

AG
TO

association of
group travel organisers

MAGAZINE

issue 2





WELCOME

Welcome to Issue 2 of the AGTO Magazine. Our new format has been well received so thank you for taking the time to feedback positive comments and praise. Feedback is vitally important in AGTO and we look forward to hearing more of your thoughts and opinions regarding your Magazine.

This issue is packed with Branch Reports of some amazing trips that GTOs together with National Updates. Our Guest Columnist this issue is John Wales, Chairman of the CTA, discussing an important subject when bringing groups to London.

We have features from our Associate members together with the roll call of new AGTO members, both GTOs and Associates, all of whom we welcome to the Association.

If you would like your own articles to be considered for use within the Magazine then please go to your branch committee members to see where you should send your relevant information.

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Visit our website: www.agto.co.uk

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National News Update

AGTO SHOWCASE & AGM 2019

22nd - 24th Feb – Eastwood Hall Hotel, Nottingham

Our weekend shaped up very nicely and a great time was enjoyed by all delegates. Look out for the full report in issue 3 of the AGTO Magazine.

AGTO OFFICES

The AGTO office has relocated to North Allerton where services to our members continue uninterrupted. Unfortunately due to the relocation we have lost our previous Administrator Charlotte Harmer. We thank Charlotte for her many years' service and wish her all the best in her future endeavours. Gill Stirk has now taken up the AGTO mantle. We welcome Gill to the AGTO organisation and wish her good luck.

BRITISH COACH TOURISM AWARDS

AGTO was honoured to be asked to be on the judging panel for the British Coach Tourism Awards and Wendy spent several days locked in a Board Room in Peterborough!! Together with fellow judges (all sworn to secrecy) meticulously working through the entries, only 52 categories! It was a very difficult task as the submissions were of such a high standard. Awards will be presented on the 20th March in

Birmingham, after the BTTS Show at the NEC. Don't forget to come along and visit us at stand C37.

AGTO HELPLINE

We have renewed the provision of our FREE legal helpline with Travlaw for 2019.

This 24 hour helpline is available to all AGTO members. Call 0113 258 0033.

EXHIBITIONS 2019

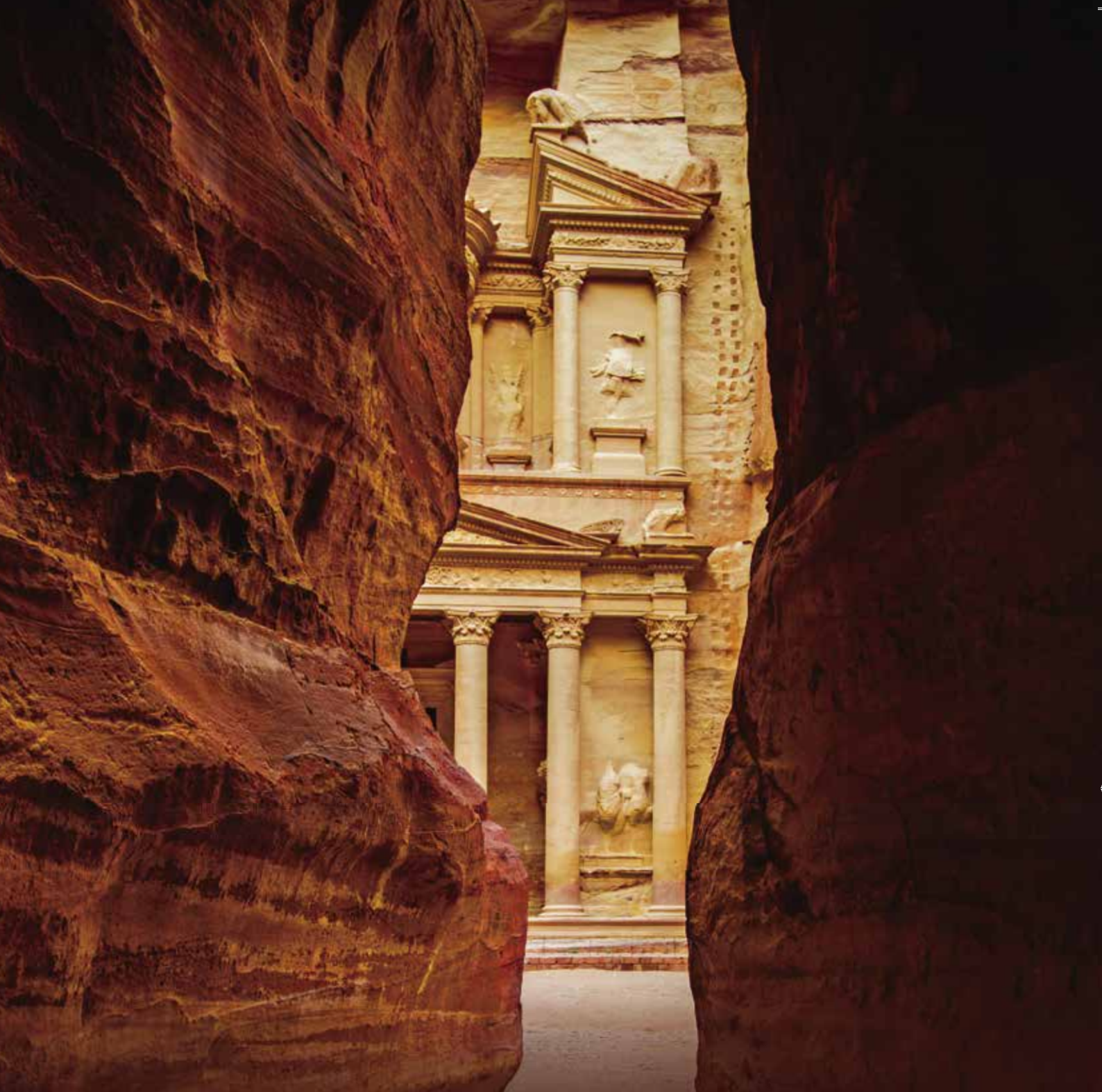
Trade shows continue to be a vital source of new membership for AGTO. In January we attended the annual Excursions™ Show at Alexandra Palace, London. As always, this was a resounding success for us with 22 new GTO members recruited. David Steele's full report can be found on page 7.

In February we attended the South West Show held at Longleat. It was a lively and pleasant show and a further 10 new GTO members were signed up.

BTTS

AGTO are exhibiting again in Birmingham on the 21 – 22nd March, a must-attend event for GTOs & Associates alike. We continue with our previous successes of hosting a Question Time panel session on the 22nd March and we look forward to seeing our members at the seminar and visiting our stand C37.





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ABTA
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4785

Guest columnist - John Wales



As I start my second year as Chair of the Coach Tourism Association, I can look back on 2018 and the great pleasure I had in being able to meet many members of AGTO.

Because of my previous role as CEO of Encore, I know only too well just what an important part GTOs play in filling West End theatres – as well as many attractions – especially on those cold, wet mid-week nights in the winter, when walk-in foreign visitors are hard to come by.

My abiding memory of AGTO members, is their unwavering enthusiasm for the venues and shows they took their groups to and their optimism for the future.

The bottom line is that I share that optimism for 2019 and beyond. But it is only fair to say that, even discounting BREXIT for a moment (if only...) there is something of what we might euphemistically call 'a challenge' on the horizon. As I am sure readers will know, that is of course ULEZ the Ultra Low Emission Zone.

The simple facts are that when the

John Wales, Chair of the Coach Tourism Association, looks to the challenges of the upcoming ULEZ - Ultra Low Emission Zone and the potential effects on coach companies, tour operators and group travel organisers.

new ULEZ rules come into place on 8th April 2019 – and cover an area roughly the same as the current Congestion Charge Zone – any coach wanting to enter the zone will have to adhere to the ULEZ standards which, in turn, means a Euro 6-standard engine and that is where the problems start.

In a nutshell, if you have a coach that does not have a Euro 6 engine you will incur a fine of up to £100 per day. It will cost you around £30,000 to have a coach converted, or, to put it another way, the cost of a perfectly nice new car. Looking at the economics of fleet ownership, the knock-on effect is that older coaches will probably not be worth converting and retained only for local work avoiding cities that enforce ULEZ rules, which may include Leeds, Southampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow and others to follow.

Why not buy a new one then? All very well except that you will be adding a couple of noughts to that conversation cost with new coaches costing around £300,000 – and possibly a lot more. The sad fact is that, as a result of this it will be those groups who have to keep the cost

down that will suffer the most.

In fact the most badly affected market will be school groups, where profit margins are low and older vehicles are the name of the game. The same harsh economics will also affect many coach firms that supply 'mid-life' vehicles to the groups market and that of course, will affect GTOs.

The situation will eventually sort itself out, but until coach operators have re-equipped (and not every one of them will be able to afford to do this), group visits to West End theatres and attractions, as well as those school trips, will be under severe pressure.

All that said, I know that the coach industry does have a bright future beyond the disruption of ULEZ and, ironically, it has a good story to tell about pollution. Larger 60- & 70-seater coaches are becoming more commonplace, taking a lot of people and powered by clean engines – a lot more eco-friendly than 30 or more cars of questionable age.

The coach operators who form the backbone of the CTA all create & operate tour programmes year

round, are all well versed in the new legislation and can advise GTO's on any implications in forthcoming planned excursions. In addition, these tour operating experts can offer tour planning advice and share the benefits of the commercially

advantageous agreements they have with suppliers, when working together with GTO's.

And of course Group Travel Organisers have a big part to play in the improved environmental travel process. Bringing together numbers

of like minded people to visit an attraction, a venue or a city centre theatre, is by far the most sensible way of moving bodies around and I am sure that CTA and AGTO members will be doing business together for a long time in the future.

Message from our CEO



In order for us to get more coverage for AGTO in the general trade press, we are asking Branches & GTOs to submit reviews of any fam trips and meetings together with any trips your GTOs organise as soon as possible after the event. I will then get them edited for submission to the Press for inclusion in the trade magazines/papers. This will highlight how active our GTOs are and help to encourage new members, both GTOs and Associates.

If you feel there could be sufficient interest you could even invite a member of the press to join your trips.

Any further information with this, please let me know.

Many thanks

Wendy

ceo1@agto.co.uk | www.agto.co.uk



Obituary - David Lote

David became well known representing Bowens, a long standing coach and holiday company and member of AGTO. After their demise he was quickly snapped up by Just for Groups which enabled

him to continue his association with many of the Group Organisers he had not just helped in the past with travel requirements, but had become friends with.

David was seen at least once, but often more, at every branch of AGTO for meetings throughout the year and always supported us at AGMs and Showcases.

In 2012 David was given the coveted ELITE Award for exceptional service and support of our Association, one of only seven Associates to receive such in our twenty-eight year history.

His valuable knowledge and cheerful disposition will be sadly missed.

David Steele, AGTO Director

AGTO at Excursions™ 2019

David Steele, AGTO Director, reports on his recent successful visit to the annual travel trade show at Alexandra Palace, London.

As the last week in January approached I knew it was time for my annual "pilgrimage" to Excursions, some 43 years after the first was held in 1976 which was held at the World Trade Centre on the corner of Tower Bridge in London. As the Exhibition proved popular and expanded the venue had to change and several new homes were found until settling at Alexandra Palace which I hope is a permanent arrangement. I attended the first show to see if it was suitable for a consortium of Thames Riverboat Operators to exhibit (I was their Secretary) and needless to say a large stand was procured for the following year.

After attending Excursions in various guises over the years I was at the Show again but this time representing AGTO and was ably assisted throughout the day by Anne Barnes (Southern Branch) and Carol Gower (Kent Branch) which enabled us to recruit 22 new members, just short of our all time record of 24 at a Trade Show, which will come as no surprise when I tell you it was at "Excursions" 2018

So were there any differences this year?

Yes, there was a Street Market for the first time which was proving popular plus entertainment via Groups Direct, an AGTO Member,

which attracted the crowds, perhaps AGTO should have a stand next to Groups Direct next time!

Numbers I understand were a little down on last year but this did not seem to matter to either us or some other AGTO members in the vicinity of our stand as the quality was high. Between 11.15am and 1.00pm the visitors to our stand were two deep and our vocal cords were being extended to their fullest. Many of those visitors were current AGTO members and it was nice to say hello to them all, especially those who had signed up last year and had come to express their appreciation of the benefits of belonging to our Association.

