

IRON MEMORIAL FUND

UPDATE FOR SUPPORTERS 17 JULY 2010

FUNDRAISING

To date we have raised €6000. How much we need is turning out to be something of a moving target, but I estimate that we now have about half the money required. The fund website : <http://www.ironmemorial.org> now has a Paypal facility and this should help us receive non-sterling payments.

Future fundraising events included a sponsored bike ride 'In the Steps of the Eleven' provisionally to be held in the last week of August 2010. During this Dave Arrowsmith and myself will retrace the route taken by the eleven in August 1914 from their disembarkment at Le Havre to Mauberge near Belgian border; and thence to Guise, via Le Fayt, Etreux and Iron. This is a journey of 400 kilometres, passing Amiens, the battlefields of the southern Somme, the Hindenburg Line and finally following the line of the retreat to the Marne. For the benefit of UK tax payers are currently negotiating with HMRC for Gift Aid relief on donations. When we have this will put a notice on the Iron Memorial Fund website. In the meantime if you would like to support us on this, please do not hesitate to contact David Arrowsmith or myself.

CHALANDRE'S GRAVE

Following representations made by the Memorial Committee to Guise Town Hall, they have agreed to adopt his grave, that is to take legal responsibility for it. Previously no-one was responsible. They have also said that they will mark it with simple iron cross and possibly a small stone tablet. As yet, I do not have any further details but in the light of what we discover, the Iron Memorial Committee may want to make a donation to something more substantial.

THE EXECUTION SITE

The execution site at Guise Château is not in a good condition. It is half building site, half rubbish dump with some of it used as a camp site for the teenagers who work there during the summer on archaeological projects. I have written to the Director of the Château to express my concern and I received no reply. In mid-May I

wrote to the British and Irish Embassies in Paris and again I have not received a reply. I do not know what more can be done.

THE STORY UNFOLDS ...

Both parts of the story have now appeared in issues 87 and 88 of 'Stand To', the journal of the Western Front Association. The story has been translated into French and we will post a link to this on some of the French World War 1 websites. On my last visit to Iron I met Claude Pereau, the oldest inhabitant in the village. Claude is 85 and his family have lived in Iron for three generations. He told me the present day location of many of the sites associated with the tragedy, including M.Matton's brasserie and Blanche Maréchal's house. He also confirmed that many of the eleven were living in a hut in the fields between Dorengt and Iron, and that to avoid German attention they had disguised the hut as manure heap! I also know the location of Waechter's house in Guise. It was connected to the Chateau by means of an underground passage way. This seems very appropriate for such a shadowy and sinister figure.

Personal details of the twelve remain elusive but recently on Ancestry.com I found a more or less complete personal file for Mathew Wilson, one of the Connaught Rangers shot on February 25 1915. He joined up in 1900 as an 18-year-old; he served in India and South Africa. Sometimes when one reads a soldier's file one has a 'feel' for what they were like in life and so it is with Mathew. He clearly had a taste for learning: he studied for the Army's education certificates and qualified as a nurse. Someone thought he was fit for promotion - he was twice promoted to Lance-Corporal, only to be returned to Private shortly afterwards, once for 'misconduct'. The file hints at a family tragedy: his parents appear to have separated sometime between 1900 and 1916.

THE NEXT STEPS

We continue to raise funds. On November 11 the Committee travels to Iron to meet the Mayor and the Community Council to meet with them after the Armistice Day commemorations. Then we will review the funding position. In our opinion, by that date, we will be in a position to place the order for memorial. I have already discussed the memorial location with the Mayor. We both favour a position next to the existing village war memorial, on a large grass-covered traffic island in the centre of the village, not far from

Chalandre's house where the twelve were taken by the Germans. This needs to be agreed with the Community Council.

At this meeting we plan to fix an unveiling date, probably the summer of 2011. I have a more definite date in mind, but I shall first talk to the three regimental associations and the Iron Community Council. Of the three regimental associations, the Light Dragoons (the successors to John Stent's regiment, the 15th (The King's) Hussars) are still operational and serving in Afghanistan. They have particularly asked to be present when the monument is unveiled. The fate of the twelve carries a message for their young men today - this is what can happen to soldiers who find themselves somewhere they should not be. A good memorial is not only about memory - it is also a warning for the future. We aim to work around dates when they will have returned to the UK from Afghanistan, as indeed we shall have to take into account the availability of the other regimental associations.

After that meeting we can move into a discussion of what will happen on the day and consult about the wording on the plaque. Of course I shall keep you informed about these developments.

Professor Hedley Malloch, Ph.D

Chairman, Iron Memorial Fund

17 July 2010