

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

Current activity is unfortunately still at a standstill, but your committee has been meeting by Zoom and there is some news:

- Annabel Scott, who has been an active member of the association since twinning started and who was in her second year as our Chairperson has resigned because she has moved away from the area. This is sad news. Annabel has been an enthusiastic and dynamic member of the committee and will be greatly missed. She founded the French conversation group and ran it until Margaret Hancock took it over, she has been one of our principal communicators with VLB and she has organised and managed contacts between schools in our area and theirs. We wish her and her family well in their new home.
- Following the departure of Annabel Shail Patel has taken over as Chair of the association until the next AGM. Perran Jervis has joined the committee to represent the Parish Council.
- The committee and the Parish Council are going to look into ways in which the Council might support the association and two committee members will attend the next Parish Council meeting to discuss this.
- The committee is actively looking at new projects for when life gets back to normal.
- A date for your diary: the date for the AGM has been fixed as 11<sup>th</sup> November. More later.

### News from VLB

- It has already been reported that the new *Maire* of VLB is Fabrice Solans. Fabrice stood as an ecologist. He visited Wrington late last year whilst still campaigning for the election and made it clear that he and his team felt that insufficient attention was being given to twinning and that they intended to give it a major boost.
- One of those who accompanied Fabrice on his visit here was Céline Dubois. She is now a member of his municipal council and has let it be known that she intends to organise a visit to Wrington in 2021 of a large group from VLB of up to 50 people, staying on a campsite. Your committee is looking into possible arrangements for this visit.

### News from France

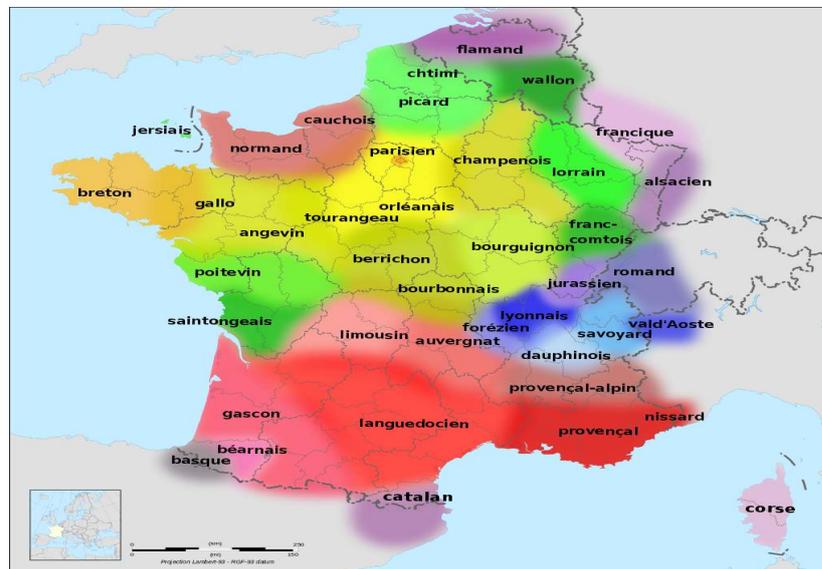
1. Like all other countries, France has been concentrating on managing the pandemic. It has had a rather lower number of deaths than the UK and started sooner than the UK to come out of its lockdown (which had been stricter than ours). However the tourist season is now under way and, as elsewhere, there has been a considerable increase in Covid-19 cases. There are reports of a serious number of new cases at the Cap d'Agde naturist resort just a few kilometres from VLB. France has been added to the list of countries from which visitors returning to Britain must quarantine for 14 days. France has threatened to retaliate by requiring visitors from Britain to quarantine when entering France but no such action has yet been taken.
- Face mask are now compulsory in many public places, including all shops. The details vary from area to area. Paris is one of the strictest.
- On the political front, France has a new Prime Minister. Edouarde Philippe was elected mayor of Le Havre in the recent local elections and has been replaced as Prime Minister by Jean Castex, who, like Emmanuel Macron, is a product of the *grandes écoles* (they were contemporaries as students). It is not unusual for French Presidents to change their prime ministers in mid-term and this does not necessarily imply a lack of satisfaction with the one who leaves the post.

