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MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
at the 559th MEETING of the
COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION
held at
2 MARLOW ROAD, MAIDENHEAD
on
THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER 1984

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 R A GOMME
Representing the Minister for Housing and Construction

MR A N LEVER
Representing the High Commissioner for Canada

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

AIR COMMODORE P NEVILLE OBE AFC RNZAF
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 GARDNER QC MP

LORD WALLACE OF COSLANY

SIR EDWARD GOSCHEN Bt DSO

GENERAL SIR ROBERT FORD GCB CBE

SIR DAVID MUIRHEAD KCMG CVO

SIR DONALD MAITLAND GCMG OBE

ADVISERS

MR PETER SCOTT BSc FICE, Honorary Consultant Engineer

PROFESSOR SIR PETER SHEPHEARD CBE BArch PPRIBA MRTPI PPILA, Honorary
Artistic 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 P H M SWAN, Director of External Relations

MR J B PATON NDH, Director of Horticulture

MR N B OSBORN ARICS, Director of Works

MR G C REDDIE, Legal Adviser and Solicitor

MR S G CAMPBELL MC, Director of Information and Secretariat

MR G A CHEATER, Director Outer Area

MR M S JOHNSON ACMA, Chief Finance Officer

MR B P McGee, Secretariat

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were reported from Admiral Sir David Williams and
Baroness McFarlane.

AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATIVE AND DEFENCE SECRETARY'S REPRESENTATIVE

The CHAIRMAN welcomed Mr Vincent, who was representing the Australian
High Commissioner for the first time, and Mr Facer who, in the absence
of Mr Blelloch, was representing the Secretary of State for Defence.

DEATH IN SERVICE

The death was reported of Mr M Lippens, a serving member of the
Works Staff in Ieper for more than ten years.

559.1 MINUTES OF THE 558TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

559.1.1 The minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

559.2 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE 558TH MEETING

559.2.1 Lebanon

Although not strictly a matter arising from the minutes it was reported that the gardening staff in Lebanon were safe and had resumed working. Headstones to replace those damaged in the fighting were in store; whether to despatch them would be reviewed every six months.

559.2.2 Libya

It had still not been possible for any member of staff to visit Libya, but a British representative had visited all the sites and reported that they were being maintained, although there was evidence of vandalism at Tripoli.

559.2.3 Burma (558.2.4)

The subject of the threat to Rangoon War Cemetery had not arisen during Mr Richard Luce's talks with the Burmese Government but the aide-memoire would have been delivered to them.

559.3 ANNUAL ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE - 1984/85 and 1985/86

559.3.1 Introducing the paper, Mr SAYNOR said that it had been extensively discussed by the Finance Committee who had slightly altered the recommendation put to them, the difference being that a temporarily reduced working balance of £400,000 was now proposed in order to reduce the funding requirement for 1985/86. Neither this nor the other reductions made in response to pressure from the British Treasury were considered prudent but the risks were accepted as tolerable and it was hoped that in future years it would be possible to establish a more appropriate basis for the figure included in the Public Expenditure Survey (PES) in respect of the Commission's annual funding requirement.

559.3.2 The Commission was being unfairly penalised by the Treasury's interpretation of its requirements when making their PES forecasts. The large amounts carried forward in previous years, resulting principally from the strength of the pound, had permitted a funding requirement substantially lower than the expenditure requirement. It was only the funding requirement which appeared in the PES, but the artificially low figures of recent years were not a proper base for calculation of requirements for future years when all expenditure had to be met from current funding. This had repeatedly been drawn to the attention of the Treasury but they had been reluctant to make the appropriate

adjustments. The benefit to Governments of lower funding in recent years could not reasonably be used as an argument to reduce provision in the future.

