

The Friends of St. George's Memorial Church, Ypres

Registered with the Charities Commission No. 213282-L1



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No. 105

NEWSLETTER

July 2020



Aerial view of St. George's Church and School, circa 1930s



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DATABASE UPDATE

Dear Friend, we are continuing the process of updating our membership database and have had a number of requests to consider sending future editions of The Friends newsletter electronically. If you would like to receive the newsletter and other occasional communications such as updates on St George's Memorial Church via email, please send your email address details to the address below with a brief note giving us permission to contact you via email. You can rest assured that these details will not be shared with any other organisation.

In the event that we do not hear from you, we will continue to send the Newsletter by post with pleasure; likewise if there are any details that we may not have correct or any other queries on your membership, please feel free to contact us and help us to keep our records up to date. Alternatively, please write to: Miss E Speare, Membership Secretary, 32 Fulwood Walk, London SW19 6RB.

Please keep our Membership Secretary up to date with any changes to your communication preferences and we thank you for the excellent response to our circular concerning GDPR. If you haven't responded to this, 'it is never too late!'

ST. GEORGE'S WEBSITE

The new St George's website, developed through support of The Friends, has been up and running since June 2017. It contains up to date news and information about St George's activities, events and contact points for The Friends. Or you can easily find yourself at any time inside St George's by taking a 360 degree tour of this beautiful church.

So, one good way of keeping in contact with St George's is by visiting its website on a regular basis.

www.stgeorgesmemorialchurchypres.com

PUBLICITY FOR ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH

One of the objects of the Association of the Friends of St. George's Church is "To promote interest in and knowledge of St. George's Memorial Church in Ypres". An effective means of bringing St. George's Church to the notice of people in the United Kingdom is through local newspapers, magazines and local history societies. Church magazines are usually looking for articles and will often welcome articles about St. George's and The Friends. Local history societies and similar organisations often welcome talks in which St. George's and The Friends are mentioned, bringing the church and the Friends to a wider audience. We hope our members will grasp any opportunity that arises to engage in such publicity.



EDITORIAL

Dear Friends,

So much has been written and discussed about the effects on every single aspect of our lives caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic. It is fair to say that many of those effects have had a negative impact on our daily routines and the 'new normal.' However, there have been positives too. One of those has been our ability to communicate more efficiently and to assure ourselves that 'Life goes on.' Who, in all honesty, knew what 'Zoom' was four months ago? In many respects Zoom has saved the day for a lot of us. The Friends' Working Party, made up of the Chairman, Sir Edward Crofton, myself, as Vice Chairman, Mike McKeon, our Secretary, and William Leetham, our Treasurer, have continued working on current Friends business and projects in between the set Committee Meetings of April and October. To this, one can add discussions in terms of planning for the future when, hopefully, we are well beyond the Pandemic.

Most of that work and relevant discussions have been managed through the auspices of 'Zoom.' In a similar way, I had the privilege to have been part of the Interview Panel, headed by Bishop Robert, for the appointment of our new Chaplain at St George's. All interviews of candidates took place over Zoom and, along with the panelists, simultaneous connections were made with ease, bringing the group together scattered across three different countries — such is the wonder of modern technology. Thinking about it, it was probably very good for the planet as well with no individual travel taking place over those days. That said, I very much look forward to being part of the welcome team when finally the Covid-19 restrictions allow the newly appointed Chaplain to travel to Ypres.

One of the pleasures of drawing the Newsletter together is to discover new aspects of the life of St George's both past and present. Imagine this then. Just a few weeks ago I received notice of the 100th Birthday anniversary on 29 May of Jeanne Lomas-Desramault from her son, Maugen Higgins. Jeanne is one of the few surviving former pupils from St George's School which was closed in 1939. Maugen's grandfather (John Lomas), Jeanne's father, had been Clerk of Works for the building of St George's Church and its school.

About five months ago, by pure coincidence, I purchased a newspaper photograph from Ebay showing Lord Plumer laying the foundation stone of the school in 1927. I subsequently sent this picture to Mawgen. Almost by return of email, I received the news that the picture included Mawgen's grandfather standing proudly to the right of Lord Plumer. What I didn't know was until that moment, Mawgen's family had no



photographs of his grandfather, apart from one in 1st World War army uniform. The family are delighted with the discovery. — the circle has been completed 90 odd years later (see pages 12 and 13).

I would like to thank all those who have contributed articles towards our Summer Newsletter — this is most appreciated.

Also appreciated, is the help and advice I have received from our printer and designer, Chris Friday in the production of this newsletter during such difficult times. Normally, I physically work alongside Chris in his office pouring over his iMac computer to get things right. This has not been possible on this occasion, of course, so again technology through Zoom and the good old fashioned telephone have come into play. Let's hope for better and easier times in December when our Winter Newsletter appears.

