

Aviva Fellowship: London & SE Region



On the Road to Rouen - 25th to 29th Feb 2016



For first excursion outside the UK, 'London & SE Region' members and friends took the plunge for the last few days of February. Planned four-day Coach trip included a day visit to Honfleur. Also provided planned stops at Amiens on the outbound journey and Le Touquet on returning.

The Group from four Fellowship Areas consisted of ten couples and seven single bookings including many younger members. Sadly, further six forced to cancel. Trip indicated all were free to follow their own plans. In practice, most happily joined others which worked well particularly for our solo travellers. This 'team spirit' meant we could have arranged a 'Canasta' competition as a third played at odd moments!

DAY BEFORE TRIP - Croydon Hallmark Aerodrome Hotel

Most booked the Thursday night (& Monday's return) at the Croydon Aerodrome Hotel night before the trip. This Hotel, and former airfield, was in 1930 where Amy Johnson commenced her historic solo flight to Australia. It was London's 1st Airport and only had grass runways!

Croydon Airport Visitor Centre



After Booking-In, Thursday evening started with a guided tour of Airport Centre museum in next door's old Terminal building. Entrance area, largely retained, has period layouts of model planes and airport building illustrating their various functions. Supported by numerous period photographic and assorted memorabilia, it has retained six original 'zonal' time clocks.

Our Guide first played a 1930's style 'Look at Life' video showing the working airport. He provided some further scene setting moving through the building to the Control Tower, heart of the Museum. Set up as in its 'heyday', it has a separate room for 'model' Controller and his equipment.



Amongst array of nostalgic flight items, RDF (Radio Direction Finding) triangulation principles were explained. Croydon was first to implement this vital system and has a simple manual demonstration model. Three 'radio beam' bearings, fixed aircraft positions for both pilots and Airport Controllers. This principle is used today in our Sat Navs.

Surprisingly a period poster, 80 years ago, indicated from rear of our Hotel we could have flown direct to Le Touquet for just £8! Little known, in 1935 the Sabini gang stole gold bullion from there and gold was never recovered (equivalent £12 million today)! Only one gang member was convicted!

We thanked our Guides and returned to the hotel to prepare for our evening meal.

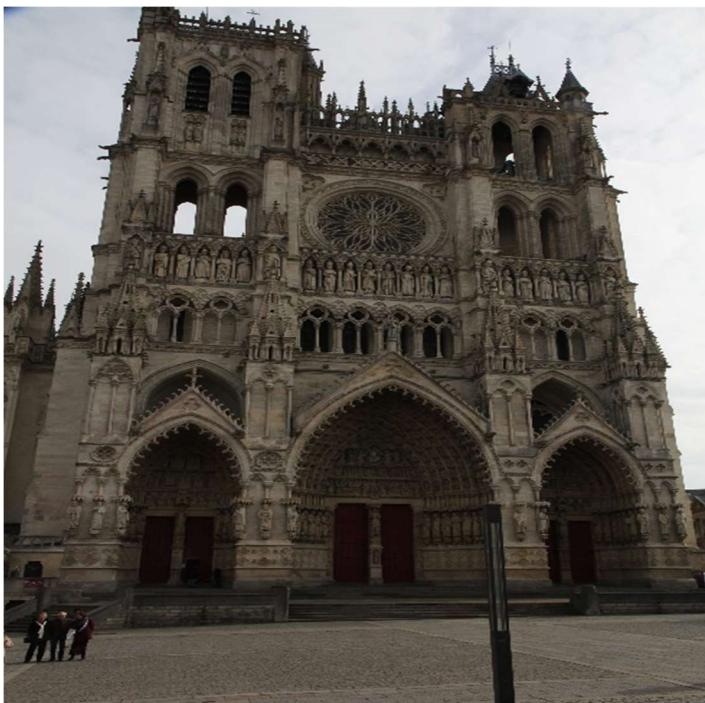
'Meet & Greet' Aerodrome Hotel Meal

As many members had not met before, our excellent Brasserie 'Meet & Greet' meal with wine gave us the chance to get know each other. Soon time for an early night to rest before our 6.00am Breakfast.

DAY ONE - 1st Stop Amiens

After an early Breakfast, the Coach was loaded and departed at 7.00am to Folkestone. On the way we picked up the last four members of our Group.

At Folkestone, the 'Londoner's' Coach joined the Euro Tunnel train and then to first 3 hour stop on French soil in Amiens.



Amiens boasts France's largest Notre-Dame Cathedral and has UNESCO World Heritage status. Its structure, for 'architects', a detailed delight really requiring research before viewing. Externally whole West facade immediately overwhelms with its prolific gothic stone carvings. Additionally, mostly within alcoves, what seems hundreds of preserved carved figures. Continued inside, its noted early 13th century sculptures, stained glass and tombs further evidence its medieval history.

After an hour or so in the Cathedral, nearby is a peaceful and picturesque area to

explore of small canals and inlets of the Somme. The area is 'Saint Leu' where brightly painted timber buildings adorn the canal banks. Dating from the 'Middle Ages', used largely as art galleries, bookshops etc. In the middle of the Canal de la Somme, is the "man on the buoy" statue by Stephan Balkenhol. Often 'dressed' by locals, they affectionately call this general area as 'Little Venice of the North'. More time would've been nice but on to Rouen capital of Normandy.

