

COVENTRY ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2024



Cover Photo

Memorial Plaque at Tulle, Nouvelle-Aquitaine

PASSER-BY

On the evening of June 9th 1944, 99 youths were shamefully buried in this ever hallowed plot - no more than a common landfill at that time. They had been brutally hanged by SS soldiers from the Das Reich Division, following the orders of General Lamerding. The ashes of some 101 deported companions who had never returned from the death camps were reverently laid next to them.

Meditate
Remember

2024 was the year in which CAIF began an involvement with the Cities of Remembrance Network, an organization initiated by the Greater Dunkirk Council in 2015 to bring together people from cities that, after having seen the chaos of war, were able to rise above the destruction and were reconstructed, in terms of both the built environment and their civic society.

CAIF took part in the 5th Symposium of the network which was held in Limoges in June 2024 and our representatives were also given special status as members of the invited foreign delegations at the commemorations at Oradour-Sur-Glane, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, 80 years since the population of the martyred village was massacred during World War Two.

The Cities of Remembrance representatives come together to collectively address questions regarding how we remember, how we promote peace and, in particular, how young people can be encouraged to participate in the promotion of peace through the creation of artistic projects and international exchanges.

More than ever, the global context demonstrates the need to promote the values of peace and friendship through the maintenance of processes of remembrance and resistance and through the development of resilience and solidarity. This is the common ground on which the network comes together.

The network also acknowledges that wars continue to rage in the world at large - such as the war in Ukraine, the conflicts in the Middle East and the struggles for liberation from authoritarianism and extremism in Africa, the Americas and Asia - and that work for peace is a never-ending challenge.

JANUARY

The year began with a breakfast at 'The Cosy Club', which was started as a regular monthly event in an effort to bring together different groups - CAIF, the Coventry German Circle and the Lord Mayor's Peace Committee - and anyone else with a common interest in international friendship.



On 17 January, the opening ceremony took place for George Wagstaffe's new sculpture in Peace Square. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress attended the Ceremony.



On 27 January CAIF's Assistant Secretary attended Holocaust Memorial Day, organized by Coventry City Council and held at the Belgrade Theatre.



FEBRUARY

A small group of CAIF members visited Dresden to attend the anniversary of the bombing of the city in 1945. They took part in the “Human Chain”, an annual event in which people hold hands to encircle the area around the Frauenkirche to prevent those with extreme views from appropriating the remembrance.

Members of the group spent a few days reconnecting with friends and also met with the British Ambassador to Germany.



A presentation was made in St Mary's Guildhall by a group of young people about the life of a former American slave who used his hard-won freedom and skills as a talented orator to tour Britain and Ireland to raise funds and support for the abolition movement. The project reached out to young people of African origin, and invited them to research, write and perform a script for an audio track telling the story of Frederick Douglass.

The project was designed and run by House of Emanuel I&I C.I.C.

Emanuel is a member of CAIF.



Permanent access to Frederick Douglass' life can be made through the “Digital Douglass” online platform.

On 29 February an online meeting was held with Dunkirk to discuss the “Olympic Flame” project which would be held in the Nord department of France in July.

