Remembering the South African War

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Chapter 1

Civic War Memorials: Public Pride and Private Grief

Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain was a society obsessed with social class and stratification, yet the war in South Africa had been a crucial evolutionary moment for the British middle and working classes. Emerging from the shadow of the aristocracy, the middle classes, and lower middle classes in particular, made up the majority of the initial volunteers for the army and thus often perceived themselves to be the instruments of victory. The war validated and confirmed their importance, status and respectability. Working-class volunteers had also come forward in large numbers, although historians debate the extent to which the motivation was patriotic or economic.¹ To many, such an egregious manifestation of patriotic service demanded some form of permanent recognition. Thus, civic leaders throughout the country took it upon themselves to begin the process of memorialising their locality’s contribution to the imperial cause. This chapter will explore how civic communities went about the business of constructing memorials in honour of their citizen-soldiers and, in the process, will attempt to shed light on the extent to which such commemorative sites can be said to have embodied a collective memory of the war.

Although it was common for the inscriptions on civic and county memorials to claim collective ownership by declaring that a monument was raised through public subscription, determining the extent to which commemorative projects were genuinely expressions of popular demand is very difficult. Frequently organising committees simply emerged from pre-existing hierarchical patterns, legitimising their membership and role by claiming that they were giving concrete form to the desires felt by their own particular communities. As might be expected, leadership tended to come from those either already in a position of influence or unencumbered by other demands and therefore able to dedicate time and energy to a memorial project. This, in practice, effectively meant

¹ See Price, An Imperial War.
those in a comfortable financial position. Indeed, so embedded was the idea of paternalistic public service in late Victorian and early Edwardian society, with Victoria’s Golden and Diamond Jubilees and Lansdowne’s South African War Fund having provided the most recent opportunities for displays of civic largesse, that the formation of an organising committee rarely involved much in the way of preparatory work. At county level this resulted in the lead being taken, more often than not, by the Lord Lieutenant who gathered around him a mixture of civic and military notables to take the project forward. Typical was the experience of Pembrokeshire, where the Lord Lieutenant, Earl Cawdor, convened a meeting in the Shire Hall, Haverfordwest, to ‘consider the arrangements to be made for the erection of a memorial to Pembrokeshire men who lost their lives in active service during the South African campaign’. With the meeting unanimously agreeing ‘that such a memorial was desirable’, Cawdor proceeded to ‘invite ladies and gentlemen to join a committee’ to oversee the work.²

In towns and cities, the civic authorities were usually the main inspirations behind war memorial schemes. However, in contrast to the frantic bout of civic memorial construction that took place following the Armistice in 1918, many civic communities in the aftermath of the South African War were content to either be subsumed by the county scheme or to leave the memorialisation of the fallen to the military authorities. Where a scheme was established, not infrequently the guiding hand of one or two particularly influential individuals with links to the military can be discerned. In Folkestone, the fact that Viscount Folkestone, the largest landowner in the locality, had served as a volunteer must have played an important part in the town council’s decision to have ‘a tablet placed in the town hall to commemorate the yeomen and volunteers from the borough who went to the Front’.³ The impetus in Dover was provided by the town clerk, Sir Wollaston Knocker, who commanded the 1st volunteer battalion, The Buffs; in Wigan, Councillor Thomas Fyans, who ‘had himself borne a part in the field of battle in honour of his country’, was the moving force behind the town’s memorial; while in Tonbridge, the organising committee included retired army tutor, John Le Fleming, who had been instrumental in establishing a volunteers corps in the town in 1859.⁴

Although the evidence suggests that in the vast majority of cases committees at civic and county level were self-forming and self-perpetuating cliques which made little or no attempt to seek genuine public affirmation, it was, nonetheless,
not uncommon for committee members, aware that reciprocal bonds of duty and loyalty were based on nothing more than location, to look to validate their authority through the calling of a public meeting. However, even when it was felt necessary to make this nod towards democratisation, it was, almost without fail, no more than that. Although the committees which oversaw the construction of the Kent, Leicestershire and Bedfordshire county memorials were nominally elected at public meetings, these were, to all intents and purposes, self-selecting groups. For Earl Stanhope, the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, who presided over the open meeting at Maidstone Town Hall to discuss the county proposals, service appeared to be simply a matter of aristocratic duty rather than the result of any public mandate. Although the gathering was held with ‘the object of electing a large and representative committee’, no vote was taken and the nominal purpose of the afternoon’s business was only achieved at the end of proceedings when a select list of ‘noblemen and gentlemen desired that their names be placed on the committee’.⁵ The unchallenged right of the county elite to assume control was equally evident in Leicestershire. The initial public meeting at the County Rooms in Leicester on 3 January 1903, convened by the Marquess of Granby, the Lord Lieutenant, was immediately followed by the inaugural meeting of the memorial committee, the members of which had been pre-selected from a list of leading military and civic figures. Unsurprisingly, the first action of the committee was to elect Granby to the chair.⁶ The careful choreographing of public debate also attended the open consultation for the Bedfordshire scheme. Chaired by the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Earl Cowper, on 10 July 1902, the meeting was immediately faced with a resolution from Cowper’s deputy, the Duke of Bedford, that ‘the whole matter [of a county memorial] be placed in the hands of a committee’. With the resolution duly passed, the usual array of civic leaders, politicians and local dignitaries were co-opted to serve on the committee and further discussion was restricted exclusively to methods for raising funds.⁷ Occasionally, the veneer of public consultation was abandoned completely and the whole matter remained the preserve of municipal officials. Exeter’s memorial scheme was initiated by the estates committee of the city council, the form was chosen at a full meeting of the councillors and the £30 costs was defrayed from the local rates. Even the unveiling of the commemorative

⁵ Royal West Kent Regiment Archives, Queen’s Own Gazette, Vol. XX, No. 6 (June 1902), p. 1759
⁶ Leicester and Rutland Record Office (LRRO), DE171, The Leicestershire South African War Memorial Committee, minutes, 12 January 1903.
⁷ Bedfordshire and Luton Archives (BLA), L/c/Cha, Bedford County Lieutenancy, county meeting, minutes, 10 July 1902.
plaque remained in-house, with the ceremony in the Guildhall on 22 February 1905 organised and orchestrated by the council alone.⁸

It was not only the management of these public meetings but their timing that invariably put the lie to any claims about open consultation. In all three county cases cited above the meetings were held on weekday afternoons, thus precluding attendance by those without the time, influence or money to leave work early. The Earl of Carlisle went one step further in placing obstacles in the path of those who wished to attend the public meeting to consider proposals for the Yorkshire county memorial. Not only was the meeting held on a Thursday afternoon but it took place in London. Unsurprisingly, the list of those present was restricted to the great and good of the county.⁹ In the small Scottish town of Alyth, fifteen miles north of Dundee, Provost Johnston’s choice of Thursday afternoon as the best time to hold an open consultation on how to commemorate the three local men who had died in the war, one of whom was the Earl of Airlie, the local laird, resulted in an attendance of just twelve. Despite this disappointing turnout, and a suggestion from the town clerk that no final decision should be reached until more views had been canvassed, a resolution fixing both the form and location of the memorial was passed and ‘most of those present were appointed to the committee’.¹⁰

In the London borough of Islington, one resident, A. T. Gould, used the apparent lack of openness in consultation to launch a strident attack on the memorial committee’s management in general. In a bad tempered letter to the Islington Daily Gazette he implied that a deep schism had grown up between leaders and led, claiming that the initial public meeting to explain the war memorial committee’s ideas was a sham as it ‘seemed simply to consist of a specially selected and favoured few’, particularly as it started at 5 p.m., a time which excluded ‘masters and men’ still at work and suitable only for ‘drones’. He went on to urge the funding of a practical scheme such as a hospital which would be especially useful to poorer people and cited examples in Scotland. The best service of the memory of the dead was by ‘sustaining the helpless ones some of our men have left behind’.¹¹ The editorial of the Islington Daily Gazette gently mocked Gould’s suggestions for their over-ambitious nature reminding readers of the great costs involved in establishing a hospital. However, this slightly facetious attitude misunderstood Gould’s commitment and passion, which was shown most forcefully at the next public meeting. After listening to the opening

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¹⁰ Dundee Courier and Argus, 19 July 1900.
¹¹ Islington Daily Gazette, 13 October 1903.
remarks, Gould returned to his agenda and pointedly stated his desire ‘that the movement should be made as democratic as possible, and representatives of the working classes added to the committee’. Wishing to at least appear inclusive, Gould was duly elected to the committee. Howell Williams, one of Islington’s representatives on the London County Council, seemed to support Gould’s sentiments for he called upon them to endow a nursing home or medical centre. Distinct tensions then erupted when Gould passed a written resolution to the mayor which he asked him to read. The mayor declined to do so stating that he did not wish the meeting to descend into discord. Gould pressed his case and asked bluntly, ‘Will you read the resolution?’, to which the mayor equally bluntly replied, ‘No, I will not, for if I do, you will have the satisfaction of getting what you desire’, which brought forth applause from the floor.¹² Left with the sense that he was being branded a politically motivated agitator, Gould sent his resolution to the *Islington Daily Gazette*:

This meeting suggests to the committee that the best method of perpetuating the memory of Islingtonians who lost their lives through the war in South

¹² *Islington Daily Gazette*, 14 October 1903.
Africa is to establish a permanent fund with the object of assisting the most necessitous cases among the widows and orphans created by the late lamentable war, and that (memorial) tablets be placed inside and outside public buildings.¹³

'I have read and read this resolution’, he added, ‘and I positively cannot see anything political in it’. However, he then placed himself within a particular socio-political context, albeit perhaps subconsciously, by concluding that his position was ‘that of every workman … so I cannot but regret that the mayor refused an opportunity to the meeting to decide for or against my proposal’.¹⁴ Accusations of political motivation were clearly regarded as extremely grave insults in relation to memorial activity. Significantly, neither side in the dispute saw themselves as acting in a political manner and were at least claiming to be oblivious to the underlying implications of their positions.

