Walter Allward and Vimy, a service in stone

Walter Allward circa 1913. (Archives of Ontario, F 1075-16-0-0-125.)
“I am trying hard, against many difficulties, to hold on to the ideals of this memorial.”

~ Allward, 1925

In the middle of the First World War, Walter Allward, a middle-aged sculptor in Toronto, had a dream about the Western Front:

When things were at their blackest in France, I went to sleep one night after dwelling on the muck and misery over there; my spirit was like a thing tormented . . . I dreamed I was in a great battlefield. I saw our men going by in the thousands and being mowed down by the sickles of death . . . Suffering beyond endurance at the sight, I turned my eyes and found myself looking down on an avenue of poplars. Suddenly through the avenue I saw thousands marching to the aid of our armies. They were the dead. They rose in masses, filed silently by and entered the fight to aid the living. So vivid was this impression, that when I awoke it stayed with me for months. Without the dead we were helpless.

This vision shaped the rest of his life. Responsibilities, W.B. Yeats wrote, begin in dreams, and this was one of those dreams, the reality behind it so powerful that the dreamer became the responsibility.

Walter Seymour Allward was born in Toronto in 1875 or 1876. Little is known about his youth, except that he attended Dufferin Public School and learned carpentry from his father. There’s a plaque in his memory at a house on Amelia Street in Toronto’s Cabbagetown neighbourhood.

In the early 1890s he took art classes with William Cruikshank, a distinguished painter and teacher. He also attended evening school at the Toronto Technical School and joined a sketching club, but his principal training was a four-year apprenticeship with the architectural firm of Gibson and Simpson. Sixty years later, his obituary in Toronto’s Globe and Mail remarked that as an apprentice, he “found little
interest in contracts and specifications. He neglected his blueprints to copy drawings of Michelangelo and ‘Greek’ sculptors.”

After Gibson and Simpson, Allward worked at Toronto’s Don Valley Brickworks, where he learned to mold clay and produce the terracotta bas-reliefs then popular in architectural ornamentation. While still at the Brickworks, he rented a studio and accepted his first public commission, a figure representing Peace for a public monument commemorating the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Jacqueline Hucker and Julian Smith (Vimy: Canada’s Memorial to a Generation) write that he “soon manifested great technical skill, allied with a love of the classical figure tradition, and an innovative approach to monument design.” Aptitude and enthusiasm made up for his relatively limited formal schooling, and his work stood out. Further commissions enabled him to leave the Brickworks, and over the next decade he became one of Canada’s most successful sculptors of historical figures. Working on large-scale commemorative monuments, he showed from the start a “meticulous attention to detail,” though it “often resulted in his failure to complete commissions within the promised time.”

Despite a reputation for stubborn perfectionism, Allward thrived in the competitive world of monumental sculpture. After Peace came works such as a life-sized figure of Dr. Oronhyatekha (chief ranger of the Independent Order of Foresters), busts of famous men for the Ontario Provincial Museum, and statues of John Graves Simcoe and Sir Oliver Mowat, both in Toronto’s Queen’s Park. According to The Canadian Encyclopedia, Allward’s “real talent lay in his heroic monuments,” such as the South African War Memorial (Toronto, 1907), the Baldwin-Lafontaine Monument (Parliament Hill, Ottawa, 1914), and the Bell Telephone Memorial (Brantford, finished in 1917, five years behind schedule).

Two of his pre-war figures were cast in bronze and now stand on each side of the steps to the Supreme Court of Canada in Ottawa. Part of a planned memorial to King Edward VII that was interrupted by the First World War, they went into storage. The Supreme Court of Canada describes them thus: “Made by Toronto artist Walter S. Allward (creator and architect of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France), IVSTITIA (Justice) and VERITAS (Truth) were forgotten for almost 50 years. In 1969, they were found in their crates buried under a parking lot. They were erected on their present site in 1970.”

Allward married in 1898 and travelled to London and France with his wife, Margaret. A friend at Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club wrote that the sculptor’s visit to Paris was both romantic and professional: “they honeymooned in Paris so that Walter could more closely examine the Rodin sculptures.” Hucker
and Smith agree that Allward travelled to Paris in part for artistic reasons and say that he retained a lifelong admiration for Michelangelo and Rodin. About the latter, Hucker writes that he “created an art of self-expression that was to become a fundamental characteristic of twentieth-century art.”

As Allward’s work matured, he remained rooted in the art of classical Greece and the Renaissance but favoured simplified forms. In a time of emergent modernism, he moved beyond the traditional artistic canon and formal academic styles then typical of Canadian monumental sculpture and worked to develop a more direct, human, and emotional art.

Many of his finest achievements reflect this new, more expressive style, including the Old Soldier in Victoria Square, Toronto, and the South African War Memorial to the northeast, near the intersection of University Avenue and Queen Street. Both were commissioned in 1903 or 1904 and unveiled several years later. The former, honouring veterans of the War of 1812 and also known as the Army and Veterans Monument, is a fully realized male half-figure atop a granite pedestal. An elderly man with sharp features, he wears his old uniform with pride. He is at once unique – a specific individual – and the universal soldier grown ancient. He wears a medal on his chest; his left sleeve is empty.

*The Old Soldier. A single medal and an empty sleeve.*
*(Photo by the author.)*
This sculpture, praised by Katherine Hale in 1919 as a “neglected shrine of art,” is riveting. It is also something new in the artist’s work. In “Walter Allward: Sculptor and Architect of the Vimy Ridge Memorial,” Lane Borstad writes that as long as Allward’s sculpture commemorated famous men, he was “constrained by tradition and conventions of portraiture.” In the Old Soldier, unbound by traditional principles, he could emphasize the elderly man’s individuality.

Something similar is true of the South African monument. Two young soldiers, gazing southeast down University Avenue in the general direction of the Transvaal, are off to serve the British Empire, while their mother, Canada (said to be modelled on Allward’s mother), points the way. Less distinctive and memorable than the Old Soldier, these young men are still vivid and themselves. And, though the monument’s imperial certainty dates it, it shows how far the artist had come in the first decade of his practice.

With his success confirmed, Allward was named an associate of the Royal Canadian Academy in 1908. Ten years later he was made a full academician. By then, however, the world had changed. As a Veterans Affairs publication puts it, the First World War had “disrupted traditions, and many artists who had lived through it experienced a strong sense of rupture in history.” In his essay on Allward, Borstad includes several of the artist’s wartime pen and ink drawings, images reflecting disruption and unease:

The drawings have a dark, ominous, and melancholic quality that reflects Allward’s romantic nature and show him to have been a private and introspective individual. They also are marked by a strong spiritual quality that reappears in the form of Christian symbols of sacrifice and resurrection in all of his later monument studies. Here are the private emotional struggles that he wove into his public art.

In the least oppressive drawing, dated 1914, a cellist in a large but empty prison cell looks up at a filmy cloud of figures floating near a high ceiling. In this sketch, Allward, himself a cellist, suggests an earthly imprisonment relieved by something transcendent, a leaden existence mediated by music, art, revelation. In the darkest of the images, dated 1916 and entitled “The Battlefield,” a Christ figure stands before a mass of corpses. The year of the Somme, 1916 marked the Great War’s pivotal horror, the nightmare that ended any illusion of Western civilization’s sanity.

With the Armistice two years later, every Canadian city and town wanted a cenotaph. Allward accepted commissions for three in Ontario: those at Stratford, Brantford, and Peterborough. The last two remained unfinished when he moved to London in 1922 to begin work on Vimy, but the completed Stratford cenotaph is a stunning work of art, a brilliant melding of human form and allegorical meaning. Two individu-
als, one standing higher than the other, represent the spiritual man and the figure of strife defeated and disarmed. It is timeless: nothing ties it to a specific conflict, and its dramatic intensity and emotional directness conveyed for post-war survivors “the supremacy of right over brute force.”

