FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 98

August 2008

Opening Thoughts

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Editor, Publisher & Printer;

P.A.& R Stephens
Moor Farm
West Heslerton
Malton
North Yorkshire
Tel: 01944 738281
Fax: 01944 738240
Email: chix@farmline.com

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Cover photograph;
Roger Bell and crew taking off from Los Martinez on the Spanish Tour

Chairman's Message

The year is passing at what feels to be some pace. In this area we seem to get endless days of showery rain - rainfall totals are well up. We have had good silage cuts, but have to mow the airstrip all too frequently. I do so hope this weather pattern changes for harvest because the thought of having to dry large quantities of wet grain is frightening.

It was rain that prevented some from attending our Yattendon Estate visit - a shame, because it was an exceptionally interesting day and we owe warm thanks to Joe Iliffe for arranging it. Not a single aircraft flew in, but I was impressed by how many participants took the trouble to drive and I am certain that they were all well rewarded.

Events have gone well this year. We shall shortly be holding our AGM, details of which are in this news letter. Please come along - we like to see and hear from members. We share common problems - if only it were true that "A problem shared is a problem halved"!

FFA Flying Scholarship for the Disabled

You will recall that in 2007, when Polly Vacher was making her successful fund-raising attempt to land at every airfield in the UK, I invited members to donate money to Flying Scholarships for the Disabled. This charity was set up in memory of Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader, whose intrepid attitude was "No legs – so what?" Many of you gave generously and we raised approximately £6500, not quite enough for a full scholarship but a useful sum. The charity was so pleased with our efforts and generosity that it has named one of its awards 'The Flying Farmers Scholarship'.

In April I had a letter from Sue Whitby, director of FSD , informing me that the FFA Scholarship had been given to Paul Soper, a young man of twenty seven living in Poole, Dorset. As Poole is not far from my home I asked Sue if it would be in order for me to make contact with Paul. She said she thought he would be delighted. I got in touch with him initially by e-mail, making it easy for him to decline the contact if he so wished. I introduced myself, congratulated him on behalf of the Flying Farmers, and offered him a ride over the local area in my aircraft. He was in fact delighted to be contacted and to have the chance of a flight.

He has a form of cerebral palsy which affects him from the hips down. He is able to walk, though not easily or far. Because he doesn't drive, on 31st May his parents brought him to the farm and we were all able to go flying. He needed the seat fully forward to be able to reach the rudder pedals. Once airborne, I explained how we look at the horizon and the position of the coaming in front of us, using this to determine whether we are straight and level, turning, climbing or descending. Within four minutes he had mastered this, so for an hour he was able to fly his parents over some familiar territory, seen from an unfamiliar angle.

After landing we invited them to stay for lunch when we were able to learn a bit more about Paul. He has a history degree and a post-graduate qualification in museum organisation. He is currently working as a civil servant for the MoD. He would like to work in an aeronautical museum, but most such appointments are short-term only. His hobbies are museums and air shows – and he certainly seems to have done many.

Aviation is in the family. His grandfather worked for Boulton and Paul at Bristol making aircraft. His father is a stress analysis engineer who has worked for Rolls Royce and on Concorde. Father related how when he was a boy living in Somerset, whenever an aircraft went over the whole family would rush outside to identify it. Mrs Soper told me that when Paul and her husband learned that Paul had won the flying scholarship they were both so overwhelmed that they were unable to work for the rest of the day! I guess most of us have no idea of the pressures and tensions of having a disabled family member.

Paul left the UK on 28th June for six weeks to undergo 45 hours of flying training and 27 hours of ground school in South Africa. We wish him all the best and hope that he will be successful in gaining his PPL.

Paul has asked me to thank most sincerely all who contributed to the FFA scholarship fund. He is very grateful for the opportunity of learning to fly.

John Golden

Committee Members

Dick Walgate	President	01472 371203
John Golden	Chairman	01725 552384
Paul Stephens	Secretary	01944 738281
Andrew Cragg	Treasurer	01303 874251
Mike Cuttell	Events Secretary	01242 236770
Martin Gosling	Airstrip Advice	01787 269369
Rick Holt	Committee Member	01386 761816
Mike Ashmole	Committee Member	01738 627622

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www.ffa.org.uk
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Registered Office—Brooker Farm, Newchurch, Romney Marsh, Kent, TN39 0DT

Committee Rumblings

The FFA Committee met at Tollerton, Nottingham on the 2nd July. All the Committee and the President were present.

1) The total membership now stands at 395. Andrew Cragg, our Treasurer has been trying to get all members to pay their annual subscriptions by standing order to ease administration. Those not on standing orders often need reminders, which all takes time.
2) The long standing discussion took place about eligibility requirements to become a member. It came to the fore this time because the owner of a very large and successful feed compounding business has shown an interest in joining. Although he might not be a farmer as such, he derives his income from agriculture and he has an aeroplane. It was thought that cases such as this should be considered by the Committee for possible membership.
3) Mike Cuttell, our Events Secretary reported that all the proposed events for 2008 have gone ahead and all to date have been a success.
4) An extra event will be added to visit a crematorium on October 1st. This was John Goddard's diversification project. See page 4 for details
5) The AGM is being organised by Mike Ashmole. Following suggestions at last year's AGM, this year's meeting will be held at Husbands Bosworth on 15th October. See page 4 for further details.
6) Mike Ashmole will be standing down from the Committee at the AGM, consequently there is a place available for anyone wishing to stand for election.
7) The next Committee meeting will most likely be held in London next February, to coincide with a winter meeting.

www.ffa.org.uk

The FFA website was set up a number of years ago by Mike Stickland, a friend of Committee member (at the time) Anthony Kedros. Mike has now sold his business to another outfit who are maybe not so easy going with their charges as he was and are a lot busier, so consequently updates don't get done very often or on time.

As far as communications with members goes, the bulk email system works a lot better as the news items are in front of you when you download your emails. One problem is that only about 50% of members choose to be on the FFA email system.

At the Committee meeting, it was decided that the website was worth carrying on. It is used by some members as an aid to finding weather sites, especially when touring. It is also useful for filling in a flight plan on the computer, downloading General Declarations and particularly useful for new members joining, to download application and standing order forms.

So from August onwards, I will be updating the website from my own computer. Hopefully, it will then be kept more up to date.

So if you have anything you want publishing please let me know. It could be useful for news items between newsletters such as if you are holding a fly-in, advertising aeroplanes or other bits and pieces, or for appealing to other members for advice.

Paul Stephens

The EU Aerodromes Regime

On 27th June the CAA received the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council about Aerodromes (and Air Traffic management). You may recall that when this originally went to EASA consultation, the document was written in such a way that we all believed that "they" intended to bring every single flying site, of every description, into their control. This understanding met with massive objection during the consultation, and I am pleased to say that the newly published document, which will become the definitive law, says as follows:

- On page 17, a new para 3a of Article 4 is to be inserted which says: "Aerodromes open to public use.... .... which can serve traffic conducted in accordance with the instrument flight rules or aircraft with a maximum take-off mass of 2730 kg or more shall comply with this regulation."
- On page 13 para 5 – "It would not be appropriate to subject all aerodromes to common rules. In particular aerodromes which are not open to public use and aerodromes mainly used for recreational flying only should remain under the regulatory control of the Member States..."

For clarification, "Public use" means aerodromes licensed and published in AIP's

From the above it will be seen that there is no threat to the majority of FFA member airstrips. As far as (for instance) Shobdon is concerned, we do not serve traffic conducted in IFR, so that although we are licensed, we will not be brought within the EASA regime.

As you all know, there was a consultation open until 10 July as to whether flying training should be allowed to take place from unlicensed aerodromes, where suitable aerodromes can comply with a GA industry regulated Code of Conduct.

Although I was not representing FFA whilst taking part in the Light Aviation Airsports Study Group (LAASG), I nevertheless made the views of our membership known, as I felt the situation to be with these words;

FFA welcomes the proposed changes. Whilst some of our members would wish to benefit from the opportunity to diversify and make more use of their airstrips, planning requirements and other more individual constraints will limit the number of airstrip owners likely to attempt to qualify.

David Corbett

Welcome to New Members

Since 1st March 2008, the following have joined

		Strip
827	Viscount Cobham, Stourbidge	n
828	John Emmerson, Boston	y
829	Paul Clarke, Llanbydder	y
830	Bobby Gott, Felthorpe, Norwich	y

The total membership now stands at 395

Programme 2008

February 20th	Kew Bridge Steam Museum, London
March 19th	Silsoe, Bedfordshire
April 16th	Alvis Bros. Lye Cross Farm, Bristol
April 22nd-23rd	Central Science Laboratory plus other visits, Yorkshire
May 6th-8th	Floatplane Flying, Perth
May 14th-24th	European Tour to Spain
June 18th	Orford Ness, Suffolk
June 21st-25th	Normandy, France
July 9th	Yattendon Estate, Berkshire
September 23rd	Windfarm, Welshpool, Wales
October 1st	Thatcham and the Goddard crematorium
October 15th	AGM, Husbands Bosworth



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.

Game Fair, Blenheim Palace, Friday 25th July to Sunday 27th July 2008

As in past years when the Game Fair has been at Blenheim, I am putting together a package for air arrivals at Oxford Kidlington airport which will include VIP transport to and from the event for a fee per person (probably around £5). I haven't had any success with discounts on landing fees but they are relatively reasonable there at present.

Anyone interested can contact me at andrew@dentcomm.net or on 07860 378429. You are welcome to publish this as it stands but I will let you have more info as soon as it is available.

Andrew Dent

Tuesday 23rd September, Welshpool

Date still not absolutely confirmed, but David Corbett has closed the list of entries for this event.

Wednesday 1st October, Thatcham

Visit to the Thatcham Accident Research Establishment where vehicles are to tested to evaluate their insurance rating. Should be a most interesting visit.

Lunch will be provided.

Afternoon visit to the Goddard crematorium where we will learn about this unusual diversification project.

Tea will be served before we pass on!

Landing at John Goddard's strip at Colthorpe Manor Farm.

Please make your entries and payment of £35.00 pp to Mike Cuttell on the reply slip before September 1st and further details will be forwarded in due course.

Wednesday 15th October, Husbands Bosworth, Rugby

Notice is hereby given that there will be an Annual General Meeting to be held at 12:00 on 15th October 2008

11:30 coffee
12:00 AGM
12:45 Sandwich lunch
13:45 A talk by Steve Jarvis a lecturer at Cranfield "Human Factors in Aviation"
14:45 A demonstration by Rotorsport Gyroplanes

There will be no charge for the meeting, lunch and coffee on the day. Please send your applications to Mike Ashmole by September 30th on the enclosed reply slip.

New Committee Members

Two of the existing Committee members will be standing down this year as per the Articles. They will be Martin Gosling and Mike Ashmole. Mike does not wish to stand for re-election, but Martin will stand.

This means that there is a position for a new Committee member, possibly two if Martin is not re-elected. Therefore we need nominations on the enclosed form with proposers. Please send these to the Secretary, Paul Stephens in good time before the meeting.

FFA European Study Tour 2009

Plans are being formulated to visit the Netherlands and Norway in 2009. Rick Holt will be organising something in Holland and Mike Ashmole will organise the Norwegian part.

Mike is asking anyone with connections or ideas in Norway, to contact him either by telephone on 01738 627622 or email on Mike.Ashmole@Blueyonder.co.uk

Visit to Alvis Brothers 16th May 08

We had the usual difficulty with low cloud slow to clear but ended up with a jolly good turn out!

We were grateful to Michael Bell for allowing us to use his strip at Garston Farm from which we were taken by bus to The Alvis Bros enterprise for principally a tour round the cheese plant.

