

# ◆ Rural parish churches and the bereaved in Sussex after the First World War

by Keith Grieves

*In the past ten years much work has been undertaken on comparative approaches to the definition and study of communities of mourning in European states during and after the First World War. In the social organization of remembrance the roles of controlling institutions and self-elected secondary élites in generating a commemorative unity of purpose have been identified in regions and some localities. Micro studies need to be undertaken, however, especially in rural areas, to consider the utility of these concepts and processes in explaining the existence of consensus and conflict in war memorial debates in rural communities. In some parishes in Sussex the Anglican Church engendered social integration and moral order well into the 20th century and presumed that it would determine local responses to commemorating the fallen. In some villages without intimate relations of organized religion and social hierarchy, it encountered resistance. Expressions of division marked a dramatic moment of social dissonance in the long history of parochial governance. Some clergymen failed to acknowledge the growth of sectional interests, who sought social gains. Nonetheless, the heavenward path of the martyred soldier-saint was confirmed and wall tablets in parish churches became sites of mourning, where appropriately pre-modern symbolism conveyed a generalizing sense of the sacred. In many parishes in Sussex memorials, featuring inscribed names, spoke eloquently to the bereaved in the context of the Absent Dead. In conditions of total war local definitions of home mattered and rural parish churches brought a meaning which made bearable the enormity of loss in the immediate aftermath of war.*

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## INTRODUCTION: BONDS OF MOURNING AND CONTROLLING INSTITUTIONS

**D**uring and after the Great War bonds of mourning were formed as people came together to cope with the condition and stages of bereavement in ‘a wider community of suffering and solace’.<sup>1</sup> This process has been explored by Jay Winter, who has identified expressions of mutual self-help among the bereaved. The quest for consolation led to commemoration and to the demand for ‘war memorials as collective symbols’ of shared grief for the Absent Dead among everyone in mourning.<sup>2</sup> Of course the designing, funding, inscribing and unveiling of war memorials in towns and villages in Britain after 1918 arose from highly localized decision-making. Negotiations took place involving individual and collective interests whose power relationship had been well understood before

the war, but had entered more fluid, less certain conditions in 1919.

The social organization of remembrance was often initiated by ‘controlling institutions’, such as churches, landowners and businesses. Their representatives expected to exert influence in well-defined *locales*. They also translated dominant hierarchical values into social action in *their* communities as they had done on many past occasions, such as the celebration of the coronation of George V, wartime campaigns for voluntary military service, domestic economy and war loans, and the formation of welcome home committees early in 1919. As self-elected secondary élites they offered the prospect of generating co-operative social relationships for the processes of commemorating the fallen in a far from egalitarian age. Alex King has argued that ‘a fundamental unity of purpose was provided by the presence of ‘controlling institutions’. In broadly defined terms, this may have been the

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case, but study of the events, which led up to the erection of many war memorials, suggests that variations and nuances abound, even in adjacent parishes.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, a common unity of purpose, despite the deeply equal context of commemorating the 'Great Sacrifice', was often less apparent in 1919 than might be expected amongst the demobilized men. Common unity arose *in spite* of continuing expressions of social exclusiveness by controlling institutions. The purpose of this article is to consider the existence of both consensus and conflict in relations between the Anglican Church, as a dominant controlling institution in rural communities in Sussex, and the *relatives of the fallen*. A contribution is offered to the very necessary process of developing local case studies on this significant cultural theme. It is important that particularities as well as generalities be identified as we strive to explore the social meanings of remembrance at familial and parochial levels, where private grief was urgently expressed within the context of public acts of recognition and consolation.

#### ANGLICANISM AND LANDOWNERSHIP IN SUSSEX

In the 19th century Sussex was one of the few counties with more Anglican than nonconformist places of worship. Wesleyan Methodism was weak and Catholic congregations were few.<sup>4</sup> In at least 54 parishes a single landowner exerted complete control and in a further 109 parishes property was in few hands. The influence of landowners was particularly evident in the many compact 'close' parishes on the South Downs.<sup>5</sup> In the Weald there were 'open' parishes, with scattered populations, but after 1870 these were more subject to gentlemanly control, exerted from pseudo-manor houses built in woodland settings. Consequently, in Sussex, forms of deference and paternalism survived into the 20th century to a larger extent than in many other counties. As an agent of social integration and moral order the Anglican Church remained significant, especially where attendance was above average because squires were resident.<sup>6</sup>

In the large village of Northchapel, near Petworth, on the outer reaches of the Leconfield estate, the rector initiated the war memorial fund. He was informed by one parishioner, 'As regards my subscription it will be given to you to do as you

wish with it, you are the Head and Strength of the Village, without the Church nice chaos it would be'.<sup>7</sup> In rural parishes after the war, these expressions of support for social control from the rectory gave continuing life to John Lowerson's image of a paternalistic clerical gentleman who 'would lead his people to heaven by personal example, charity and exhortation'.<sup>8</sup> Inescapably, Anglican clergy were identified with the social imperatives of rank, a 'prescriptive religious culture' and the ideal of a country parish comprising obedient and devout people.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the Rev. A. H. Baverstock, who had direct experience of parish life in Sussex, concluded in 1913 'it is rare to find country clergy who have a like knowledge of the country labourer and a like sympathy with him'.<sup>10</sup>

