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Crosses and Stones:

Material Religion in British First World War Cemeteries

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The present-day visitor to the meticulously maintained British war cemeteries in Belgium and France can be forgiven for perceiving something of an inevitability about their design and layout. In reality though this was very much an accident of history and the result of extensive debate and controversy in the closing months of the First World War and in its immediate aftermath. Central to the debate was the question of whether and to what extent the cemeteries should appear distinctively Christian, given that the war dead were of all faiths and none. The material religion of the resulting cemeteries thus suggests hitherto underexplored insights into the dynamics of secularization and religious resurgence in the years immediately following the First World War.

First World War cemeteries have been viewed through a variety of scholarly lenses. Philip Longworth's institutional history of the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission remains a valuable point of reference, complemented much more recently by David Crane's account of the work of the Commission's founder Sir Fabian Ware.[1] The cemeteries have also attracted attention from historians of memory and commemoration[2] and from architectural historians, drawn particularly by the substan-

1 Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: The History of Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, London 1967; David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WW1's War Graves*, London 2013.

2 George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, New York 1990, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195071399.001.0001; David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield*

tial involvement of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the leading British architect of his generation.[3] However, the place of the cemeteries in the religious history of the period hitherto remains underexplored.

Creating the Cemeteries

Planning for the cemeteries began before the end of the war with the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917. From the outset there was agreement that the cemeteries would need "some recurring symbolical object". The question was what should it be? Many thought it should be a cross, but Lutyens proposed rather that it should be "one great fair stone of fine proportions … flanked with sentinel cypresses or pyramidal oaks", giving equality to men of all faiths "in one vast cathedral whose vault is the sky".[4] Lutyens's flights of eloquence were brought down to earth by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, who with uncharacteristic bluntness dismissed his proposal as "meaningless and useless".[5] The solution, proposed in a report by Sir Frederic Kenyon, Director of the British Museum, was to include BOTH a cross and a stone. The readiness with which this compromise was adopted, despite the obvious additional expense and arguable aesthetic awkwardness, is indicative of the sensitivity of the issue. Subsequently, indeed, it was recognized that it would be "inartistic" to include both in the smaller cemeteries, and it was decided that these would have the cross but not the stone, a partial victory for the Christian lobby. There was however something of a compromise in Reginald Blomfield's standard design incorporating a sword within the cross – thus implying a militaristic and nationalistic interpretation of the central Christian symbol.[6]

There was intense wider public debate over the memorials to individual soldiers. Many bereaved parents, including Anglican bishops and their wives, wanted to be able to design or at least to choose crosses, but the Imperial War Graves Commission insisted on having uniform rectangular headstones to "carry on the military idea". They did though concede that they could be engraved with a cross or other religious symbol and also with

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Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, Oxford 1998.

3 Jeroen Guerst, *Cemeteries of the Great War by Sir Edwin Lutyens,* Rotterdam 2011; Tim Skelton & Gerald Gliddon, *Lutyens and the Great War*, London 2008.

4 Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archive [hereafter WGC], WG18/238, Memorandum by Lutyens, 28 Aug. 1917.

5 WGC, WG18/206, Note on interview with Davidson, 17 Oct. 1917.

6 For a more detailed account of these discussions see John Wolffe, *Sacred and Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland since 1914*, London 2020, 24–25, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350019294.

a short inscription chosen by the bereaved. Their rationale was that uniform rectangular headstones would imply the solidarity of soldiers on parade, which would be inconsistent with the admission of crosses and other potential variants. Moreover, rectangular headstones would be cheaper and easier to transport. If wealthier families were allowed to pay for their own more expensive alternatives this would also undermine the illusion of social as well as national and religious solidarity. This issue was only settled by a debate in parliament in May 1920, which upheld the War Graves Commission's position.[7]

Figure 1. Étaples. Photo John Wolffe, 30 April 2015.

