

AG
TO

association of
group travel organisers

MAGAZINE

issue 3





WELCOME

Welcome to Issue 3 of the AGTO Magazine. Our new format has been well received so thank you for taking the time to communicate your positive comments. 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 from GTOs, together with National Updates. Our Guest Columnist this issue is Melissa Hackney, from the Royal Horticultural Society, who discusses the many and varied benefits of gardens and gardening.

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.

Contact us:

AGTO, Unit 19, Omega Business Village,
Thurston Road, Northallerton, DL6 2NJ
020 8253 4505
agto@agto.co.uk

Visit our website: www.agto.co.uk

Connect with us:



facebook.com/agto



[@agtouk](https://twitter.com/agtouk)

National News Update

AGTO WEBSITE

Following feedback from the membership, the Board decided to redesign the AGTO website to make it more user friendly and intuitive, and to offer users a larger scope of services. It will have a new look and allow users to find items of interest more easily. Potential new members will be able to apply on line and pay, there will be automatic segmentation of members to allow accurate marketing, special offers from Associates and regular news updates and services for members.

We are just at stage one at the moment but hope to have the website up and running in the next 3 months.



WTM LONDON ASSOCIATION PARTNERSHIP

As with last year AGTO are working with WTM London as an Association partner and will feature on their website and in Association magazine, which this year

for the first time, will be dropped on every stand at the start of the



exhibition to make sure all exhibitors know who and what AGTO is. Also a special AGTO link will be circulated later in the year so that all AGTO members are able to register for a 3-day pass, including the invitation-only Monday. Watch this space for further developments of this partnership.

AGTO VIDEO

Watch out as you may be a budding actor/actress featured in the new AGTO video.

We have commissioned a promotional video to help publicise and showcase AGTO, its benefits and members. We are planning on having two versions of the video – a visual shorter version for impactful marketing at exhibitions, and a longer version demonstrating GTO trips and Associate familiarisation experiences for use on the website and for marketing purposes at shows and conferences.

The video company have been following AGTO activities and trips for the last few months, and we are just finalising scripts and voice-overs, so it is soon to be launched!

New Lanark World Heritage Site



Discover

Step back in time and enjoy a visit to New Lanark, an 18th Century former cotton spinning mill village, one of Scotland's six UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Explore

New Lanark is surrounded by beautiful walks and the gateway to the Falls of Clyde Wildlife Reserve.

Experience

Learn about 200 years of social history and industrial heritage.

Shop

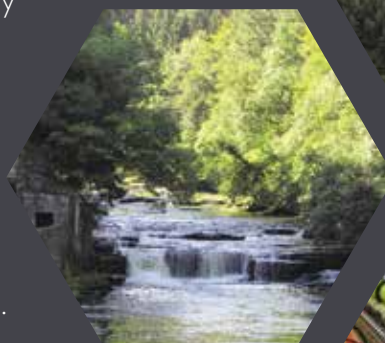
New Lanark Spinning Co. has an extensive range of contemporary gifts, books & Scottish produce, including New Lanark Spinning Co. luxury yarns.

Stay

Choose from 4-star New Lanark Mill Hotel, Wee Row Hostel or one of our eight self-catering Waterhouses. Relax in our Leisure & Beauty Centre.

Dine

Choose from Mill One Restaurant or bar located in New Lanark Mill Hotel. For casual dining try our Mill Café, serving a range of lunches, snacks, hot & cold drinks, home-baking and New Lanark Ice Cream.



www.newlanark.org

Guest Columnist: Melissa Hackney



When I first started at the Royal Horticultural Society nearly two years ago, I'd come from a travel industry background and had no idea that I would turn into a gardening evangelist... but there we go! Since I've been working at the lovely RHS Garden Wisley in Surrey, and learnt more about the work that the RHS does as the country's leading gardening charity, I couldn't help but get passionate about all that gardens have to offer.

My role is to encourage groups to come along to our four wonderful gardens, but I wanted to use this opportunity to wave the flag for the huge benefits of gardens and

Melissa Hackney, Group Sales and Marketing Manager at the Royal Horticultural Society, looks at the many and varied benefits of gardens and green spaces from personal wellbeing to collective economic tourism.

gardening on all sorts of levels. I think the word that best sums it up is 'wellbeing' – on a personal level, an industry level, and an environmental level.

Your Own State of Mind

Firstly, on a personal level. 'Wellness' – both on a physical and mental level – is very much in the news at the moment. At the RHS, we have been working with the NHS on studies that prove the benefits to individual wellbeing of being in open spaces, surrounded by nature, in addition to the physical and mental well-being generated by gardening as an activity.

As a charity we have made this one of our priorities and you'll see

lots of the content at our gardens and shows this year focuses on wellbeing. At Chelsea, the RHS Back to Nature Garden, designed by HRH the Duchess of Cambridge in collaboration with Davies White, promotes the physical and emotional wellbeing that access to green spaces and gardening provides. At our new garden in Manchester – RHS Garden Bridgewater – opening next year – we are going to have a special wellbeing garden as part of an innovative prescribing project with the local Primary Care Team, and Wisley is also seeing a new wellbeing area as part of the developments there.

For groups, going to a garden is a fantastic opportunity for everyone to benefit from the exercise of



walking round, as well as the uplifting impact that being surrounded by natural beauty has. Even when it's grey, windy and raining, gardens look beautiful – what better antidote to the unreliable weather! It is also the best way to get ideas for what to do in your own garden – whether you're talking a window box or raised beds... herbaceous borders or veg patches.

Economic wellbeing

From a travel industry point of view, did you know that one of the top three things that international visitors want to see in the UK is beautiful gardens? We are (rightly) world-famous for our green spaces and garden tourism now accounts for £2.9 billion of the horticulture sector's contribution to UK GDP, with about one-third of all international tourist visits to the country involving at least one trip to a park or garden. Impressive isn't it? I think there's much more that could still be done. The Japanese celebrate their cherry blossom, the Canadian celebrate their Maple Leaves... maybe we should make more of our roses and wisteria!

It works domestically too. There are 27 million gardeners in England all looking to be inspired. At our gardens, whilst we welcome plenty of friends and family looking for a relaxing day out, we also love working with groups. Our gardens range from 55 to 300 acres, so our visitors never feel rushed or hurried along with the sense of space that they have. Beyond the visitors, there is all the additional benefit that gardens and gardening bring – from providing local employment to supporting British nurseries and growers.

Better for the Environment

And finally environmental wellbeing. Another hot topic at the moment. Some years ago, the RHS reviewed a wide range of research into topics such as green roofs, planting that may help cool the air in summer, and green walls and climbers that can insulate buildings in winter. The results gave us a clear picture about the environmental impacts of gardens and gardening. Not only do gardens help keep our cities 'above water' by preventing flooding, but they act as the equivalent of air conditioning for our cities, keeping air fresher and cleaner as well as supporting wildlife.

Our Greening Grey Britain Campaign – this year renamed 'Greening Great Britain' – is a call to action for people around the country to get involved, in whatever way they can. This may be replanting some of their front garden to green space rather than concrete, or adding more windowboxes or pots. Since we launched the Campaign with our Report in 2015, the subject has been raised in The London Assembly, a Front Garden Summit was held in 2016 where policymakers, developers, planners and landscapers discussed solutions to start making a difference and 128 grants have been giving to communities to turn grey spaces green. We also hosted a conference at Tatton Park Flower Show in 2018 to highlight the importance of greening urban spaces.

So my rallying call has to be... get growing, get gardening and keep visiting! I did warn you I was a gardening evangelist.



The Road to Kempton Park

David Steele, AGTO Director, reports on his recent successful visit to the annual GO Travel Show at Kempton Park, Surrey.

In 2012 a monthly magazine aimed at Group Organisers changed its name from *The Pass* to *Great for Groups* and organised a show at Ascot Racecourse. Although the venue had great parking it was nevertheless a large venue for a small show and with the outside temperature being just above freezing, the inside was little better. Several stand holders called it a day early as they were too cold. For myself a dance with the rock and rollers who, as part of the entertainment, were jiving with anyone passing seemed a good idea just to keep body and soul warm. This I had to do on more than one occasion and although we did not recruit many new Organisers, it did improve my dancing! Ascot was not a success but was the start of something new for formatting a show designed to attract GTOs to an Exhibition of Attractions and Operators in the Tourist Industry.

The second attempt was for the show to take place in a

Heathrow Hotel, great room space but almost impossible to find a space in their car park. Exhibitors arriving early were fine but many of the GTOs coming later gave up and drove home, so again not the success it should have been.

Finally this innovative show moved to Kempton Park in 2014, where both the room and car parking were ideal and the show, with its roving entertainment, started to blossom. Both GTOs and Exhibitors continued to support the Show until 2017, which proved to be the last because *Great for Groups* as a magazine were about to cease publishing.

Fortunately the driving force behind the Show, Darryl Murdoch, was snapped up by Landor Travel publications, the publishers of GTO Magazine, who had their own nomadic event, and he persuaded the powers that be to move to Kempton Park in 2018, utilising the slot vacated

by Great for Groups. Both last year and this the GO Travel Show has been a huge success with many AGTO Organisers attending. With the 'sold out' notice for Exhibitors serving as a warning to book early for the following year, needless to say AGTO has reserved space for 2020 already!

The 2020 GO Travel Show takes place at Kempton Park on Wednesday 22nd April. To book your place contact Darryl on 020 7091 7891 or darryl@landor.co.uk.





Welcome

A brief introduction & of course welcome to our new Associate and GTO members. Full details of the services the Associate members offer, including contact details, are on the AGTO website.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

A5984 World of James Herriott

James Herriot, the world's most famous vet, lived, worked and wrote his incredibly successful series of books based on his experiences as a young North Yorkshire vet. Set in the heart of stunning Herriot Country, World of James Herriot is a multi-award-winning, all-weather attraction.

A5985 National Army Museum

The National Army Museum is the British Army's central museum. It is located in the Chelsea district of central London, adjacent to the Royal Hospital Chelsea, the home of the Chelsea Pensioners.

A5986 O'Neills and Oak Tree Pubs

If you're looking for a drink or a bite to eat you'll find a Mitchells & Butlers brand that's perfect for you. Operating around 1,700 restaurants and pubs all over the UK, we work hard each day to offer our customers a great choice of quality food and drink, fast and friendly service and excellent value for money. Our success is based on innovation, listening to customer feedback and ensuring our passionate staff are the best trained in the industry.

A5987 Leeds Castle

Discover 900 years of history and explore 500 acres of beautiful parkland and gardens at Leeds Castle in Kent. The whole family will enjoy the maze and grotto, thrilling falconry displays, punting on the moat, adventure playgrounds and more!

