

Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association and Oxford Ramallah Twinning

ORFA Registered Charity Number: 1155620

Annual Report April 2019 to March 2020



ORFA and ORT AGMs Tuesday 20th October 2020
6pm online Zoom Meeting



This Annual Report covers the period up to 31st March 2020. Events after this date will appear in next year's Annual Report

Thank you to all our friends and contacts in Palestine who continue to support our friendship and twinning link and welcome us so warmly in Palestine. And a big thank you **to all** the many organisations, individuals and groups in Oxford who help in so many ways to ensure that our work continues.

Thank you to our funders who made our projects possible this year and those funders who have enabled us to carry forward money for delayed projects, which will now take place in 2021: Palestine Unlocked, Unite the Union Cowley Car Factory Branch, The Queen's College Chapel Collection, Oxford District Trade Union Council and our many individual supporters. We had been allocated funding, which we hope can be carried forward, from the City council to support our Twinning launch and youth theatre visit to Ramallah and a school dance visit to Oxford.

A special thank you to John Storrs who set up and managed our website for many years.

Information about Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA)

Patrons: Iain Chalmers, Mahmoud Hawari, Karma Nabulsi, Sir Stephen Sedley, Avi Shlaim and Yasmin Sidhwa.

Trustees: Barbara Schofield (Treasurer), Tony Richardson (Chair), Joe Carter.

Meetings: Monthly – every third Tuesday of the month 6.00 pm to 6.45pm at Oxford Town Hall (currently on Zoom). Subgroups work together on projects.

Contact: Via the website www.oxford-ramallah.org, email: orfa_info@yahoo.co.uk

Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association has been working since 2003, and became a registered charity in February 2014

Information about Oxford Ramallah Twinning (ORT)

In March 2019 the official Twinning Agreement between Oxford and Ramallah was signed by Mayor Colin Cook and Mayor Musa Hadid at Oxford Town Hall in the presence of the Palestinian Ambassador Husam Zomlot.

Oxford Ramallah Twinning works in tandem with ORFA and is within the umbrella of Oxford International Links and works closely with the City Council Twinning office.

Contact: Via ORFA website www.oxford-ramallah.org, email: ort_info@yahoo.com

Chair: Tony Richardson **Treasurer:** Barbara Schofield, **Secretaries:** Joe Carter and Avril Alexander

Meetings: Monthly – every third Tuesday of the month 6.45pm to 7.30pm at Oxford Town Hall (currently on Zoom). Subgroups work together on projects.

Like most organisations we had to cancel projects which were due to take place during the Summer 2020.

The June 2020 school link/dance visit here from the **UNRWA school in Ein Areek** did not take place. We had a range of events and visits planned for when the young dancers, counsellor, headteacher and teacher were here. We had also planned activities to help support the cost of the visit and to develop future projects. We are interested in hearing from schools that might like to link with a school in Palestine. The Ein Areek school group would like if possible to reschedule and visit during Summer 2021 and are keen to link with a school in Oxford.

In June 2021 we are organising an exhibition of the **Palestinian History Tapestry** (<https://www.palestinianhistorytapestry.org/>). The tapestry uses the embroidery skills of Palestinian women to illustrate aspects of the land and peoples of Palestine from Neolithic times to the present. The Tapestry is a powerful representation of the history of Palestine. We hope that next year the school visit to Oxford will coincide with the **Palestinian History Tapestry** exhibition in the Long Room at the Town Hall **Thursday 17th to Wednesday 23rd June** during Refugee Week 2021.

In July 2020 the Mandala Theatre had planned to participate in the **Ashtar Youth Theatre Camp in Ramallah**. We had secured funding from the council for 13 people, 10 young actors, theatre workers and a video maker. The visit was to include a **launch event in Ramallah** of the Oxford Ramallah Twinning. The proposed Lord Mayor, Mark Lygo, had intended to be part of this visit. It is probable that the funding will be agreed for July 2021; Yasmin Sidhwa the director from Oxford intends to work with this in the theatre's 2021 schedule.

