

Minutes of meeting held Bridgwater-Marsa Twinning Association

Monday 29th April 2013 at West India House Durleigh Road Bridgwater

Present- Mike and Di Grabner, Joseph Abela, Barbara and Gordon Taylor, Steve and Pat Morgan.

Apologies- Helmi Holder-Wolff, Tricia Brown and James Morgan.

Minutes of last meeting-all had received and there were no matters arising.

Report of recent visit to Malta and Marsa – given by all members involved.

JA had arrived on Wednesday 3rd April and was at the airport to greet **PM** and **SM** plus our Scout Group of 17 people. Also there to greet us were Mayor Francis Debono and his wife Carmen .Councillor Dominic Spencer, his wife Claudette and their 3 children. Mark and Moria Catania plus their daughter it was a wonderful greeting with lots of photos taken despite that we were over an hour late arriving due to snow at Gatwick. Marsa council had kindly provided a coach to take the scouts to their camp site and a taxi for **SM** and **PM**. It was a poor night due to high winds for the scouts- Marsa group had erected all the tents for them at the island HQ at Florinana but little sleep was had!

On Friday evening 14th we were all picked up by mini bus and taken to the opening of the Marsa Council Art Exhibition which was held in a beautiful Vault that is part of a church on the Valletta Waterfront which is built into the Bastions. Before we went in we met Mr Jose Herrera who is the Government Minister for local council and Culture. Also members of Marsa Council. We were taken through the church into the Vault where all the Art was displayed on the walls, there were musicians-the Virtuosi Band and we were sat near the front behind the Minister and among councillors, the scouts were sat at the back. The evening commenced with music from the wonderful local group who were joined at times by a local young female singer, halfway through the evening there were speeches and presentations of plaques called the Marsa Honour Awards to 2 men who had given great service to the town 1 for a band and the other for the feast. There was more music and then we were called up for the same award which was a huge surprise. The Scouts were all given an individual Marsa trophy.**PM** was able to read out a letter to Marsa mayor and council from our mayor which had been laminated so it could be displayed when the new Marsa council offices are complete. **PM** mentioned she will obtain a copy to keep in our records.

When all the 23 artists had been awarded certificates there was a reception held outdoors on the waterfront where food and drink was enjoyed by all (especially the scouts) we were able to make many contacts with people from Marsa including Dennis Grech president of the Marie Regina Band club who would like to take part in our carnival and we met some old friends.

SM reported that on Sunday again transport was arranged by the council we and the scouts were collected and taken to Marsa to see the churches and chapel of Marsa-this was the first time that anything like this had been arranged before, Dominic Spencer had arranged it with the help of the Marsa Historical and Cultural group many members also attended also some of Marsa councillors. It was a cool and wet morning so it was ideal. The Holy Trinity Church is 100 years old and we went first to a new museum in the church which has recently been completed which was very interesting. We could not visit inside the church as mass was being said so we were transported to the younger

church Maria Regina which as the Father explained was built in the 50's-60's. We were then taken back to Holy Trinity where the church was partially ready for its centenary with all the chandeliers on show and some red damask decorating the church but not yet completed- spectacular none the less. Paul Demetri was a wonderful guide and was able to give us much information. We were then taken to Marsa Sports centre where on the edge of the golf course is a small chapel built in 1489 which was a farmers chapel when this part of Malta was not built on there was just enough room for our party to get in ! We were then taken into the complex and given drinks and snacks. **PM** presented Paul with one of our polo shirts and thanked him for his commentary. Many photos again were taken throughout the morning. Many of our business cards were given out. The whole event was filmed by Marouska Montebello who father is one of the artists' and secretary to the historical society.

Sunday afternoon saw the arrival of **M** and **D G** who were greeted at the airport by the mayor Francis Debono and his wife Carmen and Dominic and Claudette Spencer and their family. **M** and **DG** met with **S** and **PM** that evening and over dinner discussed our visit so far.

