

Extracts

DRAFT.

CONFIDENTIAL.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

at the

186TH MEETING

of the

IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

held at

32, GROSVENOR GARDENS, LONDON, S.W.1.

on

WEDNESDAY, 16TH OCTOBER 1935.

PRESENT:

Major-General SIR FABIAN WARE, K.C.V.O., K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G.,
Vice-Chairman, in the Chair,

Colonel G. L. PEPYS, C.B., D.S.O.
Representing the Secretary of State for India,

Lieut.-Colonel G. P. VANIER, D.S.O., M.C.,
Representing the High Commissioner for Canada,

V. C. DUFFY, Esq.,
Representing the High Commissioner for Australia,

S. R. SKINNER, Esq.,
Representing the High Commissioner for New Zealand,

H. WORTHINGTON, Esq.,
Representing the High Commissioner for South Africa,

Admiral SIR MORGAN SINGER, K.C.B., K.C.V.O.,

J. J. LAWSON, Esq., M.P.,

W. P. SPENS, Esq., O.B.E., K.C., M.P.,

THERE WERE ALSO PRESENT:

Colonel Sir George W. Badgerow, C.M.G., C.V.O., M.D., F.R.C.S.,
(Canada),

Lieut.-Colonel C. P. Oswald, C.M.G., O.B.E. (Assistant Secretary
Finance),

Lieut.-Colonel H. F. Robinson, C.M.G., (Director of Works),

F. C. Sillar, Esq.,

F. Tyrrell, Esq.,

B. S. Conyngham Greene, Esq.

The Vice-Chairman took the Chair and asked if it was the wish of the meeting that the Minutes of the previous meeting should be signed. This was agreed and the Minutes were signed.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that there were a few matters to which he would like to refer before coming to the regular business. A very kind letter had been received from Monsieur de Fleuriau arising out of his appointment as Honorary Member of the Anglo-French Mixed Committee. In this letter Monsieur de Fleuriau spoke of "the pious work in which I shall have an opportunity of serving the cause of Franco-British unity, to which I have devoted many years of my life".

The report of Mr. Lawson's recent visit to Italy had been circulated to members of the Commission. It would be remembered that Mr. Lawson visited the British Cemeteries at a time when the relations between the two countries were becoming rather difficult. They would have seen from the report how successful Mr. Lawson's visit had been, and he thought it would be the wish of those present if he asked Mr. Lawson to supplement what he had written.

MR. LAWSON said that there was little that he could add to his report, but he would like to emphasize again the remarkably friendly reception which was accorded to him. He was particularly struck by the capable set of Italian men who acted as the Commission's gardeners and caretakers, notably by two brothers who, between them, looked after five of the Cemeteries in the Asiago. The Cemeteries were beautifully kept, and it was obvious that the men were deeply concerned in their work and took a pride in the appearance of the Cemeteries. Another matter which struck him was the interest of the village people in the British War Cemeteries. It was notable in several of the Cemeteries, that when word reached the local people that a member of the Commission was to pay a visit

they made a point of being present at the Cemetery as a mark of respect to the British Dead.

Mr. Lawson went on to say that he had made one or two recommendations which would no doubt receive the attention of the Finance Committee in due course. At only one cemetery had he any adverse criticism to pass on the general condition and this was at Padua, where, among other matters, the hedges needed clipping. Count Memmo had explained that this matter would automatically be attended to as soon as the growth for the year had stopped and it had no doubt been put in order by now.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that it would be agreed that Mr. Lawson's report was a very valuable one, and he thought they all felt that much of the credit for its success at a difficult time was attributable to Mr. Lawson as well as to the Italians with whom he came in contact.

A number of ceremonies had been reported since the last meeting of the Commission. On July 21st, Monsieur Lebrun, the French President, when unveiling a Memorial to French Soldiers near Soissons had laid a wreath on the British Memorial to the Missing in that town. On the 21st-25th July, the Scottish Women's Section of the British Legion, accompanied by Lady Haig, visited a number of cemeteries and were received in Arras by the Municipal Council. In the course of this pilgrimage Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery was visited and the ashes of wooden crosses from one of the Fields of Remembrance in Scotland were scattered over the graves.

