

Transatlantic Council



Boy Scouts of America



Flanders Field World War I Historic Trail Ypers, Belgium

Version 1: 2009



Ruins of Ypres, 1919

'Ypres is only a heap of ruins, but it is an eternal memorial of British valour. It is only a shell-swept graveyard, but the graves are those of our heroic dead...what Jerusalem is to the Jewish race, what Mecca is to the Mohammedan, Ypres must always be to the millions who have lost a husband, son or brother, slain in its defence, and now sleeping their eternal rest within sight of its Belfry. Ypres and the expanse of earth spread out eastward is in truth 'the Holy Ground of British Arms'! For the tens of thousands of gallant Frenchmen who fought and fell here it must also be sacred to our Allies. But the brunt of the defence for four years fell upon us, and 250,000 British dead lie within its borders.'

- Colonel Beckles-Willson, a serving Canadian Officer and official collector of 'trophies' for the fledgling Imperial War Museum

'I should like to acquire the whole of the ruins of Ypres...A more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the world.'

- Winston Churchill in January 1919

INTRODUCTION

Following the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and into the early 1900's, a number of mutual defense agreements were made between the major powers in Europe. At the same time there was an increase in nationalism and imperialism by European countries as they tried to prove their dominance and strength. Although the causes for World War I are complex, it was these conditions that created the powder keg which was ignited by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914. The result was a war fought largely on the European continent that brought great human tragedy and introduced the concept of trench warfare.

The Transatlantic Council's Flanders Field World War I Historic Trail offers the opportunity to see one of the areas where trench warfare led to great destruction and the loss of life. Flanders Fields is the generic name for World War I battlefields around the city of Ypres, Belgium in the medieval County of Flanders. Ypres (Ieper in Dutch) was one of the main martyr towns of World War I. Shortly after the German invasion of Belgium, the front came to a standstill near this small town with devastating effects. Ypres was first shelled on October 7, 1914 and the last shells fell on the town on October 14, 1918. The battlefield was only a short distance from the centre of the city during this period. The allied forces held a bulge of land into German held territory around the city called the Ypres Salient. Trenches ran from north to south in an arc around Ypres and a number of costly battles were fought in the area as allied troops held the area from German occupation. Estimates of casualties for British and Commonwealth forces resulting from the occupation and fighting around Ypres between 1914 and 1918 were in the region of 500,000 (dead, wounded and missing). During the four years of conflict all inhabitants were evacuated and the city was literally flattened. Resettlement did not occur until early 1919 and significant reconstruction began in 1921. Today the area has over 150 military cemeteries and numerous memorials, the most important being the Menin Gate in Ieper. Although America played only small part in the fighting around Ypres, this historic trail offers Scouts in the Transatlantic Council a chance to strengthen the strong international focus of scouting in Europe.

I, Ross Vandrey (Scoutmaster Troop 230 in Stavanger, Norway), have put together this Historic Trail Program for the Transatlantic Council in 2008 as part of my Wood Badge ticket (NE-II-187). Much of the information has been accumulated through reference books and internet web sources which are referenced at the end of this document. I would also like to express gratitude to Wim Keereman, a teacher at the International School of Stavanger who is originally from the Ieper area and has led a number of high school trips to the localities listed as part of Flanders Field Historic Trail. Wim has been of great assistance in providing information and insight into the localities during the preparation of this guide.

RECOGNITION

A special patch has been created to recognize Scouts and Scouters who complete this Historic Trail. The requirements to earn the patch are:

- Take a walking tour of Ypres (Ieper) visiting:

The Cloth Hall and Belfry	Medieval Towers
The Menin Gate	Old Fish Market
Ramparts and Casemates	St. George's Memorial Church
St. James' Church	St. Martin's Cathedral
The Lille Gate	The Munster War Memorial
The Ramparts Cemetery	

- Visit the In Flanders Field Museum in Ieper

- Attend the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate

- Follow the cycle route outside Ieper visiting:

Tyne Cot British Military Cemetery and Memorial
Memorial Museum of Passchendaele

- Visit one additional recommended sites in the area:

1. The Flanders Field American Cemetery and Memorial
2. Friedhof Langemark German Cemetery (*on the cycle tour*)
3. Bayernwald German Trenches
4. Lone Tree Cemetery and Pool of Peace – site of the largest of the 19 mine explosions at the start of the Third Battle of Ypres.
5. Sanctuary Wood (Hill 62) Cemetery and Museum
6. Polygon Wood and Buttes New British Cemetery (*on the cycle tout*)
7. Canadian Memorial at St. Julien (*on the cycle tour*)



