



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

NEWSLETTER January 2022
Website: <https://www.wringtontwinning.co.uk>
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Welcome to your February newsletter

La Chandeleur

February 2nd is Candlemas, *Fête de la Chandeleur*, exactly 40 days after Christmas, although its origins are older, marking the mid-point of winter when the new year began on March 1st. This was the Roman calendar and marked the time of year when the planting of crops began. A celebration of the god Pan, it transformed, when the Romans became Christian, into a celebration of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and the Purification of the Virgin Mary (after Jesus' birth), and this commemoration was marked by the lighting of candles.

In France, Candlemas is celebrated by mixing these two traditions: *crêpes* are eaten (for dinner, not for breakfast), their round shape symbolizing the sun and the circle of life. Sharing them at a meal with others (usually in homes, not in a restaurant) commemorates the tradition of the Pope giving food to the poor and hungry. Many people do go into church at Candlemas and light candles.

There are numerous superstitions, mostly concerning wealth and prosperity, surrounding the making and eating of the *crêpes* at *La Chandeleur*. Traditions are regional and vary from putting a coin on top of the *crêpe* while it is cooking, to hiding the first *crêpe* for good luck, to holding a coin in your right hand while flipping over the *crêpes* with your left. If you manage this without dropping one, you will have a prosperous year ahead.

There are also weather predictions: rain on *La Chandeleur* brings 40 more wet days, but a clear and sunny day means that winter is almost past.

Finally, the circular symbolism prevails in the drinking traditions: *le cidre* accompanies the *crêpes*, but not from a glass, from a round bowl.

Sources: <https://www.frenchpod101.com/blog/2019/01/30/candlemas-in-france/>
Condé Nast Traveller, 1 February 2017

Candles in February

I leave it to you as to whether you transfer your pancake-eating penchant to February 2nd or wait for Shrove Tuesday on March 1st (more next month). If the *chandelles* aspect of Candlemas appeals to you, I have two recommendations (full disclosure: the editor has no vested interests).

Cath Collins is a small company based at Combe Fishacre in Devon. I have tried all three of their candles: Samba with Amber and Mediterranean Fig are warm and complex, Flowershop is exactly as described, very fresh. At £25 they are not a casual buy, but they give good value. For best performance, burn for a minimum of half an hour, and trim the wick before relighting.

<https://www.cathcollins.com> .



A little more affordable, also local, is **Limelight**, a company based in Corsham. They have a bigger range than Cath Collins, beautiful mixes of fragrances and it's fun to try different ones for different seasons. For Candlemas I would recommend No 19, Hearth. No 1, Basil, Lime, Bergamot and Mandarin is also a stunner. They have a sale on at the moment, so worth visiting the website. <https://limelightlimited.com>

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News from France

The election is gaining heat as the 'people's primary' has finally chosen a candidate for the left. She is Christine Taubira, former Minister of Justice. Whether she can sufficiently unify the different wings of the party, from far left to green to centre, remains to be seen, but she will have to do that if she is to unseat President Macron. The right remains divided between far right (Marine le Pen) and extremely far right (Eric Zemmour). There is much yet to happen.

Inflation is at 3.4% in France, due to rocketing energy and fuel prices (familiar?). As householders are bearing the brunt of this, French commentators are predicting a change in behaviour to respond to the squeeze on wallets. President Macron is asking EDF, once state-owned, to subsidize energy rates in the short term. The unions, still regretting privatisation, are unimpressed and resistant.

Six museums across Paris are celebrating the life and career of Yves St Laurent (1936–2008). *Yves St Laurent at the Museums* presents integrated displays that demonstrate the eclecticism of his work and its close relationship to art, from his Mondrian dress to his Versailles jacket, covered in gold leaf and rock crystals.



Yves St Laurent's Versailles jacket, on display at the Louvre Museum, beside the gilded interior panel that inspired it. *Photo: Times of Malta*

News from VLB

Things are very quiet, apart from impending roadworks for repairs to the water main. Boulevard Pasteur, 7th February for 12 weeks. Misère!

Conversations with our friends in VLB

February 21st 6pm Zoom

If you would like to take part, please email Jane Finn at jane finn20@hotmail.com

French Conversation in Langford and on Zoom

11 February 5pm Zoom

24 February 3pm The Langford Inn

If you would like to attend the Zoom meetings, just drop Margaret Hancock a line (hancock.divonne@gmail.com). It is a recurring meeting, so the universal protocols apply (see below).

