

*The 'People's War' in Concrete and Stone: Death and the Negotiation of Collective Identity in Second World War Britain**

Towards the end of 1941, the social survey organisation Mass Observation (MO) wrote a report comparing its Observers' experiences in two 'blitztowns' that the organisation had visited following the heavy air raids between the autumn of 1940 and the spring of 1941. The second section of the report described the impact that a crashed Junkers 88 dive bomber had had on the local population after it was 'placed in the centre of destruction.' Crowds of passers-by stopped to examine the plane with 'pleasure, interest and relief', while some 'scratched their names on the paint, which was covered with hundreds of names.' The display of the enemy plane, the Observer felt, had a cheering effect on civilian morale; something that was badly needed in the aftermath of heavy bombing raids.¹ In contrast, the first description was of 'a mass funeral of a type common in blitztowns.'² The funeral was a public event, and 'a great many people knew when and where the funeral was happening.' MO described the funeral procession as follows:

The procession went across the town, leaving the mortuary at the park after lunch and ending up at the cemetery. Much of the way was down the main road, which was lined with police. The procession left the park with the band of the Royal Marines playing at its head, the bass trombone emphatic. Their drums were draped in crepe. Behind them walked an elderly man in a top hat, followed by 12 Rolls Royce and Daimler hearses, driven by men in top hats. Each had a wreath on the roof and the coffins within draped in Union Jacks. Alongside each hearse marched Servicemen. Then came 24 mourner's cars, several containing officers and two unoccupied aside from the driver. Behind these again were detachments of the Services, Civil Defence etc headed by the Navy, with a Naval Officer in charge of all and giving commands. The column included Army, RAF, French Navy, Home Guard, ARP, AFS, ATS, FAP and Police. Spectators lined the route and the

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1. Brighton, University of Sussex, Mass Observation Archive [hereafter MOA], File Report [hereafter FR] 953, 'Two Blitz Occasions', 8 Nov. 1941, p. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 2. Although the town is not named in the File Report, it is probably Portsmouth on the south coast of England. Portsmouth was home to the Royal Marines and a major naval base during the Second World War. It was heavily bombed on 10–11 January 1941, when 171 people were killed.

pavements were fairly crowded the whole way. A considerable number were noted dabbling their eyes with handkerchiefs and some women biting their lips or knuckles.

The dead were buried in a trench grave, around 100 feet long, and the service was conducted by an Anglican bishop, with a Catholic bishop and ministers from other denominations taking part.³

At first glance this funeral service, burying civilian victims of an air raid, attended not only by relatives but by mourners and sympathisers from the city, by representatives of the armed services, the voluntary civil defence organisations and of the city itself, appears to embody the collective nature and identity of the 'people's war'. Interred together in a shared grave, mourned together, and commemorated by civic and military authorities, the dead of this air raid were buried as collective members of a city—and of a nation—at war, not as individual victims. However, two short sentences buried deep in MO's Report suggests otherwise: 'Most of the air raid victims had been buried privately and separately before this. The public ceremony involved only a minority of those killed in the big raid.'⁴

The bereaved of this unnamed city were not alone in their decision to bury the dead privately, rather than collectively. Of the 500 victims of air raids in Shoreditch, east London, fewer than half were buried by the local authority, and only ninety were buried together in the authority's communal graves in the Great North London Cemetery at Southgate.⁵ In Wandsworth, south London, 343 of the borough's 398 civilian war dead had been claimed for private burial by December 1940; of the forty-six recorded as having been 'buried by the local authority in blankets or shrouds in common graves', thirty-four were described as being unidentifiable. The local authority of Paddington, west London, buried just twenty-two victims of the 172 dead of the borough in the same period.⁶ Only 397 of the 1,174 civilian dead in heavily bombed Plymouth were buried in a communal grave by the city; others, including all five members of the Pengelly family, killed in a large raid on the city in April 1941, were claimed for private burial by their relatives.⁷ Around 1,450 people were killed in Liverpool during the May Blitz on Merseyside; almost 1,000 of these were buried by their families, while 554 were buried together in a 'brick lined tomb' in Anfield Cemetery.⁸ Similar decisions were made by the bereaved in

3. MOA, FR 953, 'Two Blitz Occasions', 8 Nov. 1941, p. 3.

4. *Ibid.*

5. London, Hackney Archives, S/A/27, Burial Records of Civil Defence Personnel and Civilians, 1945–1950.

6. Kew, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], Home Office [hereafter HO] 45/21922, Civilian War Dead Burials, 'Deaths Due to War Operations', Dec. 1940.

7. Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 1714/1/2, Plymouth Air Raid Casualties, 21 Mar.–24 Apr. 1941. Plymouth's communal grave is in Efford Cemetery.

8. 'Funerals of Liverpool Raid Victims', *Evening Express*, 13 May 1941, p. 3.

other badly bombed cities: Belfast, Glasgow, Bristol and Clydebank, among others, all saw the majority of air raid victims claimed for burial by families, rather than buried collectively by local authorities. The collective identity of the ‘people’s war’ ceased, for many civilians, with death.⁹

This article explores the relationship between the individual and the collective in wartime—at the heart of the ‘people’s war’—through an examination of the aims and emotions shaping those most intimate of wartime events and experiences: the death, burial and memorialisation of the war’s victims. It investigates the relationship between a drive to remember the conflict’s dead as members of the collective wartime nation, and the desire of many of the bereaved to emphasise instead familial ties and the individual, private lives of the dead. While this was not a new concern, having already been rehearsed in debates about where to bury, and how to commemorate, the British dead of the First World War, it was shaped by the very different context of the Second World War. In the later conflict, civilians were killed alongside combatants in large numbers, and debates about how to bury the dead, and how to mourn and commemorate them, preoccupied policy makers and public alike. In this conflict, public discourse about the nation, about the state’s duty to its citizens, and about citizens’ reciprocal duties towards the wartime state, entwined with ideas about domestic reconstruction in the war’s aftermath. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on public discourse: the arguments, essays and speeches of politicians and activists, the representation and formulation of that discourse in the media, and the extent to which it shaped both war aims and the eventual post-war settlement. The feelings of the individuals who constituted the wartime nation, and the multiple and complex ways that they negotiated with the idea of the ‘people’s war’, are less well understood.

The historiography of the ‘people’s war’ is wide-ranging. Research has explored its articulation in 1940, often seen as the moment of its creation; its discursive importance to both the military services and the volunteer civilian services that battled on the home front; its relationship to reconstruction and the desire of many to avoid the structural inequalities that had scarred the interwar years; and its role in

9. Bereaved relatives of those undertaking military service had far less agency concerning the burial of their loved ones. If a service member died overseas and their body was recovered, responsibility for their burial lay firstly with the different branches of the military and then with the Imperial War Graves Commission. If they died in Britain, the body could be claimed for burial by the family, who could request that the IWGC erect a headstone, or erect one privately. The examples discussed in this article are all from English towns and cities. For more on the culture and experience of death and bereavement in the other nations of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, see L. Noakes, *Dying for the Nation: Death, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain* (Manchester, 2020). For a study of Second World War Britain that takes a ‘four nations’ approach, see J. Pattinson and W. Ugolini, eds, *Fighting for Britain? Negotiating Identities in Britain during the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2015).

popular memory of the war.¹⁰ The term itself has two, often entangled, meanings. The first is a wartime unity that is imagined as (largely) cutting across divisions of social class and political persuasion: as George Orwell argued in his 1941 essay *The Lion and The Unicorn*, 'war brings it home to the individual that he is *not* altogether an individual ... At this moment it is not a question so much of surrendering life, as of surrendering leisure, comfort, economic liberty, social prestige.'¹¹ This collective effort, as widely understood at the time, would both ensure eventual victory and help to heal the divisions of the interwar period.

