

Day 1 – Saturday 19th November 2005

Excitement had been building for weeks, and now the day had arrivedtime for the Pork Pie Club's annual foreign tour. Four of us were delegated to represent our country as Pork Pie ambassadors to Spain, with an inspection tour of Benidorm's first pork pie manufacturer on the itinerary. Richard collected Kevin, Pete and John early on a frosty Saturday morning in West Yorkshire and we headed for Leeds/Bradford airport via a butcher's in Yeadon. The butcher (who also unusually sold some fresh veg and other sundries) seemed markedly unenthusiastic when asked to make up individual sandwiches for our journey. We put this down to the fact that it was early Saturday morning and we were strangers in Yeadon. Not usually inclined to extravagant spending (Pete and a duck's a...e often share the same ranking in the tightness stakes), Pete also bought a fresh bacon sandwich to eat in the car.



Our main purchase at the butcher come greengrocer was four pork pies (which he assured us were fresh) for our special airport pie-club meeting. At the airport, Kev and John headed straight for the bar, while Pete and Richard collected a newspaper and debated the quality and price of bottled water at length before choosing another soft drink to accompany their pie tasting. The verdict on the pies was consistent the butcher had kept them warm in a pie warmer, and this was not our preferred tasting temperature (we always recommend keeping a fresh pie in ambient conditions as best practice in pie husbandry). The result was a warm 'sausage roll' effect sort of greasy, flaky pastry and sausage meaty. The general consensus was that these pies were not fresh, but yesterday's pies warmed up (either that or the warmer was a very successful method of transforming a fresh pie into one that tasted a day old).

Kev had approached this 'holiday' with his usual military level of organization and planning (had he been in the scouts we wonder?). At each appropriate point, he duly collected all our passports, handed us tickets, and marshaled us in the right direction.

The journey was on time, comfortable and lived up to the excellent value-for money service we have come to expect from Jet2.

We arrived at a warm Alicante airport to discover that Kev had

pushed the boat out (to use a confusing metaphor) with the choice of hire car. This came as somewhat of a relief, especially as John's suitcase was enormous (very fastidious with his ablutions, John had packed two changes of clothes a day and, for some unknown reason, his best suit. Pete, by contrast, had packed his clothes in a small sporst/casual holdall).



It needs to be explained that Kev and Pete, whose friendship and pie-club membership go back over 25 years, enjoy a kind of banter, a mutual exchange of humorous abuse, which only best pals can get away with without falling out. It is a feature of every Saturday night pie club, and on full day events or race trips the level of abuse/criticism starts gently and builds up as the day progresses.' To John and Richard, this side-show was one of the highlights of our last pie club trip, and was already promising to be surpassed this time. The contrast between John's huge suitcase and Pete's luggage, was the first significant opportunity. "You're a bloody disgrace", said Kevin, "Fancy bringing your clothes in a carrier bag!" Pete can always articulate an excellent defence to Kevin's insults and, if necessary, counter attack. On this occasion, he chose to defend his decision to travel lightly and questioned

the need for any man to change his underpants as regularly as John, which was the cue for Kevin to claim that it was obvious from the size of his 'carrier bag' that Peter had no plans to change his underpants at all!

What makes the banter so entertaining are the differences between them. Kevin's planning and organization skills have already been mentioned. Pete, by contrast always appears last-minute and disorganized. At times, the rest of us sometimes wonder if this also provides a convenient excuse, as Pete's forgetfulness often manifests itself in his wallet. So, when Peter said he had not found time to go to the bank and had to borrow 200 euros from John, this led to more gentle abuse from Kevin. Pete's Yorkshire thrift is strangely endearing and John, who is generous to a fault, duly obliged.

After last year's challenge of 'how much luggage with can four grown men can squeeze into a Corsa', we were very impressed with our Nissan Almera hire car, with reversing camera facility! Pete had agreed to be the driver (it was a good excuse for him to avoid buying any drinks) and he took us safely to our Benidorm hotel, the Melica Sol, an impressive 4* establishment which, like the car, was more up-market than last year. (Richard wondered if Kevin had had another building society windfall, or whether he was living up to the pie-club's growing media fame, including recent appearances on Richard & Judy and Ready Steady Cook).

Kevin, who clearly regards regular (should I say constant?) eating and drinking as a personal challenge rather than a means of sustaining his Adonis-like body, had booked us in for half-board. Having had a breakfast of pie and ale, followed by sandwiches, he suggested on arrival that we go out for an 'eat-as-much-as-you-like' Chinese as an appetizer for evening meal.



“Do we have to?” said John, who is Kevin’s sparring partner in the eating and drinking stakes, “it will spoil our dinner!” This was a brave move. Kevin was not used to his itinerary being challenged. Peter and Richard tentatively mumbled supportive words backing John’s suggestion, and amazingly Kevin relented. We went for a walk instead, and found a sports bar to enjoy our first holiday drink before returning to the hotel.

After a huge evening meal (or 'a nice tea', as Kev described it) we went on the town. All day Kev had been telling Pete that he had planned something "just up your street for tonight". It wasn't clear whether Pete was excited by this or full of trepidation – he certainly wasn't going to let on, in case he revealed things which were 'right up his street' which he was hoping might remain up his private thoughts street. We were none the wiser when Kev directed the taxi to 'Rich Bitch', in Benidorm Old Town, but Pete looked relieved when we arrived and the evening turned out to be a transvestite cabaret (drag show).