The enterprise really started two generations ago from a small humble dairy farm. The family decided the only way to survive the future was to add value! So in1952 John Alvis concentrated on the manufacture of cheese and his brother, Mike, looked after the pigs. Sadly in 1960 the two brothers fell out with each other, so John bought his brother out. John has two sons who are now both involved in the business, managing different enterprises.


Maturing cheese stacked high


Garston Farm strip near Colerne

The business has now expanded from the modest 300 acres to 3,500 acres of which 1,950 acres are owned and much of which is now organic. Cropping consists of 1400 acres of ryegrass leys, 176 acres of permanent pastures and 1,774 acres of forage maize and arable crops. 1000 milking cows supply 8.0 million litres to the cheese enterprise. A herd of 800 head of young stock provide 250 heifers annually to maintain the dairy herd. 250 beef animals are sold through the farm shop and the remainder are sold as calves. Some milk is bought in under contract, currently at 40p for organic and 27p per litre for non organic which has stayed the same for the last 6 years!

30,000 pigs per year are contract reared to heavy beacon weight largely on the whey from the cheese dairy and other by-products and cereals. This enterprise is to be dropped in order to fully focus on cheese production.

Alvis Bros. are now one of the largest organic cheese suppliers to the supermarkets. They have not been frightened to quickly adapt to new innovating ideas with a new line going in to produce mini packs of cheese for packed lunches, aimed mainly at the airline readymade meals market.

4,000 tons of cheese is produced annually of which 3,000 tons are organic with also 100 tons of whey cream and butter. The cheese is matured for generally 10 months with some premium cheese taking longer. They currently have a 5 year contract with Sainsbury's which gives them stability for their colossal investment. The cheese manufacturing enterprise was a very impressive, highly organised and hygienic area. We all dutifully clad ourselves from top to toe with overalls, hats and shoe covers, to inspect the premises and were a sight to behold!


John Alvis and his son


Suitably attired for the cheese factory visit

The three dairies, the cheese factory and the farm shop are all run by separate managers and each separately costed. All managers are totally responsible for running their own units and are paid a bonus on top of salary of up to 15% of their salary, for meeting performance targets. We were all most impressed to see such a successful and well run business.

Most sincere thanks were given by Mike Cuttell to John Alvis for giving us such an interesting and stimulating day and also to Pete Gale for arranging it.

Mike Rowland

Visit to Yorkshire – April 22nd / 23rd

Despite promises of improving weather, the Almighty did his usual for yet another FFA meeting and gave us a slow to clear clag. 8 wise members, with closer connections to the Ultimate Decider, flew into their allotted landing sites the day before and avoided the problems. Moor Farm (my strip) was the main landing site with a few going to another member's strip called Eddsfield three miles away. Edd Peacock has developed his strip into one of the most pleasant places to go for a fly out, with the bonus of the cheapest fuel in the country. Thanks to Edd for letting us use his facilities.

Having organized events before, the weather problems came as no surprise, but with total dedication to the FFA (or was it because the stopover and dinner were pre-paid!), all those that were staying the night arrived either on time, slightly late or very late. They arrived either as true flying farmers or their more cautious cousins, the driving farmers, making a full compliment of 41 for dinner.

The first day had the option for anyone not able to stay overnight, to come just for the day. So we had an extra 8, making a



Jim, Angus and Hamish arriving from near Aberdeen

total of 49 on the first day in 17 aircraft and several cars. We started with a coach trip to a local lavender farm, which was used as a convenient stop for a light lunch rather than an in depth study of the in and outs of lavender production. This pleased the owner as his revenue is from the café and gift shop which were well supported by our members.

The main visit of the day was the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) near York. But first Roz (my wife) and Katie (my daughter) took a few of the urbanculturists into York for the afternoon, which conveniently lowered the number of agriculturists to the threshold of 40 for CSL.

CSL is an organisation that specialises in the sciences underpinning agriculture for sustainable crop production and commodity protection, environmental management and food safety. (I didn't write that, I got it off their website www.csl.gov.uk!) They are an executive agency of DEFRA and carry out work for governments and industry throughout the world.

I can remember when the labs were being built about 15 years ago at Sand Hutton near York on a green field site. Futuristic white buildings were constructed on the 150 acre site, with funny looking chimneys poking out. This gave the impression that secretive and sensitive government work would be carried



out. This proved not to be the case as demonstrated by 5 of the 500 scientists that work on the site, who presented short papers to us. To those that managed to keep their eyes open in the soporific atmosphere, they revealed the diversity of their studies into non food crop production, climate change and how it will affect the flora and fauna, food safety issues and emergencies such as the AI scare when the dead swan which was found in a Scottish harbour was analysed by CSL. That is just a fraction of the work currently going on.

We were then given a welcome walk round the complex with nothing much to see apart from laboratories, offices and zombie like people going about their business in the bland environment. What we did learn was that there is a lot of background work being carried out on subjects that will affect all our futures.

We returned to our farm for a quick look at the new 1500 tonne grain store built last year. I was able to show off my limited knowledge of the stirring system which allows us to store and dry corn at 12 feet deep no matter what the moisture. In North Yorkshire, it is very rare to get wheat naturally dry; more likely to be 18% or above. The day visitors departed at this point and William Procter repeated his ferrying trips of the morning with his Maule, for those that landed at Eddsfield.

Accommodation was split between two pubs with b&b, our house and my mother's. The FFA has travelled by nearly every means of transport, but I think a horse lorry was a first on this


Central Science Laboratory, near York

occasion, being used to assemble everyone for dinner at the Blue Bell in Weaverthorpe. We are blessed in our part of the world with some exceptional eating places, this being one of them.

Day two first involved another round up session with the horse box to gather everyone at Moor Farm in time for the coach at 9:30. Eden Camp near Malton was to be today's destination. The Camp was built by Italian prisoners during WW11 in preparation for German prisoners. They worked on the farms in the area and apparently didn't have a bad time. One old German, one of many who stayed on after the war, recalled that some would escape at night and go to a local hostelry, where the landlord would provide them with a pint round the back. The biggest problem was breaking back into the camp!

The Camp is now converted into a museum of WW11. Each of the 29 huts has a different theme from the Blitz, to Evacuation, to Women at War etc, etc. This isn't just a static museum – the stories are brought to life with movement, smoke and even smells of the time. Lunch was in the Prisoner's Canteen. It was interesting to see coaches from as far afield as Scotland and South Wales in the car park. The museum has won many national awards and I think everyone enjoyed the visit, until nearer the end when the Almighty did his thing again; this time he gave us an occluded front to deal with, running the length of the country from north to south moving west to east at only 10 kts.

Those previously mentioned wise men with closer connections to the great Decider, had been in touch again and knew that a clearance would come in time to fly back to places as far away as Wiltshire, Kent and Aberdeen before darkness. But on arrival back at the farm, weather printouts from the computer were doing the rounds and with only 1 mile visibility, plans were being hatched by the less hopeful to stay another night. Then the first aviator decided to give it a try and reported back that the cloud base was far higher than expected and the back edge of the front wasn't far away. Within 2 hours, all had departed safely and Roz and I collapsed in chairs and fell asleep!



Eden Camp, near Malton

Paul Stephens

Floatplanes, Scotland

Floatplanes, 6th - 8th May

Miraculously after three weeks of IMC weather the three days required to conduct the operation i.e. one day to get to Perth two days to go seaplaning and get back home, enjoyed near perfect weather.

Twelve students and three lady observers arrived at Perth in time for dinner taken in the new restaurant on Perth Airfield and booked in the newly developed Travel Lodge type accommodation also on the airfield.


The training helicopter with the floatplane in the background

The seaplane an Aviat Husky on amphibious floats is based at Loch Earn some 45 miles from Perth, which meant an 0730 start by car in order to meet the first slot at 0830 and to make sure we were able to process six students a day. Some of the students including our aged President took the opportunity to take a helicopter lesson to and from Loch Earn in order to dispense with the driving.

Meanwhile those not seaplaning flew up to Jim Anderson's strip and had a very enjoyable tour of Jim's no frills working family farm.

Students and tourers all returned in time to be entertained to pre-dinner drinks courtesy of the Scottish Aero Club, who had also laid on Dia Heather-Hayes to give a sparkling aerobatic display in his Pitts.

Dinner was at The Royal Perth Golf Club and we were joined by Dia and his Lady, Johnstone Mcmillan of NFU fame who had acted as chauffer for the day and the Scottish Aero Club's most distinguished pilot John Moffat who was credited with the torpedo that sank the Bismarck and is still flying his Piper Colt at the incredible age of 89.

After dinner Mike Ashmole gave a brief history of the Royal Perth, the oldest Royal golf club in the world founded in 1825, and our President told some amusing stories and gave a short lecture on dress code for such occasions.

Next day the group swapped around and all 12 students completed their seaplane lesson and 6, their helicopter lesson all in time to fly home in CAVOK.

Mission Complete.

Mike Ashmole

The FFA Tour of Spain 2008

The European Study Tour 2008 took us to Spain. The trip was organised by Martin (El Bear) and Annette Gosling.

Arrival & welcome dinner at Silken hotel

This years study tour around Spain had the start of the main programme at Jerez, in the South Western corner of the country, but since this was a pretty long haul from the UK, it was decided to have the meeting point in the North of Spain at Vitoria – the capital of the Basque region since 1979. Originally we were to meet at Pamplona, and we had already made arrangements there with a hotel and a farm visit booked, but after our return from the recce in February, we were sent an email from the airport to say that they couldn't accommodate us on the required date due to Notam-ed works in progress on the parking apron. Curiously, checking the Notams on our arrival day produced no such information. Personally I felt that they just didn't want a large group coming in, and in fact, would a Notam be issued over 3 months early?

As with most Study Tours that are some distance away from base, most people elected to start out the day before, and have an overnight stop en-route. The two Bobs staged through Jersey and the CRUZ crew used their own base in Alderney, others used La Rochelle and Poitiers, the Procters and ourselves stayed with friends in Biarritz, while the Stephens were pleased to have a temporary relief from their week of appalling weather (4½" in 4 days) in Mallorca.

By mid-afternoon on the Wednesday, several planes had arrived in Vitoria with varying degrees of difficulty, but the two Bobs in Jersey were not allowed out VFR, and the 4 planes that were in Poitiers were fog-bound and after much delay for a clearance, decided that the clearest route would be across France and round the Pyrenees via Perpignan. This turned out not to be the case and the East coast of France and Spain had poor weather too, resulting in a diversion into Barcelona (Sabadell). It was two days before three of the four finally caught up with the rest of us, but Peter and Janet had a further misfortune of a Vacuum pump failure resulting in a visit to Valencia for repairs, before they finally hove into view on the Saturday. 'The Barcelona Boys' felt that they should perhaps have come down the West side instead, but they made a group decision with the information they had – and hindsight is a very cheap commodity.

Those 23 of us that made it to Vitoria, checked into the Hotel Silken which was close to the centre of the old city and was thankfully a well-appointed and comfortable hotel (a big relief to Annette and I since we had had to book it sight unseen via the internet after our change of plan with Pamplona). The welcome dinner was the usual fun get-together of study-tourers, albeit with a reduced turnout, but glasses were raised to absent friends and the wish for their safe and speedy arrival to join the group.



