FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 126 *December 2017*

Chairman's Ramble

Inside this issue

Chairman's Ramble	2
FFA News	3
Programme 2018	5
AGM 2017 Report	6
FFA Kent Tour	7

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Cover photograph by Roz Stephens - The AGM, Turweston, 8th October 2017

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Well that summer didn't seem to last long - here we are just a short three weeks away from Christmas - again! Despite that, the ground is still warm, and quite dry. Ideal for crop establishment for the late drillings - such as after early lifted beet. And talking of beet, I have never seen such enormous beet as this year is producing. I was shooting in Norfolk a couple of weeks ago, standing in a large field of beet and it was like standing in traffic cones. Very difficult for the dogs to work in, too. My contractor achieved over 100 tonnes/hectare off one of his farms at 20% sugar content - that is a really spectacular yield.

The modern way of stacking beet on the field-side of a road for transport - requiring the lorries to stand in the road whilst being loaded over the hedge, strikes me as a recipe for the council to clamp down on it before long, as it is a serious disruption to traffic, with often several lorries queuing up to get under the loader. Although it takes but a few minutes to fill a 30 tonner, it is still an inconvenience to drivers in this impatient world we live in - to say nothing of the destruction of the road verges where the lorries have to get close to the hedges over which the beet are loaded. Hopefully the councils will continue to turn a blind eye.

Harvest was, by all accounts, 'not too bad', but in my case it was the worst in my entire farming career. As I reported in the last newsletter, both my wheats and barleys got off to an awful start with chemical damage to the wheat and very dry seedbeds for the barley. The wheat then went from bad to worse with take-all getting a hold in the later stages, followed by an explosion of volunteer borage (from two years previously) choking the already thin crop. The final average yield? Just 1.755 tonnes/acre!! You just have to have broad shoulders in our business. It's going into Sugar Beet next year, but I'll bet I don't get 100 tonnes/hectare!

Our final event of the AGM at Turweston in October was a well attended meeting that brought few complaints or concerns from the membership, and after a hearty lunch in the canteen we had a presentation from our 'tame' lawyer, Tim Scorer, talking about airstrip indemnity and the importance of being well protected from that nasty eventuality by any visiting aviator. Then our member Warwick Banks, spoke at length about his very extensive aviation career spanning several decades and how his enthusiasm finally waned as the introduction of more and more rules and regulations invaded the industry (where have we heard that one before?). He was also to have given us an insight on his equally interesting motor racing career interspersed with aviation, but we simply ran out of time as the members needed to return to their various bases before the onset of twilight. That can perhaps wait - as Part 2 - until next year's AGM

Brexit! What a shambles. You really would think that our politicians of all parties would get behind the government to obtain the best deal possible from Europe rather than squabbling the whole time and whingeing that they really want the whole Brexit thing called off. It's bad enough negotiating as 1 against 27, without having to fight your own countrymen as well. Never mind - there will be another 4 newsletters after this one, before the whole thing is settled (assuming it is). We're quite good at brinksmanship in our country, so everything will probably fall into place at the eleventh hour. In my opinion, when it is all signed and sealed, we will wonder what all the fuss was about.

Global warming - one of my pet hates - seems to have taken a bit of a back seat at the moment! So now I have two new pet hates right up there in the forefront of the news....

The first is 'inappropriate behaviour'. Goodness me, it was lucky for us that the 'appropriate police' weren't around for our generation. We would have all been in trouble! Most of the girls of our era enjoyed a bit of innocent attention and the odd wolf whistle. As for "I **think** he **might** have brushed his hand across my knee, and I've been traumatised about it for many years". The smiling pictures that I saw in the press hardly showed a demeanour of traumatisation - but who am I to know! In the old days, a quick knee in the groin and a curt "get orf" would have been all that was needed, and no more would have been said.

The second pet hate is the current enthusiasm for trans-gender realignment. We recently watched a particularly disturbing programme on the subject from America with Louis Theroux as the interviewer. On the

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grounds that both the politically correct police and Christmas are just around the corner, it would be wise, perhaps, for me not to pursue that one in print!

Have an excellent and peaceful Christmas and New Year one and all, and I look forward to meeting you all again in 2018 for another excellent season with the Flying Farmers.

