

ROMSEY TWINNING

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 27th September 2023. 7.30pm. Age Concern Hall, Linden Road

MINUTES

1. The Chairman (Roland Matthews) opened the meeting and welcomed the Mayor.
2. PRESENT:
John Ray (President and Town Mayor), Roland Matthews (Chairman), John Parker (Treasurer), Judy Phillips (Secretary), Ann Le Grice, Debbie Evenhand, Karen Bolton, Bryan Bolton, Gill Watkin, Liz Morley, Kathrina Gwynne, Mike Bull, Jane Bull, Julie Brinton, Lucy Greener (visitor).
APOLOGIES:
Chris Amery, Denise Amery, Jill Aussant, Victor Aussant, Angela Bernhardt, Hilary Bulloch, Sally Dickens, Katherine Edmonds, Georgette Ellison, Matthew Ellison, Richard Evenhand, Neil Gwynne, Tessa Parker, Mike Phillips, Cathy Thomas, Phil Thomas, Christine Tresise, Mike Tresise, Lilian Weatherley.
3. Minutes of the last AGM
The Minutes of the last AGM (Wednesday 2nd October 2019) were said to be a true record. Roland reminded the meeting that no AGM had been deemed to be possible or feasible for the past three years owing to the Covid pandemic. Proposed by Mike Bull, seconded by John Parker.
4. Matters Arising. None
5. Reports on activities with our Twin Towns:
 - a) Paimpol (in the absence of Denise Amery, Karen Bolton gave the report)
A group of 17 twinneders, including 4 new members, travelled on 27th April overnight from Portsmouth to St Malo, celebrating Jane Bull's birthday en route. They were collected by the Paimpol Town minibus and did some local sightseeing, before being welcomed by the new Mayor, Fanny Chappé. Saturday was spent with hosts, visiting various nearby places of interest. On Sunday the group watched a screening at the town cinema of the film *Le Réseau Shelburn* (The Shelburn Network) about a local Resistance network during WW2 which organised the clandestine repatriation of many Allied airmen who had been shot down over occupied France. There was added interest due to many locals featuring in the film. Following the screening there had been a moving thank you from a French veteran who had been a young man at the time of the Network. In the afternoon the group was taken on a walk along part of the route taken by the

escapees who were evacuated by small boats from a local beach under the noses of the Germans in their cliff-top gun emplacements. The visit concluded with a convivial communal meal in the evening, which was attended by other Paimpol twinningers as well as hosts. On the morning the group departed, a young girl was selling bunches of Lily of the Valley, a tradition on May 1st, which we were delighted to purchase.

More links continued to be built with Year 6 pupils from Karen's ex-school, Cupernham Junior, having formed a friendship group with a school in Paimpol where they had shared letters, songs and poems via Zoom. It was hoped that more Paimpol schools would join this initiative in due course. Mike Bull said that he had always hoped that Twinning would act as a facilitator for encouraging these kinds of friendship links. Karen mentioned another link forged during the summer when her son's music group had performed in Paimpol during a short tour of Brittany.

b) Battenberg (Debbie Evenhand)

On 18th October 2019, a group of twenty members travelled from Romsey to Heathrow Airport for what was to be the last group visit before the pandemic struck in 2020. The group arrived at Frankfurt Airport and were met by a coach organised for us by the *Partnerschaftsvereinigung* Battenberg. The following day, Saturday, the group travelled with hosts in private cars to the historic town of Bad Arolsen for a guided tour with German- and English-speaking guides. This was followed by a guided tour of Bad Arolsen Schloss, again with guides in both languages. There. Some members had visited Mengerhausen, a small town with half-timbered houses, on the return journey. Sunday was a day spent with hosts; visits made included the *Stolberghutte* at Usseln for a walk with a visit to the Dairy Museum; the Living Museum at Obertshausen with a chance to take part in apple pressing; the *Stilmarkt* at Giessen for an exhibition on Design and Style; the Viseum at Wetzlar, a museum dedicated to Carl Zeiss optics. The group dinner was held in the evening at the *Kupferkanne* restaurant in Battenberg. The dinner had an Oktoberfest theme with traditional Bavarian dishes, Weissbier and blue and white decorations. After a short but action-packed weekend, the group left on Monday morning for the return trip to Romsey, stopping on the way to the airport at the Hessenpark Open Air Museum which documents the history of rural life in Hesse.

