

**The Cenotaph:**  
**A consensual and contested monument of remembrance**

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The author would welcome any additional evidence about the history of the Cenotaph and the tomb of the Unknown Warrior that is relevant to the argument of this paper.

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#### *Summary*

The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, had its origins as a temporary construction that was the centrepiece of the Peace Parade of July 1919 following the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles. Numerous formations of armed forces from the UK, the Empire and other allied nations saluted the fallen at the monument. The only inscriptions on it are 'The Glorious Dead' and '1914-1918' and '1939-1945'.

The Cenotaph was designed by Edwin Lutyens who was working with the Imperial War Graves Commission. He championed secular commemoration because the war dead were from many different nations and religions. The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, also insisted on a secular monument and explicitly rejected an alternative proposal for a large cross at Admiralty Arch.

So popular was the temporary monument that it was decided that it should be replaced by a permanent one and the Cabinet explicitly rejected Church of England proposals that it should have Christian inscriptions on it or a cross on top of it because of the religious and belief diversity of the dead of the war.

It was inaugurated as a permanent monument on 11 November 1919 by a simple unveiling by King George V accompanied by the first two minutes silence.

The unprecedented mass emotion surrounding the monument made the Church of England very fearful that an alternative state cult was emerging as the centre of the Nation's and Empire's grief over the more than one million dead. The tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey was devised by the Church as an alternative religious site for the memorialisation of the war dead. Sprung on the cabinet at short notice the proposal and the ceremonial associated with the passage of the body past the Cenotaph at 1100 am on 11 November 1920, on its way to the Abbey, enabled the Church to introduce Christian religious rituals at the ceremonial at the Cenotaph. In the event, too, Christian language was included on the tomb of the warrior in the Abbey even despite a contrary cabinet decision that the tomb would be secular.

There is also clear evidence that from 1921-23 that the Church was attempting to arrange for the official state ceremony of remembrance to be conducted permanently in Westminster Abbey as a religious occasion and not at the Cenotaph. The public reaction was, however, so strong that when this was attempted in 1923 the plan had to be abandoned.

The Cenotaph is a state memorial and not a Christian one. But Christian rituals are prominent in the ceremony. A bishop leads a religious procession. A cross is borne in front of the procession and the bishop invokes the 'Lord Jesus Christ' in a prayer.

The paper concludes by suggesting that because of the origins of the Cenotaph and the changing character of public belief in the present era when at least a quarter of the population have no religion and Christians have a diminishing but still slight majority it is not appropriate for there to be any role for the Church of England in the proceedings on Remembrance Sunday at the Cenotaph.

## **The Cenotaph:**

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The state ceremony and religious service of remembrance at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, on the Sunday before 11 November, is the annual official UK state commemoration of those who have died in military service on behalf of the UK state and its Commonwealth allies and it has become a fixed, respectful and familiar occasion in contemporary life. This exploration of the origins and design of the monument and of the subsequent ceremonies surrounding it reveal, however, that they have at times, been the subject of some public controversy and private contention among religious and political elites as to whether they should be secular or religious. And what was initially intended to be, and still is in its physical form, a secular monument to the hundreds of thousands of 'The Glorious Dead', which was devised as part of the mourning and the peace celebrations of July 1919, was transformed through the decision at short notice, to dedicate a tomb to an unknown warrior in Westminster Abbey as part of the Armistice Day commemoration of 1920, to be the site of an annual state religious ceremony. It thus became, not without contest, a secular monument that would be the site each year on Armistice Day - 11 November (Remembrance Sunday from 1945 onwards) - of state ceremonial that would include a Christian religious service performed by a bishop of the Church of England. And although to this day the annual ceremony is surrounded by widespread public respect, particularly among those present in Whitehall in London for the event and among large audiences on television, there is evidence of continuing behind the scenes contention about the form and expression of the religious dimensions of the official state commemoration at what was deliberately designed to be a secular monument for the dead of war of whatever religion or no religion. In addition, the changing patterns of religious affiliation and identity in the general population in the last nine decades again raise issues which initially surfaced with some vigour at the very inception and in the earliest years of the monument, as to whether a Christian religious service should continue to be a central feature of the ceremony at the Cenotaph.

### **The toll of war and the 'banality of the cross'**

The initial debates over the form of the national monument for the dead of war on the UK mainland came to head in 1919 over the peace celebrations that had been postponed until there had been a conclusion to the Treaty deliberations at Versailles. The bodies of the hundreds of thousands of the UK military forces that had been killed on the western front and other overseas theatres of war were not brought home for burial

because the scale of the carnage would have required extensive labour that would have diverted resources from the continuing war effort. Nor were the bereaved given leave, even if they had the resources, to identify, reclaim and dispose of the bodies of their loved ones back in their homeland or in the theatres of war. Initially the military authorities in conjunction with the Red Cross had to arrange for both the short term and longer term disposal of the bodies of the dead. It was out of these challenges that the Imperial War Graves Commission, later renamed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, was established in 1917.

One of the first challenges confronting those charged with these responsibilities was how to mark the graves of the individual dead for it was decided that rather than have mass graves for rank and file forces, as had generally been the custom in the past, there would individual graves for all of the dead of whatever rank in the armed and supporting forces (Summers 2010: 17). On the western front the French authorities had decided upon individual crosses to mark each grave. German graves, too, were marked usually by crosses and some by the star of David. The British authorities debated about whether the dead should be remembered by crosses or non-religious symbols. While some members of the Commission preferred to mark the graves with individual crosses, Edwin Lutyens, already a distinguished architect and the eventual designer of the Cenotaph, was in favour of a religiously neutral form of symbolism. Such neutrality would be a gesture not only towards UK non-Christians but also towards the over 140,000 troops on the western front who were from All India (including present day Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and the many of the dead who were Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh and from other religions or none. 700,000 Indian troops also served in the Middle East and in total during the war 47,746 Indians were, according to one source, reported dead or missing and 65,126 were wounded across the many theatres of war around the globe (Memorial Gates Trust 2013).

Thus it was decided that each individual grave would be marked by a religiously neutral headstone rather than an individual cross, although many of these headstones eventually had crosses marked on them. Additionally there was the problem of some form of collective symbolism for the cemeteries, of which there were eventually 900 across the French border from the channel to Switzerland (Skelton and Glidden, 2008, 107). Some members argued for a large cross as found in many Anglican churchyards but Lutyens, again, sought a religiously neutral form of symbolism. His proposal was to erect 'a monolithic altar set in dignity on steps to be placed in every cemetery to be a permanent and reverent monument which should appeal to every feeling and denomination' (Skelton and Gliddon, 2008, 26-9). It would be twelve feet in length,

raised upon three steps, of which the first and third shall be twice the width of the second (Summers, 2010, 25). The horizontal monument would also fit in better than a cross with a landscape of poplars as found in many areas of the western front. The design involved slight curves in the apparently horizontal surfaces which were ‘part of parallel spheres 1801 foot 8 inches in diameter and the verticals of the monument meet at the same height above the centre of the spheres’. For Lutyens the spherical surfaces were, like circles, symbols of hope and happiness. In a memorandum to the Commission he envisaged a war stone in each cemetery and evoked a vast cathedral whose vault was the sky. J.M.Barrie, the author of Peter Pan, whom Lutyens met on a cross-channel boat when the former was searching for his lost son in France, thought that the form of the monument as an altar was ‘too churchy and would offend the Scots’ (Ridley, 2002, 278-80).

