

## -Battlefields Trip 2015-

The trip to Belgium and Northern France began on a chilly day in February, when myself, my good friend Daisy and history teacher Miss. Storrie embarked on a journey to the modern day battlefields.

The first evening on Friday consisted of a high ropes course, reminiscent of previous outward bounds trips. While Miss Storrie enjoyed the warmth of modern day heating, Daisy and I scaled rope ladders and leaped off the edge of towering poles, all the while faintly losing feeling in our feet. After a WWI based dinner, we handled artefacts and relics from the war, which ranged from the smallest shell fragments to fully intact rifles. In addition, we researched a local soldier. Our soldier, John Todd, lived surprisingly near the school we attend, which made his story seem even more personal to us.

The following morning, we ventured onto the coach again and headed en route to Belgium. After a fulfilling lunch, mainly consisting of crisps and chocolate, we arrived at our first destination 'In Flanders Field Museum'. The museum was deeply interesting, and had a vast array of intriguing and thoughtful displays which inspired many different interpretations. We subsequently visited 'Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery', which was our first large graveyard. The sheer scale of the site affected many on the trip, and the tour guides provided stories and accounts of many of the soldiers buried in the graveyard. This helped us comprehend how every single soldier had a story, each 10,755 in this cemetery alone. In the evening, we experienced our first 'Menin Gate Ceremony.' I was astounded and humbled that this ceremony was performed every night, without fail. The ceremony was a favourite among most on the trip, and was very poignant, yet inspired.

On Sunday, we had an early start and visited Thiepval Memorial, a huge monument that had an impact the moment you saw it. Each and every available surface on the walls of the monument had a name on it. In total, there were 72,195 names, 72,195 men who we remembered that day. Subsequently, we visited the 'Beaumont Hamel Memorial Park'. This memorial commemorated the lives of Newfoundland soldiers, who were given a misinformed message which ultimately led to their deaths. This memorial had preserved trench lines, which provided an insight into the battle, and exactly how terrifying the battle would have been. After a warm lunch of baguette and soup, we arrived at the 'Neuve Chapelle Indian Memorial'. This beautiful memorial was one of my favourites, as it had intricate Indian themed artwork/symbolism, which many felt was one of the most subtle, yet engaging ways to remember these men. After an evening of face painting and a subsequent face scrubbing session, we settled down into a much appreciated sleep.

As the last day dawned, bleary eyed with unpacked luggage, we headed off to our final breakfast, before finally packing and saying goodbye to our hotel, 'Flanders Lodge'. Monday was the most creative day, where we attended a 'Coming World Remember Me' workshop. The aim is to create 600,000 clay models to commemorate the fallen soldiers who died on Belgium Soil. In 2018, these statues will be placed in Ypres to remember these men. Afterwards, we visited The 'Langemark Cemetery', which was a mass grave for 44,000 soldiers. Even though the cemetery was compacted into such a small area, it held a solemn and haunting note to it, especially as many in Hitler's own German regiment were buried there. Finally, we visited our last Cemetery, 'Tyne Cot Cemetery'. This stunning

and sombre memorial linked back to our first ever day, when we discovered our local Soldier, John Todd. We found his name in the cemetery, and this discovery was one of the most touching and incredible ways to finally connect with the war first-hand.

Overall, the trip to Northern France and Belgium was incredibly special, and has made us view the war as more than just a history topic in school, but as a war that needs to be remembered by the generations to come.

**Marnie, AHS School Reporter.**