



WRINGTON

THE FRENCH CONNECTION



VILLENEUVE-
LÈS-
BÉZIERS

Welcome to your **Autumn** newsletter



The Dordogne in autumn *Photo courtesy The Telegraph*

I hope you have all had a wonderful summer, part of it in France, perhaps, enjoying a steadier climate than we have had here. Now we are well into the grape harvest and anticipating some delicious wines to come. We are also well into *la rentrée*, although it must have been hard to concentrate on studies in high humidity and soaring temperatures.

This newsletter looks forward to the AGM in October, after which there may be more to report in terms of activities and the direction towards 2024. You can expect another newsletter at the end of October/beginning of November that will take us up to the end of the year.

AGM and Plans for 2023–24

At time of writing, we have been unable to fix a date for the AGM because of the elusive availability of venues, so please do check on the website and, rest assured, Anne-Marie will email all members when the date, time and venue have been confirmed. It will probably be mid–late October. Meanwhile, your committee have been coming up with lots of plans and suggestions for the coming year, a summary of which follows. Not all of these ideas will eventuate, but they should give you a flavour of what is being discussed, and **please, do come forward** if you would like to get involved with any of these suggestions.

Plans for 2023-24

Visits 1: Going to France

- A '**Portable Wrington**' experience for the Villeneuve village festival including live events, produce, games (boules, French cricket, croquet, pub skittles etc).
- **Sports visit** for a specific event eg. rugby.
- **The Slow Train**: travel to Villeneuve over 3-4 days on the rural networks, stopping overnight at places of interest.
- **Exchange Network**: register of families willing to host / exchange. Two or three families together might like to visit Villeneuve as 'trail-blazers'.
- **School and College exchanges**. Sally Benwell has taken over the educational exchange and is exploring options

Villeneuve will provide the information and back-up for a thoroughly enjoyable time: visits to the many places of historic interest, nearby beaches, vineyards, activities (walking, cycling, canoeing), the Canal du Midi (which runs through the village), the Cévennes National Park, sports (tennis, rugby) and so on.

Visits 2: Coming to England

- '**Wrington: gateway to the West**' prepare a sample programme for a Villeneuve visit to Bristol and the region in 2024.
- **Cabaret Evening** (at a local hostelry): meal, songs, competitions, music and live performance. Invite a group from Villeneuve
- **Shared Interests**: group and/or a group of members of one or other of the village societies to arrange links with similar in Villeneuve.

Joint Activities: Wrington-Villeneuve

- **Virtual Villeneuve**: continue the monthly Zoom meetings
- **Virtual Boules competition**: Autumn 2023
- **Joint creative projects** (theatre, art, literature, music), perhaps around themes of shared interest / experience. (Both Villeneuve and Wrington are subject to flooding). These could include online joint / collaborative arts exhibitions and workshops
- **Exchange articles for newsletters on a regular basis**
- **Extend Zoom activities** eg. Invite Villeneuve to join the Ciné Club.

- **Develop a joint beginners conversation group** around reading and play-reading etc, focused on pronunciation etc
- **Develop simple role-play French-English language workshops**

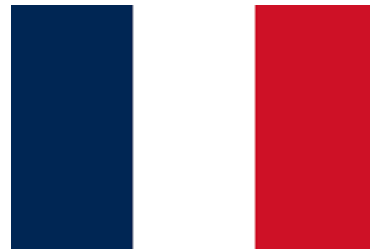
Wrighton events on French themes

We've had many enjoyable events but are always looking for events that appeal to a wider audience. We think **three meetings each year** with a speaker / event on a French theme is about right, such as a wine & cheese evening at Mother Hen, various talks – suggestions welcome.

Activities such as French conversation groups, film screenings and discussion groups will continue.

Please do get in touch if you have any comment or ideas - contact John Adams (07796 950346) or a member of the Committee via the website.

NEWS FROM FRANCE



France is hosting the Rugby World Cup and has created a Rugby Village especially for the event. There are mixed reviews about the competence and organization. There are British rugby fans who think it exceeds expectations. Others, including French fans, remember breaches of security and safeguarding at the football Champions League in 2022, and still doubt whether France is up to this level of international sport organization. It's a critical question, as the summer Olympics will be held in Paris next year. So far, the atmosphere has been electrified by Les Bleus defeating the All Blacks at the St Denis pitch in the opening game. It doesn't come much more exciting than that, and the site of the Rugby Village, on Place de la Concorde, at one end of the Champs Elysées and in full view of the Eiffel Tower, is certainly spectacular. As one British rugby fan said, "It's one hell of a backdrop to watch a game."

