

Crucifix, calvary, and cross: materiality and spirituality in Great War landscapes

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Abstract

First World War landscapes are a complex layering of commemorative materialities and spirituality, in which the past is recycled and memory perpetuated in the present. Linking the prehistoric and medieval pasts with the First World War and the present are images of calvaries, crucifixes, and crosses, which appear as landscape monuments and miniature talismanic items of bodily adornment. As poignant icons of sacrifice and remembrance, cruciform imagery focuses attention on the ways in which material culture can transform the lives of those with whom it comes into contact. By drawing together the living and the dead, new commemorative gestures are created in the home as well as on the battlefield, illustrating the power of industrialized war to realign worlds of meaning, emotion, and memory.

Keywords

Calvary; commemoration; cross; crucifix; First World War; memory.

In the poignant, multi-vocal landscapes of the First World War exists a complex layering of materiality and spirituality. Along the old Western Front especially, there are numerous embodiments of memory, religious belief, ethnicity, cultural patrimony, and tourist attraction occupying the same physical space (Saunders 2001a). Together, they provide a unique testimony to the power of industrialized war to destroy, create, and realign worlds of emotion and memory. Here I explore one aspect of this array of embodied experiences and meanings – the Christian cross – from past to present, monumental to miniature, and from battlefield memorial to the symbolic re-ordering of ‘personhood’ through bodily adornment and the ornamenting of the home.

The focus is on wayside calvaries that marked the landscapes of northern France and Belgium before, during, and after the war, and the nature of their relationship with miniature talismanic crucifixes and crosses. By comparing these two scales of representation I aim to show how meanings are created, and how, by moving backwards and forwards between landscape and object, embodied experiences brought into being new forms of commemorative activity.

Sacrificial landscapes

The Western Front is a palimpsest of landscapes, each defined and contested by different groups who engage with its materiality in different ways (Layton and Ucko 1999: 1). Where, until recently, it was seen mainly in terms of military history as an empty and inert backdrop to military action (e.g. Brown 1993; Keegan 1998), today it is increasingly recognized as a prime example of the social construction of landscape, forever open to renegotiation (Bender 1993: 276). Depending on one's interest and engagement

the Western Front is composed . . . of industrialized slaughter houses, vast tombs for 'the missing', places for returning refugees and contested reconstruction, popular tourist destinations, locations of memorials and pilgrimage, sites for archaeological research and cultural heritage development, and as still deadly places full of unexploded shells and bombs.

(Saunders 2001a: 37)

The re-ordering of landscape by total war represents a merging of industrialized technology with a 'natural landscape' which itself is a layering of cultural matter, past and present. Here, new social identities were (and still are) explored and constructed, and new forms of war commemoration created. In religious terms, these landscapes and the men who fought in them were sacrificed for peace in acts represented and perpetuated in individual and collective memory by the image of a crucified Christ.

Insights into the processes at work are given in soldiers' own accounts. Often characterized by haunting religious imagery, they describe in multi-sensorial terms the creation of new landscapes through the destruction of the old. Major John Lyne of the 64th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery observed:

The conditions are awful, beyond description . . . a desolate wilderness of water filled with shell craters . . . Dante would never have condemned lost souls to wander in so terrible a purgatory. Here a shattered wagon, there a gun mired to the muzzle in mud which grips like glue, even the birds and rats have forsaken so unnatural a spot. Mile after mile of the same unending dreariness, landmarks are gone, of whole villages hardly a pile of bricks amongst the mud marks the site. You see it best under a leaden sky with a chill drizzle falling, each hour an eternity, each dragging step a nightmare. How weirdly it recalls some half formed horror of childish nightmare. . . . Surely the God of Battles has deserted a spot where only devils can reign.

(Steel and Hart 2000: 269)

Such accounts are often worded in ways which seem to be descriptions 'of a human being, of a corpse of a village . . . [and t]he result is a close connection, an osmosis between the death of men, of objects, of places' (Audoin-Rouzeau 1992: 81). This suggests that battlefields were themselves visceral commemorative monuments which spoke directly to those whose fighting and suffering created them. Each crater, trench, and feature of the land was packed with sedimented meanings of unrecorded bravery, relief, and tragedy. Yet these places were transient – destroyed by new battles, and, after 1918, overlain by (sometimes bitterly contested) memorialized landscapes. Between 1919 and 1939, the Western Front became a landscape of remembrance for countless battlefield pilgrims and

tourists – commemorative materialities shaped less by those who had fought than by those who had not (Saunders 2001a: 42–3).

