

IMAGING HISTORY

Photography after the fact

Bruno Vandermeulen, Danny Veys (eds.)

ASA Publishers

In archaeology, photography is mainly used as a technique for gathering data and evidence. Within the framework of the research project '(in)site, site-specific photography revised' the relationship between photography and archaeology, or broader, history is explored. How do photographers visualize history? What is the importance of place, particularly the place that remains after the event took place? How do photographers or artists use photography to depict the past, when time has become 'past time'? These articles and portfolios explore, both on practical and theoretical level, how history can be captured.

The research project is an attempt to redefine the traditional relationship between archaeology and photography in order to produce new forms of image making more adapted to contemporary visual culture. The project considers photography as a 'mode of engagement', a practice in which a picture is shaped and constructed by the photographer, not a practice in which a picture is mechanically taken. Thanks to this shift it becomes possible to take artistic input into account, for archaeological photography will be able to establish a dialogue with new forms of presentation and interpretation, and make them beneficial for both art and science.

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IMAGING HISTORY Photography after the fact



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IMAGING HISTORY

Photography after the fact

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Remembering Edith and Gabrielle

Picture postcards of monuments as portable *lieux de mémoire*

Leen Engelen & Marjan Sterckx

Abstract

Picture postcards quickly gained popularity in Western Europe around 1900. The photographs on these postcards represent a wide variety of topics. From the start, the monument was one of the most popular themes. In this article we would like to focus on picture postcards of three Brussels monuments erected in the late 1910s and early 1920s to commemorate two Great War heroines, namely the British-

born nurse Edith Cavell (1865–1915) and the Belgian spy Gabrielle Petit (1893–1916). After briefly discussing the monuments and picture postcards in their specific commemorative context, we will argue that these picture postcards, thanks to the use of specific photographic strategies, can be read as what the French cultural historian Pierre Nora coined ‘portable realms of memory’.

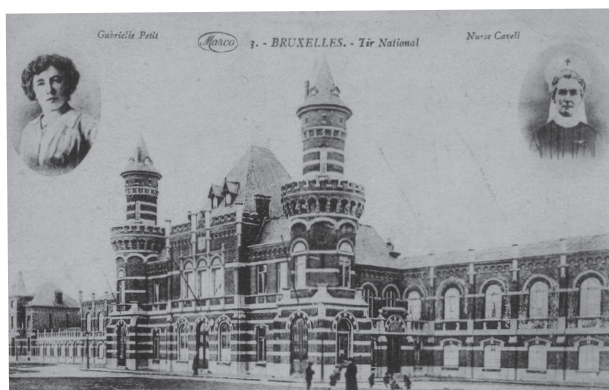
In the late 19th century, picture postcards quickly gained popularity in Western Europe. By the early 20th century they were the most popular form of mail.¹ The photographs on these postcards depict a wide variety of topics: city and landscape views, famous buildings or sites, artworks, fantasy scenes, celebrities and politicians. From the start, the monument was also a very popular theme. In this article we would like to focus on picture postcards of war memorials. As a case study we will look at picture postcards of the Brussels monuments commemorating two Great War heroines, namely the British-born nurse Edith Cavell (1865–1915) and the Belgian spy Gabrielle Petit (1893–1916). We will consider picture postcards of three monuments: a temporary Cavell monument erected behind the Grote Markt/Grand Place (1918), the Cavell-Depage monument erected in front of the Cavell Hospital School in Ukkel/Uccle (1920), and the statue of Petit, placed on the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint-Jean (1923). From a historical and art historical point of view, we will discuss how these picture postcards from the 1920s – like the monuments themselves – can be read as what the French cultural historian Pierre Nora coined *lieux de mémoire*. We would like to argue that it is thanks to the use of specific representational strategies that these picture postcards function not only as ‘photographic doubles’ of the monuments but also as fully-fledged ‘portable’ realms of memory. Before developing this further, we will

briefly discuss the picture postcards and the monuments in their specific commemorative context.

Heroines, places, commemoration, and picture postcards

The postcards of the Petit and Cavell monuments in Brussels are firmly located in a broader post-war cult of remembrance around both heroines. Between 1919 and 1924, official and popular commemoration of the war was at its height, with war heroes and heroines at its centre. Resisters, and especially female resisters who had been executed by the Germans, the so-called *fusillées*, formed a small but particular group. Cavell and Petit are cases in point. Nurse Cavell was executed in October 1915, aged 49, for successfully helping Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium; and saleswoman Petit was executed for espionage in April 1916, aged 23. Although the British nurse Cavell had lived and worked in Brussels since 1907 and eventually died there, she was to a lesser extent considered a Belgian heroine than Gabrielle Petit. As the first woman to be court-martialled and executed by the Germans, Cavell's death caused huge international outcry. The (international) commemoration cult of nurse Cavell began immediately after her death in 1915, contrary to Petit, who evolved into a national heroine only after the war (De Schaepdrijver, 2008, pp.220-233; L. Engelen, 2005b; Engelen & Sterckx, 2010; Proctor, 2003, pp.99-121; Sniter, 2008, pp.161-162).