From a personal point of view the

unloading arrangements on the Friday afternoon and loading after the Show finished on Saturday afternoon worked perfectly, all credit must be given to Fran Downton and her team from Tourism South East for such good organisation.

At the end of a tiring, but hugely satisfying day, Anne and I strolled around the Alexandra Palace Garden Centre and unwound before heading home.

Excursions as a show for Group Organisers is a MUST, the variety of Exhibitors can only inspire GTOs into finding interesting venues for their members to visit and the buzz around the Exhibition area makes visiting, or exhibiting a pleasure - roll on Excursions 2020!



Welcome

New Members

We are delighted to note the following new members of AGTO and extend a warm welcome:

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

A5979 The Bowes Museum

A hidden treasure in the heart of Teeside

This magnificent building stands proud in the historic market town of Barnard Castle housing internationally significant collections of fine and decorative arts. Purpose built in the 19th century by John and Joséphine Bowes, the Museum has a wonderful story to tell.

A5980 Pencarrow Heritage House

Home and gardens on the edge of Bodmin Moor

The House has been the friendly family home of the Molesworth-St Aubyns for almost 500 years. Tucked away on the edge of Bodmin Moor, this Cornish Georgian gem offers plenty to do, with a Grade II listed garden, Iron Age fort, children's play area, café and gift shop. They are pet friendly, dogs are welcome, and there are 50 acres to explore.

A5981 Jailhouse Tours

Seasonal events and horror tours across the UK

Jailhouse Tours opens the doors on three of the nations' oldest prisons, giving visitors a unique insight into the world of incarceration.

A5982 Kalimara Kriti Hotel and Village Resort

A unique resort on the north coast of Crete

Harmoniously spread over 240,000m² of glorious Mediterranean gardens, the landscape incorporates incredible, long, sandy beaches with world-famous sunsets that evoke a feeling of romance & relaxation.

A5983 Hovertravel Ltd

Your fastest Ferry link from Southsea to Ryde, Isle of Wight

Hovertravel provides the fastest Isle of Wight ferry route across the Solent and is the world's only year round passenger hovercraft service. Our passenger ferry service takes you directly to the shore at Southsea or Ryde in just 10 minutes.

GTO MEMBERS

2769	Jacky	Burnell
2770	Blanche	Chappels
2771	Rosemary	Goodson
2772	Carmel	Parker
2773	Gloria	Mumford
2774	Pat	Williams
2775	Trevor	Norton
2776	Ron	Blizzard
2777	Sylvia	Norton
2778	Joanne	Millett
2779	Sharon	Barrett
2780	Graham	Scrase
2781	Barbara	Ladd
2782	Valerie	Worboys
2783	David	Till
2784	Terence	Reynolds
2785	Philip	Childs
2786	Pauline	Delius
2787	Jill	Hart
2788	Christina	Brooks
2789	Janis	Stein
2790	Maureen	Arrowsmith
2791	Alexandra	Nicolaou
2792	Janice	Taylor



The recent announcement of Caroline Brown as Commercial Director will have a positive impact for Trade and Group Organisers, as she brings a wealth of experience in the Coach and Travel Industry to help expand the offering for Group Organisers in the future.

Caroline will be responsible for Alfa Travel, as well as providing commercial support to Leisureplex hotels as the group expands its senior management team.

Caroline Brown takes on the role of Group Commercial Director, following positions as Commercial Director and business unit leader for Shearings Holidays, chair of ABTA's UK Tourism and Leisure Group and more recently she held the role as General Manager at Edwards Coaches.

Caroline said, "I am really looking forward to joining such a highly respected brand and employee-owned business at an exciting time

Alfa Leisureplex Group's New Commercial Director

of development and growth for the group".

This news follows the expansion of the Alfa Groups Team in 2018, which saw the promotion of Helen Goggin to Sales Manager, encompassing the Alfa Groups and Travel Agent Sales departments in a bid to help grow Group Sales across Alfa Travel.

Helen said, "We are very excited to welcome Caroline to the team and to continue on our journey in Alfa Groups by making the customer experience one to remember. We have a great team in the Groups Department; with over twenty years of combined experience in the Travel and Hospitality industry, we are proud to help our dedicated Group Organisers plan their upcoming holidays and the future is looking really positive for everyone."

Alfa Travel provides coach and self-drive holidays in the UK, Ireland and Europe along with their expanding River Cruise and By Air products. They own a portfolio of Hotels across the UK, called Leisureplex Hotels and work with a vast number of Partner Hotels, to provide wide selection of holidays throughout the year. In the early season Alfa offer Cabaret Weekend Breaks and the increasingly popular £1 bar deals in

Blackpool and Dunoon. There is a wide selection of five to eight day holidays throughout Spring and Summer and an abundant Festive Programme throughout November and December, all of which are perfect for Group Holidays.

The Alfa Groups Team also provide a Tailor-Made Group Holiday service, which benefits the vast array of Groups who currently use Alfa Travel; including walking groups, bowls groups, choirs and church groups. From Bournemouth to Belgium, Alfa Travel can tailor-make package holidays for Groups across Great Britain and the Continent.

There are a number of discounts and offers available for Groups, when they book with Alfa Travel. These include up to four free places, free drinks and free lunches on selected spring holidays and no single supplements on autumn and spring breaks. They also provide exclusive coach travel on 30 or more passengers, so travelling as a group has never been simpler.

For more information about Caroline and the Alfa Groups team or to enquire about a Group Holiday you can contact Alfa Travel on 01257 248045 or visit their website alfatravel.co.uk/group-bookings.



News from English Heritage

You can now use your AGTO membership card at all English Heritage properties for a free planning visit. We hope to see many of you in the coming months as you plan some exciting days out.

So whether your group is tempted by architecture of all ages, gardens cultivated over centuries, the brushstrokes of an Old Master or the intricacies of an interior you'll find a day out that suits and stimulates their interests at one of our 400 properties. This means you no longer need to apply to us

for a Travel Trade Pass, just present your AGTO card on arrival at one of our sites for entry for up to two adults. Please check opening times before you visit as many of our sites are operating reduced winter hours. When you are ready to make a group booking you can contact the site directly. For Stonehenge

contact the bookings team on: +44 (0) 370 333 0604, calls are charged at local rates (mobile charges may vary) and the line is open Monday to Friday 9am-5pm (UK time). Alternatively you can email them at bookstonehenge@english-heritage.org.uk.





BTTS is back!

The British Tourism & Travel Show is back at the NEC Birmingham on 20-21 March 2019, with another helping of exclusive free seminars, networking opportunities, leading exhibitors and 'flash mob' performances. Group event director David Maguire highlights what's new for visitors at the leading annual event for the UK and Ireland's domestic tourism industry.

Encompassing the very best rich heritage attractions and coach friendly destinations, thousands of group travel operators across the UK and Ireland can once again immerse themselves into this two-day showcase – described as the 'event of the year' for providing the group tourism industry with inspiration and ideas for their upcoming itineraries.

The eclectic mix of 270+ leading visitor attractions, venues, destinations, hotels, transport providers, associations and DMOs include: Albatross Travel, Best Western Hotels, Bournemouth & Poole, Carden Park Hotel, Belvoir Castle, Gwilli Railway, Beatles Story, Continuum Leading Attractions, Devon's Top Attractions, Marketing Liverpool, Visit Coventry & Warwickshire, Marketing Manchester, The Ticket Factory, Harewood House, Longleat, Peal District National Park Trust, Jewellery Quarter, Museum of Timekeeping, Parkway Hotel & Spa, Portmeirion Village, Visit Richmond, and many more.

Inspirational Keynote line-up

Simon Calder, senior editor of *The Independent*, is widely known as Britain's leading travel commentator and the 'man who pays his way'. Based on his extensive knowledge,

Calder will be making his much-anticipated British Tourism & Travel Show speaking debut (at 1pm on 21 March), discussing various trends, challenges and opportunities in the travel sector today.

Tony Barry, visitor experience director of The National Trust, Britain's largest membership organisation, will be discussing how the respected organisation is having to change and adapt to people's rapidly changing expectations, whilst still remaining the same – in the Keynote theatre at 10.30am on 21 March.

Digital Insights

With digital becoming the forefront of business, the Keynote line-up will also include: Meredith Almond, senior strategist at Sparkloft Media, who'll be talking about the importance of social data and analytics. Adam Millbank, director of independent video production company JonesMillbank, will provide an exclusive session on video marketing, and The Digital Tourism Think Tank's will bring a fresh perspective on destination marketing; talking about some of the key trends they've seen in the industry, bringing heaps of global perspective.

Group Travel Organiser Day

Coinciding with 'Group Travel Organiser Day' (21 March), BTTS is the ultimate celebration of group travel organisers from across the UK and Ireland. Exclusive offers include free parking, a free meeting planner, free coach transfers and a raft of dedicated seminars for the most experienced group travel organisers to explore including: AGTO's interactive 'question time' session, an unmissable Keynote programme, and the second GTO Special Recognition Award ceremony.

Destination Europe Area returns

As well as a whole raft of leading tourist companies in the UK, visitors can also discover further afield in the Destination Europe area. European exhibitors confirmed so far include: Dutch Cruise Line, ITO Tours, Eurotours, Europlan, Acrona Hotels, CroisiEurope, Worldwide Attractions, Lovers Canal Cruises, Amsterdam Canal Cruises, Zaanse Schans, Keukenhof, City Circle Berlin, Swarovski Tourism Services (Austria), The Berlin TV Tower, The Memorial de Caen (Normandy), The Montparnasse Tower Observation Deck Park, and many more.

For more information and to book your free ticket, please visit www.tourismshow.co.uk.



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So what have the Branches of AGTO been up to recently?

The following reports demonstrate how active our members are whilst also checking out the detail for possible trips with their groups.

Thanks must go to the Associate members who support these activities and who get to meet & network with the GTOs during the trips.

With such a wide scope of venues and attractions, I must admit I'd find it difficult to decide which one would be the most interesting, but it does seem that wherever AGTO members go they enjoy to the full.

Keep enjoying and keep telling us about your experiences.

Wendy, AGTO CEO

Central Branch's Chairman's Message

This is my swan song as Chairman and committee member of Central Branch, as I will have retired at Central's AGM, which is being held at the February Showcase Weekend. I have enjoyed my time on the committee, starting off as Minute Secretary to help Julia, who was, and still is, filling the Secretary and Treasurer positions. Somehow I was the only one who was then prepared to become Chairman. As I am used to preparing and producing my own Club's annual magazine the job of magazine editor for Central branch also came my way. It seems at times that writing articles for the magazine is my job too as not many of you like to put pen to paper and tell us all

of your experiences. Perhaps now you have seen the content from the other branches you may be a little braver. After writing 'Johnson's Journal' for Group Travel Today for some years now I find it almost second nature. It does help to have a very good sub-editor husband, who wields a red pen correcting my grammar, and a good editor in Hugh Cairns at GTT.

I have agreed to continue with the magazine editorship as long as the committee need me to, so please send me in some articles or hints/tips about places you have been. My email is pauline_a_johnson@hotmail.com. The deadline for the next issue is 30th March.

As a committee we are delighted that two new members agreed to attend our January committee meeting to see just what is involved. We are all hoping that more of you will agree to come on the committee at the AGM as Julia really needs member's support. She can't run Central Branch on her own.

Jo Blair has given us first refusal as a branch on two Fams that Success Tours are offering in 2019. I know that several Central members applied and as I will be going on the Italian Fam I hope to enjoy your company for four days.

Pauline Johnson C1850

Out and About with Cranwell Branch

The Cranwell Branch started their 2018 outings to the Cromford Mill near Matlock. A cold day but a very interesting location brought to life by 2 tour guides. The next was to the Lakeland Retail Centre near to Doncaster to be followed by visiting nearby Brodsworth Hall. This is an English Heritage property where, once taken over, the decision was to try and maintain it is a 'lived in' property rather than update it. Both of these major locations can be strongly recommended and the members thoroughly enjoyed both.

Members have benefitted from a range of activities coinciding with the excellent weather in the last few months. This started with members attending the RAF Association Service at the National Arboretum RAF 100 Anniversary service in May followed by an outing to Boundary Mills in Grantham, lunch at the Brewers Fayre – the Farrier just off the A1 and Wollaton Hall in Nottingham. The latter, administered by Nottingham City Council, is set within 500 acres of rolling parkland and is judged to be one of the country's finest



Grade I listed Elizabethan mansions and houses a large Natural History Museum. Despite having had an excellent lunch, members enjoyed the refreshments in the courtyard café.