Meanwhile, on your behalf, I wish Jeanne many congratulations on the occasion of her 100th birthday.

Despite the current difficulties, enjoy the Newsletter — enjoy the Summer.

Stay alert, stay safe and take great care.



Every blessing, Derek Gallagher
Vice Chairman and Editor of The Friends Newsletter



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - SUMMER 2020

GENERAL

Last year I began my Report, writing in the aftermath of the 75th Anniversary of the D Day Celebrations. This year it would have been after the 80th Anniversary of the Evacuation of Dunkirk. Sadly this event has not taken place, owing to a Pandemic, the like of which has not been experienced for 100 years, and the severity of which has been compared to the perilous situation which the Nation faced in 1940.

The past three months have been dominated by this Coronavirus Pandemic, and, on a more local note, the selection process for the appointment of a new Chaplain for St. George's. Although very different, both will arguably have long reaching and perhaps lasting effects, as to how the business of our Nation and The Friends are conducted.

CORONAVIRUS

The Coronavirus, or Covid-19 as it is otherwise titled, has been responsible for the virtual shutdown of all activities in the United Kingdom, and in many countries of the world, including Belgium. Although there has been some global easing of restrictions, there is a long way to go before life will return to anything like normal. The Friends' Calendar has been particularly affected by the cancellation of the annual Pilgrimage at the beginning of May, an unfortunate occurrence for the third time in four years. Nigel Divers, David Humberston and Valerie Jacques had provided a superb itinerary, to which we will look forward next year. Life has been very much a case of 'il faut cultiver notre jardin', and one's imagination might perhaps go a bit further, in the hope that what is happening now will be 'all over by Christmas'. There is no denying the grief and desolation felt over the many who have died as a result of the Virus, in spite of the heroic care of national medical services; and our hearts go out to the families.

THE APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW CHAPLAIN

The appointment of the Chaplain designate has brought an end to what has been a difficult and frustrating two years in the life of St George's. He is assured of a warm welcome, and we much look forward to working with him and benefitting from his wisdom, during what I believe will be a fruitful period in the history of the Church.



VISITS

These have been non – existent, other than the Chairman and Secretary attending the annual Christmas Carol and Lessons Service at St George's in December, and he and the Vice Chairman, the PCC Meeting in January.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

I am delighted that the following have agreed to join the Committee.

Christopher Sims has lived in Belgium since 1965. He has a wide international background in education, and is also an experienced historical researcher and military author. Christopher had a long career with the American Battle Monuments Commission as Senior Cemetery Associate and was located at the Flanders Field American Cemetery in Waregem.

Dominiek Dendooven, the Curator and Senior Researcher of the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, joins as a Co-opted Member. He has for long been a stalwart supporter of The Friends and regularly contributes to our Newsletter.

Amy Harrison first came into contact with The Friends in 2017 through the Easter Students Project, which was sponsored by both The Friends and Kent University. She was also chosen by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for their first intake of Internship, where the programme was located in and around Flanders Fields and Thiepval. She is currently studying full time for a PhD at Kent University under the tutorship of Professor Mark Connelly.

We bid them all a very warm welcome.

CONCLUSIONS

We all look forward to the arrival of the new Chaplain. It would be remiss of me if I did not pay tribute to the Herculean efforts of those members of the Recruitment Panel, led by Bishop Robert Innes, and the Archdeacon of NW Europe, the Venerable Dr Paul Vrolijk, and which also included our Vice Chairman, Dr Derek Gallagher. At home, the members of The Friends Committee have been unsparing in their efforts to prepare for the future, and we have several interesting projects in the pipeline.

I would also like to say how pleased we of The Friends are at the progress made by John Arnold in his recovery from serious illness. St George's has not been the same in his absence!

So recently it was nice to be able to Zoom in to the recent PCC Meeting at St George's. A picture is always worth 1000 words, and this occasion was no exception. It was a



particular pleasure that John Arnold was able to attend, having been to the barber, which is a forgotten luxury in this Country, due to the Coronavirus. It was subsequently agreed that the next meeting would take place in September, when decisions would be taken regarding the future programme for the Church.

It has been unfortunate that ideas and plans have so abruptly stalled with the advent of Coronavirus. We must just hope and pray that the resolve shown by so many will enable the Pandemic to be defeated, so that we can all get on with our lives. It would perhaps be premature to predict an imminent return to full services at St George's, but the recent guidance from the Central Committee of the Anglican Church in Belgium on the exit strategy, and the resumption of church services and activities, is encouraging.



Edward Crofton
Chairman



SECRETARY'S REPORT

We have had a superb response and a substantial uptake in Corporate Membership subscriptions following our proactive communications with organisations such as School Associations, branches of the Western Front Association and Regimental Associations, all of which have an interest in the history, life and continuing mission of St George's. This process is ongoing and will result in a wider awareness of The Friends and support the maintenance of the Church fabric and life of St George's. This also presents us with an exciting opportunity to engage with groups who are planning to visit the Church in the future and we plan to take a much more active role in ensuring they have a rewarding experience.

