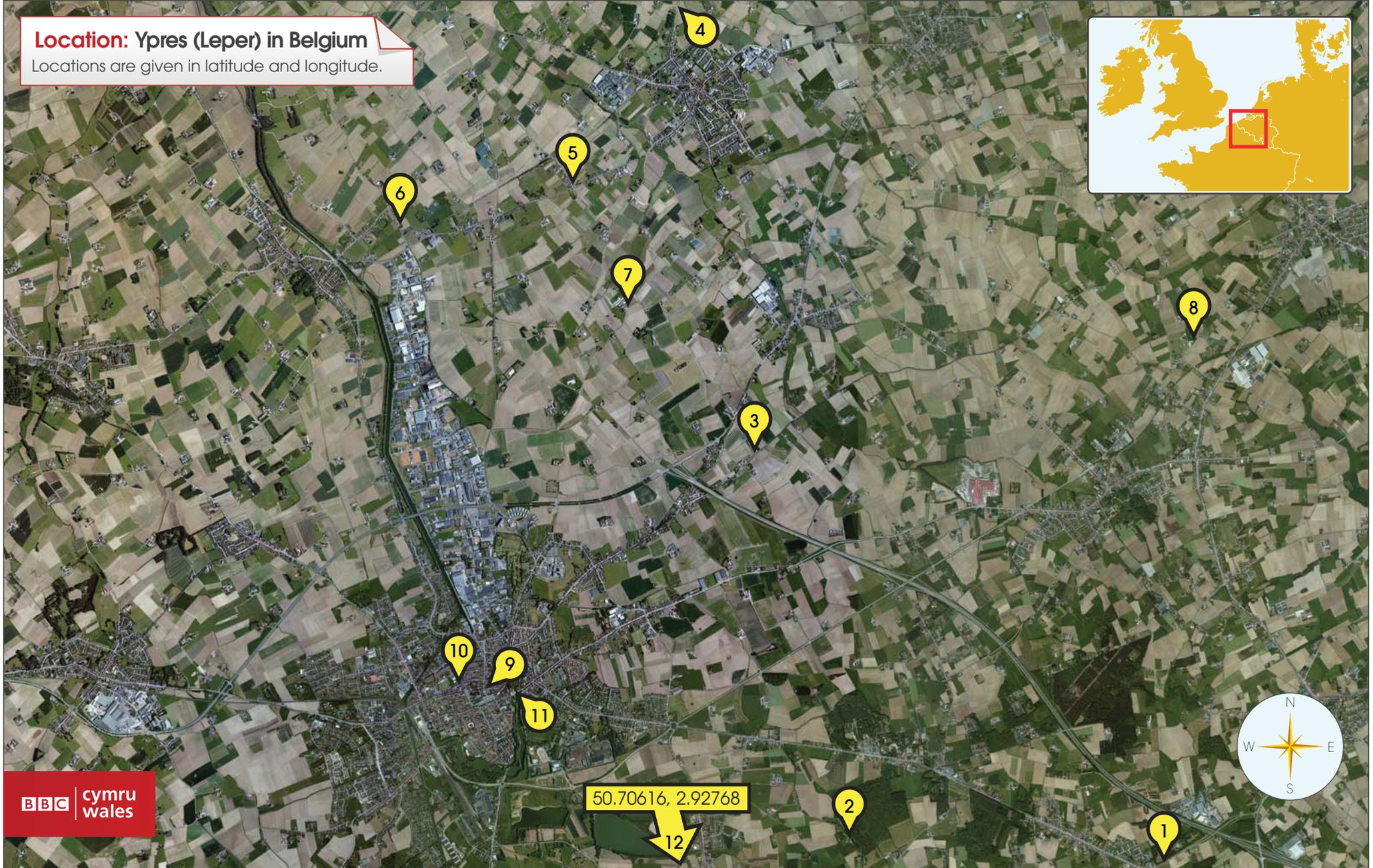


Weatherman Walking

Flanders Fields

Location: Ypres (Leper) in Belgium

Locations are given in latitude and longitude.