The Material Religion of Cemetery Design

How then did these decisions work out in the layout and appearance of the cemeteries themselves?[8] At Étaples (Figure 1), the largest and most impressive of all the cemeteries in France, designed by Lutyens himself, the so-called war stone and the cross were incorporated into the same monumental assemblage on the steep hillside overlooking the graves. The cross

7 Wolffe, *Sacred and Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland since 1914*, 25–28.

8 The subsequent analysis of the cemeteries is drawn from personal observation during a research visit to France and Belgium from 30 Apr. to 2 May 2015, supported by the plans and photographs available on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.

stands proud at the top of the hill and is the first thing the visitor sees when entering on the higher level from the road. The war stone is immediately below the cross, which makes it seem like an altar. More usually however the cross and the stone were separated in different parts of a cemetery, hence providing alternative focal points of secular and religious symbolism. For example, at Tyne Cot, another vast cemetery where many of the dead from Passchendaele are buried, they are separated by an avenue of trees. The cross, placed on top of the remains of a blockhouse left from the battle, dominates the whole site, while the stone is sited in the centre of the long semi-circular colonnade that commemorates the 35000 men who died in the Ypres salient and have no known grave.

At Terlincthun (Figure 2) near Boulogne, the cross and the stone are on opposite sides of the cemetery – the image shows the war stone viewed from the cross. This is also the view that King George V would have seen as he spoke standing by the cross when at the close of his "pilgrimage" to a number of the cemeteries he visited Terlincthun in May 1922. The moment was rich in religious and political symbolism – in his poetic account of the event Rudyard Kipling evoked the official narrative when he wrote of "a stark sword brooding on the bosom of the cross/Where high and low are one". And as the King looked down the central axis of the cemetery towards the war stone and the column on the hill beyond commemorating Napoleon's grande armée he eloquently evoked his surroundings. The King affirmed Anglo-French solidarity by acknowledging the presence of that monument to the "greatest … of all soldiers" standing guard over the dead of the British empire and saw the cemeteries as "potent advocates of peace upon earth" that with faith in "God's purposes" would serve to bring all peoples together.[9]

In smaller cemeteries such as that by the roadside at Elzenwalle near Ypres the stone was omitted, while the cross serves a practical as well as symbolic function as anyone looking for such cemeteries in the flat landscape of Belgium and northern France quickly realizes that the crosses, sometimes visible at quite a distance, are a valuable navigation aid. In the absence of a stone, the prominent cross gives such sites, often somewhat reminiscent of a churchyard, a more unambiguously Christian character, albeit with the presence of the "brooding" sword a Christianity of a particular militaristic kind.

9 *The King's Pilgrimage,* London 1922, no pagination. Kipling had a hand in drafting the King's speech: see WGC, WG1544 Pt 1, Ware to Kipling, 28 Mar. 1922. The elaborate polished language is internal evidence of drafting by hands other than the plainspoken monarch himself.

There remained the question of how to acknowledge the presence of casualties of other faiths. Jews appear to have implicitly concurred in Kenyon's judgement that they "would not be offended by the presence of the Cross in the cemetery", provided their religious identity was recognized on their own headstones.[10] With regard to Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, however, at an early meeting of the War Graves Commission, Lord Islington, the Secretary of State for India, said – as reported by Kenyon – that:

> …in regard to the treatment of the graves of Indian soldiers and the erection of memorials and buildings in Indian cemeteries, it was most important that the religious requirement of the different castes and creeds should be scrupulously respected … [H]e considered that there should be nothing in the nature of a disparity between the cemeteries of Indians and those of Christians.[11]

There was accordingly initial discussion as to whether alternative central memorials should be provided for members of the Indian Army who had died on the Western Front.[12] In the event, however, considerations of cost but also of the complexity of fairly representing all the different faiths involved led to the recognition that any systematic provision would be impracticable. Hence Indian casualties interred or commemorated (if they had been cremated) in otherwise predominantly Christian cemeteries, were not given any distinctive central memorials. However, in the layout of cemeteries with substantial numbers of Indian casualties, such as those at Gorre and La Chapelette, the cross was made the focal point for the Christian graves and the war stone for the Indian ones. Smaller entirely Indian cemeteries, such as those at Neuville-les-Montreuil and Zelobes, lack any central monument although they do have some distinctive features, such as a seat set into the wall at Neuville-les-Montreuil. The cemetery at Noyelles-sur-Mer for casualties from the Chinese Labour Corps has a Chinese-style gateway and inscription. On the other hand, the larger Indian cemetery at St Martin-les-Boulogne has both a war stone and an alternative central monument that commemorates the Hindus and Sikhs who were cremated at the site.