Not only were such rifts viewed as a slight on the memory of the fallen but they were also seen as an affront to civic prestige. For many communities the decision to persevere with the construction of a remembrance site to the conflict in South Africa was underpinned by a strong sense of collective pride. Although the justness of Britain’s involvement in the war had not been, by any means, universally accepted at the outbreak of hostilities, the military reverses of what became known as ‘Black Week’ in December 1899 had resulted in a rush of volunteers to the colours.¹⁵ Over 500 men joined the 1st volunteer battalion of The Queen’s Own Royal West Kents in 1900 and, later the same year, there were sufficient new recruits for an additional company to be formed in the regiment’s 2nd volunteer battalion.¹⁶ Leaders of civic remembrance projects were keen to celebrate this display of patriotic devotion by their communities’ members and, thus, frequently stressed the voluntary nature of service. Dover’s notables not only determined to erect a memorial plaque to those local men who had died in the war but ‘to combine with it a Roll of Fame in honour of those who volunteered for service and on whom the Corporation conferred the Honorary Freedom of the Borough’.¹⁷ In Folkestone, the town councils chose to exclude professional soldiers from their plans and commemorate only those local men who had volunteered for the war, making no differentiation between those who died and those who returned.¹⁸ At a public meeting in Salford town

¹³ Islington Daily Gazette, 15 October 1903.
¹⁴ Islington Daily Gazette, 15 October 1903.
¹⁵ Will Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars: The Volunteers in the Boer War (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999), pp. 9–18.
¹⁶ H. D. Chaplin, The Queen’s Own Royal West Kent Regiment (Maidstone: Queen’s Own Regimental History, 1959), p. 108.
¹⁷ EKA, DoCA17/1/17, South African War Memorial Committee, minutes, 6 May 1904.
¹⁸ Folkestone Express, 23 April 1904. Catherine Moriarty has noted that the tendency to privilege the sacrifice of volunteers ahead of regulars continued into the Great War. One
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hall on 17 September 1902, the mayor, Samuel Rudman, insisting that ‘Salford
should be exceedingly proud that she had put forward her quota of men’, was
similarly inclined to restrict the roll of honour to the 119 Salfordians who had
volunteered.¹⁹ It was only when the Conservative MP for Salford South, James
Grimble Groves, gently reminded those present that it was both regulars and
volunteers who had ‘represented the town of Salford so nobly in the late war’
that an amendment to extend the scope of the scheme to include ‘all Salford
men who have fought for the King and country’ was accepted.²⁰

Civic pride continued to inform the memorialisation process in Salford as
the scheme worked its way towards completion. With the King and Queen
due to visit Manchester to open a new dock in the Manchester Ship Canal,
Salford’s civic leaders were eager that the unveiling of the town’s war memorial
should be included on the itinerary. The editor of the Salford Chronicle neatly
captured the sense of civic rivalry (and civic inferiority) that now suffused
events when reporting that the initial approach by the memorial committee
had been rebuffed: ‘In consonance with their ordinary custom and the general
treatment meted out to Salford by Manchester in connection with such events
as these, the city authorities entirely ignored the existence of the borough’.²¹
However, a second delegation to the King’s private secretary, Lord Knollys, met
with more success and although the royal visit on 13 July 1905 lasted no more
than six minutes, during which time neither the King nor the Queen stepped
out of their carriage, this was enough for the unveiling to be transformed into
day of civic rejoicing, with 45,000 schoolchildren being given a souvenir mug
and 3,500 over-sixty-fives provided with a celebratory meal.²² For Salford, the
construction of what was its first major outdoor war memorial was a prime
opportunity to assert its civic identity. Having been granted county borough
status by the Local Government Act of 1888, and with a population approaching
quarter of a million by the turn of the century, the town’s civic leaders had

reason she suggests for this is that death for the professional soldier was frequently regarded
as no more than an ‘occupational hazard’. Moriarty, ‘Christian Iconography and First World
¹⁹ Salford Reporter, 20 September 1902. Once again the public meeting was held on a
weekday afternoon (this time a Wednesday) and once again the committee was almost
entirely composed of civic dignitaries.
²⁰ Salford Chronicle, 20 September 1902. Despite the acceptance of Groves’s amendment,
the inscription on the memorial still privileged the contribution of the volunteers. It reads:
‘Erected by the county borough of Salford to the many townsmen who served their sovereign
and country in South Africa 1899–1902 and particularly in honour of the volunteer active
service companies of the Lancashire Fusiliers: daring in all things’.
²¹ Salford Chronicle, 15 July 1905.
²² Salford Reporter, 15 July 1905; T. Wyke, The Public Sculpture of Greater Manchester
seized on the chance presented by the sacrifice of its citizen-soldiers to emerge from the shadow of neighbouring Manchester.²³

Pride in the sacrifice of local volunteers also played a part in initiating commemorative activity in Halifax. Prompted by the return of the volunteers of the 1st battalion, the West Riding regiment, on 18 June 1902, the *Halifax Courier* reminded its readers in the very next edition that over forty men ‘lie buried ‘neath the veldt in that far off clime, their graves marked by crude monuments erected by sorrowing comrades’ and urged the authorities to construct ‘something permanent at home … to show [the fallen] some honour’.²⁴ Yet, once again, civic rivalry was to the fore. Under the sub-heading ‘What other towns have done’, the article concluded by archly observing ‘how promptly and nobly our neighbours at Elland have recognised that they have a duty to fallen townsmen. Contrast this with the loss Halifax has sustained – 2 sons to our 31’. Across the border in Lancashire, the mayor of Rochdale used a similar argument to justify the town’s decision to embark on a memorial scheme over three years after the war had ended. It was, he explained to those present at the unveiling in June 1907, only after his appointment as mayor two years earlier that the council was persuaded ‘that Rochdale should not be behind other towns in commemorating the services of the citizens in South Africa’.²⁵

Occasionally it was the local press that led the way in ensuring that civic prestige was maintained by initiating commemorative schemes. This was the case in Birmingham, Nuneaton and Middlesbrough where the memorial movements were established and sustained by the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, the *Midland Counties Tribune* and the *North East Daily Gazette* respectively.²⁶ During the course of the war, provincial newspapers had been keen to distinguish themselves from the national press and, in the process, sustain interest in lengthy and often uneventful campaigns, by printing letters from serving soldiers with local connections. Thus, having championed local pride in volunteerism during the conflict, it was hardly surprising that, in the immediate aftermath of the fighting, some editors thought it only right that they should continue to take the lead in honouring the sacrifices of local men who had served.²⁷

A civic war memorial was not only a site of collective tribute but also a key symbol of community worth. The civic leaders of both Alyth and Ely were anxious that their commemorative projects should not be subsumed by larger

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²³ Tom Bergin, *Salford: A City and its Past* (Salford: City of Salford Cultural Services Department, 1975).
²⁴ *Halifax Courier*, 21 June 1902.
²⁵ *Rochdale Observer*, 6 June 1907.
regional schemes. In Alyth, the death of the local laird, the Earl of Airlie, at the battle of Diamond Hill on 11 June 1900, triggered the authorities to act. Eager to claim the Earl as one of their own, and concerned that a competing plan had already been launched in neighbouring Kirriemuir, where Airlie was a major landholder, a hastily convened meeting in Alyth town hall overruled the suggestion that ‘no memorial should be gone on with until after the war … as the fighting might claim more victims’, and resolved to press ahead with the construction of a commemorative obelisk in Market Square immediately.²⁸ With the unveiling taking place in July 1901, a full ten months before the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging, the editor of the Alyth Guardian felt it necessary to explain to his readers, in terms redolent with civic pride, why the town required its own memory site. It was, he wrote, because ‘Alyth had suffered in so special a manner from the South African war that, instead of joining with neighbouring communities in commemorating the fallen it was fitting it should have a local monument to commemorate its own gallant dead’.²⁹

In Ely, the recent redrawing of bureaucratic boundaries invested the memorial project with even more significance. Initially designated to be part of the Suffolk regiment and county memorial scheme, which included Cambridgeshire, a traditional recruiting ground for the Suffolks, the administrative county of Ely appeared to be under threat of being overshadowed by its more populous neighbours. This threat became a reality when the memorial committee, chaired by the Marquess of Bristol, the Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk, proposed that there should be three memorials located in the county towns of the three administrative counties of Cambridgeshire, East Suffolk and West Suffolk.³⁰ Having only had its incorporation into Cambridgeshire following the local government reforms of 1888 revoked as a result of last minute intervention by Charles Selwyn, MP for Wisbech, Ely’s leaders moved quickly to rectify this apparent slight to its independence.³¹ At its very next meeting, the members of the county committee were presented with a petition declaring that it was ‘the unanimous wish of the subscribers of Ely’ that a separate memorial to ‘the men of the Isle of Ely’ be erected in Ely Cathedral. The committee acquiesced and £50 was apportioned from the collective funds.³²

²⁸ Dundee Courier and Argus, 19 July 1900.
²⁹ Alyth Guardian, 9 August 1901. Fortunately for the civic authorities of Alyth, the Earl of Airlie and the two other men commemorated on the monument in Market Square remained the total war deaths suffered by the town.
³⁰ Although Ipswich was the headquarters of the administrative county of East Suffolk, it was, by the terms of the 1888 Act, a county borough in its own right. As will be seen, this was to cause some tension.
³² Bury Free Press, 12 November 1904.
Similar tensions held back Ipswich’s participation in the Suffolk scheme, although this time it was the decision to site a memorial in the town that caused the difficulties. Serving as the administrative headquarters of the newly formed county of East Suffolk, Ipswich was, by the terms of the 1888 Act, also a county borough in its own right. That this was more than just a bureaucratic nicety can be discerned in the protracted negotiations over a suitable location for the memorial that took place between Captain J. Mayne, the chief constable of East Suffolk and honorary secretary of the county memorial committee, and Ipswich town council. Rejecting the council’s opening offer of a position on the edge of the market as ‘too restricted’, Mayne requested a prime site abutting the town hall. Aware that this may involve a reconfiguration of existing street furniture, he looked to play up the bonds of common identity by noting that, ‘in the list of Suffolk soldiers who died in the war there are a number whose native place was Ipswich’.³³ Apparently impervious to such tactics, the council’s use of the personal pronoun when proposing an alternative site was telling of its lack of any sense of ownership of the project. The council could, Mayne was informed in a letter from the town clerk, ‘offer a site near the entrance of Christchurch Park instead in which the statue to her late Majesty Queen Victoria will shortly be erected, and your memorial would be largely seen there by many visitors’.³⁴ As discussions rumbled on, the failure to find an acceptable compromise threatened to undermine the whole scheme. It was not, in fact, until June 1906, over two years after Mayne’s initial approach, that an attempt to politicise the issue finally prompted the town council to arrive at a solution. Emboldened by his colleagues’ continued intransigence during a debate in the council chamber to discuss an alternative site in the Cornhill, Councillor J. W. Christie, chairman of the Westgate Ward Liberal Club, seized on the moment to make a wider political point about the war in general. ‘In his opinion’, he told his fellow councillors, ‘the less that was said about the war in connection with which this memorial was to be, the better. That war was not to the credit of the nation. Gentleman might cry “oh” but those with whom it was waged had now become our compatriots, and a monument should not be put up to commemorate it’. This move to open up old wounds seems to have been just the jolt the Conservative dominated council needed. With the collapse of the scheme now a distinct possibility, the mayor, Blundell Henry Burton, called for an immediate vote on the proposed site to be taken and the resolution was passed, with only Christie in opposition.³⁵