This appeal to a collective identity, and thus to collective action, was found across the political spectrum, and could emphasise an imperial, alongside a domestic, unity. As Wendy Webster has shown, wartime newsreel and radio broadcasts worked hard to present an image of an imperial people united in their support for Britain. The imperial 'family', as it was described in the king's Christmas radio broadcasts throughout the war, was imagined as bound together by ties of sentiment and loyalty.¹² Churchill's conservative and imperialist 'people's war' had none of the radicalism found in Orwell's; his people were fighting in defence of the status quo, not to overturn it. In his famous first speech as Prime Minister he appealed to a people's volunteer army that would 'never surrender', secure in the knowledge that the wartime collective was not limited by national borders as, should invasion succeed, 'our Empire, beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle.'¹³ Outside public discourse and propaganda, expressions of collective wartime identity can be found in a range of wartime communities, and seen through different actions. The duties of wartime citizenship, and the placing therein of collective needs above individual desires, can be seen most clearly in

10. Angus Calder's influential social history, *The People's War* (London, 1969), probably began this debate. His book ranges more widely over the history of the war itself, however, and argues that the radical promise of the early years of the 'people's war' was undone by reactionary forces in the second half of the conflict. See P. Addison, 'Angus Calder (1942–2008)', *History Workshop Journal*, lxx (2010), pp. 299–304. Calder revisited and revised many of his ideas in his later work, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1991), which deconstructed the creation of the 'people's war' narrative in 1940–41 through popular cultural texts. For an insightful discussion of the popular memory of the 'people's war' in British post-war film, see G. Eley, 'Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory and World War II', *American Historical Review*, cvi (2001), pp. 818–38. For consideration of how this was shaped by gender, see L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939–1991* (London, 1998); P. Summerfield, 'Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of British Studies*, xlviii (2009), pp. 935–57. For a study of the intersection between wartime citizenship and other identity formations, see S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939–1945* (Oxford, 2003).

11. G. Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London, 1941). The essay argued for the necessity of an 'English socialism' to overcome the divisions of class and income that Orwell believed were impeding the collective war effort.

12. W. Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939–1965* (Oxford, 2005).

13. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Commons, 4 June 1940, vol. 361, col. 796.

the widespread acceptance of military and industrial conscription and in the creation of voluntary civilian organisations, including Air Raid Precautions (ARP) and the Local Defence Volunteers, better known as the Home Guard.¹⁴ Although the number of volunteers for ARP remained stubbornly lower than had been anticipated, the idea of equality of sacrifice, central to the ‘people’s war’ discourse, was important to many volunteers, even if they often believed that their local ARP Post or community was showing a greater commitment to this ideal than others.¹⁵ Veterans of the First World War, perhaps too old for other services, could—and did—join in the ‘people’s war’ through membership of ARP services and of the Home Guard, and women at home with domestic and childcare responsibilities could feel an active part of the war effort through the work of the Women’s Voluntary Service and its Housewives’ Service.¹⁶ Widely articulated yet broadly defined, the collective of the ‘people’s war’ could encompass many different categories of people, belief and action. As Geoffrey Field has argued, ‘the “people’s war” was effective because it was vague.’¹⁷

The second, closely related meaning is the belief that, in order to achieve the unity necessary for overall victory, a plan for social, political and economic reform was needed. Sustained and widespread debate about this reform, usually referred to as reconstruction, began almost with the start of the war; indeed, wartime conditions can be seen as necessary for the development and implementation of such plans. The 1930s had seen politicians of all major political parties attempt to develop strategies that would enable a more coherent programme of social welfare, but these had largely foundered on opposition to the centralised planning and state growth that would be necessary for their execution.¹⁸ The necessity of a ‘command economy’ in total war removed these barriers, and created a space within which plans, ideas and dreams of a new kind of post-war society could be explored. As the foreword to *Picture Post*’s January 1941 special issue ‘A Plan for Britain’ argued, war was an opportunity ‘for doing the thinking, so that we can make things

14. On the gendered nature of citizenship in the Home Guard, see P. Summerfield and C. Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2007); on gender, citizenship and civil defence, see L. Noakes, ‘Serve to Save: Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain, 1937–41’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, xlvii (2012), pp. 734–53.

15. TNA, HO 186/371, Civil Defence Preparedness, ARP Training State (Mar. 1939); J. Hammett, *Creating the People’s War: Civil Defence Communities in Second World War Britain* (Manchester, 2022), pp. 84–5.

16. On the Home Guard, see Summerfield and Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence*; on the Women’s Voluntary Service, see J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War* (Oxford, 2003); Hammett, *Creating the People’s War*, pp. 133–55.

17. G. Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939–1945* (Oxford, 2011), p. 377.

18. J. Harris, ‘Political Ideas and the Debate on State Welfare, 1940–45’, in H.L. Smith, ed., *War and Social Change: British Society and the Second World War* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 233–63, at 237.

how we want them to be.¹⁹ Popular reception of Beveridge's innocuously titled *Social Insurance and Allied Services Report* (1942), which set out detailed plans for a post-war welfare state, and which 'gripped the imagination of the country to a remarkable degree', and the outcome of the 1945 General Election, which saw Clement Attlee's Labour Party win almost 48 per cent of the vote based on its promises to enact Beveridge's reforms, can be seen as key elements of the 'people's war', and indicative of the popularity of wartime plans for reconstruction.²⁰

For the Labour-supporting newspaper *The Daily Mirror*, if not necessarily for subsequent historians, the reasons for Labour's victory in 1945 were clear: 'The result of the election ... indicates that the people of this country knew not only what they were fighting against, but what they were fighting for. Their demands, their aspirations, can be summed up in a sentence. They want a better life.'²¹ For many years, historians broadly concurred with this analysis, agreeing that wartime conditions moved public opinion to embrace an egalitarian post-war settlement, while disagreeing on the extent to which the Labour Party embodied this mood, or lagged behind, proposing reform when 'the people' wanted more radical change.²² While historians including Paul Addison and Geoffrey Field have argued that wartime conditions shifted the electorate towards support for the Labour Party and Beveridge's reforms, Steven Fielding has discerned 'a disengagement with the political process' among the 1945 electorate, finding instead a widespread desire to focus on the personal and the private after the very public demands of wartime, and the growth of consumerism at the expense of wartime collectivism.²³ David Kynaston's social history of post-war Britain similarly finds discontent with continued austerity in this period, a feeling forcibly expressed by a working-class woman from London who, after queuing for foodstuffs in a period of increased rationing, angrily exclaimed: 'I'd like to take Attlee and all the rest of them and put them on top of a bonfire in Hyde Park and BURN them.'²⁴

19. 'Foreword', *Picture Post*, 4 Jan. 1941, p. 4.

20. 'Shaping the Future', *Daily Mail*, 19 Jan. 1943, p. 2. Approximately 600,000 copies of the *Report* were sold in six months: Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Commons, 6 Apr. 1943, vol. 388, col. 496. For a detailed consideration of the election results and their relationship to both social class and ideas of reconstruction, see Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, pp. 367–72. As Jose Harris has shown, Beveridge himself was to disown the term 'welfare state' on the grounds that it emphasised the state's obligation to its citizens, rather than their obligations to state and nation: J. Harris, *William Beveridge* (Oxford, 1977), p. 448.

21. 'Britain Gives Labour Power', *Daily Mirror*, 27 July 1945, p. 2.

22. For a classic exposition of the first perspective, see P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1977); for the second, see Calder, *People's War*. For a discussion of ideas of the post-war world to be found within wartime Conservatism, see K. Kowol, 'The Conservative Movement and Dreams of Britain's Post-war Future', *Historical Journal*, lxii (2019), pp. 473–93.

23. Addison, *Road to 1945*; Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*; S. Fielding, 'What Did "The People" Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 Election', *Historical Journal*, xxxv (1992), pp. 623–39, at 632.

