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# 'I will remember it as one more to the list of courtesies I have received': Interactions between the Imperial War Graves Commission and the Bereaved

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ABSTRACT
*This article explores the interactions between the Imperial War Graves Commission and the bereaved. It particularly focuses on communications between the Commission and those with loved ones who died as a result of the First World War, as outlined by the Commission's charter, and who are commemorated across England. Through a close study of some of the recently digitized e-files held in the Commission's Archives at Maidenhead, broader discussions surrounding the questions commonly asked by members of the public are showcased, thus highlighting the unique nature of the work undertaken by the Commission across England.*

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) is the organisation that is charged with the task of caring for the graves and memorials of almost 1.7 million servicemen and women of the British Empire who died as a result of the two World Wars.[1] They do this in more than 23,000 locations in more than 150 countries and territories. While the cemeteries and memorials found on the former battlefields are recognisable to the public, its work across the United Kingdom is relatively unknown.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission began its work during the First World War. Initially called the Graves Registration Commission, it was placed under the British Army in 1915 and was tasked with recording and caring for the graves they could find. Under the leadership of Fabian Ware, a commander of a mobile unit of the

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[1]Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2020), 'About Us', *CWGC*. Available at: https://www.cwgc.org/about-us Accessed 20 April 2020.

British Red Cross who formulated the idea, the organisation known today as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was established by Royal Charter in May 1917 as the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC). Key figures within the early organisation include Sir Herbert Baker, Sir Reginald Blomfield and Sir Edwin Lutyens, who were the initial three principal architects of the Commission, and Rudyard Kipling, who served as the Commission's literary advisor.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the IWGC sent the then Director of the British Museum, Sir Frederic Kenyon, to the former battlefields in order to consider how would be best to commemorate the dead. The 'Kenyon Report' was published in 1918 and provided the framework for how the Commission were going to undertake their task. His recommendations included the following:

1. Each of the dead should be commemorated, by name, either on a headstone or a memorial.
2. The headstone or the memorial should be permanent.
3. The headstones should be uniform.[2]

The Commission's work was not without its controversy, and there was backlash during its early years from grieving families. This controversy mostly related to the decision not to lift the repatriation ban, imposed by the British Army in 1915, on the remains of British Empire service personnel, in addition to the decision to use a grave marker that did not obviously show the religious beliefs of the casualty from a distance.[3] Signatories wrote to the President of the IWGC, HRH the Prince of Wales, presenting a petition demanding his intervention in the matter. This led to a parliamentary debate in 1920 on a motion rejecting the Commission's principles. At the end of the debate the motion was withdrawn and the issue settled in favour of the

[2]References throughout Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed* (London: HMSO, 1918); condensed version as found on Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2020), 'About Us', *CWGC*. Available online at: https://www.cwgc.org/about-us Accessed 20 April 2020.

[3]Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archive (CWGCA), CWGC/1/1/5/21, WG 783 PT. 1: War Graves Association 1919-1925. Referenced CWGCA records are available online at http://archive.cwgc.org/default.aspx Accessed 1 April 2021. Reference to this can be found in Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 187, Richard Van Emden, *Missing: The Need for Closure after the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2019), p. 153 and (2018), *CWGC Interns Handbook* [Unpublished guide to the various pieces of information imparted onto the CWGC Centenary Interns during their training], p. 26.

Commission.[4] The organisation was renamed as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1960.

Despite the popular viewpoint of the First World War being that the dead lie in a field far from home, this was not the case for a significant proportion of the casualties in the Commission's care. The CWGC commemorates more than 300,000 casualties of the two World Wars in more than 12,000 locations across the British Isles, many of which are in isolated graves or scattered within a larger site.[5] This means that the number of commemorations across the British Isles is the second highest found across the world.[6] In spite of these numbers, the graves of the fallen in the British Isles are not as well-visited by the British public as those close to the former battlefields.

The cemeteries and churchyards found across the United Kingdom that contain war graves proved a challenging task for the Commission. In many cases, families had already taken ownership of the remains of their loved ones and commemorated them in their own way. This usually meant burying them within the family plot, with their name inscribed alongside those of their ancestors. Thus, when the Commission came to start their work to honour the dead buried in the United Kingdom, they had the additional challenge of respecting pre-existing family memorials. This would often mean negotiating with the bereaved regarding grave markers to ensure that the Commission's work in remembering the war dead in perpetuity could be undertaken in the United Kingdom.

This article aims to bring some of these stories to the attention of both academics and the public, by explaining why there are war graves in the United Kingdom and some of the challenges faced by the Commission when commemorating them. There is a widespread perception that very few, if any, casualties from the First World War are remembered on British soil with many continuing to believe that casualties were solely buried overseas. The impact of the Commission's work in the United Kingdom has largely been ignored, instead the focus has been on stories of families visiting sites abroad and this having a profound impact upon them. By researching those who had loved ones buried across Britain, and who made pilgrimages to the sites of memory for loved ones in the United Kingdom, we are able to connect these locations with the wider discussions surrounding the culture and memory of the First World War.

