

Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

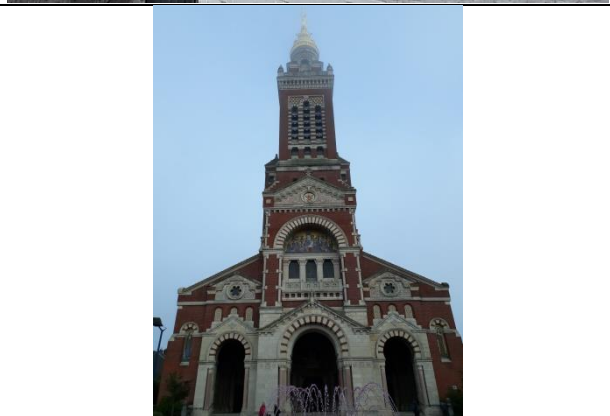
On Monday 21st October we left St. Martin's at 9 a.m. and reached Dover in good time to take the 5 p.m. crossing to Calais. Here we are departing from the White Cliffs of Dover, beneath Dover Castle



We stayed in the Mercure Hotel in Amiens for two nights



On Tuesday 22nd October we went to Albert, where we saw the Basilica of Notre Dames de Brebieres.



There were beautiful Stations of the Cross, of which this is one: 'Jesus comforts the daughters of Jerusalem'



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

The Basilica was topped by a statue of Saint Mary holding baby Jesus, and in this carving in the Church she appears to comfort a dying soldier.



The Statue was hit by a shell on 15th January 1915 and slumped to a horizontal position, shown in this mural on the side of a house, where it stayed until 1918. It became known as the 'Leaning Virgin'.



It was rebuilt after the war, and here you see it behind and above the mural.

Also in Albert we visited the Somme Museum which is in Medieval underground tunnels used as air raid shelters during the war. You went in on one side of the Church and came out quite a distance the other side, facing this mural.



We then went to Thiepval, where we saw the British War Memorial to the Battle of the Somme designed by Lutyens who designed the Cenotaph in Whitehall and the Drum Inn in Cockington



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

From the Memorial you can see the grave stones of some of those who fell during the Battle of the Somme, British on the right and French on the left.

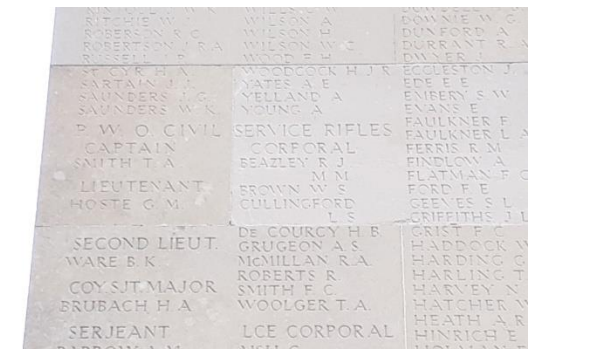


On the Memorial itself are listed the names of many servicemen who have no known graves. We were looking for the names of two in particular.



These were Herbert Brokenshire (grandfather of Janet Hooper) whose name is on the War Memorial in St. Martin's Church,

and George Michael Hoste, great uncle of Father Tony Macey.



Father Tony led a service in their memory. Both names are on this panel of the memorial, which is just one of many.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

As we left Thiepval, we passed Helen's Tower, the Memorial to the men of Ulster who died during the First World War. It is a replica of the tower of that name in Ulster.



We then went to Beaumont Hamel, where we saw the Memorial to the men of Newfoundland who died here. They provided a battalion of 800 men, most of whom died on 1st July 1916. The monument is of a Caribou, the emblem of the battalion.



Here we could walk on a path through the cratered landscape.



From the top of the memorial mound you can see over where the battlefield was, with the front line of the Newfoundlanders where the people are walking, and the front line of the Germans along the path further away.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

Our next stop was a Cemetery near Fuchsvillers, where Tracy Rendle's great uncle Cecil Arthur Mountfort Iliffe is buried.



Father Gorran led a service here in his memory.



There was a field hospital near here, and everyone buried here had been brought to the hospital for treatment but had died of their wounds.



From the Cemetery you can see our coach parked nearby. Our coach driver pulled off some amazing manoeuvres to get us in and out of this spot.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

On Wednesday 23rd October we visited Amiens Cathedral briefly before boarding our coach again.



Inside the Cathedral there is a memorial to the 600,000 men of Great Britain & Ireland who fell in France & Belgium during the Great War.

As we set off on the coach again, Father Gorran informed us that Russell Buckingham, our Churchwarden had passed away that morning, and he was very much in our thoughts throughout the day as we learnt more about those who had died during the Great War.



After this, we set off for Compiegne to see a replica of the Railway Carriage in which the Armistice was signed on 11th November 1918. You walk by the preserved railway tracks to approach the building which houses it.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

The entrance to the Armistice Museum.



View inside the replica of the carriage, with the names of those who were present for the signing.