This proposed war stone was opposed by some members of the Commission including Rev. Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, a Scot born in Edinburgh, but Lutyens argued that ‘Labour members, Jews, Roman Catholics, nonconformists, ladies of fashion especially those who suffer a loss, all seem to like it (the war stone) and agree in the banality of the cross’. The final decision was a compromise that included both suggestions in the larger cemeteries (Skelton and Gliddon, 2008, 26-9). The war stone was to be placed in the east of these cemeteries on the western front facing the men who laid buried looking east to the enemy (Ridley, 2002, 278). While the war stone was of a standard size from which Lutyens would not deviate because of the geometry which it expressed, the large Cross of Sacrifice incorporating a bronze sword came in several sizes appropriate to the relative size of the cemetery. Lutyens thought that every cross erected by the Church to commemorate the war was ‘a fagot to her pyre’ (Ridley, 2002, 289). A proposal for a Christian inscription on each cross was rejected by the Commission (Wilkinson 1978, 302-3). Some other Commission architects also sought to escape Christian traditions of memorialisation. Lutyens’ colleague architect on the Commission, Herbert Bloomfield, stated that ‘many of us have seen terrible examples of war memorials in France and were haunted by the fear of winged angels in various sentimental attitudes’ (Summers et al, 2007, 21).

Wilkinson (1978, 302-2) comments that “in the symbolism of the cemeteries a shared death took precedence over shared religion. Respect for different creeds was a fundamental principle of the Commission; the quote from Ecclesiasticus on the stone of remembrance, ‘their name liveth for evermore’ omitted a previous sentence that might have offended Hindus”. The quotation from this book of the apocrypha which begins

with the well known phrase ‘Let us now praise famous men’ was, ‘buried in peace’, but this offended high caste Hindus since, while lower caste co-religionists were buried, higher caste ones were cremated (Wigglesworth 2013).

These debates over the design of monuments to commemorate the dead in the theatres of war, which the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, had urged in 1917 should not be held in public, continued domestically in the UK in the aftermath of the conflict and surfaced in 1919 and 1920 over national monuments and ceremonies in central London. Lord Balfour, who had been Prime Minister 1902-5, was against the individual headstones. Opponents of the War Grave Commission plans said they would deny individual relatives the opportunity to create their own memorials in France and Belgium. Lady Cecil, the wife of the Bishop of Exeter, who had lost three sons in the war, wanted the cross instead of the headstone. In a parliamentary debate in May 1920 Viscount Woolmer stated that there was ‘a terrible confusion of thought – terrible because it is causing so much anguish to the country....the idea that you are entitled to take the bodies of heroes from the care of relatives and build them into a national state memorial’. A tense debate in the House of Commons was wound up by the Minister for War who stated that ‘Lutyens’ stone of remembrance ‘would exist in even two thousand years and preserve the memory of a common purpose pursued by a great nation in the remote past....and undoubtedly excite the wonder and reverence of future generations’. The minister was Mr Winston Churchill (Summers et. al. 2007, 24-5).

### **The origins of the Cenotaph**

Peace celebrations were deferred until the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919 and the cabinet then decided that there should be a parade of UK and allied troops through London on 19 July as part of coordinated celebrations across Europe. At Prime Minister Lloyd George’s insistence, it was also decided to follow the planned French example with the troops marching by and saluting a catafalque (a raised platform on which the coffin of a dead person rests) commemorating the dead of the war. Lloyd George was insistent that there should not be a national rejoicing that did not include some tribute to the dead (Cannadine, 1995, 102). The cabinet minute of 4 July (War Cabinet 1919) recorded that there was considerable feeling against to the idea. King George V was reported to be of the view that soldiers had had enough of war generally and that they were rather tired of processions and ceremonial marches, although, he had no objections to big provincial centres welcoming back their troops

from the front. There were also objections from 'other quarters' - presumably the Church of England (of which, more later).

These cabinet deliberations were partly based upon the minute of the Peace Celebrations Committee of the War Cabinet on 1 July 1919 which had recorded that Lord Curzon, the Lord President of the Council, a former Viceroy of India (1899-1905) and the chair of the committee, thought that the idea 'would be foreign to the spirit of our own people, however much it might be in harmony with the Latin temperament'. Curzon was one of the five members of the War Cabinet, established by Lloyd George on becoming Prime Minister in 1916, who did much of the 'routine work' (Taylor 1975, 75). Albert Mond, the Minister of Works, thought that the catafalque was a purely catholic idea and might not appeal to the British public generally. There clearly, then, was considerable opposition to the troops marching by and saluting a catafalque and, although Prime Minister Lloyd George's idea for a secular monument to the dead of the war prevailed in cabinet, Curzon had suggested in the earlier committee proceedings that a great cross about 20 to 30 feet high of temporary material should be constructed near Admiralty Arch facing Charing Cross by which the troops would march. Mond and General Leach were deputed by the Committee to discuss the design of the 'shrine and its position on the processional route' (NAS CAB27/52). In the event the final decision at the cabinet meeting on 4 July went in favour of Lloyd George's proposal and the Prime Minister directly commissioned Lutyens to implement the project. Lloyd George had prevailed against stubborn opposition in the war cabinet and succeeded in having a secular monument for the dead of war as the central feature of the Peace Parade and celebrations.

Given the commission to design the catafalque on the basis of his architectural eminence in UK and India, previous work for the War Graves Commission and a temporary monument to the dead of the war in Hyde Park to mark the fourth anniversary of the war in the previous year, Lutyens immediately suggested to Lloyd George the idea of a Cenotaph or empty tomb, which there is evidence that he had already been contemplating (Ridley, 2002, 288). With only two weeks available, a wood and plaster version was created for the parade in Whitehall to Lutyens' specifications. It was 'a 35 foot high memorial with a chest tomb atop a rectangular pylon with subtle set-backs throughout its height'. Concepts of 'entasis' were incorporated in the design of the monument. This is evident in that the horizontal surfaces were arcs of a circle with a centre 500 feet below ground level and the vertical surfaces taper so that they would meet 1000 feet above the ground if extended. Ornamentation was limited to three wreaths, one on top and two at the ends (Hanson, 2005,

415, Skelton and Gidden 2008). The slight curves created the illusion of linearity.

On 8 July 1919 the Times stated that ‘there were to be religious rejoicings but it was decided to have general celebrations first’...’the troops’ (of many allied nations) ‘will march by a new monument – a fitting monument to the glory of men who made the supreme sacrifice during the war. It was not of a sombre character but will be decorated by flags. It was to be temporary and fitting monument designed by Lutyens. It will tell in simple words that it is erected to the honour and glory of the fallen’. The monument was inscribed ‘to the Glorious Dead’, probably at Lloyd George’s instruction (Skelton and Gliddon, 2008, 38) and the flags of the three armed services were to be incorporated in it. The Times called it ‘simple, grave and beautiful’ (Ridley, 2002, 288). General Haig described it as a symbol of the empire’s unity. Foreign Minister Lord Curzon described it as ‘an imperial monument commemorating men of all races and creeds’ (Hanson, 2005, 412). But note that while Curzon and Haig called it an imperial monument it was also a memorial for the fallen of all the allied nations.

