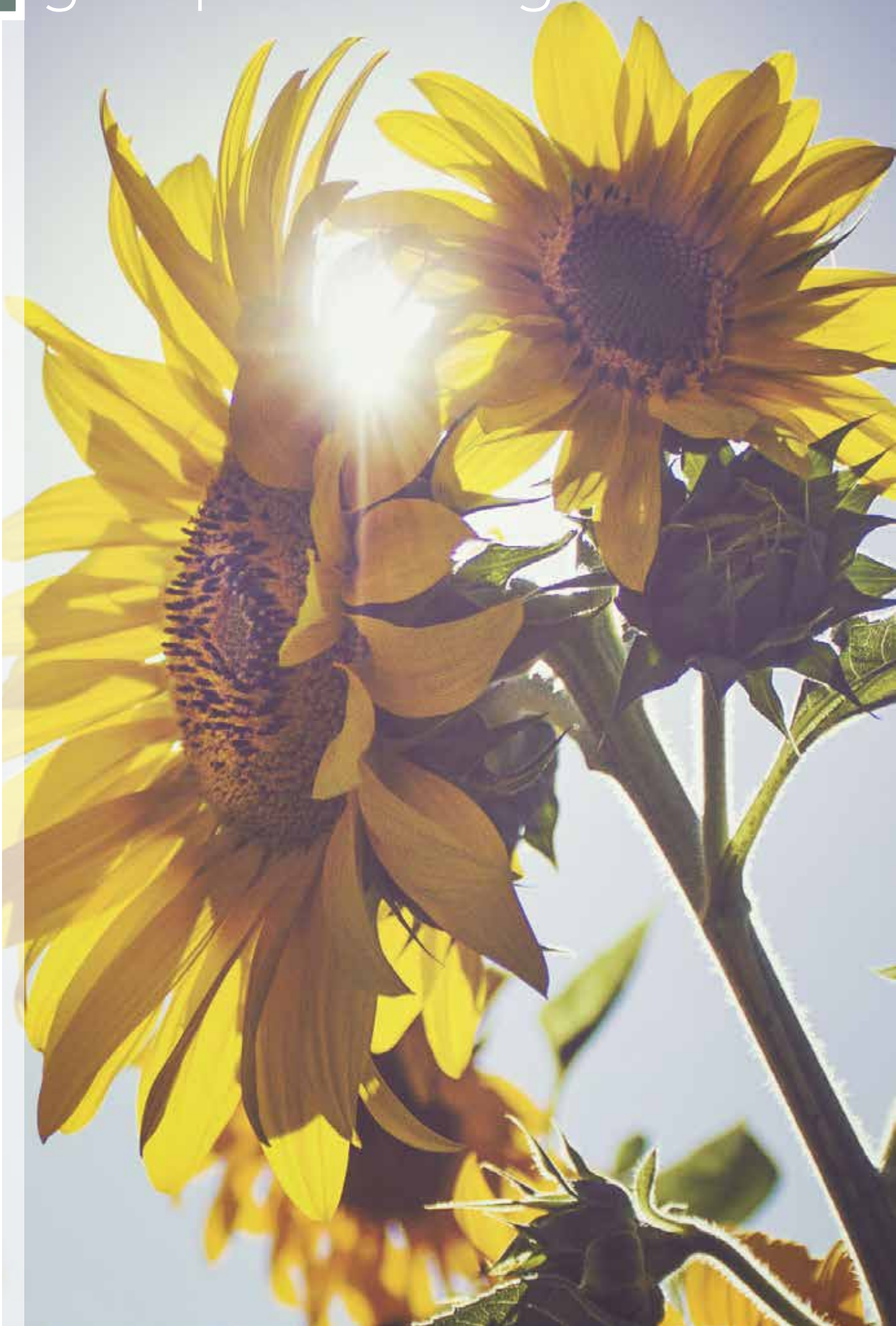


AG  
TO

association of  
group travel organisers

MAGAZINE

issue 4 | August 2019







# WELCOME

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**Welcome to issue 4 of the AGTO Magazine and what a bumper packed issue we have for you!**

New to this issue is the featured FAM trips giving details of some great trips that our Associates have put together for you to try and test the products offered, a great way to find new ideas and to try before you buy. This issue is packed with Branch Reports of some amazing trips from GTOs, together with National Updates. Our Guest Columnist this issue is Harold Burke, from the UK Holiday Group.

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 contact your branch committee members to see where you should send your relevant information.

Don't forget your feedback is always welcome on what you want to see or feature - this is YOUR Magazine.

## **Contact us:**

AGTO, Unit 19, Omega Business Village,  
Thurston Road, Northallerton, DL6 2NJ  
020 8253 4505  
[agto@agto.co.uk](mailto:agto@agto.co.uk)

**Visit our website:** [www.agto.co.uk](http://www.agto.co.uk)

## **Connect with us:**



[facebook.com/agto](https://facebook.com/agto)



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

# National News Update

In the latest national AGTO news update there are new dates for your diary, new names to welcome to the Board, a new location for a popular trade show and a new video that features members.

## 2020 AGTO Showcase Weekend

We start with news that the 2020 AGTO Showcase Weekend will take place over the weekend of 21 to 23 February at the magnificent Ettington Chase in Stratford-upon-Avon. A full programme of familiarisation trips, entertainment and, of course, the Showcase Exhibition, is being finalised, including the AGM on the Sunday morning. Full details are enclosed so make sure the dates are in your diary and you book your place soon.

## New faces on the AGTO Board

We have appointed four new directors as we move forward to further strengthen membership and travel trade engagement. Lynne Cooper is group travel trade manager with New Lanark Mills World Heritage Site. Joanna Freeman is marketing and social media executive with UK Parliament (the Houses of Parliament). Helen Goggin is sales manager at national coach holiday operator Alfa Travel and Elizabeth Mounser is proprietor of Yorkshire-based E. M. Consultancy. Stepping down from the Board are Martin Hay, proprietor of Go Cruise and Alex Jacobs, proprietor of Northern Secrets.

The new directors bring with them valuable experience. We welcome them and say thank you to Martin and Alex for their sterling support.

## Group Leisure & Travel Show moves to Milton Keynes

For 2019, the annual Group Leisure & Travel Show moves from the NEC to the Marshall Arena at Stadium MK, Milton Keynes, and is taking place on

10 October. AGTO will have a stand at the show, highlighting the benefits of membership and meeting GTO friends, old and new. As part of our move to raise the profile of AGTO across the group travel industry we are sponsoring 'The Excellence Award at the Group Leisure & Travel Awards that take place the evening before the show.

**Smile please!**

The new AGTO video promoting the benefits of membership is nearing completion. The video will appear on the AGTO website and be used for other promotional purposes. A shorter version will also be used on our exhibition stand.

**Feel like commenting?**

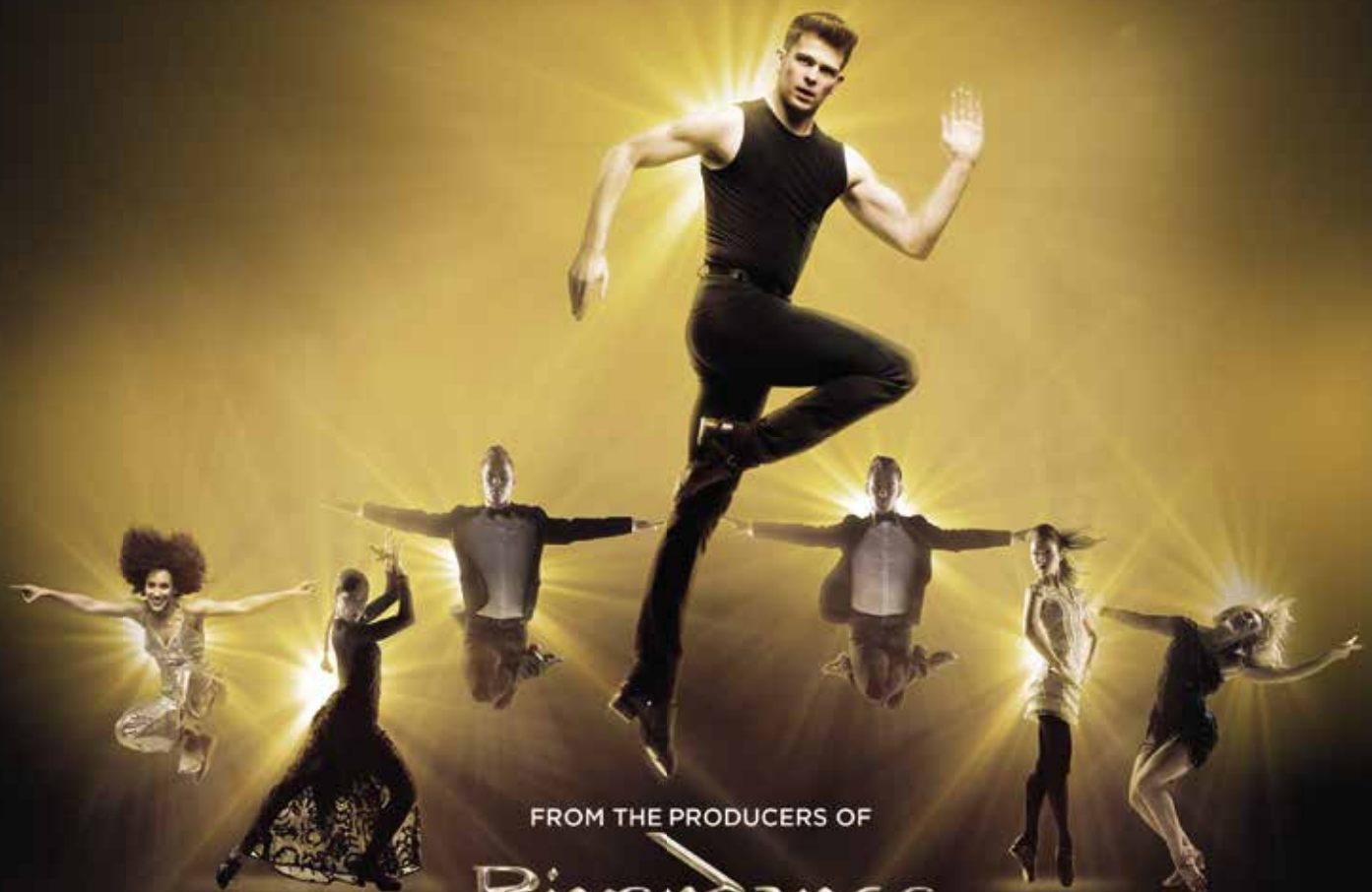
AGTO has increased its presence on social media by utilising the Discussion Group page on professional networking site LinkedIn. We already have Twitter and Facebook pages so if you're not already following us, then head over there now and click the buttons. We will be using more social media to promote AGTO, discuss issues and promote our members in the future.

**and finally...**

At the AGTO Showcase Weekend in Nottinghamshire in March, and again at the South West Group Travel Show at Longleat in February, Associate member Cruise & Maritime Voyages held a prize draw. The winners were Martin and Lorraine Gibson, Gill and Dave Brooker and Roger and Helen Sims from our Western Branch. You can read Helen's report in the Western Branch News. Who says it's not worth entering prize draws?



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# Guest Columnist: Harold Burke



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**Harold Burke, Sales Director at the UK Holiday Group, writes about why GTOs should be booking bonded trips and holidays.**

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I feel fortunate to have started in the travel industry back in the early 1970s, albeit by chance, and to have enjoyed a career which has always been focussed on providing holidays for groups.

At the time there were very few tour operators specialising in tailor-made holidays for groups, most of whom were travelling on trips arranged through their local coach company.

It's been fascinating to see our industry evolve from those early days whether it be from the demise of the Darby & Joan Clubs, 7-night duration holidays and local coach company programmes, to the rise of the U3A, short breaks and a wealth of specialist group tour operators, a number of which started up when the bus industry was deregulated back in the mid-80s.

Over the years well and lesser-known companies have come and gone which on occasions has resulted in some groups actually losing all of their money and this has always concerned me. Even with the

EC Directive on Package Holidays I am sad to say it is still possible that some companies may fail in the future without having adequate financial protection in place, despite claims to the contrary, as their schemes are generally unregulated.

From their inception I have always supported our industry representative bodies, like AGTO and the CTA, and try to share my thoughts through them about my overall concerns. My advice to group leaders is to make sure they always book their holidays through a reputable company and insist on seeing evidence of their bonding if it is not through a recognised body like ABTA or BAWTA.

One thing that has remained consistent throughout my career, although happily to a lesser extent nowadays, is that some businesses will inevitably fail. There are however regulations in place to ensure no group ever need lose out financially again, provided they never accept unsubstantiated brochure statements of financial security by an operator.

Of equal concern to me is the fact

that a number of group leaders continue to arrange their own transport and accommodation without any form of bonding in place which is in breach of the EC Directive on Package Holidays. Whilst I understand their thought process may be along the lines of their personal expertise and saving their members money this is simply a risk not worth taking. My worry is that one day a club or association will be left with a huge bill to pay having lost monies pre-paid for an accommodation or transport provider that fails prior to the holiday being taken.

It is therefore incumbent on all group leaders to undertake due diligence when booking a 'package holiday' to make sure the money they are collecting on behalf of their members is financially protected at all times.

That said we have a brilliant industry with lots of wonderful people and reputable companies that will continue to provide fantastic service and holidays for our hard working and valued group leaders without whom this great industry would not even exist!





Birmingham  
Museums

## HAVE YOU STARTED PLANNING YOUR TRIPS FOR CHRISTMAS YET?

*Birmingham Museums Trust has the perfect festive day out to remember!*

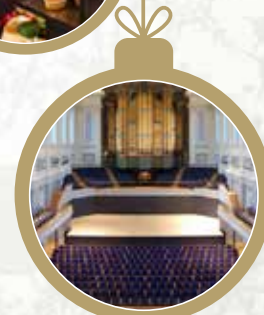
The Culture and Christmas in Birmingham tour includes:

- A guided tour of the Treasures of the Museum at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
- A Treasures of the Museum guide book
- A light lunch in the Edwardian Tearoom at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
- A Christmas performance at Town Hall or Symphony Hall\*
- Traditional Festive Afternoon Tea in the Edwardian Tearooms
- Time to visit the Frankfurt Christmas Market in Victoria Square

All for just £45 per person. This tour is available on selected dates in December only.

\*Venue dependent on the date of your visit.

To book or for more details, call 0121 348 8001 or email [groups@birminghammuseums.org.uk](mailto:groups@birminghammuseums.org.uk)



TSH photo credit: Mike Gutteridge

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The Castle Collection

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## 2020 brochure out now!

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# 2020 AGTO Showcase Weekend



**Get your diaries out and make a note of the date for the 2020 AGTO Showcase Weekend. There's an early bird price and booking forms are included with this issue of the AGTO magazine.**

The event will take place over the weekend of 21 to 23 February at Ettington Chase, a 4-star hotel, event and conference centre close to Stratford-upon-Avon.

The Showcase Weekend, one of the major annual events in the AGTO calendar, offers a unique opportunity for GTOs from across the country to network with many of the country's leading destinations, visitor attractions and travel trade suppliers. The weekend programme includes a travel trade exhibition, familiarisation trips and a black-tie gala dinner.