24. D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945–51* (London, 2007), p. 115.

Most recently, David Edgerton has questioned the very existence of the ‘people’s war’, arguing in this journal that ‘the idea of a national “people’s war” was created by historians in the late 1960s, becoming popular two decades later.’²⁵ Other recent social histories of the war have focused on the creation, articulation and circulation of a ‘people’s war’ discourse and identity from below. Sonya Rose’s landmark *Which People’s War?* explored the often-fractious relationship between individual and subordinate subjectivities and the wartime collective, while Jessica Hammett has traced the circulation and meaning of the phrase ‘people’s war’ among civil defence volunteers and Henry Irving has situated it as an ‘important frame of reference’ in wartime rhetoric around recycling and salvage.²⁶ As Mark Connelly has argued in his work on British cultural memory of the war, the conflict was ‘mythologised as it happened’, with individuals and collectives interpolating, revising and interpreting public discourse in ways that suited them.²⁷

Fielding’s and Kynaston’s studies are two of the few explorations of the reach of the ‘people’s war’ narrative to focus on individual reactions to, and negotiations with, this discourse. Other studies, including Irving’s work on salvage and Hammett’s research into voluntarism and civil defence, consider how individuals embraced, rejected and negotiated membership of the people’s war through their actions. More broadly, historical analysis of the impact on British politics and society of the Second World War has tended to fall into one of two camps: the war is understood either as a period in which growing individualism and consumerism were somewhat reluctantly put on hold ‘for the duration’, reappearing with a vengeance in the 1950s; or as a time when the demands of war moved Britain to the left, resulting in the creation of a more egalitarian post-war society in which individual lives were shaped and guided by the welfare state. Thus, the war helped to create either the individualism and consumerism of the post-war years, *or* the collectivism of the welfare state.

The reality is perhaps more complex. The burial, commemoration and remembrance of the war’s dead, the subject of this article, provides a lens through which we can consider this paradox. A history of wartime death and remembrance illustrates the ways that individuals negotiated

25. D. Edgerton, ‘The Nationalisation of British History: Historians, Nationalism and the Myths of 1940’, *English Historical Review*, cxxxvi (2021), pp. 950–85, at 981. This article, which focuses on the historiography of the ‘people’s war’ and on the myth of ‘Britain Alone’, builds on Edgerton’s earlier work on the relationship between welfare and warfare: D. Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge, 2005); D. Edgerton, ‘War, Reconstruction, and the Nationalization of Britain, 1939–1951’, in M. Mazower, J. Reinisch and D. Feldman, eds, *Post-war Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945–1949*, *Past and Present* supplement 6 (Oxford, 2011), pp. 29–46.

26. Rose, *Which People’s War?*; Hammett, *Creating the People’s War*; H. Irving, ‘“We Want Everybody’s Salvage!” Recycling, Voluntarism, and the People’s War’, *Cultural and Social History*, xvi (2019) pp. 165–84.

27. M. Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London, 2008), p. 8.

between personal identity and private desires, and the concurrent membership of a nation at war, with its multiple claims on and demands of the individual. It thus offers a uniquely intimate means of examining individual relationships with the collective of the people's war. Emotions were often at the heart of this relationship: the nation-state appealing to the emotions of its citizens through propaganda and other forms of wartime representation; these citizens often expressing their thoughts on the war in emotional terms.²⁸ Feeling is 'not a proxy for thought or belief', but studying it—here, through a focus on what people felt about wartime death and memorialisation—helps us to think about the relationship between collective beliefs and identities, and 'the messy convoluted experience lived by thinking, feeling selves.'²⁹ How did people feel about burying their dead as members of the wartime nation, rather than as private individuals? How did the state attempt to make wartime death and burial a collective, rather than private, matter? And how was memorialisation of the dead imagined as an element of the post-war settlement, a means both of ensuring that the aims associated with the people's war would be achieved, and of remembering the dead as having died for these aims? The concept of the 'people's war', as collective endeavour and as a metaphor for post-war reform, was deeply interwoven with ideas about both how the dead should be buried, and how they should be memorialised.

The article is divided into two parts. The first section examines plans for the management of civilian death and the response to these plans in wartime, tracing the ways in which the dead were imagined as both collective members of the 'people's war' and as private individuals. The second section focuses on debates regarding the commemoration and memorialisation of the war's military dead that took place in the final year of the war and in the immediate post-war era, considering the relationship between memorialisation and reconstruction. The article works with the widest definition of 'political culture', one which sees the personal as political, and which finds political thinking embedded in a range of different debates, feelings and experiences. Individual and collective relationships to the ideas embodied in the phrase 'people's war' were not only logical or reasoned responses to historical conditions; they were also felt, shaped by a range of different identities, experiences and emotions. Responses to the burial and memorialisation of the war's dead were at once deeply personal and shaped by wider historical forces. They thus allow us to think about both official and elite ideas and expectations about 'the people' in wartime, and about what Joe

28. As Claire Langhamer has shown, Mass Observation were especially interested in the feelings of their respondents, repeatedly asking 'how do you feel' rather than 'what do you think?': C. Langhamer, 'An Archive of Feeling? Mass Observation and the Mid-century Moment', *Insights*, ix (2016), pp. 1–15.

29. Langhamer, 'Archive of Feeling?', p. 3; J. Moran, 'Private Lives, Public Histories: The Diary in Twentieth-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, liv (2015) pp. 138–62, at 161.

Moran, in his work on diaries, has described as the ‘countless separate consciousnesses, swayed from one day to the next by their moods and instincts’, that constituted the people of the ‘people’s war’.³⁰

I

As Britain slowly democratised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the treatment by the state of those who died in its wars became increasingly important. The majority of British combatants had habitually been ‘disposed of’ in often-unmarked mass graves, as at Waterloo and in Crimea, while those whose relatives could afford the cost were returned home for family burials. By the time of the First World War, however, this was starting to change. Some 6,000 graves of the South African War’s military dead were marked by small iron crosses, while memorials around the country often named the individual dead, as well as commemorating victory.³¹ The identity, both individual and collective, of the wartime dead became central to the burial and commemoration of those killed on military service during the First World War. The principle of equality of sacrifice came to shape the treatment and remembrance of the war’s dead in Britain and its empire, as the bodies of the dead became the *de facto* possessions of the state. In this industrialised war, with its large non-professional army—recruited firstly as volunteers and from 1916 by conscription—and its multiple casualties, equality of treatment of the dead became paramount. From 1915 onwards, repatriation of bodies by those with the means to do so was banned, and the war dead were interred close to the sites of their death.³² The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), established by charter in 1917, insisted on a level of uniformity in the war cemeteries that it managed in the conflict’s aftermath, arguing in 1918 that: ‘In death, all, from General to Private, of whatever race or creed, should receive equal honour under a memorial which should be the common symbol of their comradeship and the cause for which they died.’³³

30. Moran, ‘Private Lives, Public Histories’, p. 161.

31. T. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), p. 458.

32. The treatment of ‘the missing’ illustrates well the changing nature of military commemoration and memorialisation. If bodies could not be identified, they were buried by the Imperial War Graves Commission with a headstone marked with the phrase ‘A Soldier of the Great War Known unto God’. The names of all of those recorded as missing were listed on memorials. These include the 54,000 British and imperial troops named on the Menin Gate at Ypres and the 72,000 named at Thiepval on the Somme, the two largest European battlefields for the British Army. However, the IWGC’s commitment to equality did not extend to all colonial soldiers and labourers, particularly away from the Western Front: see Commonwealth War Graves Commission, *Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration* (Maidenhead, 2021).

