

## Canon Chris Clarke

Bob Hine, Vice Chairman



Christopher George Clarke  
1943 - 2020

Taken at the reception in St. Andrew's to mark Chris's retirement as Chairman of the Society in April 2008.  
Photo by Mark Green.

Canon Chris Clarke died on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020 as we announced in the previous edition of *Bridge* just as we were going to print. His children, Helen and Julian, kindly provided an obituary which was printed in full in the recent Parish Magazine. So I wanted to paint in the details of Chris's involvement with the Society.

Chris's contribution to the Society was significant, particularly because he was elected its first Chairman on its formation in 2004.

It was John Edmonds who prompted the idea of forming the "Sonning & Sonning Eye Society"

to build upon the activities of two groups of residents already meeting in Sonning. At that time Sonning Parish Council (SPC) was not functioning as well as some wished and was finding it difficult to agree in particular on the question of the Third River Crossing as well as various aspects of planning applications. Although Chris was pleased to say that this problem was eventually resolved, at that time it was a great concern to many of us.

One group of the residents consisted mainly of people living on the north side of Thames Street and in Sonning Eye. They were concerned about a proposal being promoted by some, including South Oxfordshire District Councillors, that if there was to be another Thames Crossing (although they were not sure they wanted one) it should run from Charvil to the north east of Sonning. The group, brought together by Alvin Rakoff and Sally Hughes, were convinced that another Thames Crossing was needed but that it should be to the west of Sonning, as an extension of the A329M/A3290.

The second group of residents were concerned about certain planning cases, notably in the Sonning Conservation Area. They considered it important for new developments to be in character with their surroundings. This group came together at John Edmond's initiative and worked to influence SPC, Wokingham Borough Council and sometimes individual developers.

Chris was aware of the existence of the groups and in sympathy with their aims but was not a member of either. By early 2004 everyone recognised that, in order to increase their influence, they needed a more formal structure.

John Edmonds came up with the idea of forming a Civic Society. He talked to District Councillors and others, particularly members of the Hurst Society which had been active in their area for some 30 years. John and Alvin believed that a Society built on the strengths of these informal groups needed a Chairman who was not a member of either. Chris was not sure how his name came up but he does remember John Edmonds calling at the Vicarage and not leaving until agreeing to his request!

Chris always said others must judge how successful we have been in meeting our aims. For his part Chris was delighted at some of the things we were able to influence – and how much he learned about the two villages thanks to the Education Panel which is an asset not all Civic Societies enjoy.

Chris stepped down in April 2008 when he retired from 40 years in the Ministry and he and his wife Christine moved from Sonning to Upton Snodsbury.

Bridge is the newsletter of the  
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

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# The Sonning Twinning Association

## Twinned with Ligugé, 1995



Lesley Green, Chairman

Travelling into Sonning from a number of directions you cannot help but notice the signs that officially record the close link existing between the communities of Ligugé and Sonning which was formally established in 1995. Ligugé was already twinned with a German village and knew the benefits of such a link so when, in 1992, the Mayor's niece was visiting England she had a special task from her uncle to find a suitable village with which to twin. On a visit to Reading she discovered Sonning which she considered to be a delightful and compatible village!



Following this, the Mayor wrote to Sonning Parish Council and, after several exploratory exchange visits and meetings, both Sonning Parish Council and the Conseil Municipal in Ligugé agreed to formally twin. In 1995 a charter was signed in both Sonning (September) and Ligugé (November). Part of the initial process involved those in Sonning interested in taking the twinning idea forward establishing a 'working party' and from this the Sonning Twinning Association was established with Mary Chapman as the first chairman. Some members of this original group are still part of our current committee.

The charter, which hangs in the Pearson Hall states:

'We will encourage our citizens to foster friendship and mutual understanding with the people of Ligugé, believing in the principles of international peace and accord. We especially wish to promote cultural exchange between our two schools and between the families of our two communities. We hope that contacts between our young people will develop lifelong friendships and strengthen the bonds between us. We also seek to forge sporting, social, cultural and professional links between our citizens of all ages.'

It is these words (which are also found in our constitution) that continue to direct the work and activities of our association as we strive to live out the spirit of the charter.

My initial involvement with the association was as head of Sonning Primary School. It was important to continue the excellent work of my predecessor, Rosemary Bartlett, who had helped to establish the school exchange visits. Over past years it was a pleasure to continue with this and for me to witness, first hand,

the spirit of twinning in evidence as both groups of children got to know each other, attended lessons at each other's school, learnt more about family life whilst staying with their host family and hopefully increased their French or English vocabulary! There was also time to explore the local area including a visit to the Futuroscope theme park near Poitiers. This was often the highlight for the Sonning children as well as the fact that there was no school on a Wednesday afternoon in France! Sadly, in more recent times, these exchanges have diminished due to difficulties on both sides finding host families as well as tighter restrictions about exchange visits. When French teaching in primary schools was given a raised profile my pupils also enjoyed setting up a French Café serving croissants, confiture (jam) and hot chocolate either to visitors in Beech Lodge or their peers in the school hall.

The association also offers a bursary (usually annually) of £250 to enable a young person to visit Ligugé to further the importance of the links between the youth and young people of our two communities. The winner stays with a Ligugé family with younger winners usually accompanied by a parent. Applications are open to anyone in Sonning under 18. Winners from both Sonning Primary and the Bluecoat School have thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity with contact often continuing long after their visit. Although not officially



organised by the association it has been good to see the sporting links that have developed between Bluecoat School and local sports teams in the Poitiers area. The association has provided support when needed such as hosting visiting coaches and staff.

Our events always try to bring a flavour of France to Sonning! The Beaujolais Nouveau suppers and wine tasting events are always popular especially when our special guest has been a local wine grower from Ligugé! In the past we have celebrated Bastille Day, held quizzes, a cookery weekend, supper and film nights and more recently a Summer BBQ hosted by one of our committee members. Very successful French conversation classes were also run for a number of years in

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