

THE FIRST MEETING of the IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION
was held in the Secretary of State's room, Colonial
Office, on the 20th NOVEMBER, 1917 at 3.30 p.m.

P R E S E N T :-

- . The Rt. Hon. WALTER LONG, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State
for the Colonies. (Chairman).
- . Lieut.-Gen. Sir H. V. COX, K.C.B. representing the
Secretary of State for India.
- . Sir ALFRED MOND, M.P., First Commissioner of Works.
- . The Hon. Sir GEORGE PERLEY, K.C.M.G., High Commissioner
for Canada.
- . The Rt. Hon. ANDREW FISHER, P.C., High Commissioner for
Australia.
- . The Hon. Sir THOMAS MACKENZIE, K.C.M.G., High
Commissioner for New Zealand.
- . The Rt. Hon. W.P. SCHREINER, P.C., C.M.G., High
Commissioner for the Union of South Africa.
- . Dr. E. F. S. GREEN - Newfoundland.
- . Admiral Sir EDMUND S. POE, G.C.V.O., K.C.B.
- . Lieut.-Gen. Sir C.F.N. MACREADY, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.,
Adjutant General.
- . Brig.-General FABIAN WARE, C.M.G.,
- . Sir WILLIAM GARSTIN, G.C.M.G.
- . HARRY GOSLING Esqre., C.H., J.P.
- . RUDYARD KIPLING, Esqre.,

Lieut.Col. G. H. STOBART, D.S.O., (Acting Secretary).

and by the permission of the Chairman,

J.E. TALBOT, Esqre., (Acting Principal Assistant
Secretary.)

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THE CHAIRMAN stated that he had received a letter from Lord Derby in which he said that the Prince of Wales, President of the Commission, being prevented by unexpected military duties from attending had asked him to take His Royal Highness' place in conducting the first meeting. Lord Derby however, for reasons which would be readily understood, had felt unable to preside and requested that he (Mr Long) should undertake this duty and that the Commissioners should be informed how much he regretted that he would not be present at the inauguration of the work of the Commission.

On the proposal of the CHAIRMAN it was agreed unanimously that the deep sympathy of the Commission should be conveyed to Lord Derby on the death of his son-in-law, Capt. The Hon. Neil Primrose, M.P., with the request that a similar expression of sympathy should be conveyed to Lord Rosebery.

THE CHAIRMAN said that he had received a letter from Lord Islington expressing his regret at being unable to attend the meeting and saying that he had sent General Sir Herbert Cox to represent him.

THE CHAIRMAN read the following letter which Lord Derby had received from the Prince of Wales :-

Dear Lord Derby,

I am very sorry that I shall not be able to preside at the first meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission. I had fully intended to come to the meeting and was particularly anxious to do so, but unfortunately unforeseen military duties at the Front have made it impossible.

As I cannot be present in person I should be glad if you would tell the Commissioners how heartily I wish them success in starting on the important work which has been entrusted to them. You will remember that it was on consideration of a Minute which, as President of the National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves, I addressed to the Prime Minister in March last that the Imperial War Conference resolved that an Imperial War Graves Commission should be constituted under Royal Charter. This Commission has now been established and I am very glad that as its President I can continue to show in a practical way my deep interest in the work of caring for the graves of our soldiers and sailors who fall in the common cause of the Empire.

The Commission will no doubt soon be considering the question of how the cemeteries, particularly in France and Belgium, should be laid out and what kind of permanent memorials would be most suitable. I fear it is inevitable that there should be considerable difference of opinion among those who are asked to advise in these matters of artistic taste. The Commissioners will, I am sure, feel with me that it would be most unseemly that a matter of this kind should become in any way the subject of public controversy and I therefore venture to hope that the Commission, after taking such expert advice as it may think desirable, will find itself able to arrive at a unanimous decision.

I can only say in conclusion that I am confident that the Commission, representative as it is of all parts of the Empire, will set about its task with the single aim of ensuring that the resting places of our soldiers and sailors shall always be reverently cared for and marked, with permanent memorials worthy of the great cause for which they gave their lives.

I remain,
Yours sincerely,
(Sd.) Edward.

