



Annual report of activities for 2019: Last Post Association vzw

The Last Post Association vzw is an independent, non-profit organisation based in Ieper. The association organised the very first Last Post Ceremony on Monday, 2 July 1928 and is still responsible more than nine decades later for the daily performance of this unique tribute under the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing. All the association's buglers, ceremonial assistants and directors are volunteers.



This document is the association's annual report for the calendar year 2019 (01/01/2019 - 31/12/2019), its 91st year of activity.

1. The ceremonies

During 2019, the daily Last Post ceremony took place every evening under the Menin Gate at 20.00 hours.

The most important visitors/ceremonies in 2019 included:

- 12/01/2019: Mr. G. Ramsey, ACT Minister for Veterans' Affairs (Australia)
- 26/01/2019: Ms. J Hardaker, Honorary Mayor, Hamilton (New Zealand)
- 15/03/2019: Moment of thanks for former Alderman Jef Verschoore
- 30/03/2019: Organisational team of the Ghent-Wevelgem cycle race
- 14/04/2019: Paul Nothard, Director of the Office of Australian War Graves
- 20/04/2019: Delegation from the Parliament of Tasmania (Australia)
- 22/04/2019: 104th anniversary of the first gas attack (OPCW)
- 24/04/2019: Mr. S. Ryan, President of the Australian Senate and Mt. G. Edwards
- 25/04/2019: ANZAC Day
- 08/05/2019: Ceremony to commemorate the end of the Second World War
- 10/05/2019: Ieper Peace Prize
- 25/05/2019: Comité Franco-Belge du Souvenir Guynemer, Poelkapelle
- 31/05/2019: 100 Km of Ieper (walking event) and Australian U17 national hockey teams
- 02/06/2019: Departure of Ambassador Alison Rose of Great Britain



- 15/06/2019: Order of St. John & St. John's Ambulance
- 03/07/2019: Mr. B. Davis, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada)
- 08/07/2019: Dr. Brendan Nelson, Director of the Australian War Memorial
- 19/07/2019: NATO ambassadors
- 23/08/2019: Four Days of the IJzer (walking event)
- 02/09/2019: Mr. Colin Thackery, Chelsea Pensioner
- 05/09/2019: Band of the Grenadier Guards and CWGC Commissioners



- 06/09/2019: 75th anniversary of the liberation of the City of Ieper and of the unbroken continuation of the Last Post ceremony following the end of the Second World War, also attended by a delegation from the Brookwood Last Post Association.
- 29/09/2019: 50 years of twinning between the cities of Ieper and Saint-Omer (France).
- 30/09/2019: Mr. S Harris, Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Veterans Affairs (Canada)
- 05/10/2019: London Scottish Regiment and the Tuhoe Maori Group (New Zealand)
- 11/10/2019: Delegation from the Parliament of New Zealand
- 19/10/2019: Young Diplomats in Belgium
- 09/11/2019 & 11/11/2019: 'The Great War Remembered' Concert
- 11/11/2019: Armistice Day
- 22/11/2019: Mr. M. Keegel, Deputy Chief of Mission, Sri Lankan Embassy
- 06/12/2019: Christmas Truce Football Tournament (Premier League and KVK Westhoek)

2019 was the first year following the completion of the 2014-2018 centenary commemorations. As a result, there were fewer special ceremonies during 2019 than during the preceding five-year period, but in general the number of visitors - both from home and abroad - continued to be high. This applied equally to participation by bands and choirs. The safe and efficient management of these visitors was only made possible thanks to the hard work and dedication of Last Post Association's ceremonial assistants and the presence of the local police, whose efforts are very much appreciated.



2. More details of some of the special ceremonies in 2019

- Moment of thanks for former Alderman Jef Verschoore – 15/03/2019

Former Alderman Jef Verschoore played an important role within the city administration during the centenary commemorations of the First World War held between 2014 and 2018. The Last Post Association was always able to rely on his constructive support and collaboration during this period and he personally attended many of the commemorative events. The association invited him to attend the daily ceremony on 15 March as a mark of gratitude for his many years of effort in the cause of remembrance.

