The 50th anniversary of Fareham’s Twinning with the beautiful Breton cathedral city of Vannes, was celebrated in style in September 2016. Highlights included a parade by the band of Her Majesty’s Royal Marines and personnel from HMS Collingwood, a concert by the Warsash Band in the Warsash Parish Church, a grand dinner and a Mayor’s Reception garden party in the grounds of Westbury Manor, all in the company of Civic leaders and townspeople of Fareham and Vannes. In addition there was a day long coach tour stopping at various points of interest throughout the Borough for our French guests, supported by an FBC Community Grant, plus a joint visit to Whitchurch Silk Mill.

Entirely self supporting since 2009, our current Fareham-Vannes Twinning Association (FVTA) has over eighty members. Associated groups include: Fareham Medical Society, Generation 2 Table Tennis Club, Fareham Sailing and Motor Boat Club, Hill Head Sailing Club, Portchester Sailing Club, Warsash Sailing Club, the South Hants Vehicle Preservation Society and Warsash Band. We also host a Conversation Group which meets twice monthly at Titchfield Community Centre.

The Twinning agreement, displayed in the Vannes Room on floor 8 of the Civic Offices, was signed on November 12th 1966 by the Chairman of Fareham Urban District Council, CE Pryke JP. The equivalent document was signed in Vannes in 1967. Since then there have been many reciprocal visits by Civic leaders, with representatives from Vannes and our German Twin Town of over thirty years, Pulheim, attending our Annual Council Meeting and Mayor Making in alternate years each May.

Most noteworthy are the exchanges enjoyed by thousands of residents, young and not so young, staying in each other’s homes enjoying sporting and cultural lives in friendly surroundings.

The Generation II Table Tennis Club, which is based at Fareham Academy, has been hosting visits by their Vannes counterparts for more than forty years. There have been joint concerts in both towns with the Warsash Band and Vannes Harmonie. Brookfield school, Sarisbury exchanged students for 21 years with the Collège Jules Simon in Vannes. This must have started in the late 1970s and continued through the 1980s and 1990s, only ending when teachers Yvon Lotrous and his wife Maryvonne Lotrous retired in Vannes. Subsequently Yvon Lotrous became Chairman of Twinning in Vannes.

Fareham’s sailing clubs continue their exchanges and in June this year hosted Vannes Sailors. The event which was headed by George Pickburn of Warsash sailing club, was mentioned on local radio and television. The Medical Society visited Vannes in October.
Keith Brewer who was Commodore of the Fareham Motorboat and Sailing Club from 1963 and whose wife Betty was secretary for fourteen years has given me some insights into visits in the early days of the Association.

“It was a different world in many respects then. It was not common for people to take holidays abroad. So the chance to holiday in other people's homes was very attractive.

“In those early days club members did not have boats sufficiently sturdy enough to sail between Fareham and Vannes as they do now. We did exchange visits by the expedient of travelling by coach. There used to be two coaches which went from Fareham, via the ferry from Portsmouth, about sixty people altogether, but they were not all sailors. There were also Gun Club members and footballers.

“In the early days too, the Vannes visitors took the ferry to Plymouth and then travelled to Fareham by coach.

“We used each other’s boats when visiting. Our Fareham Club gave a trophy which it was intended would be competed for by the host club. Originally the visits took place in alternate years, but the gaps became longer as it really depended upon who was available.”

Keith told me that he was particularly intrigued by the fact that the French had storage places for wine in their bilges!

“When we were in Vannes, our hosts would say, 'We are into the Morbihan. Then we would raft up, that is link the boats together and visit each other. Most of them were either shopkeepers or business owners, but there was at least one doctor who played the bagpipes!

“Another interesting memory is of when the Vannes visitors first went to Fareham’s new shopping precinct which was opened in 1976. They were intrigued and wanted to buy things but had difficulty with our currency. I remember that a local bank negotiated and arranged an exchange rate to make things easier.”

Our long standing member, Dr. Chris Gorham, who is not only our invaluable Liaison Officer, but also a member a sailor and member of the Warsash Band has given some of the history of the Association and explained that there were Round Table visits between the two towns as far back as 1964. He has also explained that until the present Fareham Vannes Twinning Association (FVTA) was formed in 1998, the Fareham Vannes Twinning Committee was a Council Committee which undertook coordination of Twinning activities. Representatives from each sporting group involved served on the committee including; the
Sports Council, Lions Club, police and several Councillors. There was no provision for individual members who were neither part of one of the participating groups nor on the Committee.

As a consequence, to open up the idea to other Fareham residents a substantial Twinning Exhibition was put on in Fareham Shopping Precinct to attract people who did not belong to a particular club who might be interested and the Friends of Vannes Group began. Their members are now a very supportive part of the FVTA as are the two Fareham Borough Councillors appointed annually, currently Mrs. Pam Bryant and Mrs Katrina Trott.

Fareham Borough Council's permanent commemoration of the Golden Anniversary of Vannes Twinning is a sculpture in the garden of Westbury Manor Museum was unveiled by Councillor Mrs Connie Hockley and Monsieur Marcel Boché, Chairman of the Vannes Jumelage, on 12th September 2016. The plaque beside it describes the concept behind it:

“The strong trunk in two halves represents the two towns intertwining to signify their bond. Each trunk culminates in five branches, symbolising friendships that have blossomed. The gilded spheres seem to explode in celebration. The sculpture sits on its stone base, telling us the two towns will last well into the future.”

In the heatwave of late May 2017, twenty one FVTA members, together with Mayor and Mayoress Cllr. Geoff and Mrs Tina Fazackerley plus 2016's Mayor Cllr. Mrs Connie Hockley who had played a large part in Fareham's Anniversary Celebrations, visited Vannes for their commemoration. Once again this enjoyable and memorable visit took place during the Annual Semaine du Golfe (Gulf of Morbihan week) which is a boating extravaganza featuring more than 1,000 classic craft. This year they were complemented by 80 classic cars, of which 12 were from the newly affiliated FVTA group, the South Hants Vehicle Preservation Society. We were accorded the honour of a Civic Reception and there were very many enjoyable events put on for our enjoyment. A children's playground was named in Fareham's Honour to commemorate the anniversary.

Currently we expect to host Vannes visitors around the weekend of May 18th 2018. We welcome new members to our association which exists to encourage exchanges between cultural, professional and sporting organisations and individual members of the communities of Fareham and Vannes.

Our website, farehamvannestwin.wordpress.com has much more information including our Social Events.

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