

ALLWARD'S FIGURES, LUTYENS'S FLAGS AND WREATHS

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PIERRE DE LA RUFFINIÈRE DU PREY recently conceived the exhibition *Palladio in Print* currently on display at Queen's University until 31 October, 2008. He also wrote the eponymous exhibition catalogue.

"[Taking another whiskey.] It was after I came back here – in that awful affair on Vimy Ridge – I knew I'd go mad if I didn't break the strain". R.C. Sherriff, *Journey's End*, act 1, 1928.

Before the First World War ended an artistic tug-of-war began. The architects who advised the Imperial War Graves Commission shared a bias against the use of sculpture in cemeteries. As one of them, Reginald Blomfield, put it in his *Memoirs*: "Many of us had seen terrible examples in France, and were haunted by the fear of winged angels in various sentimental attitudes".¹ Francophile though he was, Blomfield denigrated the figural sculpture that dominates many French monuments. His statement helps to explain the architectural quality of most Commission war graves, notably those by Edwin Lutyens at Étaples, Villers-Bretonneux, and Thiepval. Unconstrained by such guidelines, the Toronto-based architect/sculptor Walter Allward worked independently for the Canadian Battlefields Memorials Commission. Allward's imposing monument at Vimy uses figural sculpture in contrast to Lutyens's more abstract reliance on carved flags and funereal wreaths. Both architects, however, communicate in their different ways the same poignant message by uniting under one somber banner the sister arts of architecture and sculpture.

To turn to Lutyens first, already by 1918 he had embarked on designing the war cemetery at Étaples, overlooking the English Channel from a hillside on the French coast at the site of a former



FIG. 1. ÉTAPLES MILITARY CEMETERY, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.



FIG. 2. ÉTAPLES MILITARY CEMETERY, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. CLOSE-UP OF ONE OF THE PYLONS. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

hospital and base camp. Seen from the train line below, or from the main road among the trees up above, a carpet of around 10,000 gravestones, including 2010 Canadian ones, creates an awe-inspiring sight (fig. 1). Religious symbolism was deliberately restricted to the minimum. The centrally positioned Cross of Sacrifice, a standard feature designed by Blomfield, is flanked at either end of the platform by twin Lutyens pylons, anticipating those of Allward at Vimy. Gavin Stamp's article earlier in this issue calls these pylons "cenotaphs", thus drawing attention to their similarity to Lutyens's Cenotaph on Whitehall in London (cf. Stamp figs. 2, 13).

Lutyens conceived of the end pylons at Étapes as sentinels, or "silent witnesses to the desolation of war", to quote the memorable phrase of King George V during his 1922 pilgrimage to some of the cemeteries (including Étapes).² Here, on this artificial plateau, Lutyens resurrected

the idea of ornamenting the pylons with drooping flags – an idea he was forced to reject at the Cenotaph. He placed them so they point skyward, drawing attention to the topmost element, which is in reality a stylized, flag-draped coffin like a Roman sarcophagus. Specifically Christian references fade away, and Lutyens invokes the classical tradition to impart a feeling of the eternal and never-changing aspects of that tradition, as he understood it. Further to intensify the hush, the carved flags do not flutter bravely but rest limp and motionless.

Focusing in on one of the pylons (fig. 2), a laurel wreath can be seen lying on top of the sarcophagus. On the long sides a garland of foliage held up by ribbons replaces the laurel wreath motif. The garland has a classical French eighteenth-century look to it – appropriate to Étapes's location – although the leaves are obviously oak, symbolic of England. They strike the only real note of naturalism in the fundamentally geometric play of simple shapes. Even the flags, according to David Watkin "hang frozen and deathly in the air".³ Lutyens abstracted their form so as to avoid the impression of anything transitory and flimsy. No doubt Lutyens's eye would have appreciated the astonishing shadow cast on the stonework by the metal crown at the top of one of the flag poles.

