



WEDNESDAY 16th August 2006

Well, it's travelling time again. The Eagle Taxi took us to the 'Black Bull' pickup point for 09:00 hrs to meet the coach which is taking us to Liverpool Airport. Everybody is in good spirits. There are 16 persons, including myself. N^o 17 will be waiting at Liverpool Airport already. No hold-ups on the way, that was a great relief because it can be quite nerve wracking when there is an accident and the motorway snarls up to walking pace. At the airport, the coach was not permitted to drop us outside the Departure lounge, instead he had to drive away and 'chuck us out' at the first roundabout leaving us O.A.Ps to push and pull our luggage back to the terminal. This was all really very silly, petty and not at all necessary. We had a Panini at Wheatherspoon's Café and then proceeded to Security. I had put all my pocket contents out into a clear see-through plastic zip-bag and kept to the recommendations in view of the recent panic, but I still had to take off my sandals!! I expected to be stopped, as always, by the walk through metal detector – it always happens because of the metal in my left ankle – but to my great surprise I walked through without a peep – the buggers were cheating, but this time I kept that to myself. Funnily enough, Julie got frisked instead. When we boarded the plane we were fortunate enough to sit on the first row of seats which is a great blessing to me because I can stretch my legs when I need to. The take-off was delayed because one person had disappeared after checking in the luggage. So, this had to be found in the aircraft's hold and removed – this took 40 minutes. I was quite concerned that we might miss the train, but the steward had a word with the captain and he assured us that we will be there in good time – and so we were. The airport Köln/Bonn is fairly new and very clean. The luggage came soon and we trundled off to find the railway terminal. Now it came home to me that things are not so easy when travelling with OAPs. Some cannot negotiate the escalators and need to use a lift which is not always there or where we want it. The train came in under N^o 940 and we wanted N^o 945 – so I did a lot of running up and down the platform to find a railway person to ask, but they were suddenly very thin on the ground. The standing train's designated number changed suddenly to 945 and to my great relief I found carriage N^o 23 and everybody piled in. However, the numbering system was weird and we could not find N^o 104 which I would have thought was next to N^o 105 – God knows where it is. I lifted most of the bags onto the baggage racks and so we set off. Through Cologne, the Cologne Exhibition station, Düsseldorf, Duisburg to Essen. Here we had only 10 minutes to go from platform 4 to platform 21. This was quite fraught, because there were very steep stairs in between. So we all helped out and there were several German gentlemen who lent a hand as well. Platform 21 was totally crowded with football supporters for the game Germany viz Sweden. But they were all good natured except one character who shouted at Derek. He was six footer and sounded quite threatening. He had a bit too much to drink and when I stepped in front of him and asked in German what he wanted – he was actually quite harmless, just loud, and even had his own minder who apologised all round for his mate's behaviour. When the train arrived we all piled in with our luggage and I heard more than a few complaints about it. Who could have guessed that there would be a football match on at 7 o'clock (when Derek and I tested this route in May it was pleasantly empty. The minder of the drunk told me about how the English behaved during the world cup which was on the whole quite good, it was only when England were knocked out that they became quite ugly – I saw it on TV and was rather ashamed and told the minder that most English are decent folk and do not condone this behaviour at all.

When we got to Recklinghausen Hbf (Hauptbahnhof = main station) there was, thankfully, a lift from the platform to the exit. Monika, bless her, was already waiting for