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³³ Suffolk Records Office (SRO), 352.1409/Ips, Ipswich town council minutes, 22 June 1904, p. 102.
³⁴ SRO, 352.1409/Ips, Ipswich town council minutes, 22 June 1904, p. 102 (emphasis in original).
Clearly, if a memorialisation project was to be a success, and if expectations about civic prestige were to be met, then it was essential for significant funds to be raised. In contrast to schemes in workplaces and religious institutions, it was much more common for memorials at civic level, where the bonds of association were looser and any sense of belonging was simply based on residence rather than a shared profession or faith, to be financed by public subscription. More often than not, funds were raised in the traditional manner: appeals in the local press, house to house collections, military concerts and a variety of other charitable entertainments. Subscription lists were regularly published in local newspapers with eminent citizens leading the way with substantial donations. Typical is the example of the Suffolk regiment and county memorial where the Marquis of Bristol, the Lord Lieutenant of the county, Sir Cuthbert Quiller, MP for Sudbury, and Lord Cardogan, whose seat was Culford Park outside Bury St Edmunds, opened the fund with a donation of fifty guineas each.³⁶ Implicit in such donations, and in the publication of subscribers’ names in the local press, was the message that it was the responsibility of all citizens to match such charitable acts if not such extravagant amounts. In Halifax, the editor of the Halifax Courier ensured that the paper’s readers were left in no doubt exactly where their duty lay. Not content with simply publishing the first subscription list, headed by the mayor with a £10 donation, readers’ consciences were pricked further with a letter from a bereaved mother thanking those who had already given for their kindness and an article, under the heading ‘A Little Child’s Help’, recounting how a four-year-old boy had collected 10s 4d.³⁷ Such shameless appeals to sentiment clearly worked and, by the time of the unveiling, the committee’s original target of £1,000 had been surpassed.³⁸

However, notwithstanding the support received from leading citizens and the editors of local newspapers, by no means all memorialisation projects met their financial goals. Successfully raising subscriptions for memorial schemes depended in part on making a clear appeal to the relevant community based on an equally clear objective. Subscribers wanted to know what they were contributing towards and delays either in deciding a final form or in explaining it to the public often caused difficulties for fund-raisers. The civic projects of Dover, Islington and Rochdale reveal this problem most fully.

Having already tested the charitable reserves of the local populace with public appeals to finance the South African War Fund in January 1900 and the Queen Victoria memorial project in June of the following year, Dover’s civic dignitaries managed to compound the financial difficulties facing what was the port’s third publicly funded scheme in four years by adopting an approach which was, at one and the same time, precise in its financial ambition and vague

³⁶ Bury Free Press, 12 November 1904.
³⁷ Halifax Courier, 21 June 1902.
³⁸ Halifax Courier, 12 November 1904.
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in its conceptual realisation.³⁹ The press release for the launch of the scheme best illustrates this point: ‘It is the intention of the civic authorities to raise an indoor memorial in St Mary’s Church, at a cost of £200, and an outdoor monument, at upwards of £300, to the memory of the men who fell in the recent war in South Africa. The type of memorials will depend on the amount of money raised and the wishes of the subscribers’.⁴⁰ Dovorians were being asked to contribute to two costly schemes while being given no indication of the final form either would take. Predictably, the appeal did not elicit an enthusiastic response and it was not until nearly a decade after the war had finished, by which time financial shortfall had resulted in the outdoor monument being abandoned, that a commemorative tablet in St Mary’s Church was unveiled.⁴¹ Reviewing the debacle of the memorial’s lengthy gestation for his readers on the day of the unveiling ceremony, the editor of the Dover Express was of the opinion that the port had ended up with little more than a civic white elephant. Insisting that ‘the very undesirable and unexplained delay in completing the memorial’ had undermined any didactic purpose that the memory site might once have had, he was adamant that, ‘as to the younger generation the South African War is entirely a matter of history, they have no personal recollection of the time of stress through which this country passed and the grave defects that it revealed in our Army’.⁴²

Islington left its appeal until the summer of 1903, which caused some to doubt whether the scheme was already doomed. An editorial in the Islington Daily Gazette bemoaned the fact that the mayor’s call to action was too late, and many

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³⁹ EKA, DoCa/10/5/7, South African War Fund Committee, minutes 13 November 1899; EKA, Do/AMS/3, Queen Victoria Memorial Committee, minutes, 19 June 1901. Lord Stanhope, the chairman of the public meeting held to discuss moves for a county relief fund and memorial scheme, made plain just how real the danger of donor fatigue was when he told those assembled at Maidstone Town Hall that ‘he had no doubt there would be a large fund in time, even though it was the year of the Coronation and there were funds for bonfires and feedings and all kinds of rejoicing’. Queen’s Own Gazette, Vol. XX, No. 6 (June 1902), p. 1760.

⁴⁰ EKA, Do/CA17/1/17, South African Memorial Committee, minutes, 6 May 1904

⁴¹ Although financial difficulties clearly played a part in the extraordinary delay in the completion of Dover’s memorial scheme, one can’t help thinking that there must have been more to it. One possible explanation may lie in the competing demands on hard-pressed civic officials’ time. Certainly Alderman Mowll, the mayor of Dover, was quick to present this excuse for the late launch of the scheme. In a letter to the editor of the Dover Express, he explained that the delay had come about ‘because the Proclamation of Peace had been followed by the serious illness of the King, his own ill-health, the welcoming home of the troops and other duties which had made it impossible at that time to consider the matter’. Dover Express, 13 May 1904. This, of course, doesn’t explain why it took another eight years before the memorial was ready to be unveiled and here the records hold no clue.

⁴² Dover Express, 19 April 1912.
had now shamefully forgotten the sacrifice made by their fellow Islingtonians.\textsuperscript{43} When the fund was launched in September it met with a desultory response, which was hardly surprising given the lack of advanced publicity over the public meeting, the subsequent controversy over the composition of the committee and the complete lack of any public announcement as to the precise nature of the scheme. In effect, the Islington war memorial committee asked people to subscribe to nothing and expected them to continue doing so. As has been noted, the committee then made no formal decision until the spring of 1905 and only exhibited a sketch of the memorial in May 1905, just two months before the unveiling.\textsuperscript{44} Inevitably, the local newspaper carried many comments on the very slow progress of the memorial fund. The target was vaguely set at between £700 and £800, and this was thought easily achievable with a population of 345,000, but only £370 was collected by October 1903.\textsuperscript{45} For this reason, the \textit{Islington Daily Gazette} and the memorial committee thought it was absolutely vital to get the support of the borough’s businessmen and major employers, and indeed the timing of the public meetings was set with a deliberate eye to avoid business hours.\textsuperscript{46} The onus was on the leading citizens of Islington to make a public statement of commitment and an early subscriptions list shows contributions from fifty-six individuals including one clergymen and three JPs; seven businesses also contributed communal amounts and others acted as groups including the employees of the council’s bathhouses and a sports club.\textsuperscript{47} Fearful that the working classes of Islington were uninterested in the project, both the mayor and local MP stressed the cross-class nature of the appeal and urged all to contribute according to their ability.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, regardless of protestations of apolitical status, the memorial scheme was inherently bound up in local (and national) forces of class and political consciousness. Confusion continued to reign, however, with little done to confirm a target amount or form until the sum of £1,000 was finally announced in January 1905 well over a year later.\textsuperscript{49} ‘Merrie Villager’, the author of the ‘Islington Bells’ column in the \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, commented mournfully: ‘My little collection for the Memorial to Islington’s Dead Braves still goes on, but so slowly that it almost discourages me, and makes me think unkind things of a great patriotic community that so easily forgets the brave deeds of her sons and brothers’.\textsuperscript{50} With little clarity emerging from the committee, the collection inched forward reaching £728 in

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\item[43] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 7 July 1903.
\item[44] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 17 May 1905.
\item[45] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 7, 14 October 1903.
\item[46] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 1, 7 October 1903.
\item[47] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 4 September 1903.
\item[48] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 14 October 1903.
\item[49] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 4 January 1905.
\item[50] \textit{Islington Daily Gazette}, 17 September 1903.
\end{footnotes}
July 1905. In order to reinvigorate the scheme, a children’s fund was established in May 1905 with a target of £50 or 1,000 three-penny pieces. The *Islington Daily Gazette* printed the proud letter of Master T. W. Saint who enclosed eighteen three-penny pieces on behalf of himself and his eight brothers and sisters.\(^5^1\) By July 814 three-pennies had been collected, which prompted a Miss Tice to note: ‘I am surprised at the children of Islington not showing a more patriotic spirit’.\(^5^2\) It is not known whether the final target was reached. On the eve of the unveiling the editorial of the *Islington Daily Gazette* reflected on the evolution of the scheme. The problem of commencing late was acknowledged, but the committee were then praised for persisting and conquering all difficulties; at the same time, ‘for the small section of Islingtionians who try to throw discredit upon the Memorial we have the utmost contempt’.\(^5^3\) Clearly, the passage to the memorial had been anything but smooth.

As we have already seen, Rochdale was even later in initiating its remembrance plans with the first appeal for subscriptions not made until a public meeting on 21 November 1906.\(^5^4\) Again, as one might expect, local residents were disinclined to contribute towards a memorial commemorating a war that had finished more than five years ago and by the time of the unveiling in June 1907 only £325 had been collected.\(^5^5\) Yet, for the civic leaders, of even greater concern than the meagre sum raised was the paucity of actual donors. More than half the total had come from just five subscribers with a further 135 subscriptions accounting for all but forty pounds of the remainder; this from a total population of 120,433.\(^5^6\) At the unveiling ceremony such manifest evidence of public disengagement threatened to reignite bitter political infighting. Thanking Brigadier-General Fry, commanding officer of the Lancashire grouped districts, for officiating, the chairman of the memorial committee and, until 1906, Liberal Unionist MP for neighbouring Heywood, Colonel George Kemp, chose to eschew conventional pleasantries and instead called into question the loyalty of the local populace:

> The memorial committee hoped to have had a stone cross, pillar or monument erected in some public place in memory of those who had fallen, so that all people might see it from every side. To accomplish this no effort was spared. At private houses, in factories and workshops, and every place the appeal was made known, and the committee hoped that a generous response would be made to it. I am ashamed to say that no response in any degree worthy of the

\(^{51}\) *Islington Daily Gazette*, 17 May 1905.

