

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society



Newsletter

May 2025

Guest Editor: Nick Marsh

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Chairman's Message

Early in April we were delighted to welcome delegates from our twin towns in Europe to two conferences in Abingdon, one hosted by the Mayor, Cllr Gabby Barody, the other by ADTTS. These conferences which usually take place in different towns each year are a really important way of meeting different people and sharing ideas to benefit all our towns. It is also really important for people to meet in person. Putting a face to a name is always so beneficial.

One of the sessions at our ADTTS conference was entitled 'Thinking outside the box'. The idea was to come up with new ideas to benefit our towns both in friendship and in tourism. One "off the wall" idea was to put together visits to Abingdon highlighting food and drink of the region. Could we really sell beer to the Belgians, wine to the Germans and food to the Italians and French? Well, it seems we could! When I asked my French guests what they would like to do on their last day, Michele and Marc said they would really like to prepare a full English breakfast. So, they did! It was very good!



A big thank you to everyone who helped with the twinning conference, to those who lent beautiful cups and saucers for a traditional afternoon tea and to people from the Council, particularly Rose and Lorraine, for their help.

Now I have a conundrum. Our brilliant treasurers, Rosemary and Ian, are retiring. They have threatened for a number of years, but now they must, so we desperately need a new treasurer. The problem is how to pitch it. If I tell you that both Ian and Rosemary slaved over the books for hours each month it will put potential treasurers off. But if I say there is really nothing to it our wonderful couple could quite rightly take offence. So, it is what it is and if you or anyone you know could help us out we would be so grateful. I can tell you though that it can be great fun and that we do enjoy wine at our meetings!

Hopefully by now in Abingdon you will be receiving details of the programme to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day. We will be laying flowers at the war memorial on May 8 in memory of ALL those in our twin towns who gave their lives. In the programme you will see that we get a mention. Do please come and visit us in Unit 24 in the Precinct on 11 May. If you can spare an hour, do help out.

Stella Carter

From the Editor

The coming month, May, heralds the start of summer, with many trees beginning to blossom. We have already had a truly spectacular period of blackthorn (*prunus spinosa*) blossom, which started in March, and the wine-making enthusiasts among us can expect a bumper harvest of sloe berries later in the year for making the traditional sloe gin and sloe vodka for the Christmas season.

May, however, sees the blossoming of the hawthorn (*crataegus monogyna*), also known, appropriately, as the May tree. In a nod to the highlight of our March programme, the talk on witchcraft in Oxfordshire, both trees have strong connections with witchcraft. The blackthorn was linked to dark magic and witches would use the branches for wands, whereas hawthorn's place in the magical world was as a fairy tree with people hanging coloured ribbons to ask the tree spirits and fairies to make wishes come true.

Our April highlight was a fascinating visit to Abingdon's Little Basement Museum, where the attendees were shown round by Mike Russell, its creator. Our thanks are due to Norma Queralt for organising this visit and writing the report in this Newsletter.

Also in this Newsletter is a brief report on the Twinning Conference held from 4th – 7th April at Abingdon Guildhall, where we were delighted to host visitors from our twin towns. A full report on this conference will be available later on.

May 9th is Europe Day. We will celebrate this with a meal at The Cosener's House with a variety of Europe-themed dishes.

Our regular listing of local events contains a good number of events. Siegfried Waterschoot gives us another fascinating insight into Belgium, this time the Sunday Breakfast and pastry, and a glimpse at the doings of the Belgian Royals!

Nick Marsh

Forthcoming Events (May 2025 – September 2025)

Friday 9 th May	Europe Day Meal
Thursday 15 th May	Evening Meeting at PRCC – The English Tea Party
Thursday 26 th June	Garden Party at St Ethelwold's
Thursday 17 th July	Treasure Hunt
Thursday 18 th September	AGM at PRCC

Evening Meeting – The English Tea Party

Thursday 15 May 2025 at PRCC, 7:30 for 8pm

For our May evening meeting at Preston Road Community Centre, we will hear about the origins and traditions of the traditional English Tea Party, accompanied by appropriately themed refreshments. This promises to be a highly enjoyable session!

