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AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ENDURING POPULARITY OF THE MENIN GATE AND THE COMMEMORATION OF WORLD WAR ONE IN BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

Wereldoorlog I gaf in Groot Brittannië aanleiding tot een groots herinneringsproject. Door een proces van selectie, articulatie, herhaling en weglating creëerde de Britten een gezuiverde herinnering aan het moeilijke verleden van de oorlog dat hen kon helpen bij het verwerken van verdriet en het eren en herdenken van de doden. Het Britse monument de Menenpoort, nabij het centrum van Ieper, is voortgekomen uit dit project en is gewijd aan de Britse soldaten die vermist raakten in de drie slagen bij Ieper. Sinds de oprichting, in 1927, komen mensen er samen om de gevallenen van de oorlog te herdenken. In zijn vijfentachtig jarige bestaan heeft het miljoenen bezoekers ontvangen en de laatste 30 jaar is het enkel in populariteit toegenomen. Deze thesis onderzoekt de relatie tussen de voortdurende populariteit van de Menenpoort en de Britse herdenking van, en herinneringen aan de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Daarbij word gebruik gemaakt van het theoretische kader van 'memory studies' met name de typologie van Aleida Assmann. Zij definieert sociale herinneringen als een vorm van herinneren die zich ontwikkelt tussen en gedeeld wordt door verschillende mensen maar gefundeerd blijft in geleefde ervaring. Deze vorm van herinneren kan een hele natie of generatie omspannen maar verdwijnt met zijn dragers. Collectieve herinneringen daarentegen zijn niet langer belichaamd maar worden gemedieerd door externe dragers als teksten, musea, onderwijs, rituelen en monumenten en kunnen van generatie op generatie overgaan. In deze thesis argumenteer ik dat de Menenpoort functioneert als zulk een externe geheugensteun en dat de populariteit van het monument onlosmakelijk verbonden is met de herdenking van Wereldoorlog I in Groot Brittannië. Als een heilige plaats biedt het monument een centrale locatie waar verschillende interpretaties en herinneringspraktijken van Wereldoorlog I samenkomen en zich probleemloos verenigen in de herdenking aan de gevallenen. Relatief leeg aan intrinsieke waarde ondersteunt de Menenpoort de creatie van betekenis. Door beroep te doen op de verbeelding van de toeschouwers slaagt het monument erin te functioneren als een brug tussen privaat en publiek, leven en dood en verleden en heden. Het geïnstitutionaliseerde herinneringslandschap van de Ieperboog, bestaande uit kerkhoven, monumenten, musea en de Last Post, biedt daarbij een fysiek en temporeel kader voor de bezoekers om het verleden te interpreteren en te delen. In een toenemend geglobaliseerde wereld, waar mensen zich steeds meer naar het verleden richten voor een gevoel van stabiliteit en identiteit is de Menenpoort een plaats waar algemene objectieve geschiedenis wordt omgevormd tot een emotioneel beladen versie van 'onze' geschiedenis en zodoende het individu verankert en verbindt met de grotere geschiedenis.

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INTRODUCTION

Here was the world's worst wound. And here with pride

'Their name liveth for ever,' the Gateway claims.

Was ever an immolation so belied

As these intolerably nameless names?

Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime

Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime

In 'On passing the Menin Gate' the war poet Siegfried Sassoon (1983) expresses his aversion to the Menin Gate in venomous verse. He condemns the monument, created to honour the missing in the Ypres Salient, as a vainglorious construction that hides the true face of the Great War and instead offers false honour, not to the fallen whose names are inscribed on its walls but to society's purified image of the heroic soldiers who died in defence of their country. Regardless of Sassoon's opinion, and maybe even because of the features he attacks so vehemently, the Menin Gate would develop into one of the most important battlefield memorials in the world. Even now, in 2012, each night over 200 people gather under its arch to listen to the Last Post, a daily ceremony which originated in 1928. When I attended the audience was respectful, most of them spoke in hushed voices as if in a church and during the ceremony members of the crowd became emotional. It was only later when I followed a class in Tartu on 'the Politics of Memory and History' that I realised what happened during the ceremony. Under the Menin Gate abstract and generalised history was reconfigured into an emotionally charged version of history, or rather into a shared memory (Assmann, 2008).

The enduring capacity of the Menin Gate to invoke such passionate feelings and the lectures on memory studies in combination with the impending centennial of the Great War brought me to my final research subject. This thesis will *explore the relation between the enduring popularity of the Menin Gate and the commemoration of World War One in Britain*. During the research process I divided the central problem into four different research areas: (a) commemoration and memory; (b) the articulation of the memories of World War One and the commemoration of the war in Great Britain; (c) the Menin Gate and its appeal and (d) the relationship between, and impact of the British commemoration on the Menin Gate. The information required to approach this topic is mainly obtained through desktop research and the study of relevant literature. Where necessary this is complemented with interviews and trips to Ypres where I had access to primary sources in the archive of the In Flanders Fields Museum and could gain additional firsthand experience of the Menin Gate and the Last Post.

Given that the subject matter concerns commemoration and remembrance the first chapter examines theoretical and analytical questions that arise when critically inquiring into the notion of memory and forms a solid foundation for the remainder of the research. It outlines a typology of memory suggested by Aleida Assmann and traces the connection between memory and history, identity and power. The latter part of the chapter is dedicated to the relation between collective memory and memorials and the politics of war memory and commemoration.

The second chapter describes the articulation of the memories of World War One in Great Britain during the twenties. By focussing on this period we can carefully trace how and why the social memories of the war took the shape they did. The image of the war that arose, did not only have a far-reaching influence on the collective memories of the Great War but would also play a decisive role in the creation and interpretation of the Menin Gate. The chapter discusses the origins of the expansive commemorative project and attempts to explain the nature of the commemoration as a primary civilian remembrance of the dead. Thereafter it focuses on the most notable durable carriers of memory and undertakes to clarify the techniques used to create a form and language of remembering that would both satisfy all social actors and support society's promise to never forget.

The third chapter traces the events which led to the creation of the Menin Gate and the Last Post and follows their evolution and popularity in the course of the following century. The history of the Menin Gate showcases that although official governmental power exerts considerable influence over the creation of the monument, it are practicalities and money which decide its shape while the meanings attached to it are determined by the British public. The chapter also illustrates the manner in which the prevalent ideas about the war in Britain are mirrored in the discourse surrounding the memorial.

The relation between the commemoration of World War One in Britain and the appeal of the Menin Gate, implicitly present in chapter III, is the central topic of chapter IV. The first part focuses on the Menin Gate and expands on the reasons to visit the memorial in the Interbellum. Thereafter we take a step back and discuss the impact of World War Two, the Cold War and other global matters on the commemoration of the war in Britain. The final part brings us back to Ypres during the last quarter of the 20th century and presents how the changed circumstances have influenced the nature and the popularity of Ypres and the Menin Gate.

Central to this thesis is the relation between the enduring popularity of the Menin Gate and the commemoration of the Great War in Britain. In the conclusion it will be argued that the memorial functions as a mediator of the collective memories of the Great War for the British. As such its popularity is dependent on the commemoration of the war in Britain. But the endurance of the monument cannot be reduced to this, the nature of the initial commemorative project, the

appearance of the monument, its location and the presence of the Last Post are all factors which enhance the appeal of the Menin Gate.

REMARK

Due to the focus of this thesis on World War One and its commemoration in Britain, all general references to 'the war' will pertain to World War One. When discussing World War Two this will be explicitly mentioned. Likewise the description of the commemoration and the memories will concern Britain and the British when not stated otherwise.

CHAPTER I THE POLITICS OF HISTORY AND MEMORY

For years memory has been a lively area of study amongst scholars, making it almost unnecessary to express that it is not a simple concept. Especially when ideas of social or collective memory come onto the scene. The idea of a memory being more than purely individual opens up new perspectives to study the past but also implies certain methodological problems. The field of memory studies is relatively young and lacks a clear conceptual framework. In order to address both the problems and the possibilities of memory studies this chapter will briefly examine the origins and the evolution of the concept of memory within Western thought. Subsequently it focuses on the development of a strong methodological framework before turning to the function of memorials and monuments as focal points of collective memory. The final part combines all these different aspects of the study of memory and presents a model for the analysis of war memory.

I THE HISTORY OF MEMORY

I.1 ORIGINS

'Remembering', writes Jennifer Richards, 'has long been a venerated faculty' (Rossington, Whitehead, & Richards, 2007, p. 20). In the antiquity the Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero recorded the origin of the 'art of memory' in his work *De Oratore*. It relates the story of a poet, Simonides of Ceos (c. 556 BC-468 BC) who was attending a banquet when disaster struck and the roof collapsed. As the sole survivor he was able to identify the crushed bodies of the deceased by remembering exactly where each guest sat. 'He inferred from this experience that persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places from mental images of the things they want to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things' (Cicero, De Oratore, II, Ixxxvi, 351-4 as cited in Yates, 1999). What is remarkable in light of this paper is the strong emphasis on the relation between memory and death and memory and material objects.

The way in which memory is valued has changed since then but the recourse of spatial metaphors remains a reoccurring theme in discourse about memory (Rossington, Whitehead, & Richards, 2007, p. 4). During the Renaissance the notion that a connection exists between objects and memory was further elaborated, propagating the idea that material objects can act as analogues for human memory to the centre of the Western tradition of memory. This approach assumes that memories can be transferred from the mind to material objects which, due to their durability, prolong or preserve them indefinitely (Forty & Küchler, 2001, p. 2).

I.2 TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the 20th century the relationship between memory and objects remains a central part of memory studies. What differentiates this century from the last is a shift towards the study of collective memory, as opposed to or in dialogue with 'individual' memory (Rossington, Whitehead, & Richards, 2007, p. 134). The introduction of this concept can be ascribed to the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs[1] (1877-1945) whose work '*Les cadres sociaux de la memoires'* (1924) was conceived in the wake of World War I (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010, p. 82). He argued that it is in society, as a member of a certain group, that people acquire, recall and localise their memories. According to Halbwachs it is impossible for individuals to remember in coherent fashion outside of this context. Groups determine which events individual members recall and which ought to be forgotten. They are even capable of producing memories in individuals of events they never directly experienced. These memories, known as collective memories, inform members of a group of past events which are important for, and partly determine, the present identity of said group (Olick, 2008, p. 7). In other words the collective memory of a group links the past with the present, creating a sense of continuity.

After a period of diminished interest, the field of memory studies started to grow again in the closing decade of the 20th century. From that point on it grew exponentially, leading to a 'memory boom' (Müller, 2002, p. 12). Factors contributing to the rising interest in memory are varied. In the first place postmodernism drew attention to the impossibility of the historical past to ever be fully retrieved, concluding that the acceleration of history[2] had resulted in amnesia. This supposed break between the present and the past draws the attention to the ways in which a society remembers. Secondly the end of the Cold War opened up archives and disclosed information which before had been unavailable, making it clear that what had been presented to the world as history was in fact a biased construction of a political regime. The recollections of those who lived under this regime offered a different perspective on the same events and provided a counter narrative. Simultaneously the memories of the Second World War which had been employed for decades to legitimise the national and political order after 1945 were released from their bounds, offering a new perspective on the Second World War (Müller, 2002, pp. 6-7). But these were not the only consequences of the collapse of Soviet Russia. Nations that had been a part of the Union for decades suddenly became independent and had to deal with their, often conflicted and troubled, past. Questions were raised regarding how to remember traumatic instances such as wars and genocides and whether it might not be better to forget?

[1] Halbwachs in his turn was inspired and influenced by Durkheims' work on commemorative rituals.
[2] The perception that the most continuous or permanent feature of the modern world is no longer continuity and permanence but change.

Holocaust studies and Post-colonialism form a third factor in the increased interest in the past. On the one hand Holocaust studies emphasised the centrality of survivors memory within their analysis of the Second World War. James E. Young argued that there was not one single Holocaust but that every nation remembered the events in accordance with its own traditions. On the other hand Post-colonialism took a wider approach to the past and furthered an interest in the way the past shaped and continues to shape the present. The final context of the emergence of memory studies is post-structuralism (Rossington, Whitehead, & Richards, 2007, pp. 8-9). Post-structuralist theorists demonstrated that any text[3] is a network of signifiers that fail to produce a final meaning. Indeed, as Barthes writes, a text or narrative consists of 'a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations' (Barthes, 1989, p. 53). Meaning is unstable, and the past can never be fully recuperated. The recent surge of interest in the matter is therefore accompanied by the realisation that every act of memory is both compromised and incomplete (Rossington, Whitehead, & Richards, 2007, p. 10).

II TERMINOLOGY

The drawback of the popularity of memory is that it has caused the term to be employed in an often bewildering variety of ways (Bell, 2008, p. 149). As a consequence of the lack of a strong methodological and conceptual framework different memory related phenomena are conflated which leads to unsustainable leaps between different levels of analysis. In order to avoid aforementioned and other imprecisions, it is useful to outline a paradigmatic framework of the concepts often used in the field of memory studies.

II. 1 HISTORY AND MEMORY

The events which led to the renewed interest in memory simultaneously caused the relationship between history and memory to undergo significant changes. The certainty that the past was set in stone, fixed and unchangeable eroded and was replaced by the awareness that the past is constantly changing. Reclaimed as they are by the present as a resource for power and identity politics, history and memory no longer appear to be neutral forces (Assmann, 2008, pp. 56-57). During the 20th century Aleida Assmann recognised two phases in the relation between memory and history. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall history and memory were polarised by theorists such as Halbwachs and Nora. Memory was presented as embodied and plural, bridging past, present and future, thus providing individuals and groups with an identity. It created values and meaning and provided

[3] Text as object of research.

motivation and orientation for action but in order to fulfil these functions it had to be highly selective making forgetting an indispensable part of the construction of memory. History was presented as the opposite force of memory. It was perceived as objective and impartial, providing a universal frame for all and therefore unconnected to the identity of a community. History, being an intellectual product, separates the past, the present and the future and calls for analysis and criticism.

From 1989 on, in what Assmann calls the postmodern stage, awareness has grown that this binary opposition between history and memory is untenable. History and memory have become more self-reflexive. There will always be a difference between the two, since, unlike history, memory calls for a conscious effort. Memories are created and require *someone* to actively remember the past. But an awareness has developed that 'memory has a history and that history in itself is a form of memory' (Assmann, 2008, p. 60). Langbacher suggests that we should consider all historical ideational phenomena to be dynamically related. According to him '(h)istory, with its thin layer of interpretation, needs to be differentiated from memory and its "thick", emotionalized, heavily mediated interpretation' (2010, p. 28). Bell consents that although memory and history often conflict they cannot be treated as two mutually exclusive ways of viewing the past (Bell, 2008, p. 153). Or as Assmann puts it more explicitly, history and memory although two distinct notions complement one another. 'Historical scholarship depends on memory not only for oral testimony and experience, but also for criteria of meaning and relevance; on the other hand, memory depends on historical scholarship for verification, substantiation, and falsification' (2008, p. 63).