A5988 Winter Gardens Blackpool

An impressive 1878 building with several venues for shows and events, plus bars, a restaurant and café. Winter Gardens Blackpool always has a stellar line up of theatre, music and comedy shows.

A5989 AC Tours

We have a long standing leisure group focus specialising in touring series and ad hoc groups throughout Europe. Find out how we can help you.

A5990 Winander Leisure

We have a long standing leisure group focus Windermere Lake Cruises - the most popular attraction in Cumbria. Windermere is England's largest lake, in the heart of the Lake District. We offer cruises from 45 minutes to 3 hours - or you can spend all day on and around the lake with our fantastic Freedom of the Lake ticket.

The Group also includes the Lakeland Motor

Museum with over 30,000 fascinating exhibits that trace the development of road transport throughout the twentieth century - cycles, motorbikes, motor cars and automobilia.

A5991 Indus Experiences

Discover the Indus experience – a collection of carefully crafted holidays designed with you in mind – offering you an outstanding selection of individual and group tours from our exclusive brochure. We also specialise in crafting tailor-made experiences for our discerning travellers.

A5992 Travel Department

Travel Department are the experts in guided travel, with over 20 years' experience perfecting tours to more than 140 destinations worldwide. Our holidays typically include flights, accommodation, transfers and guided excursions. Our friendly and knowledgeable local guides will accompany you throughout and be on hand to offer local knowledge and insight into your chosen destination.

A5981 Jailhouse Tours

Jailhouse Tours operates two decommissioned prisons; Shrewsbury Prison in Shropshire and Shepton Mallet Prison in Somerset. Our giant prison gates are now wide open for private groups and coach parties.

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GTO MEMBERS

W2793	Elisabeth	Bird
W2794	Keith	Paige
K2795	Gloria	Young
S2796	Christine	Urquhart
E2797	Tina	Theodorou
S2798	Guy	Standen
S2799	Tracey	Harvey
S2800	Julie	Adams
W2801	Sheila	Punter
W2802	Margaret	Smith
W2803	Frances	Bircher
S2804	Michael	Taylor
W2805	Emi	Bulman
W2806	Geoff	Heal
W2807	Vivienne	Robinson

W2808	Geoffrey	Ward
S2809	Gwen	Wright
S2810	Jacqui	Camfield
S2811	David	Apps
S2812	Robert	Jarrett
S2813	Sunita	Singal
S2814	Jacky	Oakley
K2815	Karen	Rossiter
K2816	Judith	Simpson
K2817	Lynne	Wood
E2818	John	Deane
S2819	Sharon	Penfold
W2820	Nigel	Brown
E2821	Bernadette	Reynolds
C2822	Neville	Patstone
K2823	Leonard	White
K2824	Brenda	Groves
K2825	Patricia	Speakman
K2826	Andrea Ruth	Lawrence
K2827	Johanna	Clark
K2828	Patricia	Chilcott
K2829	Janet	Sackett
K2830	Joyce	Tullio
K2831	Olivia	Morgan
K2832	Sheila	O'Neill
K2833	Jenny	Baker
C2834	Marion	Heywood
K2835	Janet	Hitchen
K2836	Lynda	Osman
K2837	Fred	Lemont
K2838	Leslie	Smith
S2839	Walter	Hill
S2840	Barbara	Frost
S2841	Bob	Jeffery
S2842	Pat	Oldcorn
S2843	William	Dedman
E2844	Karen	Orwell
E2845	Ian	Eaton
E2846	James	Eringa
E2847	Daivd	Bennett
S2848	Vic	Shepherd
S2849	Ruth	Pearson
S2850	Balwinder	Kavr
S2851	Mark	Chandler
W2852	Mary	Abraham
E2853	Simon	Fillery
S2854	Keith John	Sutton
S2855	Anthony	Lien
S2856	Penny	Kingsmill
S2857	Anne	Brown
S2858	Bharti	Kotecha
C2859	Judith	Carter
W2860	John Percy	Dickson

RHS Garden Wisley Hosts Major Sculpture Exhibition

RHS Garden Wisley in Surrey will be the stunning backdrop to a major exhibition of modern and contemporary sculpture from 30 May - 1 December 2019.

Sculpture at Wisley 2019 will feature the work of six seminal 20th and 21st century artists, highlighting the relationship between sculpture and the cultivated landscape in the first exhibition of its kind at an RHS Garden.

Groups visiting the garden will be able to enjoy access to this beautiful artwork as part of their garden entry. Works will include four Henry Moore sculptures including his vast *Sheep Piece*; six pieces from Lynn Chadwick including *Little Girl I, II and III*, as well as works by Phillip King and Henry Bruce. Following the opening of Wisley's new Welcome building in June, additional pieces will include a dramatic neon by Tracey Emin and maquettes of the *Four Seasons* by Philip Haas.

Prices from £12.20pp for groups of 10 plus. Call 020 7821 3170, email groups@rhs.org.uk or visit rhs.org.uk/groups.



Press Coverage for AGTO



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.

If you need any further information for this, please let me know.

Many thanks

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

AGTO at BTTS

In March AGTO made its way to the NEC in Birmingham for the annual British Tourism & Travel Show, the leading exhibition dedicated to the domestic tourism industry. Wendy Hartley-Scarff reports on the AGTO presence there.

BTTS is a show that is essential for travel trade professionals who want to source ideas and inspiration for forthcoming brochures, programmes, itineraries and tours. It showcases more than 270 exhibitors including attractions, destinations & hotels attendance - and AGTO always have a stand.

Proceedings started on the Wednesday, followed by the British Coach Tourism Awards ceremony at the National Motorcycle Museum. The glittering affair started with a floor show from *The Greatest Showman* and was hosted by Carol Vorderman. All winners were quite rightly delighted to have won, I was honoured this year to be one of the judges for the Awards. AGTO sponsored the Best Eating Experience, which was won by Planet Hollywood.

Following a survey conducted by BTTS the general consensus is that Brexit will continue to have an influence on future consumer spending (with mixed opinions on the actual impact Brexit will have on domestic business' prospects). When asked specifically about expectations of the impact of Brexit, 49% said they were fairly concerned, while 43% reported that they are not concerned at all. Notably, many respondents commented that it may be 'too early to tell as things are still unknown' whilst others stated

that 'The level of domestic tourism will grow if consumer confidence returns' and that 'travellers may be more inclined to stay at home with the uncertainty of Brexit and border/passport changes'.

As one may expect, 'value for money' and 'experience' came joint first in the list of the three main factors their customers consider when booking an outing or trip. 'Location' came second and 'culture' third; accessibility, relaxation and catering are next on the list.

As in the previous two years AGTO ran a panel discussion on the Thursday. We had three excellent panellists, our moderator Stuart Render and a full audience.

The panellists were Gyll King of City & Village Tours, Salvatore (Tony) Maniscalco of Ramblers Holidays and one of our very own GTOs, Bob Walker of MANCASS. It was a good discussion about the evolving role of the GTO and how operators/attractions should be taking more note of the comments and feedback from GTOs to develop their products. Customers want more from their trips and more different



experiences - something special.

It was also great to meet many of our existing members who were walking the floor and the AGTO Ambassadors were extremely visible during the two days. I personally met with a number of Associate members who were keen to present their products to the membership and we discussed ways of working together to reach more GTO members.

Membership recruitment was good, especially for new Associate members, and thanks must go to David Steele and Jim Barling for ably manning the stand, although I must admit I do believe they enjoyed the days as we were opposite the show girls from *Viva Blackpool* - so not an unpleasant view and both had a photo taken with the girls.

All in all it was a good two days of networking, re-establishing contacts and adding some fun into the bargain - AGTO will be back in 2020.



WHERE EXTRAORDINARY HAPPENS



SHEARINGS HOLIDAYS



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Considering arranging an ocean or river cruise holiday for your group but overwhelmed by the choice on offer? Don't give up or guess, rather seek specialist independent and impartial advice from one of the UK's foremost group cruise specialists (and AGTO Director) Martin from GoCruise.

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Contact Martin Hay Today

01202 027559

martinhay@gocruise.co.uk

for your peace of mind



News from the Branches

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 it to the full.

Keep enjoying and keep telling us about your experiences.

Wendy, AGTO CEO



Central Branch's Editor's Message

I was delighted that we had more than a quorum attend, with at least one member who hadn't been at the Showcase Weekend turning up for our AGM on the Sunday morning. I had mixed feelings about it all going in as I was retiring after my second three year spell on the committee and was fearful that Julia might end up wearing four hats and taking on all the officers roles – which wasn't really on the cards. However Sue Day, who is now only working part time at West Midland Safari Park, felt able to take on the role of Secretary leaving Julia as Treasurer, Board Director and she feared Chairman but Jim Barling at the last moment put his hand up and said he would be pleased to take over as Chairman. Sue Russell also kept her promise and joined the committee so I feel that I am leaving Central Branch in

very capable hands.

As magazine Editor I also made a somewhat impassioned plea for articles for the next few issues of the magazine and to my great joy three people promised there and then. An email to two other members, who in conversations at meetings and trade shows seemed to have interesting day trips and holidays, bought forth more promises. It appears that some of you think that either the type of day trips you do wouldn't interest other members – wrong, or you feel you aren't good writers – please don't worry about that. My first attempts had me being very precious about things when my husband waved his red pen and I dreaded even then sending the finished article to a professional editor. Practise makes perfect and

no one, least of all me, is going to be critical, just very grateful.

You will notice from the list of committee members that Stuart Parker, who has been Associate member Interchoice's representative for several years, is no longer on the committee. Stuart has gone to pastures new after 22 years with the company and we wish him well in his new job, and thank him for all the help, encouragement and support he has given to AGTO Central Branch over the years.

He will be missed, not least for his cheerful face, and who will make the coffee at the committee meetings now I wonder? I'm certainly going to miss the lively bantering with Julia and Sue.

Pauline Johnson C1850

From Sutton Coldfield to Portsmouth

Sutton Coldfield Vesey Probus took a five-day holiday to the Portsmouth area, staying at the Holiday Inn Portsmouth, a hotel which caters mainly for business people but which is within walking distance of the historic dockyards, the shopping and central district, and last but not least the sea.

On the way there a stop was made at the National Trust property, Mottisfont, an Elizabethan mansion with large gardens and grounds. It was a very interesting property.

Our second day saw us travel to Salisbury, which was still suffering from the after effects of the Novichok poisoning. As it was market day, many of the members enjoyed a shopping spree, while others visited the beautiful cathedral with its copy of the Magna Carta. The drive back to Portsmouth took us through the New Forest.

