

The Absent Dead and Figurative First World War Memorials

by

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The National Inventory of War Memorials was established in 1989. It is managed jointly by the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and funded by the Leverhulme Trust. No survey of British war memorials then existed and the available information took many different forms and was scattered in numerous archives across the country. The project involved combining these disparate sources and planning a programme of fieldwork in order to assess the current condition and location of memorials. Most available information took the form of original documentation dating from the 1920s and the aim was to produce an up-to-date catalogue.

I devised a standard recording form which included sections on a memorial's location, site, inscriptions, type, and history. These were distributed to volunteers, many of whom represented local councils, local and family history societies, branches of the Royal British Legion, local studies libraries and county archives. The success of the project is based on the enthusiasm and hard work of local people who were prepared to contribute considerable time and energy towards recording.

The full national catalogue will not be available for at least two more years although all memorials incorporating figurative sculpture have now been recorded and form the basis of the research for this paper. To date almost twenty thousand completed forms have been returned but there are still many areas where the survey is still underway. The Inventory includes memorials from the eighteenth century to the present day although the majority of records pertain to the First World War. It also includes memorials to individuals and those inside churches, as well as public memorials, so even relatively small geographical areas yield a huge number of reports, and every Cathedral or large parish church houses a wealth of regimental memorials.

*As coordinator of the project I catalogued each completed report that began to be delivered by the box load as the survey established itself, particularly after substantial press coverage in the *The Guardian* and *The Times* in November 1990.¹ I became increasingly fascinated by the accounts of communities' responses to the task of commemoration. Local newspapers' reports were particularly evocative and revealed the personal significance of memorials as well as the often complex negotiations and considerations which characterised local commemorative projects from inception to unveiling. My main interest lay in local community memorials, rather than regimental*

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or individual memorials, especially those erected after the Boer War and First World War and particularly those which included figurative sculpture either in the round or in relief.

As well as compiling a geographical or typological survey of these structures I wanted to incorporate an assessment of the motives behind them and to examine political interest and involvement, at both a local and national level. In particular, I was unhappy with the art-historical and critical judgements of figurative memorials which, in sum, tended to dismiss them as the death rattle of the realistic school before the emergence of Britain's most lauded artistic accomplishment this century, the development of Modern Sculpture. Surely, it seemed, the largest public arts project ever undertaken in Britain was worthy of deeper investigation. The number and range of figurative memorials surprised me; it was crucial to establish when they were made, by whom and how. The production of sculpture in general at this time also needed closer examination.

The motives behind the erection of war memorials were the starting point for this paper. I looked deeper into the circumstances of death and burial of those killed in the First World War, the reaction of the bereaved and home communities, and the responses of government and the art establishment. It became clear that commemorative objects, especially figurative ones, were closely intertwined with these issues, which informed the practice of artists and the types of memorials commissioned, right through to the organisation of unveiling ceremonies.

This article is the result of my particular interest in figurative First World War memorials. It examines a few crucial themes in detail yet covers a large number of objects and crosses various disciplinary boundaries. It does not claim to present a finite view of the subject area as a whole but it is based on a deeply held conviction of how a set of commemorative objects functioned in the public realm at a particular point in British history.

War memorials expose the very nature of memory and its varied forms, from emotional private recollection to politically shaped public remembrance. Memory is implicitly selective and hence its inextricable relationship with forgetting. It is important to be aware of what is forgotten in order to understand what it is that makes particular forms of memory prevail. Whilst the bodies of the British war dead were being exhumed from the mire and devastation of the First World War battlefields, replacement commemorative bodies were being sculpted at home. The aim of this article is to trace these two processes which took place in parallel, on both sides of the Channel, from the end of the War in 1918 to the mid 1920s.

Firstly I will look at the nature of modern warfare, the official measures taken to commemorate the dead and the trauma of bereavement experienced by those at home. I will then examine the actual practice of sculpture at this time and its particular applicability for commemorating those killed in the First World War.

In 1915 the War Office banned the repatriation of the British war dead.² The dead were to be buried, if possible, behind the lines and Army Chaplains performed funeral ceremonies over mass graves. Yet many bodies simply disappeared, blown apart, drowned in mud, or fragmented by bombardment in the midst of No Man's Land. In 1916 Divisional Burial Officers were appointed and together with the Directorate of Graves Registration, which had been established the same year, made efforts to centralise records of who was buried where. A leaflet entitled *The Care of*

the Dead was issued later in 1916 by the Directorate to reassure relatives at home that their loved ones had received a decent burial:

Everything is done as tenderly and reverently as if the dead man were in an English churchyard among themselves.³

Even so, in the final paragraph of the leaflet, the Directorate could not claim that such treatment was without exception:

In all wars it has been one of the fears haunting a soldier's friends that his body may be utterly lost. Even in this war there have been such irretrievable losses. But in no great war has so much been done to prevent the addition of that special torment to the pains of anxiety and bereavement.⁴

Great efforts were made to confirm the death of those reported as 'missing in action'. After a period of time, if no identifiable body could be traced, relatives were informed that the classification had been changed to 'missing—subsequently, officially, presumed killed in action'.

