



## **Report of activities for 2023 for the Last Post Association vzw**

The Last Post Association is an independent, non-profit organisation based in Ieper. The Association organised the very first Last Post Ceremony on Monday 2 July 1928 and more than nine decades later is still responsible 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 2023 (01/01/2023 - 31/12/2023), its 95<sup>th</sup> year of activity.

### **1. The ceremonies**

During 2023, the daily Last Post Ceremony took place each evening at 8 p.m. under/at the Menin Gate.

The entire Last Post Association team merits a special word of thanks for their efforts during 2023. A special word of thanks is also due to the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Ypres and its various public services (tourism, technical department, culture, etc.) for their cooperation in 2023. This applies equally to the local police force and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The following is an overview of the main ceremonies in 2023:

- 26/03/2023: Gent-Wevelgem
- 14/04/2023: Lord Astor of Hever (grandson of Field Marschall Haig)
- 19/04/2023: Guy Barnett, Minister Veterans' Affairs Tasmania
- 24/04/2023: Flag dedication Australia and New Zealand / Andrew Mehrtens (former All Black New Zealand) / Jennifer Jones, president Rotary International
- 25/04/2023: Special Last Post ANZAC Day / Matt Thistlethwaite, Assistant Minister for Defence & Veterans' Affairs (Australia)  
Vice Admiral Mark Hammond, Chief of Navy Australia
- 26/04/2023: Legacy centenary torch relay Australia / Brendan Nelson & Scott Clingan
- 04/05/2023: CWGC (Claire Horton, Iain Lower and Michele Jennings)
- 08/05/2023: Commemoration VE-Day
- 19/05/2023: 100 km of Ieper
- 06/06/2023: Joanna Roper, UK Ambassador in Holland
- 10/06/2023: Yaira Jiménez Roig, Ambassador of Cuba in Belgium
- 12/06/2023: Mxolisi Nkosi, Ambassador of South Africa
- 17/06/2023: Ambassador Quarrey and UK Joint Delegation at NATO
- 02/07/2023: 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the very first Last Post on 2 July 1928
- 07/07/2023: Musique de l'Air (Band of the French Air Force),  
Guynemer committee Poelkapelle and Sir Barney White-Spunner
- 08/07/2023: Russ Remington, former mayor Hamilton New Zealand
- 09/07/2023: Band of the Grenadier Guards; Minister Mathias Diependaele
- 11/07/2023: Peter Hudson, Vice Chairman CWGC
- 27/07/2023: Royal Military School wit HRH Princess Elisabeth
- 25/08/2023: Special Last Post for the 50<sup>th</sup> Vierdaagse of the Yser
- 26/08/2023: Ambassador Diana Reaich (New Zealand ) and family



- 05/09/2023: New Zealand Chief of Army, Major General John Boswell
- 19/09/2023: Australian Deputy Chief of Army, MAJGEN Cheryl Pearce
- 25/09/2023: 33.000th daily Last Post Ceremony
- 01/10/2023: Mémoire de Rugby (World Championship in France)
- 07/10/2023: Clan Hay
- 13/10/2023: British West Indies Regiment
- 21/10/2023: Lady Edwina Louise Grosvenor, her husband Dan Snow and family
- 29/10/2023: Sir Wayne Buck Shelford (New Zealand All Blacks Rugby)
- 11/11/2023: Armistice Day
- 26/11/2023: Major General Jeremy King (Australia)
- 07/12/2023: Farewell Rian McKinstry, Defence Attaché New Zealand;  
welcome to Captain James Barnes as new Defence Attaché
- 08/12/2023: International Christmas Truce Tournament U12

## 2. Some other noteworthy events during 2023

### - New year's reception at Talbot House - 26/01/2023

On Thursday 26 January 2023, the Last Post Association once again organised its New Year's meeting at Talbot House in Poperinge. Thanks to Simon Louagie for the warm welcome. Together with board member Jacques Ryckebosch, he showed us around Talbot House and we were told many interesting facts. After a quiet moment of reflection in the chapel, snacks and drinks followed and the second edition of the LPA quiz was organised.

