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W.V.T.A.

The first 35 years

35

Visit to Valognes

Peter Rock writes

May 16th/18th 2003

For this, the 35th Anniversary visit, a party of 30 travelled to Valognes on the noon Barfleur sailing. Amongst us were several on their first trip to Valognes, but we were delighted to have with us Sue Hayter, who was present on the first official visit in 1968! Also travelling again were Trish and Arthur Shearlock, who were present on the 25th anniversary, and Denis and Margery Ryan, Margery joining the travellers for the first time since 1989 when she visited Valognes as Mayor of Wimborne. Anthony Oliver and Christine were with us again, Anthony representing the Wimborne Town Council.

Saturday morning saw us all at the Hotel de Ville where a large gathering heard the Wimborne contingent warmly welcomed by the Mayor, M.Leboyer, and by the President of the Valognes Twinners, Bernard Tardieu. Speeches were made and gifts exchanged. We were delighted to present to the Mayor of Valognes, an original painting of the North Door of the Minster, specially painted for us for the occasion, by Helen Sims, a Grade 9 student at Queen Elizabeth's School. Bernard Tardieu, a painter and engraver himself, presented Anthony Oliver and M. Leboyer with identical portraits of the two of them, standing side by side...Twinning personified!

A visit to the excellent Cite de la Mer exposition in Cherbourg on the Saturday afternoon, was followed in the evening by dinner hosted by the Mayor at the Hotel de l'Agriculture, a splendid affair as always, the warmth of the reception given to us being exceptional, and resulting in some hearty late evening singing led by Suzanne Fleury, with all her customary verve and good humour.

The luncheon provided on Sunday by the Valognes Twinners in la Salle du Complexe Sportif was another gastronomic delight, and we left on Sunday evening wondering how on earth we are going to emulate such hospitality next year! This was a really excellent, warm, friendly weekend. The weather was generally drear but I'm sure that none of us noticed! A good time was had by all!



The 2003 Wimborne Twinners



(L to R) Bernard Tardieu, Marcel Audouard, Anthony Oliver, Sue Hayter, Peter Rock and Maire M.Leboyer

In the beginning - 1968 and before

Our friends in Valognes believe that the idea of a link between our towns was first mooted in 1966 at a meeting of businessmen organised to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings! Although the Twinning Charter between Wimborne Minster and Valognes is dated 1968 there had been several prior visits. In the very early days the individuals involved in promoting the twinning idea included M. Godefroy, M. Lepelley (La Presse de la Manche) and the Wimborne Town Councillors Messrs Maiden and Purchase. Those two prime movers on this side of the Channel were instrumental in encouraging members of various groups, clubs and associations in the town to become actively involved. For instance the Grammar School provided the translator in the person of Colin Powell; Sue Hayter and Kay Burleigh were active members representing the Ladies Circle; Ken Perkins, the area Youth Organiser, was a prominent early member, and there were representatives from other organisations and from local agricultural, retail and commercial enterprises. From these early enthusiasts the first committee was formed and it was this committee who made the early journeys to la Manche. The wheels of the Twinning machine were thus in motion.

France in the Spring of 1968 was in a state of turmoil. A press report dated May 7 describes Paris as having seen the worst street-fighting since the 1944 Liberation. 30000 students were in pitched battle with the police - bricks and Molotov cocktails versus tear gas. The student leader became well-known, one Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Another report May 21 describes France as being at a virtual standstill with up to 10 million workers having joined with the students; grievances included poor state salaries, censorship, discrimination and centralisation. President de Gaulle reacted strongly and positively, dissolved the National Assembly and announced a referendum stating that he would stand-down dependent on the result. In a general election at the end of June, de Gaulle obtained a landslide victory; to quote one report - 'The President, whose regime was all but dead a month ago, has a solid vote of confidence'

Against that background around 20 Wimburnians led by the Urban District Council Chairman, Mr Henry Purchase, made the first official trip to Valognes, by coach and the Southampton-Cherbourg ferry. A 'small crowd cheered them away and the Vicar said prayers for the visit's success' (we don't get that anymore!). They arrived mid-afternoon Thursday May 23 1968 and M. Henri Cornat, Senator Mayor of Valognes welcomed them warmly saying 'you will not be troubled by the events of the moment, and neither will we'. The weekend was a great success and a French person was alleged to have said 'de Gaulle would cry if he knew that we had welcomed the English so well' The May 30 edition of the Wimborne and Ferndown Journal carried a centre-page spread under the headline 'the French forgot their troubles and gave us such a wonderful, warm, welcome'.

