



PRESS RELEASE

# THE MENIN GATE LIONS

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# ‘Menin Gate Lions’ return temporarily from Australia to Ieper

2017 is again an important year for Ieper within the context of commemorating ‘100 years of the First World War 2014-2018’. The first top moment will be the unveiling and inauguration of the stone ‘Menin Gate Lions ‘ during a special Last Post ceremony on **Monday 24 April**. At the same time, a small explanatory exhibition about the lions will be opened in the In Flanders Fields Museum.



The two stone lions, which each hold a shield bearing the coat-of-arms of Ieper and after 1822 stood on the old staircase leading up to the entrance of the Cloth Hall, the civic and business centre of the city, will be temporarily returned to their original home as part of the commemoration of the First World War.

In the middle of the 19th century, the lions were moved to a new position at the Menin Gate, where they stood during the First World War, while Ieper was reduced to ruins by German shells. Thousands of Australian and other Allied troops passed the lions on their way to the Belgian battlefields on the Western Front. Many of them were destined never to return.

The lions, broken and damaged, were later recovered from the devastation and in 1936 they were gifted by the Burgomaster of Ieper to the Government of Australia as a gesture of friendship and gratitude for the sacrifices made by the Australian nation. Since then, they have stood guard at the entrance to the **Australian War Memorial** in Canberra, where they have been admired by visitors from all over the world.

At the joint initiative of the Belgian and Australian governments, the lions will this year be returning temporarily to their symbolic home at the Menin Gate, as part of the 100th anniversary commemorations of some of the most crucial battles of the First World War, including the Third Battle of Ieper, the Battle of Passendale, the Mine Battle of Mesen and the Battle of Polygon Wood.



The history of the lions will be told in a file exhibition in the **In Flanders Fields Museum**. First Alderman Jef Verschoore, also chairman of the IFFM: *“We are delighted that both governments and the other relevant partners, such as the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** and the **Last Post Association**, have joined forces to make possible this remarkable project. It is also self-evident that our museum will seek to explain the background and significance of these iconic statues in a free exhibition in the Cloth Hall.”*

The Director of the **Australian War Memorial**, Dr. Brendan Nelson, has commented that the strong bond between Australia and Belgium, forged by the devotion and sacrifice of those who passed through the Menin Gate on the way to the front, will be renewed and strengthened by this joint initiative.

Dr. Nelson added: *‘We will forever be united with the City of Ieper and the Belgian people, and as a token of gratitude for this unique relationship the **Australian War Memorial**, with the help of the **Royal Australian Air Force**, will return the lions of the Menin Gate to their original home.’*

*‘Belgium and Australia both remember the catastrophe of the First World War. The lions will arrive back in Ieper just before ANZAC Day, and will resume guard at the place where they once stood all those years ago. There they will remind us of the price paid by so many during the battles for Ieper, Polygon Wood and the Wijtschate-Mesen ridge, during which tens of thousands of Allied soldiers were killed.’*

The lions will be officially unveiled and inaugurated during a **special Last Post** on **24 April 2017**. The Last Post is a ceremony that has been organized every evening since 1928 by the **Last Post Association**. On 24 April, the ceremony will take place for the 30,655th time.

The lions will stand on the bridge in front of the Menin Gate and will be returned to the **Australian War Memorial** after Armistice Day, 11 November 2017.

A loan agreement has been concluded between the Australian and Belgian federal government. The federal government will provide transport for the lions on Belgian territory and will arrange for the construction of two plinths on which the lions will stand.





The project was realized with the cooperation of



Australian Government



CWGC  
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

