

ramparts route Ypres



RAMPARTS YPRES

The Ypres ramparts are the best preserved ones in the country. Their story begins 10 centuries ago when the cloth-making city arose on the banks of the River 'Ieper', later to become the Ieperlee. The active population expanded at lightning speed from the 11th century onwards. Ypres became the most successful textile city in Flanders. At first the ramparts were nothing more than an earthen wall with palisades and canals. The city gates were built from red iron sandstone from the West Flanders hills. This was followed by stone gateways and later still by stone walls and towers. From 1478, the French fortification engineer Vauban had the fortresses converted into a huge complex of ramparts and walls, wide moats, islands, frontal fortifications and marsh areas. The Ypres fortresses became even larger than the city they were supposed to protect. After periods of deterioration and salvage in the second half of the 18th century, the fortresses were completely renovated under Dutch rule (1815-1830). In 1853 the Belgian government abolished the military function of the fortresses. All the frontal fortifications were demolished and many moats were filled in. Only the north and north-west part of the main rampart disappeared. From 1860 the remaining fortress landscape was transformed into the beautiful park area of 40 hectares that we know today.

FIVE ENTRY POINTS

You can start the Fortress Route via five entry points: five special sites, each with free parking in the area.

A The Poternebrug along the Leopold III-iaan connects the high rampart over the Kasteelgracht with the Hoornwerkpark. Free outskirts parking along the Leopold III-iaan.

B The Lille Gate is the southern high point on the Fortress Route, literally and figuratively. From here you can easily reach the Vertronken Weide. Free outskirts parking Rijselesepoot and Oudstrijderslaan.

C From the Esplanade, near the Kruitmagazijn, you will discover both the high rampart along the Boterplas and the urban development on the vanished fortresses. Free outskirts parking Esplanade, Colaerplein or Oudstrijderslaan.

D The Lage Wieltegracht at the crossroads Masscheleinlaan / Plumierlaan / Minneplein forms the surprising transition from the vanished fortresses to the Kasteelgracht. Free parking Minneplein.

E Along the former outdoor swimming pool you take a sloping path to the beautiful ramparts along the Kasteelgracht. Free parking along the Basculstraat and Hoge Wieltegracht.

TOURS

A guided tour to discover the ramparts is highly recommended. Groups may apply to the Ypres Tourist Office for a guided tour at least one week beforehand. A maximum of 25 people per guide. The basic rate is € 70 /guide for two hours. The guided tours generally start at De Kazematten visitors centre behind St. Jacob's Church.

INFO & RESERVATION

Ypres Tourist Office | Cloth Hall
Grote Markt 34 | B-8900 Ypres
tel. +32 (0)57 239 220 | toerisme@ieper.be
www.visit-ypres.com



WWW.TOERISME-IEPER.BE

A Entry Poternebrug (to Lille gate: 1 km)

Cross the Poterne bridge from the Leopold III-iaan to the high fortress wall. Just before the Poterne passage through the wall and the rampart, you turn right along the wall, on the walkway over the water, to the Poterne stairway. This takes you directly to the high wall. You walk left on the path.

B Bastion, tenaille and postern

Vauban transformed the Ypres ramparts into a bastioned fortress. Bastions are protruding pentagonal fortifications. The 'tenaille' is located in front of the courtine (middle rampart). A high earthen embankment was initially installed in this outwork to catch the cannonballs. The boats to cross to the other side and reach the forward fortifications were reached via posterns (tunnel passages) or stairs from the bastion.

C Pellitory-of-the-wall and wall violins

Typical wall flowers grow on the fortress walls along the walkway. The most common species here is pellitory-of-the-wall. This lime-loving plant originates from southern Europe and has found a suitable place to grow on the traditional lime-rich mortar. Hundreds of wall violins grow on the bastion on other side of the Poternebrug, which blossom beautiful yellow in spring. This rare wall plant could be saved during the restoration work of 1991/1992.

D Cavalier or (shooting) cat

This is the name of the free-standing, high position for artillery atop the rampart. Here it consists of a raised earthen platform on the bastion. The heavy guns that fired on the enemy were installed on the cavalier or cat. Under this cavalier, in the earthen rampart of the bastion, there are three souterrains or casemates: large bomb-proof spaces used as barracks, dormitories, warehouses or armories. The Ypres souterrains are preserved intact.

