



THE FRENCH CONNECTION
WRINGTON TWINNING ASSOCIATION
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News from The French Connection

There is still only a very reduced activity. The French conversation and the cinéphiles discussions are continuing via Zoom and Jane Finn is exploring with Céline in VLB the idea of Zoom meetings between Wrington and VLB.

Committee meetings continue to be held on Zoom and projects are being discussed for when full activity can resume.

News from France

- There are plans for the lockdown to be eased gradually. Schools will soon reopen and, from May 19th, the curfew time will be changed to 9.00 pm and cafés etc. will be allowed to open on terraces.
- People in France may soon be allowed to travel for summer holidays in Europe on condition of being vaccinated. The EU's planned digital travel 'health pass' is on track for use from mid-June. The plan is that a European-wide health pass will be launched at the same time across the EU, and countries that do not have the resources to put it in place will be supported by the Commission, to avoid delays.
- Intelligent' traffic lights that turn green when vehicles approach at the correct speed and allow them to pass without stopping have been authorised by the French Interior Ministry months after it had ordered local authorities to remove similar traffic measures. Following complaints from motorists about the proliferation of radar lights, the government ordered them to be taken out of service in September 2020. But now it has authorised the use of lights that 'reward' motorists travelling at the local speed limit by changing to green so they do not have to stop. The lights will stay on red for those motorists travelling too quickly, forcing them to stop.
- Protests in France often take the form of direct action - farmers are notorious for dumping all sorts of agricultural objects outside, and sometimes inside, local authority buildings - but lingerie store owners across the country have now devised a twist on the traditional litter. The mail room at Matignon, the office of Prime Minister Jean Castex, is receiving from the stores hundreds of items of lingerie.
- If you are having difficulty in claiming a refund for a cancelled flight to France there is an independent arbitrator in France, *The Médiation Tourisme et Voyage* (MTV), that can help settle reimbursement disputes between customers and airlines out of court. It claims a 96% success rate. It makes its recommendations based on fairness, rather than law, sometimes favouring airlines and sometimes customers.

Other French speaking countries

Having looked in previous issues at French speaking Switzerland and Canada we will quickly look at other parts of the World where French is spoken.

Largely as a result of colonisation 141 Million people speak a variety of French dialects in 34 African countries, usually side by side with an indigenous language, although in some countries, e.g. Côte d'Ivoire, French is now the main language. Algeria was a French colony until 1962 and was the World's second largest French speaking

country. Morocco was a French protectorate until 1956. French is still widely spoken and understood in both countries.

In Guadeloupe and Martinique in the West Indies the official language is French.

Egypt was conquered by Napoleon in 1798 and French was widely spoken there alongside Arabic. The French language still has a large influence in Egypt and there are French speaking schools.

For many years a type of old Norman French was widely spoken in the Channel Islands (*Iles anglo-normandes* in French). French is still, with English, an official language although English is now dominant. The official language for statutes and other official documents used to be French but is now English.

In many other countries, e.g. Greece, Italy and Romania, French was the main second language although now, largely thanks to our transatlantic cousins, it has been overtaken by (americanised) English. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the status of French as one of the World's principal languages is diminishing - but never say that to a Frenchman!

AUVERGNE

The administrative region of Auvergne in south-central France comprises the *départements* of Allier, Puy de Dôme, Cantal and Haute-Loire.

The region is home to a chain of dormant volcanoes known collectively as the "*Chaîne des Puys*". The volcanoes began forming some 70,000 years ago, and most have eroded, leaving plugs of hardened magma that form rounded hilltops known as *puys*. Auvergne, with an area of 26,013 square kilometres, is one of the smallest regions of France. It has some 80 dormant volcanoes. The *Puy de Dôme* is the highest volcano in the region, with an altitude of 1,465 metres.

The northern part of Auvergne is hilly, but the southern portion is mountainous and dotted with pastures. The *Forêt de Tronçais* is the largest oak forest in Europe.

Auvergne has two major rivers: the Loire runs through the south-east and borders the north-east, and the Allier runs from north to south down the centre of the region. There are about 50 freshwater ponds and lakes, some high in the mountains with volcanic origins.

The principal city of the region is Clermont Ferrand, with a population of 143,000. The city sits on the plain of *Limagne* in the *Massif Central* and is surrounded by a major industrial area. It is the home of the *Michelin* group. Clermont Ferrand is one of the oldest French cities, known by the ancient Greeks before developing in the Roman era as *Augustonemetum*. Today Clermont-Ferrand hosts the renowned Clermont Ferrand International Short Film Festival.