Martin Gosling

Warning

It has been reported that following a flight from Ireland to an airfield in the UK, the pilot was asked to produce his pilot's licence amongst other things.

Then, all the pilots at this airfield were asked to produce their licences. Do you carry your documents at all times? - I certainly haven't done in the past. This statement is from the CAA website

When flying, pilots must carry:

- their valid licence and valid medical certificate
- personal identification documents including a photo

From the Database

At the AGM, I gave a summary of some interesting / useless information taken from the FFA database. It was suggested that I should repeat this data in this newsletter for the sake of those that either couldn't make the AGM or fell asleep during my presentation.

Please bear in mind that the information in our database is confidential to the membership so no names are mentioned, and because we are all a bit lackadaisical and apparently getting on a bit, some of this information might be a little out of date - but it does give an insight into our present situation.

Total number of members as of 10/10/17 - 411. During the year 13 members have dropped off the list and 10 have joined.

Average age - at the 2016 AGM, the average age was 64.64 years. As another year has passed we should now average 65.64 years... but, the average age of those joining was 48.57, helped by our youngest new member who is only 19. So we are now 64.92 years old.

I looked at **how we title ourselves** on the application forms. We have:- 1 Duke, 1 Earl, 1 Viscount, 2 Lords, 5 Sirs, 3 Doctors, 1 Captain, 1 Ms, 7 Mesdames (Mrs), 3 Mr & Mrs, 384 Messrs (Mr) and 1 MP. There are maybe some (I know of at least one) who are too modest to put Sir or Whoever.....on their forms.

What aircraft do we fly? This was an amazing exercise to do.

Firstly I looked at how many aircraft are declared on the database and was surprised to find 394. As we have 411 members and not all have an aeroplane or, because we are getting on a bit some have lost their medicals and have given up flying it seemed a high number. So I looked at how many have more than one aircraft and found 58 members in this category. In fact 2 members have more than 6 aircraft!

These aircraft can be broken down (so to speak) into different categories. There are:- 7 autogyros, 18 helicopters, 2 gliders, 65 microlights and ultralights, 69 vintage (including Austers and Cubs) and 233 modern fixed wing.

So, how many different manufacturers of these aircraft are there? This is like Piper, Cessna etc, not 172, 182 etc. Incredibly 94! I didn't know there were so many different manufacturers.

By popularity, we have:- 78 Cessnas, 63 Pipers, 24 Robins or Apex, 22 Vans (not including Transits and Belingos!), 14 Maules, 11 De Havillands, 8 Jodels, 8 Beechcraft etc.

The most popular types were:- 30 170/172/177, 27 180/182, 20 Piper Cubs, 19 Robin DR 400s, 11 Maule M7s etc.

What do I look at next year? It was suggested that we look at total hours flown, how long members have been flying, where they learnt and what it cost - but these details aren't on the database and trying to get information out of members can be a drawn out process.

The most hours flown by a member, that I am aware of, is 22,100 mostly on 747s. Can anyone beat that?

Paul Stephens

FFA Indemnity Agreement

Following enquiries from several members as to whether the FFA have an indemnity agreement that could be used to help protect them from visitors to their airstrips suing them in the case of an incident, we have asked Tim Scorer (well known aviation solicitor and member of the Association) to draft an agreement.

Originally, this was to be made available to individual members to buy, but because of the cost, this would be rather expensive.

As a solution to this and as an added benefit of belonging the FFA, it was agreed to make use of the funds that the Association has accumulated over the years and use this money for the benefit of all members, to pay Tim to draw up a special FFA agreement which could be individually tailored by members to suit their own airstrips.

Tim has now put together this draft agreement which he presented and explained in detail at the recent AGM. The committee will run through this again and hopefully early next year this agreement will be available for all to make use of.

This isn't an alternative to the FFA Airstrip Insurance Scheme, it is all part of protecting the airstrip owner in the case of an incident.

Remember, in this forever litigious world, an airstrip owner is a target for solicitors if an accident happens, as he potentially has assets running to millions of pounds in the value of the farm.

This indemnity agreement makes the visiting pilot well aware of who is responsible in the case of an incident.