After the war, both women soon became the subject of official as well as popular commemoration: an official exhumation and consequent state funeral, commemorative plaques and medals, and the erection of monuments. For the general public, a mass of cheap souvenirs, like teaspoons, hagiographies, memorial cards, and picture postcards flooded the market. Initially, the picture postcards represented scenes and places connected to both heroines' lives and mainly deaths: next to personal photographs (e.g. a well-known picture of nurse Cavell with her dogs) and graphic illustrations of their death scenes (usually said to be based on



1. Picture postcard remembering the death of Gabrielle Petit and Edith Cavell at the National Rifle Stand in Brussels. Marco Marcovici, Brussels. (private collection)

eye-witness accounts) the postcards also photographically represented the shrines erected in their respective death cells in Brussels' St-Gillis/St. Gilles prison, and their preliminary graves at the National Shooting Range, the place of their execution.

These two early places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*), and even of pilgrimage, correspond to both heroines and as such closely connect them to each other. Postcards of the facade of the National Shooting Range building (1889) are a good example. Already an attraction and subject of postcards before the war, the shooting range became a common decor for commemorating Cavell and Petit. The women feature prominently on several postcards via their photographic portraits in medallion format, while no explicit reference is made to the nature and dates of their deaths [fig.1]. The publishers clearly assumed that the connection of both women to the location, and their connection to each other, was generally known.



2. Numbered picture postcard of the shrine in Edith Cavell's cell in St. Gilles Prison in Brussels. Henri Georges éditeur, Brussels. (private collection)



3. Numbered picture postcard of the shrine in Gabrielle Petit's cell in St. Gilles Prison in Brussels. Henri Georges éditeur, Brussels. (private collection)

Similar remarks could apply to St-Gillis/St. Gilles prison. While the exterior of the neo-Tudor building (1884) was the subject of numerous picture postcards both before and after the war, the interior became a photographic subject only after the war. The respective prison cells of Petit and Cavell were photographed according to similar representational strategies, thus shaping memories to the same mould, and closely connecting the commemoration of both women [figs.2, 3]. As well as a similar camera angle and level, the *mise-en-scène* of the postcards is also alike, prominently featuring a framed photograph of the respective heroine (the image within the image), a crucifix on the wall, flowers and memorial wreaths, readable mourning ribbons, etc. Only a closer look reveals small differences between

them: the greater abundance of flowers in Petit's case, justifying the slightly greater camera distance, and the ribbons that not only mention her name, but also 'our national heroine' or 'our great *fusillée*', indicating that Petit's death had greater popular resonance locally than Cavell's. Both postcards seem to have been sold individually as well as as part of a postcard booklet in which the cards have successive numbers (760 for Cavell and 761 for Petit). The numbers refer to a series of several hundred postcards of Belgian tourist sites published by Henri Georges.²

With the erection of the monuments for Cavell and Petit – the new *lieux de mémoires par excellence* – the postcards of the early places of memory seem to have been quickly replaced by a variety of picture postcards of the respective monuments. Within these picture postcards, a transfer takes place from the memorial as a *lieu de mémoire topographique* to the photographic postcard of the monument as a *lieu de mémoire portable*. As a case study, we will now look at the picture postcards of the three monuments erected to commemorate Cavell and Petit in Brussels as *lieux de mémoire*, following this divide between the topographical and the portable.

Monuments as topographic *lieux de mémoire*

As is argued by Sophie De Schaepdrijver in her contribution to *België, een parcours van herinnering* (2008), the Belgian dependent of Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–1992), the statue of Gabrielle Petit in Brussels can definitely be seen as a realm of memory, a place (here in the literal sense) where history lingers and can be felt. The monument as *lieu de*



4. Photo card of the statue of Gabrielle Petit (by E. Rombaux) on the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint-Jean (Brussels). The picture was probably taken shortly after the inauguration in July 1923. (private collection)

mémoire originates from the sense that there is no spontaneous memory. Commemoration needs to be organised deliberately and be attached to 'sites', with their own material, symbolic and functional features. Moreover in the book, the monument is categorized as a so-called 'place of history'. These 'places' are considered by the editors as constitutive for establishing an enduring history of the national community to legitimise the nation state, as imagined since the 19th century.



