A BROKEN COVENANT

The creation and desecration of Sheffield's living memorials

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The Battleground

In December 2017 Sheffield's Councillors voted on a motion to address the fate of 41 street trees that had been planted during and after World War One on streets in Sheffield, and decided that a £500,000 pound price tag to retain them was too great.[1] In doing so, the councillors' decision created one of the street tree debate's most iconic battlegrounds with Western Road – which faced the loss of 23 of 54 remaining trees – becoming the focal point of one of the most emotive clashes of the protest. The trees encapsulated many of the tensions that had been brought to the fore by the crisis, not least that the money that it would take to work around them would be taken from the city's already stretched social care budget.[2] Emotions ran high, with parades and vigils, and language reflected the strength of feeling with one local paper imploring the council to rethink plans to cut down trees that had been planted to remember 'victims' of the war.[3] It appeared that a covenant between the local authority and the people had been broken – one that had been forged through the sacrifices made in the war and which had become the council's responsibility to uphold: the maintenance of Sheffield's living memorials to the soldiers lost in the conflict.

In an attempt to challenge this decision, men – some serving in the forces, and all dressed in period uniforms – had marched from Sheffield's train station to the council building in March that year, and on to the threatened trees. The council had hoped that a conciliatory proposal to plant 300 trees in the city's parks as new memorials to the war would create 'permanent' places of commemoration, rather than the problematic street tree stock.[4] However, the public consultation organised by the local authority was not enough to satisfy residents that all possible alternatives were being considered, and the feeling was that the council was wilfully desecrating a war memorial. The War Memorials Trust issued a statement encouraging the preservation of as many of the original trees as possible, the replacement – if necessary – with trees of a similar age, size and species, and the involvement of the community in any decisions about the trees.[5] Local residents also started a crowdfunding campaign to conserve and restore the trees – potentially back to the 97 originally planted on Western Road – with the broader aim of bringing people together and transcending the street tree furore through a community-led programme for enhancing and increasing the city's street trees.[6]

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The tone of the debate continued to escalate, with one campaigner suggesting that the contractor would have the blood of the war dead on their hands, and a relative of one of the soldiers suggesting that her great-uncle, having given up his life for the country, deserved better.[7] The fate of the Western Road trees brought people together in a way that differed from the attempts otherwise made to polarise the issue, and the crisis cut across otherwise entrenched political and social groups. The trees were recognised as icons for the local community, and despite differing levels of engagement with the campaign, the fate of the Western Road trees represented a common cause which transcended the political nature of the crisis.

November 2018 saw a reprieve being granted for 32 of the 35 trees on Western Road and the cabinet member responsible stated that that the cessation would still be accompanied by the planting of 300 extra memorial trees. Furthermore, a consultation was to begin on the possibility of replacing trees that had been lost in the intervening decades.[8] The mooted consultation on replacing trees, as well as the continued commitment to plant new memorial trees, meant that both the century-old trees, as well as new avenues and single tree plantings, were part of the council's programme as the local authority to both commemorate World War One, as well as all subsequent conflicts, and to develop mechanisms of perpetuation so as to ensure their future. One aspect of the council's plans was to protect the new trees by dedicating the sites as Centenary Fields in Trust, securing them as recreational spaces to honour the memory of the lives lost in the war, despite the rather confusing assertion that the new tree plantings would also serve as memorials to the Normandy Landings in anticipation of the 75th anniversary in 2019.[9]

The debate over Sheffield's memorial street trees contributed to a political crisis in the city, garnering some of the worst press coverage for the beleaguered local authority, as well as reinforcing the identification of the trees as living war memorials.[10] However, a closer look at the War Memorials Trust's letter in support of retaining the trees states that memorials in general present many repair and conservation challenges, without adding the extra caveat that memorials created using trees and other plants also bring maintenance and replacement issues quite different to those involved in perpetuating something made in stone, brick or glass.[11] Therefore the argument in this chapter is that the care and perpetuation of Sheffield's 'living memorials' became a divisive issue of desecration and destruction by the local authority, rather than a democratic debate about how best to perpetuate the memory and appreciation of the sacrifices made during World War One through care for the environment. This tension, as will be demonstrated, was present from the beginning, and the idea of living memorials was never anything other than a political issue (Figure 8.1).

