

Chippenham Twinning Association

Autumn Edition
2026

THE NEWSLETTER

From the Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to the Autumn edition of the Associations Newsletter.

Here we are, in Autumn again, and I can't believe just how quickly the first 9 months of 2026 have passed! Whilst the sun worshippers will probably be sad to see the end of Summer, I think everyone else will be grateful for the cooler weather!

The constant heat had started to abate when our friends from Friedberg visited over the August Bank holiday but that just meant that we were all feeling that bit more energetic! This was just as well as we had prepared an action-packed programme for them. The weekend was full of fun and laughter (as it should be) and very much enjoyed by our guests. As they boarded the coach to start their journey home, there were a few tears and lots of "see you in Friedberg next year". Learn more about the visit in the following pages.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the unveiling of the lovely bench that Friedberg had commissioned and gifted to the Town to mark the 35th anniversary (in 2027) of the signing of the official Twinning Charter. If you haven't already sat on or seen it, it's located on the riverside path in Monkton Park. The path is part of Friedberg Way which, in turn, is part of the National Cycle Route.

Having bemoaned the rapid passing of the year above, your committee has agreed that I should organise the annual Christmas Meal and we've decided to return to La Flambé Restaurant in Sutton Benger. The date for the meal will be Saturday 12th December – 12.30 for 1pm.

The change from a mid-week to weekend Christmas Lunch event is designed to include the 29% of our members who are still in employment and therefore can't normally take time off during the working week. Menu and booking form will follow soon.

Following consultation between both committees, **the date for the 2027 visit of La Flèche to Chippenham has now been agreed as Thursday 27th May to Tuesday 1st June.** This will be the Chippenham Folk Festival weekend and a number our members will be taking part in the entertainment at various time throughout Saturday. Consequently, Karin will be proposing a programme that will allow those guests and hosts not involved to either enjoy the spectacle or take part in something else. **The date for Chippenham's visit to Friedberg has been confirmed as Thursday 29th July to Monday 2nd August.** Further information will follow in due course.

Please put the above dates in your diary.

Finally, I'd like to welcome our most recent new member - Councillor Claire Robinson - who accompanied our Mayor Matt Bragg to several of the events over the Friedberg weekend. She was so enthused by the fun and friendship between us all that she joined immediately. If you see her at an event or elsewhere, please say 'hello' and make her feel welcome.

Yours, Richard.

Dates for your Diary

Sat. 12th Dec. 2026

12:30pm

Christmas Lunch

See page 8

Sunday 21st Feb. 2027

18:30 for 19:00

AGM

See page 8

27th May – 1st June 2027

**Visitors come from
la Flèche**

See page 1

29th July - 2nd Aug 2027

Visit Friedberg

See page 1

Gift from Friedberg

When our friends from Friedberg came in August, they brought this bench as a gift to mark 35 years of twinning between our two towns. It has been placed on Friedberg Way in Monkton Park giving a nice view of the river.



Visit from Friedberg

A group of our friends in Friedberg arrived in Chippenham on Thursday 27th August and as usual there was a reception for them at the Ladyfield church. That evening was for guests and hosts to settle in and make or renew their acquaintances.

Friday 28th August

'Get your shoes on and keep going' was the order of the day.

It all started with a visit to THE ARK where we were able to visit the fantastic national facilities and see how the various users enthusiastically engaged in rock climbing, bouldering and skateboarding. Although we were invited to 'have a go' only one took up the offer!



Geoff Barret then took us on a short, guided walk up Westmead Lane, into River Street walking through one of the oldest parts of the town, explaining something of the changing history, industry and employment that helped to shape and change the town. There had been a woollen mill at the end of the lane which burnt down and was replaced by a meat processing plant which again burnt down. Today the site is now Bowles Court Retirement Living – we certainly hope there will be no more fires!