Today, the ‘Western Front Experience’ is part of an integrated tourist circuit conceived and promoted by the official tourist offices at Amiens for the Somme in France and Ypres (Ieper) for Belgian Flanders (e.g. CDTS n.d.; TOF 1999). While battlefield tour itineraries constantly create new ‘landscapes within landscapes’ – all are dominated by ‘The Missing’ lying scattered in the fields, their names inscribed on eponymous monuments at Thiepval on the Somme, the Menin Gate at Ypres, and Tyne Cot near Passchendaele.

In the battlefields, the ‘presence of the missing’ was and still is often represented by medieval images of Christ as the ultimate symbol of sacrifice whose bodily remains ironically are also absent. For over five hundred years, innumerable calvaries had been focal points of Christian salience marking the land. Yet, in their apparently straightforward imagery and message, they represented, at least in part, an ambiguously syncretic materialization of pre-Christian belief, Catholicism, and folklore – an icon-dependent belief system which the pressures of industrialized war were to revitalize.

Crosses on the landscape

Calvaries are wayside shrines which contain images of Christ on the cross (crucifix). In northern France and Belgium at least, they are located at the junctions of roads or tracks, and function both as navigational devices and objects of veneration. Since medieval times they have fixed the landscape, symbolically acquiring it for the Christian faith in the same way that, previously, megalithic monuments marked prehistoric landscapes according to presumed religious and ideological imperatives (e.g. Bradley 1998: 51–67; Fleming 1973).

During the First World War, there was a complex interplay of the imagery of the cross, at once Christian, pagan, prehistoric and modern. Exemplifying this are the Neolithic and Bronze Age megaliths of Brittany. Many of these had been Christianized during medieval times either by having images from Christ’s Passion engraved on them, such as at St Duzec (Burl 1985: 42–4), and/or with crosses carved on top, such as La Pierre de Lande-Ros (*ibid.*: 88). Sometimes, associated folk tales recount confrontations between the Devil and a local saint, suggesting the monument is a commemorative manifestation of the tensions and accommodations that attended the original Christianizing process.

Many such monuments continued to be the focus of pagan rites well into the seventeenth (if not eighteenth) century, defying the Church’s attempts to eradicate them (Burl 1985: 122–3). In some instances, folk beliefs concerning the healing properties of the stones and water have lasted into the twentieth century (*ibid.*). The example of Breton megaliths suggests that, when the First World War became entrenched in the rural landscapes of northern France and Belgium in 1914, these regions, despite having seen many changes, retained aspects of medieval imagery and belief for local inhabitants and soldiers, who themselves mainly came from rural areas.

Modernity and prehistory clashed when Brittany’s prehistoric megaliths were recycled as war memorials after 1918. Their syncretic religious ambiguity was enhanced in their new role as commemorative monuments symbolizing a war whose industrialized intensities produced beliefs and behaviours which verged on the pagan (see below). In some

instances, a prehistoric object, such as the menhir (standing stone) at Plozévet, was integrated into a war memorial (Burl 1985: 72), creating a bricolage of old and new at the local level. On other occasions, geographical space and symbolic space were collapsed by the moving of prehistoric monuments.

Arguably the most striking example of this is the Breton memorial known as the ‘Carrefour de la Rose’ near the Belgian town of Boesinghe just north of Ypres. Here, the French 45th and 87th Divisions suffered the German gas attack of 22 April 1915. These men were Bretons – older reservists assigned to what was expected to be a quiet area and who were nicknamed *Les Pepérès*, the granddads.

After the war, this area became a place of regular pilgrimage for Breton families. Commemorating this, a typically Breton landscape was created by the planting of pine trees, broom and heather, and augmented by an authentic sixteenth-century calvary made of pink granite and decorated with figures of Jesus, Mary, and Mary Magdalen brought from the Breton village of Louargat (Baccarne and Steen 1975: 76–81) (Plate 1). In front of the calvary a memorial was built from prehistoric megaliths and an 8,000kg dolmen also transplanted from Brittany (Holt and Holt 1996: 140). The memorial was inaugurated on Sunday 15 September 1929 – a bricolage of transplanted prehistoric and medieval monuments forging friendship ties between Boesinghe and Brittany, and remaining the focus of pilgrimages up until the Second World War (Baccarne and Steen 1975: 76–81).

