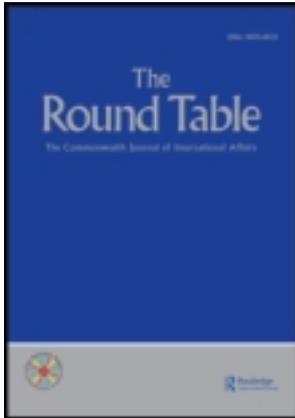


This article was downloaded by: [RMIT University]

On: 19 February 2014, At: 18:15

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctr20>

'Contested memories: Contested site': Newfoundland and its unique heritage on the Western Front

Paul Gough^a

^a University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

Published online: 22 Oct 2007.

To cite this article: Paul Gough (2007) 'Contested memories: Contested site': Newfoundland and its unique heritage on the Western Front, *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 96:393, 693-705, DOI: [10.1080/00358530701634275](https://doi.org/10.1080/00358530701634275)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00358530701634275>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

‘Contested Memories: Contested Site’: Newfoundland and its Unique Heritage on the Western Front

PAUL GOUGH

University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

ABSTRACT *The Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial is a 16.5 hectare (40 acre) tract of preserved battleground dedicated primarily to the memory of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment, who suffered an extremely high percentage of casualties during the first day of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. Beaumont Hamel Memorial is a complex landscape of commemoration where Newfoundland, Canadian, Scottish and British imperial associations compete for prominence. A previous paper argued that those who chose the site of the Park, and subsequently reordered its topography, helped to contrive a particular historical narrative that prioritized certain memories over others (Gough, 2004). This argument focused on the premeditated redesign of the ‘park’ after the Great War, and then again in the early 1960s. Since the publication of the paper the soaring popularity of battlefield tours and visits has placed an intolerable strain on the very land that many regard as sacred and hallowed. A land that took decades to recover and reclaim from violation is now being threatened again both by developers and by crowds of tourists. As a result, measures have been taken to restrict access and control roaming rights. This paper will revisit the original arguments and examine the many tensions that have arisen in one of the most popular destinations on the old battle front. Reflecting on the recent dispute, the paper will explore issues of historical accuracy, topographical legibility, freedom of access, and assumed ownership. It will also try to understand the recent disputes as examples of borrowed ‘entitlement’ and a resistance (by some British visitors) to recognizing the historic value of Canadian (or more specifically, Newfoundland) heritage.*

KEY WORDS: Beaumont Hamel Memorial, Newfoundland, Canada, battlefields, sites of memory, landscape

Parkland

Within months of the Armistice, as the native population returned to the *régions dévastées*, individuals and groups from as far afield as Australia, New Zealand and Canada set out on pilgrimages to see for themselves the sites of memory in France, Belgium and Turkey. The places which drew them were largely imaginary ones: after all, it was not the sites which attracted travellers, but their associations (Lloyd,

Correspondence Address: Paul Gough, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. Email: paul.gough@uwe.ac.uk

1998). Even before the various peace treaties had been signed in 1919 some 60 000 visitors had roamed the battlefields. Individuals who did not wish to hire the services of a professional guide or undergo the vicissitudes of the region's damaged infrastructure could join organized pilgrimages. These varied in scale from the 30 veterans from the Canadian Maritimes who visited in 1927, to the 15 000 Americans who took part in the great American Legion pilgrimage that same year. Unveiling events often attracted vast crowds; most notably the 6000 Canadians who joined the Vimy Pilgrimage in 1936 to witness the unveiling of Walter Allward's immense memorial on Hill 145 on the crest of Vimy Ridge (Vance, 1997, p. 57).

As reconstruction proceeded, often at a rapid pace, governments from across the British Empire, along with remembrance groups, veterans and bereaved families, sought to obtain small tracts of land to situate permanent memorials and create protected spaces (Clout, 1996). Dominion countries and colonies were especially concerned to secure tracts of land. The South African government purchased the site of Delville Wood on the Somme; Australian ex-servicemen's organizations (chiefly the Returned Servicemen's League) began to return to Gallipoli in Turkey. But probably the largest single scheme of land purchase was instigated by the Canadian government. It acquired sufficient land for eight memorial sites (three in Belgium, five in France) of which the largest is the 250 acres on Vimy Ridge. Such acquisitions presented formidable difficulties: property bournes had to be negotiated, infrastructure had to be instituted; entire villages, woodlands and roads had often been completely obliterated by the fighting. The task of relocating the boundaries and establishing the exact position of sites and roads required prolonged and careful instrumental surveys. There were delays while attempts were made to locate the original owners or their heirs, and long legal processes were often necessary. Although frustrating, little of this seems to have deterred civil servants from distant bureaucracies. Indeed, the Government of Newfoundland purchased no fewer than five sites, each associated with fierce engagements fought by the Newfoundland Regiment.