Work on the photography project is continuing and we have reached a milestone where all chair plaques and kneelers have been photographed and indexed. The next phase will ensure that the photographic records are checked in situ, which has been delayed due to the closure of the Church during the Pandemic. We hope to continue this in the near future and complete the indexing of all of the memorials. A new 360 degree tour has also been prepared for publication on the Church website.



Mike McKeon

Hon. Secretary



LETTER FROM THE ARCHDEACON

Emerging from lock-down.....

Dear Friends,

A lot has happened since the last time I wrote to you:

The presbytery, which was no longer fit for purpose, was sold and the proceeds are held by the British Ypres Settlement Trust on behalf of The Friends. We are very pleased with the sale of the house and the speed with which it all happened. Special thanks to John Arnold, without whom this would not have been possible. With the old presbytery gone, we now have more flexibility to find appropriate housing for the next Chaplain.

Then Covid-19 arrived. As in many countries, the virus had a major impact on public life in Belgium. People had to stay home. Many suffered or died. Churches were closed. St George's parishioners found their on-line home (if that was an option) with other churches in Belgium, most notably Ghent. The only church activity that carried on at St George's was the ringing of a single bell every Sunday between 09:55 and 10:00 am, together with other churches in Ypres. Two bells were rung at 12:00 on Easter. We want to thank the bell ringers for these faithful signs of hope throughout the last few months. As restrictions are easing, we are slowly making plans together with other churches in Belgium to plan a re-opening of the church. It will not be easy (see below).

While Covid-19 was raging, the selection process to recruit the new Chaplain was in full swing. Advertising took place in March/April. Interviews chaired by Bishop Robert with selected candidates took place over Zoom on 11-12 May. We rejoiced in an excellent field of candidates and I am glad to say that an offer was made to (and accepted by) one of the candidates. I would like to thank Peter Hawkins, Carine Sinnaeve and Derek Gallagher for participating in the shortlisting and interview process. We are now waiting for the Chaplain-designate to visit Ypres for the 'formal visit'. After this we hope to make a formal announcement. Watch this space!

When will the church re-open? It is a bit difficult to say at present. We know that the Belgian government is likely to approve the re-opening of churches soon. We are aware of the strict requirements on social distancing and hygiene. For services, a space of 1m² per worshipper will be required. Thorough cleaning will be needed before and after services. No singing allowed etc. There will be similar conditions for those who just visit the



church for viewing the remembrance plaques and for silent prayer. It will not be easy to deliver all that is required with the number of volunteers we have.

However, we are very thankful for all that has been achieved over the last few months. Please keep the issues I mentioned in your prayer (with thanksgiving), as we try to find our way forward.



Every blessing,
Paul Vrolijk
Archdeacon of North West Europe



NEWS FROM THE FRONT

The current situation at St. George's

Although many restrictions have been lifted by the Belgian Government with regard to the re-opening of Churches, St George's (as of late June) remains closed, even for private prayer. It is with much reluctance that the decision has been made by the Church Council to remain closed but, in the main, the decision has been made due to the practicalities of opening the church in a way that all the government safety measures that have to be met, can be met. Much of the problem is concerned with the numbers required daily in terms of the constant manning the church and sanitisation whilst open. We have to remember that St George's not only opens as a parish church for its congregation but also as a global place of pilgrimage. St George's is also still without its new Chaplain —however, that situation will change once travel and quarantine restrictions have been completely eased (see Archdeacon Paul's letter).

The situation is being constantly assessed and reviewed. At the very least, a further decision as to the status of opening St George's fully will be made at the next Church Council meeting in September.

Ed.

New Kneeler presented to St. George's

We are now able and pleased to report on a special event that took place on the afternoon of 11th November 2019 which saw a presentation at St George's Memorial Church by Malcolm Smith of Wilmslow, Cheshire, who kindly presented a new kneeler



*John Arnold (left) receiving the kneeler
from Malcolm Smith (right).*



The kneeler displayed in its new home



to John Arnold, Treasurer of the Parish Church Council. Malcolm, a member of the Western Front Association, had travelled to Ieper with the annual Armistice Tour organised each year by "Friends" Committee Members Valerie Jacques and David Humberston, who had arranged for Malcolm to meet John at the Church that afternoon. The kneeler bears the Regimental Badge of the now defunct Royal Army Pay Corps and was surplus to requirements at Chester Cathedral before Malcolm suggested that it be offered to St George's and which they kindly accepted. Responsible for administering all Army financial affairs, the Corps was amalgamated into the Adjutant General's Corp in 1982.

A St George's Memorial School Centenarian thanks The Friends

Dear Derek,

My mother, who was one of the first pupils of St. George's Memorial School, celebrated her 100th birthday on Friday 29th May 2020.

