A BRIEF HISTORY OF SAWBRIDGEWORTH'S TOWN TWINNING LINKS WITH BRY-SUR-MARNE AND OF BRY-SUR-MARNE ITSELF

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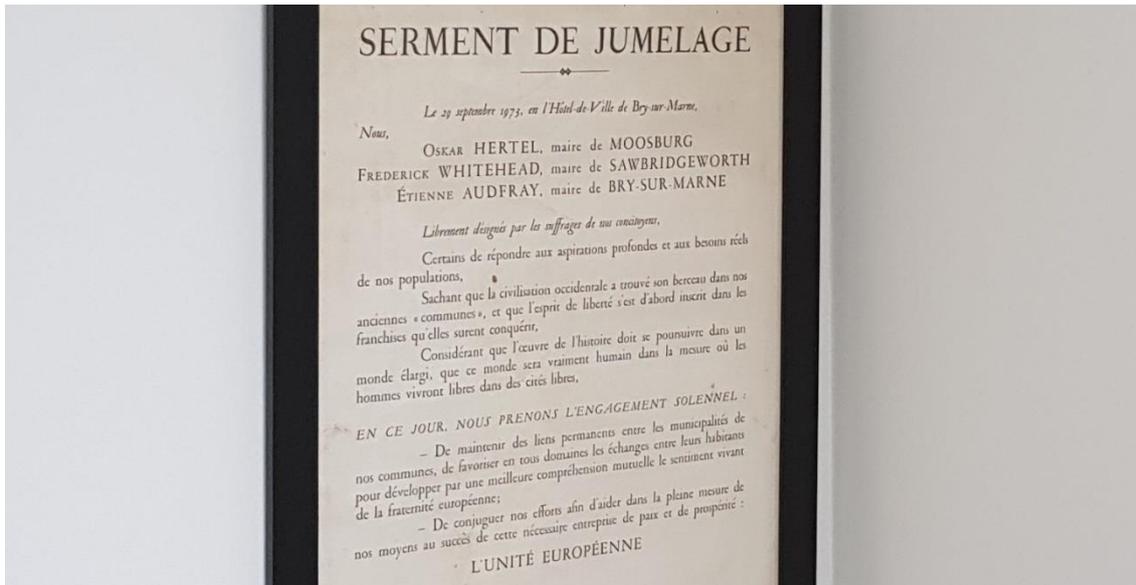**TWINNING**

The Sawbridgeworth/Bry-sur-Marne/Moosburg twinning badge for the 40th anniversary

The town twinning movement (www.twinning.org) started soon after 1945, with the support of mayors and citizens and most twinnings were between towns from countries that had recently been divided by war. The promotion of this new twinning movement was one of the main priorities of the Council of European Municipalities (as it then was) in 1951, and the 1950s saw a huge increase in the number and range of twinnings. In Europe, pairs of towns are called twin towns, but other languages refer to friendship towns or partner towns; in North America and Australasia, the towns are called sister cities. Brother cities was the name of twinned cities in the old Soviet bloc. Twin towns often (but not always) have similar populations, industries and other characteristics. The French word is 'jumelage' (twinning) but the Germans prefer 'Partnerschaft' (partnership).

The Parish News of September 1976 describes the origins of our twinning arrangement with Bry: Cllr. Tony Dodd, the then Chairman of Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council, spoke as a guest at a Bishop's Stortford Town Twinning dinner and a member of the party visiting from France (from their twin town of Villiers-Sur-Marne) passed on our interest in twinning to the mayor of Bry-sur-Marne. (Twinning started for Bishop's Stortford in June 1965 when the Twinning Oath was signed between the three towns in Friedberg.) The two mayors exchanged visits and a public meeting was held, at which attendees supported the idea of twinning. 16 children visited Bry over Easter 1973 and 25 French children came to Sawbridgeworth the same summer. The first official town visit took place in September 1973, when a party of 50 visited Bry and the formal twinning 'oath' was signed by the three mayors on 29 September. An official ceremony took place in Sawbridgeworth in September 1974, when a party of

58 Bryards visited us. The framed 'oath', signed by the mayors of the three towns, hangs in the Town Council. Cllr. Fred Whitehead was mayor of Sawbridgeworth at the time. M. Etienne Audfray signed for Bry and Herr Oscar Hertel for Moosburg. Since then there have been alternating annual exchanges between the two towns, often with the involvement of musicians and teachers from Leventhorpe School. The twinning link with Moosburg was not formalised until March 2018. See the separate article on www.sbwhistory.com. The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that we have had to cancel the planned visit to Bry in 2020 but we hope and expect to rearrange it for September 2021.