- 559.3.3 Some important points to be borne in mind when considering these and future estimates were:
- a. About 75% of Commission expenditure is overseas where it is subject to differing rates of inflation as well as exchange rate fluctuations. The Commission has no control over these but has to accept the consequences.
 - b. The Commission is faced from time to time with capital expenditure arising from circumstances beyond its control. A recent example was the destruction of cemeteries in the Lebanon which must be restored as soon as possible.
 - c. With the passage of time deterioration of stonework will become more of a problem and demand more resources for maintenance.
 - d. Nearly 80% of expenditure is on staff; so any substantial reduction must come from staff savings. Over the past 25 years, during which the task has not significantly changed, the work force has been substantially reduced. In the years from 1959 to 1976, there was a drop of 14½%, from 1715 to 1465. In the 8 years since then, the numbers have been brought down by a further 13½%, to 1267. Total expenditure reductions over those 8 years are calculated as 16% in real terms. Without this benefit, the estimate for 1985/86 would be £2.6 million greater.

These points were not put forward as an excuse for complacency but as an indication that, if the Commission was to meet its Charter responsibilities, future cost increases would have to be met by increased funding. Indeed the Finance Committee had acknowledged that its recommendations carried serious risk that supplementary provision might be necessary during 1985/86.

- 559.3.4 Commissioners expressed considerable anxiety at the prospect that the Commission's ability to discharge its responsibility properly might be jeopardised. They were especially concerned about the postponement of structural repairs which would become more expensive in the longer term. Various ways were considered of alerting Governments to the problems the Commission faced. Sir Edward GARDNER suggested that, if the British Treasury was not prepared to adjust the PES baseline figures to take into account the Commission's particular situation, a Parliamentary Question might be tabled or even an adjournment debate requested. Air

Commodore NEVILLE thought that other member governments should be warned that supplementary funding might become necessary. Mr LEVER advised that supplementary estimates would not be well received by the Canadian Government. Brigadier NAMBIAR agreed that governments should be presented with the facts because those who had to make the decisions in capitals were not always fully aware of the Commission's difficulties.

559.3.5 It was agreed in discussion that parliamentary intervention should be considered only as a last resort but that the letters sent to member governments requesting funds (which would follow the Commission's acceptance of the estimates now before them) should include an explanation of the background and a warning of a possible need for supplementary provision later.

559.3.6 *On a proposal by Mr LEVER, seconded by Sir Donald MAITLAND, the Commission approved:*

- a. *a revised estimate of £13,370,025 for expenditure during the financial year 1984/85;*
- b. *that on the basis of this estimate, and accepting that the working balance at 31 March 1985 should be no more than £382,932, no further funds should be requested from member governments during 1984/85;*
- c. *an estimate of £13,934,915 for expenditure during the financial year 1985/86;*
- d. *that in order to fund this expenditure and to provide for a working balance at 31 March 1986 temporarily limited to £400,000, member governments should be asked to furnish the sum of £13,621,983 in the financial year 1985/86.*

559.4 REPORT OF THE 599TH MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

559.4.1 Accommodation in Rome

New headquarters for the Commission's Western Mediterranean Area had been sought for several years and the opportunity which had recently arisen to use part of the British Embassy's Old Chancery Building at Villa Wolkonsky at a rental cost not exceeding £75,000 for 10 years was thought to be an acceptable solution. The existing Area offices would be sold. In reply to Mr LEVER, who stressed the need for the Commission to project a separate identity from that of the British Embassy, it was explained that it had already been agreed that the Commission would have its own "brass plate" and an address that did not include the words "British Embassy".

559.4.2 Accommodation in Ieper; Bases for mobile horticultural groups

Both of these items stemmed from the requirement to provide better facilities for mobile horticultural groups following their reorganisation. The costs were very much outweighed by the savings made through the reorganisation. The property in Ieper would also provide much needed space for the blacksmith, painter and stonemasons.

559.4.3 *On a proposal by Mr EVANS, seconded by Sir David MUIRHEAD, the Commission adopted the report of the 599th meeting of the Finance Committee and approved its recommendations.*

559.5 PROPOSED WAR GRAVES AGREEMENT WITH THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

559.5.1 The paper before the meeting explained the historical background to the subject. The government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had been insistent, over several years of negotiations, that a full-scale agreement should be entered into rather than a simple exchange of notes and that all maintenance work should be undertaken by the GDR authorities rather than by Commission staff. The cost of this work would, however, be borne by the Commission except for the fairly limited maintenance which the GDR would carry out under its Geneva Convention obligations.

