the details of these headstones in order to ensure equality. Upon the end of the war, the Commission solidified its policies and publicized a report detailing their intended plans. The purpose of the report, as stated in its introduction by Fabian Ware, is to address the Commission's feeling that "it was undesirable that a matter of this kind [the equality policy] should become the subject of controversy" and that "the appointment of Sir Frederic Kenyon, therefore, was made with a view to focusing, and, if possible, reconciling the various opinions on this subject that had found expression among the Armies at the front and the general public at home."<sup>43</sup>

The report is largely informational; it includes an evaluation of the budget, architects, placement, layout and materials used for the building of the cemeteries on the Western Front. Sir Edwin Lutyens, MR Herbert Baker and MR Reginald Blomfield, R.A. would serve as primary architects and designers, spending must be conservative, and the cemeteries should appear peaceful and dignified, yet still obviously cemeteries

---

<sup>43</sup> Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed* (London: H.M.S.O., 1918), 7-22.

and not gardens.<sup>44</sup> However, some of Kenyon's language in describing these details carries undertones of a larger political agenda—specifically, an attempt to convey distinctly British imperial strength and unity through these cemeteries. Kenyon prefaces the report by explicating his intentions:

My endeavor has been to arrive at a result which will, so far as may be, satisfy the feelings of relatives and comrades of those who lie in these cemeteries; which will represent the soldierly spirit and discipline in which they fought and fell; which will typify the Army to which they belonged; which will give expression to those deeper emotions, of regimental comradeship, of service to their Army, their King, their Country and their God, which underlay (perhaps often unconsciously) their sacrifice of themselves for the cause in which they fought, and which in ages to come will be a dignified memorial, worthy of the nation and of the men who gave their lives for it, in the lands of the Allies with whom and for whom they fought.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, the Commission wanted to do more than just honor the dead soldiers' service; their ultimate goal was to represent the soldiers' sacrifice for the Empire, and in turn, the worthiness of the Empire in demanding this sacrifice.

Kenyon then describes the equality policy. He writes that if there were inequality among the graves, then "the monuments of the more well-to-do would overshadow those of the poorer comrades" and that the value of the individual sacrifice of those

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Kenyon, 4.



“poorer comrades” would be diminished.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it seems that Kenyon and the Commission were concerned with individual commemoration, especially because they troubled themselves to create graves for every possible body they could locate and to recognize the names of those missing despite the extreme difficulty of this task. However, in detailing the reasons why families will not be allowed to create their own memorials at the gravesites, he seemingly contradicts this emphasis on the individual and instead emphasizes the importance of communal sacrifice.

The sacrifice of the individual is a great idea and worthy of commemoration; but the community of sacrifice, the service of a common cause, the comradeship of arms which has brought together men of all ranks and grades—these are greater ideas, which should be commemorated in those cemeteries where they lie together, the representatives of their country in the lands in which they served.<sup>47</sup>

It is clear that the Commission saw these dead soldiers and their graves as representatives of the cause of imperial sacrifice and as a symbol of “a great Army and a united Empire.”<sup>48</sup> The adjective “united” is crucial because it indicates that one objective of this policy of uniformity and equality was to prove that the British Empire was not weak, and had triumphed over the tragic aftermath of this devastating war. Certainly this was meant to convince the British public, especially those concerned with the policies of the IWGC, that these decisions were for the greater good. Further, it is likely that this was also a political move to present an image of a united empire to the

---

<sup>46</sup> Kenyon, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

international community and to prove the political resilience of the Empire in the postwar years.

David Crane also suggests that the report was more than an iteration of the policies of the IWGC, meant to simply inform the public of the IWGC's intentions, but that it was a forceful representation of the imperial ideals of the Commission. He writes, "it is important to remember that he [Kenyon] was writing his report while the war was still going on, and if it was not propaganda in any overt sense, it was a blueprint for an idealized Britain and Army that had no place in it for doubt, disunity or self-questioning."<sup>49</sup> This claim has grounds in Ware's introductory statements that the report was meant to "reconcile" the public concerns with the decisions of the Commission. Despite possible ulterior motivations, Kenyon's report officially publicized the Commission's intentions and laid the foundation for the Commission's memorialization work that would not be completed until 1937. Thus, after the report was issued, the Commission truly set to work, and the monuments and cemeteries that were built in the next 20 years established an unprecedented era in British war memorialization.

---

<sup>49</sup> Crane, 130.

## Chapter 2: The Memorials and Their Meanings

In order to understand how the background and development of the IWGC and its leading members played a role in shaping the image of Britain that was projected through the memorialization process, it is crucial to examine the structure, symbolism and language present in the most major memorials created by the IWGC, both within and outside of England. The Commission's work officially began in 1914, when it was still known as the Graves Registration Commission, but the bulk of the work was completed between 1918 and 1937. The amount of cemeteries and memorials built by the Imperial War Graves Commission in those twenty-some years is undeniably vast and impressive. By 1937, the total expenditures on the building of graves and cemeteries was £8,150,000.<sup>50</sup> In Belgium and France alone the Commission created 970 cemeteries which are surrounded by a total of 50 miles of brick or stone wall, and include around 1000 crosses of sacrifice, 560 stones of remembrance, 600,000 headstones, and numerous chapels, shelters and record buildings. There are also eighteen larger memorials to missing soldiers, such as the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme.<sup>51</sup> Factor in several major memorials in the United Kingdom, like the Tower Hill Memorial (also known as the Merchant Marine Memorial) in London and the Chatham Naval Memorial, and it seems almost unfathomable that all of this could have been built during 20 years of social and political turbulence. However, what is also notable about this body of work is the striking visual cohesion and the symbolic and structural elements that consistently permeate the memorials and cemeteries, despite

---

<sup>50</sup> Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: an Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years, 1917-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 47.

<sup>51</sup> Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, 57.

temporal and geographical distance. Following the policy of equality, every British and Commonwealth headstone is exactly the same—straight and narrow with a slightly curved top, made of white Portland stone, engraved with some kind of cross and the name, regiment, nationality and date of death of the soldier, or, if these things are unknown, the simple inscription “A soldier of the Great War known unto God.” Included in each cemetery is a Cross of Sacrifice and a Stone of Remembrance with the engraving “Their Name Liveth For Evermore,” and in many cemeteries, there are walls with engraved names of soldiers who went missing during battle and have no known grave. The cemeteries are all laid out in the same basic manner, with most of the space occupied by rows and rows of identical headstones, and the Cross and Stone are typically centrally located, or placed in a way such that they appear to overlook the graves. Walls of stone or brick, or sometimes even a building-like structural wall, surround the larger cemeteries. Besides the structural elements that dictate the uniformity of the cemeteries across the Western Front and the plots in the UK, there are also many instances of overtly religious and imperialistic symbolism throughout the cemeteries and memorials. The repetitive presence of the Cross of Sacrifice alone, along with the engraved crosses on each headstone, blanket the cemeteries with Christian sentiment. William Lehman A.B. Burdett-Coutts, a conservative member of the House of Commons, reinforces the religious nature of the Cross of Sacrifice in a speech given in 1920; he says, “the place of Christianity, and of the soldiers belonging to that faith, in the Great War is further emphasized by the large white stone Cross of Sacrifice,

bearing a Crusader's sword, which stands conspicuously in each cemetery."<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Cross of Sacrifice gives each cemetery a distinctly Christian overtone. The language of the inscriptions within the cemeteries, chosen by Rudyard Kipling, is also overtly Christian in nature. The inscriptions on each headstone of an unidentified body read, "A soldier of the Great War known unto God;" the inscription on the Stone of Remembrance is "Their Name Liveth For Evermore;" and inscribed on the Kipling Memorials (headstones of soldiers buried in a particular cemetery but whose exact location is unknown) is the verse "Their Glory Shall Not Be Blotted Out."



Figure 1. Headstones in Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery, Arras, France. All photos are the author's unless otherwise stated.

---

<sup>52</sup> William Lehman A. B. Burdett-Coutts, *Imperial War Graves Commission. Speech by Mr. Burdett-Coutts, M.P., In Support of the Commission's Policy of Equality of Treatment, etc.* (London: Wightman & Co., 1920), 6.



Figure 2. Stone of Remembrance and Cross of Sacrifice, surrounded by some headstones, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, West Flanders, Belgium.