The historiography surrounding this topic has shifted since the 1990s away from being 'Western Front-centric', but a misunderstood view of the Commission's work

[4]Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War*, p. 187.
[5]Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2021), 'Our War Graves, Your History', *CWGC*. https://www.cwgc.org/our-war-graves-your-history/ Accessed 1 April 2021.
[6]The country or territory with the most commemorations by the CWGC is France.

continues. Indeed, while histories of the Commission by Philip Longworth and David Crane acknowledge the presence of war graves in the United Kingdom, these sites are mentioned as a passing comment rather than receiving their own chapter or book. With the Commission's own campaigns during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic highlighting sites across the United Kingdom there has been an increase in interest in these sites.[7] However, there is still much more debate and discussion to be had in relation to First World War dead commemorated in Britain.

This article will primarily focus on the interactions the Commission had with the bereaved families of First World War casualties commemorated across England. These were taken from the recently digitised enquiries files (or 'e-files') from the CWGC Archives; while not all regiments or forces are represented, the discussions in these letters are representative of the broader debates being considered by the Commission. The article will be split into three sections: dialogues about what precisely constitutes a war grave, conversations regarding the alteration of the commemoration type for a casualty and unique situations that challenged the Commission's policies.[8]

**What Constitutes a War Grave?**

When considering the archival evidence on this topic it is important to consider what constitutes a war grave that is cared for by the Commission. According to the Commission, their work pertains to those who died whilst in service of the British Empire Forces, or a recognised auxiliary organisation, during their dates of responsibility.[9] The dates of responsibility for the First World War are between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921; these correlate to the dates that Britain declared war on Germany and the Termination of the Present War (Definition) Act respectively.[10] However, this has been met with much confusion from the public, and the documents held in the CWGC archives highlight this.

[7]These largely came under the umbrella of their 'Our War Graves, Your History' project which included their inaugural "War Graves Week" in May 2021. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2021), 'Our War Graves, Your History', *CWGC*. Available at: https://www.cwgc.org/our-war-graves-your-history/ Accessed 1 April 2021.

[8]It should be noted that the location of graves will be as per their record on the CWGC website. Many of these will be referenced in a historic format, so counties may be different to those found today.

[9]*CWGC Interns Handbook* [Unpublished 2018 guide to the various pieces of information imparted onto the CWGC Centenary Interns during their training].

[10]Ibid, p. 8.

In some cases, individuals were simply missed and were only found years later. This was the case for Driver H Gaskell of the Royal Field Artillery who is remembered at Lytham (St John the Divine) Churchyard in Lancashire.[11] In 1950, his brother-in-law wrote to the Commission to ask for a stone to be erected on Driver Gaskell's grave; he noted that the casualty had enlisted in 1915 but had died in Lytham Hospital three weeks after. The Commission had no record of him, so made the relevant enquiries to the War Office and Ministry of Pensions to ensure that Driver Gaskell's death was deemed to be attributable to war service.

Once the Ministry of Pensions confirmed that his death was considered to be as a result of the conflict, the Commission wrote to the next of kin to ask them to complete the grave registration form. This included writing out the particulars relating to the casualty and, if the family wished, a personal inscription. The letter was caveated that it might take some time to erect a Commission headstone over his grave due to the 'Commission's heavy programme of work dealing with the graves of the recent war.'[12] His family replied, requesting that Driver Gaskell's grave be given the personal inscription 'ROCK OF AGES'. Personal Inscriptions are often the part of the headstone that elicit the greatest emotional response from visitors, as they provided the family with the opportunity to display their grief. Many families chose simple phrases, such as 'RIP' or 'PEACE PERFECT PEACE', or biblical quotes to be placed at the base of the grave marker. While more research is needed to compare the epitaphs found in the United Kingdom to those overseas, it is clear that there were popular inspirations for inscriptions that can be found at all Commission sites.

This is also the case for Second Lieutenant BPB Harrison of the Royal Flying Corps, who is commemorated at Brigg Cemetery in Lincolnshire. It was not until August 1964, when a friend wrote to the Commission to query why his grave was not marked, that his name was found to be missing for Commission records. Again, as per protocol, the Commission queried the information provided by the friend, to conclude that he was killed in a flying accident at Waddington in 1918. Once this was confirmed, they wrote to the Council to ask to erect a Commission headstone. The Council permitted this and agreed to add Second Lieutenant Harrison's grave to the list of graves maintained in the cemetery; the 1914-1918 Register was also amended with his and another name to improve its accuracy.[13]

[11]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/220 (AA60353), Correspondence relating to Driver H Gaskell of the Royal Field Artillery.
[12]Ibid.
[13]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/2/611 (CCM102067), Correspondence relating to Second Lieutenant BPB Harrison of the Royal Flying Corps.

Sometimes the situation was slightly more complex, an example of which was faced by the family of Sergeant CCH Poole of the Royal Field Artillery. In 1921, his father wrote to the Commission in order to ask for a headstone to be erected on his son's grave at Gloucester City Cemetery in Gloucestershire. However, the Commission found that he had been 'Discharged Physically Unfit Para 392 (XVI) KR' on 23 January 1919 and the relevant documents had been forwarded to the Ministry of Pensions.[14] The Ministry of Pensions further noted that the late soldier was 'discharged with a gunshot wound, left leg and right arm, and valvular disease of the heart' and had died in September 1921 of '1. Aortic Regurgitation II. Heart Failure.'[15] As his death fell outside the dates of responsibility imposed by the Commission, he was deemed to be not entitled to a war grave.