Watch this space!

Report from the GASCo Council Meeting held on 22ND November 2017, at CAA House, London

The FFA had not provided a report or asked me to raise any issues with the Council

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Finances: the 2017 Management accounts forecast a small surplus at year end and the 2018 Operating Plan has been approved by the Board and costed. Members' contributions for 2017 are up on 2016 and are nearly all in. Cash at the bank is healthy.

Safety Evenings: The CAA has renewed the contract for GASCo to run the 2017/18 programme. The programme has already started, with the theme: Aware Today - Alive Tomorrow and fo-

cuses on Human Factors, Mid-air Collision, Airspace Infringements and Loss of Control.

Seminars: Another very successful Weather Seminar, this year with the theme of 'Threat and Error Management', was run in conjunction with the Met Office in September. As usual it was 'sold out'. It is proposed to run a similar seminar in September 2018 with the theme of 'Decision Making'. Other seminars proposed for 2018 include 'Helicopters', 'Ditching & Sea Survival' and 'Loss of Control'.

The LAA Rally at Sywell: This year, as well as the ever popular 'Pre-flight Challenge' a 'Pre-Flight Masterclass' was run in conjunction with the LAA.

Communications and Media: 'Flight Safety' has been given a make-over and there has been a small increase in subscriptions over the year. The annual subscription rate will increase to £20 from 1st January but will remain at £16 for those paying by direct debit. 'Hits on the web based 'Flight Safety Extra' continue to increase. The GASCo website has been upgraded.

Airspace Infringements Awareness Course: Under the contract with the CAA the first three courses have been held with 47 attendees. Two more courses are scheduled. 71 infringers have been offered the course and to date 67 have either completed the course or are booked on one. Cost estimates and the pricing model have proved robust

HEAD OF THE CAA GA UNIT

The Council was delighted to welcome Tony Rapson making his first appearance at a Council meeting.

To put the work of the GA Unit into perspective it has oversight of:

Approximately 18,000 aircraft, 50+ GA aerodromes, 30 balloon AOC Holders, 295 airworthiness organisations, 84 approved training organisations, about 200 registered training facilities and 144 flying displays in 2017 alone.

Its activity profile covers**:**

Airworthiness

Continuing airworthiness oversight, including Initial design approvals and modifications for GA aircraft.

Operations

Approval and oversight of GA aerodromes and balloon operations together with the assessment and issue of air display permissions and the delivery of air display review outcomes.

Licensing and Licensing Policy

Approval and oversight of approved training organisations and pilot licensing support.

Policy and Stakeholder Engagement

Managing AAIB relationship and managing stakeholder events together with GA regulatory policy development and publication.

Business Delivery and Improvement

Change programme management while continuing to support activities for the unit.

EDITOR'S REPORT

Two articles in the Autumn issue of Flight Safety raised a good deal of reaction. The matter of Elderly Pilots is clearly a subject in the mind of many GA pilots and an article by a former BA training and safety captain, and who has returned to private flying, cited several areas where Commercial Air Transport culture and practice could usefully be transferred to GA.

MEMBERS REPORTS

Royal Institute of Navigation: Time has been spent in trying to reduce the problem of GA aircraft infringing controlled airspace. To help educate pilots on how best to avoid infringing, a brief but comprehensive pamphlet has been produced for distribution to flying clubs and individuals.

As a result of staging the southern area TOPNAV competition event at Lee on Solent this year in 2018 the RIN will organise some training competitions prior to the main competition. These will be advertised as RIN events in support of the local GA Community.

Light Aircraft Association: A review highlights the large proportion of accidents due to loss of control within the airfield circuit. Prime among these appears to be a loss of directional control following lift-off at too slow a speed, as well as the poor judgement of approach speed leading to heavy 'arrivals' or conversely loss of control in the extended flare. Most of the small number of serious and fatal accidents this year appear to have stemmed from attempted 'turn-backs' from the climb out, following a full or partial engine failure.