Its socially exclusive priesthood was attuned to an organic, hierarchical, seemingly tranquil rural landscape. The intense conservatism of Anglican clergymen and the disruptions of war ensured that they lacked readiness for new challenges, as formal religious observance became a 'voluntary aspect of social behaviour and human consciousness'.<sup>11</sup> In the Diocese of Chichester the impact of the war on ageing, tired clergymen should not be understated. In 393 parishes there were 291 changes in personnel in the years 1908–19, of these 214 occurred in the war years. The situation at Nuthurst may not be typical, but it highlighted the problems which faced some incumbents in large self-contained Wealden parishes. In September 1917, the Rev. J. A. Rawlins regretfully resigned after twelve years in the parish. Three assistant clergymen had gone to France and, aged 75 years, he could not face another winter (*see note 12*). Some incumbents delayed their retirement by several years during the war or were only able to move to small rural parishes in the immediate aftermath of war. Lord Brassey, chairman of the diocesan finance committee, had noted that in ecclesiastical matters 'Sussex was nothing if not exclusive. After residence of twenty years in the county, a man was reckoned a new-comer, and therefore to be admitted grudgingly to any participation in Church affairs'. In December 1918 he wrote to the *Westminster Gazette* on issues confronting the clergy and observed 'It is urgently necessary to provide pensions to enable incumbents to retire when no longer capable of doing their work, instead of hanging on to their posts to the detriment of their parishes'.<sup>12</sup> The sense of nostalgia for pre-war normalcy voiced on his retirement aged 78

years, by the Rev. Dr Charles Ridgeway, Bishop of Chichester, in 1919, was not unusual. As the epitome of drawing-room churchmanship he regretted 'these days of constant and restless movement' which had brought momentous problems for church as well as state at the end of the war.<sup>13</sup>

ANGLICAN CLERGYMEN,  
CUSTOMARY PATERNALISM AND  
PARISH WAR MEMORIAL  
COMMITTEES

In 1919, the presumption of decision-making on commemorating the fallen remained with Anglican clergymen, churchwardens and propertied 'church people'. They often became self-elected members of parish war memorial committees. Sustained by charitable tradition and the apparent relevance of the voluntarist casework, they implemented commemorative schemes on behalf of the local community, including the bereaved. Of course, self-elected war memorial committees included bereaved parents. At Slinfold, near Horsham, the committee's eleven members included six relatives of the fallen, of whom one was the rector. There is no evidence that this committee specifically represented or consulted the bereaved, as a defining interest, during their deliberations. However, the subscription lists do indicate that the committee members who had been bereaved subscribed larger amounts for the chancel screen in the church than for the hospital fund as their preferred war memorial.<sup>14</sup>

In the small, scattered village of East Chiltington, near Plumpton, which tended to 'closeness', the committee decided to place the war memorial on a conspicuous site outside the churchyard. The members issued the statement that they were 'most anxious to know whether their views are shared by those whose relatives fell in the war'.<sup>15</sup> A 'social gathering' was held at the parish room to ascertain views or, as an alternative, relatives were invited to send messages to the manor house. Here the controlling interest, representing church and land, checked that their plan had support among the bereaved. On the proposed choice of site the secretary hoped that if any dissented 'they would speak'.<sup>16</sup> In a largely *post-hoc* manner a unity of purpose emerged, but social control, rather than the quest for consensus, remained paramount. At Keymer, south of Haywards Heath, the Dowager Countess of Chichester brooked no interference as

she quickly established a scheme for a churchyard cross and a lych gate, which were constructed by her estate workers.<sup>17</sup>

However, in the large 'open' parish of Cuckfield in mid-Sussex the social élite proposed a calvary cross near the north porch of the church. Subsequently, at the public meeting in November 1919, a counter-scheme comprising a cross in a memorial garden, which would be incorporated into the churchyard, from school land, was proposed. Colonel Stephenson Clarke, chairman of the memorial committee, of three members, noted that the counter-scheme overturned much initial planning. He apologized for having misunderstood the wishes of parishioners.<sup>18</sup> At Barcombe, a large fragmented village north of Lewes, in the ownership of a few, the rector expected a contentious debate. An undenominational meeting place was demanded by demobilized soldiers in the district. The rector accepted the role of secretary at the first public meeting, which was chaired by the largest landowner, but remarked that 'he might find himself opposed to what was decided upon and so was to be free to resign the work to others'.<sup>19</sup> The secondary élite, including the rector, was utterly opposed to any suggestion that the war memorial might comprise a social utility. Amid profound parochial disunity, two schemes developed, namely, a village hall and a cross in the churchyard. There is some evidence that the voices of the bereaved were heard at the many public meetings which ensued. They modified the confident, hegemonic expectation that the customary social leaders would determine the outcome of the proceedings.

Expressions of division took unusually vivid form in the large village of Balcombe, where Lord Denman presided at a meeting at the Working Men's Institute. He supported the idea of a Victory Hall, which would contribute to the welfare and happiness of the community. It won popular support from all collective interests in the village, including the bereaved. Hence, a pre-existing scheme for a parish church room was further delayed. The agreement for a memorial tablet in the church appeared almost incidental to the main business of the meeting.<sup>20</sup> Today, the memorial panels at the Victory Hall to all who served from the village continue to have far greater centrality and visibility in the life of the community than the tablet at the church.

