

The Connexion

FRANCE'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER

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Bed scenes shocked great aunt

**Roger Moore
filmed in my
Bordeaux castle**



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New twist in France's murder case of century

Killing of Grégory, 4, has haunted France for 32 years

NEW POLICE analysis techniques may have led to a breakthrough in one of France's biggest murder cases of modern times raising hopes that the killer of a four-year-old boy murdered 32 years ago will finally be identified.

Grégory Villemin was found, fully clothed with his hands and feet bound, drowned in the Vologne river in the Vosges mountains of eastern France 7kms from his home village of Lépanges-sur-Vologne on October 16, 1984. Earlier his mother had rung police to report him missing from a sand pit in the garden where he had been playing.

The case horrified France and has haunted it ever since with many twists and turns, including a series of police errors.

Jealousy amongst family members in the small village of 900 has often been cited as the most likely motive but there have been no convictions. The day after Grégory's

murder his parents received a letter that said: "I hope you die of grief. Your money cannot bring him back. I have been avenged."

Several family members also report receiving menacing phone calls over the years, from someone calling themselves 'le Corbeau' ('The Crow') often in a deep husky voice, and hundreds of poison-pen letters were received, including to investigators.

Now the boy's great aunt and great uncle - Jacqueline and Marcel Jacob, both 72, have been charged with the kidnapping and confinement followed by death of Grégory. They were remanded in custody when they

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Photo: Hugues Agence

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Sir Roger Moore filmed at my castle near Bordeaux

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Warm welcome makes village French favourite



AFTER winning a deluge of votes as France's favourite village in a TV poll, Kayersberg in Alsace is preparing for a deluge of visitors with thousands expected to now plan holidays to visit.

Previous winners of the title have seen visitor numbers soar – last year's winner, Rochefort-en-Terre, in Morbihan, Brittany, saw a jump from 600,000 to a million – and Alsace tourist officials have started publicising other local sights such as Colmar, Strasbourg and the Route de Vin.

Kaysersberg itself is renovating its historic chateau and promoting its Nobel Peace Prize winner, Albert Schweitzer, who won the prize in 1952 for his philosophy of 'Reverence for Life'.

The village is also known for its Christmas market, which can attract 50,000 visitors over a weekend, and can now expect to grow in popularity. But it was not just Kayersberg's cobbled streets, timber-framed buildings and its site on the Route

de Vins d'Alsace that won it... it won hearts for the warmth of the locals.

When the final result was shown on live TV the crowd gathered in the square outside the church went wild... and celebrated by dumping the mayor Pascal Lohr in the fountain.

Voting was by text message on the France 2 show 'Village préféré des Français' and was close until the final minutes with Kayersberg neck and neck with Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme. In third place was La Roque-Gageac in Dordogne.

The contest sees 13 villages chosen from among those on the Plus Beaux Villages de France list. Others taking part were Moncontour, Côtes-d'Armor; Piriac-sur-Mer, Loire-Atlantique; Bellême, Orne; Lourmarin, Vaucluse; Sant'Antonino, Haute-Corse; Lagrasse, Aude; Bèze, Côte d'Or; La Garde-Adhémar, Drôme; Gargilesse-Dampierre, Indre, and Montchauvet, Yvelines.

Grégory murder | Macron has been boost for tourism

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appeared in court in Dijon. Both deny involvement and their lawyers say there are no grounds and no 'scientific proof' for the charges.

However Dijon prosecutor Jean-Jacques Bosc told journalists that the couple had not been able to present a satisfactory alibi to show it was not them who had made 'The Crow' calls.

The development came from the use of new analysis techniques on the anonymous letters and voice calls, which led detectives to conclude that the authors were "a man and a woman", said Mr Bosc.

Progress, he said, had also been made thanks to the use of the latest artificial intelligence contained in a programme called AnaCrim, which places all the suspects in time and space and unearths inconsistencies. It took eight months of work by specially-trained analysts.

The data reportedly includes 400 DNA prints and 2,000 anonymous letters gathered over three decades. One hundred witnesses have also now been questioned, some of them for the first time.

However, Mr Bosc said that investigators were still unable to say who had killed Grégory nor

how he died but that the murder and kidnapping was a "collective act".

Ginette Villemin, 61, the sister-in-law of the murdered boy's father Jean-Marie Villemin, was also arrested but later released. The boy's paternal grandparents were also questioned as witnesses.

In 1993, Grégory's father was sentenced to five years in prison for shooting dead one suspect – Bernard Laroche, a cousin – after the dead man's sister, aged 15 at the time, accused him of the murder before retracting a few days later.

The boy's mother, Christine Villemin was then accused of her son's murder but later cleared. In 2004 both Grégory's mother and father were awarded €35,000 each for miscarriage of justice.