The continuing enormousness of casualty figures, which were to reach a final total of over 722,000 British dead, necessitated the expansion of the Directorate of Graves Registration.⁵ The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) was formed under Royal Charter on 10 May 1917 as a 'permanent Imperial Body' charged with the care of all graves in all parts of the Empire and in foreign countries. By honouring and perpetuating the memory of 'common sacrifice' it was intended to "keep alive the ideal for the maintenance and defence of which they have laid down their lives".⁶ The practical work of the Commission involved the maintenance of graves and the acquisition of land for cemeteries. As the number of missing reached many tens of thousands it was decided to build memorials in each of the main battle sectors on which the names of those with 'no known graves' would be engraved. Menin Gate listed 56,000, Tyne Cot, almost 35,000 and Thiepval 73,412 yet these were not in place until the very end of the 1920s and early thirties. In the meantime work continued to secure identification of as many isolated burials as possible; unmarked graves had for centuries been associated with punishment, barbarity and victimisation.

After the Armistice in November 1918 the War Office appointed a special commission to "ascertain, as far as possible, the precise location and identity of British Soldiers hitherto unaccounted for". The Commission visited areas previously occupied by the enemy and the War Office stressed that its members were "untiring in their efforts to exhaust every conceivable avenue of information....The public may rest assured that all that can be done has been done to trace the missing".⁷

An official photographer, Ivan Bawtree, accompanied one of these searches near Passchendaele in 1919. The surviving prints, deposited in the Imperial War Museum's Department of Photographs, provide a grim insight into exhumation and identification (Figs. 1a-d).

The physical exertion of such fieldwork was mirrored by an equally arduous administrative process. Paperwork such as a 'Burial Return Form' or an 'Exhumation and Reburial Report' included a map of precisely where each body had been found, details of the means of identification, whether any effects had been forwarded to

Passchendaele c.1919 -

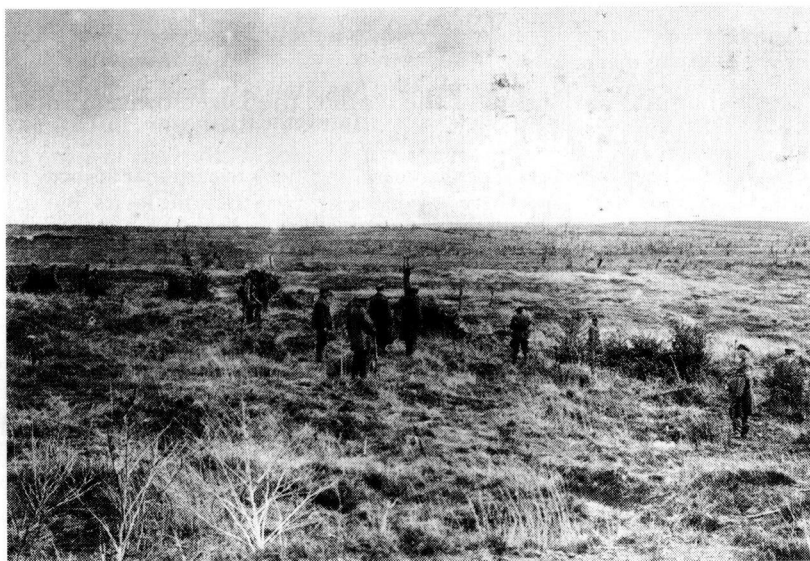


Fig. 1a
Parties searching for evidence of buried corpses



Fig. 1b
A Body found



Fig. 1c (left)
Removing remains from wet
ground



Fig. 1d (below)
The remains awaiting removal
to concentration cemetery
Imperial War Museum

base as well as a reference to the new plot, row and grave number. As each body was exhumed, the IWGC bestowed it with an identity, whether a specific name, an unknown soldier from a particular regiment, or simply 'A Soldier of the Great War—Known Unto God'. They were then reinterred 'properly' with honour, in a site of national commemoration. The bodies had been exhumed from foreign soil and placed in cemeteries on land which had been formally given to the British Government in perpetuity.⁸

The graves in concentration cemeteries were arranged to an orderly geometric plan and marked by labelled wooden crosses, later to be replaced by uniform official headstones. At this time the cemeteries appeared as barren as the surrounding landscape. Subsequent architectural and horticultural adornments (the Royal Horticultural Society arranged the planting of native English shrubs and flowers) transformed the cemeteries into oases of order and rest dotted across the ruined countryside. Desolation and blight became hidden by the spontaneous recovery of 'nature' and by the deliberate, highly organised, efforts of the IWGC.

The exhumation of bodies was mentioned as little as possible in the Commission's annual reports. The searches were almost clandestine operations. It was a clearing-up process, an ordering of mess and fragments, governed by the political necessity to create a cohesive landscape which conformed with the ideals the IWGC had been established to maintain.

Burial and cemeteries abroad had then become the exclusive concern of the IWGC. Relinquishing their role as citizens, thousands of men had become components in the military machine and in death they were to be buried and officially commemorated as such. To many at home this arrangement caused widespread distress. Apart from completing a few forms and choosing a brief inscription for the official Commission headstone, the bereaved had no input whatsoever. The vast majority, unable to visit the battlefield cemeteries in the immediate post-war period needed, in the absence of a body, some readily available focus for their grief. They too, needed to stage a symbolic honouring, in the absence of a corpse.

