

The Diary of an EMA Visit to Costa Calida Spain 2015 – by Duncan Nield

Friday 2nd October

Having left San Javier airport in our hire car, we studiously ignored the nonsensical Google Maps instructions (as I vaguely remembered the roads from a previous visit to the area) and after about 20 minutes arrived at La Zenia Servigroup Hotel.

Bob Cooper was at the door to welcome us, saying that Gill and Ian Turner were in the bar having arrived 15 minutes ago, but as yet no sign of Gary and Dianne Comer. We had all been on the same flight inbound.



The hotel had a certain initial wow factor about it. After a very friendly check in we went up to our room and tentatively entered. Although a little dated in style it was huge, pristine, with a large flat TV, two king size beds and a balcony with spectacular sea views.



We dropped the bags and headed for the restaurant as by now it was well past 21.00 and we hadn't eaten since lunch.

As we gorged on a selection of cooked pork, duck, chicken and salads we spotted loads of EMAs about the place and so handshakes hugs and hellos were exchanged for a good hour or so.

The bar looked lively so we popped in for one before bed and chatted to David & Dora Parkhill who were celebrating their 42nd anniversary and a typically animated and welcoming John and Pam Sharratt. The dancefloor was packed with Spanish couples taking their dancing very seriously and Maria decided we must take this up back in the UK. (I quietly thought to myself - actually it does look like good fun.)

We went to bed at midnight to the news that Gary and Diane had still not arrived ! They had brought their satnav with them and it had taken them to Murcia town (about an hour in the wrong direction) and were now struggling to find their way here. So Spanish sat nav instructions were matching their Google Maps partners well then!

Saturday & Sunday Oct 3rd and 4th

Today was spent at leisure, and we travelled the area visiting old haunts that I visited many times in a former life when I had a property in this area.

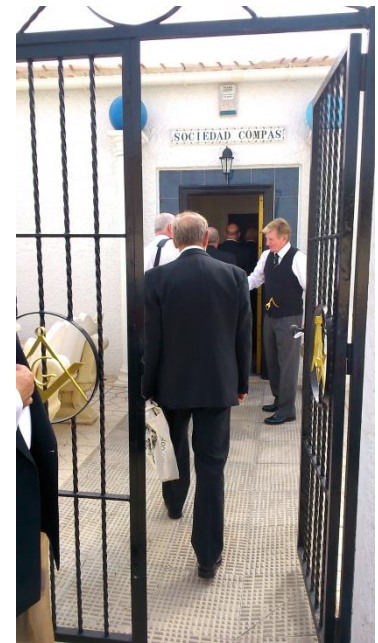
Monday Oct 5th

Bob Cooper hosted the welcome meeting in the bar area at 10.00. As well as highlighting the itinerary he stressed to all brethren that the lodge meeting later today is in a basement temple and that there are two flights of steps. The last step on the first flight is deeper than the rest and will catch people out! (We had been warned)

In the blink of an eye it was 14.15 and the brethren were gathered properly clothed and loaded onto the coach by their eager ladies who were then free to party!

Arriving at the lodge rooms in Rojasles all alighted at what appeared to be a leisure pool and bar area with a strange windowless block of white concrete next to it. On a closer examination there was a doorway with pillars adorned with two spherical balls and heavy steel gates festooned with the square and compasses – so we knew we had the right place.

On entering the building we were directed to proceed down the aforementioned staircase and thanks to Bob's warning there were no casualties. But on arriving at the bottom a stern faced tyler instructed us all to return and sign in! So we all climbed back up and Duncan Nield was the first to stumble and fall on the first step of the 2nd flight going up, this being the same step as the last on the first flight coming down. (This he then repeated when the lodge was called off, and again when the lodge was closed and we retired for the festive board)



We were treated to a fine example of an Installation, opened and closed in Spanish and attended by the PGM, his deputy, his full escort and numerous visitors in addition to 25 EMA brethren. The cold refreshments when called off was a blessed relief from the one downside – the heat which the basement Air Con was struggling to conquer.

A thoughtful table plan had been prepared for the festive board ensuring that everyone was mixed together to ensure maximum bonding and friendship. I was sat with W Bro Geoff Knight, who turned out to be a founder member of Lodge Salinas and explained that the lodge building had been bought from a bankrupt brothel keeper and the building was indeed a former brothel with basement bedrooms!

A hearty dinner was had consisting of prawn cocktail, roast beef dinner and raspberry and apple crumble & custard, washed down with lashings of wine.

Traditional firing of the toasts was adopted though the toasts were shared between the Wardens in addition to the master. (And we had to compete with a lively bingo caller next door!) The WMs toast was conducted with him standing on the table at the end of the Masters Song to then be toasted by all the brethren standing but looking up to him. A nice touch.

The meeting was closed by a very eloquent and sincere tylers toast by a striking pony tailed brother . A couple of rather hurried group photos were taken by Las Salinas resident photographer, an Alan Whicker double, and all too soon we were back on the coach heading back to La Zenia.