Our third day took us to the Isle of Wight where we had a ride on the Isle of Wight Steam Railway, followed by a



visit to Osbourne House and Gardens,

The highlight of our trip came on the fourth day when we visited the historic dockyard area, where most of the party spent their time in the Mary Rose Museum. The fantastic building houses the remains of the Tudor warship *Mary Rose*, dramatically raised from the seabed in an operation many of us had watched on television in 1982. The museum is an interactive reconstruction of the warship, together with examples of the artefacts recovered from it, all



explained by very knowledgeable guides who have an in-depth knowledge of the events around it's sinking

and subsequent recovery from the sea.

We visited the National Trust property Hinton Ampner on our way home. This is an interesting property with beautiful gardens and woodland walks and a beautiful church in its grounds.

Altogether this was a very interesting and enjoyable holiday.

Graham & Pam Russell C2761/2

Showcase AGM Fam Trip

Saturday afternoon saw us visiting a number of sites in Nottingham with 'Robin Hood' as our guide. We first went to Wollaton Hall and Country Park, a beautiful Tudor mansion, which featured as Wayne Manor in the Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises*. Our guide concentrated on the Batman theme throughout our visit, going upstairs and downstairs, even into the Bat Cave, although no one saw a bat!

The park is a very large landscaped area, with a play area for children. It is owned and maintained by Nottingham County Council, and allows free entry to all visitors. The catering staff provided us with a very welcome buffet of soup, sandwiches and cakes.

Our second stop was Nottingham

Lace Market, with a short walk around the area seeing the Art Gallery; St Mary's Church and the Pitcher and Piano, an old Unitarian Church, which has been beautifully restored keeping the existing stained glass windows. This was followed by a visit to the National Justice Museum, where we sat in the courtroom, visited the cells and exercise yard, and climbed down the stairs to the dungeons. Not a place I would want to reside in!

This was a very brief but interesting introduction to Nottingham. For myself, the Batman connection was lost, but I am not a film buff, however most people were very interested in it.

Sunday afternoon saw us visiting Southwell and Newark.

Southwell Minster is a beautiful church with a rich history, which our guide Joanne very knowledgeably passed on to us. Unfortunately, having had an excellent buffet lunch, time was not on our side, so the tour of the Minster was a quick whistle-stop tour.

In Newark we visited the National Civil War Centre, a well laid out and informative museum which again time only allowed us to make a whistle stop tour of before we again drove into Nottingham to drop members at the station to catch their trains home.

Unfortunately time only allowed a taster of each place we visited, but certainly whetted our appetites to return and spend more time there.

Pam Russell C2762

AGTO Central Branch Committee

Jim Barling - Chairman

Pauline Johnson - retiring Chairman & magazine editor

pauline_a_johnson@hotmail.com

Julia Passmore - Board Director / Treasurer

julia1cpassmore@aol.com

Sally Davison - Committee Member

Pam Russell - Committee Member

Jo Blair - Success Tours - Associate Member

Sue Day - West Midland Safari Park - Secretary, Associate Member

**INTERESTED IN
JOINING THE
COMMITTEE?**

**Email Julia for details
of the next committee
date and venue**

Eastern Branch's Chairman's Message

A warm welcome to all our new members who have recently joined Eastern Branch AGTO. We hope you will enjoy your membership and can participate in our meetings throughout the year, enabling you to network with fellow GTOs and Associate members alike.

On Tuesday 30th April, Bletchley Park played host to our Spring Meeting and what a wonderful day it was. We were pleased to welcome Members from Southern Branch who joined us for the day.

Steeped in WW2 history and, sadly, very neglected after the 1960's, Bletchley Park now has a new lease of life and is a memorial to the Code Breakers who worked there during the Second World War. Now, with the help from the National Lottery, a vibrant reconstruction of the site brings everything back to life.

We arrived at 10.30am to be greeted by staff members and were directed to The Mansion for coffee, where we were welcomed by our hosts for the day.

The Mansion, the hub of operations through the dark days

of the war, is now restored to its former glory. The operations room is still very much as it would have been then and other rooms in the Mansion have been designated to the main Code Breakers, giving an insight into their mathematics and science skills.

The dining room where we held our meeting was quite beautiful and would have been used for high ranking visitors to the Park, including Winston Churchill.

After coffee we met our guide for the tour, a charismatic Oxford historian called Ian, who took us around the grounds, enthraling us with stories and other information from the past. Everyone was mesmerised by his natural enthusiasm and charm.

In no time at all we were back in the Mansion for a light lunch and our Branch Meeting. We were able to bring members up-to-date with information and answer questions as well as providing booking forms for future events.

After this there was free time for Members to investigate all the exciting exhibitions throughout the Park.

We were especially interested in the New D-Day Exhibition, which was unveiled at the beginning of the month. Again, funded by the Lottery and public support, it entailed a film on a continuous loop looking at D-Day from the Bletchley Park perspective. Everyone thought it was stunning, from the wide screens to the clear captions, and the voiceover told how the Code Breakers were more than a step ahead of the enemy, subsequently saving lives and ending the war at least two years early.

Much reconstruction has been carried out to save "The Huts" but they remain intact inside. They are cold, dark, draughty places that must have been hell to work in through the cold winter months.

After an exhilarating and eventful day we went back to the Mansion for a final cup of tea, where our hosts finished the day with a question and answer session to round things off. It was a very worthwhile place to visit.

Patricia Maltby

OUR NEXT MEETING...

The Eastern Branch's next meeting will be at The Shuttleworth Collection, Old Warden, Bedfordshire on Friday 14th June. Home to Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines, the collection boasts vintage aeroplanes from the early 19th Century together with much more.

We then visit the tranquil Swiss Gardens which were planted as a memorial to Richard Shuttleworth's mother.

It's a great day out in lovely countryside.

We hope you will join us.

Booking forms are online or apply to Joan Hanks Events, 23 Cambridge Way, Langford, SG18 9SG tel: 01462 636626.



Montenegro Trip Booked with Success Tours

I took a group in October 2018 to Montenegro, booked with Success Tours.

We stayed at the Hotel Bellevue, Iberostar, in Budva. We had an all-inclusive package which suits my group down to the ground. I was upgraded to a room which had two balconies and it was such a great view overlooking the whole bay.

It's a fantastic situation, overlooking the beach, with about three hotel buildings on the complex, with a wide range of sports facilities, indoor and outdoor pools, spa facilities, Beach and Swim pool bars, nightly entertainment, and walking distance along promenade to the town of Budva.

We found, on our walk to the town, a small daily market and loved the old town of Budva with its stone walls, narrow alleyways and the old Citadel - a great situation.

The weather was brilliant, hot and sunny, and some of us braved the outdoor pool and the sea.

We had booked a full day excursion with lunch, and we cruised the Bay of Kotor, with views of the Dinaids mountain chains, and visited the Lady of the Rocks church, and had a BBQ lunch.

We also visited the fantastic old town of Kotor with its



walled city and after our guided tour had lunch here.

Our rep who met us also booked some of our group onto other outings and some of us did a Montenegro Tour, which took us to the ancient capital of Montenegro Cetinje, where the remains of John the Baptist are claimed to be found. We took the Serpentine road with its hairpin bends and once we arrived at the top we were 4,000 Ft. above the bay of Boka, which is a world heritage site and one of the most beautiful bays in the world.

We also took a boat trip on Lake Skadar, surrounded by dense mountains with lovely views, and we stopped at a private beach resort for lunch.

My group also took time to explore the next resort along and we discovered that a recent visitor to Montenegro was David Beckham. (He stayed at a hotel on Sveti Stefan Island).

It was a great holiday and I would go back there if an opportunity arose.

Shirley Ward

Guide Dog National Breeding Centre

30 members of my Group, EXEL Retired Staff Association, Bedford, recently visited the Guide Dogs National Breeding Centre at Bishops Tachbrook, near Leamington Spa.

An interactive two-hour tour gives an insight into a really important phase of pup development including the necessary skills to be a guide dog. I believe the lifetime cost of a guide dog training can cost as much as £65,000. Also included

on the tour were demonstrations of how blindness affects people and how their guide dog can help them overcome their disability. We were only able to see very young puppies, about six weeks old, through observation windows into their nursery.

After the tour we were given a talk by a guide dog user who had lost his sight through AMD (Age related macular degeneration).

At the end of our tour we were provided with free tea and cake. There is no cost for the tour but visitors made personal donations.

Before our tour I had booked lunch, a few weeks beforehand, at The Leopard Inn, Bishops Tachbrook, (in the village near the Breeding Centre). I can highly recommend this establishment. The food was most enjoyable and the service excellent.

Yvonne Hodson E1285

Lights, Camera, Action!

"The Golden Age of Hollywood" lasted from the end of the silent era in the late 1920s to the early 1960s. However, its heyday was the 1930's and 1940's, as motion-picture admissions started to decline from 1946.

That wasn't going to affect a new group of Hollywood hopefuls. A few months ago wannabe producers, directors and actors were transported back in time to the 1950s and to A Door In A Wall's newest interactive production.

Our team assembled at Mirth, Marvel & Maud in Walthamstow. The current building opened in the 1930s as a Granada Cinema, but there are records of films being shown on the site as early as 1896. A fitting venue to start our new production company.

Our team were among the first "Hollywood high rollers" to try out the new production by A Door In A Wall. We joined other hopefuls eager to learn the secrets to making a successful movie. Unlike A Door In A Wall's earlier interactive games, this was not a murder mystery. Instead of solving a crime, we were tasked with producing mini movies.

To help us, we were provided with scenes to act and scripts to follow.

We were told improvisation was allowed, so we ended up ad libbing most of it.

Groups of 3-6 were recommended and I was sure I'd read somewhere that not everyone had to appear on screen. We had one person drop out on the night, so our "company" was down to three. Not to worry as the game can be played by two. However this requires both of you to act. With three of us we were able to choose between two or three player scripts.

It took a while to relax into being on screen, but by the end of the night we were all having fun being a star.

As well as learning our lines we had to decide on props and costumes. We also had to get pointers from Hollywood stars and production crew on what to include in our movies. This was the interacting with characters bit of the evening.

Costume suggestions were 1950s and some groups went for the Hollywood glamour look in a big way. In fact, at some points, it was



hard to tell the real actors from the participants.

The evening ended with a glitzy ceremony to honour the best efforts. With so many teams taking part they were only able to screen the best ones. It was a pity we haven't got to see our finished products. (Yes, I know. I'm shocked we didn't win).

We all agreed it had been a fun evening's entertainment.