Immediately after the war, and occasionally before the Armistice, almost every community set about building its own tribute to the local war dead. Most memorials were organised by a committee which was intended to represent different sections of the community. Public subscription was the most common form of funding and great efforts were made to secure contributions from every inhabitant so that the memorial would be considered as belonging to everybody. Deciding the type of memorial often involved heated public debate at open meetings or in the local press. Utilitarian schemes, such as village halls were popular but there was often a greater, overwhelming need for a 'visible reminder' of those who were not to return. Monuments, of many types and form, were erected in public sites to serve solely this purpose.

Before examining local memorials in greater detail I wish to consider the government's own memorial on mainland Britain to 'the Glorious Dead'. A temporary Cenotaph was placed in Whitehall to provide a focus for the Peace Celebrations of July 1919 and its popularity led to a permanent replacement unveiled

on Armistice Day 1920 (Figs. 2 and 3).⁹ Sir Edwin Lutyens initially had been asked to provide a catafalque, but realising that a catafalque was a structure on which to place a coffin, Lutyens submitted a design for a Cenotaph. Derived from the Greek *kenotafion* [kenos—empty and tafos—tomb] a Cenotaph is defined as a monument which does not contain the body of one whose memory it seeks to perpetuate.¹⁰ It was, therefore, highly appropriate to the experience of the British public who adopted the unfamiliar term with enthusiasm. Similar temporary structures were installed across the country. When Letchworth unveiled its wood and plaster Cenotaph in October 1919 (Fig. 4), it was described as meeting:



Fig. 2
The temporary Cenotaph at Whitehall,
erected for the Peace Celebration in July 1919. Sir Edwin Lutyens
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England



Fig. 3

Unveiling of the Cenotaph and the Funeral of the Unknown Warrior, Armistice Day, 1920
Imperial War Museum



Fig. 4

Temporary Cenotaph at Letchworth, unveiled October 1919
First Garden City Heritage Museum

...a craving that has arisen among our citizens. Some definite time was needed, some definite place at which the men, women and children of Garden City could give public expression to their admiration for those who had risen to the nation's need, and acknowledgment also, of their sorrow for the loss of those who have gone out from this place, and who never returned. Moreover, though we could not gather the bones of our fallen, from the battlefields of the world, from the deeps of the sea, and place them here in a mausoleum, we could still build this empty tomb; empty, and yet to us so full of meaning, so charged with the spirits of those whose bodies have perished...¹¹

In 1919 Bonar Law explained that the Whitehall Cenotaph was "intended to represent an imperial grave of all those citizens of the Empire" and added that it would be unsuitable to convert it into an actual grave.¹² Yet, on Armistice Day 1920 the ceremony at the Cenotaph was combined with the burial of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey. The Cenotaph as empty grave of the Empire's dead was aligned symbolically with the repatriation and burial of an actual British body. The popularity of both these measures was enormous and regional memorials testify to the success of these national symbols by applying them to a more specific group of dead. A report in the *Spectator* described the fundamental success of the anonymity of the Unknown Warrior: "every bereaved man or woman can say, 'That body may belong to me'".¹³

On a local level figurative sculpture played an important part in narrowing the commemorative parameters of a memorial. Lutyens had rejected this idea for the Whitehall Cenotaph, as he told Sir Alfred Mond, the First Commissioner of Works, on 29 July 1919:

Many have suggested to me to place bronze figures representing sentries around the monument. This I would deeply regret.¹⁴

Lutyens also made a sketch which showed a soldier surmounting the Cenotaph rather than a vase and pyre.¹⁵ His reasons for abandoning this idea are unclear but there is no doubt that the Cenotaph's abstract, timeless symbolism would have been dramatically impaired by the addition of such figures. The impact of the combined unveiling of the Cenotaph and the burial of the Unknown Warrior possibly influenced Lutyens' other memorials at Southampton (1920), Rochdale (1922) and Manchester (1924) (Fig. 5), which are surmounted by a sculpted draped corpse which, the unveiling programmes read: "convey[s] to those who stand below no individual identity and so in truth 'every mother's son'".¹⁶

The Cenotaph struck a powerful chord with the British public, thousands of whom were bereaved. Yet, although popular, the Cenotaph was too abstract in form and generalised in its commemorative allusion fully to satisfy the need for a focus of grief. Local memorials were an attempt to re-site and narrow the commemorative reference to a specific group of war dead and many communities decided to provide their own unknown warrior. Unable to import a representative corpse, although some asked permission to do so, many chose to commission a sculpted body.¹⁷

The emptiness of the Cenotaph, although having a strong resonance for the bereaved, served only to emphasise the pain of absence. Several local memorials seem to counter the emptiness of the tomb by adapting it in various ways. A local



Fig. 5
Manchester
Cenotaph, 1924.
Sir Edwin Lutyens
*Imperial War
Museum*



Fig. 6

Burslem War Memorial, Staffordshire
Designed by C.G. Cowleshaw and sculpted by C. Waller
Unveiled 11 November 1921 by the Earl of Dartmouth
Imperial War Museum



