

An account of the 8th International Citroën C6 week-end at Ypres – 2018.

21 Participants of the International Citroën C6 meeting trickled in at the Mercure hotel in Roeselare in the course of the afternoon of 14 September, which was held under the motto “The Great War 1914 – 1918”.
And it was a pleasant reunion indeed.

During the briefing a Citroën C6 carrier bag was handed to all participants, containing brochures and route maps and descriptions, as well as two little bottles, one filled with water, one with wine !

A great suggestion, amply provided with information for a succesful week-end.

The first part of the programme was a visit to the Rumbeke castle, close by the hotel.
Due to road works however, we were forced to make a detour.



On arrival, all Citroëns were meticulously parked in front of the castle and coffees were served in the adjacent coachhouse.

The castle is well worth seeing, which also goes for the film featured in the attic, about King Albert I, who has tried many a time to reach peace and stop the killing, but all to no avail.

This film may change one's opinion on this issue.

Thereafter we took coffee and returned to the hotel to enjoy our 'Happy Hour', which was followed by a delicious diner and a pleasant lingering at the diner-table and the bar.

Saturday, 15 September 2018.

A busy day lay ahead and to that end a briefing was held at 10.30 hours.

Our goal was to drive to the German cemetery Langemark, through villages of Stade, Vijfwegen and Koekuit.

The road lead through a beautiful an peaceful countryside, the weather was fine and one could not help but thinking that it staggers belief that we were literally driving in the former frontlines. The very thought of war in this rural environment is inconceivable. This cemetery of Langemark taught us otherwise.

This burialground is well looked after but sober and slightly gloomy with its square entrance building.



The foremost part is called the Alter Friedhof (the Old Cemetery) where 10.000 boys lie, whereas only 6,300 of them could be identified.

In the middle of the yard is the Comradegrave, into which 25,000 soldiers are buried, all of them never identified. The area is surrounded by blocks of stone, onto which plates are mounted showing another 17,000 names.

The northern part – the Einbettungsfriedhof Nord / Embedding cemetery North – accounts for yet another 9,000 soldiers, primarily students of the 26th Reserve Corps (all identified!).



At the back one may find a sculpture by Emil Krieger showing German soldiers, mourning. Sadness and disbelief is the overall feeling when looking at the final results of battle and war.

The travel continued, and whilst still crossing former battlefields, we arrived at the British military cemetery 'Tyne Cot', some 2 kms from the centre of the village of Passendale.

This is the largest Commonwealth burialground in the world (measuring 21,8 sq.m) with white natural headstones and red roses on either side. This provides for quite a different atmosphere compared to Langemark. Equally sad and unbelievable that so many were sacrificed in this war.

We entered this semi-circular graveyard by going through the Tyne Cot Memorial, carrying the names of 33,783 names of those that could not be engraved in the Menin Gate arch and another 1,176 names of soldiers from New-Zealand in separate apsis.



Centrally located is the Cross of Sacrifice, placed on top of a bunker, a former German Commandpost. One will find the Stone of Remembrance in the rear, between the Memorial of the Missing and said Cross of Sacrifice. In these grounds 11,957 men have been buried, of which 8,369 could not be identified

Next to the entrance on the outside wall memorial plaques are mounted, stating the following in English, French and Dutch :

“This land on which this cemetery stands is the free gift of the Belgian people for the perpetual resting place of those of the allied armies who fell in the war of 1914 – 1918 and are honoured here”.



Many of us couldn't help but noticing the distinct difference between those two cemeteries.

Some think this attributable to the difference between the 'victorious' and the 'vanquished' and Tyne Cot seems to give the impression of 'triumph'.

Rather than being 'triumphant', its main difference may be the choice of colours : white natural stone as well as the use of flowers, whereas the German cemeteries make use of dark grey stones with hardly any flowers.

We all left Tyne Cot quiet and disconcerted and headed for the close by Zonnebeke domain where we were to visit the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917.



