



## **Report of activities for 2020: Last Post Association vzw**

The Last Post Association is an independent, non-profit organisation based in Ieper. The association organised the very first Last Post Ceremony on Monday 2 July 1928 and is, more than nine decades later, still responsible for the daily performance of this unique tribute under the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing. All the association's buglers, ceremonial assistants and directors are volunteers.

This document is the association's annual report for the calendar year 2020 (01/01/2020 - 31/12/2020), its 92<sup>nd</sup> year of activity.

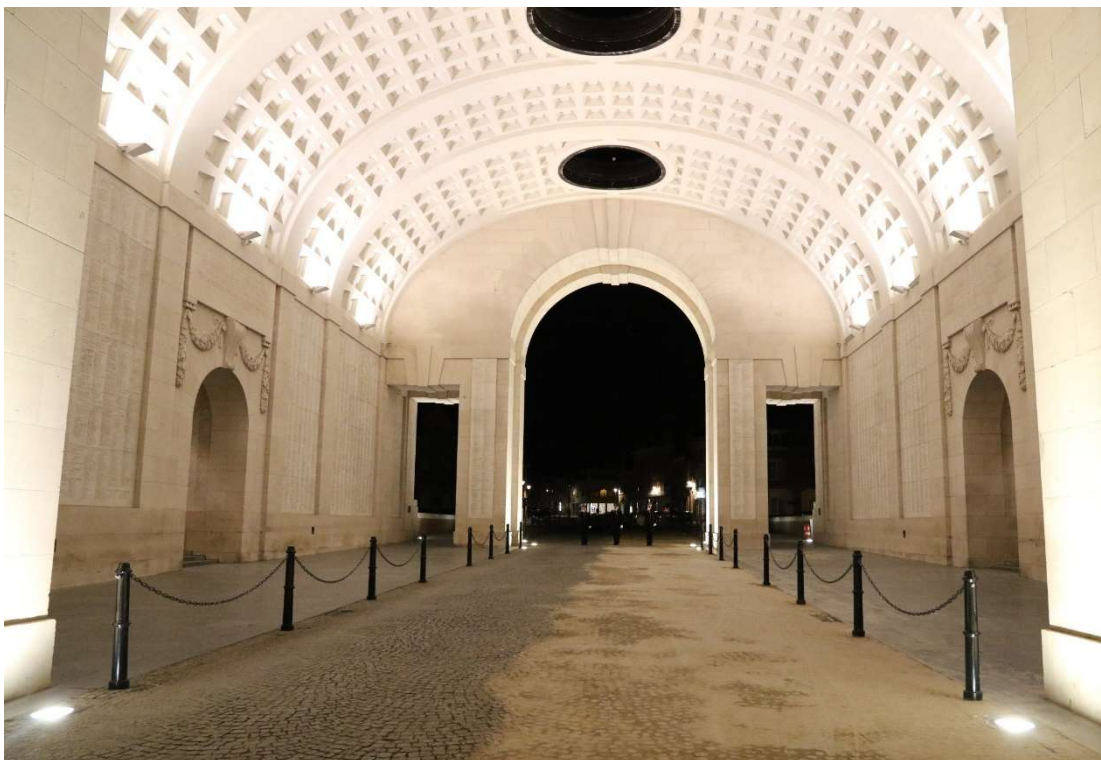
### **1. The ceremonies**

During 2020, the daily Last Post Ceremony took place every evening under the Menin Gate at 8 p.m..

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Last Post Association has done everything in its power to ensure the continuity of the daily ceremony. This was by no means self-evident as all activities were suspended due to the corona measures.

However, through lobbying, as well as through the intervention of the mayor of Ieper on the higher political level, the exception was obtained.

The necessary measures were taken to guarantee the social distance of 1,5 meter as soon as the public was again allowed to attend the ceremony. Therefore, stickers were placed on the footpath under the Menin Gate and on the bridge.



The Last Post Association is proud that it has been able to continue the unique tribute to the fallen without fail.



