

Town Twinning Chairman's Annual Report 2020

When I was appointed as Chairman last year, I had a daunting task ahead, following the fantastic job that Ken had done for many years before. Little did we know what was ahead of us, and the limited contact we have been able to have over the last 8 months or so. We have not been able to hold the AGM that was planned for November this year, but it still falls upon me to report on the activities of the Association for the past 12 months.

We would normally have started the AGM with a minutes silence to remember those members who have sadly passed away in the preceding year. Former Mayor and Long- time Twinning member Allan Tyler passed away in December 2019 and Jennifer Jennings in early 2020. Sheila Averill, who served a secretary and was such a support to Ken during his time as chair, and to us all on the committee, passed in February 2020. They will all be greatly missed

Before our activities had to be curtailed, we did enjoy some varied events and meetings. A particular highlight of 2019, only a week after the AGM was the Dinner held at the Meridian Hall to celebrate Ken's long service as Chairman of Town Twinning. Prior to the meal a Civic Reception, attended by a number of Town Councillors and staff was held in East Court, with the presentation of a Town Shield by Town Mayor Danny Favor. The Celebration Meal was deemed a great success, with over 50 in attendance including a number of guests from our Twin Towns who had flown over especially for the weekend. Ken was the recipient of a number of beautiful gifts, including a stunning Bird Bath from Mindelheim, now proudly in situ at Millfield Park Cottage. The photobooks of his time spent in Twinning were much admired and poured over by guests. One of the gifts from Twinning members included a bench, which now has a dedication to both Ken and Sheila and sits on the lower terrace at East Court. Hopefully many of you will be able to have a well-earned rest on this bench and take in the beauty of East Court over the years to come. Tributes were paid to Ken in a number of speeches from Twin Town guests and I pointed out that Ken "would be a hard act to follow". My thanks to Margaret and Alex Dale who headed a small sub- committee who organised such a fitting tribute to Ken and a great meal.

As mentioned, we have not been able to have all of the events that we had hoped to hold, and potential ones that were being considered have had to be put on the back burner. However, we have had the chance to as a committee to discuss various possibilities, which hopefully will become reality when we can, so watch this space!

Some that did take place included:

Mindelheim Youth visit from Feb 27th to March 1st. Although not an official Twinning visit, 8 young people from Mindelheim, with Alexandra and Florian as leaders, visited

East Grinstead, just before lockdown struck. The party stayed at the Travelodge, and spent an enjoyable few days in and around the town. Highlights included breakfast at Sackville School; a tour of the Town in the pouring rain, and a meet up (or two) at the Ship Inn. They spent the Saturday in London in better weather and from the photographs posted on social media it appears that they visited a long list of places. It was the first visit to the UK for many, with some wanting to relocate here, and with friendships made at previous youth events being rekindled. I would like to express thanks to all members who had helped with sorting out fares, transport, tours and accommodation, especially Andy, Ken, Sue, Pete, Anna and Vicky.

Anna and I met with our secondary schools in February and both Sackville and Imberhorne appeared committed to furthering Twinning as far as their curriculum allowed, which is positive and we hope to further this in the future.

Leap Year Lunch – Sunday March 1st. This proved to be the last event this year. 50 members came to Peredur and enjoyed a 3 course meal expertly cooked by Jackie Chambers and Margaret Dale. Unfortunately, no one proposed to me - maybe in 2024!

Lockdown then hit, and the events planned, including the Turners Hill French dinner; Quiz night; May Fayre and Town Meeting could not go ahead. We had also not met over the VE Day weekend, although it would appear that many members celebrated this from home and took in the Spitfire fly past, and the rescheduled weekend could not proceed either. It is the first year in many that we have not been able to attend the Remembrance Sunday parade and place our wreath at the foot of the war memorial, although the Town Council attended to this on our behalf. We were able to have some small gatherings at East Court during late August and throughout September, and I am told that a bar was open there, so members were able to come along and enjoy the company of other members, at a social distance. We were lucky that the weather stayed fine and we could have picnics and catch up. The highlight had to be Sues cakes. How Pete manages to keep his waistline is a matter of mystery!!

