

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society



Newsletter

November 2021

Guest Editor: Nick Marsh

In this edition:

- From the Editor
- Forthcoming Events
- Membership Subscriptions 2021/2022
- Recent Events: National Anthems
- Lucca Live Streaming Tour
- Twin travel: SINT-NIKLAAS
- Abingdon Fair – Cycle Race
- Circus Maximus – Siegfried Waterschoot
- Church Twinning Christmas Cards
- Schongau Christmas Market
- Plans for 2021 and the Queen's Jubilee Weekend
- Contact details

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

As one of the editors of our Newsletter it has always been a great pleasure to read the contributions sent in by our local members as well as from our overseas associates. I would like to express my great thanks for all the articles we have received on such a wide range of topics! It has also been hugely gratifying to read the large amount of positive feedback we have received from our readership – this is not only a pleasure on a personal level, but it reassures us as a team that our current Newsletter format has found favour!

This Newsletter once again has a number of contributions from our members, including a travel report on Lucca, a travel guide to visiting Colmar, another thought-provoking article from Siegfried Waterschoot in Sint-Niklaas, as well as information on our recent and upcoming events.

So, as we are rapidly approaching our festive season and looking forward to our own ADTTS Christmas Lunch, may I thank our readers for their articles, and may I also encourage you all to continue to send in your contributions – always very gratefully received!

I hope you enjoy this month's edition.

Nick Marsh

Forthcoming Events

Sunday 14 th Nov	Remembrance Sunday
Thursday 18 th Nov	7.30 for 8pm at PRCC. Evening Meeting. Programme TBA
Sunday 19 th Dec	12.30pm Christmas Lunch at Hilton Garden Inn

Sunday 14 November 2021: Remembrance Sunday

It is our practice to invite representatives from each of our twin towns in turn to come to Abingdon for the Remembrance weekend. Again, this year that will not be possible. Instead, Lucca will send a message to put on a wreath that we shall lay on their behalf at the War Memorial alongside the one from ADTTS. The service of remembrance starts at 10.50 am and all are welcome.

Thursday 18 November 2021: Evening Meeting

Our next evening meeting is on Thursday 18th November at 7.30 for 8pm at Preston Road Community Centre. Programme to be announced.

Sunday 19th December 2021: ADTTS Christmas Lunch

12.30 at [Hilton Garden Inn](#), Marcham Road, OX14 1TZ

After last year's disappointment, we expect that this year we can hold our popular Christmas lunch. It will be a three-course meal followed by tea/coffee and mince pies. Members will have received an email with details and a booking form from **Peter Dodd** (peteranne@aol.com). Please respond in good time before the deadline of 20th November.

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 updated the amount to the current rate.

Rosemary & Ian Jardine
80 Baker Road
Abingdon, Oxon OX14 5LJ
01235 539291 mob 07768054221
ian@ianjardine.co.uk

Recent Events

Evening Meeting - National Anthems

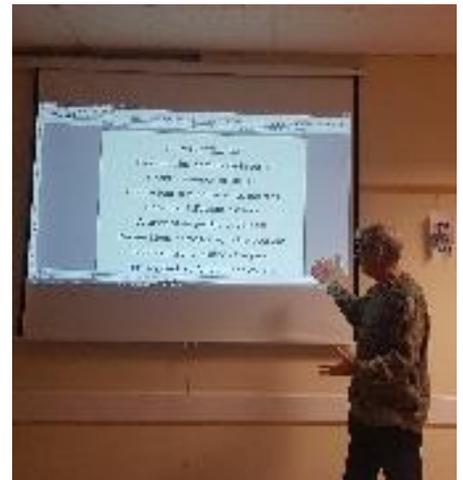
Thursday 21 October 2021 - at [Preston Road Community Centre](#)

For our second meeting together again this autumn, we were able to hold the postponed national anthems evening. Hosted by **Richard Smart**, twenty or so members enjoyed learning about various national anthems before attempting to sing them karaoke style. This met with varying degrees of success as we struggled with one or two unfamiliar languages, but enthusiasm conquered them!

