

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society



Newsletter

September 2026

Guest Editor: Brian Read

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From the Editor

Many of us now have the opportunity to relax after last weekend when we welcomed and entertained the large party from Argentan. We thank the many members and friends whose contributions made the visit such a success, with particular thanks to all the hosts. ADTTS could not have managed the whole weekend without Abingdon Church Twinning who were crucial in the organisation from early on. Abingdon Town Council hosted the mayoral party from Argentan and organised the Saturday programme for guests.

In this newsletter is a message of thanks from the *Cercle Jumelage Europe Argentan* together with their prompt and full report of their visit. We delighted in meeting old friends and making new ones. We look forward to a return visit to Argentan next summer.

Twinning gained wider publicity locally from reports of the weekend in the Abingdon Blog. See <https://abingdonblog.co.uk/?p=35793> and <https://abingdonblog.co.uk/?p=35798>.

Two other reports are included this month. The first is of the annual Treasure Hunt, this year with a (fictional) murder theme. Then we have the tale of an eventful (what could possibly go wrong?) trip to Argentan for the Bastille Day celebrations by the inimitable Richard Smart. When he moves away from Abingdon we shall miss his distinctive contribution to twinning.

Earlier in the summer, Peter Revell, who is the Mayor of Thames, took the opportunity on a big trip to pay a brief visit to Abingdon. Interactions with our sister town in New Zealand are inevitably limited by the distance. However, in entertaining him, he was able to see some of our town, including the twinning signpost, and to meet our mayor.

Indeed, the mayor will have another twinning engagement this month. Cllr Andrew Skinner, accompanied by his wife Jan, will be travelling to Schongau, our twin town in Bavaria. At the mayors' conference, hosted by the new Bürgermeister, he will meet his counterparts from Colmar, Lucca and Sint-Niklaas of the star twinning towns. As background for the visit, and of course of wider interest for readers, we are delighted to include in these pages a fascinating article on the history of Schongau. It has been contributed by local expert Dr. Jürgen Erhard.

Now, here's just a last chance reminder about the planned trip to Sint-Niklaas in November that focuses on visiting the *House of the Saint*. If you are interested do contact Nick Marsh. Full details are in last month's newsletter.

Looking ahead, September is a busy month too. Representatives will be off to twinning events in Sint-Niklaas and Schongau, while at the end of the month we shall welcome a party from Colmar. Importantly, we hope to catch up with many members at our AGM on the third Thursday. Make sure it's in the diary!

Brian Read

17 September 2026 Annual General Meeting

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society (ADTTS) will be holding its **Annual General Meeting** at the Preston Road Community Centre, Abingdon at 8pm on Thursday 17th September.

Nominations for ADTTS Officers and committee members should be with the chairman, Stella Carter (chairman@adtts.eu, 01235 539291), one week before the meeting, as also should notice of any other business to be taken at the meeting.

We expect a report on the past year and, more importantly, presentation and discussion of plans for meetings and visits for 2026/27. It will also be an opportunity to hear about the twinning weekend hosted by Sint-Niklaas during the first weekend in September.

All members are welcome to this event and to meet up with each other after the summer break. Refreshments will, as usual, be provided.

Forthcoming Events in 2026

3 rd – 7 th September	Twinning Weekend in Sint-Niklaas
Thursday 17 th September	AGM, 7.30 for 8 pm at Preston Road Community Centre
18 th – 21 st September	Mayors' Conference and Twinning Weekend in Schongau
24 th – 28 th September	Twinning Weekend Visit from Colmar
Sunday 8 th November	Laying of Twinning Wreaths on Remembrance Sunday
28 th – 29 th November	Weekend Trip to Sint-Niklaas
Sunday 20 th December	Christmas Lunch, 12.30 pm at Hilton Garden Inn

Other events in the programme are not yet scheduled, but they include a Wine Tasting and a Games Evening. The programme may also be found on the website at <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/future.htm>.

The website also has reports, with pictures, of all twinning events going back to 2007. To save typing the full domain name, the address of the website may be shortened to <http://adtts.eu/>, or simply type adtts.eu into your browser.

Membership Subscriptions 2026/2027

Subscriptions for members for the year to August 2027 are due.
The current rates are £7.50 per person or £15.00 for a family.

They can be paid with a Banker's Order. A Banker's Order form can be found on the ADTTS website (www.adtts.eu) under Contacts. If you already pay by Banker's Order, could you please check that you are paying at the current rate.

Payment can also be made directly to our Bank account by BACS to:

National Westminster Bank plc

Account: Abingdon & District Twin Towns Society

Sort Code: 60-01-01 **A/c No:** 08616752

Please use your name as a reference.

For payment by cheque, payable to ADTTS, contact Susan Read (treasurer@adtts.eu).

Membership

To join the Society, apply to the Membership Secretary, Rosemary Jardine.
See the [membership page](#) on the ADTTS website for forms and contact details.

An Apology

The October 2025 issue of the newsletter included a photograph of the *Handelsbeurs* (the old stock exchange) in Antwerp. We inadvertently failed to credit ownership of this photograph to **David Dykmans**, the copyright holder. We apologise for this oversight. The copy on our website is now corrected.

A Thank You Letter from the Argentan Visitors

Tuesday 25 August 2026

Dear Friends,

Our group arrived safely in Argentan around 11:30 pm last night. Although the crossing was a bit choppy, we had a pleasant time on the Mont St Michel ferry and we had dinner together at the cafeteria.