us and said that she had a number of taxis waiting for us – that was a most generous gesture from her and although we planned on a leisurely stroll to the hotel, most of my fellow travellers looked tired and fed up with lumping their cases about – so I was quite relieved, really. Obviously, Derek and I had done a dummy run last May and did not find it difficult at all to walk that short distance with a suitcase on wheels. The Engelsburg received us pleasantly and I met Frau Preckel who had been so kind and patient with all those constant changes I had to request of her. What an asset to their organisation – I do hope they appreciate her. We invited Monika to have dinner with us, but she has a difficult conference tomorrow. She said she would escort us to Boente, buy us a drink and then be on her way to prepare for tomorrow. So, after checking into our hotel rooms and a quick shirt change we re-assembled in the reception and walked the short distance to Boente's. They were expecting us and to my surprise, there was Jutta (a former architectural student for whom I had arranged work and accommodation in Preston some years ago) and her partner Kai waiting for us. We had a welcoming drink of vanilla and cherry which did not look very nice but the taste certainly made up for it. We then chose our food which was made much easier by numbering the 6 or 7 dishes on the card, translating the 'fare' and then just ordering at the ordering point. The waitress was impressed by this efficiency and in no time were we able to tuck in. Lots of beer, brewed in-house, followed. Matthias Briks turned up and we had a long chat with him and Jutta. When the bill came, Derek and I had a pleasant surprise, it came to less than we had budgeted for and that was a good reason to order another round of drinks. The evening came to a pleasant conclusion and we all walked back to the hotel. Derek, Brian & Barbara, Sue Bell and I stopped for a nightcap in the bar. I excused myself after a while and went to bed. Alas, the pillow was too soft and unsubstantial, so I had a lousy night and must not forget to ask for more pillows.

THURSDAY 17th AUGUST 2006

I feel quite groggy – was it lack of sleep or the 'bevvies' we consumed last night? Well, of course not. We will be collected @ 09:45 for 10 o'clock for the conducted tour of the town. The breakfast was nice, but rather short. Frau Venn and a young lady from 'Die Brücke' (Frau Saskia Dankwart) waited for us downstairs and it was raining heavily. Frau Venn therefore started to introduce the building in which the hotel is situated. She told us the story of the very large and ornate hall which required an annual toll to be paid because it was erected on a public right of way. When we ventured outside, the rain had almost stopped. We kept within the bounds of the old walled city. We called at 'Die Brücke' where we were received with sparkling wine and lovely biscuits. Monika was not there but Herr Karl-Heinz Bross gave a speech on the origin of the Institution which is now almost 60 years old. (Johannes and I went to the 50th jubilee celebrations). After that we visited St. Peter, the main Catholic Church in Recklinghausen, and saw the original Torso Cross (of which I wrote a short story which is now displayed in Preston's Minster, together with a replica miniature bronze torso cross). Then we looked at the Town Hall – not before we enjoyed Mike Chapman giving us his cry in two languages on the steps of the Rathaus – that is what the town hall is called in German – (quite an apt description, don't you think?) After that we lost Sharon and Marie who just went to find a bank to change money – apparently the first bank was not very helpful and thus went further afield (I found that out myself when I went after them and enquired from a sourly looking clerk whether he had seen them – he was just such an ignoramus and deliberately un-co-operative). The tour ended at approx. 13:00 hrs back at the Engelsburg. Frau Venn was very good and struggled valiantly with the English language. A sterling effort. We gave her a handsome tip of €20. Margaret McManus