\(^{52}\) *Islington Daily Gazette*, 14 July 1905.

\(^{53}\) *Islington Daily Gazette*, 14 July 1905.

\(^{54}\) *Rochdale Observer*, 25 November 1906.

\(^{55}\) *Rochdale Observer*, 6 June 1907.

\(^{56}\) *Rochdale Observer*, 6 June 1907; for population figure, see *Victoria County History of Lancashire, Volume V* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1911), p. 188.
occasion was made to that appeal. Had it not been for the determination and support of the mayor they would not even have had that tablet to show their gratitude to those who had laid down their lives for the county. I maintain therefore that it is a sad day … because it is not the amount they want, but that everyone should show in some way that they cared for that patriotism.⁵⁷

This attack received a barbed response from Rochdale’s Liberal MP, Gordon Harvey. From the radical wing of the party, Harvey had fought and only narrowly lost the 1900 Khaki election on an anti-war platform, and in the process had seen his Conservative opponent’s majority reduced from 1,463 to just nineteen votes.⁵⁸ Reluctant to now allow support for the war to become a litmus test for patriotism, he reminded Kemp, when seconding the vote of thanks to Fry, that, ‘there were many people in Rochdale who, although they may not have subscribed to the memorial, had an affectionate regard for the men who had served their country’.⁵⁹ Harvey’s views were echoed in the Rochdale Observer’s coverage of the unveiling ceremony. Forefronting the fact that Kemp had spoken ‘strongly about the small support given to the memorial by the townspeople’, the paper left its readers in no doubt which side in the Liberal rift it supported:

It is a fact that more than half the total of the sum subscribed was given by five individuals, and that the plans of the memorial committee had to be curtailed because of lack of support. The gossips are saying that this is a reflection on the ‘Pro-Boers’. But there are enough imperialists and ‘patriots’ in Rochdale to raise ten times £325, if their hearts were really stirred. It should be borne in mind that before the fund was opened, £5,666 was subscribed by the townspeople for the relief of the families of men at the Front. As was said in Wednesday’s Observer, whatever additional sum had been required for that object would have been raised without difficulty … It is undoubtedly true that some held aloof because of the belief that the war could have been prevented, and the feeling that if there was to be a monument it should be one to the folly and incapacity which led to such woeful sacrifice of life and treasure.⁶⁰

In Rochdale then the failure to raise an acceptable sum, the primary cause of which was most likely the delay in launching the scheme, created sufficient tension for the act of subscribing to the memorial to be viewed as a political statement. In order to avoid this politicisation of commemorative work, civic dignitaries were frequently keen to stress that their work crossed class boundaries.

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⁵⁹ Rochdale Observer, 6 June 1907.
⁶⁰ Rochdale Observer, 6 June 1907.
By 1902 Britain was a nation increasingly aware of the middle and working classes. Indeed, as already mentioned, the South African War can be seen to have been a key moment of transition for these classes. With tens of thousands of men volunteering for active service between 1899 and 1902, the war had, in many ways, served to legitimise claims for greater political representation. Yet, at the same time, the British people remained acutely sensitive to hierarchical boundaries and largely accepting of the rigid stratification of society. Both these phenomena played a part in a political scenario in which increasing uncertainty and creeping democracy created ever greater sensitivity to the issue of class. As the debacle over funding has already intimated, this evolving tension was felt very keenly in the borough of Islington. By 1901 the population of Islington stood at 335,238 making it one of the most populous of the London boroughs. At a parliamentary level the borough was represented by a Conservative MP, but the borough was declining in terms of its residential complexion. Once a smart and wealthy London suburb, the affluent areas had retreated to pockets around Highbury and Canonbury. Nonconformity was strong in the borough, which had created some tensions during the war as many Nonconformist ministers and congregations had remained unconvinced by Britain’s cause. The editor of the *Islington Daily Gazette* was therefore particularly keen to support the mayor’s insistence that the memorial was for ‘all classes’ and implied that the bulk of the troops had come from the working and lower middle classes, stating the scheme should be ‘as interesting to the humbler citizens from which our soldiers sprang as to the leaders of our social life’.

By appealing to all classes, memorial committees were also seeking to foster a sense of collective ownership in commemorative activity. If a memory site was to have any resonance within a community, and if it was to function successfully as a symbol of civic worth, it was vital that all citizens felt some engagement with the process of construction. The members of the Bedfordshire memorial committee attempted to draw in all sections of society.

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64 *Victoria County History of Middlesex*, p. 11.
The press release giving notification of the initial public meeting stressed that ‘the attendance of all classes is invited’, although the choice of a Thursday afternoon somewhat undermined the sincerity of this invitation, while the deputy-chairman of the committee, the Duke of Bedford, was insistent that, ‘opportunity should be given for all classes to contribute in order that the memorial may be representative of the whole county’. In Yorkshire, the act of giving was thought to be as important as the amount given. Concerned that a few wealthy donors would account for a large percentage of the final total, the county memorial committee initially decided to impose a ceiling of £10 on subscriptions. Although the cap was lifted when a £2,000 shortfall on the original target of £3,500 was discovered in 1902, the original resolution does, nevertheless, reveal the proprietorial sub-text that many members of organising committees felt underpinned fund-raising. Further evidence of this can be found in the frequency with which inscriptions on civic memorials proclaimed the fact that sites were ‘erected by public subscription’. Even in Rochdale, where, as we have already seen, the public’s failure to subscribe caused something of a scandal, this formula was used to impute collective ownership. At the other extreme, Darlington’s civic authorities were evidently eager to celebrate just how far the town’s memorial was genuinely the product of a communal effort by having engraved on the pedestal of its figurative monument the fact that it ‘was erected by 5,576 subscribers’. What was implicit in these inscriptions was made explicit by Lord Cawdor at the dedication ceremony for Pembrokeshire’s memorial. He told those assembled that just as the war had been a collective enterprise, in which ‘men of every rank and class gave their lives ungrudgingly’, so the Celtic cross they had just seen unveiled belonged to all for ‘it had been contributed to by all classes throughout the county’.

Reinforcing claims of collective ownership were the lists of the names of the fallen that appeared on memorials. No longer were these rolls of honour dominated by an aristocratic officer corps but, instead, all who had served, irrespective of rank, were honoured. This democratisation of naming provided a further link between the memory site and the community which it served. The insistence of the members of the Suffolk regiment and county memorial committee at their very first meeting that each of the four memory sites in

67 BLA, L/c/Cha3, Bedfordshire Lieutenancy, Notice of Public Meeting, 10 July 1902; letter from Duke of Bedford to honorary secretary of Bedfordshire county memorial committee, 27 November 1902.
68 Jones, ‘The Yorkshire County Memorial’, p. 66. Despite the memorial committee’s attempt to encourage subscriptions from all classes through the imposition of a financial cap, only 231 people contributed to the scheme. This for a memorial with 1,490 names of the fallen inscribed on it. Yorkshire Evening Post, 3 August 1908.
69 See pp. 24–25 above.
70 Gildea, For Remembrance, p. 49.
71 PRO, HDX/94/1, Booklet on the Pembrokeshire South African War Memorial, 1908, p. 4.
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Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge and Ely must include the names of the fallen was replicated across the country. Without exception, rolls of honour formed an integral part of civic memorialisation schemes. Indeed, the importance which civic leaders attached to naming can be seen in the meticulous steps taken by memorial committees to guarantee the accurate and comprehensive compilation of lists of the fallen. In Halifax, the bereaved were required to send in documentation from the War Office to support any request for the inclusion of a loved one on the borough’s roll of honour. More typical was the approach adopted in Buckinghamshire where the memorial committee utilised a range of local agencies, from parish councils to the headquarters of the county’s regiments, to verify the list of fallen for inclusion on the county monument on the summit of Coombe Hill, near Wendover.

However, problems could arise when messages about ownership implicit in public subscriptions lists were not matched by inclusion on rolls of honour. The Islington Daily Gazette carried letters from subscribers aggrieved that a lost loved one was deemed ineligible for the memorial. One man wrote stating his doubts over the comprehensiveness of the official roll of honour, while a publican who raised £13 through events on his premises was extremely upset that his son was ruled a resident of Stoke Newington and therefore could not be added to the memorial. On the eve of the unveiling the editorial of the local newspaper came back to this source of local strife and noted that some ‘feel aggrieved that those whose names might have been recorded on the plinth have been overlooked’, but defended the final decisions adding, ‘the committee, however, have done their utmost to embrace the names of all who are justly entitled to the designation Islingtonians for the purposes of the Memorial’. In Ilford a similar debate broke out as to whether men who were not resident in the borough but had served with units associated with it should be included, which was finally decided in favour of local residents only. Although the members of the Bedfordshire county memorial committee arrived at an equally narrow definition of community, they singularly failed to make this clear to the county’s residents. Having resolved at the first committee meeting that by Bedfordshire men they meant ‘men serving in the Bedfordshire regiments (regular army, militia and volunteers), the yeomanry, and all other Bedfordshire men serving in HM forces’, it was left until the day after the unveiling for the local paper to elucidate the parameters more precisely. The roll of honour

72 Bury Free Press, 12 November 1904.
73 Halifax Courier, 28 June 1902.
74 Slough Observer, 9 July 1904.
75 Islington Daily Gazette, 19 May 1904.
76 Islington Daily Gazette, 14 July 1905.
77 Ilford Recorder, 17 February 1905; Ilford Local History Library, Ilford Urban District Council, minutes, 1904–05, p. 103.
was shorter than originally anticipated, the readers of the *Bedfordshire Times and Independent* were informed, because, ‘the terms of the resolution [at the first public meeting] admitted natives of Bedfordshire who served as soldiers in the war, and also others who fought in Bedfordshire contingents, but not soldiers who were merely associated with the county by residence at some time or other’.⁷⁸ Unsurprisingly, this clarification came too late in the day to appease everyone. Mr. E. F. Bell complained in the following week’s paper that his nephew, Trooper J. D. K. Bell, an old boy of Bedford Grammar School, had been left off the memorial despite two of his peers being included. This was, Bell argued, ‘to offer an affront and to do an injustice to those who have been passed over, and to cause pain to many to whom pain is no stranger’.⁷⁹