Commenting, Wendy Hartley-Scarff, AGTO chief executive, says, "The AGTO Showcase Weekend is a prestigious industry event. It brings together our GTO

and Associate members, offering unique networking opportunities in a relaxed and tranquil setting. We've chosen Stratford-upon-Avon not only to make it as easy as possible for members from across the UK to attend, but also because of the magnificent choice of visitor attractions in the area. Our 2019 Showcase Weekend, held at Eastwood Hall in Nottinghamshire, and including 'fam' trips to find out more about Robin Hood, D.H. Lawrence and Lord Byron, was very well received by members. We're building on that success to offer a first-class weekend in Stratford that will appeal to our members across the country."

For more information, go to [www.agto.co.uk](http://www.agto.co.uk)



Ettington Chase, location of the 2020 AGTO Showcase



Wotton Hall, 2019 AGTO Showcase trip



# 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.**

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## **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

### **A5993 Bristol Aero Collection Trust**

Step aboard Concorde and embark upon an exciting flight through history. From the earliest aeroplanes to space technology and the supersonic Concorde, Aerospace Bristol will take you on a fun, hands-on journey through more than a century of incredible aviation achievements. Your journey will take you through two world wars - exploring the vital role of aircraft in these global conflicts - through the drama and technological advances of the space race and on to the modern day, where you will discover the latest technologies of today's aerospace industry.

### **A5994 The Ticket Factory**

Launched in 2007 The Ticket Factory offers you a compelling alternative to other ticket agents by putting you at the heart of the ticket purchasing journey. We've got the customer service ethos, the experience and authority of more than 25 years as the UK's most successful venue box office for the NEC, Resorts World Arena and Arena Birmingham.

### **A5995 London Transport Museum**

Housed in the old Grade II-listed Flower Market

building in Covent Garden Piazza. London Transport Museum explores the story of London and its transport system over the last 200 years, highlighting the powerful link between transport and the growth of modern London, culture and society since 1800. We care for over 450,000 items - preserving, researching and acquiring objects to use in our galleries, exhibitions and other activities.

### **A5996 Macclesfield Silk Museum & Paradise Silk Mill**

From our ancient Egyptian Mummy to the working Silk Mill, Macclesfield's historic museums will engage you in the town's unique stories and valuable collections, taking you back to an industrial era that put the town on the map. Experience an exceptional tour of the mill learning about the Jacquard Looms and silk producing machinery, immerse yourself in the finest textiles, and find out about the travels of Marianne Brocklehurst - an intrepid, Victorian, female explorer.

### **A5997 Cosmos Tours & Avalon Waterways**

Want to see more of the world? Cruise down its legendary rivers with us. Our ships feature one-of-a-kind Panorama Suites, with the widest opening windows in river cruising, the industry's



only open-air balcony, and beds that face the spectacular scenery. Cosmos Tour Directors are with you every step of the way, quality-checked hotels in the right locations and a balance of inclusions and free time, make your 'wow' moments all over the world attainable.

**A5998 WICKED London**

WICKED tells the incredible untold story of an unlikely but profound friendship between two young women who first meet as sorcery students at Shiz University: the blonde and very popular Glinda and a misunderstood green girl named Elphaba. Following an encounter with The Wonderful Wizard, their friendship reaches a crossroads and their lives take very different paths. Glinda's unflinching desire for popularity sees her seduced by power while Elphaba's determination to remain true to herself, and to those around her, will have unexpected and shocking consequences for her future. Their extraordinary adventures in Oz will ultimately see them fulfil their destinies as Glinda The Good and the Wicked Witch of the West.

**A5999 Visit Nottinghamshire**

Nottingham is a city in central England's Midlands region. It's known for its role in the Robin Hood legend and for the hilltop Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, rebuilt many times since the medieval era. In the Lace Market area, once the centre of the world's lace industry, the Galleries of Justice Museum has crime-related exhibits. Wollaton Hall is an ornate Elizabethan mansion with gardens and a deer park.

**A6000 Newark & Sherwood District Council**

Newark and Sherwood is a local government district and is the largest district in Nottinghamshire. The district is predominantly rural, with some large forestry plantations, the ancient Sherwood Forest and the towns of Newark-on-Trent, Southwell and Ollerton. We are working closely with Visit Nottinghamshire to develop tourism to the area.

.....  
**GTO MEMBERS**

S2861      Ross Williams

# Potters Resort

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**A unique Five Star Holiday Village set on the beautiful Norfolk Coast.**  
The Number One choice for your Club or Group. Join together with your Group members this December and enjoy the Festive Season at Potters Resort on a designed for adult break.  
Offers apply to Groups of **10 adults** or more and the 11<sup>th</sup> adult will receive a **free place**!

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019**  
Brochure Price: £129  
Offer Price: **£89**

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019**  
Brochure Price: £129  
Offer Price: **£79**

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019**  
Brochure Price: £259  
Offer Price: **£129**

**A POTTERS BREAK INCLUDES:**

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- ✓ Full Board Meals
- ✓ Live Entertainment
- ✓ Sports & Activities

Prices are based on standard Bungalow Accommodation, higher grade rooms available at an additional supplement.  
Free places applicable to the above 2019 breaks only.  
Group Cancellation Protection Cover is compulsory on all Group Bookings and is charged at £5 per adult.

To book or for further details please call our friendly Group Sales Team on **0333 3207 502**  
and Quote **'AGTO-Festive19'**

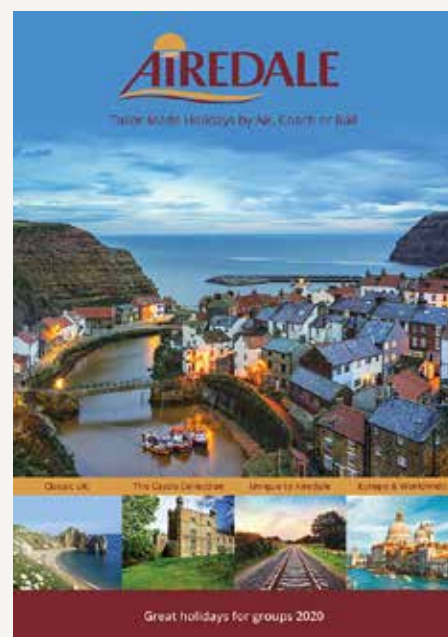


# Airedale Enters a New Era with More Than 40 New Tours

**Airedale Tours has launched its 2020 brochure and biggest ever programme to date, with more than 40 new tour ideas for groups in the UK, Europe and Worldwide.**

Managing Director Linda Schulz told us, "All the Airedale Classics are there, but we have enhanced our offering with an impressive selection of European tours by air, coach or rail. We've also added 'The Castle Collection' and a 'Unique to Airedale' selection of bespoke experiences not found anywhere else."

For your copy of Airedale's 2020 brochure call 01924 276135 or email [info@airedaletours.co.uk](mailto:info@airedaletours.co.uk)



## Wartime Christmas in the Silk Mill



Come and experience life in wartime Macclesfield and find out about the crucial role that the silk industry played in the Second World War. Macclesfield Silk Mill will be decorated to evoke the Christmas atmosphere the silk workers created in such challenging times. Your guided tour will be complimented with a display of festive-inspired objects from the archive.

For further information and to book your visit please call 01625 612045 or email [bookings@silkmacclesfield.org.uk](mailto:bookings@silkmacclesfield.org.uk)

## Blueprint Travel Media Launch new e-magazine

Blueprint Travel Media are always looking for new ways to keep Group Travel Organisers informed and engaged with the myriad of attractions and destinations across the UK and Ireland. Their team get many opportunities to meet and chat to GTOs throughout the year and one of the big topics that has come up in discussions is the gradual shift to digital media.

Nick Bevan, Managing Director said, "It is no secret that GTOs are becoming more tech-savvy to keep up with the ever-changing industry so an ingenious compromise was suggested - an e-magazine. With the same feel as a printed guide but the ability to read it on a tablet or laptop, an e-magazine offers a best of both worlds solution for GTOs."

With big season-relevant features, regional spotlights, reports from GTOs and news from attractions and destinations, these publications will provide the perfect

compliment to BTM's printed guides and keep you, the GTOs, informed all year round.

As AGTO members you will receive the e-magazine, the first issue of which

will come out in October 2019, so look out for it and if you have any feedback then they'd love to hear from you! If you have any suggestions or ideas for the e-magazines then contact them on 01743 231135, [marketing@blueprintmedia.org.uk](mailto:marketing@blueprintmedia.org.uk), or you can visit [www.blueprintguide.co.uk](http://www.blueprintguide.co.uk).





# AGTO strengthens Board with four new directors

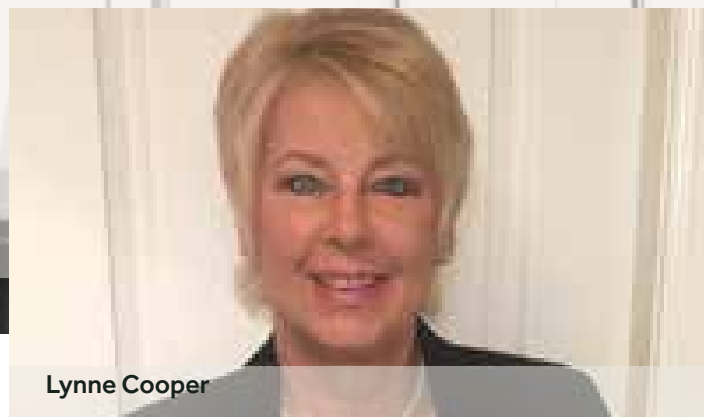
**In July AGTO appointed four new directors as it moves forward to further strengthen membership and travel trade engagement.**

The new directors are Lynne Cooper, group travel trade manager with New Lanark Mills World Heritage Site, Elizabeth Mounser, proprietor of Yorkshire-based E. M. Consultancy, Helen Goggin, sales manager at national Coach Holiday operator Alfa Travel and Joanna Freeman, marketing and social media executive with UK Parliament (the Houses of Parliament).

Stepping down from the Board are Martin Hay, proprietor of Bournemouth-based ocean, river and expedition cruise specialist Go Cruise, and Alex Jacobs, proprietor of Newcastle upon Tyne based bespoke tour operator Northern Secrets.

Commenting on the changes, Wendy Hartley-Scarff, AGTO chief executive, says: "I'm delighted to welcome Lynne, Elizabeth, Helen and Joanna to the AGTO Board. They bring with them valuable experience that will play a key role as we continue to strengthen our membership and travel trade engagement. I would also like to pay my special thanks to Alex and Martin. Over the last few years they, along with our other directors, have been instrumental in the continued growth of AGTO. We are now in a strong position to further develop our position as the UK's largest independent membership organisation supporting and representing the interests of individuals who organise travel for groups."

One of the first tasks for the new Board is the planning



of the 2020 AGTO Showcase Weekend which takes place from 21 to 23 February at Ettington Chase, a 4-star hotel, event and conference centre close to Stratford-upon-Avon.

# For the Love of Gardens - NTS Throughout the Seasons



**Scotland boasts many wonderful gardens and the National Trust for Scotland has more than 35 major gardens in its care.**

Threave Garden & Estate has a grand Scottish Baronial House set in 26 acres of gardens and is a haven for wildlife with an osprey platform and bat reserve. New for 2019 is the Garden of Contemplation and also of note, Threave Gardening Show, an annual event which will take place in June 2020. This horticultural extravaganza brings together specialist plant nurseries, landscape design and flower arranging. It is a garden for all seasons too with changing views, a great delight

for visitors through this coming autumn. A stop at the Terrace café is also part of the visit.

Nearby places include Broughton House and Garden, home to 'Glasgow Boy' EA Hornel. Get in touch for our Scotland garden itineraries from the famous subtropical Inverewe in the north to Crathes Castle in Aberdeenshire with its award-winning walled garden.

Contact us on 0131 4580204 or [traveltrade@nts.org.uk](mailto:traveltrade@nts.org.uk) for information on complimentary admission for AGTO members, 2020 group rates, tours and our gardens planner.

## Bring your group to Britain's Sistine Chapel

**Designed by Sir Christopher Wren and steeped in over 500 years of history, the Old Royal Naval College is the centrepiece of Maritime Greenwich. This spectacular riverside location offers beautiful architecture and grounds to explore.**

Originally the site of Greenwich Palace, the baroque buildings standing today were commissioned by Mary II as the Royal Hospital for Seamen. Later it became home to the Royal Naval College and is now open to the public as the Old Royal Naval College.

The magnificent Painted Hall, housed in one of the grounds' striking domed buildings, is an epic 18th century masterpiece, known as Britain's Sistine Chapel. Covering 4,000 sq meters, it celebrates Britain's political stability, commercial prosperity and naval power.

Recently reopened following a major conservation project, with a new enhanced visitor experience, the Painted Hall



is the perfect place for groups to visit. Tickets include use of a multimedia guide (available in seven languages), talks and tours throughout the day and hands-on exhibits.

Open throughout the year (except 24-26 December), special rates are available for groups of 10 or more people. The new café, situated in the elegant Undercroft beneath the Painted Hall, offers delicious catering options. Private guided tours for groups are also available. AGTO groups who pre-book can also enjoy a special 10% discount in our shop.

Book via 0208 269 4799 or [boxoffice@ornc.org](mailto:boxoffice@ornc.org)  
**[www.ornc.org/group-visits](http://www.ornc.org/group-visits)**



# 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

As this is my first 'Letter from the Chairman' in the Central Branch, I would like to say thank you to the Branch Members for electing me to this position. It will be an honour to serve in this capacity.

Many of you will know my history with AGTO, but for those who don't, here is a brief summary. I joined the then GTOA back in 2003, when running a successful group in Kent. I realised that nobody from Kent, then part of Southern Branch, ever went to meetings because of the difficulty of getting to where they were held in the North or West of the area. So I organised the then 12 members in Kent and started our own Branch with the blessing of the National Committee, becoming its first Chairman. It is now a very strong

Branch.

When I moved to Lincoln, I certainly never expected to be so involved with AGTO again, but the problems that we face in the Central Branch are probably worse than those faced in Kent because of the size of the area, plus the transport links across the country from the East coast of Lincolnshire to the West coast of Wales are dreadful!

Therefore one of my tasks will be to try and find a solution to this problem, and I don't think making more Branches is the answer. Some more discussion and fact finding will be going on in the coming months, and some proposals from the Committee for the Members to consider will hopefully be forthcoming.

The holiday season is in full swing now and I am sure that you are all very busy with your groups, but also planning next year's itinerary. I sometimes think that people don't realise the amount of work that goes into making a successful outing, not least the anxiety of not knowing if it will be successful! But then if we didn't enjoy it all, we wouldn't do it, would we. Part of the fun side is going to places on 'Fam' trips and visiting places new to us to see out if they are suitable for our group, and visiting trade shows where we can catch up with old acquaintances. The satisfaction comes when at the end of a trip everyone says that they have had a good time!

Happy organising!

*Jim Barling, C1834*

## A River Cruise with Fred. Olsen

I had the opportunity to go on a river trip aboard Fred. Olsen's ship *Brabant* in April. This is only the second season that Fred. Olsen has been operating river cruises and as my group had been talking about another river cruise rather than an ocean cruise I was very interested to see how the two compared and if the river trip came up to the high standards that the ocean cruises maintain.

The ship had started its voyage in Amsterdam and was making its way in four stages to Bucharest. I joined at Düsseldorf for the second stage to Nuremberg along the Rhine, Moselle and Main rivers.

