THE GREAT WAR CENTENARY

in Flanders

2014-18
The Great War Centenary
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
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.” •
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 (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 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.”

“Treasure your empathy and treasure peace”

Rudi Vranckx
member of the Protection Committee
THEIR NAME LIVE FOR EVERMORE
“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.”
“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.2014-18.be.
“Mijmeringen van de Menenpoort (Musings at the Menin Gate) was the title of the project organised to solemnly celebrate the thirty-thousandth edition of the Last Post ceremony in Ypres on 9 July 2015. This was done, among other methods, by telling personal stories about the names on the Menin Gate over one whole year. In addition, the Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs provided the international contacts, to ensure that the ceremonies in different locations abroad could be organised and broadcasted”, says Tinne Jacobs, Deputy Coordinator. “This is just one of the many First World War initiatives taken care of by the Project Office. We consider it important to not just take charge of the coordination, but to also help flesh out the project in terms of content.”

“The same department also assisted the non-profit organisation Talbot House with the **International Commemoration of 100 Years of Talbot House** project. It will receive a great deal of attention in Poperinge and London in the autumn of 2015. And throughout 2015 the department is supporting the Dutch organisation De Jazz van het Bankroet, helping it produce a history documentary about Belgian refugees in the Netherlands during the First World War.”

“In 2014, the department entered into cooperation with the non-profit organisation Scriptie for the organisation of the award **Scriptieprijs 100 jaar Groote Oorlog**. During a period of five years, running from 2014 through 2018, this award will turn the spotlight on bachelor and master theses about the First World War and reward the best ones. A special website has been designed for this purpose.”
“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. This is nicely illustrated by the peace hymn composed by Jef Neve, Dirk Brossé and Frederik Sioen at the request of the Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs. This piece of music was premiered at Flagey on 21 April 2015. After that, international performances will be held throughout the commemoration period. Each performance will link up with the international commemoration agenda and Flanders’ priorities in this context.”

“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.

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.

On 11 November 2013, a special Last Post ceremony was held, in the presence of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and Prince Laurent of Belgium, during which the sandbags were taken to the Menin Gate and symbolically handed over to the British army. They were then transported on a Belgian frigate to London, where they will be the central feature of the first Memorial Garden. This garden will be created at Wellington Barracks alongside the Guards Chapel which is adjacent to Buckingham Palace. The Guards Museum acts as British partner and will maintain the garden.

Discussions are currently underway with Australia about the inauguration in 2017 of a memorial garden in Canberra next to the Australian War Memorial, to mark the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele.

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The Trench of Death, Diksmuide
“An inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List 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 Grote 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.”

“The study Herinneringspark 2014-18 (Remembrance Park 2014-18) is very valuable as well. It was presented in 2012 and formulates a vision on the Westhoek region, which allows for the war past to ‘resurface’ in a consistent manner. This implies installing clear signs, improving the accessibility of
and interconnection between sites, or enhancing the readability of sites so that visitors, who are most certainly not always historical experts, can learn a great deal from it. Together with the Dutch-Belgian Group Park 14-18 and local actors we have been working on this master plan for provinces and municipalities for one whole year.”

“Currently, the dossier that will be submitted for recognition as UNESCO World Heritage constitutes the core of our activities. 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 2017. 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.”

Menin Gate, Ypres
PRIVATE H.W.J.
ABBOTT J.H.
ACKERMANN A.J.
AINSCOUGH M.J.
ALDER A.N.
ALLEN J.H.
ANDERSON E.C.
ASHWORTH E.A.
LOADER D.
LOTTS G.L.
LYNN W.
LEIGHTON W.J.
LOVETT A.N.
the great war centenary
“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

“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
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 FARO has organised study days and a series of workshops on 100 jaar Groote Oorlog – Erfgoed, herdenking, herinnering (The Great War Centenary – Heritage, Commemoration, Remembrance).’ After the first commemoration year, in 2015 there followed a roundtable meeting to evaluate the previous actions and look ahead to future activities. One of those resulting activities is a study day in December 2015, aimed at bringing academic researchers and cultural heritage workers closer together.”