There was little intimacy of organized religion

and social hierarchy at Balcombe, but in the 'close' vestry of Boxgrove Priory, estate church to the Goodwood estate near Chichester, the quest for private memorials was quickly evident and central to the remembrance of war in the locality. On 13 April 1915 the vestry meeting, attended by the Duke of Richmond, decided that the question of commemorating the fallen of Boxgrove should be left until the end of the war. However, at a special vestry meeting in October 1915 a member of the landowning family, Lady Bernard Gordon Lennox, whose husband had been killed in action in October 1914, gained support for her intention to present a stained glass window at her expense.<sup>21</sup> In May 1920 a service of dedication unveiled memorials to Lord Settrington, heir to the Goodwood estate, and to other local men who died in the war. General Sir Henry Rawlinson, who had commanded British forces in north Russia, where Lord Settrington had died in 1919, noted of the sacrifice asked of every family that,

The demand had fallen upon the highest and lowest in the land. In those memorial tablets set up to the memory of a gallant young officer of the Irish Guards, and of those others who had given their lives for their King and country, they saw that all had suffered and suffered gallantly in the same great cause.<sup>22</sup>

A community of mourning, which transcended social class, was evident in remembering Boxgrove men. However, the separate memorial tablet to Lord Settrington — made of stone with laurel wreath and family arms, in the 'home of his ancestors' — reflected the iconographic ambivalence of the Anglican Church to post-war democratic impulses in memorializing the fallen. Indeed, a regimental banner, which had hung on the barge on which he had died, was an important feature in the process of placing his death in a longer continuity of family service in times of war. Inevitably, social distance on the Goodwood estate continued to be mediated by the estate church and its memorials at the interface between the mansion and the village.<sup>23</sup> There is some evidence that, fearful of the proliferation of private memorial schemes in parish churches to commemorate the fallen heirs to manorial power in Sussex, the diocesan registry at Chichester endeavoured to constrain the granting of permissions (faculties). However, the parish church in close villages was still a vital constituent of the *ancien régime* and incumbents, in close vestries, fulfilled their obligations to their patrons. At the

welcome home celebrations in the estate village of Shipley, south of Horsham, the rector hoped that the landowner Sir Merrick Burrell would preside, but was ready to 'deputize' for him should it prove necessary.<sup>24</sup> At Framfield parish church where a memorial tablet, of white Sicilian marble and plain deep borders, was unveiled in November 1919, with almost all relatives attending, the vicar spoke 'on behalf of all who reside in this place and as their representative'.<sup>25</sup>

#### POST-WAR CHALLENGES TO THE PAROCHIAL CONTROL OF COMMEMORATIVE RESPONSES

Generally, the actions of Anglican clergymen remained deeply embedded in pre-war social norms. In many small parishes they proceeded to exert traditional influences over local communities and forceful expressions of specific consolatory need by relatives of the fallen were either absent or stifled by customary parochial practices. Unusually, in the socially and institutionally heterogeneous large village of Angmering, north of Worthing, beyond the control of the parish church, the public meeting sought a committee that was 'thoroughly representative'. It included three relatives of the fallen, two female and one male, and one representative of each of the three friendly societies and the three churches in the village.<sup>26</sup> It firmly resisted the 'expert' recommendation of a cross close to the parish church, with yew trees in the churchyard, as an aesthetically enhanced background. Instead, it sited the cross on the village green.<sup>27</sup>

In Horsham, at the centre of a large rural district, many relatives of the fallen wished that the vicar would not speak with such confident authority on the subject of a fitting war memorial, of surpassing beauty, for the town. The proposed figurative memorial did not have sufficient space for 317 names of the fallen, which were to be placed on panels at the town hall.<sup>28</sup> In February 1920 deputations of mothers and widows of the fallen demanded that the inscribing of names should take place at the site of the war memorial. A petition argued that money for the memorial was, otherwise, raised under false pretences. It firmly represented the view of *all* families of the fallen.<sup>29</sup> The church and the town council remained remarkably uncomprehending of the central importance of naming the fallen in the commemorative process.

Relatives were shocked by their own limited influence, when confronted by the civic quest for an expensive memorial of sculptural quality. Many years passed before they were able to lay their flowers at a permanent cenotaph in the Carfax. In Horsham and elsewhere these processes at the micro level suggest, as Angela Gaffney has remarked of Wales, that 'as a group, bereaved families were rarely considered or consulted in local commemorative schemes'.<sup>30</sup> With the exception of Angmering, it was also unusual for women to be directly represented on local war memorial committees in Sussex, but many undertook work as lady collectors or fund-raisers.

During this immediate post-war commemorative response many Anglican clergymen in Sussex felt that their assumption of leadership roles in rural areas was being assailed by anecdotal evidence of declining church attendance and diminishing local civil jurisdiction under the Enabling Act, 1919. In the market town of Midhurst the Rev. F. Tatchell made the gloomy prognosis in April 1919, 'I am sorry to say the young men and women of to-day say they have no use for the Church — a very deplorable thing'.<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere, in 1920, the reports of the Easter vestries, where vicars were *ex officio* chairmen, conveyed the apprehension of incumbents that their prerogatives as the focal point of parish business would be entirely dismantled by the formation of statutory parochial church councils. Hitherto, these had existed as voluntary bodies to advise and support incumbents on Anglican Church work.<sup>32</sup> The consolidation of parish governance shortly after the war completed the separation of secular and ecclesiastical business by the abolition of the anomalous vestries, which had not governed villages for many decades. The long-term decline of clergymen as rural social leaders was confirmed and the denominational future of Anglicanism was intimated. Consequently, relations between church and village were more fluid than Sir Arthur Pinero, an active churchman in Northchapel, would admit. He assumed that a memorial must be placed in the church on the grounds that 'apart from its religious significance, the church is the principal building in the village, that it is naturally open to every villager and that it is an object of interest to every intelligent stranger visiting Northchapel'.<sup>33</sup>

In rapidly changing social conditions Pinero and other churchmen had yet to acknowledge the diminishing influence of the church in rural

communities where sectional interests sought 'social gains'. The church did not speak the language of social betterment, social justice and the comradeship of the trenches. In particular, demands for regeneration by ex-servicemen's organizations affronted inegalitarian, socially remote vestry control at the moment of its final demise. In Shoreham, the vicar supported the notion of a memorial recreational ground for the returning boys of the town. In Haywards Heath the Rev. Cresswell Gee's programme of social progressivism, embracing the demand of a public hall, contained more points than President Wilson needed in January 1918 as the declared basis for an international peace settlement.<sup>34</sup> Outside Brighton, however, these expressions of promoting social unity by actively responding to the demands of demobilized soldiers were rare in Sussex.

