



THE FRENCH CONNECTION
WRINGTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION
The John Locke Room, Silver Street, Wroughton BS40 5QE

NEWSLETTER February 2023

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Welcome to your February newsletter



It's a quiet time of year, when we are all trying to stay well and make plans for sunnier days. Your small but well-formed committee are doing the same, and have plans for some exciting events, so do watch out for your March newsletter, where we hope to be able to publish more details. The French Connection is a lively cooperative of different Francophile interest groups, active and committed to those aspects of France and Frenchness (see below) with which we can most passionately connect. Watch this space!

We also now have a developing presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, thanks to the ongoing work of Anne-Marie Savory. Why not look out for us, starting here:

<https://www.facebook.com/people/French-Connection-Wrington-Twinning-Association/100089579449000/>

Unlike last year, this year both *La Chandeleur* and Shrove Tuesday fall in February, so two opportunities for pancakes and one for candles (though you can keep going with those, of course). As we have had no rain, except for a little fine drizzle, today (*Chandeleur*), we should be spared for the next 40 days (from continuous rain, at least). Not exactly full sun, though, so lifelong health and prosperity not guaranteed.

News from France

Each month seems to bring changes in France, from the Covid rules in relation to employment and sickness benefit, to the energy subsidy, and, perhaps of most interest to our members, to the regulations for residents and second-home owners (nine changes this month). Details of all these most recent changes may be found here:

<https://www.connexionfrance.com/article/French-news/18-changes-for-residents-and-property-or-second-home-owners-in-France-January-2023>

President Macron has been holding talks with the Israeli President, Benjamin Netanyahu, about their mutual, escalating concern for the building of nuclear weapons in Iran, in the light of Iran's supply of drones to Russia in the Ukraine war. More about this, and France's concerns, here:

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230203-after-netanyahu-talks-macron-warns-of-iran-nuclear-consequences>

Protests continue against the rise in pension age in France from 62–64. Seems a luxury to some of us, who are looking at 67 in the UK ...

And a hilarious story in the BBC news this week about a little media fracas concerning political correctness in the US, all embarrassing trace of which has now been eradicated from social media:

'The Associated Press, the biggest news agency in the United States, has apologised after it was ridiculed for warning journalists against referring to "the French"'. The AP stylebook Twitter account had recommended writers avoid using "the" in phrases like "the disabled, the poor and the French". It said this could be dehumanising. The French embassy responded by briefly changing its name to the "Embassy of Frenchness in the United States".

"We just wondered what the alternative to the French would be," Pascal Confavreux, the embassy spokesman, told the New York Times. "I mean, really."

The original AP tweet received more than 20 million views and 18,000 retweets before being deleted. It was widely mocked on social media.

Cultural News

It is exactly 80 years since the deportation, in January 1943, of Jews, communists and poor immigrants from the old port area of Marseille, a forgotten crime against humanity that would probably have met more resistance had it not been for the

coercion of the French police. Not only did they deport thousands of people, mostly directly to their deaths, they destroyed 1500 buildings in the area as a kind of 'ethnic cleansing'. To that point, there had been significant resistance to the Nazis in Marseille, and so Hitler decided to make an example. It's a sad story, but a moving and important one, told by the survivors, who were little children at the time. There is a very good, short documentary about this in (mostly American) English at the link below.

<https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/reporters/20230127-a-forgotten-crime-remembering-the-1943-marseille-roundup>

If you are suffering from winter monochrome sadness, there is still time to catch an exhibition at Louis Vuitton in Paris, which juxtaposes Monet and Joan Mitchell, an immersion in full-scale colour and an interesting complement and comparison for the eye.



News from VLB

Just like last February, traffic misery. In construction of the new Rue Rouvier, the section between the Rouvier car park and the boulevard de la République will be permanently closed to traffic from 3 February.

Villeneuve has a marvellous bus called the beeMob, which goes around the neighbourhoods on a regular basis, issuing transport tickets, library tickets and other types of subscription without anyone having to go far from home to perform these necessary tasks. Excellent for the elderly, the disabled, and those at home with young families.

Conversations with our friends in VLB

No dates so far for 2023, but perhaps in the next newsletter. If in the meantime you would like to know more about how the conversations work, please contact Jane Finn on janefinn20@hotmail.com.

French Conversation in Langford and on Zoom

Tuesday 14 February 3pm The Langford Inn

Thursday 23 February 3pm The Langford Inn

Cinéphiles de Wrrington

Tuesday 7th February at 5pm on Zoom. The film is a classic of the 'New Wave', *Jules et Jim* (1962), directed by François Truffaut, starring Jeanne Moreau, Oskar Werner and Henri Serre. It has been chosen by Renée Bolton, who will introduce the film and lead the discussion. This meeting was postponed in January due to technical issues.

Cinéphiles is looking for a new convenor. Shail Patel set it up during the pandemic and has done a great job in raising enthusiasm for French film. His charity involvements leave him less time now, however, and he would like someone to take it over. It has a very good following, and we watch a wide variety of French films, or films set in/about France. Anyone is welcome. Each month a different member chooses the film, and the programme is set several months in advance, usually for the whole year. Convening is just a monthly commitment to attend, and to send out the reminder to members and attenders. Would anyone like to take this over? If so, please email shail@wrringtontwinning.co.uk.