When, in 1923, the widow of the deceased wrote to the Commission and found that his grave was not considered to be a War Grave, she replied to highlight her surprise at this. It was particularly difficult for her to understand this, as she had previously been denied the right to erect a private memorial over his grave by the IWGC and now could not receive a Commission headstone to mark the grave. She referred to this as being 'rather like the "Dog in the manger" kind of treatment' and was incredibly distressed by this news.[16] It became apparent that the grave had been acquired via a free grant from the Corporation of Gloucester by the Commission and thus they owned the rights to the grave. The widow refused the suggestion that she could place her own memorial on the grave, on the understanding that the Commission could accept no responsibility for its upkeep. This was partly due to the fact that the Town Clerk had suggested she erect a headstone that looked similar to a standard Commission headstone on the grave. As she was paying for it, she wrote, she thought it only fitting that she 'might be allowed to erect one according to my own choice.'[17] While this was seen as the 'simplest course' by the Commission's Legal Team, a Financial Advisor noted that 'in these circumstances' the best solution would be to erect a standard Commission headstone at the expense of the IWGC, as it seemed 'undesirable' to argue over the cost with the next of kin.[18] Both the Commission and the widow agreed to this, and it was advised that the headstone would be placed there prior to the site's unveiling ceremony in June 1923.[19]

[14]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/161 (AA49102), Correspondence relating to Sergeant CCH Poole of the Royal Field Artillery.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid.

Those familiar with the Commission's work may be surprised by this solution, in that it is in breach of the rigid regulations imposed by the Commission at the time; however, it was not uncommon for rules to be contravened in exceptional circumstances. Sites across Great Britain show examples of various violations of the rules laid out by the Commission, and it is this that makes this area of the Commission's work so fascinating. While many of the breaches may not be followed today by the modern Commission staff; nonetheless, the work that was undertaken by their predecessors provides a unique set of examples of adapting Commission policy in order to reach a conclusion beneficial to all.

Local rules that had been imposed by other nations could also cause some difficulties when explaining to families why their graves were not marked by the Commission. This was the case for Private AO Rix of the Australian Infantry, who had died of Pulmonary Tuberculosis in March 1933 and whose death was accepted as being due to war service. When asked by Australia House, on behalf of his widow, whether a headstone could be erected to his memory, the Commission's Legal Team had a difficult situation to manage. Many other Dominion nations, including Australia, had adopted the policy of accepting the graves of those who had died as a result of war causes within their own territories, even if they were outside of the Commission's dates of responsibility. The United Kingdom Government, however, were not prepared to adopt this policy with regard to graves in the United Kingdom and thus could not reciprocate this action. In April 1928, following a discussion on the broader issue, letters were sent to all Dominions asking whether there should be an amendment to this regulation under the terms of the Supplemental Charter. Australia and New Zealand agreed that this should be the case, but Canada and South Africa provided a contrary viewpoint.[20]

The broader issue was of great concern for the Commission as they had previously felt pressure from various groups, such as the British Legion and the British Empire Service League, to sanction the provision of headstones for veterans dying from war causes after the official cessation of hostilities. Due to this pressure being largely resisted in the past, the Commission wrote to Australia House to explain that the grave was outside of their powers. Yet, at a meeting in June 1928 it was decided that they would arrange for 'the construction and erection of a headstone of their standard pattern' on Private Rix's grave, with repayment of the expenses being reimbursed by the relevant government.[21] The approximate cost of this was found to be £8 and granite would be used. It can be assumed that this occurred, as an image on Find A Grave shows a headstone on Private Rix's grave that fits the description in the Meeting

[20]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/196 (AA59824), Correspondence relating to Private AO Rix of the Australian Imperial Force.
[21]Ibid.

Minutes, however he does not appear on the Commission's database as his date of death is outside of the Commission's remit.[22]

Not all requests of this nature were met, which could be an incredibly difficult process for both the family and the Commission. This was the case with Third Class Master Gunner W Rouse of the Royal Garrison Artillery. He had enlisted in May 1899 and retired from his military service in May 1920; he died at Gloucestershire Royal Infirmary twelve years later, aged 52. Unfortunately, in the e-files, no further information was recorded regarding the cause of his death. When his widow wrote to the Commission in 1933, informing them that her husband had died the previous year, she stated that she felt it would 'please him so much' to receive a Commission headstone similar to the one 'all soldiers who died in England from the effects of war service' received.[23] She had set aside £10 for this purpose, £5 of which had come from the Forest of Dean Boy Scout Association in recognition of her late husband's service to that cause. Furthermore, in her letter she cited the fact that the late Earl Haig had received a Commission headstone to mark his grave and thus there was room for another exception to be made.[24]

This did not convince the Commission to make another exception as they replied reiterating their Charter limited the remit of their work and that their headstone was copyrighted and reserved for the graves denoted within the Charter. They acknowledged the exception made to Earl Haig, citing that the case was allowed because 'it was felt that his was an entirely exceptional position' as the Commander-in-Chief of 'the many British soldiers' commemorated at sites across France and Belgium. It was thus considered 'fitting' by the Commission that his grave was somehow 'linked' to theirs.[25] Any further information about this case cannot be found within this particular file, but it is difficult to ignore how the widow may have felt receiving this news.

