



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

- The French conversation and Cinéophile groups are taking a break during the summer months.
- On 7<sup>th</sup> June there was a Zoom meeting between members of TFC and a group from VLB. There were 7 participants from TFC and about 10 from VLB, who were all grouped around a table in the *Mairie*. The meeting was hosted by Céline from VLB. The English group, led by Jane Finn, spoke in French and the French group spoke in English. The linguistic standard on both sides was quite high so that there was no real problem in understanding what was going on. Each participant in turn introduced themselves. The discussion then turned to future events. There is a plan for a group from VLB to visit Wroughton next year for the Wroughton Fair. Céline is prepared to sing to us and they are also planning to put on a French meal. It is hoped that the visitors can be lodged with families in Wroughton, which is an excellent way of forming friendships. Our friends from VLB are also keen to have a group of their youngsters visit Wroughton, perhaps even later this year if possible, and they want to contact a school to discuss arrangements for this. It is proposed to put them in touch with Churchill Academy.
- There is obviously a great deal of enthusiasm on the part of the new team in VLB, led by Céline, to strengthen the twinning relationship and your committee will be working hard to take advantage of this.

**News from France**

- This year, for the first time, surviving British Normandy veterans and their families have their own dedicated memorial to the largest sea invasion in history. The British Normandy Memorial, which was officially opened on 6<sup>th</sup> June to mark the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, overlooks the British landing areas, including the coast off Arromanches and the remains of the famous Mulberry harbour. The site consists of a temple-like structure containing 160 stone columns inscribed with the names of the dead, a bronze sculpture of three charging infantrymen by British sculptor David Williams-Ellis, and a wall featuring the names of those who were killed on D-Day itself.
- I am sure you will all be pleased to learn that nightclubs in France may reopen from 9<sup>th</sup> July.
- As in Britain, Covid-19 has upended the property market across France, with Paris losing out but nearly all other regions benefiting as buyers seek greener and simpler post-pandemic lives. Remote working, which the government encouraged, means many people have reassessed their accommodation and their lifestyles.
- It has been made clear that, to enable them to enter France, UK nationals visiting France to stay with friends and family can show, if asked, an invitation from their host as evidence of the reason for their stay. This follows confusion over whether they would need an *attestation d'accueil* from the host's *mairie* for private visits.

## THE PAST OF PARIS

Most people know and love Paris. They enjoy the tourist sites, museums and galleries and they have their favourite restaurants. But how much do people know about the city's history? The following episodic historical extracts that affected Paris may be of interest.

The oldest traces of human occupation in Paris, discovered in 2008 near the *Rue Henri-Farman* in the 15<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, are human bones and evidence of an encampment of hunter-gatherers dating from about 8,000 BC. Between 250 and 225 BC, the *Parisii*, a sub-tribe of the *Celts*, settled at Nanterre on the banks of the Seine just West of what is now central Paris and built bridges and a fort, minted coins, and began to trade with other river settlements in Europe.

In 52 BC, a Roman army defeated the *Parisii* and established a Gallo-Roman garrison town called *Lutetia* around the marshes close to the *Ile de la Cité*. The town was christianised in the 3rd century AD and changed its name to Paris in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Paris was the object of frequent attacks by the Normans, who were able to sail up the Seine. These attacks continued until, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a treaty was signed under which the Normans agreed to stop them in exchange for the allocation to them of a colony comprising the territory which became Normandy.

During the Middle Ages, Paris was the largest city in Europe, an important religious and commercial centre, and the birthplace of the Gothic style of architecture of which the first example was the *Cathédral Saint Denis*, to the North of the city centre, which became a place of pilgrimage and a major place of worship. The University of Paris (The *Sorbonne*), on the left bank, which dates from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the first in Europe.

Work on the construction of the *Cathédral de Notre Dame*, which eventually superseded *Saint Denis* as the principal place of worship in Paris, began in 1163 and took almost 100 years to complete. It was modified frequently in the following centuries. In the 1790s, *Notre-Dame* suffered desecration during the French Revolution and much of its religious imagery was damaged or destroyed. It was seen as a national disaster when *Notre Dame* was severely damaged by fire in 2019. Although the cathedral is still closed to the public repair work is now under way and it will be restored to its previous state.

In 1789 Paris was the launching pad for the revolution which had been simmering for years, when a mob stormed the Bastille in search of the arms and ammunition that they believed to be stored at the fortress. The Bastille was also the place of imprisonment of political prisoners which the mob hoped to free. They took over the building. This event is traditionally regarded as the start of the revolution and is celebrated on 14<sup>th</sup> July every year, which is known in Britain as 'Bastille Day'.