.. *The twinning oath signed by the mayors of the three twin towns in 1973*

Town twinning barbecue August 1976 (from Parish News; Photo: Eric Este).

Sawbridgeworth Town Council has been generous in its support, hitherto, especially for incoming visits, but that funding is likely to reduce and the Sawbridgeworth Town Twinning Association (STTA) has to raise its own funds by organising quizzes, wine tasting etc. It has also participated in the May Fayre each year, dispensing wine, cheese and information. There is a big difference between the three twin towns in terms of population and also funding: both Bry and Moosburg have specific people responsible for twinning and visit costs are met from local taxation. We cannot, unfortunately always match the level of hospitality we receive. Nevertheless, what we do provide is always appreciated and we continue to explore closer links through music and our shared European history. Neither twin has the equivalent of our Local History Society, but we have made contact with local historians in both towns.

STTA has two commemorative trees in town, one each for the 20th and 40th anniversaries. One (for the 40th anniversary) is in the Sayesbury Manor courtyard (on the left, below) and the other in Gt St Mary's churchyard.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRY-SUR-MARNE

Bry-Sur-Marne (motto: 'Moult Viel Que Paris', 'Older than Paris') has a population of approximately 17,000 (2019) and is situated some 17 kilometres south-east of Paris, close to Euro Disney and, for that matter, close to the battlefields of WW1 to the east and the WW1 museum in Meaux, which we have visited during a visit to Bry and which is described in a separate article on www.sbwhistory.com. Its neighbouring town of Villiers-Sur-Marne was until recently twinned with Bishop's Stortford.

Bry publishes a wealth of information on its Council, tourism and museum websites (see references below) and not only in French. I am indebted to them and occasionally to Google translate (to support my own knowledge of French) for what follows.

The original village of Bry was formed in the Middle Ages around a harbour and a ferry that the Seigneurs de Bry (Lords of Bry) operated on the site of the present bridge. The history of the town is inextricably linked to this crossing point of the river Marne.

At that time, the village only contained the current church, the seigneurial castle and a few mansions and peasant dwellings along the main street, the Grande Rue, the Rue du Four et du Bas from Avenue du Général Leclerc.

The rest of the territory consisted of fields, woods, vineyards and meadows owned by the Seigneurs of Bry, but also by wealthy Parisian families and religious communities. For centuries, the look of the town hardly changed. At the start of the 19th century, Bry was still a small rural village that lived to the rhythm of agricultural work with a population of barely 300.

The town began to be transformed in 1859, with the development of the Parisian rail network and growing interest in living on the banks of the Marne. That year, the former seigneurial estate of Bry, which at the time extended over two-thirds of the town, was divided into plots and put up for sale by the heirs of the late chatelaine de Bry, Geneviève de Rigny. This operation, combined with the commissioning of the nearby Nogent viaduct (1856), opened a new page in the town's history. It encouraged the development of housing on agricultural land and gave the town a new residential function, which continued to gain in importance over the years.

The Bry museum features an interactive account of the Battle of Bry-Champigny of 1870, which was the largest of the French sorties from a besieged Paris during the Franco–Prussian War. On 30 November, 60,000 French soldiers crossed the Marne to the villages of Champigny and Bry on the east bank. The museum's account notes that street names and monuments commemorate this 'almost forgotten battle which profoundly marked the region'.