After the event we were sent a link to see our films and other films produced on the night. I'm not at liberty to share those made by other film producers and, while I'd like to thank the cast, crew, writers etc for our wonderful productions, the background noise requires me to withhold screening ours.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Catherine Skeggs, City Adventurers

AGTO Eastern Branch Committee

Patricia Maltby - Chairman

Joan Hanks - Director and Events Coordinator

Maria Maltby - Secretary

Linda Nicholas - Treasurer

Yvonne Hodson - AGTO magazine co-ordinator, Branch Webpage

Maureen Hardingham - Communications

Lesley Terrell - Associate Member

Kent Branch's Chairman's Message

The Kent Branch has had a stuttered start to the year with our planned meeting in March at the Bettshanger Coal Museum deferred until October.

Nevertheless our Visit Guildford meeting on Friday 24th May has attracted a good response and attendees will include some recently signed up GTOs, some Associate members and some members from Eastern and Southern branches. This meeting will conclude at RHS Wisley and we have been invited to a photo shoot with AGTO members and RHS members together, followed by an exclusive pre-opening tour of the new welcome building.

Sadly our stuttered start also means the cancellation of an Exclusive visit to Fred Olsen's Boudicca with guided

tour and buffet lunch on Monday 1st July but we are hopeful in arranging an alternative meeting on the same date.

With the introduction of the new AGTO Magazine I have prompted our membership to send me articles for inclusion but to date most have come from our committee with the exception of another from GTO Gerry March

I attended the AGM weekend at Nottingham in February which was both enjoyable and interesting. The presentations on "what's on offer" in Nottingham and the surrounding district together with the fam trips were excellent and gave me thought to book a trip there next year for my club. The showcase was very

well supported by our Associate members with many attractions, trips, theatre shows and holidays on offer.

My concern, however, is the low number of GTOs that attended this very first joint meeting of a showcase and Annual General Meeting, particularly since two years ago the survey results from the majority of AGTO members were in favour of a February meeting to include the AGM. I will raise this as an item to discuss within the Kent Branch and see how we can encourage more of our members to attend in 2020 and I will also report back to the board.

Jim Silvester

The Holiday and Leisure Show in partnership with GoCruise

This annual show moved to Kent County Showground, Detling this year having previously been a successful show at Dover Cruise Terminal. We were told by the organisers that the attendance this year was higher. There were certainly many exhibitors on show including new ones with interesting venues and offerings including Electric Bike Hire, Calais Town, a guest house in Popperinge and RovosRail in South Africa. Outside the owls and the starting up of the Rolls Royce Merlin Spitfire engine were amazing,

Not least successful was the AGTO Stand that attracted many visitors and enquiries. We signed up 11 new members for AGTO and of course Kent Branch.

On the stand throughout the day were Carol Gower and Kath Brown from CBA Outings and Carol Blackmore and her husband David from Blean Gardeners.

The AGTO Board and Kent Branch thanks them all for their efforts.

Jim Silvester

DON'T PANIC! Matinee On *Terza Joanne*

Another good outing run by City & Village tours. On arrival at the berth of *Terza Joanne* we were greeted by Gyll who explained the history of the boat and surrounding area close to London City airport.



On boarding the boat we were shown our booked tables and then had the opportunity to buy a drink at the bar or a coffee. This was followed with our Pie and Mash lunch which included gravy or Eel Liquor (much enjoyed by a few of our group who said it brought back memories especially when they added vinegar!). Our show was followed with a tribute to the Home Guard with sing-along songs and great humour from Dads Army. One of our ladies let slip it was her birthday that day and so you can imagine great fun was made from this and she really enjoyed it (I think!). On the coach going home it was nice to hear their words of satisfaction and, "When's the next one?"

Gerry March, Nights Out

Mountbatten Festival Royal Albert Hall

What a fantastic show we saw from the Massed Bands of Her Majesty's Royal Marines. The music was stirring and the precision of the drummers faultless.

There was a variety from Beethoven to Take That, film music and performers from the *Greatest Showman* to *The Final Countdown* and even a little bit of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

A special film and music portrayed the 75th Anniversary of D-Day and was very moving.



The whole show was introduced by Hercule Poroit's brother, John Suchet

We had really good seats in the stalls and so near to the stage that those closest could read the sheet music. Our coach driver dropped us on the doorstep and was waiting yards from our exit door when we left.

I was introduced to this show by Carol Gower of CBA Outings and

to my surprise we found our group and hers almost side-by-side for the matinee performance.

If you have yet to see this show then make sure you book for next year, 15th-16th March 2020. Ticket booking starts in September 2019 direct from the Royal Albert Hall box office.

My group will definitely go again.

Jim Silvester, HADARA

Kentara - Kent Active Retirement Association

The Kent Active Retirement movement was formed in 1981 and consists of individual clubs and membership. At the moment there are some 84 clubs within the region of 11,500 members, with hopefully more clubs being opened each year. Membership is limited to people who are retired or semi-retired

and over the age of 50. Members are encouraged to remain both mentally and physically fit through participating in the many diverse activities offered by both the club that they belong to and KentARA itself, which organises activities open to all members.

AGTO Kent Branch, following the

last two Travel Shows, now has 13 Kentara - Kent Active Retirement Association Clubs and nearly 20 GTOs signed up as members. That's an encouraging 15% of Kentara clubs and hopefully we can target more to join.

Jim Silvester



Pots to do at Potters

Our previous visit to Potters Resort in Hopton-on-Sea, Norfolk, had been in 2015, but when I met up with Chantelle Buckenham at a travel show in 2018 she offered me a short break week-end in March 2019 with bungalow and accommodation together with a choice of hotel rooms. I took the offer and booked a 49-seat coach. When the short break was announced to my club the response was immediate and I quickly upped the coach to a 55-seat. A waiting list soon grew and more rooms were sought and now I was changing to an 80-seat double decker coach to take our final number of 74 members and friends.

Travelling with that number of people in a coach with 60 seats upstairs and 20 seats downstairs was frankly giving me grave concerns as to who sat where and whether single passengers sat together. I'm sure all GTOs would sympathise with me. However I needn't have worried as the double decker coach arrangements went smoothly and the brand new 2019 registered double decker turned heads wherever we went.

Potters Resort has much to offer



including the indoor bowling rinks that many of us as non-bowlers enjoyed trying out. The evening entertainment on Friday and Saturday was west end quality with shows about Legends and Around the World bringing songs and music from artists and musicals we all know well. Sunday's show was *Frankie's Guy*, a performance that had started in Potters some years ago, and has been in London's West End as well as touring the UK and abroad with a singer who played a lead role in the musical *Jersey Boys*.

We were blessed with kind weather during the weekend. Our excursion on Saturday saw us guided around Norwich with our Blue Badge Guide

who amusingly pointed out many places and sites that had closed or been demolished. Anyhow the Cathedral was worth a visit and we even spotted Sir Ian McKelland there. Sunday's trip to the Broads and the Mississippi Paddle boat ride were also very enjoyable.

Many of our members played the evening Bingo and one lucky person reaped a big win.

Potters Resort is an Associate member of AGTO and a firm supporter. It's well worth a group visit there so do contact Chantelle Buckenham or one of her team.

Jim Silvester, HADARA



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The thick-forested Ardennes area and its undisputable beauty is perfect for peaceful repose

or outdoor pursuits, balancing both ends of the tourist spectrum. Seek out the spectacular castles, Wallonia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, its shared history with Britain from the Napoleonic Wars and Waterloo, to the WWI and WWII memorials and remembrance sites dotted across the region. Savour a tasting or two among the region's quality producers; from artisan breweries, chocolate shops, wonderful waffles - to cheese, wine and whisky.

Uncover the Wonders of Wallonia, a Southern Belgian region offering varied touring and unforgettable group experiences.

TOURING

The British Connection

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- Audio-guided visit to Waterloo Memorial 1815
- Audio-guided visit to Hougomont Farm
- Stepy-Thieu boat lift experience
- Guided tour of Tournai on touristic train
- Tour and tasting at The Dubuisson Brewery

ANNUAL EVENTS



Venetian Costume Festival

Annevoie Gardens

from £299pp

08 - 10 June 2019

An explosion of Venetian colour and flair hits this serene corner of Wallonia for one weekend in early summer as the Venetian Costume Festival kicks off at the Gardens of Annevoie - in sublime style. You'll be wearing a smile as you cast your eye on a procession of intricate design in such beautiful surroundings.

Package Includes:

- 3 Nights B&B accommodation
- Return coach travel via Eurotunnel Le Shuttle
- One day pass to the event
- Free time at leisure



Tanks in Mons

Mons

from £355pp

30 August - 01 September 2019

Witness WWII tanks descend on the town of Mons, just as they did in the liberation of 1944. Mons, after all, has a strong military link with Britain as the first major action of the British Expeditionary Force in World War I. Join in the celebrations, 75 years on from the Liberation, at this friendly, fun-filled gathering.

Package Includes:

- 3 Nights B&B accommodation
- Return coach travel via Eurotunnel Le Shuttle
- One day event ticket



Steam Festival

Mariembourg / Treignes

from £305pp

21 - 22 September 2019

The setting is the former international station of Treignes, where you will find vintage steam locomotives, diesel rail cars, passenger coaches among trains from the fifties. Enjoy a day of pure yesteryear indulgence as you journey on the tracks.

Package Includes:

- 3 Nights B&B accommodation
- Return coach travel with Eurotunnel Le Shuttle
- One day pass to the event
- Free time at leisure

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Boatlift, La Louvière



Mons



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Ardennes Forest



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To book your group to Wallonia
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South Quay Travel
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@south_quaytravel



Part of the Cruise & Maritime Travel & Leisure Group

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Belgium
Wallonia

Out and About with Jim Silvester

FEBRUARY

- **Workshop at the Swiss Travel Centre.** Very interesting and specific presentation on Interlaken.
- **AGTO Showcase at Nottingham.** Saturday Fam trip on Princess River Cruise on the Trent (with splendid buffet lunch) and Holme Pierrepont Hall. Sunday Fam Southwell Minster (with an even better homemade buffet lunch with extra special cupcakes) and Civil War Museum in Newark.

MARCH

- **David Lote's funeral.** Accompanied by Carol Gower. Sad occasion.
- **Calendar Girls musical at the Orchard Theatre Dartford** with Marilyn and 30 HADARA members. Very funny and worth seeing.
- **Mounbatten Festival of Music** by coach to Royal Albert Hall with 40 HADARA members. Superb performances.
- **The Holiday and Leisure Show,** Kent County Showground. Good show and close to home.
- **Weekend Break at Potters** with 74 HADARA Members. Super time.

APRIL

- **Fam Trip weekend with Alfa Travel and Leisureplex at Seabank Hotel Porthcawl Wales with excursions to Tenby and Cardiff.** Tenby is pretty and the outdoor National History Museum at St Fagans near Cardiff has interesting buildings (and it's free).

