

Belgian News

ANTWERP A CITY OF BEER, ART, DIAMONDS AND CHOCOLATES

By Georges Bernard
My journey to Australia in 1961 was because of conflict in Africa, my father never took on his position in the Congo or the subsequent one offered in South Africa.

My childhood experience in Belgium was full of depressive reminders of war, the first war and the second war.

Both my father and grandfather had been soldiers, wounded and bitter about their loss. They had suffered like many in Belgium and my childhood was a constant journey through battlefields, graveyards, soldier's reunions, visits to former prisoners

ble, goldleaf and carved stone. It is a very functional building with shops and eateries and makes international visitors welcome. A great introduction to this beautiful city.

I found a city of magnificent collections of art; Rubens House was one such experience. Wandering around the house for several hours I came to realize that the visions of Rubens have lasted for hundreds of years and are still impacting on Antwerp, after all the tourists are still spending to see him.

The greatness of art displayed in the Antwerp's Lieve Vrouwekathedraal (cathedral) is

lection of establishments, where you can spend many hours drinking the finest beers in Europe and an array of excellent foods. The chocolate shops of Antwerpen are world famous; you can buy chocolates in all sorts of shapes and tastes, even naughty ones as well.

One of the highlights of the city includes the Diamond Museum,



located near the Central Station. The museum showcased the Flemish hearts, these were a mass produced curiosity and affordable jewels loaded with symbolism. There are also displays of fine jewellery, too many styles and samples to mention. The museum is well worthy of a visit and it is very much a tour into the 500 year history of the Antwerp diamond industry. Recently the museum displayed a collection of Napoleon's jewellery, but the collection held at the museum is considerable and world famous. Of course we must mention that Antwerp is the big exporter of diamonds 8 out of 10 rough diamonds are handled via Antwerp, a visit into the diamond quarter is exciting and educational. There are many retail shops where you can purchase your dreams, or your partner's dreams!

We also visited the Plantin-Moretus museum, since my family are printers, we could not miss out on this one. The museum is the home of the Plantin-Moretus family and has a printing works, 1640 library, 1622 courtyard garden, bookshop and living quarters. The collection of books and manuscripts, paintings and technical equipment is massive and world standard.

The visit to the printshop was a reminder of my apprenticeship days, when I used to set type "from the case", just like in 1600s. Well I am glad those tough days are gone.

Every day was concluded with a café visit and sampling those



of war and concentration camps, learning about weapons and resistance, and of course viewing war movies. Even visiting my grandparents brought reminders of war since I had to walk to my family's printshop in Antwerp's Jewish quarter and observing the empty houses.

Returning to Antwerp this year after 32 years has left me with more pleasant memories.

Firstly the grand entrance to this city of art is the Central Station, a majestic building recently renovated and modernized. You can catch the train to Paris or Bruxelles, it is just so easy and trouble free. The architecture is late 1800s, bluestone and mar-

of world status. As a boy I used to sit looking at these paintings during mass, but now I understand the significance of the collection. My Catholic upbringing is no longer part of me but the art is.

The Grote Markt is a great town square dominated by the Flemish Renaissance town hall completed in 1566, the Brabo Fountain and the surrounding guild houses make the square one of the most scenic in Europe. During my visit the Markt was occupied by constant festive activities and concerts, a truly lifting spirit.

There are many chocolate shops and cafes around the Cathedral and the Markt, such a huge col-

wonderful Belgian beers, with mussels and frieten.

My childhood misery was quickly eroded, and a new spirit of Flemish nationalism arose after three Duvels!

Of course there is more to Antwerpen, but we have just mentioned a few interesting sites. Antwerp is worthy of a visit, not often mentioned in travel

chocolates and diamonds.

The Antwerp Central Railway station was renovated and is a massive structure with great display of craftsmanship.

Belgian Club Victoria

The Belgian Club committee wishes the readers of the *Dutch Courier* a Happy and Merry Xmas and a great New Year. For more



information, it is one of the most interesting cities of Europe. Too many Australian tourists just pass through Belgium and fail to see this interesting country with its unique culture. There are however many visitors from the Netherlands who enjoy the beer,

information on the club contact Georges on 9710 1309 or check the Belgian Club website on info@belgianclubvictoria.org.au, you can also contact Belgians on the facebook sites Belgians in Melbourne or Belgians in Australia.