



SALISBURY SAINTES TWINNING ASSOCIATION

Spring 2008



President: *The Mayor of New Sarum*
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Chairman's message

It has been a busy year for the Association. We have gained several new members, as well as new committee members, and have tried new events as well as regular ones.

School groups from Saintes have visited and enjoyed goodwill and hospitality, with mayoral receptions in the Grand Jury Room at the Guildhall that have been greatly appreciated.

An SSTA information stand during one of the French markets last spring generated interest, as did the Saintes stall during Salisbury Food Festival and the participation

of half-a-dozen artists from Saintes during the Salisbury City Art Trail. Again, our president hosted a reception and helped reinforce the value of twinning for both sides. Members of the Association played petanque at Woodfalls, again enjoyed a barbecue kindly hosted by Mary and Patrick Paisey, learned about, and tasted, French wines and cheeses in the demonstration studio at Waitrose, and thanks to Amy Whetstone, had a decorated Christmas tree in the St Thomas's Church Christmas tree festival. We were delighted to repay some of our president's hospitality by inviting him and the mayoress to our annual dinner in January in the Wessex Restaurant at Salisbury College. The AGM in February was chaired by the mayor and attracted the highest-



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The roundabout marking all Saintes' other twin towns. We are not alone....



The Mayor and Mayoress at the Hôtel de Ville

ever attendance, which bodes well for the future of the SSTA. Mervyn gave an interesting talk about life in Charente-Maritime after the formal part of the meeting.

As chairman, but without insignia at that stage, I was invited to join the official party in Saintes for the Bastille Day celebrations last July. It proved to be a highlight of my year and enabled me to meet old friends, make new ones, and enjoy some surprisingly good French vegetarian food. Round-table discussions on subjects of mutual interest with representatives of Saintes' other twin towns were of great relevance.

I would like to thank everyone who takes an active part in SSTA, and to thank contributors to the newsletter and Mervyn for his sterling work as editor.

Caroline Rippier

Do you know?

- There is now an official insignia that can be worn by the chairman when representing the Association. It was designed and made in stainless steel by John Barker of Burcombe. Note that the SS also represents the Rivers Avon and Charente.
- Ken Dugate, our treasurer, has indicated his wish to relinquish the post at next year's AGM. If you are interested in offering your services, please contact Ken to discuss what is entailed.
- Christophe Texier, from Saintes, has been working as a waiter at the Red Lion Hotel since November. He is due back in Saintes at the end of April and will be managing a hotel there. Thank you to SSTA members who have welcomed him during his stay here.
- **It has been suggested that carefully planned themed/special interest visits to Saintes for small groups may be of interest to members. Flying from Southampton, perhaps a three or four day visit looking at art, music, locally produced food and drink (oysters, cognac, pineau?), archaeology, architecture (ancient or modern) or walking might appeal. Do contact the chairman if you are interested or have any other suggestions.**



Diary date

Saturday 26th July 2008

Annual SSTA B-B-Q at the Paiseys. Further details to be announced.

Saturday 20th September 5pm Place TBA

Salisbury Agenda 21 Autumn Forum to include speakers from Saintes and Xanten on sustainability



One of the 22,000 (and rising) roundabouts in France. There is an annual competition for the best roundabout in the country which explains why some of them are so attractive and some of them are so whacky. This one in Saintes is replanted annually with a different theme.

Views Around Saintes



Saint-Pierre Cathedral from the pond behind the Musée de l'Échevinage.

School Visits

There have been a number of visits to Salisbury from schools in Saintes throughout the year that we have been able to assist in one way or another. Often a walk conducted by a member of the Association from the Guildhall to Old Sarum has been a popular event, especially if the weather has been kind. In June Lycée Georges Desclauze visited Sparsholt College & Harnham Watermeadows assisted by Helena Wright. In March, EREA, Etablissement Régional d'Education Adapté, which is a boarding school for disadvantaged children, visited Bishop Wordworth's School, went on

a walk along the river to Old Sarum, led by Mervyn Pannett and Helena Wright, and were hosted in the Guildhall by the Mayor and Mayoress. In the evening some committee members met up with the French teachers for a drink. Mervyn and Jocelyn Pannett discovered that the leader of the group, Raphaële François, lives in a village near their house in the Charente-Maritime and that they have friends in common. As you can see from the photos we were lucky on both occasions with the weather and the schoolchildren seemed to enjoy themselves, as much as most teenagers enjoy being taken for a walk.



Students from Lycée Georges Desclaude set off for their walk guided by Helena Wright



Students from EREA set off for their walk guided by Mervyn Pannett and Helena Wright

How to get there

Some people think that Saintes is too far away for a visit, so let me describe the different ways of getting there and hopefully dispel this view.

First thing to do is decide how to travel. Driving is a good option as it gives you the flexibility for sightseeing *en route*, as well as giving you a boot to fill up with Charentais and Bordelaise products on the journey home. It is better to travel from one of the ports on the western side of the country which will save you a lot of driving each side of the channel.

If you intend to drive these are the nearest cross channel ferry routes. LD Lines (www.ldlines.co.uk) sails from Portsmouth nightly at 2300 hours and arrives at Le Havre at 0800 hours. The return journey leaves Le Havre at 1700 hours and arrives at Portsmouth at 2300 hours. For the overnight journey you can choose a cabin, airline type first class or economy class seats in quiet and darkened lounges at extra cost. We travel this way and recommend it.