BFMTV crime reporter Dominique Rizet who has followed the case closely says that the parents moved to the Paris area to rebuild their lives and have since had three sons.

The case was re-opened in 1999 and then in 2008 when new DNA traces were discovered on letters. But the public prosecutor at the time at the Dijon Appeal Court, Jean-Marie Beney said their analysis did not advance the case.

Macron has been boost for tourism

THE WAVE of optimism that greeted Emmanuel Macron's election as president has also seen a surge in the number of tourists, continuing the rise from the end of last year.

Sites such as Mont Saint-Michel have reported numbers up and theme park Futuroscope beat its historic record for a single day with 20,000 visitors for the Ascension holiday.

Importantly, good weather also gave a boost with Deloitte/In Extenso research showing hotels in Paris and all round the coast seeing a rise in both international and leisure visitors.

Room revenues increased by up to 8% on average with the Côte d'Azur shaking off the effects of last year's Nice terror attack to rise 10% on economy holidays and 22% for high-end.

Tourism industry analyst Didier Arno of Protourisme said President Macron had played a key role in being photographed at tourist hotspots such as the Louvre and meeting world leaders such as Vladimir Putin at Versailles to give a shining image "away from rain and floods, strikes and protests" as there had been in 2016.

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Military service scheme expands

A TRIAL of 'voluntary military service' which started in 2015 is to be extended to six centres with the opening of two new ones this autumn.

These will be near Lyon at Ambérieu-en-Bugey and in Brest, run respectively by the airforce and the navy – meaning the scheme is now expanding across all three main forces.

Responsibility has been transferred from the army to the National Youth Service.

Service Militaire Volontaire (SMV) spokeswoman Lt Loumou Soumaré said the aim for 2017-2018 will be to train 1,000 young people, up from 300 in the first year and 700 in the second (72% of the first batch found work, expected to be matched for the second year).

The SMV combines barracks living and a taste of military life with broad training aimed at boosting employability.

It has now also been given a certain autonomy from the state so it may benefit from private sector funding.

"We're putting in place partnerships with firms, finance organisations and professional bodies – who will pay for our recruits' professional training, whether in building or industry, caring, catering, security etc.

"They'll focus on areas where there's demand – putting in fibre-optic cables, for example."

A partnership has been made with La Poste, who will pay for recruits' training then take them on in posts in the group.

SMV recruits training may also benefit from funding from the apprenticeship tax paid by businesses.

The project is now running until at least the end of 2018, after which it will be evaluated.

Historical baker gives a taste of the past

by MARK HAYES

IF YOU have ever wondered how French cakes and pastries have evolved through the centuries, here is how you can find out – and treat yourself to an old-style delicacy.

'La Fleur des Délices' historical bakery was set up in 2009 by Camille Lelièvre, a young baker passionate about history.

Based in Caen, Normandy, and working mainly at festivals, Camille uses recipes, methods and ingredients from the 14th to 19th centuries.

She said: "To knead my pastry and grind my spices takes time, but I do it out of respect for the product – a pastry kneaded by hand will always be better than that mixed in a machine because it has been treated without violence. And it makes for a more intense taste as a spice quickly loses its flavour if it has been ground for too long."

Camille gets her older recipes from original writings from the 14th and



Camille Lelièvre and her mother in period costume with a selection of historical goodies

15th century. "Through time, pastry has evolved according to trends, discoveries, novelties. The pastry of the 14th century is very different from that of the 17th and that of today is different again. What is interesting is to see the evolution through history to understand why this or that ingredient appears or disappears."

Camille also has outfits to fit different periods. "My costumes are made by my mother, who is also passionate about

history. She does the same job as I do but in the field of costumes."

So does she have an all-time favourite cake?

"This is a very difficult question, as every century contains little gourmet wonders," she said.

"But if I have to pick only one, it is the orange pie of Pierre de Lune that dates from the 17th century."

You can sample Camille's work at:
– The 31st medieval festival of Bayeux

(14400), Until July 2;

– Château de Canon, Mézidon-Canon, (14270), meeting on a theme of 17th century *pâtisserie*, July 14 and August 3;

– Medieval festival at the Château de Falaise (14700) August 12 and 13;

– Cider and Dragons festival at Merville-Franceville-Plage (14810) September 16 and 17;

– La Fête du ventre in Rouen (76000) October 14 to 15.

“Every century contains little gourmet wonders

Camille Lelièvre
Historical pâtissière

Booming number of exorcisms in France

MORE than three times as many exorcisms are being carried out now than was the case 10 years ago, the Catholic Church has revealed.

One priest told *Connexion* he believes this is because France is less religious, leaving people vulnerable to diabolical attacks.

Currently about 50 exorcisms are carried out per year in Ile-de-France alone compared to 15 a decade ago.

