

The UK Farman's visit to France

We recently traced our family tree and found that our 6th Great-grandfather Robert Farman was also the 3rd Great-grandfather of the famous brothers Henri, Dick and Maurice Farman. We realised that these distant cousins were highly respected in France in the fields of cycling, ballooning, automobiles and aviation.

Having researched their achievements, we travelled to Paris to search out and visit a number of important locations and memorials associated with this family, to learn more about them and to build links between the UK and French Farman histories.

Our first stop was to visit the gravestone of Henri Farman in the Passy Cemetery overlooked by the Eiffel Tower. This was an emotional and proud moment to see the words that he “gave wings to the world”

Next was the Aero-Club of France where we were given a personal tour by Cecilia Angot-Fremont of the rooms, trophies, memorabilia and photographs relating to the early aviators including the Farman brothers. We felt honoured and proud to be so warmly welcomed, but we're a little surprised that a portrait of Henri Farman does not currently hang alongside the other pioneers of the time.



We then travelled to Toussus-le-noble aerodrome where we were generously met by Gerard Finan who took us under his wing and shared some of his incredible knowledge of the local airfields and Farman history. We visited the replica plane on the nearby roundabout and the memorial to Henri Farman erected by his wife. We are also extremely grateful to Farman-Aero and their staff for allowing us access to see inside the large Farman Hangar at the airfield. It is an amazing piece of history that is still in operation today.



Our next stop was the Farman Aviation shop on Rue du Bac, where we met the owner Pierre, the grandson of Dick Farman. Pierre was full of stories and information about the



Farman family contribution to aviation, and he gave us many Internet links and documents to help with our research. It was amazing to stand and hold an original propeller from a Farman Goliath plane and see his personal collection of memorabilia of Farman Aviation. We also spent some more personal time with Pierre and his wife later in the weekend learning more about our now much extended family and were made to feel extremely welcome.

We finished our first day with a walk around Boulogne-Billancourt to see the two Farman Gardens in the vicinity of the old Farman Factory originally at 167 Rue de Silly. Both are lovely green spaces to enjoy. Whilst the Place des Ailes is also close to the site, we couldn't find any information plaque or evidence of the Farman Factory – unlike the Voisin Brothers Factory plaque around the corner on Rue de la Ferme, which is well documented.



Our second day saw us take the early morning TGV to Reims, where we hired a taxi driver to drive us to the start and end points of Henri Farman's famous 27km flight from Mourmelon-Le-Grand to Reims on October 30 1908. This took a bit of detective work as the Mourmelon monument identifying the start of the flight is still on Google maps in its old location and is now located in the town itself. We also saw the replica plane on the Henri Farman Rond-Point in Bouy and the contemporary model on the Porte Farman roundabout at the end of Henri Farman Avenue in Reims. Close by is the memorial marking the end of the flight. We also took the opportunity to visit Cave Farman across the road to purchase some fine



Champagne from the region. The library in Reims also had some early photographs, magazines and documents that we reviewed.



Back in Paris in the late afternoon we managed to get to the Cimetiere du Pere-Lachaise before it closed and after a long search found and paid our respects at the family graves of Maurice and Dick, including their English father, Thomas Frederick.



Next was a visit to Issy Les Moulineaux and the site of the first 1km loop flight in the world performed by Henri Farman on 13th January 1908 and which won him one of the Grand Prix d'Aviation. We then walked down Rue Henri Farman to Henri Farman tram Station, by this time we were feeling quite special!



On our last day in Paris we popped along to see the Icarus monument dedicated to Santos Dumont, which Henri Farman admired so much that he commissioned copies to adorn the front of his luxury Farman motorcars. We then went onto the Musee de l'Air et de l'Espace at Le Bourget. This houses a stunning collection of exhibits with many from the early years of ballooning and flight including a number of Voisin, Henri and Maurice Farman planes. We had a fantastic day there exploring and revelling at the development of flight from the early gliders to the Concorde and Airbus380 of today.

Overall we had an awesome visit to beautiful Paris, met many kind and welcoming people and look forward to developing these links and visiting again soon.



