

ELFORD/AWOINGT ASSOCIATION: FRIENDS OF AWOINGT REPORT

MAY 2018-2019

There will be a problem in trying to keep this review to a reasonable length after all the events that have taken place during this last year! It is also very encouraging to be able to report that all the activity has also enlarged significantly the number of villagers involved in this entirely positive and collaborative project.

Over the weekend of the 23/24th of June a delegation of Elfordians lead by Councillor Phil Turley and our President Greg Watkins was welcomed to Awoingt to celebrate the first of the two twinning ceremonies. Over the long weekend the group were feted, entertained, fed and watered exceptionally, as well as being made to work on the "Twinning Stall" at the village Fete to raise the profile and increase interest in the Twinning. The formal ceremonies, the significance of which was underlined by the participation of so many local dignitaries to witness the signing of the agreement to twin, were complemented by more relaxed occasions such as the official unveiling of the road signs acknowledging the official status of the two villages and the evening entertainment in their village hall.

On July the 14th, France's National Day was celebrated in glorious sunshine at the Elford Playground when a large percentage of Elfordians of all ages enjoyed savoury and sweet pancakes provided by the expertise and talents of Francophile Elfordians. The occasion was so successful that following the request of all who took part, it looks like this could be an annual event. We have fingers crossed that the weather will be as accommodating this year as in 2018!

Over the August Bank Holiday weekend Elford played host to our friends from Awoingt who joined us to sign the reciprocal documents here. Thanks to the incredible effort put in by Gregg Watkins and his team, Elford laid on a truly magnificent weekend which will long remain in the memories of all who participated! From the "inventive" route many of our visitors took to get here, the significant interest the occasion engendered in the surrounding communities whose delegates attended our ceremonies and forged further connections, to the experience of typically British Bank Holiday weather and the undaunted spirit of "carry on regardless" manifested, it certainly was a weekend never to be forgotten. Above all it proved a great showcase for many

of the talents and attributes that Elford is fortunate enough to count within its boundaries. None of this could have been accomplished without the amazingly generous support and interest of so many individuals within the village, who largely remain our unsung heroes and, although it is invidious to select specific organisations, still the Elford/Awoingt friends would like to extend very great thanks to the following, without whom none of the Twinning events would have been possible: the Walled Gardens, the Village Hall, The Church, The Crown, Claire's Kitchen and especially the Parish Council whose commitment both financial, practical (not least our splendid village signs!) and personal has made this whole enterprise not just viable but such a great success. We and our Awoingt friends are truly grateful.

In addition to these specific occasions, the year has been punctuated by very pleasant social events: minimal but necessary administrative meetings are alleviated by being held over suppers in the Crown which has also been the location to entertain friends from Awoingt on informal, friend to friend visits.

The links between the two village schools continue to flourish and each term The Friends have had the opportunity to introduce the pupils to particular French customs such as St. Nicholas and the original story of the Easter Bunny.

After such intense activity during 2018 – 2019 the next year is anticipated to be calmer but despite there not being any official visits planned, there are several friends from Awoingt who will be joining us for the Scarecrow festival and on other private visits, as well as Elfordians journeying to Awoingt to visit their correspondents there. In addition to the now numerous villagers who are involved in hosting and visiting Awoingt in person there are many more in contact with Awoingt through the monthly letter we receive giving us insights into life in Northern France which highlights both the differences and similarities we experience! The same is true of the newsletter that goes monthly to Awoingt and which is used during their club meetings. Further projects to widen village involvement are envisaged including the impressive sporting feat of the sponsored Awoingt – Elford cycle ride.

Thus the concept of twinning is alive and flourishing in both our villages. Surely something very worth while celebrating.