

# ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY WAR HERITAGE GROUP

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
WEDNESDAY 26 October 2016 at 5.00 pm  
Committee Room 2A, House of Lords

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**Present:** Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP (Co-Chair), Lord Faulkner (Co-Chair), Lord Boswell, Lord Clark of Windermere, Lord Cope of Berkeley, Lord Crathorne, Baroness Golding, Lord Hodgson, Lord Selkirk, Baroness Sharples, Lord Tope, Lord Watson, Professor Peter Doyle (Secretary).

**Apologies:** Lord Tebbit.

**In attendance:** Dr George Bailey (BCMh), Ian Campbell (Ypres Bells), Ruth Gibson (Battlefields Trust), Colin Kerr (CWGC), Dr Innes McCartney (Bournemouth University), Alan Regin (Ypres Bells), David R. Smith (Ypres Bells), Vikki Thompson (War Memorials Trust), Colin Wagstaff (WFA),

**Minutes of the last meeting.** The minutes of the last meeting were circulated. It was proposed by Lord Clark, and seconded by Lord Cope that these were a correct record of that meeting.

**Election of officers.** Lord Clark proposed that Sir Jeffrey Donaldson and Lord Faulkner continue as co-Chairs of the Group, and that the other officers should continue in their role. Lord Boswell proposed that Baroness Golding be elected as Vice Chair, and that the re-election of all officers *en bloc*. These nominations were accepted and moved *en bloc*.

**Appointment of secretary.** From the chair, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson thanked Professor Doyle for his hard work as secretary over the previous year, and noted his willingness to continue. This was proposed by Lord Faulkner, and seconded by Lord Selkirk.

**Treasurer's report.** Sir Jeffrey Donaldson gave a verbal report.

Balance of account: £116.14 in account.

Received membership subscriptions: £45.00

Closing balance: £161.14

Acceptance of the statement of the account was proposed by Lord Boswell, and seconded by Lord Faulkner.

**Lord Boswell** enquired whether members' subscriptions had been collected for the Parliament. Sir Jeffrey Donaldson replied that so far, nine members had paid their subscriptions, and that those of other members were due. Finally, it was agreed that Lord Faulkner would enquire whether there were expenses outstanding relating to the maintenance of the website.

**Sir Jeffrey Donaldson** took the chair and paid tribute to Lord Roper, a previous chair of the group, who died last year. He proposed that a note expressing condolences be sent on behalf of the Group. Closing the business of the AGM, Sir Jeffery then invited Colin Kerr (CWGC), to make his presentation, and passed the Chair to Lord Faulkner.

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**Colin Kerr (Commonwealth War Graves Commission)** commenced his presentation by indicating that he would be discussing, the Living Memories project, the 'Forgotten Fronts', and the CWGC's plans for 2017. Before this he outlined some of the themes of 2016, which had included commemoration of the Battle of Jutland, and the Battle of the Somme. He noted that a consistent thread of both was the encouragement of people, to attend the cemeteries. For Jutland, a naval battle off the coast of Denmark, this was focused on Scandinavian sites, with 300 men killed at the battle buried there, and he noted that there was Ambassador-level involvement in commemorative events at these sites. The Battle of the Somme was marked on 1<sup>st</sup> July, but it is important to understand that the battle lasted for 141 days, and this has been an important theme of the CWGC's commemorative efforts. Mr Kerr noted that there were 230 cemeteries on the Somme, demonstrating the scale and length of large engagement. To mark the 141 days in France, there have been 85 separate events with Regimental Associations, the CWGC working with these groups to take them to the relevant memorials and cemeteries. In his view, this had made a real impression on the public, with the chance that a greater number than ever would visit the Somme cemeteries.

Mr Kerr then turned to the Living Memories project, which had been funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). This initiative was centered on over 200 CWGC sites in the United Kingdom. Within these sites are buried some 300,000 servicemen and women – representative of those 'who didn't get out of the hospitals', and there was a need to remember them. The greatest challenge is perhaps that there are big inner city sites, with lots of people here. He was pleased to explain that The Duke of Cambridge would be visiting one of them, at Willesden, in the heart of North London. The CWGC has been talking to a lot of groups in order to increase participation, which has worked well, and the intention is to keep going with the community initiatives.