*Stratford Cenotaph. (Photo by the author.)*
Borstad:

By avoiding the stock stereotype emblems and attributes so typical of his contemporaries, Allward aligned himself closer to the French romantic tradition of Auguste Rodin than the academic sculpture tradition of Canada. Stratford represented the culmination of a stylistic evolution that can be traced in Allward’s career from the traditional biographical representation of Simcoe (Toronto) through the progressively bolder designs of South African Memorial (Toronto), Baldwin and Lafontaine (Ottawa), and Bell Telephone Memorial (Brantford).

Allward’s stylistic evolution and debt to Rodin also informed his design for Peterborough, and many of his post-war drawings marked themes, forms, and devices worked out during the war. In turn, these developments anticipated further evolution in the work at Vimy, just as emotions expressed in the wartime sketches carried over first to the cenotaph designs, then the work in London and France.
In June 1922, having won the competition to design and build Canada’s principal overseas war memorial, Allward left Canada with his family. After looking for a suitable studio in Belgium and Paris, he rented space in London’s Maida Vale district, where he and his family settled. From London, he would travel back and forth to the Vimy site north of Paris to direct the execution of his designs.

“A Canadian man dreams the stone that will be assembled and carved to expiate the sorrow of one country on the soil of another.”

~ Jane Urquhart, The Stone Carvers

After the war, the Imperial War Graves Commission gave Canada eight sites on which to build memorials: five in France, three in Belgium. Canadian soldiers had fought at all eight. Now each would receive a monument based on a single Canadian design.

In 1920, the Canadian Battlefields Memorial Commission (CBMC) solicited designs from artists and architects across Canada, calling first for preliminary submissions. From among the 160 entries received, seventeen were selected by the CBMC’s international jury, which then commissioned a plaster maquette (scale model) of each design. In 1921, the jury judged Allward’s the best, by unanimous decision.

The CBMC’s plans had changed, however. Now Canada was to have a single major overseas memorial, with seven more modest memorials at the other sites. After intense debate over the location of the principal site, Hill 145 at Vimy Ridge was chosen. General Sir Arthur Currie, former commander of the Canadian Corps, had argued for Hill 62 at Passchendaele, which he considered a better example of Canadian valour. As for Vimy: “I would not want to have the impression left that Vimy was our greatest battlefield.” But Mackenzie King, now prime minister, liked the image of Vimy as the altar of sacrifice, and politics won out.
In fairness, the Battle of Vimy Ridge had been the first significant Allied victory in almost two years. It was also the first battle in which all four Canadian divisions fought together, and they captured the ridge after French and British units had failed. Though only part of the much larger Battle of Arras, and largely forgotten outside Canada, the Battle of Vimy Ridge was indeed brave and decisive. More to the point, it lent itself to myth: it didn’t hurt that its dates (Sunday, April 9 to Wednesday, April 12, 1917) coincided with Easter and the annual Christian narrative of suffering, death, and spiritual resurrection.

In a 2007 *Globe and Mail* article, Michael Valpy describes how and why Vimy was mythologized. As part of Mackenzie King’s nation-building propaganda, it was presented to the public as the moment Canada came into its own and became a nation in its own right. In truth, the Canadian Corps at Vimy had been commanded by a British officer and relied on support from British units, but that was edited out of the popular account. In an act of “opportune amnesia,” Vimy became a purely Canadian victory and our nation’s defining moment.
Myth, Valpy writes, “can so easily trump history, and even culture.” He quotes Geoffrey Hayes, one of the editors of *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*: “Mythology is a funny thing. We don’t need to know what happened, we simply need to know what the myth tells us is significant. Everywhere we look, we can see that Vimy Ridge has become so closely associated with Canada as a nation that in some ways it almost doesn’t matter what happened there.” Mythology keeps it simple. We remember the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

And the monument helps. As Valpy says:

*It was radical, it was beautiful, it was pure mythology – classical Greek married to Christian symbolism – and it was a world apart from the conventional structures of remembrance being built elsewhere: the perfect symbol for a young country yearning for an identity beyond its shores.*

Sentimentality and nationalism aside, Allward’s achievement – his monument’s scale, its power and glory, its gutting sadness and sincere attempt to console the living by reconciling loss and hope – is extraordinary. Radical in form and size (the twin pylons rise thirty metres above the monument’s base), it is unique. A.Y. Jackson wrote that it “went beyond and above anything the framers of the competition conceived of. [Allward] ignored the restrictions the other competitors accepted.”

The monument is at the crest of Vimy Ridge in northern France, facing east toward the Douai Plain and the rising sun. Situated in a 117-hectare (290 acre) memorial site, the monument and its surrounding parkland belong in perpetuity to Canada, the land deeded by France to Canada in 1922 after complex negotiations. Fourteen kilometres north of the town of Arras, the Vimy Memorial includes battlefield, forested acreage, escarpment, paths, roads, open areas, restored trenches and preserved tunnels, cemeteries, smaller memorials, and a visitor centre, as well as the monument.

The memorial has three purposes:

. . . it would mark the site of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, become this country’s principal monument in Europe honouring the valour of all Canadians who fought in the First World War, and serve as testament to those Canadians who had lost their lives in France and whose bodies were never identified.

Allward selected the ideal spot on the ridge but wasn’t content to just stick his monument on it. It couldn’t simply sit there. It had to “rise out of the ridge in the manner of a military fortification,” which
meant reshaping the ridge before laying the foundation. Deep excavations were needed, and a road and paths. The site’s chalky soil, ideal for wartime tunnelling, made building difficult.

Allward convinced the CBMC to hire a young Danish engineer named Oscar Faber. Responsible for the monument’s base, Faber specified the use of cast-in-place reinforced concrete to which blocks of stone could be bonded. Later, when the stone veneer was fixed to the concrete, Allward insisted that the joints between blocks be as narrow as possible. The base had to appear long, continuous, and unbreachable.

As for the memorial park, it was to be a kind of rural cemetery in which Allward’s monument would mark the site of the battle and “the living might commune with the dead through nature.” Art and nature, Hucker writes, would comfort the bereaved, with Vimy standing on what Mackenzie King and many others viewed as sacred ground. The preliminary work, which included clearing the site of buried explosives, went ahead slowly, and Allward’s design, originally intended for Hill 62 at St. Julien, was adapted to the new topography of the ridge.

Delays were inevitable. It took two and a half years to clear the land, and almost as long to find a source of stone that met Allward’s standards. This became a fixation, as he and his agents searched Britain and the Continent for a stone that was both durable and workable. “I have been eating and sleeping stone for so long it has become an obsession with me,” he wrote Ottawa, “and incidentally a nightmare.”

At last, in an ancient Roman quarry in Croatia, he found it. A warm, white limestone known as Seget, it resembled marble, was flawless, and could be quarried in blocks large enough to suit the sculptor’s designs. Moreover, its “connection to the classical world would reinforce the transcendental values he was seeking for his monument.” He wanted Vimy to reflect a “remade classicism” expressing both antiquity and “the modern sensibilities of loss and obligation,” and Seget suited that. Sourcing and transporting it entailed supply problems, further delays, and additional costs, but it clad the concrete with the right look, touch, and spirit. The larger blocks, reshaped by expert carvers, became Vimy’s sublime allegorical figures.

