

# COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

STRATEGY TOWARDS 2039  
THE FIRST THREE YEARS  
2023 - 2026



DISCOVER LEARN REMEMBER



COMMONWEALTH  
WAR GRAVES





TO THE ARMIES  
OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE  
WHO STOOD HERE  
FROM 1914 TO 1918  
AND TO THOSE OF THEIR DEAD  
WHO HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVE

PRO  
PATRIA

PRO  
REGE

*Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium*



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Front cover from left to right: Sharing the stories at The Plymouth Naval Memorial, UK; Thiepval Memorial, France; Tending borders at Bedford House Cemetery, Belgium

Back cover from left to right: Plymouth Naval Memorial, UK; CWGC Compost Farm at Bedford House Cemetery, Belgium; El Alamein War Cemetery, Egypt



Restoring a CWGC Cathedral Tablet, Belgium







## WELCOME FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

Welcome to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Strategy, in which our six Commonwealth Member Governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, together with our Commissioners, senior management, staff, and volunteers, lay out our **Shared Purpose, Ambition, Mission, Goals and Values** for our remarkable organisation to 2039.

This strategy is the culmination of a long and highly collaborative process where Commissioners and colleagues across the world, along with multiple partner organisations in the Tourism, Heritage, Education, and Commemorative sectors, contributed their ideas and views.

But why is a new strategy needed now, at a time of such global uncertainty? After all, CWGC is more than a century old and our core purpose is well defined, expertly delivered through our talented people and ably supported by our Commonwealth membership.

In fact, now is exactly the right time to take a critical look at what we do, who we do it for, how we do it, and what else we might do to ensure our longevity and our place in the landscape of global Commemoration, because we should be under no illusion that difficult years lie ahead.

That we are working from a position of strength should not be in doubt, but there is a truth behind the saying that standing still is the fastest way of moving backwards – especially so in a rapidly changing world.

There is no ignoring the fact that this is a period of almost unprecedented uncertainty – geopolitical, climatic, and socio-economic. We have sadly seen the return of armed conflict to the European continent; felt the impact of rampant inflation; and the world is coming to terms with the fact that we may have done permanent harm to our climate and eco-systems.

We are very proud to bear the name Commonwealth in our title and yet we recognise that the nature of the Commonwealth is changing and may evolve further over time. With a global footprint and sites in 23,000



locations, in over 150 countries, our vital work already takes us outside the Commonwealth. What more might we do?

Maintaining and conserving our graves, records, and memorials sustainably; righting historic inequalities in commemoration; engaging global and diverse audiences and stakeholders in telling our stories; raising our profile and securing our ongoing relevance as the World Wars recede from living memory; building our charitable Foundation and educational, public engagement, and outreach programmes to inspire future generations; around reinvesting in our people and streamlining our processes, are just some of the critical factors informing our thinking.

Although 2039 might seem an age away, the timing of the strategy, as we look ahead to the centenaries of the Second World War (albeit with the caveat that CWGC should not define itself solely on major anniversaries), provides a realistic focus and timescale for us to work to.

I am excited to invite you to join us on the next stage of our journey. Together we will ensure the commemoration of the fallen in perpetuity and fulfil a promise made more than a century ago and inscribed in stone at CWGC sites the world over – **THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Claire Horton'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Claire Horton CBE  
Director General

# OUR PURPOSE, OUR MISSION, OUR VALUES

*“In the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon the Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war.”*

*HM King George V, 1922*

## Evolution Not Revolution, But Evolution with Ambition

The cemeteries, memorials, graves, landscapes, and records in our care are both the practical means of our commemoration of the fallen and vehicles for discovery, inspiration, and engagement. They sit at the core of what CWGC does and stands for. In developing this strategy, **we found universal commitment to remain true to our core purpose to commemorate the dead of two World Wars AND THAT WILL NOT CHANGE**, but we also found overwhelming appetite to be bold and expansive.

This strategy, therefore, is an **Evolution rather than Revolution of Our Mission BUT it is an Evolution with Ambition** – which has been carefully considered to reflect our core work and aims for our organisation, our people, and those who support and work with us.

**Our Purpose, Mission, and Values are not just words** – rather they are a commitment, a promise to those we care for, to those we serve, and to those who make that mission possible. They underpin everything we do, everything we are, everything we say, and everything we hold sacred.



