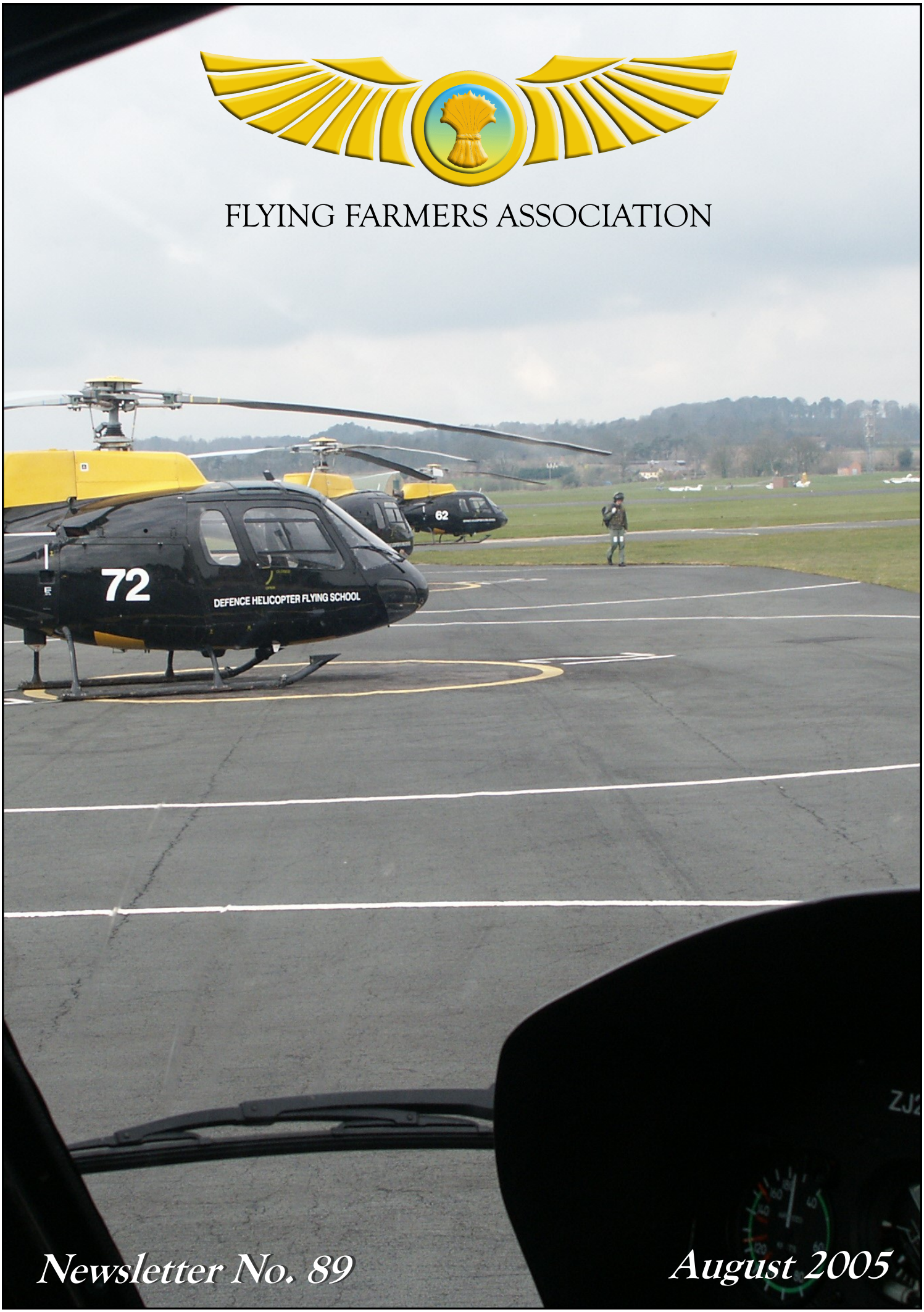
FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 89

August 2005

Opening Thoughts

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Cover photograph;

RAF Shawbury, photograph by Peter Dobson

Chairman's Message

As of 25th June, things are extremely dry here in the south, despite the very heavy rain at Glastonbury and in parts of Yorkshire which caused such serious flooding. My runway is hard and grass growth on it has slowed right down - in itself a blessing - while cereal crops are showing symptoms of drought stress at what is a critical time. I understand that some members farming on sandy soils are seeing their crops actually dying. Such is the 'pleasure' of farming.

It is strange that farmers, whose businesses are so weather-affected, should choose a sport like flying which is also weather-dependent, thereby sometimes laying themselves open to a double dose of stress and disappointment.

The Association's events seem to have gone very well this year. We are grateful to our events secretary, Mike Cuttell, and to all those who have organised meetings so willingly and well. Please continue to give us your help and ideas, and make next year even better than this one.

The AGM at Elvington is not that far away, and as always we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible there. Perhaps those members from the York area whom we have not yet met could spare the time to come to the AGM and museum. There are a great many FFA members whom we have not so far had the pleasure of meeting.

My Danish friends very frequently suggest consulting the 'Clerk of the Weather' on matters of cold, heat, rain, snow and sunshine. The Danish fitters who used to visit us had learned their English bit-by-sometimes-oddly-assorted-bit, and would refer to "earth chickens" instead of partridges, and "wood pieces" instead of trees. In translation mundane things can somehow appear in a more interesting light. Need words be a barrier? Do we actually need to spell properly? You may find the following interesting:

The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid - I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclty uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg.

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig? And I awlyas thgohut slpelnig was ipmorantt!

John Golden

Editor's Notes

Spelin is impotent Jon, becos that has joost plaid havok wiv mi spel chequer!

This newsletter is always full of the reports of the meetings carried out up to date. These meetings are a vital part of the FFA and are being well subscribed and weather permitting, they are enjoyed by most. This year has been no exception as we were privileged to enter places that you wouldn't normally go on your own account. RAF Shawbury and Melbury were two very good examples (see the reports in this newsletter).

It was decided, as mentioned in the last newsletter, that I would start doing bulk emails (see the column on the next page). When it came to setting the system up, I was a bit disappointed to find that I only had 145 addresses out of the 366 members. After the first mail went out, 25 of these were returned as being incorrect. We know from the FFA survey that over 90% use emails, so we have the potential to be able to contact the bulk of the membership very quickly and easily. Email addresses are changed regularly, especially as people are converting to broadband and change their ISP. Probably the last people you think of informing of changes are the FFA, but as we have the technology it's a shame if we can't use it. So, if you want to be included, send me an email to chix@farmline.com

Paul Stephens

Committee Members

Dick Walgate	President	01472 371203
John Golden	Chairman	01725 552384
Paul Stephens	Secretary	01944 738281
David Corbett	Treasurer	01568 708351
Mike Cuttell	Events Secretary	01242 236770
Martin Gosling	Airstrip Advice	01787 269369
Anthony Kedros	Committee Member	01295 720876
Mike Ashmole	Committee Member	01738 627622

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Committee Meeting

The Committee met at Nottingham / Tollerton on June 15th. Items discussed included;

1) The 2006 European Tour will be held in Italy. We have a number of suggested venues and contacts but we don't have an organiser. Paul Stephens has agreed to do it, provided no one else comes forward (pigs might fly!).
2) The Treasurer presented the draft accounts. It was agreed to carry on supporting AOPA, GAAC and GASCo by donating 10% of our subscription income.
3) The Events Secretary detailed the provisional meetings for the remainder of 2005 and 2006. These included The Dorset Steam Fair, Elvington, AAIB, Landrover, Rick & Laura Holt's farm, racing stables etc. in North Yorkshire (overnight) and Scottish islands (2 day)
4) It was agreed that new applicants will be provided with an FFA tie with an increase in the joining fee to £10. The annual subscription will remain at £25.
5) The Associate Membership debate has been dropped for the time being as the Committee were split in their views.
6) It was suggested that the FFA should arrange landing sites at national events such as Cereals. The Committee agreed that this is not always possible, but volunteers should be used to assist with transport when feasible.
7) Paul Stephens has started doing bulk emails to all members that supply their correct email addresses. This is to keep members up to date with news between newsletters and is intended to be light hearted and increase communication. Three such emails have already gone out notifying members of an invitation to an open day at RAF Marham in July, news of FFA members on an Air Squadron trip to the top of Norway and prior news of other forthcoming events. This is not intended to replace the newsletter. Members can pass messages and throw queries out to the membership. These will have to be done through chix@farmline.com as the Secretary holds the database of those wanting to be included (some don't). For security and privacy, email address are kept confidential by being placed in the BCC (blind carbon copy) address column so they aren't made visible. If you want to be included, please email me to let me have your address. If you haven't received one yet, I don't have your correct address.

Hangarage to Let

I am writing to see if it is possible to for me to advertise hangarage space available here at Kersey, Suffolk.

I have space in the hangar for one, if not two, small aircraft . We have a grass landing strip, the co-ordinates you have available on record in the FFA Membership List. At present we have two Jodels, and have accommodated a Piper cub, Tiger Moth, a large five seater Jodel, a Cap 10 & several microlights amongst many others. We are five minutes flight from Elmsett airstrip where fuel is available, and are just outside the Wattisham matz.

If anyone is interested then they can reach me at my e-mail address (veronica@kersey13.plus.com), or by telephone 01473 823188.

Veronica Partridge (Mrs)

Farm Visits

One of the most surprising results, for me, of the recent members' questionnaire, was the very little use members were making of each others strips. 30% of those that filled in the questionnaire had not visited another member in the last 3 years.

Surprising because more and more of our organised excursions, particularly those where farm visits are arranged, are oversubscribed.

Perhaps the reason for this lack of inter member visiting is that we are all basically polite and feel that an invitation would be required.

The purpose of this note is to try and stimulate more farm visits. One of FFA's objectives is the exchange of ideas, both agriculturally and aeronautically.

I accept the thought of 50 aeroplanes landing on your strip is daunting, coupled with the professional way that our trips are organised. Nevertheless there is a pent up demand by members to visit other members and exchange ideas.

What I would suggest is a more low-key approach; how about inviting your nearest 10 neighbours for a farm walk; nothing too grand, biscuits and coffee maybe, but bring your own provisions. I believe several benefits would ensue, firstly we are probably getting back to our founder's original intentions, secondly it should lead to reciprocal visits and thirdly it might be a teeth cutting exercise for a member organising a full blown FFA visit.

Get out your diary and directory tonight and plan your farm visit.