The French, German, Scottish, Italian, American and European Union national anthems were fairly straightforward. The Belgian one was sung in three languages, while the Māori from New Zealand was quite challenging. We sang a (deservedly) little-known verse of the British anthem* and Richard offered a friendlier alternative version of the French one. To round off the evening before socialising over refreshments, all linked arms to sing the French version of Auld Lang Syne.

Brian Read

* O Lord our God arise,
Scatter our enemies,
And make them fall!
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,
On Thee our hopes we fix,
God save us all!



Lucca Live Streaming Tour



Those of us who logged in to the two transmissions, Sunday 3rd and Sunday 17th October were in for a treat. Our first guide started us off by entering the old city at the Porta Santa Maria in the north of Lucca and making her way through the key way of the via Fillungo through the heart of Lucca. It was great to be with the Sunday Passaggiata strolling through the narrow ancient streets of our twin town again, seeing that life had returned and the inhabitants were enjoying the late summer warmth. We deviated from the via Fillungo into the Piazza San Frediano in front of the great church and found the cafes busy serving drinks bringing me many happy memories of meeting and drinking with friends there. We walked up the side of San Frediano (sadly we entered no buildings on our tour) and onto the great walls of the city to look down into the gardens of the Palazzo Pfanner before retracing our steps to via Fillungo and then entering the great Antifiatro again surrounded by busy cafes and bringing back more memories. Our route continued past many brightly lit shops and increasing crowds until we eventually entered the Piazza San Michele to admire its wonderful frontage and end our first tour. It was good to see that some normality had returned to Lucca and to reawaken so many memories of enjoyable times with friends spent in the bars and restaurants that we passed.



On our second visit we had with a different guide, we started in the courtyard of the Palazzo of the Provincial Government and learnt about the numerous famous musicians and composers connected with the city before making our way across the Piazza Napoleone where they were again getting ready for their great exhibition of Comics, across through the street market of antiques, viewing the Opera House and penetrating many little side streets and alleyways, seeing the cathedral, the Music Academy, statues of Puccini, Boccherini and others and the home and birthplace of the greatest of the Puccini family. A very instructive tour. The Summer was clearly passing this time as the clothing of the men had graduated from shorts and singlets to trousers and sleeved shirts!

Bravo and thanks to those in Lucca who promoted these tours.

Michael Matthews

Twin Travel: SINT-NIKLAAS

Compared with the sunny Mediterranean, or even further-flung exotic destinations, the attraction of a trip to the town of Sint-Niklaas might be overlooked. That would be a mistake. Sint-Niklaas has much to interest the visitor, as well as the warm welcome we receive from our twinning friends. Belgium itself has a lot to offer too.

Of all our twin towns, Sint-Niklaas is one of the nearest and easiest to get to. The choice is between travelling by road or by rail. Either is relatively easy. Depending on your particular constraints and preference, one may be quicker, cheaper or more congenial than the other.

Going by road, as for when travelling to Colmar, there's the drive to the ferry or tunnel and then the channel crossing. Onwards from Calais, the shortest route is 186 km and takes about two hours. This follows the coast via Dunkirk until close to Bruges before heading south-east to Ghent and on to Sint-Niklaas. Alternatively, a slightly longer route (an extra 15 minutes and 15 km) goes via Ypres and Ghent. Thus, there are interesting opportunities for a break of journey. Perhaps go one way and return by the other? In estimating the overall journey time from Abingdon to Sint-Niklaas, allow for delays on the M25 and waiting at the port to board the boat or shuttle. On one past twinning weekend trip to Sint-Niklaas, a big delay due to a storm in the channel meant that the party going by road arrived hours late, well after those who went by train had dined.