*Neuve-Chapelle Memorial, France*

## OUR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

WE, THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION, WORK ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF AUSTRALIA, CANADA, INDIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM.



We were established by Royal Charter to commemorate those from the Commonwealth who lost their lives in the two World Wars.

We believe that:

- Remembering individuals who have died in conflicts around the world is of universal perpetual relevance, and that;
- Reflecting on their deaths is of continuing and paramount importance for us all.





## Our Ambition

**Our Ambition is to be a global leader in commemoration for all time - unbound by date, geography, or event.**

Our Ambition reflects our position of strength, expertise, and knowledge, but also our desire to innovate and explore new opportunities – leveraging the expertise we have for the benefit of a wider audience and ourselves.



*Stone repairs Cliveden War Cemetery, UK*

## Our Mission

**Our Mission is to ensure those who died in service, or as a result of conflict, are commemorated so that they, and the human cost of war, are remembered for ever.**

**Our Mission** has been adapted to reflect both the existing reality of what the CWGC does (particularly as an “agent” – caring for non-world war graves and commemoration structures on behalf of our Member Governments and others), but also that ambition to do more, to be a leader in the commemoration of the fallen, to be unbound by date, geography, or event.

Our Mission has great and enduring meaning; each one of those we commemorate was a person like us, with their own ambitions, hopes, and dreams. Theirs are the broad shoulders on which we stand and, by reference to them, we regard all that we achieve, and all that we strive to achieve, as our privilege.



*10th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (37th Division) marching to the trenches at Arras, November 1916, IWM Q 1608*

## Our Organisation

**We are a truly talented, diverse, and inclusive global community of colleagues, of many languages and nationalities and we take great pride, individually and collectively, in our Mission.**

As guardians and custodians of this great institution, it is incumbent on us all, in our various roles, to care for each other and our Mission, and to lead by example. We work with confidence, positivity, and trust, and strive each day to leave things a little better than we found them.



*Returfing at Kitale War Cemetery, Kenya*



## OUR VALUES

Our values are not just words on a page; they reflect and set our culture, and are lived and breathed as we work, as shared expectations, behaviours, and standards.

Our organisation is entrusted with the responsibility and the great honour of caring for the graves, memorials, records, and stories of the fallen. We are an organisation of **ABIDING CARE**, which is shown each day, in all that we do, in who we are, and in how we work.

We have taken this vital word – **CARE** – and used it as the base for our Values.

### We CARE

#### **C – Commitment** – to getting it done and with pride

We recognise that our work is extraordinary, and the pride we feel encourages us to go the extra mile each day to deliver our Mission.

#### **A – Ambition** – to aspire, inspire and innovate

For ourselves, each other, and our organisation, to ensure that we hand our organisation to the generations to come, relevant, stronger, and fitter.

#### **R – Respect** – for ourselves, each other, our stakeholders, and our visitors

Respect and dignity are fundamental to everything that we do. We are a diverse, inclusive, global team. We act in trust and to build trust, with integrity, clarity, and honesty.

#### **E – Excellence** – by doing it well, safely and to the highest possible standards, always

We recognise that excellence is not a destination, rather it is a continuing dedication to high standards and improvement.



AT THE GOING  
DOWN OF THE SUN  
AND IN THE  
MORNING  
WE WILL REMEMBER  
THEM







*Flypast by a Lancaster bomber at the Runnymede Air Forces Memorial, UK*

## THE BENEFITS

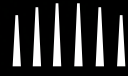
The benefits of this strategy, both inside and out, must be clear for all to see and feel. We will be stronger, fitter and our work will remain of the highest order as our reach and impact increases still further. Across the board, Environmental, Social, and Governance considerations will be integrated into all our core and charitable activities, our values, our policies, and principles, reflecting our shared commitment to an inclusive and sustainable future. The benefits that we will achieve from this strategy are:







*Recently discovered  
artefacts under  
examination at  
CWGC's recovery unit  
near Arras, France*



COMMONWEALTH  
WAR GRAVES



STRATEGY  
2023-2039

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*The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, France*

# OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our strategy, delivered against our ambition to be a global leader in commemoration, means that, in the words of our Royal Charter, we perpetuate the memory of those we commemorate and strengthen the bonds of union between all people.

To deliver on that statement we have identified **FOUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

## Caring Sustainably & Safely

– for the graves, cemeteries, memorials, landscapes and records of those who died.

