24 September 2013

**Tour of Flanders and the Ardennes in Belgium and North Eastern France, to commemorate the Centenary of the Commencement of the First World War**

**Latest itinerary and arrangements**

**Results of recce in September 2013**

In preparation for the 2014 tour by vintage Rolls-Royces of the 20-Ghost Club, Lesley and I spent a week touring Southern Belgium (Flanders, Hainault, Brabant including Brussels, Namur, Liege and Luxembourg), travelling along the Meuse and Ourthe Rivers and through the Ardennes region, and then through North Eastern France from Sedan to Arras and the Somme region.

With 9 months still to go, 14 couples have lodged deposits, with a further 4 couples indicating they would like to join the tour. A group of not many more than 20 cars would be ideal but, to accommodate as many members as wish to join, we have in most cases reserved a maximum of 25 rooms at each of the hotels in which we will stay. Restaurants have been visited and reservations made. Guides have been organised. I am grateful to Francoise Scheepers and Philippe Maree of the Belgian Tourist Office in London for facilitating introductions and arrangements, and to David Colvin CMG, a former British Ambassador to Belgium for his advice and help.

While the tour is timed to commemorate the outbreak of war on the Western Front in 1914, 10 of the 13 days will be spent visiting the ancient cities in Belgium and France (Ypres, Tournai, Mons, Brussels, Liege, Huy, Marche-en-Famenne, Sedan) and the stunning countryside of the Ardennes and North Eastern France, there will also be the opportunities of seeing (for three days of guided tours, the battlefields around Ypres and the Sommes). However, for those not interested in the battlefields, there are some magnificent cathedrals, churches, museums and town halls to see, as well as the countryside. So this is not just a tour of battlefields, although you can see them if you wish.

While reccying the route, to choose pleasant journeys and confirm the quality of hotels, as well as to identify guides to the WW1 sites, we were struck by the fact that the area of Belgium and North Eastern France has been Europe’s battleground for at least the last three centuries. It is rich in history. Recent wars have comprised:

* War of the Spanish Succession – the Battles of Ramillies (1706), Oudenaarde (1708) and Malplaquet (1709), and the sieges of Ypres, Tournai and Mons – Duke of Marlborough
* Napoleonic Wars - Battle of Waterloo in 1815 – Duke of Wellington
* Franco-Prussian War of 1870 with battles through the Ardennes and at Sedan
* WW1 - Ypres Salient, Messines, Passchendaele, Mons, the Sommes, the Marne and Verdun
* WW2 - Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes

We were also fascinated to learn that Charlemagne was born in AD 742 at Herstal near Liege; that the Bishop of Norwich laid siege to Ypres in 1395; that Tournai was ruled by Henry VIII of England from 1513 to 1519; and that pommes frites were invented in Huy.

We have tried to find pleasant rural roads, which is not always possible in Western Belgium, although the main roads are not unattractive and the countryside in the east of the country is stunning. Sedan is particularly interesting, having been taken by the German Army in each of the last three wars, notwithstanding the Maginot Line and other fortifications. Throughout our journey, the hotels and food have been excellent. We were pleased to be invited by the Governor of Liege to be part of the beginning of the WW1 Commemoration in August and we will also be welcomed by the Mayors of Tournai and Mons, where we have been afforded special parking arrangements in the Grand Place of each city, to facilitate our sightseeing and our enjoyment of these ancient venues.

Some minor changes will be made to the itinerary over the next 10 months, but the hotels are fixed and the suggested routes will be more or less as described below.

**Monday 28 July**

Travel to Ypres (60 miles from Calais, taking a rural route and avoiding main roads)

17.30 – Briefing at Hotel Ariane by Flanders Battlefield Tours

Evening Dinner at Restaurant De Ecurie (sic) in Ypres (walking distance from hotel)

Night at Hotel Ariane

**Tuesday 29 July**

Optional day tour of WW1 Battlefields, Cloth Hall in Ypres and sights around Ypres, such as Talbot House (Toc-H), Poperinghe, Messines Ridge, Passchendaele, Tyne Cot, Essex Farm, Langemark German Cemetery, Bayernwald Trenches, Pilckem Ridge and the site of the Christmas truce

19.30 – Ceremony of the Last Post at the Menin Gate

Evening Dinner – own arrangements – plenty of informal restaurants in Ypres

Night at Hotel Ariane

**Wednesday 30 July**

Optional day tour of WW1 Battlefields and other sights listed above and not covered on Tuesday.

Evening Dinner at Pacific Eiland (sic) on a lake in Ypres (walking distance or taxi ride from hotel)

Night at Hotel Ariane

**Thursday 31 July**

Day’s visit to the medieval city of Tournai (80 miles round trip)

11.00 – Welcome by the Mayor and special parking in the Grand-Place

11.30 – Optional guided tour, after which there are plenty of restaurants in the Grand-Place for lunch

Evening Dinner – own arrangements back in Ypres

Night at Hotel Ariane

**Friday 1 August**

Drive from Ypres to Mons (65 miles along main roads)

11.00 – Welcome by the Mayor and special parking in the Grand-Place

11.30 – Optional guided tour, with private visit to the Hotel de Ville (the Town Hall), after which there are plenty of restaurants in the Grand-Place for lunch (Le Table de Boucher comes highly recommended)

14.00 – Leave Mons for St Symphorien

14.15 – Guided tour of St Symphorien and the site of the first and last British casualties of WW1

15.30 – Drive from Mons to Chaudfontaine, near Liege (110 miles, of which the last half is very attractive, along the River Meuse, then open countryside and then along the River Ourthe)

