

BRITISH TOUR in FLANDERS 2012



This 3-day event was organised by the team at Kemmel Historic Comite in Ypres Belgium and was a very different event to those we have entered here previously. 2012 was the 3rd running of this biennial tour. The Saturday run was limited to just 20 British crews, with an emphasis on the Great War history that abounds in this area. Dippy and crew were joined for this trip by fellow HRCR members Jill and Nick Jones in their MGB.

We had a free morning on the Friday to explore the locality and prepare for the event. At 16.00 hours, the British entries met up with Vincent and Dirk from the Kemmel Club to collect all the usual paperwork and plates that go with the Tour. An added surprise for us all on this occasion was the gift of a splendid hamper for each crew, filled with local beers and other goodies.

The next part of our day was a group visit to the recently-revamped 'In Flanders Fields' Museum, which was very worthwhile, but with the museum closing at 18.00 hours and so much to see on the history of the Great War, a return visit will have to be made to see what we didn't have time for on this occasion. Back at the Novotel, the next treat for the crews was a PowerPoint presentation by one of the local experts on the history of Ypres. The day concluded with an excellent 3-course dinner - with wines included!

At the start of Day 2, the crews drove to the Commando Bunker at Mount Kemmel - famous today for a hillclimb course and special stages. The bunker was built in the 1950's as a command centre in case of armed conflict during the Cold War. It is perfectly preserved and hidden deep underground under quite a normal-looking small Belgium house. Our guide here was very well informed and made the tour most interesting. It was now time for a lunch break at the Restaurant De Hollemeersch - another venue steeped in motorsport history - and regularly used by the Kemmel team.

Lunch over and it was back to the Road Book, visiting more historical sights on the way to the Talbot House for coffee and cakes. Talbot House in Poperinge, opened in 1915 by the Reverend Philip 'Tubby' Clayton, was founded as a place where soldiers could take short breaks from the fighting for rest and recreation. The initials of the house in the signals spelling alphabet produced the name - Toc H - for the Christian organisation that still survives today. Here we were treated to a fascinating tour of the house and a film of life there during the war. Our young guide here was an expert on all that went on - now nearly 100 years ago.



The Tour route now continued back to Ypres with more interesting sights to be visited on the way. The highlight for Mike was to have the honour of laying a wreath at the Last Post in memory of his grandfather - Thomas Broadfield, Private 45877 - who was killed in the area on the 31st July 1917 and whose name is one of 56,000 engraved on the Menin Gate. Mike was joined by two other drivers on the Tour who were also laying wreaths in memory of their lost ones and all three of us were driven to the gate in a chauffeur-driven classic Rolls Royce. What more could one ask for? - this night will certainly be remembered for ever. To finish the day, all the crews returned to the Novotel for a sumptuous Gala Dinner.

Day 3 saw all the British crews assemble in the Ypres town square, along with the local competitors who were joining in for the Sunday run. At 10.00 hours, we left the square and drove under the Lille Gate and, following the Road Book, passed Hill 60, Hooge Crater, Zillebeke and through the village of Hollebeke. The route now continued past the Pool of Peace that was created by the detonation of underground mines on June 17th 1917. A short detour from the route took us past the impressive Mesen Tower in the Irish Peace Park. Now back on route, we passed the Ploegsteert Memorial that was founded in 1931 and has the names of 11,447 soldiers, who have no known graves, engraved on the plaques.

The 65km of route so far now brought us to the lunch halt at Le Plat Pays. The road book instruction told us to take our time - which was just as well as the food and service were first class. The break over, we now journeyed past Polygon Wood, the British 7th Division Memorial and the Tyne Cot Blockhouse - all again a great tribute to those who lost their lives. Next on route came the Brooding Soldier, the Canadian Forces Memorial and then on to Zonnebeke and the final stop at the Passchendaele



Museum for the end of the tour and the final refreshments. The results of the Tour's picture and question quiz were soon declared and the worthy winners were a local crew on their first event.

Our sincere thanks to Vincent, Dirk and the Kemmel Team for a superb weekend - the Tour routes, Road Book, hotel and meals were all first class. We would highly recommend this event to any other British crews who have an interest in World War 1 history - it was a very reasonable package. Check out the websites for details of the 2014 Tour nearer the time on: www.britishtour.be and www.classictourdiary.co.uk.