

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
at the 562nd MEETING of the
COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

held at
2 MARLOW ROAD, MAIDENHEAD
on
THURSDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 1985

Present

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR JOHN BARRACLOUGH KCB CBE DFC AFC FRSA
(Vice-Chairman of the Commission)
in the Chair

MR R L L FACER
Representing the Secretary of State for Defence

MR J ROWSOME
Representing the High Commissioner for Canada

MR A L VINCENT
Representing the High Commissioner for the Commonwealth of
Australia

SQUADRON LEADER P WILLIAMSON
Representing the High Commissioner for New Zealand

MR L H EVANS
Representing the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa

BRIGADIER S NAMBIAR Vrc
Representing the High Commissioner for the Republic of India

SIR EDWARD GOSCHEN Bt DSO

GENERAL SIR ROBERT FORD GCB CBE

SIR DAVID MUIRHEAD KCMG CVO

SIR DONALD MAITLAND GCMG OBE

PROFESSOR THE BARONESS MCFARLANE OF LLANDAFF

ADVISER

PROFESSOR E A BELL PhD FLS CChem FRSC, Honorary Botanical Adviser

SECRETARY

SIR ARTHUR HOCKADAY KCB CMG, Director-General

Also in attendance:

MR P R MATTHEW, Assistant Secretary, Deputy Director-General

MR J SAYNOR JP, Assistant Secretary, Assistant Director-General
(Administration)

MR W J SYMONS OBE, Assistant Secretary, Assistant Director-General
(Operations)

MR H WESTLAND MIPM, Establishment Officer

MR P H M SWAN, Director of External Relations

MR J B PATON OBE NDH, Director of Horticulture

MR N B OSBORN FRICS, Director of Works

MR G C REDDIE, Legal Adviser and Solicitor

MR M S JOHNSON ACMA, Chief Finance Officer

MR R J DALLEY, Director of Secretariat

MR S J BENTON, Secretariat

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were reported from Sir Edward Gardner, Lord Wallace of Coslany, Admiral Sir David Williams, Mr Gomme and Professor Shephard.

MR PETER SCOTT

The death on 13 August was reported of Mr Peter Scott who in March had relinquished after almost fourteen years his appointment as the Commission's Honorary Consultant Engineer. He had been an assiduous and much respected attender at Commission meetings. Members stood in silence in Mr Scott's memory.

CANADIAN AND NEW ZEALAND REPRESENTATIVES

The CHAIRMAN welcomed Mr Rowsome and Squadron Leader Williamson, each of whom was representing his High Commission at a meeting of the Commission for the first time.

DIRECTOR OF SECRETARIAT

The CHAIRMAN also welcomed Mr Roger Dalley who was attending his first Commission meeting as Director of Secretariat.

INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER

The CHAIRMAN reported that the Secretary had written to His Excellency Dr P C Alexander to welcome him as a member of the Commission. Dr Alexander would be visiting Maidenhead on 24 October.

MINISTER FOR HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION

The CHAIRMAN reported that following the recent ministerial changes in the British Government the Secretary had written to Mr Gow and thanked him for his interest and help during his membership of the Commission. There had been some adjustments of ministerial responsibility within the Department of the Environment and it was not yet clear which of the Ministers would succeed Mr Gow on the Commission.

562.1 MINUTES OF THE 561ST MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

562.1.1 The minutes were agreed and were signed by the Chairman.

562.2 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE 561ST MEETING

562.2.1 Proposed UK-GDR War Graves agreement

The Commission took note of the agenda paper setting out the current position with regard to the proposed UK-GDR War Graves agreement. The SECRETARY reported that during his visit to Berlin he had discussed the proposed agreement with the Head of the Consular Department of the GDR Foreign Ministry. The text of the agreement had already been provisionally agreed but he had made it clear that the maintenance charges proposed by the GDR were, in the Commission's view, excessive. It had been agreed that the Commission should provide its own detailed estimate of the work and costs involved to the East Germans so that discussions in principle to establish the basis for a contract could take place before the signing of the agreement. The GDR were in effect being invited to accept a significant reduction in the level of charges which they had previously indicated.