During our committee meetings, which, save for the one in September has had to take place virtually through Zoom, our vice chair, Julie, came up with the idea for a collection of food, initially for EG foodbank. This was coordinated by Sue, and a team was set up to collect donations, which were donated to a very appreciative Turning Tides Home for Adults with special needs in West Street. Thanks to delivery drivers, (including Ros on Bike) and to all members who donated.

As mentioned, the March Committee meeting had to be the last one for some months at East Court and all plans for the year had to be postponed or put on hold following the National Lockdown. The committee met again using Zoom in May, and in June and July. We were able to meet, in person in September at East Court, which was a first for the Association as we had both physical attendance with committee members who had to be masked, sanitised and socially distanced in the Council chambers to follow the requirements of the East Grinstead Town Council, but we were also joined by 3 members using Zoom. However, by October we had to go back to using Zoom again.

Your Committee has been working hard over these months, planning for the future and trying to find ways that we can enjoy each other's company in these difficult times. We are sad to say that some of our committee are not continuing. Jim has now moved to Ashford and Jennifer Barnes has stepped in as co-opted Treasurer...i would like to give thanks to Jim for his work as Treasurer and on the committee, and as well as wishing him all the very best for the future, I am reassured that he will remain a member of Twinning and will come to events when he can. Janice is also stepping down from the committee and again I thank her for her work and input. Finally, Alex has, after many years of hard work on the committee and particularly as membership secretary, decided to step down. Alex has been a mainstay of the Association and I cannot thank him enough for his hard work and counsel during his time of involvement. Thankfully, he and Margaret are carrying on with the coffee mornings, as soon as we can get them up and running again.

We have been producing regular Newsletters as a way of keeping in touch. They do appear to be well received and any news from Twin Town friends welcomed. If anyone has any news or events that they would like to have included, they can be sent to Chris Young or Sue Young (no relation). I would like to thank Chris and Sue for bringing the newsletters together, and to all those who have contributed

We held a Zoom Meeting with Twin Town friends on 3rd July. Unfortunately, due to technology and working times, it was not possible for all to join in but it was good to see compatriots from Austria, Germany and Spain and catch up. The discussion centred around next year's Youth event, which was due to be held in Bourg de Peage, the Frundsberg Fest and the 60th Anniversary of Twinning between Mindelheim and Bourg de Peage. It has been recently confirmed that Frundsbergfest has been postponed until 2022, and the Youth Event has sadly been cancelled as Towns and schools are unable to commit at this time. We will be working hard to try to have meetings either in person or virtually soon. During this time, Viktoria from

Schwaz has produced a cookbook with some great photos and recipes from 9 Twin Towns. We have had some copies printed for members to purchase with help from the IT department at Sackville school (thanks again to Julie). Keep an eye out for this!

Library Coffee Mornings seem to be a distant memory now. We raised £200 for East Grinstead and District Mental Health at the end of last year, This was gratefully received. The coffee mornings have always been a great way for members to stay in touch and raise funds, and hopefully they can resume as soon as is possible and safe. Once again, thanks to Margaret for being the driving force behind them.

The Millennium Garden is always in need of attention and offers to help with occasional working parties are welcome. Alex, Margaret, Andy Mason, Sue, and Pete have put in considerable work. If anyone can help in future, Please contact Sue or Margaret Dale. Thanks to Ken for repairs to the benches.

Looking forward to 2021, let us hope that it will be a better year and we can enjoy the Association as we had hoped in 2020. We are always happy to welcome new members, and would like to increase participation in the 100 Club. This is now down to 29 members and may at some point no longer become viable. If anyone would like to join, at a cost of £1 a month (half the cost of a lottery ticket), please let us know.

We are happy to listen to ideas from members for events for 2021/22. One suggestion has been a calendar to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the Association in 1962. Members could submit photos taken during the year into a competition with the best ones used for a Town Twinning Calendar, copies could be sent out to our Twin Towns.

I would like to welcome our New Town Mayor, John Dabell, whose appointment was delayed during the pandemic. John is keen to become involved in any future Twinning events during his mayoral year. I would also like to thank our President for the previous mayoral term, Danny Favor, who, along with his wife Maribel, served the Town so well during an extended year, and promoted Twinning.

Finally, and personally, I would like to thank members and the committee, for all the support that I have had over the last 12 months. If it was not for such support, with Sue keeping me on track and Julie being the vice chair that she is, we would not be where we are now.

My best wishes to you all

Nick