The only flight choice at the time was from Edinburgh, but as Ken and I were staying with friends near Berwick on Tweed and due to go home – by train – on the first day of the cruise, it felt like serendipity. I needed to be at the airport for 7am. A Fred. Olsen representative was at the check-in desk to make sure everyone was checked in safely. The usual scheduled flight choices are from Heathrow or Manchester.

At Düsseldorf we were met and taken to the ship. The cabins weren't quite ready but we were able to have a light snack lunch in the lounge by which time our cases were in



our cabins and we could unpack. So far all that I had come to expect from an ocean cruise.

I have been along the Rhine on two previous river cruises with other operators but it still enthralled me, especially the Rhine Gorge (Middle Rhine). When I booked there was a shore excursions package which included Cologne and Koblenz, both of which I had visited before, so I chose to purchase the individual shore tours when they became available, just before we sailed. It was a pleasure, after a very busy and tiring couple of months, to be able to relax and leave the ship after breakfast, in both Cologne and Koblenz, and meander along the river side through virtually empty streets in the early morning sunshine for two or



three hours. The only places open to begin with were the churches and the pavement cafes. Photographing was easy and just to sit on a bench with a coffee and watch the world go by was bliss.

The Moselle River was new to me and somewhere I had wanted to explore. We only went down as far as Cochem – and the last 2km was done going backwards (or is it astern) as that was where the best turning point was. It was Easter Monday so we didn't really expect the town or visitor attractions, other than the castle, which I had booked as a shore trip, to be open. However the whole place was buzzing with activity and I could have spent much longer exploring after the tour.

Our trip down the Main River began at Mainz. Unlike the Rhine and Moselle there are several locks to go through on the Main. The places we visited were Bamberg; Miltenberg; and for me the most interesting, Würzburg. Here we were shown around the Residence Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1981. It is one of Europe's most renowned Baroque castles but having been hit in 1945 by heavy bombing (with most of the roofs and wooden floors going up in flames) was reconstructed, and in 1987, restored to its former glory.

Overall I was impressed by *Brabant*. The cabins were comfortable with the top two decks having Juliet balconies. The food was good and the staff as friendly and helpful as we have all come to expect from the ocean cruises. You don't miss the nightly entertainment,

as it's more of a relaxing experience. There was the same option to pre-pay the gratuities before the cruise and have a 'Dining Drinks' package. What I also like about river cruising is that you moor close to the centre of the towns and cities you are visiting. In Cologne it was near the Lindt Chocolate Factory and Museum – very hard to resist visiting and sampling – so I didn't!



A couple from my group are going to the 4th leg of this cruise in September, having booked independently. The river cruises qualify for Oceans membership and I am now, thanks to this cruise, a 'silver' member. I will certainly consider booking a cruise for my group and as none of them have done the Moselle River or been to Luxembourg – one of the cruises in the brochure – Ellie has put us on the 'wait' list for 21/22. Yes, my group are booked up that far ahead!

Pauline Johnson C1850

.....

# Birmingham NT go to the Isle of Man

A much earlier start than normal followed by a good run up the M6 then surprise number one, time allowed for a coffee stop and promenade walk in Morecambe. Before boarding five men from HM Customs chose five men and five women to have a superficial check of their luggage. Then we were away. The sea crossing from Heysham to Douglas was smooth for our 3½ hour crossing. I had booked the Premium Lounge, which overlooks the forward bow for extra comfort, and has the advantage of complementary tea/coffee and snacks.

Our hotel in Douglas was The Empress, located on the sea front, a

short drive from the ferry. After breakfast the next day we were off to Peel and our first visit was to the House of Manannan Museum, which very graphically explained the history of the Island. A few of the group then went and explored Peel Castle and Peel Cathedral. After driving through some very exciting scenery, frequently being able to see both west and east coasts of the island, we arrived at Calf Sound, at the extreme southern point of the island. Due to strong winds blowing most made straight to the café and whilst eating light refreshments looked across rough water to The Calf of Man. The final visit of the day was to Port Erin, followed by a

vintage steam train ride from Port Erin back to Douglas, a line which closed to regular traffic in 1971. We arrived 20 minutes late due to sheep on the line. There were strong winds the next day but a blue sky with scattered clouds as we drove the mountain section of the TT course to Ramsey on our way to Laxey. First to be visited was the famous wheel 'Lady Isabella' where a few adventurous members climbed high up this huge metal, working wheel. A few others walked down to Laxey beach, but nobody went into the sea. After lunch it was time for our mountain tram ride up to Snaefell, the highest point on the island at 2036 feet above sea



level, with wide, spectacular views. There was a gale force wind blowing so after a few photographs it was into the café for hot refreshments before returning back down to Laxey and the coach to the hotel.

A heritage tram ride from Douglas to Ramsey started the next day before visiting the Grove Museum Ramsey – the former home of the Gibbs family, which they inhabited from Victorian times to the 20th century. It was a short distance from there to Milntown House, the only country house open to the public on the Isle of Man. On our arrival lunch was

served before a guided tour around the very interesting house. The rest of the afternoon was used to stroll around the extensive gardens. Our return journey to the hotel took us over the parts of the TT course we had not covered.

After breakfast we had a chance to look around Douglas before a morning visit to Rushen Abbey near Castletown. Free time then into Castletown for lunch, before a visit to Rushen Castle, the Old Grammar School, and finally, the House of Keys. Here a fascinating historic debate was re-enacted. The

speaker, a waxwork model, suddenly came to life and called for order. Framed portraits also came to life and spoke! We, the Members, all raised our hands if we approved of the motion. An excellent session!

An early breakfast before boarding the 'Ben my Chree' ship for again another calm and comfortable crossing. As is tradition on our holidays an included meal on the way home is a must. Today it was to the famous Olympus Restaurant in Bolton.

*Ian Wilde, C2390*

## Dunwood Travel Group GTO fam trip



Dunwood Travel Group hosted a GTO 'familiarisation' overnight at Heythrop Park Hotel near Chipping Norton, which has just been acquired by Bourne Leisure. The evening's entertainment were West End stars Nick Duncan and Shinead Barrett-Byrne. Our compere was Jamie

Walker. However the 'star turn' has just got be... (can you guess who from the photo) 'strumming' with great gusto to 'Rocking all over the World' accompanied by Jamie and a fellow volunteer. It brings a whole new meaning to Operations Manager.

*Pauline Johnson C1850*

### AGTO Central Branch Committee

**Jim Barling** - Chairman

**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

**Pauline Johnson** - Magazine Editor  
*pauline\_a\_johnson@hotmail.com*

**INTERESTED IN  
JOINING THE  
COMMITTEE?**

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



# EASTERN BRANCH DIRECTOR

This is one of the hardest reports I have had to write and certainly one which I never expected to have to do.

It is with great sadness that on Friday 2nd August our Chairman, Miss Patricia Maltby, died suddenly.

Her untimely death will leave a huge chasm in the organisation of Eastern Branch and although she had only been our Chairman since 2018 her input and planning skills will be sorely missed. On a personal

level I owe her a great deal as she was an enormous support to me after my husband's accident earlier this year, fulfilling my role at a moments notice..

In her memory we have decided to include her last reports and hope that it will remind you all of her work for Eastern Branch.

*Joan Hanks, E1976*

## Eastern Branch's Chairman's Message

Summer has finally arrived, and I hope you are all making the most of the good weather.

In April I took some of the group to Cardiff for four days, we stayed at the Holiday Inn, next door to Cardiff Arms Park and the Principality Stadium, on a weekend when there was a rugby match. It was just as well that we had planned to have Saturday as a day of leisure as the police closed the surrounding roads off and we couldn't move the coach from the coach park!

We paused at Oxford over the lunch hour on the way to the hotel, then on the Sunday took a guided tour around the Royal Mint in the morning. It was very interesting to see how money is made - unfortunately there are no free samples.

In the afternoon we visited St Fagans (or in Welsh – St Ffagans)

which is a living history museum full of wonderful buildings taken down and moved to the site. It's well worth a visit and free entry. I can recommend the cream tea at the café above the village shop.

On the way home we stopped at Henley on Thames, then paused at Cambridge Services. If you have travelled along the A14 from Cambridge to Huntingdon in the last two years you will have noticed the roadworks. Getting in and out of the services used to be quite simple, getting in still is, out is another matter. It's the new roundabouts and road layout (with very poor signage) which is now a problem. I haven't yet been on a coach where the driver has managed it first time around.

Yet roadworks continue to the bane of our lives, it's knowing where they are and allowing enough time to get through them. Locally that's

not quite such a problem as I drive around Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and a bit of Essex three days a week for the company I work for. When going on longer journeys I usually leave the knowledge up to the coach driver. There is nothing worse than arriving late for an event or attraction (or food!).

As reported elsewhere the last meeting of the Eastern Branch was at the Shuttleworth Collection and Swiss Garden, a place I will certainly put on the visit list for next year.

The next meeting will be the Branch AGM, which is scheduled for Saturday 19th October at Hampton Court, more details will be available in due course.

May I congratulate Lynda Wright on her interesting article in the new AGTO Handbook, which we all should have received by now.

*Patricia Maltby*

## NEWMARKET LADIES DAY

On a beautiful July morning 50 members and Friends of St Andrew's Ladies Luncheon Club together with members of The Provincial Lodge of Bedfordshire boarded a coach for Newmarket Race Courses for what is the pinnacle of Summer Racing 'Ladies Day'.

The ladies, without exception, looked stunning in their finery with wonderful hats to complete their ensemble.

The men were equally well turned out in casual summer attire complete with panama hats, a fitting compliment to the ladies.

On arrival at the course we set out the chairs then cracked open the Champagne and made up the Pimms to set the tone for the day. After a top up all round a sumptuous buffet was ready to eat. There were cold meats of every

type complimented by assorted salads and freshly baked rolls. To finish a boozy trifle and heavenly tiramisu were on offer, not forgetting the cheeses.

Following our leisurely lunch we headed for the course in time for the first race. We had Premier Tickets which enabled us to explore all the course.

Newmarket Racecourse is one of the most beautiful in the country and it did not disappoint. There was so much to see, the course itself is lovely and all the stands have excellent viewing to see the races as well as large screens to watch the races from start to finish. So many flowers surround the areas with lively bars as well as food outlets to suit all tastes.

Six more races followed and there was the opportunity to see all the horses before and after the races in The Paddocks, what a colourful sight.

After the last race we walked back to our coach for a welcome cup of tea and cakes. Everyone was very relaxed and seemed happy to sit and enjoy the lovely sunshine at the end of a very successful day.

There were winners and losers but all agreed it was a really super day out.

Our thanks go to Safford Coaches who took us there and back and, of course, to Newmarket Racecourses for their assistance in booking the event.

*Joan Hanks E1976*

## Shuttleworth Collection & Swiss Garden

The Eastern Branch meeting in June was held at the Shuttleworth Collection and Swiss Garden at Old Warden in Bedfordshire.

We started the day by meeting for coffee in the restaurant where tables had been reserved for us. The collection has been open to the public since 1963 and was started with exhibits originally acquired by Richard Shuttleworth. It contains some of the last airworthy original examples of aircraft and some newer replica ones. All aircraft are flight worthy.

There are also vintage vehicles, buses, motorcycles and cars. The collection is housed in six hangers. Our guide for the collection was informative as he showed us around the various hangars and aircraft from

the wood and canvas of the late 1800s early 1990s through the two world wars and beyond. It is a marvel how some of the earliest models flew (and these ones still do) the collection is a history lesson in mans' early adventures in aviation.

Tony Wright, husband of member Lynda Wright, had a personal interest in the collection as his mother had been stationed at Templeford from where Lysanders were flown.

At the conclusion of the tour we made our way back to the restaurant for lunch and coffee, before holding a short branch meeting.

The afternoon was spent viewing the



adjacent Swiss Garden which was created between 1824 and 1832 by 3rd Baron of Old Warden Lord Ongley. It is designed so that views over the various parts of it form a 'picture window'. Again, we had a guided tour, but it also a place to just stroll at your own pace, every corner brings a new 'picture' to life, the cottage itself, the grotto with stained glass, the ponds and bridges.

*Patricia Maltby*

### AGTO Eastern Branch Committee

**Joan Hanks** - Director and Events Coordinator

**Maria Maltby** - Secretary

**Linda Nicholas** - Treasurer

**Yvonne Hodson** - AGTO magazine co-ordinator, Branch Webpage

**Maureen Hardingham** - Communications

### EASTERN BRANCH MEMBERS WE NEED YOUR HELP!

**There are vacancies on  
our Branch Committee  
so please watch out  
for our AGM forms  
and Branch Meeting  
at Hampton Court or  
better still phone or  
email Joan Hanks.**



# Kent Branch's Chairman's Message

Our Visit Guildford meeting on Friday 24th May was a great success and the team there looked after us splendidly. Diana Roberts gave us an interesting showcase on what Guildford and the surrounding area can offer groups. Our guides took us on a short walk around the city to show us the sites and then we went back in the Historic Town Hall for a splendid buffet lunch. Our afternoon was equally impressive with a brief look at RHS Wisley Gardens before an exclusive pre-opening tour of the

new welcome building with Caroline Gilbert, Sally and Melissa. We even managed to squeeze in a cream tea courtesy of RHS Wisley with home-baked scones.

My plea to members for articles for inclusion in the magazine has met with some success I'm pleased to say.

Sadly there is no solid news on the opening of the Bettshanger Coal Museum but our September

meeting will be at the Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel-le Ferne, Folkestone on Friday 20th September where we will also hold our AGM.

Following our successful Late Autumn break last year we have arranged a similar one this year at the Marsham Court Hotel, Bournemouth from Friday 22nd November to Monday 25th November

*Jim Silvester, K2496*

## BradARA's First Day Trip



Members and friends of BradARA (Broadstairs Active Retirement Association) set off by coach on a beautiful sunny day in May with picnics and brollies, just in case the weather report was wrong again. Upon arrival at the dock in Maidstone we enjoyed coffee and our picnics whilst watching the boats and wildlife meandering past. Another opportunity to make some new friends too.

The trip down river was idyllic and the pilot gave us a running commentary on the local area, history and river wildlife. We saw swans and ducks with their cygnets and ducklings.

The boat offered refreshments and a bar. Anyone for a glass of wine or a G&T? Well the sun was over the yardarm, it would be rude to refuse!

A short while later we arrived at Allington Castle to be greeted by the guides (the Morecambe and Wise of Allington) set to inform and entertain us for the next 90



minutes. The grounds are tranquil and lakes and castle very picturesque. We enjoyed the history of the castle especially the gory stories about their pet lion attacking its master and how they 'walled in' a former owner for his treason. He had a good view of the gardens as he starved to death, pretty gruesome but his choice, as the alternative was beheading. The rooms on show to the public were very grand and we enjoyed a nice sit down in the Great Hall, where a huge dining table and chairs are set between two huge fireplaces, luxury but a bit draughty and smoky on a windy day.

Our return river boat trip included a cuppa and delicious cake which rounded off the day nicely. Our excellent coach driver, Tony from Loyalty Coaches, delivered us home safely in time for dinner. Everyone reported that they had enjoyed themselves.

*Jo Clark, K2827*

# PENSHURST PLACE AND ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, TUDELEY



Following a pleasant visit to Penshurst Place with AGTO Kent Branch for a pre-Christmas get-together which included an excellent tour of the property we decided that we would return with our group this spring. I am now able to share with you a report on that day which included rather more than the morning at Penshurst Place.