<https://www.france24.com/en/sport/20230910-france-s-reputation-on-the-line-as-it-looks-to-impress-during-rugby-world-cup>

Meanwhile, the ban in schools on Muslim girls wearing an abaya continues, as part of the prohibition of any expression of religious affiliation in French schools that goes back to the mid-19th century. So far 67 girls have been sent home for not agreeing to remove the garment, while another 233 arrived wearing one on the first day of term but agreed to remove it. What is interesting about this controversy, apart from the reinforcement of France's identity as a secular state and the essential concept of *Laïcité* in education, is the nature of the divide between left and right. The far right generally supports the ban, the left sees it as an infringement of civil liberties. This raises some interesting questions, and comparisons with the response to a similar situation in this country, which might not divide along the same lines. The

right-wing emphasis here tends to be on personal responsibility, rather than an institutionalized position. The equivalence of secularity with liberty and equality is an interesting philosophical proposition for the UK, and perhaps one of those differences that keep our relationship with France so interestingly contradictory.



NEWS FROM VILLENEUVE

There are 53 houses for sale in Villeneuve, including one winery and several that combine commercial and residential premises. <https://www.green-acres.fr/property-for-sale/villeneuve-les-beziers>

A new restaurant has opened, seating just 20 diners. Le Boucan is in Rue Rouvier, with Dan in the kitchen and his wife Dana at front of house. Closed Thursday and Sunday. <https://www.beziers-mediterranee.uk/restaurant/le-boucan/>

The local magazine of Villeneuve lès Béziers is available to read, in French, here, but has not been updated since March. <https://www.calameo.com/read/005462676a07ad0b6151d>

CULTURAL NEWS

The Bouquinistes on the banks of the Seine in Paris are continuing their struggle to remain during Paris's preparations to be Olympic City in 2024. City Hall wants to see the characteristic green stalls removed for what it cites as reasons of security and safety. Designated part of France's cultural heritage by UNESCO, the stallholders argue that they are a vital part of the cultural landscape of Paris. They would also lose a lot of income if prevented from being present during the Olympics. So far, they have collected 120,000 signatures in support of remaining. Watch that Seineside space.

There has been an outpouring of grief for the death of Jane Birkin (1947–2023) in July. Born in London, she had lived in France for most of her life and was taken to the French nation's heart for her bohemian style and her celebrated and controversial relationship with Serge Gainsbourg, with whom she made the record in 1969 that made her famous, 'Je t'aime ... moi non plus'. She leaves two daughters, the actress Charlotte Gainsbourg and Lou Doillon, and six grandchildren. She also had a daughter Kate, from her early marriage to the composer John Barry, but she died in 2013 after falling from a balcony in Paris. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230716-an-unforgettable-icon-france-pays-tribute-icon-jane-birkin>

FRENCH CONVERSATION GROUP



Come along for some friendly and lively conversation in French. All levels are welcome, and the Langford inn is a comfortable, relaxed place to meet and share. Our first meeting is this Tuesday, 12 September. Whatever the level of your French, you will find both hesitant speakers and completely fluent ones, and we all help each other. Onward dates to the end of the year are given below.

Tuesday September 12th, 3pm, Langford Inn

Thursday September 28th, 3pm, Langford Inn

Tuesday October 10th, 3pm, Langford Inn

Thursday October 26th, 3pm, Langford Inn

Tuesday November 14th, 3pm, Langford Inn

Thursday November 23rd, 3pm, Langford Inn

Tuesday December 12th, 3pm, Langford Inn

CINÉ CLUB

There are no meetings scheduled for September and October as we are still looking for a convenor.

Recipe of the Month

There is a bumper crop of raspberries this year, so my suggestion is an adaptation of the classic Cherry Clafoutis, which uses raspberries and just a sprinkle of lavender. This lovely idea comes from a recent book by Melissa Clark called *Dinner in French. My Recipes by Way of France* (Clarkson Potter, 2020). Clafoutis is a light dessert made with a custard-like batter.



- 3 cups (350 gms) raspberries
 - ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar divided
 - 1 teaspoon dried lavender buds (optional)
 - ½ cup (120 mls) whole milk
 - ½ cup (114 gms) crème fraîche, more for serving (optional)
 - 4 large eggs
 - Pinch salt
 - ⅓ cup (43 gms) all-purpose flour
 - Confectioners' sugar for serving
 - A little butter to grease the dish
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- Heat the oven to 375 degrees F, 180 degrees C.
 - Butter a 9-inch ceramic baking dish, or a 2-quart gratin dish, or a 9-inch cake pan. Ceramic works best. Avoid using metal baking pans which can burn the edges before the clafoutis is set.
 - In a medium bowl, toss the raspberries with 1 tablespoon sugar. Let them sit while you prepare the remaining ingredients.
 - Combine the remaining ½ cup sugar with the lavender and process in a blender until the lavender is ground, about 2 minutes. Add the milk, crème fraîche, eggs, and salt, and process to combine. Add the flour and just pulse to combine.
 - Arrange the sugared berries in the prepared baking dish, then pour the egg mixture over them. Bake until the cake is golden and the centre springs back when lightly touched, about 35 minutes.
 - Transfer the baking dish to a wire rack and let the cake cool for at least 15 minutes before serving. Dust with confectioners' sugar, slice and serve with a dollop of whipped crème fraîche or Greek yoghurt.