- ANZAC Day: 104th anniversary of the landings in Gallipoli – 25/04/2019

Every year on 25 April, the date in 1915 on which the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps landed on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, the people of Australia and New Zealand remember their countrymen who died in the First World War. The association's buglers played the Last Post at the dawn service in Buttes Cemetery in Zonnebeke and later at Tyne Cot Cemetery in Passendale. Important delegations from Australia and New Zealand attended the daily Last Post ceremonies on 24 and 25 April, as well as the special ceremony held at 11.15 hours on ANZAC Day itself. Amongst those in attendance were Mr. Scott Ryan, chairman of the Australian Senate, and Mr. Graham Edwards, a good and longstanding friend of the Last Post Association.

- Commemoration of the end of the Second World War – 08/05/2019



The City of Ieper's annual commemoration of the ending of the Second World War was held on Wednesday, 8 May 2019. After the laying of floral tributes at the Belgium Monument and



a number of other memorials on the market square, the parade – including numerous Royal British Legion standards – marched to the Menin Gate to take part in the daily Last Post ceremony, the musical accompaniment for which was provided by the Vijverzonen Concert Band from Dikkebus and the Boose Choir from Izegem.

- Departure of the British Ambassador, Mrs. Alison Rose – 02/06/2019

On Sunday 2 June 2019, the Last Post Association bade farewell to the British ambassador, Mrs. Alison Rose, who occupied her position from 2014 to 2019 and attended many Last Post ceremonies during that period. She was also closely involved in the organisation of many of the 100th anniversary celebrations of the First World War, culminating in the British commemoration of the Third Battle of Ieper in July 2017.

- Mr. Bernard Davis, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – 03/07/2019

On Wednesday 3 July 2019, Mr. Bernard Davis, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada), attended the daily Last Post Ceremony, where he laid a wreath.

- Dr. Brendan Nelson – 08/07/2019



On Monday 8 July 2019, the ceremony was attended by Dr. Brendan Nelson, accompanied by his wife. Dr. Nelson was the Australian ambassador to Belgium from 2009 to 2012, following which he served as the director of the Australian War Memorial until the end of 2019. He is a patron of the Last Post Association and it was his idea that the original lions of the Menin Gate should be temporarily returned to Ieper in 2017. This ultimately led to the



permanent gifting of replica lions by the Australian Government in 2018. Dr. Nelson is also an honorary citizen of the City of Ieper.

- Four Days of the IJzer – 23/08/2019

As is traditional, hundreds of participants in the Four Days of the IJzer walking event took part in the Last Post ceremony on Friday 23 August 2019, prior to their closing parade on the market square in Ieper.

- Mr. Colin Thackery, Chelsea Pensioner – 02/09/2019

On Monday 2 September 2019, 89-year-old Colin Thackery, a Chelsea Pensioner, attended the Last Post ceremony. In June 2019, he won the 13th edition of '*Britain's Got Talent*', the oldest contestant ever to do so. As part of the ceremony, he gave a moving rendition of the hymn '*I vow thee my country*'.

- Band of the Grenadier Guards + CWGC Commissioners – 05/09/2019

On Thursday 5 September 2019, the Band of the Grenadier Guards once again visited Ieper and took part in the Last Post ceremony. That same evening saw a visit by a delegation of Commissioners from the Commonwealth War Graves, led by Vice Chairman Lieutenant General Sir Bill Rollo and the CWGC's Director General, Mrs. Victoria Wallace.

- 75 years of the liberation and 75 years unbroken playing of the Last Post following the Second World War – 06/09/2019

Friday 6 September 2019 was marked by a double commemoration: it was not only 75 years to the day that Ieper was liberated by the 1st Polish Armoured Division under General Maczek, but on that same evening the Last Post ceremony was resumed following the German occupation, since when it has been played every evening without fail.





