

Attracting Young Persons to Twinning in Ottery St Mary

In 2006-07 the Ottery St Mary Twinning Association appointed a new Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer who took no more than a year to settle in while maintaining the twinning programme with our twin towns of Pont l'Eveque in Normandy, France and Ilsfeld in Baden Wurttemberg in Germany .

We have set about developing and implementing a new strategy specifically to get the youth of Ottery and our twin towns of Ilsfeld and Pont l'Eveque involved and also to raise the profile of the Twinning Association in the community. Some of the regular meetings were revamped with additional activities planned to achieve these objectives.

We had a twinning visit from our German twin town of Ilsfeld with a comprehensive programme of visits around and about Ottery which included the Ottery St Mary Heritage Society Museum, a summer months exhibition in the squash court of a local hotel in which twinning played an active part. Some of the twinning exhibit was transferred to the Ottery Tourist Office window during the visit from Ilsfeld.

In June we had a last minute request from the Mayor of Ilsfeld, who is an enthusiastic supporter of twinning, for us to find venues for the Ilsfeld Youth Orchestra to perform. This required urgent enquiries and after much searching they were able to perform a concert in nearby Tipton St John Church to help raise funds for reroofing, an open air performance in Sidmouth Connaught Gardens but the organised short session in the Guildhall Centre in Exeter was unfortunately rained off. It was a pity that the visit was not a week earlier when the Devon Youth Orchestra had a practice week culminating in concerts in the County.

Concentrating on raising the youth profile, we were able to host in Ottery a delegation from Ilsfeld of civic dignitaries, members of their twinning committee, school teachers and scout leaders on an exploratory visit . They spent a day at Kings School, some time with the scout group, joined in an Ottery volleyball club meeting and visited the junior football club as well as meeting the Mayor of Ottery. This has resulted in a number of exchange visits being planned, more of which to follow.

A larger party than in recent years from our French twin town, Pont l'Eveque, elected to make the Ottery Carnival weekend their choice of date for their visit to us. Those living in locally will have the date Thursday 30th October 2008 imprinted on their minds as the day that 15 inches of hail (plus a lot of rain) fell overnight devastating much of Ottery St Mary and surrounding parts of East Devon. Fortunately most members participating as hosts suffered minimal damage but the Carnival was doubtful right up to the morning of the event. Even so the route of the procession had to be changed and the location for the firework display reorganized at very short notice. This did nothing to upset our plans which also included a visit to Sand House and Gardens at Sidbury and the traditional twinning dinner at the Blue Ball Inn where a father and son entertained a group of about 80 to a musical rendition with violin and clarinet.

cont

cont

Following on from the earlier exploratory visit from Ilsfeld a group of teachers and students from Kings School has just returned from a week in Ilsfeld with the very positive prospect of the Kings School and Ilsfeld School agreeing a formal twinning partnership as you will see from the attached exchanges of e-mails.

The Ilsfeld Scouts have accepted an invitation from the Ottery Scouts to a joint camp in August 2009 in Sidmouth and plans are already in hand to organize activities both in Ottery and along the East Devon coast.

A record group of 53 twinningers from Ilsfeld are due in Ottery in April and it is pleasing to note that eight of the group are school age including two girls whose family acted as host for the Kings School trip in March. As well as the organized events we have been successful in getting the Mayor and Town Council to host a Civic Reception, a first for Ottery. At this reception it is planned to launch a new Ottery St Mary Heritage walking Tour Guide translated into German. This has been translated by members of our twinning association from the English version and with the Tourist office obtained sponsorship. We believe that it is the first guide in German for an East Devon town and expect to get good publicity both for ourselves and for Ottery St Mary. The town often gets groups of German tourists since there are many locations where TV adaptations of Rosamund Pilcher books were filmed.

At the twinning dinner our Chairman, Mark Rix, is planning to announce another exciting project aimed at attracting youth. It is intended that Ottery will host a group of youngsters from each of our French and German Twin towns for a week during the 2012 Olympic Games. Particularly with water sport events being held at Weymouth it is our plan to give these youngsters and our young Ottery hosts the unique opportunity of enjoying the Olympic atmosphere live and first hand, probably the only opportunity in the next 12 years in Europe.

In keeping with the means of communication with youth we are developing our own web site which will be hosted by both the Ottery Tourist Office web site and the Ottery Town Council web site with links to other sites as appropriate.

Appendices

Newspaper cuttings relating to Scouts camp and German delegates visit
Photograph taken at the visit to the Volleyball Club
E-mails relating to the success of the Kings School visit to Ilsfeld
Proof copy of the Ottery Heritage Trail Guide in German.

Submitted by Keith Spittlehouse on behalf of the Ottery St Mary Twinning Association

Signed *Mark Rix , Chairman*

..... *Keith Spittlehouse, Secretary*