

THE GREAT WAR CENTENARY

in Flanders





Dear Reader,



The whole world, and Flanders in particular, is commemorating the 100th anniversary of the First World War. More than nine million soldiers from about fifty modern-day nations did not survive the 'Great War'. 600,000 soldiers and civilians lost their lives in our country, among whom 550,000 in the Westhoek region, also known as Flanders Fields.

Flanders experienced all aspects of this first global conflict first-hand: the invasion, the occupation, the four-year trench war and, finally, the liberation. To this day, the Great War lives on in our collective memory.

The Government of Flanders is actively engaged in the Great War commemoration. In doing so, it builds on the efforts made during the past years. One century later, we wish to commemorate the victims of this war and condemn senseless war violence. The commemoration is an excellent opportunity to ensure the sustainable preservation of our war heritage for future generations.

As coordinator of '*The Great War Centenary (2014-18)*', I have the pleasure of presenting to you the Government of Flanders' project for the commemoration of the First World War centenary. This brochure explains the project's vision and provides an overview of the activities for each policy area: foreign policy, tourism, culture and media, heritage conservation, education, nature and forests, agriculture, etc. The remembrance project in all its facets is a unique spearhead in the Government of Flanders' policy for the next few years.

In a serene manner we also want to acquaint young people with the horrific events that took place one century ago and their consequences, and to make them reflect on war and peace.

We want to show people what happened during the war and make them understand. In commemoration of those who died, so those who commemorate them may learn from it.

Geert Bourgeois

Minister-President of the Government of Flanders
and Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy and Immovable Heritage



INTRODUCTION

Coming to terms
with the past,
drawing lessons
for the future

Pierre Ruyffelaere
Project Office
The Great War Centenary (2014-18)

“In a fitting and serene manner, that is how Flanders wants to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War”, according to Pierre Ruyffelaere, General Project Office Coordinator. “To that end it has launched The Great War Centenary Project (2014-18), which aims to put the world conflict in a broader context. This project does not just focus on war and peace, but also on remembrance, awareness-raising and the European idea.”

“The whole range of activities that are organised to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War is to increase Flanders’ visibility on the international level and generate an enduring association with the theme of world peace.”

“Another objective of the project is to create among present and future generations in Flanders an awareness of the significance of tolerance, intercultural dialogue and international understanding. This is the only way that we can foster an open and tolerant society, come to terms with our past and draw lessons from it for the future.”

“Finally, special attention is devoted to commemorative tourism, or tourism that offers a place for meaning and reflection.” ■



PROTECTION COMMITTEE

Treasure your empathy
and treasure peace

Rudi Vranckx
member of
the Protection Committee

A project can only be successful if it has a solid sounding board. That is why the Government of Flanders officially installed a Protection Committee for the Great War Centenary Commemoration on 13 December 2012. This committee is composed of authoritative figures with different social backgrounds. They all lend their names to The Great War Centenary (2014-18) project and, drawing on their own experience, launch ideas and proposals for the further elaboration of the commemorative activities. Furthermore, they help raise the project's national and international profile and attend the pivotal moments of the official programme.

These are the eleven committee members: Lieve Blancquaert (photographer), Frank De Winne (astronaut, holder of several honorary doctorates and goodwill ambassador of UNICEF), Jan Fabre (artist), Christ'l Joris (honorary chairman of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders), Wim Mertens (composer), Jacques Rogge (honorary president of the International Olympic Committee), Chris Van den Wyngaert (professor at University of Antwerp and judge of the International Criminal

Court), Herman Van Rompuy (Minister of State and honorary European Council President), Etienne Vermeersch (professor emeritus and honorary vice-chancellor of Ghent University), Marc Vervenne (professor emeritus and honorary chancellor of Catholic University of Leuven) and Rudi Vranckx (journalist).

According to Rudi Vranckx, "we can no longer ignore history, but we can hope to learn from it. That is why you should treasure your empathy and treasure peace." ■

*Grieving soldiers,
by Emil Krieger,
German military cemetery,
Langemark*

THEIR NAME LIVE
FOR EVERMORE



PROJECT OFFICE

Engine and one-stop shop

Pierre Ruyffelaere
Project Office
The Great War Centenary (2014-18)

“An ambitious project such as the Great War Centenary project requires good management. For this purpose the Government of Flanders has established a Project Office which acts as some kind of one-stop-shop within the Flemish administration for the preparation, coordination and monitoring of the project”, says Pierre Ruyffelaere, General Project Office Coordinator.

“It operates at three levels: international, Flemish and local.

At the first level the Project Office makes an inventory of the international remembrance ceremonies to be held in Flanders and abroad between 2014 and 2018. It also maps out the plans of foreign authorities to invest in commemorative monuments in Flanders Fields and formulates actual proposals for the organisation of international commemorations in Flanders during this centenary commemoration period.”

“At the second level the Project Office reports and monitors the project’s progress and lists the many initiatives organised by the Government of Flanders. In addition, it directs the central project group. This group constitutes the platform for the coordination of and information exchange about the Government of Flanders’ commemorative activities. Moreover, the central project group and the Project Office make sure permanent consultation and information exchange take place between the different partners and levels.”

“At the third level the Project Office is responsible for targeted communication on the project in order to ensure that all interested parties in Flanders are informed about it. Besides, it identifies stakeholders that may contribute to the project.” ■



ACTION PLAN

Dynamic working tool

Pierre Ruyffelaere
Project Office
The Great War Centenary (2014-18)

“On 17 February 2012, the Project Office presented an action plan to the Government of Flanders. It was drawn up on the basis of Government of Flanders policy documents and Flemish Parliament resolutions”, says Pierre Ruyffelaere, General Project Office Coordinator. “The action plan provides an overview of the various actions per policy area and focuses on foreign policy, tourism, culture and media, heritage conservation, education, the environment, nature and forests, agriculture and fisheries and scientific research. Actions will be associated with each of the objectives. In addition, the action plan gives due consideration to generic initiatives of the Project Office, general communication and intra-Belgian cooperation.”