CAA: Infringements are not reducing. Listening Squawks are being extended together with more 'Frequency Monitoring Codes' and information on how and when to use them. It has been found that the use of 'Listening Squawks' reduces airspace infringements. The next edition of charts will include squawks and frequencies

Met Office: the Met Office has now generated its first e-newsletter for General Aviation. The newsletter is hosted on the log in page of the Met Office GA briefing portal at https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/aviation/ga. Feedback is welcome,. especially on content for future issues.

RAF Flying Clubs Association: Recent incidents provided useful lessons:

Over-run at Sandown: A Piper Warrior over ran the runway after landing long, bouncing, and then deciding to land rather than go around. The pilot was used to landing on a 9,000ft runway and had not recently flown into a shorter strip.

Runaway aircraft: After being hand started a Tipsy Nipper rolled forward. The pilot tried to grab a wingtip and the aircraft spun around hitting a hangar door. The pilot opined that he needed better chocks and should have tied the tail down.

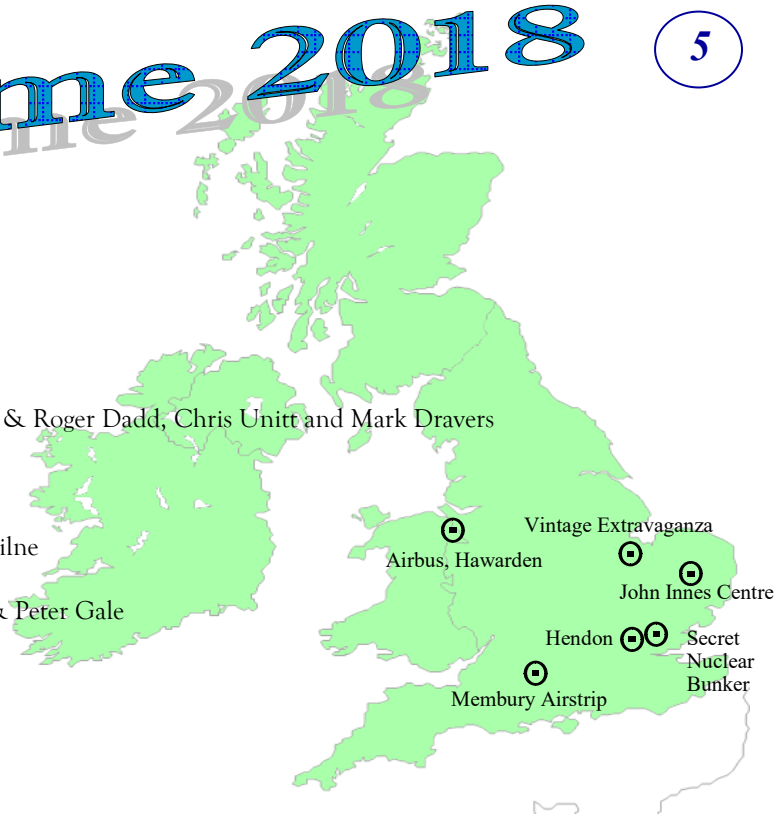
BMAA: Following a review of recent accidents the BMAA has decided to tackle two problem areas as priorities. Loss of control during landing or going-around, and hitting the near or far hedge at short airstrips.

in 2018 the BMAA will roll out its new 'Wings Award Scheme' which will give all pilots new challenges and goals to achieve. It is intended that this scheme become recognised by the CAA as a 'Pilot Recognition for Operational Up-skilling and Development' scheme.

Gerald Hackemer

Programme 2018

24th January	RAF Museum, Hendon - Neville Stops
25th April	Secret Nuclear Bunker - Martin Gosling
6th to 14th May	European Tour - Peter Evans & Roger Bell & Roger Dadd, Chris Unitt and Mark Dravers
17th & 31st May	Airbus, Hawarden - Richard Howard
5th June	Membury Airstrip - David Hunt & John Milne
20th June	Re-visit John Innes, Norfolk - David Soul & Peter Gale
4th & 5th July	2nd Vintage Extravaganza - Tony Fisher



Please note - if you happen to see anything in your area that would form the basis of an interesting FFA visit, then please contact the Events Secretary, Neville Stops (neville.stops@Cobham.com) or Gordon Bellerby (gordon@jgbellerby.com).

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.