Underscoring such complaints were the practical difficulties many memorial committees faced in delineating precisely the boundaries of community. This was particularly the case for county memorial schemes, where the inclusion of county regiments on what were generally regarded as civic sites often blurred the criteria for inclusion.⁸⁰ The insistence by Frank Green, the honorary secretary of the Yorkshire county memorial committee, that he was guided by attestation papers when adjudicating on eligibility for the roll of honour did not prevent a flurry of letters in the local press pointing out omissions. This is hardly surprising considering Green failed to state whether he was referring to the attesters’ stated place of birth, residence or both.⁸¹

Occasionally, even those in charge of the projects seemed unsure of the exact definition of the community they were serving. At the inaugural meeting for the Kent county memorial in Maidstone town hall in June 1902, Major Cornwallis firmly placed the scheme within the confines of a clearly defined locality when he stated that the object of the project was to raise a ‘memorial to the soldiers from the county who have fallen’. The Earl of Stanhope, in apparently supporting Cornwallis, managed, however, to muddy the waters by injecting a note of regional competition into proceedings. There were, he said, currently ‘3,203 Kentish men in South Africa’ and although ‘many of them might feel that the Royal West Kent regiment would be the first to command their interest, it would be impossible to leave out the other side of the county’.⁸² Although Cornwallis’s proposal was unanimously adopted by the meeting, a

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⁷⁸ *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, 3 June 1904.
⁷⁹ *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, 10 June 1904.
⁸⁰ Typical was the formula used by the Leicestershire county memorial committee who resolved to erect a memorial to ‘the fallen of the Leicestershire Regiment and Leicestershire men in other regiments’. LRRO, DE171, Leicestershire South African War Memorial Committee, minutes, 12 January 1903.
⁸¹ Jones, ‘The Yorkshire County Memorial’, pp. 70–73.
⁸² *Queen’s Own Gazette*, Vol. XX, No. 6 (June 1902), p. 1759. Stanhope’s use of ‘Kentish’ was in itself somewhat divisive. Traditionally, those born west of the River Medway were deemed to be ‘Kentish men’ while those from the east were ‘Men of Kent’.
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subsequent amendment that any surplus funds should be ‘invested for the benefit of the county regiments’ further confused matters.⁸³ With the scheme now split between a memory site based on residence and a practical fund centred on regimental affiliation, the precise constituency for the committee’s work seemed less clear than ever. Despite public appeals for subscriptions stating that the memorial was to the memory of men from the county, the commemorative plaque which was unveiled in Rochester Cathedral in 1903 lists only the county regiments.⁸⁴ A similar sense of imprecision can be found in the construction of the county memorial in Newcastle. Originally known as the Northumberland War Memorial, the inscription on the monument cites only ‘the men of the Northumbrian regiments’ with a further layer of iconographical confusion thrown in with the addition of the motto of just one regiment, the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers.⁸⁵

These debates and uncertainties reveal competing concepts of identity and belonging. Controlling officials did not always make their objectives clear and where complaints did arise, they invariably had their roots in conflicting ideas about ownership. The guardians of the schemes wanted to ensure the honour of their districts by including only those strictly eligible, while others argued for a slightly looser, but nonetheless still passionately felt, definition of community and belonging. Both sides in the disputes saw the issue of inclusion as a matter of great pride and honour. In particular, for the bereaved, to have a lost relative subsumed within what George Mosse has termed the ‘cult of the fallen’ was to have him endowed with heroic qualities and to have his death transformed from what might otherwise have seemed a tragic and senseless waste into a meaningful and legitimate sacrifice.⁸⁶

As well as retaining responsibility for establishing the boundaries of community, the vast majority of memorial committees also controlled the precise form of the memorial. In almost every instance the committees were the only body to examine different proposals and they usually made a choice without placing a shortlist or range of options before their constituencies. Even on the very rare occasion when a vote was taken, this hardly amounted to a genuine public consultation. In the small East Perthshire town of Alyth, the subscribers to the memorial were invited to a meeting in the town hall to choose the final design from the memorial committee’s shortlist of four proposals. However, the combination of a timeslot on a weekday afternoon and a prior announcement that the memorial would be some form of obelisk ensured that

⁸³ *Queen’s Own Gazette*, Vol. XX, No. 6 (June 1902), p. 1759.
only seventeen people attended, the majority of whom were already members of the committee.⁸⁷

Nearly all committees opted for some form of aesthetic, plastic memorial. In sharp contrast to the protracted debates that punctuated the work of memorial committees in the aftermath of the First World War, this decision to eschew the utilitarian seems to have met with little opposition.⁸⁸ Occasionally the local press contained letters from servicemen or their dependants questioning the wisdom of spending money on monuments when families were still suffering. The following to the editor of the *Yorkshire Weekly Herald* from the wife of a volunteer was typical:

There would have been much more honour in getting back the work they had lost through volunteering for South Africa than writing their names up in the drill hall … We are having to go through the mill. But what can we do? We are obliged to be content with a little sooner than be out of work altogether.⁸⁹

Such complaints were, however, relatively rare, especially when viewed in the context of the depressed state of the British economy in the years immediately following the end of the war, and they certainly did not result in any serious soul-searching by the civic dignitaries charged with organising memorial schemes.⁹⁰ This can, in part, be explained by the general public’s sense of disconnection with the logistics of memorial construction. Public interest in events in South Africa had waned in the last months of the conflict during the protracted guerrilla endgame and although the final casualty figures were higher than initially anticipated, the country was spared the universal grieving that engulfed it in the aftermath of the First World War. Yet, the potential for dissent did still exist. At a public meeting to discuss Salford’s commemorative plans, Sir James Lees Knowles, local Conservative MP and chairman of the Lancashire Fusiliers Compassionate Fund, defended the decision to opt for a figurative monument by pointing out that the men had been insured with the Prudential and as a result £240 had already been disbursed to support the families of the fallen.⁹¹ Elsewhere, as was the case in Tonbridge and Folkestone, criticism was deflected by combining memorial construction with a relief fund.

Another significant difference from Great War commemoration was the lack of comment about grief, mourning and the fate of the dead. Further, again

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⁸⁷ *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 15 October 1900; 8 November 1900
⁸⁹ *Yorkshire Weekly Herald*, 5 March 1904; Jones, ‘The Yorkshire County Memorial’, p. 68
⁹¹ *Salford Chronicle*, 20 September 1902
in sharp contrast to the Great War, it was rare for the ultimate symbol of Christian sacrifice, the cross, to be an overt or main element in the scheme.⁹² More often civic pride was the dominant theme. Typical was the borough of Islington which opted for an impressive piece of statuary. As has been seen, there was dissent from some quarters over form, but the majority of the committee held firm for an aesthetic, plastic memorial. Designs were invited, but from relatively unknown or emerging artists in order to contain costs; however, no decision was taken throughout the whole of 1904. It was not until May 1905 that a contract was formally signed with Bertram Mackennal, a sculptor who was rapidly cementing his reputation, for a figure of Glory holding a figurine of Victory in her right hand and a laurel wreath in her left.⁹³ The committee did not, therefore, opt for anything overtly funereal or connected with grief: the dominant iconographic message was the glory won for the borough by the sacrifice of its inhabitants. The editorial in the Islington Daily Gazette revealed the borough’s wish to display its importance and aesthetic taste: ‘The Memorial will, we think, be voted by all who see it a fitting tribute by the largest and most important borough in the metropolis to its townsmen who fell fighting for Queen and Country’.⁹⁴ The aesthetic significance of the memorial was once again stressed at the unveiling ceremony with the Islington Daily Gazette describing fully its every last detail.⁹⁵

Just occasionally, monumental iconography did focus on peace and bereavement. George Wade’s memorial to the fallen of Norfolk, unveiled by Lieutenant-General A. S. Wynne on 17 November 1904, depicted the ‘angel of peace, alighting on a globe and shattering its sword’.⁹⁶ In a similar vein, idealised female figures representing peace also dominated Albert Toft’s monument to the men of Birmingham in Canon Hill Park and Joseph Crosland McClure’s memorial in honour of the fallen of Leicestershire in Leicester. Indeed, the ‘sad and solemn’ aspect of Toft’s memorial was reinforced with the inclusion of a bronze bas-relief on the pedestal containing representations of ‘Grief’ and ‘Sympathy’, while flanking McClure’s central sculpture were two groups of figures which, ‘abandoned to despair’, were ‘intended to recall the

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⁹² A notable exception is the Celtic cross of the Pembrokeshire county memorial in Haverfordwest. A possible explanation for this may be the fact that heading the list of the fallen was captain William Edwardes 5th Baron Kensington, whose father had been the Lord Lieutenant of the county until 1896.


⁹⁴ Islington Daily Gazette, 17 May 1905


⁹⁶ Norwich Mercury, 19 November 1904.
Civic War Memorials

horrors of war'.⁹⁷ Yet, even in Birmingham and Leicester, the sombre nature of the memorials’ iconography hardly captured the true mood of the schemes. Both memorials were unveiled amid celebratory scenes. In Birmingham, the ‘enthusiastic’ crowd which greeted the arrival of Sir John French with a ‘salvo of cheering’ required seventy policemen and the erection of crush barriers to control it, while Municipal Square in Leicester was ‘gay with flags’ for the dedication of McClure’s statue.⁹⁸

The genesis of the Leicestershire memorial further reveals that the final design was hardly representative of the committee’s original intentions. Indeed, members of the Leicestershire memorial committee had only adopted McClure’s proposal as a last resort after protracted and costly negotiations with their original choice of sculptor, Alfred Gilbert, had ended in failure. As early as May 1903, the committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Rutland, the Lord Lieutenant of the County, had appeared to have painlessly fulfilled their remit to commemorate Leicestershire’s war dead. They had secured the services of Gilbert, chosen the form, an allegorical figure of Victory atop a bronze pedestal, and raised the estimated total costs of £1,140. However, the first hint that all might not be well came at the next committee meeting in January 1904. In a letter to Alderman Freer, the mayor of Leicester and honorary secretary of the committee, Gilbert requested that, contrary to the original agreement, the second instalment of the contract price should be paid directly to his bank in Bruges rather than to the Compagnie Generale des Bronzes, the company tasked with casting the memorial. Initially reluctant to alter the terms of an agreement entered into on behalf of a large body of subscribers, the committee eventually acceded to Gilbert’s persistent pleas to be allowed to do his own founding on the understanding that the memorial would be ready by September 1904. Ominously, the September deadline passed with no sign of the statue and, even more worryingly, no word from Gilbert. There then followed a round of increasingly desperate committee meetings. Attempts to secure precise progress reports were met by ever more farcical delaying tactics from Gilbert, culminating, in November 1905, with a report from the sculptor announcing that a dispute over non-payment of rent for his studio in Bruges had resulted in a court order to seize the plaster cast model of the Leicestershire statue. Astonishingly, the committee, despite revelations in the press about other unfulfilled contracts, decided to stick with Gilbert and agreed to his request to commence work on a new memorial, this time a figure of a medieval knight.⁹⁹ However, notwithstanding frequent progress reports from one...