Fig. 7 (left)
Holyhead War Memorial. 1923
L.F. Roslyn Detail
Jo Darke



Fig. 8
Burnley War Memorial,
Townley Park, 1926
Walter Gilbert
*Royal Commission on the
Historical Monuments of
England*

cenotaph could be modelled closely on the original at Whitehall or take the form of a pedestal, adapted to create a similar impression, often with figures attached. A popular composition, used for example at Chadderton, Greater Manchester, was a soldier in mourning pose guarding the cenotaph; aggressive figures lunging forward with bayonets fixed were placed to either side of the Bradford Cenotaph; soldiers were depicted in a niche at Burslem, Staffordshire (Fig. 6) and Auchtermuchty, Fife and on relief panels at Holyhead (Fig. 7), Eccles and Knockholt. At Dukinfield, Egerton, and Metherringham they surmounted the structure. At Burnley, three sculpted servicemen representing the Navy, Army and Air Force emerge from a Portland Stone cenotaph, unveiled in 1926 and designed by Walter Gilbert (1871–1946) (Fig. 8). Not only could the bereaved spectator engage with the appropriate serviceman but female spectators also with the supporting bronze figures, one of whom represents a mother and the other a sister or wife. The unveiling programme outlined at length the intended reading of the memorial:

The cenotaph merging into the three figures of sailor, soldier and airman is intended to express the emotion felt in the human heart at the ideals of those who have fallen in the Great War. The mother, overwhelmed in this emotion, places a wreath in memory of her son at the foot of the Cenotaph, and, as she stoops, the cenotaph shapes itself in her heart into the features of her son.¹⁸

The use of the present tense by the writer encourages the sense of a continuing act of visualisation in which the observer can participate. The memorial becomes a catalyst for giving shape to private memory, yet the strict instructions encourage conformity with established official history, since we also read that:

The Sculptor has endeavoured to conceive a Memorial that shall breathe nothing of slaughter, but only of duty fulfilled and, by fulfilment of duty, the comfort and thankfulness brought to those who remain.¹⁹

Dwelling on death, pain and injury was avoided at all costs. Such a deliberate omission, and similarly the secrecy surrounding the IWGC's exhumation programme, confirms Elaine Scarry's thesis, in her book *The Body in Pain*, that the persistent content of war—injury—often slips from view by a process of omission or redescription. British war memorials played a vital role in this process.²⁰

Having returned to the subject of bodily substance I now wish to consider the particular popularity of bronze figurative statuary. Many memorials were commissioned from the country's most eminent sculptors, Royal Academicians, professors in the art schools or members of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, many of whom had been responsible for the most important public commissions in the early years of the century. The huge demand for war memorial sculpture also provided work for their pupils who were less experienced but nonetheless fully versed in the practice of conventional monumental statuary. Some, such as Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885–1934), Louis Frederick Roslyn (1878–1940) and Gilbert Ledward (1888–1960) had served during the war and this enhanced their appeal to commissioning committees. In order to understand why these traditionalists enjoyed the lion's share of war memorial commissions, it is important to consider the advances being made by the so called 'Pioneers of Modern Sculpture', for the

representation of the body lay at the juncture between the sculptural establishment and an idealistic younger generation which regarded the artist's intent as more significant than the requirements of the commissioning public.²¹

During the very last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, changes in the sculptural understanding of the human form engendered a new acceptance of the incomplete body. Auguste Rodin had rejected anatomical wholeness to concentrate on the surface modulation of the fragment whilst Constantin Brancusi removed the body's outer layers to explore structural possibilities. As the critic Albert Elsen described it:

The consequence of this formal revolution was to strip the human form in sculpture of the culture of nudity, literary or historical identity and rhetoric—to remove its familiar appearance as well as its purposes. The canon had become 'meaningless', inhibiting to new ideals of creation and irrelevant to the expression and style required for a new century.²²

To the audience for British First World War memorials, the canon was far from meaningless, physical wholeness and a familiar appearance being essential. A schema was required which would continue, rather than challenge, the British civic tradition of portrait monuments raised to great men. But rather than a portrait, which was clearly impossible because of the number of dead, what was needed was an ideal form capable of both edifying the dead and providing an appropriate symbolic bodily substitute. The neo-classical bodies of the sculpture schools were, therefore, dressed in military uniforms, bestowing historic specificity on a representation of the human form which had developed from the ancient Greeks. The faces and bodies of pre-war allegorical figures, which would have supported a portrait statue, were re-clothed in contemporary garb. It was not difficult to adapt, for example, a masculine figure personifying 'Industry' which had perhaps flanked a statue of Queen Victoria or a northern businessman, and to place him in a surmounting position with rifle and great coat.

Dr Robert Tait McKenzie, a Canadian doctor who specialised in the anatomical study of athletes, sculpted numerous war memorials in Britain and Canada. He sketched soldiers of the King's Own Scottish Borderers which he was to use for the relief panel of the American-Scottish memorial in Edinburgh, unveiled in 1926 and entitled *The Call, 1914* (Fig. 9). Yet the central three dimensional statue represents an ideal form based on amalgamations of previous studies of the human face and national male types (Fig. 10). Whilst the real Scots soldiers were suitable for the illustrative component of the memorial, they were clearly too plebeian in appearance to embody the nobler qualities. The central figure at Edinburgh, and McKenzie's Cambridgeshire Memorial unveiled in 1922, encapsulated sentimental myths of a nation's youth, full of ideals, ready to fight for their country. The soldiers, being whole and unmaimed, diverted attention from the horror of the war and the tragedy of death and injury. They represented a pure race unsullied by foreign blood. The splendid physiques belied the reality of pre- and post-war poverty, malnutrition and disease.