“The action plan is a dynamic plan, which will be developed in greater depth together with the various policy areas in order to obtain a flexible working tool. It will be used for periodical reporting to the Government of Flanders.”

The action plan is available at
www.fdfa.be ■



T ALBOT
HOUSE

1915 — ?

EVERY-MAN'S
CLUB

INTERNATIONAL

Worldwide cooperation

Koen Verlaeckt
Flanders Department
of Foreign Affairs

“Soldiers from no fewer than 50 modern-day nations were involved in the military operations in the Westhoek region. This shows from the 2007 study conducted by the Flemish Foreign Policy Research Centre and it implies that many of these nations are now in the process of preparing their own national commemoration agenda”, says Koen Verlaeckt, Secretary-General of the Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs. “In the preparation of these events, timely coordination and information exchange are essential. Plenty of steps have already been taken to that end, like the bilateral agreements which Flanders concluded with New Zealand and Australia.”

“For the centenary commemoration the Government of Flanders actively builds on the efforts and preparations that were made during the previous term of office. Its explicit ambition is to establish a humanitarian and internationally oriented project, which has an enduring association with the peace motto ‘No More War’.”

“Since the commemoration has a global character, the Government of Flanders will actively support international cooperation, in the first place with its priority partners, such as the United Kingdom, but also with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and the United States.”

“The construction of memorial gardens and the organisation of remembrance concerts and public outreach activities are crucial and special instruments for promoting this international cooperation.”

“One last point of focus is the publication *14-18. 100 Years On*, written by journalist Katrien Steyaert and published by WPG Uitgevers België. The publication is mainly being used as an international promotional gift and contains personal testimonials of foreign ambassadors and members of the Protection Committee for the Great War Centenary (2014-18) Commemoration.” ■



MEMORIAL GARDENS

Flourishing
symbols
of peace,
reconciliation
and hope

With the construction of memorial gardens between 2014 and 2018 special homage is paid to all those who fought and died during the First World War. These memorial gardens will be landscaped in symbolically important places around the world with soil from Flanders Fields. The gardens are an initiative of the Government of Flanders which, together with its foreign partners, works on these symbols of peace, reconciliation and hope for a better future.

London

The first memorial garden was officially inaugurated in London on 6 November 2014. The weekend after that this garden hosted a special educational programme. For the construction of this garden, school pupils from 65 Flemish schools, as well as British pupils, collected soil from the Commonwealth cemeteries in Belgium. They put this soil in sandbags which each carried the name of the cemetery from where the soil was taken. All these sandbags were then gathered at the In Flanders Fields Museum.

Canberra

On 4 April 2017, the Flanders Fields Memorial Garden was officially inaugurated in the Australian capital of Canberra. The memorial garden is part of the Australian War Memorial and pays tribute to the thousands of Australian servicemen who fought and died in Flanders Fields during the First World War.

Together with soil from all WW I heritage sites in Australia, the garden also holds Flemish soil, symbolically gathered at Tyne Cot Cemetery, the Menin Gate locations, Polygon Wood, Toronto Avenue Cemetery and Hill 60.

Dublin

On 7 June 2017, the '*Gathering of the soil*' was held at Wytschaete Military Cemetery for the Irish memorial garden. Flemish school children handed two small boxes filled with soil to two Irish children. This soil will be used to build a memorial garden in Dublin. The cemetery holds the remains of one thousand Irish troops, many of whom perished in the mine battle of Messines Ridge in 1917. ■



PEACE HYMN

There'd be
no war today,
if mothers
all would say,
I didn't raise my boy
to be a soldier.

Alfred Bryan
(1871-1958)

In 2014, the Flemish Government commissioned Dirk Brossé, Jef Neve and Frederik Sioen to compose a hymn in commemoration of the First World War, each of them approaching it from their own specific background. The result is a mosaic of unique moods, poignant emotions and refined tonal shades. The composition entitled '*Distortion - a Hymn to Liberty*' responds to the commemoration with a reflection on war and peace and freedom.

On Tuesday 21 April 2015, the composition premiered at Flagey cultural centre in Brussels. The concert was held on the eve of the commemoration of the first gas attacks during the First World War.

This was followed by concerts in Düsseldorf on 30 June 2016 and New York on 8 November 2017. These concerts were in synch with the international remembrance agenda and Flanders' priorities as part thereof.

Further performances of the Peace Hymn are planned for 2018, both at home and abroad. ■

HERITAGE

Recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site would not just be the icing on the cake, but could also ensure that continued attention is paid to this crucial heritage.

Luc Vandael,
Flanders Heritage Agency

“No more WWI veterans are left to act as direct witnesses. However, we still have an important medium at our disposal: heritage. Military cemeteries, war memorials, bunkers, shelters, battlefields, defence lines and landscapes with relics are tangible traces of the past and are therefore definitely worth being preserved and receiving the necessary attention”, says Luc Vandael of the Flanders Heritage Agency.

“With our project *Erfgoed van de Groot Oorlog* (Heritage of the Great War) we develop a strategy to allow this heritage to live on, until eternity so to speak. We were already actively engaged in this, but during the past years it has become a policy priority within the framework of the centenary commemoration. We have eagerly availed ourselves of this opportunity, as if it were our last chance to do something meaningful for this heritage. Our agency has worked intensively to protect and spatially anchor this heritage. At the end of the day this has produced an incredible result: throughout Flanders, and especially in

the front zone of the Westhoek region, hundreds of military cemeteries, commemorative monuments, defence structures and other relics have meanwhile been given official protection. The WWI heritage has never before been so thematically focused on.”