TRAIL DESCRIPTION

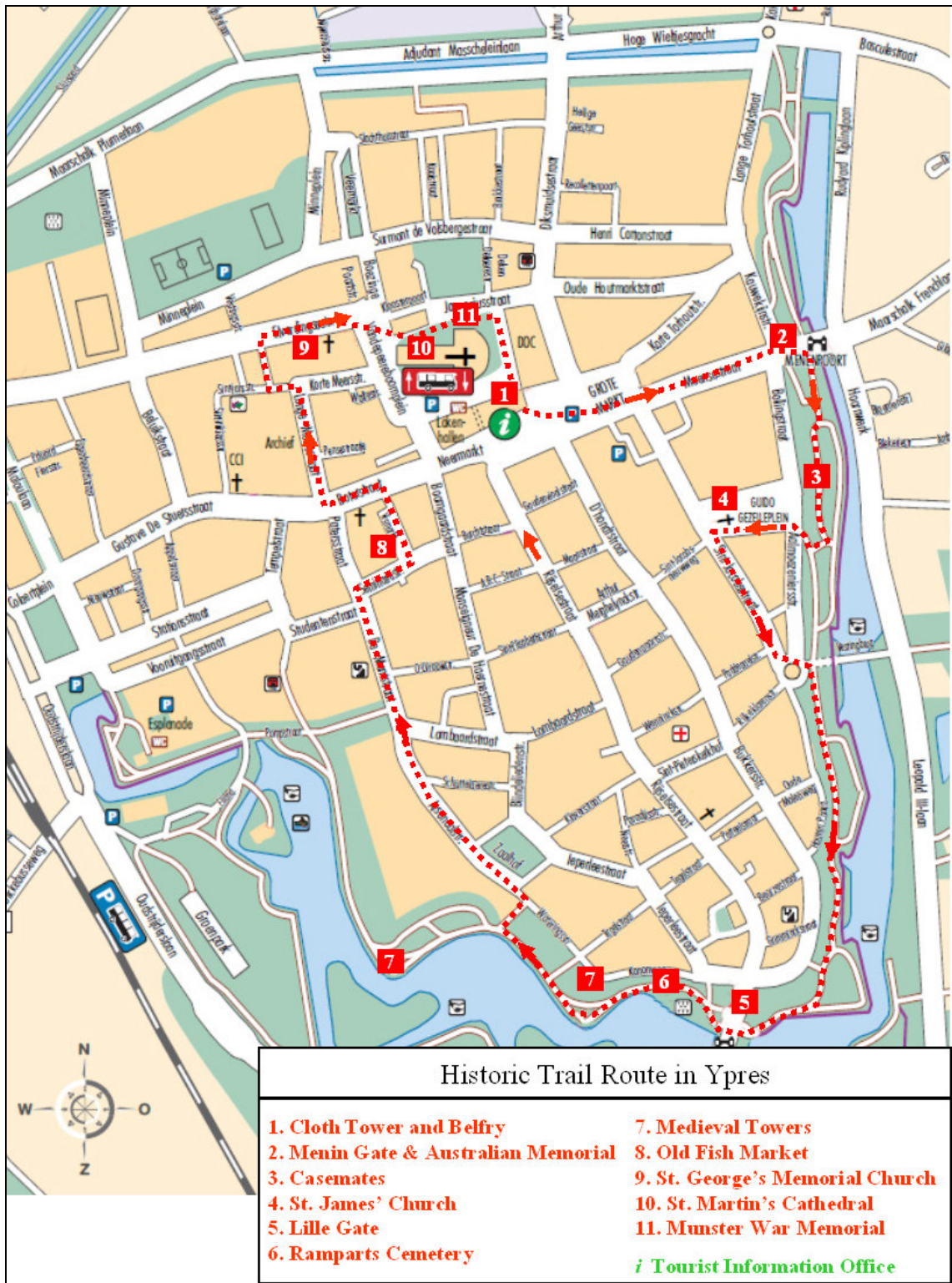
The Flanders Field Historical Trail has two significant components that are designed to be seen over the course of 1-1/2 to 2 days: one hiking and one cycling (or by car). The maps showing the recommended routes can be found on the following two pages. On each map the route is marked and key sites are noted by numbers and referenced in the legend. Further along in this guide each of these key sites is described in more detail.

