

# S.T.A.R.S. INTERNATIONAL

## TOUR REPORT REVISED GRANDE BELGIUM '07

**Report on S.T.A.R.S. visit of 25<sup>th</sup> to 29th October  
Report and sightings by Ian Minshall.**

I had not intended to go on this tour but as the South & West France tour was cancelled I decided to give it a go. I last visited Belgium in October 2005 on the STARS Grande Belgium Tour and came away needing just three class 77's and two ES's .

As usual I made my way to Dover to meet up with Adrian and the party, they arrived a few minutes down but we were soon through the immigration formalities only to be told at the check-in that the ferry was running an hour late; nothing to be done but to wait! Once aboard the ferry we were entertained by large numbers of students, many in fancy dress who appeared to be on some sort of snow boarding/skiing holiday, by the time we reached Calais many were the worse for drink!.

The first call on the itinerary was Tournai; here the platforms were full of early morning commuter trains, upon leaving we were only 30 minutes down. However, Ath station was difficult to locate and by the time we left we had lost a further 30 minutes. A brief call into Geraardsbergen picked up more units, on leaving it was decided to go to Mechelen Works and visit the Schaarbeek depots later in the day.

This proved to be a good move as we arrived at Mechelen in good time to meet our host and guide, Patrick. An excellent visit ensued with the works very busy with the CityRail Emu refurbishment programme. Nine examples were noted in various stages of completion. There are still a number of postal units on site so one had to be careful when recording the numbers! As is usual we were provided with an excellent lunch in the works canteen at a very modest cost. A quick visit to the museum followed and after saying our good-byes it was off to Schaarbeek.

On arrival at Schaarbeek permission was given to visit the various locations, of interest was my first sighting of a M6 Driving trailer (65039) and steam loco 64.169. The SNCB workshop area is now secured and access could not be gained but most of the locos could be identified through the windows. It was whilst driving along the access road in the depot area that our driver Mike Cooke failed to notice a "sleeping policeman" and unfortunately Graham Clark who was sitting in the rear of the coach received a severe jolt that caused him much distress.

We finally reached our hotel in Brussels some two hours later than planned at the end of an eventful day. Most of the party spent the early evening watching the rush hour at Brussels Midi until tiredness, cold and hunger took its toll.

Saturday dawned and we were looking forward to the day ahead when Graham decided that he was in too much pain to continue with the tour and decided to return to the UK by Eurostar. We all hope that he is now ok and look forward to meeting up with him again in the future.

Our depleted party then set off for Forest depot, on arrival, Adrian went to seek permission but was politely refused, the depot area is a secure site and as such no unauthorised

access is allowed. There was very little on the depot and the stored sleeping cars have gone. Undeterred it was on to Leuven, permission was given for us to note the locos in the yard and depot, unfortunately the Museum was secured and there was no one around to let us in. Hasselt was the next visit of the day, again permission was granted and a leisurely visit took place, the carriage sidings were quickly cleared by yours truly and to my delight ES513 was located, just ES511 to go!

The visit over it was off to the big one Antwerpen Noord! On arrival at the depot workshop no one could be found, so it was a walk along the front of the workshop to identify the locos inside, Adrian had already identified those locos at the back of the workshop during his search for someone in authority. Of particular interest were three black-painted electric locos E186-123/4/5. Permission was given to visit the stabling point, I copped two of the three class 77's that I needed, just 7848 to go!

On our way to our hotel in Antwerpen, we espied loco DE6307 stabled in the Churchill Dock area; some skilful driving by Mike Cooke took us alongside the loco that was ideally stabled for the photographers amongst us.

Following arrival at our hotel it was soon time for a quick visit to Berchem before dinner. Very little freight traffic was seen during our stay of about an hour but as Bob Flowers and I were about to cross the platform for the return train to Antwerpen Central my last Belgian loco 7848 appeared at the head of a freight train together with 7852. It is amazing how these things happen! My Chinese meal that night tasted better than ever.

Sunday was a day I was looking forward to as the first visit of the day was to the preservation site at Basrode. Adrian was having difficulty in locating the site and on one of his circuits of the Belgian countryside we came across coach 28116 at Leireken We eventually found the preservation site, they have a couple of class 84 and 85 shunters as well as number of railcars. A volunteer arrived on site and opened up the workshops that held three steam locos.

After an interesting visit of some 45 minutes or so it was off to Dendermonde followed by Aalst and its store of 145xx Couchettes (all sold to Italian firm Visali) and 174xx Brakes. Before arriving at Merelbeke depot we called at Melle yard to pick up the stored class 51's. Adrian obtained permission for us to visit the depot area but as usual we could not enter the workshops, but again we had a list of its contents and could identify everything from the front windows. Success here for Bob Flowers who cleared his class 41 railcars.