These inscriptions originate from Kipling's "eternal source of comfort, Ecclesiasticus, Chapter 44, Verses 13 and 14."<sup>53</sup>

The Stone of Remembrance, according to Kenyon in his report, is supposed to be a universal symbol of mourning and should meet the sentiments of all those who visit the graves. However, he compares the Stone to an altar, and thus imbues it with his own religiously based idea of its symbolism. Further, he and the Commission determined that it lacked a "definitely Christian character," and that "great distress would be felt if our cemeteries lacked this recognition of the fact that we are a Christian

---

<sup>53</sup> Tonie Holt and Valmai Holt, *My Boy Jack? The Search for Kipling's Only Son* (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), 145.



Empire,” which is part of the reason that the Stone is accompanied by the Cross of Sacrifice in each cemetery.<sup>54</sup> Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect for much of the IWGC’s work, although he initially resisted the imposition of a cross in every cemetery due to the “inherent cruelty of the forced cross,” contributed his own discreet Christian details to the designs of the Cross of Sacrifice and Stone of Remembrance by creating three steps leading up to each of these structures, as a reflection of the sacredness of the number three in Christian doctrine.<sup>55</sup>



Figure 3. Stone of Remembrance in Delville Wood Cemetery, Somme, France.

By deciding to include such overtly Christian elements in the cemeteries, Fabian Ware, Frederic Kenyon, Edwin Lutyens and the Imperial War Graves Commission imposed the idea of Christian morality and sacrifice upon the deaths and commemoration of these soldiers. However, not only does this designate the IWGC cemeteries and memorials as

<sup>54</sup> Kenyon, 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens* (London: Country Life, 1950), 375; Wouter Feys, tour with author, Somme, France, July 15, 2015.

distinctly Christian, but distinctly British and imperial as well. Thus, the imperialistic symbolism within the memorials and cemeteries goes hand in hand with the Christian symbolism.

There are many subtle indications of imperialistic symbolism and intention scattered throughout the designs of the IWGC memorials and cemeteries. First, the general appearance of many of the larger monument structures is imposing, grandiose and stoic—characteristics indicative of British imperial power and resolve. The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, which commemorates over 72,000 missing British and Commonwealth soldiers from the Battle of the Somme, towers over the tree line of the surrounding forests and fields in the countryside of Somme, France, casting the notion of British imperial superiority and strength over a foreign town.



Figure 4. An aerial image of the Thiepval Memorial demonstrates its enormity. Photo from <http://www.visit-somme.com>.



The Menin Gate Memorial, another major memorial to the missing, functions similarly; it serves as a central landmark in the small city of Ypres, Belgium and projects a distinctly British presence on the city center. Although it can be seen as a universal commemoration of the losses suffered during the many battles of the Ypres Salient, it is still fundamentally a British war memorial, and thus demonstrates the imposition of British imperialism on a foreign city, just like the Thiepval Memorial. Present on the Menin Gate Memorial are two plaques with Latin engravings; one says “*pro patria*,” meaning “for country,” and one says “*pro rege*,” meaning “for king.” The use of this patriotic, sacrificial language demonstrates the notion of imperial sacrifice present in the IWGC memorials.



Figure 5. The Menin Gate Memorial, west side.

Similar to the Thiepval and Menin Gate Memorials, The Chatham Naval Memorial, although located in an English city and not in a foreign city, casts British imperial authority and accomplishment over the town of Chatham—quite literally. The memorial, which commemorates over 8,000 sailors who perished at sea serving the Royal Navy in WWI (and over 10,000 from WWII), is located on a large hill overlooking the city. The central structure is a massive obelisk, which is surrounded by walls filled with the names of the soldiers commemorated by the memorial. On all four sides of the body of the obelisk is a carving of the British crown, and flanking the obelisk are four statues of lions in relaxed poses; the union of these symbols links the notions of pride and confidence, symbolized by the lion, with the presence of British imperial royalty. There are also several figures of lions carved on the Menin Gate Memorial.



Figure 6. Bottom half of the obelisk at the Chatham Naval Memorial, featuring one of the four crowns and two of the four lions.

Yet, while the Imperial War Graves Commission contributed significantly to the making of memorials after WWI and was granted exclusive control over the development of British and Commonwealth cemeteries and graves, there are numerous memorials that were created by organizations and people that had no affiliation with the IWGC, and that reflect the same Christian and imperialistic notions that are present in the IWGC memorials. Historian John Wolffe, in discussing the particularities of British interwar memorials, asserts, “the style of monuments and the content of inscriptions varied widely, but the linking of the Christian and the patriotic was frequently explicit. This was consistent with the iconography of war cemeteries themselves where a sword is contained within a central cross, and the Stone of Remembrance has the appearance of an altar.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed this is evident in the memorials that were built during the same time period that the IWGC did most of its work, but by organizations outside of the IWGC. Two memorials that distinctly reflect the patriotic, imperialistic and Christian sentiments found in the IWGC memorials and cemeteries stand across from each other at Hyde Park Corner in London: the Machine Gun Corps Memorial, designed by Francis Derwent Wood, and the Royal Artillery Memorial, designed by Charles Sargeant Jagger.

The Machine Gun Corps Memorial was unveiled in 1925 at its original location on Grosvenor Place as a commemoration to the Machine Gun Corps, which served in several locations and many battles throughout the war (the memorial was later moved to its current location at Hyde Park Corner after construction). It features a statue of the Boy David flanked by two Vickers machine guns draped with wreaths and two key inscriptions below the statue. The first is more prominent and in larger letters: “Erected

---

<sup>56</sup> Wolffe, 244.

to commemorate the glorious heroes of the machine gun corps who fell in the Great War,” and the second, an excerpt from the Book of Samuel: “Saul hath slain his thousands but David his tens of thousands.”<sup>57</sup> The fact that the biblical quotation is unidentified probably means that the makers of this memorial assumed most Britons would know this reference; this reveals just how thoroughly Christianity permeated British society. Overall, the images and inscriptions on this memorial can be seen as a metaphor for the underdog courage and valiance of the British in the war and thus represent Britain as a vulnerable yet proud and triumphant victor.

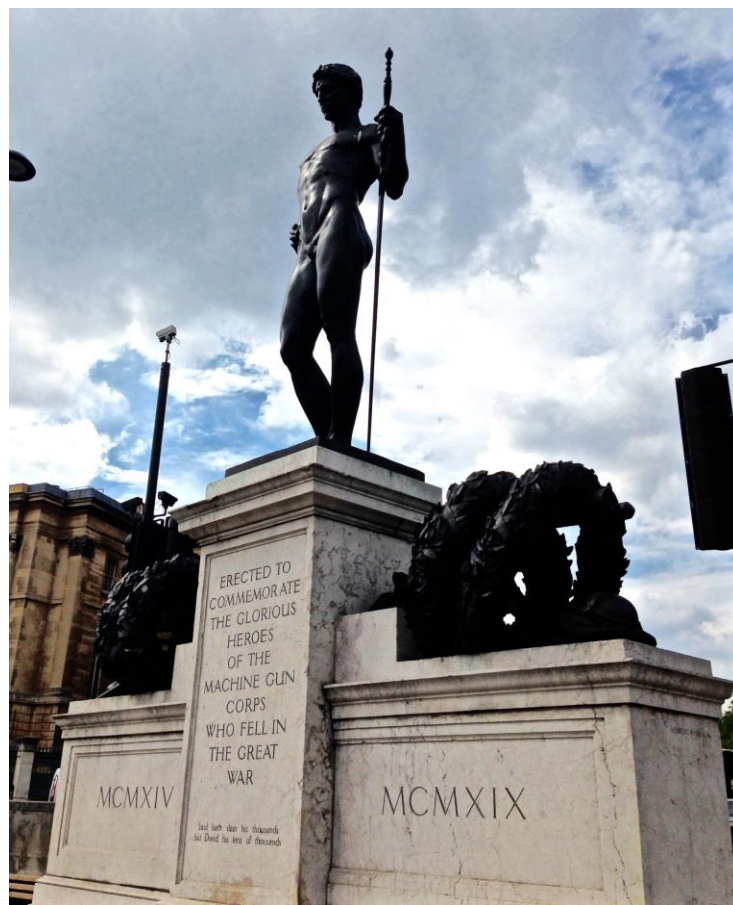


Figure 7. The Machine Gun Corps Memorial, front view.