The war revitalized the image of the crucifix, both as miniature portable object and enshrined as wayside calvary. Moreover, rumours turned into propaganda and myth,



Plate 1 The Breton Memorial, Carrefour de la Rose, at Boesinghe, Belgium. The photograph shows the sixteenth-century calvary and prehistoric megalithic dolmen both transplanted from Brittany. Photo© author.

which inspired new materialities focused on sacrifice. Most famous of these was the accusation that Germans had crucified a Canadian soldier, which first appeared in *The Times* of 10 May 1915 (and grew substantially in the re-telling). This only recently substantiated event was subsequently commemorated in a post-war bronze sculpture by Derwent Wood entitled *The Golgotha of Canada* – an object which, by materializing the myth, caused an international scandal and an official inquest (Becker 1998: 16–17).

Apart from many variations of such stories, imagery suggestive of Christ's crucifixion was everywhere during the war, from actual calvaries and bombed-out churches to shell-blasted corpses hanging from trees, from 'flying crosses' formed by biplanes silhouetted against the sky to self-inflicted hand wounds which replicated Christ's stigmata (see Bourke 1996: 84, fig.19). The symbolism of these 'insistent visual realities', as Fussell (1977: 118) calls them, had a propensity to overflow into other activities, such as 'Field Punishment No.1' incurred for minor transgressions of the military code of behaviour. On seeing men tied spread-eagled to a wagon wheel and fed on bread and water, Max Plowman remarked 'Wouldn't the army do well to avoid punishments which remind men of the Crucifixion?' (quoted in Fussell 1977: 118).

Initially, the attitude of the mainly Protestant British soldier was sceptical of this ubiquitous imagery. 'What I don't like about this 'ere Bloody Europe is all these Bloody pictures of Jesus Christ an' is Relatives, be'ind Bloody bits of glawss' (R. Brooke quoted in Fussell 1977: 118). However, these attitudes soon changed for many, as crucifixes and calvaries had their already dense meanings transformed by the conflict. The wayside calvary now commemorated not only Christ's sacrifice, but the sacrifice through woundings and deaths of countless soldiers as well. Wherever men died, 'that spot must be for ever sacred, for it is a true calvary, and there is again repeated the infinite tragedy of the Cross' (Brittain 1917: xv).

These battlefield locations trapped experiences, fixed memories, and with a quasi-spiritual irony were re-named 'Crucifix Corner' by the soldiers (Plate 2). Captain J. C. Dunn recalled meeting two old school friends for the first time in twenty years at the calvary near Jaulzy in France in 1914 (Dunn 1997: 38–9). Eighteen-year-old B. Neyland was a sapper in the Royal Engineers Wireless section near Arras in 1917, and remembered having to climb a crucifix under enemy fire to attach an aerial (GODA 2001). The Crucifix Corner near Owillers on the Somme was the place where British troops entered the communication trenches on 1 July 1916 at the start of the battle of the Somme (Middlebrook and Middlebrook 1994: 103) – in retrospect at least, a commemorative monument to the sacrifice that so many would make that day (and see Bourke 1996: 212–13 figs 55, 56).

For French Catholic soldiers, such connections were deeply felt, as they already regarded bomb-shattered churches and calvaries as places of spiritual unease.

At the centre of the cemetery stands a large wooden figure of Christ. One arm has been broken by a shell and hangs sadly, held on to the cross by the nailed hand. And the face, dripping with rain, appears to reflect an infinity of suffering and sadness.

(*La Saucisse* June 1917, quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau 1992: 85)

As Becker (1998: 15) has noted, the destruction of such holy places – from Reims cathedral to humble churches – was caused by German shells 'crucifying again the Christ of the calvaries'.



Plate 2 A surviving battlefield crucifix on the road between Henin and Nueville Vitasse in France, in 1919. The photograph shows British soldiers and members of the Chinese Labour Corps in civilian clothes. Photo© Imperial War Museum, IWM Q 390.

Connections between the prehistoric past, the Christian cross, and industrialized war and its aftermath, were particularly apparent at the ‘Butte de Warlencourt’ on the Somme. The Butte was an ancient prominence some 20m high, and said to have been the burial mound of a Gallic chieftain during Roman times (Charles Carrington, quoted in Davidson 1990: 26). It became a principal objective of bloody and fruitless British attacks during the battle of the Somme (Brown 1997: 209–10).