wants her accident last night, when a screen with the post card of the Preston floral Recklinghausen display fell over and hit her in the mouth, recorded in the Hotel's accident book. When I approached the Receptionist, she said that they do not have such a book. She promised to speak and report the incident to the management. I requested an extra pillow and a neck-roll because I had a disturbed night due to my head being too low down. In fact, at one stage, I got up and placed my shoulder bag under my pillow to raise the thing which was much better. Karl-Heinz Bross and Saskia Dankwart (on work experience secondment) are going to pick us up @ 14:00 hrs. Before that, J and I went to McDonald which was not as good as expected. Mike Chapman (mischievous devil he is) made a big deal out of that by an announcement to all and sundry that he had seen us eating there – oh, the shame of it. Mind you, the place we saw him consuming chips and a Frikkadelle did not look any more posh than good old McDonalds (alas, the hamburger was on the cold side, H&S fascists at it again, I presume). We all walked to the bus stop o/s the Rathaus and took a bendi-bus to see the Konditorei Sindern. Once there, Sindern senior, a sprite septuagenarian, and his wife received us at the door very cordially and he then gave a wonderful demonstration of Marzipan modelling by asking each one of us in turn to name an animal which he then proceeded to mould out of the lovely stuff within seconds – quite astounding, really. Then we had coffee and cake and a shopping spree for chocolate and Marzipan. Herr Bross wanted us to take the 16:35 hrs bus back to town, because it was his wife's birthday. Se we go everybody going (it took several attempts and running up and down and pulling out of hair before the pack started moving) and when we arrived at the bus stop, the time table had changed and we all had to wait 10 minutes – panic over. Six people preferred to take a taxi back to the hotel. When we got back to town I tried several men shops, including Karstadt and Hettlage & Fischer, to replace my Prinz Heinrich Mütze which I had lost some months ago. No chance, they either did not sell them or they were too large at C&A Brenningmeier. Got back to the hotel and fell onto the bed for a long rest – only to be woken by Derek who told me that we were all going out at 20:00 hrs for a meal. Well, I think we better go. Need to request another towel because only one was left when the room was made up during the day. Frau Preckel at the reception promised to put them out for me ready to collect after our return from our meal. I mentioned MMcM's accident and she informed me that management were aware of it. (I also said that if I were them I would invite MMcM to see a Doctor to make sure everything is alright). We set out (D&C, B&B, J&J, MMilne, SRiley, MChapman, and SBell&AliciaJ) to find a place to eat. We found the "Bürgerhof" at the end of the Steinstraße which was quite inviting. We had a very good feed there and everybody was pleased with the food and the way the waitress managed to serve everybody quickly and with a smile. She was grateful for my help in processing the orders. It was Derek's idea to just go for a small number of dishes – translate what there is on offer – and give a written order to the counter – it worked like a charm. The bill came to €210, but then (and after I had collected €25 from each person, the 'College girls' needed separate receipts for their expenses claim to the college. So, after that, I gave €5 back to everybody and the waitress got a big tip. In fact, the landlords too expressed his thanks for our custom and made us feel as if we saved his establishment from bankruptcy. Who knows, maybe we did. We had a leisurely stroll back through the quiet streets. A man came towards us carrying a bicycle with a severely twisted front wheel shouting "Good Evening" to us several times. We still had only one towel in our room, so I went downstairs and spoke to the barman who obliged and produced two towels immediately. Derek, Brian & Barbara, and Sue & Alicia were still in the bar and I joined them for a Weizenkorn. After that – to bed and the comfort of a second pillow and a neck roll – bliss.