RAF Museum, Hendon - Wednesday 24th January 2018

Our first visit for 2018 is planned; it is the RAF Museum Hendon

10.00 – Arrival
10.00 – 10.30: Tea/Coffee -
10.30 – 12.30: Tour of Museum by 3 guides
12.30 – 13.30: Lunch
13.30 – 15.00: Committee members to have a meeting, remainder of the group to look around at their own leisure followed by a traditional afternoon cream tea

Members of the public can currently sit inside the cockpit of our MK16 Spitfire at a cost of £10.00 per person. This is 15-minute slot with a photo opportunity. This can be pre-booked if required or can be booked on the day on an individual basis.

Cost for Tour, Lunch etc £ 27.00

There is Car parking available at an extra cost, which can be booked ahead of time.

Parking charges are £5.00 for 3-6 hours.

If you are using a satnav to visit the Museum, please use postcode NW9 5QW

Please respond to Neville Stops by **Friday 5th January 2018**

Kelvedon Hatch Secret Nuclear Bunker, 25th April 2018

Kelvedon Hatch was built under such secrecy that neither the locals nor the contractors building it knew how it would be used. It is built into a hillside, encased in 10' thick reinforced concrete 100' underground. It is where devolved central government and military commanders would have run the region had the U.K. been attacked and nuclear war broken out. (Mark you one has to wonder for how long their agony would have been prolonged and what they would have come up to in the outside world once their supplies had run out!)

It is still a 'secret nuclear bunker' but now there are big brown signposts all over the area pointing to where it is!

Handed back to the farmer in the '90's on whose land it sits, Mike Parrish has developed it as a tourist attraction specifically by **not** developing it. It is very much in every sense authentically as it was when handed back from government control, and it is that which makes it so interesting. It is still the cold, austere concrete structure with most of the original fittings. There are no glamorous guides to show you around - just a hand held audio 'wand' to guide you from section to section, where you can linger as long as you wish. Even the small cafe at the end is entirely self help with honesty boxes to pay into. Mike says it all works extremely well.

He is however laying on a buffet lunch for us all at the end of our visit in his conference area.

0945 - All aircraft arrive Stones Farm airstrip. Coffees, teas and biscuits on arrival
1000 - Coach leaves for Kelvedon Hatch
1115 - Arrival at Kelvedon Hatch
1130 - 1330 Participants free to explore bunker at their own speed
1330 - 1430 Buffet lunch in the bunker
1430 - Coach leaves to return to Stones Farm
1545 - Arrival back at airstrip - teas and biscuits available
1600 - Participants free to depart at will

Programme 2018 contd....

Costs will be £30/head, to include the coach, entrance charge and buffet lunch, payable to R M Gosling

Entries will be limited to 45 participants on a 'first come first served' basis.

Entries will close on March 23rd 2018

FFA European Tour - 6th to 14th May 2018

This next year's tour is purposely closer to home to cater for those that aren't as adventurous or don't want a long hallock.

It is also split into 3 parts and members can enter for all three parts or any one part. Hence there are three separate reply slips.

Part 1 - Peter Evans is arranging the first part, which is basically a tour of the New Holland combine works in Belgium. We will gather in Kortijk Airport on 6th May and the factory tour is on the 7th May.

Part 2 - Roger Bell then takes over in France where we will land at St Omer, Argentan, Caen and Cherbourg, visiting WW1 trenches, Thiepval and other memorials, some farms and a nuclear submarine. This takes us up to 10th May.

Part 3 - Roger Dadd, Chris Unitt and Mark Dravers take over on 11th May with visits to Channel Islands Air Search, Guernsey Woollens, The German Occupation Museum and dinner on Hern.

12th May there is a visit to Alderney including a train ride, a coach tour and dinner at the Beauchette Marina Restaurant.

On the 13th May we visit the island of Sark and finish with a farewell dinner at the Cobo Bay Hotel where we will be staying.

A rough cost guide for these last three days is in the region of £430 per head based on double occupancy room.

There are more details on the EVENTS page of our website.

Please complete the 3 separate reply slips asap.

Visit to Airbus, 17th & 31st May 2018

Flying in to Hawarden (EGNR) to visit the Airbus factory where they manufacture 1000 wings a year for their range of aircraft. They are transported to Toulouse by road, sea and the Beluga Super Transporter aircraft.