Those that made the first dinner in Vitoria

Day 2 - Vitoria to Jerez

Thursday morning split the party into those who hadn't the range, bladder or enthusiasm to make the 400-odd mile leg to Jerez in one hop, and those that had. The dozen or so who planned on the non-stop leg had a shortish cultural walking tour of the old city centre before boarding a bus at the hotel for onward travel to the airport. Security was unusually strict at the airport, and noticing the flags were flying at half-mast, we eventually learned that there had been a bombing event locally 24 hours earlier by the Basque separatists ETA and that a policeman had been killed. The funeral was in the city cathedral during the morning and the coffin was then brought to the airport to be taken to the victim's hometown. There were many dignitaries and government officials in attendance, and – understandably – we were not permitted to go out to our aircraft until all the official duties had been completed.



William & Jane en route to Jerez

Depite the unexpected delay at Vitoria Airport, the long leg down to Jerez saw everyone arrive in time for our arranged visit to the Domeq Sherry Bodega that evening before dinner – including the HOPE-ful crew (always scheduled to arrive direct to Jerez), and the two Bobs who had by now been released from Jersey. All it now needs is the arrival of 'The Barcelona Boys'.....!

Martin Gosling

Day 3 - Jerez to Huelva to Jerez

Despite the abundance of the free samples of sherry and liqueurs the previous evening, all the tour participants were assembled on time for the hour's coach trip to the Rio Tinto mines at Huelva. The trip had special significance to the party because Annette Gosling's grandfather was employed by this business for much of

his working life.

Our visit started at the mining museum where we learnt a little of the history of this vast enterprise. The mines here are reputed to be the oldest in the world, probably having been worked for over 5000 years. Bronze age artefacts are abundant suggesting a significant industry at that time. These mines are thought to be the fabled gold mines of King Solomon, an area here is still known as Carro Solomon today. The Greeks and subsequently the Romans mined, primarily for gold and silver, for over 800 years, the mines being worked by slaves who were shackled to the mine working face and forced to work until they died, usually within a couple of years.

The mines were reopened by the Spanish in 1724, but success was only achieved after 1871 when the mines were sold to a British syndicate who were to become the Rio Tinto Company. The mines were developed on a massive scale using the open cast system. At the height of operations over 16,000 miners were employed and 200 miles of rail track laid. The major ores mined were for copper and sulphur, the burning of which led to the formation of acid rain which, together with the mining operations, has decimated the natural vegetation, giving the area the appearance of a moonscape over many square miles. A 45 minute train journey into just one of the open cast mines, during which we passed all the redundant paraphernalia of the mining operation, including steam engines, smelting works, blast furnaces and slag heaps really brought home to us all, the massive scale of the operation that only came to an end in 2001. We saw the 'Rio Tinto' river, coloured almost blood red by the dissolved minerals in the water.

A new town, Rio Tinto, was built to house many of the local miners and staff when the demands of the mining operations required the demolition of local villages. For the British employees a purpose built village, Bella Vista, was built complete with tennis courts, football pitch and golf course, a development 100 years ahead of all the multitude of golf courses that now are a part of southern Spain.

Neither flying nor farming, but a fascinating day's visit from which we all learned much and we all found most interesting.

David Keene

Day 4 - Jerez to Domecq Bulls to Jerez

"He's down!" The crowd gasped anxiously as our plucky hero fell in the dust, just missing the sharp horns of the enraged animal as it charged past hell bent on murder or worse!



El Bear bites the dust

"He's up!" They cried in relief as El Bear the little known Matador and sometime East Anglian farmer leapt quickly to his feet in a very sprightly manner for a fellow whose last significant birthday gave him the right to a bus pass! The visit to the World Famous Bodega and Estancia of the Pedro Domecq family was the highlight of the Flying Farmers European Study Tour of 2008 to Spain.

On the evening of our arrival in Jerez we were shown the impressive Bodega before dinner as covered elsewhere in this newsletter. That visit set the tone for the upmarket ways of the Domecq dynasty. Nothing is left to chance and excellence is the order of every facet of their operation. The next morning was the second day of our tour and the visit to the Domecq farms and estancia promised to be something really special. We began with a tour of the finishing paddocks holding the bulls just about to go to the fifteen top Bullrings in Spain. The beasts looked big and very menacing even though they were just lolling about their feed troughs. They are selected for their attitude as well as their conformation including the size and shape of their horns, the Spanish don't want see Bambi trot out into the ring if they've paid good money for a Bull Fight after all. The more aggressive bulls are noted as they are herded from one paddock to another throughout their growing lives. This is done by men mounted on horses carrying long wooden poles with blunt ends that they use to poke the bulls to get them to move along. As an equine pursuit it makes galloping around Aintree seem a bit tame even if you do have to negotiate Bechers Brook. The very best looking and most aggressive bulls are kept for stud. All bulls killed in a *Corrida* are sold for meat. there are 15,000 bullfights every year in Spain and southern France. Domecqs use about 550 cows and 30 stud bulls in the fighting bull production operation. The bull calves are weaned at six months and given a two feet high number branded with a hot iron on the ribs that you can see from 100 yards away. Which, is dead handy if you aren't a fast runner, as these fellows can do 25 mph in deep sand. They are all ear tagged at birth. Not surprisingly lost tags are not replaced. The best bulls are sold to the bull ring operators for €15,000.00 each. Frozen Semen is sold to Ecuador, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela.

The Breed produced at the Domecq Estancia is known as *The Torre Estrella* after a local monument. There are 6,500 Hectares on three farms with 1,500 head of cattle. The bulls usually take four years to finish at 600 kgs. For the first three years they are turned out on grass pasture or range land which we saw from the coach while approaching the Estancia. The previous day we had flown over the whole of Spain from North to South and had seen huge areas that are used for extensive beef production with olive trees randomly dotted across the huge expanses of unfenced land to provide shade in the heat of the day. The temperature on the plains can reach 40 degrees Celsius so the trees are a very important part of animal husbandry. Water is available form bore holes and small dams.

The bulls are brought into finishing paddocks in lots of 15 to 20 and fed on beans, maize rye and hay in the spring of their fourth year. The 5 hectare paddocks are bare sand fenced in by 10 foot high cactus hedges with four bar 6 foot high welded steel fences inside that.

The Bull fighting business in Spain and Southern France is worth sixty million Euros and employs 40,000 people. Domecq provides 1% of all the bulls used for fighting in Spain.

Most bulls are bred and raised for fighting in small herds away from the towns. Not surprisingly a big problem is the bulls fighting amongst themselves; we were told that the annual

loss rate is between 15% and 20% from field fighting despite having cute little blunt fibreglass tip covers on their horns.

The current top *Matador* is Jose Thomas who earns about €15,000 per *Corrida*. He is allowed to select the bull breeder but never sees the bull before it comes out of the chute since that would be bad luck. Not half as much bad luck as it is for the bull.

Next to the bull paddocks was a herd of big, strong looking cows with calves at foot. These *Retinto* cattle were the dams of the oxen that are used to herd the bulls onto the trucks for transport and around the bull ring stock yards. They are descended from the draught animals that The Spanish used before the arrival of the tractor since it was not so common to use heavy horses for draught work. Next to a shady grove of palm trees was the horse paddock with a real mixed bag of breeds and types standing in the dust waiting for their next meal. There were a few of the famous Spanish Horse, also known as Andalusian, looking magnificent. The Spanish are immensely proud of this breed. Introduced to Britain for breeding the Spanish horse has had a strong influence on many of our breeds including the Connemara, Cleveland Bay, Hackney, Irish Draught and Welsh breeds. However we heard that there is now some 'blending' with English Thoroughbreds and pure Arabs. The horses used for herding and general farm riding work were mostly cross bred types. They were all quiet and calm despite having forty noisy chattering Flying Farmers in bright clothes wearing funny hats barging into their small paddock. One dear old mare took quite a liking to George Sly even though he didn't have any nuts in his pocket. There were even a couple of Welsh Mountain ponies for the children to ride.

We walked through a lovely arch into an immaculate stable yard to be greeted by a nine piece brass band and a welcome glass of sherry. After a while the band struck up with a stirring military march and set off through the stables with all of us following. The stables were mostly in a large old barn with what had been stalls for tying up by the neck converted into loose boxes by building a low wall at the front. The 20 or so boxes were full of very smart looking immaculately groomed horses. To our amazement none of the horses turned a hair at the band or us lot traipsing along behind, even though the boxes had walls no more than 5 feet high. Our nutty Thoroughbreds at home start to dance about if the radio in the tack room is a bit loud; these Andalusians are a very different breed.

From the stables we climbed stairs to be above a small bull ring about 30 yards in the round with seats laid out for us all. Then we received more drinks and *Tapas*. There was a fine gentleman sitting at the ringside quietly watching proceedings with a note pad on his knee flanked by two very elegant ladies. It turned out this gentleman is the current head of the Domecq household and he had come to assess some of his livestock. Evidently the heifers that show a bit of fire and aggression as two year olds in a little practice session in this ring are kept for breeding and the mild mannered ones go in the pot.

Presently a two year old heifer was released into the ring. She trotted around the ring, not showing any fear or distress but genuine bloody minded aggression. A mounted rider came into the ring and proceeded to canter about just in front of the heifer. His mount was unfazed by the menacing horns just a few inches from his flanks but very quick to accelerate out of harms way if they got too close or when the rider eased his reins. After a couple of close calls and a bit of showing off with the rider popping his hat over the heifer's horns, horse and rider left by a side door.

A tall young lad in very revealing, extremely tight trousers



Where's El Bear?

holding a red cape had been very wisely hiding behind a stout barrier at the side of the ring. He eventually showed himself to the delight of most of the ladies watching, well all except one. The heifer was completely unimpressed by the tight breeks and she clearly wanted to wear what they were nearly covering on her horns so she hammered across the ring intent on some very unladylike treatment of our young friend. He stood his ground boldly waving his red cape at the little heifer, then skilfully stepped aside at the last instant as the beast galloped harmlessly past brushing through the cape. This exercise was repeated a few more times. All pretty harmless really, not much of a portent for the real drama that was to unfold when our host asked if any of us would like to have a go. Step forward one Avions Robin pilot, East Anglian cereal farmer, completely unaware of the damage that can be inflicted by a bovine on a person such as one who gets between a semi wild hill bred Blue-Grey suckler cow and her calf. Hill farmers in the UK treat them with great respect. Not a bit of it, for our lad, well fortune favours the brave as they say. Here we have the progeny of a thousand years of selective breeding to find the grumpiest one amongst a whole heap of grumpy ones.

The real sport was about to begin. Bets were laid on how long it would take for the heifer to catch the man. No bets were laid on the man getting away. And she did! She bowled him over flat on his arse. Mind he was back on his feet again dead sharp to a round of applause. Rather him than me was the general opinion, it was a brave effort and our man got away to fight another day. Well done Martin "El Bear" Gosling, you were very good and walked out of the ring with your head held deservedly high.

The band had been tootling away from time to time on a little band stand at the ringside. After a while it struck up another march and the players slowly led the way away from the ring towards the front of the family hacienda, a fine two storey house with impressive porticos to the south and north elevations. We found tables laid for lunch in the shade under the North portico next to the a cool date palm grove. The arches were attractively hung with climbing geraniums and bougainvillea. Wine was served and a little starter then the main dish arrived. It was a huge *Paella* made in an enormous pan four feet across. After a selection of tasty puddings and coffee with dessert wine and liqueurs just when most were ready for an afternoon nap we were roused and ushered into a magnificent building that housed an indoor bullring. The walls were hung with pictures of famous bulls, matadors, picadors and horses.

These people are proper stockmen alright, no doubt about it, they obviously love their livestock and take huge pride in having the best and showing them off.

