



The 50th Preston – Nîmes Twinning Anniversary Celebrations

Nîmes 14. – 19. September 2005

WEDNESDAY 14.09.05

09:30 hrs called Eagle Taxis to take us to the Black Bull on Garstang Road. Left JC in charge of the house. The journey to Speke was in very cramped mini bus that did not have the power reserves to go at any significant speed. There had been some accidents on the motorways and the driver was not sure if he could deliver us on time. That put a damper on things right away. However, he took us along the M58 past Skem and got to John Lennon Airport in good time to sign in. The plane was supposed to take off at 12:25 hrs but took off 10 minutes later. The flight was uneventful apart from the extortionate price for a cup of tea and a cheese and cress submarine for £10. We noticed that the plane arrived in Nîmes 20 minutes ahead of schedule. We sat at the very last row of seats in the back of the plane and I had the feeling that it does move about a bit more than in the front. The heat of the day hit us forcibly but it was nice to be enveloped by 'wall to wall' warmth. It took some time to get our luggage, because there was only one solitary porter unloading the trolley and flinging it onto the conveyor belt outside the building. The drive to the hotel, via a toll road, was relatively short but the bus could not park outside the hotel. So we all had to walk from the



busy Boulevard Amiral Courbet past the remains of a Roman gate, Porte Auguste, to the hotel which has a nice atmosphere. At the time I had a nasty headache and I was desperate for a couple of Paracetamols which were inside my luggage. Despite taking 2 pills, the ache continued unabated. I had to lie down for an hour then we decided to go out for a walk and find a drink. We walked along the Boulevard Amiral Courbet and stopped at a small bistro for a glass of wine. Both glasses cost €4. I gave the waiter €20 and he gave me back €6. Before we left I made him understand that he still owed me €10 in change. He apologised profusely and produced a €10 note. We met Derek & Colette, Brian & Barbara at a pavement bar (O'Flahertys) and had a couple of drinks after which my headaches were history. We carried on to the Magnolia Restaurant (as recommended by Monsieur Eric) where we sat outside in the balmy evening air and had a good time eating, drinking and talking. I was really pleased that Julie is enjoying herself and is getting on famously with everybody and they with us.



THURSDAY 15.09.05

Breakfast @ 08:00 hrs.



..the Academics on their way to meet their counter parts

Today is the meeting of the representatives of Uclan, Preston & Myerscough College with their French counterparts at the CFA. Met Sophie Dousseron who came to collect them. Derek and Brian were requested to go with them. The rest of us walked down to the Amphitheatre and after much searching and running (yes, I seem to be able to run again) found the meeting place o/s the Restaurant Le Lisita (they had moved their sign). Sophie Wildbolz (Swiss/American, speaks

French, English, German, Spanish and some Italian) was our guide who took us back into the history of the 'Arena'. Fascinating story. The arena was at times used as a quarry & 100 dwellings were built inside it and the arches. They were all demolished in the 19th Century because people woke up to a new romanticism. We climbed to the top of the structure and could see over the top up to the surrounding hills. The guide was surprised to hear me speak in German to a few school children and even more surprised when I told her that I was German. She thought I had a Preston accent – whatever means. The tour finished at the Mason Carrée which is also 2 millennia old and a truly magnificent building. Sir Norman Foster, the British Architect, built the modern art gallery right next to it amidst a lot of controversy. Derek & Brian re-joined us and we all had lunch at a wonderful pavement



restaurant next to the Crocodile fountain. The palm tree was a few yards next to a stone archway. The Crocodile is Nîmes' heraldic animal, and the palm tree is also part of the town's crest. (In fact the Croc. is tied to the tree). The

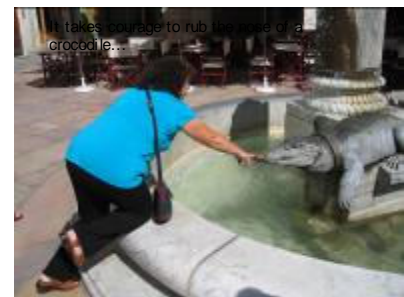


nose of the Croc. was rubbed shiny by people rubbing it and making a wish. So we all had a go. We had a very good time, eating, drinking and having fun. At the end we said 'good bye to Katy and Patricia who had joined us from the Office de Jumelage and who had been to helpful to us. After that we accompanied everyone back to the hotel for a rest. Derek, Brian, Barbara and myself



Barbara Manning and Patricia & Katy from the office de jumelage

walked to the town hall with gifts (including Lancashire cheese) for the girls, which they appreciated and, of course for Sylvie whose father sadly died a few days ago,. Katy gave me a huge pile



..takes a chance to rub the nose of a crocodile...

of literature about Nîmes for me to distribute to our fellow travellers. We also met Isabel at the Tourist Office and Derek gave her a cheese as well which she looked forward to eating. Brian and Barbara went off to meet Bruno (former deputy mayor) for a private visit. We shall all meet again at 7 pm to go out for some sustenance.



