



Activity report Last Post Association vzw

The Last Post Association is an independent, voluntary, non-profit organization. It was the Association that first founded the Last Post Ceremony back in 1928 and it is the Association that today is still responsible for the day-to-day organization of this unique act of homage at the Menin Gate Memorial in Ieper.



This document is the activity report for the year 2017 (01/01/2017 - 31/12/2017), the 89th year of activity of the Last Post Association.

1. The ceremony

The daily Last Post has been performed each single day of the year 2017 at 8.00 PM under the Menin Gate. Again, many visitors attended the daily ceremony.

Please find below an overview of the most important ceremonies under and outside the Menin Gate in 2017:

- 11/01/2017: Prime Minister Bill English of New Zealand
- 09/02/2017: Farewell to former bugler Antoon Verschoot
- 23/02/2017: The Baroness Pidding CBE
- 07/03/2017: Tony Abbott, former Prime Minister of Australia
- 24/03/2017: Delegation Parliament New Zealand
- 25/03/2017: UCI & organization Gent-Wevelgem
- 10/04/2017: Kent Hehr, Minister Veterans' Affairs Canada + Delegation New Zealand
- 21/04/2017: Karen Bradley, Secretary of State DCMS UK
- 24/04/2017: Unveiling of the Menin Gate Lions
- 25/04/2017: Anzac Day



- 08/05/2017: Commemoration of the end of the Second World War
- 06/06/2017: Dame Patsy Reddy, Governor General of New Zealand
- 17/06/2017: Order of St John & St John Ambulance
- 27/06/2017: Lord Ashcroft
- 03/07/2017: Flanders in the world with Minister-President Geert Bourgeois
- 24/07/2017: 90 Years Menin Gate
- 30/07/2017: Centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper – UK commemoration
- 25/08/2017: 45th Four Days of the Yser
- 30/08/2017: Bells St.-George Memorial Church
- 20/09/2017: Seabrook Brothers
- 25/09/2017: Centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper – Australian commemoration
- 06/10/2017: Hon Tony Smith MP, speaker Parliament Australia
- 09/10/2017: Rula Ghani, First Lady Afghanistan
- 11/10/2017: Centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper – New Zealand commemoration
- 23/10/2017: Basket Melco Ieper
- 24/10/2017: Farewell to Captain Shaun Fogarty and Andrew Gillespie (New Zealand)
- 07/11/2017: Major & Mrs Holt
- 08/11/2017: Centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper – Canadian commemoration
- 11/11/2017: Armistice
- 27/11/2017: Departure of the Menin Gate Lions
- 08/12/2017: International U12 Christmas Truce Football Tournament
- 17/12/2017: 90th Anniversary former bugler Jean Roose



In brief: the year 2017 was again a very busy year in the history of the Last Post Association. Probably the busiest year after 2014 and 2015. The hard work of the ceremonial assistants of the Last Post Association and the presence of the police were really needed and is highly appreciated.



2. Some remarkable facts of the year 2017

- Visit of Bill English, Prime Minister of New Zealand – 11/01/2017

On 11 January 2017, a special Last Post Ceremony was organized at the occasion of the visit of Bill English, the Prime Minister of New Zealand. This visit emphasized once again the strong bonds between the Last Post Association, the City of Ieper and New Zealand.

- Farewell to Antoon Verschoot – 01/02/2017

On 1 February 2017, former bugler Antoon Verschoot died. He had been one of the buglers of the Last Post Association for more than 61 years. On 9 February 2017, we said farewell to Antoon during the service in the cathedral of Ieper. With a final Last Post at the Menin Gate, the Last Post Association said goodbye to Antoon, together with his family. It was an impressive tribute to a truly remarkable personality.

- The Menin Gate Lions – April-September 2017

On initiative of Dr. Brendan Nelson, patron of the Last Post Association and director of the Australian War Memorial, the original Menin Gate Lions came back to Ieper in 2017. In 1936, they had been donated to Australia by the City of Ieper as an expression of gratitude for the Australian role in the Great War. For a long time, they have been on display at the entrance of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Many organizations from Australia, Belgium and Flanders worked hard to make this visit possible which marked the centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper (The Battle of Passchendaele). Australian Minister for Veterans' Affairs Dan Tehan and Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Kris Peeters especially came to Ieper to unveil the Menin Gate Lions on 24 April 2017, the eve of Anzac Day. The ceremony exceptionally took place on the bridge near the plinths where the Lions were placed.