#### PARISH CHURCHES AS CHERISHED SITES OF MOURNING

Consequently, in the context of a social gulf in rural parishes, where secondary élites, maintained age-old patterns of *representing* localities through social action, how might the church console the bereaved, both individually and corporately? Despite social exclusivity, customary paternalism and a general failure to consult the bereaved, the centrality of the parish churches to remembering the fallen remained largely intact. Theologically, of course, the interplay of grief and indebtedness, and its Christian articulation through the redemptive power of suffering, was of the greatest importance. The heavenward path of the martyred soldier-saint was confirmed everywhere. At St Margaret's Church, Warnham on the unveiling of a tablet with gothic surround and marble inlay and an 'outside' memorial cross, in October 1920 the Rev. R. Bowcott noted, 'They had saved others, themselves they had also saved, for although dead in the body, they would live for ever in the spirit'.<sup>35</sup> Using the language of medieval chivalry, Victorian manliness, cultural nationalism and biblical truths, consoling words from the pulpit made the death of loved ones less unbearable. Joy and sorrow mingled and the strong contemporary sense of a Great Deliverance was reiterated, alongside a great sacrifice, 'to the glory of God'.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to powerful sustaining clerical pronouncements on numerous occasions of

national crisis from recruiting to remembrance, many parish churches became cherished *sites of mourning*. Physically and historically they embodied 'home' and provided a local focus of national sentiment. Furthermore, churchyards could still be described as the final resting-place of parishioners of all denominations. The church was not only Pinero's 'principal building in the village', but *the* place where a generalizing sense of the sacred could reverentially convey thanksgiving and consolation by using appropriately pre-modern symbolism. In 1919 the vicar of Midhurst noted that the two occasions when the church was full, in recent years, had been the memorial service at King Edward's death and Armistice Day. Because they already contained sorrowful expressions of local contributions to the national 'story' and ministering elements of the memorial iconography, parish churches provided locations for tablets of dignity and solace in the knowledge that names would be held sacred for posterity. Consequently, churches were monuments of History, which should record the identities of individuals known to the parish.<sup>37</sup>

The vicar of Lancing's dictum was clear on the matter. A memorial must 'be sacred, it must be of a lasting nature and it must be a memorial which would speak for itself'.<sup>38</sup> At Barnham, near Bognor Regis, a similar approach was apparent. Originally, the parish war memorial was intended to stand outside the wheelwright's shop on a grass plot. The Rev. Barrett's counter-plan to place a tablet in the dignified setting of St Mary's Church only won support at Barnham Parish Council, when it became clear that every relative of the fallen had been visited. All of them expressed the wish that a memorial tablet should be placed in the church.<sup>39</sup> Here the 'secular' parish council's intention to place a war memorial beyond the churchyard was suggestive of a willingness to challenge the central importance of the incumbent to the commemorative process.

In 1919–1920 some early commemorative responses in villages almost suggested that the church was in the possession of the people in a barely definable, semi-mystical sense. At Fletching, the gateway to Sheffield Park, Robert Saunders, village headmaster, noted of Armistice Day, 'After tea our Church clock, which had been silent all through the War struck at 6 and has continued striking day and night. It may seem a little thing to you, but to all here it meant much, and sounded like the voice of an old friend returning from the grave'. At the end of

the war he yearned for evidence of the underlying changelessness of village life. The returning sound of the bells brought the prospect of regaining the old rhythms of parochial life. For Saunders the inner harmonies, seemingly exemplified by churchyard conversations, the timeless presence of the parish register and 'good old hymns', spanned the centuries. His letter of 16 November 1918 continued,

On Tuesday evening we had a Thanksgiving Service in Church and it would have done your heart good to see the Crowd & to hear the good old Hymns as they were sung (smitted). In all the services I have attended I never felt one like this, everyone was so excited and yet so thoroughly reverent and earnest, that the very air seemed full of electricity, and so unlike the deadly dull services we all know, that there was a feeling of unreality about it. The Vicar gave a fine address which was much appreciated and the attention and interest shown by his congregation must have been very gratifying to him.<sup>40</sup>

Here the collective sense of a sacred, ethereal place for all verged on sublime 'unreality', so unlike the monotony of routinized formal religious observance. The excitement was palpable, but there were also intimations of religious indifference in a well-ordered village which generally responded to the exhortations of the church.

