

The Relationship between Zonnebeke and Waimakariri



History of the

Twinning Relationship

The Battle of Passchendaele was one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War, particularly the Battle of Ypres. During 100 days of 1917 there were 500,000 casualties.

A large number of New Zealanders fought and lost their lives, especially on 12 October 1917 when 846 young New Zealanders were killed in the first four hours of the battle. D Company from Rangiora and C Company from Kaiapoi were part of the Canterbury Regiment that fought in the area, and it's believed that at least seven men from the district lost their lives there.

The impact of the World Wars on this region of Belgium was significant and remembering those events is of great importance to the people of this area.

Following an invitation from the Burgemeester (Mayor) of Zonnebeke-Passchendaele in 2007, a twinning relationship was established between the Municipality of Zonnebeke and Waimakariri District Council. While the relationship is not as formal as a sister city relationship, it does recognise the significant and enduring connection between our two areas.



The Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 in Zonnebeke



The formal signing of the twinning relationship was made on 5 October 2007 when the Mayor (Jim Gerard QSO) and Deputy Mayor (Jo Kane) visited Zonnebeke. They were accompanied by Graeme Matheson, Secretary/Treasurer Rangiora RSA, and Kevin Brown, Kaiapoi RSA President.

In April 2009 a delegation from Zonnebeke led by Mayor Dirk Cardoen was hosted by the Council, the visit culminating with attendance at the Kaiapoi, Rangiora and Christchurch ANZAC Day services.

A visit was also made in 2009 by the Chair and Curator of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele (1917) in Belgium to coincide with the travelling exhibition – ‘Passchendaele: The Belgians Have Not Forgotten’.

In October 2013, Graeme Matheson from Rangiora RSA, Mayor David Ayers, Councillors Dan Gordon and Kevin Felstead returned to Ypres, Belgium to attend a special service at the Passchendaele museum.

A group of Rangiora RSA members was formed in 2014 to attend the Passchendaele centenary commemorations in Belgium and subsequently representatives of the Waimakariri District Council and 45

Rangiora RSA members took part in the commemoration on 12 October 2017.

In 2018 the Council approved the establishment of the Waimakariri Passchendaele Advisory Group to provide oversight of the District’s international relations and cultural links with the Municipality of Zonnebeke, Belgium, and support the ongoing commemoration and remembrance of the Battle of Passchendaele 1917 and World War One.

In March 2018, the Council officially opened the Passchendaele Memorial Path, a walking and cycling link between Kaiapoi and Rangiora.



The Passchendaele Memorial Path was officially opened on 3 March 2018 in Kaiapoi

Message from

The Mayor

Kia ora

It is a privilege to be able to commemorate the strong connection forged between Belgium and New Zealand as we approach the 105th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele where 846 New Zealanders lost their lives over a period of just four hours.

The huge loss of life still stands as the greatest one-day death toll ever suffered by New Zealand forces. More New Zealanders are buried in Belgium than in any other part of the world, with over 12,000 service personnel buried or commemorated there.

At least seven men from the Waimakariri District lost their lives during the Battle of Passchendaele and many more were wounded and injured. The sacrifices they had made at such an early age impacted on me when I attended the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium five years ago.

During the official 100th memorial service at Tyne Cot the hairs on the back of my neck stood up as, like many, we had family who fought at the Battle of Passchendaele.

My thoughts turned to my uncle from Belfast, a Sergeant Major at Passchendaele, who suffered a serious respiratory infection for the rest of his life because of his exposure to mustard gas.

One positive aspect that emerged from this bleak battle was the ongoing friendship and



respect between New Zealand and Belgium. This is reflected in our twinning relationship with the province of Zonnebeke, where members of C Company from Kaiapoi and D Company from Rangiora formed part of the Canterbury regiment which fought in this area. We formalised this important relationship in 2007 with the Council and representatives of both Kaiapoi and Rangiora RSAs.

The warm welcome and hospitality of the Belgians will stay with me forever. They are eternally grateful for New Zealand's sacrifice and this respect is reflected in the immaculate condition of all the graves and memorials to our fallen service personnel.

While we can never thank those who gave the supreme sacrifice during the Battle of Passchendaele, we can always remember them and not forget that it is due to their sacrifice that we enjoy our freedom today.

Ngā mihi

Dan Gordon, Waimakariri Mayor



At Tyne Cot Cemetery for the 100th New Zealand commemoration of the Battle of Passchendaele with my mother Elizabeth.

Message from

Chair of Waimakariri Passchendaele Advisory Group

Kia ora

As the Chair of the Waimakariri Passchendaele Advisory Group, it is an honour to be involved in producing this information booklet which will further the understanding of the important relationship between our District and the Municipality of Zonnebeke in Belgium.

The importance of commemorating the Battle of Passchendaele and the strong connections forged between Waimakariri and Zonnebeke cannot be underestimated, and while over 100 years have passed since the date of this battle the connections between us continue to grow. Each year we find new ways to strengthen the bond between us.

In the space of a mere four hours, 60% of the New Zealanders who took part in the Battle of Passchendaele were either dead or wounded, marking it as the bloodiest day in the history of our young nation.

At the time of the Great War the population of Waimakariri District was around 18,000, with most people living rurally. Nearly every family was impacted by the Battle of Passchendaele.



Zonnebeke residents have never forgotten the sacrifices made by New Zealand soldiers. This remembrance is still very much alive today and the official twinning relationship between our two districts has formalised this deep bond that we share.

It is my sincere hope that our connections will continue to grow as we exchange cultural values built on our shared historical bond which was forged following the Battle of Passchendaele.

I would particularly like to encourage the younger generation of Waimakariri residents to learn more about this important part of our history. I am sure that many families have personal stories to pass down regarding their forebears who were involved in this battle.

