

Bourne and Bagshot Bands in Belgium

On 30th April members of the Bourne Concert Band of Woking and the Bagshot Concert Band set off for a weekend in Belgium. Like most of the group, while waiting for the coach in the early morning rain (the first pick up was at 06.30) I thought that things could only get better - and they did!! After an uneventful drive to Dover and a calm crossing to Calais, we arrived at our hotel near Antwerp at about 4pm Belgian time. There was just enough time to unpack, freshen up and have a quick drink before we set off for the centre of Antwerp.

We had a very pleasant meal in a restaurant in the harbour area of Antwerp. This had been pre-arranged by OneStage, the tour company based in Isleworth, which had organised our itinerary for us. Our party of 39 took over the restaurant and a good time was had by all. Opposite the restaurant was a very handy cab rank and we were transported back to our hotel for the very reasonable sum of €14 per cab. We then repaired to the bar to round off the day.

The following morning after breakfast we set off for Brussels. The group had a free day in Brussels and groups set off in various directions to sample all the delights on offer. Unfortunately the Museum of Musical Instruments was closed, but everybody enjoyed themselves and managed to sample some or all of the local beer/chocolate/waffles/cuisine.

But the real reason we were there was to entertain, so at 5.30 we met at Trinity Church, the Anglican cathedral in Brussels. The minister and his helpers made us very welcome and there was something surreal about a church that is flanked on either side by a nightclub!!!! The audience was small as a lot of people were away for the Mayday holiday, but they were very appreciative and really enjoyed the concert. We made full use of the church facilities, with our Trombone soloist playing from the pulpit!

After the concert we returned to the hotel and back to the bar. By this time we were all hungry and the bar staff rustled up ham and cheese rolls for 39, which were very well received. Although everyone was tired we were also reluctant to go to bed, but (fortunately, perhaps) the bar closed at 01.30.

It seemed like no time had passed and suddenly we were checking out of the hotel the following morning. The coach driver managed a logistical feat and packed the bags into the coach in reverse order of the drop-off points. Once the instruments were all loaded we set off for Bruges. The weather was very pleasant, which was fortunate as our concert that afternoon was outdoors! After some sightseeing/brewery trip time we all met up in the market square and set up the instruments for our informal concert. Although the sun was shining it was quite windy, so we were glad we had brought pegs to anchor the music. We played to an audience of well over 100 people – some English, some Belgians and some tourists from other European countries - who were very complimentary about our playing.

Then it was time to pack up the instruments, also in reverse order of the drop-off points and set off for Calais. Again, the ferry crossing was uneventful and before long we arrived at the first drop-off point. This was where I said good-bye to band members who seemed to have become old friends in a very short period of time.

Everyone said they had enjoyed themselves – and there was a mention of organising a trip to the USA. So watch this space !!!