Skelton and Gidden (2008, 43) observe that ‘The Cenotaph struck an immediate chord with the public. Its success owed much to its simplicity and non-religious appearance. It was a blank canvas on to which people could project their own particular thoughts, and with its combination of simplicity, elegance and lack of triumphalism, the British took it immediately to their hearts’.

### **A shrine for grief in the aftermath of mass carnage**

The temporary Cenotaph structure in Whitehall immediately became a focus for the mass grief of a nation ravaged by a war that had until then had not had a sufficient collective opportunity for expression – grief particularly enhanced because very few bodies had been repatriated from foreign theatres of war and few of the fallen had had individual funerals. The United Kingdom experienced 723,000 deaths directly as a consequence of the war and the Empire total was over one million. It was calculated that if the dead marched four abreast down Whitehall it would take over three and a half days for them to pass the Cenotaph. Over 6 million UK service personnel served and 30 per cent of men aged 20-24 in 1914 died. Death and injury rates were high among the social elite that supplied the officer class but overall the UK rates were lower than in France and Germany (Cannadine 1981). Scotland lost 10.9 per cent of males aged 15-49, Britain and Ireland 6.3 per cent, France, 13.3 and Germany 12.5 (Ferguson 1998, 299). Two million people were wounded. There were a quarter of a million UK amputees (Hanson, 2005, 407).

According to one source (Gavaghan 1997, 3) of the countries of the Empire, India lost 72,000 service personnel, Australia 62,000, Canada 60,000 and New Zealand 18,000. From 11 November 1918 to September 1921 204,650 bodies were moved to cemeteries. Where possible they were identified (Summers, 2010, 22).

On 19 July 1919, as part of the peace celebrations, formations of troops from the allied nations paraded past the Cenotaph at its position in the middle of Whitehall and saluted their fallen comrades. The day before the parade the King reviewed troops at the monument and the public began to leave wreaths at its base. After the ceremony these grew to a great volume. On 19 June 1946 Prime Minister Atlee replied to a parliamentary question in connection with the planned unveiling of the monument later that year with the new inscription '1939- 1945', that the Cenotaph commemorates men and women of all faiths and therefore the ceremony performed by King George V in 1919 included a simple act of unveiling unaccompanied by a religious dedication (NAS 1945, Hansard 19 June 1946).

Field Marshall Haig, Admiral Beatty, General Pershing, the commander of the American army in Europe, General Foch of France and troops from the UK armed forces and contingents of forces who happened to be, or who could be made available, from India, USA, France, French colonies, Belgium, Italy, Serbia, Japan, Portugal and Thailand marched by the Cenotaph and saluted it. Troops from all the dominions except Canada and Newfoundland participated even though they had already had their own previous parade through London (NAS CAB 27/52, The Times 8/7/19).

Despite the Times report of 8 July 1919 of the planned de-emphasis of the religious side of the occasion its comprehensive report of the parade on 21 July entitled 'At the Cenotaph: Salute to the Dead' indicated that there were present at the monument a religious choir and orchestra and men and boys in surplices. It also reported that 'For all the saints', Jesu lover of my soul', 'Pomp and Circumstance' and the last post were performed at the site.

The reaction to the monument and the ceremonies was profound. The march past and the saluting of the monument was described by the Times as 'the most moving part of the triumphal ceremonial that took place at place at a spot the memory which of Britain and her allies will do well to hold forever sacred'. There was a constant flow of people and flowers at the site for many months after and a debate began as to whether there should be a permanent version of the monument and where it might be

located, possibly away from the constant flow of traffic in Whitehall to a more suitable site, perhaps in nearby Parliament Square.

The press that was very active on the issue. The Daily Mail, echoing the Times initial comments argued that the site of the temporary structure should be the site of a permanent memorial 'since it had been consecrated by the tears of many mothers' (Hanson 2005: 419). On 16 Sept 1919 the Daily Express suggested that Cenotaph, which was by then to be a permanent memorial, should be the site of the tomb of an unknown warrior on the French model – an idea endorsed by the Lord Mayor of London (Gavaghan 1997, 6). However not all were agreed on the character of the monument and the public reaction to it. The Church Times denounced it as cult and attacked 'Cenotapholatry' (Hanson, 2005, 418-9).

Within a few days of the peace parade, on 23 July 1919, the war cabinet had decided upon a permanent memorial based on Lutyens' temporary structure and in October the Minister of Works, Alfred Mond, raised with the cabinet the issue of inscriptions on the permanent form of monument. He had received many suggestions as to Christian inscriptions that might be impressed upon the monument including suggestions from the Bishop of Winchester, acting on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Ridley (2002, 289) states that the 'Church party' envisaged a great granite cross with the Union Jack national flag prominent in its design on the monument. However Mond pointed out that in parliamentary answers government ministers had replied to suggestions of similar measures by MPs that 'the temporary structure was constructed, in order that, on the day of the Peace Procession, the nation should visibly express the great debt that it owes to those who from all parts of the Empire, irrespective of religious creeds, had made the supreme sacrifice'. Mond added that he had pointed out to the Bishop 'that a permanent memorial could not be regarded as being similar to one placed in one of our cathedrals and that in any additional inscription to that of 'The Glorious Dead' the government had to be careful not to give offence to the many non-Christian nations of the Empire who also contributed to a large extent to the armies of His Majesty engaged in the recent conflict'. He added that the architect, Lutyens, was also against additional inscriptions. The government's decision, then, was to continue with the simple single original inscription (CAB/24/90).

## **Armistice Day 1919**

The main feature of Armistice Day 11 November 1919 was the introduction, at the suggestion of the King, of the two minutes silence of remembrance which interrupted normal business, travel, educational and other every day activities around the Kingdom and the Empire and which was widely respected. The King stated that 'no elaborate organisation was required'. The starting and completion times in London were indicated by the explosion of maroons at fire stations around the capital. People nonetheless assembled around the Cenotaph in large numbers before 11.00 am on the first anniversary of the Armistice and a huge pile of bouquets of flowers accumulated. Such was the crush that many of the flowers could only be placed on the shrine by passing them over the heads of the crowd. The Times reported the event on the following day under the headline 'The Great Silence - Nation's homage to its dead - scenes at the Cenotaph - a perpetual lesson'. Wreaths dedicated to 'The Glorious Dead' were laid on behalf of the King who was at Buckingham Palace with the Diplomatic Corps to meet President Poincare of France. The President took leave to lay a wreath and salute the monument prior to the two minutes silence while fellow diplomats and the King and royal family respected the silence at the Palace. At 1230 a procession organised by the Comrades of the Great War set out from St James Walk and laid wreaths at the Cenotaph. The procession included disabled and blind veterans supported by their comrades and it was concluded by a large contingent of Women Comrades of the War. Representatives of the War Graves Commission were in attendance. After the laying of a large wreath there was drum roll, Chopin's funeral march, several minutes' silence, a short address by the Chaplain General, the 'mournful notes of a bagpipe' and the 'Last Post'. The Salvation Army laid a wreath at 2.30pm. At 4.30pm wreaths were laid from the War Office and the Admiralty. Religious services incorporating the two minutes silence were undertaken at Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral but there is no evidence that official state religious services were conducted at the Cenotaph itself (The Scotsman 12/11/19, The Times 7 and 12/11/19). The events of July and November 1919 had clearly demonstrated the deep attraction of the Cenotaph as the centre of the grief and mourning of the UK and the Empire for the lives lost during the Great War. On 19 July there had also been a very clear wider international dimension involving the troops of other allied nations. On 11 November President Poincare symbolised the involvement of the major ally of France. There was an impromptu and improvised character to the commemoration activities of Armistice Day 1919 that illustrated the great significance of the Cenotaph to the population even in the absence of an officially organised ceremony around it. The initiatives of the War Comrades in organising a remembrance event at the monument also clearly signalled the significance of the monument

for the veterans who had served in the War and indicated that the 'Great Silence' was for them, by itself, an insufficient gesture of remembrance.