From the start, Allward saw himself not only as Vimy’s designer and sculptor but its architect as well. In December 1921, he wrote Colonel Henry Osborne, Secretary of the CBMC: “I am going to Flanders to act as Architect (or designer) and sculptor and will have to serve as both from the beginning to the end of this work, because the architecture and sculpture are so closely interwoven.” Though not a member of Canada’s architectural institute, Allward saw himself as part of the architectural profession and, on his
Vimy blueprints, referred to his dual roles as architect and sculptor. It would take someone like him, he believed, to unite the sister arts of architecture and sculpture in the ruins of war.

---

The last third of Jane Urquhart’s superb novel, *The Stone Carvers*, tells the story of Allward and the monument. Here she describes the first stage of the process by which he crafted clay models for his figures:

> He auditioned models for the figures of defenders, mourners, torchbearers, for the figures of peace and justice, truth and knowledge, often abandoning or substituting these individuals before the plaster models were cast or sometimes later, when he would change his mind throughout the night. He made hundreds of drawings of swords and wreaths, of pylons and of walls, always with the lead of his pencil sharpened like a weapon. In the end it was the imposing front wall of the memorial that obsessed him, the wall that would carry on its surface the names of the eleven thousand no one ever saw again.

After drawing the models, Allward sculpted life-size clay figures based on his sketches. Then, because unfired clay soon cracks and breaks, plaster moulds were fashioned and sent to France. There, carvers, using a device called a pantograph, doubled the maquettes’ measurements and rendered them in stone.

There were twenty plaster maquettes in all, each a human figure in the classical style. Stored in Canada after the war, they were seen not as works of art in themselves but as objects taking up space, and in the 1960s the Minister of Veterans Affairs ordered the army to blow them up. Saved at the eleventh hour by the Minister of National Defence, they escaped an ironic fate. Seventeen of these remarkable figures are on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, the other three at the Military Communications and Electronics Museum, Canadian Forces Base, Kingston.

Allward’s art spanned the traditional and modern. In an article on the recent restoration of Vimy, Julian Smith shows how the monument reflects an “emerging modernism” but is not fully modernist. On one hand: “The cladding was still stone, hand-tooled and finished. The sculptural work relied on traditional stone carving techniques.” On the other: “Allward did use pantographs to transfer the design,” as well as “reinforced concrete, then in its infancy, as the underlying structural system.”
Something else argues for Vimy’s innovation. If Allward’s pre-war designs were only slowly moving away from the traditional and becoming more expressive, Vimy’s architecture represented a dramatic shift. Based on strong lines and formal abstraction, its modernism is clearest in its stark, simplified design, and especially its twin pylons. It wasn’t engineering and technology alone that made it contemporay; it was its style, experimentation, and composition. This, Borstad writes, was Allward’s “brand of modern architecture, expressed in the striking simplicity of his wall surfaces and towering pylons.”

At the same time, in his role as sculptor, Allward balanced Vimy’s geometric modernism with a more traditionally symbolic and figural art. The contrast between straight contemporary lines and classical curves is critical.

Borstad stresses the personal and emotional elements in Allward’s figures. Despite his interest in modern styles, Borstad says, Allward believed in emotion over intellect. Interviewed in 1939, he said: “Back of all high art, I am convinced there must be – not so much the intellectual – must be truly and loftily the emotional. There is no artist like the heart.” As both sculptor and architect, Allward’s aim was to express through art and architecture what the heart knew.

In his 1921 submission to the CBMC, Allward outlined his planned allegorical figures. Below a drawing of the monument’s front, he hand-lettered:


Two other figures are seen only from the other side of the monument: the Grievers (or Mourners), a man and woman who have, it seems, lost a son. They recline, abject, on either side of the platform’s southwest steps, separate in their grief.
Of the twenty figures, three tell the basic story of loss and hope: *Canada Bereft*, *Sacrifice*, and *The Spirit of Sacrifice*. In his 1921 outline, Allward described the first as “an heroic figure of Canada,” but in her finished form she seems more an image of profound maternal sorrow. The most prominent of Allward’s symbolic figures, she stands, shrouded, at the monument’s edge, staring at the ground. What she sees is a soldier’s tomb on the battlefield, and in it her dead son. She may have been heroic several years earlier, sending her boy to France as an earlier mother had sent hers to South Africa. Now a bouquet of lilies hangs in her hand, forgotten. Beyond brooding, she is desolate.

*Canada Bereft. (Photo by the author.)*

It was always the sculptor’s intention to express the war’s “loss, sorrow and futility.” In 1921, the CBMG wanted a memorial to “commemorate the gallantry of the Canadian troops.” What it got fifteen years later was, in Urquhart’s words, a “huge urn designed to hold grief.” The war may have faded from public memory, but Allward’s passion and distress had not. He wanted his monument to do justice to the dead, while fearing it might fail their mourners.
If *Canada Bereft* is linked to the tomb below, she is linked as well to the two figures behind and above, young men representing sacrifice and the passing of the torch. She seems unaware of them, but many visitors, drawn to her solitary mourning, also notice the two young men, the first (*Sacrifice*) caught at the moment of death, the second, immediately above, holding a torch as high as he can. Allward must have had John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” in mind and known the Canadian public would be sensitive to the reference. A hundred years later, it is still natural to associate the extended torch with failing hands.

*Sacrifice* (on the right) and *The Spirit of Sacrifice*.

*(Photo by the author.)*

The second figure, *The Spirit of Sacrifice* (perhaps the first figure’s soul released at death), raises his eyes to the pylons’ highest and remotest figures – the “Chorus,” Allward called them, each figure representing a universal ideal – and from them to the sky beyond.
Vimy depicts no soldiers, and no dead. Allegorical figures abstract the scene, the tomb is closed, and there are no emblems of modern warfare other than the two cannon muzzles draped in laurel and olive. As Hucker says, Vimy made “no direct reference to war or victory but alluded rather to the consequences of war and the suffering of those who were left to grieve. Through reference to the cyclical myth of sacrifice and spiritual rebirth, it also offered solace to the living.”

Allward acknowledged that Vimy was inspired, in part at least, by the medieval cathedral. The monument’s cathedral effect, he wrote, would be emphasized when a “shaft of afternoon sunlight illuminated the sculptures between the pylons.” And: “The two pylons were an endeavor to create an outline against the sky that would . . . suggest the upper part of a Cross.”

Vimy’s religious imagery is hard to miss. If Canada Bereft is the mater dolorosa, Sacrifice, with his arms outstretched, is her crucified son. Christian resurrection symbolism is central to the monument’s meaning and its desire to console. The ideals and virtues symbolized by Allward’s more secular figures are matched by a religious iconography that few could misread. Symbolic meaning, especially in relation to a transcendent redemption, is intentional and unmistakable, and Vimy is a kind of ecclesiastical stage. Pylons and platform, Hucker writes, “functioned as a theatrical backdrop for the figurative sculpture, its huge scale endowing the figures with inner strength and vitality. Upon its stage, they took part in a drama that was to be read in a primarily pictorial fashion.”

But the figures, though idealized, are also felt. They are personal as well as symbolic. Human loss is final and visceral – even for visitors with a strong religious faith – whatever we say about battlefields being sacred ground, their soil sanctified by ultimate sacrifice. The critical thing about Allward’s figures is that they recognize the mourners’ darkness and respect it.

There are traces of inflated late Victorian language in Allward’s 1921 submission to the CBMC. He referred to Canada Bereft, for example, as “an heroic figure of Canada,” then to “her valiant dead,” but very little of this pre-Somme diction, or the outlook it reflected, shows on the finished monument.
In fact, the astonishing thing about Vimy is the total absence of military triumphalism. It makes no reference to the recent clash of arms or to victory over Germany, though Allward had once intended otherwise, imagining a foot trampling a German helmet. “Even that symbol,” he said, “I have removed.”