This ceremony was organised in collaboration with the City of Ieper and was attended by many members of the Last Post family. For those who could not attend in person, the ceremony was relayed live on Facebook.

- Photo book 2014-2018 – 06/09/2019

Following the ceremony on 6 September 2019, a reception was held for invited guests at Brasserie De Kazematten, where Chairman Benoit Mottrie announced the publication of a Last Post photo book dedicated to the Great War centenary commemorations. During the period 2014-2018 the Last Post was honoured to welcome several royal guests and numerous other VIPs, although the majority of visitors were ordinary people keen to remember members of their family who had fought in the Ieper Salient during the war.



This unique photo book (with text in English) is 140 pages long and contains almost 400 photos.

- 50 years of twinning Ieper – Saint-Omer – 29/09/2019

At the end of September 2019, the City of Ieper celebrated the 50th anniversary of its twinning with the City of Saint-Omer in northern France. Delegations from both cities attended the Last Post on 29 September.

- London Scottish Regiment – 05/10/2019

Every five years, the London Scottish Regiment returns to Flanders to commemorate their involvement in the First Battle of Ieper in October 1914, when they were the first territorial regiment to be engaged in the fighting (along the Mesen-Wijtschate road, where their monument still stands). Their most recent visit was on Saturday 5 October 2019, when they also attended the Last Post Ceremony.



- Delegation from the Parliament of New Zealand – 11/10/2019

On Friday 11 October 2019, a delegation from the New Zealand Parliament visited Ieper. Accompanied by Ambassador Gregory Andrews, they took part in that evening's Last Post ceremony.

- Armistice Day: 11 November 2019

In collaboration with the City of Ieper, the Last Post Association organised a special Last Post Ceremony at 11.00 hours on 11 November to mark the 101st anniversary of the signing of the Armistice that brought the First World War to an end in 1918. Musical accompaniment for the ceremony was provided by the Royal St. Martin and St. Nicholas Male Voice Choir and the Ypriana Concert Band. The public were able to follow the ceremony via a video-relay on the market square.

As is now traditional, the lawns on the ramparts above the Menin Gate were transformed into a Poppy Field at the initiative of the Ieper branch of the Royal British Legion.

The Last Post Association also manned an info-stand under the town hall arcade on Sunday, 10 and Monday 11 November.

- 'The Great War Remembered' Concert – 09 & 11/11/2019

On Saturday 9 and Monday 11 November 2019, the cathedral in Ieper was once again the venue for 16th edition of 'The Great War Remembered' concert. For the 10th successive year, the Last Post Association organised this concert in collaboration with the Royal Ypriana Concert Band, under the leadership of Nico Logghe. Among the other 'regular' participants were the Chorus Choir, under the leadership of Tineke Devoghel, and the Ypres Surrey Pipes & Drums.



Thanks to the mediation of Ambassador Gregory Andrews of New Zealand, the Ngati Ranana Maori group from London also took part. This year's soloists were the Irishman Luka Bloom, Maaïke Cafmeyer, Lies Verholle and Kobe Sercu.

The concert told the story of four individuals and their families, based on a central theme of 'life after the First World War':

- The story of Shiago Wang, told by his granddaughter Aihua Wang and his great-granddaughter Effi Xu (China).
- The story of Sir Peter Henry Buck, told by Martin O'Connor (New Zealand).



- The story of Irma Arnaert, told by her grandson Bart Cafmeyer and her great-granddaughter Maaïke Cafmeyer (Belgium).
- The story of the great-uncle of Luka Bloom (Ireland).

Once again, the Last Post Association called on the services of a professional director in the person of Bart Cafmeyer. Geert Gombeir also played an important role in the conceptualisation and preparation of the concert.

As in 2018, three performances of the concert were organised: on Saturday 9 November 2019 at 17.00 hours and 20.30 hours and on Monday 11 November 2019 at 17.00 hours. The three concerts were attended by some 2,700 spectators. Public reaction was overwhelmingly positive.