Gavin Stamp and Jacqueline Hucker point out in their separate articles that one of the hardest – indeed grimmest – tasks during and immediately after World War I was deciding how best to commemorate those lost in action. There were hundreds of thousands of names with no remains. Memorials to the so-called Missing were erected at or near to the battlefields where they were believed to have fallen, or ports from which they had sailed. Fabian Ware, the Vice-Chairman

of the Imperial War Graves Commission, hoped the Dominion Governments would join forces with the Commission, use its architects, and follow its guidelines. But the Memorial to the Missing Australians, on the battlefield where they had distinguished themselves at Villers-Bretonneux, is an interesting instance of what actually happened. A design competition took place in 1925 and the little-known Australian architect William Lucas won it, although Lutyens eventually supplanted him. The last of the Memorials completed, two years later than Vimy, it shows how Lutyens skilfully adapted the previous design. Notably, he retained Lucas's idea of a central columnar lookout tower to honor the 10,866 Missing.⁴ But Lutyens reduced the importance of classical columns by relegating them to elegant door frames, while still maintaining overall classical symmetry (fig. 3). The out-lying pavilions have pyramidal roofs, an oblique reference perhaps to the Egyptian cult of the dead, at the same time as the tetrahedron shape keeps pace with the severely elemental geometry that Lutyens preferred in his late work. Each corner has rain-soaked-looking flags executed in a more stripped-down fashion than at Étapes.

These "sad flags", so to speak, recur at the corners on the upper stage of the tower (fig. 4). (Notice how, in the close-up, bullets fired by World War II German aircraft in June 1940 scarred the surface of the World War I monument less than four years after its inauguration.)⁵

Lutyens's largest monument to the Missing, the moving Thiepval Memorial, rises 145 feet above the peaceful landscape where the Battle of the Somme once raged on one of the most blood-soaked stretches of earth in human warfare. The commemoration of so many in a single structure at Thiepval came about because



FIG. 3. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MEMORIAL, VILLERS-BRETONNEUX, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.



FIG. 4. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MEMORIAL, VILLERS-BRETONNEUX, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. CLOSE-UP OF THE TOWER. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

of a policy of retrenchment in the face of French Government concern over the growing number of foreign monuments on French soil. Allward responded to the same concern with regard to Vimy in a letter quoted by Jacqueline Hucker, and shortly to be quoted from more fully at the end of this postscript. The decision to consolidate resulted in the fact that the Thiepval Memorial flies the Union Jack and the *tricolore*; real flags this time (fig. 5). The site slopes down to the back where a token even number of French and British unknown soldiers lie buried beneath the lawn shoulder to shoulder, as it were, in death as in battle (Coutu fig. 1). The monumental edifice, faced with French brick trimmed in Portland limestone from England, physically embodies the wartime alliance between the two countries.

The view from the main approach clearly evokes the Roman triumphal arches that Lutyens must have had in his

imagination when designing Thiepval. By making only simplified and oblique references to the classical tradition, however, he avoided odious overtones of victory and emphasized tragic solemnity instead. Sculpture is limited to laurel-leaf wreaths of the same sort Lutyens used earlier at Étapes. At Thiepval they make an even more significant contribution. In all they number twenty four, eight positioned around the top, and the rest on the lower walls which from a distance look like a base of plain white limestone.

Observed closer up (fig. 6), however, the 64 wall surfaces of limestone are inscribed with the names of those missing in action – according to Gavin Stamp the staggering number amounts to 73,000! By selecting triple arched openings Lutyens allowed himself the opportunity to increase many-fold the letters of the alphabet he could fit in. So the walls are not walls at all, but honour rolls of

such a magnitude as to defy comprehension. Notice some revealing details: the flooring where local red brick entwines with imported white stone in a sort of Anglo-French tango; the English oak leaves and acorns on the torus molding of the base course.⁶

Above the names “TO WHOM FORTUNE HAS DENIED THE KNOWN AND HONOURED BURIAL GIVEN TO THEIR COMRADES IN DEATH”, as the inscription reads, hang weighty bound-wreaths seemingly suspended by ribbons from what appear to be two pins (fig. 7). The name MIRAUMONT, written inside the wreath illustrated here, represents a bloody engagement in the Battle of the Somme. Something about the lettering of the apparently endless list conveys a sense of tragic sadness and futility rather than a buoyant proclamation of victory over death. The carved wreaths droop as if in mourning, like Lutyens’s sad flags observed earlier.



