



PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT
'SCOTTISH MONUMENT IN FLANDERS'

Introduction

After the first world war, quite a few monuments were erected on the former Western front line. In most cases they remind us of the involvement of particular military units. To a lesser extent the commitment of one or another group of people is commemorated.

In Flanders, monuments of the latter type are rather rare: the impressive Irish Tower at Messines is a conspicuous exception, but more often these ‘national’ monuments are to be found in France (e.g. the South African Delville Wood near Longueval, or Newfoundland Park in the vicinity of Beaumont-Hamel).

We can only state that the presence of such a monument contributes a lot to the establishment of a certain image of the group commemorated.

Strangely enough, at the Western Front, nowhere a monument can be found commemorating the overall Scottish involvement. This is so much more striking as the very Scottish regiments took part in some very heavy fighting, often at crucial moments.

Remarkably, in France there are some individual monuments of battalions, regiments or divisions, while in the very place where three large units (the 9th, 15th, and 51st Divisions) were almost simultaneously engaged in fierce battles near Zonnebeke-Passendale, any form of remembrance is lacking.

Apparently the conventional wisdom ‘out of sight, out of mind’ holds here.

In a period of steadily growing interest for the first world war, the time seems to be ripe to set things right. The former battlefield near Zonnebeke is historically the most suitable place to start a project on the Scottish involvement.

Historical Justification

Of the three Scottish Divisions, the 9th and 15th fought on the territory of the village of Zonnebeke. The 51st (Highland) was deployed just north of it, near Poelkapelle. Moreover, quite a few Scottish battalions were involved in the battles of other not homogenous divisions.

A well known example of such a mixed unit was the 7th Division, which both in 1914 and 1917 operated on the Broodseinde-Geluveld line. The recent burial of private Thompson (2nd battalion Gordon Highlanders) on Polygon Wood Cemetery is a typical example of the Scottish commitment.

Also in Canadian context, several units can boast a Scottish tradition (Canadian Seaforth Highlanders near Passendale, Nova Scotia Highlanders on ‘Passchendaele Ridge’...). To a lesser extent, the same applies to Australian and South- African regiments.

Presentation of the Project

The project's aim is to have a Scottish monument erected on a historically justified spot on the territory of the village of Zonnebeke, more particularly in the vicinity of Frezenberg. The monument will be unique in this respect that it was chosen to pay tribute to all Scots who were involved in the Great War. Obviously it will have a universal character, because also the Scots in emigration countries (among others Canada) belong to this target group. Our study group deliberately opted for the idea of an overall Scottish involvement rather than wanting to erect the umpteenth monument for one or another Scottish unit. Along the whole of the former Western front, no similar "national" Scottish memorial can be found.

The monument will be a 'High Cross' or 'Celtic Cross' of Scottish granite (Corrennie Pink) set on a plinth of original bunker stones. The height of the cross itself will be about three metres, the plinth of bunker stones between two and a half and three metres. The Scottish firm Fyfe Glenrock (near Aberdeen) has already been contracted to produce this cross.

'High Crosses' descend from an age old Celtic tradition, and are not only erected in Scotland, but also in many places in England, Ireland and Wales to commemorate the war casualties.

The draft, as shown on the front page, was made by Dirk Uytterschout (Halle, near Brussels) and was deliberately inspired by the village monuments one can find anywhere in Scotland. In this way the cross will constitute a symbolic link with the home land both in shape and material.

How the monument fits in the landscape

As far as location is concerned, Frezenberg is the most justifiable choice:

-on the edge of the area where the Scottish 15th Division launched a bloody attack on 17 August 1917, and with a good view over the former battlefield where their action took place.

Only weeks later the 9th (Scottish) Division, with the 1st South African Brigade in its ranks, took over the sector. Apart from some brief spells, the Scottish have been in more or less the same area for about 5 weeks in August and September 1917.

-in a historically very important sector where not a single memorial can be found though.