<sup>57</sup> “WWI 100: London’s Memorials...The Machine Gun Corps & the Man Who Mended Faces,” A View From the Mirror: A Cabbie’s London, accessed January 17, 2016, <http://blackcablondon.net/2013/10/13/ww1-100-londons-memorials-the-machine-gun-corps-the-man-who-mended-faces/>.

Charles Sargeant Jagger's Royal Artillery Memorial, also unveiled in 1925, reflects a similar representation of British triumph, but in a more dramatic manner. Positioned on the west end of Hyde Park Corner, the memorial is massive and impossible to ignore. It consists of a large Portland stone base with engravings of battle scenes, flanked by bronze statues of Royal Artillery soldiers and topped with a larger-than-life Howitzer machine gun. The memorial bears the names of the places where British Artillery soldiers died, along with this inscription: "In Proud Remembrance of the Forty Nine Thousand and Seventy Six of All Ranks of the Royal Regiment of Artillery Who Gave Their Lives for King and Country in the Great War 1914-1919." The memorial as a whole, and especially this inscription, reflects the sentiment of British imperial and Christian sacrifice. While the battle scenes and language portray the gruesome reality of the mass death suffered in WWI, the Portland stone machine gun on the top of the memorial also portrays British military superiority. Jagger was a fervent imperialist, determined to create sculpture that would "endure and convey his powerful conviction of the need for British imperial power to remain strong and resilient for decades into the future;" clearly this memorial is more of a veneration of British imperial triumph than a commemoration of loss.<sup>58</sup> Further, as Jonathan Black asserts, Jagger wanted to convey the international influence of British imperial strength through this memorial by uniting "the vivid scenes of combat below to those areas [carved on the

---

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Black, "The Illusion of Permanence: Archaeology, Imperialism and British Public Sculpture Between the World Wars," *Sculpture and Archaeology/Ed. By Paul Bonaventura and Andrew Jones* (2011): 62.



bronze panels] in which the Regiment had served with such distinction, as well as emphasize the global reach of British military power.”<sup>59</sup>

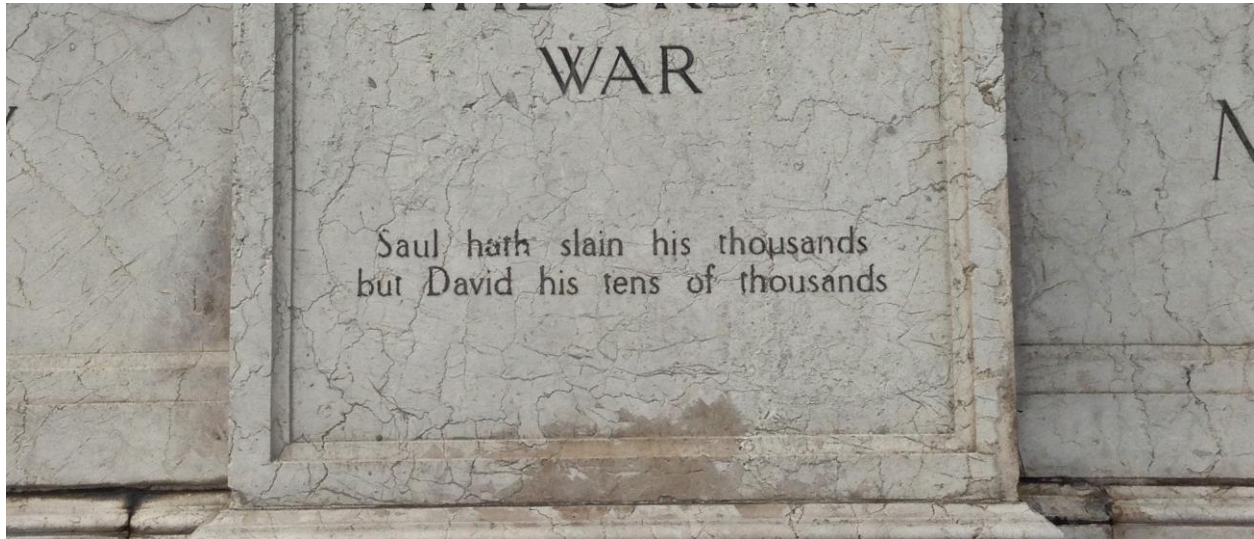


Figure 8. Inscription from the Book of Samuel on the front of the Machine Gun Corps Memorial.



Figure 9. Inscription near the top of the east side of the Royal Artillery Memorial.

---

<sup>59</sup> Black, 65.

There are several other memorials throughout London that reflect the same sentiment of British imperial strength by using figures of ordinary soldiers. Eric Kennington's 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Memorial in Battersea Park, revealed in 1924, depicts three injured infantry soldiers, having survived the peril of the trenches on the Western Front. Albert Toft's Royal Fusiliers Memorial in Holborn, erected in 1922, also portrays a soldier emerging from battle. As Geoff Archer asserts, the soldier is meant to represent the difficult yet triumphant struggle to survive battle and, perhaps more importantly, "signify the army's (and the country's) difficult rise to dominance and ultimate victory."<sup>60</sup> Lastly, Jagger's Memorial to the Great Western Railway Company

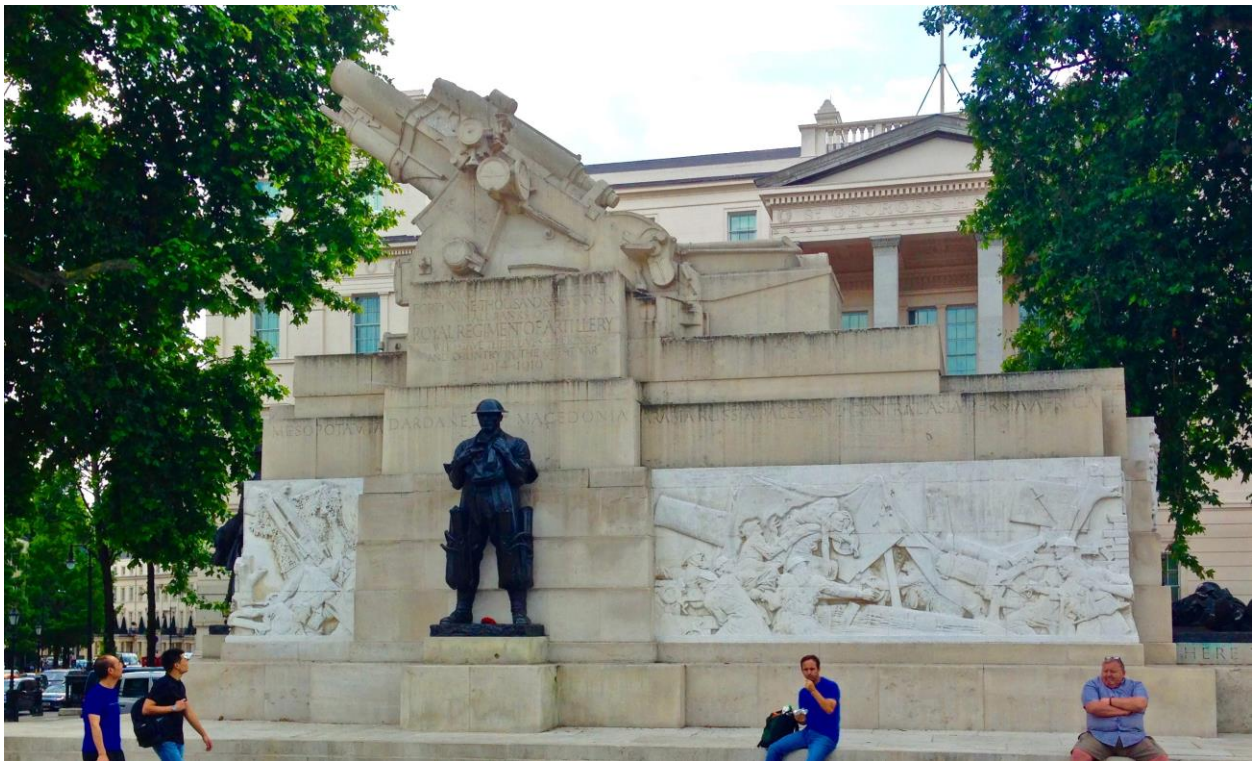


Figure 10. Royal Artillery Memorial, east side.