Oxford International Links exhibition with theme of 'Women and Photography' had to be postponed. The Photo Oxford 2020 Festival was organised by the charity Photography Oxford, and finally took place from **16 October - 16 November 2020**. As part of this Festival, there was an Oxford International Links photography exhibition with contributions from each of Oxford's eight twin cities. The Oxford International Links exhibition was curated by Oxford residents Irmgard Hueppe and Simon Murison-Bowie. ORT has submitted photographs from which three were chosen for the exhibition. Exhibition is taking place online with one picture printed and displayed in the Covered Market, central Oxford.
<https://www.artsteps.com/view/5f885adbc520fa1cd9c5e3a1>

ORT is participating in an Oxford Links event now rescheduled for 29th April, 2021 to take place at the Sheldonian. This will be a live stream event including twin cities if possible. The aim of the day is to raise awareness of twinning through the presentation of films, music, talks and other arts.

Twin City signs unveiled

In October 2019 the unveiling of the new Twinned Town signs took place. These are now positioned on the main roads as one enters Oxford.



The Mayor of Oxford Craig Simmons attended the unveiling of one of the new signs which lists Ramallah Palestine as the city's seventh twinned town.

Members of Oxford Ramallah Twinning also attended the event which was led by Oxford City Council. Craig Simmons and Cllr John Tanner spoke about the importance of Twinning.

“ORFA works in tandem with Oxford Ramallah Twinning and raises awareness through bringing groups and individuals from Palestine to share their stories with residents of Oxford. City twinning is an act of city diplomacy which aims to give

citizens the chance to engage with their respective cultures and foster friendship, understanding and networks.” Middle East Monitor report.

New Website Launched

In April 2019 we launched our new website (<https://www.oxford-ramallah.org/>). Designed and maintained by ORFA supporters, it is based on our previous website with additional interactivity. Our aim is that anyone visiting the website will find up to date and relevant information about ORFA and the connections between our two cities, and will feel encouraged to get involved. The site also documents our activities over the past seventeen years and gives links for those wanting more information about Palestine and Ramallah in particular. As we continue to develop the site, we hope to carry more videos of everyday life in Ramallah. We are indebted to John Storrs who set up the original website and managed it for many years.

Yoga and Martial Arts Project Al Amari Refugee Camp

This project began in 2019. We had already donated £1,000 raised by one of our members for the toilet and changing room renovation. We aimed to raise a further £1,000 to complete the work and have now done so thanks to **The Queen’s College Chapel collection** which raised £522 and a donation from ORFA of £478. The centre provides classes for children, young people and women in a dedicated space in the Youth Centre. The project leader, Ibrahim, is a mechanic, as well as a yoga and martial arts teacher. He teaches voluntarily and has funded and completed the work to add special flooring and to make the studio look bright and clean. The toilets and changing room really needed some work. Funds were required to pay for doors, plumbing, lighting and electrical works, and tiling and labour for two toilets (one will be child sized).

Why yoga and martial arts? The camp is overcrowded and noisy, unemployment is high, life is difficult and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which works with Palestinian refugees, has had its funding cut for schools and community organisations. The project helps with health and relaxation, building an ability to breathe and think in difficult situations and a place to meet friends in a quiet and safe environment.

Please find below the link to a short film made last year about Ibrahim, the yoga teacher at the Youth Centre at Am’ari Camp. <https://vimeo.com/448211235>

Visit to Palestine April 2019

All our trips are a life changing experience, especially for people going for the first time. We speak to ordinary Palestinians and to people experienced in spheres such as women’s centres, trade unions etc.

We are careful with regard to the safety of groups, and make sure they learn what life is like for Palestinians, and how society functions.

This visit was not an official town-to-town delegation. It followed the signing of the Oxford Ramallah Twinning (ORT) agreement. The Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) visitors were very well received at every level. We attended the Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network (BPFTN) conference in Nablus on 12-13th April (<https://www.twinningwithpalestine.net/>).

A Visit Diary

5th April Visit to the British Consulate. The Consul is very supportive of the new official Oxford Ramallah Twinning. He said that visiting the UK from Palestine can help people to feel less isolated. He also thought that when people from the UK visit Palestine their perceptions are changed, and this helps develop Britain-Palestine links. The consulate do not have funds for Twinning, but will help in whatever way they can and encouraged us.

