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Ieper, Belgium

MEDIA RELEASE

A new display shines a light on the maintenance and restoration of Belgium's Commonwealth War Cemeteries

- A century of caring is a new display at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Ieper Information Centre, highlighting 100 years of work by the Commission in Belgium.
- The display is launched in conjunction with a large-scale renovation project on 24 Commonwealth cemeteries in the Ypres Salient, supported by a grant from the Flemish Government.
- It will tell the story of the building and maintenance of these iconic sites of remembrance and pilgrimage.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) is staging a new display in its Ieper Information Centre, opening on 25 April 2018. *A Century of Caring*, will look back on 100 years of tending for the CWGC's Belgian sites. Visitors will be able to take a look behind the scenes of CWGC, showing the extraordinary work undertaken to maintain these internationally significant sites. The display will explore how the cemeteries were built during the First World War and the current restoration projects taking place across 2018.



In addition to the usual maintenance undertaken by the CWGC to keep its cemeteries and memorials pristine, the Commission is also facing the challenge of maintaining and conserving 100 year old structures. Restoration therefore becomes more important to preserve the heritage value of the Commission's original vision.



CWGC
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In 2017 the CWGC was awarded a heritage premium of 3,915,393.60 Euro from the Flemish Government to support its conservation work in Belgium. This enabled it undertake a large-scale restoration project of 24 Commonwealth cemeteries in the Ypres Salient. The project is spread over five stages, starting in 2017 and finishing in 2022. The first phase was successfully completed with the restoration of 5 cemeteries in near Ieper. The second phase starts in May 2018 and will restore the following sites:

- Spoilbank Cemetery
- Birr Cross Road Cemetery
- New Irish Farm Cemetery
- Tuileries British Cemetery
- Reninghelst New Military Cemetery

Sarah Camerlynck, Conservation Supervisor, WEA: *"In my role as conservation supervisor safeguarding the authentic structures of a sometimes more than 100 year old cemetery means also conserving the memories of those who are buried or commemorated at those sites. It means that not only current generations but also future generations will be able to keep commemorating those who have given their lives for our freedom."*

The exhibition is free and open to the public without registration at the CWGC's Ieper information Centre (Menenstraat 33-8900 Ieper) starting from April 25 2018. The center is open every weekday (except on Mondays) from 13 h to 21 h. On Friday and Saturday open from 10 h to 21 h.

For more information, images, spokespeople or more personal stories please contact:

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Notes for editors:

1. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org)

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) commemorates the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two world wars. It also holds and updates an extensive and accessible records archive.

The Commission operates in more than 23,000 locations in more than 150 countries.

Get to know the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Read: <http://www.cwgc.org/>

Follow: <https://twitter.com/CWGC>

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Watch: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuyv7WCJv_NYL04eKG3oyVA

2. Information on the multiannual premium agreement obtained by the Flemish Government

In 2015-2016 all Commonwealth cemeteries in Western Europe were inspected to obtain a global and comprehensive overview of the state of the sites. This study showed that in Flanders for about 7 million Euros of work had to be carried out. In order to make a success of this large-scale project, a multiannual premium agreement was submitted to the Flemish Government.

An agreement was signed on 7 June 2017 by Sir Timothy Laurence, vice chairman of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Geert Bourgeois, Minister-president of the Flemish region to carry out restoration work on 24 British military cemeteries in Flanders, spread over 5 phases (2017-2022). The CWGC can count on a heritage premium of 3,915,393.60 euro. The first phase started in September and was completed in April 2017. This phase included the restoration of 5 cemeteries in the Ypres salient:

- Aeroplane Cemetery
- Potijze Chateau Wood:
- Potijze Chateau Ground & Lawn
- Artillery Wood Cemetery
- Canada Farm Cemetery



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The work on the CWGC cemeteries mainly includes the restoration of boundary walls, buildings and tool houses, chapels and shelter buildings. Each brick or stone is dismantled with caution, if possible repaired and reused. To date, the bricks are still handmade, baked in a ring furnace and the stones are selected one by one manually by the masons to give the walls a color pallet as it was a 100 years ago. Also decades-old trees are protected: existing tree roots near and sometimes even fused with the cemetery walls are not destroyed, but these roots are protected and redirected.

Sir Tim Laurence, Vice-President of COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION CEMETERIES: "through our history (red. since 1917) the cemeteries and monuments have known a natural evolution – they are aged but stay true to their fundamental design and objective, namely to ensure that those who lost their lives will be never forgotten. "

Django Maekelberg, Head of Works Western Europe Area: "the emotional value of a hundred-year-old cemetery is huge for visitors from all over the world. By receiving this generous grant of more than 3.9 million euros, we are able to maintain these monumental commemorative places and rectorate them with respect for the original designs and using authentic materials and techniques. It is absolutely important to preserve these sites with monumental heritage value for future generations."

3. Photo and other credits

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