Symbols of Sacrifice, Service and Success. Exploring the design and symbolism of First World War memorials in Wales and the relationship between iconography and the community approach to remembrance and commemoration

Student Dissertation

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Symbols of Sacrifice, Service and Success
Exploring the design and symbolism of First World War memorials in Wales and the relationship between iconography and the community approach to remembrance and commemoration

Figure 1: Welsh National War Memorial

Source: Imperial War Museum, re-used for non-commercial purposes under the IWM Non-Commercial Licence © Brian Mawdsley (WMR-6640)

Lynette Hilton

May 2022

A329 EMA: The Making of Welsh History
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Introduction

Er cof am ... ‘in memory of’

The Welsh National War Memorial in Cardiff features three bronze statues of a soldier, sailor and airman holding wreaths aloft beneath a central, raised winged figure of victory. ¹ Symbolising the armed services and their sacrifice for success, the outer frieze inscription in Welsh dedicates the memorial to ‘the sons of Wales who gave their lives for their country in the war 1914-18’. ² The First World War claimed the lives of over 700,000 British servicemen, of whom over 35,000 were Welsh and standalone, symbolic monuments such as that in Cardiff, became an important part of mourning and remembrance for those whose loved ones were missing or buried overseas. ³ In studying the social history of commemoration in Wales, Angela Gaffney notes that there was an ‘overwhelming need’ for such visible representation and although a ‘mass phenomenon’, each memorial was unique as communities commissioned their own design and inscriptions. ⁴ Colin McIntyre has looked at the iconography and inscriptions of war memorials to uncover the, influences, military and family information they contain while Alex King acknowledges the role of symbolism in helping the bereaved, but contends that the imagery itself does not attribute meaning or understanding, rather it is interpretation and context that determine outcome and response. ⁵

Aiming to bring together the examination of memorial design and symbolism and community approach to remembrance, this dissertation will focus on selected standalone

¹ ‘Cardiff Welsh National War Memorial, National Memorial for The First World War (Great War)’, Cathays Park, Coflein (Cardiff, 2008) Available at: https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/32845?term=welsh%20national%20memorial Accessed 3 April 2022
public monuments in Wales in order to identify key features and meanings of their design and explore whether there is a relationship between iconography and the commemoration of loss in chosen local contexts. Considering a specific typology and adopting a micro-study approach, the shared experience of remembrance identified in existing historiography is largely supported but in seeking to establish a connection between symbolism and community mourning, some divergence in approach emerges at local level, suggesting areas for further research. This study will not include rolls of honour, gravestones nor utilitarian structures, although debate about the latter was a key part of considerations regarding the choice of memorial.

The topic of war memorials in response to the First World War alongside themes of loss, remembrance and commemoration, has been the subject of increasing debate by historians in recent years as the number of veterans dwindled. The bulk of secondary literature considers Britain as a whole, albeit with notable exceptions such as Angela Gaffney’s Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales. However, the broad conclusions drawn regarding local collaboration, the nuances and ambiguities of interpretation, and the meanings of imagery and iconography are relevant to a micro-study of symbolism and sentiment in Wales. Gaffney concentrates on the different perspectives of servicemen and those at home, the complexity of political and patriotic narratives and the economic and religious environment in the post-war years. Consensus was usually achieved when establishing memorials but she demonstrates that it was sometimes difficult to reach. In terms of symbolism, Gaffney contends that there was a strong religious element, a point partly refuted by Alex King who argues that expressing the experience of war, whether through imagery, language, loss or moral concept, was ‘fundamentally political’ and designers were influenced by the debate. Jay Winter, and Adrian Gregory agree that the majority of British war memorials were conventional in design, the output of a commercial and political process. Nonetheless, King acknowledges that local involvement was essential and the Christian cross was an important symbol of sacrifice. That crosses

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7 Gaffney, Aftermath, pp.69, 133.
8 Gaffney, Aftermath, p. 117; King, Memorials of the Great War, p.5.
10 King, Memorials of the Great War, pp.129, 249.
represented sacrifice and triumph of good over evil as suggested by Alan Wilkinson is disputed by David Cannadine, who feels that the Church was unable to offer any comfort or understanding of loss and between 1918-1939, an ‘all pervasive pall of death’ hung over Britain.\textsuperscript{11}

Bob Bushaway believes that iconographic memorials, ritual and collective commemoration perpetuated the ‘myth of the common’ and George Mosse contends that those who designed them indeed constructed ‘a myth’, designed to ‘mask war, legitimise the war experience …and to displace the reality’, using symbols and images.\textsuperscript{12} These disparate views, contribute to the general consensus that symbolism was a matter of interpretation and ambiguity but whether inherent or fabricated, meanings were validated by the feelings of individuals and like-minded social groups. This latter point is supported by Bernard Barber’s analysis of war memorials in post-Second World War America. He suggests that expression of remembrance and grief through memorials must be continually affirmed in order to retain significance, asserting that symbolic sentiment, aesthetic quality and any utilitarian purpose must be compatible with the values of the social group they serve.\textsuperscript{13} Catherine Moriarty argues that photographs were a more effective means of mourning and commemoration and the collective nature of war memorials reduced understanding and revealed little about individual feelings.\textsuperscript{14} Jay Winter also notes that symbolic and communal representations of grief and remembrance partly ‘de-constructed’ the horror of death, detracting from personal meaning and reducing the fallen to a list of names ‘empty tombs’.\textsuperscript{15} Inscriptions are a key part of the iconography and Gwenllian Awbery’s ‘The Language of Remembrance’ discusses use of Welsh and English language on First World War memorials in South-West Wales, concluding that Welsh was more widely used to express religious sentiment in working class areas and English was favoured in secular inscriptions.


\textsuperscript{14} Moriarty, ‘In a Picture only’, p.33.

\textsuperscript{15} Winter, \textit{Sites of Memory}, p. 5.
commissioned by professional people. Rachael Jones suggests that winged messengers as seen on the National Memorial of Wales, were popular post-war, perhaps inspired by the myth of the Angel of Mons. She also explores the symbolism of angels on memorials in England and Wales, particularly in female form, perhaps reflecting the role of women in war.

