

French 20th Anniversary Edition

A message from our Chairman, David Minns



2015 was a celebration year for our French friends in Montbazon and, from the experience of those members that went on the visit, our link with Montbazon is as strong as ever.

This autumn, a long-standing member of the Association, Charles Myers died towards the end of October. Charles and his wife Pauline have been members for 20 years, regularly visiting and hosting our friends in Montbazon. He will be sadly missed.

The highlight of 2015 was, of course, our visit to our French friends in Montbazon to celebrate their 20 years of friendship with us. This was an extremely successful and enjoyable visit.



The Mayor Councillor Mark Reed, our President for this year, was extremely supportive and accompanied us on the visit, together with Councillor Noelle Hones, Deputy Mayor and also Deputy President.

The Mayor of Montbazon, Bernard Revêche, and the Committee of the Jumelage, together organised a memorable visit. The Mayor's Civic reception in impressive surroundings at the Château d'Artigny was a very enjoyable highlight. The last night's Soirée Festive 'en route to the Antilles' was fantastic, entirely organised by the Jumelage Committee. Everyone was able to let their hair down and thoroughly enjoy themselves on this final evening, strengthening our bonds of friendship with the Montbazonnais.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dave Williams and Sheila Hornsby, and all the members of the social committee for their hard work in putting on enjoyable social events, thereby raising the funds we need to entertain our French friends when they come to visit us this summer.

Thanks again to all the executive committee for their ongoing commitment in helping run the Association. In particular, thanks are due to Jude Ripley who, as secretary, ensures the smooth running of the Association.

I would like to give special thanks to Judy Withyman and Christine Minns for putting our annual French Connection together and to all those who contributed the articles and photos. Judy and Christine hope you enjoy this edition.

STOP PRESS: Montbazon visit to Brentwood - 19 to 23 August 2016

Finally, we are always pleased to see your friends and contacts who show interest in our local activities and visits to France. Please encourage them to come along to our social events. They will always be made very welcome.

May I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year.

Fête des Rois: 10th January by Sue Sanders

The bright lights of the Belli Centre greeted us as we arrived for this annual Town Twinning evening of celebration. Through the windows we could see a packed hall of 60 guests thronging around the stations of Neil's 'Ice Breaker' quiz.

New faces, familiar faces, hungry faces. Everyone laughing and chatting. From the kitchen came the delicious smells of our Kings' Feast cooking.

Our President, The Mayor of Brentwood, Cllr. Vicky Davies welcomed us and there followed a solemn tribute and a moment of silence in memory of those who had lost their lives in Paris during the terrorist attacks of the previous week. Our condolences would be passed on to the Marie at Montbazon.

Then we could feast. 10 tables sharing Chicken Marengo with vegetables, prepared as usual by Sheila's excellent team of cooks.

More quizzes followed, tickets for the many raffle prizes were quickly sold out and then the galettes and cream were served, each containing a 'fève' to be found by those 'Rois' who could win and wear the crown for the evening.

Groans as the quizzes were solved and scored. The 10 crowned kings were photographed for posterity. The raffle was drawn and then we and our new found friends stumbled out into the darkness, Jenny clutching a pottery chicken full of jam. (Don't ask!).

We found our chariot home with the aid of a head torch and agreed once again what a super event this was, and is, to promote new and old friendships and raise a substantial amount of funds towards our Association.

Bonne Année



Quiz Night: 21st March by Brian Davies



This evening was a resounding success, great attendance and the 73 quizzers taking part, and a great time was had by all. The evening was led by quiz master Colin Ewan and his wife Barbara who used her excellent maths skills to keep the score board. Midway through the evening we enjoyed a fish and chip supper that was provided by Chris's Fish Bar. Valerie Fletcher, our treasurer, did a superb job and acted as MC for the evening in our chairman David's absence.

Colin kept the evening going in a very professional and humorous way, and there was a mixture of questions aimed at the professional and the not so professional quizzers. We also played a last man standing round. For the uninitiated this involved those taking part standing up, paying £1 and then being given true and false cards; if you were correct you remained standing and moved on to the next question. The last man standing received half the takings and the other half went to the association.

My own table consisted of my daughter and son-in-law, grandson and their friends. We thought we were doing ok and then played our joker on the history round. Well, this was a disaster, not as knowledgeable as we thought we were; but we battled on and to our amazement finished as the winners, not I must add due to my contribution but the prize of a bottle of wine for each member of the team were well received.

The raffle was quickly and efficiently drawn by Monica and Valerie, and at the end of evening I heard many complimentary remarks that people had enjoyed themselves and I am sure that from the convivial atmosphere of the evening we will be seeing many of these folk at future events.

