

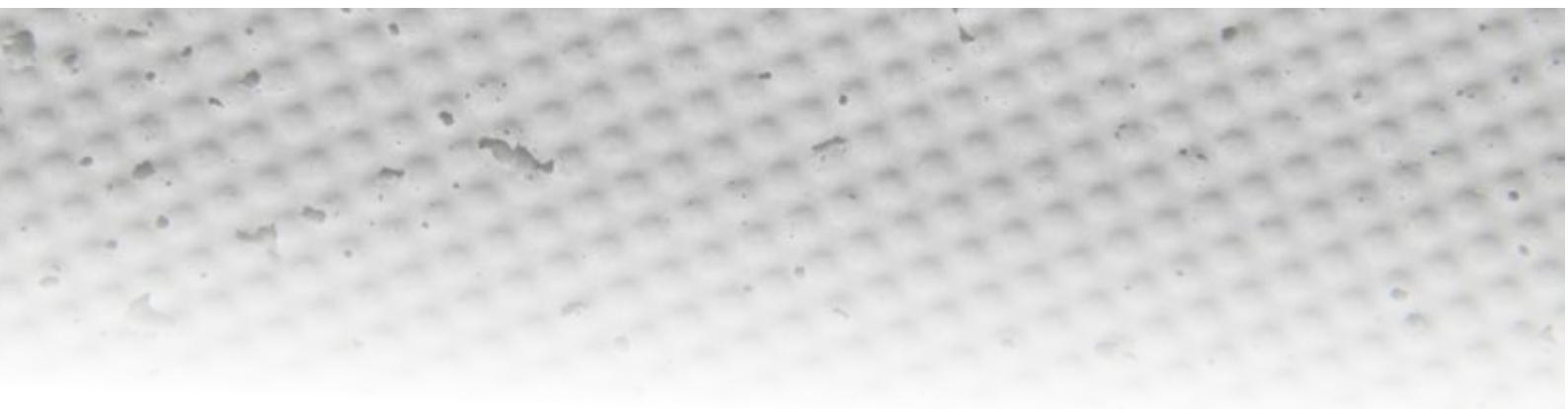


**CONCRETE**  
EMOTIONS

EMOTIONS  
**CONCRETE**

Courtenay Waring-Thomas

It has always fascinated me, the way people react to materials. Very rarely are these emotional responses based in fact, you may tell people that logically the best material to make plates from is some form of plastic, but to them it won't feel right. This intermingling of emotions, traditions and materiality is what inspired me to start a project about concrete, arguably the most polarized yet abundant material of the modern world.





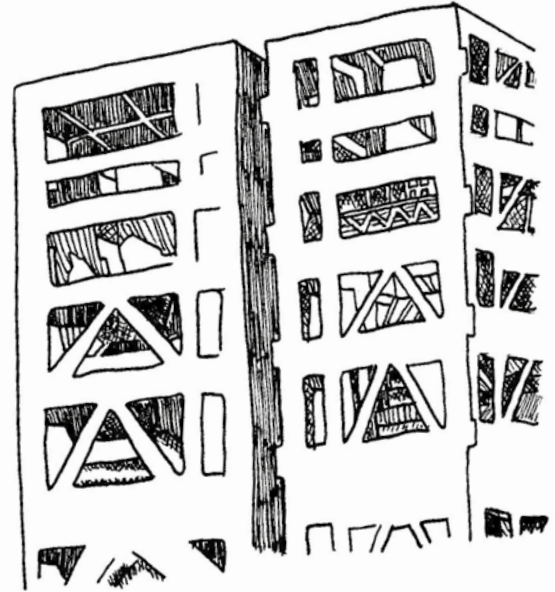
The pantheon in Rome, still the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the worlds today.

Concrete may be “Modern” but it is by no means “new”. A material made popular by the Romans, the examples of which still stand over 2000 years later. Concrete has a rich and long history, yet to many people it’s only history is from the last 100 years and the brutalist movement that dominated it’s use.



At the start of this project I took a trip to a cement factory in Spain. I wanted to look at the start of the life cycle of concrete. I felt it was important to give myself more context of the material and where it come from, a side not usually thought of when thinking of the material.

I realised as I was taking pictures of the cement factory and drawing it that while it's important to be aware of concrete's ties to architecture I wanted to make sure that I focused on the material itself and not take inspiration from the buildings created from it. It will never be possible to cut the ties concrete has with architecture, simply by virtue of the material, by avoiding harsh lines and geometric shapes I can avoid the comparison at least in my own work



One way I immediately thought of to subtly change perceptions of concrete was to bring it into a more domestic setting. By creating a piece that people would use in their daily lives I hoped it would temper the idea that concrete is dehumanising or too harsh to be used in the home.



The method of creating the bowls was relatively simple. I wanted to keep the form as familiar as possible so I took a silicone mould of a disposable bowl. This was for two reasons, one it would be easily recognisable and two it should negate the imposing “solidness” that concrete had become known for. This creates an almost delicate piece of concrete design.



