

Worcester Twinning Association

CONNECTIONS

WINTER 2020



Editor Contact: Derek Furby
Membership Contact: Malcolm Campbell



By now you may have noticed that this year is by no means normal and I'm sure all our lives have been turned upside down. With lockdown and travel restrictions both in this country and abroad it has made it very difficult to go on holiday or visit family and friends. I'm sure that when this pandemic hit us back in March, things would be back to normal by the end of summer. We now know better. This has meant that all Twinning Association Events have had to be cancelled, or postponed until next year at least.

A new word has recently come into our vocabulary, 'Zoom'.

Due to the rule of 6, and the Guildhall being closed, we have had to resort to Zoom to hold our Executive Committee meetings. This has proved very successful, and as this mode of communication is proving popular with other organisations, more and more people are becoming comfortable with using it. It is hoped that, in the near future we can bring our members and Twin Towns closer together on a regular basis.

It has been very difficult to bring together a newsletter this year, so I have asked our liaison officers how they and their twin towns have coped during the year.

www.worcestertwinning.org.uk

I think that with all of us our lives have been turned upside down since the beginning of the Corona Virus pandemic. I'm sure we have all found ways of coping with what has now become our new normal.

Lock down was quite an endurance test at times. If ever I found myself in a low mood because of social isolation then I would take myself out in the garden and spend hours out there working away. I think that our daily walks and all the time spent out in the garden were a real lifeline for us at that time.

We found some really beautiful places within walking distance from home that we never knew existed before and we found many short cuts and alley ways in our neighbourhood that we never knew about before. Duck Brook and the Battenhall farm area of Worcester were a real revelation to us. Who needed foreign travel when we had all this beauty on our doorstep?

I have always regarded myself as a fair-weather gardener but I've taken my garden more seriously this year and I've been out there in all weathers.

Our garden has never looked so good. We have laid a new path, which would still be on our gardening to do list if it had not been for lockdown. We've grown beans, tomatoes, courgettes, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants, salad leaves and the list goes on. I'm busy planting many, many bulbs at the moment.

Mother's Day and Easter just weren't the same this year. On Mother's Day we saw our children individually on the day at a good social distance in our garden. We always get together for a family meal on Easter Sunday but this year we had a family get together on Zoom and raised a glass to celebrate what is usually a lovely family occasion. We all get together for Christmas usually and with the wider family too but at the moment we are all wondering what sort of Christmas we will be allowed to have depending on restrictions at the time. I will be having a big birthday at Christmas but I think this celebration might have to wait until next summer.

It was difficult not being able to see friends but we kept in touch over the phone and with one of my friends who lives in France we were sending each other What's App messages and photos of our beautiful gardens daily. These What's App messages and phone calls were a real lifeline in the days of lockdown.

Both family members and friends have had the virus. My son in law who is a super fit 40 year old was knocked for six by the virus, while 2 of our friends who are 70 years olds got off lightly. One of them just lost her sense of taste and smell and that's all and her husband although he tested positive he had no symptoms whatsoever. It's bit of a lottery in the way that the virus affects different people. All the same I would rather not catch it. I would rather keep my social contact to minimum for now.

I have kept in touch with Karl-Heinz during this difficult time. He's been in hospital; to have an operation on his back. He's had months of physiotherapy and he has spent three weeks in a residential rehabilitation clinic. He seems to be gradually regaining his strength.

I hope that everyone is keeping safe and well and I'm sure that we are all looking forward to better times when our twinning activities can resume and we can meet up with our friends across the channel once again.

Until then stay safe and well.
Margaret.

Covid 19 in Kleve

Like everywhere the numbers of infections are increasing here too.

In the whole county of Kleve we now have 1610 people infected with the virus, 1332 are classified recovered. The city of Kleve counts 233 infections. We have in Kleve county 33 people in hospital and on the whole we have 43 people who died of the virus.

So far it's not too bad but the restrictions are getting more strict, going into town is no fun anymore. We can go shopping only with masks and sometimes you don't recognise family members because of the mask.

In one shop every customer had to take a trolley although only one was buying; that is to control the number of customers. Appointments with hairdressers, only with mask and disinfection. Appointments with doctors are not easy to get.

But what everybody misses is meeting family and friends. The rules of how many are allowed inside or outside change every day and that makes people unsecure and angry.

We both stay at home as much as possible. Luckily I can still have my physiotherapy twice a week and Gisela and I can go to the gym for a smooth rehab. sport. There is a big room which allows big enough distance, on the floor and in the locker room we have to wear masks. When we enter the gym we have to register with name and address.



