

**Baldock Town Twinning Association**

**Eisenberg : Baldock : Sanvignes-les-Mines**

  

**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2022**

This AGM marks my first in the position of Chairperson, all be it in an interim capacity having stepped into the role on Vivienne's resignation in August 2022. You are all aware of my passion of Town Twinning and I hope I will do the Association justice, if I am officially appointed as Chairperson this evening.

**Membership**

Sadly, we didn't welcome any new members to the association in the year and we saw a reduction in participation of some longer standing members, despite the return of our exchange visits. We received subscription payments from 26 members and I ask that all members pay their subscriptions on time as the Association relies on membership fees to fund the exchange weekend. A task for the upcoming year is to encourage previous members to return. I hope that with a continuation of normal activity, we will be able to welcome them back.

Attracting new members continues to be our greatest challenge, though not one that is unique to BTTA. As word of mouth is our most successful recruitment tool, I would ask all members to do whatever they can to introduce new members for the long term good of the Association.

Fortunately, we did see the return, in principle, of our pen-pal project between St Mary’s Junior School and a school in Sanvignes. Sue Luckett is taking the lead on the initiative and we hope to see it fully up and running this year. Hopefully the continuation of that may bring some new members to us.

We did learn the sad news in December that Malcolm Bage had passed away. Malcolm was an important member of the Association, serving as chair between 2001 and 2003 and was vital to recruitment of members. Sanvignes extended their heartfelt condolences on his passing. Although I never knew him personally, I know how close many members were to him and am confident his legacy at the association will continue with the stories members can share. We extended Honorary Membership to Malcolm in August 2021 via letter, though with lockdowns and concerns for Malcolm’s health, the Committee never managed to meet him in person to make the honour official. A bench or similar honouring other past members was discussed at the last AGM and it is still the intention of the Committee to take this forward to mark their dedication to the Association for so many years.

**Financial**

Despite the relatively low number of subscriptions paid in the year, our finances have remained stable thanks to our fundraising events, mainly the Murder Mystery during Baldock Festival and the French Lunch. With the commitment from all members through the year, either through financial support or by providing meals or help at various events, we were able to break even in the year, which is no small feat. John will have more detail on this in his report later this evening though has already shared the accounts with you all.

**Twinning Exchange Visits**

We were very pleased to recommence our exchange visits in the year, with a successful and enjoyable trip to Sanvignes by 11 of our members and a visit by 10 members from Eisenberg. The Committee arranged a flexible programme of events for their visit, which proved advantageous when 5 participants from Eisenberg were unable to travel at the last minute. There was a slight change in programme on the first evening, when the Watsons hosted a full reception meal, rather than drinks and nibbles. This was to accommodate the arrival time of some of the participants. The dinner was a great success and we thank John and Christine for all their hard work and to all who made meals for the dinner. Thanks also goes to Greta and Ray, who hosted a farewell breakfast. Although not all participants departed on the day, it was a nice way to end the official exchange weekend. The group day out involved a trip to Bressingham Steam Museum and Gardens and the meal was held at The Orange Tree in Baldock with speeches by Ender Önder, an alderman in Eisenberg, and Aby.

Although unable to attend, due to our little bundle of joy’s arrival in June, the feedback from the trip to Sanvignes was extremely positive and the hospitality extended to our newest members, who hadn’t visited Sanvignes previously, was fantastic. The entire group came together every evening for dinner, either at the home of a Twinning member or at the local community hub, and the day trip took members to a local vineyard. I was disappointed to miss out but look forward to meeting our partner family this year here in Baldock.

**Fundraising**

Our biggest fundraising event by far was the Murder Mystery, which made in excess of £1300 and was a sold out event. Some unexpected attendees threw a spanner in the works for catering, but we will be prepared for this this year. The Murder Mystery is very much a group effort so a huge thank you everyone who was involved but special thanks goes to Viv Reed for writing and directing the play.

The French Lunch, as always, proved a big success attracting members from the LALG singles group, thanks to Brian Noble. We thank Mary and Michael Muir for their continued support in this and their hard work and the help of everyone involved, particularly Sue Luckett who helped Mary with the cooking.

We started a new town wide event in the year with the support of Leysbrook Estate Agents in Letchworth, who sponsored an Easter Trail around the businesses of Baldock. BTTA incurred no costs for the event, just time expenditure, and we made £160. We are running the event this year, again with the support of Leysbrook and hope to increase this amount. Thanks goes to Janet Hammond for decorating 21 Easter eggs to display around town, which we can continue to use in future.

**Committee**

The committee met 5 times in the year and continues to work hard to provide an active and sustainable association. I want to thank them for their hard work in a year that was busier than the previous two. Since the resignation of Viv Reed in August 2022, I have been acting as Chair and Sue Luckett has been filling in as minute taker during our meetings. Due to Viv’s resignation, we will have a change in officers for the coming year, which we will discuss later in the meeting. We also have two new members of the committee to propose this evening and a suggested change to the Constitution.

**Programme for 2023**

As we look forward to 2023, I am pleased to be able to confirm that our usual programme of events will be taking place. Planning and rehearsing for the Murder Mystery play, set to take place on 29th April is already underway, which has again been written by Viv and we welcome some non-BTTA members to the cast this year. We are expecting it to be another popular evening, so put the date in your diaries now and make sure you buy your tickets quickly to avoid disappointment.

Mary and Michael have kindly offered to host the French Lunch again this year on Sunday 1st October. The cost of this will be £27.50 for 5 courses with payment in advance. The Easter Trail, which had its inaugural year last year, will be taking place over the Easter Holidays from 31st March.

It would be nice to add some additional events in the year to our programme so if anyone has any suggestions, please let me know.

**Exchange Visits for 2023**

Our exchange visits are set to go ahead this year and I will talk about them more later in the agenda.

**Collaboration projects**

Through the year, we continued to work with other local Twinning Associations to share best practice and ideas, attending workshops in Royston and Knebworth, and this seems to be reaping some benefits for us now financially. We have found an insurance company that will provide a group policy for multiple associations at a much lower rate per association, which will see us saving around £140 a year. I continue to work with the British German Association as a Regional Representative and I hope that this may also help the association in collaborative fundraising projects in the future. Our biggest collaboration is one, which has already been mentioned, that with Leysbrook Estate Agents in Letchworth, who fund our Easter Trail enabling us to keep all money raised from the event.

To finish with, I would like to offer my thanks to everyone on the Committee for their support and hard work throughout the year and to Viv for her time as Chair from April 2021. As a relatively new addition to the Association, I value the insights that existing Committee members are able to offer me, whilst I learn the ropes and am indebted to them for their support whilst I balance work, family commitments and twinning.

I am hopeful that I will continue to see Baldock Twinning flourish and grow. Working with other local Twinning Associations makes me realise how lucky we are in Baldock to have such committed members and I hope this enthusiasm endures for years to come.

Thank you.

Abigail Hucker (Interim Hon. Chairperson) 21st March 2023