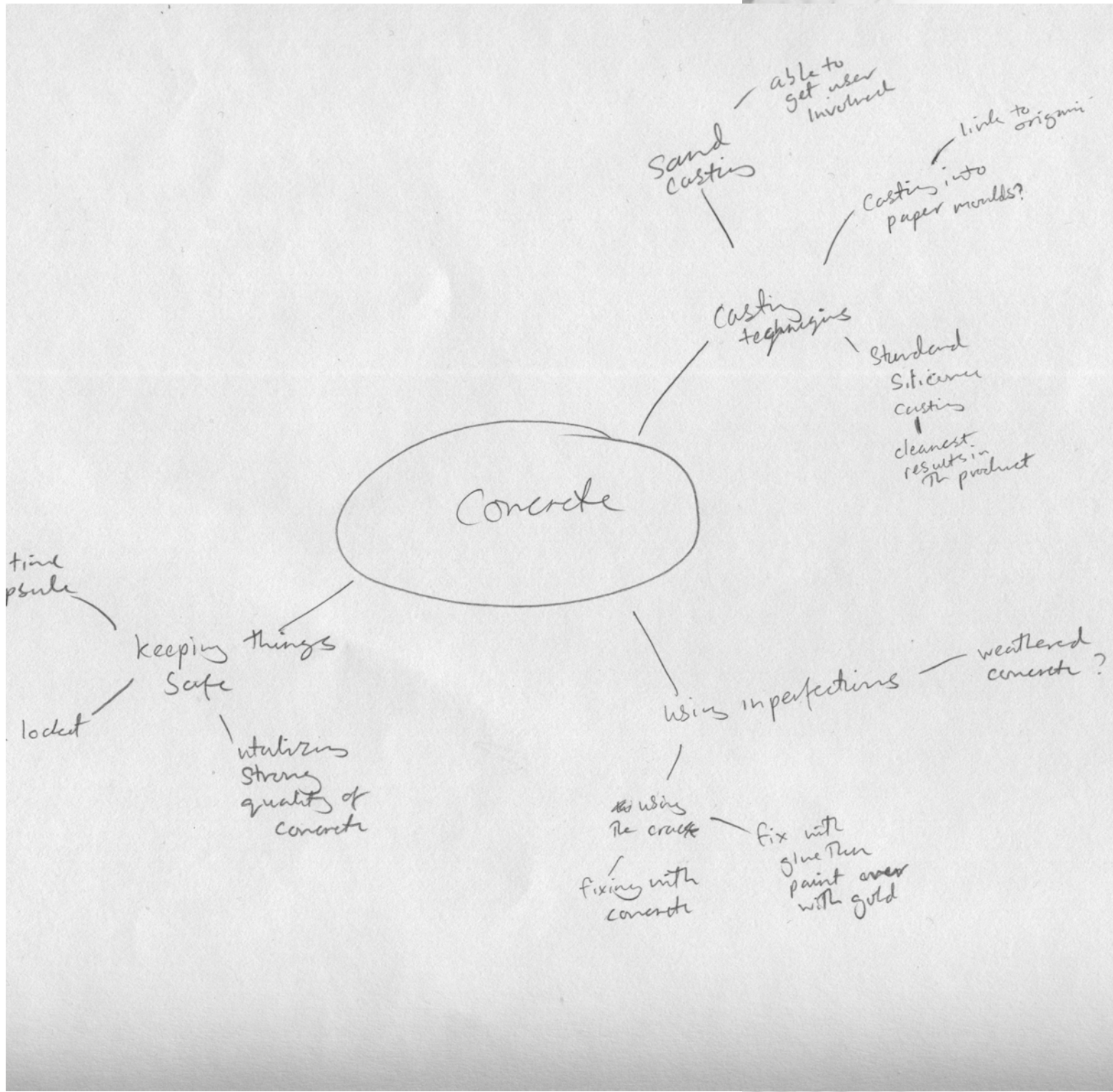
One of the main things people thought when looking at these pieces was “is that really concrete?” And while this means that I was successful in avoiding some of the stereotypes that concrete has, if no one notices that the pieces are made of concrete in the first place was there any point in using the material?



I decided that instead of completely trying to avoid association with the parts of concrete that causes people to vilify the material I could try to use the imperfections of concrete and turn them into features. I wanted to try and make repairing concrete the focus. Inspiration from Japanese ceramic repairing techniques, I tried making the cracks in the concrete a decorative feature.







Exploring various ways to change perceptions about concrete.



The first method I came up with to change peoples perceptions of concrete was to create a method where they where the ones creating the concrete pieces. People always feel closer to things they create themselves. To make the process as accessible as possible I came up wit the idea to use a sand casting technique, this is not only an easy casting method it also means the user will have to create the mold with their bare hands, carving shapes out of the wet sand, offering a much more tactile process than most casting where you would just pore the concrete into the mold.