Wendy – the groups' co-ordinator at Penshurst Place – proved extremely helpful in putting together a plan which would work for us and it was agreed that we would arrive at approximately 9.45am and head straight to the restaurant which opened early for us and provided teas and coffees along with giant cookies. (Well we had had early breakfasts!) This was extremely useful as the venue does not normally open until 10.30am except for pre-booked groups, so to have the restaurant open early too was much appreciated.

Our group was then split into two, and two extremely knowledgeable guides led us into the property and imparted much knowledge on the history of the building and its previous occupants.

This tour took roughly an hour which left us a further hour to wander around the extensive and extremely neatly tended gardens before spending a few minutes in the delightful shop before boarding our coach at 12.50pm to carry on with our day.

Next stop was for lunch which I had decided we should take at the popular Black Horse Pub in Pembury (see footnote) and arrived spot on time at 1.30pm. Here they have a roomy conservatory restaurant at the back which comfortably seats a few over 40. The food is all home prepared and cooked and the portions are generous. We chose to have a two course meal which we had all pre-selected from a good variety on offer and elected to get everyone to buy their own drinks, though jugged water was also available on the tables. After visiting the bar I guess we started eating at around 1.45pm having given everyone a small card reminding them of the meals they

had chosen to save any confusion, and they were swiftly served at our tables which had been laid out in three long rows so we could enjoy the company of quite a number as we ate our meals.

Well-fed and watered the coach returned for us at about 2.55pm and we set off on the final visit of the day... to All Saints' Church, Tudeley - a journey of about 15 minutes by coach - and in particular to see and learn all about the very special Chagall windows. There is plenty of information on the windows online and also available in the church on arrival. We felt a stop of about half an hour here would be about right and left Tudeley for our journey for home at 3.45pm after a most enjoyable day, which had started a little earlier than usual, but finished correspondingly early, and the timings worked really well for us.

Contacts:

Wendy, groups co-ordinator at Penshurst Place  
Tel (01892) 870307

Michelle at the Black Horse Tel (01892) 822141  
(Try it yourself first by booking into their Sunday Carvery!)

Administrator at Tudeley Church (Liz Wood)  
(01892) 833241

All three have helpful websites, and that for the church is particularly useful in the details provided. They receive visitors from all over the world to see the windows so pre-booking a group is essential.

NOTE: There are no toilet facilities at Tudeley Church for larger groups. For small groups say under 20, who book a cuppa (in the rather small room adjacent) they can offer toilets, but for larger groups you are on your own so these facilities are not available. For this reason lunch in the comparatively local pub works better than the option of a rather longer drive after a meal at Penshurst Place.

*Carol Gower, K1770*



# KENT BRANCH FIRST MEETING OF 2019



We held a very interesting and full programme for our meeting at Guildford and RHS Garden Wisley on Friday 24th May

Our thanks go to Diana Roberts for allowing us to hold our branch meeting in the Historic Town Hall, for her insight and presentation of all that Guildford and the surrounding areas can offer groups, the guided walking tour of the town and not forgetting the splendid lunch she laid on for us.

It is certainly a place to consider for a visit for your group and Diana and her team can be contacted for any help and assistance.

Thanks also to Caroline Gilbert at RHS Garden Wisley for showing us around the gardens and also a behind-the-scenes tour of the new visitor centre prior to its official

opening. And not forgetting the super cream tea laid on especially for us.

The new visitor centre and facilities are now open and designed to welcome group visits and coaches. Caroline says even if you want to stop for a comfort break and tea/coffee with your coach on your way to somewhere else you are more than welcome. Just let them know a few days ahead of time.

Thanks also to Lynda Wright's (Eastern Branch) husband Tony for the collage of superb photographs he took.

*Jim Silvester, K2496*

## BOOKER TRIP'S TENTH BIRTHDAY!

They say time flies when you are having fun – the 10 years I have been running Booker Trip have certainly flown. During that time I have travelled the length and breadth of England with the group, been to Ireland, Poland (twice), Austria, Hungary, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium several other countries in Europe and done getting on for 150 day trips.

Going out with my group is like taking out a group of friends, I have a huge number of regulars and to see them welcoming each other as they board the coach is great. I give out sweets and biscuits and on the way home I always do a quiz and the prize is always something relevant to the day out. When I did the Great Stink with City and Village Tours – the quiz prize was a variety of toilet products!

In May I took the group to The Mansion House. It was such a great tour, done by one man and even with 55 people we could hear every word. The afternoon was spent at Charthouse which is a monastery and the tour was guided by one of the brothers.

In June we went on a Hertford Canal Cruise, we had lunch in a local pub and then had a two and a half hour cruise from Ware to Ware. It was during the boat ride that I was surprised with the cake celebrating my ten years of Booker Trip. We bought everyone a glass of Prosecco and cut the cake to have with it.

Legal London was my July trip – a City and Village tour, a great day out – brilliant guide and such an interesting tour.



At the end of July we went to Shropshire for six days and at the beginning of August 60 of us enjoyed a river cruise from Vienna to the Black Sea.

My husband, Bob, asks when will I retire – I keep threatening to cut down but then I get an idea for another trip or holiday and off I go again. I kid myself it keeps me young, not sure the wrinkles on my face reflect that!

*Eileen Booker K2006*

# Out and About with Jim Silvester .....

## MAY .....

- **New Forest Hampshire - Lyndhurst and Beaulieu National Motor Museum.** Research trip.

- **Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens** with 40 HADARA members. Newly opened after 10-year closure. It was well worth a visit, with gorgeous colours.

- **Solid Sixties Show at the Orchard Theatre with Marty Wilde and Charlie Gracie.** Both artists still going strong!

- **Radisson Blu Waterfront Hotel, Stockholm** Attended functions of ex-business association including the *Vasa*. The *Vasa* is the only preserved seventeenth-century ship in the world and a unique art treasure. More than 95 percent of the ship is original, and it is decorated with hundreds of carved sculptures. Also went to the ABBA museum.

- **Walk Right Back at the Orchard Theatre** with Marilyn and 30 HADARA members. Excellent show and well worth catching.

- **AGTO Kent Branch meeting at Guildford and RHS Wisley.** First meeting of the year and well attended.

## JUNE .....

- **9 to 5 The Musical at the Strand Theatre** with Marilyn and friends. Dolly Parton produced show with Louise Redknapp and Bonnie Langford.

- **New Jersey Nights at the Orchard Theatre** Marilyn and 24 HADARA members. Super show with fine performances.

- **Coach outing to Battle** and then The Moorings Pevensey Bay for lunch with 55 HADARA members and afterwards to Eastbourne. A three course lunch at The Moorings for £10 - what more can you ask for?

- **Witness for the Prosecution at County Hall**

with Marilyn who was invited by ATG and Group Line. Splendid Agatha Christie mystery in the old LCC/GLC County Hall which is fabulous and we didn't guess the ending. Well worth a group visit as the play is extending its run.

- **Last Night of the Proms at the Orchard Theatre** with Marilyn and 12 HADARA members. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at their best with classical and modern pieces finishing with the usual flag waving numbers.

## JULY .....

- **Devon and Cornwall** with The Association of Kent Veteran Golfers. 16 Golfers from various Golf Clubs representing Kent at the Veterans Golf Association from Devon and Cornwall. Stayed at the Derwent Hotel Torquay part of TLH group. A comfortable 3\* hotel with good food, facilities and entertainment.

- **River Cruise on the Douro in Portugal** with 21 HADARA members The Douro River lived up to all expectations with beautiful scenery on the way to the Spanish border. Really nice holiday and cruise on the *Douro Spendour* with Riviera Travel and organised by Martin Hay from GoCruise.

- **Outing to Essex with City and Village Tours** and 33 HADARA Members. We picked up a Blue Badge Guide in Great Dunmow who took us through pretty countryside to Thaxted for morning coffee and walking tour before heading to High Easter for Lodges Coaches and lunch followed by coach trips on vintage charabancs. Well worth checking out.

- Visit to the *Tereza Joanne* moored at King George V Docks London. Courtesy visit from Gyll at City and Village Tours to see the cockney matinee with Gordon Bennett. Very enjoyable afternoon's entertainment with singing and dancing.

Jim Silvester, K2496

## AGTO Kent Branch Committee

**Jim Silvester** - Chairman

**Carol Gower** - Treasurer

**Carol Blackmore** - Secretary

**Eileen Booker** - Committee Member

**David Steele** - Board Director

## UPCOMING MEETINGS FOR KENT BRANCH

### Friday 20th Sept

Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel-le Ferne, Folkestone followed by AGM

### Fri 22nd - Mon 25th Nov

Marsham Court Hotel, Bournemouth



# Northern Branch's Chairman's Message

Well I hope you have all had a 'fab' summer and have survived the sometimes too high temperatures. Here, my group have been doing lots of things locally. My group are very enthusiastic and we have so much to see and do in our area. In York we are blessed with the choice of so many theatres, not least the temporary Rose Theatre with Shakespeare plays on offer every day.

However, to business. Our team are working hard as always, and our regular meetings keep us well in touch. We have recently welcomed John Flynn of Roleon to our committee, and we thank him for his support. We have our Northern Branch familiarisation weekend in Lancashire 1st to 3rd November which is open to all AGTO members. This is so reasonably priced with lots

to see and do in the itinerary. We will be visiting beautiful Samlesbury Hall with a Tour by 'Janey the Witch'. We will enjoy a cruise from Barton Grange Garden Centre followed by lunch at Oswaldtwistle Mills and a guided tour on our coach. The finale of our weekend will be a tour of Leighton Hall and a visit to Carnforth Station. Breakfast and dinner each day is also included, as is coach transport for all the excursions. Please contact Bob Walker for more details – [rj.walker@btinternet.com](mailto:rj.walker@btinternet.com).

Also, Pam is busy quoting her groups for their 2020/2021 tours and has lots of ideas for trips if you need some inspiration for your group. She'll be pleased to offer you a quote and can be contacted on [p.wharton@ellensmith.co.uk](mailto:p.wharton@ellensmith.co.uk).

Bob is always on the go and will have longer haul holidays on offer, a report from his recent trip to Cuba is included in this edition.

I have some sad news about my own club. Since our last meeting the York Telecom Recreation Club, of which I have been secretary for 20 years, has decided to close. Leeds and Bradford are in a similar situation with the membership not reflecting the activities. The closure will take a little time to sort but what it does mean is that I will not be able to renew my AGTO membership in this role. However, I do plan to re-brand and work with a smaller group and am already looking at days out and short holidays for next year.

*Jenny Robinson*



## EXPLORING CUBA

driver, and off we went into downtown Havana. We were welcomed with a flash and a bang in a tropical downpour.

Lazaro pointed a few of the sights as we made our way to the Hotel Sevilla, located right in the centre of the city. We were welcomed at the hotel with a cocktail and check-in was swift. There were a couple of problems with the bathrooms, so room changes were necessary, but apart from that the hotel was reasonably comfortable and was inspired by the Moorish lines and motifs of the entrance to the famous Court of the Lions in the Alhambra Palace.

The group were left on their own for the rest of day/evening, with time to relax and take the opportunity to discover the local area and sample Havana's amazing street life, grab some food/drink and retire whenever they wanted.

### Friday 10th May

After breakfast, we were met at the hotel by Lazaro, for a full day exploring Havana. Our first part of day consisted of a walking tour of Old Havana. A short stroll from the hotel was the Museum of the Revolution, housed in the former Presidential Palace, which offers a fascinating insight into Cuba's revolutionary history. A very interesting museum

..... To be honest, Cuba had not featured in my 'bucket list', but after a few requests to do a tour there from my group I decided it was worth a look. After some research and with help from Success Tours a 15-day tour was arranged and duly advertised to my group.

On the 9th May 2019, 25 MANCASS members gathered for their KLM flight, via Amsterdam to Havana. The flights and Amsterdam transfer went very smoothly and we arrived in Cuba mid afternoon. The airport was quite busy but eventually we surfaced in the arrivals hall to be greeted by Lazaro, our guide for the next 10 days. The baggage was stowed on the coach by Oswaldo, our



and we probably needed more time there, but it was near the hotel, so making it easy for a return, if one wanted.

Following this we continued our guided stroll through Old Havana, passing the old Bacardi Building (by the way, Bacardi is not now produced in Cuba), Ernest Hemmingway's watering hole, La Floridita, the gem of a shop, Dr Johnson's drugstore and the famous historical squares; Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza Vieja and Plaza de Armas. It was very hot today and a seat in the shade in a local café on the Plaza Vieja for a drink, was very welcome.

We continued our stroll soaking up the vibrancy of Old Havana and the narrow bustling streets, with music everywhere, before being served lunch in the Bodeguita Del Medio (one of Hemmingway's frequented restaurants). The lunch was good, as was the obligatory music, supplied by local musicians. After lunch we explored further into the Old Town to a local bar where we made some of Cuba's famous rum cocktails with the local bar staff. Off course we had to try them!

We then continued the tour on the coach, which took us to Revolution Square overlooked by the mural of Ernesto Che Guevara, through the downtown Vedado district of the city and past the elegant mansions and embassies in the Miramar district before a spectacular drive along the Malecon, Havana's seafront promenade, before dropping us off at the hotel.

One of the highlights of our visit was a 2-hour drive in a vintage American car - a great way to enjoy this unique city! The cars cruised along the waterfront passing Plaza de San Francisco, the port, the old railway station, Revolution Square, Bosque de La Habana and the Miramar district to La Fontana, one of Havana's famous private restaurants, where we had an excellent meal and of course music and cocktails!

### **Saturday 11th May**

After a busy day yesterday the group were free to explore at their leisure. We all found things to see and do, shop or take a stroll along the Malecon to view the street sculptures. A lot of walking, but a relaxing day.

### **Sunday 12th May**

After breakfast it was time to meet Lazaro and Oswaldo for our trip to Las Terrazas National Park, an area of outstanding natural beauty which is protected as one of Cuba's most important National Parks. On arrival at the park were joined by a local ranger/guide for our visit to a former coffee plantation house where he recounted the history of Cuba's coffee industry which is closely linked to the slave trade. We were also lucky to see the Cuban national bird, the Toco-ro.

We were then taken to the lakeside village of La Terrazas to visit a local artist who makes hand-painted cards out



of recycled paper. Our lunch was at the Farmers House restaurant which is set within the National Reserve before being taken to Banos del San Juan - a set of waterfalls and pools very popular with the locals, although due to lack of rain the waterfalls were not falling very much. Time now for a coffee stop at Café de Maria, just down the hill from our hotel. Great coffee, particularly the specials!! From the terrace you could see flamingos in the nearby lake.

After our check-in at the Hotel Moka, on the side the valley with views across Las Terrazas, we had a little time to explore and relax before making our way down to the village and the La Fonda de Mercedes restaurant for some local Cuban cuisine.

### **Monday 13th May**

After breakfast, we headed west towards the picturesque Viñales Valley, an area protected by UNESCO as a world heritage site for its outstanding natural beauty. It is dominated by strange limestone mountain formations called Mogotes and the valley is also the home of Cuba's tobacco plantations. Our first stop to day was at local tobacco plantation. We are warmly welcomed by the farmer and served a coffee along with a tot of local rum! Afterwards we visited the traditional tobacco drying house to see how the tobacco crops are turned into the world's best cigars.