June saw members visiting Oakham, unfortunately the Castle which houses a range of horseshoes donated by monarchs and other notables and also the Museum were closed on Tuesday but members found the town interesting and visited a range of refreshment locations. The cruise on Rutland Water was enhanced with the good weather. The restaurant, near to the ferry, provided an excellent menu and ice cream.



July was a planned outing to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park near Wakefield. To save the £30 coach parking fee it was agreed that the members would pre-order tea, coffee and Danish pastries. This proved to be a good investment with a self- service table and plenty of liquid refreshment and pastries. There was a limited time at this 'coffee stop' but members felt that it would justify much longer on another occasion.

The main feature of the outing was Lotherton Hall near Leeds. The members also considered that this would certainly justify another visit. Unfortunately for me they returned to Sleaford without me and their organiser, Gill, since early in the afternoon I had my first journey in an ambulance, to St James Hospital in Leeds. After eight hours of treatment I was discharged at midnight. The excellent doctor even arranged hotel accommodation for us. The service by all NHS staff in the ambulance and in the hospital proves that in an emergency the NHS, in it's 70th year, can come up trumps.

Mike Smith, C1922

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Twixmas in Scarborough

When the committee asked at the 2017 AGM in Newark if members would support a 3-night break between Christmas and New Year, with the option to bring family, friends or members of their group, the idea seemed attractive to those attending. We hoped we could book the whole hotel and have our AGM on the last day before we came home. However the proof as they say was in the pudding and no other GTO besides Julia and myself booked. As we both had members of our own group interested we decided to go ahead. Sue Day our Associate committee member also joined us along with her companion Terry.



The Red Lea Hotel above south beach Scarborough is family run and a lot of care and attention to detail has visibly been taken in its upkeep. All the bedrooms were of a good size, spotlessly clean with comfy beds. The food was good and the three night's entertainment - local singers - excellent. All

entertainment started at 8.30pm and ended at 10pm. Just right.

With only two groups to accommodate for coach pick ups Stuart from Interchoice - another Associate member of our committee - who had found the hotel for us, was able to do two local

stops for my group and then we headed up to Toton where Julia's group are based. That was also a bonus as Julia was able to use her local church premises to provide us with coffee and mince pies. A far better option than a motorway service station.

Our lunch stop was the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington. Despite the slightly foggy day – which actually lent atmosphere to the planes standing outside – we all enjoyed the couple of hours spent there. The NAAFI is large enough to take a couple of groups and serves hot and cold food. A short 15 minute talk had been booked in the Chapel, and we learnt that during WW11 there had been up to 2300 French airmen and staff based there as well as a Canadian squadron and that the main aircraft based here were Halifax's. One large hanger has a Halifax and

a Hadrian glider. The gliders had two crew and were used to take supplies or guns over to France and up to 3 gliders at a time could be towed behind the Halifax.

Friday, the sun shone and we all went out in the morning to discover the town of Scarborough before returning for soup and sandwiches at lunchtime. A traditional pantomime 'Robin Hood and Babes in the Wood' had been booked at the Spa Theatre just below us on the promenade. Unfortunately the cliff lift was out of order and the Council are doing major works to underpin the cliffs so we chose to take the coach, rather than a quick two-minute trip down the lift. Did we enjoy the pantomime – yes we did – some of us were noisier than the children with our 'boos' and 'its behind you' cries not to mention all the singing and hand clapping.

Recycled youngsters? You bet we were. It has to be said that the happy mood continued into the evening as we danced the night away to the music of Joel, a very accomplished singer, originally from the Philippine's but now based in Scarborough.

Saturday was another fine day as we set off for the Sea Life Centre. Again a most enjoyable 90 minutes. Watching stingrays coming up to be photographed, turtles swimming and otters playing. Julia had a vociferous penguin, called Custard, try very hard to escape with her out of its enclosure. Then it was off to Whitby to wander along the narrow streets in the old town, sample Whitby fish and chips at the famous Magpie Restaurant or tea and cakes in one of the numerous cafes.

Sunday came all too soon. With no AGM to worry about we left at 10am and had a quick stop at a garden centre for refreshments. No hot food unfortunately as the kitchen staff have time off until the New Year BUT the bargains on bulbs and primroses were too good to miss for any gardener. We wished you were there. You really missed a good Twixmas.

Pauline Johnson C1850



AGTO Central Branch Committee

Pauline Johnson - retiring Chairman & magazine editor
pauline_a_johnson@hotmail.com

Julia Passmore - Secretary & acting Treasurer
julia1cpassmore@aol.com

Sally Davison - Committee Member

Jo Blair - Success Tours - Associate Member

Sue Day - West Midland Safari Park - Associate Member

Stuart Parker - InterChoice Holidays - Associate Member

INTERESTED IN JOINING THE COMMITTEE?

Email Julia for details of the next committee date and venue

Eastern Branch's Chairman's Message

The Eastern Branch AGM was held in October at Hyland House, Chelmsford at the Visit Essex Show.

The Branch Committee staffed the AGTO stand and several new members were signed up.

Enid Pamment stood down as Chair after over 20 years in office at this meeting and Patricia Maltby was elected to the post. Enid will be missed and is a hard act to follow. I would like to thank her for her years of hard work on the Association and Branch's behalf.

The year has seen the Branch gain new members and continue to grow.

Joan Hanks, our Director and

Events Arranger has provided trips to: Eltham Palace and Gardens with a guided tour and lunch followed by afternoon refreshments at the Cutty Sark, The London Museum of Water and Steam, with guided tour and lunch, The Musical Museum at Kew Bridge, where various mechanical instruments were demonstrated, a concert on the Mighty Wurlitzer rounded off with tea and cake. All of which were hugely enjoyable and informative.

Linda Nicholas as Branch Treasurer has made sure we have made best use of the funds available to us.

The Committee meet four times a year and are always looking for new members to join it, it's true to say that none of us are getting any younger and if the Branch is

to continue to move forward then the Committee need to plan for the future. With the publication of the National Magazine it has been decided that the March edition of *Eastwise* will be the last. Yvonne will continue to be point of access for the Branch submissions to the new magazine. Our thanks for all her hard work in the publication of *Eastwise* over the years.

Thanks, must also go to Tony Wright who provides a photographic record of Branch fam trips and meetings.

The year ahead will no doubt bring many challenges, please support your Branch, your Association and Committee.

Patricia Maltby

GOODBYE EASTWISE

I'm reminded of the old saying "When one door closes, another one opens". I am a little sad to report that the next issue of *Eastwise*, the Eastern Branch Newsletter, will be the last one. However, I am sure you will agree that the first edition of the AGTO magazine, apart from being very attractive, is informative, giving an overall view of what is happening in our Association and with its members.

Eastwise started from very small beginnings and was an A5-sized newsletter written by one of our members and produced on his typewriter. It was then produced on my computer and printed in colour for about ten years or more. The production of *Eastwise* has been undertaken for the last two years or more by the Meppershall Messenger, who I feel have produced a very attractive, colourful newsletter.

I hope our Eastern Branch members have enjoyed



receiving copies of *Eastwise* and hope that they will continue to send me their copy for inclusion in the AGTO Magazine, as I am now the named contact with the publisher of the AGTO Magazine. (email yhodson@gmail.com)

I would like to thank all Eastern Branch members for their support over the many years that *Eastwise* has been in existence and look forward to receiving all your articles etc. for the new magazine.

Yvonne Hodson, E1285

Shefford Leisure Group Visit Stow Maries Areodrome

In October we visited the Mess Hall, used by the R.F.C. during the First World War, at the Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome, near Maldon in Essex. I had no idea it would prove so interesting, as were the stories of smuggling and piracy, told to us by a superb Blue Badge Guide.

We learned about life in the Royal Flying Corps as it was a Century ago, and had lunch (which was home cooked and huge!!) Afterwards we left the Mess, together with their Century old music and decorations, and were invited to view the hangers with original aircraft (still flying). My what an experience!

After our thanks to the very helpful and informative staff, who are all volunteers, we made our way to the Royal Burnham Yacht Club and into the tea room, which was the width of the Yacht Club, overlooking the salt marshes of Dengie Hundred. There we were enjoyed welcome cups of tea or coffee and an enormous piece of delicious cake! With all this food I guess our Landmark coach was a lot heavier going home, should it have been weighed?

What a delightful day!

Enid Pamment



AGTO Eastern Branch Committee

Patricia Maltby - Chairman

Joan Hanks - Director and Events Coordinator

Maria Maltby - Secretary

Linda Nicholas - Treasurer

Yvonne Hodson - Eastwise, Branch Webpage

Maureen Hardingham - Communications

Lesley Terrell - Associate Member

Kent Branch's Chairman's Message

The Kent Branch has enjoyed a very successful year and achieved the goals it set for 2018.

During the year the growth of membership continued and under the Chairmanship of Jim Silvester with considerable support from Carol Gower (Treasurer) Eileen Booker (Secretary) and Carol Blackmore (Carol 2) we put together an interesting schedule of meetings which attracted good support from our membership.

It also gave us the opportunity to meet both new and old members and exchange views and ideas.

Five meetings were held during the year:

- Brogdale Farm for the Apple Blossom (sadly not out) and Mount Ephraim
- A day out in London with support and complimentary services from our regular Associate Members Crosskeys Coaches, City and Village, Thames Clippers and Tower Bridge Experience
- Visit to Deal and Walmer Castles

organised by English Heritage where we held our AGM

- Weekend Break at Bembridge Coastal Hotel I.O.W organised by Warner Leisure
- Christmas Gathering and Lunch courtesy of Penshurst Place

Both Eileen and Carol were instrumental in attending Travel Shows on the AGTO stand and more members were signed up to the Association.

We have also had the pleasure of having Associate members attending all of our meetings and making a presentation and speaking to us during lunch and tea.

The introduction of GDPR brought us concern together with new documentation to both AGTO and our own clubs and organisations and even now in my mind it's still unfinished.

Our objectives include the growth of membership of the Kent Branch as well as assuring that our established and new members enjoy their AGTO membership, use the benefits it offers and support and contribute to

the Kent Branch activities.

The meeting schedule for 2019 will include:

- Betteshanger Mining Museum on Tuesday 26th March
- Visit Guildford and Wisley Gardens on Friday 24th May
- Exclusive visit to Fred Olsen's Boudicca with guided tour and buffet lunch on Monday 1st July

My role as Chairman has been made all the easier thanks to the help and assistance from Carol, Eileen and Carol (2) together with David Steele our Board Director and Charlotte from ASL.

Eileen Booker has stood down as our Secretary but will remain on our committee. We thank her for the many years service she gave the Association. Carol Blackmore has kindly taken over the role of Secretary.

We are all very much looking forward to being involved in AGTO activities for 2019.

Jim Silvester



Island of Dreams for Kent Branch GTOs

Not quite the Caribbean variety but certainly a beautiful Island set in the Solent.

A hearty crew of some 39 members and friends visited Warner Bembridge Coastal Hotel on the Isle of Wight towards the end of November for a 3-night break.

This weekend break was generously organised by Sarah and Barbara from Warner Leisure who put together a vigorous itinerary to showcase the delights of the Hotel and the Island.



Edison Lighthouse, the group famous for their No1 hit "Love Grows Where My Rosemary Goes". They were an excellent band and provided hits we all knew. There were plenty of people on a crowded dance floor all evening.

Sunday was an opportunity to see the Isle and the weather improved and the sun shone.

The evening's entertainment was a very funny comedian and impersonator whose Pavarotti was hilarious.

The weekend was a very successful fam trip for the Kent Branch members to see a Warner Hotel first-hand and to discuss, ask questions and consider bringing their own groups along.

From a Kent Branch standpoint it gave us the chance to meet our fellow GTOs over 4 days and get to know them a little better, helped by the Chairman's suggestion of sitting at a different table when we dined.

AGTO members that are interested in seeing a Warner Hotel should contact either Sarah Goldbrough or Barbara Flood at Warner Leisure who would arrange a fam visit at special GTO rates. Sarah can be contacted on 07843 346185 or sarah.goldsbrough@bourne-leisure.co.uk

Sarah says, "We're happy to arrange for AGTO organisers to visit to our hotels and villages just for the day, overnight stays or full breaks. We're also happy to meet them for coffee or lunch in their local area if they want more information."

Our trip began with the gentle and highly proficient Wightlink ferry crossing from Portsmouth to Fishbourne and then a short drive to Bembridge.

