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Antiquity at the National Memorial Arboretum

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The paper explores the use of ancient and historic material cultures and architectures within the recent resurgence in public commemoration in the UK. Using the case study of the National Memorial Arboretum (Staffordshire), the study focuses on how ancient designs (including prehistoric, classical and medieval styles and forms) interleave with the arboreal, geological and celestial themes of the memorial gardens. Together these designs serve to create a multitude of temporal poises by which auras of commemorative perpetuity and regeneration are projected and sustained. The paper proposes that archaeologists can bring their expertise to bear on the investigation of the complex, varied allusions to the past within contemporary landscapes of memory.

Keywords: arboretum; commemoration; landscape; memorial; reuse

Introduction

This paper considers the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) (near Alrewas, Staffordshire, UK; hereafter 'NMA') as an assemblage of contemporary commemorative artefacts and memorials. Material citations to the ancient and historic past are replete within the NMA's plantings, stones, material culture, monuments and landscape. This rich and eclectic collection of memorials, gardens and woods, laid out around the Millennium in a Midlands riverine landscape of gravel extraction, provides a decisive case study demonstrating the enhanced appropriation of the past, including the results and interpretations of archaeological research, in early twenty-first century commemorative practice.

The case study of the NMA foregrounds the veritable scramble to harness antiquity within contemporary memorial gardens and within a specific landscape that is simultaneously an arboretum, a site of national mourning, an educational facility, a museum and a popular visitor destination. The paper addresses the tension and connection between the retrospective appropriation of the past and the prospective mnemonic discourse of 'growing remembrance' that underpins the commemorative programme of this large and complex arboretum. As an assemblage of diverse memorials, the NMA's use of the past through material citation serves as a wakeup call to heritage professionals and archaeologists by foregrounding both the depth and breadth of the interleaving strategies currently in operation by which a bricolage of ancient and historical material cultures are refashioned, replicated and reused, within memorial gardens of contrasting scales and functions. These citations, explained to visitors through texts, image and audio commentary, facilitate both private and public mourning as well as constitute the selective remembering and forgetting of the past in the present through material and monumental media. In commemorating aspects of the UK's national, imperial and colonial past, this site's memorials are of global interest.

A sketch of the NMA

The NMA was directly inspired by the founder David Childs' visit to the Arlington Cemetery and National Arboretum in Washington DC. Designed for the millennium, the NMA was

officially opened in 2001. Since 2003, the site has been run by a charity, the Royal British Legion, its remit to serve as the UK's national garden of remembrance. The NMA's literature and website state that it is 'where our nation remembers'. The official guidebook sums up this heterotopic commemorative landscape (see also Gough 2004, p. 449, 2009) as a 'living and lasting memorial to commemorate and celebrate ... those who have given their lives to the service of their country ... all who have served and those who have suffered as a result of conflict ...' and (serving as a catch-all for the civilian monuments) '... others who for specific or appropriate reasons are commemorated on the site' (NMA 2009, p. 4). The more recent version of the official guidebook adds that it is intended as a place that 'fosters pride in our country' (NMA 2012, p. 1).[1]

The NMA's visitor centre contains an education centre together with a shop and restaurant, and provides the focus of an annual schedule of activities for visitors, including veterans' events held by the British Legion as well as academic conferences leading to publications (Andrews et al. 2011). A covered walkway (cloister) links the visitor centre to the adjacent Millennium Chapel of Peace and Forgiveness, available for prayer and contemplation, and where a two minute silence is observed at 11am every day. The remaining substantial building on the site is the Far East Prisoners of War Memorial Building, a museum within the gardens themselves. To the south, east and north of these buildings are 150 acres of memorial gardens, groves and woods linked by paths and avenues. These memorial gardens are grouped into four 'zones' (each afforded a colour – purple, orange, green and blue – to help guide visitors). The gardens border upon artificial lakes created by gravel extraction and the River Trent to the north. To the east is the River Tame, beyond which lies the National Forest. The NMA claims to be situated 'at and in the very heart of the country' (NMA 2009, p. 2) and 'at the heart of the Nation' (NMA 2012, p. 2), and it is indeed a microcosm of the National Forest's own 'growing' metaphor linking trees to nationhood and restoration following national sacrifices.

The arboretum is thus both 'central' within the Forest which in turn is situated to be geographically and conceptually central within the UK (Gough 1996, 1998). More prosaic boundaries lie to the south (the access road) and west (the large, visible and active Lafarge Alrewas Quarry donated the land for the NMA's construction). The quarry remains a 'living' testimony to the former industrial landscape that existed on the site prior to the building of the NMA. Currently, over 120 memorial gardens and groves can be found at the NMA, containing over 240 memorials (NMA 2009, pp. 1–2, 2012, p. 2). The site's trees are growing, but so are the number of memorials, a process that repeatedly reinvigorates the site's public profile and diversity. Thirty-three new memorial gardens were dedicated between August 2011 and December 2012 (NMA 2012). The memorials are sponsored and dedicated to a mixture of civilian groups, charities, societies and organisations, the police, other emergency services, military regiments and veterans' groups. There are gardens that commemorate specific conflicts, military campaigns, the victims of war (including children and prisoners of war) and victims of accidents, tragedies and terrorist atrocities. We also find peace gardens. Further woods and groves commemorate particular societies, charities and social identities in life and death, from neonatal and stillborn deaths to couples celebrating their 50th and 60th wedding anniversaries. There are also over 50,000 trees, many dedicated to commemorate individuals, either spatially affiliated to a particular memorial grove or in separate themed memorial woods (NMA 2012, p. 2).