In the mid-nineteenth century a vast public works programme was commissioned by Emperor Napoléon III and directed by the Prefect of Seine, Georges-Eugène Haussman. The work was carried out between 1853 and 1870 and included the demolition of medieval neighbourhoods that were deemed overcrowded and unhealthy, the building of wide avenues, new parks and squares, the annexation of the suburbs surrounding Paris and the construction of new sewers, fountains and aqueducts. Haussmann's work met with fierce opposition, and he was dismissed by Napoléon in 1870, but work on his projects continued until 1927. The street plan and distinctive appearance of the centre of Paris today are largely the result of Haussmann's renovation.

There have been two Paris *Communes*. The first one governed Paris during the early years of the French Revolution, from 1789 until 1795. Established in the *Hôtel de Ville* just after the storming of the Bastille, it consisted of 144 delegates elected by the 60 divisions of the city. Before its formal establishment, there had been much popular

discontent. The new Commune meant that there was a genuinely revolutionary, if not always very effective, challenge to the legislative Assembly. The eventual execution of its leaders led to its disestablishment in 1795.

The second Paris Commune was a revolutionary socialist government that controlled Paris from 18 March to 28 May 1871. During the Franco-Prussian War Paris had been defended by the National Guard. Radicalism grew among its soldiers and in March 1871, during the establishment of the Third Republic, soldiers of the National Guard seized control of the city and refused to accept the authority of the French government, instead attempting to establish an independent government. The Commune governed Paris for two months, establishing policies based on a progressive, secular system of democracy in which church and state were separated. The Commune was eventually suppressed by the national army in 1871, after a bloody week of fighting in which over 6,000 people were killed. The Archbishop of Paris and other hostages were shot by the Commune in retaliation.

The *Basilique Sacré-Coeur*, now a famous landmark of Montmartre, was completed in 1914. It was consecrated after the end of the First World War and is considered as both a political and cultural monument, representing a national penance for the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War and for the actions of the Paris Commune of 1871. Montmartre had been the scene of many of the events of the Commune and there are reminders of its existence in what is now a major tourist venue.



**The Fête Nationale**, usually referred to colloquially as '*le quatorze juillet*' is the French national day, known to the British as 'Bastille Day'. It is marked by a major parade down the *Champs Élysées* of France's military might and of their supporting non-military services such as the *sapeurs pompiers*. The parade passes down the *Champs-Élysées* from the *Arc de Triomphe* to the *Place de la Concorde*, where the President of the Republic, his government and foreign ambassadors to France stand. This is the oldest and largest regular military parade in Europe and commemorates the storming of the Bastille and the beginnings of the French Republic. It is a national holiday and is celebrated all over France. In the towns and villages there is, by tradition, music and dancing in the squares and parks and it used to be a very 'folksy' occasion where young and old danced to simple music, often provided by a local group. Today, the 'folksy' element is often replaced by disco music and dancing that appeals more to today's young generations.

## THE ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE

We recently considered some of the questions a visiting Frenchman might have about British life and habits. Our French visitor has now had a close look at English houses and this raised some more questions and formed new impressions:

- Why do the windows on English house open outwards so that you cannot clean them from inside and have to employ a window cleaner?
- Why is the pipework on English houses often on the outside wall, where it is exposed to the frost, rather than being inside?
- Why do the English insist on having dust gathering fitted carpets throughout their houses when wooden or tiled floors are far more hygienic and easier to clean?
- He was surprised by the 3-piece suites that furnish most English living rooms. He had never seen one before.
- He was surprised that conservatories are now so popular in England. In France, where they are called '*verandahs*' they are a rarity.
- Our Frenchman was not surprised at the pride the English take in their gardens. They are renowned for it in France, although the French are not far behind these days. He was pleased to see at first hand '*la pelouse anglaise*' - the English lawn, whose reputation is legendary in France and which few French people dare to try and imitate.
- He was puzzled by the English passion for building their new homes to look like old ones. He found it difficult to understand the suburban 'mock Tudor' and 'mock Georgian' houses to be found in all suburbs and wonders what fuels this passion to copy the past.
- He did not understand why the windows of English houses do not have shutters, which are almost universal in France for security purposes, for insulation and to keep out unwanted light.

## RESPECT BETWEEN SPOUSES



ANTHONY HANCOCK



