“Worthy of th'heroic dead”:
Gratitude, Memory, and Local Action in a Grieving Britain

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Remembrance both haunts and supports a community. A form of preservation, the process of remembrance requires both collaboration and clear objectives: more specifically, what emotions should future generations inherit? In a postwar society, gruesome experience and painful bereavement converged in commemorative actions. As Pericles observed, “grief is felt not so much for the want of what we have never known, as for the loss of that to which we have been long accustomed.”1 In the years immediately following the First World War, the British people actively searched for ways they could collectively mark the transition from life that had “been long accustomed” to a new life framed by loss. Britain entered into a period of transition; a kind of culture of commemoration emerged following the Armistice. On all levels grief was personal. How a community, whether a rural hamlet or an urban enclave, should commemorate the tragedy required a combination of civic responsibility and personal mourning. The nation was searching for a way to translate their grief to bereavement and their bereavement to commemoration.

Yet if one visits the small village of South Elmham, St. Michael (Suffolk), a conspicuous abnormality may be shortly realized. Unlike most localities in Great Britain, with the exception of the fifty others that share the same good fortune as South Elmham, St. Michael2, there is no public war memorial. No Cross or obelisk connects the residents to the bereavement born out of the Great War. What was “long accustomed” was not lost in communities like South Elmham, St. Michael, but simply translated. As a

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2 According to Norman Thorpe, Rod Morris and Tom Morgan, responsible for a database that lists the thankful villages and their commemorative methods: http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/thankful.htm.
“thankful village,” a community where all enlisted men returned home from the War, the absence of immediate grief and the presence of thanksgiving manifested itself with a simple roll of honor in the parish church. At once an aberration and a normality, this thankful commemorative gesture constitutes yet another level of commemoration missing from the narratives about the War’s memorialization. How did those fifty one communities that did not immediately mourn compare in their memorialization to those communities that did mourn? How does an understanding of thankful village memorialization contribute to or challenge the historiography surrounding Great War commemoration? The way in which the nation’s communities processed modern warfare, articulated its significance, and determined its commemoration was affected by the sheer breadth of mourning. A process involving “individual acts” that are “socially determined,” the commemorative process began with local communities looking for a method by which the tragedy would be appropriately memorialized in response to the needs of the locality.

Historians have tended to study either the process of mourning and commemoration on a national scale or on a localized scale. How commemoration was produced by specific bereavement and how the memorials contributed to nationalistic goals have been crucial components of the historiography. Studies of Armistice Day, the War Graves Commission, and the development of the Cenotaph have each contributed

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to or been complicated by Britain’s road toward healing. It is logical, then, that this project proceed within the context of the larger historiographical debates surrounding not only commemoration, but the post-war social analysis required to comprehend the seemingly inexorable grief. Ultimately this study is about memorialization rather than the effects of historical memory. It will contribute to the historiography in a new way by addressing the thankful villages. Scholars have approached British memorials to the War’s fallen as expressions of heroic and patriotic language; however, others have emphasized the centrality of local action to the development of the early memorials. The thankful villages’ commemorative forms, developing without immediate grief, mediate this debate: they demonstrated how a community could maintain highly localized commemorative forms, while also illuminating the significant need to participate in a national process of grief.

I

The post-Armistice British historical landscape can be approached in a number of ways. Scholars of the period have studied the ways in which the war transformed demographics, economics, culture, and Empire. And within these historical lenses, methodology can prove to be a challenge: different voices present different documentation of post-war Britain. Statistics, poetry, memoirs, memorials, to cite a few, have been used to measure the pulse of the post-War nation. Paul Fussell has observed how, “that war detaches itself from its normal location in chronology and its accepted set of causes and effects to become Great in another sense -- all-encompassing,
all-pervading, both internal and external at once.”⁶ Fussell alluded to all the different (and changing) mediums by which the War was remembered, and thus, was conveyed to the future.

In his well loved poem, “1914: The Soldier,” Rupert Brooke wrote the following words:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England’s, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.⁷

Here Brooke united soldier to England and man to earth in order to craft a poem that was at once patriotic and foreboding. Made all the more ironic by Brooke’s subsequent death from illness while serving with British forces the following year, the sonnet is emblematic of a set of war poetry shaped by men from the educated middle class: a British class whose poetry’s breadth of memorialization combined mastery of literary style and allusion. As Fussell observed about Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et decorum est:” “It is unthinkable that any American poem issuing from the Great War would have as its title and its last two lines a tag from Horace familiar to every British schoolboy.”⁸ As Fussell suggested, familiarity, patriotism, and style produced, out of the poets’ “evidence of experience,” a memory that could “speak not for one heart only, but for all to whom

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⁶ Fussell, 348.
[England’s] call has come in the hour of need and found instantly ready,” as one 1915 contributor wrote to the *Times*. Britain’s collective grief partly relied on this work, produced by such men as Brooke, Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg, in order to translate memory into collective memory.

Born out of “national necessity,” this form of memorialization provided for England a space through which the nation could express collective grief and thereby also memorialize the tragedy. In 1915 May Herschel-Clark wrote “The Mother” in response to “The Soldier.” Her poem emulated Brooke’s in language, tone, and theme:

If you should die, think only this of me  
In that still quietness where is space for thought, 
Where parting, loss and bloodshed shall not be, ...  
...think, my son, with eyes grown clear and dry  
She lives as though forever in your sight,  
Loving the things you loved, with heart aglow  
For country, honor, truth, traditions high  
--Proud that you paid the price.¹¹

Herschel-Clark’s work demonstrated a process of memorialization in which the mourner, in this case the mother, continued to articulate the same principles for which a soldier, perhaps her own son, gave his life. Judith Kazantzis communicated this process in the following way: “She will immortalize him in her obedience to the values for which he died.”¹² There is an important distinction, then, between memory and remembrance.

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a distinction that is given considerable attention by scholars of social memory.
Brooke’s observations and emotions recorded in “The Soldier” were the memories;
Herschel-Clark’s “immortalization” of such memories was a process of memorialization.
It would be inconceivable to proceed into a discussion of memorialization without
elaborating on this distinction.

Maurice Halbwachs has most prominently written on this core component of
memory’s development. In On Collective Memory, Halbwachs studied the way in which
an event’s memory was shaped by the specific receiving that memory. Memorialization,
then, is a matter of contextualization. Class and culture both determine which
memories become collective, how the “mind reconstructs its memories under the
pressure of society.” Whether on a collective or an individual scale, either through
monument or letter, what and how one chooses to remember is determined by external
factors. Herschel-Clark applied Brooke’s themes of national honor, duty, and sacrifice to
the establishment of her own memory. She placed her personal experience within
society’s own growing expectations for memorializing grief. This social undertaking was
about processing transition. There are a number of ways in which historians may
approach this moment in British culture. Among these methodological differences are
varying results.