In the years that followed, the land was divided up even more, involving both agricultural land that had been preserved until then, but also large plots from old housing estates, which were divided up again. A new population, mainly Parisians, settled in Bry in order to own a country house a short distance from Paris and to enjoy the amenities offered by the hills and banks of the Marne. Between 1856 and 1936, the population increased from 411 to 5,182. The land sale poster below dates from 1897.
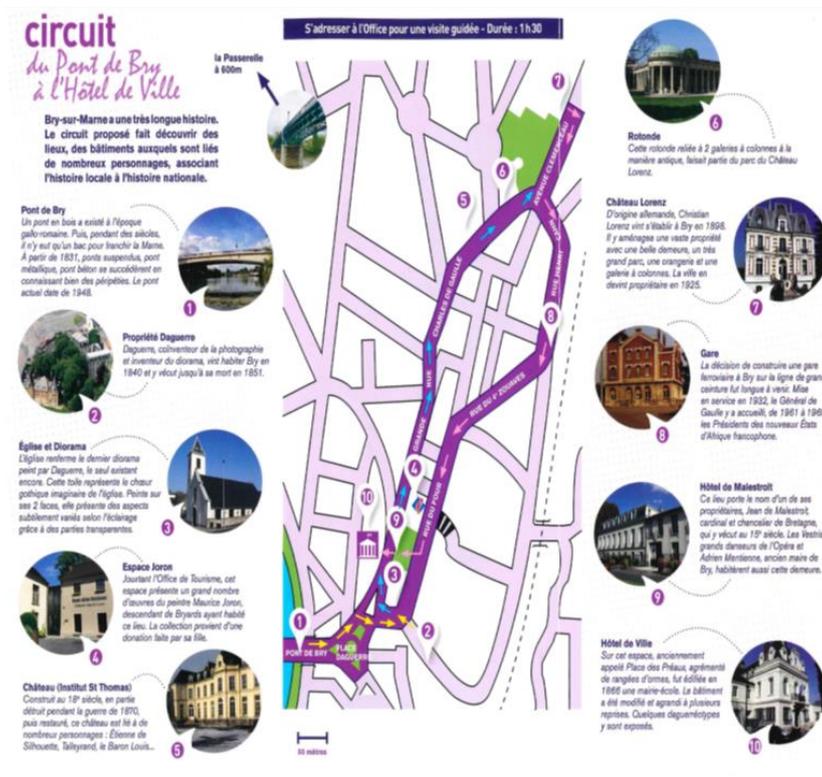
The development of infrastructure and transport supported the growth of the population: construction of the first and second Bry bridges (1831 and 1873), removal of the bridge toll (1884), the start of the tramway (1888 and 1901). The 1920s and 1930s were marked by the opening of the current Bry bridge (1938), and the development of the Boulevard Pasteur (1928).

Despite its development, the town still had a rural character at the beginning of the 1950s, the hillsides and the plateau still being devoted to agriculture. The Bryards who lived through this time remember those lush green hillsides, where people used to pick raspberries, plums or Mirabelle plums. However, these last cultivated areas could not resist the expansion of the Paris region.

The plateau was gradually opened up to urbanization, with the inauguration of the Saint-Camille hospital (1952), the construction of the Cité de la télévision (1972) and housing. From the 1970s, several developments have largely transformed the town's landscape (known as ZAC, zones d'aménagement concertés, urban development zones).

However, the town has managed to develop harmoniously, without losing its soul. Collective housing and suburban housing coexist in a pleasant living environment. Over time, the town has managed to retain its character as a residential suburb.

Heritage of the city https://museedebry.fr/#/homepage-bry/en. The website describes the key historical buildings in Bry.

Villa Daguerre*:* this property dates back to the sixteenth century. When Louis Daguerre*, the inventor of the daguerreotype, arrived in 1840, it consisted of two dwellings, outbuildings and a large park facing the Marne. After Daguerre's death in 1851, his wife sold it to the sisters of the Sainte-Clotilde congregation.

The property was devastated during the fighting of 1870 (the Battle of Bry-Champigny referred to above). The sisters of Sainte-Clotilde contented themselves with rebuilding the dwelling house, but, unfortunately, they had the old outbuildings knocked down. In 1907, the property was bought by Adrien Mentienne, who donated it, a few years later, to the Modern Teaching Society of Léopold Bellan. This institution ran an orphanage and various medical-social establishments until 2010.

*The museum has a wealth of well-presented information on Daguerre and his diorama in the Saint Gervais-Saint Protais church. The daguerreotype was the first commercially successful photographic process (1839-1860) in the history of photography; each daguerreotype is a unique image on a silvered copper plate. See https://museedebry.fr/#/homepage-daguerre/en

Parish Church Saint Gervais-Saint Protais*:* the church dates from the beginning of the 13th century, originally a simple private chapel dependent on the Seigneurs of Bry, who used to be buried there. Ruined during the wars of religion, it was rebuilt in 1610 and consecrated in 1617 in the presence of the bishop of Mâcon, Gaspard Dinet. In 1706, the territory of Bry was removed from the parish territory of Noisy-le-Grand, on which it had depended for centuries, to form an autonomous parish. The church was enlarged in the 18th century and, during renovations in 1842, Daguerre created his diorama in the choir. The diorama represents the choir of a Gothic church painted in 'trompe l'oeil', giving the illusion that the building continues behind the apse. The modulating natural light which entered through a glass opening on top and probably also through the sides, continually changed the aspect of the painting, making it seem as if the candles flickered on and off.

