

Belgium 2017

In 2017 we visited Belgium for the fifth time though this was our first visit to Ghent, where we stayed for the whole week at the NH Hotel, within walking distance of its main tourist sites. In **Ghent, Bruges** and **Brussels** we had an academic all-day meeting at each of three major hospitals where we learnt about current working between the university and the community at the first two, and the role of the military at the third (The Queen Astrid Military Hospital, QAMH), which is a major Burns Centre and dealt with the consequences of the 2016 terrorist bombing of Brussels' airport and metro system.

There was also competition at each hospital for the now well-established Registrar's Prize, each won by a female trainee. Our group of 40 included four who attended briefly and two Travelling Fellows on a Price Thomas Bursary who each presented two papers: Ernest Azzopardi, pre-FRCS currently in Swansea with a strong research interest, and post-Fellowship hepato-biliary surgeon Andrew Healey who was studying endoscopic ultra-sound at the St Raffaele Hospital in Milan: he talked about this and about HPB training. Ernest Azzopardi discussed novel approaches to infection, including a graphene based amylase detector which he had just patented and may permit the early detection of infection in wounds, burns especially.

Under President Terry Irwin, the visit was the first organised by Colonel Simon Mellor as TSS Secretary. Key individuals at each hospital were Dr Dirk Bernard (Medical Director of AZ Sint Lucas Hospital in Brugge), Professor Piet Pattyn at UZ Gent, and Colonel Guy Borgers, Director of the Queen Astrid Military Hospital where we also saw the very modern Burns Unit. All gave us superb meetings. Incidentally, AZ stands for Academic Hospital, UZ for University Hospital, and SZ for community hospital. Slightly confusing is the different spelling between nations of the cities we visited: Brussels (*Bruxelles, Brussel*), Ghent (*Gant, Gand* or ancient *Ghendt*) Bruges (*Brugge*) and Ypres (*Ieper, or 'Wipers'* to the Tommies of the First World War).

Our visit included guided tours of Ghent, Bruges and the battlefields of the Salient around Ypres where we attended the Last Post ceremony at Menin Gate, held daily for thousands of people, schoolchildren included, lest we forget our freedom has been preserved by the sacrifices of the First World War, a conflict which gave rise to our own organisation.

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