During August many parties, mostly of ex-Service men and detachments of the Women's Branch of the British Legion, visited the cemeteries. In the course of one of these tours, Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery was visited by a party of women from the British Legion Headquarters when the ashes of Poppy Day Crosses were scattered over the graves.

Another party of pilgrims who had visited many of the Commission's cemeteries and memorials was the Union Fédérale Nord Africaine des Médailles de Verdun. At Terlincthun British Cemetery, on the 24th August, the band of the Grenadier Guards, under Major Miller, laid a wreath on the Stone of Remembrance and played the hymn 'O God, our help in ages past', followed by the French and British National Anthems. The party was accompanied by the Mayor of Boulogne and other civil and military representatives. On the following day the band visited Boulogne Eastern Cemetery where a similar ceremony was held. It was estimated that some 5,000 people were present.

The Commission would be interested to know that on the 24th August the Ypres Branch of the British Legion held its Annual Flower Show. Colonel Higginson and other members of the Commission's staff were present, as were also a representative of the Burgomaster and a number of Municipal Officials. The majority of the exhibitors were members of the Commission's staff, and the exhibits were of an exceptionally high quality.

On the 31st August, the Arras Branch of the British Legion held its Flower Show, the opening ceremony being performed by Mrs. Higginson. Many French and British visitors attended this Show and among the prizes competed for were a Challenge Cup, a Sutton Challenge Cup, and Royal Horticultural Society Jubilee and Silver Medals.

Mr. C. A. Griggs, the Head Gardener of the Paris Group of Cemeteries, had visited Denmark for his annual leave and on his own initiative had taken the opportunity of a visit to Copenhagen to inspect the British graves in the Western Cemetery there.

He had furnished a most useful report, as the result of which, one or two necessary matters were being attended to.

A recent report from Mr. Batty, the Commission's Travelling Superintendent Gardener in Germany, stated that the Secretary and staff of the German War Graves Association recently visited Niederswehren Cemetery and inspected the graves. When leaving the visitors informed Mr. Grant, the gardener in charge, that they were greatly impressed both by the structural and horticultural appearance of the Cemetery.

The number of visitors signing the Visitors' Books at the Memorials and Cemeteries in France and Belgium during the month of September was 15,041 which compared with 17,870 in the corresponding month of 1934.

REPORT OF THE 245TH MEETING OF
THE FINANCE COMMITTEE.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN asked Colonel Oswald if there were any particular items in this Report to which he would like to refer.

COLONEL OSWALD invited attention to Item 4 which dealt with the continuation of the Exchange Relief for a further month, and to Item 6 which referred to bringing certain of the staff who were not on the Superannuation Scheme into the National Health Scheme in France. He also referred to Item 9 which showed that a plaque to the Million Dead, similar to those in other Cathedrals in France, would, in due course, be erected in the Cathedral at Arras. Finally, he referred to Item 11 which dealt with the difficulty of getting some of the children from outlying villages to the School at Ypres in time to start work at the proper hour.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said, referring to this latter item, that the position at present was unsatisfactory. All the children

were able to reach the School before lessons began except six, who, if they came in by the regular bus service, would inevitably arrive three quarters of an hour late. To meet this difficulty a special bus had been chartered by the Commission at a cost of 16/- a day. This charge might have been justified when a considerable number of children were brought to the School by it, but now that only six children needed to use the bus it was clearly desirable to endeavour to find some alternative arrangement.

After some discussion, in which the Vice-Chairman explained that the matter was being taken up again with the School Authorities to see if they could, by a readjustment of the curriculum, meet the requirements of these six children, it was proposed by Sir Morgan Singer, seconded by Colonel Vanier and agreed:

2. "That the Report of the 245th Meeting of the Finance Committee be adopted."

ANGLO-GERMAN-FRENCH AGREEMENT.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN referred to former discussions on the subject of an Anglo-German-French Agreement and stated that acting on the Commission's instructions, he had been to Berlin and discussed the whole matter. He proceeded to explain what had taken place in detail.

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(As it was essential to submit the proposals for their approval to all the Governments concerned and as it had been agreed with the French and German Governments that these proposals should at present be regarded as secret it had been decided to circulate the Minutes, in so far as they dealt with this question, separately and secretly in the form of an appendix. This appendix would be entered in the Minute Book and copies of it were being sent to all members of the Commission marked "Secret and Confidential.").