It was now on to Dampoort yard, a site that I have not visited, surprisingly, we were given permission to access the yard and identify the many locos. The site was also home to two K1 coaches used as mess rooms, only 28913 could be identified. The final visit of the day was to Gent St Pieters SP that being successfully accomplished. Mike Cooke gave us a grand tour of Gent before delivering us to our hotel, we must have driven on all the cobbled streets in the city, and Adrian could be heard muttering about the costs of replacement exhaust brackets!

That evening was wet and cold so after clearing up what we could from the platform ends restaurants beckoned and a pleasant meal was had noting the trams as they passed.

Monday was the final day of the tour and our first visit of the day was to the preservation site at Maldegem, I have been here previously, but since that visit they have acquired loco 9151. There was no one on site, the workshops were secured, and so we were left to identify what we could.

Brugge followed, a visit to the depot confirmed that no locos are stabled there, the only occupants of the old steam shed being permanent way wagons. The station area stabling

points were soon cleared before making our way to Zeebrugge. Enroute, at Zwankendamme we come across four stabled class 23 locos that were ideally placed for photographing. The locos at Zeebrugge were identified before heading to Oostende; visits were made to the depot, station and carriage sidings.

The visit to R.P.I (Wagon LITS) facility was very disappointing, Adrian had commented that he had not received any response to emails and faxes and upon arriving at the site entrance it became obvious why this had been so. The site was deserted and the coaches that remained were wrecks apart from TPO 80405 (Ex UK), why that is there is anybody's guess! Interrogation of a member of staff at the Oostende carriage works by Adrian confirmed that R.P.I. (French company) had closed the site and removed the useful assets to Paris.

It only now remained to call at Depanne before boarding our ferry and home.

In conclusion, I enjoyed the tour, the format made a refreshing change from previous Belgian tours. The party, although modest in number bonded well, visits to Basrode and Dampoort Yard were firsts for me. Whilst I cleared my Belgian locos, I still need much coaching stock and with orders for more M6 coaches and driving trailers there is still plenty to look for on future tours and of course ES511!!!

My thanks to Gary, Adrian and Mike the officers on the tour for their efforts, to the fellow members for their comradeship and my good friend Bob Flowers for his company.

### **SIGHTINGS.**

Locations shown in *italics* were visited in free time and items listed were not seen by all.

#### **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

Tournai: 472/74/75, 834, 2101, 2308, 2721.  
Ath: 218/45/69, 306/85, 778, 2114/20, 5511/14.  
Geraardsbergen: 245, 424, 609/34/39/63, 921/42/47, 4115.  
Mechelen Works: 167/92 200/42/64/66, 302/08/18/21/26/33/36/46/60/61/67, 453/64  
506/08/10, 604/78, 812/25, 932/39/41/77/79/81/82/83/89, 994/98/99,  
2913, 4109/31, Postals 964/66/71/73/74/75, Passing 2745/46.  
Schaarbeek: 206/09/16/37/61, 309/71/94, 612/26/58/61/86/90, 702/03/31/60,  
763/77, 821/23/29, 901/04/40/51/52/85, 1189, 1341/52, 1608,  
2104/06/13/20/28/34/39/41/42/44/51, 2213, 2303/08/46/65/79, 2382,  
2505, 2610, 2704/32/59/67, 4402, 5215/16, 5301/06/13/16, 5318,  
5501/11/12, 6077, 6244/49/82, 6331, 7336/54/60/73/76/80,  
7387/90/91/93/95, 7816, 8011/32/35/37/49/52/55/64/65, 8201/02,  
8204/06/07/08/09/11/13/17/19/22/33/41/43/69/72, CFL1603,  
CCB215/16, ES208, ES401, ES507, Steam 29.013, 64.169, Passing  
517, 740, 1192, 1355.  
*Brussels Midi: 188/91/96, 201/06/10/33/37/84, 301/03/04/10/11/13/14/20/23/24*  
*(In free time) 325/32/38/39/49/51/55/56/57/59/64/65/68/69/71/74/81/92/93/96,*  
*401/03/09/17/19/20/21/22/24/27/28/29/31/33/34/36/43/76, 502/03*  
*509/11/12/19/20/24/25/26/29/30/32/33/34/35/37/39/46/49/52/53/54*  
*/58/59/60/64/65/67/68, 601/02/07/17/20/24/25/37/39/41/57/63/64*  
*/86/93/95, 702/32/34/41/46/47/48/52/55/59/64/72/76/79/80, 804*  
*/06/10/15/18/24/26/27/35/36/37/39/41, 973/93/96, 1182/84/89,*  
*1347/48/51/52/53/55/56, 1605, 2016, 2103/06/17/20/21/22/24/33*  
*/36/37/39/41/43/45/48/53/57, 2213, 2332/79, 2704/07/08/16/25/32*  
*/33/36/41/44/48/57, CFL3005, Thalys 4302/22/32/43, 4537, ICE 4653.*

#### **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

Forest Depot: (view) 8210, Thalys 4322.