To conclude this section, one of the most heart-warming stories from the e-files comes from the records relating to Gunner W Pascall of the Royal Garrison Artillery. When, in 1926, his final verification form was received by the Commission, his next of kin noted that she did not have 'the means to pay for' a replacement headstone.[26] The

[22]Find a Grave, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/192877787/albert-oswald-rix Accessed 1 April 2021.
[23]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/198 (AA59841), Correspondence relating to Third Class Master Gunner W Rouse of the Royal Garrison Artillery.
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid.
[26]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/189 (AA56871), Correspondence relating to Gunner W Pascall of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

Works Team asked the Enquiries Team to inform Mrs Pascall that Commission headstones, with the exception of an optional personal inscription, were provided to qualifying casualties free of charge. Mrs Pascall chose to add the personal inscription 'REST IN PEACE'.[27] By 1936, Mrs Pascall had passed away and the family wanted to put a fresh memorial on the grave; as the plot was owned by the Commission the Commission needed to agree to this. Eventually, it was agreed that the Commission would sign over the ownership of the grave by a deed of assignment in the form given in the Cemetery Causes Act 1847.[28] This is a more commonplace example of the flexibility the Commission adopted in terms of their strict regulations and begins a discussion on the broader topic of changes in commemoration. The flexibility shown by the Commission to these grieving families provide the primary findings of this research and is thus the main argument of its discussion. In the next section, another aspect of the Commission's work will provide further evidence of this flexibility through the organisation's interactions with the bereaved regarding changes in commemorations. This was often some of the most challenging work in the United Kingdom for the Commission, as will be shown through examples of communications found in the Commission's e-files.

## Changes in Commemoration and Challenges

Visitors to Commission sites often have a clear image of what to expect from a Commission cemetery, which is often based on the cemeteries in France and Belgium, such as Tyne Cot Cemetery and Memorial in Belgium. This permeates the public's understanding of the Commission's work, with white headstones in clear rows, flowers planted to a design and the grass mown perfectly being the standard viewpoint. This does not relate to all Commission sites, particularly as there are more than 30 types of stone used by the Commission to make their grave markers; nevertheless, the fact that the majority of the public will be introduced to the Commission's work by the sites along the former Western Front has a profound impact on the public's perception of the organisation. As with all sites with war dead, the Commission had a clear remit in terms of their work across the United Kingdom. However, commemoration here was often one of the most complicated issues faced by them. When studying aspects of the Commission's work in the United Kingdom it must be remembered that that the majority of the sites, and indeed the graves themselves, are not owned by the Commission. This unique situation provides the context to many of the difficulties and queries faced by the Commission and, in order to resolve these, the Commission often had to be flexible in both their rules and their rulings. In this section, the focus will be on requests for changes to commemoration from families, in addition to various aspects that affected a particular plot; this issue could often prove

[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid.

more difficult to resolve when compared to decisions surrounding similar issues in Commission-owned sites.

Similarly to those making pilgrimages to sites in France and Belgium to visit the graves of loved ones, families from across the British Empire made the journey to see the final resting place of their loved ones in Britain. This often began a correspondence between the Commission and the next of kin, particularly if a private memorial erected by the family was no longer suitable. An example of such a situation can be found with the grave of Serjeant FWC Bootle at Oxford (Botley) Cemetery in Oxfordshire. In 1956, the works team noted that the private memorial was becoming worn, and the Area Superintendent informed them that Sgt Bootle's sister had recently visited his grave and had enquired about the cost of its renovation. He had informed her that the Commission would likely replace the headstone free of charge, as removal and replacement privately would cost a significant amount of money. The Commission wrote to the sister using the address on a letter given to the Superintendent offering this service; she gratefully accepted this and stated that she did not wish to add a personal inscription to the new headstone.[29]

A particularly interesting part of this case is the fact that the Commission arranged to have this erected within a matter of months in order to ensure that the sister could view the new headstone before she returned to her native Australia. This pleased her greatly and she wrote to the Commission to convey her thanks to the Area Superintendent. She noted she would remember this as 'one more to the list of courtesies I have received since I arrived in England, I do appreciate it.'[30] This is a prime example of the pilgrimages that families of the bereaved undertook to visit their loved ones outside of the Western Front narrative, and thus highlights the importance of the Commission's work in the United Kingdom.