The historiography on war memorials points to a multifaceted topic subject to interpretation and complex connections between images, emotion and action, and Abousnnouga and Machin further suggest that iconography references intangible quality as much as symbolic meaning. The debate has focussed on finance and location in Britain rather than Wales rather than links between iconography and community sentiment although public opinion influenced debate in some areas. This offers scope for iconographic analysis of specific types of edifice through which the relationship between symbolism, design and local commemoration can be explored. Chapter 1 uses the Coflein and Imperial War Museum databases to establish the typology, looking at standalone monuments on publicly accessible sites, and their distribution using the preserved counties of Wales. Within that framework, design and symbolism is examined, using selected examples of cenotaph, obelisk, cross, pillar, and statues to demonstrate diverse approaches to remembrance and any underlying influences. Chapter 2 focuses on local context, with micro-studies to explore how community sentiment, mourning and understanding related to the commissioning and design of the memorials. Newspaper articles and minutes of

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memorial committees have been used to examine themes of remembrance and commemoration and establish the extent to which design reflected sentiment and belief or was more practically and politically driven.

In ‘Remembering the Dead in Northop: First World War Memorials in a Welsh Parish’, Bartlett and Ellis conclude that permanent memorials were most appropriately designed locally and gave purpose to loss but did not replace personal memorials. The scope for disagreement when balancing communal and individual needs rendered memorial-making a potentially challenging and delicate affair. Public memorials were, in themselves, a symbol of communal loss. However, this dissertation demonstrates that each is different and the iconography is varied, yet common themes of religion, language, nationality and the role of women emerge and, in some cases suggest communal characteristics. It also discovers that, in particular local contexts, the relationship between design and communal mourning and the extent to which the final product reflected a shared unspoken ‘language of remembrance’ differed although public engagement in the process could be vocal. There remains much scope for further local studies to explore the meaning of memorials and ensure their significance for future generations.

Chapter 1
Representing remembrance: Memorial design and symbolism

On 3 September 1919, the Western Mail carried a short article entitled ‘War Memorials’, declaring that each locality should have one and they should be both ‘prominent’ and ‘chaste and impressive in design’. The author further hoped that they would be pure and simple, a source of ‘affectionate pride’ for the bereaved and a reminder to future generations of the sacrifice of war.\(^\text{24}\) Of the 6.1 million British men who served in the First World War, 11.6% were killed and over 35,000 of the 722,782 fatalities were Welsh, meaning that almost all families and all areas of the country were affected by the emotional and practical impact of bereavement. In England and Wales, 74% of total casualties were under the age of 30 and as Bartlett and Ellis point out, it was important that permanent memorials of whatever form, were put in place to give purpose to the loss as part of what Adrian Gregory terms a shared healing process.\(^\text{25}\) In the decade after the First World War, thousands of structures, buildings, plaques, shrines and stained glass windows were erected across Wales by communities, councils, employers, schools and social groups and remain a distinctive part of the landscape and collective memory of war.\(^\text{26}\) Of these, perhaps the most visible, and the focus of this study, are the standalone monuments on external sites in towns and villages, which represent a lasting, physical expression of remembrance, dignifying the deaths of the fallen, and offering reassurance about their willing sacrifice and a site of mourning for those whose bodies were never repatriated.\(^\text{27}\) In this context, notwithstanding their individual design features which render them unique, local war memorials are in themselves a symbol of commemoration and community contribution.\(^\text{28}\)

\(^{28}\) Gaffney, Aftermath, p.171.
As indicated in a letter to The Times on 21 July 1919, noting the poignancy of its simplicity, public reaction to the temporary Cenotaph in Whitehall designed by Edward Lutyens for the Peace Celebrations, was positive and indicated a desire for a permanent monument.²⁹ Many communities followed Lutyen’s example and favoured monumental masonry in what Alex King termed a ‘conventional’ style albeit with variations.³⁰ The Imperial War Museum (IWM) memorials database lists 2,659 war memorials in Wales, many of which are also detailed by Coflein, War Memorials Online and the War Memorials Trust.³¹ Distributed by county, using the preserved county 1974-1996 boundaries, there is a fairly even split between north and south with the balance attributed to Dyfed in the south-west as shown in Appendix 1.³² A similar regional pattern emerges when classifying memorials by type, where plaques and tablets listing the names of the fallen dominate in all counties, followed by standalone monuments of which the top five comprise a cross, obelisk, pillar or column, cenotaph and figure or statue as noted in Table 1. Nonetheless, within the typology used by IWM there are variations and it is necessary to be mindful of overlap between some of the descriptions. Separate categories are used for sculptures/cast figures and for servicemen/servicewomen although on many of the memorials, the distinction is unclear and for the purposes of this study, they have been amalgamated.

<table>
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<th>Table 1: Distribution of memorial types by county</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cross</td>
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Source: Imperial War Museum, War Memorials Register

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³⁰ King, Memorials of the Great War, p. 1.
³² War Memorials Register’, Imperial War Museum, 2022
When considering the design of war memorials, some communities were keen to explore utilitarian options such as memorial halls and sports facilities. However, the IWM data suggests that ultimately, the focus on standalone monuments supports the arguments put forward by King and Gaffney that in the challenging post-war economic conditions, such buildings were often too costly and, in the IWM analysis, represent only around four percent of memorials in Wales (See Appendix 2). More prominently listed are Rolls of Honour/Books of Remembrance which account for nearly nine percent of the total, testament to the value placed on recording names, recognition and inclusion. These were compiled by communities and institutions from the start of the war to identify and commemorate those who served, whereas inscriptions on post-war monuments were generally limited to those who died. Angela Gaffney has observed that the number of monuments in the form of crosses signifies a strong religious element in the context of loss. As a symbol in itself, the cross conveys the Christian message of death, self-sacrifice and resurrection and provides a physical shrine and site for worship. As Alex King observes, ambiguity of interpretation in the connotations of both darkness and light can help the bereaved make sense of the post-war reality. David Cannadine has argued that war memorials were ‘generated by the bereaved for their own comfort’ as the Church struggled to explain or justify their loss and Gaffney agrees that the religious message could be ‘inadequate’ for some. The religious theme is also suggested by the use of figurative angels, as messengers of hope, immortality and peace and Rachel Jones notes that many are female, perhaps representing the ‘emotionalisation’ of war memorials.

