



MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

at the

240TH MEETING

of the

IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

held at

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

on

Wednesday the 14th January 1942

at 12 noon.

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.

Major-General R.M.M. LOCKHART, C.I.E., M.C.
(Representing the Secretary of State for India).

E. MacLEOD, Esq.
(Representing the High Commissioner for Canada).

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

D.B. SOLE, Esq.
(Representing the High Commissioner for South Africa).

The Hon. SIR EDGAR BOWRING, K.C.M.G.
(Representing the Government of Newfoundland).

Lieut-General SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH, G.B.E., K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

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

There were also present:

Colonel C.E.T. ERSKINE, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C.

Colonel A.R. MacALLAN, (A.A.G., D.G.R. & E.)

Colonel C.P. OSWALD, C.M.G., O.B.E. (Controller).

Lieut-Colonel H.F. CHETTLE, C.M.G., O.B.E. (Director of Records).

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

F.C. SILLAR, Esq. (Assistant Secretary, Finance).

Captain H.P.R. FOSTER.

Captain F. TYRRELL, M.B.E.

Second Lieutenant O.D. HOLT.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the Minutes of the 239th Meeting had been circulated. They were approved by the meeting and signed.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN welcomed General Lockhart, who replaced General Muspratt as representative of the Secretary of State for India; and he expressed the Commission's gratitude to General Muspratt, who had watched the Commission's interests at the India Office from 1931 - with a break due to service in India - to the end of 1941. He also expressed the Commission's congratulations to Sir Edwin Lutyens, their consulting Architect, who had received the Order of Merit in the New Year Honours List. He mentioned the receipt of apologies for absence from Mr. Lawson, Sir John Kennedy, Sir William Mitchell and the Adjutant General.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN, continuing, reported that Sir Herbert Hart, Chief Administrative Officer in the Eastern District, had moved his office, with the approval of the High Commissioner for Palestine, from Jerusalem to a more central position at Cairo. News had been received of the desecration, by unknown hands, of eight British graves in a cemetery in Finland, but the Foreign Office had advised that no useful purpose would be served by a protest. A letter had now been written to the India Office embodying the view expressed by the Commission at their last meeting that Indian soldiers should be commemorated on a footing of equality with British soldiers.

COLONEL ERSKINE said that the matter had been referred to the Government of India with a request for the expression of their view.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN, continuing his report, said that a conference of the District Inspectors had been held on the 8th January at Wooburn House, and had been attended by representatives of the Air Ministry. Considerable progress had been made with the scheme for central R.A.F. Cemeteries in the United Kingdom.

The Special Committee appointed to consider matters at issue with the Treasury in connection with surplus revenue of the Endowment Fund had now obtained a settlement very much on the lines desired by the Commission. That Committee consisted of Mr. S.M. Bruce, Sir George Macdonogh, Mr. Spens and himself, with the assistance of Sir Edward Peacock and Sir Herbert Ellissen.

It was moved, seconded and carried unanimously:

2. That the Commission desire to record their appreciation of the assistance given to them by the Special Committee appointed under Resolution 4 of the 238th Meeting of the Commission and that a letter conveying the Commission's thanks be addressed to each member of the Special Committee.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN then referred to a suggestion made by the Prisoners of War Information Bureau, and accepted by the German Government, for the exchange of photographs of German graves in British or British-controlled territory and of British graves in German or German-occupied territory. No action by the Commission was called for: if the work was undertaken it would be done on behalf of the Service Departments, and possibly by the British Red Cross Society; but he thought it ought to be mentioned to the Commission. The Dominions, he understood, supported the proposal; and so did the Adjutant General and the War Office. The determining factor seemed to be the comfort that would be given to relatives in this country. The only strong opposition that he had found was expressed by Mr. J.J. Lawson, who said that opinion in the North-Eastern Counties was averse from any contact with the Germans, remembering what had happened in the matter of the exchange of prisoners, and that the Germans might ask for films and use them for other purposes.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH supported the proposal.

