

ANZAC Day in London

Our final day on tour and our contribution to the ANZAC Day commemorations had arrived and with it our 3.30 am start to a very long day. The boys were amazingly good at getting up and ready at such an early hour and having packed all luggage the night before we made excellent time in getting on our coach and off to Hyde Park for 4 am.

Upon arrival we were taken to our position midway up the hill in front of the Australian Memorial and once sound checks had been completed we got to watch the very large crowd begin to gather along with the other military and student groups who were to take part.

The ceremony itself was simple but moving and our boys played an integral role singing the National Anthems Australia and New Zealand and the hymn 'Abide with Me'. There were many young Australians in the crowd and a number of old boys who were delighted we were there.

Upon conclusion of the ceremony we were back on the coach and off to our hotel so that we could check out of our rooms [funnily hotel reception weren't keen on us doing that at 3.30 am] and then off to the Abbey School who had invited us for breakfast. The Abbey School is the school attached to Westminster Abbey and has only 30 students with seven to a class. Breakfast was lovely and afterwards we went into Westminster Abbey for a rehearsal.

Standing up in the Organ Loft while we rehearsed was a surreal experience. The building is breathtaking in its scale and decoration and with the centuries old grave markers and the knowledge of all that has occurred within, it was a special moment for us all. Adrian Keenan had been given special permission to play the organ and our boys had been invited to perform for 30 minutes prior to the service proper - an invitation never before extended in our knowledge to a school choral group.

Very quickly it was time for us to race a couple of blocks through the streets of London to the cenotaph for the ANZAC Day march and remembrance service. We made it to our position by the skin of our teeth literally crossing the last street as the band struck up their first notes. With our High Commission escort clearing the path ahead and a police escort moving us across the roads we felt quite the V.I.P.s.

The march was a wonderful experience with all the pomp and grandeur only the British can muster. The boys sang the National Anthems accompanied by the military band and watching Miss Barman and the Band Leader eyeing each other out of the corners of their eyes to ensure a synchronised start was one of the minor highlights of the day.

We got to march down the street at the end and the boys enjoyed the applause of those assembled.

As soon as we reached the end of the road it was a mad dash off again across the roads back to Westminster Abbey for the ANZAC Day service in the presence of the Duke of Kent. Straight up into the Organ/Choir loft for our 30 minute pre-service performance. The boys sounded sublime and although very tired by this stage sang wonderfully.

Tyson Sadlow, son of Trish who works in our Business Office had graciously agreed to photograph our time at Westminster Abbey and he was fantastic. He had a great way with the boys, was accommodating to Miss Barman's needs and afterwards took us out for some formal and fun shots. We cannot thank him enough for this as professional photography in London would have seriously stretched our budget and for him to give up shooting Paris Hilton to spend time with us really impressed the boys.

The Westminster Service was again a real experience for the boys and their singing rang out clear and strong. While the length of the programme had a number of them struggling to keep awake, they all enjoyed the more ceremonious and military aspects. For many a real 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. They were positioned right in the front and had an uninterrupted view of everyone and everything.

We received many compliments on the boys singing and deportment throughout the day and it was a very fitting way for us to conclude this successful tour.

While we, as I write this in Bangkok International Airport, are all looking forward to being home, many boys are lamenting that it is all over and none of us can believe how quickly the time has passed.

We board our last flight shortly with a real sense of achievement and satisfaction in a job well done.