Vimy became, in the artist’s words, “a sermon against the futility of war,” and nothing about it romanticizes militarism. His reaction to the suffering caused by war had been a desire for social harmony. In London and France, this took shape in the identity and placement of his figures, many representing the values and ideals he believed essential to social and spiritual wellbeing. The figure of Peace he placed at the monument’s highest point, supreme.

Years later, near the end of the Second World War, Lieutenant Doris Carter, a Canadian army nurse, was in Belgium on her way home. In her service memoir, she writes: “The next day we did not leave for England as expected, but instead went by lorry to visit the Peace Memorial in Vimy.” Lieutenant Carter got Vimy’s name wrong, but not its spirit.

Inevitable delays and cost overruns at the Vimy site brought pressure from Ottawa for lower standards. In his choice of materials, for example, Allward was instructed to accept lower-quality stone and imperfect finishes. He resisted, sometimes ignoring Ottawa altogether. “To these demands,” Hucker writes, “he presented an inflexible front. Allward’s courage and determination ensured the extraordinary quality of the resulting monument.”

Vimy has three fundamental features: its modernist structure (ramparts, platform, and pylons), its figurative sculptures, and the names of the missing. While some of Allward’s stone carvers worked from his designs to produce the twenty symbolic figures, others inscribed the name and rank of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France with no known grave.

The engraving itself is distinctive. First, in contrast to the practice of placing some names far above the visitor, unavoidably making them remote, Allward had each name inscribed around the relatively low walls of the ramparts. All names are accessible to the visitor. Second, he insisted on narrow, tight joints between the wall’s stones not only to project a continuous surface but to allow the carvers to inscribe
names across the joints both vertically and horizontally. No name is forced into place, there are no gaps, and there is an even, continuous rhythm. Third, he designed a typeface for the names that is both dignified and warm.

![Detail of names inscribed at Vimy. (Photo by the author.)](image)

As Vimy’s sculpture and architecture are in harmony, so the monument and memorial park are in balance, integrating nature, design, and history in the service of respect and reassurance. Visitors reach the monument through a landscape planted with trees native to Canada, and the setting is serene. At the same time, much of the parkland is off-limits to visitors because of unexploded ordnance, and the Great War’s bomb craters are still obvious, if grassed over.

Just as Vimy’s parkland is both landscaped and natural, Allward left much of the area around his monument untouched.

Hucker:

*Significantly, he chose not to place his structure within a precinct or garden . . . but directly on the unbounded battlefield, . . . Once the monument had been built, Allward turned the excavated area in front of the*
structure into a grassed space that he referred to as the amphitheatre. . . . He retained the remnant battle landscape around the sides and back of the monument, thereby creating a direct and powerful emotional connection between the monument and the ridge.

Seen from the amphitheatre:

Allward’s monument may be understood as a modern retelling of Greek drama. Rising from a site of so much destruction and loss of life, the monument’s mythology harnesses the violent and irrational forces released by the war and offers the promise of a return to order and harmony.

In this drama, staged at the intersection of monument and landscape, the past is recognized, honoured, and accepted. The possibility of life beyond war and loss is acknowledged, and the receptive visitor is renewed. Dramatically at least, the meeting of art and nature makes emotional sense of a tragedy that otherwise makes no sense at all.

As the years passed and most Canadians lost interest in the war, Allward kept on with Vimy, though Urquhart imagines him feeling “like a vessel into which the world’s diminishing sorrow was poured for safe-keeping.” Then, in 1934, two years before the monument’s inauguration, he and Margaret lost their son, Donald. An architect like his older brother Hugh, Donald had joined his father to help with the work in France. Under a confusing headline (“Sculptor is Killed”), The Gazette, a Montreal daily, reported that the younger man had died in Dinard, a seaside town near Saint-Malo, after an accident: “Donald, 27, son of the noted sculptor, Walter Allward, . . . fell from a third-storey window of the Villa Cendrich where he was living. Also a sculptor, he was associated with his father in business.” Hucker and Smith write:

Walter and Margaret found themselves grieving the loss of their son and assuming responsibility for raising their six-year-old grandson, Peter. . . . The fateful irony of the situation could not have escaped Allward: he and his wife had now joined the legion of mourning Canadian parents.

On July 26, 1936, Vimy was unveiled by King Edward VIII. Speaking about peace, rebuilding, and hope, he used diction that in our time sounds sentimental, insincere, and formulaic. He spoke of “our fallen comrades,” “the splendour of their sacrifice,” and the “consecration of our love for them.” Even then, a
cynical veteran like Siegfried Sassoon would have found Edward’s platitudes hard to bear, but standard phrases and sentiments were what the 100,000 people present must have expected.

Several thousand Canadians had sailed from Montreal for the pilgrimage to Vimy and the opening ceremony. The Canadian media paid little attention – public interest in the overseas memorial had faded – but the British papers gave it extensive coverage.

Mackenzie King wasn’t there. Though keen on the idea that Vimy had been built on sacred ground at the ridge’s altar of sacrifice, he didn’t visit until October. When he did, he wrote that he found the monument “exceedingly fine and impressive” but out of proportion with Canada’s contribution to the war. “It is in fact the most pretentious war memorial in the world,” he noted in his diary.

By then, the Spanish Civil War had begun and the Second World War was less than three years away. As renewed global conflict neared, there was a revival of interest in Vimy as people feared for its safety. Allward assured the public that he’d foreseen the possibility of fresh warfare and, as a result, had used stone rather than bronze for his statues. Bronze could be melted down for bullets and shells. Stone was useless in modern weaponry.

In the spring of 1940, however, the public’s fears seemed justified. As the evacuation from Dunkirk dragged on and the Germans attacked Paris, British and Canadian media reported, incorrectly, that Vimy had been bombed by the Luftwaffe. “Vimy Memorial Smashed by Nazi Bombers,” announced The Montreal Daily Star, and Canadians were outraged. In response, Hitler left Berlin and went to France for a photo-op. Strutting at Vimy on June 2, he made Allied propagandists, the alleged source of the story, look both dishonest and inept.

But there was more to Hitler’s visit than ridicule and bravado. Serge Durflinger, a history professor at the University of Ottawa, writes that Hitler admired Vimy and said so at the time. It’s not surprising. He’d served in the same sector in the First World War and may have felt a bond with his brother-enemy. Further, the monument’s blend of classicism and modernism was probably to his taste, and, since he still hoped to negotiate a separate peace with Britain and its former colonies, it may have seemed wise to respect a key Allied symbol. In any event, the Waffen-SS, essentially Hitler’s private army, was instructed to protect Vimy from insult or abuse by regular German troops. When the Allies pushed the Germans out of France in 1944, they found the monument, unlike many others, whole and undefiled.
Of the several reasons for Vimy’s survival, however, its lack of triumphal architecture, victorious imagery, or anything symbolizing German defeat was probably paramount. As a peace memorial, Vimy did not inflame or offend, and so it withstood the war.

What it could not withstand was time. By 2001, after more than sixty-five years of rain, snow, wind, and varying temperatures, the monument was falling apart. The pylons were still relatively sound, but the platform and walls had eroded and cracked. As early as the 1980s, stones started to fall away, and by the turn of the century many of the names of the missing were no longer legible. Staining was widespread, and the monument had become an eyesore.

