

**ROMSEY TWINNING  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2025, 7.00PM  
AGE CONCERN HALL, LINDEN ROAD, ROMSEY**

**MINUTES**

**1** The Chairman, Roland Matthews, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

**2 PRESENT:**

Russell Theron (President and Town Mayor), Roland Matthews (Chairman), John Parker (Treasurer), Judy Phillips (Secretary), Karen Bolton, Julie Brinton, Jane and Mike Bull, David Chillingworth, Debbie and Richard Evenhand, Kathrina and Neil Gwynne, Ann LeGrice, John Mason, Vinnie McLean, Mike Phillips, Jean Rivers, Gill Watkin.

**APOLOGIES:**

Denise and Chris Amery, Jill Aussant, Angela Bernhardt, Bryan Bolton, Pat Boniface, Lucy Greener, Steve Hunter, Robert LeGrice, Gill and Bruce Maddick, Ian McLean, Liz Morley, Tessa Parker, Kathy and Phil Thomas, Mavis Trantham, Christine and Mike Tresise, Lilian Weatherley.

**3 Minutes of the last AGM**

The Minutes of the last AGM (11 October 2024) were said to be a true record. Proposed by Debbie Evenhand, seconded by Karen Bolton.

**4 Matters arising**

Roland was pleased to report that there had been encouraging signs that we would be able to display twinning charters in the Town Hall (Mayor's Parlour). A meeting would be arranged in due course with the Chief Officer and John Parker (representing the Town Council).

Referring to item 6 (Treasurer's Report), John Parker was pleased to report that our donation of £350 to Hampshire Record Office was indeed recovered as Roland's application for a grant from TVBC had been successful.

## **5 Reports on activities with our Twin Towns**

### **a) Paimpol** Karen Bolton gave this report:

A group of 19 Twinners from Romsey visited Paimpol in May, 4 of whom were first timers. It was a very enjoyable and successful visit and Karen referred us to the newsletter on the website for the full details.

It was the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Twinning with Paimpol in August this year. Julie Brinton and Roland Matthews visited Paimpol during the Festival du Chant de Marin in August and marked the anniversary with a photograph holding the charter with Jean-Luc Glory (Président of Paimpol's Comité du Jumelage and Roland's opposite number).

There is no news regarding further school links with Paimpol. However, Karen's colleague at Cupernham Junior School is continuing to maintain the email links already established.

### **b) Battenberg** Debbie Evenhand gave this report:

Sadly, the planned visit from Battenberg that had been scheduled for September did not take place as they had not been able to recruit enough to make the journey financially viable. They had been intending to come by coach, but the cost proved too high for the number involved. Some of the Battenbergers had expressed a wish to visit Romsey at a different time of year from their customary autumn dates so this will be borne in mind when planning future visits.

### **c) Treviglio** Report given by Roland Matthews in the absence of Phil Thomas:

A group of 10 visited Romsey at the end of February. A group from the Treviglio Mayor's Office, who had previously visited Romsey in July

2023, had hoped to join the visit but were unable to come in the end owing to local commitments associated with their Festival of the Weeping Madonna. The weekend had included a group visit to Chichester and Fishbourne Roman Palace and a farewell group dinner at the Mortimer Arms at Ower, where the guests of honour were John and Tessa Parker in John's role as Mayor of Romsey and President of Romsey Twinning. A new feature of the visit was an Anglo-Italian quiz held on the first evening at the Nightingale inn. Pub quizzes are a peculiarly British phenomenon, but lack of familiarity proved no handicap for our Italian visitors who triumphed on the night over the home-grown teams.

## **6 Treasurer's Report and presentation of Annual Accounts**

John Parker explained that our turnover varied from year to year, depending on the pattern of incoming and outgoing visits. We aim to keep our budget for incoming visits within a range of £600 - £800 per visit. He pointed out that fund-raising events were needed to ensure we had sufficient funds to host future incoming visits, otherwise it could be necessary to raise the annual subscription rate. He was not proposing to increase the rate on this occasion.

The balance at year end (to 30 April 2025) was £2363.14 and there was a deficit for the year of £291.30.

Mike Bull asked if Romsey Twinning should become a Registered Charity, and John commented that he would not want to undertake the administrative burden that would be necessary, adding that he saw no real benefit unless Gift Aid was considered. Debbie Evenhand agreed about the administrative burden but suggested that various grants could be applied for as a Registered Charity. John pointed out that grant-making bodies will not necessarily support ongoing needs, preferring instead to make a grant for a new activity or special project (for example a particular visit). Neil Gwynne mentioned the need to apply soon for any grants because the impending changes to local government might make it harder in future to obtain grants.

Julie Brinton proposed acceptance of the report and annual accounts and Kathrina Gwynne seconded it.