5. Picture postcard of the temporary monument for Edith Cavell (by J. Marin) erected behind the Brussels' Grote Markt/Grand Place in November 1918. Nels-Ern. Thill, Brussels (Postcard-collection Dexia Bank, Brussels)

After the initial plans (1920) by Baron Janssens to place a monument to Petit in the Brussels Warande park were rejected by, among others, the city architect, a monument was erected three years later (1923) on the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint Jean [fig. 4]. It is a bronze statue by the sculptor Egide Rombaux (1865–1942) on a pedestal of nearly two metres high, designed by the architect Adrien Blomme (1878–1940).³ On the initiative of the *Ligue des patriotes*, the inhabitants of all Brussels municipalities contributed financially to the statue, highlighting the involvement of the public.⁴ Despite the rather poor resemblance between the statue and Petit, the press praised the artwork, which represents a female figure in a long dress and coat, with one bare shoulder (reminiscent of the French Marianne), her left hand on her heart, and her head turned upwards in defiance as she looks across the square at an imaginative firing squad *hors champ*, thus representing her death scene. The statue expresses Petit's stoic and bold attitude vis-à-vis the enemy (she didn't ask for a pardon and refused to be blindfolded) and subscribes itself in the *ils ne passeront pas* tradition of military war memorials. Moreover, Petit is clearly represented as a role model for (female) bravery, devotion and citizenship, still a relatively new way of representing women in public sculpture. On the pedestal we find a reference to her (ascribed) last words: 'Long live Belgium! Long live the ... king' and a double dedication to the memory of Gabrielle Petit and all the Belgian women who died for their country.⁵ The Brussels monuments for Petit and Cavell were actually the first to be erected for contemporary individual women in Belgium (Leclercq, 2000, p. 185).

The first statue of Cavell in Brussels was one of a group of seven temporary stucco monuments, by different sculptors, commissioned to mark the return of the Royal Family to the capital on October 22, 1918. The statues were erected in the city centre where celebrations took place.⁶ The Cavell monument was sculpted by Jacques Marin (1877–1950)⁷ and placed behind the *Broodhuis/Maison du Roi* on the Grote Markt/Grand Place [fig. 5].⁸ It consists of two parts: the lower section formed by a monumental pedestal above a series of stairs, against which a smoothly sculpted group of nurse Cavell in chains followed by several lamenting women; the upper section (on top of the pedestal) is a female allegory, with flowers in her arms and long flowing hair and robes, graciously walking in the other direction. After several months the monument was removed, and until now, its whereabouts remain unknown. Of all the stucco monuments created for that occasion, those of Cavell and King Albert I (by the sculptor Jules Lagae on the Paleizenplein/place des Palais) were the only ones dedicated to an individual. The other statues represented allegorical figures like *La Brabançonne* (Lady Belgium), or honoured the dead and wounded soldiers as a group. Bearing the inscription ‘To Edith Cavell. Tribute to England’ it is clear that gratitude was not only being expressed to nurse Cavell, but also to the British ally.⁹



6. Monument for Edith Cavell and Marie Depage (by P. Du Bois) in the front garden of the Edith Cavell nursing school in Uccle/Uccle, Brussels. Phototypie, A. Dohmen, Brussels. (private collection)

The second monument to Edith Cavell is more modest and also honours Marie Depage, the wife of Dr Antoine Depage and a fellow worker of Cavell, who died on the *Lusitania* when the Germans torpedoed the ship in May 1915 [fig. 6]. The statue was erected in 1920 at the entrance to the nursing school that Cavell ran with Dr Depage. This bronze statue is by the Brussels-trained sculptor Paul Du Bois (1859–1938), who four years later also made a statue of Gabrielle Petit for her hometown Doornik/Tournai.¹⁰ His Cavell statue consists of two allegorical figures, presumably Time (the winged male figure) and Glory (the nude young woman), bending forwards to present flowers and laurel leaves to Edith Cavell and Marie Depage, who are present not by their portraits, but by the inscription of their names on the tomb-like pedestal.¹¹ In contrast to the first Cavell monument (1918),

the Cavell-Depage monument (1920) is no longer dedicated to the British ally: disappointments following the Treaty of Versailles may have left their trace here. Around the same time, monuments to Cavell were inaugurated elsewhere in Belgium and in Europe, such as a commemorative bas-relief (1922) in the Anglican Christ Church in Brussels, the stone monument (1920) by George Frampton (1860–1928) on St. Martin's Place, London, or the bas-relief (1920) by Gabriel Pech (1854–1930) in the Tuileries, Paris.

