



THE FRENCH CONNECTION
WRINGTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION
The John Locke Room, Silver Street, Wrington BS40 5QE
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News from The French Connection and VLB

Both countries, like much of the rest of Europe, are still in lockdown, so activity is more or less at a standstill.

- On 22nd January there was held the first Zoom meeting of the French conversation group. Eight people participated. The meeting had been organised by Lindsey Shaw-Miller who, before she moved from Blagdon to Bath 2 years ago, had been a member of the group. On moving to Bath she retained the connection. The meeting went on for over an hour and it was agreed to repeat it on a fortnightly basis. Anybody who has a reasonable level of conversational French and who would like to become a part of the group should contact Margaret Hancock on margaretdivonne@gmail.com. Exceptionally, a second meeting was held on 29th January. The committee has decided to subscribe to a paid Zoom membership so we will be able to have extended Zoom meetings with an unlimited number of people. At the last meeting there was a discussion about how we might profit from this and a number of suggestions were made. One was to start a group to watch selected French films and to hold a Zoom meeting to discuss them. Another was to organise Zoom meetings in a mixture of French and English with a group from VLB. This will all be looked into.
- Subscriptions that were paid for 2019/20 have been extended to 30.09.21 due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown rules meaning that it has been impossible to arrange any meetings / events. If you are unsure whether you have paid for 2019/20, please contact the treasurer at treasurer@wringtontwinning.co.uk for payment details

News from France

- By mid-January there had been approximately 73,000 reported deaths from Covid-19 in France.
- Strict lockdown measures are still in force and a national curfew is in place between 18:00 and 06:00. Cross-border travel restrictions have been stepped up and it is now difficult to move into or out of France other than to or from another EU country (which no longer includes the UK) without good reason.
- Vaccination has started in France but the numbers are far less than in the UK. The level of scepticism about being vaccinated is higher in France than in the UK.
- It is no longer possible for UK nationals driving on UK licences in France to exchange them for French licences, as is required of non-EU nationals. The rules to do this were not covered in the Brexit deal signed in December. France has agreed to allow drivers using UK licences to continue to do so until the end of this year but if the UK licence expires, as recent photocard ones do after 10 years and all do when the driver reaches 70 and every three years after, it cannot be renewed to a French address and currently cannot be swapped for a new one registered to a French address.

The Côte d'Azur

This is the southern coastal strip of France running along the Mediterranean from around Cassis (near Marseille) to Menton and the Italian border (although there is no official definition of where it begins and ends). The English term 'Riviera' is an Italian word not used by the French. The region was first 'discovered' by upper class British people in the late 18th century as a place to escape to in the winter. When the railway arrived in the mid-19th century its popularity increased. One did not go there in the summer as it was too hot. It became very fashionable to have a villa on the coast between Saint-Tropez and Menton and British and other royalty were frequent visitors. Visitors did not of course mix socially with the natives, who spoke only French.

The development of the area as a summer resort gathered speed after the second world war, since when the changes have been immense. As recently as the 1960s it was a region with great charm, a magnet for artists, blessed with a lovely climate and a picturesque landscape and atmosphere. Since then the developers have taken over and almost every available spot has been built on to accommodate tourists, not always with great taste. The result has been severe overcrowding, traffic problems and high prices.

Saint-Tropez, close to the western end, is renowned as a haven for expensive yachts and wealthy tourists. Moving further eastwards you arrive in Cannes, replete with expensive villas and hotels and famous for its annual film festival. Moving on eastwards you come to Golfe Juan, where Napoleon landed after his escape from Elba and from where he started his march to Paris. A little further on still you come to Antibes, with its interesting old town and its wonderful deep water harbour, home to the magnificent floating palaces of the very rich.

Then comes Nice, a city of some 340,000 people and one of the most populous urban areas in France. Nice is a major commercial and business centre but it also has a famous seaside promenade (*Promenade des Anglais*), some interesting old quarters and market, and is of course famous for its battle of the flowers in February and its extravagant pre-lenten carnival.



Nice

Going further eastward along the coast you will come to St. Jean Cap Ferrat, where some of the most opulent jet-set villas are to be found and, having crossed the Principality of Monaco, you will eventually arrive at Menton, up against the Italian frontier. Menton these days is almost as much an Italian town as a French one. Menton is famous for its *fête du citron*

To discover some of the area's old charm it is worth going just a mile or two back from the coast where you can still find some interesting villages, such as the old Piemontais village of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, on the Moyenne Corniche, the perched village of Eze, and behind Cagnes-sur-Mer, the artists' paradise of St. Paul de Vence, with its lovely (and expensive) Colombe d'Or restaurant, formerly owned by Yves Montaud.



Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (the Grimaldi Castle)

To get to the Côte d'Azur you can fly to Nice or Marseille, or you can spend just over 4 hours on the TGV from Paris to Nice. Alternatively the journey can be done by road in a long day's drive from Calais (but avoid the main holiday departure times).

The Alambic



The word 'alambic' is an ancient term, used in many countries to describe a liquor still. The strange contraption in the photo above is a mobile alambic that was traditionally towed by tractor from village to village in French wine growing areas after the wine harvest. It spent a couple of days or so in each village and the villagers were able to bring the skins of their home-grown grapes, after the juice had been extracted for wine-making, to be distilled into a fearsome liquor called '*marc*'. During its stay the alambic became a social gathering point for the villagers, for whom it provided an opportunity for conviviality. The pervading smell in the close vicinity was potent and added to the atmosphere. As with a number of activities in the France of days gone by, the operator of the alambic required a licence and the licence was handed down in families from generation to generation. Sadly, around the turn of the century, the government decided that, as the licences expired, no new ones would be granted and they could no longer be handed down, so the alambic, like so many other customs of rural life, will soon pass into history.

Quirky French motor cars

André Citroen was born in Paris in 1878, the son of a Dutch father and a Polish mother. Having been born in France he was a Frenchman. He can be regarded as the grandfather of the French motor industry, having founded a brand which is among the World's leading brands of motor car today, although in the 1980's it merged with another old French icon of the motor industry, Peugeot. It is now in the course of adding to its group the European business of General Motors, which will add the Opel and Vauxhall brands to its range.

The French motor industry was booming in the 1970s, a time when the industry in

Britain was in a crisis. Until more recent years when all motor cars began to be more or less alike, Citroën had a reputation for producing unusual, rather quirky, cars. In the mid-1930s it produced the first mass produced front-wheel, drive car, the *traction avant* (a system now used almost universally). It was produced from 1934 to 1957 and was hugely popular in many countries.



Traction avant

In the early post-war years Citroën started to produce cars with adjustable hydraulic suspensions. These cars could be seen to rise up on their suspension when the engine was started. They offered a very soft 'floating' ride, which affected some people in the same way as being on a boat in a rolling sea. The iconic DS range, produced in the 1950s, was ahead of its time in appearance and features - although it unfortunately suffered serious reliability problems. It was produced in various versions until the early 1970s and is still a favourite with classic car collectors. The hydraulic suspension system was used on some later models until the end of the 1980s, when it was abandoned.



DS 19



One of the first



One of the last

Even quirkier perhaps than the DS was the 2CV, known as the *deux chevaux*, because the French horsepower classification for tax purposes was different from the British one. This was a very basic 'go anywhere' car first produced just before the war. At first it had but one single headlamp and a hand operated windscreen wiper. It had a top speed of around 40 mph. It continued to be produced and gradually refined until the 1980s. It became a cult car and sold worldwide in its millions. There are still a number around today and they sell for prices much higher than their original cost. In its final form the 2CV had 4 doors, a canvas folding roof and an 800cc, two cylinder air-cooled engine (no need for anti-freeze) with a dashboard mounted gear change operating a no synchromesh 3-speed gearbox. It was renowned for reliability, low maintenance costs and (believe it or not) ride comfort.

A contemporary and a competitor of the 2CV was the Renault 4L. This was a more conventional small estate car, very simple and very sturdy. It had a reputation of being very reliable, requiring little maintenance, and long lasting. It was produced from the '60s to the '90s and sold in huge numbers.



Renault 4L

A rather different, but no less unusual, French car was the Matra-Simca Bagheera. It was intended as an affordable sports car and was built by the automotive division of the French engineering group Matra in cooperation with car manufacturer Simca (subsequently taken over by Peugeot). It had a 1294cc overhead valve, rear mounted engine and an all fibre-glass body (which was subject to cracking). It had three comfortable seats abreast and a low, sports car, profile. It had an astonishingly sprightly performance for its engine size and price and excellent cornering and road-holding qualities. It was produced with minor variations from 1973 to 1980. Unfortunately it did not have a good reputation for reliability and longevity.



Matra-Simca Bagheera

More Covid truths



