

THE FLANDERS FIELDS POST



**EXTRA
SPECIAL
EDITION**



2014-18
Flanders Fields

14-18

WWI BROKE OUT!

Who would have thought that a murder in Sarajevo would turn into a worldwide conflict, involving dozens of countries? The war to end all wars, was supposed to be over by Christmas 1914. Yet four years and millions of casualties later, the world looked back in horror.



How did it all start? The murder of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz-Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip was the spark that triggered it all. In the month following the murder, tensions between the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Italy) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia) rose and, although diplomatic steps were taken to cool the situation down, by the end of July, the matter was out of control. Too many weapons had been piled up in the arsenals, too many troops mobilized and too many hidden agendas emerged from the darkness. The big powers in Europe had passed the point of no return as the logic of the arms race came to its conclusion.

On 3rd August 1914, Germany declared war on France and invaded Belgium the next day, leading Britain to intervene against Germany. Soon other nations followed, turning the conflict into a war that would eventually become the First World War. The rest is history.

“This is already the vastest war in history. It is war not of nations but of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world-madness and end an age.”

H.G. Wells (1914)

Home by Christmas

In hindsight it seems improbable but, at the actual onset of the war in August 1914, both allies and central states were convinced that they would fight a short war battle - just a quick confrontation to straighten out matters, settle accounts and then go back home to celebrate Christmas. The men who went to the front, whistling, believed it and said to their wives, I'll be home by Christmas! They would soon find out how wrong they were.

Did each party have its justifications for going to war at the start? As the war went on, the initial reasons for being involved seemed to become less clear. The great powers battled it out to see who would be left standing at the end. In his book 'The War that will end War' (1914), H.G. Wells says, "This is already the vastest war in history. It is war not of nations but of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world-madness and end an age."

So it did. The world has never been the same again since. WWI was so horrific - in numbers of casualties, shattered families and divided nations - that humanity resolved to never again allow global warfare to threaten civilization. This resolve would soon be challenged.

Flanders Fields. A place to remember.

By the end of 1914, only a very small part of Belgium, near the coast in Flanders, was held by Belgian and British troops whilst some of the fiercest and deadliest battles raged in Flanders Fields. With an estimated loss of life on both sides of more than 400,000 men, the Battle of Passchendaele - near Ypres - ranks among the deadliest confrontations of the war, comparable with the battles at Verdun and the Somme.

Flanders Fields still bear the scars of the outrageous battles of WWI. War cemeteries, memorials, museums, bunkers and trenches are silent witnesses to an atrocious past.

In order to commemorate the centenary, Flanders will host a wide variety of exhibitions, events and special re-enactments. Flanders invites visitors to reflect on peace and understanding, the horrific events of the conflict and to remember all the victims.

WWI IN 10 QUESTIONS

A hundred years ago, the 'war that would end all wars' put the world on fire. How could this happen? Here's a short history of World War I in 10 questions and answers.

1. How did WWI start?



June 28 1914 - Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, leaving the town hall of Sarajevo, shortly before they were shot.

The history books tell us that the war began on 28th June 1914 when a Bosnian Serb called Gavrilo Princip shot the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, whereupon Austria-Hungary declared war on the Serbs. How did so many other countries get involved in the conflict? In fact, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was just the final spark that hit a powder keg that had been filled for a long time. If the murder in Sarajevo provoked the war, what caused it was a lethal cocktail of international politics, an arms race between countries and the instability of the Balkans.



The arms race: gun-turrets were made for the German war fleet.

On the eve of the Great War, Europe was divided into two blocks of nations, each held together by an alliance. On the one hand, there was the Triple Alliance, which tied Germany, Austria-Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Italy together. On the other hand Great Britain, France and Russia had vowed to stand by each other in case of an attack, forming the Triple Entente.

Britain wanted to protect its overseas economic supremacy. However, Germany also wanted colonies of its own and, to that end, began building war ships. France on the other hand, wanted revenge for the defeat against the Germans in 1870-71, when they lost Alsace-Lorraine. The Russian Tsar, for his part, wanted to expand his influence among the Slavic people. Meanwhile all of these major powers began to produce weapons and their arsenals were crammed with the equipment needed for a major war.

It was the perfect recipe for trouble and that trouble began in the Balkans, which was a political minefield at the beginning of the 20th century.

2. How did Belgium get involved?

Austria-Hungary suspected that the Serbians had a hand in the murder of the Archduke and declared war on them. Big brother Russia, in support of their Slavic brothers in Serbia, began to mobilise and so did Germany, which declared war on Russia.

Germany felt squeezed between the French and the Russians and knew that it couldn't beat both countries at the same time. Fearing a war on two fronts, Germany came up with the old Von Schlieffenplan. In order to cover their back and have their hands free against Russia, the Germans wanted to defeat France quickly, entering via Belgium. However, the Belgians wanted to remain neutral and refused to allow Germany to send its troops through Belgium into France. Germany invaded Belgium on 4th August 1914 and, immediately, Great Britain declared war on Germany.

3. How did the Belgian Army stop the German offensive in Flanders Fields?

The German troops swept through Belgium, taking and destroying cities along their way. The Belgian army and troops of the British Expeditionary Force, who had come to the rescue, began to withdraw towards the sea, pursued by the Germans. On 14th October 1914, the Belgian army began to dig in along the river Yser. The Germans attacked Diksmuide, a small town on the Yser, on 16th October. The Battle of the Yser had begun.

Map of Europe (as seen through French eyes) - 1870

The German Moloch lies at the heart of Europe. Greedily, he stretches his right hand towards Belgium and The Netherlands, while crushing Austria-Hungary with his left leg. At the same time, he touches the Russian bear and the French peevish gnome, both turning nasty at the touch. Great Britain is an angry looking stepmom who keeps an air of indifference but closely watches everyone around her.



The Germans tried many times to cross the river and sometimes succeeded for a while but were always pushed back. The bombardments by British and French warships of the Flemish shore were also instrumental in keeping the Germans on the East bank of the river. On 23rd October, the last bridge over the Yser was blown up.

The Germans kept pushing and so the situation became critical for the Belgian Army. It was decided to inundate the entire Yser front, opening the sluices at Nieuwpoort. During the nights of 26th to 30th October at high tide, the water of the North Sea rushed into Flanders Fields, flooding an area 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) wide, reaching as far as Diksmuide. As a result, the Germans began to withdraw. The war turned into a war of trenches.



1914 - After the flooding of the plains.

4. What was the importance of Ypres for WWI?

Both sides considered Ypres to be of strategic importance. The British wanted to prevent the Germans from pushing on to Calais and threatening their channel ports. For the Germans, Ypres was an obstacle on their way to the sea.

The town would be attacked and heavily bombarded several times again during the war. By the end of the war, Ypres was completely in ruins, including the medieval gothic style Cloth Hall.

5. Where was the frontline in the West?

The German failure to capture Ypres in 1914 brought the war in the Flanders theatre to a complete standstill. For four years soldiers would man the trenches in harsh conditions, exchanging fire from rifles, machine guns and artillery. The landscape and villages in the region were reduced to rubble.

The Belgian army held a small strip of Belgian territory between the river Yser, the coast and the French border (approximately 5% of the total surface of Belgium).



1916 - Carrying away the wounded.

From Ypres onwards the British held the front line, beyond Armentieres in France. Then the French took command up to the Swiss border. Fierce battles were fought to capture points deemed of tactical or strategic importance, often a mere prominence in the otherwise utterly flat landscape.

THE PEOPLE

More than **60 million soldiers** participated in WWI. The conflict involved **33 countries** or, in other words, 1.5 billion people. That means 80% of the world population at that time! **10 million soldiers died**. More than 20 million, both soldiers and citizens, were injured. France, the UK, Russia and their allies lost 6 million soldiers, Germany and the other Central powers 4 million.

Famous men fought in the war, such as **Roland Garros**, **Ho Chi Minh** and **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk**, the writers **JRR Tolkien** and **AA Milne**, the sculptor **Henry Moore** and the actor **Basil Rathbone**. Another soldier, who was wounded in the First Battle of Ypres, became famous later on by starting WWII. His name was **Adolf Hitler**.

<p>28 June Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary is assassinated by a Bosnian Serb nationalist, while visiting Sarajevo. Kaiser Wilhelm II promises Germany's support in case Austria-Hungary wants to retaliate against Serbia.</p>	<p>4 August Germany declares war on France.</p>	<p>30 October The sluices at Nieuwpoort are opened in order to flood the Yser plain and halt the advance of the Germans.</p>	<p>April Fierce battles rage for the control of Hill 60.</p>	<p>25 April ANZAC-Day, the Australian and New Zealand troops join the war. Their first challenger is the Ottoman Empire in the Battle of Gallipoli.</p>	<p>21 Feb-15 Dec Battle of Verdun. (France)</p>	<p>7 June Battle of Messines. British mining engineers blow up a hill controlled by the Germans, using 500,000 kilos (1,102,311 pounds) of dynamite.</p>	<p>25 April Defeat of the Allies in the Battle for the Kemmelberg.</p>	<p>25 September The American troops join the war in force.</p>	<p>28 June The Treaty of Versailles ends the war between Germany and the Allies.</p>
<p>1914</p> <p>28 July Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.</p> <p>25 July Russian mobilization.</p>	<p>1915</p> <p>4 August Germany invades Belgium. Britain declares war on Germany.</p> <p>22 April-25 May Second battle of Ypres. The Germans use chlorine gas for the first time in the war.</p> <p>25 September Battle of Loos (France) - The British too use chlorine gas.</p>	<p>1916</p> <p>1 July-18 Nov Battle of the Somme. (France)</p>	<p>1917</p> <p>31 July-10 Nov Battle of Passchendaele. First use of mustard gas (Yperite) by the Germans.</p>	<p>1918</p> <p>April German Spring Offensive.</p> <p>11 November 1918 The Armistice is signed at Compiègne (France) in a railway carriage.</p>	<p>1919</p> <p>28 Sept-11 Nov Allied Liberation Offensive.</p>				

Continuation: WWI IN 10 QUESTIONS

6. Why is mustard gas also known as Yperite?

On the 22nd of April 1915, the Germans launched the first gas attack, using chlorine gas. Later that year, the British used chlorine gas in the Battle of Loos.

Throughout the rest of the war, both sides used ever more lethal gasses, culminating in the use of the fearsome mustard gas, by the Germans in the third Battle of Ypres in 1917. As Ypres was the city in which mustard gas was used for the first time on such a large scale, today people still refer to mustard gas as 'Yperite'.



1915 - German soldiers of the Marinekorps Flandern in the dunes. They are wearing rubber masks, one of them still has a primitive mouthpiece.

7. How did the war evolve on the Eastern front?

Contrary to the trench war in the West, the war on the Eastern front was fought over vast territories and front lines. In the early stages of the war, the Russians were quite successful and won some battles against Austria-Hungary and even Germany. However, problems of co-ordination and communications proved fatal. In the Battle of Tannenberg in Poland (26th to 30th August), General Von Hindenburg - the later president of Germany - gave the Russians a heavy blow in what is called one of the biggest victories in history but it wasn't decisive. Russia's defeat would come from within. In November 1917 Lenin took power and began peace talks with Germany, which led to the Treaty Of Brest-Litovsk on 3rd March, 1918.

8. How did this war evolve into a world war?

'The Great War' as it was first called, soon turned out to be a true 'World War' when more countries got involved in the conflict. The level of involvement differed of course; some actually went to battle, others only delivered some kind of support. Many countries got involved because of their relationship with a (European) nation: they were allies, dominions, colonies, etc.

