

Belgium, October 2007

My head had hardly hit the pillow when the ringing alarm signalled the start of our last trip of the year, raising the exiled Brummie from his slumbers, he had spent the night (and I use the term night, loosely) at the Blyth hotel, we were ready to meet the mini-bus when it arrived spot on 2am on Friday 5th October. Metal Mickey had chosen the 2am start in order to catch the 07:40 sailing from Dover to Calais (you don't want to get stuck in traffic and miss it you know!), I took the wheel, as is usual the drive took 3 hours and 40 minutes and we caught the 06:20 sailing, which left at 06:15. P&O provided us with a full English start to the day on what was a very smooth and very empty sailing. French customs had been struck down with the usual case of apathy and I was sound asleep before the Paris turn off. The drive to Antwerp Luchtbal passed all too quickly and we were on the platform by 11:07. I had packed for just about every weather, but decided against shorts and sun cream, I needed both. Despite being low in the sky, which caused problems with photos, the sun was very warm and this made our 2 hour stay very pleasant. A constant stream of freight and light engine movements keeping us entertained. Standback was still on the hunt for his last class 2600 electric, 2620, but this was one of the few that did not pass through. Electrics 1312+1310 stormed down the bank towards the docks, 2601, 2602 & 2603 all passed within minutes of each other and MRCE class 66, 653-05 in black livery, managed to dodge the cameras. As the sun swung round in the sky, making photos almost impossible we moved to Antwerp Noorderdokken, where in a little under an hour 15 numbers entered our books including SNCF 36006, with a freight into the docks and 6297+6315 'top & tail' on an engineers working. Having carefully avoided the attention of the Belgium railway police we moved on to Leuven.

We did the stabling point first, it was a good job we did as the pair of locos actually on it, 2334+2339 moved off as we got there, leaving it totally empty. Electric 2702 passed with a passenger working then our attempts to gain entry into the station failed due to it being a building site. Cutting our losses we headed for Liers in order to photo IR4017 the 17:27 to Gouvy, which should be class 1500 hauled. We were not disappointed as 1504 was turned out for the service and as a bonus, if you can call it that, we visited the depot and identified 5 EMU's. We called at Ans, there is an 'infra' yard here that occasionally produces locomotives, it did not today with just ES515 being stabled here. Both 1342 and 1354 passed with long distance workings before we headed into Liege and our hotel. In a break from the normal Ibis, we stayed in the Mercure at Liege central, it was not easy to park here, the hotel director gave up his reserved parking space for us and Standback had to rub Vaseline on the van sides to get it in the space. After a quick de-louse we met in the bar and decided to let the hotel restaurant feed us. It was a good choice, Frogs Legs in garlic followed by traditional Belgium Meatballs in apple sauce. A full belly led to a walk, the station was out of the question, it being a little over a mile away, so a nearby bar was selected. I don't know what it was called, but it should have been 'the whip and handcuffs.' I would like to tell you what it was like inside but I do not want to get this site closed down, so enough to say we suffered a complete dignity failure and were forced to consume lashings of beer to forget the sights!

Antwerp Luchtbal (11:10 – 13:15) 803/14/23/33/34/35/38/43 1182/85/91 1310/12 2005/15/18
2320/23/29/38/45/58/62/70/76/80 2551/53 2601/02/03/10/19/26/30 6315 7785/88
7834/35/44/46/56/58/65/66 Thalys 4302 4534 SNCF 36013/020 Private Owner M653-05 **Antwerp
Noorderdokken (13:30 – 14:20)** 166 930/37/43 2338/50/62/70 2601/30 6242/61/97 6315 7857 SNCF
36006 **Leuven SP (15:35)** 2334/39 with 2702 passing **Liers (17:05 – 17:30)** 317/45 401/82/90 1504
Ans (17:50) 670 1342/54

Day two always starts too early, by 07:00 we were all eating our fill of the bacon & eggs provided. As we were staying two nights here there was no need to check out and so by 07:30 we were on our way to view the main locomotive works at Salzinnes. The whole place is closed over the weekend, but it's easy to view from the road and this produced 20 numbers, including 5504 which I have been after for a while. Once we were happy here we moved on to the nearby depot at Ronet, an ask got us a visit and a further 29 Numbers were our reward, these included CFL 3018 and a very photographic 6257. From here we made our way to Chatellet, the yard here had haunted us for a while, this time we found it. Along with it's usual shunting locos we found 7 stored class 22XX electrics and noticed a

small depot, we had to examine it so again an ask got us a visit. We have never been here before, it contained mainly EMU's but the small smattering of locos included 2752, one of the class recently fitted with auto couplers. Once we had finished here we moved on to familiar territory and the yard at Marchenelle. There was engineering work going on here and that may be reflected in the fact that only 7 locos were actually stabled here, our numbers being 'pumped up' by the passing trains. Charleroi Infra Yard came next; all the usual shunters were missing with just 6217 and a very worn 6262 being in residence. Round the corner is Charleroi Sud depot. We had to negotiate our way through the squawk box to gain entry; the depot engineer was very nice, escorting us round the entire depot. Among the 49 numbers at home were 2620 and 7346 both of which were the last in their respective class for Standback ('I bet he bought the beer' I here you all say – don't hold your breath waiting to find out!).