As solid objects in locations that people can (re)visit to commemorate or enliven their memories, monuments can be considered durable *lieux de mémoire*. They also function as 'anchors' to talk about personal memories and specific moments in history with younger generations. Over the years, special dates like July 21 (Belgian National Day), August 4 (German invasion of Belgium in 1914) or November 11 (Armistice Day) as well as the birthdays and anniversaries of their deaths, are marked by ceremonies at the monuments to Cavell and Petit. Antoine Prost and others have argued that in the case of war memorials (*monuments aux morts*), the location, although quite complex to interpret and often polysemic, contributes a great deal to the monument's meaning (Prost, 1984, p.200; Sherman, 1999; Sniter, 2008, p.154). Moreover, through the presence of the monument, a particular square, street or corner is post-factum, and possibly arbitrarily, invested with new collective memories and thus with new meaning. The Cavell-Depage monument in Ukkel/Uccle is actually the only one of the three statues under discussion with a prior link to the site. Until now, it is firmly located within the local context, placed in the semi-public space of the front garden of the school where Cavell and Depage worked, and located at the cross-section of streets then recently named in their honour, of which postcards were also made separately¹² [fig.7]. Street names are of particular importance in relation to *lieux de mémoires*. In 1919, the Brussels district of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek/Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, where Gabrielle Petit briefly worked as a saleswoman, also named a street after her: the by then deemed inappropriate rue Hamburgstraat was renamed rue Gabrielle Petitstraat at the request of local inhabitants.¹³



7. Picture postcard of the Edith Cavell nursing school and the Cavell-Depage monument on the corner of rue Edith Cavellstraat and rue Marie Depagestraat in Ukkel/Uccle, Brussels. Henri Georges éditeur. (private collection)



38. BRUXELLES. La Place Saint-Jean et la Rue de la Violette.
 8. Coloured picture postcard of the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint-Jean in Brussels. Stamped 1904. (private collection)

Yet Petit's statue was not placed in Molenbeek, but on the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint Jean, a more prestigious location in the historical heart of Brussels, symbolising her status as a true national heroine. Although constructed in 1845,¹⁴ the square remained empty until 1918 [fig.8], when one of the seven temporary stucco monuments previously mentioned was placed there: a group entitled *To our soldiers who died for the fatherland (À nos soldats morts pour la patrie)* by Louis Mascré (1871–1927) [fig.9]. The square swiftly became a place of national commemoration. The Petit statue was inaugurated five years later, on July 21, 1923, in the presence of over 500 notables, including Queen Elisabeth and her daughter, princess Marie-José.¹⁵ After the inauguration, picture postcards prominently featuring the Petit statue replaced postcards of the pre-war square [fig.8], which involved altering the camera angle and distance [fig.4].

Picture postcards of monuments
 as portable *lieux de mémoire*

Like some other postcards, picture postcards of monuments can be seen as *lieux de mémoire* in themselves. Thanks to practices like postcard collecting and archiving¹⁶, or publishing postcards in numbered or topical series, postcards, just like monuments, are surrounded by commemorative practices. The picture postcard photographically representing a monument can become a substitute for actually experiencing and visiting the monument, or become a souvenir of the actually experienced monument, be it during its inauguration, a commemorative event, or simply as a passer-by. Instead of being topographical and three-dimensional, the *lieu de mémoire* becomes photographic, two-dimensional, and portable, to use Nora's terms.

Because of the original communication function of the postcard, memories become transferrable, and potentially and often literally, time and space-travelling. The new popular medium of the picture postcard enjoyed



9. Picture postcard of the temporary monument 'À nos soldats morts pour la Patrie' (by L. Mascré) erected on the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint-Jean in Brussels in November 1918. Stamped 1919, Nels-Thill Bruxelles. (private collection)

wide (inter)national circulation and had a huge social and artistic impact. When looking at sent postcards, their commemorative function as well as the portability or transferability of memory comes to the forefront. Frequently, the correspondent explicitly refers to the represented monument or, even more often to the person and facts represented by the actual monument. A clear example is the handwritten addition 'Souvenir of war. Brussels 1918' on a postcard featuring Cavell's monument in Brussels. On the flip side, the sender writes 'Following your wish, I send you a small souvenir of Miss Edith Cavell.'¹⁷ Another example can be found on a postcard sent by a woman to a male correspondent in Paris in May 1920, four years after Petit's death. It features a well-known photograph of Petit made by a Brussels photographer just before or during the war. This picture, appearing in several post-war publications, was also used in picture postcards. Under the handwritten and pre-printed captions, the sender explicitly comments on the photograph of the heroine: "*When in Paris there are beautiful women, in Belgium, there are courageous women. Long live Gabrielle Petit!*"¹⁸ The sheer number of unsent postcards of these monuments still found today seems to indicate that many of them were in fact kept for diverse, among other commemorative, purposes.

The function of the picture postcard as a *lieu de mémoire* in its own right becomes crucial in the case of monuments that moved to a new location or disappeared altogether, such as the 1918 temporary Cavell monument [fig. 5]. The postcard of the original monument becomes a photographic substitute, and a permanent record of an ephemeral sculptural object. The photograph then plays a key role in the documentation of the short-lived sculptural installation and becomes an essential element in the afterlife of the monument.¹⁹ Despite the relatively short presence of all seven temporary monuments in Brussels' public space during 1918, several different postcards of them circulated well into the 1920s, and even now, for example, on commercial collector's websites. The Cavell monument seems to have been particularly well represented in picture postcards, and examples are

still relatively easy to find. English captions on some suggest that they were targeted at the British market as well.