### **The symbolism of the Cenotaph**

While ostensibly non-religious the Cenotaph is, like the Stone of Remembrance, infused with what Ridley calls 'secret geometrical meanings' and has various other possible pantheistic notions surrounding it. The philosophy of its architect may have further stimulated the hostility and suspicions of the Church of England which had been apparent in the discussions over the temporary and permanent form of the memorial. Emily Lutyens, the wife of the architect of the Cenotaph, and her social circle, may have also worried the Church. Emily Lutyens dedicated her life to theosophy from 1909 for two decades and Edwin shared some of her religious sentiments. Theosophists sought to distil the wisdom of the ages - from all known religions. Emily was a devoted follower of Krishnamurti, a young Indian brought to the UK as a possible incarnation of the 'Great Teacher' whose coming would be the greatest event for two thousand years and some believed that he would be a Buddha on the planet Mercury a million years ahead. Emily believed that her husband was initially sympathetic to theosophy. She stated that 'the idea that truth is to be found in all religions' and the sect's 'focus on brotherhood and tolerance with a broad outlook on truth' appealed to him but Edwin made it clear to his wife that 'architecture is of this world. I want to be of this world, you, and of you. Of course architecture is divine and spirit making in the best sense, but it never separates from the world. It brings divine essence to the world' (Emily Lutyens, 1957). His wife once said 'I talk, you act; what I preach, you live'. In 1910 Lutyens had also written 'you may laugh at me a bit, but au fond somewhere, I am horribly religious, but cannot speak it, and this saves my work (Ridley 2002, 365, 415).

The calculations for the Cenotaph occupied 33 pages. The design of the monument was influenced by the illusion of linearity evident in the Parthenon. In 1931 Lutyens wrote that 'the intricacies of proportions and recurring ratios are without end and admit some fourth dimension which cannot be expressed. As in the Hindu faith where the name of god cannot be mentioned save perhaps under the mystic mono-syllable OOM'. When asked once at a conference 'what is proportion?' he answered 'god' (Ridley 296, 366). The influence of his prior work in India and his experience of the egalitarianism and comradeship of people of diverse faiths and none amid the carnage of terrible warfare no doubt greatly enhanced his disposition towards cosmopolitanism and pantheism.

So behind the design of the apparently secular Cenotaph and Stone of Remembrance there are mystical beliefs related to the geometry of ancient

Greece, Hindu views of the transcendent, and a contemporary belief in the equality and comradeship in diversity of all who fought and died in the Great War and those who mourned for them. The Church of England had, perhaps, reason to be suspicious of, and antagonistic towards, the eastern and cultic features surrounding the architect, his wife and their social milieu and philosophy. They were emblematic of rival doctrines and world views to those of the state church. These ideas challenged the Church's exclusive claim to truth and offered an alternative and perhaps more convincing vision of the meaning of the war and the sacrifices involved. Just over some two decades earlier the Church of England had rejected the polytheism of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, perhaps the largest ever gathering of representatives of the diverse religions of the world. Expressing his disapproval of that gathering the then Archbishop of Canterbury had stated "the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion. I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions without assuming the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims" (Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia 2013).

The vigorous but unsuccessful campaign of the 'Church party', to have, firstly, a large cross in place of the proposed catafalque in the Peace Procession, and secondly, a cross and Christian inscriptions upon the permanent version of the Cenotaph was, then, a continuation of the struggles in the cemeteries of France and Flanders and the meetings of the War Graves commission, to construct an official national symbolism and meaning appropriate to the sacrifice of the lives of so many hundreds of thousands on behalf of the state and the national community.

The immense public reaction to the temporary monument and the rapid resultant decision of the cabinet to construct a permanent version in the same location, despite its obvious difficulties in the middle of a busy street, because it had been 'hallowed by the tears of mothers' and the deep accompanying emotions of the hundreds of thousands who had, and who continued, to pay their respects to the fallen at the monument, justifiably raised the fears of the Church of England that a new state cult had arisen that threatened the Church's central role in the official public state-religious ceremonies and the sentiments and loyalties of the population. Another measure of the public respect for the monument was the custom that developed of men doffing their hats as they walked past the Cenotaph— a custom that died out as hats gradually disappeared as daily wear in the 1930s (Taylor 1975, 164).

The mass emotion and ritual surrounding the Peace parade and the construction of the temporary monument had occurred despite the fact

that there had been national services of thanksgiving on the proceeding Sunday 6 July 1919 when all denominations had also been encouraged to hold their own services including even in open air public places (CAB 27/52). Conventional religious services and rituals had failed to meet the emotional needs of the population.

Spiritualism – the belief and practice of communicating, apparently in a direct way, with the purported spirits of the dead – was also rife and a further indication of the inability of the conventional churches, which largely spurned such activities, to console the grieving population. Building on its Victorian antecedents spiritualism was to be found among the armed forces in the stress of battle and among the hundreds of thousands of the bereaved and others during and after the war (Cannadine, 1995, 227-9, Winter 1995, 54-77). Even as late as 1928 on the tenth anniversary of the conclusion of the Great War the strength of the Spiritualist movement was evident in the mass service at the Albert Hall in London on Armistice Day when large numbers in attendance rose to their feet to demonstrate that they had been in communication with their dead (Scotsman 12/11/28).

The popularity of the Cenotaph was related to the difficulties that the Church was finding in offering a convincing explanation for the necessity and scale of the mass sacrifice of the war. Just as the Great War had demonstrated that national loyalties trumped international solidarity among the socialist and labour movements of Europe, so international fraternity among the various Christian churches of Europe was fragmented and Christian leaders, some with deep commitment, a few with some reservation, supported the respective war efforts of their nation states (Burleigh 2005, 438-460). The Church of England struggled, unable to cope. It could not offer adequate explanation or comfort. ‘Chaplains were unable to give victims of the war an adequate burial. Church leaders could not give a consistent response to the profound questions of why such large scale slaughter, injury and cruelty had occurred. How could it be that a god would allow such a state of affairs and whose side was he on? And would all dead soldiers go automatically to heaven? (Cannadine, 1981, 218-9).

### **Enter the Unknown Warrior**

The original intention for the temporary model of the Cenotaph to be a secular monument to mark the ultimate sacrifice of members of the armed forces of the victorious allies, and the subsequent government decision after the Peace Celebrations of 1919 for there to be a permanent version

with a similar character, critically came under challenge in the following year when, again at very short notice, it was decided that an unknown warrior would be disinterred in the battlefields and brought to the United Kingdom to be re-interred with due respect and ceremony in a special tomb in Westminster Abbey on the occasion of Armistice Day 1920 – a date that had already been earmarked for the ceremonial unveiling by the King of the permanent Cenotaph monument (CAB 23/22; Hanson, 2005, 423).

