



SALISBURY-SAINTEs TWINNING ASSOCIATION

Winter 2011



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Chairman's message

THERE is still time to wish members a happy 2011 before the hard work starts for SSTA's 21st anniversary. This will be marked by a multitude of special events and one-off initiatives.

In addition to these, please note that the AGM takes place on 18th February at 7.30pm upstairs in the Cycle Club, Salt Lane, where we will welcome John Powell, musical director of the St John Singers as our speaker. He is calling his illustrated talk "Memories of St John Singers' visit to Saintes in October 2010".



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In this newsletter Rosie Gairdner, wife of a St John Singer, has written about the choir's visit from her perspective, whereas John's talk will focus on aspects of planning and undertaking such a trip, as well as the pleasures of performing in new surroundings.

With Salisbury Amateur Operatic Society visiting Saintes in June, and members of Salisbury Rugby Club and Riverside Tennis Club hoping to do so, they may be able to learn a thing or two from John.

Do come along to the AGM and bring your friends who want to know more about twinning. The first drink is on the Association and there are, of course, slices of galettes de Beurley for everyone.

Amitiés
Caroline

Do you know a good restaurant in the Saintes area?

Mea Culpa. Some months ago someone very kindly sent me a recommendation for a restaurant in Saintes. I put it to one side ready for this issue of the newsletter. Stupidly, by a piece of over enthusiastic email inbox weeding, the recommendation was consigned to the ether. Whoever you are who sent this to me please accept my gratitude for your efforts and my apologies for my incompetence. Please send it again and I will do my best not to throw it away.

If anyone else wishes to submit a recommendation to their favourite restaurant or café in Saintes, please do not be put off by this sad tale. I will do my best to look after it well.

Mervyn Pannett

Diary dates

27 th January	Monthly Rendezvous at the Red Lion (and last Thursday of the month thereafter).
Friday 18 th February	AGM at 7.30 pm at the Salisbury Cycle Club, Salt Lane.
Thursday 21 st April	Arrival of visitors from Saintes for the 21 st Anniversary celebrations
Saturday 23 rd April.	SSTA Theatre visit to see the French farce "The Game of Love and Chance" by Marivaux.
Monday 25 th April.	21 st Anniversary Celebration
French Films at the Arts Centre.	Helping to mark the 21 st anniversary of the twinning, the Salisbury Arts Centre are screening a variety of French films between January and July. See centre's Press Release at the end of the Newsletter.

See You at the Next Rendezvous 27th January

The Association's monthly informal Rendezvous in the lounge at the Red Lion continue to be a great success. Everyone, be they members or prospective members, is welcome to drop in to the first one of the year which takes place on Thursday 27th January between 7.30 and 9pm. Just turn up and you will be warmly welcomed.

21st Anniversary Calendar

Sales of the calendar have been good but not spectacular. A number of members have bought several copies for themselves as well as friends and family, thereby spreading the word about the association, our aims as well as introducing people to the many wonderful sights to be seen in the two cities.

The Saintes association bought over three hundred copies as well as arranging sponsorship from a number of local businesses. Hopefully they will help raise the profile of the twinning with Salisbury amongst the people of Saintes and persuade more of them to visit our beautiful city. Bridget Brennan was hoping to persuade the Mayor of Saintes to have one in his office.

If you have not bought your calendar yet you can still do so, at the ridiculously low price of £2.50 per copy. Please apply to Caroline Rippier or Mike Thomas. They will also be on sale at the AGM.

An Aussie's Impressions of Saintes

During my visit to England from my home in Melbourne last summer I took the opportunity to fly out to my old friends Jocelyn and Mervyn Pannett at their house in France. Having been a British Army wife for many years I knew Salisbury well and I also knew parts of France from family holidays. However I had never been to the Charante Maritime or even knew of the existence of Saintes. My hosts were therefore very keen to take me there and I am very grateful that they did.

It was a beautiful day, very warm and sunny, quite the best weather for visiting somewhere new. My first impression was of a light and airy town with many memorable places to visit. We parked at the Abbaye aux Dames and walked to the centre of the town. I did enjoy the sign outside the British shop and its name Perfide Albion, wonderfully ironic although I wonder if the French get the joke.

There are so many wonderful things to see in Saintes, from the river, the Roman remains, the cathedral and the church with the St Jacques pilgrims' chapel in the crypt. I also walked up the many steps to admire the view from the Belvedere, thereby earning my wonderful lunch at the Clos des Cours restaurant, where I was able to talk "antipodean" with the owner.

However, I cannot claim any of these to be the most memorable site I saw. That has to be the "beware Kangaroos" sign on the back of a local car, the last thing I expected to see in Saintes!

As with Salisbury I will keep on coming back to visit Saintes as both places are wonderful and hold many happy memories for me.



Cathy Lacey

Cathy has her copy of the 21st Anniversary calendar in Melbourne. Have you got your copy?