### - The restoration of the Menin Gate started on 17 April 2023

On Monday 17 April 2023 the Commonwealth War Graves Commission started with the restoration of the Menin Gate.





The works are expected to continue until the summer of 2025, preparing the monument for its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2027. For the first time in its history, the daily Last Post had to leave its traditional location under the Menin Gate.

Until Wednesday 26 April 2023, the ceremony was organised on the grass area at the top of the Menin Gate (near the Indian monument). From Thursday 27 April 2023, it moved to the bridge, where the ceremony will continue until early May 2024.

A special thanks to the entire team of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, to the staff of Monument Vandekerckhove and to the City of Ypres for their cooperation during this period. Also to the Police who closed the traffic every evening near the Gildestraat.

- Decease Charles Vermeulen - 20/04/2023

On Thursday 20 April 2023, Charles Vermeulen died at the age of 95. He was a director of the Last Post Association for 70 years (1953-2023).

Along with honorary Chairman Guy Gruwez, he became a director of the Last Post Association in 1953. He was treasurer from 1966 and vice-chairman from 1985 to 1996. Thanks to his sustained efforts over so many years, the Last Post Association is still able to continue its mission today: to honour and commemorate the fallen soldiers of the Commonwealth.

The Last Post Association is very grateful to him for all he has meant and done for the Association.

A remembrance ceremony was held at St Martin's Cathedral at 11am on Friday 28 April 2023. There, the buglers played the 'Te Velde' in honour of Charles Vermeulen.

- Flag dedication Australia and New Zealand - 24/04/2023

Also at the initiative of Johan Moors, ceremonial assistant of the Last Post Association, new flags were officially inaugurated for Australia and New Zealand on Monday 24 April 2023 at St Georges Memorial Church in the presence of the Ambassadors and representatives of both countries. These flags will be used by the City of Ypres and the Last Post Association at official ceremonies and special visits.

- ANZAC Day - 25/04/2023

The special Last Post on ANZAC Day was again organised on Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 11.15 am. Ambassadors Diana Reaich of New Zealand and Caroline Millar of Australia participated in the ceremony. A small catafalque party of the Ypres CCMP was also present at the ceremony.

As thanks for their daily efforts, all Last Post Association volunteers were welcome to the barbecue offered by the Embassies of Australia and New Zealand on Thursday 21 September 2023.



- Interviews IFFM - 27/04/2023

The Last Post ceremony has been included on the list of intangible cultural heritage in Flanders for a number of years. A number of board members, buglers and ceremonial assistants were interviewed at the request of Els Veraverbeke, curator of the Ypres Museums. This is to document the daily ritual of sounding the Last Post through film and interview. This will be included in the collection of the In Flanders Fields Museum and shared with the public. The objective is to organise these interviews every few years to create a time document.

- Commemoration of VE-Day - 08/05/2023

The end of the Second World War was commemorated on Monday 8 May 2023, during a the daily Last Post Ceremony. Harmony De Vijverzonen from Dikkebus provided the musical accompaniment.

- Ultimas - 16/05/2023

The buglers of the Last Post Association became laureates of the Ultimas in the movable and intangible heritage category on Tuesday, 16 May 2023.



The jury's motivation was as follows: 'The "Last Post" shows that heritage is "emotion": it gives a place to commemoration and mourning and allows stories to surface. It offers people connection and tells a universal story of how we want to be in the world, of letting go, taking hold and passing on. The fact that the buglers play selflessly, and with an enormous drive and maintain this very meaningful ritual deserves all the credit.'

At the initiative of the buglers, all Last Post Association people were welcome to a social gathering at the Yperley on Sunday, September 24, 2023.



