

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society



Newsletter

October 2021

Guest Editor: Brian Read

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Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting

At the end of a most extraordinary year for everyone it is time to take stock of what has happened and what we can take forward as a society for the future of Twinning. So much is said and written about the negative aspects of Covid, I would like to focus on the positive things.

To start with I am sure we have a renewed sense of pride in the area we live. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, offered to the world on a 'not for profit' basis has been developed and worked on by many people living in Oxford, Abingdon and the Vale of White Horse. In addition, all those months when we only allowed to do one hour's exercise a day has enabled us to really appreciate where we live and to discover new walks, architecture we had not studied before and local history we never had time for.

Then we all learned to 'zoom'. What a difference that has made to Twinning. Suddenly more people than ever before have been able to meet and greet on this platform and get to know each other. It has been such a pleasure.

And then there is the newsletter. What started as a two or four-page bulletin for ADTTS has turned into a monthly magazine for all our twin towns, which is not only informative but really interesting too. So, thank you particularly to Nick Marsh, Ian Jardine, Brian Read and David Pope for all the work you have put into producing these gems. The payback for you is that you can now put 'editor' on your Curriculum Vitae. Then thanks must go to all the articles submitted by our friends in our twin towns. What fantastic articles we have received from you. You can now put 'Foreign Correspondent' on your C.V.'s. How impressive does that sound! We also have emerging historians, and, having read September's issue, a budding travel correspondent. Thank you to you all.

The ADTTS committee has kept going throughout the pandemic, holding meetings mostly on zoom. For the last three meetings though we have been able to get together outside on a terrace under the vines and where olive trees and lemons flourish, so we can imagine we are in Lucca. Having a member of the committee responsible for each twin town is working really well and spreads the workload. Many thanks to our treasurers and members secretaries, Rosemary and Ian Jardine and to Phil Addison our Minutes secretary. We do still need a general secretary though. It is not an onerous job now, and you will have a lot of fun, so please think about it.

We held our first foray into the outside world with a summer drinks party in Michael Matthews' Garden, which was very successful.

Looking to the future we hope very much to be able to resume our Thursday evening meetings live, but of course will always be guided by government guidelines. I really hope though that we can continue to offer our newsletter to all our members and overseas twinners. We welcome contributions.

Lorraine Oates who is our twinning representative on the council has been working very hard on our behalf and we are looking forward to having a 'twinning signpost' to be placed on the grass outside the Royce Room. Thanks go to Connie Addison who has done the drawings for the signpost. Plans are underway to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June next year and we hope we will be able to invite people from all of our twin towns then. We have discovered so many new, beautiful and interesting things about our town and the countryside around during lockdown, we want to share them with you. Hopefully by next year we will be able to start planning other visits too.

Stella Carter
Chairman ADTTS

Forthcoming Events

Thursday 21 st Oct	7.30 for 8pm at PRCC. Evening Meeting – National Anthems
Thursday 18 th Nov	7.30 for 8pm at PRCC. Evening Meeting
Sunday 19 th Dec	12.30pm Christmas Lunch at Hilton Garden Inn

Thursday 21 October 2021: Evening Meeting - National Anthems

Our next evening meeting is on Thursday 21st October at 7.30 for 8pm at Preston Road Community Centre. This will be our national anthems evening, which had to be postponed due to Covid.

We shall work through the British, French, EU, Belgian, German, Scottish, Italian, American and New Zealand anthems with a few words of historical introduction before listening to them and then singing them together in karaoke style. We shall then sing a little-known verse of the British anthem and an alternative version of the French one. To round off the evening we shall sing the French version of *Auld Lang Syne*.

Refreshments will be served.

Membership Subscriptions 2021/2022

Subscriptions are now due for the year starting 1st September.

The amount is £7.50 per person or £15.00 for a couple.