THE ROUTE

The fortress route reveals the most beautiful places on the ramparts around the whole outskirts of the city, from high up on the ramparts to low down along the moats. The route also explores the vanished fortresses in the north and north-west of the city.

You can start the walk from five entry points (see walking map). The info panels along the route tell you more about the 10 centuries of history of the fortress landscape and its typical nature. The route is 4,5 km long, good for 2 hours of walking fun. You can also explore part of the route, or expand it with three beautiful sub-areas: the **Ketelkwaad** and **Hamiltonpark** to the west of the **Majoorgracht**, the **Hoornwerkpark** in the east and the **Vertronken Weide** south of the city.

This walking brochure describes the route in a clockwise direction, from the entry points. The Grote Markt and the Cloth Hall, with the visitors' and tourist centre, the In Flanders Fields Museum and the Ypres Museum are always less than 500 metres away. The route is accessible to wheelchairs and prams. The (often subterranean) spaces and buildings can only be visited with a guide: Kruitmagazijn, Leeuwentoren, Poortwachtershuis, Saskamer and arched Ieperlee, IJskelder,... All useful info about this can be found at Tourism Ypres.



A Ice Cellar

The ice cellar was like a public freezer. The deep cellar is insulated with a double brick wall and covered at the top with soil and trees. In winter the cellar was filled with blocks of ice from the rampart moat. Straw was placed on top of the ice. Meat and fish were preserved on the ice, and ice was also used for many medical purposes (e.g. to alleviate pain and contusions). The ice cellar was accessible to rich citizens, churches and hospitals. Guided visits only.

B The Hoornwerkpark

The surprising Hoornwerkpark is located along the east side of the Poternebrug and the Leopold III-iaan. This natural, varied park landscape (8 ha) was installed on the hill along the eastern city outskirts, where Vauban built a large 'horn work' (horn-shaped fortification complex). A citadel ("Spanish Castle") was built here under Spanish rule (mid-17th century). The French fortification engineer Vauban demolished the citadel and had a large hornwork built there as frontal fortification. Part of the hornwork relief with underground casemates was preserved there. The Hoornwerkpark, opened in 1999, became a fascinating, natural landscape with hedges and bushes, pastures and flowery meadows, an orchard and pools that frogs and salamanders call home. Here you can hear the cuckoo sing as you admire a view of the bell tower! The Hoornwerkpark is not accessible to wheelchair users.

C Reception Centre The Casemates

After the Dye Garden, steep stairs lead you down to the Visitors' Centre and Brasserie De Kazematten. The casemates behind Saint Jacob's church are open free to the general public during the opening hours. Architect Benny Govaert has splendidly restored these remarkable spaces. They house several amenities. The Saint Bernard brewery has a café where you can enjoy a bite to eat in a unique decor and of course taste the famous Saint Bernard beers. In one of the casemates a modern presentation of 10 centuries of Ramparts awaits you. You can immerse yourself in the ancient history of the Ypres ramparts with touchscreens.

D Dye garden

Plants that have been used for centuries to dye Ypres cloth are grown in the dye garden. In the painters you will find successfully (from the Menin Gate): paint chamomile (yellow to orange from the flowers), dyer's greenweed (yellow to orange from the flowering branches), common ox tongue (red to pink, from the roots), large or wild teasel (not a dye plant, used for roughening or brushing the woven cloth) (red to pink, from the roots), large or wild teasel (not a dye plant), madder (bright red, from the rhizome), woad (blue, from the leaves) and wild reseda (bright yellow, from the whole plant). Dye plants were not replaced by chemical dyes until the end of the 19th century.

E Menin Gate

The Menin Gate is a memorial to 54,896 Commonwealth soldiers fallen before 15 August 1917 on the Ypres front without a known grave. The gate is built on the site of the 18th century Antwerp Gate in this location disappeared around 1853. The Menin Gate was inaugurated in 1927. The Last Post is performed here every night at 8 pm.

