

Agen trip

20/06/2019-24/06/2019

On 20th June 2019 the Unloved Heritage Llanelli group visited Agen, France. There were 8 young people in attendance along with youth workers Karen Morris and Tim Bowen. DAT's Sarah Rees, Town Councils Delyth Jones and The Llanelli Twinning Association's Paolo Piana. Agen, France is twinned with Llanelli, the purpose of the visit is to celebrate the 30th anniversary of twinning, to find out how the two are similar and different, to compare Llanelli's industrial part to Agen's and to find out what life is like as a young person growing up in France.

The majority of the young people on the trip had never been abroad before so had to apply for a passport beforehand. A lot of time was spent in a weekly after school club ensuring all of the young people were prepared for all aspects of the journey including what to expect at the airport and how to speak basic French.

Day 1

The group met at Bwlch in Llanelli at 5am, there were a lot of blurry eyes amongst the young people who were not impressed by having to be up so early. They were also really excited. Our mini bus arrived on time and after lots of hugs with parents we were on our way. The journey to Bristol airport was smooth with the young people going straight back to sleep. As soon as they noticed the airport signs they started to get more and more excited. We were dropped off at departures and stopped for a photo outside the airport. We had already checked in online so after Sarah and Paolo dropped off their full-size cases, we were off to get through security. All of our young people were wearing sunflower lanyards, which are given to young people with unseen disabilities. We spent time going through hand luggage before getting to security, where we found despite repeated reminders that the young people had brought items not suitable for hand luggage (like razors) or had brought too much liquids. After dealing with this we were ushered as a group to a que for disabilities. Each young person had to stay with their key adult who had possession of their passport and boarding pass. Security was challenging as there were still items the young people had not told us about and we were not prepared. Stress levels were high especially in the young people who had not flown before. After some time, the entire group was through security and we headed for a quiet spot in the café. We boarded the plane ahead of the passengers with the lanyards and took our seats. Some of the young people were nervous about flying but overall the experience was enjoyed. An incredibly smooth take off, flight and landing contributed to this. On the other side security was slow but our young people took it all in their stride and we were collecting luggage and through to arrivals in no time. Our French friends greeted us with flags and banners which was lovely, they then drove us to our hotel in the centre of Agen. The trip was a little longer than expected and the young people were starting to get a bit agitated after a long day of travelling. Check in at Apart City was fast, we assigned all the young people rooms and gave them some quiet time to unwind.

Later on, in the evening we walked through Agen to a restaurant near the train station. The young people were wide eyed taking everything in and enjoying their different surroundings. The evening meal was hosted by the Agen Twinning Committee. The young people had been given a choice of set menu decided before their arrival, however the food was not what they expected. Steak was served incredibly rare – each young person tried all food with no hesitation although not all liked it. We presented our hosts with some gifts to thank them for entertaining us. However, as the French like to sit and chat for a long time after eating our young people started to become boisterous, especially since they were also tired. We decided to take them back to the hotel for some sleep,

they did however discover the vending machine on the way up to their rooms and many Euros were spent investigating French snacks and sweets.

Day 2

After an early wake up call for the young people we headed out to find some breakfast at a local bakery, Sarah was paying all in one go for meals as this was the easiest option. Young people were given a choice of snack and drink, this was difficult to manage at first as some young people were taking too long to decide however as the trip went on, they managed to be more decisive.

We spent time visiting the local school Paul Dangla College during the morning. We met with an English teacher who guided us around and we met with pupils and learnt about how the school day differed in France. There were certainly some things that the young people would like to see introduced in Coedcae School at home.

Whilst the weather was warm today it was raining quite heavily in the morning and we all got a little wet. This was the only day that rain was forecast during our stay

After our visit to Paul Dangla College we headed straight for a reception at Agen museum hosted by the deputy mayor. We exchanged gifts and our young people were given a little bag with a T-Shirt, cap and a pack of prunes. The young people were polite and friendly and happy to chat despite the language barrier. The event was also photographed by the local paper le Petit Bleu (<https://www.petitbleu.fr/2019/06/23/30-ans-damitie-entre-agen-et-llanelli,8272887.php>) We did initially think that the reception included a buffet however this was not the case, so we headed to Radio City for some burgers afterwards.

After a brief break at the hotel our hosts picked us up in the mini bus and took us to visit the SUA rugby stadium, we were given a guided tour of the stadium including all of the training rooms, changing rooms and all other behind the scenes places. This was of particular interest to one of our young people who is currently in training with a view to joining the Scarlets rugby team. This was a turning point for him, he became instantly chattier after the visit and more comfortable with all the adults in the group (he has previously struggled with self-confidence issues)

After a quick costume change back at the hotel, we headed out into the annual music festival - fête de la musique. This was an amazing evening with the young people getting involved in the dancing groups and generally enjoying the lovely relaxed atmosphere. After a busy evening listening to music, eating candy floss and dancing we went back to the hotel for some much-needed sleep.

Day 3

Another early start for the young people who were starting to feel a little tired. They had been up during the night shopping at the vending machine.

We headed out for some breakfast and some more croissants and pan-au-chocolates along with freshly squeezed orange juice, they really enjoyed eating outside.