---

<sup>60</sup> Archer, 203.



in Paddington Station depicts a soldier reading a letter from home. Although the memorial is not an explicit expression of imperialistic might, it conveys a strong sense of patriotism by illustrating the notion of the soldier's bonds with his home and his desire to fight and sacrifice himself for his country.<sup>61</sup> By incorporating figures of soldiers that represent patriotic and imperial sacrifice, the makers of these memorials contributed to the impression of British imperial veneration conveyed in British WWI memorials.



Figure 11. Great Western Railway Memorial, Paddington Station, London. Photo from <https://farm9.staticflickr.com>.

---

<sup>61</sup> Archer, 205-206.



Overall, the themes and sentiments represented in the language, symbolism and structure of British WWI memorials—both those built by the IWGC and those built and funded by other architects and organizations—reflect the ideals of British patriotism, imperialism and Christian sacrifice. The fact that the same sentiments and themes present in the IWGC memorials are echoed in non-IWGC memorials indicates a collective desire, on the part of British citizens, architects, the government, and the IWGC, to view their empire as united and strong in the aftermath of the war and to present this image to the rest of the world. Further, the unity of symbols throughout various types of British war memorials indicates the thorough pervasion of Christian and imperialist ideals in 1920s British society.

### Chapter 3: Christianity, the Empire and a Distinctly British Faith

Fabian Ware and the Commission had in mind a more specific mission than simply reinforcing the union between Christianity and imperialism through the image of the memorials: they were actually trying to create the notion of a uniquely British Christian faith. As Kenyon describes in his report, “The cross [of sacrifice] should not be of the bare pattern, which would provoke comparison with the crucifixes habitually found in French cemeteries, but rather of the nature of the crosses found in many English country churchyards, or the Celtic crosses characteristic of northern Britain.”<sup>62</sup> In this same section of the report, Kenyon also describes how the Stone of Remembrance should “meet many forms of religious feeling” and serve as “the mark, for all ages, of a British cemetery of the Great War.”<sup>63</sup> In *The Immortal Heritage*, Ware includes the prayer that would be used during the erection of tablets in commemoration of the total losses of the British Empire. One line in particular evokes the connection between the spreading of Christian faith and the international mission of the Empire: “all that is now said and done shall be for the good of our nations, the welfare of mankind and the spread of Thy Kingdom throughout the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>64</sup> The words “Thy Kingdom” are distinctly ambiguous, and seem to simultaneously refer to God’s kingdom and the British Empire. These details suggest that the IWGC wanted to avoid identifying with any particular Christian denomination and thus allow all British Christians of any denomination to be able to relate to the religious sentiments of the

---

<sup>62</sup> Kenyon, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Kenyon, 10-11.

<sup>64</sup> Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, 36.

memorials. The IWGC also wanted to distinguish British memorials from any other memorials and part of this involved distinguishing the image of British Christian belief from that of non-British Christian belief. This had two effects: it allowed for the increase in number of British citizens who could feel connected to the IWGC cemeteries and memorials, and it created a unique sense of British faith that distinguished itself from the Christianity of other nations; this is exactly what Ware and the Commission intended. By establishing the notion of a distinctly British sense of Christian identity through the memorials and the already historically intertwined sentiments of Christianity and imperialism, the Commission moved toward achieving its goal of presenting the image of a unified Empire, both to Britons and to the international community.

These phenomena of the merging of Christianity and Empire and the creation of a distinctly British faith also occurred with the erection of the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in 1920. The Cenotaph is a monolithic Portland stone memorial—built by Edwin Lutyens and commissioned by the British government—which stands in Whitehall, London, just near Westminster station. The first version was built with wood and plaster in 1919, and was originally meant to be a temporary memorial that would allow British citizens to grieve their losses at home immediately following the end of the war. However, as Geoff Archer explains, the Cenotaph was “a starkly abstract, essentially classical structure, lacking any sort of imagery save for the simple carved wreaths on the top and side...its simplicity, made essential by the limited time available to build it and the fact that it was initially constructed out of wood and plaster, was its overriding attraction;” thus, the Cenotaph quickly and unexpectedly became an icon of postwar pilgrimage and received such praise that demands arose for a permanent

version to be created. The permanent Portland stone version was then unveiled on Armistice Day, November 11, of 1920.<sup>65</sup> The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior was unveiled in Westminster Abbey during the same Armistice Day ceremony where the Cenotaph was unveiled. This monument is essentially a tomb containing the body of an unidentifiable British soldier transported from the battlefields of the Western Front. Similar to the Cenotaph, the Tomb was created as a general place of mourning for British citizens, a testament to the gravity and scope of British losses in the war.



Figure 12. The Cenotaph at Whitehall, London.

---

<sup>65</sup> Archer, 195-196.

Initially planned as a secular monument so as to not create divisions on a religious basis, the Cenotaph ironically became imbued with religious meaning until it eventually gained “holy” status. However, the cooperation of Church and state involved in the unveiling process could not have been the only factor that contributed to this ideological transformation. So how did the Cenotaph eventually come to be known as “the people’s shrine”?<sup>66</sup> One possibility is the planning done by the Memorial Services Committee, a cabinet committee of Parliament responsible for creating the Armistice Day ceremony during which the Tomb and Cenotaph would be revealed. The Committee seemed to be primarily concerned with the language in the inscription on the Tomb, the Christian nature of the unveiling ceremony, and making sure that the ceremony and presentation of the memorials represented a national sentiment of grief. Originally, the inscription on the Tomb was to read “A British Warrior/who fell in the Great War/1914-1918/For King & Country,” but somehow during the planning process, a significant amount of text was added to this inscription, including the phrase, “for God for King and country.”<sup>67</sup> This is an important change, as it clearly indicates that the Memorial Services Committee intentionally inserted Christian language into the memorial. While this was an addition made to the Tomb and not the Cenotaph, it was inherently tied to the Cenotaph given the simultaneous nature of the unveiling of the two memorials. Thus, the Committee contributed to imbuing both the Cenotaph and the Tomb with the idea that the British soldiers’ collective sacrifice was made both for

---

<sup>66</sup> Gavin Stamp, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (London: Profile Books, 2007), 42.

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum from the Memorial Services Committee Summarizing the Dean of Westminster’s Suggestion, October 15, 1920, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London.

Britain and for God. The Committee also emphasized the importance of choosing the right religious representatives to invite to the ceremony. A document entitled "Report from Memorial Services Committee 3 November 1920," states the intentions of the Committee:

It was generally agreed that invitations should be limited to the following denominations: Wesleyan, United Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist, Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic Church and Chief Rabbi. The Chairman undertook to send personal invitations to the heads of the above denominations, and also to consult the India Office as to whether that Department considered it desirable that representatives of Mahomedan and Sikh religions should also receive invitations.<sup>68</sup>

The Committee also discussed how this ceremony would be inherently Christian in nature, although that presented a problem, given that the Tomb and Cenotaph technically represented the efforts of all of the Commonwealth forces, which included Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Jewish faiths as well. Eventually the Committee decided to indeed invite "one Hindu priest and one Mahomedan priest to be present at the Cenotaph."<sup>69</sup> Note that the non-Christian representatives were invited to be present at the Cenotaph, not the burial of the Tomb. It is possible that the Committee wanted to place the Muslim and Hindu representatives at the Cenotaph to avoid forcefully including them in a Christian burial ceremony, but it is also possible that they wanted to

---

<sup>68</sup> Report from Memorial Services Committee on the Details of the Unveiling and Ceremony of the Tomb, October 19, 1920, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London.

<sup>69</sup> Report from Memorial Services Committee, November 3, 1920, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London.

exclude them from this ceremony in order to keep it strictly Christian. The latter possibility is most likely true, given that the Committee continuously referred to the ceremony as a “strictly domestic affair” and emphasized that it should “strike a chord of deep feeling in the hearts of the nation.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, by the time of the unveiling ceremony on Armistice Day, the Cenotaph and Tomb stood to represent British sacrifice, British grieving and British faith; these memorials were not inclusive of all faiths, nationalities and beliefs of the Commonwealth nations under the Empire, but rather, perpetuated an image of Christianity that catered exclusively to British cultural and religious identity.