Troops from all over the world - China, Vietnam, India, Senegal, Morocco, etc., - came over to fight or help. On 25th April 1915 for example, the men from 'down under' landed in Gallipoli on their way to Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey), an ally of the Germans. They met with fierce opposition by the Turkish army and the battle dragged along, making tens of thousands of casualties, until the end of 1915, when the Allies (also some French were involved) retreated their troops. Ever since then, on ANZAC Day, 25th April, Australians and New Zealanders commemorate the soldiers who fell in WWI and other wars. ANZAC means 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps'.

With the arrival of the 2nd Canadian Division in France, in 1915, the Canadian participation in the war effort was confirmed. Soon, other divisions were to arrive and the Canadian Corps was formed. Most of them were volunteers, as Canada did not impose conscription until 1916.

The Congress of the United States declared war on Germany on 6th April 1917 and drafted 2.8 million men. The first American troops arrived on the western front in June but it was not until October that they were up to divisional strength. Nevertheless their participation in the war boosted morale among the allies.

9. Which are the best known battles on the Western Front?

WWI saw many immense battles but some of them really stood out. In 1916, two great battles raged on the Western Front. At Verdun, the Germans attacked the French. At the Somme, it was the Forces of the British Empire that stood against the Germans. This became one of the bloodiest engagements in history. On the first day, the British lost 60,000 men, 20,000 of them killed. By the end of the battle, on 19th November 1916, a million men were killed or injured.



1918 - The destroyed operation terrain between Passchendaele and Zonnebeke.



British soldier killed in action in front of Passchendaele. Thousands of dead were never found.

A year later, a gigantic battle raged at Passchendaele, also called the third Battle of Ypres. The British pronounced it *Passiondale*, as it was a carnage of mud and suffering. In fact it was a series of battles with changing successes. It was a war of attrition, which weakened the German army but to no avail in terms of gain in terrain. The cost was terrible - in total, some 450,000 soldiers from both sides were lost for a gain of 8 kilometres (5 miles). That gain was soon to be lost again to the Germans in April 1918 during the fourth Battle of Ypres. The Battle of Passchendaele remains until today an example of pointless battle.

10. How did WWI end?

Russia officially departed the war in March 1918, allowing Germany to start focusing its efforts



June 1919 - The German delegation during the peace negotiations in Versailles.

on the Western front. By the end of September 1918 the Allies had begun the Hundred Days Offensive. It was the last straw for the Germans. The Allied Forces, now with the participation of US soldiers, breached the German lines. Meanwhile in Germany, a revolution took place and the new government soon signed the Armistice on the Western front on 11th November 1918 in Compiègne, France. Fighting officially had to stop at 11 o'clock, on the 11th day of the 11th month. The German Emperor was removed from power and a year later the Treaty of Versailles put an end to World War I.



SOME MORE FIGURES

700,000 women worldwide took jobs in factories in order to make weapons.

Soldiers from both sides dug **40,000 kilometres** or **25,000 miles** of trenches.

War was declared **65** times and diplomatic relations were under severe strain.

THE MATERIAL

Tanks and flamethrowers were used for the first time during WWI. British tanks with cannons were defined as 'male' and those with heavy machine guns were called 'female'. The flame throwers could fire flame jets as far as 40 meters (130 feet).

THE LAST POST: An eternal tribute

The solemn, daily devotion of Ypres' buglers at the Menin Gate keeps the memory poignantly alive

Silent crowds wait for the stroke of 8 o'clock. Then the volunteer buglers from the local fire brigade raise their instruments to play the Last Post. Nothing quite prepares you for the powerful emotion of experiencing this moving ceremony first hand.

Since 1928, the notes of the Last Post have broken the silence across the cobbled streets of Ypres, a town entirely rebuilt from the rubble and the devastation that had been visited upon Flanders during the First World War.



Menin Gate.



Devastating numbers

The vast, white, Portland-stone walls of the Menin Gate are engraved with the names of nearly 55,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers lost on the field of battle but with no known graves; a son, a father, a brother. In fact the walls of the Menin Gate were not big enough: a further 34,957 names of the lost and untraced are inscribed on the walls of Tyne Cot cemetery to the east of Ypres, overlooking the orderly ranks of 12,000 headstones immaculately maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. These men are long gone but the residents of Ypres make sure they are not forgotten.

Heading out to the trenches

Historically, the Menin Gate of Ypres was simply a crossing point over the moat



Buglers preparing to play the Last Post.

and through the ramparts of the old town fortifications, on the road to the nearby town of Menin. It had a special significance for the troops: it was from this spot that thousands of soldiers set off for the part of the Front called the Ypres Salient - many of them destined never to return.

This became the chosen site for one of the grandest and most haunting memorials of the Great War. The new Menin Gate was built in the form of a Roman triumphal arch, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield. During the inauguration ceremony, in July 1927, the Last Post was played for the first time by buglers from the Somerset Light Infantry.

Daily tribute to the dead

Inspired by this event, in 1928 - ten years after the end of the Great War - the head of the Ypres police force, Pierre Vandebraambussche, founded the Last Post Association and the Last Post ceremony in Ypres has been held every day since - or almost every day. The sole exception occurred during the four years between 1940 and 1944 when Ypres was occupied by the Germans during the Second World War.

During this period the daily ceremony continued at Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey (England) and the tradition was maintained here on the first Sunday of the month until recently. At Ypres, the ceremony at the Menin Gate resumed on the very evening that Polish forces liberated the town, even though heavy fighting was still going on nearby.

The Fire Brigade

The Last Post Association is still responsible for the day-to-day organisation of this unique tribute. Following its long-established tradition, the buglers of the local volunteer fire brigade, of which they are all required to become members. Four silver bugles were originally donated to the Last Post Committee by the Brussels and Antwerp branches of the Royal British Legion, while others have been presented over the years as the bugles age.

The ceremony serves as a symbol of gratitude to the men who willingly made the supreme sacrifice on the Salient, fighting in a conflict that would eventually bring peace and restore the independence of Belgium. The very persistence of this tradition, day after day, week in week out, underlines the importance of keeping the memory alive, as each generation passes on the baton to the next.

Now, in the context of a modern, united Europe, the ceremony has taken on a broader meaning: the remembrance of all who lost their lives in this conflict - from both sides of the front line. In this sense the Last Post ceremony is not just an enduring reminder of the past but a beacon of hope that projects into the future.

The 30,000th Last Post

By 9 July 2015 the buglers past and present will have sounded the Last Post at the Menin Gate on 30,000 occasions.

To mark this 30,000th Last Post, the WWI centenary programme called GoneWest will be organising an event under the auspices of its artistic curator, the Flemish actor Wim Opbroeck. Belgian fire brigades will contact their network (many have links to fire brigades in other countries) and invite them to join the tribute. The idea is to have people gathering in fire stations all around the world, regardless of the local time, to watch the 30,000th Last Post being played in Ypres - a moment of solemn, global remembrance for the First World War - a tribute to a tribute.

www.gonewest.be/en



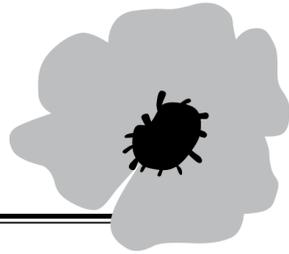
Menin Gate.

Menin Gate visitor information

The Last Post ceremony takes place at 8pm every day of the year. There is no entrance fee and no need for prior reservation. On busy days, crowds begin to assemble at least 30 minutes before the event begins. It is possible to request a special extended version of the ceremony. Individuals or groups may, for example, wish to lay a wreath or bring musicians or a choir. The Last Post Association is happy to consider such requests but applications should be made well in advance. These extended ceremonies are also public and also begin at 8pm.

www.lastpost.be/en

The poppy that became A POEM



IN FLANDERS FIELDS

BY JOHN MCCRAE, MAY 1915

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

On 3rd May 1915, Ypres, an officer of the Canadian army is sitting on the rear step of an ambulance. He is looking at the grave of his friend and brother-in-arms Alexis Helmer, killed in action the day before. He sees beds of blood-red poppies growing among the graves in the burial ground. He begins to write the first words of what is now a famous poem:

***In Flanders fields
the poppies blow...***

The poet was Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, who was also a doctor and, according to Cyril Allinson - a sergeant-major serving in McCrae's unit - this is how the red poppy became associated with The Great War. Allinson got to read the poem and stated that it was "almost an exact description of the scene in front of us both". McCrae worked on his poem for several months before sending it to *The Spectator* in London, which rejected it.

It was later published in *Punch*, the weekly British satirical magazine, albeit at first anonymously. 'In Flanders Fields' became the most popular poem of that time but McCrae would not live to see his Flanders Fields Poppies grow into an international symbol of remembrance. He died of meningitis on 28th January 1918. He was buried at the British war cemetery in Wimereux in France, near Boulogne-sur-Mer.



American symbol of remembrance of the Great War. On 29th September, 1920 the convention of the war veterans association National American Legion decides to proclaim the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy America's national symbol of Remembrance.

One of the participants in the convention was Anna Guérin, who represented the French YMCA. She came up with the idea of selling silk poppies to support French children orphaned by the war. She also wanted to have the poppy accepted as a remembrance symbol by the allied nations in the Great War. Partly because of her efforts, the Flanders Field Poppy became known also in Great Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and around the world as the symbol of remembrance of soldiers killed in the Great War and in later wars. Ever since, whenever the victims of war are commemorated in those countries, people wear artificial poppies on their chest.

How a flower became a symbol

New York, 9th November 1918. Professor Moira Michael, who works for the YMCA in New York, takes a brief pause between her duties and grabs a magazine. In it she reads the poem by John McCrae, a moment she later described as a 'deep spiritual experience'. She is deeply moved by the poem, especially the last stanza - "We shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields".

She feels as if the voices of fallen soldiers who in the poem warn the reader not to forget them, address her directly. At that point she pledges that she will always wear a red poppy as a token of remembrance. She even writes a poem on an envelope, answering the call in McCrae's last verse:

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet - to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died.

Matching words with deeds, Moira Michael starts on a crusade in order to have the poppy accepted as the

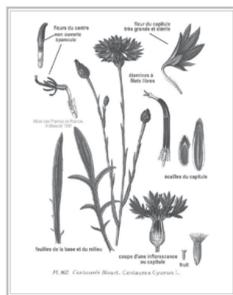
A flower on a pile of rubble

John McCrae's poem is not the only link between the poppy and the war. Poppies prosper on rubble and in places where the soil is frequently disturbed. The battlefield in Flanders was one big pile of war-torn soil and the ground was churned up by thousands of shells. This made the seeds germinate. So, the abundance of red poppies on the battlefields of Flanders - often the only spots of colour in a sad landscape of ruin, mud and bomb craters - had everything to do with the war.

Moreover, the poppy is also called slaapbol (sleeping ball) in Dutch, because it is akin to the opium poppy, used for the production of the morphine administered to the wounded soldiers. Lastly, with its deep red colour like the blood of the soldiers that flowed so plentifully and a black heart like a shot wound, the poppy is a perfect, yet not so obvious symbol of war remembrance.