FRIDAY 18th AUGUST 2006

The weather looks wet (well, it did so yesterday, cleared up and it got quite warm and muggy) and I am curious as to how the guided tour through the Ruhr Valley will proceed. We shall see. Monika introduced us to Roy Kift and Günter the bus driver and we set out on time @ 09:00 hrs. On the way to the Zollern II-IV pit. Roy gave a very comprehensive running commentary on the area which was very interesting although some of our delegation did find his read-off explanations too fast to follow and probably not interesting enough (we should have invited the shopaholics amongst us to visit a Trafford Park equivalent – so here we were accused of male bias because we (Derek and my male compatriots) wanted to impart important eco-socio-political history to our delegation). The pit complex had the most interesting and elegant buildings I have ever seen in such a context, i.e. a coal mine. Obviously, the pit had been sanitised, scrubbed and painted to make it palatable to the populace who are now able to follow an immense industrial heritage trail, signposted throughout the Ruhrgebiet – needless to say, one needs at least a fortnight and the stamina of a Bull to do it all. Maybe the Guinness Book of Records could be interested? Brian, Mike and I climbed to the very top of the winding tower from which we had a wonderful view over the area. Inside the winding tower was the coal sorting area which must have been an absolute hell of noise and dust and frantic activity – and very dangerous too. The engine house which housed the winding gear had a huge marble backed switch board and the man in charge had a dais raised off the ground in front of the switch board – a proper master of all he surveyed. The machinery, including the massive winding gear (cables leading through slots to the top of the winding tower (Förderturm) and compressors were built in 1903 and are still most impressive. Mike came in and gave a sample of his powerful voice which totally filled this huge hall and people outside could hear him as well. We also saw a 2mØ tunnelling machine and the cage in which the miners were transported up and down the shaft. This must have been extraordinarily frightening (I wonder if people ever got used to it being hurtled down at breakneck speed and then yanked up with their stomach trailing yards behind). They just had a chain around their chests to make sure they did not come in contact with the shaft walls – that would have rubbed out a person in seconds – the thought alone made me shiver and relieved that I did not take on the offer to become a miner all those years ago in the mid 50ties. The souvenir shop was reasonably priced and Julie bought herself a walking stick which was in sections, had a brass hammer & pick head on top and a glass drinks flask in the hollow part. (Mike was the inspiration because he saw it first and acquired one.) I bought a gold pin with oak leaf and the miner's crossed hammers (Hammer & Schlegel) symbol as a potent reminder of what I luckily escaped from. At 12:00 o'clock sharp we all repaired to the "Pferdestall" (stable) Restaurant on site for a bowl of soup which was surprisingly good value for money – and everybody liked it, except Ann who felt poorly and gave lunch a miss. After lunch we went ahead to go to the old ships lift at Henrichenburg (Waltrop). This was a disused works which had been turned into a museum with fascinating displays of steam engines and all there is to know about inland navigation. Several ladies of our party began to grumble and stated that they were bored by all this 'male bias'. Oh dear, food for thought – it never occurred to me that somebody could be bore with such wealth of wonderful artefacts – but they had a point which I shall take into consideration if I am ever trusted again with making suggestions during the organisation of an excursion to the 'Vaterland' or elsewhere. So, we broke off and instead went to a café for generous helpings of coffee and cake – this found popular acclaim and soon the grumbles stopped. Phew... For the coffee, tea and cake with cream we paid out of contingencies – the same as we did for lunch. Derek handed me



€20 for the driver and he also settled with Roy. We were dropped outside the Apotheke (pharmacy) opposite the Engelsburg and when we crossed the road, some of us saw the official delegation from Preston being driven to Sindern for a demonstration. Whilst Julie had a rest, Mike Chapman and I went to a quiet room and practiced his cries which are coming on fairly well. Then we walked into town to find a shop which sells Prinz Heinrich Mützen to replace the one I lost a while back. But nobody has them anymore except C&A but they are miles too big and are hanging around my ears. Not a pretty sight. That's a shame; maybe there will be a shop open in Münster on Sunday. We are going out for 19:30 hrs tonight – don't know where yet. People seem to gel together by now. We stepped out with the whole crowd, bar Valerie and Geoff who were invited to dine with friends, and went to an Italian restaurant. The proprietor was most obliging and very soon set up a long table for all of us. We had a slight hiccup with the order for Audrey who wanted an omelette with nothing else with it. She got one covered in chives and was most upset and refused to eat it. When I called on the proprietor to change it, he obliged and sorted it out very quickly and soon she was smiling again. Phew... The food tasted good and everybody was complimentary about it. MMcM & MM left to go home and on the way met Christine Abram, Jean Al-Serraj and J Hull who came up and joined us. After a while we broke up and after paying mine host, we joined up with Lorraine Norris, Carol Forrest and the Mayor and his wife at Boente's. It was a warm night and the Biergarten was just the right place for drinking, laughing and talking. Our two ladies from Preston College had a good day and sounded upbeat about the whole thing. They had made good contacts. On return to the hotel we had a night cap until 1 a.m. before we got to bed. Julie told me then that a member of our group had disgraced herself last night by vomiting all over her room and leaving it there and going on the Ruhr trip without telling anyone. The room had to be thoroughly cleansed and fumigated by people with masks and special equipment. When confronted by this and asked why this had not been reported at the time, she denied all knowledge of the incident. I am really annoyed that I got this second hand. However, Derek had done the decent thing and already been and apologised to the Receptionist, Frau Preckel, who did most of the cleaning up.

