

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY WAR HERITAGE GROUP

PROGRESS REPORT ON PLANS TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENARY OF WW1 AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TUESDAY 10 JULY, 2012
4.00pm, COMMITTEE ROOM 4A
THE HOUSE OF LORDS

Minutes of the Meeting

Apologies for absence: Earl Attlee, Lord Crathorne, Lord Hodgson, Lord Lee, Lord Maginnis, Lord McColl, Madeleine Moon MP, Baroness O’Cathain, Baroness Royall, Nicholas Soames MP.

Present: Lord Faulkner, Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Lord Clarke, Lord Cope, Lord Grenfell, Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Lord Roper, Lord Selkirk, Baroness Sharples, Lord Watson, Professor Peter Doyle (Secretary).

In attendance: Frank Baldwin (Battlefields Trust) Stephen Chambers (Gallipoli Association), Tony Cowan (British Commission on Military History), Peter Frances (CWGC), Richard Hughes (Western Front Association), Jennifer Humphreys (Office of Madeleine Moon MP), Frances Moreton (War Memorials Trust), Toma Paro (Leeds University).

Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the last meeting. The minutes of the last meeting were circulated and confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 July 2011.

Election of officers. Jeffrey Donaldson MP was invited to take the chair to take nominations. Lord Faulkner was proposed and seconded as Chairman, and was duly elected. From the chair, Lord Faulkner then accepted the nomination of other officers. It was noted with regret that Lord Boswell, previously a Vice-Chair, would be required by his Parliamentary duties required to stand down. Lord Faulkner acknowledged his hard work for the Group with thanks. Lord Faulkner accepted the nomination of Lord Roper, Lord Cope, Nigel Dodds MP and Baroness Golding as Vice-Chairs, and Jeffrey Donaldson MP as treasurer, which was moved *en bloc*.

Chairman’s report. Lord Faulkner reported upon the activities of the previous year. Discussions relating to the forthcoming commemoration of the Centenary of the Great War have naturally been a central focus, and officers of the Group have been active in proposing initiatives and were invited to the launch of the Australian Commemorations at Australia House in April. Lord Faulkner reported that he had had meetings with Dr Andrew Murrison, the Prime Minister’s Special Representative, to discuss this. Lord Faulkner had recently written to the Dutch Ambassador regarding the salvage of metal from the Royal Naval cruisers *Aboukir*, *Cressey* and *Hogue*, which were sunk in the North Sea in September 1914. He hoped to report on this at a later meeting.

Re-appointment of secretaries. Lord Faulkner thanked the secretaries for their hard work over the past year, and noted their willingness to continue in their roles. They were duly re-appointed.

Treasurer's report: Jeffrey Donaldson MP provided a Treasurer's Report. He noted that as most members had signed as members for a period of five years, there had been little income this year, and as a consequence, there had been no bank charges.

Opening balance in bank account		£221.14
Income 2011/12		
Membership subscriptions	nil	
Expenditure 2011/12		
Website hosting	nil	
Bank charges	nil	
Closing balance in account at 10 July 2012		£221.14

Lord Cope thanked the Treasurer for his hard work over the past year.

Lord Faulkner then invited Dr Murrison to present his report.

Report from Dr Andrew Murrison on progress made in the Commemoration of the Great War, to commence in 2014.

Dr Murrison commenced by thanking the Group for its interest and guidance. In his opening statement, Dr Murrison expressed the view that the First World War was of 'seismic importance', and that he had been honoured to act as the Prime Minister's Special Representative in order to collate views and develop a recommended and fitting programme of commemorations for the period 2014–2018. He explained that he had submitted his recommendations to the Prime Minister, and although he was not at liberty to share details at this stage, he was able to indicate that his recommendations had been accepted, and that they would form the 'blue-print' to commemorate Britain's place in the Great War.

