

Hearts Great War Memorial Fund - Memorial at Contalmaison, France

The City of Edinburgh Council

29 April 2004

Purpose of report

- 1 This report provides information on the work being undertaken by the Hearts Great War Memorial Fund towards the establishment of a memorial at Contalmaison, France, and seeks approval of a financial contribution from the Council.

Main report

- 2 The Hearts Great War Memorial Committee aims to establish and maintain a physical commemoration in Contalmaison, France, in November this year, of the participation of the Edinburgh 15th and 16th Battalions of the Royal Scots at the Battle of the Somme.
- 3 Members of the Regiment had planned the memorial as far back as 1919 but, for a variety of reasons, this was not progressed and the scheme foundered because of a lack of funds.
- 4 There is currently no formal civic acknowledgement of the two City of Edinburgh Battalions. Hearts Great War Memorial Committee has, therefore, revived the plan to establish, within sight of the graves of those who died in the Battle of the Somme, a memorial to commemorate the sacrifice made by Sir George McCrae's Battalion and the specific role of the players and members of the Heart of Midlothian Football Club and others from Edinburgh and the surrounding areas.
- 5 It is hoped that the memorial cairn will be erected in the town of Contalmaison, to where the 16th Royal Scots advanced on the first day of the battle of the

Somme in 1916. An ten foot high cairn will support a bronze tablet plaque and three supporting plaques and is being built by the Watson Group, Stonemasons, using Scottish stone. Edgar Gibson from Orkney is designing the plaques and the bronze work is being carried out by a Nairn based company, Farquhar Ogilvie-Lane.

- 6 It is planned to unveil the cairn at a ceremony to be held in November this year and to make the ceremony an annual event. The Committee is also giving consideration to the strengthening of connections between the people of Edinburgh and Contalmaison and has expressed a wish for the Council to be formally represented and involved both in the ceremony and in wider developments.
- 7 The Committee is in the process of fundraising to meet the costs of the memorial and its target, in the first instance, is between £30,000 and £35,000. Approximately half of that sum has been raised to date and a formal request has been made to the Council for a contribution.
- 8 There are references in Jack Alexander's recent book "McCrae's Battalion" to the heroism of the men of the Royal Scots but also to the fact that the then Edinburgh Corporation refused to give support to the memorial proposals. At that time, of course, far less was known about the brutality of the fighting in World War I but, with the passing of time, the full horror has become better understood.
- 9 In the years immediately following the War, efforts were made to secure a fitting memorial to the heroism and sacrifice displayed by the two Edinburgh battalions. The following extracts from Jack Alexander's book record what happened next:

"Goodwill, however, was in short supply in the chambers of Edinburgh Corporation. When Sir George and his Memorial Committee submitted their proposals for support and funding, they were dismayed to be told that neither would be forthcoming. Bearing in mind that McCrae's was the 2nd Edinburgh City Battalion and that Edinburgh owed an unacknowledged debt of gratitude to the original volunteers, this was just insulting. McCrae's had done the city proud, but the city didn't know it. No one who had stayed at home throughout the late hostilities had the slightest notion of the horrors of trench warfare. Carried along by a censored press that was never anything less than optimistic about the Allies' prospects, that described 1 July 1916 as "a day of broad success along the line", the Edinburgh public and their elected representatives remained in a deep state of blameless ignorance. Thousands of local men had been killed since 1914, and thousands more wounded, but family grief was private. It crossed the landing to a neighbour, it whispered up and down the common stair, but it seldom reached beyond the outside door. Even after 1 July suspicion that something dreadful had happened was never officially confirmed. It was weeks before the relevant casualty returns found their way into the papers – and when they did, they were staggered to minimise their impact. Thus McCrae's roll of wounded from the battle was

published anonymously over five days in mid-August, with the names of the missing withheld for a fortnight. The roll of killed did not appear until September – concealed within several separate regimental lists. It took a further six months for the War Office to announce that the missing were actually dead. The same procedure was followed with the 15th Royal Scots, so that while Edinburgh undoubtedly knew that the two City battalions had fared badly, there was nothing (other than the conflicting accounts of returned convalescents) to suggest that 1 July 1916 had been the capital's blackest day since Flodden..."

"In the face of widespread civic indifference, the association now tried a change of approach. Since their appeal to the Corporation's conscience had failed to impress, perhaps an appeal to its pocket might succeed. There remained the matter of the Provost's own battalion, the 1st Edinburgh City, sponsored by the late Sir Robert Inches. Surely the capital was obliged to commemorate their efforts. If all parties were agreed, perhaps some joint commemoration might be adopted - a statue, a plaque, or something less expensive. The suggestion that Princes Street be renamed "McCrae's March" apparently went down like a lead observation balloon. When Sir George tried to shame the council by announcing that the Tyneside battalions were proposing to place a substantial memorial close to the Bapaume road at la Boisselle, he was all but ignored. This was the final straw: at their next reunion, in December 1920, the 16th Royal Scots resolved to go it alone."

"Five days before Christmas Sir George sent out the following dispatch:

The 16th Battalion The Royal Scots was raised in Edinburgh in December 1914. It took part in the famous forward movement on the Somme on July 1st 1916, and from that date it was constantly in or near the front line, until it had been so shattered that it could no longer exist as a unit. Eight hundred members of the Battalion sacrificed their lives in the War and we feel sure that neither Edinburgh nor Scotland would be willing to see these brave men pass away unrecorded. As a fitting memorial, it has been agreed to erect a tablet on the wall of St Giles Cathedral. In order that the memorial may be worthy of those whom it commemorates, it is desirable to raise a sum of £1,000. We respectfully appeal for the support of the survivors of those who served or were trained with the Battalion; of the relatives of the fallen; and of all friends in Edinburgh and elsewhere who wish to express their appreciation of these men who fell in the service of their country."

- 10 It seems entirely appropriate that in 2004, the centenary of the signing of the Entente Cordiale with France, proper recognition should be given to those Edinburgh men who sacrificed their lives. The association with Heart of Midlothian Football Club has ensured that their memory lives on in the city and the proposed memorial cairn in Contalmaison will replicate this in France, where they fell.

Financial Implications

- 11 The overall cost of the memorial is not high and a donation of, £5,000 from the Council seems appropriate. The authority for such expenditure can be found in Section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. A funding source for this sum will be determined by me in consultation with the Director of Finance.

Recommendations

- 12 The Council is recommended:
- (i) to approve a donation of £5,000 to the Hearts Great War Memorial Fund; and
 - (ii) to remit to me to discuss with the Hearts Great War Memorial Committee the Council's participation in the ceremony of dedication at Contalmaison in November 2004.



Tom Aitchison
Chief Executive

21/05/04.

Appendices	None
Contact/tel	Tom Aitchison 469 3002
Wards affected	
Background Papers	Letter from Hearts Great War Memorial Fund dated 12 March 2004