

December 2014

***Centenary***  
**Christmas Truce and Flanders  
Peace Field Project**



Report

by  
Don Mullan



A selection of Christmas Truce images from Robert T. Barrett's book *Silent Night – Holy Night*, which he has generously donated via the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project to St. Nicholas Church, Messines. See page 8

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*The Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project  
is a gift of the Island of Ireland Peace Process  
to the European Project and World Peace...”*

Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate

## Introduction

In the following pages I have given a brief summary of a series of related Christmas Truce commemorative initiatives I was involved in organising during the month of December 2014, the centenary month of the WWI 1914 Christmas Truce.

All of this has been the product of over six years engagement at home and abroad, since I first visited Flanders on 28 August 2008, the day I was inspired to develop the Flanders Peace Field initiative; and subsequently the wider Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project.

If the Flanders Peace Field is not mentioned in detail below, it is because the initiative is currently being run by the Belgium based organisation 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw', created by personnel associated with the Messines Peace Village and Volkstourisme ivzw, with the field located between the Island of Ireland Peace Park and the New Zealand War Memorial on Messines Ridge. A number of commemorative games have already taken place on the field since its 'Official Opening' by the Messines Peace Village and 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw' on 24 August 2014, including Christmas Day 2014, generously funded by Roma Downey and Mark Burnett.

There is still matters to be considered regarding this initiative, including provenance, governance and location. It remains the intention of the originators of the idea, as well as the patrons of the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Pelé, that the governance of Flanders Peace Field should be an entirely independent international organisation, operating under Belgian or, if necessary, French Law. It is also part of a wider objective of Peace Fields International, and must also seek to meet the requirements of UNESCO should the site of the 1914 Christmas Truce be considered as a World Heritage Site, which must also encompass the town of Armentieres, France.

With the centenary commemorations of the 1914 Christmas Truce over, the work of building legacy begins. That has always been my objective. The potential for legacy building will be clear in many of the projects outlined below.

During the centenary commemorations, excessive interest was placed on the various soccer games played during the truce which, while important, somewhat overshadowed the cultural and religious dimensions of the truce. This, of course, can be rectified in the building of a legacy project. A legacy project will require genuine partnerships – local, regional and international – based on integrity and transparency and an understanding that Peace is the offspring of justice. This requires, within Flanders and Wallonia, and nearby France, a genuine spirit of cooperation, based not on



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self-interest, but in honouring the fact that all are the inheritors of a territory, the liberty for which, hundreds of thousands of young men from across Europe and the globe, suffered and died during four harrowing years of trench warfare.

Equally, within the Island of Ireland, the sacrifice and suffering of thousands of our own, north and south, catholic and protestant, who travelled to Flanders and France and other WWI conflict zones, can be a source of genuine reconciliation in cross community and cross border initiatives today.

The Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project, as well as promoting cross community and cross border reconciliation and bridge building at home, also presents a unique opportunity for the Anglo-Irish Peace Process to extend its positive influence to Europe and beyond.

As we now look towards legacy building with the passing of the 1914 centenary commemorations, it is useful to recall the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, written to the Mayor of Messines on 20 February 2013, concerning the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project:

*The Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project is a gift of the Island of Ireland Peace Process to the European Project and to World Peace. It is a gift that the Belgium people should receive with the respect and responsibility it deserves, as custodians for all humanity. It is a gift that requires the grace and reciprocal generosity of like-minded people.*

Don Mullan  
Creator  
Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project  
Associate Chair  
UNESCO Global Youth Programme  
1 March 2015



*The epitaph on the gravestone of Rifleman E.J. Ward, Rifle Commonwealth Cemetery, Ploegsteert Woods, Flanders.*

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# The Projects:

6 December 2014

## Multi-Faith 'Goodwill Gathering'

On 10 April 2013, I was asked by the Belgian Federal Commissioner-General, with responsibility for WWI Centenary Commemorations, Mr Paul Breyne, to help organise a multi-faith gathering in Messines to commemorate the 1914 Christmas Truce.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu agreed to be the convenor of the gathering, to be known as 'The Goodwill Gathering'.

It began with optimism which included the hope of a contribution by the recently elected Pope Francis, known for his ecumenism and contribution to multi-faith dialogue. It also seemed logical as the centenary of the 1914 Christmas Truce was the one shining moment of WWI which presented the opportunity for the Vatican to offer an uplifting statement, especially since Pope Benedict XV had been the first to call for a truce during the first Christmas of WWI.

Following careful soundings, Archbishop Tutu sent a thoughtful letter to Pope Francis, his invitation supported by the Irish Cardinal, Sean Brady. I also followed up in February 2014 with a visit to Rome to lobby for the Pope's involvement, which included two very engaging and respectful encounters with the Anglican Communion's representative to the Holy See, Archbishop David Moxon, and with the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson. Both were positively disposed.

Two developments, however, undermined our efforts. Archbishop Tutu's letter to Pope Francis, delivered by courier to the Vatican on 30 January 2014 was, apparently, lost within the Vatican system for over three months, before it received a courtesy response from the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, informing him that the Pope would be unable to participate. This, however, followed a disappointing response from the Secretary General of the Belgian Bishop's Conference, on 27 March 2014, stating the Belgian Bishops would not support Archbishop Tutu's invitation to Pope Francis. Without their support, the invitation to the Holy Father was mortally wounded.

In the wake of the 'regrets' letter from Cardinal Parolin, following the Belgian Bishops' Conference response, Archbishop Tutu withdrew as convenor of the multi-faith gathering. It was a unfortunate development but understandable.

