

Views from the Pews - And Nation Shall Speak unto Nation

A simple and hopefully uplifting story to counteract what you may be hearing on the news this week. We in Cambridge are 'twinned' with Le Quesnoy in France thanks largely to a connection with St Andrew's Church whose then Vicar was a Chaplain in WWI. It was he who commissioned the now-famous window commemorating what the people of Le Quesnoy call 'La Liberation' in 1918.

To coincide with Armistice 2023, and to mark the end of Covid's interruption to international travel, a delegation came to us for a long weekend, as part of a longer stay in New Zealand. There was brass band music, a civic commemoration on the morning of Armistice Day, a dinner, and a service in St Andrews.

We broke bread together on the banks of Lake Karapiro, alongside civic dignitaries, representatives from the newly opened Museum in Le Quesnoy, and members of our Friendship Association.

There are something approaching 150 'twins' in New Zealand, quite a lot. The movement started after WW2, and features many relationships with Japanese and Chinese communities, as well as those with more conventional friends. Sadly, some twinning arrangements with Russian towns are in abeyance. The motives for the movement are many and varied – some are quasi-commercial – but underpinning all these relationships is an often subconscious wish to banish stereotyping, and to judge people by our own experiences, rather than by relying on what others want us to think.

Sitting down to eat together overcomes language barriers too – much School Certificate French was unearthed that day as not all our visitors had a good command of English. But for some, shared food was all we had, plus much gesturing!

The dinner had its emotional moments too; our guests were overcome to learn that no fewer than 3 grandchildren of servicemen who had participated in La Liberation were present that evening.

Nor did we forget that it was the 11th November – proof if ever it was needed that the guns will and do fall silent if we have the willpower to make it so.

Make your individual pilgrimages to Le Quesnoy if you can – you can be assured of a warm welcome.

A bientôt Francis Le Bon – until we meet again.