



## **SOUTHERLY BREEZE March 2015**

Hello everyone

Welcome to the spring edition of Southerly Breeze, and I expect like me you are looking forward to some warmer weather in the months to come for your group outings.

If you were able to attend the National AGM in Northampton I am certain you will agree that it was a very valuable event with plenty of time to network, not only with Associates but also with other GTO's. I think most if not everyone came away feeling the GTOA really has turned itself around and we look forward to the future with great optimism.

At the last Board Meeting in February we welcomed Chris Bugsgang, the new CEO of GTOA, and although he wasn't officially taking up his position until March 1st he had already attended many interviews with leading travel magazines. I have invited him to, and am hopeful that he will attend, our next branch meeting at Henley Rowing Museum on April 23rd. This will be a great opportunity for you to meet and get to know him, listen to his plans for our organisation in the future and perhaps get answers to any questions you might have.

The new showcase weekend in Newcastle is taking shape and I can promise you it is going to be a spectacular event so make sure the date, September 18 – 20, is in the diary. Travelling by train? If you register with East Coast Trains they will alert you by email when the cheap tickets first go on sale and if you are in receipt of Tesco's vouchers, did you know they can be converted to rail vouchers to spend with Red Spotted Hanky?

Our plans for the educational visit to Cardiff are well in hand and I am delighted to say that we have 27 booked in at the moment but still plenty of room for more. It's not too late to book.

I have been out and about with my own group and I am pleased to say the weather has been kind to us, with our latest adventure to the newly refurbished Warners Alvaston Hall in Cheshire. But more of that later.

Happy Organising

*Jenny Barling*

## Officers and Committee Members of GTOA Southern Branch

Chairman: Jenny Barling  
Vice Chairman: Doreen Hardham  
Treasurer: Anne Barnes  
Secretary: Pat Bastin  
Committee: Diane Salter  
Lesley Terrell  
David Lote  
Stanley Davies – co-opted

**The Southern Branch Members extend a warm welcome to:**  
New member: 2466 S Mr David Gent – Tadley U3A

We look forward to meeting you at one of our meetings.

### Dates for your Diaries:

**Thursday April 23<sup>rd</sup> - The next Southern Branch meeting will be held at Henley Rowing Museum.** We will meet at 11am for refreshments first, followed by a short introduction by the Museum staff.

I am delighted to say that Mike Bugsgang, the new CEO of GTOA has accepted an invitation to attend, so please make every effort to come along to meet him. Please email Jenny Barling by April 15<sup>th</sup> – [jennyb@vfast.co.uk](mailto:jennyb@vfast.co.uk) – if you are able to attend or to give apologies.

Henley Rowing Museum, Mill Meadows, Meadow Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 1BF

**Sat 18<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April - Southern Branch familiarisation visit to Cardiff**

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July – Southern Branch Meeting, with lunch and tour of the Claremont Hotel, Eastbourne – courtesy of Daish's**

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2015 – AGM weekend at Marriot Gosforth Park, Newcastle**

**An invitation** - for any Southern Branch Members to attend Kent meetings and fam visits. If you would like to go to any of these, please contact Eileen Booker by email at [bookertrip@live.co.uk](mailto:bookertrip@live.co.uk) or tel: 01227 765917

**Thursday  
May 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Branch meeting, fam. visit & lunch at Daish's Hotel, Eastbourne - plus another afternoon visit**

**Saturday  
July 25th**

**Summer branch meeting at Lullingstone Roman Villa with opportunity to visit Lullingstone Castle & World Garden, Country Park cafe and nearby lavender fields in bloom.** *Experience these yourself then 'mix and match' for excellent group days out.*

**Copy Date for the next Newsletter**

**July 14<sup>th</sup> 2015.**

**Please send your contributions to the Editor:**

If you have a great day out or holiday with your group, please share it with others.

Please send articles, photos and reports, preferably as an attachment to an email to:

Jackie Ring: [ring\\_jackie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ring_jackie@yahoo.co.uk) or by post to  
14 Manston Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU4 7YE

Please note that due to the high cost of printing and postage all future editions of Southerly Breeze will be sent by email to those members with email addresses. If you require a paper copy for some specific purpose please let Jenny know. Paper copies will be posted as normal to those members without computer facilities.

## A Message from Mike Bugsgang

The first few weeks in my role as the newly appointed Chief Executive of GTOA have proved extremely positive. Meetings with existing and potential members, other tourism bodies and the media have indicated considerable optimism for the groups travel market.

