SCOTLAND'S GREAT WAR MEMORIALS

Dr J.J. Smyth and **Dr Michael Penman** discuss Scottish Great War memorials, asking what the huge volume and diversity of memorialisation projects can tell us about the way Scots sought to remember and commemorate their dead in the immediate aftermath of war

What constitutes a 'war memorial'? The answer most people would give, we think, would be to refer to any or all of the civic or parish memorials that are ubiquitous in the villages, towns and cities throughout Scotland. These monumental structures, even when relatively modest, were paid for and constructed by communities acting through civic committees or local authorities to mark the gratitude felt towards those who fell. If that 'ultimate sacrifice' was not to be forgotten then the collective memory of it had to be given a physical manifestation.

Causewayhead memorial, 1923

This was a sentiment given greater impetus by the emotional impact of the monolithic Cenotaph erected in Whitehall, London, at first a temporary structure of wood and card, for Peace and Armistice Day ceremonies in 1919. By far the majority of parish and civic memorials were proposed, funded, designed, built and unveiled in its wake over the next five or so years. Typically situated in a prominent position or public thoroughfare in an urban centre, often close by a church or civic buildings, these monuments would constantly remind the population of those who had fallen and the debt owed by the living. If that was the primary message intended, other

lessons could also be learned. The memorial, and especially its unveiling ceremony, could be seen as a celebration of victory but it was likely more often seen as a warning that this 'war to end all wars' must never be repeated.

There were, however, many other memorials to the fallen; often utilitarian rather than monumental, driven by a desire to make reparation by providing a service to the community. Such practical commemoration could include buildings – a village hall, a cottage hospital – that were intended to be permanent, while others could be more ephemeral – workshops for unemployed veterans, school bursaries, a bus stop, gas or

electrical lighting, or even just a monetary collection towards a good cause linked to the war.

As well as the general locality, across which the shared ambition was to commemorate everyone, there were huge numbers of private bodies and institutions which wished to acknowledge their dead also: schools, regiments, churches, societies, businesses, banks, post-offices, landed estates, sports clubs, etc. In most instances, though not all, these would be more modest memorials, like a bronze plaque or a stained glass window. These are also, simply by the constant change in population, the decline of certain communities, and the closure or re-location of companies, schools and so on, the more likely to have been forgotten, lost or even destroyed.

Of course many do still exist, and even where a school, hospital or church has moved into a new building, the memorial could be transferred (have a look, for example, at the Royal Bank of Scotland's relocation of memorials when branches close (https://scot. sh/hsrbs). But even where the

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original building remains and fulfils the same purpose, a memorial can easily be lost from sight. There are any number of buildings, including churches, where panels listing the fallen of the congregation have become partially or completely obscured. How many of us are aware of the large memorials to railwaymen situated in Glasgow Central and Edinburgh Waverley stations? Furthermore, such private or sectional memorials are, by their very nature, exclusive; they commemorate the fallen members of a particular group only. In most instances this exclusiveness is unremarkable and inoffensive, but what are we to make of Bridge of Weir golf club in Renfrewshire

Memorial to the Great War fallen of Aberdour, with names listed in alphabetical order

Buchylvie War Memorial, unveiled on 30 October 1920 with 26 names engraved and listed in alphabetical order. Two further names are listed at the base to honour the fallen of the Second World War

which refused to include the names of its young professionals who died in arms because they were 'not members'?