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⁹⁹ In 1905 Julia Frankau had employed Gilbert to design a memorial to her late husband. The following year, with the deadline missed, she publicly denounced Gilbert in the magazine,
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of Granby’s acquaintances who lived in Bruges and the offer of a £100 bonus should a new November 1906 deadline be met, the new scheme was no more successful. Finally, in January 1908, over five years after the first public meeting, the committee admitted defeat and abandoned the contract with Gilbert. The £905 already paid in fees was written off, a second round of funding through private appeal to the principal subscribers quickly raised £1,039 and Joseph Crosland McClure of Leicester Art School was engaged to replace Gilbert. With completion on time and at cost now the sole goal, the committee gave McClure a free hand over design. His decision to replace the terminal lions of his original proposal with allegorical figures of peace, war, grief and sympathy was unquestioningly accepted at a committee meeting in August 1908 so long as it ‘would not increase cost’.¹⁰⁰ By the time of the unveiling ceremony in July 1909, memories of the war in South Africa had receded to such an extent that McClure’s iconography could be detached from the recent past. An anonymous art critic writing for the Leicester Daily Post felt the significance of McClure’s work lay not in any commentary on the conflict with the Boers but rather in the universal truths it exposed:

It would have been easy for Leicester to have acquired a commonplace monument, hung about with festoons of laurel wreaths and Martini rifles, and exploiting all the obvious ideas which can be so cheaply got together by assembling the materials and instruments of warfare. The khaki-clad soldier is by no means a contemptible attribute of a war memorial, especially when such a memorial is erected in his honour; and there are worse ways of paying him respect than by setting up his counterfeit presentment in bronze. But from the artistic point of view this literal and personal way of furnishing forth a monument has the demerit of lacking originality, even if the other demerit of cheapness of idea be not admitted. It has been said that all great art is impersonal, and the statement can be supported by sufficient number of references to really great achievements. In any event, it seems probable that a memorial which endeavours to be a fine emblem of the thoughts and emotions inspired by all warfare will live longer and have more abiding interest than one which commemorates with exacting particularity any single war. Whilst events fall in time into that limbo from which historians strive to reclaim them, and a battle becomes a thing labelled with a date, the struggles of humanity will inevitably produce war of one kind or another till the end of time, and its dreadful handmaidens, ‘leashed in like hounds, will crouch for employment.’¹⁰¹

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¹⁰¹ Leicester Daily Post, 2 July 1909.
The sombre motifs of Toft and McClure’s work at Birmingham and Leicester respectively were, therefore, the exception rather than the rule. As the *Leicester Daily Post*’s anonymous art critic indicated, much more common were depictions of soldiers, frequently in action, where the emphasis was on a combination of heroism and realism. For the editor of the *Bury and Norwich Post*, A. G. Walker’s Suffolk regiment and county memorial, which portrayed ‘a wounded soldier raising himself from a large rock, and grasping his Lee Mitford rifle as though anxious for another shot at the enemy’, was ‘singularly appropriate’.¹⁰² In Salford, Sir James Lees Knowles’s desire that the town’s monument should be of ‘historical interest’ was realised in George Frampton’s triumphalist statue of a Lancashire Fusilier caught in the moment of victory, waving his busby in the air.¹⁰³ Llanelli’s figurative statue of a bare-headed soldier with rifle at the ready in anticipation of an enemy attack was considered by the local newspaper to be of particular worth because ‘it was modelled from a North County guardsman – a magnificently built young fellow – who went through the South African War. He was shot in the neck at Belmont, the bullet coming out near his left shoulder’.¹⁰⁴ The civic dignitaries who comprised Warrington’s memorial committee also opted for a figurative representation of the soldier-hero in action. Their decision to have the town’s memorial modelled on the last moments of Lieutenant-Colonel William McCarthy-O’Leary, who had commanded the local volunteers and died at the battle of Pieter’s Hill on 18 February 1900, not only rooted the site firmly in the locality but also, as the editor of the *Warrington Guardian* noted, presented future citizens with an unambiguous lesson. The figure of O’Leary, the paper’s readers were informed, caught ‘at the moment when victory was about to crown the efforts of many arduous weeks … in what was perhaps the proudest moment of his life, … pointed the way to duty as clearly as anything ever did in this imperfect world’.¹⁰⁵

As we have already seen, even when death or grief was a memorial’s dominant iconographic message, this could be counteracted by the tone set on the day of its unveiling. Notwithstanding the sober nature of Alfred Drury’s design, the dedication of the statue of O’Leary in Warrington was treated as a ‘general holiday’.¹⁰⁶ In Ipswich, despite the fact that the solemnity of Albert Toft’s sculpture of a mourning soldier in honour of ‘the Suffolk soldiers who lost their lives in the South African War’ was reinforced by the town council’s decision that the unveiling ceremony ‘was not an occasion for the elaborate display of flags and bunting’, the ‘immense crowd’ that gathered to witness

¹⁰³ *Salford Chronicle*, 20 September 1902.
¹⁰⁴ *Llanelli Mercury*, 31 August 1908.
¹⁰⁵ *Warrington Guardian*, 23 February 1907.
¹⁰⁶ *Warrington Observer*, 23 February 1907.
proceedings seemed intent on treating the day as a civic fête.¹⁰⁷ Noting that those assembled to greet the arrival of General French, the victor of Elandsplaagte, and other officiating dignitaries soon ‘began to wear an appearance of considerable animation’, the local paper disapprovingly reported that the ‘hubbub that was continually going on’ had, in its opinion, undermined the dignity of the event.¹⁰⁸ A similar scenario unfolded at the unveiling of the county’s sister memorial in Bury St Edmunds. Although the Bury and Norwich Post was certain that ‘citizens will have taken due regard to the words of the mayor at the last council meeting when he pointed out that the proceedings were scarcely of a festive nature, and that the paramount feeling of the day would be regret that so many had fallen’,¹⁰⁹ the coverage of the unveiling in the Bury Free Press suggested otherwise. Reporting that the appearance of Lord Methuen ‘was greeted with applause which increased until the volume seemed to fill the Cornhill Square’, the paper observed that the ‘densely packed crowd’ appeared to be in ‘holiday mood’.¹¹⁰ There was equal excitement in Nuneaton for the unveiling of A. E. Rost’s bronze figure of a ‘soldier at the ready’. With ‘flags and bannetettes’ bedecking the streets and the police straining to keep the crowds under control, the town was fully en fête. At the centre of this public clamour was Sir Redvers Buller. Invited to perform the unveiling honours, Buller found himself repeatedly ‘mobbed by crowds anxious to shake his hand’.¹¹¹ Indeed, for many local inhabitants, the dedication of a remembrance site to their community’s fallen seems to have played a poor second to the thrill of receiving a visit from a figure of national prominence. The Dover Express neatly caught the sense of breathless excitement that greeted Field Marshal Lord Roberts on his arrival to unveil the port’s memorial in 1912: ‘every eye was strained to catch a glimpse of the hero of a hundred fights. It would, indeed, have been a strong-hearted Briton who did not experience a thrill of emotion at that moment’.¹¹² The same appeared to hold true for Llanelli. Despite, as will be shown later, the editor of the local paper’s disapproval of the war he was still prepared to concede that Roberts’s visit for the unveiling of William Doyle-Jones’s statue of a guardsman was ‘the occasion of a great display of popular enthusiasm’.¹¹³ The presence of Sir John French and Sir Redvers Buller at unveiling ceremonies in Folkestone and Tonbridge respectively received similar coverage.

¹⁰⁷ Gildea, For Remembrance, p. 191; East Anglian Daily Times, 1 October 1906. The mourning soldier, head bowed and rifle reversed, was to become a staple of commemorative sculpture after the Great War. There is a particularly fine example, again by Toft, in the London borough of Streatham. See Borg, War Memorials, pp. 109–110.

¹⁰⁸ East Anglian Daily Times, 1 October 1906.

¹⁰⁹ Bury and Norwich Post, 8 November 1904.

¹¹⁰ Bury Free Press, 12 November 1904.

¹¹¹ Midland Counties Tribune, 22 November 1904.

¹¹² Dover Express, 25 April 1912.

