

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society



Newsletter

March 2024

Guest Editor: Brian Read

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From the Editor



It's spring! Well, possibly. Certainly, 1st March is the official start of meteorological spring. Not that the weather seems to notice. It's hardly warm and sunny. February brought much rain and the River Thames remains in full flood. However, let's look forward to a busy programme of twinning activity over the next few months.

The March meeting at PRCC has a very local flavour. Enthusiast Ann Ford is coming to tell us about the iconic Morris Minor car featuring in films and on TV. It promises to be an entertaining evening.

The date 9th May should be in your diaries. It is, of course, Europe Day. That means we shall mark it by our customary meal together. Look out for details.

Two twinning visits are forthcoming. ADTTS will be represented at the *La Fête de la Normandie* in Argentan (16th – 17th March). Meanwhile, we now have detailed planning of the programme for the group off to Lucca (11th – 15th April). May the sun shine!

In this month's Newsletter we are reminded of the (deservedly) well-attended talk by Mark Lane who came over from Argentan and gave us a fresh perspective about D-Day. Indeed, there is renewed interest in the subject as in June there will be celebrations of the eightieth anniversary of the landings on the beaches.

Another interesting contribution in this issue, is an article by Doris Küter, who is the new leader of the twinning circle in Schongau. *Fasching* in the pre-Lent period is a big deal in Germany. Doris describes how this festival plays out locally. A twinning visit at this time would be very tempting!

An innovation is a listing compiled by Nick Marsh of events in Abingdon in March. Even though it includes just selected events, it shows how much is regularly happening in the town. Among all the art and music items, of particular interest in this year of the centenary of his death, we spot a performance of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, live-streamed from the Royal Opera House.

We round off this month with musings on the English language from our columnist, Siegfried Waterschoot, from Sint-Niklaas.

Forthcoming Events (March - May 2024)

16 th – 17 th March	La Fête de la Normandie - Argentan
Thursday 21 st March	Evening Meeting: "Morris Minors in the Media" – PRCC
11 th – 15 th April	Twinning Trip to Lucca
Thursday 18 th April	Evening Meeting: Oxford's Twin Towns
Thursday 9 th May	Europe Day Meal
Thursday 16 th May	Evening Meeting: The Blue Plaques of South Oxfordshire

For details of all the events arranged so far for the rest of the year, look online at the ADTTS website. The full programme may be found at <http://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/future.htm>.

The website also has reports, with pictures, of all twinning events going back to 2007. Note, that to save typing the full domain name, the address of the website may be shortened to www.adtts.eu. (Indeed, even the ubiquitous 'www.' may be omitted.)

Evening Meeting - "Morris Minors in the Media"

Thursday 21 March 2024 - 7.30 for 8 pm at Preston Road Community Centre



Morris Minors are of particular local interest as the cars were assembled at the MG factory in Abingdon. Ann Ford, an owner of a Morris Minor and enthusiast, will come to give a talk on how the cars have played a part in TV and film productions.

"An informative but light-hearted and often amusing presentation by Ann Ford ably assisted by her husband John who ran a successful business hiring out their collection of Morris Minors (and some other classic cars) to film, TV and publishing companies spanning the period 1990-2015. Her presentation, supported with a comprehensive photographic display and other memorabilia, includes personal recollections of major films and

TV sitcoms. The cars were frequently used as 'props' in magazine advertising. Eventually, they diversified to weddings, and some of them were very unusual indeed. They sometimes transported VIPs such as Members of Parliament and pop stars to Charity Events. Questions and audience participation to view the display is encouraged at the end of the presentation. As this is a 'retro' subject, they even dress to match the period!"

(Photo credit: Ann and John Ford, previous owners of this police car, now in the Oxford Bus Museum at Long Hanborough.)

Entrance is £5, including refreshments.

Invitation to La Fête de la Normandie

16 - 17 March 2024 - Argentan

Members from ADTTS will be going to Argentan for the annual Fête de la Normandie. This is in response to an invitation from the mayor and councillors of our twin town of Argentan. They will host two people from each of their twinned towns to come for the weekend of 16th and 17th of March and to enjoy this festival of regional crafts, gastronomy and produce.