- Outing to **Biggin Hill Memorial Museum and Down House** with 20 HADARA members. Both worth visting.

- **Rip it Up** musical at the Garrick Theatre by coach with Marilyn and 48 HADARA members. A must-see show that's almost finishing.

- **Go Travel Show** at Kempton Park Racecourse. A ride on the 60s Musical Routemaster Bus was a treat and I finalised plans with The Jockey Club for HADARA's visit to the panoramic restaurant and race day in August.

- Orchard Theatre summer season launch with Marilyn which included an audience with Jason Donovan, the producer of **Priscilla Queen of Dessert**. Can't wait to see it later in the year.

- Another visit to the Orchard Theatre with Marilyn to see **Sounds of the Sixties Live** which features Hayley, a singer from *Strictly Come Dancing*, and Ian who tours with Brendan Cole. The show is compered by Tony Blackburn who traces his career from the Pirate Ships to his current shows on BBC Radio 2. He is very funny and the singers and live band get through 100 songs. If the show is in your area go see it. Had our photos with Tony after the show but unsure to include them in case of copyrights (His not mine!).

- Visit to Steve Reed's **travel forum** at Painshill Landscape Gardens. As usual a fine selection of operators to discuss ideas with.

- **Tina the Musical** at the Aldwych Theatre by coach with Marilyn and 48 HADARA members. A new cast and a truly wonderful musical.

Jim Silvester

RECENT/ UPCOMING MEETINGS FOR KENT BRANCH

Friday 24th May

Visit Guildford and
RHS Garden Wisley

Monday 1st July

Port of Dover
Fred.Olsen *Boudicca*
(NB now cancelled)

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

I am very happy to say that since last year things with us are certainly flourishing.

We welcomed Ray Haworth and Hazel Jones to the committee, and now John Flynn since the AGM.

There's plenty of enthusiasm and ideas floating around which we are moving forward with and familiarisation trips and holidays have already been planned by our existing stalwarts Pam and Bob. I would like to thank them for all the work they put in planning, contacting people and negotiating the best prices for us.

Our next trip is to Lancashire on the 1st November 2019 for 2 nights (3 days) and includes

accommodation with breakfast & dinner each day, entrance to Samlesbury Hall, Cruise with Cream Tea from Barton Grange Garden Centre, visit to Oswaldtwistle Mill with Soup & Sandwich Lunch followed by a guided tour, visit to Carnforth Station and Tour of Leighton Hall. All of this for just £119.00 per person sharing a twin/double room. Supplements will apply for sole occupancy rooms and non-AGTO members. Please contact Bob Walker or Pam Wharton for more information. Members from other branches would be most welcome.

We continue to have regular meetings sharing ideas etc and we just need a huge wave of enthusiasm

and action from our Northern Branch members.

The National AGM weekend was excellent, meeting new contacts and renewing long standing associates and friends and I congratulate the organising team.

I also am very impressed with the new look members handbook. It's clear, easy to read, full of information, modern and bright. We've had some great reports from our members' trips, you'll note that we may be the smallest branch but we still have lots going on!

So good wishes to you all, have a great summer.

Jenny Robinson

A JOURNEY TO THE ITALIAN RIVIERA

In April 2019, my group and I travelled from Manchester to Genoa with EasyJet, where we were met by minibuses for the journey to Hotel Monte Rosa in Chiavari, where we stayed for seven nights. It is a very pleasant, uncommercial seaside town. A street market selling fruit and vegetables is open every day and also clothes on Fridays.



We found a very nice café which was frequented by locals and which also catered for two of our party who need a gluten free diet. Whilst there, a local lady approached us to assist with translating the menu. She advised us to go to Hotel Vis a Vis in nearby Sestri Levante where there is a rooftop terrace with amazing 360° views. The next day, we duly found our way by train and located the Vis a

Vis hotel. The staff were so helpful that they sent a car to the base of the hill for those in our party who were having difficulty with the climb. As predicted, the view was amazing over the town and the bay. For those whose Italian is like mine, non-existent, the name Sestri Levante means quiet beach.

On the third day we hired mini buses which took us to the region's famous resort of Portofino. Unfortunately, the weather was dull and raining, so we did not see it at its best. Along this coast the hills run down to the sea in very deep, steep sided valleys to small coves of varying sizes. Portofino is no exception and the harbour is very small. From there we went to Santa Margherita, along the coast, where

there is more promenade. It was also less expensive for lunch and coffee! The neighbouring town of Rapallo had suffered considerable damage from winter storms and repairs were taking place.

Day four was spent in Chiavari, viewing the cathedral and finding a very nice coffee and pastry shop.

On day five, we ventured to the 'Cinque Terre', which involved changing trains. We went first to the furthest village, Riomaggiore. This is a narrow valley, running down steeply to a minute cove where there are a few cafes squeezed alongside the slipway. Later, we boarded the train again and alighted at Venazza. Venazza is a much larger, wider town with many shops and cafes. Some of us had a lunch of chips in a cone from the Chinese chippy! This area is very popular with serious walkers who try to reach all the towns in one day.

On our last day, we visited Comogli, which again involved changing trains. A larger town with two levels. One down on the harbour, reached by lift if required, and an upper level where there was a fruit and vegetable market in progress. The range and quality of the produce was excellent with some varieties we don't see here in England.

Many of these towns and villages were only accessible by boat until the railway was built in the 1930s. The local



trains were cheap and clean. Some of the platforms had high steps up or down and care was needed to get on and off, especially for less able travellers.

Our Hotel, The Monte Rosa, is family run and was comfortable and clean and the staff were very helpful and friendly. The food was excellent with a good choice at each meal.

Northern Branch



Spring Mystery Weekend

Following an early start the Spring Mystery got underway. None of the passengers (except myself and the driver, of course!) knew where we heading for the weekend.

Our first port of call was St Oswalds church, Hartlepool. On arrival the group were welcomed by our host, Jack, and given a brief history of the church, before the main event, Bell Ringing. A few decided that the spiral staircase was too much and escaped to the church hall for a brew. Once up in the tower our hosts explained the intricacies of bell ringing and what not to do! Then it was time to have a go. It was more strenuous than I expected, but fun.

Having used up all that energy, lunch beckoned in the church hall and a lovely spread it was too!

Back on the coach we headed further north with murmurings of Newcastle as our destination, but the mystery still remained!

Next up for the group was a visit to the National Glass Centre at Sunderland. We learnt how Benedict Biscop first brought glass making to Sunderland, and Britain, in the 7th Century AD to produce glass for the impressive windows at Bishopwearmouth Monastery and found out how the craftsmen of Sunderland went on to produce



some of the finest glass in the world for century after century. We witnessed the skill of the glass blower during a glass making and the techniques of the flame working demonstrations. All this was followed by afternoon tea in the restaurant.

We then left for our final station stop, The Grand Hotel, Seaburn, just a five-minute drive away from the Glass Centre. That fooled 'em!

With a swift check-in it was time to unwind before our drinks reception and evening meal.

Saturday dawned and the group were greeted by our Blue Badge guides for the day, Gwen and Tom Keating. As usual their narratives brought to life the area, its history and the people.

Leaving the hotel we passed by The Stadium of Light and crossed over the River Wear on the recently opened bridge into the city of Sunderland. Our first stop of the day was at the Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens. It combines a museum, art gallery, exhibition space and Winter Gardens to create a stunning visitor attraction in the

heart of the city centre with plenty to see within. It houses the largest collection of Lowry painting outside of The Lowry, Salford. The Art gallery was also hosting a collection of Leonardo Di Vinci drawings, but unfortunately for us all the tickets for the day had been pre-sold.

We boarded the coach once more for the short journey, back to Roker and a visit to St Andrews church to meet our host, Doug. The church had been specially opened for our visit and we were not disappointed.

Doug gave the group an excellent overview of its history and the treasures to be found inside, including William Morris carpets, Ernest Grimson furniture and the painted ceiling in the sanctuary depicting the creation of the sun and stars which is painted in 'egg-tempera'.

Sometimes known as 'the cathedral of the arts and crafts movement', St Andrew's Church, Roker, is of international importance. In the early 20th century when the seaside resort of Roker was growing, the need for a new church soon followed. Local wealthy shipyard owner John Priestman was the main benefactor and the church, designed by Edward Prior, was built in 1906 - 1907. A

handsome building constructed of grey magnesium limestone quarried locally at Marsden, it is 165 feet long with the east facing tower over 80 feet high. There is also a large impressive tapestry by Burne-Jones of the 'Adoration of the Magi' based on the Cologne legend. It is one of several copies produced. There are two magnificent stained glass windows in the church - the east window and the Lady Chapel windows.

Lunch was beckoning and it was decision time for the group, do I stay on the coach for a coastal drive to South Shields with Tom or take a cultural walking tour with Gwen along the Monkswearmouth side of the River Wear?

The walk was about 75 minutes and Gwen took us to and explained about the historical places and artwork along the trail.

Although the plan was for the coach to pick us up again, everyone decided to walk back to the hotel instead, which took about 30 minutes.

It had been dry all day but as soon as we set out for the hotel, yes you guessed it, a shower. It didn't dampen our resolve though and made good time back to base camp. We were even treated to a launch of



the Lifeboat.

Back at the hotel we said farewell to both Gwen and Tom, who had done a fantastic job throughout the day.

A little surprise for the group now was a cream tea in the restaurant, after which it was time to unwind before our drinks reception and evening meal.

L.S. Lowry used to stay at the hotel, and his room (now used for functions) is decorated with copies of his paintings. The staff kindly opened the room for us to have a look in.

On Sunday it was time to depart to our first mystery destination, Washington Old Hall. It is the ancestral home of George Washington, but it seems he wasn't really interested in where his roots lay. I suppose he had a few more things on his mind than that.

The hall is not massive, but it is interesting and the staff very knowledgeable. The gardens are also worth a visit. A visit to Holy Trinity Church, known as The Church on the Hill, is also worth a look in.

During our visit I received a phone call from our next stop, the Middlesbrough Transporter Bridge, telling me that our pre-booked visit and activity wouldn't be going ahead, due to us being gazumped by the Bungee Club UK. The gentleman was only a volunteer at the visitor centre and he was none too happy either.

I had booked the Bridge Tour via Middlesbrough Council, but had received no communication from them about this! Needless to say a letter of un-chuffedness was sent to the council when I got home.

What to do now? After a short conflagration with the driver we decided to head for Thirsk and The World of James Herriot attraction. A quick call to them to make sure all would be OK for our visit and the mystery was back on track.

