

The story behind 'The Hauntings'

Introduction by Jo Oliver, Pheasant Foot Farm, Somerset, England:

I am so pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to tell you of 'The Hauntings' and all he stands for.

'The Hauntings' has made a few but significant appearances within the United Kingdom and in Dublin, within the Island of Ireland. Belgium is his longest journey to date, where his presence returns to what I can only describe as a space and time which is sacred. I refer to his memory and to the thousands of other souls for which the Menin gate depicts both rest and honour. We thank all the sponsors both here in Belgium and at Amesbury England who have united to make this possible.



The journey from my youth to this moment in time:

In my youth I loved walking the acreages of hillside near my home. It gave me a sense of peace and strength as I gazed on the panoramic views of Somerset, Dorset, and Devon. It was at this time that I absorbed the oral history of the land from aging locals and one story in particular became deeply etched within my thoughts. This story haunted me and remained with me. It was about the presence of a young WW1 soldier walking the hillside. He could be heard, felt, and sometimes seen as he searched for his home, loved ones and final destiny. As time passed, I succeeded in acquiring this land and farmed it. The soldier's presence haunted me still. The small farm also became a story board for my writing, and the soldier's presence continued to haunt me. I would gaze down from the hillside and see in the lower fields mossed over ham stone rubble – that, was I thought, his home. I would gaze upon the adjoining small hill and believed that was where his loved ones once walked and looked out for his return.

But what of his destiny? It was then that I realised that I was to play a part in this. Thus, I commissioned his being as I saw it, to be sculpted out of a weld of discarded pieces of metal whose intricate detail enabled light to filter through his form and give him a mystical aura. As I looked on him, I wove the story of how when dying on the battlefield his guardian force had pledged to him his destiny which was to give his finite body immortality. He would then forever 'make a difference' through challenging and inspiring all who gazed upon him.

Little did I imagine the full extent to which his presence would inspire so many who encountered him. One such man was Phil Monk of Amesbury, England. His own wonder and determination brought so many of us together to secure his presence here today. Likewise, we hold dear our meeting with Peter Slosse, who visited our farm and raised the Belgium flag on the land where I first encountered 'The Hauntings' presence. So, quite separately and without any knowledge or forethought, we were all working on parallel lines towards this very day when we would all pause together at this time and in this most special and sacred place.

My last words:

I imagine you too will be moved by my 'character'. I must explain the word 'character' which also relates to my writing. Rather, **he is us; he is the 'common man', he is not linked to any race, politics, religion or gender and certainly not to a love for war!** In my 'Stories from Pheasant Foot Farm', he plays an essential role which commemorates all that is good in the common man challenged by War or any other adversity. I hope you will be moved, enjoy and be inspired by his presence. When he returns to those Somerset hills of England, it will likely be to rest for a short while. His next contribution to humanity is yet to be written.

Footnote:

I must acknowledge the art and construction of **Martin Galbavy**, for his exceptional ability to artistically interpret my descriptions of 'The Hauntings'. **Chris Hannam**, of The Dorset Forge for creative metal work, & management skills. I must also not forget **Rowlie Moores** for his dedication to the history of WW1 and his intuitive transportation skills leading to the safe arrival of 'The Hauntings' on his valuable WWI truck. I also acknowledge one other special soul, **my Paul**, for always believing in me!