

**THE FRENCH CONNECTION**  
**WRINGTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION**  
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### News from The French Connection

As you can imagine, there is none.

### News from France

- The lockdown in France has been stricter than that in the UK. France has had slightly more deaths than the UK from Covid-19. To leave your home you are required to complete a form saying where you are going and why. Failure to do so results in a fine if you are stopped. It is discouraged for two or more people to travel in a car together. If they do so each must complete a form.
- However, in a broadcast to the nation on 28<sup>th</sup> April, President Macron announced that the lockdown will start to be eased from 11<sup>th</sup> May. Schools and crèches will start to reopen, but teachers will be required to wear masks. There will be a gradual return to work and shops will reopen, but restaurants, cafés, bars and cinemas will remain closed. Public gatherings of no more than 10 people will be permitted. Borders with other European countries will remain closed and people may not travel more than 100km. from their homes unless they have a special professional or family reason for doing so. A further announcement is promised in 2 weeks time.
- Car insurance refunds: Car drivers in France will be getting a refund on their insurance premiums to compensate for lack of use during the lockdown period.

### News from VLB

As in most other places, public life in VLB has more or less stopped due to Covid-19. The *Mairie* is closed to the public and schools, shops and restaurants are closed. However Fabrice Solans, the mayoral candidate who visited us in Wrington late last year, and who is enthusiastic to give a new lease of life to twinning, has continued to post his thoughts. The following is a free translation of an extract from his latest post: *'In less than a month, with the drastic reduction in human activity, nature has already started to take back its rights. The impact of our "civilised" society has been bad for the planet since the end of the second world war. As a result of the coronavirus the flagrant consumption to the detriment of the Earth that feeds us and enables us to live has come to a sudden stop, which could be our salvation. This health crisis should be the trigger for collectively thinking of another world in which we are more united, closer to each other and more human'*. Many of us may share his views and be hoping that governments and society as a whole will have learned these lessons.

### Cardons

The cardon (cardo in English) is an ancient vegetable similar to the artichoke. It has a relatively bitter taste, and a high vitamin content. Although it is now almost unknown in Britain it is still regarded as a delicacy in parts of rural France and is grown (with some difficulty) in country gardens. It is usually served on its own, as a *gratin*, before the main course. It can also be found in other countries that border the Mediterranean. Although no longer eaten in Britain references to it can be found in old editions of Mrs. Beeton's cookbooks.

### Marking the end of the War

May 8<sup>th</sup> marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in Europe. In France this day is always a public holiday, although this year, for obvious reasons, the ceremonies to mark the occasion will be reduced. Memories of the war are still very much alive in France. The number of people who served in the war and are still alive is becoming fewer, but they will never forget. Those who lived through the war but were too young to serve also have vivid memories. Younger generations may believe that such a war can never happen again, whilst older people are less certain of this. They will point out that after the 'war to end all wars' in

1918, people said the same. Apart from the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, Europe has been more stable and peaceful in the last 75 years than it had been since Roman times. Most people in France and elsewhere in Europe see that as a reason why we need more than ever to remain solidly united. The new wave of nationalism sweeping Europe is a cause for concern. All over France you can find 'stele', memorials to the war dead. Memories are especially poignant in areas where the Resistance was particularly active. In the mountainous areas of the Savoie the *maquis*, young men who were often communist sympathisers and whose main motive was to avoid compulsory labour in Germany, took to the woods and slopes and carried out sabotage to hinder the Germans. When the war ended they took their revenge on the *milice*, a collaborationist para-military force organised by the German occupiers to enforce their regime. The situation in some places came close to civil war, pitting the *ex-maquis* against the *milice*. In Annecy former members of the *milice* were rounded up by the *maquis* and executed. Even if we cannot take part in the ceremonies on May 8<sup>th</sup> it will be a good time to look back on those days.



The above picture shows a *stele* in Habère-Lullin, a village in the Haute-Savoie. On December 25<sup>th</sup> 1943 a group of young people were holding a party in the old château. This was forbidden. German troops arrived and shot 23 of them, putting their bodies in the château and burning it to the ground. The few who were not shot were deported to forced labour in Germany. None still survive.

#### What's in a name?

The French have a custom of naming streets, bridges, squares and railway stations after people and events that have contributed to the history of France. You can find, just in Paris, radiating from the Place Charles de Gaulle, the Avenue Foch, Avenue Kléber, Avenue Victor Hugo, Avenue de la Grande Armée and Avenue Wagram. Look around and you will find the Gare d'Austerlitz, the Pont d'Alma and others. This trend is repeated across France. Should we find it surprising that you will not find anywhere in France a Place Trafalgar, an Avenue Wellington, a Boulevard Shakespeare or a Gare Waterloo, nor even a Pont Agincourt?

#### Pézenas

Pézenas is a small and charming medieval town about 30 minutes drive from VLB. It has narrow streets, charming squares and its own architectural style. It also has a well preserved Jewish ghetto from the middle ages. The French writer Molière lived there from 1647 to 1657 and his memory lingers on in the town and its theatre. It is well worth a visit to wander its narrow streets and enjoy a drink at a café in one of the old squares.



A French glimpse at the greatest nation on Earth



ANTHONY HANCOCK