

Casualties and the Imperial War Graves Commission

In the First World War, the total number of casualties was horrendous. In the UK alone, the latest military death toll estimates are just under 900,000. France, with a smaller population, lost almost 1.4 million. Russia lost 2.2 million, Italy 651,000, Romania 335,000 and Serbia 365,000. The total allied death toll was over 6 million. The German Empire lost 2 million, Austria-Hungary 1.5 million, Ottoman Empire 771,000 and Bulgaria 87,000. These figures include service deaths attributable to disease (*as caused the deaths of several of our servicemen*), who are treated as a casualty of war without distinction, since if they had not been in that place at that time, they would not have caught the disease which killed them. As a percentage of the population, UK military deaths represented approximately 2%. The population of St Endellion in 1911 was 1,049, so our casualties represented 3% of the population, half as much again as the national percentage.

Prior to the First World War, little thought was given to casualties and it may have been down to local populations to bury the fallen in mass graves, typically with only officers receiving any memorial. This changed through the driving force of one man, Fabian Ware. He was too old for service, but became commander of a small British Red Cross team in France. He was struck that there was no mechanism for documenting or marking graves. Such graves were often with makeshift wooden crosses, and the tides of war frequently obliterated such transient markers. Ware set up an organisation within the Red Cross, the importance of which was soon given official recognition and eventually transferred to the British Army as the Graves Registration Commission.

The great numbers of casualties soon swamped municipal graveyards, and Ware began negotiating for the purchase of land for use in perpetuity as military cemeteries. His unit was continually reminding padres of their duty to bury the dead in proper cemeteries, but with the best will in the world, burial in the midst of the hell that is war could not be carried out with the same process and reverence of a quiet country churchyard and some had to be placed in makeshift temporary graves. Recording these was not without dangers. One of the unit's officers, Captain John Doran Macdonald, had been killed in 1916 by shellfire as he was erecting crosses on the Ypres to Menin road. In 1916 a small booklet *The Care of the Dead* was produced to reassure relatives that their loved ones had received a proper burial. Many enquiries and requests for photographs of graves were received from relatives. They were still a small unit, and did their best to respond but were in danger of becoming overwhelmed.

In 1917 Edward, Prince of Wales (*later Edward VIII*), himself an ex-soldier, became the president of the National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves, which was intended to take over the work after the war. Ware felt a more international body was needed and, with the help of the Prince of Wales, submitted a memorandum to set up what became the Imperial War Graves Commission. No sooner had the war ended than a report was presented to the commission setting out how it was envisioned it would proceed.

Two main elements of the report were that bodies should not be repatriated and that memorials should be of a uniform design regardless of class or rank. Top architects were to be commissioned to design the cemeteries and their memorials. The two principal memorials were to be the Cross of Sacrifice, with a bronze sword affixed to emphasise the military character, and the cross for the religious affiliation of the majority of the dead, and larger cemeteries with over 400 graves were to have the Stone of Remembrance, inscribed *Their name liveth for evermore*.



