

Speech by Klaus Eberhardt, Mayor of Rheinfelden, marking 50 years of twinning with Vale of Glamorgan

Dear Friends of the twinning between Vale of Glamorgan, Fécamp, Mouscron and Rheinfelden,
Dear Guests,

Over the past months the surge of activities by the twinned towns in preparing for our anniversary celebrations are for me clear evidence of the friendships between our communities, our citizens, our cultures and our nations. These 50 years of twinning prove conclusively that we are absolutely serious about friendship, mutual understanding and commitment for enduring peace and liberty in Europe.

On the 12th of May, 1968, the twinning documents linking the towns of Fécamp, Barry and Rheinfelden were signed. The agreement contains this statement:

“To foster international friendship and goodwill, we aim to promote and strengthen the cultural and social interaction between the citizens of our three towns and achieve a better understanding for the cultural legacies of our nations.”

Or, as put more succinctly in 1969 by Rheinfelden's then mayor at the Easter Youth Games in Barry:

“If you cultivate friendship, you're cultivating peace.”

The initiators from local politics, but in particular the clubs, associations and many committed individuals, have succeeded in a most remarkable way to put the spark of life into this friendship. Those visits by the Barry Male Voice Choir in the early years of the partnership are unforgettable; their concert in Rheinfelden's Church of St. Joseph is still talked about even today. The reciprocal visits by the bands from both towns were also occasions on which many young people from the two countries could come together, especially when the Easter sport festivals, events lasting several days, were organised. These are the people who have made the partnership into a living thing, putting their personal stamp on it, and in so doing have made it possible for so many citizens of both towns to get to know and appreciate each other.

I would also like to remind you of that day in 1974, after the reform of local government in Wales, when Brinley Williams, the newly appointed mayor of Vale of

Glamorgan, immediately on his first day in office in his new position announced the continuation of the town twinning.

“I am taking this marvellous opportunity, on the first day of our existence as a new borough, to convey our warm and friendly greetings to you and your citizens, and to assure you that it is our resolute intention to nurture and expand the connections that already exist between us.”

In the following years, this message continued to be put into practice; the reciprocal visits went on as before, and the partnership between the two towns was consolidated by their twinning associations.

After 50 years these partnerships have almost become something we just take for granted. But precisely at this present time, against a backdrop of burgeoning doubts about the concept of Europe, direct personal connections are all the more important, indeed more so than ever before. This applies also to projects that enable a common goal to be achieved or from which people can learn something from each other. Town twinings are a stabilising element in ensuring good relations at national level. They act against the resurgence of nationalist resentments. The free exchange of information and opinions is an essential basis for a free Europe at peace with itself.

One of the many lesser well known pioneers of town twinning once had this to say:

“A united Europe would be the best legacy that we could ever leave to our children.”

It is our task to continue to unite our Europe in peace and liberty, and to do everything in our power to enable our children to work for this ideal in the future. I would therefore like to express my heartfelt thanks to all the citizens and associations who are involved in this worthwhile task.

Klaus Eberhardt | Mayor of Rheinfelden