



Belgian Events - December 2016

Newsletter of the Embassy of Belgium in London

Dear readers,

This final issue of 2016 contains news on topics varying from ministerial visits to World War Remembrance ceremonies. As usual, the newsletter focuses on the latest events at the Ambassador's Residence. You may also enjoy reading the usual 'faits divers' section under 'Did you know?' and an interview with a Belgian academic in Oxford. The cultural calendar lists upcoming Belgian events in the UK.

Do get in touch if you have any news or suggestions you would like to share with us via belgianevents.uk@diplobel.fed.be. New subscribers can provide their details via the [Embassy's website](#).

Ministerial Visits

Several Belgian Ministers visited the UK during the past few weeks. On 22 November, **Premier Michel** met with British Prime Minister May in Downing Street. The two leaders discussed their common response to the terrorist threat and the Brexit process. A week later, **Minister Jambon** was in London for a visit to the Interior Ministry and the Metropolitan Police during which organised crime in Europe was the main topic on the agenda. Last week **Defence Minister Vandepuut** participated in the anti-ISIS coalition.



War Remembrance

Edith Cavell

In October, the Belgian Embassy joined annual commemorative wreath laying ceremonies at the **Edith Cavell's** statue off London's **Trafalgar Square** and at **Norwich Cathedral** in memory of the British nurse who was executed during World War One. Edith Cavell worked in German-occupied Belgium during the First World War. She was tried for treason and executed on 12 October 1915 by the Germans for helping Allied troops escape.



Minister-Counsellor Jan Bayart at the grave of Edith Cavell in Norwich

Torches of Remembrance

In November, the yearly **Torch of Remembrance** service at **Westminster Abbey** was attended by, among others, the UK Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Fallon and Ambassador Trouveroy.

In November 1945 the Dean of Westminster was asked to re-ignite the Belgian Torch of Remembrance at the **Colonne du Congrès in Brussels**, which had been extinguished by the Nazis during the occupation. Torches were lit at the grave of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey and transported to Brussels to rekindle the permanent flame at the Belgian Unknown Warrior's grave. Each year since then a short ceremony has been held in the Abbey for the lighting of the torch which is now called the British Torch of Remembrance.

The idea of a torch to act as a symbol of remembrance for fallen comrades in the First World War originated in Belgium in 1926. Inspired by an idea of The Belgian National Veterans Federation, representatives bearing torches from the nine provinces of Belgium assembled annually on 11th November at the national memorial to the Unknown Warrior in Brussels. There, having paid homage, the torches would be extinguished for that year. The popularity of this symbolic act spread rapidly throughout Belgium so that several hundred local torches were borne in the main provincial towns and their spirit was handed over to the provincial torch.

In November 1965, a British Torch first made the pilgrimage journey to Brussels via Dover and Ostend. Since then, the British Torch has become the only one that represents the Anglo-Belgian community.



Colonne du Congres in Brussels

Belgian Boys at Northwich Cemetery

During the Great War of 1914-1918, some 200 **Belgian refugees** were housed in the county of Cheshire (NW England). Sadly, 2 boys did not make it back home. Frans Buysens, believed to be aged ten, died of peritonitis in February 1915 and was buried in **Northwich cemetery**. In June that year, Henri Joseph Burghys, also aged 10, died during an operation at the Victoria Infirmary. He was buried in the same grave. More than a century after their death, a headstone for the young refugees featuring details of their short lives was unveiled on 28 November in Northwich Cemetery. The blessing was attended by John Meeus, Honorary Consul for Belgium.



Westminster war memorial

Earlier this month, Ambassador Trouveroy attended the unveiling of a new War memorial outside Westminster City Hall dedicated to members of staff from the original Westminster City Council

who fell in the Great War 1914-1918. The ceremony was conducted by the Lord Mayor of Westminster in the presence of the Dean of Westminster.

Did you know...?

Famous strip cartoonist dies

Last month, Belgium's famous strip cartoonist **Marc Sleen** (born Marcel Neels) died at the age of 93. Sleen was the author of numerous popular strip cartoon series including *Nero*, *De Lustige Kapoentjes*, *Piet Fluwijn en Bolleke* and *Doris Dobbel*.

Sleen joined the daily *De Standaard* after the war, becoming its chief draughtsman. He produced courtroom sketches, portraits and even maps. His cartoons were also published by the daily *Het Volk*. *Nero* first sees the light of day in 1947. Absurd situations and recognisable characters result in a brand of quintessentially Flemish humour that is widely appreciated. *Nero* is acknowledged as Sleen's greatest creation: a carefree, good humoured antihero who became Flanders' most popular strip creation.



Nero

In 2009, Sleen was given a museum of his own in the premises where the *Nero* newspaper strip was born. The same street also housed the Brussels Comics Art Museum. In Belgium, comics have grown into an institution and form part of daily life. [Read more](#)

Dutch - Belgian border changes

Belgium and The Netherlands have signed a treaty to redraw their border, with each country handing over a few hectares of uninhabited land on the Meuse river to their neighbour. The land swap near Maastricht was signed last month by the Belgian and Dutch foreign ministers, during a three-day state visit of King Philippe and Queen Mathilde to the Dutch King and Queen. Belgian foreign minister Didier Reynders said: "This could be the first time that a border has been redrawn without any war, any crisis or any conflict."