6th April Visit to the Palestinian Museum, attached to Bir Zeit University, and attended the "Intimate Terrains" art exhibition which explored Palestinian artists, through their relationship with place and location, from the 1930s to the present day, showing erasure, fragmentation, distance and belonging. To me the video work of Suha Shoman and Larissa Sansour was outstanding.

7th April Visit to the Democracy and Workers Rights Centre (<https://www.dwrc.org/>). We learnt about the present situation of the unions, particularly the democratic independent unions.

In the West Bank the Palestinian Authority banned the Union of Public Employees, which had 40,000 members and used sanctions against its leaders. This had a big effect on independent unions, and although they are still active in banks, hospitals and colleges, they haven't had a congress for some time. The new social security and health and safety laws have only been partially implemented and this means there are frequent problems for workers around what should be their statutory rights.

9th April Visit to Al Amari Refugee Camp to discuss a project for a sewing visit to the UK in Summer 2021 to coincide with the exhibition, during Refugee Week, of the Palestinian History Tapestry in Oxford Town Hall.

We then went to Defence of the Child International (DCI) where we heard a detailed report on the present situation, including the continuing increase in the numbers of child prisoners per year, and figures for those with no representation, use of stress positions, hand and feet tying, beatings etc all up by 50 percent. When children lose more than one quarter of the year of school, they have to retake it, and some are embarrassed by this and don't go back to school.

"Each year approximately 500-700 Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years, are detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. The most common charge is stone throwing." (DCI.)

The point was strongly made that this inhuman treatment of children needs to be reported more widely. Website: <https://defenceforchildren.org/>

10th April Visit to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) basic school in the village of Ein Arik, with a view to linking the school with one in Oxford. We met the head, other teachers and the school counsellor. We saw the school council in action in the playground, organising activities including Dabke dancing. We discussed a number of possible joint actions.

Meeting with the Mayor of Ramallah, Mayor Hadid. We were warmly welcomed and discussed cultural activities, the purpose of our link, keeping the link active and how to involve young people, particularly in Oxford, and outlined possible future plans, including our hope that the Mayor of Oxford would be able to visit. We were hosted to a meal in the Municipal Garden restaurant and continued our discussion.



Photo: Meeting with Mayor Hadid at Ramallah Municipality

Visit to Deir 'Ammar village/refugee camp and we were taken up the hill to the top of the village, from here one could see seven settlements, on hilltops, all around the village. Some of the natural springs that had been used by the village for centuries have been taken by Israeli settlers.

11th April Visit to the Museum of Natural History in Bethlehem, we were shown around this amazing museum which showcases local flora and fauna, as well as developing initiatives in biodiversity and sustainability. The Director, Mazin Qmsiyeh, talked on the political situation, stressing that in nature diversity is a necessity to survive, and that the attempt by the Israeli state to remove Palestinians would not succeed.

Back in Ramallah/Al Bireh, we went to the project that ORFA is supporting for a new toilet and changing room in the Karate and Yoga Centre in Al Amari Camp. We spoke to the instructor and children. The boys and girls told us how this was a safe activity for them and that it was fun and made them feel strong and confident. In the

evening we attended a celebration of the Twinning in Al Amari Camp Women's Centre. We met a group of young people and the group leader from the youth centre. The young people showed us some of the work they had produced.

12th April Attended the Twinning and Friendship Conference in Nablus. We were grateful to BPFTN organisers for supporting the cost of the conference and hotel for the two Palestinian delegates who attended with ORFA/ORT. After the conference the young Palestinian woman, who attended with us all, said this was the best experience for her to be part of the Twinning.

Nablus has been officially twinned with Dundee for nearly 40 years. The Mayor of Nablus attended, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, and the Governorate, as did the British Consul General, Philip Hall. It was also addressed by a number of the groups, Dundee, ORFA, Walsall/ Kobar. We discussed with the Director of the British Council, Martin Daltry, how the British Council helps facilitate school links.

