

BONNE ANNEE 2020 A TOUTES ET A TOUS

News from The French Connection

The new committee has held its first meeting. Annabel Scott has retained the position of Chair and Janet Walters remains as Treasurer. John Adams has taken over as Secretary. The committee is planning a programme of events which it is hoped will provide a varied take on French life. Details will be published as soon as possible in the village journal and on social media and of course in this newsletter.

An email requesting subscriptions for the year 2019/20 will be sent out shortly. Please renew as soon as possible and if your subscription has lapsed please consider re-joining.

News from France

- The widespread strikes that began before Christmas in protest against Emmanuel Macron's proposed pension reforms are not yet over. There has been no truce over the Christmas period and the disruption continues into January despite the fact that Macron has made a concession reducing the proposed pensionable age of 64 to the present pensionable age of 62.
- Strictly speaking British residents in France will be obliged, as soon as the UK leaves the EU on 31st January, to apply for residence permits (*cartes de séjour*). This is to bring them into line with other non-EU nationals resident in France. A new government website has now opened making it possible to apply on-line. However the French government has made it clear that there is no urgency to apply until the longer term relationship between the UK and the EU has been clarified.
- British residents travelling to France will be able to continue using their EHIC medical treatment cards until the end of the transition period. After that it depends on the terms of any agreement that is reached between the UK and the EU. There is a risk that the cards will no longer be valid and medical treatment will have to be paid for.
- As from 1st January the *taxe d'habitation*, an annual tax on the occupation of residential property similar to council tax in the UK has been abolished for most people. The abolition does not however apply to secondary residences so people with holiday homes in France will not feel the benefit.
- Four regions of France are in a state of 'pre-epidemic' for flu. There is also evidence of a widespread outbreak of gastro-enteritis. Anyone travelling to France would be wise to inform themselves about conditions in the area they will be visiting and to take any necessary precautions.
- The latest food scandal in France is over *foie gras*, one of the traditional culinary delicacies that is in great demand over the festive season. Official inspections have discovered that a significant percentage of the *foie gras* that is produced does not conform to prescribed standards, mainly because it contains more than the permitted quantity of water.

After the floods in VLB

Our friends in VLB have been busy cleaning up after the catastrophic floods suffered by their village last October. The situation was very quickly designated by the French government as a '*catastrophe naturelle*', which is more or less what we would call an act of God. In a

situation of *catastrophe naturelle*, provided you are insured against flood damage (or fire if the problem is a fire) you can automatically claim on your insurance. The insurance cover is guaranteed by the state and the insurers who have to pay up can claim partial reimbursement by the state.

Etat civil

If you have dealings with French bureaucracy it will not be long before you come across the notion of *état civil*. A person's *état civil* describes their personal circumstances, name, address, date of birth, marital status etc. There used to be a document called a *fiche d'état civil* that you could request from your Mairie with a record of your personal circumstances, but these no longer exist. *Etat civil* has to be proved for a number of transactions, including the purchase or sale of property. The French have identity cards that contain some of that information but we do not, so if you are asked to prove your *état civil* you may have to show your passport and your birth and marriage certificates (probably with certified French translations). You may be asked for a birth certificate that is less than 3 months old. This is because in France birth certificates are regularly updated to record current circumstances. If you explain that this does not happen in Britain an old birth certificate will usually be accepted.

Brexit - the reality

We are now firmly on course to leave the EU on 31st January. Some of you will welcome this and your only regret will be that it took so long. Others will be apprehensive of the future of Britain all alone in a big World in which it no longer calls the shots. As the negotiations proceed we will try to keep you up to date with what it all means for your trips to France, your ownership of property in France and even your decision to go and live in France. However, there is one aspect of Brexit that has received little attention - its effect on language. There are debates going on at the moment within the EU about whether English will cease to be an official EU language but if you want to understand better how the French might feel about the linguistic implications of Brexit you just need to Google [French Brexit song](#) and it will all be revealed.

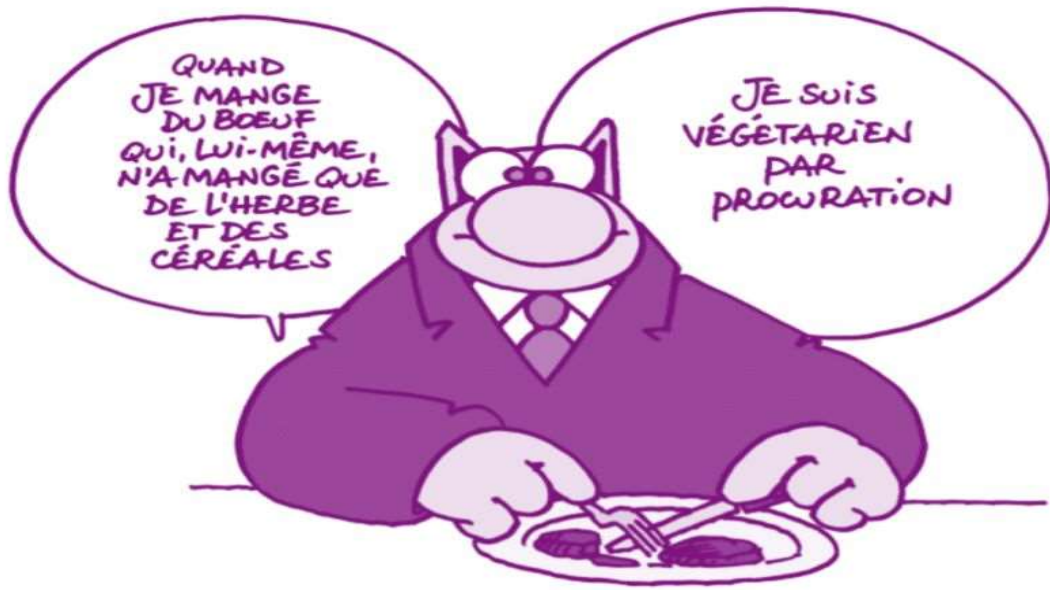
Cap d'Agde

Just a few kilometres from VLB, on the shore of the Mediterranean, is the holiday resort of Cap d'Agde. The town is now quite built up, mainly with modern holiday resort architecture. It has glorious beaches but its main claim to fame is its naturist colony, one of the first in France. Here you can camp or rent accommodation, subject only to the condition that you remove your clothing - although great care is taken to make sure that this custom is not abused. Your correspondent remembers a story about Cap d'Agde going back some years to when he was working in Paris. The manager of the French branch of an English property development company that was doing a residential development at Cap d'Agde arranged a meeting with the French architect who was staying at the naturist resort. He travelled from Paris in his suit and tie and carrying his briefcase, to be met at the gate of the resort by the architect - who was stark naked. Whilst he was well used to the idiosyncracies of the French our Englishman might have been excused for being mildly surprised. However he managed to keep his cool, and his suit.



Naturist village, Cap d'Agde

A French contribution to the fight against climate change



Philippe GELUCK

ANTHONY HANCOCK