The **Dutch-Belgian border** follows the old course of the **Meuse** river. But when the river's path was straightened in 1961 to ease navigation, this created three small parcels of land on either side of the new river that belonged to the wrong country. This led to jurisdictional problems. A Belgian parcel of land on the Dutch side of the river was often used for illegal parties and drug dealing, and Belgian police could only access the area by boat without obtaining permission to cross Dutch territory. If the land swap is ratified by both countries' parliaments next year, it will take effect on 1 January 2018. A three-hectare peninsula switches from Dutch to Belgian ownership. Belgium will hand 13 hectares of land to the Netherlands implying that Belgium is becoming 10 hectares smaller.

Brussels honours Jo Cox

An **area of Brussels** will be named after the late MP **Jo Cox** in a **tribute** to the politician who was killed in her West Yorkshire constituency in June.

The 41-year-old is included on a list of 26 "illustrious women" whose names will be used for squares, streets and buildings around the city. The City of Brussels said it had been "overwhelmed" by the Labour MP's death and wanted to "pay tribute" to the mother-of-two after she had lived and worked in Brussels for several years.

First Alderman Alain Courtois from the City of Brussels said the project was about "highlighting the great ladies who have marked our history".



Belgian to lead UK Dementia Institute

Belgian neuroscientist Bart De Strooper of the Life Sciences Research Institute VIB and the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), has been appointed as head of the new UK Dementia Research Institute (UK DRI) at University College London. Read more [here](#).



Belgian beers UNESCO heritage

Belgian beer culture in all of its aspects has been approved by **Unesco** for inclusion on the [list of world intangible heritage](#). “Belgium has won the world cup for beer culture,” said Flemish culture minister Sven Gatz, formerly director of the Belgian Brewers federation. “This is a really fine accolade for everyone in this country who is working with beer.”

Unesco, the United Nations educational, social and cultural organisation, keep a register of invaluable and protected cultural heritage – not buildings or artefacts, but rituals and traditions such as polyphonic singing in southern Portugal, Momoeria New Year celebrations in the Kozani region of Greece and the making of kimchi in South Korea.

Unesco’s latest entry cites 1,500 types of beers produced in Belgium, as well as the growth of craft beer and beer gastronomy and the increasing use of sustainable practices in the industry. “Making and appreciating beer is part of the living heritage of a range of communities throughout Belgium. It plays a role in daily life, as well as festive occasions.”

Europe's best whiskey is ... Belgian

‘The Belgian Owl Single Malt 64 Months’ has once again been hailed as the best whiskey in Europe in the new edition of the influential ‘Jim Murray’s Whisky Bible’. [Read more](#)



Newsletter 'Focus on Belgium'

Did you know that you can receive the '**Focus on Belgium**' newsletter in your mailbox? It summarises what has happened in Belgium during the past month, puts a spotlight on a famous Belgian and tells you an interesting fact about our country. The November issue is now available.

[Focus on Belgium](#) is the website of the FPS Foreign Affairs aimed at shedding light on the various assets of our country: creativity, diversity, gastronomy, culture, upcoming talents, evolutions and perspectives. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the newsletter.



Events at the Ambassador's Residence

The Ambassador hosted again various business, cultural and academic events at his Residence in Belgrave Square. Some of these events are listed below.

Katoen Natie - 1/11

A cocktail was organised for [Katoen Natie](#)'s major base metals clients and prospects during the LME (London Metal Exchange) Week at the Ambassador's Residence. The Belgian world leading logistics service and engineering provider established in 35 countries and based in Antwerp remains a strategic hub for base metals storage.

Belgian Financial and Business Club - 10/11

Frederic Hufkens, CEO of A.S. Adventure, addressed an assembly of high level Belgian professionals active in the economic and financial fields in the UK. The talk was followed by a walking dinner which allowed networking by the Belgian professionals.



Students Maritime Sciences - 15/11

Students in Maritime Sciences from the **universities** of **Ghent** and **Antwerp** were welcomed by the Ambassador and received presentations on economic diplomacy, the education competence of Flanders House and diplomacy.

Fundraiser Combat Stress - 17/11

A fundraising event for the charity [Combat Stress](#) took place at the Ambassador's Residence. Combat Stress is the UK's leading veterans' mental health charity which treats a range of mental health conditions including PTSD, depression and anxiety.



Belgian CEO investor forum - 22/11

A forum was hosted with the aim of bringing together Belgian Biotech and MedTech companies with UK-based investors and exploring potential for technical and business collaboration with OBN member companies. Ten early stage Belgian companies previously selected by [FlandersBio](#) and [BioWin](#) were invited to participate in the pitch.

Royal Academy - Luc Tuymans - 29/11

A buffet dinner was offered to the senior curator of the **Royal Academy** (Adrian Locke), Luc Tuymans, Herwig Todts and Patrons of the RA to highlight the current [James Ensor exhibition](#) and the Embassy's involvement.

