

JOURNAL ENTRIES FOR THE OUTBOUND TO OXFORD-LEUVEN OUTBOUND (2012)

Tuesday and Wednesday, September 4 and 5, 2012 - Joyce and Mike Anhorn

Today we met at the *Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology* and University of Oxford. This is a world class museum with many wonderful exhibits. We had the opportunity to enjoy the displays that we were interested in. Most of us met at the café in the lower level for a light lunch.



Some chose to visit the castle.

In the afternoon we met and started on our walking tour of downtown Oxford. A climb up the Carfax Tower gave us a view of Oxford.

Mary was our guide and we started our tour of the University,

The University consists of 138 colleges. Each college is financially responsible and is

home for about 400 students. Each college tries to enroll 10- 12 new students in each of its faculties every year. The tuition fees are the same for all students and there is no preference for the British. Students apply to the separate colleges based on the instructors they are interested in.

The Bodleian Library was founded by Sir Thomas Bodley and opened in 1602. Today, together with the other libraries which serve the University of Oxford, the Bodleian is the largest university library in the UK. The Bodleian is also the oldest *copyright* Library. It receives one copy of every book published in UK.

The monumental Tower of the Five Orders of Architecture is very interesting as each level features a different style of Architecture.

The Chapel built in 1604 has beautiful stained glass.

We were met by our hosts after the two hour tour and spent an evening with them. Many ambassadors took the opportunity to take our hosts for dinner.

An amazing day. The weather was great and so hard to imagine these beautiful buildings are so old and so well maintained.

Thursday, September 6 - Myra Avey

We are up early to meet at Buckland Village Hall to leave by 9:30 a.m. We are to go by a community bus that is used by seniors to go shopping, to the Doctor or for other purposes. This bus is also made available to community groups and the Oxford Friendship Force uses it for most incoming visits. While gathering in the parking lot we notice the thatched roof on the nearby homes. I had seen them in NW England and had been told that they are made with flax. One of the Oxford F.F. people said that they use reeds. They are slate grey in color, will last about 30 years and can be repaired. Many of them had rush/flax filled shapes of birds, snakes, etc. on them, perhaps to keep birds away. The peak was covered with a fretwork- like topping that was decorative. Soon we were away with Martin, our bus driver and Jane Bye, the group leader.

We are going to Stratford-upon-Avon; Shakespeare's birth place. It is not a big city and tourism is the main activity. The city has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. The name of the city has a Saxon origin and means the area where the road crosses the river. The Avon River.

On the way there, we have an on-going commentary. What different names of towns! *Bledington* has one of the largest markets in that part of England. We go past manors, towers, and the White Horse which we will see again. The harvest of wheat and other crops has been taken in. We are told about a wartime bunker that ran from Leicester to the area we drove through. It was top secret and had the enemies invaded England it would have been a second line of defense and would have held the government. Our driver has been in it. We were told about the hedge-lane competitions for championship. There are different styles and different parts of the country have different requirements for the competition. Quite often the hedgerows prevent you from seeing the countryside. They are getting rid of them, but similar to our getting rid of trees along roads, the wind damage to fields is causing second thoughts. As we drive along the Mebrush River there are many fruit trees growing. This area has had much rain, so good crops. We went through *Stow-on-the-Woe* where gypsies gather annually for their horse sale. At *Moreton-in Marsh* the National Fire Service does their training. It is also known as an antique town. Jane's daughter had two antique chairs stolen. They were later recovered by one of the dealers here and the person was caught. They were worth \$5000 pounds. The *Lych Gate* was noted for having a roof over the corpse during the burial ceremony while the mourners stood out in the rain. With comments like that it was no time until we were in Stratford on Avon.



The first stop was Anne Hathaway's cottage. Ann was Shakespeare's wife and he would have courted her here. The cottage is surrounded by gardens, fruit trees, woodlands and an area with sculptures done by local people. Parts of

the building date back further than the 15th century and many of the 16th century fireplaces are still in place. It is said that the wooden bedstead, with a mattress of rush cords threaded unto the wooden frame, was the bed where Anne Hathaway was born. Customs of the time were to carve your own wooden plate which would be cleaned by the owner by wiping with bread, and then it was held in a plate holder for the next meal. Having a bed was a matter of prestige so quite often the bed was placed in the living room in front of the window for all to see. The kitchen fireplace held many items that were used in those times. One example was the spit which turned the meat to be cooked. There were also hooks for the cooking pots and the stone baking oven where a fire would burn until time to put the baking in. The fire was taken out and the door closed until the baking was done. The whole cottage was an interesting experience with guides to tell you about different areas of the house.

