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COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
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THEIR NAME LIVETH
FOR EVERMORE

.....
ANNUAL REPORT
2023 - 2024
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THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

PATRON

His Majesty King Charles III

PRESIDENT

Her Royal Highness
The Princess Royal

CHAIRMAN

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
from 31 August 2023 to July 2024
The Rt Hon John Healey MP
from July 2024

VICE CHAIRMAN

Vice Admiral Peter Hudson CB
CBE

MEMBERS

The High Commissioner for Australia

His Excellency
The Hon Stephen Smith

The High Commissioner for Canada

His Excellency
The Hon Ralph Goodale PC

The High Commissioner for India

His Excellency
Vikram K. Doraiswami

The High Commissioner for New Zealand

His Excellency
Phil Goff CNZM

The High Commissioner for The Republic of South Africa

His Excellency
Jeremiah Nyamane Mamabolo

Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas DBE

Vasuki Shastry

The Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson
DBE MP

The Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP

Sir Timothy Hitchens KCVO CMG

Keryn James

Lieutenant General Sir Ben
Bathurst KCVO CBE

Air Marshal Sir Stuart Atha KBE
CB DSO

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES FOUNDATION TRUSTEES

Chair

Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas
DBE

Major General Alastair Bruce of
Crionaich OBE VR KStJ

The Rt Hon Kevan Jones MP

Sir Adrian Montague CBE

Captain Jay Singh-Sohal

Julian Evans

Gerald Allison

Christopher Walsh

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Director General Claire Horton CBE

Director of Operations Barry Murphy

General Counsel Vincent Collins

Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Ian Hill

**Director of Commonwealth Relations and Global
Strategy** Charles Garrett OBE

**Chief Marketing Officer and Director of the
Foundation** Michele Jennings

Chief People Officer Martha Desmond

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HIGHLIGHTS
2023-2024
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A SELECTION OF HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR'S NUMEROUS
ACHIEVEMENTS CELEBRATED IN THIS REPORT.



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Our maturing approach to
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The opening of our first new
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NORMANDY 80
Marking 80 years
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Updates from
our dedicated
commemorations
team

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FOREWORD BY THE VICE CHAIRMAN PETER HUDSON CB CBE

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This has been a very memorable year for the Commission, the details of which this annual report succinctly captures and which I hope you will find of interest. While the world remains a deeply troubled place, our work and our cemeteries and memorials remain focal points for acts of commemoration and stand fast as reminders of the human cost of conflict.

At the outset, I must acknowledge the extraordinary service of His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent who stepped down as our President after 53 years at the head of the Commission. His dedication and passion for Commission

business inspired the many people who met him during his visits; all in the Commission are enormously grateful for his unfailing commitment and guidance. We are honoured to welcome Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal as our new President. Already a proactive ambassador for our work, Her Royal Highness visited our headquarters and, in recent months, has shown her support through visits to our sites in Sri Lanka, Norway, and France.

This year also marks a new chapter for the CWGC with the ascension of His Majesty King Charles III as our Patron. The first time the Commission has had a Royal

Patron, and it speaks volumes about the importance His Majesty places on our work as a Commonwealth organisation that fosters diplomacy and unity.

Among the many high-profile visitors to our sites this year was His Holiness Pope Francis who led an All-Souls Day mass from our Rome War Cemetery. The selection of our cemetery as the venue for one of the most holy ceremonies of the Catholic year had particular importance, falling on the anniversary year of the beginning of the Allied Italian campaign. The anniversary was marked by numerous commemorations across Italy, including

THIS YEAR ALSO MARKS A NEW CHAPTER
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His Holiness Pope Francis led Mass at the CWGC's Rome War Cemetery to celebrate All Souls' Day.



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WELCOME FROM DIRECTOR GENERAL CLAIRE HORTON CBE

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The past year has been a rollercoaster ride for the Commission. From the lows and impact of conflict on our work and people, to the incredible highs of delivering an ambitious programme to mark D-Day 80, we've ridden the rough with the smooth. But throughout all the change and turmoil, several important things remain constant, including the support of our governments and public and the dedication and brilliance of our staff and volunteers.

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Navigating those challenges while remaining true to our mission to honour the dead of the world wars, is part and parcel of leading this remarkable organisation. From external factors, like managing the sustainability of an ageing heritage estate to global economic uncertainty, each challenge has been met with the unwavering commitment and ingenuity of our people and the support of our Commissioners and member governments. I am extremely grateful for the confidence and support shown by our funding member states – whose faith in our new strategy and direction of travel was reflected in a secured agreement to our funding position for the next three years. That support has an obvious direct

impact on our ability to deliver our global mission and the ambition of our strategy.

Across the Commission, health and safety has continued to be a priority, ensuring staff remain safe and supported in all their roles. The Commission is rightly recognised for the standards it delivers, but we work hard behind the scenes to ensure that those standards do not come at the expense of a safe working environment. The significant investment in this area of our work is reaping tangible benefits.

Risks beyond our control have also required action – particularly given the security issues faced by our people in the Sudan, Lebanon and the Middle East. Our colleagues and their immediate families in Gaza faced significant threat and hardship, necessitating their evacuation, while colleagues in Israel have also faced challenges to their daily lives. Despite these, their resilience, professionalism and optimism have been exemplary. Restoring our sites in the region will be a priority when the situation allows.

This past year also saw significant progress in the strategic area of deepening relations. Our conference in partnership with The Royal United Service

Institute in London, explored the future of commemoration with discussions, debates and keynote speeches exploring the ongoing relevance of commemoration and what form it may take in the future. It is through such international partnerships, that we can influence the direction of future commemoration and reinforce the importance of collaboration in marking our shared history.

