

RTWOMVC WW1 Commemorative Visit to Belgium, 7-9 August 2018

As part of our 80th Year Anniversary Programme the choir spent 3 days in Belgium which included taking part in the Last Post Ceremony at Menin Gate, a visit to Hill 60 battle site and Sanctuary Wood Cemetery and culminating in our own concert at St Georges Church in Ypres.

On Tuesday evening we assembled early in the at the Menin Gate, gather. At 8pm in the presence of hundreds, and a large RAF Cadet contingent, the Last Post Ceremony began with the Association's buglers.



At the end of the 2 minutes silence and led by Richard Walshaw we sang Steal Away and My Lord, What a Morning while wreaths were being laid. Ours was laid last by two of our own Veterans Peter Davies and Richard Coombe. In the huge monumental arch surrounded by the 54,000 names of soldiers whose bodies were never recovered (the names carved by Burslem of Tunbridge Wells) the atmosphere was electric and the event extremely moving. Afterwards, several people thanked us for the singing and adding meaning to the ceremony.





The Choir after the ceremony, and a few of us standing by the gate





On Wednesday morning we drove to Hill 60, a small but key area of higher ground fought over many times by the Allies and Germans, and untouched since then. Richard Coombes a qualified WW1 historian explained the significance of the location, put the battles on it into context, stressed the significance of the mining operations by both sides, and helped us understand the conditions in which the soldiers fought, and the cost in lives. He then took us to the huge British-created Caterpillar crater to show us the massive impact of tunnelling and mine-laying.





The remains of the crater produced when 32,000kg of explosives were detonated under the 'Caterpillar' - near to Hill 60.



Sanctuary Wood Cemetery



Under the trees and close to the Cross of Sacrifice, the choir sing *My Load What a Morning*, *Steal Away* and *Rock of Ages*.



The Canadian Memorial at Hill 62.

The lads take a break !



A View of Ypres from the top of the hill



On Wednesday afternoon we spent the time back in the Market Square, Ypres enjoying the entertainment, having a drink, and chatting with the large numbers of Royal British Legion members who were there for the GP90 commemorations. Over 2,000 of them had just taken part in a large parade, and march to the Menin Gate for a special service. On the large stage erected in the square there was London Welsh Male Voice Choir, and we enjoyed listening to them perform, especially some of the songs we which we also sing.

In the evening, time to relax over a Belgian Beer or two.



Thursday morning and some time was spent sight seeing in the town before preparing for our concert in St George's Church



St George's Chapel, Ypres, Belgium 9 August

St. George's Church was built as a memorial to British and Commonwealth troops who lost their lives in the Great War. It is a "living" church, serving the needs of a local congregation and many thousands of pilgrims who have been visiting the battlefields of Flanders since war ended in 1918.



Programme

St George's Chapel, Ypres, Belgium 9 August

Music Director & Accompanist Richard Walshaw
Guest Performer Caroline Walshaw, Soprano

Llanfair Welsh hymn Williams/Lyte arr M Thomas

Amazing Grace 18thC English hymn arr W Stevens

African Prayer National Anthem of South Africa
Sontonga/Edwards arr E Jones

Skye Boat Song Scottish folk song Boulton arr W Stevens

I Dreamed a Dream Les Miserables, Schonberg/Kretzmer
arr G Arch

Bring Him Home Les Miserables Schonberg/Kretzmer
arr J Leavitt

Caroline Walshaw, Soprano *Silent Noon*

Deus Salutis Welsh hymn Jones/Davies arr M Thomas

Irish Blessing Irish folk song A Goddard

The Lord Is My Shepherd English psalm,
Arr W Stevens

American Trilogy traditional arr M Newbury

Our Concert was attended by over 100 people and was the culmination of three days of a memorable and often moving experience.