33. Cited in P. Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Barnsley, 1967), p. 33.

Despite some resistance from family members who wanted to reclaim the bodies of *their* dead, the war cemeteries managed by the IWGC came to be widely understood as a fitting means by which to bury and commemorate the military dead of the war; sites that emphasised both equality in death and the state's reverence for its war dead.³⁴ The dead were further memorialised communally at home: the thousands of war memorials erected in villages, towns and cities across Britain listed names collectively and provided a site where the bereaved could mourn, together or alone, while the ceremonies that grew up around Armistice Day provided a further opportunity for remembrance of the war's dead, and acted as a reminder of the shared sacrifice of wartime.³⁵ Interwar planning for the management of the dead of any future war was largely based on the assumption that this model for the burial and commemoration of the military dead would be followed, and that it could be extended, so far as possible, to the treatment of anticipated civilian casualties.

By the late 1930s, it was becoming increasingly clear that another European war was likely, and that civilian casualties might equal or outnumber the military dead. State planning for civilian death in air raids was shaped by the belief that large numbers of civilians would be killed from the outset of any future conflict. The doctrine of 'air power', which became increasingly dominant in military and political strategy and planning in the interwar period, had at its heart the belief that a 'knock-out blow from the air' would be the deciding factor in any future war.³⁶ 1936, the year of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland by the Nazi state, saw the Home Office begin to plan in detail for the management of the victims of the anticipated 'knock-out blow' that would open any coming war. Drawing on the numbers of civilians killed in the air raids of the First World War, government statisticians initially suggested that a figure of 2,250 dead per day could be expected. However, this figure was swiftly revised upwards to suggest a maximum daily aggregate of, approximately, 18,000 corpses, of which 7,000 would be in the area styled 'London and the Mouth of the Thames', and it was to be this second, much higher, figure that informed subsequent planning.³⁷

34. The key debate about the war cemeteries and the decision not to allow repatriation of the military dead can be found in Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Commons, 4 May 1920, vol. 128, cols 1929–72: 'Imperial War Graves Commission Debate'.

35. On memorials, see J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1995); on Armistice Day rituals, see A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919–1946* (Oxford, 1994).

36. Brett Holman traces popular awareness of this idea in Britain to 1922 and a series of articles in *The Times* by Brigadier-General P.R.C. Groves, former representative of military aviation to the League of Nations: B. Holman, 'The Air Panic of 1935: British Press Opinion between Disarmament and Rearmament', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xlvii (2011), pp. 288–307, at 291–2.

37. TNA, HO 45/18142, Disposal of the Dead, Nov. 1936.

Faced with such figures, civil servants based their planning for the ‘disposal of the dead’ on mass burial by local authorities, a circular issued to borough and district councils in 1936 noting that while bodies ‘will, in many cases, be removed for burial by relatives or friends’, authorities would need to prepare a ‘complete scheme ... covering all stages from the collection of bodies to their interment.’³⁸ While proposed solutions to the expected problem of ‘disposing’ of large numbers of fatalities during heavy air raids included burial at sea and mass cremation, the eventual model adopted was trench burial: the interment of a large number of bodies side by side in one long trench, rather than in numerous individual graves.³⁹

It was hoped that drawing on the model of combatant burial and commemoration used during the First World War would avoid the potential impact on morale of repeated individual burials and side-step memories of pauper burial by the parish, in which the bodies of the poor were buried in single graves, one on top of the other.⁴⁰ Both of these aims were only somewhat realised. More often than not, the people of the ‘people’s war’ resisted the idea that their civilian dead should be buried as members of a wartime collective. Pauper burial cast a long shadow, and although the care and maintenance of the IWGC cemeteries of the First World War had done much to alleviate the sense that burial by the state was shameful for the military dead, this belief often persisted with regard to civilian victims of war. Pauper funerals, in which those without means for a private interment were buried by the local authority without ceremony and often with little to mark their graves, were widely perceived as stigmatising. In 1938, around one in eleven burials in London was conducted by the local Public Assistance Committee, with the dead interred in ‘common’ graves. While the burial of several bodies in one grave is commonplace in British cemeteries, these are usually family members and the names and details of the dead are marked on headstones, as an attempt to ensure their remembrance both as members of a family, and as loved individuals.⁴¹ Burial in a ‘common’ grave, often unnamed

38. TNA, HO 45/18142, Circular to Borough and District Councils, Nov. 1936. A Home Office meeting of December 1936 suggested that this planning had ‘over emphasized the probable number of cases in which bodies might be expected to be removed for burial by relatives or friends’: HO 45/18142, Second Interdepartmental Meeting, ‘The Burial of Those Killed in Air Raids’, 14 Dec. 1936.

39. Plans for final burial were left to the local authorities, but with guidance from the Home Office. Trench burial was by far the most often cited plan for burying large numbers together. See, for example, Glasgow, Mitchell Library, D-CD4, Glasgow Corporation Civil Defence Department, Memo on Emergency Mortuaries and Arrangements for Burial Issued by the Department of Health, Scotland, 17 June 1940.

40. On pauper burials, see T. Laqueur, ‘Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals’, *Representations*, 1 (1983), pp. 109–31; J.M. Strange, ‘“Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns”: Reassessing the Pauper Grave, c.1800–1914’, *Past and Present*, no. 178 (2003), pp. 148–75.

41. J. Rugg, ‘Managing “Civilian Deaths Due to War Operations”: Yorkshire Experiences during World War II’, *Twentieth Century British History*, xv (2004), pp. 152–73, at 154.

and alongside strangers, erased the individuality of those so interred. While the state worked to ensure that communal interment of the civilian dead was imbued with the same sense of reverence attached to the graves of the IWGC cemeteries, perceptions of collective burial by the local authority in wartime were often shaped by memories of the pauper's grave.⁴² Any collective membership of the 'people's war' could not be assumed in death.

An early indication of the limitations of collective identity after death came soon after the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force from France and Belgium in the summer of 1940. Attacked as they waited for evacuation on the beaches, and again as they sailed across the Channel and arrived at the ports and harbours of southern England, approximately 200 military dead were returned to Britain with their surviving comrades. In the chaos that followed the fall of France, and the widespread anticipation of invasion, ninety-two of these dead were buried hurriedly in a trench grave in Dover, some in coffins but many wrapped in shrouds, still others in the greatcoats in which they had died. As the threat of invasion diminished, some of their families demanded that the bodies be returned to them for burial; as in the First World War, the remit of the IWGC to bury the bodies of combatants only extended to those who died in battle overseas.⁴³ Military casualties who died in Britain could either be claimed for burial by families, or interred by the IWGC.⁴⁴ Several families requested permission to remove bodies from the trench grave in Dover for private burial. A conference held between the IWGC, the War Office and the Home Office decided to reject these claims, arguing that 'the soldiers buried after the evacuation from Dunkirk must be regarded for all practical purposes as having fallen in action abroad.' The conference noted that the nature of mass burial in wartime could make the later identification of individual bodies difficult: 'Where 90 bodies are buried in shrouds in a single trench the work of removal will be, as the Town Clerk of Dover points out, if not impossible, in the highest degree repulsive.'⁴⁵ The suspicion that bodies were not treated with the reverence that the bereaved would desire, as seen here, underpinned at least some of the resistance to burial as members of the 'people's war'.

42. For an example of this, see the coverage of the burial of four generations of the same family in three graves by Wembley Corporation in November 1940. The *Daily Mirror* accused the authority of being 'profiteers in death', as they charged the surviving family for separate funerals, including a charge for a baby buried in the same coffin as her mother. 'Profiteers in Death', *Daily Mirror*, 3 Dec. 1940, p. 1. This story is discussed in more detail in Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 161–2.

43. TNA, HO 45/21922, Summary of Conference held by IWGC, with Representatives from the Home Office and War Office, 16 July 1940.

44. For more detail on the management of military death in the Second World War, see S. Spark, 'The Treatment of the British Military Dead of the Second World War' (Univ. of Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis, 2010).

45. TNA, HO 45/21922, Summary of Conference Held by IWGC, with Representatives from the Home Office and War Office, 16 July 1940.

