

# **Belgium Trip-2018**

By Harry Yr 9

A journey that began in the middle of the night determined our perspective on the world for the rest of our lives, here began the vast adventure that told the story of WW1.

## **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> March**

In the early hours of Friday morning, we had reached Belgium, a small town in Ypres known as Boezinge held our first venture through a miniature hospital near the frontline, it was hidden within the earth and lay beside a small cemetery of British troops. It was here we found a hero, born in Manchester and a heroic surgeon who operated on thousands of allied troops.

Our next destination was a museum that held some of the wars most devastating weapons, ranging from gases to bombs, all weapons of mass destruction that claimed many lives. As we wandered freely throughout the museum, absorbing information of the soldiers' traumatic lives, some of us had the opportunity to try on armour worn by some of the troops, this gave the perfect experience, enabling us to feel the weight and pressure behind each and every soul. Additionally, within the museum there were trenches holding sandbags and bunkers where 100 years ago people lived, alone and packed with disease and smells.

Later in the day we arrived in Passendale, a town that held a colossal cemetery of allied troops. Row after row, grave after grave, the size of 4 football fields together still wouldn't compare to the insane amount of soldiers buried here, some unknown, identified by only a regiment or a hand. It was truly jaw dropping and sad to see, each life that had been taken saving all of us. In the evening we stopped off at a local park in Molenbos which showed how close the Germans were to the Triple entente, additionally, hidden within the trees lay a crater that the allies had made when destroying the German camp.

Our last location for the day was to Ieper, the main town of Ypres, where we watched the sunset over the cathedral and have a meal. After tea we walked to the famous Menin Gate Memorial where we listened to the last post while the entire village watched, it was here where I and many others realised the size of the sacrifice these soldiers gave and the amount they did to save us. We then drove to the hotel.

### **Friday 9<sup>th</sup> March**

After breakfast in the morning, we prepared our belongings to travel to Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a place that contained a massive monument in honour of the troops that fought. As we walked around we gained sight on a figure that brought question as to what it was, this as we learned was Mother Canada, who watches over her wounded as she gazes at the coffin below her. From the monument our tour guide pointed out key locations where the Germans attacked and attempted to overpower the allies. After the monument we journeyed to Arras where we saw a range of

different graves and learned how different cultures and countries honour their fallen. For example, Jewish people honour their troops by placing pebbles on graves.

Next, we travelled to Souchez where we honoured one of our own, J.Crabtree, we here learned that he was from Milnrow and had gone to similar schools. Before we returned to our hotel we had one last stop, Ablain-St.-Nazaire. Here we saw two mass graves holding over 5000 people! We also saw the lighthouse that contained 5 bodies of unknown soldiers who died and were randomly chosen. Also at this location, a memorial, famously built in the shape of a ring holds the names of over a hundred thousand soldiers. Here, you are struck with the vastness of death, of destruction. A truly deep and hard hitting place.

### **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March**

Our last day had come, and to start it off we ventured to Poperinge where we explored a house that held many memories of the war, within the attic there were fragile and precious ornaments that survived and a cat called Bengy who guarded this sacred room. After lunch we walked through Poperinge and quickly travelled to our last cemetery that held the first ever black officer in battle. We sadly then began our journey back through France towards the Channel.