



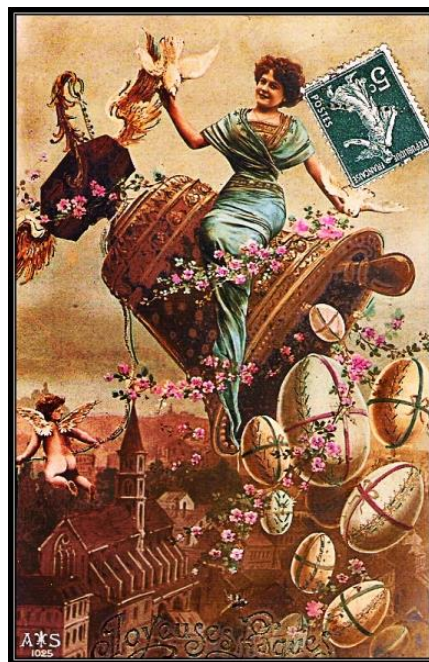
THE FRENCH CONNECTION
WRINGTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION
The John Locke Room, Silver Street, Wrington BS40 5QE

NEWSLETTER March 2022

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Welcome to your **April** newsletter
Pâques



We are more than halfway through Lent (la Carême) as April begins, and Easter will arrive (very late!) this month, almost on top of the first May bank holiday. Like us, France celebrates Easter with a three-day weekend, Easter Monday being a national holiday. Also like us, they celebrate Easter as a family time, with a special meal of Gigot d'Agneau (also called l'Agneau Pascal).

The question of gender and article around the word *Pâques* is complicated and quite illogical. If you want to say Easter in French, it is simply *Pâques*, no article. If you say *le Pâcques*, that is Passover, from which the word derives (more below). If, however, you want to wish someone a happy Easter, you must use the feminine plural, even though the word itself is masculine (isn't this fun?): Joyeuses Pâques.

Why is the word for Easter in the Romance languages based on the word for Passover?
Because the crucifixion is recorded as taking place during the Passover feast. The adopted Latin

word for Passover is *Pascha*, which derives from Greek (Πάσχα) and Aramaic (*Paskha*). Our English word comes from a completely different line of heritage. It's Germanic, going back to Old English and the celebration of the goddess Eostre, who brings in the spring. This is where the idea of the Easter bunny comes from too.

In France there are no bunnies. Instead, there are *les cloches de Pâques*, little winged bells that fly over France dropping Easter eggs in gardens, for which children must then hunt. No bells are rung between midday on Good Friday and Easter morning, and this little gift is given by the bells as they return to their towers on Easter Sunday. Someone in the family calls out 'les cloches sont passés', and 'la chasse aux oeufs' begins.

* * * * *

News from France

We are back on France's green travel list! Unvaccinated travellers are now welcome, with a negative Covid test.

The French rugby team won the Six Nations and Antoine Dupont was named their Player of the Championship. Brilliant!

France's spymaster, Eric Vidaud, has been sacked for failing to predict the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Seems harsh, he's only been in the job since last summer, and he was not alone in his optimism and apparent failure to grasp the issues, but it's not a job for the faint-hearted.

The French elections are gaining momentum with a lot of division at the political extremes. At the time of writing, Marine le Pen has gained some ground on Macron, who is under criticism domestically and environmentally, with the McKinsey affair as a storm in a teacup that will do no more than entrench existing positions. He has gained respect, however, for his reasonable stance over the war in Ukraine, and for attempting to negotiate with Putin before hardening his line. He is also perceived as having dealt well with the pandemic, even though there were protests during the worst phase. An interesting fortnight lies ahead.

French fashion photographer Patrick Demarchelier has died at the age of 78. During a long and illustrious career, he photographed, among many others, Princess Diana, Beyoncé and Madonna.

