

## Harpenden group off to Germany

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**By Katie Linsell**

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The Harpenden group Friends of Alzey will make its 15th visit to their German twin town on Thursday.

Since its creation in 1981 the group has been running trips bi-annually and welcoming visitors from the German town in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate.

Twenty four members will stay with families in Alzey and tour the local towns of Trier and Mainz and the Rheinhessen vineyards in the area.

The four-day trip will be Esther Duras's fourth visit to a family who have become good friends.

She said: "It is important that we don't stay in a hotel but learn about the family's way of life there, which has turned out to be remarkably similar to ours.

"Our towns are similar as they are both attractive and free of superstores. Alzey is smaller and has a picturesque medieval centre."

The Friends of Alzey throw fundraising suppers and quiz evenings to treat the Germans to trips to Cambridge and London while in Harpenden.

The group is keen to establish a youth group so linguistic and cultural exchanges can be set up with Harpenden schools.

Rosemary Ross, 70, one of the group's founding members who made her first visit to Alzey in 1969, said: "The connection was especially moving in the early years when members of both groups had been involved in the war.

"They weren't sure how much they wanted to meet."

The towns were first twinned in 1963 as part of the burgeoning movement building bridges with Europe to prevent a repetition of World War Two.

Town councillor Michael Weaver said: "I've learnt a lot from the friendship whether discussing council activities with the Mayor or getting to know the people of Alzey on an individual basis. I've really found it very enjoyable.

"The twinning is a good experience as it stops the community becoming insular. We have a lot to offer and the Friends of Harpenden like to hear from us."