Blackmore Ramble: 15th July by Jude Ripley

On Wednesday 15th July, about two dozen people met for the walk at 7.30 at Blackmore Village Hall. Tim the dog, ably assisted by his owners, Colin and Sue Miers, led us across the road into a field running round the North of the village. We were fortunate to see yellowhammers, chaffinches, blue tits and great tits, as well as some horses. We then crossed the road leading to Norton Heath and came back to the village via a very over-grown path round the edge of a field of rape. We had to cross a field with cattle, including three bulls, which made some of us extremely nervous! But at 8.30 precisely, we arrived safely at the Prince Albert public house, where we enjoyed a very welcome drink and the unique Ploughman's platter served by Laurie. Thanks go to Colin, Sue and Tim for leading the walk once again, and for organising a fine, dry evening this year!



Coffee Morning: 10th September by Christine Minns

Coffee and cakes galore.

We were delighted that the Mayor, Mark Reed, and Deputy Mayor, Noelle Hones, were among the thirty people who made their way to our door on Saturday 10 September. They had both joined the visit to Montbazon so had plenty to talk about. All could sample the many cakes made by willing volunteers, enjoy a cup of coffee and try their luck with the raffle. There was quite a buzz as members got together to chat about the recent visit to Montbazon and look at a selection of photos that Jude and Dave had kindly made into a slide show.



Film Night: 10th October – Camille Redouble - by Sue Kortlandt



I love watching foreign films with subtitles, trying to see how much I understand. This was my first, very enjoyable experience of a Brentwood/Montbazon film evening. The home-made cakes and coffee got us all chatting, before the “serious” business. Camille Redouble was described as a comedy. Naomie Lvovsky, writer and director, also played the lead role of Camille Vaillant. Her partner of 25 years has left her for a younger woman; she is very angry and upset. At a New Year's Eve party hosted by an old school friend, she gets blind drunk, collapses and wakes up in hospital, to find that she is 16 again and her parents have come to take her home.

She then finds herself re-living that period of her life, trying desperately to put right what she sees as her mistakes. However, she cannot help falling in love again with Eric, getting pregnant with their daughter and is unable to prevent her mother from dying suddenly. Of course, the situation resolves itself when she wakes up – back in hospital, realising that it had all been a dream. Or had it? In Camille's “dream” she became emotionally attached to a school teacher and gave him a keepsake, asking him to look after it for her. She now visits him and finds that he has, indeed, kept the envelope - for 25 years! An intriguing twist! Camille now realises that she cannot change the past and must get on with life as it is.

So this was a comedy, but with a serious message underlying it. I enjoyed the film and look forward to more!

French Artists' Visit: June

Although the artists' visit was not part of the Jumelage, it resulted from a meeting that took place when the French visited us in 2014. Thirteen French artists from Montbazon, including some members of the Jumelage, came to Brentwood at the very end of May to take part in a packed 5-day programme of activities and trips organised by the Brentwood Art Society. It was a most successful visit which has led to an invitation to members of the Brentwood Art Society to take part in a return trip to Montbazon. This has forged a link which it is hoped will strengthen the bonds between Brentwood and Montbazon.



Evening of Fun: 14th November by Christine Minns



A great gathering for this social event – 40 members assembled at the Fane Hall to take part in a variety of games and quizzes organised by the social committee.

Before we began, we stood for a minute's silence in memory of those who tragically died the day before in the terrorist attacks in Paris, and in support of our friends in Montbazou.

We started off with a picture quiz, the four categories arranged round the walls of the hall: we had to guess the decade when certain films were released, certain events occurred, the birthdates of women of note, and to identify 10 towns in France. We could work individually or as teams.

We had barely got our brains together after that when another quiz sheet was handed out – guessing the names of underground stations in London which had been translated into French! Quite a challenge. Who guessed 'Digue'?

We then gave our brains a rest at the interval for refreshment – a substantial buffet of sandwiches and snacks prepared by members.

After the break we had a competition to roll a pound coin to win a bottle of whisky. The coin landing nearest the bottle won the prize.

Then back to work again to finish with a game of Bingo – or Loto in French. Emmanuelle called out the numbers in French, supported by an English translation (fortunately!) by Capucine. A completed line was a 'quine' and a full house was 'carton plein'. Thanks must go to the committee for a really successful and enjoyable evening.

Pre-Festive Gathering : 6th December by David Minns

Twenty-three members turned up for the Pre-Festive Gathering on Sunday 6 December. This was hosted by Heide Brenke who kindly opened her Hutton home to us all.

We gathered together to sample an inviting spread of Stollen, mince pies and other sweetmeats, washed down with freshly prepared mulled wine.

It was good to see new members attending and there was lots of talking and getting to know each other, as well as renewing friendships. It was an opportunity to catch up on members' news and made a pleasant relaxed start to the festive season.