There had however been some earlier public discussion of the idea of a tomb for an unknown warrior to symbolise the death of the tens of thousands that had had no known grave but it had been rejected by the government. The Daily Express had suggested on 16 September 1919, some two months after the Peace Celebrations, that an unknown warrior might be honoured by being buried under the Cenotaph (British Legion Journal 1955). On 29 Oct 1919 (Hansard col 658) Bonar Law, the government spokesman, who had lost a son (Cannadine 1995, 100), responding to a question in the Commons, rejected the idea of the burial of an unknown warrior. He said that 'the whole nation could sympathise with the sentiment behind a question in favour of an unknown warrior but it will be carried out in a more impressive way by the decision, already announced, to reproduce in a permanent form the Cenotaph in Whitehall, which as its name implies, is intended to represent an Imperial grave of all those citizens of the Empire, of every creed and rank, who gave their lives in the war'. Bonar Law (MP for Glasgow Central and briefly Prime Minister in 1922) said he was, however, willing to change his view if this was the view of the House – a diplomatic answer that would find support on both sides of the debate. It might be noted that this answer, again, interpreted the monument as an imperial and not an international symbol as it had been on 19 July 1919 (Westminster Abbey 2013).

The idea of a tomb for an unknown warrior was, then, one which had had some public currency after the Peace Celebrations of the previous year but had been discouraged by the government. However, shortly after the cabinet's decision to proceed with the unveiling ceremony for the permanent Cenotaph on Armistice Day 1920 – plans which did not include religious components and against which Archbishop Davidson protested (Wolffe 2000, 262) - the idea of a coincident entombment of an unknown warrior was adopted and promoted by Herbert Ryle, the Dean of Westminster Abbey, and endorsed by the monarch and cabinet. Rev David Railton (1884-1956), who had been a chaplain on the western front, later (1931) claimed to be the originator of the idea but as has been shown above the proposal was already in the public arena. Railton claims to have written to Dean Ryle in August of 1920 suggesting the concept, but he also

readily concurred that the implementation of the idea would not have been possible without the sponsorship and efforts of the Dean who certainly took over the idea and its implementation.

Ryle's biographer, Fitzgerald (1928), wrote that Ryle was a patriot, profoundly convinced of the righteousness of the allies' cause and the necessity of fighting to the death against Prussian militarism. From 1914 onwards he conducted 86 war related services. He helped establish the Abbey as a central rallying point for the nation's religious faith and the war time services which he conducted helped the Abbey become a shrine of the empire. He encouraged the Abbey to promote more of a focus on overseas missionary work 'to help the people realise the Church's imperial responsibilities and to win some vision of the greatness of the missionary opportunity and privilege'. 'The very stone of the Abbey', Fitzgerald wrote, 'spoke to those present of the spiritual link which bound men of British birth to one another and their forefathers and to god' (Fitzgerald 1928). His was an international British vision of the empire closely tied to Christian faith. Dean Ryle, it is argued, took up the idea of the unknown warrior's tomb because of ecclesiastical misgivings about the secular and non-denominational nature of Lutyen's Cenotaph similar to those reported earlier in this paper (Hanson 2005, 402).

Dean Ryle's advocacy of the proposal for a Christian entombment of an Unknown Warrior as part of the ceremonials at which the Cenotaph was to be unveiled was a masterstroke in terms of regaining the Church's initiative in national state ceremonial concerning the remembrance of the dead of the war. But its successful implementation depended on convincing the committee in charge of ceremonial chaired by Lord Curzon, who was now Foreign Secretary (Cannadine 1995, 100-2). Curzon had clearly been sympathetic to the 'Church Party' throughout the debates over a national monument but had been overruled by Lloyd George in his earlier advocacy of a large cross as the central monument for the Peace Parade of 1919 but on this occasion Curzon was able to prevail in holding a state Christian ceremony for the entombment of the unknown warrior. The cabinet accepted the proposal some three weeks before the Cenotaph was to be unveiled (CAB 23/22; Hanson 2005: 423), again requiring considerable last minute efforts to complete the implementation of the idea in the very short time scale available. The initial plan approved by the cabinet was for the wording on the tomb in the Abbey to be secular (Wolffe 2000, 264). Indeed the illustrative suggestive wording before the cabinet on 15 October was 'A British warrior who fell in the Great War 1914-1918 for King and Country' (CAB 23/22/18). Somehow Archbishop Davidson and Dean Ryle were subsequently able to override this decision and introduce a Christian element to the inscription on the tomb.

## **The Cenotaph, the Unknown Warrior and Armistice Day 1920**

The public response to the ceremonial passage of the body of the warrior from France, across the channel and through the south-east and London and its interment in Westminster Abbey was phenomenal – even more so than had been the reaction to the erection of the temporary Cenotaph some sixteen months earlier. It stimulated the greatest display of collective and individual emotion of any event in the twentieth century United Kingdom, probably far more than was the case of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997. The pent-up unexpressed grief of millions who had not been able to mourn in the presence of the body of a dead relative or friend found further expression in respect for the body of the unknown warrior.

Following its progress across the Channel and around the south east of England the body rested on its procession to the Abbey at the permanent version of the Cenotaph which was to be unveiled by the King. Following the precedent of the previous year the initial plans for the unveiling of the Cenotaph did not include prayers. Archbishop Davidson protested and eventually reached agreement with Curzon that there would be a rendering of ‘O God our help in ages past’ led by massed choristers in surplices and the saying of the Lord’s Prayer. At the insistence of Curzon, representing the interests of the state, there would, however, be representatives present from other religions and denominations. As well as six other Christian denominations, there were Jewish and Sikh representatives and Hindu princes from India. But the imam of the Woking mosque was unwell and unable to attend. The ceremonial at the Cenotaph was to be transformed from a mainly secular event to a religious one performed by the Church of England with ancillary symbolic representation of other faiths and Christian denominations (Wolffe, 2000, 262).

The arrival of the King was accompanied by the national anthem, the monument was unveiled without ceremony, there was a two minutes silence, the hymn ‘O God our help’ and finally the last post. ‘It was a low key understated ceremonial, totally lacking any form of ostentation or triumphalism (Cannadine 1995, 100-2). The Times (12/11/20) reported that the Lord’s Prayer was said at the Cenotaph ceremony.

Following the unveiling of the monument a procession led by the King, the prime minister, cabinet and military leaders moved on its way to the Abbey for the interment. Dean Ryle preached that the ‘unknown warrior’ had died ‘that England might live’. ‘The effect of Ryle’s coup in 1920’, writes Wolffe (2000, 262-4) ‘was to secure the enduring position of his great church as a focus on national feeling and ceremonial’.

People attended the two shrines in large numbers from all parts of the Kingdom. Huge lines queued on four days from Trafalgar Square past the Cenotaph and onwards to the Abbey. A ten foot mound of wreaths accumulated at the former site. On Saturday 13 November the Times reported that 'for two days now Whitehall has been filled with the soft shuffle of feet, and for two days the lines of mourners have been unbroken'. On the Sunday the 14th there was a queue of 7 miles. Some gave up queuing once that they had reached the Cenotaph. On Monday 15th the Times reported that 'the scenes in Whitehall and the Abbey during the last few days excel in simple pathos anything that they have ever seen.' From Armistice Day Thursday 11 November to the following Monday morning it is estimated that overall one million to 1.5 million people passed the Cenotaph and half a million entered the Abbey. It is estimated that the over 100,000 wreaths were deposited at the Cenotaph and they piled up ten feet high. The Abbey closed after a week but still people turned up in large numbers at the Cenotaph (Skelton and Glidden 2008, 47, Hanson 2005). According to the Westminster Abbey Guide of 1924, and referring to the tomb, 'Day after day numberless multitudes of pilgrims of every class and almost every nation, east as well as west, black, coloured, and white visited the spot - for a week' (Westminster Abbey 2013).