We would like to thank you again for the wonderful weekend that we have spent in Abingdon. It is always such a pleasure to spend some time with you and to stay a few days in your beautiful town and district.

Thank you so much to Church in Abingdon and ADTTS members and all the lovely people who volunteered to host or to help organize the weekend. We also thank Amitiés Internationales members in Argentan.

Our group of participants now have beautiful memories in mind and it is very encouraging for the future of our friendships.

Our greatest achievement was to bring together people of all ages and from several associations, enriched by our differences.

Let's now hope that young English and French participants will see how to invent new ways to make twinning exist for their generation.

70 years of Twinning should indeed be a great inspiration to all!

Again, it was so good to see you all,

Take care,

Marie-Lise, Romane, Luc, Carine, Guy, and all the members of Cercle Jumelage Europe Argentan



The younger visitors in the Indian restaurant and the hand-painted wrought-iron horse figurine presented to ADTTS (photos: editor)

Report on the 70 years of Twinning Anniversary in Abingdon

Friday 21 August to Monday 24 August 2026

The 70th anniversary of the sister city relationship between Argentan and Abingdon was a success, allowing 34 members of the CJEa and Amitiés Internationales to strengthen existing bonds and forge new ones.



Day 1:

Very early morning departure from Argentan (5 a.m.) to Ouistreham via carpool.

8:30 a.m. – Boarding the Guillaume de Normandie ferry for a 6-hour crossing on very calm seas.

In Portsmouth, a bus chartered for our group was waiting to take us to Abingdon.

After a 2-hour drive, we arrived there around 4:00 p.m., eager to see our English friends again or to get to know them and start new friendships.

Stella Carter, president of the Abingdon sister city association, the mayor of Argentan, E. Flouvat, and a deputy mayor, L. Jaumet, accompanied by her husband, welcomed us at the meeting point. The smiles on the faces of the English and French families set the tone for the weekend ahead: laughter and a great atmosphere were guaranteed!

A first evening spent with our host families gave us a chance to enjoy some English cuisine before a well-deserved night's rest.

Day 2:

The morning was devoted to the **official celebration of the 70th anniversary** of the sister city relationship, with the renewal of the charter signed by the mayors of the two cities, Andrew Skinner and Emmanuel Flouvat.

At 10:15 a.m., we were all invited to City Hall for the official welcome ceremony at the entrance, where the "Town Crier" was waiting for us, standing at attention. What a surprise for our group!

Next, speeches by each mayor highlighted the values of the sister city relationship and the strong bonds that unite our two towns. The **signing of the new charter** concluded the official ceremony, giving way to culinary and sightseeing festivities.



A **presentation in English on the history of Abingdon** by Elin Bornemann, a lecturer from the town's history museum, provided insight into the town's origins and evolution through the centuries up to the present day.

A **tour of the museum**—the town's former town hall—on Market Square rounded out this presentation. It also provided an opportunity to enjoy a panoramic view of Abingdon.

The Morris Dancers troupe, led by Mr. Hemming, added a touch of **music and folklore** to the first part of the day.

Next, it was time for **Afternoon Tea**: The French and English guests shared a very British snack prepared by the town hall, with the help of the English twinning association. The scones took centre stage!

We had to make a crucial choice: should we enjoy them "Devon-style" or "Cornwall-style"?

In Devon, you first spread a generous layer of clotted cream on half of the scone, followed by a spoonful of jam. In Cornwall, on the other hand, people prefer to put the jam on the scone first, then top it with clotted cream.

To help digest this fabulous afternoon tea, a **tour of Abingdon** with a choice of itineraries was in order. There was also an option to



visit St. Helen's Church and to watch the bell ringers at the top of its tower.

At 7:00 p.m., a hearty meal was scheduled at Tiffins, an Indian restaurant in the city centre and hosted by Abingdon's sister city association. Only the French group attended and a few members of Abingdon Twinning, together with the mayor.



Day 3: A day in Oxford

Several options were offered, and each French person had to sign up in advance.

Starting at 10 a.m., one group made their way to Oxford by bike with Richard, the others went there by bus, or on foot along the Thames.

Once there, the group joined either Norma, Stella, Gloria, Peter, or Brian for a guided tour of the city's iconic landmarks. Others toured Christ Church College. A third group chose to discover the secrets of the College's cathedral. A last group learnt about Oxford's most famous detective, Inspector Morse.

Upon returning from this long and beautiful outing, the Morris Dancers treated us to a half-hour performance of traditional dance and music on the Market Place.

At the end of the day, a sumptuous buffet prepared with care and love by the English twinning team brought us together for one last memorable evening. The thank-you speeches by Stella, Marie-Lise, and Maggie from the Church Twinning group celebrated the friendship and values that have united our two cities for 70 years. The Argentan twinning club presented a hand-painted wrought-iron horse figurine to ADTTS. The Frenglish songs harmoniously united our voices and were a lot of fun to sing!

Day 4: Departure

The weekend's festivities concluded with the promise and desire to meet up again next year — bringing together all generations — in a spirit of joy and good cheer. It will be the turn of the people of Argentan to host our English friends!



Compte-rendu des 70 ans du jumelage Argentan Abingdon

L'anniversaire des 70 ans du jumelage entre Argentan et Abingdon fut une réussite, permettant à 34 membres du CJEA et Amitiés Internationales de renforcer les liens avec leurs amis outre-manche ou/et d'en créer de nouveaux.