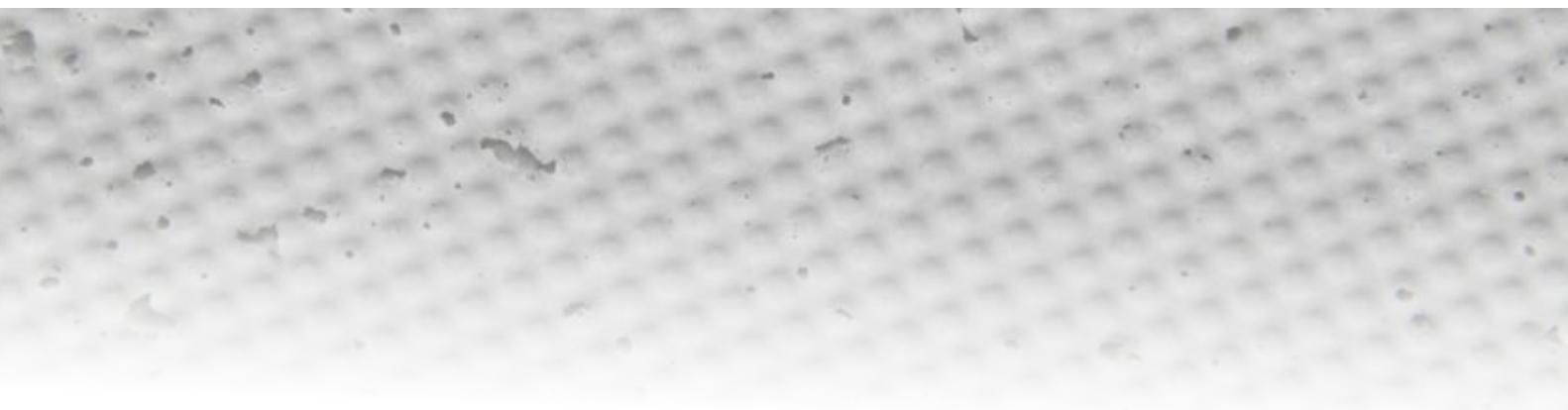




While I feel that giving an element of participation would be useful in forcibly changing the perception of concrete, this method of sand casting by nature creates rough pieces with very little possibility of creating delicate pieces of concrete. This I feel plays too much into the idea of concrete being just a solid mass, an association I want to avoid in my work.

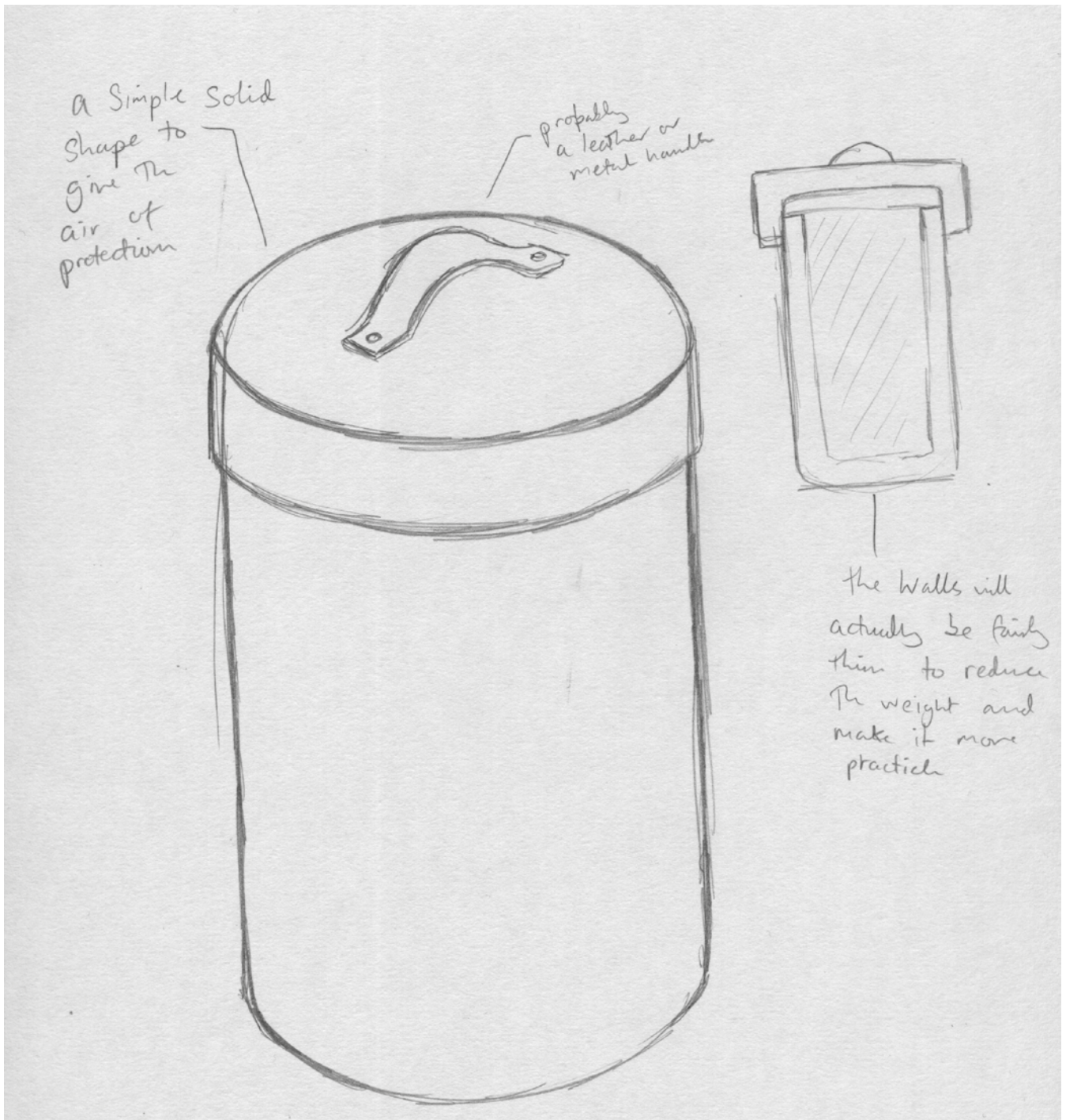


When making these concrete time capsule type pieces I wanted to extenuate the quality concrete has of being long lasting and strong. If I could create something that would keep peoples memories or things that are important to them safe it would cause people to see concrete as important and useful as a material outside of it's architectural roots.





The main issue I had with these pieces was that at such a small scale concrete isn't nearly as strong as it is on larger scales and if these pieces were to break the whole point of them would be lost. They could actually damage the views of concrete further by contradicting one of the things people agree is useful about it.