SATURDAY 19th AUGUST 2006

Had a lie-in and then just had a leisurely breakfast. Monika came and she was please with how everything is going. Nadine turned up and it was nice to see her. Julie and I had lunch at Karstadt. At 15:00 hr we had a conducted tour of the IKONENMUSEUM – very interesting and deeply absorbing – apart from some people trying to touch those priceless artefacts. The tour was followed with rapt attention – I say that, because even the 'chatterboxes' amongst us shut up for a while and listened. Gordana Veljanovic (who is Serbian and a highly qualified art historian) used all her English she knew and only occasionally asked me to complete a sentence or answer questions. The mass in St. Peter was something else. Herr Pantförder, the Bürgermeister of Recklinghausen, got up and welcomed us when we approached our reserved seats and the officiating priest, Probs Heinrich Westhoff, came down from the Altar platform and shook hands with me, reminiscing about the good time he had in Preston when he came to Donald Pearson's ecumenical conference. The mass itself was most impressive and held in Latin. The Cecilian Choir officiating and the Gutenberg Male Voice Choir joining in a rousing "Hallelujah" chorus at the end. Mike Chapman was outside and when sufficient people had assembled around the church door, the performed his cry to the bemusement and then pleasure of the bystanders. The Bürgermeister on his way to something else turned back and I showed him the cry in German on the piece of paper I



carried. Monika then came and introduced Mike to the Bürgermeister. Met Ingrid Brenk, Achim Grunschel with wife Gaby and daughter Carola. Also Frau Ott said hello which brought back memories of an exchange gone awfully wrong. From the church we walked straight to 'Albers' for our dinner. We all sat on a long table and most of us had a soup and steak which was delicious. Of course, plenty of beer and wine was used for lubrication. I used the same method of ordering as before at Boente's and the food came onto the table very quickly. Again, the bill came to less than we had anticipated and Derek and I were very pleased which prompted us to give the gang of waiters a well deserved tip of € 50 (that is extra to the service charge which, together with the VAT is included in the final bill) so we can go back there whenever we like and be well received. From Albers we walked to Boente's where the Mayor's party was already dining in the Biergarten. At about Midnight (Julie had already gone back with MMcM and Joan Ainscough) I had enough and took my leave and escorted Collette back to the hotel. She too would have preferred a nightcap at the hotel instead of hard wooden slatted chairs in the open air which was feeling rather damp. Some people are concerned about the trip to Münster tomorrow because, apparently, the shops are shut. Well, it is Sunday after all and Münster is the seat of the local Bishop. Maybe next time, if there is a next time, we need to have not only a plan B but also plan C + D, but we will never be able to stop all the grumbles.

SUNDAY 20th AUGUST 2006

The sun was shining when I got up at 7 a.m. this morning, but now, at 08:15 hrs it is overcast. That might change. We also have to say good bye to our two fellow delegates from Preston College who have to travel back today, because they could not get a flight on Monday with us. That is a great pity, because tonight is the big reception at which we will meet a lot of interesting people. I think they both enjoyed themselves and we all took very kindly to them. Let's see what the day will bring. We all walked to the railway station where there was nobody to talk to in the way of rail personnel, instead there were machines dotted about into which one was supposed to feed money in order to procure a ticket – hopefully to the desired destination. Actually, the ticket machine was easy to handle and dispensed the tickets to the airport quite quickly after feeding money into a slot (€17.40 one way) and punching in the code for Köln Flughafen (2070). And then it was time to say good bye. I told them both, and this is probably the greatest compliment a man can give a female, that we could steal horses with them and also to give our love to Jacki who had to stay behind to mind the 'shop' in the Principal's office at Preston College. The 'gang' was still apprehensive to go to Münster, but once we got there we split up and we left everybody finding their own way around. Looking at the sky I thought I better buy an umbrella at the station, just to guarantee that it won't rain. Before we split up, the 6 of us had a coffee in a busy student's bar and I had an ice cream. Julie and I went into the Cathedral and witnessed the last few minutes of the Sunday mass. It was rather impressive. We then walked to the astronomical clock but it had been turned off due to the mass being said. There was a vintage car rally on the cathedral square but they were all fairly recent models – let's say the car models were all younger than me – none over 50. Julie wanted some lunch, so we stopped at a restaurant called "Kiepenkerl" (a Kiepe is a basket carried on one's back) and had some cheese on bread and found it enjoyable. Then it was time to find our way back to the station which we made in good time. When the train came in, D&C and B&B were still missing. I desperately tried to contact Brian on his mobile, but only got the messages service. Just when the train was going to start moving, they turned up – very much to our relief. I thought we had to leave them behind because I