Bastille Day in Argentan

Places are still available for the Bastille Day outing to Argentan from Friday 11th July to Thursday 17th July. See the programme in the April Newsletter or contact Richard Smart on 01235 523324 or dickcsmart@gmail.com.

VE/VJ Day - 80th Anniversaries of VE and VJ Day

This year marks the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ day. These are moments of living history, with possibly the last chance for some of those who served at home and abroad to celebrate.

Abingdon Twinning Society will have a stand at Unit 24, The Precinct, on Sunday May 11th.



Thursday May 8

12:00 Ceremony at Abingdon war memorial
19:30 Concert, St Helen's Church

Saturday May 10

10:00 – 17:00 Operation Overlord model railway display,
Abingdon Royal British Legion, Spring Road

Sunday May 11

10:00 – 15:00 MG Rally, Abingdon Market Place
10:00 – 15:00 Veterans and Town Twinning organisations
Unit 24, Abingdon Precinct
10.00 – 16:00 Operation Overlord model railway display,
Abingdon RBL
12:00 – 14:00 Barbecue, Abingdon RBL

Sunday May 18

14:00 – 16:30 VE Commemorative Tea Dance,
Preston Road community centre

Saturday August 16

10:30 Music in the Market Place
14:00 Fun bun throwing,
Abingdon Rugby Club, Lambrick Way

Sunday August 17

14:00 – 16:30 VJ Commemorative Tea Dance



Abingdon Town Council

Abingdon Town Council is supporting this through a grant towards the cost of the plans to honour these events.

Commemorations nationally start on Monday May 5 – the Early May Bank holiday – and include a Military procession, flypast, the return of the poppies to the Tower of London. The Town Council would like town businesses, shops and houses to decorate their buildings from this day and to the weekend.

VE day itself falls on Thursday May 8 and Abingdon Town Council are looking at events on that day and the following weekend. The role the town played in World War II has been at the heart of the plans.

The aim is to include all parts of the community from church bell-ringers, to town actors, singers, musicians, car and railway enthusiasts as well as veterans, cadets and our twin towns. All events are free with donations to the Poppy Appeal. Volunteers, contributions and participation are welcome.

Lucca - Europe Days – May 8-12 in Lucca

The twinning event will take place in Lucca from May 8 to May 12, 2025. Four guests will be hosted by local families or accommodated in B&B rooms in the city.

*If you might be interested in this opportunity to visit Lucca, then please contact **Elio Astone** (07801 260262 or elioastone@outlook.com), who facilitates ADTS contact with Lucca.*

Past Event: Evening Meeting – Visit to the Little Basement Museum Thursday 17th April 2025 at 4 East St Helen Street



The Little Basement Museum entrance

On Thursday 17th April we had an outdoor meeting of the Twin Towns Society. We were lucky enough to be invited to the Little Basement Museum in East St Helen Street by the owner and excavator Mike Russell. The museum has been a project for Mike for many years since he bought the building as a shop, firstly for sub-aqua gear then skateboards and after various other reincarnations it is now a hairdressers shop.

The basement currently houses a museum charting the history of Abingdon for thousands of years, from the first settlements to the present day. Amongst the many other things Mike excavated are ... the well going down to the Thames, many interesting artefacts, bones, shellfish, clay pipes and evidence of fires used for cooking, oak timbers and stones from Abingdon Abbey. The excavations are beautifully displayed in cabinets.

Two groups of ten people came, they were either members or people associated. Two people came who walked in Colmar and two others who helped as walk leaders when we had the walk weekend, the rest were committee or members. It was a nice atmosphere.

It was a very interesting meeting and we thanked Mike for his time and for preserving a special part of Abingdon for all of us. We repaired to the Punch Bowl afterwards for a sociable drink.