Lunch at the Chocks Away restaurant on the site.

In the afternoon there is a guided tour round the airfield hangars to see some aircraft including several Antonovs which you can board. Or, take a taxi into Chester.

Restricted to 20 per day. Organised by Richard Howard. Reply slips will be in the March newsletter.

Membury Airfield, 5th June 2018

09:30-10:00	Arrive
10:00-10:30	Brief talk from Southern Sailplanes
10:45	Depart tractor &trailers by Ramsbury
11:15-12:30	Brewery/distillery/chipwood boiler tour
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:45-16:00	Farm and forestry tour
16:30	Membury for departure

Re-Visit John Innes Centre, 20th June 2018

2nd Two Day Vintage Extravaganza, 4th & 5th July 2018

Day 1 – July 4th. We should arrive at Fenland airfield by 9:00am so that we embark the bus at 9:30am.

We travel to our first venue just north of Boston to Robert Crawford's rare collection of steam and tractors. A real time warp indeed!

Next we would take lunch at the Poacher Pub nearby then on to Richard & Val Mason's collection of vintage Ford tractors a short distance from the Poachers. After which, time permitting, we travel east on the A17 to the largest North Level IDB pumping station at Tydd Gote, then on to The Cromwell Hotel in March.

There will be a guest speaker who will give us an illuminating talk on Cambridgeshire aviation from the early years of flying.

Day 2 – July 5th. I would like to to embark the bus at 8:45am to travel approx 8miles to John Thomas' fine collection of immaculately restored vintage lorrys. After which we go on to Gordon Easton's museum to view his latest acquisitions.

There will be a BBQ ???? lunch at Gordon's museum. I will give you the venue postcodes in due course for those who might be delayed. I will refine this info in due course into an easier readable format with the approximate timings and post codes for the magazine.

AGM 2017 Report

Report From the 2017 AGM, Turweston, 10th October 2017

The weather was reasonable enough for most of the 59 attendees to fly into Turweston for the 43rd AGM of the FFA. As usual, there was a very warm welcome and excellent facilities with tarmac or grass runways available and a new control tower / hospitality building at Turweston overlooking a lake and the runways.

Unfortunately, as the numbers were greater than first expected, we had to be moved to a nearby hangar as a temporary theatre for our AGM, where the projector had to be shown on a white block wall and maintenance was still being carried out on various aircraft (albeit as quietly as they could).

However, we ignored that and we had a good interactive AGM between Committee and Members. Our new Events Secretary ran through the 2018 calendar and even hinted at events in 2019. Please see the EVENTS page on the website for more details. The Minutes of the meeting can be found on a separate sheet with this newsletter.

After lunch Tim Scorer, our tame FFA solicitor, released the draft version of a new Indemnity Agreement for the use of members to help protect them against liability claims at their airstrips. More to follow when this is complete.

The day was finished off by our member Warwick Banks relating his flying career, with photos of the many different types of aeroplanes he has flown starting in 1962. He related his experience in each aircraft and it appeared that nearly everyone of them has come to grief over the years – not with Warwick at the helm though! It was a shame that time was running out and he didn't have time to tell us about his motor racing career as well, in the times of Jim Clark and Graham Hill. Perhaps another time!

Paul Stephens

FFA Kent Tour 20th - 21st June 2017

Seven planes and 15 members flew into Pent Farm a day early and enjoyed the delights of Hythe along with a further member who had arrived during the afternoon by train. Those who stayed at the Imperial Hotel and who ate there will be pleased to know that their unexpected complimentary evening meal was just that, due to a hotel admin error! A further 12 planes, 1 car and 29 members arrived at Pent Farm the following morning making a sell-out tour. The first and only glitch of the tour occurred when the coach arrived at Pent having failed to swing past the hotel to pick up the previous days arrivals. A convoy of cars was quickly despatched and they were able to get to Pent without further delay. Thanks to Ian Weston for stepping up with his car, to Jon Hanna for volunteering to get a taxi and to the members who were very patient while it was sorted out.