2015 Visit to our French Friends in Montbazon

Thursday 20th August: Visit to Chenonceau by Rosemary Smith



The first day of our visit looked like being a very full day. The sun shone and the sky was blue. Peter and the coach were ready and we were soon *en route* for a river cruise on the Cher and a visit to the Château of Chenonceau.



A bilingual commentary on the cruise boat told us about some environmental aspects of the river and we wondered if we'd seen the monster fish

that had been introduced to control the number of catfish. But no, maybe it's as elusive as the Loch Ness Monster! Of course, as soon as we sighted the château with its fairy-tale towers and beautiful arches spanning the river the cameras were jostling for position.



After getting our tickets and instruction from Michelle, there was plenty to see in the extensive grounds before we all met at the Orangery restaurant for a tasty 3 course meal with wine and coffee in very elegant surroundings.

There were shaggy and smooth breeds of donkeys, young goats and a fantastic *potager*, the vegetables and flowers of which were the envy of all us gardeners. After lunch, a leisurely wander around

the formal gardens of Catherine de Medici and Diane de Poitiers was a treat to the senses of colour and design – the real forte of French garden designers.

At the appointed time the group with audio-guides set off on an exploration of the many rooms of this exquisite château – beautifully decorated and well furnished. After the first few rooms I was struggling to cope with the crowds, so I found a quiet seat in the Gallery, listened to the whole audio short guide and then had a leisurely wander through all the rooms including one where some conservators were working on the restoration of the large portrait of Louis XIV, which he had presented to commemorate his visit in 1650. On the top floor of the Gallery were display boards with summaries of the histories (in English) of the six most important women who had lived in the château since it was built by Tomas Bohier and his wife Katherine Briconnet in the 16th century: Diane de Poitiers, Catherine de Medici, Louise of Lorraine, Louise Dupin, Marguerite Pelouze and Simone Menier. The château has a varied history through the years with its royal connections, intrigues and periods of bad fortune. Like many of our stately homes, part was converted to a hospital during the First World War, but today it stands proud!



The whole day was a wonderful start to our 20th anniversary visit!

Friday 21st August: La Chocolaterie by Diane Mathews

Have you ever seen a chocolate teapot?

On Friday 21 August – the second day of our French Town Twinning trip in Montbazou – all 32 of us duly arrived at the coach in the town to be taken to visit the chocolate-making factory “La Chocolaterie de Bracieux”.

Our tour guide, who spoke excellent English, took us into an area – a recreation of the forest - to show us how large the trees grow, and to see the cocoa pods and how they are still harvested by hand! Then we had a short film-show about the island of São Tomé, where this particular chocolaterie obtains its cocoa, and the farming of the cocoa beans, followed by a chocolate mousse-tasting. We were then led on to a chocolate moulding demonstration – followed by the obligatory shop where we also saw a full-sized chocolate moulded sports car and a chocolate moulded stag. One of our party wanted to buy a couple but he decided that would be too dear!!!



And yes, you know, we did also manage to find a chocolate teapot. DELICIOUS.

Friday 21st August: Pique-nique (picnic) at Bracieux by John Smith

In many ways it was a standard (very informal, rather noisy, almost riotous) Montbazonnais picnic, although the build-up to it seemed to be cloaked in mystery. I thought it would be held somewhere *en route* between Bracieux (of the chocolate factory) and Cormery (of the micro-brewery)..But no – it took place at Bracieux, just across the road from the chocolate factory. It then became clear why the French tour of the factory (lasting an hour) took place as soon as we arrived, and we English were sent off to explore the town and get ourselves a coffee or something before we had our tour, starting at 1.30 a.m. So – when we came out from that we were straight across the main road to where the tables were now set out, in the shade beneath small trees and alongside a slow-moving river.

Our hosts had brought along an enormous picnic hamper which caused Peter a little difficulty in shoe-horning it into the luggage compartment of the coach. Half of the compartment was taken up by trestle tables and benches from the Grange Rouge – clearly we were going to be using them for the picnic.

Very fortunately the trees gave us good shade on a hot sunny day (32 or 33 degrees). The content of individual lunches varied widely, depending on what the hosts chose to bring. We enjoyed a 3 course (with wines) mini-banquet of starter, main and dessert. There was lots of chat with all those present, lots of photographs taken, so a very good time was had by all. Once we were all filled up and chatted-out, we set to the task of repacking the hampers, then folding up the trestle tables and benches, and helping to get all of these back to the coach and packed away into the luggage compartment.



Following that, we all got into the coach, together with our purchases from the chocolate factory and set off on the hour-long journey to the brewery. But that is another story!!