A group from Battenberg would be visiting Romsey from 27th to 30th October 2023, and were travelling here by coach. There would be a bi-lingual guided visit to the Silk Mill at Whitchurch on Saturday, including lunch, and the rest of the day would be spent with hosts. Sunday was a free day with hosts and in the evening there a group dinner was being held at the Empress of Blandings in Copythorne.

c) Treviglio (in the absence of Phil Thomas, Roland gave the report)

Last October 2022 a group of 17 members from Romsey went to Treviglio, our first visit for 4 years because of the pandemic. On the first day there was a civic welcome at the Cultural Centre where the Friendship Agreement between the two towns was renewed by the two Mayors, followed by a lunch in a local restaurant, generously funded by the Mayor's office. In the afternoon there were visits to the local church, the *Santuario*, and to the town's museums. On the Saturday there was a group visit to the ancient city of Brescia. The Amici treated the group to lunch in a local restaurant. The Sunday was spent with hosts until a farewell group dinner in the evening which was attended by the Treviglio Mayor.

The original planting of Romsey's gift of spring bulbs in the Giardini Romsey (Romsey Gardens) in Treviglio had failed unfortunately for a number of reasons, but a subsequent re-planting organised by the town hall in Treviglio had been more successful and photographs of the blooms had appeared in the summer newsletter, including one of the plaque Romsey Twinning had commissioned to record its gift.

In July a group of 11 twinningers from Treviglio, together with 6 members of Treviglio theatre group TAE Teatro came to Romsey, their visit timed to coincide with the Romsey Festival and Beggars Fair. As well as a day spent enjoying the sights and sounds of Beggars Fair, which on this occasion had included street theatre and stilt-walking from the Italian theatre group, the visit had included a Mayor's reception at the Town Hall, a guided tour of the Abbey and an evening concert in the Abbey featuring Michelmersh Silver Band and the Spitfire Sisters. Sunday was spent with hosts and in the evening a brief photocall for a group photograph at Treviglio Close was followed by a well-attended barbecue at Woodley Scout Hall featuring a pork roast, Eton Mess dessert and a glass of locally produced fizz. In addition to their appearances during Beggars Fair TAE Teatro had also run a circus skills workshop for young people and presented a children's show at the Plaza.

The Mayor of Treviglio came over with a small party on the final day and had been welcomed to the barbecue. Roland expressed thanks to John Ray for having found time at short notice in a busy schedule to welcome his counterpart and give him a brief tour of the town.

Twinning had helped facilitate a concert in Treviglio by Romsey Youth Choir during their summer tour of northern Italy which had been very well received.

Roland thanked the group co-ordinators for their hard work. He announced that our Paimpol co-ordinator, Denise Amery, was stepping down from the role and that Karen Bolton had agreed to take it on. He expressed his thanks to Denise for her active and diligent work over many years, and the meeting showed its appreciation.

6. Treasurer's report and presentation of Annual Accounts

John Parker explained that the turnover varied from year to year depending on the number of inbound/outbound visits and how payments were made. At present the income for the year was £2,637.75 and expenditure was £2,271.75, with a surplus of £366.00 for the year. The bank balance on 30th April 2023 was £3,490.81, a healthy figure due largely to the enforced lack of twinning activity in the Covid years. Mike Bull asked if the Committee had considered setting a minimum balance to safeguard the association's operation. John did not see the need for this at present, providing that Twinning could continue to generate income from the Quiz Night and other events. Mike Bull asked if the Committee had considered applying for charitable status. John replied that in his view there was insufficient benefit in relation to the amount of work involved in applying for and maintaining charity status.

7. Membership Report

John Parker reported that as of 17th August there was a total of 40 memberships, the same as the previous year. However, in 2021 there were 42 memberships, in 2020 there were 44 and in 2019 there were 46, so whilst it was relatively stable the trend appeared to be of a slow decline in numbers. Kathrina Gwynne pointed out that unfortunately, as younger people were likely to be less able to have the resources to go on trips or to host, membership tended to be more appealing to older people. It was agreed that the Committee would discuss this. John Parker suggested that one approach could be to hold more social and cultural events here, without exchange visits, to encourage interest and attract new members, especially since the difficulties of Covid restrictions have (hopefully) passed.