From then onwards we were looked after royally, beginning with being shown to our splendid rooms, then a pre-dinner drinks reception, followed by dinner with wine and finally the show lounge where seats were allocated to AGTO KENT.

On Saturday we were given a presentation of what Warner can offer groups and shown around the facilities including a visit to the dining room to meet the Chef.

Our morning was completed by coffee and cakes in the bowling area where we given bowling tuition by the team before venturing onto the rinks to play a few ends. Most of us gave it a try and a whole lot of fun and laughter was had.

The headline act for Saturday night's entertainment was

Jim Silvester

Troubles and Tribulations for Christmas Lunch at Penshurst Place



Penshurst Place, what a wonderful old building and a great meal! But what a journey to get there.

The reception was due for 10.30 and we were to be met at the gate as the House was closed to the public for a month for cleaning and preparing for the new season to begin. The tour of the house was to start at 11.00 a.m.

Our journey should take about an hour but in the run up to Christmas



we decided to leave plenty of time so left home at 9.30 a.m.

We had decided to take the route along the M2 to junction 2 as there were expected delays on the M20. We got as far as the Faversham junction when the signs said the M2 was shut after junction 3, so back to plan B and the M20. We left the M2 at the next junction and proceeded on the A249 only to find we joined the queue for the M20 at the Detling Show Ground we had also used up our first 30 minutes, by this time we were trying to work out plan C, D and any others we could think of.

The large scale map that is always to hand was opened on the correct page (we do not have a sat nav as the map is a lot cheaper). It was decided that we would navigate our way through Maidstone and out the other side. This is just before Christmas and everyone was out shopping, visiting or generally on the road, it was stop start for another 30 mins and we were still a way from the venue, we knew we were going to be late.

By the time we were seeing the signs directing us to Penshurst Place it was 11.00 a.m. when the group were to start their tour of the House and

the House was shut to the Public so how were we going to get in if the gate was locked?

There were 3 of us in the car and we started to think we may not get our lunch so looked at any pubs/ restaurants we passed to see if the worst happened we could find somewhere to eat. We arrived at last and of course there was no gate shut or otherwise and nobody standing by it. We noticed some cars parked in a field and a shop so in we go. The shop was the gift shop to the house and it was open.

We went in to ask for help, the ladies were very sympathetic and said we were not the only ones arriving late and if we walked along the footpath there would be someone to meet us at the top, they would ring ahead and tell of our arrival.

Five minutes later we were being greeted and ushered into this wonderful room with a blazing fire right in the middle of it as it would have been in medieval times, there were also people we recognised and oh bliss a cup of coffee. We could now relax and enjoy our surroundings.

Some of our members were still missing and did not arrive until we

were well into our tour, but they were still greeted by the staff and made very welcome and brought to join our tour. The lady guide was so knowledgeable about the history and so enthusiastic about the house she brought it to life. We enjoyed it so much we had forgotten the traumatic time we had getting there.

It was now time for lunch in one of the ancient rooms off the main hall. The toilets were just off this room and they were far from ancient, they were beautifully modern and very welcome.

We had a traditional Christmas Lunch which was hot and very tasty and there was a buzz of happy chatter going round the room. Everyone was talking about when they could bring a group back and enjoy the House or maybe the gardens again. The only thing left was to try and navigate a route home which we hoped would be a little easier than the one we had we had on our journey that morning!

Carol Blackmore, Blean Gardeners

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UPCOMING MEETINGS FOR KENT BRANCH

Friday 24th May

Visit Guildford and RHS Garden Wisley

Monday 1st July

Port of Dover

Fred.Olsen *Boudicca*

CHRISTMAS AT BEDGEBURY

It was way back in mid-June 2018 that an email dropped into my inbox from See Tickets stating that as a local resident/GTO they were advising me that there was to be a new 'Christmas Illuminations' event in Bedgebury Forest in the weeks leading up to Christmas which may interest me. This was the first year the event was to take place, so I was keen to learn more.

I chose to make a reservation for my group for the Friday evening immediately prior to Christmas at 5.30pm which, I thought, would allow my supporters to extend invitations to their wider families, including grandchildren. School was over – what a wonderful start to their Christmas holidays.

And it was the case... The organisation was superb in all respects. See Tickets were excellent in their administration of my ticket order, which needed increasing to two coaches as the number of applications grew to 96 people. As is usual with theatre seats I was given a good period of time to sell the tickets before payment was due.



They were also able to provide me with a second coach parking space despite advertising just one per evening, and these were nicely positioned near the entrance to the event. Coach parking was very reasonably priced.

Clear instructions/hints, which I could not fault, were provided in advance enabling attendees to assess the suitability of the event for them.

You may have seen coverage on local TV news programmes. I am led to understand that this one mile light show (in part situated on, or alongside, the lakes which doubled the impact) was set up by the same organisation as provide the Christmas trail event at Kew Gardens. A similar event took place at Wakehurst Place, and my grandson thought the two events both deserved 10 out of 10, whilst my granddaughter

thought Bedgebury had the edge. On a mild, dry December evening we counted our blessings that the weather allowed us to enjoy the event to its full potential. The paths to be taken were clearly marked, and staff were posted at short intervals around the course offering guidance and cheerfully offering visitors seasonal good wishes.

We allowed an hour to walk the trail and a further hour to enable refreshments to be taken on site – there were also merry-go-rounds and other attractions for the children – and asked our members to return to the coaches for 7.30pm departure. A number returned a little earlier, whilst those who left it to the last minute to come back agreed they had sufficient time.

We returned home smiling – all were children, no matter what age we really were. Well done to the organisers, it certainly started our Christmas season on just the right note. I trust the organisers will also recognise the public's endorsement of the event and repeat it in the future. I wholeheartedly recommend it.

*Carol Gower
CBA Millennium Outings*



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and keep
guide**

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RHS Gardens for all Seasons

One of the things that make the RHS Gardens so special is that regardless of the weather or season, there is always something of colour and interest to inspire and enjoy. People often ask us what to expect, when to visit, or what is looking good in different months – the answer is – with acres to explore, nationally significant plant collections, and a diverse range of garden events filling the calendar – there really is something for everyone at any time of year. Here are some examples to help you plan your next group visit. We hope that you will be inspired to visit us many times and watch us grow through the seasons – every visit to the RHS supports our charitable work, and our mission to make the UK a greener and more beautiful place.

Month	RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey	RHS Garden Rosemoor, Devon	RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Harrogate	RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Essex	RHS Garden Events and Flower Shows
February/ March	Enjoy a fabulous mix of cyclamen, crocus, hoop-petticoat daffodils, irises and heapticas in the Alpine Meadow as well as carpets of crocuses on the Conifer Lawn.	Admire early camellias and the swathes of snowdrops; fascinating bark and stems in the Winter Garden, the coloured stems of Salix and Cornus around the lake and the wonderful scent of Daphne bholua ‘Jacqueline Postill’.	Enjoy fabulous displays of early-flowering bulbs such as Cyclamen, Galanthus, Eranthis and Iris. Bursting into life, they create stunning combinations.	As well as the early spring flowering bulbs, hellebores are beginning to emerge in colours from creams and whites, through to pinks, dark purples and almost blacks.	Early Spring Show – Hyde Hall Spring Plant Fair – Wisley Spring Flower Festival – Rosemoor
April	This month brings blossom and daffodils throughout the arboretum; and in the Orchard, and a magnificent range of starry white, pink and purple magnolias. Enjoy camellias, rhododendrons and carpets of erythroniums in the woodland and a flourish of 15,000 tulips in the top terrace. Now is the time to see the garden’s iconic Wisteria, including a splendid 75m Wisteria Walk featuring dark purple and mauve blooms.	As spring blooms, the Upper Woodlands become full of wood anemones; naturalised daffodils and fritillaries carpet the meadows; rhododendrons and camellias throughout the Garden are all bursting into flower. Vibrant bedding displays followed by magnolias join the spring sensation. Japanese ornamental cherries and fruit trees are in full blossom. The meadows are bright yellow with buttercups while the streamside bursts into life and the Upper Woodlands are carpeted with English bluebells.	Spring blossoms abound across the Garden with drifts of daffodils, hyacinths, scillas, chionodoxa and trilliums. The Woodland comes to life as cherry trees and magnolia come into blossom and the Alpine House is full of delicate spring blooms. Late spring at Harlow Carr brings carpets of bluebells to the Woodland and displays of potted tulips. Giant alliums start popping up in the herbaceous borders and the rhododendrons are also a must-see.	Adding a much needed splash of colour are the daffodils and crocus while in the Woodland Garden admire many beautiful shades of the camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons. Other spring gems include the gorgeous spring blossom of <i>Viburnum</i> , <i>Ribes</i> , <i>Forthysia</i> and <i>Malus</i> .	RHS National Rhododendron Show – Rosemoor Spring Gardening Weekend – Harlow Carr Spring Craft Fairs – Wisley and Hyde Hall
May					
June	The spectacular Bowes-Lyon Rose Garden boasts more than 4,000 roses and 5,000 herbaceous plants. Showcasing a huge choice of rose types from true old roses, English Roses and floribunda to more unusual varieties, it is a heady mix of colour and scent. Look out for lawn art throughout the garden as well.	The largest Rose Gardens in the South West become an amazing fusion of colour and scent, whilst the Wildflower Meadows change into a dramatic yellow and purple haze. Then the Mediterranean and Exotic Gardens start to develop.	The streamside is adorned with brightly coloured dolly-mixture candelabra primulas, orchids and Harlow Carr’s celebrated blue <i>Meconopsis</i> poppy. Roses, lilies, wistera and jasmine fill the Scented Garden.	The Modern Rose Garden at Hyde Hall reaches its full glory in June when the roses erupt into a wonderful display of colour and fill the air with a heady fragrance.	RHS Harlow Carr Garden Flower Show Rose Weekends – Hyde Hall and Rosemoor Rosemoor’s five-week-long Rose Festival
July	In summer, the Mixed Borders are one of the jewels in Wisley’s crown. Providing one of the most iconic views of Wisley, these mixed borders are amongst Britain’s finest. In their full glory from July, <i>Phlox</i> , <i>Helenium</i> , <i>Salvia</i> and <i>Nepeta</i> .		The main herbaceous borders come into their own with colourful ribbons of rudebeckia, helenium, echinacea and achillea, contrasting with the tall luxuriant grasses.		

August		Flowering in the Hot Garden reaches a peak, with vibrant purples and oranges making a beautiful and atmospheric space, complemented perfectly by the newly opened Cool Garden, with its blue and white flowers and a focus on water. The garden buzzes with bees and other pollinators.		August is the month to enjoy a picnic sitting amongst the borders full of stunning colour or head to the shaded walks of the streamside woodland and arboretum.		The Mediterranean-styled Dry Garden comes into its own with its fabulous range of drought-tolerant plants like verbascums, echiums and California poppy. Enjoy the colour-themed Herbaceous Border with its salvias, daylilies and dahlias; The Cottage Garden filled with traditional favourites such as delphiniums, sweet peas and hollyhocks and the abundance of vegetables in the Global Growth Vegetable Garden.	RHS Flower Show Tatton Park RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival Surrey Sculpture Society Trail – Wisley RHS Garden Hyde Hall Flower Show RHS Garden Rosemoor Flower Show
						Many late flowering perennials bring colour to the garden. Anemones, asters, sedums and rudbeckias brighten up the borders, and autumn bulbs start to push through, bringing the vibrant colours of cyclamen and colchicum.	Surrey Sculpture Society Trail – Wisley RHS Wisley Garden Flower Show
September		Don't miss the Fruit and Vegetable Garden at harvest time – great for home gardening ideas. At this time, you can also see fiery acers in the Stone Garden; the sun-loving container plants and climbers on Rosemoor House as well as enjoying rich scents and magical colours of the Upper Woodland Walk.		The Kitchen Garden is packed with fruit and vegetables. Experience the spectacle of the Main Borders at their full height with ornamental grasses and late herbaceous colour.			
October/ November		Autumn in the Glasshouse? Never. Here it is always summer. Entering the Glasshouse is like walking into a jungle – tree ferns, tall palms, lush leaved creepers and dazzling flower displays. The Equinox Borders show their best colour, with 200 cultivars of aster, autumn flowering Kniphofia and various Euonymus.	Enjoy autumnal colours all across the garden with Acer, Cornus, Liquidambar and in particular along the Stream and Rock Gully; and the Foliage Garden which shows you don't need flowers to create colour in the garden.	Autumn bulbs, cyclamen, crocus and gentians start to emerge and the Alpine House is full of colour. The Garden is aglow with amazing autumn woodland colours.		Shrub roses produce vibrant hips in red and orange, before late autumn and into November, when the leaves of the trees turn wonderful shades of fiery red and orange.	Taste of Autumn – Wisley and Hyde Hall Apple Festival – Rosemoor
December/ January		Explore the winter walk full of winter scents, colours and textures. With architectural outlines softened by modern mass plantings, there are many views to enjoy. Come to the Rock Garden and Alpine Houses and admire a wide range of alpine plants from every alpine region in the world. Look out for the Cyclamen, blooming in winter in full colour.	Don't miss the Winter and Foliage Gardens which are enchanting at this time of year. These gardens are filled with a surprising mix of colour, fragrance, texture and structure. Key highlights include <i>Daphne</i> , <i>Mahonia</i> , <i>Sarcococca</i> , <i>Hamamelis</i> , dogwood and willow stems, silver birch, <i>Acer</i> and cherry tree bark.	The Winter Walk is a treat at this time of year, with its Cornus stems in all shades from green, through orange, yellow and crimson and winter-flowering shrubs such as <i>Sarcococca</i> and <i>Daphne</i> .		A sprinkling of frost turns the Garden into a haven of beauty. The new Winter Garden will enable you to celebrate the delights of winter with its multitude of radiant stem colours, peeling barks, luminous leaf colours and dazzling berries.	Christmas Craft Fair Wisley and Hyde Hall Glow Wisley Glow Rosemoor Glow Harlow Carr