II. 2 MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Memory in the most narrow sense of the word, refers to the embodied and autobiographical memories that are accumulated through the process of living and disappear with the death of the individual. These memories are fragmentary and episodic (Onken, 2010) unless they are embedded in communicative and social frameworks. It is within these frames that individuals construct, redirect and adjust their personal memories to create meaning for themselves (Onken, 2010, p. 279). This indicates that memories are dynamic, always evolving and changing even on this individual level. Our identity depends on memories we accumulate over time but as Gillis points out 'we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities' (1994, p. 3). Both memory and identity are highly subjective, they are not and should therefore not be treated as fixed things (Gillis, 1994, p. 4).

It is impossible for these autobiographical memories to be embodied by another person. However they can be shared with others by verbalising or visualising them and from then on they are no longer exclusive property (Assmann, 2008). This border between individual and social memory is often difficult to detect. Let us take the example of a photograph of one's childhood; many will

remember what happened the moment the picture was taken, but it is almost impossible to discern whether we really *remember* the experience itself or if it was told to us and then integrated into our personal memories. Similarly it seems nearly impossible to disentangle what we have experienced ourselves and what we have read about or seen in movies. In these instances it is notoriously hard to draw a line between an individual memory and the shared material sign, such as a photograph (Assmann, 2008, p. 50). This could be taken as an expression of the fact that 'individuals remember in order to belong' to a group (Onken, 2010, p. 279). Memory is 'tied to what it means to be a person' (Misztal, 2005, p. 1328), it is the critical medium through which identities are constructed, it allows for a kind of certification or validation of the existence of a self whether it be individual or collective. It can give a sense of belonging and stability and creates expectations for the future. A group's identity is sustained, similarly to an individual's identity, by what is remembered, and what is remembered is defined by an assumed identity.

Gillis contends that 'the relationship between memory and identity is historical' (Gillis, 1994, p. 5). In the 20th century he recognises two overlapping phases of commemoration the 'national' and the 'post-national'. National memory is shared by people who never actually met, yet who regard themselves as having a shared past. In its pursuit to create a common origin and a collective identity, 19th century national commemoration was largely an organised form of remembering. For but not from the people, often limiting the spectators largely to the role of audience. In the 20th century national memory practices became more democratic (and more impersonal) but still took place at specific times and specific locations in a compulsory and ritualised manner. This began to alter in the wake of the Second World War and by the late sixties the era of national commemoration was coming to a close. Presently the nation is no longer the site or frame of memory. In this transnational world increasing numbers of people are forced to contend with multiple identities and the memories that correspond to these identities. As such individuals are dependent, not on one but on several collective memories. This creates an enormous obligation to remember but most find it difficult to do so without having access to images, mementoes and physical sites to objectify their memory. In the post-national phase of commemoration everyone is his or hers own historian and knowledge of the past is no longer constricted to one central narrative, commemorated at compulsory timeframes and spaces (Gillis, 1994).

II. 3 A TYPOLOGY OF MEMORY

The concept of memory is often a source of mystification and conflation. To develop a clear conceptual framework we draw on the typology of memory as outlined by Aleida Assmann. In the article: 'Transformations between History and Memory' she argues that social memories, as shared embodied memories, can encompass larger social entities such as nations or even whole generations. When elaborated through visual and verbal signs, institutions of learning etc. social memory can transform into true collective memory. Collective memory is a mediated form of memory, a construction of reality and highly subjective. Indeed in the strictest sense collective memory is not a memory at all but rather a metaphor. Large groups and institutions do not *have* a memory as individuals do, they construct one with the aid of material signs (Assmann, 2008). Assmann considers the term collective memory 'an umbrella term for different formats of memory that need to be further distinguished' (2008, p. 55).

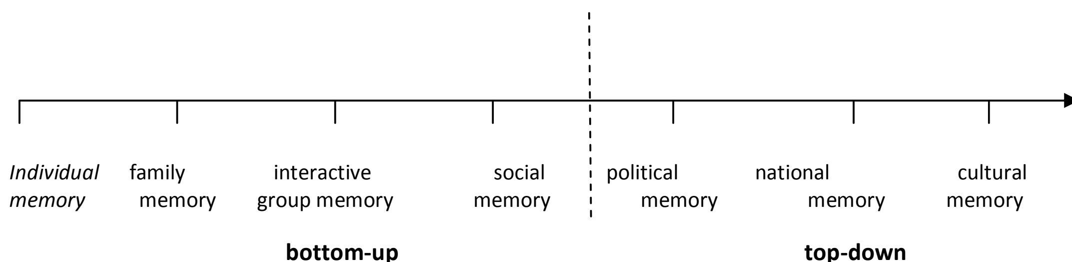

Figure 1: *Formats of memory of Aleida Assmann as visualised by Eva-Clariata Pettai*

Individual to social memory are implicit, embodied and therefore short term varieties of memory. They remain grounded in lived experience and are therefore heterogeneous in nature. However to create shared beliefs and values and a sense of common identity from one generation to another amongst greater societal groups more stable, durable carriers and external symbols are necessary. Political, national and cultural memory is transmitted through museums, textbooks, libraries, commemorative dates, educational institutions and let us not forget: through monuments. It are these top down formats of memory that form the true collective memory, binding people together by constituting a common identity (Assmann, 2008, p. 55).[4] Within this context the negative connotation of the term 'myth' as untruth disappears. Instead a myth refers to an event, idea, person

[4] This bears resemblance to Benedict Andersons' idea of 'imagined communities'. According to him the nation is a socially constructed community imagined by those who perceive themselves to be part of that group. A shared framework and shared experiences can lead to the construction of this common identity (Edensor, 2002, p. 7).

or narrative that has acquired symbolic value and is engraved and transmitted in memory (Assmann, 2008, p. 68). Actual historical circumstances surrounding experiences are no longer of importance for collective identity, according to Onken, while the experiences themselves are transformed into highly simplified narratives that transcend whole generations (2010, p. 281). In other words collective memory forms an indispensable part of the cultural framework of a community or nation, it provides a context and gives meaning to individuals and society alike.

III MEMORY AND POWER

How does memory influence politics, or vice versa? Why does a society remember certain events while others are irrevocably forgotten? And what are determinative factors for the power of memories? These are questions that immediately come to mind when the relation between memory and power is considered and which need answering.

As a shared interpretation of the past, top down collective memory helps to constitute a political culture and influences individual and social memory. Collective memory could be considered an ideational factor which creates a framework for the thoughts of individuals. This does not lead to cultural homogeneity because, like other ideational factors such as religion and nationalism, collective memories are meaningful only so far as they become relevant in the mental structures of individuals (Langbacher, 2010, p. 26). They can always be contested. Consequently societal, bottom-up, memory has the ability to change dominant narratives of a community. This emphasises that memory is not stable but dynamic and highly susceptible to change. Or as Müller put it so succinctly, 'the past is an argument' (Müller, 2002, p. 23), an ongoing negotiation where different actors try to establish their version of past events as the truth. Journalists, politicians, historians and even societal communities all have the ability to reconfigure memory and often do. For on the one hand memory can set the political agenda. Memories of the world wars could thus be an explanatory factor for the European policy of avoiding war against all costs. But on the other hand politicians can legitimise current decisions through the evocation of historical analogies (Müller, 2002).

Having established that memory has power over politics and politics have power over memory the question remains: which memories have this power and why do they arise? Langbacher recognises four interrelated variables that may explain the emergence of a memory. The first is the magnitude of the historical event. As Langbacher explains 'collective memories are most likely to be formed and maintained about events that represent long-term changes in people's lives' (2010, p. 33). Secondly, the events that cause these changes are often traumatic in nature, successfully processing trauma requires discourse and recognition by a collective entity such as the nation. A

third condition is the need for appropriate mechanisms which allow memory to be absorbed by a population. Since collective memory is a mediated form of memory it needs both transmitters such as textual resources, monuments, press and educational facilities and a meaningful structure to explain the past. These facilitators of memory do not appear out of thin air but are constructed by involved societal groups, critical communities and the government. A final factor in the emergence of a memory is relative power. Affected parties must feel powerful and safe enough to speak up, this requires a modicum of openness and freedom (Langbacher, 2010, p. 37). Based on these findings one might say that the very nature of a democracy enables memory and allows its discourses to flourish.

But a historical event will not give rise to one but to several sets of memories. Different members of a group have different perspectives and will remember different things. Three sets of circumstances create this pluralism. Demographical factors and group membership give rise to different collective memories and corresponding identities. The different types of memory as outlined by Aleida Assmann will circulate simultaneously. And memories based on different historical events can surface (Langbacher, 2010, p. 32). Not all these memories will achieve the same amount of influence. In society a prioritised hierarchy of memories will arise where some will hold more power than others. A first aspect determining the possible power of a memory is its ambiguity, the extent to which it manages to appeal to a variety of audiences and invite different understandings (Müller, 2002, p. 31). A second is the emotional dimension of a memory, the depth of attachment it invokes. The most important dimension is that of power and competition. The degree of dominance a memory achieves in a political culture, depends on the extent to which members of the intellectual elite and the political community accept this memory in question as being valid and legitimate. As Paul Connerton writes; control over the memories of a society conditions the hierarchy of power, images of the past commonly serve to legitimate the present social order (Connerton, 1989, pp. 1-3). Forgotten events could thus be perceived as memories that lost the struggle for dominance (Langbacher, 2010, p. 33).

IV MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

The typology of memory and its relation to power made evident that social groups do not have a memory but make one for themselves (Assmann, 2008, p. 55; Winter J., 2006, p. 138). As such collective memory is necessarily a mediated memory based on selection and inclusion, remembering and forgetting. It is backed up, writes Assmann, 'by material media, symbols, and practices which have to be grafted into the hearts and minds of individuals' (2008, p. 55) and stabilise society's self-image. Monuments and memorials are two such material signs[5]. Pierre Nora refers to these sites of memory with the term *Lieux de Mémoire*, remnants of a time when memory permeated the entire society. For a monument to be a *Lieux de Mémoire* it must be material, functional and symbolic, and most important there has to be a will to remember. Nora's theory is interesting but ultimately based on a sharp distinction between memory and history on the one hand and past and present on the other. *Lieux de Mémoire* are places where memory crystallises and secretes itself, in a time where memory has been replaced by the cold facts of history (Nora, 1989). In other words according to Nora true memory is a thing of the past, an opinion which is not followed in this paper.

James Young offers a different perspective on the matter of monument and memorials. According to him memorials recall deaths or tragic events and provide places to mourn while monuments are considered markers of triumph. However useful this distinction is in theory, in reality it is untenable. Nearly all war monuments stemming from the 20th century express both mourning and triumph although the balance is never fixed (Winter J., 2006, p. 86). Moreover understandings of commemorative symbols differ greatly depending on who is interpreting them. What is seen as a monument by some might be perceived as a memorial by others. Therefore the terms monument and memorial will both be used to refer to the Menin Gate.

More useful definitions in light of this paper, are offered by F. Tuan, who describes a memorial as 'an artifact that imposes meaning and order beyond the temporal and chaotic experiences of life' (Mayo, 1988, p. 63). And Barber who defines a war memorial as 'a social and physical arrangement of space and artifacts to keep alive the memories of persons who participated in the war sponsored by their country' (Mayo, 1988, p. 62). Albeit quite open, both descriptions offer a preliminary framework and emphasis the function of memorials as external anchor points of memory. Through a radical reduction of content and a high symbolic intensity monuments manage to integrate the memories of the many in one carrier which acts as a stabiliser. As such monuments

[5] In this context we can also refer to Hobsbawm and Rangers' work 'Invented Traditions' from 1983 or to 'Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity'. These authors argue that all nations need ancient national symbols and traditions to construct an identity and for themselves. In order to do so traditions are constantly reinvented or even invented (Edensor, 2002; Gillis, 1994).

actively exclude aspects of the past and do not only mirror what a social group or nation wants to remember but also what it wishes to forget (Mayo, 1988, p. 75). Whether a monument will be erected and the shape it will take is determined by people with sufficient power to marshal public consent for their erection.

But although a memorial's appearance remains unaltered, the meanings attached to it do not. From the moment of their conception monuments take on a life of their own (Young, 1993, p. 3) and offer themselves up to a variety of interpretations. According to Mayo this can create a barrier for authentic remembrance since monuments are expected to represent truth (1988, p. 73). Alex King offers a different interpretation of the function of memorials. In his view memorials do not convey meanings or messages, rather they are things that require sense to be made of them, offering opportunities for people to express different interpretations of the past. Disputes over symbolism of commemoration do not require the imposition or acceptance of a dominant meaning but simply a continuing practice of reverence for the site and its commemorative rituals. Monuments offer a shared locus within which meaning can be contested (King, 1998, p. 13). As time goes on and society changes, so do its needs and thus its interpretation of history. This may alter the perceived meaning of its memorials. Or if the events they commemorate lose their importance for the collective memory of society, their meaning may fade completely. They become anonymous landmarks or ornaments.

V THE POLITICS OF WAR MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION

Keeping memories of the past alive requires dedication and active recollection. Events will only be remembered over a longer period if later generations recognise them as being meaningful. Thus explaining why traumatic experiences that disrupt the social fabric of society and wrought long term changes in people's lives, such as wars, are more likely to gain a place in the collective memory. The 'Politics of War Memory and Commemoration' edited by Ashplant, Dawson and Roper is dedicated entirely to the remembrance of war in the 20th and 21st century. They define the politics of war memory and commemoration as: 'the struggle of different groups to give public articulation to, and hence gain recognition for, certain memories and the narratives in which they are structured' (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 16). Narratives of articulation refer to the memories of war after they have been reformulated according to wider discourses in society such as national identity, religion and politics. In other words narratives are the shared formulations through which social actors convey their memories. These can range from dominant and hegemonic to local or oppositional. The arena's of articulation refer to the socio-political spaces where social actors can

find a stage for their specific war memories in order to advance a claim for recognition and receive the opportunity to spread their memories. It is the power of the social actor which determines whether the memory has a chance of becoming central and defining in a nation or whether it will remain marginal. The preeminent arena of articulation in the 20th century was the nation-state since war is central to its identity and continuity (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 22).

By paying attention to different dimensions of commemorative practice the authors manage to encompass two of the prevailing paradigms. The first perceives commemoration as a political practice bound up with rituals of national identification while the second focuses on the significance of commemoration for psychological reasons, such as mourning. In reality these processes are related and constitute each other, it is impossible to separate them tidily. Mourning takes place within the state in a 'context of official meanings and understandings, which influence who can be commemorated and in what terms' (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 9). Simultaneously the public practice of mourning and commemoration by social groups and individuals has the capacity to influence the political or national memory. This illustrates that the two ruling paradigms rather than being opposites, study the same subject from different formats of memory. As a consequence, and as the next chapter will demonstrate, the study of war memory needs to consider both public and individual forms of commemoration and the complex but intimate relations between them. Cultural modes of expressions often shape subjective responses. But these pre-existing templates consisting of cultural narratives, myths and tropes are not merely deployed by individuals, they form the very frames through which war is understood on every level of society.