Mayors' Conference

Abingdon Town Council wishes to take its turn to invite all the mayors of our twin towns to a conference to strengthen links and address issues of mutual interest. In parallel, ADTTS would invite representatives of the corresponding twinning societies for the weekend. The originally proposed date this April proved not to be convenient for all the mayors. A new date with longer notice will be agreed, probably for the autumn or next spring.

Coach Trip to Portsmouth

Following on from Mark Lane's presentation at our recent evening meeting, this proposed day out from Abingdon by coach to take us to Portsmouth to visit the D-Day Museum there was originally planned for February, but it must now be rescheduled for later on. Besides the refurbished and reopened D-Day Museum, it will also be also an opportunity to visit the dockyards, Spinnaker Tower, etc.

Group Visit to the BMW Mini Plant in Oxford

It is hoped to arrange an ADTTS group visit to the BMW factory in Oxford where the Mini car is made. Opportunities for these popular visits are limited. Members will be notified when a date for a visit has been secured.

Past Event - Evening Meeting - D-Day

Thursday 15 February 2024 - at Preston Road Community Centre

In preparation for the D-Day commemorations in June for the 80th anniversary of D-Day, Mark Lane came from Argentan to give a talk about the invasion of Normandy by the allies in 1944.



Mark Lane is an American, who worked in curatorship and museums, and then retired to Argentan, where he has immersed himself in local history. This year is the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy and Mark traced the involvement of the British in deceiving the Germans as to where the invasion would take place. Uncertainty as to the site was critical to avoid German armour counter attacking the invasion forces.

Mark summed up WW2 in six words – American steel, Russian blood and British deception and then went onto give a thumb nail sketch of the origins of the war. He started with 'the long fuse', the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. Better machines meant greater food supplies and a bigger population, seeking to expand. In the late 19th century, there was a second industrial revolution, this time particularly in the USA and Germany. Cheaper newsprint meant that poorer people became better educated and informed about the world. Germany wanted an empire to rival that of the UK and France and Mark suggested that this 'empire envy' caused WW1. Fast forward to the Treaty of Versailles, where Germany was required to pay massive reparations, especially to France, which had seen so much of its country devastated – also the French wanted to get their own back for the reparations they had been forced to pay Germany after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.

In the interwar years peace movements grew apace in the UK, France, and the USA but in Germany the mood was one of vengeance. Germany felt that it had been stabbed in the back in 1918/9 and the Jewish population became scapegoats for this (yet again). The Great Depression starting in 1929 caused banks supporting Germany to withdraw their support leading to political instability, hyperinflation and ultimately the rise of Hitler. The threat of Russian communism was another factor causing alarm in Germany and elsewhere. In countries other than Czechoslovakia, there was a movement to the right politically – towards fascism.

Hitler was much influenced by a book, the *Decline of the White Races*, written by American, Madison Grant, and published in 1921. Among other points this suggested that the white, Nordic races, came south into Europe from Norway and led to Hitler's obsession with that country. Another event of great significance in the interwar period was the production of the Enigma coding machine. The Poles acquired some and Marian Rejewski studied their operation. Later in the early 1940s The British, (e.g. Alan Turing, though many more thousands were involved) became heavily involved in code breaking. Incidentally Mark pointed out that people with mathematical and/or linguistic abilities were especially good in this area – that lets me off!

The German external intelligence service, the Abwehr, was headed by Admiral Canaris, a man Hitler originally trusted. However, Canaris became disillusioned with Hitler, took part in the July 1944 plot, and paid with his life. It is also believed that Canaris supplied information to General Franco which persuaded the latter not to throw his lot in with Hitler.

Germany was very successful in capturing Allied agents in France and Holland, maybe 100 or more died, but less successful with their own agents they planted in Britain. Most were soon captured and turned into double agents, though it was doubtful how well they could be trusted.

A particularly interesting and useful double agent was Juan Pujol, known as Garbo. He was a Spaniard, who after the Spanish Civil war, went to Portugal and tried to enrol as a spy firstly

for the British, who were initially not very interested and then for the Germans who were. He then went back to the British and worked for both masters, to great effect for the Allies.