However, the Memorial Services Committee is not solely responsible for the development of the religious and domestic importance of the Cenotaph. The media and British citizens in general shared the sentiments imbued by the Committee in the planning process. Immediately after the ceremony took place, British newspapers were flooded with reports of overwhelmingly positive reactions to the ceremony and the memorials themselves. There were also letters to the editor from citizens expressing their approval and gratitude for the ceremony, including this excerpt from a letter entitled “Our London Letter,” which emphasizes the national importance of the Cenotaph:

In Whitehall, where stood out boldly the covered Cenotaph around which stood his Majesty, the Princes, great statesmen, Peers, and warriors, the tableau was a veritable microcosm of the Empire marked by the grandeur,

---

<sup>70</sup> Report from the Memorial Services Committee On the Details of the Unveiling and Ceremony of the Tomb, October 19, 1920, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London.

solemnity, and dignity associated with such solemn ceremonials. But this was not only personal, it was national.<sup>71</sup>

Gavin Stamp remarks on how the Cenotaph represented more than just a commemoration to the loss and sacrifice of the British in the war, but that it “somehow managed to express the inarticulate grief of a wounded, damaged society.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, the Cenotaph is a manifestation of the suffering and grief of the British nation; certainly this sentiment rang true among British citizens and members of the government. Prime Minister David Lloyd George affirmed the status the Cenotaph had gained as a national emblem of British mourning and sacrifice in a letter to Lutyens, thanking him for “designing and building the memorial which has become a national shrine.” His letter expresses public affirmation of this occurrence as well: “how well it represents the feeling of the nation has been amply manifested by the stream of pilgrims who have passed the Cenotaph during the past week.”<sup>73</sup> Essentially, due to the collective contributions of the Memorial Services Committee, Lutyens, the Church, and British people in general, the Cenotaph transformed from a secular symbol into a holy, sacred, national shrine; it became a monument that represented distinctly British grief, replaced any alliance toward particular Christian denominations with the notion of one British faith and allowed grieving British citizens to individually and collectively find solace in the idea of a strengthened nationhood after a devastating war. Further, the Cenotaph allowed the British public to feel a sense of security under the notion of a unified and

---

<sup>71</sup> “Letter to the editor, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, November 11, 1920, accessed June 25, 2015, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>72</sup> Stamp, 42.

<sup>73</sup> Hussey, 394.



capable empire that could provide them with the comfort of a meaningful communal place to express and reconcile their losses.

This discussion of the Christian and imperial ideals portrayed in the memorials and the resulting occurrence of a distinctly British faith reveals an interesting possibility of intention within the memorialization process. It seems that while these cabinet committee members, Fabian Ware, the IWGC, and others involved in making Britain's most notable WWI memorials preached the notion of a unified Empire, they were really trying to achieve a unified Britain. Further, these actors did not seem to care much about showing the world how great and mighty all of the nations included in the Empire were, but rather, how great and mighty Britain was and how capable it was of supporting an internationally dominant empire. Thus, the memorials were not meant to be representative of the heroic sacrifice and triumph of Britain and everyone else within its domain; they were meant to represent the heroic sacrifice and triumph of Britain.

## **Chapter 4: The Debate Concerning the Equality Policy**

### **The Debate**

Ironically, though the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior served to unite the British public in mourning and merge the many Christian denominations into one unified British faith (which was also ironic in itself because the Cenotaph was designed explicitly as a secular monument), the IWGC's policy of equality in the building of cemeteries and graves simultaneously generated dissent and division among the British public, and between citizens and their government. As discussed in Chapter 1, Ware, Kenyon and the Imperial War Graves Commission created uniformity among the graves and forbade relatives to erect their own monuments in order to ensure equality of commemoration; they were unwavering in this. The Commission valued individual commemoration, but only to the extent that the representation of each individual sacrifice amounted to an image of collective sacrifice for the Empire, and they made sure to reiterate, with steadfast conviction, that this method of commemoration was best for everyone. The forcefulness of Ware, Kenyon, and the supporters of the Commission in reiterating the necessity of the equality policy seems like a strategy to prevent a reaction, or to at least diminish its strength. However, while these statements in support of the equality policy were meant to reinforce the positive intentions of the IWGC and assure the bereaved that the Empire was taking care of their dead, they generated the opposite reaction and instead ignited a significant public debate beginning in 1918 with Kenyon's report. The debate included arguments from British citizens, members and supporters of the IWGC and members of the British government. David Crane explains how, after the report was issued, the Commission found itself faced with public dissent

and criticism in the form of speeches, meetings, private and public letters, editorials in newspapers, public petitions, and memorandums opposing and in favor of the equality policy.<sup>74</sup> He describes that “week in, week out, letters in *The Times* show the depth of anger at the refusal ‘to allow bereaved parents, widows, and orphans to have any way in regard to the graves of their loved-ones.’”<sup>75</sup> Ethel M.M. McKenna commented on November 13 of 1918 that the Commission’s plan for uniform headstones “will convert what should be beautiful resting-places for loved and honoured dead into dreary expanses of unlovely headstones.”<sup>76</sup> On December 7, 1918, Thomas C. Fry, a notable clergyman, urged that the War Office discontinue funding for the IWGC’s project because “the only way to stop what is undoubtedly giving pain to many is to stop payments for the work.”<sup>77</sup> On June 6, 1919, a grieving widow expressed her frustration with her inability to create a unique grave for her husband:

My husband...served from the beginning of the war with great distinction and unselfish heroism. He was buried with full military honours, and his battalion, whom he loved and who loved him, erected a beautiful cross to his memory...Why could not I be allowed the consolation of reproducing that cross in stone to any uniform size and height allowed...Is it true that the War Graves Commission are anxious for uniformity because of the economy of reproducing hundreds of slabs of the same block?<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Crane, 145.

<sup>75</sup> Crane, 145.

<sup>76</sup> Ethel M. M. McKenna, letter to the editor, *The Times* (London), November 13, 1918.

<sup>77</sup> T. C. Fry, letter to the editor, *The Times* (London), December 7, 1918.

<sup>78</sup> Letter to the editor, *The Times* (London), June 6, 1919.

An editorial in the *Spectator* from February 1, 1919 criticizes the Commission for emphasizing quality, efficiency and artistic style over respect for the dead and their loved ones and claims that separation of the graves from the bereaved was a sign of disrespect.<sup>79</sup>

There also exist some notable criticisms from prominent public figures. Viscount Wolmer, a member of Parliament, was one of the strongest opponents to the equality policy and served as a voice for the dissenting bereaved. Viscount Wolmer issued an official motion within the House of Commons against the equality policy, which echoed an earlier motion made by Sir James Remnant, another MP:

To call attention to the resentment aroused amongst relatives of fallen soldiers by the action of the Imperial War Graves Commission: that in the opinion of this House, relatives of those who fell in the war should be allowed to erect monuments of their own choosing over the graves of their fallen relatives, subject to such regulations as to size as may be prescribed by the Imperial War Graves Commission.<sup>80</sup>

Viscount Wolmer also spoke publicly on the matter, voicing his own unconstrained opinion beyond the confines of a political document:

The conception that you have in the graveyards designed by the War Graves Commission is of a great national Imperial memorial, a great war memorial, a great memorial to the British Army...by all means have memorials. Make them out of Government stone if you like. Make them uniform. But you have no right to employ, in making these memorials, the

---

<sup>79</sup> Crane, 146-147.