In order to take the train option, start, as for going to Colmar, from St Pancras station. This time, take the Eurostar to Brussels. The service to Brussels, compared with that to Paris, is a little less frequent and less crowded. Arrive at Brussels Midi/Zuid/South station and, unlike in Paris, it's just a simple change of platform to catch an onward train. Belgium has a dense and frequent domestic train network. It's possible to find a direct train from Brussels to Sint-Niklaas, taking about 80 minutes. However, often it's necessary to make an easy change in, for example, Ghent or Antwerp, which can in fact be slightly quicker overall. Consider taking a route via Antwerp, since the terminal station building there, particularly the interior, is magnificent! (Pictured)



To give an idea of timing, for example leave St Pancras at 11:04 and arrive in Brussels at 14:05 local time. There, take the 14:29, change at Ghent and reach Sint-Niklaas at 15:42, giving an overall journey time of 4:13, plus an hour for the time change. There will be a much greater choice of Eurostar departures as services return to a pre-covid timetable.

For the return journey from Sint-Niklaas to London, there is a wide choice of trains. The latest time to set off is 19:02, changing at Ghent and Brussels to arrive at 22:15 in St Pancras. However, an early afternoon departure would allow time for a relaxed dinner in Brussels before boarding (an earlier) Eurostar.

Note that when buying tickets at www.eurostar.com, you can conveniently book a return to "Any Belgium Station" for about £10 extra each way. Unlike with buying European train

tickets, when you can often choose specific seats (like on an aircraft), Eurostar is different. It allocates seats at random. However, after booking, you can then go to the web site at any time and change to any seats that are free. It can be worthwhile to move seats to avoid sitting next to a pillar instead of a window.

A visit to Sint-Niklaas can be more than satisfying in itself. However, it is easy to take the opportunity to extend the trip, perhaps going via another town on the way home. Obvious candidates for a stop-over are Antwerp, Bruges and Ghent, all easily accessible by train. Then, of course, don't forget Brussels!

If you have any comments or further thoughts to offer about travelling to Sint-Niklaas, then do send them to the editor of the Newsletter (newsletter@adtts.eu).

Brian Read

Abingdon's ancient annual street fair

Abingdon Fair, a fun-fair (une vogue, ein Kirmess) is held every year for two days in early October. Note that this FUN fair is a strictly entertainment fair, selling "rides" on carousels, roundabouts, waltzers, dodgems, ghost trains etc (though there are stalls selling highly-sugared treats like candy floss and toffee apples and chips). For two days traffic closes in the town centre and along the High Street and the full length of Ock Street down to the White Horse pub. This year the fair's advertising poster carried the claim that it is "the longest street fair in Europe at 1.5 miles." Advertising this claim has brought controversy in the town as to how long the street fair really is. Correspondence on the Abingdon blog clustered around a length of 1KM, from people who had walked the distance to find out. Speculation there followed that the 1.5 miles was calculated by counting the length on one side of the street and then back again. To be "fair" (no pun intended) in many places there ARE rides on both sides of the street, and the distance may be increased by the few large rides on Stratton Way and at the head of a couple of the side-streets.



The Mayor and Abingdon Town Councillors helped to lead the service. The Mayor thanked many people for making the fair possible, including Mr William Wilson M.B.E., and his wife Emily, who lead the organisation of the fair.

Photos courtesy: abingdonblog.co.uk



After the service, those that wanted could have a ride on Hebborn's Galloping Horses carousel. Pictured are Mr Nigel Warner, the Town Clerk; Cllr Samantha Bowring, the leader of the town council; and The Mayor, Cllr Cheryl Briggs.

The Abingdon Town Council website (2018) has the length at 1 mile and yet also perpetuates the claim that this is the longest street fair in EUROPE. A look at Google proposes the Links Fair at Kircaldy in Fife, Scotland as "the longest street fair in Europe", though it doesn't give its linear length. The Fife fair is stated in the same Wikipedia article to be six days long, so is

their claim based on duration rather than distance? There are certainly rides and helter-skelters in their photograph but is it a strictly rides fair, as opposed to commercial stalls?