In his thorough demographic approach to post-War Britain, The Great War and
the British People, Jay Winter demonstrated how two very different mediums, data and
personal account, could communicate very different realities about the ravaged nation.

Within demography and economics, Winter tracked various continuities and discontinuities in regard to the War’s effect on the nation. Winter demonstrated how changing wages affected nutrition, establishing new positions for the lower classes.\textsuperscript{14} Simultaneously Winter demonstrated the “unequal distribution of war losses:” greater enlistments in the upper classes, medical examination failures in the lower class, and the vulnerability of officers, most of whom were of the higher classes.\textsuperscript{15} Post-war demographic changes suggested social changes that began long before the November 1918 Armistice. Winter argued that “demographic gains in wartime is an indictment of a society that tolerated conditions of deprivation in peacetime but that found the means to alter them in wartime.”\textsuperscript{16} Yet after articulating the specificity of demographic response, Winter moves in his final section to articulating the complications of emotional response. When considering the “separation and bereavement” of soldiers, Winter wrote, “It is this ambivalence towards a war of staggering carnage which made their being bereaved so difficult and so full of shifting emotions.” Winter continues, “In nearly all war literature, disgust at the meaningless of death in the trenches was accompanied by profound affection for the men who fell, as well as for those who managed to survive.”\textsuperscript{17} Winter pointed out how these conceptions of the dead, “shifting” and “profound,” were inadequate in light of memorialization: “these collective rituals were insufficient to prevent survivors from carrying with them the memory of the dead” either through literature or memoir, anxiety or indifference.\textsuperscript{18} Guilt complicated both

\textsuperscript{15} Winter, 281  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 4.  
\textsuperscript{17} Winter, 291-92.  
\textsuperscript{18} Winter, 298.
soldiers’ and citizens’ post-War experiences. Henry Williamson in his memoir *The Patriot’s Progress* wrote, “I must return to my old comrades of the Great War -- to the brown, the treeless, the flat and grave-set plain of Flanders ... for I am dead with them, and they live in me again.”¹⁹ Williamson imagined himself unremoved from the past; his writing memorialized a need for reconciliation. The poignancy of Williamson’s memoir demonstrated how memorials could only do so much for surviving men.

Winter’s observations revealed how, “the act of remembrance was conducted in different ways and with different voices.”²⁰ As opposed to demographic or economic data, Winter suggested how complex memory would be. Britain had changed. Yet the ways in which scholars would analyze change would be shaped by what medium would be used to articulate that change. As Fussell and Winter have suggested, the way in which British citizens imagined their relationship with the dead differed greatly among individuals. Great War commemoration is fundamentally a case study in this British cultural transition. War memorials and the text chosen for war memorials offer subsequent generations an opportunity to observe how the populace was imagining the dead and their nation. This method of understanding post-War Britain comes with its own set of problems and debates about those problems.

A public expression of private emotion, commemoration involved politics. As T.G. Ashplant observed, “The politics of war memory and commemoration is precisely the struggle of different groups to give public articulation to, and hence gain recognition for, certain memories and the narratives within which they are structured.”²¹ The

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²⁰ Winter, 303.
²¹ T.J. Ashplant, et al. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*
differences between memorialized thanksgiving and memorialized grief is yet another layer of commemoration the scholarship must address. This study of thanksgiving will attempt to contribute to an understanding of the many different voices and methods that comprised this point of transition for Britain.

The thankful engaged in the same uniform commemoration as the bereaved eventually did; thus, it is important to understand why both groups made these commemorative decisions -- decisions that would have lasting implications on the way in which future generations would think about the conflict. Scholarship on the ‘why’ has been explored: Natasha Danilova, Jay Winter, Mark Connelly, and Samuel Hynes, among others, have principally debated the following: approaching commemoration as a community process that established belonging to national or communal history; focusing on memorialization as a personal expression of mourning; or by studying the politics of commemoration and the way in which it mediated these different objectives.

While there was some agreement among writers as to the nature of the collective memory, there was also much debate. Samuel Hynes in A War Imagined dedicated much discussion to journalist Philip Gibbs. Gibbs’ Realities of War marked a considerable departure from the “consistently positive” reports he had produced during the conflict.22 For instance, Gibbs opened his 1917 report on Vimy Ridge with a keen optimism: “Today, at dawn, our armies began a great battle, which, if Fate has any kindness for the world, may be the beginning of the last great battles of the war.”23 He emphasized the war’s end rather than its already gruesome realities. Later, as Hynes

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noted, Gibbs wrote in *Realities* of his experience at Corbie hospital, “where there was a
great carving of human flesh which was of our boyhood, while the old men directed their
sacrifice.”\(^{24}\) Hynes was careful to analyze the differences in both language and tone. He
also argued how such horrific, yet realistic, imagery could not have been “tolerated”
before 1918.\(^{25}\) Timing played a role in determining which material would be acceptable
in national memorialization. While some praised the realities of the “moral witness”\(^{26}\)
Gibbs discussed, others favored the “nobility”\(^{27}\) of the more traditional forms of
memorialization: the “hope and determination”\(^{28}\) inspired by Herschel-Clark or Brooke.
Hynes suggested that this process is one of disenchantment. It was a “condition of loss”
that “extended its presence into English culture after the Armistice -- as forms of loss.”\(^{29}\)
These distinctions reveal the complexity and importance of the rhetoric used to establish
collective memory. Though English culture and politics entered into a new dialogue
about the role of remembrance, what is more significant to the history of Great War
memory is that disillusionment with the past was accompanied by immediate
disillusionment with ways in which the nation was attempting to remembering that
past.

    Heroic rhetoric, what Gibbs’ would have regarded as unrealistic idealism,
contributed to what George Mosse called “the myth of war experience”\(^{30}\) in the decade

\(^{25}\) Hynes, 284.
\(^{27}\) Edmund Gosse to Andre Gide. quoted in Hynes, 288.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Ibid, 311.
120.
following the Armistice. Established by a sense of nationalistic urgency, the formulaic, patriotic rhetoric that grew out of the heavily memorialized literature has been a position “too often accepted at face value,” according to Adrian Gregory.\(^{31}\) Gregory, in \textit{The Silence of Memory}, argues the centrality of the bereaved, not the evidence of experience, to the establishment of national remembrance. This argument was consistent with Halbwachs’: collective memory grew out of the receiver’s initiative -- an action that was directed by or contingent upon the societal context in which the information was received. As Winter observed, “We all recollect the past, but remembrance is generated by action.”\(^{32}\) At the center of this “action” resided a detailed process determinative to commemoration.