From the outset there was an awareness that provision for Indian casualties in the various individual cemeteries needed to be complemented by some overall memorial. Initially it was proposed to construct both a mosque and a Hindu temple, but there were multiple objections to this plan, both

10 Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will be Designed*, London 1918, 11.

11 WGC Minutes, 18 Feb. 1918.

12 WGC, WG 909/7, note dated 19 May 1919.

Figure 2. Terlincthun. Photo John Wolffe, April 2015.

Figure 3. Fort Pitt, Chatham, Kent. Photo John Wolffe, August 2015.

from Anglicans at home who opposed the provision of non-Christians places of worship at public expense and from the government of India that did not want to bear the expense of a "lavish" project and pointed out that Sikhs too would expect their own provision.[13] In the end therefore the single Indian memorial opened at Neuve Chapelle in 1927 was designed to avoid identification with any particular religious tradition. The war stone was a central feature of a circular enclosure, while the cross was replaced by a column modelled on the pillars erected in India by the ancient emperor Ashoka. Ashoka's edicts inscribed on the original pillars advocated religious tolerance, a spirit that is reflected in the universalistic sentiment of the inscription on the column at Neuve Chapelle: "God is one: his is the victory", in English and in three major Indian languages.

Headstones as Personal Religious Statements

What then of the headstones? It is instructive first to compare the impression produced by the normal uniform headstones at Étaples or Terlincthun with the unusual example of Fort Pitt in Kent (Figure 3) where the standard headstones were mixed in with individually designed ones. This situation arose at Fort Pitt because it was already a military cemetery before the First World War and so had existing burials from earlier conflicts, and indeed some from the earlier years of World War One itself before the Wars Graves Commission was established. It is easy to see from the example of Fort Pitt how the relatively disorderly appearance was unattractive to the military mind, and how the personal choices of relatives would have undermined the aspiration to convey an impression of social, national, and religious solidarity.

Nevertheless, the headstones themselves did give scope for some limited personal expression. A form circulated to relatives offered them the option of choosing an inscribed cross, star of David, or neither. These examples (Figure 4) show the two ways in which the cross was incorporated, either as a separate incision in the stone, or with the deceased's regimental badge in the cross bar. The overwhelming majority, apart from Jews, chose a cross, showing near universal acceptance of at least a conventional Christianity. Only in a small minority of cases, just two from a sample of 216 at Terlincthun cemetery, did relatives choose not to have a cross inscribed. Such a decision, however, was not necessarily indicative of atheism, as it appears quite as likely to reflect staunch Protestant rejection of a perceived Catholic symbol. One of the two examples identified at Terlincthun, the

13 For a fuller account of these discussions see John Wolffe, "Forever England beneath the Cross of Sacrifice" in John Carter Wood (ed.), *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Göttingen 2016, 61, https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666101496.53.

grave of a gunner from Nova Scotia, has the inscription "My Saviour has my treasure and he will walk with me".[14] Similarly, an example at Tyne Cot, of a sergeant from an Ulster regiment, carries the inscription: "Thy will be done".[15] The second example from Terlincthun, with the single inscribed word "Mizpah", is more enigmatic, but the absence of either a cross or Star of David suggests that despite its biblical origins it was intended as a love token without religious significance.[16]

The short inscriptions that the bereaved chose for themselves are a particularly interesting feature of the headstones. By no means all the headstones have them, as the bereaved were expected to meet the additional cost, which is likely to have deterred poorer families. Nevertheless, there are many thousands of such inscriptions which provide a fascinating cross-section of personal secular and religious responses to the tragedy of bereavement in the war, but have yet to receive any serious attention from academic researchers. A sample of 216 headstones in block 10 at Terlincthun, of which 145 or 67.1% have a personal inscription, was selected for detailed analysis.[17] This was a particularly high proportion, probably accounted for because the casualties buried in this block all died in the last few days of the war, in November 1918, or from their wounds soon after it ended, so bereavements still felt quite recent when relatives were invited to request inscriptions in 1920. By contrast in a sample of 100 headstones for men killed in the first year of the war – 39 from Terlincthun, 61 from Gorre – only 35 had a personal inscription. More than five years after they had died, some parents would have died themselves and widows remarried and other next of kin presumably emotionally reluctant to re-engage with their loss by devising an inscription.

