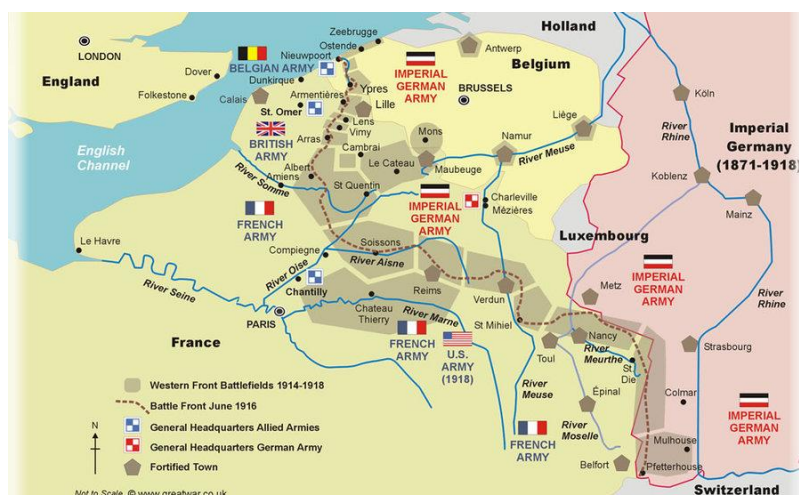


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NEWS RELEASE

Colchester based, civil-rights campaigner, Simon Collyer, founder of the Association of Pension & Benefits Claimants CIC has been asked to take part in project that is attempting to establish a permanent walk along the lines of the Western Front as it was known in the Great War.

Inspired by a letter from a soldier in WW1; historian and leading educator and author Sir Anthony Seldon will undertake a walk across the Western Front, as it was in 1916, from Switzerland to the English Channel - a total of 450 miles - in homage to this soldier, Alexandar Douglas Gillespie and to the millions of soldiers that lost their lives in WW1 1914-1918.

The walk will take place during the Summer of 2016 and will coincide with the 100th anniversary of the battles of the Somme and Verdun.

Sir Anthony Francis Seldon, FRSA FRHistS FKC, is a British schoolmaster and a contemporary historian, commentator and political author, known in part for his biographies of John Major, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown is the author of over 30 books on British history and other topics. Most recently, he has written Beyond Happiness and Cameron at 10. He is the former head of Wellington College in Berkshire, and is currently the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buckingham.

The walk was first described a hundred years ago by Second Lieutenant Douglas Gillespie, the night before he died at the Battle of Loos, in a letter to his headmaster back at school. He wanted a Via Sacra (sacred road) to be established after the war, along which all would walk to remind them of the grief that war causes.

The motive for the walk is to remind people about the consequences of war and to commemorate all those who fell. If there is a message in the walk, it is that there is a danger to countries retreating into nationalism, as they did in the years leading up to 1914.

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For more details, call Simon Collyer, on: 01206 509623

KEY WEBSITES & VIDEOS

Website: www.viasacrawalk2016.org.uk (<http://www.viasacrawalk2016.org.uk/>)

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/193371047699603/>

Sir Anthony Seldon: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Seldon

Sir Anthony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvH634opiCA>

Tom Heap: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqeASStiCfYY> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv1WDSKVFal>

Sir Anthony Seldon

Anthony Seldon is the author of over 30 books on British history and other topics. Most recently, he has written *Beyond Happiness* and *Cameron at 10*. He is the former head of Wellington College in Berkshire, and is currently the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buckingham. He is also an Executive Producer on *Journey's End*, working with Guy De Beaujeu of Fluidity Films. It is due to be filmed later in 2016.

Inspired by the story of an ancestor who was wounded on the Western Front in 1915, Anthony has always been interested in the history of the First World War. In 2013 he wrote, with David Walsh, *The Public Schools and the Great War*. While working on this project, he came across Alexander Douglas Gillespie's story. This has inspired him to walk the Western Front himself, to see what remains of the 450-mile frontline that once occupied the attention of the world.

Alexander Douglas Gillespie

In 1914, Alexander Douglas Gillespie was a bright man with a promising future. At Winchester College, he won the King's Gold Medal for Latin Verse, the Silver Medal for Latin Speech, the Warden and Fellow's Prizes for Greek Prose and Latin Essay, and the Duncan Prize for Reading. He was elected in 1908 to a Scholarship at New College, Oxford, and took his degree in 1912 with a First Class in Classical Moderations and a Second in Literae Humaniores.

He was reading for the Bar when war broke out in 1914, and volunteered his services at once, obtaining a commission in the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. He went to the front the following February and was killed at the Battle of Loos on the 26 September 1915. With no known grave, he is commemorated on the Loos Memorial.

His most famous letter, published in the *Wykehamist* of 14 June 1915, was written to his Headmaster and was subsequently picked up by the national press for its vision of what might be done with the Western Front after the War. He suggested a *via sacra* (sacred road) between the lines. 'I would like to send every man, woman and child in Western Europe on a pilgrimage along that *via sacra*, so that they might think and learn about what war means from the silent on either side.



A volume of his letters entitled "Letters from Flanders" was published in 1916.

Source: Anthony Seldon and David Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War*, p. 133