To stop the issue I was having with strength in the smaller time capsules I decided to design a larger more substantial time capsule.

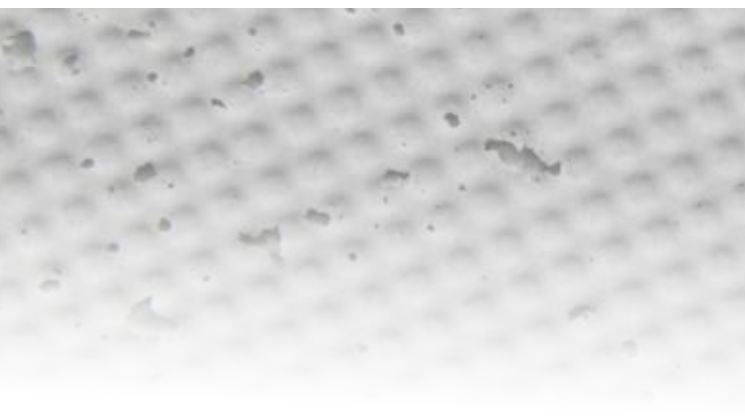


Making the molds for these time capsules proved much more difficult than my earlier pieces. I decided to vacuum form the molds in two parts so I could easily take the set concrete out, however by using a plastic mold the excess water in the concrete mix isn't able to evaporate out and so unless the concrete is completely set there is the danger that the piece could break.

I also tried out different molds like the one above made out of a semi ridged foam, this was good because the foam let the concrete breathe but to get the object out I had to completely destroy the mold and since I wanted all the pieces to be uniform this way of moulding wasn't feasible



I decided to take a trip to the cemetery on Lewes road in Brighton, this was to get an idea of the materials used in the emotionally charged time that is death. It is a situation where tradition and emotion has always won over logic, especially in the past. It was also interesting to see the material difference in the old and new parts of the cemetery







In terms of history, Portland stone and marble were traditionally used for headstones. In this cemetery, Portland stone was particularly popular, supposedly because of the Portland quarry's being so close.



In the mid 18 hundreds granite became popular once people realised that with time and weather the more traditional materials became ineligible.

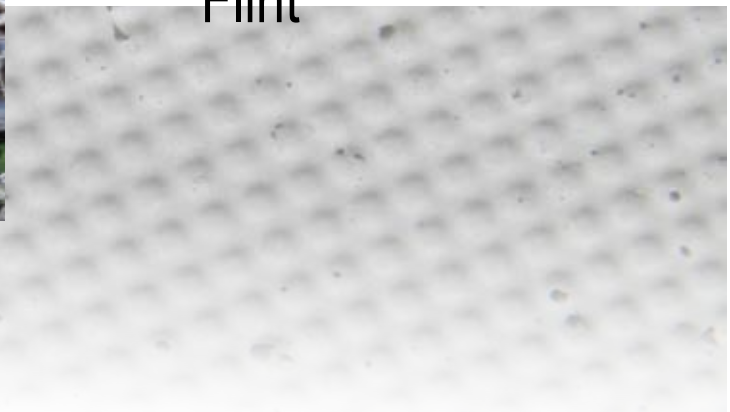


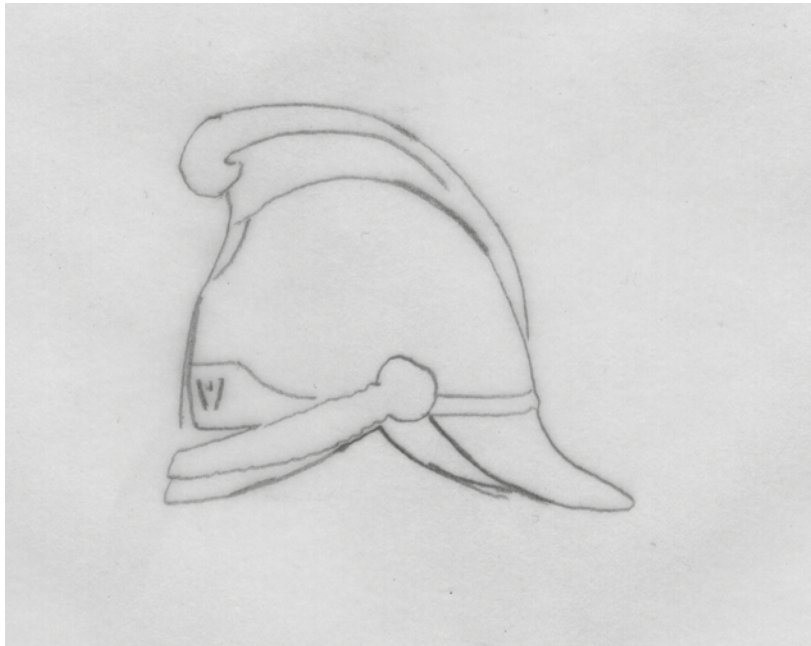


What struck me was how unkempt some of the graves were, understandably so some of these graves were hundreds of years old, but no matter why someone chose that material for the grave in the past all your left noticing now is how well the material has aged .

