

# Touch the History at Ypres

Ypres is the silent witness of the Great War or World War I. During the entire war period, from 1914 up to 1918, Ypres was the scene of some of the most important battles in the First World War, later referred to as the Great War.



## Ypres Salient

The Ypres Salient is the area around Ypres in Belgium which was the scene of the heaviest battles during the Great War. In the trenches all around Ypres extremely bloody battles were fought. Many of these battlefields have left their traces in the landscape around Ypres.

Visit the various Ypres Battlefields and discover how the profound impressions of the Great War remain today. Experience the importance and severeness of the Great War in the interactive museum In Flanders Fields Museum where the stories of 'ordinary people' make war tangible and personal: men, women and children, civilians and soldiers, authors and artists... They confront us with their war, our past.

## Milestones of World War I in Ypres

On August 4th 1914, the German invaders collided with allied forces around the medieval town Ypres in what became known as the First Battle of Ypres. From then onwards the area around Ypres would become one of the most important strategic areas throughout the entire First World War.

The second battle of Ypres on April 22nd 1915 initiated for the first time in history the use of weapons of mass destruction. The use of chlorine gas by the Germans killed thousands of allied soldiers, mainly French troops including a lot of North-Africans. After this battle, Ypres Salient became an experimental battlefield introducing flame-throwers and from July 1917 onwards mustard gas, also known as "leperiet" causing severe casualties on both sides.

The severe battle from July 31st till November 10th 1917 ending in the Battle of Passendale was an unprecedented massacre.

## The Battlefields

Between 1914 and 1918 hundreds of thousands of soldiers fought doggedly over this cramped corner of the Western Front in four years of concentrated warfare around Ypres.



The desolate battlefield landscape that defines the Ypres Salient's horrors in popular memory is long gone but many reminders of the profound impression the Great War made here, remain today.

Many people visit the war graves of Tyne Cot Cemetery or want to see an actual trench like the Yorkshire Trench.

Other popular and interesting battlefield sites around Ypres: Hill 60, German cemetery in Langemark, Essex Farm Cemetery – site John Mc Crae, Bayernwald or Pool of Peace – mine crater – in Wijtschate and many more...

### **Half a Million Lives**

Almost half a million people died in the trenches and in No Man's Land between 1914 and 1918. Among them not only Germans, French, British and Belgians, but also Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, Senegalese, Canadians, Australians, New-Zealanders, South-Africans, Chinese, Indians, Jamaicans and lots of other nationalities.

In the 1920s the Commonwealth War Graves Commission built 150 military cemeteries in and around Ypres in the honor of all those who gave their lives during the war. Next to the cemeteries the War Graves Commission built monuments in and around the city in order never to forget what happened in Flanders Fields.



The Menin Gate is one of the most important of these monuments, where every night the Last Post, traditionally the last salute to the fallen warrior, is played in memory of the soldiers of the then British Empire and Allied Forces who fell in the Ypres Salient during the First World War.

Every evening at 8pm precisely, the "Last Post" has been sounded since 1928 under the imposing arches of the Gate. Even almost one hundred years later, the ceremony remains impressive.

### **Surroundings**

During the four years long war the town in the heart of the Ypres Salient was literally flattened. In the beginning of May 1915 all remaining inhabitants were obliged to evacuate, which turned Ypres into a real ghost town.

From 1919 onwards the first inhabitants returned to their destroyed town and gradually the reconstruction began. In the early years following the Great War the returnees and the new 'Ieperlingen' lived in wooden shelter homes. From 1921 the actual reconstruction started including the faithful restoration of Ypres' most important historic monument : the cloth hall.

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