



# SALISBURY–SAINTES TWINNING ASSOCIATION

Summer 2010



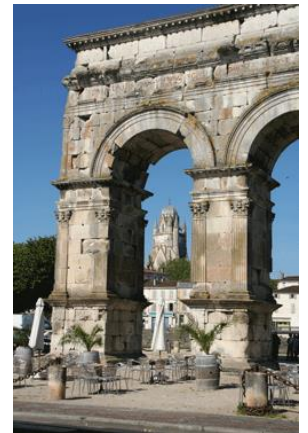
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## **Chairman's message**

Plans are well in hand for the SSTA 2011 calendar, which is Mervyn Pannett's brilliant brainchild. Copies will be on sale in August and I know you'll love it, as will your family and all your friends worldwide.

Another of the initiatives to mark the Association's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday next year is the introduction of a series of academic awards for the most outstanding students of French at Salisbury's four senior schools. The awards will not only support the students themselves but will also add an extra dimension to the SSTA's mission.



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If you are planning to head towards Saintes, do remember that Jumelage members are always happy to meet visitors from Salisbury and show them round. Just let me or Helena Wright know and we'll put you in touch.

Enjoy the summer, at home or abroad, and I'm looking forward to meeting you at the barbecue on 31<sup>st</sup> July, once more kindly hosted by Mary and Patrick Paisey.

Warm congratulations are due to Mary, a founder member of the SSTA, who has been made an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for her unstinting service to the community.

*Caroline Rippier*

## ***Do you know a good restaurant in the Saintes area?***

Sadly nobody has come forward with any recommendations of good restaurants in Saintes or its surrounding area. The editor and his family are prepared to carry on with the good work of trying out new places and reporting back through the newsletter, despite the obvious danger to their waistlines and wallets. However, peoples' tastes differ so it would be much better if we could have some recommendations from other association members to give more variety to the list.

You may be interested to know that our recommendation given in the last newsletter, Clos de Cours, next to the theatre, received a Michelin listing in this year's guide, the first step towards a star.

## **Diary dates**

Saturday 31 <sup>st</sup> July	SSTA Annual B-B-Q
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> September	Salisbury Food and Drink Festival in the Market Place.
Thursday 21st October	European food & wine tastings in Waitrose Studio

## **Website**

The association now has a website which you can access at [www.salisburysaintestwinning.co.uk](http://www.salisburysaintestwinning.co.uk). This has been created by David Allen who, as SSTA webmaster, is also keeping it regularly updated with news and photographs. David is very happy to receive ideas for improvements to the website so please look at it critically and tell David how you think that it can be improved. We want to project the best possible image of the association to the general public as well as making the website as informative as we can.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Calendar**

2011 is the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the twinning between Salisbury and Saintes, the actual date of the founding of the twinning was St George's Day, 1990. To mark the occasion we intend to hold some events about which more will be published later. However, one way we intend to mark this important birthday and raise some funds for future events is to produce a 2011 calendar containing photographs of both Salisbury and Saintes. Although this is being done by SSTA we hope that a number of copies will be sold in Saintes so the calendar will be bi-lingual and, hopefully, appealing to people in both cities. The calendar is still in the design stage but we have arranged for it to be printed in August so that it will be available for sale at the Food Fair in September. The calendar will be sold with an envelope included so that people can send them as presents through the post. We hope that you like them and will purchase them in great numbers.

## **Miss Saintes visits Salisbury**

Stéphanie Monteau, the current Miss Saintes, was in Salisbury on a six week internship with the Salisbury & District Chamber of Commerce. She was taken by our Chairman to Greentrees School where she had to handle a huge range of questions from 34 eager nine to ten year olds in Year 5. She coped extremely well and everybody appreciated her visiting the school.

Her next challenge was to accompany Caroline to the top of the cathedral tower to experience the wonderful bird's eye view of the city. Her head for heights served her well and she seemed to enjoy the experience. Not one for the faint hearted.

Along with the mayor she attended the inter schools sports event where she presented some of the athletics prizes. She enjoyed her visit to Salisbury and we hope that she has taken home some fond memories of our lovely city and the people she met. We also hope that this is just the start of a long relationship between her and Salisbury.

*The photograph shows Stéphanie, appropriately at Saintes Close in Hampton Park.*



## **View from the South West - Abbaye aux Dames**

The Abbaye aux Dames is situated about 300 metres to the west of the Charente. The easiest way to find the abbey is to take the road away from the river opposite the Arc Germanicus, Rue de l'Arc de Triomphe, which will take you to it.