Within this phenomenal commemorative variability, designed to encapsulate personal and family mourning as well as various forms of public commemorative ritual, there are also

memorials to commemorate animals and things as well as people. An example of the former is the Army Dog Unit Northern Ireland Memorial. An example of the latter is a memorial to a Prisoner-of-War cemetery that no longer exists: the Changi Lych Gate Memorial (NMA 2009, p. 83, 2012, p. 52). Hence, the NMA is a landscape of diverse memories where the military are joined by a range of civilian groups, and where living individuals and groups are remembered together with the dead. At the NMA, we find a landscape designed to incorporate discordance as well as to inspire consensus and coherence in commemoration. Hence, the visitor can encounter memorials to those shot for cowardice in the First World War close to memorials commemorating the army regiments in which they served. Likewise, there are memorials to the victims of the bombing of Dresden and memorials to the flight crews who dropped the bombs. The NMA contains memorials to the victims of the nuclear bombs dropped on Japan, while on the far side of the site there are multiple memorials to those that suffered atrocities as prisoners of war in the Far East.

Innumerable groups are absent from the memorial repertoire which is redolent of the political climate during which the site was conceived. For instance, despite the recent addition of the Railway Industry Memorial, workers in agriculture and industry are hardly represented, including those subject to the diseases and disasters of recent times and contemporary with the conflicts, regiments and charities that form the subject of many of the memorials. Likewise, workers in public services beyond the armed forces and emergency services are striking in their absence.

Still, the NMA does valorise the act of remembrance over the subject of commemoration. The manner of the founder of the NMA's memorial reflects this ideology. A plaque by the David Childs' Trees reads a message (paraphrasing Shakespeare's Sonnet 30): 'to be remembered is o'er paid' (NMA 2012, p. 25), an appropriate quotation that simultaneously valorises the founder's good works and the broader programme of the site he worked to create.

The centre piece of the arboretum, in terms of scale, location and significance, is undoubtedly the colossal Armed Forces Memorial, opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 12 October 2007 (Figures 1 and 5). This memorial is inscribed with the names of UK servicemen and women killed on active military service since 1945, including 49 theatres as conflict from Palestine, Malaya and Korea to the most recent theatres of conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya (NMA 2009, p. 21, 2012, pp. 7–10). Each year, the number of names grows; currently over 16,000 names can be read upon its Purbeck Marble surfaces.

As a dramaturgical space (see Gough 1998), the NMA's monuments are there to be experienced and to provoke emotive responses rather than to be passively viewed. They are to be walked passed, through and read about during informal personal and group visits as well as during public ceremonies. Each grove facilitates different levels of permeability and different conduits of access for the visitor, from the open 'seascape' of the Royal Naval Review where most memorials can only be accessed over grass without a paved surface, to the closed privacy of the SANDS Memorial Garden surrounded by thick hedges and trees and entered via a small gate and a spiralling wood-chip path. For those unwilling or unable to traverse the landscape on foot, most memorials are accessible to wheelchair users and mobility scooters. Alternatively, the gardens and memorials can be viewed from the land train that provides an audio commentary explaining the principal subjects of each memorial garden.

As a young arboretum, stone and brick monuments are particularly prominent elements of the landscapes alongside the plants and trees. Moreover, texts are clearly active mediators of the visitor experience. The official visitor guidebook, the website and the plaques that furnish all the memorial gardens together provide a textual gloss to direct each visitor to understand the commemorative subject(s), the meaning of the designs, the selection and symbolism of the stones, plants and trees, and (occasionally where appropriate) to the name of the artist. As the geographer Gough (2004, 2009) has emphasised, despite its eponymous arboreal emphasis, the NMA is a text-led memorial programme by which words aim to inform, instruct and educate the visitor.

While the overall national vision of commemoration behind the NMA as a place ‘where the nation mourns’ remains pervasive in the literature about the site, Gough (2009) has argued how the project has quickly fragmented into manifold localised and thematic memorial strategies focusing on each memorial grove. Certainly, each visitor today will experience the arboretum differently depending on their affiliation to particular institutions, regiments and charities and indeed, whether they are a curious visitor, a veteran and/or someone in mourning. Furthermore, each memorial has its own discourse and statement to make to the viewer and some exist in an awkward tension with each other in form, scale and location. Yet, despite the diversity of experiences and messages being integral to the character of the NMA, an overriding ‘vision’ provided by the official literature continues to struggle to harness the memorial variability and dissonances. Hence, although the NMA is a landscape of many different messages and monuments, and an end point for visitors making very different forms of commemorative pilgrimage, it retains a core goal as a commemorative entity that is more than the sum of its parts.



Figure 1. The main approach to the Armed Forces Memorial, NMA.
Photograph: Howard Williams, November 2009.