Our next port of call was the extraordinary Viñales Mural de la Prehistoria. This huge mural is painted on the side of a cliff and the mojitos served here were superb!

We travelled back through the picturesque Viñales village where a fabulous lunch was served at a local organic farm, which afforded wonderful views across the valley. Appetites satiated, we drove back down through the village to the El Indio caves for a subterranean boat ride through the underground system.

Dinner tonight was in the organic vegetarian El Romero restaurant in the village where the menu was full of locally-sourced ingredients. A fabulous meal and very accommodating (we were a little late arriving) and pleasant team that run it. Back at the hotel a local band were performing in the bar and I must say they were excellent.

### **Tuesday 14th May**

On the road again, sadly saying farewell to Las Terrazas, we travelled towards the south coast of the island where our first stop was to explore the French influenced small colonial city of Cienfuegos. Overlooking a picturesque bay the Club Cienfuegos provided us with our lunch. After lunch we had a stroll through the colonial centre and along the seafront promenade. Getting people out of the street market was the hardest part!

Leaving Cienfuegos behind we headed along the coast road, through the sugar cane fields to Trinidad, preserved

by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Our accommodation was in a Casa Particular, old homes that have been converted into rooms. Sounds a little basic and in some ways they are, but all the rooms have facilities and are comfortable and the Casa has a bar and a place to eat. The Casas look small from the outside, but a bit like a Tardis, bigger behind the façade.

Due to the size of our group we couldn't all be accommodated in one Casa (due to rooms being booked by other people), so a couple of people stayed nearby in an equally comfortable abode.

The evening meal tonight was served al fresco at the Casa Lola, our main base. A really enjoyable evening.

### **Wednesday 15th May**

We met Lazaro for our comprehensive tour of the centre of Trinidad. We started our tour with a visit to a local shop. Lazaro explained the differences about the currency (local and convertible pesos) and also the current food rationing. Continuing our stroll, we popped into Bar Yesterday, all things Beatles bar, then the History Museum focusing on a family's life in Cuba in the 1800s.

Our next pit stop was the La Canchanchara, an old house dating back to the 18th Century to sample their unique Trinidad rum and sugar cane cocktail.

We then made an interesting visit to the Museum of the Fight against the Bandits, which covers the revolutionary battles in the nearby Escambray mountains. It was worth the climb up the bell tower to see the very best views across Trinidad.

We then made a short stop in the Plaza Mayor and the Church of The Holy Trinity before arriving at the Restaurante Trinidad Colonial. An excellent lunch! We had remainder of the afternoon free.

Our dinner tonight was at local private restaurant, Vista Gourmet. The dining afforded you great views across the city and the food was superb.

### **Thursday 16th May**

Today were off to Sancti Spiritus, small unique colonial town with a river running through it, across which is the oldest stone bridge in Cuba. Lazaro took us on a short walking tour of the town and even bought us all ice creams. A visit to local produce market was interesting and bunches of the small sweet bananas that they grow in Cuba were purchased by the kilo by our group.

With time to explore before lunch, the main church and bell tower proved popular, along with a visit to the bridge and off course a coffee!

Lunch at Restaurant Meson de la Plaza was average, but the music was good.



After lunch we returned to Trinidad via the Monument to the Revolutionary Spies. It is located where the farm and the spies met their demise. A very sombre yet peaceful place.

Back in Trinidad, there was a little time for shopping or a relaxing drink before heading off out to find somewhere to have dinner.

### Friday 17th May

Breakfast complete, bags packed we set out for Sugar Mill Valley. Here the 145ft Manaca Iznaga Tower stands as a silent witness to Cuba's history of slavery where more than 30,000 slaves worked in the sugar plantations overlooked by this tower. You get fantastic views from the top and well worth the effort to climb up.

The walk up and down from the coach parking bay is lined with stalls selling all sorts of wares and haggling is the order of the day..

Moving on, we took the picturesque journey through the Escambray Mountains, with its plantations of pineapple and mangoes before reaching our destination of Santa Clara. Santa Clara is a city of major historical significance in Cuba.

First we visited the final resting place of Ernesto Che Guevara at the very symbolic Mausoleum along with time in the museum dedicated to his life. Photo stop completed, it was time for lunch in the city centre at the Restaurante Santa Rosalía.

We did have a little time after lunch to explore the centre, but most just sat in the sunshine in Leoncio Vidal Park admiring the architecture or people watching.

Our accommodation for tonight was the Hotel Los Caneyes, Santa Clara. It is set in the countryside just on the edge of city and is what one would call a holiday park. Most of the accommodation is in cabanas set around the grounds. Very pleasant and tranquil, that is when the pool disco party had finished!

Our dinner tonight was buffet style taken in the main restaurant. An excellent choice and plenty of it.



### Saturday 18th May

After our brief stay in Santa Clara, we made our way back into the city to see a couple more sights. The first stop was at the memorial of Taking of the Armoured Train honouring the Battle of Santa Clara, followed by a visit to another statue of Che Guevara holding a child.

From here we travelled direct to Varadero, a stunning beach resort covering the 20km Hicacos Peninsula. The resort has a golf course and one of the best beaches in Cuba with white sands and crystal clear waters.

Arriving at the Hotel Sol Palmeras, Varadero in time for lunch. First we said our farewells to Lazaro and Oswaldo. We hoped that we could get an early check-in at the hotel, but alas no luck. It did give us time to explore the complex and get our bearings. As the deal here was all inclusive, it also meant we didn't have to worry about paying for drinks or snacks whilst we waited for our rooms.

The group were free and easy here. Just time to relax and enjoy the sun, sea and sand, along with a drink. Entertainment was provided each night in the hotel, if you wished to see it and in some cases take part.

### Sunday 19th to Tuesday 21st May

With three days to chill out, that is exactly what everyone did, enjoying taking the hop-on hop-off bus around the peninsula, catching the little train to the shopping mall, walking along the beaches or enjoying the free water activities. There was something here for everyone and you didn't go hungry or thirsty either!

### Wednesday 22nd May

With the holiday drawing to a close, sadly we had to say adios to Varadero and travel back to the city of Havana. Great news when we arrived back at the Hotel Sevilla, Lazaro was there to meet us and he had arranged an early check-in! We were also asked to meet in the top floor restaurant at 6.30pm prior to going out for our last night in Havana.

With a full afternoon to explore the group dispersed to see more of the sights on offer. The Cámara Oscura was very popular as was the Museum of Mural Painting which exhibits some beautifully restored original frescoes in





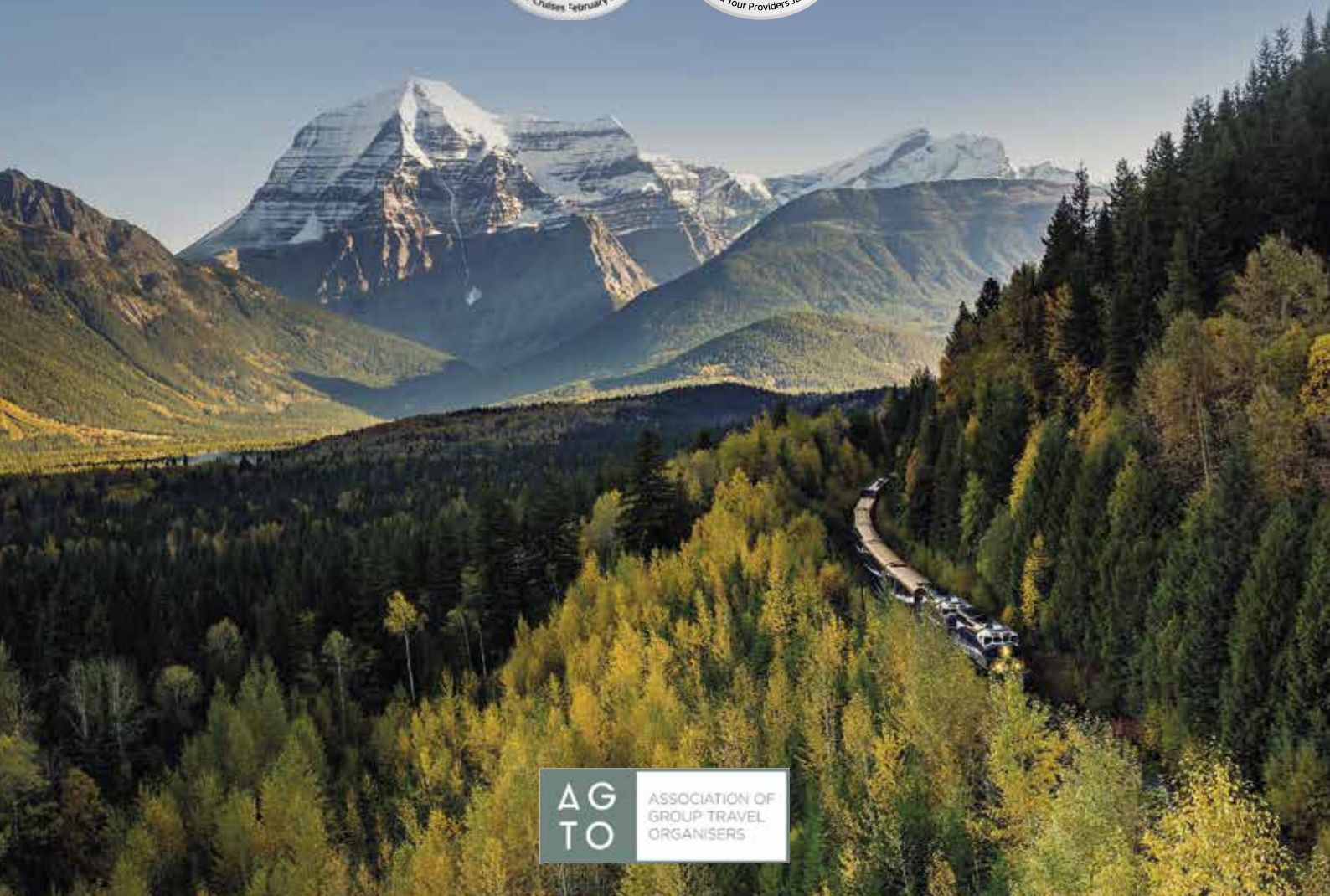
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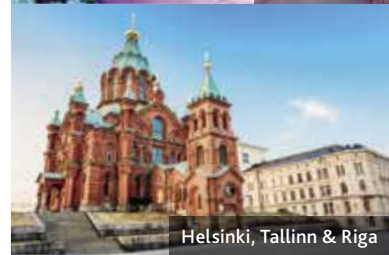
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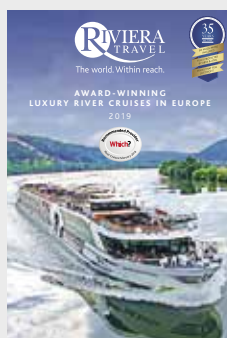
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one of the oldest surviving houses (16th Century) in the city. The Capitol building is being restored but it had recently opened for tours.

Washed and brushed for our last night in Cuba, the group congregated in the rooftop restaurant for cocktails and we also informed that we could have breakfast in there the following morning. That was a nice surprise!

A short stroll from the hotel brought us to the Havana Gourmet Restaurant where we treated to a fabulous meal before heading to a performance by the world-famous Buena Vista Social Club in their home city at the Havana Café. An excellent venue with quirky exhibits all around, great music and show.

#### **Thursday 23rd May/Friday 24th May**

With the final morning at leisure, there was some last minute shopping or exploring to do in Havana.

Luckily I did manage to fit in a tour of the Capitol, although

not fully open you did get to find out more about Cuba's history and a good look inside the building, albeit with some of it under wraps.

Early afternoon we departed the hotel for our overnight flight back to Manchester via Amsterdam.

Overall the tour had been a real eye opener for us all, as none of the group had visited the island before, but we thoroughly enjoyed it! We had covered a few miles over the 14 days, met a lot friendly and helpful people and seen a lot of interesting things during our stay.

I'm glad I was persuaded to organise the tour and I must extend my thanks to our guide in Cuba, Lazaro, for his cheery demeanour and commentary throughout.

A big thanks to Success Tours for putting together another great holiday, one that we will all remember for a long time.

*Bob Walker, N1082*

## **A Literary and Historic Day Out**

**The idea for a visit to Elizabeth Gaskell's house in Manchester came after John Flynn met the house manager, Sally Jastrzebski-Lloyd, at a travel trade show. He explains more about the trip.**

In April I took 45 members of Role On – the support group for recent long term former carers across the Wirral – on a day trip to Manchester. We travelled with Rochdale-based Ellen Smith Coach Tours, whose drivers are friendly and very supportive of members who need help with mobility.

Elizabeth Gaskell's novels such as *Mary Barton*, *Cranford* and *North and South* are well known and we thought

it would be interesting to learn more about the writer herself. Arriving at the house our coach parked close to the entrance and we were welcomed by Sally who gave us an overview about the house's history and what we would see during our visit. We were then split into two groups, each with a guide who led us round the ground and upper floors. The guides were excellent, they gave us plenty of information, could answer any question we posed and encouraged us to touch and inspect the exhibits. The house is fully accessible with lifts between the floors.

The basement houses an excellent café where we enjoyed cakes to die

for and also discovered more about Elizabeth herself, and the people who had visited her at home, including Charles Halle (founder of the Halle orchestra) and writers Charles Dickens and Beatrix Potter. There is also a pretty compact garden to wander around too.

We followed on with a coach tour of Victorian Manchester and had lunch at the grade II listed 200 year old pub, The Briton's Protection, which is decorated with murals relating to the Peterloo Massacre.

Our literary and historically rich day was much enjoyed by all.

*John Flynn, N2477*

### **AGTO Northern Branch Committee**

**Jenny Robinson** - Chairman

**Avril Redfern** - Treasurer

**Pam Wharton** - Secretary

**Bob Walker, Ray Howarth, John Flynn and Hazel Jones** - Committee Members

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## AGTO NORTHERN BRANCH

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

**All Branches Welcome**

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### 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

Since last writing, I am pleased to report that our branch continues to grow and we have had very good attendance at our meetings. Our day at RHS Wisley was a most successful one, thanks to Caroline Gilbert from RHS for hosting this, and it was especially nice to have time over lunch and during the tour to socialise with other members and exchange ideas.

Our next important date is our AGM and meeting at the Wildfowl and

Wetlands Trust Centre at Arundel on 25 September – a lovely location so hope to see a good attendance and visitors from other branches will be very welcome.

We also have two Familiarisation visits coming up. On 3rd October, City and Village Tours are giving us a guided walking tour called Soho Scandals in London. We also have a three-day break at Warners, Cricket St. Thomas from 29th November. I look forward to meeting members

at our events. Happy and successful organising everyone!

*Sue Povey, S1972*



## BRICK LANE MUSIC HALL

Stepping back in time – to a time when variety acts were performed in taverns, where singers, dancers and speciality acts 'did a turn' while the audience joined in (or not, as they wished but they usually did). We were treated to some great songs (if we couldn't actually remember all of the words we just la-la-ed along because the tunes were so familiar), some rather risqué jokes (but no swearing) about life in general and love in particular, and they also played the spoons (a lost art). Acts included *Puttin' on my top hat*, a selection of Marie Lloyd and Al Johnson songs, and Irish songs and dances. One of our members was called upon to assist the derring-do of the escapologist – 'How did he do it?' I could hear people ask! A lunch was included for our visit, although this can be afternoon tea if you prefer. Brick Lane Music Hall is not in Brick Lane (although it used to be which is how it got its name) but is now located close to London City Airport near the old docks, and housed in a fabulously decorated building, an old church, which added to the atmosphere. They are well set up for coaches, with a drop off right outside and free secure parking nearby, always a consideration when visiting London.