The largest of these was at Beaumont Hamel on the Somme. Purchasing the 16.5 hectare (40 acre) tract of land required prolonged negotiation with nearly 250 landowners, and was not concluded until 1921. These arrangements, and the extended task of developing each site and planning for appropriate monuments, was delegated by the government to the Director of Graves Registration and Enquiry, Colonel Thomas F. Nangle, a former wartime padre of the Regiment and Newfoundland's representative on the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC).

The battle for Beaumont Hamel on 1 July 1916 may need little introduction. It was at this point on the 11-mile battlefield that the great mine of Hawthorn Crater was exploded at 7.20 am and here too the dreadful moment when the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment—some 801 officers and men led by Colonel Hadow—were erroneously ordered to attack over open ground into a killing zone that was swept by well positioned German machine guns, some more than a mile away. By this time in the first hours of the five-month long offensive the Newfoundlanders were possibly the only attacking troops visible above ground on that sector. Because their communication trenches were blocked by the dead and the wounded, the battalion had to climb onto the open ground under fire and advance without cover some 250 yards before they even reached their own front-line. They had to cross no-man's-land down a slope where, for the first time, some may have glimpsed the German wire over 550 metres

away. Forty minutes after they broke cover the Newfoundlander's action was over; as one of the few survivors later noted "there were blokes lying everywhere" (Cave, 1994, p. 70). At roll call only 68 of the unit were unwounded; casualties had been over 90%, not the grimmest statistic of the Great War but among the worst and made more horrible by the high percentage of loss for the small population of Newfoundland. To put this into context: from 1917 Newfoundland, a self-governing colony, provided over 6000 men for the infantry, manpower for the Royal Navy, as well as considerable expertise and manpower for the Forestry Corps based in Scotland—in all, a considerable contribution from a total population of only 250 000 (Cave, 1994, p. 57).

This tract of land was fought over again during the war (and again during the Second World War), most notably in November 1916 when the 51st Highland Division gained much of the enemy lines that had so easily repulsed the Newfoundlanders. It is, however, the 'first of July' narrative that dominates the preferred readings of the topography. Once cleared of dangerous materials and debris it was reshaped by Rudolf Hogo Karel Cochius, a Dutch-born landscape architect and resident of St Johns, Newfoundland. Working with Nangle, he designed the landscape so that it centred on a raised stone cairn surmounted by a huge bronze caribou (sculpted by Basil Gotto) from where the devastated landscape of trench lines and craters can be viewed. Some 35 000 seedlings, plants and small trees were imported from Holland, Scotland and Newfoundland and the caribou was surrounded with species indigenous to eastern Canada—white spruce, birch, dog-berry and juniper. Inside the perimeter of the memorial space are several IWGC cemeteries. Contemporary photographs show their pristine gravestones flanked by plantings and saplings, while behind lies the barren and pock-marked Somme plain (Hurst, 1929, p. 265). Adding to the sense of drama is a petrified stump of a tree that had acted as a gathering point for soldiers seeking the illusion of shelter during the attack on 1 July 1916. Long since perished, it has been preserved (with the help of a sunken barrel of cement) and stands sentinel half-way across the old no-man's-land. Known as 'the Danger Tree' it has become one of the key memorial emblems along the entire stretch of the Western Front, eulogized and celebrated as an icon of remembrance. The memorial park was formally opened by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, former Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, in July 1925. Upon Newfoundland's entry into Confederation in 1949 it was recognized as a Canadian National Historic Site and is now administered by the Canadian government's Department of Veteran Affairs.

Significant Tourists

Dick turned the corner of the traverse and continued along the trench walking on the duckboard. He came to a periscope, looked through it a moment, then he got up on the step and peered over the parapet. In front of him beneath a dingy sky was Beaumont-Hamel; to his left the tragic hill of Thiepval. Dick stared at them through his field glasses, his throat straining with sadness.