It is clear that this “action,” when studied within the context of competing memories, tended to focus on broader rhetorical and cultural trends. Historians have dedicated substantial focus on the effect of this cultural shift in England in the twentieth century: an “exponential” growth in our interest in historical memory. Yet at the core of this “action” there is still much to say about local memorialization. Halbwachs’ interest in memory was concerned with the local effect on this complex process of memorialization. As Gregory put it, “ritual” and “language” are not enough to articulate the way in which a British individual mourned and memorialized.\(^{33}\) What is needed, then, are opportunities in which comparisons can be made within the theatre of memorialization. This thematic and comparative study seeks to examine yet a deeper level of Great War commemoration: how those communities that did not mourn

\(^{31}\) Gregory, 120.  
\(^{32}\) Winter, \textit{Remembering War}, 277.  
\(^{33}\) Gregory, 6.
compared in their memorialization to those communities that did mourn. What was consistent? What was inconsistent? Was there communication between localities? Most importantly, how does an understanding of thankful village memorialization contribute to or challenge this historiography surrounding Great War memory?

II

In order to understand the significance of British individuals memorializing thanksgiving, it is important to place such efforts within the context of the bereaved. For local communities in England, the mourning process encompassed both individual and community. Collective, localized mourning did not just contribute to Brooke’s nationalism or Gibbs’ pessimism, but tended to momentarily focus inward. Take, for instance, news of the death of twins Archibald and Adolphus Gallienne from the Channel Island of Guernsey in June 1918: “They were, in their 24th year and will be remembered as two of the most prominent players of the Rocquaine Football Club ... Previous to being called up, Archie had been employed for several years by Mr. James McKane ... while Adolphus was in the employ of Mr. John Fallaize, of Rocquaine.”

For the twins’ parents the grief would have been unbearable. Yet also for the community from which the twins were sent to France, the loss would have been poignant. The notice in the Guernsey Press did not only articulate familial grief, but also a kind of communal investment in the twins. What is significant here, like any obituary, is how each lost soldier “was also part of the network of relationships that might involve jobs, neighborhoods, friendship or shared sports,” wrote Elizabeth Walton on the Guernsey

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losses. As the most tragic result of the infamous ‘Pals’ battalions, uniformity in death, as in enlistment, extended the pain throughout the entire community. Thus, the community’s response focused initially inward toward the community’s specific loss prior to focusing outward toward national grief: “an effort to think publicly about painful issues,” wrote Winter.

Mark Connelly has written extensively on the value of studying localized memorialization. Whatever the socio-economic status, location, or size may be, a focus on community working to articulate their grief (or their thanksgiving) is valuable because it demonstrates how a locality could “refine” its memories. Connelly observed the need for close studies of local commemoration aside from the scholarship concerned with the art and “ironic content” advanced by some historians. Rather than just being studied objectively, as forms of art, memorials may also be studied ethically, as ways in which they connected people and communities. Thus, studying memorials is not an exercise in analyzing chosen text, but rather, engaging with a community’s carefully chosen, refined sentiments purposed for future analysis.

The War’s impact was immediately felt and internalized in the years following the Armistice. One reviewer wrote in a December 1919 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* that the Great War “chang[ed] the whole face of things.” Many historians have studied the Great War as a representation of cultural, military, or political discontinuities. Fussell explained how the soldier’s and nation’s responses to the

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36 Jay Winter, *Remembering War*, 140.
modernized warfare represented a break from cultural tradition or myth, and thereby “frame[d] memory, our memory” of the war.\textsuperscript{39} John Keegan discussed the experience of the common soldier: the palpable effects the advanced warfare had on the individual. They have focused on “what modern wars could do to men:” how the ordeal of fighting, the process of understanding, and the challenge of remembering have altered British culture.\textsuperscript{40}

Likewise, Hynes quoted Katherine Mansfield’s reflections on change. Writing to her editor about Virginia Woolf’s \textit{Night and Day}: “It is really fearful to see the ‘settling down’ of human beings. I feel in the \textit{profoundest} sense that nothing can ever be the same -- that, as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise.”\textsuperscript{41} Observing how “art must change” because the war “changed reality,” Hynes pointed to both change and continuity.\textsuperscript{42} He observed that although commemorative art would have to acknowledge change, monuments and war memorials did the exact opposite: they “deny that assertion: nothing had changed, heroes were still heroes, the Big Words retained their authority.”\textsuperscript{43} Remembrance, and the “authority” of its rhetoric, transcended the particularities of what was remembered. The thankful villages’ choice to commemorate support this observation. Hynes’ suggestion takes on new significance when comparing the commemorative actions of both the bereaved and the thankful in several years following the Armistice. The bereaved initially chose civic projects, while the thankful usually chose modest plaques and only a few exceptions erecting monuments.

\textsuperscript{41} Hynes, \textit{A War Imagined}, 269.  
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{43} Hynes, \textit{A War Imagined}, 282.
Nationalistic rhetoric, translating private mourning into public action, as Winter described, affirmed Hynes’ observation. Yet the call for memorials which stressed “sacrifice and duty”\(^{44}\) were not the only ways in which the bereaved sought to commemorate their dead brothers, sons, and fathers. More active approaches that emphasized service or recreation were popular in the years immediately following the Armistice. These initiatives suggested that the first commemorative actions were dynamic: the living were grasping at ways to remember the dead through changed action rather than static observance of the “Big Words” communicating honor, duty, and sacrifice.\(^{45}\)

Acts of remembrance occupied this interplay between public and private, national and local. They began as forms of contextualized commemoration. In his book *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Winter argued the importance of context. He wrote, “Local war memorials rose out of the postwar search for a language in which to reaffirm the values of the community for which soldiers had laid down their lives.”\(^{46}\) The community’s “values” were initially emphasized over the uniform rhetoric Hynes’ argued. As both Winter and Walton observed, “reaffirmation” of local tradition or practice was an important component of early memorialization. Yet in addition to the local tradition as the focal point for commemoration, there was also increased attention given to nationalism or imperialism. The following localities exhibit a variety of ways in which, like in Guernesey, mourning could be locally translated to commemorative action


\(^{45}\) Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 282.

\(^{46}\) Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 79.
that reiterated themes of bravery and triumph, while also representing forms of active, long-term commemoration that signified crucial departure from pre-war life.