She was born, Jeanne Felicie Lomas-Desramault in Ypres in 1920, the daughter of John Lomas, ex-RSM of the Sherwood Foresters and Celina Desramault from Ypres. After the Armistice, John Lomas stayed in Ypres to work for the IWGC on the Tyne Cot Cemetery.

My mother remembers her father supervising the building of their family house in the Steursstrasse, next door to the church of St. Nicholas. She describes how the rooms in its top floor were often occupied by Sir Reginald Bloomfield and his engineers who were working on the Menin Gate Memorial nearby. The ground floor of the family house became the English Tea Rooms, run by her mother Celina, to cater for people visiting the war graves in and around Ypres.

In 1927, Jeanne's father became the 'clerk of works' for the building of St. George's Memorial Chapel and the Memorial School. In July 1927 it was Jeanne, aged 7, who presented a bouquet of flowers to Field Marshall Lord Plumer before he laid the foundation stone.

When the school was completed, Jeanne and her two younger brothers became three of its first pupils. They can all be seen on the 1929 Memorial School photograph. This is why St. George's Church and school still holds many fond memories for my mother.

After her family moved to England in 1930, Jeanne regularly re-visited Ypres, the last time being in 2010 to celebrate her 90th birthday. She always visited the Desramaults, particularly those at 117 Rijselstraat, the Menin Gate and St. George's Church too.



*'John Lomas, grandfather of Mawgan Higgins, and Clerk of Works,
to the right of Lord Plumer laying the foundation stone of the school'*

My mother wishes to thank The Friends of St. George's for making her Hundredth Birthday even more special for her with a selection of photographs of the Memorial Church.

They are in good company. They sit alongside the special 100th birthday card from Queen Elizabeth.

Kind regards,
Mawgan Higgins



St George's Bell Ringing News

Readers will be aware that the local bell ringing team was started from scratch with a miscellaneous bunch of enthusiasts who had never rung bells before. December 2019 saw a new stage in our development. Martin Adshead, the deputy tower captain, who took a course in learning how to teach others in 2018, had been training PCC member Carine Sinnaeve from scratch. Bell ringing teachers came over from the UK in December to assess Martin's teaching skills and he passed with flying colours. Then they turned their attention to me, giving me the instructions on how to teach the basics of bell ringing. So we now have two Ieper ringers capable of training new blood and we started to train fresh recruits in January.

February saw our Annual General Meeting in the presence of Archdeacon Paul Vrolijk. A lot of formal stuff was arranged, discussed and we adopted our official constitution. There was a visiting band from Twickenham, a very full Spring ahead with many visiting bands on the calendar and enthusiastic practising going on.

Then came the Covid-19 crisis. Our last practice night was Tuesday 10 March. If I tell you the ringing room measures 2m90 by 2m90 and the distance between the ropes varies from 65 to 85 centimetres, you will understand that bell ringing, as we know it, cannot happen at St George's for the foreseeable future. Good bell handling is just one of the skills a bell ringer needs. Being aware of what happens around you is just as important. Fortunately there are training tools available to develop these necessary ropesight and listening skills, in the shape of videos and sound recordings. So while in lockdown, Team Ieper has kept practising at getting better online, by working through a new set of videos every week. It is a far cry from being able to meet each other and ring together, but it is something and it keeps us in touch with ringing and, importantly, with each other.



Martin Adshead preparing for the solidarity ring on the 8th Sunday of lockdown

But this doesn't mean the bells are completely silent! On Thursday evening March 19, two ringers from the same household answered the call to ring church bells in Ieper and Poperinge in support of medical staff. This was followed by an initiative from the Belgian Catholic Bishops to ring all church bells nationwide on Sundays between 9:55 and 10:00. This act was



*Martin Adshead ready for the
ANZAC ring on 25 April*



*ANZAC bell, No.7,
rung on 25 April by Martin Adshead*

to show solidarity with everyone affected and support for all congregations unable to worship together. So, since Sunday March 22, a member of the Ieper team of ringers has been ringing one of the eight bells along with those of the Sint-Maartenskerk around the corner and all other churches further away. They were truly moving moments and we are proud to have taken part. On Easter Sunday two ringers chimed four bells, this time at noon. When we heard the city of Ieper had to cancel all the ceremonies for ANZAC-day on April 25, we offered to ring our no. 7 bell, which bears the inscription “100 years of ANZAC The Spirit Lives 2014-2018”. This was gratefully accepted and Martin Adshead did the honours.

We agreed to a request from a group of WWII museums in Normandy to ring in commemoration of the D-day landings on June 6, since no big ceremonies can take place in France this year. This was done by our ringer Sven Berg, whose day job is in the army.

The Covid-19 crisis has made us fully aware the other side of bell ringing: not only is it a fascinating and highly enjoyable hobby, it can also be a truly meaningful thing to do.



