

In Conversation with Dudley Clarke-Jervoise,

Chair of Hayling Island Gorrion Twinning Association

Interview by Julia Kitchen, committee member



Julia How did you become chair? Did you volunteer?

Dudley Rod, my predecessor, decided to step down due to the arrival of a baby in their family. He is still doing a good job leading the organisation of the Ale-ing Fest. Averill approached me in her capacity as the twinning president and asked me if I would be vice chair or chair. I said vice chair with a view to feeling my way in and getting some experience. At the meeting somehow, I was voted chair and Tony was voted vice chair. We had never had a vice chair before and had to change the charter in order to allow for this

Julia How do you want to move things on and change things?

Dudley I think the association works very well but I am disappointed about the lack of younger members – people in their 20s and 30s. On the Gorrion side there are some young people involved but not here. Families are much closer in France. Having lived there for 12 years I know that – I lived in a small village where everybody knew everybody. If anybody had the slightest problem the whole village rallied round to help and look after them. There were only 86 people in the village. I am also concerned that we don't have more members. Membership has been static for years. We seem to get interest from people but then they don't always join

Julia I always think that if you want people to do something you have to facilitate that – make it easy for them. I know a couple of people who have said they want to join but haven't actually done it. Perhaps we could experiment next year with making it easier for people to join

Dudley I looked at the website when I became chair and saw that we needed to update it and make it more appealing to prospective new members

Julia I'll add that to the "to do" list. How is the twinning association funded?

Dudley There is some revenue from the very small membership fee. Still £10.00 a year for a family – absolute bargain. What do we offer for it? We offer some social functions, a newsletter, the opportunity to host the French when they visit Hayling and the opportunity to go to Gorrion. Gorrion is only two and a half hours drive south of Caen. The French are very welcoming and hospitable.

The Ale-ing Fest is the main fundraising event for the twinning association. We are going to the planning of the Ale-ing Fest early this year to take advantage of all the free publicity through various publications. We need to publicise the event more

Julia We don't particularly publicise that the Ale-ing Fest is a fundraiser for the twinning association and I don't understand why not. Every piece of literature to do with the Ale-ing Fest should say "in aid of HIGTA". Partly that is an outreach thing – it is publicising the twinning association and it also anchors the Ale-ing Fest as a fund-raising rather than a commercial event. We don't promote the Ale-ing Fest on the twinning website. We might mention it in passing but we don't focus on it – the two operate completely separately

Dudley I certainly think they should come together more.

Julia Do we get any financial support from Havant or Hampshire Council?

Dudley We used to get some money from Havant Borough Council but that stopped. I have been thinking we should set up a meeting with them to discuss whether there is any chance of some funding in the future. One or two of the councillors are actually members of the twinning association

Julia On the French side it is very much funded by the civic purse. Things are run differently there. The mayor of Gorrion always comes on the French visit to Hayling Island and he takes an active part in the association.

Dudley The bureaucracy is unbelievable there. Even the tiniest of places has a mayor. Our village of 86 people had a mayor and the Mairie building with the flags outside and there was a part-time secretary to the mayor. All funded by the Prefecture. Very different from here. We should invite the Havant councillors to come to the dinner when the Gorronais visit.

Julia Occasionally someone comes

Dudley The mayor usually turns up – maybe because they see it as their civic duty if a mayor from elsewhere is visiting. We would like to see more enthusiasm from the council for the twinning association

Julia Let's add forging better connections with Havant Council to the "to do" list for next year. We have a committee with lots of longstanding members who contribute a lot and are willing and amenable. Do you think we need more committee members?

Dudley I think we need some younger committee members to supplement the existing committee. There are some very hard-working members of the current committee, people who do a lot.

Julia Perhaps between now and the AGM we should have a drive to recruit new committee members. New people bring new skills and the committee evolves

Dudley We do need to think about the future. We need new blood and some younger people to ensure the continuation of the association

Julia What about Brexit? Do you think that has an impact on people wanting to be involved in the twinning?

Dudley No, I don't believe Brexit has an impact at all.

(There followed a spirited discussion on Brexit which we decided not to record in this interview. It concluded with Dudley and Julia agreeing to disagree)

Julia What do you think the point of the twinning association is? What are we doing? Why are we doing it?

Dudley I think the point is that there is a desire to mix with different nationalities. Gorrion is not a million miles away from here and it is easy to get to. I think the long weekend visits to Gorrion and their return visits here are great fun. The exchange of views is good. Our members also make other visits

to Gorrion – the Fete de la Musique in June and the Christmas market in December. The Hayling cyclists have also stayed there in the past

Julia Do you think that the opportunity to visit Gorrion as part of the twinning if you are a member is something that we should publicise more? We talk about the visits occasionally but I don't think we state clearly that any member can be involved and go to France and stay with a French family. I don't think that is widely known. Even existing members don't necessarily know that

Dudley We should explain that more clearly then

Julia I will add it to the "to do" list

Dudley The other thing is to get some of our schoolchildren going over there. In our day we did exchange trips and no-one thought anything of it but today that is no longer possible. Gorrion actually has a house run by the mayor where people can pay to stay – it could easily accommodate families of a football team for example. It consists of several two and three bedroom self-catering apartments. It gets booked up early for the holiday months as people like to take advantage of the excellent sports and recreational facilities in Gorrion.

I know the football team here would like to go but it is a question of organisation and time. Quite a lot of parents would have to go with them. If we get some younger people involved they are likely to have young children and be interested in taking their children to Gorrion. It doesn't have to be a football team – it could just be a visit. We did have some French 15-16 year olds over this summer accompanied by one of their aunts and that went well so we want to encourage more of that

Julia What is happening in the next 12 months?

Dudley There is the trip to France at the beginning of May. We have a coach organised but people can take their own cars if they prefer. Ale-ing Fest in October. 21st annual dinner in January open to all members. Monthly committee meetings first Monday of each month followed by a social evening in one of the local pubs. The AGM is in March so any new prospective committee members need to come forward in time for the AGM