

Daniel Penfold

What is Friendship?

A historic show of goodwill between the people of Bristol and Hannover took place in 1947, in which Bristolians donated their shoes to keep German children warm during a bitter winter. Celebrating the 75th anniversary of that event this year, the Bristol-Hannover Council has been organising international trips between the two cities for the better part of a century. Thomas Hermann first came to Bristol from Hannover in 1974 with his English teacher. After positive experiences in Bristol, this turned out to be the first of many trips across his lifetime!

When first visiting Bristol, he kept an open mind and had no big expectations of local culture, yet he was still pleasantly surprised by how friendly people were. He mostly stayed with families across his various trips and was able to experience first-hand how they functioned. As well as being an English language student, he came along as a tourist and has distinct memories of first seeing the Clifton Suspension Bridge and visiting the Aardman Animation Studios. One of his first English meals was fish and chips which he enjoyed, though he loves Bristol for its variety of multicultural cuisines, with the Indian and Pakistani restaurants being especially good!

Across his trips here, Thomas has met a large number of different people, from locals and the families he stayed with, to the other people involved with the Bristol-Hannover Council. He's been involved with organising trips from Hannover to Bristol and vice versa, resulting in a lot of time spent on Zoom meetings the past few years. Throughout this, he has befriended many people, including the head of the Bristol-Hannover Council, and local politicians. Between these people, he's maintained contact and friendships with a lot of them, still keeping in touch with the

families he initially stayed with decades ago. He's maintained a healthy friendship with a lot of the people he's met, including those whose views differed from his own. He's had a number of friendly and deep conversations about Brexit with friends who take a different stance on the topic but finds they still have more in common than they have differences.

As someone who's come and gone from Bristol on many occasions over the decades, Thomas has seen first-hand how things have changed, both architecturally and culturally. The harbour and its uses have seen drastic changes and he finds the M-Shed is the best place to recollect and reflect on how much progress has been made. Populations have grown and Bristol is now very much a young person's city, with students and activists fighting for fairness, in the same way that Bristolians and Hannoverians broke down post-war barriers to help each other. The biggest thing Thomas has learned from his travels is the importance of experiencing other cultures. International friendships, especially between the UK and Europe after Brexit, are more important than ever when it comes to looking out for one another.