Our physical work continues with significant milestones, including the completion of the new cemetery at Loos in France, a poignant addition to our



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Claire Horton CBE Director General.

At CWGC's Kariokor War Cemetery, Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla joined British and Kenyan military personnel in an act of Remembrance before presenting World War II veterans with replacement campaign medals.



estate. The progress made in addressing the Non-Commemorations Programme also reinforces our commitment to ensuring that all who served are commemorated with dignity and respect. It was in that light that I was delighted to welcome Their Majesties The King and Queen to Kariokor in Kenya in November, where they joined British and Kenyan military personnel in an act of Remembrance. Their Majesties then heard how we are working hand-in-hand with local communities and stakeholders to ensure all those who supported Britain's efforts in both world wars are properly commemorated.

Sharing that story of commemoration was a key part of our Legacy of Liberation campaign which culminated in significant events in Normandy and Arnhem to mark the 80th anniversaries of those momentous campaigns.

Normandy was a significant milestone for us as we delivered an ambitious programme of events to pay fitting tribute to those who served, and to demonstrate the significance of our organisation and the importance of passing on the baton of commemoration to the next generation. Symbolising that act was a specially

created Torch of Commemoration – a replica of The Canadian Remembrance Torch, it was created by students from McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. The Torch took part in a series of events across the UK, France and Germany ahead of the main commemorations in Normandy, where it became a focal point of our Vigil to the Fallen on 5 June.

Our President, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, alongside serving military, led the vigil and moment of reflection, focusing on the memories of those who fought and honouring those who fell. At the climax of the event, as darkness fell, each of the 4,600 headstones in Bayeux War Cemetery were individually illuminated in an act of thanksgiving. Other graves across Calvados were lit using tea lights placed by local schoolchildren. Broadcast live on the BBC, the event was the highest rated programme screened that evening – helping us, alongside unprecedented media coverage, reach new audiences.

Sharing the story of who we are and who we commemorate is a core purpose of our charitable arm, the Commonwealth War Graves Foundation. Developing and growing the Foundation remains a

key focus. Initiatives like “The Big Help Out” have been crucial in supporting our efforts, engaging volunteers to assist with both practical tasks and raising awareness. As the Vice Chairman has mentioned, meeting some of our incredible volunteers was a highlight of our recent Commissioner tour to Scotland. The contribution of all our people is greatly valued and our more than 2,000 volunteers will continue to make a difference to both our profile and our ability to care for the resting places of the dead.

As we reflect on this year's achievements and challenges, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to our member governments, Commissioners, public, staff, volunteers, and partners for their unwavering dedication to preserving the memory of those who served. Together, we continue to honour their legacy.

I commend this report to you.■

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**WITH
THANKS**
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We would like to thank His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent for over 53 years of dedicated service to the fallen in his role as President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The Duke of Kent served as our President from 1970, visiting many of our sites and staff around the world and represented the Commission at major events.

He was succeeded in November 2023 by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal.



STRATEGY TOWARDS 2039



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DELIVERING THE FUTURE: CWGC STRATEGY TO 2039

Our mission remains unchanged: in the words of our Royal Charter, we perpetuate the memory of those we commemorate, strengthening the bonds of union between all people. With the launch of our new strategy in March 2023, setting our ambition to be a global leader in commemoration, we continue to harness the ambition, passion, commitment, and expertise we have as an organisation in service of our mission.

In a period of global uncertainty—geopolitical, climatic, and socio-economic—that increasingly seems to be the new normal, our ‘CWGC: Strategy Towards 2039’ is a roadmap to help us critically examine what we do, who we do it for, how we do it, and what else we might do to ensure our longevity and our place in the landscape of global commemoration.

For too many organisations, corporate strategies are easy to write and even easier to forget. We are a complex organisation with wide responsibilities, including: maintaining and conserving our graves, records, and memorials sustainably; righting historical inequalities in commemoration; engaging diverse global

audiences and stakeholders in telling our stories; raising our profile and securing our ongoing relevance as the world wars recede from living memory; building our charitable Foundation, public engagement, and outreach and educational programmes to inspire future generations; and reinvesting in our people while streamlining our processes.

With the challenge of knowing that the execution of one may negatively affect another, we remain sharply focused on the delivery of three-year plans, with processes built and ongoing improvements to allow the Commission to deliver our commitments and readjust to short-term challenges while remaining focused on the long term.■

**WE PERPETUATE THE
MEMORY OF THOSE
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STRENGTHENING THE
BONDS OF UNION
BETWEEN ALL PEOPLE.**

Our staff undertake maintenance in East
Grinstead (Mount Noddy) Cemetery, Sussex, UK.

ORGANISATIONAL FITNESS

In March 2024, the Commission completed the first full year of its 'Strategy Towards 2039 – The First Three Years (2023-2026)'. In April, approximately 2,000 strategic milestones were agreed upon for delivery in 2024-2025. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been embedded across the organisation, improving transparency and accountability. Work is also underway to align with the United Nations' Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles.

The Commission is facing significant funding challenges due to an ageing estate requiring more frequent interventions and the growing impact of climate change. Nevertheless, the Strategy has provided a strong foundation for good governance. Efficiency savings and process improvements are being reviewed across the organisation as part of the action to tackle these challenges. Opportunities identified and underway are varied: from water consumption efficiencies around the world; security and insurance reviews; the expansion of the volunteering programme to include gardening roles in the UK; to readjusting and renegotiating a range

of goods and services contracts; waste management improvements; and a review of travel.