Jour 1 : départ très matinal d'Argentan (5h) pour Ouistreham en covoiturage.

8h30 - Embarquement à bord du ferry Guillaume de Normandie pour 6 heures de traversée avec mer très calme.

A Portsmouth, un car anglais réservé pour notre groupe nous attendait pour rejoindre Abingdon.

Après 2 heures de route, vers 16h nous étions arrivés à destination, impatients de revoir nos amis anglais ou de faire connaissance et démarrer de nouvelles amitiés.

Stella Carter, présidente du jumelage d'Abingdon, le maire d'Argentan E. Flouvat ainsi qu'une adjointe, L. Jaumet accompagnée de son époux nous ont accueillis au point de rendez-vous. Les sourires des familles anglaises et françaises donnaient le ton du week-end à venir : rires et belle ambiance garantis !

Une première soirée en famille a permis d'apprécier les mets anglais avant une belle nuit de repos bien méritée.

Jour 2 : La matinée fut consacrée à la célébration officielle des 70 ans du jumelage avec renouvellement de la charte signée par les maires des 2 villes, Andrew Skinner et Emmanuel Flouvat.

Dès 10.15, nous étions tous conviés à la mairie pour le cérémonial officiel d'accueil à l'entrée de la mairie où le « crieur de la ville » (Town Crier) nous attendait de pied ferme. Quelle surprise pour notre groupe !

Ensuite, les discours de chaque maire ont rappelé les valeurs du jumelage et liens forts qui unissent nos deux villes. La signature de la nouvelle charte a clôturé la cérémonie officielle pour faire place aux festivités culinaires et touristiques.

Une présentation en anglais de l'histoire d'Abingdon par Elin Bornemann, une conférencière du musée d'histoire de la ville a permis de connaître les origines et l'évolution de la cité à travers les siècles jusqu'à nos jours.

La visite du musée, ancienne mairie de la ville, sur la place du marché a complété cette présentation et donné l'occasion à chacun d'avoir une vue panoramique d'Abingdon.

La troupe des Morris Dancers, menée par M. Hemming a apporté une saveur musicale et folklorique à cette première partie de journée.

Puis l'heure de l'afternoon tea a sonné et d'autres découvertes plus culinaires pouvaient démarrer. Les français et anglais ont partagé une collation très British préparée par la mairie, avec l'aide du jumelage anglais. Les scones ont été mis à l'honneur ! Nous avons dû faire un choix crucial : les déguster à la mode « Devon » ou « Cornwall » ?

Dans le comté de Devon, on applique d'abord une généreuse couche de clotted cream sur la moitié du scone, suivie d'une cuillère de confiture. À l'inverse, en Cornouailles, on préfère mettre la confiture sur le biscuit, puis la clotted cream par-dessus.

Pour faciliter la digestion de ce fabuleux Afternoon Tea, une visite d'Abingdon avec choix de parcours s'imposait. La visite de l'église St Helen fut également proposée pour y observer les sonneurs de cloche.

A 19h, un copieux repas programmé dans le restaurant indien Tiffins du centre-ville et offert par le jumelage d'Abingdon a permis à chacun de goûter une cuisine très populaire en Angleterre. Le maire d'Abingdon était présent.

Jour 3 : visite d'Oxford avec choix de parcours :

Plusieurs options étaient proposées et chaque français a dû s'inscrire en amont.

Dès 10h, les groupes ont rejoint Oxford à vélo avec Richard, en bus ou à pied en longeant la Tamise.

Une fois sur place, certains ont suivi Norma, Stella, Gloria, Peter et Brian pour une visite guidée des lieux emblématiques de la ville. D'autres ont fait la visite du College de Christchurch. Un groupe a préféré connaître les secrets de la cathédrale de ce même College. Un dernier groupe a suivi les traces de l'inspecteur le plus célèbre d'Oxford, Inspecteur Morse.

Au retour de cette longue et belle balade, le groupe des Morris Dancers nous offrait un spectacle sur la place du marché pour une demie heure de danses et musique traditionnelles.

En fin de journée, un buffet somptueux préparé avec soin et amour par l'équipe du jumelage anglais nous réunit pour une dernière soirée mémorable. Les discours de remerciements de Stella, Marie-Lise et Maggie du Church Twinning ont mis à l'honneur l'amitié et les valeurs qui unissent nos deux villes depuis 70 ans. Le cercle jumelage a offert une statuette représentant un cheval en fer forgé peint à la main. Les chants en franglais ont harmonieusement uni nos voix et ont fait beaucoup rire.

Jour 4 : Le départ :

Les réjouissances du weekend se sont terminées avec la promesse et l'envie de nous retrouver à nouveau l'année prochaine toutes générations confondues, dans la joie et la bonne humeur. Ce sera au tour des Argentanais de recevoir nos amis anglais !



*On the roof of the Museum and the visit to Oxford
(photos: editor)*

Treasure Hunt

Thursday 13 August 2026

Do we live in and around the murder capital of the world? One might think so, given it attracts some of the world's greatest detectives, such as Morse & Lewis, Barnaby & Troy and Marple & Poirot. This local relevance inspired the theme for the annual ADTTS treasure hunt. Stella and Howard put in a lot of effort in planning and research to devise varied and interesting clues to challenge us.

