

Gemini

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Spring 2015

Leamington International Twinning Society Magazine

Chairman's Letter

Dear Friends,

This will be my last letter to you as Chairman as I am standing down from July 1st. It has been a terrific pleasure to lead the society and my term has been full of interest. I would like to once again express my thanks to the committee for their support and good humour. They have all done a great job.

As I said at the March 13th AGM we are at a critical moment in our history. The underlying message from the dissolution of HKIV is a clear warning to all of us who care about Twinning and what it stands for. Reading the local press it seems that there is a malaise which is overtaking us all. Leamington Carnival is to close yet again and recently there was an insufficient turn out at the U3A AGM.

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Forty years or so ago our elder son copied out the story below. It has remained prominently displayed in our household ever since and is now yellow with age. The message is as relevant today as it ever was.

So Whose Job Is It Anyway?

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realised that Somebody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Upcoming Events

On June 19th a special meeting of LITS will be held at 19.30 at the Leamington Rugby Club to discuss the future of the Society. If you have not already signed up to attend please contact Peter Cantlay - see below

The next LITS members social evening will held on Tuesday the 19th of May at the Newbold Comyn Arms. A reminder email will be sent out in early May

The next outgoing twinning visit to Brühl will be from the 28th of October to the 1st of November. If you have not already signed up to go please contact Peter Cantlay on 01926 490209 or pcantlay@gmail.com

Following my report at the March 13th AGM, arrangements have been made for a Special Meeting to be held on June 19th to discuss the survival of LITS. See 'Upcoming Events' above for details. Please come and contribute both your ideas and how you believe you can best support LITS. As there are no major events on the horizon for a while it's a good time to become involved, either on or off the committee as some members already do, making valuable contributions. I do acknowledge and wish to thank the excellent work done during my term by non committee members but more help is needed.

As always, my very best wishes to you all.

John Mather

Five days in England

A Poem by Frédéric Nicol

***In the town of Leamington
I made friends and I had fun.
Talking English all day long
is not so easy it sounds!***

***In the Assembly
The Mayor Welcomed us all
Then I met my so nice hosts
Both so funny and gentle.***

***It was sunny in Stratford
When I have walked along
The bright city where the Bard
Used to live when he was young.***

***In the Birmingham's Thinktank
There are still old time machines
That used to sing with steam
The Yorkshire pudding and beer
I enjoyed in the pub nearby
What a luck for citizens
To have such a library
Built with so elegant lines
I would like to live nearby.***

***On the fourth day in Warwick
I was in All Saints' Church School
I gave a speech to the children
They all listened carefully
I explained to them why I was there
To help them meet new friends.***

***Living in Sceaux near Paris
To thank me they had a song
Happiness was all around
Then I saw how well they work
Kindly leaded by their teachers.***

***It was time to say goodbye
Thank you for these moments
Shared so friendly in England.***



2015 LITS Annual General Meeting

By Chris Davis

If you were unable to attend the LITS AGM on March 13th this year the following article will provide you with a synopsis of what took place at the meeting.

The LITS President, John Knight, Mayor of Royal Leamington Spa, opened the 42nd Annual General Meeting by welcoming 28 officers and members. He acknowledged the close working relationship between LITS and the Leamington Town Council in furthering our international links. Twelve apologies were received, the minutes of the 2014 AGM were approved and best wishes for a speedy recovery were to be sent to Councillor Roger Copping.



Chairman John Mather presented his Annual Report and began by thanking Nigel Appleby, Jenny Mather and Martha Lieberman for their long service on the Committee. He showed his appreciation by presenting each of them with a small gift. He thanked all contributing members to Gemini announcing that David Carson had won the 2015 prize draw for his contribution. He stressed that LITS had reached a critical moment in its relationship with our twin towns and in finding volunteers to take on responsibilities on the LITS Committee was critical. He also pointed out that although the membership was stable it was ageing, and that people tended to prefer independent travel and younger members were not joining.

The following reports were presented to the members:

1) Brühl

The Germans visited us to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the twinning and it was a most successful weekend with the Civic Service in the Parish Church being the highlight. Several members went to Brühl to join in the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the Brühl/Sceaux twinning.

2) Heemstede

A delegation from Heemstede was received in June which, and at the request of our Dutch guests included a less formal friendship dinner than in the past. We were planning to visit them in October 2015 so were very surprised to receive a letter from their Mayor telling us that HKIV had disbanded, their Council would no longer play an active role although individual clubs and societies would still be encouraged to maintain links.