From there we drove to the coach station and were left on our own until 4pm. Most of us found somewhere to eat first, then went to Shakespeare's home. His father was a business person who was fairly well off. The home, now a museum with a picture show story line which tells about William Shakespeare's life, was enlightening. Of course Shakespeare did not live in Stratford on Avon all the time. He lived in London and other places where his plays were being presented. He did finish his life in his hometown. The gardens have been kept up and music and parts of his plays were being presented by young actors in the garden. Oh no; hurry to catch the bus and we are on our way back. Through *Chipping Norton* and on to *Burford*. In 1649 the Levelers (who did not believe in fighting) sought refuge in the church here. They should have been safe there, but were killed. Soon we are back at the parking lot, picked up by our hosts and whisked home.

Friday, September 7 - Hazel and Lyle Erga

We woke to a beautiful sunny day which was a "Free Day with our Host". Jane had a tasty breakfast ready for us in the conservatory of her delightful 1751 stone cottage which was covered with roses. After breakfast we started our drive to Waddesdon Manor through the picturesque meandering country lanes which were totally charming. We came to the delightful pub "The Trout" built along the shore of The Windrush River. This was a favorite stop for "Inspector Morris" of the T.V. series of the same name which was one of our favorite series at home. He supposedly died here in the show. Lyle took photos of the Pub and its beautiful location.

We next drove by the ruins of an ancient "Nunnery" where a former English Queen sought refuge in the distant past. It is now a lovely picnic ground. Our next stop was a country pub by a water wheel where we had a delicious lunch. We arrived at Waddesdon Manor. The grounds were just beautiful. This magnificently turreted chateau was built in the French Renaissance style circa 1875-1877 by a 35 year old widower Ferdinand de Rothschild to charm his guests on his Saturday to Monday parties. He filled the Chateau with treasures he had collected from around the world; superlative English paintings, the finest French 18th century Art and Objects D'Art set in rooms clad in panelling from the

grandest Parisian Town Houses. It has been kept in exceptional repair by four generations of Rothschilds until it was bequeathed to The National Trust in 1957 by James Rothschild in his will. His wife Dorothy remained on the Board restoring the works of Art till her death in 1988. The present Lord Rothschild manages the running of the Estate. He and his family live close by in the village. It was wonderful to visit this lovely place. I was amazed to see Marie Antoinette's beautiful desk. The Automaton of the elephant was intriguing! The warm colors of the Morning Room were so inviting in the sunshine. I also particularly enjoyed the Paintings of the Fairytale "The Sleeping Beauty" acted out by different Rothschild family members and their friends as models for the set of paintings. They were lovely paintings and were done by the Russian Artiste Leon Bakst for James and Dorothy Rothschild. The gardens here were spectacularly beautiful. We took the land train to the Aviary where we saw and heard some gorgeous birds. I really liked the Emerald Starling and the Blue Fairy Bird. Dazzling colors!

We left Waddesdon Manor at 4:30 driving home through different country lanes for Jane had to pick up the Scottish salmon for our Farewell Party early. We came to a terrific tailback of traffic but it didn't faze our driver, she is a very good driver. Jane spied a Red Kite bird of prey and pointed it out to us; it is a very beautiful bird. We then arrived at our village and changed clothes for our night out at the medieval Pub across the lane. It was built in 1606 and was totally charming. We had a reservation so in we went and ate a delicious meal including the Pudding. We left and walked down the lane to the Village Hall. We were going to the movie "The Exotic Marigold Hotel". The evening began with a glass of Champagne and then the movie began. It was full house. Halfway through the movie the film stopped and we had another glass of champagne and we continued to watch this delightful movie. After stacking the chairs we had a lovely walk back home under the stars then off to bed.

Saturday, September 8 - Hazel and Lyle Erga



Oh. Oh. Fog. Never mind. We made an early start to avoid the heavy traffic associated with equestrian event being held at Blenheim Palace. Jane zipped down countless minor roads and it worked well. First stop was Bladen to see the graves of Winston Churchill and family members. Touching how such a great man was buried at a tiny, old church. Then we hurried into

Woodstock for a glimpse of the market, & Jane's favourite art gallery. Next we entered the church to take photos of the kneeling pads of the present Duke of Marlborough in their special pew. We then met our group in the gift shop in preparation of the tour of Blenheim Palace. The recorded voice of Sir Winston Churchill set the stage as we entered. So many elegant portraits of stern, serious people, many of them of the Marlborough family. Describe this magnificent place? Not possible. Just some observations.