**Groups save
up to 50% on
admission**
*see back page
for terms and
conditions



RHS Gardens for all Seasons

Each of our four RHS gardens has its own distinctive personality, reflecting the unique character of its location within the surrounding landscape. They also have much in common. All are places of beauty, tranquility, interest and inspiration. They also continually evolve to keep pace with, and push the boundaries of, modern gardening practice, building on over 200 years of accumulated knowledge. Our newest garden, RHS Garden Bridgewater, opens to the public late summer 2020.



RHS gardens offer world-class visitor services and facilities, tours and catering. Our calendar of events at the gardens continues to open up a great choice for groups, with beautiful seasonal attractions such as Glow illuminations and our winter walks, making the RHS gardens must-visit destinations at any time of year.

Exclusive Group Benefits

- Discounted rates for Groups of 10+
- Ample free coach parking
- Welcome Meet & Greet from a member of the groups team
- Special group rates for admission and catering
- Free entry for coach driver and tour leader
- Free refreshment voucher for coach driver
- £5 Discount retail voucher for all group members (minimum spend applies).



Group Tour Organisers save 50% at RHS Gardens

With so much on offer at the RHS and as a special thank you to our loyal Group Tour Organisers, we are pleased to offer a special saving of up to 50%.

When booking two or more visits to an RHS garden within 2019, your repeat visit between October 2019 and January 2020 is half price, making it even better value to come back through the seasons and see how our gardens grow.

(Terms and conditions apply see rhs.org.uk/groups for full details)
50% saving is not applicable at RHS Garden Rosemoor*

**Groups save
up to 50% on
admission**





Kent Branch invite you to a Branch Meeting arranged by Martin Hay from Go Cruise in association with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines on-board Boudicca in the Port of Dover on Monday 1st July 2019

Visit Programme and Cost

The visit will comprise of a welcome on-board drink, followed by a short presentation by Martin Hay and members of the Fred. Olsen team.

Thereafter there will be a guided tour of the ship (both cabins and public areas), concluding with a buffet lunch with drink in the ship's main restaurant. The cost is £25 per person, payable at the time of booking

NB: All those attending will be given a voucher entitling them to a £50 per person on-board credit applicable to any Fred. Olsen cruise booking arranged through Martin Hay within six months of the visit.

Application Procedure and Small Print

Currently there are just 30 spaces available, if demand is particularly strong it may be possible to increase the number of spaces available but this is not guaranteed. Those interested in attending the visit are encouraged to apply as early as possible. Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines reserve the right to review the applications submitted, with priority being given to those with a genuine interest in or track of arranging longer trips and holidays in either this country or aboard.

A maximum of 2 guests is permitted from any one group.

All bookings must be made through Martin Hay at Go Cruise on 01202 027559

In order to complete a booking all guests will need to confirm the following:

Their title, full names exactly as per passport, date of birth, together with their address, phone number and email address as well as their full passport details (inc. passport number, issue and expiry dates, place of birth and issuing authority etc) and supply full payment (£25pp)

The programme is expected to commence at around 9.30am and conclude around 1pm

Complimentary parking will be available on the day

Final timings and joining instructions will be circulated to all guests approximately 10 days before the visit

Further Information and Any Questions:

Any GTO with any questions regarding the visit or who would like and further information or guidance on arranging an ocean cruise holiday for their group are encouraged to call Martin Hay on 01202 027559

COCKNEY MATINEE ON BOARD THE *TEREZA JOANNE*

.....

I thoroughly recommend this trip which is exclusive to City and Village Tours and is designed to allow our coaches to both travel to and leave the east end of London without getting involved in rush hour traffic. It means you don't need to set off too early in the morning, neither are you late home, yet it is a delightful, easy-going day packed with loads of fun and laughter.

The location is interesting. The cosy, yet roomy *Tereza Joanne* is moored in the George V Dock, just at the end of the runway to City Airport - which provides a source of interest outside the windows, too, with spectacular views across the water to the City skyline. What's more - the coach can park onsite (free of charge) so passengers only have a very short, level walk onto this permanently moored boat, so is suitable for passengers of all degrees of mobility.

So, let me tell you more about it.

As you arrive late morning the cash bar is open for coffee or your drink of choice, and later you will be served your lunch of fish goujons and chips or chicken

and chips which you will pre-order. The lunch is included in the cost. These are served, basket style, at your table by friendly staff. Wrapped around the meal is first class Cockney entertainment provided by Gordon Bennett – a genial singer and musician – suitably attired, of course - who provides song sheets for the audience to join in all the old favourite songs. There is an opportunity to join the impromptu 'orchestra' playing the spoons, tambourines etc. which is hilarious for both participants and audience. The mid-session interval is the opportunity for those who want it to buy a dessert and have a further cuppa, and by the end of the event the audience are up on their feet partying - waving flags or doing the okey cokey... 'cos that's what it's all about! A fun and therapeutic experience to be enjoyed by all.

At 3.30pm it's back to the coach for the pre-rush hour journey home. I guarantee that everyone in your group will leave smiling, with a warm glow and you'll get the credit for giving them such a good day out !

Carol Gower
CBA Millennium Outings



AGTO Kent Branch Committee

Jim Silvester - Chairman
Carol Gower - Treasurer
Carol Blackmore - Secretary
Eileen Booker - Committee Member
David Steele - Board Director

Northern Branch's Chairman's Message

Well what a topsy turvy year we have had. Lots of dissapointments and concerns about the Group.

Now I am pleased to say we are sparking off this new year with three new committee members and we are so pleased to welcome them.

Lots of work had been done in the past year mostly by Pam and Bob for which we are very grateful but we are

a team and not lacking in enthusiasm so lots to plan for the coming year. We already have a couple of exciting trips on the table and we do hope for our members and any other Branches interested to join in.

Thank you so much to the top team for a great AGM and showcase weekend. For me the food was excellent, the Saturday morning meeting very useful and the

Associate Members' "whats on offer" exhibition really valuable.

The fam trip I was on was excellent and we enjoyed a very good buffet lunch on the boat. Saturday evening - fabulous, all of it.

So, for now, best wishes to everyone and good organising.

Jenny Robinson

EXCURSIONS FAM TRIP

In January of this year, we invited some of our Group Organisers to join us on a Familiarisation Trip to London, to coincide with Excursions at Alexandra Palace. The idea behind the trip was to showcase one of the fabulous hotels we use on our tours, as well as some of the interesting attractions that are available to see.

25th January saw all participants be picked-up from home, using our popular door-to-door service and transferred to either Birch Services or Stockport Bus Station. Groups Manager, Pam, was on board the coach to welcome everyone. Everything ran smoothly and we were on schedule as we began our journey. We made a quick comfort stop at Sandbach Services on the M6, and our driver Brent was on hand to serve teas & coffees on board the coach. Next stop was at the market town of Banbury, the coach dropped us right by the famous Banbury Cross, right in the centre of town. An important centre for wool trading in the 13th Century, Banbury is now a lively and thriving town with charming streets and historic buildings alongside new developments. Many of our guests made their way to Wetherspoons for lunch, although two intrepid explorers went in search of The Reindeer – no not an actual reindeer but Ye Olde Reine Deer Inn, a traditional English pub dating back as far as the Medieval period. After a short stop here, we continued to Gerrards Cross and The Bull Hotel, www.sarova-bullhotel.com, our home for the next three

nights. Dinner was taken in the Restaurant, a delicious 3-course 'Carvery' style buffet. Although it's self-service, there are always plenty of staff on hand to help those with mobility difficulties. We were joined by Paul Targett, MD, and Heidi Phipps, our Taxi Co-ordinator.



26th January, after a hearty full English breakfast, we left the hotel and headed for Alexandra Palace for the Excursions Show. Our Organisers got the opportunity to meet face-to-face with over 300 attractions, destination partners and Tour Operators from all over the UK to discover, discuss and plan future trips. As VIP Guests of Tourism South East, we were welcomed

by the Town Crier and treated to a complimentary glass of wine! We left 'Ally Pally' after time for lunch and made our way to The RAF Museum London - www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london. We enjoyed tea/coffee on biscuits on arrival before the group split up into 2 smaller groups for very interesting and informative guided tours of the museum. The Museum can tailor make a tour to your group's specific interests, remember to ask when making an enquiry. Highlights here include three new innovative galleries exploring the first 100 years of the RAF, a themed outdoor play area for under 11s and a new restaurant Claude's. We returned to The Bull for another delicious dinner.

27th January saw us make our way to Windsor where we met our guide, Tony Howe, who took us on a tour of the Chiltern Hills. We drove through many towns & villages many had only heard of, and passed Chequers, the official country residence of the Prime Ministers of Great Britain. We stopped for lunch in Henley-on-Thames, one of the most beautiful towns in England. Henley's riverside location, surrounded by a Chiltern landscape, lends itself to long lunches and quirky shopping. There's a pub where Charles I drank, a Chantry house, a butcher that smokes his own meat and independent shops still offering the personal touch.

We returned to Windsor to join our French Brothers cruise along the Thames - www.frenchbrothers.co.uk. We enjoyed a fantastic Afternoon Tea during the cruise, which was a little cold but thoroughly enjoyed by all. Back

to the hotel for dinner. We said goodbye to Paul & Heidi who had a long drive ahead of them back to base!

28th January we bid farewell to The Bull and travelled to Blenheim Palace - www.blenheimpalace.com - birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill. We were met on arrival by Cathy & Ulrika and treated to Blenheim Cake & Coffee before being given our tickets to tour the Palace at leisure. The Audio Guides are excellent and allow the visitor to learn as much, or as little, as required. Back on the coach following our visit for the journey homeward, making a comfort stop on route. We arrived back at Stockport & Birch ahead of schedule and all taxis were waiting to transport our guests home.

We got some really good feedback from the trip:

Joyce said, 'I must say I was impressed by your organisation, very successful. We had an enjoyable and informative Fam Trip.'

John said, 'Please accept our thanks for a wonderful weekend. I can't imagine how much effort and work were involved but it was a fabulous time in great company and the events were superb. Well done!'

Peter wrote in to say, 'A quick email to thank you most sincerely for a thoroughly enjoyable weekend. Everything was excellent.'

So, if you look after a group and are looking for assistance or ideas of possible group trips, then give us a call.

Pam Wharton, Ellen Smith Tours



Christmas at Haddon Hall

On a damp Saturday in December we arrived at Haddon Hall to a very warm welcome (even though the temperature was decidedly chilly!).

Home to Lord and Lady Edward Manners, Haddon Hall is one of the country's most elegant stately homes.

Haddon invites visitors to



immerse themselves in centuries of history, art and craftsmanship, and stroll around the Hall's magnificent cascading gardens (although not at their best in December), to enjoy uninterrupted views of the Peak District.

We had booked a guided tour of the hall, which this year was dressed for Christmas based on Fairy Tales. Our guides were very informative and brought the history of the building and the people who have lived there to life. Along with its little secrets!