CONCLUSION

This chapter served as an introductory orientation to the field of memory studies. The reasons behind the recent interest in memory were traced and a typology was outlined after the model of Aleida Assmann. The relation between memory and power, memory and its durable material carriers (as opposed to embodied memories) and the politics of war memory received extra attention. We found that wars have a high likelihood of being included in the collective memory of a society and that monuments may act as anchor points for these memories, mirroring not only what society wants to remember but also what it wishes to forget. In regard to war, memorials can be perceived as an attempt to keep the memories of the past alive. They are an important part of the arena in which the struggle of different groups to gain recognition for their version of the past takes place. A monument can act as a focal point where different formats of memory and interpretations of the past come together. The next chapter will focus on the creation of a commemorative project in the wake of the Great War and how this was expressed through countless public monuments, cemeteries and other carriers of memory.

CHAPTER II THE ARTICULATION OF THE MEMORIES OF THE GREAT WAR

World War I gave rise to one of the most encompassing commemorative projects the world has ever witnessed. The following chapter traces the origin of this urgent need to remember and describes how memories of the war took shape in a process where different formats of memory, social actors and overarching cultural narratives influenced and were influenced by one another. And resulted in the memorials and cemeteries, the Unknown Soldiers and countless other enduring symbols that are still widely known today and have become determining symbols of the collective memory of the Great War. The first half of the chapter focuses on the need to remember and the articulation of the memories in public space. The second half will discuss the enduring carriers of memory, the anchoring points of the commemoration of the Great War.

I THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL MEMORIES

I.1 'IF YE BREAK FAITH WITH US WHO DIE' (WHY REMEMBER?)

A war is always a difficult past. War comes with pain, suffering and violence caused by humans; it ruptures the normal patterns of life and death. Within certain limits killing is legitimised and even encouraged during a war. It destroys the very social rules that shape society and make peaceful co-existence possible. The creation of an excess of meaning is one of the only ways in which society can explain the abnormality and legitimise the unexpected destructiveness and suffering (Meire, 2003). The discourse of sacrifice was an indispensable instrument in the attempt to retrospectively make sense of World War One. In this scenario the war was presented as a purgatory struggle that could renew society, purging it from moral and political evil. Participation in the war was perceived as a personal and a moral triumph for the individuals involved, but the supreme contribution to the war was delivered by the self-sacrifice of the soldiers. This perspective on war created an obligation for the living. In the post-war world it fell to them to become active citizens and *create* a new world in honour of the dead (King, 1998). Commemoration of the war and the lives that were lost became a duty of the entire society (Meire, 2003). The best the living could do to prevent the deaths being in vain, was to make sure that it never happened again.

A second reason for the width of the commemorative project is the scale and the democratisation of war. Due to this democratisation, war was no longer a matter for professionals but for the entire society. The vast majority of the British army consisted of civilians turned into soldiers (Koch, 2010, pp. 16-18). As a result nearly every family was affected by the consequences of World War One, nearly every person had to miss someone of their friends or acquaintances. The

social fabric of society was so badly damaged, that the only way the war could be commemorated meaningfully was if the fallen were a part of that memory. This need to remember increased because mourning for the fallen was hindered. In the first place by the horror and the nature of the tragedy, not the old and sickly but the young and healthy had died violently (Tarlow, 1997, p. 110). Secondly there was terrible uncertainty as to the survival of thousands of men who had vanished in combat. At the end of the war only 50% of the fallen had an individual grave. The lack of information and of a body made it extremely hard to acknowledge that a person was really dead. This was exacerbated by the decision of the British government not to repatriate the fallen but to bury them at the former front. This decision is understandable, since many soldiers were missing and shipping the often shredded remains of the deceased to England would have been an expensive logistic nightmare. But it created an enormous divide between the living and the dead (Meire, 2003, pp. 141-149). As J. Winter writes: 'Commemoration was a universal preoccupation after the war. The need to bring the dead home, to put them to rest symbolically or physically was pervasive' (Winter J., 2006, p. 28). Public commemoration conferred recognition on the dead, marking them as special, elevated above society. Since there existed no records of any significant military act for the majority of the dead this appealed to those left behind.

I.2 THE SILENT VETERAN

Although the commemoration of the First World War was comprehensive in the twenties and thirties, the actual experiences of soldiers, of veterans, did not become a part of the shared memories of the war. This is not surprising, considering individual memories have to be expressed and shared in order to become social memories. Traumatic war experiences of chaos, confusion, helplessness and injury remain essentially fragmented and inconceivable and therefore indescribable. The impossibility to share memories of the war at the front would have a profound impact on the memory of World War One.

At the end of the war the first concern of the returned soldiers was to regain a normal life. A difficult task for those who returned relatively unharmed and nearly impossible for the disfigured and the *Geulles Cassées* who had been the heroes during and just after the war. Of the latter group many retreated from society entirely to live alone or with fellow-survivors (Meire, 2003, pp. 89-97). In their case the gap between them and wider society existed quite literally but even the soldiers who did return to their pre-war lives felt there was a gap between themselves and the ones left behind. The coping mechanisms which had allowed them to survive and give meaning to the war had been linked with the context of living at the front to such a degree that they became meaningless

back home. As a consequence it became impossible to speak of their war experiences with friends and family.

Memories of the war were not only hard to express, they also seemed to disappear. Chaotic, painful and fragmentary experiences are easily forgotten. This selectivity of memory was not unwelcome for many of the survivors or in fact for the entirety of society. Speaking about violence was strongly discouraged because attracting attention to the brutal character of the war hampered the mourning process society was going through. In the first aftermath of the war, memories could only be successful if they helped to heal the wounds the war had left. This was impossible if the war was perceived as an exercise in futility or as a political battle. For that reason it was easier for society to commemorate the dead than the disfigured who formed a living proof of the brutality and horror of the war experience (Meire, 2003).

I.3 THE NEEDS OF THE BEREAVED

In London, 19 July 1919, otherwise known as Peace Day, was dedicated to the celebration of Britain's victory. The key event of the day was to be the military victory parade consisting of 18,000 men which would allow the spectators to see the weapons of modern warfare. During the parade the troops saluted their fallen comrades at a temporary wooden construction in the form of a cenotaph carrying the inscription 'The Glorious Dead' and the beginning and end date of the war. When the parade had passed the audience were invited to spend their afternoon in Hyde Park where ample amusement was provided. But many present chose to remain at the monument marking it as the key site of the day, converting it into a sacred space. In the weeks that followed hundreds of thousands more visited the Cenotaph. Needless to say Peace Day was not the joyous military celebration the government intended it to be. Instead duty, loss and grief dominated the event. This illustrates the shaping of the social memory of the war (Meire, 2003).

The recollection of victory and veterans was stimulated by the government but the civil mourning of the citizens of Britain for the fallen soldiers was so overwhelmingly present that it became the heart of the commemoration (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 23; Meire, 2003, p. 137). Individual grief and bereavement is mediated by mourning and is expressed through gestures and artefacts, such as possessions of the deceased, photographs or his signature. Passing through the stages of memory is a process of forgetting as much as of remembering (Winter J., 2006). According to Winter the search for the fate of soldiers and the effort to console and comfort the bereaved created a kind of kinship bond between families in, and after, wartime and those who set about helping them. From consolation and comfort it was only a small step to a shared commemoration (2006, p. 30). Commemorative practices made the personal and unique grief public and shared

(Tarlow, 1997). The influence of civil society and the perceived needs of the bereaved on the social memory of World War One was profound. The development of central national sites and rituals of British commemoration, like the Cenotaph, often emanated from individual or semi-individual sources and were 'adopted and sometimes reshaped through a process of negotiations between interested parties brokered by the government' (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 25). In the aftermath of the war, memories of the bravery and the endurance of the soldiers were widely supported, experiences of futility, cruelty and the real horror of battle were not. They hindered society's need to grieve and return to normal life and were thus not included in the social memories of the Great War (Winter C., 2009, p. 614).

I.4 DISCOURSES OF MEMORY

The expression of grief, individual and social memories is mediated by larger discourses and processes that map the terrain in which commemoration takes place. They mould the conditions of the practice (Sherman, 1994, p. 186) and could be seen as a frame in which war and loss are given meaning. The most important of these discourses were nationalism, patriotism, religion and romanticism. They helped to heal the wounds World War One had left in individuals and society by tying past, present and future together and offering personal and public answers.

Post-war commemoration turned to religious or semi-religious practices, such as spiritualism and séances, with at its heart ideas of the equality of death, sacrifice and regeneration (Meire, 2003, pp. 154-161). The expectation of eternal and meaningful life could overcome a sense of loss (Mosse, 1990, p. 46). According to Mosse the cult of the fallen soldier achieves to unite the need for contact with the dead, with sacrifice as the central meaning giving idea. Thus connecting the nation with local communities and families of the deceased. By offering families medals as a gesture of gratitude the fatherland gained a place within the private sphere. (Meire, 2003; Mosse, 1990). Through this idea of the fallen as a sacrifice for civilisation or the nation, those left behind could transform grief into gratitude and pride. It did mean however that society owed a debt to the dead, a better world for which the soldiers had fought had to be created and a first stipulation for its conception was the promise to remember for eternity. The theme of regeneration was also felt in the appropriation of nature where the fallen became a part of nature's cycle of death and resurrection. Especially the image of the poppy was and is associated with the war at the Western Front. Popularised by the poem *'In Flanders Fields'* the poppy became a symbol of the transfiguration of death for the bereaved and the experience of death in general (Mosse, 1990, p. 78; Tarlow, 1997, p. 115). In '21 the British Legion capitalised on this natural discourse of regeneration and the symbol of the poppy and began selling poppies in support of ex servicemen, the action was a great success. In accord with

the symbolism of the poppies the primary meaning of wearing the flower was one of remembrance, of repaying the dead the debt of gratitude by helping to support those who survived and commemorate those who did not (Moore, 2008).

The natural and Christian discourse evoke the idea of timelessness, of an order beyond the day to day affairs of individuals, nations and the political world (Tarlow, 1997, pp. 115-116). A characteristic which they share with the classical and antique imagery and style opted for in the construction of memorials and cemeteries. All three manage to transcend the present and established an associative connection over spanning time and place, neatly bypassing the problem of the lack of causality which is inextricably bound up in the image of World War One (Meire, 2003, p. 60). They were aided in this aspiration by another central theme of the commemoration of the Great War, hope. A theme which shines through in the concept of the war as a redemptive sacrifice, first over Prussian militarism and later over militarism tout court. And put the burden on Britain and other nation states to realise the creed of the commemoration: 'Never Again' (Gregory 'The Silence of Memory' in Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 264)

II MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF MEMORY

Once a memory has been selected and articulated it will slowly be forgotten unless the information is regularly rehearsed or recalled (Winter C., 2009, p. 615). Cemeteries, memorials and commemorative practices facilitated mourning and made private grief public which influenced the social and eventually the collective memories of the Great War. In addition they functioned as a framework for memory, enshrining remembrance of the war in rituals of symbolic, formulised and regular practice, increasing the chances that the past would not be forgotten when embodied social memory evolved into collective memory (Winter C., 2009, p. 615; Meire, 2003, p. 160). In light of its subject this paper will mainly focus upon material carriers of memory, only including others insofar as they are relevant to this subject. The first part will cover the reasoning behind choices as uniformity and simplicity in the design of commemorative structures. Subsequently we will focus on four of the most well-known symbols of the First World War: the subscription of names, the Cenotaph, the Unknown Soldier and the cemeteries at the former front. We close the chapter by expanding on the function of memorials in the commemoration of the Great War.

II.1 PORTRAYING THE WAR

In the aftermath of the war it soon became clear to the political actors of the age that the public would not accept a commemoration based on militarism and victory. Military meaningful locations, such as the former frontline and battlefields, could never unambiguously recall victory through triumphal arches or otherwise glorious monuments, too many had found their death on those sites (Meire, 2003). Even if this had not been the case, the nature of the memory of the war, as a civilian commemoration of the dead, required practices of mourning and discourses of memory that were familiar to the public, such as laying flowers at graves or integrating the dead in (semi)religious narratives where suffering and death led to a better world or eternal life. The unfamiliar military rhetoric and parades did not appeal to the majority of society in the same way traditional models did.

The newly created Imperial War Graves Commission[6] and other governmental actors were faced with a difficult situation. They struggled to create a form and language of remembering that would satisfy the political actors, comprehend the soldiers disgust with 'the old lie'[7] and would avoid suggesting to the bereaved that their losses had been meaningless (Scutts, 2009, p. 389). They were burdened with the task to integrate social memories of several social actors while remaining faithful to the political memory. Uniting these interests was nearly impossible. In the end the problem was solved through a focus on each and every individual fallen, meticulously naming every lost name and imposing with absolute rigidity the concept of equality in death. Each of the commemorative spaces was meant to recall all the others, generating a web of remembrance connecting all the parts of the world that had been involved in the war (Scutts, 2009). Since every action of the War Graves Commissions was publicised broadly and could count on the interest of the public in the UK, the influence they had on the commemorative project can hardly be overestimated.

II.2 THE CENOTAPH AND THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

The success of the Cenotaph as a memorial to the Great War, might have come unexpected but is by no means unexplainable. Symbols as the Cenotaph and the Unknown Soldier offered an anchor point for memory and a focus for grief. They responded to a need for places to mourn in the absence of a body. By offering a common denominator both the Cenotaph and the Unknown Soldier bundled the loss of the nation. The Cenotaph incited a spontaneous response to the infinite meaning of

[6] The commission was, and is, charged with the maintaining and marking the graves of members of the forces of the empire, erecting and maintaining memorials for those who have no known grave and providing records and registers of these burials and commemorations (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, n.d.)

[7] Phrase from a poem by the war poet Wilfred Owen, the old lie refers to the line: 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' (It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country) (2008).

nothingness. It permitted the audience to project their personal grief and memories on a construction, surrounded by thousands of others doing the same, uniting them in remembrance. The Unknown Soldier had a similar function, the crucial image is not the tomb but the story of the selection of an unknown body from the cemeteries on the Western front. The power of the Unknown Soldier lies in the fact that the generic body could be anyone and therefore everyone. It managed to represent each and every one of the fallen, reinforcing absolute equality in death (Laqueur, 1994).