Le Bleuet

In France, the corn flower is the symbol of The Great War. Like the red poppy, the corn flower (le Bleuet in French) grows among corn. It too was often the only colour on the grey battlefield. The blue colour also referred to the light blue uniform French conscripts had to wear as of 1915. The corn flower became the symbol for all soldiers who died on the French battlefields of The Great War. Here too, it was a woman - the battlefield nurse Suzanne Lenhardt - who was instrumental in the acceptance of 'le Bleuet' as the French national symbol of remembrance.



Alexis Helmer was buried on a small burial ground that was situated near a farm halfway between the town of Ypres and the village of Boezinge. Essex Farm, as the place was called by the British, was near the front line and was used as a field hospital, governed by John McCrae.

Since there was no chaplain present, McCrae conducted a simple service at the graveside. The grave has since been lost. Lieutenant Alexis Helmer is now commemorated on Panel 10 of the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres; he is one of the 54,896 soldiers who have no known grave in the battlefields of the Ypres Salient.

Later on, the burial ground became known as the Essex Farm Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield. A bit north of the cemetery, you can still find the remains of a medical post and a memorial for John McCrae.

Today 1200 soldiers are commemorated here. The youngest of them was private *Valentine Joe Strudwick*. He was fifteen.



Trooping the colour

The poppy flowers in more colours than just red! There are hundreds of varieties, each with their own colour. The Himalaya poppy is a heavenly blue. In Wales they are mainly yellow, while in California you'll find them in orange, pink, yellow and even cream-coloured. There are also purple and even near black varieties. In New Zealand some people prefer the white poppy to remember the fallen soldiers as, in their opinion, the red poppy is too politicised and because the white poppy allegedly conveys a more pacifist symbolism.

WHERE AND WHEN DOES THE POPPY GROW?



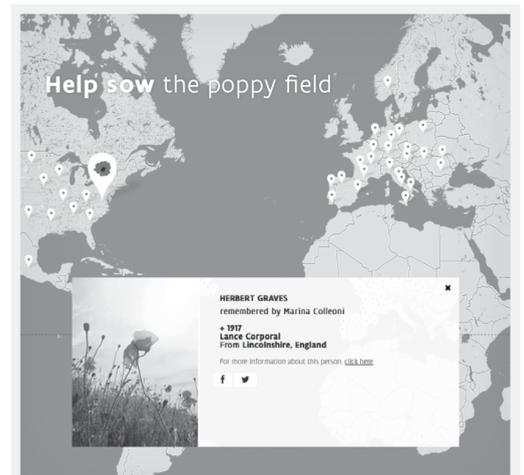
The poppy is not really indigenous to the heavy clay soils of the Flemish coastal region as it prospers better on light, sandy ground, however, the battlefields provided the ideal environment for the seeds to germinate. Also present-day farming methods have taken their toll on a flower that is considered by many a 'weed'. So if you come to Flanders to watch seas of poppies, you might be disappointed.

That is why the Flemish Agency for Nature and Forest is about to lend a hand. Under the motto *Taking care of Flanders Fields*, almost 120 acres of field are to be transformed into poppy fields for the commemoration of The Great War Centenary. If you would like to admire them, the best time would be late spring and summer as the poppy flourishes only in those seasons.

Join US in creating a worldwide poppy field

www.flandersfields1418.com/poppyfield

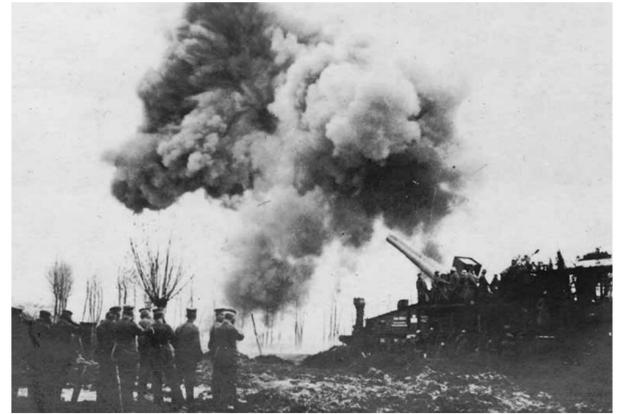
You too can commemorate someone who died during the Great War in Flanders Fields by sowing a virtual poppy. Enter the name of the person you wish to commemorate or have the name of someone who died during WWI allocated to you at random. Then you can upload a picture or choose one from the gallery. It only takes a moment. By 2018 we want to commemorate all those who died during WWI, with a global, virtual poppy field.



World War One IN PICTURES

WWI was the first war to be photographed and filmed extensively. Not only by military men on scouting missions or for propaganda. Ordinary soldiers and citizens too captured what they saw around them.

Here are some remarkable images of the Great War raging in Flanders Fields.



1917 - German navy artillery on a railway carriage in the woods of Houthulst.



The university city of Leuven was set on fire by the invading Germans who were convinced that civilians had been shooting at them. 1 out of every 8 buildings was burnt down.



Mud was one of the worst enemies.



In France and Great Britain, fugitives are massively used in the war industry - on the picture, Belgian women are filling artillery grenades.



1917 - Catch of rats in the trenches. The men are wearing the typical khaki police hat.



British troops in the trenches.



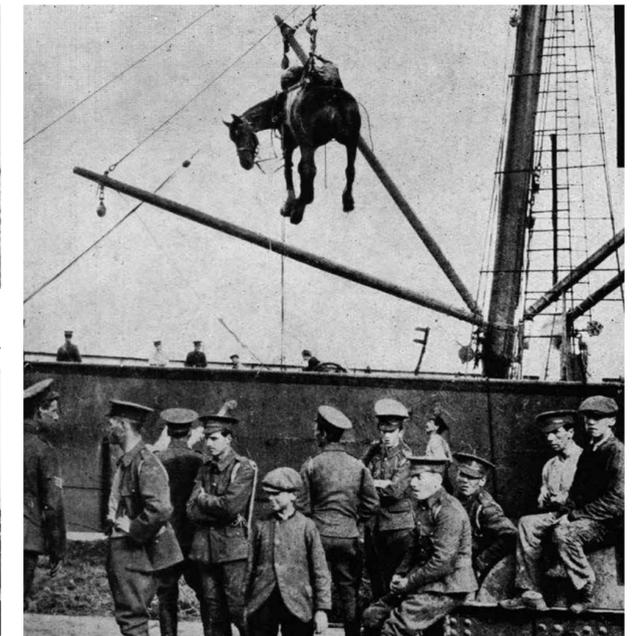
1914 - Indian troops with Vickers-machine gun.



1916 - Lancers looking for lice. Note the woollen hat underneath the helmet, which was distributed from late 1915 onwards.



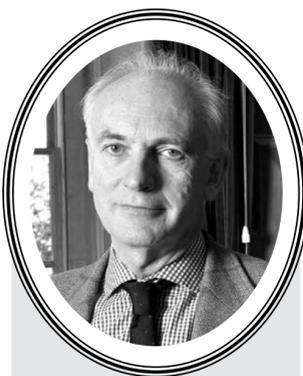
Belgian refugees in the Netherlands.



1914 - Arrival of the British troops and material. In the initial phase of the war, 20,000 horses were also brought ashore.

Interview with Sir Hew Strachan

SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM OF COMMEMORATION



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Sir Hew Strachan has been Chichele Professor of the History of War and Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, since 2002. His books include **The First World War: Volume 1: To Arms** (2001), **The First World War: an illustrated history** (2003; related to a multi-part television series and translated into French), and (as editor) **The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War**. He is a Trustee of the Imperial War Museum and a Commonwealth War Graves Commissioner, and serves on both the United Kingdom's and Scotland's national advisory panels for the centenary of the First World War.

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What is the right way to commemorate a war that took place a century ago? In a recent interview, the eminent historian Sir Hew Strachan offers us some sound insights and advice.



Commemorations of the start of the First World War begin in earnest this August. This centenary has already been marked extensively by articles in the press, books, TV documentaries, stage plays and concerts. We have all had the opportunity to become acquainted with the story of the war, but nonetheless it remains remote. No one who fought in it is still with us. For the school students visiting the battlefields today, the war took place four generations ago. How can we ensure that the commemorations hold our interest and sustain their relevance to the modern world?

Local memories, global war

For Sir Hew Strachan, it is important that the commemorations should not be simply about remembering the dead. This is, rather, an opportunity to review the First World War afresh, to shake out the clichés and tired preconceptions and to develop new understandings of a global conflict that – as its name suggests – had long-term repercussions for the entire world.

As Chichele Professor of the History of War at All Souls College, Oxford, as a member of the National Committee for the Centenary of the First World War, as a Commissioner of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and as the author on numerous highly regarded books on war, including *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (new edition 2014), he is certainly in a position to judge.

“My concern is that commemoration can be very local and parochial,” he says. “People think about remembrance in terms of their local church, their local school or war memorial. There’s nothing wrong

with that: they are the obvious sites in the landscape – that’s what we see of the First World War. But the war is so much bigger than that. We need to go from local to global, and be able to put local commemoration in the broader context.”

We should not ignore those who died, of course, but our remembrance should also embrace the vast majority of combatants who did come home, and how they shaped the modern world in the light of their experience.

“It is not enough simply to restore war memorials,” he adds. “There should be an appetite – and funding – for people who ask questions beyond the obvious ones, who look at remembrance critically. Then we can begin to widen out the discussion.”

Raising new questions

There is a tendency to see the war in very polarised terms. Over the past century, attitudes towards the war have shifted back and forth, especially at each successive major anniversary. Around the time of the half-centenary in 1964, the widely held view was that it had been a futile war, with soldiers led to slaughter by an incompetent and indifferent High Command – “lions led by donkeys”, as this view is often summarized – in a wasteland of muddy trenches. By that time also the Second World War had to some degree eclipsed the memory of the First: the Second World War seemed to have a clearer good-versus-evil narrative, which made the First World War harder to justify.

Now in 2014 we have a much more nuanced view, and a better understanding of the difficulties for the First World War generals facing the unprecedented circumstances of industrialized war. And there are plenty of uncomfortable truths that don’t fit the old narrative. For all the losses, and the terrible injuries sustained, we have to accept that most combatants went to war willingly, and for some this was even a most exhilarating time in their lives. “Certainly the war did not seem futile at the time,” comments Sir Hew. But he urges caution: “There is a danger in the debate of now swinging too

far the other way. But it is not ‘either/or’; it’s ‘both/and’.”

It is in such areas of ambiguity that interesting questions can be asked. When is it right to go to war? When is it right to conclude it? When is it right to carry on fighting? Do the causes validate the losses that you suffer? “The causes of war and the way it is fought have to be judged independently. You can be right to go to war and fight it in a stupid way, and you can be wrong to go to war and fight it in a very intelligent way.”

Such questions, raised in the context of the First World War, have a real relevance today as we observe the progress of contemporary conflict, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Syria.

A four-year journey

Commemorations will last for over four years. This is an opportunity to track the course of the war as it unfurled, putting aside for a moment the lens of hindsight.

In 1914, for instance, across Europe and across the world, the outbreak of war was greeted with apprehension and a sense of great uncertainty – uncertainty about the causes of the war, uncertainty about the outcomes. What did it feel like to be a citizen of which ever side in the conflict at that time, and what can that tell us about the uncertainties of all wars while they last? “To capture this notion,” comments Sir Hew, “is one of the big challenges of the centenary commemorations.”

There are promising signs that, as we move through the centenary years towards 2018, succeeding historical landmarks will inspire new themes. The centenary of the Battle of Jutland in 2016, for instance, could redirect the focus on the role of the navies.