Mr Kerr also noted the CWGC's commitment to what he termed the 'Forgotten Fronts', typical of which being Salonika. The Commission had been successful in holding an event at Doiran Memorial, with local children from visiting the site. Other 'Forgotten Fronts' included the 54,000 graves in Iraq, including large

numbers from India, and he noted there had been a more interest in Indian involvement in the war recently. He explained that the memorial in Basra to the missing of the Mesopotamian Campaign included the names of the British soldiers, but though it noted that 30,000 Indian troops had been lost there, they had been not named on the memorial. Mr Kerr was pleased to announce that a commitment had been made that the names of these men would be added to the Memorial in due course.

Turning to 2017, Mr Kerr outlined some of the events that the CWGC would be taking part in. He commenced his explanation with reference to the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Pacific theatre during the Second World War, which commenced on 8 December 1941 with the fall of Hong Kong to the Japanese, followed by the campaign in Malaya and the surrender of Singapore. He noted that 2017 will also mark the hundredth anniversaries of the Battle of Arras and the action at Vimy Ridge in April. Commemorating the Third Ypres will also be significant, as would the Battle of Cambrai. This would mean an extended period of commemoration. He noted that 2017 also marked the anniversaries of significant actions in Palestine, Jerusalem, Gaza, Beersheba, and though there were some political difficulties, the CWGC has been sensitive to them, and has managed to build links with ambassadors, with British Ambassador from Jerusalem attending at Gaza. Lastly, Mr Kerr explained that the commemoration of the loss of life at sea during the war is often a challenge, with fewer graves. He was pleased that the touring 'blood red poppies' exhibit will be installed at the Plymouth naval memorial, which should help raise awareness.

Finishing his presentation, Mr Kerr thanked the group for supporting the CWGC. He explained that it would be valuable if the pdf files containing details of local war graves that have been sent out to MPs, could reinforce the importance and significance of the 200 large CWGC sites, and not just the local churchyards. However, he was pleased to confirm that following the initiative carried out in association with the All Party War Heritage Group, there has been increased visibility for war grave sites in the United Kingdom, with community groups beginning to champion the sites. He closed his presentation with the suggestion that MPs and Peers could be active in supporting them in order to maintain their momentum of interest.

**Lord Faulkner** thanked Mr Kerr for his presentation, and invited comment and questions.

**Lord Cope** expressed his interest in Palestine and his appreciation to the CWGC for looking after Palestine Police graves, which technically fall outside of the dates of the two World Wars. He commented that, the Consul General for the Occupied Territories might be a better placed to assist with the commemoration of the war dead at Gaza Cemetery. Mr Kerr thanked Lord Cope for his comments.

**Lord Hodgson** enquired after CWGC sites where prevailing advice is against visits. He wondered how many areas there were in this situation, such as Benghazi, and others in North Africa? Mr Kerr agreed that there are difficulties in some sites, with, for example, Kohima, close to the border of India with Burma generally seen to be

safe, while Imphal is difficult. He explained that the CWGC, which protects such sites in perpetuity, would 'play a long game' and where access is difficult, would wait until conditions change. In general, the CWGC follows Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice. Where it is deemed to be unsafe for staff to go to a site, such as at Tripoi, it is sometimes the case that local contractors can be employed to do the work until conditions improve.

**Lord Hodgson** also noted that Tanzania was a forgotten campaign of the First World War, and noted that Britons abroad were keen to see this commemorated. Mr Kerr agreed that this aim was a valuable one.

**Baroness Sharples** enquired after the fate of the sailors HMS *Neptune*, which was sunk in the Mediterranean in 1941. Mr Kerr confirmed that the names of the sailors who were lost at sea are commemorated at one of the three Naval Memorials, based at Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth.

**Lord Watson** asked what the public response to the Somme commemorations had been, and also enquired whether the 200 large UK sites could be found on the CWGC website. Mr Kerr confirmed that the 200 sites are not highlighted as such, though they are on the site. He agreed that it might be valuable to have a list of them there. Turning to the Somme initiatives, he explained that the public had been asked what they thought of them, and that the response had been positive. Mr Kerr explained that people's preference for future communications about this was through the website, rather than by direct approaches, and the CWGC intends to follow this. He further explained that the CWGC hopes to carry out an initiative with the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, their German colleagues, that would allow access to a dedicated wifi system at British and German sites such as Tyne Cott and Langemarck (Belgium), as well as Monte Cassino (Italy) and Normandy (France).