On Monday morning **JA** had arranged a visit to Marsovin winery the members of the association had a taxi and **JA** escorted the scouts as they walked which took them about an hour and we all arrived at the same time. It was an interesting visit and the scouts were interested when we were taken down a 400 year old stone spiral staircase to the vaults. Bernard explained well and it involved some science all the scouts now know how to open a bottle of champagne! The young people went off to spend the rest of the day on the beach. **JA** left to spend it with his family and the rest of us to sample some of the wine.

That evening the Mayor, his wife, Dominic, his family and Adrian Attard the executive secretary to the council met up with us at Mike and Di's hotel so a very pleasant evening was enjoyed. It had been decided at a previous meeting that we would arrange to take out our Marsa friends to dinner. It was arranged for Tuesday evening as Wednesday was booked. Prior to meeting them we were able to go into the Art Exhibition to look properly at all the really beautiful art. 15 of us met at the Waterfront and a wonderful evening was had as we met up with Adrian's family who we had not been able to see for many years. It was a lovely way to be able to thank them for all the hospitality over the years. **D** and **MG** had not seen Claudette's son Nigel for about 9 years.

MG was able to present to Francis Debono and the council a Bridgwater plate.

Wednesday we had been invited to take part in a radio broadcast on Trinitarji FM In the past **JA** had arranged that he, **MG** and **PM** had been involved in broadcasts via Facebook. This was better as we were in the radio studio just over the road from Holy Trinity Church. The presenter is Frederick Scerri and it was great to meet him. **MG** gave a talk about Bridgwater the town and the history. Also the background of the twinning and the history and how we see it –benefits and expectations. It was then quite informal with **PM** and **JA** talking also **FD** and **DS** who talked about carnival. We also had a couple of questions from listeners-one of which was how do we get to Bridgwater from London. It was explained we are still a very English town with lovely countryside. We have been invited to take part in a monthly link up to broadcast via Facebook. They found a local song and played "Drink up your Cider!"

After we were taken to see the new council offices we could also see Bridgwater Park where the palm **MG** planted several years ago is still growing well. We went to the back of the church where they were making street decorations for the feast in June and also to the Trinity band Club HQ where they are renovating the front of the building back to its original state.

We then walked through Marsa and along the dock area to the Waterfront to meet the NGO's (non government officers) of various organisations in Marsa. We met with Ms Alison Camilleri who gave a talk about MEUSAC which enables groups to obtain EU money for young people. **MG** and **DG** had come across its HQ in Valletta. Also present were the Mayor and councillors. We spent time talking to those present in Marsa but it was felt that it would be difficult for our association to be able to arrange on our own. **BT** feels we need an MEP to help us. It was also suggested that perhaps some of Bridgwater councillors could be able to help or invest in helping us.

MG was presented by Raymond Montebello (secretary of the Historical and Cultural Society) with a picture of his artwork of the Holy Trinity Church to celebrate the centenary. **MG** presented the Historical society with a Bridgwater plate. This was the last event for **P** and **SM** as they and the scouts returned on Thursday 11th.

MG and **DG** were invite to Marsa Labour Club's reception to thank all it members for the help that enabled them to win the general election. There was a hope that the new Prime Minister Joseph Muscat (who is one of our Honorary Vice Presidents) may attend .**MG** and **DG** had seen the Egyptian PM arrive to see him and in the evening he also had a state visit to attend so was unable to attend. However they were introduced to the President of the labour Club and several MP's. Mike was able to present a Bridgwater Plate to the Marsa MP who would give it to JM.

He also presented a polo shirt to the president of the club. There were several speeches in Maltese and English.

MG also presented a Bridgwater teaspoon to Claudette Spencer for all her work and hospitality – she was delighted.

MG and **DG** were invited to a ground firework display in Florinana but it did not start until 10.30 hrs and they had to be up in the early hours to return to England so regretfully had to decline.

It was noted that a fantastic time was had by all.