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Flanders Fields

The small Belgian town of Ypres was a key battlefield throughout World War One. It was where the British stopped the German advance in autumn 1914 and was the site of a series of battles, the most famous being at the nearby village of Passchendaele. By the end of the war in 1918 the town had been virtually destroyed.

The places Derek visited are both in the town and in the surrounding area. While the town of Ypres is easy to walk around the other locations are several miles away, so we recommend going there by car or coach. All are open to the public and easily accessible. Note that the spellings of place names are in both French and Flemish. We've listed both here.



Geluveld (Gheluvelt) and the First Battle of Ypres (50.83455, 2.99447)

Geluveld is situated on the Menin (Menen) Road (N8) approximately 5 miles (8km) from the centre of Ypres. There is ample parking by the church from where it is possible to see the Geluveld chateau through wrought iron gates. It's privately owned and we had special permission to film there. But the memorial to the South Wales Borderers and 2nd Worcesters can be accessed by walking with your back to the church, crossing over the minor road and following a hedge-lined path leading to some farm buildings.

On 31 October 1914 an action by two small groups of British soldiers may have changed the whole course of the war. At Geluveld Chateau the German army almost broke through the British lines and only the 1st South Wales Borderers and the 2nd Battalion of the Worcesters stood in their way. Their heroism on that afternoon stopped the German advance and blocked the way to the channel ports which could have fallen to the enemy. The British commander Sir John French called it the "worst half hour of my life" and later wrote that "England and the Empire had been saved from a great disaster." The memorials commemorate those men from the South Wales Borderers and the Worcesters who bravely saved the day.



The South Wales Borderers memorial at Geluveld Mill.

Weatherman Walking

Flanders Fields

2 Sanctuary Wood and Hill 62 (50.83698, 2.94606)

A little further along the N8 (Menin Road) lies Sanctuary Wood and Hill 62. Turn off the N8 between Leroy Foie Gras delicatessen and the Canadian Café (feestvaal) and the Hill 62 museum is located roughly 1,500m along a winding road. The café serves drinks but not food.

Sanctuary Wood/Hill 62 is one of the best preserved trench systems in the whole of Belgium. After the war ended the owners, the Schier family, fenced off the trenches and although it's been repaired over the years it gives an authentic idea of what it was like to fight in trench warfare. Note how the trenches are in zig zags so that if a shell exploded casualties would be restricted to one small area. Sanctuary Wood got its name in 1914 when soldiers who had become separated from their units during the battle sought refuge in the woods before being redirected back to their units. The local commander General Bulfin offered them "sanctuary" in the woods, hence the name.

Next to the trenches is a small museum packed with photographs and memorabilia. There are also a number of What the Butler Saw-type machines where you can view stereoscopic photos of the battlefields. They show original 3D photographs and are fascinating, although be warned some are quite graphic and show dead bodies.

There is a charge to visit the museum and trenches, which also has a coffee shop and toilets. It's open all year round, although closes earlier between October and March. The trenches can get quite muddy (they are authentic) so wear walking boots or wellies when you're visiting.



Hill 62/Sanctuary Wood museum.

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Flanders Fields

3 1st Monmouthshire Regiment Memorial Frezenberg Ridge (50.87612, 2.93022)

Taking the N313 out of Ypres and through Saint Jan look for a turning after you have passed under the A19 motorway. Follow the country lanes to the memorial to 1st Battalion Monmouthshire Regt.

When the Germans attacked this ridge on 8 May 1915, all three Monmouthshire battalions were in the front line and suffered heavy casualties. This limestone memorial was erected by the father of Lt. H.A. Birrell-Anthony, one of the 13 officers and 132 other ranks in the 1st Monmouths who lost their lives in the battle. The action of the 1st Monmouths became famous when another officer Captain Harold Edwards refused a German request to capitulate with the words "Surrender be damned!" and was last seen firing his revolver at the attacking troops. His bravery is commemorated in a painting "May the Eighth" by Fred Roe which is on display at Newport Museum and Art Gallery.