As we were passing reasonably near to the Transporter Bridge, we decided to call in and at least have a closer look at it and the Bungee jumpers.

The group were disappointed about the cancellation as they were looking forward to going up top on the bridge and also going across on the gondola.

Back on the road we headed towards home with a final mystery stop at Thirsk.

What a great visit the World of James Herriot is, with all enjoying it. The attraction covers the life and books of the 20th century veterinarian and author James Herriot within the



Yorkshire Dales. I suppose with the windy and damp conditions, indoors was probably better than on the top of a bridge!

The Mystery Tour had been based, in the main, on the familiarisation visit the Northern branch had held in Sunderland last year. I would like to thank everyone, especially Tom, Gwen and Caroline Purvis (Grand Hotel) who helped put together a great package once again.

With the mystery solved, all that was left to do was say farewell to the group after a great weekend.

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

It is now a busy time of year for Group Organisers, taking our groups on days out and breaks away, hopefully reaping the benefits of our winter planning. I have just returned from taking a group on an HF walking holiday in Shropshire, where the weather had an unseasonal week of fairly significant snow and we felt we were on a mountain expedition at times!

Our Southern Branch Committee had two Associate members. The very sad part of the news is that, as many of you already know, David Lote died shortly after his attendance at our meeting at Hampton Court, hosted by our other Associate, Lesley Terrell. Just after our next meeting at Leonardslee, Lesley retired from her post at Historic Royal Palaces and Lesley and her husband have now moved down to Devon. We were very grateful for

all the support they both gave to our branch.

The recent Go Travel Trade Show at Kempton Park was a successful one. I helped on the AGTO stand and the day brought in a very pleasing number of new members for us. Our own branch meeting at Leonardslee Gardens in April was also enjoyed by members. We had an excellent turn out of approximately 40 attending which was most encouraging. It was good to be amongst one of the earliest groups to experience its re-opening and see all the work that has been carried out.

Our next meeting is at RHS Wisley on Wednesday 3rd July, an opportunity to see their new welcome building and plant centre and have a guided tour of their gardens after our meeting. The visit will include a two-course lunch with wine in the private Terrace Room, followed by a guided

tour. As we have recently received a compensation payment from our bank, the committee decided the branch would subsidise the cost of the day for members, making this £20 for members with non-members or guests paying £26. If you would like to join us, please contact Jackie Ring, our Branch Secretary, for a booking form. I look forward to seeing a great turn out of members again for what promises to be a special day.

Sue Povey, S1972



Tudor Stories at Hampton Court Palace

As you wander through the Tudor kitchens, courtyards, gardens and state apartments you can be transported back to the times of King Henry VIII and King William III.



The audio guide informs you of the stories of palace life but better still you can get involved in one of the re-enactments.

I joined the Queen Anne's favourite tour and was guided through the baroque part of the palace by the duchess of Marlborough and Mrs Hill (The Queen's dresser). They both felt that they were the Queen's favourite and had been personally selected to arrange the décor of the palace. Whilst one was out of the room the other tried to gain your favour and to discredit the other. They had very differing ideas on the décor and tried to draw you in to agreeing with them.

On a previous visit I bumped into King Henry VIII and his entourage. My sister was delighted to be introduced to the King as one of his new courtiers.

There is so much to explore that I would advise you



to spend a whole day there. There are 60 acres of spectacular formal gardens and 750 acres of parkland.

The gardens contain the world's oldest maze, a record-breaking grape vine, three national plant collections, over one million flowering bulbs, and a huge variety of wildlife, including the descendants of Henry VIII's deer herd.

Some of our members found the drinking fountain in the courtyard.

Next year there will be celebrations to commemorate 500 years since Henry VIII met Francis I at what came to be known as The Field of the Cloth of Gold. Special events will be taking place, including Tudor food,

jousting, etc.

To find out details of group visits please see hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/visit/group-visits.

Hampton Court Palace is also home to the Royal School of Needlework. A member highly recommended the tour of the school. The tour is not included in the fee for entry to the Palace. For further information and tour fees visit www.royal-needlework.org.uk/events-exhibitions.

The Historic Royal Palaces premises also include The Tower of London, Banqueting House, Kew Palace, Kensington Palace and Hillsborough Castle. For further information visit the HRP website www.hrp.org.uk.

Anne Barnes S2023



Leonardslee Gardens

Just like the novel, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, this garden had been neglected for over ten years, prior to

its purchase by Penny Streeter OBE.

The wildlife, plants and insects had flourished undisturbed. Today the gardens are home to foxes, rabbits, badgers, weasels, stoats, shrews, voles, deer and wallabies. Green woodpeckers, heron, kingfishers, wild mandarin ducks, nuthatches and tree creepers are often spotted.

Ray Abrahams, the Head Gardener gave us a very interesting introduction to the garden's history, and how the plants were collected during the Victorian era by Sir Edmund Loder when he created the gardens.

Ray's first job as a teenager was for Sir Eric Savill at his gardens in Windsor Great Park, where he learnt about the plants that rich Victorians bought into their gardens from around the world, how and why they were hunted, and the lengths some collectors went to, to get a specimen themselves. Since then he has gained a lot of experience around the world renovating woodland gardens.

He said that during the renovation work, as they cleared large areas and let sunlight in for the first time in years, they have discovered champion trees, and also rare hybrid plants, some of which are on the extinction list and no longer surviving in the wild. Ray conveyed his passion for conservation and protection of the rare plants and is working in partnership with Kew gardens to preserve them.

In addition to the gardens, there is the Grade II listed Mansion House where afternoon tea is served and a restaurant, the Doll's House exhibition and a new vineyard.

Spring is a good time to visit for the array of colour, in May for the azalea and rhododendron, but also later in the year for autumn colours.

Some of us bumped into Adam Streeter. He was very welcoming and pleased that we visited. He explained some of the background of how hard they have all worked to get the gardens ready for opening. Many changes had been made to renovate derelict buildings and convert them into shops and cafes. He acknowledged that some teething problems need to be worked on but the venue had only been open for four days before our visit. Adam is working on access for disabled visitors to the bottom of the garden which is down a very steep slope and is not currently suitable for mobility scooters and people with low fitness levels. Other areas of Leonardslee are accessible see www.leonardsleegardens.co.uk/accessibility.

Adam is in the process of developing a map of the grounds for visitors. The map was not available for us on the day so it was a bit of an adventure trying to find our way around the garden.

They are looking to provide refreshments down by the lake, currently there is no opportunity for a cup of tea before you start the climb back up the hill.

They are also planning special events which would draw people into the gardens throughout the year, not just spring and autumn, such as music and opera, with Proms concerts already arranged for September and a number of events connected to their wine business. Details will be on their website as they arrange these.

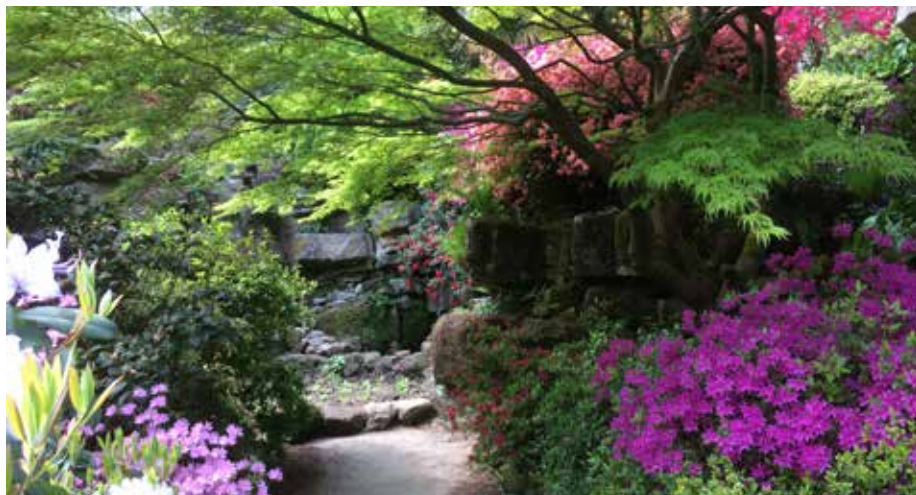
Be aware that you need to warn your groups that Leonardslee is a cash-free zone. There is an outlet at reception and the Stable Block gift shop that can accept cash and you will be given a card that can be used throughout Leonardslee. Simply return your card at the end of the



day to receive a cash refund of any remaining money.

Make sure you have plenty of room in your car or coach for the plants, ornaments and gifts you can purchase from the shops and nursery.

Anne Barnes, S2023



Mini Plant Tour

A guided tour of BMW Group's Mini Plant at Cowley, on the outskirts of Oxford, is an interesting and fascinating look behind the scenes at how this iconic British car is made. Hundreds of new Minis leave the line every day – in fact, one every 67 seconds.

Three UK plants have each had a part to play in the manufacture of the Mini, but it's in their plant at Cowley where the body pressings, sub-assemblies and engines all come together, and the car is painted and finished, ready for delivery.

My U3A group was divided into smaller groups, given full safety briefings and donned hi-viz jackets before we entered this live factory environment. A small mini-bus

of them quite heavy, and welded them together – and a car shape started to become recognisable. Automated vehicles travelled along designated routes to supply the assembly line with more parts, so we had to be careful where we walked – and sometimes a few sparks flew. It was quite mesmerising. Occasionally a human was seen!

Visitors are not allowed into the paint shop as this has to be a completely dust free zone. So the next part of the tour was to see the areas where they finish off the cars – all to each customer's individual specification. Some had sun roofs, different types of seats, left- or right-hand drive, and of course different colours – whatever the customer wants. Every engine is switched on and checked before the car is driven off the line – and off to meet their new owner.

A small museum has older models of the car on display – a few 'I used to have one of those!' were heard. The site has 100 years of automotive manufacturing history, and a very interesting video showed how cars used to be made here – plus iconic races and celebrities who owned a Mini.

This was a really interesting tour – so different from the usual visit to a museum where you only see how things used to be. The retired

engineers in our groups were especially interested to see how things have changed. Some of the guides were retired employees and all were informative, explaining the process and answering questions along the way.



(pun not intended!) took us to the different departments around the site. The first part of the plant we went round was where rows of robots lifted different body parts, some

Being a factory environment, there was no café available, unless you book an additional snacks package, so we stopped off at a nearby garden centre for an early lunch before our tour which was at 1pm. We spent a good three and a half hours at the plant.

There is quite a bit of slow walking involved, and standing listening, and the tour is not really suitable for wheelchair users, but some of my group had sticks and managed, albeit slowly. Also, anyone with a pacemaker fitted cannot go into the first part of the plant, but were able to watch a video of this until they rejoined the group. If in doubt, it's best to check with Mini before you book for these people – they were very helpful.