Five car loads of participants sped off to drive round the villages of south Oxfordshire seeking answers. Prominent in the puzzle was that doyenne of crime: Dame Agatha Christie. Where was she buried and with whom? We needed to take a selfie with her (statue). Could we find Mary Mead in Cholsey? (Few did though.) What was the name of the big house next to St Agatha's Church? (But no points for knowing who lived in it!)



Stella announcing the answers to the Treasure Hunt

Despite the heat, all participants eventually arrived at The Wheatsheaf in East Hendred where their chosen dishes awaited. After enjoying an excellent meal (and perhaps a pint or two of Hooky), we checked off the correct answers, comparing successes. Overall, it was a challenging but very enjoyable evening. The only unanswered question was: What would next year's challenge be?

Brian Read

The History of Schongau

What Was Lost, Rediscovered, or Never Truly Gone

by Dr. Jürgen Erhard

On the night of July 10 to 11, 1971, an extraordinary crime took place in Schongau. Several exhibits were stolen from the town museum, which was then still located on Blumenstraße. Among the 15 stolen objects were several historical weapons as well as two religious artworks. The most significant object from Schongau's history to vanish that night was the executioner's sword belonging to the 17th-century Kuisl family of executioners from Schongau. All police investigations came to nothing, the perpetrators could not be identified, and so the whereabouts of the valuable historical objects remained unknown.

The infamous Kuisl executioner dynasty, who practised their craft in Schongau in the early modern period and carried out sentences with the sword in question, are now known far beyond the borders of the district. Oliver Pötzsch, a descendant of this family, immortalized his ancestors years ago in several best-selling novels. But the Kuisls and their trade represent only a small part of the eventful history of the town on the Lech River and its surroundings. And this history is at least as exciting as the criminal case of the theft of the unique sword – a story that, incidentally, did not end there.

Archaeological finds point to a long history of settlement around the Lech River, with the most impressive pre-medieval traces undoubtedly left by the Romans. After the Roman legions had subjugated the areas north of the Alps, they built the Via Claudia Augusta in the Lech River Valley in the first century AD. This remarkably straight Roman trade and military route, running parallel to the river, connected northern Italy with Augsburg, the most important Roman city in the region. Even after the Romans withdrew from the Alpine foothills, the road remained an important trade route for centuries to come, a route that would shape Schongau's history for centuries.

The original settlement of Schongau was located in the area of today's Altenstadt and was founded in the Middle Ages by the Guelphs. The chosen location was strategically advantageous on the former Roman trade route, which divided here and led via Füssen towards the Fern Pass and, as a branch route, over the Lech to Partenkirchen and on via the Brenner Pass to Italy. The first documented mention of Schongau can be found in 1065 and 1070 in the cartulary of Benediktbeuern Abbey. The place name is derived from the Schönnach stream, which still flows through Altenstadt today.

With the death of Welf VI in 1191, the Staufers took control of the Lechrain region. In the 13th century, the town of Schongau was relocated for political and economic reasons. The new settlement was established in the immediate vicinity on a hill formed by a tight meander of the Lech River (ger. Lechumlaufberg), where the old town of Schongau is still located today. In order to monitor the important Lech crossing from here and to secure the new settlement, a town fortification was first built with a town wall approximately 1.6 kilometers long. Only once the fortifications had been completed did construction begin on the parish church, homes, and workshops.

The Staufer dynasty's rule in the region did not last long, and in 1268 the town came under the control of the Wittelsbach dynasty. In 1331, Emperor Louis the Bavarian confirmed the Schongau citizens' existing town charter and, following the Munich model, gave the town its own law book and the privileges of citizen admission, coinage, and lower jurisdiction. As an important base and trading centre for north-south traffic between Augsburg and Italy, the town also repeatedly received lucrative trading privileges, which led to the construction of a merchant hall – today's Ballenhaus – at the beginning of the 15th century.

In addition to its economic importance, Schongau had also been the seat of administration and jurisdiction for the region since the Middle Ages. The town administrator and the town judge of the Wittelsbach dynasty enforced the will of the sovereign from the Schongau town castle and exercised supreme jurisdiction over the town and its surroundings. While the Schongau city council was allowed to hold court for minor offenses, judgments for serious crimes were handed down by the lordly judge. For this reason, Schongau always required an

executioner to conduct interrogations and carry out sentences. Particularly during the great Schongau witch trials of 1589–1592, in which 63 women were convicted and executed in Schongau, the executioner Abriel, who played a key role in the witch trials, an ancestor of the famous Kuisl family of executioners, was instrumental in convicting the alleged witches. These miscarriages of justice in Schongau during the European witch hunts were not only the largest trials of their kind in the Duchy of Bavaria, but certainly also one of the darkest chapters in the history of Schongau.

Beyond the witch hunts, the early modern period was a time of upheaval for the town of Schongau. The heyday of the town on the Lech River, which began in the late Middle Ages, effectively came to an end during the Thirty Years' War. A Swedish attack on the town was repelled in 1632, but just a few years later, Schongau was occupied by Protestant forces. A significant part of the population died as a result of violence and disease, and the economic consequences of the war were also devastating for the town. In addition, trade flows within Europe shifted, causing the old trade route along the Lech to become increasingly less important.