8. Chairman's Report

"It has been an odd experience reading through the minutes of the last general meeting we held in October 2019. At that time Wuhan was a non-descript provincial city in China unknown to most of us, and we were in a state of happy ignorance with no idea of what was heading towards us over the ridge. Four years on, chastened and, I hope, a little wiser, we can give thanks that Romsey Twinning has come through the difficulties and challenges of those years with its core mission and values intact. It is early days still to assess what lasting impact it has had on the twinning landscape generally but we can at least say with some confidence that all three of our twin towns are also back in business.

It is customary on these occasions for the Chairman to review the past year since the previous AGM. As we have not had a meeting since 2019 I thought it would be useful to pick out first some highlights of that period, partly to provide continuity for the record, but also to demonstrate that we found other ways of maintaining our profile and remaining active even though we were unable to organise any twinning exchange visits. When the pandemic hit initially in March 2020 and we went into the first and most severe lockdown the immediate casualty was a planned visit by

Battenberg to Romsey in May. By way of consolation and encouragement many of us had fun compiling a lockdown album of photos of a weirdly deserted Romsey which we sent to Battenberg and our other twin towns, together with recipes for some classic British dishes. The album remains a valuable record of an extraordinary time which hopefully none of us will have to experience again.

During this period we also saw the names of Battenberg and Treviglio added to the streetscape of Romsey with closes named after the two towns in the Meadow View development off Cupernham Lane. In autumn 2021 we conducted an online survey of members' views which generated some useful information for the committee. And in September that year we made our first foray back into gathering in person when some twenty members met outdoors for coffee one morning in the Memorial Park. While in-person meetings remained problematic we went online to reach out to our twin towns and arranged some Zoom sessions which included an illustrated talk on Shakespeare and a video and talk from Treviglio about an important date in their history, the 500th anniversary in 2022 of the miracle of the Weeping Madonna which spared the town from destruction.

Finally in this short survey I must mention our participation in the celebrations for the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022. At the Street Party organised by the Carnival Committee in the town centre and held on a perfect summer's day Romsey Twinning was given a prime location in the Cornmarket from where we distributed free slices of Battenberg cake to all comers. We also handed out leaflets about twinning and about the origins of Battenberg cake. The venture certainly gave the association a high profile on the day and generated some valuable publicity.

And so to the past twelve months. You have already heard reports on the activities with our twin towns. We were particularly pleased to be able to go to Treviglio in good numbers last October for our first exchange in any direction since our visit to Battenberg in October 2019. In March some 25 members enjoyed our annual dinner at the Dog & Crook in Braishfield. At the end of April 17 Romsey twinningers made the ferry crossing to Brittany for a long weekend in Paimpol, our first visit there for nearly five years. And in early July, as you have heard, a group from Treviglio visited Romsey for Beggars Fair and the Romsey Festival, accompanied by members of TAE Teatro and, for the final 24 hours, by the Mayor of Treviglio and his party.

These then are the headline events for the year, and of course it is a great relief that we have been able to resume twinning visits. But perhaps the most significant achievement of the past year for me is that last month we finally completed our work on sorting and editing the records of Romsey Twinning and were able to deposit the selected material at the county Record Office in Winchester. With our partnership with Paimpol going back over 60 years this was a considerable undertaking but it was one that had to be done ever since we were required to remove our archives from the Town Hall some five years ago. The work was not glamorous and took longer

than expected due to the pandemic. Whilst it has not advanced the future of Romsey Twinning in any obvious way it has at least secured its *past*. Once the archive is fully catalogued members will be able to go to the HRO to search and consult it, knowing that it is now in a safe space and being conserved to appropriate professional standards. As part of this project we are in discussion with the Town Council, through John Parker, our Treasurer, with the aim of having a wall-mounted display of twinning charters and other key documents in the Mayor's Parlour. John is also arranging a donation to Hampshire Record Office to accompany the deposit. HRO cannot make a charge for these services so rely on voluntary donations to support their important work.