Our people are a major asset. The 2023 People Survey results, shared that autumn, showed positive outcomes in health and safety after a year of focused work. Action plans have been developed for lower-scoring areas, including establishing employee voice groups. Workforce planning is complete in two global areas, with a further two underway, and horticulture apprenticeships have been introduced in the UK to support succession planning.

We are committed to ensuring fair and ethical working conditions for those who work for, or with us, and this extends to our commitment to combat modern slavery and human trafficking. In September 2024, we published our third annual Modern Slavery Statement, for the financial year 2023/4, in which we detailed our progress as against this commitment. We found no instances of modern slavery in our organisation or operations and made good progress against our objectives, including the introduction of

A snowy morning at Ninth Avenue Cemetery, France.



our supplier code of conduct and fairness at work policy, as well as raising awareness of the risks of modern slavery via bespoke training. We recognise that our work is on-going and, we will, as part of our ethical compliance framework, remain focused on this. We will update in our next annual Modern Slavery Statement.

The second round of CARE Awards was live-streamed in March 2023 to celebrate our values—commitment, ambition, respect, and excellence. In the same month, the updated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy was approved. A Women's Mentoring Programme, launched in August 2023, aims to provide female employees in the Horticulture and Works departments with broader responsibilities.

Finally, improvements to the volunteer portal and the Foundation's website are enhancing the user experience and donation processes.■

SUSTAINABILITY UPDATE

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Autumn at Tyne
Cot Cemetery and
Memorial, Belgium.
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Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do today. Our sustainability goals guide not only the projects we undertake but also how we undertake them. This past year has seen significant progress, with our teams around the world making important changes to how they work, travel, and think.

Monitoring and reporting give us a clear view of how we are progressing with our three vital goals: combating climate change, protecting biodiversity, and promoting a circular economy.

There is always more we can do, and we look forward to 2050 when we expect to meet our target of becoming a carbon-neutral organisation. We're also looking forward to the birds and bugs, the wildflowers and solar panels, and even the compost bins.■



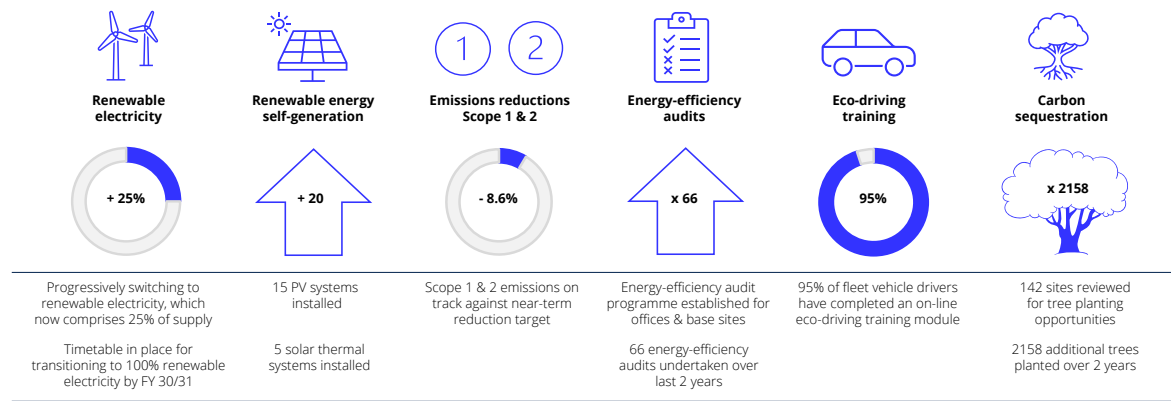
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Top: A bug hotel installed in Leopoldsburg War
Cemetery in the Netherlands to encourage biodiversity.
Bottom: Without chemical weedkillers, our staff now
hand-weed all our borders, a time-consuming but vital
task. Cabaret Rouge British Cemetery, France.
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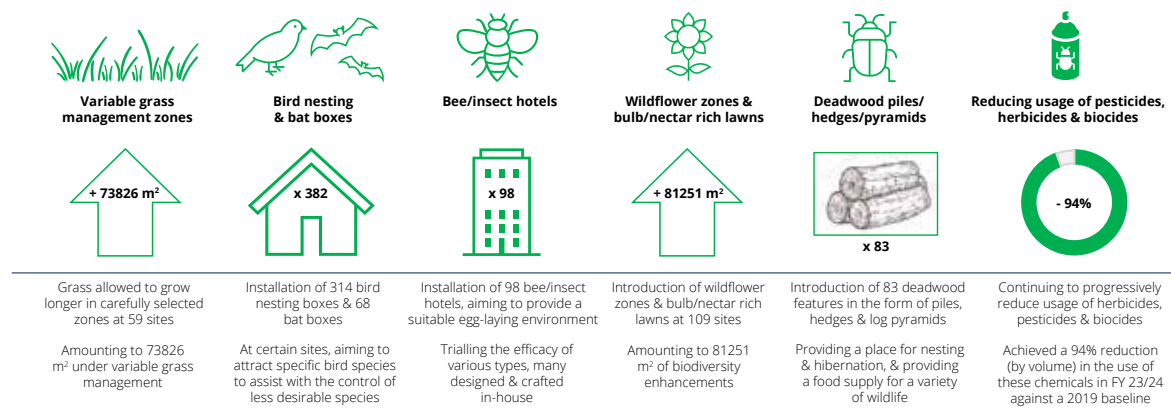
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Large areas of Venray War Cemetery in the Netherlands were allowed
to grow into wildflower meadows for the first time, dramatically
improving the biodiversity of the site.
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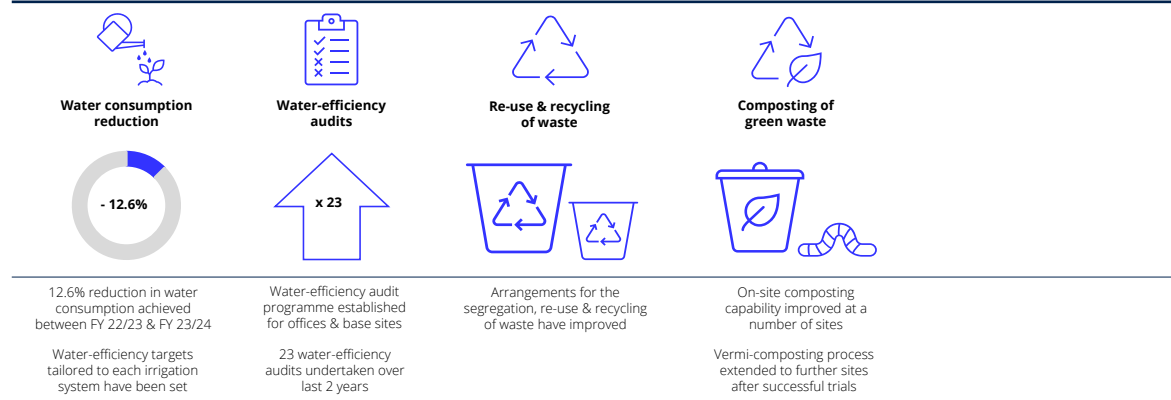
Combatting climate change - key achievements by end of FY 23/24



