

Normandy Meeting: St Vaast-La-Hougue

A small group of Members gathered for drinks in France and Toby Fleming's house at St Vaast on the evening of Friday, 8 October, at the start of what was to be a fascinating weekend. The evening gave us all an opportunity to become acquainted and swap travellers tales - Andy and Pat Wiseman's train had mysteriously changed destination from Poole to Bristol on the way down; Jane Bowen and Jan Ward had taken three hours to get from Belford to Southampton only to spend another three hours getting from Southampton to Portsmouth and Diana Christian had found the extended scenic route from Cherbourg to St Vaast! Fortunately, John and Judith Downer experienced no travel problems. We returned to our hotel, the aptly named France-Fuchsias, for a gourmet meal and retired to bed, anticipating the programme France had arranged for us.

On Saturday, we spent the first part of the morning exploring the Market and a very superior delicatessen, before gathering at France's for drinks and a buffet lunch. As might have been expected, a fair amount of the next three hours was spent looking at France's collection and emitting suitable oohs and aahs! With three cabinets packed full of



Mauchline Ware there was much to take the eye. Among the tartan pieces, a particular joy was a small cylindrical container with discs displaying aces of the different card suites - presumably an upmarket way of declaring trumps. The transfer ware included a crucifix, a book published by the Smiths, a spinning top, an oblong box containing a small clothes brush with a mirror on the back and a needle case with a transfer of the Eiffel Tower. More generally, looking at all the transfer items gathered together, there was a sense that many items produced for the French market were subtly different from those sold at home. One or two shapes seemed specific to the continent, and others were more graciously curved than similar pieces made for the British market.

After an excellent buffet lunch, we set off in convoy to visit an airship hangar nearby. This massive building in reinforced concrete had been built during the First World War, as part of the French navy's anti-submarine tactics. The aim was to hand drop bombs on enemy submarines which could be seen clearly from the air, although we were told that the very sight of the airships acted as an effective deterrent. We were impressed by the scale of the structure, the building techniques employed and the fact that it had survived 90 years almost intact. There are now plans to restore it and bring it back into use for modern day airships. A fascinating day ended with a superb meal in one of the local restaurants.

On the Sunday we travelled to Caen, to the home of Colette and Jean-Pat. Chabot. (Colette is one of our new members). They had arranged a most interesting walk round the centre of Caen, showing us the parts of the old city which had survived the wartime



bombardment, taking in the huge Sunday market, the Bellem - a French naval tall ship used for training which was moored in the harbour, and the antique shops (all sadly closed!). We had lunch in a restaurant by the harbour before returning to the Chabots' home to admire their collections and enjoy tea. Colette had a good range of Mauchline Ware including another crucifix, a leather and sycamore handbag (above) and a style of stamp box that even John Downer hadn't seen before. Jean-Pat had a fine collection of music boxes, and their home was a testament to their good eye for other interesting and unusual items. It was with some reluctance that we left, conscious that we had to get back to St Vaast, and then on to Barfleur for yet another gastronomic experience.

All in all it was a most enjoyable weekend. We parted, enriched by the friendship and hospitality we had experienced, our increased knowledge of things Mauchline and the opportunities to appreciate the wider aspects of Normandy's life and culture. Thank you France and Toby for inviting us and for arranging such an excellent programme.

What's all the fuss about?

In the last Journal, John Baker asked for information about the bewigged gentleman, throwing down a law book. Islay Donaldson and Jane Bowen have pointed out that this is the Vicar of Bray, who has kept his benefice from Charles II to George

I by changing his beliefs to suit the period. The last verse of the well known song reads:

*The illustrious house of Hannover,
And Protestant succession,
To these I lustily will swear*

*Whilst they can keep possession:
For in my Faith, and Loyalty,
I never once will falter,
And George, my lawful King shall be,
Until the times do alter.*