Civic and parish memorials

All memorials provide a link to the past, but it is the civic or parish memorials which are the most publicly visible reminders of the loss suffered by communities, both in terms of their physical presence and that they always sought to be inclusive. So much so that a casualty could be listed on more than one memorial; the place they were born and the place from which they enlisted or were conscripted. This sentiment is witnessed also in the large numbers
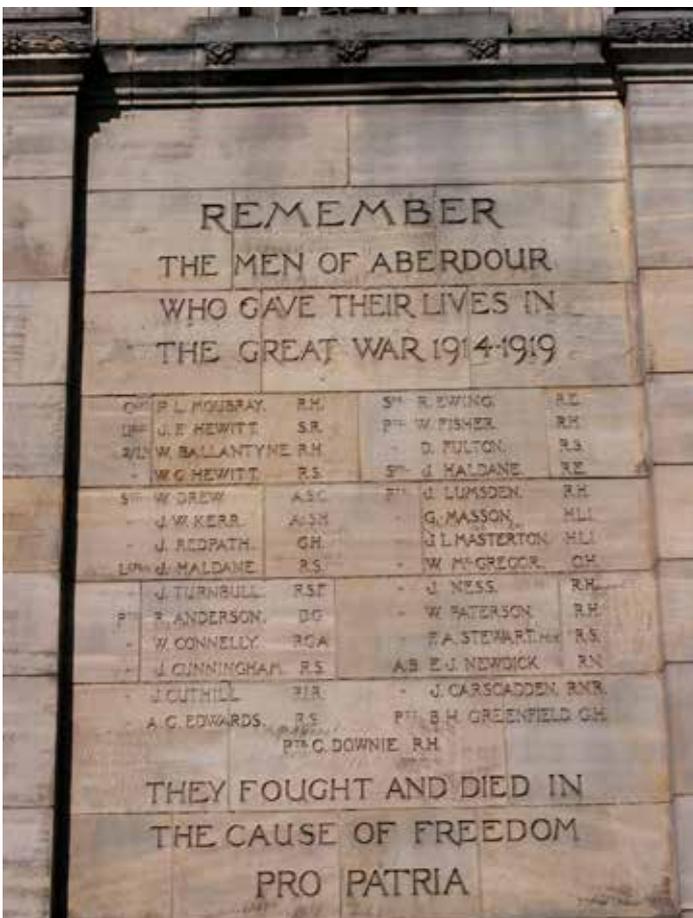
of names of men who served in Commonwealth forces included in Scottish memorials, most often Canadian or ANZAC. Emigration was not seen as a break with their place of birth.

While such memorials are the best source for at least beginning a local study of the war and its impact on a community, they are not without their own difficulties. The church of Scotland and the united free church played very prominent parts in the construction of memorials and their unveiling ceremonies, much more so than the other christian denominations. Their joint activity would seem to have been part of the process of protestant re-unification eventually finalised in 1929. The church of Scotland saw commemoration as part and parcel of its role as the 'national' church and often memorials would be located in the grounds of, or adjacent to, the parish church. At times a memorial might be within the church, as at St Michael's in Linlithgow, or the memorial could be the church itself, as with the 'restoration' of St John's in Perth.

This, of course, raises the question of how other denominations responded. The ecumenicalism that is a feature of Remembrance Sunday now was not in evidence in the inter-war period. That memorial events became religious services made it difficult for catholics to attend, even at the unveiling of the Scottish National War Memorial (SNWM) in 1927, although the clergy of neighbouring St Mary's cathedral in Edinburgh had been invited to attend that ceremony (despite being excluded from the SNWM committee). And while the free church did attend on that occasion it was absent from many others; its calvinism was uncomfortable with the notion that their sacrifice has secured a place in heaven for the fallen.

Even though civic memorials were intended to include all the children of a parish, not all names were listed. At heart, this was because neither the war office nor the individual service arms provided an official roll call of those who died. Memorial committees had to compile their own lists from newspaper reports, paper rolls of honour kept throughout

the conflict by streets, local communities and congregations, or, after 11 November 1918, information provided by schools, employers and, of course, families. The editor of the *Stirling Observer*, in response to readers' complaints about the absence of any coverage of the death of their relations, explained that the paper was reliant upon the public providing that information: and when it did, these letters from commanding officers and comrades to the bereaved families were often printed in full, providing remarkably uncensored and moving details of the circumstances of their loved one's death and its impact upon their fellows in war. Thus local newspapers – which often printed christmas or end-of-year special issues compiling portraits and details of the dead for the previous twelve months – remain a vital and direct source for anyone researching the Great War's impact upon a community.

Once the grave scale and likely duration of sustained loss became apparent by the spring of 1915, communities – indeed even national bodies – began to propose and organise for more permanent memorials and remembrance. Glasgow corporation decided in the autumn of 1915 to begin compiling

a roll of honour for those who fell. After the armistice, in order to finalise the roll, the corporation put up the names they had on boards which were displayed in the public libraries across the city. Appeals were made for people to check that their relation was on the list and that their details were correct. In this ad hoc process names were inevitably missed. A relation of one of the authors of this piece, Denis Brogan, who was born in Glasgow but served in the Inniskilling Fusiliers, is not on the city's roll of honour but is included in the names on the SNWM. The reason for his absence on the former can only be guessed at; was his widow, left with a young child, too traumatised to check her husband's name or otherwise alienated by the predominance of protestant authority in overseeing post-armistice commemoration (a feeling naturally heightened by the legacy of the 1916 Easter rising in Ireland)? The reason for Denis's inclusion on the latter is because the SNWM contacted all Irish regiments for details on the Scots included in their ranks.