Katy & Patricia in their office



FRIDAY 16.09.05

A day in the Camargue and lunch in Aigues Mortes. A lady called Patricia (who was recommended to us by BritsNîmes) came to the hotel and rearranged the whole tour and then took us by coach on a wonderful tour of the Camargue. We could see that a lot of damage was caused by the recent floods which happen



Sea salt production

very rarely but are devastating when they do occur. We first bypassed Aigues Mortes and visited the seaside town of Grau du Roi (a sort of 'new town' development with lots of space, nice houses and, from what we could see, a pleasant lifestyle. This new town was designed to re-start the regional economy and it looks as if they have succeeded) and carried on to Port Camargue where we stopped and had an hour to stretch our legs. We walked to the seaside and Derek and I took off our sandals and enjoyed the feel of sand under our feet. We were proper gentlemen for not taking photographs of topless ladies dotted all over the beach. The water was surprisingly cold. Whilst walking to our meeting point, we were suddenly caught up in a bull run, with mounted cowboys (or whatever the French equivalent is) carrying long poles chasing a bull down the road. We got to Aigues Mortes at lunchtime and drove around the outside of the walled city which was quite an experience.



The famous tower at Aigues Mortes



Bull running in Port Camargue

We had lunch at a pre-arranged restaurant, the Citadel, which was very good, with lots of wine, and everybody was happy. After lunch we visited a vineyard and had a taste of their products – they were not exactly generous with the stuff but that way nobody got inebriated. Being in such close proximity to the sea, the vines tolerate

salt which is quite unusual. The scale of the enterprise was on an enormous scale – from where we were standing during the wine tasting, we could see almost a square kilometre of vines stretching to the horizon. Unfortunately, the conducted tour and the tasting was a rather hurried affair and did not make a good impression upon us. On thinks of vine and its whole paraphernalia as wholesome and health giving – this experience was just that of a factory,



Lunch at the Citadel in Aigues Mortes



a km² of vines!

and its whole paraphernalia as wholesome and health giving – this experience was just that of a factory,

rather cold and soulless. I am quite certain that is a rare exception to the rest of French vineyards. Our guide was embarrassed and said so. After that we went the long way home through a flat landscape ^{Aigues Mortes} which again yielded up evidence of the ravages wrought upon it by the recent floods. In all, it was a wonderful day and not easily forgotten. Went out for a meal with the 'gang' and had a very enjoyable time.



SATURDAY 17.09.05

The 'Mistral' is blowing 'cold' from the North and it was decidedly unpleasant to walk about in shirtsleeves. Put on my green cashmere pullover and felt decidedly better. Found the café Fournil de Nicholas in the rue de Madeleine which is run by a lady from Chorley, but before we could order anything, the waitress spilled a lot of milk over a lady customer. This caused a lot of stress in the waitress and so we left to let them get on with it – only to return later for lunch which was good. Julie and I went to the post office and the manager helped us to buy some stamps for our postcards. The town is thronging with people in traditional clothing. At around 14:00 hrs we assembled by the Maison Carrée and the civic delegation from Preston was there as well. Peter Kuit (Director of Environmental Services) and his wife, the leader of the council, Cllr John Collins, Cllr Peter Horton and his wife (standing in for Ken Hudson who is the leader of the Conservatives) and, of course, the Mayor, his wife, Ishwar



Taylor and his group of Gujarat Hindu Dancers for the Hindu temple on South Meadow Lane. The Mayor

looked decidedly unhappy and when I asked him what was bothering him, he replied that the hotel does not take into account the fact that he and several others are vegetarians for religious reasons. He said, whilst the others are having 3 course meals, he and the others are given lettuce leaves and carrots. When he complained about it he was fobbed off and told there were no provisions for vegetarians. That sounds strange. I spoke to Brian who informed Katy who will make representations to the hotel and soon sort this out. Peter Kuit came over and we had a few words, also regarding the job on The Close. I explained that the work on site will start on Tuesday, 20th September but the paperwork has already taken more than 6 weeks. The performance of the Preston Gujarat Hindu Dancers was a wonderful sight against the backdrop of the 2000 year old Maison Carrée. The brilliant Indian costumes presented afterwards at