Hitler was obsessed with Norway, as has been noted, and eventually stationed 200 - 400,000 troops there. Meanwhile he built a defensive wall, or series of linked strong points along the French coast through the low countries and western Denmark and up into Norway. The idea was that any point that was attacked could be quickly reinforced.

The British and Allies needed to create uncertainty as to where the landing in Europe would be. They had to deflect attention from Normandy and make Hitler think that the Calais area was very likely – the Germans would have used this for an invasion of the UK - and Norway. It was decided that dumping a body at sea together with incriminating papers (Operation Mincemeat) could not be used again. So apart from false information conveyed by double agents the British built large dummy installations, of tanks and landing craft in the Kent area and in eastern Scotland and arranged for radio traffic to appear to originate from those areas. As an illustration of the care taken dummy tanks were moved overnight and actual tank tracks left as evidence. In Scotland multiple, small, fires were lit at night to indicate the presence of foreign troops.

The landings were successful, deception had done its work.



This was fascinating talk, delivered without notes and with some excellent simple slides to back it up.

Let me stress three points. This did not in any way glorify or diminish the horrors or the evil of WW1, WW2 or all wars and conflicts. Secondly in a talk of an hour or so it is only possible to give a snapshot of a few areas and individuals. Such a vast subject would need a book, many books, to do it justice, and this has to be appreciated. Finally on a more academic point, I am sure you all, and amateur and professional historians, could argue over some of the themes – e.g. did empire envy cause WW1? – forever. That is a luxury that those of us fortunate to have survived, so far, these terrible events, have.

Our thanks to Mark for a different take on D-Day and a most interesting and stimulating talk. And, as Napoleon said, an army marches on its stomach, and an ADTTS audience does as well. To aid this Nikki, Connie, Susan, Stella, and Howard, fed us on baguettes, French cheeses, cider and calvados.

Neil Hancox 16 February 2024

Quiz Evening – ERRATUM

The report in last month's newsletter of the January Quiz meeting suffered an unfortunate technical glitch in production. The first paragraph was corrupted. The complete paragraph should be:

"Our genial quiz inquisitors, to borrow a phrase from TV or radio from way back yonder, Peter Dodd and Brian Read, subjected the brains of 20 or so enthusiastic twin towners to several rounds of memory testing questions. For good measure they also threw in a couple of tasks requiring digital skills / judgement and one needing basic arithmetic. Yes, we all survived, just."

We apologise to our readers and especially to the author, Neil Hancox, who wrote an excellent account of the evening. The correct version was posted on the website.

What's on in Abingdon in March

There is a wide variety of events happening in Abingdon this month. Here are just a few culled from Abingdon Town's events website, <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/events>

Click on the links for further information on each event.