Friday 21st August: The Brasserie de l'Aurore in Cormery by Sheila Hornsby

For a while Roland Kanoor of the Brentwood Brewing Company had been considering the possibility that the Town Twinning Association could perhaps find a similar artisanal '*brasserie*' in the Montbazon area of the Loire Valley. Initial attempts to make contact with the Brasserie de l'Aurore in Cormery, a few kilometres east of Montbazon, had not come to fruition, but as luck would have it a trip to the brewery, located in the old station building, was included in the programme for this summer's visit.

This was a great opportunity to taste the beers, les Turones, and to meet the owner and brewer Emmanuel Alfaia. We explained to him that a Brentwood brewery was interested in a link and he kindly presented us with a pack of 4 beers as a gift for Roland and his colleagues. This was gratefully received and a reciprocal gift was delivered to Cormery by ourselves at the end of October. Further discussions with Emmanuel's English speaking wife Christelle revealed that she is very interested in stocking beers from other small breweries, such as Brentwood, so we are optimistic that an exchange of products may well be possible in the future.



Hopefully this will be another success story in our quest to widen the scope of our Association in order to foster commercial, cultural, educational and sporting benefits for our two communities.

Saturday 22nd August: Official Civic Welcome by Noelle Hones, Deputy Mayor



reception. We were greeted by the Mayor of Revêche, and Sylvie Giner his deputy who gave told us about the town.

The Mayor of Brentwood, Mark Reed, and the speeches, then read the Charter which was other's language. Next, the band - dressed as the Marseillaise and God Save the Queen.

Having arrived in Montbazon after a tiring but enjoyable journey by coach and ferry, Jon and I spent a wonderful evening in the care of our host Aline Beaudeau who served us a wonderful cassoulet – très agréable!

The next and sunny, we (Mairie) for



morning, which was bright travelled to the Town Hall the official welcome Montbazon, Bernard us a tour of the Town Hall and

Mayor of Montbazon gave signed in April 1995 in each British guardsmen - played

We felt most welcome, especially as the square had been decorated with flowers and an English telephone box.



Saturday 22nd August: Anniversary Dinner at Château d'Artigny by Pam Richards



champagne and aperitifs in the
the weather was kind to us.

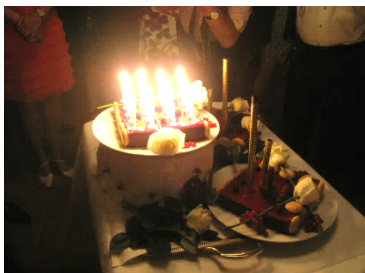
Our five-course meal was a
celebrate our 20 years of
poached egg and asparagus
with Greek-style vegetables,
and raspberry dessert and coffee. All washed down with a 2013 Bordeaux Superieur, Château la Mothe du Barry. Excellent food, venue and congeniality.

What a venue! For those members seeing Château d'Artigny for the first time, they could not fail to be impressed. Bought by the Coty family in 1912 and rebuilt over twenty years, the château, set in 25 hectares, is now a 5-star hotel with spa.



Everyone in their best 'Bib
and Tucker' enjoyed
grounds – and thankfully,

superb and delicious way to
Twinning friendship. A
starter, followed by bream
goats' cheese, a chocolate



The Anniversary cake with 20 candles was a triumph.

Here's to the next 20 years!

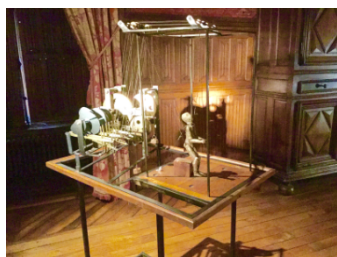
Leisure Time

Visit to the Château de Candé by Frances and Rob Cowling



the castle library and taking up three
Skinner organ, it is one of twenty
world and has been restored in
lots to see in this castle, not least an
mechanical models by the artist
occupy a very large area and contain a
sixty or so roe deer and 150 species of

We visited this small castle with our host Catherine. Built in the 16th century in French Renaissance style it had many owners and underwent many changes. It reached the height of its fame in 1937 when Wallis Simpson and the Duke of Windsor were married there. Wallis Simpson lived at the castle before the wedding and there are displays of her wardrobe including hats and handbags. Installed in



floors is an American made
remaining models in the
working order. There was
exhibition of curious
Antoine Birot. The grounds
number of unusual trees,
nesting birds. We found the

Wallis Simpson and Duke of Windsor link the most fascinating and for us introduced a new perspective on this couple.