Wood in the doors-magnificent Decor of the various rooms-wow! Green room with its three step ceiling-beautiful! It looked like the walls and ceiling curved inward to create a dome but put your head on the wall and see straight walls. It was a clever deception. The saloon with its red upholstery and wonderful dishes (awesome) is used only once - at Christmas. Maybe we could book it for a meeting? Not likely! Fresco paintings on ceiling and wall took 1 1/2 years to paint at 500 pounds when a worker might make only one pound per year.

The library was about as long as a hockey rink (to put it in Canadian terms) with an impressive pipe organ at the end. It was sad to see photos of the room being filled with hospital beds during the war. That statue of Queen Ann made her look beautiful compared to her portrait. Artistic choice or bribery?

Ah, lunch!. Coffee. Pork pies from Melton Mowbray. Eccles cakes. etc. Diet starts tomorrow! Now to go through the "Untold Story" part where the human, flesh and blood came into focus. It was amazing to see the actors be so still but their breathing was evident. We came away with a feel for how life may have been. Very well done. So a walk on the grounds, across the bridge and there was Jane in her black Ford ready to go home. More backroads wide enough for one car and a skinny bicycle at a time. We arrived safely at home and went directly to a village fete held at a wonderful and elegant estate. Hundreds of people, brass band, food, dog show, raffles, food, white elephant sale, did I mention food?, book sale, welly-wanging (competition in how far one could throw a welly -rubber boot) It is not an Olympic sport yet. Fun, but time to go.



After a short time at home it was off for the farewell in such a fine home. First was the game of trying to knock the bottle-like object off the post by throwing half a baseball bat at it. I suspect it was invented by cricket players who had just downed their fifth beer. And more food including Scottish salmon. Delicious.

Then came the "pudding" table. Wow! Diet tomorrow for sure. Finally our farewell entertainment which they seemed to enjoy- especially when the left side was singing a different verse from that of the right. So, lump in throat, mist in eye and it is goodbye to a group who do FFI proud. And so the end of another marvelous day as we relax at home with a cup of tea, a glass of sherry, little Fergie, the charming little Jack Russell at our feet. A satisfied smile. Good night

Sunday September 9 - Deanna Gupta and Sam Yakimishyn

This was designated as a "Free Day"; all of us travellers had different experiences.

It was a beautiful, beautiful sunny day; in fact our whole stay in Oxfordshire was like that. Our hosts told us we were very lucky.

After a family breakfast, our host Steve Hill kindly offered to drive us to Oxford. We wanted to spend more time there and see more of its beautiful historic buildings and revisit the Ashmolean and Natural History museums. We wanted to be able to tell our grandchildren we had seen Alice in Wonderland's Dodo and visited Exeter College where a Harry Potter movie was filmed.

For supper we took our host Steve out to *The Fleece*, a pub in Whitney. We ordered up the Sunday special rump roast with Yorkshire pudding and for dessert, English Summer Pudding, along with Malbec red wine from Argentina.

Monday, September 10 - Deanna & Sam

Today we're off to the village of Avebury to see the restored Manor and its prehistoric henge. We start with the manor and its beautiful gardens. The musical phrase "in an English country garden" rings through our mind as we delight in the kitchen garden with vegetables for sale, next the maze of hedges and topiary, all beautifully trimmed and finally the gorgeous flowers. So many wonderful photo opportunities. The visit inside the manor is a treat for all the senses, as visitors are invited to truly be "guests of the house" and not treat it as a museum. It's a new display concept that the National Trust is experimenting with. Sam tried the leather exercise chair in the 16th century parlor. Deanna lay down on the four poster in the Tudor bedroom. All the while thinking about the ditty "sleep tight and don't let the bedbugs bite!" The lumpy straw mattress could have been filled with lice and it was lying on a netting of chords that required re-tightening every couple of days by the maid servant.

Very conveniently, the maid's little cot swung out from under the bed, so she was always near at hand.

Lunch break was at the "Red Lion Public House" and since it was misty and windy we decided that a dark malt was also required. There was a huge caricature of Prince Charles, seems he lunched there when helping with the archeological dig.