The source of the problem was technological. Allward and Faber had bonded the limestone veneer to a concrete base before concrete’s properties were fully known. It turned out that these materials expand and contract at different rates as temperatures rise and fall. As a result, there was widespread cracking at the joints – their narrowness now part of the problem – and a buildup of water behind the veneer. Decay was inevitable. Allward meant Vimy to last a thousand years. It wouldn’t last a hundred.

In 2001, under pressure from the public and the media, the Canadian government announced a programme to restore thirteen war memorials in Europe. Vimy received much of the thirty million dollars allocated.

Between 2004 and 2007, a team of restoration specialists renewed the monument in time for its rededication on the ninetieth anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The key was the stone: “For two years, the entire monument was shrouded in a giant, weatherproof cocoon as workers removed every original block of Seget from the sprawling base, cleaning and repairing the stones where possible, replacing them with new stones where necessary.” In the end, most of the stones on the pylons could be kept, but only half of those on the base. Fortunately, the owner of the quarry in Croatia, aware of Seget’s role at Vimy, agreed to quarry fresh stone to replace the unsalvageable.

The renewal was ambitious, systematic, and thorough. In addition to repairing or replacing stone blocks and surfaces, the team restored statues, improved drainage and lighting systems, and, faithfully and fittingly, relettered the names as Allward had instructed: across both vertical and horizontal joints.

The rededication took place on April 9, 2007. The prime ministers of Canada and France were there, and Queen Elizabeth, and a large and enthusiastic audience, including war veterans and students. Prime
Minister Harper referred to the Battle of Vimy Ridge as central to Canada’s “creation story,” and the Queen said that the Canada of the time “deserved so much to take its rightful place . . . as a proud sovereign nation, strong and free.” There were fireworks, pageantry, and speeches with a familiar rhetoric. The Queen and both prime ministers noted the previous day’s roadside bombing in Afghanistan, in which six Canadian soldiers had been killed. The Queen referred to Vimy as “sacred soil.” Nothing was said about the soil in Afghanistan.

Allward may or may not have believed that the battlefields of France and Belgium were truly sacred, but he definitely believed in the reality of grief and the need for consolation. Convinced that his art had the power to comfort, he did what he could. Believing, too, in our debt to the dead, he tried to show “what we owed them and will forever owe them.” That was the other half of his service and duty.

In February 1937, now sixty, he returned to Toronto and tried to start again. Urquhart imagines what it must have been like. Vimy was in the past, the ribbons cut, speeches made, tears shed. Everyone, including him, has left:

Allward returned to a country he hardly recognized. The war had been over for twenty years; few people wanted to discuss the monument. . . . He could not disengage. Designs for further monuments were attempted by him – he wanted to move forward, wanted to reenter his life. But like a long love affair that had ended in sorrow, the Vimy Memorial would not relinquish the large space it had occupied in his heart. He wouldn’t let it go, and traces of its brooding presence entered every drawing he made.

For fifteen years he’d worked on nothing but Vimy. He was out of touch with Canada, the Canadian art world, and perhaps contemporary art in general. His return had been anticlimactic, his reception in Toronto a disappointment. For Torontonians, the Great War was long over, the Great Depression was the new reality, and Mae West, the great Hollywood distraction, was in town. The Globe and Mail fumed: “the nation apparently has been too preoccupied with other problems . . . to pay tribute to the man who put Canada on the map artistically in Europe.” On the positive side, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada made him an honorary fellow, he received honorary doctorates from Queen’s University and the University of Toronto, and, in 1938, Mackenzie King rose in the House of Commons to say that “this House desires particularly to express its appreciation of the services of Mr. Walter S. Allward, who, as
the designer and architect of the memorial at Vimy, has given to the world a work of art of outstanding beauty and character.” Not a word about pretension.

And Allward did find new work: another Queen’s Park statue of a Canadian historical figure, William Lyon Mackenzie. Unveiled in 1940, however, it met with little enthusiasm. According to Dennis Duffy, its symbolism was incoherent: “executed in a mode at once figurative and allegorical,” it “eludes its audience’s search for meaning.” And the timing was wrong: not only was Canada in a new world war, but representational sculpture, especially if it relied on dated symbols and conventions, was out of style.

The allegorical tradition, the source of Allward’s strength, was passé, and the Canadian public was uninterested in his artistic language. He lived another fifteen years but received no more commissions. “Modernism,” Duffy says, “had taken its toll.”

But it must have been more than that. He had given so much for so many years. He’d realized a masterpiece and given the world something on the grand scale. He was in his sixties, he’d lost a son, and after all the brilliance, resourcefulness, and passion of Vimy, perhaps it was hard to feel much for relatively trivial subjects.

As for sculpture with historical themes, Canada was too caught up in the present and near future – the prospect of war, then war itself – to care about the past. Like the civilian and military bureaucracies that might have given him commissions, the people were “too busy preparing for a violent future to wallow in nostalgia for a violent past.”

And inevitably, he did worry about Vimy and its fate under Nazi Germany. He had struggled to make something that would last. Under Hitler, it could be debased slowly or destroyed in an instant. In the end, though Vimy did survive, Urquhart believes “the psyche of its creator did not. Allward remained a kind, courteous man who walked slowly through the city streets in a grey coat.” Soon he was pretty much forgotten.

He died in Toronto on April 24, 1955 and was buried in the churchyard at St. John’s Anglican Church in the city’s north end.

His death brought a fleeting revival of public interest, then renewed obscurity. In 2001, however, the Canadian government named Walter S. Allward a National Historical Person, and The Canadian Encyclopedia salutes him, as it might a legendary general, as Allward of Vimy.
Allward, 1930. (Archives of Ontario, F 1075-12-0-02.)
Postscript

On May 26, 2013, The Toronto Star published an article entitled “Vimy Ridge tour gives hope to Canadian vets of Afghan War suffering from PTSD.” Murray Brewster of The Canadian Press reported that several veterans, including Captain Andrew Richardson, had visited the memorial that day, sponsored by Wounded Warriors Canada. The primary focus of Wounded Warriors, a veterans support and advocacy group, is service-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Captain Richardson said that Vimy helped him make sense of what he’d gone through in Afghanistan. It also made him think about the traumatized Great War veterans who resumed their lives at home and contributed so much. “These men came back weaker in some ways, but strengthened and resolved.”

Captain G.W. Johnston, founder of Wounded Warriors, says that trips like this help soldiers “complete the circle” and find a new sense of purpose. “A good argument can be made,” he says, “that a lot of the veterans who helped make our country suffered from PTSD. You can suffer from an operational stress injury and still be a high functioning person.”

Captain Richardson said that Vimy gave him hope. And that was Allward’s dream: to inspire respect for the dead and provide solace and hope for the survivors.

To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.

~ Raymond Williams
This epigraph is cited on p. 49 of Jacqueline Hucker and Julian Smith’s *Vimy: Canada’s Memorial to a Generation*, published by Sanderling Press in 2012. Balancing clear text and first-rate photos, *Vimy* is an excellent introduction to the monument and the memorial park that surrounds it.

The full name of the Vimy Memorial is the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. Some writers refer to the monument (the sculpture, that is) as the memorial or the Vimy Memorial; others use the term memorial only when referring to the sculpture and its 117-hectare site. I like the latter and distinguish between monument and memorial along these lines.

*In dreams begin responsibilities* is one of the epigraphs to Yeats’s 1914 volume, *Responsibilities and Other Poems*, though Yeats pluralizes begin.