“An important tool in this context was our inventory, which provides an overview of the architectural, landscape and archaeological heritage from the Great War in West Flanders. It is not just an encyclopaedic work, but also a scientific instrument which we have been able to use for our protection activities. This inventory showed us, for instance, the most important types of bunkers and the most interesting typologies of commemorative monuments. The inventory can be consulted online at <https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be>. We have noticed that a lot of people consult this inventory for brief information about a specific site and immediately find other documentation which is of interest to them. They sort of take a stroll through our inventory. We are still proud to say that this inventory is fairly complete.”

“The main focus of our activities is currently on the application we are submitting for recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The value of our Great War heritage is not exclusive to Flanders; it is universal. For the first time in history those who fell during a war are commemorated as individuals, irrespective of their rank, social status or nationality. This marks the beginning of a whole new tradition. Moreover, the heritage and its integration into the landscape has been worked out with great care and quality and always embodies a call for long-lasting peace. The confrontation with these uncountable gravestones and names gives us food for thought and makes an ethical appeal to man and society. These are all reasons why we believe that the military cemeteries and monuments for the missing in Flanders deserve to be entered on the World Heritage List.”

“Our candidacy - which, on Flanders’ side, encompasses a carefully thought-out selection of 18 sites - is a transnational dossier, because Flanders is working on this together with Wallonia and France. We try to involve as many actors as possible in order to be able to conclude a cooperation agreement and to ensure that all parties can endorse the main lines of the dossier.”

“We hope to receive a definitive answer in the summer of 2018. For Flanders, the inscription on the World Heritage List would be a wonderful culmination of our integrated heritage strategy, the icing on the cake so to speak. But above all - and this is probably even more important - this recognition could especially play a role in the period after 2018 when the attention for the First World War will probably start to wane. A quality label awarded by UNESCO could make sure that this crucial heritage continues to receive the attention it deserves.” ■

ABBOTT PRIVATE
ACKERMANN J. H.
AINSCOUGH M. J.
ALDER A. N.
ALLEN J. H.
ANDERSON E. C.
ASHWORTH E. A.



CULTURE

Numerous pieces
are discovered which
no one even knew
existed. We should
not allow them to
disappear again.

Wouter Brauns,
the Department of Cultural Heritage

“Archives material, museum objects, customs and traditions: these are all types of cultural heritage. You can use them to document combat actions, but also to demonstrate the impact of war outside the combat zones, since most of the country was occupied territory. In this way we also want to turn the spotlight on the less explicitly narrated stories”, says Wouter Brauns from the Department of Cultural Heritage, which comes under the Department of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media.

“The Government of Flanders allocates operating and project grants to cultural heritage actors, including with regard to the First World War. We provide structural support, for instance, to the In Flanders Fields Museum and the Yser Tower Museum, two key players in this centenary commemoration. Within this framework a lot of actions are also organised by museums, archives and other organisations whose main focus is not the First World War.”

“Our own department also launches initiatives, one of the most striking of which is the entry of objects and archive material from the First World War on the List of Items of Exceptional Importance. These items

are so unique in Flanders that we want to continue to protect them, among other things by making sure they cannot be sold just like that and are not allowed to leave the territory. Diaries, pictures, a German ultimatum and even decorated flower sacks: they have all been entered on the list.”

“Some objects on this list had been insufficiently known up till now. The same definitely goes for the stuff which people brought along within the framework of Europeana 1914-1918. This is an important European project aimed at unlocking privately owned collections on the First World War. Over the past years cultural heritage actors in Flanders organised collection days on which private individuals could come and show their war objects and documents and have them digitised. The result is available online at www.europeana1914-1918.eu. The collection days were a huge success and an excellent way to discover treasures that would otherwise remain under the radar.”

“The intangible cultural heritage is facing the same risk. For this reason Flanders has introduced an entirely new policy and set up the Flanders Inventory for Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010. In the context of

the First World War the Last Post and Memorial Day have been added to this list, so as to enhance the visibility of these examples of good practice and to keep exchanging knowledge about them.”

“Exchanging knowledge is also the explicit objective of FARO, the Flemish Interface Centre for Cultural Heritage. In recent years, the support centre organised numerous seminars, workshops and publications on ‘100 jaar Groote Oorlog – Erfgoed, herdenking, herinnering’ (Great War Centenary Commemoration - Heritage, commemoration, remembrance) in recent years. In 2017, FARO staged a Winter School on Archives & Education, in tandem with The National Archives (UK). 2018 will be seeing an inspiration bundle on the Great War Armistice Centenary Commemoration, in association with the project secretariat for the ‘Great War Commemoration’.”

“And the focus on the commemorations goes beyond the Department of Cultural Heritage. The Arts Department is also supporting arts projects centred around the commemorations, and the Department of Media, Film and e-Culture is funding the Vlaams Instituut voor

Archivering (Flemish Archive Institute – VIAA) which, in association with various cultural heritage partners, masterminded the ‘Nieuws van de Groote Oorlog’ (News from the Great War) project. This flagship project which digitised the Belgian press, the trench papers and pamphlets put out during the First World War, is available for consultation at hetarchief.be. Another project, conducted by the Ghent City Archives department and various other partners, also digitised the placards put up by the German occupying power and made them available for consultation.”

