

# British Chinese Armed Forces Heritage

## Symposium & Conference



### The Chinese Labour Corps and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

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The Commonwealth War Graves Commission works to ensure that the 1.7 million people who died in the service of Imperial and Commonwealth forces in the two world wars will never be forgotten. We care for cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations, in over 150 countries around the world. Our values and aims, laid out in 1917, are as relevant now as they were 100 years ago.

The Commission's principles:

- Each of the dead should be commemorated by name on the headstone or memorial
- Headstones and memorials should be permanent
- Headstones should be uniform
- There should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race or creed

Since our foundation by Royal Charter in 1917 we have constructed over 2,500 war cemeteries and plots. For those with no known grave, their names have been inscribed on a number of permanent memorials, known collectively as Memorials to the Missing. Over a million burials are now commemorated at military and civil sites, which can be found on every continent except Antarctica. The commemoration of the dead from the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC) who served with the British forces in the First World War forms part of this global and perpetual task.

Using material from the CWGC archives I will illustrate how the Chinese authorities and the CLC themselves played a key role in the commemoration of their fallen comrades. I will talk about the role the CLC played in the production of headstones and how the design for Noyelles-sur-Mer Chinese Cemetery, the final resting place of 841 Chinese casualties, came about, incorporating as it did suggestions made by the Chinese authorities at the time.

I will also illustrate design links between Noyelles-sur-Mer and other locations for Chinese commemoration and remembrance, in particular the Hong Kong Memorial, originally designed as a general memorial to all Chinese who served and died with the Commonwealth forces, including not only the Chinese Labour Corps, but also those individuals who served with the Commonwealth navies, merchant services and various military works units (in particular the Royal Engineers, Inland Water Transport).

My talk will end by focusing on the recent work the CWGC has undertaken to add/re-engage names on CLC headstones, and its commitment to remembering all Chinese Labour Corps casualties along with the other 1.7 million casualties which fall under its charter remit.