The Abingdon Street Fair is thought to be about 700 years old, having started around the time of a plague, the famous "Black Death". It started as a "Hiring Fair" where so many agricultural workers had been lost in the plague that farmers needed to hire itinerant labourers to bring in the harvests. Hence the (smaller) "Runaways" Fair in Abingdon, held just a week after the main fair, when workers who did not like their new master could break their contract and return to Abingdon to find a new boss. Though these fairs wouldn't have been fun-fairs, they would clearly be a theatre for market stalls and a cause of drunkenness and trouble as the famously many, many pubs and inns along Ock Street were open all day.

There is a history of street markets or fairs causing public unrest in Abingdon dating back to long before the Black Death and the "hiring" fairs. Such markets were the source of much of the enmity between the townspeople, centred on St Helen's Church and its guild (now Christ's Hospital charity), and the historic Abbey. The townspeople had the right to buy and sell at their regular market, but the Abbey were constantly organising competing fairs in the town, open to stallholders from outside the town who paid the Abbott for their space. These were often the cause of riots by the townspeople, including some of their armed assaults on the Abbey gates, which quite often led to deaths on both sides.

It's not clear when Abingdon Fair became a FUN fair, but fairground "rides", boxing booths, "curiosity" and "wild animal" stalls seem to be a nineteenth century development in England.

The roads are closed, neighbouring streets' access to the main street closed off and Abingdon Fair is set up on the Sunday afternoon and early evening. My wife and I are not long-time Abingdonians but we live quite near the Fair and delayed our Sunday stroll into early evening so that we could see the range of attractions before it commenced action on the Monday. This was a fascinating way to see the Fair, one could inspect how CLOSE the back of the incessant blaringly noisy, whirling, highly illuminated rides are to the front doors and windows of the houses on the streets, including in particular quite a number of care homes and retirement hostels. And they are the latest thing in rides technology, how high, fast can you go, upside down, shaken side to side, scared out of your wits in the Abingdon night air?

It was quite cold as my wife and I reached the town square just minutes after 7.30. We were lifted by the sound of hymn singing, not from St Nicholas' church on the square, but from the square's very centre, dwarfed by the giant new Waltzer and backed by the wonderfully-lit traditional centre of a fair, the "up and down wooden Galloping Horses."

We had arrived just in the first few bars of the introductory hymn of a Special Service of blessing of the Fair. Hymn sheets of 3 hymns were already circulating. The Hymn, led by the irrepressibly cheerful Abingdon Band, sung by a befrocked priest accompanied by the Mayor and Members of the Town Council in their regalia, their gowns, and those wonderful back-and-front-pointed Napoleon (or is it Nelson) ceremonial hats, and a small but enthusiastic group of attenders, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind...." rang out "...forgive our foolish ways" (!). Although this service is advertised and apparently a feature of the preparation of the Fair every year, it came as a beautiful spirit-warmer on that cold evening, a sense of continuance and personal identification with the generations who had been before. This spirit continued with a really quite fascinatingly unusual mini-sermon by Revd Charles Miller, Vicar of St Helen's, about temporary or even permanent abandonment of worry and care in favour of faith, in trying to become, as he put it in his closing carefully enunciated word: "care-less". We then sang, appropriately to his thoughts, "Immortal, Invisible God only Wise". An unusual and thoughtfully-worded prayer of blessing the Fair and dedicating its activities followed, (I particularly noted the benediction of "a justifiable profit").

After a closing hymn, *The Day Thou Gavest Lord, is Ended*, my wife and I departed into Stert Street to check the time of the morrow's Cycle Race. A quick decision to walk back through the Jewellers' Arcade saw us behind the now-revolving Galloping Horses and the "sight of the night".

Flying past on the carousel, mounted on his painted wooden steed, a lone town councillor, pointedly be-hatted, gown flowing out and behind him in the flying momentum. A Monty Python moment in old Abingdon. At the other side of the carousel, also mounted and by now upping and downing towards us, the rest of the councillors, flying by. Wonderful to see, while the "common people" who had attended the service waited in a patient queue for THEIR free ride. Sorry we didn't get to picture YOU Mr Lone Equestrian Councillor, but for us you were the "Sight of the Night". A heart-warming evening all round.

