



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2016-0102 | 5 May 2016

Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Westminster Hall
Tuesday 10 May 2016
1.30pm to 3.00pm
Debate Initiated by Keith Simpson

The proceedings of this debate may be viewed on Parliamentlive.tv

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1. Press articles

The following is a small selection of recent press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

New Straits Times

[A shame cemetery is left to 'rot'](#)

Leslie Andres

1 May 2016

BBC News

[Lost WW2 bomber crews remembered in German service](#)

27 April 2016

The Times (subscription required)

[British war graves left to crumble in the dust](#)

25 April 2016

Martin Fletcher

Daily Express

[Veterans' families furious as graves of British WWI heroes left to rot](#)

25 April 2016

Mail Online

[Finally, a farewell for six fallen heroes: British soldiers killed during WWI – including a milkman who joined as volunteer when the war broke out – are buried after lost remains are found](#)

Simon Tomlinson

20 April 2016

Centenary News

[Actor Hugh Dennis joins CWGC call to remember war dead commemorated in UK](#)

13 April 2016

Daily Express

[Outrage as First World War headstones trashed in sickening attack](#)

26 February 2016

The Independent

Are faith-specific war memorials the best way to remember the fallen?

Santanu Das

9 November 2015

BBC News

Inquiry into British war graves attack in Libya delayed

12 February 2015

Myanmar Times

Mogok residents urge upkeep of historic British war cemetery

Si Thu Lwin

19 January 2015

2. PQs

Communities and Local Government: Grants

22 Mar 2016 | 31665

Asked by: Colleen Fletcher

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 March 2016 to Question 30411, on grants, to which 45 bodies his Department has provided grant funding under the Charities Act 2011 during the financial year 2015-16.

Answering member: Brandon Lewis | Department for Communities and Local Government

The Information requested is given in the table below

Beneficiary list for s70 Grants

[...]

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

[...]

Business of the House Subject: Pensions; Commonwealth War Graves Commission

17 Mar 2016 | 607 c1106

Asked by: Chris Stephens

The Leader of the House wrote to me on 24 February about the pension fund of employees of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and he said that no final decision had been made. In the Adjournment debate on 29 February, the Minister said that the final decision had been made in September. Will the Leader of the House say why he gave such inaccurate information?

Answering member: Chris Grayling | Leader of the House

I would not have made that comment without having been told that that was the case by the Ministry of Defence, and I will ask it to respond to the hon. Gentleman.

World War I: Anniversaries

02 Mar 2016 | 28090

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans the Government has to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli.

Answering member: David Evennett | Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The two national events that marked the centenary of the battle of Gallipoli on 24th and 25th April 2015, were key commemorative events in the centenary programme.

The first, a UK-led Commonwealth and Ireland Ceremony was held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Helles Memorial in Turkey on 24 April 2015, the eve of the centenary of the Gallipoli landings. This event was attended by The Prince of Wales, accompanied by Prince Harry, senior representatives of the nations involved in the Gallipoli Campaign and descendants. The Prince of Wales met with descendants on board the Royal Navy's ship HMS Bulwark.

The second, on Anzac Day, was held at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. This National Service of Commemoration event was attended by Her Majesty The Queen, senior representatives of the participant nations, and around 2500 descendants, included wreath-laying and a march past the Cenotaph led by military personnel.

Business of the House

10 Dec 2015 | 603 c1160

Asked by: Chris Stephens

The Leader of the House will recall that on 29 October I raised the issue of the abolition of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission pension scheme and the concerns that many hon. Members have. Despite his assurances, we have heard nothing since from the Government. Will the Government make a statement and inform Members what discussions and decisions have been made on the matter?

Answering member: Chris Grayling | Leader of the House

I always seek to follow up issues raised with Departments. If we have not had a response, I will make sure I chase up again today and get a proper response for the hon. Gentleman.

War Graves

04 Nov 2015 | 14259

Asked by: Tom Brake

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make it his policy to transfer responsibility for military graves maintained by his Department to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

Discussions between Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) are continuing regarding the transfer of maintenance responsibility for the graves of military personnel buried in the UK since 1948.

Annual costs for the maintenance of each grave for which MOD is responsible are estimated to be between £65 and £205 depending on the location and condition of the grave. The MOD's annual grant to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in respect of the graves they maintain is in excess of £47 million.

War Graves

04 Nov 2015 | 14258

Asked by: Tom Brake

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on transferring to that Commission responsibility for the maintenance of military graves currently maintained by his Department.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

Discussions between Ministry Of Defence (MOD) and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) are continuing regarding the transfer of maintenance responsibility for the graves of military personnel buried in the UK since 1948.

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War Graves

04 Nov 2015 | 14257

Asked by: Tom Brake

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate he has made of the annual average cost to the Ministry of Defence of (a) maintaining each grave for which it is responsible and (b) the value of the grant made to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in respect of each grave maintained by that Commission.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

Discussions between Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) are continuing regarding the transfer of maintenance responsibility for the graves of military personnel buried in the UK since 1948.