The Hall's grandeur is plain to see and the rare 15th-

century frescoes in the Chapel are marvellous.

After the guided tour the group had free time to explore on their own or listen to the Christmas carols being performed by the choir in the main hall.

The roaring fire in here was certainly a welcome bonus!

The group were booked into the cosy Haddon restaurant which is situated in the 17th Century stable block, with views over the River Wye. We had booked a 2 course Christmas lunch and the choices on offer suited everyone's palate. The food and the team that looked after us were excellent.

Soon it was time to say goodbye to Haddon, via the shop of course, before making the short journey to Bakewell for a little retail therapy.

The weather decided that it was time to put a dampener on the proceedings and the heavens opened. Sheltering in cafes, shops and the inns were the preferred options, rather than strolling about.

I must extend my thanks to everyone at Haddon (hall and restaurant) for making our Christmas visit such a pleasant one.

Overall, a lovely day out.

Bob Walker, MANCASS



AGTO Northern Branch Committee

Jenny Robinson - Chairman

Avril Redfern - Treasurer

Pam Wharton - Secretary

Bob Walker, Ray Howarth and Hazel Jones - Committee Members

AGTO NORTHERN BRANCH

Lancashire - Familiarisation Visit • Friday 1st – Sunday 3rd November 2019

All Branches Welcome

ITINERARY

Friday 1st November 2019

- From 13.00hrs. Afternoon Check-in at the Best Western Plus Samlesbury Hotel
- 14.00hrs Depart the hotel to nearby Samlesbury Hall for refreshments & tour by 'Janey the Witch'!
- 19.30hrs Dinner at the Best Western Plus Samlesbury Hotel

Saturday 2nd November 2019

- Breakfast (From 07.30hrs)
- 09.30hrs Transport Departs Hotel for Barton Grange Garden Centre. Here we enjoy a Cruise aboard Kingfisher Cruises with a delicious Cream Tea.
- 11.45hrs Depart Barton Grange for Oswaldtwistle Mill where we enjoy a Soup & Sandwich Lunch.
- 13.45hrs Depart Oswaldtwistle Mill with our guide for a tour of lovely Lancashire, theme to be confirmed.
- 16.00 Arrive back at Oswaldtwistle Mill for a little free time to browse.
- 17.30hrs Arrive back at hotel with time at leisure prior to dinner
- 19.30hrs Dinner

Sunday 3rd November 2019

- Breakfast (From 07.30hrs) & check-out
- 09.30hrs Depart hotel for Leighton Hall. Coffee & Biscuits on arrival followed by a Guided Tour of the Hall.
- 12.30hrs Depart Leighton Hall for nearby Carnforth Station, film location of the film *Brief Encounter*.
- 13.30hrs Depart Carnforth Station and travel back to Samlesbury Hotel.
- 14.00hrs End of Tour

COST

AGTO Member (based on 2 sharing)	£119.00 per person
AGTO Non-Member	£124.00 per person
AGTO Member (Single)	£161.00 per person
AGTO Non-Member (Single)	£166.00 per person

To make a booking, please call Bob Walker on 07872 634561 (Deposit of £25 will be required)

Southern Branch's Chairman's Message

Congratulations on the very first issue of the excellent new National Newsletter for AGTO! It was enjoyable to read and so good to hear about the activities of other branches around the country, with photographs.

Since this first issue, our Branch has had its AGM, hosted by Denbies Wine Estate in Dorking, where we were all treated to a tour and a welcome wine tasting after the meeting. I would like to thank our small Committee, especially our Secretary, Jackie Ring, for their support and hard work over the past year. We start 2019 with a healthy Southern membership and I have been most encouraged to see that our events have been better attended. Although the AGTO Showcase and AGM Weekend in Nottingham is quite some distance for us, I am pleased that more

Southern members are attending than last year and we look forward to this.

Our first event of the year was a branch meeting and tour of Hampton Court Palace, kindly hosted by Lesley Terrell of Historic Royal Palaces on 8th February. Thanks to everyone who attended and braved the not so pleasant weather for an insight into this historic venue and grounds. We now look forward to some outdoor venues for our branch meetings in the Spring and early Summer where we can discover some new facilities for groups. Our first event is to visit Leonardslee Gardens on 11th April, very soon after its exciting new opening after a closure of several years. This is sure to be popular with groups as it is a large and beautiful estate to visit and there are some new initiatives which

could be combined in a visit. On 3rd July, Wisley RHS Gardens are kindly hosting our meeting and we will get to see the results of several years work and completion of new visitor centre and catering facilities. We welcome attendance from members of other branches, (please notify us) as it is always good to exchange ideas and meet with you.

Happy organising,

Sue Povey, S1972



Denbies Wine Estate

Denbies Wine Estate near Dorking in Surrey recently hosted Southern's AGM. This is my favourite time of year for visiting, between late September and early October, when the vines and the trees in the surrounding hills display beautiful autumnal shades of brown, red and orange which contrast with the colours of the grapes.

Photos around the Visitor Centre show the changing scenery and growth of the vines during every month of the year which show that this is a year-round attraction.

The Visitors' Centre caters very well for groups and has been designed with provision for disabled access with lifts and ramps etc.

There are quite a variety of walks, tours and tastings on offer. Please see the Denbies website for further details. There is a train ride around the estate in use between April and September which is very convenient.

Denbies has a wonderful gift shop, restaurant and farm shop which sell local produce.

After our meeting we were given time to visit the art gallery and have lunch at reserved tables in the restaurant.

We then went on a tour and wine tasting. The tour started with a film on the history of the estate and gave details of the geology of the site – this was followed by a tasting of some of their most popular wines, two sparkling, a rosé and a red, with a voucher to use in the shop.

The White family had bought the site as a pig and cattle farm and subsequently found that the land was not suitable for that purpose. As a joke, a geologist who lived the other side of the valley pointed out to the owner of Denbies that the site shared the same geology and climate as the Rheims area of France where champagne is produced and the site was an ideal place for viticulture. The White family adopted the idea and in 1986 the first

vines were planted. Several years later the estate started to produce their award-winning wines.

Denbies produce their sparkling wines using the same methods of fermentation and bottling as Champagne. Although the Sparkling wine they produce is considered to rival Champagne, they are not permitted to call it that because it is not produced in the Champagne area of France.

The only difficulty with the venue is that it has a low bridge at the entrance. Coaches that are too big to pass under the bridge will need to park in the coach park and the passengers can be transferred to the Visitor Centre by pre-arranged transport. I would also suggest an early lunch because the food disappears quickly.

For further information about group bookings visit www.denbies.co.uk/tickets/groups and www.denbies.co.uk/tours-and-experiences

Anne Barnes S2023



Blenheim Palace Christmas Cinderella Experience and Illuminated Light Trail

Friday 30th November thirty eight Meadhurst Club RMS members and guests set off to the Oxfordshire countryside to find the Palace had certainly excelled in the event.

The courtyard had the usual hot dog and drinks stand and 4 fairground rides, looking resplendent against the buildings backdrop. Following lunch we headed through to the Christmas market which had the usual craft and food stalls you expect

see at the Christmas markets with its Santa and reindeer sculpture made from fruit and natural items.

Approaching dusk we were treated to twin rainbows over Blenheim Palace, quite spectacular.

The Palace – Cinderella Experience: - The palace looked spectacular with the pillars lit up with swirls of lights and illuminated Christmas trees in the archways all looking very decorative. Entering the palace

we were soon enthralled with the Cinderella theme; little mice around the rooms and plenty of fabric pumpkins hidden in corners and shelves, quite spectacular and beautifully decorated, meandering through the palace each room was themed around different characters, The Evil Stepmother; the Ugly Sisters; the Prince and Cinderella.

There was also a Fairy Godmother

room with a beautiful fireplace, a screen where the Fairy Godmother peeks into shot before arriving in the scene, a really clever touch. The carriage was beautiful and illuminated by a wave of the Fairy Godmother's wand. The trail ended in the ballroom, with Cinderella's dresses all lit up in different colours, the glass slipper in its case with a footman nearby. Then as the clock struck midnight the lights changed colour giving a different appearance to the room, very cleverly done with clocks projected onto the ceiling very effective.

Then it was our time slot for the light trail, about 1.8 miles long with its background music playing. Several places you needed to stand and watch for a while to see the whole of the display, not missing the poppies light display in trees, the illuminated gingerbread style house and tree trunks, the light bridge and reflections and frozen crown lights on the lake.

The crown display on the lake with *Frozen* music, the light display down



the hill and the light tunnel that was so popular this year, so magical as we walked around not forgetting the long cascade lighting with its *Ski Sunday* music, the fire light display, the marshmallows over the fire with the trail ended with the beautiful light and music displays using the Palace as a backdrop and meeting Santa outside his house and Winston Churchill's statue in the

dark observing the activities.

With a selection of stalls along the trail providing chestnuts, mulled wine and cider, hot drinks & marshmallows to accommodate all our needs.

A very successful day out enjoyed by all.

Sylvia Adams S 2322

Warners Littlecote

On a cold Friday morning in the middle of January my group set off for a weekend at Warners Littlecote. We often go away at this time of year as it can be rather quiet and miserable just after the festivities and we felt we needed cheering up. We go to Warners a few times a year, but had chosen this one because it is such a lovely



house, wasn't too far to travel and the entertainment promised to be jolly, with two live bands playing jive and rock and roll from our era of music.

We share cars so we have some independence while we are there and can go off in small groups to visit different places and not all have to do the same thing – some went to Marlborough, Devizes, Lacock and Corsham all of which are nearby. There is more choice of National Trust and other places to visit later in the year. Wherever we are I lead a walk on one of the days – and this one took us along the Kennet River to a nearby village for a pub lunch, then up and over an old airfield used by the US Airborne Division and Parachute Regiments (the Band of Brothers) during the Second World War and back through the woods where they were encamped.

Littlecote House has a full and varied history going back at least to Roman times, evidenced by the mosaic floor which was unearthed only a few decades ago.

There are links to Henry VIII and Jane Seymour, and it was also an important place during the Civil War as the Parliamentarians used the house as a hiding place, and the Wills family (of tobacco fame) refurbished it in the 1920s – and before Warners took it over, it was a theme park owned by entrepreneur Peter de Savary. You can find out about this history by going around the different rooms in the house yourself, but I recommend taking a free guided tour – where you will be told about strange goings-on, gossip about illicit affairs, a curse, and, of course, a ghost. If you feel brave enough, there are some historic bedrooms in the old house which can be used by guests. We enjoyed a pre-dinner drink in the grand Tudor hall, amongst the armoury and portraits of the great and (not-so) good!

We like to take part in many of the Warners activities – and there are plenty to choose from. (We were pleased with ourselves for winning a quiz one morning.) Some people choose to stay in and participate in all the things there are on offer – rifle shooting, archery, yoga, aqua aerobics, swimming pool, spa, and there is various games equipment to use, plus a film shown in the afternoon. You can sit outside in their wonderful grounds where they sometimes hold a barbeque. If your group is interested in gardening, they could arrange for a private tour given by one of the gardeners – and I understand that he may be able to provide seeds and cuttings of plants grown there for you to take home.

We particularly enjoy the entertainment in the evening – and think it's great to have live music where we can get up and dance! Beforehand there is usually some sort of game show (which you don't have to take part in but is fun to watch) and afterwards there is often singing in the bar later, so it can be a full evening. But the house, as with many other Warner locations, also provides quiet

areas for guests if they don't want to go to the main entertainment – sometimes some of my group will find a quiet corner (such as the elegant drawing room) and play bridge or card games, or have a game of snooker or bowls. You can take part in as much or as little as you like.

We are already booked to go to the Isle of Wight in April to enjoy the seaside.

www.warnerleisurehotels.co.uk t: 0330 100 9772 speak to Sarah Goldsbrough or Barbara Flood.

Jackie Ring S2221





Aviva Fellowship – Three-day trip to Thursford's Xmas Spectacular & More!

This was London & South East Region's second extended trip, after Rouen in 2016. This time members and friends from our five London Areas, ventured into the East Anglian heartland.

This Coach Trip centred around one of the constituent companies' home, Norwich.

From a Stratford Station Start

The Coach took a mid-journey break in Cambridge, a delightful but small city which has played more than an integral part in the nation's history. We parked near the River Cam and here met our Guide, Liz a former Cambridge colleague of Hilary our joint organiser. We started with an easy walk into the city centre via and then through, where permitted, some of the famous universities. We decided against a punt on the river in view of time constraints and the temperature. However, with plenty to be seen, we had no difficulty in filling our four hours there. Liz had started our tour first at the famous Kings College and Chapel. Having seen the Chapel frequently on TV, it was a privilege to walk in and appreciate

its real beauty and relative simplicity. Founded in the 15th century by King Henry VI, the Chapel represents the 'height' of late perpendicular Gothic English architecture.