Next we were guided around the henge, a truly extraordinary sight. It is the largest stone circle in the world and it dates back 6000 years. From here there is an ancient lane way to Stonehenge. Archaeologists are still trying to interpret these massive stones, some over 45 Tons and the massive ditch around them; whereas the Druids have their definitive answer.

On the return trip we saw Silbury Hill the largest tumulus in England. (A tumulus is a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves.) This area is spotted with many other smaller ones. They are believed to be the grave sites of chiefs. Other interesting stops were the white chalk horse on the hill at Cherhyll and the great covered barn built in 1761; very sturdy and very tall, looks like a cathedral.

It was then back to our starting point and then meeting up with our host Steve Hill. We were very glad that he was doing the driving through the narrow winding country roads from Buckland Village to his home in Middletown Village, as we were completely lost, add to that the fact that it was dusk, the villages have no street lights, and that the English drive on the “wrong” side of the road!

We were very glad to be back at his place in the Cotswolds. Steve is a gourmet cook and wine connoisseur and we dined on fresh figs, pasta al dente with chicken, mushroom sauce, English trifle and a French red wine.



Tuesday, September 11, 2012 - Muriel Kuchison

Up at 5:30 a.m. Ouch!

Finally packed with the big piece of luggage packed in Ann's VW boot last night.

Toast and coffee, brush teeth and on the road by 6:30 a.m. Ann anxious to beat the morning rush hour to get us to Thornton on time for 7:50 a.m. which is the meeting time to board the bus to Gatwick. Jitters: Theresa and Pat stuck in traffic behind an accident.

Last minute they arrive as do Sam and Deanna only to discover that the bus doesn't arrive until 9:40. We boarded the bus for an uneventful trip to Gatwick. We checked our luggage and went for lunch.

A browse in *Harrods* netted a few treasures for a few people. Oh, the bragging rights! As we wait for the Gate to be announced there is still no posting but at 1:40 p.m. a message appears on the departure screen. "Please Wait". Finally at 2:00 p.m. it appeared. Everyone takes off for the long trek, a long line-up and a short 50 minute trip on Easy Jet after choosing your own seat.

Amsterdam. How wonderful! Thanks to Sam's expertise in negotiating, we find a shuttle bus that will bring us to our hotel in two shifts. We get set up and go out for a glass of wine/dinner/snacks/dessert and return to our hotel room to crash.

Wednesday September 12 - Clare Scott

After a week in Oxfordshire, England the Edmonton and Area Friendship Force members who were on the exchange travelled to the city of Amsterdam, where we stayed for four nights. I was to record what we did on our first day in Amsterdam. Four of us spent the

day in the canal boat. The following is what we saw, learned and experienced.

Amsterdam

In the 1600's Amsterdam was the world's leading commercial and financial centre. They built an enormous town



hall, which is currently the Royal Palace. This city is now an international harbour and trade center.

Walls of the hydrangea flower are everywhere.

We went on a canal cruise in Amsterdam on my day to record. Over 2000 houseboats are on the canals. A government freeze has been placed on any new building spots on the canal for more houseboats. Once each week the locks are opened to pump fresh water in and dirty water out. We passed by the basement where the Dutch gold reserve is housed, the Heineken brewery, the Van Gogh museum, the gold gilded very impressive train station, and Anne Frank's House. There are three canals. The wealthiest live along the Gentleman's Canal. The poor man's canal is another and the Kaiser canal is the widest at 85 feet wide. Canal bicycles can be rented.

This city has a great tolerance for foreigners and it has 173 nationalities. The buildings lean inward giving them a larger appearance. They have a hoisting hook at the top so furniture or other items can be hoisted without damaging upper floors. Windows on the top floor are larger than the ones on lower floors to create the illusion that houses are larger than they are. The largest Protestant church was built in 1620 in the Netherlands. Warehouses along the canal were built to store whale oil from Greenland and Norway.

One canal is called the Brewers' Canal. In the 16th and 17th centuries the water was bad and it was healthier to drink beer. Thus many breweries were built along the canal.

The golden age for Amsterdam was the 1600's when they brought textiles, spices and stones into this international harbor from the Far East. Five hundred of the bridges date to the 1600's. After the Second World War a deeper harbour was built. Next to Rotterdam, Amsterdam is the second deepest harbour and it is the fifth largest harbour in Europe. It is closed by locks and therefore has no tides.