Allward recounted his dream in an interview with Anne Anderson Perry, “Walter Allward: Canada’s Sculptor,” *Studio*, 75 (April 1922). This interview and the quotation itself are cited in Lane Borstad’s “Walter Allward: Sculptor and Architect of the Vimy Ridge Memorial,” an essay in the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, Vol. 33, Number 1, 2008. This issue of *JSSAC*, dedicated entirely to Allward, is a rich source of information about the man and his work.

There’s some confusion about Allward’s birthdate. It’s often said to be November 18, 1876, but his gravestone at St. John’s York Mills Anglican Church gives his birth year as 1875. Borstad writes that Allward was born on November 18, 1875, “the second son and one of eight children of John Allward and Emma Pittman,” originally from Newfoundland. (Source: [Lane Borstad](#).)

The memorial plaque is mentioned in “Cabbagetown People: The Social History of an Inner City Neighbourhood.” It’s located at 43 Amelia Street, west of Sackville Street.
The 1891 federal census gives Allward’s occupation as architecture student. About his early life, see Borstad. As for his evening classes, see Borstad again, as well as The Canadian Encyclopedia and Laura Brandon (warmuseum.ca).

Borstad writes that Allward attended Central Technical School, Brandon that he studied at the New Technical School. I’ve substituted Toronto Technical School: Central Tech wasn’t founded until 1915, while its predecessor, the Toronto Technical School, opened in the early 1890s.

Borstad notes that the “sketching club” was the Toronto Art Students League, and that Allward’s evening classes included modelling.

(page 2:)

In The Stone Carvers (2001), Jane Urquhart writes that after finishing his apprenticeship, Allward “had been employed to design and model the terracotta bas-reliefs that decorated the outside walls of the homes of the wealthy.” This passage is on p. 265 of the McClelland & Stewart paperback edition, referred to throughout.

The Hucker and Smith quote about Allward’s skill and emerging style is on p. 28 of Vimy.

See Borstad re Allward’s early success notwithstanding “a meticulous attention to detail” and a problem with deadlines (pp. 24-25). Brandon also mentions Allward’s first studio, opened in 1894, and the figure of Peace.

In a brief article on Allward, Lawrence Hayward writes: “it is no wonder very little cooperation existed. One competition after another just to make a living. The whole setup . . . has all the built-in disaster anyone would want.” (The Lawrence Hayward Collection.)

The following sources shed light on Allward’s early successes: Borstad, Brandon, The Canadian Encyclopedia, and the City of Toronto Archives (“Honouring Heroes”).

The source about the figures of Justice and Truth is the Supreme Court of Canada website.

Allward’s time in England and France is mentioned in Hucker and Smith (p. 28) and, as noted, in Hucker’s “After the Agony in Stony Places,” an essay in Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment, edited by
Hayes, Iarocci, and Bechthold, 2007. It is also discussed in Dennis Duffy’s “Complexity and Contradiction in Canadian Public Sculpture: The Case of Walter Allward,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Summer 2008). Duffy’s article is the source of the honeymoon quote.

Allward was a founding member of Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club. (Source: Jacqueline Hucker in *JSSAC*, Vol. 33, Number 1, 2008, p. 48.)

(page 3:)

Allward’s pre-war style is discussed by a number of writers, including Hucker in “After the Agony.” The traditional canon, Borstad writes, “sought to represent incidents, achievements and heroes; not the human and personal experience of those incidents and achievements.”

(pages 4-5:)

Katherine Hale’s remark is cited in Borstad, p. 25; its source is a piece published in *Canadian Magazine*, January 1919.

Borstad’s comments on the *Old Soldier* and the South African War Memorial – including the fact that the figure of Canada was modelled on Allward’s mother – are on pp. 25-26 of his essay.

The City of Toronto publication noted above says of the South African monument that it showed the artist’s “inclination toward allegorical representation and his talent for recreating the human form.

*The Canadian Encyclopedia* includes information about Allward and the Academy.

The source of the quote about the “rupture in history” is a short piece about Allward in “Story Galleries – A Brief History of Vimy,” Veterans Affairs Canada. See: *VAC*. The phrase also appears in Hucker’s “Vimy: A Monument for the Modern World” (p. 45 in the *JSSAC* number cited above). Many writers and artists, Hucker writes, “had experienced an acute sense of a rupture in history, which in their work took the form of images of irony, fragmentation and ruin.”
Borstad is my main source about Allward’s work from 1913 until the Vimy competition, including his pen and ink drawings from 1913-16. Borstad’s opinions on these drawings are expressed on p. 28 of his essay: “Here are the private emotional struggles that he wove into his public art. The folly inherent in the pursuit of earthly pleasure, the passage of time, inevitability of death, personal sacrifice, a sense of entrapment, all form themes throughout the balance of his career.”

The description of the Stratford monument (“the supremacy of right over brute force”) is Allward’s and is cited by Borstad, p. 26.

(page 6)

The remarks about emblems and Rodin are Borstad’s, pp. 26-27. In the same essay, on p. 34, he states that Allward spent several months looking for studio space in Paris and Belgium before choosing London. Urquhart describes, fictionally of course, Allward’s decision to rent the studio in Maida Vale. See The Stone Carvers, p. 269.

(page 7)

Sources with respect to the memorial competition include Michael Valpy in The Globe and Mail (“Vimy Ridge: the making of a myth,” April 7, 2007), Jonathan F. Vance in Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War (1997), Pierre De La Ruffinière Du Prey in “Allward’s Figures, Lutyens’s Flags and Wreaths” (JSSAC), and Brandon’s “History as Monument.”

General Currie’s remark about the Battle of Vimy Ridge and Prime Minister King’s view of Vimy as the “altar of sacrifice” are noted in Valpy’s article.

(page 8)

Some veterans objected to the mythologizing of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. They were, they said, perfectly aware of their Canadian identity before April 1917.
Geoffrey Hayes is cited above.

James Ernest Brown witnessed the subsequent Battle of Arleux, April 28-29 (Soldier for his times, note 12). It impressed him, perhaps more than Vimy. “You will doubtless know all about it after the war . . . one of the hardest fought battles and best victories yet fought by this brigade.” Few recall it now.

A.Y. Jackson is quoted in Borstad, pp. 32-33. See also Canada.com (“Vimy, 90 years later”) about the monument, as well as Hucker in relation to Allward’s indifference to the CBMC’s guidelines (JSSAC, pp. 42-43).

This general description of the Vimy parcel is based in part on details provided by a Government of Canada website. See “Vimy Ridge National Historic Site of Canada” at Canada’s Historic Places.

The source of the quote about the Vimy Memorial’s three purposes is Hucker’s “After the Agony,” p. 284. The importance of narrow joints is noted on p. 286 of that article.

The quote about the monument rising out of the ridge is from p. 36 of Vimy, and Oscar Faber is mentioned on pp. 38 and 112.

For more on Vimy’s location, see Hucker and Smith, pp. 34-39, as well as Hucker’s article in JSSAC, pp. 43-46. The latter is the source of the remarks about a rural cemetery and “communing with the dead through nature.” On p. 46: “To a greater or lesser extent, the First World War cemeteries and the war memorials are all evidence of an effort to return harmony and beauty to a world shattered by a calamitous event. The Vimy Monument makes this explicit.”

Du Prey (p. 60) writes that Allward’s design had been drawn up for the entirely different site of Hill 62, St. Julien, in Belgian Flanders.

The soil in the Vimy area and the hiring of Oscar Faber are described by Hucker (JSSAC, pp. 43-44), and the same source notes Faber’s use of reinforced concrete and Allward’s insistence on fine joints. Veterans Affairs Canada states that the monument “rests on a bed of 11,000 tonnes of concrete, reinforced with hundreds of tonnes of steel.”
Sources with respect to Allward’s choice of stone include Borstad (p. 34), Hucker and Smith (pp. 49-50), Hucker (JSSAC, p. 44), and Brandon. A U.S. Government website clarifies the difference between limestone and marble: USG.

