

# Material Diplomacies: Tracing Material Provenance, Memory Ethics, and Strategies of Repair in the Temple of Peace and Health

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## Abstract:

Conceived in 1928 as a memorial to the Welsh soldiers and regiments who lost their lives to WWI, and a centre for peacemaking and public health action, the Temple of Peace & Health was designed to encode international humanitarian values in its very matter. Architectural morphologies, overseas materials, and emblematic reliefs were deliberately chosen and sourced to symbolise its commitment to serve the two notions across borders. These founding intentions have been highlighted and challenged by historical realities and events that cross its built time: From opening on the eve of WWII to its 1967 anti-investiture bombing and, later, its evolution into an asset of Cardiff University estates and a Cymru Global<sup>1</sup>-managed civic venue, the Temple leaves a layered legacy in which every repair or adaptation is a political act<sup>2</sup>.

This paper merges a material provenance study of the building with a semiotic reading of its material grammar (architectural morphologies, decorative reliefs, axial procession, and the crypt's choreographed commemoration ritual)<sup>3</sup> to navigate that maze of a future critical adaptation strategy. In parallel, a developing semiotic inventory maps the developing meaning of key architectural morphologies and artefacts. Selective material representations of global allies, daunting thresholds, inaccessible crypts, and hidden archives question its legibility<sup>4</sup>. This research aims to de/construct the building's symbolic matter and take note of its current pathologies to invent novel approaches to a future programme and critical conservation strategy.

We operationalise the Temple's historical legacy, material significance, civic performance, and embodied carbon and question how we can preserve commemoration rituals and humanitarian legacies while enabling inclusive reuse within a protected Grade II listed fabric. By treating its regional significance, international vision and symbolic syntax as heritage values, the paper offers a transferable framework for working with modern civic memorials where historical contestations make conservation choices intrinsically plural.

**Keywords:** *Temple of Peace and Health, Material Diplomacies, Adaptive Reuse, Percy Thomas*

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