From the moment of the unveiling, the two Lions attracted many visitors who took pictures of them. Almost immediately many people asked to let them stay permanently as they were an added value to the Menin Gate. On 25 September 2017, the Australian Government, through minister for Veterans' Affairs Dan Tehan, announced that they would produce replicas of the Menin Gate Lions and gift them to the City of Ypres, a gesture that was highly applauded.

On 27 November 2017, we said goodbye to the Menin Gate Lions who left for Australia on Tuesday, 28 November 2017. We all look forward to the installation of the replicas in the second half of 2018.

- Anzac Day: 102nd anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli – 25/04/2017

Each year, on 25 April, the day of the landing at Gallipoli (Turkey), Australia and New Zealand remember their fallen of the Great War. The buglers of the Last Post Association sounded the Last Post during the dawn service at Buttes Cemetery at Zonnebeke. Important delegations from Australia and New Zealand attended the daily Last Post on 24 & 25/04/2017 as well as the special Last Post on Tuesday, 25 April 2017 at 11.15 AM.

- Visit of the Governor-General of New Zealand – 06/06/2017

On 7 June 2017, the centenary of the Battle of the Mines at Wijtschate-Mesen took place. On the eve of this centenary, Dame Patsy Reddy, Governor-General of New Zealand, attended the daily Last Post Ceremony.

- 90 Years Menin Gate – 24/07/2017





On Monday, 24 July 2017, the 90th anniversary of the Menin Gate took place. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission organized a special ceremony at 11.00 AM on which the buglers of the Last Post Association played the Last Post and the Reveille.

- Centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper (The Battle of Passchendaele) – 30/07/2017

On Sunday, 30 July 2017, the centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper was commemorated with a special ceremony organized by the British Government. Belgian King Philip and Queen Mathilde attended the ceremony together with Prince William and Princess Kate. King Philip and Prince William addressed the public during a short speech. Approximately 200 relatives of soldiers mentioned on the Menin Gate attended the impressive ceremony together with a limited number of invited people.

As representative of all the people active within the Association, Benoit Mottrie, Chairman of the Last Post Association, was awarded the Order of the British Empire by Prince William.



Finally, the British Government offered an unique and high level multimedia spectacle on the market square and the cloth hall. This commemoration received a lot of attention in Belgium and abroad.

On 26 September 2017, the Australian national ceremony for the 3rd Battle of Ieper took place at Buttes Cemetery in Zonnebeke. On the eve of this commemoration, His Excellency General Sir Peter Cosgrove, the Governor-General of Australia, attended the daily Last Post.

On 11 October 2017, the New Zealand commemoration for the 3rd Battle of Ieper took place. An impressive projection show on the ramparts took place before the daily Last Post. After the ceremony, the New Zealanders performed a haka as a token of appreciation for the never-ending efforts of the Last Post Association.



Finally, on 8 November 2017, the national Canadian commemoration for the centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper took place.

- Armistice: 11 November 2017

Together with the city of Ieper, the Last Post Association organized the 11.00 AM special ceremony at the occasion of the 99th anniversary of the Armistice of 1918. The ceremony was musically supported by the Royal St. Martin's and St. Nicholas Men Choir and the Ypriana Band. The public could again follow the ceremony on the large screen on the market square in Ieper. HRH Princess Anne and her husband Sir Tim Laurence attended the ceremony.

On initiative of the Royal British Legion Ieper thousands of red cardboard poppies were planted on the grass next to the Menin Gate. The Last Post Association had an information stand under the Nieuwerck on the market square of Ieper where the new roll-up banners made in 2017 were displayed.

- Delegation Last Post Association to India and Australia

On Sunday, 5 November 2017, a delegation of the Last Post Association travelled to India and afterwards to Australia for Armistice. The delegation consisted of chairman Benoit Mottrie and buglers Rik and Dirk Vandekerckhove.