All of this before we headed into the Museum to be greeted (and given refreshment) by the staff who showed us around and gave us information on the John Aubrey exhibition – a pioneering historian, scientist, and biographer who was born in the hamlet of Easton Piercy, near Kington St Michael in 1726. The local man who made good. Unusually for the time Aubrey was open to consulting and collaborating with a wide range of people (even the ordinary worker). Who they were or where they were from didn't matter, instead, he proudly credited and celebrated the knowledge and experiences they had.

As part of the Museum visit, time permitted for a visit to The Yelde Hall, one of the oldest buildings in Chippenham, dating from the 15th century. Over the years it has served many purposes: armoury, fire station, town hall, prison, as well as the Council Chambers. Since our previous visits improvements have been made to allow greater use of this historic building.

Time allowed for a quick food intake before going off to:



Stanley Park for the formal welcome from the Mayor, Councillor Matt Bragg. Alongside the formal greetings and speeches, we had short verbal presentations from Maddison Long and Jaxyn Mackay who spoke about their BMW Internship experience in 2025 and how this had helped to crystallise their ideas about future employment. Particular thanks were expressed to Jochen and Sylvia Hartmann for the practical arrangements made for the visit and their support and hospitality during the visit.

Shoes still on, we continued to the next event in Monkton Park - the unveiling of a beautiful park bench. Our town is the beneficiary of a park bench from Friedberg which had been commissioned in recognition of our long-established friendship with them. On behalf of the town, the bench was officially received by The Mayor. It has been placed in a prominent position along one of the walkways where hopefully it will be well used.



After the official hand over our Mayor Matt Bragg was one of the first to try it out with Steffan, and then a few others did so!



After a busy day it was home and time to take our shoes off.

Alan & Jackie

Barn Dance 29 August 2026



On the Saturday evening our visitors were introduced to a popular English tradition: the barn dance. There is nothing like a good barn dance to get people animated and socialising but a distinction must be made between a good barn dance and good dancing. The appeal of a barn dance is watching your friends make

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a total Horlicks of trying to get the steps right. In this respect the twinnings (from either town) did not disappoint. The Friedbergers are familiar with Morris dancing; I had to explain to a visitor that English country dancing is like Morris dancing on steroids. It turned out to be more like Morris dancing on LSD.

For music we had Jellied Reels, a four-piece ceilidh band who by their own admission are would-be rock and blues musicians. In between dances they gave us a few demonstrations of their ambitions in this direction.



Please note the black, red, gold table decoration too.

The evening began with a delicious ploughman's supper with plenty of fresh, healthy salad to take the edge off our guilt when enjoying the home-made Victoria sponge and trifles that were also on offer. When the dancing began in earnest, so too did the laughter. We are so lucky that our Friedberg partners have such a good command of English. The Caller soon exhausted his repertoire of ten German words, which expanded to about twenty by the end of the evening. It must be said that the visitors made a better job of interpreting the Caller's instructions than the Chippenham folk. Having said that, it would appear that one or two members actually do know their do-si-dos from their stripping the willow. Although the dancing could best be described as divine chaos, we were treated to a moment of exquisite grace and beauty when, between numbers, Stefan Schiller and Ulrike Hesser showed us a few steps of a foxtrot (without music) that would take the glitter ball in any series of Strictly. After that it was back to the organised chaos – and fun. Monika Hüllerman asked the band to finish with Auld Lang Sein, in which everybody participated; this time nobody got it wrong. This event was another success and a credit to Karin. Nights like this are what twinning is all about.



Brett

Sunday 30th August

A highlight of the recent visit from our friends in Friedberg was a tour of Downton Distillery in the south of Wiltshire on Sunday. Due to limited space in the building one group went in the morning, the other in the afternoon.