He went on along the trench, and found the others waiting for him in the next traverse... "This land here cost twenty lives a foot that summer," he said to

Rosemary. She looked out obediently at the rather bare green plain with its low trees of six years growth...“See that little stream—we could walk to it in two minutes. It took the British a month to walk to it—a whole empire walking very slowly, dying in front and pushing forward behind. And another empire walked very slowly backward a few inches a day, leaving the dead like a million bloody rugs. No Europeans will ever do that again in this generation.”...They came out of the neat restored trench, and faced a memorial to the Newfoundland dead. Reading the inscription Rosemary burst into sudden tears (Fitzgerald, 1934, p. 66)

Why is it considered so important to preserve battlefields? If landscape is “memory’s most serviceable reminder” (Lowenthal, 1979, p. 110) they can be regarded as key sites in a continuous educational process, places where successive generations “revise or expand their cultural memory through interaction with the artifacts and landscapes of its past” (Rainey, 1983, p. 76). Battlefield sites are not a single, sealed terrain isolated in a given moment of time, they are multi-vocal ‘landscapes of accretion’ stratified by overlapping layers of social, economic and occasionally political history; furthermore, they are invariably politicized, dynamic and open to constant negotiation (Bender, 1983; Saunders, 2001, p. 37). As such they pose particular problems for those who wish to preserve them. Lowenthal suggests that traces of antiquity can be so faint that “only contrivance secures their recognition”. In the absence of signposts, he asks, “how many visitors to an old battlefield could tell that it *was* an historical site?” (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 265). To which we might add, with regard to Beaumont Hamel, how exactly might a segment of battlefield be preserved and rendered distinctive given the ravages enacted on that desolated landscape?

Visitors play a key part in the evolution of these *lieux de mémoire*—these ‘sites of memory’ (Nora, 1984–92; Winter, 1995). Musing on the visitor’s role in constructing and perpetuating memory within significant landscapes, Harbison—strolling purposefully across the archetypal preserved battleground of Gettysburg—considered that “serious tourists” help monumentalize the landscapes they pass through, “classicising them by concentrating on certain nodes of significance which acquire ceremonial eminence” whatever their outward condition (Harbison, 1991, p. 38) The ‘serious’ tourist, he argues, has a part that is essentially reconstructive in that it brings value to a specific place, nurtures communities of interest, and often leads to such highly choreographed events as re-enactments, pilgrimage and mass anniversary. In these heightened ritual moments the sites are “not merely the material backdrop from which a story is told, but... constitute the meaning by becoming both a physical location and a sight-line of interpretation” (Johnson, 1999, p. 254).

Of course, we must be mindful as to who is interpreting, and to what end. In the early 1960s the Beaumont Hamel site was modified: much of the spruce planting around the cairn was cut back because it obliterated both the caribou and the view. A small superintendent’s lodge was built on the site and a memorial plaque unveiled. Some landscaping modifications were also undertaken and several 1916 trench lines were re-excavated and rebuilt so as to define their orientation and appearance. This act of reconstruction was intended (as an information leaflet tells us) to “preserve in

its original state the shell-pitted ground between St John's Road and the *Y-Ravine* across which the heroic advance of July 1, 1916 was made". In this task, the Canadian authorities were assisted by a veteran officer who had fought as a platoon commander during the battle (Cave, 1994).

Since then the site has remained extraordinarily popular, especially with British remembrance societies and ex-servicemen's associations for whom it has become a peerless icon of the trench war. Furthermore, during the past decade, it has become an essential 'stop' on the itinerary of tours and educational field trips taken by British school children who are studying the National Curriculum course in History. As a result, its very popularity is now deemed to be a threat to its ecological future. In 2000 the Department of Veteran Affairs Canada undertook research which showed that in a single year one million visits were being made to Vimy Ridge, while 250 000 people visit the far smaller site at Beaumont Hamel. The same organization hosted the first international gathering of battlefield conservation experts, bringing together archaeologists, conservation architects, ground penetrating radar consultants, military historians and landscape architects, along with the custodians of the many memorial sites in northern Europe. The Vimy Charter (which resulted from this symposium) recognized the impact on the historic terrain in northern France and recommended immediate action to safeguard the sites. It was agreed that no further damage should be caused; any conservation actions should be reversible; and "no more should be done to increase the loss of legibility of the site permanently" (Vimy Charter, 2000).

