

Comberton Twinning Association

History and Happenings

The first idea of twinning Comberton with a village on the Continent came during a game of golf in October 1997 between Malcolm Wright and two other players who told him that their village was twinned with a place in France and that they had annual golf exchanges. What a good idea he thought!

The first step was to contact the Parish Council. They were not against the idea but did not want to become involved. However they would support it if it happened. They provided a contact, the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB), which keeps a data-base of all places worldwide seeking twinning partners. The LGIB provided this information, which included the population of each place. The criteria for selecting a twinning partner were that it should be:

- a) of similar population size,
- b) within reasonable travelling distance to make exchanges easier,
- c) close to a historical university town/city (as Comberton is to Cambridge).

Initially the preference was for somewhere in Holland, to ease the language problem as many Dutch speak good English. However, very few places in Holland were seeking twinning partners at the time and none came sufficiently close to the criteria. The next choice was France and the LGIB list included numerous places there. From this list Le Vaudreuil seemed to fit the bill; it is less than 300 miles from Comberton by excellent roads, it is close to the ancient university city of Rouen and its population of around 3,500 is not excessively higher than the 2,500 of Comberton.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to contact someone in Le Vaudreuil, so four of us (Ivan & Brenda Brown and Malcolm & Nerys Wright) decided to take a short break in the area and visited Le Vaudreuil 'incognito'. Whilst there they did visit the Mairie, but no one involved in trying to find a twinning partner was available so they left contact details. First impressions were that it was a very nice village/small town with many more shops than Comberton (it could hardly have less!). It has two churches, secondary and primary schools, a good sports centre, a hotel and restaurants AND a golf course. It is on the river Eure, a tributary of the Seine, about 15 miles south of Rouen and fairly near to Monet's Garden at Giverny. It is about a one-hour journey from Paris. The distance from Comberton is approximately 267 road miles plus the Channel. Total journey time via the Tunnel is around 6 hours, assuming no hold-ups.

In due course a phone call was received from Le Vaudreuil expressing an interest in exploring the possibility of forming a twinning partnership. A small group of six, including their Mayor and the Headmaster of the secondary school, visited Comberton in March 1999. The weather was excellent and the daffodils were in full bloom. They had a walking tour of Comberton and visited Cambridge. They clearly liked what they saw and, before leaving, the Mayor said they would like to pursue a twinning relationship. By this time a small committee of Combertonians had been formed, who were invited to visit Le Vaudreuil for a week-end in June. After this visit it was mutually agreed to become twinned.

One of the first things to be done was to draw up a Twinning Charter expressing the aims and objectives of the partnership and this was duly signed by both parties at Twinning Ceremonies held in both places. The first of these was held in September 1999, when 45 residents of Le Vaudreuil (called Valderoliens) visited Comberton.

The Ceremony was held at the Village College, where the Charter was signed by the Mayor of Le Vaudreuil, the Chairman of the Parish council and the Chairmen of the respective Twinning Committees. An evening of entertainment by talented local performers and supper preceded the ceremony. The evening was generously subsidised by the Parish Council and by sponsorship by local businesses and organisations. Signs were erected at the entrances to the village stating 'Comberton Twinned with Le Vaudreuil'. During the week-end the Mayor of Le Vaudreuil presented the prizes and trophies at the Allotments and Gardens Annual Show.

In May the following year, 43 Combertonians visited Le Vaudreuil for the reciprocal Twinning Ceremony. Preceding the Ceremony we were treated to an excellent evening of entertainment which included a French Can-Can performed by the ladies of Le Vaudreuil and, of course, supper. Signs at the entrances to Le Vaudreuil announce 'Le Vaudreuil Jumelé avec Comberton'. We were fortunate to receive a European Grant for this visit so the cost to participants was quite small.

Copies of the Twinning Charter are displayed at the Village College, Meridian School, the Village Hall and St Mary's Church.

The format of visits in each place are similar. Visitors arrive by coach late on a Friday evening to be met by their hosts for the week-end. On Saturday hosts entertain their guests in a variety of ways. On Saturday evening or Sunday lunchtime some form of entertainment is arranged. Visitors generally leave for home around mid- to late afternoon.

In 2013 for example the Valderoliens visited Comberton in October following the visit from Comberton to Le Vaudreuil in June to coincide with the Armada at Rouen. We celebrated the 15th anniversary of twinning with an abridged version of Comberton Players pantomime 'Dick Whittington' much to the bemusement of our visitors. In 2017 The French visited us in October when we arranged a hog roast and Ceilidh, a very enjoyable event. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our April visit to Le Vaudreuil due to lack of support. We have now decided to have one visit a year, alternating between us and our twinning partners, at least for the immediate future. Our 2018 visit was very special – taking part in medieval festivities to celebrate the millennium of their church. We took part in a procession wearing medieval costumes mainly borrowed from Comberton Players, attended events in the church and the village communal medieval meal at a pop-up tavern among other activities.

There have been visits by both communities each year since 1999. Good friendships have been formed, which have resulted in a number of private visits.

We have been trying to promote sporting exchanges. So far this has been rather unsuccessful apart from rowing exchanges, but these have been with St Ives rowing club since we don't have a river in Comberton!

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary the French visited us in April. Activities included a bring & share supper in the Village Hall with entertainment by members and a tour of Girton College with lunch. We went to Le Vaudreuil in September and were treated to a river tour of Rouen and a bilingual karaoke evening with supper.

We started 2020 with a winter party hosted by one of our members but other plans for 2020 have been disrupted by the Covid 19 pandemic including a visit from the Valderoliens (to be rearranged for 2021), AGM and BBQ. Hopefully these can be rearranged when things return to normal.

Comberton Twinning Association is run for members by members and organises regular social events locally. A dinner and a summer barbeque are held each year. A Quiz night is held in November to raise funds to subsidise expenses during visits by Valderoliens. It is now totally self-funding, which is necessary since European Grants are given only once and the Parish Council grant was just to get us started.

So what is the point of twinning? The aims are summarised in the Twinning Charter and in the Association's Constitution. In short, in addition to fostering good relations with our neighbours in France it is hoped to learn from them and they from us. And let us not forget that everyone usually has a good time on exchange visits, at very small cost.

If you are not already a member and would like to participate in this enjoyable and educational activity, please complete the attached Membership Application form and return it with payment as shown on the attached form. The annual subscription is only £10 for adults and children under 16 join free. Ability to speak French is *definitely* not a requirement but, who knows, you might learn some. If you do decide to join it is hoped that you will be able to host some French visitors in return for being hosted by them when Combertonians visit Le Vaudreuil.

Further useful information can be found at

<http://CombertonTwinning.org.uk>
http://CombertonTwinning.org.uk/twinning_faq.html

(Malcolm Wright/Glynis Ellis/Paul Hardy)
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