Christopher Hussey in his biography of the sculptor has discussed the meaning

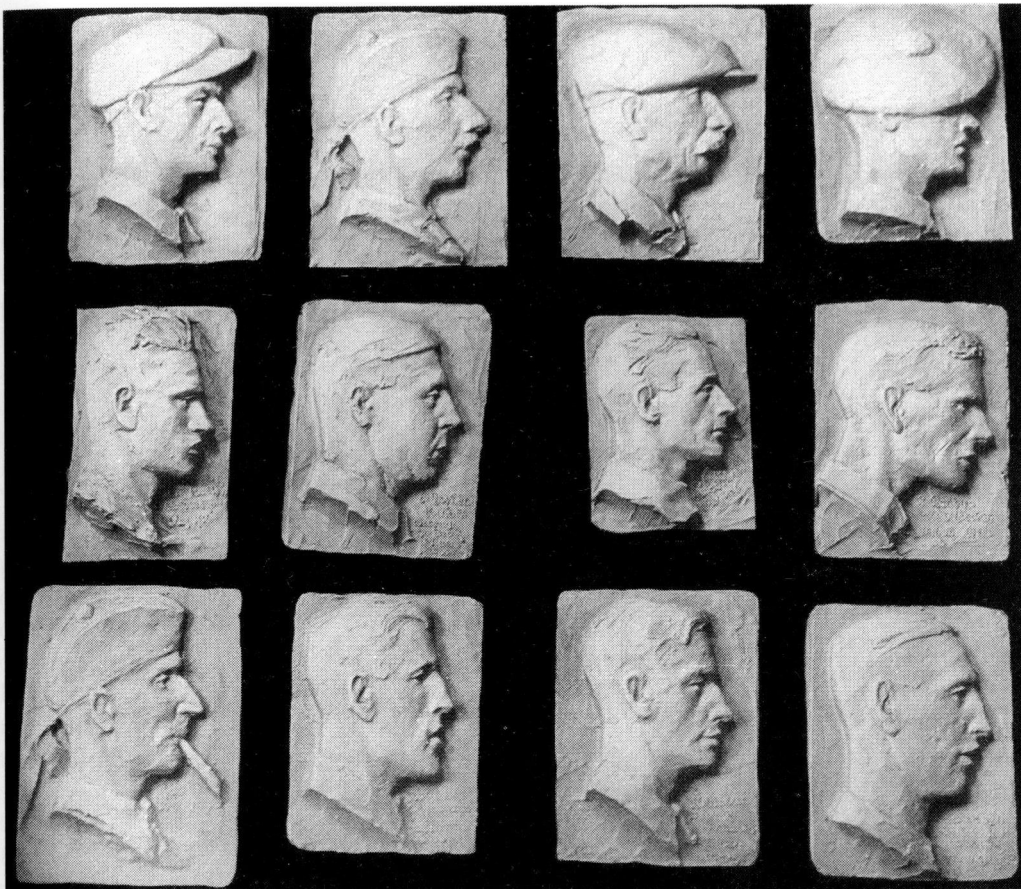


Fig. 9

Sketches of soldiers of the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Robert Tait McKenzie

of the Whitehall Cenotaph and Unknown Warrior, comparing it to *The Call, 1914*:

It remained for Robert Tait McKenzie to give the universal symbol human shape and temporal reality in such a way that the simple-minded may see in it their own lad who went away, even the manner of his going....What the principle figure represents instantaneously, the frieze develops in space and time.²³

This instantaneous function is crucial to an understanding of the soldier-statue's appeal after the First World War. Cenotaphs, crosses and obelisks, in all their forms, were unable to provide such an effect. Neither was the depiction of servicemen in the form of a relief, which although illustrating the activities and circumstances of war, could not provide a substitute for the absent dead. From the confines of the illusory, pictorial plane the soldier had to reinhabit everyday space, shedding his purely narrative function and engendering a bodily dialogue with the spectator.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, avant-garde sculptors were



Fig. 10
The Call, 1914. The Scottish American War Memorial, Princes Gardens, Edinburgh
 Unveiled 1926. Robert Tait McKenzie

returning to direct carving in wood or stone, denouncing modelling and subsequent casting or pointing as mere mechanical reproduction on the basis that only direct carving could be permanently imbued with the artist's actual touch and creativity.²⁴ However, the most vocal proponent of the New Sculpture, Edmund Gosse, believed that modelling and subsequent bronze casting, "is not a translation of the original but that original itself".²⁵ He saw the process as retaining the greatest element of the artist's touch, closest to his original conception and creativity. Yet this quality necessitated the artist's involvement throughout subsequent procedures and there was a world of difference between carefully cast bronzes and those which were produced and chased without the sculptor's direct supervision. After the sculptor had made the clay maquette he could, in fact, hand his work to the founders without any involvement in the casting and final chasing procedures.