## Sharing the Stories

– of those we commemorate, and those who make that commemoration possible, with an ever-wider and more diverse audience, across all nations.

## Deepening Relations

– with our existing membership, public, and volunteers but also broadening and exploring those partnerships (both new and existing) that, in the fulfilment of our mission, help us to become a valued instrument for diplomacy and influence.

## Organisational Fitness

– these priorities will be supported by strong internal systems based around a programme of Organisational Fitness, which – built upon our Values and aligned with environmental, social, and governance considerations – will ensure CWGC is well-governed and led, just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive, with its people and systems enabled to deliver our Mission.

The delivery of these strategic priorities will also bring recognisable and measurable benefits for **Our Profile**.

**Successful delivery will ensure we achieve our ambition as a global leader in Commemoration for all time.**

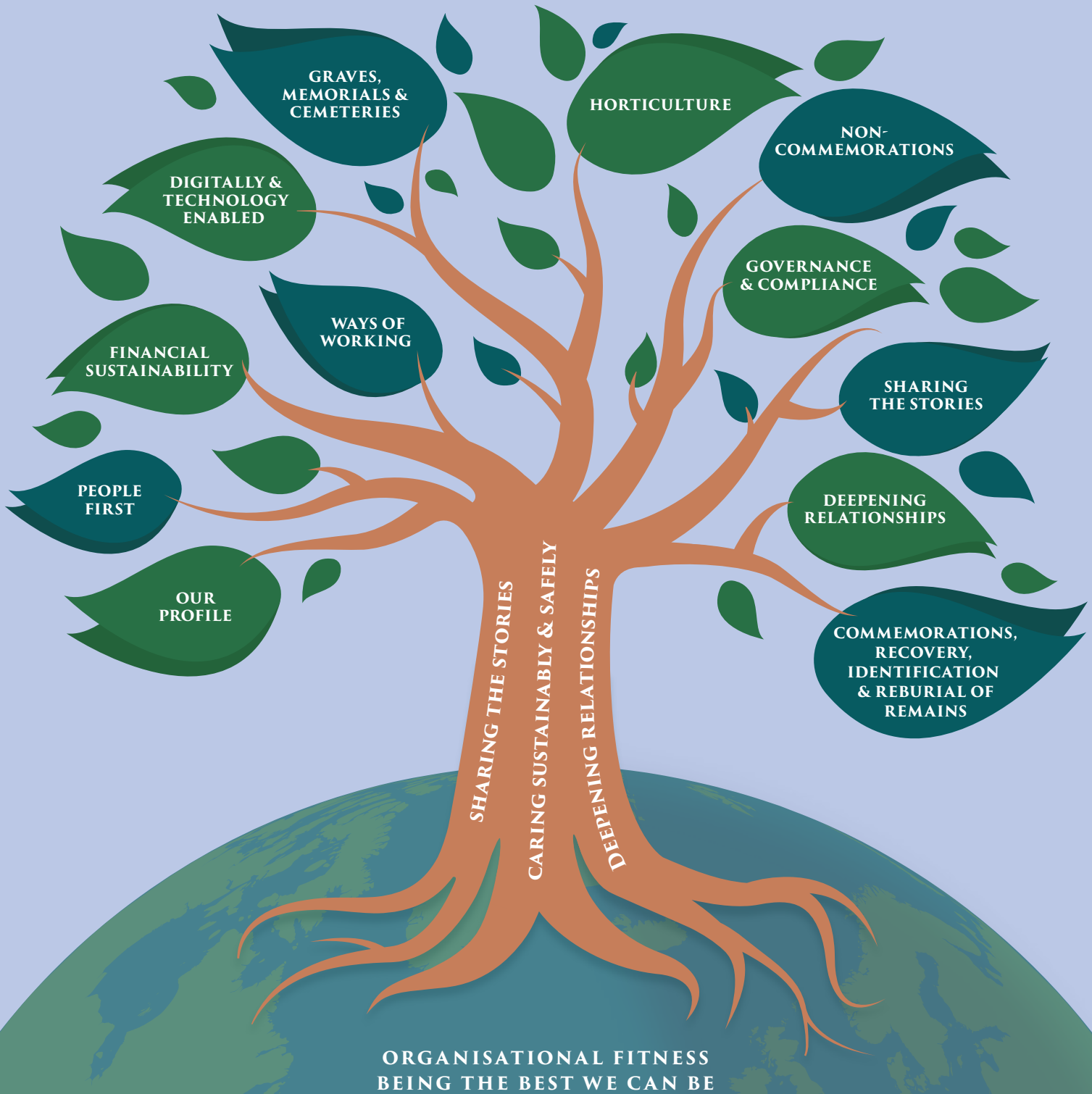


ANZAC Day at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore



# THE MISSION

To ensure those who died in service, or as a result of conflict, are commemorated so that they, and the human cost of war, are remembered for ever.