33 King, Memorials of the Great War, p. 98.; Gaffney, Aftermath, p.87.
34 ‘Their Names Shall Live for Evermore’, West Glamorgan Archives Memorials Project, West Glamorgan Archives Available at: https://swansea.gov.uk/hiddenwarmemorials Accessed 12 April 2022;
‘Welsh Memorial, Swansea University, Available at: https://war-memorials.swan.ac.uk/ Accessed 13 April 2022.
35 Gaffney, Aftermath, p.177.
36 Mosse, Fallen Soldiers, pp. 32-35.
37 King, Memorials of the Great War, pp. 11 and 135.
Samuel Hynes observed that memorials ‘embody’ ideas about war and have their own language. For Paul Fussell, whose own memories were expressed through language and shaped by personal experience, the iconography of the war itself underpins interpretation of memory. The basis of interpretation is hence important and, in the view of Abousmouga and Machin, analysis of visual symbols of commemoration depends on description but needs a point of reference as signs have meaning only in relation to other signs. Malcolm Quinn agrees that symbols must be seen in context but argues that they neither contain nor produce meaning but rather enable individuals to generate understanding for themselves. Exploration of selected examples of the iconography on crosses, composite and figurative standalone memorials appear to represent what Geoff Archer describes as a ‘range of interests’ in order to reflect the community response, and themes of honour, peace, religion, politics, the representation of women, and national identity emerge. The more complex ‘composite’ structures which bear multiple images and sculptures demonstrate attempts by communities and designers to produce a response to commemoration that spoke for all.

Statistically, crosses are typical of village memorials and are commonly found in many towns across Wales. The simple memorial at Dollgellau in Gwynedd, unveiled in October 1921 features a granite Celtic cross mounted on a tapered plinth and three-step base, suggesting a predominantly religious sentiment. Similar to the Christian crucifixion cross and symbolising victory of life over death, the Celtic cross as an ancient symbol, may also represent the four seasons or four elements. The cross can therefore signify Christian principles and unity between the dead and the living whilst also aligning with more fundamental ancient beliefs, bearing in mind that Lutyens did not include a cross on the

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47 King, *Memorials of the Great War*, p. 131
Whitehall Cenotaph to ensure inclusivity for non-Christians although the contradiction between Christian ideals and support by churches and chapels for the war, was unreconcilable for some.\(^{48}\) On the sides of the cross shaft are indented reliefs, one carved with crossed leeks and an inscription in Welsh and the other a crown with inscription in English. The English inscription declares ‘they are not dead, such spirits never die’ while the Welsh inscription \textit{Addug Angau, Ni Ddwg Angof} affirms that ‘when death comes, it does not mean we forget’.\(^{49}\) The local population’s dual sense of identity and loyalty to King and country is evident in the symbolism of the Welsh leek and British crown, the former also traditionally associated with battle.\(^{50}\) Use of both languages may also reflect community composition and at the unveiling ceremony, some speeches were delivered in Welsh and some in English.\(^{51}\) Gwenllian Aubery’s study of inscriptions on First World War memorials in Wales where both are present, finds subtle differences in tone and vocabulary but at Dolgellau the expression of remembrance is very similar.\(^{52}\) Panels on all four faces of the pedestal list 107 local casualties of the First World War. As evidenced at a public meeting in Dolgellau in July 1919, there were many local memorial schemes in Merionethshire; from a county perspective, tablets and rolls of honour were seen as the optimal and most cost-effective approach.\(^{53}\) Alex King notes that tablets ‘carried the essential meaning of the memorial’ and the east-facing panel is headed by Mary Smith, out of the conventional alphabetical sequence that acknowledged equality of sacrifice and the only woman commemorated.\(^{54}\) Mary served in the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps and died at home in August 1918.\(^{55}\) Representation of women on memorials in Wales was relatively rare and,

\(^{48}\) McIntyre, \textit{Monuments of War}, p. 112; Archer, \textit{The Glorious Dead}, p.144.
\(^{49}\) ‘The Mawddach Estuary War Memorial’ Available at: \url{http://www.mawddachestuary.co.uk/warmemorials/#Dolgellau} Accessed 10 May 2022
\(^{51}\) Gaffney, \textit{Aftermath}, p.163.
\(^{52}\) Awbery, ‘The Language of Remembrance’ pp.129-130
\(^{54}\) King, \textit{Memorials of the Great War}, pp. 132, 189.
\(^{55}\) Record Details for Mary E. Smith, \textit{Forces War Records}, Available at: \url{Record Details for Mary E Smith (Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps) (forces-war-records.co.uk)} Accessed 10 May 2022; \textit{The Mawddach Estuary War Memorials}, Available at: \url{http://www.mawddachestuary.co.uk/warmemorials/} Accessed 10 May 2022;
like the use of both languages, recognition of her contribution may reflect the community desire to be inclusive.

The ‘composite’ war memorial in the town square at Rhayader in Powys was unveiled in September 1924. A stone clock tower, it also features a cross at the top of a domed gothic arch. The columns of the tower have open pediments and figures on cornices, above engraved panels with the names of eighty-eight First World War dead.56 Fulfilling a practical and traditional memorial function, it was designed by a local architect, Benjamin Lloyd.57 The extent to which his own ideas took precedent is unclear but in addition to the religious aspect, the memorial appears to fulfil Bernard Barber’s three requisite functions, a symbolic expression of social sentiment and value, an aesthetic appeal to art and beauty, and a utilitarian purpose.58 Its imposing size, communal location and provision of a timepiece, apparently donated by a war widow, address a practical need and make a statement about commitment to remembrance, also reflected in the lists of the fallen. The inscription evokes the Glory of God and gratitude to the dead but also states in both English and Welsh ‘they died that we might live’ Gwell Angau Na Chywil ydd.59 However, the detailed sculptured figures are the outstanding iconographic features, comprising a soldier, a winged female figure holding a child, an angel holding a wreath, and a Welsh dragon defeating a German eagle.60 The dragon is one of few to feature on war memorials in Wales and illustrates both Welshness and victory in a somewhat aggressive representation; Archer notes that victory is more often shown as an allegorical winged female figure and Winter agrees that most memorials do not celebrate victory because of the sacrifices made to


56 ‘Rhayader War Memorial’, Imperial War Museum, Available at: https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/6850 Accessed: 20 April 2022
57 Rhayader, Coflein, Available at: https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/32982?term=rhayader%20war%20memorial
Accessed: 20 April 2022
58 Barber, ‘Place, Symbol, and Utilitarian Function in War Memorials’, p. 66.
59 Rhayader, Coflein.
achieve it. At Rhayader, the two female figures offer a softer approach; one emphasises peace and the protective role of women and the other holds a wreath symbolic of the victory of life over death. In contrast to the rarely-seen dragon, the soldier is one of the most common images on war memorials, presented here as a slumped figure in mourning with rifle at ease. The composite design of the Rhayader memorial implies a desire to accommodate as many community views and interpretations as possible.

