



REPORT TO THE COMMEMORATIONS SUB_COMMITTEE
31st January 2018

FLANDERS FIELDS MEMORIAL PROPOSAL IN THE PEACE GARDEN, CHRISTCHURCH.

A proposal has been put forward by the Government of Flanders to incorporate a memorial honouring all the Irish who lost their lives in World War 1 in the Peace Garden which is located opposite Christchurch Cathedral and has been closed to the public for perhaps 10 years due to issues of anti-social activity and the lack of universal access.

The park was completed for the Millennium celebrations in 1988 and includes a cast bronze symbol of a tree, together with verses from Patrick Kavanagh, WB Yeates and a biblical proverb to express the theme of peace. There was also a small memorial promoting peace in northern Ireland which consisted of a small glass case containing a brick. The text relating to this memorial is now illegible.



Official Opening of Completed Peace Garden 1988.

The proposal from the Flanders government coincides with plans by Dublin City Council to refurbish the garden by raising the level of the central sunken area thus creating a flush level surface for universal access. Some of the dense tree and shrub planting will be removed to alleviate unnecessary shade in the garden and a number of the elements from Dublin City Councils 2017 Silver Gilt 'Bloom' garden will be used in the Peace Garden including granite paving and solid oak benches.

The Government of Flanders has developed bilateral projects of remembrance with many nations to mark the Centenary of WWI. As every nation has its own unique bond with Flanders Fields and its

own traditions and policies in remembering WWI, each memorial is unique. The Government of Flanders develops these projects based on the principle of partnership and respect for local policies and traditions to bring people together in reflection about war and peace, about sacrifice and suffering, about tolerance and hope, about forgiveness and reconciliation. The Garden will be a place for quiet contemplation for the entire community, whatever their political opinion, nationality or creed.

Historical Context linking Ireland and Flanders:

During WWI approximately 50,000 Irish soldiers died on the Somme and in Flanders. Of them 20,000 were Protestant volunteers from Northern Ireland, 30,000 were Catholic volunteers from all provinces of the Island of Ireland.

Minister Charles Flanagan on 7th June 2017 at Messines: "the reasons Irishmen joined the fight, were as varied and complex no doubt as the individuals themselves, but it is clear that like the Redmonds, for many the plight of Belgium and its people struck a chord. In small corners of Ireland, the news from Kemmel, from Loche, from Messines, became a part of the daily life and conversation of thousands of mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers. The bonds created then endure today." (Encl. p. 5)

But the bonds between Flanders and Ireland go back further in time. Both the Flemish and Irish people have had a tumultuous history, suffering war and violence because of religious reasons. Both nations had to fight for the recognition of their language and culture. Trade and academic links e.g. between Trinity College and Leuven University go back to dim and distant medieval times.

Contemporary Context of Ireland and Flanders:

On 1st of June 2016 Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness visited the battlefields in Flanders with Minister President Geert Bourgeois (*see image below*). At the Island of Ireland Peace Park, Wytschate Military Cemetery and at the Irish 16th Division Memorial they talked about the importance of peace, reconciliation and remembrance and laid wreaths in memory of all the fallen.



Martin McGuinness laying wreath with Geert Bourgeois at the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines

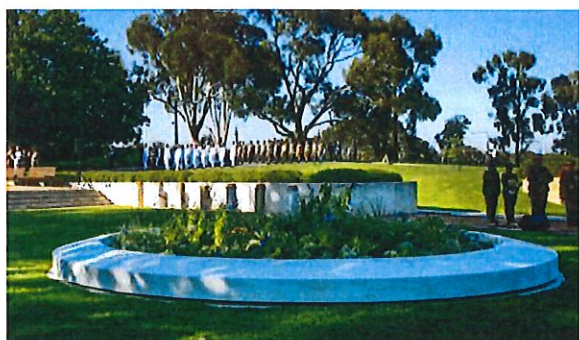
At the grave of F.E. Ledwidge in Artillery Wood Cemetery, the Deputy First Minister read poetry. Mr McGuinness said: “WWI is an important part of Ireland’s multi-layered history, during which tens of thousands of Irish people lost their lives. If we are to build understanding and reconciliation on this Island we all need to recognise and accept the complexity of the historical events and different political narratives that make us who we are as a community and as a people”.

As a follow-up of this visit, the General Representative of the Government of Flanders to the UK and Ireland met with Mr. McGuinness, Minister Chris Hazard and advisor Conor Heaney on 19th September 2016 to discuss cooperation in remembrance and plans for Flanders Field Memorial projects in Stormont and Dublin.

A hundred years after the conflict, the Government of Flanders wishes to develop a memorial project with Ireland, respecting history and all political and religious persuasions, in the same spirit that resulted in the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Mesen/Messines.

The Dublin memorial would be a partnership between The City of Dublin and the Government of Flanders.

The principles of the Flanders memorial would be entirely integrated in the existing plans of Dublin City Council for the refurbishment of the existing Peace Garden.



Flanders Fields Memorial Garden in Canberra, Australia.



Flanders Fields Memorial Garden in London.

Flanders soil will be integrated with soil of the four Provinces of Ireland and put in a circular monument and covered with grass. The circular monument relates to the holes in the roof of the Menin Gate in Ypres. The stone of the monument will be Irish granite and engraved with a poem of Francis Ledwidge. Around the monument four benches of Belgian blue stone engraved with the symbols of Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht will be installed. On the top of the circular monument the names of the battlefields where the Irish fought in Flanders Fields, will be placed.

In front of the monument a consecration stone will explain the monument.

A draft text proposal for the consecration stone is as follows:

THIS MEMORIAL IS THE GIFT OF THE PEOPLE OF FLANDERS
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND
IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE IRISHMEN WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
FOR THE FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE OF BELGIUM
1914 – 1918
THE SOIL IN THIS MEMORIAL HAS BEEN GATHERED AND BROUGHT
HERE FROM THE CEMETERIES AND BATTLEFIELDS OF FLANDERS
WHERE SOLDIERS OF THE ISLAND OF IRELAND FOUGHT AND DIED
HONOUR THEM AND REMEMBER



1:100

Complete removal of a change in level and a reconfiguration of the space. (Reves Limestone paving. Maintain all the beds in situ and substitute heavy stone cover for low herbaceous woodland groundcover)

Option D

Bloom show garden elements to be retained in Peace Park



Proposed Plan for refurbishment of peace Garden 2018.