

## The Worship Livery Company Master's Weekend May 11<sup>th</sup> –May 14<sup>th</sup> 2023

The Worship Livery Company of Wales Master's Weekend started on Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> 2023 with 23 Liverymen and guests setting off for Normandy with a full programme and hope in their hearts determined to engage in fellowship, friendship and fun.

The Master had prepared historical notes which were very interesting, informative and perfect to refer to throughout the weekend. He also provided technical support to the guide with his expertise as a Royal Engineer as well as providing water and wine for the troops.

As Ron Eccles commented – The Master serving wine on the coach was a highlight.

The Portsmouth to Ouistreham 5hrs 45mins Ferry crossing turned into a sing along with a Cornish choir.

Una Scott

*I thought the choir started the trip off on a good note, and the French children who tried to wreak havoc, then ended up, singing the same as everybody else.*

Janet Williams

*My highlight started with the choir singing on the boat and getting involved and then having these lovely French young ladies sing to us, which was really rather fun*



We arrive at the hotel in Caen where Rosemary and John Solbé met us, and the Master led the toast to a successful landing.

John Wort the specialist guide joined us.

### Friday May 12<sup>th</sup>

#### Pegasus Bridge and museum

John Wort gave a graphic description of the landing of the three gliders to take Pegasus Bridge in the early hours on D-Day, 6<sup>th</sup>, June 1944. He graphically described the dangers encountered and the skill involved to successfully securing this key strategic position.

In the Pegasus Memorial museum, a powerful combination of the detailed narrative of the gliders landing and the taking of the bridge with the life size models of the gliders and dummies of the men gave a depth of understanding of the bravery and skill of the British invasion forces on D-Day, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.

This was one of the many highlights for some Liverymen who commented:

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Roisin Pill

*I found the Pegasus Museum and certainly those gliders, seeing the actual things that was very dramatic, I thought, that upset me rather, it brought it home very much so. I did think that museum was very good.*

Sarah Cockbill

*When I had a conversation with my ex- military son and told him I was coming to Normandy, he said, make sure you go to Pegasus Bridge, which we did, which was a nice way to break the ice*

David Protheroe

*My highlight was Pegasus Bridge It was a remarkable achievement and being present at the place where it happened was very moving.*

Christine Castledine

*My overall highlight was the commentary and the detailed information given by John. My place highlight was Pegasus Bridge where it all started from.*

*Philip Kitchen*

*The achievements are incredible at Pegasus Bridge, you have three gliders coming over in the dead of night on the tail of dawn landing within feet of each other, without any sort of computers or anything at all, a compass on a bit of string.*

*And when you appreciate how those men felt walking onto the gliders, not knowing what they were letting themselves in for, they didn't know they didn't have a clue, and they were only early 20s.*

Liverymen shared their memories of the war, that were brought back:

Roy Scott

*As a lad one of my neighbours was a glider pilot, and I never knew what a glider pilot did. He was much older than me. He was in his 20s, and I was just a schoolboy, but this chap was a glider pilot. He didn't get involved in the D-day, he was all hooked up and ready to go to Arnhem and his toe rope broke so that was the end of his war. He didn't crash or anything. He was able to land it, but on this side of the sea, rather than the Dutch side. So, looking inside the gliders to see where he sat the primitive controls and how very sparse it all was. That was something that really brought it home to me.*

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The Café Gondree the first house in France to be liberated on D-Day was located on the bank of the Caen Canal on the west side of Pegasus Bridge was an opportunity for many Liverymen to immerse themselves in the experience and have a welcome coffee. The owners of the café Therese and George Gondree served the Germans in the cafe and passed on information to the French resistance — it was the original 'Allo 'Allo!. Their daughter who was 8 years old on D-Day has continued to run the café with family members so the café is very much as it would have been on D-Day. The walls are covered in memorabilia, it has a unique ambience and great coffee.