Sven Berg about to ring for DDay on 6 June



*Marlies Boink
Tower Captain*



RE-OPENING OF THE MENIN GATE JULY 1st 2020

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Last Post Association has done everything possible to ensure the continuity of daily Last Post ceremony. From Saturday, 14 March 2020 onwards, the ceremony took place without public attendance. From Wednesday, 18 March 2020 onwards, the daily tribute was played by just a single bugler, although this number was again increased to three on Monday, 11 May 2020.

Chairman Benoit Mottrie declared ... *“The Last Post Association is proud that we have been able to continue our unique tribute to the fallen, which has been played every evening, without fail, since the end of the Second World War. We are grateful to the City of Ieper, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and all other individuals and organisations who have made this possible. From our own country and around the world, we have received many thousands of messages of support and appreciation for our efforts to ensure the continuation of the daily Last Post. In particular, I would like to thank the buglers, ceremonial assistants and members of the LPA board for their outstanding work during these past difficult months.”*

(Reproduced with permission from the Last Post Association)



Pat and Peter Hawkins, representing St. George's by laying a wreath at the Menin Gate at its re-opening on July 1st 2020



THE (LACK OF A) PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

As late April gave way to early May, enlisted members and friends should have been eagerly anticipating our resurrected and rejuvenated annual Pilgrimage to the battlefields of Belgium and Northern France. With all logistical arrangements completed, and a personalised itinerary ready to be unveiled, the hospitality of Ypres, the solemnity of the Menin Gate and the now peaceful fields of the Salient and Somme alley awaited. Yet we live in alarming and uncertain times. The national and international lockdown imposed to control the coronavirus pandemic curtailed not only our travel plans but our own freedom too as, effectively confined to barracks until further notice, we could only pause and contemplate what might have been.

Denial of liberty in this way, and for this reason, is a new concept for us all to conquer as best we can. At least, for us, it became an enforced opportunity to undertake many previously indefinitely postponed chores on the domestic front. With more creative moods returning, however, inspiration was found amongst fellow prisoners from centuries past with a parallel to one particular author foremost in the mind . . .



John Bunyan



*Bunyan Memorial Window
Bedford*

In common with our Great War fallen, John Bunyan also knew War. At the age of 16 he joined Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentarian Army and served for three years. By 1660, he was a preacher for the Bedford Free Church, a nonconformist group whose freedom was curtailed by legislation passed following the Restoration of the Monarchy. Bunyan would, in fact, fall foul of an earlier Act prohibiting the gathering of more than five people to worship (comparable, surely, with our current predicament under lockdown) except in a



parish church, from which nonconformists were already excluded. When he refused to give up preaching, his initial term of three months was later increased to 12 years and it was during this time that he penned various works, including his most famous, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Published in 1678, six years after Bunyan's eventual release, it gained immediate popularity and has never, to this day, been out of print. It is also regarded as the first novel written in the English language.

Today, in the Bunyan Meeting Church in Mill Street, Bedford, a stained-glass window depicts a seated Bunyan, pen in hand, gazing wistfully at the window of his cell and the freedom beyond it. Although we, at the time of writing, are only allowed access the outside world for short periods of exercise and essential purchases, the longing for our previous liberty and normality is, like that of Bunyan, very real. The enforced postponement of our Pilgrimage was most unfortunate and although we regret the loss of the opportunity to pay our respects to our Glorious Dead we trust that sufficient freedom will, in time, be returned to us so that we can return to the battlefields once more. Provisional reservations are already in place for Spring 2021 when we very much hope that those who were thwarted this year will be ready, able and willing to join us.

We very much look forward to enjoying your company "Back at the Front"!

Valerie Jacques, David Humberston and Nigel Divers



The Friends Pilgrimage Group in 2017



REMEMBERED WITH HONOUR

*In the fifth of our series featuring those commemorated in
St George's Memorial Church, Ypres, we remember . . .*

CAPTAIN JOHN HENRY STRODE BATTEN

Captain John Henry Strode Batten was the eldest son of retired soldier and farmer, Colonel John Mount Batten, CB, JP, Lord Lieutenant of Dorset by his first wife Margaret, née Brooks. Born at Aldon, near Yeovil, on 23rd December 1875, John Junior was educated at Minterne Magna School, Thomas Hardye Grammar School in Dorchester and Rossall School, near Fleetwood, before going up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. After completing his BA degree John was gazetted to his father's old Regiment, The Kings (Liverpool), on 20th May 1899, being promoted to the rank of Lieutenant the following March.



John Henry Strode Batten

John Batten served through the Second Boer War (1899-1902), first with the Mounted Infantry and later as a Supply Officer. Between March and June 1900, he saw action in Natal, in particular at Reifontein and Lombard's Kop as part of the Battle of Ladysmith. On 6th January 1900, he also took part in the Battle of Wagon Hill, fought as part of the Siege of the same town, when a Boer attack was driven back by British forces at a cost of 175 killed and 249 wounded.

