

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

at the

224TH MEETING

of the

IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

held at

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

on Wednesday, 8th February, 1939, at 3.0 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

Colonel C.E.T. ERSKINE, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C.,
Representing the Secretary of State for India.

E. MACLEOD, Esq.,
Representing the High Commissioner for Canada.

F.T. SPRANGE, Esq.,
Representing the High Commissioner for Australia.

C. KNOWLES, Esq., C.B.E.,
Representing the High Commissioner for New Zealand.

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

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

Admiral Sir HOWARD KELLY, G.B.E., K.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O.,

and

The Rt. Hon. Earl BALDWIN OF BEWDLEY, K.G.

THERE WERE ALSO PRESENT:

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

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

Major H.F. CHETTLER, C.M.G., O.B.E., (Director of Records).

F.C. SILLAR, Esq.,

F. TYRRELL, Esq., M.B.E.,

B.S. CONYNGHAM GREENE, Esq.,

O. HOLT, Esq.

The Vice-Chairman took the Chair and asked if it was agreed that the Minutes of the previous Meeting, which had been circulated, should be signed. This was agreed, and the Minutes were signed.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that there were several matters of interest to which he would like to refer before coming to the general business.

A communication from Brigadier-General Hart stated that the caretaker's cottage at Ramleh, in Palestine, had been partially destroyed by fire on the 15th January when various articles were stolen. This was the second time that an attack had been made on this cottage. The caretaker, Mr. Gale, and his wife were not in the cottage as they had been provided with quarters in the Royal Air Force camp at Ramleh for some time past. General Hart stated that no damage had been done to the Cemetery at Ramleh and that work was proceeding there, and in fact in all the British Cemeteries in Palestine, without interruption. He (The Vice-Chairman) had enquired into the previous attack at Ramleh during his recent visit to Palestine, when he had been informed that the damage was undoubtedly caused by an independent band of Arab brigands.

General Hart had also reported that the Comte de Hauteclocque, the newly appointed French Delegate in Damascus, had paid an official visit to the British War Cemetery soon after his arrival in Syria. M. Hauteclocque, who was accompanied by General Keller and senior French officials, was received at the Cemetery by the British Consul and Vice-Consul in uniform, and he laid a wreath on the Stone of Remembrance. After inspecting the Cemetery, the Count expressed his admiration for its beautiful

condition. General Hart went on to say that the Count's Chateau at Bernicourt was the Headquarters of the British Tank Corps during the War, and he also reported that an account of this ceremony was broadcast from Daventry on the 26th January in the Arabic transmission.

Major Ralph Rayner, Conservative M.P. for the Totnes Division of Devonshire, had recently completed a tour of the Cemeteries in France and Belgium, and he had expressed his approval of all that he had seen. Major Rayner had intended to accompany the party of Members of Parliament who visited the Cemeteries last year, but he was prevented from doing so.

The number of visitors signing the Visitors' Books at the Cemeteries and Memorials in France and Belgium in December was 562. This figure was rather less than the corresponding figure for the previous year.

The Vice-Chairman said that he had reported to the previous Meeting that trouble had occurred through the local Turkish representatives refusing permission to visitors to land on the Gallipoli Peninsula. He had taken the matter up with Sir Percy Loraine, the British Ambassador in Turkey, and he had recently heard from the Ambassador that in his opinion there would be no more trouble. He had also raised again, in correspondence with the Ambassador, the question of forming an Anglo-Turkish Mixed Committee on the lines of the Committees which existed in other countries where British War Cemeteries were situated. He (The Vice-Chairman) had always felt that the existence of a Committee of this kind would help to solve any difficulties which arose regarding the Cemeteries on the Gallipoli Peninsula and Sir Herbert Hart was in entire agreement, but the Ambassador had said

in his recent letter that he adhered to the view which had been expressed by the Foreign Office in 1936 that the formation of such a Committee was not at present desirable. It was clear from this that nothing more could be done at this juncture, but he proposed to raise the matter again in the near future.