II.3 NAMES AND CEMETERIES

At the other side of the same discourse strategy the hypernominalism of the war cemeteries, with their individual markers and the inscription of the names of the missing, provided a counterbalance to the common denominator offered by the Unknown Soldier and the Cenotaph. The practice of naming the fallen and providing individual graves was an explicit break with the Victorian aesthetic of death. In the 19th century the working classes were often buried in collective graves. Naming the fallen, was a practise which originated in the army and was used to acknowledge that all those who had lost their lives during the war were worthy of personal attention (Laqueur, 1994). A new development following World War One was the omission of the military ranks, according to Alex King this was taken to connote the equality of sacrifice. The fallen had achieved an equal level of moral achievement which transcended all other differences (1998, p. 187). Thomas W. Laqueur argues that the hypernominalism of the cemeteries and the names managed to eschew the representations and the production of meaning, becoming a sign of their own multitude. What is represented is the thing itself and the democracy of death that this collection makes so manifest (Laqueur, 1994, p. 161). The precise meaning of the names and the headstones is neither defined nor definable. Essentially 'the sources of modern memory in WWI derive their meaning from their intrinsic lack of it' (Laqueur, 1994, p. 164).

Figure 2: *British Cemetery by Ypres*

The same could be said of the two monuments that were designed to adorn the cemeteries of the Commonwealth: the 'Cross of Sacrifice' and the 'Stone of Remembrance'[8]. Rudyard Kipling provided the phrases inscribed on the Stone and the Cross: 'Lest We Forget' and 'Their Name Liveth for Evermore'. These lines both warn the visitor not to forget while reassuring them that the names

[8] The Stone, although secular in nature was often mistaken for an altar by viewers.

of the fallen will forever be remembered. They suggest to explain the losses, the war, the cemetery itself, yet in their fragmentary quality seem to be evading explanation, putting the responsibility of interpretation back on the viewer (Scutts, 2009, p. 399).

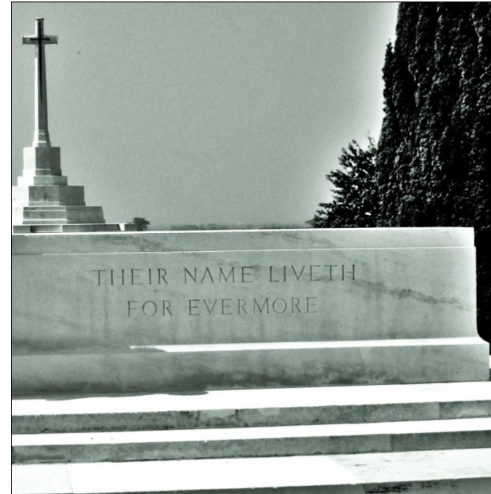

Figure 3: *Cross of Sacrifice & Stone of Remembrance*

The overall design of the cemeteries seemed to refer to a churchyard emphasising the link with nature (Mosse, 1990, p. 93) and attempted to transcend the horror of war by creating a 'foreign field that is forever England' (Brooke, 1914, p. 15). This feeling of timelessness, of permanence was deliberately evoked. In the planning documents it becomes clear that the cemeteries were supposed to last for eternity which meant that their primary purpose would shift. They would no longer offer a consolatory space to the grieving, instead they would have to communicate with those who were never personally affected by the war. The indeterminacy of the design and the inscriptions make this possible but the ultimate reliance of the cemeteries on the imagination, will, belief and hope of those deeply bereaved to construct meaning for themselves is also a shortage of the symbolism (Scutts, 2009, p. 413). According to Scutts the battlefield cemeteries at the Western Front with their enigmatic inscriptions and vague symbolism stand on the cusp between two historical eras looking back in confidence and forward in doubt to the future. They, and other commemorative structures of their kind such as the Cenotaph and the Unknown Soldier, offered both a comforting narrative by which the recent violence could be understood and presented a surface upon which protesting counter narratives could be projected (Scutts, 2009, p. 413).

II.4 MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS

Like the cemeteries, the memorials dedicated to the Great War and its fallen were intended to endure for eternity. During the 1920s and '30s it was generally expected that every civil community should have a memorial (King, 1998, p. 27). Indeed as King writes; 'the commemoration of the dead in the wake of the First World War, was probably the largest and most popular movement for the erection of public monuments ever known in Western society' (2001, p. 147). The construction of those monuments took place at the conjunction of a number of discourses, practices and social actors many of which were discussed in this chapter.

To encompass different meanings and understandings of the past most memorials were traditional and classical of outlook. Time honoured and ancient formulae such as obelisks, crosses

and other universally recognised abstractions released monuments from any association with a particular style and managed to evoke a feeling of permanence and timelessness (Borg, 1991). The population was attuned to this style and felt connected to it which was something modernist art, such as Dadaism and Surrealism with its technique of defamiliarization could not offer. Essentially World War I sculpture was a continuation of the Victorian tradition adapted to the unprecedented circumstances of the war (Borg, 1991, p. 86). The traditional, abstract and non-determinalist forms utilised by architects concealed as much of the past as they revealed. It was precisely because they did not show the true face of war that monuments could offer comfort (Young, 1993; Meire, 2003). The dead were alluded to by allegorical figures, mourning comrades or the inscription of their names. This impersonal traditionalist symbolism opened the way for widely divergent interpretations and is one of the key elements of the public monuments of World War One .

Reasons to erect monuments were manifold. One of the most pressing motivations was to honour and commemorate the dead. Commemoration of the war dead was not only a retrospective activity. During wartime it had been employed to keep up home-front morale and to focus the attention on the front in a personal way, this led to the erection of small public shrines to the war dead. Afterwards building a monument was one of the means by which a community could express their gratitude and indebtedness, but also mourn their losses (King, 1998). The need to portray the common victim or participant of the war and not, as was custom before, one heroic figure such as a general or king led to stylistic difficulties. The impossibility to depict every one of the fallen was solved by keeping what was depicted ambiguous, anonymity was used as an instrument which allowed the onlooker to identify more closely with the memorial (King, 1998). Commemorative constructions offered a purified memory of the dead and suppressed both the violence of war and profane compensations such as sex and drink. Through this symbolism and the speeches given by their inauguration, a monument could have a didactic function, conveying morally good memories was believed to inspire and motivate people (King, 2001, p. 152). Jay Winter sees memorials foremost as foci for rituals, rhetoric and ceremonies of bereavement, as sacred places where people could grieve individually or collectively (2006, p. 79). Within this discourse monuments are often presented as a substitute to a grave or a tomb, the idea of substitution might explain one feature shared by nearly all the monuments, that is the prominent inscription of the names (Meire, 2003; Sherman, 1994). Alex King casts doubts on the validity of viewing memorials as purely mourning sites, he highlights the 'fragmentation' of the memory of the fallen in the multi-layered commemoration at the civic and local level. The names of the war dead are not limited to one but may be repeated on several memorials: 'represented in one place as a citizen of a town, in another as a member of a church, club or military union' (King, 1998, pp. 218-219). These places do not seem

to be conceived as substitute graves to regulate processes of grief since they have a primarily institutional significance.

A second factor contributing to the widespread erection of monuments was the promise of society to 'Never Forget'. This motivation was often accompanied by the explicit intention of averting future wars. The Great War was to be the war to end all wars and the countless memorials would be one step in the fulfilment of this ideal. As time went by and anxiety grew that it might not be possible to avoid another World War, the memorials and commemoration of the Great War offered a platform to express this worry (King, 1998).

After the decision to build a monument was made, conflicting interests came to the surface. Alex King argues that erecting a monument, although it is a public and collective process, conducted through institutions, does not presume a common interpretation of this action by all involved parties. Between one group and another the same commemorative act might be seen as signifying quite different things (King, 2001, pp. 147-149). The final choice of a monument was often determined by financial and institutional power. Monuments did not augment the social cohesion of a community and neither did they give a final meaning to World War One. In a society that no longer believed that public sculpture could convey clear moral, ethical or political ideals, memorials were bequeathed another task (King, 1998, p. 246). They offered a sanctified space and became a focal point of all commemorative behaviour thus transcending the day to day life of a community.

Inspired by Young, M. Rowlands contends that the visual structure of a monument encourages forgetting as part of a healing process and can facilitate the transition from negativity, pain and loss to more positive emotions. It encourages the bereaved to imagine the fallen as heroes: honourable, loyal and upstanding citizens that did not die in vain but fought, sacrificed themselves to protect their country or those left behind. A monument provided contact with the dead and a way out of mourning through the transcendence of those death by affirming that they did not die in vain (Rowlands, 2001). Erecting a monument could reinstate a feeling of mastery over the events, as a purified memory is created and narratives to understand the war are developed people retrospectively feel they control their past. These two factors might resolve the conditions of negativity and impotence that ruled in the wake of the war.

Alex King concurs that memorials were regarded as standing in some way for the horrors of war while also possessing the capability to enhance forgetting the brutal reality of that past. He argues that their chief purpose was to offer a medium of expression produced by collectivities. The symbolic representation, the form the memorials took is therefore not a form of power in its own right. Beyond the fact that they commemorate the dead their meaning is vague and open for interpretation, if remembrance was to give retrospective meaning to death, it was bound to mean

different things to different people (King, 1998, pp. 210-211). Monuments often gave rise to debates within a community, they opened up the field for contesting ideas to be expressed. However these disagreements were secondary to the need to ensure that the dead were properly honoured. People could disagree profoundly on the moral meaning they believed a memorial to convey but in the end they were united in their respect for the sanctity of these objects central to the commemoration of the dead. In the British spirit of remembrance unanimity was achieved in practice when the living adequately remembered their dead. Differences in opinion about the meaning of the past did not matter as long as it was not forgotten. In this sense the memorials of the First World War were truly envisaged as living memorials, offering a central location to remember for eternity.

CONCLUSION

The scale and the unexpected horror of the First World War necessitated a commemorative project of an unprecedented magnitude. Memories of the war could only be successful if they retrospectively gave meaning to it and helped to heal the wounds it had inflicted. The real face of the war, its violence and brutality hindered the process of giving meaning and was therefore suppressed. Instead society commemorated the purified idea of the common soldier, transforming him into a self-sacrificial hero who generously laid down his life in defence of his country and ideals. The healing process was advanced through the utilisation of familiar and trusted ideas of regeneration, nationalism and religion which made the events more understandable. Within this context monuments could offer comfort precisely *because* they concealed the true nature of World War One. Their presence in the landscape was a materialisation of society's promise to never let anything like it happen again. Their most important characteristic lay in the fluency of the meanings attached to them. Communities made a collective effort to commemorate the glorious dead but often disagreed profoundly on the moral meaning of the war, deaths and the commemorative symbols dedicated to them. The monuments of World War One did not explain the past but facilitated the creation of meaning. The following chapter will trace the origin and the 'life' of one of the most famous of the memorials dedicated to the commemoration of World War One: the Menin Gate.

CHAPTER III THE MENIN GATE

To the British Ypres was holy ground. Their troops had been present in the town since the very beginning of the war and by 1918 more than 200,000 thousand men lay dead or missing in the Salient (Dendooven, 2003, p. 12). None of them would be repatriated. Ypres, inevitable, became a focal point of the commemorative project of the British Empire. The countless gravestones and the Menin Gate bear testimony to the need to commemorate the 'Glorious Dead'.

This chapter owes a great deal to Dominiek Dendooven and his work 'Ypres as Holy Ground. Menin Gate and Last Post' (2003) the only book entirely dedicated to this subject. The following pages first trace the events that led to the creation of the Menin Gate, the difficulties that were encountered along the way and its evolution up to World War Two. The second half of the chapter discusses the Last Post, a ceremony which was inspired by the inauguration of the Menin Gate and has been taking place underneath its arch since 1928. The two are inextricably linked, making it impossible to assess the popularity of the Menin Gate without taking the Last Post into account.

I THE MENIN GATE

I .1 THE YPRES SALIENT: SACRED GROUND

Practically every division of the British stationed on the Western Front passed through Ypres at one time or another. Its immediate surroundings were the theatre of constant combat, escalating in 1914, 1915 and 1917 during the first, second and third battle of Ypres. Over 200,000 men lost their lives in the Salient but Ypres never fell. Even one of these factors would have made the town into an important location. The combination of all three transformed it into holy ground. The sanctity of the Salient was strengthened by the decision of the British government not to repatriate the dead effectively making Ypres the last resting place of many citizen-soldiers. Consequently the question of how to commemorate the war in Ypres was of the greatest importance and attracted considerable attention of the British citizens. That the town was not located on British territory complicated the matter, obliging them to take the wishes and demands of the Belgian local and national government into account.

The question of Ypres was addressed for the first time soon after the armistice on 21 January 1919 during a meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC). Winston Churchill in his capacity as secretary of state for war, made the following proposal: 'I should like us to acquire the whole of the ruins of Ypres. […] A more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the world' (Winston Churchill as cited in Dendooven, 2003). Not everyone in the commission thought the idea

to pertain the ruins as a monument was realistic. The plan did not take into account the town's significance for the Belgian people or the desires of its displaced populace (Dendooven, 2003). Meanwhile the Imperial War Graves Commission was joined in its venture by the Battle Exploit Memorials Committee (BFEMC). This committee had been set up to identify and name the principle battles and allocate sites for monuments to the battle achievements and Ypres was to become one of those (Dendooven, 2003; Meire, 2003).

When the fraction supporting the plan to rebuild Ypres proved to be the strongest, purchasing the entire city became impossible and the British adapted their plans. They suggested to conserve part of the ruins in the city centre permanently and to complement this with the erection of a major war memorial. The majority of the Britons was in favour of the plan to retain these ruins. But in Belgium the issue was a source of fierce debate. Pressure was applied to the Belgian minister of the Interior from all directions. The local population of Ypres began to make its voice heard while the British made it very clear that they were closely watching every move of the Belgian authorities. An important factor in reaching a conclusion was money. After the war the Belgian treasury was nearly empty. They simply could not afford the costly compulsory purchase measures which the plan would involve and the British gave no indication that they were willing to pay. Slowly it became clear that Ypres would most likely be rebuilt to its pre-war image and on 15 April 1921 the idea of the ruins was abandoned officially by both the Belgian government and the British authorities (Dendooven, 2003). From now on all attention would go to the construction of a monument.

The Battle Exploit Memorials Committee had been working on the realisation of this war memorial since 1919. In September of that year they engaged the architect Reginald Blomfeld, a senior architect of the IWGC, to inspect the town for suitable locations. After his visit Blomfeld suggested the site of the Menin Gate. The location offered an excellent view across the moat but was still close to the city-centre. Moreover it was of great symbolical significance, it was through this gate that hundredth of thousands soldiers had set off for the front, many of them never to return (Dendooven, 2003, p. 41). Blomfeld drew preliminary plans for a gigantic 'triumphal archway' (Battle Exploits Memorial Committee, 25 september 1919). However at the end of 1919 the government decided that the work would be supervised, not by the BEMC but by the National Battlefields Memorial Committee (NBMC). A newly erected committee which answered only to the government and was to construct a series of memorials 'paying homage to the Army and its exploits on the field of battle' (National Battlefields Memorial Committee, 24 February 1921). The entire process of selecting a site and architect was repeated. in February 1921 they reached the same conclusion as their predecessors, an imperial monument would be erected on the site of the Menin Gate to

commemorate the fighting in Belgium. Due to its location in Ypres, Britain's symbol of national suffering, this great national monument should become Britain's most important war memorial.