Before the Siege was finally listed at the end of February, John managed to write home to his grandfather, to advise him that: *"I am writing this to you during the siege of Ladysmith, or rather, I trust, the last few days of the siege. We have been shut up here since the 2nd of Nov, and it has been a very momentous affair, as since that date we have been completely cut off from the rest of the world, so have no papers or letters. A few runners have I believe managed to get through the Boer lines with dispatches at odd times . . . Was under fire for the first time and felt a bit shaky at first but soon got used to it. Boers have been shelling the camp daily (except Sundays). Since the beginning of the siege we have lost one Sergeant and nine men. It is surprising how little damage their shells have done considering the number of shells that have been dropped. Grub and drink are getting scarce . . . Will write again better, but thought you would like to hear word so please excuse the scrawl. "*

After serving in both the Transvaal (December 1900 – October 1901) and the Orange



Free State (October 1901 – May 1902) for the remainder of the conflict, John was subsequently awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal with four clasps and the King's South Africa Medal with clasps for 1901 and 1902.



John Henry Strode Batten

In August 1908, John married Augusta Kavanagh; they would have no children. On 1st December the following year, he was promoted to the rank of Captain and by August 1914 was a JP and a member of the Junior Army and Navy Club.

In August 1914 he departed for War with the 1st Battalion of The King's (Liverpool Regiment), leaving Talavera Barracks at Aldershot for Southampton and sailing to Le Havre on SS *Irrawaddy*, arriving at the port on 13th August. As part of 6th Brigade, 2nd Division, the Battalion saw action near Mons before taking part in the retreat to the outskirts of Paris.

On 20th September, during the Battle of the Aisne, John came to the attention of his superiors when his Brigadier reported: *On a particular occasion, quite regardless of himself, he encouraged and steadied the men on the right of his battalion, and of the brigade when very heavily attacked, and when the situation at that point was critical. It was owing to his very gallant conduct on that occasion that the portion of the line held its own.* General Richard Hutton Davies, commanding the 6th Brigade also commented: *By his exceedingly gallant and cool conduct he did a great deal to stop a rush and prevent what easily might have proved to be a disaster to our part of the line.* For his gallantry that day, John Batten would be "Mentioned in Despatches" by Sir John French, the notice appearing in the *London Gazette* of 19th October.

That very same day, the Battalion arrived at Godewarsvelde (known to the Tommies as "God wears Velvet") near to the Franco-Belgium border, from where they would march to the outskirts of Ypres. On 24th October, the Battalion were sent to the area around Polygon Wood, where they relieved the 1st Staffordshires and were ordered to attack the village of Molenaarelsthoek, just to the north-east of the Wood's eastern perimeter. The Battalion advanced to the outskirts of the village where the German forces offered a spirited resistance before the Kings captured all but two of the cottages from where fierce machine gun fire poured forth. Two further attacks proved unsuccessful and amongst the day's fatalities were the Battalion's Lieutenant Colonel, William Bannatyne, shot through the heart near the Zonnebeke to Becelaere road. He was buried in the orchard of one of the cottages, a building he had intended to use as his headquarters. The Battalion dug in for the night on the north side of the village.



The following day, 25th October, close to the uncaptured cottages, Captain John Batten was shot and, according to one source, *killed outright whilst crossing a small gap in a hedge to confer with his Commanding Officer by some men hidden in a house about 500 yards away.... We buried him that night beside the Colonel in an orchard close to a farm outside the village where he was shot.* Neither grave could be located after the War and consequently both men are remembered on Panel 6 of the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing.

John Henry Strode Batten is also remembered on Memorials at what is now Hardyes School in Dorchester and Rossall School in Fleetwood. His widow erected a Memorial Window and Tablet close to the altar in the Chapel at Up Cerne Manor, the Batten family home in Dorset. The tablet inscription, beneath the Regimental Badge, reads: *In loving memory of John Henry Strode Batten, Captain, The King's Regiment who fell in action 25th of October 1914 aged 39 years and is buried in Flanders. He gave his heart to his home, his life for his King and Country and his soul to his God. Erected by his widow.*



Hardyes School Memorial



Rossall School Chapel Memorial

Also commemorated by plaque on a chair at St George's Memorial Church in Ypres, it is perhaps fitting to conclude with more words from General Davies, written after John's death: *I should like you to know that he was looked upon by all who knew him as one of the very bravest of the brave.*

Valerie Jacques & David Humberston



ARTHUR MERGHELYNCK ESQ., THE REMARKABLE NOBLEMAN WHO LIVED WHERE ST. GEORGE'S NOW STANDS

Did you ever wonder how the location where St George's Memorial Church now stands looked before the First World War ? Well, there are remarkably few photographs of that particular Ypres corner. And yet, this is where one of the most remarkable and best known residents of Ypres lived.