The global aspects of the First World War should also provide constant fresh impetus. In Western Europe, there is a tendency to see the war exclusively as the Western Front, but of course there was action too on the Eastern Front, in Italy, in Turkey. And the war had an impact throughout all the European empires of the day, in India, Africa, and across the Middle East of the Ottoman Empire.

There will be points along the line when all the various countries will join the narrative as they will mark their centenary of involvement in the war – the USA in 2017, for instance. “Collectively lots of people are doing very different things in different parts of the world,” says Sir Hew. “These

should not be seen as the exceptions: they need to be integrated into the whole.”

In brief, we can look forward to a varied and colourful programme of commemorations over the four years, each enriching the debate and leading to new perspectives. “It’s got to be journey,” says Sir Hew, “or it’s going to be very boring!”

He adds: “For Flanders of course, this is a big occasion. 1914 was the moment that the world came over. And in 2014 that world is coming back. They have certainly risen to the challenge with a great deal of imaginative initiative.”

Peace and reconciliation

We leave the last word to Sir Hew: “In these centenary commemorations there are two opportunities running in parallel. One is trying to understand the history of the war, and that remains controversial, but we shouldn’t be frightened of that; it’s an opportunity for discovery and debate and for education. And the other is the opportunity for celebrating the reconciliation between countries that were fighting each other then, but which are clearly not fighting each other now. So we should be able to approach this on two different levels: commemoration, but also celebrating the state of Europe today and reinvigorating our sense of living in a Europe at peace.”



THE NAME LIST

On 4th August 2014, the *In Flanders Fields Museum* launches The Name List Project. It entails a non-stop projection of the names of the people who died exactly 100 years ago and whose deaths were a consequence of the war on Belgian soil, or are commemorated as such. The projection gives a day by day overview of the deaths occurring up until the end of 2018. A website will be launched as well where people all around the world can look up their own relatives among the dead and perhaps even fill in any missing details.

www.inlandersfields.be



IN FLANDERS FIELDS MUSEUM



The *In Flanders Fields Museum* is the hub of WWI commemoration in Ypres. It displays more than 2,000 original objects and documents, giving a unique representation of the First World War in Flanders. The interactive kiosks make your visit even livelier, as you are transported into the past where you can follow personal stories. New scenography highlights the most recent museum applications, including touch screens, interactive poppy bracelets, video projections and soundscapes. On top of all that, you can now climb the bell tower for an extraordinary view of what was once a completely devastated region. And more than just being an exhibition, the museum has a WWI knowledge centre that allows young and old to research the dramatic events of the past.

www.inlandersfields.be

BRUSSELS EXPO 14-18 IT'S OUR HISTORY



For the First World War’s 100th anniversary commemorations, the Royal Army Museum in Brussels is organising a major exhibition entitled ‘14-18, it’s our history!’. It brings all aspects of the conflicts that left Europe battered and weakened, and places the history of the war in a broader context. The war and everyday life during the German occupation constitutes an important part of the exhibition, but most of all, it illustrates how this conflict profoundly influenced the history of the 20th century. To make sure of this,



various original objects, though provoking scenes, personal accounts, multimedia and films are on display. The role of this exhibition is to open the eyes of the visitor to the story of the firstly European, then global, war. Moreover, it seeks to establish a connection by depicting how the events during this period of the early 20th century affected lives then, and continue to do so up to this day.

26 FEB 2014 - 26 APR 2015

www.expo14-18.be

THE ROAD TO FLANDERS FIELDS

How - during the Great War - did the common soldier get to the battlefield? In fact, by ship, train, truck, horse and cart or on foot - in that order.

British soldiers were shipped across the Channel, mainly from the port of Folkestone. The UK had the largest navy and merchant fleet in the world, so there was no problem finding ships. Troops coming from the Commonwealth had to travel weeks by ship and train to reach Belgium and France. For instance, Australians and New Zealanders would go from Alexandria in Egypt (if they had been to Gallipoli), to Marseilles in France and by train to northern France or to the French port of Le Havre. If they were leaving from Australia it would be from Fremantle, to go through the Suez Canal or around Africa via Cape Town in South Africa and then to Marseilles or England. The fleet consisted mainly of converted merchant ships. The Indians too came in by ship through the Suez Canal or via the Cape. Canadians crossed the Atlantic Ocean by steamer. All troop transportations over sea were very dangerous, since the Germans had cruisers and U-Boats all over the globe. Many troop ships were sunk, either by shells or torpedoes.

Once the soldiers were in Belgium or France, they had to rely mainly on horses and their own feet. Especially in the beginning, horses were the major means of transportation but they became useless once the battlefields were

blocked with trenches and barbed wire. The railways took over as the war went on. Trains, which were fast and reliable, transported large groups of soldiers with their equipment and supplies to the front-line. The British even made special ambulance trains in order to get casualties away from the front.

Cars and motorised vehicles were also used but not so often. There is one famous exception at the beginning of the war. While the Germans swept through Belgium in the direction of Paris, the French Military had to find a means to get as many soldiers to the front as quickly as possible. They sent 4000 soldiers to the Marne by means of Parisian taxi cabs to save Paris from being taken by the Germans. The cabs were later called the Taxis of the Marne.



A column of French vehicles is following the Belgian march.

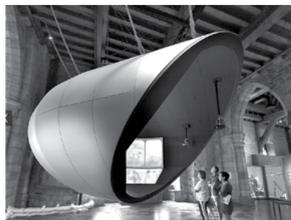
FLANDERS FIELDS IN 48 HOURS

140,000 men enlisted in Ireland to serve in the First World War, and although for many years those who served were not commemorated as they were in many European countries, today it is a different story. The Irish played an important part in Flanders Fields when the 16th (Irish) Division joined forces with the 36th Division, fighting alongside each other at the Battle of Messines.

Day 1

In Flanders Fields Museum

1
YPRES
(see page 11)
Grote Markt 34



10 a.m. Start the trip with a visit to the hub of the WWI commemoration in Flanders Fields: the *In Flanders Fields Museum*. Entry is with a white bracelet with a red poppy on it, instead of a ticket. This recently refurbished museum - located in Ypres' impressive Cloth Hall - focuses on personal stories remembering the story of the invasion and trench war. Take time, to slowly climb the bell-tower to have a look at what were once the battlefields.

Talbot House

2
POPERINGE
(see page 22)
Gasthuisstraat 43



2 p.m. After lunch head for Poperinge, a 15 minute drive. It's here that Talbot House can be found, a large house in the middle of the town, also known as *Every Man's Club*, where soldiers of all ranks

would visit. The interior is still as it was 100 years ago, with comfy chairs, desks to write letters home and a library (the men had to leave their cap when they wanted a book - this way they were sure the soldiers returned the book before leaving). It's also somewhere that now, just as the billeted soldiers would have done a hundred years ago, you can relax with a cup of tea! Walk through the house and garden, it's easy to imagine that this was a safe haven amidst the insanity of the war.

Death cells

3
POPERINGE
Guido Gezellestraat 1



3:30 p.m. However, Poperinge was also a place of execution and the execution pole in the courtyard of Poperinge town hall is a painful reminder of it. Shell-shocked soldiers, who didn't know what they were doing and fled, didn't meet any compassion from their officers. They were court-martialled to death, spent their last night in the jail of the town hall before being shot in the courtyard.

Lijssenthoek

4
POPERINGE
Boescheepseweg 35A



4:30 p.m. Some 7 miles from Poperinge, lies the second largest war cemetery of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Lijssenthoek, the biggest casualty clearing station of the Ypres salient. Those who didn't make it, were buried here. Pay a visit to the visitor's centre and then walk past a line-up of 1,392 poles, which make up the timeline of the cemetery - a three dimensional bar graph of the more than 10,000 casualties buried here.

Menin Gate

5
YPRES
Menenstraat



6 p.m. Return to Ypres for a visit to the Menin Gate - by far the most famous Commonwealth war memorial in Flanders Fields. On its white walls are engraved the names of 54,896 soldiers whose body was never found (another 34,000 are commemorated at Tyne Cot Memorial in Passchendaele, because the

Menin Gate was not big enough to hold all the names). Since 1928, each and every day, apart from the Second World War, the Last Post is played just outside these walls.



The Last Post

6
YPRES
(see page 5)



8 p.m. At the end of the first day, this experience is very emotive... the four buglers - in the uniform of the voluntary fire-fighters of Ypres - stand in line and the first notes sound like a call. If we can't call the soldiers back to life, let's send them "a final farewell at the end of their earthly labours and at the onset of their eternal rest", as it reads on www.lastpost.be. There are many video clips of the ceremony on YouTube, but as one comment on the videos says: "You must have seen this once in your life. If you are not moved by it, you're made of concrete."

Reflect on the first day over dinner in Ypres.



Day 2

Irish Peace Park & Tower

7
MESSINES
Armentiersesteenweg



10 a.m. A good place to start the second day is the Irish Peace Park, near the town of Messines (Mesen). This traditional Irish round tower commemorates the Catholic and Protestant Irish divisions fighting side by side during the Battle of Messines and is meant as a symbol of reconciliation. Take a moment to read the poems and letters from fellow Irishmen that are sculpted in nine stone tablets and provide inspiration for both today and the future.

The Pool of Peace

8
WIJTSCHATE
Kruisstraat



11 a.m. Drive on about 2 miles to the village of Wijtschate, where in June 1917, the British undermined one of the highest German positions with 91,000 lb. of explosives. The explosion created 19 craters, the Pool of Peace being the largest and most impressive one. From the pool take a tour on foot to the nearby Lone Tree Cemetery and Spanbroekmolen Cemetery.

Time for a traditional Flemish lunch.

Bayernwald

9
WIJTSCHATE
Voormeezelestraat



2:30 p.m. The Bayernwald site lies between Wijtschate and Voormezele and shows how the Germans did very much the same as the allies - dig mines and trenches and build bunkers. It's important to see the German side too.

The Grave of Major William Redmond

10
LOKER



3:30 p.m. Fifteen minutes driving, takes you to the 'lonely grave' of Major William Redmond at Loker, surrounded by fields. Major 'Willie' Redmond was one of the Catholics who fought side by side with the Protestants in Messines. He was the brother of John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and himself a most determined advocate of home rule for Ireland. But when his brother made the call to join the British army, he was one of the first to enlist.

Are you planning your visit in October?
Do not hesitate to go to the new Vistor Centre
in Nieuwpoort as from 17th October,
next to the Goose Foot lock complex. The centre will be
dedicated to the deliberate flooding of the Yser plain.

See more tours on www.flandersfields1418.com

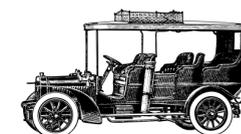
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MORE WWI STORIES

Although the Great War was mainly fought on the European continent, in the Middle-East and at sea, a conflict of such magnitude had a deep impact on the lives of so many. Remarkably, in Ireland, it brought Catholics and Protestants closer together.

Island of Ireland Peace Park

Today the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Mesen still commemorates the Catholic and Protestant Irish divisions fighting side by side during the Battle of Messines.

(see page 13)



The story of Major Willie Redmond

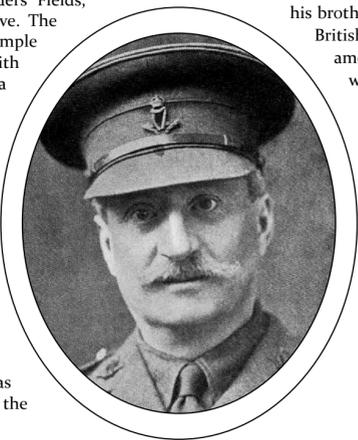
Amongst the fields around Loker, a village near Ypres, in Flanders Fields, lies a lonely war grave. The tombstone is a simple standing cross in grey stone with a small chapel above it with a statue of the Holy Virgin. The name engraved on the cross is Major WHK Redmond.

