

Twinning weekend in Montesson 2023

It was an early start from Thame Cattle Market at 5am, but everyone was on time and it didn't seem long before we were pulling into Dover and could already see France across the water. Our coach driver, Tomasz, then surprised us all by handing out free meal tickets from the ferry company, DFDS, so we had a lovely breakfast onboard with a grandstand view of the sea.



Looking back to the White Cliffs in the early morning sunshine

Our first destination in France was the hypermarket and shopping centre in Boulogne. It was a chance for everyone to stretch their legs and the extensive wine "cave" was very popular.



A light lunch at the Boulogne shopping centre

Arrival in Montesson was on the dot of 6pm and to a warm welcome in warm sunshine from our host families. Some French families were first-time hosts, others have been hosting the same Thame visitors for over 20 years, but they had all prepared wonderful French meals for their guests. A chance for plenty of conversation in multiple languages before some much-needed sleep.



Saturday morning meetup at Montesson Town Hall

The Montesson twinning committee had organised a day trip for us on Saturday, so we all met up at the Town Hall for the 30 minute journey to Chateau Malmaison.



Display at Malmaison recollecting Jackie Kennedy's visit in 1962

This was the heritage 'open doors' weekend in France, so there were some additional treats with the 1960s Citroen from Jackie Kennedy's visit and a display of dancing from Napoleonic times.



Dancing in the Château de Malmaison ballroom in early 19th century costume

This is the former residence of Josephine Bonaparte and for a few years before that was the meeting place of Napoleon's cabinet. Beautifully restored, it now hosts a museum devoted to the Bonaparte family and has lovely gardens in which to wander.



Bust of the man himself and yes, the famous painting as well



In the gardens of Château de Malmaison

The picnic lunch was demanding to be eaten so we wended our way into the nearby Parc de Bois Préau and watched the red squirrels. It was getting quite hot by this stage, so a short walk into the shade of nearby Rueil and its shops and cafés was next on the agenda.



The beautiful market square in Rueil

The main square in Rueil with fountain and market stalls was incredible and we spent a happy few hours around the town centre, before heading back to the coach.



Mairie de Montesson with the flags out for the festival weekend

We could spend some time in Montesson in the late afternoon before getting ready for the start of the Fête du Pâté à la Carmen. German families and guests from Montesson's twin town of Baesweiler had also arrived and our hosts laid on a celebratory meal for two hundred.



A busy hall with two hundred guests for dinner

During the dinner, David Laver spoke on behalf of Thame, we heard from the Mayor of Montesson



Jean-François BEL
1944-2023

Nicole Bristol and from Burgemeister Pierre Froesch for Baesweiler, who thanked us for Harry Kane. Montesson Twinning President Anne Gillet did an excellent job with her own speech and translations of the others.

The evening finished with a bang – literally - with fireworks on the banks of the Seine.

On Sunday morning, a small delegation from Thame met with the widow and family of Jean-François Bel, who sadly passed away earlier this year. Jean-François helped to set up the twinning between Montesson and Thame, had visited Thame many times and was a strong supporter of our twinning links.



Montesson church on Sunday morning

Sadly, the timetable to get back to Thame meant departing before the festival parade, after we had spent the morning's free time on cycle rides, café visits, attending Mass or just relaxing. However, Thame was still represented in the parade by the enthusiastic Montesson twinning committee and we hope to be able to stay for the parade in future.