MR. SPENS, opposing it, said that it would be used by the Germans for propaganda, and that the question should be decided by the War Cabinet.

GENERAL LOCKHART enquired whether the proposal would be extended to Italian graves.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he thought that might be a natural consequence. His own opinion was evenly balanced, but he was impressed by the comfort that relatives found in a photograph, and he was generally influenced by the example of the fighting men who endeavoured to act decently even if the enemy did not.

MR. MacLEOD said that the High Commissioner's view was that relatives should not be denied the opportunity of receiving photographs.

MR. SPENS said that on his information the first suggestion was for an exchange of photographs of prisoners, and came from the British side; it was promptly accepted by the Germans and extended to photographs of graves.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that so far as the correspondence went the proposal as to photographs of graves came from the British side; it perhaps originated in photographs taken by the Royal Air Force and sent to Germany.

REPORT OF THE 290TH MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE:
ESTIMATES FOR 1942-1943.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN referred to the unqualified success of the Staff Canteen now established at Wooburn House with the sanction of the Finance Committee.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH enquired whether any of the gardeners interned in Germany had been allowed to return to work in France.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he had no knowledge of such a decision. Incidentally, one gardener, with his wife and children, had very recently made his way back from occupied France and was then in the building.

The Estimate recommended by the Finance Committee was in two parts: (1) for 1914/18 graves, expenditure on which was being met from Endowment Fund Income, and (2) for Present War Graves

and Civilian War Dead, expenditure on which would be met out of grants provided by the participating Governments (a grant in aid by the United Kingdom, authority to use balances by the Dominions).

(1) 1914/18 graves.

The Estimate for 1942 was £74,600, as compared with £102,850 for 1941. The reduction was due principally to the fact that the provision made for repaying the Foreign Office for advances made to dependants abroad of men interned, or to staff abroad but not interned, was being confined to men actually working in cemeteries in France and Belgium. That accounted for about £20,000 of the reduction. The rest was made up of about £5,000 due to the diminishing number of men receiving concession pay, almost all the men being now self-supporting, and of unspecified increases and decreases.

£3,000 of the Estimate was for maintenance of structure and headstones in this country. The Finance Committee had considered the matter very carefully; they were of opinion that this work should be continued so long as labour remained available because the appearance and the durability of the headstones depended very largely on the periodical treatment which they received.

Maintenance in the Eastern District was proceeding normally except for Macedonia, now in enemy occupation, where special arrangements had been made through the American authorities in Berlin (which it was now learnt that the Swiss would be able to continue). In Italy, Count Memmo was continuing his work and funds were regularly supplied to him through neutral channels.

The surplus income from the Endowment Fund estimated as likely to be realised on the 31st March 1942

was about £120,000. This was the subject discussed between the Special Committee and the Treasury. Such part of this surplus as the Commission might decide was not required for current commitments on 1914/18 work would under resolution 3 of the 239th Meeting of the Commission be lent at call, free of interest, to the United Kingdom Government. The income expected on investments at present held was just over £200,000.

(2) Present War Graves and Civilian War Dead.

The Estimate was £35,000, as compared with £26,830 for the current year. The increase was due to (a) additional staff for Records (Final Verification), and the maintenance of the growing number of present war graves in the United Kingdom, (b) additional headstones for graves in Canada, (c) a provisional sum for headstones in India, and (d) an allowance of £3,000 for unspecified items.

As regards Final Verification, the Commissioners would remember the decision to erect temporary crosses and not headstones during the war, but, on the other hand, to proceed at once with the collection of the data for headstones and Registers. That decision had been explained to the relatives in the leaflet sent out by Casualties branches, and it would be carried out energetically; there was evidence that it was appreciated by the relatives. In Canada - at present more favourably situated - the Agency was erecting headstones. The question of setting up headstones in India had been referred to the Government of India for their advice.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH enquired whether the considerable reduction in estimated expenditure in Egypt was due to the supply by the War Office of wooden crosses for graves in Libya.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN agreed. The Commission had paid for a number of wooden crosses for graves in Commission cemeteries in Egypt, but those cemeteries were now full.