Evening Dinner at the Chateau des Thermes, in its own parkland, near Chaudfontaine

Night at the Chateau des Thermes

**Saturday 2 August**

Opportunity to enjoy a swim or the Spa at the Chateau (treatments need to be booked well in advance by phone or e-mail)

13.30 – Police escort to the centre of Liège

14.00 – Park in the Place Saint Lambert on the site of the old cathedral, outside Le Palais des Princes**-**Évêques, at the invitation of the Governor of Liège, for the beginning of the WW1 Commemoration. This event is being described as “The British Afternoon”.14.30 – Private guided tour of the Palais, the WW1 museum and a preview of the film to be shown to the Heads of State of 52 countries on Monday 4 August

Opportunity to visit other places of interest in Liège

Evening Dinner at the Chateau des Thermes, Chaudfontaine

Night at the Chateau des Thermes

**Sunday 3 August**

Drive from Chaudfontaine to Waterloo (65 miles along main roads)

11.30 – Optional guided tour of Waterloo. Restaurant to be suggested for lunch

Afternoon drive from Waterloo to Brussels (20 miles)

Evening Dinner at Hotel Amigo, in the centre of Brussels next to the Grand-Place

Night at Hotel Amigo

**Monday 4 August**

Opportunity to visit Brussels, including the Parc du Cinquantenaire, where there are two interesting museums (the Royal Army and Military History Museum and the AutoWorld Museum

18.00 (tbc) – Private tour of the Town Hall in the Grand-Place

Evening Dinner – own arrangements

Night at Hotel Amigo

**Tuesday 5 August**

Drive from Brussels to Marche-en-Famenne (100 miles, the second half of which is most attractive, along the River Meuse, through the ancient town of Huy and through the Ardennes)

Recommended lunch stop: Les Caves Gourmandes in Huy (need to book in advance)

Evening Dinner at Chateau d’Hassonville, in its own parkland, near Marche-en-Famenne

Night at Chateau d’Hassonville

**Wednesday 6 August**

Stunning drive (110 miles) through the Ardennes, from Marche-en-Fammene to Sedan

Evening Dinner at La Tour D’Auvergne Restaurant in the Hotel Le Chateau Fort, inside the walls of the fortified castle of Sedan (the largest in Europe)

Night at Hotel Le Chateau Fort

**Thursday 7 August**

**Either**: Day in and around Sedan, visiting the interesting Le Chateau Fort Museum, a museum on the Franco-Prussian War in Bazeilles, perhaps with a short drive to the battle sites of the Franco-Prussian War. Sedan was a disastrous defeat for the French in 1870; **Or**: Travel to Verdun (100 miles round trip) to visit the museum at Fleury, Fort Douaumont and Fort Vaux. Verdun is the scene of the one of the bloodiest and most intense battles of WW1.

Evening: Medieval Dinner in the Banqueting Hall of Le Chateau Fort

Night at Hotel Le Chateau Fort

**Friday 8 August**

Drive from Sedan to Gosnay (140 miles, the majority of which is through the open countryside of rural Northern Eastern France)

Evening Dinner at the Bistro Restaurant of La Chartreuse (a former abbey, with a stunning walled market garden) south of Bethune

Night at La Chartreuse

**Saturday 9 August**

Optional day tour of the Somme battlefields (approximately 100 miles), visiting Vimy Ridge (taken by the Canadians in 1917), Albert (and its museum), Thiepval and the Lochnagar Crater

Evening: Final dinner of our tour at the grand restaurant (Robert II) of La Chartreuse

Night at La Chartreuse

**Sunday 10 August**

Tour ends after breakfast (55 miles to Calais)

**Registration for joining the tour**

If you haven’t already signed up, please complete the attached form. The cost of the tour will be £4,000 per couple.

**Tour of Flanders and the Ardennes in Belgium and North Eastern France, to commemorate the Centenary of the Commencement of the First World War**

Double or twin-bedded rooms have been booked, with dinners on most nights at the chosen hotel. The price of the 13 night tour, including guides, route books etc will be £4,000 per couple and is based on a couple sharing a room. Participants will be free each day to lunch en route, except in a few instances (eg where there is an all-day guided tour or event). Dinner will be provided each night, except for two evenings in Ypres and one in Brussels. Wine will be included with dinner on a few evenings.

The tour has already attracted a lot of interest. Because of this and the need to pay deposits for hotels, particularly in Belgium, at this busy time due to the Centenary Commemorative events, we are asking members who wish to participate in the tour to complete the following booking form and to pay a deposit on making your booking of £2,000 per couple.

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To: Sir John Stuttard, Layton House, 23 Layton Lane, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 8EY

Names………………………………………………………………………………………………

Address……………………………………………………………………………………………..

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E-mail…………………………..……………… Postcode……………..Phone…………..………

Please include us and our car in the WW1 – Commemorative Tour of the Battlefields, the Ardennes and Champagne in July/August 2014.

I enclose a cheque for the deposit of £2,000 made out to “20-Ghost Club Limited” to secure my place on this tour.

Car………………………..Chassis…………………..Reg…………………….Colour……………..

Body style………………………..Coachbuilder…………………….Year…….……………..

*As a participant in the 20-Ghost Club Commemorative Tour of the WW1 Battlefields, the Ardennes and North Eastern France and in consideration of the right and privilege to enter and participate in this tour and intending to be legally bound, I agree to release the 20-Ghost Club and all committee members and its representatives from any and all liability and injuries, damage or loss or consequential loss arising from my entry and participation in the event*

*Signed…………………………………………………………………..Date………………*

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