F Entry Outdoor pool (to Poternebrug: 0,85 km)

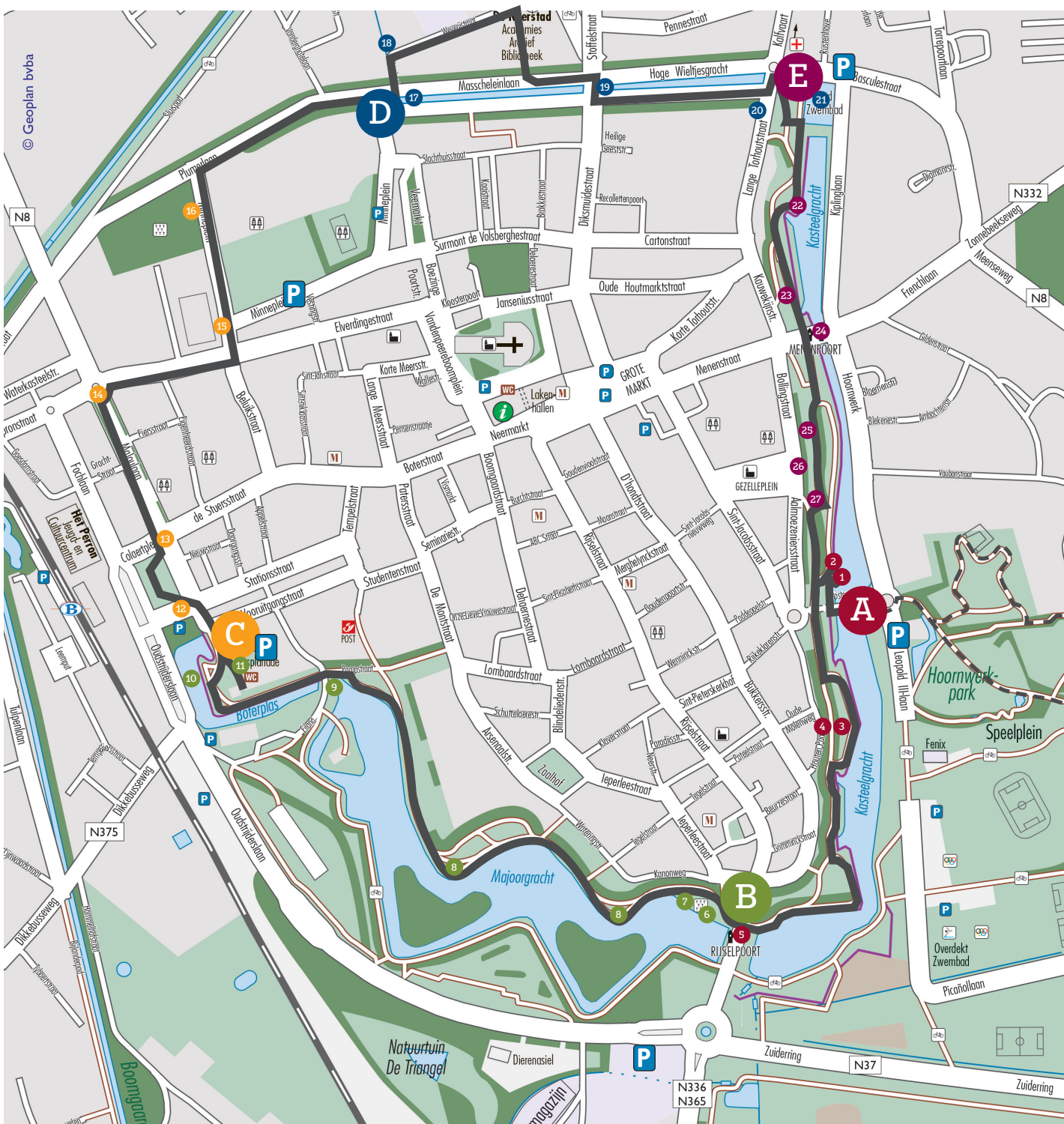
The forward point of the bastion or stronghold was the 'salient'. This salient was fortified with its natural stone. The rampart behind the salient was raised to hold the heavy guns. The slope (the 'cavalier' or 'cat') was where the artillery was mounted on a wooden platform. Visitors can now look over the rampart to see the surrounding landscape. When Ypres was still a military fortress, there was an earthen bank on top of the wall, where the soldiers could seek cover. Fuchs had the rough earthen banks removed to provide people walking there with an unobstructed view. Other military parts of the fortified site were also cleared. Fortified sites were always planted with trees, tall-growing species that produced timber for all kinds of military purposes. The trees also served as a camouflage for the guards on the ramparts, and as a screen to hide the buildings in the city from sight: smoke from the cannons and musket rifles would linger as a curtain between the foliage. Fruit trees were sometimes planted in times of peace. When the Ypres fortifications were turned into a hitting park, around 1860, the landscape architect Louis Fuchs also had decorative and exotic trees planted. One of the few trees to survive the First World War, the huge, multi-stemmed chestnut tree near the Menin Gate, was there before 1914 and even recovered after the conflict. It also survived WW2, when the people of Ypres plundered the fortified sites for firewood. The tree population was finally restored in 1947.