Sheffield, along with many other northern industrial towns, had suffered disproportionate losses during the war, with the battle of the Somme encapsulated as a loss of life 'Two years in the making. Ten minutes in the destroying' as many of the young men who had volunteered in 1914 walked into machine gunfire near the town of Serre.[12] The story of the Sheffield Pals battalions makes the felling of trees planted in their memory all the more challenging, however, it has not yet been framed within the debate that took place at the time about how the city as a social and political entity could recognise their sacrifice, how that affected the environment in Sheffield, and what aspirations such memorials represented as a rapprochement between the city's industrial identity and its populace.

Rather than test the merits of either side in the most recent debate about Sheffield's street trees, the issue of commemoration during and after the war is explored through an examination of what was discussed and intended at the time, and poses the question, does the term 'living memorial' mean the same thing to contemporary audiences as it did at the time? And, if a more nuanced understanding of a living memorial is reached, how might that affect the way in

FIGURE 8.1 The trees on Western Road, Crooksmoor, Sheffield, became a focus of the conflict over the fate of many of the city's street trees when threatened with felling. What appears at first glance to be a rather ordinary tree-lined street, was in fact a kind of living memorial, planted to remember the sacrifice of the pupils of the Western Road Council School during the war. *Source*: Jan Woudstra, 2018.

which we manage and restore commemorative tree plantings in the future? Drawing upon the literature of commemoration and memorialisation, the local history of the 12th Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, and archival material drawn from newspapers and public records, this chapter proposes that the covenant between the city and its people, although damaged, could be remade through a new understanding of the sacrifices made, and the intention with which the original tree plantings took place.

Intention and representation

Underlying the debate about the fate of the Western Road trees was not just that they had been planted in the spirit of commemoration, but also that they were almost a proxy for the graves which families had been denied by the unprecedented circumstances of the war. Yet memorials to soldiers prior to World War One are uncommon and most of the men who died on battlefields were left without any mark at all, buried in haste to stop the spread of disease. The war was fought on an unprecedented scale, and the complexities of identifying, burying, and memorialising the dead resulted in a new language of commemoration and memorialisation both at home and on the battlefields.[13] The issue was political from the start, with the decision made in March 1915 to not repatriate the bodies of any British Imperial troops to anywhere in the Empire. Although it might have been possible for wealthy families to undertake such a task,

it was beyond the means of most. The shock to the morale of communities from which the predominantly northern and traditionally un-military Pals battalions were drawn, like Sheffield, were anticipated as being the hardest hit.[14]

Along with all the human lives lost, the impact upon the landscapes of the Western Front became part of the war's haunting iconography: the shattered trunks of trees, the despoliation of the earth, all heightened in the eerie paintings of the war artists in which nature was another casualty and which has unavoidably informed our understanding of the conflict. Trees played an emotive part in Britain's reimagining of the post-war landscape, with the proposition of one officer for a Via Sacra along the Western Front indicating the way in which a future pilgrimage could be ameliorated by fruit and shade.[15] After the war, momentum gathered behind projects like Roads for Remembrance, which aspired to hold universal benefits and have permanence, 'something that will last for all time.'[16]

However, the investment in infrastructure proposed by the Roads for Remembrance committee was much more focussed upon bridges and road surfaces than upon creating memorial avenues as a form of commemoration (Figure 8.2). Trees as memorials represent a temporal challenge, often not developing into the groves that were intended, or presenting management challenges as planting schemes evolve.[17]

The potentially truculent behaviour of the living elements of war memorials outlined below adds weight to the difficult decisions that contemporary custodians of memorial landscapes must address. The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire sets out some important

FIGURE 8.2 In Weston Park, Sheffield, sits the York and Lancaster Regiment War Memorial and the Boer War Memorial. They were erected in 1923, two years before the Barker's Pool memorial. The main memorial is framed by trees, including an oak planted by the West Riding Field Ambulance Old Comrades Association in memory of their fallen comrades from the 1914–1918 war. *Source*: Camilla Allen, 2021.

caveats about the movement of plaques and the dedication, and *rededication*, of trees, stating that although