“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, together with various cultural heritage partners, is implementing the ‘News of the Great War’ project. This important project involves digitising the Belgian press, including trench papers and pamphlets, from the First World War.”

“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

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 Groote 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
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. “War tourism and remembrance have 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. 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. Baseline measurements have already been carried out, for instance of the current, international renown of Flanders and Flanders Fields as a destination for WWI tourism and of the number of visitors there. We will resume these measurements during and at the end of the five-year period in order to be able to monitor developments and to outline, in 2019, the impact of the resources invested by Flemish society in this commemoration.”

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

In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
renovated and extended In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, the renovated and extended Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 where special attention is devoted to the disastrous Battle of Passchendaele, the refurbished Talbot House and the reinforced Lyssenthoek Cemetery in Poperinge, the renovated Yser Tower Museum in Diksmuide and the recently inaugurated 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

“An elaborated 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 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. Some projects focused on the German invasion and the Martyr Towns - we refer in this context to the exhibition Ravaged in Leuven - whereas others concentrated on the siege of Antwerp, which was commemorated with the installation of a pontoon bridge across the Scheldt. The city also devoted increased attention to ‘14-18’, for instance through the organisation of an exhibition at the Fotomuseum on the use of photography during the First World War. Other cities also staged historical and art exhibitions, like the large-scale exhibition 14-18. It’s Our History! at the Royal Museum of the Army and of Military History in Brussels.”

“Focus is placed not just on the manoeuvre war, but also on the trench war. In October 2014, the entire front line was marked by people carrying torches over a total length of 84 kilometres. This project was called Lichtfront ’14 (The Light Front). Concerts and re-enactments are also planned to commemorate the Christmas truces of 1914. 1000 Voices for Peace was another wonderful project that truly captured the public imagination. Choirs from fifteen countries that fought in the war joined with over twenty Belgian choirs, culminating in a concert at the Brussels National Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Koekelberg, where all these voices jointly sang about the commemoration, but above all about peace.’ In 2015 there was global interest in the 30,000th Last Post – the ceremony that takes place every evening under the Menin Gate in Ypres.”

Spread the word

“With 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. All over the world Visit Flanders representatives are committed on a daily basis to informing the professional travel sector
the great war centenary
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.”

“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 65,000 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.”

“On the digital level we have also designed an application with poppies, a symbol which we definitely had to and wanted to use. In the application we invite interested people to commemorate a specific war victim. This may be a family member or acquaintance, but also someone from the Name List of the In Flanders Fields Museum which mentions all the casualties of the Great War in Belgium, including citizens, soldiers, fellow countrymen and foreigners. You virtually plant a poppy for this specific person from where you live, and a poppy symbol will then appear on a world map. This map demonstrates the international character of the war, and of the commemoration. The slogan is: Join us in creating a worldwide poppy field.”

“Another action is The Flanders Fields Post, an English-language one-off newspaper which we distributed exactly 100 years after the outbreak of the First World War in 115,000 copies around the UK, Ireland and Canada. This and other actions should ensure that Flanders Fields remains on the radar of everyone who feels drawn to the history of and many personal stories from the First World War, for the entire commemoration period.”

“Since I have been participating in Visit Flanders commemorative project, I have been moved by something almost every day. We knew from the very start 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. Who knows how long it will take before we remember this episode like we remember the Battle of Waterloo? 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.”
“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, for instance, which is an international symbol of gratitude. Our agency has turned the spotlight on it by sowing poppy fields. By 2015 there were more than 60 hectares, spread over the five provinces
of Flanders. Of those 60 hectares, 20 were sown by towns and municipalities that wanted to join in the initiative. We are planning to sow even more fields every year until 2018, and we are also organising poppy bike trails along the flourishing fields. In doing this we want to really turn Flanders Fields into the place ‘where the poppies blow’.