- Visit tot he US - June 2023

On Monday 5 June 2023, the Ypres Last Post Association travelled to New York & Washington. The delegation included vice-chairman Mathieu Mottrie and buglers Raf Decombel and Jan Callemein. They travelled to the US at the invitation of the Doughboy Foundation and Taps for Veterans who also want to start a daily Last Post Ceremony at the new US Memorial in Washington (from September 2024).

Together with Flanders House in New York, a particularly nice programme was worked out during which the Last Post Association delegation visited various sites and monuments. In total, the Ypres buglers sounded the Last Post three times in New York, in Gettysburg and in Washington.

- The Last Post in the landscape, Mesen - 17/06/2023

The first evocation as part of the 'The Last Post in the Landscape' project took place at the New Zealand Memorial Park in Messines on Saturday 17 June 2023. The evocation was attended by 400 people.

There, Brigitte De Cock told the intriguing story of George and Herman Bollinger from New Zealand, but whose family originally came from Germany. During World War I, George and Herman were deployed in the Messines/Ieper region and both brothers were mortally wounded there. An Pierlé sang and De Brasserie provided the music. WXII provided the atmosphere with a variety of instruments. And the Ambassador of New Zealand spoke a word of thanks.



The Last Post Association offered a drink to all attendees at Peace Village after the event.

- 95 years Last Post - 02/07/2023

Sunday 2 July 2023 marked the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the very first Last Post on Monday 2 July 1928. It was the 32,915<sup>th</sup> day that the daily tribute was sounded at the Menin Gate.



- MSM for Benoit Mottrie - 04/07/2023

On Tuesday, 4 July 2023, Canadian Ambassador Alain Gendron awarded the Meritorious Service Medal of Canada to Chairman Benoit Mottrie on behalf of the Government of Canada. The ceremony took place at the Canadian Embassy in Brussels.

- 100 years Guynemer monument - 07/07/2023

As part of the 100th anniversary of the unveiling of the monument to French pilot Guynemer in Poelkapelle, the committee of the same name and the Band of the French Air Force took part in the daily Last Post on Friday, July 7, 2023.



- 100 years Canadian monument in St Julien - 08/07/2023

The buglers of the Last Post Association took part in the ceremony at the Canadian monument in St Julien to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its unveiling on Saturday 8 July 1923.

- Band of the Grenadier Guards - 09/07/2023

At the invitation of the government of Flanders, the Band of the Grenadier Guards once again participated in the daily Last Post on Sunday 9 July 2023. Minister Mathias Diependaele was present on behalf of the Flemish government.



- Ambassador Millar - 10/08/2023

On Thursday 10 August 2023, Australian Ambassador Caroline Millar laid a wreath for her great uncle listed on the Menin Gate. Thanks to Johan Moors who did a lot of research work for this.

- 50 years Vierdaagse of the Yser - 25/08/2023

The Last Post Association participated in the special Last Post for the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the Yser Four Day Marches on Friday, 25 August 2023.

- Menin Gate recognised by UNESCO - 20/09/2023

On Wednesday 20 September 2023, the Menin Gate, along with 26 other cemeteries and sites in the Westhoek, was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Commenting, Flemish Minister for Immovable Heritage Matthias Diependaele said the commemoration in Flanders is 'a living tradition that is now part of our identity', referring to the Last Post that is sounded every evening at the Menin Gate in Ypres.

- 33,000th daily Last Post - 25/09/2023

On Monday 25 September 2023, the daily Last Post was sounded for the 33,000<sup>th</sup> time.

- The Last Post in the landscape, Poperinge - 01/10/2023

The second evocation as part of the 'The Last Post in the Landscape' project took place at the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Poperinge on Sunday 1 October 2023. More than 400 people attended the evocation.



This evocation featured a number of soldiers from the Caribbean:

- The Manley brothers: Douglas Roy is buried in Poperinge and his brother Norman later became the very first prime minister of Jamaica.
- And Herbert Morris, one of the youngest soldiers executed during WWI.