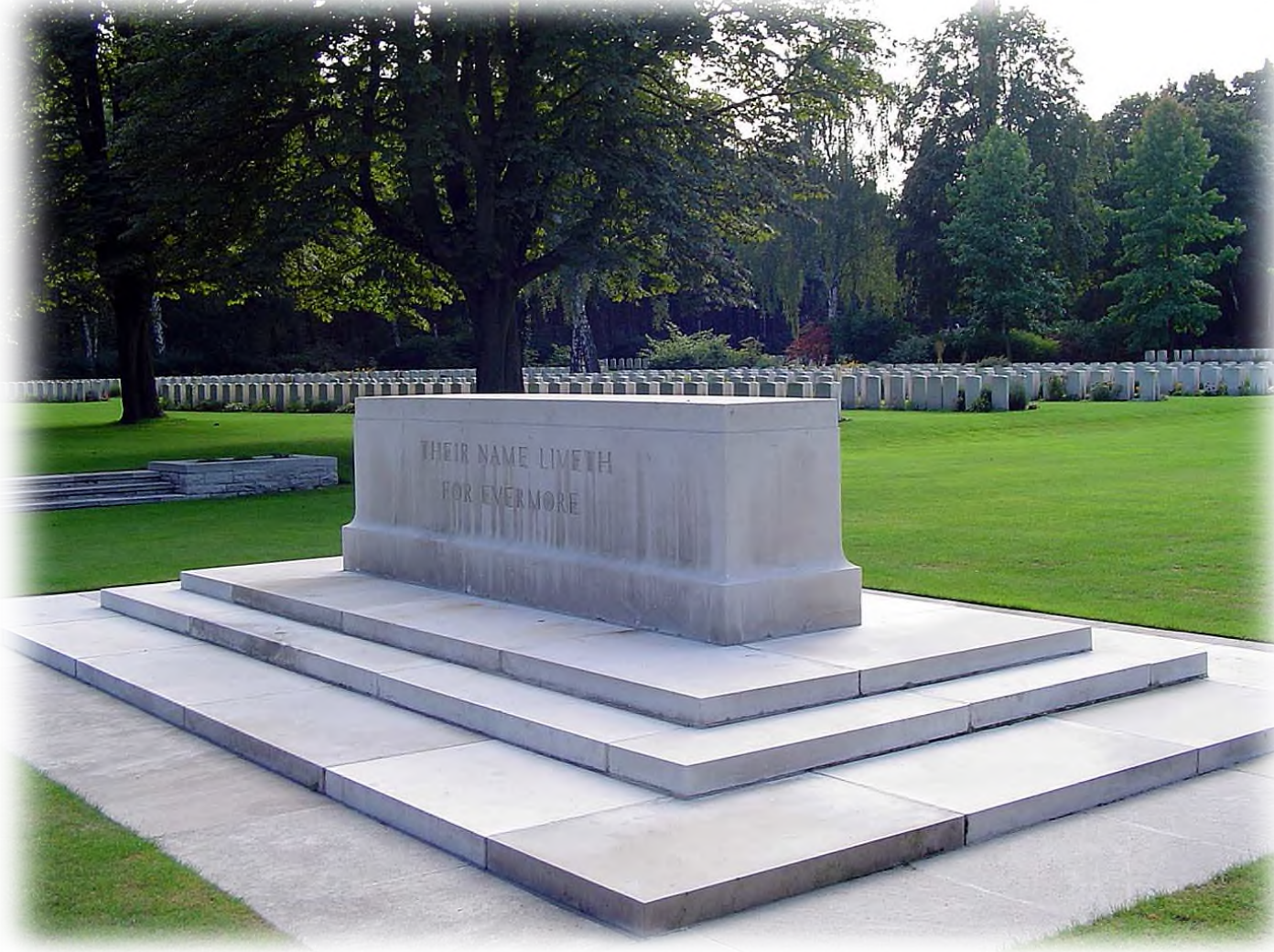
A temporary grave marker in the DCIL museum

Rudyard Kipling, whose own son had been lost in the war with no known grave, wrote an article in *The Times* on the proposals, which was subsequently published as an illustrated booklet *The Graves of the Fallen*. This wider publicity generated a storm, particularly the decision not to repatriate the dead. Apart from the logistical nightmare, the commission had evidence that the soldiers themselves had consistently expressed the wish to be buried with their colleagues should they fall. Others opposed the principle of uniform design, as relatives who could afford it should be able to have their own choice of memorial. The commission were concerned that the wealthy might erect conspicuous memorials to honour their son's sacrifice above others, no doubt considering that each had made an equal sacrifice of everything they had to give. There were some aggressive newspaper adverts talking of the Commission's 'tyranny' and refusal to listen.