This pagan memorial was Christianized by bombardment and large numbers of dead. Thus transformed, it was memorialized with crosses, first by members of the attacking British units in 1917 (Plate 3), then by the Germans during their March 1918 offensive. The German cross disappeared after August 1918 when the Butte was taken for the last time by the British. As the focus of pilgrimages and tourist visits during the inter-war years, it was re-memorialized by returning Allied soldiers and the bereaved, but in 1944 it once again had a German cross on its summit placed there by Hitler’s Wehrmacht soldiers (Coombs 1994: 101). The constant replacement and removal of memorializing crosses atop the Butte was a symbolic conflict of ownership fought with cruciform images that lasted from 1916 until 1990, by which time all the crosses had disappeared and the land been bought by the ‘The Western Front Association’ of the United Kingdom and marked with their official memorial plaque (Davidson 1990: 18).



Plate 3 The Butte de Warlencourt on the Somme battlefield, France. The photograph records a visit by Cabinet minister Sir Edward Carson in 1917, and the short-lived British memorial crosses. Photo© Imperial War Museum, IWM Q 11633.

In memorabilia re-membered

A sharp point of connection between commemorative landscapes, materialities, and the bloody corporeality of crucifixion imagery lay in the observation by soldiers of the apparently miraculous survival of many calvaries. They noticed how these objects appeared either to have survived intact or at least were spared total destruction. It occurred to many men – the religiously uncommitted as well as the devout – that these monuments were protected by the sacred image of a crucified Christ.

Illustrating this point is the calvary in the town cemetery of Ypres, which not only survived thousands of German shells but advertised the fact in the image of a large German dud shell which lodged itself between the wood of the cross and the figure of Christ and remained there until taken down in 1969 (Fussell 1977: 118). Another example, the Crucifix Corner at the crossroads near Bazentin-le-Grand in the middle of the Somme battlefield, was named after the metal wayside cross that survived intact and still stands today scarred by shellfire (Middlebrook and Middlebrook 1994: 164).

In the minds of Protestant and Catholic alike, such observations appear to have forged

a talismanic connection of form and belief between landscape and human body through large and small cruciform objects. Poignancy and irony were never far away in this relationship between the monumental and the miniature. By analogy, it was believed that the protection afforded the calvaries could be transferred to those who carried or wore small amuletic crosses and crucifixes. In this way, perhaps, the dead and the living found proximity via places and material objects (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 6). Here, in part at least, is exposed the relationship between the human experience of war-torn landscape and religious belief, which was objectified in a distinctive kind of material culture, widely known as ‘trench art’ (Saunders 2000, 2001b, in press).

The propensity of Catholicism to integrate ‘icons’ into religious devotions affected the forms and uses of some kinds of metal trench art, such as pairs of silver-plated artillery shell cases adorned with a soldered-on cross, which appear to have been the focus of religious devotions in French dug-outs. Such activities were part of wider ambiguous practices of a talismanic nature regarded with suspicion by the Catholic hierarchy as highly dubious if not evidence of neo-pagan idolatry (see Becker 1998: 99–105).

Particularly prominent were ‘bullet-crucifixes’ typically made from several rifle bullet cartridges joined together to make the ‘cross’, with a figure of a (usually commercially made) crucified Christ soldered on to the front. Examples of these were made and carried by soldiers during the war and have been found on battlefields (LC: PNM28). Sometimes, the crucifix stood on an inscribed base and had regimental badges attached (NAM: Acc. No. 8004–58; Becker 1996: 55). The popularity of this form extended beyond the French army (GHM: Acc. No. 1993–8), and outlived the war years to become a common souvenir for battlefield pilgrims and tourists between 1919 and 1939 (see below).

A more formal use is illustrated by an example in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. It is a German bullet and cartridge case fashioned into a cross by a French soldier and subsequently used by a chaplain of the Royal Naval Division on the Western Front, where it was placed on a gun wheel and served as an altar for religious services conducted in the field (NMT: Ref. No. AAA0081; see also, DCLI 1998).

Under the physical and psychological pressures of war, the power of such miniaturized crosses overcame the Protestant iconophobia of many British soldiers, as indicated by their asking

the nuns of Albert, on the Somme, for medals and crucifixes . . . [and i]t became common knowledge that Tommies who may never before have seen crucifixes were attracted to the wayside calvaries they came across in France and Belgium, and some war memorials in English churchyards were modelled directly on them.