As shown in the previous section, it was not uncommon for there to be omissions to lists of casualties deemed to be in the care of the Commission. Furthermore, there could be oversights related to graves of casualties believed to be commemorated on private memorials. An example of this is the case of Driver EA Sheepwash of the Royal Field Artillery. After being accidentally killed on 28 May 1921, he was buried at Chatham Cemetery in Kent and the Commission recorded that his grave was marked by a private memorial. In 1960 the Commission wrote to the Driver Sheepwash's parents to draw attention to the fact that the grave location was denoted by a private

[29]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/153 (AA48189), Correspondence relating to Serjeant FWC Bootle of the Australian Imperial Force.
[30]Ibid.

memorial which 'bears no reference to him'.[31] In his letter, the Director General noted that the Commission would be happy to erect one of their standard headstones and that the stone would be placed at the foot at the grave, within the existing kerb, free of charge. The family were offered the opportunity to include a personal inscription of 'not more than 60 letters,' as per the Commission's general rules, if they wished to include this on the headstone.[32] The reply received from the eldest brother of Driver Sheepwash included an apology for a delay in responding to the letter; as his parents were now deceased, he had been in consultation with his siblings regarding what the family wanted. They ultimately decided to have the headstone erected on Driver Sheepwash's grave with the personal inscription "FOND MEMORIES CLING TO BYGONE DAYS."[33]

One of the most commonplace reasons for individuals with loved ones buried in the United Kingdom to get in touch with the Commission was to alter a casualty's commemoration type; this was usually either to remove or add a Commission headstone to the marking of the grave. There are countless examples of this within the available e-files, one of which relates to Acting Bombardier HE Leggett of the Royal Field Artillery. His parents wrote to the Commission in 1920 to explain that they had made all the funeral arrangements and would like to have a wooden cross erected on his grave. This was accepted by the Commission, but by 1929 the deceased's brother had written to the Commission to note that the wooden cross had not been replaced and they had some difficulties with the Cemetery Authorities who had prohibited all wooden memorials.[34]

The Commission were reluctant to help with this query, as it was found that a private memorial already marked the grave. The family stated that this was the case, but that the additional wooden cross had been placed at the foot of the grave in Allerton Cemetery, Lancashire. This related to a larger historic problem. In a number of cases wooden crosses had been erected as temporary memorials and then private memorials had been constructed, thus doubly commemorating a casualty. Initially it had been agreed that Commission headstones would also be erected in addition to any private memorials on graves in the United Kingdom but this decision had since been reversed. However, in this case the Commission offered to erect a Commission headstone if the family would like the wooden cross to be replaced, which the father

[31]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/262 (AA60706), Correspondence relating to Driver EA Sheepwash of the Royal Field Artillery.
[32]Ibid.
[33]Ibid.
[34]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/116 (AA42088), Correspondence relating to Acting Bombardier HE Leggett of the Royal Field Artillery.

agreed to.[35] This is another example of an exception being allowed to the rules imposed by the Commission and demonstrates some of the nuances found within UK-based war graves.

A similar situation was found in the case of Gunner A Collier of the Royal Field Artillery. In 1956 a local sculptor wrote to ask permission to remove the Commission headstone covering his grave at Bradford (Thornton) Cemetery in Yorkshire, as the family would like to erect a headstone and kerb. However, a potentially misleading image sent with the letter suggested that the family wished to have the Commission headstone recumbent in the centre of the family plot. The Commission did not object to the removal of the grave marker, provided that Gunner Collier was named on the private memorial, but did take umbrage at the possibility of the headstone lying flat. In their reply, the Commission stated that 'they could not give consent' to the headstone being placed recumbent on the grave. As per the Commission's instructions, the Commission headstone was destroyed, and Gunner Collier's name was included on the new family memorial.[36]

The Commission's work has not been limited to those who served in the Armed Forces, they also commemorate recognised Auxiliary organisations.[37] This includes Nursing Services provided during both World Wars. One example relating to commemoration is a communication regarding two nurses who were buried at Sutton Veny (St John) Churchyard in Wiltshire. A sibling of Sister FIC Tyson wrote to the Commission in 1953 to draw attention to the fact that she had received evidence of neglect of both her sister's grave and that of Matron Walker. The Commission wrote back to state that they had received contrary information from both other visitors and the Church authorities, and that they were unable to accept responsibility for private memorials. An interesting development in the reply is the offer to arrange for the memorials to be cleaned and then inspected to see if further repairs were necessary. It should be remembered that the maintenance of private memorials was outside of the Commission's remit so this would be contrary to the rules imposed.[38]

[35]Ibid. A visitor to the grave today will see a Private Memorial with a Commission headstone placed in front of it.

[36]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/133 (AA44101), Correspondence relating to Gunner A Collier of the Royal Field Artillery.

[37]A list of these, and a remit of the work undertaken in relation to each organisation, can be found in the Commission's Commemorations Policies. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2020), 'Commemorations: Eligibility Criteria', *CWGC*. Available at: https://www.cwgc.org/media/udkhsep3/cwgc-policy-eligibility-criteria-for-commemoration.pdf Accessed 21 December 2020.

[38]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/166 (AA50618), Correspondence relating to Sister FIC Tyson and Matron JM Walker, both of the Australian Army Nursing Service.