MR. KNOWLES, GENERAL LOCKHART and MR. MacLEOD observed that they had not received copies of the leaflet circulated to the next-of-kin.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he would see that copies were sent to them. The leaflet had been very well received; only one objection had reached him, and that was due to the fact that overseas casualties to other ranks were notified only by letter, and not by a letter following a telegram. Thus it happened that the mother of a private soldier fighting in Libya, opening a War Office letter, found first the leaflet with a picture of a cemetery and then the notification of death. The matter would be taken up with the War Office, and he hoped to arrange that in such cases the despatch of the leaflet should be held up for a few days.

It was moved by Sir Edgar Bowring, seconded by Mr. MacLeod, and carried unanimously:

3. That Items 1 to 3 of the Report of the 290th Meeting of the Finance Committee be adopted.

It was moved by Mr. Spens, seconded by Mr. Knowles, and carried unanimously:

4. That Item 4 of the Report of the 290th Meeting of the Finance Committee be adopted.

It was moved by Sir George Macdonogh, seconded by Mr. Sole, and carried unanimously:

5. That the Report of the 290th Meeting of the Finance Committee be adopted.

TRUSTEES OF THE IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES
ENDOWMENT FUND: ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR 1941-1942.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN submitted this paper to the meeting, and it was laid on the table.

RECORD OF CIVILIAN WAR DEAD.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN reported that no decision was required in this matter. He wished only to report that the work was being carried on well, and nearly sixty per cent of the relatives had completed and

returned the forms sent to them.

DEFINITION OF A WAR GRAVE.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the matter was exceedingly complicated, and only one point was now raised for consideration. On the general question, the Service Departments had been asked to state what classes of personnel they considered entitled to War Graves. On the special question of bodies washed up or brought ashore, the Ministry of Health, by circular 2507 of the 21st October 1941 had instructed the coastal authorities that all such bodies should be assumed, in default of evidence to the contrary, to be the bodies of officers or men of the British Merchant Navy dying through enemy action at sea.

The Commission generally expressed agreement, but it was decided to write to the High Commissioners for their agreement before adopting the presumption.

CREMATIONS.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN referred to the paper before the meeting. He explained, in reply to questions by Mr. MacLeod, that cremation (except in the case of Indians) was carried out in every case by the relatives and never by the Services; and that a grave containing ashes in an urn would be marked by the Commission in the normal way.

MR. KNOWLES suggested that when the relatives placed a commemorative tablet in the crematorium the proposal to include the name on the Commission's panels would result in double commemoration.

COLONEL CHETTLÉ said that in some crematoria the relatives' tablet might be in any one of several places, and would be very difficult to pick out.

MR. MacLEOD asked that in crematoria where a panel was set up by the Commission a copy of the Register should be provided.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN undertook that this should be done.

It was moved by Mr. Spens, seconded by General Lockhart and carried unanimously:

6. That the Commission, having considered a paper number A/30 and dated the 5th September 1941, resolve:

- (1) That the controlling authorities of crematoria in the United Kingdom be invited to agree to the permanent commemoration of the Service war dead there cremated (except those whose ashes have been buried in a regular burial ground) by means of a panel or panels fixed at a suitable place at the columbarium or in the grounds, the list of names to include all such dead irrespective of private commemoration; and
- (2) that the printed Register should record under the name of each crematorium the names of the officers and men there commemorated.

DESTRUCTION OF OLD ENQUIRY FILES

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN, referring to the paper before the meeting, explained that the files to be released for destruction were those on which no correspondence had taken place since the 1st January 1932. It was an administrative decision, for which members were not asked to accept responsibility.

The meeting terminated at one o'clock.