Fever tent in front of the hospital.

Last week we went to an Indian restaurant in Kleve for my birthday. I had to book in advance and we also had to register in the restaurant.

Holland now being declared as a hotspot – we don't really know how to handle Dutch customers; everything is so complicated. Thank God we have not heard about big parties or demonstrations here.

Karl – Heinz



Today, 15th November,

Our new mayor who started his Office on 2nd November 2020, kept to the Tradition and together with the cities treasurer, went to the war cemetery this morning. and placed flowers on the graves of the 2 soldiers from Worcester. Our new mayor is Wolfgang Gebing and he has been to Worcester with the group of councillors 2 years ago.

He promised to get in touch with all twin towns. Hopefully next year everything will be much easier.

Please stay all healthy.

Very best wishes

Karl-Heinz

Terry's covid experience

Life has been very odd this year and Margaret and I have been confined to the house longer than we would have liked. We had booked to go to France in March, but then I encountered coronavirus in Worcester! I must have been one of the first in the Worcester area to become ill with covid-like symptoms, not that my symptoms were recognised at that time! I caught covid very early in March, well before lock-down! First of all, I experienced a week of aching and lethargy – even more lethargy than usual, so I stopped preparing Margaret's food, did not leave the house, and we tried to distance ourselves at home. In the second week, I developed a parched throat and mouth, making eating very difficult, not that I'd been eating much since all my food tasted odd – I had lost my sense of taste. In the middle of a spell of good weather, I was also cold until the end of the second week, when I developed a fever. I am not sure what happened next, but it seems that Margaret tried for hours to get someone to answer her call to NHS111, before giving up! So she dialled 999 and I was soon surrounded by some very concerned paramedics.

They did some tests, then the paramedics donned protective gear, and drove me to hospital by ambulance, where there was not the usual queue of similar vehicles waiting to discharge their occupants into A&E. We drove straight up to the door, and I was wheeled straight in! Having been pushed through the almost empty waiting area, we were confronted by a door which read "Covid-19. Strictly no admittance!", so my paramedics knocked on the door and someone the other side peered through a small window and pointed to the "Keep out" notices. They knocked again; this time the door was opened a crack and a voice said that no-one was allowed in. The paramedics said that they had phoned ahead, so paperwork was shuffled and the door opened! Inside was a line of sealed cubicles, and I was pushed into the first one! Over the next few hours, the other cubicles slowly filled up and I was visited by doctors in space suits who gave me a series of tests, but not a covid-19 one since they didn't have any of these! After 8 hours, they said that they would discharge me as long as my temperature was under 37.8°C. Mine was higher, so they gave me a litre of cold water to drink and did not measure my temperature again! I was discharged at 5 o'clock in the morning with a prescription for **antibiotics** and the warning that Margaret and I had to stay isolated in the house for a further 14 days! At home, we really were incredibly careful, and Margaret did not catch it! It took 4 weeks for the

virus to take its course and for me to feel that I could do normal things (like eating) again, but I was very weak and continued to lose hair for several weeks!

I did recover, and then plucked up courage to step outside the house again. It was scary at first, but I eventually enjoyed many evening walks by the river, and friends and neighbours kept offering to do the shopping. I am no gardener, but the garden is looking better now than it has for years and we even grew our own courgettes.



Well, some of us met and had an enjoyable tea party on Zoom. When the committee next meets (on Zoom) we will be discussing how to take this forward with some meetings for members, to which, we hope our friends from our twin towns will join us. Please let us know if you have any ideas about fairly cost-neutral meetings which we can hold virtually in this way. We really need to show that we won't let our friendships and our twinning philosophies get knocked out of the way just by a virus.

One other event has taken place

recently – the handover of our exhibition to the County Council's Archive Section at The Hive. So many people put so much work into this that it is a relief to have it properly stored and cared for. Earlier storage in the bowels of the Guildhall were not successful and the cases quickly showed signs of mould from the dampness there. Since then it has been sitting in my garage, a solution which could only be short-term since we plan to move to a down-sized house soon.

Let us hope that, having it in the Archive Section will allow it to be rolled out for use every now and then so that the people of the city can see it. It certainly caused a lot of interest during the week that we had it in the Guildhall in 2017.