(Inglis 1998: x)

Some soldiers either made their own crucifixes or asked others to make the items on their behalf. Such was the case with Rifleman Vincent Sabini of 18th Battalion, ‘London Irish’ Regiment, 47th London Division – a devout Catholic who went over the top at Messines in Belgium on 7 June 1917. Almost immediately he was hit in the knee by a German bullet – a wound which bequeathed a permanent limp (Plate 4). Hospitalized to England, Sabini recovered, and from the bullet removed from his body fashioned a crucifix which he subsequently had gold-plated and wore around his neck until his death in 1981 aged 90 (Plate 5).



Plate 4 Rifleman Vincent Sabini with his walking stick. Photo© T. Spagnoly.

For Sabini, fashioning, then wearing, his bullet recycled as a crucifix was more than making a souvenir. It was a denial of the bullet's potential for killing, and a constant reminder of a triumph whose painful ambiguity was present in every step he took. Yet, while the bullet's agency re-made his public body through maiming (see Bourke 1996; Reznick in press), Sabini had exercised his own agency in creating the crucifix that signified the greater achievement of surviving the wound and the war. Through painful wounding and extraction, impaired walking, and bodily adornment, the bullet had re-made Sabini's body. It represented his sacrifice and his Catholic faith – and in a sense he became a living commemoration of the war.

This relationship between body, bullet, crucifix, and landscape was perpetuated by Sabini's family. Tony Spagnoly, nephew and inheritor of the item, is a well-known First World War battlefield historian, author, and tour guide. These roles are given credence by his wearing of his uncle's crucifix, especially during visits to Messines. Standing virtually on the spot of his uncle's wounding, he has found that relating Vincent Sabini's experiences and then showing the crucifix elicits a highly emotional response, often visibly affecting people in a way which the grand narratives of military history fail to do. The identities of both men continue to be informed and constructed by this object in a complex interplay of materiality, spirituality, and emotion, which has forged a relationship



Plate 5 Vincent Sabini's crucifix made from the German bullet which wounded him on 7 June 1917. Height 4cm. Photo© author.

between the family and a small town in Belgian Flanders over the best part of a century (T. Spagnoly pers. comm. May 2002).

A different kind of response relationship between a personalized miniature cross and the people with whom it came into contact is illustrated by private John Scollen of the 27th Battalion, 4th Tyneside Irish. On 27 June 1916, he wrote to his wife just days before he went into battle on 1 July:

My Dear Wife and children it is with regret I write these last words of farewell to you. We are about to make a charge against these awful Germans. If it is God's Holy will that I should fall I will have done my duty. . . . It is hard to part from you but keep a good heart. . . . Dearest wife Christina accept this little souvenir of France, a cross made from a French bullet which I enclose for you. . . . GOODBYE GOODBYE and think of me in your prayers.

From your faithful soldier
Husband and father
John Scollen B Coy 27th SB NF
Goodbye my loved ones DON'T cry
I made the cross myself

(J. Brazier pers. comm. 2001)

John Scollen died on the first day of the battle of the Somme. This extract from his prescient last letter home illustrates how his crucifix took a different course from that of Vincent Sabini. Scollen's crucifix becomes a poignant symbol of loss, an object its maker considered as eloquent as the last words written to his loved ones. For Scollen, the bullet crucifix materializes his front-line experiences, emotions, and sense of impending (sacrificial) death.

In transit from France to England, the timing of its sending has a sense of terrible premonition. Literally and figuratively it was an object 'in transition'. Posting the letter and crucifix was an act of self-commemoration before the fact (i.e. of death). By the time it would have been received, the sender's death would have made the opening of the letter

a commemorative act. Fashioned and last touched by the still living husband/father – the family's handling of the crucifix represented a direct and painfully sensual connection between the living and the dead. By sending it to his wife, Scollen was giving away an intimate part of himself, an embodiment of the quiet time he had spent making it, probably with his family in mind. It was also, more widely, an ambiguous symbol of the war inasmuch as its shape spoke of sacrifice – those already made and his own, which he rightly believed was imminent.

The Sabini and Scollen crucifixes, while physically slight and artistically unsophisticated, are semantically dense objects. The historical and emotional meanings which they have accumulated over the years have the power to trigger new embodied actions and gestures through which the past is re-enacted in the present – and which transforms them again in the process (Seremetakis quoted in Hallam and Hockey 2001: 11; Connerton 1989: 72–3).