Payment can be made by Banker's Order, cheque or by BACS to
ADTTS bank a/c: National Westminster Bank plc, Market Place, Abingdon
Sort Code: 60-01-01 **A/c No:** 08616752 **Ref:** Mem + your last name

Many of you have standing order arrangements. If you do, it would be helpful if you could check that you have uprated the amount to the current rate.

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Recent Events

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 16 September 2021 - at Preston Road Community Centre

It was strangely normal. We had last met together in the hall in February 2020. That was a year and a half ago. But now with everyone vaccinated and the gradual revival of social life, we decided to try holding an evening meeting at Preston Road. With a second year of no twinning visits to or from our twin towns, would interest in the Society have waned? In the event, it seems that ADTTS is still healthy. Even with some Covid restrictions at the venue, twenty members turned up for the Annual General Meeting, with a dozen sending their apologies.



The meeting itself was almost routine. We welcomed the Mayor, Councillor Cheryl Briggs, who presided over the elections. These were reassuring, in that all officers and committee members were re-elected. Thus, Stella Carter stays Chairman, Brian Read as Vice Chairman, while Ian and Rosemary Jardine continue to act jointly in the Treasurer and Membership Secretary rôles. However, we are still without a Secretary. Those duties have been very effectively devolved to the other officers and committee members, but we could really do with a Secretary in post as a coordinator.

The meeting was reminded of who is the principal contact for each of our twin towns and friendship links:

Argentan	Richard Smart
Colmar	Norma Queralt
Lucca	Ian Jardine
Schongau	Brian Read
Sint-Niklaas	Nick Marsh
Thames, NZ & Abingdon, VA	Stella Carter

The other members of the committee are Michael Matthews (Vice President), David Pope, Linda Phillips, Lorraine Oates, Nikki Henton, Peter Dodd and Philip Addison.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Eileen Bontempelli was invited to report on the activities of **Abingdon Church Twinning**. The next exchange planned is a visit by mini-bus on 7-11 April 2022 to Sint-Niklaas for their Passion Play. The famous Oberammergau Passion Play, originally scheduled for 2020, had to be postponed due to the Coronavirus. Members will now be going 7-11 July 2022, staying with twinning hosts in Schongau. An invitation to the twin towns to participate in an Eco Church Weekend is being planned, probably for next October. Christmas cards would be sold again, this year using two photographs offered by Alastair Fear.

The formal proceedings of the meeting were followed by the opportunity to chat over a glass of wine and enjoy canapés prepared by Susan Read.



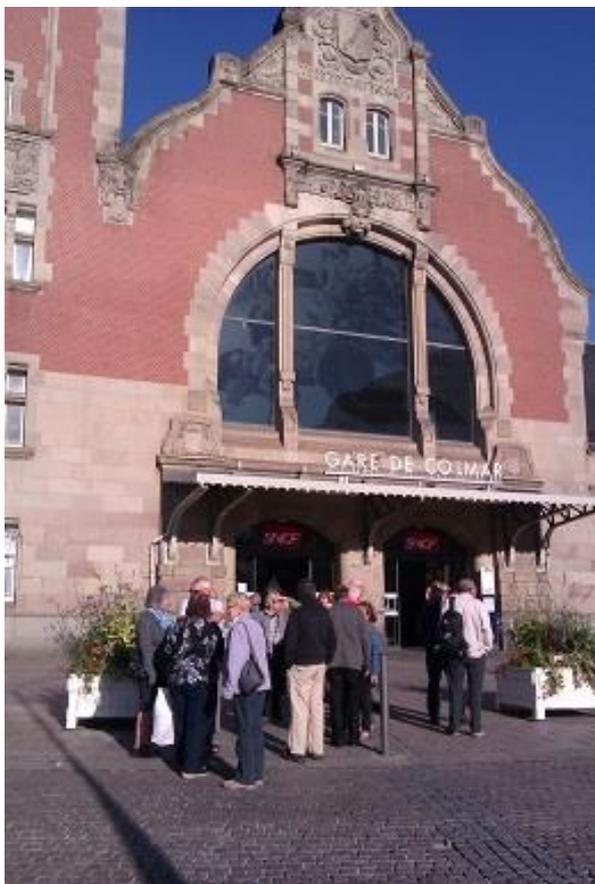
Twin Travel: COLMAR

A visit to Colmar is always a pleasure and offers plenty of interest. But here we are concerned with how we get there. For this twin town, we have a real choice; there are three realistic means of travel. They are by road, by rail and by air. They each have their merits (and demerits) depending on circumstances and preference.