Consequently, in what proved to be a controversial act, visitors were discouraged from wandering uninhibited across the battlefield; instead they were encouraged to stay within demarcated areas. Semi-permanent footpaths were introduced on certain tracts of the ground so as to minimize erosion, and (at Beaumont-Hamel) an enhanced visitor and interpretation centre was created. Less controversially (although more profound in the long-term reconceptualization of the site), it was decided that the term 'Park' would be dropped in favour of 'memorial'. This was done to ensure that the former battlefield was regarded as a 'reverential' space as distinct from a place of recreation or historical re-enactment. Under the direction of the custodian of the site, the induction and training of battlefield guides—usually Canadian students on short-term internships (often the same age as those Great War soldiers who fought across the same ground)—was refreshed, drawing upon expert advice from battlefield archaeologists and historians. An interpretation centre, designed in the architectural vernacular of Newfoundland, was erected near the entrance to the site and the car park extended to cope with the multitudes who visit.

Once a number of these changes had been made, the impact on visiting remembrance groups, schoolteachers and battlefield tourists from the UK was rather considerable. By tracking the letters pages of such popular magazines as *Stand to!* *The Journal of the Western Front Association* and through follow up interviews and correspondence with the authors of some of the letters, I was able to gather a sense of their frustration at the changes being wrought on a once-familiar landscape. One correspondent described the expectation of the site in these terms:

One of the central features of our visit to the Somme is to spend at least an hour at Newfoundland Park and conduct in-depth fieldwork in this portion of the

battlefield. Regular visitors to this invaluable preserved site will be familiar with its features and the benefits it affords anyone studying trench warfare. The events of 1st July 1916 can be followed by standing in the British front-line, looking towards the German trenches and then going ‘over the top’, timing how long the walk across no man’s land takes. The view from the German front-line to the British trenches (both front-line and reserve) brings home why the first day of the Somme was so costly for the British and Newfoundland troops who fought there. (Nicholas, 2000, p. 40)

Expectations, however, seemed to be compromised by minor factual errors. A number of correspondents were critical of the historic signage on the site, which was in some places plainly ‘inaccurate’, in other places ‘misleading’ (Hughes, 2002). For example, the main trench line was marked as *St John’s Road* (named, one imagines, after the capital of Newfoundland). However, during the war this was actually the name given to the metalled road between the two villages behind the lines. Another trench half-way across the old no-man’s-land (complained one letter-writer) was not labelled at all, largely because it was created during a later battle and therefore has no part in the Newfoundlander’s ‘First of July’ narrative (Ayley, 2001). As another correspondent wrote, the site was “replete with errors and misunderstandings—it is plainly inauthentic” (Hayhurst, 2001). Some regular visitors described their frustration in not being able to roam at will across the site, even feeling ‘cheated’ of the experience. As an outcome of further interviews carried out on the site in 2004 and again in 2006, one group, leaving the Memorial (in April 2006) told how they had started travelling to the Verdun Salient to regain the authentic sense of a sacred site of memory. Beaumont Hamel, said a member of another group, was now too ‘organized’.

‘Authenticity’ is, of course, a term hedged by contingencies. Selective reconstruction in 1922 and 1960 reinscribed the Beaumont Hamel Memorial terrain with a particular interpretation of history. By focusing exclusively on the Newfoundlander’s story, any parallel exploration—of the German soldiers or of the Scots troops who fought across the same site five months later—has to remain as a sub-plot. In order to underpin the dominant narrative, all the captions, markers and signage have to lend authority to a particular reading of the space. As a consequence, memory is reassigned and controlled. This is not surprising. As Lowenthal observes, “markers celebrating this relic or forbidding access to that one profoundly influence what we make of them” (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 82). In the highly charged yet emptied landscapes of the Somme, every visual indicator and signpost affects how history is re-experienced. As has since been realized by those who have custody of the Beaumont-Hamel Memorial site, battlefield preservation demands compromise and the judicious use of the power of suggestion, an endorsement of Lowenthal’s dictum, “One can only allude to the original conditions, not recreate them”.

The Changing Faces of Commemoration

What are the broader issues that are aroused by these ‘controversies’? And what do they tell us about the changing nature of commemoration and the issues of remembrance in Commonwealth sites of memory?