At times, however, the plan to bury civilians together as collective victims and symbols of the nation in wartime was successful. When the bereaved shared a strong sense of collective identity and collective loss, and when they were reassured that the state and local authority were acting with the care and reverence for the dead that was their due, burial in a shared grave was more likely to be accepted. In Coventry, the small industrial city in the West Midlands that suffered a devastating air raid in November 1940, 422 of the 568 recorded dead were laid together in long trench graves. Coverage of the first funeral in *The Birmingham Post* utilised the language of commemoration associated with the military dead of the First World War:

Their sacrifice, and that of others like them who are yet to be interred ... is a call to all who survive for consecration of the task of making sure that though Coventry citizens have died, the name and fame of Coventry shall never die ... civilians today are in the front line of battle, bearing equally with their comrades in the fighting services[.]⁴⁶

Attended by Coventry's mayor and bishop, aldermen, representatives of the military services and voluntary organisations, interdenominational and widely covered in the national and international press, the burial of Coventry's dead successfully conveyed both their collective identity and a wider recognition of their part in the 'people's war'.⁴⁷

The wartime state was quick to recognise the importance of conveying a sense of respect for the dead if collective burials were to avoid the stigma associated with the pauper's funeral. In one of a series of circulars that swiftly followed the beginning of heavy air raids in September, the Ministry of Health wrote to all local authorities in November 1940, reminding them that 'burial of civilians by a local authority should be regarded as no less honourable than burial of a soldier by his comrades', and that, in support of this, the use of the Union flag as a pall could be considered 'appropriate'.⁴⁸ It proved harder to ensure that this was enacted. Early in the London Blitz, *The Sunday Chronicle* reported on the burial of ARP volunteers 'in a common grave' in Poplar, east London. Despite having 'died for their country as surely as if they had been in the front line', the newspaper claimed that the volunteers had been taken to the cemetery in a lorry and buried without ceremony.⁴⁹ After reading this article,

46. 'City's Tribute to Its Dead', *Birmingham Post*, 21 Nov. 1940, p. 3.

47. Coventry was unusual in being named as a target of air raids in the press. In an attempt to suppress knowledge of successful air raids among the enemy, most bombed cities outside of London were not named. Heavily bombed Hull, for example, was referred to as a 'north east coast town', while the small town of Clydebank, devastated in a raid in March 1941, was described as 'a town in western Scotland'. See *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 Oct. 1944, p. 1; J. Macleod, *River of Fire: The Clydebank Blitz* (Edinburgh, 2011).

48. TNA, Housing and Local Government [hereafter HLG] 7/761, Civilian War Dead Bible, Circular 2192, 'Ministry of Health to Local Authorities: Deaths Due to War Operations', 1 Nov. 1940.

49. 'The Test', *Sunday Chronicle*, 29 Sep. 1940.

a volunteer ambulance driver wrote to London County Hall, to the Home Secretary and to his local commanders to tender his resignation, 'unless treatment at least on a par with that of the hateful enemy be forthcoming.'⁵⁰ Discontent with the burial of civilians by the state, and the emotional distress felt by the bereaved, could be long-lived. Reverend E.A. Moir wrote several times to the Home Office in 1947, requesting the disinterment of his wife, buried in Hither Green Cemetery, Lewisham, in a 'multiple' grave with other victims of the same VI rocket in 1944. Moir claimed that he had consented to 'national burial', as he termed it, 'on the promise that civilians killed by enemy action would be "buried as our soldiers who died on the front line".' To his distress, he found that 'my wife had been buried in a common grave, with other coffins piled on top, as paupers might be.'⁵¹ The desire that the civilian dead be buried as private individuals, rather than as collective members of the 'people's war', was especially visible when the bereaved suspected that their loved ones were not treated with dignity by the state.

Although it became clear that the majority of the civilian dead would not be buried collectively by the state, but would be interred privately, as members of families and loved individuals, the relationship between the treatment of the war's dead and civilian morale remained important. A royal message of sympathy was sent by the Home Office to the next-of-kin of civilian victims of war and the IWGC worked to ensure that the bereaved felt their dead were remembered and honoured as members of the wartime nation, even when they were buried privately. Fabian Ware, the founder and vice-chairman of the IWGC, contacted the Prime Minister just two weeks after the beginning of the London Blitz to remind him that the Commission's powers had been extended to include the commemoration of the dead of this second war. He wrote: 'The principle of equal honour for all will continue to be observed. In this connection we have to consider the commemoration of civilians; men, women and children, by the deliberate slaughter of whom the enemy is creating a new category of normal war casualties.'⁵² By 1941, a letter had been drafted for the IWGC to send to relatives of the dead, asking for details of those civilians killed in air raids, with which they could then draw up a Roll of Honour:

50. TNA, HO 186/376, Blitz, Casualties/Burial of Casualties, Letter from Driver C.H.A. Flashman to Miss Waller, 29 Sep. 1940. After investigating, the London Civil Defence Regional Headquarters concluded that, while there was 'a certain amount of truth in the *Sunday Chronicle's* allegations, they are grossly exaggerated': Letter from London Civil Defence Region to Home Office, 8 Oct. 1940.

51. TNA, HO 45/21922, Letter from E.A. Moir to Ministry of Health, 14 Feb. 1947. This case is discussed in J. Rugg, 'Managing "Civilian Deaths Due to War Operations".'

52. TNA, War Office [hereafter WO] 32/9850, IWGC Commemoration of Civilians Killed in Air Raids, Letter from Fabian Ware to Winston Churchill, 18 Sept. 1940. A supplemental charter for the IWGC had been issued in 1939, empowering the Commission to collect the names of the civilian dead and to publish them in a Roll of Honour or another form of memorial.

As you know, the IWGC ... was originally concerned with the commemoration of members of HM Forces ... For more than 20 years it has helped to keep their names a living memory ... now that war takes its toll of the non-combatant population as well, it has been given a new duty—that of collecting the names of all Civilians who become victims of enemy attack, so that their memory may be preserved for all time ... The Commission believes that this way of national remembrance will have your approval; for it will help to ensure that the example of this generation, and the self-sacrifice of so many in the present struggle, will not be forgotten by their fellow countrymen, and that the names of our dead will be held in reverence by generations to come.⁵³

By April 1942, the IWGC had received the names of 42,085 civilian casualties, some sent by bereaved relatives and others collected from the record of the Registrar-General and local authorities. Relatives of the dead could consult the records in the IWGC offices in London, Edinburgh and Belfast. After the end of the war, these and subsequent names were listed in a Book of Remembrance displayed in Westminster Abbey, a symbolic site close to the burial place of the Unknown Warrior.⁵⁴

Letters from the bereaved to the IWGC, sent by Ware to the Home Office, articulate both a sense of gratitude that their loss had been formally recorded and commemorated, and a claim to unity and equality with the military dead of wartime. A Mr Hawksley of Hull wrote that 'this is the first recognition I have so far received of my terrible loss. It makes one happier to think that we are not merely nonentities ... a number that can be rubbed out and forgotten', while Mrs Price of Tooting wrote to 'express how pleased I am that my husband's name will be remembered alongside that of the fighting forces.'⁵⁵ While the bereaved may have wanted to bury their dead as individuals and family members, there was nonetheless a desire that they be remembered as members of a wartime collective; listed alongside the military dead, and accorded the same perceived honour. The decision by the IWGC to list the dead by region and surname, and crucially to mirror the lack of distinction of rank seen in its military cemeteries in these lists, was articulated through a language of equality of sacrifice and common identity. Describing the form that the Roll of Honour would take, Ware argued that 'The list in the Abbey was not the place to draw any

53. TNA, WO 32/9850, IWGC Commemoration of Civilians Killed in Air Raids, Letter to Be Sent from IWGC to the Bereaved, n.d.