The return visit took place during the weekend of September 28/29 the occasion being tinged with sadness due to the death of M. Cornat just a few weeks after the May event. The French delegation was then led by their new Mayor, Marcel Audouard. At a 5-course dinner at the Masonic Hall, all present stood in silent memory of M. Cornat after which M. Audouard spoke of 'M. Cornat's dear wish to see this twinning made a reality'. M. Audouard went on to pledge that 'all of us, in respect to his memory, will do our utmost to strengthen the links of friendship which exist between the two towns, and by this means to develop the widest range of exchanges'. By this time the Chairman of the Wimborne U.D.C. was Cllr R H Rodway and he was presented with a 'huge bottle of Calvados' by M. Chavanne de Dalmassy, vice-president of the Valognais twinnings. 'Vive Wimborne' he said as he handed it over. Apparently Mr Rodway was a teetotalter and there's no record as to what happened to the Calvados!

The In-Between Years

1969 - 1973

There is no detailed record of these early years but in 1973 the Association lost one of its most energetic and enthusiastic founder members when Bernard Inman passed away. During that same year there were both-way visits by football teams and parties of schoolchildren. Also the Scouts went on to French soil. It was notified that a 'Square de Wimborne' would be a named area in Valognes. Chairmen/Presidents during this period included pioneers Bill Williams, Denis Upstone, Bernard Inman, Henry Purchase and Tom Budden.

1974 - 1978

Footballers and school parties continued as prominent twinnings during this period. Wimborne Square was baptised in 1974 together with a 'bar de Valognes' in Wimborne. Folk-dancers, singers and farmers were also crossing the channel and in 1977 a Valognes visit coincided with the Queen's Silver Jubilee - there is record of "lusty singing of French songs but with the English relying heavily on 'Jerusalem'!" 1978 saw the 10th anniversary, celebrated in Valognes, where the Wimborne party was 'entertained supremely well' and 'with all the warmth and welcome of old friends' On this occasion Mr Purchase presented the hosts with a glass candleholder engraved with the Minster and with a 10 year commemoration. Stuart Haggett was President throughout this period.

1979 - 1983

Much sadness during this period on both sides of the Channel resulting from the death of Henry Purchase in 1980, tributed as 'one of the founding fathers of the T.A, to which he gave long and inestimable service'. 1981 saw our first lady president, a certain Sue Hayter, happily still active in the Association today and regarded with affection and respect. In 1982 there is a reference to a new County Association of Dorset Twinned Towns, attended by Tricia Shearlock (still able to enjoy the 35th celebrations in 2003). In 1983 there is note of the departure, owing to promotion, of Stuart Haggett, French master at Canford, past - Chairman of the Association, and a mega-organiser of visits to France

1984 -1988

1984 sees the first reference to the Wimborne Folk Festival where the 'Valognes twinnings performed their French country dances with great verve'. In a September trip to Valognes, the Wimburnians were received by the Mayor, Mme Heinis (still involved during the 35th celebrations). A number of 'firsts' are recorded in 1985 - the coach going all the way from Wimborne to Valognes (i.e. no baggage-handling - a much appreciated development), a wine-tasting evening, and a French film (Le Boucher de Chabrol, shown at Canford School). The 1987 Officers included Treasurer, Colin Joseph, sadly lost to us recently.

Around 1987 there was a recorded lull in interest from Valognes but a quick resuscitation enabled the 20th anniversary to be celebrated in Valognes where Mme. Heinis was presented with a shield showing the coats of arms of both towns.

Presidents during this period comprised Archie Eales, Terry Piper and Edward Stanham together with Colette Pariot in Valognes

1989 - 1993.