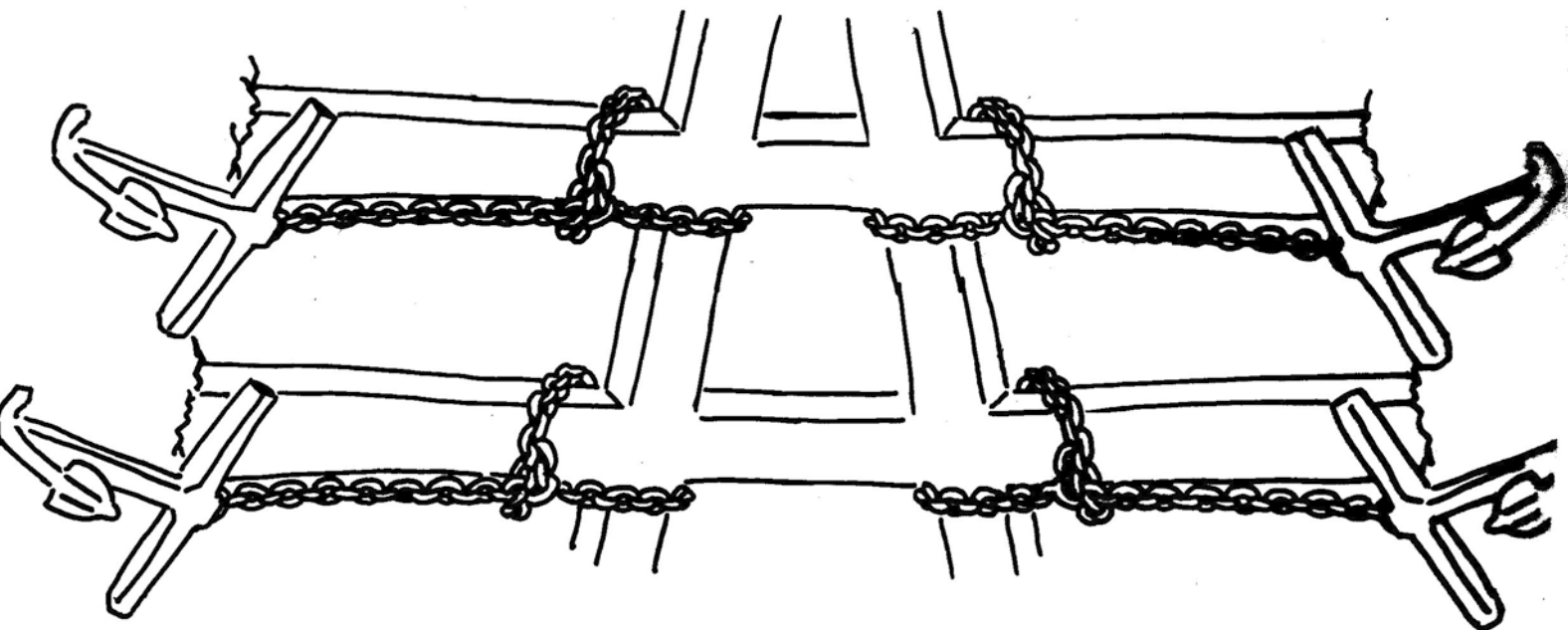


Stone  
Wood  
Plastic  
Marble  
Granite  
Flowers  
Flint

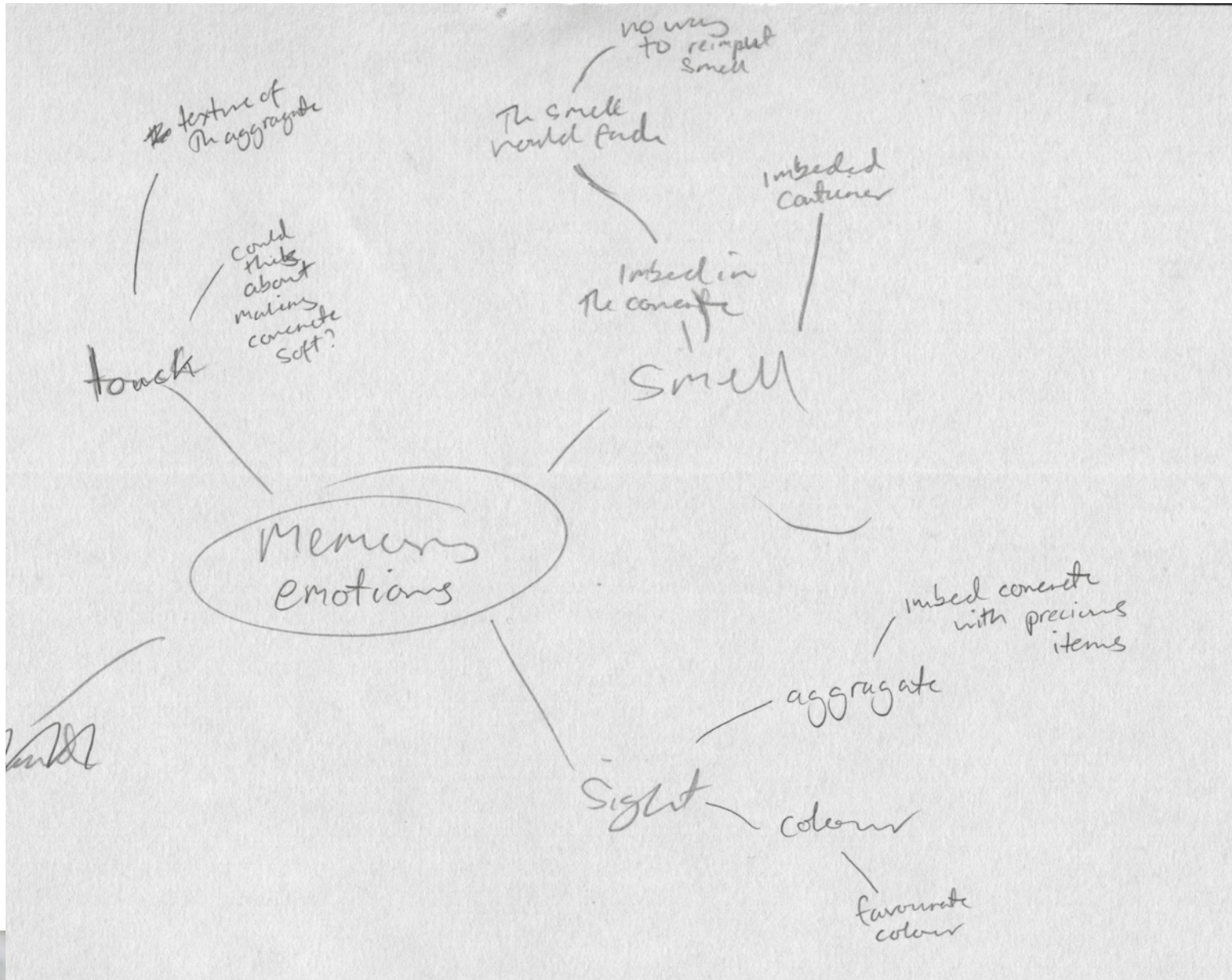




One of the most interesting things I took from the trip was the objects people use to remember loved ones. To me, an impartial party, the objects made little sense. The story's of those object remains between the deceased and their loved ones.



Making a spider diagram helped me work through some of the thoughts I had at the cemetery and I decided to develop the