



CANADA REMEMBERS GUIDE

Commonwealth Cemetery Design

I created the Canada Remembers Guide website because I wanted to help fellow Canadians find our WW1 and WW2 cemeteries and memorials in France and Belgium. On a recent trip to France and Belgium in January 2024 to do research for the website, I visited the In Flanders Field museum in Ieper, Belgium, which had an excellent exhibition about commonwealth war cemeteries. The following contains information from that exhibition, as well as my general observations from the 40+ cemeteries I visited on that trip.



Battlefield vs. Collective Cemeteries

There is a wide range in the size of WW1 Commonwealth cemeteries. Some are tiny battlefield cemeteries, which I find particularly poignant because often the casualties happened in one battle, at that location, over a period of a few days or weeks.

Also, these small battlefield cemeteries are often in quiet, remote areas in the countryside which seem so peaceful now, but must have been incredibly chaotic and frightening at the time. According to the information at the museum, it seems that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission generally left battlefield cemeteries intact if there were more than 40 burials.



Wood Cemetery, Marcelcave, France

Many Commonwealth cemeteries are “collectives”, meaning that bodies were recovered from other cemeteries and from battlefields in the area. In some case, the reinterment occurred because an existing cemetery fell behind enemy lines and was destroyed in subsequent battles. In others, it may have been because the cemeteries had been located on private lands or in a heavily trafficked area. In those case, the Registry at the cemetery will list the number of casualties relocated and from which cemeteries.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

According to the In Flanders Fields Museum , there are more than 200 military cemeteries in West Flanders, which is the region in which Ieper (was Ypres during WW1) is located. Nearly all of those cemeteries are British and, therefore looked after by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).



Architectural Elements

All British military cemeteries contain architectural elements such as an entrance gate, a shelter or a chapel and at least one bench.



Hooze Crater Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium



Cabaret Rouge British Cemetery, Souchez, France



Courcellette British Cemetery, Courcellette, France



Sanctuary Wood Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium

All Commonwealth cemeteries with more than 40 graves have a Cross of Sacrifice, which is freestanding cross on an octagonal base with a bronze sword on the front. According to the In Flanders Field Museum, the Cross of Sacrifice is seen “*not only as a Christian symbol, but also as a universal symbol for sacrifice*”.



Maple Copse Cemetery, Zillebeke, Belgium



Cantimpre Canadian Cemetery, Saille-lez-Cambrai



Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery, Dieppe, France

Cemeteries with more than 1,000 graves have a Stone of Remembrance which says, “THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE”.



Each British cemetery has a Registry and a Visitors Book. Some cemeteries have memorial headstones, which may say “Known to be buried in this cemetery” or “Believed to be buried in this cemetery” if the original grave was destroyed. Landscaping, such as trees, is custom to the area but around the headstones, the plants are low-growing so as to not block the words engraved.

Canadian Memorials

Both Canada's Veterans Affairs and the Canadian War Museum's websites have good descriptions of the battles that took place at the locations where Canadian memorials can be found. The ones at Le Quesnel, Courcellette, Dury and Bourlon Wood in France and at Hill 62 and Passendale in Belgium are in the shape of a large cube, cut from solid granite, with commemorative words on all sides.

The only ones that differ are the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France and the St. Julien "The Brooding Soldier" monument in Belgium



Bourlon Wood Canadian Memorial



National Canadian Vimy Memorial



St. Julien Canadian Memorial

Newfoundland Memorials



Masnières Newfoundland Memorial

Newfoundland was not part of Canada during the first world war and, as such, has its own memorials to its war dead. At Beaumont-Hamel, nearly every man in the regiment was killed in the attack on July 1, 1916. This horrific battle and others nearby are commemorated with a bronze caribou monument. They can be found at Beaumont-Hamel, where there is also a Visitor Centre, intact trenches and Commonwealth cemeteries, and at Gueudecourt, Masnières, and Monchy-le-Preux in France, and at Kortrijk in Belgium.

There are other smaller memorials scattered throughout this area commemorating various regiments, including the 85TH Canadian Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders). Memorial near Passendale, the 2nd BATTLE OF YPRES MEMORIAL at Gravenstafel Ridge, and the 12 memorial plaques at Mont des Cats abbey.



Safe travels, KW.