Despite a number of challenges, Commissioner General, Paul Breyne, was anxious to see a multi-faith gathering held, even after I wrote to him suggesting that it be postponed. Thanks to the wonderful support of the Deacon of Messines, Rev. Dirk Verschoore, St. Nicholas Church, Messines, was the venue for a small but dignified gathering on 6 December 2014, attended by the daughter of Archbishop Tutu, Rev. Mpho Tutu, and the



*Commissioner General Paul Breyne addresses the multi-faith gathering at St. Nicholas Church, Messines.*



*Rev. Mpho Tutu enjoys a friendly exchange with the Mayor of Messines, Sandy Evyard.*

President of the French chapter of *World Religions for Peace*, Dr. Ghaleb Bencheikh, along with the Vicar General of the diocese of Bruges.

Also in attendance was the Commissioner General, Mr. Paul Breyne, who, just a few days earlier, had been released from hospital after a life threatening illness.

Mr Breyne's presence was deeply appreciated, especially after we had received a letter the previous week from the President of 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw', Dirk Vandermaelen, disassociating the organisation from the multi-faith gathering! The primary reason for the letter was to ensure 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw' had no financial liabilities for the 'Goodwill Gathering', despite the fact that the Commissioner General had, all along, stated that 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw' were in possession of funding for the gathering which was Mr Breyne's initiative.

Despite the difficulties, the gathering was a thoughtful and moving event and will be the subject of a publication in 2015. The gathering was given the warm and enthusiastic support of the parish council of St. Nicholas Church, Messines, for which we are deeply grateful. The council generously provided refreshments for all in attendance.

Prior to the gathering Rev. Tutu and Dr. Bencheikh were warmly welcomed by the Mayor of Messines, Sandy Evyard, at the Town Hall. Rev. Tutu presented him with stones which I had asked her to bring from South Africa, as the first contribution to a 'Peace Wall' the Mayor plans to create in Messines. The Mayor assured Rev. Tutu that when the wall is eventually completed he will place the South African stones on top.

A huge thank you must be extended to Rev. Verschoore, his family and the parish council of St. Nicholas Church Messines, for their exception support, warmth and generosity.

## **St. Nicholas Chutrch Crypt – Multi-Faith Space**

As well as the presentation the three main speakers, the 'Goodwill Gathering' included the dedication of the St. Nicholas Church crypt as a multi-faith space. This will be developed further, as a primary legacy arising out of the 'Goodwill Gathering', along with other ambitious initiatives, during the centenary period 2014-2019.

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<http://www.diaken.be/document/20141206TutuMesen.pdf>

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<http://www.paxchristi.be/2014/12/herdenking-kerstbestand-1914-in-mesen/>

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## **Pilgrimage**

After the Gathering Rev. Mpho Tutu and Dr Bencheikh lead a small group on a pilgrimage to Rifle Commonwealth Cemetery, Ploegsteert Woods, and the grave of 23 year old Rifleman E.J. Ward, London Rifle Brigade, who died on 8th December 1914, just two weeks before the Christmas Truce. The pilgrimage to his grave was to highlight the epitaph on his gravestone, chosen by his family, which simply reads: 'PARDON & PEACE'. We will consider using this epitaph at the entrance to the St. Nicholas crypt as its meaning is deep and invites reflection.

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The 100th anniversary of Rifleman E.J. Ward was two days hence. Some of the most famous pictures of British and German soldiers meeting on Christmas Day 1914 are with Rifleman Ward's comrades.

Close to where he lies is the grave of a 15 year old Jewish British soldier, one of the youngest combatants to die in WWI.

We thank Rev. Tutu and Dr Bencheikh for leading this inaugural pilgrimage.

## **Robert T Barratt Exhibition**

Robert T. Barrett is one of America's top illustrators. He is a professor at Brigham Young University, Utah, and the author of 'Silent Night – Holy Night: The Story of the Christmas Truce' (2003):

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<https://cfac.byu.edu/2014/12/19/illustrations-of-truce-highlight-peace-in-a-time-of-war/>

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<http://roberttbarrett.com/>

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<http://www.amazon.com/Silent-Night-Holy-Story-Christmas/dp/1590381661>

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Robert T Barrett agreed to donate the original illustrations from 'Silent Night – Holy Night' to me for St. Nicholas Church, Messines. He had the illustrations delivered in time for the multi-faith gathering, where they were presented to Mr Paul Breyne and Rev. Dirk Verschoore. The Robert T Barrett Exhibition is currently being framed and will hang in St. Nicholas Church, Messines. It is also planned to publish a multi-language version of 'Silent Night – Holy Night' during the centenary period.

We are extremely grateful to Robert T Barrett for this very generous and valuable gift to the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project which will contribute enormously to our legacy objectives.

**11 December 2014**

## **Introduction of US Congressional Resolution**

On this day Congressman Joseph Crowley of New York introduced a resolution commemorating the centennial anniversary of the World War I Christmas Truce of 1914.

Congressman Crowley has engaged with me about the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project since 2012 and in 2013 he wrote a letter of support to the Mayor of Messines. During a meeting I had with him in September 2014 Congressman Crowley invited me into his office on Capitol Hill and informed me that during a visit to cousins in England during the summer he had learned that his great grandfather had actually participated in the 1914 Christmas Truce.

Congressman Crowley will be an important ally in the future and I would expect him to visit Messines, Comines-Warneton and Armientiers in the future in support of the area being designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.





United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

## *House of Representatives*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON RESOLUTION "COMMEMORATING THE 100<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORLD WAR I CHRISTMAS TRUCE OF 1914"

HON. JOSEPH CROWLEY  
of New York  
in the House of Representatives

Thursday, December 11, 2014

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, today I have introduced a resolution commemorating the centennial anniversary of the World War I Christmas Truce of 1914.

One hundred years ago this month, soldiers on the Western Front came together to unofficially pause hostilities and celebrate the Christmas holiday without regard for country lines or battle lines. The truce gave armies on both sides an opportunity to bury their fallen comrades, as well as share some festive cheer while far away from their homes and families.

Reports from soldiers on the front lines were that soldiers engaged in singing carols, sharing food and other provisions, and even lighthearted games. One of the most well-known aspects of the Christmas Truce is the impromptu football game that took place among the men. Many football clubs to this day recognize the Christmas Truce by holding commemorative games, and this year's historic anniversary will feature a number of recognitions in the sporting world.