Comparing initial commemoration to commemoration in five or so years following the war reveals changing approaches to commemorative initiatives. Typically during the war or immediately after the war the public sought locally distinctive methods of commemoration. During the war, memorial services, notices of deaths, and memorializations pervaded newspapers. The citizens of Dovercourt, Exeter, after news of a fallen Captain Fryatt, immediately turned to commemoration in the form of a “cottage hospital” wing. As news of the dead came from France, immediate details brought communities together to begin thinking about commemoration. Yet these plans were inwardly-focused. In other words, these grieving communities tended to develop methods of commemoration unique in comparison to the eventual monuments and memorials that would pervade the British landscape. These early plans were local in design and significance. Initially, memorials would “reflect their local character and their sensitivity to the needs of the bereaved, whose identities were in no sense a mystery to those who attended the annual ceremony, or who stopped for a moment’s reflection.”

Determinative to this theory of remembrance is provincialism. Concern for the immediate locality was the initial source for initial philosophies of remembrance.

In Essex, only a month after the Armistice, citizens began offering various proposals for commemorative acts. H.R. Aldiss of Braintree suggested a new town park in commemoration of the fallen. He asked for “recreation, reading, and tea rooms built;

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48 Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, 95.
rowing and sailing boats for hire.”

49 Space for recreation as a form of active, enduring remembrance was on the minds of the Essex citizenry. In December 1918 G. Cook of Chelmsford similarly suggested active community engagement as a means for wholehearted county remembrance. Seeking a memorial that would be useful, reverent, and perennial, Cook suggested the following:

As a memorial I suggest a Home, a club, or an hotel, with accommodation for business, pleasure, refreshment, sleeping, baths, etc. This would be useful; it would also mean a comradeship welcome to Service and ex-Service men. Place in our churches and chapels a memorial to those who have fallen, and in the schools of the various districts place a roll containing the names of those who served during the great war, for the enlightenment and instruction of the future generation. A good county movement appeals to the broad-thinking mind, as some small places may collect and spend money upon some useless object.

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Like Aldiss’, Cook’s suggestions to the County Chronicle offered outlets for commemoration rather than “objects.” Cook sought a way in which the community could not only honor the fallen through a static memorial, but also through dynamic service to those who returned. In these editorials one cannot help but notice the “network” of relationships so crucial to both local mourning and memorialization.

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What mattered in the months following the Armistice was sensitivity to past, present,
and future relationships within the community: between civilians as well as with and among veterans.

In Witham (Essex) William Stevens and Ernest Smith reported on the town’s status of memorial planning. These two citizens, who appear to preside over the town’s planning meetings, were concerned with both funding and design: “before a final decision could be reached as to the form the memorial should take, the confirmation of the subscribers in public meeting would have to be obtained.” 52 The process was financially as well as practically local. Historian Brian Bond wrote, “These memorials and monuments remind us that British fatalities in the armed forces between 1914 and 1918 were greater than those in the Second World War ... in these circumstances there was an understandable tendency to repress memories of the recent war.” 53 But it is evident that these unconventional commemorative forms actually provided for the community a way to remember the dead by focusing on life rather than death. Through action, rather than static commemoration, these communities sought to remember the war daily.

According to further news sources from the months immediately following the Armistice, the decision as to how a community would independently honor the fallen was consistently (and understandably) collaborative. Towns would come together, typically in local parishes, to discuss both project funds and designs. The planning process for a war memorial in Withernsea (Yorkshire) demonstrated the collaborative approach independent from the national government. A “Memorial Committee”

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handled all financial and planning responsibilities for the urban council. Much of the committee’s work, as outlined in Hull’s *Daily Mail*, consisted of organizing funds and developing plans that would later serve to establish a “memorial garden” in Withernsea.

54 In a *Daily Mail* report detailing meeting minutes from an urban council committee meeting, a revealing exchange occurred between committee members regarding land from the urban council and the scope of the Memorial Committee’s “scheme:”

Mr Davis ... should not have subscribed a penny piece if he had known that the scheme was going to be held up whilst other competitive schemes were being pushed forward.

Mr Cauly’s idea was that the committee had neglected the matter, and everybody else was pushing forward on their various schemes.

Mr Dixon pointed out that the committee was relieving the Council of the responsibility of about £700 they would have had to spend on a road.

Mr Dixon suggested they might expect £100 or £200 from the Council.

Mr Canty remarked that when all was said, it was not a memorial, but a speculative progressive scheme for the benefit of Withernsea, and he would have sooner taken the money they had got and erected a memorial credible to the place. 

55 This exchange among city council members reveals both the delicacy of memorial schemes and also the practical issues that impeded such schemes. As Withernsea suggested, expensive memorial projects, many of which did not come to fruition due to expenses, faced the challenge of interpretation as well. Mr. Canty remarks suggested the eventual “memorial garden” to be nothing more than a civic project, “a memorial credible to the place” would have spared the city council expense and time. These were

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the kinds of conversations localities were constantly engaging in following the war: what would be the commemorative decision? Would that decision adequately express grief, honor the fallen, and preserve memory of this era? These questions required answers that were both appropriate and feasible.

Connelly, in his detailed study of commemorative decisions in East London, suggested that these conversations emerged long before the Armistice: “The question of what form the main civic war memorial should take had been posed as early as 1916 when it was suggested that a bungalow estate be built, primarily for returning ex-servicemen.” Connelly observed how in East London many challenged these larger war projects because they were mere “plots to boost civic profile of Ilford rather than a genuine attempt to commemorate the dead.” The same conversations in Withernsea were forming in Ilford. The civic projects seemed to, in the eyes of some citizens, evade the purpose of the memorial itself: to honor the fallen.

Many of these civic projects did not see completion. This outcome was primarily due to the inability for some of these smaller communities to fund their plans. For instance, the Daily Mail of Hull reported on Lincoln’s citizens failure to fund one of the city’s memorial projects: “it was felt that a memorial to which less than a hundred people subscribed could not be looked upon as a citizens’ memorial.” This failure in Lincolnshire revealed the issue of connecting financial contribution to the memorial’s civic ideals. Yet as Withernsea and Ilford suggest, there was significant pushback on

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56 Connelly, 114.
57 Ibid.
58 “War Memorial Scheme Abandoned,” Daily Mail (Hull, England), Saturday, October 23, 1920; pg. 3; Issue 10944.
these community engagement projects. Not only were they expensive, but the civic projects were paradoxically inadequate.

For all the planning and collaboration dedicated toward localized memorialization, a tension existed between local and national forms, particularly concerning graves. In a letter written by Mrs. Helen Pigott of Brentwood (Essex), the following petition began circulating in March 1919 as a protest against the Imperial War Graves Commission headstones:

In the name of thousands of heart broken parents, wives, brothers and sisters, we the undersigned appeal most earnestly against the decision of the Imperial War Graves Commission that no crosses (other than those engraved on the headstone, which time and weather will soon deface) are to be erected over the individual graves of those who gave their lives to preserve the lives and liberties of others. It was through the strength of the cross that many of them were able to do so. It was only through the hope of the Cross that most of us are able to carry on this life from which all the sunshine seems to have gone; and to deny us the emblem of that strength and hope adds heavily to the burden of our sorrow. ...

