

Elford's unique weekend

August Bank Holiday weekend in Elford is traditionally a grand village event and this year was no exception – except – it was a unique occasion: celebrating the twinning of our small village with Awoingt, a village of similar size in the northern French department of Hauts de France. Over the past five years the contacts between our two villages have grown, widened and deepened to the point where this year the two Parish Councils agreed to sign official letters of twinning and thus we look forward to the continuing development of a long and strong friendship between the two villages.

The Official delegation from Elford travelled to Awoingt at the end of June to participate in the signing ceremony there, which took place during the weekend of their village fete and it was with great pleasure that Elford welcomed their Mayor and a group of, now good, friends from Awoingt for the celebrations here. After battling the Bank Holiday traffic on their various routes from Dover, the visitors much appreciated the traditional warm welcome in the Crown Inn. A leisurely morning with their hosts joining in various activities locally, to extend their knowledge of the area, was followed by the formal signing Ceremony on the Saturday afternoon where a group of ours and local dignitaries as well as those connected with neighbouring twinning organisations joined Elfordians for a “Pimms” reception in the Elford Hall Walled Garden’s Marquee before the documents were signed in a especially written, very moving ceremony carried out in both French and English. At the Village Hall even more people joined the party for Canapes and Pimms, so that all the activities and clubs of the village could be represented at this celebration of a thriving village, before all sat down to a super four course dinner championing English cuisine, created by Brisket and Brulee at the Crown Inn, and culminating with The Mayor of Awoingt and our Councillor from Elford unveiling a plaque commemorating this significant event of Twinning.

Despite classically awful English weather on the Sunday morning the delegations convened at the village hall and walked through the deluge to officially unveil the new village road signs in an atmosphere of conviviality that will be indelibly printed upon our memories! Although the intriguing treasure hunt through the village aimed at giving our visitors the opportunity to discover more of Elford was rather cut short by the downpour, the classic home-made cream tea at the end, was all the more appreciated!

The finale of the “Official” weekend took place in St. Peter’s Church where a solemn observing of one of the particular ties between the two villages was made with the reading of the names of those who had died in the World Wars followed by enthusiastic renditions of both National Anthems which led us into a beautiful and joyful professional musical recital crowned with the communal singing of the “la chanson du nord”, a song particularly dear to our Northern French guests. Cheered by a glass of sparkling wine to lessen the sadness of the goodbyes, the peripatetic Elford wall hanging was welcomed back from its visit to Awoingt and this wonderful weekend sealed with an exchange of mementoes to keep the memories alive: a beautiful picture of Awoingt for Elford and the especially newly named Elford Rose for Awoingt.

Although this was the end of the “Official” weekend several of our French friends stayed longer to prolong what had been a fascinating, exciting and uplifting weekend, a brilliant showcase for all the talent and great facilities in our village.