The Christmas Truce has always inspired me as a reminder that it is possible for opponents to look beyond their differences and see each other as people, but I have a more personal connection as well. My great-grandfather was one of the soldiers present during the Christmas Truce, and his story and his experiences have been passed down as family lore.

I've also been drawn to this year's commemorations by my good friend Don Mullan, an Irish author who has been championing worldwide celebrations of this proud moment in world history. Don has been developing a Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project in Messines, Belgium in partnership with the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace and UNESCO. This project has gained the support of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and will help ensure that the Christmas Truce, and more importantly, the lessons it has taught us, will always be remembered.

I hope that this holiday season, wherever we are, we can all take a moment to remember the Christmas Truce and to remind ourselves of a time when soldiers laid down their weapons and recognized how essential it is to value humanity. The Christmas Truce is a symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, and reminds us that even in the darkest times, we should always strive toward peace.

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2014-12-12/pdf/CREC-2014-12-12-pt1-PgE1827-3.pdf>

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13-14 December 2014

## Visit of Deputy First Minister and Jeffrey Donaldson MP to Messines

Negotiations with the office of the First and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland have been on-going for over a year. The Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, indicated to me during a visit to Stormont in 2012 that he would be anxious to visit Flanders in the context of the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project I was developing in and around Messines. The Deputy First Minister invited me to meet the First Minister, Peter Robinson, to introduce the project. The hope was that both Ministers would visit Messines to open the Flanders Peace Project, an Irish initiative brought to Belgium and this was agreed with by the Board of 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw'.

Consequently, the Mayor and Chief Executive of Messines, and the President of 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw', invited the First and Deputy First Ministers to 'Officially Open' Flanders Peace Field on 6 or 13 September 2014. However, on 23 August 2014, the Messines Peace Village and 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw', distributed a written invitation to the citizens of Messines, to attend the 'Official Opening' of the Flanders Peace Field the following day, for the first game to be played on the field, between two adults teams from England and Germany. The German and British Ambassadors were invited to the Official Opening and the Irish Ambassador was invited only after the Manager of the Messines Peace Village, who had, without consultation with the Board of 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw', been appointed Manager of the Flanders Peace Field, was instructed to do so by Commissioner-General Paul Breyne.

The following week the Mayor of Messines received a letter informing him of the First and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland's unavailability.

The Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, however, expressed the wish to reschedule, along with Jeffrey Donaldson MP. After much negotiation and preparations, the date was set for the weekend of 13-14 December 2014 to coincide with the visit of the Omagh-Waterford Peace Choir.

Minister McGuinness was anxious to record the thanks of the people of Ireland to Derry actress, Roma Downey, and her husband, Mark Burnett, for their – as yet – unacknowledged gift of €25,000 to Messines to prepare the land on Messines Ridge that was to become Flanders Peace Field. Their donation was received by 'Flanders Peace Field ivzw' who, to date, have not acknowledged the generosity of Ms Downey and Mr Burnett. Much to my embarrassment, as the person who had solicited the donation.



*Roma Downey and Mark Burnett, who generously funded the creation of 'Flanders Peace Field'*

Unfortunately, due to protracted negotiations over unresolved contentious issues that threatened to undermine the Northern Ireland Peace Process, both politicians had to postpone their visit. The talks included the participation of both the British Prime Minister, James Cameron MP, and the Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD.

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<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/dec/23/northern-ireland-talks-belfast-political-agreement-christmas>

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The Mayor of Messines had agreed to host a reception of the Deputy First Minister and Jeffrey Donaldson, as well as the members of the Omagh-Waterford Peace Choir.

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However, once he had been informed that the two politicians were unable to travel, he cancelled the reception. While one understands his disappointment and frustration, it was entirely correct that the Irish Peace Process should take precedence over any visit to Messines. The cancellation of the reception for the Peace Choir, however, seemed harsh, and caused logistical difficulties.

On 23 December, the Mayor of Messines sent me a text expressing his genuine happiness that there had been a breakthrough in the Peace talks on the eve of the centenary of the Christmas Truce. It was, indeed, very good news:

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<http://www.irishcentral.com/news/politics/Breakthrough-reached-on-North-talks-after-Cameron-deal.html>

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## **Visit of Island of Ireland Peace Choir to Messines**

Since the first Christmas Truce Concert at Kimmage Manor in 2011, the Omagh-Waterford Peace Choir, through their director/founder Dr Phil Brennan, have harboured a strong desire to visit Flanders and the site of the 1914 Christmas Truce. Through funding secured with the support of Jeffrey Donaldson MP and Cooperation Ireland, the choir was able to attend. Damien Tiernan covered the visit for RTE News and *Nationwide*.

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<http://www.radiotimes.com/episode/cgxzwv/nationwide--nationwide>

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It must be recorded that an entirely legitimate booking for the choir was made at the Messines Peace Village, following enquiries about availability with Mr Filip Delmotte, Board Member of the Peace Village and Volkstoeurisme, the company that manages the Messines Peace Village. However, a week before the arrival of the choir and their guests, Dirk Vandermaelen, in his capacity as President of Flanders Peace Field ivzw, wrote to inform me that the Peace Village was fully booked and unavailable. This was followed up with an email from the manager of the Peace Village informing me that the booking I had made was invalid "as it had not been made properly"! This, despite the fact that I had made the book personally at the Messines Peace Village, in his presence.

With absolutely no fuss or difficulty, an alternative hostel was found in Ypres (Ieper), *The Menin Gate Hostel*, through a simple phone call and follow-up emails. The management were entirely accommodating and helpful and made the booking a simple process. The only drawback was distance. Of course, we would have preferred to stay in the Messines area and having to travel back and forth to Ypres for food added pressure on our already crowded schedule.

