

CITYLINK



Exchange to Chartres, 2024

Chairman's letter

Michael Bevis writes:

Much seems to have happened since the AGM on 21st March when I was elected Chair. Firstly, I would like to thank Anne Scicluna for her work as Chair last year. I am pleased that she has been elected as Vice Chair for this year. I would also like to welcome the Mayor of Chichester Councillor Sarah Quail who ex-officio is our President. I hope that in the coming year we can provide an interesting programme of events for our members and to widen the appeal of the association and encourage new members. At the same time, I hope we can help establish new links between organisations and individuals in our two cities



New connections

While we were in Chartres on the exchange visit, I was approached by Marie-Paule who works for Chartres Internationale and who is a painter and ceramicist. She would like to put on an exhibition in Chichester so I have put her in touch with the Oxmarket gallery in the hope that something can be arranged for next year. I was also approached by Pierre-Antoine Lany of the Chartres Archaeological Service who would like to establish links with the archaeological service in Chichester. I have already visited James Kenny who is the Chichester District Council's archaeologist on the site of his current dig in Priory Park and I hope that we will be able to make some new connections there.

Exchange visit 2024

Michael Bevis writes

The Friends' twinning visits alternate; thus, it was our turn to visit Chartres this year. In all 29 members were made very welcome as always and we enjoyed a very full programme while we were there from Thursday 2nd May to Monday 6th May.

This year cost prevented us from all travelling by coach from Chichester as we had done in previous years. Some members travelled from London to Paris via Eurostar and then crossed Paris by taxi to take the train to Chartres, arriving at the station there to be welcomed by our French hosts. Some members decided to travel by car either direct or by combining the visit with holidays in other parts of France. I drove as I was checking the route of a cycle ride and you can read my report on pages 9-10. It was a novel experience to be part of the welcoming party on the platform at Chartres station.



Coffee time at St Pancras International



Welcome party at Chartres

I was delighted to be welcomed again by Pascal and Laurence Poussard whom I had first met when they came to Chichester to celebrate 60 years of the twinning. Laurence is a member of the Commission of the Amis de Chichester and our friendship is a great example of many that have been established over the years of the twinning.

Having spent Thursday evening 'en famille', on Friday we set out on a packed programme which started in the Salle des Mariages at the Mairie de Chartres, where we had our usual meeting between the committees of the two twinning associations. We discussed how both might attract a wider and younger membership and other topics of mutual interest. We issued an invitation for the Chartrains to visit us next year over the first May Bank Holiday weekend although which day they will arrive depends in part on transport on 1st May which will be a Bank Holiday in France.

We were pleased that our President Craig Gershater in his last week as Mayor of Chichester and the Mayoress Judy Gershater were able to join us to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the twinning. We were officially received in the elegant surroundings of the Salle Montescot by M. Patrick Géroutet, Deputy Mayor of Chartres, responsible for the city's twinings and also



President of Chartres International. The customary speeches were made and gifts exchanged.

In the afternoon there was an opportunity for a guided tour of the cathedral, which has undergone a comprehensive programme of renovation and cleaning over the past fifteen years. Others visited the city's greenhouses. Chartres has a nursery which provides plants for the parks and gardens in the city on a scale which we do not see here.

On Saturday we departed very early for our day trip. This year we started at the Château of Fontainebleau where we were given a guided tour. Although many of us had previously visited (I had done so as part of the schoolchildren's' exchanges which took place in the 1960s!) it was very interesting.

The weather in France has not been good this year and as we left for our lunch stop in the nearby town of Moret-sur-Loing, the rain which had started earlier in the day poured down and it was quite chilly – not at all what we had hoped for.

The town is an ancient walled town and known for the paintings of it by the Impressionist painter, Alfred Sisley. It is also known as the place where for many years the nuns produced barley sugar. When they were prevented by the Second Vatican Conference from indulging in commercial activities, they handed over the secret recipe and it is still produced locally. As one might say it would have been rude not to try it and bring some back as presents for the family!

On Sunday the Mayor and Mayoress with Anne Scicluna as Vice Chair of the Friends and I joined Patrick Géroudet for Mass in Cathedral celebrated by the Recteur of Chartres and over lunch at Patrick's beautiful house nearby was able to pass on greetings for the Dean of Chichester.