time capsule idea into urns but using the concrete itself at the holder of the memories rather than the vessel.





CU/IN  
200



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**KENDAL BLACK CR...**  
SKU :UU100025A  
**£129.00**



CU/IN  
170

**TRURO BRASS CRE...**  
SKU :UU100024B  
**£249.00**

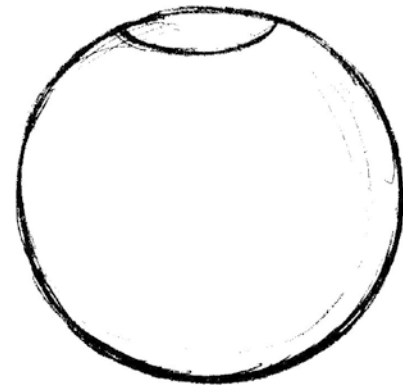
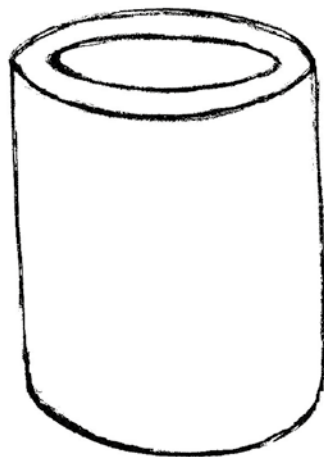
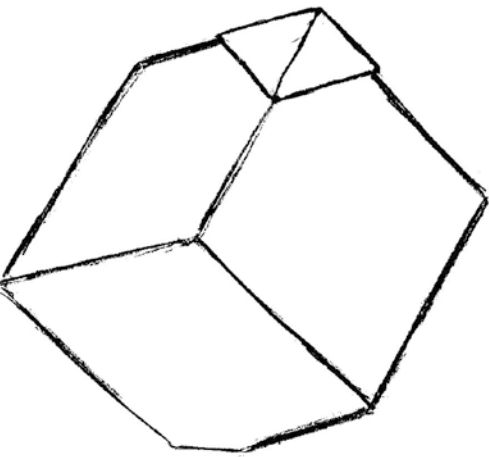
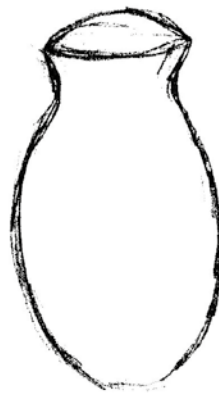
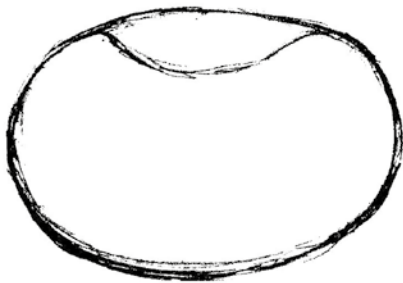


