

Arklow and Châteaudun celebrate 40 years of Town Twinning

Cathaoirleach Pat Kennedy of Arklow Municipal Council, accompanied by ten members of Arklow Town Twinning Association paid a special visit to Arklow's twin town of Châteaudun from 2-5 June, 2023. Forty years ago Arklow was twinned with the town of Châteaudun in the Eure-et-Loir department in France. Since 1983 the two Town Twinning Associations had organised many social, cultural and educational events. The Mayor of Châteaudun, Mr Fabien Verdier welcomed the Arklow delegation to a civic reception in the Town Hall.

Representatives of Châteaudun's other Twin Towns from Marchena (Spain), from Schweinfurt(Germany) and from Kromeriz(Czechia; formerly known as the Czech Republic) were also present.

Martine Provost, Chairperson of Châteaudun Town Twinning Committee welcomed all and recalled the history of the Twinning with Arklow since 1983. Chairperson of the Arklow Town Twinning Committee Maria Fitzmaurice thanked Martine, her committee and the host families for the warm welcome and assured all that the friendships and contacts built up over the years would continue to flourish. She thanked the many people who had contributed so much to the Twinning since its inception. The Cathaoirleach of Arklow Municipal Council then spoke and recalled how the links between Arklow and Châteaudun had progressed and paid tribute to the work of both committees. In December 2022, Arklow MD invited the Mayor Verdier of Châteaudun to visit with members of Châteaudun's Town Twinning Committee on the occasion of the re-opening of the Parade Ground.

Mayor Verdier then congratulated all those who had travelled to celebrate the 40th Anniversary. He thanked those present from the other three European Twin Towns and stated that a strong and united Europe was vital. Later in the cool interior of the historic Châteaudun castle, a charter confirming the continuation of the Town Twinning, was signed by Cathaoirleach Kennedy and Mayor Verdier. The visitors then toured the castle with its Dungeon dating from the 12th century and its beautiful Renaissance staircase. The Castle was built to protect the Beauce region located as it was the only secure look out point over the fertile valley of the Loir, a tributary of the well known Loire. The origin of the town's name comes from the Gaelic word 'Dun' or 'Dunum' meaning stronghold or fort. The visitors attended a rose-planting ceremony in a nearby square called "Place d'Arklow" overlooking the Loir.

Sunday's ceremonies were a wonderful conclusion to a series of visits. Of greta interest was a visit to Châteaudun's Library and Museum with its impressive collection of books donated by the town's notable citizens who were leaders in the political and scientific world. The Arklow delegation viewed pages from a 14th century Bible written in Latin and decorated in a style that recalled images of our own Book of Kells! Students from Nermont Secondary School carried out research on some aspects of Irish life of interest to them and these topics were all on display in the entrance lobby of the Library along with items of Arklow pottery, ceramics and Irish lace.

On arrival in Châteaudun a mural painted by students of the Anatole France Secondary school was unveiled by Cathaoirleach Kennedy and Mayor Verdier. The mural, painted on

one side of a large electricity transformer (substation), features the Bay of Arklow and is part of a project funded by Enedis, the French National Electricity Distributor Board in association with the Châteaudun Twinning Committee. Each side of the transformer will feature a scene from each of the four twin towns. The Arklow mural is the first to have been completed. On the day of departure, the visitors from Arklow were invited to the same school to meet students of the International Class who solved riddles in English about aspects of Irish culture.

The visit to the former military aerodrome in Châteaudun with its display of military aeroplanes in its high security location was of interest to the visitors. This aerodrome has the longest ex-military runway in France. Some members of the Arklow delegation hope that a certain Irish airline might seize the opportunity to develop this outstanding feature!

All the visitors and their hosts were brought on an evening visit to the world famous Cathedral of Chartres 50 km north of Châteaudun. After a tour of the interior of the Cathedral, a delightful meal was arranged in the best 'creperie' in town. A mini train then brought us on a 60-minute tour of the illuminations of Chartres. The Cathedral and other historic buildings were lit up by a light show with various themes. Unforgettable!!

The members of Arklow Town Twinning Association wish to thank Cathaoirleach Pat Kennedy and his wife Helena for attending the 40th Anniversary of the Town Twinning with Châteaudun. They also thank Arklow Municipal Council for its ongoing support.

By Anne O Connell with photos from members of the Arklow and Châteaudun committees.