The Assistant Regional Inspector visited the site in 1954 and noted that the stones were not in good condition, mainly due to the memorials being placed in recumbent positions. The Inspector stated that it would be a 'great deal of work and expense' to bring the memorials up to standard, so proposed that replacement with Commission headstones would be a better solution. This proposal was accepted by the family. The Commission's Administrative Officer suggested that the description of the inscriptions on the memorials should be noted so that they could be incorporated within a personal inscription for each of the women. By December 1956 replacement headstones for Sister Tyson and Matron Walker had been erected.[39]

Adding to the memorials within a family plot was a common occurrence. In 1936 the vicar St Andrew's Church at Steyning in Sussex wrote to the Commission on behalf of the family of Gunner G Feast of the Royal Artillery. The previous July Gunner Feast's widow had died and been buried in the same grave in Steyning Churchyard. Their daughter had now requested that a kerb be placed around the headstone and sought the consent of the Commission. As the Commission had no rights of ownership to the grave they could not refuse; however, they did request that the stone used for the kerb be similar to that of the headstone and that the headstone be reset to its correct height after the work. Furthermore, they stated that any damage done to the stone was the responsibility of the daughter and that they could not financially support this work. This appears to have been met with agreement from the family and a kerb was installed.[40]

A complication that could often arise when approving such requests was the question of maintenance; many families assumed that the Commission would take on the maintenance of a private memorial or additional memorials on the grave. In terms of maintenance of a standard grave there was, and is, a set of expectations, the policies of the Commission having largely remained the same as since the time of its formation. It must be remembered that if it is a private memorial the next of kin still hold the rights to the grave, and thus the remit of the Commission in these cases is limited.[41] In situations where a grave has been marked by a private memorial, the Commission would check that the grave marker is clean, with the name of the casualty clearly

[39]Ibid.

[40]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/207 (AA60050), Correspondence relating to Gunner G Feast of the Royal Field Artillery.

[41]Details of discussions regarding the maintenance of graves in the United Kingdom can be found across IWGC Meeting Minutes in the 1920s and 1930s, but clear guidance was finally agreed to at the 332nd Meeting on 21 December 1950, CWGCA, CWGC/2/2/1/332 (WG1831/274), 332nd Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

legible, that the grave itself was clear of weeds and the entire headstone visible, with flora and fauna such as grass and plants not obstructing the view. There are more expectations when a grave is located within a plot, but the general regulations listed were the usual expectation. If these expectations were not met the Commission would, and will, liaise with the families to find an appropriate solution.

Unfortunately, Gunner Feast's family were of the impression that the Commission were responsible, and in 1963 his daughter wrote to the Commission asking if they could repair the kerb erected to the memory of her mother. The Commission explained that they could not do this, but the plot could be maintained by them if the kerb was removed and the grave level turfed. They gave her the option to add a commemoration to her mother at the base of the headstone, either adding to the current personal inscription or changing the headstone entirely to have a longer epitaph. This offer was initially ignored, but after a similar request in 1971, the daughter agreed to this solution and paid the cost of £6 for the removal of the kerb, returfing and engraving.[42]

It is unclear when policies regarding adding to a personal inscription were finalised, but the solution offered to Gunner Feast's family would be unlikely to be the end result today, and is another exception to the Commission's general rules.[43] Personal Inscriptions chosen by families are now expected to be of the time, so references to those who died after a casualty's death, or relatives they would never have met, would be unlikely to be accepted by the Commission's Commemorations Team today.[44]

In the case of Gunner Feast, the situation was not concluded once the kerb had been removed. A year later, the daughter wrote to the Commission to highlight her dismay at the grass on the grave 'being allowed to grow over' and finding the grave covered with weeds.[45] As a consequence of this disappointment, she asked whether the Commission could lay a matching cement base with an opening for a flower vase. This was not agreed to, as it would 'create an undesirable precedent.'[46] Indeed, the Regional

[42]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/207 (AA60050), Correspondence relating to Gunner G Feast of the Royal Field Artillery.
[43]This is detailed in the Kenyon Report of 1918, upon which the Commission's founding principles were founded. Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed* (London: HMSO, 1918), p. 10.
[44]Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2020), 'Commemorations', *CWGC*. Available at: https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/commemorations/ [Accessed 21st December 2020].
[45]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/207 (AA60050), Correspondence relating to Gunner G Feast of the Royal Field Artillery.
[46]Ibid.

Director replied to the internal conversation stating that the supervision required, plus the fact that the operational team were not due to work in this area for some time, would prove difficult. In his final sentence, he states that 'We always like to help relations if possible, but I feel like this would be going too far!'[47] A local masonry company was recommended to take on this work for the family, and the Regional Director provided advice regarding the cement base in relation to the Commission headstone.[48]

As alluded to in at least two other letters, not all families were grateful or indeed happy with the work output of the Commission in the United Kingdom. A letter from the sister of Private FJ Marks of the Devonshire Regiment provides an example of this. In 1963, she wrote about the 'disgrace' she found her brother's grave to be in at Great Horwood (St James) Churchyard in Buckinghamshire.[49] This was further exacerbated by the fact that, when compared to her other brother's grave in Malta, it left a lot to be desired. It was found that the grave had a Commission headstone but was not owned by the Commission; instead there was a Maintenance Agreement with the Parochial Church Council for the upkeep of the three war graves in the site.[50]

While this was being investigated, Private Marks' sister wrote again, stating that her brother had also visited the site and found the state of the grave 'shocking'.[51] Indeed, when compared to the graves in Malta, it raised the question among the family 'why shouldn't the graves in our country be looked after as they are?'[52] It appears that the main issue for the family was the fact that his grave was completely flat, save for the headstone. The Rector of the Church assured the Commission that the grave was not neglected, and the Inspectors of the site only found issues with the length of the grass. The Commission thus replied, explaining the policies for graves in the United Kingdom and how these policies were as similar as they possibly could be to those in war cemeteries abroad.[53] Whilst it is unclear whether the Commission ever received a reply, or whether it was ever resolved with the family, it is apparent that not all were content with the thought that their loved ones were not receiving the care they would have received had they died abroad.