Back in Britain the IWGC had started a debate about the commemoration of hundreds of thousands missing soldiers who had no known grave. The Commission decided that 'to give effect to the desires of the relatives that the missing dead should be permanently commemorated, individually and by name, as near as possible to the places where they fell' (Ware, 1937, p. 32). The missing memorials were the result. Each of these honoured the missing of a particular battle or geographical area. Since it would be illogical for Ypres to become the site of two major British monuments the government decided that the memorial to the missing would most suitably record the feat of arms of those commemorated. In the summer of 1921 the two projects were merged and the IWGC was given the responsibility of the construction of the Menin Gate (Dendooven, 2003).

I.2 BUILDING THE MENIN GATE

The Imperial War Graves Commission went back to the 1919 proposal submitted by Sir Reginald Blomfeld one of their own Principal Architects, and after a close inspection he was asked to revise his plans. Blomfeld, the most conventional and traditional of the architects employed by the IWGC, though that memorial architecture should be abstract and impersonal. There was no room for sentiment only the utmost simplicity and austere restraint would do (Longworth, 1967). In his cemeteries Blomfeld set out to give abstract expression to the ideas of heroic self-sacrifice for a noble cause (Dendooven, 2003). For the Menin Gate his goal was to symbolise the enduring power and indomitable tenacity of the British Empire (Longworth, 1967).

By January 1922 the final tenure agreement for the Gate was worked out between the British and the Belgian authorities and in May of that year all the necessary permits were obtained. In the meantime Blomfeld had amended his original design. The most difficult problem, Blomfeld found, was to find space for the vast number of names which kept increasing as work went on (Blomfeld, 1932). The form of the memorial was subjugated to the requirements of this central feature causing Blomfeld to alter his original design so the inscribed panels would catch more light and be better legible. It would take the IWGC until 1924 to take the decision that all missing British in the region of Ypres until 15 August 1917 would be commemorated on the Gate together with the names of all missing Canadians and Australians[9] (Dendooven, 2003). In the end almost 55,000 soldiers are listed on the walls of the memorial but the number changes. Unsurprisingly, in light of the huge numbers they were dealing with, mistakes were made. Sometimes names were commemorated on two

[9] The names of the New Zealand forces are not inscribed on the memorial. The representative of New Zealand did not agree with the decision to commemorate the missing on central memorials, their names were inscribed in cemeteries near the place they fell (Dendooven, 2003).

memorials, on the wrong one or it was discovered a soldier had a grave after his name had been engraved. In rare instances someone was even overlooked. Up to this day when a mistake is discovered, a name will be added or removed.

Early 1923 the laying of the foundations could finally begin but the work on the Gate was hampered by a number of difficulties. In the first place the ground turned out to consist of running sand, the worst possible bedding, which delayed the construction until an alternative foundation was created. Secondly the compiling of the lists of the missing turned out to be a long and difficult process. And thirdly the devaluation of the Belgian frank in 1926 nearly bankrupted contractors paid in this currency and caused the Belgian workers to try and find employment in France (Dendooven, 2003). Despite all these vicissitudes the work was carried out in an admirable manner writes Blomfeld, and in 1927 two years behind on schedule (and ten years after the third battle of Ypres) the Menin Gate was finally completed (Blomfeld, 1932).

I.3 VICTORY ARCH OR MEMORIAL HALL? (THE APPEARANCE OF THE MENIN GATE)

The double origins of the Menin Gate as a memorial to the missing and a monument to the battlefield exploits are manifest in its appearance. The design is essentially a large rectangular gate structure inspired by the triumphal archways of classical antiquity and elongated to provide space for the name panels. These names transform the inside into a memorial hall and are often seen as the most poignant aspect of the Gate. The monument is located on the site of a former Menin Gate and overarches the Meense Straat, the main entranceway of the city. It surmounts the moat and is enclosed by, or rather crowns, the rampart of Ypres.

Figure 4: *The Menin Gate facing Ypres*

The monument is 25 meters high, 31 meters wide and 42 meters long (Meire, 2003), its exterior facades are faced with red brick and Portland stone. It has three passageways; the central passage, over the road, is surmounted by a semi-circular arch, finished off with massive keystones. The two smaller passageways, over the footpaths, are surmounted by flat arches and finished likewise with massive keystones. Overall the facades are highly classical in appearance: Doric columns on high square plinths are set under a roof construction with an architrave and a frieze, interspersed with medallions and a continuous profiled cornice. The crowns are comprised of alternate inset and protruding blocks of stone (Dendooven, 2003, p. 100). The Menin Gate marks a crossing point, the gateway to the battlefields. On the side that faces the city its

crown is surmounted by a sarcophagus, draped with a flag and topped by a wreath (fig. 4). The side overlooking the former front is crowned by a lion sculpted by William Reid Dick (fig. 5). Above the central arches the following lines are engraved: 'To the armies of the British Empire who stood here from 1914 to 1918 and to those of their dead who have no known grave'. The inscriptions above the flat arches sound rather more imperial: 'Pro Rege, Pro Patria'. Along each side of the structure, level with the rampart wall, a gallery with six Doric columns in white stone has been constructed. A double staircase links the main memorial with the gallery. At Coomans', Ypres' City Architects, suggestion these replaced the four corner staircases Blomfeld had originally planned. In part because the altered design provided more space for the inscription of names (Dendooven, 2003, p. 63).

The interior of the Gate is reminiscent of a memorial hall, sober, austere and dominated by thousands and thousands of names inscribed on Portland stone panels (fig. 6). They fill up the inner walls and continue along the staircases up to the galleries. A stone panel above the left staircase carries the text: 'Ad majorem Dei gloriam. Here are recorded the names of officers and men who fell in Ypres Salient but to whom the fortune of war denied the known and honoured burial given to their comrades in death.' The text above the opposite staircase is complementary and reads as follows: 'They shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away'. The pillars, the reverse side of the Doric columns in the facade, on the side of the market square are likewise inscribed with short texts: 'This memorial was built and is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission'; 'Deze Poort door de stammen van het Britsche Rijk ter eere van hun dooden opgericht wordt aan de burgers van Yper geschonken tot versiering van hunne stad en herinnering aan de dagen toen zij door het Britsche Leger tegen den inval beschermd werd'; 'Erigé par les nations de l'Empire Britannique en l'honneur de leurs morts ce monument est offert aux citoyens d'Ypres pour l'ornement de leur cité et en commémoration des jours où l'Armée Britannique l'a défendue contre l'envahisseur'. The Gate is enclosed in a massive arched barrel vault and decorated with a white coffer ceiling. Three large round openings in the ceiling provide the necessary light (Dendooven, 2003).

Figure 5: *The Menin Gate facing the former battle fields*

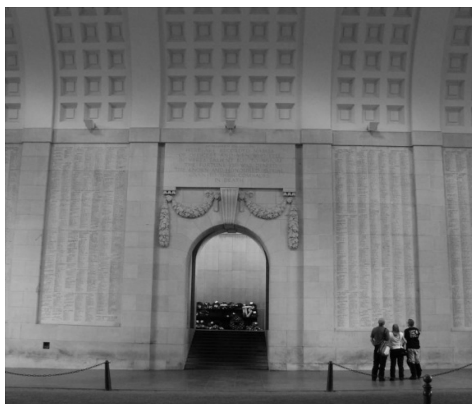

Figure 6: *Interior of the Menin Gate*

I.4 INAUGURATION

The British public and press had taken a close interest in the monument that was being built in Ypres (Dendooven, 2003). In general, public opinion was favourable, although some found that the money spent on memorials could be better expended elsewhere, the majority of the population seemed to perceive the memorials to the missing as a focus for grief (Stephens, 2009). The IWGC was aware that the commemorative project in Britain centred on the commemoration of the dead and was afraid that the Menin Gate would be interpreted as something quite different. In preparation of the inauguration ceremony a press release was written to explain the *true* meaning of the Menin Gate: 'as otherwise foreign journalists will rather let themselves go on the lines that it is an Arc de Triomphe celebrating the victories, which might give offence to the next of kin of those whose names are inscribed upon it, and who, no doubt, consider it purely as a Memorial to their Dead, and in no sense a Monument of Victory' (Ingpen, 18 Mei 1927).

Sunday the 24th of July 1927, thousands of British arrived in Ypres and since it was unlikely that all 15,000 anticipated visitors would find a place at the Menin Gate loudspeakers were set up all over the town. The BBC was present and would broadcast the ceremony live so that many more could follow the proceedings back in Britain. The honour of unveiling the monument fell to Field Marshal Plumer, other guests of honour included King Albert I of Belgium, the British minister of war, Sir Reginald Blomfeld and Fabian Ware, director of the IWGC. At 11 o'clock the procession arrived at the Menin Gate. Field Marshal Plumer's speech for the occasion left a deep impression on the press and those gathered (Dendooven, 2003). He spoke of the grief of those who had 'no grave to visit, no place where they could leave tokens of loving remembrance.' And went on to say that 'there should be erected a memorial worthy of them [the missing] which should give expression to the nation's gratitude for their sacrifice and its sympathy with those who mourned them. A memorial has been erected which, in its simple grandeur, fulfils the object, and now it can be said of each one in whose honour we are assembled here to-day: - '*He is not missing; he is here'* (Plumer as cited in Foster, 2011, p. 58). Words that have been tied in with the commemoration at the Menin Gate ever since. He concluded his speech with the following sentences: 'No words can express our feelings adequately, but they will be expressed for us by the familiar bugle calls at the conclusion of the service. The 'Last Post' and the Pipers' 'Lament' are our tribute of mourning to our loved and honoured dead – the 'Reveille' is the triumphant proclamation of our sure and certain hope of their resurrection to eternal life' (Meire, 2003, p. 426). With these words the Menin Gate was officially opened.

Reactions in the Belgian press contained only the highest praise for the ceremony. They were impressed both by the contemplative religious atmosphere and by the attention that was paid to the

bereaved (Derez, 1997). The articles in the British papers were written in the same vein, the Daily Mail remarked that it was: ‘a strange crowd and a strange service – strange in the sense that the military and the religious ceremony was dominated by a humble, self-effacing, grateful spirit’ (Meire, 2003, p. 426). The unveiling of the Gate had made an impression on all those assembled and would form the inspiration for the painting ‘The Ghosts of the Menin Gate’ by the hand of the Australian Will Longstaff and to the local ceremony: the Last Post. Both would in their turn enhance the repute of the memorial.

Responses to the monument itself were similarly favourable although oppositional voices could be heard. Perhaps the most acidic criticism was expressed in the poem ‘On Passing the New Menin Gate’ by Siegfried Sassoon (1983, p. 153).

Who will remember, passing through this Gate,
The unheroic Dead who fed the guns?
Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate,—
Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?

Crudely renewed, the Salient holds its own.
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;
Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone,
The armies who endured that sullen swamp.

Here was the world’s worst wound. And here with pride
‘Their name liveth for ever,’ the Gateway claims.
Was ever an immolation so belied
As these intolerably nameless names?
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime
Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.

The article in the Berliner Tageblatt of the Stephan Zweig was of a completely different order. The Austrian author took a highly positive view towards the gate as illustrated by the following exerpt: ‘... fur das verlorene Denkmal [the Cloth Hall] hat Ypern ein neues gewonnen, und das ich es gleich voraussage, ein seelisch wie künstlerisch überwältigendes: das Meningate, errichtet vor der englischen Nation für ihre Toten, ein Denkmal, so ergreifend wie nur eins auf europäischer Erde. […] dieses Denkmal gilt den Toten, den sechsundfünfzigtausend englischen Toten bei Ypern […] und alle

diese sechsundfünfzigtausend Namen sind eingegraben mit goldenen Lettern in der marmornen Stein, so viele, so unendlich viele, das, ähnlich wie auf den Säulen der Alhambra, die Schrift zum Ornamente wird…' (Zweig, 1928, p. 190). This sentiment was echoed in the British press by James Dunn who called the Menin Gate 'a library of dead' (Meire, 2003, p. 406).

I.5 INTERBELLUM

The world wide publicity the Menin Gate had garnered, reawakened the public interest in battlefield tourism and provided a goal and a wider significance for British pilgrimages[10] to the Salient (Lloyd, 1998, p. 108). It offered a place where family and friends of the fallen could feel closest to the ones they had lost (Dendooven, 2003). Combined with the publication of the so called 'war books'[11] that offered a more critical account of the war, this led to a rise in the number of visitors to Ypres, all of whom wanted to behold the famous Gate in person. Unlike the war books the Australian painter Will Longstaff tied in with the hegemonic memories of the war. His painting 'The Menin Gate at Midnight' was inspired by the inauguration ceremony and shows the Gate with, in the fields beyond it, a ghostly army surrounded by poppies. This picture, a product of the tide of spiritualism that was sweeping the Anglo-Saxon world at the time, heightened the appeal of the Menin Gate, and made it a familiar building even to those Australians that never made the journey (Stephens, 2009).

During the inter-war years many ceremonies for veterans, pilgrims and officials took place at the Gate. The largest of all pilgrimages occurred in the summer of 1928 and was organised by the British Legion, an organisation which had been founded as a coordinating body to care for those who had suffered as a result of service in the armed forces. Between 3 and 8 August 11,000 veterans and their families took part, the pilgrimage culminated in a memorial service to the dead at the Menin Gate. The Daily Mail estimated that in all more than 60,000 thousand people attended the ceremony (Lloyd, 1998, p. 155). As they walked to the Gate the pilgrims wore civilian clothes, they did not want to give the impression of a victory parade but wished to show that their dead comrades were not yet forgotten (Dendooven, 2003). The entire proceedings were broadcasted by the BBC and discussed at some length in the British papers (Lloyd, 1998). But the monument did not only attract those searching for the names of the missing, many of its visitors were tourists. During the summer season a travel operator at the Belgian seaside offered tourists trips to Ypres three times a week, attending the Last Post under the Gate was promoted as the climax of the visit (Dendooven, 2003).

[10] We are using the term pilgrim to describe those who came to Ypres in the years between the World Wars and who had lost family or friends in the region.

[11] These books offered an oppositional narrative to the discourse of the war as a sacrifice and were often negative in tone. They explicitly described the difficult circumstances of the soldiers during the Great War which often left readers with the idea war had been futile.

How many people exactly visited the Menin Gate between its opening and World War II will never be known, the visitor books give an indication although it should be born into mind that not everyone leaves an entry. In the months July and August of 1928, 23,000 pilgrims left their signature, of which 15,000 in August. In August ’29 the numbers approached those of the previous year when about 15,000 people signed the register. From 1930 on the economic crisis reared its head and the amount of visitors declined, hitting the lowest point in August 1932 when only 9,000 signatures were counted. After that attendance grew steadily and in August ’36, 18,000 visitors let know they had been at the Menin Gate, in December of the same year however only 37 signed the book and only three of those were British demonstrating that travelling overseas during the winter months was far less common than it is today (Dendooven, 2003; Meire, 2003). Overall the numbers recorded match the wider pattern of interest in places associated with the war, which was raised after 1927, until the depression effected travel, and was particularly high between 1936-1939 (Lloyd, 1998).