The abbey was founded in 1047 and remained a spiritual centre and place of learning right up to the French Revolution. Throughout its long history it enjoyed considerable royal and aristocratic patronage, being placed under the protection of the King of France in 1378. At its height it had one hundred nuns whose main purpose was to educate daughters of the nobility. Its importance and wealth was greatly enhanced during the period of the Abbess Agnes Barbezieux, a relative of Eleanor of Aquitaine who, along with many other gifts, donated the money to fund the new abbey church. Abbesses were generally daughters of the nobility which meant that the abbey had very considerable influence. However, being an abbess didn't necessarily mean that you had to lead a monastic life. One abbess had ten children, one of whom was reputed to have been fathered by Louis XIV.

Throughout its history the abbey received many gifts from wealthy donors, no doubt wanting to save their souls. Much of this came as grants of land, especially in the area at the mouth of the Charente. It received grants in the Marennnes, with its salt marshes, a source of considerable income in those days, and on the Ile d'Oleron. If you know the area, you will know that a small island, Ile Madame lies just off the coast at Port des Barques. The "madame" after whom it was named was the Abbess of the Abbaye aux Dames, who was its legal owner.

Throughout its centuries of existence the abbey suffered many disasters. In 1320 the then abbess decided to put the abbey under the protection of the king of France, despite the fact that it was in the part of Aquitaine then under the English crown. Edward II appealed to the Pope to get his property back but received no reply, so in 1326 he unleashed bands of mercenaries against the abbey who sacked it. During the wars of religion in the 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries both the Huguenot and the king's armies ransacked the convent buildings and then in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the buildings suffered two severe fires. This led to a reconstruction programme between 1650 and 1660 which saw the construction of the buildings we see today.

The abbey ceased its monastic activity in 1792 at the height of the French revolution when it was converted into a prison. Ten years later Napoleon turned the buildings into a barracks, in which role it remained until 1924. It was then bought by the town who undertook some restoration work up until 1940. For the next four years it was used again as a barracks, this time for the occupying German army. After the war the abbey church was re-consecrated as the local parish church and reconstruction work, particularly in the decade between 1970 and 1980, was continued. It is now a music school and concert venue. Final point, behind it is a large, free car park in which there is nearly always space to park, only about 400 metres from the centre of the town. *Mervyn Pannett*



The Romanesque Abbey Church



Convent Buildings

### ***Saintes Street Party***

Jocelyn and I were privileged to be invited to the Street Party held by the Comité de jumelage de Saintes Salisbury held in the Jardin Public at Saintes. This was a lovely get together of the French and British members of the twinning association in Saintes and where we met up with old friends and made new ones. We were entertained during the evening by Entente Musicale 17, a group of British musicians living in the Saintes area with a varied repertoire ranging from Bach, through Gershwin to the Beatles. It was a lovely evening and the Gods were kind with the weather, especially considering the cloudburst we drove through on the way there.

*Mervyn Pannett*



### ***Do you want to learn French?***

We have received a most generous offer from Graham Prior which reads: "...I should like to offer 2 free French lessons to SSTA members. I teach people to communicate in French, with no grammar or writing involved. I use sound as the main function in learning. If anyone is interested in speaking to me, they can ring me on 07919 050306."

Thank you, Graham, very much for such a generous offer. If anyone wishes to take up this offer, please contact Graham direct.

### ***New Members visit Saintes, or, a Nautical Approach***

As virgin members of the Salisbury Saintes twinning association we decided as lifelong leisure sailors to arrive by water.

We picked up our cruiser on the river Charente at Jarnac - upstream of Saintes and by way of several locks, Cognac and the passage of two days approached Saintes downstream from the South East. Saintes is surprisingly well developed on the Southern bank of the Charente and the Cathedral is prominent from about six kilometres out: disappears as you close and dominates as the bridges crossing the river come into view.

We had planned to arrive as the sun dropped below the yard arm and tie up on the Northern bank where a landing place with pontoons was shown on the chart. We saw the pontoons from about one kilometre distant; swung the boat round to tie up neatly facing upstream into the current.

All achieved we climbed down onto the newly installed pontoons only to discover that they were so new no walk ashore connection had been made. We needed provisions and sustenance and consequently moved off downstream and re-moored on pontoons adjoining the Arc de Germanicus Square which is currently receiving a splendid face lift with the public open space receiving a thorough make over.

A brief walk over the bridge to the town centre which houses a range of excellent shops, restaurants and boutiques. We arrived on a Sunday semi out of season (mid April) and there were few restaurants open but we found a splendid central bar with an obliging landlord on the main street.

A fleeting visit well worth while: splendid river, and when finished an inspiring background to the Arc de Germanicus. We returned to the east having enjoyed Saintes.

*David Octon*

*Thanks David, I have often fancied hiring one of the boats at Jarnac and heading off down the river. This makes me even more determined. Ed*



A typical Charente river frontage view that David would have enjoyed

### ***Stop Press***

A group of nine students from the Lycée Georges Desclaude will be running a stall at the Salisbury Food and Drink Festival. Last year another group from the Lycée ran a stall at the festival and were a great success. This year's group is hoping to repeat their predecessor's success this year.