

COMBERTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION

Chairman's Report for AGM - Wednesday 13th June 2018

Introduction

This is my second year as chairman. The twinning is surviving, but not thriving. Despite that, it is continuing to give pleasure to members from both countries, and has led to permanent friendships.

Twinning Visits to France

At the last AGM we were lamenting that we had had to cancel the April 2017 trip to France due to insufficient numbers (partly triggered by it being in the Easter holidays). For this AGM we have just returned from a successful weekend in Le Vaudreuil, albeit with only 30 participants - not enough to fully fund the trip. Thanks go in particular to Brian McCabe for arranging the coach and travel bookings, and for coping with finding an alternative company when our usual coach provider could not provide a crossing.

We left on Friday evening at 4pm in order not to exclude schoolchildren and teachers, and we arrived in Le Vaudreuil around midnight local time. The cost of travel was £70 per adult and £35 for children under 16. The date of 8-10 June was chosen to coincide with a medieval festival weekend to celebrate one thousand years of the church of Le Vaudreuil. We were very lucky with the weather – hot and sunny, with none of the thunderstorms that they had experienced earlier that week.

We spent the Saturday taking in the various medieval and Viking events, culminating in us participating in a memorable medieval-themed procession around the village in late afternoon. Many thanks go to Glynis who masterminded costumes and created medieval headdresses, and to Comberton Players, whose theatre wardrobe we raided to provide appropriate costume components! Later in the evening, most of us ate (medievally) with our host families at a pop-up tavern run by their festival association.

After spending Sunday morning with host families, we then all met for an excellent reception and lunch at the Golf club (on the site of their ancient castle), before returning on Sunday afternoon, arriving here around 9:30 pm. In all, an excellent visit.

Given the recent difficulties in getting enough people, we are currently not envisaging going to France in 2019, but instead aim for 2020, probably in October.

Twinning Visits from France

We welcomed a contingent of 37 French from Le Vaudreuil on October 27-29, for what was generally felt to be a very successful twinning weekend. For the first time, they did not stop for a day in London on the way – instead they stopped for a shorter time in St Albans and arrived here in late afternoon. We held a hog roast and ceilidh at Meridian School on the Saturday evening, and had a caller who paired French and English participants together for each dance, so that all had fun.

We are planning a visit by the French in 2019, either 31 May-2 June, or 5-7 April. Based on current feedback, the May date, being at the end of half-term, conflicts with existing arrangements for several families, so the current best candidate is 5-7 April.

Given that next year will be the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the association charter, ideas are particularly sought of possibilities for venue and entertainment.

Social Events

Our annual barbeque was hosted in the delightful gardens of Manor Farm by Godfrey and Pauline, with food coordinated by Stephanie and contributions by committee members – thanks to all.

Our main fund raiser was the quiz, again ably organised in November by Peter Mitton. We had our annual dinner again at The Park on the 2nd February, and feedback on the food and ambiance was again very positive.

Publicity

On the publicity front, we have had adverts for the twinning in the village magazines of most of the 11 surrounding villages which feed Comberton Village College. We had a stand at the Church fair. Despite that we have gained very few new members - but welcome the Meadows family from Coton, plus Richard Winski and the return of Suki and Tansy Williams. Personal recommendation is by far the best way of getting new members. We have a web site – see <http://CombertonTwinning.org.uk>, with information and downloadable posters – a resource for all of you to point your friends at.

Constitution and policies

With the help of the committee, I've revised the constitution of the association, to bring it up to date and include the various clauses that are expected for a non-profit organisation these days. In particular, if we are to get any funding grants from e.g. the supermarkets community funds, they require specific clauses about accounts and what happens if the associations dissolves.

I've also created a personal data protection policy, driven by the introduction of the European GDPR directive. I've even been contacted by another twinning association to ask to use it!

Future of the Twinning

Next year will be the 20th anniversary of the twinning - the first official visit and twinning charter were in 1999. However, after 19 years, we are struggling to recruit and maintain enough members to keep the twinning viable into the future. This is due to several factors – the association is by no means alone among village clubs and associations in seeing falling numbers and less interest from the younger generations in this type of voluntary community events. Importantly, the shift by the village schools to teaching Spanish rather than French has certainly made the twinning of less interest to young families.

We currently aim to continue the twinning with one visit a year instead of two, so to welcome the French in 2019 and going to France in 2020, but your opinions on the future of the association are requested – there is an agenda item at the AGM for this, or by email.

Thanks

A big thank you to all my committee – nothing would happen without them! Thanks also to all of you members, for hosting visitors and supporting the twinning association.

Paul Hardy, 11-June-2018