### **Christian, multi-faith or secular?**

In his diary entry for 11 November 1920, following the state religious ceremony of entombment, Archbishop Davidson of Canterbury reported that he 'was well enough to take part in the Cenotaph unveiling and the burial of the Unknown Warrior in the Abbey....I had had some keen controversy with the Prime Minister and cabinet, especially Curzon, about the proceedings at the Cenotaph. They had wishes, or the Prime Minister had wishes, that the proceedings should be entirely secular, alleging as a reason that Mohammedans and Hindus were among those to whose memory it stood.... But I prevailed, and we had a prayer and 'O God our help'....Instead of anyone disapproving there was unanimous expression of thankfulness that we had thus marked our Christian fellowship.' (Bell 1952, 1037).

However, the reception of the new monument was not as unanimous as recorded in this diary entry. Shortly after the ceremony Dean Ryle received a protest letter against the inscription on the tomb which included the phrase 'In Christ shall all be made alive' pointing out that many Jewish homes mourned a lost warrior son. 'The great and beautiful conception of the re-interment of the Unknown Warrior is baulked by the introduction of a Christian aspiration'. Ryle refused to remove the

Christian inscription. He admitted 'the warrior could be a Jew, a Moslem or a Mormon or have no faith at all'. 'The text', he went on 'reflects the faith of those who buried him. Nine out of ten mourners are Christian. The phrase represented the Christian faith for which the Abbey stands; of which the funeral service was the most solemn expression; to which the King belongs; and on behalf of which the Dean and Chapter, who provide the stone, have dedicated their lives' service'. Ryle's biographer adds that 'This correspondence illustrates Ryle's strong common sense as well as his refusal in any way to compromise his Christian faith. It would have been well if a similar spirit had been shown in the designs and inscriptions of certain other notable memorials of the war (Fitzgerald 1928: 314-6).

The possibility that the grave might well be a warrior for some person for whom it might be religiously inappropriate was also later considered, in 1931, by Rev David Railton (Westminster Abbey 2013). The warrior, whom he had wanted to be known, following the egalitarianism of the battlefields, as the 'unknown comrade' 'could have been a soldier, a sailor, a padre, a Roman Catholic, a Jew, a Salvationist, a Wesleyan, a Presbyterian or any other or no denomination, wealthy or from a slum, from the British Isles, the colonies or the dominions or he could have been a padre' – people of any of these backgrounds, he explained, had served at the time in the battlefields of Flanders and France.

Railton, a Scot, who had served as a chaplain, claimed that he first had the idea of the Unknown Comrade when he was inspired during the war by a rough cross of white wood at Armentieres inscribed 'An unknown soldier' (of the Black Watch). 'How that grave caused me to think!' he later wrote. 'I love every inch of Scotland. I had served in the earlier days a private soldier, in the ranks of the Scottish Territorial Battalion...How I longed to see his folk. But who was he, and who were they? From which of the mystic glens of old Scotia did he come? Was he a citizen of 'Auld Reekie'? Was he one of the grand old 'Contemptibles? Was he just a laddie - newly joined - aged 18 - the son of a shepherd from the far away Highlands? There was no answer to those questions'.

After the 1920 ceremony Prime Minister Lloyd George wrote to Lutyens, perhaps trying to reconcile him to the overwhelming Christian religious ethos of the ceremonies in relation to the Unknown Warrior, that "the memorial (the Cenotaph)...has become a national shrine not only to the British Isles but also for the whole empire; the Cenotaph, it may be said, is the token of our mourning as a nation; the grave of the unknown warrior is the token of our mourning as individuals' (Hanson 2005, 462). At his death in 1944 Lutyens' estate paid 120 guineas for a service in

Westminster Abbey and he was then cremated in West Finchley, London (Ridley 2002, 415).

The religious service at the Cenotaph on 11 November 1920 and the religious service and symbolism of interment of the Unknown Warrior completely negated the secular symbolism and meaning of the Cenotaph that Lloyd George had so insistently required in July 1919 against the clear reservations of significant elements of the Church and the war cabinet. Sixteen months after the march past of international troops at the temporary Cenotaph, the Prime Minister was acquiescing with a very religious state and Empire religious ceremonial for the interment of the Unknown Warrior. In 1919 when he insisted on a secular monument he was negotiating and concluding the Treaty deliberations at Versailles and was, perhaps, at the height of his power. A J P Taylor claims that Lloyd George, as Prime Minister (1916-22), had at times almost dictatorial powers. But he also suggests that he sometimes lacked the discipline and persistence to see a project through to completion. 'He darted from one problem to another, rarely finding enough time to work one of them through to the end'. He was ready to jump from one policy to a conflicting one without any claim of consistency and 'was not a man of plan or system' (Taylor, 1975, 73, 131-2. 1998, 41-49). His acquiescence in the ceremonies of November 1920 perhaps also gives an indication of the diminution of his power that was brought about by the ending of the five member War Cabinet in November 1919 and its replacement by a much larger 21 member peace time coalition cabinet of Conservative and Liberal members (Taylor 1975, 650-2). This erosion of his power was to culminate two years later in his ejection from office when Conservative MPs revolted against the continuation of the Conservative/Liberal Party coalition government. As the leader of the coalition government he needed to keep the support of a Conservative Party wedded to the Church of England, the Empire, and traditional patriotic British institutions. It was these latter forces that prevailed through the initiative of the Dean of Westminster in the ceremony of the burial of the Unknown Warrior. As David Marquand writes concerning the eventual fall of Lloyd George:

'For Conservatives of almost all stripes the great challenge of the times was to ensure that the established institutions and norms of the British state..... retained their old authority in the bewildering world of mass democracy. In their eyes, the Crown, the Church, the Cabinet, the Bank of England, Parliament, party, the armed forces and the senior civil service were part of the wider structure of leadership and consent which they were duty-bound to defend' (2008:80). Lloyd George had finally in early 1920 secured the disestablishment of the Church in Wales – a measure which required the second use of the Parliament Act of 1911 to overcome

opposition in the Lords (McLean 2010). But he was not to be allowed to frustrate the Church of England.

One other aspect of the ceremonial of 11 November 1920 that is worthy of additional comment is evident in Lloyd George's letter to Edwin Lutyens - from being an international monument to the war dead of all the allied nations on 19 July 1919 the Cenotaph had become, on 11 November 1920, as part of the ceremony of the entombment of the Unknown Warrior, a UK and imperial monument to those who died as subjects of the King (The Times, 6/11/20). The French were advised that entombment of the warrior was to be a 'domestic' occasion and that they would not be involved. And to this day the annual service of remembrance at the Cenotaph is for the United Kingdom and the states of the Commonwealth.