F Entry Outdoor pool (to Poternebrug: 0,85 km)

The forward point of the bastion or stronghold was the 'salient'. This salient was fortified with its natural stone. The rampart behind the salient was raised to hold the heavy guns. The slope (the 'cavalier' or 'cat') was where the artillery was mounted on a wooden platform. Visitors can now look over the rampart to see the surrounding landscape. When Ypres was still a military fortress, there was an earthen bank on top of the wall, where the soldiers could seek cover. Fuchs had the rough earthen banks removed to provide people walking there with an unobstructed view. Other military parts of the fortified site were also cleared. Fortified sites were always planted with trees, tall-growing species that produced timber for all kinds of military purposes. The trees also served as a camouflage for the guards on the ramparts, and as a screen to hide the buildings in the city from sight: smoke from the cannons and musket rifles would linger as a curtain between the foliage. Fruit trees were sometimes planted in times of peace. When the Ypres fortifications were turned into a hitting park, around 1860, the landscape architect Louis Fuchs also had decorative and exotic trees planted. One of the few trees to survive the First World War, the huge, multi-stemmed chestnut tree near the Menin Gate, was there before 1914 and even recovered after the conflict. It also survived WW2, when the people of Ypres plundered the fortified sites for firewood. The tree population was finally restored in 1947.

RAMPARTS ROUTE YPRES | ROAMING BETWEEN STONES, NATURE AND WATER



1 Wooden horse casemates

The Ypres population sought shelter in the three underground souterrains of the Wooden Horse (interconnected corridors of 30 metres long and 6 metres wide) during the two world wars. In the First World War they were used by the British troops as command post, hospital, printing office, shelter and dormitory. These souterrains or casemates are named after the "wooden horse", an ancient corporal punishment for insubordinate soldiers.



2 Brewery 'de Kazematten'

As from April 2014 the brewery 'De Kazematten' is installed in these casemates. The new beers Wipers Times 14 and Wipers Times 18 are brewed here. You can visit the brewery in group - on reservation only - and off course taste the beers afterwards. Info and reservations: Houten Paard 1, 8900 Ypres, info@kazematten.be, tel. 057 388 021. Dutch-language guided tours every Saturday afternoon at 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. English-language tour at 4 p.m.

3 Lille Gate

This is the only city gate whose original 14th century rooms are still preserved: the Gatekeeper's House (east side) and the Lock Rooms (west side). The water management of both the Majoorgracht and Ieperlee was performed with stop logs from the lock rooms until the end of the last century. The gatekeeper and his militia stayed in the gatekeeper's house. All those who entered or left the city were strictly controlled, those who carried goods had to pay excise (taxes). During the First World War, the command post of Marshal Plumer was located here. commandopost van Maarschalk Plumer.



4 Entry point Lille gate (to Esplanade: 1,2 km)

5 British cemetery

A small British military cemetery from the First World War, Ramparts War Cemetery is located on the sloping banks near the Lille Gate. 193 soldiers are resting here: 158 British, 10 Canadians, 11 Australians, 14 New Zealanders, including ten Maori. Most of them died during their transfer from the front to the hospitals in the city and were buried here.