He reported that he had been working closely with other countries, and in particular, the Commonwealth Countries, Ireland, and in fact all other belligerents, regardless of their side during the conflict. The outcome of his discussions was an extension of understanding and friendship. As an example of this, at Thiepval on 1 July, Dr Murrison attended a ceremony accompanied by Owen Paterson MP and the Irish politician, Dinny McGinley TD. Though the significance of this might be muted at present, it indicates the importance of anniversaries in extending understanding between Britain and Ireland. In Dr Murrison's view, this was a really significant moment.

Dr Murrison recognised that there was a clear duty to engage in remembrance. He was aware, in discussion with representatives of other countries, that each has its own agenda: there is no clear, settled, narrative. In fact, while some nations will commemorate, others will celebrate the war as the crucible in which their nations were created. He noted that it is our duty to mark this terrible event, but that there are different imperatives for each country involved. For Britain, it is important to consider how the events will be marked at home as well as abroad.

He then gave an outline of the basic plans for commemoration in Britain. There will be some large national commemorations, though small in number, commencing in August 2014. There was also a need to mark a uniquely British event; for most

people, this was the Battle of the Somme. As such, the first day of the Somme (1 July 2016) will be the focus for the United Kingdom's Government-led activity activity. In addition, the anniversary of the end of the war falls on a Sunday, and therefore there will be a small amount of celebration on this day, which will be a Remembrance event.

Dr Murrison went on to explain that there is also a need to mark the aspirations of other countries. Max Hastings has suggested that Britain is 'behind the curb', though in Dr Murrison's view, the United Kingdom is now 'ahead of the game'. Continental partners will mark other dates, and like in the UK, there will be a small number. For the UK, with its Commonwealth partners, the war was truly global in impact, which puts this country in a different place than its continental partners.

He was at pains to reiterate that nothing that the Government will announce will represent a 'dead hand on the activities of other groups up and down the country'. It is expected that the Heritage Lottery Fund will continue to be generous in their support. Vitally important is the role that the Imperial War Museum (IWM) will have in coordinating national efforts, thereby providing support and networking opportunities, but this is not intended to command and corral activity. The IWM has shown it has an appetite to show some leadership, and perhaps some resources. And there is a need to do a lot of work amongst youth and education.

Dr Murrison closed with the explanation that the programme is intended to provide a memorial of the conflict. He did not anticipate that there would be any more Portland Stone memorials of the conflict, but rather a much more ethereal monument marking the centenary for generations to come.

Lord Faulkner expressed his appreciation of Dr Murrison's exposition and asked for comment from the Group.

Lord Cope encouraged Dr Murrison to consider the educational opportunities of the commemorations. He went on to ask whether the Japanese were to be part of this, as they were allies?

Dr Murrison had met with the Japanese embassy to discuss this matter. His feeling is that the Japanese will probably go with a small-scale academic consideration of the conflict.

Lord Grenfell thanked Dr Murrison for his excellent presentation. He had concerns, however, that the whole exercise could appear fragmented. Each country will wish to do their own thing, each looking at what was important to them; and he is keen that there should be collaboration. Lord Grenfell also suggested that there seems to be a tendency to consider only 1914, which was the beginning of a terrible war. In his view there should be a focus on what it means to lose youth. He also expected that there will be questions raised over the performance of the General Staff.

Dr Murrison explained that there is a narrative, commonly held in Australia, that the 'Diggers went to the war and were slaughtered at the behest of Englishmen'. Fortunately, this is a minority view, which will not dominate popular feeling. There are a number of other misleading narratives, and it is important that we ensure these do not get in the way. For example, some have expressed the conflict as a 'European Civil War', and there is a risk that the commemoration could be used for political agenda. In his view, the commemorations should focus on remembrance. He went on to explain that there was a necessity to engage youth directly, and not necessarily at CWGC War Cemeteries. Instead, it is important to draw on personal interest stories that will inspire individual groups. For example, young people will be represented at

an event marking the Christmas Truce, and the FA will be involved to mark the events surrounding the famous 'football match in no man's land'. There are other examples of similar 'pegs'. As for the 'Lions and donkeys thing', this is an interesting concept, especially as casualty rates among general officers shows that they suffered disproportionately.

