

## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Faversham Town Twinning Association held at 7.30 p.m. on Thursday, 30th January, 2025

1. Welcome. Catherine Bessières-Craddock welcomed the 14 people attending, with a particular welcome to Bob and Dan who had recently become members.

**2. Apologies for absence** were received from : Eileen Allen, Councillor Julian Saunders, Guy Bouffard, Jennifer Bouffard, Lesley Govier, Tim Whishaw, Trevor Martin

### **3. Matters arising from previous minutes.**

There were none and the minutes were accepted.

### **4. Chair Annual Report.**

Catherine thanked all who continue to support the Faversham Town Twinning Association, some of whom were present that evening. She then read her report as follows.

*Looking back at last year's AGM and our list of ideas for activities, you will notice that some remain unimplemented. We'll consider revisiting these during our discussion of future plans. Nonetheless, we achieved one of the primary goals of our association and hosted many successful events outside our original plan.*

*On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022 we held a well-attended and enjoyable pre-Christmas gathering at Castella. Some members notified us later that they had not been able to attend due to dietary restrictions. We have spoken to the owners and they are open to alternative menu suggestions for future events.*

*In early February 2024, Steve Craddock, Mike Wilkins, and I attended a South Kent twinning associations meeting in Minster near Ramsgate. Representatives from Sandwich, Broadstairs, Fordwich and Sturry, and Eastry reported similar issues to ours, particularly delays in twinning exchanges despite enthusiasm from French partners. Nevertheless, all maintained links with their twin towns and fostered member interest in French culture through events. We agreed to share event plans via email. Notably, Sandwich uses a small cinema to show a range of relatively new French films at low cost, which they also open to members of other associations. I regularly shared details of these screenings last year and will continue to do so, alongside those organised by the Film Society at our Royal Cinema.*

*On 17<sup>th</sup> March, we organised and funded a visit to Hazebrouck's Mi-Careme parade for seven Eastling School pupils and their parents. Supporting young people in exchanges with Hazebrouck is one of our primary goals, and we were delighted to achieve this. Clarissa Hanna and Trevor Bryans were in Hazebrouck to meet them and Suzanne Elcoat, a former QE French teacher who accompanied many exchange visits to Hazebrouck kindly supported the Eastling group. However, despite much preparation by our committee, poor planning on Hazebrouck's side caused confusion. This experience underscored the need for broader organisational support beyond Hazebrouck's Town Council for future exchanges. The newly formed Hazebrouck twinning association may offer more reliable collaboration once fully operational.*

*On 14<sup>th</sup> July, we celebrated Bastille Day at the Physic Gardens with food, games, music and good weather. Nearly all attendees, members and non-members, enjoyed the event, with two*

deciding to join our association. Similarly, on 14<sup>th</sup> September, we held our annual “Déjeuner sur l’herbe” again at the Physic Garden. Attendance was lower than in previous years, but those present, including some Castella French Club members, enjoyed a leisurely lunch. Two of them expressed interest in joining FTTA and have since done so.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October, we hosted a French wine tasting at the Purifier Building, led by Clive Barlow of Press Wines Services, one of only 400 Masters of Wine globally. The evening was both informative and convivial, attracting non-members who expressed interest in future events. Also Clive and his wife Ann greatly enjoyed the evening and offered to run another tasting next year.

On 17<sup>th</sup> August, Valentin Belleval, Mayor of Hazebrouck, made a brief unofficial visit to Faversham while holidaying in Kent with his family. He informed Trevor Martin (then Mayor) and me of his visit, wishing to meet socially. Valentin, his girlfriend, and his family joined a few of us at Castella before exploring the town and Open Faversham exhibitions. It was a relaxed, enjoyable encounter, demonstrating Valentine’s genuine enthusiasm for Faversham – a sentiment we hope to see mirrored by his appointed councillor for twinning links.

Members of our planning and management committee, though young at heart, are advancing in years yet we were able to accomplish a great deal this year, even as some members balanced other commitments or faced health challenges. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my fellow committee members:

**\*Richard Shipman**, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, whose reliable, efficient work enables us to plan and run events successfully.

**\*Christine Ford**, our Minuting Secretary, though not a committee member, promptly produces accurate minutes – a vital and thankless task. Sadly, but understandably, she has decided not to continue in this role and we are extremely grateful for all her support over the years.

**\*Clarissa Hanna and Trevor Bryans** who, despite Clarissa stepping down as Chair last year, have both continued to strongly support the committee and our events. I am particularly grateful for their support of the Eastling visit to Hazebrouck. Had it not been for their presence there, the day could easily have been not just disappointing but a complete disaster.