> moving plaques is far from ideal, [but] we hope you understand that the future development of the Arboretum would be impossible otherwise. We take our roles as guardians of remembrance seriously and believe that these changes are important for the overall good of the site.[18]

Yet none of these issues are new. Commemorative tree planting was an issue in 1922 when the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University reported that although the use of trees as memorials was popular to remember soldiers who had lost their lives, they presented a range of problems from species selection, which resulted in either incongruous mixes of natives and exotics, an ignorance of any existing planting plan, or little thought to the shorter life span of the tree, with the emphasis that any memorial tree should be selected so as to have the longest life span possible.[19]

Such an intention demonstrates the clear fallibility of living memorials as opposed to the more enduring nature of monuments carved out of stone, not least that their creators wanted to be outlived by the memorials. Furthermore, as opposed to the celebration of victory which had typified many types of the monument before World War One, the scale of the impact across the nations involved necessitated different memorials. Communities became responsible for memorialisation, with either static 'symbolic' memorials such as crosses, obelisks, figures or stained-glass windows, or more functional civic structures such as libraries, halls, hospitals, parks and allotments.[20] All of the latter were considered 'living memorials,' and the choices as to the symbolism or utility of these memorials were descriptive of deep divisions of class, politics and culture, coupled with divided opinions about the war.[21] Over time, the symbolic memorials have remained visible as foci of annual commemoration, whereas memorial landscapes face unique threats, and require different modes of protection and recognition.[22] The term 'living memorial' proved to be even more elastic, sometimes interchangeable with peace memorials, with the hope that 'the more tranquil remobilisation of nature would facilitate health and happiness for all.'[23]

The form that memorials took had to tread a delicate balance between resistance and glorification of the sacrifice of war, whilst also comforting the bereaved and reassuring them that there was meaning in their loss (Figure 8.3). During and after the war, memorialisation upon and near the battlefields focussed upon the individual, finding equality between aristocratic officers and working-class soldiers through a rigorous recording and identification of every life lost.[24] Historians' interest in this language of memorialisation has in turn eclipsed the public discourse about what happened to soldiers' dead bodies, instead focussing upon the memorial practices and architectonic features of cemeteries.[25] Furthermore, over the intervening years, much of the complexity and tension that accompanied the creation of cemeteries and memorials has been obscured by the dominant forms that commemoration has taken. Paul Gough notes that memorials have become bound up with an idealised form of reverence in a way that 'obscures' their alternative role as foci for protest, political agitation and dissent.[26]

The politics of Sheffield's Great War

The key to the campaign to save the Western Road trees, and the other war memorial trees, was that they had been planted by distinct communities in Sheffield. The trees on Western Road and Gillot Street were dedicated to students from the Western Road Council School and their

FIGURE 8.3 The dedication stone in Herdings Park, Sheffield reads 'Lest We Forget/All the brave men and women of Sheffield who gave their lives and those who hereafter continue to give in pursuit of freedom and peace. WW1 Centenary 2018,' part of the successful efforts of the local authority to create new commemorative avenues in parks across Sheffield. *Source*: Camilla Allen, 2021.

descendants were aghast that the trees that had been planted for them could be cut down. The inscription that marks the trees states that they 'were planted in grateful appreciation of the part taken by former pupils of this school in the Great War, 1914–1919.' The trees on Western Road and Gillot Street were planted on the 4 April 1919, whereas the trees on Tay Street, outside what was then the Crookesmoor School, were planted in March 1917 and the dedication plaque carries the poem 'To the shrine lift your eyes/Let your voices arise/You are up at the top/Crookesmoor.' There is no mention of the Pals Brigade, or the Somme, but the specific loss of life, as well as the wider contribution to the war effort that the students from both schools made, is clear in both.