William 'Willie' Redmond was the brother of John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Willie himself was also an active member. He was an MP in the House of Commons in the UK and a determined advocate of the Irish Home Rule Bills. He was imprisoned three times by the British for his opinions.

A SEPARATIST AND YET A PATRIOT

Although a separatist and devoted Catholic, he strove to reconcile Irish Catholics and Protestants. Passionate as William Redmond may have been, however, he was also a man of reason. He thought that fighting the Germans was the right thing to do, even if it meant joining forces with the British and soon he

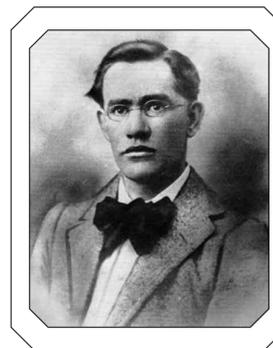
would have the opportunity to fight side-by-side with Protestants on the WWI battlefields. When his brother called Irishmen to join the British against the Germans, he was among the first to answer. He was already 53 years old at the time when he enlisted in his former regiment - The Royal Irish.



BATTLING SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE PROTESTANTS

A year later Willie was promoted to Major, which (to his great displeasure) kept him away from the front line at the Somme. In June 1917, however, Willie was given special permission to join his battalion for the Battle of Messines in Belgium, where the Irish Catholics and Protestants heroically fought as one. It was during this battle, while leading his men out of the trenches, that Willie was hit and severely injured by flying shrapnel. He died the same day. William 'Willie' Redmond was buried on 8th June 1917 in a convent garden in Loker, Belgium, where it lay in the care of the nuns. Today the nuns have gone but the grave still remains, now in the custody of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission.

The war poet



Another Irish nationalist lies buried in Passchendaele in Flanders. The soldier and poet Francis Ledwidge left school at 14 and worked as a labourer. However, he felt he had poetical talent and wrote many poems from an early age. In 1911 he received recognition for his work by the well-known author Lord Dunsany, who introduced him to the Dublin literary scene.

Although a moderate Irish nationalist, he enlisted with the Irish Volunteers in the British army. He believed he was furthering the cause of Irish independence from Britain. Ledwidge served in the battle of Gallipoli and in Serbia. In 1915, an initial volume of fifty poems by him was published as *Songs of the Field*. It received favourable press coverage.

Francis Ledwidge was killed while serving in Flanders, at Boezinge near *Le Carrefour des Roses*, on 31st July 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres. He was aged 29 and was buried at Artillery Wood Cemetery in Passchendaele. A little bit to the south of the cemetery, a memorial was erected in honour of Ledwidge. The Ledwidge memorial is inscribed with lines from a verse of his poem "Lament for Thomas MacDonagh":

“ He shall not hear
The bitter cry
In the wild sky
Where he is lain.”

The youngest soldier killed or not?

Was his name John or Patrick (his brother or cousin) or was it Patrick Fitzsimmons? It is one of the great mysteries of WWI. The War Office recorded the following: 'John Condon fell victim to a chlorine gas attack on 24th May, 1915 near a little town named St. Julien. It was the last day of the Second Battle of Ypres. His remains were exhumed and based on a stamp in one of his boots - 6322 4/R.I.R. he was identified as John Condon. The boot was given to his family and by means of correspondence his age - 14 - was established.' Thus, according to the War Office, John Condon was the youngest soldier to die in WWI. But there are other versions, according to various sources.

Based upon research by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, it is now believed that John Condon would have been 18 years old when he was killed and that the wrong name is on the grave.

The same stamping could denote 6322 Rifleman Patrick Fitzsimmons, 2nd Bn. Royal Irish Rifles, killed in action on 16th June 1915, who previously was in the 4th battalion Royal Irish Rifles. However, the remains of Patrick Fitzsimmons were never found and his name figures on the walls of the Menin Gate in Ypres.

An interesting theory is put forward by Roger Verbeke and Dominiek Dendooven, both working for the documentation centre In Flanders Fields Museum. According to them, John and Patrick Condon were brothers. As John was 18 in 1913 and gained more money than his 12 year old brother Patrick, it sounds reasonable that economic reasons led the family to send Patrick to the war. As he was tall for his age and the recruiting sergeant was not too inquisitive about ages, he was accepted, under the name of John Condon. The real John stayed home and worked in the brewery in Waterford. Thus the youngest soldier killed was 14 years old but it is Patrick Condon, not his older brother John who is buried in the war cemetery at Poelkapelle.

However, according to *Ulster Ancestry* (active in the field of Genealogy, Ancestry and Family History Research in Northern Ireland), John and Patrick Condon were not brothers but cousins and they both enlisted in the British army! The web site ends the debate, saying: 'It's fair to say that some questions could be asked as to its credibility (of the stamp on the boot - editor). However, the War Office confirmed that John Condon was the youngest soldier killed during the war and who are we to question such an authority?'

The grave of John Condon, the boy soldier, at Poelkapelle British Cemetery has become almost a national shrine with hundreds visiting it every day, especially schools and young people. The fact that a 14 year old was killed in Flanders Fields, clearly speaks to the imagination.

Father Browne, the story of a survivor



1985. Father Edward O'Donnell SJ is searching in the basement at the Irish Jesuit Provincial's House when he comes across a large black metal trunk. In it he finds a large collection of negative albums, photographs and most amazingly of all an album containing photographs of Titanic's voyage.

It turns out that all of these photographs are the work of Father Francis Browne SJ who died in 1960 and was almost forgotten by this time. Subsequent investigations revealed he had enjoyed worldwide fame in 1912 when his photographs of the Titanic's journey to Cobh were published worldwide. He had travelled first class to Cobh having been given a ticket by his uncle Robert Browne, Bishop of Cloyne.

Father Browne had a flair for photography. He got his first camera from Robert Browne and went on a grand tour of Europe, and the pictures made on that journey showed great promise.

During his short voyage aboard the RMS Titanic, Browne took dozens of photographs. He shot pictures of his cabin, the first-class dining-room, the promenade, the decks and of life aboard in general. Thus, the last known pictures of victims of the Titanic disaster were made by Father Browne. Among them are photographs of Captain Edward J. Smith and engineer William Parr, but also numerous third-class passengers whose names were never traced.

Browne befriended an American couple who offered him a ticket to New York and back. But his principal told him to leave the ship. When the news of the Titanic's shipwreck came out, Father Browne sold his photographs to the press. His most famous album has been described as the *Titanic Album of Father Browne*.

In 1916, the 36-year-old Browne, who by now was ordained as a Catholic priest, was sent to Europe to join the Irish Guards as a chaplain. He served at the Battle of the Somme and at Loker, Wytchaete, Messines Ridge, Passchendaele and Ypres in Flanders. He was wounded five times during the war, once severely in a gas attack, and was awarded the Military Cross and Bar for his valour in combat. Of the many pictures Browne took of the war in Europe, one called *Watch on the Rhine*, is a classic of World War I. Father Browne was a lucky man. He escaped death by not being permitted to continue his voyage aboard the Titanic and he survived some of the fiercest battles on the Western Front. Francis Browne died in Dublin in 1960 and was buried in the Jesuit plot in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.

Brussels AIRPORT
THE GATEWAY TO THE HEART OF EUROPE
www.brusselsairport.be



The Wipers Times: the salve of humour

The most celebrated trench newspaper of the First World War emerged from the ruins of Ypres ("Wipers"). Fizzing with satirical humour, over its 23 issues it vividly brought to life the human side of the front line. We spoke to Nick Roberts, grandson of the editor, about his memories of his grandfather.



relentlessly flippant, upbeat tone of optimism and wonderment.

The *Wipers Times* ran for 23 issues, produced at irregular intervals from February 1916 to December 1918. It in fact changed its name as the Sherwood Foresters relocated, first to *The New Church Times* (because they were near the village of Neuve Église), then to *The Kemmel Times*, *The Somme Times*, *The B.E.F Times* (British Expeditionary Force), and lastly, at the end of the war, *The Better Times*. But it always bore reference to the original name, *The Wipers Times*.

In early 1916, Captain Frederick J. Roberts and a party of men from the 12th Battalion Sherwood Foresters were hunting among the rubble of Ypres for material to shore up the trenches. They found a printing press, and were about to break it up when a sergeant – a printer in civilian life – stepped forward and said that it could still be made to work.

So the idea was hatched to create a trench newspaper for the regiment. It would turn out to be a moment of inspiration which had immeasurable value for morale on the front line.

Disarming humour

Against a backdrop of the well-documented horrors of the trenches – the smell of death, gas, ever-present danger, rats, lice, damp, boredom – *The Wipers Times* carried the refreshing scent of humanity, delivered through persistently charming humour, spiced with a sparkling eye for the absurd. While some of the satirical digs and mockery have a cutting edge, *The Wipers Times* somehow managed to tread a fine line that stayed the censors' pen – but it must often have been a close-run thing. The paper clearly had supporters among senior officers who appreciated the power of humour to underpin morale when circumstances are grim.

This no doubt had something to do with the lightness of touch of its editor, Captain Fred Roberts, and his sub-editor (and second-in-command) Lieutenant Jack Pearson. The very first editorial in No. 1 Vol. 1 shows their subtle tongue-in-cheek delivery. "Having managed to pick up a printing outfit (slightly soiled) at a reasonable price, we have decided to produce a paper. There is much that we would like to say in it, but the shadow of censorship enveloping us causes us to refer to the war, which we hear is taking place in Europe, in a cautious manner."

This first issue laid down the framework for all subsequent editions, with their mix of spoof advertisements, limericks and doggerel poetry, jokes, parodies of newspaper reports by correspondents in national newspapers, and absurd but pertinent statements under columns called "Things We Want To Know", "Answers to Correspondents" and "People We Take our Hats Off To" (e.g. "The Editor of this earnest periodical. (Thank you SO much. ED.") If there is gallows humour here, it is produced paradoxically by a

The design remained roughly the same throughout: a small format magazine of some 16 pages, with a heavier-weight cover, all made visually use of numerous typefaces and the occasional engraving. The quality of production is remarkably sophisticated, given the dangerous and makeshift circumstances in which the paper was produced. Only about 100 or 200 copies were printed of each edition, but they were passed around the trenches and so had a far wider distribution. The paper became well enough known and loved to warrant the publication of bound collected editions after the war.

Belated recognition

Nick Roberts, grandson of Captain Fred Roberts, the editor, has a rare complete set – and it was this that Ian Hislop – editor of the famous British satirical magazine *Private Eye* – came to see when he was researching and writing his TV play called *The Wipers Times* – first broadcast by the BBC, to great acclaim, in September 2013.

For Nick this was wonderful public acknowledgement of his grandfather's legacy. He has very fond memories of "Pops", who was living in the USA and Canada when Nick was in his teens, and occasionally visited in the company of his third wife Irma. Even in his late 70s, Fred Roberts – an imposing figure, always dapperly dressed in a suit and tie – had the same impish smile and gleam of humour in his eyes that can be detected in wartime photos of him

in uniform. Fun and friendly, he was generous to a fault: "He was always a very generous man. He had very little money at the end of his life, but that was probably because he gave it away to good people and worthy causes. We all loved him dearly."

