

Thesis proposal on public memorial

[Countries](#), [England](#)



- Country and tragedy

I propose to investigate the commemoration of the First World War in Belgium.

The foundation of the Belgian monarchy in 1830 was tolerated by the so called Great Powers under the strict condition of neutrality, an order that needed to be safeguarded by the Great Powers. This is (one of the reasons) why, when, in 1914, Germany invaded Belgium in order to reach Paris and catch the French off guard, Great Britain engaged in the emerging conflict. The Belgian army was able to withstand the German invaders for a month, making it possible for the British and French forces to prepare a counter offensive. Consequently, Flanders became the main settlement of the British army.

- Memorials

Thousands of British and Commonwealth soldiers were killed on the Western Front in Flanders. Because of its central position within a network of roads, the city of Ypres became one of the main stages of battle. In 1927, the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing was erected at the eastern part of town, where soldiers exited the city when departing for the front line. It is dedicated to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed in the war and who have no known graves. Since July 1928, the Menin Gate is the stage of the Last Post Ceremony. Every evening at eight o'clock, the road under the memorial is closed and buglers play the Last Post, the traditional salute to the fallen.

Private memorial

Alexander Arnot died in the battle of St. Julien, north-east of Ypres, in 1915.

The letters he wrote from the front (between December 1914 and March 1915) were published in a local newspaper and can now be found online (<http://www.rawson.me.uk/arnot/>).

- Secondary sources

De Schaepdrijver, Sophie. *De Groote Oorlog. Het koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*. Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 1997.

This book is written in Dutch, but it is one of the most important works on the First World War in Belgium. Reviews can be found in *The English Historical Review*, *The Journal of Military History*, *The Journal of Modern History* and the *Revue du Nord*.

Keegan, John. *The First World War*. London: Hutchinson, 1998.

Kesteloot, Chantal. "Introduction: Commemorating 1914-1918." *Journal of Belgian History* 42, no. 4 (2012): 180-181.

Lehrer, E., C. E. Milton and M. E. Patterson, eds. *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Meyer, J. ed. *British popular culture and the First World War*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Stephens, John. "'The Ghosts of Menin Gate': Art, Architecture and Commemoration." *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 1 (2009): 7-26.

- Interesting questions

In this paper, I wonder whether the commemoration of what happened in Belgium during the First World War is dynamic or rather static (for example: are German soldiers included in the commemoration by now or are they still

neglected)? How do both types of memorial respond to the ‘ violent past’ (and does this differ from the past)? And how does the commemoration influence local life, since especially the Menin Gate and the Last Post ceremony are very present in the city of Ypres?