FIG. 5. MEMORIAL TO THE MISSING OF THE SOMME AT THIEPVAL, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

In comparison to Thiepval, the Vimy Memorial enjoys a commanding location at the edge of the ridge of Hill 145. It is the most dramatically situated of the World War I grave sites on the Western Front. The architect/sculptor of Vimy, Walter Allward, never had Lutyens or Blomfield's advantage of touring the battlefields before sitting down at his drawing board. He lived in Toronto and designed the Vimy monument from his imagination, based on material provided by the Canadian Battlefields Memorial

Commission. But, as Lane Borstad points out in his article, Allward had received various commissions for Ontario war monuments early in his career, before winning the Vimy competition in 1921. Allward was unanimously selected by an international jury of architects on the strength of his remarkable dream-inspired preparatory drawings, illustrated by Borstad and by Julian Smith in this issue (Borstad fig. 24; Smith fig. 3). Equally remarkable, as Smith notes, the completed structure departed very little

from the initial *parti*, a good French word that architects use to mean the overall arrangement of a scheme. In Allward's case, to compound the brilliance of the achievement, the monument was originally designed for Hill 62 at Saint-Julien near Ypres, over the Belgian border in Flanders, and the location only changed to Vimy the following year.

Allward had training as an architect in Toronto and considered himself a member of the profession. He used the twin



FIG. 6. MEMORIAL TO THE MISSING OF THE SOMME AT THIEPVAL, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. CLOSE-UP OF LISTS OF NAMES. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.



FIG. 7. MEMORIAL TO THE MISSING OF THE SOMME AT THIEPVAL, FRANCE: EDWIN LUTYENS. CLOSE-UP OF A WREATH. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

titles architect and sculptor on his astonishingly large and detailed blueprints for the Vimy monument, preserved in Queen's University Archives. Soon after winning the competition, moreover, Allward wrote a letter, also preserved at Queen's, to Colonel Henry C. Osborne, Secretary of the Canadian Battlefields Memorial Commission, in which he stated: "I am going to Flanders to act as Architect (or designer) and sculptor and will have to serve as both from the beginning to the end of this work, because the

architecture and sculpture are so closely interwoven..."⁷

People who cross the bomb-cratered Vimy Memorial park do not often realize how much architecture and engineering lies out of view: the massive concrete substructure with the twin pylons resting on top; the intricate series of ramps, stairs, and terraces leading up to or down from the main platform (fig. 8). All this, of course, is hidden behind a facing of stone quarried from the coast of

Croatia with sculptures on it carved out of the same material. Over the course of time problems have arisen with the stone cladding, as Julian Smith's account of the extensive recent restoration makes clear. But the structural elements beneath the surface continue to pay tribute to Allward's architectural knowledge and his close collaboration with the British engineer Oscar Faber who, Jacqueline Hucker points out, had previously collaborated on Blomfield's Menin Gate Memorial (Stamp, fig. 19).



FIG. 8. CANADIAN NATIONAL MONUMENT, VIMY RIDGE, FRANCE: WALTER ALLWARD. FROM THE NORTH EAST. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

Looking from the north east of the ridge, to the left of the flags of Canada and of France, which officially ceded the land for the Vimy Memorial in 1922, a long wall in front of the pylons supports the embankment and a terrace. At the right end a statue group shows sympathy to the helpless and that at the left symbolizes the act of breaking the sword of war. In the centre stands what Allward's competition-winning drawing calls "An heroic figure of Canada brooding over the graves of her valiant dead" (Borstad fig. 24). Up the side walls and at the back, carvers inscribed the names of 11,285 Canadians missing-in-action in France (Smith fig. 4). Several documents,

including the manuscript Allward letter alluded to earlier, refer to the wall as "intended to suggest a line of defence...". Several features intentionally recall town fortifications, like those the French military engineer Vauban had constructed for King Louis XIV at Ypres, and from which Blomfield took his cue in designing the Menin Gate there.

On closer inspection, beside the Breaking of the Sword statuary group to the right, there protrudes from the pseudo-fortification wall the mouth of a cannon draped with a laurel leaf and olive branch wreath, as if to suggest that the guns are silenced (fig. 9). Full scale drawings in the Allward

Fonds at Queen's University indicate that he paid careful attention to this wreath motif, forcefully reminiscent of Lutyens's work at Étapes and Thiepval.