[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid.
[49]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/3/89 (CDEW24400), Correspondence relating to Private FJ Marks of the Devonshire Regiment.
[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Ibid.

It was not always the case that the family were the first to notice an issue with a particular site. In 1962, the Commission wrote to the brother of Gunner FH Place of the Royal Garrison Artillery (the Commission having been unable to locate his widow), to inform him that the burial ground where he was interred was deemed unmaintainable.[54] It was explained that Gunner Place would be commemorated by a Special, or Kipling, Memorial headstone at Houghton-le-Spring (Durham Road) Cemetery in Durham, a cemetery near to where he was buried alongside three other casualties who would be commemorated in the same way. Gunner Place's brother gave his approval of this alternative commemoration and chose the personal inscription 'REST IN PEACE' the Kipling Memorial which installed on 3 March 1964.[55]

Kipling Memorials, or Special Memorials, can commonly be found in Commission sites across the globe for those who had been killed in action and received a burial, but whose grave had since been lost. While this is the most frequent reason for a Kipling Memorial being used, it is not uncommon to see them at cemeteries across the United Kingdom. Kipling Memorials in the United Kingdom are used similarly to those found in cemeteries abroad; they are usually utilised when a site at which a casualty is commemorated is unmaintainable. 'Unmaintainable' is broadly defined as either the site now being closed for burials and no longer cared for by a Cemetery Authority or religious community, the burial ground has been redeveloped, or it is no longer safe to visit that cemetery. This again highlights the fact that key features of the Commission's work can be found locally and emphasises the importance of the sites across Britain. Through exploring local churchyards and municipal cemeteries, the public can easily be told the Commission's story.

**Unique Situations**

In the final section of this article the discussion will turn to unique situations faced by the Commission in the United Kingdom. The title of this final section is slightly misleading as arguably all casualty cases are unique. However, the following stories were surprising to read when looking at the e-files, and hence can be categorised into a broader topic of unique situations.

The first casualty's story that fulfils this category is that of Gunner W L Buckley of the Royal Garrison Artillery, who was recorded as buried at Halliwell (St Peter) Churchyard in Lancashire. There was initially some confusion surrounding this casualty, as in March 1928 he was reported to have been buried both at St Peter's and Shoeburyness (St Andrew) Churchyard and Extension in Essex. The matter was initially considered to be resolved, as it was thought that the Bolton burial was the

[54]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/132 (AA43922), Correspondence relating to Gunner FH Place of the Royal Garrison Artillery.
[55] Ibid.

correct site, because the original marker at St Andrew's referred to a cross erected as a memorial cross by his comrades. The situation believed to have happened was that the body was moved to Lancashire at the request of his relatives in February 1917, but the wooden cross was not removed at the time and was later replaced by a Commission headstone. Hence, it was deemed that the solution would be to remove the Commission headstone in Essex and have the Private Memorial in Lancashire as the sole commemoration for Gunner Buckley.[56]

This was not as straightforward as it seems, however, as when the Commission's contractor visited the churchyard in Essex in October 1938, he was informed by the Sexton that the burial had been made by him personally and that he was quite sure that the body had not yet been removed. Ultimately, it was concluded that there were three possible explanations for the 'extraordinary state of affairs' that the Commission found themselves in: 1) Gunner Buckley was interred in Essex and the hospital authorities were responsible for an incorrect registration; 2) Gunner Buckley was originally buried in Essex, with his body later exhumed and reburied in Lancashire; or 3) Gunner Buckley's remains were still in Essex and that the widow was mistaken in her belief that he was buried in Lancashire. The view was taken that explanation 1) was the most probable and that the resolution to this delicate matter was to view the site in Lancashire as the place where Gunner Buckley's remains lay and ask the Rector of St Andrew's, Shoeburyness, to approve the removal of the headstone in Essex.[57]

The Rector was happy for the headstone to be removed, provided that a copy of the certificate of burial at Halliwell was signed by the present Vicar and a copy of Mrs Buckley's letter accompanied by a note of explanation from the Commission could be provided, which was sent to him in December 1938. The Rector himself thought that there was 'undoubtedly' a body buried in the grave, and thus requested that the grave be marked as the grave of an Unknown British Soldier.[58]

The second example of a unique case is that of Lieutenant VJ Austin of the Royal Field Artillery. Now buried in Canterbury (St Martin) Churchyard in Kent, he is one of the few repatriations back to the United Kingdom during the war. It is commonly known that, from March 1915, there was a ban on repatriations among the British Empire Forces, but some casualties were repatriated either prior to this order or illegally after the war, with grieving families bearing the cost of this task. It is not wholly clear what the case is for Lieutenant Austin himself, as he was killed at La Bassée on 26 January 1915. The e-file relating to him was initiated by a letter in March 1963 from someone

[56]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/134 (AA44435), Correspondence relating to Gunner WL Buckley of the Royal Garrison Artillery.
[57]Ibid.
[58]Ibid.

undertaking research on his father, Lord Austin, the founder of Austin Motor Company, who wanted clarification of a controversy surrounding Lieutenant Austin's burial.