Until 31 st March 10:00am – 4:00pm	Abingdon Museum	"Celebrating Abingdon Women in the Arts and Sciences" Exhibition. It will highlight the lives of remarkable women, some who lived in Abingdon and made major contributions to the cultural life of the town, some who came from Abingdon and went out into the world to accomplish great things.
2 nd March 11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Under the County Hall, Market Place	Hummus and Dip making workshop . One Planet Abingdon invite you to come along to learn how to make a variety of dips, including hummus.
3 rd March 3:00 – 4:00 pm	St Nicolas Church	The Virtuoso Flute Peter Robertson flute, Yoshiko Endo piano play Poulenc, Telemann and Faure
8 th March 5:30 pm – 9:30 pm	Abbey Cinema	Mayor of Abingdon's Film Night The Mayor of Abingdon, Cllr Gwyneth Lewis, invites you to a free discussion and film night on the topic of Domestic Abuse. The event will be held in support of the Mayor's charity, Reducing the Risk .
9 th March 7.30 pm	St Helen and St Katharine School	Abingdon and District Musical Society Concert including works by Coleridge-Taylor, Ravel and Tchaikovsky
11 th - 16 th March 10:00 am – 4:30 pm	St Helen's Church	Abingdon Artists Spring Art Exhibition Artworks by Abingdon Artists on display and for sale in the beautiful setting of St Helen's Church. Free entry, all welcome, accessible venue.
14 th March 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm	Abingdon Library	Poetry Event Award-winning poet Andrew Jamison will be reading from his latest collection <i>Swans We Cannot See</i> .
16 th – 23 rd March	Various Venues	Atom Festival of Science and Technology Every year ATOM Festival hosts a series of events to allow our community to discover the world-class science and technology taking place right here, as well as learning about the companies, organisations and scientists who make it happen.
19 th March 2:30 pm – 3:30 pm	Trinity Church Hall	The Real World of Forensic Anthropology A talk by Sue Black, the UK's leading forensic anthropologist.
20 th March 7:30 pm – 9:00 pm	Christ Church Hall	Cape and Kruger. Self-guided and independent , an illustrated talk by Peter Barker. Hosted by Abingdon Naturalists Society
23 rd March 7:30 pm	St Helen's Church	Abingdon and District Musical Society Concert , including works by Duruflé, Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Dupré and Mozart
26 th March 7:15 pm – 9:30 pm	Amey Theatre	ROH Live: Madame Butterfly Puccini's exquisite opera, live-streamed from the Royal Opera House
29 th / 30 th March 7:30 pm	Radley College	The Delicate Sound of Pink Floyd 11 Musicians performing songs from Pink Floyd's iconic 1988-89 world tour, live in the stunning setting of Radley College, all profits to charity.

Fasching – Karneval – Fasnacht

Today I would like to tell you about the "Fifth Season" in Germany.

Depending on which area of Germany you live in, it's called

- **Karneval** (in the Rhine area such as in Cologne and in the Ruhr area)
- **Fas(t)nacht** (Hesse, Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, parts of Bavaria such as Franconia and Upper Palatinate) or
- **Fasching** (Bavaria and Saxony)

There are also different carnival greetings in many areas such as: Alaaf, Helau or like here in Schongau LECHAU!

The Time of Fools always begins on November 11th at 11:11 a.m. On this day the royal couple is proclaimed. The pair open the balls, festivals and parades. They will be accompanied by the *Elferrat* (an eleven-member carnival committee that plans and manages the carnival events), the *Prinzengarde* young adults who perform show dances and the *Minigarde* consisting of children. The highlight with all its festivals, parades and other events begins on the Thursday before Ash Wednesday.

The Thursday is also called *Weiberfasching* (women's carnival). Then women storm the town hall and take over control. It is customary on this day for women to cut off men's ties. Men are also not allowed into carnival parties on this day. Or rather, it's only at a late hour that we celebrate together again.

The next day is Sooty Friday. The name comes from the fact that earlier on that day the fools tried to put soot on people's faces. Nowadays the custom is still very popular among children.

After a day of partying on Saturday, there will be a big carnival parade in Schongau town centre on Sunday. This year there were 23 carnival floats and groups on foot that caused a lot of laughter among the spectators with their satires on political and local issues. Everyone was dressed very imaginatively. A stage is set up at the *Ballenhaus* where the guards perform their acrobatic dances. The float and the best pedestrian group are awarded a prize. The winner receives a suckling pig and 30 litres of beer.

The next day is *Rosenmontag* (Rose Monday). There is a big carnival parade in Cologne. On Shrove Tuesday the last forces will be mobilized and the traditional *Kehraus* (last dance) in the Schongau *Trachtenheim* will be celebrated again. The prince and princess with the guards appear for the last time. At midnight the carnival prince is buried and the carnival ends.

A popular pastry during carnival is the doughnut. This is a fried yeast dough that is filled with various jams. But beware! Sometimes one is filled with mustard... I was amazed to find these doughnuts at the Monday market in Abingdon - luckily filled with delicious jam!

Take a look at the homepage of the Schongau Carnival Society, there you will find great photos from Schongau: <https://lechau.de/>.

And under this link you will find a newspaper report with great photos of the carnival parade: <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/schongau/schongau-ort29421/umzug-2024-grosser-gaudiwurm-in-schongau-begeistert-die-narren-92827025.html>.