ADDENDUM - IT'S ALL HAPPENING IN ABINGDON!

15 hours later, and we're leaving home again, this time for the "Women's Cycle Race", the women's equivalent of the Tour of Britain, its first stage passing through Abingdon Town Centre, with Stert Street closed to traffic from 11.45 to 12.45. We decide not to brave what we expect to be the packed pavement of Stert Street and head for Wootton Road, the wide section just before the college, opposite Tesco Express. We hear that Stert Street has been designated the first sprint of the day, which has started in Bicester. But here we can stand at safe distance from other spectators, and we'll have a long view back towards the town as the cyclists sweep round the bend just after John Mason School and then our view following them in the opposite direction until they have passed the college. We wait and wait and the road seems to be still open, but at about 12.15 police motorcyclists begin to roar past us at breakneck speeds, then another group, then in ones, but always thunderously roaring past with great relish. This process lasts for about 15 minutes, by which time I estimate about forty to fifty police motorcyclists have passed, it's the day of their motorcycling lives, occasionally one stops at the end of a side road, but then roars off again when a new one thunders up to take his place. This is the rolling system for closing the sideroads as the time approaches for the cyclists to pass. It's a great spectacle in itself, a sort of police Dukes of Hazzard.

At last, the side roads have been blocked off and the police motorcyclists hold up motorists who have to wait in their cars until the race has passed. My wife and I are keen on watching the Grand Tours on TV, we've been watching them for about (can it really be?) 25 years. The Tour de France, the Giro, the Vuelta. To us the team names are household words, yes but magical, as they change their combinations of sponsors names over the years: Orica Greenedge, Saxo Bank Timkoff, Francaise des Jeux, Bora Hansgrohe, and the ever-memorable Omega Pharma Quick Step. We know all the jerseys. We love them all. They are part of our lives.

Now one or two Sky Cycling team vans go past at steady speed, excited whistles are blowing like the coaches at the Oxford Rowing Bumping Races, and the huge gang of cyclists hoves into view, flat out. In a second they're past, unusually no breakaway group at the front, just the peloton and no strugglers spewing out the back. One huge swarm of muscles and energy, helmetted, lots of sunglasses, only looking at them from the rear is it clear that they are women, as they speed off with their sometimes-long hair streaming out behind their helmets. In a flash they are gone, we catch our breath and realise it was so quick, so bunched that we didn't have time to even notice their jerseys. And now the usual cavalcade of team cars follows, carrying the team managers, the doctors, the mechanics, the commissaires.

The motor manufacturers turn out their best models for these teams, painted in the team insignia and colours, mostly with foreign registration plates, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, France. Now we see from those so-familiar team names that the teams in the race are in fact the women's' teams of all our much-loved cycling teams. But you'd never have known

it from watching that speeding, individually undistinguishable swarm of cyclists who were in your view for just a couple of seconds, yet on about 300 metres of visible road.

We reach the last of the team cars in hot pursuit of the cyclists, managers screaming at their charges on the intercom. But as suddenly as it began the hubbub stops, quiet descends, the trapped motorists go into gear and roll off in their boring unicolour cars, and the world returns to normal.

We cross the road, we go into Tesco, buy a loaf and some tea bags and tread off home.

Phil Addison

From Siegfried Waterschoot in Sint-Niklaas

Circus Maximus

The 11th of November. It is evening. The bugles have played their last tunes, the poppies have been removed from the button holes. The mind is preparing the body for another bleak and gloomy November. Only the salvation of the Christmas celebration is a silver lining lowly shimmering on the distant horizon.

We don't have that. The 12th of November is the day that our good old friend Sinterklaas (Saint Nicolas) arrives in his hometown of Sint-Niklaas. Without any bells or whistles, oh no, that's for later in the month. The 14th of November, to be precise.

Perhaps you're wondering why the 12th of November?