... We pray most fervently that the right which has been from all time the privilege of the bereaved may not be denied to us.\(^59\)

Resistance to the Commission’s insensitivity to local preference demonstrated the stark reality that those who lived together, in a village or county for instance, believed to have a substantial stake in the Graves Commission’s work. Concerns about religious expression were, for individuals, concerns about ideological self-preservation and future commemoration. For the Commission these concerns also had both practical and

symbolic implications: “The problems that [the Commission] faced were considerable, and were not only logistical. What sort of monuments should each cemetery have? How symbolic should they be, and with what sort of symbolism?” wrote Hynes.60

Yet developing sufficient sites of national mourning ultimately relied upon government rather than local preference. As Philip Longworth observed, “the uniform headstones would convey the idea of equality” through attempts at uniformity by the newly established Commission.61 The “privilege of the bereaved” was not necessarily denied, but adapted to respond to the country’s million dead rather than to a locality’s dead. This petition signified the shift that occurred toward state sponsored commemoration. Tom Lawson argued that not only were commemorative headstones an issue of bereavement or practicality, but of nationalism, as well. The British cemetery in France or Belgium were to represent Englishness and be, for pilgrims or foreigners alike, an “empire of the Silent dead.”62 Commemoration was not simply about how to mourn. It was about how to advance an idea of Englishness to those abroad or at home. Part of the complexity of commemoration resided not simply in a dialectic between personal and communal mourning, but also in this “competition between ideas of Englishness and Britishness.”63 As an editorial in the Times communicated in November 1918, “all should have equal treatment so as far as their graves were concerned. Were the erection of monuments left to individual initiatives, probably those of the well-to-do

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60 Hynes, A War Imagined, 271.
would overshadow those of the poorer comrades.” The government, then, played a role in securing a classless system of national mourning while “the place for the individual monument, it was thought, should be at home.”

In a letter dated 26 February 1922, Rose Haig Thomas wrote, “To cant at the humble memorials erected to their dead heroes from the narrow purses of rural districts is cruel; to compare the differing money values of the tributes lying at the foot is not to understand.” She continued, “To visit the metropolis is the privilege of the rich few. The stone memorials, though not designed by Lutyens, symbolise the local grateful memory of youthful sacrifice.” Class had a part to play in the way the citizenry imagined the memorialization process. There was, as evident in Thomas’ letter to the *Times*, a thematically connecting strand among memorials. Whether in country villages or in central London, the themes of patriotism and sacrifice sought to override class distinctions.

The same concern for contribution despite social standing was revealed in the early plans for the London Cenotaph. In November 1918, only one week after the Armistice, a D.H.S. Cranage wrote to the *Times* expressing concern how, “surely there will be a great demand for a great central memorial representing the whole Empire” while at the same time, “Almost every town and village in the Empire ... will want its own memorial.” Cranage continues, “What is to be the relation between the two

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65 Ibid.
projects?"\(^{67}\) So soon after the Armistice Cranage demonstrated the need for all citizens, regardless of status, to be able to connect donations to their patriotism: “It is most desirable that every subscriber, however poor, should feel that he has a share in the public monument which will be evidence of our faith before the whole world, as well as in the intimate commemoration of his own district.”\(^{68}\) Inclusion was paramount to early commemoration, both on micro and macro levels. Cranage emphasizes participation in a large process of commemoration in order to communicate citizenship. Perhaps, then, early commemoration, as “evidence of [their] faith before the whole world,” contributed to the changing socio-economic dynamics Winter studied. Not only could commemoration be used to articulate grief, but it also could be used to communicate fundamentals of the English identity across different classes. While “different social groups have a differential power to make their meanings and memories central and defining,”\(^{69}\) as Ashplant suggested, in the years immediately after the War there also existed the desire for different social groups, even those “weaker and more marginalized,”\(^{70}\) to contribute to both localized, “differential” memorialization and national forms of memorialization.

The initiative required bureaucratic means to meet uniform, nationalistic ends. As George Mosse put it, such memorials -- cenotaphs, headstones, or rolls of honor -- were “places where the nation worshipped itself. They are conservative expressions of

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\(^{68}\) Cranage, Times.

\(^{69}\) Ashplant et al., 21.

\(^{70}\) Ashplant et al., 21.
the ‘cult of the fallen.’” To compare Pigott’s petition and Mosse’s observations is to compare inward versus outward looking forms of remembrance. The former relied on the experience of the bereaved while the latter, though an expression of national grief, relied on the perpetuation of competing themes relating to valor and sacrifice. This dialogue about the nature of commemoration corroborates what Lawon observed about these decisions, that there existed, “both a tension between looking outwards and looking inwards, and over the precise forms of looking inwards.” Lawon pointed out how varied conceptions of Englishness could be communicated through commemoration. A kind of national conversation was beginning to emerge, and it would be this conversation from which the thankful villages would not be omitted.

Emulation was paramount both to establishing this conversation about commemoration and to the spread of commemorative models. As a contributor wrote to the Hull Daily Mail in January 1920, “I have looked for some time in your valuable paper to see if there was anyone who will take up the idea of a memorial similar to the Cenotaph in London.” The national place of mourning was being connected to and cared for by individual localities across Britain. The contributor continued, “there are those that can never resume the ordinary duties of life. They should have part in our first thought, hoping this letter will draw the attention of our Lord Mayor.” The local newspapers served, as demonstrated in Hull, as important points of communication about how a locality would honor the dead, participate in a larger process of national

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71 George Mosse quoted in Winter, Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, 93.
72 Lawon, 104.
74 Ibid.
grief, and also be in touch with various mourning constituencies: “In the modern era, it has been the nation which has been the prime arena for the articulation of war memories and the mobilization of commemoration,” as Ashplant wrote. Only five months later a memorial would be placed in Hull, including “the names of the 46 men who sacrificed their lives.”

