



At the Farewell Dinner of the 2012 Register Autumn tour Robert Crowson, RV8 owner and proprietor of Mackenzies Yorkshire Smokehouse, suggested that the V8 Register should go into Mainland Europe for the 2013 event. Bob and Carolyn Owen, yet again, volunteered to help with the organization. Initially Robert suggested a Loire tour but it soon became apparent that such an event would demand much more time, expense and driving distance than members are accustomed to. By the end of January Robert and Bob had prepared a more modest tour proposal based on the Hermitage Hotel in Montreuil sur Mer in northern France.



Montreuil is an attractive small hilltop town surrounded by ramparts and possessing pleasant squares and plenty of brasseries and restaurants. Just 60km south of Calais, the drive from the ports is straightforward using either the autoroute or the more scenic coastal road.

The hotel, a historic former convent and hospital, has been restored in the last decade and converted into a comfortable hotel. The management have made a point of welcoming classic car clubs and provides secure parking, attractive group discounts and demonstrate a willingness to do all they can to make tours like ours a success. Club members showed plenty of interest and so on Friday 27th September, 26 cars arrived in Montreuil. The majority, of course, V8s in various forms but as usually happens, we also had a couple of MG Cs, a TF and a Healey 3000. The Healey's owner said he had started off in his V8 but had mechanical problems close to home and had been forced to bring one of his other cars, lucky man to have such a choice!



All those who had booked arrived safely, with one exception. Gordon and Jennifer Hesketh-Jones in their much travelled GT were delayed en-route from Spain and did not arrive until Saturday morning. The hotel gave us a welcoming aperitif followed by a very good evening meal, all provided in a comfortable reserved dining room. Saturday was a day to relax and get to know the lovely old town, walk the ramparts and select a restaurant for an evening meal. The weather was bright and sunny and the outside cafes in the squares did a good trade. As the day wore on the number of young people increased and we found out that on the next day there would be a big sporting event. The competition, one of a series across France, involved a 10km run around the outside of the ramparts through what looked like an assault course and required participants to get very wet and muddy! All competitors had to register on Saturday and since there were 5,300 of them arriving in a town of 2,300 people things became very lively indeed. Still we all managed find a place to eat and the later night activities showed that UK does not have a monopoly on noisy Saturday nights. Our own hotel bar was enlivened by a very popular impromptu piano recital by our Welsh musician Tudur Jones.



Sunday morning was dry and clear and the square outside the hotel was filled with serious athletes, fun runners and teams in colourful fancy dress outfits. Much of the town was closed off with barriers and for a moment it looked as if our scenic tour to Agincourt wouldn't get as far as the exit gate. One or two of us, however, adopted the French approach to such a problem and simply removed the barriers at the gate. We then all left the town without further drama, even though some of the Gendarmes looked rather puzzled! The drive using a well-marked tulip route book took us along quiet roads through small villages and along rural valleys. Most people went to the nearby restaurant before visiting the battlefield museum, which perhaps shows our nation's preference between food and history. The museum is modern, well laid out and with good audio visual displays. It tells the story of King Henry's dramatic victory over a numerically vastly superior French army. The story is told in a remarkably even handed way but does not hide the terrible losses suffered by the French. We left in a rather sombre mood. By the time we arrived back at Montreuil most of the sporting competitors had left and there were just a few exhausted and mud spattered figures making their way back to their buses.

The weather on Monday was even better than on previous days and by lunchtime many of us needed sun cream as the temperature rose to the mid-twenties. The route was very different from Sunday's, going through open countryside with lots of quiet well surfaced roads with sweeping bends encouraging a bit of enthusiastic driving. Our destination was the Atlantic coast, which despite the lovely weather was almost deserted. Many of us took lunch at the very attractive seaside town of St Valery sur Somme which has many waterside restaurants and some lovely walks. One of our party had reason to regret the lunchtime 'Moules et Frites' as by evening the ever popular Rob Lewis went down with food poisoning. He and Denny missed the farewell dinner, but at least they didn't have to listen to the speeches, mine included. Mike Taylor thanked the organizers, particularly Robert and Stella Crowson for their generous sponsorship and also Bob and Carolyn Owen for their route trialing and document preparation. The organizers thanked everyone for coming along and thanked the hotel and their caterers for the excellent food and wine. Members were invited to suggest where the tour might go in 2014 and everyone retired well fed and watered.

Monday was dispersal day, with quite a few extending their continental stay and moving to other parts of France or further afield. Rob said he was well enough to drive his RV8 and thanked Chris Yates who had offered to ferry the car back to UK. Everyone seemed to enjoy the tour and certainly we all thought the hotel gave us an excellent deal and backed it up with friendly and efficient service. Quiet roads, sunshine and good company: a recipe for a successful long weekend.

Report contributed by Al Barnett