At Ranville CWGC Cemetery the Master John Charles signed the visitors book on behalf of the WLCow -and placed a wreath at the grave of a Welsh serviceman with the words:

'Rhag i ni anghofio'

'Lest we forget'

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Janet Williams

*The thing that stands out would be the small act of remembrance that we did, which was really rather special. And the sadness of seeing all the graves and the ages of the boys, it was very moving.*

We visited Sword Beach, Juno Beach and Gold beach three of the five beaches where the British and Allied forces landed on D-Day 6<sup>th</sup>, Juneto take back German occupied France. We were given a detailed explanation of the strategy, the difficulties encountered, the challenges, the bravery and the ultimate success of the British and allied forces. It was not the best of weather which added to the appreciation of the mammoth task encountered on those very beaches.

Stuart Castledine

*I think actually seeing the beaches we've seen in all the films of the D-Day landings, but it's only when you actually get to the five beaches where you realise the scale of the thing the*

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*length of the sand and then also the type of sand it's sand that it is hard sand, so it brings home to you what a sensible place it was for the people to choose to do the landing. That is something that you don't get from the films. In the film, as you get all the action of the people going in and out of boats, but you don't get the perspective that standing on the top of a mountain and looking down to see how big the beaches are, that is the thing, to see with your own eyes, coming to a place it makes a difference to what do you read in the history books and see in the films.*





## Gold Beach

When we visited Gold beach we could see the remnants of one of the two Mulberry Harbours, temporary harbours. We were all astounded by the feat of engineering, logistics and vision of the British Admiralty and War Office to build temporary harbours taking them in sections across the English Channel and then assembling them to facilitate the rapid offloading of cargo essential to support the Allied invasion of Normandy.

In the ARROMANCHES CENTRE we had more detail of this engineering feat of the Mulberry Harbour B along with many more fascinating incites into the construction and the obstacles that had to be overcome to provide a harbour that played a central role in the success of the invasion.

## Philip Kitchen

*I think I have to comment about the exhibition that made me late back for the coach. I got my headphones on, and I was walking round the exhibit, and I came across the process of developing the Mulberry harbour and that was fascinating. The planning that had gone in the preparation, the build-up of all the material for the Mulberry harbour itself, imagining what might have gone wrong with the Mulberry harbour and how they would've dealt with it. The scale struck me as far larger than I ever believed before, and that's probably a reflection of my ignorance and the idea of coordinating American Canadian British and Free French scale. I just can't believe the kind of things that people would've gone through to make it happen. Seeing what people were coping with without technology pretty much with pen and paper. It's an impressive feat.*

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2023

## St. Mere Eglise and the Airborne Museum

Visiting the pretty town of Saint Mare Eglise we imagined the American Airborne Divisions landing early in the morning of D-Day. The chaos of the landings— we saw the paratrooper John Steele's billowing parachute caught on the church roof.



Ron Eccles

*I thought that museum that we went to in Murray Gliese was one of the highlights. It really was a fantastic museum, left a permanent impression on me, and of course to see the parachute still draped over the church, I think that was amazing.*

The airborne museum used a lot of technology to bring to life the exhibits and the experience of D-Day. Some Liverymen were taken back to their own experiences of the war.



*Janet Williams*

*At the airborne museum that was more difficult because of the noises, you remember the planes, the planes that used to come over the house and drop bombs, and that brought back a lot of memories that I didn't really want. I remember and it's amazing you think you weren't that old, but these things stay with you.*

*Keith Williams*

*– it's not just remembering the war. We were bombed we were there we were bombed out.*

*Janet Williams*

*My family lived close to North Holt airport which was a place that they used to use and of course the Luftwaffe tried to bomb all airports, and then we lost our windows*

*Keith Williams*

*We live next to a tank factory and when they tried to bomb the tank factory, they bombed our house. When we got all that sorted, later, we had a doodlebug drop in the field right opposite us and blow it all apart again and we became evacuees. So, I was evacuated back to Wales and Janet was evacuated back to Lincoln.*

*Yes, we remember the bombing we've been part of the bombing I had mates that were killed in the bombing. It's a bit of an emotional trip but it's nevertheless part of history and you can't pick and choose which are the nice bits of history you like and ignore the bad. History is history and it's all in there*

## Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc

The events of the D-Day landings at Omaha Beach by the US army were explained by John Wort and then we looked around at the features, the steep slopes the strong defences and the open beach, that had to be overcome and the sacrifices made to achieve the successful invasion, linking with the British landings to secure the Normandy coast.