Excitement over we headed out to Marchinne-au-pont station for the line of withdrawn shunters that have been here on our last two visits, they had gone! We drove on to Monceau, again we were allowed a visit and the hatful of class 77XX diesels were supplemented with the usual barrel full of withdrawn locomotives around the old depot. After removing the collected undergrowth, we did the 30 min drive to Mons. An unscheduled detour gave us a false start before we finally found the police station and hence the entry into the yard. A nice gaggle of locomotives were stabled here today 12 in all, including 4 class 62XX diesels, 6218, 6218, 6316 & 6323 all of which were totally unphotographical! Sandwiched between the canal and the station at Ath were two further shunters, 7374 & 7381 and both these allowed themselves to be photographed. The long drive to Schaarbeek came next, we negotiated with the squawk box, failed, so walked it in. The depot foreman was happy to allow our visit and after first doing the yard we entered the depot to be met by some members of the preservation group PFT, one in particular, spoke excellent English and told us all about the locomotive they were working on, 5183, explaining that they were going to return it to it's 1970's livery but unfortunately were unable to fit a working boiler. We found a further 55 numbers scattered around this depot and we were then told we had visited at the right time because SNCB was on the verge of closing the depot as it is no longer needed. Excitement over we headed back towards Liege and a well earned beer. However the thought of having to buy this beer was too much for Standback who proceeded to put in a 'spirited' (3 points and £60) drive back to Liege arriving with enough light left to visit the depot at Kinkempois. Obtaining permission was no problem and a steady walk round found 81 numbers at home, 10 of which were class 55XX diesels, all looking worn out, with the decision by SNCB to stop overhauling this class these may be some of the last photos we get. Surprisingly NS diesels 6509 & 6512 were 'on shed' and still here were 'silver bullet' electric locomotives 1802 & 1804, long withdrawn. I thought these would have gone to the great razor blade factory in the sky long ago. While we were in the area we visited Angleur; there is a small 'infra' depot here and this evening it held 7 further numbers, three of which were class 62XX diesels.

It was dark now so we headed back to our hotel, a quick scrub down and we convened in the bar, where to everyone's amazement STANDBACK BOUGHT THE BEER! (This is the first recorded time since October 3rd 1997). We walked away from the whip and handcuff this time and found an excellent restaurant to dine in. Standback joined me with the garlic snails but declined the pigs kidneys in Madera sauce. The exiled Brummie and Metal Mickey playing the safe card with chicken and steak respectively. We returned to the hotel in time to see France beat New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup, before heading off to bed and some well earned sleep.

Salzannes Works [view] (08:35) 5502/04/24/25/41 6214/24/35/69/88 6307/11 7369/72 7868 8068/69 8218/32/36 **Ronet Depot (09:10)** 259 674 747 807/34 1320/21 2301/03/14/43/45/47/57/58/67 2603 2722/60 6215/16/43 7766 8221/23 ES505 CFL 3018 SNCF 36010 **Chatelet Yard (10:10)** 2206/30/33/36/40/43/47 2749 7362/63/65 with SNCF 36011 passing **Chatelet Depot (10:40)** 241 458 647/58 710/36/64/73/76/77 802/37 2153 2306 2730/36/52 7337/77 **Marchenelle Yard (11:25)** 2316 2614/15/30/33 2701/57 with 243 596 732 775 2148 2748 and 7384 passing **Charleroi 'Infra' Depot (11:40)** 6217/62 **Charleroi Sud Depot (11:45)** 680 702/18/41/72 820/24/26/36 978 2221/23/24/49 2338 2601/04/05/08/12/18/20/23/25/29 4107/10/13/14/20 6231/75 6314/28 7343/46/49/61/76/78/83/85/89 7738/42 7831 9115/28/44 **Marchanne-au-point station (12:30)** 444 610 2141 2739/44/45 all passing **Monceau (12:45)** 2347 5123/31/47/48/50 6213/40/66/67/86 6306 7301/03/05/06/10/13/14/16/17/18/20/21/22/23, 7324/25/26/27/28/30/31/32/33/35/39/44/45/47/48/59/66/82/86 7739/46/49/73/87 7825/26/27/28/30/32 8439/43 **Mons (14:05)** 236 531/42/47 697 780 2106 2706/07/13/21/23 6218 6313/18/23 7358/88 **Ath (14:45)** 189 201/29 383/99 682 752 7347/81 **Schaarbeek Depot (15:50)** 564 695 2213 2753 5183