In Northchapel the unveiling of the memorial tablet became the rector's didactic occasion for inculcating succeeding generations in a noble heritage of self-sacrifice. The moral worth of 'grand-sire's name' on the wall diminished during the 1920s as one fifth of agricultural workers left the land, but the intimate and collective knowledge of the fallen, in a crowded church, was of greater moment than their appearance in a moral continuity. He noted,

And here in this quiet little village, where the same families live on generation after generation, it should need little insistence to reverence the memory of our own kith and kin. With us it is a family affair for, remember, here in this place, most of those names which are recorded were baptized.<sup>41</sup>

#### WALL TABLETS AS LOCATIONS OF NAMES

In the village of Salehurst the quest for an artistic and patriotic wall tablet for the parish church

proceeded quite separately from the plans in the same district for Robertsbridge clock tower as an 'outside memorial'. The churchwarden argued that it fulfilled 'our most obvious duty to provide a Memorial in the only historic building of a public character in the parish'. This view was echoed by a bereaved father, who in providing details of the precise name to be inscribed, added his 'humble opinion that, something should be erected in the church which would be held sacred and preserved for generations'.<sup>42</sup> Despite the loss of his son his opinion remained 'humble' and he was not formally consulted in the choice of memorial type. The bronze relief tablet, which was lettered with rose, thistle and shamrock border with crossed flags in white metal, drew admiration from one early visitor. He supported the use of national symbols, because the soldiers had 'saved us from worse than death and for the flag'.<sup>43</sup> The tablet also contained the image of St George and the dragon. These pre-modern motifs won approval as early commemorative responses and were unveiled near altars and pulpits in numerous churches on the first anniversary of the Armistice.

The long history of the wall tablet, as an architectural frame for inscriptions, suggested that much detail might be applied to convey, as noted by Laurence Weaver in 1915, a sense of 'monumental glory in a noble setting'.<sup>44</sup> He drew attention to the traditional depiction of 'gallant deeds' on tablets to inform good practice after the war. The seascapes on 19th-century tablets for great naval commanders, replete with classical motifs, in the Chapel of St Michael (sailor's chapel) at Chichester Cathedral remind us of the countless opportunities for expressions of patriotic sentiment and allegory in this devotional art form. However, in contrast to what happened after the Crimean and even the South African war, temporarily uniformed volunteers who enlisted in 1914–15 personified the notion of sacrifice rather than of duty and service, and relatives expected them to be remembered as individuals rather than as anonymized members of regiments. Moreover, it was difficult, and certainly not comforting, to present their war service in realistic ways or to depict them in modern uniform. Consequently, the values of the society which they sought to defend in the 'Great War for Civilisation 1914–1919', as stated on the Victory medal, were reflected in some of the motifs which were used in the early commemorative response.<sup>45</sup>

Except at Horsham, naming the war dead became the pre-eminent design consideration. Sometimes the distinction between officers and men, so redolent of memorials from the South African war, was stated, as at Salehurst. However, the unprecedented listing of so many names in alphabetical order reached towards, in Thomas Laqueur's words, a 'democracy of death'.<sup>46</sup> He has referred to the overwhelming significance of memorials as locations of *names*. Rather than receive a singular meaning, which was produced by controlling institutions and announced at unveiling ceremonies, the memorials generated a 'sort of commemorative hyper-nominalism', as the bereaved inscribed their diverse remembrances of lives at sites of mourning. Official parochial statements, containing elevated language, mattered less than the existence of simple often unadorned, memorial tablets, which remembered the individuality of known inhabitants as they had been when they had left home, and allowed public acts of collective mourning for the Absent Dead.

#### ROLLS OF HONOUR, PARISH MAGAZINES AND DEFINITIONS OF HOME

The permanent listing of names at parish churches also reflected years of carefully compiling information on Rolls of Honour, which at Ashurst recorded 67 names from a village of 300 inhabitants 'who have gone to serve our King and Country by Land and Sea and Air'.<sup>47</sup> A standardized poster format for the Roll depicted the accoutrements of the Christian knight on a border of oak leaves containing the helmet of salvation, shield of faith, sword of the spirit and breast-plate of righteousness. The names of ten men were edged in black to denote those killed in action; others were indicated as wounded. Additionally, some temporary wall shrines were constructed, especially during 1917, as at Apuldram where flowers were placed, at great festivals, to remember those who had died in the war but were not in God's acre.<sup>48</sup>

Parish magazines provide much evidence of communication between the front, families and the rectory regarding the service of soldiers and sailors from the locality. Intimate knowledge of a fallen soldier named from the pulpit formed an integral feature of sustaining rhetoric, not least in fusing national war aims and the defence of the village. In



Fig. 1a. Warnham war memorial, which was 'unveiled' in October 1920. A strong sense of a 'great deliverance' of the living village was evident at the unveiling of the Warnham war memorial cross. It was at a cherished site near the entrance to St Margaret's church. The cross is of Yorkshire stone and 'contains' a sword of sacrifice. Its setting-up required alterations in the boundary wall of the churchyard, and it is bounded by a line of posts-and-chains to 'sanctify' its space.

Fig. 1b. A detail of the inscription and list of names at the base of the memorial. The listed names were confirmed at public meetings. After some debate (see text), they included Trooper Blackwell, in recognition of Mrs Blackwell's loss, although she was not domiciled in the village at the time of her loss (1914), thus recognizing her as part of the local community of mourning.