The sun was shining when we visited the museum at Pont de Hoc and then spent time walking amongst the craters left from the Allied Forces' bombs and exploring the incredibly fortified bunkers of the German Army. We were all hit with a sense of awe and thankfulness at the amazing achievement of the Allied forces in overcoming such obstacles to take the Normandy coast against all odds.



Some of the Liverymen had relatives with direct connections to Omaha.

*Keith Shankland –*

*Normandy Omaha beach My father, for example, would say if you're going to Normandy, you're going to Omaha beach. Omaha beach was the highlight for me, not just the beach but. I think that little trip along the coast is gorgeous now.*

*Omaha, actually seeing the bunkers that was a really important bit when you went into the bunkers, you really realised, when they were talking about fortification, you think a big gun would take them apart but with 2 m wide walls, I'm not an expert on concrete but the concrete was of the highest quality you know these bunkers were built to last and they are still intact today. Yes, Omaha was my highlight of this trip and the bunkers*



Sarah Cockbill

*My father had a lot to do with Omaha. My father was at Omaha so there is more of a family link. My father served as a dental surgeon, but didn't say much about his war experience. When he did, he mentioned Omaha. He was with the Royal Highland Division but wasn't allocated to one specific Regiment as he had to provide professional expertise when required.*

Ron Eccles

*Omaha beach resort such a beautiful beach full of holidaymakers in the summer. When you think of all those Americans struggling to get up the cliffs or forced to go through these little gaps with the machine guns, most of them never got off the beach, never got off the beach that was such a mixture of emotion in Omaha.*

Roisin and Malcolm Pill

*The sunshine on Omaha beach and the wind at Pointe du Hoc*

Charles Slatter

*The personal reminiscence of the veterans, woven against the backdrop of the invasion of beaches by our guide John Wort made a big impression. The overall history also placed in the very personal of their memories*

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On Saturday we enjoyed an evening of fellowship and an excellent meal at the Mercure Hotel, and some ventured for drinks afterwards in Caen harbour and tried the extraordinary array of light beers on offer. A fun time was had by all, and we said farewell to John and Rosemary Solbé, who are off on further adventures in France.



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Sunday May 14h

We caught an early Ouistreham to Portsmouth Ferry.

The Master's weekend to Normandy was exceptionally well planned and benefitted from the Master's excellent choice of specialist guide in John Wort who explained in detail the history throughout the trip, with a depth of knowledge and detail that brought the reality of the dangers, difficulties, bravery, sacrifice, co-operation and skills of the D-Day landings. He even managed humour which was a relief in a sometimes harrowing narrative.

We all agree that the Master's Trip was a great success and as Ron Eccles said  
"It brought fellowship, friendship and so much laughter."







Khawla Eccles

*I think it was lovely to be together again you know after all we've been through, we thought we were never going to make it. So, to be together with friends, such lovely friends the trip has been lovely. Really it is the Livery guild as I always knew it, such friendship.*

Sarah Cockbill

*It has been a lovely couple of days, and we have seen so much. The gliders they were amazing. When I got in there and if one of those models has moved, I would have gone. So realistic*

*So there have been a lot of really good times and seeing Caen as well I haven't realised how old it was. There are bits of it left. Obviously, it's a replacement but somehow, they have tried to marry the old with the new, not wonderfully but it's there.*

*I didn't appreciate the scale of what those men went through.*

John Solbé

*The amazing accuracy of the three gliders at Pegasus*

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*The disasters that befell the US troops but how we needed them  
The incredible sustained secrecy before the operation  
Just what kind of conditions my gentle Uncle Bill faced in setting up the HQ of 48 Commando  
behind St Aubin – which he never once talked about (but recorded day by day in letters to his  
wife)  
The superb commentary of Jon Wort – bringing it all to life  
The lovely fellowship of the trip*

Janet Williams

*Janet it was very interesting, and I think the small but very friendly group has made it really nice.*



and all arrived home on Sunday evening, much wiser about the D-Day landings in Normandy on 6<sup>th</sup>, June 1944

### Master's comment

I much enjoyed sharing my interest in military history with the group and felt the trip, as did the one to North Wales achieve my aim in my year – *'My aim is for everyone to have fun and have smiles on their faces'*. I had no input to the interviews and was heartened reading the narrative which meant I had achieved my aim on this event.