As a brief aside, it is necessary to explain Kevin's promise to Pete in the taxi that the evening would be 'just up your street'. Other members of the pie club were used to enjoying Kevin's occasional innuendos that Pete has bi-sexual tendencies (Kev regarded it as good sport), but we were to witness later in the holiday that Pete has the greater wit and crucially the sense of opportunity to get his own back. For the time being, Pete expressed his irritation and bided his time.

Back to the show, which Kevin had been recommended after it featured on a BBC programme 'a life in the sun'. For 5 euros we were treated to a trio of



Day 2 (Sunday)

After breakfast we drove to Altere for a sea-front walk (like big kids we couldn't resist playing on the beach furniture), then up the coast road to the Jalon valley. By this time we had got wise to Pete's tactics at the road toll booths. He would drive up to the toll and then remember that he had no change to pay for it, so one of us would pay the bill, and it would require regular nagging to recover Pete's contribution. This time, Kevin directed Peter (unbeknown to him) to a credit-card-only toll gate. Pete drove up to the toll and once again declared he had no change. By the time he realized the 'sting', he was unable to reverse the car (there were angry Spaniards waiting behind) so he had no alternative than to use his credit card, giving a very good impression of a grumpy old man in the process.



Day 3 (Monday)

This was the day we had been anticipating with excitement, for it was the day of our official tour of inspection. Under Kev's direction we drove out to Finistrad to meet Malcolm, who had recently set up a pie business, and was doing a roaring trade supplying the British bars around Benidorm. Malcolm was proud to show us around his brand new factory and kitchen, and was overcome with emotion as he recalled the difficulties he had faced with the Spanish planners and builders. At the height of the Spanish summer he has been making pies in his garage because the factory was delayed, and the pressure had clearly taken its toll, but now he could be duly proud of his new establishment. We were very impressed, both with the factory and the product, and we learnt more in 20 minutes about the art of pie making from the butcher (who had left York to go and make pies in Benidorm) than we had learnt in the last 20 years. Fantastic pies -we scored them 10 out of 10. Having thanked him for his hospitality, we wished him all the best in his Spanish enterprise, and went to discuss our newfound knowledge over a drink in a local café. Finistrad is a fascinating

and pretty little village, with some



interesting history, and we enjoyed a brief guided tour from Kev, whose cousin Tony lives nearby.

From Finistrad, we travelled via the motorway to Calpi, for another sea-side walk. Pete, flushed with enthusiasm, challenged Richard to a walking race, which left Kevin and John in stitches as they saw the race develop into a cross between the Keystone Kops and Monty Python's ministry of silly walks. Pete accepted defeat gracefully and after a longer walk, Richard & Pete rejoined the others, who were by now (where-else?) in a local café/bar. Pete ordered a coffee and got Nescafe.

It was getting dark so we returned to the hotel. After tea we

visited a few of the hundreds of Benidorm bars and walked along the sea-front before ending up at the Rock and Roll café again. This time it was another Elvis tribute singer – great singer but not a great look-a-like (a tough challenge for someone Chinese).

Tonight's beach-side walk had given rise to another bout of verbal sparring between Kev and Pete. Whilst admiring the sand sculptures, Kev noticed a tractor trawling the sand and observed confidently that it would be hot the following day, as it was always hot the day after the beach was cleaned by a tractor. Pete could not let this go unchallenged. To him, Kev's home-spun weather forecast linking beach cleaning at night to good weather the following day did not have the same credence as the tried and tested blue-sky and shepherds' delight homily. 'That's b.....cks', he said. " they clean the beach every night." (at this point John and Richard did not contribute – they could see some sport coming and were about to enjoy it. Besides, they both had an uncanny intuition that Kev was probably right – he usually is, and he visits Benidorm at least 13 times a year!). " no it isn't" said Kevin, who was affronted by Pete's audacious challenge. " They always clean the beach before a hot day. You'll see – there'll be topless grannies on the beach tomorrow." This prospect rather dampened our enthusiasm for supporting Kev's theory, but nevertheless a bet ensued which delivered the prospect of a much more appealing spectacle and we eagerly awaited the following day....



Day 4 (Tuesday)

“You’re going to kiss my a...e Peter Charnley, you’re going to kiss my a...e !”. Unusual words to wake up to on a Tuesday morning, but the resonance of this repeating chant from the adjoining balcony meant Kevin had won his bet and we could look forward to a sunny day ahead. Pete, waking from a daze, was unimpressed.

During breakfast Kev’s relentless goading – he was adamant Pete was going to keep his side of the bargain – was clearly starting to irritate Pete. The goading continued as we took our last walk in a very sunny Benidorm, and finally, after listening to another “You’re going to kiss my a...e” from Kevin, Pete rose to the challenge. “Come on then, let’s get on with it”, he said. In the middle of a crowded sea front, Pete started to raise his voice: ‘Get your trousers down, Kevin, let’s do it here, come on...

Kev had clearly not anticipated this. Pete was now starting to enjoy making Kev squirm and he repeated his words even louder. Bearing in mind we were four men walking out together, this started to turn heads and raise eyebrows, and Kevin (a full-blooded and very macho sort of bloke) could not cope with the attention. “OK, you’ve made your point, let’s call it quits.”

We walked along quickly to escape the attention, and Kev soon found an opportunity to re-assert his already proven theory about the weather. Pointing to the beach he said, “What did I tell you – topless grannies!”



Time was pressing, and much as we enjoyed watching senior citizen beach aerobics we had to do our last minute duty free shopping. Pete, of course, had to borrow some money to do his!

Unusually the journey back to Alicante airport and then to Leeds/Bradford was relatively incident free. Back home, and the end of another pie-fect holiday.