M.A. Ashmole

Welcome to New Members

Since 1st March 2005, the following have joined

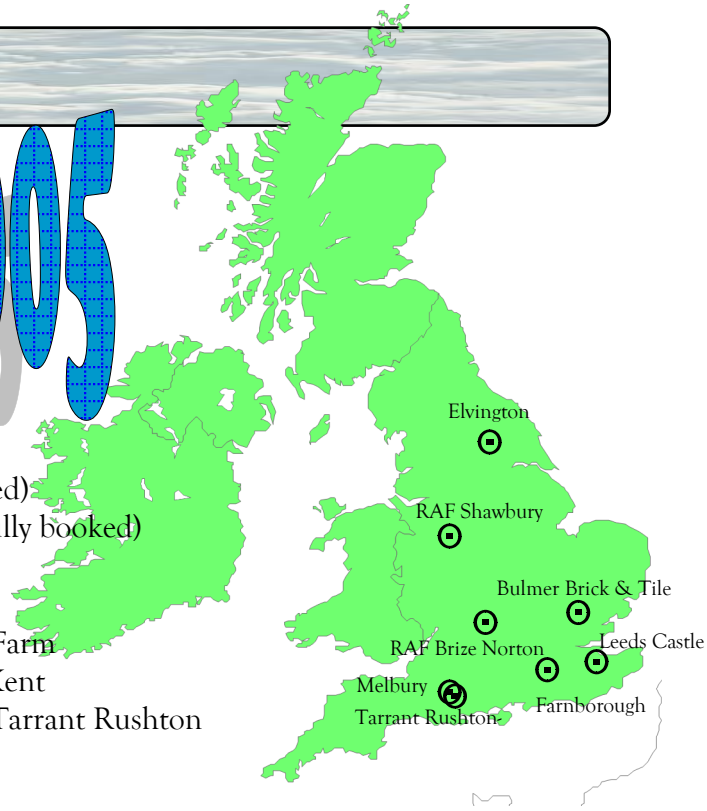
771	David Bell, Retford
772	Trevor Williamson, Richmond
773	Alex Howard, Isle of Colonsay
774	Gary Tait, Isle of Man
775	Stephen Whitwell, Bury St. Edmonds
776	John McWilliam, County Cork (rejoined)

Goodbye to

342	Air Cdr Simon Bostock, Harrogate
751	Roger Callow, Sleaford
611	Richard Goodenough
109	John Scale, Dyfed, Wales
610	Francis Spear
656	Peter Sumner, Wollaston, Northants.

Programme 2005

Wednesday March 9th	RAF Shawbury (Fully booked)
Tuesday March 15th	RAF Brize Norton (Fully booked)
Wednesday April 20th	Bulmer Brick & Tile, Essex (Fully booked)
Wednesday May 18th	Velcourt, Melbury, Nr. Yeovil
Saturday June 4th	The European Tour, Germany
Thursday 30th June	Normandy – Farmers Weekly Farm
Wednesday July 20th	Leeds Castle & Lees gardens, Kent
Friday September 3rd	The Great Dorset Steam Fair, Tarrant Rushton
Wednesday October 19th	AGM, Elvington, Nr. York
November	AAIB Farnborough



The 2005 AGM will be held at Elvington, near York on Wednesday 19th October at 12:30 pm - organiser Mike Ashmole

Elvington Airport is adjacent to the museum, walkable from the apron. Details are in the AFE VFR Flight Guide under Elvington and in Pooleys Guide under York. Fuel will be available.

11:30 Arrive by air or road
11:45 Coffee and bacon roll
12:30 AGM
13:30 Buffet lunch
14:30 Tour of the museum
15:30 Museum closes.

For early arrivals, the museum will be open from 10:00.

The cost of entry to the museum and refreshments are being covered by the FFA. The landing fee needs to be settled by the aircraft captains.

In order to facilitate catering arrangements, could you please complete and return the tear off strip by 30th September.

Attendance at the AGM is limited to members and wives only.

This will be the only notification of the AGM.

If you require overnight accommodation, please contact the museum direct on 01904 608595. They can supply a list of suitable places.

Note: Brize Norton was cancelled at the very last minute by our host, as he was called away on duty. This was very disappointing as Mike Cuttell put a lot of effort into organising the event.

Friday 3rd September, The Great Dorset Steam Fair

This will be at a busy time for many of our members however, if you have a spare day and have never experienced this event held on a 600 acre site at Tarrant Rushton, it is well worth seeing.

Vintage tractors and engines, 200 working steam engines, 50 showmans engines, 100 fairground organs and 2000 working exhibits.

If we have sufficient interest, the plan will be to land at Compton Abbas and hire a bus to convey us to and from the event.

Approximate price excluding landing fee will be £20 per head to include admission and a bus. An early expression of interest is vital to contain our costs. Please fill in a reply slip and send with SAE to Mike Cuttell by 3rd August.

November, AAIB Farnborough

Two Wednesday visits (dates to be agreed) for up to 25 people on each day for a short visit to the hangar and compound where the wrecked aircraft are examined to ascertain what went wrong.

Please send in the reply slip with SAE to Mike Cuttell by 30th August.

European Tours, 2006-Italy, 2007-Romania

Please see more elsewhere in this newsletter

Events such as these set above are arranged by FFA members on a voluntary basis. It is accepted by those who participate that nothing undertaken by the FFA collectively or members individually shall be construed as establishing a duty of care nor in any way removing or modifying the duties, responsibilities or obligations of pilots or land owners in relation to any event and attendance thereat. All information provided in these programmes is purely advisory and should ALWAYS be verified from official sources.

If you organise an FFA event your main worry in the few days preceding the event is that the weather will be suitable. This was no exception, but despite the forecaster making reassuring comments the night before, I remember waking up in the early hours and peering into the night sky in an effort to see whether she was correct or not. Our host, Squadron Leader Martin Locke wanted us on the ground as close to 0900 as possible, so for some it was going to be a pretty early start before any early weather had burnt off.

Coming from Cheltenham with a run of just 60 nm, we had no trouble at all until we reached Shawbury where, to stay visual, we had to drop to 1400 feet.

We were all directed to park at the dispersal point once occupied by V bombers, where a coach arrived to collect us. Martin Locke spent a good deal of his time as a Vulcan pilot, a period he described as "pretty boring" skulking around at 40,000 feet.

Shawbury first became an airfield in 1917 and was named No 9 depot station and was occupied by No 29 Flying Training Wing and the Aeroplane Repair Section. The Royal Flying Corps were established under the command of Major A.W.Tedder and one can just imagine how many famous pioneers were trained in those skies.

The airfield reverted to agriculture in 1920 but was reopened in 1938 with war clouds gathering. Aircraft types included Hart, Blenheim, Audax, Battle, Gladiator and Fury. Surprisingly it trained many pilots from the USA.

In January 1944, Shawbury became the Central Navigation School with the arrival of Wellingtons and Stirlings and in the same year it was named the Empire Air Navigation School, during which time it undertook the famous Aries series of flights to evaluate navigation equipment. It was from Shawbury that a Lancaster first completed the first around the world flight and also flights to the North Pole. By then there were 500 aircraft based at Shawbury.

The Central Flying School (Helicopter) Squadron arrived there in 1976 equipped with Whirlwinds and Gazelles but was renamed the Triservice Defence Helicopter Training School. They are now equipped with single engined Eurocopter Squirrel for initial training and students then graduate to the massive twin engined Bell Griffin which is an improved version of the well proven Huey. As their name implies, the now provide helicopter training for army, airforce and navy. There are 1100 personnel and over half of those are civilians. 25 Squirrels are on the pan serviceable every morning to cope with 3 courses of 18 students on a common syllabus. They employ 130 instructors on a 1 to 2 student basis. Shawbury achieves an astonishing 17,000 flying hours per year under the guidance of CFI Andy McKie, and as we were to see on our visit, the sky is full of rotating wings.

Students arrive with fixed wing experience of anything between 40 and 5500 hours. Some have arrived because they have failed the fast jet course. I asked whether any of the fixed wing non achievers arrived with a chip on their shoulder. Andy said that if they do "they are taken round the back of the bike shed and sorted out!"

All the students are affectionately known as "The Kiddies" by all the instructors. I wondered how well that was received by some of the pupils!

The course is staggeringly demanding leading me to ask how many failed. The answer was 1-3 per course. No one climbs aboard a Squirrel until he can demonstrate total engine management in the simulator - a turbine can easily be destroyed when starting or stopping. No one may use a checklist. Every item must be confined to memory and in the case of the Bell griffin, pre start checks take an astonishing 45 minutes! Would your memory be that good? Absolutely nothing must be missed.



A helicopter simulator - photo by Peter Dobson

All the aircraft are on the military register to absolve them from CAA rules that would preclude much of their flying activities, some of which is very low level in awful weather day and night. A map in the briefing room is surrounded by photographs of complaining neighbours' properties. Many night time sorties are without lights.

The greatest testament to their capabilities is the almost non existent accident record. Many of their roles are top secret, but we were told of two examples. The first was to fly at night without lights at 50 foot above the sea wearing night vision goggles to rendezvous with a submarine. Total journey time - 8 hours. Another was to load a boat and crew into a Chinook, lower the helicopter into the sea until the water fills the cabin, then drive the boat out of the back! When I asked about corrosion, Andy shrugged his shoulders.

There could be little doubt in the minds of any FFA member that anyone capable of passing this course had to be the very best achievers anywhere in the world.



The ATC simulator - photo by Peter Dobson



The Horsa glider - photo by Peter Dobson

I was warned that lunch at £2.50 per head, would only be a finger buffet. It transpired that our coach transported us to the officer's mess where a very agreeable choice of hot meals or salad was provided. Where else could you take a party of 22 people out for a cooked lunch and pay just £39.00.

After lunch, we were taken to meet the head of the ATC school, a very young looking Wing Commander Jane Chalmers. ATC training, she explained, has taken place at Shawbury for 55 years. Some students are only 16.5 years old when they join and they now train over 550 students per year. We were ushered into a room which, although on the ground floor, gave the impression that we were all in the top of a military control tower. Immediately in front of us was a standard controllers desk with 5 seating positions and all the equipment one would normally expect. Replacing what would have been the windows was a full floor to ceiling screen of 5 panels to give the impression of a 180 deg. view of the operational airfield. Aircraft, complete with sound effects were landing, taking off or passing overhead. It was extremely realistic even to the point that one heavy transport came in low level from our right, crashed as it passed the tower and burst into flames as it passed, with the attendance of a fire truck and rescue helicopter. Most impressive. Jane streesed the need for us all to talk to controllers whenever and wherever we flew. Thet really do need to know who we are, where we are going and POB. Her dramatic example of POB was an aircraft which crashed and the manifest gave 4 POB. The cockpit was destroyed and the fire crew, apparently, let the aircraft burn on the assumption that the crew had been killed on impact only to discover that there had been 44 people in the cabin, who died of smoke inhalation.