Amsterdam has 740,000 permanent inhabitants. In the 1600's there were 50,000. Many of its historical buildings are maintained by UNESCO preservation. The 1857 Hotel Amstel viewed on our canal cruise has hosted Royalty, Bill Clinton and Marlene Dietrich.

Thousands of bicycles are parked along all sides of the canals and under bridges. Newer bikes are frequently stolen.

The older houses along the canals were built on wooden piles and as the ground is soft, the piles and houses have sunk. Concrete is now used for piles. Canals are 9 feet deep and 63 miles long and have 1250 bridges. One is an arched 17th century bridge. Low iron railings were installed in the 1700's along the tops of the canals. A layer of mud, and horses and carriages is found in the canals and now a layer of bicycles has been added. Carriages with more than 1 horse are now restricted. On and in the canals are ducks,

geese, swans, grieves, herons and fish. Skaters use it if it freezes. Street artists frequent the canal banks.

In the Rijksmuseum we viewed Rembrandt's famous "Night Watch". In this museum are the magnificent doll's houses and the best Delftware.

The Nautical Museum has 300 ship models; *Nemo* is the Science and Technology Museum. Another museum is the Trope Museum.

September 13 - Sharon Schnell

Muriel Kuchison, my travel mate, and I started the day with a good, large Starbucks coffee and breakfast sandwich. Sam Yakimishyn and Deanna Gupta were already there. We talked about our travels and plans for the day.

Muriel and I needed to wash clothes; I was about to recycle the best of the dirty. The concierge told us about the Wash and Net (Laundromat) down the street so we trotted down the uneven brick and cobble stone sidewalk with our bags of "secrets". The sign said "open at 11:00 am." We did not want to wait, or waste of time. We returned the same route back to the hotel, dropped off the "secrets", and walked to the canal pick-up platform to catch the Red Line to Anne Frank's Museum. Lyle and Hazel Erga were there. We made arrangements for the next day for a six hour tour of Volendam, Marken and Zaanse Schana villages.

The Anne Frank House is of interest to many people of all ages and countries. After waiting in line to get our tickets, then waiting in line to enter the house, we inched our way through rooms with posted photos and quotes from Anne's diary. Someone built miniature house and furniture. The rooms are small and stairs are narrow in width. Eight people lived in these cramped quarters till almost of the end of the war when they were found. They were all sent to a concentration camp. Anne's friend was sent to the camp before the Franks. She was excited when Anne arrived at the same camp. She got small scraps of bread from other prisoners and secretly gave them to Anne. Otto Frank, Anne's father, survived the concentration camp.

There were videos done after the war; one with the woman who worked for the Franks in their business, and one with Anne's father, Otto. Even though Otto Frank was close to his daughter, he said after he read her diary "no parent can know the inner thoughts and feelings of a child even if they have a good relationship like he had with Anne." The diary has been translated into 70 languages.

September 14 - Donna Wyatt

What a great day! We had agreed to meet with Tineke and Christine at Den Haag, otherwise known as *The Hague*. We took the tram to Amsterdam Centraal, had a coffee & croissant for two euros each and then waited for the train. For a while we stood on

the platform to watch the fast-moving, quiet trains move through. We boarded at 9:12, arriving just after 10:00. Tineke met us on the platform and took us to her apartment condo in Voordam, a suburb of Den Haag. She lives quite close to the wooded home of Queen Beatrix.

It was so interesting to see her home and the place where her Friendship Force ambassadors stay. Christine had come from Middelburg to visit with us. We had coffee and a delicious Dutch pastry and shared stories of their visit to Canada two years ago. After chicken soup at lunch, we went to den Haag, passing the Shell Oil headquarters and parked in front of the Canadian Embassy. We walked along the street passing several gov't buildings with reserved parking for their ambassadors. The USA embassy had tight security following the murder of the American ambassador to Libya.



We continued walking past the Queen's working palace with its gates decorated in gold. There was a lot of activity in the area as they prepared for the opening of parliament on Tuesday following the election yesterday. It appears to be very people-centered as stands we're being set up so the Dutch could watch as the queen walks through the central square of the Parliament Buildings and through the main doors. A light could be seen in the small tower that is the prime minister's office.

Our next spot was the beach area bordering the North Sea. We watched the wind surfers sailing across the waves then walked along some newly built walkways to a magnificent hotel. Tineke said that their FF club had celebrated their 25th anniversary with a brunch there. After delicious suppers of salmon, shrimp, cod and chicken, Tineke and Christine took us back to the train. We returned to our hotel, happy with this opportunity to meet with our FF friends who had stayed with us in Edmonton, just two years ago.