Working closely with GTOA's Board, Branches and administration company, I am confident that this optimism can be transformed into a real shift in perceptions of group travel and as a consequence, the Association can grow even stronger.

Encouragingly, the Government seems to have awakened to the value of tourism to the UK economy with sizeable sums of investment recently announced for coastal and countryside projects that will benefit the groups sector.

GTOA's Annual Conference at the Newcastle Marriott Gosforth Park over the weekend 18-20 September is a must-attend event for members, so be sure to put the date in your diary right away. It will be good to meet members at what promises to be a great networking opportunity in a beautiful part of the country with much to offer groups.

Meantime, I hope to meet many members of Southern Branch at the familiarisation visit to the Henley Rowing Museum on 23 April.

***Mike Bugsgang***  
***Chief Executive***  
***GTOA***

*Mike Bugsgang attended Tourism South East's Beautiful South Travel Fair at Painshill on 7<sup>th</sup> March where Southern Branch had a stand. He is pictured here with Jenny Barling and David Steele.*



# Aviva Fellowship Croydon – Trip to Brooklands Museum 15th July 2013

On a very hot summer's day, as Members arrived, they were warmly greeted and 'booked-in' by Hilary Kearney at the Gate Lodge. 34 of us then met and mingled at the Sunbeam Café, part of the original Brooklands Clubhouse, near Weybridge in Surrey. After some light refreshments we then gathered upstairs and we had a brief talk from our Organiser Chris House. Chris informed us that amongst us was Alan Chipperfield, now 90 years old, who flew Wellington bombers during WW II. Also present was Bert Firmin, who was an ex Spitfire pilot. Chris then sadly reminded the party that Dickie Dyke's (also an ex WW II RAF man) funeral was taking place at that moment in Wallington, and a short period of contemplation was observed.

Maddie, a Brooklands guide, then gave us a brief introduction to Brooklands history which, from its inception, and sadly 'cheap' (6" thick, instead of the specified 9") concrete track construction, was increasingly heavily funded by Hugh and Ethel Locke-King. This eventually led to its opening in June 1907, with a cavalcade of 43 automobiles, a real spectacle for its time! Many world records were subsequently established there over the years on their track; in fact, Malcolm Campbell's 'Bluebird' racing car was built and developed at Brooklands. A small airfield soon followed, together with a 325ft hill climb with a 1 in 4 gradient, quite a test for acceleration and braking systems in those days and still used today. Unfortunately the track, as part of the aircraft production site attracted severe bombing during WW II and was latterly uneconomic to restore. However, London Weekend Television filmed one of the Hercule Poirot episodes (with David Suchet) at Brooklands, and more recently (September 2009) Top Gear's James May broke the world record for the longest Scalextric track, using the remnants of the Brooklands circuit.

During WW II, Barnes-Wallis (designer of the Wellington bomber, and the famous 'bouncing bomb' of the Dambusters fame) was based at Brooklands, and the aviation hangars contain many examples of his work, including a partly restored Wellington that was recovered from the bottom of Loch Ness in 1985, discovered by an American adventurer looking for Nessie!

After the Introductory Briefing, we were split into two groups with two further expert guides John & David, and proceeded with the tour. Exhibits included a Formula One museum, a bicycle museum (featuring a tandem with a side-car) amongst others. Far too much to see in one day!

After lunch, some of us met in the main hangar to see Alan Chipperfield climb once again into a Wellington cockpit. The other half of us were due for our UK first production Concorde Flight Experience. We learnt that the UK Concorde's nose and tail were built at Brooklands with France providing the middle sections and wings. Certainly a 'flight' to remember and somewhat less than the 70's return ticket price tag of \$10,000! Amongst the other static aviation displays was a VC10 airliner, once used by the Sultan of Oman as his personal transport – very opulent indeed!

A brief visit to the large London Bus Museum completed a very interesting day out. It needs another visit to see those areas we didn't have time to see. Thanks go to the Brooklands Guides and our Organisers.

*Report by James O'Neil - August 2013  
Submitted by Chris House*

**BROOKLANDS  
WEYBRIDGE**  
Racing Car, Aircraft, Bus & Cycle Museum  
**MONDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2013**  
FELLOWSHIP VISIT STARTS AT 11.30 A.M.