Although it proved to be very busy, coffee is quickly served at the restaurant next to the museum. Hereafter we all went to the museum that looks a bit like an English country house with vast acres of land.



In fact, the entire area used to be a major battlefield which has been rebuilt since. Inside however, the museum tells the story of the Battle of Passchendaele.

The Museum was reopened in 2011 and significant extensions were made, including a new underground museum.

The current route, which is more than 600 metres long, displays an extensive collection of objects and impressive photographs.

Impressive also are the meticulously replicated trenches and visitors can imagine themselves in the year 1917.



The entire tour takes up to two and a half hours easily. The photograph (above) shows only a very small part of the reconstructed trenches.



When walking underground, the dressing and communication stations as well as the sleeping arrangements and head-quarters can be seen.

It is hard not to get a feeling of oppression hearing the constant thunder of artillery guns, shell-bursts, whistling of bullets and the exploding mortar grenades.



All rooms are poky and dimly lit and never fail to give a choking impression.

Even more so when realising that thousands of young men were to spend most of their days in these stuffy rooms, as there was nothing left above ground.

Although carefully reconstructed, daily reality cannot be imitated: the hopelessness, the stench, the noise, the mud, the filth, the lice, the rats...

Lingering on in these rooms will no doubt give most visitors an eery feeling. Needless to say that this tour is quite a worth while experience.

After our visit to the museum, we set out for Ypres and we tried to drive straight into the centre by driving through the Menin Gate in a column, which we managed to do indeed.

We crossed the Grote Markt (Great Market square), went past the Cloth Hall and the impressive church, to arrive at the parking space. It took a short while to walk back to the Grote Markt and restaurant "L'atelier" where we could take a rest, have a drink and enjoyed our dinner.

Unfortunately there was not very much time left to properly visit the Cloth Hall, but it took only a glimpse to see how beautifully and thoroughly the main hall has been restored.

Even more so, considering below photograph, taken in 1917 when the town was all but obliterated by artillery fire. This picture is taken from left to the right, whereas the next shows the magnificent restored building of to-day



There was cheerful chatter during dinner and an animated discussion about all that had been experienced this day.

It is no exaggeration to say that all participants showed a profound interest in the history of the Great War.

After having finished our dinner, we left for the Menin Gate to witness the sounding of the 'Last Post'.



Following the Menin Gate Memorial opening in 1927, the citizens of Ypres wanted to express their gratitude towards those who had given their lives for Belgium's freedom. Hence every evening at 20:00 hours, buglers from the 'Last Post Association' close the road which passes under the memorial and sound the "Last Post".

This ceremony has been carried on uninterrupted since 2 July 1928, except for the occupation of the Germans in WWII (May 1940 ~ 6 September 1944) and usually in the presence of a large audience.

This event however brief, never fails to impress and was therefore a fitting close of our International C6 meeting.

In the meantime, night had fallen and we all strolled back to our limousines.



Some of us however managed to stroll the wrong way but we all found our way back to the hotel.

Obviously there was a lot to talk about after we arrived in the hotel and at the bar and so we did, well into the small hours !

Sunday, 16 September.

This next day we were all to travel back, starting with a drive to Edegem, within easy reach of Antwerp.

This seemed simple but turned out however not to be an easy job, since on this particular day Belgium had its car-free Sunday, of all days !

Inevitably, there were many deviations, road-blocks and consequently many delays.

Ribbon development seems an Belgian art and in the process it became clear that various road markings eventually lead to a blind alley...

Obviously, this made it quite impossible to arrive on time at our rendezvous Brasserie (Brewery) "Hof ter Linden" in Edegem.



Fortunately however, all Citroëns and their crew-members trickled in and had a snack and a glass of wine.

Eventually, we all went on our way home full of impressions of Word War I and the pleasant time we spent together.

This weekend was blessed with sunny weather and clearly ended all too soon.