First stop was Chapel Down Vineyard at Small Hythe, near Tenterden for a tour of the winery and vineyard. We learned that, in the 15th century, Small Hythe was a thriving port and shipbuilding centre situated on what was then a large river. At its peak in 1546, Henry VIII ordered the 300 ton "Great Gallyon" to be built there. Established (much later) in 2001, Chapel Down was one of the early vineyards to arrive in the south of England. The chalky soil, similar to that of Champagne 90miles south, cool climate and south-facing slopes produces sparkling, white and light red wines from main varieties Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Bacchus. In fact they only have 22 acres of vine around the winery; instead they own other vineyards across Kent and also source grapes from contract growers over a wider geographic area from Essex to Hampshire. Typically, these growers will establish, maintain and run the vineyards themselves and sell the grapes to the company with much of the specialist work such as establishment, planting, pruning and picking being available from specialist contractors. Being out of season the winery was not in use but members were walked round the process of winemaking from grape to bottle including the complicated méthode champenoise used to make the sparkling wines. The cheaper variants of sparkling will be a blend of variety and year while the more expensive will typically contain the grapes from one year only. Their wines, the sparkling in particular, have won many awards over the years, often ahead of French contenders. The tour was followed by a tutored tasting and then lunch in the Swan Restaurant – with wine, of course.

After lunch, a 14-strong splinter group were dropped off at Sissinghurst Castle, the former home of Diplomat Sir Harold Nicholson and his wife, the famous author Vita Sackville-West. It was she who designed the gardens first opened to the public in the late 1930's. On her death, in 1962, Nicholson gave over Sissinghurst to the National Trust and it is now one of their landmark gardens.

The rest of the team carried on a few miles to a 100 acre Hop and Cherry Farm in Goudhurst owned by 3rd generation farmer Andrew Coombe-Jones. With the decline in the national hop acreage, Andrew is one of few remaining hop growers and very nearly packed them in himself a few years ago. However, new markets for micro breweries and rapidly expanding exports to the US for the home-brew market have meant that his determination has paid off. Standing in a hop garden it was clear that with the structures required to support the hops this was not a crop that you can just jump in and out of. Each year, strings have to be attached by hand to a top wire for the hops to grow up. At harvest, the whole hop plant, now 16' tall is cut down and transported to the processing machinery where the hops are separated and pressed into a $1m^3$ bale weighing 60kg. By this time, the temperature outside was 32 deg. C and the shed was a welcome relief. Things have moved on, no more the hundreds of Londoners taking their summer holiday on the farm picking the hops from the plant by hand instead, 12 privately sourced eastern Europeans.

Andrew also grows cherries and the harvest was in full swing. The large cherry trees sporting eight different varieties were literally dripping with cherries and the prospect of a crop 3 times the previous year's. 50% are sold retail locally including a roaring trade on a road-side stall and 50% go wholesale via a merchant and may end up in any part of England at whichever market is offering the best prices. The network of fresh produce transport is so efficient that the haulage cost is not such a significant factor in the equation. The group wandered amongst the trees and grazed on the cherries to their hearts content and then had some punnets to take home. It did seem appropriate to give our host a bottle of Chapel Down bubbly, having just been there; what I didn't tell him that I had bought it some weeks earlier in Waitrose in Tenterden next door, where it is significantly cheaper than the Vineyard shop!



Another short hop to Cranbrook and we arrived at one of the free-range egg houses run by Fridays Ltd, a family concern founded by David Friday 60 years ago and now run

by our FFA member Andrew Friday and his brother, with a 3rd generation coming on. They have grown over the years by expansion rather than acquisition to become one of the 5 top egg producers in the UK producing 1.2m eggs per day consuming 64000 tonnes of feed per year all milled in-house. Broken eggs are not wasted; they go into a boiling plant to make mayonnaise which itself is used in value added sandwich mixes. To maintain the flock they buy 25,000 day-old chicks per week and rear them to point of lay. Volume growth of Free Range egg consumption is currently 13% year on year. To meet this fast growing demand they need to grow production and this is certainly challenging in the South East due to Environmental legislation; Planning, Muck handling, Renewable energy, Professional and planning fees (£70,000 for the building we were visiting) and Wildlife surveys. Long standing relationships with twenty plus independent free range egg producers also help them to keep up with demand.