Cultural news

The photographer Laura Henno has an exhibition at the Palais deTokyo in Paris, 15 April–4 September, which documents the lives of a group of teenagers, aged 10–20, who live in Mayotte, a French territory off the coast of East Africa. It is one of five islands and the only one that still 'belongs' to France, and therefore a connection for hopeful migrants to the EU. They are undocumented immigrants, some of them orphans, who have come from the independent islands around. They face deportation and many have drowned trying to get there. They live in a temporary shelter on the beach, protected by a trained pack of dogs. A bit like Lord of the Flies, they make their own rules, but there are certain dominant characters, who built the shelter and train the dogs, including the one shown here, Djoubi, whom Henno has been documenting since 2017. As a young, white, female photographer, this has not been an easy

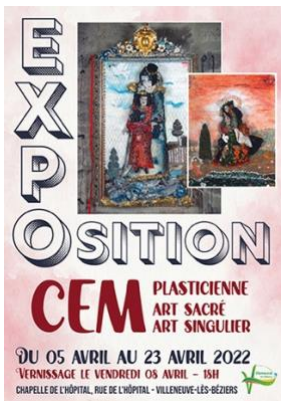
project, but she seeks to give these youngsters back some dignity and pride in their identity, as well as to document a community of young people in limbo, forced to look after themselves, intimidating to some of the locals and yet harmless, just surviving.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/mar/23/undocumented-teenager-in-limbo-mayotte-laura-henno-best-photograph>



News from VLB

An exhibition and a concert forthcoming in April:



CEM is an artist who makes pictures on found objects such as stones and things she finds on the beach. *En 2004, la découverte sur une plage d'un bois flotté oriente son travail vers la technique qui est aujourd'hui la sienne. Afin de "révéler" la beauté de ces végétaux, elle y ajoute des touches de peintures, de carton, de mousse, de paille de fer, de tissus ou de pierreries.*



Après le succès des deux premiers exposés sur Victor Hugo, Fanny Seguin revient pour un nouveau récital : *Le Soldat inconnu à travers les âges, de Renoncevaux à la Guerre de 40*. Entrée libre, public adulte.

Conversations with our friends in VLB

No meeting in April.

We shall meet on Zoom on May 23rd at 6pm.

If you would like to take part, please email Jane Finn at janefinn20@hotmail.com

French Conversation in Langford

12th April 3pm The Langford Inn

28th April 3pm The Langford Inn

There is no need to book for these French chats, just turn up. They are friendly, informal and fun. If you would like more information, please email Margaret Hancock, margaretdivonne@gmail.com.

Cinéphiles de Wrington

5th April 5pm on Zoom. *Amélie* (2001), the full title of which is *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. It was the film that launched the film career of Audrey Tautou. The discussion will be introduced by Phil Parker. At the moment we are still meeting on Zoom, but, as with the French conversation group, we are hoping to meet face-to-face as the spring opens up.

Please note the universal log-in for all French Connection and Wrington 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

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Stop Press: The film that won the Oscar for Best Film, C.O.D.A., is based on a very popular 2014 French film, *La Famille Bélier*. The American film was made in conjunction with the French production company. C.O.D.A. stands for Child of Deaf Adults. The American version uses a majority of deaf actors, whereas the French film used hearing actors, including the Belgian

François Damiens, who played the clumsy Swedish boyfriend in *La Délicatesse*. If you are going to see C.O.D.A, you might be interested to see the French original too. Available to rent for £2.49 from Amazon Prime,

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

Le gigot d'Agneau Pascal



1 leg of lamb
Garlic, salt, pepper, olive oil
Fresh rosemary and optional dried *herbes de Provence*

You can prepare the lamb in advance, but make sure you take it out of the fridge at least 2 hours before cooking.

Dry the surface of the lamb all over, remove any really thick areas of white fat that remain. Cut the garlic into tiny batons, like dolls-house chips. Using a long, thin, sharp knife, make narrow cuts deep into the meat at intervals all over, inserting a baton of garlic as you do so. The quantity of garlic is to your taste. This is called *piquer la viande à l'ail*. You can also insert a couple of rosemary leaves with the garlic if you like. Put the leg into a roasting dish and rub with a little olive oil (go easy, lamb has lots of natural fat).

Sprinkle with pepper and, if you like, some dried *herbes de Provence* to give a herb crust. **(This much can be done in advance, then brought out two hours before cooking.)**

Heat the oven to very hot, 240 degrees if possible.

Sprinkle the whole leg with salt and put into the hot oven for 20 minutes.

Lower the heat to 200 degrees and cook for 12–15 minutes per lb (500g) if you like it pink, 18 minutes per lb if you like it cooked through.

