Town Twinning Weekend Easter 2013

At 10.30am on Good Friday our 43 visitors (aged from 10 to 76) arrived having travelled through the night from our twin town of Vern d’Anjou. They were welcomed at the Village Hall by the 14 host families of Tatsfield. The Fairtrade Group very kindly served teas, coffees and delicious cakes. The English hosts then had the freedom to choose how to spend the rest of the day. Some visited Beaver Water World, some took them on a walk and to a traditional English pub whilst others visited the gardens of Chartwell. In the evening, families got together for a social meal and to brush up on language skills; sign language always assisting along with some cleverly chosen games!

On Saturday, as they love to visit London, they were taken on the new Emirates Airline gondola travelling from the Excel centre high across the Thames to the O2 arena. If you haven’t yet been, the views are fantastic and to be recommended. Whilst looking around the O2, one of our French guests, Michel, provided much amusement by wearing a mask of the Queen! They were chauffeured to a picnic lunch at the Forum, a lovely and warm village hall in Greenwich.

A brief stroll took them along the river to rendezvous with some French speaking guides for a tour of Greenwich, taking in the Painted Hall, Chapel, Old Royal Naval College, Cutty Sark, National Maritime museum and the Observatory. They then had some free time before walking through Greenwich Park to the wonderful viewpoint at the top and to catch their breath! From there we went on to Zero Degrees in Blackheath for an evening meal and tour around the microbrewery on site.

Sunday morning was relaxed as is traditional before meeting for the official reception at the village hall at midday. Entertainment was provided by Rosie Fuller on piano vocal, Sam Fuller on electric guitar and Jim and Sophie Mullan on guitar vocals. This provided a lovely prelude to the more formal speeches from Peter Fuller, Chair of the Twinning Association, Hervé Forveille (President of the Vern d’Anjou Association), Sue Smale (on behalf of the Parish Council) with Christine Armstrong providing the English translation, Paul Berthelôt (on behalf of the Major of Vern d’Anjou) with Yannick Maussion translating into English. Everyone seemed to appreciate the efforts to make this year’s reception less of a formal occasion and more of an extra social event to be enjoyed by all.

Last year in Vern, we embarrassed ourselves a little by failing to rise to a challenge to knit the longest scarf. Our French counterparts had galvanized many people, especially from the retirement home in Vern and made a scarf 87 metres long! In response we decided to commission a special gift made and designed by a local knitter, Sandra Monks, for the people of Vern to show our appreciation. There was even a mini version adorning a teddy bear for them to take too.

Despite the cold weather, there followed a treasure hunt around the village, which ended at Huw and Althea Davies’ barn for a BBQ and games. A bonfire kept the guests warm and pool, darts and ‘splat the rat’ were played inside the barn. John White’s goats put in an appearance for the children and a piñata, whilst not very English did keep the children amused for quite some time.

The Sunday evening soirée was at the Bakery where the guests were treated to a fantastic 4 course meal followed by a two-piece band that kept us all dancing until the small hours.

On Monday, 1st April, over breakfast, the English hosts came across what looked like the Parish Magazine with a headline about the Crown Jewels being returned to Angers. On closer inspection, the photo of Henry VII looked suspiciously like Chairman Peter Fuller and Edward Plantagenet rather like Hervé their President. Our French friends do love a practical joke and being Aprils Fool’s Day they had cleverly produced a news story!

We took them to Sevenoaks Indoor bowls club where 16 very kind volunteers demonstrated how to play. The morning was spent trying to perfect the technique before an amazing buffet lunch was served. During the afternoon the 50 players were split into 16 teams for a competition. The Bowls club made us all feel very welcome; it’s a great facility and well worth a visit.

The final evening was Race Night and with the village hall decked with rosettes, whips, caps and silks, betting was underway! With special Tatsfield currency created by Sean Mooney, guests were given 27 ‘Tats’ to play with. Halfway through guests were treated to beef in beer followed by apple crumble and custard. There followed a slight rigging of one race so that Daniel, one of our French guests was the only winner as it was his birthday!

As is usual, an early start on the Tuesday saw our French guests depart at 6am for their long trip back to the Loire Valley. It was another great weekend spent with new and old friends. We managed to avoid the worst of the cold weather through careful planning.

We are very grateful to all the hosts for welcoming our French visitors into their homes and for joining in with the activities and especially to those new hosts who took the plunge! Thanks go to all involved in ensuring the weekend ran smoothly. We look forward to your support for the fundraising events which will follow over the next 2 years in preparation for hosting again in 2015. If you would like to become involved in the twinning association or would like to get your name down to visit Vern next Easter, please contact Pete or Rosie Fuller on 01959 573554.