You can also shorten the driving distances in France by travelling either with Brittany Ferries (www.brittany-ferries.co.uk) Portsmouth to St Malo or Plymouth to Roscoff. A further ferry line is Condor (www.condorferries.co.uk) which runs from Poole and Weymouth to St Malo using Sea Cats, although these are not good in rough seas for poor sailors.

From Le Havre the roads are dual carriageway from the outskirts of the town until you exit the autoroute at Saintes about four hundred miles and seven to eight hours later. Driving in France is a very different experience than in the UK, the roads have less traffic, especially the autoroutes, making for a more relaxed journey. The autoroute tolls for this one way journey are about 35€ to 40€ but you will recoup a lot of that by avoiding the N and D roads, with their endless bypasses littered with roundabouts. If you go to St Malo or Roscoff the costs will be cheaper as there are no tolls in Brittany.

However, if you just want to get to Saintes without all of the fuss of driving, then flying is the quickest way. The best route for us here in Salisbury is Flybe (www.flybe.com) from Southampton to La Rochelle. It is a one hour flight getting into La Rochelle most days at between midday and 2 o'clock. You can hire a car at the airport and drive to Saintes in about forty five minutes. Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) have just started an evening service from Stansted to Angoulême. I know very few details about the service or hire cars but you can certainly get a train from Angoulême to Saintes as I will discuss later.

Finally, you can let the train take the strain. To make your journey a holiday in itself you can take the Eurostar (www.eurostar.com) to Paris, stay a night or two there before catching the TGV to Angoulême (www.sncf.com). You can arrange hotels in Paris through Eurostar which, when we did it, was very good value. The TGV from Paris to Angoulême takes about three hours and is fairly cheap when compared with the cost of British train journeys. From Angoulême there are trains every two hours along the Charente River to Saintes.

I have not quoted any ferry, flight or train costs as these depend on dates of travel and special offers available. If you want to travel in July and August, however, the prices will be high and everything heavily booked. A good time to avoid if you can.

Saintes is a beautiful city and the surrounding countryside is lovely. It is certainly worth the journey, however you choose to travel.

Mervyn Pannett

A holiday in the Charente-Maritime

We have had another wonderful holiday in the Poitou-Charente, staying for two weeks in a superb gîte near the small town of St Jean d'Angely. We found the gîte two years ago, very well appointed, in a very small but vibrant 'hameau', called Chantemerle sur la Soie, a rather sweet-sounding name. We visited Saintes that time, and found the Abbaye-aux-Dames and the old part of town fascinating, with lots to see and do. Our nearest town, St Jean d'Angely, like Saintes, is a pilgrim rest *en route* to Santiago de Compostela, and so has magnificent remains of its very large abbey, and a large old part to explore. The area of Charente is full of places to visit, even in poor weather, which we suffered in 2007. Rochefort, La Rochelle and Royan are all on the coast, and most historic. The old fortress town of Brouage, now abandoned by sea and garrison, is well worth a trip to see how the French protected themselves from the ravages of the English fleet. It now sits in a 'maree', about 2 km inland from the sea.

Angoulême, with its 'trompe l'oeil' wall paintings, Pons with its 'donjon' and Cognac, with its brandy, are all near and well worth a day trip, with so much to see. There are also masses of small and interesting little chateaux to be visited all over the place. Of course, eating out is a pleasure wherever you happen to be, but the seafood on the coast is not to be missed.

The Charente is a truly wonderful area for a holiday, and within easy reach of the Channel ports. We too recommend the area to all, as a perfect holiday region, where you can practise French with very friendly locals.

James Thompson

Another sight in Saintes

This locomotive is sited on the east side of the town and is a reminder of the important part that Saintes played in the railway industry in south-west France. About 1500 people used to be employed in SNCF repair workshops in Saintes.



French Cathedral Singers visit Saintes

The French Cathedral Singers are a choir recruited and led by Philip Baxter. They come from all parts of England, with the majority coming from Salisbury, and are about 45 strong. Every year, based upon a selected French town, they sing for a week or so in the cathedrals and abbeys of that region.

Saintes was chosen for 2007 and a very happy choice it proved to be. The repertoire consisted of English church music both organ-accompanied and a capella. Many of the rehearsals took place in the Cathedral and singing the mass there was a very special occasion.

Evensong was sung in the nearby towns of Royan and Cognac. The latter of course necessitated a distillery visit, however this in no way affected the quality of the singing.

Half the choir stayed in the Abbaye-aux-Dames at Saintes and half in the Hotel des Messageries. Neither were able to provide meals, so there was plenty of scope for exploring the excellent local restaurants. On the Saturday before we left Bridget Brennan, now the chairman of the Saintes/Salisbury Twinning Association, laid on a reception for the choir in the cathedral cloisters which was greatly appreciated, as was the visit to the magnificent municipal art gallery which she also organised.

The tour to Saintes was deemed to be one of the best the choir has ever experienced – friendly people and a lovely cathedral – in a town of true French character. There might well be a return visit in a few years' time.

David Allen