Protecting biodiversity - key achievements by end of FY 23/24



Promoting a circular economy - key achievements by end of FY 23/24



A friendly helper joins the team at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium.

A WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE

Workforce planning is a strategic process that has been used by the Commission since 2023 to ensure we have the right number of people with the appropriate skills in the right roles at the right time to meet the needs of our strategic plan. This process involves analysing current workforce capabilities alongside forecasting future workforce scenarios and providing a clear strategic pathway forward.

While using the same methodology, workforce planning has clearly identified varying requirements across different territories. For instance, in France we have recognised opportunities to develop our workforce in collaboration with social enterprise providers, with a particular focus on northern and southern teams due to the impact of climate change. In Asia, we have emphasised succession planning and organisational design to better support some of the remote territories that are managed, while our other operational regions are set to “go live” in November 2024.■



Senior Technical Supervisor Beatrice Mwenesi delivers training at Nairobi War Cemetery, Kenya, on soil structure to CWGC Diploma in Horticulture trainees. The course is being delivered to Commission trainees in the UK, France, Germany, Greece, and Kenya.



Left: Technical Supervisor Brenda Muliro leads a theory lesson for trainees in Kenya.

Right: Health and Safety Advisor Simon Nelson is shown how to apply a protective wax treatment to a bronze panel by the team at Kohima War Cemetery, India.





TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES, POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE UNIONS, INCLUDING THE POSSIBLE USE OF ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEERS.

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UNITED KINGDOM CASE STUDY

Some strategic decisions informed by UK Workforce Planning have included identifying an ageing workforce, understanding mobility issues, and considering how best to develop the skills of our existing workforce.

The issue of an ageing workforce was highlighted in 2023, revealing that 48% of the UK operational teams are due to retire within 10 years, and just three employees under the age of 33. This has led to discussions on offboarding retiring employees through a consultative approach, offering phased exits rather than abrupt “hard stops.” Additionally, efforts have accelerated to develop a new generation of horticulture and works colleagues by recruiting apprentices. This approach has allowed us to leverage some of our experienced workforce as mentors and coaches, facilitating knowledge transfer to support the next generation.

We also recognised that roles requiring higher levels of mobility were becoming increasingly challenging to recruit for,

particularly in Scotland. To address these challenges, potential solutions are being explored in collaboration with the unions, including the possible use of additional volunteers.

From a skills gap perspective, the focus for 2025/26 will adopt a “return to basics” approach. We aim to identify individual skills training needs based on role competency levels and tenure. Blended learning delivery will be coordinated by the global HR teams.■



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Our UK apprentices, Grace and James, hard at work maintaining Cannock Chase German War Cemetery and Cannock Chase War Cemetery in Staffordshire, UK.
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SHARING
THE STORIES

War Graves Foundation Guides welcomed thousands of visitors throughout the summer to our sites in France and Belgium.



We continue to build momentum with our education, engagement and communication campaigns. This year, the Foundation has taken on a more central role, with fundraising becoming a major component of our efforts. In time, we hope to establish a self-sustaining programme of events, projects, and campaigns that engage and inspire audiences—particularly the next generation—with our work.

Foundation membership reached an all-time high of 1,862 as of 31 August 2024, and income exceeded targets, generating over £681,000 between September 2023 and August 2024. Key Foundation projects included the return of our much-loved “Walking Our War Graves” virtual sponsored walk, which raised

£8,000 and saw participants virtually walking the Normandy coastline. Other highlights were the CWGF Carol Service at the Guards Chapel in London and an Evening at Brookwood that welcomed over 500 people for a night of music and song.

The Foundation’s success has largely come from its integration into our wider campaigns and events. It played a key role in our campaigns to commemorate fallen rugby players during the 2023 Rugby World Cup and Olympians during the 2024 Paris Olympics, with donations encouraged via social media and physical exhibitions in France. Fundraising was also central to our campaigns marking the 80th anniversaries of significant World War II events, including Normandy and Arnhem. Throughout these anniversaries, social

media promoted the Foundation and encouraged donations, while our teams on the ground offered merchandise.