Cambridge held our interest with a plethora of historic buildings at every stage of our tour. We needed to take care of the many cycles (mostly students) in the city centre - the popular and most practical form of transport. Lunch was finally then sought nearby, many taking to the city's popular cafe/restaurants adjacent to Kings College. After a late lunch break, unfortunately time to join the coach again. We then headed North into the heart of East Anglia for our hotel.

Our Hotel: Dunstan Hall

The Hall was originally built in 1859 by Robert Kellett Long. Since transformed, it now provides 72 Bedrooms, sauna/ pool and a golf course. It's just a few miles south of Norwich and we would all thoroughly recommend it. After booking in, a few drinks were needed by some of us before dinner. The splendid 3-course meal was later served to

the group all together on one long dining table. It was an excellent evening meal and service.

Full day at Norwich plus Thursford evening Show

The second day was full, eventful and undoubtedly the highlight. After a full English breakfast for most, just a short coach journey and then dropped off near Norwich Cathedral.

We started with a visit to the historic Cathedral, second largest next to Westminster with a spire second only to Salisbury. Our tour guide provided us with much detailed history and showed us some unusual aspects of the splendid 'two part' building. Here we also learnt that, it's alleged, even Henry VIII had been made to compromise by the forceful and influential Bishop Richard Nykke. This related to Henry's standard demand to claim and remove all Catholic aspects and trappings from churches. Despite this, the Cathedral was still able to celebrate its 900th anniversary in 1996. Also, we found the grave of Edith Cavell had been placed in the St. Saviours Chapel.

Afterwards, we were ably guided by our former Norwich staff member Martin to our next stop. He took us on a slow wander through the city centre shops, highlighting sights of interest and aiming us towards the former head office of Norwich Union in Surrey Street. Norwich remains a fine old city and, little known, had celebrated its 150th Anniversary as a port in 1983, just a small part of a great history. It has managed to retain many of its intriguing and narrow winding streets. Its Market Place can claim once international roots from its Saxon origins and has retained period arcades nearby.

Aviva's Norwich Marble Hall

Norwich Union's Head Office was built in 1905 by George Skipper, a leading local architect. The Marble Hall it seems was a fortunate accident as the special Italian marble was originally a shipment intended for the Houses of Parliament. Following long and unexpected shipping delays, the marble then became a 'job lot' looking for a new home.

Anna Stone, our Company Archivist and Thomas Barnes her Assistant, provided our group (split into two)

both with informative tours. The first started in the magnificent marble entrance hall whilst the other in the impressive Boardroom. After both groups had visited these, they were then shown the other specialist Boardrooms. In one, we were honoured, as displayed were some selected original ledgers, historic photographs relating to WW1 and a policy register which had been extracted especially for us. This included the record of the first policy issued by the Hand in Hand in... 1696! However, sadly time was short and it was soon time to return to our hotel for dinner and prepare for the main evening event.

Off to Thursford Spectacular

After dinner, the coach took us out into the wilds of Norfolk and finally down the local winding lanes to our rural destination, Thursford. This was deep in the countryside around 7 miles from the nearest town. The tiny village has hosted the largest and longest-running (42 years) UK Christmas show and proudly employs around 130 professional performers! Leaving the parking area, Christmas was upon us with twinkling lights, illuminated trees together with an

abundance of decorations, including some reindeer and animal-based scenes.

Entering we quickly forgot it was only mid-November! The show was held in a very large old potato storage facility. It boasted one of the largest three-part stages and was highly decorated. The stage design had allowed its use as left, right and centre sections. The audience seating layout for around 1700 mirrored the stage. This allowed 130 variety artists to perform, often having approached their respective stage section through the audience from the three aisles. This provided a truly immersive experience from the word go with music, dancing (including Irish), carols, seasonal songs with a great comedian/compere. All delivered professionally and seamlessly.

There was further interest at the interval as many took a stroll. It's also the home of the claimed, 'World's largest collection of Steam Engines and Organs'. This included a Wurlitzer and a Carousel. As the Show finished, we realised we had all somehow felt part of it and a little sad it was all over. We intermingled



with the large crowd as we slowly left to returned to the coach. We took a quicker route home along rather narrow roads which speed us back to our hotel for a nightcap.

Day 3 Returning Home via Bury St, Edmunds

Saturday was our final day, after breakfast, only a short drive through south Norfolk into Suffolk, where we had more to see at Bury St. Edmund. Once a historic market town set deep in rural Suffolk, now has a splendid and imposing Cathedral with a renown Saturday market,

numerous local shops and many historic buildings to view. The former famous 'Bury Fair' had attracted visitors from Europe and the Far East up to mid-Victorian times. To explore our varied interests, we broke up into informal and smaller groups.

Outside the city centre most found the old Abbey gardens with just the 'walled' remains of the old abbey left. At the far end of the garden was the Cathedral, the highlight of 'Bury' as the locals call it. St Edmundsbury Cathedral, originally built as St. James Church in the 16th Century, was created a Cathedral in 1914. It's

since had additions, the latest being a magnificent tower to celebrate the Millennium. Four hours later the various groups re-assembled and we then proceeded on our final leg to Stratford.

Our Group had thoroughly enjoyed their three well-filled days and 'will always remember Thursford'. These memories had set the group's mood ready to celebrate the forthcoming Christmas season.

Thanks go to all involved in organising this not-to-be-forgotten trip.

Chris House – S 2386

Why I attend Branch Meetings

I've been a group organiser for over 12 years, and I soon realised the advantages of AGTO membership (GTOA as it was then). As I am still working, however (unlike my lovely retirement group members), I don't have spare time during the day, only in evenings, weekends or lunchbreaks to sort things out - thank heavens for email and the internet! It meant I couldn't attend Branch Meetings, or many of the group travel shows either, as they were mostly on weekdays.

One day, however, I realised that a brief staycation coincided with a Southern Branch AGM, and I decided to attend to see what goes on. I'm so glad I did. Since then, I've made an effort to attend most of the other Branch Meetings. There is no better way to get ideas for destinations for groups than by talking to your fellow Group Travel Organisers who have already been there, who have experience of booking with a particular venue, who can give you tips on how to get the most out of your visit, and can tell you hair-raising stories of things they wish they'd known before they went somewhere. It is a particular delight to talk to some of our Associate

Members, who enjoy meeting GTOs socially, and hearing from us what our needs and impressions are, and you realise that this sort of dialogue is leading to great deals and mutually beneficial exchanges of views and advice.



Add to that the delight of visiting wonderful gardens, cathedrals, houses and museums as guests of our generous Associate Members, and getting a real in-depth view of what is on offer for your group, and you will know that your attendance at Branch Meetings is time well spent. Give it a try, just take my word for it!

*Claire Wickes S1660,
OSA Sussex Branch & Matinee Club*

AGTO Southern Branch Committee

Sue Povey - Chairman

Anne Barnes - Treasurer

Jackie Ring - Secretary

Diane Salter, Pat Lake, Lesley Terrell - Committee Members

Western Branch's Chairman's Message

I am sure many of you will have heard the sad news that Wilfred (Wilf) Williams and Dave Tysall are no longer with us. We send our condolences to their families.

Please continue to send your

reports, stories, events and ideas to Helen as the co-ordinator for input into the AGTO Newsletter.

Please also note the earlier article from our CEO Wendy Hartley-Scarff regarding sending trip reports to

her for dissemination in the Press. We ask that members of Western branch to do that via Helen who will co-ordinate them if necessary and send them to Wendy as they arrive.

Roger Sims W2388



Western Branch AGM Weekend in Cornwall

The late David Lote, Just for Groups, organised a fabulous weekend in Cornwall for the Western Branch Autumn meeting and AGM. It appeared that he

also organised the most fantastic weather for the whole weekend which really enhanced the trips to Pendennis Castle, the trip across to St Mawes and then Treliassick House and Gardens.

Arriving by individual cars we met at the Cliffdene Hotel, Newquay for pre-dinner drinks and a 3 course meal prior to an informal get-together in the bar. We welcomed Emma Bainbridge from JG travel, groups@jgtravelgroup.com, who gave a presentation of what her company could offer GTOs and who generously sponsored the wine at dinner on Friday. The late Dave Tysall had organised a fun quiz for everyone which enlivened proceedings and lead to a great night for members as they caught up on friendships and news.

On Saturday morning Mainline Coaches provided the transport for the 24 GTOs to embark on the fam visits; firstly to Pendennis Castle who hosted the AGM meeting as well as a guided tour of the Castle complete with information from costumed staff and a live firing of the gun!

Following lunch, again provided by Pendennis Castle, the coach took us to the ferry crossing where the St Mawes

Ferry Company had laid on a special charter ferry across Falmouth Bay to St Mawes. Although there was only time in St Mawes for an ice cream it proved to be the best option and we all felt that we were on a summer holiday; so, full of ice cream and bonhomie, we crossed back across Falmouth Bay.

We boarded the coach to Treliassick House and Gardens, our final port of call; stunning autumn colours in bright sunshine showed off the gardens magnificently before returning by coach to the hotel.

Live music followed Dinner and the evening was rounded off by dancing and general exuberance by all! Farewells on Sunday morning were accompanied by promises to see everyone again at the South West Trade and Travel Show in Longleat or in Nottingham for the AGTO National AGM and Showcase weekend.

Thanks to Mainline Coaches and Just for Groups; it was a fabulous weekend.

Helen Sims 2150



Group Holiday to Shropshire

Airedale Tours provided the country house hotel and coach for this 3 night, 4 day, holiday centred on the Buckatree Hall Hotel, situated at the foot of the famous Wrekin, near Telford. The Club researched and booked the venues and comfort stops. Prior to the holiday Airedale produced a two-page itinerary document setting out the daily events programme with the venues to be visited and highlighted some brief historical facts.

Day one's first stop was the Pump House Café in Gheluvelt Park, Worcester. The park, on the banks of the River Severn, has some attractive walks and features which we enjoyed prior to a return to the café where all the meals were ready. Suitably refreshed we moved on to the Red House Cone at Stourbridge with its glass museum, and enjoyed a demonstration of coloured crystal glass blowing.

On day two it was an early start for the coach journey, via Craven Arms, into mid-Wales and a brief comfort stop at Crossgates before the final short leg to Abbey Cwm Hir Hall. Set in beautiful countryside this early 19th Century house was built within an estate owned by Thomas Wilson. Successive owners remodelled and enlarged the building and its current owner purchased the somewhat neglected building in 1997.

Having spent some 10 years and a small fortune it is a pleasure to move through the house with the owner Paul Humphreys or one of his knowledgeable guides. The 12 acres of gardens and woodland terraces provide further opportunities to explore. We enjoyed a buffet lunch after the house tour.

Our return journey was a scenic route via Newtown, where we passed Pryce Jones Warehouse, the world's



first mail-order business, and then onto Welshpool and Shrewsbury.

Day three we visited the historic Middleport Pottery at Burslem for a guided tour of the working factory.

This magnificent pottery was built on the banks of the Trent and Mersey canal in 1888 and at the time as a model factory with a wide floor layout to improve working conditions and achieve higher productivity. Sadly, maintenance had been neglected and by 2011 it was scheduled for closure. The UK Historic Building Preservation Trust and its Patron HRH Prince Charles stepped in and provided the £9 million to restore the building, protect the jobs and site activities.

The whole site is now a Grade I listed building and the now single kiln operation provides glazed decorative ware, marketed as Burleigh pottery and sold in the factory shop.

After lunch in the on-site café we drove to Attingham Park (NT) at Atcham, near Shrewsbury. Originally an estate of 8000 acres and a house known as Tern Hill, occupied by the first Lord Berwick and incorporated that house into Attingham Hall which was completed in 1785. In addition to the Grade I listed house there are five Grade II listed structures, the stable block, two bridges, a toll house and gardens.

During the First World War the 8th Earl was in the army and the house was used as a war hospital. Post hostilities the Duke married Teresa Hulton in 1919, but there were no children of the marriage and on his death in 1947 he wished the property to the National Trust.

On Thursday, we departed our hotel. The accommodation was very good, the food choice and presentation could not be faulted and staff were very efficient.