The hiking trail is a walking tour of the present day city of Ieper, Belgium (see hiking map). The walk should take approximately 2-3 hours plus an additional hour in the In Flanders Field Museum. The route passes many of the historical sites in the city. Most of the sites that can be seen on the walk are associated with the period during World War I, however, there are a few older sites of interest as well. The trail begins at the Tourist Information Centre near the Cloth Hall. The In Flanders Field Museum can be found inside the Cloth Hall and could be visited either before or after the walking tour of Ieper. From the Cloth Hall you proceed to the Menin Gate, site of the Last Post Ceremony and memorial to over 55,000 British and Commonwealth Soldiers who died between 1914 and 1917. You next proceed to the Lille Gate, the old ramparts and the Ramparts Cemetery at the southern end of the city. Finally, you return toward the starting point visiting the Old Fish Market and St. George's Church and St. Martin's Cathedral which both hold a special place in the remembrance of World War I.

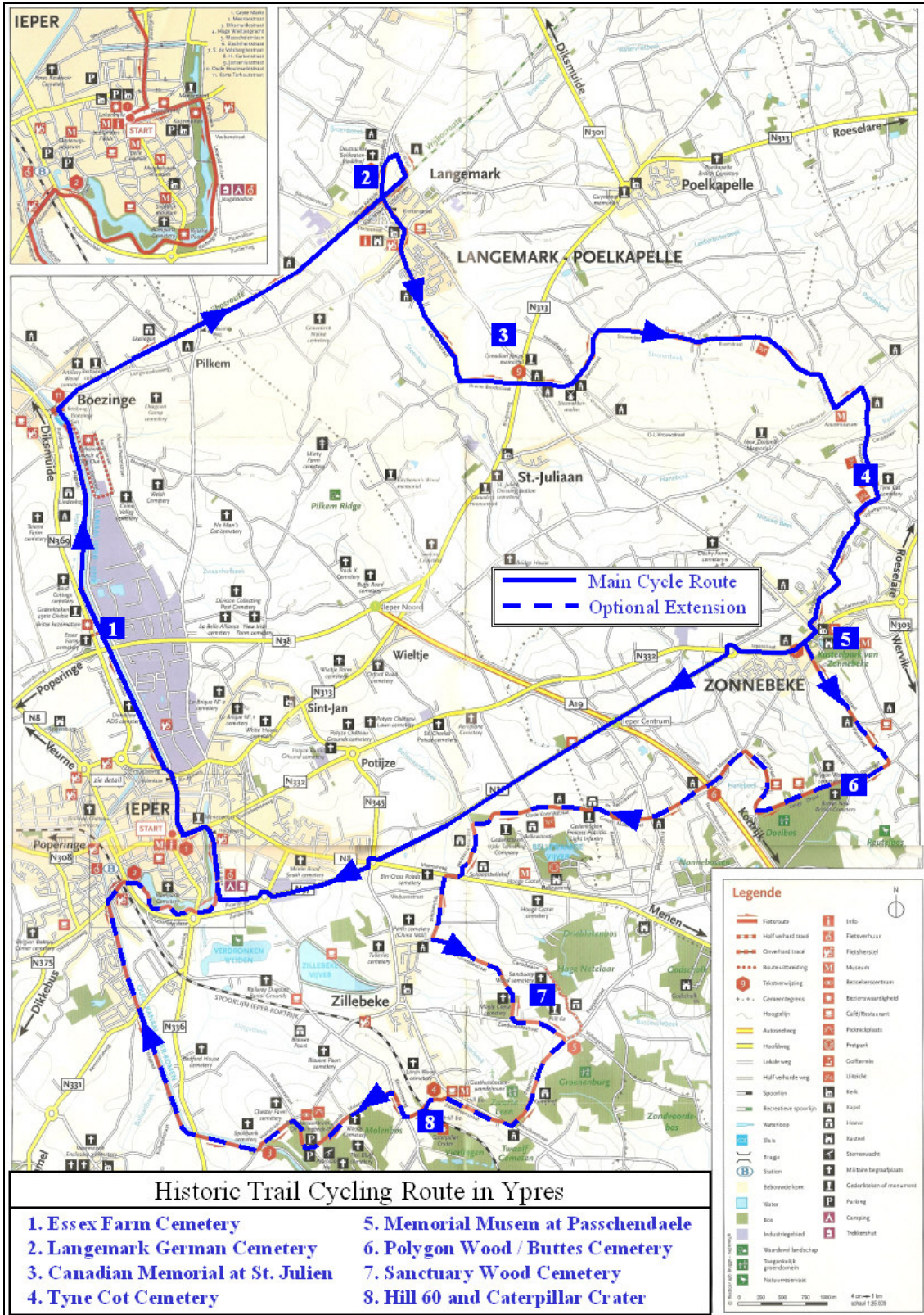
The cycling tour is a 45 km route that begins at the campsite, though you may also start at the Cloth Hall. The route is a non-strenuous ride that should take at least 4-5 hours and passes a number of famous landmarks and sites in the Ypres Salient around Ieper. From Ieper centre, the route proceeds north into the countryside. The first stop is Essex Farm Cemetery near the site where the famous poem *In Flanders Field* was written by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae. The route then goes to the German Cemetery at Langemark before proceeding southeast past the imposing Canadian Monument and reaching the impressive Tyne Cot Cemetery. From Tyne Cot Cemetery there is a short cycle ride to a stop at the Memorial Museum of Passchendaele. At this point the key sites have been seen and the cycle route heads back to the Ieper and the campsite along the main road. However, from the Memorial Museum of Passchendaele you may choose to extend the ride to a few additional sites which are described in this guide (see Optional Extension on the map).

****** IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE ******

As a result of the tremendous amount of explosives and projectiles that were used during World War I in the Ieper region, shell casings and unexploded armaments are still commonly found – even in frequently traveled areas. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO PICK UP ANY SHELL OR SHELL CASING** as many of the unexploded munitions may still detonate. Any device seen should be reported to the authorities immediately.



Historic trail hiking route for Ieper starting at the Tourist Information office.



Historic trail cycling route for the area around Ieper, starting at the campground.

HISTORIC TRAIL SITES ON THE IEPER HIKING TRAIL:

Tourist Information Office – Start of Hike

The Ieper Tourist Office is found in the Regional Visitors' Centre for Ypres & the Westhoek in the main square (Grote Markt) next to the Cloth Hall. The shop has all kinds of maps with cycling, walking and car routes, books, postcards, posters, etc. and a regional exhibition with an interactive scale model.

For more information see their website at http://www.ieper.be/ieper_en.aspx?SGREF=10587

In Flanders Fields Museum

<http://www.inflandersfields.be>

The In Flanders Fields Museum is located in the restored first floor of the Cloth Hall. The museum is interactive and takes you back to the Great War of 1914-1918. You are given the chance to experience the history first hand as a soldier or a nurse, as an inhabitant of Ypres or as a refugee. Exhibits include historical artifacts, suggestive sound and light evocations, documentary films and models which bear witness to the destruction of a whole region, the atrocities the war brought about and the hope and resurrection of Ypres.

Entrance fees for the museum as of January 2009 are:

Adult: 8.00€

Age 7-24: 1.00€

Age <7: Free

Groups (min. 20): 5.50€ with reservations made at least 14 days in advance

Museum Hours:

1 April-15 November: 10.00-18.00

16 November-31 March: 10.00-17.00

Closed for several weeks following Christmas break each year

You are encouraged to check for updates and/or make a reservation on-line at the museum website.

1 The Cloth Hall and Belfry

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloth_Hall,_Ypres

The Cloth Hall was one of the largest commercial buildings in the Middle Ages. Construction began about 1260 and the building was completed in 1304. Except for the lower portion of the belfry and a few pieces of wall of the west wing, the structure was completely destroyed during the First World War. The building was carefully reconstructed to its pre-war condition between 1933 and 1967. The Cloth Hall is 125 m wide and the belfry tower rises 70 m. high. The present spire with its helmet and dragon (1692) is an exact copy of the pre-war spire.



The Cloth Hall today (left) and in 1919 after the end of WWI (right).

2 Menin Gate & Australian Memorial

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menin_Gate_Memorial

The Menin Gate Memorial was opened in 1927 in memory of the missing British and Commonwealth soldiers (except New Zealand and Newfoundland) who were killed in the battles in the Ypres Salient during World War I between 1914 and August 15, 1917. The monument bears the names of nearly 55,000 soldiers. Those killed later are recognized at the Tyne Cot British Cemetery.