We were thrilled by the positive response from our visitors and the substantial funds raised. But it’s not just about income; the money raised by the Foundation has already been put to good use. One significant initiative is the launch of the For Evermore database, funded by a generous donation from the Post Office Remembrance Fellowship. For Evermore allows the public to discover and upload stories of the fallen to a permanent online platform. Since its launch in November 2023, it has seen fantastic uptake, with over 5,000 stories already uploaded.



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During the Paris Olympics, we highlighted Olympians commemorated in our sites with a special exhibition at our Visitors Centre in Beaurains, France.
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Replica World War I uniform being used during an education workshop at our Visitors Centre in Beaurains, France.
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OUR EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT TEAMS ARE EXPANDING THEIR REACH AND ARE NOW WORKING ACROSS THE UK AS WELL AS IN BELGIUM, FRANCE AND IN KENYA.

These For Evermore stories have also contributed to the continued development of our interactive virtual reality app, Memory Anchor. Currently, more than seventy of our cemeteries and memorials feature interactive tours, with dozens more planned at locations around the globe. This innovative technology is enabling visitors to explore our sites and the stories of those we commemorate in new and exciting ways.

Our Education and Engagement Teams are expanding their reach and are now working across the UK as well as in Belgium, France and in Kenya. They continue to play a vital role in engaging new generations, leading tours, coordinating events, and promoting our work to local schools and communities. One standout project saw the collaboration between our engagement staff and the operations team in Harrogate to build a show garden at the Harrogate Flower Show, which went on to win a gold medal.

From Foundation funding to winning gardening gold, this has been a remarkable year for fundraising, outreach, and communication campaigns.■



Above: Commission Gardener Helen Gregory and Commission Head Gardener Tim Lambert with their Harrogate Flower Show gold certificate-winning show garden "11,000 Miles from Home".
 Left: Memory Anchor provides tours of dozens of our sites around the world, engaging people with our work and the stories of those we commemorate.



Our Head of Recovery Unit, Stephan Naji, gives insights into our ongoing work to recover and rebury the fallen of the world wars at our Beaurains Visitor Centre, near Arras, France.

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LIGHTING THEIR LEGACY

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THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF PASSING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMEMORATION TO THE NEXT GENERATION CULMINATED IN THE D-DAY 80 EVENTS.

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On 14 May 2024, we proudly launched our 'Lighting Their Legacy' Torch of Commemoration campaign at Horse Guards Parade in London, followed by a reception on HMS Belfast and a formal welcome at Trinity House. The Torch symbolised the passing of responsibility for preserving the memories and lessons of the world wars. Its purpose was to inspire greater engagement, particularly among younger generations. Our Director General, Claire Horton CBE, passed the Torch of Commemoration to the then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who in turn presented it to D-Day veteran Peter Kent. Distinguished guests throughout the day included our former Secretary of State for Defence and Commission Chairman, Grant Shapps, as well as Dame Kelly Holmes DBE OLY, honorary Colonel of the Royal Armoured Corps.

Following its launch, the Torch of Commemoration embarked on a UK-wide tour before travelling to France. It also journeyed to Italy as part of the Monte Cassino commemorations and continued through Germany, facilitated by our sister organisation, the Volksbund. The Torch

was later integrated into the Evening at Brookwood concert, amplifying its symbolic journey further.

The central message of passing the responsibility of commemoration to the next generation culminated in the D-Day 80 events. Thanks to the efforts of the Foundation team, we were excited to have the support of Jaguar Land Rover, which provided three liveried vehicles. These vehicles offered excellent visibility for the Commission at all Torch and D-Day commemoration events, as well as providing comfortable transport for some of the wonderful D-Day veterans taking part in the commemorations



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Top: Commission staff carried the Torch of Commemoration on the Liberation March through the Netherlands this year.
Bottom: Normandy Veteran Ken Hay with the Torch of Commemoration during a special visit to Westminster.
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Our Director General, Claire Horton CBE, with the then Secretary of State for Defence and Commission Chairman, Rt Honourable Grant Shapps, during the inaugural Torch of Commemoration event at Horse Guards, London, 20 May 2024.
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..... CWGF Guides carry the Torch of Commemoration during the remembrance service in Bayeux War Cemetery on 6 June 2024.

Media and public relations coverage surrounding these events was particularly strong. In the lead-up to D-Day 80, an opinion piece by the Director General was published in *The Times*, emphasising the importance of ensuring the lessons of the fallen endure. The article, informed by polling conducted by marketing agency Campfire, highlighted that fewer than 50% of young adults were aware of D-Day. This prompted a call for greater public participation in commemorative activities and gained significant traction in national news outlets across the UK. We also launched new education materials to support teachers in this task.

Between May and August, there were 2,104 media pieces covering the Torch of Commemoration campaign following its launch at Horse Guards Parade, and over 4,000 mentions of the broader Legacy of Liberation campaign. A major exclusive was

secured with BBC One's *The One Show* after an event in Manchester, reaching an audience of 2.3 million viewers. Throughout the campaign, we provided spokespeople for interviews on live TV and radio, including BBC One, ITV 1, Sky News, GB News, as well as regional BBC and ITV news programmes and radio stations. ■



..... Top: Air Cadets pose for a photo with the Torch of Commemoration during a visit to the Runnymede Air Forces Memorial, Surrey.
Bottom: Italy Campaign Veteran John Hearn passes the Torch of Commemoration to children from the local scout group in Cassino War Cemetery, Italy.



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NORMANDY
80
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To mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the Commission organised a series of significant events to commemorate the sacrifices made during this pivotal moment in history. Concluding our 'Lighting Their Legacy' Torch Roadshow, our events across Normandy in June provided an opportunity to share the important lessons represented by the torch with a broad audience across the UK and the Commonwealth.