DAY TWO – Rouen City

This was 'home' to our early Kings, William the Conqueror, Richard the Lionheart and King John etc. Ibis Rive Droite hotel formed our base for the next three nights.

On Saturday a full day to visit the largely medieval city centre. Tourism Centre, by the Cathedral, advised visits should be - Joan of Arc Church, Notre Dame Cathedral, Gros Horologe clock, Museum of Fine Arts and perhaps XXL Panorama (from June 2016, showing Rouen in 1431). Attractions are situated in easy walking distance within the city centre.

Starting with Notre Dame Cathedral, like Amiens, it dominates with gothic features and extensive figurative stone carvings. Unlike the majority of English Cathedrals, in Rouen, despite considered 'site of England's birth', historic notes unfortunately provide few English translations! Many early Kings and royalty are buried here including Richard the Lionheart's embalmed heart in a statuesque knight's tomb. Tradition was to divide Kings corpses and bury parts in significant areas of their kingdom. Amongst others, we noted Empress Matilda's tomb, daughter of Henry 1. Strangely Matilda, almost our first Queen and after a fight, secured the English throne for her son Henry II through her second marriage to Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou. Her full story and walled tomb is featured in 1st episode BBC's 'She Wolves'.

Adjacent to the Cathedral, for lunch, is an area containing a host of nationally themed restaurants. Nearby is the striking 14th Century "Gros Horloge" double sided clock mounted as the centrepiece of a medieval arch. This huge clock ran for 400 years without stopping until 1928! The clock, now refurbished, leads us through its arch onto the modern St Joan of Arc Church.



Here in 1431 Joan of Arc was burned for heresy and its marked with a Cross in the churchyard. The Church is on the site of earlier St. Vincent's church (1520-1530). The church has incorporated thirteen large stained glass windows from St. Vincent's which illustrate Biblical stories. Church's

overall design is based on a traditional 'upturned boat' and features a beautifully varnished wooden hull shaped internal roof. The Church forms an integral part of thriving period market place.

Remainder of afternoon was spent strolling through the centre ending in the extensive rooms of the Museum of Fine Art. This is famed, after Paris, for housing the largest Impressionists' collection and for art enthusiasts worthy of spending time here.

Rouen, on the banks of the Seine, is a fascinating 'medieval' city to explore. Well worth further visits but do research in English beforehand! However, like most French cities, it also provides a wealth of gastronomic and liquid delights.

DAY THREE - Our Day in Honfleur

Sunday, sunny but brisk morning our coach travelled to Honfleur and crossed the spectacular modern Pont de Normandie Bridge on the way. Honfleur has retained its old picturesque harbour and is fringed by period face slated housing.



A favourite haunt of many French impressionist painters.

Found the Tourist Office for a map, then most followed a route around the old town's outskirts. Initially along the front to witness many individual and quirky homes (including a one up/one down

residence!). Back in the centre we all looked for Coffee shops. Amongst the many, some were then led astray by being introduced to Calvados, Normandy's very own Apple Brandy! Its customary to drink with Coffee. Perhaps worth bringing small samples home!

After Coffee, most visited the wooden church of St Catherine's. Constructed just after the 100 years' War it's based on naval principles i.e. an upturned hull. The largest wooden church in France, its unusual in having a separate Bell Tower. As the Tower drew lightning strikes, it was built some distance away in case of fire. A variety of shops and restaurants provide lunch choices with a chance to enjoy their local speciality, seafood dishes. We learned to our cost, Honfleur regularly attracts large numbers of weekend tourists even in February. Some of our Group even had to queue outside the Restaurant for their lunch!

DAY FOUR - Final Return Stop at Le Touquet

Home time came only too soon on Monday but even the journey back was not without interest. Stopping to explore and for some lunch in Le Touquet. Since the 1930's, it's outer town has been known for its stylish individual 'architect designer' residences and being the 'coastal resort for Parisians'.



Initially majority took a bracing walk on the huge expanse of sandy beach before seeking restaurants for a good lunch! The old town also has many quaint buildings dating back centuries. Some 'Calvados' fans found suitable restaurants in the centre whilst others sought ones in the quieter older quarters. After eating and roaming, just left

sufficient time for some local specialist memento shopping!

Back then to the coach, and further shopping in the Calais terminal, before the Euro Tunnel and return to the Aerodrome Hotel. After good-byes and, must do it again promises, some stayed on for an evening meal and overnight stay.

Very grateful thanks go to Hilary Kearney for her time, effort and patience in helping organise this trip. This meant the many facets of our trip ran successfully. Also, to the members who went, as all ensured it was a happy and enjoyable tour to remember. We must extend thanks to the support of Success Tours and to Darren, our coach driver, for his safe driving, local knowledge and repartee!!

Chris House - Chairman - London Aviva Fellowship

Martin Green - Croydon Member - Photographer & Outline copy

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PS. London Region are planning a larger Reims Trip (40 places) for **3rd to 6th March 2017**, probably via Arras (including a WWI London Regiments cemetery) and another tourist stop. Our 3 night base Reims, is a UNESCO World Heritage site and where French Kings were crowned! Planned Trip also includes a 'Mercier Champagne Cellars Tour and tasting session'.

Fellowship members and partners interested in joining the London Region Group please contact Chris House at housec@avivafellowship.force9.co.uk. Both the Coach Trip and Aerodrome Hotel terms were outstanding bargains and we hope to repeat for the next trip!