Going to Colmar from Abingdon by road involves a channel crossing and much driving. The geographical distance is 936 km in the direction East-South-East. It's 140 miles to the Eurotunnel at Folkestone. That's nearly 2½ hours, plus the customary stop on the M25 at Clacket Lane Services. Alternatively, the Dover ferry terminal is 10 miles further. From Calais to Colmar, the shortest route using the A26 over the Vosges is 620 km, taking at least 6½ hours. A longer (690 km) route, but faster, though probably not quicker, uses the A4 via Metz and Strasbourg. Famously, Stan Ponting on his annual trip to the Colmar Book Fair would choose a route through Luxembourg to take advantage of the cheaper petrol there. Deciding to drive to Colmar is tiring, but probably the cheapest option with a car full. It does have the advantage of allowing a return home with a boot full of Alsace wine!



Flying to Colmar is popular. It means a flight to Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg airport. (There are few flights to the small Strasbourg airport.) Landing in Basel, take a bus to a railway station (Basel SBB, St-Louis or Mulhouse). Then catch a Strasbourg bound train to Colmar station (twenty to forty minutes). Flying is probably the quickest option, though perhaps not the easiest or pleasantest. Factor in getting to Heathrow or Gatwick. The coach from Oxford (Gloucester Green or Thornhill) is practical. Though, if there are two or more of you, a taxi direct from home in Abingdon to the airport is worth considering.



Increasingly, the train to Colmar is the choice. Start with the Eurostar from St Pancras to Paris. Even with the current restricted timetable, there is no rush. The 12:31 from St Pancras is convenient. (Arrive in good time, buy a picnic for the journey and enjoy a coffee in the station.)

Incidentally, if you travel to London by train from Didcot or Oxford to Paddington, then take the Hammersmith and City underground line to King's Cross / St Pancras. Note that the steps up to this line will probably be behind you when alighting, not at the buffers end of the platform. The alternative is going from Oxford to Marylebone, which is nearer to St Pancras. For the tube, walk to Baker Street station (or change there). The 205 bus might be easier? However, taking a taxi rather than the tube is an attractive option.

The 12:31 arrives at the Gare du Nord in Paris at 15:47 French time. That leaves more than ample time for the ten-minute (that's all) walk to the Gare de l'Est station. Trains to Strasbourg are quite frequent. The 17:23 TGV gets to Strasbourg at 19:13. Change to a local train. The 19:21 arrives in Colmar at 19:52.

The return journey home from Colmar is even easier. For example, catch a morning train from Colmar to Strasbourg. (They are half-hourly.) Spend the morning and have lunch in the city. The 14:41 from Strasbourg reaches Paris Gare de l'Est at 16:35. At the Gare du Nord allow at least half-an-hour for the Eurostar check-in. Even so, the 19:13 still leaves time first for a meal, perhaps at the *Brasserie Terminus Nord* across the road. Arrive 20:39 UK time at St Pancras.

An earlier return journey is possible. For example, 12:07 from Strasbourg, 17:13 from Gare du Nord, arriving 18:32 at St Pancras. Of course, all these train times could change a bit in future, but they are a good guide for planning a trip.

Alternatively, it's possible to avoid changing stations in Paris by taking the Eurostar to/from Lille. For example, on the last twinning trip to Colmar a group of us on the journey back after lunch in Strasbourg caught the TGV to Lille Europe station, with just a change of platform for the Eurostar. The connection was a little tight, but the check-in at Lille is quick.