The choir was accompanied by the Chief Executive of Cooperation Ireland, Peter Sheridan, and a member of the Democratic Unionist Party, Brenda Hale MLA, whose husband Mark was killed while serving with the British Army in Afghanistan in 2009. Brenda's quiet dignity and the story of her own personal tragedy and loss added immensely to a deeply moving and emotional weekend, especially during our visit to the Menin Gate and Prowse Point Commonwealth Cemetery.

The choir sang 'Danny Boy' at the Menin Gate, after which they travelled to Messines. They were given a very warm welcome by the Deacon of Messines, Rev. Dirk

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Verschoore, who gave the gathering a brief outline of the history of Messines. He outlined the role of St. Nicholas Church during WWI and told the story of the visit years later of the German veteran of the Battle of Messines, Ottor Meyer. Herr Meyer returned to Messines as an act of reconciliation and brought with him candelabras and a magnificent chandelier which he donated to St. Nicholas Church.

The Rev. Verschoore had brought gifts of small globes for each member of the choir and their guests, as a reminder that our work is about building a caring and just world; the choir sang 'Whispering Hope' in the church before Rev. Verschoore invited them to visit the crypt of St. Nicholas Church where their harmony during the singing of 'Nearer My God To Thee' brought warmth to a place with a particularly cold memory of having once endured the presence of Adolf Hitler:

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_0MBsIYUME](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_0MBsIYUME)

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Rev. Verschoore and the Messines Parish Council also provided light refreshments for the choir which was sincerely appreciated.

From Saint Nicholas Church the choir travelled to Prowse Point Commonwealth Cemetery which holds the graves of both commonwealth soldiers and 12 German soldiers from WWI. At the graves of the German soldiers the choir sang 'Stille Nacht', in German, English and Irish. It was hauntingly beautiful. They then walked to the graves soldiers from Ireland: one, T. Delaney, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who had been killed on 24 December 1914, just before the Christmas Truce; and his neighbour, M. Murphy, killed six days later, on 30 December 1914 – the small gap between their graves symbolising the period of the Christmas Truce. Here the haunting words and melody of 'Red is the Rose' was sung. Given that we were in the presence of Mrs Brenda Hale, whose personally story echoed the tragic losses that lay silently in Prowse Point Cemetery, and in hundreds of cemeteries across Flanders, moved many in our group to tears.

The choir then made their way to the nearby Christmas Truce Cross (left at Christmas 1999 by the Khaki Chums, marking the 85th anniversary of the truce), where they stood for photographs. Here too they met beautiful old Marie Therese, a most gentle, warm and welcoming Walloon neighbour, whose farmhouse sits just across the road from the Christmas Truce Cross. The choir was delighted to honour the presence of Marie Therese with the singing of *Danny Boy*.

The choir then moved to the Island of Ireland Peace Park's reconciliation stone, where they participated in a small ceremony of symbolically laying down stones they had brought from Ireland. The stones had been brought from all over Ireland for the Mayor of Messines Peace Wall. The Mayor of Messines, Sandy Evrard, and city officials attended. At the Reconciliation Stone *The Omagh-Waterford Peace Choir* officially changed their name to *The Island of Ireland Peace Choir*.

The highlight of the visit was a concert performed at Sint-Machutuskerk in nearby Wulvergem for the local community. A striking poster, in English and Flemish, advertising the concert, was designed by the Anglo-Irish artist, Andrew Edwards, featuring his magnificent Christmas Truce monument:





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It was a huge success and the concert was given a standing ovation at the end. All of the Irish group were delighted to discover that old Marie Therese and one of her sons had come to enjoy the concert. We dedicated the concert to both Marie Therese and Brenda Hale MLA.

We were especially honoured on this occasion by the presence of Mr Gerry Mulligan, Northern Ireland Executive, Brussels, and the Irish Ambassador to Belgium, H.E. Eamonn MacAodha.

Once again, great thanks must be extended to the Rev. Dirk Verschoore and the parish council of Wulvergem who enthusiastically welcomed the choir and their Irish and British visitors and who later hosted a reception for us in a nearby hall. The gathering was immensely enjoyable, during which a wonderful gathering of Belgians (including Marie Therese and her son) and Irish, enjoyed an additional hour of singing and merriment.

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<http://irishcatholic.ie/article/singing-songs-peace>

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Special thanks must be extended to the management and staff of the Menin Gate Hostel who welcomed the Irish group without fuss and with immense warmth and professionalism. We must also thank Geoffrey Donaldshon MP and Cooperation Ireland for helping to sponsor the visit to Flanders of the Island of Ireland Peace Choir, and especially, Ms Emer Lyttle whose administrative skills were invaluable.

### **Monday 15 December 2014**

#### **Christmas Truce Talk – Magaret Aylward Centre, Glasnevin, Dublin**

I was invited Fr. Richard Sheehy PP, Glasnevin, to speak on the Christmas Truce on the occasion of the centenary. I spoke also about the journey of reconciliation made by the German soldier, Otto Meyer, a Veteran of the Battle of Messines, who came from the German city of Hildesheim, famous for its 1000 year rose.

One of the ideas that emerged from this gathering was the possibility of twinning Hildesheim with Glasnevin and bringing a sprig of the Hildesheim rose to the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, as a symbol of reconciliation and friendship on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Messines, which included the 36th Ulster and 16th Irish Divisions.

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<http://www.margaretaylwardcentre.ie/latest-news/>

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Special thanks to Fr. Richard Sheehy and the Margaret Aylward Centre for organising this event.

### **Tuesday 16 December 2014**

#### **Meeting with the Football Association of Ireland**

Together with Professor Patrick Dolan, NUI Galway, Chair UNESCO Global Youth Forum, I attended a meeting at FAI Headquarters to discuss the forthcoming Republic of Ireland vs. England friendly in Dublin on 7 June 2015.

