



Great Yarmouth & Rambouillet Twinning Association

Twinned since 1956



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So, arrangements were duly made for a visit by minibus, to take place over a long weekend, Thursday 4th October to Sunday 7th October 2012. The journey is approximately 410 miles, each way, so the daylight of two days were taken up with travelling.

Marlene Fairhead, GYBC Councillor linked with our Twinning Association, was joined by her husband, Peter, who co-drove the minibus with me. In the end, only four teachers out of my hoped-for six, could make the trip and these were:-

Diana Timms from East Norfolk Sixth Form College, Gorleston
Nicola Comar from Lynn Grove High School, Gorleston
Amanda Dagg from Fairhaven Primary School, South Walsham and La Jolie Ronde
Natasha Bird from Homefield Primary School, Bradwell.

However, I quickly discovered that what we lacked in teacher numbers was more than made up by the quality and charm of the four teachers who did manage to go!

The drive started from my house in Bradwell at 7.45am on the Thursday and just over 10 hours later, it finished in front of the Mairie (Town Hall) at Rambouillet at 7pm, French time, which is one hour ahead of us.

Following a welcome drink and introductions by Janine Christienne, Councillor in charge of their Twinning (5 of them!), we were driven by our respective hosts to their homes for a shower and evening meal.

Friday's programme started with a visit to a highly respected Nursery School (L'école maternelle du Bel Air) where we were joined by the Inspector of National Education, Rambouillet district, the Deputy Mayor, with delegated responsibility for educational affairs and Alain Chaudé, Président of the Rambouillet Twinning Association. We spent an hour viewing the various children's classes and work before leaving, fortified by croissants and coffee or mint tea, to visit l'école élémentaire Clairbois, which already has a link established with our Homefield Primary school. There we had a quick tour of the school and listened in to an English language class, where the teacher had prepared some of her pupils to give brief presentations in English.

Lunch was taken at the Lycée (more or less equivalent to our Gt Yarmouth and East Norfolk Colleges) which has more than 2,000 students. Diana Timms, who already has a link between her East Norfolk College and the Lycée, stayed behind to see more and take part in an English language lesson, while Nicola Comar visited 2 of the three Public Collèges. The rest of us proceeded to the Primary school, La Louvière, for a quick tour and to spend time with one of the classes learning English. It was here that Natasha Bird gave her improvised version of 'Humpty Dumpty', which the children then repeated and Marlene Fairhead and Amanda Dagg performed the ditty (with actions) of 'I'm a little teapot' – that's my kind of entertainment! Marlene's husband, Peter, then read aloud (emphasis on 'loud') the story of Mr Noisy, which the children were familiar with and had watched it on DVD. If the teachers in adjoining classrooms were hoping for a quiet Friday afternoon, they were no doubt a little alarmed at the antics of the school's English guests! – but apparently they were amused rather than bemused so the Entente Cordiale remains intact!

Dinner was taken 'en famille' so that we could have a chance to talk with our hosts at home and get to know each other better.

Saturday morning was free for relaxation, walking through the street market and some ventured a little further onto the château and its lovely grounds. Rambouillet is what I call a 'well-heeled' (affluent) town (commuter distance to Paris) and the main shopping street, narrow and with its central cobble stone roadway, has many small

shops & boutiques, with attractive but to our eyes, pricey merchandise. The bakeries of course sell delicious cakes and tarts which are hard to resist – so some of us didn't!

In the afternoon we visited la Maison d'Elsa Triolet & Louis Aragon (French Writer & Poet), an interesting house built around a water mill and still containing items of furniture and kitchen equipment from the 1950s. Unfortunately we encountered rain on the Saturday afternoon which prevented us from walking in the gardens.

A farewell dinner was laid on for us at the restaurant Bisson, next door to the Hotel Mercure. – courtesy of the Rambouillet Twinning Association and Council.

On Sunday we all met in front of the Lycée at 9.15am-ish, loaded the minibus, said our goodbyes and took group photos. We set sail at 9.45am and headed out to the Carrefour supermarket to fill up with diesel which, subject to actual conversion rate when Peter's credit card statement arrives, looks to be about 20% cheaper than in UK.

A pleasant journey home, via the channel Tunnel, saw us home by 7.30pm, British time.

I managed to fit in quick meetings with the Director of Rugby and the Director of L'Usine à Chapeaux, which, in old hat-making factory premises, provides musical instrument tuition, art classes, dance & yoga ,skate-boarding and concerts in a small theatre. These are for youngsters who pay for lessons but which are subsidized by the Council.

All in all, a very enjoyable and productive weekend which did a lot to strengthen our Twinning ties and gave a real boost for establishing schools links.

Brian Grainger, 2012