3) Sceaux

The link is alive and kicking and we had just played host to a group of 40 which included a young family and a school teacher, Frédéric Nicol, who spent the day visiting All Saints Primary School in Warwick. Jenny Mather thanked Pippa, Colin and Sue for their support in arranging the visit. From now on Sue Statton would be taking over as the Sceaux coordinator.

4) Social Programme

LITS were looking for a replacement for Pat Carson to organize social events. The Christmas Lunch at Woodland Grange had been a great success and it was hoped to repeat it in early December this year. In order to give members the chance to meet up between visits, informal get togethers at the Newbold Comyn Arms are now being organized on a regular basis.

5) Treasurer's Report

Colin Beadle thanked the Town Council for their continued support. As result of this the Society has a healthy balance of £6000. The Children's Trust, founded with the prize money from the Europe Prize won in 1984, continues to make grants for children to travel abroad, however, new trustees for the fund are needed. Colin also expressed concern that with lower numbers of members now participating in twinning visits it is becoming increasingly difficult to cover the cost of the coach travel to our twin towns.

6) Elections of Officers and Committee

Mr Mather said that a number of the existing members of the Committee: himself, Peter Cantlay, Colin Beadle, Tony Bass, Judith Clarke, Fiona Trewick, and Sue Staddon were willing to continue although John would be retiring as Chairman as soon as a replacement could be found. After six years John felt he had played his part in the development of LITS and it was time for someone else to take over. Unfortunately there had not yet been any nominations for any new Committee members or a new Chairman.

In view of all the challenges which LITS now faces John proposed holding a Special Meeting in the next few months to discuss the future of the Society and he said that he was willing to remain as Chairman until then.

The Chairman's report was followed by a very agreeable buffet supper when the members had the opportunity to discuss the issues raised during the meeting and exchange their views on the future of LITS.

The Thinktank

By Michael Purdue

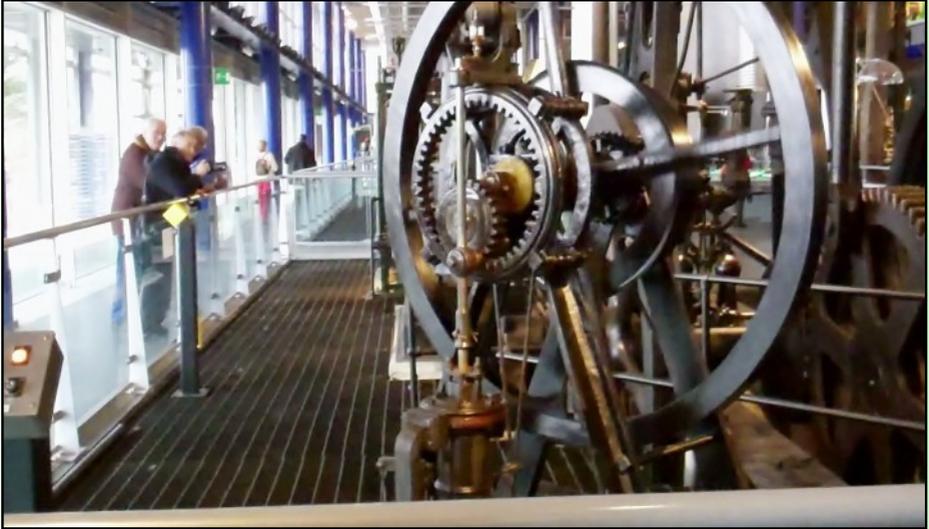
The weather for our visit to Birmingham was a real disappointment as the day before had been so lovely. It was dull and overcast and constantly threatened rain. Not the ideal weather to visit Birmingham which looked drab and sometimes downright ugly. Just as the rain started to fall, we arrived in front of a glass-fronted building, half obscured by what seemed like thin wooden planks. It reminded us of a much larger version of a new retirement home in Sceaux, which has caused such an uproar among the residents (of Sceaux of course) not of the home.

As is often the case in modern-style building, the inside was much more appealing than the outside - very spacious and full of light, in fact an ideal place for a science museum. The museum was definitely American style with lots of hands-on exhibits, more child-orientated than for adults. The visitors guide brochure was full of photos of children engaged in various activities. Without being entirely satisfied with the museum as a whole, everybody found something that they liked whether it be locally-made jewellery or a robot's arm, or in my case, steam engines.

I spent all of my time at level zero, entitled THE PAST by the museum. I seriously enjoyed watching the old steam engines in action like the one shown below.