The Bishop of Cornwall said in 1922: “The task triumphantly completed is the task that those our dear brothers had bravest share in, who gave their lives for King and Country ... We salute the blessed dead, we salute them with grateful hearts, because they had their share in the great task that is today completed.” The Bishop incorporated the citizenry, through salutation, in Britain’s solemn victory. Yet the second task required more agency on the part of the citizenry: a second task “called the rebuilding of the world ... Fellow citizens of a great empire, it is this our task of reconstruction, this of bringing the kingdom of God.” He continued, “There is need not only for intensity of purpose, but also for unity of method.” Imperialism and memorialization joined in the Bishop’s rhetoric. The commemorative event conferred upon mourning the urgency of nationalism and responsibility for imperialism. The Bishop’s words demonstrate three distinct components of local commemoration: nationalism, mourning, and methodology. Local action required mediating these objectives in order to satisfy the needs of the living and establish a memory for future generations. An initiative that was

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75 Ashplant et al, 22.
78 Ibid.
once localized and national, post-Armistice Britain, as Lawson suggested, was struggling to find the right language and the right action to honor the fallen and affirm citizenship. The commemorative process was grounded not simply in patriotic “Big Words,” but in dynamic, local action.

Fundamentally different, even isolated, from the rest of the nation, the thankful villages also faced this task. Aware of both their own fortune and the commemorative practices of the less fortunate, the thankful sought to establish a “thankful memory.” Anomalous yet remarkable, these communities offer a new perspective on this period in British history; they demonstrated the pervasiveness of participation central to the nation’s growing culture of commemoration.

III

There are fifty one thankful villages in Britain and thirteen “doubly thankful” villages -- those without casualties after both world wars. Arthur Mee coined the term “thankful village” in his 1936 book, *The King’s England*, a forty-one volume guide to England’s counties. There is no clear geographic bias in terms of the villages’ distribution in Great Britain; they are scattered across the country. Additionally, there is no indication that the places to which the men were deployed affected their survival; however, as indicated by one of the villages, there was a distinct consciousness that Lord Kitchener’s Pals recruitment was responsible for their good fortune. This suggestion indicated that villages participated in and benefited from the Pals system. The villages range in size, but most of them are very small. The largest enlistment was fifty nine in

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Arkholme (Lancashire), while the smallest enlistment was two in Maplebeck (Nottinghamshire).80

Unlike the bereaved memorials, those in thankful villages were often enveloped in modesty. On the doors and walls of local churches or chapels in these quiet, rural villages, a simple plaque was typically placed to honor those who served their country and were blessed with a return trip home. When personal grief is absent but the communal agency to commemorate national grief is readily available, what is the outcome? It seemed that the thankful villages continued to engage with grief for the nation’s dead despite no immediate connection to those dead. These thankful commemorative forms, then, illuminate the significance and sheer power of British national grief. Take for instance Teigh (Rutland), where a simple bronze plaque commemorated both bravery and survival:

This Tablet Is Erected
To The Glory of God
And In Humane Acknowledgement of
His Mercies In Preserving The Lives
Of The Eleven Men and Two Women
Residents of Teigh Who Served In
The Great War of 1914-1918

Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD81

Unlike the monuments in bereaved villages across England, this plaque did not simply celebrate the nation-at-large. The emphasis pointed strictly toward the community; it focused inward. It seemed that the Divine and the individual were brought together

rather than the Divine, the individual, and the nation. It was appropriate, then, that
many thankful villages commemorated their dead in the local parish church as the
village center. Commemoration, in grief's absence, could reflect internal private
emotions rather than external social ideals.

Following the war, stories began to emerge about small communities in which
each enlisted soldier survived the conflict and returned home. An F. Clayton wrote the
*Sunday Times* four years after the Armistice alerting the newspaper to the existence of
such a remarkably blessed community: “Your readers may be interested to know that
there is another ‘fortunate village’ in Somerset. Shapwick sent thirty-two men to war,
and they all returned safely.”\(^82\) Clayton’s referenced Shapwick as “another” one of these
anomalies, suggesting the existence of a dialogue about the communities in the national
press. The same year S.D. Scott reflected on a visit he accidentally made to one of the
villages in the Cotswalds. Scott marveled at “a tablet in the church porch record[ing] the
names of those in the Great War, ‘all of whom, by the great mercy of God, returned in
safety.’” He continued in his letter to the *Times*: “I shall not readily forget the
impression made by coming across this most beautiful little Saxon church in the valley
of the Colne during a holiday ramble ... through many a month of toil will the
recollection of that haven of peace and of the men who returned to give glory to God be a
solace and an inspiration.”\(^83\) Both Scott’s and Clayton’s recollections demonstrated a
dialogue that centered around this phenomenon. Just after losing a generation of

soldiers to modern war, the nation was crippled by grief. It is no wonder that individuals sought to publicize the existence of these communities; they were not simply aberrations, but gifts of grace amidst suffering. As E.F. Rideout in the *Sunday Times* that same year asked, “I should be so much obliged if any of your readers could tell me the name of the village -- I believe it was in Somersetshire -- from which thirteen men went to the war and all returned safely.” He continued, “A memorial was erected in commemoration.” These excerpts revealed a public interest in knowing these communities’ good fortune. Yet they also indicated a demonstrable concern for understanding the good fortune amidst collective adversity.

On September 6, 1919, an Aberdeen cross was presented to the little village of Knowlton (Kent). On this Saturday in 1919, Knowlton received the memorial for winning a competition established by *The Weekly Dispatch* in 1914: “for the purpose of ascertaining the best comparative voluntary recruiting record in the villages of the United Kingdom.” As Major Elmer Speed, one of the twelve men who enlisted from Knowlton, stated, the “signal of honour” was a “tribute to the noble lead and as a beacon for generations to come pointing that sometimes hard but ever glorious path of duty which all of us owe to our country and to our King.” Yet in Knowlton this Aberdeen cross is distinct from other memorials: each name inscribed upon the cross’ base is of a soldier who returned from the War. Knowlton, as the winning village of a competition

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begun “before the institution of compulsory service in the Army,” celebrated death’s absence.

The town praised Lord Kitchener, “the greatest of organizers,” for his recruiting efforts in forming the Pals. Although it is appropriate that one of the fifty one villages which did not lose a single soul characterized Kitchener as a hero, one can only imagine what kind of reaction a mother from any other British village would have at this small ceremony in Kent: Knowlton honored survival as a product of localized recruitment. Even though Knowlton’s good fortune enhanced patriotism and remembrance, it also demonstrated the centrality of collaborative thinking to methods of remembrance.