The issue was eventually debated in Parliament, with strong words on both sides. One opponent considered the poor were 'too generous to rob their fellow sufferers of the solace of the individual memorial because they themselves cannot afford to erect one'. Some considered that great deeds do not depend on memorials in stone. That great orator Winston Churchill, who had himself fought in the war, closed the debate. Referring to the Stones of Remembrance designed by Edwin Lutyens, he said these would exist in 2,000 years, when they would 'preserve the memory of a common purpose pursued by a great nation in the remote past and will undoubtedly excite the wonder and the reverence of future generations'. With overwhelming support in the house for the commission's proposals, no doubt reflecting the vast majority of public opinion, Churchill asked for this sensitive issue to be decided without a vote, upon which the amendment was withdrawn and the commission could go forward in its mammoth task.



Cross of Sacrifice



Stone of Remembrance

The task of building the cemeteries began in 1920 with three experimental cemeteries in France. The architects created a walled cemetery with uniform headstones in a garden setting. The best advice on plants was sought from Kew Gardens and advice on the garden design from Gertrude Jekyll. The logistics of carving hundreds of thousands of grave stones, each taking about a week, were daunting, not least in finding the necessary stone masons. By the end of the 1920s, the majority of work had been done, although the last cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux was not completed until 1938 and stone masons were still working on the Menin Gate when the Germans invaded Belgium in 1940.

The work of maintenance is never ending, but the building work in France was generally considered complete over 50 years ago. The finding of a previously undiscovered mass grave of 250 soldiers, principally Australian casualties and perhaps including our own *George Honey*, in Fromelles during 2008 meant a new cemetery was commissioned, which opened in 2010.

In 1960 the commission changed its name to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. It is now responsible for the graves of 1.7 million commonwealth service men buried at over 23,000 separate sites in 153 countries. It is a non-governmental organisation funded by the member states, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa.

Since the earliest days, documentation was crucial, and most still survives, with much available to view at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. Here are some documents relating to the First World War Commonwealth War graves at St Endellion churchyard; *Richard Saundry*, *William Josiah Blake* and sailors from the SS *Armenian*, most unknown, whose bodies were brought in to Port Isaac at the end of June 1915.

Regt. No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Number or letter of Plot	Row	Grave	Type of Memorial	Type of Grave	Remarks
14th Bn. Canadian Inf.	SAUNDRY, RICHARD	Sgt. R.	25/07/17	-	-	-	P.F.	0	
14th Bn. Canadian Inf.	BLAKE, WILLIAM JOSIAH	Acty. W.J.	11/10/15	-	-	-	P.F.	0	
	SAUNDRY, RICHARD	Sgt. R.	25/07/17	-	-	-	P.F.	0	
	BLAKE, WILLIAM JOSIAH	Acty. W.J.	11/10/15	-	-	-	P.F.	0	

Grave Registration Report Form

1st line	2nd line	3rd line	4th line	5th line	6th line	7th line	8th line	9th line	10th line
Number & Rank	Individual, Male and Females	Regiment	Date of death	Age	Height	Place of Birth	Religion	Remarks	

Headstone Schedules for the contract of inscriptions required.

The families of Richard Saundry and William Blake had already erected their own headstone so these are noted as not included in the contract