Sunday was also the gastronomic highlight of the trip with a Celebration Dinner to mark 65 years of twinning at La Sellerie restaurant in Thivars, a village near Chartres. This was an opportunity for Yvonne Chretien as Présidente of the Amis de Chichester to speak of the enduring friendship between the two associations and for me to respond.

On Monday we all set off on our way home; happy to have enjoyed another very successful weekend.



Full reports on the visit to the greenhouses and to Fontainebleau are included in this edition of Citylink.

Visit to the City Greenhouses

Pamela Kemp writes

On our recent visit to Chartres we were offered a choice of a guided tour of the cathedral, a visit to the municipal greenhouses or a free afternoon. My correspondent and I opted for the greenhouses where the woman in charge escorted us, explaining everything which was going on and answering our numerous questions.

The first one we entered seemed to cover a vast area filled with a huge assortment of plants in pots at various stages of growth. We were told that the cultivation of the plants is done from seed, cuttings

or, for new varieties, bought as small plugs only slightly larger than seedlings. In total they raise between 20,000 and 24,000 and all of the work is done by four women.

All of the work is done by hand, including the watering, as different varieties of plants require more or less water; potting on as the plants become larger, although there is a very basic automated system which fills pots with the compost they make; pest removal, dead heading, dead leaf removal all of these tasks.

The aim is to be as organic as possible except when there is an invasion of pests, such as, most recently, ants which entered by the drainage holes under the pots and ate the roots. The first sign of their presence is when the plant starts to fail and by then it is too late. They had to call in an outside firm to deal with this as they had lost a large number of plants all of which would have to be replaced.

The plants are grown for the flower beds, called *massifs* in French, in the public gardens and for the containers all over Chartres. There are four teams, each with a leader, who plant out the borders and fill the containers four times a year in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter after removing the previous season's plants.

One year there was drought and a ban on watering was imposed. After only a couple of weeks all the plants were dead and had to be replaced. To try to avoid such a thing happening again they bought a huge container to capture rainwater. This has worked very well as it is made very clear when they are watering that they are using captured rainwater. We also saw enormous mounds of their compost all ready for the pots.

We then moved on to other greenhouses as another aspect of their work is to provide large, potted plants for indoor events. We saw enormous *monstera deliciosa*, *howea forsteriana* and *ficus elastica decora* among the more recognisable, at least to me. They towered above our heads reaching heights of seven or eight feet.

With the sun shining on the roof of the greenhouse, the heat was getting to us all so we took the opportunity to move into another cooler area where we could sit down and take breath. A most enjoyable and interesting visit.



Visit to Fontainebleau

Mark Parmiter writes



Fontainebleau would be magnificent enough viewed in silence. But, as we traipsed into the richly ornate Renaissance ballroom, the Balthazar Neumann Orchestra started to play a piece by Handel. Just for a minute or so, the music seemed to fill the space and breathe life into it, and to bring the past right up to us visitors of the 21st century. It was as magical as it was unexpected.

We had arrived in Fontainebleau in time for our scheduled start of 10am after a journey of several hours through less than promising-looking weather.

Once there, for some time we milled around outside, under hoods and brollies against the steady cold rain. Eventually, we got through the door and met Helena, the completely charming guide for the English-speaking group who was waiting for us just inside. We were soon to find out that Helena has a nearly encyclopaedic knowledge of the chateau. Just picking up 30% of what she had to say would be most informative, which was just as well really, given the amount of background noise, her own soft voice and the state of my hearing.

We started our tour with the theatre, a part of the chateau that was created in 1857, during the reign of Napoleon III. It is something of a marvel because the architect created the illusion of ample space in a theatre only 15 metres wide. Instead of paintings, the auditorium is largely covered with luxurious fabrics. Helena explained that the original chandelier would have carried a mix of lighted candles and oil lamps. There would also have been lighted candles all around the walls, inches from those fabrics. Given that the previous theatre had burned down, this beautiful but fragile space seemed like a monument to a time before risk assessments.