The commemorative function of picture postcards as portable objects is complemented by the way monuments are visually represented: the monument, itself the *lieu de mémoire par excellence*, and its photographic double. Yet the photographic *simulacrum* is never an exact double; it inevitably lacks qualities of the original, such as its three-dimensionality, scale, texture, and the changes in light and shadow. Nevertheless, the photograph invests the original *lieu de mémoire* with new meaning, thanks to the use of certain representational strategies, such as the *mise-en-scène* and certain photographic codes. One could even argue that the in situ photography of public monuments for picture postcards forms a genre, which is influenced by, and influenced itself, contemporary views on the monument and the city or landscape.

In situ photography of public monuments for picture postcards

Whereas literature on the photography of artworks, and on photography and sculpture in general, is relatively large,²⁰ the in situ photography of public monuments remains un(der)studied, especially photographs made for commercial publishers, as is the case for postcards.²¹ The photographers remain mostly unknown, as do the dates when the pictures were taken. In reproduction photography, paintings are usually photographed without any context, whereas sculpture is reproduced, out of necessity, against a background. Unless a gallery or studio context was specifically required, which creates another genre,²² the photographer looked for or created (before or afterwards) a uniform, contrasting background: dark or black for white marble or stone sculptures, and light or white for dark bronzes.

In the case of public sculpture, especially statues outside, which are our focus here, the photographs always include a time and space-defined frame. The photographer becomes more present when photographing public sculpture than reproducing paintings; he or she has to determine the point of view – literally as well as metaphorically – towards the monument and the cityscape that forms the background.²³ Even if one regards these pictures as merely documentary photography, in which “the photographer must (...) intervene as little as possible” (Henri Matisse, as quoted in Johnson, 1999, p. 5), the photographer still had to make many choices, regarding distance, depth, perspective, lighting, framing, composition, extras, and so on, thus leaving the imprint of his or her vision on the monument and the city. The specific surroundings of a street, square or park contain many extra signifiers to guide our reading, such as buildings, trees, cars, shops, tram rails, advertisements, or passers-by. The viewpoint and framing were chosen not so much by coincidence, but were influenced (even if applied implicitly or unconsciously) by a multitude of aspects, such as the position of the sun, the specific architectural décor, and the photographer’s experience and knowledge of certain codes and conventions. For example, in three classic articles from the *Belle Époque* period (1896, 1897, 1915) entitled ‘How

sculptures should be photographed' (*Wie man Skulpturen aufnehmen soll*), art historian Heinrich Wölfflin underlines the importance of finding the ideal viewing position, that is, the one originally intended by the sculptor.

Since the late 19th century (e.g. Alinari brothers, Eugène Atget), but mainly after the Second World War, public sculpture has been represented from unseen viewpoints and in close-up, without any distance and context, almost bringing the stone or bronze to life. A late example of this evolution are the post-war, subjective and quite overwhelming pictures of Brussels statues by Julien Coulommier (°1922) in *Statues de Bruxelles* (Baetens, 2002; Coulommier & Broodthaers, 1957/1987) or those in *Brussels: Silent Witnesses* (Ranieri, Ribas & Vanden Eeckhoudt, 1979). In contrast, the picture postcards from the *Belle Époque* and interwar period, show the person explicitly on its pedestal, as a glorified hero(ine), superior to his or her earthly passers-by. A comparison of postcards from this period demonstrates that the statue is often shown centrally and frontally or at a three-quarter angle, with a foreground, and, more often than not, shot from a low-angle, mainly because of the height of the pedestal, creating distance, difference and context. This way of photographing the monument corresponds to a view on sculpture as a *grand art* and a means of glorifying *grands hommes* – even when women are represented.²⁴



10. Picture postcard of the Petit statue on the Sint-Jansplein/place Saint-Jean in Brussels. Rare landscape format. Stamped 1924, E. Desaix, Brussels. (private collection)

These characteristics are also prominent in the picture postcards of all Cavell and Petit monuments. For the vertically orientated Petit monument, the landscape format is rare [fig.10], and the position showing Petit's face in profile, with the rue Sint-Jansstraat stretching out behind her, prevails²⁵ [fig.4]. This scenery clearly outlines and accentuates Petit's figure and face against the light and even background of the sky, contrasting with the dark bronze. As far as luminosity is concerned, the easterly orientated rue Sint-Jansstraat was an ideal background to photograph the statue around midday or in the early afternoon, when the sun shone from the side, as the shadows indicate.²⁶ The photographers' choice for this wide and slightly inclining street in the background, also gives the statue a monumental setting and creates an

image of astonishing depth. Here, the vision of Jules Victor Anspach (mayor of the City of Brussels from 1863 to 1879) who admired Haussmann's monumental urbanisation of Paris, prevails, more than the late 19th century 'picturesque' vision of his successor Charles Buls (mayor, 1881–1899).