Sheffield was one of several northern industrial cities that formed their own battalions, part of 'Kitchener's Army' which was first raised by local industrialists, city councils, and concerned citizens and became 'iconic symbols of the wartime volunteering spirit.'[27] These battalions, made up of men from all walks of life, held dual names. Thus, the 12th Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment, was unofficially known as the Sheffield City Battalion, and other Yorkshire and Lancaster formations went by the names of the Bradford Pals, Barnsley Pals, and the Miners' Battalion. What began as a cohesive and socially homogeneous group of volunteers in Sheffield was then diluted by the necessity to reappoint men to different roles in the wartime economy; some men were promoted to officers, others to roles in the munitions factories, whilst others were dismissed as being underage or unfit for active service.[28] The men of the Sheffield City Battalion were a visible sight within the city, training first at the Bramall Lane football club and later at Redmires on the edge of the Peak District, where traces of the training trenches that they dug still remain.[29] The battalion was first sent to Egypt to protect the Suez Canal, but when the tension there deescalated, they were transferred to the Western Front and on 1 July 1916 found themselves near the heavily guarded town of Serre. The assault was a disaster, with

the battalion of over 1,000 men reduced by almost half through death, injury and the disappearance of men whose bodies were never recovered.[30]

Seven years later, the sacrifice and loss of life were remembered at a service in Sheffield Cathedral, described as showing the love that the city had for its own battalion and attended by survivors, relatives, friends and 'representatives from the life of the city.'[31] The service coincided with the unveiling of the York and Lancaster Regiment memorial in Weston Park, as well as one in Serre. The bishop remarked that the anniversary stood firstly for comradeship: that the men had persuaded one another to join, and, rather than coming from military families, 'they were bred in the arts of peace' and despite the service of Sheffield men in other regiments in the British Army, the City Battalion 'represented Sheffield as such.' The grief that the bishop alluded to was countered by another churchman, Canon Spencer Elliott, who at the following service in St. Paul's Church, Sheffield, chided his congregation by saying that he 'wondered sometimes whether they really remembered their loved ones who gave their lives in the war. The remembrance should make them unselfish and less inclined to complain.'[32]

The two clerics' comments present diverging views of those who lost their lives, the city that they came from, and the lives of those left behind. Including the loss of life at Serre, around 5,000 Sheffield citizens died during the war. The conflict affected the form and function of the city, with industry shifting to munitions, women joining the workforce, and the German bombing of factories. At the point at which the 7th anniversary of the Somme took place, Britain was in the grip of depression with high unemployment, deflation and stagnant economic growth. It was within this environment that those who survived found themselves, and it is within the tensions that were felt in the city that the planting of trees between 1917 and 1919 becomes even more interesting, not least, because they appear to be the most discreet and the least contentious of any of the acts of commemoration in the city (Figure 8.4).

The trees

Sheffield's newspapers hold a unique record of the discourse in the city in relation to the tree plantings. The first, in March 1917, was on Tay Street outside Crookesmoor Council School in honour of the old boys of the school who were in the forces.[33] Mr. E. Snelgrove, a former master, had conceived the idea and the trees were to be accompanied by a roll of honour recording the names of all the former pupils who had joined up. Inspired by this planting, a Sheffield councillor, Mr. Kaye, decided to plant the upper part of Oxford Street which then linked the school to the tram route to Walkley. Contributions to the tree planting were made by the schoolchildren who paraded on the streets during the planting ceremony. The council's park staff advised on the choice of trees and supervised the planting. The newspaper reported that at the time 560 names had been secured for the roll of honour, but that it was believed that there were many more and that they welcomed any additions to the list.

Later that year, the momentum behind the memorialisation that would accompany the end of the war became more loaded. Writing in the *Sheffield Telegraph*, one commentator repeated the adage that 'nothing in modern English taste [is] so bad as in our public monuments' and that Sheffield would be well-served to create alongside any artistic monuments, memorial groves in one, or each of the city's parks.[34] These trees would mean that 'innumerable generations of Sheffielders could rest beneath the shade of the 'Somme' oaks and reflect upon this heroic time' and keep the heroes' memory green.[35]

This suggestion was met with support by another reader, Mr W. Greaves, Honorary Secretary of the Midland Reafforesting Association, who likened the proposed tree plantings to those

FIGURE 8.4 The trees on Oxford Street, Sheffield are less clearly legible as a memorial, but constitute one of the first acts of commemoration when they were planted in 1917. Blending into the edge of the Ponderosa park, and dwarfing the terrace housing typical of Sheffield, the scene is at odds with the formal and symbolic memorials in Weston Park and Barker's Pool. *Source*: Camilla Allen, 2021.