<sup>80</sup> Coutts, 1-2.

bodies of other people's relatives...Are you going to consider the feelings of the bereaved relatives or the artistic susceptibilities of the casual tourist?<sup>81</sup>

Ware, the Commission, and its supporters were quick to respond to these criticisms. In a letter in response to an angry dissenting widow, Ware writes, "I know how English people dislike...any interference with their liberty in any way...but they do not understand that such committees as this...are really designed to help them."<sup>82</sup> Yet, Viscount Wolmer's statement illustrates a very different issue than what Ware seems to be addressing: the fact that the IWGC was depriving citizens of their right to mourn their lost loved ones in a private, personal manner, and that this was gravely offensive to many of the bereaved. The bereaved were not primarily upset about their lack of liberty in the matter, although that is a likely underlying factor; they largely felt that the equality policy rendered them incapable of making any conclusive connections to their dead husband, son, brother, etc., and that the IWGC and its supporters within the government were using the bodies of their loved ones to promote their own agenda. However, although Viscount Wolmer and other angry citizens openly expressed this sentiment, supporters of the equality policy continued to claim that the IWGC's policy would be best for everyone, and to reiterate the importance of representing the collective sacrifice of and for the Empire. For example, the following statement was made in a counter-memorandum from the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee in response to the petition from the British public to be able to choose the graves of their lost ones:

---

<sup>81</sup> Crane, 158-159.

<sup>82</sup> Crane, 145-146.

When the widows and mothers of our dead go out to France to visit graves they will expect to find that equal honour has been paid to all who have made the same sacrifice, and this result cannot be attained if differences, however restricted, are allowed in the character and design of the memorials erected.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, how could the members of the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee claim that they *know* that the grieving widows and mothers expected equality, especially when there existed letters and petitions to the contrary? Statements like these seem to be an attempt to speak for the bereaved, telling them that equality in representation was paramount for everyone, rather than allowing them to voice their own desires.

William A.B. Lehman Burdett-Coutts was one of the most notable public supporters of the equality policy and one of the most aggressive responders to disagreements with the policy. In 1920, he gave a speech outlining his reasons for supporting the policy; below is an excerpt from that speech:

This Memorial is to be erected by, and at the charge of, the State. It is not intended to express only, or mainly, the personal sorrow of relatives. It is a collective tribute by the Empire and the Nation to those who all alike made the same sacrifice for the same cause, and between whom therefore, as individuals, no distinction of rank, position, or means should be made apparent. The object of the Commission is to represent, in a foreign land and to future generations, the whole British Empire joining as one great unit to defend by arms...So in years to come, as travellers from all nations

---

<sup>83</sup> Crane, 151.

move from cemetery to cemetery the impression of this ideal will be cumulative in its effect, and will tell to the world with simple but overpowering force the story of the unity and devotion of the British Empire.<sup>84</sup>

Burdett-Coutts' statement reiterates the essential points that Kenyon makes in his explanation for the reasons of the equality policy in his Report, but with slightly more force behind the message that the bodies of the dead soldiers transcended the individual soldiers' sacrifices and stood, instead, for the triumph, superiority and legacy of the Empire. There was also an authoritative tone to this speech; he states plainly what the memorials and cemeteries are and what they are not; further, he is not interpreting or justifying the policy, but rather, stating it as an inarguable fact. Finally, he imbues an inescapable moral duty on all British citizens to forgo their individual private interests and unite under the common cause of supporting their Empire. Burdett-Coutts was a well-known conservative MP at this point; his status as a representative of British citizens' interests within the government serves as its own form of authority. To reinforce even further the inarguable rightness of the equality policy, he reads a letter from demobilized soldiers units:

The Comrades of the Great War, The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, on hearing of the proposed Motion in the House, passed Resolutions specifically urging equality and uniformity. These Resolutions derive additional weight from the fact that representatives of these bodies together with those of The National

---

<sup>84</sup> Coutts, 5.

Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers [...] went to France to view the work of the Commission, and have returned fully satisfied. A report of their visit states:--‘regarding the Cemeteries, when these are completed, I am confident no monument to the dead will be more impressive or beautiful than the British Cemeteries in France and Flanders.’<sup>85</sup>

Burdett-Coutts’ incorporation of this letter into his speech was undeniably savvy: who could possibly argue with the wishes of those who were closest to the conflict and witnessed death firsthand? They watched their comrades and friends die on the battlefields and they sacrificed their own safety and lives to fight for their country; wouldn’t they know best how the dead should be commemorated?

Rudyard Kipling, whose opinions and contributions to the memorialization process had been consistently influential and respected, asserted that the criticisms of the dissatisfied bereaved were unjustifiable. He stated, “Our boy was missing at Loos. The ground is, of course, battered and mined past all hope of any trace being recovered. I wish some people who are making this trouble realized how more than fortunate they are to have a name on a headstone in a known place.”<sup>86</sup> Kipling’s argument also serves to dismantle the one advanced by Viscount Wolmer—the dissenting side’s strongest parliamentary voice—that the bereaved were not represented by the Commission’s policy, as Kipling is himself a bereaved father.<sup>87</sup>

Due to their political influence, the voices in support of the Commission’s policy were simply stronger and more difficult to argue with, and thus, by the middle of 1920, it

---

<sup>85</sup> Coutts, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Holt and Holt, 146-147.

<sup>87</sup> Holt and Holt, 145.



seems that the debate was finally resolved, and the dissenting voices had been more or less silenced. An article in the *Western Daily Press* from May 3, 1920 proclaims:

The widespread opposition that has been manifested against the decision of the Imperial War Graves Commission has almost wholly evaporated...the members of the Commission have all along taken the view that as every one of our glorious dead now lie in the 3,000 odd British cemeteries in France and Flanderes made precisely the same sacrifice so should the memorials that mark their resting place be equal in design and value...Gradually the public has come to realise the justice of this decision.<sup>88</sup>

Maybe the public did truly realize the justice of the decision, or maybe they just had to “reconcile themselves” to the “determined expression of imperial sentiment and meaning” expressed by the equality policy; either way, the IWGC, with the support of members of the government, the media, Kipling, and demobilized soldiers, had effectively defended itself against criticism and doubt.<sup>89</sup> The Commission would continue its work memorializing and commemorating the dead soldiers and the collective imperial sacrifice of WWI, unimpeded and with faithful adherence to the equality policy, until 1937.

---

<sup>88</sup> Letter to the editor, *Western Daily Press*, May 3, 1920.

<sup>89</sup> Lack and Ziino, 360.

### **Reinforcing the Policy: The King's Pilgrimage**

In 1922, the IWGC published a text entitled *The King's Pilgrimage*, written by Frank Fox with an introductory poem by Kipling. The book, in its original form, appears almost like a children's book and reads like a simple but compelling short story. It is a narrative and illustrative account of King George's visits to the cemeteries of the Western Front several years after the end of the war. It poetically describes his unwavering approval of the IWGC's cemeteries and his humble address to the bereaved, thanking them for their cooperation and reinforcing the importance of their role. The text is clearly an attempt to reinforce the IWGC's opinion on the necessity of the equality policy and to persuade the public that the way these cemeteries and memorials were being built was best for everyone, especially because the King himself affirms it. Although the King probably would have visited the graves in some fashion, his visits would not have been so staged and documented so poetically had the IWGC not intended to convey some specific message through the book. The King's visits to the graves of the Western Front seem to fit into a neatly packaged tale of both triumph and humility, with equal veneration of the sacrifice of the soldiers and the tasteful, appropriate nature of the IWGC's cemeteries. The opening paragraph of the first chapter summarizes the course of the King's visit and sets the tone for how the book portrays the King's pilgrimage:

It was our King's wish that he should go as a private pilgrim, with no trappings of state nor pomp of ceremony, and with only a small suite, to visit the tombs in Belgium and France of his comrades who gave up their lives in the Great War. In the uniform which they wore on service, he

passed from one to another of the cemeteries which, in their noble simplicity, express perfectly the proud grief of the British race in their dead; and, at the end, within sight of the white cliffs of England, spoke his thoughts in a message of eloquence which moved all his Empire to sympathy.<sup>90</sup>

The overall language and tone of the book presents the King as an authoritative yet reverent participant in the IWGC's work and illustrates the graves themselves in an idyllic and fantastical light. Given the political background of the author Frank Fox, it makes sense that the book would portray the King and the graves in this manner. An Australian born supporter of British imperialism, Fox spent most of his adult life as a journalist and often used his writing and reporting to advocate for imperialist politics. Coincidentally, he worked as an editor for the *Morning Post*, the same publication that helped Fabian Ware develop his imperialistic values.<sup>91</sup> The following passage exemplifies Fox's use of poetic language and idealistic literary imagery to present, all at once, the King's laudatory viewpoint of the cemeteries, the passionate and honorable sacrifice of the British soldiers, the IWGC's intended perception of the image of the cemeteries, and an overall veneration of imperial perseverance:

---

<sup>90</sup> Frank Fox and Rudyard Kipling, *The King's Pilgrimage* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1922), 4, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36075/36075-h/36075-h.htm>. I employ the electronic version of *The King's Pilgrimage* because I was not able to access the original version outside of the British Library. I needed to reference the work during the writing process, which occurred after I left London.

