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17 July 2017

# MENIN GATE: THE HISTORY, DESIGN AND UNVEILING

On 24 July, the CWGC will mark the 90th anniversary of the unveiling of the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial with a commemorative service and exhibition.



One of the first, and perhaps the most famous, of the monuments constructed by the Commission around the world, the [Menin Gate](#) bears the names of more than 54,000 members of the British and Commonwealth forces who died in the Ypres Salient and have no known grave. It also honours all those who served there, bearing an inscription devised by writer Rudyard Kipling, who was the first Literary Advisor to the Commission:

*To the armies of the British Empire who stood here from 1914 to 1918 and to those of their dead who have no known grave*

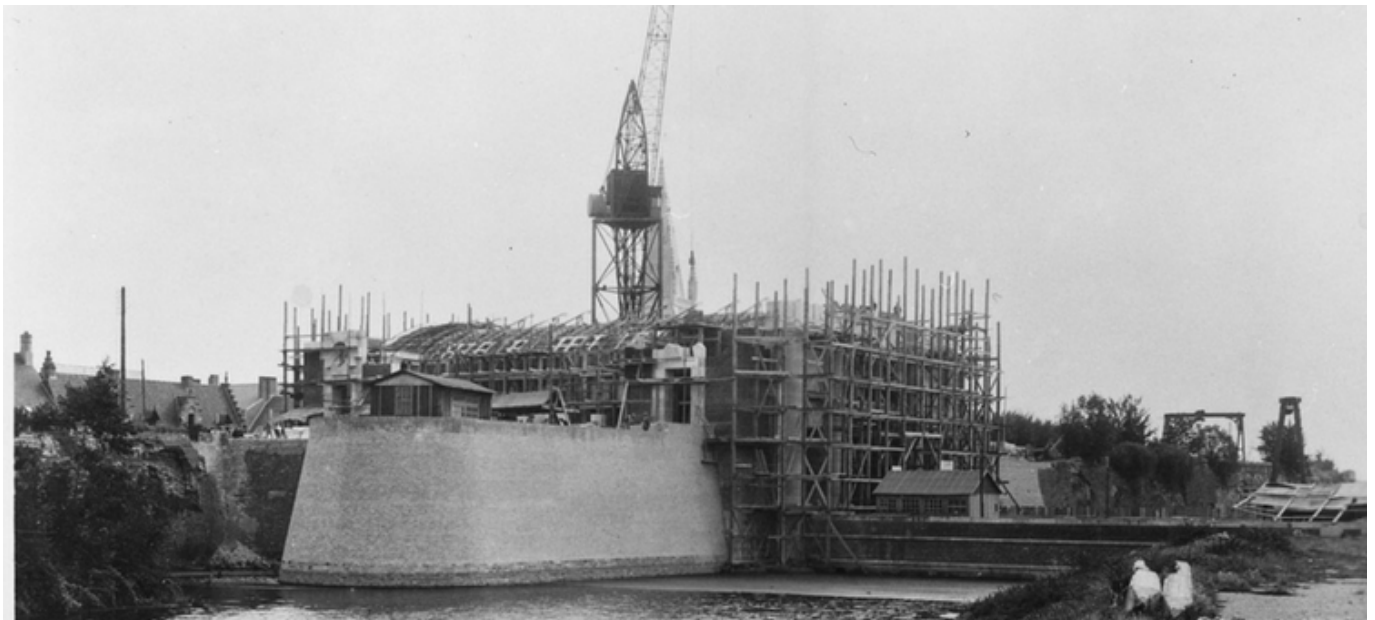
## The history

From October 1914 to October 1918, five major battles occurred at Ypres (now Ieper) in Belgium. The area saw some of the heaviest fighting in the First World War leaving Ypres in ruins. By the time the last shells fell in Belgium in November 1918, the fighting had claimed 193,000 Commonwealth lives – more than half of these men have no known grave.

As hundreds of thousands of Commonwealth troops had passed through the city on their way to the battlefields, it was decided that Ypres was where the missing should be commemorated. Within the city of Ypres, different options were considered. Moderating Sir Winston Churchill's suggestion to claim the entire city as a memorial, the Belgian government agreed to make available a section of the ramparts, incorporating the ruins of the old Menin Gate, where a fitting memorial might be built.

*"I should like to acquire the whole of the ruins of Ypres... A more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the world," Sir Winston Churchill, 1919.*

## The design



Sir Reginald Blomfield, one of the Commission's first three Principle Architects, was appointed to design the memorial.

He sought to design a monument based around the concept of a triumphal arch and a central hall. He drew inspiration from the seventeenth century Porte de la Citadelle in Nancy, France, a structure he admired.

The memorial is built of reinforced concrete faced with Euville stone and red brick. Its design is neo-classical and features symbols such as a lion, wreaths and garlands.

The lions atop the memorial are the work of Scottish sculptor Sir William Reid Dick. It is the symbol of Britain, but also the lion of Flanders. The sculptor had a distinguished career in the military, serving with the Royal Engineers in France and Palestine. It was while he was in the trenches that he began carving.

The central hall is dominated by the name panels of the missing which run along the entire length of the interior. There are 60 panels, arranged by regiment and in order of rank in alphabetical order.

Today, the memorial bears the names of more than 54,000 men of the forces of Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and United Kingdom who died in the Ypres Salient and who have no known grave. The New Zealand government decided that the names of its missing should be commemorated in cemeteries near to where they died.

## The unveiling



*"He is not missing: he is here!"*



Were the words of Field Marshal Lord Plumer as he unveiled the memorial on Sunday 24 July 1927, in the presence of thousands of veterans and family members. Crowds lined the ramparts and the streets, and loudspeakers relayed the events to the market square. The unveiling was also broadcast by the BBC.

At the end of the ceremony buglers of the Somerset Light Infantry sounded the *Last Post* and pipers of the Scots Guards played a lament.

Soon afterwards, the act of sounding the *Last Post* became a daily ritual, led by the local fire brigade. It has been sounded under the arch every night at 8pm almost every day since, except during the Second World War when Belgium was again occupied. Today organised by the Last Post Association, the ceremony is often attended by hundreds who have come to pay their respects.

## More stories about the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial

[Faces of the CWGC Menin Gate Memorial](#)

# LATEST NEWS



11 July 2019

## Digital archive reveals First World War stories

More than 800 family stories from the First World War have been preserved for future generations to share in a digital archive, created by the Commonwealth War Graves Foundation and the University of Oxford. Following a series of roadshows and community-led events, the free-to-access Lest We Forget online archive will preserve a snapshot what life was like for the wartime generation.



03 July 2019

### **New grant to help tell the stories of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Runnymede Air Forces Memorial**

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The Commonwealth War Graves Foundation (CWGF) is delighted to announce today that it has secured a £60,000 grant from Biffa Award in connection with the

Association of Independent Museums. The grant, which is part of the History Makers programme, will enable the CWGF to develop a digital exhibition for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Runnymede Air Forces Memorial.