Lord Eden expressed the view that education requires preparation, and some considerable build up. To this end, to what extent will the media be involved, given that this needs to be lifted off the ground to spread this throughout the country. He also asked whether there would be collaboration between the IWM and National Army Museum?

Dr Murrison replied that the BBC has been part of the working group, and it has been advising on how to get news of the centenary to the 'usual suspects' and also to those who might not normally have engaged. He recognised that important for the media to have a story, a narrative that requires a point of interest, e.g. Christmas Truce. Fortunately, the IWM is way ahead of the game. It is a flagship, and its regeneration will enhance its reputation as a world-class institution that will collaborate with other museums across the United Kingdom.

Lord Clarke was very reassured by the presentation. He expressed a view that the Christmas Truce in 1914 will be of great interest. In his experience, there is a narrative in the Cumbrian archives. He asked how organisers of events will engage the county archives, with the many diaries that exist, for example, and how they will engage with museums. This is particularly important, as it engages with people directly. Lord Clarke also suggested that some consideration be made towards complex issues, such as class divisions, and Conscientious Objection. This is important, he felt.

Dr Murrison agreed that archives were important, and noted that there would be more material appearing from attics as the commemorations began. He believed that the role of the Imperial War Museum would be pivotal in this, as a major part of its future work will be encouraging people to upload scanned material into its online database. He recommended that Dianne Lees (IWM) be invited to discuss this matter. He agreed that there were difficult issues to be discussed, and that the war has 'Big Society' implications. But he was also aware that the British Army of the Great War was a social and cultural melting pot, and therefore it is possible to examine these issues through this particular lens. He agreed that the role of Conscientious Objectors, and others groups, such as Munitions Workers, should form part of the focus on the Great War during this period.

Lord Roper agreed that national archives and regimental museums were important repositories of information. He posed the question whether what was intended was commemoration or remembrance, and whether the former Imperial armies would be included. And he asked whether the war poets might represent a 'peg' for interest.

Dr Murrison dealt with the last issue first. Matters are complicated for, for example, India, as the Indian Army at Nueve Chappelle included men from Pakistan and Bangladesh. He agreed that the words used here are important, and specified that what was intended was certainly remembrance and not celebration. In his view, battles such as Trafalgar and Waterloo were subject to commemoration, as they are more distant, and therefore, historical. Matters are different for the Great War, as people still have contemporary knowledge, a special case. He agreed that regimental

museums are important; the IWM will take 'light touch' in its engagement with such museums. Finally, Dr Murrison acknowledged the cultural legacy of the War poets, and envisaged a large number of activities relating to their work in schools particularly.

Lady Sharples noted that she possessed two volumes of letters and glass slides from her father in the Great War. **Dr Murrison** agreed to pass on this information to the IWM.

Peter Bottomley was concerned that though the arts are covered, the scientific advancements and workers might not be recognised. He wished also to ensure the Irish contribution was adequately covered. Thirdly, he was at pains to point out that the war effort was not simply that of the UK, for example, Russia suffered heavily. Finally, he noted that his constituency has runs a series of lectures on Gallipoli, might add to the richness of the commemorations.

Dr Murrison agreed that Britain was not alone, and as such, has written to all MSPs regarding the opportunities to get involved; he had already discussed his connection with Ireland. In his view recognition of scientific achievements was rather difficult, given such things as the use of poisonous gas, but there have been tentative approaches to scientific societies. Unfortunately, connection with the Russian authorities has proven difficult as yet, and they have yet to respond.

Lord Faulkner thanked for Dr Murrison for his illuminating presentation, and for responding so fully to the numerous questions asked of him. He noted that he would like the Group to follow up the opportunity to discuss developments with Dianne Lees of the Imperial War Museum. With no other business, he closed the meeting.

THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY WAR HERITAGE GROUP EXISTS TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT THE PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION OF WAR GRAVES, WAR MEMORIALS AND BATTLEFIELD SITES.

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