

Tayside Western Front Association (WFA) Branch Trip to the Western Front – June 2017

The Tayside Branch of the WFA organised a week's trip to sites on the Western Front in Northern France and Flanders in mid June 2017. The trip was arranged in collaboration with The Black Watch Association, which added to the knowledge and expertise within the group and to promote links with other related organisations locally.



After a long, but largely uneventful, drive from Tayside down to Hull and the ferry crossing, we drove on to the Loos battlefield and Dud Corner Cemetery, which incorporates the memorial to those lost in the battle but have no known grave. This list of names still includes Captain the Hon. Fergus Bowes-Lyon, a cousin of the Queen Mother, who does now have a headstone in Quarry Cemetery. Several in our party who were also on the Loos Centenary Tour by The Black Watch Association were present at the formal inauguration of the grave in 2015. Of particular significance to the Black Watch, Dud Corner Cemetery contains the graves of four officers of the 9th Black Watch who were buried during the hostilities themselves.

After a visit to the massive Notre Dame de Lorette French Military Cemetery and the recent Ring of Remembrance, we moved on to the Vimy Memorial ("Mother Canada" is the statue at the front) memorial overlooking the Vimy Ridge. A surprise here was the discovery that the name of Acting Corporal John High, of the 16th Bn Canadian Expeditionary Force, a man from Kirriemuir in Angus, was missing from the names on this impressive memorial.

After a night in Arras, the next morning was spent on the Somme battlefields. This included a visit to the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont Hamel (which includes the famous "Jock on a Rock" memorial to the 51st Highland Division, overlooking "Y" Ravine), before nipping into Mill Road Cemetery by the Ulster Tower (where we discovered a small plaque to Private William Harper, a missing soldier from Dundee's Own 4th Black Watch, which bore the message, "Whaur Are Ye Wullie?") en route to our visit to the Thiepval Memorial (upon which Pte Harper is commemorated).



During the afternoon, we visited the Lochnagar Crater, followed by Caterpillar Valley Cemetery at Longueval, where we visited the headstone to the grandfather of one of our troop, Private John Patrick of the 9th Black Watch. We then left the Somme to visit the Cambrai battlefield and the site where the tank, Deborah, was found and will soon be displayed, "re-buried" in a purpose built centre, at Flesquières. Mike Taylor also gave a very informative talk on the largely forgotten taking and holding of Bourlon Wood by the 119 Infantry Brigade (the Welsh Bantam Brigade) in 1918. We then returned to the Arras battlefields with a drive through Monchy-le-Preux, where the British Cavalry and Royal Horse Artillery fought valiantly in April 1917, before our last stop of the day,

Brown's Copse Cemetery, the final resting place of Sergeant Thomas Brown MM, 7th Bn Seaforth Highlanders from Meikle. Also many 7th Black Watch and a good number of 6th Battalion men are laid to rest here.

The following day, our base moved from Arras to Ypres, taking in Woburn Abbey Cemetery at Cuinchy, where the recently discovered remains of Lance Corporal Morrison of the 1st Black Watch were re-interred in July 2016. We then took in the Aubers Ridge, Neuve Chapelle and Fromelles battlefields before visiting the Island of Ireland Peace Park on the Messines Ridge.

That evening our party had the honour of laying a number of wreaths (including one from our branch of the WFA) at the Menin Gate as part of the "Last Post" ceremony. This ritual has continued every evening since it started in 1928 (although its location was transferred to Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey for four years during WW2). Of note was the temporary presence of the stone lions which have been lent by the Australian Government to the City for just seven months, as part of commemorations marking the centenary of major battles in the Ypres Salient.



The following morning was free time for members of the party to visit the "In Flanders Field" Museum in Ypres, Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 at Zonnebeke or to just take in the cafes and sights of Ypres before rejoining the coach to travel to Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest CWGC cemetery in the world.

It was then on to the monument at Black Watch Corner where we were welcomed by the pipes of a member of the Field Marshall Haig's Own Pipes & Drums, affiliated to the Black Watch Association, who was resplendent in a WW1 uniform that included a kilt in "Passchendaele" tartan. There followed a short ceremony undertaken by Rev Brian Dingwall with contributions from both Tam McCluskey and Ronnie Proctor.



Lunch at the nearby De Dreve café-bar included a fascinating talk by Johan Vandewalle about the results of his excavations in the area and a visit to his own collection.

The next stop was at Pond Farm where we were met by the extraordinarily enthusiastic Stijn Butaye and his mother. Stijn has built up a remarkable collection of artefacts, all found on the farm. In their barn was also a replica tank that is now approaching completion. This tank is similar to the G5 Glenlivet tank which was put out of action on 31 July 1917 and remains buried on farm property,.

Our final day included a visit to the Welsh National Memorial Park (including a rendition of the Welsh National Anthem by a party member, reflecting his pride in his ancestry) and on to Hooge, where we visited the crater, trenches and museum. Following a brief stop at Boezinghe Churchyard to visit the grave of Captain Edward Urquhart of the Black Watch, killed during the Langemarck battle of 1914, we drove north to see the impressive Belgian breastwork trenches on the banks of

the Yser Canal. Sadly, this was a hurried stop as we had to ensure we were in good time for the ferry home.

In all, it was a very busy, but hugely rewarding, schedule to fit in all the visits. Despite a wide range of interests, ages and backgrounds within our group, a strong sense of camaraderie quickly developed and the whole trip was enhanced by the breadth and depth of knowledge within the party. Even before we had arrived back in Scotland, preliminary discussions were already taking place on a possible follow-up trip - maybe next year?