Well, here in Flanders, we have three great friends of the children: Saint Martin, Sinterklaas and Father Christmas. Some decades ago, these wise men had a meeting to decide who would be celebrated on which day, so not one child would be confused.

They came up with a clear line-up where Saint Martin starts the events on the 11th November, seamlessly followed by Sinterklaas who enters the country on the 12th of November and is celebrated on the 6th of December. Father Christmas then closes the ranks with a celebration on the 25th of December.

For those who want to know more about Saint Martin follow the link

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Martin%27s_Day

After two years of lockdown in Spain, Sinterklaas is back in town (almost). You will be able to visit his house again, after reserving a timeslot online and "*Sint in de piste*" will return too. Loosely it translates as: Saint Nicolas in the circus.

"*Sint in de piste*" is an event that takes place two weekends in a row with three performances a day and will definitely be sold out.

Normally the tent would be rented from the UK, but Brexit made that impossible. Luckily a similar tent was found in Spain. That's a bonus. The tent and Sint-Niklaas both from Spain. (Please, don't start any nit-picking discussion about the man's whereabouts. If the children believe he lives in Spain, he lives in Spain.)





Photos courtesy www.sintindepiste.be

With its 2250 seats, this tent is the biggest you can find in Europe. The storyline of this year's performance is that there is something wrong with the chocolate the Holy Man needs. We can't have that, now, can we?

The circus acts in between the story are, as expected, from the highest quality. Only the cream of the crop is good enough for the greatest friend of all the children. Because of the high quality of the acts, this event doesn't only attract the children and their parents but also circus lovers. They are so abundant that they were taking the places of children who wanted to come and see Sinterklaas.

To solve this inconvenience the organization created two more shows called Winter circus, between the two weekends. The acts are longer and meant for grown-ups. These performances too will be sold out.

Church Twinning Christmas Cards



The Church Twinning Christmas cards are now ready for sale. They cost £4.50 per pack of 10 cards, 5 cards each of two Abingdon scenes. They are available from each Church's Twinning representative, or from Maurice Tubb (01235 526963, mauricetubb@virginmedia.com).

Schongau Christmas Market



Among the many disappointments of last year was the cancellation of the annual Christmas market in Schongau town centre. However, preparations for a Christmas market this year have begun.

The recently revised coronavirus regulations for Bavaria will now allow it to go ahead without major restrictions. This means no mask or "3G" certificate requirement and no controls on access. Nevertheless, safe distancing must be still a consideration, but dangerous overcrowding is not expected.

Thus, Schongauers can look forward to the usual stands and musical entertainment while enjoying a Bratwurst and Glühwein. The Christmas market on Marienplatz will take place from 2nd to 12th December. Now the hope is for good weather!



(The pictures were taken in December 2009 during the Mayors' Conference in Schongau.)

Brian Read

Plans for 2021 and the Queen's Jubilee Weekend.

Now that it seems travel in Europe will become easier and safer next year, we are really looking forward to meeting all our friends from the Twin Towns, but while uncertainties remain it is too early to make firm plans or fix any dates.

One date we can be sure about however, is the Jubilee Celebrations to mark the 70th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II over the weekend of 2nd to 5th of June 2022. The Town Council is planning a series of events over that weekend which will include the traditional bun throwing from the roof of the County Hall. We will let you have more details including any specific Twinning events in a future Newsletter.

We know that several of our members are keen to invite their old friends from the Twin Towns to join them for that weekend. We will be very happy to welcome any people from the Twin Towns who are in Abingdon then, either as guests of our members, or who come independently, and arrange for them an opportunity to all meet together.

ADTTS Contacts

Chairman

Stella Carter

The Old Bakehouse

2 Winterbourne Rd, Abingdon OX14 1AJ

01235 520317

chairman@adtts.eu

Treasurer & Membership

Ian & Rosemary Jardine

80 Baker Road

Abingdon, OX14 5LJ

01235 539291

treasurer@adtts.eu

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is two days before the end of the month. Please send contributions to newsletter@adtts.eu.

Keep right up to date by going to www.adtts.eu.