559.5.2 Stahnsdorf Cemetery contained the great majority of Commonwealth graves in the GDR and its present condition was unacceptable. The Commission was therefore under pressure to accept the GDR terms, and as it seemed unlikely that these would be improved it was felt that they should now be accepted. It would, however, first be desirable to clarify the level of charges the GDR authorities would levy.

559.5.3 Sir Donald MAITLAND had serious misgivings about the proposed agreement which he thought might give away too much and thereby set a precedent for other governments to press when negotiating with the Commission. He wondered whether alternative commemoration might be considered as another option. It was suggested in reply that abandoning the graves could also set an undesirable precedent for unfriendly governments and should only be considered as a last resort.

559.5.4 Several Commissioners were concerned that the proposed agreement would be between the GDR and the British governments (with provision for the Commission's other member governments to accede) rather than with the Commission itself. In reply, it was explained that the

GDR government had insisted on entering into the agreement with the British Government only but had accepted without any restriction the provisions for accession by the other member governments.

- 559.5.5 *In order to take account of the reservations expressed the Commission agreed, on a proposal by Lord WALLACE, seconded by Mr VINCENT, that while a final draft war graves agreement with the GDR should be settled on the basis outlined in the paper it should be submitted to all member governments for approval before being signed by the British Government and acceded to by the other governments concerned.*

559.6 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMONWEALTH-FOREIGN JOINT COMMITTEES

- 559.6.1 Proposals to re-allocate some seats on the Commonwealth side of the major Joint Committees had been set out in a "green paper" attached to the Director-General's letter of 8 October 1984 to all Commissioners. Approval of these proposals had already been indicated by all non-official Commissioners and on behalf of the Chairman and all other member governments except India. Brigadier NAMBIAR confirmed acceptance of the proposals on behalf of the Indian Government since certain queries about Indian membership of the Italian and Netherlands Joint Committees had been satisfactorily resolved.

- 559.6.2 *On a proposal by Sir Edward GOSCHEN, seconded by Air Commodore NEVILLE, the Commission approved the proposals set out in Appendix A to the paper and, consequentially, appointed the individuals listed in Appendix B on a personal basis as honorary members of Joint Committees and took note of the ex-officio appointments to Joint Committees set out in Appendix C.*

559.7 COMMONWEALTH-FOREIGN JOINT COMMITTEES - APPOINTMENT OF FOREIGN MEMBERS

- 559.7.1 *On a proposal by Brigadier NAMBIAR, seconded by Mr FACER, the following were appointed to be members of Commonwealth-Foreign Joint Committees:*

COMMONWEALTH-FRENCH JOINT COMMITTEE

French Honorary Member

His Excellency Monsieur Jacques Viot
(French Ambassador, London)

in succession to His Excellency Monsieur Emmanuel De Margerie

COMMONWEALTH-ITALIAN JOINT COMMITTEE

Italian Official Member

Generale di Corpo d'Armata MO Ferruccio Brandi

(Commissioner-General, Commissariato Generale Onoranze Caduti in Guerra)

Nominated by the Italian Government in succession to
Generale di Corpo d'Armata Pietro Tolomeo

559.8 BURIALS AND COMMEMORATIONS

A. Unmaintainable graves in the British Isles - alternative commemoration

- 559.8.1 Following the decision taken at its 558th meeting in September 1984 to continue commemorating locally those war dead in the United Kingdom whose graves were accepted to be unmaintainable, the Commission was asked to consider six instances where alternative local commemoration was now deemed appropriate and one for which, in accordance with earlier decisions relating to the Republic of Ireland, alternative commemoration would be on the Grangegorman Memorial in Dublin.
- 559.8.2 *On a proposal by Sir Robert FORD, seconded by Mr GOMME, the Commission approved the alternative commemoration of the 25 war dead referred to in the paper before it.*