I like to imagine it would have been better still seeing someone shovelling coal into a boiler rather than the steam arriving in under-floor pipes, but I was happy looking at pistons going up and down and cams turning. I loved seeing the affordable Murray 1805 engine but the jewel of the collection had been built, it was said, by James Watt himself.



The rest of the group had long disappeared before I had had my fill of the noise of the heavy machinery and the smell of oil. The rest of the floor was a bonus. Having been crazy about train spotting as a child, I had the pleasure of seeing a Princess Coronation Class locomotive – The City of Birmingham.



I had forgotten how enormous these locomotives were. There were also fighter planes, a tram and several old cars, but nothing could distract me from the pleasure I had experienced watching these old steam engines chugging away.

Sunday Lunch at The Woodman Pub

By Dominique Dauger



Everyone knows that French people love good food. You may not know that the French also love talking about food – which is what I am going to do: tell you about our mouth-watering, typically English Sunday lunch at the Woodman, a city-centre Birmingham pub, in a private dining-room.

We were served generous plates overflowing with: Yorkshire pudding (which many French people discovered for the first time), pork roast with apple sauce, a fried pork rind, various veggies and grilled potatoes. All this was washed down with a pint of “English Pioneers hand-crafted lager, brewed from the ground up” (whatever that means!).

The atmosphere soon became boisterous, and munching this Sunday fare, the French guests happily started sharing personal experiences about food, drink and beer, whether French, English or otherwise exotic. Then on to the dessert, also a typically English one: apple pie with custard cream. Yummy, if not particularly good for our figures.



We learnt that the pub was built around 1897, and is one of the classic “terracotta” pubs from a golden age of Birmingham pub building. This pub, famous in Victorian times, was empty until just three years ago, but fortunately was restored in 2013. At least this Victorian building was preserved and is helping to retain the character of old Birmingham: something that, unfortunately, has practically disappeared from Britain’s second largest city which now boasts huge avant-garde buildings. Although architecturally impressive, these can now be found anywhere in the world. At the Woodman’s, we felt that we were really in England, eating different food from any other country, which is what we were here for: to discover a country and one important aspect of its culture.

Treasuring one’s traditions, even or especially culinary ones, is a must today: it is what makes up the identity of a nation (well, not only, I admit). Even if English food does not have as great a reputation as the French or Chinese, it deserves to be preserved and better known, especially when it is fresh and typical. Up with good old English food and beer!



Oh, what a lovely lunch we had at the Woodman Pub!

The Library of Birmingham

By Sue Staddon

The short coach trip from the Woodman pub to the Library of Birmingham via New Street Station gave our visitors a little tour of Birmingham city centre, which many had never seen before. One lady described it as 'une salade russe' - an eclectic mix of styles, which it certainly is.

But when we arrived at the new Library of Birmingham, everyone had to agree that it has a style all of its own. Following an international design competition the Dutch architects Mecanoo, led by Francine Houben, created the unique design of the building. It was opened in 2013 by the inspirational young Pakistani student, Malala Yousafzai.



The exterior is a stack of gold and grey cuboids overlaid with aluminium circles. Inside, the library is arranged in layers, nine floors high, with a cylindrical space in the centre. We began our visit at the bottom, where the children's library and the music library with sound-proof instrument practice rooms are located.

We travelled upwards on blue escalators through the book rotunda where part of the library's enormous archive is on display. We were able to see a temporary exhibition 'Stones and Bones' about archeological discoveries in Birmingham and the West Midlands. The library has gardens on some of its higher levels which allow people to read or think in peaceful surroundings and give great views over the city.



Two of the library's most striking features, the glass lift and the Shakespeare Memorial Room, were unfortunately unavailable to visitors on the day we were there. The Shakespeare room is wood panelled and has been painstakingly reconstructed by local craftsmen to house a collection of 43,000 important and valuable books. It was disappointing not to be able to see it, but that definitely gives our friends from Sceaux a good reason to visit again!

The Royal Shakespeare Theater's Tower

By Elisabeth Silence

Monday the 9th of March, we went to Stratford upon Avon to visit the Royal Shakespeare Theater. It opened its doors on Wednesday 24th of November 2010, following a three-and-a-half year construction project to transform it.



Close to it, a tower was built because the original 1879 Shakespeare Memorial Theater had had a tower. That one was a water tower that was supposed to provide water under pressure for firefighting. Unfortunately, it didn't work - the old theater was destroyed by fire in 1926.



