

***“They came, they saw, they loved it ! “***

“Oh, to be in England, now that April’s there!”. My quoting Robert Browning’s famous poem at our Official Reception Dinner, our French guests’ last evening, had a two-fold significance. Firstly I wanted to reflect the overwhelming impression given by our visitors that they had thoroughly enjoyed their all-too-brief stay in the sunny and verdant, albeit chilly, north-west of England. I also wanted to underline the nostalgia that very many of us feel for our respective Twin Town, after a few or very many visits, and with the prospect of returning there the following year.

Over sixty adults and a dozen or so youngsters arrived early on the evening of Tuesday April 18<sup>th</sup>, more or less on time in spite of the tedious M6, to be submerged in the warm welcomes of their hosts for the next four nights. After a restorative meal, a good night’s sleep and “une grasse matinée”, around 150 hosts and guests met up next morning in the picturesque surroundings of Lymm Hall, thanks to the kind hospitality of Paul and Mary Cottrill, before going their separate ways to lunch, an afternoon’s outing, then dinner with friends and families.

Thursday and most of Friday was “free time”, with individual or small group outings into Cheshire, Liverpool, Manchester, North Wales, the Lake District or elsewhere, then we assembled again on Friday evening at the Statham Lodge hotel for the Official Reception Dinner.

The recently decorated Gainsborough Room was enhanced by white and gold balloons, marking this first leg of our twinning’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, as around 130 French and English sat down to an excellent three-course meal, followed by a “Golden Wedding” cake, ceremonially cut by Président Michel and Chairman Peter, hand on hand on the knife.



Lucy “Jukes” Barlow, who had entertained us so well in 2015, sang and played an impressive range of French “chansons” during and after dessert, before toasts were proposed and gifts exchanged by Peter and Michel and by Lymm Parish Council’s Vice-Chairman John Bamforth, with wife Margaret a host this year, and Jean-Claude Vivet, an Adjoint to Meung’s Maire Pauline Martin, detained in France by the Presidential Election.



Youngsters stayed the pace best as the tempo and volume increased, with some impressive gyrations by the under-12s, whilst we “oldies” did our best to chat and our French friends, new and long-standing, told us how greatly they had enjoyed their visit and how much they would look forward to welcoming us “chez eux” for the return match in 2018.

All too soon it was morning and time to rendezvous to board their coach for the return journey, with many a hug, bisous and not a few tears, at the end of our 49<sup>th</sup> get-together, once again warm, friendly and well supported.



We all owe a great deal to the efforts of our Committee in planning, organising and running the visit, and to members who made this possible by supporting events and fund-raising activities over the previous two years.

***We plan to rendezvous in Meung in early summer 2018, with the core visit likely to run from Tuesday May 29<sup>th</sup> to Saturday June 2<sup>nd</sup>, a schools' holiday period, with a Bank Holiday here on Monday May 28<sup>th</sup>. Put the date on your calendar.***