



McCrae's Battalion Trust 100th Anniversary Pilgrimage Contalmaison 2014

Centennial Commemoration THE WAVERLEY TRAIN



The McCrae's Battalion Trust is the world's first registered charity to be inspired by the sacrifice of an infantry battalion of the Great War. On 1 July 1916 – the bloody opening day of the Battle of the Somme – seventeen British divisions assaulted an impregnable German defensive system, bristling with barbed wire and machine-guns.

20,000 British soldiers died that morning – the idealistic best that the New Armies had to offer. A further 40,000 were wounded. Entire battalions of pals, brothers, neighbours and work-mates were wiped out in a matter of minutes. Amid the awful carnage it was a unit from the capital of

Scotland that penetrated furthest into the enemy position. The 16th Royal Scots, the 2nd Edinburgh City Battalion, named after their charismatic and much-loved colonel, Sir George McCrae, lost almost three-quarters of their strength. Somehow, though, a small party pressed on to reach the tiny ruined village of Contalmaison, deep inside the German trench system. In their time they were recognised as heroes, but posterity is unkind and the achievement was forgotten.

In November 2004, a fourteen-foot-high traditional Scottish cairn was unveiled in Contalmaison to finally right this historic wrong. Constructed by Scottish craftsmen, using entirely Scottish materials, sourced in Caithness, Nairnshire, Moray and the Lothians, it is now recognised as the most handsome battalion memorial to be erected on the Somme since the high-water mark of commemorative projects in the 1920s. It is truly ‘the last of the Great War memorials’.

In 2006 the fundraising group that built the Cairn evolved into Scottish Registered Charity number 037303 – the ‘McCrae’s Battalion Trust’. We’ve already held ten successful ceremonies of Remembrance in the village and the ‘Contalmaison Cairn’ has become a distinctive Scottish presence on the Western Front. With the collaboration of The Royal Scots Association and the Royal Regiment of Scotland (which embraces all the antecedent Scottish regiments that served so bravely in the war), we are pledged to return every year. Had the memorial been built in 1920, Contalmaison would by now be an established date in Scotland’s annual civic calendar. ‘Better late than never,’ as the Colonel would doubtless have said.

2014 marks one hundred years since the start of the Great War, the formation of McCrae’s Battalion and the enlistment of the Hearts players and their pals from other clubs. It promises to be a busy year on the Western Front – with an unprecedented number of travellers, many of whom will be visiting France and Flanders for the first time. Owing to the upsurge in demand for ferry berths, our pilgrimage begins at Waverley Station, on the same southbound platform used by the lads who left Edinburgh with their rifle and packs, many of them never to return.

Attached is our itinerary – which includes three nights in the Holiday Inn Express, right in the centre of Arras. With competition for peak period hotel places at an all-time high, we’ve done well to secure these rooms and we know from previous experience that Barbara and her team will have a warm welcome waiting for us.

The future of Remembrance lies with the young, so we’re pleased to confirm that a number of Scottish sixth-year students will again participate in our official pilgrimage. As usual, West Calder High School are to the fore, but they’ll be joined this year by representatives of St Mungo’s High School in Falkirk, and by a group of (almost equally) young soldiers from the PRU at Craigiehall who are recovering from a variety of injuries sustained on recent active service.

The establishment of the Contalmaison site and our annual pilgrimage has firmly cemented Scotland’s links with France and the Somme. The 2014 pilgrimage will further cement our close ties. We have established a new tradition of Franco-Scottish remembrance, reviving the ancient friendship of Europe’s oldest alliance. The Scottish Footballers’ cairn is now an important part of the local fabric. As always, the McCrae’s Battalion Trust and our friends in Contalmaison look forward to welcoming anyone who is interested in joining us on 1 July to commemorate the finest unit in Lord Kitchener’s volunteer Army.

McCrae’s Own – Scotland’s Sporting Battalion



Monday 30 June

08.00 assemble Waverley Station – southbound platform to be confirmed.

08.30 leave Edinburgh for London (King’s Cross) – to arrive at 12.50. Transfer to executive double-decker coach to be conveyed through the Channel Tunnel direct to our hotel.

19.00 (approximately local time) arrive Holiday Inn Express Arras.

20.00 welcome gathering in hotel. Free evening thereafter.

Tuesday 1 July

07.45 leave hotel for Contalmaison ceremony.

09.00 ceremony begins, followed by laying of tributes at Contalmaison Village Memorial.

10.30 depart Contalmaison for Lihons to visit the grave of Alan Seeger, the American poet, who was killed in 1916 while serving with the French Foreign Legion.

Return to *Salle de Fêtes* in Contalmaison for lunch.

