

Friends of Chaville: Report from the Chair 2017-18

I am bringing the work of Chelle and Jim Paice to the fore this year. Our quiz, run so ably by them both, was again very successful. When I wonder 'Where did all these quizzers come from?' as they stream into the hall, the answer is quite simply that Chelle has been busy networking and calling and urging. This year she also gave a talk on French Gardens at Mill Hill Library. The fact that the room was packed out is a tribute to her hard work. It was a very interesting talk, very well presented and very informative. Thank you again Chelle.

We have had a number of petanque practices up at Potters Bar during the year. We also had a restaurant meal at restaurant '36' but of course the major event was the visit of the French at the end of April. As there was a bank holiday on Tuesday May 1st the group came on Saturday morning and stayed until the afternoon of the Tuesday so we had 2 full days and 2 half days instead of the usual 3 full days. The programme moved around a bit accordingly. It started with the petanque match on the Saturday afternoon. Despite steady rain and cool temperatures it was all great fun with a lot of people taking part to a greater or lesser extent. The French had some very strong players, most notably newcomer Claude, so although we fought hard the silver salver, presented this year by Mayor Brian Salinger, is once again in their hands. This was followed by a well-earned meal at Bistro The Walk.

The next day we visited Kew Gardens where much to our amazement it did not rain! Everyone enjoyed exploring the various options as they wished- the treetop walk, Kew Palace and kitchens, the greenhouses and so on. However on the Monday the rain returned with a vengeance. Nevertheless, the walk through Soho planned and led by Irene covered many interesting places. Two pubs were of particular (historical!) interest. Firstly, there is the John Snow pub named after the local doctor who discovered that cholera was water-borne, thereby saving thousands of lives. Secondly there is the Intrepid Fox pub, named after Britain's first foreign secretary Charles James Fox, a womanizer, debtor and dandy of 'great charisma' who persuaded the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire and other great ladies of the day to kiss tradesmen in return for their votes. Soho has altogether a very remarkable and colourful history. We ended up at a restaurant in Chinatown and as we were a big group we all had the chance to try a great variety of dishes. A very enjoyable meal! This was followed by a visit to the Royal Opera House backstage. We saw costumes and scenery being made, watched ballet dance practices and were awed by the size and scale of this magnificent 10-storey building.

Lastly on Tuesday morning we went to Barnet Museum where we were welcomed by Mike Naronha. We saw some of the magnificent 34 banners of some of the families who were involved in the Battle of Barnet of 1471, during the Wars of the Roses. The banners, made by volunteers at the museum, are now hanging from lampposts all along Barnet High Street.

We were pleased to welcome a number of new French visitors to the group and despite the merciless poor weather the weekend was thoroughly enjoyable. There are different plans afoot for next year with a visit to Guernsey being proposed instead of the visit to Chaville. We will see how this venture works.

Irene Nichols (Chair of Friends of Chaville)