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It is well remembered that 20 years ago, during the last friendly in Dublin, the neo-Nazi group, Combat 18, attended the game specifically to create trouble and succeeded in having the game abandoned:

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<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/england-vs-ireland-night-neo-nazis-football-hooligans-rioted-lansdowne-road-1444092>

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Matters discussed were the following:

1. The Andrew Edwards Christmas Truce monument to be brought from England to Dublin for the Ireland vs. England friendly on 7 June 2015. The hope is that it would be positioned on the centre circle before kick-off and then removed to one of the entrances where departing fans can view it close-up. Given what happened 20 years ago, it might be good if both the Ireland and England teams could gather around the monument for a friendship photograph before kick-off.

The monument is made of resin, not bronze, and will not cause any damage to the ground. It is hoped during December 2015, to donate a permanent bronze version of the monument to Messines area, as a gift of the peoples of Ireland and Britain, if funding can be found.

2. The Island of Ireland Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project will partner with UNESCO and Cooperation Ireland for the event. I have discussed with John Delaney the possibility of having a collection within the grounds to bring Irish children, north and south, catholic and protestant, to Flanders and France, to engage in friendship and reconciliation experiences, focusing on the Christmas Truce and recalling the famous games of football that were played during the 1914 Truce, as well as the comradeship between Irish and Ulster Divisions during WWI.
3. The game will take place on the 98th anniversary of the Battle of Messines, when both the 36th Ulster and 16th Irish Divisions fought side by side along with ANZAC forces to liberate Messines. The Battle of Messines provides a wonderful opportunity to bring both communities in Northern Ireland together, and also the peoples of Northern Ireland and the Republic. For the game the Mayor and Chief Executive of Messines, along with the Deacon of St. Nicholas Church, Messines, will attend the game. It might be special if they could be presented to fans either before the game or at half-time. Messines is the site of the Island of Ireland Peace Park.
4. We discussed the Island of Ireland Peace Choir, comprising youth and adults from all across Ireland, north and south, singing at the beginning of the game, and quite possibly both national anthems.
5. We also discussed, in passing, the possibility of a friendly game in 2017 involving the Western Isles (Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland) vs. Germany, to mark the centenary of the Battle of Messines.

Special thanks must be extended to Mr Joe McGlue of the Football Association of Ireland and Professor Pat Dolan for attending the meeting.

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## The Christmas Truce Lecture – President Mary McAleese.

Professor Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, accepted the invitation of the Department of Foreign Affairs to present the 3rd annual Christmas Truce Lecture as part of the Iveagh House Lecture series.

The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charles Flannigan TD introduced Professor McAleese. Professor John Horne of Trinity College and myself were invited to respond. The British Secretary of State, Philip Hammond MP, also attended; along with invited guests comprising the diplomatic corps, academics and the public. The event was moderated by the veteran RTE presenter, John Bowman.

It was also arranged that the Island of Ireland Peace Choir and tenor Jerry Lynch, would perform at the end of the lecture. Their contribution was a wonderful addition, especially given the Christmas Season and the subject of the lecture.

The lecture received extensive media coverage, with the Irish Times reproducing it in its entirety:

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<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/mary-mcaleese-the-christmas-truce-1.2048413>

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The Department of Foreign Affairs has made the text of the lecture available in PDF format:

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<https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/ourwork/christmastruce1914/Christmas-Truce-of-1914-Speech-by-Professor-Mary-McAleese.pdf>

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The Department also made a recording of the entire evenings proceedings available on-line:

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<https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/our-work/casestudiesarchive/2014/december/christmas-truce-of-1914/>

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The lecture was a beautifully crafted and thought provoking presentation.

Professor McAleese concluded thus:

*A nineteen year old private Henry Williamson wrote home to his mother on St Stephens day. "Yesterday the British and Germans met and shook hands in the Ground between the trenches, and exchanged souvenirs. Yes, all day Xmas day and as I write. Marvellous, isn't it?" And it was, for a glorious moment it was. Go ndeana dia agus muidine trocaire ar a n-anamacha uaisle.*

And so it was, and remains a moment of inspiration to be harnessed and built upon for the good of all humanity, now and in the future. That is the inspiring challenge of the legacy building this project represents.

The evening was very dignified and ended with a reception hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charles Flanagan. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and specifically, the members of the Reconciliation Fund, must be sincerely thanked for a wonderful event.

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Thursday 18 December 2014

## **Launch of *Ireland and Belgium: Past Connections and Continuing Ties***

The Irish Ambassador to Belgium, H.E. Eamonn MacAodha, invited me to contribute a chapter to a new book recalling Ireland's long relationship with Belgium, published by the Irish Embassy, Brussels. Ambassador MacAodha was anxious that the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu has described as 'a gift of the Island of Ireland Peace Process to the European Project and World Peace', should be acknowledged and recorded in this prestigious publication.

The book was launched in Brussels by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny T.D. whose speech is available at the following link:

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[http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Speeches/Belgium\\_and\\_Ireland\\_%E2%80%93\\_Past\\_Connections\\_and\\_Continuing\\_Ties\\_Speech\\_by\\_An\\_Taoiseach\\_Enda\\_Kenny\\_TD\\_.html](http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Speeches/Belgium_and_Ireland_%E2%80%93_Past_Connections_and_Continuing_Ties_Speech_by_An_Taoiseach_Enda_Kenny_TD_.html)

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*The Irish Times*, in reporting the publication of the book, highlighted the 'Powerful and Historic' links between Ireland and Belgium:

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<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/powerful-and-historic-links-between-ireland-and-belgium-explored-in-new-book-1.2043174>

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Sincere thanks must be expressed to Co-Editors of the book, Ambassador Eamonn MacAodha and Aileen Murray, for their invitation to contribute to this important publication.

## **Christmas Truce Talk – Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre, Limavady**

I was invited by the Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre, Limavady, to give a presentation entitled: *The 1914 Christmas Truce: Inspiring Reconciliation and Healing Today*.