Apart from the telltale wreaths, and despite the fourteen years Allward spent in London working on the Vimy commission, research in the Allward Fonds indicated no contact between him and his artistic counterparts in England, until evidence came to light from an unexpectedly obvious source. The evidence takes the form of an Allward clipping from the front-page of the December 5, 1933 Toronto *Globe and Mail* newspaper.⁸ The headline reads: "Huge War Memorial



FIG. 9. CANADIAN NATIONAL MONUMENT, VIMY RIDGE, FRANCE: WALTER ALLWARD. CLOSE-UP OF THE SOUTH END. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

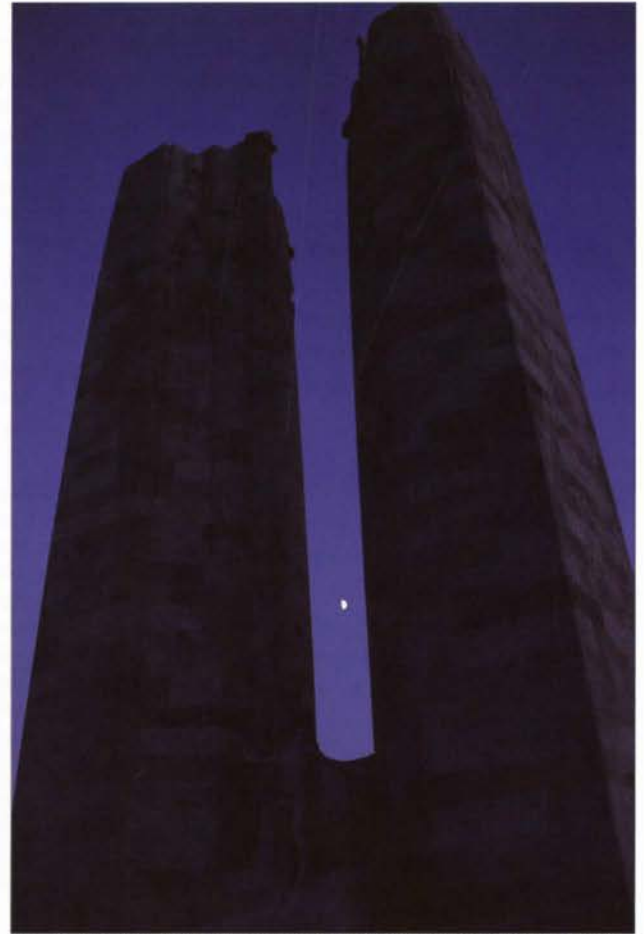


FIG. 10. CANADIAN NATIONAL MONUMENT, VIMY RIDGE, FRANCE: WALTER ALLWARD. CLOSE-UP BY CLAIR DE LUNE. | PIERRE DU PREY 1987.

Placed on Vimy Ridge Soon to be Completed ... Design and Impressiveness Lauded by Great English Authority". The well-informed journalist, William Marchington, derived his information from a reliable source: Colonel Osborne in Ottawa, Allward's stalwart supporter on the Canadian Battlefields Memorial Commission. The article begins "Sir Edwin Lutyens, eminent British architect who designed the Cenotaph in London ... recently visited the Vimy Ridge Memorial, and described it as 'this great masterpiece' in a letter to Colonel Henry C. Osborne". So, at last, there is conclusive proof of a connection, however tenuous, between Lutyens, Vimy, and Allward.

The connection transcends specific borrowings, and consists of one independent genius's esteem for another's ability to express the sadness of war and the gladness of peace.

Marchington's informative article continues by quoting further from the Lutyens letter, perhaps written shortly before or after he attended the August 1932 inauguration of his nearby Thiepval Memorial. According to Marchington:

Sir Edwin writes: "The main structure is practically complete, but the magnificent statuary upon which you are now engaged cannot be hurried. To spoil this work by

haste would mean that the time already spent would be wasted and the quality of the monument as a whole would be spoilt. I am sure that when it is unveiled it will make a great impression for all time The world will only then realize how worthy a memorial Canada has raised to her glorious dead".