Visit to the Fortress of Montbazou by Frances and Rob Cowling

On the Saturday we went with our host family to the Fortresse de Montbazou. This 10th century keep stands on the hill overlooking Montbazou. In its day this fortress was a domineering feature of the landscape and one of the homes of the "Faucon Noir" the ruthless Count of Anjou. We entered the fortress and immediately witnessed a trebuchet actually firing at the wall of the keep. Luckily the shot in this case was a spherical plastic container of water weighing about 5 Kg and it crashed into the wall of the keep dramatically disintegrating with water spraying in all directions.



Also in the grounds were many stalls illustrating artistry, building techniques, metalworking, weaponry, games of that time and clothing. I was able to fire a replica crossbow and try out many of the skills used at that time. This keep is famous for its underground passages and we were not disappointed with a tour that led us down into a cave full of old methods of torture.

The replica bakery made its own bread and sold what might be best described as 10th century "fast food". The grounds do host various displays of medieval fighting and life. However, one incongruous feature is the 9 meter copper Virgin Mary and child on top of the keep, this was erected in 1866 before the archaeologists were able to reveal the extent and importance of this keep, reputedly the oldest in France. This was a brilliant visit, the guides spoke English and fortress staff were so enthusiastic in their work, we learnt so much and were able to get involved.

"The first time that we have seen a trebuchet fired and used a crossbow!"

Visit to Chédigny by Jude Ripley

On our free afternoon, our hosts took us to Chédigny, which is the only garden village in France to be classified as "remarkable". It is situated in the Indois valley, near Tours, in Indre et Loire.

Several years ago, the mayor had the idea of replacing the pavements with flowerbeds and planting climbing roses to spread over the walls of the houses. Parked cars were no longer allowed in the pedestrianised main street. The inhabitants embraced the Mayor's



initiative and have planted their own gardens to blend and harmonise with the municipal flowers, so the overall effect is like walking into one huge garden!



The village has attracted artists of various kinds, who exhibit and sell their work from the lovely old buildings. The wash-house has been renovated and now overlooks the beautifully planted banks of the river. What an attractive and peaceful place to have a leisurely stroll!

"Interesting visits, lovely food – a very special celebration of 20 years"

Visit to the Château du Clos Lucé and the Parc Leonardo da Vinci by Evina Montgomery



In 1516, at the age of sixty-four Leonardo da Vinci, military engineer, architect, anatomist, painter, scientist, mathematician, a rigorous observer of nature and producer of wonderful celebrations for King François I, accepted the royal invitation to move from Rome to live in the Clos Lucé, in Amboise, the summer residence of the Kings of France.

Here, with an allowance from François of 700 écus a year, he was free to dream and work on many of his passions devoting much time to perfecting his prolific inventions.

The Château, built in 1471, has seven furnished rooms restored to 15th – 18th century elegance, open to the public. In these rooms Leonardo entertained François I, important people and a great many skilled artists and craftsmen who came to visit him. The four-roomed basement is devoted to forty of his inventions, centuries ahead of his time, the forerunners of many things we take for granted today.

In the Parc Leonardo da Vinci, surrounding the Château, shady paths, under great plane, pine and yew trees, his creations and inventions are displayed in this garden setting. Here waterfalls, springs, a lake and his innovated triangulated bridge show his great bond with nature. Sixteen giant machines, animated models, forty translucent canvasses, three and four metres high, are carefully situated throughout.



Now Quiet on the Western Front by Tony Maule

The plan for our free day was to visit Old Tours with Pierre. Christiane was busy with preparations for the evening. I had mentioned to Pierre that I was keen to go to church and Pierre knew of a church where Mass was at 11.15 am. Having parked, with some difficulty, near the town centre we first walked by a very old church, no longer open. More an ancient monument, it had been built in 525AD, even before St Augustine arrived in England in 597 AD. We then moved on to the church where I was to spend an hour whilst Mark and Pierre went to the central square in search of a cup of coffee.



They collected me at 12.15 pm and we strolled around admiring the buildings, many built after the war. Tours was badly damaged by bombing during the war. British bombing I was told. Evidently, Tours was a centre full of German troops and equipment. The bombing was to prevent their use in Normandy after D day.

We eventually found ourselves in rue du Grand Marché, looking at a restaurant called Le Marché Gourmand. It had quite a narrow frontage but turned out to occupy four floors. They provided us with a lunch to remember. Afterwards we returned to Montbazou for some tea in the garden. This was followed by horizontal therapy in preparation for the last evening of our visit.

To end a fascinating visit l'Auberge du Prieuré lets you discover the taste of original recipes from the time of Leonardo. A really beautiful and historical place to visit.

An Evening with our Hosts by Anne Long

When the French Musicians came to Brentwood in 2014 to take part in the Brentwood Arts Festival Malcolm and I provided accommodation for two ladies, our exchange host Valérie Milcent and her friend Hélène. We had a good time with a lot of laughs.