had the rest of the party to look after and most important of all, I held all the tickets. I am glad we came back a train earlier, because that gave everyone the chance to freshen up and get changed for the main event of this visit. We took a taxi to the Ruhrfestspielhalle because I did not know the way there on foot. The hall is most impressive in its airy appearance with a Henry Moore statue on the forecourt. We were ushered to the front where seats were reserved for us. The Bürgermeister was already there and greeted us in a friendly manner. The concert under the motto: "Zwei Chöre – eine Freundschaft" (two choirs – one friendship) was brilliant and the virtuosity of the soloists and musicians alike was truly outstanding. During the break we met Jutta Kurdelbaum and her mother. As it is, when one is involved in the organisation of anything, the sheepdog herding instinct takes over and I found it very hard to even concentrate for a few minutes of pleasantries. Monika asked me to tell Mike to get ready for his cry. He got changed in the toilet and left all his stuff there, draped over a wash basin. Only when he told me that he was worried about his wallet I walked out of the Bürgermeister's long speech to retrieve his effects and especially his wallet which I put into my pocket. When I returned with these items, the BM was still speaking. Mike's cry found much acclaim and introduced some essential colour and fun to the proceedings. The people assembled did their mayor a great discourtesy by jabbering away and not paying any attention to what he said. I and many others thought that was an experience we do not wish to experience again. Monika promised me a copy of the BM's speech because I could not understand it for the incredible noise the people made although I stood right next to him. He complimented our Partnership and the work we were engaged in, etc. After he had finished, a young man, I believe he comes from Huddersfield, read out the English version of the speech – there again, nobody could hear it because of the general hubbub the people made around the bar. Maybe they should have left the bar closed until the speeches were over. Our Mayor was announced by Mike with his bell clanging and shouts of oyez... and he made a nice speech which again, was completely ignored by the multitude. Derek asked me to speak and I scribbled down a few lines of thank you etc, but Monika said NO because many other people had wanted to speak – but she asked me to wait until after the food had been served. It was very hectic to go around and speak to all the people whom I knew, but I could not stay long with anyone. Heinrich Westhoff, the Probst of St. Peter came up beaming – we shook hands and then I had to rush off again. The civic parties exchanged gifts and then suddenly Monika asked me to say a few words on behalf of our delegation (because I speak the language). The microphone was switched on and our Mike rung his bell and announced me – a very strange feeling. I said what I felt I had to say and then introduced Ann to present her embroidery to the BM which she did, slightly swaying. He was very gracious and accepted it. After that, everybody mingled. Monika told me that there were two Muslims who were interested in making contact with Fayyaz. I gave them my card with F's e-mail address and we parted in the hope that there could be a link in the making. They will contact F in due course. They seemed nice persons but very cagey – presumably because of the current problem with fundamentalist fanatics. We need to sort this out at grass root level and I hope we have helped to make a small contribution. Carol Forrest came up to me and asked if I could take some photos because she had forgotten her camera. We were all invited to sign the 50th anniversary golden book – so we all queued patiently to put our names into this big folio. When they were handing out gifts, I was pleased that Derek was remembered and to my surprise there was even a bottle for me. For the rest of the evening we 'networked'. Then my hearing aid packed up. It is an awful feeling to suddenly be cut off from the world although my residual hearing is good enough for a conversation, but it is just not very sharp. I fished a spare battery from my 'bullet' (which I carry on my key