“We are also shining the spotlight on other areas. The park De Drie Fonteinen in Vilvoorde is one of our seven core areas. From Polygon Wood to the Mastenbos and the Mechelse Heide, from the Galgebossen to the Praatbos: they all have a specific relationship with the war and tell many different stories. If they weren’t being used as military training grounds or as theatres of war, they were popular clearance or hiding places.”

“In 2015 De Drie Fonteinen was the place to be. Exactly 100 years earlier, the German governor-general Moritz Von Bissing took up residence in it. Until his death, he ran the German administration of occupied Belgium from De Drie Fonteinen. Ironically, in another corner of the park the Americans were organising food aid for the needy population. That piece of park was therefore ‘neutral’ ground in the middle of a country at war. In 2015, walks through the park and exhibitions at the Ruiterijcomplex commemorated this incredibly evocative period. Together, these histories are a sample of stories that reveal the relationship between forests, nature and landscape and the First World War, as well as the people at and behind the front. I really like searching for these stories, not just because I am a history freak myself, but also because they provide a whole new angle to the ‘14-’18 theme.”

Mine Crater,
Hollandse Schuur,
Wijtschate (Heuvelland)
Mothers are extremely practical and can make small change go a very long way. Without them we would never survive, because there’s so little to eat and it all costs a fortune,” August Van den Neste said in Eeklo in 1917.

The quest for food was a problem suffered by the Belgian population throughout the war. The occupation hindered the work of farmers, bakers and fishermen. The chronic shortage of food and drink made the horror of the war even worse. In April 2015 the travelling exhibition Boter bij de vis came to the Hopmuseum in Poperinge, and it will make its way through the Flemish provinces in 2016 and beyond. Even to the less ‘traditional’ regions of remembrance. You can find the full programme at boterbijdeviswo1.be.

Visitors are learning about everyday life in the First World War from this new perspective. The central themes are the difficult food situation and the creativity of the Belgian population. The partners receiving the travelling show – which mainly tells a general story – are also adding to it with more local, regional or themed content. There is a special focus on children aged 10 to 14. During their visit to the expo, thanks to the educational package on offer, they gradually discover what their lives would have been like during the First World War and they write about it in their own personal diaries. Their diary immediately becomes a souvenir of the expo that they can take home with them.

And the website www.boterbijdeviswo1.be, themed around agriculture and food, remains the anchor for the remembrance project. New contributions will be added at regular intervals to the stories of famine, food supply and wartime cuisine. Supporting this part of the remembrance project, and providing the basis for it, is scientific research commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and conducted by the Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History (ICAG) at KU Leuven.

Every year the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History (ICAG) at KU Leuven and heritage partner the Centre for Agrarian History (CAG) hold a contact day – a time for the general public to encounter and be inspired by tales of farming and food during the First World War. This day is always in the autumn. You can find more information about previous and upcoming contact days at www.boterbijdeviswo1.be.
As a result of the WWI centenary commemorations, farmers are increasingly being asked by visitors and customers about the First World War. This makes them curious to find out about the history of their own livestock and region, and then disclose it to the general public. The farmers know lots of interesting stories told by previous generations that are well worth passing on. But they do not have sufficient supporting information and methodologies for conducting research. Farmers from West Flanders interested in diversification were assisted in reconstructing their own stories via the ‘WOI op ‘t erf’ project. They were given a tailor-made, practical research tool; supported in their search via workshops; and encouraged to pass their stories on to the general public. You can find the accompanying guide at http://www.boterbijdeviswo1.be/over-ons/project-woi-op-t-erf.

The farmers want to use the results as a diversification activity – making the fascinating history of agriculture more visible to the general public. The objective was to make farmers more aware of their own valuable historical patrimony. The intention is to roll out the project further to farmers in other regions of Flanders.

