

Worcester Twinning Association

CONNECTIONS

WINTER 2022



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Vernon



Impressions from my first visit in Vernon

When I think back about our recent visit to Vernon the feeling of friendship still resonates. As a non-English native, I felt privileged to experience the amazing atmosphere of camaraderie for the 15th anniversary celebration of the Friendship Pact between the historic city of Worcester and the picturesque town of Vernon in northern France.

Our twin town organised an incredibly interesting programme engaging both, those interested in history but also the environment. What I found quite different about visiting Vernon and its area with our French group, was that it felt like we experienced it through the eyes of the locals, who readily stepped in if we got lost in translation or simply told us some interesting first-hand facts which we wouldn't have discovered as tourists.

I stayed in the family home of my hosts situated in the famous village of Giverny, close to Vernon. During those few days I learned incredible facts about Claude Monet, whose famous house and beautiful garden was only a few yards down the road. In the past, the house was generally open to public and Monet's original paintings were kept there, hanging on the walls and being accessible to the people from the village. Much has changed over the decades. Before Monet died, his wish to keep the garden without too many people, as the haven of rest, was disregarded. I think he would be saddened to find that hundreds of people from all over the world are visiting his garden daily. Hustle and bustle is omnipresent there, making the lives of the locals often disturbed. On the positive side though, the number of tourists has not taken away from the beauty that this enchanting little place offers.



Together with the English delegation from Worcester we celebrated the liberation of Vernon on 25th August in 1944. We visited the monument commemorating the lives of men who belonged to the first Worcestershire Regiment. My host family told me that the spot where the monument stands now was previously a field hospital. The Germans found it and subsequently bombed the area.

The village of Giverny was liberated a day later than Vernon. From my host family I learned that a Lancaster bomber had crashed in the village in June 1944, seven men from the UK died and the monument together with their grave can be found in Giverny's cemetery. Visiting the monument and discovering its history was a thought-provoking experience. It made me reflect on the peace for which we should be grateful and never forget about its high cost.

I very much enjoyed the cycle ride from Giverny to Vernon where I was accompanied by both of my hosts. I learned about and used a cyclo-path which was created after the conversion of an old railway, the same rail track on which Monet travelled over a century ago. He liked the scenery so much that he decided to buy a property there. Many other painters, mostly American impressionists followed his example. Interestingly, another great artist fell in love with this beautiful nook in France. His name was Pierre Bonnard, and he was a great representative of the Nabis group.

I will always cherish the memories of different places that I was taken to by our friends from France, whether it was a boat trip on the Seine, the visit of the Vernon Museum, the Farm in Tilly, the museum of combs in Ezy sur Eure or a Chateau d'Anet.

As we were coming back home to England, I was still pondering over how amazing this trip was. I learned some fantastic French recipes, which were all so well cooked by my hosts, improved my French, tried different types of cheeses, wines, and of course tasted the local delicacies such as Calvados. However, this trip was more than about seeing places and enjoying food. We had the opportunity to make good friends, share cultures and enjoy each other's company. I am determined to keep the friendships I made and hope to meet these beautiful people again.

Denisa Foderova

Le Vésinet

Not Eurovision, but Mondiovesinion!



After a two year pause our Fête de la Marguerite visit resumed on Friday 24th June when a small group of members from Worcester arrived in Paris, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Le Vésinet's twinning with Oakwood, USA.

The beautiful setting of the "Pavilion des Ibis" in the park by the lake for the Gala Dinner on the first evening was a wonderful start to the weekend events. These traditionally include the "Dîner en Blanc" on Saturday, which has now become a worldwide phenomenon. Our hosts bring tables and chairs to the park and create an elegant lakeside dinner party and all participants must wear white. There is always a full day excursion on Monday and this time we visited the historic town of Compiègne and its impressive Imperial Palace.