Our last visit was to an incredible project to build, from original plans, a complete Horsa glider to a quality good enough to fly. It is an enormous beast and we were invited to climb aboard. It has a wingspan of 88 feet, length of 67 feet and has an all up weight of 15500 lbs.

It has a crew of 2 pilots and could carry 28 armed soldiers or alternatively it was just wide enough to accommodate a jeep / trailer / weapons combination. The Horsas built during wartime were constructed in and around Birmingham.

The idea of crating a replica was conceived by a few veterans of the Midland Branch of the Glider Pilot Regiment Association was recently as 2001, when in June of that year, RAF Shawbury offered hangar space and a team of 15 volunteers have taken this project forward having obtained a large section of a Horsa wreck.

The whole project was given added impetus when in early 2002, BAe Systems found the original working drawings. The donation of those drawings was, however, conditional upon an understanding that the aircraft would not be flown.

The team of volunteers has now increased to 30, but the project is great need of manpower, parts and funds. The FFA are donating a cheque for £100.00 and , if members wish, a further visit can be arranged - perhaps as a fund raising exercise.

Those of you who missed our visit and who would like to be included in future plans, please fill in the usual reply slip.

Mike Cuttell

A Day in Essex, 20th April 2005

As organisers we suffer many sleepless nights before our flying events, worrying about the weather more than anything else - and so it proved last Wednesday. Two perfect spraying days on the Monday and Tuesday, with a forecast for two more excellent days on the Thursday and Friday, only left the Wednesday with a forecast of a dismal day across the country and 70% chance of rain and low cloud. In fact typical weather for an FF A visit!

Looking out of the window at 6am only confirmed our worst fears, and the phone started ringing at 6.45am with requests for weather reports from participants across the country. But we are an intrepid lot who don't take defeat lightly, and by various means - including a Richard and Joyce Hall who drove all the way from Staffordshire, Paul Platt and Stella who drove 184 miles from Worcestershire, and our treasurer who came from Herefordshire - we had nearly a full house of participants, including 13 aircraft, by the time the coach was scheduled to leave, admittedly in improving weather conditions. When the weather gets in the way of our visits, it is so heart-warming for the organisers that so many members make so much effort to get to the meetings, even when they can't fly.

Jim Lawrence

Jim Lawrence is a young man (by my standards!) who was given 100 acres by his father with a few cattle about 15 years ago, and was told how lucky he was to have it; and just to get on with it. It took him a very short time to realise that it was a quick way to bankruptcy, and so he set about the diversification that he now runs so very successfully. In a short 12 years he has transformed 100 acres and a few old cattle sheds into a multi-million pound business.

He started by making a few garden lights for neighbours and now employs over 60 staff and last year had a turnover of £4million. He says turnover rises steadily by about 15% a year and he keeps wondering when the bubble will burst - but says he has no obvious competitor, and so maybe it will continue. His extraordinary success is in fact his own Achilles Heel, because the farm is located in a very rural area and the roads leave a lot to be desired. The bigger the business grows, the more traffic is generated, and the neighbours are now getting very unhappy with the local disruption - although the local council has just granted planning permission for another building to be put up! One has to wonder how long it will be before he feels the need to relocate to an industrial estate.

His production consists of any aspect of domestic and rural iron work and suggestions from customers form a large part of his range. His methods of production range from hand crafting


Jim Lawrence with Martin & Annette - photo by Warwick Banks

with heat and a hammer, to fairly sophisticated computer operated turning and milling equipment to produce things such as light fittings. Wall lights, curtain rails, lamp standards, fire gratings, tree guards etc. etc. are all available - either production or bespoke. Any cast iron items such as fire grates are not produced on site but are imported from India. A recently introduced idea is to complement the curtain rails with a curtain making service providing a range of materials for the customer to choose from, and lampshades to enhance their wall brackets.

He attributes the greatest part of his success to the fact that his sales are about 98% catalogue mail order. This results in payment by credit card - which in turn means he gets his money within 3 days - usually before the goods have left the works. He reckons that on a £4 million turnover, his maximum debtors only get to £7000 - I wish farming was like that!

Martin Gosling

The Bulmer Brick and Tile Company

After an excellent lunch at the Mill Hotel at Sudbury, we drove about two miles to visit the Bulmer Brick and Tile works at Bulmer. This is a family owned and run business that has been operating since 1450. The current owners are the Minter family, who bought the business in 1936. Peter Minter, now Managing Director, was at the time of our visit the newest member of FFA; he owns the farm surrounding the brickworks, but has contracted out his farming to Martin Gosling, our event organiser for the day.

The brickworks is full of history and traditional craftsmanship. There are 5000 "patterns" for different products, including over 100 sizes of facing bricks. All the bricks are hand made – it was a joy to watch the craftsmanship, and to talk to the staff, both men and women, who were making the bricks; the brickworks is one of only two remaining in the country that make bricks by hand. The Bulmer brickworks is the only remaining one of 13 local brickworks – the other 12 were all closed over a 4 year period after WW II.

Bulmer has a wide variety of customers, and is able to make almost any size or shape of brick or other similar product required by their customers, who include Hampton Court, the National Trust and many other historical buildings; the Officers Mess at RAF Duxford was built with Bulmer bricks.

Each brickmaker is supplied with a barrow load of pre-prepared clay, from which he fills his mould and consolidates the contents; he then inverts the mould and taps out the brick onto a plywood "plate" on a flat barrow; after being tipped, the bricks are laid out in long lines out of doors, under a narrow roof to keep direct sunlight and rain off the bricks; during the drying out process the bricks reduce from 20% to 1% moisture content and shrink by 12%. Some bricks have to be finished to a tolerance of 1 mm.

While we were at Bulmer, a production run had recently started to produce 32000 18lb bricks for a redevelopment project at St Pancras station; all of these 32000 bricks are going to be made by one man.

All the product is fired in one kiln. This kiln has been in use since 1937, and is a most unusual domed shape. The chamber in which the product is fired is in the centre of the dome, and around it is a "passage" in which the coal is stored, and from which the fires are stoked. Temperatures within the firing chamber reach 1100/1200 degrees (C or F?); the 24 firings done annually use about five and a half tonnes of coal each. The company have plans to build a new – similar – kiln alongside the present one. The site has already been cleared, and foundations laid; the estimated cost is some £80,000.

An interesting note about the use of kilns on this site is that, during World War II, there were also some open topped kilns on site; these had to be withdrawn from use because of the blackout regulations.

Another interesting aspect of the kiln is emissions. The "thought police" have decided that the company should pay a carbon tax on the emissions from the kiln; they are trying to charge £6000, but Peter Minter is counter claiming that all the emissions are being absorbed by the trees and undergrowth that have established over the years on the acres of ground from which clay earth has already been "harvested", and which is being allowed to grow wild. At the time of our visit, the debate had not been resolved.

The clay itself is extracted from a bank of earth some 15' – 20' high; some 40 million years ago the area formed part of the Thames Estuary. There is no prospect of the company's raw material source running out for several generations. Their production has averaged some 80,000 bricks per annum for the past 23 years.

Not only does the company make a wide variety of individual bricks – there is a range of other traditional clay-related products, including such products as lime putty, and the company offers production of any size of lintels and arches, etc, using modern bonding methods and traditional facing bricks; and there is a cutting shop that can finish bricks and other products to the customer's required shapes and sizes.

We were privileged to enjoy a fascinating visit, and to be able to watch the Bulmer craftsmen and women at work; the works employs 17 in the brickyard, 9 in the cutting shop, and 4/5 in sales and management support. Very many thanks to Peter Minter and his team for a fascinating visit!

David Corbett


Peter Minter - photo by Warwick Banks

Melbury, a truly memorable day

18th May 2005


The Flying Farmers at Melbury House - photo by David Corbett

Our day was divided into four parts:

1) Evershot Farm
2) Main House
3) Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens
4) Abbotsbury Swannery

All these enterprises are part of the Ilchester Estate which is owned by The Honourable Mrs Townshend.

Evershot Farm and the Main House

Evershot Farm includes the land around the main house and parks between the villages of Evershot and Melbury Osmond south of Yeovil and the land at Abbotsbury located between Weymouth and Bridport.

Velcourt has been retained on a Management Agreement since April 1994. The farm is all livestock, specialising in milk and lamb production. The forage area is grass and maize, because of the soil type and altitude only early varieties of maize can be grown at present. Varieties for 2005 are Crown and Kingdom.

Sheep graze extensively on the parkland and restricted areas at Evershot and all land at Abbotsbury dedicated to sheep, is permanent pasture and in both the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Organic Farming Scheme. The sheep are mainly Romney ewes with a small flock of rare breed - Portlands also being kept on the farm. Ewes all lamb outside, late March early April.

The farm has five dairies all calving all year round in order to maintain level profile payments. The dairies have at present 1520 cows. Feeding policy is based around complete diets. Straights are used and there is no feeding in the parlours. The forage ration is 60% maize 40% grass silage. Forage quality plays a major role in determining the farm's profitability. Average herd production is 10,515 litres per cow, formidable in anyone's language.

Thanks to Robbie Taylor, Velcourt Farms Director, for his time and patience during our visit.

At the main house, we were treated by our hosts to a magnificent display of the house ,its wonderful gardens and beautiful deer park, where the cull yield is 150 head per annum within the ring fence, and I also understood that a further 150 are culled on the rest of the Estate.

We were treated to a superb lunch whilst being entertained by the family's dogs, varying in all sizes and descriptions.

Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens

Based on the site of a former monastery, the area was first acquired in 1541. In 1765 the first Countess of Ilchester built a castle on a site overlooking Lyme Bay. The gardens were established to provide fresh produce for the family in residence. That walled garden is now the centre of the Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens that we know today. In 1808 the open fields around the gardens were planted with trees by the 3rd Earl of Ilchester.

The range of plants in the gardens was expanded by the 4th Earl who was a diplomat on foreign service, a leading botanist and an expert on the flora of Europe. He introduced many species from a wide range of countries which have been cultivated allowing the gardens to develop into the magnificent spectre they are today.