September 15 - Theresa Sarnecki

Up around 6:30 a.m.; finished packing, then breakfast. Met the rest of the group in the lobby. Donna had arranged for two minibuses to take us to the train station. It was a great way to get us there.

Got the train to Brussels. Like British trains, there is very little room for luggage. Myra and I were fortunate to get into a compartment where a young Chinese fellow lifted our big bags onto the racks above our heads.

The countryside was pretty - very agricultural with many grain fields, cows and canals. We didn't see any windmills.

When we were approaching Brussels we realized the young man was getting off so we asked him to put our bags back down on the floor. We had to squeeze them together as other passengers needed a seat.

The Midi Station in Brussels was huge. The people in Leuven had told us to have lunch there and we would be met by one of their members. Unfortunately she missed us when we arrived. Myra had to search for a bank machine and on her way back tour group she spotted a Friendship Force sign. Hiro Saiko is a member of FF Leuven although she lives in Brussels. She had lunch with us and helped us to get on the fastest train. She was very helpful.

The Leuven group met us after a half hour. Dany and Greta Smeyers were the exchange directors and hosts for Clare and me. They led us out of the station to a lovely reception at a new close-by hotel. They even arranged a room to put our luggage in. We should never have had lunch as the spread begged to be eaten. Drinks were served as we were welcomed. Dany, Greta and the hosts seemed very nice. We spent the evening at their homes. Leuven seems to be a classical Belgian town.

September 16 - Larry Wyatt



This was designated as a “Free Day” and our hosts Gaya and Gustave suggested that we take the train to visit the North Sea area. We met Myra at the train station, which was only a few blocks away from our Leuven apartment. The five of us boarded the train and headed to the Flemish North Sea area.

When we arrived, it was easy to see why it was a favourite area for the locals. The area contained fish markets, large sculptures on the beach and many interesting areas to explore. We decided that it would be very interesting for us all if we went to the Atlantikwall area for a look at the Openluchtmuseum.

This museum shows the actual brick walled trenches the German army built during the time they occupied Belgium during WW I and WW II.

“The Open Air Museum Atlantikwall at the Raversijde Domain is one of the biggest war museums in Europe and consists of a WWI



section and a WWII section. Within the perimeter of the museum are two batteries: Battery Aachen - WN Bensberg and Battery Saltwedel Neu - Stp. Tirpitz.”

We were overwhelmed with what we saw. It was truly an amazing museum. It was incredible to be able to stand in the trenches and view the war time artifacts that were shown there.

Control-Click below for more pictures of what is there.
[http://ww2places.info/?a=obj;en;29&s=\\$s&f=\\$f&i=&t=\\$t](http://ww2places.info/?a=obj;en;29&s=$s&f=$f&i=&t=$t)

After about two hours, we took our leave and returned to Leuven to discuss what we had seen and how emotional it had been to view the actual area where all of the events of Allied Invasion had taken place.

Supper prepared by Gustav was a delicious Scottish salmon.

September 17 - Dianna Steele

Monday September 17, 2012 - Leuven

What does today hold in store for us?? After, a somewhat tumultuous Sunday spent with our host where her car was struck by a speeding motorcycle in Tongeren and where the two occupants of the motorcycle were rushed to hospital and we were transported back to Antwerp in the back of a tow truck with our host's car in tow.



Would today be as eventful? As it turns out, not as eventful but thoroughly enjoyable. We arrived in Leuven later than the group and the tour had already started. When we arrived with the group we were introduced to our guide Jos who proved to be not only knowledgeable about history but also a raconteur with a tremendous sense of humor.

Jos' tour took us through the university area explaining the importance of this institution to

the city of Leuven but also to its importance in Belgian history.

We were introduced to the Great Beguinage, a historic area which was an ancient alternative female community system (going back to the time of the Crusades) for women who wanted to lead a monastic life of prayer and service without being tied to the monastery with strict vows.

We enjoyed an excellent lunch at the Foyer Restaurant (it should be commented that our meals in Belgium were universally superb).

Part of our visit included a tour of the magnificent Town Hall of Leuven - it is an incredible edifice with building beginning in 1439.

We also were taken on a tour of St. Peter's Church.

The day was capped with an official reception hosted by a member of the Belgium government in the Rathsheller of the Town Hall.

This was an excellent start to our tour of Belgium.