See Duffy about the sculptural achievement of Paul Albert Bartholmé in Paris. Duffy writes that “Bartholmé supplied him [Allward] with proof that white stone could be a medium for a consoling story about death.”

The remarks about “transcendental values,” “remade classicism,” and “loss and obligation” are Hucker’s (JSSAC, p. 45). Information about clearing the site of explosives is drawn from Brandon, while the “nightmare” quote serves as the epigraph to The Stone Carvers and is repeated on p. 270 of that book.

(pages 11-12:)

Borstad (pp. 57 and 60-61) addresses Allward’s use of the title architect.

Urquhart’s main characters eventually work at the monument: “some Jesus huge Canadian war memorial that’s going to be built at Vimy, where I lost my leg in France,” one character says. “It’s been in the works for years. The sculptor, Allward – the man who got the commission – is such a fanatic that it took him forever to find the right stone, apparently. Then they had to build a road, clear the site, . . . That would have been a real treat . . . like clearing a charnel house.” (The Stone Carvers, pp. 269 and 241-42.)

Allward’s clay modelling is discussed on p. 50 in Hucker and Smith, and in Laura Brandon’s article. Urquhart summarizes the technique on pp. 348-51 of her novel, and Brandon describes the timely rescue of the maquettes.

Brandon summarizes the procedure by which Allward’s plaster maquettes were converted to Vimy’s stone: “French stonecarvers at the Vimy site copied the plaster figures employing a technique that enabled them to double the dimensions as they carved. Using a pantographic, or copying, device the stonecarvers measured the relative depths of different parts of the plaster figures with a measuring rod. By drilling into the stone blocks placed beside the plaster carvings to depths determined by another connected measuring rod, they were able to reproduce the plaster dimensions at twice the scale.”
The three plaster figures at the military museum near Kingston are *Canada Bereft* and two *Grievers*, clearly a father and mother. Both *Grievers*, also known as *Mourners*, are shown reclining. At Vimy, they are positioned on either side of the platform’s southwest steps at the back of the monument. The other seventeen maquettes are displayed alone or in groups in Regeneration Hall at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. The female figures are *Truth, Hope, Charity, Honour, Faith, Peace*, and one of the four figures in *Sympathy of the Canadians for the Helpless*. The male figures are *Sacrifice, The Spirit of Sacrifice, Justice, Knowledge*, three of the four figures in *Sympathy of the Canadians*, and the three figures in *Breaking the Sword*. These two groups (*Sympathy of the Canadians* and *Breaking the Sword*) are known collectively as *The Defenders*. At Vimy, they stand beside the stairs at the front, at opposite ends of the Wall of Defence. Above each group, the carved cannon muzzles draped in laurel and olive branches symbolize Victory and Peace. At Vimy, *Sacrifice* (the figure arching backwards, with arms outstretched and foot pinning a sword) and *The Spirit of Sacrifice* stand between the pylons. (Note: the authors of *Vimy: Canada’s Memorial to a Generation* refer to these figures as *The Spirit of Sacrifice* and *Passing the Torch* respectively.)

See Julian Smith’s “Restoring Vimy: The Challenges of Confronting Emerging Modernism,” published in *JSSAC*. The issue of modernism at Vimy is touched on by Hucker (*JSSAC*, pp. 41, 43, and 45), Canada’s Historic Places, and Borstad (pp. 35-36). On p. 45 in *JSSAC*, Hucker writes that Allward had “the same modern preoccupations that Fussell, Hynes, and Lacquer had identified in the work of artists who had lived through the war.”

Also on p. 45 in *JSSAC*, Hucker refers to the dominant post-war classicism in cemeteries and monuments: “Their was a remade classicism, expressing the modern sensibilities of loss and obligation, which demanded that somehow the past be kept present.”

On p. 48 in *JSSAC*, Hucker notes Vimy’s “close resemblance” to the stage sets of E. Gordon Craig. “Allward was not the only post First World War monument designer to have been influenced by modern theatre design.”

See pp. 29-31 of Borstad’s essay in *JSSAC* about the personal and emotional elements in Allward’s work. Allward’s opinion about emotion over intellect is quoted on p. 30.
Duffy writes that the model for Canada Bereft, the monument’s central figure, was a “dancer turned artist’s model, Edna Moynihan.” Canada Bereft is sometimes known as The Spirit of Canada, A Nation Bereft, Canada Mourning Her Fallen Sons, or, gratingly, Mother Canada.

About Allward’s use of the lily in his design for Canada Bereft, Duffy writes: “The lily is associated with funereal and wedding bouquets alike. The dessication of this bouquet ties its meaning more closely with the former.”

The CBMG’s desire for a memorial that paid tribute to the soldiers’ gallantry is noted on p. 47 of Hucker’s essay in JSSAC.

Borstad writes that Allward’s design demonstrated the “tendency to emotion over intellect” noted above: “Confronted with the magnitude of World War I, he sought to express loss, sorrow and futility. By 1920, the stark reality of the cost in human lives overwhelmed the feelings of patriotism expressed in his South African Memorial.” (p. 30)

See Duffy re Allward’s hope that his work “was worthy of the men who gave their lives.”

Allward’s Chorus (the allegorical figures of Truth, Faith, Justice, Charity, Knowledge, and Peace) are in niches sculpted out of the pylons. The sculptor imagined them chanting what he called the Hymn of Peace. (See Vimy, pp. 26 and 42-43.)

The quote about the cyclical myth of sacrifice is from Hucker’s essay in JSSAC, p. 43. From the same essay, p. 46: “If the secret of tragedy lies in its ability to transmute pain into exaltation, so the beauty of the monument is enhanced by its retelling of the ancient myth of sacrifice and spiritual rebirth in which the pain of loss is overlaid with the hope of a new life.”
See Valpy, Hucker, and Du Prey about Vimy’s cathedral effect and the upper part of the Cross. Allward’s statement about the latter is cited in Du Prey, p. 64. For the religious features of the Vimy Monument, see Hucker (pp. 283 and 287 in “After the Agony”), Brandon, Duffy, Hucker and Smith (pp. 25 and 29-30), and Valpy.

Re religious iconography: in the November 2013 issue of “The Torch,” published by Friends of the Canadian War Museum, Brandon writes: “The Spirit of Sacrifice holds a burning torch aloft. He was clearly inspired by John McCrae’s celebrated poem “In Flanders Fields,” in particular the lines “To you from failing hands we throw / The Torch; be yours to hold it high.” Next to the Spirit of Sacrifice, Sacrifice leans back against an altar-like structure. He is emblematic of Isaac, Abraham’s intended sacrifice to God. The Sacrifice of Isaac prefigures the Crucifixion, the two events together being central to post-First World War justificatory sentiments that centered on the redemptive possibilities of the enormous loss of life.”

The extended quote about the monument’s theatrical backdrop and pictorial drama is from Hucker, JSSAC, p. 43.

On pp. 29-30 of Vimy, Hucker and Smith write that Allward “sought to create, using a modern architectural vocabulary, a structure that could convey the spiritual qualities embodied in a church or a temple. . . . In sum, Allward’s monument is envisaged as a church or temple-like sanctuary dedicated to the memory of those whose lives have been sacrificed to war, and to the belief that by their heroic sacrifice they have gained spiritual rebirth.”