“Many interesting searches for cultural heritage are thus currently ongoing in the sector. Personal documents of people, whether they are on display in the In Flanders Fields Museum, have been registered on the List of Items of Exceptional Importance or are popping up elsewhere: THEY tell the real stories. And raise a lot of questions. Who did the documents belong to? What did the owners go through both during and after the war? The answer is often very touching. That is why we must treasure this heritage more than ever.” ■



PRESS FROM THE GREAT WAR

One of the largest
databases in the world
with newspapers from
1914-1918 online

There are more than 360,000 pages of Belgian press material from the First World War available via nieuwsvandegrooteoorlog.be. Over two years, the Vlaams Instituut voor Archivering (Flemish Archive Institute – VIAA), the Vlaamse Erfgoedbibliotheek (Flanders Heritage Library) and 13 culture/heritage organisations inventoried, digitised and uploaded hundreds of thousands of newspaper pages from 1914-1918.

Nieuws van de Grote Oorlog (News of the Great War) is safeguarding the information from these fragile news pages for future generations, and putting the digital heritage of the First World War on the international map. Supported by the Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, you can search the website not just in Dutch, but in English, French and German too.

A unique collection

For *News of the Great War*, VIAA has digitised more than 270,000 newspaper pages, and is storing the material electronically for the long term. Spanning some 1,000 unique titles and 52,000 different editions,

this extensive collection consists both of ‘legal’ publications that the German government of occupation permitted and censored, and trench papers and ‘illegal’ publications (newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, pamphlets and leaflets).

The bulk of the pages in *News of the Great War* are from the collections of three major heritage libraries: the Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience (Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library) in Antwerp, and the Ghent and Leuven University Libraries. From their huge collection of newspapers, no less than 190,000 pages from 1914 to 1918 have been scanned in. The ADVN, the In Flanders Fields Museum, KADOC, the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, the AMVB, the Provinciale Bibliotheek Tolhuis, Amsab-ISG, the Liberaal Archief, the Provinciale Bibliotheek Limburg and the Letterenhuis have added to this a combined total of 80,000 pages. ■

www.nieuwsvandegrooteoorlog.be



FLAMANDS
VELD
MUSEUM

FLAMANDS
VELD
MUSEUM

TOURISM

What does the
First World War
still signify these days?

It is almost
an existential question.

For that reason alone,
attracting visitors most
definitely does not just
have an economic
side to it.

Lea Winkeler,
Visit Flanders

“As soon as circumstances allowed it, people started to visit the landscapes of the war in the Westhoek region, like some sort of pilgrimage or out of curiosity”, says Lea Winkeler, Great War Centenary Project Manager for Visit Flanders. “Remembrance tourism has thus existed since 1919 already and we are building on that today. We suggest ideas to people who are interested in this part of the past, we invite them to Flanders and make sure they find the stories here they are looking for. We also provide all the supporting services, from guides to transport and accommodation. The quality of their experience is always our main goal.”

“This became even more important given the growing interest in Flanders and Flanders Fields that could be expected between 2014 and 2018 – and the fact that visitors have indeed found their way to our remembrance sites. This didn’t only happen in 2014: also in 2017 - the centenary commemoration of the Battle of Passchendaele, a.k.a. the Third Battle of Ypres - and the end of the war in 2018 also resonate with a lot of people. In order to be able to handle these larger visitor flows responsibly, we have already initiated a plan of approach in 2006, together with Westtoer, the autonomous agency for tourism of the province of West Flanders, on the basis

of a thorough analysis of the tourism potential. This is in keeping with our philosophy of working with knowledge, with data: the same approach will also be used during the commemoration years. We assess the international awareness of Flanders and Flanders Fields as a destination for World War I tourism. We measure the number of visitors, where they hail from, which sites they visit and what they make of them. This enables us to monitor developments, but also assess the impact of the resources invested by Flemish society in these remembrance activities.”

Quality on the ground

“After the research comes the action. Between 2010 and 2014 the Government of Flanders appropriated 15 million euros for The Great War Centenary Impulse Programme. This programme allocated financial support to 44 projects for the development or improvement of their WWI offer, so as to enable them to give visitors the experience they are looking for and expecting. Sometimes, this implies improving a place of remembrance by constructing a parking area or installing an essential information sign. Other times it is about unlocking stories that would otherwise escape our attention or about making large

strategic investments. We are proud, for instance, of our five gateways to the Westhoek region: the thoroughly renovated and extended In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, the renovated and extended Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, the refurbished Talbot House and the reinforced Lyssenthoek Cemetery in Poperinge, the renovated Yser Tower Museum in Diksmuide and the visitor centre in Nieuwpoort, close to the locks which were opened in 1914 to flood the Yser planes. Each of these sites is a natural starting point for anyone who wants to explore the heart of Flanders Fields. They offer a well-founded introduction to the theme and invite visitors to also visit the surrounding area.”

“The Government of Flanders has opted for an attractive commemoration that extends beyond the different policy areas. We must, however, at all times keep our core objective in mind: to give visitors access to an important part of history - which may in some cases be a very intimate and emotional family history. We are only too aware of how carefully we should approach tourism in this context. We call our approach ‘*tourism+*’. It combines seven principles, from respect for the victims, history and relics, to multiple voices, deepening and a message of peace. Our approach is highly regarded both nationally and

internationally and may serve as a source of inspiration for dealing with other sensitive commemorative sites around the world. It is a guideline for fine-tuning our thoughts.”