I.6 WORLD WAR TWO AND THE LIBERATION

Unlike 26 years before Ypres did not remain in allied hands during World War Two. In the night of 28 to 29 May 1940 the British armed forces withdrew from the city, signalling the start of four years of German occupation. The Menin Gate had been hit by machine gun and anti-tank fire in the skirmishes between the British and the Germans for control of the city but was not destroyed. Notwithstanding several swastikas which had to be removed, German troops generally treated the British cemeteries and memorials with respect and Adolf Hitler himself is known to have visited the Gate twice (Dendooven, 2003).

‘The liberation of Ypres’, writes Dendooven, ‘had been subject to a ‘race’ between the various Allied units’ (2003, p. 103). The British troops were beaten by the First Polish Armoured Division which liberated the town on September 6, 1944. British soldiers who visited Ypres were much impressed, not (only) by the town itself but by the associations it carried. One of them, wrote the following about his arrival shortly after the liberation: ‘Suddenly, one of our party realised what the monument was – the Menin Gate. We were in Ypres. We stood on holy ground… On the Menin gate we read the names of the thousands of our men who had died at the front near here. It made us feel very small...’ (Wingfield, R. M. as cited in Dendooven, 2003, p. 103). The 11th of September 1944 the Daily Telegraph reported that the memorials were safe at Ypres. Repair works on the Menin Gate started in 1945 and continued until ’48, the work was done in such a way that the scars the Second World War had left would remain visible but otherwise no changes were made to incorporate the events of the Second World War. The Menin Gate would remain a memorial dedicated to the Great War (Dendooven, 2003).

In the years after WWII with its horrors fresh in mind the attention of the greater audience was small, only a dwindling number of veterans continued to return to the Salient (Gardiner, 1973, p. 514). It would take until the 1980s for the number of visitors to reach its pre-war level again (Dendooven, 2003). Instances of vandalism have been rare throughout the monument's history, the registers continue to be stolen now and again but the Menin Gate itself has hardly ever hardly ever been touched (Dendooven, 2003). In 1986, 60 years late, the Belgian government made good on a promise they made in the 1920s and listed the Menin Gate as a classified monument.

II THE MENIN GATE AND THE LAST POST

The Last Post and the Menin Gate are essentially two complementary and mutually supportive ways to commemorate the Great War and its aftermath. At its heart, a commemorative practice such as the Last Post does nothing but express *that* we remember. The melody in itself does not possess the capacity to invoke a specific memory of the past. It obtains its meaning partly through its location under the arch of the Menin Gate surrounded by the names of the missing (Meire, 2002). Every day, at 8 o'clock when the bugles play its familiar tones the memorial likewise attains a new significance to all those attending the ceremony (Dendooven, 2012). The appeal of the Menin Gate and the Last Post are therefore impossible to separate.

II.1 ORIGIN AND MEANING

The Last Post grew almost spontaneously as a tribute of the population of Ypres to the thousands of soldiers that gave their lives in the Salient in defence of the town (Delobel, 1960). The first time the Last Post was played under the Menin Gate was during the inauguration of the monument when Field Marshal Plumer stated that the bugle calls would express the feelings that words could not. The Last Post and its counterpart the Reveille are bugle or trumpet calls used in the British army. The former signalled the end of the days labour, calling the troops back to their quarters, while the latter was played at the beginning of the day to rouse the men.

Four days after the official opening of the Gate a local newspaper drew attention to the Dutch inscription which announced that the memorial erected by the British people to honour their dead was a gift to the citizens of Ypres to remind them of the days in which they were protected by the British army. The article asked the citizens of Ypres how they could express their gratitude. The local chief of police, Pierre Vandenbraambussche, inspired by the speech of Marshal Plumer, thought the best way to honour and commemorate the British soldiers was to play the Last Post each evening

in perpetuity under the Menin Gate[12]. Pierre Vandenbraambussche soon found the necessary support for his idea and at 8.30 p.m. the 2nd of July 1928 the very first Last Post ceremony was held.

During a normal ceremony traffic is stopped by the police at both sides of the Menin Gate. The buglers, until the eighties in their work clothes to underline that the ceremony was a tribute from local citizens, move to the centre of the road, take up position and play the Last Post. An extended Last Post encompasses a number of other elements which vary according to the circumstances. The special ceremony leaves room for a speech or prayer, the laying of wreaths under the Gate, national anthems and for a minute of silence[13]. After the Last Post is played the exhortation is cited, the fourth verse of the poem 'For the Fallen' by Laurence Binyon (2008):

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

The audience then repeats the last line. At, or close to, the end of the ceremony the Reveille is played which, according to the Last Post Association, symbolises both the resurrection to 'eternal life' of the fallen and the return to daily life at the end of the act of remembrance (Last Post Association, 2012). It is only in this longer version of the ceremony that the remembrance of the dead becomes explicit.

II.2 INTERBELLUM

The highpoint of the first year of the Last Post was undeniably the pilgrimage of the British Legion in August. The appreciation of the pilgrims combined with a great deal of other positive reactions convinced the Committee that the ceremony should be restarted after its winter break. From the 1st of May 1929 the Last Post has sounded every single night with the exception of World War II when Ypres was occupied by the Germans. The strength of its simplicity was clear from the very beginning and international recognition followed quickly. In the middle of 1929 between six and seven hundred people were present every day and in 1930 the Last Post was broadcasted live by the BBC and Radio

[12] The Last Post Committee became an official non-profit organisation in 1930.Its purpose as expressed in the statutes was: 'to maintain in perpetuity the daily playing of the Last Post Ceremony under the British memorial at the Menin Gate in Ypres, in honour of the soldiers of the British Army who died in Ypres or in the Ypres Salient during the war of 1914-1918' (Dendooven, 2003, p. 119).
[13] A tradition which was invented for the first commemoration of armistice in 1919 and which had been an unexpected success.

Belgique on Remembrance Day[14]. Dignitaries from all over the world were keen to attend and numerous special ceremonies were organised by veteran associations and the like (Dendooven, 2003).

Nevertheless it was not all roses, there were often complaints by British about the lack of a uniform and the fact that the buglers were local citizens and not veterans. These spectators had not understood that although a British melody was performed under a British monument the Last Post was essentially a local expression of gratitude in no sense linked to the city or any other official instance (Dendooven, 2012, p. 116). Other issues were the poor turnout during the winter months and the constant lack of funds which plagued the Committee especially during the Great Depression but would remain a worry until well after World War II.

II.3 LIBERATION AND THE SILENT YEARS

During World War II the Last Post was suspended and its melody would not sound again until Ypres was liberated more than four years later. But on the very day of its liberation, September 6, 1944, the ceremony was resumed and the Last Post has been played every evening since. The first year after World War II the allied troops, of which many were based in Ypres, attended the ceremony in large quantities. But the initial upsurge of attention and visitors did not last and from 1946 on, after the British troops had left Belgium, attendance dropped dramatically. In the years leading up to 1950 the number of tourists and special delegations was at an absolute low. Over the second half of the '50s this improved slightly but the number of visitor was still a long way from the pre-war figures (Dendooven, 2003).

On October 8, 1960 the 10,000th Last Post was celebrated. Both the Vice President of the Last Post Committee and the Burgomaster prepared a speech for the occasion. They spoke of the sacrifice of both the town ruined in the war and of the young soldiers who fell for their fatherland in defence of Ypres. The Menin Gate, both memorial and triumphal arch was, said the Vice President, a true impersonation of their sacrifice. The cenotaph represented their death, while the lion symbolised their courage, strength and victory. 'The Menin Gate is the emblem of our liberation and of our rising again – thanks to the sacrifice of so many. The Last Post is the voice of our people commemorating with much reverence, thanking with all sincerity and honouring with due emotion' (Delobel, 1960). The Burgomaster added that in this century of haste and speed, where the much sought after future leaves little place for the past and even less for reflection, the Last Post ceremony functions as a link between a very tragic past and an equally uncertain future (Dehem, 1960).

[14] 11 November also known as Armistice Day.

Although the Last Post continued to form this link few people were there to witness it. In 1973 Patrick Beaver wrote in the introduction to a new edition of the Wipers Times, a trench magazine, that the British no longer knew the meaning of Ypres. Even at Armistice there was hardly a British uniform to be noticed at the Menin Gate (Meire, 2002, p. 363). Antoon Verkouter, bugler at the Last Post between 1963-2010, likewise said that if you would have asked a citizen of Ypres what the Last Post was in those days, many would have answered: Last Post what? (Hertoghs, 2011). By this time the war had been over for more than 60 years, those who had personal memories or experiences of Ypres were at least 75 years old. So although the soldiers who fought there continued to return, their numbers dwindled as they died or became too old to travel (Gardiner, 1973; Holloway, 1974).

But the situation was not quite as bad as these tales suggest, the Last Post still had the capacity to create quite a stir in the United Kingdom. During the interwar years the British had been constantly worried about the proper commemoration of the dead at the former front since it was out of their reach and control. The Last Post, often interpreted as a commemorative ceremony for the British dead rather than a Belgian expression of gratitude, had received its fair share of attention and appreciation. Their prime concern was therefore to ensure the continuation of the ceremony. When, in 1963, the Daily Telegraph printed an article which claimed that the Last Post would have to be suspended unless further funding was found this was quickly picked up by other media and generated quite a commotion. The chairman of the Last Post Committee had to send a letter to the papers to allay the disquiet, it was published under the title 'Menin Gate Ceremony will not end'. Nevertheless the incident proved the British still cared for the ceremony which was made further evident by the influx of donations following this episode (Dendooven, 2003; Meire, 2003).

In 1966 the Last Post was attended by both the Belgian and the British Royal couple. A highly publicised event which was reflected in a growth of the amount of visitors attending (Dendooven, 2003). On Armistice 1973 the remembrance ceremony in Ypres was broadcasted live by BBC television, reactions were highly positive and from then on radio and television performances became a regular occurrence (Dendooven, 2003, p. 145). Other special occasions in those years include the 15,000th day the Last Post was played and a triple anniversary: the 60th of the third battle of Ypres and 50 years Menin Gate and Last Post. Other well known personalities started to find their way to the ceremony and in 1985 and '86 amongst others: Pope John Paul II, Mother Theresa and Sir Bob Geldof attended the Last Post. Especially the visit of the pope, who prayed underneath the Menin Gate for both the dead and peace, made a lasting impression. The culmination of high profile events and visitors and the media attention that came with it led to an ever increasing amount of visitors. And as a result a new generation started to become interested in the ceremony.

II.4 REGENERATION

The Last Post ceremony has changed little in its nearly 75 years of existence. In the 1970s the Committee decided to include all the fallen in the Salient, the buglers now wear their fireman uniform instead of work clothes and in the 1990s the Committee altered its name to the Last Post Association (Dendooven, 2003). But at its heart the Last Post ceremony remains unaltered. Sometimes it seems as if the speeches given under the memorial and during an extended Last Post do not alter either. As late as 1992 a Canadian minister praised the Belgian society and its social security as an example for all, with the strong implication that the death of 8,000 Canadians in protection of the country had not been in vain. 11 November 1998 brought the 80th anniversary of the First World War, the last that could be celebrated in the presence of veterans. Media attention for World War One and the Armistice ceremony was greater than ever before (Meire, 2003). In Ypres, King Albert II and Queen Paola of Belgium and Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain made their attendance at the Menin Gate, the event was broadcasted in its entirety by both Belgian and British television. In 2011 the ceremony was recognised as intangible heritage by the Flemish government (Vlaamse Overheid, 2012) which ties in with the relatively recent increase of attention for the ceremony within Belgium.

By the end of the 1990s the Last Post was attracting over 200,000 visitors per year, this number has remained relatively constant since. No matter which day of the week at 7.59 p.m. a large, and often very varied, audience stands under the Menin Gate, waiting for the Last Post to begin (Blicke, Six, & Tange, 2011, p. 16). In 2006 it was estimated that, out of the approximated 326,900 people that visited the Westhoek, a little over 217,000 found their way to the Menin Gate memorial and the Last Post (Westour, 2008). This makes it one of the most visited heritage sites of the Great War in Belgium.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to trace the processes leading to the construction of the Menin Gate and outlined its history from 1919 to the present.

It was found that the construction of the memorial took place at the conjunction of several discourses and social actors. Official governmental power exerted a considerable influence but the determinative factors in the choice for one memorial at the site of the former Menin Gate were practicalities and money. During the planning stages and the building of the Menin Gate, social memories of the war proved to be a very influential force. The monument's highly classical appearance still illustrates that it was envisaged as both memorial for the fallen and monument to the battlefield exploits. But as Karen Dale Shelby writes: ' A monument is defined less by what it looks like than by what it represents or how people utilise it. The monument expresses the power and the sense of the society that gives it meaning' (Shelby, 2008, p. 95). Under influence of the civilian remembrance the British government reconfigured the meaning of the Menin Gate. When Marshal Plumer spoke his famous words: 'He is not missing; he is here' he singlehandedly steered the interpretation of the Gate away from its function as a victory arch and emphasised its connection with the missing, casting it in the role of a substitute grave. In the following century the speeches during the ceremonies under the Menin Gate often contained formulas that closely resembled the memory discourses in Britain during the Interbellum.

As a commemorative site the Menin Gate made use of the same techniques as other monuments and symbols of the Great War. It was classical of appearance, had a nondescript meaning and was meant to remind us of the First Word War forevermore. On the one hand the names on the walls mirrored the hypernominalism of the cemeteries while on the other hand the memorial bundled the loss of the nation and offered a common denominator on which grief and memories could be projected. But its size, location and the presence of the Last Post single the Menin Gate out and enhance its sanctity. The numerous ceremonies, the attention of official instances and public figures led to a fair amount of media attention and made the Menin Gate famous from the moment of its inception. The next chapter shall expand on the attraction of the Menin Gate and explore the relation between the memorial and the commemoration of World War One in Britain.

CHAPTER IV BRITISH COMMEMORATION AND THE APPEAL OF THE MENIN GATE

As a palpable relic of the Great War, the popularity of the Menin Gate is connected to the public's interest in this event. When a conflict loses its relevance and is forgotten, memorials dedicated to it lose their function and become shadow memorials, largely invisible monumental forms in the landscape (Mayo, 1988). This chapter addresses the interest in the Menin Gate in Ypres in relation to the larger processes and events in British society which determine the attention paid to the commemoration of World War One. The beginning of the chapter ties in with chapter II and III and expands upon the reasons that existed in the interwar years to travel to the former front and the Menin Gate. Not surprisingly perhaps, the number of visitors to the Western Front dropped steeply in the wake of the Second World War. Part two discusses these developments and the impact the second war had on the meaning and commemoration of the first one. The final part focuses on the reasons behind the renewal of interest in the Great War and the Menin Gate.