In depictions of the stucco war memorial temporarily placed on the same square in 1918, photographers chose another angle and another of the seven streets giving onto the square as background [fig. 9]. This was out of necessity, because the memorial was placed quite close to the building behind, and had a clear front side. The same goes for the Cavell-Depage monument, positioned right in front of the entrance of the nursing school [fig. 6]. Because here the figures lean instead of stand on the pedestal, the memorial is less elevated. It is therefore generally photographed in landscape format, from closeby and at eye level, all quite unusual. However, in picture postcards of the nursing school, the memorial is less prominent; the school and the memorial mainly serve to accentuate the impressive vista of rue Edith Cavellstraat, with groups of children strolling around [fig. 7].

People are often visible in picture postcards of public statues, be they inhabitants, visitors or tourists, and either actively posing or as 'passive', unsuspecting passers-by. Animated street scenes were popular subjects in photography at the time.²⁷ Not only does the public refer to the specific time and place the photograph was taken; it also reminds us that public monuments were often co-financed and supported by the local community, as was the case for the Petit statue. Moreover, the presence of people helps the viewer of the postcard to measure the scale of the monument. The people in the photographs often seem 'tiny' in comparison with their congener in stone or bronze on a high pedestal, and this underscores the literal and metaphorical *grandeur* of the person represented and of the monument. The contrast in scale is all the more striking when children are depicted.

Children are repeatedly represented around monuments, often in little groups. No doubt, while playing, they became curious about the photographer and his camera, for whom they formed ideal photogenic extras. But the presence of children beside monuments in picture postcards also seems to strengthen the statue's educational, commemorative or even moralising role towards younger generations: the postcards then function as *memento mori*, reminding them of the fleetingness of life and of past atrocities, or as *exempla virtutis* – examples of virtue – in the case of heroes. The Cavell and Petit monuments combine both: by glorifying two war heroines, they likewise warn future generations against the atrocities of war. On the pedestal of the Cavell-Depage monument, the inscription explicitly appeals to passers-by to share this message with younger generations: 'Passer-by, tell your children: they killed them.'²⁸

On almost all picture postcards of the Petit statue and the temporary Cavell monument, flowers and memorial wreaths are visible, just as on the earlier mentioned cards pre-dating the monuments [fig. 2, 3].²⁹ In the early 1920s there was still a lively cult around both heroines, and their monuments were sites for well-attended ceremonies, including their inauguration. These occasions, or the period immediately afterwards, were often photographed for picture postcards, in order to show the lively commemoration, through flowers, memorial wreaths and sometimes the

crowd. These photographs thus became the main elements in the afterlife of these events too.

On closer examination, the temporary Cavell memorial, carefully cordoned off from the general public, only seems to be decorated with official wreaths and British flags [fig.5]. This may suggest that it wasn't a place intended for popular expressions of public gratitude or private grief. The posture of extras in these photographs suggests a distance between the Belgians and the British heroine as well as the British ally: when people are present, they form small groups and remain at a distance. In contrast, in photographs of the Petit monument, the pedestal is covered with numerous posies and small bouquets, and members of the public stand close to the monument [figs.4,10]. Here the iconography and *mise-en-scène* of the pictures denote proximity between the monument and the public. Although the statue is placed in the middle of the square and surrounded by streets, people are walking up to the monument, examining it closely, reading the inscriptions on all sides, looking up at Petit's face, while carriages and cars pass by. Although some people are looking at the camera, they are not posing but merely curious about the photographer's presence. Petit was considered a national heroine, uniting Flemish and Walloons as well as all social classes, and this seems to be reflected in the picture postcards.



11. Picture postcard of the Petit statue on the renewed Sint-Jansplein/ place Saint-Jean with the new pedestal. Mid 1930s, Nels-Ern. Thill, Brussels. (private collection)

After the reconstruction of the square in the mid 1930s, the Petit monument received a new, equally large, pedestal with the text now attached directly onto the stone. Several publishers then had new pictures of the monument taken. Generally the same composition as before was used, but the photographs were taken at a closer distance, singling out the monument to the disadvantage of the context, and they are not as animated as they used to be: no people, nor flowers [fig.11]. The latter postcards seem to indicate that changes had taken place in Gabrielle Petit's public image and commemoration, as the presence of people on photographs of the city was

still in vogue at that time (cf. Natkin, 1934, p.68). Her status as a national heroine was no longer uncontested, as it was in the early 1920s. In the course of the 1930s (and 1940s), pacifists, Flemish nationalists, anti-German groups, patriots and the Belgian resistance ‘hijacked’ her persona for their own political agendas, and after the Second World War, all memory of her quickly faded (De Schaepdrijver, 2002, 2008; L. Engelen, 2005a, pp.63-96). In 2005 her memory was briefly resurrected when Petit was shortlisted for the *Grootste Belg* competition (‘Greatest Belgian’ competition) where she ended 94th out of 100.