On 7 November 2017, they took part in the ceremony at the India Gate Monument in New Delhi. On 11 November 2017, the Last Post was sounded at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, Australia. After an earlier visit in 2012, the RSL Victoria once again invited the Last Post Association. Upon invitation of Dr. Brendan Nelson the delegation travelled subsequently to Canberra, the Australian Capital City where they performed the Last Post at the Australian War Memorial.





The delegation also had meetings with important VIP's in Australia: the Governor of Victoria and Minister Mathias Corman (who has Belgian roots).

- Concert The Great War Remembered – 11/11/2017

On 11 November 2017, the 14th edition of the Great War Remembered Concert took place in the St. Martin's Cathedral in Ieper. For the 8th consecutive year the Last Post Association worked together with the Royal Ypriana Band under the lead of director Nico Logghe. The Chorus Choir from Ieper and the Ypres Surrey Pipes & Drums also participated in the concert.

In 2017, the Last Post Association again offered a classic concert with the collaboration of soprano Lies Verholle and tenor Sean Ruane.

Again, two editions of the concert took place: at 4.30 PM and at 7.30 PM for a total of ± 1.800 spectators. The reactions of the public after the 2017 edition were again unanimously positive.



The excellent collaboration and support of the following organizations contributes to the success of the event: the city of Ieper and its different services (tourism, cultural centre and technical service), as well as Dean Hemeryck and his team. The Last Post Association highly appreciates their support. Also, a special thank you to coordinator Mathieu Mottrie for his efforts.

The concert 2018 will be the 15th edition and will have 'Armistice' as the central theme.

The Last Post Association also realized a DVD of the 2015 concert, an edition which was highly suited to do so.



3. People

The year 2017 was the 89th year of activity of the Last Post Association. On 08/01/2018 the organization consisted of 29 persons, namely:

- The Management Committee (3): Benoit Mottrie, Guy Gruwez and Philippe De Bruyn
- The Board of Directors:
 - o *Permanent members* (7): Carl Denys, Philippe Dochy, Mathieu Mottrie, Jacky Platteeuw, Patrick Donck, Charles Vermeulen, Jacques Ryckebosch
 - o *Joined members* (2): Hans De Keyser and Cédric Jacques
- Buglers (6): Rik Vandekerckhove, Dirk Vandekerckhove, Raf Decombel, Tonny Desodt, Jan Callemein and Christophe Wils.
- Buglers-trainees (2): Filip Deramoudt (05/01/2018) and Dieke Vandekerckhove (08/01/2018)
- Pipers (2): Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen
- Ceremonial-assistants (4): Brian Claeys, Emmanuel Waelkens, Gilbert Denturck and Eddy Vandermeersch
- Photographer (1): Francis Vanwysberghe
- Secretariat (2): Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert

4. Organization LPA

Every first Monday, the board of directors held their monthly meeting. The entire board of the Last Post Association closely worked together to further optimize the work of the Association and to take care of the daily and special ceremonies.

The secretariat of the Last Post Association was performed by Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert. Ian Connerty remains responsible for the follow-up of the many requests to participate in the ceremony. He also coordinates all requests from choirs, bands, pipers, ... He also takes care of the organization of the special ceremonies. And the Association can always count on Ian on many other occasions.

Jan Malsaert is responsible for the membership recruitment, the bookkeeping, the communication, follow-up of the meetings of the board, support for the concert and several other subjects.

- Code of Conduct

At the end of 2017, the Board of the Last Association drew up a Code of Conduct for everyone active within the Association: directors, buglers and ceremonial assistants. This Code of Conduct will, after consultation with all related parties, become operational in 2018.



- Fixed rehearsals buglers

The monthly rehearsal for the buglers and buglers-trainees took again place in 2017, and this to continue to guarantee the quality of the playing during the ceremony. Many thanks to Roland Neyrinck for leading these rehearsals which take place in the buildings of the leper Fire Department.

End December 2017, Filip Deramoudt and Dieke Vandekerckhove succeeded in their musical test. They started as a trainee at the beginning of January 2018 and this for a period of six months.