The 145 inscriptions from the 1918 sample consisted of 83 that were secular in nature, and 62 that made some kind of religious or supernatural reference, ranging from conventional reference to God (for example "Thy will be done") and hopes of heavenly reunion to explicitly Christian sentiments or quotations from the Bible or a well-known hymn. The proportions were

14 Ervin Newcomb Hendry. This and subsequent references to individual headstones are referenced by the full name of the casualty as providing the most straightforward way to access supporting detail including images of the original grave registers on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website: https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/. The inscriptions quoted below are all from the Terlincthun sample unless otherwise stated.

15 Robert James Leslie.

16 Thomas W. G. Williams. *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English*, Oxford 2002, defines Mizpah as "a ring, locket, etc., given as an expression or token of association or remembrance, originally and especially one with 'Mizpah' inscribed on it".

17 The samples from Terlincthun and Gorre were identified by observation of the actual headstones during site visits on 30 Apr. and 1 May 2015 and subsequently facilitated by study of the online grave registers.

Figure 4. Example headstones at Terlincthun. Photo: John Wolffe, April 2015.

Figure 5. Examples of Muslim and Hindu headstones at Neuville les Montreuil. Photo: John Wolffe, April 2015.

Figure 6: Muslim headstone and Christian crosses at St-Charles-de-Potyze French cemetery near Ypres. Photo: John Wolffe, May 2015.

quite similar in the 1914–15 sample of 35, with 20 and 15 respectively, indicating that even though fewer of those bereaved earlier in the war provided inscriptions, the sentiments of those who did were not significantly different from those bereaved in 1918. The categorization was inevitably made in the absence of any evidence of the actual beliefs of the next of kin. For example, several relatives chose the phrase "until the day breaks", which has been classified as religious. We cannot know whether the allusions to the Bible (Song of Songs 4:6) and perhaps to Bishop Walsham How's well-known lines "But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day/The saints triumphant rise in bright array" were intentional, or whether the phrase should be understood in a more limited secular sense of hoping for better times to come. The currency of the phrase was, however, evidence of the cultural diffusion of biblical and Christian language. Overall while the above classification of the inscriptions therefore involved subjective and, to some extent, arbitrary judgements it nevertheless indicates that although secular sentiments predominated, a substantial minority of relatives responded to their loss in more or less religious terms.

Inscriptions classified as secular included factual statements of parentage and hometown ("To the dear memory of the only son of Mrs E. Kay of Preston"),[18] patriotic statements ("He fought and died at his country's call"),[19] or a sense of enduring memory and love ("Ever in our thoughts"; "Loved for ever").[20] Jewish inscriptions, for example "Mourned by parents brothers and sisters and relatives"[21] on a headstone at Étaples, tended particularly to emphasize a family context amidst the militaristic male solidarity of the orderly gravestones. Indeed, the blending of secular patriotism and Christianity apparent in the overall design of the cemeteries was seldom echoed in the personal inscriptions: only one headstone – perhaps significantly that of an officer – in the two samples from Terlincthun and Gorre explicitly linked "God and country".[22] In general relatives who chose religious inscriptions avoided military or patriotic allusions. The theme of rest and union with Jesus was common and in striking juxtaposition to the brutality of the battlefield in inscriptions such as "Safe in the arms of Jesus"[23] and "Jesus in thy tender care we leave our soldier Daddie there".[24] Also widespread were expectations of eventual reunion, such as "Our loss,

18 Charles William Kay.
19 Reginald Clarke.
20 N. Lightfoot; George Arthur Barrow.
21 R. Levy.
22 Duncan Gillies Forbes MacBean (at Gorre).
23 James Mitchell.
24 Peter McKerracher.