## **7 Membership Report**

John explained that there was a small fluctuation in membership numbers each year, reflecting whether the Town Mayor and consort (honorary members as the Association's President) were themselves members of Twinning. As of 31 August 2025, there were 2 honorary memberships, and 39 standard memberships (22 joint and 17 individual). Last year there were 61 memberships and this year 64, although the overall trend is of a continuing slow decline. It had been agreed by the Committee that we would add the question "where did you find out about Twinning?" to our membership forms from now on to assist with member recruitment.

Roland said the association was sad to learn of the deaths of three members during the past year: Malcolm Kaill, Annegret Evans, and Gay Drysdall.

## **8 Chairman's Report**

Roland Matthews presented his report:

In reviewing the past year I would like to start by thanking once again our coordinators for the three twinings we support: Karen Bolton, Debbie Evenhand and Phil Thomas. We all reap the benefits of their hard work, most of it behind the scenes, in maintaining and nurturing the partnerships with Paimpol, Battenberg and Treviglio.

Although the exchange visits lie at the heart of our activity we recognise that not all our members wish or are able to travel abroad as participants, so it is important for the association to maintain a profile on the home front and to offer events here that everyone can be involved in. During the past year we have held a skittles evening at the Ship Inn in Redbridge and an annual dinner at the White Horse in Ampfield, where we were very pleased

to welcome as our guest Helen Klaassen, the new Chief Officer of Romsey Town Council.

Our President, the Mayor of Romsey, was also our guest at the dinner; this happened to be John Parker, our Treasurer, so we were delighted to welcome John and Tessa as our guests on this occasion. I am pleased that John was able to play a full part in the twinning programme in spite of the many competing claims on his time during his year of office; as well as welcoming his opposite number from Paimpol to the Town Hall at the end of May last year he took part in the visit to Battenberg last autumn and was our guest at the dinner in honour of our visitors from Treviglio in early March. And although his Mayoral term had finished when he and Tessa were part of the group visiting Paimpol at the end of May John was still received with all due ceremony by Fanny Chappé, the Mayor of Paimpol. If you haven't already done so I encourage you to read his account in the most recent newsletter of meeting Fanny and her family on this visit. I would like to record here my personal thanks to John for his continuing commitment and support for twinning.

One of the events held during John's year as Mayor was the VE Day picnic in the War Memorial Park in early May, where Romsey Twinning proudly displayed its banner and promoted the association.

Your committee has met five times during the year. I would like to thank its members and my fellow officers for their help- and support over the course of the year.

In my report last year I alluded to some concerns about the future direction of twinning, and to changes that might be needed to secure its future, in the medium term at least. At the start of the year I put a discussion paper about this before the committee. Having shared the paper with my opposite numbers in the twin towns I wrote to the members this summer to outline the basic proposal: to introduce a 'gap year' into the pattern of twinning exchanges so that henceforth they take place on a three-year, rather than two-year, cycle.

Linked to this is a specific proposal that next year, exceptionally, we replace twinning exchanges with a project inviting artists and arts groups from each of the twin towns to take part in the Romsey Festival in the first half of July. The idea is that there will be artists from Paimpol, Battenberg and Treviglio in Romsey at the same time – perhaps over the middle weekend of the Festival, which will include Beggar’s Fair; not only will this offer, we hope, a forum for sharing ideas, practices, and information about respective cultures amongst the participating artists, but it will also give a prominent profile to Romsey Twinning itself. And this project is consistent with an objective which has become increasingly important in recent years: to supplement our regular activity and to spread the twinning model by encouraging and facilitating links and exchanges between other community groups across national borders.

Although at every stage in this process we have asked for feedback and comments I am afraid to say this has been practically non-existent thus far. As far as our partners on the continent are concerned it is fair to say that two at least look on the proposals with a mixture of sadness and resignation, but both do accept the need for change; a need which has only been highlighted by the very sad cancellation of Battenberg’s scheduled visit to Romsey two weeks ago, as well as by the recent demises of other local twinning groups (Wellow and North Baddesley). Since announcing the proposal the committee has always been clear that any significant change to the pattern of our core activity should carry the broad approval of the membership. The annual general meeting remains the primary forum for such matters to be aired, so with that in mind I shall conclude by opening this up for your thoughts and comments.

There followed a full discussion about the proposed changes to our core activities. The discussion moved between the proposal for a gap year next year in our schedule of visits (with some sort of participation from each of our Twin Towns in the Romsey Festival in 2026) and the further suggestion that in future the schedule of visits would be on a three-year basis instead of alternate years.

Roland clarified that the participation in the Romsey Festival would be for next year only, not a regular occurrence. Concerns were raised about the

accommodation of any groups or participants from the Twin Towns, their transport costs and whether any performance payments might be expected. There was concern that it could be difficult to find accommodation for any larger groups of performers. Ann LeGrice pointed out that no-one outside Twinning would provide accommodation without payment for hosting. John Parker stated that he felt the accommodation might be provided by our members as is usual during Twinning visits but that transport costs would be borne by the visitors. Extra fundraising and grant applications would be needed otherwise. Vinny McLean asked if our Twin Towns visited each other (they do not) and therefore taking part together in the Festival could be an attractive proposition for them. John Mason pointed out that some years ago the links forged with other interest groups such as sailing, rugby, walking and scouting meant that Twinning got new members and became a facilitator of Twinning links. It was agreed that this was an approach we should continue to pursue. While it is no longer possible to have direct exchanges with schools/young people, due to safeguarding constraints, online links (such as the Cupernham Junior School initiative) could be the new way forward here.