Conclusion

How did photographers visualize the history and legacy of two Great War heroines in Brussels? The specific location of their monuments not only gives meaning to the statues, and vice versa, it also determines the strategies photographers used to depict them in situ. Within photographs of these monuments used for picture postcards a duplication of *lieux de mémoire* takes place, notably a transfer from the fixed monument as a *lieu de mémoire topographique* to the photograph of the monument as a *lieu de mémoire portable*. Once photographed, the memorials, with their specific spatial surroundings and commemoration practices, became portable *lieux de mémoire*; time and space-travelling memories that still speak to us today.

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ENDNOTES

- On the history of the (picture) postcard, see e.g. Berthier, 1904; Claretie, 1907; Derrida, 1980; Goldberg, 2009; Guyonnet, 1947; Holt & Holt, 1971; Kyrou, 1966; Malaurie, 2003; Prochaska, & Mendelson, 2010; Ripert, Frère, & Forestier, 1983; Rosenheim, 2009; Schor, 1992; Staff, 1966; Sterckx, 2006; Van Peteghem, 1992; Vints, 1996; Willoughby & Delifer, 1993.
- The numbered series started before the war. As far as we can tell, the numbers 700 and above are related to the First World War. The prison cells of Petit and Cavell are the only cells in the series. Other related images are the tombs of Cavell and Philippe Baucq at the National Shooting Range (nr. 802), the *Rue Edith Cavell–L'Ecole belge d'infirmières* (nr. 4663), the *Ecole Edith Cavell d'infirmières belges* (nr. 4664) and the Petit monument (nr. 725).
- Rombaux won the Prix Godecharle in 1887 and the Prix de Rome in 1891. He realised memorials in, among others, Brussels, Nijvel, Blankenberge, Verviers, Tienen, and Doornik. After the First World War he helped the architect Govaerts in Leuven with the restoration of statues on the Grote Markt/Grande Place. C. Engelen & Marx, 2002, pp.1344-1349; Bruno Fornari in Van Lennep, 1990, pp.531-532.
- Brussels City Archive. Beaux-Arts: dossiers 306-325. *Inauguration du monument Gabrielle Petit le 21 juillet 1923 (liquidation du subside provincial); Inauguration du monument Gabrielle Petit, le 21 juillet 1923 (mesures d'exécution et divers)*. One text on the pedestal also mentions the public subscription: 'Ce monument a été érigé par subscription nationale à l'initiative de la Ligue des Patriotes'.
- The original inscriptions on the different sides of the pedestal read 'Vive la Belgique! Vive le ... Roi!' and 'À Gabrielle Petit. Fusillée par les Allemands le 1 avril 1916. Et à la mémoire des femmes belges mortes pour la patrie.'
- It concerns works of the sculptors Jacques Marin, Jos Van Hamme, Marquis de Poncilly, Marcel Wolfers, Charles Samuel, Léandre Grandmoulin, Jules Lagae and Louis Mascré. For an account of the event see for example *Le Soir*, November 23, 1918.
- Jacques Marin received the Prix Godecharle in 1895 and made several war memorials for, among others, Manage, Châtelet, Lessen, Rixensart. Engelen & Marx, 2002, 1108; Sophie Orloff in Van Lennep, 1990, 489-490.
- It concerns the red brick, step-gabled building behind the Broodhuis/Maison du Roi. The monument stood in what is now the Peperstraat/rue du Poivre (now closed to the public and under surveillance), alongside the Vlees-en-broodstraat/rue Chair et Pain.
- The original inscription reads: 'à Edith Cavell. Hommage à l'Angleterre'.
- Du Bois (sometimes written Dubois) was, with Egide Rombaux, a pupil of Charles Van der Stappen, and a founding member of the artists' group Les XX (1883). The following year, he received the Prix Godecharle. He is also the author of several monuments, among others in Brussels, Liège, Doornik, Mons and Huy, and of many medals. Aubry & Van Loo, 1996; C. Engelen & Marx, 2002, pp.624-629; Judith Ogonovsky in Van Lennep, 1990, pp.375-377.
- 'À Edith Cavell. À Marie Depage. 1915. Passant, dis-le à tes enfants: ils les ont tués.' Usually an old bearded man with wings represents Time, often with an hourglass and/or a scythe as attributes.