**28 POINTS OF INTEREST**  
to include an initial site briefing plus  
**Guided Tour Around Museum**

During the Afternoon there will be 2 Sessions of Simulated  
**Flights on Concorde**  
(Places Permitting)

**Admission £9 after subsidy Flights £4**  
Car Parking by Museum KT13 0SL: FREE  
Catering at Popular prices - Sunbeam Cafe Outdoor Clothes required  
Group Save Tickets available from British Rail  
Applications available late May

*Chris produced his own poster to publicise the event to his group's members*

## **FRED OLSEN CRUISES**

**two-night mini-cruise to Amsterdam,  
departing from Harwich on 11th April**



This has been organised by the Eastern Branch who are holding their Branch Meeting on the Braemar earlier in the day and then many of them are staying on board for the trip. Other GTOA members are welcome to join them. This is a great way to see the ship and experience a Fred Olsen cruise for yourself to find out whether a cruise would be suitable for your own group.

Fred Olsen offered special rates which proved extremely popular. If you are interested in going, phone them on 0800 0355 110, quoting GRP9999 to check current availability and price.

See more details on the GTOA website or Fred Olsen Cruises' website (cruise ref. M1509).

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## **The Mill at Sonning**

I have been to this theatre twice with my group. Set right by the Thames, a visit is a lovely way to spend an afternoon or evening. A ticket for a performance in the semi-round intimate theatre includes a delicious buffet meal in their restaurant. They will soon complete a refurbishment of the building and while this is being done they are presenting a play 'in promenade'.

See their website for further information. They often have special offers of four tickets for the price of three. Or call Ian Southgate, Marketing and Admin Officer, on 0118 969 6039 for group rates (and mention GTOA).

<http://www.millatsonning.com/>

*Jackie Ring 2221*

# Not what we thought we were going to do that day....

*The Waverley* is the last sea-going paddle steamer in the world. It has been magnificently restored with towering funnels, timber decks, sparkling varnish and brass. It was seen on TV recently with the enthusiastic passengers Michael Portillo and Len Goodman. It spends a few weeks each year in the Thames area travelling between various piers or doing round excursions. I went last October with two friends to suss out this trip for my group. It was a gloriously sunny day (to start with) and we were headed on a one-way trip to Southend, planning to do a short walk, and then return to London by train. Leaving Tower Pier, it was wonderful to have Tower Bridge raise specially for us, then we had a relaxing few hours on deck, with a commentary as we watched the buildings of London pass by and become the marshes of the Estuary. We went into the engine room to see the gleaming pistons and the paddle wheels which were mesmerizing to watch.



With a heavy storm and strong winds approaching we were advised that the ship would not be able to dock at Southend pier, so we did a detour to Gravesend. The ship's purser had contacted all the various coach companies who had groups on board and arranged their alternative pick-ups. We had to decide on a Plan B. The captain had mentioned a new gurdwara, a Sikh temple, as we'd passed by earlier, so we decided on an impromptu visit. We were made to feel very welcome and were shown around with explanations on what was going on in all the different areas, the chanting, the praying, and all our questions were answered. We were even offered food – and noticed some arm-waving in the distance just in time before us three ladies sat at a spare table amongst all the men to eat it. We promised to return.



We then did the short crossing on the little ferry from Gravesend to Tilbury and picked up the C2C train from there, explaining to the ticket man why we weren't getting on where our tickets said we should. I always take a variety of train, bus and other maps with me, but I hadn't been quite prepared to end up in a different county all together.

I can thoroughly recommend a group trip on the PS Waverley, and also to the gurdwara, although for a group it would be courteous to check beforehand.

<http://www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk/>

<http://gurunanakdarbar.org/>

**Jackie Ring 2221**



# Beat the Winter Blues Mystery Trip



This year I decided to plan a mystery trip to start off the day trips for the year. No one had a clue where we were off to.

It was a dull day in February and we set off for our first stop which was to be Guildford Cathedral.

We had two knowledgeable guides and two groups set off for tour of Cathedral. It was excellent.

We had a lunch at the refectory serving good quality food and was a lovely lunch stop. By then the sun was shining on the hill looking out from the restaurant.

On the coach again and across the countryside with spring flowers just showing us that the countryside is waking up from winter's sleep.

We headed off to Farnham to the Antiques centre which has been on 'Antiques Road Trip'. This is an old mill steeped in history. It was once a brothel and also a club in the 60s where Mick Jagger and other stars used the mill as a night club. Now its many rooms are stuffed full of treasures. Everyone had a great time finding so many collectables. It is also a good stop for tea or coffee.



Now we had a scenic drive across the countryside to East Horsley. I had prepared a commentary on the route with a wealth of information about Lord Lovelace. We had an afternoon high tea at Thatchers Legacy Hotel - Associate GTOA members. This was excellent and nothing was too much trouble. The staff were very caring and everyone was chatting. The restaurant was beautifully presented and I can fully recommend this hotel. It would also be good lunch stop or indeed Sunday lunch. The hotel gardens are a treat in any season.