- Transfer of the LPA-archives to the City Archives



Different members of the board and collaborators of the Last Post Association made the inventory of the documents of the Association which were first centralized by the secretariat of the Association. On 18 May 2017, the official transfer to the City Archives took place. The archives contain the correspondence of the Association, photo material, an overview of the special ceremonies, ... The main piece is without doubt the book containing the annual reports from the beginning of the Association into the early nineties. This book offers a detailed overview of the history and activities of the Last Post Association throughout the years. A special thank you to honorary chairman Guy Gruwez for his many efforts on this matter. And also to the City of Leper and the services of the City Archives for the high-quality storage and maintaining of the archives into the future.

Memberships

In 2017, a special effort was done for the screening and completion of the database of the Association. This database now contains more than 9,700 contacts.



The number of members of the Last Post Association has increased significantly in recent years:

- number of lifetime members: 44 on 31/12/2017 (+ 18 in 2017)
- number of members:
 - 2015: 441
 - 2016: 540
 - 2017: 687

The numbers of members increased by 22 % in 2016 and by 27 % in 2017. The Last Post Association hopes to maintain this number of members in 2018 and, if possible, to realize a further increase in 2018.

In 2017 six newsletters were sent out by e-mail.

Website

In 2017, the website of the Association was continuously updated: the calendar, news items, the different newsletters, the concert, new photo galleries, the 'FAQ'-page, ...

Through the website visitors can order the Last Post lapel badges, cd's and DVD of the concert 2015. And many people did so. In 2017, more than 320 online orders for lapel badges were registered for a total amount of ± 5.500 EUR.

Numbers of visitors to the lastpost.be website:

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Visitors	159.188	144.230	110.498	142.503
Unique visitors	115.381	102.782	78.568	99.187
Pageviews	668.402	511.852	380.641	493.197

2014 was the absolute top year in the interest for the Great War in general and for the Last Post in particular. 2015 was less busy and this decrease continued in 2016. In 2017, the number of visitors again increased and this due the many events related to the centenary of the 3rd Battle of Ieper.

Origin of the visitors of the website:

1. Belgium: 49,66 %
2. Great Britain: 26,76 %
3. Netherlands: 8,78 %
4. Australia: 3,17 %
5. Canada: 2,43 %
6. United States: 1,90 %
7. France: 1,86 %
8. Germany: 0,93 %
9. Ireland: 0,53 %
10. New Zealand: 0,51 %

The top 5 represents more than 90 % of the visitors.



Sociale media

The Last Post Association makes important efforts to be present on Facebook and Twitter. In this way, information is provided to the visitors, to the members and the people following the Last Post Association on these media.

Numbers:

- Facebook: 10.479 likes on 18/04/2018 (or +44 % compared to 2016)
- Twitter: 1.606 followers on 18/04/2018 (or +23 % compared to 2016)

Last Post App

Further efforts to promote the Last Post app remain certainly necessary. The Last Post Association plans a minor update of the app in 2018.

5. Thanks to



The Last Post Association wants to thank each and every one who played a role in the busy year 2017:

The **city of leper** and in particular mayor Jan Durnez, first alderman Jef Verschoore and the city administration for the always smooth and good collaboration. The Last Post Association can always count on the different services such as tourism, culture department, technical service, ...

We can further not forget the efforts made by the **police**: traffic is held each day from 7.30 PM till 8.30 PM. A special thank you for all the efforts of the police people is therefore certainly justified.



The Last Post Association would also like to thank Liz Sweet and Richard Nicholl from the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** for their commitment and dedication to the organisation. Many thanks for the new LPA-info panel that has been realized in 2017.

A big thank you to all **our people**:

- The 6 buglers who are consciously present during their week of service. The two teams of 3 buglers which consist of Dirk Vandekerckhove, Tonny Desodt and Raf Decombel on one side, and Rik Vandekerckhove, Jan Callemein and Christophe Wils on the other side.
- The 4 ceremonial assistants for their efforts. Due to the large crowds, their early presence is really necessary.
- Pipers Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen who are present on special ceremonies.
- All members of the board for their many efforts.
- Ian Connerty and Jan Matsaert who take care of the secretariat.