When considering the influence forms of commemoration have had on a culture’s memory, what can be said about this memorial’s impact on Knowlton’s idea of post-war England? What is suggested, at least, by the Kitchener reference, is not pessimism, disillusionment, or simple patriotism, but a kind of detachment from the bereavement which the rest of the nation was to endure. Yet simultaneously it is clear that Knowlton needed to express their thanksgiving for the benefits of service and the blessing of survival. This instance is consistent with what Hynes suggests, that memorialization relied on the preferences of the “living,” who “were determined” to be part of the process. Thankful commemoration exemplified sensitivity to place, and was, therefore, thematically connected to the more standard and mournful processes occurring in other parts of England. Thanksgiving was both personal and communal. The Knowlton ceremony conflates two issues: the first regarding the thankful forms of commemoration

\[86\] The Dover Express, September 12, 1919, p. 6.
\[87\] Ibid.
\[88\] Hynes, A War Imagined, 272.
previously discussed and the second regarding the image of the War itself. Knowlton obviously benefited from Lord Kitchener's model, while other communities did not. The Pals, “a perfect expression of civic culture,” resulted in concentrated tragic losses. Yet Knowlton’s praise of Kitchener and his model, understandably, suggested a different view of the conflict entirely. Knowlton exhibited how the thankful imagined the conflict in different terms: while in most localities the War was a painful reminder of England’s international prowess, as Lawson pointed out, the thankful villages were places in which definitions of Englishness could take on highly insolar forms.

While the thankful villages processed the war and subsequently memorialized the resulting emotion, in this case thankfulness, a similar process of preservation persisted that was common to both the thankful and the bereaved. Hynes argued the centrality of nationalistic rhetoric of heroism or patriotism as indications of post-war continuity. Through the memorial building, bereaved communities seized the memory construction process in order to preserve specific values and “remind future generations of the Great War.” Future rememberance would be dictated by immediate action. The same was true for thankful villages; however, their commemorative response often seemed more self-conscious. Thankful forms of commemoration immediately reconciled the future with the past. These exceptionally fortunate villages had the task of preserving thankfulness over pride; “worth” over detachment.

Honoring the eighteen men who fought and returned from the War, a plaque in St. Peter’s Church in Helperthorpe (Yorkshire) included the following inscription:

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89 Winter, The British People, 32.
Sons of this place, in future be it said
That you are worthy of th’heroic dead
They fought, they bled, that we who live may reap
A richer harvest, ere we fall asleep.\(^91\)

The Helperthorpe plaque’s inscription demonstrated how in 1919 the community was thinking about future generations: “in future be it said,” that although Helperthorpe’s men returned from the Front, this community emphasized their value among “th’heroic.” The top of Helperthorpe’s plaque read, “in thankful memory,” rather than, “in thanksgiving,” which indicated the town’s consciousness about the future: this community sought for the future the same emotions felt immediately after the War. For the thankful, as well as the bereaved, a commemorative act was an “attempt by a society to deal with certain fundamental needs of those who survive the war.”\(^92\) These communities were in the context of a grieving nation that was attempting to affirm nationalistic goals. Perhaps the “fundamental need” for a thankful village would be to establish a language of commemoration that would be appropriate to its circumstances, yet engaged with the nation’s larger nationalistic undertaking. The Helperthorpe plaque’s inscription denoted both the village’s rare blessing as well as its engagement with “a richer harvest,” that was the nation’s victory.

Similar to the language used in Helperthorpe parish’s plaque were the words chosen by the citizens of Aisholt (Somerset): “These men of ours unselfish, unafraid, / Went to the World-wide fight, / Forget not how they fought and how we prayed, / For England and for right.”\(^93\) Other memorials include this verse as well, such as in the

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\(^91\) “Helperthorpe,” last modified October 2014, [http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/helperthorpe.htm](http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/helperthorpe.htm).

\(^92\) Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 270.

\(^93\) “Aisholt,” last modified October 2014, [http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/aisholt.htm](http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/aisholt.htm).
bereaved communities of Otterton (Devon)\textsuperscript{94} and Frome (Somerset).\textsuperscript{95} In Aisholt remembrance was concerned with memorializing the soldier’s effort. The centrality of heroic service was more concentrated at sites of thanksgiving.

Typical of memorials across the nation, for both the bereaved and the thankful, was ascription to the Divine. With few exceptions, such as at Herodsfoot, Arkholme, Middleton-On-The-Hill, and Knowlton, rolls of honor and commemorative plaques and monuments were almost always placed in the local parish church or cemetery. More often than not, “Thanks Be To God” or “Deo Gratias” concluded both rolls of honor and commemorative plaques.\textsuperscript{96} In such as at Ousby (Cumberland),\textsuperscript{97} Rodney Stoke (Somerset),\textsuperscript{98} or Flixborough (Lincolnshire),\textsuperscript{99} the parishes commissioned stained-glass windows in honor of the safe return of their men. In the case of the thankful village of Middleton-On-The-Hill (Herefordshire), whose St. Mary’s Parish Church’s cemetery included a memorial in the form of a lantern, the inscription invoked the Old Testament:

\begin{quote}
A thank offering to Almighty God
"At evening time it shall be light"
for the safe return of all the men from this parish
who fought in the Great War 1914 - 1918
and 1939 - 1945.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

Thankful commemoration assumed a recognition of continuity with pre-war life. A community unfamiliar with warfare’s grief gave thanks for such continuity after the Armistice; however, what had changed, and indicated through the act of placing memorials in the town’s central gathering spaces, was its interaction with the larger national community. As McIntyre wrote, the “sacrifice theme” and the importance of the parish converged with religious inscriptions on memorials. This importance applied to the thankful just as it did the bereaved. The parish became the site of interaction with the larger concerns of the Christian nation. Without local mourning, the thankful were nevertheless engaged with the nation’s mourning. Through the religious placement and language of commemoration, it is clear that these communities did not choose to remain isolated from the nation’s grief, but engaged with it through memorialization.

The centrality of communication is important to the thankful communities. As demonstrated by numerous articles in the Times and Daily Mail, among other publications, the nation was engaged in a dialogue about ways in which towns and communities were honoring the dead. B.H. Tower wrote to the Sunday Times in November 1922, “The village of Woolley in Somerset can claim a happy originality in putting up a war memorial to the living; it was either that or no memorial at all.” Tower’s observations suggested a concern for inclusion that existed among the thankful. Similar to Cranage’s suggestion in the Times, Tower indicated that the thankful, as well a the bereaved, perhaps felt a kind of pressure to memorialize: Woolley needed to communicate its transition to peacetime even though not much had changed, for this

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101 McIntyre, 112.
village. These communities, as demonstrated by their actions, felt some need to respond to both community and nation. For instance, the gates at the parish church in Wigsley included the names of the eight men who survived and returned to England, while also including “In Memoriam 1914 - 1918” on the iron gates to acknowledge a grieving nation.\textsuperscript{103}

These communities were not hesitant to celebrate the Armistice, with “excellent dinner[s]” and “program[s] consisting of conjuring and comicsongs,” as the village of Upper Slaughter did in 1923.\textsuperscript{104} As the nation grieved and unified through the process of commemoration, the thankful were not omitted. A hamlet in Yorkshire claimed a more explicit continuity with pre-war life. A \textit{Sunday Times} contributor in 1924 observed the following about the village of Catwick’s “strange war memorial:”