The following decades were also marked by crises and wars. The town's location on the border at an important crossing point over the Lech River meant that Schongau was repeatedly caught up in European conflicts. During the War of the Spanish Succession, Austrian troops captured the town in 1704 and destroyed eight of the original 16 towers of the castle and town fortifications. Far more serious, however, was the loss of important trading privileges during the 18th century. The town of Schongau and a large part of its population lived off the income guaranteed by customs and market rights in previous centuries. Many residents who had previously lived from trade and crafts had to adapt to the new circumstances, and so Schongau transformed into a modest market and administrative town with a largely agricultural character. In the 19th century, Schongau developed into an important industrial centre in the region thanks to its connection to the railway network and the arrival of the Haindl paper mill. This process gained momentum after the Second World War and continues to this day.

Despite all the upheavals, Schongau's historical heritage and rich history have remained an important part of the character and self-image of the town and its inhabitants. This made the loss of the important exhibits in the museum robbery in 1971 all the more painful. So, there was great joy and surprise when, exactly 50 years after the art objects disappeared, most of them reappeared. In July 2021, nearly all of the stolen objects – except for two church figures – were rediscovered in the estate of a deceased Schongau weapons collector. The relatives agreed that the items should be returned and handed them over to the Schongau City Museum. So, before it was rediscovered, the missing executioner's sword was actually only a stone's throw away from the museum and may never have left Schongau at all. Just like the executioner's sword of the Kuisl dynasty of executioners, the traces of Schongau's past and the lives of its people have never truly vanished.

Today, locals and tourists alike hike and cycle along the original route of the Roman Via Claudia Augusta in the western part of the city, and after 800 years, the accessible and almost completely preserved medieval city wall still stands proudly on the Lechumlaufberg mentioned above. Part of the district administration office for the Weilheim-Schongau district is located in the former ducal castle, and administrative work for the region is still carried out here just as it was centuries ago. The historic Ballenhaus on Marienplatz in the heart of the Gothic old town continues to bear witness to Schongau's prosperous trading past, and the executioner's sword of the Kuisl family has also returned to its rightful place and can once again be viewed in the town museum.

All these places and many more tell the story of the town of Schongau and the people who lived there. They continue to invite both locals and visitors to rediscover the rich history of Schongau, whether on one of the many city and themed tours, during a museum visit, or on a long walk around the medieval city walls.

About the Author

Dr. Jürgen Erhard, born in 1984, is the district heritage officer for the Weilheim-Schongau district. Raised in the village of Schwabsoien, he now lives in Schongau. He studied history, education and social sciences in Augsburg. His interest in history and his passion for his homeland come together perfectly in the town of Schongau, where he is a volunteer member of the committee for the town museum and also offers guided tours for locals and visitors.

Visit by the Mayor of Thames, NZ

Saturday 18 July 2026

Thames, our furthest sister city, is situated on the Firth of Thames in North Island, New Zealand. It may be the other side of the world, 18,380km distant in fact, but it is a town surprisingly familiar to a number of people in Abingdon and the surrounding villages. I know for certain that six members of ADTTS have been to Thames. Linda even worked close by as a teacher. So, when Peter Revell made contact and asked if we could meet, we were delighted to welcome him.

Peter Revell is the Mayor of Thames, and, on a trip to North America and the UK was keen to learn about his sister city, Abingdon. He arrived with his wife Keri and close friend Susan, whose daughter it turns out, is married to the vicar of St Ebbes in Oxford.



Mayor Peter Revell, his wife Keri and Stella by the twinning signpost



Peter and Andrew in our garden presenting a banner of Thames

Howard and I welcomed them with coffee and then took them on the river Ock walk into the town to see the twinning signpost and then to the museum where our mayor, Andrew Skinner and his wife Jan were waiting to welcome them and to show them around including the view from the roof of the museum. They then all walked back to our house for an English lunch of salmon and salads and strawberries and cream, sitting in the garden.

Over lunch we told Peter of his rights as he was now a Freeman of Abingdon. There are more sheep in New Zealand than there are people. He got quite excited at the prospect of driving them over the bridge and wanted to take them over the bridge to Drayton too. We told him that wasn't allowed.

It was a very happy afternoon and a great opportunity to strengthen the ties between our two towns. We would love to extend a warm welcome to anyone from Thames coming to England. Do get in touch. We would love to show you around Abingdon.

Stella Carter

Bastille Day Catastrophe 2026

This year nobody wanted to accompany me and I don't blame them because this was the plan. If you hate me, you might find this report quite funny!!!

Thursday 9th July: Go by local bus with my Brompton folding bike and old person's bus pass to Portsmouth. My techy friend Paul had worked out a route with his friend Google, Abingdon-Oxford-Reading-Basingstoke-Winchester-Southampton-Fareham-Portsmouth. It would take 9 hours, which is still quicker than cycling and it would be FREE!!! I always take the absolute minimum and borrow towels, t-shirts, etc. from my host just leaving them with a pile of washing when I leave. Night ferry to Ouistreham then cycle the 40 miles to Argentan. I got up early and thrashed my French lodger Marie Françoise at cards, got to the bus stop before 9.30 just as the X2 was arriving and my bus pass sufficed, which surprised me; I thought they were valid after 9.30. Got to Oxford, put my Brompton in the waiting room just as the X40 to Reading drove up. I thought today would be my lucky day; everything was going right. That was when my luck changed. Picked up the bike and came back just in time to see the bus driving off with the driver pointedly ignoring my shouts and waves. Waited 30 minutes for the next one, which was cancelled, waited another 30 minutes, the driver took one look at my Brompton and told me I could not bring it on board as folding bikes have to be in a bag apparently. I swore under my breath and told him I would lock it up and come without it. I locked it up and turned round to see this wretched jobsworth driving off without me, deliberately ignoring my shouts and waves. I waited another 30 minutes for the next bus which was cancelled, then another 30 minutes for the next one which took me to Reading where I was told they no longer do a bus service to Basingstoke. At that point I gave up and went by train to Portsmouth harbour, got a couchette on the night ferry and arrived in the early hours at Ouistreham.



