

## NEW TO TWINNING!

(note by John Fairhurst)

Well, actually, *new to Malmesbury*, having moved here recently. The Twinning Association has helped me make a good number of new friends: as you would expect, in Gien (our French twin) and in Niebüll (our German one) but also, and not least, in Malmesbury itself.

Given my interest in European history and culture, my efforts to improve my French and my determination to put down roots in my new hometown, I signed up for the locally organised trip to France. The coach journey to Gien was horribly long - but the hours spent travelling helped break the ice with my fellow Malmesbury twinnings.

My hosts Maria and Daniel were certainly worth the effort of getting there. They could not have been nicer. Maria was actually Portuguese, but married and settled in France. That helped, as I know parts of Portugal quite well. Daniel – being French – was into wine... that helped even more! Never mind that they spoke only a little English; after a few glasses of Daniel's red my French conversation rose to new unknown levels, or rather "*nouveaux niveaux inconnus!*"

Gien is a lovely little riverside town, steeped in history with a surprising similarity to Malmesbury. There is a strong sense of community and a real pride in the town, evidenced by their civic figures (their Deputy Mayor was fully engaged with us and obviously delighted that our Mayor, Fran, was there), by their impressive Town Hall and by their generous hospitality. And after a hard day's sightseeing, really excellent local amateur singers and dancers were able to entertain us two nights running.

It was a long weekend – just Friday to Monday – in beautiful June weather. I would have liked to have stayed longer...

So I continued to be involved and elected to accommodate one of the German visitors in August. (The Association is more of a 'tripletting' than a 'twinning' group: Gien, Niebüll and Malmesbury are family together. We visit one and host the other each year.)

Torsten was in a situation not unlike mine: having just transferred to Niebüll he was making local contacts and keen to improve his English, which he taught in school. Brilliant guest, so appreciative and – contrary to the stereotype – very receptive to British humour. (I *do* so like people who laugh at my jokes!) Hosting gave me the impetus to explore things on my (relocated) doorstep: Salisbury (35+ years since my last visit), the Steam Museum (never been!), Castle Coombe (Wow! That cream tea was genuinely delicious)...

Full credit to those who organised these opportunities. Thank you. And to anyone reading this, wondering if they should be more involved, I say, "*Go for it! There are no strangers, just friends you have yet to meet.*"

**John Fairhurst**