A chronological overview of the special year 2020:

- 14 March 2020: the ceremony is reduced to the blowing of the Last Post without public
- 18 March 2020 - 11 May 2020: a single bugler, only the Last Post and no public
- From 11 May 2020: three buglers, only the Last Post and no public
- 1 July 2020: a maximum of 400 spectators
- 28 July 2020: a maximum of 200 spectators
- 29 October 2020 until 31/12/2020: 2 buglers, no public
- The measures remain applicable in 2021.



Please find below the overview of the main ceremonies under the Menin Gate in 2020:

- 01/07/2020: Public attendance resumed after the lockdown of 3 ½ months.
- 13/07/2020: Farewell to Shane Arndell (Defence attaché New Zealand)
- 31/07/2020: Ambassador Gregory Andrews of New Zealand
- 06/09/2020: Commemoration of the liberation of Ieper after the Second World War
- 09/09/2020: Tony Desodt bugler for 25 years and farewell to Ambassador Gregory Andrews of New Zealand
- 11/09/2020: Peter Slosse OBE, Christophe Onraet MBE and Erwin Ureel MBE
- 29/09/2020: Lieutenant General Greg Bilton, Chief of Joint Operations (Australia)
- 07/10/2020: Ambassador Diana Reaich of New Zealand
- 11/11/2020: Armistice
- 29/12/2020: 32,000th daily Last Post

As the Association has been able to continue the ceremony during the pandemic, the organisation got a lot of media attention in Belgium and around the world as well as many messages of encouragement and appreciation.



## 2. Some remarkable facts on the year 2020

### - Commemoration of the end of the Second World War – 08/05/2020

The commemoration took place during the first lockdown of 2020. There were only 4 people present under the Gate as well as 3 buglers. Alderman Desmadryl laid a wreath on behalf of the City of Ieper.



### - Public attendance resumed – 01/07/2020

The first lockdown eventually lasted 3 ½ months. As all non-essential displacements were forbidden during this period, the volunteers of the Last Post Association and the police were very often the only people present at the Menin Gate during this period.



From 1 July 2020, 400 spectators could again attend the Last Post and took place on stickers on the ground to guarantee the social distance of 1 ½ meter. Extra stickers were





placed between the Gate and the lions of the Menin Gate. And extra nadars were used so that all spectators could stand at 1 ½ meter from each other. As soon as the full capacity was reached, the area around the Menin Gate was closed and no more people were admitted. All people had to wear face masks. Thanks to the police of Ieper for their collaboration.

On 1 July 2020, the Last Post Association welcomed the city council of Ieper, the Ambassadors of Australia, Canada and New Zealand and representatives of the British Embassy, the CWGC, the British Legion and several other organisations. Their presence was a special token of appreciation for the continuity of the daily ceremony.



- Goodbye Farewell Shane Arndell (New Zealand Defence Force) – 13/07/2020

On Monday 13 July 2020, the Last Post Association said goodbye to Captain Shane Arndell of the New Zealand Defence Force. He attended the Last Post Ceremony on many occasions in recent years.

- New promotion video for Tourism Ieper – 13/07/2020

The Last Post Association collaborated in the recordings of the new promotion video for Ieper which was realised by the tourist department of the city.

- Commemoration liberation Second World War – 06/09/2020

On Sunday 6 September 2020, the liberation of Ieper after the Second World War was commemorated. The Royal Band De Vijverzonen from Dikkebus took care of the musical accompaniment. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were in fact the only band that performed under the Menin Gate in 2020.



- Goodbye to Ambassador Gregory Andrews (New Zealand) – 09/09/2020

On Wednesday 9 September 2020, the Last Post Association said goodbye to Gregory Andrews, the Ambassador of New Zealand. He attended the Last Post Ceremony on many occasions and was a very appreciated person in the In Flanders Fields area.

- Tonny Desodt, bugler for 25 years - 09/09/2020



Bugler Tonny Desodt sounded his very first Last Post on Saturday 9 September 1995. On Wednesday 9 September 2020 he has been a bugler of the Last Post Association for exactly 25 years. Congratulations Tonny for all your efforts to remember the fallen in the past 25 years.