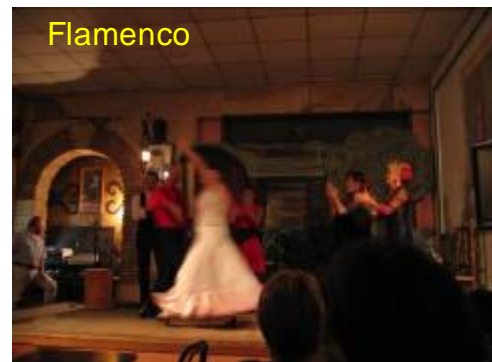


the fashion show by these rather beautiful girls made the crowd clap with appreciation. A surprise happened when, at the end, a number of French students from the Nîmes Fashion College, modelled the same dresses as their Indian colleagues and got just as much applause. An interesting development was the change to the traditional sari combined with wide trousers. The designers created a more modern version with colourful tunics and more tightly fitting trousers with very pleasing results. Suddenly we can see and feel that our 'multi cultural society' really



has something to offer and had invited us to share a beautiful creation. I was uplifted by the whole thing and congratulated the Mayor on the success of this 'experiment'. He was still very angry about the treatment he was receiving. After the performance Julie and I went to the new art gallery designed by Sir Norman Foster and looked at an exhibition of German painters. There is a lot of Vergangenheitsbewältigung (a word expressing coming to terms with the past) in these pictures and it was a depressing experience,

but, I suppose a kind of reality which has to be addressed and dealt with. I asked Julie how many years of 'therapy' were required to 'cure' those characters – to which she replied that they were truly beyond redemption. I can believe that although she said it tongue in cheek. Julie and I looked at the food market and were totally impressed with the quality of the food stuff from vegetables to cakes and especially cheeses. One wonders why we are 'ripped off' so shamelessly and do nothing about it. For the evening, an Andalusian party was planned at the Centre Culturel Andalou. We walked there from the hotel to the Boulevard Sergent Triaire. The centre is quite small and makeshift but had a terrific atmosphere. We had



a salad, paella with mussels and king sized shrimps and then a piece of Camembert cheese for desert. Drinks we had to buy ourselves and I bought a bottle of Rosé which lasted us all night. The performances were brilliant and Julie refused to go until the bitter end and about 2 am. Then we (Brian, Barbara, Derek, Julie and I) walked to the Hotel Imperator where we were supposed to meet Dimitri and Frederic. There



were huge crowds of young people waiting to get into the hotel disco which was being held in the garden. Brian rung Frederic and he came to the foyer to get us in – past all those bouncers. The garden of the hotel was absolutely heaving with people dancing to the beat of some rock band. We had to wiggle ourselves diagonally through this towards the VIP area, which was just as crowded but in a small walled garden. Here we saw

Dimitri and Chantal who greeted us like long lost friends. Frederic then turned up with a large bottle of Champagne which was very nice and we toasted each other. A conversation was neigh impossible but the ambience was great. We finally extricated ourselves from this heaving mass of bodies and got out in one piece. We strolled home to the hotel amongst the celebrating people and were forcible struck by how well everybody was behaving, no drunks, no fights – how civilised. Just as we were



turning into the little street to our hotel, Barbara suggested we all went for a nightcap. Julie wanted to go to bed. So I escorted her to the hotel and rung the 'night bell' whereupon the night porter appeared and let her in. I got back to the others who were in a bar next to O'Flahertys (who was closed for the night). This place was heaving as well and conversation was not possible. We finally got home at 3:45 am in the morning. I feel great. It was fun – no hangover.

SUNDAY 18.09.05

We got up late for a 10 o'clock breakfast. Had a leisurely walk around the town. Visited the cathedral where a mass was in progress and then stepped into the museum next door (which used to be the Bishop's palace). Just as we were inside, there was a ceremony of sort and singing, so we could not get out of the building and



The meeting of the Costiers outside the former Bishop's Palace

waited until it was over. It looked like a congregation of winegrowers who were wearing ceremonial garb and lots of medals. Had a Pastiche (Fennel) drink with water to dilute it and some cheese for €20 o/s the theatre (we won't go there again) and at 14:00 hrs watched the 'Pride of Preston' perform again their cheerful dances but this time more intimately in front of the cathedral on the Place aux Herbes. Before the performance met the Preston civic delegation again and had a word with Peter

Kuit and Bhikhu Patel, the Mayor, who looked much happier now that they were fed properly. Katy's intervention seems to have paid off. Met Patricia who conducted us on this great tour of the Camargue, her husband and a few friends. She then handed me her Poodle dog, called Dolly, and we had a great time walking from ancient house to ancient house which



Guess who wants a staircase like that....

were open for inspection because of the Feria. It was indeed a stimulation afternoon. I promised to send some of the photos I took. At 7:55 pm we shall assemble for our farewell party. We'll be sad to go, but the broken down dishwasher is waiting at home.



The Preston Gurajat Hindi Dancers performing in front of Nimes Cathedral

We got to the venue and were ushered upstairs to a small private room, just big enough to accommodate all of us: Derek & Colette, Brian & Barbara, Julie & I, Nick & Mary Rose, Alan, Ann, Jackie, Leysa, David, Ruth, Jill & Alan. We had our first course when the lights went out – and stayed out for a long time. Little tea-lights were brought in and lots of more wine.