The distinction between modelling and carving was made at least as early as Alberti's *De Statua*, written in the 1430s, and the debate was updated with Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form* in 1893 which went through nine editions by 1914. Yet, at the end and turn of the nineteenth century, art schools concentrated on modelling above all else in the education of their sculpture students. The French professors who led this field, in both Paris and London, had an enormous influence on the generation of English sculptors working in the early years of the twentieth century, the most notable being Aimé-Jules Dalou, employed in 1877 as a teacher of modelling at the National Art School, and his assistant and successor in 1880 Edouard Lantéri,²⁶ who became "the most respected teacher of sculpture and modelling of his generation".²⁷ In 1902 he published the first of what was to be a three volume work, *Modelling—A Guide for Teachers and Students* which became the standard text book on the subject. Modelling in clay was the best method of creating bodies. From the clay, figures could be pushed and teased until form emerged from the form-less. The sculptor began by making small sketch models, one of which would be enlarged by way of pointing with the clay built-up around a wooden armature, to the size of the final work. A student of Lantéri, Albert Toft, in *Modelling and Sculpture* (published in 1929) likened the armature to "the skeleton upon which to build the flesh".²⁸ Jacob Epstein later expounded the appeal of modelling, saying "it is the creating of something out of nothing".²⁹ The artist controls the material in a process of addition. In Michelangelo's words, *per via di porre*, or, as Robert Hughes has described it, "the build up, lump by lump, pinch by pinch, touch after touch, of complex volumes out of clay or wax, later to be cast in bronze".³⁰ Whereas carving is the opposite, a process of subtraction, *per forza di levare*, the figure has to be revealed from within the mass and is always determined by the original shape of the block of stone. The discipline required for the painstaking carving process was imbued with the resonance of humbling, sacred toil, the artist's battle with the elements. Eric Gill regarded carving in this light and reiterated the addition/subtraction dichotomy in a lecture of 1918.³¹ By contrast modelling, with its flexibility, contortability and the alchemic casting process with precious metals, was charged with decadence and excess.

John Angel, an Exeter man who had studied at the Royal College of Art, received

the commission for the memorial in his home town which was unveiled in July 1923. Four bronze figures, a sailor, a soldier, a prisoner of war and a nurse, surround a column which is surmounted by a figure of Victory standing on a dragon (Fig. 11). The Victory and prisoner of war figures were exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1922. The figures were first modelled as nudes, around a wooden or metal armature. The local newspaper described this process:

First he made his Victory figure. It may be explained that first the figure was modelled from the life, and made anatomically true. Then it was draped. Then an enlargement was made from the original figure...The four subsidiary figures were built up as the Victory was.³²

Charles Sargeant Jagger, Lantéri's studio assistant from 1911, also carefully swaddled his nude figures so that they retained their form when subsequent clothing or accoutrements were added: "we must ensure against the danger of destroying or cutting into the nude form beneath" (Fig. 12).³³ Great value was placed on the integrity of the whole sculpted body, despite the fact that when cast the resulting hollow bronze would present only an illusion of solidity. The method of modelling the bodily form was regarded as a vital element in the creation of physical verity. "Though I strongly urge the student to build up his work anatomically," wrote Toft, "it should not in the end look like an anatomical figure cut up, as it were, but should be a complete whole".³⁴ The modeller's aim was to belie the actuality of the segmented finished form. The skills of the sculptor, and that of the founder's chaser were both required to create an impression of cohesive flesh and blood.

A photograph of the interior of the Morris Art Bronze Foundry in about 1924 shows the Exeter 'Nurse' in the process of assembly (Fig. 13).³⁵ Here the Soldier and Sailor were also cast whilst the Victory and Prisoner of War were sent to A.B. Burton at Thames Ditton. The Nurse's right arm is yet to be fitted and the socket hole is clearly visible. She is placed to the side of Walter Marsden's seated mother with child for the St Anne's on Sea War Memorial unveiled in 1923, and the plaster pattern and bronze cast of Gilbert Ledward's female nude *Awakening* later erected in Roper Gardens, Chelsea in 1965. Ledward's work, the finished bronze and the amputated plaster, represents the conventional academic nude, like Derwent Wood's *David* which was cast in the same foundry the following year. The Angel and Marsden figures are typical of the ideal nude dressed in contemporary costume and classical drapery to serve the ends of war commemoration.

Photographs of Angel's Exeter maquettes make it clear, especially in the surface treatment of the soldier's coat, that the figures were made up from hundreds of small balls of clay, a process known as *à la boulette*. This pitted appearance is equally evident in the final bronze casting. C.S. Jagger also used this process to great effect. As Nicholas Penny commented on his Royal Artillery Memorial figures of 1925, "the surfaces of the bronzes are rough too, reproducing the mosaic of clay pellets out of which the models were made, reminding us also of the clay in which these soldiers fought".³⁶

Each of the Exeter War Memorial figures, and its naming, was described in the unveiling ceremony programme:



Fig. 11
Exeter War Memorial. Unveiled July 1923. John Angel
Imperial War Museum



Fig. 12
Nude study being clothed in Muslin, from C.S. Jagger, *Modelling and Sculpture in the Making*
(London, 1933)



Fig. 13

Interior of Morris Art Bronze Foundry, c. 1924
From left to right: *Awakening* plaster cast (Ledward),
Woman and Child from St Anne's-on-Sea War Memorial (Marsden),
Awakening bronze cast (Ledward),
Nurse from Exeter War Memorial (J. Angel)

The Soldier figure is a typical Tommy; indeed one may go further and say, a typical Devon, racy of the soil. Mr. Angel has set out to present a type, and those who knew our soldiers at the Front will recognise in his creation a vivid representation of the spirit of the British Army—fearless, adequate, ready for anything that may befall, and supremely natural.³⁷

‘Racy’, meaning ‘distinctive, not smoothed into sameness, retaining traces of origin’, not only describes the character of the men which Angel’s work commemorates but also the production of the sculpture itself (Fig. 14). The uniform surfaces of conventional nineteenth century bronzes were criticised by the proponents of the New Sculpture, vigour of surface treatment being regarded as a vital means of expression and increased naturalism. In 1921 the Royal Society of British Sculptors cited Dalou as the most significant influence on the younger generation who were described as having:

replaced the inanimate idealism of their predecessors with a sturdy realism which implies not the mere imitation of obvious things, but an earnest striving for actuality, character and individuality.³⁸