Let's continue to grow our strong bonds and learn more about each other so we can pass our stories on to the next generation.

Ngā mihi

Neville Atkinson, JP
Waimakariri Deputy Mayor



Message from

Lieve Bierque Honorary Consul of Belgium



However, over the years the ceremony has also acquired a wider significance.

So, when the bugles blow, it is not only the soldiers of the British Empire who are being honoured, but also their comrades from France, Belgium, America and many other Allied lands, who likewise “stood firm and did not count the cost”.

At the same time, thoughts may also turn to those who fought on the other side of no-man’s land: enemies then, but partners now in a new, united Europe.

In this sense the Last Post not only represents a mirror of our past, but also a beacon of hope for all our futures.

The Belgians have not forgotten and will not forget.

Lieve Bierque



Source references:

lastpost.be/
www.100.govt.nz/the-menin-gate-last-post-ceremony-an-enduring-tradition

On the promenade in Sumner and the Passchendaele Memorial Path you see the names of the Belgian cities where New Zealand servicemen fought during WWI: Zeebrugge, Ypres, Messines and Passchendaele. In each New Zealand village, you can see the memorials of WWI and WWII — the long list of names but no graveyards.

The many graveyards in Wallonia and the Flanders in Belgium are the resting places of these young soldiers who were fighting in WWI and WWII and never returned to New Zealand. It is grim to realise that all those young soldiers “From the uttermost ends of the earth” never came home to fulfil their lives, hopes and dreams. They are “nurturing” the Belgian soil.

Belgians have not forgotten their sacrifice.

Every evening at 8pm since 11 November 1928, the Last Post has been sounded under the imposing memorial arches of the Menin Gate in Belgium.

The ceremony was originally intended as an expression of the gratitude of the Belgian people towards those who had died for their freedom and independence and so it remains, even today.

Message from

Freddy Declerck Honorary Captain RNZN

Kia ora

It's a huge honour and a real privilege for me to contribute to this pamphlet on the strong connection between the Waimakariri and Zonnebeke districts.

New Zealand soldiers served in Zonnebeke (Passchendaele is a village of Zonnebeke) in 1917-1918 and they had many losses. Of the 4,633 New Zealanders dead in Belgium, 1,937 are buried or missing in Zonnebeke. Most were from Canterbury, many from Waimakariri. This connection between our districts is so important because their sacrifice should never be forgotten.

For the people here, the New Zealanders who visit are seen as pilgrims. Most of them understand very well how difficult it would have been for NZ families, 100 years ago, to imagine where their men fought, were wounded, gone missing or been killed. Through the twinning of our Districts we are connected in a more direct way and for us, the people of Waimakariri represent the New Zealand families with losses here.

We share a similar landscape as Canterbury and we are both regions of agriculture. There are more similarities, as we are both young countries which had to struggle to become independent nations.



When I visited your country, I felt at home because of the warm reception, the care for us and above all the friendship. The way you remember your dead with memorials in the different villages on ANZAC Day is exactly what we do in our villages on Armistice Day. We honour our dead the same way and here we honour yours as well.

It is my wish that the bond between the two districts will become stronger in the future so we can continue the remembrance and commemoration of those who have given the ultimate sacrifice, and for families who could not come over to mourn over the graves of their beloved father, husband or son. It's not always easy because we are separated by half a world, but with some good will, a lot is possible. I also hope we can build interest in our shared story with the youth of both districts/countries.

I believe we should give it a try, never give up, kia kaha.

Ngā mihi

Freddy Declerck



Freddy at the graveside of a NZ Captain



Laying a wreath at the main gate as part of the New Zealand commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele, October 2017.



Mayor Dan Gordon's grandfather served in WWI





The flags of Belgium and New Zealand.



Alderman Joachim Jonckheere of Zonnebeke laying a wreath on behalf of Waimakariri on 12 October 2021, remembering the losses New Zealand suffered.

Message from

*Ian Thompson
President
Rangiora RSA*



Rangiora RSA's involvement with the twinning of Waimakariri and Zonnebeke, Belgium.

In October 2007 a party of four people attended the 90th anniversary of the battle of Passchendaele, Belgium. They were Graeme Matheson, Secretary/Treasurer Rangiora RSA, Jim Gerard, Waimakariri Mayor, Jo Kane Deputy Mayor and Kevin Brown, Kaiapoi RSA President.

This meeting confirmed the twinning agreement between Waimakariri District Council and Zonnebeke Council, Belgium.

There has been a strong relationship between the two Councils ever since.

In October 2013 Graeme Matheson on behalf of Rangiora RSA, Mayor David Ayers, Councillors Dan Gordon and Kevin Felstead returned to Ypres, Belgium to attend a special service at the Passchendaele museum.

A group of 75 Rangiora RSA members was formed in 2014 to attend the 12 October 2017 commemoration, Belgium.

Waimakariri Council and 45 Rangiora RSA members took part in the commemoration.

Ian Thompson



Message from

Neill Price JP President Kaiapoi RSA



The Kaiapoi RSA is honoured to join with other contributors in the production of this important document which intends to enhance the already well recognised unity between Waimakariri and Zonnebeke since 1918.

From 1914 to 1918 many men and woman from Waimakariri travelled to the other side of the world for what was to be called the Great Advance.

Unfortunately many did not return.

Every evening at the Menen Gate a ceremony takes place to honour New Zealanders and other nations in true military style.

This has led to both Districts coming together as friends.

This friendship has endured and is to be encouraged even more in the future so we can both continue to honour their contribution to our way of life.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

L. Neill Price QSM QFSM JP





WAIMAKARIRI
PASSCHENDAELE



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