Not everyone in Nimes likes bullfighting!



Our farewell to Nimes party...

Just when we were deciding on what alternative course to order (one that did not require cooking) the lights came on again. The food was simple but wholesome – and there was plenty of it. David Kidd made a speech thanking Derek and Brian (and after a gentle reminder from others that I was also part of the organising committee) and me for the



Our farewell to Nimes party...

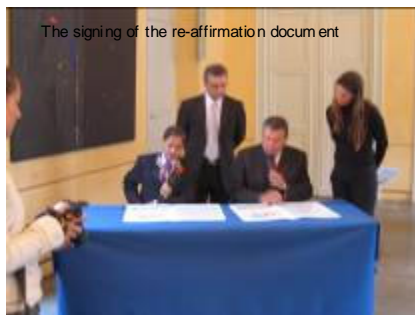
work we put into organising this visit of academics to Nîmes. Derek replied and then Nick sung a ballade and Ann rendered a WWII song about tight items of clothing etc; the lyrics of which must have been considered quite risqué in those days (hence her breathless rendition). It was midnight when the party broke up and we rolled back to the hotel. Derek, Brian and Barbara went for a nightcap but we were feeling rather tired from the night before and so decided to rest instead.

MONDAY 19.09.05

The Feria is over and so is the warm weather (probably only for a few days). Today we return to the UK. The reception at the Town Hall is set for 11:00 hrs and we all received an invitation to attend. The ceremony is a repeat of the ceremony we had at Preston Town Hall in June. I am glad that I brought my blazer and black shoes to look a bit more formal (but not a lot). Hopefully we'll meet a lot of people there we saw over these past few days and who made our stay here quite special. The Jumelage Office with Katy, Patricia & Sylvie, Isobel from the Tourist Office, BritsNîmes, Sophie Wildbolz who gave us the conducted tour of the town and Patricia Brochier for the trip around the Camargue – not forgetting her husband Guy who was a charming translator for the fashion show outside the maison Carrée. We were all very much surprised as to how pleasant people are around here. Even this morning when I posted Julie's 3 postcards in the post box, I walked past a group of vagrants without either being accosted for money or shouted at. I suppose the weather helps keeping people calm. This place is steeped in 2000 years of history and one feels connected to the past by absorbing the atmosphere and touching hewn stones worked on 2 millennia ago. I feel it is important for any people to be connected to the past and respect their inheritance – it makes them more grounded and gives comforting feeling of belonging. Julie and I started out to take one last walk through the town – to the Arena and Maison Carrée. 11:00 hrs we met at the Town Hall for the civic reception. There were lots of familiar faces and we met Robin Boxall, the President of BritsNîmes. Jean Paul Fournier, the Mayor, gave a speech which was translated by Sophie Wildbolz and the Mayor praised for bringing the it. Well, such is should have been from politicians like Collins gave a notes. The Mayor



The Mayor of Nîmes speech



The signing of the re-affirmation document

of Preston made his own speech (he refused the Mayor's Secretary's offer of writing it for him) and he asked me if it was o.k. I told him that it was fine – it came from the heart and I meant it. I asked him if he had received my letter, inviting him to be the Hon. President of Preston

Twinning Partnerships – he acknowledged receipt and promised to come to our next meeting. He also told me that he had received my e-mail regarding our programme and support for his stance against bull fighting. Spoke to Katy and Patricia and suggested that they – as workers for the cause – are sent to Preston to find out what we have to offer. This, of course, met with their full approval. I said the same thing to Sophie Dousseron. We left the



town hall and met at the restaurant Magadou(?) for a light lunch. After that a walk back to the hotel and then boarded a coach taking us to the airport.



Check-in was unhurried and noted by the absence of these awful crushes of people known at large airports such as Manchester and/or London. The flight lasted 2 hours and passed without much hassle.



The skies over Liverpool were grey and the temperature was reasonable at 18°C. The 'City' provided minibus transport for every one – for which we are truly grateful because the first journey was a bit fraught – i.e. it was a nice surprise for us. The driver agreed to take us all home and Derek slipped me £20 for the driver who was very pleased about that. I am starting the job at The Close tomorrow and there is a broken down dishwasher waiting for me. I am really tired now but it was all worth it.

Delegates List

Delia Ann Jackson	UCLAN
Nick Peake Mary Rose Kane	UCLAN
David Kidd	Myerscough College
Jacki Hughes	Preston College
Leysa Kopciowski	Preston College
Brian Manning Barbara Manning	PTPs
Jürgen O H Voges Julie M Voges	PTPs
Alan Rowland Gillian Rowland	PTPs
Derek A Smith Colette Smith	PTPs
Ruth Archer	PTPs
Ann Weardon	PTPs
Alan Marley	PTPs