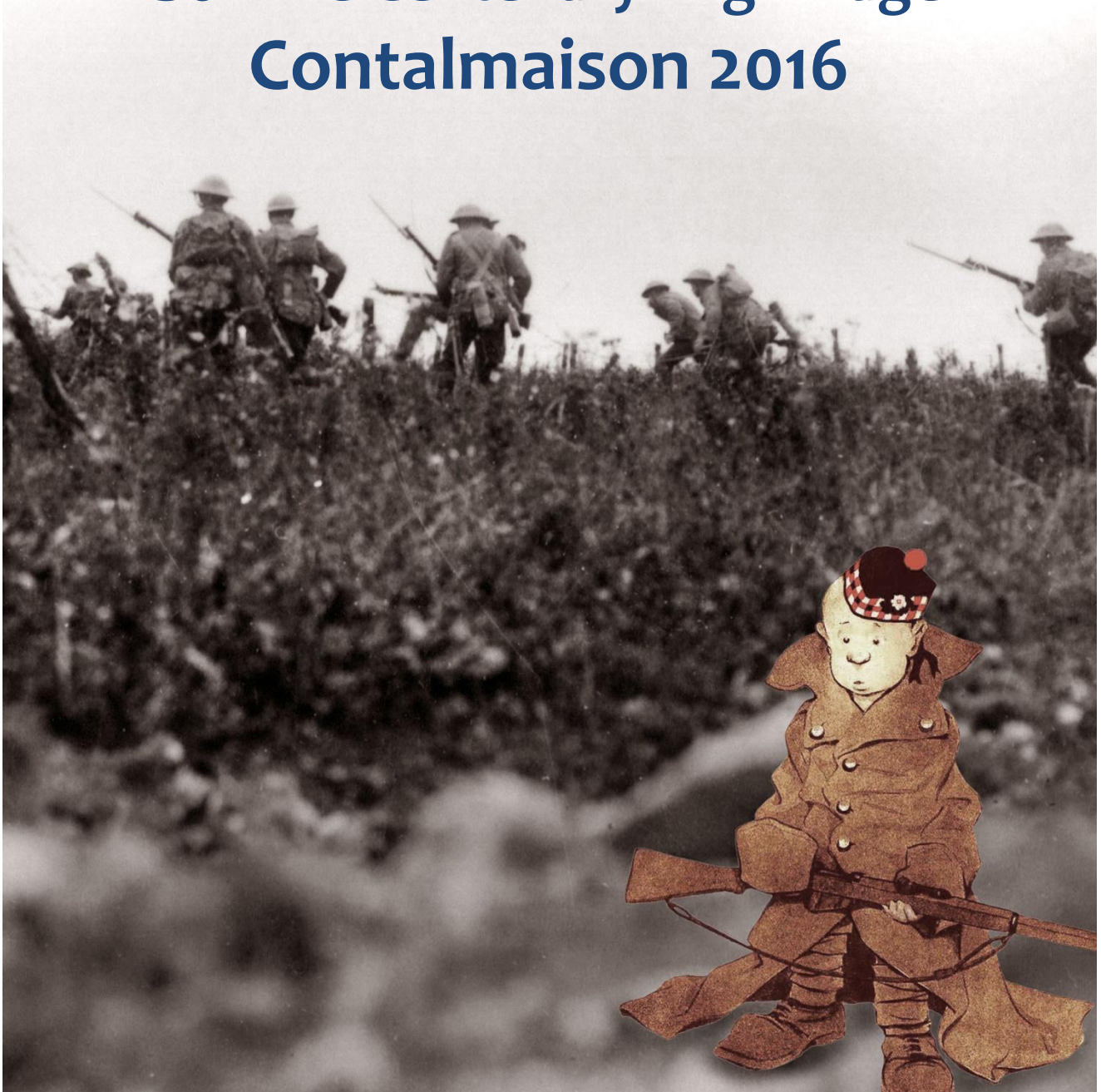




McCrae's Battalion Trust

Somme Centenary Pilgrimage

Contalmaison 2016



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 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 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 monument 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' and has already become a distinctive Scottish presence on the Western Front.

1 July 2016 will be particularly poignant – one hundred years to the day that McCrae's Battalion was destroyed. Up and down the old front line – from Gommecourt to Montauban – thousands of pilgrims will gather to pay their respects to the men of the Third and Fourth Armies. Eight thousand tickets have been allotted for the village of Thiepval alone – an unprecedented challenge for the fragile local road network. McCrae's Battalion Trust has been planning our participation for several years and has secured excellent accommodation with our friends at the Holiday Inn Express, right in the centre of the beautiful city of Arras. This year we'll be spending four nights there, so you'll have plenty time to explore.

The future of Remembrance lies with the young (as we never tire of pointing out), so we're pleased to announce that a number of Scottish sixth-year students will again join our travelling band. As usual, West Calder High School are to the fore, and they'll be joined again by students from Falkirk and by a group of (almost equally) young soldiers from the Personnel Recovery Unit 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. 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



ITINERARY

Wednesday 29 June

08.15 assemble Waterloo Place, where two executive coaches from Abbot Travel will be parked on the eastbound carriageway with the McCrae's Battalion Trust crest in the front window. You will already have been allocated a coach and they will be clearly identified by number. Couriers from MBT will be onboard both vehicles throughout the trip.

08.45 leave Edinburgh for Ramsgate with ample rest stops *en route*, including a longer break for lunch. Our first night will be a free evening, spent in the Holiday Inn, near the picturesque town of Minster. It's a comfortable, well-appointed establishment with its own bar.

Thursday 30 June

08.45 board coaches.

09.00 leave hotel for Folkestone and Eurotunnel. Adjust watches (forward one hour).

12.30 arrive Calais.