There is a video clip of this year's parade at [Faschingsumzug.mp4](#).

Maybe visitors from our twin towns will come to Schongau during the carnival season. Then you can see a completely different side of our city.

Your Doris Küter

(English translation: Brian Read)



To shorten or not to shorten?

You British love to shorten or make abbreviations of words, don't you?

And I even don't take the texting language into consideration, (which in my opinion is the worst). I know, it comes natural to you, but for us, non-native speakers it's a nightmare.

When we, full of confidence, put foot on English soil, the first encounter with the English language is a bit of a shocker. Did the British use the same text book as us? Our English definitely isn't your English. It sounds alien. Not Klingon-alien-like, but even so.

I can't shake the impression that, if it would be possible, to turn every sentence or thought into a three-letter word, you would be jumping for joy.

I can't help it but the word *laziness* creeps into my mind. It's as if the use of your mouth for something else than drinking or eating is foul play.

Imagine that you, as a rookie, hear the following sentences for the first time:

- If you're going walkies, don't forget to put your wellies on and take your brolly with you. (If you want to walk your dog, don't forget to put on your rubber boots and take your umbrella with you.)
(*The translation between brackets, is for us non-native speakers.*)
- Are you sleeping in jammies, a nighty, undies or in the buff? (Are you sleeping in pyjamas, a nightgown, underpants or naked?)
- My nan is quite a character. Always dressed to the nines, never forgetting her lippy, she's my fav. It's always so homely at her place, really comfy. Especially, when she puts on a brew, or even better makes me a hot cocoa. Just fab. (My grandmother is quite a character. Always dressed impeccably, never forgetting her lipstick. It feels always at home and comfortable at her place. Especially when she makes tea or even better, a hot chocolate. Just fabulous.)
- If you don't have a lot of dosh, try that chippy around the corner. They charge you only seven quid for a massive portion. (If you don't have a lot of money, try that fish and chips around the corner. They charge you only seven pounds for a massive portion.)
- If your telly is broken, don't ask for a sparky, you need a repair man. (If your television set is broken, don't ask for an electrician, you need a repair man.)
- I've only one question left. Why do people say cheers, when there's nothing to toast about? (Cheers is commonly used to say thank you.)

So, in the future, my Abingdon friends, if you meet a twinning member, I implore you to always speak in complete sentences formed with complete words or else you will encounter many blankies (blank stares, see what I did there?)

Siegfried Waterschoot, Sint-Niklaas

Welcome to new members

We are delighted to welcome two new members to our twinning society:

Penny Clover and **Harry Stoopman**.

A Dove of Peace in Every Twin Town?

The local newspaper in Schongau reports that the town is to receive a sculpture featuring a peace dove by the artist Hubert Lang. It is to be erected in the monastery garden of the Heiligegeist Hospital by the war memorial. The bronze sculpture is in the form of a peace dove with an olive twig in its beak – a symbol of peace worldwide. Lang would like the unveiling to take place on the date 8th May, the anniversary of the day when the weapons were laid down in Europe in 1945 and the Second World War ended with the then official surrender of the German Wehrmacht.

Hubert Georg Lang has installed several peace doves in the region. The one for Schongau, worth about 10,000 euros, is offered as a permanent loan to the town. Lang hopes that this will not be the last. He quotes Bürgermeister Falk Sluyterman as having the idea that a dove of peace could be set up in all the twin towns of Schongau. "It would be nice if that could succeed. Unfortunately, not much has yet happened," the artist regrets. "But Schongau is now making a start."

For picture of the artist with a similar peace dove sculpture on the Kaiserstuhl, see <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/schongau/schongau-ort29421/friedenstaube-gegenueber-kriegerdenkmal-schongau-hubert-lang-92837279.html>.

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Non-members of the Society are also welcome to receive copies of this monthly newsletter. Just email your request to newsletter@adtts.eu.

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is two days before the end of the month. Please send contributions to newsletter@adtts.eu. (No publication in August)



Flooding of the River Thames at Abingdon