As each lad of the village went off to the war he nailed to the door jamb of the smithy’s shop a farthing. Before the war was very far advanced there was quite an array of farthings, which no one dared to disturb. Recently the last of the contributors to this unique war memorial returned to his native village, proving that the farthings were distinctly lucky, for everyone who left behind his lucky charm has returned.\textsuperscript{105}

Perhaps the most unique way in which a village memorialized good fortune, Catwick has no war memorial or roll of honor, only this simple plaque of coins now cared for by the blacksmith’s grandson, John Hugill.\textsuperscript{106} Unique, unconventional, and essentially local,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} “Wigsley,” last modified October 2014, \url{http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/wigsley.htm}.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic} (Cheltenham, England), Saturday, November 17, 1923; pg. 7. \textit{British Newspapers, Part IV: 1780-1950}.
\textsuperscript{106} “Catwick,” last modified October 2014, \url{http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/catwick.htm}.
\end{flushleft}
the same language of duty and honor are imprinted on this simple wooden plaque.

McIntyre suggested that “the ideal or complete war memorial is the one that carries the most information about the men commemorated that it is possible to include, there is no way one can decide on what is a typical war memorial.”

Even with the thankful memorials, highly untypical, there seemed to exist a need to represent fully and secure for the future the emotions of thanksgiving. The Catwick example indicated a way in which such specific concern for the men’s roles in the community could be relayed through the simple memorial.

IV

Why do these anomalous communities matter? Perhaps they do not. Ultimately the search for articulations of grief sets a certain precedent for historians. As many have suggested, the politics of commemoration have been determinative to providing a framework by which the nation’s citizens could mourn. Either through public narrative or through the state’s bureaucracy, the nation and the private voice reconciled through commemoration: “When individuals can express and compare their memories with the experience of contemporaries, can begin to formulate a shared language and identify common themes” wrote Ashplant, “then what may be termed ‘shared’ or ‘common’ memories can emerge.”

Indeed, language shared among individuals to “compare” or collaborate established a kind of nationalistic trajectory. These communities without loss could participate in this exchange. The inscriptions on the thankful memorials, nearly identical to those of the bereaved, suggest this communication and dialogue.

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108 Ashplant et al., 18.
Scholarship of World War One commemoration is clear about many of the fundamental differences in approach. As some of the scholarship has noted, the future of commemorative studies has tended to move toward survivor narratives. How can the historians shape a narrative of a conflict centered around testimony? There are problems to this approach, understandably: “Such attempts to transform public commemoration through giving the voice of survivors a public audience can be problematic.”\textsuperscript{109} This approach “makes critical judgement difficult” and threatens objective representations of politics, explains Ashplant.\textsuperscript{110} There still remains a place for the scholarship of the war memorial. Whether used to mediate personal grief and civic objectives or represent national ideals, the war memorial preserves thoughts and emotions in a manner that, for the historian, communicates clear objectives and implications.

Thankful villages participated in national commemoration, despite their fortunate, and therefore remarkable, circumstances. Immediately following the Armistice as communities sought to locally honor their brothers, sons, and fathers, the attention given to localized forms of national grievances did not exclude the thankful. Yet unlike the immediately bereaved, haunted by personal and cultural change post war, the thankful villages’ commemorative actions represented continuity with the community prior to the war. Historians debated and studied the ways in which a society forms remembrance based on its analysis of a specific memory. The thankful must be a

\textsuperscript{109} Ashplant et al., 49.  
\textsuperscript{110} Ashplant et al., 50.
part of that process. They represented a kind of apotheosis: a culmination of localized
intentionality, thematically national and irreversibly emotional.

The thankful communities clarified the activity of commemoration in the
immediate post war years. Scholarship surrounding this process has understandably
neglected the inclusion of the thankful and concentrated on the bereaved. By focusing
on a specific kind of locality at a specific era in British history, analysis of the thankful
villages and the ways in which each engaged in collective grief, despite their
fundamental differences, corrects an historical discrepancy. Although the existence of
such communities has become more recently known, this project’s goal has been to
include and analyze their commemorative processes within the larger bereaved context
and its scholarship.

To understand the thankful villages and their relevance in the historical
landscape is to understand the immense gap between what was experienced on the
battlefield and what was communicated by the citizenry. The war was painful. Soldiers,
whether British, American, French, or German, struggled to find the words to
communicate that pain: “It was a vivid, wild experience,” wrote American Will Percy to
his father, “and I think I went through it calmly by refusing to recognize it as real. You
couldn't see men smashed and killed around you and bear it except by walking in a sort
of sleep, as you might read Dante’s Inferno.”111 Plenty of historians, and plenty more, will
attempt to bridge the gap between our modern perception of the war and the war as it
actually affected the lives of men and women. And, as so many have done,

commemoration will continue to be central to this endeavour. Commemoration, and the many decisions that comprised commemoration, articulate time and action that for so many was indescribable.

The consideration of the thankful villages contributes to this conversation: they represent yet another dimension of the War and another way in which modern Britain was shaped by this War. In 2013 poet Avril Newey’s wrote, “These Thankful Fields,” for Arkholme (Lancashire). It is a poem about the plight of a thankful soldier and of his community, of those who,

    ploughed the glebes of Hell,
    became a sentence in their nation’s pride
    then coming silent home,
    picked up their grandsires’ tools
    and, seeding poppies
    in these thankful fields
    grew for themselves
    perhaps sufficient peace?

    Remember them.\(^{112}\)

According to Newey, the significance of the thankful villages extended beyond the local and impacted the wider nation. In order to put together an accurate historical record of both remembrance and bereavement after 1918, the addition of the forgotten blessed is imperative. Although seemingly opposites, thankful and bereaved villages shared characteristics that clarify historians’ studies of the First World War’s memorialization. Fussell observed that, “The whole texture of British daily life could be said to commemorate the war still.”\(^{113}\) The thankful contributed to this comprehensive scope of Britain’s grief and its commemoration.

\(^{112}\) quoted from “Arkholme,” last modified October 2014, [http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/arkholme.htm](http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/TV/arkholme.htm).

\(^{113}\) Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 341.
While a nation found itself both paralyzed in grief and active in competing forms of memorialization, the thankful opened their arms to their beloved home from the front. Yet they did not turn away from their national community. At times self-conscious, modest, and detached, their memorialization was both distinctive and indicative: a product of both intensive provincialism and nationalistic rhetoric. At once disconnected and engaged, these localities illuminated the importance of commemorative participation in a nation burdened by tragedy.
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