It is also of note that while the cross held high by the leader of the robed Christian procession at the contemporary ceremonies is of bronze or golden composition and about four feet in height there is evidence in a newsreel of 1930 of a large wooden cross being carried in the vicinity of the Cenotaph during the remembrance ceremonies which is more of the twenty to thirty feet size proposed by Curzon in the planning meetings for the Peace Celebrations of 1919 (National Archives 2013). The Church clearly felt that it required a physically large symbol to counter and appease what it regarded as the unwelcome mass emotions and sentiments focused upon the large monument authorised by the state which threatened to become an alternative symbolic expression of, and rallying point for, the loyalties and feelings of a nominally Christian nation and empire that had been traumatised by war. And to this day the Church of England feels the need to display, with state concurrence, the prominent cross leading a religious procession and to utter Christian prayers referring to the 'Lord Jesus Christ' in the Remembrance ceremony to demonstrate its Christian nature and the centrality and dominance of the Church of England in the rituals of the UK state which take place around a monument that was essentially secular in its conception and design.

### **Attempted changes to an enduring and sacred ritual**

The basic pattern of subsequent official state remembrance rituals at the Cenotaph was largely shaped by decisions in 1921. The cabinet explicitly trimmed more overtly religious aspects of proceedings by decreeing that, while there should be the hymn 'O God our help', it should be led 'not by a choir but by a military band' (CAB/24/129). There is evidence, too, that the initial establishment of these rituals at the Cenotaph was not without considerable challenge from the Church and perhaps not as smooth in operation as suggested by key commentators (Cannadine 1995, 100-2;

Wolffe 2000, 262-4). Indeed the Church appears to have been endeavouring in the early 1920s to move the official remembrance ceremony from the Cenotaph to Westminster Abbey where the Unknown Warrior now lay interred. In 1922 there were suggestions from the Church that the remembrance ceremony should take place in the Abbey (CAB 23/21). In 1923, when Armistice Day fell on a Sunday the Archbishop of Canterbury succeeded in arranging a remembrance service in the Abbey in which the King would lay a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior and the remembrance of war and the celebration of the Armistice would be organised nationally through churches of all denominations. The cabinet was initially persuaded that there should be no ceremony at the Cenotaph but eventually this decision was reversed due to the strong public demands. According to the Times (23/10/23), it became recognised that if there was no ceremony, the public at the Cenotaph would organise an impromptu service. The official service at the monument was attended by the Prince of Wales on behalf of the King (CAB 23/46, The Times, 18 and 23/10/23, October, 5 and 10/11/23). Reporting the occasion the Times (12 November) wrote that 'The Silence was poignant, the service was beautiful in its simplicity; but it was the tramp of the interminable legions of the bereaved, hour after hour, which brought realisation in the fullest measure of what the Cenotaph means to the common people' .

In 1924 it was decided that 'the lines of the ceremony' would 'closely follow those of 1921 and 1922' with the King laying a wreath at the Cenotaph (The Times 18/10/24). The attempt of the Church to organise a national state religious ceremony for the dead of war at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior in place of the ceremony at the Cenotaph had failed because of the strength of public reaction and the emotional and symbolic significance of the Cenotaph to the public.

There have been some other subsequent attempts at major change but they have also been resisted because of the continuing deep emotional attachment of large and influential sectors of the population to the customary form of the ceremonies. The basic shape of the pre-1939 ritual has been retained to the present day, despite occasional attempts at change, and with some minor but significant variations in more recent times.

In the immediate aftermath of victory in Europe there was an attempt by the newly elected UK Labour government, following consultation with the churches and the Chief Rabbi, to find a new formula of remembrance. The cabinet was reported to be unanimously in favour of developing new arrangements suitable to commemorate the Second World War as well as the Great War by instituting ceremonies in the summer months in place

of those of 11 November. The Bishop of Winchester, on behalf of the Church of England, also investigated the possibility of a new summer season of victory celebrations but the proposals for change were effectively vetoed by the British Legion which preferred the inherited model that was put in abeyance during the years of the Second World War and which it claimed was 'deeply engrained in the minds of the nation' (NAS 1945).

As the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the First World War approached in 1968, there was a feeling that interest and support for the ceremony at the Cenotaph was declining as the younger elements of the population lacked recollection of the years of war and that it needed renewal to attract wider interest. Some major churches had called for wider denominational participation in the ceremony at the Cenotaph and commemoration of all who had died in the service of their country, not just in two World Wars, and to introduce some form of call of dedication for the future. There were discussions between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church and the Free Churches about developing a more ecumenical form of remembrance service, designed to reflect the changing significance of remembrance Sunday itself. In addition to a reference to 'past sacrifice and deliverance' a new proposed more ecumenical form of the service 'provided for penitence for present shortcomings and for dedication to the service and future welfare of mankind'. It was adopted by the above named churches and, after much to-ing and fro-ing, particularly as to which publishers were to receive attribution in the published form of the service, it was jointly recommended as being available for use at local remembrance services. There also was a proposal for a special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ecumenical religious service in St Paul's Cathedral.

Interestingly there were objections about the proposed new form of service from the Anglican Evangelical Alliance which complained of not being consulted and that 'the new recommended form of service included 'prayers for the Dead'. 'These prayers' it protested 'went even beyond the theology of the Roman Catholic Church inasmuch as they seemed to include the un-baptised'. Nor did the Alliance like the term 'approved for use at remembrance services'. The Archbishop of Canterbury replied that 'prayers for the departed are an invariable feature of services on national occasions and this has been so for many years before I came to office' (Ramsey 2013, 142 ff.75-185).

The Labour government of the day subsequently rejected the idea of any change to the inherited rituals. The Under-Secretary for Defence wrote to Archbishop Ramsey that 'the Cenotaph service itself is the culmination of the other ceremonies and observances that are held in the preceding week and it is intended to be the unique expression of the nation's tribute to

those who died. A service in St Paul's the following day might well be something of an anti-climax, and would not perhaps add significantly to the Cenotaph service itself'. The Home Secretary, James Callaghan, also replied to the Archbishop of Canterbury in relation to some suggested variations to the service at the Cenotaph involving the end of the custom of the laying of wreaths in the following terms:

'The remembrance of the sacrifices made by the dead in the two world wars is of great significance to many. Wreath laying has for so long been a particularly important part of the proceedings to remove this would be distressing to many.....It may be a few years yet before any radical change of emphasis is likely to be acceptable. I shall not therefore be introducing any changes to the ceremony this year'.

Following receipt of this letter the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to the Archbishop of York, perhaps with an eye to posterity and future explorers of the Lambeth Palace archives, that 'it is of course a state occasion and we have no status, but perhaps the new ecumenical service may point the way to what might be done in future at the Cenotaph' (Ramsey 2013 142 ff.75-185).

There could be no clearer statement than in the comments of the Home Secretary and the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1968 that the annual remembrance ceremony at the Cenotaph is a state occasion the form of which is determined by the government of the day but which is heavily influenced by a strong tradition and accompanying expectations of how it should be performed as well as sometimes competing religious and secular influences.

### **Multi-faith remembrance?**

If the concern of the Church of England in the 1960s was to broaden participation in the Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph by including a wider range of Christian churches in the religious aspects of the ceremony, the concern in the later parts of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first century has been to be more inclusive by widening the participation in the ceremonial through the involvement of non-Christian religious denominations. As successive governments have sought to display a greater awareness of religious diversity in the UK brought about by more varied immigration streams from Commonwealth countries and from other members of the European Union, and from internal and international tensions associated with religious divisions, the religious delegation at the ceremony has come to include representatives of Orthodox Christianity, as well as a variety of Christian denominations, and non-Christian faiths such as Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. This is in

marked contrast to mid-century and certainly in the 1980s when one former civil servant involved in the proceedings recalls the Chief Rabbi as the only representative of non-Christian religions being present.