Cinéphiles de Wrington

1st February at 5pm on Zoom, when we shall discuss *Deux Jours, Une Nuit* (2014), directed by the Dardenne brothers, starring Marion Cotillard and Fabrizio Rongione. Cotillard, with none of her usual glamour, but all the usual charm, plays a woman whose colleagues have been offered a £1,000 bonus in return for her dismissal. She has one weekend in which to persuade them to turn it down, so she can keep her job. The discussion will be led by Lesley Stephens. Please use the universal joining instructions below.

Our next film, available on Amazon to rent or buy, will be:

1 March *Etre et Avoir* (2002), a documentary about a small, rural school, directed by Nicolas Philibert.

That will be the last film on the present list. Shail Patel welcomes suggestions from members for the next round. **Please send him your suggestion before 20th February.**

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

+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

Having used up my pancake idea in the last newsletter (apologies to Chandeleuristes), I have turned for inspiration to the book I am currently reading, *Le Dit du Mistral* by Olivier Mak-Bouchard. In chapter 10, the anonymous narrator makes dinner for his neighbours, a 'cake' of tuna with olives. Tuna has become a blacklisted food because of over-fishing, but I was intrigued, so I've found a couple of variations on this theme. One simply omits the tuna and uses olives alone, the other suggests smoked duck breast and gruyere. That sounds altogether too urban for the Luberon, the setting of the novel, so I have adjusted it to involve smoked salmon instead.

'Cake' aux olives vertes

300g plain white flour
2 tsp baking powder
150g green olives, pitted
150g smoked salmon
(150g gruyere or pecorino, shredded, optional)
3 large eggs
200ml muscat or sherry (I used Pineau de Charentes)
150ml olive oil

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees.

Grease and line a 1ltr loaf tin (10cm x 20cm).

Spoon the baking powder through the flour and sieve into a bowl.

Break in the eggs and mix until well blended and all the flour is absorbed, the mixture smooth.

Add the muscat and olive oil and mix well.

Add the olives and smoked salmon, cheese if you will. The batter will be quite thick.

Pour into the loaf tin and bake for about 40 minutes. A skewer inserted into the centre of the 'cake' should come out clean.

Leave to rest in the tin for about 5 minutes, or until firm, before turning out onto a wire rack to cool.

The narrator served this with a *gratin* of courgettes, which is why I would leave out the cheese.

Wine of the Month

Another discovery from my literary palate. When the narrator of the novel made his 'cake', the neighbours who came to dinner brought some of their home-made **vin de noix**. This is a liqueur made from walnuts, which they drank as an aperitif. The walnuts are picked green on a very specific date: 24th June. The liquor is then macerated for at least three months, even better left until Christmas, and better still, bottled and left for a couple of years (which is what I do with sloe gin, so much finer than drinking it young). Here is a recipe, found on the blog <https://curiousprovence.com> .

Vin de Noix

- Ingredients -

30-40 Green Walnuts

5 Litres of Red Wine (from the local cave
or simple boxed wine- remember this is a Paysane
version of an aperitif)

1 Litre of Eau de Vie (alcool des fruits)

1 kg of Sugar

- Method -

Bash the Walnuts so that they crack
(or if you're less daring cut them in two
with a sharp knife)

Put them in a bonbonne or demijohn with
all the other ingredients and mix well.

Leave to macerate for at least 3 months
Rotate the demijohn a few times a week
(or whenever you happen to remember)

Strain and bottle your concoction
Leave in the bottles at least until Christmas

The longer you leave the bottles the better
the Walnut wine!

Le mot juste

Creuser. To dig, to bore for water, to plough, to delve (deeply into a problem), to hollow out; *la fatigue lui creusait les joues* (tiredness had hollowed out his cheeks), *un visage creusé de rides* (a face furrowed with wrinkles), *creuser l'estomac* (to feel empty, hollowed out, hungry), *se creuser la cervelle* (to rack one's brains), but *ne se creuser pas* (not to overtax oneself).

Les heures creuses (empty hours, a slack period).

And my favourite, related word that we all know well: **Le Creuset**: the crucible!

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