

Trip to the Battlefields 2018

The Mount- Millthorpe Battlefields trip set off on Friday 16 March for a whistle-stop tour of the trenches of the Western Front.

We survived a choppy ferry crossing and gave the students an outline of the causes of the First World War as we travelled along the Ypres salient. We started the tour at the huge cemetery of Tyne Cott. Here the soldiers were bogged down in mud as they fought through the wet summer and winter of 1917. The French army, further south was in disarray and the British had to keep the German army under constant pressure to prevent them from breaking through the French line. As a result the third battle of Ypres has become famous for the terrible conditions endured by the troops. Here, Aidan Wilson was able to lay a poppy on the memorial to the missing, for his relative.



We then moved out of the cold and into the Passendaele museum. Mr Baybutt and the boys are shown here taking a quick break in the replica dug outs.

Tom admiring the depth of the trench systems.



Our next stop was the casualty clearing station at Lijssenhoek. The students were told about the complex medical evacuation service that included field hospitals and ambulance trains. Tragically, casualty clearing stations had to include large areas for the burial of the bodies of soldiers who died of their wounds. Lottie's relative was buried at this cemetery and she was able to pay her respects at the grave.

We then visited the concentrated cemetery of Langemark. This contains the remains of German soldiers that have been moved and concentrated together in one graveyard. Olivia was our wreath bearer as we observed a minute silence.





Next we paid a visit to 'Sanctuary Wood' to look at how tourism developed from the early 1920s as relatives came to France and Belgium to find the graves of their sons, fathers and brothers. Incredibly the Mount School ran their first battlefield tour in 1920! Sanctuary Wood was preserved by the original owner of the land and contains the trenches and shattered remains of tree trunks. The students had a chance to run around in the preserved trenches and enjoyed a very welcome hot drink.

We finished Saturday with a visit to the Menin Gate. This is the main entrance to the city from the famous Menin Road and was the route the soldiers took in and out of the city during the Battles of Ypres.



The fire service of Ypres have maintained the discipline of sounding The Last Post every evening as an act of remembrance. Jack and a fellow student from The Mount School laid a wreath from the two schools.

After a much needed sleep in France we then stepped back in time to 1916 and the battle of the Somme. Here we recreated the tragic events of the first day of the Somme by advancing from the original trench line of the Leeds Pals Battalion.



We then moved to the massive memorial to the missing at Thiepval. This shows the names of the soldiers who died whose bodies were never



recovered. The students were given the names and addresses of local York residents to find on the memorial. Iris and Jack were also able to find the names of their own relatives here.



Finally we visited the Canadian Memorial at Vimy Ridge. The students were awed by the size of this memorial. The statue they are standing beside represents Mother Canada weeping for her children. At Vimy Ridge The Canadian army fought fiercely to capture the ridge from the German army.



They had built an intricate network of tunnels under the German trenches in order to move men and equipment and to plant explosives. The students were given an opportunity to explore the tunnels and trenches. The striking resemblance to our own B block during the building work was also mentioned!

We then finished our tour and set off back to the ferry and finally school. This was a great tour made even greater by having such a wonderful group of interested and well behaved students. Below are some of the student's reflections given on the last evening of the tour.

"I want to devote some time to the individuals that time tries to swallow: the Chinese soldiers, black soldiers, women and many more..."

"It's hard to describe everything because I am lost for words..."

"The scale of the death and destruction is incomprehensible..."

"Despite the blustering wind, I thought every step of our journey to be full of meaning. I am very glad I came as it allowed me to understand the Great War far more than before."

"My experience on the Battlefield tour has been incredible. I have gained an enormous amount of respect for those who fought and this trip has made me realise the huge scale of the war."

"But in these lands, if you do try
Their outstretched hands to hold
So listen as they shout to be told
And beware the ballads, songs of old
With rhymes as bold as brass
Cute little rhymes, of ye olden times,
Of the little lad or lass

For these fields are steeped in stories
And thick with passing time
Both sides fought, and both men died
Each for another man's crime
So for Nellie, John, Ernst and Frank
Among many others we saw
Thank you, for your sacrifice
For our order and our law

For them that sleep beneath these stones
Are flesh and blood and heart
They breathe this air with me and you
But only time apart
But only time apart"