¹¹³ Llanelli Mercury, 31 August 1905.
That unveiling ceremonies were viewed as grand spectacles rather than solemn rites is hardly surprising. Not only did they, more often than not, present the public with the chance to glimpse a national celebrity but they were also, frequently, carefully choreographed military pageants, redolent with all the pomp and circumstance that civilian audiences invariably found irresistible. Although the schemes in Dover and Tonbridge were, nominally, civic ones, the arrangements at the unveilings were dominated by the military authorities. In St Mary’s Church, Dover, Field Marshal Lord Roberts’s arrival was greeted by a general salute from the massed ranks of the locally billeted Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, while ‘the entrance to the church was lined with officers from the regiment and the aisles with sergeants’.¹¹⁴ The presence of all the local volunteer battalions and the yeomanry in the precincts of Tonbridge castle for the unveiling of the memorial to the men of the borough who died in the war ensured that, in the words of the local paper, ‘the grounds presented a truly military spectacle’.¹¹⁵ Outside Kent, the same held true. The decision by the Bedfordshire county war memorial committee to fix the date for its unveiling ceremony ‘in order that advantage might be taken of the fact that both the militia and yeomanry were in training’ seems to have paid off, with the editor of the local paper enthusing that the presence of the Imperial Yeomanry ‘with their lances held erect and pennants gaily fluttering in the breeze’ ensured the occasion was truly ‘a spectacle’.¹¹⁶ The following description of the unveiling of Rochdale’s memorial provides some insight into where the balance lay between civic reflection and military pageant:

The yeomanry and the volunteers, in their brilliant scarlet, lent a much needed bit of colour to the other-wise sombre appearance of the gathering. The volunteers occupied positions to the right of the army veterans, the volunteer band divided the Fusiliers from the members of the Duke of Lancaster’s Own Imperial Yeomanry who formed up immediately to the left of the speaker’s platform near the tower, and the firing-party, drawn from the yeomanry were in line with the platform, making up an effective and impressive spectacle.¹¹⁷

What was implicit in the scale of the military arrangements for Rochdale’s dedication ceremony was made explicit by the town’s mayor, Alderman Jones, when he opened proceedings. Explaining the ‘object of the gathering’ to the assembled crowd, he ‘remarked that to some whose relatives were being commemorated the day would be a sad one, to others not intimately connected with them it would be a day of rejoicing’.¹¹⁸ With only forty-one names

¹¹⁴ *Dover Express*, 19 April 1912.
¹¹⁶ *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*, 3 June 1904.
¹¹⁷ *Rochdale Observer*, 6 June 1907.
¹¹⁸ *Rochdale Observer*, 6 June 1907.
appearing on the list of the fallen out of a population of over 165,000 it was clear which emotion Jones felt would be in the ascendancy. Both the rarity of Christian iconography on memorials and the general absence of overt grieving at unveiling ceremonies imply that the dead were often commemorated on a level beyond that of the immediate family and its needs.

By recalling the fallen as a collective rather than as individuals, ceremonies could be used to stress wider points about communities. In the process, the focus on the dead could be lost. This was most clearly seen in the unveiling of the Islington war memorial. The local newspaper’s coverage of the event records speech after speech stressing the glory of Islington and the beauty of its memorial. Civic pride was very much the tenor of the day and the dead were almost incidental to the occasion.¹¹⁹ For self-made businessman and mayor of Halifax, Josiah Wade, the actions of the living at the unveiling ceremony assumed greater importance than the names of the dead on the memorial. Keen to dispel any prejudices that might surround commerce, he told those gathered that by turning out in such ‘strong force’ they had shown that, ‘even in a manufacturing town absorbed in making pounds, shillings and pence, they could devote a day to love of town, king and country. He was voicing the opinion of the inhabitants when he said they were a loyal people to the king, to his army and to his navy’.¹²⁰ Latent patriotism was also the leitmotif of Lord Barnard’s address to the citizens of Darlington at the unveiling of the borough’s aggressively militaristic statue of an advancing British soldier. Although theirs was ‘primarily a trading and industrial district’, the packed crowd inside the grounds of St Cuthbert’s parish church were urged not to forget that ‘there existed a military spirit which only required the occasion to bring it forth’.¹²¹

Local pride was frequently merged with the dual concepts of duty and sacrifice to infuse memorials with wider significance. In a florid opening to his coverage of the unveiling of the Suffolk county memorial in Bury St Edmunds, the editor of the *Bury Free Press* seamlessly linked past and present to underline the region’s long tradition in the service of king and country:

The memorial harks back to those stirring times in our local history when, to the roll of the drum, the inspiring music of the bands of their respective regiments and echoing and re-echoing cheers, these brave lads, realising the necessity of responding to their country’s call, left our shores to fulfil the battle-cry of that far-famed East Anglian – Nelson – ‘England expects that every man this day will do his duty’.

¹²⁰ *Halifax Courier*, 12 November 1904.
¹²¹ *Darlington and Stockton Times*, 12 August 1905.
The function of the site was clear; it was ‘to remind our children’s children of the pluck and heroism which characterised their forefathers’.¹²²

Calls to emulate the fallen were features of unveiling addresses throughout the country. Canon Bartram, at the unveiling of the Dover civic memorial in St Mary’s Church, taking as his text ‘their name liveth for evermore’ from Ecclesiastics XLIV, urged Dovorians to view the commemorative tablet as ‘a reminder and example of courage and patriotism’.¹²³ His choice of text and lesson were, of course, to be the staples of remembrance services in the aftermath of the Great War. However, in contrast to the Great War, the South African War was not seen as the war to end all wars; the relatively short casualty lists and remoteness of the battlegrounds ensured that it had no such public resonance. Thus, central to speeches about the need to carry the spirit of the fallen forward into future generations was the warning that the conflict in South Africa was unlikely to be the last time that such self-sacrifice would be required. The vicar of Huddersfield made this explicit at the unveiling, in May 1905, of the memorial to the men of the district who fell in the war. In his dedication address he told the assembled crowd:

Some day war may break out again for us. Some day the call may come for men to risk their all for the honour and defence of the fatherland, for the safety of wives and children, and then men will come forward cheerfully to do their duty. They will know what is expected of them, they will rise to their responsibilities, they will prove themselves not unworthy of such noble kinship. England will have brave sons because your sons were brave … this memorial is to stand here as a rebuke to softness. It is to tell us and all men that it is a sin and a shame to sit at ease when God and man call us to service, and that every man must be ready to give up time and money, and, if need be, health and life itself, if thereby he may win the honour and happiness of having served his generation according to the will of God.¹²⁴

However, such fatalistic acceptance of a militaristic future met with some resistance. The town’s Liberal MP, Sir James Woodhouse, who had toed the Campbell-Bannerman party line of muted support for the war, urged the citizens of Huddersfield to draw a more pacific lesson from the memorial they had just seen unveiled:

War was a terrible thing for both sides and all classes of people – those who lived in the great halls no more than in the small cottages knew the feeling that arose when their loved ones were in danger. And it was for that reason that war brought home to us how great are the blessings of peace.

¹²³  *Dover Express*, 26 April 1912.
¹²⁴  *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 27 May 1905.
We honoured those who had fallen in the war, but hoped that it would be long time before ever such another occasion was necessary as that which they commemorated that day.¹²⁵

This sentiment was echoed in the *Huddersfield Examiner*, a paper which had been trenchantly anti-war throughout the conflict. Commending Woodhouse's speech, the editor indicated to his readers that a sea-change in public attitudes now meant that patriotic duty was no longer the sole preserve of the military:

The signs of the times indicate that the wave of militarism has spent its force, that patriotism is recognised in those efforts which bring a country to the foremost place in science, in literature, in arts, in commerce, and the pursuits of peace. It requires very little urging now that to live for one's country is as necessary as to die for it is noble, though it is the latter thought which is principally suggested by the events of last Saturday.¹²⁶

Frequently, messages about duty, service and sacrifice were fused with reminders about the value of Empire. At the unveiling of the civic roll of honour in Folkestone, Sir John French, who had commanded the 1st Cavalry Brigade in South Africa, was keen to cite the war as evidence of the enduring strength and popularity of Britain's imperial family. Although willing to accept that the war had revealed some fissures in the imperial sub-structure, he was, nonetheless, insistent that:

One of the most noteworthy features connected with the recent war was the knowledge we had come to possess of the great fund of patriotic feeling which permeated the British Empire. Remembering what a world-wide Empire ours was, and of what different elements it was composed, he did not think the sacrifices in connection with the war were too great if such sacrifices could show us we all were bound together in one bond of fellowship.¹²⁷

With the ethics of imperialism coming under increasing scrutiny councillor S. Brown, the mayor of Tonbridge and chairman of the town's memorial committee, was anxious that the inhabitants of Tonbridge should keep at the forefront of their minds the core values of the Empire. In his address at the unveiling ceremony in the castle grounds, he reminded them that, 'this was a great Empire, under the flag of which no man was a slave, and which carried with it peace and wealth of commerce'.¹²⁸

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¹²⁵ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 27 May 1905.
¹²⁷ *Folkestone Express*, 23 April 1904.
¹²⁸ *Tonbridge Free Press*, 24 June 1904.
of the Tonbridge memorial committee to confront the contested memory of the conflict head-on can be seen in the choice of the recently dismissed Sir Redvers Buller as officiating dignitary. In offering a vote of thanks after the unveiling, Charles Fitch Kemp, the president of Tonbridge Central Conservative Association, dismissed public criticisms of Buller’s military record by asserting that, ‘Sir Redvers had been a gallant soldier and above all he had proved himself to be one of the kindest and best of generals’.¹²⁹ As a further endorsement of Buller’s standing, a bereaved mother and three war veterans were then ‘given the honour of shaking hands with the General’.¹³⁰ Equally aware of the divisive potential of imperial politics, the chairman of Wigan’s memorial scheme, councillor S. Fyans, called for a unified front at the unveiling of Goscombe John’s heroic statue of an advancing infantryman. ‘The monument would’, he told those gathered in Mesnes Park, ‘serve as an incentive to duty; no matter what a man’s political creed might be, his duty was to uphold the Empire’.¹³¹

Indeed, the contentious nature of the debates that surrounded both the motivation for, and conduct of, the war in South Africa meant that officiating dignitaries were particularly keen that the messages contained in their addresses should be seen as relevant to all sections of society. Sir F. S. Powell, the Conservative MP for Wigan, picked up on Fyans’s call for cross-party collaboration by insisting in his unveiling address that he was there to represent ‘all classes, all orders and all sorts of men’. To underline further the apolitical nature of the occasion, and to avoid the possibility of alienating any element of his audience, he quickly separated the men being commemorated from the wider context of the conflict:

It had been more than any other army a sober army … There had been criticisms on the conduct of the campaign but those criticisms had dealt with general officers and those in high command, but so far as he knew the only remarks made on the conduct of ordinary soldiers had been comments of admiration and commendation.¹³²

The memory of the war was then to be found not in the heroics or victories of generals but rather in the more politically neutral virtues of the rank and file. In Ipswich, General Sir John French was equally keen to deflect any possible dissension and, in the process, rescue the reputation of Suffolk’s fallen from the potentially damning verdict of history by extolling the qualities of the ordinary

