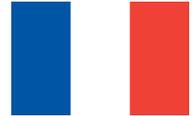




BILLERICAY TWINNING ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER No 27 OCTOBER 2017

FUN WALK 2017

On 21 May Association members took part in John Baron's Fun Walk. The starting venue was the same as the previous year on the west side of Barleylands Road. The Association set up a stall to raise awareness of our Association and to explain to the public what the Association does. Several members of the public came up to the stall and showed interest, but no new membership resulted.



John Baron MP and the walkers

We thank Janet Cosgrove for organising us for the walk and we thank all those who sponsored the walkers. And we thank Roberta Copsy for walking.

WALK OF FRIENDSHIP LE GERS, FRANCE 19-25 AUGUST

By Mary Hawkins

La Marche this year took place in Southern France and must have been one of the hottest ever. Most days we were walking in temperatures of 30° Celsius, reaching to 40° sometimes; that is over 100° Fahrenheit, but this probably increased the sense of camaraderie amongst the participants. There were 67 of us from the 4 different European towns including 9 from Billericay (7, until Jeannine and Howard arrived after a disastrous experience with their car!) and, as ever, we all enjoyed renewing friendships, catching up with events over the previous year, etc. We stayed at Le Hameau des Etoiles about 5km from

Fleurance in Le Gers, south-west France. We lived in cosy cabins in a 'village de vacances' of which there are about 50 in France; this one, renowned for the clarity of the night sky, having sophisticated telescopes and astronomical equipment in order to see the constellations above us.



Entrance to the chalets at Le Hameau des Etoiles

This large grassy area had a number of fruit trees with ripe fruit (which were enjoyed by many of us!), a swimming pool, a large lake and quite a lot of wild life.

Le Gers is one of the least populated departements of France, described as a French Tuscany, with little hilltop villages surrounded by fields of sunflowers, maize and cereals for sago and polenta. It's an area of rolling hills with splendid views.



On the walk with a village in the distance

The organiser of the week, Monique Peyrelade, told us that one of her aims was to familiarise us with this little known region, so walks took place every morning with visits to places of interest in the afternoons. Visits to local villages showed us that they were as attractive to wander round as they appeared in the distance.

On the day of arrival, after our evening meal in the verandah dining area, many of us attended a short film on the area which described the “bastide” significance of the villages.

On the Sunday, we all walked to the town of Lectoure where most of us were disappointed by having to rush through the Sunday market!



Approaching Lectoure

However, we had lunch in the grounds of the Chateau de Miramont-Letour where we were later taken round the impressive collection of old agricultural tools and machinery by the aristocratic owner, Patrick de Lary – a descendant of a musketeer.



The Château de Miramont-Letour

On the Monday, we visited the village of St Clar which was a delightful example of a ‘bastide village’, typical of the area, with an old wooden market hall in the central square surrounded by an arcade of arches, providing shelter for the villagers from the hot sun and heavy rain.

Our picnic was arranged in the courtyard of the Maison de l’Ail, a renowned garlic farm, where we were treated to a short film on garlic cultivation

followed by an opportunity to buy some of the excellent produce on offer.



Picnic in the shade at the garlic farm

On the Tuesday, it was a treat to picnic by a river, followed by a visit to the Cistercian Abbey of Flaran in which the present owner houses his art collection which includes paintings by Picasso, George Romney and Gainsborough.



Flaran Abbey

On Wednesday we spent our ‘day off’ in Auch where the guide took us around the old town and the Cathedral of Sainte Marie with superb sixteenth century stained glass.



La Mairie at Auch

We then went on to the farm, Terre Blanche, which concentrates on rearing geese for pate and where we had the most delicious lunch. The day ended with a visit to Le Domaine d’Embidoure where the local drinks of armagnac and floc were enjoyed.

Thursday was another enjoyable day. After the walk there was a visit to the enclosed village of Larressingle, one of the most prized in France. (where the ice cream was good too!).



Entrance into the walled village of Larressingle

Then onto Condom (always worth a laugh), where we saw the cathedral and the statue of the Four Musketeers – d'Artagnan having come from Le Gers.



Condom cathedral; the statue of the musketeers outside

Our last walking day was spent visiting a village, Castelnau sur L'Auvignon, almost destroyed in 1944, as it had been a centre for the Maquisards, Second World War Resistance fighters.



The War Memorial at Castelnau sur L'Auvignon

Afterwards we watched the plum pickers in a huge orchard who stopped for lunch, of course, as soon as the huge clock in the papal village of La Romieu chimed midday. The fourteenth century church and cloisters there were beautiful and very impressive, towering above the surrounding countryside. Only the more fortified of us managed to climb up to the top of the clock-tower for the magnificent view.



A view down to the courtyard from the clock-tower

Monique gave us a wonderful week with three excellent guides and an interesting mixture of walking and visits to fascinating places in le Gers. This combination was much appreciated, I think, by those of us who aren't as young as we were! The atmosphere amongst the walkers was as warm and congenial as ever and when we said our goodbyes, we all promised to 'See you next year in Italy!' This is an area I would highly recommend to anyone wanting to visit an area of France which is fascinating and deserves to be better known.

THANK YOU TREVOR

The Billericay Twinning Association has shown its appreciation to Trevor Stansfield for his efforts in bringing about the Billericay Twinning Association. He was the prime-mover in our twinning with Fishers, Indiana and took a substantial role in our relationship with Chauvigny. He was our first Chairman when the Association was formed in 1997. Thanks to Trevor we are now 20 years old.