**\*Councillor Julian Saunders**, who, with his late wife Sheila, revived the twinning in 2016 and remains an active, responsive committee member.

**\*Steve Craddock and Eileen Allen** for their support in all events with special thanks to Eileen for her help so far in researching travel and accommodation for a possible trip to France in early Autumn.

**\*Margaret Abram**, who regularly offered advice and support despite personal and family health issues.

Before we hear messages from Hazebrouck and discuss future plans, I'd like to provide some context for our twinning links. As highlighted earlier, Hazebrouck consistently expresses enthusiasm for our twinning but approaches it differently from us. Whilst our Mayor and, occasionally, a few committee members are regularly invited to official events like building openings, all attempts to establish links between schools or other groups have made little progress. Over the past four years, we've explained that while we value official invitations and hospitality, our aim is to enhance Faversham and Hazebrouck twinning links by fostering regular exchanges with Hazebrouck's groups. Regrettably action on their part has been slow and limited.

We were encouraged when Hazebrouck Council announced plans in September 2023 for a new twinning association open to interested residents. However, the association was only created in February, 2024 and its first meeting did not take place until November, 2024. Most of this information came not from the appointed twinning councillor but from Jean Michel Saus, a retired Lycée Saint Jacques teacher and long-time ally. Jean Michel, who produced a video presentation for us, has been instrumental in keeping us informed and optimistic. His efforts highlight the potential for stronger collaboration in the future.

A short video was played showing New Year greetings from Valentin Belleval, followed by Jean Michel's presentation on Abbe `Lemire a key figure in Hazebrouck's history.

Given the issues outlined earlier, we are not currently positioned to establish the links we desire with Hazebrouck. That said, with allies like Jean Michel, we remain hopeful. In the meantime, we can continue promoting French language and culture through successful events like Bastille Day, "Dejeuner sur l'herbe", and wine tastings, all of which we propose to repeat this year.

We are also planning two new events:

a) *Francofun Evening on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March at 7 pm at Castella. This will be an informal opportunity for French speakers of all levels to practise their French in a supportive, fun environment. The Castella French Club, a friendly group of native and fluent non-native speakers, will help organise this event.*

b) *Lille Grande Braderie Trip in early September, involving a one or two night stay to explore the town and its famous flea market. We aim to make this trip accessible to as many members as possible.*

Details of these events will be shared in due course. Catherine invited questions and consideration of our association's future direction, and asked for proposals for new activities bearing in mind our limited resources and the need for collective effort to maintain and build upon our achievements.

## **5. Financial Report.**

The financial report is attached. Richard was warmly thanked for his immaculate report. Clarissa asked whether HMRC might feel we should be spending some of our savings. Richard said HMRC would only be worried if we held over £10,000. He was wondering whether to transfer some of the money to a savings account.

The financial report was accepted.

Proposer: Catherine Bessières-Craddock

Secunder: Chris Oswald -Jones

## **6. Election of Officers**

Trevor Martin was elected to the committee as the Mayor's representative. Christina Montzamir indicated that she did not want to continue as committee member but all other members confirmed that they would be prepared to continue to serve and the committee was elected en bloc. Trevor Bryans offered to become Minutes Secretary. Chris Oswald-Jones and Christine Ford offered to help in any way they could.

Proposer: Trevor Abram

Secunder : Chris Oswald-Jones

## **7. Future Plans**

a) Mayor of Sittingbourne is organising a charity bike ride in France including Calais, Bruges, and Ypres, but not Hazebrouck apparently. Catherine said she would have to be certain that Hazebrouck would welcome them properly as a group from Faversham had been upset not to receive hospitality last year. Clarissa suggested a meeting with the Sittingbourne organisers as they are twinned with Ypres.

b) Trevor Bryan would like to reactivate the book group and would be happy to organise it.

c)The Physic Garden event could include petanque. Steve will investigate other possibilities for petanque venues.

d) Lille – Grande Braderie (as above)

## **8. Any other business**

a). Chris Oswald-Jones expressed his displeasure that the tricolour was not flown from the town mast on Bastille day and asked that this should be rectified this year.

b) A new member Bob McKay already has contact with music groups and will be singing in Lille on 2<sup>nd</sup> August at an event which draws international choirs. He is happy to be a link and suggested that an invitation to the event should be sent to the Mayor of Hazebrouck.

There have been strong links by musicians in the past (one was the Choral Society which used to have an exchange with a choir in Hazebrouck). Catherine has already contacted Matthieu about sports groups, music groups etc.

**Date of next AGM**

A 'mini' AGM is to be held, as part of a social event, on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May. This is to deal with financial matters following the end of the financial year. This date will be confirmed after consultation with the Town Council.

A full AGM will be held in April, 2026.

DRAFT