One of our members wrote this piece afterwards and sent it to the Music Hall – and it appears on their website. It's so nice for them to receive such positive feedback.

So did our audience think we passed muster with our Music Hall shows?

"It was absolutely wonderful! My Dad was an East End boy and was in at the tail-end of all the music halls when he was a little boy, taken by his parents. He taught me music hall songs instead of the usual nursery rhymes and I was pleased to join in on Wednesday with *The boy I loves sits up in the gallery!* The whole thing was so professional, so slick, so perfect – I hugely enjoyed everything and was weak with laughing and singing – it was a blast! The food was so good too and so expertly served, great staff, and at the bar. Your costumes were great too! Thank you for a wonderful afternoon! I shall always remember it!"

*Jackie Ring S2221*



# Delights of Tuscany

The upper Tuscany region was where I took my group of 34 in late May for 7 days. This was organised through Success Tours and it certainly turned out to be a very successful trip. We flew to Pisa and our itinerary was deliberately based in this region to avoid long coach journeys on the days out and to include some lesser visited destinations, whilst also including Florence. Our hotel, The Palace Hotel in Viareggio, was an excellent 4 star hotel with spacious rooms, classic and stylish furnishings and it served one of the best huge buffet breakfasts we have had. It also had a lovely roof terrace and bar for pre dinner drinks or watching the sunsets!

On our first morning we visited the delightful town of Lucca. There is so much to see here within its city walls: packed full of historic churches, towers, a palace, medieval architecture and small, local gastronomic shops and restaurants. Some of our group climbed up the 225 steps of Tower Guinigi to see the amazing views of the ancient buildings and mountains beyond! After a well earned break for lunch we then travelled on to the village of Borgo a Mozzano on the Serchio River to see the famous Ponte della Maddalena, known as the "devil's



bridge". This is a very steep and narrow medieval bridge and worth visiting.

No visit to Tuscany is complete without a visit to Florence and so the next day we braved the crowds and had a walking tour of the city's highlights. This was quite tiring for some on a hot day and it worked well to have free time to explore further or take a rest. Later in our itinerary we visited Pistoia, known as "little Florence" for its similar architecture but without the crowds. I highly recommend this town as it was most attractive, very easy to walk around

and far less touristy.

On one of our other days, we visited the spa town of Montecatini Terme to see its famous spas fed by mineral water springs and the hill top town above, Montecatini Alto, that is reached by funiculaire (but there is also a small car park a pre-booked coach can reach). After this we had a delightful but lazy afternoon visiting a lovely local vineyard and sampling some of their excellent wines.

On our free day, Viareggio had one of the largest markets in the area and so some chose to stay in the town and explore or shop and others found that the nearby railway station with regular trains and short journey times to Pisa, Lucca, Florence, etc gave them ample opportunity for independent sightseeing.

I was very happy with all the arrangements on this tour and can highly recommend being more selective when visiting an area as big and popular as Tuscany.



*Sue Povey, S1972*



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## **AGTO SOUTHERN BRANCH**

### **2- or 3-night FAM GETAWAY WEEKEND to**

### **Warner Leisure Hotels, Cricket St Thomas, Somerset**

### **Friday 29th November 2019 | All Branches Welcome**

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This Grade II listed Regency mansion doubled as Grantleigh Manor in BBC TV series *To The Manor Born*. More than 30 years later, there's still the invitation to enjoy the good life and the space and grandeur of it all. Historic rooms make it easy to wind down, while open fireplaces, squishy sofas, framed photos and tapestries in the lounges offer a traditional backdrop for afternoon teas. Plus, it's all enveloped by 160 acres of beautiful grounds which you can explore on foot – either joining the gardener's chatty tours or following the signposted trails through the formal gardens, woodland, and around the chain of lakes. Activities which Warners arrange during the day will keep you entertained, but if you wish to explore the area, Cricket St. Thomas is situated right in the middle of classic English fields and valleys, just 15 miles from Dorset's heritage coastline. After dinner, evenings play out with live music and shows.

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AGTO Southern Branch thanks Warner Leisure for arranging the weekend and showcasing the holidays it can offer groups.

**To make a booking, please call Jackie Ring on 01483 824450 or email [ring\\_jackie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ring_jackie@yahoo.co.uk)**

# RHS WISLEY – BRANCH MEETING



After the meeting, members had an opportunity to socialise during a lovely lunch. It was great to learn that many of the lunch ingredients were grown at Wisley.

Whilst most of the Southern Branch members enjoyed the horticultural tour lead by an experienced Gardener, I chose to take the shorter guided tour so that I could have more time to explore the garden and the Sculpture at Wisley Trail. The Sculptures will be displayed until 1 December 2019, featuring works by Henry Moore, Henry Bruce, Lynn Chadwick, Tracey Emin, Philip Haas, and Phillip King.

If you take your group, make sure that you allow a whole day. The gardens are vast but you don't realise how far you have walked because there is always something different around each corner which grabs your attention. The view of the valley from the top of the Rock Gardens was amazing, the Glasshouse was full of colourful plants, a waterfall and a hippo! The orchards will look fantastic when in flower or at harvest time. Other areas to enjoy are the herb garden, Bonsai walk, the colourful borders and the rose garden. As stated on the promotional material this is a 'garden for all seasons' and 'where inspiration grows'.

Oops! I have to report that I got asked to leave the

gardens. You will be relieved to know that it was not due to my bad behaviour, but unfortunately the gardens were about to close and I had simply run out of time.

I didn't get to see all of the gardens, so I am looking forward to revisiting it with my group.

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To book call 0207 831 3170 or [www.rhs.org.uk/groups](http://www.rhs.org.uk/groups)

We are very grateful to Caroline Gilbert, RHS who was our host for the day. [carolinegilbert@rhs.org.uk](mailto:carolinegilbert@rhs.org.uk)  
01483 212 445

*Anne Barnes S2023*



# Southern Branch AGM Meeting

11.00am, Wednesday 25th September | WWT Arundel BN18 9PB

WWT Arundel is one of nine wildfowl and wetland nature reserves managed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, a nature conservation charity in the UK. On this 60-acre reserve, situated in the Arun valley, they provide a variety of habitats for its large number of different species of 'residents', as well as visiting wildlife.

After the meeting and visit to the WWT, you are free to wander around the lovely market town of Arundel to see what else there is which might be of interest to your

group – perhaps the tea shops, Arundel Castle (paying your own entry) or the Cathedral, or nearby Amberley Museum.

Members from other Branches are very welcome to attend any of our meetings.

Please contact Jackie Ring, Southern Branch Secretary for further information and to book.

Tel: 01483 824450 or email [ring\\_jackie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto: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

The Western Branch Summer Meeting on 15th June, at Sherborne Castle was a very interesting day. Arriving in a rain shower was a little inconvenient but the usual 'British Spirit' ensured laughter about the 'summer' weather amid dripping umbrellas and a dash for the café; a light-hearted start to the day! There was a disappointing turn-out: 56 Western Branch members and only 11 attended, along with 6 guests. However for those who were there June and Christine had arranged a very informative day for us, including tea and coffee on arrival, lunch, a talk by Ann Brigg (Senior Steward of the Castle) and a self-guided tour. All for a cost of £15 per head!!

Ann Brigg informed us that the original Sherborne Castle was built in the C12th but is now a ruin. The current castle was built in 1594 by Sir Walter Raleigh on the site of the

original hunting lodge. Initially the land was leased to Sir Walter by Elizabeth I but later he was given the freehold. Sir Walter and his wife, Bess Throckmorton, incurred the disfavour of the Queen and he had a troubled family life as a result, however even when he was in the Tower of London Bess visited him and it is believed he and Bess conceived their last child there. Further woe surrounded the family when Raleigh was released from the Tower and sent by James I to find the gold of El Dorado; he took his teenage son Walter on the mission with strict instructions from James I not to engage with the Spanish. Unfortunately Sir Walter's son got into a fight against Spanish soldiers and was killed and Sir Walter, with no gold to give to James I, was imprisoned in the Tower again. Sir Walter Raleigh was then beheaded and forfeited his property to the Crown. Sherborne Castle

was purchased by the Digby family in 1617 and is now the stately home of the Wingfield-Digby family. It is still used by the family, although they don't live there now. Surrounding the Castle are 42 acres of Grade I listed gardens and a lake created by Capability Brown.

Looking forward, I hope to see members and guests at our Branch AGM in Salisbury on Saturday 28th September 2019. This will now be a one-day meeting with an optional overnight stay for those who wish to make a weekend of it. We are actively seeking members to join the committee and would love to hear from you. Committee meetings are generally held during the Branch outing and the duties are not onerous. We would really welcome new blood and fresh ideas!

*Roger Sims W2388*

## GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL CHORISTERS VISIT BERLIN



As part of my work as Gloucester Cathedral Music Department Manager I have the rewarding but sometimes stressful task of organising and running the tours for the Cathedral choirs. It was this task back in 2008 after returning from a tour to the USA that I became acquainted with the GTO organisation, having been nominated for GTO of the Year, and made it to the '4 finalists' list. I didn't win but that event persuaded me to become a GTO!

From 10th – 13th May this year, our 37 Choristers (boys and girls) and six staff members went to Berlin at the invitation of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra - probably the best orchestra in the world- to perform in a concert at the orchestra's own concert hall, the Philharmonie. The boys and girls spent four days in Berlin, preparing music by the contemporary composers Jonathan Dove and Nico Muhly, and then performing the works with the Berlin philharmonic to a packed hall. The Choristers, all between 7 and 13 years old, sang entirely from memory. The



conductor, Simon Halsey, said "The Berlin Philharmonic and choirs from all over Europe were astonished by the excellence and unflagging professionalism of your remarkable choristers. With such a distinguished music staff it was just what I had anticipated!" A tribute to the preparation and high standards expected of the choristers by the Cathedral's Director of Music, Adrian Partington.

The Cathedral's Singing Development Leader Nia Llewelyn Jones said "Not many children can say that they have sung on the stage of the Philharmonie alongside what many would consider the best orchestra in the world, with a massed international choir of over 500 singers and the composers of both pieces present. But, our choristers can! This was an outstanding experience for our children to sing in a very different setting to that which they are used to."

Our trip to Berlin was an intensive few days with a vigorous rehearsal schedule. But, our choristers worked hard and delivered during all rehearsals. The conductor commented on their professionalism and excellent delivery. It was a joy to spend time with the children and get to know them better in a different setting. It was a particular pleasure for me to have both the boys and girls present. We did have a few opportunities to 'let off steam', including a trip to the beautiful Tiergarten Park,

where the children played and even built a den in the woods. It was lovely to see the children interact with each other, and especially to see the way in which the older children helped and supported the younger ones. I feel that everyone bonded; the atmosphere was positive and friendly throughout.

The concert was wonderful. The final movement of Jonathan Dove's *There was a child weaves together* many themes in the choral and orchestral parts, leading to a dramatic climax. At the core of this were our own choristers, stood in the front row, singing their hearts out. I felt moved and very proud. This was clearly a sentiment shared by the children – many of them were in tears, overcome by the occasion and the joy of being a part of such a performance. The atmosphere at the post-concert reception was joyful and vibrant. Comments from parents have included '(My daughter) said that was the best thing that happened to her in her life!' It was a privilege and pleasure to be a small part of this tour, and to spend time with great colleagues both young and slightly older!"

Thanks go to ACFEA Travel Consultants, London for their professional approach to organising flights, accommodation and refreshments and to Rover European Coaches for travel in UK.

*Helen Sims W2150*

## Guided Tour of NT Cliveden House & Gardens

Last year four of the Wales and Midlands Travel Club committee went to Cliveden on a recce which I had arranged with Mat who looked after groups booking a visit. He very kindly took us on a shortened tour so we would know what to expect on the day of our groups tour.

Sadly the day before our visit Mat had left the NT and moved to Rievaulx Abbey, English Heritage.

We left Cardiff with a full coach and the journey going well until we hit the M4 between the M5 and M32 section. Unfortunately there had been a car fire (could not even tell

what type of car) and some lanes closed. We lost a bit of time there and then again further along the M4 in the road works – more delays. I decided to ring Cliveden and advise them as we were booked on the house tours for certain times and did not look like we would get there in time. The chap who had taken over from Mat phoned me back and we re-arranged the times for the house visits. Thankfully we were only about 20 mins late but having put back the house times allowed everyone time to visit the little girls and boys rooms!

The group were split into three



groups for the house tour and each guide was very good. After the tour we had time to obtain lunch in the NT Orangery (very good food, you can book for the group in advance but we decided to let everyone choose on the day – turned out to be a good choice as the weather was HOT!). The 2 tour guides for the gardens at 2pm split the group up and off they went, all said it was excellent and how much they enjoyed it. Due to on-going spinal and hip problems I was not able to go on the garden tour.

People then had time to visit other parts of the estate, including shopping and many indulged in ice creams or ice lollys!

The coach departed Cliveden at 4:45pm and we arrived back in Cardiff about 8pm. All said what a wonderful day and could I book another NT trip for next year.

Many in our Travel Club are members of the National Trust, even more are members of the National Trust for Scotland. For those joining, if you are over 60 you can join the National Trust for Scotland as a senior from the age of 60. Unfortunately with the National Trust you have to have been a member at least 5 years before

they allow you to join at the senior rate.

There is a big difference in membership price. Many of our group only join when they have retired, so you can understand why they join the NTS.

### Details about Cliveden

Set high above the River Thames with far-reaching views, the beautiful gardens capture the grandeur of a bygone age. For more than 300 years Cliveden was home to Dukes, Earls, Viscounts and for a while a Prince. A glittering hub of society, Cliveden hosted exclusive parties and political gatherings, later becoming infamously associated with the Profumo Affair.

The gardens have been visited by virtually every British Monarch since George I and many famous designers, including John Fleming, Nora Lindsay and most recently Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe have helped shape them. • Famous Parterre, beautifully restored with colourful spring and summer bedding displays • The Long Garden features distinctive topiary and is planted with special displays for spring and summer • Spring floral displays including

snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells and impressive autumn colour • Outstanding sculpture collection on display throughout the garden • Restored Cliveden Maze, a full height yew tree maze. • The Rose Garden, reinstated in 2014, based on Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe's original 1950s design - includes over 900 roses, creating a summer long display.

Cliveden House Tour -The stunning Italianate mansion is leased as a private hotel and NT visitors can take a look inside on certain days from March to October. The tour of some of the public rooms on the ground floor will include the impressive Great Hall and famous French Dining Room. The tours operate from 11am to 12:30pm on certain days only and last about 30 minutes.

Cliveden House (the hotel) is where Meghan Markle stayed the night before her wedding to HRH Prince Harry of Wales

Thanks to all the Staff at Cliveden NT for making it such a wonderful day. Also thanks to our new driver, John, from Mainline who did a wonderful driving job on the day.

*Heather Taylor W1008*





# Day Trip to Dolly Parton's 9 to 5 Musical

This was the Wales and Midlands Travel Club's second London trip of 2019 and little did I realise when I booked the tickets last year what a day it would be!