There can often be cheaper fares on offer from Paris to Strasbourg, so it's better to buy a ticket for the final leg to Colmar separately (and also retain flexibility in when you travel). A return ticket is only cheaper than two singles on Eurostar. Otherwise in Europe just buy single tickets. (That allows you to return by a different route if you wish.)

When staying in Colmar, there are a number of possible easy days out by train. **Strasbourg**, half an hour north from Colmar, is the most obvious. However, on the way there consider getting off at **Sélestat**. The town's prize attraction is the famous *Bibliothèque Humaniste*. Take a shuttle bus from Sélestat station to visit the castle of **Haut-Koenigsbourg**. South of Colmar is **Mulhouse**, half an hour by train. Here, visit the *Cité de l'Automobile* and *Cité du Train* museums.

Colmar is also close to the villages of the Alsace Wine Route. An excellent choice for a day out is the pretty village of **Turckheim**. It's only a ten-minute journey by train from Colmar. Stroll round the cobbled streets and admire the traditional Alsace style houses. Take a walk through the vineyards just outside the walls and finish up at the *Cave de Turckheim* where you can taste (and buy) the splendid local wine.



A trip to Colmar might be extended further afield. Within easy reach (just 53 km by car or 45 km by bike) is the attractive town of **Freiburg**, the gateway to the Black Forest. The most direct and fastest route is to take a bus east from Colmar across the Rhine to Breisach. There it's a five-minute walk to the S-Bahn (suburban train) station for a train to Freiburg. The whole journey is about an hour and a half. Alternatively, the long way round is to go south by train from Colmar to Basel SBB station and change for a train back up the other side of the Rhine to Freiburg. This route can be nearly as quick if the connection at Basel is favourable. Otherwise, going north via Strasbourg could be quicker.

Of course, **Basel** itself (45 minutes by train from Colmar) is worth visiting. It is also very conveniently situated to reach by train almost anywhere in **Switzerland**.

I hope this has given you some ideas for when travelling to Colmar becomes feasible. If you have any comments or further thoughts to offer, then do send them to the editor of the Newsletter (newsletter@adtts.eu).

Brian Read

ADTTS Schools Presentation Competition

ADTTS is organising a Presentation Competition for local schools – mainly for pupils in Years 7 to 9.

The task is for individual or small groups of pupils working together to create a multimedia 5-minute presentation on one of our twin towns, using appropriate computer software, and suitable for showing on screen. Schools may submit presentations for each of the twin towns, or for just one town, or for as many of the towns as they like.

Each school's presentations will be judged by a Judging Panel from ADTTS and the best of these will go forward to the final judging stage where the overall winners will be chosen. At the final judging stage, the best presentations will be shown at an evening meeting of the members of ADTTS, where the eventual winners in each town category will be chosen.

The presentations should be 5 minutes in length (give or take 30 seconds) and should show the geographical position of the town and give a brief introduction to its history/formation, and provide an interesting and comprehensive picture of the twin town, which can include, for example:

- Famous citizens of the town
- Architecture/interesting buildings
- Local industry/farming/means of livelihood
- Cultural aspects
- Famous events held in the town
- Food and drink
- What are the links with Abingdon?
- Etc.

The presentations will be expected to have a lively commentary (spoken or subtitled), may include music, and should make use of the various techniques offered by digital multimedia software including, for example, moving images, split screen, animations, etc. Each presentation should have a title at the beginning and credits at the end.

Prizes: The school judged to have submitted the best presentations overall will win a significant prize presented by a local organisation. The pupils or groups that have submitted the winning entries in each country category will also be awarded a special prize donated by the twin town of the country in question. There will also be cash prizes for the pupils and for the runners up submitting the best presentation. Our twin towns will also be approached to provide prizes if they so wish. Certificates will be awarded to each entrant.