THE CHAIRMAN proposed the following resolution :-

The Imperial War Graves Commissioners desire to convey to His Royal Highness their respectful thanks for the letter addressed to their Chairman, Lord Derby, and to assure His Royal Highness that the recommendations contained therein will receive their careful consideration.

The Commissioners gratefully acknowledge the fact that it was to the personal initiative of His Royal Highness, as President of the National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves, that the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission was due, and they deeply appreciate the assurance now given that His Royal Highness will continue to take a practical interest in the work of caring for the graves of our soldiers and sailors by acting as President of the Commission.

SIR GEORGE PERLEY in seconding the resolution said that he was sure that the setting up of this Imperial Commission, charged with the sacred duty of caring for the graves of our sailors and soldiers, would still further promote the closer co-operation and better understanding between the different parts of the Empire which would be the result of the present war.

The RESOLUTION was carried unanimously.

2. THE CHAIRMAN said that Lord Derby had already communicated with all the members of the Commission as to the appointment of a Vice Chairman and had received letters expressing approval of his suggestion that Brig.-General Fabian Ware, Director of Graves Registration and Enquiries, would be excellently fitted for the post.

THE CHAIRMAN expressed the opinion that there was a distinct advantage, at the outset of the work of the Commission, in having the duties of Vice Chairman, and Director combined in the same person, and he moved that Brig.-General Fabian Ware be appointed Vice Chairman.

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This was SECONDED by SIR ALFRED MOND and unanimously agreed to.

3. THE CHAIRMAN informed the Commission that the appointment of Lieut.-Col. G.H. Stobart, D.S.O. to be Acting Secretary and Mr J.E. Talbot to be Acting Principal Assistant Secretary to the Commission had been approved by His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales.

4. THE CHAIRMAN stated that by an Agreement dated 9th August 1917, the Belgian Government had provided land in perpetuity for the graves of British soldiers who fall on Belgian soil.

SIR THOMAS MACKENZIE moved the following resolution :-

"The Imperial War Graves Commissioners place on record their very deep appreciation of the noble and generous action of the Belgian Government in providing at its own cost, under the Agreement of 9th August 1917, permanent burial places for the British soldiers who fall on Belgian soil.

The Commissioners resolve that, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs be requested to communicate the terms of the above resolution to the Belgian Government".

MR RUDYARD KIPLING in seconding the resolution said that there was no portion of the Empire and hardly any race within the Empire that was not represented among the vast cloud of witnesses to Freedom that lie on the Flanders front; and there was no portion of our Empire that would not be moved with gratitude to Belgium the great-hearted country that had taken our dead to her breast for ever.

The RESOLUTION was passed unanimously.

5. THE CHAIRMAN said that as a matter of urgency Lord Derby had consulted the Commissioners as to the proposed appointment of Sir Frederic Kenyon, K.C.B., Director of the British Museum, as Advisor to the Commission as to the architectural treatment and laying out of cemeteries, and having received favourable replies, had confirmed the appointment. It remained for the Commission to consider the following draft terms of reference :-

Sir

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SIR FREDERIC KENYON'S duties will be to decide between the various proposals submitted to him as to the architectural treatment and laying out of cemeteries, and to report his decisions to the Commission at the earliest possible date.

- (1) He will act in consultation with the Director of Kew Gardens and recognised artistic and architectural experts in this country.
- (2) He will ascertain and consider the opinion of British and Dominion architects and artists among the Armies of the front.
- (3) He will consult the representatives of the various Churches and religious bodies on any religious questions involved.
- (4) He will report as to the desirability of forming an Advisory Committee from among those who have been consulted, for the purpose of carrying out the proposals agreed upon.

After some discussion, it was decided to substitute the word "recommendations" for "decisions" in the fifth line of the draft.

With regard to paragraph 2. Mr Schreiner pointed out that there were in the Dominions artists and architects who did not belong to the Armies, whose advice would probably be of assistance to Sir Frederic Kenyon.

