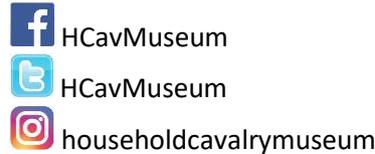




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TALES OF THE HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY

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HAIG MEMORIAL

In this video, I'm going to tell you about the only British military equestrian statue in France. It is that of Field Marshal Earl Haig.

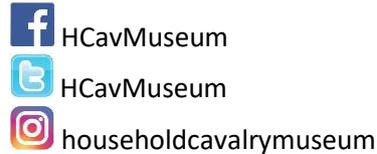
As many of you will know, was Commander-in-Chief of the British Army on the Western Front from December 1915 until the end of the First World War. Less well known is the fact that Lord Haig was Gold Stick & Colonel of The Royal Horse Guards (The Blues) from 1919 until his death in 1928, and that his daughter, Irene, married into the Astor of Hever family, three generations of whom were Life Guards including her husband, her father-in-law and her son.

The statue whose recent repair has been led by the Field Marshal's grandson, the 3rd Lord Astor of Hever, is in the main square of the northern French town of Montreuil-sur-Mer, which served as the location of the combined British Armies' GHQ from the spring of 1916 until the end of the war.



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The little walled town was chosen because it was close to the front line, but also within easy reach of Channel ports, was on the main London to Paris route and near the huge transit and training camp at Étaples. Montreuil also benefited from strong defences with strict access control, thus reducing the risk of espionage.

After the war, both the British and the French erected equestrian statues in memory of the close co-operation between their military leaders and armies. A fine statue of Marshal Foch, the French Supreme Commander, was erected by the British in London's Victoria a mere year after his death in 1929.

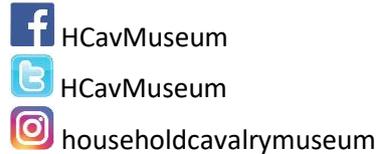
The following year, France returned the compliment, recognising Haig's decisive and critical support of his French counterpart. Commissioned and funded by the town of Montreuil together with French veterans' associations, the statue was unveiled in June 1931 with statesmen and military leaders from all over the world attending the ceremony.

The sculptor was Paul Landowski, who also created the Christ the Redeemer statue on the Corcovado Mountain overlooking Rio de Janeiro, and Marshal Foch's Memorial Tomb in Les Invalides.



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Lord Haig is depicted seated on Poperinghe, a stalwart companion on the Field Marshal's visits to his troops across the battlefields of France and Flanders, and through the London streets for the 1919 Victory Parade.

At his master's military funeral, Poperinghe was also the horse which followed Haig's coffin, carried by eight Blues, with his master's boots reversed in the stirrups.

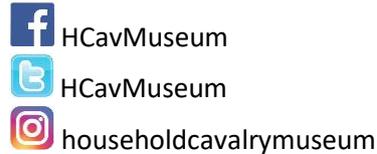
In July 1940, in an act of vengeance, invading German troops destroyed the statue, leaving a solitary plinth. After the war, again through the generosity of local veterans, the statue was recast from Landowski's original mould, which had been kept under lock and key in Paris throughout the Nazi occupation. Three tons of German bronze were poured into the mould as a reparation levy. The restored statue was unveiled in another grand ceremony in 1950.

However, in the last seventy years, time has taken its toll on the bronze and the elegant memorial required urgent attention. Under the leadership of Lord Astor, a committee was formed and a restorer selected to undertake the work.



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As Lord Astor has written in the current edition of The Guards Magazine, the restored statue will be unveiled on 11th September 2021. It will be a very special occasion with – Covid permitting - a full and varied programme of events including the unveiling and wreath laying at the War Memorial on Saturday, which will be attended by the British Ambassador, the President of the Royal British Legion (established by the Field Marshal 100 years ago), the Silver Stick, two senior NCOs and a Trumpeter of The Blues and Royals in Review Order and representatives from the other Regiments of which Haig was Colonel.