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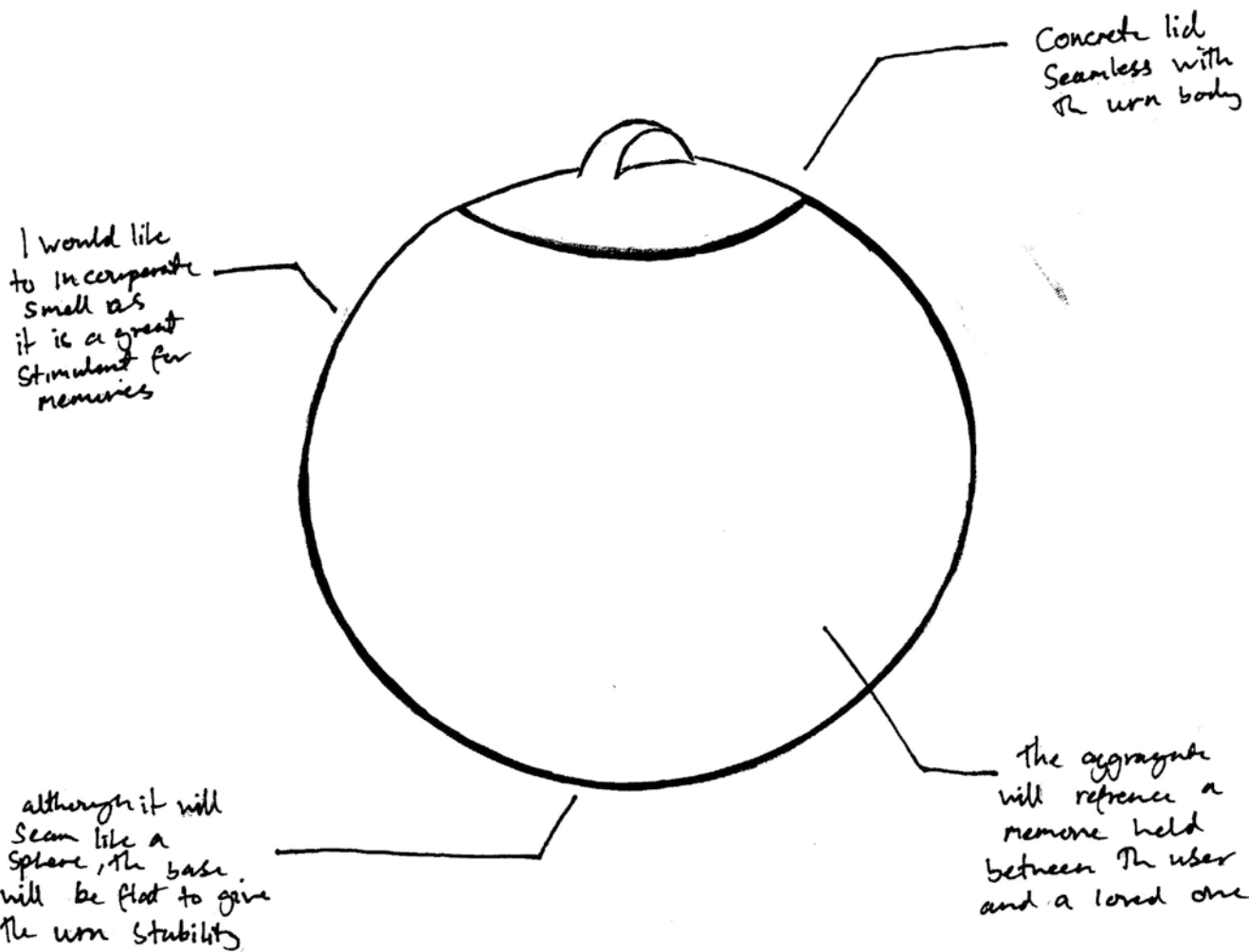
**FARNHAM FLOWER ...**  
SKU :UU100023A  
**£129.00**

I did some research into urns, both traditional ones and more modern designs. I found that not only were these fairly expensive, they didn't allow much chance for the user to personalise it or feel a connection with the object.

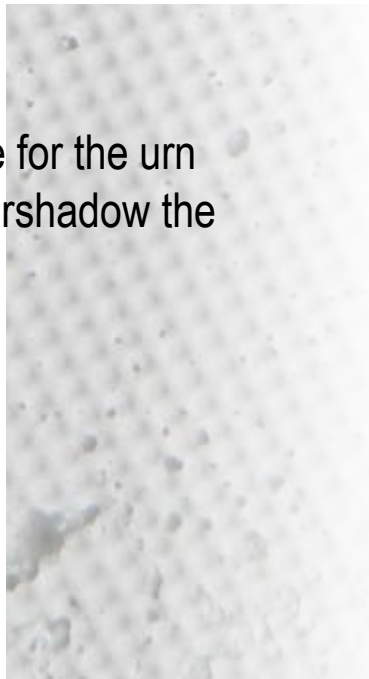
I tried playing around with different shape ideas for urns, careful to stay away from traditional or complicated urn shapes. This was mainly to not detract from the material or the story being told with the material.

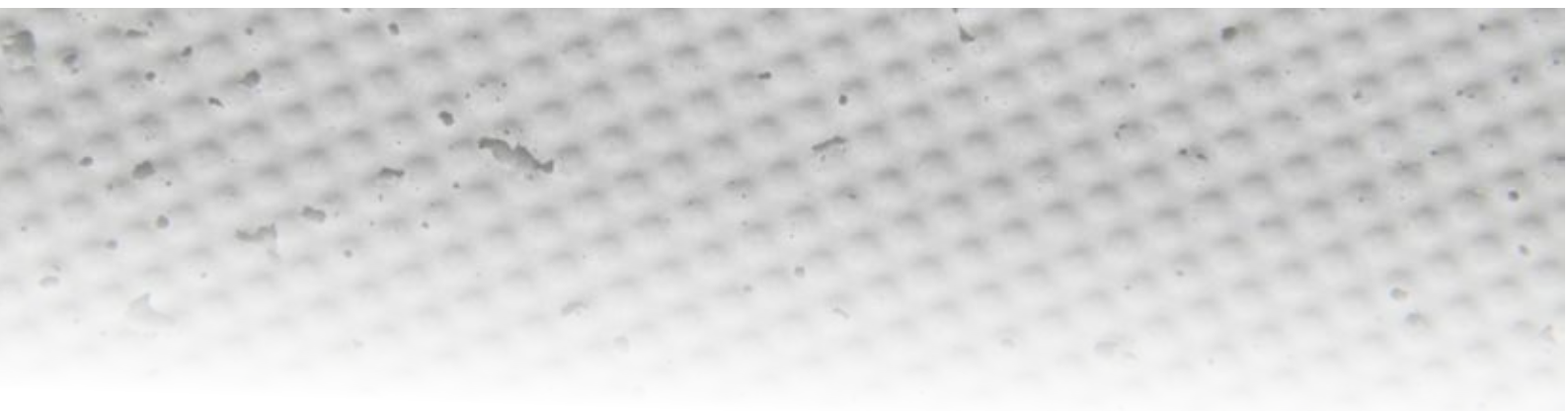






I ended up going with a simple shape for the urn as I thought anything more could overshadow the material.