Members of the Last Post Association were once again able to take advantage of a preferential period for the pre-booking of tickets.

An event of this scale and complexity is only possible with the help of many different people and organisations. In particular, the Last Post Association is grateful for the assistance it received from the City of Leper and its various services (Tourism, Cultural Centre and Technical Department) and from the cathedral authorities (Dean Hemeryck and his team). A special word of thanks is also due to co-ordinator Mathieu Mottrie of the LPA, for his tireless effort to make the concert a success.

A DVD of the 2018 concert was released in 2019.

- [Christmas Truce Football Tournament – 06/12/2019](#)





On 7 and 8 December 2019, the youth section of the local leper football team – KVK Westhoek – again organised the annual Christmas Truce Tournament in collaboration with the English Premier League. As in previous years, 200 of the young participants from the tournament's twelve top U12 teams attended the Last Post ceremony, this time on Friday 6 December 2019.

• Personnel

2019 was the Last Post Association's 91st year of activity.

On 31/12/2019, 26 people were actively engaged on behalf of the organisation in an official capacity, namely:

- Executive board (3): Benoit Mottrie, Guy Gruwez and Philippe De Bruyn
- Board of directors:
 - o Working members (9): Carl Denys, Philippe Dochy, Mathieu Mottrie, Jacky Platteeuw, Patrick Donck, Charles Vermeulen, Jacques Ryckebosch, Hans De Keyser and Cédric Jacques
- Buglers (6): Rik Vandekerckhove, Raf Decombel, Tonny Desodt, Jan Callemein, Christophe Wils and Filip Deramoudt.
- Pipers (2): Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen
- Ceremonial assistants (3): Brian Claeys, Emmanuel Waelkens and Gilbert Denturck
- Photographer (1): Francis Vanwysberghe
- Secretariat (2): Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert

On 16/01/2019 Dirk Vandekerckhove retired as a bugler of the Last Post Association. The Association is most grateful for his many years (1984-2019) of dedicated commitment.

• Operational working

In terms of its internal organisation, the Last Post Association and its full complement of accredited personnel worked hard throughout the year to optimise the performance of the Last Post ceremony and all matters pertaining to it.

The secretariat work of the Last Post Association was further carried out in 2019 by Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert.

Ian is responsible for dealing with all the many requests to participate in the ceremony from individual wreath-layers, groups, choirs, bands and pipers, as well making the necessary arrangements for the organisation of special ceremonies. Where necessary, the Association can also count on his continued support in a number of other areas.

Jan is responsible for membership recruitment, bookkeeping, communication, the organisation of meetings (board of directors), support for the GWR concerts and also assists with various other matters.



- Rehearsals for the buglers

In order to ensure the high quality of the Last Post ceremony, the monthly rehearsals for buglers and candidate-buglers continued to be organised in 2019. The Last Post Association is grateful to Roland Neyrinck for his willingness to conduct these rehearsals, which take place in the local fire station.

- Subsidies from the Flemish Government

In January 2018, Mr. Geert Bourgeois, the then Minister-President of Flanders (also responsible for Foreign Affairs), granted a subsidy of 60,000 euros to the Last Post Association with the aim of strengthening the association's administrative and organisational capacity, not only in the busy year 2018 but also for the years following completion of the Great War centenary commemorations. This generous subsidy made it possible in 2019 for the Last Post Association to continue its organisation of high quality ceremonies and events for an international public, which helps to highlight the position of Flanders as a premier destination for remembrance tourism.

- DVD of the 'Great War Remembered' concert 2018

A DVD of the 2018 concert was released in 2019 and is available for purchase via the website of the Last Post Association.

- Membership

During 2019, a major effort was made to update and check the Last Post Association's database of contacts and members, which currently contains some 11,200 names.