After we were all comfortably seated again a single horseman rode into the arena and proceeded to give a display of equitation of a standard similar to that in the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. We were treated to five displays one after another ranging from Classical dressage by a single rider which looked good enough for Prix St George; through a display of mounted handling by a rider using a stock saddle in full chaps with wide brimmed hat very reminiscent of the outfits used by stockmen in the USA. Perhaps they got their dress code from the Conquistadores? There were two different types of formation movements by up to five riders in matching livery. A man on an outstandingly beautiful iron grey stallion gave a demonstration of circus trick type riding, the cleverest trick being turns on the fore hand on one leg only. We were treated to a six handed formation ride to music carried out at the canter with some very narrow gaps in the crossing manoeuvres. Finally one magnificent chap in an embroidered outfit that was nearly all gold in the traditional Spanish *Cavallero* style complete with big hat with ostrich feathers gave a terrific display of classic equitation with great confidence and panache. Including changing leg at the canter on every leg right across the arena. Altogether a really outstanding display that impressed even those of our members who don't normally watch horse shows or fall asleep in the dressage!

Throughout the day we had been guided and had the Domecq operation explained to us by a friendly and urbane fellow called Juan who was the farms manager. After loading back into the coach we drove through the beautiful countryside back to Jerez past the cattle grazing peacefully under their olive trees, much wiser and more knowledgeable about the beef and bull business in Spain. It was a wonderful day that we shall remember for ever. The next time I face a stroppy suckler will I be tempted to shout "Hey Toro!" and wave my hanky at her? I don't think so, I don't think I have the bottle of El Bear, or the bounce.

Roger Bell

Day 5 - Jerez to Gibraltar

The flight from Jerez to Gibraltar was split into 4 waves of 4 A/C in each wave, the reason for the 4 groups was that Gibraltar had to close the road as it crosses the runway. After landing and checking in we had a long wait to get a taxi into the centre due to the fact that the road was closed which had caused a huge bottle neck. There were various comments from the locals and for the disruption we had caused. It was strange to be back in an English speaking and cash country. When we had all arrived at our hotel and consumed a quick lunch we all got into two buses to give us a tour of the rock which covers 2 ½ square miles.

The rock of Gibraltar occupies a strategic position at the eastern entrance to the narrow strait and guards the only exit from the Mediterranean to the wide ocean beyond. Gibraltar has been in the historical limelight for over 3,000 years. 4,000 years ago the ancient mariners daren't pass the rock for fear of the currents. The Phoenicians sailed past it and used it as an important landmark, marking the entrance to the Atlantic. The Greeks gave it the name *Calpe* which means urn, possibly because of its shape. The present name of Gibraltar comes from the Arabs who invaded Spain in the VIII century. Tarik was the leader of the invading army. Since then the rock has been known as *Gibel Tarik* - the mountain of Tarik. The Arabic name has altered over the centuries to its present form of Gibraltar.



The Rock

Tarik did not build the Moorish castle, nor did he found the city. Both were built five centuries after his death. He did however build a fortification along where Southport Gates now stand and up the side of the rock. It was in 1160 that the city was founded by the Sultan of Morocco, Abd-al-Mummin who built a castle and citadel. The first town was very small.

200 years later after the fall of Algeciras to the Christian forces, the city of Gibraltar was extended as far as Southport Gates. The present line of Main Street is almost the same today as it was 600 years ago when it was built by the Muslims. It was during the capture of Gibraltar by the Castillians (1309-1333) that the streets of the lower town were constructed and Gibraltar became a substantial city

It wasn't until the time of Cromwell when Britain first became interested in the rock but it was not captured until the War of the Spanish Succession. Gibraltar became a British garrison in 1830 and was declared a colony. Spain has never been able to accept the loss of Gibraltar with good grace and twice



'Ere Jane, have some of my fleas!

during the 18th century she tried to recapture it without success. The first time was the short siege of 1727. There was a more serious attempt during the American Revolution when Spain joined forces with France in the war with a specific aim of taking Gibraltar. The Great Siege commenced on June 21st 1779 and lasted nearly 4 years. During this time the rock was defended by a force of 7,000, commanded by the Governor, General Sir George Eliott. The battle eventually ended on February 2nd 1783. The city took many years to rebuild, hence the lack of Moorish buildings remaining here. Gibraltar has been a fortress for centuries and evidence of this is to be found all over the rock, from guns to battlements and gun turrets. The museum of Gibraltar houses an impressive collection of artefacts dating back to pre-historic Gibraltar, when caves were occupied by the first settlers.

The decision was taken in 1940 to put as many as possible of the support facilities underground, accommodation, offices, hospitals, storage areas with heating, ventilation etc. The facility was to cater for a garrison of 16,000 men to live, under siege, inside the Rock for up to a year. These were all to be built in a vast network of tunnels and chambers threading the length of the Rock. In all there were 34 miles of tunnels in the Rock and most were finished by 1943. The bulk of the work was done by four companies of royal Engineers, mainly consisting of miners and quarry workers, and a Canadian tunnelling company which had perfected a diamond-drill blasting technique. It was at this time that the difficult decision was taken that there would have to be a public road across the runway, still of course a prominent and unusual feature of the airfield today. 7.500 tons of rock were quarried from the north face and transported daily to build the runway. The spoil from the tunnelling operations which were going on at the same time was also put to good use. It is unfortunate that it has not proved possible in some way to provide a glimpse of this massive undertaking for the modern visitor, unique in the world today and far exceeding in scale any medieval fortification. We were very privileged to be able to see some of the complex. My thanks to Paul Beaver and Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fulton KBE, RM the Governor of Gibraltar.

Neville Stops

Day 6 - Gibtaltar to Almeria

We were allowed a free morning, which was spent by many shopping in Main Street, the High Street of Gibraltar. The ladies wanted to go to Marks and Spencers and Top Shop (all very British, especially with the English uniformed bobby stood outside next to the red phone box), but the first item needed was an umbrella. Flying Farmers kept meeting in the street proudly showing leather goods, glass and cameras bought using their best bartering skills, as many of the shopkeepers are of Moroccan descent and like a good haggle.

It was whilst talking to shopkeepers that we realised the disruption that the FFA visit had caused in the town, as it was totally gridlocked for two hours because the road from Gib to Spain was shut whilst we arrived. Although we had followed air traffic's request to land in 4 groups, the road had to be kept shut between our groups for some commercial traffic.

Consequently, the departure arrangements were modified to depart in quick succession. The problems occurred further up the coast en route to Almeria via Malaga. Despite having the flight plans, the controller at Malaga was totally flummoxed when all these G reg aircraft called for clearance through his zone. Personally, we had elected to fly direct which meant a long Mediterranean sea crossing, but we were kept amused as we listened to the frustrated radio exchanges taking place.

Almeria is distinctive on the approach as there are hundreds of acres covered with glass and plastic growing fruit and veg for the British market.

Day 7 - Almeria to Tabernas area to Almeria

We travelled north from Almeria into the desert for a variety of visits. The first was the Solar Research Station, a 4x4 ride through some of the National Park, lunch at a delightful restaurant with an olive pressing museum on site and finally a visit to an ex film set where many spaghetti westerns by Sergio Leone such as Fistful of Dollars and The Good the Bad and the Ugly were shot - now converted to a theme park.

We arrived at the largest Solar Research Station in Europe (which was most interesting) where we were split into two groups. Our group was whisked away in a convoy of land rovers to visit The National Park. This turned into a fascinating geological expedition. This area is reputed to be the driest place in Europe. However when it does rain it is fast and furious and causes a lot of erosion. They to seem to have more extreme weather, last year 60% of the annual rainfall came in one day and 3 years ago the snow (almost unheard of out here) flattened out half their green houses. This is extremely serious for them because the area is noted for the export of tomatoes. The white roofs of the green houses stood out as a colossal reflective area which looking like a gigantic lake the day we flew in to land at Alkmera airport.

Historically The Moores were here in 1500 and in those days they stored water in the low caves and grain in the high ones.

We were told this national park had been protected since 1987 and consists of sand and winding streams in the valleys and rock mostly of volcanic origin. The terrain varies from 60 meters below sea level and rises to over 490 meters above sea level. Despite the lack of rain there was a variety of colorful



Indian country

flora and fauna that had learnt to adapt to the arid and salty environment. The area survives only because of the vast resource of water inland in the mountainous area but they are very conscious that the whole area could quickly resort to a desert!

Many trees including Palm trees have been planted over the last 45 years; although not natural to the area they survive well. This landscape is the ideal backdrop for filming. Many westerns have been shot here, together with Laurence of Arabia and Jordan. In fact it is reported that over 500 films have been filmed here. Apparently this is also where John Lennon wrote "Strawberry Fields For Ever"!

Mike Rowland



Hands up George, you Sly customer!

"The horses look in good nick," said El Bear as we waded through the dust in the *ersatz* Western Town towards The Jailhouse. I was surprised how the East Anglian cereal farmer had picked up on livestock condition in such a short time. A couple of days previously our brave tractor driver had taken on the future mother of a ferocious fighting bull with nothing more than a large handkerchief for protection and here he was full of care and consideration for a couple of old screws tied up to a hitching rail in Spain's answer to Dodge City.

We had endured the scorching heat and snakes in Death Valley before clambering onto our air conditioned coach and debouching into what for all the world looked like a Wild West town in the late 1800s.

It was perfect. There was a saloon and a livery stable with a whacking great Bank and Sheriff's Office all gathered around an open square. It was exactly as you would picture it. The stables were clean and tidy there was a museum of the most extensive collection of horse drawn vehicles I have ever seen, and I have been to every great equestrian museum in Europe. I have seen horse drawn guns, ambulances and coaches but never have I seen a horse drawn pharmacy and lots of other vehicles. The buildings were convincing 19th Century, mostly in wood with a few built of brick infill and all arranged exactly as so many towns have been built all around the world, along the main drag into town. There were haberdashers and gunsmiths together with milliners and hardware stores. All fully fitted out with their wares to be seen through the windows, it was a marvellous display.

We arrived in the middle of the afternoon and had enough time to explore the 500 acre site before the highlight of the day which was to be Western Film Scene. It all started off calmly enough with a coach driving into the main square and off loading some innocuous looking bags into the Bank. Shortly followed by a very dodgy looking Priest driving a pair of horses pulling what they call a "buckboard" in the Westerns into the square. After a bit of coming and going with various horsemen toing and froing a huge gun battle developed with a number of fit young men running around and diving off balconies onto straw palliases. One unfortunate fellow was dragged through the dust by a galloping horse for no particular reason other than the fact he was wearing a long coat that may have been last year's fashion in Tombstone. The Priest turned out be a baddy which is a shame for the Pope, who is currently on a tour of Australia apologising for everything and everyone else who ever went before him in The Church.

Eventually good prevailed over bad and the baddies were all locked up in the jail. This created a chance for a baddy to tie a rope to the grill on the jail window and gallop off, towing it out of town. However the bad guy was caught and thrown back into choky to cheers from the assembled FFA members and the remaining kids from the local comprehensive that weren't in the saloon bar downing a few shots of "red eye".

Then a bad guy was led out of the jail and hanged on a scaffold. It looked a lot more convincing than your average school nativity as the body wriggled and writhed attempting to free itself from the noose. All very gruesome but nowhere near as gruesome as bull fighting, so this audience never flinched. A voice at the back was heard to quietly mutter, "A few public executions like this might cut down on the amount of rural theft that we are all suffering in the UK."

After a bow the goodies and baddies went off to do what all actors do at curtain call and have a cooling beer or a Mountagay and Coke behind the batwing doors in The Luvvy Lounge.

We all looked at one another and shuffled a bit not quite sure what to do next then a bright voice said, "Let's go to the zoo." So we explored some more and there it was above the town a delightful little zoo.