14.00 (approximately) arrive Holiday Inn Express, Arras (breakfasts inclusive). Check-in and allocation of rooms is followed by a free afternoon and evening in the town. For those of you who haven't visited Arras before, you'll find a multitude of excellent bars, restaurants and shops. Arras is built on 10th Century limestone quarries and it's possible to circumnavigate the honeycomb of cellars in a popular guided tour. Climb to the top of the *Beffroi* (the belfry of the Town Hall) for a panoramic view of the town and the surrounding area.



Arras Memorial

Hearts players John Allan and David Philip are commemorated here.



Friday 1 July
CONTALMAISON CEREMONY

06.45 board coaches.

07.00 *sharp* depart hotel for Contalmaison.

Please note that on this morning of mornings it will not be possible to wait for stragglers. The coaches will depart at the stated time.

09.00 ceremony begins, followed by laying of tributes at the Contalmaison Village Memorial and at the memorial to 2/Lt Donald Bell, the first professional footballer to be awarded the V.C.

12.00 Thiepval Ceremony of Remembrance begins. We have arranged for screens to be erected to watch this historic event, which takes place in the presence of Queen Elizabeth and representatives of the governments of all countries whose soldiers fought on the battlefields of the Somme. Light refreshments will be provided during the programme.

13.30 (approximately) board coaches for Albert for a free afternoon. The Royal Scots Association Pipe Band will be playing in the town centre during the afternoon and this will be an opportunity to support them and soak up some of the commemorative atmosphere in this friendly little town.

17.00 board coaches for the short drive to *Le Tommy*, the world-famous restaurant and café in the front-line village of Pozières. *Le Tommy* is owned by the irrepressible Dominique Zanardi, whom we've asked to host a grand Scottish evening in honour of McCrae's. There will be food and drink in abundance along with entertainment from Craig Herbertson and Ed Westerdale. Entry is by ticket only. If you are on one of our coaches, the price is included in the overall cost of the trip. Applications from independent travelers are welcome. Please contact Jack through our website: www.mccraesbattaliontrust.org.uk



Dominique's trenches



20.30 (approximately) board coaches and head to Arras for free evening.



Saturday 2 July
SOMME BATTLEFIELD TOUR DAY

09.00 depart Arras for Contalmaison

The village of Contalmaison was a key strongpoint in the rear of the German first-line position in front of Albert. Contalmaison finally fell on 10 July. Four days earlier the 12th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment was all but wiped out attempting to take Quadrangle Trench, which guarded the southern approaches to the village. A handsome stone memorial in Contalmaison Municipal Cemetery commemorates this attack and we'll be paying it a visit to hear more of the story. We'll also walk up to Contalmaison Chateau Cemetery, which was used as a dressing station in 1916 by both the Germans and the liberating Allies.



Leaving Contalmaison behind, we'll then move on to the German Cemetery at Fricourt for a short ceremony to commemorate a brave and stubborn enemy. The young German soldiers who served and died on the Somme had no more wish to be there than our lads. We should remember them as well.

David Petersen's stunning dragon (left) awaits us at Mametz Wood, where the Welsh Division took part in a series of costly attacks in July 1916. The dragon first appeared in 1987 with a little help from the Western Front Association. He (or perhaps she) remains just about the most striking memorial in the whole of France and Flanders.



We also plan to visit the village of Flers, where a fine marble obelisk commemorating Clapton Orient's contribution to the English Footballers Battalion was erected in 2011. We'll stop for lunch at Péronne for a couple of hours. There are several nice pubs, *cafés* and restaurants – and you'll have the option of visiting the Museum of the Great War in the fortified *Historial* building near the town centre. MBT have been there before, but the displays have been substantially altered and extended over the past couple of years. Of particular interest is the extensive collection of drawings by the German artist, Otto Dix, depicting the grim reality of life in the trenches. Any British front-line soldier would recognise the images immediately.



Thiepval Memorial

After lunch we'll visit Gordon Dump Cemetery (where most of the McCrae's lads are buried) and the brooding Thiepval Memorial to the Missing (where most of the unidentified burials are commemorated).

18.00 (approximately) board coaches and head back to Arras for free evening.



3 July
FLANDERS BATTLEFIELD TOUR DAY

09.00 depart Arras for Ypres



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 recently undergone a major refurbishment in time for the centenaries. Most of the galleries have been substantially redesigned and it's well worth seeing. You'll also want to visit the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, which commemorates nearly 55,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Salient between 1914 and 1917.

En route to Ypres (where we'll have lunch and a free afternoon) we'll visit



Black Watch Corner to see Alan Herriot's sculpture commemorating nearly ten thousand officers and other ranks of the Black Watch regiment who gave their lives in the war. Popular demand sees us return to Tyne Cot, the largest Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in the world. Tyne Cot Memorial is an extension of the Menin Gate and incorporates panels commemorating 35,000 officers and men who died in the Salient after 16 August 1917. Panoramas in the recently completed visitor centre offer a rare opportunity to stand on the ground occupied by the Germans and see the features that they saw during the war.



17.00 (approximately) board coaches and head to Arras for free evening.

Monday 4 July

08.00 rise and pack.

09.00 depart Arras by coach to return to UK via Channel Tunnel. On arrival in UK adjust watches back one hour. There will be regular comfort stops during the return journey and a longer break for lunch.

20.30 arrive Waterloo Place, Edinburgh.

We hope you'll enjoy your trip with us and that you'll consider joining us again in the future. And thank you for coming. We couldn't do it without you!

**Trustees of McCrae's Battalion Trust
December 2015**

VERY IMPORTANT STUFF

Remember that for the duration of the pilgrimage we expect everyone be on the coach at the appointed hour. And on 1 July logistic imperatives mean that it will not be possible to delay the coaches for anyone (without exception) for even a short time.