First, there is the issue of who ‘owns’ the Beaumont-Hamel site. Clearly, a significant minority of visitors contest the notion that it is exclusively a site of Newfoundland memory. In part, this is justified. Beaumont Hamel Memorial contains three Allied cemeteries (Y-Ravine Cemetery, Hawthorn Ridge Cemetery No. 2 and Hunter’s Cemetery) which were established soon after the fighting of July 1916 and passed into the jurisdiction of the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (CWGC). It also has several monuments, including one to the 29th Division, which had English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish regiments as well as the Newfoundlanders. There are memorials to English regiments put in place by their Regimental Associations. It might also be argued that, at the time of their investment, many Canadians, Australians and other constituencies of the Empire considered themselves to be British. To this end all those who are commemorated are remembered as belonging to a greater organization, not one sullied by more recent tribal sentiments and interests (Robinson, 2006). However, as this shared imperial membership has waned, many British—or to be more exact English people—have sought in vain for evidence of a specifically English place on the Somme. Instead they are presented with national emblems of Scottish, Welsh and Irish contribution and loss; there are hundreds of local and regionally sponsored sites of memory, from a Sheffield Memorial Park and an Ulster Tower, to a trench preserved to the memory of the Accrington Pals. Within the wider precinct of the 1916 Somme battleground there are constructions dedicated to the Chinese Labour Corps, monuments to Indian and New Zealand combatants, a South African Museum, memorial plaques to the Australian Expeditionary Force, and Allward’s imposing monument to the Canadian Corps at Vimy. Arguably it was the Ypres Salient that was held to be the epicentre of British emotional attachment to the Western Front, and this was certainly the case up until the Second World War. However, since possibly the 1960s—with its many 50th anniversary events—it is the Somme that has dominated the popular imagination (Cave, 2006).

This burgeoning sense of a British ‘ownership’ of the Somme and its military past has clashed with a crisis in the very idea of Englishness, which has been further complicated by European Union debates about the nation-state and the promotion of regionalism across Europe (Baucom, 1999). As a set of values and guiding principles, the role of Commonwealth has only partly steadied this volatile matter of national identity. The cohesion offered by, for example, the burial of a single Unknown Warrior in London who was deemed to represent the British Empire’s loss has been steadily challenged by the inauguration of Unknown Warriors in Australia (1993), Canada (2000) and New Zealand (2004). Although New Zealand lost 18 166 combatants during the Great War, the remains of a New Zealand soldier were selected not from Gallipoli, as one might have anticipated, but from the Caterpillar Valley Cemetery on the Somme, where the New Zealand Division fought in 1916. It is tempting to exaggerate the ‘crisis’ of identity felt by many English, especially as Britain is invariably understood as ‘Greater England’ within the strands of English popular consciousness. However, although the symbolism adopted by British and Commonwealth countries can be traced back to a taproot of English values and imagery, there is a nagging anxiety—fuelled by energetic debates about devolution and amplified by recurrent

by-election results—that Britain is inexorably sub-dividing. This may, of course, manifest itself in a further proliferation of regionally sponsored sites, which tap directly into (and actually strengthen) notions of Englishness and its regional identities.

Second, we must acknowledge that specificity matters hugely to those pilgrims who make annual visits to the necropolis of the Somme. The accurate recording of times, dates, actions are augmented by a comprehensive knowledge of troop formations, deployments and actions. To these individuals and social groups, exactitude represents a truth that is immutable. It is this attention to incontrovertible detail that makes it possible for many observers, to “commemorate the dead without glorifying the war” (Shepherd, 1997, p. 227). During the radical changes to the site in 2000, many pilgrims felt that their shared jurisdiction of memory had been compromised, even threatened. Memorial schemes, by their very nature, often have to prioritize one story over another, with the result that entire swathes of memory—and by extension layers of topography—can be rendered invisible. The prioritization of the Newfoundlander’s story is felt by some to promote a disproportionate ‘hyper-visibility’, which occludes the part played by others, so that it promotes a factional cause. In part this may be a result of the extraordinary circumstances of that dreadful morning in July 1916; it may also tell us something about the relationship between Newfoundland and Canada, whose huge historic contribution to the war is commemorated in the equally vast memorial grounds of Vimy Ridge some miles to the north.