Most farmers are not zoo people, preferring to see animals either running free or working for a living but this was a good zoo. It was filled with mainly African game animals that were as El Bear said, when he saw them, "They all look in very good nick."

Quite amazing, our much esteemed lowland arable farming tour organiser and host had become quite an animal lover maybe even a bit of a bunny hugger, or as one dour, hard-bitten stockman from the hills said, "He might be a good judge ..... ONE DAY!"

Roger Bell

Day 8 - Almeria to Los Martinez

After a strict pilot's briefing by our organiser, the Flying Farmers Squadron was getting very disciplined. The take off from Almeria was exactly as air traffic requested and we departed in very quick succession with the minimum of radio chatter to try and find Los Martinez.

This was a dirt strip with no markings and to confuse matters was a couple of mile from the indication on the chart. Some were worried about their propellers, but by careful management, there was no damage done.

After a very pleasant flight from Almeria to Los Martinez, near Murcia in south east Spain we were welcomed by Robin Mann, the arable manager of G's Farms. Robin was brought up on a farm in Fife and educated in Edinburgh.

G's Farms was founded in 1952 by Guy Shropshire in Ely, U K, expanding into Spain in the 1980's as the supermarkets started demanding year round supplies of vegetables. Their holdings in Spain now total nearly 4000 hectares, growing mainly lettuce and celery. The farms are spread over a fairly wide area from Murcia down to Aguilas, thereby having a degree of diversification / protection from water supply or weather issues and so we were only able to see a small part of the operation.

We had a look at some celery in the field and saw a celery harvesting rig in action. Not having seen one before, I was surprised to see the plants in the ground before the machine and the packaged, boxed and palleted product coming out the back, just the same as one sees in the aisle of the supermarket. Inside there were about a dozen people, mostly Moroccans, their movements almost a blur. They can process up to 28,000 stakes in a shift. There was a large amount of discarded celery left on



A celery harvesting rig

the ground. However, this was not entirely wasted - a flock of sheep were waiting a short distance away.

After lunch we donned the inescapable fluorescent jackets to look around a citrus packing factory, which came to the company with the acquisition of Pascual Hermanos in 2002. The factory handles G's produce as well as imported produce from South America. We left clutching bags of lemons to take home. After a short coach journey we had a whistlestop tour of the celery packing factory, viewing the new "water knife" celery trimming machine – it operates at about 1500 psi, needs no sharpening and reduces brown ends. It also cut staff from 70 to 23.

Day 9 - Los Martinez to Lleida

The next morning we had a quick look at a recently installed de-salination plant, en-route to the air field. However, some of the flying farmers were more interested in the Spanish "up and over" door to the building - it is hung from the top, moving inwards at the bottom, with a horizontal piano type hinge about a third of the way down moving outwards - no doubt they were considering its suitability for hangar use!

G's Espana are having a challenging time with price volatility, foreign competition, rising costs, the strength of the euro and an unsympathetic Government which favours urbanisation over agriculture. Established water supplies seem to only be available sporadically, there are no single farm payments received by the Group in Spain. G's are responding to these challenges by "managing" their relationship with the supermarkets, improving the taste and quality of their produce and investing in plant and machinery to become more self-sufficient in water supplies and to cut production costs. Despite the high cost of land in Spain, they are increasing the proportion that they own outright and also acquiring land in Morocco. The large size of the Group and having managers such as Robin will ensure their continuing success.

Angus Anderson

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Preparing to depart from Los Martinez

Los Martinez to Lleida required a fuel stop en route as no fuel was available at either airfield. Some went to Castellon and some to Reus. Lleida is another, dirt / grass strip operated by an enthusiastic flying group with a few aircraft in a hangar. Flying training takes place from this very unlicensed airfield (unlike the UK!), but it appears they have similar problems as the UK with objectors and closure threats to their operations.

Day 10 - Various visits in the area

The first visit of the day was to one of the largest food factories in Europe. Within one massive building, all different classes of livestock from chickens to pigs to bullocks are slaughtered processed and further processed. I don't think UK legislation would allow so many different animals to be turned from living to ready meals in one premises due to cross contamination.

Apart from the usual chicken breasts and sirloins, we were shown the thousands of Iberico and Serrano Hams and Chorizo sausages curing in controlled environments.

After the factory tour, we were taken to the company's golf course for lunch and a few of us took the opportunity to practice a bit of golf driving. Great fun.

Having had lunch and some time to relax at the Golf Club, the coach took us a short journey to the Sola Machinery factory. These machines are sold in the U.K. under the KRM label.

A range of gravity and air drills also fertilizer spreaders are produced in a modern very well run Factory. Mark the Production Manager guided us round all stages of assembly and tried to answer the many questions that concerned us as farmers.


Sola drills, aka KRM in the UK

We then moved to another part of the factory and were introduced to Alfredo, an Italian, who had developed and built a new type of precision seeder now under the Sola banner called the Prosem K-VP. With the help of demonstration rigs, he explained the unusual way in which the seeds were sucked onto a disc through very small holes and when the suction stopped, the seed fell to be planted. These drills could plant a range of seeds from tomatoes to peas, and were made with telescopic frames that could carry up to 12 units.

A very interesting tour ended with a vote of thanks and a special thank you to Marta who had arranged the whole day's activities.

William & Jane Procter

The day was finished off with a local farmer taking us round his

farm and then inviting us into his period farmhouse for some liquid refreshment.

Day 11 - Lleida to Farm Visit to Lleida

After a short coach journey from the hotel in glorious sunshine (in short supply for most of the tour) we arrived at Loss Pollas a 1000hectare farm 40kms NW of Lleida which has been reclaimed over the last 40years or so from rock and scrub.

We were welcomed to the farm by Jose Fulton, the farm manager and his father also called Jose, who gave us a short talk on what they grew - maize wheat and barley being the main crops with olives and alfalfa production following up. He then introduced Andrew and Robert who just happened to be at the farm doing a survey.

They work for an Australian firm called "Information Precision Farming". They take sophisticated photographs of areas of land from the air and then process these images to determine the vigour of the crop across the field. The changes in vigour are coloured coded enabling the farmer to accurately inspect the areas needing attention. The cost for this service is 4 to 5 euros per hectare depending on hetaerae. Perhaps a useful tool considering the price of fertilizer and fuel these days?

We were then taken to the field which had been surveyed and were easily able to see the areas shown to be in need of attention, one or two of the keener agriculturists were given a hand held GPS programmed to the mapped fields and marched purposefully off into the middle distance to inspect the crops and give their opinions. Virtually all the crops are irrigated from a 10 hectare reservoir which draws its water through pipes from the Pyrenees area to the north. It stands on high ground on the farm so facilitating gravity feed to all the centre pivot irrigators.

Until a week or so before our arrival they had had no rain and feared for the crops as irrigation was curtialed. As an insurance against drought they were trialing what they called dry barley, a variety called Hispanic, which will grow reasonably well in dry conditions. It yields approximately 3 tons per hectare against irrigated normal varieties of approximately 6.5 tons per hectare.

We then went to the farm office where Jose told us about the general yearly cropping policy of the farm and of the olive oil production. The olives grown are a local variety called Druequina which are quite small but renowned for their flavour. They are pressed and bottled in the local town and then returned to the farm for sale, we were all presented with a small bottle to take home.

We then boarded the coach for a short journey to a cooperative owned alfalfa processing factory. On arrival Jose, who also works in the marketing department there, informed us that the factory takes in around 5,000 hectares of alfalfa from surrounding farms, producing 400 tons of pellets and 200 bales per day, running 24 hours 6 days a week. They sell most of the bales into the home market but the pellets are exported around the world, notably to Japan and Malaysia. Due to the recent hike in oil prices the dryer had been converted to burn a mixture of crushed olive stones and almond shells. One never ceases to be amazed as to the ingenuity of man!



By now stomachs were rumbling, so the troupes were rounded up from different parts of the plant and bussed off to a restaurant in the local town. On arrival drinks were served whilst Andrew and Robert gave a more detailed presentation of what they did and the benefits to be derived.

After a superb lunch, with so many courses that I lost count, a vote of thanks was given to Andrew and Robert, then to Jose who insisted on speaking English to us, all day, so that he could practice for an English exam that he was taking later in the week.

Gordon Bellerby

We returned to the airfield at Lleida, as we were to meet the local press and Mayoress. The flying club members were also there in force and it wasn't too long before the drinks were going round in the clubhouse.

We had our final dinner in Lleida where a vote of thanks was given



to Martin and Annette by our new boy and girl - Trevor and Lyn Williamson who were on their first European Tour. They were presented with a framed photograph and a wind vane in the shape of Martin's DR400 from us all for all their efforts over the previous nine months, bringing the tour together. Martin also thanked Richard Howard for the visits that he had set up and Neville Stops for organising the tour of the Rock.

Day 12, Lleida to Home

After we'd been lucky weatherwise with all the flying days actually on the trip, the return journey home proved difficult. The brave ones made it home that day, but not exactly VFR. Others took up to 4 days before they arrived home, and two aircraft were left in the hangar at Lleida, their crews taking the Easyjet option from Barcelona.

Many thanks to Martin and Annette for organizing yet another successful tour. Where do we go next year? Watch out Holland and Norway!

The Cultural Spanish Tour

I was so impressed with Lavina Soul's comprehensive report about the Spanish Tour that I thought it was worth publishing it all. Lavinia is obviously on a higher educational plateau (having been university educated) than the run of the mill FFA member and so she sees things from a different and very interesting perspective! No offense to those of similar intellect. (editor)

Spainish Architecture and Culture

Yesterday, while listening to radio 4, I heard a British matador explaining what it means to fight a bull. The first thing he made very plain was that it is not a fight in any sense of the word. He is contracted to kill the bull, and in such a way as to display the art and skill of movement. As I listened to his Yorkshire accent I wondered if it was possible that he was tall slim, hair slicked back in a pony tail and sporting tightly fitting clothes, resembling those worm by a male lead at the ballet. Forget the accent ! My mind's eye sees Spanish culture.

Spain has the second highest number of world heritage sites in the world today. Its culture is shaped by the history of the nation, its Mediterranean climate and its geography. Roman, Muslim and Christian influences have left a lasting legacy on the architecture, customs, art and cuisine.

Spain's architecture ranges from prehistoric monuments in Minorca, roman ruins, Mudejar buildings, gothic cathedrals, medieval castles, modernistic Gaudi to the Brits on holiday/ retirement villa of today.

For the average 18 something on holiday in Magaluf, Spain is all about sex and sangria and for many a Brit on holiday its little more than an apartment, or hotel near the beach, with the sangria of course. But, as we progressed with our tour we began to absorb the rich pattern of the real culture of today. Our visits to the enterprises, ancient and modern, meeting the people and being surrounded by the buildings of the past, we began to get a feel of what Spain is really all about. A total immersion.

This began in Vitoria. A place of grandeur and stateliness, the capital of the Basque country. Built on a hill, which lies in a plain surrounded by mountains, it is a blend of old Spanish history with young modern development. A medieval city centre gives way to new suburbs of wide avenues, gardens and buildings.

The Silken, our hotel was located in the centre of town. Looking out of our window I could see the new Cathedral built in Neo Gothic style. A quick visit before supper made me aware of a very different culture in this region as all the notices were written in two languages. Spanish and Euskara (the native name for the Basque language) or Castilian. The Cathedral, a vast structure built between 1907 and 1973 seemed plain and unfinished inside yet, outside there were intricately carved arches around the doors. Some were reminiscent of Rodin's Gates of Hell with beautiful women entwined with snakes and chained to skeletons of leery old men, in contrast others displayed the beauty of foliage, roses, oak leaves and acorns.