MR. LAWSON asked if Mr. Millington, the Commission's representative at Chanak, had been refused permission to land on the Peninsula.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that so far as he knew no difficulties in landing had been placed in Mr. Millington's way, but some local official, who had misunderstood his instructions from Angora, had been over-officious and had raised objections to the landing of Colonel Robinson and Colonel Higginson during their recent visit.

The Vice-Chairman went on to say that arrangements were now being made to hold a Meeting of the Anglo-German-French Committee in London on the 15th May. It would be recalled that the original intention had been to hold the Meeting in January, but the German Members had explained that it would be inadvisable for Admiral von Trotha, who was 73 years of age, to undertake a journey to London at that time of the year.

Another matter to which he wished to refer was a further request from the Belgian Association known as "Nos Tombes", a voluntary Association which looked after certain British War Graves in Communal Cemeteries in outlying parts of Belgium, for approval of the suggestion that all these British graves should be concentrated to central points where their maintenance would be a very much easier matter. Members of the Commission would remember that any concentration of this kind was definitely

contrary to the Commission's policy. When, after the War, it was decided that the remains of British Soldiers could not be sent home for reburial, an undertaking was given that the graves would be properly and reverently maintained in the places in which they were then situated. No grave had been moved except for imperative reasons, and if a departure was now made from this principle there was a serious danger that the demand for the removal of certain graves to the United Kingdom and to other parts of the Empire might be renewed. In a number of cases the same difficulties existed to-day as were present just after the War, and no request of this sort could possibly be considered. It had been necessary once more to communicate this decision to the Belgian Authorities.

MR. KNOWLES asked if the Commission had not moved graves from time to time in the past.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that for sanitary and other reasons it had been necessary from time to time to move certain graves or small Cemeteries, but no grave was moved without his special sanction, and for reasons which were considered imperative.

There was one other matter to which he would like to refer, which would be of particular interest to Lord Baldwin. There was a Regimental Memorial at Gheluvelt erected by the Worcestershire Regiment, on which there was an inscription which referred to the Germans as "an unchivalrous foe" - in the Flemish wording, "barbarous". This inscription had been brought to the notice of the Colonel of the Regiment, and it had been decided, in view of the different feeling which now existed, that the wording should be altered. The matter was not one with which the Commission were directly concerned since the

Memorial was erected by the Regiment themselves, but the Commission welcomed, nevertheless, the proposed change, in view of the international good feeling which they were endeavouring to foster through the agency of their Mixed Committees. A somewhat similar state of affairs existed in connection with a Memorial which was erected after the War at Sledmere, in East Yorkshire. On this Memorial there was a frieze depicting German soldiers engaged in various acts of barbarity. This Memorial was resented by people in Germany, and it had been mentioned to Mr. Sillar in the course of his recent visit to Berlin. The question was being watched.

Report of the 278th Meeting of
the Finance Committee.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he would like to invite the Commission's attention to one or two Items in this Report. Item No. 3. dealt with certain renovation work on the Naval Memorial at Portsmouth, and he emphasized the importance of giving constant attention to Memorials in an exposed situation such as this.

There were also two Items dealing with members of the Commission's staff which had occasioned the Finance Committee considerable anxiety.

Another matter of interest dealt with the appointment of a Welfare Worker, and it would be seen that the Commission proposed to make a contribution of £200 for one year towards his stipend, with a possible continuance at a rate to be reduced in subsequent years.

Finally, the Vice-Chairman referred to the arrangements made with regard to his own appointment and stated that he was perfectly prepared to continue his work

under the conditions agreed.

It was proposed by Earl Baldwin, seconded by Mr. Macleod, and agreed:-

- 2). "That the Report of the 278th Meeting of the Finance Committee be adopted."

Report of the 2nd Meeting of the
Anglo-Egyptian War Cemeteries Committee.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that it was desirable formally to adopt a Report on the 2nd Meeting of the Anglo-Egyptian War Cemeteries Committee. He had given an account of this Meeting at the last Meeting of the Commission and he would like again to emphasize the value and importance of Meetings of this nature.