-a place pregnant with symbolism: weather circumstances permitting, Passendale, the finishing point of the 3 months' 'Third Ypres' is well visible. Furthermore, it is almost exactly on the jumping off line of some important attacks.

-on the road to Saint-Charles de Potyze, the only genuine classical French burial ground in the region (Kemmel is a mass grave). In this way it may be an important part of the route taken by visiting groups.

-practical and in a safe place for visitors. There is a broad shoulder, separated from the main road by a ditch.

The inauguration of the Scottish Cross will be linked to a 'Scottish Weekend' to which –apart from delegations from both the Scottish Executive and the Flemish Government- also the British ambassador and Scottish military and civil delegations will be invited.

Timing

The inauguration of the memorial will be the climax of the Scottish Memorial Weekend on 25 and 26 August 2007. All other activities will be linked to it (tattoo, Highland games, visits to historical battlefields.....)

The memorial weekend fits in a number of ambitious activities that will be organized by the municipality of Zonnebeke as a result of the commemoration of the Battle of Passendale after 90 years (see overall brochure 2007).

To emphasize the historical link between Flanders and Scotland, the Scottish weekend will take place under the motto ‘Will ye come to Flanders’ according to a well known and age old Scottish song about Highlanders who came to Flanders to fight (original title “Will ye come to Flanders”).

Provisional program:

Friday 24th August 2007

20.00: special Last Post at the Menin Gate (Ypres) in cooperation with the Last Post Association

Saturday 25th August 2007

17.30: unveiling of the Scottish Memorial on the Frezenberg (Zonnebeke)

20.30: tattoo in the grounds of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 (situated in Zonnebeke village)

It is advised to book tickets early, only about 1000 tickets available.

Sunday 26th August 2007

04.00 (AM!): gathering at the entrance gate of the Memorial for a dawn walk through the area of the Scottish attacks between 31st of July and 20th of September 1917. The walk starts on the historical line and hour of the 15th (Scottish) Division attack on the first day of the Passchendaele campaign.

During this walk, a dawn service will be held on the new Memorial and the play “The Prayer”, written by William St. Clair will be performed on the site of the original battlefield.

13.30: Highland games in the grounds of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 (in Zonnebeke). Admission free, 20 teams of 10 persons can apply for participation (already 7 places taken)

Remark: Time schedule can be slightly adapted.

Financing

The prime cost of the memorial (inclusive the setting of it) is estimated at 33.000 euros (about 21.000 pounds). Up to February 2006, about £17.000 has been raised. The monument has been ordered at Fyfe Glenrock (Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire) on the 25th of August 2006 and in between the stone has been quarried.

A sponsoring campaign was started on Armistice Day 2005. Letters to the Scottish P.M. and the leaders of the four most important parties have been sent. A campaign to appeal to the public has been launched and raised much interest.

Contacts with the former Scottish Regimental Associations and the new Royal Regiment of Scotland are in progress. The bunker stones for the plinth have already been acquired. Although some not unimportant gifts have been promised, among others from the 'Passchendaele Society 1917', it remains vital to get some structural partners involved in the project. With a structural grant, The Flemish Government and Scottish Executive have recognised the efforts of the Committee and are supporting the campaign.

Information about the project

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Account Name: "Scottish Memorial in Flanders"
Branch Sort Code 56 00 70
Account Number 38618842

Belgian bank account details at KBC:

Account number: 738-0152025-48
IBAN: BE11 7380 1520 2548
BIC: KREDBEBB
Account name: Genootschap Passchendaele Society 1917
Please state in message: "*Scottish monument*"

Conclusion

The project will be of permanent importance in keeping the memory of the Scottish engagement in the 'Great War' alive.
The Celtic Cross will by its location, historical importance and its artistic value be a striking landmark for the 400,000 visitors coming to the front area each year.
By dedicating the monument to all Scots involved in the Great War, it has a singular and universal character.
Moreover, it offers an excellent opportunity to emphasize the bond between two federal states within Europe visually and permanently.

Erwin Ureel
Coordinator of the Scottish Memorial in Flanders- Campaign