I THE APPEAL OF THE MENIN GATE DURING THE INTERBELLUM

Battlefield tourism commenced before the war had even ended. People were fascinated by the (former) front and wanted to visit the places they had heard so much about during the war. Often it were not the sites themselves that attracted travellers but their associations. In those days tourism was not only about sightseeing but about recapturing the meaning of war. The same could be said of the pilgrimages of the bereaved. The sites they travelled to provided a focal point for places and experiences that might solely exist in the minds of the pilgrims (King, 1998). After the initial success, travel to the battlefields declined over the next few years, hitting its lowest point in 1926.

1927 marked a turning point for tourism to the Western Front, several factors contributed to this. Most commonly identified with the resurgent interest in the war is the publication of the 'war books'. Works written by veterans that told of the lives of ordinary men in the big machine of the war. Secondly a public discussion had begun in England, it was felt that they had reached a critical period in the commemoration of the war, there was a generation growing up with no memories of it, and an effort should be made to remind those of the tragedy of war. The opening of the Menin Gate on 27 July 1927 proved a third trigger for battlefield tourism. As described in chapter III the event did not go by unnoticed, thousands attended the ceremony which was broadcasted live on radio by the BBC. The memorial both benefitted from and added to the rekindled interest in the war.

The decision to emphasise the function of the Menin Gate as a memorial to the missing proved to be fruitful. Many Britons saw it as the most important English war memorial at the former front. On the radio it was even called ‘the supreme monument of the dead’ (King, 1998, p. 108). As a national memorial it provided a goal for pilgrimages, a single destination on the Western Front where all pilgrims could be directed to pay homage to their dead (King, 1998). The unveiling of the memorial encouraged pilgrims and tourists, who had yet to do so, to travel to the Ypres Salient. The location of the memorial, close to the city centre and in the middle of the remembrance landscape of the Salient was part of its appeal.

Those who knew one of the missing commemorated on the memorial, or lost someone in the war were drawn to the Menin Gate because it appealed to their imagination. The thousands of names inscribed on the walls encouraged travellers to look beyond the veil of death (King, 1998, p. 126). As such it tied in with the greater discourses that dominated the commemoration of the war at the time. It answered the need of the living to contact the dead, to feel close to them. It could act as an empty grave for those who had none and offered a place where private grief could be shared. As mentioned in chapter II, the absence of a body, funeral and a final farewell made it hard to mourn the dead and this was even more so for the families of the missing, they would never be able to visit the grave of their loved ones. Distressed families often attempted to seek contact with the dead through alternative means. The Menin Gate catered to this need and symbolically reunited the living with the dead. In the absence of a body a name could hold the identity and personality of the soldiers to those who knew them. Touching or seeing the names of relatives was an emotional experience (Stephens, 2009). The inclusion of a name on the memorial bestowed honour on the soldier and marked him as a hero which furthered the mourning process. Consequently many of the visitors treated the Gate as they would a grave and left flowers or other tokens for the fallen.

The function of the Menin Gate as a place of commemoration is intensified greatly when the Last Post is played underneath it. Hearing the Last Post was a reason in itself to visit the memorial. The ceremony tapped a chord among the travellers to the battlefields. For those who had lost someone it seemed as if the Last Post symbolically stopped time and enabled the veterans and bereaved to feel close to the fallen and assure them that they were not yet forgotten (King, 1998). But the ceremony was not just there for the bereaved. Since in essence the Last Post under the Menin Gate does no more *than* express that we remember the dead and leaves the content of the memories to the spectators, it attracts a divergent audience. Tourists, pilgrims and officials such as the prime ministers of Canada, New Zealand and Australia were all equally welcome in the Interbellum (Dendooven, 2003). By remaining quiet and behaving in a respectful manner all who attend, participate in it equally, no matter their motivation, and enhance its sanctity.

In the late thirties the number of visitors to Ypres rose sharply. The deteriorating international situation encouraged the British to return to the battlefields in order to prepare for another war, to express their anxiety or in the desperate hope that another war might somehow be avoided (Lloyd, 1998).

II THE SILENT YEARS AND THE ALTERING MEANING OF WORLD WAR ONE IN BRITAIN

In the first years after World War One, it was difficult to agree on what it had actually meant. That the war had to have a meaning was clear, too many had perished for it to be different. Even those who thought otherwise did not speak up in Britain out of respect for the perceived needs of the bereaved parents (Todman, 2005). Eventually public opinion identified the war as a redemptive sacrifice, first over Prussian militarism and later over militarism tout court. The Great War was proclaimed the war to end all wars (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000).

The outbreak of World War Two marked the failure of this aspiration and rendered World War One and its message of hope virtually meaningless. The First World War had been futile, a lesson which was driven home when it was compared to World War II which was more clearly fought for a good cause against a dreadful enemy (Meire, 2012; Todman, 2005). In the aftermath of 1939-1945 ideas of senseless death and the horrors of trench warfare moved to the foreground of the social memories of the First World War. These ideas had always been present in society. But it was only in the wake of WWII, when the bereaved parents, whose needs had thus far determined the depiction of World War One began to pass away, that they could be expressed freely. From that point on the depiction of the war as a horrible and ultimately futile conflict began to gain the upper hand (Todman, 2005).

Many of the monuments of Great War, who were constructed as a partial fulfilment of society's promise to never let anything like that happen again, lost their meaning. They became icons of bygone beliefs (Mayo, 1988, p. 74). According to Julia Kristeva the horror of the destructive forces of the 20th century had overtaxed the symbolic means of humanity, leaving them hollowed out, paralyzed (Kristeva, 1989, p. 223). In 1946 virtually no one wanted the monuments of the Second World War to take the form they often did after the last: costly erection in stone. The memorials of '14-18 were seen as a mockery of the dead (Whittick, 1946).

It is almost needless to say that very little people travelled to Ypres and the Menin Gate anymore, they had other things on their mind. Only the soldiers who had fought in the Salient kept returning but year after year their number dwindled as they grew too old to travel. Public interest in the Great War and its memorials declined further, hitting its absolute low point in the fifties. And for

a while it seemed as if the conflict would be banished from memory and continue its existence solely as history.

III REGENERATION

When we endeavour to look at the causes behind the renewed attention for the First World War and the increase of battlefield tourism, we must tread carefully. There are no easy answers, any attempt to formulate an answer, no matter how well supported, will contain elements of speculation. In the remainder of the chapter we will first focus on the broader picture and present several factors that led to an increasing interest in history and complement these with developments that simultaneously attracted attention to WWI. Afterwards we return to Ypres and take a closer look at the appeal of the Menin Gate during this period.

III.1 REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN BRITAIN

Due to improving socio-economic circumstances in the fifties and the sixties people had more time and money available to expand their interests and hobbies. This development coincided with a rekindled interest in history and heritage (Dendooven, 2012; Urry, 2002). Explanations for the increasing attempts of Britons to create a sense of emotional engagement with the past often centre on the 'dislocation of identity attendant in the modern world' (Todman, 2005, p. 70). Dan Todman writes that the globalisation and rapid pace of change (also known as the acceleration of history) has removed individuals from the secure background in which their parents existed and they were raised. This makes them wary of predicting the future and, as the world seems more unstable, people work harder to seek stability and affirmation of identity in the past (During, 2005; Todman, 2005, p. 70).

RENEWED ATTENTION FOR ALL THINGS PAST

That the interest in the war was renewed relatively easily was possible because the memories of World War One although no longer actively rehearsed by talking about them or travelling to the battlefields were still there. A war such as this one fought between the most powerful states of the time is installed at the centre of world history and is not easily forgotten (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000, p. 60). On a more personal level, those who experienced the war themselves would never forget it and as a consequence their children, the next generation, grew up in a world where the influence and aftermath of the First World War were inescapable (Todman, 2005).

The beginning of the renewal of interest in history and heritage can be traced back to the late sixties when the academic world changed its approach to history. Until then the past had mainly

been studied from a top-down perspective, wars were often depicted as affairs between nations. This slowly began to alter and a more humane, bottom-up, point of view, was winning terrain. Survivor testimonies, so-called oral history, were recorded and received their share of attention (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000; Dendooven, 2012; Meire, 2003). The commemoration of the Great War which was above all a highly personal, civilian commemoration of the dead suited this methodological framework perfectly (Meire, 2012). The changing paradigm resulted in a quest to record the memories of the veterans of WWI. An initiative which was given added impetus by the realisation that these men were aging and might not be around much longer to tell their stories (Todman, 2005, p. 200). This new approach to the war was supported by a small number of books written by old-soldiers in the twenties and thirties which were still read and studied. Like the stories of the veterans, they concentrated on the experiences of ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances. These books had the advantage that they fit in with the prevalent view on the war as an exercise in futility.

Among the general population of Great Britain genealogy enjoyed a growing popularity. Studying family history led amateur-historians often back to the Great War. In the first place because the veterans, by now well into retirement, had the luxury to look back and began to share their memories more freely with relatives (Meire, 2002, p. 377). These memories concerned their family's past in the bigger picture of the Word War and offered an emotional tie with history. Secondly many genealogists had relatives who died in, or suffered because of the war (Dendooven, 2012). Often these ancestors had left artefacts and mementoes relating to their family's experiences during 1914-1918. These acted (and still do) as evocative objects, or rather memorial signs and continued to stimulate interest in the past long after their original owners were gone (Todman, 2005). But the fascination for tangible and intangible heritage did not remain limited to the family sphere (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000; Urry, 2002) and resulted in a heightened attention for the thousands of memorials that were created across the world during the twenties and thirties and which generated 'a web of remembrance' (Scutts, 2009).

All these developments led to the same thing: an increase of the interest of the Britons in the Great War. Over time the changed perspective on history and the interest in genealogy and heritage led to a wealth of new material about the war which was included in and added value to history books, TV documentaries and movies. A focus on individual experiences was an extremely effective tool for involving the audience (Todman, 2005). Bottom-up history transformed the almost ungraspable scale of the war into recognisable experiences of individuals and enabled the audience to identify with the past. As such the memories of the war reached a part of the public that did not actively search for information.

THE COLD WAR AND THE MEMORY BOOM

A crucial moment for the renewal of interest in the past was the fall of communism in 1989. As mentioned in chapter I, the end of the Cold War was one of the triggers of the 'memory boom' in the nineties which initiated an exponential growth of the study and attention for World War One. In the first place the disintegration of the Soviet Union released the memories of two World Wars of the hegemonic ideological frame of the struggle between the democratic capitalistic West and the totalitarian communistic USSR. And created possibilities to reassess their continuing legacy in the late 20th century (Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000). Some historians, amongst which Eric Hobsbawm, saw the fall of the wall as the end an era. Hobsbawm's book 'Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century 1914-1991', began the century with the outbreak of World War One, which marked the end of the long and peaceful 19th century and would define the 20th (1994). Although controversial, Hobsbawm's work was highly successful and generated renewed interest in 1914-1918 (Dendooven, 2012).

Secondly the disintegration of the USSR was a crucial moment for globalisation. The increasing globalisation and the acceleration of history that came along with it caused individuals to look to the past to sustain and anchor their identity (Gillis, 1994; Todman, 2005). Nations likewise turned to the past and since war is central to the identity and continuity of nation-states the memories of the First and Second World War moved into the spotlight again. In the case of Britain the First World War was the last war where their contribution was decisive for the overall victory and even more importantly World War One was perceived as the event which facilitated the transformation of Britain from an empire into a modern nation-state. In other words the myth of the war in the trenches is part of the very foundation of modern Britain (Dendooven, 2012; Van der Auwera, 2008).

The interaction of all these circumstances and events created a framework which facilitated and supported interest in and study of World War One[15]. An evolution which had considerable influence on the British Isles. Maybe the most visible sign of the renewed attention for and the emotional attachment to the (memories of the) war is the poppy appeal, in the week before Armistice it is impossible to avoid the red flower. It has become an unwritten rule that all those in the public eye such as politicians, celebrities, sportsmen or news presenters should wear one. This

[15] In this context we can also refer to the work of Foucault who argues that through discourse power produces a regime of truth which defines what is taken for truth and restricts the kind of knowledge which can be amassed. In fact 'relations of power cannot themselves be established without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association.' (Foucault, 1980, p. 93) As such it follows logically that the disintegration of the USSR, one of the power blocks of the second half of the 20th century, and the end of the Cold War was accompanied by the disintegration of the discourses which legitimised this state of affairs and thus opened up new perspectives on the past.

tradition is more than purely a formality, public figures who fail to comply with the custom elicit a fair amount of controversy and even outrage (Kelner, 2011; Van der Auwera, 2008).

III.2 IMPACT ON YPRES AND THE MENIN GATE

YPRES

The civilian and personal aspects of the commemorative structures in Ypres perfectly support and are supported by the late 20th, early 21st century form of commemoration. In a time when, according to Gillis, the nation as site and frame for memories (Gillis, 1994, p. 17) is ousted for a more personal connection with the past, Ypres might be defined as a mnemonic device for a generation that finds it difficult to remember without access to external mementoes, images and physical sites (Gillis, 1994).

Under the motto 'Never Again' the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (formerly known as the Imperial War Graves Commission) had created a commemorative landscape on the holy ground of Ypres with eternity value. The sites do not seem to have aged at all, the cemeteries and memorials of the British in the Salient, look as impeccable now as they did the day they were built. The landscape of the Salient, the first element of its appeal cannot be separated from the second. Ypres' central place in the collective memories of World War One. The Great War changed the associations connected to the town and grafted it in the collective memories of the Britons. The key role of Ypres in the war effort, culminating in the three battles of Ypres, constituted an important part to the formation of the myth of the trenches, the founding myth of modern Britain. After the war its status as holy ground was enhanced by the non-repatriation policy of the government. The horror of trench warfare and the battles by Ypres speak to the imagination and correspond with a wider discourse which regards the war horrible and ultimately futile. It is therefore not surprising that the Western Front has often been depicted in literature and popular culture. The poems 'Memorial Tablet' by Siegfried Sassoon (1983) and the world famous 'In Flanders Fields' by the Canadian John McCrae (2008) are early examples of the imagery created around the Western Front. More recently the 'Regeneration' trilogy by Pat Barker (1996) and the highly successful 'Blackadder goes forth' (1989) presented a similar interpretation of the war (Todman, 2005; Wilson, 2008). These largely negative portrayals of the past in popular culture become more influential now the last of the veterans have died and a generation of great-grandchildren have arrived on the scene, who no longer have a personal connection with the war but have grown up with the myths surrounding it (Todman, 2005).

This brings us directly to a third element of Ypres' appeal. Now the old-soldiers have passed on and the social memories have transformed into collective memories, the battlefields and landscape can be considered the last witnesses of the Great War (Chielens, Dendooven, & Decoodt,

2006). The former frontline is a place where one can physically follow in the footsteps of the soldiers and visit the places whose names are grafted upon the collective consciousness of Britain. The combination of physical closeness, the myth of the war and factual knowledge exercises the imagination of visitors and lends an extraordinary appeal to locations such as Ypres or the Somme.

