

2014 Exchange

The 46th year of our annual exchange visits with Meung-sur-Loire gave us as much enjoyment and as warm a welcome as ever. Around seventy Twin Towners, with ages from four or less to four score and more spent five varied and thoroughly enjoyable days with our host families, new or familiar, at the end of May.



The showers abated just as we arrived at the Mairie, late, in the case of our coach party, who endured a stop-start crawl around Paris as most of France set off for their Fête de l'Ascension break. Hugs and bisous, fizz and nibbles, then off to "Chez Vous" for the first of many tasty meals. As usual, highlights of our all-too-brief stay were the Excursion and Official Reception and Dinner.

This year the excursion took us on a journey of discovery into peaceful and secret Sologne, close by, south of the Loire and off the usual tourist tracks. First to Romorantin, Sologne's "chef-lieu" main town, where the superbly organised Museum gave insights into every aspect of Solognot rural life, past and present, from the hunting lodges of rich Parisiens to the humble, basic skills of the "paysans" The Museum featured a temporary and topical exhibition devoted to the American Army camps in Sologne towards the end of World War I, of great interest to those who visited it. By contrast, just around the corner, the Matra automobile Museum brought us back into the world of 20th Century design and industry, with a large and impressive collection of Matra cars, classy saloons to F1 and Le Mans racers, alongside fascinating exhibits of engines and technical features. Highlights included the original model of the Renault Espace family vehicle, designed and developed in the early 1980s by Matra, then commercialised by Renault. The Museum premises were the site of the original Matra-Renault production line, employing hundreds of engineers and technicians in this unlikely rural setting until 2003, when Matra closed and Renault moved Espace production to its main facility.



Two contrasting visits wetted our appetites for an excellent lunch and further delights in the afternoon, in the form of a master chocolatemaker's and the historic Château de Villesavin. The first took us through all the processes that transformed the seeds in the cocoa pod into all kinds and tastes of chocolate creations, from tasty nibbles to a six feet tall edible statue of a shapely negress. After this we were transported back as far as the fourteenth century, with a guided tour of a classic French country château ; incidentally it was here that Président Michel Bret and Chantal were married – happy memories, no doubt.

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As usual the gathering on the final evening of our visit was lively, animated, and long. A champagne reception preceded an excellent five-course dinner, in turn followed by music and dancing to a dynamic duo, called Batt-Clav, French code for drums and keyboard.

As we "old-uns" settled into digestive conversation, our cohort of youngsters jiggled and bounced around the dance-floor with multi-lingual delight, twinning in action! There was just time next morning for a stroll around the quiet streets and the animated market stalls of a Sunday in Meung, then, all-too-soon, more hugs and kisses, but now with the odd tear we had to say "Au Revoir" until next Spring. We returned home, tired but happy, with a host of warm memories to take us through to next April.