the remote downland setting of Burpham, the Rev. C. Toogood wrote in 1915, 'Here, as in every English village, the glory and the sadness reaches us; our hearts are full of sympathy with Mr and Mrs Greenfield in their anxious time of waiting for certain news of their son's fate. God grant that he still lives, but, if not, to him is the glory, and to his murderers the shame'.<sup>49</sup> The multi-layered connections of the Christian, the martial and the parish as home were, sometimes, more explicit in the *Burpham Quarterly Paper*. For example: 'Since I last wrote to you, the supreme sacrifice of all the offering of life itself, has been made by one of us, Edward Foulkes; he died for his country, for our



village, for our homes; he did his duty, and he died for us'.<sup>50</sup> The Church-driven process of recording names of men and women on active service and as killed, wounded, missing and prisoner in parish magazines, Rolls of Honour and temporary wall shrines was in its fifth year before permanent commemorative schemes were undertaken. The enormity and brutality of the attritional struggle on the Western Front was constantly mediated by events and services which conveyed a sense of an interwoven home, family and locality. In May 1919 Canon Wilson, chairman of the welcome home organizing committee pronounced with precision, Cuckfield has done splendidly. Some three or four hundred men had gone out from there, of which number 82 had given up their lives and a large number had been wounded. Some had gained decorations, and deserved all they had got. Now they had come home and the musicians played 'there's no place like home'.<sup>51</sup>

Clarity in parochial definitions of home mattered. In Barcombe the names to be recorded included 'those whose homes would have been in Barcombe had they lived to return, or who, or whose families, have been, or are now domiciled in Barcombe'.<sup>52</sup> In Warnham a public meeting deliberated at length on whether Trooper Blackwell's name should be recorded on the memorial tablet. He had been killed in 1914 and his widow, subsequently, settled in the village. A vote of nine for and against was followed by a further vote, which secured 13 for and 10 against inclusion.<sup>53</sup> Mrs Blackwell inhabited a community of mourning whose process of naming the war dead was so locally rooted that it was not without difficulty that recognition was given to her loss (see Figs 1a & 1b).<sup>54</sup> In the long history of memorializing the dead in parish churches, the remarkable moment of using public meetings to guide the commemorative process of 1919 contrasted with the pre-war vestry norm that only the landed élite of Warnham should be represented in artistic marble monuments in St Margaret's Church.

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTINUUM OF SOLDIER-SAINTS

In the sparsely populated and isolated Wealden parish of Ashurst an illuminating household canvass, comprising 36 responses in collecting lists, provided unusual evidence of the continuing centrality of the parish church to the community

in mourning shortly after the war. Seventeen returns specifically requested a memorial at the church, of which six wanted a stained glass window. Five responses expressed no preference with regard to what was decided and three returns stated that the bereaved should choose the most appropriate memorial.<sup>55</sup> The rector provided relatively neutral guidance on options and costs, but was influenced by a South African war memorial in Lower Beeding parish church. The power of traditional Christian iconography and language was very evident in the choice of the military saints, James and George, for small windows at Ashurst in memory of the ten names of the parish.<sup>56</sup>

In 1919 the use of soldier-saints as a historical continuum brought solace and comfort to the relatives of the fallen in the context of much emphasis on the Pauline ideals of righteousness, truth, justice, faith, hope and love, with the ideals of chivalry never very far away.<sup>57</sup> Their use in statements of local patriotism reflected the persistence of sustaining 'home front' imperatives and the sense of a Great Deliverance, which the historiography of the war has largely banished since the late 1920s. In a generalizing, non-doctrinal sense of the sacred, the imaginative discourse of a war for truth, decency in warfare, freedom from oppression and progress in the future had yet to meet the secularizing abstractions of modernity.

#### CONCLUSION

Rather than focus on the theological precepts of the Anglican Church, this article has focused on it as a 'controlling' social institution in some rural communities in Sussex in a deferential age. There its lingering effects were still powerfully embedded in the voluntaryist work of the secondary élites. It was a church of the classes before the masses. By 1925 liberal social commentators, such as J. R. Robertson Scott, concluded that there was 'a large body of opinion antagonistic to a faithless church' in rural England.<sup>58</sup> Despite the predilection for the social dynamics of charity, paternalism and obligation and an inability to explore the social consequences of the comradeship of the trenches, parish churches in rural Sussex brought consolation to the bereaved. A fundamental unity of purpose in commemorating the fallen may have arisen, as at Ashurst, but the social dissonance engendered by self-confident civic and ecclesiastical authorities, as

at Horsham, revealed the absence of a negotiated regard for the needs of the bereaved. As individual voices there is some evidence that war memorial committees were influenced by the bereaved, but often after planning schemes had begun and rarely as a collective interest. At Barnham a canvass of the opinions of the bereaved halted an unrepresentative plan. At East Chiltington the relatives of the fallen were given the opportunity to discuss the plans of the rural social leaders. However, evidence of the systematic incorporation of the wishes of the bereaved is sparse in surviving records. Frequently, the incumbent had a firm position on the subject from the outset. This might have arisen from customary commemorative practices expressed in the South African war, or from abiding romanticized images of the departure of volunteers at the beginning of the war, reinforced by references to the church as a defining feature of home in some soldiers' letters to the rectory.

In deferential districts the conservative sustaining role of incumbents, as at Fletching, and the reverential regard for wall tablets in sacred spaces, as at Salehurst and Northchapel, spoke eloquently to rural communities, as they endeavoured to construct a tolerable meaning to the enormity of loss. In the immediate aftermath of war belligerent patriotic motifs remained appropriate as victory and sacrifice, joy and sorrow and thanksgiving and commemoration intermingled until the triumphalist impulse ebbed away. Briefly, notions of victor and vanquished held sway in Salehurst and Northchapel. In short, devotional art kept the realities of modern war at bay through recourse to the conjunction of the sword and the cross (see Fig. 1a) and a noble tradition of self-sacrifice through high diction, warrior saints and manly exhortation. In historic buildings, with long continuities of local association, dignified expressions of sacred reverence to the fallen were chosen with an eye to posterity. The gaze of the bereaved enabled these inscriptions to become curiously democratic in time. At Fletching an electrifying 'unreality' pervaded at a packed congregation at a thanksgiving service which secured an elevated consoling power whereby tribute was made to heroes of the parish who fell on the battlefield.