A contemporary archaeology of the NMA

Within the rich, varied and vibrant field of ‘contemporary archaeology’ (see Harrison and Schofield 2010), material cultures, structures and landscapes of conflict continue to be key areas where archaeological investigations have provided new perspectives and insights onto the recent past (e.g. Saunders 2007, Schofield 2009). Yet while an exciting range of studies have recently engaged with the materialities, corporealities, biographies and landscapes of conflict commemoration worldwide (e.g. Crossland 2000, Walls and Williams 2010), large memorial gardens including the NMA seem to have escaped archaeologists’ attention. Moreover, few other disciplines have addressed the NMA as a complex assemblage of monuments accumulated over a relatively short duration (see Gough 2009) and most have focused on discussions of specific memorials within its grounds in relative isolation (e.g. Black 2004, Gough 2004, Graham and Whelan 2007, p. 492, McDowell 2007, Switzer and Graham 2009, pp. 158–159).

The particular lack of archaeological engagement with the NMA is striking given how the site spans multiple key themes in the archaeological study of the contemporary. This is because the NMA is more than a heritage site with a theme of conflict commemoration; it also forms part of the archaeology of peaceful protest (e.g. Beck et al. 2009), the archaeology of charities and voluntary groups, and the archaeology of conservation (e.g. Holtorf 2008). Moreover, the NMA is part museum but also its memorials create hyper-real spaces in which the past is portrayed to visitors in conflated and idealised fashions, reminiscent of theme parks (Holtorf 2005, Harrison and Schofield 2010, pp. 271–278). As a landscape of memory, the NMA is of palpable interest to the archaeology of death and memory, studying human mortality from earliest prehistory to the present. Specifically, the NMA forms part of a long-term trend in novel, cenotaphic commemorative public spaces, detached from the traditional churchyard and cemetery where the dead are selectively remembering with the absence of corporeal traces (Holtorf and Williams 2006, Gough 2009, Williams 2011, 2012). This paper selects one theme in addressing this particular archaeological component to the NMA, how the arboretum provides a rich case study for how material citations of multiple pasts, including those from deep antiquity, permeate modern commemorative culture (see Holtorf 1996, 1997).

Engaging with the NMA

The field methods utilised for this introductory study are not exclusively archaeological techniques and are necessarily rudimentary in order to sketch broad themes linking the NMA’s memorials. Here, the memorials of the NMA are considered to be an assemblage, bound by context but with divergent genealogies of influence upon their design and execution. This study results from primarily first-hand observations of the NMA combined with a digital photographic record of the memorials encountered between May 2009 and September 2012. I have also drawn upon information from within two editions of the office visitor guidebooks (NMA 2009, 2012), the NMA’s website [2] and the published history of the site by its creator, Childs (2008). This is not only because these sources of information provide detail about memorial form and dedications and their allusions to ancient and historic forms and materials, but because these texts are intended as active agents, directing visitor experience and mourning practices.

The approach adopted embraces the spirit of Hamilakis’ call for an archaeological ethnography that does not denigrate the material world but instead explores the qualities, or ‘thingness’, of memorials in their settings as key to their mnemonic efficacy in contemporary memorial gardens (Hamilakis 2011, p. 409). Approaching the memorials and materials of the

NMA as an archaeological assemblage resists regarding the site as a single entity, an ‘arboretum’, but instead as a complex web of associated memorials that share themes in design and signification. Likewise, this approach avoids the compartmentalisation of the site into specific memorials considered in relative isolation, and hence a ‘biographical’ approach to individual memorials is not attempted. Equally, a visitor-focused ethnography is regarded to be ethically contentious as well as outside of the parameters of this study and the expertise of this author. Instead, I explore in broad terms the power of the ancient past within multiple memorial gardens to mobilise a sense of national identity and national imagination via a plurality of forms and spaces (see Hamilakis 2007, pp.23–33). I regard this approach as necessary groundwork for future research that might wish to conduct a more detailed archaeological ethnography of the NMA as well as a wider comparative survey of contemporary memorial parks and gardens.

A place of antiquity

The antiquity of the NMA is redolent in the location itself, a ‘reclaimed’ landscape from gravel and sand extraction quarries leased from Lafarge Aggregates within the National Forest. The guidebook emphasises the value of quarrying for understanding the ancient past of the area, picturing a digger driver kneeling beside the bones of a woolly rhino found on the adjacent Alfrewas Quarry in 2002, together with the statement: ‘quarrying is important to archaeologists, who can quickly search for historical artefacts in large areas of land that are being quarried’ (NMA 2009, p. 14). Archaeology is, therefore, integral to the NMA’s foundation myth (NMA 2012, p. 3).

Traces of this antiquity are afforded a place within the NMA. Memorial 339 in the Blue Zone is also directly archaeological: ‘... the land demarcated by fence posts is a 3000 year-old Bronze Age Burial Mound and because it is classed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument it cannot be planted with trees or built upon’ (NMA 2012, p. 102). The mound ‘has not been quarried and is being developed as a wildflower meadow providing a haven for wildlife’ (NMA 2012, p. 102). The celebration of conservation is ironic and not only because of the contrast with the landscape destroyed by, and reclaimed from, quarrying around it. It is ironic because this ‘real’ and yet near-invisible ancient monument is surrounded by emulations of, and citations to, British prehistory.