*177 trees planted near
Ouistreham all named after
soldiers*



*The tree of peace,
Ouistreham*



La pissotière de Ouistreham

Friday 10th July: Went by bus from Ouistreham to Caen and then a replacement SNCF bus from Caen to Argentan where my hosts, Alain and Natalie live very near the bus/train station. It was a lovely bus ride but the weather was so hot by the time I got there I was exhausted. Alain and Natalie run a bourrée (like ceilidh) and have been over a few times running French style barn dances.

Saturday 11th July: Went with Alain in his ancient Renault 4 to do a bit of tourism, visited some of the beaches, the British Normandy Memorial Museum at Ver-sur-Mer where there are thousands of steel silhouettes of veterans who died on the beaches. After that we visited l'Abbaye aux Hommes in Caen where William the Conqueror is buried. He was not popular, nobody wanted to bother burying him and after three days in the Abbaye his body filled with gas and exploded with a loud bang, hence the expression 'he went out with a bang.' We then went to Falaise castle where we saw where William was conceived. Apparently, the Viking warlord, Duc Robert was looking out the window and saw a beautiful woman, Arlette, a

tanner's daughter, doing her laundry in a stream. He thought 'phwoar!!!', which is the same in English, sent for her and the result was William, the first of many illegitimate children he fathered and the reason why William had to fight off many of his siblings in order to inherit the dukedom. We then came home, had a huge meal and went to bed exhausted.

Sunday 12th: Is the 60th birthday of my oldest Norman friend, Eric Lecrosnier and he had a big celebration in a church hall. Lots of friends, relatives, food, drink, chat, dancing and singing. Some of us had to dance around in tutus and wigs and later I had them all singing the French version of auld lang syne at the end. After singing happy birthday about 10 women crowded round Eric trying to kiss him. I was most impressed and very jealous. I asked him later why he was so popular and he told me that his wife, Odile, had told all the women that the last one to kiss him would have to sing a solo!!! What a great idea, I can't wait for my next birthday! I stayed the night at Eric's.



Argentan war memorial still marked with shell and bullet holes



One of the plaques at the museum at Ver-sur-Mer



These silhouettes were made in Oxford

Monday 13th: A fairly relaxed day, I wandered round Argentan reliving old memories. In the Église St Germain in the market place there are lots of photos and tapestries from Abingdon, photos showing what Argentan looked like in 1944. Even now you can still see shell marks and bullet holes in the original buildings. It also tells the story of how when Henry II said something like 'can nobody rid me of this tiresome cleric' referring to Thomas a Becket, he said it in that church. The knights then rode off to Canterbury and killed Thomas a Becket.

Tuesday 14th Bastille Day: Normally they have an *apéro citoyen* (free drinks and nibbles), a parade, speeches, a picnic and the evening fireworks but because of the weather-related fire risks they just had a twinning picnic at 12.00. I met my friend James Wigmore who came over with his Brompton, stayed in a Caen hotel and just came to Argentan for the picnic. They just love eating!!! We ate, drank, chatted laughed and sang. I met Manu the new mayor who is an old kayaking friend of Dave Surman's who is coming over in August. In the evening, we had another huge meal at Guy Frénéhard's (the twinning chairman) and then watched Spain beat France at football. Poor old things!!

Wednesday 15th: After a fairly relaxing morning, Natalie, Alain and I had lunch in a café and I set off back. Many Norman friends had offered to pick me up at Ouistreham and drive me back there but I like the idea of doing without a car and using public transport even when it seems utterly insane! With the hot weather many buses and trains were cancelled but if you leave yourself plenty of time it can be fun. I eventually got a train to Caen and while waiting for the bus to Ouistreham it occurred to me that e-scooters (trottinettes) are far more popular in France than here. While reflecting on this a young woman rode up on one and folded it up ready to put on the bus. I approached her and said very politely (I think) 'excuse me I'm English and wondered would you mind if I took a photo of your scooter?' 'Yes, I would', she snapped back. 'Not you, just the scooter', I ventured. 'Don't you dare', she riposted. I felt I'd been accused of some kind of perversion or perhaps 'trottinette' has a

slang meaning I don't know about. Another scooter rider came along; we all got on the bus and I did consider trying to discreetly take a photo but I didn't want to be arrested. We got to Ouistreham in good time and I noticed something I haven't seen for a long time. A 'pissotière' an old-fashioned men's loo quite open, anyone can see in and there are three cubicles. I hadn't used one for decades so I thought I'd give it a go. As soon as I started to wee, I got sprayed with cleaning fluid so I went to the next cubicle and the same thing happened so I went to the third one, same thing. I realised then that weeing sets off the cleaning but it was a bit late. I came out drenched, looking as if I'd wet myself. No, I didn't take a photo! I went for a walk along the beach before the ferry sailed and saw lots of memorials to the allied landings and all the young people who gave their lives that we might all live. Around Ouistreham there are lots of campsites and children's playgrounds. A great area for a family holiday. See the photos. I slept well in my couchette and the last I heard about the England Argentina game was that England were winning 1-0 with 10 minutes to go. In the morning, I asked a ferry employee what the final score was and he told me 2-1 to Argentina and I automatically said 'mais tu te fous de ma gueule', which is a very rude way of saying 'you're kidding'. He thought it was hilarious. I then came home by train and bus.