I decided to change the design a bit after making these three test urns. By using a slightly squatter shaped sphere I hope to give the pieces a more “friendly” feel.

This was the plaster master I used for the vacuum form mold.



I again chose to vacuum form the mold in two parts, but this time leaving out an opening at the top so I would be able to press the concrete into the form allowing as thin a wall as possible. Keeping the delicate feel of the concrete.



I decided that I would give all my final urns a story or memory attached to them, as if they could be for real people. This is important as the urns are not just about being a product but also about capturing a memories.



“He used to take my brother and me to the big bonfire at the edge of town, every year we’d go. I used to hate the smell of ash and the crowds, but he’d always hold my hand so I wouldn’t get lost. Yeah that’s a memory I’ll cherish.”

“On one of our last trips together we went to Torquay, all we’d do was walk up and down the beaches, it was simple, but to me it was perfect.”

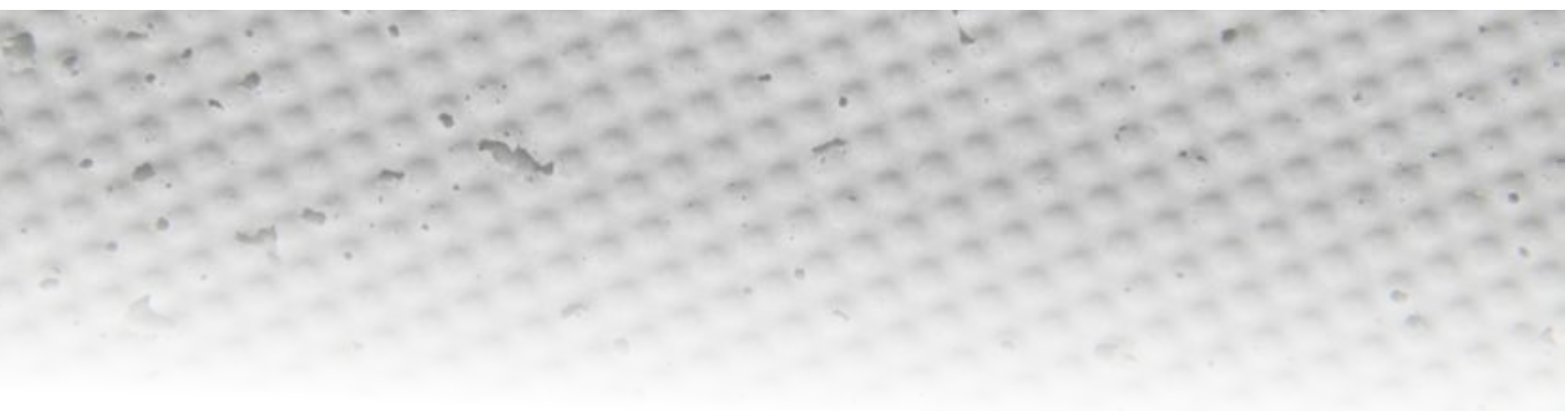
“I remember at the end of our first date he ran off and came back with a bunch of daffodils he had just picked from the ground, it was ridiculous and romantic, since then he’d always buy me flowers.”

“I loved looking through her sewing kit when I was younger, all those bits and pieces she had picked up over the years, she always tell me the story’s of how she came about them.”

“We would always spend Christmas with her; I remember every year going over to her house and the whole place smelling like cinnamon.”

“It’s the little things I’ll miss, like smelling the perfume that she wore for all those years.”

During the end of this project my grandfather sadly passed away, Towards the end of his life my grandfather had a lot of memories issues and I had been partially inspired by that to include memories so heavily in this project. I could see so clearly how much memories mean to people. I decided to create two urns dedicated to each of my grandfathers, my other one having passed away a number of years ago. These urns were different to the hypothetical urns I had created so far, these were based entirely on my memories that I had with each of my grandfathers. These proved to me how important certain objects are to my memories of people.





The first and last memories I have with my grandfather are based around cherries. I remember when I was about 4 years old; my grandfather took me to nursery one day. We were waiting just outside of the doors, but I didn't want him to leave so he gave me a cherry and promised to give me another when he came back to pick me up. It's one of the oldest memories I have. A few months before he passed away I went to visit him, it was summer and we'd just had a really good year for our cherry trees, I took him a huge container of cherries. I was hoping they would make him feel a bit better.

For the memorial urn I added cherry pips and stems to the concrete, to me they hold the most significance when I think of my relationship between my grandfather and me.

Dedicated to Peter Waring

When I was a child my grandparents lived in their home country of Dominica, I remember when they came back to England I couldn't understand them, for me their accents were too strong. I didn't feel a connection with them. As I got older I would go into my grandfathers workshop in the garden. That was where I found my connection to him. My grandfather was a carpenter and I would go and play with his tools, it was in those moments that I felt closer to him, that I could understand him.

I have created an urn with wood scraps embedded to remind me of that workshop all those years ago and to remind me of the similarities between him and me.

Dedicated to "Tommy" Thomas