The tower is 36 meters high which is about the height of seven double-decker buses stacked one on top of the other. A lift took us up to the viewing platform at the 8th level where, on a clear day we can see for 20 miles. The weather was beautiful but a little bit windy and we could hear the wind blowing all around the tower. We enjoyed views across Stratford upon Avon. On arrival, we

were given a map by a guide, so we could identify all the local landmarks, including Shakespeare's houses and the Holy Trinity Church where he was baptised and is buried.



The nearby obelisk, which you can see in above

picture was erected in 1876 in memory of Mark Philips, a famous politician and is exactly the same height as the tower.



There are 174 steps from the tower's viewing platform to the ground floor. We descended via the stairs so we could see pictures, which were installed on the staircase walls, of the building of the tower .

Many thanks to our friends for the organisation of this visit which was very interesting.

Lunch at the Dirty Duck

By Guy Lepagnol



The visit of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and its tower was a pleasure for the eyes but not filled enough our stomachs... Fortunately, the LITS had planned everything, and providentially booked us into the Dirty Duck Pub.

This pub is a 15th Century building steeped in history. Everybody enjoyed this very traditional pub which was cosy, warm, luminous and spacious in the back rooms. Located near the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, along the Waterside in Stratford, the Dirty Duck is world famous in theatrical circles. Its name was changed from The Swan sometime in the past, to The Dirty Duck. For generations RSC actors have drunk in this pub, have complained about rehearsals, competed to have their photos hung alongside Judi Dench and Richard Burton, and most importantly, met members of their audiences.

On the right-hand-side of the bar is a small room where the walls are covered with photographs of actors and where the air is very heavy with theatrical emotion. It is said that there is nothing more enjoyable for an actor than to have the public giving their opinions about him or her, and this post-show engagement is what makes acting in Stratford-upon-Avon so very special.



It is sure that many of these actors made their choice, as we did, from the simple but delicious menu:

- Roasted cherry tomato pasta, with basil-infused linguine, garlic bread, and a salad garnish,
- Macaroni cheese, with garlic bread,
- Traditional fish and chips, with tartar sauce and mushy peas,
- Chili and rice, with beef, sour cream and tortilla chips,
- Smoked haddock, with spinach and West Country Cheddar Florentine bake.

For an attractive dessert, the choice was a Treacle tart, an ice cream, or for the most greedy and gourmet customers, the warm chocolate fudge cake, (my choice, of course) which was so tasty and melted in the mouth. From the bar, we enjoyed delicious beer: bitter or ale!

Then, walking along the river and through the streets, heading towards Trinity Church, we went to say hello to William Shakespeare and to view souvenirs of his life in Stratford, exhibited in the Church.

Backstage at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre

By Emmanuel Hennequin

For our visit to the theater, we were divided into three groups. Our group started at the entrance with a brief history of the building. In fact, three theaters were built: the first in 1879 but was destroyed by fire in 1926, the second in 1932 and the last in 2007. The entrance wall from previous theater, has been preserved and the floor of the old stage used in the current entrance.



After this we headed backstage. In this enormous area everything needed for the performances is stored. Some of the stage sets are suspended so that they can be rapidly lowered when required. The walls are painted black to avoid light reflection towards the stage. A video screen allows continuous monitoring of the theater.



We then moved on into the dressing rooms. They are relatively small identical box rooms each of which are shared by 2 or 3 actors. Here they get changed and put on their makeup for the performances. The actors are normally recruited for a season. Their training began in London and continues in

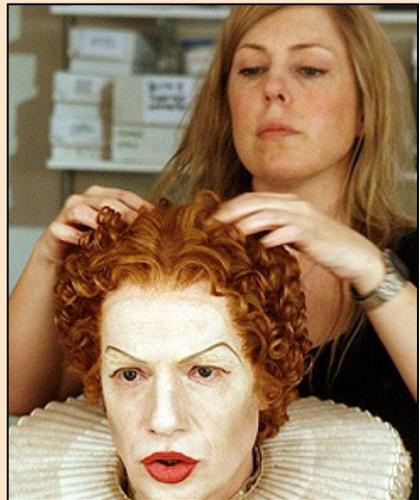
Stratford where the actors are required to wear their costumes for the full dress rehearsals.

After this we went down the corridor to the room where the actors make the rapid costume or makeup changes required during the course of the performances without having to go back to their dressing rooms. This very small space is isolated from the corridor by a curtain making invisible to other actors as they pass up and down on their way to and from the stage.