In 1917 the sculptor W.G. Stevenson (1849–1919) stated that “literary description comes more aptly from a writer, a sculptor depends more upon his clay and its mobility, to convey the atmosphere or ‘feeling’...”³⁹ The viscosity of clay and its eventual permanence when cast in bronze had great symbolic weight. Clay was paralleled with the fragility and malleability of human flesh and the process itself of moulding and casting for war memorials is significant. The mortal flesh suffers and dies and its place is taken by a permanent representation of the former, which will not age and wither. The vulnerable substance of the earth, “soft, inert structureless, essentially passive,” is transformed into a stable, precious copy.⁴⁰ Toft describes bronze as the most permanent of materials, “as it resists the destructive influences of adverse temperature, as well as the natural decay to which less concrete substances are subjected”,⁴¹ or, in Spielmann’s words, “the characteristics of clay or wax frozen hard”.⁴² At both Cambridge and Elland in 1922 the bronze casting of memorial soldier statues had not taken place before the arranged unveiling date. As a result plaster casts had to stand as a temporary replacement—at Cambridge it was painted to resemble bronze. Great concern was expressed that wet weather would ruin the work and expose the ‘subterfuge’, highlighting the vulnerability of the figure at all stages before its final translation into bronze.⁴³

Modelling technique reached its apogee with Rodin who visited the Sculpture School at the Royal College of Art in 1913.⁴⁴ The expressive movement of the sculptor’s hands and tools indicates the malleability of the parent material and also that of the bronze in its molten state which seeks out every crevice of the plaster mould. Toft enthused about the accuracy of detail obtainable with bronze: “wings, flowers and accessories of all kinds can be kept much nearer to the delicate proportions of nature than would be possible in marble carving”.⁴⁵

Textural differentiation in the finished piece could be used to great effect. Many figurative memorials consist of a soldier standing on, and sometimes even emerging from, the mud of the trenches. The treatment of the clay is as lumpen



Fig. 14
Exeter War Memorial, *The Soldier*. Detail
Imperial War Museum



Fig. 15
Stone War Memorial. 1921. Albert Toft
Scott Engering

mud; it is itself. The debris of war—cartridge cases, shrapnel and helmets—make it clear that this earth is the trampled mud of Flanders. Toft's soldier figure with rifle reversed can be found at five different locations, at Stone, Staffordshire (10 January 1921) (Figs. 15 and 16), Leamington Spa, Warwickshire (27 May 1922), Streatham, London (14 October 1922), Thornton Cleveleys, Lancashire (17 November 1923), and Guest Keen and Nettlefolds, Birmingham. With this figure he only provided a suggestive base, yet at Oldham, unveiled in 1923, the earth becomes an integral part of the composition with soldiers shielding behind it, climbing and encompassing it (Fig. 17).⁴⁶ At Alloa, Sir Robert Lorimer and Charles D'Orville Pilkington Jackson's (1887-1973) memorial is a particularly powerful example (Fig. 18). Here the heads and shoulders of three soldiers emerge from a muddy mound entangled with barbed wire and debris. Above, a figure of St Margaret casts her hand over them.⁴⁷ These figures, half-buried in the earth, closely resemble photographs of soldiers rising from trenches in the coagulated landscape of northern France and Flanders where "the water-logged landscape defined the conditions of combat...".⁴⁸ The Alloa memorial also provides an interesting example of historically specific iconography. The central soldier forces back barbed wire which he is about to cut with wire-clippers. The impression of release and freedom can be compared with the more conventional use of broken chains or fetters which themselves were used in the design of First World War memorials. At Newton Abbot, Courtenay Pollock's (1877-1943) bronze female figure of 1922 holds broken chains in her outstretched hands.

In 1901 Spielmann described clay as "the most natural, the most necessary, of all the materials to the modeller's hand—and the most treacherous".⁴⁹ Only a few



Fig. 16
Stone War Memorial. Detail
Scott Engering



Fig. 17
Oldham War Memorial, 1923. Albert Toft
Imperial War Museum



Fig. 18
Alloa War Memorial. 1924. C.D. Pilkington Jackson
Imperial War Museum



Fig. 19
Hale War Memorial, 1922. F.J. Wilcoxson
Scott Engering

years later the perilous implications of the substance were to extend far beyond the sculptor's discourse, and in turn, re-inform it. The 7 ft. bronze soldier surmounting a tall pedestal at Hale, Cheshire, sculpted by F.J. Wilcoxson, was depicted wearing sacks tied around his legs with string, "a protective measure against cold and the mud of Flanders much practised by the English soldier" (Fig. 19).⁵⁰ Yet all combatants suffered from such conditions. The war memorial at Chalons sur Marne sculpted by Gaston Broquet and entitled *La Relève* depicts four soldiers struggling to the front line laden with kit and weapons who slip as their boots sink into the mud beneath them. Broquet's loose modelling creates the same impression as the Alloa memorial, of earth and man being one substance. Broquet's work attracted interest in Britain. In 1921 he won the *Grand Prix* at the 134th Exhibition of the Société des Artistes Français for a bronze group entitled *Dans les boues de la Somme*. This piece represented two soldiers struggling in the mud of the communication trenches, supporting a wounded comrade in an improvised sling. It was illustrated in the *Builder* where it was described as "a fine, vigorous bit of work, and the best thing of its kind in the show".⁵¹ 'Boues' with its meaning of mud, filth and clay captures the sculptor's awareness of the symbolic appropriateness of his medium.