Fred Roberts died in Canada 1964, aged 82. His passing went almost unnoticed in the press, and the extraordinary achievement of his wartime newspaper had become a mere footnote in history. For Nick this

has all changed as a result of Ian Hislop's TV play, which gratifyingly prompted *The Times* to print obituaries of both the editors, Roberts and Pearson, in September 2013, half a century after their deaths (Pearson also lived into his 80s and died in 1966). "As each member of the family inherited *The Wipers Times* through the generations," says Nick, "there was a feeling that Pops effort to keep up the morale of the troops was never properly recognised. And yet that is why I am so proud of him. And that is why I take my hat off to Ian Hislop. At last Pops has the recognition he deserves."

Precious testament

The Wipers Times remains an extraordinary testament to the resilience of humanity in the most traumatic circumstances. This is the authentic voice of the trenches.

Because the context and targets of its humour are so wide-ranging, it provides a remarkably three-dimensional picture of life on the front line, and our knowledge and understanding of the First World War would be all the poorer without it.



War poetry

Not all of *The Wipers Times* is irreverent fun. Here and there are poems of great poignancy, all the more powerful for their contrasting solemnity. One of Nick Roberts' favourites appears in the edition of March 1916. As Nick puts it, "It shows a moment of raw emotion."

TO MY CHUM

No more we'll share the same old barn,
The same old dug-out, same old yarn,
No more a tin of bully share,
Nor split our rum by a star-shell's flare,
So long old lad.

What times we've had, both good and bad,
We've shared what shelter could be had,
The same old crump-hole when the whizz-bangs shrieked,
The same old billet that always leaked,
And now - you've "stopped one."

We'd weathered the storm two winters long,
We'd managed to grin when all went wrong,
Because together we fought and fed,
Our hearts were light: but now - you're dead
And I am Mateless.

Well, old lad, here's peace to you,
And for me, well, there's my job to do,
For you and the others who lie at rest,
Assured may be that we'll do our best
In vengeance.

Just one more cross by a strafed road-side,
With it's G.R.C., and a name for guide,
But it's only myself who has lost a friend,
And though I may fight through to the end,
No dug-out or billet will be the same,
All pals can only be pals in name,
But we'll all carry on till the end of the game
Because you lie there.

Christmas 1914 - German and British soldiers play football!



It seems unreal, but during Christmas 1914, on several locations along the Western Front Line, German and British soldiers climbed out of their trenches and began to fraternise. It allegedly began with Germans singing Christmas carols and putting Christmas trees on top of their trenches. Soon after, soldiers from both sides met each other in "no man's land". The (unofficial) truce gave them the opportunity to bury the dead that were left in "no man's land" but they also exchanged drinks, food and cigarettes. Suddenly, a football was kicked from somewhere and the soldiers started what seems like a game of football.

Private Ernie Williams of the 6th Cheshires, who served in Ypres at that time, reported several years later to the BBC: "The ball appeared from somewhere, I don't know where but it came from their side - it wasn't from our side that the ball came. They made up some goals and one fellow went in goal and then it was just a general kick about. I should think there were about a couple of hundred taking part. Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves. There was no sort of ill-will between us. There was no referee and no score, no tally at all. It was simply a meleé - nothing like the soccer you see on television. The boots we wore were a menace - those great big boots we had on - and in those days the balls were made of leather and they soon got very soggy."

It is not really a big surprise that this spontaneous truce - induced by the foot soldiers, not by their officers - came to happen early in the war. At the time, we were only four months in a war that was supposed to have ended by Christmas. The devastation on the battlefield was as yet not such that the landscape was irreparably damaged. There were still villages to be seen with church towers and 'no man's land' was not as yet strewn with bodies and savaged by shells. All of this apparently added to a certain atmosphere of normality and, with soldiers of both sides mostly being Christians, the truce seemed natural. The Christmas Truce lasted only for one day in most locations, but in some occasions, it was extended until New Year's Eve. Afterwards, the fighting began once again.

FLANDERS PEACE FIELD

To commemorate this unique moment of peace, the local football pitch in Messines where the truces took place, will be turned into the Flanders Peace Field. Educational activities and football matches with international teams will be organised. John Cale (Velvet Underground) will perform a special concert on 20 December and a Christmas Truce memorial will be inaugurated by a German and British school.

The spy who came in by bike

During the Great War, no fast cars were used by spies (there weren't any). A former cycling champion used his bike instead! In 1913, Paul Deman won the first ever Tour of Flanders (now a UCI World Tour Classic and a monument to cycling on the old continent). In 1914 he won another classic - Bordeaux-Paris but the war abruptly interrupted his career and he joined Belgium's espionage service, smuggling coded messages into the neutral Netherlands - by bike, of course. Shortly before the Armistice he was caught by the Germans and jailed in Leuven. Fortunately, the jail was liberated by the British on the day his execution was scheduled. He started racing again and won Paris-Roubaix in 1920 and Paris-Tours in 1923.

Another monument to bicycle racing - the Tour de France - could not be organised during the Great War. The route of the 2014 programme visited many places where the war left its mark. After starting from Yorkshire, Le Tour 2014 followed the front line and went through Flanders (Ypres), Artois, Aisne, Champagne, Verdun and the Vosges mountains. Lille, Arras, Reims, Epernay, Nancy and Mulhouse, all hosted stages.

EXHIBITION Sport and the First World War

To mark the start of a stage in the Tour de France in Ypres on 9th July, an exhibition will display objects and documents connected to sport and famous sporting personalities during the First World War. Many thousands of sportsmen joined the forces. Hundreds of them died, including three former winners of the Tour.

Fair Play? Sport and the First World War runs in conjunction with an exhibition in the Town Archive about local cycling life in the Ypres of yesteryear.

14 Jun 2014 - 14 Oct 2014
In Flanders Fields Museum Café
www.inflandersfields.be

Cricket at Passchendaele

In 1914, the English national cricket league was suspended, so that hundreds of players could enlist in the armed forces. In order to commemorate this event, international cricket teams (including German ones) will take part in the first 'Passchendaele Memorial Cricket Cup'.

16 - 17 August 2014
Zonnebeke Memorial Park

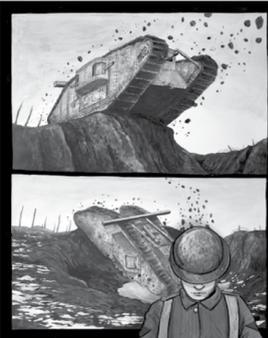
SNEAK
PREVIEW

A FRAGMENT OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL PASSCHENDAELE

www.ivanpetrus.com

PASSCHENDAELE





ART AND THE GREAT WAR

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The Great Recessional

In 1914, the once straight forward art of war suffered a terrible blow: gone were the bright uniforms, the thin red lines of the battle square and concepts like the dash and the melee. In their place came khaki field dresses, machinegun fire, mustard gas and tangled trenches, signalling the death of the old decorum and invoking an overwhelming sense of loss.

The Great War ruined the rituals and pageantry that had been part and parcel of Western culture and society for the better part of two hundred years. It not only abolished the language of pomp and circumstance, but also laid waste to formerly self-evident truths. Art gave perhaps the most poignant expression of this sea change and played a vital part in stripping away the glossy veneer that had previously coated our stories of heroism and war.

After the atrocities of the Somme and Ypres, the old ways of looking at the world could no longer be relied upon to make sense of what had been an utterly blind and bewildering experience. The soldiers had walked into this belated war expecting another Boys' Own adventure in the making. They left it shell-shocked or disillusioned, or not at all. The psychological impact of the trauma of the Great War cannot be underestimated: it completely dismantled universally accepted values and ideas, which fundamentally changed mankind's motives and means of interpreting, communicating and coping with the outside world.

In the visual and literary art of the period, the feeling of dread is inescapable. The traditional codes and conventions were stripped away leaving a series of experiments and -isms (modernism, surrealism, expressionism, futurism, the list goes on), to reveal the gaping chasm between reality and representation. Rising from their ashes were undeniably modern schools of art that deliberately distorted and debunked the world around them, highlighting medium over subject matter. As a result, the face of art was changed forever.

The battlefields of Flanders provided a suitable setting for this reorientation, for it was here that the soldier-poets and frontline artists witnessed the horrors of war first-hand. Inspired voices from either side of the conflict continue to resonate across the region as it opens its venues and battlefields to the unforgettable heritage of these creative pioneers. But Flanders also looks forward. To mark the occasion and deliver its message of gratitude and hope, it has invited visitors and a host of contemporary artists to strike up a vital conversation with the ghosts of the past.



A storied future

The most ambitious art project in the region is **Coming World Remember Me**, curated by Jan Moeyaert and conceptual artist Koen Vanmechelen, who aim to pass on the torch of remembrance to future generations. People from around the world will work together over the next four years to create 600,000 clay sculptures, each one wearing the name of its sculptor, each one marking and representing a life lost in the Belgian theatre of the Great War. The project is all about participation: it involves schools and organisations and welcomes visitors to take part in workshops, lectures and art classes that reflect on the significance of the war. In 2018 the 'New Generation' statues will line the grounds of the Palingbeek domain close to Ypres, as part of a unique retrospective that faces our shared future outright.

Other noteworthy art exhibitions commemorating the war include Mechelen's **War Artists**, a fascinating retrospective that focuses on the life and work of local artists as they exemplify universal stories of suffering. Leuven's **Ravaged** brings into sharper focus one of unsung tragedies of the period, the wanton destruction of Leuven and the University Library, to demonstrate how art and culture have been targeted in conflicts for centuries.

In Antwerp you can visit **Signed the Artist** in the Middelheim Museum; which spotlights the radical departure in the period arts through seminal work from prime movers from both sides of the front, such as German painter and sculptor Käthe Kollwitz. **The Moderns** by the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, showcases the war-inspired innovations of the Flemish avant-garde in painting and literature. Throughout Flanders, then, and for the remainder of the year, the unbreakable bond between modern art and the Great War takes centre stage, welcoming visitors to discover its historical (and often hidden) meanings.

www.comingworldrememberme.be
www.middelheimmuseum.be
www.kmska.be
www.letterenhuis.be
www.stedelijkemuseumamechelen.be
www.ravage1914.be/en

STRIFE ON THE SILVER SCREEN

A relatively new kid on the cultural block was cinema, whose moving pictures had evolved from a novelty attraction into a public spectacle and propaganda tool. The heroism and horrors of the First World War have inspired countless filmmakers since and many of this year's exhibitions and events use film to tell their gripping story. To prepare for the original footage of the front, here are some classics that are not to be missed:

All Quiet on the Western Front (1929): this controversial masterpiece, which won the Oscar for best picture, brilliantly chronicles the war's repercussions in the German psyche. The closing scene offers one of the most chilling moments in cinema history.

Paths of Glory (1957): Stanley Kubrick's stylised knockout gauges the divide between the top brass and the front line troops and brilliantly visualises the industrial terror of the war.

Oh! What a Lovely War (1969): a scathing satire that sends up the absurd excesses of the Great War, painting it as a vaudeville comedy of errors that pits the common soldier against the clueless fops in the war room.

Un Long Dimanche de Fiançailles (2004): not even the director of maudlin *Amelie* shies away from the terrors of the Somme as he recounts the story of a French girl's harrowing quest to find her fiancée, left for dead in no man's land.