However the gardens suffered serious storm damage in 1990 and are still being reinstated, although we did not notice this.

The gardens are situated in a valley close to the sea in which a micro climate allows many exotic species to co-exist with our more familiar plants. It was truly a sight to behold and words can not describe the pleasures we experienced from such wonderful displays.

Abbotsbury Swannery

Abbotsbury conserves the only managed colony of nesting mute swans in the world. Records date back 600 years, started by Benedictine monks who maintained the colony as a source of food for the table.

Each February the staff prepare a two acre nest site. Food such as wheat is offered as their natural foods die back at this time of year and have been depleted by up to 1400 swans and many thousands of other waterfowl.

Normally around 300 swans could be in breeding condition, so reed is cut to permit nesting material for up to 150 pairs. Water levels are adjust-


Landing at Melbury strip - photo by David Corbett

ed in streams and ponds in readiness for the breeding season ahead.

Records of each pair are maintained and prove that most pairs return to the same spot each year. One day after hatching, cygnets are briefly removed from the nest to be sexed, tagged and given the "Hive of llchester" web mark.

Many thanks to Charlotte and James Townshend and their dedicated team of staff. Everybody present will have lasting memories of your wonderful estate and your most generous hospitality.

Robin Humphries

The weather was superb and 59 members attended. 14 aircraft and 2 helicopters landed at Melbury - a superb and immaculately maintained grass strip. 7 aircraft landed at Judwin (Westland Helicopters at Yeovil).

A large coach was provided by our hosts for the day and it collected the Judwin contingent and transferred them to Melbury.

Our hosts declined to accept any payment for what would otherwise have been an expensive day.

As an expression of thanks to them, we were able to present a cheque value £500 to the RABI (which was a charity nominated by James Townshend) with the balance of monies to the FFA account.

Mike Cuttell

Footnote

A very appreciative letter was sent to Roger Bell (the event coordinator) from Patrick Shervington, Chief Excutive of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI), thanking all the 51 'flyers' involved in the day at Ilchester Estate and the Townshends for their thoughtful gesture.

The European Tour 2005

Saturday, June 4th 2005

Narrated by Roger Bell (all in italics)

"You are cleared to land Two Six Left Berlin Tempelhof." The Air Traffic Controller's calm voice made the hair on the back of my neck stand up with excitement. This was it! This was the big one! I could hardly believe I was actually going to land not just in Berlin, but at Tempelhof, one of the most famous airports in the World. Childhood memories of grainy newsreel film of Senior Nazis disembarking from three engined Junkers 52s had burned into my subconscious that this was a place where great historic events had taken place. I had arrived direct from Bournemouth without stopping, I was tired, excited and slightly overawed by the demands of the long solo journey where I had been forced up to 14,000 feet to avoid towering thunderclouds over the Ruhr. The Controllers along the way had varied from being helpful but not much use as along the South Coast of England where one controller was handling flights from Portland to The Wash; to plain useless as in France where the Lille controller refused to answer my call in English but happily chatted away to French speaking heavy jet pilots. The Dutch and German controllers had been exemplary in their patience and skill, something we were all to experience more of in the next eight exciting days. I had followed the official approach route into the outskirts of Berlin with its notified reporting points carefully avoiding the conflicting traffic heading into Berlin Schonefeld and Berlin Tegel each located only five miles away to the North and South respectively. So very different to the London TMA where woe betide any GA aircraft that should stray within ten miles of Heathrow.



Final for 08 left, Templehof, returning from Obermehler

*The final approach for 26 Left Tempelhof descends between two lines of tower blocks and in the final half mile the people on their balconies look down on the arriving aircraft and we were looking straight into their sitting rooms. These must be the only flats in the world that put up net curtains on the twentieth Floor. (*They actually have landing lights on the roof tops and have signs in the houses saying "when going to bed, do not turn the landing light off!" Ed.) *After landing I followed a little Follow Me mini bus for what seemed a couple of miles to eventually finish up parked in the middle of the largest expanse of concrete I have ever seen. The Ground Handlers where friendly and obviously excited at the prospect of twelve Englander Aircraft all arriving at the same time. Not wanting to be tail-end-Charlie when we flew out the next morning I enquired about the fuel arrangements and within a moment not one but two fuel bowsers were swarming all around our little squadron. The refueller who dealt with my request was a huge man with a massive gut who quite cheerfully pointed out that if I used my BP card and not my Shell card then the fuel would be cheaper, despite the fact that he was wearing a Shell uniform and driving a Shell truck.*

We all duly closed up our aircraft and hopped onto a mini bus for a lift to what seemed to be half way across Berlin to the GA arrivals gate of which more later. The first person we met in Germany who was not smiling was the rather grumpy individual on the security check in desk who demanded gruffly "Papers!" I now knew how the hearts of those escaping POWs must have sunk when the same imperious demand was made of them after getting away from Colditz which was in the itinerary for a visit this week, yet more history, very exciting. German as a language can be magical as in Lily Marlene and frightening as in those heavy Wagnerian Operas.

Having made our way out of the terminal there was no sign of Martin or the promised coach to the Hotel, still, no matter there was a taxi which we hopped into and said in our best German "Nehmen Sie mich bitte zum Hotel Steigenberger?" To which the reply came in broad Bir-

mingham, "That'll be the one near the Kudam then?" How disappointing. Our driver was not Michael Schumacher's other brother but a chatty little fellow from Pakistan who had been living in Brum for twenty years before falling for a German girl and moving to Berlin.

The Hotel was magnificent. Five Stars and they were all shiny ones! Bear Gosling had hit the jackpot with this one, I had a look around and decided that if the weather was bad I could happily just stay in the hotel for five days and be pampered. A few Flying Farmers had already gathered in front of the Hotel on a little terraced area for a glass of something and were exchanging flying tales, marvellous we had all arrived safely. Dinner the first evening was enlivened by speeches from the Hotel Manager, assistant manager, our tour guide Nigel Dunkley, a very amusing chap who was to be the catalyst for the success of our tour and lastly Martin Gosling. As is the German custom they all spoke before the meal and at some at length, but no one seemed to mind. After dinner a few of us went for relaxing stroll through the streets around the hotel which we were told were quite safe. The shops were brightly lit and full of expensive clothes and jewellery giving the area the feel of comfortable, elegant affluence.

Sunday 5th June

Weather was overcast with heavy showers which we had to fly around in the Berlin area but flying North to Peenemunde was clearer and took about one hour. Once assembled we were given our next mode of transport - 25 bicycles and two Mopeds for our onward journey to the Peenemunde harbour - a 15 minute ride. Quite a sight and a lot of fun - a squadron of Flying Farmers with two outriders ! After this exertion we were ready for our lunch on board the Vida a three-masted sailing ship.

Bill Burton

Sunday dawned overcast and rainy, not good for our intended trip to the V1 and V2 rocket base at Peenemunde. We all assembled a little sheepishly at Tempelhof searching for a break in the weather. Reluctant to take on the highly accurate navigation required to exit the Tempelhof zone. There was no sign of an improvement so we started up taxied out and took off into overcast at 1000 feet.

As we flew out to the East along a multi track railway line in the middle of the City the weather worsened and one aircraft announced that he was aborting and returning to Tempelhof. Various people made helpful weather reports from up ahead and eventually he turned around and had another go. Having cleared the suburbs we flew North across what had been East German Collective farmed land, huge fields with occasional shambolic steadings with big buildings seemingly randomly dropped all over the place. Lines of trailers and other gear were lying out in the open. There were still signs of outside winter stock feeding with bare patches of land where feed rings had been left in the same place for too long The difference in the styles of farming was immediately apparent in that the West German fields which we had flown over the previous day are usually small strips punctuated with immaculate villages and farm steadings spotlessly maintained and everything put neatly away out of sight of passing aircraft.

We arrived at Peenemunde after an hour between heavy thundery showers. ATC was to say the least sparse with a terse reply of "Wind 270 at 10 knots" in response to the request for joining and landing instructions. Nigel Dunkley had assured us that he had been told that, "Airfield control quote is very experienced." At what, we were not quite sure but it wasn't maintenance either as we taxied in to a novel sight for those familiar with German efficiency and tidiness. There were cracks in the hard surface with rubbish and litter lying all over the place. Our hosts were two immaculately dressed ground staff girls who spoke no English being former East Germans however our guide Nigel soon had the whole troop mounted on bicycles apart from one of his sons and me on scooters as outriders carrying two of the ladies of our party as pillions who were reluctant to take on a German pushbike with the only braking being a push backwards on the pedals.

The Rocket site a mile from the airstrip was entered through a heavily fortified brick building with thick walls and roof. It would appear that not all the rockets went where the designers wanted them to and occasionally they would turn around in mid air and return from whence they came, which I should think did wonders for the local laundry business. There were examples of V1 and a V2 together with more modern rocketry lying about in the open which is a shame because they are showing signs of the sixty years of weather they have seen. The actual ramps were all broken up but the neighbouring former coal fired power station has been converted into a museum with a good display of exhibits well laid out showing how the base was in its busy time. Sadly there was evidence of the harsh treatment meted out to the slave labourers who had worked on the site. Outside was a good collection of modern East and West German military aircraft some of which were not usually on display. (http://www.peenemuende.de/)

We lunched on a converted Baltic Bulk Carrying Barge to which some wise entrepreneur had fitted three make-believe masts. Still if it will do for Disney it will do for us! The food was unusual with a good deal of stodgy stuff apart from good old fish and chips which most people had.

After lunch some brave souls went on a tour of a monster Juliet class Russian Submarine with startling dimensions being nearly 300 yards long and able to carry a crew of 80 sailors. It was the largest diesel powered type of submarine in the world. The idea was for it to cruise over the Atlantic and lie submerged off New York waiting for a signal to launch a couple of nuclear missiles when required. Thankfully it never got the opportunity to see action.

We took a different route on the flight back which was interesting and showed again the backward state of East German agriculture which may be partly due to the low quality soil in the Northern Part of Germany. However the towns were attractive many having the traditional twin spires on their churches. These had been closed and locked during the Communist Regime.