During the morning we shopped at the local indoor market to pick up lunch. Our young people were given Euros and told what food to buy and they headed out to buy food for all 13 of us. We then took the food to a local park where we used Skype to connect to Llanelli as part of the Great Get Together event. The young people held up Welsh and French flags and we spoke to MP Nia Griffith and Lee Waters who were attending the event in Llanelli Town centre. After our lunch we embarked on a long-guided tour of Agen with one of our hosts Jean-Pierre Hilaire. The Guided tour included a

return visit to the museum to learn more about the history of the town and a visit to Théâtre Ducourneau where the young people stood on the stage looking out at the empty seats in the audience.

We walked around Place des Laitiers (the commercial heart of the city in the Middle Ages) Place de la Mairie (town hall square and the seat of political power for centuries) The Gravier (footbridge, quay on the Garonne bank and reflected on a time when the economy of Agen depended on the Garonne) Canal bridge (and discussed the history of commercial venture and construction)

We stopped for an ice-cream and refreshments at Café vélo (A former water tower and an example of successful regeneration) We then continued to walk along the canal to the railway footbridge and then onto the train station (where we discussed the arrival of the railway and how it impacted the economy of the city with Agen turned its back on the river Garonne)

Finally, we visited the local tourist information office and tried some prunes and then took in a panoramic view of the city from the top of the car park

Throughout the day the young people took it in turns to use cameras to photograph and record Unloved Heritage and other significant aspects of the trip. We now have thousands of photos to document.

The young people (and adults) were exhausted having spent so long outside in the sun and walking so far (over 25000 steps) After some downtime at the hotel we headed out for an informal evening meal at a local restaurant, all of the young people enjoyed a steak and some stopped for an ice-cream on the way home before heading to bed at around 11pm.

Day 4

We left the young people sleep a little later this morning as they were struggling with tiredness. We visited our local bakery again for breakfast and then headed to the outdoor farmers market to purchase our lunch. The farmers market was vibrant and had lots of fantastic smells. The young people were given an amount of money and a food to buy and then headed out to buy the food themselves. Their attitude to this task was amazingly positive, despite the language barrier, they were happy and comfortable approaching vendors to purchase food. They chatted to those who could speak English confidently about the project and why they were in Agen.

We ate the food on the grass by the market, one young person tried a peach for the first time (and liked it). Another ate the neck of a cooked chicken. The food was amazingly fresh, and they noted how different it was to back home. They went off to play and one young person got stuck in a tree, they all got involved helping to get her down and there were lots of giggles.

The temperature today was in the mid 30's – which was difficult for some of the young people, they tried to find shade at every opportunity.

During the afternoon our hosts took us on an excursion to Barbaste, a journey on the mini bus took us to see some amazing sites including castles. It was extremely hot, and the young people were finding it difficult and this resulted in some bickering. This however stopped immediately and the whole mood changed when we stopped in a spectacular church in Nerac. The sombre atmosphere and contrasting cool temperature gave the young people the chance to reflect with some finding their emotions too much. Some lit a candle, and some signed a prayer book. The change in mood

was quite profound. We headed back to the bus shortly afterward and back to the hotel for an hour of quiet time before heading out to food. However, during that time some of the girls had a disagreement and time was spent sorting it out before going to food a little later than planned.

As this was our last night, we met up with our hosts again at a local burger restaurant. The young people enjoyed their time here (especially using the self-service carbonated drink machine). One of the boys did fall asleep here as tiredness was taking over after such a packed schedule. We made sure when we arrived back at the hotel that everyone was aware of our earlier start the next day to head home.

We also spent some time recording thoughts from the young people back at the hotel which will be edited into a video later on.

Day 5

An earlier start on the last day as it was home time. Extra time was spent ensuring that rooms were inspected. We headed to our favourite bakery for breakfast and the mood was a bit lower than previous mornings as the young people didn't want to go home.

We stopped at a newsagent on the way back to the hotel so that the young people could buy postcards and fridge magnets, unfortunately we had not really had any time to shop so most of the young people had not had the opportunity to spend their money.

Our hosts picked us up for the last time and drove us back to the airport. We said our goodbyes and headed into departures. The young people were a little more prepared this time and getting through security was less problematic (although one young person's bag was searched after she forgot to take liquids out of her bag) A last minute lunch at the airport before the young people stocked up on vending machine sweets before boarding the flight. Our group was seated altogether on the way home making managing seats a little easier. The flight was once again very smooth and as it isn't a long flight no one had the chance to get bored. Security was quite straightforward on the other side apart from one of our young people having to go through non-UK security as she is Lithuanian, she was thrilled to meet another Lithuanian worker whilst going through security.

We arrived back at Bwlch at around 5pm with all parents waiting and keen to see their children. After lots of hugs each young person headed off home after a fantastic time in Agen which we hope they will never forget.

Outcomes of the visit

This was the first time Dyfed Archaeological Trust has worked abroad and it was certainly beneficial to us as a trust. A number of different procedures had to be put in place to make the trip happen however now we feel we would be more prepared in future. Our partnership working has definitely improved as a direct result of working together so closely, during the trip we also discussed future working and how we could make this possible.

As a Trust our knowledge of working with young people has also increased and we are able to meet the needs of the young people involved in the Unloved Heritage project in a better way.

In terms of practical skills, the young people learned some French, gained self-confidence, tried a number of new things, learnt how to use a variety of camera equipment including Go-Pros. Our young people now have a greater understanding of the relationship between Llanelli and Agen and have discussed and debated what they believe is Unloved Heritage both in Llanelli and Agen.

Following the visit, a group from the Agen Twinning committee visited Llanelli and our group greeted them and took part in a number of events showing the visitors around their town, they were excellent hosts.

A video of the trip is currently being made and will be used at community events to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the twinning.

