In 1913 Toft sculpted a small figure entitled *The Metal Pourer* which provides a visual play on the sculpture and its method of creation (Fig. 20). Here a workman holds a ladle heavy with molten metal which 'pours' into the base of the sculpture and from which the figure itself seems to have derived. This piece illustrates the movement of the all-encompassing viscous metal. A two metres high version, *Iron*, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1916.⁵² Another earlier example is Dalou's *Potato Picker* of 1889. Here a figure bends to the earth, providing a similar circular play on the interrelated substances of body, clay and earth.

The use of clay as a metaphor for the substance of human bodies and the earth itself, an idea familiar from the Book of Genesis, was prevalent at this time.⁵³ During the First World War so many had died in the mud of the battlefields that the significance of recreating sculptured bodies from clay did not go unheeded. Wilfred Owen made a similar analogy as early as August 1914:

Bodies, the product of aeons of Natural Selection, melted down to pay for political statues.⁵⁴

The final verse of Sir John Arkwright's hymn 'The Supreme Sacrifice', which was a popular choice at war memorial unveiling ceremonies, makes a similar reference:

Long years ago, as earth lay dark and still
Rose a loud cry upon a lonely hill
While in the frailty of our human clay
Christ, our redeemer, passed the self-same way.⁵⁵

A more personal variation came from Vera Brittain a few weeks after the death of her *fiancé* in December 1915:

How I hated them [the birds singing] as I walked back to the station one late



Fig. 20
The Metal Power. 1914 cast. Albert Toft
The Fine Art Society

afternoon, when a red sunset turned the puddles on the road into gleaming pools of blood, and a new horror of mud and death darkened my mind with its dreadful obsession. Roland, I reflected bitterly, was now part of the corrupt clay into which war had transformed the fertile soil of France...⁵⁶

Sculpturally, Antonio Canova's (1757-1822) dictum, 'Clay is the Life; Plaster the Death; Marble and Bronze the Resurrection', was imbued with sudden contemporary applicability.⁵⁷

Whilst serving, Alexander Carrick actually sketched a model of a gunner from the most readily available material—the mud of the trenches. This was cast in plaster behind the lines by a Belgian artist and finally in bronze on Carrick's return home.⁵⁸ In 1918 the statuette was exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy. It was as if the khaki (i.e. dust-coloured) uniforms, intended for the drier climes of India and Africa, were turned to slurry in the damp of Northern France and Flanders. As Sir Ian Hamilton stated at the unveiling of the Batley War Memorial in 1923:

The men went forth into battle and the women wore khaki. Miles and miles of khaki cloth poured out of Batley and the fighting men wore it, fought in it, died in, and were buried in it. So here today we have unveiled a figure of one of those brave Yorkshire fighters.

In *Modelling for Sculpture—A Book for Beginners*, published in 1930, Gilbert Bayes (1872–1953) refers to the idea that only direct carving can be described as sculpture: "in warmer climes, where marble is natural to the soil...something might be said for this view".⁵⁹ Yet other media are seen as being "much more suitable climatically to this country than marble". He continues, "Clay has proved on the whole better as being freer and more easily altered in consistency to meet the needs of the moment, and is generally used in England".⁶⁰ Bayes regarded marble as something of an alien import. Clay modelling with its requirement for damp and moisture is viewed by him as a far more native activity.

The clay metaphor was however a misappropriated axiom in terms of the finished product. Every bronze soldier statue was in fact hollow and comprised separate parts joined together to create an illusory appearance of solidity and wholeness. In the foundry, limbs and heads and torsos would be rivetted and welded together and workmen would then chase the piece to disguise joins.

Thus, the figurative sculpture of First World War memorials provided one complete symbolic body which replaced the many absent, fragmented corpses which were, at this time, still being salvaged from the battlefields, reinterred and, if possible identified. Never before had a single body represented so many who had 'passed out of the sight of men'. The dead's very absence facilitated the process of idealisation, of whom they had been as people and the circumstances of their death. The sculpted body shaped private personal memory as well as creating public myths. By avoiding any reference to physical and social fragmentation it engendered a literal and metaphorical remembering.

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40. These words were used by William Tucker to describe Rodin's use of clay 'for what it is'. See Tucker, W., *The Language of Sculpture* (London, 1974), 1988 ed., 19.
41. Toft (1929), 175.
42. Spielmann, M.H., *British Sculpture and Sculptors of to-Day* (London, 1901), 5.
43. For Cambridge see Hussey (1929), 66-7. The Elland memorial was designed by F.W. Doyle-Jones. The model was unveiled outside the town hall, the bronze later placed on a prominent site at the entrance of a park.
44. Frayling (1987), 84.
45. Toft (1929), 179.
46. The surmounting figure of an infantryman carrying rifle and bayonet was used alone to commemorate the 41st Division at Flers, France and the Royal Fusiliers at Holborn (1922).
47. Representative of Scottish nationhood, St Margaret's feast day on 16 November was appropriately near Armistice Day.
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