The emerging themes of sacrifice, women and community support are reflected in the figurative memorial at Merthyr Tydfil, designed by Gloucestershire-born Leonard Stanford Merrifield, which features a Portland stone niche with an arched cap, again emulating classical Roman architecture. The central alcove contains a bronze figure which, underlining the point about interpretation, is variously described as the legendary St Tydfil, one of the mythological Three Fates weaving the web of life, and ‘Madonna-like’. Standing on an altar of sacrifice, she is flanked by statues of a miner and mother and child, each pointing to a garland of funeral wreaths at the base. Again in protective pose, this woman appears to depict the endurance and separation of those left behind and the miner illustrates the contribution of the South Wales coalfields to the war effort both at the Front and as a reserved occupation. The iconography appears to have been carefully considered to represent the local mining community although a long delay in its construction because of difficulty in obtaining a suitable site, caused frustration and at the 1922 annual meeting of Merthyr Chamber of Trade, a member queried the slow provision of a memorial for the town. Eventually completed on a terraced hillside in 1931, the inscription in English and Welsh, introduces a religious note evoking ‘the Glory of God’ but bears no list of the war dead, the 1,140 names collected by the War Memorial Committee being too many for a plaque and hence recorded elsewhere. This contrasts with some communities in South

61 Archer, The Glorious Dead, p.42; Winter, Sites of Memory, p. 94.
62 Archer, The Glorious Dead, p.42;
64 ‘Annual Meeting of Merthyr Chamber of Commerce, Merthyr Express, 28 Oct 1922, p. 9, Available at: https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002970/19221028/082/0009 Accessed 21 April 2022
65 William Lewis, War Memorial Book (Town and Parish of Lampeter, 1921) Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwPbJefS7p1ZOEhruUG5OUR1dI/edit?resourcekey=0-DKkSmy17d0EcvVqa1RFV4hA Accessed 21 April 2022
Wales despite the value placed by families on remembrance; in Barry, the Committee struggled for responses and information provided was not thoroughly checked and could be inaccurate.66 Nonetheless, the iconography and level of engagement in Merthyr appears to represent the community and demonstrate its involvement in the memorial process. Gaffney suggests that its size was a matter of civic pride but cites a letter from a Merthyr war widow expressing strong preference for a monument rather than a hospital ward or ‘useless column’.67

The allegorical iconography of the Port Talbot memorial, set in a park donated in 1918 in memory of the war dead, also features the female form. It again seeks to cover a variety of aspects that can offer meaning and individual interpretation. The granite pillar mounted on a three-tier platform perhaps representing the Trinity, is surmounted by an imposing Angel of Victory holding a wreath and a small, winged Victory. On the bronze plaques attached to each of the four faces, are a male nude with garland and sword, against a background frieze of soldiers bearing rifles; a woman holding a torch lamp in front of a frieze of soldiers bearing a stretcher; a female with a child and a lamb surrounded by doves of peace; and an inscription panel in English only honouring God and the dead.68 If the iconography is intended to represent victory, war, remembrance and peace as suggested in the Coflein narrative there is also an overall sense that victory encompasses both humanity and inhumanity.69 The classical male nude figure could demonstrate the strength of a naked warrior but Nicholas Penny suggests that, in sculpture nude men and winged women are ‘poetic’, also noting that relief carvings can conjure action whereas static figures do not.70 These contradictory understandings illustrate the complexity of interpreting war memorial imagery. On a more practical note, Bertram Nayland observed that the ‘affluent feeling’ in Port Talbot on his return from the war was short-lived because the ‘industrial troubles in

66 Gaffney, Aftermath, p. 77.
67 Gaffney, Aftermath, pp. 67, 34
68 Port Talbot, Imperial War Museum, Available at: https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/2060 Accessed 20 April 2022.
69 Port Talbot, Coflein, Available at: https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/419433?term=port%20talbot%20war%20memorial Accessed 20 April 2022.
1921.....knocked poor old Wales back twenty, thirty years’.71 Concerns about memorial funding hence appear to have been a key part of decision-making. Letters to the Glamorgan Gazette in February 1925 suggest that people were ‘very fed up indeed’ with the way the fund had been run, believing that unveiling a memorial ‘encumbered by debt’ would be an ‘insult’ to the fallen.72

At Llandaff, the war memorial again features a female figure, positioned on a central plinth, flanked by two male statues, the younger in football boots perhaps evoking a sporting spirit, and an older man in workman’s clothing both bearing rifles. Designed by Cardiff-born Sir William Goscombe John and erected in 1924, the Celtic-robed woman sculpted in bronze, is an imposing sight wearing a crown with one arm raised, either in blessing, salute or defiance; in the other hand, she bears a protective shield. The male figures may represent ordinary men training as soldiers and according to Cadw, the female figure is symbolic of Llandaff itself. The inscription in English only remembers the ‘sons’ of Llandaff and the Cathedral School and commemorates 105 names.73 However, one of these is a woman, Edith Mary Tonkin, a Ward Maid with the Voluntary Aid Detachment who died on 13 October 1918 aged twenty-six and is buried in Mont Huon Military Cemetery, Le Tréport.74 As part of the iconography, this inclusion may well reflect community sentiment and while only one female name is listed, exclusion of others may have been a family choice.