This year, on our visit to Montbazon, Hélène and her husband Didier asked us to spend an evening with them as a 'thank you'. It was indeed a splendid evening. They have a delightful house with a beautiful view overlooking the valley of the Indre. The food was delicious and the wine flowed, as it usually does when visiting anyone involved with the Jumelage.



We talked and talked, discussing frivolous French and English celebrity gossip as well pressing matters of the day. We tried not to mention the 'problem' at Calais but the question of the European Union came up. This was very interesting to find out their thoughts on the possibility that the UK may depart from the EU. Whatever happens, we determined that the Twin Towns of Montbazon and Brentwood would not be affected. So, we can all breathe a sigh of relief on that!!

Walking back to our host's house well past midnight under a very dark sky full of stars it was pointed out, to my embarrassment, that I had spent half the evening extolling the delights, pleasure, and the absolute necessity that Hélène and Didier just had to join the Jumelage so that they could visit us next year in Brentwood. We will now have to wait to see if my powers of persuasion worked or if it was just dismissed by the fact that I had partaken of too many glasses of wine!!

Visit to Amboise by John Saxton

Most of us associate the genius, Leonardo da Vinci, only with Italy, so we were astonished to find that he had lived out the last three years of his life, under the patronage of King Francis I, from 1516 to 1519, in the stately Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise, next to the River Loire. Amboise was then a magnet for Europe's intelligentsia. The château is attractive but compact; it presents a wondrous contrast to the terraces of humbler dwellings sharing the steep, narrow lane. Canals criss-cross the tranquil, wooded grounds. Much original art, mostly portraiture, and furniture were on display in the impressive bed chambers. Kitchens and dining rooms held models, drawings and film animations of the genius's inventions. Outside, suspended in the trees were translucent reproductions of The Master's paintings, including, of course, La Gioconda or Mona Lisa. Pedaloos, hired out on the system of waterways around the gardens, using paddles according to da Vinci's design, were crewed by giggling visitors, heedless of ever soggy trousers.



Huge thanks to our Montbazon hosts, who planned the day to give us treats all the way. Much of the journey was alongside the picturesque Loire. We parked the car in the shadow of the riverside castle, once the king's residence. With its spiral carriageway to the turret top and structural integration of rock cliff, it will reward a proper visit - one day. Traditional tunes from an organ grinder accompanied our excellent pavement café lunch, while petits enfants delightedly accepted the invitation to

crank the organ. On the ten-minute stroll between half-timbered cottages to Château du Clos Lucé, troglodyte dwellings could be glimpsed in the sheer cliff face behind them. A notice declared one of them to have been used as a shelter during WWII.

A Visit to Villaines by Monica Donegan

Claude, my hostess, and I set out early on Sunday morning on a mystery tour of the area. It had rained during the night and we set off with appropriate wet weather clothes.

We travelled west towards Azay le Rideau. We stopped to admire the home of Honoré de Balzac in Saché. The writer visited this château many times between 1823 and 1848 because it was owned by friends of his parents. His novel “Le lys dans la vallée” is set along the 3km stretch of the River Indre between Saché and Port de Ruan. We continued on, reaching the village of Villaines. Its many troglodyte caves along the roadside were an important feature for the artisans of the village.

Villaines is famous for baskets and willow work of all kinds. The cooperative was founded in 1849 by the local curate to help keep local basket weavers in business. This became France's oldest agricultural cooperative. Today there are around 60 basket weavers in the village who grow, strip and craft their own work. They can be identified by the sign of a basket hanging outside their house.



We toured a large showroom with a wide variety of objects ranging from small place mats to mannequins with wicker head-dresses. There were cribs for babies, shopping trolleys, armchairs and baskets of all shapes and sizes.

We strolled along the river bank to admire the numerous varieties of willow growing in the nearby fields. The workers cut the willow during the winter months, sort it by size and then stand it in a pit of water. It is stripped in spring after the sap has risen under the bark and then stored in the ideal conditions found in the caves that we had passed earlier. The basket makers use it, soaked to create their numerous articles.

Visit to the Montbazon Fire Station by Jude Ripley

We were invited by a new member of the twinning association, Councillor Eric Rival, to visit the fire station in Montbazon.

The brigade at Montbazon consists of 50 volunteers, five of whom are female. They are on duty for one week in four, fitting this around their normal work. They are responsible for three communes. They have six vehicles: an ambulance, a fire truck, a reconnaissance Landrover and a vehicle to attend forest fires, a command vehicle and a van.

85% of their call-outs are to attend road traffic accidents; they also attend fires, floods, and incidents including fallen trees, cats stuck in trees, and snakes! They have two types of uniform: one is fireproof with a Star Wars-type helmet, and the other is high-viz. The air bottle they must use when entering a fire has an alarm attached, and is very heavy – maybe this is why there are so few female volunteers!