The ‘prehistory’ of the NMA is not simply one of industrial extraction erasing and uncovering the distant past. Within the grounds, there are material vestiges of the nineteenth century, including the railway line bisecting the eastern side of the site. Moreover, traces of twentieth-century warfare can be found in pill boxes line the River Tame and now reused as bird hides as integral components of the NMA’s wildlife theme (Figure 2). The Second World War is here commemorated through its archaeological traces as well as memorials.

Rooted in antiquity

The NMA’s trees are planted in support of the desire to secure the ‘future’ of remembrance, so that remembrance can ‘grow’ rather than diminish with the passage of time. Through the selected species, numbers and location, a complete arboreal iconography is employed following traditions well established in twentieth-century war commemoration (including the Commonwealth War Graves Commission). A key component of this tree symbolism is the evocation of distant times and distant places by the choices made over which species were selected for particular plantings and the names afforded to them (see Gough 1996, 2009, Cloke and Pawson 2008, p. 115). Indeed, trees are not only aimed as a metaphor of living remembrance, they also encapsulate a hope for real restoration of the living in a spiritual and

a physical sense. For example, the guidebook outlines the hope that the yews grown at the arboretum may be one day clipped for processing in anticancer drugs (NMA 2009, p. 11)



Figure 2. Pill box incorporated into the memorial landscape beside the River Trent.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

Individually and collectively, trees are mnemonic agents with the NMA linking past and present (see also Cloke and Pawson 2008). The complex and pervasive arboreal commemorative symbolism is explained principally through the visitor guidebook. The numbers of trees, plants and flowers, their combinations, the shapes and colours of their arrangement and species' provenance are all employed to link to commemoration of past conflicts, events and institutions in Britain's national and the colonial past. For example, species from the Indian subcontinent, including Kashmir rowan, cedar and the Bhutan pine, commemorate the Indian Army and Royal Indian Navy (NMA 2012, p. 122). The juxtaposition of trees of different regions is used to complement the sentiment of the memorial garden: the Anglo-Japanese Grove comprises of flowering cherry trees and plantings of European and Japanese maples as a symbol of reconciliation (NMA 2009, p. 115, 2012, p. 85). The Bevin Boys Memorial contains three trees representing England (narrow oak), Wales (mountain ash) and Scotland (scots pine) from whence the conscripts

came (NMA 2012, p. 39). Similarly, the trees of the Twin Towers Memorial were planted to commemorate the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks and comprise of two giant Redwoods that represent the twin towers complemented by single trees of different species selected to symbolise Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and America (NMA 2012, p. 22).

Further trees commemorate the colonial history of botanical collecting itself: the trees in the chapel commemorate David Douglas' North American collection and classification of plants and the introduction of new plants into the UK, including the Douglas fir. The link of place and prehistory is more explicitly cited in other plantings at the NMA. The ancient primordial forest of Ireland is cited in the Irish Infantry Grove where Irish yews are planted in the shape of a shamrock and a single oak was planted, taken from a stand in Tollymore Forest Park. The guidebook tells us that the oak was believed to be one of the few species in Ireland to have survived the last ice age, affording the memorial with a sense of antiquity and endurance against all hardships (NMA 2012, p. 90). Therefore, while individual trees and plantings might commemorate specific persons or events, woodland connects the visitor to a primordial early Holocene (Mesolithic) pre-agricultural British Isles.

The specific antiquity of certain trees is deployed in apposite contexts; the use of a giant sequoia from California in the Golden Grove commemorates couples who have reached their 50th wedding anniversary (NMA 2009, p. 11, 2012, p. 90). Two pieces of bog oak frame the entrance to the Boys' Brigade Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 36). Meanwhile, within the Millennium Avenue there are trees sponsored by High Sheriffs. To commemorate this institution's ancient Saxon origins, the lime trees were propagated from what is believed to be the oldest tree alive in Britain today, at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire, making them 'genetically over 2000 years old' (NMA 2009, p. 53, 134). The use of the Saxon past to conjure antiquity is also found in the connection made between the use of alder charcoal to produce gunpowder and the name Alrewas meaning 'alder wash'. Together, these associations are connected in a single alder tree planted on an island within a water feature that forms the centre-piece of the Royal Artillery Garden (NMA 2012, p. 46).

More specific arboreal genealogies are used to commemorate the dead; conkers were selected from Drayton Manor, the home of Sir Robert Peel, founder of the Police Force, to grow the trees in the chestnut avenue of 'The Beat' (NMA 2012, p. 75). Meanwhile, the Western Front Association Memorial contains an avenue of hornbeam propagated from the only tree in Delville Wood to survive the Battle of the Somme (Gough 1996, p. 83, NMA 2012, p. 145). The Memorial for the Royal Tank Regiment uses trees to commemorate two key First World War battles in which the regiment first operated. An oak tree within a circular seat comes from Flers on the Somme where tanks were first used against German positions. Meanwhile ash trees propagated from the battlefield of Cambrai fill the grove (NMA 2009, p. 118, 2012, p. 88). This marks the reverse of the practice found elsewhere, of trees from homelands planted on First World War battlefield cemeteries (Gough 1996, pp. 81–82).