This diversity of expression across the limited sample considered appears to reflect the multiplicity of thoughts the memorials collectively aimed to express and the potential difficulties in respecting all. Nonetheless, through the variety of classical, allegorical and


72 ‘Port Talbot War Memorial’ Glamorgan Gazette, 13 Feb 1925, p. 6, Available at: https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002846/19250213/109/0006, Accessed 20 April 2022.


74 Edith Mary Tonkin, Lives of the First World War, Imperial War Museum, Available at: https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/searchlives/Edith%20Mary%20Tonkin/filter Accessed 30 March 2022

figurative structures, certain themes recur in the iconography, particularly Christian principles of duty and sacrifice, representation of women, use of language, victory and national pride. The relationship between the associated symbolism and meaning and commemoration in a community context is therefore worthy of further exploration.

Figure 2: Caernarfon War Memorial  
Source: Photos by author 6 May 2022  

Figure 3: Caernarfon – dragon relief
Chapter 2
Community commemoration: Collective mourning and the commissioning and design of local memorials

The equitable split of war memorials between North and South Wales suggests that across the country at community level, there was a shared purpose and desire to commemorate the sacrifices made in the Great War. Reflecting this sentiment, each memorial was unique in its design and inscriptions and local war memorial committees were appointed with responsibility for the commissioning, funding and design of memorials.75 Jenny Macleod notes that such was the ‘intense localism’ in Wales that the proposed national memorial in Cardiff met with little financial support from other areas and became essentially a commercial exercise, promoted by the Conservative *Western Mail*.76 The bulk of funding was donated by subscribers in Cardiff and Glamorgan who, with interest, raised £34,000.77 In September 1917, the *Welsh Outlook* reported Pembrokeshire’s ‘petulant spirit of hostility and the decision to ‘remain outside’ the National Memorial Scheme.78 By July 1919, the Chair of Montgomery County Council recorded that that they were ‘pretty well sick of Cardiff’ and although they nominated two representatives, Caernarvon Town Council was relieved to hear that the scheme had been abandoned and ratepayers were to be ‘spared the expense’. Of 200 councils approached for help, only twenty-one agreed to participate 79 Nonetheless, the *Western Mail* felt the memorial commemorated a ‘glorious spirit of unity and kinship’80 having celebrated the bilingual unveiling ceremony on 12 June

75 Gaffney, *Aftermath*, p. 24
77 Gaffney, *Aftermath*, p. 45;
80 ‘Welsh National Memorial’, *Western Mail* 11 July 1928 p.6, Available at: Welsh National War Memorial, | Western Mail | Wednesday 11 July 1928 | British Newspaper Archive Accessed 14 April 2022.
1928 attended by the Prince of Wales and Lloyd George, as a national effort, reporting crowds of ‘ten deep’. However, Macleod contends that despite this, its inscriptions in both English and Welsh and the recording of 35,000 names of the fallen at the Welsh National Museum, because of its dearth of Welsh materials, absence of a Welsh designer, and the Committee’s desire for a Greek shrine-like design, it lacked ‘Welshness’ and was far less representative than its more successful counterpart, the North Wales Heroes Memorial in Bangor. Kimberley Ackels contends that national war memorials ‘sanitised’ war and agrees with Alex King that they were used for ‘propagation of political attitudes’ and served a ‘latent political purpose’ at a time of instability, apparently the case at Cardiff. She suggests that governments relied on symbolism such as the dolphins and lions on this memorial to convey Christian ideas of hope, strength and courage. It appears that, in Cardiff, while considerable local financial support for the memorial was forthcoming there was little interest from elsewhere and the design was outsourced and impersonal, with preferences driven by the Executive Committee.

The North Wales Heroes Memorial Arch and associated University College Science buildings in Bangor were also erected by public subscription including a donation of £100 from the Prince of Wales. By 1924, a total of £90,000 had been collected from across North Wales, London, Liverpool and Manchester with remaining monies used to fund student scholarships, fulfilling the need for a structured memorial and a utilitarian function. The Committee included representatives from the counties of North Wales and from church, academic, political and military organisations. The two-storey Tudor-style gateway with bronze doors, carved coats of arms on the stonework and panelled ceilings were also erected by public subscription including a donation of £100 from the Prince of Wales.

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81 ‘Homage of Wales to her fallen sons’ Western Mail, 13 June 1928, p. 6. Available at: Western Mail | Wednesday 13 June 1928 | British Newspaper Archive Accessed 14 April 2022
83 Timberly Ackels, ‘Lest we forget: Exploring collective memory in interwar Britain’, Southern Methodist University, 2009 pp. 63-64 Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/305000779/84D3693A2C0A46F1PQ/41?accountid=14697 Accessed 24 April 2022
was designed by Bolton-based but Carmarthenshire-born D Wynne Thomas. The design competition which required a sculpted building, was by invitation only, drawing negative press comment.\(^88\) However, it indicates that the committee had driven the memorial type and design, which encompasses military and imperial symbols together with Welsh emblems, combining national pride, regional and local sentiment.\(^89\) The wooden, carved panels on the upper floor bear the names of 8,500 war dead from North Wales and the arch features foliage carvings including the Prince of Wales fleur-de-lys feathers and an English rose, with dragon carvings on either side.\(^90\) Tablets on either side of the doorway are inscribed in English and Welsh to the memory of the fallen heroes of North Wales. The Caernarvon Memorial Committee files include a letter from the North Wales Heroes Committee dated 13 October 1922 asking for names of those from the town for inclusion, evidencing wider community involvement and support.\(^91\)

The National Heroes memorial in Bangor displays little religious iconography despite church involvement but the City of Bangor’s own tribute is one of many crosses symbolising Christian sacrifice, mounted at the top of an obelisk on an octagonal plinth as often used for baptismal fonts, representing redemption and new beginnings. A sword of sacrifice is engraved on two faces of the pillar and the base bears inscriptions to the glory of God and memory of the fallen in both Welsh and English with panels bearing alphabetically listed names of 128 First World War dead.\(^92\) However, unlike the National Heroes project, the Bangor memorial was subject to controversy at local level with opposition to a utilitarian scheme partly on the grounds of its Christian YMCA connection. In April 1919, the *North Wales Chronicle* and *Caernarfon and Denbighshire Herald* reported on a War Memorial


