

How It Began

The idea of 'twinning' was originally considered by Birchington Parish Council in 1988. Preliminary research and groundwork was undertaken by then serving Councillors, (the late) Peter Brill and Vic Adams. They looked for a town not too dissimilar to Birchington which was felt to be within 'day trip' distance.

They came across La Chapelle d'Armentières who were themselves looking for a twin town. We seemed to fit their socio-economic ideals as well. After making positive contact with their French counterparts, the Council decided to take a varied cross-section of Birchington residents on a coach to see the town and meet the people. The Parish Council were very well aware that the whole village had to be in favour of the Twinning concept if it were to be a success.

So, in mid-January 1989, at the very early (and cold) start of 4am, the coach set off across the Channel. The welcome we received was overwhelming. The French were very keen to meet and impress us all. They had planned a whole day of receptions and tours of the local area - culminating in a very fine meal.

Feedback - especially from the Residents Association - was so positive that formal twinning planning was started straight away. The Parish Council, though, would obviously need help with everyday running duties and at a packed meeting held at the Village Centre, a Twinning Committee was formed. Initially to help the Council with preparations for the Official Twinning ceremonies, but eventually to act as the facilitating link for the future on behalf of the Council itself.

The Birchington Twinning Association was therefore formed in 1989. Plans were quickly made. The proceedings in France took place in May 1989 and our own official ceremony, on Dog Acre, a month later in June. The aim of the Association - to promote cultural and sporting links, as well as to encourage school exchanges, and to establish a better understanding between the two communities - has been ongoing and successful ever since.

(Notes extracted and adapted from a previous article by Kay Cowell)



Based on Kay Cowell's note on the Twining

Over the last 30 years there have been many occasions where the two communities have enjoyed and upheld the ideals laid down and promised in both Charters. The numerous cultural visits, exchanges between the primary schools, the many sporting and fun events, as well as participation in carnivals on both sides of the Channel have helped forge many personal and group friendships that endure to this day.