Finally, while trees dominate the commemorative symbolic repertoire, the rose and poppy are also efficacious in the memorials of the NMA (see Gough 1996). For example, the Royal British Legion Poppy Field (NMA 2012, p. 142) and Royal British Legion National Remembrance Garden – 'My Remembrance Day' (NMA 2012, p. 136) develop the symbolism of the poppy into the NMA's landscape, the latter complementing the former by making the ephemerality and collective character of poppies in traditional commemoration more personal, portable and permanent through material culture.

Stones, soil and the celestial

The geological evocation of past landscapes is another widespread theme in the NMA. In many cases, stones' spatial relationship with each other, rather than their specific provenance, suffices to represent events, groups and organisations; such as with the Normandy Veterans Memorial. Here, five stones – placed in geographical order to symbolise the coastline of Normandy – are named after the beaches Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword (NMA 2012, p. 73). The Mediterranean Campaigns of the Second World War Memorial is also laid out geographically with the outline of the North African Coast, with the Sahara Desert represented in pebbles. In geographical ordering along this garden, we find memorials to the British First and Eighth Armies (NMA 2009, p. 112, 2012, pp. 81–82). Likewise, the British Korean Veterans Memorial is built on a slope that the guidebook explains is intended to represent the hills where the war was fought. Meanwhile, the four memorial stones on the ridge represent the four years that the war lasted (NMA 2009, p. 76). An extreme form of landscape recreation was devised for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution Memorial at a location that is as far from the sea as one can get within the British Isles. When observed in 2009, it overlooked the River Trent and comprised of a sand, gravel and pebble beach adorned with a lifeboat station, lobster pots and a memorial statue. The trees in one corner were intended to represent a mother and her children looking anxiously out to sea hoping for the safe return of the lifeboat (NMA 2009, p. 126). Yet the beach was not simply a representation of the contemporary coastline; it was rooted in history. The lifeboat dates from the early twentieth century and the oilskins of the lifeboat man sculpture cite the Victorian origins of the Institution.

In many other memorials, provenance of stone and soil take priority. The Boy's Brigade Memorial contains stones representing each of the four countries comprising the UK. There is slate from Wales, Purbeck limestone to represent England and bog oak citing both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A granite rock from the island of Ailsa Craig (in the Firth of Clyde) supports the Anchor, the symbol of the Brigade (NMA 2009, p. 53). Another abstracted geological memorial is within the Royal Naval Review; a cairn commemorating the Loch Class Frigates and incorporating stones from each of the Scottish lochs after which the Frigates were named (NMA 2009, p. 90, 2012, p. 127).

More specific stone provenances link the memorial to specific historical events: the Phantom Memorial incorporates stone from Senone, near Moussey, France, commemorating the French men and boys of that place who were sent to Dachau and Matthausen concentration camps in 1944 rather than reveal information about SAS activities (NMA 2012, p. 78). Meanwhile, Dartmoor granite was selected for the Royal Marines Association Memorial given their base and training in the Devonian landscape (NMA 2012, p. 124). In the case of the Fauld Explosion Memorial, the stone is a direct mnemonic of the underground explosion caused by munitions stored in an abandoned gypsum mine in 1944 which killed 70 people (NMA 2012, p. 44). Likewise, sand was brought from the French town's beaches to surround the Dunkirk Memorial's plinth and plaque (NMA 2012, p. 21).

An interesting and purposeful inversion of this commemorative discourse on the provenance of soil and stone is found in the Road Peace Wood (NMA 2012, p. 143). The memorial at the wood's entrance commemorating the victims of road accidents is a circular piece of tarmac with the charity's insignia painting on it like road markings. This memorial does not cite a particular place, its use of ubiquitous tarmac allows it to call to mind everywhere and nowhere on Britain's roads, simultaneously citing all the locations where road deaths have taken place and hence meaningful to mourners and victims (Figure 3). Simultaneously, this

clever protest memorial creates a dissonance within the overriding emphasis on nature within the NMA.

So far we have seen the use of botany and geology to cite place and antiquity, but the heavens also play a part in creating a sense of order and timelessness, implicitly inspired by ancient cultures and their monuments. The Shot at Dawn Memorial is located at the easternmost point of the Arboretum which the guidebook tells us is the first place touched by dawn light (NMA 2009, p. 122, 2012, p. 94). The HMS Kandahar and HMS Neptune memorial is aligned on the exact position off the coast of Libya near Tripoli where the wreck of the HMS Neptune lies (NMA 2009, p. 90). Within the Memorial Chapel ‘a light shines on to the altar from the bearing and elevation of sun at 11.00 on the 11th November, Armistice Day’ (NMA 2009, p. 31, 2012, p. 15). Finally, the Armed Forces Memorial has a striking use of orientation and alignment. Inspired by prehistory, specifically the Neolithic tomb of Maeshowe in Orkney, a vertical break in the outer curving wall and the gap in the ‘door’ on the straight southern inner wall of the memorial allow the sun’s rays to ‘stream through the door of the sculpture, illuminating the centre of the Memorial’ (NMA 2009, p. 25; Figure 4). Most specifically the alignment allows light (should there be no clouds on the 11 November and in the weeks either side of it) to hit just above the head of the bronze sculpted figure being held aloft on a stretcher inside the northern inner wall.