<sup>91</sup> Martha Rutledge, "Fox, Sir Frank Ignatius (1874-1960)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fox-sir-frank-ignatius-6229>.

Going out of Belgium to France the sun was shining and the graciousness of Nature, covering with herb and blossom the ulcers of the old battle-fields, made this corner of Flanders seem a fair and human country. For those who now saw the district for the first time, the concrete forts lying like the bleached skeletons of strange monsters in the fields, and the serried ranks of the graves, coming up in line after line to give their mute witness, told something of what it cost to hold the Ypres Salient. But the King knew all that it had been in the long dark winters of the war, when the very abomination of desolation brooded over it, and in its pools of slime his soldier struggled and choked that the fields of England might be kept free of the foe. He did not hide from those with him that the memory of it weighed heavy on him and that in his mind, with pride in the thought of such superhuman devotion, there was a passionate hope that never again in the world's history would men be called upon to suffer as these men had suffered. Speaking, too, of the cemeteries, where general and private rest side by side beneath the same simple stones, equal in the honour of their death for duty's sake, he agreed that this was the only possible way.<sup>92</sup>

The passage demonstrates how Fox used a dramatic storytelling narrative style to portray the sacrifice of the British soldiers as an epic tale of courage and tragedy. The phrases “superhuman devotion,” “passionate hope,” and “the very abomination of desolation” exaggerate and fictionalize the experience of the soldiers fighting on the

---

<sup>92</sup> Frank Fox and Rudyard Kipling, *The King's Pilgrimage* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1922).

Ypres Salient. We cannot deny that the losses the British suffered in the war and the brutality of the combat on the field were devastating; however, this piece of literature dramatizes the events of the Western Front to the extent that it reads like a fictional story rather than a truthful account and removes the events of the war from the context of reality. Further, the description of how the ruined battlefields had been transformed into a beautiful natural landscape just four years after fighting concluded offers praise to the efforts and vision of the Commission. The description of the garden-like quality of the cemeteries might also function to appease bereaved family members; they were not allowed to plant flowers on their own loved ones' graves, but they need not worry because the IWGC made sure that the cemeteries were appropriately beautified.

Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem that prefaces the book, the title of which also serves as the book's title. The poem offers a tribute to the sacrifice and honor of the British soldiers and, in classic Kipling style, venerates the righteousness of the Empire and the achievements of the IWGC. The penultimate stanza reinforces Fox's portrayal of the cemeteries as peaceful, beautiful mourning sites that the IWGC worked hard to create:

And the last land he found, it was fair and level ground  
Above a carven Stone,  
And a stark Sword brooding on the bosom of the Cross  
Where high and low are one;  
And there was grass and the living trees,  
And the flowers of the Spring,

And there lay gentlemen from out of all the seas  
That ever called him King.<sup>93</sup>

The verse also references the influential presence of the Cross of Sacrifice and the Stone of Remembrance and the manner in which the graves gracefully equate the sacrifice of the soldiers—"where high and low are one." The last two lines emphasize that these soldiers nobly gave their lives for their King and their empire.

Similarly, the final stanza of the poem reaffirms that the soldiers knowingly and willingly gave their lives to preserve their empire. It also imparts the idea that, in order to prevent the diminishing of the soldiers' sacrifice, Britain must not allow the graves and memorials to crumble and deteriorate, and thus, they should continuously commemorate and remember the lives given for the Empire:<sup>94</sup>

All that they had they gave—they gave—  
In sure and single faith.  
There can no knowledge reach the grave  
To make them grudge their death  
Save only if they understood  
That, after all was done  
We they redeemed denied their blood,  
And mocked the gains it won.<sup>95</sup>

*The King's Pilgrimage* strikes a keen balance between respect for the sacrifice of the dead and the grief of their bereaved, the wisdom and authority of the King, the

---

<sup>93</sup> Fox and Kipling, *The King's Pilgrimage*, electronic version, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Roger Ayers, "The King's Pilgrimage: Notes on the Text," Kipling Society, accessed April 25, 2016, [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg\\_kingspilgrimage\\_notes.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_kingspilgrimage_notes.htm).

<sup>95</sup> Fox and Kipling, *The King's Pilgrimage*, electronic version, 3.

beauty and appropriateness of the graves, and the overt yet justified support for the equality policy. The IWGC clearly crafted this text in order to send a specific message to the British public, and this message is that the equality policy is best for everyone and the Commission deserves the authority to make these decisions for Britain's war dead. However, the book is more than just a veneration of the IWGC's policies and work—it is an attempt to assuage those citizens who resisted the equality policy and were silenced during the debate. The text is prefaced by this passage: "profits from the sale of this book will, by His Majesty's desire, be distributed among the philanthropic organizations which for some time have been assisting relatives to visit the cemeteries abroad."<sup>96</sup> If a grieving widow were to open to the first page of this book in 1922 and read that the profits were being given to relatives to visit the graves of their dead soldiers, she would probably be more inclined to believe in the genuine intentions of the IWGC than if the earnings of the book were going toward funding for the Commission to build more memorials. Clearly the IWGC was not trying to make money off of this publication, and the fact the funds were allocated specifically to British citizens for cemetery visits reinforces the idea that this book was born out of a desire to appeal to the public in a specific way. Then, if we consider that public criticism of the IWGC's decisions was dangerous for the Commission's image and could potentially interfere with its financial and political support, it is logical to assume that the Commission would want to make a public statement to prevent any resurgence of the debate. Thus, the book serves as the IWGC's final attempt to convince the public that the Commission should be trusted and

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

supported, and that a policy of equality and uniformity was, as the King claimed, the only possible way to adequately honor the sacrifice of the dead.

## **Conclusion**

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the conclusion to the debate concerning the equality policy illuminates a question of greater ethical significance: to whom does the body of the dead soldier belong? Since the dead cannot speak for themselves, with whom does authority rest in deciding how their lives are commemorated? When we speak specifically of war dead, the question becomes even more difficult to answer. The British and Commonwealth soldiers who fell in WWI were legal subjects of the British Empire sent by the state to the Western Front to sacrifice their lives on behalf of the Empire, so does that mean the state had the right to decide what happened to their bodies in death? There are certain elements of commemoration and mourning, however, that transcend legality. Generally, as a human race, we value respecting individuals in death, and that usually entails commemorating them according to their wishes; however, if no specific wishes are expressed before death, as was the case with the majority of British soldiers, there is no way to know how they would want to be remembered, or what they would like to be done with their bodies—a living voice must choose for the dead. Perhaps that voice then belongs to those who knew these individuals personally, and would therefore have a better idea of how they would have wanted to be remembered, rather than the state. The dissenting bereaved who criticized the equality policy claimed that they knew best how to commemorate their loved ones, and further, that it was their right to decide. Fabian Ware, the Imperial War Graves



Commission and its supporters claimed the opposite: the state knew best and the state held the authority to decide; but there is no law to determine whether or not the state had the authority to use the bodies of the dead soldiers to create a national memorial in recognition of the glory of the British Empire's collective sacrifice. As we discussed, the debate culminated in favor of the equality policy and the Commission's agenda, yet, this result was based purely in the political and financial support that the Commission had acquired, and not in any legal definition concerning the authority of the state over the dead soldier. Thus, these questions remain unanswered. However, by examining the imperialistic agendas of Fabian Ware and his supporters, the relationship between the Imperial War Graves Commission and the British government, the historically intertwined development of Christianity and the Empire, and how all of these factors manifested in the imperialistic image of Britain's World War I memorials, we realize the power and influence that political persuasion can hold over the state of the individual citizen—even in death.