Liz



Vernon Contact: Rosemary Campbell

Life in Vernon

Choir singing started back in September and so did English conversation classes for me, bridge playing for Barry. Now everything stops again for 4 weeks at least. It seems this lockdown won't be so strict as the 1st one: schools will be open (but not universities), working from home is encouraged whenever possible and going out for shopping for food or essential products is allowed, more shops will remain open such as those providing technical items. Of course restaurants, bars, cinemas, theatres and the like will remain closed. I hope all these measures will prove efficient. We still have to fill in a special form whenever we go out giving our details, the purpose for which we are leaving home (there is a list of what you can do). You can go out for an hour a day for a breath of fresh air but no further than 1km from where you live. The thing which I fear most is the weather and lack of light at this time of the year. It will be miserable!

Obviously most events are cancelled (the Christmas market for example, but I only had a few non-perishable items I bought in February, and they have no German things.

Nothing is happening with the twinning. No meal for the start of the 2020-2021 season of course, very little communication from the president apart from the copy of a mail in German the other day (does everyone speak German in Vernon?). I think he could send a few words from time to time to the members as I do to the choristers or the participants to English conversation classes: it is good to keep in touch with the members.

I just don't know what's going to happen for Christmas. I just hope we will be able to have a family reunion, it is so important at this time of the year and especially for the children.

Keep safe and look after yourselves.

Bénédicte Reynolds

Nevill Swanson

An Oxford graduate and former industrial chemist, Nevill Swanson played a major role in our successful twinning association in Worcester for many years. He was organised, sociable and capable of coping in any situation. He will be missed.

As chairman, Nevill's gentle encouragement and support persuaded many of our members to take on responsible posts within the Twinning Association. He spoke French fluently, and encouraged others, including me to use their foreign languages. International friendship was his forte, and he loved meeting people from other countries, not just from our twin towns but he cast his net wider to twins of our twin towns, like Vilanueva de la Cañada in Spain and Kiskunmajsa in Hungary.

He was keen to find new twin towns and, although he was unsuccessful with Toledo in Spain, I believe it was Nevill who came across Worcester's 100 year old adoption of Gouzeaucourt. This village in northern France was totally destroyed in WW1 and was fought over by the Worcestershire Regiment. Nevill took a keen interest in



the Worcestershire Regiment, so it's a shame that he was not able to visit Gouzeaucourt when Worcester revived this twinning. However, as chairman, he helped to organise a friendship pact with Vernon, where the Worcestershire Regiment had established the first bridgehead across the Seine in 1944 after the Normandy landings. While chairman, Nevill travelled extensively, and prepared pertinent speeches for every occasion. He was a competent translator, and on one occasion in le Vésinet, when our mayor gave a speech which was hard even for us English to follow, Nevill "translated" this into clear, perfect French. Stephen Inman also recalled Nevill helping him with the preparation of a French speech in Vernon, when Stephen was Mayor.

Nevill accompanied the twinning party on several occasions to Lithuania, and guided the group to gastronomic gems to spend our evenings tasting local delicacies and sipping the local nectar! I've no idea how he found these places, but he seemed to have a very good nose. On our first visit to Lithuania, we had a free day in Kaunas (Lithuania's second city) before we went on to Ukmergė, our future twin town. At the end of the afternoon, Nevill met us with a big smile – he had found a traditional Lithuanian restaurant where we could eat that evening – we did, and the food and service were superb! On a subsequent visit to Ukmergė, at about midnight, after the formal proceedings of the day were over, the Hungarian Mayor invited the Worcester delegation to his room; he must have known Nevill's tastes, since he produced a bottle of his own home-made Hungarian schnapps and, with little language in common, we spent the early hours improving international relations! Accommodation was limited in Lithuania, so I usually had to share a room with Nevill, and his snoring made it difficult to sleep! On that trip though, the Hungarian home brew did the trick!

Some of us said a final goodbye to Nevill on 30th July at the Vale Crematorium. It was a beautiful summer day, and a lovely setting for a Scottish piper to accompany Nevill on his last journey. The pipe music set the tone for a moving ceremony, a tribute to Nevill in words and music. His family and a limited number of friends were there, including former mayor Stephen Inman.

Terry Coles



Paul Gerhard Küsters who was the honorary Chairman of Kleve twinning, from its concept up until Karl- Heinz agreed to take over.

Paul passed away on Monday 19th October. He was 97

Gouzeaucourt Contact: Liz Smith



Unfortunately, yet another sad loss to our international community this year.

Lucien Defawe discovered the connection between our two towns and uncovered a very interesting history with his district of France, Gouzeaucourt and Worcester during and after the First World War.

Lucien who was 84 passed away on the 18th February 2020.