Events in Normandy began on 5 June with a service of thanksgiving at Bayeux Cathedral, organised alongside the Diocese of Bayeux-Lisieux, with the support of Bayeux Town Council and the UK Ministry of Defence. This was followed by a procession through the streets of Bayeux, uniting veterans, serving military personnel, dignitaries, and members of the public in a collective moment of remembrance.

As night fell, a powerful moment of reflection unfolded, with over 5,000 headstones illuminated in Bayeux War Cemetery. This moving display of remembrance was part of a live broadcast by the BBC.

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The Red Arrows make a special flypast of Bayeux War Cemetery, France, during the 80th anniversary D-Day service of remembrance, 6 June 2024.
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Our President, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, led the vigil and moment of reflection, honouring those who fought and died. The broadcast featured performances in the cemetery, and award-winning poet, author, and broadcaster Lemn Sissay OBE FRSL read a newly commissioned poem; musician Jack Savoretti performed a beautiful new arrangement of Soldier's Eyes; and BAFTA-winning actress Katherine Parkinson gave a heartfelt reading of a letter from Captain Derek Taylor to the mother of Bombardier Norman Harry Bottoms of the Royal Artillery.



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Middle: HRH The Princess Royal, President of the Commission, meets veterans of the Normandy Campaign at Bayeux War Cemetery, France, on the evening of 5 June 2024.
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Bottom: Thousands of headstones are illuminated in Bayeux War Cemetery, France, for a special BBC broadcast on the night of 5 June to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day.



AS NIGHT FELL, A POWERFUL MOMENT OF REFLECTION UNFOLDED, WITH OVER 5,000 HEADSTONES ILLUMINATED IN BAYEUX WAR CEMETERY.

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The broadcast was watched by more than five million people around the world and placed the Commission and our work at the heart of the Normandy 80 commemorations. The finishing touch was undertaken by local schoolchildren from communities across Normandy, who came together in Commission cemeteries to place lights on each of the graves. This moving act of tribute was performed by thousands of people across the region and saw over 20,000 graves illuminated and was the culmination of a sustained period of educational outreach work.

The following morning, 6 June, the Commission led a traditional service of remembrance at Bayeux War Cemetery, featuring a flypast by the RAF Red Arrows. To conclude our D-Day commemorations, on 7 June we welcomed numerous

veterans of the Normandy Campaign to Ranville War Cemetery. These remarkable individuals paid tribute to their fallen comrades and thanked Commission staff for their dedication and skill in maintaining the graves of their friends.

The events in France throughout the anniversary period attracted extensive media coverage across the UK and beyond. The BBC's live simulcast between Portsmouth and Bayeux brought the extraordinary ceremony to a national audience, generating significant traffic to our website. The coverage resonated widely, with articles appearing across major outlets such as BBC News Online, The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, and various French media, ensuring the importance of these acts of remembrance reached millions.■



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 : Top: Award-winning poet, author and broadcaster, Lemn Sissay OBE FRSL, reads a newly commissioned poem during the special BBC broadcast from Bayeux War Cemetery, France, on the evening of 5 June 2024.
 : Right: Musician Jack Savoretti performs a beautiful new arrangement of "Soldiers Eyes" during the special BBC broadcast from Bayeux War Cemetery, France, on the evening of 5 June 2024.
 :

ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERING

Chelsea Pensioner Colin Thackery performs during the Foundation's Evening at Brookwood concert on 17 May 2024.



This year has been exceptional for the Commission's volunteering and engagement activities, with our cemeteries, memorials, and visitor centres welcoming visitors eager to learn about our work and the individuals we commemorate. Our engagement teams and volunteers have connected with thousands of people worldwide, bringing together diverse communities and fostering a deeper understanding of our mission.

A major highlight was War Graves Week in May, themed around our wider 'Legacy of Liberation', campaigns, with events held across the globe. Countries such as Canada, Ghana, South Africa, and Iceland participated for the first time. A wide range of stand-alone activities were organised, but we also made great use of local partnerships, attending large-scale events like the Ottawa Tulip Festival. In total, over 7,000 people engaged in activities at more than 155 locations across 15 countries. We were particularly proud this year that War Graves Week was acknowledged in the UK Parliament, with a debate in the House of Commons praising the Commission's work. Deputy Speaker Nigel Evans noted that he had heard some of the finest speeches in his 32 years as a parliamentarian.



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Students tour Chittagong War Cemetery, Bangladesh, during War Graves Week 2024.

Top: War Graves Week events in Nairobi War Cemetery, Kenya.
Left: A photo exhibition exploring the legacy of the world wars in Italy was installed in Cassino War Cemetery during War Graves Week this year.

OUR ENGAGEMENT TEAMS AND VOLUNTEERS HAVE CONNECTED WITH THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WORLDWIDE

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Our dedicated and passionate volunteers are fundamental to our success. They deliver events, lead tours, support operational teams, and work in our archives, fully integrating into the organisation. The Eyes On, Hands On programme continues to be an important asset, with over 2,200 volunteers assisting our operational teams with inspections and maintenance of scattered headstones across the UK. Volunteers now cover 92% of our sites, ensuring that the UK scattered estate is well-maintained.

In June 2024, we launched our first “Big Help Out” day at Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey, where volunteers joined us for weeding and mulching. Following its success, we now hold monthly volunteer days at Brookwood. Moreover, we introduced the Volunteer Gardener role, with volunteers maintaining small plots every 7-10 days under regional team guidance.

The Speakers Programme delivered 186 talks to 6,311 people this year, while War Graves Week in May marked the launch of

our annual tours programme, with regular volunteer-led tours taking place at more than 100 locations.