Our first stop was the Jenny Ring Craft Centre at Hanbury, near Redditch. The café/restaurant overlooks the gardens and ponds and there are a number of artisan workshops on site and, when we visited, there was an exhibition of over 100 wood, metal and stone sculptures. It was then a short journey to Coughton Court (NT) the home of the Throckmorton family who have lived there for over 600 years. The house passed to the National Trust in 1946 but the family remain in residence under a 300-year lease and they provide the inspiration and supervision of the 25-acre garden.

With reluctance we departed Coughton to return home in the comfort of Bristol's Eagle Coaches.

*Graham Jones 2508W
Keynsham Probus Club*

Belgium October 2018

Setting off from Exeter at 6.00am Friday 5th October, a group of 31 from Howmet Sports and Social Club headed to the ferry port of Dover. After a 45 minute breakfast stop at services, we arrived in plenty of time for the 12.55 ferry to Calais. Some made their way to the food court for lunch, whereas others thought the bar more important. After a short journey of 1¾ hours from the ferry we arrived at the Ibis Centrum hotel in Kortrijk, Belgium, checking in at 5.15pm. The City of Kortrijk being in the Flemish province of West Flanders has plenty of restaurants scattered around the main square as well as being tucked away in the cobbled side streets.

Breakfast was a good hot/cold buffet with plenty of choices. This was also where people swapped information of the restaurant meals from the night before. Following our leisurely breakfast, we made our 35 minute journey back across the French border to the City of Lille, where people roamed freely before catching the return coach at 4.00pm.

Sunday, being the day that Belgium shops are normally closed, the ladies of the group were pleasantly surprised to find that Kortrijk shops were open for the first Sunday in the month.

As a bonus, passing the hotel that morning we had a parade of brass bands followed by a procession of WWII US military trucks, jeeps, caterpillar tracked scout vehicles, motorcycles and bicycles with the occupants all in the appropriate military uniforms. The procession ventured down the main street into the main square where they lined the perimeter.

We learned that this was an annual celebration of the day the City was liberated. After many photographs and a pleasant walk alongside the river we boarded the coach at 2.00pm for Ypres.

Upon arriving 30 minutes later, most headed to the WWI Flanders Field Museum. Again, plenty of restaurants around the cobblestone main square for dinner before making our way to the Menin Gate.

Here a mass of people jostled to gain the best views of the kilted pipers entering the Gate. At 8.00pm the four buglers lined up facing the pipers where they played the Last Post.

Several people in the crowd had a lump in their throat and discretely wiped away the tears as they remembered lost loved ones.

Monday, before boarding the homeward coach we were again pleasantly surprised to find the main street outside our hotel closed to traffic for a comprehensive street market. On our journey back to Calais we pulled into a chocolate and tobacco shop followed by a second stop, this time at a beer and wine warehouse. Arriving early at the ferry port our hopes of catching an earlier ferry were dashed by a hold up caused by a coach at the head of the queue being found to have immigrants stowed away under the bodywork.

Arriving back in Exeter, everyone agreed to what an enjoyable week-end we'd all had. Thanks go to Eiron and Lynne Jones of Majestic Tours (5569) for organising a good venue with superb excursions. I don't know how they did it, but they even managed to arrange the

brilliant warm sunshine throughout the week-end topped by the fact that we had flat sea ferry crossings each way.

*Martin Gibson (1231 W)
Howmet Sports and Social Club*



WESTERN BRANCH SUMMER MEETING

Saturday 15 June 2019, Sherborne Castle



10.00 Arrival and coffee in the meeting room above the tea shop in the grounds of Sherborne Castle

10.30 Branch meeting followed by a talk about the castle and gardens

12.30 Lunch of cold quiche and salad

After lunch: free time to enjoy the historic castle built by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1594 (self-guided) and the beautiful 42 acres of Grade I listed gardens and 50-acre lake created by Capability Brown.

The castle is located off New Road, on the B3145, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from Sherborne town centre – follow the brown tourist signs. Postcode DT9 5NR. The rail station is $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away.

The cost is £19.00 each; which includes coffee/tea on arrival; talk about the castle and garden; lunch of homemade cold quiche and salad; self-guided tour of the castle and grounds. Additional refreshments can be purchased.

The ancient market town of Sherborne is just 5 minutes away by car, famous for its historic buildings including its delightful Saxon Abbey Church, the renowned Sherborne Boys' School, all built with ochre-coloured hamstone.

To make a booking please call Martn Gibson on 01626 773503

AGTO Western Branch Committee

Roger Sims - Chairman

Martin Gibson - Treasurer

Gill Brooker - Secretary

Helen Sims, Andy Holmes and Martin Hay - Committee Members

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AGTO members are welcome at any of the listed Branch and National events.

For more information go to the Branch pages at: www.agto.co.uk

Date	Branch	Events	Contact
20th March	National	British Coach Tourism Awards, Birmingham	www.tourismshow.co.uk
20-21st March	National	BTTS at NEC Birmingham	www.tourismshow.co.uk
24th March	National	Holiday & Leisure Show, Maidstone	www.holidayandleisureshow.co.uk
11th April	Southern	Leonardslee Gardens, Nr Horsham	Jackie Ring jackie@yahoo.co.uk
16th April	National	Go Travel Show, Kempton Park	www.gotravelshow.co.uk
16th April	Eastern	Family Day at Bletchley Park	Joan Hanks joan.hanks@virginmedia.com
28-30th April	Central	Highlights of Hampshire	Jo Blair, Success Tours jo.blair@successtours.com
29th April	National	Group Buyers Forum, Painshill Park	www.stevereedtourism.co.uk
End of April	National	Deadline for #3 AGTO magazine copy	Branch Chair or Magazine coordinator
24th May	Central	RHS Garden Wisley	Julia Passmore julia1cpassmore@aol.com
24th May	Kent	Visit Guidford & RHS Garden Wisley	James Silvester jamessilvester600@msn.com
14th June	Eastern	The Shuttleworth Collection, Old Warden and the Swiss Garden	Joan Hanks joan.hanks@virginmedia.com
15th June	Western	Branch Meeting, Sherborne Castle & Gardens	Martin Gibson mgibson.gts@talktalk.net
1st July	Kent	Ship Visit-Boudicca with Fred.Olsen, Dover	Martin Hay (01202 027559) martinhay@gocruise.co.uk
27-29th Sept	Western	AGM Weekend - Salisbury & surrounding area	Martin Gibson mgibson.gts@talktalk.net
1st Oct	Central	Italy's Imagna Valley	Jo Blair, Success Tours jo.blair@successtours.com
10th Oct	National	Group Leisure & Travel Show, Milton Keynes	www.grouptravelshow.com
14th Oct	National	Group Buyers Forum, Salford Quays	www.stevereedtourism.co.uk
19th Oct	Eastern	Family Day at Hampton Court, River Trip	Joan Hanks joan.hanks@virginmedia.com
Oct TBC	Kent	Pre-opening Betteshanger Coal Museum	James Silvester jamessilvester600@msn.com

Theatre Tip

Our resident critic, Carlie Newman, reviews **MANDELA: The Official Exhibition.**

While this is not a theatre, it is, to all senses, a theatrical experience! It's a new global touring exhibition. We see Nelson Mandela as a person and also as a political and humanitarian leader.

Divided into zones, each one shows us part of the great leader's journey. All the displays of film, photos, clothes, historical artefacts and personal items are clearly marked so that there is no need to follow a written guide or wear headphones.

The Early Years gives us a glimpse of the traditional rural life that Nelson led as a young boy in the Transkei.

The *Struggle is My Life* shows the terrible effects of apartheid. Film gives us views of segregation and police brutality.

Prison Years will show you a little of the visual aspects of Robben Island and an idea of his life in a prison cell.

Anti-Apartheid in Britain is particularly interesting for the older ones amongst us who lived through this period in the 1980s. The contributions of celebrities, trades unions and ordinary British people helped to bring to an end the apartheid government in South Africa.

Freedom? Shows something of the violence of the early 1990s with original news footage of the time and leads up to the first democratic election.

Healing a Nation displays iconic objects and video contributions from, amongst others, family members and Neneh Cherry, Peter Gabriel and Lewis Hamilton.

Finally, **A Moment with Mandela** lets each visitor hear directly from Mandela (also known as Madiba) about carrying the legacy forward.

Each of the areas has special objects associated with the zone. So, we see the ceremonial headdress which was awarded to Mandela on his release from prison by King King Xolilizwe Sigcawu of the Xhosa people; Apartheid public signs; one of Mandela's famous hand-printed batik

shirts; his beloved trench coat.

At the launch on 7 February was Chief Nikosi Zwelivelile Mandela (referred

to as 'Chief'), Grandson of the Leader, was pleased to speak about his grandfather's legacy.

I interviewed Zelda la Grange, who served President Mandela, after he came out of prison, for 19 years in various capacities including his Executive Personal Assistant and Manager of his personal office until his death in December 2013 aged 95. In response to my questions she only met him in 1994 after he was President. She had worked for the Government and applied to the Presidency office and ended up working for Mandela personally. After he died, she published her memoir and set up the Nelson Mandela Foundation in 2001. Zelda is currently in talks to make the book into a feature film.

Zelda remembers the last time she saw Mandela: he was already very ill but smiled and recognised her. She believes that one of the very saddest moments in Madiba's life was when he buried his only living son, Chief's father. It brought back memories of burying his first child who died in a car crash.

The exhibition, Zelda believes, is a good way to ensure that his speaking and achievements will keep his memory alive. She has become a motivational speaker.

I am sure that her work along with other members of his family including the Chief will make sure that future generations remember and celebrate the life of this great man.

MANDELA: The Official Exhibition (26 Leake Street Gallery, Waterloo, London booking until 2 June 2019 Box office: 0844 453 9094)



THE LAST WORD... it's not easy being a GTO!

Planning your next day trip, short break or holiday should be fun. But these days, searching high and low for a visitor attraction's group rates, wondering if your mailing list is GDPR compliant, or being told that your local operator might not be able to take you into central London anymore because his very clean, safe but old coach just doesn't meet emission regulations might have you wondering why you bother.

Since taking up office in 2018 I've met with a wide range of GTOs. There's a common theme among their many comments and it's about the challenges they're facing simply trying to organise a day trip or a short break. Our guest columnist,



John Wales, discusses the issue of coaches in London - a problem that isn't helping GTOs. On 8 April the new ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ), comes into effect in central London, coaches will need to meet the very latest 'Euro 6' exhaust emission standards. In principle, great. All new coaches meet this requirement, but older coaches don't. Coach operators have three choices: buy new coaches, retrofit their older coaches so that the engines comply with the new regulations (a costly exercise), or pay the daily fine of £100 for entering the zone. There's a fourth option of course. Some coach operators are telling GTOs that with poor coach parking facilities, traffic congestion, and now the ULEZ, they're simply not prepared to take trips into central London anymore.

Some GTOs, fed up themselves with the hassle of London, are eschewing the West End completely and taking their groups to discover other London attractions, or to local theatres, many of which offer West End-quality productions at significantly lower prices – and the

coach parking is usually better too!

Over these last few months, and due in part to the comments from members and our Associates, our suppliers, we've started on our route to improved communications. In February we had our Showcase event at Eastwood Hall Hotel in Nottinghamshire. It was a real delight to meet so many members and to listen to your thoughts and comments on our industry. I'm very keen to improve how we all communicate with each other and you'll be seeing more opportunities for face-to-face meetings. The website is getting a makeover and there'll be more information about our Associate Members. After all, these suppliers have some really good offers for AGTO members, so we need to make sure we're shouting those benefits from the rooftops!

I would welcome your feedback as to how we can improve communications and give added value to you, as members.

Wendy Hartley-Scarff,
CEO, AGTO

AGTO SHOWCASE WEEKEND - sneak preview, full report next issue!



"Excellent Showcase weekend"
Linda Shelton, National Garden Scheme, Associate Member

"Nottingham Showcase was excellent"
Julia Passmore, GTO, C1859

"The weekend was excellent and well received by everyone"
Sue Povey GTO, S1972

"Wonderful weekend in Nottingham, the hotel, food, outings and entertainment were brilliant"
Anne Barnes GTO, S2023

"A brilliant event, great to meet so many of you GTOs"
Joanne Scurr, Castle Howard, Associate Member

"Just a quick note to say thank you for all the great organisation for the event at Eastwood last week. I made some interesting contacts"
Kristy Elsmere, Woods Travel, Associate Member