*A portrait photograph of
Arthur Merghelynck*

Arthur Merghelynck was a member of the local gentry, born in Ypres on 9 March 1853 and orphaned at a young age. He was 18 years old when he inherited a considerable part of the family fortune, allowing him to live off what his numerous possessions yielded him. Four years later he bought the castle of Beauvoorde in the village of Wulverghem near Veurne (Furnes) where he became burgomaster in 1885. He had the derelict castle completely restored and refurnished in a typical Flemish renaissance style. It became his summer residence. His winter residence, a town house, occupied the corner of Vandenpeereboomplein and Elverdingstraat, indeed now the address of St George's.

In the summer of 1871, Merghelynck made the acquaintance of Ypres town librarian and archivist Jules Cordonnier. The two men struck up a life-long friendship. Cordonnier was a passionate genealogist. Merghelynck caught his enthusiasm and in 1877 published the first fruits of his research: *Recueil de genealogies inédites de Flandre*. A large number of publications followed, culminating in his *Vademecum* (1896), a listing of the 555 manuscripts on genealogy and history he had collected. In 1893 he was appointed archivist for the town of Ypres. That same year, however, he managed to purchase the 'Hotel Merghelynck', the stately town house his great-grandfather François Merghelynck had built in 1775. Arthur Merghelynck decided not to live in his newly acquired property, but to make it a museum dedicated to the lavish lifestyle of the nobility in the 18th century.

The museum was filled to the brim with works of art and collectibles dedicated to the



Flemish gentry and their luxurious life in the decades before the French Revolution. A novelty was that these were not exhibited in display cases, but that the museum consisted of period rooms where it seemed as if the original residents had left five minutes ago. Merghelynck was extremely proud of and dedicated to his 'Hotel-Museum Arthur Merghelynck', and published two works on it, in 1894 and 1900.

On 20 June 1895 he married Julianne Flyps, born in 1866 in Langemark. She was a girl of humble origins: her father was a smallholder and she was a waitress in a tavern in Rijselstraat. The Ypres establishment had strong feelings about the difference in class. Arthur Merghelynck was never to forgive them for this. Henceforth, Ypres residents were only allowed to visit the museum with the written permission of the owner while visitors who were strangers to Ypres only had to register with the resident housekeeper who would then give them a guided tour. The couple did not have any children. Arthur Merghelynck Esquire died on 14 July 1908, exhausted and almost blind. On the day of his funeral, 21 July 1908, a photograph was taken of the funeral procession leaving his townhouse. It is still the best photograph we have of the corner where from 1927 onwards St George's Memorial Church was to be built.



*The original house on the site where St George's Church would be built.
Photograph on the day of the funeral of its owner, Arthur Merghelynck, in July 1908'*



In his will, Arthur Merghelynck left his museum, building and contents, not to the town of Ypres but to the Belgian State on behalf of the Belgian Royal Academy in Brussels. The title and rental income from three farms had to fund the maintenance of the museum. The castle of Beauvoorde was bequeathed to the Royal Flemish Academy for Linguistics and Literature in Ghent, and his rich collection of books and manuscripts to the Royal Library in Brussels. The bequest was accepted by a Royal Decree dated 19 April 1910. The Royal Academy regarded the collection of the Hotel-Museum as ‘closed’ : no objects were therefore to be added and presumably neither was there to be any tinkering with the arrangement. The Ypres town council nevertheless showed its appreciation for the life’s work of Arthur Merghelynck by changing the name of Oude Kleermarkt where the museum is located to Arthur Merghelynckstraat.

Merghelynck’s widow continued to live in the castle of Beauvoorde until her death. During the First World War, the Merghelynck residence in Ypres was razed to the ground. Having no desire to have it rebuilt nor to resettle in Ypres, she finally sold the ground to the Ypres League to have St George’s Memorial Church and the British Memorial School built on it. As to the museum that was Arthur Merghelynck’s brainchild : about half to one third of the contents were evacuated and survived the war. The museum was rebuilt and could re-open in the 1950. It is now a hidden gem, probably Ypres’ most remarkable yet least known museum.

Dominiek Dendooven, In Flanders Fields Museum



The interior of the Merghelynck Museum, Ypres



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Mike McKeon, our Secretary has again delved into our Archives and has selected an excerpt from an article published in The Friends Newsletter in February 1970. It was written by a veteran (Dennis E. Taylor of 3rd Monmouthshire Regiment) and is titled “The Quiet Corner”:

THE QUIET CORNER

Beauty, calm and serenity must surely be the first impressions on every visitor to our beloved Church in Ypres, such impressions only to be further deepened by its brightness and colour as closer inspection reveals the delicate works of art of the Memorial windows banners and plaques.