Norma Queralt

Twinning Conference Weekend

Friday 4th – Monday 7th April 2025



Town Crier greeting delegates



Mayor and Town Crier



Peace Pole Celebration



An English Tea Party



At the Loose Cannon Taproom

Under the broad heading “Growing the Bonds of Friendship”, ADTTS hosted the 2025 Twinning Conference for delegates from our twin towns. This conference is held on an annual basis in the various twin towns, in parallel with a separate Mayors’ Conference held at the same time.

The programme started on the Friday evening with the Mayor of Abingdon, Gabby Barody, welcoming all the delegates to both the Twinning Conference and the Mayors’ Conference at the Cosener’s House. While the Mayoral delegates stayed for dinner at the Cosener’s House, our Twinning Conference delegates went to the taproom of our local brewery, The Loose Cannon, for supper and a taste of local beers.

The conference itself took place on the Saturday in the Guildhall, Abingdon. It started at 8:45 am at the Twin Towns signboard with a proclamation from the Town Crier and a welcome from the Mayor.

The first morning session was entitled "Understanding each other" where the delegates of each town and organisation told us about themselves and how each society works in a 5-minute presentation.

The second morning session looked at "Strengthening links and forging new links" where representatives from local clubs and societies in Abingdon came and gave us a short talk about their activities with the hope that this could lead to new links being forged between our towns. These activities included Table Tennis, Running, Drama, the Arts and Ukulele playing, where Howard, representing the Bakehouse Strummers, finished his presentation with a spirited rendering of "Singing the Blues".

After an excellent Ploughman's Lunch organised by Stella we recommenced in the afternoon with "Ideas for non-traditional twinning" in order to increase the scope of twinning to encompass new ideas for twinning associations to adopt.

Later in the afternoon the delegates went to St. Ethelwold's Garden for the Peace Pole Celebrations. This was the first anniversary of the Abingdon Peace Pole – "Let's Build Bridges Not Walls". The event included readings, live music and circle dancing, and was accompanied by excellent refreshments.

For Saturday evening the Mayor of Abingdon, Gabby Barody, had invited the delegates from both conferences to a dinner at The Coseyner's House where speeches were made and presents exchanged and delegates from both conferences mingled with each other.

Many delegates were travelling back on the Sunday, but a variety of activities were on offer for those who remained, including watching the bell ringing in St Helen's church, hosted by Brian Read, a trip to the White Horse with Richard Smart, and tours of Oxford with Phil Addison and Peter Dodd. At 5 pm Stella hosted a sumptuous Tea Party in the English tradition at her home, at which over 30 people enjoyed a lavish spread of traditional English cakes, biscuits and sandwiches, elegantly served on exquisite and skilfully crafted cake stands.

A fuller report will become available on the ADTTS website.

Nick Marsh

Hot Cross Buns in Sint-Niklaas

Our friend Herman Cole from Sint-Niklaas has sent us this link from the Sint-Niklaas News about a baker who is making traditional Hot Cross Buns in Sint-Niklaas. The baker made them specially for Good Friday.

We hope our readers in Sint-Niklaas managed to find them and enjoyed them as much as we enjoy hot cross buns here!

The link to follow is:

www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20250418_94007225

Church Twinning

We will be hosting visitors from churches in our twin towns of Sint-Niklaas, Schongau and Argentan from Thursday 12th - Monday 16th June. Church Twinning runs a programme of daily events, but we are looking for hosts who could offer accommodation, and also volunteers to host one or two visitors for an evening meal on the Saturday. Knowledge of French, German or Flemish is not required as all the guests speak good English. Please contact Elizabeth Simpson (simpsonem123@gmail.com) or Anne Dodd (anne.dodd28@gmail.com) if you can help. Thank you.

Invitation to Sint-Niklaas Twinning Weekend

Dear All,

Old habits never die, so we invite four people from your city to participate in our twinning. The twinning will take place from Thursday 4th (arrival) - to Monday 8th Sept (departure). As always, our program is somewhat linked to the Peace Festival (Balloon Festival) that takes place at the same time.