Vitoria, White Virgin Square

The next day the walking tour led us to a promenade. The Paseo de la Senda. This stretches for 3.5 km, is covered by a canopy of trees and lined with mansions and museums. One fine dwelling, which reminded me of a Venetian palace, was the home of the President of the Basques Party, it was secured behind decorative but secure wrought iron gates and guarded by a man in a ceremonial style uniform of red. Much like a Swiss guard for the Pope at the Vatican. Later outside another large Gothic church ,the sombre sight of the funeral for a senior policeman killed by a separatist bomb only a few of days before our arrival made me acutely aware of the extremes that differences in culture can lead to.

We arrived in the Plaza de la Virgen Blanca (White Virgin Square) In ancient times markets were held here outside the city walls. All around the square are characteristic buildings, and in the centre a monument to the Battle of Vitoria. This marked the end of Napoleon's domination of Spain and the hero of the hour was the Duke of Wellington ,who has the pride of place on the monument. The buildings, six stories high had fine balconies enclosed with glass. My romantic notions that this is where the daughters of the house were safely displayed to prospective suitors, were dashed by our guide who said the enclosure was merely to keep off the weather!!

We continued through the narrow streets, overhung with balconies, which almost touched each other, towards the old quarter. Untouched by mass tourism you could feel the solid strength of the past. We relived the history of the medieval settlement with our guide. The site was chosen by Sacho el Sabio, King of Navarre as a stronghold against Castile.-Three streets cross the hill and the town was laid out around these in the shape of an almond. This structure remains. The street names taken from the guilds of craftsmen and merchants for whom it was renowned in the middle ages.

We reached the highest point of our walk. From our vantage point we were able to admire the red tile roofs of the ancient buildings, and more balconies enclosed by windows. A darkening sky made me wary of the journey south that we were to make within a couple of hours.

The view from 5,000 feet revealed a Spain of contrasts, isolated villages, houses huddling together in the shadow of hills, vast tracts of forest and open grass land, fields of crops, dry parched ground and groves of trees that could have been olives....and so to Jerez, a name synonymous with the word sherry!

World famous for its bodegas, Jerez greeted us...with a giant Michelin man holding two fingers up to the world. Was this sculpture to cheer up the residents of the soviet style blocks of flats that dominated the suburbs? Is this the architecture and culture of Spain in the 50's and 60's.Thankfully the heart of the settlement revealed something completely different, a charming Andalucían city of wide streets and squares.

Jerez de la Frontera, so named because it once stood on the

frontier between Moorish and Christian realms. Here, more than one Christian church is built on the foundations of an old mosque. The Bodegas Funador Pedro Domecq is the oldest in Jerez is located in the centre of town, we entered through a beautiful garden into a colonnaded walkway covered with vines, which we learned was once a road, which was closed to the public by a king of Spain wishing to visit the sherry house. Although in the centre of town, we felt that we had stepped back in time. Built in the 18th century, the high arches of the interior with Cathedral like proportions, allowed for the stacking of the barrels four high. Outside, the sound of gunfire or was it drum beats? Was announcing the return of pilgrims to the city. Was this 2008?

Later, we settled down in one of the many fine tapas bars and ordered everything on the menu, I find now that I am home, I should have had a chilled glass of pale dry fino sherry to complete the custom.

Walking back to the hotel that night, the sound of Gregorian music drew us to a church crowded with hundreds of people, and spilling our into the street. It was the pilgrims with their statue, returning it to its place of rest.

The Victorian household at the mining complex took me by surprise, not expecting an English home in this semi arid region. The porches were added later, to protect the interiors from the searing heat of the sun. Architecture takes its inspiration from and provides for, the people, and in this case the people were English engineers.

Inland from Jerez The Domecq bull breeding farm fulfilled all my expectations of a Spanish hacienda...a place out of time in the modern world. The house, the stables, the gardens. Immaculate and staffed. The Bull breeding farm was also home to some of the famed Andalucían dancing ponies and we were entertained royally to a fine display of their skills. Our guide seemed to acknowledge that we were in a time warp and that this could not continue for much longer - an aspect of Spanish culture that would disappear into the pressures of the modern world.

The guitar was invented in Andalucía in the 1700's when a 6th string was added to a Moorish lute. Also, Jerez claims to be the home of the flamenco and has produced many stars and has one of the largest remaining gypsy populations in the province. A fast, boisterous, evening dinner show, at the ' La Tabera Flameneca', an old traditional and extremely rustic building. The music was provided by the dancers clapping and tapping and stamping their feet. An energetic, passionate performance. I guess the tourists will keep his culture alive, however I did notice quite a few locals enjoying the show.

And so to the Rock!

Controlling the entrance of the Med, and being one of the most strategic points in the world, it changed hands for hundreds of years between Spanish and Arab until the British gained control in the 18th century.

The Rock provides us with a subterranean city of roads and rooms. The first galleries being dug in 1779 when the Spanish and French tried to take control from the British who were embroiled in the war of Independence with America.

Outside the rock Gibraltar lacks buildings of aesthetic and ornamental beauty, Much architecture being limited by military requirements, giving rise to blocks of apartments with a barrack like appearance. Old architects went for looks ,modern developers go for the maximum utility of the building. Costs determine how a building will look and this is very evident in many of the new developments of Gibraltar.....high rise, concrete blocks.

In the older part of town I got the feel of 'little England' I think this was due to the fact that the recent improvements in the shopping areas are reminiscent of home counties small town centres - or perhaps it was due to the iconic English phone booth, resplendent in red, on the corner of a street. The city of today was rebuilt after the Great Siege by the Boschetti Brothers from Genoa and is reputed to look more Italian than British or Spanish. However, the network of narrow streets, built for horse drawn carriages, remains on the side of the rock, as the new homes were built on the foundations of the old.

Religion, culture and architecture always go hand in hand, and Gibraltar is no different. A striking new mosque, which would look at home in Islamabad has been built, half way up the rock, although the Moslem population prefer to use a tin shed lower down the slopes to worship in. The Roman Catholic cathedral was once an Arab mosque, although you would never know from its exterior, rebuilt in the 1800's after the siege. The 19th century, Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Trinity comes as a surprise with its Moorish-style horseshoe arches However, this imitation Moorish architecture is appropriate given the period of Moorish control.

Building, building, building, flying from Jerez to Gibraltar I became very aware of the super development of the coastal areas of Spain. Buy your dream, from the concrete blocks or the Big Mac villas, individually quite nice, but hundreds of them, all the same, with just the token topping of difference, a change in the colour of roof tile, a wider balcony etc. You do not need an identity anymore.

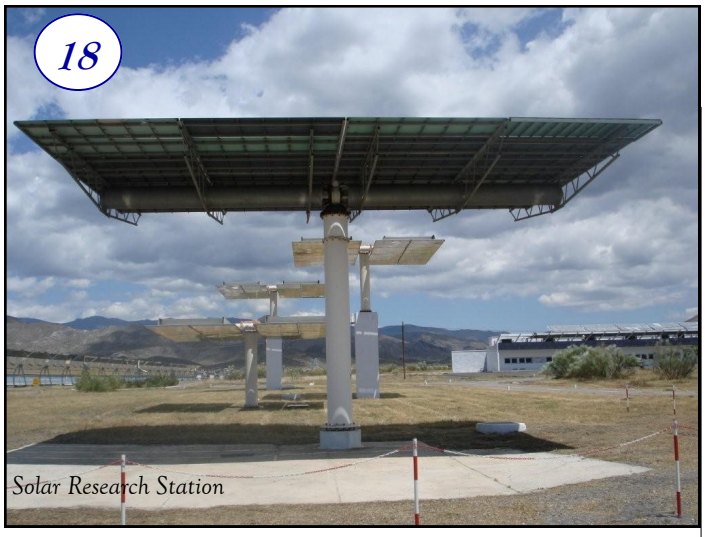
Spain has an extraordinary artistic heritage, From Goya, and Picassso, to Dali and Gaudi and is open to the ideas of great internationalists as is evidence in the Guggenheim museum, So what has gone wrong?

Our guide in Murcia implied that with political support and dodgy planning officials, everything had got out of hand. Also, a rapidly growing economy coupled with the wealth and desire by the northern Europeans for a piece of the sunshine had led to fortunes being made out of property price inflation... a story we all can identify with. This development had led to a clash of interests for the diminishing water supply between the farming enterprises and the new developments. With the declining world economy the bubble had burst and many of the developments were unsold. I sympathise with the people who have got trapped in the dream but feel that perhaps Spain has been given a breathing space to sort out its planning ideas for the future. Especially as water is going to be in such short supply.

Now you do not expect to find a 19th century American frontier town in inland Spain. But there is one... albeit a stage set



New development near Murcia



Solar Research Station

for the 1960's Italian movie directors like Sergio Leone, famous for a Fistful of Dollars and the Good the Bad and the Ugly. This mini Hollywood now turned tourist attraction was the backdrop to hundreds of movies. Although, its not surprising as this sun baked semi arid province has the appearance of Arizona with its weirdly eroded ravines, dry river beds and barren slopes.

Home of Europe's largest solar energy plant with 3,000 hours of sunshine a year. I am not sure you would class this as architecture but the rows of futuristic heliostats gave me much to marvel at and wonder whether the lavender hued energy saving box with windows... or the new office block for the site, is the architecture of the tomorrow.

In contrast, the ruins of an ancient fortress on the hill little sign of habitation until you reach the coast. which is again in the phase of super development. The hotel Cabogata Garden, smart new, fine facilities but at the centre of a soulless development, which felt a bit like ghost town in the making. Walking to the supermarket in the evening you could not help but notice the sameness of every building. White, square, utilitarian. The old town of Almeria along the coast I am led to believe is interesting but I only caught a passing glimpse of it on the way to our evening meal.

Flying to Murcia, along with all the cranes...metal ones, and new buildings, it appeared that a good chunk of the coastal area was under wraps, swathed in field after field of plastic greenhouses. Cities of polythene homes to our winter food.



Lleida, view from the old cathedral

The Hotel in Murcia was different - extrovert, modern.... and very red it was located opposite a line of cranes and unfinished concrete blocks which I learned were to be a shopping street. Here, the Spanish building boom seemed at its height. Acre upon acre of new development... Disneyesque, storybook style. It would be easy to loose your identity in this new metropolis. Our guide told us that more property has been built in the region of Murcia in the past year than the whole of the united Kingdom .

Finally to Lleida. We briefly touched down in coastal Reus, the birthplace of Gaudi, before heading inland to the dusty strip which is the airport, currently threatened by the anti flying brigade. Arriving ahead of the crowd, and with a free afternoon, we were able to climb up to the Seu Vella, or Old Cathedral, a Gothic Romanesque construction, begun at the beginning of the 13th century. Built on the top of a hill which is the centre of Lleida, it is visible from anywhere in the city. A climb, up the 238 steps, to the top of the octagonal bell tower, provided us with a stunning vista over the city. Near the old cathedral we saw some surviving sections of the old wall which once circled the city and some walls from an Arab fortress of the 9th century.

In the town, peering into buildings, I was delighted to discover a fine example of my favourite of all old Spanish features:- the central courtyard, open to the sky ands surrounded by an arched walkway gothic in appearance ,on the upper story. There was much redevelopment, of the old apartments in progress, but pleasingly they were preserving the flavour of the past with the remnants of medieval architecture, an arch, a gargoyle, a family crest, were cemented into the newer dwellings. We found the Seu Nova or new cathedral, a massive structure built in neo classical style in the 18th century, Inside revealed the largest supporting columns that I have ever seen. It was overpowering.