As we climbed onto the coach Ian Benton called to Duncan Nield 'Duncan will you please change your name to Neil, it would make my life much easier', but was assured by Duncan that he will answer to most things.

Meanwhile the ladies had been enjoying a lavish evening of food, drink and live music at Alejandros a short walk from the hotel.

The menfolk actually arrived back at the hotel before the ladies and so most dashed to their rooms to change into something cooler and then charged their glasses in the bar.

The sound of much chatter and loud giggling was heard in the distance and the ladies soon appeared en masse and in very high spirits. 'Where's my Dave' shrieked Liz Hair and suddenly the men looked sheepishly around and thought the unthinkable 'Did we leave one behind?'. (Thankfully it turned out that Dave had gone to change like the rest of us but once he found his bed decided to stay in it!)

After a few more drinks most had retired but Maria and Duncan remained together with the Irish Crew. David Parkhill was finally persuaded by Dora that enough was enough and we all meandered to the lifts whilst David asked 'What's the difference between an Irish wedding and an Irish wake?' and then answered himself by saying . 'There is one less drunk Irishman at the wake.'

Once squashed into the lift we rose dreadfully slowly and the lift seemed to be stopping at every floor even though we were all on floors 7 and 8 – Herbie had a satisfied and mischievous smile quietly in the corner.

Tuesday Oct 6th

For the trip to Cartagena the bus was fully loaded by 9.15 and we were off.

By the time all had sampled the Maritime Museum along with a quick coffee brandy outside the Roman Theatre Museum entrance, the Roman Theatre tour and the story of its discovery in the town centre in 1985 was awesome!

It was then time for a wander and lunch. After randomly dispersing into the old town centre crammed with eateries of all persuasions, a sizeable gang found themselves at the same pavement restaurant . The menu del dias was a generous helping of tuna salad, calamari, seafood and meat paella, followed by a choice of tiramisu or ice cream – all for 15 Euros.

With rather full bellies we all wandered back to the harbour front to be greeted by a waving and whistling Bob who was collecting people onto the boat for our harbour tour. The tour was conducted in relative quiet to give lunch chance to settle and we were taken around the circumference of the harbour which in sequence consisted of: the harbour front marina, the Spanish armada hold (a somewhat loosely guarded collection of small warships), a modern boat repair yard the ruins of old fortifications, the red and green lighthouse points which marked the exit to open sea, an active container loading bay, and moorings for container ships. One contained a variety of livestock peering at us with the same surprise that we were showing them.

Back on dry land there was just time for one last drink – taken by Maria and Duncan in the Yellow Submarine Beatle themed pub – before we were back on the coach arriving back at the hotel around 17.00.

Wednesday Oct 7th

The menfolk held their usual EMA meeting (Minutes available separately) in the hotel whilst the ladies took a shopping trip to the Zenia Boulevard shopping complex .

Everyone was then at leisure to lunch, laze by the pool and prepare themselves for the big night.



At 18.30 the hotel patio was being prepared for the welcome drinks and a very dapper Bob Cooper was to be seen sat calmly as the waiters scurried back and forth with tables and various drinking paraphernalia. Very much a contender for the next James Bond.



By 19.15 the patio was thronged with formally attired brethren and ladies – a gathering of 48 EMA members plus 43 guest masons and their ladies from Las Salinas and other local lodges.



All were called to the dining room by 'James Bond' at 19.30 sharp and we were treated to a fine gala dinner with free flowing wine, interesting tapas (the best being the parma ham date and almond wraps), pork in brandy and strawberry cake and ice cream.

It was then time to work off the calories so Kevin Tyler (very good) and Johnny Soulman (not quite so good) performed a wide variety of songs old and new for us and the dancefloor bounced pretty much all the way to closing time at 1 a.m. A special mention should be given here to Arnie and Beryl Lawton who simply never stopped.



Thursday Oct 8th

Some sore heads were to be found propped up by tired arms at breakfast proving the gala dinner a hit.

The formal event was over and sadly for some it was time to pack the bags and get ready to go. (Some were staying on until Sunday)

The weather also seemed to be indicating that we were in danger of overstaying our welcome. For the first time we experienced less than perfect conditions with the palm trees bending and the sea turned into a relative tsunami, when compared to the mill pond it had been thus far.

Even the farewell drink at the Melida beach bar had a range of pullovers, trousers and light jackets on show as people braved their way through some unfeasibly large brandy's, G&T's and other indulgences. After a final farewell and a toast to Barbara Benton on her recent 80th birthday celebrations we all scuttled reluctantly away to our rooms.

Friday 9th October

Another very slow start for some, who only just made breakfast which closes at 10.00.

After a final breakfast and pleas for a room late check out which fell on deaf ears, most people packed and vacated their rooms bang on midday as required. And thus another fine EMA event came to an end. Next stop Bexley Heath, April 2016. Onward !

(Author and editor - Duncan Nield, Assistant Secretary, 12th Oct 2015 Duncan@enabler.co.uk)