The presence of the In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM), which opened in 1998, enhances this effect and is a fourth reason to travel to Ypres. The museum offers an overview of trench warfare in Flanders between 1914-1918 and functions as an introduction for the entire region, as such it attracts over 200,000 people per year (Westour, 2008).Central to the exhibition is the human experience and the contemporary landscape as the last witness of the war (In Flanders Fields Museum, 2012). From 2012 it consciously integrates references to other sites in the region to strengthen its function as the point of departure for visitors of the Salient (Westour, 2008). Offering factual information becomes more important for a contemporary audience that does not always understand the significance and value of the memorials and cemeteries (Winter C., 2009).

The final two reasons for the increasing numbers of visitors are of a more prosaic nature. In the first place the improved socio-economic circumstances and transport links, led to a growth of tourism in general and of battlefield tourism in particular. Tourists cannot be seen as a homogeneous group, reasons to travel to Ypres are as diversified as the visitors themselves. A number of them come to find relatives, others are driven by a more general interest in history and some have nationalistic motives. A considerable part of the travellers to Ypres consists of secondary school children. This is due to the fact that World War One became an obligatory part of the national curriculum for secondary schools during Thatcher's reign (Meire, 2002; Van der Auwera, 2008).

In the second place tourism is highly selective and creates products to suit specific market groups, marketers and operators select memorials and places that will provide the greatest interest and experiences (Winter C. , 2009). Ypres with its high density of material artefacts of the war is easily marketable as a 'heritage product'. This is not to imply that tourists are passive consumers of commodified history. Most tourists travel to Ypres out of a genuine interest in the past (Westour, 2008). Through their visit and participation in the commemorative rituals tourists can take part in the selection and the rehearsal of the collective memories of the Great War (Winter C., 2009).

THE MENIN GATE

If we define Ypres as a commemorative landscape or an external memory, than the Menin Gate could be described as its beating heart, keeping the memories of the war alive. As such the appeal of the memorial cannot be separated from its surroundings. At the conjunction of all commemorative activities taking place in Ypres the Menin Gate continually mirrors what Britain wants to remember and what it wishes to forget. The altering interpretations of the First World War did not truly affect the memorial since, like the majority of the funerary architecture of 1914-1918, the Menin Gate does not offer an explanation of the past instead it relies on the imagination of the audience and provides a shared locus within which meaning can be created and contested. Relatively empty of meaning and sanctified by its function to honour the dead it unites all different standpoints during the act of commemoration. The 'static' tangible heritage of the Menin Gate and the 'living' intangible heritage of the Last Post strengthen each other and offer a unique and authentic experience anchored in a local remembrance landscape where spectators are seen as active participants of the ceremony rather than passive consumers (Richards, 2011).

As the national monument of the British abroad and the homestead of the Last Post, the memorial is the preferred location for official commemorative ceremonies and a certain stop for celebrities, royalty or otherwise well-known individuals who visit Ypres. On the one hand a culmination of such high profile events, and the media attention that came with it, acted as a trigger for the increase of interest in the Menin Gate and the Last Post in the eighties. On the other hand reoccurring events, such as the Armistice ceremony, the consecutive anniversaries of the third battle of Ypres and the more nationalistically oriented Anzac Day ceremony, assert media attention at more regular intervals.

The impact the Menin Gate and the Last Post can have on individual visitors is illustrated by Guy Gruwez, chairman of the Last Post Association until 2006: 'the Gate is an appropriate location (for the Last Post), everyone is kind of there (in Ypres) for the same thing: they have visited the former front or the (In Flanders Fields) museum, and are already impressed and then you see (on the Menin Gate) the loss that has been suffered… ' (Meire, 2003, p. 342). People become emotional, even children of 14, 15 year old are affected; start crying (Swierstra, 2003, p. 12). Here, 'objective, abstract history turns into re-embodied collective memory' […]. 'History in general is reconfigured into a particular and emotionally charged version of our history' (Assmann, 2008, p. 65).

This capacity to transfigure history into memory, or if we look at the wider picture to create bridges between past and present, public and private and death and life is, in light of the changed nature of commemoration, maybe one of the most important qualities of the Menin Gate. Seeing and tracing the names on the walls, even when it is not one of your ancestors, creates an emotional

link between the past and the present. Many Britons seeking for a more personal understanding of World War One instinctually search for their own name or those of friends and family (Todman, 2005, p. 69). In modern society the Menin Gate is one of the few places left where this direct interaction between past and present and death and life remains possible in a socially accepted manner (Meire, 2012). It facilitates remembrance of the war dead and creates ties between present and past. More than eighty years after its conception the Menin Gate still fulfils the function it was created for but its impact is wider than that, a visit to the memorial can also evoke more universal questions about life and death and can conjure up thoughts of highly personal losses.

CONCLUSION

This chapter offered a history of the memories of the Great War in Britain and sought to clarify the reasons behind the waxing and waning of interest for World War One. In second instance it explored the relation between the commemoration in Great Britain and the Menin Gate.

We found that the altering meaning attached to the war is founded on a paradox. No war that killed so many people could easily be considered worthwhile. Yet the very scale of the casualties necessitated a rhetoric of remembrance designed to console the bereaved. Words like sacrifice and glory were used to talk about the war. When the restraining influence of the bereaved fell away and the Second World War ruined the primary interpretation of the first as a redemptive sacrifice, the doors were opened for a more critical judgment. As a consequence the commemoration of World War One was at a historical low point in the 1950s until processes on a transnational level heightened the interest in the past. But due to the changed circumstances a growing number of Britons came to believe that the war had no purpose, this interpretation had an unwanted side effect: it threatened the heroic status the individual soldiers continued to hold while a growing number of Britons looked into their personal and national past as a source of identity (Todman, 2005).

Chapter IV builds on chapter III and explicates that the appeal of the Menin Gate cannot be separated from on the one hand the presence of the Last Post and its location in the remembrance landscape of Ypres and the British interest in World War One on the other hand. The nearly symbiotic relation between the memorial and the British commemoration demonstrates that the Menin Gate functions as a material carrier of memory. More than eighty years after its inauguration the Menin Gate remains the anchor point of British memories at the former Western Front reflecting the nature of the British commemoration of the war. Symbols and symbolic practises associated with the Great War such as the inscription of names and the poppy are inherent to or surround the memorial. Individual visitors gather under its arch to commemorate and honour the dead, by tracing the names of the fallen, laying flowers or by attending the Last Post. During official events ideas of mourning, the fallen, sacrifice for the greater good, remembrance and gratitude are omnipresent.

That the Menin Gate is still such a powerful symbol of remembrance can be ascribed to three factors. In the first place it was never rallied or associated with one specific political or social movement[16]. Instead the memorial lies at the centre of several discourses and sanctified by its

[16] This did happen to the IJzertoren. The tower mirrors the evolution of the Flemish movement and has taken on its conflicted nature. As such the memorial became tainted by its connection to collaboration, Nazism and the extreme right and consequently its popularity is strongly dependent on the overall popularity of the Flemish movement.

function to honour the dead it unites all different standpoints on the war during the act of commemoration. This brings us to the second factor: the Menin Gate has no clear inherent meaning its *raison d'être* is to honour and commemorate the dead of the Great War in the Ypres Salient. But in what capacity they should be honoured is not specified. It is left to the spectators to decide whether they see the dead: as a moral example to us all; as brother, father, lover, son or friend; as a sacrifice for a better world or as victims of senseless slaughter. As such the gate can accommodate all different meanings attached to the war. And finally the Menin Gate is unique. It is (one of) the most prominent battlefield memorials in the world (Foote & Vanneste, 2011), located in Ypres, a memorial sign in its own right and surrounded by a dense web of memorial signs and commemorative practises.

V CONCLUSION

Central to this paper was the exploration of the relationship between the enduring popularity of the Menin Gate and the commemoration of World War One in Britain. This topic necessitated closer study of (a) theories of memory and commemoration; (b) the articulation of the memories of World War One and the commemoration of the war in Britain; (c) the Menin Gate and its appeal and (d) the relationship between and impact of the British commemoration on the Menin Gate. In addition we found that in order to answer the question put before us it was also a requisite to consider the influence of transnational events. At the end of our journey we found four overarching reasons for the enduring popularity of the memorial.

The first and foremost is its function as a durable carrier of memory of World War One for the Britons. Over the course of eighty years it continually reflected what Great Britain wanted to remember and what it wished to forget. Langbacher and Müller contend that collective memories are most likely to be formed and maintained about traumatic events that represent long-term changes in people's lives. A determinative factor in the amount of power a memory achieves is its ambiguity, the extent to which it manages to appeal to a variety of audiences and invite different understandings (Langbacher, 2010, p. 37; Müller, 2002, p. 31). As such World War One was almost predisposed to become part of the collective memories of Britain and soon gave rise to the most encompassing remembrance project ever witnessed. The commemoration was essentially a civilian commemoration of the dead originating from the need to mourn the fallen and society's consideration for the perceived needs of the bereaved.

The pre-dominant social memories of those early days would determine commemoration of and the meaning attached to the war over the course of the 20th century. At the heart of the interpretation of World War One lies a paradox. A conflict that killed so many could not easily be considered worthwhile, yet the very scale of death limited the option to question the purpose of the war. The real face of the World War One was suppressed and society's commemoration centred on the purified idea of the citizen soldier and transformed him into a self-sacrificial hero. Familiar and trusted ideas of sacrifice, regeneration, nature's cycle of life and death, spirituality and nationalism were utilised to advance the healing process and to retrospectively explain the events. Britain promised the dead to never let anything like that happen again.

The Menin Gate was part of a larger effort society made to keep the memories of the past alive. Like all memorials dedicated to the war it concealed the true nature of the event and reflected the dual attitude towards it, simultaneously expressing sorrow and victory. The latter interpretation soon faded to the background under the pressure of the social memories of the Britons. From that

point on the memorial's primary function was to commemorate and honour those who 'sacrificed' themselves during the war. The names that adorned the walls became its central feature.

When the Second World War broke the prevalent interpretation of the war as a redemptive sacrifice over war. World War One was put on the backburner and the meaning attached to the war became progressively more negative. In sync with the commemoration in the UK the number of visitors at the Menin Gate dropped steeply. This illustrates the indissolubly link between the Menin Gate and the commemoration of the Great War in Britain. It will only survive as an active memorial as long as the Britons and by extension the Commonwealth remember the First World War. In the 20th century the Menin Gate became the most important memorial on the battlefields *because* of the strength of the British commemoration.

Second, to remain relevant over time the Menin Gate had to be flexible, open to a variety of interpretations. The memorial suggests to explain the losses but in its ambiguous quality evades giving an actual explanation, putting the responsibility back on the viewer. This characteristic is supported by the sacred nature of the commemoration of the war dead. The British 'spirit of remembrance' is essentially a-political, under the arch of the Menin Gate there is no room for politics or military display, only for remembering and respect. This became increasingly important as the 20th century progressed. The outbreak of the Second World War ruined the dominant interpretation of World War One as the 'Great War', the war to end all wars. It was replaced with a mental map dominated by horror and disaster. The negative mythology of the war as a whole fitted awkwardly with the continuing respect and admiration for the legacy of the common soldiers (Todman, 2005). Yet all these different views on the war can easily coexist at the Menin Gate. Empty of any definite meaning the memorial does not attempt to explain the past but facilitates the creation of meaning.

Third, it was not only the meaning attached to the war that changed. From the sixties the manner in which the war was approached also underwent significant changes. The nation was no longer the site or frame for history and memory, instead man himself became the measure of things. The top-down approach of history which focused on events of a national scale was complemented with a more humane bottom-up point of view. Oral history and survivor testimonies that paid attention to the experiences of ordinary men in the extraordinary circumstances of the war received progressively more attention. At the other side of the same process the nature of the commemoration changed and grew more personal. Everyone became his or hers own historian, searching for a personal and emotional link with *their* history. In this transnational globalised world an increasing number of people seek stability and affirmation of identity in the past but they find it difficult to remember without access to mementoes and physical sites to objectify their memory (Gillis, 1994; Todman, 2005). Due to the civilian nature of the commemorative project in the twenties

the Menin Gate and the rituals that surround it, can facilitate a personal connection with the past. Attending the Last Post at the Menin Gate reconfigures history into a particular and emotionally charged version of our past. Visiting the memorial can unite personal, family history with world history and thereby anchor the former and provide stability. Physically tracing the steps of the soldiers who left the city for the battlefields through the Menin Gate or touching the names of relatives or familiar names creates an emotional link between private memories and public history, between past and present and between life and death.

Fourth, as a focal point of memory in Ypres, an anchor point where different formats of memory and interpretations of the past come together, the Menin Gate is *the* most important memorial of the British at the former Western Front. The Menin Gate transcends its immediate location and is linked to a complex cultural transformation of the commemoration in Britain (Foote & Vanneste, 2011). That it is able to do so is due to its physical location, or more specifically to the density of memories it is surrounded by and the highly symbolical position of the Gate itself. In the Ypres Salient, sacred ground in its own right, the Menin Gate is part of a wider web of remembrance consisting of commemorative spaces such as cemeteries and memorials which are supported in their function by museums. Together 'objective' history, institutionalised commemoration practices[17] and the material presence of the war in the Salient provide an anchor point for the memory of the Great War (Meire, 2003, p. 374). At the centre of this dense remembrance landscape the Menin Gate both benefits from and strengthens it. The memorial offers a sacred space where all the different commemorative practices and discourses come together in remembrance. At 8 p.m. the sanctity of the Menin Gate intensifies and silence rules over the audience when the bugles of the Last Post perform their final farewell to the fallen surrounded by the names of those who left Ypres through the Menin Gate never to return.

Like all memorials the appeal of the Menin Gate is largely a construct of the imagination. Visitors are not so much interested in the architecture but in the associations that the memorial invokes. As long as the world remembers, the Menin Gate, at the heart of a remembrance landscape and in the centre of Ypres, Britain's holy ground, will be there to remind the living of those who died in the Great War.

[17] By which we mean both more or less fixed elements in commemorative practices such as the Last Post and the systematic individual remembrance that was applied by the IWGC in the wake of the war.

SELF EVALUATION

As much as I loved working on this project I do not believe I did my topic justice. My inexperience with writing a paper of this magnitude at times got the upper hand of me. If I were to do it over again there are some things I would change. In the first place I would search more help and advice from the very beginning both for the content of the paper as for the writing process. Second I'd delimit my research question sooner and spend more time on the methodological framework which would allow for a more focused literature study and give me more time to spend on interviews. Third, I would outline the thesis properly before starting the actual writing process. If I applied these three simple guidelines I might avoid the problems I encountered, which mainly related to a lack of direction and therefore of efficiency and the thesis laying before you might have more depth and be more to the point. None the less I am grateful that I had the opportunity to spend this much time and attention on a topic that truly fascinates me and despite the lingering insecurities am reasonably happy with the way my thesis turned out.

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