54. 'Graves of Two Wars. Records of Civilian Dead', *The Times*, 28 Nov. 1942, p. 6. For details of the Roll of Honour in Westminster Abbey, see 'Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour, 1939–1945', available at <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/civilian-war-dead-roll-of-honour-1939-1945> (accessed 9 Jan. 2023). The IWGC had originally planned to display the names in Westminster Abbey straight away, but the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, argued that this should wait until the end of the war.

55. TNA, WO 32/9850, IWGC Commemoration of Civilians Killed in Air Raids, 'Civilian War Dead. Extracts from Letters', 9 June 1942.

distinction between them. It presented the great mass of people who had lost their lives and the introduction of titles or distinction was inappropriate.⁵⁶ The Roll was thus both a memorial to the individuals who had died and a statement of collective identity, commemorating the civilian dead of the war in the same manner as 'the lists of names to be found on the great central memorials of the last war, such as the Menin Gate.'⁵⁷

The collective identity of the 'people's war' had its limitations. While the bereaved who had lost members of the military forces had relatively little agency over the burial and commemoration of their loved ones, the families of the civilian dead were more able to assert their individual agency. They overwhelmingly wished to claim their dead as individuals, as people known and remembered by family and those close to them, rather than as members of the collective wartime nation. As a perceptive local government official in Bristol wrote, when contemplating requests for the disinterment of civilian fatalities from a collective grave in the city:

the majority of bereaved persons seemed actually to dislike their relative's deaths being associated with the war ... the efforts of the IWGC and the Ministry to classify these deaths as heroic and to celebrate them by memorials and battlefield conditions like those of Etaples and Vimy does not evoke much enthusiasm in the minds of humble civilian sufferers.⁵⁸

The model of collective burial and memorialisation, widely accepted in the aftermath of the First World War, had a limited appeal for the civilian bereaved of the Second World War. While the collective identity of the 'people's war' may have been embraced by some in other areas of wartime, it did not usually extend beyond death. Bodies were largely claimed for burial by their families and interred as private individuals. Only when there was a particularly strong sense of collective, local identity and experience, and when the bereaved were convinced that their dead were being treated honourably by the state, did many agree to collective burial as members of the 'people's war'. For most, the dead were first and foremost individuals, family members who were best remembered and grieved for by those who knew them, a process that demanded private burial rather than collective interment as part of the 'people's war'.

II

As the war moved towards its conclusion, thoughts began to turn from burial to memorialisation of the war's dead. The dead were, of course, memorialised in a variety of ways, some intimate and private, others

56. Maidenhead, Commonwealth War Graves Commission [hereafter CWGC] Archives, CWGC1/2/D/3/24, Civilian War Dead, 11 Apr. 1945; Memorandum from Vice Chairman, 3 Dec. 1945.

57. CWGC Archives, CWGC1/2/D/3/24, Memorandum from Vice Chairman, 3 Dec. 1945.

58. Bristol City Archives, 35210, Application for Removal of War Dead Buried in Communal Graves in Bristol, 15 Oct. 1941.

formal and public. As in the First World War, the military dead were largely buried close to where they fell, and memorialised in IWGC cemeteries through both individual headstones and the Cross of Sacrifice and Memorial Stone placed at the centre of most cemeteries.⁵⁹ But, like civilian casualties, they were also remembered and memorialised in the home, through photos on mantelpieces, treasured letters and school reports, clothing, medals and bedrooms left untouched.⁶⁰ These informal, intimate memorials and sites of remembrance were places where family relationships with the dead were maintained and remembrance was shaped, offering the bereaved a 'sense of control and agency' in the face of sudden death.⁶¹

Newspaper 'In Memoriam' columns also provided a space for memorialisation of the war dead by the bereaved rather than the state, providing a site where individuals and families could make their loss public and shared. 'In Memoriam—Roll of Honour' columns were common in local newspapers across the country and functioned as a means for the war's dead to be distinguished from others remembered in the same columns. The notices in these columns most commonly described individual lives and private losses within the context of wartime; these were sites where the war's dead could be reclaimed by their families while their loss was shared with the wider community and their identity underlined as those understood to have died for the greater good. Such notices thus placed individuals as part of a collective wartime dead, but at the same time provided a site where their private, often familial, identities could be foregrounded. The *Hartlepool Daily Northern Mail* 'In Memoriam' column for 6 June 1945 included the names of three men killed during the D-Day landings the previous year. While their bodies, if recovered, would have been buried in Normandy, this was a space for their families and friends to remember and claim them as private citizens, these more intimate relations and personal losses emphasised in the concluding sentence of two of the notices: 'True hearts that loved him never forget.'⁶² Of the eight men killed on D-Day and listed in the 'In Memoriam' column of the *Nottingham Evening Post* one year later, a paratrooper was remembered as the 'loving husband of Nora, Daddy of Jacqueline', who 'died that we might live', while the 'Loving Mam' of Fred Clarke reminded readers

59. The Cross of Sacrifice was designed by Reginald Blomfield, and the Memorial Stone by Edwin Lutyens. For a history of British war cemeteries, see S. Edwards, 'An Empire of Memory: Overseas British War Cemeteries, 1918–1983', *International Journal of History and Historiography*, xxxviii (2018), pp. 255–86.

60. For an unusually detailed record of the multiple ways in which individuals were memorialised within the home, see the collection of letters from relatives of 'the missing' airmen of a Pathfinder Squadron: London, Imperial War Museum Archive, Department of Documents, Papers of Squadron Leader Reverend G.H. Martin, Letters of Next of Kin of Missing Personnel.

61. L. King, 'Remembering Deceased Children in Family Life: The School Case of Poor Harold, 1920–31', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 93 (2022) pp. 225–44, at 240.

62. 'In Memoriam—Roll of Honour', *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 6 June 1945, p. 8.

that 'some think we forget you when they see us smile, but don't know the heartache that smile hides all the while.'⁶³ Spaces such as these inverted the listing of names on public war memorials; both provided a public space where private grief became public and where the dead could be remembered as individual members of a national collective, but 'In Memoriam' notices emphasised the private individual and their relationship with the bereaved, rather than with the wartime state.

It was the proposed construction of new, public war memorials, however, that was the key focus of discussion about how best to commemorate the dead of wartime. From the outset, ideas about collective, public memorialisation were intertwined with ideas about reconstruction and the post-war, and the legacies of the 'people's war'. The 1941 *Picture Post* special issue on reconstruction argued that the political failings of the 1920s and 1930s had had their roots in the period immediately following the First World War, when 'imagination, planning, an idea of the country we wanted to make ... when they were needed, were not there.'⁶⁴ Memorialisation of the first war had, likewise, come to be widely seen as inadequate. In an early discussion of memorialisation, the *Architectural Review* claimed in January 1944 that memorials to the dead of the First World War 'suffer from an incongruity between what is recorded of grimmest human experience and its genteel presentation to the eye.'⁶⁵ *The Spectator*, in an article arguing for the preservation of bombed churches as contemplative spaces for remembrance, described 'war memorials after 1918' as 'failing to keep alive the spirit of the men whose sacrifice they were meant to symbolise.'⁶⁶ Public memorials to the dead of the 'people's war' would need to avoid the perceived failures of the wave of memorialisation following the First World War; they would need to find both a fitting means to commemorate the dead of modern warfare, and a way to 'keep alive the spirit' of those who had died as participants in the 'people's war'.

While debates about wartime burial had focused on the bodies of civilian casualties, most discussion of war memorials was directed at how to memorialise the military and civilian alike. In April 1944, the Royal Society of the Arts convened a conference to discuss memorialisation. The conference summary demonstrates the delegates' perception of the popular mood:

(Military) men and women are, in the main, determined to break away from the purely monumental memorials which appeared all over the country

63. 'In Memoriam', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 6 June 1945, p. 1.