ORGANISATIONAL FITNESS  
BEING THE BEST WE CAN BE

GROWN ON A CULTURE OF

C A R E

COMMITMENT AMBITION RESPECT EXCELLENCE

# INTRODUCING OUR GOALS

Our Priorities are matched to **12 GOALS** focused out to 2039. Each goal is measurable and has clear benefits for Our Mission.



*Community engagement in action at The Hollybrook Memorial, Southampton*



## OUR PROFILE

*A global leader in Commemoration for all time – caring for the fallen and keeping their stories alive.*

CWGC and our charitable arm, The Commonwealth War Graves Foundation (CWGF), are at the heart of Commemoration and ongoing Remembrance. Recognition and awareness of such, among global audiences at all levels, will ensure both are understood, valued, supported, and cherished “international treasures” in the delivery of their mission in perpetuity.

**OUR OVERARCHING AIM IS THAT BY 2039 CWGC AND CWGF WILL BE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISABLE WITH A CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD AND VALUED MISSION; RELEVANT, WELL REGARDED, AND LEADERS IN GLOBAL COMMEMORATION.**





# ORGANISATIONAL FITNESS

*Ensuring our governance, people, systems, processes, and technology support the delivery of this strategy.*

We will embark upon a programme of Organisational Fitness that will put our people first, diversify our income, and efficiently and effectively use our resources to deliver on the ambition and purpose of this strategy.

## PEOPLE FIRST

CWGC's reputation for excellence is dependent upon our ability to attract, develop and retain a skilled and motivated group of people – be they directly employed staff, volunteers, or contractors.

We CARE about our people. We are Committed to putting our people first. We have the Ambition to be an employer of choice. We treat everyone with Respect.

We strive for Excellence – for ourselves and for our organisation.

**OUR GOAL IS THAT WE WILL SUCCEED BY PUTTING OUR PEOPLE FIRST, AT THE HEART OF OUR ORGANISATION, ATTRACTING, DEVELOPING AND RETAINING TALENTED, MOTIVATED TEAMS. OUR STAFF, OUR VOLUNTEERS, AND OUR CONTRACTORS WILL BE PART OF A JUST, INNOVATIVE, AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE THAT HELPS PEOPLE TO BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE.**



*Training at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand*

## GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

From our Royal Charter to our ethical policies and codes of practice, we will ensure the CWGC is consistent, fair, and equitable – with the right guidelines and guidance in place to inform our decision making. Our organisation will deliver best practice in all operations of our business – ensuring CWGC is well governed and well led.

**OUR GOAL IS TO HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE, FULLY FUNCTIONING GOVERNANCE, COMPLIANCE, AND ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK THAT INTEGRATES ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) CONSIDERATIONS AND DELIVERS THIS STRATEGY EFFECTIVELY.**

*The Director General with our team in Nairobi, Kenya*





## WAYS OF WORKING

Our processes will be enablers to our people in the delivery of our strategy and mission. Through rapid improvement and investment, we will give our people the tools they need to succeed. We will remove bureaucracy and will streamline and digitise where we can and should. We will empower our people. We will innovate. Remaining open to innovation, we will be an agile organisation, committed to continuous improvement and value.

**OUR GOAL IS TO IMPLEMENT STREAMLINED WAYS OF WORKING – OUR OPERATING MODEL, STRUCTURES, AND PROCESSES – THAT ARE VALUES-LED, OPTIMISING PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY, MINIMISING BUREAUCRACY, EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE, AND GETTING THINGS DONE.**



## DIGITALLY AND TECHNOLOGY ENABLED

We will transform our business through the bold, ambitious, and widespread development, adoption, and integration of new and emerging digital and technological solutions.

From communicating more readily with ever wider global audiences, to creating simpler ways for people to engage with us, or contribute to our mission, our use of technology will ensure a customer-focused approach to all we do and offer.

