

A wonderful concert touched with sadness!

We had a reasonably restful day today with sightseeing at the Peronne War Memorial taking up most of the morning. The drive was only a short one and the village of Peronne is particularly pretty.

The boys were incredibly interested in the artifacts held at the museum and marvelled at the detail of the displays which portrayed daily life in the trenches as well as the military equipment. The museum is a very reverent and sombre place - well worth a visit to help cement an understanding of the ultimate pointlessness of war. The boys' behaviour reflected the nature of the outing and they spent a considerable amount of time viewing the displays and reading the information.

Before we left our hotel, Mark and David Evans were picked up by Chris Reason and the channel 7 film crew and driven out to the Crucifix Corner war cemetery for a short addition to the ANZAC story which will air this Saturday evening. Mark and his father went out and found the grave of a great-great Uncle who died in the recapture of Villers-Bretonneux.

We had lunch at a charming restaurant in the main square - pizzas [gourmet] for all under the blue skies and colourful umbrellas. Surrounded by pots of flowers and other merchandise the boys chatted away the afternoon while feasting on delicious pizzas and lemonade. Afterwards we walked down the street to a little patisserie where the boys purchased all sorts of treats really enjoying both the food and the experience of selecting, ordering and purchasing their wares in French. Surprisingly many of them chose to purchase a baguette and happily munched away on their bread while we walked back to the coach.

Dinner again at the hotel [profiteroles for desert were a big hit], and off to our concert at Villers-Bretonneux. The performance hall was much larger than that in Dernancourt and the audience included the Australian Ambassador to France, the Mayor of Villers-Bretonneux, the Secretary of the Department of Veteran's Affairs and the Head of the Australian War Graves Commission. They all loved the boys' singing and were impressed by their deportment.

The French crowd fully engaged in the performance and again the boys received a standing ovation. They particularly enjoyed the percussion numbers and Heather Barman's speeches in French. The boys' were relaxed and sang from their hearts.

While the day was good fun and a great success from a musical point of view, it was also touched with sadness as this was the last time the boys will perform their full repertoire together. From now on our performances will consist of the National Anthems of Australia, France and New Zealand and hymns which will round out the ceremonies. The boys were a touch quiet on the way home as they reflected on the enormity of what they have achieved and the wonderful opportunity they have had.

A very busy day tomorrow with five ceremonies scattered all over the Somme.