MR. LAWSON asked whether any difficulty had been experienced in the inauguration of this Committee.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the actual formation of the Committee had been delayed until the formal signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. As soon as that Treaty was signed the Egyptian Government expressed their desire to be associated with the British Commonwealth in the creation of a Mixed Committee to care for the British Graves in Egypt. Sir Miles Lampson, the British Ambassador in Cairo, took a keen interest in the Committee's work.

It was proposed by Mr. Lawson, seconded by Mr. Sprange, and agreed:-

- 3). "That the Report of the 2nd Meeting of the Anglo-Egyptian War Cemeteries Committee be adopted."

Discovery and Reburial of Bodies in
France and Belgium.

MAJOR CHETTLER, in response to a question by the Vice-Chairman, said that the figures for the weeks under review were considerably smaller than those for the corresponding periods

in 1937 and 1938. Nevertheless, it would be seen that 71 British bodies had been found, which was a remarkable fact considering the time of the year and the weather that had been experienced.

Report of the Committee on the
Preservation of Headstones.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the Report on the question of the preservation of headstones in the Near East had been circulated to members of the Commission and they would have seen from the Report the nature of the problems to be dealt with. Colonel Higginson and Colonel Robinson had made a detailed examination of many of these stones during their recent visit to Egypt and subsequently a Meeting of the Committee was held at which the two experts, Dr. Desch and Mr. Howe, were present. The trouble in these Cemeteries - and a similar trouble existed in Iraq - was apparently due to the presence of salt in the soil. In one or two Cemeteries in Iraq it had been found necessary to abandon the erection of headstones altogether and to commemorate the names on a Screen Wall, the actual graves being marked by pegs. At Baghdad Cemetery the headstones had been raised from the ground on sheaths and this action had apparently overcome the difficulty. It had to be borne in mind, however, that the Commission's headstone was designed to rise straight from the ground and that if it was mounted in a sheath its appearance was unsatisfactory.

It would be seen from the Report that the Committee finally came to the conclusion that the graves in Egypt should be marked by headstones of green Westmorland slate, which they considered capable of

withstanding the local conditions.

COLONEL HIGGINSON, replying to a question from the Vice-Chairman, said that both Dr. Desch and Mr. Howe had no hesitation in recommending the use of green slate in Cairo Cemetery, and consequently the Committee decided definitely to recommend the construction and erection of headstones of this material.

MR. LAWSON said that there could be little doubt that this question of erosion was a serious one, and that some of the stones in the East had been almost entirely eaten away. He noticed in the Report that at one time the use of basalt was considered, but he was glad to see that ultimately the Committee had decided in favour of green slate.

COLONEL OSWALD said that the financial aspect of the question had been considered by the Committee when making their recommendation.

It was proposed by Admiral Kelly, seconded by Mr. Knowles, and agreed:

- 4). "That the Report (reference W.G.1831/166 dated 3rd February 1939) of the Committee on the preservation of headstones be adopted."

Anglo-French Mixed Committee.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that there was a vacancy among the British Official Members of the Anglo-French Mixed Committee caused by the resignation of the Hon. Philippe Roy on his retirement. It had been emphasized at the last Meeting what valuable work Dr. Roy had done for the Commission during his period of office as Canadian Minister in Paris, and the Commission were very sorry to lose his services. They were, however, delighted to know that Dr. Roy was being succeeded by Colonel Vanier and that Colonel

Vanier had expressed his willingness to serve on the Mixed Committee.

It was proposed by Earl Baldwin, seconded by Mr. Neethling, and agreed:-

- 5). "That the Commission having considered a paper No. W.G.546 dated the 1st February 1939 resolve that Lieutenant-Colonel George P. Vanier, D.S.O., M.C., be appointed, and he hereby is appointed, an Official Member of the Anglo-French Mixed Committee in succession to the Hon. Philippe Roy."

That concluded the business.

Jabine Warr