**OUR GOAL IS TO UTILISE INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGY SERVICES & SOLUTIONS, ENSURING OUR PEOPLE HAVE THE TOOLS AND LITERACY THEY NEED TO WORK SAFELY, EFFICIENTLY, INNOVATIVELY, AND EFFECTIVELY, WHILE REDUCING COSTS AND GROWING OUR AUDIENCE.**

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

This strategy comes at a time of unprecedented economic and political uncertainty and although CWGC's core funding is underpinned by our Member Governments we must continue to maximise the potential of that income and grow and diversify our income streams to avoid over reliance on any one single income source. In so doing, our ambitious strategy provides ample opportunities for our organisation, our Charitable Foundation, and our people to explore new and additional income streams, fundraising opportunities and being more value conscious, efficient and effective.

**OUR GOAL IS TO BE FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE BY SECURING A MULTI-YEAR CORE FUNDING SETTLEMENT, DIVERSIFYING OUR INCOME STREAMS, AND DELIVERING YEAR ON YEAR EFFICIENCIES.**



## CARING SUSTAINABLY & SAFELY

*To ensure the last physical reminders of the human cost of the World Wars are valued and visited.*

CWGC is responsible for the commemoration of 1.7 million individuals – caring for graves, cemeteries, and memorials at 23,000 locations in more than 150 countries and territories. Our work, on every continent except Antarctica, makes us one of the world's largest commemorative and horticultural organisations.

Caring sustainably, in this context, is defined by the most efficient use of the resources at our disposal (including financial), the finite resources provided to us by our environment (stone, water) and, through a conservation management approach for our unique landscape, structures, and records/commemorations – appreciating that we are their custodians and under our stewardship there is an onus on us all to pass our organisation on, fitter, stronger, and more relevant than ever before.

### GRAVES, MEMORIALS AND CEMETERIES

We are the custodians of a unique historic estate of international importance. The battlefields have long been reclaimed but our structures endure as human reminders of the cost of war. It falls upon us to care for these places, safely sustainably, and appropriately so that we may pass them on to future generations – thereby ensuring their legacy.

**OUR GOAL, IN LINE WITH THE BEST CONSERVATION PRACTICE, IS TO COST-EFFECTIVELY, SAFELY, AND SUSTAINABLY MANAGE OUR COMMEMORATIVE ESTATE (STRUCTURES) IN PERPETUITY TO A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE TO ENSURE THE LAST PHYSICAL REMINDERS OF THE HUMAN COST OF THE WORLD WARS ARE VALUED AND ATTRACT EVER MORE DIVERSE VISITORS FROM NEW GENERATIONS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE.**



*Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm), Belgium*

### HORTICULTURE

Our horticulture, from the smallest blade of grass to the mightiest of oaks, is an essential element of our commemoration of the dead. Cemeteries are as much places for the living as they are for those they commemorate, and our gardens and beautiful landscaped spaces not only play fitting tribute to those who died, but ensure they are welcoming and soothing for those who come to pay pilgrimage.

**OUR GOAL FOR HORTICULTURE IS TO DESIGN AND DELIVER ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE, COST-EFFECTIVE, BIODIVERSE, AND LOCATION APPROPRIATE WORLD CLASS HORTICULTURE THAT DELIGHTS, INSPIRES, INFORMS AND ATTRACTS EVER MORE DIVERSE VISITORS OF CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE.**



*Nairobi War Cemetery, Kenya*



## COMMEMORATIONS, RECOVERY, IDENTIFICATION & REBURIAL OF REMAINS

For many, our commemorative records are their first point of interaction with the Commission, while the records themselves underpin all other remembrance activity. Ensuring they are accurate, include all those entitled to commemoration, and are accessible to all, are essential drivers not just in meeting our core purpose, but in the delivery of other key priorities of this strategy including Our Profile, Deepening Relations, and Sharing the Stories.

Included within the Commemoration sphere is the growing task of timely and safe recovery of remains – aiding our member governments and others in their efforts to identify those remains where possible and regardless of known or unknown, afford them the dignified burial their sacrifice so richly deserves.