Every year, pupils from the Vrij Agro- en Biotechnisch Instituut agricultural school in Roeselare work on a specific theme about the First World War. As part of the Molsla project, they went in search of the forgotten vegetables that people grew and ate in the Great War in order to survive. They discovered the accompanying family recipes, memories and stories. This was a way of getting them to think creatively about the major impact the First World War had on daily life. The schoolchildren were supported in their research by experts from the CAG and ICAG, and various other specialists from the agricultural industry. For the farm owners of tomorrow, it is particularly instructive to hear that both Michelin-starred chefs and the general public are interested in these forgotten vegetables and the context in which they were used during the First World War. But it doesn’t stop there: in partnership with the West Flanders Chamber Of Commerce and Industry, the children are learning how that produce can be brought to market in a creative way. The destruction of farms during the First World War, and how they were rebuilt afterwards, is the next theme they will be studying. They will again be supported in this by the CAG, ICAG and other experts.
“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.”

Elias Van Quickelborne, Agency for Maritime Services and Coast
“The First World War should be anchored in our collective memory and therefore also in our collective consciousness,” says Mark De Geest, coordinator of the VRT (Flemish Public Broadcaster) project 2014-18 De Grote Oorlog – 100 jaar later (2014-18 The Great War – 100 Years On). “For this reason we want to inform our audience about it by means of reports and documentaries, projects in the news and on our websites, and also via valuable entertainment, such as a fascinating fictional story. As the public broadcaster we see it as our job to devote substantial attention to this important chapter in our history. Now we are a hundred years on from the Great War, the VRT believes it has a duty to play a leading role in the commemoration of it.”

“In the run-up to the centenary commemoration of the First World War, we worked hard on the digital archiving and unlocking of historical interviews with veterans and other direct witnesses. As early as 2009 we started interviewing over one hundred very old Flemish people about their childhood during the Great War. De Allerlaatste Getuigen (The Very Last Witnesses) – the resulting six-part documentary – was rebroadcasted in 2014. The annual live broadcast of the Last Post ceremony in Ypres on Armistice Day is another important moment to draw attention to the war and to “revive” the message of peace and international solidarity.”

“Arnout Houben made a documentary series entitled Ten Oorlog (At War), about his 1,500-km hike along the western front line, which appealed to a striking number of young viewers. The prestigious drama series In Vlaamse Velden (In Flanders Fields) – the ten-part story of a Ghent family trying to survive during the war – drew high viewing figures on channel Eén, while Canvas presented the four-part series Brave Little Belgium, in which historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver explained the course and impact of the war in Belgium from the sites where the historical events took place.”

“Both In Vlaamse Velden and Brave Little Belgium are of vital importance to us in offering the general public an insight into questions like: what does war do to people and a community? And perhaps: how can we prevent it from happening again? As director of this documentary series, visiting some of the historic war sites was very moving and made a huge impression on me, from Fort Loncin in Liège to the Belgian cemetery at the refugee camp...”
in Nunspeet, the Netherlands. The aim of Brave Little Belgium is to share this emotional experience and atmosphere with the viewer.”

“The First World War was the subject of many other TV and radio programmes, and the various websites also devoted a lot of attention to this theme. Radio 2 broadcasted Café Cuba, a prestigious 45-part radio play. Canvas showed 12 short animated films entitled 12 minuten voor Vrede (12 Minutes for Peace) – a reflection on the First World War; and Ketnet looked at the war through the eyes of young viewers in Kleine Handen in een Grote Oorlog (Little Hands in a Big War). In addition to countless reports on the news, the VRT news created a very detailed and informative offer via www.deredactie.be.”

“In 2014 the VRT broadcasted live commemoration ceremonies from Liège, Mons, Nieuwpoort and Ypres. With the support of more than 8,000 volunteers, Lichtfront (The Light Front) became a poetic and highly memorable TV experience. The live broadcast of the 30,000th Last Post ceremony in 2015 brought the whole world a ‘Tribute to the tribute’, with Ypres linked up to broadcasters in Germany, France, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and India.”

