

ANNUAL REPORT ON 2023 FOR AGM 22/2/24

I cannot imagine a busier year for the Friends of Alzey than the 60th anniversary year of 2023. In preparing this report, I felt both exhaustion at the sheer amount of activities we undertook, but also real satisfaction that together we have secured a positive future for our twinning , in the short term at least.

The undoubted highlight of the year was the sunny ,wine-filled weekend in Alzey in September. We were a group of 25 people, 10 of whom joined the visit for first time. Seeing the involvement of those first timers felt a bit like winning an Olympic medal. All your committee members are due huge thanks for being so good-humouredly ‘in training’ since the pandemic, working hard to appeal to local people and building up networks ; in September we had proof of success.. ‘smiling, happy people’, all delighting in new friendships and in discovering Alzey. Newbies, including Deputy Mayor Councillor Pip Liver and husband John, you were and are so welcome. And to the past masters of twinning visits, including Town Mayor Councillor Fiona Gaskell and husband Philip - naturally, so are you! As has become traditional, we reconnected with our Alzey friends in December over zoom and together looked forward to the 2024 visit.

Earlier in the year, your support at our tea party and Quiz and Lea Singers’ concert was greatly appreciated. To mark our anniversary, Cornelia and Harriet put a great deal of time into preparing an archive display; the boards followed us from event to event and helped participants to a deeper understanding of the twinning relationship. This evening I’ve brought a couple of items which for me capture the essence of that relationship - a booklet about the peace quilt made in Alzey in the 70s and a report on the 50th wine festival, ‘Winzerfest’ for your interest. In the early decades of the towns’ partnership, the relationship was all about linking up at the wine festival. I think those participants would be, or ar, staggered at the range of activities we now offer - conversation evenings, a Stammtisch and an English - speaking social evening each month and now also , thanks to Cornelia, a thriving German literature group. One person who has witnessed these changes is our President, Rosemary Ross. We are most grateful for her openness to new ideas and delighted that she and Gavin enjoyed the weekend in Alzey with our group.

Another Rosemary helped shape our success in recent years, and that is Rosemary Farmer. She was the Town Council’s appointed representative on our committee for many years, and a staunch supporter, always ready with a listening ear. When she retired we presented her with a gift to thank her on behalf of us all. In the course of the anniversary year, I worked closely with Officers at the Town Council ; we are fortunate to enjoy their support and quite understand that they are accountable to the Harpenden residents whose taxes

they spend. As a committee, we provided answers to a new set of questions from the Council about our relevance - you can read these on the Town Council's website. It's very fitting that Councillor Fiona Gaskell is their new representative on our committee ; she will Chair the annual Liaison meeting for town twinning at the Council Chambers at 11 a.m. on March 5th. If you are interested in finding out more about this meeting, please ask. Fiona attends committee meetings, but is not listed on your agenda because the Town Council and not our members puts her in post.

Community engagement

Our Stall at Harpenden Carnival attracted a great deal of interest. We served wine and offered a quiz to children. After the Lea Singers concert many audience members were treated to coffee and German biscuits.

A Probus group had a talk about our history and activities, and we provided a display for the History Society's cabinets in the library. It would be marvellous if we could somehow involve townspeople in our forthcoming visit, so we will be working on that idea in the next few months. If you have any thoughts please let us know.

As far as schools go, it was an important step to appoint our first Youth Representative, Sima Esteki. The students at Sir John Lawes and their exchange visitors from Elisabeth Langgässer Gymnasium all received a certificate of participation from us in July. I was so inspired by the young people and teachers that I tacked a visit to the school onto my time in Alzey in the hope of setting up a class link with a Harpenden primary school. The year 6 class at the Lea responded to the challenge, so we hope that their connection will grow. At our last AGM I introduced Sally Pearson as a new member - I'm delighted to announce that she is going to advise us on educational matters, a role to which she is perfectly suited as a teacher of German in our town. Jonathan Bullock has also helped our discussions about school involvement. Young people are the future or Nachwuchs in German, and we must engage their interest for the bright long-term future that we want for twinning.