



The Swindon-Salzgitter Twinning Association



JOURNAL OF THE VISIT BY SALZGITTER TO SWINDON 15 to 22 JUNE 2011

INTRODUCTION

This journal details the visit made by our friends from Salzgitter to Swindon in 2011 who were hosted by members of the Association.

The programme had been designed to allow for organised visits, informal gatherings and free time when hosts could entertain their guests as they wished.

THE FORMAL PROGRAMME

Mayor's Reception

After an uneventful journey from Heathrow airport, the guests went to their hosts for a well deserved rest before the first semi-formal event the following morning. For this, the Mayor, Cllr Ray Ballman hosted a reception in the parlour in the Civic Offices.

An umbrella was presented to the Mayor, a fitting gift considering the weather that we had been suffering at the time. After tea and biscuits, the Mayor took us on a tour of the Council chambers and the newly refurbished rose garden. During the visit, members of both twinning associations were interviewed by Swindon Community Radio (105.5 FM). The rest of the day was free for private trips.



Welcome Evening

The evening was given over to a welcome meal of a very tasty curry at the house of one of our members. Members and guests could mingle and renew friendships and meet new people.



Visit to Wadworth Brewery

On the following day, there was a tour of the Wadworth brewery in Devizes. We were escorted round by a very knowledgeable lady who explained the beer-making process simply and succinctly. This was followed by beer tasting and lunch at the Black Swan in Devizes.



After lunch, guests had free time with their hosts.

Brunch

On the Saturday morning there was a brunch at one of the members' homes where all could indulge in a full English breakfast so as to fortify them for the afternoon private visits.

Visit to Houses of Parliament and London

The highlight of the programme was a trip to London. The journey to the capital was somewhat fraught owing to road-works on the M4 but we made it in time for the planned visit to the Houses of Parliament. This trip had been organised through the office of the North Swindon MP, Justin Tomlinson. Two of the MP's research staff took us on the tour. We first went into Portcullis House opposite the Westminster Palace (the modern building is next to where Scotland Yard used to be) and from there under the road into the precincts of the Houses of Parliament. From Westminster Hall, the 1000 year



old part of the Parliament buildings and the place where many famous people have lain in state, into the central lobby, the voting lobbies and the various corridors linking all these parts. It was a wonderful experience to be able to pass through the House of Commons, the centre of the British parliamentary system. We also had the treat of visiting the Terrace of the Houses of Parliament where MPs and their guests can take tea and have meals. Our hosts for the visit were very well informed and gave explanations of all that we saw. To our guests' delight one of our guides spoke excellent German and gave some of the explanations in their own language.



In

the afternoon, Association members escorted their guests around their chosen places of interest in London. Although we could not visit Westminster Abbey (the queue was too long for the short time we had) nevertheless a walk over the route of the Royal Wedding seemed appropriate. From Parliament Square the route went down Whitehall passing the Banqueting Hall and Downing Street and across Horse Guards Parade to St James's Park. Across the park, was Pall Mall leading passed St James's Palace

and Clarence House to Buckingham Palace to the left of which is the Royal Mews where the state coaches are kept.

Others had chosen to mix some of the royal sites of interest with other landmarks such as Trafalgar Square and along the great



shopping streets of the capital (Piccadilly, Regent Street and Oxford Street) as well as taking advantage of the good weather of enjoying walking in the various parks of central London.

Finally all arrived in Park Lane and the rendezvous with our coach for the homeward journey. The latter proved far less irksome than the journey up to London since there were no road works to impede us. Guests then spent the rest of the evening with their hosts.

Farewell Meal

The last formal item was a farewell meal at the Purton Club with a fine buffet and entertainment by a group (Dave, Mike and Roy) singing a medley of well-know songs, soothing music on keyboards by Stuart and the local Brinwell choir.



The final morning of the visit was spent with hosts and, after our farewells, the guests departed for Heathrow and their journey home.

INFORMAL VISITS

Even though the twinning between Swindon and Salzgitter has been in place for over 35 years, it was still possible for hosts and guests to choose from among the many interesting places in and around Swindon to visit. The following outlines some of the places that were chosen.

Swindon Town Centre still offers many opportunities for retail therapy as well as places to eat and drink and some of us took full advantage.

Old Town offers a wide range of shopping. Also



some took the chance to visit the Museum with its comprehensive coverage of the history of Swindon and its environs and the Art Gallery with exhibitions of local and Chinese art. The icing on the cake was that it was festival week with entertainment in the street and the Town Gardens. The Gardens looked beautiful in the sunshine.

Outlet Centre is a shoppers' paradise and a number of our group went there to seek out bargains.



Cotswold Water Park an idyllic place to relax among the more than 150 lakes which forms the catchment area for the Upper Thames and has been formed over millions of years.