## **Epilogue: WWI Was Just the Beginning**

Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware was not a British politician. He never became Prime Minister, he never rose to great fame in the British public sphere, and he was not a war hero. He was simply an educated man with an obsessive determination to change the world, and he did. His fervent conviction in the moral duty of the British Empire to facilitate international cooperation resulted in a massive, distinctly British body of commemorative architecture that symbolizes his beliefs precisely. His legacy will live on

until the stone crumbles into the earth, joining the remains of the bodies it commemorated. Yet, this legacy could not exist without the financial and ideological support of certain members of the British government. Once other British pro-imperialists recognized that Ware's vision was plausible, the domino effect of governmental support began, and by the early 20's, despite public criticism, his dream became attainable. In 1937, upon the conclusion of the Commission's work, Ware published *The Immortal Heritage*, in which he outlines the accomplishments of the Commission and the details of the memorials and cemeteries built over the last 20+ years and reaffirms the legitimacy of the Commission's policies and decisions. The following excerpt from Ware's account makes clear his satisfaction with the Commission's work and its achievement of his initial political goals:

My fellow-Commissioners, whose duties have called and still call them to watch many other spheres of human activity, would agree that the special nature of work in the Commission's service has engendered an exceptional type of zeal and personal devotion. It is this widespread devotion or fervor among the members of the Commission's staff in the conduct of their daily routine which has impressed most forcibly those who have controlled, and many who have observed, the work of the last twenty years. The preservation of that spirit is as necessary as the durability of materials for the permanence of the work. It is a natural growth in those who have seen rising on the foundations, which they laid during the war, a monument worthy of their comrades-in-arms—men who fought 'not for glory, nor for wealth, nor for honour, but for that freedom which no good

man will surrender but with his life.' To transmit it to their successors they must have faith and vision—faith in their service as a living model of co-operation between the equal partner nations of the Commonwealth and vision that through their work Nation may speak peace unto Nation.<sup>97</sup>

The Imperial War Graves Commission had achieved what Ware believed to be successful international cooperation, led by the British Empire and facilitated through the memorialization process. Ironically, two years later, WWII would begin, the Commission's work would start over again, and Ware's ideal of international peace and cooperation would prove fickle. The British WWI memorialization effort is the story of imperialistic optimism in the age of a dying empire; what story does British WWII memorialization tell?

---

<sup>97</sup> Ware, *The Immortal Heritage*, 62.

## Bibliography

- Archer, Geoff. *Public Sculpture in Britain: A History*. Norwich: Frontier, 2013.
- Ayers, Roger. "The King's Pilgrimage: Notes on the Text." Kipling Society. Accessed April 25, 2016. [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg\\_kingspilgrimage\\_notes.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_kingspilgrimage_notes.htm).
- Black, Jonathan. "The Illusion of Permanence: Archaeology, Imperialism and British Public Sculpture Between the World Wars." *Sculpture and Archaeology / Ed. by Paul Bonaventura and Andrew Jones* (2011): 61-81.
- Carey, Hilary M. *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Charles Sargeant Jagger, *Great Western Railway Memorial*, 1922, London, United Kingdom.
- Charles Sargeant Jagger and Lionel Pearson, *Royal Artillery Memorial*, 1925, London, United Kingdom.
- Clarke, Peter. *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*. London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1996.
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Accessed January 28, 2016. [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org).
- Coutts, William Lehman Ashmead Bartlett Burdett, Right Hon. *Imperial War Graves Commission. Speech by Mr. Burdett-Coutts, M.P., In Support of the Commission's Policy of Equality of Treatment, etc.* London: Wightman & Co., 1920.
- Crane, David. *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves*. London: William Collins, 2013.
- Croom-Johnson, Norman, Rudyard Kipling, and Douglas MacPherson. *The Graves of the Fallen*. London: H.M.S.O., 1919.
- Cross, Colin. *The Fall of the British Empire: 1918-1968*. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1969.
- D.J. Williams, *The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior*, 1920, Westminster Abbey, London, United Kingdom.
- Fletcher, Anthony. "Patriotism, Identity and Commemoration: New Light on the Great War from the Papers of Major Reggie Chenevix Trench." *The Journal of the Historical Association* 90 (2005): 532-549.

- Fox, Frank and Rudyard Kipling. *The King's Pilgrimage*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1922.
- Fox, Frank and Rudyard Kipling. *The King's Pilgrimage*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1922. Accessed April 15, 2016.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36075/36075-h/36075-h.htm>.
- Francis Derwent Wood, *Machine Gun Corps Memorial*, 1925, London, United Kingdom.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- H. Chalton Bradshaw, *Guards Memorial*, 1926, London, United Kingdom.
- Holt, Tonie and Valmai Holt. *My Boy Jack? The Search for Kipling's Only Son*. London: Leo Cooper, 1998.
- Hussey, Christopher. *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens*. London: Country Life, 1950.
- India Office Records and Private Papers. British Library, London, United Kingdom.
- Joseph Armitage, F.V. Blundstone, and Sir Herbert Baker, *Tyne Cot Memorial and Tyne Cot Cemetery*, 1927, Ypres, Belgium.
- Kenyon, Frederic. *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed*. London: H.M.S.O., 1918.
- Lack, John and Bart Ziino. "Requiem for Empire: Fabian Ware and the Imperial War Graves Commission," in *Empires in World War I*, ed. Andrew Jarboe and Richard Fogarty. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Laqueur, Thomas. "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Lawson, Tom. "'The Free-Masonry of Sorrow': English National Identities and the Memorialization of the Great War in Britain, 1919–1931." *History and Memory* 20 (2008): 89-120.
- Lloyd, David Wharton. *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia, and Canada, 1919-1939*. New York: Berg, 1998.
- Louis, Wm. Roger, Judith Brown, and Alaina Low. *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume IV*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Meyer, G. J. *World Undone*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2006.

- Milner, Alfred. *Constructive Imperialism*. London: National Review Office, 1908. Accessed April 5, 2016. Hathitrust.
- Milner, Alfred. *The Nation and the Empire: Being a Collection of Speeches and Addresses*. London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913. Accessed April 5, 2016. Hathitrust.
- Parsons, Timothy. *The British Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A World History Perspective*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.
- Robbins, Keith. *The British Isles, 1901-1951*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Sir Edwin Lutyens, *The Cenotaph*, 1920, Whitehall, London, United Kingdom.
- Sir Edwin Lutyens, *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*, 1932, Somme, France.
- Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir William Reid-Dick, *Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery*, 1918-1945, Arras, France.
- Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir William Reid-Dick, *Tower Hill Memorial*, 1928, London, United Kingdom.
- Sir Herbert Baker, *Delville Wood Cemetery*, 1918, Somme, France.
- Sir Reginald Blomfield and Sir William Reid-Dick, *Menin Gate Memorial*, 1927, Ypres, Belgium.
- Sir Robert Lorimer and Henry Poole, *Chatham Naval Memorial*, 1924, Chatham, United Kingdom.
- Stamp, Gavin. *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*. London: Profile Books, 2007.
- Sullivan, Zoreh T. *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Summers, Julie and Brian Harris. *Remembered: the History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. London: Merrell in association with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2007.
- A View From the Mirror: A Cabbie's London. "WWI 100: London's Memorials...The Machine Gun Corps & the Man Who Mended Faces." Accessed January 17, 2016. <http://blackcablondon.net/2013/10/13/ww1-100-londons-memorials-the-machine-gun-corps-the-man-who-mended-faces/>.

Ware, Fabian Arthur Goulstone. *The Immortal Heritage: an Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years, 1917-1937*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937.

Ware, Fabian Arthur Goulstone. *The Worker and His Country*. London: E. Arnold, 1912.

Winter, Jay. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Wolffe, John. *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945*. London: Routledge, 1994.

## **Acknowledgments**

First I must thank my academic advisor Monica Rico for her consistent and invaluable guidance throughout this project and my entire career as a student at Lawrence University. I must also thank Paul Cohen, whose expertise and advice was instrumental during the writing and editing phases of this project.

Many thanks to the students in my History 650 Senior Experience class, the students in my History 620 Historiography class, and all of my friends, family and fellow students who helped me brainstorm and edit, encouraged me to keep going in moments of doubt, and listened to me ramble about the intricacies of my research.

Finally, I must acknowledge and thank the donors who contributed to the William A. Chaney Fund for Excellence in History and allowed me to travel to London and conduct my research. I simply could not have completed this project without their support.