**OUR GOAL IS TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE FULLY DIGITISED, INTEGRATED & ACCESSIBLE CASUALTY & ARCHIVE RECORDS TO ENABLE EFFECTIVE COMMEMORATION OF THE FALLEN IN PERPETUITY, AND WORK WITH PARTNERS TO DELIVER AN EXPERT, PROFESSIONAL, AND COMPLIANT SERVICE IN SUPPORT OF THE DISCOVERY, RECOVERY, IDENTIFICATION, REBURIAL, AND COMMEMORATION OF WAR CASUALTIES, AND ENGAGE AN EVER-WIDER AUDIENCE WITH CWGC.**



*SS Mendi commemoration at Southampton (Hollybrook) Cemetery, UK*

## NON-COMMEMORATIONS

Our work on the non-commemoration of Commonwealth war dead is perhaps the biggest and single most important piece of work since the end of the Second World War. Ensuring all those eligible to commemoration are commemorated in line with our equality of treatment principle is core to our work and purpose.

**OUR GOAL IS TO IDENTIFY AND APPROPRIATELY COMMEMORATE ALL THOSE ELIGIBLE WAR DEAD NOT PREVIOUSLY COMMEMORATED BY CWGC OR NOT COMMEMORATED EQUALLY AND, MORE WIDELY, TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE CONTRIBUTION THEY MADE DURING TWO WORLD WARS.**



*Canadian reburial at New Irish Farm Cemetery, Belgium*

## SHARING THE STORIES

*Keeping alive the names and the memory of those who died.*

The CWGC is the custodian of 1.7 million stories. Relevancy and ongoing support for the commemoration of the war dead relies heavily upon the appreciation and understanding of the human cost of war.

Through creative and interactive means, we will source, store, and share the stories of those we commemorate with the global communities affected by their loss. We will do so in the language and on the platform of their choice – taking advantage of any technology that can help deliver this strategic aim.

We will also share the stories of our organisation and our people – those whose daily task it is to keep alive the memory and the names of the fallen – thereby ensuring the CWGC and CWGF are “international treasures” – recognisable with a clearly understood and valued mission; relevant, well regarded, and leaders in global Commemoration.

**OUR GOAL, THROUGH AN EXCEPTIONAL DIGITAL OFFERING, IS TO ENABLE THE STORIES OF OUR SITES, AND THOSE COMMEMORATED THEREIN, TO REACH, EDUCATE, INFORM, AND INSPIRE NEW GENERATIONS AND ENCOURAGE BROAD GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT.**

CWGC guides at The Arras Memorial, France



## DEEPENING RELATIONS

*Ensuring CWGC is a global leader in Commemoration and an instrument for diplomacy and influence on behalf of our Member Governments.*

The CWGC aims to be a global leader in Commemoration and yet we recognise that in the delivery of that aim, we are one of many organisations in the collective sphere of Commemoration, Heritage, and Remembrance and that, while each has its own needs, through the deepening of existing relations and the development of new partnerships, our collective voice is stronger.

We will deepen and develop our strategic partnerships with our six Commonwealth Member Governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom and the wider Commonwealth whose contribution and loss during the World Wars needs to be better known and valued. In so doing, we will build on our reputation and expertise to become a broad instrument for diplomacy and influence on behalf of those governments. We will also cultivate pro-active links with countries not part of our Commonwealth of nations – starting with those nations in which we commemorate the dead. We will develop relationships with all who can further the delivery of our Purpose and Mission.

**OUR GOAL IS TO HAVE DEVELOPED THE HIGH-LEVEL GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS NECESSARY TO BE VALUED AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR DIPLOMACY AND INFLUENCE, AND TO HAVE CONSOLIDATED OUR LEADERSHIP POSITION WITHIN THE GLOBAL COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE.**



*Māori ceremony at Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, France*







# IMPLEMENTATION

## STRATEGY TO PLAN THE FIRST THREE YEARS 2023-2026

This document, our strategy, describes our mission out to 2039 – the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. We will deliver our strategy through a rolling three-year implementation plan, the first of which will run from 2023 to 2026.

Progress will be reviewed quarterly, and the implementation plan (published internally) will be updated annually. Every three years we will revisit the strategy and revise and update our goals to ensure they remain timely and relevant.





**MORE  
INFORMATION**

**CWGC STRATEGY  
2023-2039**  
CONTACT DETAILS  
[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

# MANY STORIES MANY VOICES ONE COMMISSION ONE MISSION



**COMMONWEALTH  
WAR GRAVES  
COMMISSION**

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