Christ's gain but we shall see him again".[25] Other inscriptions struck a note of faithful resignation, for example: "Dear Lord how could I give him up to any but to Thee".[26] Biblical texts quoted included "For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3),[27] "The Lord is my Shepherd therefore can I lack nothing" (Psalm 23:1),[28] and "Because I live ye shall live also" (John 14:19).[29] Allusions to well-known hymns included "Father in thy gracious keeping leave we now our loved one sleeping"[30] (adapted from John Ellerton's "Now the labourer's task is o'er") and "Peace perfect peace with loved ones far away"[31] (from Edward Henry Bickersteth's "Peace perfect peace"). Relatives who chose such texts were, it seems, responding to their loss in a spirit of Christian devotion and acceptance rather than finding comfort in a narrative of nationalistic sacrifice.

Nevertheless, some inscriptions were ambiguous, probably deliberately. Some had a biblical origin and spiritual meaning but could also be interpreted in a secular and military sense such as "Fight the good fight"[32] or "Greater love hath no man than this".[33] The wording "He died that others might live"[34] on a headstone at Étaples carries the biblical resonance of 1 Thessalonians 5: "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that … we might live with him." It can equally well though be construed as a straightforwardly secular statement on how the deceased sacrificed himself in war in order to secure the lives and freedoms of others. A quote from the Te Deum, "The noble army of martyrs praise thee",[35] appears to identify the war dead as Christian martyrs. Perhaps significantly though this particular gravestone, is that of one of the few women to be buried at Étaples, a nursing sister who died from burns sustained when the Germans bombed a military hospital. The idea of martyrdom was more plausibly associated with a non-combatant.

Great care was taken to provide appropriate headstones for non-Christian burials. For Jews the cross was replaced with the Star of David and other faiths were given religious inscriptions in the appropriate sacred language (Figure 5). Jewish relatives were contacted on the same basis as Christians

25 George Elliott.
26 Walter J.W. Carter.
27 Thomas John Honeybun.
28 Harry George Street.
29 Frank Albert Broad.
30 William Anderson.
31 A. Durrington.
32 Frederick Charles Wood; cf I Timothy 6:12.
33 Harry Johnson; cf. John 15:13.
34 George William Phillips.
35 Gladys Maud Mary Wake.

and were able to provide personal inscriptions if they so wished, but relatives in India do not appear to have been given any such opportunity. Hindu and Sikh soldiers who were cremated were sometimes given a headstone with the wording in English "The following soldier of the Indian army is honoured here". Crucially though, although these graves were usually in separate plots from the Christian interments, the headstones were exactly the same shape, so they look identical from a distance, and it is only the inscriptions that distinguish them. At St Martin les Boulogne, however, in an apparent adaptation to perceived Muslim custom, all the headstones were more rounded than in the other cemeteries.

A recent Commonwealth War Graves Commission report has concluded that there were significant inequalities in the treatment of non-European casualties in other theatres of war, especially in Africa, but that in Europe itself equality of treatment was "effectively achieved".[36] Nevertheless, this analysis has suggested a need to nuance that assessment in relation to the material religion of the cemeteries. Although non-Christian casualties were given a headstone consistent with their religious tradition, many of them were buried in cemeteries centred on a Christian cross of sacrifice or without any central religious memorial. The essentially secular Lutyens war stone, if present at all, was the only alternative focal point provided. Moreover, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh headstones lacked the personal religious inscriptions, which as we have seen, gave an intriguing individuality to some of the Christian and Jewish headstones.

Comparison and Conclusion

It is instructive to compare British war cemeteries with their French counterparts, which demonstrate contrasting approaches to the same underlying challenge of bringing together religious, personal, national and military motivations in the material fabric of commemoration. It is somewhat paradoxical that whereas the British, with continuing close links between church and state, opted for rectangular headstones (albeit with inscribed crosses), the French, despite the 1905 separation of church and state, chose crosses as the standard provision for casualties who were not identified as Jews, Muslims or atheists. Moreover, the different shapes of the headstones for these minorities – rectangular with rounded tops for Jews and atheists, and with an outline suggestive of an Islamic arch for Muslims – means that they stand out in cemeteries as immediately distinguishable from the majority (see Figure 6). In that way the French approach rendered religious minor-

36 George Hay & John Burke, Report of the Special Commission to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration, Maidenhead 2021, accessed online at https://www.cwgc.org/non-commemoration-report/, 2022-09-30.

ities more visible, while diminishing the visual impression of uniformity and solidarity characteristic of the British cemeteries. On the other hand, individual ornamentation was forbidden, and the French cemeteries did not allow any scope for the kind of distinctive expression enabled by the British personal inscriptions. Memorials only carried a standard inscription giving the casualty's name, rank, regiment and date of death, with the words "Mort pour la patrie" (or "Mort pour la France" in cemeteries outside France). In this way the secular republic asserted itself even on the cross bar of the Christian cross.