The winning town presentations will be shown at a Twin Towns Music Concert, to be held in the Amey Theatre in Autumn 2022 or Spring 2022.

We are currently looking for sponsors who would be willing to sponsor the main prizes to be awarded in return for suitable exposure in the local press and at the Twin Towns Music Concert. So, if you have any contacts in any firm or organisation who you think might be willing to sponsor this event, please let me know.

Nick Marsh

nickqgmarsh@gmail.com

Invitation to Lucca - live streaming guided tour

We have received from Antonella Giusti in Lucca's tourist office the following invitation:



I would like to inform you of an initiative that might interest you and that we would be grateful if you would help us to make known to the citizens of Abingdon.

It is an invitation to "[visit](#)" [Lucca](#), your twin city... from the comfort of your sofa, while waiting to do it in person.

Lucca Tourist Promotion Office has organised a series of **live streaming guided tours** to which everyone is invited, provided they have a device to connect.

It's not a pre-recorded film, it's not a 360° photo, it's all in real time.

There is no need to book: to participate, just click on the link during the event and connect to the live guide.

The link takes you directly to the ICARUS platform page where the live broadcast takes place.

ICARUS platform allows users to access and interact with the guide, not only to ask questions, but also to get any details or insights they want to see during the live broadcast. To interact and guide the camera, users simply need to register on the site using the available form, enter the system and participate in the extraction of the pilot who will have the opportunity to "guide the guide" and explore the details or views that interest him/her most while waiting for the next live tour.

The tours take place on Saturdays (in Italian) and Sundays (in another language) at 17:00. (Central Europe Time)

Each date will have a particular theme that will be revealed the week before.

Here are the links to all the dates:

25 September 2021 (ITA): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/b2e29c91-1b1d-4ae2-b9dc-07f87d30f9c7>

26 September 2021 (FR): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/1afa3912-dcae-4172-9229-efee9ca3520c>

02 October 2021 (ITA): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/27d2fea6-6fc4-4b43-a4b8-c8d1a1b55552>

03 October 2021 (ENG): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/2bc4dc97-fef8-4419-af57-35a0345dcf8c>

09 October 2021 (ITA): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/97613441-e081-4491-a9d2-132186083b5f>

10 October 2021 (DE): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/7b60d121-2612-4d8a-849e-b435dfdfb07b>

16 October 2021 (ITA): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/887a558a-c23c-4a0d-b9c4-ec0979c0cbb1>

17 October 2021 (ENG): <https://icarus.travel/travel-view/0604950e-8abe-4a0c-a93f-342a99f1bb5e>

More information and all links to participate in the upcoming visits are on our [FB/luccaturismo](#) and in the events section of the same.

*The tour on 26th September was engaging and promising (though unfortunately the link failed after just ten minutes). Do try it! Just click on the relevant link at **4pm UK time**.*

Twining News from Schongau

Schongau's local newspaper published on 8th September an article about "Many Anniversaries for Schongau Town Twining". It is illustrated by a picture of Colmar in Covid times, saying that travel to Colmar is again possible, though under strict conditions. All five partnerships with Schongau's twin towns have anniversaries coming up: In 2022/23 variously 60, 50 or 25 years of twinning will be celebrated with Abingdon, Colmar, Lucca, Gogolin and Sint-Niklaas.

Go to <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/schongau/schongau-ort29421/viele-jubilaeen-bei-den-staedtepartnerschaften-90969253.html> to see the article online; or here is a summary:

Ursula Diesch, who is the official responsible for town twinning, reports that with Corona many visits and events have had to be cancelled or postponed. Only a few things were possible, such as the musical trip broadcast on the Internet to the twin towns that was offered in May by organist Andreas Wiesmann. Otherwise, contact was maintained mostly digitally through regular Zoom meetings with members of the Friends' Groups from the twin towns – organised by members of the Twin Towns Society in Abingdon. There is also a monthly newsletter with information from all partner cities online at www.adtts.eu. The current September newsletter and also previously published ones are available.