\(91\) ‘North Wales Heroes Committee’ 13 October 1922, *The Gwyndd Archives*, XM/1369/67

Committee meeting at which Mr T F Dargie had explained the YMCA proposal for a non-political ‘rallying centre’ for young men, sailors and soldiers; portraits of lost servicemen from the town would adorn the walls. Although already approved by the Mayor and with £2,500 of the estimated £8,500 cost already raised, other Committee members expressed concern about the lack of independence of this scheme, also rejected by the Comrades Association on grounds that the abstemious YMCA was not a secular organisation. By May 1919, in face of opposition, the YMCA scheme had been dropped and a town meeting was held on 22 May 1919, recognising that people had not been allowed to approach the question of a memorial with an open mind’. At that meeting, the Committee had also received other suggestions including a playing field, swimming baths and monument and the Comrades had offered a counter-proposal for a non-sectarian, non-political (but not non-alcoholic), institute but were prepared to accept a city memorial in recognition of those who fought. A new Committee was formed but John Roberts of the Old Museum, Bangor, observed that the ‘persistent’ revival of circumstances arising from the Comrades’ objections had dented public enthusiasm for the war memorial, which was finally unveiled in its present form on 31 October 1923, Christian principles and public opinion having apparently prevailed as reflected in the simple design and message. The issues in Bangor appear to have focussed on the religious nature of the YMCA proposal but the dissent bears out King’s theory that management of choice was a challenge and could be influenced by local political and social interests and Maurice Halbwachs’ collective memory theory about the influence of human beings over each other within different social groups. The discussion and suggested alternatives also illustrate that there was a body of opinion in favour of remembrance through what Barber terms ‘living memorials’ which served an

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94 ‘Proposed Bangor War Memorial, Objection to YMCA Control’ *North Wales Chronicle*, 17 April 1919, p.3. Available at: https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4245907/4245910/37/war%20memorial Accessed 4 May 2022.
ongoing practical and communal purpose. Gaffney points out that often, memorial buildings may have been a first choice but were superseded by monuments on grounds of cost, with any residual funds used for social purposes. Ultimately, the type and design of memorial, whether utilitarian or otherwise, had to reflect the values of the community and serve the purpose of remembrance in a way that was compatible with individual and group interpretation.

In nearby Caernarfon, there were also complaints about the Committee’s approach, this time regarding design and the commissioning of an architect. On 13 November 1918, Rowland Lloyd Jones, the County Architect, wrote from France suggesting Twthill as a site for a memorial that should be an ‘expression of love and gratitude.....noble, beautiful, simple....to ease the sorrow of those who are left’. At a public meeting held in March 1919, the question of form although ‘little mentioned in public’ was discussed and options considered included a monument, memorial hall, YMCA boys and girls club, healthcare provision for the poor, and a welfare scheme for dependants of the fallen. However, the key requirement was a structure inscribed with names of the dead, demonstrating the importance afforded by the community to this aspect of design. By August 1920, the Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald was querying lack of progress, noting that other towns had done more. Another public meeting on 14 December 1920 concluded that the estimated cost of Lloyd Jones plan to convert a sports hall to a memorial hall at £30,000 was prohibitive. A letter from the Borough Accountant on 20 December 1920 asserted that ‘the general consensus of opinion in the town’ was that the memorial should be of a ‘simple but artistic design’ and Committee meeting minutes from the same day note a shortlist of a
soldier, cairn or cenotaph. In arguing that design was driven by commercial needs, professional judgement and practices rather than client requests, Alex King notes that central guidance was available and while some Committees applied contractual restrictions to ‘preserve consensus’, most were open to advice. Having decided on a cenotaph-type structure, initial designs from Lloyd Jones and the architect Robert Pierce were deemed unacceptable by the Office of Works which was promoting ‘medieval crosses’. In response, Pierce observed ‘nothing is more likely to arouse controversy [among the artistic fraternity]...than ‘the question of art’. For the ‘great fortress’ town of Caernarfon, he felt the memorial should symbolise sacrifice and victory with inscriptions in Welsh and names of the fallen. The Committee was prescriptive when inviting architects to compete for the work. Designs were invited from three architects for consideration by Professor A. C. Dickie of Manchester University with a maximum budget of £1,200 including inscriptions on bronze panels and manufacture, a construction of suitable stone, not too large, with inscriptions on brass panels but no mention of artistic iconography. The assessor’s decision to award first place to Lloyd Jones was robustly challenged by Robert Pierce who contended that Jones had broken the rules by submitting three designs rather than two which, while not stated in the written invitation, had been the intended approach and the file copy of the draft recommendation for the memorial bears out this assertion. King points out that memorial design was a business opportunity although Committees did not always adopt the assessor’s recommendation but at Caernarfon, it was agreed on 20 June 1922. Funded by public subscription in amounts ranging from 1d to £100, the cenotaph was unveiled on 12


112 King, *Memorials of the Great War*, p. 106; Caernarfon War Memorial Committee minutes, 20 June 1922, *The Gwynedd Archives*, XD1/895;
November 1922 but not by Lloyd George as expected because he was unwell.\textsuperscript{113} It is surmounted by a finely-sculpted threatening dragon, with crosses carved in relief near the top of each side, carved shields including the town coat of arms on each side of the lower section and dedications to the fallen in Welsh with their names inscribed on brass panels. The castellated decoration of the turrets mirror the style of the castle. In fulfilling his remit, the designer has delivered an imposing structure, capturing simple messages of Welshness, patriotism, recognition of Caernarfon’s history and Christian remembrance and appears to have achieved community requirements.\textsuperscript{114}