↑ HELLAND (ST. HELENA) CHURCHYARD.	BLAKE, A.B. W. J. H.M. Yacht "Liberty". Mercantile Marine Service. 30th Nov. 1918.
↑ MARSHALL, Lieut. Col. Richard John. 4789. 14th Bn. Canadian Inf. (1st Central Mounted Bde.). 3rd Nov. 1916. Age 33. Son of Charles and Mary Marshall, of Hlland Bridge, Bodmin.	FOLEY, Sailer J. S.S. "Armenian", Mercantile Marine. 20th June 1915.
↑ LANIVET CHURCH CEMETERY is a little east of the main Bodmin-Trew road, adjoining the School.	↑ THERE ARE SEVEN UNIDENTIFIED REMAINS of the Merchant Navy buried in this Churchyard.
↑ PENDRAY, Roy Frederick William. 33779. C.P.O. Working in the Royal Air Force. Accidentally drowned in river Wey 16th May, 1921. Age 17. Son of Tom and Grace Pendray, of Glass Lane, Lanivet.	↑ ST. MINVER (ST. JAMES THE GREAT) CHURCHYARD.
↑ LANIVET (ST. BRYNETTA) CHURCHYARD. LANIVET RURAL has been extended to the East.	BLAY, Carpenter's Crew. Joe. M1969 (Dev.). R.N.H.M.S. "Vindicta". 7th May 1918. Age 49. Eldest son of Joe and Bessie Bray, of St. Kew.
↑ NICHOLLS, Rev. Joseph. 20149. 14th Bn. Devonshire Regt. 21st May 1920. Age 22. Son of Fred and Lucy Nicholls, of Bodmin, Bodmin. In new ground.	↑ ST. MABYN CHURCH CEMETERY.
↑ LUXULIAN (SS. CYRILAC and JULIETA) CHURCHYARD.	ELLERY, Son. P.O. T. 27691. R.N.H.M.S. "Japan". 16th July 1919. Age 43. Son of George and Elizabeth Ellery.
↑ PHILLIPS, Gen. C. D. 14224. No. 3 Depot Coy. Royal Garrison Artillery. Died of meningitis 18th April 1917. Age 39. Son of the late Charles and Susan Phillips, of Lerton, Looe, Cornwall. View, Grampond Road.	RUNDLE, Pte. Frederick George. 12107. 1st Bn. Wellington Regt. N.Z.E.F. 24th June 1917. Age 26. Son of John and Christiana Rundle, of "Lozengrove", Hlland, Bodmin, England.
↑ ST. ENDELLION (ST. ENDELLION) CHURCHYARD contains eleven British War Graves, including those of seven unidentified merchant seamen. The S.S. "Armenian" was captured and sunk by an enemy submarine on the 28th June, 1915 twenty miles West of Trowee Head, with the loss of 29 lives.	↑ ST. MABYN CHURCHYARD.
↑ NANSFALLON CEMETERY, LANIVET, belongs to a body of French.	HENT, Mat. 877. D.S.O., M.C. Royal Field Artillery. 19th May 1918.
↑ PERRYMAN, Pte. Alfred Edward. 1224. 1st Bn. Duke of Cornwall's Light Inf. (Drowned at Cambou, Northumberland 10th July 1915. Age 19. Son of Edward and Lucy Perryman, of Nansfallon, 4. 7.	↑ ST. MINVER (ST. MENEERIDA) CHURCHYARD.
↑ ST. ENDELLION (ST. ENDELLION) CHURCHYARD contains eleven British War Graves, including those of seven unidentified merchant seamen. The S.S. "Armenian" was captured and sunk by an enemy submarine on the 28th June, 1915 twenty miles West of Trowee Head, with the loss of 29 lives.	ST. MINVER (ST. MENEERIDA) CHURCHYARD.
↑ AITCHISON, Fourth Eng. Thomas. S.S. "Armenian". Mercantile Marine. Drowned as a result of an attack by an enemy submarine. 26th June 1915. Age 40. Son of Thomas and Ellen Aitchison, of Liverpool. Husband of Sarah Aitchison, of St. Grove Rd., Austree, Liverpool.	↑ ST. MINVER (ST. MENEERIDA) CHURCHYARD.
↑ C. 6 (Looe) Rural District 1914	↑ C. 6 (Looe) Rural District 1914
↑ St. Endellion Rural District 1914	↑ St. Endellion Rural District 1914

Working copy of the Register of Graves Note that unknown SS Armenian sailors are also buried at St Minver and St Enodoc

Sources

World War 1 Casualties: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_war_1_death_toll
 Imperial War Graves Commission History: Philip Longworth *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_War_Graves_Commission and <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=JDQVfHkQQ4C&pg=PT140&lpg=PT140&dq=v=onepage&q&f=false>
 Captain John Doran Macdonald: <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=127835>

SS Armenian graves in St Endellion Churchyard using the standard design and layout and including Mrs Aitchison's personalised inscription