It was a time of conveying absolutes shortly after a total war, which employed all means to achieve

final and decisive victory. Controlling institutions, especially such a repository of national sentiment as the Anglican Church, could not stand aside.<sup>59</sup> In the enchanted years 1919–20 a blend of patriotic justification and images of Christian sacrifice brought succour to the bereaved, rather than reminders of carnage and mutilation on the Western Front.<sup>60</sup> In the 1920s the relations of church and village grew dysfunctional as cultural nationalism declined, demands for social justice grew and the exhortatory power of the incumbent diminished.

Planning memorials for posterity has never been straightforward. After the Great War many controversies ensued on the most appropriate way to convey the nobility and sadness of war on memorials and the balance which might be struck between the two. Before the democratizing consequences of waging large-scale continental war became pronounced, 'church people' energetically accorded the fallen the 'highest distinction': that of permanently recording their identity in parish churches. Amid quiet, meaningful controversies, rural parish churches had become monuments of History, reflective of whole communities of mourning, through the unprecedented process of inscribing the names of all men who had made the great sacrifice and lay in foreign fields.

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**Author:** Keith Grieves, School of Education, Kingston University, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT2 7LB.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> J. M. Winter, 'Communities in mourning', in F. Coetzee & M. Shevin-Coetzee (eds), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 350.
- <sup>2</sup> Winter, in Coetzee & Shevin-Coetzee, 348; J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), 30, 79.
- <sup>3</sup> A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: the Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 248, 102.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Vickers, 'Religious worship in 1851', in K. Leslie & B. Short (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Sussex* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1999), 76–7. See also B. I. Coleman, 'Southern England in the census of religious worship, 1851', *Southern History* 5 (1983), 154–88.
- <sup>5</sup> B. Short, 'Landownership in Victorian Sussex', in Leslie & Short (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Sussex*, 98. For an evaluation of 'open' and 'close' communities in Sussex see B. Short, 'The evolution of contrasting communities within Rural England', in his (ed.), *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 19–43 and P. Brandon & B. Short, *The South East from AD 1000* (London: Longman, 1990), 316–22.
- <sup>6</sup> D. M. Thompson, 'The churches and society in nineteenth century England: a rural perspective', in G. J. Cuming & D. Baker (eds), *Popular Belief and Practice. Studies in Church History* 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1972), 269–70; J. Obelkewich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825–75* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 325. See also pp. 115, 321. This essay endeavours to identify the continuities as well as the ruptures in personal faith in Sussex during and after the war and has benefited from the admirable introduction in A. Becker *War and Faith: the Religious Imagination in France 1914–1930* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 4. For the argument that the decline in churchgoing was not particular to rural areas nor especially evident after the First World War, see R. Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993), 151–85.
- <sup>7</sup> West Sussex Record Office (hereafter WSRO), Par. 142/4/5 Northchapel war memorial committee, Amy Burroughs to Rev. G. Bright, 14 April 1919.
- <sup>8</sup> J. Lowerson, 'The mystical geography of the English', in Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community*, 154.
- <sup>9</sup> Obelkewich, *Religion and Rural Society*, 115; P. C. Hammond, *The Parson and the Victorian Parish* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 198; H. McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789–1970* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1981), 59.
- <sup>10</sup> Rev. A. H. Baverstock, *The Failure of the Church in the Villages* (London, 1913), 27.
- <sup>11</sup> A. D. Gilbert, 'The land and the Church', in G. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside I* (London: Routledge, 1981), 49–50.
- <sup>12</sup> *West Sussex County Times* (hereafter WSCT) 22 September 1917; F. Partridge, *T.A.B. A Memoir of Thomas Allnutt, Second Earl Brassey* (London: John Murray, 1921), 151–3.
- <sup>13</sup> *Sussex Daily News* (hereafter SDN), 5 March 1919. See also the *Chichester Diocesan Gazette* March 1919. The life of Charles John Ridgeway (1842–1927), Bishop of Chichester (1908–19) is commemorated in an ornate, Gothicized wall tablet in the Chapel of St Clement at Chichester Cathedral.
- <sup>14</sup> WSRO, Par. 176/43/4 Slinfold war memorial committee, minutes of committee meeting, 21 August 1919.
- <sup>15</sup> East Sussex Record Office (hereafter ESRO), Par. 293/43/2/2, East Chiltington war memorial committee, draft statement [October 1920].
- <sup>16</sup> ESRO, Par. 293/43/2/1, East Chiltington war memorial committee, minutes of committee meeting, 7 October 1920. See A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain* 29.
- <sup>17</sup> SDN, 26 February 1919.
- <sup>18</sup> SDN, 1 December 1919. For an exploration of this theme see K. Grieves, 'Common meeting places and the brightening of rural life: local debates on village halls in Sussex after the First World War', *Rural History* 10, (1999) 171–92.
- <sup>19</sup> ESRO, Par. 235/16/5/1. Barcombe war memorial committee, minutes of public meeting, 28 April 1919.
- <sup>20</sup> SDN, 20 January 1919.
- <sup>21</sup> WSRO Par. 27/12/1, Boxgrove parish, vestry minute book, meetings on 13 April 1915, 4 October 1915 and 4 August 1919.
- <sup>22</sup> General Sir Henry Rawlinson quoted in SDN, 17 May 1920.
- <sup>23</sup> J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914–45* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 356; G. Ewart Evans, *Where Beards Wag All* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 199–200.
- <sup>24</sup> SDN, 16 May 1919.
- <sup>25</sup> SDN, 10 November 1919.
- <sup>26</sup> WSRO, Par. 6/7/7 Angmering war memorial committee, minutes of public meeting, 14 January 1919.
- <sup>27</sup> WSRO, Par. 6/7/7 Angmering war memorial committee, minutes of public meeting, 1 April 1919.
- <sup>28</sup> WSCT, 24 May 1919, 28 February 1920.
- <sup>29</sup> WSCT, 3 April 1920, 5 June 1920, 3 July 1920, 31 July 1920.
- <sup>30</sup> A. Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 39. See also pp. 33, 37, 40.
- <sup>31</sup> SDN, 23 April 1919.
- <sup>32</sup> See, for example, the report of the vestry meeting at All Saint parish church, Crowborough in the SDN, 8 April 1920; O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church Part II 1860–1901* (London: SCM Press, 2nd ed. 1972), 200–201.
- <sup>33</sup> WSRO, Par. 142/4/5 Northchapel war memorial committee, A. Pinero to Rev. G. Bright, 14 February 1919.
- <sup>34</sup> SDN, 16 Jan. 1919 and 7 March 1919. On the favouring of utility memorials see B. Bushaway 'Name upon name; The Great War and remembrance', in R. Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 146–7.
- <sup>35</sup> WSCT, 2 October 1920.
- <sup>36</sup> On the redemptive power of suffering and the consoling concept of noble sacrifice see A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), 180–181, 297–308; J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 248–51; A. Borg, *War Memorials from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991), 100–102; A. Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1974), 152–3. The emphasis on duty, manliness and honour is widely evident in Sussex, for example, in the use of Psalm 12 v. 4 at the unveiling of Holy Trinity Church memorial