Accessibility

“Through its commemorative initiatives Visit Flanders is also aiming to increase the social capital. In other words, we want to make anything that has to do with the First World War as accessible as possible to people with and without disabilities. This is a requirement for all subsidised projects. We have already made many achievements on the ground, although there are limits to making infrastructure physically accessible. Sometimes, it is impossible to work miracles or at least within the short term. However, in the meantime we can at least make sure that people with disabilities receive detailed information about the degree of accessibility. We have gathered this information and are disseminating it both home and abroad. The importance of such information was emphasised, among other things, at the World Travel Market in London where we were presented with a world accessibility award for this approach in 2013. It was a welcome signal to us that we should continue to take steps, although it is not an easy task.”

Experience

“A commemoration programme should also include high quality public events. Exhibitions, concerts and other cultural-artistic projects in Flanders together form an internationally relevant WWI agenda, thanks to, among others, project grants totalling 11.7 million euros. A first group of projects received support for their development in 2014 and 2015, whereas a second group was allocated grants for the last three years of the commemoration.”

“Although it is practically impossible to select only a few events from the almost endless offer, several clusters can still be distinguished. Often, a concrete historical date is often grasped as an opportunity for building a cultural and/or participatory event around it. Examples that come to mind include the Antwerp project which in 2014 commemorated the evacuation of the city by recreating a pontoon bridge which was crossed by no less than 85,000 people. In 2015, there was

worldwide interest in the 30,000th rendition of the Last Post, the ceremony held each evening beneath Menin Gate in Ypres. More recently, in 2017, the experimental, musical and visual outdoor spectacular *‘KraterFront’* (Crater Front) commemorated the Mine Battle.”

“Temporary historical and art historical exhibitions provide deeper interpretation of the events and create a link to today’s world, or to the many sites in the remembrance landscape. Often, personal stories are a major ingredient. In 2016, six strong women acted as the running theme of *‘De Zijkant van de Oorlog’* (The Side of the War, but with the added meaning of “she side” in Flemish), an exhibition staged at six locations around the Westhoek. The experiences of children provided the material for *‘Oorlog in Korte Broek’* (War in Short Trousers) in Ghent. The exhibition circuit *‘1917. Totale Oorlog in Vlaanderen’* (1917 – Total War in Flanders) not only included historical sites, but also shed light on the personal experiences of soldiers who fought in the Battle of Passchendaele.”

Grieving Parents (detail)
by Käthe Kollwitz,
German military cemetery,
Vladso (Diksmuide)





“The artistic ‘*Coming World Remember Me*’ project, which has been up and running since 2014, really captures the imagination. People get to build their own statuette at workshops, with each statuette representing one of the 600,000 people who were killed during the First World War on Belgian soil, civilians and troops alike, hailing from every corner of the globe. They will be brought together as part of a landscape installation in 2018 in the former no man’s land just outside Ypres: a powerful symbol, both of the suffering caused by the war and of the healing and peace-inspiring strength of remembrance.”

Spread the word

“With such a high-quality offer and strong agenda we want to attract potential international visitors to Flanders. A third, important part of our programme is thus the active communication abroad. In many locations around the world Visit Flanders representatives are committed on a daily basis to informing the professional travel sector and reporters

about our Region and to kindling their interest in it. The Great War Centenary commemoration represents a vital link in this and in this context we are not just talking about countries such as Great Britain, The Netherlands, France, Germany or the United States.”

“Our head office in Brussels also crosses boundaries by launching a general communication campaign. A very dynamic component of this campaign is our Facebook page where we create an international community by posting messages about historical facts and about which activities are organised in Flanders in relation to these facts. We already have 142,000 followers and their numbers continue to grow. What is even more touching is that they are very active. They post memories or pictures of their great-grandfathers who fought in Flanders and share interesting messages with each other. Commemorating together is actually a reality here.”

“Another example is The Mud Soldier, which we installed in the run-up to the Passchendaele (2017) remembrance activities. At the heart

of this initiative was a '*sand sculpture*' on Trafalgar Square in the centre of London. It showed a weary, seated soldier. Using an ingenious sprinkling system, the sculpture was reduced to mud in a matter of a days. It commemorated the many victims and the inhuman conditions of Passchendaele, where the weather and the muddy landscape were almost as lethal as the unrelenting shelling by the enemy troops. The Mud Soldier not only caught the attention of the thousands of passers-by on Trafalgar Square, it also drew extensive media coverage in a wide number of countries. We posted a Mud Soldier video on social media, to which we linked messages giving people more details of the commemorative activities in Flanders, and even included referrals to travel package deals."

"These and other actions were intended to maintain awareness of '*Flanders Fields*' among those who feel stirred by the history and the many personal tales of the First World War throughout the entire duration of the remembrance period. We are confident that our efforts will continue to support remembrance tourism to Flanders, even beyond 2018."

"As I work on this Visit Flanders remembrance project, not a day goes by without something touching me. At the outset, we assumed that this could well be the last time we will be able to '*reanimate*' the commemoration of the First World War on such a large scale and make people truly realise the sense and nonsense of it. There are no direct witnesses left and soon our emotional connection to this story may start to fade, as may our natural curiosity about how this war could ever take place and what impact it has on today's society. What we can learn from it today. It is almost an existential question."

"Attracting visitors for the commemoration definitely has an economic side to it, but it is about so much more. When a Frenchman visits his grandfather's grave here, this is a deep personal experience. When a bus of British school children visit Ypres and the surrounding area, it makes them reflect on war and peace, on their country's history and on the solidarity with other people. It is our duty to make sure this is the most meaningful experience of their lives." ■

NATURE AND FORESTS

Nature is a *crown witness* of the First World War which - however weird this may sound - sometimes also benefited nature.

Marleen Evenepoel,
Administrator-General of the Agency
for Nature and Forests.