The owner of the gin distillery is Hugh and he began by giving an overview of the history of Downton and the area since Tudor times. The famous Elizabethan explorer, Sir Walter Raleigh, lived in Downton; his sense of adventure is reflected in the ethos of the distillery, which sponsors current explorers- recent challenges have been travel in South America, aircraft display teams and three rowers who crossed the entire Atlantic Ocean. The distillery's earliest gin is called "Explorer's" in celebration of this ethos and contains cedar which, while grown locally, was introduced to England by Walter Raleigh.



Hugh then guided us through a botanic garden where he grows plants which are used in the other gin for which the distillery is known, "Great Bustard". This gin contains the plants and berries which the bustard



bird feasts on. The bustard is synonymous with Wiltshire, even appearing on our flag, and is being reintroduced to the wild. The garden was reclaimed from a rubble heap and now contains a veritable bounty of plants, including juniper (which forms the main ingredient of gin and takes four years to grow), wormwood (which deters grazing by deer), yarrow and lucerne. A minority of plants in the garden are imported, notably angelica from Belgium. The reuse of the rubble heap reflects another ethos of the distillery, reuse and recycling.

The garden is a home for wildlife, such as hedgehogs, and sea eagles also live in the area.

The tour moved on to the vineyard, planted in 2014 on an old piggery. Hugh explained that while the vineyards are 12 years old it took time for them to settle. The vineyard is completely organic, contains nine types of grape and will be harvested early in September, with the help of Downton villagers, in a time determined by the lunar cycle. Once the grapes are picked, sheep are released in the vineyard to graze and naturally cut the vines back. Hugh pointed out rose bushes (bottom left in the picture) at the ends of the rows which act as an indicator of pests. Once picked, the grapes ferment over a period of years and the resulting wine is shipped straight to Michelin starred restaurants in America. The leftover skins from the



grape harvest are another source of material for the distillery. Hugh pointed out that vast majority of the hardware related to the harvesting is either recycled or reused.



The tour ended in a gin tasting session in the distillery itself, where Hugh guided us through the gins and pointed out what differentiates mass produced gin from the specialised gin which Downton distils. Mass produced gin uses flavour essences while Downton uses the local botanicals. Hugh explained that he distils gin to bring the botanicals to the “front” of the gins’ flavour. The tasting covered the “Explorer’s” and three versions of the “Great Bustard”: the usual variant, the autumnal variant which includes apple and a navy strength which is 57% alcohol by volume and was very potent!

Additionally, we sampled an upcoming “Orangecello” distilled from rinds and available for Christmas.

Downton gins are available from their website, either in bottles or reusable refills which reflect the reuse ethos and benefit from being cheaper to purchase.



As Hugh was a knowledgeable, enthusiastic and entertaining speaker everyone thoroughly enjoyed the two hours together and we emerged slightly tipsy and with a much better understanding of sustainable, organic local gin distilling.

Julian and Natascha

The two groups met for lunch at The Goat in Downton where we all enjoyed a good meal from the carvery.



All good things come to an end, and this was organised by Monika and we all met for a full English breakfast at The Angel where the whole group came together before some left for Heathrow and others departed in their own cars for different locations.

Everyone agreed that it had been a very good weekend and we had managed to offer our guests good English summer weather.



My thanks to everyone who so willingly wrote up reports of the different days. *Pip*

On 12th September the Chippenham Male Voice Choir put on a concert to raise funds for Chippenham Twinning Association and our thanks go to Margaret for organising this very successful event which raised much needed funds. Unfortunately, no-one has written a report or sent me any pictures.

Forthcoming events

Christmas Lunch 2026

On Saturday 12th December 2026 many of us will be meeting at la Flambé in Sutton Beger for a Christmas lunch. The menu will be sent to all members in due courseP.

AGM Sunday 21st February 2027

More details in the newsletter in January.

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Fostering friendship and links between Chippenham and Europe

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For the pre-payment for all activities and membership renewal the bank details are

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Newsletter Editor

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The newsletter is only as interesting as you make it, do please send any contributions to me whenever you like, and I will collect and collate it.

The deadline for the winter issue will be **7th January 2027**

Pip Higman