Figure 3. The Road Peace Memorial Wood.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.



Figure 4. At 11am on the 11th day of the 11th month (but also for late morning during much of the late autumn), light enters the Armed Forces Memorial, NMA through two aligned vertical apertures to strike the bronze sculpture of a mourning woman looking up at a stretcher held aloft by military personnel bearing their fallen comrade. Photograph: Howard Williams, November 2009.

Monumental antiquity

The geological and astronomical themes lead us neatly onto the evocation of antiquity through architecture. Classical and medieval – and to a lesser extent prehistoric – architectures pervade twentieth-century conflict commemoration (Holtorf 1997, Saunders 2007, pp. 63–77). Unsurprisingly, we find many explicit examples incorporated into the NMA as almost all of the NMA’s memorials draw upon existing traditions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century memorial sculptures including regimental insignia incorporating ancient symbols and deities. For example, the Royal Corps of Signals Memorial is surmounted by a bronze statue of Mercury, reflecting the Corps’ cap badge (NMA 2012, p. 89). Likewise, the Basra Memorial Wall (NMA 2012, p. 86) depicts an

Assyrian sphinx upon its outer face (Figure 5). Yet, we also find innovative deployments of antiquity in monumental form.

The NMA includes innumerable rough-hewn stones, making it a megalithic landscape as much as an arboreal one. For example, there are at least five stone circles. The British Korean Veterans Memorial (see above) is a stone circle. The same is true of the Ulster Ash Grove commemorating the Royal Ulster Constabulary GC (Figure 6). This monument also commemorates the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve, the Armed Forces and other organisations in service of the crown, who lost their lives in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 2001. There are six stones forming a crudely circular arrangement, each one representing and derived from a different county of Northern Ireland, focusing on a Mourne granite pillar (Childs 2008, pp. 157–159; NMA 2009, p. 95, 2012, p. 137). Meanwhile, the Anglo-German Grove comprises two concentric circles of silver birch encircling an inner circle of stones retrieved from the rubble of the Frauenkirche in Dresden destroyed by Allied bombing in 1945 (NMA 2009, p. 115, 2012, p. 85). Each stone has inscribed on it the name of a British or German city subject to intensive aerial bombardment during the Second World War. Therefore, the grove links retrieved artefacts from a medieval ruin caused by the bombing into a new, unified monument to peace. Another use of prehistoric form is more abstract: a circular mound or platform is surmounted by four stones raised on stainless steel dowels to commemorate the achievements of the Royal Engineers (NMA 2009, p. 105, 2012, p. 74). The combination of mound and stone circle echoes the form of the Armed Forces Memorial. The RNLi Memorial discussed above was redesigned by the gardener and TV presenter Chris Beardshaw. Witnessed in 2012, the signboard informs the visitor that they are able to walk through a beach with groynes, while the standing stones are intended to represent a crew of a lifeboat on a mission. A cairn represents the lives saved by their work; it is surrounded by a circle of further standing stones, each stone intended to represent a lifeboat man (Figure 7).



Figure 5. The eastern face of the Basra Memorial Wall.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

In addition to stone circles and innumerable monoliths, there are a range of cairns and mounds that educe an ancient sepulchral form including the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 98). Likewise, the cairn-like Dieppe Raid Memorial Garden within the Allied Special Forces Memorial Grove contains shells and plants citing the rocky French coastline (NMA 2012, p. 144). A rather different monument is the Golden Grove; this is a circular earthwork planted with golden trees and shrubs (NMA 2009, p. 120, 2012, p. 90). Its form is intended to represent a golden wedding ring, but with an inner low bank and external ditch, both broken by causeways, it also echoes the form of prehistoric causewayed enclosure.



Figure 6. The Ulster Ash Grove.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

Antiquity at the NMA involves more than stone circles, enclosures, cairns and barrows. More common still are ancient and classical themes, many continuing the emphasis upon circularity in memorial form. For example, the Leonard Cheshire Amphitheatre serves as an open-air auditorium where services in the chapel are relayed and the 11am Act of Remembrance is repeated daily (NMA 2009, p. 56). The grass banks provide a striking resemblance to the appearance of denuded Roman amphitheatres in the British landscape, as at Cirencester and Silchester. The Shot at Dawn Memorial's stakes are arranged in the shape of the hemispherical seating of a Greek theatre so as to look onto the 'stage' where the statue of the blindfolded boy is positioned representing a soldier awaiting execution by firing squad (NMA 2009, p. 122). Pyramids are among oriental themes and are found on three memorials: The Suez Veterans Association Memorial (NMA 2009, p. 69), the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces Memorial (NMA 2009, p. 79, 2012, p. 51) and the HMS Kandahar and HMS Neptune Association Memorial. The last of these reflects the ships' Second World War demise in an Italian minefield off the North African coast (NMA 2009, p. 90, 2012, p. 127). In addition, a monument halfway between a pyramid and an obelisk forms the focus for the memorial

garden of the 41 Club (past members of the Round Table) (NMA 2009, p. 127, 2012, p. 101). Obelisks have a long history in British commemorative history, and at the NMA examples include the Ulster Special Constabulary Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 135) and the Spiritualists National Union (NMA 2012, p. 143).