Every evening since 1928 the Last Post is sounded beneath the Gate by the local fire brigade. This ceremony was stopped during German occupation during World War II but resumed on September 6, 1944 – the day Ypres was liberated. Last Post Ceremony information can be found at the Last Post Association website at www.lastpost.be. This includes a Book of Honor to add comments and a form to request participation in the Last Post Ceremony.



Menin Gate

The Australian Memorial was erected in 1993 next to the Menin Gate in memory of the 43,000 Australians that fell in the Ypres Salient during World War I.

3 Ramparts and Casemates

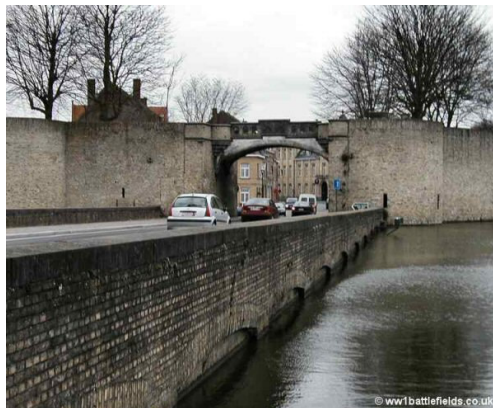
Ypres has been surrounded by ramparts from 1100 onwards. The present rampart structures date back to French construction in 1678. The ramparts were originally a clay wall with fortified gates, then with moats, walls, corner towers and underground vaults. Later on, the bastion system was adapted. In the First World War, the arches withstood the fiercest shelling. During the war shelters were dug into the ramparts to house large numbers of resting soldiers and other rear line units. In these covered halls, corridors and bunkers, there was provision for sleeping quarters, headquarters, and hospitals.

4 St. James' Church

The original church dates from 14-15th century. The tower now has louver holes and a stone spire.

5 Lille Gate

The oldest city gate in Ypres, it has three round bastions are which are the remains of the Burgundian fortifications dating back to 1395.



The Lille Gate present day (left) and near or just after the end of World War 1 (right).

6 Ramparts Cemetery

http://www.cwgc.org/search/cemetery_details.aspx?cemetery=51404&mode=1

Located along the ramparts just to the west of the Lille Gate, this cemetery holds the remains of 198 Commonwealth soldiers from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, New Zealand and Australia who died at different times during the fighting around the Ypres Salient. These include the graves of six Australian troops killed simultaneously by the same shell and symbolically grouped together.



Ramparts Cemetery

7 Medieval Towers

Both the Lion and Dominican Towers would have been extremely important parts of the medieval ramparts that protected the old city. It is thought that the towers date from around 1383, but it was not until the mid 1980's that they were both discovered again, buried and a long way from the public view for many centuries. They are well worth a close look at if you get the chance.

8 Old Fish Market

The Fishermen's House was a toll house, a beautiful building with a baroque façade from 1689. On top of the bas-relief facade is a statue of Neptune, king of the seas, and two other statues representing the two rivers Scheldt and Leie that flow through Ghent, the capital of the East Flanders province. There are also two covered counters in the fish market.

9 St. George's Memorial Church

<http://www.w1battlefields.co.uk/flanders/stgeorges.html>

This church was built after World War I following an appeal by Lord French of Ypres and consecrated in 1929. The church was designed to be furnished with memorials from regiments and other army units. There are a large number of individual memorials and recognitions as well.



St. George's Memorial Church

10 St. Martin's Cathedral

The original St. Martin's Cathedral was begun in 1221, but its tower was not completed until 1434. The destruction of the cathedral during the Great War was widely reported and used for propaganda purposes. Today what remains of the shelled ruins can be seen at the side of the reconstructed cathedral. The ruins lie in an area called the "lapidarium" and include large pieces of masonry left as physical reminders of the destruction of what was described by Ypres historian Vernon de Deyne in 1918 as "one of the most important religious monuments of its period". Spread all over the interior of the cathedral are decorations from different times which survived the destruction.



St. Martin's Cathedral today (left) and the portico entrance to the cloisters in September, 1917 (right).

11 Munster War Memorial

Located on the side of the St. Martin's Cathedral, this Celtic cross was erected as a memorial by the people of Munster, Ireland to the soldiers from that area that died in the Ypres Salient.

The Munster Memorial next to the restored Cloth Hall.