Leuven Depot: 269, 648, 748/53/56, 5407, 6227, 6312/13/17, 7402, 7846/60, ES407, ES512, Passing 350/56/68/73/77, 525/34/39/50/51/55/56, 757, 1341, 2356, ICE 4654.  
 Leuven Museum (view) : Steam 64.045, Units 220902, 4905.  
 Hasselt Infra: 6254, 8433/54/55.  
 Hasselt Depot: 328/59/89, 402/36, 554/61/69, 2131, 2722/42, 4117/33/34/35, 4136/37/39/45/46/48/53/55, 5523/26, 7357/70/71/75/79, 7854, 9111/16/19/24/34, Passing 358, 552/56, 2373, 7761/75, DE6304.  
 Hasselt CS: 205, 303/15/27/42, 401/03/04, 511/12/20/45, 685, 2134/38, 2707/17/41.  
 Hasselt Yard: ES513.  
 Antwerpen Noord: 1207/08, 1304/20/29, 2005/09/15, 2301/13/16/40, 2501/02/04/06/08/09/12, 2551/52/53/57/58, 2602/06/07/11/18/32, 5101/46/64/66, 5404, 5910, 6204/21/36/46/50/53/56/60/64/68/77/81/83/94/96/97/99, 6315/30, 7209, 7401/04/06/07/08/09, 7702/03/04/05/06/08/14/19/20/23/28/29/31/32/74/76/77/81/82/83/7785/90, 7818/34/35/36/38/40/41/42/43/47/49/50/51/55/56/58/63, 7864/65/66/70, 8250/56/59/60/62/64/65/67/70/74, 8441, E186123/124/125, SNCF 36013/18  
 Churchill Dock: DE6307.  
*Berchem:* 307/39/54/70/78/85, 402, 811, 934/43, 1181/89, 1304/20, 2123/24, (In free time) 2141, 2738/44, 4101/30/40/43/47, 4535 6261/63, 7848/52, SNCF 36018.

### **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

SDP Basrode: 8463/67, 8509/16, Railcar 4302, ES106, ES 205, ES409.  
 Dendermonde: 304, 426/33, 602, 2107/18, 2302/48, 2755.  
 Aalst: 228, 529, 641/89/91/93, 2112, 2354, 4194.  
 Melle Yard: 5106/08/09/18/26, 6252/84, Passing 314.  
 Merelbeke Depot: 270, 343/97, 439 603/11/16/27/31/53, 739/73, 1208, 1301/06/12/19/22/32/40/42/45/54, 2310/29/31/55, 2514, 2619, 2726, 4121/22/26/27/28/58/67/68/70/71/71/75/76/80/86/88/89/91/96, 6201/02/10/22, 7311/53/56/67/68, 7791/94/99, 7801/08/10/12/18/20/22/23, 9109/23/32/38, Postal 962/70/72, Passing 394, 409/35.  
 Dampoort: 2309/12/25/39/45/64, 7715/16/17/18/71/80, 7802/04/21, Passing 447/65, 2127, 2738/52.  
 Gent St Pieters SP: 183/186/91, 208/14/25/26/33/34/39, 435, 532, 2503, 4111/68/97, 7811.  
*Gent St Pieters:* 330/57/67, 529/31/33/41/58, 1350/51, 2738, 4181/87/90.

### **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

Maldegem: 4403/05, 4620, 8040, 9151, 73.410, ES303.  
 Brugge SP: 543, 614, 721, 2009, 6243, Passing 183/86, 470/89, 565.  
 Brugge Station: 564, 2113/55, 2303/27/35/44/79/80/81, 6219.  
 Zwankendamme: 2338/59/63/78.  
 Zeebrugge: 7797 7806/09/13/33.  
 Blankenberg: 555.  
 Oostende CS: 2758, 7793, 7802.  
 Oostende Depot: 182/85, 235, 452/61/70/77/89, 562, 1360, 1601/03, 2113/55, 7807/14  
 Oostende Station: 541, 1355/59, 2121, 2713.  
 De Panne: 314.  
 Dunkerque: EWS 66236.