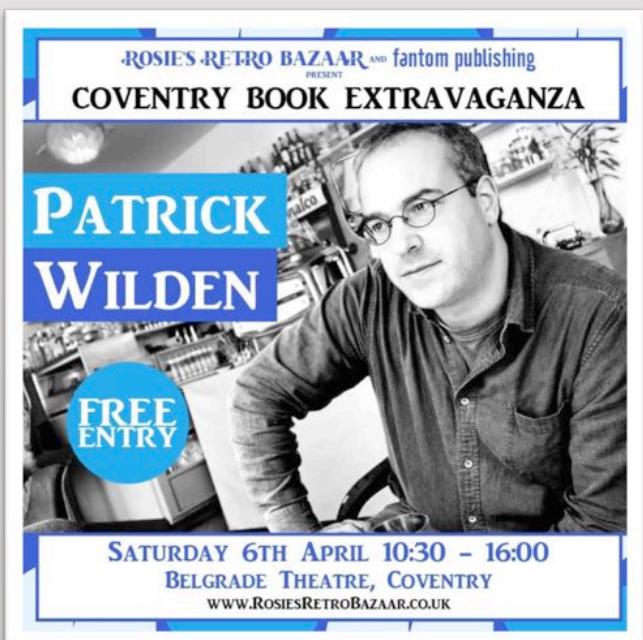
MARCH

8 March - International Women's Day

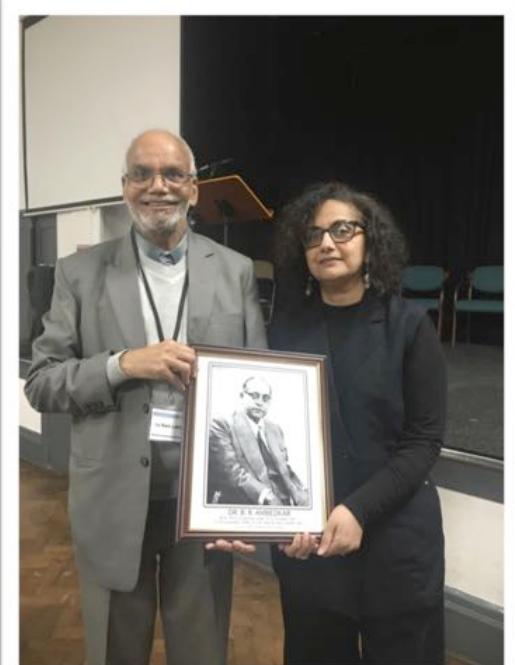
CAIF member,
Pru (Lady
Godiva) with
some of her
Godiva Sisters
celebrating
International
Women's Day
2024



APRIL



Patrick Wilden came to Coventry from Dresden as part of the Coventry-Dresden Writers' Exchange.



14 April is Equality Day - Nirmal Puwar was the Guest Speaker and the Equality Award 2024 was given to the Carers' Trust. With CAIF Chair, Cllr. Ram Lakha, OBE

MAY

CAIF's AGM was held on 16 May with guest speaker Coventry poet Navkiran Mann, who read some of her works. CAIF supported her in her visit to Dresden.



CAIF's friend from Dresden, Sylvia Kumichel, made a visit to Coventry.

From 26 May – 2 June, a small group of CAIF members went to the friendship town of Meschede, Germany, where they stayed with hosts and enjoyed a programme of sightseeing and social events in the company of friends from Vannes in Brittany.



JUNE/Oradour-Sur-Glane 80th Commemoration

On 10 June CAIF's Secretary and Assistant Secretary attended a commemoration ceremony to mark the 80th anniversary of the massacre at Oradour-Sur-Glane, on the same date in 1944, when the "Das Reich" Waffen SS killed 643 civilians - men, women and children - in cold blood and completely destroyed the village. Immediately following the massacre General Charles De Gaulle of France decreed that the village be left as it was following this tragic event - a ruined village with all traces of what had happened there preserved in perpetuity as a permanent historic memorial.

"We arrived in the village before 8:00am and waited outside the Town Hall as many military veterans, bedecked in their battle honours, assembled before the parade – including villagers and many relatives of the victims of the massacre set off northwards to the war memorial and then back down the hill towards the "Monument Aux Morts", the memorial to the martyrs".



Mayor of Oradour-Sur-Glane, Philippe Lacroix leads the Parade



Veterans and villagers walk together to the entrance to the ruined village

"From there, we had to make a difficult trek to the Esplanade within the ruined village and, after much effort, reached our seats amongst the foreign delegations. There then followed a series of presentations – wreath laying by various organisations from all over France and, notably, a rendition of John Lennon's "Imagine" by a choir of local school children".



JUNE/Oradour-Sur-Glane 80th Commemoration

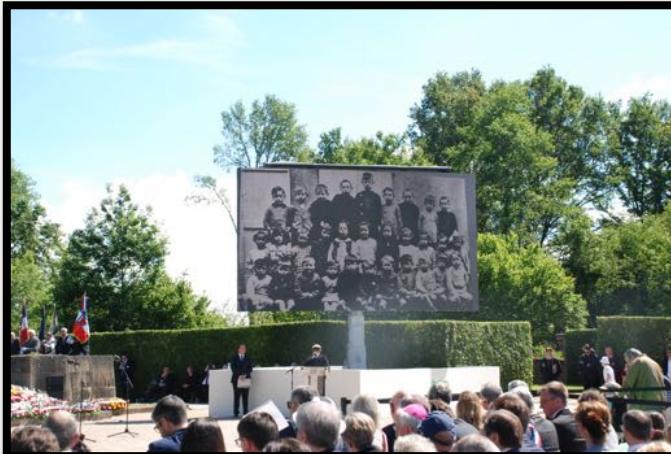


CAIF's Secretary making the long trek from the Town Hall to the Esplanade, an opportunity not to be missed - to take part in such a memorable event, a once-in-a-lifetime and unforgettable experience.