562.3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

562.3.1 The SECRETARY informed the Commission that at the Chairman's invitation he had consulted all Commissioners on the question of a successor to Air Chief Marshal Sir John Barraclough as Vice-Chairman. The proposed appointment of Admiral Sir David Williams had been unanimously endorsed. The President had been consulted informally and had also concurred in the proposed appointment.

562.3.2 On a proposal by Sir Edward GOSCHEN seconded by Mr VINCENT, the Commission appointed Admiral Sir David Williams GCB DL as Vice-Chairman for a period of three years with effect from 1 April 1986.

562.4 ANNUAL REPORT 1984/85 AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS OF THE COMMISSION

562.4.1 Mr MATTHEW thanked Commissioners for their comments on the draft Annual Report and confirmed that copies would be available for distribution in October.

562.4.2 Mr JOHNSON introduced the Accounts which had been approved by the Finance Committee on 5 September after it had heard the Auditors' report. Expenditure in 1984/85 had been 12.2% higher than in 1983/84 but in line with the revised estimate. Mr FACER expressed satisfaction at the very small difference between the revised estimate and the outturn.

562.4.3 On a proposal by Mr ROWSOME seconded by Sir Robert FORD, **the Commission approved the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the Commission for the year ended 31 March 1985.**

562.5 REPORT OF THE 601ST MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

562.5.1 Installation of microcomputers

Mr SAYNOR reported on the recent installation of two microcomputers in the Finance Department. Progress had been slightly delayed by staff turnover but by the end of the current financial year it was hoped to have all the main Head Office accounts on computer, with the financial control function to follow at a later stage; total savings were estimated at about £9,000 per annum.

562.5.2 Reorganisation of horticultural work in France and North West Europe Areas

Mr SAYNOR reported on the savings achieved by the reorganisation of horticultural work in France and North West Europe Areas which would result in cash savings of about £900,000 per annum without, he believed, compromising maintenance standards. In reply to the CHAIRMAN, who wondered whether reorganisation had had any effect on staff morale, Mr PATON said that the changes had put more pressure on gardening staff, but he had talked extensively with them and felt they had reacted remarkably well. He believed that the new system had raised overall standards by ensuring more regular attention to the smaller isolated cemeteries.

562.5.3 Report of Senior Grade Appointment

The SECRETARY reported the appointment of Mr Henry Mackay to the post of Senior External Relations Officer in the grade of Senior Executive Officer.

562.5.4 On a proposal by Brigadier NAMBIAR seconded by Sir David MUIRHEAD, **the Commission adopted the report of the 601st meeting of the Finance Committee.**

562.6 STORM AND WINTER DAMAGE IN NORTHERN EUROPE

562.6.1 The report was introduced by Mr PATON who felt that some considerable time would be needed to make up with new plantings the substantial losses which had resulted from the very low temperatures and cold winds of the previous winter. In addition, a powerful storm had struck northern France and Belgium on 14 August, uprooting trees and damaging 150 headstones. Restoration work was in progress and the local staff were to be congratulated on the way in which they had responded to the problem. This was endorsed by the CHAIRMAN on behalf of the Commission.

562.6.2 Mr OSBORN reported that, apart from the headstones affected by the storm, cemeteries and memorials in France and Belgium had not suffered any abnormal structural damage although there had been frost damage to stonework, particularly at some of the 1914-18 cemeteries in exposed locations.

562.6.3 **The Commission took note of the report contained in paper 562.6.**

562.7 BURIALS AND COMMEMORATIONS

562.7.1 Introducing the paper, Mr SYMONS reported that in accordance with a Commission decision of June 1983 the inspection of the graves in the United Kingdom of 28,000 war dead buried in family plots and designated as not within the Commission's control had recommenced in September 1984 and should be completed within six years. From information received so far it seemed that up to 2000 of these burials might require alternative commemoration. Proposals for the alternative commemoration of seventeen had been approved by the Commission in the previous twelve months and he expected this figure to rise substantially over the next few years.