Once a list had been compiled a decision had to be taken as to how the names were to be presented, what details (if any) to include and, most importantly,

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in what order were they to be listed. Public memorials to those who fell in battle were essentially a late-19th-century invention, embraced by cities and towns to commemorate rank and file who fell in Britain's Imperial conflicts, but for which there remained a strict hierarchical demarcation by rank. However, First World War memorials, commemorating mass conscript armies, heralded a transition (though still incomplete) to a more democratic practice in which all who fell were given equal prominence and significance. Georgian memorials had originally focused on the senior military figures of national importance; think of the various Nelson columns across the UK and Canada (including the one in Dublin blown up by republicans in 1966), or the similarly numerous statues to Wellington. With the Crimean (1853-56) and then the Boer Wars (1880-1, 1899-1902) the contribution of all ranks began to be recognised and in the case of the latter especially the names of all who fell tended to be included, though still in separate listings of 'officers, non-commissioned officers, and men'. The Black Watch Memorial on Edinburgh' mound is a striking if typical example.

Naming the fallen

While memorials to individuals in war have continued to be built, such as the statues to Bomber Harris (1992) or SAS-founder David Stirling (2002), it can be argued that the nature of the First World War with its catastrophic losses and citizen army demanded a collective commemoration. And the public wanted the names of their loved ones to appear on the memorials. At Stirling the memorial, unveiled in 1922 by western front commander-in-chief General Sir Douglas Haig, by then a veterans' champion, originally was without names: but a year later, in response to popular complaint and demand, four brass plates were attached to the base where all 667 known names were listed in alphabetical order without distinction by rank. Glasgow's great granite cenotaph, flanked by recumbent imperial lions beneath a lowering sword, unveiled in 1924, has no names inscribed on it; with over 18,000 dead there was simply not enough room. The roll of honour includes rank, unit and home address for each entry but is similarly democratic as the order of the roll is strictly by surname, and its full title is, 'Roll of Honour of the Citizens of Glasgow who died in the Great War 1914-18'. The corporation was determined to avoid drawing distinctions among its dead and emphasised that the military effort had been by a citizen army. The foreword to the roll read:

The fact that no distinction won by officers or men indicated on the Roll may seem to call for a word of explanation. It early became apparent that particulars of such honours could not be fully ascertained, and, rather than take the invidious course of giving these in some cases and not in others, the committee, after due consideration, decided to omit them altogether. That this was a wise decision will be conceded by those who reflect that the Roll is mainly one, not of professional warriors, but of peace-loving citizens, who, called to arms by a great national peril, bore, each and all, their stern ordeal with an equal measure of courage and constancy.

Such approaches, however, were not universal: not every place embraced the egalitarian ideal. While Buchlyvie in the Trossachs listed their dead alphabetically and gave no detail other than their names, other localities kept to the hierarchical. For instance, Aberdour in Fife, whose memorial was a new church hall, placed the officers at the top of the memorial plaque. Why these differing local practices? In truth we do not really know. Very few formal written minutes of local memorial committees (often adjuncts to other town or civic committees) survive and each community would have to be studied independently before any definite answer could be offered or to see if the local press reported in detail on committee discussions. That tensions did exist is almost certain.

Take, for example, Callander in Stirlingshire, a county in which partial memorial committee minutes survive for only three of its 29 parishes. In that relatively wealthy town the minutes record that the 'Comrades of the Great War', a local veterans' organisation, withdrew from the memorial committee in 1920 after it refused to include the names of all who served rather than only those who died, a point of disagreement echoed in a number of parishes throughout Scotland. Tensions in Callander were also briefly heightened by controversy over the siting of their monument on ground donated by a wealthy landowner, although the simple mercat-cross aesthetic of their completed stone column and heraldic lion memorial, unveiled in September 1921, had been accepted after consultation with the (short-lived) Scottish War Memorials Advisory Committee, initiated by the Royal Scottish Academy to ensure quality-control of the physical memorials from an artistic and architectural viewpoint. There was some unhappiness, too, at the manner of raising subscriptions for the Callander memorial with dances and sales-of-work, common across Scotland, to be supplemented in this locality

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by door-to-door collection by boy scouts which was in turn rendered awkward by the local newspaper's repeated publication of the names only of those donating £1 or more.