“Over a period of 150 minutes, as the proceedings on the Esplanade took place, we sat with an almost unbearable sun beating down - without any head protection, though with plenty of water bottles provided – while the two Presidents - of France and Germany - President Emmanuel Macron and Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, made their way slowly through the ruins of the village”.

JUNE/Oradour-Sur-Glane 80th Commemoration



While the slow presidential procession through the village was taking place the names of each of the 643 martyrs were read out by schoolchildren.



Notably, the two Presidents displayed a great empathy towards each other which was further enhanced by their encounter with Agathe Hébras, the grand-daughter of Robert Hébras, the last survivor of the massacre who died in March 2023, and Karin Eideloth, the grand-daughter of Adolph Heinrich, one of the members of Das Reich who had taken part in the killings in June 1944.

This act of reconciliation was reflected, in particular, in Steinmeier's address from the podium in which he spoke about the need to –

“... feel the authority of suffering, the victims and profound sorrow. Here, big words become small - they must stand up to the speechlessness that goes along with great suffering”.

President Steinmeier is the first German Federal President to participate in a commemoration ceremony to mark the massacre.

JUNE/Oradour-Sur-Glane 80th Commemoration

President Steinmeier went on to say that –

"It is courageous people who allowed us, as Germans, to be here today. And they are courageous to have initiated a special reconciliation. Reconciliation took place between actual people in day-to-day encounters: It is a reconciliation that never forgets. But it does not only look back to the past. It lives in a new present and also hopes for a better future. For us, Germans and the French, the hope for a better future became a reality: the reality of Franco-German friendship". With this statement he emphasised the importance of a united and peaceful Europe: "Let us never forget the damage nationalism and hatred caused in Europe.

Let us never forget the miracle of reconciliation that the European Union has achieved!

Let us protect our united Europe!"



After the two addresses the Presidents laid their own wreaths and then inspected the guard of honour, which was being provided by the decorated veterans.

JUNE/Oradour-Sur-Glane 80th Commemoration

“When the ceremonies were complete we made the difficult walk back to a reception followed by three further acts of commemoration led by Oradour-Sur-Glane’s mayor, Philippe Lacroix, in particular at the local school where there was singing by young children and their teachers and a commemorative reading by a poet from Limoges, Gauvain Sers”.



In the evening the foreign delegates were invited into the Mayor’s Parlour where a series of presentations were made by Philippe Lacroix and Benoît Sadry, the President of the National Association of Families of Martyrs. CAIF’s Secretary was presented with two gifts of Limoges Porcelain – one for Coventry’s Lord Mayor and one for CAIF. Two books were inscribed with dedications from CAIF and the day ended with a dinner hosted by the Mayor of Oradour-Sur-Glane. The proceedings ended at 21:30 – the end of a very long and unforgettable 13 hours of commemoration and ceremony.

JUNE/Limoges Symposium

On the following day, 11 June, CAIF's Secretary and Assistant Secretary attended the 5th Symposium of the Cities of Remembrance network which took place at the Maison de la Région. Delegates from many parts of Europe assembled to hear addresses from the podium from three roundtables.

- 1: "Passing on memory: why and how should we remember".
- 2: "Places of remembrance in Europe: assessment and prospects"
- 3: "Remembrance tourism in the digital age: from pilgrimage to consumerism?"

CAIF's Assistant Secretary took part in Roundtable 2 alongside a Member of Parliament for the First Constituency of Bas-Rhin, a Member of the Presidency of Associations of the National Liberation Movement of Slovenia, and the Head of the Office of Cultural Affairs, Monuments, Protection and Museums in Rostock.