“You would not expect it, but nature played a very substantial role during the war. It supplied food and raw materials (many forests were for the greater part chopped after 1918), served as a hiding or resting place for the soldiers or changed into a military zone, and later on into a place of remembrance. After the war some forests were still the same, but others had to fully adapt or regenerate.”

“It is the opinion of the Agency for Nature and Forests that Flemish nature areas made a great contribution during war time and therefore it regards them as *crown witnesses* of the war, like war veterans who are still very much alive today. This was the carefully chosen slogan in 2014 for our *Week of the Forest*, during which the local fauna and flora testified to the Great War.”

“Yet oddly enough, the war was actually also beneficial to nature. Bomb craters, for instance, became beautiful ponds which today provide an ideal habitat for the northern crested newt. The bunkers that once offered protection to soldiers are now excellent shelters for bats. In other places as well, nature has shown its resilience and new life has sprouted from the destruction. We want to keep taking care of this new

nature, hence our slogan for the coming years of commemoration: *Taking care of Flanders Fields*. Whether we guide people through it on foot or by bicycle, it will always be done respectfully. This is a remembrance and experience project with which we want to steer clear of any type of naked commerce. Once you realise that thousands of soldiers lost their lives here, you cannot but approach it with respect. They fought for our freedom and we must continue to be grateful for that.”

“The Great War Centenary commemoration is a source of special stories and surprises for our agency. It is very rewarding to keep the memory alive in our very own special way and to be able to highlight the experience of nature. This experience is the key focus of our plans for the future. Through the commemoration of '14-'18 we want to let the Flemish people enjoy nature again and make them more aware of it. This story offers a great deal of food, both literally and for thought.”

“Just take the poppy, the international symbol for the many victims of the First World War. Since 2014, our agency has been training the spotlight on the poppy by sowing poppy fields on our estates. In 2017, we

provided 73 partners who joined this project with free poppy sowing seed, which - combined - accounts for 30.5 ha. Together with the 53 ha of fields under direct management, 2017 offered some 83.5 hectares of poppies scattered across Flanders. “

In 2018, we are going for the symbolic 100 hectares, along with our partners. On our website we are posting photos of the fields in full bloom. We are also mapping out cycling routes that take cyclists along the flowering fields. All cycling routes have been neatly gathered in a Dutch and an English brochure, available for download from our website, truly making Flanders Fields into the fields *‘where the poppies blow’*.”

“We are also shining the spotlight on other areas. We have singled out seven key estates, each with their own past rooted in the Great War. These seven estates are: Drie Fonteinen (Three Fountains) park, Polygoonbos (Polygon Wood), Mastenbos (Masten Wood), Mechelse Heide (Mechlin Heath), Galgebossen (Gallows’ Woods), Koppenbergbos (Copper Mountain Wood) and Praatbos (Talking Wood). Each of these places is entwined with the war in its own way and acts as a

source of stories. When not being used as a practice ground or battleground, they were a favourite place for grubbing or taking shelter. These estates also act as the backdrop for remembrance projects we will be setting until 2018.”

“In 2017, the focus was on Polygon Wood, where a symbolic Vredesbos (Wood of Peace) was planted. 523 standard trees keep alive the memory of each of the 523 fallen soldiers who have been identified and laid to rest at the two cemeteries in and around Polygon Wood. In 2017, we already had numerous commemorative events in the Wood of Peace. On the occasion of ANZAC Day, this was where a work of art was inaugurated and the ambassadors of the five countries concerned planted a tree of remembrance. In September and October, the wood was visited by Australian and New Zealand descendants of those killed in action, paying their respects at the tree planted in memory of their long lost relative. In 2018, the focus will be on Koppenbergbos (Copper Mountain Wood) outside Oudenaarde, where troops fought during the final days of the war.

We are keen to bring the Great War commemorations to a worthy and respectful conclusion by planting, together with many town and cities, a tree of peace on 11 November 2018 - a memorial tree that references the ancient tradition of perpetuating the memory of pivotal moments in life by planting a tree. All towns and cities have been invited to join in, many of which have already responded favourably.” ■







AGRICULTURE

The focus is always on military strategies and the victims, which is justified of course, yet agriculture and food supplies provided for the daily necessities.

Gert Luypaert,
Department of Agriculture
and Fisheries

“The travelling exhibition entitled *Boter bij de vis* (a time-honoured Flemish expression which literally translates as ‘*butter with the fish*’, meaning you pay cash for the products or services you buy) introduces visitors to everyday life during the First World War. The exhibition centres on the dire food situation and the ingenuity of the Belgian population and its farmers. In 2017 and 2018, the *Boter bij de vis* exhibition will be taking in various locations around Flanders. The full schedule is detailed on www.boterbijdeviswo1.be. Alongside the travelling exhibition (which primarily tells the broader background story), the partners hosting the exhibition will also devise a more local, regional or themed component of their own. In 2018 too, the exhibition’s hosts are set to reach out to primary school and lower secondary school children. The educational booklet that accompanies the exhibition enables the children to discover the story behind World War I, as they get to flesh out this story in their own diary during their visit to *Boter bij de Vis*. This diary is also a memento of the exhibition for them to take home.”

“The thematic www.boterbijdeviswo1.be website tells the stories of wartime food supply and soup kitchens. A wide number of wartime cookery booklets are now available in digital form, enabling anyone interested to try out these recipes for

themselves. The website is regularly padded out with new stories and research resources.”

