The Materiality of Remembrance: Twentieth Century War Memorials in Devon

Volume One of Two

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signed................................................................. Samuel Walls
ABSTRACT

The armed conflicts of the twentieth century have arguably been one of the most dramatic social forces to have influenced British society, its memories, identities, and the modern landscape. One of the most evident of the physical traces of the impact found in almost every parish in Britain is the ubiquitous war memorial. War memorials are a symbol identifiable to almost all Europeans, and much of the world (Davies 1993). As such the investigation of these commemorative forms can provide useful insights into how death in conflict, warfare, the community and the nation were perceived and materialised. They also provide material traces of how different conflicts and political situations have subsequently shaped their retention, destruction, use, and meaning over the course of the twentieth century. It is apparent that war memorials acted as a distinctive commemorative element, which is largely still visible today, that were constructed to help people and communities come to terms with both individual and collective losses through warfare during the 20th century. The losses commemorated by these war memorials and styles have since the 1990s not only been used to remember deaths in conflict, but other to commemorate other emotional losses and events (such as the death of Princess Diana and the abduction of Madeline McCann).

The thesis analyses the twentieth century war memorials from two study areas in Devon (the South Hams and East Devon), areas which were previously much neglected in terms of their military heritage and post-medieval archaeology. The two study areas also provide a range of settlement sizes and types, as well as in terms of the dominance of the Church of England and in the size of the non-conformist communities in these areas. Both areas also had some atypical war experiences during the World Wars in particular, with various military bases and training facilities existing for varying lengths and dramatically shaping the commemorative landscapes of the regions. The commemorative patterns which emerge from the two study areas are also set against the wider regional and national patterns of remembrance in order to provide detailed discussion on the changing nature of conflict commemoration during the twentieth century. The analysis of materiality of twentieth century war memorials evidences not only the biographies of the memorials, but also their roles in memory and identity formation, articulation, and manipulation.
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