

Ypres Trip 2014

On Friday the 12th September Years 8 to 11 gathered very early, at 4:55am, eager to go to Ypres. The pupils congregated in their teacher-led sub-groups, supported by prefects and deputy prefects, for registration before being allowed on the coach.

Once on the coach everyone was super excited about what lay ahead, planned by the famous Mr Pugsley.

On the coach journey to the Euro tunnel our coach driver played music to entertain and help pass the time. Everyone sang along to Frozen.

Once on board the train at the Euro tunnel, we passed the time by playing 'catch' with a 'Where's Wally' hat. The natural skill of the Year 11s, playing catch, was evident.

Once in France, we drove on the wrong side of the road: wrong for the UK anyway, but correct for the continent! On the way to our first activity my bus, known as the cool bus, blasted the population of France and Belgium with different chants and songs.

Finally, we arrived at Tyne Cot British Cemetery, which is where the battle of Passchendaele took place. Now it is home to 11,908 gravestones. In addition, over 34,000 names of soldiers who were never found are also recorded. One of these was my friend's great, great cousin. We were lucky in finding his name. This was one of the most astonishing places I have ever been to. What made it even more memorable was the respect shown by the pupils of Great Marlow School, it was as if someone had hit their mute button. Everyone sensed the sadness of the place. The cemetery was beautifully kept: everything had a place and everyone buried was equal in death.



Next, we went to Langemark German Cemetery. It was an astonishing place mainly because it's the only German cemetery in Belgium, and also because the organisation of the graves was



completely different. For example, the gravestones were laid on the floor with up to 16 names on each stone. Here too, those present paid their respects for the dead. I am lucky enough to be able to speak some German so was able to read some of the stones. On one it gave the names of two brothers: one died in 1914, the other in 1915. The brothers were laid

together and named the un-breakable brothers.

Activities 3 and 4 took up the rest of the day. Activity 3 was visiting the Menin Gate, which had inscribed on it the names of 54,896 British and Empire soldiers, who were never found at the Battle of Passchendaele. Here, I found one of my ancestors: Second Lieutenant Edward Parsons. After finding his name, it struck me how powerful and monumental the history trip was proving to be. Again, the pupils of the school behaved immaculately as they paid their respects to the fallen soldiers who died so we can live in peace and freedom.



David Bliss

However, the pupils' mood changed as soon as they saw the best chocolate shop in the world! As a prefect I set an example to the others by buying two massive bars of Belgium chocolate, two boxes of macaroons, two packets of fudge and two bags of marshmallows. Obviously they weren't all for me: I gave my Mum one of the marshmallows because I am very generous!

Once everyone had consumed their healthy lunch we made our way to the Flanders Field Museum. This has to be one of the most spectacular buildings to look at in the world; it was MASSIVE! Inside it housed amazing statues and interactive displays for visitors. GMS pupils behaved impeccably, showing the locals how British school children conduct themselves.

Next was the Hoge Crater Museum, here there was a huge collection of costumes, rifles and bullets. I purchased a German Cross of Honour and also a deactivated grenade. (Back at home, my mum found this a very interesting purchase.)



Finally, we visited the Sanctuary Wood Museum, home to a very awesome, very muddy trench, which all the pupils found fascinating. Mrs Pugsley and Mr Ross jumped over an explosion pit full of dirty water, which was fine for Mr Ross, but Mrs Pugsley ended up with a soggy leg.

Sadly, the time came when we had to return home. I speak for all pupils when I say we could have spent a whole week there.

On the way to Calais yet more songs and chants were sung. A favourite film theme was "Let it go" from 'Frozen'.

On board the ferry we all ran to buy food and drink. Many spent time on deck re-enacting the key scene from Titanic. The other passengers found this very funny.

Back in Marlow, there was one last registration at 11:30pm before pupils were dismissed. Everyone went home realising that they had been on the best trip of their lives: it would not have been possible without the great teamwork of teachers, prefects and pupils working alongside with each other.

By David Bliss