



Flanders
State of the Art

P R E S S R E L E A S E

World War I monuments and cemeteries included on UNESCO World Heritage List International recognition for a 100-year-old commemorative tradition

On 20 September 2023, at the annual meeting of the World Heritage Committee, 139 cemeteries and memorial sites along the former Western Front of World War I were confirmed as being the latest additions to the UNESCO World Heritage List. They include sites in France, Wallonia and Flanders.

139 outstanding architectural and landscape sites

The nomination consists of 139 sites: 16 in Wallonia, 27 in Flanders and 96 in France. It is a careful selection that pays tribute to all the victims of this conflict, from more than 130 modern-day nations.

The sites are powerful symbols of reconciliation and equality and honour every soldier irrespective of their geographical or social origin. The global dimension of this nomination and the universal message of peace are strikingly timely, given current international events.

A victory after 15 years of effort and cooperation

This prestigious recognition is the result of 15 years of close cooperation between the Flemish, Walloon and French administrations and site managers.

The proposal to include these sites was a result of a strong network between the Flemish Agency for Immovable Heritage, the Walloon Agency for Heritage (AWAP) and the French Association des Sites et Paysages de Mémoire de la Grande Guerre. In addition, several local partners and the main managers of the sites concerned were also closely involved.

For more than 100 years, numerous organisations such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge and the American Battle Monuments Commission have been the guardians of this heritage and will now be recognised by UNESCO.

A message of peace with international resonance

Inclusion on the World Heritage list is positive news for Wallonia, Flanders and France. This heritage also belongs to the more than 130 countries whose fallen soldiers, were given their final resting place here. Visitors from all over the world commemorate their ancestors and find

solace here. The global recognition is a great message of fraternity for the homelands of soldiers originating from all corners of the world.

Flemish Heritage Minister Matthias Diependaele said: *'I am delighted that the World Heritage Committee has placed these cemeteries and WWI commemoration sites on the World Heritage List. These are cemeteries and monuments that bring people from all over the world together to commemorate war victims. In Flanders, for example, the commemoration is a living tradition, and we are reminded of that with the Last Post ceremony that resounds every evening at the Menin Gate in Ypres. They are also important to convey the peace message "no more war".'*

Flemish Tourism Minister Zuhail Demir: *'The history of World War I in is a popular reason for tourists to visit. During the centenary commemoration of the Great War, as many as 2.8 million visitors came to the Westhoek region of Flanders Fields. More than half of these were foreign visitors. The fact that the region is now being recognised by UNESCO, is fantastic news. We hope this will encourage and inspire tourists to discover and investigate the unique heritage of this Western region of Flanders '.*

Elio Di Rupo and Valérie de Bue, Prime Minister, and Minister of Heritage in the Walloon Government: *'This recognition is an honour for Wallonia, because these sites have an extraordinary power to reconcile people. Their inscription celebrates the diversity of this rich heritage. They were designed by renowned architects and landscape architects, allowing each people to express their identity and culture. This international recognition reflects Wallonia's ongoing commitment to heritage that is an important contribution to promoting peace on a global scale.'*

About UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee

Founded in the aftermath of World War II, UNESCO is the cultural and scientific arm of the United Nations. UNESCO's mission is to contribute to peace building, poverty alleviation, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, science, culture and communication.

The World Heritage Committee consists of 21 countries that serve on the committee for a four-year term. Belgium and its regions Wallonia, Brussels and Flanders were elected in 2021 to sit until 2025. The committee oversees the conservation of recognised sites. Each year, it also decides on the inclusion or deletion of individual monuments and sites on the World Heritage List.

The inclusion of these monuments and cemeteries sends a powerful message. It supports Belgium's role within UNESCO, and reinforces the values of peace, equality and reconciliation between nations that the three regions keenly promote.

-Ends-

20 September 2023

Notes to Editors:

Images

<https://collection.cloudinary.com/visitflanders/603e9db6ff286e5a41b8d115c2e8429a>

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For a list of the 27 sites in Flanders Fields with newly aquired UNESCO status:

<https://www.visitflanders.com/en/discover-flanders/arts-and-heritage/flanders-fields/27-wwi-memorial-sites-flanders-fields>

The First World War was fought from 1914 to 1918. More than 650,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders served in this war. Over 66,000 of its servicemen lost their lives and more than 172,000 were wounded . Arriving in Flanders in April 1915, many of the casualties fell victim to the first chlorine gas attacks and later at the infamous Second Battle of Ypres. During the war, over a million soldiers from 50 different nations fought in Flanders creating a landscape of memory which continues to dominate this small corner of Belgium.

About VISITFLANDERS

This Flemish government agency is the official tourist organisation for Flanders. The organisation strives for the sustainable development and promotion of tourism to and within Flanders, with a view to boosting the economic return, employment and the well-being of its inhabitants. www.visitflanders.com

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