Clafoutis is best served within an hour of baking, while it's still soft and warm; but it is still quite good for up to 6 hours if you keep it at room temperature. You can use up the **leftovers** for breakfast, topped with Greek yogurt and more berries. It's recommended to use up leftover clafoutis within 24 hours.

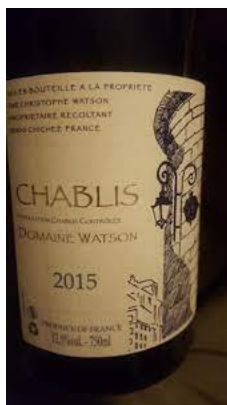
“At our house, the conversation might be in English, but dinner’s in French.”

—Melissa Clark



Wine of the Month

You probably all know the actress Emma Watson as Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter films. Did you also know that her father, Chris Watson, makes wine? He makes wine from seven family-owned farms in Burgundy, Domaine Watson Chablis and a red wine called Irancy (dubbed ‘Burgundy’s newest region’) made from 100% pinot noir. The wines come with a very good reputation, and a price to match: £29.50 per bottle for the current vintage, more if you want an older bottle. You can order them direct from domainewatson.com.



Not only that, but Emma and her brother Alex have developed a gin that is made from the lees of her father's Chablis, augmented by grape mass from neighbouring vineyards. It's a project about which they are passionate, from the recycling of the grapes to the sustainable packaging and beautiful bottle. The gin they have developed, called Renais, really is a refined, elegant spirit.



The name is derived from renaissance, the rebirth refers to the re-use of the grape mass. 'To me, Renais is a family project; the Chablis region evokes very special memories of growing up. I've loved having the opportunity to create something with my brother Alex,' says Emma. 'I'm particularly proud of upcycling grapes from vineyards, including my dad's, to reduce waste and create something new.' Juniper, coriander, citrus and honey, along with a distillate of one of Burgundy's defining soil elements, Kimmeridgian limestone, are at its heart. 'Grand cru grapes are the most prized natural ingredient from the region, and we're very lucky to [get them],' says Alex. 'The limestone is what gives Chablis its famed mineral flavour and provides great body and structure to the gin. Renais is our family's love letter to Chablis.'

Personally, I've let the gin hype pass me by, on the grounds that, if you drink gin with tonic or other mixers, your drink is mainly about the mixer. If you want to taste the designer botanicals, you need to drink it alone, on ice. I have to say, though, that I bought some first-edition Renais on the excuse that it would be a nice surprise for our daughter, a dyed-in Harry Potter aficionado. I was really surprised by the quality. At £45 per bottle, it's in the middle of the designer gin price range. I think it's worth every penny.



Le mot juste

Tomber meaning to fall, to drop, to descend, and often used with *laisser*, so *laisser tomber*, to let fall, to let go. Our nearest word to this is 'tumble'. What is also interesting is its close relationship to *le tombeau*, meaning tomb. There is an expression in French *rouler à tombeau ouvert*, which means to drive at a reckless speed (lit. to drive with an open tomb). There are some beautiful French music compositions inspired by *les tombeau* of previous composers. Three that come to mind are *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel (1914–17), *Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy* (1920) by Paul Dukas (composer of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*), and then, indeed, *Le Tombeau de Paul Dukas* by Olivier Messiaen (1935). My favourite is the elusive Ste Colombe's *Le Tombeau des Regrets* (date unknown). His life is a mystery, we don't even know his first name (possibly Jean), but we do know that he was the teacher of Marin Marais (1656–1728), who wrote a *Tombeau* to him in 1701. There was a powerful film made in 1991, *Tous Les Matins du Monde*, starring Gérard Depardieu and his son Guillaume, playing the older and younger Marin Marais, that portrays his tutelage with Ste Colombe. It is based on a book of the same name by Pascal Quignard, and the viol music is played, throughout the film, by the wonderful Jordi Savall. It takes us, however, back to the idea of *les tombeaux* I'm afraid: Guillaume Depardieu, a talented actor as the film makes clear, died of pneumonia at the age of 37.

I think *mettre nos regrets dans le tombeau* is a very good plan for the rest of 2023!

Lindsey Shaw-Miller, Newsletter Editor, *The French Connection*.