undertaken by Queen Victoria. Areas of waste land in the city could be beautified by tree planting, and would also 'purify the atmosphere, and also preserve our water supplies.'[36] Mr. Greaves' aspirations for tree planting also aligned with a common concern at the time, that despite trees being a valuable and important asset of the country, reserves of timber were low compared to other countries.[37] He also put forward the suggestion that to plant trees as a memorial in acrostic form, the first letter of the species and the first letter of the soldier's name should be the same, in a similar manner to Victoria's planting at Eynsford in Kent, in which the trees spelt out the name of a Tennyson poem. Technical difficulties aside, the aspiration was that such plantings would be educational, and would encourage people to 'take a greater interest in one of the greatest friends of man.'[38]

The discussion continued in 1918 with another letter extolling the 'excellent idea' of planting trees, not just in memory of the fallen, but also for the appreciation of the living as well as the dead so that those who returned would 'be able to gaze upon the memorial trees and rejoice at the sight both for themselves and their unreturning comrades.' Furthermore, the point was made that for many of the returning soldiers their heroism would only otherwise be recognised upon their death many years later, missing the opportunity to hold them up as an example to others during their life. The following month, another reader pointed out the opportunities for planting trees in many of Sheffield's gardens. The writer, V.H. Lucas, suggested that

> If there could be a neighbourly amalgamation of sympathy for such a movement in every house of any one street to each plant a similar variety of any of the above, and all the same age and weight, say, six feet, in three years there would be a transformed appearance of charm and arboreal beauty, and they would represent in many homes a living touch of in memoriam.[39]

Arboreal poetry was balanced by practical management in his next letter, in which he relayed his experience as forester and head gardener to the county borough of Barrow in Furness, and which was closed with the assertion that 'all sensible comment is an aid to the attainment of memorial tree planting and a more beautiful Sheffield.'[40] Lucas then followed with an even more passionate call for trees to be planted as, in his opinion, although bronze or stone memorials had their place, trees gave unique consolation and comfort to the parents of fallen soldiers, providing a visible manifestation of growth and development that they had been denied by the war, 'the nearest symbolic likeness or reminder of the loved lost one's babyhood, childhood, boyhood, youth, and manhood.'[41]

Following the Armistice, other schools followed suit and in April 1919 nearly 100 sycamore and plane trees were planted on Western Road and Gillot Street to commemorate the self-sacrifice and service of its former pupils, both living and dead. A total of 401 former pupils were remembered in the service, 64 who had died, and 12 who had been awarded distinctions. The article notes that the trees were intended to beautify the district, and the inscription states that they were planted in appreciation of the contribution to the war made by the students. A memorial tablet for those who lost their lives was to be created and would be placed in the hall of the school. The tree-planting ceremony was preceded by an address to the school by the Rev.

FIGURE 8.5 One of the trees on Oxford Street, Sheffield, rededicated a century after being planted with a laminated sign reading 'Planted in 1917/In memory of 77 Crookesmoor Boys fallen World War One/Commemorated in 2017 for those lost in Any War.' Trees on Oxford Street and Tay Street were also dedicated to specific 'Crookmoor Boys' who had died in the Somme. *Source*: Camilla Allen, 2021.

V.W. Pearson, who reminded the scholars that those who had died in the Somme were among the brightest and best of Sheffield's young men, and that it remained for the children to make Sheffield a place worth saving, and that the trees 'would beautify streets and beautify lives.'[42]

Sheffield's living memorials

The debate during the war had elevated trees to the medium of a memorial, as well as the street tree plantings demonstrating an achievable commemorative activity in which the community could participate (Figure 8.5). As well as the trees around the Crookesmoor and Western Road Council Schools, some were planted on Binfield Road in Meersbrook, 'at the joint cost of certain persons and the Highway Committee.' The council's Highway and Schools Committees record the administrative processes that supported the tree plantings, with the local authority providing trees and doing the planting, sharing some of the costs, and fixing tree guards.[43] Meanwhile, a more intimate scheme took place near the Crookes Congregational Church, who dedicated seven trees to the young men from their congregation who had fallen during the war, with six trees planted on Springvale Road and one on Cobden View Road at the cost of 50 shillings (two pounds and ten shillings).[44] Alongside the trees, the church committee also commissioned a memorial at a cost of £20 as well as a stone to be carved and placed near the vestry door which was carved at a cost of £4 and ten shillings.[45]