Everyone had a great day out, so proving that a winter trip can be a special day out. The way I planned this trip was so we could have still had a good time whatever the weather.

*June Barnard 2231*

## Christmas Lunch Cruise

Following the Southern Branch social invitation from Heather Egerton of City Cruises, I thought the lunch cruise along the Thames would make an ideal Christmas outing for my group. We arrived in London



with time to have coffee before boarding the vessel or to take a little stroll along the Thames for the more energetic amongst us.

On boarding the boat we were welcomed and shown to our tables and once we were underway, drink orders were soon completed and a delicious 2 course Christmas lunch was served. The commentary as always was very interesting although at times a little difficult to hear for the laughter that reverberated around the room.



The voyage took us from Tower Pier, up to Westminster, then down almost to the Thames Barrier before returning to Tower Pier taking a good two hours.

We completed the day with a visit to Hyde Park and the Winter Wonderland. We all stared in amazement at the many

fairground rides and some positively made me shudder. For most of us though we enjoyed the Christmas Market stalls which were just that little bit different.

Finally, back on our coach, we took a tour of the Christmas lights and rounded the day off with drinks and mince pies before departing for home.

*Jenny Barling -1835 S*

## New Year Jaunt

A holiday at Warner's is always good but it is a great way to start the New Year and chase away the winter blues.

This year Stuart Parker from Interchoice Holidays arranged for 30 of my group to stay at Alvaston Hall in Cheshire which had recently benefitted from a £12 million restoration project.

We were all soon settled into our rooms which were first class. The bathrooms all had double size walk-in showers plus a clever little light that was activated on opening the door, so there was no need to go fumbling in the dark for light switches or waking your room mate. The beds too were exceptionally comfortable and the staff, food & entertainment all top notch. The price included two excursions. We enjoyed a day in Chester beginning with a coach guided tour for which I had engaged Blue Badge Guide Tom Jones – and yes he did give us a song. His knowledge of Chester was first class and he certainly knew his facts having been brought up within Chester's City Walls.



Our second day out was to Port Sunlight. Again this was fascinating with an excellent Museum which centred around the making of Sunlight Soap. There was also an art gallery with both buildings set in the delightful village built by Lord Lever for the workers at his factory, which is better known today as 'Unilever'. The day was rounded off with a short

visit to Cheshire Oaks Shopping Village where we were met on our arrival and given a 10% discount card and refreshment voucher. There were some great bargains to be had.

We had one day at Alvaston Hall to spend as we wished and there was no shortage of activities to take part in. The Leisure Centre had a lovely pool with a Jacuzzi and steam room and a superb gymnasium plus a Spa Centre for those who like to indulge in a massage, facial or manicure. The entertainment team also led walks, taught dancing of various types and coached choirs. Or you could simply find a quiet spot to chill out and relax. Thank you Stuart for organising this for us and we are all looking forward to Bodelwyddan Castle next January.

*Jenny Barling*  
1835 S

If you contact any of the venues or companies mentioned here, please say that you were recommended by someone from **GTOA Southern Branch!**

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Have a look at the newsletters from other regions on the GTOA website and you may find that they are organising a fam trip to a place you are interested in seeing. If it is genuinely somewhere you would consider taking your own group, contact them and ask if you can be included.

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## **Group Cruise Specialist wins major national travel award**

Leading Independent Ocean and River Group Cruise Specialist and GTOA Director, Martin Hay from Go Cruise, has won a prestigious national travel award. Martin was presented with “Homeworker of the Year 2014” by Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA UK & Ireland) which represents more than 1,500 travel agencies the length and breadth of UK & Ireland.

Martin received the honour at CLIA’s Cruise Excellence Awards in front of senior figures within the UK cruise industry onboard Fred. Olsen’s ‘Black Watch’. The CLIA Homeworker of the Year award not only reflects the Martin’s success in arranging ocean and river cruise holidays for both individuals and groups, but also recognises he is a great advocate for the industry, continually enhancing his own knowledge and looking for opportunities within all sectors of the industry.

To discuss your individual or group cruise requirements contact Martin on 01254 245386 or [martinhay@gocruise.co.uk](mailto:martinhay@gocruise.co.uk)



*Pictured L-R:  
Lucy Huxley, Editor in Chief Travel Weekly Magazine,  
Martin Hay, Andy Harmer, Director CLIA UK & Ireland*