“In the commemorations of the First World War, in recent years the VRT has unmistakably helped to inform the public about the historic events that unfolded 100 years ago and reflect on what that period means for our country even now. The broadcaster is committed to continuing that task with the same ambition in the years to come.”
“Let us break down walls”

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

“Maybe mathematical patterns can be found in war strategies. During religious instruction 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. That is why the Minister for Education ordered the CANON Cultural Unit in 2013 to bundle together the best initiatives. This has resulted in a brochure, entitled 100 jaar Groote Oorlog herdenken in de klas (Commemorating the Great War Centenary in the classroom), which was compiled in 2014. Up-to-date information is available at www.cultuurkuur.be.”

“It not only contains actions, events and calls on the occasion of the Great War Centenary commemoration, but also provides background information and tools for adopting a quality approach to the commemoration in the classroom.”

“The brochure also contains ten tips and plenty of inspiring examples of good practice. We always use an appreciative tone, since the education sector already conceives and realises so many ideas and we want to share the most successful ones. The problem is that Flemish people still too often tend to do things all by themselves, whereas it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel time and time again. Let yourselves be inspired by each other and do not be afraid to pick up some ideas from your colleagues.”

“We also show that you need not necessarily visit the Westhoek region to commemorate the First World War, because a lot of initiatives are organised in your own neighbourhood. We present books that may serve as background information for teachers, as well as children’s and youth books about this theme. This list will be updated in the 2015 edition. The CANON Cultural Unit primarily wants to act as a conduit and a filter. A steering group of teachers tells us what they like and what is still lacking.”

“We also bring trainee teachers together and disseminate the materials they have gathered on this theme. We think along with them on how they can use archives and sources, how VIAA’s TESTBEELD can help them with this, how to make voice-overs for interesting
fragments, and how to unlock information on the website www.ingebeeld.be. Interested parties can find more information on this website about this type of projects: for pupils of primary and secondary education, and even for pre-schoolers."

“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. This theme can be approached from so many different angles, and it would be a missed opportunity if we failed to do so. 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.”
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 CultuurNet Vlaanderen’s UiTDatabank and which are thus also available through many other public-oriented channels.”

“The public-oriented website also includes news items and background information regarding the commemoration and, because of the international nature of the commemoration project, it is available in four languages: in Dutch, French, German and English. The website’s concept is interactive, with articles that can be recommended and shared on Facebook and Twitter and it includes a forum where people who are interested in the Great War and the commemoration project of the Flemish authorities can communicate.”
“Every village and every town in Flanders has its history and its link with the Great War”, says Tinne Jacobs, assistant coordinator of the Project Office. “Therefore, it is The Great War Centenary project’s intention to organise a commemoration that enjoys wide support, with Flemish initiatives as well as smaller, local, initiatives.”

“After the war, memorials, remembrance sites or museums were created in almost every Flemish municipality where fighting took place and victims rest in many municipal cemeteries. These local events, the heritage and the memory of these local occurrences remain relevant and valuable to this very day.”

“West Flanders is actively engaged in this remembrance. At the level of the province, a policy steering group is active and in cooperation with Westtoer, a programme office has been created which has its seat in Diksmuide. With a budget of five million euros, the war heritage has to be opened up to cultural tourism. In addition, the province develops a cultural programme each remembrance year which includes several events under the denominator Gone West. These programmes will last several weeks and will take place during the period of important historical commemorative moments.”

“But battles were fought in other provinces as well, and many towns and municipalities will commemorate their history of the Great War. In the province of Antwerp, a project team worked on the commemoration within the framework of the European project The Great War between the lines. The province of Limburg is bundling its programme under the denominator Limburg 1914-1918: small stories in a Great War and Flemish Brabant is developing a project called The Great War in the Brabantse Kouters. When life was survival. In East Flanders, the Heritage units Meetjesland and Leie-Schelde pay particular attention to the theme of the Dodendraad (Wire of Death).”

“As part of the network of Martyr Cities, the towns of Aarschot, Dendermonde and Leuven, in cooperation with the Walloon towns of Andenne, Dinant, Sambreville and Visé, develop a joint programme to commemorate the first days of the Great War. Local and regional actors also contribute to this.”

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

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