**Lord Selkirk** mentioned that there were a number of unidentified graves on the Italian island of Lampedusa. His view was that these were most likely to be Royal Marine Commandos, and he wondered whether there was any chance that they could be marked as such? Mr Kerr said that he would look into this.

**Lord Faulkner** then invited Mr Alan Regin to make his presentation.

**Alan Regin (St George's Memorial Church, Ypres)** opened his presentation by explaining that he was a practicing bell ringer, and that he had a particular interest in the Great War as Rolls of Honour note the large number of bell ringers who died during the conflict. On a visit, he was taken by the sight of St George's Memorial Church in Ypres, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, and built in 1927–29. Examining the church and its records, it was obvious that the Church tower was designed with bells in mind, with specifications suitable of housing them. Nevertheless, bells were never installed, and currently there is only a bare brick tower.

Mr Regin explained that the Bells for St George project<sup>1</sup> has gained permission from the local authorities and the Church to cast and install a peel of English bells in the tower, and has a fundraising target of £195,000 to achieve this. He further explained that he was looking for help in getting the project more widely recognised. For example, each bell could be case with up eight inscriptions, from schools, regiments, or similar organisations, at a cost of £2000 pounds. In addition, a memorial book has been commissioned, and each donor giving greater than £100 will feature within its pages.

The ringing chamber is currently a bare room. It will be paneled and named in honour of Bertrand Fruitt, who was among finest bell ringers, and who was killed in the Great War. It is intended that the Belfry will be sound insulated to ensure that the bells do not disturb the local residents. The association has been offered the use of two Great War vintage lorries to assist with the installation. Mr Regin explained that the project team had been presented with sixteen hand bells, by the grandson of a Great War veteran. These are at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry being refurbished and will eventually be housed inside the tower. Finally, Mr Regin mentioned that there is a particular issue with VAT, which will be charged as the bells, being made at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, are to be exported to Belgium.

**Lord Faulkner** thanked Mr Regin and opened the floor for comment by suggesting, with regards to the VAT issue, that he talk to the office of the General Representation of the Government of Flanders in London. Mr Colin Kerr (CWGC) noted that all VAT is waived for the CWGC in its work. He added that there will be a ceremony in next year to mark the opening of the Menin Gate Memorial in 1927, and there might be value in some form of link to the raising of the bells.

**Lord Cope** commented that as a bell ringer himself, he is strongly supportive of this project, and this view was supported by Lord Hodgson and Lord Selkirk, who's uncle was killed in the Ypres Salient.

**Lord Faulkner** then invited Dr McCartney to make his presentation.

**Dr Innes McCartney (Bournemouth University)** commenced his presentation by thanking the All Party Group for the opportunity to discuss his work on the wrecks of the Battle of Jutland, fought 100 years ago this year, and to highlight the targeting of the ships by illegal salvagers.

For the past 17 years, Dr McCartney has been working to map out the battlefield, and has identified that its archaeological record is quite exceptional, almost unrivalled in quality. But his work has also identified that unscrupulous salvagers, who are destroying the naval heritage and removing the possibility of future study with as yet undeveloped technology, have targeted the site. Dr McCartney described how all the shipwrecks have been targeted by metal thieves, amounting to a heartbreaking loss of information and cultural heritage.

The Battle of Jutland was fought off the coast of Denmark. The battle itself has has been described as a skirmish, with ten percent of the ships engaged lost, and

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bells4stgeorge.org](http://www.bells4stgeorge.org)

ten percent of the men killed. Yet the scale of the dead was shocking, with some 8,500 sailors killed, of which 6,000 plus were British. The ships that were lost suffered terrible destruction, and five of them exploded – yet these have been subject to outrageous activity. Dr McCartney took HMS *Indefatigable* as an example. From the destruction of this ship in battle there were only two survivors. The site of the wreck was unknown until 2001, when he discovered the wreck.