The researcher had found an account which stated that his remains had been brought over to Folkestone and that he was buried in Canterbury shortly afterwards. The researcher stated that the popular narrative was that, due to the repatriation ban and the impossibility of bringing war dead home, he was smuggled over in a crate of spare parts. While this could be seen as quite a far-fetched narrative, the researcher noted that there were a number of eyewitnesses to this act, which challenged how the story was portrayed in the press.[59] A contemporary press report, cited by the researcher, had recounted Lieutenant Austin's repatriation to Folkestone from La Bassée in January 1915 and his burial at Canterbury on 8 February, thus contradicting the alleged illegal nature of the repatriation. Due to the confusion from the writer regarding the exact date when the repatriation ban was imposed, there was also some confusion regarding whether this was illegal at the time or not.[60] After some delay the Commission responded that it could not confirm or deny any of this as they did not include such information in their records. Although it is clear from contemporary sources that Lieutenant Austin was repatriated prior to the ban and there was no need for his body to be smuggled back hidden in spare parts, the later embellishments to the story makes for fascinating reading and demonstrate the range of queries the Commission had to address.

Lieutenant Austin's case was one of a small sample of individuals repatriated to the United Kingdom, but his story has garnered some attention due to his background as the son of the founder of Austin Motor Company, Lord Austin. His repatriation and funeral in England were used as an example by Sir Albert Ball, in a letter to the Commission from June 1918, as to why he should be allowed to bring his son, the fighter ace Captain Albert Ball VC DSO and 2 Bars MC, home to be buried near to the family. Lord Austin and Sir Albert Ball were friends and Sir Albert had been invited to attend the funeral of his friend's son at Canterbury in 1915. Following the war when the Commission were consolidating British graves into the large cemeteries we know today, Sir Albert refused permission to move his son's grave if he could not be returned to England, a request the Commission could not agree to.[61] Whilst it may

[59]CWGCA, CWGC/8/1/4/1/1/145 (AA5958), Correspondence relating to Lieutenant VJ Austin of the Royal Field Artillery.
[60]Ibid.
[61]More information can be found in the files relating to Albert Ball in the Commission's Archives in Maidenhead. They include information surrounding Captain Ball VC's repatriation, the family's refusal to have him concentrated to Cabaret Rouge

never be clear the exact circumstances of Lieutenant Austin's repatriation, it provides a captivating narrative surrounding why the repatriation ban was imposed and the repercussions of this.

To bring this article to a close, it is clear that the sites along the former battlefields that are synonymous with the Commission's work had a profound impact on the British public's understanding of the organisation's remit, when the reality is far more complex. As shown in the case of sites across Great Britain, the Commission often had to resolve the issues it faced here alongside the families as many had already taken ownership of and marked the grave. This provided a series of common complications, from understanding who was entitled to a war grave to looking at ways to alternatively commemorate casualties with private memorials whose name was no longer legible. The Commission's clear guidelines were often challenged in these cases, which meant that some flexibility was required on their part to ensure that their monumental task could be done. This flexibility is largely confined to the United Kingdom, and thus provides an interesting aspect of First World War commemoration in Britain that both challenges and extends the current discussions surrounding this topic. Indeed, the cemeteries and memorials found in the United Kingdom can provide a unique insight into the Commission's work, and an interesting case study into broader funerary practices for the dead of the two World Wars. These insights are outside of the scope of this article but it is hoped that the discussion into this fascinating topic is just beginning.

The article focuses on some of the stories to be found within the e-files that have been digitised thus far. These narratives are generally representative of the wider discussions surrounding the Commission's work in the United Kingdom and begin to highlight some of the constraints the Commission worked under in resolving matters in Britain. Broader research and discussions need to be conducted on the topic prior to conclusions being made surrounding the impact of these decisions, but by exploring these stories and beginning research into these localised histories it is clear that the commemorations in the United Kingdom both conform to and challenge the public's expectations of a 'typical' Commission site. The flexibility shown by the Commission in Britain highlights the importance of the history that can be found locally, and in particular its importance in relation to our understanding of First World War commemoration. By challenging popular narratives that have been a fundamental part of the historiography in recent decades, a broader understanding of the topic can be achieved, and local history can be explored further. It is hoped that this research will encourage people to remember to visit their local war dead, and not solely focus on nearby war memorials and the cemeteries found near to the former battlefields.

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Cemetery and other ephemera. CWGCA, AGE 6/6 PT. 1 (uncatalogued), Correspondence between the IWGC and the family of Captain A Ball VC.