64. 'Foreword', *Picture Post*, 4 Jan. 1941, p. 6.

65. 'Save Us Our Ruins', *Architectural Review*, xcvi (1944), p. 14.

66. 'Memorial Churches', *The Spectator*, 17 Aug. 1944, p. 2. This was part of a wider debate about the preservation of bombed churches: see 'Save Us Our Ruins', *Architectural Review*, xcvi (1944), pp. 13–14. On the Church of England and memorialisation, see P. Webster, 'Beauty, Utility and Christian Civilisation: War Memorials and the Church of England, 1940–47', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, xlv (2008), pp. 199–211.

after the last war ... the trend seems to be more towards a more practical type of memorials which will benefit the families and descendants of those who have lost their lives ... community centres, youth clubs, village halls, the preservation of tracts of land, public parks or gardens of remembrance, hospitals and convalescent homes ... schools and school equipment and playing fields.⁶⁷

Memorialisation and reconstruction were thus neatly folded into one another. Unlike the majority of memorials to the dead of the First World War, memorialisation of the dead of the 'people's war' would, above all, be useful. 'Living memorials', such as those suggested by the conference, would both commemorate the dead and link their deaths to the collective of the 'people's war', ensuring that the war aim of reconstruction, for which they were assumed to have died, would be met.⁶⁸ This collective, however, was to be overwhelmingly imagined and experienced at the local level rather than the national, benefiting the lives of those in the community through 'useful' and practical memorials rather than glorifying the dead as members of the nation state.

As in the aftermath of the First World War, when local committees oversaw the creation of civic and workplace memorials at which nationally shared rituals would be enacted, often choosing designs from memorial brochures and thus ensuring a widespread coherence of both form and function, there was a perceived need for some shared principles around memorials. The conference established the War Memorials Advisory Council (WMAC) to provide local authorities and organisations with guidance on 'the principles which should underlie our memorials'.⁶⁹ However, by no means all agreed with the Council's desire for utilitarian memorials, and a debate in the House of Lords, opened by Lord Chatfield, Admiral of the Fleet and Chair of the WMAC—who argued that memorials should be 'useful to the living while honouring the dead'—saw representatives of the Church of England express concern that the 'sacred' nature of memorials would be lost.⁷⁰ Although he had previously spoken in support of Beveridge's proposed reforms, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, argued against linking reconstruction to memorialisation.⁷¹ He stressed that 'the association of the war memorial visibly and permanently with those we desire to commemorate

67. London, Royal Society of Arts Archive [hereafter RSA], War Memorials Advisory Council [hereafter WMAC], PR/GE/117/10/3, Conference on War Memorials, 27 Apr. 1944.

68. On the concept of 'living memorials', which was drawn from contemporaneous debates in the United States, see A.M. Shanken, 'Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II', *Art Bulletin*, lxxxiv (2002), pp. 130–47.

69. Letter from E.F. Armstrong, President of the RSA, *The Times*, 18 Aug. 1944, p. 5.

70. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Lords, 14 Feb. 1945, vol. 134, cols 1023, 1042–3.

71. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Lords, 24 Feb. 1943, vol. 126, cols 249–56.

should be a guiding principle'. Bishop Bell agreed, acknowledging that, while 'village halls, community centres and child welfare clinics are all most desirable in themselves', nonetheless 'they are to be deprecated as war memorials.'⁷² Writing in the *Canterbury Diocesan Notes* the following year, Lang's successor, Geoffrey Fisher, allowed that 'it is sometimes possible to provide a memorial which serves a social purpose', but concluded that 'it is my own feeling that ... a memorial should be itself and nothing more.'⁷³ While representatives of the Church of England were not alone in urging caution regarding the collapsing together of memorialisation and reconstruction, they were in a minority.

Letters to the WMAC from authorities, organisations and individuals planning to build memorials, and responses to a Mass Observation Directive of August 1944 (asking 'What are your views on the form which memorials to the dead of this war should take?') favoured memorials that had a function outside of simple remembrance. MO respondents overwhelmingly expressed the view that 'memorials must take the form of being useful to the living.'⁷⁴ For some of those who responded to the MO Directive, the memorials of the previous war had lost any meaning that they may have originally held. A schoolteacher in rural Sussex thought that he 'would prefer none', as 'they help people to forget quite as much as to remember.'⁷⁵ A schoolmistress reflected that 'I am never quite sure of the purpose of war memorials', while the sense ran through many responses that any money spent on memorials with a purely monumental form would be out of step with the mood of the people.⁷⁶ An accounts clerk argued that 'we must never again allow thousands of pounds to be spent on purposeless heaps of stone and metal', a view echoed by a housewife who pleaded for 'no blocks of stone or slabs of brass or such mockery'.⁷⁷ Some channelled the imagined wishes of the dead: a member of the RAF thought that 'the dead would not wish to be commemorated by a cold stone memorial', while a civil servant argued that 'the dead would rather we made useful memorials than more statues and pylons.'⁷⁸ The belief that the dead of the 'people's war' had died not only to defeat a military enemy, but also to build a better future, ran through many of these responses.

72. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Lords, 14 Feb. 1945, vol. 134, cols 1038, 1043.

73. RSA, WMAC, PR/GE/117/10/6, *Canterbury Diocesan Notes*, Mar. 1946. Lang had been succeeded in 1942 by William Temple, who died suddenly in 1944. Temple was succeeded by Fisher.

74. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondent 1015.

75. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondent 1078.

76. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondent 1056.

77. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 3485, 1699.

78. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 3333, 3434.

For Nella Last, one of MO's most prolific writers, memorials to the First World War were worse than useless.⁷⁹ Last eloquently described her dislike of 'dead, lifeless, sterile, dull' memorials, such as the 'cenotaphs, wayside crosses, bronze plaques with names on etc of the last war.' Of the Barrow-in-Furness memorial, she wrote: 'how I hated it. I knew so many of the lads and men whose names were on it, warm, vital, laughing people—no connection with the lifeless cold thing which commemorated them.' For Last, memorials were intensely personal and had an important emotional function. She tried to imagine how they might best offer comfort to the bereaved, reflecting that 'if I wanted to keep in memory a loved one, I'd choose a cot in a hospital, a garden of flowers, a holiday home for servicemen and their wives and children, and I'd care for those who came home sick in mind and body.'⁸⁰ Writing in a similar vein, a schoolteacher responding to MO wanted memorials that helped to care for the living. Her preference was for an 'endowment for research into the causes of war' but, recognising that 'this would be too cold and remote for many of the bereaved', she suggested that 'memorials should take the form of service to comrades of the dead.' Echoing the collective identity and purpose of the 'people's war', she thought that the bereaved could find comfort in 'personal service in connection with the memorial', which would be 'more satisfying than placing flowers on a tombstone.'⁸¹ For both respondents, remembrance of the dead would be best achieved through memorials that embodied something of the aims and identity that they associated with the 'people's war', remembering the dead through acts and institutions which benefited both the bereaved and the wider community.

The contrast between the 'dead, lifeless' memorials that Last described and the widely desired memorials to the 'people's war' was clearest in the wide-ranging advocacy of access to green spaces. Playing fields, parks and recreation grounds were all frequently suggested as a fitting means of memorialising the dead. The *Leicester Mercury* reported that Coalville Rugby Club was planning to commemorate the eight members of the club who had died in the war by building a new memorial rugby ground, and Mass Observers wrote to demand 'more provision of playing fields and open spaces', 'fields, gardens and national trust lands or parks' and 'gifts of beauty spots'.⁸² One 36-year-old respondent suggested 'large tracts of open country ...

79. For edited collections of Last's wartime writing for MO, see R. Broad and S. Fleming, eds, *Nella Last's War: A Mother's Diary, 1939–1946* (Bristol, 1981).

80. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondent 1065.

81. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondent 1061. Advice to the bereaved that they would find solace by throwing themselves into the collective war effort was widely found in wartime cultural texts: see L. Noakes, 'Gender, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, viii (2015), pp. 72–85.

82. *Leicester Mercury*, 16 May 1946; MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 2751, 3596, 3133.

given to the people to enjoy', while a 42-year-old chemist demanded 'a national policy of opening up the mountains for the people.'⁸³ The WMAC likewise suggested land for the use of the people as an appropriate means of memorialisation. Land would offer the 'restfulness and beauty' of the memorial, furnishing a place for contemplation and remembrance, while providing a measure of egalitarian access to the countryside, combining the 'levelling' ideals of the 'people's war' with a site for remembering the dead.⁸⁴ The Land Fund, established in 1946 and described by Hugh Dalton in his budget speech of that year as 'a war memorial ... which is better than any work of art in bronze or stone', was possibly the most substantial post-war memorial project, using funds to purchase land and buildings which were then donated to a range of charities for public use.⁸⁵ By 1952, the Fund had acquired twenty-seven properties and estates, which were managed by the National Trust, the Youth Hostels Association and other charitable bodies.⁸⁶

The belief that the dead had died in order to secure a better future for the living permeated the debate about war memorials. As a 38-year-old MO respondent put it, 'the best memorial is to try to realise the ideals for which we sacrificed the dead, and give their children a better world to live in.'⁸⁷ This principle also shaped local reconstruction policies. An Alderman Scouling, Justice of the Peace for West Ham, wrote: 'I am opposed to putting up granite memorials. I am in favour of slum clearance and open spaces for our children and the children of the men who made the supreme sacrifice.'⁸⁸ Plans for memorialisation which echoed these aims were found across the country. Cheriton and District Citizen's Union wrote to the WMAC to declare that public opinion in the district demanded that 'no more stone slabs should be erected as war memorials' and that they therefore proposed to build a 'larger public meeting centre.'⁸⁹ In Sussex, Crowborough and Jarvis Brook District Council published a pamphlet arguing that a memorial hall for the community would 'hallow the cherished memories of those who gave their lives and at the same time serve in the social and cultural advancement of those who inherit the country.'⁹⁰ Pendock Parish Council in Gloucestershire voted to raise funds for memorial cottages,

83. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 2684, 2751.

84. RSA, WMAC, PR/GE/117/10/1, War Memorials Advisory Committee Overview, n.d.

85. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Commons, 9 Apr. 1946, vol. 421, col. 1840.

86. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., House of Commons, 17 July 1952, vol. 503, col. 2310.

87. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondent 1066.

88. RSA, WMAC, PR/GE/117/10/3, The Undertakers' Journal, n.d.

89. RSA, WMAC, PR/GE/117/10/6, Advice Requests, Correspondents File C-E, Letter from Cheriton and District Citizen's Union, 15 Apr. 1946.

90. *We Will Remember Them! War Memorial Hall*, Crowborough and Jarvis Brook fundraising pamphlet, n.d.

and a war memorial village, offering homes to disabled veterans, was opened in Derbyshire.⁹¹ Mass Observers largely agreed. A housewife wrote to suggest that ‘a small home for an old couple who ... may have lost their breadwinner’ would be a fitting memorial, while a member of the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force argued that, ‘as these men died so that we might live, it seems reasonable to spend money on the living rather than the dead.’⁹² Reconstruction thus became framed not only as desirable but also as a duty to the dead; a means of securing the values for which the authors believed the people of the ‘people’s war’ had died.

III

The burial and memorialisation of the dead of the Second World War demonstrate both the reach and the limitations of the ‘people’s war’. Collective burial of the civilian war dead by the state was, for many, a step too far. The maintenance of the IWGC cemeteries of the First World War acted as a model for the burial of combatants, perhaps offering a desired reassurance that they would be honoured in perpetuity. Even in these most collective of burial places, however, the dead’s more intimate, familial relations were remembered in the short inscriptions that many next of kin chose to follow the military record of identity on individual headstones.⁹³ There was no such tradition for the burial of the civilian war dead. The dominant model of collective burial within British cemeteries and graveyards had been the burial of paupers in ‘common graves’ by the parish; a form of interment that was widely feared and understood as both punitive and lacking any sense of reverence or respect for the dead. At times, the narrative and rhetoric of the ‘people’s war’, with its emphasis on common sacrifice and shared war aims, could overcome resistance to collective burial. Where there was a strong sense of local identity, a belief that the dead had died together as members of the ‘people’s war’ and a recognition that they were being honoured by the nation, as in Coventry after the devastating air raid in November 1940, significant numbers of the bereaved agreed to the burial of their loved ones as members of the wartime collective. For the majority, however, the shared identity of the ‘people’s war’ ended with death.

While most of those who were able to do so chose to bury their war dead privately, memorialisation could, in contrast, provide a space and a means to emphasise the dead’s participation in the ‘people’s war’ and, at the same time, to benefit the bereaved and the local community.

91. RSA, WMAC, PG/RE/117/10/9, Advice Requests, Correspondents File M–P, Letter from Vicar of Pendock Church, 2 Mar. 1946; ‘War Memorial Homes Opened’ (British Pathé, 1952), available at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/war-memorial-homes-opened> (accessed 10 Jan. 2023)

92. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 3405, 1657.

93. Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 243–6.

Reconstruction, so central to ideas of the 'people's war', was interwoven with memorialisation, but this was a reconstruction understood and experienced at the level of the family and the community, rather than the more abstract nation state. It was playing fields, community halls and hospital wings that were wanted in the aftermath of this second war, not grandiose statuary statements of national belonging and shared remembrance. In discussions about memorialisation towards the end of the conflict, the memorials of the First World War became 'useless lumps of stone' that were 'noticed by very few humans and very many pigeons', and so had failed to ensure remembrance of the dead.⁹⁴ Implicit in such critiques was the belief that they had failed because their only function was memorialisation; memorials to the 'people's war' would avoid such a fate by enabling the process of reconstruction for which, it was implied, the dead had died. In so doing, they would help to make wartime sacrifice worthwhile, achieving the imagined cause of building a new and better world. The moral authority of the dead was frequently invoked in these discussions: one respondent was certain that 'something that would benefit the community as a whole' was 'what the boys themselves would prefer', while another claimed that 'the best memorial is to try and realise the ideals for which we sacrificed the dead and give their children a better world to live in.'⁹⁵ This insistence on reconstruction as a central war aim, for which the dead had given their lives, helped to give meaning to loss, strengthening the affective bonds between the war dead and the post-war world.

Tracing the reach and limitations of political ideas and collective identities through intimate and emotional histories, such as those of death, bereavement and memorialisation, opens up new avenues for historical understandings of the Second World War. It places the individuals who experienced the war at its heart and attempts to trace these experiences and their relationship with political belief, recognising that feeling was both a subject of policy and a historical force in its own right. The people whose feelings, experiences and beliefs are traced here lived with, and negotiated, the demands and potential rewards of the 'people's war'. While the integration of memorialisation with reconstruction was imagined as a means of achieving a post-war settlement that befitted the 'people's war'—ensuring the dead lived on in collective memory and through collective betterment—the burial of the dead remained, in large part, a private matter. This assertion of individuality, the greater informality around memorialisation and commemoration, and the memorial focus on local and community life illustrates a wider shift towards individualism in twentieth-century

94. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 3596, 3594.

95. MOA, Directive Aug. 1944, Respondents 3596, 1066.

Britain, but it is also suggestive of the ways in which the ‘people’s war’ was lived and experienced: in families and communities. It is here, rather than in the structures and culture of the nation state, that we should look for evidence—or a lack of evidence—of the collectivity and communitarianism that has long been placed at the heart of the ‘people’s war’.

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