CAIF's presentation was concerned with what happened in Coventry in November 1940 and the post-war reconstruction with 3 key messages:

- 1: Coventry overcame the negative memories of war and destruction by creating a mission of Peace and Reconciliation.
- 2: Coventry offered a pathway of hope for a better future as the pioneer of the post-war Twinning movement, bringing people together to overcome intolerance, prejudice, insularity and fear of the 'other'.
- 3: We must continue to transmit the memories of the past to counter the problem of "forgetting" and encourage young people to create their own memories of peace and international friendship.



CAIF's closing statement was very well received –

"Citizen-to-Citizen diplomacy must be the way towards Peace and we advocate for a world in which mutual understanding and international friendship are the norm between peoples and their societies.

We would hope that these are values which will be represented by our leaders."

JULY



Through CAIF's liaison, pupils from King Henry VIII School, Coventry (a group member of CAIF) took part in the Youth Games as part of the "Olympic Flame" Project in Dunkirk where they witnessed the Olympic Torch passing through on its way to the Games in Paris.

The Lord Mayor's Peace Committee's "Children's Peace Conference" in Coventry Cathedral was held on 10 July.

The pupils presented their work on the theme of Peace. CAIF was able to make important links for future projects.



Cardinal Newman, a UNESCO School, hosted a group from the city of Boading in China. A reception was held in the Council House on 12 June.

CAIF members enjoyed a lunch together at Bella Italia.



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JULY cont'd/-



John Yeadon was given a FAMA Award by the City of Dresden for his tireless work for the Coventry-Dresden Arts Exchange



Certificates of Appreciation from CAIF were presented to Rainer Barczaitis (left), who has promoted the friendship links between Coventry and Dresden over many years; and to Karin Mitzscherlich, who has recently retired from the Office of International Relations in Dresden, where she has been instrumental in facilitating the exchanges between Coventry and Dresden.

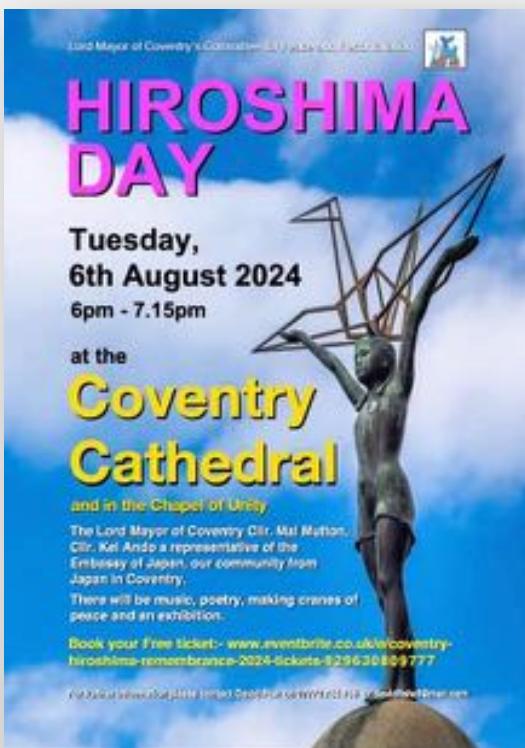


DRESDEN LINKS

The T.U.D.O.R.S Drama Group - under the direction of Marc Lalonde - visited Coventry once again with their moving performance of "In Dafur". They also visited Stratford.



AUGUST



Hiroshima Day took place in Coventry Cathedral on 6 August. Cllr. Kai Ando, a representative from the Embassy of Japan was the keynote speaker.

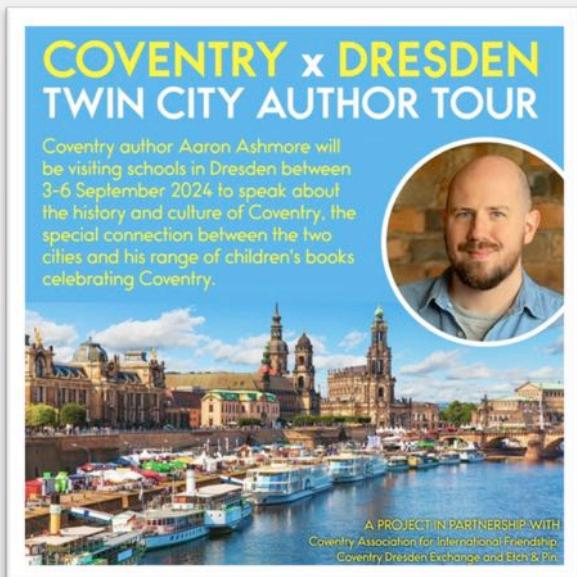


CAIF's Secretary and Assistant Secretary presented the Lord Mayor, Councillor Mal Mutton, with a gift of Limoges Porcelain from the Mayor of Oradour-Sur-Glane, Philippe Lacroix.