The Last Post Association's number of members in recent years is as follows:

- number of lifetime members: 72 on 31/12/2019 (+ 9 in 2019)
- number of ordinary members:
 - 2015: 441
 - 2016: 540
 - 2017: 687
 - 2018: 790
 - 2019: 726

This means that on 31/12/2019 there was a total of 798 lifetime and ordinary members.

Membership increased by 22% in 2016, 27% in 2017 and 15% in 2018, but fell by 6.50 % in 2019. This fall was probably attributable to the end of the centenary commemorations of the Great War, which has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of special events.

Website

As in previous years, the website was kept up-to-date throughout 2019 with amendments relating to the calendar, news bulletins, newsletters, the GWR concert, photos of the daily ceremony, frequently asked questions, etc. Via the website it is possible for visitors to purchase online Last Post badges, CDs, the DVDs of the 2015 and 2018 GWR concerts, ties and the 2014-2018 photo book. Sales in 2019 remained good, notwithstanding the end of the centenary period.



The number of visitors to the Last Post website (www.lastpost.be) in recent years is as follows:

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Visitors	159,188	144,230	110,498	142,503	101,630	71,002
Unique visitors	115,381	102,782	78,568	99,187	62,378	41,770
Page views	668,402	511,852	380,641	493,197	391,002	251,713

2014 was the absolute top year for interest in the First World War in general and the Last Post ceremony in particular. This interest fell away slightly in 2015 and again in 2016, but recovered in 2017, the year marking the 100th anniversary of the Third Battle of Ieper and Passchendaele. There was a renewed decrease in 2018 and this trend was repeated in 2019, the first year after the completion of the centenary celebrations.

The origin of visitors to the website is as follows:

1. Belgium: 47.44 %
2. Great Britain: 27.62 %
3. The Netherlands: 7.33 %
4. United States: 4.31 %
5. Canada: 2.75 %
6. Australia: 2.20 %
7. France: 2.04 %
8. Germany: 1.36 %
9. Ireland: 0.68 %
10. New Zealand: 0.38 %

Taken together, the top five countries represent almost 90 % of all visitors.

In 2020 the Last Post Association plans to update its website with a new 'look-and-feel' and a more performant webshop.

Social media

The Last Post Association makes every effort to be present on social media, where it provides its members, visitors and followers with all relevant information about our organisation.

Some figures:

- Facebook: 16,568 likes on 16/03/2020 (+12% in comparison with 2018)
- Twitter: 2,101 followers on 16/03/2020 (+16 % in comparison with 2018)
- YouTube: 281 subscribers
- Instagram: 310 subscribers on 16/03/2019 (only started at the end of 2019)

• **Word of thanks**

The Last Post Association wishes to thank everyone who contributed towards making 2019 another successful year:

The City of Ieper and, in particular, Burgomaster Emmily Talpe, Alderman Diego Desmadryl and the other members of the city council, for their continued assistance and co-operation



throughout 2019. Collaboration with the various city services, such as tourism, culture and the technical department, was likewise excellent, for which the Association is most grateful.



The daily Last Post ceremony would not be possible without the much-valued assistance of the local police, who halt the traffic passing under the Menin Gate from 1930 hours to 2030 hours each evening.

The Last Post Association would also like to thank the entire team of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for their commitment and dedication to the commemoration of the war dead and, in particular, for their maintenance of the Menin Gate Memorial.

Thanks are also due to the members of the personnel of the Association who carry out the bulk of its work:

- The six buglers, who during their alternate 'on-call' weeks are present at the Menin Gate each evening. The two teams of buglers consist of Rik, Tonny and Filip on the one hand and Raf, Jan and Christophe on the other hand.
- The three ceremonial assistants – Brian, Gilbert and Manu – for their tireless efforts, without which the effective control of the crowds attending the ceremony would not be possible.
- Pipers Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen for their presence at special ceremonies.
- All members of the board of directors for their efforts in various fields.
- Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert for their performance of the organisation's secretarial duties.