The only official central feature of these cemeteries was a flagpole and tricolour. However, whereas the British cemeteries were tightly controlled by the War Graves Commission and entirely funded by the state, in France individuals and organizations were given permission and land to add their own central monuments to the cemeteries.[37] The most conspicuous outcome of this arrangement was the massive ossuary at Douaumont near Verdun, the initiative of the local bishop and funded predominantly by public subscription. The complex incorporated a substantial Catholic chapel. Similarly at the centre of the massive cemetery at Ablain St Nazaire, near Arras, the small chapel dedicated to Notre Dame de Lorette, which was already a Catholic pilgrimage site before the war, was replaced with a much more substantial building.[38] At St Charles-de-Potyze in Belgium there is not only a secular monument erected by the grateful inhabitants of the nearby town of Ypres, but also a calvary in the Breton style, depicting Christ on the cross and grieving women, which was added in 1968.[39] At Douaumont too there were later additions, here recognizing the religious diversity of the burials on the site, with a Jewish memorial opened in 1938 and a Muslim one in 2006.[40]

This article has highlighted the significance of the cemeteries as material evidence of the complex dynamics of national religious life in the aftermath of the First World War. The compromises made in the design of the British cemeteries are revealing physical evidence of the uneasy balance between Christian and secular understandings of national identity among the elite groups responsible for making decisions. They are also evidence of an awareness of religious diversity, in some ways ahead of its time, but with

37 Antoine Prost, "Les cimetières militaires de la Grande Guerre, 1914–1940", *Le Mouvement Sociale* 237 (2011), 135–151 [147], https://doi.org/10.3917/lms.237.0135.

38 http/://www.greatwar.co.uk/french-flanders-artois/cemetery-ablain-st-nazaire-notre-dame-de-lorette.htm, accessed 2022-09-29.

39 http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/cemetery-saint-charles-de-potyze.htm, accessed 2022-09-29.

40 https://www.landofmemory.eu/en/sites-historiques/douaumont-ossuary/, accessed 2022-09-29.

its expression constrained by the practical realities of limited resources and the desire for uniformity and architectural coherence. However, alongside the official narrative conveyed by the carefully constructed cemeteries, the personal inscriptions provide more varied impressions of the attitudes of the bereaved. Fragmentary though this evidence is, it is suggestive of diverse popular religious attitudes. While some relatives felt it apt to apply the biblical language of fighting the good fight or of a man laying down his life for his friends, many others asserted the ties of family rather than those of patriotic military service or placed their faith not in a God of battles and sacrifice, but in a gentle Jesus caring for their loved one and giving them hope of heavenly reunion. Herein lie alternative readings of the material religion of the cemeteries to that suggested by the "stark sword brooding on the bosom of the cross", and the orderly headstones intended to "carry on the military idea". ▲

SUMMARY

This article analyses the diverse religious messages conveyed by the physical layout and material details of British war cemeteries as they developed in the aftermath of the First World War. On the one hand the ubiquitous central monument of a sword within a cross conveyed an image of Christian militarism. This was reinforced by the orderly layout of the uniform headstones reminiscent of a regiment on parade. Meanwhile the central memorial stones included in the larger cemeteries signified a more secular and pluralistic nationalism that gave tacit recognition to the presence of significant Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh casualties among the dead. The inscriptions on the individual headstones gave scope not only to recognise diverse religious identities, but also for the bereaved to include brief epitaphs. The substantial minority who used these to express religious sentiments in general demonstrated a Christian faith that was more personal than nationalistic in tone. The article concludes with a brief comparison between British and French war cemeteries: paradoxically in view of the recent separation of church and state the latter used cruciform headstones except for non-Christian casualties thus highlighting diversity whereas the uniform rectangular headstones of the British cemeteries implicitly affirmed the solidarity of their dead.