

26 January 2017 -Visit by French Students to Wrington Vale

On a bright, chilly morning in late January a group of twelve post-6th form French students, wrapped up against the comparative rigour of an English winter, arrived for a visit organised by the Wrington Twinning Association (part of the Wrington Vale French Connection). The students were from the Lycée Marc-Bloch in Sérignan (Languedoc), which provides secondary education for students in our twinned village of Villeneuve-lès-Béziers, just as Churchill serves Wrington. Since the students were following a course of management studies the focus of the visit was local agricultural production.

However, the first stop was Churchill Academy where the group leader could move from email exchanges to personal talks with language staff at the Academy with a view to developing educational collaboration. There was also a warm welcome from the Year 9 Churchill student ambassadors who quickly established a rapport with the visitors as guides on a tour of the school, reinforced when the group were invited to join the singing during a music lesson. However, the day had a tight schedule and the group was soon on the move to the next destination – Thatcher’s cider mill in Sandford.

The Thatcher’s visit provided a fascinating insight into the latest production techniques at the stunning new facility that, in a seamless process, starts with the apples and ends with wrapped pallets of cider. The students could and did make interesting comparisons with a process with which they are much more familiar back in the South of France – one of the largest wine-making regions in the world. A quick coffee break at the refurbished Railway Inn café-restaurant was followed by a short scenic tour of the Mendips via the Cheddar Gorge, ending with a finger-buffet at The Plough Inn, where the quality and range of the spread was highly appreciated by the food-savvy students. David Simpson joined the group to welcome the students on behalf of Wrington Parish Council. There was however little time to linger since the party were expected at the new dairy unit at Regilbury Park Farm, run by the Alvis family.

At the farm the students were introduced to the integrated production system that gives animal welfare top priority and provides a sustainable and entirely waste-free production cycle. For many of the Languedociens this was their first encounter with dairy livestock and production, and aroused a good deal of interest. Then a short drive to Lye Cross Farm where they observed aspects of the cheese making process and, standing amongst towering stacks of cheese in the storage area, sampled different kinds of cheddar produced at the farm.

All too soon a very informative and enjoyable day came to an end. To judge from the enthusiastic responses of the student group, it provided an experience that will live in the memory as they move into their future careers and many expressed a desire to return in the not-too-distant future. Their enjoyment was shared by the group leaders and, indeed, the members of the twinning association who accompanied the group during the day.

The Twinning Association would like to thank again all those who made a special effort to ensure the success of the visit: Churchill Academy staff and students, Phil Smith at Thatcher’s, Gabriel Withers at The Plough Inn, Nick Green and Peter Alvis at Lye Cross Farm. Also thanks to the Wrington minibus supplemented by members of Committee of the Twinning Association.