As the custodians of Beaumont Hamel Memorial began gently to assert their historic ownership of (and responsibility for) the site, so access was brought under control. Nothing could have been more calculated to upset British visitors. A freedom to roam is enshrined in the popular imagination of many in Britain, despite the fact that British rights-of-way are more restricted than in many European countries and over 90% of Britain is privately owned. Recreational walking is a massive pastime of many Britons; some 10 million walkers take to the countryside each summer Sunday (Solnit, 2000, p. 160). However, it is not a birthright and it took prolonged campaigns and mass trespassing events in England after the Great War to contest draconian restrictions which kept hikers off thousands of acres of privately owned moorland in the north of England. The pitched ‘battle’ between 400 walkers and 30 gamekeepers at Kinder Scout in 1932 tipped the balance in favour of wider access and heralded more liberal legislation, even requiring changes to the Countryside Act of 1949.

Walking, argues Solnit, is the antithesis of owning: “it postulates a mobile, empty-handed, shareable experience of the land” (2000, p. 162). Similarly, pilgrimage unites a set of beliefs with simple actions, and is usually predicated on a journey that culminates in a walk that is potentially transformative. Combine these aspirations with a libertarian attitude to land access and one begins to recognize the bundle of grievances that have been accumulated by English battlefield tourists, pilgrims and visitors. Their indignant and hurt tone is pithily captured in this extract from a letter to *Stand to!*:

You can imagine my surprise and annoyance to find, in July 2000, that the front-line trenches [of the Newfoundland Memorial] of both sides have been

allowed to become overgrown with weeds and that visitors have been denied access to them. This is also true of much of No Man's Land . . . I can understand why access to Y-ravine has been restricted in recent years after the discovery of unexploded shells (albeit a shame), but closing off the front-line trenches indefinitely devalues the experience of the Park for all concerned. (Nicholas, 2000, p. 40)

To their credit, the custodians at Beaumont Hamel have been diligent in explaining the rationale for their acts, not least the need to protect the delicate ecological balance of the parkland, where unmanaged access would have threatened to erase history (Charlesworth and Addis, 2002). Poor or misleading signage has been evaluated and largely replaced; the induction and training of the guides is as thorough as it can be given the relative experience of the interns; often, however, it will never match the level of expertise of so many of the amateur and semi-professional historians who visit the site (see Figures 1–5).

Why is it, asks the current custodian, that the vast preserved parkland of Vimy Ridge—only 30 minutes car journey to the north—has not aroused the levels of anxiety, even opprobrium, that has been visited upon those who have jurisdiction over Beaumont Hamel? Perhaps it is because Vimy Ridge (rather like the Delville Wood memorial site which is associated with the South African forces, or the land around Pozieres, which is linked to the Australian Expeditionary Force) is uniquely linked to a Canadian feat-of-arms, so much so that its historic roots are uncontested. Vimy was almost uniquely a Canadian victory, one that has been consciously projected over the decades as a nation-building event. By contrast, Beaumont Hamel is promoted as a site of memory for an island and a people whose national identity has been in flux for some time: after all, until recently Newfoundland was described as 'England's oldest colony' and it was self-governing until as recently as 1947, when the population voted for Confederation with Canada. One might further argue that, for Newfoundlanders, the Somme was 'apocalyptic'; its memory still casts a long shadow over 1 July 'Canada Day' celebrations in Newfoundland, a persistent indication of a trauma-induced loss of identity and particularity (Fraser, 2007). Does this more fully explain the need to impress upon visitors the Newfoundland narrative, as if by way of compensation?

And, as we have seen, the site bears the burden of its 'evocative' topography: it is almost unparalleled as a tract of preserved battleground and is routinely described as "probably the most interesting place on the whole Western Front" (Middlebrook and Middlebrook, 1991, p. 83): a burden that raises expectations, indeed a sense of entitlement among those who wish to absorb its uniqueness. Arguably its universal appeal lies in its claim to represent the Great War experience more generally, rather than Newfoundland in particular. It is the challenge of representing the generalities of prolonged conflict with the specificity of a few defining minutes that defines the tensions in managing its geographical histories. Recent events at Beaumont-Hamel have energized the debate about preservation and interpretation of historic remains, adding a fresh dynamic to the orthodoxies of remembrance that regards all customs, all sites, and all rituals relating to the 'trench experience' to be immutable and unchallengeable.



Figure 1. Trench lines, Beaumont Hamel Memorial, showing new concrete flooring.
Source: Paul Gough.



Figure 2. Signage, Beaumont Hamel Memorial. *Source:* Paul Gough.