Professional designers and sculptors therefore played a key role in the relationship between memorial design and community sentiment. As early as 1916, \textit{The Times} editorial suggested that memorials must express public taste but observed that the artist ‘cannot give us what we like unless we know what we like’. Memorials must have a purpose and the artist ‘cannot give them purpose…..only carry out their purpose’.\textsuperscript{115} Sir William Goscombe John commented that he made ‘twenty different designs before reaching the final stage’ of the Llandaff memorial suggesting that interpretation of requirements could be an iterative and nuanced process.\textsuperscript{116} His design for the Lampeter memorial was perhaps simpler than his other more dramatic figurative structures and was produced following public rejection of the Memorial Committee’s decision to erect a monument, which was later overturned after consultation with bereaved families.\textsuperscript{117} The Lampeter Womens’ Institute (W.I.) had also discussed the memorial and voted for ‘some form of monument’ with any surplus funds to go towards ‘some object of use’, an indication that in this community, there were again


mixed views about design and form. At a well-attended public meeting in April 1919, four schemes were put to a ballot with a monument out-scoring a park containing a monument by 36 votes; a cottage hospital and girls school received little support. The Committee evidently used the wishes of the bereaved to achieve its original purpose but the defeated proposer of the memorial park nonetheless made a generous donation. The War Memorial Book, issued by the Committee to mark the unveiling on 14 October 1921, noted that the initial public meeting ‘did not go smoothly’ but ‘Lampeter felt proud indeed’ to secure Goscombe John’s services and acknowledged the support of ex-servicemen, public donations and the work of others, including a father who had lost his only son. Set on a raised, gated terrace with benches for contemplation on a site donated by a local family, Goscombe John’s design features a bronze statue of a lone soldier in full kit with a slung rifle on a granite base. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in May 1921, ‘The Victor’ is described as possessing ‘an almost holy calm’. The Committee’s view of the intended message was to ‘inspire courage, faithfulness, patriotism and the love of duty’. The inscription which includes the Welsh phrase *Mewn Angor Ni Chant Fod* ‘They will not be forgotten’ honours 41 servicemen and one woman, Ella Richards, a nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment who died on active service on 14 October 1918 and is buried in Salonica. The relationship between community mourning and design in Lampeter appears to have been close, with women represented on both the Committee and the memorial itself.

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120 William Lewis, *War Memorial Book* (Town and Parish of Lampeter, 1921), p.10. Available at: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwPbJefS7p1ZOEhUUG5VOUR1dI/edit?resourcekey=0-DKkSmy1T7dOEzVaqlRFV4hA](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwPbJefS7p1ZOEhUUG5VOUR1dI/edit?resourcekey=0-DKkSmy1T7dOEzVaqlRFV4hA) Accessed 30 April 2022.


122 ‘Opening of Royal Academy Exhibition’, Dundee Courier, 2 May 1921, p. 3. Available at: [https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000164/19210502/034/0003](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000164/19210502/034/0003) Accessed 30 April 2022.


Women were also included on inscribed panels at the Swansea Cenotaph, designed by Borough architect Ernest Morgan and prominently positioned on Swansea Esplanade. Situated in a sunken octagonal ‘Court of Memory’, symbolically requiring those who visit to descend below ground level to be closer to those they mourn, it ensures contemplation cannot be ‘idle’ or ‘passing’. Panels on the inner walls bear names of 2,274 First World War dead servicemen, servicewomen and munitions workers and that of war widow, Mrs Fewings, who laid the Kings Shilling under the foundation stone. Constructed in Portland stone, on the two broader sides of the cenotaph are bronze reliefs of the Swansea arms inscribed ‘For God and Country’ in Latin and an anchor inside a wreath. The Swansea War Memorial Committee had considered sketches in the Local Government Chronicles in May 1919, which urged communities to be mindful of setting and take professional advice. Options of ‘an imposing memorial of large dimension’ were discussed including an illuminated clock tower on Townhill or a cenotaph on the Promenade at an estimated cost of £3,000 using residual monies for the education of children of the fallen. A public meeting on 8 May 1920 noted a variety of suggestions and the principle that the memorial should be long-lasting and for everyone. Nonetheless, like Caernarfon and Lampeter, the process was not without challenge. The Cambria Daily Leader in January 1919 noted suggestions for a technical college, scholarships, a monument or lasting reminder of sacrifice. The Herald of Wales also reported a ‘diversity of views’ as to the form of memorial but ‘clear unanimity of opinion’ among burgesses that it should serve all of Greater Swansea. However, the paper noted that three ex-servicemen organisations had agreed on a hostel scheme and other areas including Landore, Fforestfach and Mumbles favoured local memorials.

126 ‘Swansea War Memorial Committee’, 7 November 1919, West Glamorgan Archives, TI57/14.
127 ‘Swansea Cenotaph’, Imperial War Museum. Available at: Swansea | War Imperial War Museums (iwm.org.uk) Accessed 1 April 2022; ‘Swansea Cenotaph, Coflein. Available at: Swansea Cenotaph | Coflein Accessed 1 April 2022.
129 ‘Minutes of Memorial Committee’, 7 November 1919, West Glamorgan Archives, TI57/14.

letter from Mr Payne at Mumbles advocated a separate tablet dedicated to war heroes from that district; J. L. Lewis, a ‘discharged soldier’ from Swansea favoured ‘a worthy work of art.....religious in nature’ albeit conceding that the opinion of bereaved parents should prevail.\textsuperscript{132} Perhaps a little biased, \textit{The Cambria} supported the Mayor in pressing ahead with the central memorial despite breakaway activity which favoured separately funded utilitarian options. It saw provision of hospitals and communal buildings as a ‘municipal obligation’ believing such memorials were ‘dishonourable’ to the memory of the dead. In its opinion, the memorial should be ‘distinctive, standing alone from the affairs of everyday life’.\textsuperscript{133} In the event, money was allocated to alleviate hardship for disabled soldiers.