CAIF members Monika and Nikolai made a visit to Cork where they enjoyed the company of the Ó Bhéal poets and met with Cork's Lord Mayor, Dan Boyle.

SEPTEMBER



Coventry author and local business man, Aaron Ashmore, visited Dresden taking his books on various aspects of Coventry into schools where he was given a very positive and enthusiastic reception.



CAIF met with Ciaran Kelleher Byrne, who works in the International Relations Department in Coventry's twin city of Cork. He was accompanied by Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Honoré Kamegni, and his wife, Vivienne. We discussed the possibility of some CAIF members attending the St Patrick's Day Parade on 17 March 2025. We hope that this is the start of more friendship links.

OCTOBER

CAIF'S Assistant Secretary and member Nikolai attended the "Heritage and Democracy Conference" held in St Mary's Hall. The conference - organized by AKTLD (Working Group on Theory and Education in Heritage Conservation) in collaboration with Coventry University - sought to examine the rôle of the Nation State in both enforcing heritage protection as well as defying it and the empowerment of the people in shaping the policies and direction of the state.

Thanks to Sabine Coady Schäbitz, associate professor of architecture at Coventry University.



The Band "Tighten Up", from Dresden, performed at 2-Tone Village.

CAIF supported them with a donation towards their expenses.

The poets Catherine Ronan and Cedric Bikond arrived in Coventry from Cork and performed at both Fire and Dust's session at LTB (The and at Earlsdon Carnegie Library).

They also enjoyed a warm welcome with Coventry's Lord Mayor, Councillor Mal Mutton.

This visit was supported by CAIF.



NOVEMBER



November is an important month in the city of Coventry with many events promoting Peace and Reconciliation.

CAIF members met with representatives from our twin cities of Kiel and Dresden in the Cosy Club. The visitors were here to meet with the Lord Mayor and to take part in the day of Remembrance at the Memorial Park on Sunday 10 November.



At 5pm on 14 November, a service was held in Coventry Cathedral in remembrance of the events of the night in 1940 when the old Cathedral of St Michael was destroyed.

After the service a vigil was held in the Cathedral ruins and people were invited to light and place a candle for remembrance.



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DECEMBER

In early December, CAIF's Secretary and Assistant Secretary met with the Head of English at Lyng Hall School along with a group of pupils who are UNESCO Ambassadors to discuss ideas for a project for next year's Cities of Remembrance symposium to be held in Dunkirk and Ypres in May 2025.



CAIF members enjoying a Christmas meal



CAIF members continue to enjoy monthly breakfasts at the Cosy Club with members of the Coventry German Circle and the Lord Mayor's Peace Committee, Coventry poets and artists, and any visitors. We share a common interest and come together in pursuit of international friendship.

Dates for 2025

13 FEBRUARY - 80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DESTRUCTION OF DRESDEN to be attended by a group of people from Coventry including CAIF members.

17 MARCH - ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE IN CORK to be attended by CAIF members.

21-24 MAY - CITIES OF REMEMBRANCE SYMPOSIUM commemorating the 85th ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION DYNAMO to be held in DUNKIRK and YPRES. CAIF's Secretary and Assistant Secretary will attend along with teachers and pupils from Lyng Hall School.

3-7 JUNE – CAIF members' visit to KIEL

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CAIF's Committee

*

President: The Lord Mayor of Coventry

Chair: Councillor Ram Lakha OBE

Deputy Chair: Mary Goodwin

Treasurer: Paul Fernandez-Montes

Secretary: Linda Hirons

Assistant Secretary: Dave Hirons

CAIF would like to thank both Lord Mayors for their support in 2024

Councillor Jaswant Singh Birdi

Councillor Mal Mutton

Thanks also to CAIF members Monika and Nikolai for their work with our friends in Dresden and Kiel and for paving the way for a deeper link with Cork.

CAIF

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