September 18 - Bruges - Hugh Steele

Our second day! What to expect? Certainly it would be hard to surpass yesterday's tour of Leuven. But ... Brugge is one of my favorite places in Europe. I don't think we were disappointed with this perspective. Under the informative tutelage of our excellent guide Jean-Marie we began our venture.

Highlights of the tour:

- Lake of Love
- Michelangelo's masterpiece "Our Lady and the Infant" in The Church of Our Lady.
- the haunting and spiritual exploration of the Beguinage and it's church.
- the Square: the Belfry and the Halles, the Town Hall, the Borough and the Basilica of the Holy Blood.

Also:

- a very interesting boat ride on the canals. Their beauty etched in our memory. For Muriel, the discovery that her friend from Edmonton was sitting on her patio as our boat passed. It is ever a small world.
- Afternoon shopping: Was any lace or chocolate purchased??
- Finally a superb repast at the Crowne Plaza Cafe and a rush to catch the next train in anticipation of our next adventure.

September 20 - Lillian Limberger

Today we boarded a bus to take us to Ieper. This is the Flanders Fields Country and the Great War 1914-1918.



Our first stop was at Diksmuide to view a stretch of the old Belgian front line. There was 40,000 km of trenches during the war.

We then went to the Ijzer Tower, Gate of Peace and Ijzer Crypt. It has 22 floors which are devoted to a museum on the themes of War, Peace and the Emancipation of the Flanders'. A view from the top of the tower offers a panorama over the old front line.

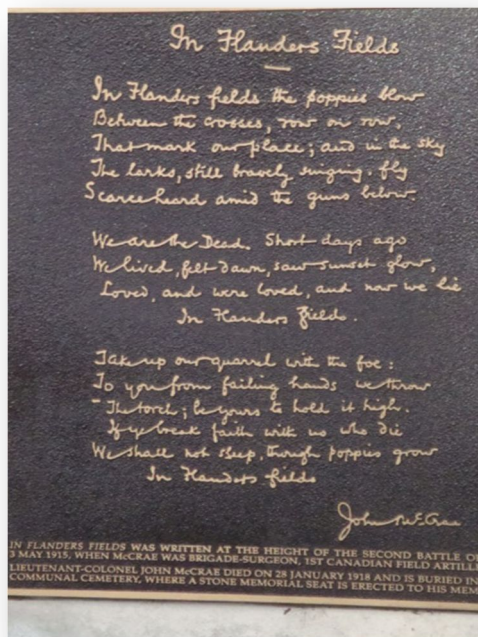
There are 17 graveyards in this area. You will find monuments in

the roundabouts in the roads in the towns.

We had our lunch here...

We stopped at Langemark-Poelkapelle to see the monument of the Canadian Brooding Soldier. This Canadian Forces Memorial was erected in remembrance of the 2,000 dead of the First Canadian Division, who were killed in the fighting which followed the German gas attacks of April, 1915.

Then we went to the Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest Commonwealth Military Cemetery in the world. It was here in 1917 that the British army fought for 4 months to break the German line.



We viewed the John McCrae memorial. McCrae was a Canadian doctor born in 1872. He was a volunteer and was deeply affected by what he saw and in May 1915 he wrote his famous poem "In Flanders Fields".

In Ieper we went to the *Flanders Fields Museum* and then had our group dinner. We tried paperings hommel beer.

At 8 pm. we went to the square to watch the "Last Post". This has occurred every evening since 1930. The feature country was Africa this night and South African students were singing their anthem.

We were home by 10 p.m. and Chris our host was there to pick us up.

September 21 -FF Beer Walk and Farewell - George Clarke

The morning was free time with our hosts. Jan Engelen took me to the museum at the actual site of the Battle of Waterloo where the forces of the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon and his army on June 18, 1815. It was an outstanding presentation of how the battle was fought and thus the demise of Napoleon. Merilynn and Leni enjoyed themselves shopping at the Leuven market.

(I think I speak for everyone by saying that our hosts were so gracious and so eager to please. I just casually mentioned that one thing I would have liked to have seen while in

Belgium was the site of the Battle of Waterloo. Next thing you know, it's all arranged. I'm thinking I should have asked for an electric bike.)

The beer walk started around 2:30 PM in the little village of Hoegaarden just east of Leuven. Hoegaarden is a farming community famous for growing grains which leads to brewing beer by the beer-loving Belgians. In the recent past, there were 36 independent breweries. Now there are just two as most have been bought out by the big guys.

