

COXA's Third Foreign excursion to Europe [pre-Britex]; this time to visit our classmates in Normandy.

On **Thursday 5th May 2016**, a “mixed bag” of Clapham Xaverians, wives, partners and friends crossed the Channel for a fourday excursion to Normandy to enjoy a typical Xaverian vacation and more importantly to pay our respects to “fallen” comrades from World War II. **“The Intrepid Band of Brothers [and sisters] that WERE Normandy 2016”**

David & Lynn Leathem, Sharon Manwell, Richard & Rene, Lawrence & Sarah, Mick O’Flynn & Ashya, Micky Burke & Bernie, Vic & Marilyn, John [Colin’s friend], Colin Garvey, Tony Griffin, Brendan & Anna Williams, Mick & Dot Power, Eddie O’Brien, Aiden Coletta, Harry Mellor, Bena & Michael McLoughlin [our leaders & tour guides] and Scotty - 27 Tourists Not forgetting Paul [I’m just putting this into reverse] – our driver.

Day 1 – May 5th [Purley 6.45am] – meet and greet.... Lots of coffees...and renewing of old acquaintances.....We reached Eurotunnel by 8am; time for a spot of breakfast and we were off to the continent.... A leisurely drive down to Hornfleur for lunch – an absolutely beautiful French port, with its centuries-old buildings, cobbled streets and horse-drawn carriages and quaint fish restaurant, a real treat! Problem was, it was the feast of the Assumption and the streets were packed as it was a public holiday... We tourists eventually squeezed into eating houses and, after a few glasses of plonk, the crowds seemed to fade! At this point – a recount – our numbers were down by one... Dave [our illustrious Chairman] had not travelled down with us but had been in Paris the day before [on business] and travelled down to join up with us at lunch – there’s precision for you mind you it was [pre Britex!].



We were pulling out of Hornfleur when we noticed Vic Roszkowski and Marilyn sauntering down the quayside, almost two short that time... we really had to get better at the “head-count” malarkey.

We travelled through the afternoon crossing Brittany and arriving at Ranville in Normandy where we stopped to pay our respects to Clapham Old Boy Peter Higginson who had died on 27th June 1944 in Normandy. Peter was at the College from 1932 to 1938 and was at school at the same time as his brother Harold. He was a Lieutenant in the King’s Shropshire Light Infantry and attached to the Commandos... he was only 22 years old.



Peter's brother Harold survived WW2 and went onto University and become COXA cricket Captain... fate dealt them differing hands. Both brothers were in Walsingham House and lived in Narbourne Road SW4 – opposite the “Fish Pond” at Clapham Common, a five minute walk to school [houses now selling at £1.8 million – according to Zoopla]. I also downloaded a photo from Narbourne Road... these were [and are] brilliant 4/5 bedroom family homes.

We found Peter's grave at Ranville Cemetery and prior to that Mick and Bena McLoughlin filled in the detail of how important the “actions” were around Ranville, the third largest Military Cemetery in Normandy, it's often called the “airbourne cemetery” as most of the troops buried there were dropped by air.



Mick McLoughlin points out some interesting detail in Ranville Churchyard



The band of Tourists – posing for a photo at Peter Higginson's grave – possibly his first visitors in 70 years



Peter Higginson's grave at Ranville. We have attempted to piece together his life from the "odd" College record and from the information we could find on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Register.

Peter was a young man who joined Clapham College in the early 1930s with no idea of where his education would take him, when he left in 1938, he'd have not planned to enlist, be promoted as an Officer and be attached to the Commandos. His special skills were obviously quickly recognised and he parachuted as part of a special unit into Normandy. Where he was killed in action at the tender age of 22.

We didn't really know Peter but it was a privilege to visit his grave, contemplate on him as an individual amongst those many thousands of graves at Ranville and remember good times in Clapham with him and to offer a prayer for his soul. Rest in Peace Peter



Day 2 - Friday 6th May

Up early

Day 3 - Saturday 7th May

Breakfast with friends

Day 4 – Last Day - Sunday 8th May

When's the next one [in 2017] to Michael.....?