But 2022 was also a very special year because it was the première of the Mondiovesinion International Singing Contest! Susannah Greenow, a former HOW College student represented Worcester in the final. We proudly watched her brilliant performance on the open-air stage at the Fête. She sang "Tears Dry on their Own" by Amy Winehouse and "Blue Skies" by Irving Berlin, which the enchanting world-renowned Josephine Baker, former resident of Le Vésinet, performed in 1927. The other finalists came from USA, Australia, Spain, Germany and France and each was presented with a trophy from the organisers in Paris. Thirtytwo video applications were initially received and assessed by an international panel of judges. The musical genres were amazingly varied – religious, opera, jazz, pop, rock, country. The contest was a huge success and attracted a large audience. The friendship between the finalists when they all sang together at the end was a joy to behold. There will surely be another contest in June 2023!

<https://www.worcestertwinning.org.uk/home/index.php/le-vesinet> <https://jumelageslevesinet.com/fete-de-la-marguerite-3-anniversaires/>

We would welcome applications from singers in the Worcester area for 2023. The winner will be invited to stay and perform on stage in Le Vésinet during the Fête de la Marguerite.

Rosemary Campbell Chair

www.worcestertwinning.org.uk

Worcester Ma.

How about that trip to Worcester!' Building sporting links between Britain and the USA in the 1920s

Readers of the Boston Globe in the 1920s had little reason to think of faraway Worcestershire. If American readers were familiar with the county at all, it was probably on account of Lea & Perrins whose most famous product was advertised extensively, helping to explain why Globe journalists referred to Worcester as 'The Saucey City' (sic). Given this context, the strident headlines 'SOCCER STARS OF WORCESTER COUNTY WELL PRIMED ON EVE OF ENGLISH INVASION' (2 October 1926) and 'WORCESTERSHIRE, ENG, SOCCER TEAM TO START BAY STATE INVASION NEXT WEEK' (14 September 1927) are particularly striking

What were the events that led to football teams from Worcester, Mass, about 40 miles from Boston, visiting 'Worcestershire, Eng' in 1926 and 1929, with teams from Worcestershire crossing the Atlantic in the other direction in 1927 and 1930?

The story begins during the First World War when the Mayor of Worcester, Arthur Carlton, established the British-American Fellowship with the aim of ensuring that US servicemen passing through on their way to the front would receive a warm welcome. The scheme was based on the premise that towns and cities in Britain would 'adopt' towns and cities in the USA in a version of what later became known as 'twinning'. Providing hospitality in the cathedral city for soldiers from its Massachusetts namesake was one of the most obvious ways to develop the connection. After the war the Fellowship found other ways to continue its goodwill mission, principally through 'a school-linking scheme' and Carlton 'devoted an enormous amount of time to the carrying out of this work' (The Times, 4 July 1919).

Carlton's British-American Fellowship was one of a number of organisations that emerged to promote Anglo-American goodwill after the US entered the war in 1917. The wartime alliance created opportunities for those who could see advantages in fostering links between two communities which spoke the same language, despite the geographical distance between them. Sport – popular on both sides of the Atlantic – offered possibilities of building personal connections and prominent businessmen in Worcester County, Mass, were persuaded to sponsor the Worcester County Sportsmanship Brotherhood (WCSB) with a view to issuing a challenge to the sportsmen of Worcestershire.

The Americans took the initiative in proposing football – or, as they preferred, 'soccer' – exchange visits. Though less popular in the US than American football, soccer was firmly established there in the 1920s and the 'Bay State' was one of its strongholds. There was concern that the USA should not become isolated from what was an increasingly a global phenomenon and George M. Collins, the Globe's soccer correspondent, who had managed the US national team that competed in the Olympic tournament at Paris in 1924, was keen to stay connected. The Brotherhood proposed a visit in 1925 but Worcestershire was not quite ready for an American invasion and it was only in August 1926 that the formation of a British-American Sports Fellowship based in Worcestershire was announced, just in time to welcome the WCSB's first soccer ambassadors.