(pages 16-17:)

For references to Allward’s non-triumphalism, see Canada.com, as well as Hucker in “After the Agony” (p. 283), the same author in JSSAC (p. 43), and Canadian Historical Places. On p. 36 of his essay, Borstad refers to Allward’s “personal disillusionment with and reaction to the horror of war.”

The helmet on the tomb and the various swords (tip down, broken, or lying on the tomb) are less martial than symbols of death and the end of strife.
The source of Allward’s statement about the German helmet and his sermon on the futility of war is Hucker and Smith, p. 108. Their source is “Canada’s Wonderful Memorial to Her Missing,” Our Empire, 1933. Interestingly, Allward made very few design changes over the fifteen years in London and France.

Published in 1999, Doris V. Carter’s memoir of wartime service in North Africa and Europe is entitled Never Leave Your Head Uncovered: A Canadian Nursing Sister in World War Two.

About Allward’s stubborn refusal to compromise, see Hucker’s “After the Agony,” p. 286.

See the same source and page about the inscription of the soldiers’ names. In discussing these inscriptions, Duffy notes that Allward, at first reluctant to include them, came to see them as “his monument’s principal feature.” Agreeing, Duffy writes that “The vast numbers of the Missing form a tragic and potent feature of the Great War, a fact that moves us still, long after any idea of Defending the Right has lost interest.” These names, he says, “provide a meaning for viewers to the Memorial at a time when allegorical representation exists only as a satiric device in editorial cartoons.”

Duffy contrasts Vimy and Thiepval, the British Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. About the latter, he writes: “The final listing-place for those whose bodies had been reduced to inscriptions, the structure conveys nothing consoling or comforting, nothing beyond a shudder.”

(pages 18-19:)

The quoted passages about the landscape, amphitheatre, and memorial park are from Hucker (JSSAC, pp. 46-47).

See The Stone Carvers, p. 351, for the passage about Allward and the world’s diminishing sorrow: “Allward began to feel like a vessel into which the world’s diminishing sorrow was poured for safe-keeping, and the weight of it was heavy on his bones.”

The sources about Donald Allward are those already mentioned: Hucker and Smith (pp. 50, 65, and 112) and The Gazette, May 21, 1934. Hucker and Smith thank Scott Allward, Donald’s grandson, for information he shared with the authors.
These excerpts from King Edward’s speech are reported in Canada.com (“Vimy, 90 years later”). Other sources about the monument’s unveiling are Valpy and Borstad ("extensive coverage," p. 34). About Mackenzie King and Vimy, see Valpy, as well as Borstad, pp. 34-35.

Allward’s 1921 plans had called for “Canada” and “the Sacrifice” to be made of bronze, “making two dominant notes.” Canada.com mentions Allward’s decision to use stone only.

A number of sources mention the propaganda about the alleged Nazi destruction of Vimy, as well as Hitler’s visit to the monument and the reasons it wasn’t harmed. See, for example, Valpy, Canada.com (Vimy, 90 years later and The real story of who saved Vimy Ridge), and The Toronto Star (“How Hitler spared Vimy Ridge”). The source of Serge Durflinger’s remark about Hitler’s admiration for the monument is Canada.com.

I’m indebted to my friend James Middleton, knowledgeable on many subjects, for his thoughts first on the origins of the Great War, and second on the reasons why Hitler protected Vimy. In 2012, James asked Jonathan Petropoulos, an authority on the history of Nazi Germany and art, for his opinion on Hitler’s rationale. It’s a matter of speculation, Professor Petropoulos replied, but his decision to protect Vimy may be traced in part to his close relationship with Edward VIII. Knowing that Edward had been at the monument’s unveiling, Hitler may have preferred not to offend him.

(page 20:)

For more on Vimy’s decay and the measures taken to fix it, see Richard Foot (“A monumental labour of love,” CanWest News Service, April 9, 2007). See also Hucker (JSSAC, p. 47), Du Prey (p. 61), a Veterans Affairs Canada piece entitled “The Canadian National Vimy Memorial,” and, above all, Julian Smith’s “Restoring Vimy,” cited above. Foot is the source of the quote about Vimy’s restoration under a shroud.

(pages 21-22:)

On the subject of Vimy’s rededication in 2007, and for the references to that ceremony, see “Vimy part of Canada’s ‘creation story’: PM,” CBC News (online), April 9, 2007.
Winston Churchill wrote about Ypres: “A more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the whole world.” The author Michael Morpurgo puts it differently: “If Ypres was perhaps the most concentrated killing field in British history, it was a killing field for many other peoples too. If it is sacred, it is sacred for all of them.” (Intelligent Life magazine, Spring 2011.) Some visitors, of course, see nothing sacred in an abattoir like Flanders.

Allward’s remarks about our debt to the dead are quoted in many publications, including Hucker and Smith, p. 29.

The passages from The Stone Carvers about Allward’s last years are on pp. 379-81 of that work. About Allward’s return to Canada after fourteen years, see Borstad, p. 35. Duffy discusses Allward’s final completed work (the William Lyon Mackenzie statue) and the end of his career.

The quotations about “a violent future” and “the psyche of its creator” are from The Stone Carvers, pp. 379 and 381 respectively.

Borstad writes that during and after the Second World War, Allward produced a series of drawings that reveal “the very personal horror, disillusionment, and bitterness” he felt about war. Allward called them war cartoons. (See Lane Borstad.)

Allward’s gravestone is the first in a row of four identical stones. His wife Margaret’s is to the right, and the third is that of their son Hugh and his wife Jean. (Below Margaret’s name and dates are those of Sarah Kennedy, perhaps a sister.) The fourth stone has one name only: Blyth Allward Mancuso, 1938-77. Donald’s name doesn’t appear on these stones or in his father’s Globe and Mail obituary (April 25, 1955), which ends: “In 1898 he married Margaret Patricia Kennedy, who predeceased him. He leaves one son, Hugh L. Allward, a Toronto architect.”

See Architects in Canada for more on Hugh Allward, whose architecture practice was continued by his nephew, Peter Allward. The latter, Donald’s son, donated 101 photographs documenting the design and construction of the Vimy Monument to Library and Archives Canada, as well as fifty-five photographs, five negatives, and a chronology of his grandfather’s life and career.

The Allward gravestones are well cared for, their inscriptions sharp and clear. The typeface on each is uniform, refined, and distinctive, the Ns particularly so. Perhaps Allward, or one of his descendants, designed it. Fort York Branch 165 of the Royal Canadian Legion has installed a plaque on the path near
Allward’s grave. Beneath an image of the Vimy Monument, it reads: “Walter Seymour Allward, CMG, LLD, RCA. Sculptor, Architect and Designer of the Vimy Memorial which honours the legacy of those Canadians who fought and died in the First World War.”

The source about Allward’s becoming a National Historic Person is the City of Toronto publication mentioned above. See the following reference to “Allward of Vimy”: Canadian Encyclopedia. A final note on Allward’s posthumous recognition: the day after The Globe and Mail ran his obituary, an editorial read: “Walter Allward remains secure in his place as the dean of Canadian sculptors by the common consent of fellow artists and the public alike.”

(page 24:)

For more on Wounded Warriors Canada, see WWC. Its motto is Honour the Fallen, Help the Living, and Roméo Dallaire is its national patron.

I’d like to thank my friend Gary Ockenden for the Raymond Williams quote. Williams was a prominent twentieth-century British social critic, cultural historian, novelist, and left-wing educator. During the Second World War he served as a tank captain in France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. In 1951, he refused to serve in Korea but was discharged from all military obligations after explaining his objections to the war. See John Higgins’s Raymond Williams: literature, Marxism and cultural materialism, 1995, p. 127.

© 2016 John Burge