

Past Master Memories

Past Master Derek Foster recalls the first Needlemakers trip overseas: to Portugal in 1987

While we all have to face the fact that it is unlikely that we will be able to take a holiday abroad this year, we can at least look back and remember past holidays. Many of you will have been on the overseas holidays that many Masters have organised and which have become such an enjoyable part of the Needlemaker's social programme, but you may not know how this tradition started.



In 1986, D'Arcy Orders, a liveryman who lived in Portugal, wrote suggesting that the livery arrange a visit to Portugal in recognition of the 600th anniversary of the Peace Treaty between England and Portugal – the world's oldest existing treaty which was signed in May 1386. The Court agreed that this would be a fine idea, but as it was too late to arrange it for 1986 it was decided to go ahead in the summer of 1987. As this would be in my year as Master, it fell to me to make the arrangements.

D'Arcy, who knew everyone that mattered in Lisbon, agreed to make all the local arrangements, if I could find a hotel and get the party there safely. There were thirty six of us, mostly couples, so I went to Thompson's travel agents in the City and booked the group for a week on one of their package holidays to Estoril, a convenient distance outside Lisbon and where D'Arcy lived. The only problem was that the Hotel Atlantico, did not have enough single rooms, so I had to book five singles into two other hotels, that were not as near the rest of us as I was led to believe - this meant these five felt rather isolated (something we all understand these days!) and Brian Hatfield has never let me forget this!



I took the chain and badge of office with me in my hand luggage - there were no real security arrangements in those halcyon days, so I had no difficulty getting these through Customs. I did remember to tell our insurers! I also took the Master's ermine lined gown in my luggage together with "black tie" clothes. I must have had to take more than one suitcase!

The week was great fun and meant that Liverymen really got to know each other – the chief reason that similar holidays are still so popular. We had visits to local places of interest, including of course a port winery. We were also received at Lisbon city hall, where I handed over a letter of greeting from the Lord Mayor of London to the Mayor of Lisbon. I got "properly dressed" for this occasion as the photo of me standing in front of a statute was taken in the city hall.



We also had tea with the British Ambassador in the Embassy garden. On the way to these events, our coach got stuck in one of Lisbon's narrow streets because of a parked car – so three of the younger members of the party got out and manhandled the car out of the way to loud cheers from the rest of us. On the last night we had a formal dinner at the English Club to which D'Arcy arranged to invite all Liverymen from other livery companies living in or around Lisbon. The Ambassador was also due to attend, but unfortunately, he was ill that evening.



A few years later Peter Barrows arranged a visit to Aachen and then my brother, Alan Foster, arranged one to Bayeux and so the tradition was established. Long may it continue to flourish, as the friendships formed on these holidays play a very important part in making the Needlemakers such a friendly company.

PAST MASTER DEREK FOSTER

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