The tour was led by Friendship Force member Freddy Mannaerts, a bit of a bon vivant, who told us all about the brewing of beer in his town, described the local landmarks and schmoozed the locals at each stop. (He's running for office in the October local elections.)



Belgians take their beer drinking very seriously. Each beer ideally must be drunk from a particular drinking vessel which varies from mugs to champagne flutes. Our first stop was the Kapittelhuis where the farewell party was held. We sampled Rose beer which tasted like a carbonated fruit drink.

Next we visited Het Nieuwhuys which is the only "independent" brewery in Hoegaarden. It is run by a husband and wife team where she explained how the pub grew from brewing for themselves and friends to an all out brewery. We sampled their light coloured Rosdel brand which is about 6% alcohol. It was quite smooth. They also brew a darker 9% product which had a more bitter taste.

Next was the cafe Beer of Hoegaarden where we sampled Grand Cru, a blond beer with a wide head and 8.7% alcohol content. It tasted rather bitter to me but was Freddy's favorite.

Last stop was Kouterhof Hoegaarden where we sampled the 'cream of beer'. It had what I would describe as a honey taste.

At each stop, besides beer, we were served a snack of pate on bread or cold meat on a cracker. So we weren't all that hungry for our return to Kapittelhuis for the farewell dinner. However, we were welcomed and accompanied by many of our hosts for a nice dinner of beef in gravy with vegetables and the obligatory Belgian fries (don't call them French fries) with a scrumptious crème Brule for dessert.



After speeches, thank yous and presentations to each club we presented our country in full: first by an off-key version of "This Land is Our Land" followed by an explanation of each province and territory in Canada emphasizing features and size compared to Belgium. We ended with renditions of "It's a Small World" and "Farewell to Leuven" and nobody booed.

Saturday, September 22, 2012 FF Departure from Leuven - Merilynn Clarke

We dragged ourselves out of bed at 5:45 a.m. so we could have breakfast and leave for the station in good time to catch the train to Brussels at 7:37 a.m. We were all excited about taking the Eurostar, a train that travels as fast as 300 miles per hour through the Chunnel, a passageway under the sea between England and France. One can catch it in Brussels, Belgium as well.



When we got off the train in Brussels there were no signs or instructions as to how to get to the Eurostar that would take us to St. Pancras Station in England. We knew we had to go down a level of stairs but the lifts did not work and an escalator was not to be found. George thinking he knew where he was going, bounded down the steps so I trailed after him bouncing my suitcase down the stairs hoping the wheels wouldn't break as I surely could not lift my suitcase laden with dirty clothes and Belgian chocolate. We yelled to the gang "we'll meet you at the station" and took

off down this long hall that had a picture of a train with an arrow so we assumed that was the Eurostar. In the meantime, somehow Hazel and Lyle departed from the group. The gang that was left had the dilemma of either waiting for them or continuing on so they would not miss the train. They luckily arrived just in time to go through security and get on the train. The Ergas were nowhere in sight. Thank goodness the seats were all assigned so we all knew what car (Number 18-the last one--more running with a heavy suitcase) and seat to take.

Arriving at St. Pancras station we had to find the place where we could punch in the numbers for our group ticket on the Tube (the subway is called the Tube in England). It had been arranged and paid for ahead of time by our travel agent. The Tube



station ticket sellers did not know what we were talking about so some of the gang went to the Traveler's Information booth while the other half stayed back and guarded the luggage. This seemed to take forever. Finally, it was discovered that the group ticket was offered by Euro Rail not the Tube station. So Sharon, Donna and Mike went to the Euro Rail booth and picked up the Tube tickets so we could get through the gates and get on the Tube which would take us to Heathrow Station where we would catch the plane.

The Tube was jam packed so no seat was available to sit in for most of the journey. It was a 55 minute ride. I was with Joyce and Mike Anhorn and we were all exhausted. When we got off the Tube at Heathrow we needed to go through Tube gates again. Thankfully, we still had the ticket we used to get on the Tube beforehand and therefore had no trouble getting through.

Alas, we arrived at Heathrow ready to do more shopping or sleeping if you could find a few seats strung together. So who do we see strolling around Heathrow?? Elton John, Elvis? No, the Ergas. They missed the Eurostar we were on but managed to catch the next one. A few hours later we all caught the plane home. So all's well that ends well. And I thought writing about the last day would be boring!!