JA would like everything documented and to send a report to the Mercury with photos (He wondered if we needed parents' permission for scout photos) He wondered if a supplement could be made but it was pointed out that **PM** had sent articles and photos but very little had been published. **PM** would like to have photos so she can sort some out. **JA** gave his on a CD she will need **DG** and Scouts if possible. She has also asked **FD** if she could have a CD of those that he and possibly those taken at the Art exhibition- she is waiting for a reply. She had contacted Marouska about the filming but was being edited, will contact again. **JA** feels we really need to "blow our own trumpet "

Correspondence-PM explained she has been in contact with several times Dennis Grech President of the Marie Regina band Club re a band coming for carnival(he had sent photo's) She contacted Bridgwater Carnival Committee and had a reply from Chris Hocking who has been in contact with Dennis. She had also sent each Scout a letter to thank them for their help and wonderful behaviour.

James Morgan had sent a paper copy of the daily blog that was written by the Scouts and available on our website to parents. **PM** explained that they had visited the St John's hospital and the Malta Experience so they would have an idea of the history. They visited Mdina, 2 visits to the beach, met up with Marsa Scouts on Saturday and enjoyed an ice breaking game and then a treasure hunt in Valetta. The leaders saw some of the state opening of Parliament. They also visited Marsa Scout HQ where they met the Marsa leaders and wives. They also saw the Marsa Pipes and Drum core practicing for the feast at Florinana. They attended the Art Exhibition, the visit to the churches and the Winery-most of which does not happen during a normal camp. The highlight of the week for some was a visit to Fort Rinella.

MG said **DS** has a dream of the winning carnival cart visiting Malta's carnival which apparently is now going to be held in May not February. We had a discussion with Dominic at great length about pros and cons but when it was discussed with the Minister for Culture he had not disagreed. **MG** will write a letter to the carnival committee. **PM** to send letter head to enable this.

Francis Debono had expressed a wish that some of the Marsa artists work could be exhibited in Bridgwater **P** and **SM** had met people from the Arts Centre and were given the contact for the manager of the Art gallery -**PM** has emailed him waiting a reply. **BT** pointed out that art is also displayed in the Library and Blake museum. She pointed out that they would need their own insurance.

It was also suggested that we have a Marsa-day or week that could tie in with the art- maybe we could ask our council. Also maybe we could incorporate a fund raiser during it.

PM pointed out that we have had an invite from the new Mayor and Mayoress elect Councillor Dave and Mrs Shirley Loveridge on Friday 17th May 2013- the first time we have been invited to the Mayor making in St Mary's Church and after at the Town Hall. **PM** explained that Helmi Holder-Wolff had expressed an interest in attending. **SM** and **JA** proposed that as this was a new programme and an unknown Mayor that we should be represented by our Chairman and Secretary this was seconded by **BT** and all agreed.

Treasurers Report- **SM** explained that the hospitality at the Waterfront was (as he had just had credit card bill) £301.51p which left a balance of £864.16p in the account.

PM and **SM** had met Steve Gill and his wife (the founder member of the Association) recently who has been very unwell and has stepped down as County Councillor due to ill health. He is still involved with a Facebook Maltese group who get together occasionally. One of which is Imnarja to take place at the Admirals Landing on 29th June he has invited anyone who is interested as would like to keep in contact. He gave **PM** a contact for Maltese food and drink.

We also discussed the gifts we had received on this visit and there is the Mdina glass that was presented to **PM** and **SM** at the Regatta last September. It was felt that they should be kept in one place and the Mayors Parlour does have all the Twinning gifts and awards there from the other countries. It was felt that it would be appropriate to present them to our present Mayor and Mayoress who had hope to come on this visit but due to health problems were unable. **PM** also pointed out that Graham and Kay Granter were with the original party that visited Malta before the twinning was agreed.

PM will email Town Clerk, Mayor's secretary and Graham. We will also ask the Mercury to be present as it will be a formal presentation to the council.

We will discuss at next meeting possibility of Marsa Week/day the where when and how.

We held a discussion about a Bridgwater Flag as we had not spoken again to Marsa council about it during our visit. We have never had a flag and as **BT** explained (she used to work for a council at one time) that every town has a seal and things/pictures depicted on the seal represent the town. **PM** had sent Marsa's secretary our seal that Alan Hurford had asked for and he felt if one was available as a flag he would love to be able to fly it from the Town Hall. **JA** said there was a flag in St Mary's Church that had been presented by the Queen on a visit here.

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 14th May 2013 at 8 pm at West India House, Durleigh.