At the station there is a room where we saw a lovely vintage hand-operated fire pump and a large collection of trophies won at inter-station sporting events. This room is used for theory training by the brigade and the JSP – the organisation for young cadets, of whom there are 15, including three girls. The training received by the volunteers is identical to that of the professionals, but they are only remunerated for any call-outs they attend.

We were served an apéritif at the end of the visit, and left the station full of admiration for the bravery, enthusiasm, and commitment of the volunteers, and of Eric in particular.

A Change of Plan – Visit to Amboise by Chris Lacey

Sunday morning found us looking at the rain falling gently in the garden. What to do? Staying in the dry on the comfy sofa with our hosts seemed like an inviting idea. We couldn't do the planned Hunting Show, the hounds would not be running in the rain. Then our host suggested Amboise, we could find things to do even if it continued to rain. Having made one decision the next one was more important - where to eat? After several attempts to book a table being greeted by “nous sommes complets” or “nous sommes fermés pour les vacances”, we gave up the technology and used our hostess' method to choose one. Placing a finger, on the page for the town in the local telephone directory she made a random selection. A phone call later, we were set.

As we drove the weather improved. When we arrived at Amboise we expected to find a sleepy town on the banks of the Loire. Instead there was a market in full swing and the streets were throbbing with people. Parking looked impossible, but having driven past the castle we turned around to find that there was a spot just waiting for our car. Walking to the town square we found our restaurant complete with our table reserved. There followed, a wonderful meal of crêpes, cider and the largest salad I have seen in a long time. While we ate we watched the children dancing to the music of a hurdy-gurdy man.



Following our meal we strolled up the hill stopping briefly to photograph some of the Troglodyte cave homes. Then on to see le Château du Clos Lucé, the home of Leonardo da Vinci for the last ten years of his life.



Passing through the house we came to the exhibition of models, drawings and visual presentations of some of his many innovations, including the helicopter and the first tank. When we moved into the garden we had the opportunity to see larger scale models, that we could see working. There were families enjoying a ride on paddle boats and children turning a helicopter blade. In between the garden was a made more delightful by large scale images of some of his portraits, suspended between the trees. In all it was a truly inspirational visit and a tribute to such an amazing man.

Walking back to town we stopped to photograph the WW2 air raid shelter in the cliffs. Then back to the car to hurry home and prepare for the evening's party.

“Parc Leonardo da Vinci was well worth a visit”

“This part of the Loire region offers so many opportunities for insight into French culture, cuisine and hospitality. A fantastic trip!”

“This was our first experience of the ‘Twinning’ and we were overwhelmed by the warmth and hospitality of our French hosts”

Sunday 23rd August: 20 ème Anniversaire du Jumelage

Soirée Festive 'En route to the Antilles' by Jennifer Daly

After four fabulous days of hospitality our visit to Montbazon was to finish with a 'Soirée Festive'. Where were we going? I have to declare a prior ignorance as to where the Antilles actually are. So, for anyone like me requiring enlightenment 'The **Antilles** are an archipelago bordered by the Caribbean Sea to the south and west, the Gulf of Mexico to the northwest, and the Atlantic Ocean to the north and east. Well, the 'Programme du Séjour' did only promise 'en route' and not even the amazing fundraising efforts of the town twinning committees were going to take us all that far!



It didn't have to. The balmy temperatures in excess of 30 degrees centigrade had set the Caribbean scene, the village hall had been decorated in festive style and our hosts were in theme in their Caribbean couture. Cocktails on the terrace, Creole cuisine and creative choreography made it a most entertaining evening. It started with 20th Century Fox recapping 'vingt ans d'amitié' and finished with that truly universal dance 'The Conga'. It was our first town twinning visit to France and a very memorable one, well done Montbazon!

After a speech from Laurence Le Blevec, President, with a response from David Minns, our Chairman, gifts were exchanged.



On our departure, to our surprise, the Jumelage generously gave each of us visitors a bottle of Chinon.



"The Creole Evening was the height of excitement, colour, food and dancing and everybody was in a good mood – 10 out of 10!"

First Visits to Montbazon

By Joyce Wynne and Ian Rose

Early one morning we left Brentwood on the coach, knowing hardly anyone. The mayor and several councillors were part of the group, given the special significance of this anniversary visit. By the time we arrived in Montbazon that evening, we'd got to know a few more people and were soon to experience the beginnings of what was to come, with a warm welcome offered by our French hosts. From then on, our feet hardly touched the ground! An extensive programme of visits and events, sociable get-togethers, not to mention food and drink, filled our days and evenings.