Our theme this year is: **HIDDEN PEARLS, RIGHT AND LEFT.**

A short peek at our program reveals:

- On Friday we'll visit the town of Antwerp.
- Saturday afternoon we'll visit the fortress Liefkenshoek, along with a part of the harbour and a visit to the abandoned village of Doel. Afterwards, depending on the weather, you can admire the balloon festival on our Grote Markt.
- Sunday starts with a guided walk through Sint-Niklaas. In the afternoon there is our famous Games Without Borders, followed by the farewell barbecue.

The registration deadline is June 1. Provide your name and email address. Please advise if there are couples and if there are any medical problems related to allergies, etc.

Correspondence email address: siewat@hotmail.com

From Siegfried Waterschoot in Sint-Niklaas

SUNDAY BREAKFAST

Some weeks ago, I came across a newspaper article about an inquiry to find the best "boterkoek or koffiekoek". Literally translated butter cake or coffee cake. A more accurate translation is Danish pastry or viennoiserie. In the UK you've your high-tea, over here in Flanders we have our Sunday morning breakfast. Both are deeply rooted traditions in their respective cultures. Last Sunday I took some pictures in my local bakery to show you the abundance of choice you have in pastries and buns.



The basis of the pastries is always a kind of risen puff pastry, the topping or filling can be fruit (apple, cherries, pear, peach, mango), frangipane, chocolate, different kinds of nuts, a thick vanilla custard or sultanas. As you can tell, you're spoilt for choice.

The same applies to the buns or rolls. We call them "pistolets". There's a huge variety in white, brown and whole-wheat. Made with plain flour or special bran, spelt or buckwheat flour. Nuts, sesame seeds and poppy seeds can be thrown into the mix. The texture can be crunchy or soft. They are served with a choice of different kinds of sliced ham and cheese. Or you can satisfy your sweet tooth with a nice dollop of homemade jam.

Recipe for the dough

Ingredients

1kg plain flour
75g yeast
530ml milk
1 egg
75g caster sugar
17g salt
20g unsalted butter
350g softened unsalted butter

Preparation

1. Mix all the ingredients together except for the 350g of butter.
2. Knead the dough for a short amount of time (1/4 hour) and roll the dough out.
3. Divide the butter into 3 portions.
4. Spread 1 portion on half of the rolled-out dough. Fold the dough into three and roll out again.
5. Do the same once again
6. The third time you fold the dough into two and roll out
7. Let the dough rest and rise for at least 1 hour
8. Roll out again to approximately 3mm thick. Cut the dough into rectangles (about the size of a mobile phone) and fill the piece with whatever you want. If you want to use chocolate chips or raisins, double the size and roll the ingredients in the dough.
9. Preheat the oven to 210°C, put the pastries in the oven for about 20 min. Please, check at 17 min. because the timing I got is for an industrial oven.



3, chocolate bun
2, round pastry filled with sultanas
1, pastry filled with vanilla custard and topped with chocolate.

THE COMPOSTELLA PILGRIMAGE CHOPPED INTO ROYAL PIECES.

The Holy Week this year for our Royal family signified the final part of their walking the route to Santiago de Compostella.

They started in 2017 near the border of Spain with France and walked every day about 35k during the Holy Week. They have done this every year except, of course, during the Covid-years. The year 2025 marked the last part of the route for them. Our King and Queen were accompanied by their children except for Elisabeth who is studying in Harvard, USA. Naturally they never walked alone. They were accompanied by a security detail and some close friends.

Did they immerse themselves completely in the pilgrims' ways? Not really. Their hostel was at least a 4-star, full accommodation hotel, strategically located along the walking route. Every morning the Royal couple was brought by car to the starting point of that day's walk. And of course they were collected at the end of the day. "Noblesse oblige" as they say in French.



What's On in Abingdon in May

Here are just a few of the forthcoming events culled from Abingdon Town's events website, <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/events>.

Click on the links for further information on each event.

And if any of you have an event you would like put in here – please let us know via the email link at the end of this Newsletter.