13th April On the second day of the Conference we went to Sebastya, which is about 10 miles outside Nablus and is linked with Hanwell in London. We were shown the Roman remains; the Roman elite used to come here from Nablus. We saw columns, a small theatre, an amphitheatre, and also the remains of a 6th century BCE Greek tower.



Photo: A group of participants from the conference in the Roman Amphitheatre

These Greek and Roman remains were the most visited in Palestine, until the Oslo Accords. It is not possible for Palestine to look after these sites effectively now. The site of part of the Roman remains overlooks a settlement which for years dropped its sewage into the area. After a long campaign this was stopped in 2015, but it has started again. We had further meetings and were hosted by the Sebastya Association. AR



Photo: Members of our group visiting the garden at the Mahmoud Darwish museum overlooking Ramallah.

Oxford International Links Promotion Evening

In November 2019 we were very pleased to be able to participate in an Oxford International Links promotion event within the Town Hall. Each twin city had a stall and guests were invited from arts/culture and business together with Councillors and the media. We found the evening useful for discussing sources of potential funding and making new contacts within the arts sector. The event was featured on a local TV station with an interview from the Oxford-Ramallah twin. The picture below gives a flavour of what our stall was like. NS



Photo: Exhibition stall.

Other Activities/Actions

Talks

Two Labour Party branches – East Oxford and Headington Quarry requested a speaker. A member of the committee spoke about the new Twinning and the history of its achievement. The appalling situation in Palestine was described by giving examples that ORFA/ ORT has had reported to them from our Palestinian partners and through our experience when on self-funded visits. The contribution was well received at both meetings.

ORFA/ORT Representatives attended a meeting at the **Palestinian Mission UK** in Jan 2020 for NGOs and groups supporting Palestine.

British Palestine Friendship Twinning Network AGM London Feb 2020 NS and NM gave a report on the achievement of the official Twinning. We were congratulated by both Avi Shlaim, ORFA patron, and Dr Hosom Zomlot who spoke about the situation in Palestine and the importance of grassroots organising and described the Twinning as an achievement.

Other

A member has passed the Food Hygiene certificate which is necessary for Twin cities to hold when organising events serving food - Attendance at a communications workshop run by the City Council for all twin cities - Participation by arranging the painting of decorations for Perm with Refugee Resource Women's group and Twinning Officer - Teams joining the Leon Link Quiz.

Annual Financial Report April 2019 - March 2020

ORFA Accounts:

Financial period start: 02 April 2019

Financial period end: 01 April 2020

Income and expenditure

Carried forward: **4145.62**

Income: **4452.66**

Spending: **2744.57**

Total (balance) on 1 April 2020: **5853.71**

Main points:

1. Most donations are received now through the Localgiving (gift aid automatically processed):
2. Donations were received by ORFA to specifically support the school dabke visit and Palestinian History Tapestry exhibition.
3. Charity Commission Annual Return 2019/2020 to be submitted with the figures as shown here.