It is significant that the suggested reforms of the remembrance ceremony in 1968 did not make reference to involvement by non-Christian religions. The official recognition of religious diversity had waned mid-century compared to the immediate post-World War I period, but of course, given the history of the Cenotaph, these diverse streams of religious faith ought perhaps, if there were to be religious dimensions to the ceremony at the Cenotaph, have had continuing representation from the monument's earliest days and throughout the twentieth century, but the fact that these religions now again in more recent years have representation at the ceremony might be seen to be a form of positive adaptation to both the history of the state and the realities of life in the contemporary UK and Commonwealth.

But nonetheless, the Christian element of the remembrance service, conducted by the Church of England, continues as a key part of the event. As described earlier a Church of England functionary, usually the Bishop of London, participates in a robed religious procession which is led by a member holding high a large - about four feet high - bronze or golden cross. The bishop utters a Christian prayer invoking the 'Lord Jesus Christ' while the members of the religious delegation, like all other attendees, stay mute in respectful silence – as do the leaders of the larger political parties - some of whom are reported to be atheists, like one in five of the population (National Centre for Social Research 2009). The utterance of a Christian prayer and the presence of other Christian elements throughout the ceremony symbolise the continuing ritual dominance of that religion, in its Church of England form, in the public life of the UK state and its annual ceremony of remembrance of the dead of war at the Cenotaph.

The role of the Church of England in defining the state religious rituals of remembrance is also evident in less obvious ways. The Church, has, on behalf of the UK state, become the official broker for the state recognition of religious denominations. The official religious delegation at the Remembrance Day ceremony in 2012 included representatives of various Christian denominations or confederations of churches and non-Christian denominations such as Zoroastrians and Jains as well as Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists. These are the non-Christian religions that the Church of England has, in its inter-faith deliberations, come to recognise as the more valid and virtuous expressions of religious faith that should have representation in state ceremonial such as royal weddings

and annual remembrance services. They received state recognition in the very first official action of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 when, on 15 February, the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace introduced the monarch to 'leading representatives' of *the* eight non-Christian world religions' (emphasis added) 'as well as Christian representatives...and a display of sacred objects of each faith (Archbishop of Canterbury 2013). Admission to the ranks of the officially recognised religious delegation at the Remembrance Day ceremony, members of which are allowed to lay wreaths during the official ceremony, is strictly controlled through such definitions of religiosity – the implementation of which the UK government delegates to the Chaplain-General of the armed forces. Spiritualists who have persistently presented a different perspective from the Church of England, as to the channels of communication with supernatural realms, and who constituted a particularly strong movement during and immediately after the First World War as many tried to accommodate to the deaths of loved ones, are still denied official recognition as a recognised religious denomination in the ceremonies, despite there still being numerous spiritualist churches. Humanists, too, struggle against such restrictions at the UK ceremony, although they have, in recent years, obtained that right in the equivalent annual ceremony at the Stone of Remembrance in Edinburgh (Spiritualist 2013, Guardian 2013a, Armed Forces Humanists 2013).

### **The future of religious representation at the state remembrance ceremonial at the Cenotaph**

The results of the 2011 censuses on religious affiliation for the United Kingdom provide illuminating findings on the suitability of the existing arrangements for the recognition of religious denominations and faiths at the annual ceremony of remembrance at the Cenotaph. In England and Wales 59.3 per cent of respondents reported that they were Christian; 25.1 per cent said they had no religion and 7 per cent did not answer the voluntary question. Muslims were 4.8 per cent and the other officially recognised non-Christian religions constituted 3.2 per cent (ONS 2012). In Scotland, where the question was different, a lower percentage of 54 said they were Christian and 2.5 per cent recorded other religions. 37 per cent reported no religion – a considerably higher figure than south of the border (National Records of Scotland 2013). In Northern Ireland 80 per cent of the population said they were Christian and 16 per cent that they had no religion. Generally in the UK the non-religious are a substantial and growing sector of the population numbering, on census criteria, at least over a quarter of the population (Guardianb 2013).

Members of the officially recognised religious groups present at the ceremony thus represented about two in every three of the population and while the Church performing the religious ritual at the event could be said to represent the small majority of the population who said they were Christian, Anglicans of the officiating denomination are only about one in three of the population (ONS 2012, YouGov 2012).

Attempts to constitute a more diverse and representative religious delegation at the remembrance ceremonies could become more inclusive if the 57,000 write-in census Pagans in England and Wales and the 39,000 write-in census Spiritualists (both of whom lacked a pre-coded response in the questionnaire as presented by the census authorities) were included. In fact Pagans, who recognise many gods, like the Ancient Greeks and Romans, probably have a strong claim, for reasons given above concerning the conception and design of the monument, to be officially present at the rituals at the Cenotaph. The Anglican writer Wilkinson (1978, 302-3) has, indeed, called the monument 'pagan'. And these latter groups are more numerous than the 20,000 Jains and the Zoroastrians (2011 figure not available at time of writing, but 4000 in 2001) who are officially represented at Cenotaph ceremonial. The total of 'other religion' respondents who were not represented in the pre-coded categories was 240,000 – collectively as numerous as Buddhists and nearly approaching the Jewish figure of 263,000 (BRIN 2013).

And, of course, the census does not ask questions as to whether people are atheists. The census return of 25 per cent for people with no religion in England and Wales and 37 per cent in Scotland is compatible with findings from the National Centre for Social Research (2009) that indicate that 19 per cent of the population do not 'believe in god or any higher power'. A national memorial ceremony cannot be completely unifying if its rituals exclude such significant proportions of the population.

In a society where religion and belief is so diverse it is thus impossible for one religious denomination, or even an array of religious denominations, to be adequately representative of the views of the population. In a plural society religion is inherently divisive as competing denominations seek dominance or eminence in the social and political sphere. In a democratic state people find their common sentiments and unifying symbols through their loyalty to the state and respect for the democratic process and the rights and obligations of citizenship rather than through shared religious belief. Common citizenship presents a surer common ground for the shared values and beliefs of the general population than does religious division and competition. Hence a secular ceremony with which all can identify, shorn of current religious elements and building upon the

substantial other elements of the existing ceremony, would provide a more appropriate and inclusive annual commemorative ritual for the all the people of the UK state and the Commonwealth at a monument designed to encompass the remembrance of all the dead of war whatever their religion or beliefs or nationality.

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## **Illustration**

1919 Image at

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## **The Cenotaph: Timeline**

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1917              | Founding of the Imperial War Graves Commission   |
| 1918 11 November  | Armistice  |
| 1919 19 July.     | Peace Parade. Temporary Cenotaph monument  |
| 1919 11 November. | Armistice Day. First two minutes silence<br>Impromptu wreath laying at the Cenotaph  |
| 1920 11 November. | Unveiling of the permanent Cenotaph.<br>Interment of the Unknown Warrior.  |
| 1923 October.     | Plan for service at Westminster Abbey to replace<br>the ceremony at the Cenotaph on Sunday 11<br>November. Cenotaph ceremony restored.<br>Two ceremonies held. |
| 1924 11 November  | Familiar ceremony at the Cenotaph  |