Further afield, hosts took their guests to places in areas surrounding Swindon

Aldbourne has the medieval church of St Michael, extended in the 15th century in the perpendicular gothic style, overlooking



the village green. Nearby is the medieval ringwork Lewisham Castle. The village saw action in the English civil war and hosted Easy Company of the US 101st Airborne Division just before D-Day. Easy Company was featured in the TV series '*Band of Brothers*'. The village was also the backdrop for a *Doctor Who* episode. The people of Aldbourne are nicknamed 'Dabchicks' after the little grebe.

Avebury is renowned for its very large stone circle, causeway and picturesque village. Nearby are also the prehistoric relics the Sanctuary and the West Kennet Long Barrow.



Didcot Railway Museum is complementary to our own Steam museum. The Didcot museum has a number of engineering sheds containing reminders of the railway works that once thrived there and has a passenger railway open for rides by the public much like the Swindon and Cricklade Railway at Blunsdon.

Kingston Bagpuize House has a history dating



back a thousand years but took its present form when the house was redeveloped in the 18th century and the Saxon church being rebuilt in 1799. Mary Blandy (a cousin of the owner John Blandy) was the last woman hanged in Oxford after she poisoned her father over his objection to her lover.

Malmesbury is a quintessentially Wiltshire village with so much history to see. Of particular interest are the abbey and market cross but the town has over 400 listed buildings of historic importance.



Lacock is in effect the English village that has never changed. There is no street furniture and tight control is exercised on the style and decoration of the houses.



Because of this, the village has appeared as some 25 different TV series and films with, perhaps, the best known programmes being *Cranford* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. The Abbey (a private house since the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry X111) is a centre piece of the village. The design as a family home was by William Sharrington and then passed into the Talbot family. One very interesting

feature was the brew-house that used the gravity system just as had been seen by the group at the Wadworth Brewery. The Fox Talbot Museum proved to be really interesting containing a history of photography and including an exhibition of photographs made using the processes developed by Fox Talbot.



Oxford is a world-renowned city with thriving shops and pubs, a vibrant student population and



many University colleges. Christ Church is one of the fine university colleges and its dining hall is famous worldwide. Its walls are lined with the pictures of those who worked there including Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and it boasts a very fine stained-glass window showing Dodgson himself and the characters of *'Alice in Wonderland'*. The hall was also used in scenes from the films about *'Harry*



Potter'. Many visitors also take time to marvel at the Bodleian Library and the Ashmolean Museum.

Snowhill Lavender Farm was described as a delight with the sight and smell of the lavender coming into bloom. The farm sells the flowers, plants and a whole range of products made from lavender.



Stratford-upon-Avon is the one-time home of William Shakespeare and his wife Anne Hathaway whose cottage is still a very popular visitor attraction.

Stratford is still a major centre for performance of Shakespeare's plays and the



RSC Theatre has been re-opened after refurbishment.

At the time of the visit there was a regatta on the river.



Uffington White Horse the enigmatic stylised view of a horse carved into the chalk hills is now thought to be 3000 years old. Previously it had been suggested that it was made to celebrate the victories of King Alfred. The horse looks over the Vale of the White Horse on the edge of the Berkshire Downs. Near by are several other important monuments including Dragon Hill, with its bare top said to have been caused when St George killed the dragon and spilled its blood leaving ground on which nothing would grow. Also around the area are The Manger, Uffington Castle and Pillow Mound.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photographs of the Mayor receiving the umbrella, Avebury and the regatta at Stratford-upon-Avon were by Margaret Fryer.

Other photographs were by Roger Gower except for the following:

St Michael's Church, Aldbourn;

http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/gallery/church/aldbourne_picF0013.JPG

Avebury;

http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-avebury-property_image-2

Ann Hathaway's cottage, Stratford-upon-Avon;

http://www.stratford-upon-avon.co.uk/images/ah_2011_400.jpg

Christ Church, Oxford;

<http://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/images/quadaugust360.jpg>

Kingston Bagpuize House;

<http://www.kingstonbagpuizehouse.com/images/house2.jpg>

Malmesbury Abbey;

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4a/Malmesbury.abbey.exterior.arp.jpg/220px-Malmesbury.abbey.exterior.arp.jpg>

Snowhill Lavender Farm;

<http://www.snowhill-lavender.co.uk/data/snowhill/images/landscape.cray11.gif>

Swindon Old Town Village;

<http://www.oldtownvillage.co.uk/images/towngardens.jpg>

Swindon Retail Outlet Centre;

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d4/Swindon.shopping.arp.750pix.jpg/220px-Swindon.shopping.arp.750pix.jpg>

Uffington White Horse;

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/48/Uffington-White-Horse-sat.jpg/280px-Uffington-White-Horse-sat.jpg>