

## Report of activities of Ballymahon/Landevant Twinning Group 2023

The highlight of our group's year was the visit of our twinning partners from Landevant. The visit took place in the first week of August in order to facilitate visits to the All-Ireland Fleadh in Mullingar. Host families opened their homes and provided transport to and from local events. The object of our itinerary was to highlight what Longford and Ballymahon have to offer in terms of culture, landscape, heritage and local business. The fleadh provided us with a unique opportunity to highlight our world-famous music and dance.

- We welcomed a group of fifteen visitors in the "River Inn" at a reception on Saturday the 5<sup>th</sup> of August.
- The following day, the group enjoyed a walk in the beautiful surroundings of Newcastle Woods. This was followed by coffee provided by a local trader. Each of the host families then brought their visitors for lunch in local establishments.
- On Monday there was an organised visit by bus to the Shed Distillery in Drumbshanbo where we had a guided tour. In the afternoon we visited Arigna Mines.
- Tuesday the visitors explored the town of Ballymahon which included a visit to Bridgeway Family Resource Centre. We had lunch in Cooney's Hotel. After lunch we had a very interesting and informative trip to the Knights of Conquest heritage centre in Granard. We also took in the spectacular view of nine counties from the summit of the Granard Motte and Bailey. The official welcome hosted by Longford County Council and Ballymahon Municipal Authority in Ballymahon library also took place that evening.
- Wednesday was a day to remember at the all-Ireland Fleadh. We treated our guests to a traditional Irish music workshop in Aras an Mhuillinn led by local musician Ger McLynn. Our guests gave a live performance of Breton song and Dance in the market square which was on the official Fleadh programme. Our group was then invited to attend a reception titled "Float the Fleadh" where the visitors discovered the history of the Royal Canal. The rest of the day was spent by our visitors discovering our music and dance on the streets.
- The following day the group travelled at their own expense to visit the sights in Dublin. On the way home they really enjoyed the international concert at the fleadh with acts ranging from as far away as Japan and Argentina.
- Friday Morning our guests were able to try out paddle boarding on the canal at Ballymahon with some of our qualified members instructing. In the afternoon a visit was organised to Corlea Bog Road and we enjoyed the beautiful amenity walk there. This was followed by a tour of St Mel's Cathedral with its impressive interior. There was a farewell barbeque in Skelly's Bar later that evening
- On Saturday morning we said our goodbyes.

Other activities throughout the year outside of meetings to organise the August visit included a very successful table quiz in Cooney's Hotel to fundraise, members taking part in local events such as the Charity fun run in Ballymahon and finally a well-attended Christmas party in the Rustic Inn.

## **A Week of Friendship and Exploration in Ballymahon. (Report for Local Newspapers)**

The wonderful landscapes of County Longford played host to a heartwarming cultural exchange as the Ballymahon Twinning Group welcomed a group of French visitors for a memorable week of camaraderie and exploration.

From the moment the French delegation arrived in Ballymahon, from Landevant in Brittany on Saturday evening, 5th August, the warmth of the Irish welcome was palpable. Host families opened their doors and hearts to the visitors, forming connections that would prove to be the cornerstone of a remarkable week ahead.

Despite the unpredictable summer weather, which has seen more than its fair share of rainfall, the French guests were greeted with remarkably sunny days throughout their stay. This unexpected blessing infused the experience with an extra dose of energy and enthusiasm.

The week's events kicked off with a captivating woodland walk through the enchanting Inny Valley near Newcastle, where the sound of French and Irish voices blended harmoniously amidst the natural beauty. Coffee and conversations flowed at Charlie McMonagle's impromptu coffee shop and art centre, creating great memories.

The Ballymahon Twinning Group thoughtfully curated a diverse program that showcased the essence of County Longford and Irish traditions. The visitors delved into history at the Corlea, Bog Road, gaining insights into ancient ways of life. At Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Mullingar, the French participants wowed the crowd with spirited performances of Brittany's singing and dancing.

A highlight of the itinerary was a tin-whistle workshop led by local music teacher Ger McLynn, where the French group discovered the joy of playing an Irish tune on this traditional instrument. The group also ventured to Arigna Mine for a unique experience in coal mining, and discovered a burgeoning Gin and Whiskey distillery along the way.

A visit to the summit of Granard Motte, climbing 165 meters high, offered panoramic views of the surrounding Irish midlands, leaving an indelible impression. The journey continued to the Nights of Conquest Heritage Centre, where the history of the region was vividly brought to life.

On Tuesday evening, the Ballymahon Municipal District of Longford County Council extended a warm welcome reception at the Ballymahon Community Library. The evening was highlighted by a captivating recital of Irish traditional music, guided by the talents of local musicians under the direction of Geraldine McLynn. Additionally, the event showcased the remarkable talents of **Dasho Kostapento**, a young Ukrainian resident of County Longford.

This extraordinary week of cultural exchange left an enduring mark on all involved, forging connections that bridge borders and cultures. The bonds formed in County Longford will undoubtedly continue to flourish, enriching the lives of both the French visitors and their Irish hosts.