

# An Inspired Presentation on the Empress Eugenie

On 20th November 2012, 50 members and guests of The Farnborough Society were treated to an inspired talk, lavishly illustrated with photographs, engravings and oil paintings about the Empress Eugenie.

Our speaker, Jane Jones, wove a tale of a spirited woman who, as a schoolgirl ran away from her boarding school in Bristol with her friend, a princess. As a result, Eugenie was sent to school in Paris which was considered to be a dangerous place at the time so she was taught to shoot a pistol and became extremely good at it. It became apparent that, despite the tribulations in her life, this spirit was indomitable since, after meeting Samuel Cody when she was in her 80½s and living at Farnborough Hill, she requested to be taken to her Spanish birthplace by aeroplane. Sadly, it was generally considered to be too dangerous for her to do this one assumes we are talking bi-planes here!

Jane showed us an engraving and an early photograph of the dress Eugenie wore upon her marriage to Napoleon III. It was a beautiful creation made in England and consisted of a great deal of lace with diamonds sewn on and a four metre long train. Jane also told us how Eugenie won over those French people who did not want a Spanish woman for their Empress by getting out of her wedding carriage and curtsying to the crowd. She also refused the wedding gift of a necklace worth over 600,000 and requested that, instead, the money be used to set up an orphanage for girls.

In addition to her historical research Jane had visited France with her husband after reading about a house Eugenie had bought, later in life, in the south of the country. Jane had a copy of an old photograph of this house and with a bit of detective work they managed to find the house and a road named after Eugenie.

Colour photos showed the house to be still in beautiful condition and located in a very leafy environment.

At the end of this fascinating talk, the vast majority of the audience agreed that they had certainly learned things about the Empress Eugenie they had never known previously and a rousing round of applause was given to thank Jane for her very entertaining and hugely knowledgeable presentation.