

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY WAR HERITAGE GROUP

**MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER, 2012
5.00pm, COMMITTEE ROOM 3
THE HOUSE OF LORDS**

Minutes of the Meeting

Apologies for absence: Geoffrey Clifton-Browne MP, Lord Cope, Lord Eden, Baroness Fookes, Sir Gerald Howarth MP, Simon Hughes MP, Anne McGuire MP, Lord Roper, Lord Tebbit

Present: Lord Faulkner, Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Baroness Andrews, Lord Clark, Baroness Golding, Lord Hodgson, Julian Lewis MP, Lord Morgan, Baroness Sharples, Peter Doyle (Secretary), Peter Barton (Secretary)

In attendance: J. Armstrong (HLF), F. Baldwin (Battlefields Trust), P. Burley (Battlefields Trust), P. Cornish (IWM), Tony Cowan (BCMh), Lt Col. K. Donaldson, Jean Hockings (APPWHG Web Manager), R. Hughes (WFA), J. Humphreys (representing Madeleine Moon MP), F. Moreton (War Memorials Trust), T. Sutherland, D. Tattersfield (WFA), C. Wagstaff (WFA)

Chairman's report

Lord Faulkner reported on correspondence with the Dutch Ambassador, regarding the reported salvage of metal by Dutch contractors from the Royal Navy cruisers, the *Aboukir*, *Hogue* and *Cressey*, which were sunk in September 1914. The Ambassador reported that the ships lie in international waters, and that the British Government had relinquished its rights to the ships, as they had been sold for salvage. Removal of materials from the vessels was therefore not illegal. Lord Faulkner had written to Lord Astor drawing attention to issue. In his reply, Lord Astor did confirm that though the ships were war graves, the British Government had indeed relinquished its rights, with the result that the vessels remain unprotected. It was agreed that this was not satisfactory, and that something should be done given the fact that the 100th anniversary of the sinking would be marked in September 2014.

Lord Faulkner reported that he had been invited to join the Ministry of Defence WW1 advisory board. He hoped to be able to report on the outcome of the meetings to the Group.

The La Boisselle project, Somme, France: Mr Peter Barton

Peter Barton gave a presentation on his archaeological work on the Somme battlefield. He started by reminding the Group of its involvement when the site had been threatened with development two years ago, when planning permission had been granted for the construction of nine houses on the site. Mr Barton's involvement had come about through invitation, and its owner had asked if he could 'give value' to the site, in a historical sense. The work has now identified many facets of the site, and has lifted the threat of development.

He went on to provide an orientation of the site for the Group. The site, known as the 'Glory Hole' to the British was the location of the activities of three nations, with French, British and German trenches, and with underground activities from all of them. The site in 1914 consisted of farm buildings with cellars that were to become part of the trench lines. One part, the *Granathof*, was very symbolic and was first held by Breton troops. The team have recovered interesting artefacts here, and found a French soldier, whose death has been traced to 27 December 1914. Three further French soldiers' remains have been found in the trenches that were dug in 1914, and forensic archaeologists are working with their remains, but it is unlikely that they will be identified.

The British took over from the French here in 1915, and the frontline has been identified, with every trench on the site is well preserved. The front line was called Scone Street but the Scots who took over from the French. Below ground, it was the British 179 Tunnelling Company that took over from the French engineers in 1915. Mr Barton explained how his team had identified the workings of the engineers underground. The tunnels and shafts were first identified using geophones, and then three entrances were opened up, stabilised in case of failures. The shaft they found descended to 18 metres below ground, opening up into a separate, subterranean battlefield. Below ground the chalk is sound, and much evidence was found of the soldiers who worked here. They found relics of the men of the 11th Border Regiment.

Underground the team found shafts and from them, laterals, that followed the line of the trenches at the surface. Off these are attack galleries cut to create a square gallery. Mine chambers had sandbags to muffle the sounds of the men working. Plenty of material was found underground, small objects, calvaries, boxes of gun cotton, but the real story is the people, the men who lived and died underground, and the villagers who lived here before and after the war.

Lord Faulkner thanked Peter Barton for his presentation, and opened the discussion.

Lord Clark enquired whether the tunnellers were in regiments, or miners' battalions? Mr Barton explained that all soldiers of the Royal Engineers, though most had been civilian miners or tunnellers.

Re-development of the Imperial War Museum, London for 2014: Mr Paul Cornish, Imperial War Museums

Paul Cornish, the principal historian working on the project, commenced his presentation by explaining that the Great War galleries of the Imperial War Museum (IWM), are under re-development, and that they will re-open in 2014 in a greatly expanded space.

Mr Cornish and his team were tasked with creating a 'ground-breaking' exhibit that would include up-to-date historiography. It would look at objects in their broadest sense, and would incorporate some of the largest exhibits hitherto displayed separately. He was also tasked with looking at causes and consequences. It would also link home and fighting fronts, and would examine people's engagement in the war. Central to the exhibit was a strong chronological narrative, as the IWM had identified that there were significant numbers of people who did not know the story of the war.

The gallery space will be over 1000 sq m, well over twice the size of the current exhibit, and will have fourteen sections. The first two will deal with pre-war tensions between the major powers. There will be an examination of why the war occurred, and the battles of 1914. There will be focus on the reasons for joining the war, the propaganda, and the recruiting effort. Sections will deal with the trench deadlock, and the development of specialised techniques here. There will also be

recognition of the war as a World War; though the Western Front will remain the primary focus, there will also be discussion of the war at sea, and with other fronts, such as those facing the Ottoman Empire and the Bulgarians in 1915.