5212/15/17 5303/06/13 5403 5506/11/12 5947 6249/50/56/82 7338/54/60/73/80/87/90/91/93/94 7724
8011/32/35/37/64/65 8201/02/04/06/07/08/09/10/11/17/19/22/33/41/43/69/72 ES208 401 507 CFL
1603 with 1183 & 5216 passing **Kinkempois Depot (18:15)** 106/54 219/60 313/48 427 668 771
1502/03 1802/04 2139 2250 2351 2606/11/21/28/31 2703/09/12/29/40/51 4104 5142
5503/05/10/13/21/26/28/31/35/36 6041 6211/27/55 6313 7350/51
7711/12/34/35/43/51/52/53/55/58/60/61/63/64/65 8212/15/16/24/26/27/28/31/34, 8237/39/40/45/55
9146/56 NS 6509/12 SNCF 36008 **Angleur (19:05)** 6241/74 6329 8252 8444/47/48

Our final day saw us at the breakfast table by 07:30. Standback celebrated yesterday by indulging in two plates of bacon, egg (to runny for my liking), sausage and fried potato; it's a good job he's on a diet. A painless checkout saw us away at 08:00. The exiled Brummie lead the escape committee from Colditz car park and Clara showed us the way to Hasselt. We had to wake the depot engineer up to obtain permission to visit but he gave it and walk round produced 33 numbers (and a visit from the contract security firm). Hasselt still has a few class 91XX diesel shunters allocated to it and 5, 9111, 9116, 9119, 9124 & 9134 found there way into our cameras. After saying thanks we headed to Antwerp Noord. Unable to gain entry into the depot we made our way to the holding sidings, we got permission to visit with no problems and despite looking empty it held 90 locomotives. We filled many a gap in our photo list with both new and old locomotives, 2510 being particularly welcomed. We could not leave without one last try at Noord Depot, so Metal Mickey circumnavigated the building to try and find an open door, then returned with the depot engineer who let us in by the main entrance and gave us a full guided tour (just like Immingham then!). Inside were 41 locomotives which meant that the depot was quite full, a shinny 6312 contrasted nicely with a shabby 6254 and three hire locomotives, E186123/124/125 were undergoing acceptance tests. We should see these running on Belgium rails soon. Once the visit was over the depot engineer showed us out, shaking each one of us by the hand as we left.

The drive to Merelbeek took less time than we expected. Metal Mickey in his best Fronglish negotiated the squawk box and the depot engineer was happy to allow a full visit which netted us a further 61 numbers. We all photographed electric locomotive 1608 in gold livery, except the exiled Brummie whose film had run out, and diesel 7800 was also popular, the low autumn sun making the front ends gleam. We said our goodbyes and headed off for Brugge, where a quick stop at the station revealed 4 class 62XX diesels stabled in the 'infra' yard, more than we have ever seen here before. As is usual on these trips we next filled the mini-bus with cheep French beer before letting P&O return us to England. I took the wheel, we blinded the pilots attempting to land at Stanstead and made Blyth just before midnight, our last trip of 2007 over.

As always it's thanks to Pete for the planning and Malc for the European driving, we will be at it again next year, so watch this space.

Hasselt Depot (08:50) 369/94/95 401/14/39/40 2742 4117/30/32/33/35/36/38/39/45/48, 4151/55
7357/70/71/75/79 7848 8439/54 9111/16/19/24/34 **Antwerp Noord Holding Sidings (10:15)** 1308/29
2009/13 2317/37/46/55/70 2501/02/04/06/08/09/10/12/13 2552/53 2632 5167 5404
6204/21/40/44/53/60/68/77/83/94/96/99 6331 7209 7401/04/05/06/08/09
7702/03/04/09/14/19/22/25/26/27/28/84/85/86/88/89
7816/17/18/35/36/38/42/44/46/49/50/51/52/55/56/58/59/61/65/66/69 8259/66/67/68/74 8441 SNCF
36006/020/021 **Antwerp Noord Depot 11:05)** 1201/12 2017/25 2312/28/32/33/62/71/73/74 2557
2602/09/19 6254 6312 7403 7705/06/07/08/59/74/75/76, 7790 7815/37/47/61 8250/56/57/60/62/79
E186123/124/125 **Merelbeek Depot (12:30)** 178 415/19/32/34 617/25/30/32 745/58 962/72 1206
1322/39/45/48/55 1608 2336/48/64 4111/12/15/22/25/26/28/58/67/81/82/86/89/94 6210
7311/53/56/67 7770/77/94/96/98 7800/02/04/11/12/19/22/23 9109/23/32/36 **Brugge Station (13:55 –
14:20)** 186/93 205 533/56/57/61/99 1354 2016 2320/27/80/81 2743 6203/12/22/28