DATE		CREDIT	DEBIT	BALANCE
27/03/2019	Donation through localgiving	9.06		4145.62
05/04/2019	ORFA's fundraised donation for Yoga Project		1000	3145.62
10/04/2019	Donation through localgiving	46.9		3192.52
11/04/2019	Dabke Dance Group visit - expenses		230.98	2961.54
15/04/2019	St.Giles's Parish Rooms for PHT/Mayor		52.5	2909.04
17/04/2019	Donation through localgiving	225.97		3135.01
01/05/2019	Donation through localgiving	46.6		3181.61
15/05/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		3225.76
22/05/2019	Donation through localgiving	23.02		3248.78
31/05/2019	Conference in Nablus		64	3184.78
05/06/2019	Donation through localgiving	21.13		3205.91
12/06/2019	Conference in Nablus		64	3141.91
12/06/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		3186.06
03/07/2019	Donation through localgiving	11.15		3197.21
05/07/2019	Donation	20		3217.21
18/07/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		3261.36
16/08/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		3305.51
23/08/2019	Chapel The Queen's College (Yoga Project)	521.89		3827.4
09/09/2019	Donation through localgiving	22.3		3849.7
11/09/2019	Donation from individual	50		3899.7
18/09/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		3943.85
25/09/2019	ORFA donation to the Yoga Centre project		1000	2943.85
16/10/2019	Website fees		69.84	2874.01
16/10/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		2918.16
05/11/2019	Localgiving membership fee		96	2822.16
07/11/2019	Donation through localgiving	22.3		2844.46
14/11/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		2888.61
02/12/2019	Leaflets for the Twinning conf. in Palestine		25	2863.61
18/12/2019	Donation through localgiving	44.15		2907.76
20/12/2019	Britain Palestine Twinning Network (subs)		35	2872.76
30/12/2019	WOCA (renting venue in 2020)		101	2771.76
16/01/2020	Donation through localgiving	44.15		2815.91
29/01/2020	Donation through localgiving	44.6		2860.51
12/02/2020	Donation through localgiving	44.15		2904.66
19/02/2020	Donation: project 2020 Unite Cowley Car Plant	1100		4004.66
20/02/2020	OCVA membership for 2019		6.25	3998.41
28/02/2020	Palestine Unlocked donation project in 2020	1800		5798.41
04/03/2020	Donation through localgiving	11.15		5809.56
18/03/2020	Donation through localgiving	44.15		5853.71

4452.66 2744.57
income expenses

Through the Charity Commission ORFA charity is classified as:

- Working in the area of education and training, arts/culture/heritage, human rights/religious or racial harmony or diversity.
- Working with the general public/mankind.

ORFA's Charitable Objects are copied below as adopted: (CONSTITUTION ADOPTED 18 OCT 2011 AS AMENDED ON 19/11/2013)

1. TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS (AS SET OUT IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUBSEQUENT UNITED NATIONS CONVENTIONS AND DECLARATIONS) BY ALL OR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING MEANS:

- RAISING AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE ISRAELI - PALESTINIAN CONFLICT IN GENERAL;
- RESEARCHING AND MONITORING ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INFRINGEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAW;
- EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW;
- PROMOTING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAW;
- WORKING TO ELIMINATE ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INFRINGEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAW;
- WORKING TO OBTAIN AND PROMOTE REDRESS FOR THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND THEIR FAMILIES AND INFRINGEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAW.
- PROVIDING SUPPORT TO AND RELIEVING NEED AMONG THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND INFRINGEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND THEIR FAMILIES.

2. TO ADVANCE THE EDUCATION OF THE PUBLIC IN THE UK AND PALESTINE, IN PARTICULAR IN RAMALLAH AND ITS ENVIRONS BY ALL OR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING MEANS:

- TO PROVIDE EXTRA-CURRICULAR EDUCATION TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS OF THE LOCAL PEOPLE, INHABITANTS AND REFUGEES;
- TO FOCUS ON IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THOSE IN NEED, ESPECIALLY THE YOUTH AND REFUGEES.
- TO ASSIST IN PROVIDING DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY EDUCATIONAL TEACHING MATERIAL, BOOKS AND TOOLS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE EDUCATION OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUTH AND REFUGEES.
- TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY BASED EDUCATION THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY BASED PROJECTS AND RESOURCES.
- TO HELP THE COMMUNITY BUILD SUSTAINABLE AND LOCALLY MANAGED EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES.
- TO BRING PEOPLE FROM THE COMMUNITY BASED PROJECTS TO OXFORD TO FURTHER THEIR EDUCATION IN A WAY THAT IMPROVES THEIR SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITIES AT HOME AND ABROAD.
- TO PRESENT MATERIAL IN VARIOUS FORMS TO EDUCATE PEOPLE IN OXFORD ABOUT THE CULTURE AND ORDINARY LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF RAMALLAH.
- TO SEND GROUPS AND DELEGATIONS FROM OXFORD TO PALESTINE AND IN PARTICULAR TO RAMALLAH AND ITS ENVIRONS TO IMPROVE THEIR AWARENESS AND TO BUILD COMMUNITY BASED / INDIVIDUAL CONTACTS BETWEEN OXFORD AND RAMALLAH.