I'd booked four private tours to cover the full coach-load who wanted to go. I didn't pay until I was sure of getting the numbers, in spite of them asking for the money within a week of the provisional booking. We did unfortunately have a date change due to 'prototype protocol' as they closed the whole site to the public because they were testing a new model, which they weren't allowed to tell us about – but we guessed it was likely to be something electric.

Further information is on - www.visit-mini.com/visitmini - but make sure you are reading about the correct location - if the price is in euros, then the visit will be in Germany!

Jackie Ring S2221



Day Trip on the Waverley



Our groups did a combined trip last September on one of the world's greatest historic ships, The Waverley, which is the last sea-going paddle steamer in the world. It is magnificently restored with towering funnels, timber decks and gleaming varnish and brass. You can see and hear the mighty steam engines as they propel the paddles that take the Waverley majestically down the river Thames from Tower Hill to Southend. The ship holds 700 passengers with seating inside / outside for all + bars, dining room and tea room. The ship left at 10.00am, returning at 7.30pm. Tower Bridge opened for us which was wonderful to witness as was seeing all the lights along the river when it got dark on our return trip.

There are not many dates available for this route and we were so lucky with the weather which was absolutely perfect being hot, sunny and dry. The



only drawback was that we didn't get long ashore but even so the majority of us managed the 1.34 mile walk along Southend pier warranting the traditional fish and chips before taking the pier train back.

I can highly recommend this trip.

Beryl Edwards, Wayfairer S2335
Sylvia Bliss, WOFA S2408



Southern Branch's Summer Meeting

11.00am, Wednesday 3rd July | RHS Gardens, Wisley GU23 6QB

Coffee/tea will be served from 10.30am

The meeting will be followed by a two-course lunch with wine in the private Terrace Room and a guided tour of the gardens. This will be the opportunity to see Wisley's new welcome building and plant centre which is opening in the spring.

The cost to members of this visit is £20 and non-

members/guests is £26. Their Groups Guide is available to view at www.rhs.org.uk/groups/documents/rhs-groups-guide.pdf

Please contact Jackie Ring, Southern Branch Secretary, for further information and a booking form.

Tel: 01483 824450 Email: ring_jackie@yahoo.co.uk

AGTO Southern Branch Committee

Sue Povey - Chairman

Anne Barnes - Treasurer

Jackie Ring - Secretary

Pat Lake, Sylvia Adams - Committee Members

Western Branch's Chairman's Message

It has been a busy few months since Christmas for the Western Branch Committee members. The South West Travel Show involved Committee members and their friends at Llongleat swiftly followed by the National Showcase and AGM weekend.

While it is great to see the Committee members attending these events, it would be even nicer to see some of our Western members attending events. As GTOs we have considerable advantages and offers extended to us in the way of fam. visits at very reasonable prices, and,

taking into account the included costs for meals (as specified in individual fam details), refreshments and tours, it is a wonderful way to go and see the beautiful buildings and countryside around us.

Roger Sims W2388

AGTO National AGM, Showcase & Branch Meeting

Eastwood Hall was an excellent venue for the Annual Showcase weekend, AGTO AGM and Western Branch Spring meeting. It was a weekend packed with activities, food and drink, excellent entertainment and plenty of opportunities to chat to exhibitors.

The dinner on Friday was a chance for Western Members (sadly only Committee members and their partners had booked to attend the weekend) to catch up and there was much chatter and hilarity during and after the meal.

Saturday morning was spent browsing the exhibition with a refreshing number of new exhibitors as well as many friendly faces from long-term Associate Members. Some of the group offers are very tempting as well as the goodies of sweets, cakes, pens, toy animals, bookmarks and calendars (although a 2020 planner would have been more apposite for me, as my 2019 calendar is full).

Three coach parties then assembled for their pre-selected afternoon fam. tour. Some of our Western members had opted for a trip with Princess River Cruises on the River Trent and a tour of Holme Pierrepont Hall; some attended the literary haunts of Newstead Abbey (Lord Byron) and DH Lawrence's Birthplace Museum but Roger and I took the Heroes and Villains tour with 'Robin Hood' as our guide.

Ezekial Bone (a charismatic individual) spends his life acting the role of Robin, and other characters, bringing to life the tales and folklore of the region. But the first stop wasn't anything to do with Robin Hood, the coach drove



to the impressive entrance to Woolaton Hall.

Our tour was based on the fact that Woolaton Hall was the location of the Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises*. Our guide at the hall was full of anecdotal tales of false cemeteries, the garden party, and the Bat Cave. Following the tour lunch was served and we left fully sated.

Next stop was a visit to the old centre of Nottingham and a guided walk to explore the area. Starting at the Contemporary Arts Centre, we walked inside the Pitcher and Piano. The original building was named High Pavement Chapel, a church converted into a bar. No

drinks for us, but a close view of the beautiful stained glass East window, designed by Philip Burne-Jones and William Morris. Then we walked up to St Mary the Virgin Church with links to Robin Hood, toured around the streets of the Lace Market area, and visited the National Justice Museum (a bit gruesome and a distinctly 'cold' feel for me!).

Arriving back at the hotel there was a relaxing hour before dinner with pre- and post-dinner entertainment courtesy of made tourism marketing.

On Sunday morning Western branch members gathered and held our Branch meeting, during which our Chairman, Roger, made a presentation to Phil and Heather Taylor in recognition of their long service to our branch Committee and Phil's retirement as Western Branch Chairman and the National Board Representative.

Following the Branch meetings the AGTO AGM took place. Wendy Hartley-Scarff, AGTO CEO, chaired the meeting and completed the agenda in a record time of 58 mins. There was no time for relaxing however as the additional GTO fam. departed early afternoon.

The first stop was Southwell Minster, where staff had laid on a lovely lunch (the caterers were a family firm who obviously delighted in home baking; Grandma was in

the kitchen, daughter serving tea and coffee, grandson topping up plates with additional sandwiches and cake!)

During lunch we were welcomed by one of the guides and given an insight into Southwell Minster and all that it has to offer.

Following lunch we were divided into groups for our tour of the Minster. In the Quire our guide informed us: "The clergy stalls include 'Wolsey's stall', he spent the last five years of his life here in Southwell" We saw the brass eagle lectern which was originally at Newstead Abbey. At the dissolution of the monasteries it was hidden in a lake for more than 250 years and given to the Minster in 1805.

Below the roof and above the great arch at the east end of the nave is Christus Rex, made of elm and oak and overlaid with burnished copper and gold leaf. A visit was also made to the Chapter House. There is a lot to see at the Minster and well worth a trip.

We also visited the Civil War Museum in Newark. From the outside it appears insignificant but once inside the displays are wonderful.

What a weekend !

Helen Sims 2150

RBL Outing to National Arboretum, Living Centre of Remembrance

On Sunday 16th December, 18 intrepid members and friends of Minchinhampton RBL braved the remains of storm Deirdre and boarded a coach for the two-hour journey to the National Centre of Remembrance for an illuminated night walk.

Arriving at the visitor centre we enjoyed a leisurely late lunch, Christmas style (first of the season for me!) and a glass of wine. There was time afterwards to wander around the shop and make a few purchases before we gathered to be ushered outside and be pointed in the right direction – along a path illuminated by burning torches.

A roughly circular illuminated route

took us around the central Armed Forces Memorial – set high on a mound and accessed by impressive flights of white steps. Both eerie and fascinating was the light show illuminating the sky from somewhere in the centre – of "Ack Ack" lights, which of course, I have only seen in films.

The path wound its way up and round some beautifully designed memorials, the RAF centenary memorial and Parachute regiment being particularly memorable. There were many memorials to the side that we couldn't see as only certain main ones were illuminated. Walking through woodland with hanging lights which changed colour, with bird song, coloured fountains of



water on the lake, dodging the rain drops, we stopped to look in awe at the monument to the Household regiment and one to Showmen – fairground workers who went to fight – a memorial depicted by a fairground carousel horse and twisted gilded poles, absolutely charming.

Finally we climbed the white steps to the Armed Forces Memorial whose walls have the same dimension as the dome of St Pauls, London. This awe inspiring monument has a slit in its outer wall, where at the 11th hour of the 11th month, sun light slips through the gap and across through a gap in the inner wall. The inner side of this gap is a powerful statue representing the Eternal Door. The statues in this inner sanctum are very powerful and thought provoking,

depicting the tragedy of war.

For a generation of recent servicemen to see the names of their colleagues lost during service to their country – Falklands, Iran, Afghanistan – is a sobering moment, one which I have no words to describe.

This wonderful place, all 150 acres of it, requires a further visit on a nice spring / summer day to explore it and all its wonderful images. And in 50 years time, when all the young trees, many of which are dedicated to individual service personnel, have grown to maturity, it will be truly magnificent!

*Cheryl Ritter
for Roger Sims 2388*



The Wales & Midlands Travel Club

After our visits to Chavenage in 2017, many of the group requested I book for a Christmas Lunch in December 2018.

Within a month of our 2017 visits the lunch was booked. In less than a month the trip was sold out with 11 months to go!

I had arranged with Caroline (manager & also the elder daughter of the owners David & Rona Lowsley-Williams) for the house to be decorated ready for Christmas. All was in place, menus & table details all sent & been confirmed with Joanna (Caroline's younger sister who looks after all the in house catering)).

Off we set on Friday 7th December, having reminded people to bring their own wine as Chavenage does not hold a licence to sell alcohol. They provide all the glasses needed for the drinks. One of the first people to book was Gareth, our driver of many years, who had been our driver on the previous year's trips! Please make sure you follow the directions given by Caroline otherwise you may find your coach stuck in a lane!

We arrived to find the house not decorated for Christmas, but the film crew getting the house ready for filming the last series of *Poldark* on the Monday! What a treat this was, instead of family portraits of Caroline's family up in the Great Hall – it was *Poldarks* & *Warleggans*!! Needless to say nobody minded, they were happy to hear about what was happening the following week.



When watching the *Poldark* series on TV you see Poldark riding along the Cornish coast & you then think Trenwith House (actually Chavenage House) must be in Cornwall – no it is about two miles north west of Tetbury Gloucestershire, which is over 150 miles away!

The group were taken through to the Edwardian Ballroom/dining room and everyone found the table allocated to them. Drinking commenced! Caroline came and joined the group and gave information & details relating to Chavenage. She has some excellent tales to tell and people were thoroughly enjoying her talk. Lunch was then served; the food once again was excellent. After lunch Caroline continued with her chat

with lots of anecdotes about filming that has taken place at Chavenage.