In contrast to these diverse prehistoric and ancient monumental allusions, medieval architectural forms are also found, including the ruins of the Frauenkirche from Dresden (mentioned above) and ‘rebuilt’ into a stone circle. The memorial to the battle for Monte Cassino commemorates Allied Forces who fought for the capture this key site during the Allied invasion of Italy in 1944 (Figure 8). It cites the formidable medieval hilltop monastery both through its form and its representation of the walls within an inset panel. A stone and marble altar in the open-air chapel-shaped garden commemorates the Brotherhood of Greek Veterans (NMA 2012, p. 77) and crosses adorn select memorials including the Royal Logistics Corps (NMA 2012, p. 83). The local Staffordshire landscape is also present through medieval citation: the Lichfield and District Garden has a double seat at its centre with the distinctive shape of the three towers of Lichfield cathedral providing a canopy (NMA 2009, p. 55, 2012, p. 38). Moreover, the buildings of the NMA themselves refer to Britain’s medieval Christian heritage. The visitor centre and chapel were constructed to mimic a medieval monastery linked by a cloistered way (NMA 2009, p. 27, 2012, p. 11). Indeed, the choice of a wooden building for the chapel again cites antiquity by echoing: ... the early wooden churches that were built in Britain to house the new religion some 1700 years ago but its design goes even further back to the Greek temples where some of the earliest Gospel teaching would have been heard. (NMA 2009, p. 27). Meanwhile, the 12 Douglas firs that support it purport to represent the 12 apostles. So when present, the focus of medieval allusions is upon the deep antiquity of Christian origins and hence also primordial.



Figure 7. The stone circle within the Royal National Lifeboat Institute Memorial.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.



Figure 8. The Monte Cassino Memorial.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

More recent allusions to the historic past in architecture and sculpture deserve mention, including the carousel horse adjacent to the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 96; Figure 9). Meanwhile, the Household Division Memorial is topped with a copy of the railings from the old Chelsea barracks (NMA 2012, p. 97). The sculpture of men and women in historic uniform reflects this theme upon the Royal National Lifeboat Institution Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 100), the Auxiliary Territorial Service Statue (NMA 2012, p. 37), the four figures (representing army, navy, air force and underground movement) of the Polish Forces War Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 91) and the newly erected Durham Light Infantry Memorial. Other memorials use 'antique' militaria to commemorate the history of

regiments, as with the miniature First World War tank surmounting the memorial within the Royal Tank Regiment Memorial (NMA 2012, p. 88: Figure 10). More distant places are cited through replica or retrieved materials. The Burma Star Memorial adopts the traditional form of an obelisk (see above) but its precise significance comes from it being a smaller scale replica of the memorial in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Kohima: a crucial conflict in the defence of India from the invading Japanese Empire (NMA 2009, p. 74). Meanwhile, the British Nuclear Test Veterans memorial commemorates all personnel of the Combined Services Task Force who served during nuclear tests between 1952 and 1966. A grotto of Pacific shells has been placed at its base evoking the geography of the incidents. Specifically, this is a replica of a shell-decorated memorial situated on Christmas Island where some British nuclear tests took place (NMA 2009, p. 88). This is a powerful monument linked to an ongoing campaign for recognition by those who died of conditions likely acquired through intense exposure to nuclear radiation.



Figure 9. The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Memorial.

Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

Merging antiquity and history

The most striking memorials are those that juxtapose antiquity and history in attempts to transcend the latter, including the Anglo-German Grove (above) and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution Memorial (above). It is also evident in the relatively new (dedicated 12 July 2012) Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Memorial. Here, we find an example of the innumerable allusions to the ancient past through classically inspired regimental mottos and badges merged with hyperreal statuary (see Holtorf 2005, pp. 130–149). Situated upon a low (burial?) mound is a sculpture of Belepheron on Pegasus, juxtaposed with a twentieth-century paratrooper gathering his kit after a successful jump (Figure 11). [3]

More striking still in its juxtaposition of recent and distant pasts is the National Associations of Memorial Masons Memorial. This grove commemorates memorial masons through history; the visitor walks clockwise around a ‘Bronze Age burial mound’ along which one encounters a timeline of memorials from earliest prehistory to contemporary ‘national award-winning’ memorial designs (Figure 12). On the way, one passes prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and modern memorials of varying form (NMA 2012, p. 123). There is even a First World War memorial dedicated to all British and Commonwealth service men and women who died in the conflict, aping the obelisks commonly raised by local communities to their fallen (NMA 2009, p. 86). The guidebook states that these ‘are particularly appropriate to the NMA and to the Education programme which the Arboretum is delivering to children’ (NMA 2009, p. 86).