(35 Euros – all-in).



The Contalmaison Cairn

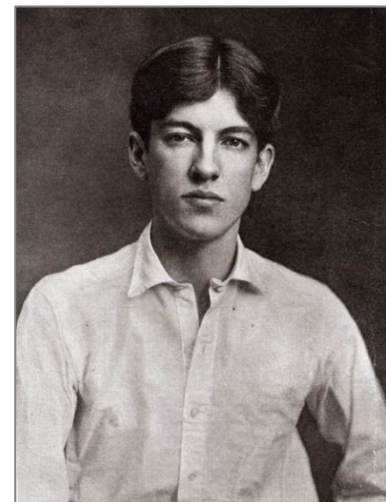
I Have a Rendezvous with Death

*I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When spring brings back blue days and fair.*

*It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.*

*God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,*

*Where hushed awakenings are dear...
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.*



Alan Seeger. 1888–1916

17.00 (approximately) return to Arras for free evening.



Wednesday 2 July

08.15 depart Arras for 'Battlefield Tour' day.

We have a short drive from Arras to Ypres and en route there'll be a couple of interesting stops. Bayernwald is a unique German site located between the villages of Wijtschate and Voormezele. It consists of two mine galleries, a mine shaft, a trench system and five bunkers; and is accessed via a footpath which passes through the restored network of trenches. A commanding view of Ypres demonstrates the degree of German observation over the famous British 'Salient'. We know a fair bit about the German units that garrisoned the line in this sector – not least the identity of an unremarkable corporal by the name of Adolf Hitler.



Bayernwald then



Bayernwald now

9.30 arrive Bayernwald

10.30 leave for Sanctuary Wood

10.45 arrive Sanctuary Wood

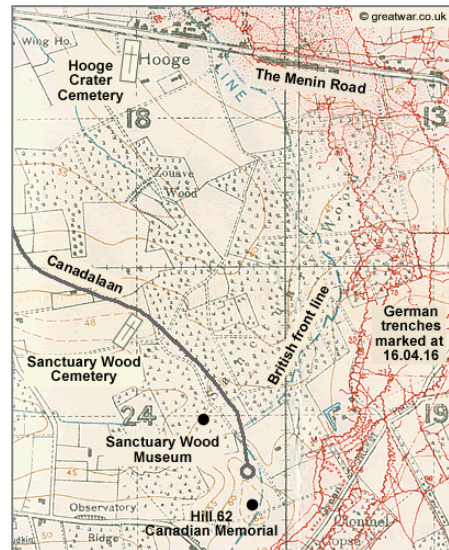
Sanctuary Wood is probably the earliest surviving example of a battlefield tourist attraction on the Western Front and one of the few places where you still can see an extended section of 'traversed' trenches – in this case part of the British support line, south-east of Ypres. It opened for business in the late 1920s to cater for the very first groups of battlefield pilgrims. Typically, they would have been veterans re-visiting some spot where they were wounded, or relatives of soldiers who were buried in one of the new war cemeteries or



commemorated on one of the new memorials. Today it's an indispensable part of any visit to the Ypres Salient. There's an interesting museum display (complete with grisly stereograph viewers), a café and a shop.



Sanctuary Wood



11.50 leave for Ypres for lunch

The cloth-producing city of Ypres was almost entirely destroyed during the Great War. Its sensitive reconstruction remains one of the wonders of modern Europe. In many places it's hard to believe you're not looking at a genuine medieval townscape. Pubs, restaurants and cafés are to be found in abundance – along with its numerous chocolate and confectionery shops. Cheap tobacco is available in a couple of establishments in the Grote Markt, opposite the Cloth Hall.

The famous *In Flanders Fields* museum in the Cloth Hall has just undergone a major refurbishment in time for the centenaries. Most of the galleries have been substantially redesigned and it's well worth seeing.



Cloth Hall, Ypres



15.00 leave for Zonnebeke Château

Zonnebeke Chateau is situated in the centre of Zonnebeke, about 3 kilometres from Tyne Cot Military Cemetery, the largest British and Commonwealth cemetery in the world. It houses the Passchendaele Memorial Museum, which incorporates a detailed trench reconstruction and a 20-foot deep dugout with head quarters, accommodation, workshop, communication room and first aid post.



Passchendaele Memorial Museum

16.15 Leave for Arras

18.00 arrive back in Arras for free evening. Optional visit to Arras Memorial to the Missing, where Hearts player John Allan is commemorated.

Thursday 3 July

08.00 rise and pack. Free morning in Arras.

13.00 depart Arras by coach to return to London King's Cross.

18.00 depart King's Cross for Edinburgh.

22.28 arrive Waverley Station.