And the outside of the replica of the Carriage where the 1918 Armistice was signed.
The original was kept here between the wars, and Hitler insisted on the French signing the World War II Armistice here in 1940, before taking the Carriage to Berlin, where it was subsequently destroyed by fire in 1945.



Our next stop was at Vimy Ridge, where the Canadians were given the task of capturing high ground held by the Germans in April 1917. The whole area is looked after by the Canadians - young Canadians come to spend several months as guides here, and we spoke with several of them. Here we see the landscape cratered by mines.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

We could also walk through the trenches in the area.



The Canadian Memorial itself dominates the highest point of the ridge. When we visited, there was a ceremony being held by a group from Canada of ex-servicemen and current servicemen of the battalion which fought here in 1917.



From the top we could look down over the area dominated by the ridge - The Arras area was important to the Germans as a coal-mining area which they needed to hold for their supplies.



From Vimy Ridge we set off for Lille, where we stayed in the Novotel for the next two nights. The Cathedral here seems to be still under construction.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

On Thursday 24th October we crossed the border into Belgium and our first stop was the John McCrae Memorial Site near Ypres. Ypres is the French name for the town, which in Flemish is Ieper, and was known to the British troops as 'Wipers'. The IJzer (Yser) river was the front line between the Germans and the Allies, and was held from 1914 to 1918.



There was a field hospital here, where the wounded were treated in concrete shelters like these. Major John McCrae (1872-1918) was working here as a military surgeon when he wrote the famous poem 'In Flanders Fields' in 1915.



In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

Within the John McCrae site is the Essex Farm Cemetery, and one of the graves here is of the youngest soldier to die, Rifleman M.J. Strudwick, who was only 15.



There was also the grave of Private T.Barrett, who had won the Victoria Cross.



Our coach waiting for us during our visit to Essex Farm.



From there we went on to Tyne Cot Cemetery.



Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

Tyne Cot is the largest War Graves Cemetery for Commonwealth forces in the world.



It is the resting place of more than 11,900 servicemen of the British Empire from the First World War.



From Tyne Cot we went into Ypres, where fittingly we alighted from the coach next to St. Martin's Cathedral which some of us visited, while others went into the Flanders Fields Museum nearby.



Then on to the Menin Gate, where Janet Squires laid a cross on behalf of a friend. Searching for a name on this Memorial is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

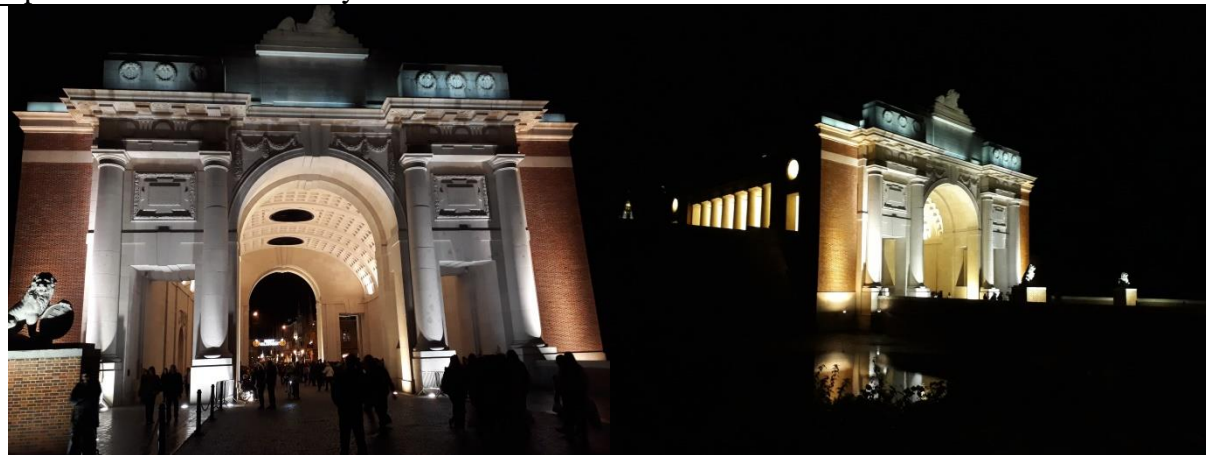


Battlefields Trip 21st - 25th October 2019

Later we returned to the Menin Gate for the Last Post Ceremony, which is held every night at 8 p.m. There were hundreds of people there, many of them school children. We were fortunate to be present when there was a choir also, who sang 'In Flanders Fields' between the Last Post and Reveille. We all felt that this event was the climax of our tour.



Looking back towards the Menin Gate as we made our way to the coach, one of many queued up to take the crowds away.



On Friday 25th October, Father Gorran held a Requiem Mass in a room in our hotel, for those who fell in the First World War. We also remembered Russell Buckingham at this Mass. After this, we made our way home, having experienced a very full and thought-provoking programme.



Here are some of our party relaxing during the ferry crossing back from Calais to Dover.

Many thanks to Father Tony Macey for organising and leading such a memorable expedition in his own inimitable style.