Those who are interested in town twinning in Schongau can make a note of the next face-to-face meeting of the Circle of Friends (Freundeskreis). This is planned for 19th October (7 p.m. at Gasthaus Lindauer). It's an open group with 78 members - anyone interested can come. *(A report of the meeting for the next Newsletter please!)*

The Circle of Friends now plans two trips this Autumn: An educational day trip on 22nd September to Colmar of the Evangelical Community of Schongau for 35 participants, with a tour of the city, a visit to the Unterlinden Museum and a reception in the town hall. The mountaineering choir then travels to the French city with 60 participants and will perform together with a music group from Colmar. They will enjoy French cuisine at the invitation of the Friends Circle of Colmar (Les Amis du Jumelage). Ursula Diesch reveals that Schongau's mayor, Falk Sluyterman, also on this trip, will meet the new Lord Mayor of Colmar, Éric Straumann, for the first time.

Planning for the coming year is very difficult due to the current Corona situation and proceeds cautiously. So far there is only one definite event - and that had been planned for 2020. In the hope that the Passion Play will take place in Oberammergau, guests from Abingdon come to Schongau in July and, with the exception of the night in Oberammergau, are accommodated in host families in Schongau.

And then, of course, one wants to plan for the forthcoming anniversaries. Ursula Diesch expects that the 60-year-old relationship will certainly be a topic at the next conference of the twin towns, which is to take place in Sint-Niklaas in 2022. As a rule, the mayors of all twin towns, the twinning officers and representatives of the twinning societies take part. There is not yet a precise date for the conference.

Historical Background

On 6th December 1961, the Schongau Town Council decided to join the sister cities of Sint-Niklaas, Colmar and Lucca. Various celebrations took place in 1962 and 1963, hence the assumption that the anniversary celebrations will take place in 2022 and 2023. A 50th anniversary can be celebrated for the town twinning with the English. The friendship treaties with Abingdon - previously twinned with Sint-Niklaas - were signed in 1970, and the celebrations did not follow until 1972. More recent is the connection since 1996 between Schongau and Gogolin, though marking the 25 years in 2022 needs to be discussed in detail.

Brian Read

Twinning News from Argentan



The 8th FORUM DES ASSOCIATIONS was held on September 11th in the Boulodrome on Argentan. 77 stalls representing culture, sports, health, legal, charity were present with over 1,200 visitors.

The Cercle Jumelage covered its Twin Towns - Abingdon, Rotenburg and Baja.

Pierre Silliere

Twinning News from Colmar

Yes, we still work for a Christmas Market end of November. Things are getting better all the time (Like the Beatles song). So, we keep being optimistic.

As a matter of fact, we are working on a 2022 programme, with the 60th anniversary of our twinning partnership. We are awaiting the mayor of Schongau on October 9, and we hope that our friends from Abingdon have nice ideas to this purpose too...

Marc Lischer

Slowly life is getting back to normal...! We are going to Ribeauvillé at the end of this week as I said last time and we are having visits here from Schongau. Last week a group from the Schongau churches spent an afternoon here *en route* for Burgundy. In early October we will have a large group of singers (*Bergsteigerchor* also from Schongau) here for a visit and they are giving a concert. We will welcome them and have organized the concert (an evening with a local musical group as well and a buffet), visits here and in other nearby towns.

Next year we are looking to celebrate 60 years of twinning with Schongau, Sint Niklaas, Lucca and Colmar as well as 30 years of our Association. We will look forward to welcoming representatives from all our twin towns at that time - not sure of the date yet! We're also not sure what the other original twin towns may be planning.

As you see from Marc's reply it looks like the Christmas Markets will happen this year in Colmar. We are still trying to work out if we can organise a twinning weekend at the end of November! If we do, do you think people would come? (*Tell Norma Q if you are interested.*)

We hope that you are all well and we send you our very best wishes.