View from the South West – a Walk through the Calendar

There are many lovely photographs of Saintes in the Salisbury Saintes Twinning Association 21st Anniversary calendar, so I thought it would be a good time to “walk” through the town using these photos to have a better look at Saintes, to bring back memories to those of you who have been there and to help persuade those of you who have not that now would be a good time to make the trip to explore this lovely French town.

We will start at the Abbaye aux Dames, because that is always a good place to find a free parking spot. There was an article about the Abbaye in the last issue of the newsletter so I will not go into any further detail here. Leave the abbey precincts onto Rue de L'Arc de Triomphe and head left towards the river. You are now walking along the old Roman road, Agrippa's Way, which ran between the two major Roman towns of Lugdunum, now Lyons, and Mediolanum Santonum, now Saintes.



On arrival at the river you will see the Arc Germanicus. This large triumphal arch originally stood on the Roman bridge that crossed the river at this point and was the main entry into the town, which stood on the other side of the river. This bridge was a major crossing point from the first century AD until it was finally demolished in the 1840s. We owe its existence to the foresight of the then French Culture Minister who persuaded the town's Mayor to move it stone by stone and rebuild it in its present position, about 50 metres from where it originally stood. Had he not done so the pieces of the arch would now be on the river bed, along with most of the bridge.



Turn left at the arch and you will see the pedestrian bridge upstream. On the way to it you will pass the old abattoir, which now houses a museum of Roman items which have been dug up over the years of development and construction as Saintes has grown and been rebuilt. This is well worth a visit as some of the pieces of the buildings housed there look as if they were carved yesterday. A small photo of the museum can be found on the August page of the calendar. As you cross the river you may see the old gabare which takes people on pleasure trips on the river in summer. Gabares were the Charentais barges, carrying cargo, especially cognac, up and down the river. A small photo of the gabare is found on the January page of the calendar.



You now walk away from the river to the square beside the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre. If it is market day you can walk through the covered market and admire the beautiful stalls covered in fish, cold meats, cheese and wine. A small photo is on the February page of the calendar. The main market is typical of a French market, fish and shellfish from the coast, local fruit and vegetables, and of course in this part of the world, cognac and Pineau des Charentes. This photo was taken just before Toussaint, All Saints, when it is traditional to put chrysanthemums on family graves, so every market is full of these beautiful blooms.



Past the cathedral you walk up the Rue Alsace Lorraine, a walking street, and if you turn down to the left at the Rue des Jacobins you come to the old monastery building which is now the town library. Go through the modern part of the library and you come out into a beautiful but very steep garden built around the sides of an old courtyard. If it is hot and you want to cool off climb up to the vine covered pergola and rest in the cool air. If you are energetic you can continue to the top of the garden and enjoy the view over the city, which is from where this photo was taken.



Return to the walking street and continue up to the Cours National, the main road through Saintes. You can stop at the top and enjoy a drink at the café on the corner and watch the world go by. Across the road is Le Palais de Justice, an attractive colonnaded building currently undergoing a major refurbishment. A photo of it is on the May page of the calendar. After your drink walk up the Cours National and you will come to the Galia Theatre, which is shown in this photo. Half way down the alley to the left of the theatre is the Clos des Cours restaurant, where you will get a wonderful welcome and a delicious meal.



You now have a long walk to the old Roman amphitheatre. On the way you will pass the church of Saint-Eutrop, one of the pilgrim resting places on the St Jacques pilgrim route. Saintes is on one of the many routes to Santiago de Compostela, which are always marked by the sign of a scallop shell. On to the amphitheatre, an impressive arena built into a natural bowl in the hill. It is best to admire it for the architecture and not to dwell too long on the spectacles which would have taken place here. *Mervyn Pannett*



A Groupie in Saintes

I have never really thought of myself as a Groupie; but, having followed the St. John Singers hither and thither, perhaps that is what I have become. Admittedly, you won't find me hanging around the west door of this or that Cathedral or Church trying to obtain the Conductor's autograph or, for rarity value, that of a tenor. So perhaps I am really still a "hanger-on" – a groupie with L plates.

When the St. John Singers' visit to Saintes was mooted, I am ashamed to admit that I did not know where it was. The fact that we were flying to Bordeaux was a fair indication that it was not in Brittany or Haute Provence, and I eventually found it on the map. What ignorance! (I am now working on locating Xanten).

Our journey was uneventful, though it was perhaps reassuring to find that the Bordeaux "ring-road" was no faster than the M.25 on a Friday evening in the height of summer.

We were accommodated in the Abbaye aux Dames. I was at school in a convent, but my husband could not recall ever having slept in a Nunnery. The "cells" were more than adequate, and off the main corridor were three or four bathrooms / washrooms / shower-rooms / loos in a variety of combinations. Given that the average age of our party was, shall we say, the wrong side of "uncertain", the scope for running into a fellow visitor during an essential nocturnal ramble was considerable.