It could be argued that as time placed the war at a greater distance and as scepticism about the very purpose of the war

The Glasgow roll of honour, first published in 1922 and giving details of more than 18,000 people who lost their lives in the Great War

grew, so the democratic approach to memorialisation became the norm. This, however, needs more research. Certainly, to our eyes today there is something about a memorial where the names are distinguished – separated? – by rank that jars. These memorials exist as monuments and thus original

sources, as it were, and no-one should wish to see them altered in any way, but changes can be made in the virtual world. On the website dedicated to the war memorials of West Lothian (https://scot.sh/ hswlothian) there are pictures of all the parish memorials which show the variety of practice in the county – from the purely democratic as in Dalmeny (with names only, arranged alphabetically) to the strictly hierarchical as in Abercorn and Kirknewton & East Calder (officers first). In every instance, however, when the names have been transcribed onto the website, they have been arranged in simple alphabetical order.

Memorials and the community

In this regard, parish and local civic memorials are very much a reflection of the communities which erected them, revealing much of the war-experience, politics, culture, economy and surviving demography of that community and locality. Thus, present-day researchers can often discern these unique characteristics and sensitivities in the fund-raising activities which supported most Scottish parish memorials completed *c*.1920-27, and in the physical nature of the chosen monuments (often compromised by cost and size) and then the ceremony which accompanied its unveiling. In that regard, the local press remains a crucial source for historians alongside the military details of the fallen individuals to be gleaned from the open access databases of the Scottish National War Memorial or the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. These and other sources have been drawn on to great effect by a number of current projects cataloguing memorials and researching their histories and recorded names: not least the Scottish War Graves Project (http:// scottishwargraves.phpbbweb.com/), the War Memorials Trust (www. warmemorials.org/links-scotland/) and the Imperial War Museum's War Memorials Online (www. warmemorialsonline.org.uk/).

In truth, however, in the years

ROLL OF HONOUR
OF
THE CITIZENS OF GLASGOW
WHO DIED IN THE GREAT WAR
1914 -18.

THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE.
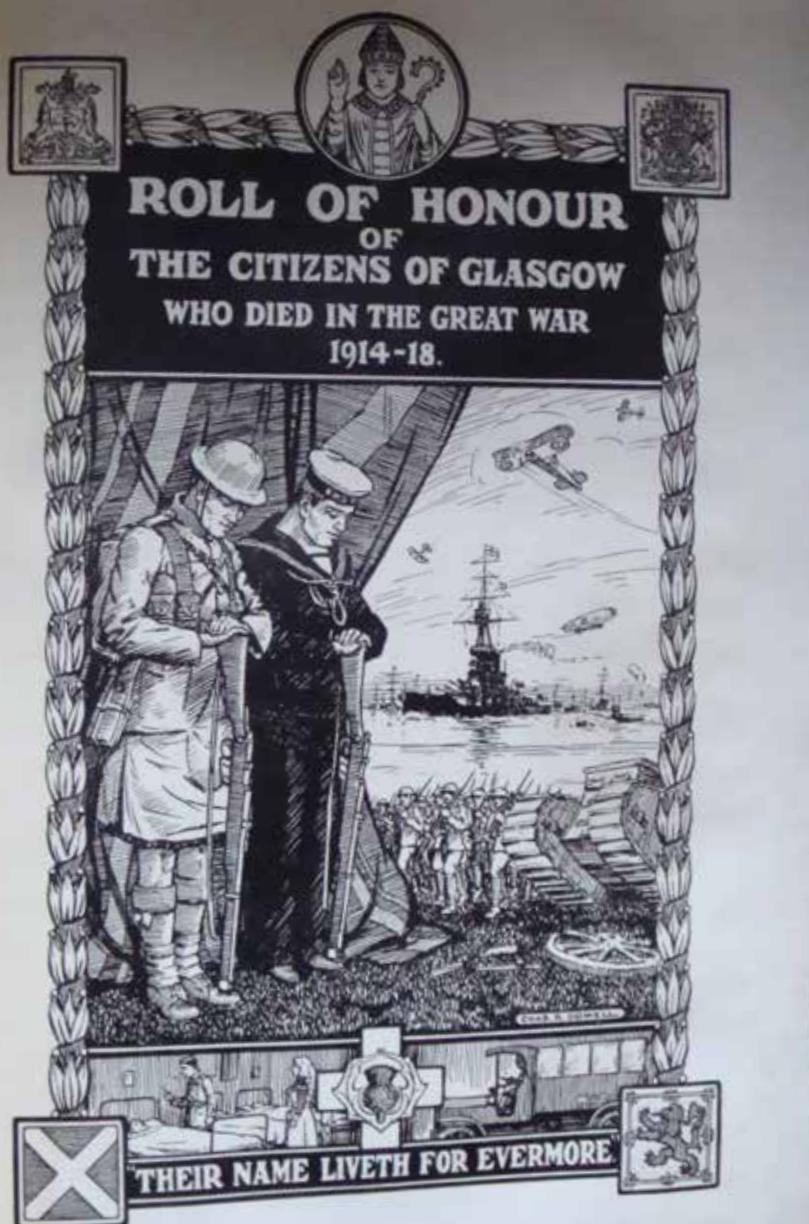
after the war there were perhaps few monuments across Scotland which provoked a profound emotional response when first unveiled, in and of themselves as physical objects. Even when new there was a traditionary familiarity in the popular iconography shared by hundreds of memorials in their chosen form of a Celtic cross, cairn or obelisk, up-turned sword or rifle, or soldier at rest (and Bannockburn parish in Stirlingshire objected to their statue of a *Highland* soldier). That said, there is arguably more poignancy to be felt at a community's loss on viewing such a memorial as that of Elie in Fife, mounted on the outer wall of the parish churchyard and which records the fallen in alphabetical order along with their peacetime occupation, than there is in encountering the sheer scale and martial power of the SNWM in Edinburgh Castle, recording all of the nation's fallen by regiment and service. And of course, what most naturally provoked an onlooker to tears was sight of the engraved name of their own lost loved-ones.

Yet what linked such small village or great city memorials in the first flush of remembrance was their shared meaning of loss and sacrifice and how those feelings were expressed and experienced from 1919 onwards. Here, far more important than formal speeches by dignitaries (which

were absent from the unveilings of the London Cenotaph and SNWM), we must try to appreciate the emotional experience for all assembled – veterans, families, school children, clerics – of the prayers and music deployed in these public ceremonies. *The Last Post*, *God Save the King* and *Scots Wha Hae* were typically played and sung at memorial unveilings and subsequent Armistice Days across Scotland. But most striking of all were the piper's laments, particularly the traditional dirge of *Flowers of the Forest*, echoing the lost 1914-18 generation back to Scotland's lost host at Flodden in 1513. Many are the contemporary sources which record the closing play of this piece as 'the most heart-gripping moment of the service', and that 'the mournful wail of the pipes seemed to renew an ancient grief'.

Thus, the Scottish crowds who gathered at their memorials in the inter-war years shared in something of the intense personal response recorded by John (Lord) Boyd Orr on hearing the pipes play this lament after the slaughter of his friends and comrades on the Somme in 1916: 'I have never in my life felt so unutterably sad'. *Flowers of the Forest* would be played, too, at Haig's funeral in 1929, by which time it had become Scotland's musical presence at Cenotaph ceremonies. And Lewis Grassic Gibbon would invoke its impact in his post-war novel, *Sunset Song*:

And then, as folk stood dumfounded…the Highlandman McIvor tuned up his pipes and began to step slow round the stone circle of Blawearie Loch, slow and quiet and folk watched him, the dark was near, it lifted your hair and was eerie and uncanny, the Flowers of the Forest as he played it. It rose and rose and wept and cried, that crying for the men that fell in battle.

This should serve as a powerful reminder that, lest they be forgotten as 'urban wallpaper', Great War memorials are sites of remembrance to be experienced on Armistice Day and with all the senses.

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