

## 2009 Exchange

### Wednesday

Air France's "Voyage en Deux Actes" made for an inconvenient start to the visit for both hosts and guests, with a long day and hours of waiting for the travellers, and a staggered welcome party for us hosts. As always however, the pleasure of meeting old friends once more, or the excitement of new relationships, soon banished all other thoughts, with hugs and bisous all round. The one sad note was the absence of Barbara and Valentine Moret, who had not been allowed to leave France owing to a gap in their documents.

Our "Thé Anglais" went down well, cuppas and cakes being very welcome after the long day's travel. I'm sure we are all very grateful to Jean who again came up trumps with a mammoth baking session and the same organisation that makes High Legh Teas such an annual success. Sincere thanks too to everyone who helped in any way, from setting-up to washing-up, from pouring tea to clearing away; thanks too to new Parish Council Chairman Joe Griffiths who joined us for his first official function under the heavy P.C. collar.

### Thursday

Our weather was rather unsettled, so perhaps it was a good thing that the 13 young people visiting us were able to spend most of Thursday's free day in local schools. Many thanks to the staff and pupils of Lymm High, Oughtrington and Cherry Tree schools who gave all the youngsters a warm welcome and a really interesting and memorable experience. Every single one of them was delighted with their day, as was Madame Pitrou, Headteacher of the École Saint-Jean. All expressed the wish to strengthen the links between schools in Lymm and Meung and to find pen-friends for themselves and their friends.

Our full-day excursion to Merseyside set off in high spirits from Lymm Rugby Club on the Friday morning. A quick inspection of the Albert Dock's toilets, then all aboard the open-top double-decker for a City Tour – in the city drizzle. Having been forewarned, our visitors were well equipped with impers et parapluies and were soon duly impressed by the architecture and potted history of Liverpool, freely translated from "Scouse" into French. Our local guide John had many a tale to tell about his city, most of which found their way through the language barrier.

A stop-off to visit the impressive Victorian edifice of St. George's Hall was well worth the time and the brief dash through the rain. Although we weren't able to see the splendid Minton tiled floor, which has been uncovered only eight times in 150 years, the architecture and decoration were highly impressive as, in a different way, were the fragrant prison cells and the court-room. Judge Birchall noted that several of the individuals in the Dock, both French and English, looked quite at home there!

Back on board, then down to the Pier Head in good time to embark on the 1 o'clock Mersey Ferry, serenaded by Gerry Marsden's "Ferry Cross the Mersey", for a 40-minutes cruise along the impressive Liverpool waterfront and a welcome hot drink.

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“Over the Water” to the Wirral and our waiting coaches for the short-ish journey to Ness Gardens. The less said about their “Buffet Lunch” the better, since it’s still in litigation, but the gardens, with or without guides, and the improving weather hopefully made up for the shortcomings of the catering department. By five o’clock the sun was shining and we were speeding back to Lymm after a varied day which encouraged many of our visitors to think of making a longer visit in the future to the Capital of Culture 08.

### **Saturday - Saturday night reception**

By Saturday evening, after a free day, the sun was streaming into Mere Golf and Country Club for our Official Reception and Dinner-Dance.

At last a chance to circulate amongst friends old and new and to share a drink and a chat. Hopefully our speeches and presentations weren’t unduly long before we were ready to move into the dining suite and find our beautifully decorated tables, once again with Jean’s finishing touch. The four-course dinner was excellent, served with speed and skill, and soon the strains of the Chicago Teddy Bears were wafting down the corridor. As always, they played with expert musicianship interlaced with humour and provided us with great entertainment.

All too soon departure time approached, but not before many an enjoyable lunch party had been shared.