Upon returning to Telmpelhof we were treated to a guided tour of the Airport buildings

After lunch, it was time to act out a schoolboy ambition, or fantasize about war on a Russian submarine. Under the direction of Commander Nigel Dunkley {ex British Forces BRIXMIS and The James Bond club} the party was led aboard by Flugfuhrer Roger Bell [ex ?] regailed in his 2-star Soviet Gen-



David Bell, Richard Howard and Bob Germany at Brandis.

eral's cap. Russian submarine U461 moored in Peenemuende harbour, is diesel fueled and is a carrier of tactical missile systems. Built in 1961, commissioned in 1962, it was one of 5 operating with the Red Flag fleet based in Latvia. With a crew of 80, working 40/40 shifts using the same bunks, with 2 toilets inside the pressure hull, one outside, you can only assume most of the crew were conscripts as no normal person would volunteer to work in such a confined and basic workplace.

FFA no. 1 squadron, in close formation then proceeded on bicycle to the site of the V1/ V2rocket, where what was commonly called the Doodlebug, was developed, assembled , and launched. Early problems with the steering mechanism were solved by their famous pre war aviatrix Hannah Reitsch a female [4 feet 8 tall] being launched in specially adapted piloted machine, no undercarriage, but managed to crash land it on mud flats. The steering problem was solved, much to our cost, for which she was decorated by the Fuhrer himself. The main power station is now a museum with all the history of V1/V2 rockets plus early ballistic missiles, some of which were on display. Also on view were several Russian aircraft, fixed wing fighters and helicopters. One can only admire the ingenuity and design skills of the people involved in this early technology, although put to war use. These same people were close to perfecting the atomic bomb at this time, had they won the race, who knows how different it would be today? The site was bombed heavily at much cost by the RAF and the bravery of aircrews flying so far to destroy this site should not be forgotten. Many thanks to all for making it a memorable trip.

George and Claire Sly

Monday June 6th

After all the excitement of Rocketry and Soviet Super Nuclear subs we were back to work on Monday with a visit to the newly opened British Embassy to hear about the work of the interestingly named Department for Agriculture Farming and Fisheries (where have you seen that name used until recently?). On the way we visited The Brandenburg Gate and had a group photo taken in front of an enormous hoarding showing the rather harrowing spectacle of the area immediately after The Fall of Berlin with damaged buildings, shot up vehicles and fallen masonry littering the streets. There were many young Germans taking a good deal of time to read the captions around the hoarding which were informative, accurate and thorough in their depiction of the Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. Also we went to look at the outside of the Rebuilt Reichstag http://www.reichstag.de with its smart new dome on top designed by the British Architect, Lord Norman Foster. The Reichstag was designed by Paul Wallot and built between 1884 and 1894. It has been used since 1999 as the seat of the German Bundestag. Its new dome has become a symbol of the Berlin Republic and the building itself is one of the capital's main attractions. The tour took us to the Siegesaeule or Victory Column, a splendid monument of a beautiful girl (the Goddess of Victory) on top of a tall column in the centre of the Tiergarten known colloquially as "the Chick on a Stick", and to the former Headquarters of the German wartime Wehrmacht High Command, the place where the plot to kill Hitler failed in July 1944. Everywhere we went we saw traces of the hated Berlin Wall which was put up in August 1961 by the East Germans. The Berlin wall was for many years the site at which residents of and visitors to the city's western sector could see Europe's partition.

We were treated to a talk in a purple painted round drum like auditorium in the splendid new building with its electronic gates and terrorist proof detection devices. went on a Tour of the British Embassy and the Wintergarten and enjoyed a briefing on German farming followed by an open Forum.



Gordon and Caroline doing some serious flight planning.

British Embassy, Berlin

After the major German decision to move the seat of government from Bonn to Berlin the British Government decided in 1991 to build a new British Embassy on it's pre-war site of Wilhemmstrasse next to the famous Adlon Hotel which is just round the corner from the Brandenburg Gate. The old embassy was a dark and dingy place and was abandoned in 1939 on the outbreak of war and destroyed by fire in 1944.

The Queen opened the new embassy on the 18th July 2000. This building was designed by the prize-winning English architect Michael Wilford at a cost of 75 million dollars. It's striking modern appearance and innovative design has the exterior made of sandstone coloured metal with a protruding blue framed triangular window over looking the street. There is extensive use of glass giving the building a light and airy atmosphere which is much liked by the 125 diplomats who work there.

When we first arrived, if one had not noticed the words 'British Embassy' one would have thought we were going to a college of modern art design! We were shown the oak tree that the Queen planted, to commemorate her visit. We then climbed the stairs into the reception room called the Winter Garden. This had a blend of striking modern colours which you either liked or hated with two bizarre modern sculptures. Having finished our coffee and biscuits we were introduced to Mr. Craig Egner (Scottish), the First Secretary Agriculture. He outlined the extreme pressure East Germany was having on West Germany. The latter did not only have to support the Eastern sector heavily, financially, but this had occurred when there was also a major reform in agriculture resulting in up to 50% unemployment in the industry. It would take many years to adjust and reach harmony again.

After lunch in a very busy restaurant under the bullet and shell splinter pocked arches of the Main Eastern railway track into Berlin, where young soldiers escaping to Berlin from the horrors of the Eastern Front were shot out of hand if they failed to produce the correct pass. We walked through the streets with our guide Nigel giving us a tour of the various sights with tales of immense importance of World Changing events to the most trivial tabloid intimate detail. His knowledge ranged from the immediate history since the wall fell after The Cold War right back to Charlemagne and beyond.

Frau Renate Kunast, who spoke good English, from The Ger-

man Agriculture Ministry introduced our speaker Herr Jungehulsing, who spoke little English. We heard that the Germans are the biggest exporters in the World with €734bn. of visible exports which isn't bad for a population of 80 million. The figures and statistics rolled out in an impressive PR exercise that convinced us of the importance of Germany as a World Economic Power. The attitude of the Ministry people in Germany was a huge contrast to the attitude of our own home grown DEFRA people in that they were obsessed with importance of ensuring that every farmer received every support possible to ensure the successful outcome of his work whereas Defra appears to be obsessed with ensuring that we all toe the line and don't get anything we are not entitled to and woe betide those who have the temerity to question the efficiency of them and their systems.

Mike Rowland

Monday Afternoon

German Minister of Agriculture, Frau Renate Kunast who is the Federal Minister for Biological Diversity, spoke about the importance of introducing alternative cropping and using those crops as usefully as possible. She also touched on Farm Animal Welfare saying that battery hens are to be reduced on a transitional basis. No mention was made of veal calves which are a main staple in Continental restaurants and a sensible way of disposing of unwanted billy calves from dairy herds. The CAP featured quite well in the talk with the big problem seeming to be how to distribute the energy. There were only 940 people in their Ministry! I think they must have been referring to the department within the Ministry. Frau Sigrun Neuwerth touched on the prickly subject of immigration controls for dogs cats and ferrets to the UK. Yes you read it right ferrets are being imported, presumably as domestic pets.

The Germans have made huge strides in the world of Biodiversity and you can now run your car or tractor on biofuel derived from oilseed rape.

In the evening we had a superb meal at The Grenander Restaurant which was a short walk along brightly lit clean streets full of shops with every possible imaginable luxury. There were still lots of people walking around when we returned at about 10.30 pm. A few of the party were invited to go into a smart looking night club for "A Spectacular Floor Show" so in they duly trooped, only to reappear a few moments later with very red faces when they realised that every one of the pretty young things on the pictures outside were all actually blokes with make up and probably still in possession of their "Meat and Two Veg" as one of them delicately put it and so to bed with laughter ringing in our ears.



Roger Bell, Annette Gosling and our guide, Nigel Dunkley having a highland fling at Templehof.

Tuesday 7th June

Tour of historic Berlin & Potsdam including, Soviet War Memorial, SS/Gestapo HQ, Luftwaffe Museum, Checkpoint Charlie, Glienicker Bridge Olympic Stadium and Gatow .

Our first visit was to the 1936 Olympic Stadium. Built by Hitler, this very impressive arena was designed to demonstrate to the rest of the world the superiority of National Socialism. Where Hitler and the leaders of the third Reich reviewed Nazi rallies and parades. A visit to the top of the bell tower provided a panoramic view, not only of the stadium and Olympic complex, but also the whole of Berlin and its suburbs.

Our party was very privileged to be permitted to visit the 'Langemarck Hall', A closed area behind the reviewing dais which Hitler ordered Speer to construct to remember the dead of the First World War. This is not normally open to the public but Nigel managed to arrange a visit for us in connection with his war history research work.

Next was a visit to Gatow, the airfield that serviced the British sector of West Berlin. First we saw the site of the prison block where Nazi criminals spared the death sentence, including Rudolf Hess, were imprisoned. On the former airfield itself is the museum of the German Air Forces, where the history of the service is displayed from the very beginnings, using balloons and airships, through both world wars and subsequent soviet influence until the German reunification. Also displayed was a history of Gatow itself, with special attention to its role in the Berlin airlift. A very impressive collection of over 100 aircraft was especially noteworthy as it contained a real mix of both western and eastern types, adversaries in former times, now parked peacefully together.

Not nearly enough time to do the museum justice, but next we had to go farming.....

David Keene

A rather cloudy morning heralded the arrival of our coach for a trip to a fruit farm .This was located just North of the town of Potsdam, about 20km SW of Berlin.

The farm was originally a state farm and consisted of about 3700 ha ,which produced Tulips, Crocus and Gladioli .Since the demise of Eastern Germany the farm is now run by a small company called Obstgut Marquardt GbR ,with our host, Manfred Klienhert at the helm. We met for a short (!) briefing in the old tulip house. This building is now used as a canteen, an old farm machinery museum and a cold store for about 70tons of apples. Here, we were refreshed with apple juice and an apple liqueur, which found favour as we were not flying that day!!

The thrust of the business currently is to direct sell most of the produce to Berlin, as there is no margin in wholesaling. Similar to the UK perhaps. To complement this they have opened a farm shop selling their own produce and that of other local businesses, such as candles, pottery and other vegetables. Labour to harvest apples and cherries is becoming difficult to find .Once this was done by Polish workers, but now they are EU Citizens, tax and NI has to paid which makes them too expensive. The farm's answer is to recruit Turkish workers who sleep under the apple trees at harvest time.

The farm would like to borrow one million euro to fund an expansion of the farm shop but the banks seem very reluctant to lend this amount, in fact Manfred had been consulting with

a third bank the day we were there but to no avail !!

They also had plans to expand the tourism side of the Estate by letting shooting of wild boar, and to start a pick your own enterprise for potatoes and other fruit on the farm. This may prove difficult considering their distance from a large population.

Our thanks must go to Manfred and his staff for their time and for providing a very welcome lunch.

