

Edinburgh moves to strike Friendship Agreement with Contalmaison

The city has a long and lasting friendship with the town of Contalmaison in northern France.

The Lord Provost is now to sign off on a Friendship Agreement with the town to put that on a more formal basis.

The friendship arises from the continued representation by the council at a special ceremony held on 1 July each year when the battle of Contalmaison is remembered.

During the Battle of the Somme in the First World War 20,000 were killed and 40,000 wounded in one morning on 1 July 2016.

Among the dead five hundred from Edinburgh, Midlothian and Fife were killed, and some 800 wounded. Casualty levels rose during the day including a number of young men from the 16th Royal Scots at Contalmaison.

In the report to be brought to the first virtual council meeting next Tuesday the following story is related: "The town of Contalmaison, in the North of France saw a great deal of fighting during and was one of the key allied objectives during the first Battle of the Somme. The advance from the British lines on Contalmaison was led by the 34th Division, a New Army Formation which had been recruited in Edinburgh, Northumberland, Grimsby and Cambridge, elements of the 16th Royal Scots, "McCrae's Battalion" and of the Tyneside Irish

battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers. They succeeded in penetrating the defences that same day, before being outnumbered and forced to withdraw by the opposing German forces.

“The “McCrae’s Battalion” connection to Edinburgh is particularly poignant and important for the City. This was a volunteer battalion of the 16th Royal Scots formed by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir George McCrae who rallied the men of Edinburgh to enlist beside him. It was also referred to as “The Sporting Battalion” because of the high number of professional sportsmen drawn from a number of football clubs, notably Heart of Midlothian FC and Hibernian FC, along with a number of other sporting clubs from across the City and beyond.

“In 2004 the McCrae’s Battalion Great War Memorial, designed by the historian Jack Alexander, was unveiled. This memorial cairn was first proposed by the survivors of the battle in 1919 and, as such, is considered to be the last of the Great War memorials to be built. The service and sacrifice of the Battalion continues to be remembered and deserves to be commemorated in by the Council, this year as in any other. The proposed friendship agreement will act as a lasting signal of our respect and remembrance, complemented by future visits to the Memorial Cairn when circumstances again permit this.”

The Friendship Agreement will include a commitment of enduring friendship between the City of Edinburgh and the village of Contalmaison. It is intended that it will be signed by both places although it has no legal impact.



Contalmaison