David Mallen

Royalty just around the corner

People of Abingdon beware, during the next three years you will be in the presence of royalty.

Our crown princess, Elisabeth, is coming to Oxford.

She was named after her great grandmother, the dearly beloved queen Elisabeth, the wife of king Albert I, who was our king during the Great War. During her life she patronized the art in all its forms. She's best remembered for establishing the world-wide renowned yearly Elisabeth Music Competition for, alternately, piano, violin, singing and cello. She was the first patroness until her death in 1965. Currently our queen Mathilde fulfils this honour.

But I digress yet again, my apologies. Back to our crown princess. Last year she completed her military training and service at the Royal Military school in Brussels. This was part of her education as Belgium's future queen, since she will be head of the Belgian army. This month the princess will be starting her study at the Lincoln College in Oxford. Her majors will be in politics and history.



To get accepted into Lincoln College, she wasn't privileged in any way. She had to pass her admissions tests, which were anonymous, just like everybody else.

The College was selected on grounds of the small number of students, only 300, and the one-on-one tutoring which makes the organisation of the security easier.

You may wonder why she hasn't opted for one of the universities in Belgium. It's all about politics. You have universities in Flanders and in Wallonia and there are Catholic and Liberal universities.

Whichever choice our royal makes, it would set off a wave of criticism in the media which will trickle into the Parliament.

Therefore, in order to avoid this political minefield, Her Royal Highness will study abroad, just like her father, King Filip, who went to Oxford and Harvard.

Princess Elisabeth will be no stranger to Great-Britain because she finished her secondary studies in the Atlantic College of Llantwit Major, Wales.

So, dear Abingdonians, prepare yourself for some Royal sightseeing in the next couple of years.

Siegfried Waterschoot
Sint-Niklaas

Photo: Instagram: @belgianroyalpalace

The importance of being uploaded

I'm sitting on the porch of our rented mobile home on the campsite of Pertuis in the Provence, France, sipping a coffee, watching two squirrels chasing each other in the tops of the pine trees.



It's difficult to write about something autumnal whilst enjoying a sunny, warm and green scenery. Not one leaf has dared to change colour, let alone to start its twirling journey onto the soil.

I therefore decided to scoop another story out of my-travels-in-France-cauldron.

Two years ago, we stayed on this very same campsite. We had a lot of intentions to explore the surroundings. Me on my new electric bike, Marina on her mobility scooter. Our battery capacity could cover around 40 miles. We decided to take things slow, because I had to get used to riding my bike in the hilly countryside. Mechanical gears on the right-hand grip, electronic gears on the left and going uphill. So confusing for a man's brain which, so the women say, can only manage one thing at the time.

Armed with a topographic map we set out to conquer the countryside choosing the back roads to avoid heavy traffic. As we got bolder, we bound for a village in the neighbourhood called La Tour d'Aigues, famous for a burned-down renaissance castle. We wanted to explore a shop which sold regional products at a reasonable price.



We were pedalling along the low traffic roads, until, after a lazy bend, the road surprised us with a serious hiccup. A short upward slope of more than 20%. I panicked. My brain had to decide in a split second to throw the bike in the lowest gear and to push the power button to the maximum in order to overcome that little bugger.

I tossed across the road, trying to stay upright, juggling to get the gears right. Suddenly I bumped into Marina's scooter, which had stopped all of sudden, not able to handle the slope. In the blink of an eye, I had to make the choice to fall to right or to the left. The tarmac on the left side seemed to be a little bit softer, so I dropped to the left. I checked myself for any severe damage, but luckily that wasn't the case.

I looked for Marina to see if she was alright to find her dissolved in a heap of giggles, tears running down her cheeks. She tried to ask if I was fine but the words were drowned in another outburst of laughter.

This, my friends, is 40 years of marriage in a nutshell.