Annual costs for the maintenance of each grave for which MOD is responsible are estimated to be between £65 and £205 depending on the location and condition of the grave. The MOD's annual grant to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in respect of the graves they maintain is in excess of £47 million.

Business of the House

29 Oct 2015 | 601 c517

Asked by: Chris Stephens

Will the Government make a statement or have a debate in Government time on employees' pensions in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission? The Leader of the House will know that the commission made a decision to close the final salary scheme in December 2014, but only started consultation with trade unions in June this year. Does he agree that commission staff are working harder than

ever due to the centenary commemorations, and that cutting their pensions while the director general gets a 50% pay rise is completely and utterly inappropriate?

Answering member: Chris Grayling | Leader of the House

I understand the point the hon. Gentleman is making. A whole range of organisations have had to take difficult decisions about final salary pensions, given the very welcome—but challenging for pension fund trustees—increase in life expectancy. I will make sure that the concerns he raises are passed on to my ministerial colleagues.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Pensions
28 Oct 2015 | 13202

Asked by: Vernon Coaker

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress his Department has made on resolving the dispute between the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and its employees on that body's pension scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is a Royal Charter body and while we were consulted and in agreement with the Commission's approach, its pension arrangements are ultimately a matter for the Commission's senior management and the Trustees of the scheme. I understand the Commission has proposed the closure of its defined benefit pension scheme to future accrual in the face of rising costs. Following a period of consultation, the Commission is now considering the range of responses received but no decision has yet been taken.

World War I: Anniversaries
22 Oct 2015 | 901737

Asked by: James Berry

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans his Department has to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of the Somme.

Answering member: Tracey Crouch | Department for Culture, Media and Sport

A UK national commemorative event will take place on 1 July at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme in France. This is a free ticketed event - the public ballot for tickets opened in September and will run until 18 November. There will be a daily service of remembrance at Thiepval on each of the 141 days of the Battle and a wide programme of events in the UK. Manchester will play a key role in this and I will announce further details shortly.

World War I: Anniversaries

01 Oct 2015 | 8381

Asked by: David Mackintosh

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what further steps his Department is taking to commemorate the First World War centenary leading up to 2018.

Answering member: Tracey Crouch | Department for Culture, Media and Sport

A national commemorative event will be held on 31 May 2016 to mark the Battle of Jutland and the wider war at sea.

There will be a national commemorative event to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme at the Thiepval Memorial in Northern France on 1 July 2016. The Government is working with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on a £1.6m refurbishment of the Monument to ensure that it endures for future generations and on a lighting installation that will see the Monument lit from 1 July 2016. In addition we are working with partners to encourage Somme commemorative activity across the UK.

There will also be national events to commemorate the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in 2017 and the end of the conflict in 2018.

In addition Government will continue with established programmes for the conservation, repair and protection of War Memorials; the Cathedral Repairs Fund; Schools Battlefield Tours; and the laying of commemorative paving stones and the restoration of graves of Victoria Cross recipients buried in the UK.

The poppies sculptures 'Wave' and 'Weeping Window' will go to locations throughout the UK starting with the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Woodhorn Museum and Northumberland Archives, and St George's Hall, Liverpool.

There will be a series of school debates beginning next year to look at the causes, conduct and consequences of the War.

We encourage local communities to get involved in commemorating First World War events. Heritage Lottery Fund has recently made available an extra £4m for communities to explore, conserve and share local heritage of the First World War to ensure that these projects can continue throughout the centenary period.

World War I: Anniversaries

13 Jul 2015 | 6009

Asked by: Dan Jarvis

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to publicise the ballot for 8,000 free tickets to the ceremony to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme in July 2016.

Answering member: Tracey Crouch | Department for Culture Media and Sport

Following the Secretary of State's announcement on 1 July, which launched the ballot website to strong press interest, we are looking at a number of further opportunities to raise awareness of the ballot. Leaflets were handed to all those attending the 1 July event this year and are available at the Thiepval Visitor Centre. Our partner organisations, The Royal British Legion and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, are also promoting the information on their websites and through related social media channels.

Communications activity will focus on key points in the period from now until the ballot closes on 18 November. It will involve press announcements and planned coverage in both media and broadcast outlets to highlight the relevance of the battle of the Somme, the upcoming centenary and the ballot arrangements. The communications campaign will be supported by a strong social media presence, under #Somme100, to promote engagement beyond traditional audiences and direct users to the dedicated event website. We will also work closely with our key stakeholders to amplify messaging around the ballot and look to use celebrity endorsement.

Germany: Military Bases
06 Jul 2015 | 4916**Asked by: Kevan Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's plans are for the maintenance of graves of former UK service personnel and their dependents currently in British army bases in Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

There are no military cemeteries for British Service personnel and dependants on British bases in Germany. The Rheindahlen Military Cemetery was transferred to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in 2013. We are in discussions with the CWGC to take over management of the Limmer Military Cemetery later this year.

Gurkhas: War Memorials
23 Mar 2015 | 227893**Asked by: Dan Jarvis**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many and what proportion of Gurkha soldiers who fought in the First and Second World Wars are commemorated on war memorials.