From there, we were taken to the gallery commissioned by François I in 1528. Through the 1530s, this gallery was filled with murals framed with stucco reliefs, at the time a quite novel combination. It exemplifies the way the chateau was to develop, in construction, style and purpose. The gallery is an expression of power and prestige through fine art. Just in case a visitor might ever be unsure as to whom to attribute this splendour, François helpfully had the letter “F” included throughout

The City of Chichester twinned since 1959 with the City of Chartres

www.friendsofchartres.org.uk

the decorations, along with his emblem, the salamander. Curiously, among the wall paintings is a rather odd depiction of an elephant, clearly by an artist who had never seen a real one, as he gave it paws.



During the seventeenth century, under King Henri IV, the old medieval donjon became the centre of the royal apartments. There is a magnificent, almost life size sculptural relief portrait of him above a fireplace in one of the rooms. Near to this is a magnificent bed-chamber, touchingly decorated to celebrate the birth of his son, the dauphin. The decorations include several images of dolphins, these too by an artist who had apparently never seen a real one. In fact, the infant dauphin is shown riding a dolphin, which is verging on confusing.

With time, it seemed, the chateau's décor grew ever more ornate and luxurious. There were thrones, a stunning chapel, chambers featuring beds that could comfortably accommodate a family of six. One such bed, a quite magnificent object, complete with a gorgeous canopy, had been made for Marie Antoinette, just before the revolution. She never got to use it. The chateau survived the revolution largely unscathed, though all the original furniture was sold off. By the time the theatre was built in 1857, it seems that grandeur was firmly back in fashion. The restoration of the palace to the condition we can see today began in the 1960s, under President de Gaulle.



Fontainebleau is named after Fontaine Belle-Eau, a nearby fresh water spring. In a long life that started in the 11th century, the chateau has transformed from hunting lodge to castle to palace. At some point, a new façade was built to face the town, rather than the forest. The house became a showcase for art and a statement of monarchical power and prestige, expressed not through military might but through art and culture. Some of the art, including its extraordinary elephant and dodgy dolphins may have a sort of antique comedy about it. But it has a power that we can still feel today, especially when, as we were lucky enough to find, it is set to music.

Anniversary Dinner: 65 years of twinning

Menu

Soupe de Champagne et ses
amuse-bouche
Symphonie de pétoncles tiède aux
petits légumes safranés
Confit de canard et son crémeux
carotte/ orange
Pommes de terre et légumes de
saison
Dessert surprise
Côteau de Béziers Le Mas de la
Tour blanc et rouge



Entente Cordiale - a Troubled Affair?

Peter Tudge writes

As Captain Mainwaring* might have said 'If the French had played cricket, it might have been different'

We've all heard the stereotypical statements about the French, too numerous, too trite to mention, and used, if at all, by readers of this magazine, light-heartedly.



At this point it is necessary to define the terms of the analysis; by 'we' I mean the English, and I wonder if a majority of French people are aware that 'English' is not synonymous with 'British'. The Americans seem not to be. Here at home the complexities in the usages of 'UK' and of 'Great Britain' are every day evident.

The French have their own ways of summing up the English. We lose major football tournaments (apologies to the heroes of '66). We bow and curtsy to monarchs. We eat beef and our cuisine is awful. I can already sense the hackles rising among our readership!

In a Pan-European survey where participants were asked to list in order of merit the cuisine of various countries, English cooking came midway in the table; the French put us in last place. We very often praise French cuisine, perhaps without proper scrutiny, and denigrate our own. Self-deprecation, a near relation of understatement, is a national pastime.

The French vaunt their republican credentials but seem fascinated - and puzzled - by our constitutional monarchy. In the 18th century Montesquieu, who had been living in England for eighteen months, said that he was not interested in whether the English enjoyed political liberty. 'It is enough for me to state that it is established by their laws.' Another political philosopher said that the English system was a republic in all but name and recommended that the ideas behind it should be adopted in France.

The French take to the streets readily. They look on bemused at our patience in the face of national discomfort.

In spite of and perhaps because of this the French are our friends and we are theirs. We have had and still do have, a complicated *affaire* with them. Cousins quarrel, but we share common values and as cousins, common origins. The members of this Cicestrian-French twinning emphasise what we have in common with the French.

Not sharing in the playing of cricket has been made irrelevant.

