

REPORT FROM COUNCILLOR KAREN SAWBRIDGE ON RECENT ACTIVITY OF THE BRIDGNORTH & DISTRICT TWINNING ASSOCIATION

10TH JULY 2023

In early April 2023, The Bridgnorth & District Twinning Association Committee Members, consisting of Fran Spicer (Treasurer) and myself, met with the Chairman of the Schrobenshausen Twinning Association, Harmut Seigl, along with Damien Williams, whose Manager Coach of the Spartans U17s football team, in the hope of being able to arrange for the Spartans U17s football team to participate in the Festival Weekend in Schrobenshausen (scheduled to be held between 23rd and 26th June 2023).

Following this successful meeting, we were able to help the team travel to Schrobenshausen and participate in a local football match on Saturday 24th June 2023. I watched the match which was very tight and so I was pleased when the whistle blew and both sides had scored one goal each. My partner, Steve Farrell and I stayed in the same hotel as the U17s Spartans during the course of this weekend, so we saw first hand how much the trip had meant to these young sportsmen.

A number of people helped to finance the trip, including the Bridgnorth Town Council, the Committee Members of The Bridgnorth & District Twinning Association, who held a tombola during the Bridgnorth Festival, which raised £500 and the parents of the young team, so very grateful thanks is passed onto all concerned.

Below follows a report from Fran Spicer, Treasurer of The Bridgnorth & District Twinning Association

Bridgnorth Twinning Association celebrates 30 years of friendship with Schrobenshausen

A hardy band of Bridgnorth "Twinners" set off on Friday morning, 23rd June, heading for our twin town of Schrobenshausen in Germany to join with the townsfolk from Thiers in France for the annual Twinning Festival. This Festival takes place every year rotating between the three towns. This year, however, is a special year as we continue to celebrate 30 years since the Twinning Charter was ratified by the town councils of Schrobenshausen and Bridgnorth.

Twinning was introduced after the Second World War, its aim to build links and exchanges between towns, bringing reconciliation and friendship after years of conflict. Bridgnorth was twinned with Thiers in 1978 and with Schrobenshausen in 1992, Schrobenshausen was already twinned with Thiers, so the triangle was complete.

There have been annual visits between the towns every year (excluding 2 years during the Covid pandemic) since its inception. These visits in the past have included school exchange trips and sporting exchanges as well as twinning members being welcomed into host families. Friendships have been forged and memories made. Last year Bridgnorth welcomed the two towns to celebrate the late Queen's jubilee and to commemorate the 30 years of twinning. This year the 30-year celebrations continue.

Unfortunately, in recent years the school exchanges have not happened, and the sporting exchanges have dwindled. This year, however, the under 17 Spartans Football team have stemmed the tide, sending a strong team to celebrate the 30 years of twinning. A fantastic football match was held between Bridgnorth Spartans and SV Steingruff, Schrobenshausen ending in a 1 all draw – honours even and ready for a re-match next year. It is hoped that Thiers will also field a team in the future. The players had an amazing adventure and cannot wait to visit again. Due to the incredible welcome and success on the field Spartans are already planning to send an under 13 and under 15 team to Schrobenshausen next May to further reinforce the friendship between our two countries and to develop the relationship between the sports clubs still further.

Flying out of Manchester our troupe arrived in Schobenshausen after some delays: we passed through the gate and queued to join our plane when we discovered our flight had no captain, having to return to the gate until thankfully one eventually turned up having received a call whilst he was in the gym on his day off to save the day; once landed and having inordinate delays getting through passport control we lost one of our members in Munich airport for a short while. When we finally arrived some 2 hours late, we were warmly welcomed by our hosts; some of many years standing and some new, who soon became firm friends for life. We were treated like royalty throughout our visit.

On Saturday we had a guided tour of Schrobenhausen, famous for its white asparagus and the portrait painter Lenbach – he once painted a portrait of Bismark who was wearing his full military regalia, Bismark was not happy with the final painting as it only showed his head and shoulders. Lenbach's repost was to say he painted "Kopf, keine Knöpfe" (heads not buttons)! We also toured the local town of Ingolstadt with an option of a trip to their Audi Museum. The gothic architecture and huge churches are a sight to behold, and the traditional Bavarian buildings are so different from our own architecture.

In the evening we were treated to a traditional Bavarian feast of schnitzel, pretzels, wurst (sausages), ham, cheese, salad, sauerkraut, and bread, together with our host families and our French friends. Some traditional Bavarian costumes could be seen with the ladies in dirndls and men in lederhosen. After the meal we enjoyed spending time at the Schranzenfest – an annual festival with local live music, serving German beer in enormous Beer Steins (tankards).

On Sunday there were formal speeches from the mayors of Schrobenhausen, **Harald Reisner** and Thiers, **Stéphane Rodier** and Bridgnorth former mayor, **Karen Sawbridge**. Celebrating the importance of the tripartite friendships and stressing the importance, now more than ever, of keeping twinning alive, given the conflict between the Ukraine and Russia which is so close to home. Gifts were exchanged between Bridgnorth and Schrobenhausen to commemorate the 30-year anniversary and consolidating our relations in years to come. It was wonderful that Helen Howell, being the mayor 30 years ago when the charter was signed and Mike Proudman a founder member and long-standing Chairman of the Association were present at the event.

A trip to a local asparagus farm with tea and cakes concluded the day's festivities.

The football team left on the Sunday morning, and our French friends left on the Monday morning, leaving our small steadfast band. We enjoyed a visit to a local moated castle and church in Sandizell, where the Count of Sandizell welcomed us with a guided tour. The church was incredibly ornate – something truly to behold.

It was soon time to leave, back to Munich to catch our flight home. After further delays we arrived home around 3am, weary but not cowed after our amazing visit. The welcome and kindness was second to none and the cultural visits were very interesting. Our hosts could not have been more hospitable.

The Twinning Association are now already looking forward to the visit to Thiers next summer. We also hope to host a rugby team from Thiers in the autumn. We are keen to welcome new members to join the Association for an annual membership fee of only £10 per year – a small price to pay to foster new friendships with our European allies. Should anyone be interested in joining or finding out more please contact Fran Spicer, Treasurer, by email to franspicer9@gmail.com.