Stephen Goddard.

Wednesday 8th June

On Wednesday morning after an uneventful flight to Obermehler/Schlotheim some 140 miles southwest of Berlin we were given a very warm welcome by Karl Voget who was to be our host for the day. Karl farms 350 hectares nearby which he reclaimed from the Soviets some 12 years earlier. On the way to his farm we were given a very interesting tour of a monastery which was undergoing extensive restoration which is to be used as an Ecumenical Youth Centre, the funding coming mostly from donations from the Church, Deutschebank and the Steel Industry who were providing the steel structure to restore an ancient barn on the site. The settlement was first built in 1131 on land which was deemed difficult to farm by an order of Monks who wished to demonstrate to the local population what could be achieved in such circumstances. Deserted before the first world war and closed down in 1968 because of its dangerous state, the restoration was begun in 1989, starting with the Chapel which has an impressive Roman arched ceiling but has also a very spartan interior. In 2002 the restoration of the Christ Pavilion was started, its construction encompasses some very thought provoking glass walls which depict man's use and misuse of the earths resources such as poppy heads and syringes i.e. drugs to light bulbs, CDs etc i.e. mans ingenuity. Most of the running of the centre was overseen by six couples who lived on site who were required to have the practical and technical skills to help with the ongoing restoration. After many photographs were taken and questions answered, we departed for a magnificent lunch prepared by Karl's wife Ulli in their beautifully restored farmhouse.

Gordon Bellerby



Karl & Uli's house



Some of the 1000 head at the Collective farm

In the afternoon, Karl took us to a Collective Farm. As we arrived, there was a great bustle of sweeping and painting and hammering going on. It appeared that this was for an open day the next day and not for our benefit! The farm manager, who was a bright and cheerful thirty year old was proud of his farm and this showed in that everything was much neater and tidier with all the tractors and implements carefully put away if possible inside although there wasn't room for everything in the 100 yard long cart shed. They are using cow slurry to make electricity by pumping the slurry into two holding tanks that are agitated to keep fermentation at the right temperature. The tops of the tanks are sealed in a poly bag and the methane gas that is produced is drawn off into a plastic 100 mm (4inch) pipe and fed to two converted diesel engines that turn generators. The electricity that is produced is fed into the National Grid. The bit we couldn't work out was that they sold the electricity for about 9cents and they only pay 5.5cents to buy it back for the farm! Obviously the German Government is so keen to be seen to be doing the right Bio thing, that they are prepared to subsidise the production of Bio Kilowatts. The system cost €1 million to set up and will be paid off in 5 years.

After the bio gas setup we went onto see the cow unit which was fairly standard in that they milked 1000 Holstein/Friesian cows in three shifts in a herringbone parlour with a zero grazing system fed from half a dozen big clamps with feeder trailers. The followers that we saw looked healthy and happy.

Thursday 9th June

The Flight to Brandis

After 5 nights based at Berlin Tempelhof it was time to pay our airport dues which were considerably reduced thanks to Nigel's negotiations and being able to produce noise certificates. Martin making a single payment on the tour participant's behalf saved much time.

With a good forecast we were all anxious to fly, which led to a long queue for departure. Papa Echo was asked by ATC if he would do a formation take off with us in Uniform Yankee. Roger replied affirm so we lined up together. I got take off clearance and started rolling slowly, no sign of Roger rolling so it was full power and off to Whisky Two where Roger caught up and overtook us. The flight was uneventful over varied rural scenery until we got to the Brandis circuit where it looked like a formation landing as well, with us on a right base another on final and yet another on a tight right base. We chickened out and went around for another final approach which we had to ourselves. Brandis being in former East Germany was a famous experimental airfield for Junkers jet bombers during the war before being taken over by the Soviet Air Force The original wartime tower, hangars and accommodation blocks had fallen into disrepair and were nearly hidden by self generated trees seen as we left in the coach for Colditz Castle.

Jim Anderson



The inner courtyard, Bader's room on the right.

Colditz Castle

The purpose of flying to Brandis was to visit the well known Colditz Castle. But wait a minute, that's only well know to us - the German people don't take much interest in this ex-prison for difficult Officers, it's only the glamorisation it has received in our TV series and films that has highlighted it to us. Our guide, Renata, turned the question on us - where were the German Officer POWs kept in the UK? Apparently it was at Cardiff, but none of us knew that.

The pretty village of Colditz is dominated by the castle, originally a hunting lodge, perched on the rising ground. On entry, we were greeted in the first courtyard by scaffolding from floor to rooftop as it is being converted into a hotel with a museum. Going further up and into the building, we came to the more secure inner courtyard, made famous in the films, surrounded by the ex inmates' quarters and a chapel. In this small yard, 500 men would have used it for exercising, sunbathing and the headcounts.

The main story of Colditz seems to be the ingenious escape attempts, including the glider, tunnels, impersonating German guards and a brave attempt by someone who dropped from a top floor and caught each window ledge as he dropped to break his fall!

You tend to get the impression that the officers were maybe in their 40's as depicted in the films. The average age was only 24. They were certainly very mature for their age. There were over 300 escape attempts with 19 successful home runs. This was a record for any POW camp in both World Wars - and they claimed it was escape proof! But when you think about it, because these officers were persistent escapees and tradesmen like tailors, engineers and even artists that could draw maps, passes and identity cards, sent to Colditz because they had these skills, it became a centre of all the necessary people to perform escapes.

After returning to Brandis, we flew to Hamm, some via the famous dams. Claas did us well that night by putting on a fabulous dinner at the hotel.

Paul Stephens

Friday 10th June

The day started with an 8am start for the 50 minute bus ride from the Hotel Mercure to the Claas factory based in Harsewinkel.

The first stop was the impressive technopark opened in 1992. A most impressive building with the roof supported by laminated timber beams. The building housed items of current production and an interesting museum that also contained the founders bike!

Here Herr Meuller (who entertained us at the hotel on the previous night) was there to greet us. We were told that 20,000 visitors per year passed through these portals. We were then ushered into the cinema for a short presentation on the history of Claas. Founded in 1913 by Franz Claas, now in the control of Helmut Claas and daughter, the company has 2,700 employees plus a new factory in Russia for combines only.

Then to the factory; with a length of 0.62 miles end to end, workers move around on a fleet of bikes provided by the company. The factory works one shift starting at 6am with two short breaks 9am to 9.15am and 12noon to 12.15pm.

Most impressive were the robot profile cutters and welders. These machines were state of the art and were maintained mostly by the makers. A mezzanine floor had been fitted in the main part of the factory whilst still in production and contained overhead conveyors for the production and paint-lines, this must have been a Safety Officers nightmare!

All panels were pre-dipped in an acid formulation and then powder coated before assembly. Most parts, other than engines were made in this factory or by satellite factories. The combine bed was manufactured in Hungary. No combines were built for stock, all were built to customer specifications.

After a superb lunch in the canteen we were to have another short film show. We were told that Claas build 38% of all combines in Europe and 15% worldwide, 4,000 combines are built in Harsewinkel yearly. Claas have now taken over Renault tractors and produce them in Claas's familiar colours, the flagship being the Xerion.

After thanking Herr Meuller for his and the factory's hospitality it was a journey back to Hamm to visit the world wide parts



The group at the Claas showroom.

distribution centre. Here, as the name suggests all Claas spares are held, going back many years until the demand no longer exits.

55 million pounds worth of spares are kept under 110,000 part numbers with 96% availability at all times on 24hrs / 365 days. The stores are run as a joint venture with logistics group to aid distribution. Paper work is kept to a minimum by means of computerisation. All forklifts, though manually controlled are directed as to where they deposit or withdraw their parts. The operation is so strict that even the correct sized box is given for each part to be packed in. After a tiring but interesting day we returned to the hotel at around 5pm.

Bob Beard



Martin & Annette in a relaxed mood towards the end of the tour.

Saturday 11th June

From Hamm in Germany to Liege to visit Fort Eben-Emael in Belgium.

The fort was constructed between 1932 - 1935 to defend the Albert-Kanal and a number of important bridges, and in an attempt to maintain Belgium's neutrality (between France and Germany). The surface measurement is 75ha and a superstructure of 45ha, complete with a tunnel system and galleries of 4 km. The Germans attacked the Fort in May 1940 as the early part of the Blitzkrieg. They used for the first time, and in great secrecy gliders towed by JU52's, these were released 30km from the target. The Fort was taken completely by surprise as the nine gliders, 70 men, equipped with 50kg specially shaped explosives, landed quietly on its top! The first glider landed at 0400 hrs and the Belgians surrendered at 1000hrs with very little loss of life. The lack of command and the element of surprise to the first airborne attack to be carried out by gliders contributed to their early surrender. If the Fort had been on full alert it would have been able to hold out for an excess of 5 weeks – rather than 5 hours!

We routed back to Hamm via the Möhne Dam, as a tribute to the Dambusters Raid on the night of 16/17th May 1943. We returned leg weary and exhausted yet again from Liege airport to the delightful little strip at Hamm to be greeted by the tall and imposing looking Chief Flying Instructor who was so impressed by our appearance and organisation that he wanted us to stand in line for a group photo, sadly people had already started drifting off by the time the request was made so we made up for it by buying him a glass of the excellent local beer in the little bar/restaurant in the Flying Club. All the club aircraft are kept in small hangars like a long implement shed with doors on to protect them from the burning sun in summer and ferocious cold in winter. The extremes of continental weather are much greater in Germany and made us realise how fortunate we are to have the Gulf Stream gently keeping us more temperate. We met up in an unusual restaurant for our farewell dinner in Hamm, which turned out to be run by Bosnians despite advertising itself as being Argentinean! However they had very good steaks which hit the spot and prepared us for the rigours of our return trip in the morning.

Neville Stops

Sunday 12th June

The visibility for the return to the UK was good for flying however with a slight head wind. The Goslings were the first away as usual, shortly followed by the Burton airliner then the rest of us got away in dribs and drabs. The controllers along the route soon got used to this Balbo of unruly pilots using their GPS on Direct To for navigation and gently shepherded the more serious offenders away from their hot spots. The only one who got really upset was the poor man at Ostend who after having put up with ten TMA busts on the trot threatened to report one poor unfortunate whose only mistake was a late handover from Brussels Radar. David Keene following his usual policy of not talking to any one unless he has to, raised the heart rate of those who were in earshot crossing the Channel by not responding to position requests from Paris Radar until a relay was established with another FFA who was at a higher level and communications were resumed to everyone's satisfaction.