- Peter Slosse OBE, Christophe Onraet MBE and Erwin Ureel MBE – 11/09/2019

On Friday 11 September 2020, the British government granted several high awards to Peter Slosse (OBE), Christophe Onraet (MBE) and Erwin Ureel (MBE) for their role and efforts in the commemoration of the fallen. Together with the British Ambassador, they attended the Last Post Ceremony and received a gift from the Last Post Association.

- Lieutenant General Greg Bilton, Chief of Joint Operations (Australia) – 29/09/2019

On Thursday 29 September 2020 Lieutenant General Greg Bilton, Chief of Joint Operations (Australia) attended the Last Post at the Menin Gate.

- Ambassador Diana Reaich of New Zealand – 07/10/2020



On Wednesday 7 October 2020, the Last Post Association welcomed Her Excellency Diana Reaich, the new Ambassador of New Zealand. During her first official mission in Belgium, she laid a wreath during the ceremony together with Defence Attaché Colonel Rian McKinstry.

- Armistice: 11 November 2020

On Armistice 2020, a special Last Post took place at 11 a.m. with only 4 participants: Belgian prime minister Alexander De Croo, mayor of Ieper Emmily Talpe, CWGC-area director Geert Bekaert and Benoit Mottrie on behalf of the Last Post Association. Bugler Tonny Desodt played the Last Post and the Reveille and Gil Vermeulen played the lament. The ceremony was livestreamed on the Facebook page of the Last Post Association and received a lot of interest in the regional and national press.



The traditional concert The Great War Remembered, organised on Armistice by the Last Post Association, was cancelled due to COVID-19.

- 32,000<sup>th</sup> Last Post – 29/12/2020

The 32,000<sup>th</sup> daily Last Post took place on Thursday 29 December 2020. The ceremony was livestreamed on Facebook.





### 3. Personnel

2020 was the Last Post Association's 92nd year of activity.

On 31/12/2020, 27 people were actively engaged on behalf of the organisation in an official capacity, namely:

- Executive board (3): Benoit Mottrie, Guy Gruwez and Philippe De Bruyn
- Board of directors:
  - o Working members (9): Carl Denys, Philippe Dochy, Mathieu Mottrie, Jacky Platteeuw, Patrick Donck, Charles Vermeulen, Jacques Ryckebosch, Hans De Keyser and Cédric Jacques
- Buglers (6): Rik Vandekerckhove, Raf Decombel, Tonny Desodt, Jan Callemein, Christophe Wils and Filip Deramoudt.
- Pipers (2): Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen
- Ceremonial assistants (4): Brian Claeys, Emmanuel Waelkens, Gilbert Denturck and Youri Van Miegroet (since 18/02/2020)
- Photographer (1): Francis Vanwynsberghe
- Secretariat (2): Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert

### 4. Operational working

In terms of its internal organisation, the Last Post Association and its full complement of accredited personnel worked hard throughout the year to optimise the performance of the Last Post Ceremony and all matters pertaining to it.

The secretariat work of the Last Post Association was further carried out by Ian Connerty and Jan Malsaert.

- Rehearsals for the buglers

To ensure the high quality of the Last Post Ceremony, the monthly rehearsals for the buglers continued to be organised in 2020. These rehearsals were suspended however due to COVID-19.

- Subsidies from the Flemish Government

In January 2018, Mr. Geert Bourgeois, the then Minister-President of Flanders (also responsible for Foreign Affairs), granted a subsidy of 60,000 euros to the Last Post Association with the aim of strengthening the association's administrative and organisational capacity, not only in the busy year 2018 but also for the years following completion of the Great War centenary commemorations. This generous subsidy made it possible in 2019 for the Last Post Association to continue its organisation of high-quality ceremonies and events for an international public, which helps to highlight the position of Flanders as a premier destination for remembrance tourism.



## - Membership

During 2020, a major effort was made to update and check the Last Post Association's database of contacts and members, which currently contains some 11,300 names.

