

# Air Accident Investigation Branch Tour

**On Friday, 29th January 2010, the twenty members lucky enough to secure places were the guests of the Air Accident Investigation Branch, where our tour guides, John McMillan and John Firth, ensured us a thoroughly absorbing morning.**

The first hour consisted of a presentation on AAIB's activities, including a brief history, a breakdown of the staff and their responsibilities, details of the range of aircraft AAIB investigates and of the various organisations with whom they regularly work, including the emergency services, the RAF, manufacturers, operators, national air traffic services, the Civil Aviation Authority, marine salvage companies, universities and the Met Office. Locally, QinetiQ provide help with materials technology, photography, X-ray and spectroscopy.

Using footage of accident sites and in some cases actually of accidents, John talked about the risks and challenges involved, as well as the many different kinds of evidence gathered, such as wreckage, human remains, soil samples, eye witness accounts, aerial photography, weather information, flight plans, Air Traffic Control information, company procedures and much more. AAIB produces inquest evidence, a monthly bulletin and inspectors' reports, and John emphasised that the reports produced do not seek to apportion blame or liability, but to present findings and to offer safety recommendations where appropriate.

Stopping briefly to examine a selection of the so-called 'black boxes', flight data recorders dating from the 1970s, we were taken into the hangar to see the wreckage of microlights, helicopters and aeroplanes currently under investigation. John and Julian took turns explaining each accident. It was sobering to realise that many had been fatal, and even more sobering to be in the place where until recently the remains of the Lockerbie disaster were housed. We were shown a photograph of a large section of fuselage in that very hangar, with the gaping hole in its side caused by the bomb.

The tour was an extraordinary experience and our guides exceptional--extremely knowledgeable and willing to answer all our questions. In writing to thank AAIB, The Farnborough Society has asked whether we might arrange another tour, to accommodate those members who were unable to secure places this time.