



THE FRENCH CONNECTION
WRINGTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION
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Après un long hiver de confinement, bienvenue enfin au printemps



News from The French Connection

The French conversation group and the cinéphile club are thriving on Zoom. Jane Finn is continuing to pursue the idea of setting up a Zoom chat group with our friends in VLB. This will be conducted in a mixture of French and English so competence in French is not essential. If you might be interested in taking part contact Jane at jane@wringtontwinning.co.uk

Otherwise everything is still shut down, except that your trusty correspondent will continue to produce these newsletters, although, as there is no news he has to make up most of the content. It is to be hoped that he does not run out of ideas - **YOU** might be able to help by writing something for the newsletter .

News from France

- France has reintroduced lockdown for the whole country for 3 weeks after a sharp rise in Covid infections in recent weeks. Schools and non-essential shops are closed and there is a 7 p.m. curfew.
- As did a number of other European countries, France put a ban on the roll out of the Astra Zeneca vaccine due to suspicions that it could cause serious blood clots (despite the lack of any clear evidence of this). This ban has now been lifted but it is bound to have increased the already high level of scepticism in France about

the wisdom of being vaccinated.

- President Macron also imposed a ban on the use of the Astra Zeneca vaccine on the over-65s, on the grounds that it was no protection for this age group. This has also been proved wrong and the ban has been lifted.
- Thousands of British citizens in France have been left without a valid driving licence, or face losing theirs within months, because of bureaucratic overload and the failure of the two countries' governments to sign a post-Brexit reciprocal agreement. The French government announced late last year that, as a consequence of Brexit, British residents of France would need to exchange their UK licences for French ones, and would have until 31 December 2021 to apply to do so. However, those applying to exchange their licences since January have had their requests rejected on the grounds that no reciprocal licence agreement is yet in place between the UK and France.
- Are you planning to take the ferry to France? Several France-UK routes with Brittany Ferries which had been hoped to reopen in April will not now start until mid-May at the earliest, nor will foot passenger tickets resume in April as previously planned.
- Food for thought - France has chosen to submit the baguette as a candidate for a place on Unesco's 2022 list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

No snails please, we're British

What should a Frenchman coming to live in Britain look out for here and how would he find it different from his home country? The '*entente*' is certainly more '*cordiale*' than it used to be, but our French *immigré* must accept that he will meet those who have not forgotten Agincourt but who might not have remembered that, in the last two world wars, we were on the same side. Here are a few tips for both him and his hosts:-

- He should not try to understand what motivated Brexit, or why a nation of 60 million people thinks it can fare better economically and politically by itself than as part of a group of 500 million people. He must remember that Britain is an island nation, which must largely account for the insularity of its people.
- He should not expect an Englishman to speak French. The likelihood is that he learned a few words at school and promptly forgot them. If our Frenchman does not understand his English the Englishman will probably just speak louder, accompanied by a few indecipherable hand signals. This is said with due deference to the small minority of fine Brits who speak excellent French and also with a footnote that many French are no better than the Brits at languages.
- Although France is still largely an agricultural nation, our Frenchman may well, like most of his countrymen, come from a city, where he will live in an apartment (perhaps with a weekend home in the country). For the French, inner city living has long been normal and cities have been designed or adapted to make them into agreeable places to live. It is less so in Britain. He has to realise that the average Brit is in love with his house and garden, possibly on the edge of a city which may be very short on charm, and to and from which he will spend hours commuting daily. Those French who do have houses are, however, usually deeply in love with them. Family houses are often passed from generation to generation. A Frenchman is very attached to his 'roots' and frequently retires back to the place from which he came. Moving home is a more dramatic affair to him than to a Brit, and he has difficulty in understanding our relative mobility.
- Linked to the attitude towards one's roots and one's home, is the attitude towards family. To the Frenchman family and friends are separate compartments of his life. He does not expect his friends to be interested in his family or vice versa. His private life is much more private and he will easily become bored when regaled with details of young Johnny's progress through life. The exceptions are weddings and funerals, at which everybody is present as a sign of '*solidarité*'.