In discussing the proposal for a revised, three-year schedule of visits, the meeting expressed both genuine concern and disappointment as well as seeing the potential benefits with this arrangement. Richard Evenhand pointed out that, post-Brexit, much good work had been done to try and repair the damage done to our relationship with our European neighbours, but he wondered how our fellow twin towns might feel if we began to drop off in our visiting pattern. Julie Brinton wondered if this proposal might in fact be welcomed by our twin towns who were possibly also struggling with keeping members and making regular visits. Debbie Evenhand said that our link with Battenberg was particularly under threat as the costs and logistics involved in travelling had increased in recent years. Roland suggested that spring 2027 might be an appropriate time to invite Battenberg to Romsey as that year would be marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the twinning link. It was pointed out that sometimes individual twinning members would arrange private visits to or from their partners; such contacts outside the formal exchanges were always welcome and were to be encouraged.

Following the discussions, a show of hands demonstrated a broad agreement in principle to the gap year proposal and for confidence in the Committee to discuss the matter further. Roland said the Committee would make this an early priority and agreed that the proposed revised schedule of visits would be made available to members. Mike Bull stressed the need for members to have more information to enable them to give their opinions on the proposed changes. Roland pointed out that he had not so far received any feedback from members to the mailing he had sent out in July outlining the proposals but agreed that more details could be helpful. He concluded that if we wanted twinning to continue, we did need to adjust and adapt.

## **9. Amendment of the Constitution**

A motion to alter the Constitution was put to the meeting. The change was necessary to give the Committee greater flexibility in fixing the date of the AGM. The proposed change meant that the first sentence of Clause 5a) would now read: "The Committee shall call for an Annual General Meeting to be held in the autumn of each year, and in any event before the end of the calendar year."

The motion was proposed by Mike Bull, seconded by Richard Evenhand, and the vote showed all present in favour.

## **10. Election of Officers and Committee Members**

Roland Matthews, Denise Amery (Vice-Chairman) and Judy Phillips have all agreed to continue in their roles. John Parker is standing down from his role as Treasurer and Kathrina Gwynne has volunteered to take over. All the current Committee members have agreed to continue, and John Parker agreed to remain on the Committee as a general member.

A motion to approve the election of Kathrina Gwynne as Treasurer, the re-election of the other Officers, and the re-election of the Committee en bloc, was proposed by Jane Bull and seconded by John Mason.

## **11. Confirmation of Patron**

Countess Mountbatten has agreed to continue her role as Patron of Romsey Twinning. Lady Mountbatten said she hoped that her association of many decades with Romsey Twinning might “be of some assistance in [our] efforts to strengthen the organisation.”

## **12. Future Events**

There will be a Quiz Night on 4 October. Other events will depend on decisions regarding the pattern of future visits.

Geoff Cooper, a TVBC Councillor, is interested in creating a link with a town in Ukraine. Roland would be meeting him to discuss this. Roland stressed that any such twinning involvement would look very different to our existing twinning links and that his priority would always be to preserve and maintain those links.

## **13. Publicity**

Karen reported that our website has been up and running for over a year, although there has not been much traffic. She asked members to use the Twinning email address ([romseytwinning@gmail.com](mailto:romseytwinning@gmail.com)) if they had any comments or suggestions for items. She thanked members for their contributions to the newsletter and asked that any photos submitted should be sent in jpeg format rather than via WhatsApp. Roland thanked Karen for her work on the website and publicity. Mike Bull stressed the importance of our publicity being directed to outsiders to promote Twinning and our website, suggesting local publications such as the Romsey and District Society newsletter and local free magazines (e.g. Discover, Romsey & Wellow Gazette) as possible places to submit articles. Richard Evenhand mentioned that the link to our website should be included in all publicity, so it would be easy for anyone interested to connect.

## **14. AOB**

David Chillingworth pointed out that he had not been asked for a further subscription contribution. The Treasurer agreed to investigate this.

Our President, the Mayor, said how important he thought twinning was for reaching out to our neighbours, especially to young people, and encouraged us to keep up the good work.

Roland concluded the meeting with words taken from Gian Battista Scrivanti's speech at the dinner in honour of the visit by Treviglio in March: "It is our responsibility to remind people that town twinning is not just about ceremonial visits or formal agreements. It is about real human connections. It is about the friendships that are formed, the experiences that are shared and the lessons that are learned in a world where misunderstandings often lead to conflict. These connections are more crucial than ever."

He thanked everyone for their attendance and declared the meeting closed at 9.15pm.