B. Graves not within the Commission's control in the United Kingdom

- 559.8.3 *On a proposal by Mr LEVER, seconded by Mr EVANS, the Commission approved the classification as "not within the Commission's control" of the 14 war graves enumerated in Supplementary List No 28, laid before the meeting and signed by the Secretary for identification.*

559.9 HISTORICAL NOTICES

- 559.9.1 *The Commission took note of the report which concerned the delay in the programme for the erection of historical notices and the action taken and proposed to overcome the problem of early deterioration of legibility.*
- 559.9.2 Sir Peter SHEPHEARD expressed surprise at the failure of some of the stainless steel notices and thought that the Commission should persist with the programme. Mr GOMME agreed; on a recent visit to Greece he had seen the historical notices at Suda Bay and Phaleron and had found them very helpful.

559.10 SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS EXECUTED BY OR ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION BETWEEN 1 SEPTEMBER AND 30 NOVEMBER 1984

- 559.10.1 *On a proposal by Sir Donald MAITLAND, seconded by Mr VINCENT, the Commission confirmed the action taken for the execution of the documents serial numbers 594-595 and 233-234, referred to in the Schedule laid before the meeting and signed for identification by the Commission's Legal Adviser and Solicitor.*

559.11 COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION SUPERANNUATION SCHEME (1952) - APPOINTMENT OF A MEMBER OF THE SCHEME AS A TRUSTEE

- 559.11.1 *On a proposal by Sir David MUIRHEAD, seconded by Mr EVANS, the Commission approved the appointment of Mr Philip John Noakes as a Trustee of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Superannuation*

Scheme (1952) for a period of three years from 23 January 1985 in succession to Mr Ronald Richard Clothier MBE, and expressed its appreciation of the services that Mr Clothier had rendered in that capacity since his appointment in 1982.

559.12 TOURS BY COMMISSIONERS AND HEAD OFFICE OFFICIALS

559.12.1 The CHAIRMAN reported on his visit to Oosterbeek War Cemetery in September where he had attended the ceremony commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem. It had been a great occasion on which he had felt proud of the standard achieved by the gardening staff at the cemetery. He had been able to visit some other sites in North West Europe Area and was concerned about the state of the Menin Gate where water was coming through the panels and names were becoming illegible. The major overhaul which he knew to be programmed for the Menin Gate clearly illustrated what had been said earlier in the meeting about the investment required to carry out structural maintenance: here was a great memorial crying out for attention.

559.12.2 Sir Donald MAITLAND had taken the opportunity to visit Moshi Cemetery whilst in Tanzania. It was well looked after in spite of the recent drought. Lord WALLACE had visited Gibraltar with a Parliamentary delegation and had been invited to visit the North Front cemetery with the Governor, Admiral Sir David Williams. The war graves there were well maintained and weed-free.

559.13 DIARY

559.13.1 *The Commission took note of the report of remembrancetide ceremonies around the world and also of the exhibition of the Commission's work at the House of Commons. Lord Wallace mentioned that many favourable comments had been made about the exhibition and about the quality of the Commission's Annual Report.*

559.14 OTHER BUSINESS

559.14.1 Proposed Polish Memorial, Brookwood

The Polish Embassy had asked whether a memorial could be erected in the Polish Plot at Brookwood Military Cemetery. Their aim was to have it dedicated on 9 May 1985 which would make it impossible to put the proposals to the Commission for prior approval in detail. There was already a similar memorial in the Czech plot. The Polish memorial would be designed by the Commission's architect and would carry a simple and non-controversial inscription. In the absence of any objections work would go ahead on this project.

559.14.2 His Excellency the Hon William Young

Mr Young had not been able to attend the meeting but, as he was soon to return to New Zealand, the Commission asked Air Commodore NEVILLE to convey its thanks for the interest he had taken in its work and to wish him all the best for the future.

559.14.2 Seasonal Greetings

On the CHAIRMAN's proposal the Commission agreed to record its appreciation of the work of its staff in the maintenance of cemeteries and memorials all over the world during 1984, and wished them a happy Christmas season and a successful year in 1985.