

HEATHFIELD & WALDRON TWINNING ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023

2023 was another landmark year for the Association when we celebrated our 25th Anniversary. Since the Association was established in 1998, we have seen several changes in our activities with some events discontinued and new ones introduced. In particular, exchange visits between various interest groups no longer take place which is a source of regret to the committees here and in Forges. We would certainly welcome the reintroduction of this practice should a suitable opportunity arise. Fortunately, however, we do still have annual group exchange visits which now take place over a full weekend. This in turn gives us much greater flexibility in planning the programme for the visit than hitherto. We also organise a number of social events for our own members.

Our social programme for 2023 included a lecture on the role of the French in our local iron industry, a new event, and we hope to arrange further lectures on suitable topics, the annual "Bastille Day" BBQ kindly hosted by Richard and Wendy Ridley – always an enjoyable occasion even though this year the weather on the day proved somewhat challenging – and our annual quiz in November which was very well attended. We also had stalls at the Parish Annual Assembly and Le Marché which do provide the opportunity to keep our existence in the public eye.

The main event was of course the visit in September from our friends from Forges when we welcomed a party of 9 to celebrate our "Silver Anniversary". We had organised a full weekend of activities with a coach trip to Hastings on the Saturday for a lunch of fish and chips and in the evening an informal supper at Sheepsetting Lane with musical entertainment. As is customary for these special visits we exchanged official gifts - we presented a silver salver suitably engraved and received a ceramic plaque depicting a dairy cow being representative of the Normandy region.

Approval had already been given to name a section of the pedestrian walkway in the High Street "Forges Parade" and on the Sunday morning we unveiled the sign which was an excellent photo opportunity. We then adjourned to The Middle House in Mayfield for a typical Sunday Lunch. All in all, it was a highly successful visit helped hugely by the weather, one of the hottest weekends of the year, and did much to reinforce our friendship.

Even though we incurred significant expenditure in hosting the visit from the group from Forges and – we believe rightly - having subsidised some of the costs to members of their participation in the weekend's activities, nevertheless our finances remain healthy with a year-end balance of £2,870. Membership numbers remain strong with a total membership of over 50. Sadly, I must report the death of two of our members, Mike Dimsdale in January and Ian Tindall in September. Both had been in poor health, but their passing is none the less hard for their families. In line with our usual practice donations of £25 were made to each of the charities nominated by their families.

As ever I am grateful for the support I have received from my fellow committee members and in turn the whole committee is appreciative of the strong support of the membership. We look forward to 2024 being yet another enjoyable and successful year for the Association.

Sheila Drennan

March 2024