Les Juke Box Heroes performing live in front of St Germain church



St Germain church, which can be seen from miles away

OBSERVATIONS

It was so hot that many buses, trains and activities were cancelled and we all felt very lethargic.

I had always thought that there was no point in the French having pedestrian crossings because drivers never stop, but on this visit I couldn't believe how polite and kind the drivers seem. Alain told me that recently they passed a law saying if you don't stop you can be fined quite heavily. Some drivers were fined and hey presto French drivers became polite and kind!!!

I got to know Argentan through being a teacher and running school exchanges. It is a very interesting area especially if you are interested in History, WW2 and the Normans; our histories are interwoven. I used to take my students to Pegasus Bridge, William's tomb, Falaise where William was conceived, St. Germain church in Argentan and Montormel where the Battle of Normandy took place and where farmers are still ploughing up human remains occasionally. The chateaux of Caen, Falaise, Argentan and Alençon were all built one day's march from each other and in 2018 BC (Before Covid) I was toying with the idea of contacting Coventry (twinned with Caen), Henley (Falaise) and Basingstoke (Alençon) and doing something together.

I will be leaving Abingdon quite soon but I hope somebody can take over as link with Argentan. It is our nearest twin town and I have had some fantastic experiences over the years.

Richard Smart

What's On in Abingdon in September

Here are just a few of the forthcoming events culled from Abingdon Town's events website, <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/events>.

Click on the links for further information on each event.

And if any of you have an event you would like put in here – please let us know via the email link at the end of this Newsletter.

Nick Marsh

2 nd September 7:30 – 9:30 pm	The King's Head and Bell	<u>Abingdon Speakers' Club</u> Do you want to improve your public speaking ? Join us and learn how to be a better communicator. Toastmasters is a nonprofit organisation that operates clubs worldwide for the purpose of helping people develop communication, public speaking and leadership skills.
3 rd September 8:00 – 10:00 pm	The Topsy Mercer, 22 High St. Abingdon	<u>Awkward Actors present: How Awkward – An evening of Spontaneous Comedy (Improv Comedy Show)</u> Fast-paced improvised comedy inspired by your suggestions. Monthly show with the Awkward Actors - Upstairs at the Topsy Mercer, Abingdon. Every scene, sketch and story is created on the spot, meaning no two shows are ever the same. Expect quick wit, unexpected twists and plenty of laughter as the cast turn audience suggestions into completely original comedy. We love suggestions but audience participation is entirely optional – if you'd rather sit back and enjoy the show, that's absolutely fine. No-one ever gets picked on, it's just not our thing! Whether it's your first improv show or your fiftieth, you're guaranteed a unique night out. Tickets £5 <u>Awkward Actors event tickets from TicketSource</u>
Until 4 th October 10:00 am – 4:00 pm	Abingdon County Hall Museum	<u>Exhibition: SAXON Abingdon</u> Following on from last year's Roman exhibition, we will continue the story of the Abingdon area and its people through the Anglo-Saxon period and give a more detailed context to the significant Anglo-Saxon artefacts in the Museum's permanent display, such as the rare 7 th century gold ring with glass bead decoration. Excavations have uncovered much about the Saxon's presence in Abingdon, for example the discovery of a Saxon cemetery on Saxton Road. The exhibition looks at the archaeological evidence and takes a closer look at people's lives here in the early medieval period. FREE Admission
Until 27 th September 10:00 am – 4:00 pm	Abingdon County Hall Museum	<u>Exhibition: Cherished Clay by artist Kayleigh O'Donnell</u> Kayleigh O'Donnell is an Abingdon potter and recent Great Pottery Throw Down quarter finalist. The exhibition 'Cherished Clay' showcases Kayleigh's creative work whilst on the television series as well as her recent makes.

5 th September 10:30 am – 4:00 pm	25 Bury Street, Abingdon	<u>Repair Café – Sewing and Electrical</u> 10.30-12.30 Sewing and textile repair to fix holes zips and simple alterations 1-4 Electrical and household items repair. Don't throw it away – see if one of our repairers can fix it for you. Free (donations welcome)
5 th September 2:00 – 4:00 pm	Northcourt Centre	<u>Autumn Flower Show</u> Flowers, plants, vegetables, fruits. Refreshments available. £2
6 th September 2:00 – 4:00 pm	Trinity Church, Conduit Road	<u>Abbey Brass Band and Acappella Harmonies Annual Concert</u> A local concert performed by two Abingdon based ensembles – Abbey Brass Band and Acappella Harmonies. Hosted at Trinity Church on Conduit Road, starting at 2 pm, doors open at 1.30 pm. Not one to miss, see you there! £5 - £18
6 th September 3:00 – 5:00 pm	St Michael and All Angels' Church, Abingdon	<u>Huw Rhys James Piano Recital</u> Huw Rhys James, the acclaimed Austria-based concert pianist, will perform works by Bach, Schumann and Debussy at St Michael's Church, Park Road, Abingdon on 6 September at 3 pm. Huw has family links to Abingdon and entertained us wonderfully in previous concerts. The afternoon promises to be a real treat so please do put the date in your diary. Tickets £15. Refreshments available.
12 th September 10:30 am – 1:00 pm	Abingdon County Hall Museum	<u>Meet the Archaeologist</u> Meet the archaeologist Roger Thomas and author of the new book 'England's Oldest Town? – The Archaeology of Abingdon'. Roger will be presenting his book in the Sessions Gallery (first floor) and will be very happy to show you around the archaeology display and help you with any questions you may have regarding the archaeology of Abingdon. Copies of the book 'England's Oldest Town? – The Archaeology of Abingdon' will be on sale in the Museum Shop.
12 th September 7:00 – 9:15 pm	Amey Theatre	<u>Comedy Buoys with Headliner Rory Bremner</u> Get ready for another huge night of stand-up as Comedy Buoys returns with a fantastic mixed bill of top circuit comedians — headlined by the brilliant Rory Bremner . One of the UK's most celebrated comedians, impressionists, and satirists, Rory is a true comedy heavyweight. Famous for his razor-sharp political impressions, quick-fire wit, and appearances across British TV and radio, this is a rare chance to see a genuine comedy icon live in Abingdon. From Mock the Week appearances to his legendary impression work on Rory Bremner... Who Else? , he remains one of the UK's most respected and hilarious performers. Doors open at 6:00 pm. This event will run from 7:00 pm to 9:15 pm. Tickets £29.27

