

SHIPDHAM TWINNING ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2026 SHIPDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

It might seem a bit odd to say that Shipdham Twinning Association has two 40th anniversaries, but it is true. Last year in May 2025, we arrived at our twinned village in France to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first visit from Shipdham to Noyant-la-Gravoyère. This year, in about four weeks' time, we will be welcoming our French friends to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their first visit to us. That's how you can have two 40th anniversaries.

Shipdham is now the only village twinning in Norfolk: all the rest are towns or the city of Norwich and the number of active twinning associations sadly is dwindling. In 2024 when we last hosted our French guests, we welcomed a party of 34 people: this year it will be a party of 41, so Shipdham Twinning is bucking the trend. It's difficult to pin down how and why we are thriving, but like many successful organisations it's because we work at it and enjoy the help of those around us. Having said that, no matter how hard we work, we depend on new people coming forward. We run social events where everyone, not just active twinners, are invited. In fact, our next event is this coming Sunday right here in the WI hall at 2pm where we will have French crêpes...all right, pancakes...with teas, coffee and soft drinks and games for all the family. It will also be a chance for those who are hosting this year to meet together, chat about our plans for May and have some fun and all for £5.

Maybe that is the most important factor right there...Fun. It's all worth it because everyone enjoys themselves. It isn't headline-grabbing, but twinning is about the people not the country. It's ordinary folks such as you find in Shipdham and Noyant who initially got together and said, "Let's give this twinning idea a go" and here we are still giving it a go 40 years later. We have a great weekend, going around together, having meals together and sharing our homes. International relations are pretty bleak at the moment, but just not here.

One of our key events in May is a lunch mainly funded by a generous grant from the Parish Council for which we are very grateful. We have invited not only the French and English twinners, but past twinners who are no longer able to join in actively, members of the Parish Council and others in Shipdham who have helped us out over the years, maybe by offering safe parking for the French coach or finding enough cutlery for our High Tea, putting up marquees for an event, giving us archive materials that would otherwise have been lost and a host of other seemingly small ways that show that the Twinning doesn't exist in isolation. Even though we have members from across Norfolk now, we are still the Shipdham Twinning Association and proud to be so.

We always welcome new members: even now it's not too late to offer to host in May. Next year we are off to France. What's not to like?

Stephen Kite

Chairman, Shipdham Twinning Association