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<https://www.facebook.com/limavadymuseum/photos/a.443583165655950.118560.433030093377924/1004043902943204/>

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The presentation was made to a mixed audience of Roman Catholics and Protestants of various denominations. It was well received by all in attendance. The presentation was similar to that delivered earlier in the week at Glasnevin and there was also interest in the Hildesheim connection in the lead up to the centenary of the Battle of Messines.

Limavady is a place of special affection to me. It is the birthplace of my paternal grandfather, Alexander Mullan, and also the place where the melody of 'The Londonderry Air', was first noted by Jane Ross of Limavady, later published by George Petrie in *Ancient Music of Ireland* in 1855.

The possibility of a joint Limavady/Glasnevin twinning with Hildesheim was discussed with much interest, to mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Messines in 2017.



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In attendance at this event was Ms Rhoda Baxter of the Pavestone Centre, Coleraine, who was particularly interested in the Christmas Truce Candle initiative. She spoke to me afterwards about the work of the rehabilitation work of the Pavestone Centre and suggested they could help. She invited me to visit the Centre the following afternoon, which I did and was very impressed by the quality and beauty of their craftwork. I received from her three of their largest candles, echoing the design of the world famous Giants Causeway hexagonal basalt rocks, to use at the first Christmas Truce Candle ceremony in Messines on Christmas Eve, 2014.

Very special thanks must be extended to Ms Jamie Austin of the Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre, Limavady, for organising this event. Jamie was a delight to work with also.

**21 December 2014**

## **Christmas Truce Concert, Christ Church Cathedral**

The 4th annual Christmas Truce Concert was held in Christ Church Cathedral. For the fourth year in a row, the concert was given a standing ovation at the end by the over 300 attendees.

The power of the concert is a combination of the narrative and carefully chosen quotations and stories from the 1914 and 1915 Christmas Truces, and a selection of carols, hymns and folksongs which Dr Phil Brennan and I have developed over the past four years.

Amongst the distinguished guests were Brenda Hale MLA and the new German Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Matthias Höpfner. Both read alternate verses of the 23rd Psalm in English and German, in memory of its reading during the 1914 Christmas Truce.

The 2015 Christmas Truce concert, as well as recalling Richard Schirrmann, will begin to look towards the 1916 Battle of the Somme and the 1917 Battle of Messines.

Anglo-Irish Artist and Sculptor, Andrew Edwards, once again, designed the poster for the 2014 Christ Church concert:



Very special thanks must be extend to Dr Phil Brennan and all the members and musicians of the Island of Ireland Peace Choir and special guest, especially Jerry Lynce whose rendition of 'A Silent Night -Christmas 1914' by Cormac McConnell from Enniskillen, is always an eagerly anticipated highlight of the concert:

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XK233YzsodY>

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The Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Rev. Dermot Dunne for his cooperation, and most especially, the director of administration, Ms Nuala Kavanagh and her staff, who have been a delight to work with.

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22 December 2014

## US Congressional Resolution

United States Congressman, Joseph Crowley (D.NY) has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field Project since 2011 when he wrote a letter of support to the Mayor of Messines. Since then he has learned that his great-grandfather was a participant in the 1914 Christmas Truce.

On 11 December 2014 congressman Crowley introduced a US Congressional Resolution before the Speaker of the House of Representatives. On 22 December 2014, before the US Congress dissolved for the Christmas holidays, the Resolution was published, the full text of which can be read at the following link:

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<http://crowley.house.gov/press-release/crowley-commemorates-100th-anniversary-world-war-i-christmas-truce-1914>

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The resolution resolved that the US House of Representatives:

- (1) honors the 100th Anniversary of the World War I Christmas Truce of 1914;
- (2) recognizes the Christmas Truce's symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity; and
- (3) commemorates the World War I Christmas Truce of 1914 and its legacy as a message of future peace and unity between all nations.

Special thanks are extended to Congressman Crowley, his entire staff and especially his Chief of Staff, Jeromy Woodburn and Ms Nicole Cohen.

24 December 2014 – Christmas Eve –

## 100th anniversary of the 1914 Christmas Truce

11:00 hrs

### The Andrew Edwards Christmas Truce Monument – All Together Now

In November 2008, just over five weeks after my first visit to Messines, I invited Anglo-Irish sculptor, Andrew Edwards, to return with me, as I wished to bring him to what might be described as the epicentre of the 1914 Christmas Truce. My hope was that it would inspire him to create a monument to the Truce.

Andrew Edwards was deeply moved by the visit and not only committed to doing a monument, but also he proposed the idea of creating a sculpture trail that would link Messines with nearby Commines-Warneton and Armentieres, France.

All had gone quiet since then, until, with three months to go to the centenary, Andrew telephoned me to inform me that he had decided to do a monument in time for the anniversary.

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With the active support and encouragement of English and Welsh friends, in particular, Chris Butler of Fine Arts Foundry and the Liverpool poet, Thomas Calderbank, Andy literally worked himself to exhaustion.

The result, however, is, unquestionably, the most moving monumental tribute to the 1914 Christmas Truce created to date. When compared to the UEFA monument, close to Prowse Point Commonwealth Cemetery, there is simply no contest.

The monument was taken from Liverpool's W/WII bombed cathedral and transported to Messines, arriving at 11am on Christmas Eve 2014.

There to greet us was the Mayor of Messines, Sandy Evrard, the Town Clerk, Patrick Florissoone, and members of the Town Council, as well as some citizens.



*Mayor Sandy Evrard examines the Andrew Edwards Christmas Truce Monument on the green of Messines market.*

When the resin monument was taken from the lorry and placed on the green of Messines Market, it was clear that the Mayor, his fellow Councillors, and the Town Clerk, were deeply moved. Both the Mayor and Town Clerk stated that they were deeply moved by the monument and were close to tears.

A commitment has been made to Messines that if the funding can be found to cast the monument in bronze, it will be presented to the city of Messines as a gift from the people of Britain and Ireland, and as a symbol of the Anglo-Irish Peace Process.