6 Majoorgracht

'Major moat' is a slightly unfortunate translation of the French 18th century name 'Fossé majeur', the main moat. It is the only moat that still has the same structure as in the Louis XIV era (1686). There are still three fortifications in the wide, protruding corners (islands). Both are now left untouched as nature reserves. The third island, with its brasserie restaurant Pacific Island, dates back to the Spanish era (around 1640). You can observe beautiful birds on the water and along the banks here: blue heron, grebe, cormorant, coot, moorhen and mallard. With a bit of luck you will see the sandpiper or the stunning kingfisher, often staying near the islands.

7 Leeuwentoren and Predikerentoren

The Predikerentoren (Preachers' Tower) and Leeuwentoren (Lion Tower) are part of the 14th century Burgundian rampart. In the French era the towers were lowered and transformed into an artillery platform. The Lion Tower owes its name to its sturdiness: the walls are 2.4 metres thick. A brick tunnel through the earthen wall connects the tower to the city centre. At the bottom of the narrow archer windows a round opening was made to accommodate the first primitive cannon barrels. The Monk Tower is named after the (former) monastery built adjacent to the fortresses.



8 Bellepoort - Tempelpoort

The Bellepoort was one of the four 17th century city gates which connected the city to the outside world. A drawbridge was located at the entrance and a studded gate behind it. Vauban built the Bellepoort in 1683. It replaced the Burgundian Tempelpoort from the 14th century, which was located more to the north. The Bellepoort was demolished in 1896. 'Cijns' (toll) had to be paid until 1865 to bring goods inside the city.

9 Boterplas

West of the city walls there were extensive forward fortifications in the past: the 'horn works' of Belle and Elverdinge, designed by Vauban. They were demolished in 1744 but partially restored around 1820 by the Dutch authorities. After the final filling of the moats in 1853 this freed up space for, for instance, the station, the prison and new lanes.



10 Esplanade and Ammunition Dump

The Esplanade was created as an open space between the 14th century fortress walls and Vauban's new city walls (around 1680). The square was used for military parades and the construction of a gunpowder depot. 75,000 kilos of gunpowder could be stored in it. The walls of the building are

2.5 to 3 meters thick. A loam buffer was installed between the roof and the barrel vault to reduce grenade impacts. The ammunition dump was built in 1817 by the Dutch army on the foundations of a French equivalent. Up to 75,000 kilos of gunpowder could be stored here. The walls of the bomb-proof building are 2.5 to 3 m thick. A buffer made of clay was installed between the roof and the domed ceiling. The ammunition dump survived the First World War. Guided visits only.

11 Entry point Esplanade (to Lage Wieltjesgracht: 1,35 km)

12 Fortified site turns into a railway complex

In 1853 the fortifications were broken up for the first time so as to provide a route to the new railway station along the western edge of the town. Safety considerations dictated the need for the station building to be constructed on the 'solid ground' of an advance fortification near Boterplas. The railway succeeded in ending Ypres' isolation, helping to boost the city's economy. Hotels, cafés and shops were built on the former fortified sites near the station, while travellers were able to enjoy the floral delights of the station park.

13 Boulevards and new mansions

After a huge vacant plot was created by demolishing the fortifications in the northwest, the city authorities decided to create a new residential area extending from Elverdingestraat to Boterplas. New building land was made available for the first time in many years. The beautiful location on the outskirts of the city, near the new station, attracted wealthy property developers. The wide, tree-lined Boulevard Malou and the Colaertplein were regarded as the city's finest residential area. After the war the houses were rebuilt in almost the same eclectic style, so that Maloulaan and Colaertplein were able to maintain their grandiose status.



14 Former Elverdinge Gate

This city gate appeared in the early 13th century but was walled up by the Spaniards around 1633, together with the Boezinge Gate. In the light of Ypres' status as a large military city, the administrators decided to apply stricter traffic inspections. The Diksmuide Gate was the only way to leave the city for people travelling to Boezinge, Elverdinge or Veurne. Up until about 1860, this former gate was a casemate (measuring 36 m long, 4.80 m wide and 4 m high) used as a military warehouse.

