

Chair's Report: Monmouth/Carbonne Twinning Association March 22, 2023

Good evening! It's wonderful to have our AGM in person once again, rather than virtually on Zoom. Thank you so much for coming!

It was fantastic to return to Carbonne in September after several postponements of our trip due to Covid. How lovely it was to be together in France with our French friends! On the first day we were invited to the Mairie for a 'vin d'honneur' where we were welcomed by the Mayor, and then had a lovely surprise viewing of a slide show which portrayed the last visit of the Carbonnais to Monmouth. Our day out took us north of Toulouse to the Montauban area. There we had a tour of the Crambes Hat Factory in Causade, where we could observe the fascinating craftsmanship of hat-making close up. This was followed by a delicious lunch in a restaurant which featured local food and wine, and then we went on to the vineyard where this wine came from and were given an in-depth talk on wine making. We also thoroughly enjoyed our day at the Terrasse Restaurant near Carbonne, which is on an ancient site where woolen cloth was woven in Medieval Times. Before the official meal, some of us had a fascinating tour of les Souterrains, which are the cellars of the restaurant, where we learned that this had once been an extremely important industrial site with extensive mills and a thriving port on the Garonne River. Drinks on the terrace were accompanied by a wonderful concert by a local band called Les Diatonics, which culminated in a tango demonstration by la Présidente of the the Carbonne Twinning, Réjane Soula and her husband, Jean-Pierre who is one of the founders of our Twinning. After a delicious 3 course meal we all enjoyed a bilingual and bicultural quiz. We also thoroughly enjoyed time spent with our French hosts on our free days. I thought it was one of our best visits ever.

Other events during the year were the Pétanque afternoon in July and the Coffee morning at the Priory in November. At both of these events our founder member, Pat Groves, played a key role in the catering as always, and as she would have been doing this evening. Her amazing scones, fabulous coffee walnut sponge and delicious cassoulet and Welsh cakes are irreplaceable. She and her husband, Roy, were generous and loyal members of the Twinning since it was founded in 1975. She served on the Committee and was vice-chair for several years. She will be very sadly missed both in Monmouth and in Carbonne. We also miss Phyllis Brown, another long-term member who has passed away since our last AGM. Our thoughts are with both Mike and Roy and their families.

On a brighter note, we have been delighted that Deborah Morgan has continued to develop the link between Osbaston Junior School and the primary school in Carbonne. The children continue to exchange cards, emails, posters, videos, and a Teddy made of school uniform was delivered to the Carbonne school on our last visit. Recently they exchanged Valentine cards. We hope that this scheme will now spread to other schools in both the Monmouth and Carbonne areas. It was great to see the pupils from Osbaston at our coffee morning where they showed us some of their language work.

Another positive development was our recent Skittles match at the Royal Oak with the Waldbronn Twinning. It was a great social event, and the Carbonne team even won the very colourful trophy. We are already planning a return event.

Once again I'd like to thank the Committee for all they have done to make this year a success. Paul has efficiently written up the Minutes of all our meetings and sent out Newsletters to members, Jane has managed our finances brilliantly so that we have plenty of funds to host the Carbonnais when they come next May. All the other committee members have contributed excellent ideas and have been a great support at all our events.

Overall this has been a good year for the Twinning. In 2 years time we will reach our 50th anniversary, and we hope that we will still be thriving, as this is such a wonderful organisation for the people of Monmouth. Sadly we have lost many long term members in the past few years and all of us are getting older. We really need to attract new younger members in order for the Twinning to survive. We have just started work on a new Twinning website in order to promote the Twinning, as most people nowadays search the web to find activities which appeal to them. Averil has offered to keep the site up-to-date so that news of our events will be accessible. We look forward to hosting the Carbonnais in Monmouth from the 7th-12th May 2024, and we hope that we will have some new members to take part in this visit so that they can get to know the joys of the Twinning. As they say in France. Vive le Jumelage!