Surely Lutyens was prompted to write in part because someone – perhaps Allward himself – had mentioned that the fate of the Vimy monument's completion hung in the balance due to lack of funds and pressure to finish the job after so many years' delay. Whatever the case, Lutyens rose to the crisis with a timely, generous, and heartfelt tribute. How right he proved to

be about the happy outcome and positive world opinion. Vimy's "marble arms ... like the architecture of heaven", as Canadian novelist Jane Urquhart recently described the pylons, were inaugurated by King Edward VIII on 25 July, 1936.⁹

A decade before, Allward had addressed André Ventre, *architecte en chef* of the French Commission des Monuments Historiques, a revealing letter. Allward ended it by way of explanation and justification with these words:

From my youth I have admired the qualities in the work of your great sculptors, and in making my design for Vimy, I endeavored to erect a memorial which might be acceptable to your people, fully appreciating their high regard for art.... some thing artistic[,] spiritual[,] and broadly human in its expresion [*sic*].¹⁰

Who can doubt that he achieved his aim by infusing mute Croatian stone with a human voice, while avoiding the mawkish sculpture the English War Graves' architects like Blomfield abhorred? Allward's figures imbue the architecture with pathos in the same degree as do Lutyens's flags and wreaths.

Allward's letter to Monsieur André Ventre includes the following, deeply felt personal observation: "The two Pylons were an endeavor to create an outline against the sky that would ... suggest the upper part of a Cross. In the afternoon when a shaft of sunlight will break through the space between the pylons, and, illuminating part of the sculptures, will suggest a cathedral effect". Allward's intended "cathedral effect" is beautifully evoked in a picture of Vimy's soaring pylons framing a half moon at that bluish time of day the French so fittingly call *l'heure bleue* (fig. 10).

NOTES

1. Blomfield, Reginald, 1932, *Memoirs of an Architect*, Macmillan, p. 181. Examples of the sentimentality to which Blomfield alludes may be seen in the legion of monuments illustrated in de Busscher, Jean-Marie, 1981, *Les folies de l'industrie*, Brussels, Archives d'Architecture Moderne.
2. King George V, as quoted by Stamp, Gavin, 2006, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*, London, Profile Books, p. 100.
3. Watkin, David, "Cities of Silence: The Cemeteries and Memorials of the Great War", *Country Life*, vol. 162, no 4193, 10 November, 1977, p. 1400.
4. Lucas's unexecuted competition-winning design, which looks rather like a columnar grain silo, is illustrated in Hurst, Sidney C., 1929, *The Silent Cities...*, London, Methuen, p. 223. The Australian architect-general Joseph John Talbot Hobbs, one of the victors of Villers-Bretonneux and an adjudicator in the competition, is sometimes erroneously given credit for the design. It would certainly seem that he had a hand in transferring the job from Lucas to Lutyens.
5. Blunden, Edmund, 1967, *The Unending Vigil. A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 1917 - 1967*, London, Constable, fig. 49, illustrates the damage to Villers-Bretonneux.
6. The acorns and oak leaves were brought to my attention by Crellin, David, 2002, "'Some Corner of a Foreign Field': Lutyens, Empire and the Sites of Remembrance," In Andrew Hopkins and Gavin Stamp (eds.), *Lutyens Abroad: The Work of Sir Edwin Lutyens outside the British Isles*, Rome, The British School at Rome, p. 104
7. Queen's University Archives, Allward Fonds, Box 1, Vimy Correspondence, letter dated 16 December, 1921.
8. *Ibid*, Box 2, Vimy Clippings. Jacqueline Hucker's note 16 to her article in this issue, refers to an exchange of letters between Lutyens and S. C. Mewburn, Chairman of the CBMC, which took place in early 1932. This may help to date the time of Lutyens's visit or visits to the Vimy construction site.
9. Urquhart, Jane, 2001, *The Stone Carvers*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, p. 352. Urquhart's work of fiction was based on extensive consultation of Queen's University Archives' Allward Fonds.

10. Queen's University Archives, Allward Fonds, Box 1, Vimy Correspondence, letter dated 12 April, 1926. The letter exists in a typed copy with manuscript addenda. Jacqueline Hucker kindly informs me that among uncatalogued papers in Veterans Affairs, Ottawa, is the initial letter of enquiry from André Ventre (1874 - 1951).