

## PITA Meet 2008: a visit to Aylesford and Springfield mills

by Barry R. Read

It is not entirely unusual to have conversations across the Breakfast Table with complete strangers whilst travelling, we've all done it. However, it was a first (for myself anyway) to spend the night in a Carmelite Monastery and admit, to the resident "Sister Elizabeth", over eggs and bacon, that "for my sins, I work in the Paper Industry". It was only after the last word had left my mouth that I realised that "for my sins" is perhaps not the best way to describe your career choice to a Nun.

However, the delight of Aylesford Priory - The Friars" to locals - was just one of the highlights of a very, very busy week at the end of May.

I can honestly say that last year's PITA Meet at Frogmore Mill exceeded everyone's expectations, not least of all my own. That success created a certain amount of pressure to repeat the event, but there was also an element of "How do you follow that?" With hindsight, I think it's fair to say that such fears were unfounded and the PITA Meet 2008 was every bit as much a success as it's predecessor and in some ways has set the bar even higher for future events.

### Working Group Meetings

Refreshed after my night of quiet contemplation in the Monastery, I arrived at

Aylesford Newsprint (one of our hosts for the day) along with about 50 other papermakers and suppliers from the length and breadth of the UK. The day's proceedings started with the usual Working Group Meetings (Engineering, Environment & Energy, Finishing, Paper Making and Raw Materials), all well attended.

It always pleases me as a Working Group Chairman that, despite the difficult times faced by the Paper Industry, individuals make the effort to travel considerable distances to attend these meetings and feel that the rewards justify the efforts. The "Drive of the Day Award" probably goes to Kurt McConnie of Nalco, who drove the 270 mile from Blackburn that morning - circumnavigating the M25 and the dreaded Dartford Crossing - and only arrived slightly late. Later in the day Kurt revealed that he is due to have the equivalent of a "tachograph" fitted to his car, it will be interesting to see what impact this has on his journey times!

The discussions at Working Group Meetings are always lively and varied, whilst the flow of conversation provides a good barometer to the hot topics in the industry and what is needed to address these. I would like to feel that it is from these discussions that many of the solutions to "key issues" emerge, which has the potential to help every Paper Mill in the UK.

The Working Group Meetings were followed by an excellent lunch in Aylesford's Staff Restaurant, almost worth the trip in it's own right, before we got down to "the meat of The Meet".

### Aylesford's Project Jura

Joined by several members of PITA's Southern District, the group were treated to a presentation of the recent "upgrades" to Aylesford's PM14, which is described internally as "Project Jura". The main task of the project was the installation of a new headbox, however the mill took the opportunity to maintain and upgrade various other parts of the Paper Machine at the same time.

The project was extremely well managed and met all the tight time schedules. With a thousand employees and contractors working tens of thousands of man hours over the 12 day period, the machine was back in production within a few hours of the scheduled start up and producing saleable paper by the second reel. It is often true that it is the little things that impress most and Aylesford had recorded the whole event using time lapse photography, producing a video that condensed the installation down into a few minutes. The DVD of the installation is now a much sought after collector's item,



Anders Astrom describes Project Jura



Daven Chamberlain completes the Southern District AGM in record time



Adrian Day lands yet another Burger



Aylesford's Excellence Centre was packed for the Presentations

although I don't think that Spielberg need worry just yet!

After that, the group split into two parties.

- The first and larger group toured the Aylesford Operation, taking in the upgraded Paper Machine and the Deinking plant. Even though PM14 has been running for some time now, it is difficult not to be impressed by the operation as many of our party obviously were.
- The second group took the short coach journey into Maidstone, to visit the entirely opposite end of the Papermaking spectrum at Whatman International. The name Whatman is synonymous with filter media, ranging from the humble filter paper through to the complex separation media used in Biosciences, yet for many of us it is fundamentally a sheet of paper. The visit to the Springfield Mill site was a first for many of the group and it was certainly something to talk about on the bus heading back from the mill.

Without wanting to sound like an acceptance speech at an awards ceremony, it wouldn't be right to pass this point without acknowledging some of the help and support that went into making the PITA Meet a success.

- Thanks must go to Aylesford Newsprint for allowing such a large group to make use of their facilities and tour the mill. Anders Astrom's presentation on the Project Jura and the contributions from John Godsall and Nick Brabyn were all open and highly informative. Thanks must also go to Marisa George for her help in providing the facilities within the Excellence Centre.
- Thanks must also go to Steve Horsman of Whatman International for opening up the doors of this fascinating mill and acting as a Tour Guide par excellence, according to the returning visitors.

With the business of the day behind us, it was time to get down to important matters and that required a visit to Cobdown Sports & Social Club, just around the corner from Aylesford Newsprint.

**Southern District: AGM and future events**

The second item of business was the Southern District AGM, conducted in record time by Daven Chamberlain, the first item being to ensure that everyone had a drink. With the election of a new Chairman and the support of "the committee", the Southern District is set to embark on an exciting programme of meetings for the 2008 / 2009 season, starting with an evening with a major

equipment supplier and a return visit to Frogmore Mill to see their new Visitor Centre. This will be followed, later in the year, by the traditional Kentish pastime of "A Visit to the Brewery", before taking some events over to the Western District in the New Year. Full details of the meetings will be appearing in *Paper Technology* and on the PITA Web site.

With the formal business of the day complete and the Kent weather providing an unusually pleasant backdrop, the rest of the evening was spent enjoying the barbeque and a few drinks, all provided by the generosity of the event sponsors who are listed in the illustrations. To add to the traditional barbeque fare, Peter McLaverty added a South African flavour with an extremely large contribution of Boerewors, a kind of spicy Cumberland Sausage with an interesting "sting in the tail". Peter obviously relished the role of BBQ Chef and is thoroughly recommended to anyone planning a private barbeque this year.

The evening wore on, the barbeque moved indoors, for the European Football, and this weary contributor returned to cloisters; reflecting on the conversations of the day and planning the Carbon Circles session for the following day.

Although the UK Paper Industry has been ravaged over the past few years by the extraordinary increase in energy costs, combined with a noticeable lack of recent investment, 2008 / 2009 could be a turning point, if the mood in Maidstone was any measure.

With significant investment in the Newsprint sector, rumours of a new packaging grade machine and paper generally enjoying a resurgence of popularity - due to its excellent Carbon and Environmental credentials - perhaps 21st May was a good day to celebrate and the start of a new resurgence for PITA.

This contributor is sure that he does not have to report on the conversations that take place when Papermakers gather. In the words of the old Chinese curse "We live in interesting times" and everyone has, at least, one view on the future of the industry. One thing was obvious, to a man, those attending the meeting are committed to the UK Paper Industry and are planning to attend next year's PITA Meet.

Once again, thanks to all the sponsors, for their contribution to this event, without which the PITA Meet could not have taken place. I am grateful that so many gave so much so freely, making the organisation so much easier and ensuring that everybody had a great time.



## PITA Meet 2008

PITA would like to acknowledge and thank the following sponsors for their support in staging this year's PITA Meet:



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