* **French readers:** Captain Mainwaring is a character in a well-known TV comedy about the Home Guard during the Second World War. He typifies certain attitudes at the time, e.g. distrust of 'foreigners'.

Cycling to Chartres

Michael Bevis writes



For ten years from 2008 to 2017, I took part in an annual charity cycle ride to Chartres organised by the Rotary Club of Chichester Harbour. Large sums were raised for various charities over the years. Unfortunately, the increasing costs involved meant fewer participants for an event which needed a big support team. Coupled with the effects of COVID, this meant that there was no chance reviving it as a major fundraiser for the Rotary Club.

I am a keen cyclist and ride regularly with a little group who got to know each other on the Chartres ride. We talked a lot about how much we had enjoyed it and wondered if it could be revived. Last November, I called a meeting at my house of those who I thought might like to take part and by the end of the evening we had a plan with the ferries and hotels booked. We decided that we needed a backup car (our *voiture balai* to coin a term from the Tour de France) which meant that our luggage was transported for us and we could be picked up if someone had a mechanical problem.

In the end eight of us cycled the whole way and Pascal Poussard joined us for the last part of our run in to Chartres and the first part of the following day. We crossed to Ouistreham on Thursday 23rd May. After spending the night at the B&B Hotel we set off, crossing the famous Pegasus Bridge and followed the route we had taken in previous years. I had taken the opportunity of the exchange visit earlier in the month to check out our route with Malcolm Danks, the navigator for the *voiture balai*.

We stopped for lunch at Chez Chantal – a very traditional place in Beaumont le Roger spent the night in Evreux as we had done before. It was disappointing to see

Evreux so deserted and looking rather rundown. It seems that some towns such as Chartres are thriving while others have the same problems as we do here with changing social and shopping patterns.

Saturday morning saw us start by facing the slow climb out of Evreux before passing through the small town of St André on our way to the beautiful Eure river valley. We were joined at our favourite coffee stop of the Cheval Blanc in Cherisy near Dreux by my 'twin' Pascal Poussard, who is a keen cyclist. We stopped for lunch at Le Relais du Chateau in Maintenon before completing the sixty miles to Chartres.



On arrival (after a quick shower!) we were very pleased to be formally greeted at the Mairie by Councillor Martine Mokhtar who is responsible for liaison with commerce on the Chartres council and by Yvonne Chrétien, Présidente of the Amis de Chichester and other members of the association. An excellent meal at le Café Serpente just beside the cathedral helped fortify us for the next day and there was just time for us to see part of the fantastic illuminations before turning in.

On Sunday we were on the road again with a strong head wind to contend with. We were caught in a hail shower from which we had to take shelter before reaching our lunch stop in Verneuil sur Arvre. Here we said good bye to Pascal who had done his turn at the front against the headwind giving us great encouragement.

L'Hôtel du Dauphin in l'Aigle, where we stopped for the night after our shortest day of 55 miles, was our favourite hotel of the trip with a great dinner in their Brasserie. We were slightly worried about the 63-mile final day back up to the ferry port for the 4.30pm sailing but we were able to devise a route confident in the knowledge that if there was a real emergency we could be picked up. About 15 miles of the route was on a *voie verte* – an off-road cycle path which had formerly been a railway track.



In the event we all made it with time for a late lunch at Le Channel restaurant before taking the ferry. All of us were back at home by about eleven on Bank Holiday Monday. We were tired but had had a great weekend cycling through some beautiful French countryside on roads which are better maintained and with less traffic than here. We are already thinking about our next trip.

Le Jour Du Marché

Pamela Kemp has conjured up for us the atmosphere of a French market in the Dordogne, where she used to live.

Merci, Pamela, d'avoir pris la peine d'écrire en français.

C'est jeudi, le jour du marché à Lalinde. Tout au long du bassin du canal en deux rangs sont les boutiques des marchands. La première c'est le marchand des pêches, jaunes et blanches, qu'il cultive. Il y a toujours une queue mais ses pêches sont tellement bonnes on ne s'impatiente pas.