Lady Linn Trio and Youth Choir Chorus provided music and singing. Rien Deleu & Baptiste Cobbe told the story of the soldiers.



The Ambassadors of Jamaica, Belize, Trinidad/Tobago and the Bahamas were present at this evocation and afterwards at the reception at Talbot House.

The third and fourth evocations will take place in 2024:

- Saturday 8 June 2024 at 8.30pm - Caterpillar Crater, Zillebeke
- Sunday 18 August 2024 at 3pm - Tyne Cot Cemetery Passchendaele

- Ceremonies New Zealand - 12/10/2023

At the request of the New Zealand Embassy, the buglers of the Last Post Association took part in two ceremonies on Thursday 12 October 2023 for the 106<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the 's Graventafel in Passchendaele: at the New Zealand column there and then also a short ceremony at Tyne Cot Cemetery.

- Armistice Day - 11/11/2023

On Armistice Day, Saturday 11 November 2023, the special Last Post took place at 11am and this on the bridge and a part of the Frenchlaan.





Together with the city of Ypres, the detailed plans for this ceremony were worked out. The weather was very nice on 11 November and all the elements of the traditional Armistice Day commemoration were present: the poppy parade, the British Devon Fire & Rescue Service Band and West Yorkshire Police Band, the Ypres Surrey Pipes & Drums, the Royal Harmony Ypriana and the Chorus choir, the usual boxes for VIPs, invited guests, members of the LPA, etc.. Only the poppy drop could not take place in 2023.



Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo was again present as was Flemish minister Matthias Diependaele. Many Ambassadors, military attachés and CWGC representatives also attended the special Last Post. On the market, everyone could follow the ceremony on the big screen and the Last Post Association provided an information stand under the Nieuwerck.

- Concert The Great War Remembered - 11 & 12/11/2023

The Great War Remembered Concert took place for the 18<sup>th</sup> time at St Martin's Cathedral. Once again, three editions of the concert were organised and were held on Saturday 11 November at 5pm and 8.30pm and on Sunday 12 November 2023 at 5pm. Also in 2023, there was a seating plan, numbered seats and e-tickets only. All performances were sold out, representing a total of 2,700 attendees.





The soloists at the 2023 concert were Bert Ostyn, Lady Linn, Lies Verholle and Elisabeth Vanhoutte. The quartet Troissoeur also took part and Wouter Deprez, in his own words, gave a testimony to 'The Landscape'.

The Royal Harmony Ypriana, the Choir and Youth Chorus and the Ypres Surrey Pipes & Drums provided the music and singing.

A special thanks to conductors Nico Logghe and Tineke Devoghel, director Bart Cafmeyer and Geert Gombeir for the production, but also to everyone else who did their bit to make the 2023 concert a very successful one. Special thanks also to Mathieu Mottrie for this top edition, but also to all the staff of the Last Post Association for their contribution to the concert. Finally, thanks to all external partners for the very smooth and pleasant cooperation.

### 3. Personnel

2023 was the Last Post Association 95<sup>th</sup> year of activity. On 31 December 2023, 27 people were actively engaged on behalf of the organisation in an official capacity namely:

- Executive board (3): Benoit Mottrie, Philip De Bruyn and Mathieu Mottrie
- Board of directors (8): Guy Gruwez, Carl Denys, Hans De Keyser, Philippe Dochy, Patrick Donck, Cédric Jacques and Jacques Ryckebosch
- Buglers (6): Rik Vandekerckhove, Tonny Desodt, Raf Decombel, Jan Callemein, Christophe Wils and Filip Deramoudt.
- Pipers (2): Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen
- Ceremonial assistants (6): Gilbert Denturck, Bart D'Hulster, Jens Leupe, Johan Moors, Youri Van Miegroet and Emmanuel Waelkens
- Photographers (2): Francis Vanwynsberghe and Eric Compernelle
- Secretariat (1): Jan Malsaert

### 4. 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 by Jan Malsaert.

#### - Ceremonial assistants & buglers

- From Tuesday 17 October 2023, Jens Leupe joined the team of assistants.
- The monthly rehearsals for the buglers continued to be organised each month in 2023.