15 Barbelhof, Minneplein, prison

Before WW 1 the present-day large community education campus covered a huge open area between the medieval fortifications and the Vauban Ramparts. This 'Barbelhof', the Garden of St. Barbara, was used by shooting associations as a practice area. Under Dutch rule (1815-1830) the rampart was removed, providing the square with even more space. This was used as a military training area, referred to as the 'Plaine-d' Armes' (Defenders' Square), which local people soon started calling the 'Plaine d'Amour' (Lovers' Square) or 'Minneplein'. When the people of Ypres returned to their war-torn city in 1919, a prefab village was built on the Minneplein, the only relatively open nearby area... The open square was assigned a new purpose in the 1950s, when it became the Royal Athenium, the present-day Community School. This is where one of the two British military cemeteries within the city is located: Ypres Reservoir Cemetery. The name refers to the drinking water reservoirs and the water tower that used to be here until 1914. Another part of the vacant fortified site was earmarked for building a 19th century British-style prison. Rebuilt after the war, the prison underwent several modernisation programmes.

16 First drinking water supplies

A modern system to supply drinking water to Ypres was not introduced until the late 19th century. Featuring a reservoir, steam pump and water tower, the first filter plant was built on the fortified grounds near what used to be the Elverdinge Gate. The city's water was distributed through a network of cast iron pipes. Everything was destroyed during the war. The two new drinking water treatment stations started operating between 1924 and 1926 near Ypres city's Zillebekevand and Dikkebus lakes.

17 Entry Lage Wieltjesgracht (to Outdoor Pool: 0,67 km)

18 Slaughterhouse and Wieltjesgrachten

Between 1853 and 1860 the walls and ramparts along the north side were completely demolished. In 1860-62 a municipal slaughterhouse was erected on the site of the demolished Boezingepoort, on the north side of the Veemarkt. The slaughterhouse was rebuilt after the First World War. It was closed and demolished in 1986-1988, except for the Director's Residence. The site was transformed into a hotel-restaurant. The broad fortress moat was partially filled in and reduced to a narrow moat, to ensure the fortress water could flow into the Ieperlee. This is how the two Wieltjesgrachten were created on either side of the Diksmuidestraat. The banks were planted with walnut trees according to ancient tradition, the Ypres people "knocked" the walnuts from the trees here.



19 The Ieperlee

The Ieperlee began to suffer from flooding in the 17th century, a process that would continue until the end of the 19th century. The "Op stap 'op' de Ieperlee" (A tour of the Ieperlee) booklet will help you discover this culverted urban river. Behind the wall along Weverijstraat the river reemerges to run on to the Ypres-IJzer Canal.

20 Diksmuide Gate and Neerstad

This was the site of the major Diksmuide Gate complex, where a tunnel led to the 'Basseville' or Neerstad, a military settlement around the harbour on the Ypres-IJzer Canal. All the defence structures disappeared around 1860, after which the vacant land was assigned for use as a gas plant and steelworks which then went on to become the leading steel company in Ypres from 1930 to 1960: Picanol. The Neerstad was later converted into a municipal library, archive and academy in the early 21st century.

21 Care services around the edge of the city

A residential and care centre, the "Huize Wieltjesgracht", is located nearby, on the site of the former Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-ziekenhuis hospital. Before World War One, this "hospital" was situated on the Market Square, where the courthouse now stands, but moved to this site after the end of the conflict. The beautiful, neo-Classical facade was kept after the establishment was converted into a care centre. This site has long been associated with the care of the sick and needy. A Franciscan monastery was built here in the Middle Ages. A "psychiatric hospital" was built in 1850, which was regarded as a major innovation at the time.

22 Former open-air swimming pool

Located at the end of the Castle Canal, the former open-air swimming pool was still in regular use until 2001. Many generations of people from Ypres learned to swim there during the pleasant summer months. The first version of the swimming pool was created in 1885, as a basic bathing area for the army as, for many soldiers, a dip in the pool was one of the very opportunities to wash themselves. Civilians were also allowed to use the pool. A brand-new swimming pool, built in 1928 featured a concrete basin and changing rooms. Rebuilt in 1937, the pool was extended to create a 50-metre Olympic pool, where official championships were held. The open-air swimming pool was closed down in the interests of hygiene in 2001.