The Andersons had elected to break their long journey back to Aberdeenshire at Headcorn, so they and a few others met up for lunch and to compare notes for the last time before taking off for a very long leg home. David Keene who is a member of the Headcorn based Flying Tigers was able to show some of us a very interesting and relevant piece of history lying in the corner of a hangar gathering dust - the actual V1 flying bomb that had been fitted with a cockpit and manual controls for a test flight by Hanna Reitsch at Peenemunde! It is believed that it is to be taken to Germany for refurbishment and then returned to be put on permanent display at Headcorn.

As I climbed into the cockpit for the last leg of the journey back to Dorset I contemplated what had happened over the previous eight days of flying and fascinating visits to places that I had only read about in books. The FFA Study Tour next year is to Italy and if it is half as interesting and fun as this year it will still be an enormous success. . We were indeed fortunate to have the Goslings friend, Nigel Dunkley on the Berlin end of things. His knowledge and organisational skills are truly outstanding and all delivered with an unending flow of diamond quality historical knowledge and interspersed with gentle witticisms. Everyone was very appreciative of Bear Gosling ably supported by Mrs Bear. The logistical problems were sorted out so smoothly that it seemed they had been doing it all their lives. The serenity of our noble organisers even in the tightest of corners facing the most horrendous of bureaucratic muck ups reminds one of the famous swan that glides effortlessly over the water all the while paddling like fury unseen beneath the waves. None of the 2005 Flying Farmers European Study Tour party will never ever be late for a coach trip again, since we all now know that "Nine o'clock is nine o'clock"! Well done Martin and Annette you are stupendous.

Roger Bell

Break Out To Colditz

Although this was part of the FFA European Tour, Ray Friedlander wrote such a comprehensive report of that day, I thought it warranted a page to itself (editor).

The day dawned bright and virtually cloudless as we prepared for our 0930 departure for the last time from Berlin Templehof. They would have to pick this day to calibrate the ILS on 26L wouldn't they! As a result of this the tail enders were delayed up to 30 mins at the hold as the bright red calibration aircraft did several circuits. Anyway we all finally left with cloud few at 4000' and headed SSW for the 100 nautical miles or so flight to the small airfield at Brandis which is a provincial airfield about 18 miles south west of Leipzig.

Brandis airfield has a very interesting history of its own. In the 1930's it was the home of the Luftwaffe's Blind Flying School and, during the war, became a secret experimental base for some very interesting and strange aircraft, as developed by the Junker's and Messerschmit factories. These included the circular winged "flying beermat", which never got past the experimental stage. There was also much activity with rocket-powered aircraft, some of which were used in service.

After the war the Soviets took over until 1992. Now, there is much evidence of the Soviet times with derelict drab looking barracks and administration blocks that have been simply abandoned. Brandis is now a private airfield run by the local town, but still feels very much like a run down ex-military airfield.

On the 45 minute coach ride to Colditz we were advised not to expect a "fairytale castle", and, as we drove through the relatively flat countryside, we began to wonder what to expect. Sure, the terrain was flat, but it had to be a bit of a fortress didn't it? Well, we needn't have worried for, as we approached the small town of Colditz, we caught our first glimpse of the "Castle". Whatever our expectations had been it certainly was impressive. More like a five story monastery, with it's plain stone coloured flat sides and small windows arranged in neat uniformly spaced rows, this building formed an imposing sight perched as it was on a steep hill overlooking the village.

The coach parked in the attractive little town square and after a few minutes to buy the odd ice cream or two we made our way up the steep but short hill to the castle, over the moat bridge, through the archway and in to the inner courtyard.

Then it all came back. Yes this was exactly the place we had seen in those classic escape films. The atmosphere hit you straight away. There was the cobbled courtyard surrounded by those high building sides and tower. You could just see in your mind's eye those ghosts of times gone by, those airmen and others lounging around in uniform, maybe playing volley ball or somehow whiling away the time of their incarceration.

Of course that's the Colditz we, the English have all heard of! But it existed before. We soon learned of its history from our excellent guide - Frau Renata Lipmann. An obvious academic with excellent English, she was able to explain that the Castle was first known to exist in 1046 and actually existed before the town, which appeared on the scene in the 13th century. Originally owned by Emperors the castle was the subject of disputes and local punch-ups for many years. It was destroyed by fire together with the town in the 15th century by the Czech Hussites, was rebuilt in Saxon hands, and destroyed again, by a fire in the bakery in 1504. So, it went on into more peaceful times when it became residences and hunting lodges for various rulers.

However, it started to decline from the mid 1700's was turned into a poorhouse in 1800 and then a workhouse. By 1829 it became a psychiatric asylum, which it remained until 1924. The Nazis took over and in 1933-34 it was used to imprison about 600 of their opponents.

And so, back again to WW II. "OFLAG IV C" as it was known, became a prisoner of war camp for Allied Officers from Great Britain, the Commonwealth, France, Belgium, Holland and Poland, and was claimed to be escape proof. This was soon proved to be incorrect by 31 successful escapes, despite the rocky crags, the numerous guards, barbed wire and searchlights. Not surprising, since many of the prisoners were escape "experts" rounded up from previous attempts at other less secure camps. Prisoners of Colditz were considered to be "important" consisting of officers, some well known such as Douglas Bader (complete with orderly attendant) and the so called "prominente" – well connected people who might be used as bargaining chips at the end of the war. These included two of Winston Churchill's nephews, Earl Haigh – son of Field Marshal Haigh, Lord Lascelles – nephew of George VI, and others.

For a POW camp the inmates were relatively well treated and respected by their captors. They were allowed many activites including games, lectures of many academic interests, including the possibility of gaining a degree, music and theatre. Despite all this, the main interest was escape, with over 300 attempts in all, of which there were 12 French, 11 British, 2 Dutch and 1 Polish successful escapes. Of these 19 in total were from the confines of the Castle itself. Two of the well known British successful escapees were Pat Reid, author of the best seller and film "The Colditz Story", and Airey Neave who later became an MP only to be tragically blown up by the I.R.A.

During the visit we were shown the famous French escape tunnel, which, although discovered before it could be used, was a very ambitious project; tunnelling at several levels, and passing under the wooden chapel floor. It was this discovery that precipitated the formation of the escape committee which co-ordinated the various attempts; thereby pooling expertise and efforts.

Our very interesting visit concluded with a view of the museum which showed many artefacts including forged documents and German uniforms, a secret French Radio and a model of the glider which was discovered in the roof, and which, had it been used for it's intended escape attempt, would have flown successfully.

The visit to Colditz had been fascinating, but we had already run well over time and so we were finally whisked away in the coach for a rather belated lunch en-route and back to Brandis.

Aboard our respective aircraft we headed west to the small and friendly airfield of Hamm for the next stage of our tour.

By the way – Colditz Castle today? After the war it became a hospital and nursing home under the East Germans. When the Russians, left it became owned by the State of Saxony within the Federal Republic, and is being renovated for use as a conference centre and hotel –" We have ways of keeping you here until you pay your bill!!!"

Ray Friedlander

"Deauville I will have to remain clear of your zone to avoid CBs, Golf Sierra Lima" Oh dear, I thought if Bear is avoiding bad weather that doesn't bode well for the rest of us Flying Farmers trailing in over the Channel from all over the UK, low on fuel and tired after the intense concentration of avoiding level busts around the London TMA.

With ten miles to run I heard Bear and the others make successful approaches and switch off. So when I was told, "You are cleared for a straight in approach to Runway 30 at Deauville." It was natural to request a run and break to amuse the boys and let the locals know The FFA were in town.

On landing the weather was humid and muggy following the thunder clouds and rain. The Continental, our hotel in the centre of town, was not as grand as the Steigenberger in Berlin, but a fraction of the cost and clean with friendly English speaking staff.

That evening we all dined together in a busy little restaurant right opposite the hotel with a good sea food menu and the usual French custom of five courses meant that no weight watching was possible.

Next day dawned overcast but mild and we embussed for the forty mile journey to the former Farmer's Weekly farm near Vimoutiers. We met Tim and Chrissie Green who took over the FW lease in 1987 and run the farm as their own enterprise. Tim was at Harper Adams in 1973/4. The farm is now 244 Hectares and was formerly made up of fourteen separate small farms. The buildings were in the middle of renovation work which seemed a good idea since they were originally built in 1803. The Landlord put up a full sized shed last year to house the state of the art cow unit. Tim has recently expanded the holding by 60 hectares and a further 179,000 litres. In May he took a sheep technician into the partnership and employs two others full time. The flock of mainly Bleu Domaines has slightly expanded which unfortunately do not impress Tim but he says buying sheep in France is very difficult due to lack of available breeding stock.

The dairy cows were turning out as we arrived and we saw some fine Holsteins with a few Montbelliards and one or two Normandy cows mixed in. The Normands are an interesting breed. It is assumed that the breed was brought to northern France by the Vikings in the ninth and tenth centuries. About 1850 it was crossed with the Shorthorn and expanded southwards by displacement cross breeding. A herd book was established as early as 1883, which was followed by the first monitoring society in France in 1907. In 1920 the herd book was reorganised, and in 1946 it was decided to include all cows in the milk production study. To consolidate the breed further, the herd book for bulls was closed. In 1958 this breed accounted for one quarter of the total cattle population of France.

Any calf that has not got dark rims to the eyes is not allowed to be kept for breeding. So the cows all have rather amusing spectacles which when you get used to the idea are quite attractive in a way. They are dairy based dual purpose cattle. The annual milk yield is on average 4100kg (4.2% fat, 3.6% protein). Tim is very proud of one of his cows which scored 89 points when inspected by the Breed Society.

Purchasing and distribution does not seem to be as well organised in France as it is in the UK. There used to be a number of Farmer's Co-ops but these have largely closed now with only four remaining in the country. The minimum wage legislation has had an impact on bigger businesses but not so with smaller farmers since the minimum is €8.00 per hour or about £5.50 which is well below the going rate for a tradesman. The same story goes for the maximum working week where only businesses with over 22 employees are affected. Tim has no chance to change any of this since he has no voting rights other than in the local Parish Elections.


Tim, scratching his head

The drift from the land has accelerated in recent years with farms getting bigger. This has been helped by the recent efforts of the French Government to reorganise the highly fractured and inefficient distribution of land. If all the land owners in a parish agree then the little scattered strips can be reallocated into ordered blocks. However there are other problems since it is forbidden to trade in quota in France, however there is an automatic annual increase of 6% dependent on National Production. Despite all this the Greens have no intention to return to the UK since they feel that the quality of life is much better on the French side of the English Channel.

