

Tribute to Martyn Allies

Tribute to Martyn Allies: Service of Celebration, St Mary's Minster Church, Saturday 13 March 2010

I've been asked to talk about Martyn particularly in connection with his service to the Reading Düsseldorf Association, of which I am his successor as Chairman, and his involvement in the community in Reading.

By the time Martyn went to Rheindahlen near Düsseldorf as his final RAF posting, he had had a home in Caversham for several years, although mostly being stationed in far-flung corners of the globe. There can seldom have been a more fortunate and productive posting. In 1972 we celebrated the 25th anniversary of our international links, originated by Phoebe Cusden in 1947, and Martyn became involved in the events in Düsseldorf.

Within a year or two he was getting seriously active in the Reading Düsseldorf Association. It's highly uncharacteristic that the first mention I can find of him in our records is his apology for absence from a committee meeting in April 1974. He very rarely missed meetings. But he had a good excuse – he didn't retire from the RAF and come back from Düsseldorf until a year after.

By 1977 we were celebrating thirty years of friendship, and Martyn was leading the celebrations. He became Chairman that year, and so began a period in which he transformed the Association. The friendship began with an exchange of young people, and it had continued to focus on these annual visits. Martyn recognised that with easier foreign travel, and the growth of school exchange trips, our own exchange would no longer be a source of strength or a reason to continue – although it carried on for another fifteen years. He was the driving force behind a change of direction. We started to encourage every organisation Martyn could think of or make contact with to make a connection with a partner in Düsseldorf. And of course, Martyn soon knew a great many organisations. There were churches and choirs, orchestras and drama groups, schools, political parties, businesses, public services, and clubs for every sport you can imagine.

This growth of new links to Düsseldorf must have taken an immense amount of work. It's not always easy in the days of the internet and cheap international phone calls. It must have been far harder when they had to rely on letters. But Martyn was never afraid of hard work, and seldom discouraged by difficulties. He was sometimes a little devious; allegedly, he would select a pair of organisations that he thought ought to match up, and get each of them to think that the other was already keen to do so. By the time they discovered the deception, if they ever did, they were generally too grateful to Martyn to be worried about it.

Martyn also knew, perhaps from his years of leadership in the RAF, just how to multiply the effectiveness of his work. He was an outstanding motivator, leader and delegator. He could persuade you that you were exactly the right person to do a job, and that you were burning with the desire to do it. He would check up that you actually were doing it, and offer advice and suggestions about how. And somehow he did all this so tactfully and gently that his support was welcome. Maybe that was because he was so fully committed to the task in hand.

I was one of his victims. He asked me to take over as Secretary in 1992, and I'm still involved. But that's getting slightly ahead of the story.

I got to know Martyn when I became a councillor in 1984, and heard about the Düsseldorf connection. He persuaded me to learn some German and take part in the churches' exchange with

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Düsseldorf, and we welcomed some guests in 1990. The next year it was our turn to visit them, and Martyn had inspired sufficient keenness that I decided to do so even though the trip was a week after I became Mayor. He was on the trip as well.

A few months later, the Council decided that it was time to choose some more Freemen of the Borough. On that occasion, each of the main parties selected someone. Two of them put forward eminent Councillors who had served for many years, including being Mayor. The Liberal Democrats proposed Martyn. As Mayor, it was my duty to move formally the appointment of each of the Freemen. Sadly, I can't find any notes of what I said, but I distinctly remember knowing that Martyn's service to the community fully merited that high honour.

My main work with Martyn has always been with the Reading Düsseldorf Association, but I should at least mention some of his other activities. He stood for the Council several times, although he was never elected. He was not a very partisan person, but certainly keen to serve his community. He did so particularly by setting up and running the Caversham Heights Society and by running the Reading Arts Festival, which was one of his main activities when he had just retired from the RAF. Others will also talk of his commitment to the Methodist Church and the work he did there in serving his neighbours. I'll only say that he could generally be relied on to play an active part in the ecumenical activities of Churches Together in Caversham and Reading. In the Reading Düsseldorf Association we thought we owned Martyn, but we didn't. He had his finger in many other pies, and very effectively too.

I went to Düsseldorf twice more during my year as Mayor, and both times Martyn came along. In September 1991 we were invited to an exhibition at the City Museum. In May 1992, Martyn was the main guest, because he went to receive the Verdienstorden, a decoration from the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia, from the Land Prime Minister Johannes Rau, who was later president of Germany. It was on that occasion that I prepared a short speech in German including the words: "Martyn, wir sind sehr stolz auf dir" – Martyn, we are very proud of you. Nothing since has changed my mind. He continued as our Chairman until 1998, and after that remained a very active member of the Committee, full of ideas and suggestions, and following them up tenaciously. Last November, we rather belatedly made Martyn the Honorary Vice-President of the Reading Düsseldorf Association, and I'm very glad that we could do so.

We should not define Martyn just by his work. He was a very pleasant man, thoughtful in every sense of the word, with a wide range of interests, and a really good friend whom I miss a lot.

Martyn brought immense energy and commitment to all he did. I have often hoped that by the time I reached his age I might be as energetic as he was. That's a very high standard to reach, and he has set us all an example to follow and a challenge to strive for.

Ich sage es noch einmal: Martyn, wir sind sehr stolz auf dir.