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Summary of The Unknown Soldier in Great Britain

The present text is the result of the individual study and analysis of eight documents about the rite of the Unknown Soldier in Great Britain. Let’s start with the “definition” of the Unknown Warrior, who represents all the soldiers who lost their life fighting in the World War I and whose identity is still unknown. The idea of a ritual to preserve the memory of warriors who died for their country, but whose place of death or whose body remained unidentified, came from the chaplain David Railton, who served on the West Front during the conflict. He was impressed by the inscription “An Unknown British soldier” on a grave in a back garden at Armentières: he wrote to the Dean of Westminster, Herbert Ryle, to convey a remembrance of that scene. Thanks to his efforts this memorial was carried into effect and entered in force. The body of the Unknown Soldier destined for the burial was chosen from four (or six) British servicemen without identification marks who were exhumed from some of the main British battle areas on the Western Front on the night of 7th November 1920. When the bodies were brought to the St Pol’s chapel, in northern France, the commander of British troops in France selected one, which was placed in a coffin; the other bodies were buried. The pallbearer started its journey: it was escorted under a French honour guard to Boulogne, to finally arrive in Great Britain at London’s Victoria railway station on the 11th of November 1920. Eight bearers who belonged to the Grenadier Guards entered the carriage and draped the casket with the union flag. A steel helmet, side arms and a webbing belt were placed upon the coffin and after that the bearers carried it outside. After that, six black horses drew the carriage through the streets of the city, passing through Grosvenor gardens, the Hyde park, Whitehall and along the Mall. The cortege stopped at the Cenotaph where King George placed a wreath on the coffin, and finally the gun-carriage moved toward Westminster Abbey, where the Unknown Soldier was buried. The burial included two minutes of silence, whose start was signalled by the ringing of church; the first one had the function to commemorate those who fought and returned home, the second one to remember those who did not. As regards the message that these documents convey, what emerges is a willingness to encourage the maintaining of the commemoration. Even now keeping on memory those who fought in war is considered important; this is why thousands of letters dedicated to the Unknown Soldier were written on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Great War. Since the objectives of the documents are not making you forget the past and understanding not only the history, but also the importance of this ritual, the language used is simple, direct and easier to understand. In this way a wider audience can read the documents to find out the most interesting information to understand and better reflect on the rite. They are all descriptive texts, so they rarely present figures of speech such as metaphors, alliterations or hyperboles: the writers have to be objective in reporting facts.