- To compensate for the damage to business caused by the pandemic the French government has announced a loan scheme to the tourist industry to enable businesses to take out loans guaranteed by the government, which means they can borrow more than they would otherwise be able to.
- The Brexit discussions between the UK and the EU are dragging on and the outcome is still uncertain. A question that preoccupies some people is whether they will need a visa to visit France after the end of this year. This is unlikely, although to live in France or to stay there for more than 3 months at a time it is probable that visas will be necessary, as was the case before the UK joined the EU. To take your car to France you now have to have an insurance 'green card' and it is probable that, from the end of this year the EHIC card will no longer be valid, which will almost certainly increase the cost of travel insurance to the EU.
- The champagne industry is having a bad season. The demand for champagne is falling due to a number of factors: the French are drinking less wine, a trend that has been exacerbated by Covid-19, and there are now many excellent alternative sparkling wines available. The main champagne houses have a policy of restricting the quantities put on the market in an effort to keep prices up. This means that large quantities of grapes are left to rot on the vineyards.

## The languages of France

Today the only official language in France is French (Article 2 of the French Constitution). But what is French? It is popularly thought that French is derived from old Latin. Another view is that French is Latin, as it has now evolved, although the same could be said of Italian, Spanish and, to a lesser extent, Portuguese, Romanian and Romansch.

However French was, until fairly recently, not the language universally spoken in France. There were many other languages and dialects that prevailed in different regions, as the map below, taken from '[Langues de France](#)' shows.



Some of the languages of France are also cross-border languages (for example, Basque and Catalan), some of which enjoy a recognised or official status in the respective neighbouring state or territory. The Alsatian language which used to be spoken in Alsace is really a dialect of German (during the German occupation of Alsace in the Second World War the people of Alsace were forced to speak German) and the Flamand spoken in parts of the Northwest is Dutch. Other cross-border languages are influenced by the languages of the neighbouring states. The Basque language is a mystery. It bears no relationship to French or any other local language and has some similarities to Finnish and Hungarian, but nobody knows how it arrived in the Basque country. In Monaco, although French is the official language, there is a Monégasque language which dates

back to the Genoese origins of the rulers of the principality. Traces of some of these languages can still be found today. There are still newspapers printed in Alsatian and Monégasque and Basque is still heard in the French Basque country, where all official signs are still shown in both languages.

Once, when working in the Côte d'Azur region, your correspondent advertised for a bilingual secretary. He received an interesting application from a lady of a certain age, who claimed to speak 5 languages. When interviewed, after she had explained how she was going to reorganise the office, she was asked about her 5 languages. "Oui", she said, "Je parle français, provençal, niçois, piémontais et occitan". Asked about the level of her English she said, "Ah non, je ne parle pas anglais". She did not get the job.

### Cévennes

The Cévennes is a wild mountain area a short drive north-west of VLB. It houses a national park and is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The mountain range is not high by European standards, the highest being around 1,700 metres.

This is real rural unspoilt France at its best. The Cévennes National Park is a paradise for adventure lovers, thrill-seekers and nature enthusiasts. This is an area of impressive diversity - the northern area being more mountainous and the southern sector being more Mediterranean in nature. With its picturesque villages, dusty trails, rivers and rock faces, the Cévennes is an ideal destination for an active holiday.



Some people will think it an added attraction that the Cévennes is off the main tourist routes. It is not well served by air or rail and is away from the main motorway routes. It is however well served by campsites and has an abundance of activities including rock-climbing (there is a *via ferrata*), canyoning, and of course walking. Full details are available on the Cévennes-Tourisme website.

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