

Dear Member,

Welcome to this, our second newsletter of our twinning association since we restarted our quarterly newsletters. Well, it was meant to be quarterly but, for a variety of reasons it is nearly four months since the first! And what a wonderful four months it has been for the association with our quiz night, our incredibly successful trip to St Brice and the firming up of our plans for future events.

In the last newsletter, one of our co-editors, Rosemary, wrote a short piece about her joining the association. This time, it's Alec's turn.

### JOINING THE ASSOCIATION (ALEC)

I moved to Robertsbridge just over 10 years ago. I had recently separated from my then wife and didn't know anybody in the village; it was just a convenient place for work and other interests.

Wherever I have lived I have always liked to take a part in local life and have always found that a good way to meet new friends. I had never belonged to a twinning association before but I have visited France on holiday and for work scores of times and loved the country and its people. So, in 2003, I tentatively joined the twinning association. It was a great move. I have visited St Brice six times now and have put up four lots of guests from France, on five occasions, at my home in Robertsbridge.

I have made countless new friends in Robertsbridge, and just as many in France, thanks to joining the association and taking an active part. My partner, Anne, and I have even had an 11 year old from close friends in St Brice visit us for a holiday one summer to help him with his English. We have become particularly friendly with one couple, the lad's parents, and have even met up with them away from both villages.

So, if you are one of our more "passive" members and not yet taken a trip or hosted visitors, why not give it a try? You will not only help the village become a more vibrant place but will be astonished by the friendship and goodwill with our St Brice friends.

### QUIZ NIGHT

On October 21 we had yet another successful quiz night, again at the village hall. Everyone who has been to many of our quiz nights thought this was the best one ever. For those who have not been, our quiz nights are not like any other. Not for us, some boring old duffer standing blandly asking questions. This time we had film clips, which were a popular success, and live music for the music questions. And all the time, hosted by our jovial treasurer, Tony Brooks, who has years of experience. It has to be mentioned that Alec, one of our editors, was this time in the winning team

and had to be restrained from doing a lap of honour! Mind you he joined a team of regular quiz goers and was a bit of a passenger.

Surprisingly, the attendance was slightly down on previous years, which was a great shame as this is our biggest fundraising event of the year. It still made us money but we plan to review our marketing for next year as this has now become one of the best annual events in our village.

## TRIP TO ST BRICE

On the weekend of 3/4 December we had a great trip to St Brice. For the first time in a few years we had enough members travelling to warrant a coach and in the early morning dark, around 6.30, about 30 of us started our trip. We made good time and arrived in St Brice at 12.30. There we were met by our welcoming hosts and were taken for lunch, mostly in our hosts' homes where, after lunch, we could freshen up and relax before the evening events.

Our hosts took us individually into Reims to the Christmas market. What a spectacle! Just the ambience of the lights was brilliant. Hundreds of stalls all along a main street were selling everything you can imagine. Local and ethnic arts and crafts were for sale, every imaginable variety of foods were offered, and, of course, a number of stalls selling traditional mulled wine. There were street entertainers and a particularly wonderful band playing jazz, swing and pop music with some classics for good measure. We had to drag ourselves away to Reims Cathedral for an amazing light show. Rosemary has described this eloquently so the next portion of this letter will encapsulate her experience.

After the Cathedral light show we were treated by our ever generous St Brice friends to a wonderful meal at a restaurant on the outskirts of Reims. What a night; not just the food but the wonderful friendship and camaraderie of the evening. From every table we occupied, there were sounds of loud chatter and laughter.

The next morning we spent with our hosts, who gave us lunch, before we reluctantly boarded the bus and mid afternoon for the trip home. We arrived back in Robertsbridge at around 9.30, tired but happy after weekend that will be remembered forever. For those members who have never been to St Brice before, we strongly urge you to come next time. The fun, the generosity of our hosts and the magnificent friendships developed will never be forgotten. Certainly, having enough people to go by bus was a great bonus. Old friendships were renewed and new ones forged and, on the trip back, we had a wonderful communal time.

## REIMS CATHEDRAL LIGHT SHOW

(Rosemary's reminiscences)

Our hosts ensured we were all assembled in front of the cathedral by 7.30 prompt for the commemorative light show. I have been to several different son et lumiere shows but I have never seen the like of this before and doubt I will again.

All the shops turned out their lights and the show started in pitch darkness. All aspects of the cathedral's intricate stonework were picked out either en bloc or individually with a rainbow of colours. You could see details you would miss in broad daylight with the naked eye. Tiny, intricate carvings were picked out. Different layers were delineated by different bright, exotic colours. All the statues of the saints and other Christian worthies were lit in such detail that your eyes were fooled into thinking that the statues were moving. Then, a suggestion of the architect's drawings for the cathedral were superimposed on the fascia, followed by tiny figures all working at the appropriate crafts e.g. a tiny carver forming one of the many rose windows, another picking out a statue, one working on the pillars and others bringing the stones to the right positions. These figures grew larger and modern dancers, in shadow form, were then seen dancing round the features that we had just witnessed being made.

Pretty much all the kings of France were crowned in Reims. There were exceptions, but my history is not good enough to be more specific. We were then treated to a camera panning through people from all ages, dressed in the costumes of the time, bowing in the presence of the newly crowned kings as if the king in question was processing through the crowds of his subjects. I recollect that there was colour in the costumes represented though the figures themselves remained shadowy. We skipped the bit of history where the heads got chopped off.

Reims was an epicentre in both the First and Second World Wars. To this day, there is a WW1 German mortar shell lodged over the main entrance to the cathedral. Everywhere was flattened. This was represented by stark black and white lighting, roars of thunder and flashing effects that made the building appear to be shaking beneath the onslaught.

Fortunately, we then got to peace time and calmer music together with tranquil illumination of the cathedral, very like impressionist paintings of the place. At one time it was awash with shades of blue, like a Van Gogh. Then it all ended. There was silence, followed by a roar of approval, cheering and clapping. The city's lights went on, business resumed.

I cannot, by my description, do this show justice. I would love to see it all again, but it will end this year and I do not think I will be around in 100 years' time to celebrate the next anniversary. Fortunately, I understand the cathedral is producing a DVD of the show and I am hoping to be able to purchase a copy, so that those who did not or could not come will have some idea as to what they missed. One of our party tried to capture it all but found herself overcome with emotion and fearful of missing some of the finer points of the show, she stopped using her camera and simply watched, transfixed.

#### DINNER DANCE

You have already received notification of our dinner dance on 25 February so we will not repeat what was said. But the editors strongly advise you to book your tickets. Not only will this help the association's finances but it will further encourage our continuing friendship and place in our village life. The menu is outstanding and the food will be prepared by our volunteers. But don't think this will be amateurish as our "volunteers" are also expert caterers.

And a quid for a round trip by minibus must be the bargain of the century for those who want to have a refreshment ( or two) without worrying about driving home.

#### OUR HOSPITALITY

Our friends from St Brice will be visiting us in mid May. We sincerely hope that we can extend to them the hospitality they have extended to us. You will receive more information nearer the time but please think about hosting our French friends.

#### FINALLY

This is your newsletter so if there are any comments you want to make or any views you want published please email Alec on [alecm\\_kent@hotmail.com](mailto:alecm_kent@hotmail.com) or Rosemary on [rosemary@theorchard.plus.com](mailto:rosemary@theorchard.plus.com)

Rosemary and Alec