<i>1st May</i> 6:00 – 7:00 pm	Abingdon Library	<u>Author Talk with Jasper Fforde</u> Jasper Fforde, bestselling writer of "absurdist fiction", will be talking about his latest book <i>Red Side Story</i> , the sequel to <i>Shades of Grey</i> , a funny and darkly satiric adventure about two star-crossed lovers on a quest to survive – even if it means upending their entire society in the process! Including a Q&A and book signing. Tickets £2 inc. a welcome drink, available from Abingdon Library, by calling 01865 815005 or email abingdon.library@oxfordshire.gov.uk
<i>1st May</i> 7:00 pm - 10:30 pm	Unicorn Theatre	<u>The Salts with support from Barton Hartshorn</u> The Salts are a co-operative of seasoned musicians, creating what is fast becoming one of the most exciting and energetic folk concepts of recent times. With their own unique sound that mixes well written original compositions alongside classic traditional tunes, it's a guaranteed blast. You could say that 21st century folk fires a respectful broadside at the traditional. The Salts perform shanties but not quite in the way you might expect. £15 - £17
<i>3rd May</i> 9:00 – 11:30 pm	British Legion	<u>The Royal British Legion Presents Rockingham</u> ROCKINGHAM – Abingdon's Premier Rock Covers Band. Join us for a night with the classic rock covers band "Rockingham" Abingdon's premier rock covers band. Enjoy rock hits from the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond. Free

<i>8th - 11th May</i>	<i>Various venues</i>	<u>VE 80 Celebration</u> May 8th, 2025, marks the 80th anniversary of VE Day, when the nation unites to celebrate 80 years of peace since the end of World War II in Europe. It was a war that claimed the lives of the 56 men remembered on Abingdon's war memorial and a further 47 from Abingdon School. Abingdon Royal British Legion, with support from Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, is marking these momentous anniversaries with events honouring the sacrifices made by townsfolk at home and abroad.
<i>10th - 17th May 10:00 am - 5:00 pm</i>	<i>St Nicolas Church</i>	<u>Art and Craft Exhibition</u> The Abbey Group of artists, Claire Cross, Nick Cross, Chris Eccles, Margaret Horton and Emma Williams welcome everyone to their Artweeks exhibition. There will be many new, original works as well as prints and cards for sale. Also available to buy will be glass creations, jewellery and homewares. Fully accessible. NB It is closed on Sunday 11th May.
<i>16th May 7:00 pm - 10:30 pm</i>	<i>Harwell Village Hall</i>	<u>Sam Carter with support from Three Idle Women</u> Over the course of his fifteen-year career, Sam has earned a reputation for vivid, narrative-driven songwriting 'as penetrating as Richard Thompson's best work' (Uncut). A highly regarded instrumentalist to boot, Sam is renowned by many as "the finest English-style fingerpicking guitarist of his generation" (Jon Boden) and has been described as having a 'killer voice' by Ivor Novello-winning musician Nitin Sawhney. £18 - £20
<i>23rd May</i>	<i>Dorchester Abbey</i>	<u>2025 English Music Festival</u> The English Music Festival celebrates the brilliance, innovation, beauty and rich musical heritage of Britain with a strong focus on unearthing overlooked or forgotten masterpieces of the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Join us in Dorchester-on-Thames for audience favourites and some new discoveries, including World Premiere performances by guest artists including the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Twin Towns Calendar for 2025

Here is an incomplete list of a few major festivals and events in our twin towns that may be of interest to potential visitors during 2025. Do please notify any additions using the email link at the end of this Newsletter.

<i>14th July</i>	<i>Argentan</i>	<i>Bastille Day</i>
<i>5th - 7th September</i>	<i>Sint-Niklaas</i>	<u>Peace Festivities and Balloons weekend</u>
<i>14th September</i>	<i>Lucca</i>	<u>Holy Cross Celebration Luminara Procession</u>



Emil and Ingrid Ruß, from Schongau, with Brian and Stella under the Schongau Lantern

ADTTS Contacts

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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)

The Society's website is <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/>. This address may be abbreviated to <http://adtts.eu>.

The programme may be found on the website at <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/future.htm>.

The website also has reports, with pictures, of all twinning events going back to 2007.