

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society

Newsletter

January 2019

Guest Editor: Nick Marsh

The Chairman and Committee of the Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society wish a

Happy New Year

to all our members and our friends in our Twin Towns and elsewhere in Europe, the USA and the Antipodes.

Forthcoming Events

Thursday 17th January	Evening Meeting: Quiz Night
Thursday 21st February	Evening Meeting: Fasching / Carnival
Thursday 21st March	Evening Meeting: French Evening
Thursday 4th April	Joint Film Show - IN THE FADE (<i>Aus dem Nichts</i>),
Thursday 18th April	Evening Meeting: Colmar – (Programme to be confirmed)
Thursday 9th May	Europe Day Meal
Thursday 16th May	Evening Meeting: Leger
Thursday 20th June	Evening Drinks Party

Evening meetings are held at Preston Road Community Centre – 7:30 for 7:45 pm

New Members – Where are they?

“The more the merrier”, is an expression that springs to mind during the festive season of Christmas and New Year parties. Our recent Christmas Dinner, where we had a huge turnout of members, was testament to how enjoyable our events can be when they are well attended.

As the New Year is upon us, perhaps it is time not only for resolutions but also to think how we can increase our membership. After all, more members means not just more people attending our informative and entertaining evenings, but also an influx of new ideas as well as opportunities for more twinning events and, importantly, providing the Society with a sound foundation for the future.

We have some excellent upcoming events, our first three of 2019 include a Quiz Night, a Fasching (Carnival) themed evening and an evening of French food, music and competitions. These events provide an excellent opportunity for us to showcase our society to potential new members.

Perhaps you know someone who might be interested – it could be a friend, a relative, a work colleague or even a neighbour. If you think they might be interested please bring them along. The more the merrier!

Future events

Evening Meeting - Quiz Night Thursday, 17th January, Quiz night

7:30 for 7:45pm at **Preston Road Community Centre**

Our popular quiz evening offers eccentric fun like no other! Let both your mental and physical dexterity be challenged. Expect some questions with a European flavour and, of course, rounds with integral refreshments. **Bring some friends!**

Evening Meeting - Fasching/Carnival Thursday 21st February 2019

7:30 for 7:45pm at **Preston Road Community Centre**

Fasching is the Shrovetide carnival celebrated in German-speaking countries. It involves merrymaking, street parades and parties and dressing up. It usually reaches its high point during the three days preceding [Ash Wednesday](#), culminating on Shrove Tuesday. Join us for what promises to be a very enjoyable and entertaining evening! **Bring some friends!**

Evening Meeting – French evening

Thursday 21st March 2019 – 7:30 for 7:45pm at **Preston Road Community Centre**

An evening devoted to fun with a distinctly French flavour. There will be French food, including French cheeses and pastries, accompanied by French wine. Also on offer is French music, a quiz, and, for the brave, Karaoke (in French, of course). **Bring some friends** along to join us in celebrating in French style!

Evening Meeting – Joint Film Show

Thursday 4th April 2019 – 7:30 for 7:45pm at **Health and Wellbeing Centre, Audlett Drive**

In the Fade (Aus dem Nichts) 2017. An award winning crime drama directed by Fatih Akin. Joint evening with ABCD Film Society <https://abfilms.org.uk/>

Canoe Camping in Oxfordshire 2019

Thursday 27th June – Monday 1st July 2019 (See Dec. 2018 Newsletter)

Bastille Day 2019 – Trip to Argentan

Saturday 13th July – Tuesday 16th July 2019 (See Dec. 2018 Newsletter)

Recent events

Sunday 16th December – Christmas Lunch

A cold, windy and wet Sunday lunchtime (we call it 'dreich' in Scotland), around 50 hardy souls ventured out from their centrally heated homes to congregate at the Limoncello restaurant in the centre of Abingdon for our annual Christmas lunch. The owners kindly opened the restaurant specially for us (it is usually closed on Sundays), so we didn't annoy other customers with dripping raincoats and umbrellas. It was beautifully warm inside and the warm Christmas cheer was abundant.