It was the day after the marches in London against President Trump. I know London is bad for traffic, but taking nearly 90 mins to do seven miles is!

I thought London was supposed to be getting coach friendly these days for parking etc instead it seems to be the opposite. Coach parks being closed and a few bays being opened instead is no help at all. Coaches can bring in large groups of people in one vehicle compared to how many cars would be needed. The members of our club prefer to go to London for the shows as they like the day out to the show and able to have lunch before the show.

Due to the popularity of this musical we sold 101 tickets and took two coaches on the day.

On the day we went Louise Redknapp, Bonnie Langford and Brian Conley starred in the show. Bonnie Langford and Brian Conley stole the show. I can honestly say it was one of the funniest shows I've been to, it was superb, laughing so much we were crying with laughter. Brian Conley as the 'lying Boss' – oh to see him strung up in the air (for those waiting to go I will not spoil it.) Bonnie Langford was incredible, what an all-round dancer and singer she is.

*9 TO 5 THE MUSICAL* is based on the 1980 film of the same name which starred Dolly Parton. It tells the story of Doralee, Violet and Judy – three workmates who are pushed to boiling point by their sexist and egotistical boss. Concocting a plan to kidnap and turn the tables on their despicable supervisor, will the girls manage to



reform their office – or will events unravel when the CEO pays an unexpected visit?

Inspired by the cult film and brought to you by Dolly herself, this hilarious new West End production is about teaming up, standing up and taking care of business!

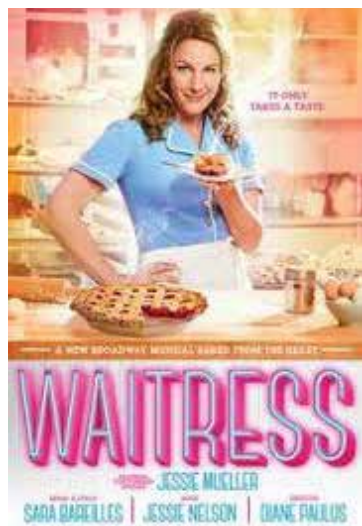
It features the songs *9 to 5*, *Backwoods Barbie* and *Get Out and Stay Out*.

Once again Allen at Groupline did us proud with superb Front Stall Seats at less than half price for a group rate at the Savoy Theatre. Everyone enjoyed it so much, they have passed the details of the trip onto work mates, and I have ended up having to book another trip in October to the show.

I'd also like to thank our two drivers Gareth and Brad from Mainline for an excellent day and for getting the coaches into London in time for everyone to get some lunch before the start of the show at the Savoy.

Heather Taylor W1008

## Day Trip to see Waitress the Musical



The Travel Club for many years has organised day trips to London mid-week for members to be able to go to matinee shows or spend the day in London. This way they only need take one day's holiday leave.

This was the first trip of 2019 for the Club. I had been persuaded by one of the deputies of the Travel Club to obtain tickets for the show as he had seen it on Broadway.

Once again Allen at Groupline did us proud with excellent Dress Circle seats

at nearly half price for a group rate at the Adelphi Theatre.

I must be honest, I did not know what to expect, not having seen the film that the musical was based on. However, featuring an original score by acclaimed singer-songwriter Sara Bareilles, the musical is based on the motion picture of the same name written by Adrienne Shelley. Waitress tells the story of Jenna Hunterston, a waitress who is in an unhappy marriage to her husband Earl. When she unexpectedly discovers she is pregnant, she starts an affair with her

gynecologist and begins to look for ways out of her abusive relationship, embracing her unique pie-making skills as a chance for a new life.

Waitress premiered at the American Repertory Theater (ART) in Cambridge, Massachusetts in summer 2015. Featuring direction by Diane Paulus and choreography by Chase Brock, the production starred Tony Award winner Jessie Mueller who led the cast at the Broadway opening.

The production opened on Broadway in March 2016 at Brooks Atkinson Theatre, where it is still running.

For the first 10 minutes I wondered what I'd come to see, but then on came the actor playing Ogie and I went from not being interested to laughing/crying for the rest of the show. The three female leads playing Jenna, Becky and Dawn were great as well. This is a show for adults!

Thanks to Allen at Groupline for excellent tickets and Mainline Coaches and especially our driver Gareth for getting us to London on time and back to Cardiff.

*Heather Taylor 1008W*

# WESTLAND RETIREMENT GROUP VISIT CAMBRIDGESHIRE

At the end of April we took our Westland Retirement Group to the Cambridgeshire area using our local coach company South West Coaches. We stayed at the Marriott Hotel in Huntingdon which I must say as one of the best hotels we have ever stayed in, the food and staff were above excellent. We had a free day in Cambridge, which has a very good open air tour bus taking in all the sights and universities of Cambridge.

We took a trip on the Nene Valley Railway and visited Burghley House which were both worth doing. Of course you cannot visit this area without visiting the Duxford Imperial War Museum which is massive and interesting especially for the men! Also a visit to Ely Cathedral was truly wonderful and must be one of the



best in England. On the way home we had a river trip on the River Lea at Ware stopping at the Fish and Eels country pub for lunch; excellent. A good holiday was had by all, except the weather could have been better - gale force winds and cold but at least it did not rain.

*Christine Hewitt & June Coleman, W1888*



# Trip to Chawton House & the Jane Austen House Museum

In June Yatton Outing Group visited the lovely village of Chawton with its pretty thatched cottages and Chawton House by coach with 47 members of our Outing Club, having pre-booked a guided tour and a lunch in their Great Hall.

From the initial booking to waving goodbye we were made welcome by the staff there. The house has a small staff and their many volunteers welcome visitors, give tours, and help with a range of tasks throughout the estate.





Such a beautiful setting - our first view of the house and the beautiful church being down the long gravel drive with sheep grazing in the fields, sweeping lawns and even a ha-ha. It is a lovely house, renovated tastefully and sympathetically with the help of an American benefactor, and it is easy to imagine the generations of the Knight family living there since the 1600's. We were split into two groups, and our guide Ian was so informative, bringing the house to life with his descriptions of life there through the ages, explaining how the Knight name has endured (with the help of name changes as in the case of Edward Austen, Jane's brother - to enable him to inherit the estate). It was known as The Great House by Jane who visited it regularly. Particularly interesting was the very old map of London which was set out on an eight-sided screen, one of only two in existence and used from time today when details from it are required for new installations - last used in connection with the new Crossrail in the South East.

We arranged for our group to have lunch in the Great Hall and afterwards had a little time to visit the grounds, the walled garden and the inevitable shop. A member of the family was on hand with his own knowledge of living there. The upkeep of Chawton House is now only possible through

a charitable trust which survives on visits like ours and hopefully it will continue to gain in popularity.

Unfortunately we did not have time to take in the garden trail - a full day here would have been necessary for us to see everything, and we wanted to include in our day out a visit to the Jane Austen House museum, a short stroll through the village away.

We continued our day with the pre-arranged self-guided tour of the Jane Austen Museum the cottage where Jane Austen, her mother and sister (both named Cassandra) and their friend lived on the estate owned by Edward Knight. The house is old and shows its age, but it is really charming.

First there is an interesting and informative short film available on



loop supplying the background of Jane and her family's life here and elsewhere. The family's home is quaint and very interesting, with authentic pieces they would have used and enjoyed. On display in the house there are many items such as a lock of her hair, her turquoise ring, part of a hand-quilted coverlet she had sewn with the help of her mother and sister, her writing desk (where she would have written many of her manuscripts) and letters she wrote. Particularly touching was a letter written by her sister to a close family member telling of Jane's illness, her last days and her death in Winchester.

Luckily the sun was shining so we were able to sit in the delightful gardens - really easy to imagine that not a lot had changed since Jane Austen lived there.

Opposite the cottage is a lovely old pub with pretty gardens, Cassandra's Tea Rooms (presumably named after Jane's mother or sister) and parking.

We had a wonderful day in Chawton visiting these two houses and it was well worth the several hours of travelling from Somerset to see them, even for the few who were not Austen fans.

*Elisabeth Bird, W2793*

# Fam trip on CMV vessel *Marco Polo*

"You've got to be in it to win it" so the saying goes ! and it certainly proved to be the case for 4 members of Western Branch who entered the Prize Draw with Cruise & Maritime Voyages. Whether you entered at the AGTO AGM in Nottingham Showcase weekend or the South West Trade Travel Show it was still the 'luck of the draw'. But Martin and Lorraine Gibson, Gill and Dave Brooker and Roger and Helen Sims were delighted to meet up on Saturday morning as they boarded the Marco Polo in Portsmouth Cruise and Ferry Port for a short cruise. Portsmouth to Tilbury London – you can't get much more exotic than that can you? On arrival in London on Sunday morning there were coaches waiting to transfer passengers back to Portsmouth to collect cars and drive home. Cruise & Maritime had invited 17 guests GTOs on this special fam. trip and of course we recognised friends from Southern Branch, Central Branch and Associate members.

How much can you pack into 26 hours? A huge amount if Cruise & Maritime Voyages have anything to do with it!

- Saturday 1000-1130 Embarkation and unpack
- Saturday 1130-1330 Lunch
- Saturday 1330 Lifeboat drill – muster stations, briefing and lifeboat station
- Saturday 1400 Sail-away party and first-class entertainment on the pool deck
- Saturday 1600 full British 'Tea' with sandwiches, rolls and cakes
- Saturday 1700 Bridge tour – exclusive visit and chat to the Bridge team
- Saturday 1730 Free time to relax in the sunshine and use the whirlpools
- Saturday 1930 Pre-dinner reception with drinks and CMV Bingo (with prizes)
- Saturday 2015 Dinner in the Waldorf Restaurant (posh frocks and fine dining)
- Saturday 2200 Showtime in the Marco Polo Lounge Theatre
- Saturday 2300 Late night entertainment and dancing
- Sunday 0200 Bed!
- Sunday 0700 Clear cabin and breakfast
- Sunday 0830 Disembark
- Sunday 0900 Coach to Portsmouth
- Sunday 1200 Farewells and thanks!

The weather was fabulous; blue skies, sunshine and a calm sea. Many of us were still on deck at midnight as the ship turned north-eastwards across the English Channel leaving behind the lights of the French coast to make the turn towards Margate and then to London.

Thanks must go to Oliver Tillson and Marie Fowler, CMV Group Managers, who were attentive throughout, generous in their hospitality and enthusiastic about all the Cruise & Maritime fleet. Oliver must also have a special mention for his CMV Bingo and his late night disco dancing. Bravo to both of you.

*Helen Sims W2150*





# TOUR TO WELLS CATHEDRAL AND CULLOMPTON PARISH CHURCH



More than 40 members of the Stuart Singers Choir travelled to Wells Cathedral on a cool April morning, transported by Rover European Coaches for the first stop on our Choir Tour.

I had arranged with The Bishops Palace, Wells, whilst at the South West Travel Show, to give us Group entry rates even when we arrived in smaller groups as long as we were wearing our 'Stuart Singers' polo shirts and some of the choir managed a quick self-guided tour around the Bishops Palace Gardens which they thought was fabulous.

Having liaised with the Wells Cathedral Vergers and set up my music stand Roger and I had a coffee and cake in the Cathedral Coffee shop and a quick walk round the Cathedral before meeting up with the choir who were assembling beneath the magnificent scissor arch in Wells Cathedral. Our informal concert started at 1.05pm and we were allowed to sing for 40 minutes. Performing in this wonderful building was a very memorable experience and it was a privilege to have such an opportunity, "you could hear

yourself resonating throughout the Nave" said a delighted choir member. Many of the visitors to Wells Cathedral stopped to sit and listen to our programme of music, interrupting their own tour, it was lovely to have such an impromptu and enthusiastic audience. Following the concert many of the choir took advantage of the Wells Cathedral coffee shop for lunch, whilst other members wandered around the town, on market day, and enjoyed the atmosphere and sunshine.

Shortly after 3pm we travelled by coach to Cullompton to the Padbrook House Hotel. We have used this hotel on a previous visit, it is in a well-appointed location, with good quality rooms and friendly staff.

In full 'choir uniform' at 6.30pm the Stuart Singers made their way to St Andrew's Church for an evening concert with the Wyndham Singers Male Voice Choir. The church is in Simon Jenkins book of 'England's Thousand Best Churches', and the medieval, fantail, vaulted roof and the splendidly decorated rood screen were immediately apparent

when we entered.

This 'twinning' of the choirs was our third shared concert together and they greeted us like long lost friends. There were over 200 in the audience and each choir performed a varied programme, 20 minutes for each choir in the first and second half of the concert followed by a joint rendition of Parry's Jerusalem. We were well entertained by the Wyndham Singers repertoire and the 'entertaining' continued after the concert, across in the Community Centre, where a fine supper had been provided by the Wyndham Singers' wives. After supper there was the usual ad hoc renditions of songs to keep us all singing until 11pm when the coach returned us to our hotel. After breakfast on Sunday we returned back to Minchinhampton with anticipation of the next get-together with the Male Voice Choir.

Thanks to Rover European Coaches, Wells Cathedral, Bishops Palace Wells, Padbrook House Hotel and Cullompton Church.

*Helen Sims W2150*

# 2020 Summer Fam and Branch Meeting

Saturday 20th June | Chavenage, Nr. Tetbury, Gloucestershire



Chavenage is a wonderful Elizabethan House and has been used as a location for many TV shows & films, such as *Lark Rise to Candleford*, *The House of Elliott* and *Poldark*. Those of you who watch *Poldark*, you will know it better as Trenwith House. Western Branch has made

arrangements with Caroline, the manager of Chavenage and elder daughter of the owners, for a FAM visit with a guided tour followed by a buffet lunch. Joanna, Caroline's younger sister, runs the in-house catering, & can cater for all needs & is arranging a buffet lunch, anyone with special dietary needs, please ensure details are shown on the booking form.

The tour gives you details of the history of the house and the two families that have lived at Chavenage since the reign of Elizabeth I.

Please put the date in your diary now!

Booking form and details of the day will be in the Autumn magazine.

Please email Gill or Martin to let them know if you will be booking.

## NT and NTS information

My mother's family is from Scotland & I spent many summer school holidays there as a child. I grew to love the visits to castles & houses. When Phil & I got married we had our honeymoon in Scotland & visited many NTS properties, saying yes we would join. We eventually joined in the 1980s at Culzean Castle near Ayr, we have been members since & now have seniors membership.

Over the years I've taken groups on holidays to Scotland & included many Scottish National trust properties. Due to this, when people have not

been members of the National Trust already I've given them the information re the National Trust & the National Trust for Scotland.

The National Trust for Scotland - if you are 60 & not been a member previously, you get the automatic seniors rate.

The National Trust - if you are 60 plus when joining - you have to have been a member for 5 years of the last 10 years to obtain the senior rate. Otherwise you have to pay the adult rate.

There is a big difference in price between the NT & the NTS, please check on the web pages for both organisations.

The NTS is happy to offer AGTO members free admission for their own familiarisation trips. Please contact the team in advance to get your tickets, quoting your AGTO membership number, name and address. You should email [traveltrade@nts.org.uk](mailto:traveltrade@nts.org.uk) and your tickets will be sent on to you.