¹²⁹ Tonbridge Free Press, 24 June 1904.
¹³⁰ Tonbridge Free Press, 24 June 1904. The decision to invite Buller to unveil the memorial must have owed a lot to the presence of John Le Fleming on the memorial committee. Le Fleming had been a tutor at the army crammer attended by Buller and his son had served under Buller in South Africa.
¹³¹ Wigan Examiner, 6 February 1903.
¹³² Wigan Examiner, 6 February 1903.
soldier. Pointing out that the majority of those named on Albert Toft’s statue of a mourning soldier had died in ‘a splendid but unsuccessful attempt’ to take Suffolk Hill during the battle of Colesberg on the night of 5–6 January 1900, he explained to those gathered in the Cornhill just why such events should be viewed as sacred:

It is not always because these encounters have been absolutely successful: it is not always because the immediate object had been obtained: it is because the men engaged have shown they are true soldiers of their country – because they have fought to the death, fought like men.¹³³

At the unveiling of the Bedfordshire county memorial, Lady Cowper, deputising for her sick husband, again eulogised the spirit of the fighting men but this time within more narrowly defined parameters. Stating that the khaki-clad statue of an infantryman was representative of the ordinary British soldier, she asserted that, ‘moreover, it was the type of those who had not made that splendid profession their own, but who, when there was a stress and some help was needed, came forward … standing shoulder to shoulder with their fellows in the fight’.¹³⁴ This sentiment was echoed by councillor Fyans in Wigan for whom the town’s memorial ‘would, in some way, be a monument to bravery, particularly of the auxiliary forces’.¹³⁵ Such attempts to locate the memory of the war within the rank and file of the armed forces point towards the growth in public regard for the ordinary soldier and the development of closer ties between the civilian and military worlds in Edwardian Britain.¹³⁶

Again and again public figures attempted to draw a veil over past divisions by refocusing remembrance on abstract virtues. Typical was colonel Kemp’s exhortation at the unveiling of the commemorative plaque outside Rochdale town hall for the citizens of the borough to set aside their differences. Thanking General Fry for officiating, he concluded his address by observing that, ‘Whatever might be the opinion as to any war, whether it was right or wrong, just or unjust, it was the duty of all those who were able to do what they could to bring it to a successful end. The men and women we are honouring saw what their duty was, and they did it’.¹³⁷ Efforts to depoliticise the commemoration of the war were particularly important at a time when the scandal over the importation of indentured Chinese labour to work in the mines of South Africa

¹³⁴ Bedfordshire Times and Independent, 3 June 1904.
¹³⁵ Wigan Examiner, 6 February 1902.
¹³⁷ Rochdale Observer, 6 June 1907; See also East Anglian Daily Times, 1 October 1906; Wigan Examiner, 6 February 1902; Queen’s Own Gazette, Vol. XX, No. 6 (June 1902), p. 1760.
had resurrected accusations that the war had been fought solely to advance the interests of the capitalist ‘Randlords’. Such political sidestepping was attempted by the editor of the *Llanelli Mercury*. He sought to win over those opposed to the council’s plan for a ceremonial unveiling of the town’s war memorial by removing the ritual from the context of the war’s contentious origins:

There are those, we are aware, who look upon the whole occasion as a hateful thing. They see in the memorial nothing more than a vulgar appeal to the fighting instincts of the people, and have no desire to perpetuate the memory of men who sacrificed their lives in the national cause. Surely, however, this is not what is involved? The memorial had its inception, not in the spirit of militarism, but in that instinct of respect for the dead, which is inherent in the human breast. The war in which these men were engaged was no doubt precipitated by the avarice and greed of unscrupulous capitalists, but what did the soldiers know of this. The conflict was none of their making … Whatever we may think of the causes of that sanguinary conflict, or the diplomacy which preceded it, there can be but one opinion of the men who, when the call came, were ready to sacrifice themselves for their country.¹³⁸

Not all attempts to appease opposition were, however, successful. Although, as already noted, the inscription on Darlington’s memorial boasted of over 5,000 subscribers, seventy of the town’s sizeable Quaker community boycotted the unveiling ceremony by attending a Peace Association prayer meeting arranged for the same time at the Friends’ Meeting House.¹³⁹ Of the opinion that religious contemplation rather than civic celebration was more in harmony with the feelings of the relatives and friends of the fallen, the gathering’s opprobrium was reserved in particular for the municipal authorities’ choice of ‘a memorial representing a soldier in fighting form’. This would, it was claimed in a press release signed by the meeting’s chairman and president of the local Peace Association, Mr J. B. Friend, be ‘likely to encourage defiant and revengeful feelings and [was] calculated to appeal to the lower and more savage instincts in our nature’.¹⁴⁰

Yet the rhetoric of dedication addresses and the memorialisation process as a whole were not entirely depoliticised. Although dignitaries were generally keen to sidestep old questions about the morality of the war, they were, nonetheless, often happy to exploit the commemoration of the war to make political points about the state of Britain’s armed forces. At the unveiling of the Suffolk county memorial in Bury St Edmunds in November 1904, Lord Methuen seized on the army’s ‘friendly relations with civilian life’ to call for increased investment in the

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¹³⁸ *Llanelli Mercury*, 31 October 1905.
¹⁴⁰ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 5 August 1905; *Darlington and Stockton Times*, 12 August 1905.
army. Those gathered were told that if they wished to ensure the country was in a ‘state of readiness’, they ‘must stand the call on their pocket and be prepared to stand some discomfort in their daily lives’.¹⁴¹ For many, an overriding concern was the issue of conscription. Unease over the performance of auxiliary troops in South Africa combined with wider misgivings about national efficiency had resulted in a vigorous and influential movement, spearheaded by the National Service League, dedicated to the introduction of compulsory military service. At a public meeting in September 1902, Salford’s MP, Mr J. Groves, was quick to claim the town’s remembrance project for the anti-conscription lobby. Endorsing the mayor’s plans for a figurative monument, he expressed the hope that the lesson of the memorial ‘might be in favour of volunteering to save us from conscription’.¹⁴² The following week’s edition of the Salford Chronicle threw its full weight behind Groves’s stance. Urging all citizens to support the scheme wholeheartedly, the paper’s editor directed his readers towards what he felt was the true lesson of the war by encouraging them to cast their minds back to the rush to volunteer in the wake of Black Week:

> These volunteer companies marked a new era in the history of the army. A movement, the importance of which cannot be too highly extolled, and the inception of which was in the ranks of the Lancashire Fusiliers, has shown the nation the possibilities of a vast economical fighting force. The extension of the volunteer system contains a germ of a system that might, by good administration and a little generosity, be fostered and strengthened, and it would at once provide a solution for that dread bugbear conscription.¹⁴³

At the forefront of the campaign for national service was Field Marshal Lord Roberts, who had assumed the presidency of the National Service League in December 1905.¹⁴⁴ In great demand as a guest of honour at unveiling ceremonies, he took full advantage of the flurry of invitations that came his way after his retirement in 1904 to tour the country propagating the cause of military reform. In York he warned the assembled crowd that the country would remain in the ‘van of civilisation’ only if it had an army ‘trained to be able to take its place in the defence of this great empire’.¹⁴⁵ For the townspeople of Llanelli the message was more explicit; if they were to ‘make war impossible’,

¹⁴¹ SRO, GB554/23/1, Supplement to the Bury and Norwich Post, 22 November 1904.
¹⁴² Salford Chronicle, 20 September 1902.
¹⁴³ Salford Chronicle, 20 September 1902.
¹⁴⁵ Quoted in King, Memorials of the Great War, p. 213.
then they would need to tap the ‘great potential reserve in the entire manhood of the country’.¹⁴⁶ Coming at a time when the future of the volunteer movement seemed under threat from Hugh Arnold-Foster’s attempts to reduce the military budget, this apparent call for compulsory service hit a raw nerve with the editor of the *Llanelli Mercury*:

Does the Field Marshal propose to introduce conscription into the country? … Lord Roberts may rest assured that Britain will never be defended by the conscript, for we believe that the volunteer will do all that is necessary in that direction. The treatment meted out by the present government to the volunteer force is nothing short of a scandal, and if Lord Roberts would use his great influence to secure more liberal recognition from the War Office of our ‘citizen army’ he would be doing a great service to the Empire.¹⁴⁷

Even those who opposed the introduction of conscription felt that the experience of South Africa had revealed serious shortcomings at the heart of British society. Sir Ian Hamilton, fresh from his experience as a military observer during the Russo-Japanese War, used the occasion of the unveiling of Birmingham’s civic war memorial to contrast unfavourably the value systems of the Occident and the Orient.¹⁴⁸ In Japan, he told those assembled, life is regarded ‘as a bubble compared with the national honour’ whereas ‘Western civilisation laid more and more stress on the value of life until even the most feeble and flickering manifestation is guarded from natural extinction’.¹⁴⁹ Britain’s increasing social ‘degeneracy’, as Hamilton called it, was also the theme of Sir Redvers Buller’s address at the dedication of the memorial plaque in East Ham town hall in July 1904. All citizens, Buller insisted, must be prepared ‘to defend home and hearth … as the fight for existence was becoming harder’.¹⁵⁰ For both men, the solution to Britain’s declining martial appetite lay in the introduction of compulsory drill.

The civic commemoration of the South African War was, therefore, partly an extension of and partly a break with previous commemorative customs. The memorial forms were remarkably consistent with Victorian funerary practice, as were their iconographic messages, reinforced during unveiling ceremonies, which were always conformist and reassuring. As noted, messages and symbols aimed squarely at those grieving were rare and often the dead were used by the wider communities to which they belonged to make a range of other statements.

¹⁴⁶ *Llanelli Mercury*, 31 August 1905.
¹⁵⁰ *East Ham Echo*, 22 July 1904.
However, although control was almost without fail retained by self-selecting civic elites, the memorialisation process did show signs of democratisation. Officiating dignitaries were keen to stress the cross-class nature of their work and this manifested itself in the insistence that memory sites should honour all who served not just those from more privileged backgrounds. Despite this, not all memorial schemes were accepted with universal approval and dissent was expressed. As in the aftermath of the Great War, certain pre-requisites for a successful war memorial scheme emerged: leadership had to be firm and clear, the fund-raising target needed to be set early and, crucially, it had to be realistic and within the means of the community and the form of the memorial had to be advertised quickly and effectively. Some communities, most notably Islington and Dover, failed to do this and their civic pride took a knock in the protracted gestation which followed. The commemoration of the war in South Africa in civic communities was, then, a transitional moment, marking the beginnings of a shift from the paternalism of the nineteenth century to the collectivism of the twentieth. The next chapter will focus on the ways in which the army remembered its fallen of 1899–1902 to explore how much this sense of transition can be extended to the military sphere.