- in Horsham. *WSCT*, 3 April 1920.
- <sup>37</sup> WSRO, Par. 142/4/5 Northchapel war memorial committee, A. Burroughs to Rev. G. Bright, 14 April 1919.
- <sup>38</sup> *SDN*, 9 May 1919. It is tempting to wonder whether the vicar of Lancing had in mind the massive memorial aisle of Lancing College chapel.
- <sup>39</sup> *SDN*, 1 April 1920.
- <sup>40</sup> Imperial War Museum, 79/15/1, Robert Saunders to his son in Canada, 16 November 1918, p. 192. See also M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850–1980* (1981, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1985 reprint) 54–6.
- <sup>41</sup> WSRO, Par. 142/4/14 Northchapel war memorial committee, Order of Service for dedication ceremony on 5 June 1921 and newspaper cutting [no date].
- <sup>42</sup> ESRO, Par. 477/4/31 Salehurst church war memorial committee, Henry Kealey to L. J. Hodson, 17 February 1919.
- <sup>43</sup> ESRO, Par. 477/4/31 Salehurst church war memorial committee, H.C. Wickham to L. J. Hodson, 7 June 1920. See also *SDN*, 22 November 1919 and for the wider context A. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 245.
- <sup>44</sup> L. Weaver, *Memorials and Monuments Old and New: Two Hundred Subjects Chosen from Seven Centuries* (London: Country Life, 1915), 117. See also 92, 185, 258.
- <sup>45</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 79.
- <sup>46</sup> T. W. Laqueur, 'Memory and naming in the Great War', in J. R. Cullis (ed.), *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 161; J. Winter 'Kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War', in J. Winter & E. Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), 55. A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, 130; C. Moriarity, 'Private grief and public remembrance: British First World War memorials', in M. Evans & K. Lunn (eds), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 137–8.
- <sup>47</sup> WSRO, Par. 11/4/4, Ashurst war memorial, Roll of Honour. See Ephesians 6:13–17.
- <sup>48</sup> *SDN*, 21 August 1917.
- <sup>49</sup> WSRO, Par. 31/7/1, *Burpham Quarterly Paper* no. 52, Epiphany 1915.
- <sup>50</sup> WSRO, Par. 31/7/1, *Burpham Quarterly Paper* no. 58, no date [1916].
- <sup>51</sup> *SDN*, 2 May 1919.
- <sup>52</sup> ESRO, Par. 235/10/5/1, Barcombe war memorial committee, minutes of executive committee, 28 November 1919.
- <sup>53</sup> WSRO, Par. 203/7/28, Warnham war memorial committee, minutes of public meeting, 30 November 1919.
- <sup>54</sup> On sites of remembrance which arose from locally rooted social action and war memorials in an 'organic landscape of memory', see Winter, 'Kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War', in J. Winter & E. Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, 59, and J. Lowerson, 'The mystical geography of the English', in Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community*, 159.
- <sup>55</sup> WSRO, Par. 11/4/4, Ashurst war memorial, minutes of public meeting, 12 March 1919 and unsigned and undated collecting lists.
- <sup>56</sup> A. Borg, *War Memorials from Antiquity to the Present*, 41.
- <sup>57</sup> *WSCT*, 22 September 1917. See also Marrin *The Last Crusade*, 219 and M. Smith, 'The war and British culture', in S. Constantine *et al.* (eds), *The First World War in British History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 178.
- <sup>58</sup> J. Robertson Scott, *England's Green and Pleasant Land* (London, 1925), 211. See also C. F. G. Masterman, *England After War: a Study* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922), 197.
- <sup>59</sup> A. Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, 221.
- <sup>60</sup> M. Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981). On continuities in the depiction of the soldier-hero see A. Borg, *War Memorials*, 108–13.