ring) but it was a dud. So I left it off completely and somehow managed. Derek ordered taxis for which I was glad, because I had no idea as to how to get back to the hotel. I deposited my suit jacket in my room and then we headed back to Boente's for a farewell drink. After a few beer, the waitress behind the bar, called: "Time" (would you believe it!) because she wanted to go home. That is quite understandable, because she was at her post every time we called at Boente's – and that was almost every night. We all tramped back to the hotel and carried on talking and drinking to about 1 a.m. the Councillors who came on this trip were in general on a 'high' because of their treatment and all swore a holy oath that from now on they would be aware of what 'twinning' is about and 'bang the drum' for it. Well, we have heard that one before – and not only once. As a twinning association we have, through our contacts, created a mini "Camelot" where everybody (after a few libations) suddenly became human. Members from opposite parties embraced each other, drank together and shared their problems together. It was truly uplifting to see that happening. But from experience, it will probably not last – but at least we made people aware that there are spiritual benefits to be gained (and not just the bottled kind) from visiting another country and to be away from the usual pressures at home and at work and relax in good company, food and drink. The cultural contribution made by the two choirs was immense and we felt particularly proud that the Cecilians gave such a wonderful concert under their musical director Graham Jackson. Not forgetting the Gutenberg Male Voice Choir whose musical director is an attractive lady who has them eating out of her hands. We met the Grunschel family and Linda Dierstein who looked completely different to what I remembered of her. I took a photo of Ruth Archer with Julia G and Linda, her "children" and plenty of others. I also took lots of picture of people signing the golden book.

MONDAY 21st AUGUST 2006

I slept well and woke up at 07:18 hrs. Rather late. I got ready and packed immediately. Julie got up and whilst she dressed, I wrote in my diary. Jochen Weber, the Deputy Bürgermeister came at 09:00 hrs to say his farewells and said also how sorry he was that he missed all the fun. At 11 o'clock sharp, the official delegation took their leave and departed in a mini bus. All were beaming widely and expressing their full satisfaction with the visit. Reinhold Hegemann said 'hello' and Monika and Nadine were there to see everyone safely off. Derek settled the bill (over € 3,700) and left a tip. Then it was our turn to depart. Derek had ordered a number of taxis who turned up and transported us swiftly to the railway station for the 11:51 hrs train to the airport. Whilst waiting on the platform, Matthias Briks turned up to say his good byes to Audrey and Joan who had hosted him and Silke in June. We managed to 'decant' at the airport and I was pleased that there was a lift for our ladies. We were given our boarding cards very quickly when the lady at the counter realised that we had to wait from 14:00 to 19:00 hrs (5 long hours). Julie got seat N^o001. We hung around a bit when MMxM dropped her bag and her lemonade bottle exploded with a very loud plop. We expected to be swiftly surrounded by armed guards sporting balaclavas – well, instead we surrounded the steadily expanding puddle of liquid, lest someone should slip and fall on it. The cleaners finally turned up and so we could go. For the rest of the afternoon we just mooched about, sat down and got up and annoyed by the clanging of the toilet doors. Finally we boarded the plane, all in black and yellow livery and sat down again on the front row. This plane, a Boeing, had a display screen which gave a position reading at short intervals which helped to pass the time very quickly. Manchester airport has extraordinarily long corridors along we marched for endless minutes. The baggage came quickly and soon we were out of the place and our bus was waiting for



us. I asked the driver if he would drop us at junction 31a. but he said that he was contracted to drop us at Black Bull Lane (after driving past our house?) Julie became quite cross and gave him an earful. I told Derek and he said: "Leave it to me" and sure enough, the driver relented (no doubt persuaded by the prospect of a decent tip) and we were let off at the roundabout. MM came with us, because I had promised to take her home. Then we had a decent cup of tea or two and slept like a log. I do hope that everybody had a good time.