There were five tables, each occupied by ten twintowners doing the usual Christmas party things – pulling crackers, laughing or wincing at the corny jokes therein, and simply enjoying each others' company. The food was delicious, the atmosphere wonderful. My only complaint was that the noise generated by all the chattering made it sometimes difficult to hear.

Many thanks to Nikki for organising the event with her usual efficiency.

Margaret Hancox



"Wonderful, the trout was absolutely gorgeous"

"The drinks service was excellent"

"Super party, loved the table set up"

"Change of venue seemed popular"

"Very friendly and welcoming"

"I felt I was in Italy"

"Excellent veal, very efficient service, the staff really knew what they were doing"



ONLY TOWN TWINNING CAN DO THIS No 2 IN A SERIES---SINT NIKLAAS

Phil Addison

As we are in the Christmas season, our thoughts turn to good old St Nick. Not only our historic medieval church in Abingdon dedicated to St Nicolas, but to our friends in the Flemish town which bears the good saint's name. This year, to mark the 800th anniversary of the founding of Sint Niklaas, it was great to receive a visit to Abingdon by St Niklaas Burgemeester Lieven and his wife Erika, when he made a speech about Sint Niklaas town to not only our Town Council, but also, on the same evening, to one of the regular monthly social meetings of our Town Twinning Society, which drew one of the highest number of people we have had at our meetings.

I recently trained as an Oxford tourist guide, and I was very honoured to be asked by our Chairman Stella to do a guided tour of Oxford for Lieven and Erika. Stella and I had attended together a guided tour of Oxford to mark "Curiosity Weekend", our tour was given by a Russian research student at Oxford University and covered many of Oxford's historic connections with Russian nationals. This gave Stella the idea that I should research a one-off tour for Lieven that would include Oxford's Flemish connections.

By cheating (more than a little, I suspect) and interpreting this as "Belgian" connections I was able to put together quite a full tour, but in researching the tour also learnt a lot about the coming to the fore and wider acceptance of the Flemish nation and language by the rest of Belgium.

This came to my attention when I was following up King Albert of Belgium, the Soldier King (with his Queen Nurse) who, in 1919, joined the honoured names who have received an honorary Oxford University degree in the Sheldonian Theatre. The award was in recognition of the single-handed resistance by the Belgians and Flemish to prevent an early advance along the French coast in 1914 before the Allies were organised to resist the advance into France. The Belgian and Flemish soldiers fought side by side but didn't understand each other's language, and a subsequently-famous Flemish actor gave an only slightly-veiled critique about the oppression endured by the Flemish people and long non-recognition of their language in a performance in Flemish of Goethe's Goetz von Berlichingen, which forced a wider recognition of the Flemish language and of the contribution of Flemish soldiers and people to the nation, and the formation in 1945 of the Flemish National Theatre the National Toneel.

I also became aware of the character of the queen of our English king Edward III in the 14th century, Phillippa of Hainault, founder (under the guise of her chaplain) of Queen's College Oxford. Apart from interceding to stop Edward III executing the town-council "martyrs" on the conquest of Calais, Queen Phillippa, incredibly, was the 14th century starter of the English coal-mining industry in north-east England and the instigator of the English lace industry.

At this later point in the afternoon, with the tour close to its end, it comes about that I ask Lieven about any previous visits to England. His reply is that he has visited London a number of times but been "many times" to Wales.

"Wales. Lieven?, Wales? Why Wales?"

"Because I became interested in a Welsh poet who wrote about his experiences in the 1914-18 trenches, and I taught myself Welsh so that I could understand the poems better. I am interested in Welsh national culture and have regularly visited the Eisteddfods for many years."

He tells me this at 16.58 in the afternoon.

