

# British peers pay homage to their heritage railway in Spain

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## Press release

**TWO ENGLISH** peers and 19 of their children and grandchildren have just returned from a flying visit to pay homage to a treasured piece of their family's history - a Victorian railway in Spain that was entirely British built.

It was the first time they had ridden the line conceived by their great grandfather, the famous British railway financier Sir Alexander Henderson. And just in the nick of time before the final whistle blows - this scenic country railroad is slated for conversion into a high speed freight line in 2015.

Dubbed Mr Henderson's Railway after its founder, the railroad has also attracted the attention of train buff Michael Portillo, who is researching its colourful history for his next Great Continental Railway Journeys, the popular BBC TV series.

The visit was arranged by Andalucía-based travel company Toma Tours to show the family how their ancestral railroad has

nated by the history of the railway, and we want to share this piece of Andalusian heritage with our clients so we can keep it alive for future generations" said Manni Coe, director of Toma Tours. "We contacted Lord Faringdon to tell him of our plans and the response I received was most surprising. Not only did he personally wish to visit the railway, the entire family wanted to come along too!"

Mr Henderson's Railway was opened in 1892 to provide a vital transport link between the rural south and more industrialised north of Spain. It was also enjoyed by wealthy foreign tourists on ports of call in Gibraltar, as well as British officers and their families stationed on The Rock. It was entirely British built, from the track and trains down to the paper, ink and pens used by the Algeciras (Gibraltar) Railway Company to run it.

Mr Henderson also financed hotels at each end of the railway



Off on a whistle-stop tour



Looking over what was once 'bandit country'

helped shape the history of Andalucía and continues to support the village communities along the line today. The group included Lord and Lady Faringdon III, his second cousin Lord Marlesford of Suffolk and his wife, and Viscount Davidson who has connections with the family in Scotland and Argentina.

The reunion was a year in the planning and the pinnacle of Toma Tours' dream to revive the old railway and share its fascinating history with a wider audience through a new 5-day Gourmet Walking Tour based around the line, to be inaugurated in October

"We have always been fasci-

line - the Hotel Reina Cristina in Algeciras and the Reina Victoria in Ronda, designed by Colcutt and Hamp of London - their unique 'Britishness' entirely thanks to this Anglo-Spanish project. During the early 20th century the hotels became a magnet for poets, writers, politicians and Hollywood film stars (US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Cole Porter, Tyrone Power, Ava Gardner, Rock Hudson, Ernest Hemingway, the Spanish poet Lorca). Heads of state met at the Reina Cristina for the famous 1906 Algeciras conference, covered by Winston Churchill as a young journalist.

During their whistle-stop

three-day visit the family shared stories and anecdotes about the past. Local invited guests included Quentin Agnew Larios (of London Gin fame) whose family mansion in Los Barrios was also built by Colcutt and Hamp; and Maria Parkes - daughter of the celebrated Director of Reina Cristina Hotel, Hans Lieb, who brought with her some highly amusing and informative photos and articles about the hotel that began with 200 staff members and today operates with just 32.

Considered a major feat of engineering, Mr Henderson's Railway runs uphill through mountainous terrain that was once 'bandit country' to the historic

mountain town of Ronda, 750 metres above sea level. It soon became the lifeblood of the area but, after a recent period of closure, underwent complete renovation before re-opening in March 2011.

us last week... I was amazed by the railway line and had not realised what stunning countryside we would be passing through. Ronda was a jewel and I would love to go back there... The hotels

## Toma Tours dream is to revive the old railway and combine it with a five-day Gourmet Walking Tour

Highlighting the importance of the work Toma Tours is doing to promote the railway, the communities who rely on it, and the hotels in Ronda and Algeciras, a representative of Lord Faringdon's family said:

"Thank you so much for organising a wonderful trip for all of

were such a contrast to each other and it is hard to imagine how the Reina Cristina will survive, going forward. It has a fascinating history and would have been special to see in its heyday..."

Story by Belinda Beckett, photography by Robin Graham

### About Toma Tours

(www.tomatours.com)

**TOMA** Tours is a small company specialising in bespoke tours around Spain, Andalucía and Morocco. Their aim is to share 'The Spain you never knew, and will never forget' so people can discover the real destinations behind the tourist trail.

Visitors wishing to learn more about Mr Henderson's Railway, otherwise known as the Smuggler Train to Ronda, can join Toma Tours for their regular day trip from the Marbella area. Toma Tours have also created a unique Gourmet Walking Holiday so guests can experience this journey for themselves.

Details can be found at <http://tomatours.com/andalucia-gourmet-walking-holiday-ronda/>

### Belinda Beckett

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