“In addition to making the story behind food and farming during the First World War accessible to the public, the Agriculture and Fisheries Department encourages academic research into these topics. Since November 2014, a research project has been underway in association with the Interfaculty Centre for Agricultural History (ICAG, Leuven University), entitled ‘*World War I and restoration. The reconstruction of countryside and landscape in Flanders after the Great War*’. The project’s aim is to deliver new insights into way the countryside and its farms were rebuilt, and to provide a better understanding of the mechanisms behind this recovery. In the spring of 2018, the first research results will be presented at a seminar that will assume the form of an inspirational event, aimed at making the restoration heritage available to wider audiences. For the organisation of the content and the practicalities of the event, the organisers are working with the Agricultural History Centre (CAG) and other partners from the domain of heritage conservation. This inspirational event constitutes the stepping stone to an international conference to be held in 2019, where recent scientific insights into the rehabilitation of the countryside in Belgium and other countries are to be unfolded.” ■



MARITIME SERVICES AND COAST

We have restored
the protagonists
of two legendary
chapters in Flanders'
Great War to their
former glory.

Elias Van Quickelborne,
Agency for Maritime Services
and Coast

“One of the major episodes of the First World War in Flanders was the flooding of the Yser plains which halted the advancing German army in October 1914. This was done at the Ganzepoot, a lock complex at Nieuwpoort, where six rivers flow out into the North Sea”, says Elias Van Quickelborne of the Coast Department.

“Therefore, the Ganzepoot is a historical witness, which was, however, entirely destroyed during the First World War. The complex was rebuilt soon after, but these past few years it urgently required a facelift. A small part of the bank was on the verge of collapsing, which is why our agency decided to rebuild that section. In addition, the top layer of most of the other banks was renewed as well. This is how we restored the complex, located close to the famous Albert I monument, to its original state and gave back some of its former glory.”

“Another important monument worthy of our attention is the HMS Vindictive. This ship was sunk by the British in May 1918 at the Ostend port channel to obstruct the German U-boats. This important blockship was recovered in 1920 and its bow section was converted into a monument, which was recently restored and inaugurated in May 2013 at the Halve

Maandijk in Ostend by King Albert II. On the occasion of this centenary commemoration the bow section has been placed in its definitive location on the new eastern longitudinal dike.”

“This is how we manage to save the protagonists of two legendary chapters in Flanders' Great War from oblivion. It is a beautiful reminder at the coast for fishermen, residents and tourists”

WW I, the battle for the North Sea

At the impetus of the Provincial Executive of West Flanders and the Flanders Marine Institute, and with the support of Visit Flanders, an exhibition is set to open its doors in Bruges on 23 April 2018. It focuses on the war that was waged at sea during WW I. The exhibition examines the naval forces of both sides during the war, and takes a closer look at the raids on the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend. Remembrance activities are also being organised in association with the United Kingdom and Germany. ■

VRT

This was a unique opportunity: digging up 100-year old stories about death and destruction, life and survival.

Arnout Hauben

Following in the footsteps of the past commemorative years, the VRT is also including programmes on the Great War centenary commemorations in its 2016 and 2017 broadcasting schedule. An update with a look ahead at 2018.

‘Onder Vlaamse Velden’

Continuing the successful furrow ploughed with the *‘Ten Oorlog’* (Going to War) series, the autumn of 2016 saw a three-part series entitled *‘Onder Vlaamse Velden’* (Underneath Flemish Fields). After walking the entire frontline from Nieuwpoort all the way down to Gallipoli for *‘Ten oorlog’*, Arnout Hauben took Eén (the VRT’s flagship TV station) viewers on an exploratory trip around the West Flemish clay in prime time. On the trail of a team of archaeologists, he literally delved into the past of the First World War. The exceptional finds made for special stories. The excavations not only exposed weaponry and ammunitions, trenches and shelters, but also human remains.

Kraterfront

100 years ago, on 7 June 2017, Zero Hour marked the time when a series of mines in the Messines area were detonated. As part of this commemoration and the *‘Kraterfront’* (Crater Front) event in the Westhoek, Radio 2 West Flanders made a four-part series of radio broadcasts, packed with stories linked to objects from the First World War. The series was aired from Tuesday 6 June through Friday 9 June 2017 as part of the regional daily lunchtime radio programme. The news bulletins on radio, TV and the *deredactie.be* website too reported on the international commemoration of the historical Mine Battle, which was attended by representatives from domestic and foreign governments and royal households.

Centenary commemoration of the Battle of Passchendaele

The summer and the autumn of 2017 trained the spotlight on the commemorative events surrounding the Battle of Passchendaele.

On Sunday 30 July, Eén (VRT 1) aired a compilation of the *‘Ten Oorlog’* series, followed by the live broadcast of the remembrance event on Ypres’s Central Market Square, which attracted 923,746 viewers.

Starting on Friday 28 July 2017, there was a re-run of the international five-part hit series *'Parade's End'*, featuring Benedict Cumberbatch and Rebecca Hall in the starring roles, which was largely shot in Flanders with a Flemish crew.

On 31 July 2017, 153,725 Canvas (VRT 2) viewers watched the British ceremony held at Tyne Cot cemetery in Zonnebeke. In addition, Canvas showed the 'Drie dagen in augustus 1914' (Three Days in August 1914) TV documentary, about the first days of the war in Belgium, featuring gripping testimonials.

The television and radio news, the VRT's current affairs programmes, and the VRT NWS website comprehensively covered the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian remembrance ceremonies on the occasion of the centenary commemoration of the Battle of Passchendaele. The special '14-18' feature on the vrtnws.be website was supplemented with a three-part longread which told the story of Passchendaele in texts, images and information graphics. This saw the VRT incorporate new forms of storytelling, geared to smartphone and tablet users' digital reading comfort.

On the occasion of the Australian remembrance ceremony on 26 September, the VRT's video platform VRT NU posted the *'Vermist aan het front'* (Missing at the Front) VRT documentary on the identification of Australian servicemen. The dawn ceremony at Polygon Wood in Zonnebeke was streamed live that very morning by the VRT and broadcast on Canvas and Australian television.

