

## CHELMSFORD TWINNING PARTNERSHIP

### Annual General Meeting, 2023

Saturday, August 19<sup>th</sup> 3.00pm at Galleywood Heritage Centre

#### *Chairman's Report*

Those of you who were present at our 2022 AGM will recall not just the lovely weather, the beautiful setting of Gloria's garden, to say nothing of the delicious refreshments afterwards, but also the welcome given to our new President, Val Bliss, following the resignation of Mick McDonagh. We are therefore delighted to welcome her back after her first year's presidency – not made easy on account of health problems – and trust that she'll enjoy continuing to work with us on the future of twinning.

The committee had to get to work straight away by preparing for the celebration of 30 years of twinning with Backnang and Annonay, an event that had to be postponed from 2020 because of the Covid pandemic. A delegation from the town council and the Partnerschaftsverein from Backnang joined us over the weekend of October 21st to 23rd. Unfortunately, for various reasons, we had no representation from Annonay. The weekend began with the customary tree planting at Hylands Park, with Chelmsford Mayor Councillor Sue Dobson and Oberbürgermeister Maximilian Friedrich wielding their spades. The weather was perfect on the Saturday morning for our outing on the Blackwater estuary aboard the Thames sailing barge, 'Hydrogen', which included an on-board buffet lunch. Some members were even allowed a brief stint at the tiller!

In the evening, delegates, members and hosts joined each other for a very successful reception at The Hive in Oaklands Park.. We were delighted that attendees included some students from Boswells School who have been doing great work with the Backnang/Chelmsford Community Radio links. The spread that the restaurant laid on for us was excellent and put us in the right mood for the speeches. The respective mayors shared the cutting of the celebration cake, the consumption of which rounded off a highly enjoyable evening.

The Sunday saw us at the Cathedral morning service, during which Ob. Friedrich read the lesson. The visit coincided with the Cathedral's special 'Gaia' display, and the Backnang delegation couldn't resist a photo call as they gathered below the huge globe suspended from the ceiling. The weekend ended when the Partnerschaftsverein joined us for a very enjoyable farewell lunch at Middleton's. The whole weekend had been a great success and I am full of admiration for my committee's meticulous planning for the event. In December, a group from Backnang came over to man their stall at the traditional Cathedral Christmas Market and, as usual, did a roaring trade selling the German produce they had brought over.

The new year began with our annual twinning dinner, held this time at the Il Palazzo Italian restaurant on the evening of January 21<sup>st</sup>. We had a good attendance but had to contend with the noise and stress of a packed restaurant on a Saturday evening, with over-stretched staff, resulting in somewhat slow service. The committee would welcome

feedback and suggestions for our 2024 celebration, particularly on venue and time.

Meanwhile, Baddow Hall Primary School had been working on a partnership with the Schillerschule in Backnang and a small group of their staff paid a visit to Chelmsford in March. Such links require financing and a CTP team had joined a Quiz Evening at Baddow Hall to help raise the necessary funds. Then, in April, we held our own annual quiz at the Galleywood Heritage Centre. The traditionally Autumn event had been re-scheduled to the Spring because the 30<sup>th</sup> Twinning Anniversary had to be given top priority. Rising costs had led us reluctantly to abandon the inclusion of a fish'n'chips/ chicken'n'chips supper but the lower entry price of £7.50pp resulted in a record attendance of ten teams. Details of Income and Expenditure will be included in Elaine's Treasurer's report. The shield winners were, once again, Elaine's team who called themselves 'The team with no name'. The committee discussed the pros and cons of returning the event to the Autumn but decided against it, at least for this year, partly for fear of overdoing it but mainly because our main event this Autumn will be our hosting the Essex and Suffolk Twinning Congress on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

The last weekend of June included the popular Backnang Strassenfest and a small group from Chelmsford travelled to Backnang to join in the events and renew acquaintances. It turned out to be one of the most enjoyable Strassenfests members could recall. There was also the opportunity to renew contact with Annonay whose delegation included some new faces as well as the more familiar ones. In fact, these contacts, together with the increased exchange of e-mails, together with an independent visit by Bill and Pam Forrester to their *fête des ballons*, suggest that the links with Annonay are looking a lot more promising after years of virtually zero interchange. Furthermore, the Council delegation included the Leader, Councillor Stephen Robinson, who was attending for the first time and apparently really 'gelled' with Oberbürgermeister Friedrich and returned with an enhanced enthusiasm for twinning.

So, here we are at the end of a busy twelve months. I am perhaps conscious that this Chairman's report reads more like a review of the year and that I have not addressed some of the big issues that cause concern – the ageing and falling membership, the difficulty of finding committed helpers, the paucity of younger members, to name a few – but we are still very much alive and kicking. We are already discussing plans for the future, including opening up once again visits to Annonay as well as Backnang, although personal health issues prevent me from visiting either.

As usual, I will end by thanking my fantastic committee for all their hard and unstinting work and ..... may I just slip in a personal 'thank you' to my granddaughter Jessannie who has been keeping our website up to date so efficiently.

*Alan Arnot*