Many other communities and congregations in Sheffield created memorials for their loved ones, and it is possible that many more trees were planted to commemorate the war. Records of such schemes are few and are totally outweighed by the volumes of minutes and correspondence relating to the creation of symbolic memorials such as crosses and obelisks. A letter to the *Sheffield Telegraph* in April 1919 took to task the planned extension of Sheffield's Cathedral as a memorial, with one point asking whether specific elements were to be recorded: a list of men who had died, those who had won honours, the battles fought by the Sheffield battalions, and lastly the story of the city's contribution to the war, 'more remarkable and important than that of any other industrial community the world.'[46] Later that year, the arrival of a tank which had been awarded to the city as a 'permanent memorial' to the city's financial efforts for the war was trailed by the newspaper.[47] The tank, weighing around 26 tonnes, needed a permanent resting place that had 'all the advantages of strength allied with easy public access.'[48] When the nearby town of Chesterfield's tank arrived, the ceremony of presentation set out people's dislike of armoured vehicles as memorials. In the captain's speech it was suggested that although they were seen as unæsthetic, there had never been a pretence to the contrary. Tanks were instruments of death and destruction, and that made them appropriate as a memorial to a 'phenomenally deadly and destructive war… its very grimness [made] it a particularly apt and instructive souvenir.'

The strength of feeling in the captain's address exemplified the tensions that emerged with the creation of more complex and expensive memorials. In Sheffield, the design and cost of a memorial in the city centre was the subject of fierce debate, with one commentator decrying the ambivalence to survivors when all the focus was on honouring the heroic dead (Figure 8.6).[49] The writer, an almoner for the Regimental Homes of the Sherwood Foresters, suggested that the money raised for memorials be put towards more fitting and 'doubly blessed' memorials for both the comrades who had been lost and those who needed care.[50] Another idea, seeing that the war was fought for an ideal, was that any memorial should be idealistic and not utilitarian, that the dead would be honoured by caring for the living.[51] The proposal was that Ecclesall Wood could be acquired and dedicated in perpetuity to the people, and that within the woodland a clearing could be made as a setting of monuments erected by the Sheffield units and the design left to the discretion of the soldiers and their friends.[52]