When everyone had finished & were ready to leave, we had time to purchase guide books & postcards of Chavenage, also some home made jams & chutneys.

Before we left, we had already made a booking for next December 2019. I think that says it all. If you are looking for somewhere a bit different to take your group for a Christmas lunch, then please get in contact with Caroline – if you want Caroline's phone number or email address then please get in contact with me. I recommend you make a recce so you know the correct way to advise your coach driver – do NOT follow

the SAT NAV, follow the directions given by Caroline.

Chavenage is a wonderful Elizabethan House and has been used as a location for many other TV shows & films, such as *Poirot*, *Lark Rise to Candleford* and *The House of Elliott*.

Thanks again to all the family at Chavenage for another wonderful visit & photographs with this report by kind permission of Chavenage House.

Also thanks to Mainline Coaches (5869) and especially our driver Gareth.

Heather Taylor, 1008

South West Travel Show

Many thanks to Western Branch Committee members and friends who took time to help with manning the AGTO stand at the South West Travel Show Exhibition on Saturday 16th February at Longleat. David Steele was delighted that we managed to sign up 10 new GTOs, not all for Western Branch, and encourage new Associate Members to join AGTO.

The location at Longleat proved very popular and the exhibitors seemed to be doing very well, lots of smiling faces, positive handshaking and an air of excitement as GTOs found new activities and made new contacts.

The free access to Longleat House and the Safari Park for GTOs were popular post-exhibition activities and



Helen and I took advantage of both of them, however we avoided the monkey enclosure to ensure that we left the park with windscreen wipers and car aerial intact!

Longleat is noted for its Pride of Lions and we were not disappointed, they really are magnificent.

Roger Sims 2338

AGTO Western Branch Committee

Roger Sims - Chairman

Martin Gibson - Treasurer

Gill Brooker - Secretary

Helen Sims, Andy Holmes and Martin Hay - Committee Members

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
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 CANCELLED	Martin Hay (01202 027559) martinhay@gocruise.co.uk
3rd July	Southern	Branch Meeting and Visit, RHS Wisley Gardens	Jackie Ring (01483 824450) ring_jackie@yahoo.co.uk
End of July	National	Deadline for #4 AGTO magazine copy	Branch Chair or Magazine coordinator
27-29th Sept	Western	AGM Weekend - Salisbury & surrounding area	Martin Gibson mgibson.gts@talktalk.net
1st-4th 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 jamesilvester600@msn.com
4th-6th Nov	National	World Travel Market, Excel, London	www.london.wtm.co.uk



Photo credits: Ethan Robertson; Patrick Fore; Annie Spratt; Neil Fedorowycz; Unsplash; RHS Wisley, Carol Sheppard; RHS, Georgi Mabee; RHS, Joanna Kossak; RHS, Jonty Wilde; RHS, Sarah Mercer; Mirth, Marvel & Maud; Royal Albert Hall; AGTO; Stuart Render; Branch members.

Nottinghamshire hosts successful AGTO



Take Robin Hood, Lord Byron and DH Lawrence, add in a travel trade exhibition and a gala dinner, and mix liberally with some superb networking opportunities with travel trade professionals and the chance to catch up with friends and you have all the ingredients for this year's AGTO Showcase Weekend.

Held at Eastwood Hall near Nottingham in February, the Showcase Weekend gave members a wonderful opportunity to find out more about group-friendly attractions, destinations and experiences in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

A key element of the weekend itinerary was the programme of familiarisation trips. On the Saturday one group headed off to discover two family homes; the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum in Eastwood, and Newstead Abbey, famous for its association with the poet, Byron. A second group enjoyed a cruise on the River Trent with Princess Cruises, followed by a visit to the impressive Holme Pierrepont Hall, a fascinating Tudor house built in 1500 by Sir William Pierrepont and still lived in by his descendants.

A third group, with 'Robin Hood', aka 'Ezekial Bone', aka Ade Andrews, acting as tour guide, headed off to see Nottingham's famous Wollaton Hall, an Elizabethan country house of the 1580s, to find out more about the filming of the 2012 Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises*, where the hall doubled as Wayne Manor. Tour guide Robin then led the group on a walk around the city's historic Lace Quarter and into the National Justice Museum.



Showcase & AGM – February 2019

On the final day a fourth fam took members to see the imposing Southwell Minster, and to visit the National Civil War Centre in Newark, one of England's classic market towns.

On the Saturday morning the popular Associates Trade Exhibition gave members the opportunity to find out more about visitor attractions, destinations and suppliers. It also gave Associate members the chance find out from GTOs what sort of tours and experiences they were looking for.

Commenting on the event, Wendy Hartley-Scarff, AGTO chief executive, says: "The Showcase Weekend is a key event in the AGTO calendar, and a key benefit of AGTO membership, bringing together GTOs from our many regional groups. The itinerary is designed to give them the opportunity to talk to other GTOs and suppliers in a relaxed environment, to share ideas of what worked and what didn't and to go away with inspiration for day trips and holidays for the year ahead.

"I'd like to thank Visit Nottinghamshire, Newark and Sherwood District Council, English Heritage, and the National Garden Scheme, and our sponsors South Quay Travel & Leisure, Cruise & Maritime Voyages, Historic Royal Palaces and Made Tourism Marketing for their magnificent support. This was my first Showcase Weekend since becoming chief executive and I'm already looking at ways to make the 2020 event even more beneficial for GTOs and our Associate members."



Theatre Tip

Carlie Newman reviews the Playhouse production of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF is a super musical with lots of well-known songs and a story based on the life of Jewish villagers in Ukraine in the early 1900s. If it's given a good production, then this musical gives us something extra – a real emotional involvement. At the Playhouse this virtually immersive presentation is not just good, but superb.

The Playhouse theatre has been transformed into the fictional village of Anatekva. There are wall hangings and lanterns around the wooden sides of the auditorium and the little houses on stage come out into the audience. A path winds its way through the centre.

The story focuses on the poor milkman Tevye (Andy Nyman) who lives with his wife Golde (Judy Kuhn) and their five daughters. He just about scratches a living, but has to contend with a variety of disasters. It starts with his horse which goes lame, leaving Tevye to pull the heavy cart. But his main troubles are caused by the actions of his daughters, who, individually, wish to marry men of their own choosing. It is against tradition – one of the main themes of the show and one which Tevye and the other older Jewish characters continually reference – which states that marriages should be arranged by their parents, generally through the services of the Matchmaker, in this case, Yente (an amusing Louise Gold). Tevye has to think up imaginative scenarios to convince his wife to let his daughters have their own way – but only up to a point. He never comes to terms with one of them.

Although the musical deals with the troubles of a long time ago and the issue of anti-Semitism rears its ugly head, it is, unfortunately, coming to the fore today in our own society.

Under director Trevor Nunn's expert direction, the musical carefully juxtaposes funny and lively musical moments with more poignant ones.

Based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem, this particular production began life at the Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre. Music, provided by an 8-piece band, is of consistently good quality and produces glorious sounds



for the score by Jerry Brock and lyrics by Sheldon Harnick. The choreography based on Jerome Robbins' original and directed by choreographer Matt Cole, is exciting with the famous bottles on the head dance performed faultlessly.

Tevye and Golde's five daughters are well-depicted here, with each one showing their own character. They are carefully delineated and beautifully presented by the five actresses, Molly Osbourne as Tzeitel, Harriet Bunton as Hodel, Nicola Brown as Chava, and a group of youngsters as the two youngest. Judy Kuhn is exactly right as the milkman's long-suffering wife, Golde. She puts real feeling into her special song replying to Tevye's question, she sings "Do You Love Me?" alongside him and as she does, we see how their long marriage has worked. As for Tevye himself...Andy Nyman does not have the charisma of Topol, the original Milkman in London in 1967, but his is an altogether less joyful interpretation. He appears to have a personal link to God and consults him constantly before speaking directly to the audience. The rest of the large cast are all just right for even the smallest part, with some excellent singing from Stewart Clarke as Perchik.

Maria Friedman will take over the role of Golde and Anita Dobson will play Yente from 18 June. The rest of the cast will remain the same.

The production does not only give us a full social scene, but it is also an example of physical theatre with its thrusting stage and connection with the audience. Lighting and sound production enhance our experience.

You may enter the auditorium humming, "If I were a rich man," but you will go out with a far more all-round view of life in the small village, how the people lived and in particular the story of Tevye, a poor man with a rich family life.

Rating: *****

Fiddler on the Roof, Playhouse Theatre, London until 28 September 2019. Box office: 0844 871 7631)

THE LAST WORD... there are things a GTO knows!

In February 2002, responding to a question at a U.S. Department of Defence news briefing about the lack of evidence linking the government of Iraq with the supply of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups, United States Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld said: "There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know."

It's hard to disagree, but fast forward to 2019 and as I know all too well, in the world of coach tourism there are indeed things that we know we don't know

For GTOs, planning a trip or a tour requires research, finding out what

tours are available, and what the prices are. A quick trawl through the websites of many visitor attractions reveals a huge disparity in the quality and amount of this vital information. Sometimes the information is buried deep in the website, requiring the skills of Miss Marple to find out what you need to know. It really shouldn't be like this. GTOs, of course, are in a great position to do something about it.

At the British Tourism & Travel Show at the NEC in March our exhibition stand was busy with GTOs coming to find out what AGTO can do for them. Many of those GTOs weren't members but had heard about us and wanted to find out more. In turn, I took the opportunity to ask them what action they had taken to encourage visitor attractions, not only to improve the quality of their information for groups, but also to look at introducing new and different experiences. I wanted to find out if GTOs realise they have the power to really influence visitor attractions.

The answers I received surprised me. A couple of existing members of AGTO told me that they'd read my comments earlier in the year and felt newly empowered to question visitor attractions about what they were doing to step beyond the traditional

tour and tea package. Another GTO told me that as a result of asking the question they'd been able to put together a behind-the-scenes tour of a country house, with the owner delighted to do a meet and greet. I hope the GTOs noticed the big smile on my face.

It's a topic I have no doubt I'll be returning to again in the months to come. In the meantime, it does seem that the days of simply accepting the group tour that's offered you, without asking the question – That's great, but what else can you do to give our group something special, and a really memorable experience? – are well and truly numbered.

GTOs have a huge amount of experience. Are visitor attractions listening to GTOs? If not, why not?

Donald Rumsfeld was probably right of course. There are undoubtedly things we don't know we don't know. But as we look ahead to our summer and autumn trips, encouraging visitor attractions to take a closer look at their group offers can only bring benefits, both to them and to GTOs. That, of course, is something we do know!

Wendy Hartley-Scarff,
CEO, AGTO



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