

## 2011 Exchange

We started with a showery welcome at Warrington Town Hall, followed this with a splendid summer's day in the Lakes, and finally a cold and gloomy departure from Manchester airport on the last day. In spite of the weather however, the warmth of friendship and mutual affection remained constant throughout this forty-third annual exchange visit.

With many thanks to Councillor and "Twinner" Ian Marks, we were able to welcome our 60-plus visitors in the 8th Century Palladian mansion behind its impressive "Golden Gates". The Mayor, Councillor Mike Biggin, himself acquainted with Meung through his days at Lymm Grammar School, gave a welcome, in English and confident French. This was followed by his Clerk who gave a wealth of facts and figures, historical, architectural and anecdotal, about the building, the town and the Mayoralty. A group photo on the Hall's back lawn was followed by an ample and tasty buffet. This was a very pleasant and interesting start to the five-day visit.



The next day, Thursday was spent in a variety of ways with host families, and allow me at this point to offer a sincere thank-you to all of you who welcomed our French friends into your homes.

Friday dawned with a clear blue sky and after an early start we were treated to a stimulating traverse of the Kirkstone Pass, from Ambleside to Patterdale, where we could admire the scenery and thank the Lord that we weren't driving up and down the steep, winding and narrow mountain road.

Soon after 11 o'clock we arrived in Glenridding and boarded the "Raven" for for a hour's scenic cruise up and down most of the length of this most beautiful of lakes. The boat's Master provided an informative commentary, yours truly again went to work translating his commentary (rivets and all) and all 120 of us soaked up the sunshine.

After the boat it was back onto the coach again for the short run to Rheged, the nearby Lakeland Discovery Centre, for lunch, shopping, a cinema viewing (unfortunately not the promised film about the lakes), and also active play for the under 10s.

All aboard again by five, then a smooth ride down the motorway back to Lymm. All-in-all a most enjoyable day's excursion in



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glorious weather and a wonderful chance for our French guests to experience some of the beauty of the Lake District.

After a pleasant Saturday morning and afternoon at leisure, time to put on jacket and tie, dress and dancing shoes, for our "Official Reception" Dinner and Dance, held once more at Mere, this year in the spacious James Braid Suite. An ample four-course meal, with wines from Spain and Chile preceded the toasts, led off by Councillor David Openshaw, Chairman of Lymm's Parish Council. This was followed by Président Jean-Claude Vivet who responded to Chairman Peter's toast to Meung, reproduced below by request of our visitors, and finally Maire Adjointe Isabelle Proust spoke on behalf of Madame le Maire Pauline Martin.

Meanwhile our four "Musiciennes Folkloriques", four mature ladies with the intriguing label "Jasper's Leap" had begun with a background of Scottish airs during the dessert course, so that very soon they were in a mood to whip us into some active dancing. The dos-à-dos, promenades, loop-the-loops and strip-the-willows found their enthusiasts and some talented new recruits among the under-5s, so that the compact dance floor was filled most of the time until the batteries ran out, bringing together French and English, grandparents and toddlers in an uninhibited spirit of enjoyment and bonhomie.



And so to the all-too-quick return home, handshakes, bisous and tears at the airport or by the car; old friendships renewed, new relationships forged, more happy memories, some new experiences.

**Adieu chers amis, à l'année prochaine à Meung-sur-Loire.**