The stories about Passchendaele continue to stir Flemish viewers 100 years after the events, as shown by the great sense of engagement and the response to the related articles on the social media platforms of the VRT broadcasting stations.

Those who wish to immerse themselves in the history of the First World War should log on to www.deredactie.be/VRTNWS for the week-on-week updates on the vagaries of the war that unfolded in Flanders Fields 100 years ago and background stories.

2018: the spring and final offensive and Armistice

In 2018, the topics of the spring and final offensive and the Great War armistice centenary commemorations will take pride of place in the offering on radio, TV and online.

Canvas has already agreed to join in 'Waterfront', the large-scale public participation project of Gone West. As part of the project, there is to be a 'Radio Gaga De Luxe' presented by Joris Hessel and Dominique Van Malder, who will be gathering personal stories and messages before and after the Waterfront from the participants. ■

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Let us break down walls

Dirk Terryn,
CANON Cultural Unit, Department of
Education and Training

“Obviously our history has its numbers, and there is a lot of chemistry involved when it comes to chemical warfare. As part of religious or non-denominational ethics classes you can wonder what the peace concept implies exactly. We can come up with plenty more examples of how the First World War can be integrated into lessons in primary and secondary education”, says Dirk Terryn of CANON, the Cultural Unit of the Department of Education and Training.

“However, we need to be realistic: teachers already have a lot to deal with and even if they are prepared to adopt a creative approach to a theme such as the war - which is often the case - they sometimes can no longer see the wood for the trees. Which is why, in 2014, we gathered the best ideas in *‘Commemorating the Great War in the Classroom’*.”

Cultuurkuur (Culture Cure)

“The comprehensive offering is made available for consultation on www.cultuurkuur.be, which lists the current actions, events and calls as part of the Great War Centenary Commemoration. Here is where cultural partners and schools present their own schemes for each other’s benefit, offering background information and tools for a quality approach to remembrance in the classroom. In doing so, Cultuurkuur is the ultimate gathering ground for ideas to help each other with cultural inspiration. No one needs to work on their own and reinvent the wheel at every turn. Find inspiration in one another ... this in itself should relieve a lot of the pressure.”

“The Archive for Education caters for teachers looking for visual aids, gathered by teachers (in the VRT archives, and elsewhere). In other words, ready to use. Inspiring materials on the Great War for primary and secondary schools alike are just a click away at <https://onderwijs.hetarchief.be/themas/100-jaar-groote-oorlog>. We also bring together student teachers and disseminate the material they have collected on this topic. We help them come up with ideas on how to use archives and resources.”

Cultuur in de Spiegel (Culture in the mirror)

“Culture is vital to man and society: culture is what enables us to reflect, speak and write, express ourselves and lend shape and meaning to things. We understand one another through shared meaning. Cultural competences are key skills that everybody needs, throughout their life and in every imaginable context. Rethinking and reflecting on war in general is also closely in keeping with the reference framework we have devised together with the education providers and researchers of HIVA (Research Institute for Work and Society)/Leuven University and VUB. Alongside the much needed transfer of knowledge, cultural education is the best way to process information and to lend (new) meaning...”

“Strictly speaking, the First World War is not on the curriculum of each teacher in primary education or each specialist teacher in secondary education. However, one can adopt a broad approach to the curriculum. It is a subject that sets a lot of things in motion and which is on the news. And so I say: let us break down walls and think in a project-based way. There is a lot of movement surrounding this topic and things are picked up by the news on a regular basis. Waiting until the textbooks or the teaching plan raise the topic would be a missed opportunity. I believe that every teacher can add his or her personal touch to this commemoration, which is a huge added value for the generation that is currently growing up.” ■

Belgisch Front den 10 December 1914
Leer Beminde Liefste, Schoonbroeder, en
Met het begin van het nieuwe jaar,
en voorspoed in al onze omstandigheden, en
gezondheid, het welk in deze tijden onmis-
Beminde Schoonbroeder, welke niet d
hant, dat gij van den oorlog edt m
van by onze vrouwen en kinderen
Wijzen 1917 met eenen lief-
heden by mijn

COMMUNICATION

On the same wavelength

Tinne Jacobs,
Project Office
The Great War Centenary (2014-18)

“In the organisation of an extensive project such as The Great War Centenary (2014-18), it is crucial that all parties involved are on the same wavelength”, says Tinne Jacobs, assistant coordinator of the Project Office. “That is why all agreements regarding communication within the Flemish authorities have been compiled in a framework, including the use of the logo, the press review, agreements regarding the use of the image archive, cooperation with the Flemish Info Line.”

“The digital communication regarding the commemoration project in its turn mainly takes place through the website **www.2014-18.be**. It is an audience-oriented website where the agenda plays an important part. There is an up-to-date calendar of all Great War events, set up by the authorities as well as by other organisers, which are included in UiTDatabank by Publiq and which are thus also available through many other public-oriented channels.”

“We also conduct science communication via substantive projects. To this end, in 2014 the department entered into a partnership with Scriptie not-for-profit organisation, to organise a ‘*Great War Centenary Commemoration Dissertation Award*’. Over a five-year period – from 2014 through 2018 – the organisation behind the Award will push Bachelor and Master dissertations on the First World War into the limelight and single out the best dissertations of praise. To this end, the dedicated www.scriptieprijs2014-18.be website has been designed.” ■

*Belgian Christmas letter on textile,
In Flanders Fields Museum,
Ypres*

Colophon

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For more information, please contact The Great War Centenary 2014-2018 Project Office or visit the project's website.

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