Material culture in crucifix form was a prominent feature also of the inter-war years where the dominant theme of commemoration was sacrifice (see Kenyon 1918; Moriarty 1991). Between 1919 and 1939, battlefield pilgrimages were made by veterans, the bereaved, and the curious (Lloyd 1998). Memory, experience, and identity were often embedded in cruciform imagery. In the Imperial War Museum is a photograph of Captain Harry Edwards taken on a return visit to the Crucifix Corner in 'Blighty Valley' near Authuille on the Somme (IWM HU 66263), where he had been wounded on 21 July 1916. The photo caption recalls how, 'when I was wounded I crawled down to this spot & was doctored up in the dressing station marked by a pile of chalk where I am standing'. The image of the cross was adopted also by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), which incorporated it as the 'Cross of Sacrifice' in the shape of a sword in their battlefield cemeteries (Lloyd 1998: 125).

Battlefield pilgrims and tourists often bought souvenirs of their visit 'as acts of worship to the deceased's memory, and of solidarity and empathy with local people for whom their loved ones had died and whose economic hardships were everywhere apparent' (Saunders 2000: 58). Above all, perhaps, pilgrims were spiritually reunited with the dead through their acquisition of such items, becoming objectified in the strange shapes of recycled war *matériel*, the purchasing of which 'authenticated' their experiences (Stewart 1994: 134).

Bullet-crucifixes now became one of the most popular tourist souvenirs of the post-war era. Stripped of their visceral talismanic qualities, they also underwent subtle 'civilizing' and ornamentalizing changes of form – mounted on tripods of bullet cartridges or circular bases, and often decorated with small memorial plaques adorned with images of post-war memorials, such as the Menin Gate at Ypres or nearby 'Hill 60' (Plate 6). Larger crucifixes made from the distinctively ridged copper drive-band of artillery shells were also made, often as stand-alone household ornaments (Plate 7).

These items, like the devastated landscapes from which their raw materials came (and in part helped create), were themselves contentious objects. Ambiguous commemorations of sacrifice, they represented and elicited different responses to the war and its aftermath from victors and the defeated. While they resonated positively with many relatives and friends of Allied soldiers, they appalled Germans, like Gerhard Schinke, who visited Belgian Flanders in 1927. He was shocked at how the war had been



Plate 6 Bullet-crucifix on a tripod of German Mauser bullets. The memorial plaque shows the 1927 Menin Gate at Ypres and indicates it was a post-war souvenir for battlefield pilgrims. Height 20 cm. Photo© author.



Plate 7 Household crucifix made from the distinctive ridged copper drive-band from an artillery shell decorated with scrap brass floral elements and bullets. The commercially made Christ figure has become detached. Height 40cm. Photo© author, acknowledgement to the Versavel Archive.

commercialized in Ypres and especially upset by the profusion of war souvenirs for sale in shops and by children on the streets (Eksteins 1998: 310–11).

During the inter-war years, such items were clearly destined for the home (Saunders 2001c: 480–1). Transformed into commemorative ornaments, they fabricated the past through re-ordering the material world of domestic space (Radley 1994: 53). Such objects accommodated themselves to the emotional atmosphere of a home which had suffered loss. Embodying absence, they were a visual focus for countless private acts of commemoration and remembering – triggers for treasured memories and only ever a glance away. Even today, trench art crucifixes or commercial crucifixes, flanked by trench art objects, are not uncommon items in the living rooms of older generations of French and Belgians.

Conclusions

The relationships between images of Christ and the cross in monumental and miniature forms during and after the war exemplify ‘the capacity of material objects to bind the

living and the dead, to hold a fragile connection across temporal distance and preserve a material presence in the face of an embodied absence' (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 18).

For soldiers during the war, and for bereaved battlefield pilgrims during the 1920s and 1930s, crucifixes, calvaries, and crosses merged with devastated countryside, broken human bodies, and 'the missing', to forge the experience of 'being in' a landscape – of simultaneously 'creating and living the commemorative act' as an acknowledgement of the sacrifices made by the living as well as the dead.

Along the old Western Front today, the social commemoration of the Great War dead is an ongoing process, constantly taking on new, unexpected, and sometimes contentious forms. From tourist musings to motorway construction, from the establishment of guest-houses to museum exhibitions – it often seems as if every activity has a potentially commemorative intent. And, at the heart of this intent, is the enduring image of the crucified Christ, symbol of sacrifice in landscape and home.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Annette Becker, James Brazier, Tony Spagnoly, Paul Cornish, Aurel Sercu, and John Woolsgrove, all of whom have made this article possible.

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