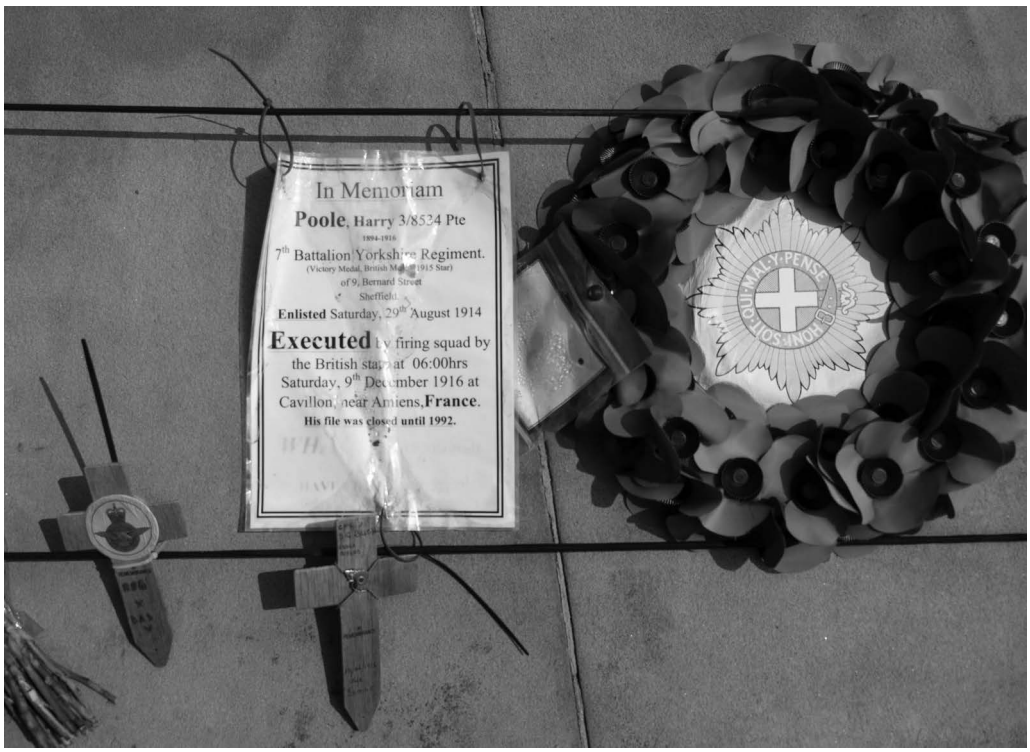

FIGURE 8.6 Politics and memorials are interwoven, as this addition to the Sheffield War Memorial in Barker's Pool testifies: a family commemorating the loss of one of their relatives, executed during the war. This alternative dedication is reflective of Paul Gough's observation that formal and symbolic memorials can obscure their role as alternative foci for dissent and disagreement with conflict. *Source*: Camilla Allen, 2021.

It is necessary to read between the lines, and despite the increasingly rambling suggestions that the wood could also be modified to create a lake, tea pagoda and a zoo of 'hardy animals,' the letter also hints at the heartache of parents such as the author of the letter who wanted something worthy of their sons' sacrifice. In this, it does not address the sacrifices made across the city, but the particular loss of life in the armed forces, and something that would be an 'imperishable shrine for ages to come' for the people of Sheffield. Yet even this elaborate park-as-shrine distracted, in some people's minds, from the real memorials of war. Writing in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* in 1919, one resident communicated in a short but succinct manner, the social contract that had been broken:

> Sir, – With so many living war memorials round about us, would it not be the most fitting to devote what funds we can towards helping the widows and orphans of those who have made the supreme sacrifice, and especially our poor blinded heroes, and the crippled and maimed. Surely these are our living war memorials, and surely they are worthy of the very best that lies our power do for them, not a charity, but as a duty for the great sacrifices on our behalf. Let the stained-glass windows, and crosses, obelisks, etc., wait at least for a while.[53]

This covenant, that sacrifice would be rewarded with care, was a political issue. Widows' pensions, jobs for disabled ex-servicemen, housing, education, even afforestation, were issues that affected people's lives, and which were shaped by the national government and local authorities

in the years after the war, with varying levels of success. In such a context, the planting of street trees in Sheffield represented a subtle and affordable form of commemoration for some institutions and individuals, the real scale of which we may never know. It appears that the trees were 'living memorials' in the sense that they contributed to the city environmentally, emotionally, and aesthetically. A much smaller number were planted as direct memorials to fallen soldiers, in which a single tree represented a single soldier. The term 'living memorial' held weight as a means of expediting buildings and facilities for communities, yet which often became mired in conflict as to whom those buildings and facilities excluded, and the suggestion that there could be a better use of the funds. The suggestion that Sheffield's living memorials were neither, and were in fact the people widowed, orphaned, or maimed by the war, makes an uneasy parallel with the difficult decision that the council felt that they had to make 100 years later: find the money for an expensive restoration of the trees or protect the social care budget.

For decades after the trees were planted on Western Road, and presumably, on all the other sites around Sheffield where memorials had been created, annual ceremonies took place to remember the privations, sacrifice, and loss of the war. However, it appears that over the years the services dwindled and the trees' significance as foci of remembrance diminished. This mellowing of grief might suggest that the intention in planting the trees, and the comfort that they gave the bereaved, also dissipated over time. Over the intervening decades, the realities of life and death in the sylvan world took their toll. By the time the furore of the Western Road trees had reached its height, just over half of the original avenue remained; trees whose end was not contested, probably falling foul of disease, vehicles or development. This is not to lessen the remaining trees' significance, yet it does indicate that the spirit in which they were planted represented an aspiration of the covenant between the city of Sheffield and its citizens has also been lost. When the local authority took on the maintenance of the trees, they also took on the maintenance of the memory of sacrifice and loss. The trees themselves are not a manifestation of that covenant, but they represent the aspiration that the city would be worthy of the sacrifice and service during the war, and that is something to carry forward in the political discourse in Sheffield today.

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