Heather Taylor W1008

## AGTO Western Branch Committee

**Roger Sims** - Chairman

**Martin Gibson** - Treasurer

**Gill Brooker** - Secretary

**Helen Sims, Andy Holmes and Martin Hay** - Co-opted Members

**June Coleman** - Committee Members



**LIMITED SEASON UNTIL 2 NOVEMBER**

JAY  
**MCGUINNESS**

WENDI  
**PETERS**

KIMBERLEY  
**WALSH**

AND

MATTHEW  
**KELLY**



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# Overnight & Lunch Events

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Step aboard *Columbus* or *Magellan* at Tilbury for a fabulous show and delicious five course lunch, or dinner and show plus the option to stay overnight with breakfast the following morning. Includes welcome cocktails and ½ bottle of wine per person with the meal.

	Thurs & Fri	Sat
Lunch & Show	£49pp	£59pp
Dinner & Show	£79pp	£89pp
Dinner, Show & Overnight*	£99pp	£109pp

Cabin upgrade options & single cabins available upon request

**Book a group of 20 adults and the 21st adult is FREE!**



*Marco Polo* - 6th, 7th, 13th, 14th & 21st Dec



*Columbus* - 19th & 20th Dec



*Magellan* - 6th, 7th, 12th, 13th & 14th Dec

## Marco Polo at Bristol Avonmouth

**Friday 6th December 2019**

**Saturday 7th December 2019**

**Friday 13th December 2019**

**Saturday 14th December 2019**

**Saturday 21st December 2019**

## Magellan at London Tilbury

**Friday 6th December 2019**

**Saturday 7th December 2019**

**Thursday 12th December 2019**

**Friday 13th December 2019**

**Saturday 14th December 2019**

## Columbus at London Tilbury

**Thursday 19th December 2019**

**Friday 20th December 2019**

**[www.cruiseandmaritime.com/overnightevents](http://www.cruiseandmaritime.com/overnightevents)**

☎ 0844 998 9274 or see your ABTA Travel Agent

Offers subject to availability and may be withdrawn without notice. Terms and conditions apply visit [www.cruiseandmaritime.com](http://www.cruiseandmaritime.com). Prices are per person. \*Based on twin inner cabin occupancy. Please note that wheelchairs are not suitable for use on board and we regret that wheelchair assistance will not be available at the port for our onboard events. Groups may not be seated together, maximum table size is 8. Onboard events are non-refundable and non-transferable. Calls cost 5p per minute plus your telephone company's access charge. Operated by South Quay Travel & Leisure trading as Cruise & Maritime Voyages. ABTA V9945. ATOL 4619.



# Associate Member Fam Trips

**New from this issue we feature fam trips organised by Associate Members especially for AGTO members. They're a great way to get new ideas and are tailored specifically for the group organiser.**

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## **13th - 15th September - Just for Groups!**

Exclusive 'Group Organiser Educational Weekend' arranged in conjunction with Kynren, Beamish and Durham Tourism. Experience first-hand the amazing Kynren and award-winning Beamish Open Air Museum. Pre-book now as places are strictly limited and available for bona-fide group leaders and one travelling companion. The £119 per person subsidised cost will be fully refunded if you then go on to make a new group booking with just for groups!

Early booking is recommended. To book your place today contact Sales at Just for Groups on 01603 886740.

## **17th September - Old Royal Naval College**

Immerse yourself in Britain's Sistine Chapel and discover the recently restored Painted Hall, an epic masterpiece of baroque art. Included • tour / talk with one of our expert guides at 2pm • complimentary cream tea in Admiral's House from 3pm • Free time to explore the Painted Hall and the Old Royal Naval College site (until closing at 5pm) Time: 1.30pm arrival for 2pm start

This FAM Trip is open to GTO AGTO members only and is limited to 30 spaces. To RSVP please email Siobhan Harrison at [sh@travelbeat.co.uk](mailto:sh@travelbeat.co.uk) by end of day Tuesday 10th September.

## **26th September - Macclesfield Museums & Paradise Silk Mill**

Exclusive invitation-only event for AGTO members on Thursday 26th September 11 – 1pm.

Our expert Guides will explain all stages of the silk weaving process and give a demonstration on a restored loom. Experience the unique sights and sounds of a technology that laid the foundations for our digital age. Explore how Silk shaped Macclesfield over 300 years, it's intriguing connection with Egypt, and the role that our silk industry played during the Second World War.

To book email [bookings@silkmacclesfield.org.uk](mailto:bookings@silkmacclesfield.org.uk)

## **21st October - Coach Tours UK Magazine and Creative Tourism Ideas and Solutions North**

Staged at the Cliftonville Hotel, Cromer, this one-day event is free for coach operators and group travel organisers to attend, and is aimed at adding valuable ideas for tour programmes in the North Norfolk region.

Contact Matthew on 01733 363480/[editor@coachtoursuk.com](mailto:editor@coachtoursuk.com) or Amanda on 01733 363481/[amanda@coachtoursuk.com](mailto:amanda@coachtoursuk.com)

## **23rd - 26th October - Ramblers Walking Holidays Lakeland retreat**

Our beautiful country house in the Lake District played host to our recent group organiser's event when people came from far and wide to get a feel for our holidays, whilst experiencing the best mountains and lakeside paths. Come and experience the legendary hospitality of our authentic Lakeland retreat, by the shores of Buttermere; meet the Hassness House staff, our leaders and fellow group organisers. Prices start from £195 per person!

Call Paco on 01707 331133 or email [Paco.Gonzalez@rwhtravel.com](mailto:Paco.Gonzalez@rwhtravel.com) to reserve your place now.

## **11th - 15th November - Scotland trip with Ellen Smith (Tours)**

Salutation Hotel, Perth • Full Scottish breakfast each day • 3-course, choice menu dinner with tea/coffee each day • Porterage • Executive coach & professional tour driver throughout • Fully Escorted by Ellen Smith staff • Three Bridges Cruise with cream tea • Guided tour of Dunfermline • Visit to the V&A Museum in Dundee • Entry to RRS *Discovery*, Dundee • Entrance to Black Watch Castle & Museum, Perth, with tea/coffee & shortbread • Some evening entertainment in the hotel • £169.00 per person sharing a twin/double room, £64.00 single room supplement. Tour departs Greater Manchester/Lancashire but self-drive or is an option if you would like to join us.

To book contact Pam Wharton on 01706 648126 or [p.wharton@ellensmith.co.uk](mailto:p.wharton@ellensmith.co.uk)

## **6th December - Cruise and Maritime Voyages**

A free, hosted overnight event onboard MV *Magellan*. We will hold 15 cabins, based on two people sharing, for AGTO members or one AGTO member and plus one. £10 refundable deposit per person at the time of submitting names to secure a space, this will then be refunded upon attending the event. Aimed at group travel organisers who arrange group holidays and not day trip organisers. The festive event will include overnight accommodation, welcome drinks reception hosted by Cruise and Maritime Voyages groups department, five-course dinner with use of the ship's facilities and and onboard entertainment. Before disembarkation a continental breakfast will be served. To book contact the groups department on 01708 893109.

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Date	Branch	Events	Contact
13th-15th Sept	National	Just for Groups! Group Organiser Educational Weekend	01603 886740
17th Sept	National	Old Royal Naval College fam trip	Siobhan Harrison sh@travelbeat.co.uk
20th Sept	Kent	Battle of Britain Museum, Folkstone & AGM	James Silvester jamesilvester600@msn.com
25th Sept	Southern	AGM - Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Arundel	Jackie Ring, 01483 824450 or ring_jackie@yahoo.co.uk
26th Sept	National	Macclesfield Museums fam trip	bookings@silkmacclesfield.org.uk
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
3rd Oct	Southern	'Soho Scandals' guided walking tour, hosted by City & Village Tours	Pat Lake, 01608 643458 or plake1970@aol.com
8th Oct	Eastern	Visit Essex Group Travel Show	carol.jolly@essex.gov.uk
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	Eastern Branch AGM & day at Hampton Court courtesy of HRP	Joan Hanks joan.hanks@virginmedia.com
23rd-26th Oct	National	Ramblers Walking Holidays Lakeland retreat fam trip	Paco Gonzalez, 01707 331133 or Paco.Gonzalez@rwhtravel.com
<b>End of Oct</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Deadline for #5 AGTO magazine copy</b>	<b>Branch Chair or Magazine coordinator</b>
1st-3rd Nov	Northern	Lancashire Fam Trip x 2 nights (3 days)	rj.walker@btinternet.com
4th-6th Nov	National	World Travel Market, Excel, London	www.london.wtm.co.uk
11th-15th Nov	National	Scotland Fam Trip with Ellen Smith Tours	Pam Wharton, 01706 648126 or p.wharton@ellesmith.co.uk
22nd-25th Nov	Kent	Autumn Break at Marsham Court Hotel, Bournemouth	James Silvester jamesilvester600@msn.com
29th Nov - 1st/2nd Dec	Southern	Fam w/e at Cricket St Thomas hosted by Warner Leisure Hotels	Jackie Ring, 01483 824450 or ring_jackie@yahoo.co.uk
6th Dec	National	Cruise & Maritime Voyages festive fam trip	01708 893109
2020 5th Jan	National	Excursions™, Alexandra Palace, London	associate-membership@agto.co.uk
21st-23rd Feb	National	AGTO Showcase & AGM Ettington Chase, Stratford Upon Avon	www.agto.co.uk

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](http://www.agto.co.uk)



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# Theatre Tip

## Carlie Newman reviews the Trafalgar Studios production of *Equus*.

**The main event has already happened when the play starts. 17-year-old Alan Strang has blinded six horses with a sharp instrument in the stables in which he has been working at weekends.**

The play, therefore, is not so much a thriller about what happened but an examination of why Alan chose to do such a dreadful deed.

Dr Martin Dysart (Zubin Varla), a psychiatrist working in a hospital, is asked by a Magistrate friend, Hester (Natalie Lopez Holden) to treat Alan Strang (Ethan Kai) who has committed a terrible crime. He agrees and from time to time addresses the audience about the boy and what is happening with him as he relives Alan's case and considers how he dealt with it, the boy's reactions, and what happened in interviews with the parents. He is concerned about Alan's reactions to the pressures brought by his mother (Doreene Balckstock) and father (Robert Fitch).

As the past is recreated, Dysart is able to see that the father is very domineering, ordering his wife to take back the TV she has bought as he won't have a television in his house and railing against Mrs Strang's very religious education of their son.

But the main interest lies in Alan's sexual relationship with horses especially one who he treats as a God. While the boy is obviously disturbed, Martin wants to discover what made him hurt the creature he loves so much. You will have to go the theatre to find out for yourselves!

The play, which is based on a real-life case, was written by Peter Shaffer. Its best-known revival was in 2007 in the West End when Daniel Radcliffe took the part of Alan Strang and *Harry Potter* film fans rushed to see him naked!



Here it is directed by Ned Bennett and the production is from the English Touring Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East.

On a mainly bare stage the different scenes are shown by the use of props and evocative lighting. Here the horses are played by actors – with wonderful movement, they capture the essence of the horses they portray. Particularly good is bare-chested Nugget, played by Ira Mandela Siobhan. He is able to move his head in a kind of circle, just like a real horse.

Except for the two chief actors, all other roles are taken by cast members who double up in individual parts as well as being horses. All are very good. The two main characters, Dr Dysart and Alan Strang are both excellent. Zubin Varla brings a certain gravitas to his role and is moving towards the end when he realises that any 'cure' for the boy will result in him becoming just an ordinary person rather than the special lad he could be. And Ethan Kai shows that Alan is a disturbed teenager who is scared of his own passion and sex-driven love of horses.

Unmissable!

**Rating: \*\*\*\*\***

**Trafalgar Studios, London until 7 September 2019.  
Box office: 0844 871 7632)**

Photo credits: AGTO/Stuart Render; Unsplash; NTS; ORNC; Alys Tomlinson; Annie Spratt; RHS; WWT; Neil Fedorowycz; Phil Taylor; AGTO article contributors.



I'M NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN  
SEND MY LOVE (TO YOUR NEW LOVER)

I KISSED A GIRL  
CAN'T STOP THE FEELING!  
I WANT IT THAT WAY

CAN'T FEEL MY FACE  
...BABY ONE MORE TIME

IT'S GONNA BE ME ★ LARGER THAN LIFE

EVERYBODY (BACKSTREET'S BACK)

OOPS!... I DID IT AGAIN

I WANNA GO ★ OVERPROTECTED

BLOW ★ SHOW ME LOVE

CONFIDENT ★ IT'S MY LIFE

SHOW ME THE MEANING OF BEING LONELY  
PROBLEM

ROAR

BREAK FREE

TEENAGE DREAM

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU

(I DON'T BELIEVE YOU)

QUIT PLAYING GAMES (WITH MY HEART)  
LOVE ME LIKE YOU DO

WHATAYA WANT FROM ME  
SINCE U BEEN GONE  
AS LONG AS YOU LOVE ME

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# THE LAST WORD... are GTOs telling the best story?

**Once upon a time...! Those three little words are very likely to take you back to your childhood when all we seemed to need was a good story and all seemed well with the world. Not that we knew too much about the world. In an era long before the internet, we learnt about the world by watching the team from the BBC's Blue Peter head off on their annual expedition. Perhaps we glanced through holiday brochures. If we were very fortunate, we would find ourselves sitting in the family car as our parents headed over the Channel to exotic Calais and beyond.**

Today, everything and anything we need to know about the world is available at the click of a mouse, or a tap on our phones or tablets. Except that it's not.

Talking with AGTO members I find



myself learning more and more about the group travel industry. The bigger picture I get, but the finer points of organising a trip, and some of the pitfalls faced by GTOs would normally pass me by. So I really enjoy hearing more about all of this from our members. One topic that seems to crop up time and time again relates to the paucity of first-hand information about the actual group experience. Visitor attractions and destinations tell you what you need to know about making a visit. Then there are many photos posted on Facebook, Instagram and elsewhere showing lots of smiling people enjoying themselves. It's all wonderful stuff. But where's the bit that explains what happened during the trip, did the planned itinerary work, what should other groups look out for, that sort of thing?

Of course, there are indeed some reports of group travel experiences. You can see them in magazines such as this. It's all about spreading the word for the benefit of the whole group travel sector. But reading some of these reports, which usually explain where the trip went and what was seen, I wonder if, collectively, we're missing a trick. The experience that each GTO gains on any trip, whether it's a day out or a touring holiday, is invaluable. If the group

leader, or another member of the group, is writing a report that is going to be seen by other GTOs, perhaps in a magazine, or on TripAdvisor, or Facebook, or even an online blog, I can see real benefits in including a few words about what worked and what other tour planners need to keep an eye on.

While I'm talking about places to visit, and how you can find inspiration to organise a trip that's a bit different, may I mention World Travel Market (WTM). This three-day exhibition, now in its 40th year, takes place from 4 to 6 November at ExCeL, the exhibition centre in London's docklands. There are around 5,000 exhibiting companies, destinations and attractions representing almost every country across the world. It's free to attend and AGTO members have access to all 3 days including the invitation only Monday. Travel from central London is easy by the Docklands Light Railway, or by the Jubilee Line and the Emirates Air Line. For more information, go to [www.london.wtm.com](http://www.london.wtm.com) there will be a special AGTO registration link on our website [www.agto.co.uk](http://www.agto.co.uk) in the forthcoming weeks. A visit to WTM this November really could give you something special to write about.

*Wendy Hartley-Scarff,  
CEO, AGTO*

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