The memorial to Lt. H.A. Birrell-Anthony and the 1st Monmouths at Frezenberg.

4 Langemarck German Cemetery (50.92164, 2.91675)

Follow the N313 through the village of St Juliaan then turn left into the town of Langemarck following signs towards the war cemetery.

Langemarck is one of the largest German military cemeteries in Belgium with 44,292 bodies interred there. It has a different look and atmosphere to the Commonwealth war graves, surrounded by oak trees and with grey headstones set into the ground. Part of this stems from German culture, but another reason is practical. While the Belgians (and the French) were happy to give land for the dead of their allies they were less keen to do so for their old enemies. The small grassed area behind the entrance is a mass grave with the bodies of 25,000 soldiers buried there. Hitler claimed to have fought at Langemarck in 1914 and revisited the site after the Germans conquered Belgium in June 1940.



The mass grave at Langemarck German cemetery where 25,000 soldiers are buried.

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Flanders Fields

5

Hedd Wyn and Welsh National Memorial, Iron Cross (nr Pilckem) (50.90328, 2.90097)

From Langemarck head towards Boezinge and look out for the Sportman Café at the Iron Cross crossroads with its prominent Croeso sign.

Across the road from the café is a memorial to the poet Ellis Humphrey Evans, better known as Hedd Wyn, who died of his wounds near this spot on 31 July 1917. Ellis Evans was a farmer from Trawsfynydd in Meirionydd who entered his poem 'The Hero' for the National Eisteddfod 1917 under the pen name Hedd Wyn while he was serving in Belgium. He was killed weeks before the ceremony, so his winning chair was draped in a black cloth before taken back to his cottage near Trawsfynydd where it can still be seen today. His story was made into an Oscar-nominated Welsh language film in 1987. There is a small museum to Hedd Wyn inside the Sportsmans Café.

50 metres down the road is the new Welsh Memorial overlooked by its fearsome dragon. This memorial is the result of hard work by local villagers who wanted to commemorate the sacrifice of all the Welsh soldiers, over 35,000 in total, who lost their lives during World War One. Although it's next to a busy road, it's an impressive memorial with a Welsh flag, a Croeso sign and a commemorative bench.



The Sportsman Café (on the left) and the Hedd Wyn memorial (on the right) at Iron Cross near Pilckem.



The new Welsh Memorial at Iron Cross, Pilckem.

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Flanders Fields

6 Artillery Wood Cemetery (50.89967, 2.87256)

A short drive towards Boezinghe look for signs on the right directing visitors to Artillery Wood Cemetery a short distance off the main road.

Artillery Wood Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery is the final resting place of Private Ellis Humphrey Evans (Hedd Wyn). To find his headstone look in the register kept in the brass locker to the left of the entrance. It's arranged alphabetically and look for EH Evans (he's not listed as Hedd Wyn). The grave is in Plot 11, Row F, Grave 11. It's a peaceful spot and visitors often leave gifts from Wales next to the headstone.



Hedd Wyn's headstone in Artillery Wood cemetery.

7 Goumier Farm Bunker (50.89140, 2.90959)

Turn right (south) at Iron Cross, where the Welsh dragon memorial is sited, down Groene Straat and then go right at the T-junction onto Ieperstraat. The bunker is about a mile away on the right.

There are traces of World War One all across this part of Belgium. At Goumier Farm, just to the south of Iron Cross, is a German defensive bunker. The Germans built hundreds of these, often prefabricating the concrete walls in factories before installing them at defensive points. This seems to have been a communications bunker as it doesn't have that many firing points. It has a plaque to the 38th Welsh division who attacked this area in 1917. You can see the bunker from the road, but it's privately owned so you can't get access inside without permission.



Goumier Farm bunker.

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Flanders Fields

8 Tyne Cot Cemetery (50.88771, 3.00113)

Tyne Cot Cemetery is situated 9km North-East of Ypres just off the N303 towards Passchendaele. From Ypres follow road signs to Passchendaele/Zonnebeke (N332).