MR FISHER was of opinion that Sir Frederic Kenyon should be given as free a hand as possible in consulting experts and others with regard to the treatment of cemeteries and that therefore paragraphs 1 and 2 might well be dispensed with. This view was generally agreed to and it was accordingly decided to omit paragraphs 1 and 2.

GENERAL MACREADY expressed the view that in the erection of memorials on the graves there should be no distinction between officers and men.

MR FISHER considered that all graves should be treated alike, and MR GOSLING said that it was important that a pronouncement of the views of the Commission on this matter should be made as soon as possible. He believed that if the principle of equality of treatment was laid down clearly at the outset it would be universally accepted by the public.

MR GOSLING proposed and GENERAL MACREADY seconded that the following words should be added to the instructions to Sir Frederic Kenyon :-

"The Commissioners are of opinion that no distinction should be made between officers and men lying in the same cemeteries in the form or nature of the memorials".

This was passed unanimously.

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The terms of reference as finally agreed were as follows :-

"Sir Frederic Kenyon's duties will be to decide between the various proposals submitted to him as to the architectural treatment and laying out of cemeteries and to report his recommendations to the Commission at the earliest possible date.

(1) He will consult the representatives of the various Churches and religious bodies on any religious questions involved.

(2) He will report as to the desirability of forming an Advisory Committee from among those who have been consulted, for the purpose of carrying out the proposals agreed upon.

The Commissioners are of opinion that no distinction should be made between officers and men lying in the same cemeteries in the form or nature of the memorials".

6. GENERAL WARE informed the Commission that the Egyptian Government had offered through the Agricultural Department to maintain all the graves of British soldiers in Egypt and to provide free of charge all the land required for the purpose.

THE CHAIRMAN proposed that the thanks of the Commission be tendered to the Government of Egypt for their generous offer and that the Secretary be instructed to consider the offer in detail and report at the next meeting.

This MOTION was seconded by SIR THOMAS MACKENZIE and carried unanimously.

7. GENERAL WARE reported that an offer had been received, through M. Carton de Wiart, that the Institution Royale des Filles de Militaires at Messines should take care of the graves in that district. The question had also been discussed through the Minister at Havre with the Belgian Government.

On the proposal of the CHAIRMAN it was agreed that the thanks of the Commission be conveyed to M. Carton de Wiart and that the Secretary be instructed to report on the matter further at the next meeting.

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8. The APPOINTMENT of a SUB-COMMITTEE to consider the creation of local committees was considered.

THE CHAIRMAN was of opinion that this matter should be postponed and Mr Gosling thought that it would be inadvisable to set up local committees until the Commission had decided upon the general principles on which their work should be conducted.

A MOTION that the matter should be postponed proposed by Mr GOSLING and seconded by the CHAIRMAN, was agreed to.

9. The arrangements regarding graves of Dominion and British soldiers in this country were considered.

GENERAL WARE stated that the particular question was that of Brookwood Cemetery, in which British and Dominion soldiers were buried. An unofficial Committee representing the High Commissioners and the London Command had been formed and had applied to be recognised as a Sub-Committee of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

IT WAS AGREED on the proposal of the CHAIRMAN, that the High Commissioners should be asked to make enquiries into the working of this unofficial Committee and that the Vice Chairman and Secretary in consultation with them should consider the matter and bring it up at a subsequent meeting.

10. Copies of a statement, showing the number of men who had lost their lives in all the theatres of war and the number of burials reported and graves registered were circulated to the members of the Commission and the Chairman requested that these figures might be regarded as secret.

GENERAL WARE stated that it was proposed to issue the statement monthly to the Commissioners to keep them acquainted with the progress of the work.

11. The question as to the date of the next meeting was discussed and on the Chairman's proposal, it was agreed that the next meeting should be held in about a month's time but that the actual date should be left to Lord Derby and General Ware to fix.

12. MR GOSLING urged that there should be a public announcement as to the policy of the Commission in regard to the erection of memorials.

IT WAS AGREED that General Ware should have the necessary statement prepared for publication in the Press and submit it to Lord Derby.

At the request of Sir GEORGE PERLEY it was decided that a copy of the statement should at the same time be sent to each of the High Commissioners for transmission to their Governments.

(Sgd.) Edward P.
Chairman.