Trevor receives his certificate from Marion

At the last AGM we agreed to a small change in our Constitution by the introduction of Life Membership and it became an honour for our Chairman to bestow the first Life Membership on Trevor. Thank you Trevor.

TRINO 1st to 5th JUNE

By Martin Hart

The town of Trino in the Piedmont area of Italy was this year's location of the twinning association annual meeting. Piedmont is in the north west of Italy, and Trino is at the heart of the rice growing region. The meeting was a truly international affair with representatives from Chauvigny, Geisenheim, Banfora and Billericay, and for the first time, a delegation from Zlotoryja in Poland.

The theme of this year's meeting was the "Gocce de Vita – Drops of Life – Solidarity versus Responsibility", a project which focused on addressing issues such as local community support for the disadvantaged, food waste and water conservation.

Billericay was represented by Maggie Kingston and Martin Hart, who were hosted by Ada and Fabio (plus their very friendly cat Gijou) who had an apartment in the centre of town. In keeping with good Italian tradition, Ada's mother lived in the apartment below. Ada and Fabio proved to be excellent hosts, and the fond memories of wonderful meals with wine produced by Ada's father linger on.



Maggie, Marin and their hosts Ada and Fabio plus German delegate

The weather in Italy was hot and sunny, and on arrival day, old acquaintances were renewed amidst a flurry of ciao, bonjours and wie gehts. Delegates were given a warm welcome by the Mayor, Alessandro Portinaro, at an outdoor reception in the Piazza Paleologo. After the reception, delegates returned to their hosts to freshen up and enjoy a meal.

The following day, delegates gathered in the Teatro Civico to participate in a range of workshops dealing with local projects from the representative countries

such as community support activity in Trino, the refugee programme in Geisenheim, fund raising bottle top collection in Chauvigny, and a video introducing Zlotoryja.

Later on in the day, delegates visited a project which provided social activities for older people. This turned out to be livelier than anticipated as the visit included participating in open air dancing led by Isabel, the mayor's wife. As the temperature was now in the mid 30s, this proved to be a fun but challenging experience!

Saturday dawned bright and clear, and the plan for the day was to visit the town of Como, which has an idyllic lakeside setting, and is famed for its beautiful cathedral (Duomo). On arrival the group was divided into two based on language preference, and then shown around the sites by local guides. It was a fascinating experience wandering around the town through the narrow streets of the medieval area, and taking in sites such as the old Roman gate to the town, and the statue of Alessandro Volta, the Italian physicist and chemist reputed to be the inventor of the electric battery. After completing the morning's site seeing, lunch was taken in a restaurant in the nearby town of Rescaldina. The restaurant is well known, as it used to be owned by the Mafia, and has now been confiscated from them and restored for the benefit of the local community.

The evening's entertainment was held in the Mercato Coperto (covered market) in Trino. The meal was prepared and served by students from the IPSEOA "Sergio Ronco", which is a school for training young people in subjects such as catering and tourism, using recovered food ingredients. After the meal there was a presentation on food and water waste and conservation, followed by a performance of Burlesque dancing. Those delegates with any energy left then participated in dancing for everybody to round off a long, but very enjoyable day.



Trino market

On Sunday morning, in order to plan the programme for future events, a meeting was held in Trino library for members of the twinning committees.

Afterwards, for those who wished to attend, Holy Mass was held in the nearby San Francesco church.

As good luck would have it, Sunday was also the day of the local fair, “Trino in Piazza” which meant the streets were packed with people shopping at the variety of stalls on display, and sampling the dishes that were being prepared by amateur cooks participating in the food competition. The food on offer was delicious, and too tempting not to try for many of the delegates!



Italian Masterchef! – The food competition

The consistent good weather that had prevailed during the visit with temperatures in the 30s continued, and shade and coolness was found during a tour of the beautiful local churches conducted by pupils of the Liceo Artistico.

Sadly all good things must come to an end, and on Sunday evening, a closing ceremony was held in Piazza Banfora, where the delegates from Zlotoryja signed a twinning agreement with Trino and speeches were made by the Mayor and Presidents of the organisations thanking people for their participation and outlining proposals for future activities.



Piazza Banfora

The final celebrative dinner was held in the nearby Il Convento restaurant where gifts were exchanged amongst delegates, excellent food and wine was consumed, and farewells made to friends and acquaintances.

It was a truly memorable visit, and our thanks go to Ada and Fabio for being such wonderful hosts, the Comitato del Gemellaggio di Trino for organising and hosting the visit, and finally the people of Trino for their warmth and hospitality.

FISHERS

There have been no Fishers activities in the last year. As the Chairman explained at the AGM, there are severe financial restraints on both sides of the Atlantic. Schools in Billericay do not have the money to send a teacher to the United States and to fund the supply teacher that is needed whilst the regular teacher is away. In the USA, the “Renaissance Faire” which used to be a big money-spinner for the town of Fishers has been moved to another town in the County.

Fishers twinning is presently dormant although Mayflower School are hoping to maintain contact.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The big event of 2018 will be the visit of our friends from Chauvigny. They will be arriving on 23/24th May and departing on 27/28th May, the exact dates depending on the Ryanair timetable.

Preparations are well under way with a reception, a day visit to Canterbury and a banquet dinner. But still lots to do and arrange.



Canterbury Cathedral

But before the Chauvignois arrive there are two events to look forward to.

The Fun Walk this year is expected to be on 20th May.

The Quiz night will be in early January. The last Quiz night in January 2017 was a major success thanks to Maggie, Martin (quizmaster) and Mary for arranging everything. There were 11 tables and 80 attendees. Let’s hope we can keep to or surpass this number in January.

Keep an eye open for emails announcing these events.