The city spills down towards the banks of the river here, the apartments with wrought iron balconies, gave glimpses of blue and white tiles adorning the undersides. Some of these balconies were covered which gave the appearance of highly decorative windows suspended over the road. Then across the river resides the cranes, the high rise, the concrete metropolis of today.

Our tour to the Sola factory and farm visit gave us a brief glimpse of some of the large Spanish farm dwellings isolated in this part of the countryside. With little external adornment they had a defensive air about them. Our one view of an interior was magic. The walk through the stone hallway into the livestock farmer's ancient home took us back in time. It felt like the 15th century.

Although we never visited any of the major sites of Spanish architecture and culture, we were treated to a fine experience. Our expectations were validated to a certain degree but there were more than a few surprises. We arrived in Lleida the weekend of the Aplec de Cargol, a festival when hundreds of kilos of snails are eaten. An ancient custom that I would never have associated with Spain. As we prepared to leave I thought of this and how it was a million miles from my idea of castles, bull rings and flamenco dancers. I thought of the amazing ancient structures and the recent over development of the Costas and what the final outcome of such rapid change will be on Spain's architectural and cultural development.

Lavinia Soul

FFA Visit to Orford Ness 18th June 2008

Wednesday the 18th June dawned dull and drizzly with a forecast for heavy rain spreading from the northwest and with a biting southeast wind. Not an unusual start to an FFA visit! I wonder whether anyone has done any statistics that might point to an unfavourable light being cast on the Association by the weather gods?

Nevertheless 16 members and guests from the 24 (maximum any one group) booked, in 5 fixed wing, 2 helicopters and 2 cars arrived at the very smartly maintained old RAF Bentwaters base near Ipswich.

A 1964 Bristol bus conveyed us in some style to the ferry terminal at Orford Quay, with a stop en route for supplies for those who had not heeded the advice that Orford Ness has absolutely zero eating or even tea making facilities. The ferry was not of the roll-on roll-off variety but a 12 seater whaler that took us across the 100 meters or so that connects the mainland with what is basically a shingle spit, the biggest in Europe, that has built up over the centuries and is still very unstable in its geography, with the lighthouse being severely threatened by the encroaching sea. Most of this is now owned by the National Trust who paid £3.5 million for it in 1993. Much work has been done by the Trust and our visit was well organised and we travelled in a specially made trailer.

Our guide, Paddy Heazell, a retired headmaster who is working on a book about the Ness, and was a mine of information even if some of it seemed a bit long winded given the strong, cold and prevailing wind in which we huddled whilst it was imparted to us.

The spit was first used in modern times (1913) by the RFC who had no less than two airfields on the site where they conducted the earliest trials of both aircraft, gunnery and bombing. This was the precursor to Martlesham Heath whence they subsequently moved, but remained affiliated. During WW1 the island was base for some 600 of the more intelligent RFC/RAF staff, mostly corporals, commanded by a single officer! A well laid out information building had some interesting photos. Orford Ness kept a low profile during both wars and was never attacked by the enemy, the only hostile action being from a B17 that bombed it – surely by accident!

Between the two world wars research continued at a leisurely pace but prior to 1936 Robert Watson Watt began his experiments with RADAR here, although we were told that both the French and Germans had used the technology for certain civilian ground applications but had not thought of its potential in aerial combat.

We toured the abandoned hardened bunkers (pagodas) that housed the various experiments carried out on the atomic bombs, which were complete with the primary HE charge that set off the atomic reaction but not with the atomic bit, to make sure that under all conditions of extreme cold and heat, vibration and sonic bombardment it would not go off before it was supposed to. Quite a sensible but very expensive precaution. On display in another building was a decommissioned air launched and surprisingly small atomic weapon, a WE 177.

We climbed the "Black Beacon", a beautifully restored wooden tower built in 1928 by the RAE Farnborough to house an experimental rotating loop navigation beacon, but now affording excellent views to wildlife enthusiasts. We later saw a marsh harrier on the island, which might not have excited all shooting devotees.

Then a short walk to the lighthouse where we were greeted by the Trinity House keeper. This was a privileged visit not accorded to many and well worth the effort of climbing the spiral staircase of the tower to the light itself. The lighthouse was built in 1792 and is still pristine though the sea has recently rapidly encroached to threaten the building which will have to be soon shored up or actually moved. Now it is unattended, is all electric and, remarkably, is battery powered. Its light can be seen some 25 miles distant and rotates suspended on a pool of liquid mercury. Magnificent views were enjoyed as was the welcome heat and shelter from the biting wind!

Another project on the island had been the 1960's "Cobra Mist" which was built by the Americans at a cost of some £56 million pounds as an over-the-horizon radar aimed at central



Russia. We were again privileged to visit this vast and largely empty building now housing the 500W transmitters for the BBC's World Service, in English, which are beamed towards Poland on 648 and 1292 metres. It was suggested that they were wasting their £30,000 per month electricity bill and that they should be directed towards Peterborough! Our guides were very knowledgeable radio engineers and we were given explanations as to why the Americans suddenly abandoned the site in 1973, which had suffered from "interference" and had never worked properly. Whilst they thought that the engineers could have worked round the interference, probably caused by a well placed Russian trawler, the most likely reason was that "tricky" Dicky Nixon, then the President, had done some deal with the Russians.

Following this we took the ferry back to the mainland, enjoyed a tea (and welcome warmth) in the quayside cafe and another bus ride back to Bentwaters where there is an excellent museum about the station's history with many artefacts and we were fortunate to have had it opened especially for our visit.

A long and often cold day but very worthwhile. Our grateful thanks to Paul Coulten for taking so much trouble to organise it for us and thanks to the owner of Bentwaters, Bill Kemball, for allowing us to land there. The National Trust's website about Orford Ness is worth a visit for more information.

Normandy Study Tour

Our Chairman said. "I don't know why you bother, nobody reads the tour notes."

Please let him know if you have read and enjoyed these notes. He is on valco@bowerchalke.fsbusiness.co.uk

"Okay Lads, When the red light goes out and the green light comes on you move down the aircraft towards the door....." The Cockney voice of the Loadmaster shouted above the din of the two huge radial engines and the 100 knot slipstream to the nervous young paratroopers as the DC3 droned on towards the Drop Zone of the Greatest Airborne Invasion in History. We were watching a film in the D Day Museum just outside Bordeaux. It was a calm sunny day in June 2008. Just 64 years and a couple of weeks after the film we were watching had been made. We were not far from where wholesale mayhem and human slaughter had been unleashed on the unsuspecting farming folk of Normandy by the combined Forces of the Allies on June 6th 1944.

Our own gentle arrival had followed a tour of the Invasion Beaches at 501 feet in the Bonanza above any person vessel or structure. We left Bournemouth around lunchtime on Saturday the 31st June and cruised over the Channel under the same path flown by the Invasion fleets of bombers towing gliders and Dakotas carrying paratroops all those years before us. We were intent on following the route taken by our predecessors. In fact we skimmed along the waves until we were close enough to the French coast to have to bother about the law then lifted up to a legal level and looked straight down at what must have been a truly frightening sight for those young men.

There were the beaches and Hitler's Atlantic Wall Fortress. Although we subsequently learned that the wall had lots of chinks and was not complete by Rommel's estimation. It must have been pretty bloody frightening to be sitting in the back of a glider made of nothing more than plywood and linen listening to the sound of anti aircraft guns banging away trying to kill you and your mates. Then after the release to hear the sound of your tug aircraft droning away knowing that there was only one way and that was down in the darkness.

The airfield at Granville is orientated East/West and makes approaches dead easy since the prevailing wind comes over the dunes from the West. The little clubhouse has a good restaurant and is only a short walk from a level sandy beach. Our arrivals had been scheduled to be between 1300 and 1600 that day and with one exception we were all able to hop on the luxury coach for the short ride through the Normandy countryside to Villedieu Les Poeles.



Southern England farmers noted that the cereal crops were no further forward than those at home. Also hay making was suffering just as much as at home. Everywhere was wet, wet, wet. Our host and organiser John Golden who is Golden by name and golden by voice on the coach tannoy announced that the locals were way behind this year which was a relief for those waiting for drier weather at home. At least we weren't alone.

Villedieu Les Poeles is the major centre for bell founding and copper bashing in Northern France. The name means "God's Town of the Cooking Pots." It is a noisy business banging out pots and pans so the town became renowned for those who were hard of hearing. The Chairman's silken voice purring over the coach tannoy explained that there is a French expression for "The deaf one" that not surprisingly has been taken as the name for some of the shops and restaurants in Villedieu.

The God bit comes from the efforts of The Knights of St John who were much loved for the protection they afforded. In 1130 Henry 1st of England who was also Duke of Normandy, who must have been quite a diplomat since that must have been like getting the Taliban and George W Bush in the same footy team, granted the Knights the right to call the town Villedieu.

The first morning we hopped back on the coach heading for Cherbourg where we had a stunning visit to France's first nuclear submarine. We paused when we heard that this vessel carried as much power as all the high explosive manufactured by all combatants in both WW1 and WW2.

On the way to the sub we passed through the old Transatlantic Passenger Ship Hall which has been transformed from a near derelict shell with broken windows and pigeons nesting in the eaves to a magnificent example of early 20th Century megalithic architecture. So good that it is known as *The Notre Dame of The Seas.* Also standing alongside is a new building which houses the *Cité de la Mer, a* sea aquarium arranged with pictures and guides over three floors with every type of fish from shark to the prettiest tropical fish with highly iridescent colours. There were separate tanks with menacing looking eels and other frightening denizens of the deep.

Back in the Atlantic Terminal was a light and airy restaurant which served delicious *Moules Marinieres* with a lovely bottle of Sancerre for lunch.

Back on the coach we travelled south to St Mere Eglise which was at the heart of the American Airborne operations on D Day, with some troops even dropping into the middle of the town. There is a good little museum just off the main square, and close to the famous church with a parachute hanging on the side in memory of a young paratrooper who got caught there. In the museum the story of the American Airborne is told via hundreds of artefacts and photographs, there are two films, and original examples of a Waco Glider and a C47 Transport aircraft. Outside are tanks, half tracks and guns.

That evening we dined well in our hotel, Le Fruitier in Villedieu.

Next morning was clear and sunny so we set off for Bayeux to see the tapestry. The tour starts with a visit to the tapestry itself helped by small handheld radio receiv-



ers that tell the tale of the invasion of 1066. Then there is a fascinating exhibition of models and drawings of rural life in the 11th Century followed by a film of the making of the tapestry. I have seen the tapestry three times over the last thirty years and can thoroughly recommend it as a trip now. There is so much to see and it is all explained in English with an excellent commentary.

On the outskirts of Bayeux is probably the best museum of the Normandy campaign. There are films, dioramas, maps, guides and exhibits including some German armoured vehicles. The only slightly annoying thing is that if you blinked you would not notice the contribution made by the British Empire in the liberation of France. Even the diorama of a bombed French village that has two soldiers in British battle dress who were formerly Coldstream Guardsmen have now been rebadged as Polish. It is worth a visit and you should allow at least two hours having a good look around.

Lunchtime found us in a small farmyard drinking delicious home made scrumpy while the swifts wheeled and chattered around our heads. We were the guests of Ludivine and Christophe Le Monnier who gave us a short farm walk around their 50 cow dairy unit and an excellent lunch of barbecued pork in a recently repaired and spotlessly clean barn.

