

Visit from Horb to Haslemere May-June 2018

Since 1991 the towns of Haslemere and Horb have cultivated strong links the fruits of which are evident each year when one town visits the other. This year, Horb came to Haslemere. The flight over was somewhat fraught with complications at Stuttgart airport and landing delays at Heathrow.

On the journey to Haslemere Michael Bawtree (Chairman of the Haslemere Twinning Committee) formally welcomed everyone whether longstanding friends or first-timers, and expressed the very sincere sorrow of all at the absence of Christine Dietz who was mourning the passing of her husband, Ludwig, only a few days earlier. Our route took us along the M25 (also known as the biggest car park in England and not dissimilar to the A81 in rush hour!) Our hosts had planned a stop off at Guildford Cathedral which, architecturally speaking, resembles Stuttgart Central Station with its factory-like appearance from the outside. The Cathedral's interior by contrast is beautiful in its simplicity. Guildford Cathedral is one of England's youngest cathedrals started in 1936 and consecrated in 1961. The building was partly funded by a 'buy a brick' program, similar to the way in which the renovation of the roof of Horb's church was funded. The signatures of various members of the Royal Family are still visible.

Membership of the Haslemere Twinning Association is not restricted to the town itself; members come from several outlying villages, like Chiddingfold where two families came together to share a meal with their German guests.

Ralph Zimmermann (Horb's Burgermeister) was pleased and impressed to see that two German flags were flying at the Town Hall to welcome us as guests and in honour of the link between the two towns. The manager of the 'White Horse' pub offered all visitors from Horb a free pint of beer!

On Friday we were treated to a day out together starting in Chichester at the cathedral where the main attraction was a flower festival; also on display was the German-English reconciliation tapestry by Ursula Benker-Schirmer. The afternoon was spent at The Weald and Downland Museum where English houses and workshops of all ages have been brought together, as in the Vogtsbauernhöfen.

Saturday morning witnessed a superb concert featuring (1) the first performance in modern times of the Weinrauch Messe (1789) the manuscript of which belongs to Norbert Gessler, who, last year, showed the manuscript to Haslemere's principal organist, Clive Osgood, in Horb, and (2) an 'Ave Verum' composed by Clive Osgood. The choir, the string ensemble and the conductor received a well-earned standing ovation.

The Gala Dinner was held on Saturday evening at the start of which, Jutta Lauffer read a very warm letter from Christine Dietz in which she remembered our mutual friendship since 1991 and looked forward to many more years of meeting together. The Mayor of Haslemere, David Round, and the Burgermeister of Horb, Ralph Zimmermann, both spoke enthusiastically about the relationship between Horb and Haslemere. David Round made it clear that whatever the outcome of the Brexit

discussions the friendship between our two towns would remain the same. Ralph Zimmermann said how much he had been impressed by the whole twinning experience and declared that in future he would be taking a much more active part. He thanked Michael Bawtree and his committee for the very warm welcome they had arranged and presented him with a painting of Horb by a local artist.

The main event on Sunday was a lunchtime BBQ at the home of Sylvia McCallum and Christopher Tibbs. Their garden is huge and easily accommodated everyone. Apart from an amazing buffet of food, we were able to try the very English game of croquet on the lawn. Ralph Zimmermann learnt this game and quickly discovered how to win fairly consistently!

Quite coincidentally, Horb's press representative was able to spend considerable time with the manager of the Haslemere Twinning Association's website manager, Seb Welford, who, it was learnt, is the nephew of the late British composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976). In May 2019 in Horb Seb Welford will present an illustrated talk on living, as a child, with Benjamin Britten, highlighting one of Benjamin Britten's compositions 'Noye's Fludde' which was dedicated to Seb and his sisters. This work, which is well suited to school or church choirs, could well become the basis of a future project between the young people of the two towns.

The flight back to Stuttgart was supposed to have taken off from London Heathrow at 19.00. It was delayed by a further three hours due to a bird flying into one of the plane's engines in Dubrovnik! It was therefore in the small hours of Tuesday morning that the travellers from Horb eventually arrived home ... very tired ... but very happy with the memories of the five days spent in Haslemere.

Hans-Michael Greiss, translated by Seb Welford and Michael Bawtree.