Please note the universal log-in for all French Connection and Wrrington Twinning Association Zoom meetings, whether committee, conversation or Cinéphiles:

<https://zoom.us/j/4933115546?pwd=bmhLSnZrSkIPRHZhRjhQaFFNczJHZz09>

Meeting ID: 493 311 5546

Passcode: 610359

One tap mobile

+442080806592,,4933115546#,,,,*610359# United Kingdom

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NB We are now publicising our events a little more widely, but still in the locality. This means I need to hear from you about dates for inclusion by 15th of the month, please! Otherwise, I cannot make the deadlines for the local press.

Recipe of the month

'Fast Men make Good Omelettes' was the name of a chapter in a trendy cookbook when I was young, and teaching myself to cook,. Indignation was my main response. I was *not* going to leave an important skill like making an omelette to young men of dubious moral fibre, for whom it was some sort of seduction preface. Fortunately, I had already been taught to make an omelette by my mother, and it is her wisdom that follows. She was a dutiful cook, in recoil from her own mother's reputation as an excellent one, but she had some inherited knowledge, and a few really good skills, even if she lacked the enthusiasm to apply them. An omelette, as a quick and nutritious meal, is a wonderful thing, but good technique is crucial, or you end up with a bland, leathery thing that is no fun at all. Here are my tips:

1. Use 2 eggs per person
2. Handle them carefully. Don't beat them up too much, or they will be leathery. You are just breaking the eggs up a bit, it's fine for there still to be areas of white that are separate.
3. Add a small amount of other liquid to your mix. Most people use milk, but you can just use water. It's to break up the surface tension, rather than dilute the eggs, rather like a little water with a whisky. Use about half a cup with 2 eggs.
4. Get your pan very hot and make separate omelettes if you can. Small omelettes are easier to craft, but this isn't crucial, if you want to make one big one and divide it.
5. You only need a very small amount of fat, about the size of a walnut. More than that and your omelette will be greasy. Butter works best, coconut oil is also good.
6. When the fat is very hot—it has stopped sizzling but not yet begun to burn, you need to pay attention here—pour in the eggs and, as soon as they hit the pan, keep the pan moving around so that you quickly cover the bottom, then continue to lift the edges of the omelette, letting the eggs run into the spaces, until there is no more mobile liquid.
7. Now turn the heat down to medium. The omelette is done when it is all set and just lightly coloured underneath. Many people like the eggs still to be soft and liquid in the centre, some do not. As soon as the omelette is as you want it to be, lift one side, fold it over in the centre and serve.

8. If, when the eggs hit the pan, they do not whoosh as they hit the fat, then the pan and the fat were not hot enough. You might still be able to rescue an edible omelette, but don't turn the heat down and be prepared to whip it out quite quickly, once it has set, before the bottom burns.
9. Fillings: the most authentic filling is *fines herbes*, selected according to season and cut up very fine. You can add these to the egg mixture, or you can throw them into the pan as soon as the omelette begins to set. Cheese works well, and how much you use depends on taste. (I would err on the side of minimal.) This should be added immediately the eggs have begun to set. Ham is also good, and so is smoked salmon, both best added to the egg mixture before pouring in, but they make it more difficult to control the mixture so be sure that you want them.

The first time I went to Paris was as a young girl, our first meal was at a typical bistro somewhere on the right bank. I ordered, in the best French I could muster, *omelette nature*. It wasn't on the menu, but *au fromage* and *au jambon* were. The extremely grumpy waitress, realizing we were English, said they didn't have *omelette nature*. She was a dark, dumpy, matronly type of person, I was young, blonde and doing my best to be glamorous. To both our surprises, her dismissive attitude provoked a sudden improvement in my French, and I made it quite clear that, if they had *omelette au fromage* and *omelette au jambon*, they had *omelette nature*. She stomped off to the kitchen. It was a longish wait, but eventually, a perfect *omelette nature* turned up in a beautiful roll on a plate, attended by a bowl of salad and a few delicate chips. The holiday improved and so did my French.



Wine of the Month

This month, I'm leaving the wine to you. If you have had a dry January, you have probably been looking forward, and are now enjoying, a favourite wine of your own. If you haven't had a dry January, you may now be feeling a little jaded, and a wine recommendation is not what you crave. I'm in rebellious mode. January has not been dry, but I'm not quite jaded either. I'm alternating fizzy water (not French, I'm afraid) with a newly acquired stock of rosé. Bizarre, you may say, but it's rather refreshing, in the middle of winter, to have this pretty pink wine that



smells a little of roses, is light in alcohol, and blows away some cobwebs. Salut!

Le mot juste

I was recently sent a video about the names of trees in French, which proves very interesting. The word *l'arbre* itself acquires its meaning through botanical use. The original meaning is *shaft*, so the word referred only to the trunk or bole of the tree. One of the lovelier words in the list (see link below) is *le charme*, which means *hornbeam*, nothing to do with its usual meaning of *charm*, just like our English word. It is always amusing to find French phrases which directly translate English ones (or rather, have probably come into English from Norman French). In the case of trees, *les arbres vous cachent le forêt* is the equivalent of *you can't see the wood for the trees*. But how interesting that, for us, the phrase implies a deficiency on our part. We are not perceiving correctly, we are unable to see the bigger picture. In French, it is just what it is: the trees are hiding the forest, so the detail is hiding the bigger picture. Not your fault at all!

<https://www.frenchtoday.com/blog/french-vocabulary/tree-arbre/>



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