The Last Post Association's number of members in recent years is as follows:

- number of lifetime members: 82 on 31/12/2020 (+ 9 in 2020)
- number of ordinary members:
  - 2015: 441
  - 2016: 540
  - 2017: 687
  - 2018: 790
  - 2019: 726
  - 2020: 702

This means that on 31/12/2020 there was a total of 784 lifetime and ordinary members.

Membership increased by 22% in 2016, 27% in 2017 and 15% in 2018, but fell by 6,50 % in 2019 and by 3,3% in 2020. Please note that for great parts of 2020, the Last Post Ceremony took place without public.

## Website

In 2020 the Last Post Association started with the renewal of its website and its content management system. The current site and content management system date from 2014. All photo material as well as the monthly calendars were archived.

The needs and wishes of the Last Post Association were discussed and detailed. The structure of the new website was determined, designed and adjusted in a future proof concept with an attractive layout, an user friendly membership page and an integrated web shop.

The new site and management system will become operational in 2021.

## Last Post App

The Last Post App is still available in the App Store and in Google Play. About 3,600 users downloaded the app in 2020.

## Social media

The Last Post Association makes efforts to be present on social media, where it provides its members, visitors and followers with all relevant information about the organisation.

Some figures:

- Facebook: 22,604 likes on 15/04/2021 (+36,4% compared to 2019)
- Twitter: 2,329 followers on 15/04/2021 (+10 % compared to 2019)
- YouTube: 471 subscribers on 15/04/2021 (+67,6% compared to 2019)
- Instagram: 1,284 followers on 15/04/2021 (+414% compared to 2019)





### Archive of the Last Post Association

Through CO<sub>7</sub>, a permanent access was obtained to the website [www.historischekranten.be](http://www.historischekranten.be) ('historical newspapers'). The website was searched from 1928 up to and including 1990 for all relevant entries of the Last Post at the Menin Gate. All the information was registered in an Excel file with the following details: year, month, date, subject, source and photo material. The file now already contains more than 800 records, can be searched and is updated permanently.

Several recent documents of the Last Post Association were in 2020 added to the archives of the Association which are kept by the archive department of the City of Ieper. A digital copy of several pictures taken by former press photographer Gilbert Bossaert were obtained through the help of the people of the City Archives.

The Last Post Association forwarded several photos to the Culture Centre of Ieper for its exhibition on 10 years Het Perron which should take place in 2021.

### Information panel

In October 2020, the information panel on the corner of the Bollingstraat was renovated. Many thanks to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for their collaboration.

The Last Post Association also transmitted several points for attention regarding the restoration file and maintenance plan for the Menin Gate which are made up and followed up by the CWGC.

## **5. Word of thanks**

The Last Post Association wishes to thank everyone who contributed towards making 2020 another successful year:

The City of Ieper and burgomaster Emmily Talpe, Alderman Diego Desmadryl and the other members of the city council, for their continued assistance and co-operation throughout 2020. Their collaboration in the COVID-year 2020 was essential to guarantee the continuity of the daily Last Post Ceremony. Collaboration with the various city services, such as tourism, culture and the technical department, was likewise excellent, for which the Association is most grateful.

The daily Last Post Ceremony would not be possible without the much-valued assistance of the local police, who halt the traffic passing under the Menin Gate from 1930 hours to 2030 hours each evening.

The Last Post Association would also like to thank the entire team of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for their commitment and dedication to the commemoration of the war dead and for their maintenance of the Menin Gate Memorial.

Thanks are also due to the volunteers of the Association:

- The six buglers, who during their alternate 'on-call' weeks are present at the Menin Gate each evening. The two teams of buglers consist of Rik, Tonny and Filip on the one hand



and Raf, Jan and Christophe on the other hand. But for a great part of 2020 the teams were not able to play together due to the corona measures.

- The four ceremonial assistants for their tireless efforts, without which the effective control of the crowds attending the ceremony would not be possible. Their work during the COVID-19 pandemic has been essential.
- Pipers Pierre Dervaux and Gil Vermeulen for their presence at special ceremonies.
- All members of the board of directors for their efforts in various fields.
- Ian Connerty and Jan Matsaert for their performance of the organisation's secretarial duties.