Passchendaele (2008): the most expensive Canadian film ever made, this intermittently violent and bittersweet film about the doomed love between a soldier and a nurse is set against the backdrop of the Third Battle of Ypres.

War Horse (2011): Steven Spielberg's sweeping adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's eponymous book follows an English boy who goes to the front to look for his beloved horse, serving overseas with the cavalry.

WAR THROUGH THE LENS

Pictures and propaganda

In 1914, photography was part of the new media of the day, and another fitting testament to the rampant progress of technology, whose innovations were taking the battlefields quite literally by storm. The increasingly popular medium of photography was capable of showing the horrors of war with sensational speed and unrelenting immediacy: stark, raw, seemingly unfiltered images of trench warfare reached the home front with an ingrained ability to shock and awe people in ways they had not experienced before.

However, in many cases, the novel matter-of-factness of war photography was only an illusion, a carefully orchestrated trick on the eye. Frequently and deliberately slanted or glossed, front line photography joined print and other contemporary modes of communication as a mouthpiece of propaganda, stirring the nation's blood with portrayals of derring-do, or pointing out the outrages committed by the enemy.

More subtle and touching by comparison are the photographs of the people who witnessed the bedlam of war from the front. By this stage, the technologies and processes of the medium had been sufficiently democratised for common soldiers and amateur photographers to take full advantage of its arsenal of possibilities: using their own celluloid film and handheld cameras, they were able to take 'snapshots' of what was happening around them, capturing – rather than staging – life during the Great War. As such, these pictures may offer a less technically accomplished, but all the more powerful depiction of the miniature moments that defined this global conflict.



Arresting photographs of the Great War abound in Flanders as it makes ready to commemorate the centenary. In Antwerp's FotoMuseum, the aptly titled exhibition **Shooting Range** takes on a modern slant as it revisits a wealth of original war photographs, shown in their historical context. Presenting the images as they appeared in the magazines, newspapers, postcards and military dispatches of the day, the display puts on view (and into question) the tremendous extent to which the new medium was put to use at the time, as well as the perceptions and prejudices it helped to create. As well as showcasing cameras of the time, the exhibition, utilising latest technology, offers an app to discover more. In Bruges, similarly, **The War in Pictures** offers an engrossing glimpse into the war-aded life inside and beyond the medieval walls of the occupied city, as seen – and shot – through past and present eyes. The multimedia exhibition covers every aspect of the war and features rare photographs sourced from archives around the world, whose power and significance are reframed in original work from leading names in the international world of Magnum photography.

www.fotomuseum.be
www.bruges1418.be



THE STRAINS OF WAR

On the eve of the First World War, military music and songs were steeped in traditions, whether it be the rousing band music and battle hymns of the military tattoo, the light entertainments of the Music Hall, the wistful soldier's ballad or the evocative patriotic compositions. Music inevitably suffered the same upsets as painting and literature: coming back from the Ypres Salient, it was hard for anyone to imagine verdant Lands of Hope and Glory and put them to exhilarating music.



This year, continuing the centenary's theme and remembrance, Flanders Fields will be alive with music that tune into the enormous significance of the Great War. **1000 Voices for Peace**, for instance, has invited the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra and 35 choirs to perform a one-of-a-kind oratorio for peace, written by the world-renowned Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki. The choir will give new and vibrant meaning to the watchword "never again".



For De Munt opera in Brussels, musician and author Nick Cave, composer Nicholas Lens and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui have written, scored and choreographed an original production that addresses the traumas of the Great War. In twelve poems or canti, the post-modern opera **Shell Shock** gives voice to as many anonymous protagonists as they relive or reflect on the vicissitudes and alienation of war, making for a spellbinding journey into the heart of the crisis.

www.1000voices.be/en/
www.lamonnaie.be/en/opera/421/Shell-Shock

EVENTS TO REMEMBER

Flanders commemorates the Great War Centenary with numerous exhibitions, re-enactments and other events. Some take you back in time, so you can see what impact the war had on soldiers and citizens back then, others point out the significance of WWI for us today. On this page we zoom in on a selection of projects but you will find ample information elsewhere in this newspaper about other events, exhibitions, art projects, etc., which are being organised to evoke the history of the war. You can find a complete list of all 14-18 Commemoration events in Flanders on www.flandersfields1418.com

The Light Front

Different locations

17 October 2014

www.gonewest.be/en



On 17th October, a major interactive event called The Light Front will be organised. It will follow the front line as it existed at the time of the ceasefire in the autumn of 1914, after the flooding of the plains. The Light Front will be recreated by 8,750 participants with flaming torches along the

stretch of land between Nieuwpoort beach and Ploegsteert. Artistic fire installations will also be set up in the nine municipalities involved. In addition, the names of the 600,000 people who died on Belgian soil will be projected. If you want to participate, please register at www.gonewest.be

Pontoon bridge becomes Peace Bridge across the River Scheldt

Antwerp

3rd - 5th October 2014

www.antwerpen14-18.be/en

A highlight of the commemorative programme in Antwerp is the contemporary reconstruction of the 1914 pontoon bridge, symbolising the connection between the past, present and future. The temporary pontoon bridge across the River Scheldt will be built by the Belgian and Dutch armies. This Peace Bridge gives tens of thousands of visitors the unique chance to cross the River Scheldt on foot, following in the footsteps of the Belgian army and the more than 100,000 refugees who fled a burning city in search of a safe haven.



The Old Contemptibles Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917

Zonnebeke

15 Aug 2014 - 15 Dec 2014

www.passchendaele.be

On 22nd August 1914, a British Expeditionary Force of over 100,000 men saw action in Western Europe for the first time in over 100 years. They succeeded in slowing down the German advance in Belgium, even bringing it to a standstill at Gheluvelt (Zonnebeke). However, the cost was high - the loss of half their troops.

The story of the Old Contemptibles, during the period of October to November 1914, is brought to life in a series of unique and complementary exhibitions at various locations.

Eugeen van Mieghem The Great War

KBC Tower Antwerp

15 Sep 2014 - 27 Nov 2014

www.vanmieghemmuseum.com



In recent years the work of the Antwerp port artist Eugeen Van Mieghem has been rediscovered internationally. His work is often compared to that of artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Théophile Steinlen. At the outbreak of the First World War, Van Mieghem observed and portrayed the departing refugees and other telling scenes from daily life in a city on the verge of war. His works provide a unique perspective on the horrific experience of Antwerp's population during the First World War.

Heavy Traffic, railway traffic and other means of transport at Poperinge 1914-1918

Poperinge

19 Sep 2014 - 5 Sep 2015

www.poperinge14-18.be

The railway station of Poperinge was a logistic turntable and central turning point for the medical evacuation towards France. Not only soldiers and freight were moved to and from the front line through railway line L.69 Poperinge-Hazebroek. Wounded and sick soldiers as well as refugees passed through the town.

The dynamic diorama will fascinate all ages by displaying several station scenes. An app tells the story of L.69, departing from the railway station and taking the visitor on a cycling trip or hike to WWI sites where images from the past appear. Old railway maps will reveal an ingenious network of routes.

Exodus. Fleeing the war

MAS Antwerp

21 May 2014 - 31 Mar 2015

www.mas.be



A million Belgians fleeing the war. Monumental black and white photos in the museum's 'Boulevard' follow the refugees on their way - the flight, the first emergency aid and living in exile until their return to a shattered country in 1918.

A YOUTH VIEW: "It could have been us!"



Sam Whiting and Regan Cain looking at the names of the missing.

In 1914, the official age for joining the British Army was 18, yet some soldiers were found to have enlisted as young as 14. A visit to the battlefields by today's youth can be quite confronting.

Sam Whiting and Regan Cain, both 14 years old and from Carshalton Boys Sports College in south London, were part of the advance party testing WWI centenary battlefield tours for schools. This is their report.

Tyne Cot Cemetery, the Menin Gate, Passchendaele and the "Coming World Remember Me" workshop - these are just a few of the places we had the honour to visit earlier this year. In March we were lucky enough to be picked for one of the pilot trips for the First World War Centenary Battlefields Tours. The whole experience was an emotional one, with the aim of showing young people the conditions, sights and experiences of war. We embraced every second of it and are proud to say we can pass on the stories we heard and the learning we acquired.

Our visit to Belgium and France was very different to how we expected it to be. At the Menin Gate, a huge archway in Ypres, the names of thousands of British and Commonwealth soldiers missing in Belgium were engraved into its walls. We attended the Last Post ceremony which takes place every evening. The military were in attendance and people were laying down poppy wreaths to remember those who had sacrificed their lives. Whilst we were there it made us reflect, with sadness, on the events which had taken place during the war.

Feeling a connection

The battlefields we visited were not how we imagined them. The trenches were narrow and we realised just how awful living conditions must have been. We were able to picture, with more clarity, what it might have been like to be a soldier on the Western Front. It was weird to think that so many individuals had fought and died in the exact places where we were standing.



The schoolboys with the nephew of John William Stracey.

Our research into the life and death of an individual soldier, John William Stracey, from our locality, Carshalton, was fascinating. We discovered photographs of him before and during the war, were able to see where he had served and been killed and were able to visit his memorials at Tyne Cot Cemetery near Ypres, and in Carshalton. We even traced his closest surviving relative, his 82 year old nephew, who came to visit us at school. This was so powerful and gave us more of a 3D image of the war. It allowed us to realise that it is so important to understand the individual stories of those who took part in the war to help comprehend the horror and magnitude of the suffering.

Ever-present danger

When we visited Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries, we were shocked to see rows upon rows of white, gleaming headstones. It really brought home to us the scale of the deaths and the numbers of families who lost someone. When walking around the various cemeteries you could not help but notice the ages of some of the dead soldiers. It had a huge impact on us to think that 100 years ago many members of our families would have gone to fight and it could have been us who would have had to fight if we were a few years older.

At the last cemetery we visited, a serving member of the armed forces, Faz, told us the story of his struggles in war and how he lost his best friend in Afghanistan, which made it the most touching of all, as we realised that soldiers are still making sacrifices for us today.

Spreading the word

Finally, we visited the "Coming World Remember Me" pottery workshop in Ypres where we made a clay model of a man. Each model is going to form part of a memorial for all 600,000 who died in Belgium during the First World War. It was very poignant to make something which is tangible and will form part of a special memorial, as our small contribution to remembrance.

Today we feel like ambassadors, who have a duty to share our experiences and passion for all that we have learnt. Through all of this, the question that has been asked of us is, "Why do you think this is important?" Our answer has always been, "Because millions of men died for us to be free today and it is up to our generation to remember those who have fallen for us."

We have shed many tears on this experience and we are honoured to be able to pass on the legacy of men such as John William Stracey. These kinds of trips are not your average school visit to a museum, where you're just reading from a piece of card in a glass cabinet or learning from the comfort of the school classroom. We were able to walk through and stand in real trenches and in the middle of actual battlefields and this has been an experience that will stay with us forever.

This is our history and we shall always remember what all those soldiers did for us and why.

Sam Whiting and Regan Cain



At the Flanders Fields Memorial Garden 1914-2014, London.

ADVERTORIAL

JULES DESTROOPER: BISCUITS AND POST CARDS

Biscuit-maker Jules Destrooper, world-famous for its thin almond biscuits and its Belgian butter wafers, was established in 1886 at the little town of Lo near the river Yser. During WWI however, the biscuit factory was closed down because of a lack of raw materials. Jules Destrooper junior, who was sent home from the front because of an illness, began to print and sell postcards. The cards depicted local scenery as well as war situations. Destrooper's postcards quickly found their way to the soldiers at the front who sent them home to their loved ones. The back catalogue consists of some 150 different post cards.