These efforts showcase the increasing engagement with our work and the vital role of community participation in preserving our shared heritage. ■



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Top: The D-Day Darlings lead the singing during the CWGF Evening at Brookwood, 17 May 2024.
Left: Children get hands-on during Heritage Open Day at the Thiepval Memorial, France, building bird boxes and learning about sustainability and biodiversity.
Right: Volunteers lend a helping hand with the weeding at Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey, UK.



IEPER VISITOR CENTRE

THE CENTRE COMBINES WARMTH AND HISTORY TO OFFER A TRULY ENGAGING EXPERIENCE.

In 2017, the Commission proudly opened its first Information Centre in Ieper, Belgium. Since then, it has become a welcoming space for visitors exploring the Flanders battlefields, helping thousands of people learn about the Commission's work both locally and globally. The centre has played a key role in connecting with pilgrims to the battlefields and the local community by hosting various events, talks, and exhibitions, while also offering souvenirs to raise money for the Foundation.

In 2023, the opportunity arose to relocate the centre to a larger, more prominent location directly opposite the Menin Gate Memorial, which could provide new and exciting ways to engage with the public. The original centre closed

in December 2023, and work began immediately to create a new visitor centre, complete with exhibition areas, a shop, and a café space.

This exciting project was managed by the Ieper team, with design and construction carried out by local heritage experts, Monument. The new centre is inspired by the post-World War I period, capturing the spirit of the time when the Imperial War Graves Commission was actively creating the cemeteries and memorials we still care for today. From historic cemetery signs and reclaimed furniture to the thoughtful use of textures and period details, the centre combines warmth and history to offer a truly engaging experience.

Some of our first visitors to our new Visitor Centre.



NON-COMMEMORATION PROJECT

AT THE CORE OF THIS PROGRAMME IS A COMPREHENSIVE,
MULTI-NATIONAL EFFORT TO FIND THE NAMES OF THOSE
WHO WERE PREVIOUSLY UNRECOGNISED.

The Commission's most significant commemorative efforts since World War II continue, actively addressing the previous unequal commemoration of African and other non-European soldiers, carriers, and labourers from the world wars. Established in 2021, this dedicated programme redresses historical inequalities in commemoration. It spans thirteen countries, including Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, India, and Pakistan, focusing on identifying the forgotten, raising awareness of their service, and creating new memorials or amending existing ones to honour these individuals.

At the core of this programme is a comprehensive, multi-national effort to find the names of those who were previously unrecognised. By October 2024, Commission researchers had identified more than 11,000 servicemen who had not been commemorated, and their names are now in Commission records. The research process involves meticulous archival work in East and Southern Africa, the UK, India, and Tanzania, although access to Egyptian archives remains a challenge.

A major part of this research centres on India's critical role in World War I. Key documents, such as the Punjab Registers, may reveal up to 10,000 soldiers who were not properly commemorated. Research led by Greenwich University and the UK Punjabi Heritage Association, in partnership with the Commission, is validating these findings. The Punjab Registers will further allow the Commission to explore village memorials in India and Pakistan, uncovering more hidden histories. A grant from the British Library has allowed the digitisation of thousands of previously unknown Kenyan military records in partnership with the Kenya Defence Force.

One of the goals of the programme is to raise awareness of the overlooked contributions of these individuals. The Commission is collecting oral histories and first-person accounts to preserve the stories of veterans and their descendants. In 2023, the organisation interviewed seven World War II veterans from campaigns in Africa and Burma. With the support of funds from the Foundation, training and equipment has been provided to Kenyan students as this project

expands across the country to preserve stories from newly identified Kenyan veterans. The aim is to record up to 74 interviews, creating a unique oral history resource freely available to all.



Our Research Supervisor, Josephat Sande, has led our efforts to discover the names of service personnel previously not commemorated by the Commission.

RECOVERIES AND REBURIALS

In May 2024, the CWGC was honoured to be able to support the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in their request to repatriate an Unknown Newfoundland Soldier. Representing all those who made the ultimate sacrifice during World War I, he was reburied in the newly renovated National War Memorial in St Johns on 1 July.



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Our team installs a new marker on the former grave of the Newfoundland Unknown Warrior, Cagnicourt British Cemetery, France, July 2024.
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Providing a fitting place of burial for those we recover continues to be our principal responsibility. The number of casualties recovered in France over the past decade has required the construction of a new cemetery, only the second since the completion of our World War II sites. Loos British Cemetery Extension was inaugurated by our President, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal in September 2024 and is already the last resting place of more than 50 casualties. The design is in keeping with our historic cemeteries, but sustainable construction techniques were used, and biodiversity is encouraged through the planting of wildflowers.

As well as our work to recover, identify and bury those casualties found today, we continue to investigate the identity of those who have been in our care since the end of the world wars. Where we locate significant new evidence, we may re-open a case today. Painstaking research has allowed us to re-register over 40 CWGC graves this year, marking them with a new CWGC headstone bearing the

name of a casualty who until now has been commemorated on a Memorial to the Missing.