15 th September 2:30 – 3:30 pm	Abingdon United Football Club, Northcourt Road	<u>The Colours of Geology</u> Landscape is something we accept and often go out of our way to enjoy. But have you ever thought about how these came into being and what the colours that we see within the rocks, or the stones that we walk over, actually tell us? This talk will look at some of the most spectacular scenery on the planet and, without going into indigestible detail, reveal the story behind their formation. Ruth has been interested in geology since she saw folded rocks in a cliff on a beach holiday when she was very young and ended up studying the subject at university in her 40s. This talk is a piece of self-indulgence on her part. £4
17 th September 6:00 – 7:00 pm	Abingdon Library	<u>Woodland – A Poetry Launch</u> Three founders of the Friends of Radley Large Wood, the artist and poet, Diana Bell, the nature writer and poet, Paul Gamble, and the author and poet, Sylvia Vetta, have curated Woodland, an anthology of prose poems and pictures to celebrate this ancient woodland. Join Sylvia and Paul for a special reading, and immerse yourself in the beauty of nature right on our doorstep. Tickets £2 inc. free welcome drink, available from the library counter, call 01865 815005 or email abingdon.library@oxfordshire.gov.uk
19 th /20 th September	Various venues	<u>Abingdon Heritage Weekend</u> "From Agriculture to Atoms" is the theme of our 2026 Heritage Festival as we tell the story of the working lives of Abingdon's people. In Victorian times local agriculture was the basis for industries such as brewing and malting and we were home to one of England's largest clothing factories, but people were also engaged in many other occupations which now no longer exist. The early C20th saw the expansion of Abingdon's leather trade and the advent of car manufacturing and other industries; and from the 1940s the town was at the heart of post war scientific discoveries with Harwell and Culham at the forefront of the emerging atomic research, attracting thousands of new residents to the town. Visit our "Abingdon at Work" exhibitions in the Guildhall and Unit 25, Bury Street and find real-life stories, pictures and films, showing the changing nature of employment and how ordinary people lived and worked between 1800 and 1960. As well as our exhibitions, there will be "Open Doors" in about 10 other historic buildings around the town, some of them not normally open to the public, and others with special displays for the event. There will be family-friendly activities and our popular Heritage Walks on the Sunday. The detailed programme will be on our website https://www.abingdonheritage.org.uk/ from late July and in a leaflet available from early September.

22 nd September 7:00 - 9:00 pm	Amey Theatre	<u>NT Live: The Misanthrope</u> Award-winner Sandra Oh (<i>Killing Eve</i>) plays the title role in this razor-sharp reimagining of Molière's classic dark comedy. <i>Telling the truth isn't always that simple. Alice, a brilliant novelist, despises the carefully constructed lies of modern society. But the more she challenges those around her, the fiercer the backlash becomes. Soon, she must confront the price of speaking her truth in a world that would rather silence her.</i> <i>Filmed live on stage at the National Theatre, Indhu Rubasingham directs Martin Crimp's (Cyrano de Bergerac) highly anticipated play. £13 - £15</i>
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Twin Towns Calendar for 2026

Here we try to list events in our twin towns that may be of interest to potential visitors during the coming months. Do now please tell us about all the major events for each twin town for next year! Use the email link at the end of this Newsletter.

Argentan	<u>https://en.normandie-tourisme.fr/hidden-gems/argentan/events-in-argentan/</u>
Colmar	<u>https://www.tourisme-colmar.com/en/whats-on/events/event-agenda</u>
Lucca	<u>https://www.luccawhatson.com/calendar</u>
Schongau	<u>https://www.schongau.de/de/Aktuelles/Veranstaltungskalender</u>
Sint-Niklaas	<u>https://www.ontdeksintniklaas.be/en/see-and-do</u>
Thames, Coromandel Peninsula	<u>https://thecoromandel.nz/events/events-calendar/</u>

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Non-members of the Society are also welcome to receive copies of this monthly newsletter. Just email your request to newsletter@adtts.eu. Back copies are also available on request.

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is two days before the end of the month. Please send contributions to newsletter@adtts.eu.

The Society's website is <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/>.
This address may be abbreviated to <http://adtts.eu>.