Following unveiling of the cenotaph on 21 July 1923, the British Legion raised a grievance regarding inclusion of names of county officials on the panels. Letters to the press had also expressed strong protest and the Committee passed a resolution for their removal and agreed to remind people of the sanctity of the Court of Memory as some ‘lack of reverence’ had been reported.\textsuperscript{134} Notably, the ancient religious swastika symbol representing divinity and wellbeing remains in the corners of inscribed panels despite its later association with Nazis in the Second World War. As Quinn has argued, symbols are not objects but ‘used by people’ to elicit meaning and all are open to interpretation.\textsuperscript{135} The request for names had been published in March 1922 and the contributions made by Swansea women killed in explosions at the Pembrey munitions factory were recognised on a separate panel, including Dorothy Mary Watson and Mildred Owen who died in July 1917.\textsuperscript{136}

The traditional design combining visual impact with a focus on inscriptions, simplicity and space for personal reflection feels proportionate to the losses suffered but there is little indication that the symbolism reflects community feeling. The consultative process and level of engagement as evidenced by newspaper reports and correspondence, suggests that it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Letter from Mr Payne to Swansea Memorial Committee, February 1919, \textit{West Glamorgan Archives}, TL 57/14; ‘Celtic Cross Proposed’ \textit{Cambria Daily Leader} 19 April 1919  p. 5. Available at: \url{https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4426831/4426836/81/war%20memorial}. Accessed 2 April 2022.
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\item \textsuperscript{134} War Memorial Committee minutes, 14 August 1923, \textit{West Glamorgan Archives}, TL 57/14.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Quinn, \textit{The Swastika}, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{136} War Memorial Committee minutes, 31 March 1922, \textit{West Glamorgan Archives}, TL 57/14; ‘Munitions Girls in Mourning’ \textit{South Wales Daily Post}, 11 August 1917 Available at: \url{funeral_south_wales_daily_post_11_august_1917.png (396×700) (womenandwar.wales)}. Accessed 6 April 2022; ‘Women, Wales and War’ \textit{Women’s Archive of Wales}, Available at: \url{Browse the collection Women and War: Women’s Archive of Wales} Accessed 6 April 2022
\end{itemize}
was an emotive topic and the civic approach was not wholly supported, despite its religious and military elements. The number of other suggestions received and many smaller memorials in the Swansea area also indicate that in a larger town, remembrance in sub-districts was equally important and probably more personal. The simple Mumbles stone-slab memorial commemorating 131 First World War casualties, was not unveiled until 30 July 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, testament perhaps to the community’s persistence and determination to acknowledge its war dead and illustrating that the monument itself with inscribed names served purpose and need; detailed design and symbolism was not always required.

**Figure 4: Lampeter War Memorial**

Source: Photo by author 6 May 2022

137 ‘Welsh Memorials to the Great War, Swansea University (2022). Available at: [https://war-memorials.swan.ac.uk/](https://war-memorials.swan.ac.uk/) Accessed 26 March 2022

Conclusion

In this brief study of selected standalone edifices on external sites, some common themes emerge in the analysis of iconography and of community feeling in relation to commissioning and design of local memorials. However, variations also occur in the meaning attributed to memorials themselves and their detailed features, in the approach taken by local Memorial Committees and professional designers, and in the community response and level of engagement whether emotional or financial.

All of the memorials and communities considered, appear to convey a shared need to recognise the sacrifices made and put in place a lasting tribute, even from ex-servicemen who may have felt the fallen were more valued that those who served and returned. In Bangor and Swansea these groups demonstrated a clear preference for utilitarian-type memorials that were of tangible benefit to the living but were not ultimately agreed. Alex King argues that memorials were primarily influenced by the institutions involved and the symbols used were an indicator of ‘social and political stability or change’ but nonetheless concludes that commemoration was a surprisingly united affair on a national scale, conducted at local level. Committees certainly held decision-making powers but in these examples, there was consultatation and divergence occurred, particularly regarding the type of memorial as in Lampeter and Bangor, and the location as in Swansea where smaller districts wished to pursue their own schemes. In addition, regional divisions occurred in relation to the Welsh National Memorial in Cardiff where support from beyond Glamorgan was notably lacking and the corresponding North Wales Heroes memorial was a more successful project. The iconographic detail was largely the interpretation of designers who competed won commissions, as in Caernarfon, and were not always local people.

Catherine Moriarty contends that although public memorials represented community loss, they reveal little about the way people felt and the extent to which they offered comfort could be limited. This was not the case in Lampeter, where design and

139 King, Memorials of the Great War, pp. 9, 15.
140 Moriarty, ‘In a Picture Only’, p.34.
symbolism appears to have reflected and directed community sentiment with the views of bereaved families taking precedence in terms of form and design. The Memorial Committee’s willingness to seek and support their views may have been motivated by a desire to proceed with its original decision but the resulting statue represents the soldiers mourned and offers no air of triumph, rather one of reassurance to serve the needs of the grieving community. In contrast with the civic cenotaph in Swansea, it is more personal.

Design and symbolism suggest recurring themes around Christian principles of sacrifice and resurrection, the glory of God, national pride and Welshness, the role of women, and a focus on soldiers as ordinary but heroic men, all equal in death. Welsh inscriptions or phrases are used on all but three of the memorials examined in this study and of these, one is in Latin and the others are in South Wales indicating that the designs do reflect the communities they represent although the Welsh dragon appears only three times. If inscriptions are included, women are featured in over half, either as allegorical figures of Victory, mothers or named fallen heroines, also reflecting post-war recognition of their qualities and contribution.

Stephen Heathorn suggested that if monuments are an aid to memory and provide shared consolation in bereavement for the living and equality in sacrifice for the dead, the impact of art and iconography must depend not on designers’ intentions but on the understanding of the wider population.141 The micro-study approach of this dissertation has confirmed that the symbolism of selected examples is as varied as its interpretation but with some common themes. It has also shown that in some communities, despite outsourcing to architects, there was a relationship between design and communal mourning although it may not have reflected a majority view. There is much further research to be done at local level to explore this question further. Remembrance in the context of war memorials is therefore a complex combination of places, emblems, images, and words in a tangible form.

that served individuals and groups, and continues to convey a message of respect and commemoration to succeeding generations.

*Mewn Angof Ni Chant Fod* ... ‘They shall not be forgotten’¹⁴²

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**Figure 5:** Swansea Cenotaph

Source: Photos by the author, 1 April 2022

**Figure 6:** Mumbles Memorial

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**Words:** 7,634

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¹⁴² From a poem by John Ceriog Hughes, cited by Gwenllian M. Awbery, in 'The Language of Remembrance', p.127
Appendix 1

[Image: War Memorials in Wales - Distribution by County]

Source: War Memorials Register, Imperial War Museum [iwm.org.uk], March 2022

Appendix 2

[Image: War Memorials in Wales by Type]

Source: War Memorials Register, Imperial War Museum [iwm.org.uk], March 2022
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