Two deposits at The Hive supply details of this ambitious scheme to promote transatlantic goodwill through sport. Percy Harper of Stourbridge, a famous referee and the secretary of the Worcestershire County Football Association, kept a scrapbook of correspondence and press cuttings, along with match programmes, menus and other memorabilia relating to the 1926 and 1927 tours (899:195/1786/1b). The great and the good of the county were heavily involved. Harper and the WCFA were drawn in to the arrangements from 1925 after he had been approached by the Lord Lieutenant, Viscount Cobham, president of the new Sports Fellowship. Sources relating to Worcestershire's 1930 trip are to be found in papers preserved by Alderman Percy Jones of Stourbridge who accompanied the county's representatives on their visit to Worcester County (705:1144/10539/ii).

It was not unusual for English teams to play overseas in the 1920s though tours were usually undertaken by professional clubs cashing in on their fame or by so-called 'Middle-Class Wanderers', often public-school Old Boys taking an Easter break in continental Europe. The Worcester tours were different in that the players on both sides were drawn from clubs playing in local leagues. Biographical notes in match programmes indicate that the Americans were mainly from works teams in and around Worcester. The Worcestershire party that crossed the Atlantic in 1930 comprised men working in a variety of occupations from agriculture and market gardening to car manufacturing, carpet weaving, engineering and plumbing; there was also a GWR clerk and an Oxford undergraduate. An expenses-paid trip to the USA was more than they could possibly have anticipated when they took the field in local parks and recreation grounds in the 1920s.

There were occasional misunderstandings. Percy Harper, who refereed the first match of the 1926 tour at Stourbridge refused to allow the visitors to replace their goalkeeper when he was injured, much to their dismay. It is

doubtful that they were consoled by reports suggesting that losing 5-2 with ten players 'has a better moral aspect than a defeat by a lesser margin with eleven players' (Berrow's Worcester Journal, 16 October 1926). Despite this incident it is clear that the American party returned home with a positive view of their time here. Collins, writing to Harper in 1927, recalled 'our visit to Worcester and District' with affection; he continued, '... every time I run up against one of the players the first thing we say is "How about that trip to Worcester"' (!)

Football, it seems, was almost incidental, a means to an end. The exchanges were intended to educate and to generate goodwill. When the tourists were not training or playing, they were subject to a relentless schedule of dinners, receptions, factory visits and sightseeing. As E.S. ('Bill') Irwin of the Worcester News-Telegram explained to Harper before the 1927 tour: 'You gave us a wonderful time last fall in England and, if possible, we are going to give you one this fall'. He reminded his friend that they would be coming to a 'dry country' – this was the era of prohibition – 'but we will do our best, and that really is not too bad'.

It is possible to discern something of how the Worcestershire players responded to their American experiences via interviews given to the local press on their return. In general, they were impressed by American modernity. A Worcester police constable on the 1927 tour recalled a multi-story car park seen in Boston, 'a gigantic helter-skelter', as a thing of wonder, 'a marvellous arrangement' (Berrow's Worcester Journal, 22 October 1927). They also recalled a land of plenty. Bernard Lane, trainer on the visit to the USA in 1930, was impressed by the gigantic steaks served in the dining car on a rail journey from New York to Boston: 'This meal will live long in our memories' (Berrow's Worcester Journal, 25 October 1930). The Americans seemed to be impressed largely by Worcestershire's antiquity; I have yet to find any comments on the food.

Dilwyn Porter

Worcester

Visit to Perry Wood Primary School

Perry Wood Primary School went to town to celebrate Worcester's 400 year-old charter. On 1 October 2021, the whole school seemed to be involved; they invited the Mayor and they even invited 2 people from the Twinning Association (Derek and Terry) to tell year 2 about our twin towns.

Derek and Terry had no idea what year 2 pupils might know. How good was their maths? How much did they know about geography? We also had the impression that we were going there to answer questions posed by one Y2 class. So it was a bit of a surprise when we were put in front of the whole of Y2, and were asked to "take the lesson"!