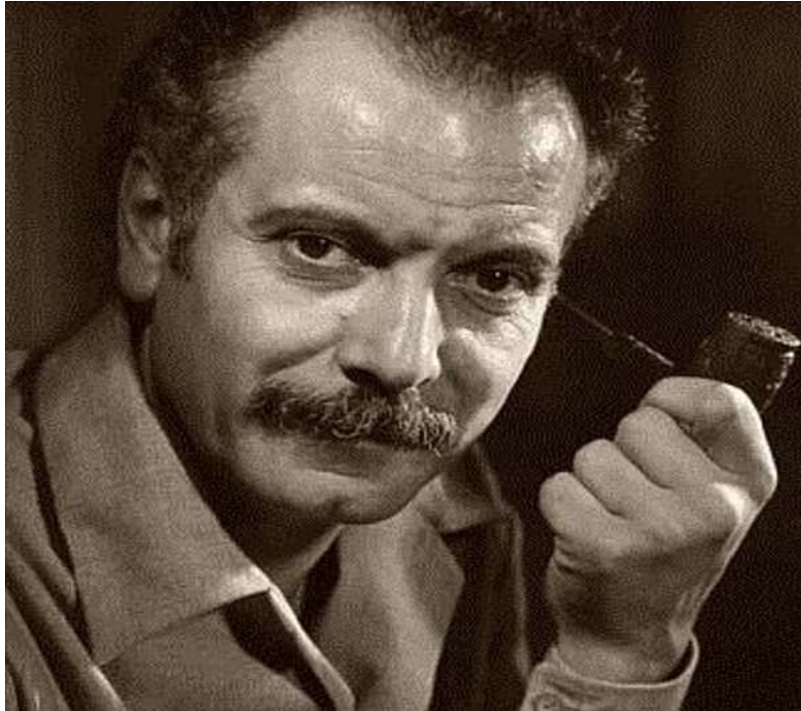
As well as its highly distinctive black lava stone Gothic cathedral, one of



Clermont-Ferrand's most famous sites is the *Place de Jaude*, on which stands a grand statue of *Ver Cingetorix* astride a warhorse and brandishing a sword. The inscription reads, '*J'ai pris les armes pour la liberté de tous*'. This statue was sculpted by Frédéric Bartholdi, who also created the Statue of Liberty.

CHANSON POUR L'Auvergnat

This poignant ballad comes from Georges Brassens, the irreverent French 'minstrel' who was highly popular in France in the 1970s and until his untimely death in the early 1980s. Brassens was born in Sète, just a few miles from VLB and the primary school in VLB is named



after him Brassens owed an immense debt of gratitude to a couple, Marcel Planche and his wife, Jeanne, who hid him and looked after him after he had absconded from a forced labour camp in Germany in 1944. Marcel Planche came originally from the Auvergne, although he had moved to Paris. The words, with an English translation, are set out below.

Chanson pour l'auvergnat

Elle est à toi cette chanson
Toi l'Auvergnat qui, sans façon,
M'a donné quatre bouts de bois
Quand dans ma vie il faisait froid.

Toi qui m'a donné du feu quand
Les croquantes et les croquants

Song for the man from the Auvergne

It is for you this little song
Man of Auvergne who without fuss,
Once gave to me four bits of wood
When in my life there was really cold.

You who gave fire to warm me when
Staid members of the upper crust

Tous les gens bien intentionnés
M'avaient fermés la porte au nez.

Ce n'était rien qu'un feu de bois
Mais il m'avait chauffé le corps
Et dans mon âme, il brûle encore
À la manière d'un feu de joie...

Toi, l'Auvergnat quand tu mourras
Quand le croc-mort t'emportera
Qu'il te conduise à travers ciel
Au père éternel.

Elle est à toi cette chanson
Toi l'hôtesse qui, sans façon,
M'a donné quatre bouts de pain
Quand dans ma vie il faisait faim.

Toi qui m'ouvrit ta huche quand
Les croquantes et les croquants
Tous les gens bien intentionnés
S'amusaient à me voir jeuner.

Ce n'était rien qu'un peu de pain
Mais il m'avait chauffé le corps
Et dans mon âme, il brûle encore
À la manière d'un grand festin...

Toi, l'hôtesse quand tu mourras
Quand le croc-mort t'emportera
Qu'il te conduise à travers ciel
Au père éternel.

Elle est à toi cette chanson
Toi l'étranger qui, sans façon,
D'un air malheureux m'a sourit
Lorsque les gendarmes m'ont pris.

Toi qui n'a pas applaudi quand
Les croquantes et les croquants
Tous les gens bien intentionnés
Riaient de me voir rammené.

Ce n'était rien qu'un peu de miel
Mais il m'avait chauffé le corps
Et dans mon âme, il brûle encore
À la manière d'un grand soleil...

Toi, l'étranger quand tu mourras
Quand le croc-mort t'emportera
Qu'il te conduise à travers ciel

All the people with good intent
Had slammed their doors shut in my face.

It was merely a fire of sticks
But it had warmed my body through
And in my soul it burns on still
In the way a bonfire would do.

You man from Auvergne, when you die
When the mortician bears you off
May he take you across heaven,
To the God everlasting.

It is for you this little song
You the hostess who, without fuss,
Once gave to me four bits of bread
When in my life there was hunger .

You who opened your larder when
Staid members of the upper crust
All the people with good intent
Enjoyed seeing me go without.

It was merely a bit of bread
But it had warmed my body through
And in my soul, it burns on still
In the way a great feast would do.

You, the hostess, when you will die
When the mortician bears you off,
May he take you across heaven,
To God everlasting.

It is for you this little song
You, the stranger, who, without fuss,
Looking dejected, smiled at me,
When the policemen took me off.

You who didn't join the applause when
Staid members of the upper crust
All the people with good intent
Laughed to see me be led away.

T'was merely a touch of honey
But it had warmed my body through
And in my soul it burns on still
In the way bright sunshine would do ...

You, the stranger, when you will die
When the mortician bears you off
May he take you across heaven,

To God eternal.

To God everlasting.

If you would like to listen to the song there are several versions on youtube. Recommended versions are those of Brassens himself and Juliette Greco.

Getting it into perspective



ANTHONY HANCOCK