APZI/VOKA West Flanders - 9/12

During a lunch meeting of representatives of the [Association Port of Zeebrugge](#), the [Port Authority of Zeebrugge](#), the Flanders Chamber of Commerce and Industry and private sector representatives from the UK and Zeebrugge the [importance](#) of ensuring existing trade relations and flow of goods were discussed.

Interview with a Belgian in the UK

*Professor **Sophie Marnette** was born in Liège and raised in Brussels. She studied 'Philologie Romane' at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and went on to do a PhD in French Linguistics at the University of California (Berkeley). Recently, Professor Marnette became Head of the French Department at the University of Oxford (officially entitled "Chair of the Sub-Faculty of French" in Oxford Speech) a position no other Belgian has ever held before.*



What made you decide to pursue a career in the French language in an English-speaking world?

Some of the greatest specialists in my field of Medieval French happened to work at the University of California (Berkeley), so I set out to do a PhD under their supervision. From the very first moment, I have thoroughly enjoyed the academic freedom and meritocratic atmosphere I found

in American and British universities. The study of the French Language takes a very prestigious place among Anglo-Saxon academia, so I never felt that my field of studies limited me, on the contrary.

Your academic career has enabled you to live in various parts of the world. How did this experience help shape you as a person with, I guess, a multicultural mind-set?

I left Belgium for Berkeley when I was 21 and lived in a wonderfully diverse place called the *International House*, with 600 students from all over the world. This is where I met Ted, my husband, who is American and Dutch, and where I made other great friends too. Everybody who lived there was passionate about their studies, curious about the world, constantly learning about other people's views and cultures. It is this openness for dialogue – which also takes a certain amount of patience and tolerant understanding - that I have relished all along my journey, studying, working, and doing research at international universities such as UC Berkeley, UCLA, St Andrews, Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, MIT or Princeton. This is also how we are raising our 13-year old son Garry.

Can you tell our readers what your recent appointment at Oxford University entails?

Being Head of the Oxford Sub-Faculty of French is both stimulating and challenging. We are the biggest French Department in the UK, with more than 30 permanent members of staff covering a very broad range of Francophone language, literatures and culture across the centuries, and with an intake of about 200 undergraduate and 35 postgraduate students a year. So it takes a lot of energy to offer the best possible environment to a thriving community of scholars and students. This means both making sure that our great tradition of teaching and research continues despite budgetary constraints while also constantly opening up to new perspectives on the world in terms of interdisciplinary and theoretical frameworks. We are also very keen to develop our impact on the wider society and to further our commitment to recruiting students from the broadest range of backgrounds. To make all this financially possible, fundraising is becoming crucial to ensure the continuity of our university posts, to provide institutional scholarships and bursaries for students approaching graduate study in a climate of diminishing public funding support and to fund innovative research initiatives. So the job entails an interesting mix of administrative tasks, blue sky thinking and community building and advocacy.

There have been reports of a considerable drop in EU students' applications to UK universities following the referendum in June. Is this trend also noticeable at Oxford University?

Oxford's EU picture remains more or less steady on last year. We have seen a rise of about 1% in applications from EU students and 4% overall. The University has made clear statements to reassure prospective students from around the world that they are as warmly welcome as ever and we are "determined to remain a thriving, cosmopolitan community of scholars and students." The fees will also remain unchanged for EU students starting next year.

In what ways do you think Brexit might affect you as a lecturer at Oxford University and more generally as an EU citizen living in the UK?

While I feel that my University is very supportive, there is no doubt that there will be a substantial financial drop for academic research since UK scholars will lose access to EU research funding. EU Students' applications will undoubtedly be impacted after the UK officially exits the EU as they will then be charged higher fees. Unfortunately, successful exchange programmes like Erasmus might be severely impacted if not disappear. As an EU citizen, I have serious administrative worries: the UK is already imposing severe administrative and financial burdens on foreigners who are not EU citizens and it is very likely that this will be extended to EU citizens (expensive and lengthy applications for visas or UK resident cards, etc.) and there are also uncertainties about pensions. More than that, I am very anxious about how the atmosphere is changing around us both in the press and day to day life.

Are you in contact with other Belgians in the UK?

Not really. My friends and acquaintances come from all over the world, including but not limited to Britain and Belgium.

Do you often travel to Belgium?

Yes my husband, my son and I visit my Belgian family two or three times a year: the Eurostar makes it very easy. I also love travelling to Belgium for academic events.

What are your long term plans? Can you envisage yourself returning to and working in Belgium?

Not for the moment. It is absolutely wonderful to work for one of the top universities in the world and I have very much enjoyed my life in the US and in the UK so far. Belgium will always be close to my heart but my professional and family life is now anchored in the wider world. That said, I am sure it will be very nice to spend more time in Belgium after my retirement.

Events Calendar

In our [listing of upcoming events](#) you will find details on exhibitions, lectures, concerts and sports activities with a Belgian touch. The list is continuously updated.



Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy 2017 to all our readers!



Christmas in Brugge

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