

# A visit to MONTREUIL

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THE SUN shone as we left Dover, promising fine weather but the NW wind blew across the French coast and it turned out to be a cloudy, cold and windy day for our visit to Montreuil. However, our coach was warm and full with forty-eight members and friends and we did not have to emerge until two hours after reaching Calais.

We followed the interesting, winding coast road to Boulogne, enjoying Leo Wright's commentary. We hugged the sand dunes thrown up by the Germans from as far away as Dunkerque as their protective Atlantic Wall dotted with forts and bunkers, some of which are now museums. Passing Bleriot-Plage where the aviator took off on his flight to Dover in 1905 we came to Sangatte where the Channel Tunnel enters France to emerge inland at Coquelles – the terminal with its imaginative exhibition centre. The word 'gat' apparently comes from a word meaning a narrow channel and marks the beginning of the Straits. As has Dover the village is receiving a face-lift to fit its future rôle.

We passed the proud obelisk to the Dover Patrol similar to the one at St. Margaret's Bay and enjoyed the views from Blanc Nez and Gris Nez – 'le site des Caps' – with its rolling countryside and picturesque villages. One of these – Audinghen – housed the Gestapo and was flattened by the RAF who later gave the village church its very modern metal spire. Coming into Boulogne the Colonne de la Grande Armée recalled Napoleon's abortive attempt to invade England. His statue portrays him with his *back* to England, facing his next objective – Austria.



Montreuil sur Mer still retains 'on sea' in its name although la Mer has long since receded ten miles to Le Touquet, leaving only the river Canche far below this picturesque hill town so reminiscent of Rye. The town originated around a seventh century monastery founded by the missionary St. Saulve on the site of a Roman-Gallic fort. After destruction by the Normans in the late ninth century ramparts were built round this monastery from which the town derives its name. It had a flourishing trade in wool and woollen goods. In 988 Hugh Capet, King of France annexed the town and built a royal castle on the site of the present Citadel and right up to the thirteenth century it was the only royal port. After the town was sacked by the Spanish troops of Charles V in the sixteenth century it was rebuilt, the ramparts reinforced and bastions added. A citadel replaced the royal castle.

In the present century it became the headquarters of Sir Douglas Haig in World War I. His statue dominates the largest square – La Place de General de Gaulle, where our coach parked just as the market stalls were packing up. Armed with town map, leaflets on places of interest and a list of eating places, thoughtfully provided by Joan Liggett, we were left to our own devices with a reminder to meet at the citadel at 2.30. First thoughts were for sustenance and we dispersed to the place of our choice. Rapid service is not a French custom and unfortunately little time was left for exploring Montreuil's labyrinth of winding streets and alleys. Two of the oldest of these were Clape en Haut and Clape en Bas. They owe their names to two sewers at the top and bottom of the cobbled streets – clape meaning valve (of the water pipe). Flanked by tumbledown cottages with scarlet geraniums in their window boxes some are used as workshops and one as a crêperie. Also cobbled and very precipitous is the Cavée St. Firmin leading down to the Porte de Boulogne once a main thoroughfare traversed by kings, later a haunt of artists like Barbizon and used by Victor Hugo as a setting for the chapter in *Les Misérables* where Jean Valjean becomes Mayor.



Port de Boulogne, Montreuil.

The main building is the Abbey church of St. Saulve. Word spread that it was closed for a big wedding and many enjoyed watching the guests arrive. One or two of us slipped in hoping to blend with the congregation and enjoyed the last few minutes of the service with the organ bursting into a resounding finale echoing through the beautiful vaulted nave. Because of wartime destruction the records go no further back than 1467 and the chancel was never rebuilt but there is a finely carved pulpit and a notable Treasury. Also worth visiting was the tiny chapelle de l'Hotel-Dieu – attached to the Town Hospital with elaborate wood panelling and ornate altar.

Those of us who could not face the icy wind or had neither time nor energy to walk the three kilometre circuit of the ramparts were able to appreciate the view from these and from the citadel where we gathered as a group. No sign of the custodian here – maybe his weekend begins midday Fridays – but at each tower a tape related its purpose and history in French and English. Entry to one of the remaining Castle towers was up a winding, unlit, unroped stairway to a room hung with some of the faded coats of arms and a roll of honour of the Knights who lost their lives only a few miles away at Agincourt – seventysix names and six from the same family, long since forgotten and only remembered now by this moving Memento Mori. Tramping through long grass we looked at other ruined towers with far reaching views of the peaceful countryside – most of the towers are overgrown with ivy, so different from our own tidied-up ruins.

As we descended to rejoin the coach passing Marshal Ney's house on the way, drizzle set in. It had been stated that if time allowed we might stop at another historic site. Leo Wright described three possibilities – Agincourt (Azincourt in French), Crecy and the Field of Cloth of Gold. Unfortunately we had to forego this pleasure in favour of the material claims of the Hypermarket. Perhaps another time these historic sites could have priority?

Our driver thoughtfully drove us to the Ferry through the brightly lit shopping streets of Calais – a good end to a most interesting tour for which we are much indebted to Joan Liggett for her organisation and care and to Leo Wright for his helpful information.

## A Quiz for Old Dovorians — Compiled by May Bradley (113)

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|---|--|-----|---|
| 1 | Where was the "Queen's Hall" and for what was it used?     | 7   | Where was Minerva College?                            |
| 2 | Where was Messrs Barwick's first business premises?        | 7a  | What is it used for now?                              |
| 3 | Where was "The Round House"?                               | 8   | Where was the Gordon Boys' Home?                      |
| 4 | Where was the Y.M.C.A. Hut?                                | 9   | Where was the Dover Girls' Orphanage?                 |
| 5 | Where is the plaque that records the site of the Y.M.C.A.? | 10  | What was a 'Fue de Joie'?                             |
| 6 | Where was the Jewish Synagogue?                            | 10a | Where in Dover did it take place?                     |
|   |  | 10b | When?   |
|   |  | 11  | Name the 5 public houses that were in Townwall Street |

*Answers on page 131*