Answering member: Anna Soubry | Ministry of Defence

The information requested is not held, as the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is not responsible for War Memorials. However, the UK National Inventory of War Memorials, maintained by the Imperial War Museum, lists over 50 memorials that are linked to the Gurkhas, including one which is situated outside the MOD headquarters building in Whitehall.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission commemorate all those Gurkhas who died in the two World Wars and the names of those who have died since the end of World War II, whilst on duty, are inscribed upon the Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Libya

09 Feb 2015 | 222954

Asked by: Andrew Stephenson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what reports he has received on progress made by the Libyan authorities on arresting and prosecuting people who desecrated the headstones of British soldiers at Benghazi War Cemetery in February 2012.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government was appalled by the damage to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery and the Benghazi Military Cemetery that occurred in February and June 2012. As soon as UK officials were made aware of the damage, they visited the cemeteries to inspect the damage, and raised the issue with the Libyan authorities in Benghazi and Tripoli. With support from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the site has since been restored to a standard befitting the sacrifice of those commemorated in Benghazi. There is now a patrol and guard outside the cemetery to protect this important site from any further attacks.

However, the authorities are unable to conduct investigations due to the current political and security situation. The attacks appear to have been carried out by extremist individuals, whose motives are unknown. Other religious sites in Libya have also been attacked since 2011, including Islamic sites. The UK is focused on supporting the efforts of Bernardino Leon, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to build a political settlement and establishing a National Unity Government. This will help stabilise the country and help the judicial system to function again.

Libya

09 Feb 2015 | 222953

Asked by: Andrew Stephenson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what progress has been made on repairing desecrated headstones of British soldiers at Benghazi War Cemetery, Libya.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government was appalled by the damage to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery and the Benghazi Military Cemetery that occurred in February and June 2012. As soon as UK officials were made aware of the damage, they visited the cemeteries to inspect the

damage, and raised the issue with the Libyan authorities in Benghazi and Tripoli. With support from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the site has since been restored to a standard befitting the sacrifice of those commemorated in Benghazi. There is now a patrol and guard outside the cemetery to protect this important site from any further attacks.

However, the authorities are unable to conduct investigations due to the current political and security situation. The attacks appear to have been carried out by extremist individuals, whose motives are unknown. Other religious sites in Libya have also been attacked since 2011, including Islamic sites. The UK is focused on supporting the efforts of Bernardino Leon, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to build a political settlement and establishing a National Unity Government. This will help stabilise the country and help the judicial system to function again.

War Graves

04 Feb 2015 | 222360

Asked by: Nigel Dodds

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will discuss with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission measures to safeguard overseas war graves from desecration by Islamist extremists.

Answering member: Anna Soubry | Ministry of Defence

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. It is therefore not practical to expect that all of these sites can be protected from those who, for whatever reason, might seek to damage the graves or memorials. However, in the event of such damage, the Commission will ensure that appropriate repairs are made as soon as is practicably possible.

3. Other Parliamentary material

Debates

Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Pension Fund

29 Feb 2016 | 606 cc786-798

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Lords question for short debate on what assessment they have made of the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

22 Jun 2015 | 762 cc1429-1443

Early Day Motions

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION - SEVERE WEATHER DAMAGE

EDM 1089 (session 2013-14)

Alan Meale

12 February 2014

That this House is aware of the sterling work done by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; notes that the recent inclement weather has had a devastating effect on Britain's communities with many areas damaged by severe flooding and high winds; reminds Ministers that 2014 marks the centenary of the start of the First World War and 75 years since the beginning of the Second World War, which has already placed major burdens on this organisation and its task to look after the many graves in its care throughout both the UK and other parts of the Commonwealth; and requests that the Government responds urgently and positively to this body's needs which are likely to be immense considering the weather damage done.

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

EDM 501 (session 2012-13)

David Simpson

11 September 2011

That this House expresses its thanks to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for its continued work to ensure that 1.7 million people who died in the two world wars will never be forgotten; applauds its care for both cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations, in 153 countries, including the graves of more than 935,000 identified casualties and almost 212,000 unidentified individuals and for its efforts to ensure that the names of almost 760,000 people can be found on memorials to the missing; recognises the vision and determination of its founder Sir Fabian Ware; and reiterates the view expressed by King George V in 1922 when he said 'I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon earth through the years to come than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war'.

4. Further reading

[Commonwealth War Graves Commission webpage](#)

[Commonwealth War graves commission Annual Report 2014-2015](#)

[War graves in the UK: A unique approach to commemoration and care](#), *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, 31 October 2014

[Greg Clark: remember UK war graves too](#), Department for Communities and Local Government, 9 November 2015

[Millions of pounds to support restoration and repair of First World War memorials](#), Gov.uk, 19 December 2013

[QSD on the Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission](#), Lords Briefing pack LBP-2015-0025, 17 June 2015

[Maintaining and funding war memorials](#), Commons Briefing paper CBP-7180, 20 May 2015

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