The Mayor invited all who had travelled with the monument for soup and sandwiches once it had been installed and press photographs had been taken.

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<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/iconic-peace-statue-set-to-visit-ireland-30876774.html>

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**19:00 hrs**

## **Launch of Christmas Truce Candle**

Beginning at the Andrew Edwards Christmas Truce Monument on Messines Market green, a procession involving Belgian, Irish, French, Welsh, English and Australian visitors, made their way to St. Nicholas Church to participate in a short ceremony to inaugurate the lighting of the first Christmas Truce candles.

The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Dirk Verschoore and myself, and three children from the congregation were called forth to hold the first Christmas Truce candles, produced by the Pavestone Day Care Centre, Coleraine, Co. Derry. The three candles were later presented to: Rev. Verschoore, for Belgium; Andrew Edwards, for Britain; and myself for Ireland.



*Children from Messines and Liverpool hold the first Christmas Truce candles.*



*Rev. Dirk Verschoore, Deacon of Messines (left) with carillonneur Wim Berteloot (centre) and Don Mullan, moments after Wim had lead the world in a great global celebration of the centenary of the Christmas Truce.*

It is the intention of the Christmas Truce and Flanders Peace Field project, in conjunction with St. Nicholas Church, Messines, to spread the tradition of the Christmas Truce Candle throughout the period of the WWI centenary, with a strong peace and humanitarian dimension to the initiative.

Special thanks must be extended to Rev. Dirk Verschoore, his family, and members of St. Nicholas Parish, Messines; the children who participated, and to Rhoda Baxter of the Pavestone Centre, for providing the candles.

### 19:14 hrs South Africa

## Desmond Tutu Lights Christmas Truce Candle

Archbishop Desmond Tutu agreed to champion the lighting of the Christmas Truce Candle. At precisely 19:14 hrs, at his home in Cape Town, South Africa, the 1984 Nobel Laureate recorded a video message to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1914 Christmas Truce and to light the Christmas Truce candle.

In his message Archbishop Tutu recalled the moment when young soldiers crossed No Man's Land to greet one another and where surprised that they were just like themselves. It was a moment of hope. A moment when light shone in the darkness of a world at war. A moment to recall and recapture. In lighting the Christmas Truce candle the Archbishop implored the world to choose dialogue and understanding over disunity, war and violence. He implored the world to learn from the Christmas Truce and allow it to be a shining example, not just on this, the 100th anniversary, but for the next century too.



*Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 2013. Photo: Libris Förlag*

Archbishop Tutu finished by wishing everyone a very Happy Christmas.

Special thanks to Archbishop Tutu for agreeing to record his message and to leading the Christmas Truce candle initiative; and to Roger Friedman, Oxymedia, Cape Town.

### 19:14 hrs Messines

## Worldwide Christmas Truce Carillon Concert, led by Messines Peace Carillon

The director of the Royal Carillon School, Mechelen, Belgium, Koen Cosaert, wrote to me on 29 December 2014:

*Our project for the commemoration of the Christmas Truce has been a great success! Over 100 carillonneurs worldwide took part. Even on the very day colleagues were still announcing their participation. The commemoration*



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*has been broadcasted in Belgium both on the Flemish and Wallonian national television news and the national radio. An interview with me has been broadcast several times on 24th and 25th of December.*

*Many colleagues promoted the event with articles in the local press, on their websites and on the social media. We really can say that it was a worldwide event which caught also worldwide attention. Here are some links:*

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<http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2014/12/23/rockefeller-chapel-joins-worldwide-carillon-concert-christmas-eve>

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<http://www.lyon.fr/evenement/concert/concert-de-carillon-3.html#.VJ6CJmMCIZQ.facebook>

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[https://twitter.com/wellesleybells/status/547070603102924801?utm\\_source=fb&utm\\_medium=fb&utm\\_campaign=Beiaardcentrum&utm\\_content=548382025871556608](https://twitter.com/wellesleybells/status/547070603102924801?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=fb&utm_campaign=Beiaardcentrum&utm_content=548382025871556608)

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<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-s-peace-tower-carillon-bells-mark-1914-christmas-truce-1.2882856>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CfBfxKA0NQ&feature=youtu.be>

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<http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/videozone/programmas/journaal/2.36970?video=1.2192378>

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*And you will find more on our facebook page:*

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<https://www.facebook.com/Beiaardschool?ref=hl>

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The idea of the Carillon Concert was inspired by the 1915 Christmas Truce on the Bernhardstein Mountain, one of the Vosges Mountains in eastern France, near its border with Germany. Richard Schirrmann, the founder of the International Youth Hostelling Association, then a soldier, recalled:

*"When the Christmas bells sounded in the villages of the Vosges behind the lines ..... something fantastically unmilitary occurred. German and French troops spontaneously made peace and ceased hostilities... they remained good friends even after Christmas was over... Why did the soldiers on the Bernhardstein not want to fight each other anymore after celebrating Christmas together? Certainly not out of cowardice, but because they had come to know each other as human beings."*

When I read this statement by Schirrmann, I knew it was very important that the Messines Peace Carillon should take centre stage in a worldwide concert.

In 2011, while working as a visiting lecturer at DePaul University, Chicago, I contacted Wylie Crawford, President of the World Carillon Federation (WCF) at the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, University of Chicago, about a possible worldwide concert. Wylie was immediately enthusiastic and supportive of the ideas of seeking to engage the international carillon community in ringing their bells to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 1914 Christmas Truce.

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The idea was simple. We would invite carillonneurs, in their respective time zones, to organise a Christmas Truce Concert, beginning with Stille Nacht – Silent Night, at precisely 19:14 hrs on Christmas Eve 2014, to be led by the Messines Peace Carillon. To advance the idea, Wylie invited me to address the 18th WCF World Congress on 2 July 2014 in Antwerp, inviting carillonneurs to participate.