Adding to the more normal 'exchangers' during this period, records show those from the fire, police and hospital professions. The 1990 list of officers gives a first sighting of Michael Evans and this coincides with a reference to cycling, and the 100mile 'Transmanche' event in particular (although the record does refer to Michael and Valerie 'jibbing at the full route'). In 1993 Michael becomes President and plays a major role thereafter, not least in developing the newsletter to its present standard. In Valognes, Suzanne 'Swan' Pesnel is installed as President. The Wind Band played in Wimborne, appropriately arriving in a hurricane! 25th celebrations in Valognes included Mayor Anthony Oliver, and Christine, who were amongst those making a successful landing at Tatihou (almost as if practising for the following year's D.Day anniversary!). Town banners were exchanged.

1994 - 1998.

Peter Rock's name appears in 1994 when there was a reciprocal '25th' visit to Wimborne led by Swan Pesnel and Anne Heinis. Valognes sold their produce at the Folk Festival for the first time, and a local bagpiper played at their 50th Liberation Celebration. 1995 sees Oonagh Linehan amongst the officers, becoming President in 1997 coinciding with Suzanne Fleury's election to the similar post in Valognes. In 1996 a squad of Wimborne runners took part in the Valognes half-marathon and Peter Rock led a gardens visit to la Manche. A party led by M. Leboyer, Maire de Valognes was here for the Association's 30th anniversary.

1999 - 2003

A reciprocal visit to Valognes in 1999 when they gathered together all Presidents since inauguration. In 2000 Wimborne presented 103 young trees as part of a Dorset/la Manche donation following the great storm which caused so much earlier devastation. 2001 saw Helen Brooks in the President role and our first participation in the Valognes Xmas Fair.. In 2002 Bernard Tardieu takes office in Valognes and a party visit Wimborne for the barbecue evening - and so to the present year with Peter Rock installed.

May 1968



Henry Purchase, U.D.C. Chairman making the address on Saturday 25 May 1968 during the civic visit to Valognes (text below)



In the church at Valognes - Sue Hayter in the centre

Quoted below is the text of the inaugural address given by Mr Henry Purchase; it is felt that his aspirations expressed at that time, would be unchanged today

It is with very real pleasure that I rise to respond on behalf of the citizens of Wimborne Minster in the County of Dorset, England.

It is now many months since a twinning between our two towns was envisaged and I have had the pleasure of meeting some of your leaders both over here in your lovely town of Valognes, and at home in Wimborne when M.Hebert, Mme.Le Marchand and M. Edouard visited us last year.

My wife and I were also most courteously and cordially received by you when we visited Valognes last August. At last the day has arrived when I have the honour of leading a Civic Delegation to your town composed of some members of my Council, also Mr Williams and Mr Inman - Chairman and Secretary of the Wimborne Committee elected to arrange interchanges between Societies, Clubs and Associations in our two towns - and other ladies and gentlemen representing those Associations.

Thus here and now begins the Twinning Association between Valognes and Wimborne Minster, an arrangement which I believe and trust will bring our peoples in a close association with each other through visits not only on club or association level but by reciprocal visits by our towns' inhabitants to each others homes.

M. Cornat, I have learned with pride of some of the work which you have done for Valognes, for la Manche and for France. It gives me great pleasure to be associated with you in the joining of our two towns and with God's help this, in some small way, will, I am certain, serve to unite the peoples of our two great countries more closely together.

There is one thing further which I must say on behalf of my delegation : it is to thank you all for the friendship shown in your most cordial reception of us; your hospitality to us has been most generous. We hope to receive a Civic Delegation from Valognes next Autumn. I pray that you will yourself be able to lead it and that we may repay to you at Wimborne Minster, in the County of Dorset, at least some of the kindness and generosity which you have extended to us here in Valognes.



The Twinning Charter is signed

It wasn't all plain sailing in 1968, in fact there was an incident of no sailing at all!

The wife of Councillor John Smith joined her husband towards the end of the weekend and they decided to stay in France a little longer : but this coincided with an (oft-repeated) problem at Cherbourg Port and whereas the main party left on the last boat prior to a blockade, Mr & Mrs Smith were unable to get back.

Mr Smith had a fish and chip business in Leigh Road and a photograph in the Evening Echo displayed a notice placed on the shop door 'Sorry. Regret closed. Stranded in France. Back as soon as possible' !