That first evening a group of us found a splendid restaurant, the Clos des Cours in the Place du Theatre (which we later learned was one of the best in Saintes), after being turned away by the one next door. That restaurateur had just produced a new menu, and felt there were too many of us for experimentation at that late hour. I would have thought that a bunch of "Rosbifs" would have been perfect fall-guys.

Our first day, Friday, included a preliminary wander whilst the choir rehearsed, a breakfast reception at the Mairie, and a brilliantly conducted tour of the City by Gillian Broome, including the fabulous Roman Amphitheatre. This was followed by lunch at a restaurant for which we had placed our orders several weeks earlier back in UK. The problem was remembering what on earth we had ordered.

I had had no idea that Saintes was once a Roman town, with a wealth of history. I was thoroughly taken with it and, if you have not been there, do go. Much of it is built of the local light-coloured sandstone, which is most attractive.

Whilst the choir moved off to sing at an Old Peoples' Home, some of us continued our tour. We did not attend this concert, not only to avoid hearing the programme ahead of the main concert the following day, but also because some of us were a bit worried that we might be mistaken for residents and offered a wheelchair.

Not being part of the choir, we hangers-on had more than one opportunity to do a little extra exploring. The market was a joy: fish of all sorts artistically laid out; cheeses and meats. Perhaps the most incongruous building was the English Shop, outside which hung two small boards, one depicting a jar of Marmite, and the other a bottle of Lea and Perrins. The merchandise was interesting, to say the least.

We rejoined the choir at a splendid reception laid on by the welcoming Committee, where we met your esteemed editor and his wife, whom we agreed to meet up with again on their return to the UK. The "price" was being asked to write this article. Afterwards, we drifted together down the main street, and sat on the pavement having a night-cap (or two), whilst groups of motor-cyclists vied with each other as to who could go fastest and make the most noise. Concorde had nothing on this lot.

Saturday involved a delightful river cruise to Chaniers, where we had a splendid lunch in a converted mill – probably not the ideal way for singers to prepare for a concert. On our return we had the excitement of seeing a kingfisher perched on a post by the river bank. The concert took place in conjunction with a local ladies choir in the beautiful Romanesque Abbaye aux Dames. As the singers cannot sing their own praises, let me do it for them. Both choirs were excellent and it was a most enjoyable evening.

Our final privilege was to attend Mass on Sunday morning in the Cathedral, where the St. John Singers formed the choir.

Having had wonderful weather for our trip, we felt even more blessed when it poured with rain on our return journey to the airport. So, to sum up: a hugely enjoyable time in a lovely city, with excellent company and wonderful hosts. What more could one ask?

Rosie Gairdner

Here is detailed information from Salisbury Arts Centre's marketing co-ordinator, Harriet Brember.

French flavours for the film season this spring at Salisbury Arts Centre!

Marking the 21st anniversary of the Salisbury Saintes Twinning Association, Salisbury Arts Centre's Spring 2011 film season has a distinctly French flavour!

As January draws to a close, Salisbury Arts Centre has managed to squeeze in a special film double bill on **Saturday 29 January**. Starting at 6pm with Jacques Tati's **Monsieur Hulot's Holiday** (cert. U), members of the public can catch the much loved and accident prone Monsieur Hulot in his first ever adventure as he causes havoc at a French holiday resort! The double bill is completed with **The Illusionist** (cert. PG) at 8pm. A delightful hand drawn animation following the trials and tribulations of a struggling 1950s entertainer, **The Illusionist** is based on a previously unmade script by Jacques Tati. Tickets for the double bill special are just **£10**.

Moving into February, director Joann Sfar tells the story of a turbulent and glamorous life in the flamboyant biopic **Gainsbourg** (cert. 15) screening on **Thursday 3 February**. Sumptuous set designs and cinematography embellished with animations and puppetry come together with the style and panache of other recent French hits such as *Amélie* and *La Vie en Rose*.

The Secret in their Eyes (cert. 18) follows on **Thursday 3 March**. Director Juan Jose Campanella conveys a mesmerising mix of politically charged suspense thriller and generation spanning romance as a retired lawyer revisits the case of an unsolved murder. Finally, rounding off the spring 2011 film season on **Thursday 7 April** is **Coco Chanel and Igor Stravinsky** (cert. 15). Following on from *Coco Before Chanel* (screened at the Arts Centre last spring), this dual biopic captures the charisma of two monumental personalities against the backdrop of 1920s Paris.

For film fanatics that can't wait until Salisbury Arts Centre's summer 2011 film season, tickets for two films have already gone on sale. **The Girl Who Played with Fire**, the highly anticipated second instalment to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, which sold out at the Arts Centre last spring, screens on **Thursday 5 May**. The spring season's French twist continues on **Thursday 7 July** with **Certified Copy**, a mature and deep thinking romantic comedy in French, Italian and English.

Tickets are **£7 (£10 for the Monsieur Hulot & The Illusionist double bill)** and the screenings start at **7.30pm** unless otherwise stated. For further information and to book tickets please visit the Arts Centre website www.salisburyartscentre.co.uk or contact the box office on 01722 321744.