See the cards, taste the biscuits!



Visit the Jules Destrooper Visitor Centre to learn everything about more than 125 years of rich history. A selection of the postcards is on display and, of course, it's the perfect place for you to try the delicious Jules Destrooper biscuits!

www.destrooper.be



LIFE BEHIND THE FRONT

The average soldier spent no more than five days a month in the front line. One of the favourite pastimes in between battles was reading letters sent from home and replying to them. It was estimated that the soldiers on the front received 12.5 million letters a week! The soldiers always looked forward to the mail coming in, as they often got packages with food, magazines, clothes and of course cigarettes, which they were always short of.

In order to prevent boredom and the resulting slackening morale, the officers had the soldiers exercising and they organized sporting events. Not only did it keep them fit but also promoted team spirit. Favourite sports were football, rugby, cricket, boxing and athletics.

Music and theatre were also popular. Choirs and brass bands toured the rest camps behind the lines to entertain the soldiers. Often the men staged comedy sketches or started singing themselves. And when the time came to return to the lines, many went to church in view of a possible death in the days to come.

Of course, when they were 'on leave', the soldiers went to pubs and bars to have drinks or get some other relief. War and prostitution have long been associated together. The Great War was no exception. With such a host of young guys behind the lines, it comes as no surprise that brothels sprung up like mushrooms in the towns and villages. What's more, they were entirely legal. In France they were called *maisons tolérées*. In fact, the Military encouraged them as they didn't want the troops to become frustrated, which could affect morale.



TALBOT HOUSE EVERYMAN'S CLUB

The officers on their part had Officers' Clubs for relaxing. Privates were not allowed there. However, the famous *Talbot House* in Poperinge was an exception. It was established by Reverend 'Tubby' Clayton and welcomed soldiers from all ranks. Reverend Philip Thomas Byard Clayton was an Anglican Clergyman, who became an army chaplain in France and Belgium. Together with army chaplain Neville Talbot, he rented a little house in the middle of Poperinge and established an 'Every man's club'. They called it Talbot House, in honour of Neville's younger brother Gilbert.



It was meant to be a safe haven amid the horrors of war. There were comfortable chairs, books and desks to write letters on. The soldiers could get a hot meal and drinks and there was also a library. Soldiers had to leave their cap when they wanted to read a book so as to make certain that they would return the book, on leaving. The original underlying objective of Talbot House was to promote fellowship and Christianity, and Clayton saw it as an alternative for the lewd recreation on offer in pubs, bars and brothels behind the lines. Today Talbot House is a memorial and a museum, but you can also stay the night and have breakfast. A unique experience! Book your stay at Talbot house on www.talbothouse.be

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

On our Facebook page, we gather stories from our fans from all over the world. You will find a selection below. If you want to know more about these stories or make your own contribution, please come and visit our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/FlandersFields1418

FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

Neath the sacred soil of Flanders fields, so many lonely souls still lay. Those dreadful secrets, lost, concealed, where scattered blood red poppy's sway.

In fields of wheat where trees of green, do mask the horrors that did unfold. The bloodiest of grisly scenes, denied the brave to be the old.

The anguished screams of soldiers young, soft whispers in the breezy sky, Where once did bullets speed from guns, breathtaking beauty now belies,

The horrors, chaos, turmoil noise, the living hell that was the war. Such tragic loss, so many boys, bayoneted shot or bombshell floored.

Forever in our hearts and minds, as time does pass year after year, Red poppies signify the binds, of gratitude, we proudly wear.

Lest we forget those men so brave, who's likes could not be sold or bought. The ultimate to give they gave, a more gallant fight was never fought!

In memory of the many.
James Bridgewood - 2-4-14



A postcard from the First World War, Royal Canadian Engineers 2nd Field Company - Overseas Contingent Niagara Military Camp 1915.

Gail Jordan



Both my grandfathers served in Flanders. One was amongst only 50 survivors of his regiment on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, where 60,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded in 5 hours. The other was permanently disabled in a mustard gas attack, the gas destroying one lung and half his stomach. When my grandmother gave me the cap badge he was wearing, I got blisters on my fingers from just touching it, more than 50 years after the event..

James Blair



HOW TO GET THERE?

Belgium is situated between the Netherlands at its North side, Germany and Luxembourg at its Eastern border and France in the South. The Flanders Fields battlefield is in the West, near the North Sea coast and directly opposite the UK across the English Channel (the sea strait between the UK and Belgium / Northern France).

Depending on your starting place, you can reach Belgium and Flanders Fields by various means of transportation.

By plane

Brussels Airport is Belgium's main airport. It is located near the city of Brussels (20'). Car rental, trains, taxis, buses, etc. are available and can get you to any location within Belgium. www.brusselsairport.be

By train

Brussels is at the heart of Europe and has many railway connections. Big European cities like Paris, London, Berlin and Amsterdam are close by. There are direct trains between Brussels and:

- Paris, Cologne, Amsterdam – www.thalys.com
- London, Ebbsfleet, Ashford, Lille and Calais – www.eurostar.com

They connect with domestic trains at Brussels' Gare du Midi/Zuidstation.

By car

Major European highways like the E19, E17, E40, E41 E314 and E313 pass through Belgium. To get to Flanders Fields you should head for Ypres. Leave the E17 in Kortrijk and take the A19 to Ypres.

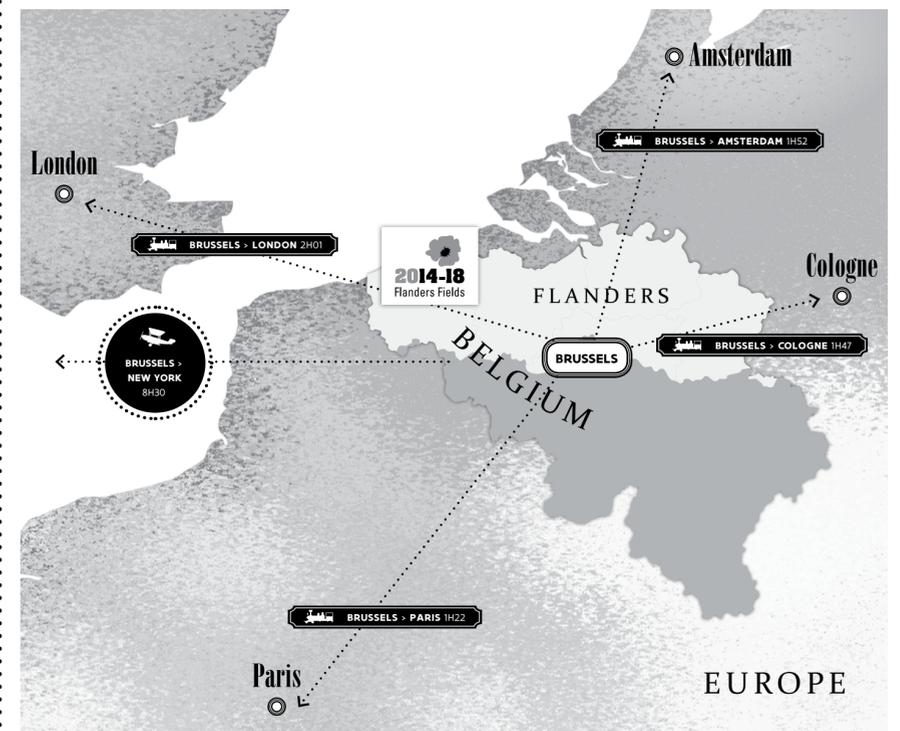
By bus

You can get to Belgium on Eurolines from all over Europe. www.eurolines.com

By ship

There are regular ferry crossings between the UK (Dover) and the ports of Zeebrugge in Belgium and Calais and Dunkirk in France. These ports are close to the battlefields.

- www.poferries.be
- www.myferrylink.com
- www.dfdseaways.co.uk
- www.eurotunnel.com



HOW TO GET AROUND?

When you arrive in Brussels, note that the Flanders Fields battlefield region is just some 125 km (77 miles) away. You can get there in various ways:

By train

You can travel by train to Ypres from every town in Flanders. This will generally require a change of train in Kortrijk. Tickets can be bought online or at the station. www.belgianrail.be/en

By bus/tram

Buses cover the whole country, along with trams in the big cities. Most routes cover short distances but you can hop from town to town by bus. www.delijn.be

The **Poppy Bus** will travel between Nieuwpoort and Ypres with a stop in Diksmuide. This bus will enable you to visit the brand new visitor centre (17 Oct 2014) at the foot lock complex in Nieuwpoort, the Yser Tower and the town of Diksmuide and the town of Ypres with its In Flanders Fields Museum and the Menin Gate. The last bus to Nieuwpoort is at 8.30 pm so that you are able to attend the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate.

From Ypres you can take the regular buses to Poperinge (Talbot house), Zonnebeke (Tyne Cot & Memorial Museum

Passchendaele) and Langemark (German cemetery).

On presentation of the ticket at the museums you get €1 reduction. Price of the *Poppy pass* (valid for 1 day): adults €6, children €4. Point of sales: tourist offices of Ypres, Diksmuide and Nieuwpoort. Duration: 1st July to 30th November 2014. In July and August, 5 trips per day. From September, 4 trips per day.

By car

Many of the WWI battlefields, memorials and cemeteries are located in the countryside so it really helps to have your own car. (Drive on the right side of the road!)

There are many car routes that allow visitors to discover the war landscape and its different landmarks. www.flandersfields.be/en

Cars can be rented from the major car rental companies, which have branches in Brussels, Bruges and Ostend, as well as from local companies. www.hertz.be www.eurocar.be

By bike

As in the rest of Flanders, you will find a network of numbered junctions in the Westhoek region. You can use these to create your own route. There are also a number of themed cycling routes that will take you past WWI heritage sites. You can find a list of cycle hire companies that operate in the Westhoek region at www.tourismewesthoek.be/fietsverhuur

Tours

Many municipalities throughout Belgium such as Brussels, Ghent, Ostend and Bruges offer full-day organised coach tours to Flanders Fields, incorporating the main sites and the Last Post ceremony. www.flandersfields1418.com

Accessibility

Most of the Commemoration events and initiatives pay great attention to accessibility for people with mobility problems etc. You can find all of the information you need on this subject at www.accessinfo.be



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UP TO 18% DISCOUNT

Do you want to visit Flanders for the Commemoration of the Great War?

Hire a car from Europcar and receive a discount up to 18%! Europcar has a pop up office in Ypres, so you can rent a car on site! With a rental car you can make your own schedule for touring Flanders Fields. Mind you, Europcar doesn't have any oldtimers, so you'll be touring Flanders in a contemporary car.

Europcar



Discover Flanders Fields by car

The action is valid until 31st December 2018. For reservations, visit www.eurocar.be/offers/flanders-fields or enter the discount code: 52073255





Flanders Fields. A place to remember.

During the Great War, many people dedicated their lives to helping others. One of them was the French woman, Irène Curie, Nobel Prize winner Marie Curie's eldest daughter. Just like her mother, Irène showed a keen interest in medicine and radiology and, despite her young age, she helped her mother train over 180 medical orderlies during the war. Irène even ran the radiology department of a hospital in Hoogstade, Flanders Fields.

To learn more about Irène Curie's story, visit flandersfields1418.com.

Flanders Fields has countless tales to tell. Come and discover them for yourself or contribute your own story.