The French do "formal" with such style: lunch in the Orangery at Chenonceau; the town-hall reception; dinner at the local Chateau d'Artigny. Then there was the "fun" element: the boat trip; a picnic under the trees; the mayors reading speeches in each other's language; the Caribbean party finale. Even the weather was good to us.



It seems everyone came home needing a rest! We were certainly impressed by how much was fitted in to those few days, thanks to a lot of hard work by the twinning committees. No wonder they are already working on next year's exchange!

Most of all we enjoyed the friendliness and generous hospitality of our new French friends, and look forward to seeing them all again when they come to Brentwood.

By Heide Brenke

For me the best day of our French holiday was the second day. This wasn't as grand as the Chateau Chenonceau spanning its arched pillars across the River Cher and attracting some 900 000 visitors per year nor the "superbe" lunch we enjoyed in its elegant Orangerie, this was the picnic we had under the trees opposite the church in the little town of Bracieux.



Not the kind of picnic I am used to, where I am uncomfortably perched on some rug at best, in danger of spilling my drink while debating whether to pull on a cardigan or not and at any rate at some point jumping up (sort of) as if stung by several wasps and erupt into a fitful arhythmic dance because of a cramp in my foot. This was very different! We sat on benches at long tables, dappled sunlight lurking through the trees painting shadows on the white tablecloths, people were laughing and chatting and basket after basket of delicious home cooked food emerged from the boot of the coach and carried to the tables.

Mind you, this was after we had visited the chocolate factory, where we had been told we could eat as much "chocolat" as we liked, instructions which I followed to the letter! And now all this!

I looked across to Monica, who was munching a roll which she claimed was filled with 10 different ingredients. That makes even an M&S sandwich pale and uninteresting!

I looked at the quiet green river, its trailing water lilies and took a sip of my verre de rouge and thought warmly that this is France at its best and that it hadn't changed in all those years I hadn't been here!

By Hetty Smith

My introduction to Town Twinning came about when my friend Clémence, a member of the French association, proposed to me one day over lunch, "Would you like to come and stay with us in France this summer?" Despite having never taken part in an exchange program before, and only meeting Clémence around two weeks previously, the exciting opportunity and the call to adventure caused me to reply with a non-hesitant, "Why not!"

However, in spite of having all of the extensive vocabulary under my wing that accompanies taking part in half of a course of GCSE French, and being 15 years old, it was safe to say that my language skills were rather limited (or should I say limité?)



I was initially anxious about this barrier, yet after stepping off the coach my fears were immediately dispelled as we were greeted with an extraordinarily warm welcome. What we saw was a trend that continued throughout the whole trip: the French hosts were incredibly hospitable and would make every effort to ensure our stay was enjoyable. Clémence's family, the Lacornes, were kind, friendly, and made me feel at home soon after arriving. The experience of staying with a French family I found particularly rewarding, as this gave everyone the chance to authentically encounter the culture first hand, for example when, to my bewilderment, the coffee was served in the cereal bowl!

The overall highlight was, as I'm sure the other members will agree, the incredible reception we received by the French Town Twinning members. Their enthusiasm was infectious and they met every activity with incredible energy - the pinnacle of which was shown when to the astonishment of the Brits, we were treated to an unexpected yet nonetheless entertaining dance spectacle performed by our hosts!

Overall, as a first-time trip I found the experience incredibly valuable and would highly recommend it. The process enabled me to meet new people, form strong ties, and without it I would not have gained a close friend. I look forward to having the opportunity to participate again!

Photos and Reflections



"Wonderful to see the fields of sunflowers again"



"Swanning about on the river at Chenonceau"

"Amazing food and wine but, above all, friendship that was genuine and palpable"



"The reception outside the Town Hall on the Saturday morning was the best we've experienced in 12 years"



"What a surprise to find Coldstream Guards performing at the Town Hall!"



"The 'English Municipal Park' – what a brilliant touch!"

"Friendship, hospitality, excellent food and wine. What more could we ask for?"

"A fabulous long weekend of celebration"



"An excellent celebration of 20 years of twinning"



"I never cease to marvel at Michelle Garbet's innovative ideas and their practical outcome"



"Dance session was great fun!"

"The picnic, by the river, felt like we were in a Monet painting 'en plein air'"

"I didn't eat a single croissant during my visit (I did eat an awful lot of everything else!)"

"A chocolate factory and an artisan brasserie all in one day – what was not to like?"

"Mountains of 'Haricot Vert' fresh from the garden"

"Singing the Marseillaise (almost) properly!"

"At last I know how to make a chocolate duck"

"Good fun every evening, never home before midnight"

"Tragic end to my chocolate rabbit I had bought for our hosts chocolate blob!"

"Really enjoyed meals when amongst the French, having to help one another with the languages"



Farewell until we meet next year

Don't forget our Quiz Night on Saturday 12th March 2016