Showing a video of a dive to the site, Dr McCartney indicated that on discovery, the site was very jumbled and difficult to interpret, a function of the ship's violent end. But just twelve years later, on returning with advanced multibeam scanning equipment, it was possible to examine the site with an amazing level of detail and precision, identifying the fragments of the exploded ship now resting on the seabed. Dr McCartney explained that on first inspection, there appeared to be a fragment missing from the wreck. Returning for a wider survey, he was able to identify this, lying half a kilometre away from the stern of the ship – showing that it had sailed on after the explosion, before finally sinking. This example shows how important it is to preserve such shipwrecks intact, as the new research is helping to rewrite our understanding of the battle and the way it was played out. This represents all new information, which is only possible if the ships are left where they lie, intact and left alone. Every story of this ship and others is transformed by advancing technology that can only interpret it if it's still there. But increasingly, the Jutland wrecks are being targeted by salvagers. The ships lie at a depth of around 60–80 metres, within the capability of many divers.

Recently, a colleague of Dr McCartney gave him a picture of the *Indefatigable*'s propeller, photographed at a salvage company yard. This bronze propeller was subsequently melted down for money. In Dr McCartney's view, as this ship still remains the property of the United Kingdom, this represents theft. There is more evidence of the looting of the ships. An online photograph shows an unidentified man holding the unique crest of HMS *Queen Mary*, another of the Jutland wrecks, which was looted in 2008. Dr McCartney showed photographs of the looting of this ship, including the highly damaging salvage of one of the bronze engine condensers, the metal content of which have been valued at around £65,000. This ended up in a yard in the Netherlands. Further examination of the wrecks has shown that a large number of ships condensers are missing. Examining the *Queen Mary* further, the X turret has now been destroyed by grabs in order to get at the condenser. The multibeam technology shows without doubt that the ship has been looted in this way, and applied to other ships, shows just how many wrecks have been targeted.

According to Dr McCartney, the MoD considers the case 'too difficult to prosecute'. Yet salvage is continuing, and the majority of the ships are in effect 'war graves'. A list of the ships looted was supplied, with salvage from them including small artefacts as well as large features such as the condensers. Many of the items appear to be ending up at yards in Terschelling, in the Netherlands. The only ship not yet targeted and as yet remains untouched, is HMS *Warrior*. Pristine, in Dr McCartney's view, this ship should be left in peace.

Having shown the endemic level of damage and looting, Dr McCartney made some suggestions as to how this could be tackled.

**Firstly**, there is the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Heritage, adopted in 2001. This powerful legislation had four main principles: the obligation to preserve underwater heritage; a commitment to *in situ* preservation; a regulation that prevents commercial exploitation; and a commitment to information sharing<sup>2</sup>. As understood, this Convention has been put forward by DCMS for ratification. Obviously this is of the greatest importance for not only the Jutland wrecks, but all others across the world. Dr McCartney suggested that the All Party Group could assist in this.

**Secondly**, Dr McCartney outlined a way in which salvagers could be easily tracked, using a satellite application developed in the UK, known as ‘Catapult’<sup>3</sup>. This technique was designed to track illegal trawlers in real time, and maps out the position of trawlers, and is a technique being used in some countries for watching fishing fleets and other activities. This could easily be used to track salvage ships at sea, and could be a powerful tool.

**Lord Faulkner** thanked Dr McCartney for his important presentation, and opened the floor to questions and comments.

**Lord Selkirk** noted that the final resting place of the German Imperial fleet is at Scapa Flow, and this has been ‘harvested’ for scrap. But he noted that this was a different proposition, as these are not War Graves, while Jutland. Mr Kerr added to Lord Selkirk’s comment by explaining that, though the term ‘war grave’ is often used in this context, technically such ships are not graves, with the point of commemoration of the British Jutland dead being at the Royal Naval Memorial in Chatham.

**Lord Cope** enquired after the status of HMS *Swift*, sank off Argentina in 1770, which has again been the target of divers. There has been some question of ownership, and whether it lay in international or territorial waters? Dr McCartney replied that the UNESCO Convention does not recognise the distinction, with all underwater heritage protected.

**Lord Boswell** enquired whether the definitions of what is or is not property be ironed out with the White Paper relating to the Convention?. In Dr McCartney’s view, they would be, but as yet, the opportunists are acting as they wish. It was Lord Boswell’s view that the All Party Group should make a representation to the DCMS and the MoD to flag up the problems here.

**Baroness Golding**, suggested that it would be useful to get access to the paper and to move forward with that, especially as so many other sites are under threat, such as the Second World War wrecks of the HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*.

**Lord Faulkner** thanked the contributors for their stimulating presentations and closed the meeting.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/2001-convention/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sa.catapult.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Case-Study-IUU-July-2014Final.pdf>

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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