The Home Front will consider the development of Britain's manufacturing efforts and the use of munitions workers. The tensions between munitions and recruitment, and consideration of conscription will figure too. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) and its impact will be considered. Dealing with 1916, 'Total war', the Somme would figure heavily, and part of this exhibit will be the large 9.2 howitzer, previously displayed separately. Other aspects of 1916 will be the submarine campaign, life on the home front and the Easter uprising in Dublin.

Life at the front will be a focus, but will not be so chronological. Wounding, prisoners, comforts, religion, and so on will be covered, with some interactivity focussed on young people. The aspect of 'machines against men' will be dealt with, and there will be a double height exhibition space using both the Great War tank and the Sopwith Camel aircraft. There will also be the opportunity to examine how perceptions of the war shaped have been shaped through war art. At home, strains of the war will be considered, as well as what was happening in other countries. Contrasts will be drawn that might help explain such aspects as the Russian revolution. The final section will be devoted to 1918, when the Allies turned the tables on the Germans.

The consequences of the war will figure heavily, human and financial, as well as the memories of the war. The fact that the war had a huge impact on shaping the future world will also be examined.

Lord Faulkner thanked Mr Cornish for his detailed exposition, and asked for questions.

Lord Morgan asked is there was any emphasis on the domestic front? Mr Cornish agreed that this would be covered, with discussion of the roles of women and children, and consideration of food issues.

Baroness Andrews was interested to know whether the role of science and scientist would be covered, particularly the consideration of gas. Gas would figure in the exhibit, it was revealed.

Baroness Golding expressed her admiration for the new Ashcroft VC Gallery, but was concerned about the closure of the museum for six months. Mr Cornish thanked her for her comments, and explained that the museum has had to be closed, as there is to be a major structural re-organisation of the museum.

Threats to the Towton Battlefield: Mr Tim Sutherland

Tim Sutherland is an archaeologist working in York who is concerned about British battlefields. He has been intimately involved with a project at the battle site of Towton, fought in March 1461, during the Wars of the Roses. Starting in 1996, Mr Sutherland had taken part in an investigation of a mass grave, and since then there has been a growing interest in the battlefield. During the period 1997–2012, over 2000 artefacts have been recovered across the field of battle, and several graves have been identified.

The artefacts have been found to have been littered across the battlefield. Many are unique, such as the earliest lead composite shot, mediaeval handguns and other important finds. Mass graves with semi-articulated human remains have been identified in a small number of pits. Mr Sutherland has also been involved in the

development of a battlefield trail on behalf of landowner and Royal Armouries. A small visitors centre has also been developed on site

Despite these successes, there is a problem with ‘night hawkers’, illegal metal detecting on the battle site, the activities of whom are reported to the police if possible. For the first time, there have been developed landowner agreements to prevent metal detectorists, which means that damaging site or removal of objects are now criminal offences. This is seen as a good example of higher-level stewardship of the site, and has been identified as being a good example of active protection by English Heritage (EH).

In 1995, EH set up a register of historic battlefields. Its purpose was to prevent development and it identified sites on a Battlefields Register. In 2008, a developer applied to build on Towton, though nothing would be allowed to take place. However, the application is outside the current site boundary as identified on the Register – and there is evidence to suggest that this boundary is wrong. As such, in Mr Sutherland’s opinion, Towton is under threat, and because the application is outside the current boundary, EH has no objections to the development. Mr Sutherland has asked to be able to carry out archaeological work on what he considers to be the extension of the site, but has so far been refused permission. As such, he feels that one of the most important of Britain’s battle sites, rich in detail and archaeological diversity, is under direct threat. He feels that, in this case, the register is acting against the site. In his opinion, the Secretary of State should call in this application for Public Inquiry, before it suffers irreparable loss.

Lord Faulkner thanked Mr Sutherland, and invited questions.

Frank Baldwin (Battlefields Trust) agreed that there were threats to Towton, Shrewsbury, Northampton and Naseby. In all cases, the potential threats apply outside the area identified in the site boundary. He also noted difficulties of dealing with EH over these matters.

Lord Faulkner expressed the opinion that EH should be allowed to comment on the presentation. As Baroness Andrews had to leave early, he would be prepared to write to her for her view on this.

Baroness Golding asked how urgent this matter was? Mr Sutherland expressed the view that permission is now on hold, but this would need urgent attention. Baroness Golding expressed the view that this was indeed urgent.

Lord Clark expressed the opinion that this application should indeed be called in for inquiry.

Jeffrey Donaldson MP suggested that the best person to deal with this might be the local MP; he suggested that he might speak with the relevant person regarding the matter.

Lord Faulkner agreed to write to Lady Andrews for her view on the matter

Any other business

The representatives of the Western Front Association (WFA) expressed their concern over the way that the Government will commemorate the Centenary of the Great War. In their view, the final 100 Days should be considered.

Lord Faulkner agreed that he would ask members of committee to take this on.

Jeffrey Donaldson MP suggested that the WFA draw up a list of significant events in the Great War that could be used in discussions. For the island of Ireland, Messines in 2017 was significant. He noted that the Advisory Board was open to suggestions. The WFA agreed to do so.

Lord Morgan expressed the view that other theatres of war be considered, and in particular, the Middle East.

Jeffrey Donaldson MP agreed that these would be in there too.

Kingsley Donaldson added his support to the call from the WFA for recognition of the final 100 Days of the Great War.

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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