The free-range building we visited at Tolehurst Farm is the largest achievable in the UK because of the need to comply with EU Hen Welfare and RSPCA Freedom Food rules. The building was 260m long and housed 64,000 free range hens in four separated houses within one building. With a maximum permitted ranging distance of 350 meters and a Freedom Foods outdoor stocking density of 2000 hens per hectare this effectively limits the size. (Interesting to note that the EU legal maximum is 2500 hens/ha!) The hens are given access to the range from 9.00 am to sunset. Everybody had seen hens before but we could only marvel at the size of the house and the technology behind it. Thanks were made, Andrew was presented with one of our new FFA wall clocks and we left to collect Alpha team at Sissinghurst.

Back to the Imperial Hotel on the seafront at Hythe, a grand period-piece hotel from the heydays of seafront holidays. In the evening we were privileged to have a talk from Mr Henry Shackleton, father-in-law of member Chris Reynolds and WW2 Bomber pilot. In a talk with pictures and without notes he told us of about his RAF career. After training in Canada he was still too young for active service so he remained there instructing on Oxfords. Returning to the UK he flew Halifaxes out of Middleton St George, now Durham Tees Valley airport and after 17 missions in his first tour without

being shot at, he requested transfer to Pathfinders on Lancasters flying out of Sandy. On his 26th mission with Pathfinders he was shot down over Berlin where he stooged about for 3 days, evading capture, speaking German from a "German for Escapees" book, until he was captured and sent to Stalag Luft 3 for 18 months. He said that his favourite phrase was "I am busy" (Ich bin beschäftigt) since it conveyed both a sense of urgency and authority and at the same time discouraging further conversation. After the war he became a Civil Engineer. He said that he found some satisfaction in the symmetry in his life where he spent the first part of his career destroying things and the second, rebuilding them. *".....so vibrant well delivered without a note to refer to, brought it back to us even more clearly. How many of those wonderful men are still left? Probably no more than a couple of dozen. So humbling".*



In the morning, there was again a choice of activity. The main group departed on the bus for Hawkinge Battle of Britain Museum (which opened especially early for us) while a group of 10 went to visit some local gardens.

Hawkinge is the result of decades of work by a dedicated group of people who quite simply researched and scoured the county for crashed WW2 aircraft, which being Kent, largely meant aircraft lost during the Battle of Britain. Each recovered artefact had a story to tell not least that of its surviving or perished pilot. Best summed up by the chairman *"The museum at Hawkinge was without doubt the best I have ever been to - just so many personal stories of tragedy and courage. I could have spent many hours there."*

Then a short hop to the Capel Battle of Britain Memorial on the cliffs beside Folkestone. Here, a 100m diameter propeller carved in the chalk and at its centre a lone stone airman looking balefully out to sea. Alongside, a granite wall bearing the names of all who were killed in the battle. Its no coincidence that this is where the Hurricanes and Spitfires of Hawkinge would have coasted out to do battle with the Germans. New to the site was the Battle of Britain Experience, a multi-media, all-ages presentation with a powerful film at its heart which many found very moving.

Back on the bus and back to the airfield. Pent Farm has a maintenance organisation with significant expertise in warbirds and vintage planes. Some members had a quick tour of the maintenance facility while 3 members took the opportunity to fly in one of two resident warbirds, a Harvard and a Stearman. Gordon Bellerby was surprised to see his old AA5B in the hangar along with its new owners, a small world.

The "garden" group had been visiting two local gardens in the National Garden Scheme, West Court Lodge and Churchfield both conveniently within walking distance from the airstrip and were already settled in Chris and Jane's beautiful garden where a



superb BBQ lunch had been arranged. Departure at leisure after lunch into a gin-clear blue sky with some bumpy weather moving in from the very North after three days of unbroken sunshine.

A big thank you to my two co-organisers, Andrew Friday and Chris Reynolds. To Chris for the use of Pent Farm, a strip attracting so many complimentary comments. To Jane Reynolds for organising the local gardens and hosting such a wonderful BBQ lunch to round off the tour.

Andrew Cragg