A few moments of reflection and deep thought should be indulged in to fully comprehend the real meaning of the entire scene, but more time will be necessary to really appreciate the care and thought that has been taken in designing the various emblems, all of them, in their own particular way, of sombre simplicity, but still giving their same message in different words and forms.

What message is conveyed to you? This question can raise a very difficult and controversial problem. Some will say that never again, in any circumstances, shall war be allowed to happen. Others may say that aggression by a land grabbing Nation or State must be resisted in honour of our fallen Comrades and in spite of the risk of further war. It is all very difficult. Perhaps inspiration gathered in quiet thought and prayer will guide us to the correct solution.



The Friends of St George's Memorial Church, Ypres,



Our Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ in whose name
The St George's Memorial Church
in Ypres is dedicated.

Grant that its life and worship
may ever abound to your greatest glory;
And that as The Friends we may do our part,
by prayer and offering,
To strengthen its witness to all the world;
Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit
live and reign ever One God.

Amen.



To: The Honorary Membership Secretary, The Friends of St. George's Memorial Church,
Ypres, 32 Fulwood Walk, London SW19 6RB

I wish to become a Member and enclose/ or have arranged electronic payment/ bankers order
of £ as my first subscription.

Name

Address

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Postcode

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Date

By signing below, you are confirming that you are consenting to The Friends of St Georges
Memorial Church, Ypres holding and processing your personal data for the following purposes
(please tick the boxes where you grant consent):

To keep me informed about news, events and activities about The Friends of St Georges
Memorial Church, Ypres

I consent to the church contacting me by post phone or email.

Our communications are typically (but not limited to) our newsletter, which is published twice
per year.

Signed:

Dated:

Where you do not grant consent, we will not be able to use your personal data; (so for example
we may not be able to let you know about forthcoming activities and events); except in certain
limited situations, such as where required to do so by law or to protect members of the public
from serious harm. You can find out more about how we use your data from our "Privacy
Notice" which is available from our website.

You can withdraw or change your consent at any time by contacting the Membership
Secretary at:

32 Fulwood Walk, London SW19 6RB or email: plusnet32@espeare.plus.com

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Please indicate if you wish to pay subsequent subscriptions by banker's order or electronic banking.

We would appreciate it if you could fill out the Gift Aid form if you are a UK Tax payer.

A Gift Aid form is not required for donations of £20 and under but we will need you to tick here to agree to Gift Aid.

Note: All membership fees are regarded as a minimum donation.

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UK Life Membership	£250
Overseas Life Membership	€250
UK Joint Life Membership	£375
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Signature date. / /20.

This declaration may be cancelled by you in writing at any time. Please advise The Friends of any change of address and should you no longer pay income or capital gains tax. Regular payments may be made by banker's order.



Bankers Order Form

To (name & address of your bank)

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Please pay to Lloyds Finsbury Circus sort code 30 95 74 account number 00252832

For the account of The Friends of St George's Memorial Church Ypres

the sum of £ (amount in words)

on (date)

and annually on the same date thereafter until further notice.

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Signature Date

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From Great Britain:

Sort code – 30.95.74 Account number – 00252832

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POLITE REQUEST

Subscriptions are our lifeblood and keeping up to date with Annual Subscriptions reduces our Administration time and costs considerably. If you haven't considered setting up a Standing Order, this is the most convenient way to stay up to date.



Membership matters

We are continuing to modernise and update our membership records and would like to remind Friends that if you wish to receive communications via email to please pass your details on to our Membership Secretary, Miss Eve Speare. She can be contacted at plusnet32@espeare.plus.com. We have already received some responses, for which we are very grateful. We will, of course, continue to communicate by traditional mail but are happy to embrace the ever changing “digital” world.

This is also to remind Members not paying by standing order that regular subscription needs to be paid on a regular basis to our Treasurer in order to ensure Members receive the Newsletters and other communications.





ARMISTICE DAY 11th NOVEMBER 2020

There is the hope that, as usual, the Armistice Day Service will be able to take place on Wednesday 11th November starting at 09:15hrs — those attending are asked to be in their seats by 09:00hrs.

However, the decision to hold the service will depend on the Governmental restrictions and rules being applied at the time and the ability of St George's to comply in terms of the practicalities likely to be involved. Either way the number of persons allowed to attend could be very limited.

If, given the opportunity, you would like to attend the service then please apply for tickets asap via the Church Warden, Mrs Ricky Beets, at the following email address: ricky77.beets@gmail.com



DEAR FRIENDS, DO HAVE A LOVELY SUMMER !

Derek Gallagher, Editor and Vice-Chairman of the Friends

derekfgallagher@gmail.com



*Anny Cruz-McKeon
“ A penny for your thoughts”*

*Anny caught in the moment,
quietly pondering
during her first visit to
Ploegsteert Wood Cemetery*