I think of Jesus College, just around the corner, founded in 1555 by Hugh ap Price, originally principally (or exclusively) for students from Wales, and a college fundamentally for students from Wales for 350 years and more thereafter. It closes to visitors at 17:00. Full of Welsh emblems and decorations.

Lieven is expected in the Council Chamber in Abingdon for his speech at 7pm. We arrive at the huge wooden medieval Jesus College gate.

Large notice: "Closed to visitors from 5pm each day", (only the students are there after 5pm.).

I say 'Follow me" and we enter by the small access door cut into the main "fortress" door. I go into the Porters Lodge. The Porters are the keepers, the mastiffs, no-one messes with the Porters. I explain that I'm from Abingdon and Lieven is the burgemeester of our twin town in Flemish Belgium. "He's speaking to our Town council this evening, sir, and returns home tomorrow" The mastiff nods.

I've got Lieven and wife in, out of hours. Apart from the students we are the only visitors. It's not yet time for dining. We have the 16th century dining hall to ourselves.

I can show him all alone the fantastic carvings of Welsh dragons, Prince of Wales feathers etc. We venture into the back quad, normally out of bounds to visitors. Stone dragon carvings and the fantastic rowing graffiti, one of the largest in Oxford, incorporating a huge red dragon.

And finally I know I still have the piece de resistance, the chapel. We are alone in the chapel. I had some special personal practice in here during my recent training, guiding my fellow-trainees. I had to find things about the chapel which were not in the guide-books to tell my fellow-trainees about. I show Lieven the sets of 16th century stained glass windows on either side, depicting Welsh saints with (to Englishmen) quite unusual Welsh names. The regimental flags of heroic wild Welsh regiments, hanging from the old wooden rafters.

By now, he is truly in Welsh heaven.

While he's busy closely admiring the carved dragons on the seats, I sneak to the big brass lectern, with the huge old bible. Just to check it's the same as ever.

"Lieven, I'll sit down with Erika here, would you like to read to us from the bible?"

Lieven eyes me, quizzically. "Just go up to the bible and start reading to us, Lieven".

Up he goes, he takes a look, his eyes are like saucers, they're popping out of his head. The huge bible is a bible in Welsh! Just Welsh. No translation. He swallows.

And off he sails, easily, skilfully, confidently reading it aloud to his wife and me sitting in the pews, in (for all I know) perfect-sounding Welsh, with its lovely, lls and gwrchs and gwlls and so on. Lieven is in a (Welsh) world of his own.

We have only time to admire the diminutive metal winged dragon and the tiny snail on Jesus' gate before hurrying back to Abingdon (on the bus). Lieven arrives in time for a change of clothes and resumes his burgemeester persona in time to address the Abingdon Town Council.

Such coincidences. Such chance coming-togethers. Only town twinning can do this. Memories of a lifetime. For which of us? Lieven, Erika or me?

I'll let you readers decide.

Summer jobs in Colmar

Marc Lischer, Head of International Relations for Colmar, has informed us of a number of Summer Job opportunities for young adults (18+). This is an "exchange" scheme and Abingdon would need to offer a Summer Job position for a young adult in return. The positions on offer are:

1. Assistant at Aqualia Swimming Centre.
2. Museum assistant at Musée Bartholdi or at Musée Unterlinden.
- 3.** Assistant at the Musée du Jouet (Toy Museum).
4. Assistant at the Colmar Youth Hostel.

These positions are for one month, either the month of July or the month of August. The salary is around €1200 for the month, and accommodation at the Colmar Youth Hostel is offered. Applicants need to be fluent in French.

For further details of these jobs please contact chairman@adtts.eu or secretary@adtts.eu

Annual Membership -- 2018/2019

Thank you to everyone who has already paid their annual membership for 2018/2019, either by direct debit or at the recent AGM. The subscription is £7.50 per person (£15 per couple). Cheques to be payable to ADTTS and should be sent to Ian and Rosemary Jardine – their address is at the bottom of this newsletter.

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