We had no Power Point presentation to hand, so we tried to involve the children, starting by asking them to work out how many twin towns Worcester has. They had to add up 1 in Germany, 1 in the USA, 1 in Lithuania and 3 in France – Terry pretended that he had lost count, so they had to help him! Then we found that they had an idea of how far away London is from Worcester, so had them guessing how far away, in London distances, each twin town was. One of the children got the distance to Worcester MA exactly right! Terry then introduced himself as the mayor of each twin town in turn, and the children had to guess which town he came from. Terry tried to use all the right languages, and the mayors' actual names - the children seemed to enjoy guessing, especially with the help of Keksas, Terry's Lithuanian toy dog! We did take a couple of props with us to help.

After we had finished our half hour with Y2, the head boy and girl gave us a very interesting tour of the school, ending up in the hall, which was full of children looking at the Mayor. The Mayor had to sit still on the stage while the children painted him.

On our way round the school, we had been in the reception class, where we found children painting other things: cardboard models of Worcester buildings. On Saturday 2nd October, these models were all on display in the Guildhall, together with lots of Mayoral portraits and several versions of the Charter. Derek and Terry were also there, on photos taken while we were talking to Y2!

The visit taught us a lot about Y2, and we hope that Y2 learnt something about twinning.

Terry Cole

Gheluvelt Park Centenary

This year saw the 100th Anniversary of the opening of Gheluvelt Park in Worcester. It was named Gheluvelt after a small village in Belgium, just south of Ypres in Western Flanders. In the park is a Memorial to the men of the 2nd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment who bravely fought a counter attack to retake Gheluvelt during the First World War on 31st October 1914.

The park opened on 17th June 1922 and as part of the Centenary celebrations (17th June 2022) a morning open air service was held at the War Memorial where a wreath was laid and a tree was planted to mark the occasion

This was attended by The Mayor, our local MP Robin Walker, Lt. Col. Patrick Holcroft, and other dignitaries.

We were invited along with other exhibitors to take our Gouzeaucourt exhibition to display in the park.

Although the day started dry the weather soon turned into a torrential downpour. This resulted in very few people braving the elements to view any of the exhibitions on show.

A few brave souls did come to see us and ask questions about our display but most just came to shelter under our gazebo.

This gave us a good opportunity to sit down and have a good talk to the members who turned up to help.

The organisers decided to close the event early, which we were all very pleased about.

Our banners were taken back to their permanent home at the Hive by Terry, after having a couple of days to allow them to thoroughly dry out.

Derek Furby



Gouzeaucourt

This year our summer holiday started in northern France. Gouzeaucourt is not far from the ferry, so we felt that we should visit Gouzeaucourt while in the area. I told them when we'd be passing and, though the Mayor was busy that day, Danièle invited Margaret and me to dinner. Danièle is the widow of Lucien Defawe, the historian who first investigated the links between Gouzeaucourt and Worcester, the ones that started 100 years ago. Danièle's was a very welcome invitation, since we know her well and she is an excellent cook.

On the way to Gouzeaucourt, we stopped at the village of Flesquières to visit Deborah! Buried under the village after WW1, Deborah was a British mark IV tank which took part in the Battle of Cambrai in 1917. After a long search, another local historian, Philippe, discovered Deborah in 1998 and dug her out of a rather large hole in the ground. One hundred years after WW1, several tons of armaments are still being dug out of the fields of northern France every year.

Anyway, Deborah now has her own, purpose-built museum in the village – a very impressive museum, which tells her story, Philippe's recovery story, the story of her crew, and what happened in the Battle of Cambrai.

The stop in our new twin town was certainly worthwhile. We were given a very warm welcome and treated to some superb food. The Mayor made it clear that they are looking forward to greeting a group from Worcester in the near future.

Terry Coles