We then returned backstage to see where the costumes are looked after. They are all systematically reviewed, cleaned and ironed following each performance. There are laundry facilities in the workshop. The costumes have to be especially designed for each role and capable of rapid changes by the actors. Thus, the switching is done with simple clips and covers for the blood bags if the character is to receive a cut from a knife or a sword.

After this we visited the wigs and special effects department. The wigs are made on site with real hair. For the special effects, especially those involving injuries, it is essentially that the blood used has the right colour, viscosity and taste (especially if it has to come out of the actor's mouth!) so all the blood bags are exactly tailored to the needs of the performers .



The tour ends for us in the lobby of the Swan room, part of the old theatre, which is still used for some performances.

Our Day with Our Guests

By Anne Singleton

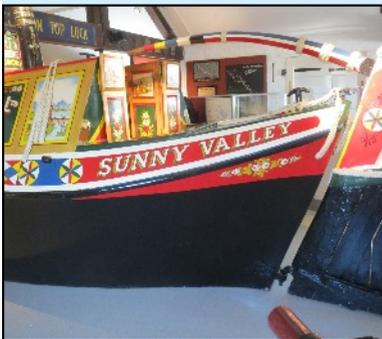
Saturday dawned bright and dry, with the promise of sunshine a little later. Our French guests, Emmanuel and Dominique, had slept well and looked forward to our planned day at Stoke Bruerne Canal Museum in Northamptonshire. Arrangements had been made to make this trip with Nigel and Janet Appleby and their French guests, Bernard and Roselyne Bareau.

A slower than anticipated journey along the M1 meant that we arrived half an hour later than planned. The museum is set in a delightful location alongside the Grand Union Canal, and the contents of the museum proved to be equally impressive.



Inside the museum were brief histories of the most famous engineers involved in the building of canals, such as Andrew Yarranton, James Brindley, John Smeaton, Thomas Telford etc. and also James Watt, who concentrated most of his work in Scotland.

Pictures of various types of canal boats adorned the walls, for example narrow boats, barges, lighters, short boats, tug boats, (or Tom Puddings as they were also known in the trade), keels, trows, trugs, dredgers, to name just a few! The narrow boat was the most common boat used in the Midlands.



Boatmen were very skilled workers, a fact not generally appreciated, as they had to know about the general upkeep of their boats, the loading of goods, and manoeuvring of the boats and horses (and later diesel engines) through locks and tunnels, not an easy task. It was apparent that families who were born and raised on the boats were very loyal to their companies, and dedicated to their work. It was interesting to see all the various examples of canal boat paintwork, as companies

decorated their boats, doors, planking and hardware such as jugs and buckets to their own unique patterns. It was good that there were pictures and diagrams for our guests to study, as the descriptions were all written in English. Our guests did manage to understand the gist of the descriptions, as they all speak good English.

These canals played an extremely important role in the economic development of the UK in the 19th century as they enabled the transportation of coal and other key materials around the country at a time when there were no proper roads or other means of moving large amounts of heavy materials. Their importance is reflected in a charming, if somewhat intimidating sign, from this time, displayed in the Museum. The long term importance of the canals was echoed by an advertisement placed in the Times In March 1944 which said: 'Women volunteers wanted for two months training - £2.00 per week. Only women with a robust constitution need apply'



On leaving the museum we were surprised to see John and Jenny Mather with their French visitors, Alain and Dominique Gabard. They were on their way to lunch at the local pub before visiting the museum. By this time the weather was wonderful, with deep blue sky and hot sun, so we walked along the towpath to see the Blisworth tunnel. This tunnel is 1.75 miles long, which brought its own problems in the days of canal transportation. Because of the length normal propulsion, i.e. horses were not possible, so the boats had to be 'legged' along. This meant lying on the roof of the boat and walking along the tunnel walls. In 1930 there was one occasion when there were 25 boats in this tunnel at the same time!

By this time hunger and thirst drove us into the nearby pub, the Boat Inn, where we found John and Jenny's group already tucking into their lunches. We all enjoyed a pleasant lunch there despite a long waiting time.

We had intended to visit Canons Ashby House that afternoon, but unfortunately ran out of time and reverted to plan B, namely a quick walk around Warwick town centre, as Emmanuel and Dominique had not previously done this. They were particularly impressed with St. Mary's Church and intend to make a visit there when they return to Warwick in August.



We then returned home in order to prepare for the civic dinner that was to follow that evening.



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