If, finally, the Newfoundlanders have ‘won’ the war of memorialization it has been a hard-won campaign, requiring fortitude, clarity of purpose and painstaking communication about how a venerated tract of land ought to be treated and cherished. Amid all this effort it might be regretted that the recent change in title—



Figure 3. Trench lines with view towards the memorial caribou, Beaumont Hamel Memorial.
Source: Paul Gough.



Figure 4. Trench line, Beaumont Hamel Memorial. *Source:* Paul Gough.

from ‘Newfoundland Memorial Park’ to ‘Beaumont Hamel Memorial’—has been at the expense of the specificity, the assiduous “clip and mow and prune” (Shepherd, 1997, p. 227) and the faultless attention to detail that makes the Silent Cities of the Commonwealth schemes such extraordinarily powerful places of war and peace.



Figure 5. New footpath to the site of the Danger Tree, Beaumont Hamel Memorial.
Source: Paul Gough.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the many correspondents cited in this article. In particular I would like to thank Arlene King, Director/Directrice of the Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial, colleagues from the Department of Veteran Affairs, Canada, and the staff at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, St Johns, Newfoundland. Part of the original fieldwork for this paper was made possible by a grant from the Canadian Studies Faculty Research Program administered by Canada House, London. I would also like to thank the editors and referees for their advice and encouragement during the development of this paper.

References

- Ayley, P. (2001–present) Correspondence with the author.
- Baucom, I. (1999) *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Bender, B. (1983) Stonehenge: contested landscapes (medieval to present day), in: B. Bender (Ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg).
- Charlesworth, A. and Addis, M. (2002) Memorialisation and the ecological landscapes of holocaust sites: the cases of Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau, *Landscape Research*, 27(3), pp. 229–252.
- Cave, N. (1994) *Beaumont Hamel: Newfoundland Park* (London: Leo Cooper).
- Cave, N. (2006) Correspondence with the author.
- Clout, C. (1996) *After the Ruins: Restoring the Countryside of Northern France after the Great War* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press).
- Corbett, D. P., Holt, Y. and Russell, F. (Eds) (2002) *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past, 1880–1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

- Fitzgerald, F. S. (1934) *Tender is the Night* (London: Allen Lane).
- Fraser, S. (2006–07) Correspondence with the author.
- Gough, P. (1996) Conifers and commemoration: the politics and protocol of planting in military cemeteries, *Landscape Research*, 21(1), pp. 73–87.
- Gough, P. J. (2004) Sites in the imagination: the Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial on the Somme, *Cultural Geographies*, 11(3), pp. 235–258.
- Harbison, R. (1991) *The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable* (London: Thames and Hudson).
- Hayhurst, A. (2001–present) Correspondence with the author.
- Hughes, C. G. (2002–03) Correspondence with the author.
- Hurst, S. (1929) *The Silent Cities* (London: Methuen).
- Johnson, N. (1999) Historical geographies of the present, in: B. Graham and C. Nash (Eds), *Modern Historical Geographies* (London: Longman).
- Lloyd, D. (1998) *Battlefield Tourism* (Oxford: Berg).
- Lowenthal, D. (1985) *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Lowenthal, D. (1979) Age and artifact, dilemmas of appreciation, in: D. W. Meinig (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Middlebrook, M. and Middlebrook, M. (1991) *The Somme Battlefields: A Comprehensive Guide from Crecy to Two World Wars* (London: Penguin).
- Nicholas, J. (2000) Letters to the Editor, *Bulletin of the Western Front Association*, 60, p. 40.
- Nora, P. (Ed.) (1984–92) *Les lieux de mémoire* (7 vols) (Paris: Editions Gallimard).
- Rainey, R. M. (1983) The memory of war: reflections on battlefield preservation, in: R. L. Austin (Ed.), *Yearbook of Landscape Architecture*, pp. 68–89 (New York: Van Nostrand Reinold).
- Robinson, P., Lt-Col. (2005–present) Correspondence with the author.
- Saunders, N. J. (2001) Matter and memory in the landscapes of conflict: the Western Front 1914–1919, in: B. Bender and M. Winer (Eds), *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place* (Oxford: Berg).
- Shepherd, P. (1997) *The Cultivated Wilderness: Or, What is Landscape?* (Cambridge: MIT Press).
- Solnit, R. (2000) *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking).
- Vance, J. (1997) *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).
- Vimy Charter (2000) Vimy Declaration for the Conservation of Battlefield Terrain.
- Winter, J. (1995) *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).