On passe devant la poissonnerie parce qu'il fait chaud - on reviendra plus tard, mais nous allons nous arrêter à la fromagerie. Quel choix, on est gâté. On prendra une tranche de brie de Meaux, un autre de brebis, un peu de chèvre, un morceau d'un fromage des Pyrénées et enfin une tranche de Salère



Maintenant ce sont les légumes et les fruits, la salade et les fraises - comme elles sont bonnes, un goût délicieux. L'été en Dordogne il y a une fête des fraises à Vergt où on peut goûter toutes les variétés différentes.

Ensuite on va aller chez Peyrie, la boulangerie pâtisserie, pour le pain, peut être le pain de maïs, une spécialité de la région et une tranche du gâteau aux noix, une autre. Tout à côté se trouve la boucherie où nous reviendrons plus tard.

Dernièrement il y a le marchand du jambon, un jambon rôti et encore chaud. Il ne faut pas se tarder ou il n'y en aura plus. "Quatre tranches s'il vous plaît."

Maintenant on va aller à la Petite Cuillère prendre un café avec des amis, se décontracter, bavarder. C'est l'heure. Au revoir.

Market Day

it's Thursday, market day at Lalinde. All along the canal basin is a double row of stalls. The first is a seller of peaches, yellow and white, which he grows. There's always a queue but his peaches are so good that we 're happy to wait.

We'll pass by the fishmonger because it is hot; we'll come back later, but we'll stop at the cheesemonger. What a choice, we are spoiled. A slice of brie de Meaux, another of sheep's cheese; a bit of goat's cheese, a piece of cheese from the Pyrenees and, finally, a slice of Salère.

Now for the fruit and vegetables, some lettuce and strawberries; they are so good and taste delicious. Summer in Dordogne there is a festival of strawberries at Vergt where one can taste all the different varieties.

Next, we're going to Peyrie's, the bakery, for bread perhaps some made with maize, a speciality of the region and a slice of walnut cake, another. Just next door is the butcher where we'll return later.

Lastly there is the ham seller, a roast ham which is still hot. One mustn't delay or there won't be any left. "Four slices please."

Now we'll go to La Petite Cuillère to have coffee with friends, relax, chat. Time's up. We'll be back.

Information Page

President

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Chichester

Councillor Sarah Quail

Officers and Committee

Chair: Michael Bevis 781016

Vice Chair: Anne Scicluna 789065

Treasurer: Stephen Northdale 822148

Members

Clare Apel 783738

Anne-Louise Briggs 784346

David Nason 573716

Julia Sander 527435

Peter Tudge 023 9273 2538

John Wilton 788833

Conversation Circles

Groups meet monthly for lively, informal conversation in French. We welcome new members, whatever your level of French at Petit Cercle meetings.

From September onwards, there will be only one Petit Cercle meeting per month. This will be on the first Tuesday of the month.

The Cercle Avancé will meet once a month. The dates are currently under review and will be circulated later.

For further details, call **Julia Sander 01243 527435/ 07788 641926**, or email **foccevents1959@gmail.com**

Petit Cercle

10.30 am to Noon

Tuesday July 2

August: Vacances

Tuesday, September 3

Tuesday, October 1

Tuesday, November 5

Tuesday, December 3

Venue: The Coffee Bar, The Festival Theatre, Oaklands Park, Chichester PO19 6AP

Friends of Chartres Future Events.

Monday June 24: 7.30 pm

Four Cities Event

The Assembly Room, North Street,
Chichester

Tom Brown, Head Gardener at West Dean,
in conversation with Phil Hewitt

Sunday July 21: 2.30 pm onwards

Garden Party

Hosted by Michael Bevis at Little Oak, West
Way, Chichester PO19 3PW

Sunday, September 8: 6.30 - 9.00 pm

Social Evening at Fishbourne Centre

Boules, Quiz and Fish and Chips

Thursday December 5: 6.00 – 9.00 pm

Christmas Soirée

Sherbourne Room at the Bishop's Palace

Exchange to Chichester 2025

Arrive Thursday May 1/ Friday May 2

Depart Monday May 5/ Tuesday May 6

We are looking for a

Secretary

to take the minutes at committee meetings. We meet five times a year.

If you are able to help, please contact the Chair, Michael Bevis at

focchairman1959@gmail.com

CITYLINK

Contributions are always welcome. If you have any stories or pictures to share, please send them to

foccitylink1959@gmail.com