Tyne Cot Cemetery is the largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in the world with 11,954 graves, two thirds of which are unidentified and bear the motto, "A soldier of the Great War, known unto God", which was written by Rudyard Kipling. The cemetery itself is actually situated on the site of a German strongpoint, which, after its capture in October 1917, became an advanced dressing station. The Cross of Sacrifice is located over a German blockhouse. The name comes because these bunkers resembled workers cottages on Tyneside. In all, 58 Welsh soldiers from a variety of battalions are buried here. The north-eastern boundary wall bears the names of 35,000 casualties who have no known grave and who died from 16 August 1917 to the end of the war. Nearly 1,000 of these are from Welsh regiments.



Tyne Cot cemetery.

9 Ypres Cloth Hall (50.85237, 2.88683)

The cathedral-like Cloth Hall dominates the centre of Ypres and houses the In Flanders Fields Museum.

The Ypres Cloth Hall was a medieval cloth hall and one of the largest buildings of its time. It served as the main market and warehouse for the prosperous Flemish cloth industry. The original structure, completed in 1304, was devastated by artillery fire during World War One with only its clock tower still standing. This became a symbol of the town's resistance. Between 1933 and 1967, the hall was meticulously reconstructed to its pre-war condition as were many of the buildings that now comprise the centre of this very attractive city. The Cloth Hall now houses the In Flanders Fields Museum, which has an interactive display with films, photographs and memorabilia.



Ypres Cloth Hall.

10 **St George's Memorial Church** (50.85237, 2.88288)

St George's Memorial Church is situated a short distance from the Cloth Hall on Elverdingstraat.

St George's Church is a key site for the British in Ypres and was built for bereaved families to worship when they visited the battlefield. The idea of building an Anglican church was first mooted as early as 1919 and was opened by the Bishop of Durham in 1929. It was built as a result of the efforts of the Ypres League, an organisation dedicated to keeping the memory of Ypres alive and boasting some prominent supporters such as Field Marshal French himself.

It was designed to accommodate about 200 people and the interior furnishings were supplied by families of the fallen. Every item in the church serves as a permanent memorial to a soldier who gave his life in France and Flanders. One of the stained glass windows is dedicated to the Monmouthshire regiment, bearing the regimental badge, the Welsh dragon and the motto 'Gwell Angua na Gwarth (Better Dead than Cowardly).



St George's Memorial Church.

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Flanders Fields

11

Menin Gate (50.85217, 2.89166)

The Menin Gate is situated only 200m from the centre of Ypres on the Menin Road (Menenstraat) which runs alongside the central plaza in front of the Cloth Hall.

No visit to Ypres would be complete without attending the daily ceremony under the arches of this most evocative of all war memorials. The Last Post has been played here by members of the local Fire Service since 1928 and is attended every evening by hundreds of people, including groups of schoolchildren from all over the world, who want to pay their respects to the soldiers who died and have no known resting place. The ceremony takes place every evening at 8pm. The walls of the memorial are inscribed with the names of more than 54,000 of the 'missing' soldiers whose bodies were never recovered and are lost forever beneath the fields of Flanders.



The Menin Gate.

12

Frelighien Christmas Truce Memorial (50.70616, 2.92768)

The small village of Frelighien is situated on the France-Belgium border just to the north east of Armentieres. It can be reached by taking the N336 from Ypres towards Waasten (Warneton) and crossing into Deulemont, turning right along the D945. The memorial to the Christmas Truce is situated in the rather attractive park opposite the football ground.

On Christmas Day, 1914, there were a number of unofficial truces held along the line although they were looked upon very dimly by commanding officers on both sides. In Frelighien the British line was held by the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The Germans occupied the village with the Welsh dug in to the west. It is likely that, as the Germans tend to start Christmas celebrations on the 24 December, the Welsh troops began to see Christmas trees appear above the trenches and could hear carols being sung and probably responded with carols of their own. There are numerous accounts as to what happened at Frelighien but it is widely accepted that German troops holding the Lutun brewery offered the Welsh soldiers barrels of beer in return for cigarettes and Christmas puddings!



Christmas Truce Memorial, Frelighien.