Figure 10. The Royal Tank Regiment Memorial.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

Most prominent of these hybrids of deep antiquity with hyper-reality is The Armed Forces Memorial. The guidebook explicitly states that it was inspired by ‘...the ancient landscapes of prehistoric Britain and the classical forms of ancient Rome’ (NMA 2009, p. 21, 2012, p. 9) (Figures 1 and 5). The memorial’s role is for ‘families and friends who have no grave to visit, or who remember those in graves in far-off places’ (NMA 2012, p. 9). As a cenotaph, the monument remembers not only those who were killed but the ‘wives, husbands, partners, parents, children and colleagues who loved them’ (NMA 2012, p. 8).



Figure 11. The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Memorial. Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

The memorial is placed on a mound that the guidebook describes as ‘based on early British barrows or tumuli’ (NMA 2009, p. 21). It ‘echoes the ancient burial mounds of our ancestors – an earthen platform 100m across that recollects monuments like Silbury Hill and the mounds around Stonehenge’ (NMA 2009, p. 25). The memorial on the mound is made of 200,000 bricks faced with Portland stone and consists of two curved walls framing two straight walls inscribed with the names of servicemen killed on active service since 1945. A ‘slender obelisk’ is placed at one edge so as to look into the oval enclosure between the innermost walls. Here, bronze sculptures on either side depict acts of heroic mourning. The bronze servicemen inside the northern wall carry a dead or dying comrade on a stretcher, which: ‘... echoes of Homer’s Iliad and the Trojan War, where the body of Patroclus was carried on a shield by fellow Greek warriors back to the grieving Achilles, whose armour he had borrowed’ (NMA 2009, p. 25). As discussed above, the guidebook informs us of the meaning of each figure, and that the alignment and axis of the Memorial portray a greater meaning of celestial orientation inspired by Maeshowe in Orkney (see above; NMA 2009, p.

25). The UK's current armed forces are therefore being commemorated through a heady mix of romanticised prehistory and Homeric poetry, more so than any First or Second World War memorial predecessors. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the historic realism of the bronze sculpture, its antique resonances and even its unfolding nature, render it more similar to recent American memorials than to anything else previously conceived in the UK (see Doss 2007, p. 20, 2008).[4] The enduring nature of the memorial is underpinned by the present absences of its smooth, yet-to-be-inscribed surfaces. The memorial appears poised between past, present and the future, impatiently awaiting the addition of future names. Indeed, the memorial has space for the addition of the names of many thousands of British service men and women currently living or yet to be born, the victims of conflicts as yet unknown. Antiquity is here used to create an aura of authority and authenticity in a novel commemorative context (see Holtorf 2005, pp. 112–129).



Figure 12. The National Association of Memorial Masons Memorial.
Photograph: Howard Williams, November 2009.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed and appraised the arboreal, geological, celestial and antique allusions to the past found at the NMA. There are further strategies still by which memorial gardens at the NMA cite the past in material media. These include the relocation of memorials from elsewhere (see Gough 2004). A recent example of this commemorative strategy is the Basra Memorial Wall. Originally constructed in Basra in 2006, it was rebuilt at the NMA as a 'personal gesture' to commemorate British soldiers from the 37th Armoured Engineer Squadron in 2010 and incorporating the original bronze memorial plaques (NMA 2012, p. 86, Figure 5). Equally, there is a range of ways by which historic materials are incorporated into the memorial gardens, particularly present as ways of staging historicity within memorials that commemorate suffering and tragic events. For example, the new

Hiroshima Stone Memorial (dedicated 12 July 2012 to promote reconciliation) is comprised of stone sourced from the bombed city (Figure 13).[5] These reused pasts invite further research.

Whether by reuse or replication, the NMA conflates multiple pasts to stage temporalities through the use of trees, soil, stones, the heavens and antiquity. Significations inevitably vary considerably between memorials, yet this web of associations shared between memorials collectively serve to condense and commemorate the UK's localities, nationhood, military and colonial history and merge together individual and collective memorials in a single commemorative assemblage. What antiquity brings to the memorial gardens as an assemblage is a shared sense of forgetting, both of detail and of character, allowing the memorials to cohere and sublimate all manner of deaths into perpetual sacrifice and an organic growth of remembrance for the nation within the NMA's landscape (see also Rowlands 1999, Doss 2007, 2008). This range of replicated and retrieved material cultures can be seen to sustain a nationalist discourse of British endurance to military and civilian tragedies and hardship, scars that can only be healed through a perpetual process of remembrance.



Figure 13. The Hiroshima Stone.
Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

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Notes

1. For this study, the 2009 and 2012 guidebooks are utilised as ‘primers’ revealing the official message of the site.
2. <http://www.thenma.org.uk/>.
3. <http://www.thenma.org.uk/about-us/memorials/featured-memorials/featured-memorialspage-5/>.
4. Two examples discussed by Doss are more gratuitous than the Armed Forces Memorial but adhere to the same tradition of bronze ‘realism’ and antique context: The National D-Day Memorial: <http://www.dday.org/>, and the Community Veterans Memorial: <http://www.communityveteransmemorial.org/>.
5. <http://www.thenma.org.uk/events/events-calendar/calendar-of-events/hiroshima-stonememorial/>.

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