ERECTION OF HEADSTONES ON GERMAN GRAVES

IN BRITISH CEMETERIES IN FRANCE.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that one of the matters which had been discussed in Berlin was the erection of headstones on the German graves in British Cemeteries in France. The present unsatisfactory position was well known to members of the Commission and it was essential that something should be done. As a result of the discussion the German Government agreed to provide individual headstones for these graves on condition (1) that the French Government would admit the stones free of duty, and (2) that the Commission would undertake the cost of erection. The German Government argued that as they were being put to the additional expense of providing individual headstones, instead of one headstone for every two graves, they would ask the Commission to bear the expense of erection, as otherwise they had not the money to proceed with the work. A resolution was before the meeting which showed that it was proposed to refer this question to the Finance Committee for consideration and report.

This proposal was agreed to, and the following resolution was moved by Mr. Lawson, seconded by Mr. Duffy and agreed:

4. "That the Commission having heard a statement by the Vice-Chairman resolve that, it being understood that the German Government is unable to contemplate the erection of individual headstones on German graves in British Cemeteries in France, firstly unless the stones may be imported into France and Germany duty free and secondly unless the Commission undertake to erect the stones on delivery at the respective Cemeteries without expense to the German Government, the financial

question of the Commission defraying the cost of the erection of such stones be referred to the Finance Committee for consideration and report."

HEADSTONES ON GERMAN GRAVES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that another matter which had been discussed in Berlin was the very unsatisfactory state of the existing headstones on German graves in the United Kingdom. These stones it would be remembered had been made in Germany to a design approved by the Germans. The stones had been sent over to England and erected on the graves, all the expense in connection with the provision and erection of the stones being borne by the Commission. It was soon found that the stones became illegible and adverse criticism had been passed. The Germans were asked if they could not replace the stones at their own expense and replied that they were unable to do so. As a result of the recent discussions, the Germans had agreed to provide a better type of stone on condition that the Commission bore the cost of erection. It was suggested, subject to the approval of the Commission, that this matter should also be referred to the Finance Committee for consideration and report. This action was agreed to, and the following resolution was proposed by Mr. Spens, seconded by Mr. Skinner, and agreed:

5. "That the Commission having considered a memorandum dated at Berlin, 11th October, 1935, on the supply by and at the expense of the German Government of new headstones for German Prisoner of War Graves in the United Kingdom resolve that the financial question of carrying out the erection of such stones at the expense of the Commission be referred to the Finance Committee for consideration and report."

ANGLO-FRENCH MIXED COMMITTEE.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that Lord Allenby had expressed his willingness to be nominated an Honorary Member of the Anglo-French Mixed Committee to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Lord Byng.

It was proposed by Mr. Duffy, seconded by Mr. Spens, and agreed:

6. "That the Commission having considered a statement No.9/L35/8/V resolve that Field Marshal the Right Hon. Viscount Allenby, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., be appointed, and he is hereby appointed, an Honorary Member of the Anglo-French Mixed Committee."

IRAQ COMMITTEE.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that, in accordance with the terms of the Instrument appointing the new Iraq Committee, it was necessary for the Commission to nominate a Secretary and an Assistant Secretary. It was suggested that Colonel Hughes should be Secretary and Captain Peek Assistant Secretary. This was agreed and the following resolution was moved by Sir Morgan Singer, seconded by Mr. Worthington, and agreed:

7. "That Colonel C. E. Hughes, C.B.E., be appointed Secretary of the Iraq Committee of the Imperial War Graves Commission and that Captain G. H. Peek, O.B.E., be appointed Assistant Secretary, under Part 1, Clause 3, of the Instrument dated 28th September 1935 appointing the Committee."

EFFORD CEMETERY, PLYMOUTH.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that this was a resolution that the seal of the Commission be affixed to the counterpart of the grant by the Plymouth Corporation of a War Grave in Efford Cemetery,

Plymouth. The grave had previously been retained by the relatives, but they had now abandoned their interests in it.

It was proposed by Mr. Lawson, seconded by Colonel Vanier, and agreed:

8. "That the Seal of the Commission be affixed to, and the Proper Officer sign, the counterpart of the grant by the Corporation of Plymouth to the Commission of the grave of Corporal H. J. Thomas, No.C.7608, in Efford Cemetery, Plymouth."

That concluded the business.

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