It was clear by the response that this was going to be a huge success. The carillonneurs realised that this imaginative idea also offered them something very unique – an opportunity to perform in a worldwide concert – the first in the history of the world – and also something very meaningful.

Koen Cosaert offered to work with me in coordinating the concert. I travelled to meet him in Mechelen in September to work out the practicalities and also to agree an invitation to carillonneurs worldwide, together with a general press release they could use to advertise their concerts.

The initiative was a stunning success. Following receipt of Koen's email on 29th December 2014, I checked on the internet and began to harvest all the links I could find in English and French, referencing the Carillon Concert. I found hundreds, including the six offered by Koen above.

Koen has since written to me suggesting that the initiative should be repeated again next year and, perhaps, become an annual celebration!

At one concert, in Bournville, England, an estimated crowd of 5000 attended. A report by Bournville Village Council Residents Association reported:

*A poignant moment gripped the large crowd when the memory of the First World War Christmas Truce was evoked with the playing of the Christmas carol, Silent Night, by Trevor Workman on the Bournville Carillon, as part of a worldwide concert to celebrate the Christmas truce between German and British Soldiers in 1914.*

That poignancy was also felt in Messines. Belgian carillonneur, Wim Berteloot, deputised for Koen Cosaert.

The Deacon of Messines, invited all in attendance at the lighting of the Christmas Truce candle to step outside where mulled wine was served by members of the St. Nicholas Parish Council and Rev. Verschoore's family. As 19:14 approached, silence descended on the gathering. And, then, at precisely 19:14 the great Peace Carillon of Messines played, for the first time, 'Silent Night, Holy Night'.

At that moment, the wind stilled, and a great peace descended over the land and the stars, hidden as we entered the church, were now shining brightly. It was reminiscent of Christmas Eve 1914, though not as cold, as the land was not covered in frost. It was hard to imagine, at that moment, we were part of a worldwide initiative, involving over 100 carillons in 11 countries, on three continents: Europe, America and Asia. And, with the lighting of the Christmas Truce Candle by Archbishop Tutu, Africa was also with us.

It was a wonderful demonstration of partnership, based on kindness and respect, and a shared vision of helping one another.

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The playing of Silent Night on the Messines Peace Carillon is to be repeated in perpetuity, every evening at 19:14 hrs to ensure the memory of the Christmas Truce inspires its listeners to commit to building peace and working for a more just and equitable world. This in turn allows the possibility of ritual, similar to what happened when the buglers of Ypres decided to play the Last Post night after night at the Menin Gates. It may take a few years to capture the imagination of the worldwide public, but it will. This, again, is part of the legacy building this project aspires to achieve.

I was also thrilled by the participation of the great carillon of Cobh Cathedral, Co. Cork, Ireland.

A very special thanks must be extended to Wylie Crawford and Koen Cosaert, Rev. Dirk Verschoore and all the worldwide carilloneurs who participated. And, surely appropriately, Richard Schirrmann, whose recollection of the 1915 Christmas Truce on the Bernhardstein, close to the French/German border, inspired this event.

**25 December 2014**

## **Irish Independent – Centenary Article**

On Christmas Day 2014, the Irish Independent choose to publish the chapter I had submitted to Ambassador Eamonn MacAodha and Aileen Murray for the book: *Ireland and Belgium: Past Connections and Continuing Ties*, as a centenary reflection for readers:

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<http://www.independent.ie/life/christmas/an-extraordinary-encounter-in-messines-that-symbolises-the-spirit-of-christmas-30861832.html>

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## **Peace-Is-Possible Internet Film**

During a visit to Brigham Young University on 4 April 2014, I was introduced to Professor Jeff Sheets, Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communications, by the illustrator, Robert T. Barrett. Robert hoped that Jeff and I might find a way of collaborating on the story of the Christmas Truce.

I was contacted in September 2014 by Professor Sheets with a view to assisting him in making a short 3-4 minute internet film that would explore the 1914 Christmas Truce from a multi-faith perspective. He wished to make the film with students and faculty from his College, with funding provided by the US non-denominational group *Faith Counts*:

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<http://faithcounts.com/who-we-are/>

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The aim was to make a short film that would be released through various forums on the worldwide web, that would explore the horror of WWI, the miracle of the Christmas Truce, the inspiration the truce offers today and the fact that 'Peace is Possible'. Jeff arrived at Brussels Airport with a small team of filmmakers on Thursday 20th November. We spent five days in Belgium and France filming WWI locations.

Jeff had also secured a wonderful backing tract of BYU male voices singing 'Silent Night'. Our combined efforts resulted in a short film that can be viewed at the following link:

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<https://cfac.byu.edu/2014/12/15/student-collaboration-tells-an-impactful-christmas-message/>

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The film went live on the worldwide web on 17 December 2014. By Christmas Day it had over 400,000 views via Facebook and YouTube alone.

I wish to thank Professor Sheets and his BYU team for all their hard work. They were a pleasure and a privilege to work with.

## **Christmas Day**

Christmas Day 2014 was spent in Flanders visiting friends, French, German and Commonwealth cemeteries, the Christmas Truce Cross left in 1999 by the Khaki Chums, and a short courtesy visit to the Flanders Peace Field where another adult game of soccer was taking place.

We also took the Andrew Edwards monument close to the EUFA memorial where some wonderful photographs were taken with the backdrop of Messines and the Island of Ireland Peace Tower in the distance.

It was a glorious sunny day, again, reminiscent of Christmas 1914. It was as though the spirits of all those who had witnessed and participated in this 'moment of humanity in the midst of carnage' were alive and celebrating with us.

There, at the epicentre of the truce, I recalled the prayer of Professor Mary McAleese at the end of her lecture, just nine days before:

*Go ndeana dia agus muidine trocaire ar a n-anamacha uaisle.*

Yes, indeed, May God have mercy and compassion on their noble souls.

Don Mullan  
1 March 2015