Afterwards she explained, that it was so funny, looking in her rear mirror, seeing the disbelief on my face, my body swivelling and then slowly tipping over to the left.

We gathered our wits and managed to get to the top, where we climbed onto the road to our destination.

In the village we found out that the shop was closed and more importantly, the key of the bike lock had been broken off. This meant that I couldn't lock my bike anymore and also, I couldn't take the battery out of its cradle to recharge. A beer on a terrace in the sun brought us some solace and plans were made.

To make a long story of doom and gloom shorter, I'll tell it in telegram modus.

We called our son to send the spare key for the bike to us by post. – Until its arrival we stayed low key on the campsite to save battery.

– Our very first lockdown. –

The envelope arrived with a hole in it, but no key. Instead of putting the key in a little box, my son had used a standard envelope.

– The lockdown continued. –

I called the bike shop in our hometown and asked how I could get a new key, emphasizing that I needed it to charge the battery. – The shop owner said that the number on the key was needed and for lack of it, we needed to find a local brand shop which could access the bike's computer to search for the number. – The nearest brand shop was 40 miles away.

– The lockdown started to be annoying. –

Next day we drove to the local bike shop. I explained my problem and how to solve it to the shop assistant. He gave me a blank stare. He answered that he would explain the issue to his boss. As he would call us, we exchanged mobile phone numbers and I left my bike behind.

- Another day on the campsite. –

The day after I was called by the shop assistant. He got the number. Yes! We agreed that we would collect my bike the day after. I started to order two new keys on the specialized website. DAMN IT. 14 days delivery time. We would be home by then. I phoned my bike shop again and asked them to order the 2 new keys, still muttering about charging batteries.

- We felt chained to the mobile home -

A bit crestfallen we went to collect my bike. I thanked the shop assistant for his efforts, although, I said, it was all in vain, because we had no key and we couldn't charge the battery. He started to laugh. He then showed me a plastic cap at the head of the battery cradle, behind it was a charging point. Imagine the looks on our faces. My goodness. All that fuss. All that stress. All that lockdown. For nothing. I could have strangled the owner of my bike shop, but I still needed him to fix the lock.

- We got the "free out of jail" card. -

Home again I confronted the shop owner with his lack of mentioning the important information about the possibilities of charging the battery without removing it. He simply answered: "Oh, didn't I? I'm so sorry about that". He picked the remaining piece of key out of the keyhole for free and charged only one key in order to soften my anger.

Siegfried Waterschoot
Sint-Niklaas

Zoom with Argentan and its Twin Towns

Richard Smart and I along with Councillor Lorraine Oates and Town Clerk Nigel Warner took part in a very productive zoom meeting this morning with the Mayor of Argentan, Carine Gobe from Argentan's town council and two of their colleagues. We were joined by representatives from Baja, Hungary and Rotenburg, Germany, their other twin towns.

Our meeting covered many topics. The elections which have just taken place in Germany were touched upon. Rozalia Preininger, a city councillor from Baja, explained the Hungarian pre-elections which are taking place, the results due today. The pre-elections involve the four political groups not in power. The result of the vote will decide which one of these four parties will run against the governing party in 2022.

As one would expect our talks also covered covid with rules in each country varying slightly. Nigel talked about the lack of HGV and tanker drivers, which has also made the news in France, Germany and Hungary.

Our main focus though was for the future. Argentan are holding their Christmas market from 16 - 18 December and invited us to attend. Richard is keen to go so if anyone else would like to go please get in touch with myself or Richard, our rep for Argentan. Nigel and Lorraine talked about early preparations in Abingdon for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee next June.

Carine from Argentan asked for ideas about a joint venture for all their twin towns and the idea of an art exhibition was suggested and received unanimous support. This sounds a really exciting idea and one we hope we can work on together.

A further zoom meeting with Argentan is planned for January 2022. Our thanks go to Carine Gobé from Argentan town council for organising these very useful meetings.

Stella Carter
29 September 2021

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