#### - Wreath laying service

From October 2023, the Last Post Association offers the opportunity to lay a wreath for the fallen when someone cannot be present in person at the Menin Gate in Ypres to do so. Ceremonial assistants from the Last Post Association will lay the wreaths. A photo session was organised, an info video was made and a new page and accompanying application form were added to the website. After the wreath laying, the photos will be published on the website.



#### - Royal Albert Hall

In 2023, the Last Post Association further developed its plans to bring the Concert The Great War Remembered to the Royal Albert Hall in London. A lot of new contacts were made and existing contacts were further intensified to possibly host three editions of the concert in London in spring 2026.

#### - Extraordinary general meeting - 04/12/2023

The Last Post Association organised an extraordinary general meeting on Monday 4 December 2023 to bring its articles of association in line with the Companies and Associations Code.

#### - Membership

During 2023, a major effort was made to check and update the Last Post Association's database of contacts and members, which currently contains ± 11,700 records.

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

- number of lifetime members: 102 on 31/12/2023 (+ 6 in 2023)
- number of ordinary members:
  - 2015: 441
  - 2016: 540
  - 2017: 687
  - 2018: 790
  - 2019: 726
  - 2020: 702
  - 2021: 621
  - 2022: 543
  - 2023: 552

This means that on 31/12/2023 there was a total of 654 lifetime and ordinary members.

A remarkable trend is the change seen by the origin of members. The proportion of Belgian members has increased from 46,7% in 2017 to 56,7% in 2023. In contrast, the proportion of British members decreased from 39,9% in 2017 to 28,6% in 2023.

#### Social media

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

Some figures:

- Facebook: 30,785 followers on 29/03/2024 (+ 2,4% compared to 2022)
- Twitter: 2,669 followers on 29/03/2024 (+ 5,3% compared to 2022)
- YouTube: 1,010 subscribers on 29/03/2024 (+ 25,2% compared to 2022)
- Instagram: 2,013 followers on 29/03/2024 (+ 12,4 % compared to 2022).



## 5. Word of thanks

The Last Post Association wishes to thank everyone who contributed towards making 2023 another successful year:

The City of Ieper, Mayor Emmily Talpe, Alderman Diego Desmadryl and all other members of the city council for their continued assistance and co-operation throughout 2023. Collaboration with the various city services, such as tourism, culture and the technical department, was also 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 for their maintenance of the Menin Gate Memorial.

Thanks are also due to the volunteers of the Association:

- 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 six ceremonial assistants for their tireless efforts.
- Pipers Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen for their presence at special ceremonies.
- Photographers Eric Compennolle and Francis Vanwysberghe for capturing many ceremonies.
- All members of the board of directors for their efforts in various fields.
- Jan Matsaert for his performance of the organisation's secretarial duties.

A very special mention here for honorary Chairman Guy Gruwez who became a director of the Last Post Association in 1953. Anno 2023, therefore, he has been a director within the organisation for 70 years. A very remarkable and unique achievement.

## 6. Monthly meetings

The board of directors held its meetings on the first Monday of each month.

## 7. Newsletters

In 2023, five newsletters were sent by e-mail.

## 8. Objectives for the year 2024

- ensure the continuity of the daily ceremony during the restoration of the Menin Gate
- the commemoration of the Armistice on 11/11/2024
- the concert The Great War Remembered 2024
- maintain the number of members
- the organisation of the 3rd and 4th evocation 'The Last Post in the Landscape'
- the organisation of the concert at The Royal Albert Hall in 2026.