- Then there is the matter of food and drink. For our Frenchman this is a passionate subject, which must be discussed (and not just amongst the ladies). The correct season to buy a particular cheese and the altitude at which the cows should graze, or the correct preparation of snails collected from the countryside, can fuel hours of animated conversation. Our Frenchman will find it difficult to understand that the preferred restaurants of many Brits are Indian or that the British rarely drink tiny cups of strong black coffee.
- He must also remember that the Brit drives on the wrong side of the road. Years ago thought was given to whether this could be changed over. There was a suggestion that there should be a transitional period of driving down the centre, but this was abandoned as impracticable.
- The Brit has not adapted easily to metrication. He has been allowed to keep his beloved 'pint', and is struggling with other measures. Equally, many Frenchmen are still struggling to adapt to the Euro and still quote prices in francs. Sometimes, if they want to impress with big numbers they even use old francs (of which there were 10 to a new franc).
- And of course, there is the pound sterling. The Brit has yet to be convinced that the Euro is a major World currency, used by more people than sterling, and that it is here to stay.

It would be hard to get these points across in a classroom but our Frenchman will just have to be exposed to Britishness until he grasps them. His German or Italian neighbours, each of whom have their own culture, but to whom the Frenchman feels closer than he does to the Brits, would of course have similar problems.

These differences are being eroded, partly because people travel more and are more exposed to other cultures and partly because of the pervasive transatlantic influence which first sweeps across Britain and then crosses the Channel and continues eastwards and southwards, carried, like coronavirus, principally by the young. It is to be hoped that, a hundred years from now, there will still remain some vestiges of linguistic and cultural differences. In the meantime let us rejoice that the Brits still have their sense of humour, which no continental neighbour has yet learned to copy (or even to understand) and, after all, if it becomes too much, we can always sit back and have 'a nice cuppa tea', which our Frenchman will probably decline especially if it has milk and sugar.

FRENCH SPEAKING CANADA (QUEBEC)



Quebec constitutes nearly one-sixth of Canada's total land area and is the second largest of the 10 provinces after Ontario in population. Its capital, Quebec city, is the oldest city in Canada and is home to the renowned McGill University. The province's major city, Montreal is the second largest city in Canada. Whilst Quebec still has many old buildings, Montreal is a modern metropolis, with an extensive Metro system and an elaborate maze of underground streets and shops, so that in the extreme cold of the winter, if you are in the centre of the city, you hardly need to venture into the freezing outdoor temperatures.

Both Quebec and Montreal are situated on the St. Lawrence River and Seaway. The Seaway is a system of canals and locks linked to the river, that enables large ships to get as far inland as the American great lakes.

Much of the rest of the province is taken up by forest and agriculture. The climate differs from North to South but, as a whole, it is very cold in winter and hot in summer. There are almost no spring or autumn seasons. The climate changes from summer to winter and back again almost overnight.

The official language of Quebec is French. It is a variety of French based on that spoken in France in the 17th century and uses many expressions that are not used in France today. For example, where the French say 'weekend' Canadians say '*fin de semaine*' and the word for building is not '*immeuble*', as in France, but '*édifice*'. If you watch a French Canadian film on French television it is likely to have French subtitles.

The southern boundary of Quebec Province meets the USA close to Niagara. French Canadians however are not great admirers of their neighbours to the South and there is a wealth of jokes and cartoons that are evidence of this. The Trump era provided a field day for Canadian humour.

What is now Quebec Province was part of a much larger French territory from the early

Dry Bones



17th century. It was ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Paris in 1763 after the defeat of France in the War of Spanish Succession. The boundaries have changed several times. Quebec is fiercely independent. It jealously guards its use of the French language and has held two referendums, in 1980 and 1995, on whether to separate from the rest of Canada. Both were defeated.