562.7.2 On a proposal by Sir Donald MAITLAND seconded by Mr FACER, **the Commission approved the alternative commemoration in the United Kingdom of four war dead in accordance with the proposals summarised in section A of paper 562.7.**

562.7.3 On a proposal by Lady McFARLANE seconded by Mr EVANS, **the Commission approved the alternative commemoration in South Africa of eighteen war dead in accordance with the proposal summarised in section B of paper 562.7.**

562.8 COMMONWEALTH-FOREIGN JOINT COMMITTEES:
APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS

562.8.1 Mr SWAN reported that whilst the foreign governments concerned had not proposed any changes in the composition of the major European Joint Committees, they had agreed that those foreign members, both honorary and official, occupying officially designated posts should henceforth be appointed on an ex officio basis. In future therefore the Commission would be invited only to take note of these appointments. Approval would continue to be required for the appointment of honorary members nominated on a personal basis, and for the appointment of members of the other Joint Committees.

562.8.2 On a proposal by Sir David MUIRHEAD seconded by Squadron Leader WILLIAMSON, the Commission approved the appointments set out in section A of paper 562.8 and took note of those set out in section B.

562.9 EXECUTION OF DOCUMENTS

562.9.1 On a proposal by Sir Robert FORD seconded by Mr VINCENT, the Commission confirmed the action for the execution by the Commission or on its behalf of the documents serial numbers 598 and 240-241, referred to in the Schedule laid before the meeting and signed for identification by the Commission's Legal Adviser and Solicitor.

562.10 TOURS BY COMMISSIONERS

562.10.1 Lady McFARLANE reported on her visit to sites in Israel whilst attending an international conference on nursing. She had unfortunately had to curtail her intended programme but nevertheless had been able to see Ramleh, Gaza and Jerusalem War Cemeteries as well as the Protestant Cemetery at Mount Zion. She had visited the administrative office at Ramleh and drew attention to the useful plant nursery being developed at Gaza.

562.10.2 Lady McFARLANE also reported that whilst on a private visit to the Inner Hebrides in August she had noticed on the island of Gigha a Commission headstone which appeared to her to be maintained to a satisfactory standard.

562.10.3 Sir David MUIRHEAD reported on his recent visit to Western Mediterranean Area office at Rome and to cemeteries and memorials in Southern Italy during which he had covered a thousand miles in four and a half days in the company of the Area Director. The overall standard of maintenance had been good despite problems at certain sites; he felt that there was a need for better signposting in some places.

562.10.4 The CHAIRMAN reported that he and Sir Donald Maitland had visited 25 churchyards and cemeteries in the United Kingdom Area in which standards had varied widely. Some plots were well maintained by their local authorities but many private cemeteries and parochial churchyards appeared not to be in such good condition. He believed that the United Kingdom Area, despite the advantages of the reorganisation which had brought about a central base and better working arrangements, was still underprovided with resources to tackle a very daunting task, and that the problems might benefit from further analysis.

562.10.5 Sir Donald MAITLAND endorsed the Chairman's comments but pointed out that even in those cemeteries which were badly maintained overall the Commission's graves were invariably as well tended as any.

562.11 DIARY

562.11.1 The Commission took note of the report of various ceremonies including the visit of the British Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher MP, to Heliopolis War Cemetery. Mr SAYNOR, who had been on tour in Egypt at the time, reported that the ceremony had gone well and that both Mrs Thatcher and the Egyptian officials present had appeared to be very impressed.

562.12 OTHER BUSINESS

562.12.1 Damage to cemeteries, Basra

It was reported that the two cemeteries in Basra had sustained damage from the shelling of the city by the Iranians and that one gardener had been injured. The Area Works Officer was due to visit Iraq in October when it was hoped he could visit Basra and make a fuller assessment of the damage.

562.12.2 W B Gurney & Sons: 250th Anniversary

Gurney's, the Commission's verbatim reporters for many years, were celebrating their 250th anniversary; and the CHAIRMAN asked their reporter at the meeting, Mrs Hussey, to convey to them the Commission's warm congratulations.

562.12.3 Farewell: Mr John Paton

The CHAIRMAN reported that Mr Paton, the Director of Horticulture, was retiring after twenty eight years of service with the Commission. He had been an Area Superintendent in both France and Greece and had held various administrative posts at Head Office, but it was especially as Director of Horticulture that he had left his mark on the Commission's activities all over the world. His fine record of service had been recognised by his appointment as an OBE in the New Year Honours List, and the CHAIRMAN felt sure that everyone would want to wish him and his wife every happiness in his retirement.

562.12.4 The Commission warmly endorsed the Chairman's remarks and placed on record its appreciation of Mr Paton's long and devoted service.