Most of the 6,000 permanent elements of Hitler's Atlantic Wall which stretched over 1,875 miles have been stripped of all the steel work and guns. However there is one gun battery at Longues Sur Mer that retains the weapons that were fitted in 1943. We approached the battery on foot in the sunshine along a track through tall fields of oilseed rape with larks singing overhead. The menacing stance of the four fortified gun emplacements or casemates situated 600 meters back from the cliff top overlooking the beach was a chilling reminder of the desperate battle that took place here on D Day. At the cliff top was an observation post with a five feet thick armoured roof, which was itself topped by a smaller two feet thick roof on small stilts. This OP gave an excellent view over the Western end of the Seine Bay and the Omaha and Gold Beaches in particular. Not surprisingly this battery attracted a lot of attention from the RAF before, and the Royal Navy during, the landings. They were bombarded by HMS Ajax, USS Emmons and the battleship USS Arkansas. The latter opening up at 17 kilometres in response to ten rounds from the battery that landed close enough to warrant the battleship shifting her attention from the batteries immediately in front of her on Omaha Beach. The battery was eventually subdued after a duel with HMS Ajax at 0620, who fired one hundred and fourteen 6 inch shells from a range of 7 miles. Later the battery restarted firing on the landing craft on Gold Beach which prompted HMS Ajax and The Cruiser Argonaut to open up again, firing a total of sixty six shells that silenced the position finally at 0845.

To the complete amazement of all, the battery started firing again in the afternoon. This time it was engaged by not only Ajax but two Free French battleships, the Georges Leygues and the Montcalm. The battery finally stopped firing after 1900. The men in the battery had been firing and receiving income fire for over fourteen hours. One can only imagine the scene inside the casemates as round after round pounded into the heavy concrete and surrounding land shaking everything, reeking of burnt cordite and red hot shrapnel flying around everywhere. It must have been a deeply unpleasant experience.

The morning of the following D Day saw the battery surrender to elements of the "Fighting Fiftieth" Northumbrian Division without resistance. According to contemporary reports "The gunners morale was very low" I am not surprised!

There was one casemate with a huge chunk missing from its back. We pondered as to how this could have happened. No six inch shell would have had the force to split five feet thick reinforced concrete, we surmised. It transpired that after the battle the RAF took over the bunkers and put AA guns on the roofs to defend a landing strip established just to the rear of the position. They stored all the explosives and cartridges for their guns inside the bunkers. One night there was an unexplained explosion that blew the back off the casemate. It must have been a heck of a bang!

We dined in a Routier type of roadside café that evening for €10 a head including wine at St Cecile. The food was good the atmosphere was relaxed and the staff were as usual in France most polite and attentive. The choice of restaurant was good and just shows it is not necessary to go to top places to get a satisfactory meal.

The French are famous for many things but something that doesn't get the attention it should is their prowess as horsemen. One surprising thing is a Frenchman won The Badminton Three Day Event this year, for the first time. I am surprised a French rider hasn't won it before. Their Thoroughbreds have been winning all the major prizes on the flat and over the jumps in the UK for some years now and it was with some excitement that I read in the programme that we were to visit the French national stud.

The stud at St Lo is one of 23 studs around France run by



The Minister of Agriculture to improve all breeds. In the 17th Century the King started a small stud chain nationwide known as the "Royal Stud". Not surprisingly the name was dropped after the Revolution. Then Napoleon expanded the idea to 30 studs and called it the



National Stud. The buildings are arranged around a large central courtyard about 150 yards long and 75 wide with grooms quarters and forage storage above the stables which were originally stalls that have been converted into loose boxes by blocking off the ends with a low wall and a door.

There are 50 stallions standing at St Lo today comprising English Thoroughbreds, French Trotters, Selle Francais, Cobs, Percherons and that well known breed " Le Poney!" I was delighted to see the New Forest pony well represented. The French have a very pragmatic approach to breeding and I saw a really handsome Lusitania Stallion from Portugal who we were told would cover anything that the breeder was prepared to pay for. They don't have the sniffy puritanical attitude to their Stud Books that are the bane of many breeds in Britain.

Stud fees range from €80.00 for a cob to €1,400.00 for a top Selle Francais. The A.I. Suite was very busy with semen being sold all over the world.

Students of Architecture have a thin time of it in Normandy. The USAAF and the RAF flattened most of the old towns and cities and what they missed the gunners got the rest. There are two notable exceptions. Villedieu Les Poeles into which the very brave Mayor rode in the first American Jeep to show that the Germans had left and the completely jaw-droppingly beautiful Chateau Balleroy. If you ever wonder why the Frogs had a revolution, go to this Chateau. It has a classic Versailles type of approach along a straight drive through the village. There are formal gardens laid out geometrically in front with shrubs and low plants in a neat formation. The front of the building has a central Louis XIV type façade of three stories high and three windows wide in the centre leading to wings on either side of two stories high and three windows wide. The whole building has steep pitched Mansard roofs with dormer windows balanced above each stack of windows. There are two stable blocks at the front which again demonstrates the French love of the horse. British grand houses have the stables tucked away around the back out of sight. One block is for the owner's own horse and the other for all the guests'. Why? Well to save any risk of visiting horses bringing infection of course. If you want your horses to have snotty noses just buy a youngster from a sale in England.

The interior is very carefully preserved in exactly the style that it would have been in the 17C.

The magnificent chandeliers have been carefully electrified to make the lights look like candles. There is a type of under-floor warm air heating system that allows heat from fires in the basement to course up through the building. It must have been a lot more civilised in winter than the starving peasant's hovels in the village. The principal rooms are mostly panelled in oak with parquet floors, they are all of a useable size and feel comfortable and relaxing. The works of art in the house would require a whole page on their own. Suffice to say it is every bit as good as any gallery. I saw pictures of great beauty that I did not know existed. The best one being a Juste d'Egmont of circa 1650. The most striking feature of the painting is not just, Anne d'Autriche, the old girl herself looking splendid and the Mother of Louis XIV, The "Sun King," the subject of the painting; but the arrangement of him, his Mum and his Brother the Duc d'Anjou. The young future king, on whom all royalty should model themselves in my opinion, is flanked by a beautiful angel holding a laurel wreath above his head in anticipation of his future greatness. The colours are as good as you can get anywhere even today. Go and see it, you will not be disappointed.

Balleroy was purchased by Malcolm Forbes in 1970 for Forbes Inc. He was a ballooning enthusiast and established the world's first balloon museum in a converted stable at Balleroy in 1975. The museum is interesting to all aviation enthusiasts and has a very funny little film in French.

After the splendour of Balleroy a trip to a cider maker was a



welcome change and a bump back into reality. We were shown how cider has been made over the ages and enjoyed a taster glass or two before going out for a farewell dinner in the best restaurant in Villedieu at La Ferme de Malte.

The whole tour was carried out at a brisk pace. There was hardly a moment for the faint hearted to back off or think twice. For FFA tour veterans this was not a problem but the pressure was definitely on. On the last day I told the chairman that I didn't know there was so much to see and do in Normandy and he said he could have kept the pace up for a month and still not got to see everything. He's a fit chap our Chairman. My most sincere thanks to John and Claire for organising a very interesting tour which appeared to go without a hitch and was well enjoyed by everyone I have spoken to.

Roger Bell

Yattendon Estate Visit

As predicted, the morning of 9th July dawned wet and windy with a cloud base of a few hundred feet at best. As a result, the entire contingent of 28 Flying Farmers took the wise decision to drive to Yattendon, which seemed a great shame as the Estate had sacrificed half an acre of Poppies for aircraft parking!

On arrival we were met by our hosts for the day, Joe Iliffe who is a Director of the Estate, together with Nigel Petter, the Land Agent and Alastair Jeffrey, the Farms Director.

After a brief introduction, we were taken by coach to see the Christmas tree yard which forms just one of the many business enterprises within the Estate.

The Christmas tree business started in the mid 50's as a way of adding value and has developed over the years to what is today one of the largest producers of home grown trees in the country, producing some 50,000 trees per year, comprising mainly Nordman Firs. The trees are generally cut between November 5th and December 3rd, usually by foreign workers who cut the trees on piece-work. The current rate is £1.10 per tree to cut, extract and to load onto the trolley.

The silviculture of the trees is more complex than one might think, with fields being soil mapped in order to avoid compacted layers or areas of impeded drainage. The trees also require regular care in the form of bud-nipping and shearing in order to produce the "ideal" Christmas tree shape. Potash is also added for tree growth and Nitrogen at the rate of 80-120kg/ha for colour.

The trees are marketed through a co-operative called Needlefresh Direct Ltd, through which the trees are sold to a range of well known supermarkets and garden centres.

The next stop was the new dairy unit at Frilsham. The dairy suffered catastrophic flooding in the unprecedented rain on 9th July 2007 and as a result had to be closed down for 6 months. This gave the farm the opportunity to carry out improvements to the milking parlour and to improve ventilation by removing some of the Yorkshire boarding and installing 9 slow speed fans.

This has resulted in 550 very contented cows with no appreciable heat-stress which has in turn resulted in a low incidence of mastitis and a high calving rate.

The unit has 74ha of grazing and produces 4.5m litres of milk with a labour force of 6 people. The current rate paid by Arla Foods for the milk is 27.45p/lt

We were then taken to the Game and Wild Food Cookery School which occupy ex- agricultural buildings on the Frilsham Home Farm.

At the school we were treated to a very interesting demonstration by Mike Robinson of how to skin and butcher a Roebuck, after which we all got to taste the results. There was enough meat from the one animal to provide around 40 portions. The current wholesale value of a roe carcass is approximately £45 giving a cost per portion of just over £1.

Following the demonstration, we were treated to a first class buffet lunch which included smoked venison and wild duck, all of which is available at Mike's restaurant, The Pot Kiln at Frilsham. www.potkiln.org

The next stop was Alan Hayward's Vicar's Game which is a game and meat processing plant based in the old Casey Fields dairy buildings.

Alan has invested a considerable sum of money in order to transform the old unimproved buildings into a state-of-the-art facility which meets all of the food processing regulations.



His enthusiasm for the project was clear to see as we were taken on a tour of the various buildings and shown the various processes. First on the list was the Sausage room aka milking parlour where anything between 1 and 3 tonnes of custom made sausages are produced daily. Work in this room starts at 5am every day and custom made sausages are produced for a wide range of customers throughout the country. Three delivery vans are fully employed in delivering the various products direct to the customers.

From there we were taken to the bacon room, where a range of bacon products are produced, together with other smoked meats.

The main game products come from locally sourced venison, pheasants, partridges and pigeons. The through-put of venison carcasses is a staggering 5000, mainly through the winter months. The prime cuts are used as they are, and all of the lower grade cuts and trimmings are converted to sausages and burgers so that there is very little that gets wasted.

Pheasants and Pigeons are plucked and dressed and sold either as whole, oven ready birds, or they are converted into pies or terrines which in turn add value to the product.

Plucking is carried out using a plucking machine, and a man is expected to pluck at least 1000 pigeons in a day, or a pheasant every minute!

In the winter, a total of 30 people are employed with a large contingent comprising overseas workers.

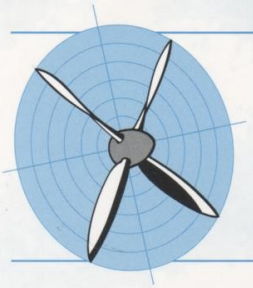
The final stop of the day was the Poppy field and a quick look at the airstrip, through the sheets of rain and howling wind!

The Poppies are grown on contract for a firm in Scotland. In total around 3500ha are grown in the UK with approximately 100ha being grown on the estate. British grown Poppies are favoured over their Tasmanian rivals because the capsule produces about 2% more Morphine than the foreign competition.

Despite the appalling weather, the day was great success and it was such a pleasure to see such a diverse, tidy, well managed estate.

Very many thanks to Joe, Nigel and Alastair in giving their time to make the day so enjoyable and to Mike Cuttell for organising the event.

David Hunt



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