

Barrie discovers its twin in England

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The Barrie British Club celebrated the twinning of Barrie with Harrogate, England, Friday afternoon while Mayor Jeff Lehman went through the formal ceremonies in England.

On hand for the local celebrations were, from left, Barrie Councillor Barry Ward, 16 Wing Major Andrea Sloan and British Club president Meg Parker.

Barrie made history yet again with a spa town in northeast England.

Harrogate is the final resting place of Sir Robert Barrie, the Royal Navy officer after whom the city is named. The distinguished officer was laid to rest in his wife's hometown on June 7, 1841.

Harrogate is also the hub where many airmen were based during the Second World War, including flying officer William Howard Porritt, who died in the line of duty at age 25 and who rests in the Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery.

"The twinning of Barrie and Harrogate keeps alive the connection with those who served there and returned home, and the sacrifices of those like flying officer Porritt will not be forgotten," said RCAF Major Andrea Sloan.

The No. 6 RCAF headquarters was near Harrogate. There are ties between not only Barrie, but CFB Borden, the birthplace of the RCAF. Many local men flew in night bombing missions in Germany and participated in mine laying missions from that area in England.

While the local British Club celebrated the twinning Friday with a cake in the afternoon, Mayor Jeff Lehman and Harrogate Mayor Michael Newby signed the documents at 7 p.m. London time.

That was the culmination of several years of work by Barrie's International Relations Committee, prompted by Lehman asking to know more about Sir Robert Barrie. Jean Maurice Pigeon went on a quest that took him from Florida, where Barrie's Scottish father was posted as a military physician, to Harrogate.

The military history with Sir Robert and Porritt made the journey to Harrogate

"one of the most exciting," said International Relations Committee member Mark Sachkiw.

"This is the fastest twinning we've done," he added.

Twinning translates into educational trips for high school students, as well as economic development missions to explore business opportunities.

Lehman said Harrogate is very focused on tourism.

"They call themselves 'a city of festivals'. Sound familiar," he told The Advance.

"And get this, they have two big data centres for the financial industry."

That's a sector Barrie has also been working to develop. Since BMO brought its data centre to town in 2005, TD and IBM have also come to town. Another centre is to be announced Thursday.