- The sculptor's choice to deviate from this iconographical tradition by representing a rather young and muscular man might allude to the many young men whose lives were cut short during wartime.
12. In fact, the whole neighbourhood functioned as a realm of memory. In 1926 a statue (by Godfried Devreese) for the then recently deceased Dr. Depage was erected on the nearby place Brugmannplein. Next to the aforementioned rue Edith Cavellstraat and rue Marie Depagestraat, there is the rue Franz Merjaystraat. Franz Merjay (1852–1917), a local rentier, was executed by the Germans in May 1917 for espionage. Several of his nine children were arrested in the Cavell-Baucq case in 1915.
 13. Information given by Chantal Kesteloot at the conference *Local memories in a nationalizing and globalizing world (1750 up to the present)*, Universiteit Antwerpen, October 17, 2009.
 14. At the time of the making of this square in 1845, early plans to erect a statue of Andreas Vesalius on the site of the Medieval (since 1195) but then recently destroyed Sint-Jan/Saint Jean hospital, which would have created an intrinsic link between the monument and the site, were rejected by its sculptor, Joseph Geefs (1808–1885). After fierce discussions, the Vesalius statue was finally inaugurated in 1847 on the Brussels' place du Barricadenplein.
 15. Several newspapers and illustrated journals published an account of the inauguration. See for example N.N., 1923.
 16. Postcard collecting became a real vogue around 1900. While collecting in general was more or less considered a male activity, postcard collecting was considered a suitable accomplishment or mania for women. This research also made great use of postcard archives, such as the large collection of Dexia Bank (Brussels) and the private collections of both authors.
 17. 'Souvenir de guerre. Bruxelles 1918' and 'Selon ton désir, je t'envoie un petit souvenir de Miss Edith Cavell.' Postcard from Anna [Delatte] to [her sister] Mlle Renelde Delatte, sent from Brussels, April 29, 1919, private collection.
 18. "Si à Paris il y a de jolies femmes, en Belgique, il y a des femmes courageuses. Vive Gabrielle Petit!" (with 'jolies femmes' underlined by the sender of the postcard). Postcard from an unknown woman to Monsieur Jules Gasthuys (Paris) sent from Brussels, May 1920, private collection.
 19. When writing about ephemeral sculptural objects and installations, Johnson (1999, pp.1-6) mainly talks about the sculptural arrangements at the universal exhibitions or later earthworks.
 20. See e.g. Baetens, 2002; Biagi, 2005; Billeter & Brockhaus, 1997; de Font-Réaulx & Bolloch, 2006; Droth, 2005; Gautherin, 2000; Johnson, 1995, 1999; Marcoci, Mason, Pinet & Wölfflin, 1985; Pinet, 2007; Powell, 2006; Schneider, 2009; Batchen & Bezzola, 2010.
 21. Geraldine Johnson (Johnson, 1999, pp.1, 6) mentions in situ photographs of public sculpture, but does not go into the subject. For an introduction to the topic see Sterckx, 2004, 2006.
 22. On this subject see Bergstein, 1995; Wood & Curtis, 2002.
 23. A 1934 manual for the amateur photographer mentions the difficulty of capturing monuments: 'L'éclairage, la position de l'appareil devront être choisis avec soin et ici, moins qu'ailleurs, il faudra compter sur le hasard pour obtenir la perfection. [...] Lorsqu'on photographie un monument [...], il se présente pour l'amateur une certaine difficulté.' Natkin, 1934, p.58.
 24. See Sterckx, 2006. The author is currently preparing an article on this subject.
 25. The cards in landscape format take the Séverin pharmacy at Petit's right instead of on her left and the rue Duquesnoystraat stretching out behind her.
 26. Again according to Natkin (1934, 24-25), lighting from the side was best: 'Soleil de côté! Eclairage idéal', as opposed to sunlight in front on the camera ('Contre jour! Dangereux pour les débutants') or sunlight behind the camera ('Image plate').
 27. The above-mentioned 1934 photography manual recommends as follows: 'les scènes de rues, les scènes de genre constituent des sujets originaux et personnels d'une popularité sans cesse croissante. Que de scènes amusantes et dignes d'intérêt nous offre, en effet, la vie quotidienne d'une ville animée!' Natkin, 1934, p.68.
 28. The original inscription reads: 'Passant, dis-le à tes enfants: ils les ont tués.' On the Gabrielle Petit monument she addresses herself to the passer-by as if she was still alive: 'Je viens d'être condamnée à mort. Je serai fusillée demain matin [...] Et je leur montrerai comment une femme belge sait mourir.'
 29. The Cavell-Depage monument in Ukkel/Uccle is an exception. In none of the picture postcards of this monument are flowers or other commemorative objects present.