When the cooking time is up, remove the meat from the dish to a warm plate, cover with foil and leave for 20 minutes to rest.

Pour most of the fat from the roasting dish and use the little that remains to make a sauce. Simply put the pan on a low to moderate heat, add some chicken stock and/or some red wine to deglaze the pan, scrape up the meat residue from the bottom, reduce, and season if necessary.

Gigot d'Agneau is usually served with dauphinoise potatoes and flageolet green beans.



As a starter, you might, with this late Easter, like to serve asparagus. Here is a very good, carefully prepared recipe for roasted asparagus with soft boiled eggs. Absolutely delicious and very fresh for the beginning of spring!

<https://www.frenchtoday.com/blog/french-food-wine/roasted-green-asparagus-egg-mollet/>

These recipes come from the blog French Today, written by Camille Chevalier-Karfis, who was born and bred in Paris, and supported by her husband, Olivier Karfis, who is of Greek heritage and who cooks. And that, my friends, is a marriage most definitely made in heaven.

<https://www.frenchtoday.com/blog/french-culture/>

Wine of the Month

A good claret is the obvious choice to go with gigot d'agneau, and as it is Easter, we should look for the best quality. Two wines which stand out, for under £20, are Château Pierbone, from Haut-Médoc in the Gironde, a typical blend of 68% cabernet sauvignon and 32% merlot, and from the wonderful vintage of 2010, very good value at £14.95. It comes from a 50-hectare estate (Château Peyrabon) bought in 1998 by Patrick Bernard, whose investment in both vines and technology are really showing by 2010. This claret appeals for its retention of youthfulness in spite of maturity in the bottle (such an attractive quality!), and 'a cedary, cigar-box nose', to quote Tim Sykes.

A little more expensive from the same region is Château Charmail, 2012, a less straightforward blend of 49% cabernet sauvignon, 33% merlot, 15% cabernet franc and 2% petit Verdot. This was made by Olivier Sèze at his estate near St Estèphe. He sold it in 2008, but stayed on until his last vintage in 2014, when he moved on to become winemaker at Château Caronne Ste. Gemme. He was said to be at his peak in 2012. This is, however, a wine that divides opinion and disappoints some. 'Olivier Sèze was an exponent of pre-fermentation cold maceration techniques which can result in more supple tannins and classy fruit character while retaining a deep colour. The wines made by Olivier were matured in oak for one year and neither fined nor filtered before bottling. They usually need at least 4 years bottle age before they are ready to drink.' There has been plenty of time for ageing, but it may be this method that disorientates some palettes.

Both of these clarets are conventional wines rather than trail-blazers, but many of us go to a good claret for just that dependability. All clarets are best decanted two or three hours prior to drinking. Some would say that Chateau Margaux is the best way to go with its distinctive, dark-fruit aroma and sophisticated charm, but you'll struggle to find anything under £20 that does it justice. The Wine Society have a 2016 in their Exhibition range that has won two silver medals, for £24.

The photo above shows that the chef has chosen Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent. There is plenty of this available and affordable, and again, the Wine Society has an Exhibition 2020 version that is amazing value at £11.25. It's a bit young for my taste, but that's Beaujolais. If it's your thing, then this might be for you!

Now I *could* talk about the relative merits of a good Rioja, or a Puglian red, or a Greek Xinomavro, for less money and perhaps a bit more character, but then, who would I be? Not the editor of *this* newsletter!

Le mot juste

An easy one this month: *le poisson*. I write on 1st April, the day in France of *le poisson d'avril*, which is what their word for an April Fool. Look out for fishy tricks. In France, the zodiac sign Pisces is often just called *Poisson*, and where we use the word 'fishy', meaning suspicious, their adjective *poissoneux/se* means just that, full of fish, no inuendo, and usually applied to a particularly abundant river or stream. In contrast to the April Fool, they also have a lovely phrase for being completely in your comfort zone: *comme un poisson dans l'eau*. How interesting and contrary that our answering phrase is the complete reverse: someone out of their comfort zone is 'a fish out of water'. Which just about sums up our national relationship with the French!

Lindsey Shaw-Miller, Newsletter Editor, Wrington Twinning Association and The French Connection.