After seeing the cows safely out to pasture and having a cup of coffee in the Parlour we embussed for a tour of the estate and saw some first class standing crops and an array of high quality farm buildings that Tim has erected which will revert to the Landlord after fifteen years. The farm is set in a bowl surrounded by wooded slopes covering fairly steep cliffs which have been excavated in places leaving large caves. One of which is big enough to take over a thousand sheep on a hot day. Other crops included maize for ensiling, wheat and barley.

The lunch spot was a restaurant called "Le Sap" attached to a cider museum set up by the local council. The excellent meal was going to be the usual French five courses again before tour organiser Anthony Kedros intervened and got it cut down to a measly four. The museum curator was delighted to have someone to inspect her fully working exhibit. A quick look showed a horse driven apple mill like a gin gang. A massive apple press drained into an underground wooden tun. The press beam was about 25 feet long and four feet thick. All in perfect working order and every piece of wood had heavy worm infestation. It would never have been allowed to continue by the HSE.

Back on the bus again we passed a dismantled V1 rocket site near St Sylvain and the spot where Rommel was wounded in a strafing attack by a roving Allied fighter, thus invaliding him



The flax pulling machine

out of the War for good. Ironically this spot is near a village called Foy de Montgomery. From where he was evacuated back to Germany only recovering to be invited to commit suicide following implication in a plot to kill Hitler.

Our next stop after passing the Pont L'Eveque cheese factory was near Falaise where we were introduced to an absolutely charming Belgian farmer called Bernard Van Der Meresch who appeared to be Mr Flax and Onions for Normandy. Bernard is farming 400 hectares and has taken the wise precaution of marrying his son to his neighbour's only daughter who farms the same again. He has spent 30 years growing onions which he claims to have learnt all about as a student on a farm near Ely. A field of standing flax looking for all the world just like a thin cereal crop was being lifted and swathed by a clever machine. The swather did the work using fast moving belts that grip the stem of the flax and yank it out of the ground then lay it flat on a sloping deck that passes the pulled stems over the top of the machine and spits them out of the back onto the ground in very neat and orderly swathes. It was travelling at about ten miles an hour with the driver sat in his own huge cloud of dust with no cab or protection for ears, eyes or breathing. Tough guys these Normans!

The flax lies desiccating for about two months being turned occasionally. After baling and storing the product is brought to a handling plant that runs eleven months of the year converting it into a type of yarn by threshing, teasing for grading and re-baling for spinning elsewhere into linen. The plant was situated in the middle of the growing area which had a lot of Belgian farmers who had come down to Normandy in the thirties looking for better growing conditions for their crop than they had at home. The crop is planted in September and swathed in June. The usual rotation is one crop of flax every six years. There are about 80,000 Hectares of flax grown in France yielding between 6 to 9 tonnes of flax per hectare. This will produce about 2 tonnes of finished product which sells for €1.50 per kilo.

Onions are close top Bernard's heart. He loves them and we were treated to the sight of the great man carefully scraping up a few that had been spilled from the spout of the picker and carefully putting them back on the pile. No profligate waster this man! He prefers Flash and Keepwell as his main varieties which provide good yields and the right size, shape and colour product for French housewives. He had been getting €0.70c per kilo off the farm recently but he said that the price wouldn't hold as the bigger growers up North would soon join the market and the price would settle back to around €0.25c per kilo. The next day I noticed Tesco selling onions at €2.00 per kilo. We all know who makes the big money in food. He starts harvesting in June and won't finish riddling and packing until January. The packing and storage shed had a simple in box blower system for drying and frost prevention.

The yard was well set up and there was ample undercover storage for the expensive array of top of the range machinery including a brand spanking new JD 8300 stood next to last years JD 7820.

On our field walk Bernard took us into a steel Dutch Barn and showed us a 2 inch hole that had been punched right through one of the RSJ uprights. The story was that it came from a low flying Spitfire that had been attacking German tanks hiding in the barn and I thought I had problems with the kids causing damage shooting sparrows with an air gun! Bernard's distaste for the Brussels Bureaucracy was evident throughout the day by his constant references to injustices emanating from the Capital City of his erstwhile family home. As I left he pressed a piece of paper into my hand and said, "Show this to your farmer friends in Britain." I opened the paper on the coach and read as follows.

Message to the Brussel Bureaucracy

"Farming is mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you are one thousand miles from your cornfield." Eisenhower 1956.

(I saw this written on the wall of a cattle market in Madera, California. Bernard Van Der Maresch)

We returned to lovely Deauville and had a walk along the beach front before showering and changing for dinner and for the want of anything better returned to the same restaurant as the night before for another five course meal.

The forecast next day was mixed with some low cloud to the West of England and better weather in the East. We had a problem with the Flight Plans to leave France. There is a free standing machine like a juke box called *Olivia* in many French airports that is touch sensitive and usually allows pilots to file quickly and get away without any delay, but not that day. This particular *Olivia* refused to acknowledge even the touch sensitive persuasion that a size ten mart boot could deliver. Those of us who could remember the number of West Drayton and Manchester managed to sneak out that way after calling them on our mobiles.

After navigating around the anchored fleet of warships in the Eastern Solent and all the Temporary Restricted Zones that seemed to pop up in front of where ever you wanted to go, a few members went to the PFA Rally at Kemble which wasn't very well attended due to poor weather on the Sunday.

Anthony Kedros deserves a pat on the back for setting up and organising a first class trip to a beautiful part of our nearest neighbouring country with all the trimmings and five courses with almost every meal!



Tim and Bernard

Pete Sumner 26.08.50 - 19.05.05

Our Chairman - John Golden and Peter Evans represented the FFA at Peter Sumner's funeral held on Monday 6th June, following a tragic accident. This is the address given by the vicar at his funeral.

The loves of Pete's life – family, farming and flying.

Pete was born and brought up, until his teenage years, in Ingleby, Derbyshire the eldest of four brothers. Pete often remarked that he started his farming career from the age of four helping his parents on their dairy farm and to be quite honest he was looking forward to easing into gentle, partial retirement but still giving his son, Chris, a helping hand. A "helping hand" was the thing that Pete excelled at, as his family, friends, fellow farmers and members of the parish council will testify to.

Pete, his parents and brothers moved to Tower Farm at Wollaston in 1965 and after obtaining a National Diploma in Agriculture at Writtle College in Essex Pete returned to work on the farm with brothers Dick, Tim and father Clarence where he made all the major farming policy decisions from the word go. Whilst in Essex he met Sandy whom he married in 1972 and they lived at Knuston Lodge Farm, Irchester for ten years during which time Chris and Jocelyn were born and where Pete first embarked on his love for building and design and turned a disused loft into a bedroom for himself and Sandy. It was at this time that Pete fulfilled a life time ambition and obtained his private pilots licence but this lapsed for a while due to the pressures of family and farming but it wasn't long before Pete regained his licence. He adored flying and the freedom of the skies, plus it gave him a good view of all his crops!

At the age of 31 Pete took the tenancy of Tower Farm from his father and went onto expand his business and farm in his own immaculate and innovative way.

Keen to be involved in the local community, Pete became a Governor at Wollaston Comprehensive School and, 22 years ago, also followed in his mother's footsteps by becoming a parish councillor. He was firstly on the Playing Field Committee and had a great input into the maintenance of both the field and buildings as well as organising an annual dance to raise funds. His latest role had been as Chairman of the Parish Council and he enjoyed the challenges this presented whilst doing his best for the village and giving freely of his time to attend meetings other than monthly Council ones, if he felt they would be of benefit to the village.

Pete was a selfless person who had been a blood donor attaining 50 donations before being "retired" due to himself being put on blood pressure medication.

On the flying front, for the Project Propeller initiative he had volunteered to fly World War II RAF veterans to Kemble to attend reunions – even letting one of them take the controls of his plane – for the first time since the end of the war. For the Popular Flying Association's project entitled "Young Eagles, Pete took seven youngsters for their very first flights.

Pete was thrilled to have become a granddad at a relatively young age and enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren, especially Chloe.

Another ambition of Pete's was to design and build his own home and he had been over the moon when he had been granted planning permission for this at Shepherds Hill and envisaged starting the build once harvest had finished. His mind was buzzing with different ideas for his dream retirement home and this is what he was focussing on when his untimely death occurred.

On a personal note, Sandy and the children freely admit that Pete did so much for them all without any consideration for himself or asking for thanks.

As so many people have written in the many messages of condolence, "Pete was a lovely man who will be sadly missed by many".

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Romania - Summer 2007

I have proposed to the committee that I should organise the 2007 study tour to Romania. I have been lucky enough to make friends with a Romanian, Constantin Chesculescu, who lived in UK for some 25 years but who returned to Romania when the last dictator was deposed. One of Constantin's friends (Mihai) owns one of the few private aircraft in Romania, which he keeps on his farm. One reason for choosing 2007 is that the city of Sibiu, around which we will be based, will be the Culture Capital of Europe for 2007. Other possible visits at this early stage of planning include:

- Mihai's farm – approximately 1000 dairy cattle;
- A newly established fully integrated poultry operation – 20m euro's finished 2004;
- Local wineries;
- A feed mill;
- A large timber plant (for those who did not go to Riga!)

In addition, there will be activities related to the Culture Capital of Europe 2007, and other recommended non-agricultural activities are trips to the painted monasteries of North Moldavia, and the nature reserve of the Danube Delta.

This will be a fairly ambitious trip, and I need to know how much interest there may be from FFA members in taking part in this tour. Please, therefore, will members who might wish to be involved give me an indication of their interest by the end of August this year, in order that I can do some preliminary planning. By advising me of your interest within the next two months, you are not committing yourselves in any way – but I do need to work with Constantin to do some early work on the project. To give you some idea of our connections there, Penny (my wife) is driving her horsebox out to Romania to deliver some ponies to Constantin, and to bring two dressage horses back, in September this year.

Please let me know if you may have any possible interest in this trip, by e-mail to david.corbett5@btinternet.com (or by snail mail if you are not "with us" yet!); let me know your aircraft type, and likely numbers on board. I cannot guarantee that the trip will accommodate large numbers – but advanced warning will make orderly planning much easier.

Finally, for those interested in looking at Constantin's business, look at www.rapel.biz And – if any member has their own contacts in Romania, please let me have details.

David Corbett

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