Efforts continue to ensure that all those who are eligible for commemoration as a war casualty are recognised. Including casualties found by the Non-Commemorations Project team, the details of more than 1,700 individuals have been added to our register this year. We have also been able to locate nearly 300 graves, mainly of those soldiers who were discharged and who subsequently died at home in the United Kingdom during World War I due to their military service. Buried by their families, their graves were previously unmarked or their private memorial no longer provided fitting commemoration.■

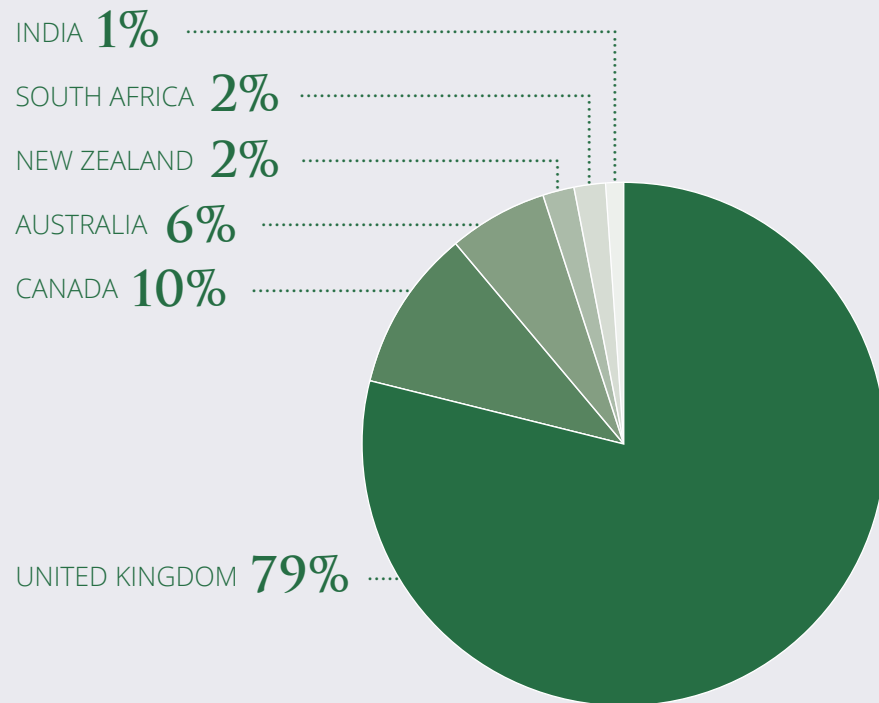


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Reburial of a unknown British soldier, Messines British Cemetery, Belgium, October 2023.

CWGC FINANCIAL SUMMARY

£81.3M

TOTAL CONSOLIDATED INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 2024



PERCENTAGES OF CONTRIBUTIONS
BEING MADE BY
PARTNER GOVERNMENTS

£83.7 million was spent during the year in ensuring the 1.7 million war dead were commemorated in accordance with the obligations set out in the Commission's Royal Charter. The money was spent ensuring that these cemeteries and memorials were maintained 'in fit provision'. Our member Commonwealth countries contribute to the funding of the Commission in proportion to the number of graves of each nations force we maintain.

The Commission's income for the year ended March 2024 was £81.3 million. Member governments' funding comprised £70.5 million (87%).

The Commission spent in line with expectations during the year resulted in a year-on-year increase of 6% in its consolidated expenditures to £83.7 million.

The financial outcome for the year, before pension scheme adjustments, was therefore - at an agreed forecast deficit of £2.3 million due to completion of major structural projects funded by reserves.

The Commission's consolidated balance sheet position reported a net surplus position of £0.3 million. The pension scheme deficit of £18.3 million was an in-year increase of £5 million. A long-term funding plan has been approved by the Commission with the pension scheme trustees to fund the pension scheme's agreed actuarial deficit.

Our full accounts are available on the website at www.cwgc.org

OUR COMMITMENT

BREAKDOWN OF NUMBERS OF WAR DEAD BY FORCES

Nationality	1914–1918 War		1939–1945 War		Both Wars		Overall
	Identified Burials	Memorials	Identified Burials	Memorials	Identified Burials	Memorials	Casualty count
Australian	39,155	23,185	28,604	12,092	67,759	35,277	103,036
Canadian	45,613	19,390	37,323	8,065	82,936	27,455	110,391
Indian	8,238	65,845	18,228	68,797	26,466	134,642	161,108
New Zealand	11,774	6,297	9,040	2,886	20,814	9,183	29,997
South African	6,775	4,919	10,058	1,856	16,833	6,775	23,608
United Kingdom	481,976	414,134	245,135	138,770	727,111	552,904	1,280,015
Total	593,531	533,770	348,388	232,466	941,919	766,236	1,708,155 *

* As a result of our investigations into historical cases of non-commemoration, this figure is likely to change

There are 217,757 unidentified graves of World War I & II in CWGC care, including 4,251 of non-Commonwealth casualties.

The names of 68,152 civilians of the Commonwealth, whose deaths were due to enemy action in World War II, are commemorated in the Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour, held at Westminster Abbey, UK.

The CWGC also cares for the graves of non-Commonwealth casualties from World War I & II on behalf of their governments. In addition, we maintain the graves of service casualties from other conflicts on an agency basis for the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence.

Figures will vary on a daily basis as individuals are accepted for commemoration as war casualties, as human remains are recovered from the former battlefields for burial in a newly created CWGC grave; existing graves are identified; and as casualties who have been named have their official point of commemoration moved from a Memorial to the Missing to the headstone marking their grave. Numbers may not be directly comparable i.e. some counts are for each individual, whilst others represent more than one individual. For example, a collective grave may be counted as a single grave but is the resting place of multiple individuals.

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If you would like to get in touch with the CWGC, please visit www.cwgc.org/contact-us.

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COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
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FRONT COVER IMAGE:

*Bayeux War Cemetery Vigil 5th June 2024,
televised by BBC as part of Tribute to the Fallen.*

WITH THANKS FOR IMAGES

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission would like to thank all those who have contributed to the production of this annual report with information and/or images. Your help is greatly appreciated.

www.cwgc.org