I would like to thank John Mason and Denise Amery, two long-standing members, who gave us the benefit of their experience and memories when reviewing the records. And I would like to record a special vote of thanks to Judy Phillips who was my steadfast and always good-humoured companion over the many, many hours we spent poring over old committee minutes, press cuttings, correspondence, photographs and other twinning material.

At this point I would just remind the meeting that at the 2019 AGM we passed a number of resolutions endorsing the Committee's overall approach to the management of the association's records and giving the Committee authority to sell or otherwise dispose of any artefacts and memorabilia not suitable for retention. The Committee has met 5 times over the course of the year.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the committee for their work and support throughout the year. And I would like to thank all our members for their loyalty and continuing support as the association has navigated these difficult few years. As we look ahead now to the visit here by Battenberg at the end of next month I hope we can look forward to a year of activity in which all three of our twin towns feature again at long last."

Julie Brinton thought that Twinning should nowadays discourage the exchange of official gifts between twin towns wherever possible as the association had nowhere to keep, let alone display, such gifts. Kathrina Gwynne suggested holding an auction of these gifts for members. Although a previous attempt had been made to offer gifts to members in exchange for a donation, it was agreed that the Committee could consider this again if there was sufficient suitable material. Roland informed the meeting that one of the gifts (the model of the sailing ship given to Lord Louis) had been accepted back by Countess Mountbatten.

9. Election of Officers and Committee Members

Roland thanked the Officers (Denise Amery, John Parker, Judy Phillips,) for their support over the past year. A motion to re-elect the Officers en bloc was proposed

by Mike Bull and seconded by Debbie Evenhand and agreed unanimously. Members were asked for other nominations to join the Committee but none were made. Roland named the existing Committee members (Angela Benhardt, Karen Bolton, Debbie Evenhand, Ann Le Grice, Phil Thomas,) and thanked them for their efforts over the past year. A motion to re-elect them en bloc was proposed by Bryan Bolton and seconded by Julie Brinton and agreed unanimously.

10. Confirmation of Patron

Roland had asked Countess Mountbatten if she were willing to continue as our Patron for another year and she had agreed to do so if we wished. The motion to confirm this was proposed by Jane Bull and seconded by John Parker and agreed unanimously.

11. Future events

These included our Quiz Night on 7th October and the visit from our Battenberg guests at the end of October. Other fund-raising and social events were yet to be decided and would be announced in due course via forthcoming newsletters. Roland suggested that TwinFest (which had not happened because of Covid) could be revived at a future date, perhaps once the association had built up its financial reserves. Mike Bull wondered if 2026, the date of the next Romsey Festival, might be worth considering for this. John Parker suggested that in the meantime, perhaps TwinFest Online could be considered, as people had become accustomed to online meetings via Zoom and Teams during Covid.

12. Publicity

Roland thanked Karen for taking on the role of producing a newsletter twice a year. It was agreed that this was a useful way of keeping in touch with members. Now that the records issue had been dealt with the priority in publicity terms was to create a website for Romsey Twinning as the lack of a web presence had been a concern since the demise of the RomseyNet site. Twinning did at least have a Facebook presence, thanks to John Parker, but Bryan Bolton stressed the importance of having a website for attracting new members. Karen Bolton asked for any suggestions and comments on the newsletter content to be sent to her. The next one would appear in December.

13. Any other business (including questions from the floor)

Gill Watkin asked when Subscriptions were due, and John Parker informed her that it was January.

Mike Bull asked about the display of our Charters in the Town Hall. Despite efforts from John and Roland there had sadly been no progress so far, but they would continue to try to find a suitable space.

John Ray mentioned that the Carnival Committee had had some success with securing sponsorship from local businesses, especially local developers such as McCarthy Stone and Churchill. He said that these companies were keen to be seen as

part of the local community and were definitely worth approaching for support. John Parker wondered if they should be approached to sponsor a specific project such as an incoming visit, though John Ray stressed that money appeared to be available now and might not be in the future. Roland asked what sponsors might expect in return. John Ray thought that the company name/logo on publicity was all that was required.

As there were no other questions, Roland declared the meeting closed, thanking everyone for attending. He also thanked Ann Le Grice and Judy Phillips for their help with the refreshments, and Judy for taking the Minutes.