Chateau Lorenz*:* this chateau was built in 1867 for Pierre-Émile Lemoine, a maker of mourning jewellery, and his wife. In 1899, it was bought by a rich German who had

made a fortune in the trade of fine pearls, Christian Lorenz (1853-1919), who became a naturalized Frenchman in 1908. The town became the owner in 1925. It is currently the base for community groups, including the one for senior citizens: 'the Rayon de Soleil Bryard' (Bry's ray of sunshine).

Adrien Mentienne Digital Museum www.museedebry.fr. The main museum collections are presented interactively in French and English:

- Louis Daguerre, the magician of the image https://museedebry.fr/#/homepage-daguerre/en
- The Battle of Bry-Champigny (1870) https://museedebry.fr/#/homepage-1870/en
- History and heritage of Bry-sur-Marne https://museedebry.fr/#/homepage-bry/en

Maurice Joron collection: the museum also houses a collection of the works of this artist, see https://museedebry.fr/#/homepage-joron/en including *Expression of a fighting artist,* a book designed and produced with the support of photographer Mathieu Lombard, which tells the story of Maurice Joron's life during the First World War, with drawings, photographs and correspondence.

Square de Lattre de Tassigny: Christian Lorenz, a wealthy German naturalized Frenchman, bought a bourgeois residence in Bry in 1899 and built around it a large wooded park of four hectares with a sumptuous gallery with neo-classically inspired columns. Falsely suspected of espionage during the First World War, he was denaturalized in 1918 and his property was confiscated by the state. The commune of Bry bought the property in 1925 and renovated part of the old gardens, which became the Square de Lattre de Tassigny.

Bry-sur-Marne Chateau (above): built in the 18th century by the architect François II Franque, at the request of Etienne de Silhouette. In 1803, the Prince of Talleyrand, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Napoleon 1st, became a tenant of the castle for seven years. Baron Louis, Minister of Finance under the Restoration and under Louis-Philippe, bought the property in 1816. On his death in 1837, he bequeathed it to his niece Geneviève de Rigny, who died there in 1857. The castle was partly destroyed by French artillery in 1870. In 1925, after restoration to its primitive aspect of the 18th century, the Congregation of the Ladies of Saint Thomas de Villeneuve bought the property and transformed the building into a private school group.

Hotel de Malestroit (above): in the 15th century, this manor was the residence of Jean de Malestroit, bishop of Nantes and Grand Chancellor of Brittany. After many

reconstructions and restorations, the Hôtel de Malestroit was bought by the town in 1974. It is today the seat of the municipal music school and houses the association "Office Culturel de Bry". At the corner of its facade, are the columns from the Tuileries burnt down in 1870 and the lion fountain whose basin is the 17th century basin of the church's baptismal font. Many twinning events have been held here, especially concerts in the gardens at the rear. Opposite the Hotel de Malestroit is the *Hotel de Ville* (Town Hall), above, the meeting point for town twinning visits.

Bry footbridge (above): in order to make connections between the northern part of Bry and Le Perreux easier, a footbridge was built in 1893-94. Produced by the workshops of Gustave EIFFEL, it is an 80m-long metal structure resting on two river piers. The gangway was raised in 1917 to increase the draft. Reserved for pedestrians, it was transferred to the two towns of Bry and Perreux in 2007.

REFERENCES

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Historical circuit of the city centre: https://www.officetourisme-bry94.fr/images/Brochures/circuit_historique.pdf
Museum: https://museedebry.fr/#/decouverte-ville-de-bry/en
Diorama: https://museedebry.fr/#/video-diorama/en
Bry-sur-Marne tourism office : https://www.officetourisme-bry94.fr/index.php/fr/
Town map: http://www.map-france.com/Bry-sur-Marne-94360/map-Bry-sur-Marne.html