There are around 2,500 requests annually in the region, which does not in itself represent an increase said Ile-de-France exorcist, Father Georges. However what has changed is the number of cases being identified as possession by the Devil as opposed to other causes such as psychiatric illnesses.

Father Georges said: "It's gone up over two or three years. There's a growing paganism, so the Devil is more at home."

"Thirty years ago there wasn't a village where the church wasn't open for people to come and pray and where there was the holy sacrament [blessed bread] which we believe is the real presence of Jesus. And the national authorities have opposed Christianity for years."

Discerning real possession is not foolproof, he said, however signs can include the person



Father Emmanuel Coquet

speaking in a language they have never learned or demonstrating extraordinary strength.

One almost certain sign is if the possessed person speaks to the priest about the priest's sins.

All 100 French dioceses have at least one exorcist.

Father Emmanuel Coquet, responsible for supporting the exorcism service at the secretariat of the Bishops' Conference of France, said: "Today there are many fragile people who find themselves completely isolated in our society; asking for exorcism can be a way of speaking about their suffering, their pain. So they come to the Church and we listen."

"We support them on a journey to discover the root of the problem, and this doesn't necessarily end in exorcism, in fact

usually it does not. Sometimes people just need someone to listen to them."

Priests work with the person over an extended period to "unravel what is really happening." Simply feeling possessed by the devil is not enough.

Before undertaking what is known as a "major exorcism" – that is, a formal ceremony, as opposed to simply praying for the person – the church often has a psychiatric assessment done. In other cases the priest relies on his experience.

"It's a reality. The devil exists," Father Coquet said. "In extreme and rare cases, people can be possessed by the devil. They really can."

He warns however, that the demand for exorcism from vulnerable people is resulting in various non-Catholic organisations springing up, which may be purely commercial and seeking to make money from a 'gap in the market'.

He said they may appear at the top of a Google search for exorcism and appear to be Catholic at first glance.

"They are easy to spot," says Father Coquet. "If they are offering to train people as lay exorcists or asking for money for their services, they are not Catholic," he added.

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Refugee cricketers make French and EU history

by EMILY COMMANDER

A GROUP of cricket-mad refugees have made history by helping to form the first cricket league in northern France, by winning their first full game and by being named European Citizens of 2017 for their efforts to integrate.

The Saint-Omer Cricket Club Stars are mostly from Pakistan and Afghanistan and the club was founded after the refugees were spotted playing in a park in the town where many had been living in the 'Jungle' migrant camp.

Now, a few months on, they have helped to found the new Hauts-de-France cricket league and won their first full game, beating Dynamo de Lille.

Player Javed Ahmazay, 30, originally from Afghanistan, said cricket has had one important effect: "The way people view us has changed: we are no longer refugees but sportsmen."

They now also have a proper ground to play games on after they began life in the



Cricket-mad refugees set up demo games at Saint-Omer cathedral

Glacis public park in Saint-Omer, where a group gathered regularly to play an improvised version of cricket using tennis balls reinforced with sellotape.

Businessman Christophe Silvie, 37, of Landron Ambulances, spotted their impromptu games while he was out jogging in August 2016 and, being an anglophile, spoke to them about starting a cricket team. Although they were managing to have a knock-around, as refugees they had no possessions, let alone any playing kit but now the players' talent and Mr Silvie's generosity and determination are starting to pay off.

Mr Silvie said: "The team dynamic is

fantastic. The players train hard, they have improved their French, and they have visited schools to introduce young children to the sport."

In April, the club – called Soccs for short – played their first match in the French Cup against France Gymkhana, Gonesse. They lost, by 252 runs to 129, but it was an impressive effort against a second-division side which has been playing for years and has won France's cricket Superleague in the past.

Now they have two teams in the new Hauts-de-France league and while the firsts won their first game against Dynamo Lille the seconds lost to Valenciennes.



The Soccs players celebrate their first win

They have also been recognised at European level and were awarded the European Citizen's Prize for their work to improve international understanding.

There has been an improvement in the players' lives. Mr Ahmazay said: "We are proud to wear the Soccs strip."

All their hard work could still fall through, however, if the club does not receive the financial and practical support it needs to keep going. Even some transport is difficult and expensive for players with no access to cars.

Anyone who can give support or help with their new pitch can contact them via [facebook.com/SaintOmerCricketClub](https://www.facebook.com/SaintOmerCricketClub)

“
We're no longer seen as
refugees but sportsmen
Javed Ahmazay,
Soccs cricketer

Drivers face fines from July for not having air pollution stickers

DRIVERS this month face fines of €45-€180 in some towns and cities if their vehicles do not have pollution rating stickers.

The Crit'Air sticker is compulsory for vehicles inside the Paris *périphérique* – even those from outside France and even if no pollution warning is in force.

They also apply in Grenoble and Lyon-Villeurbanne.

There are six categories from zero for pollution-free electric vehicles up to category 4 and 5 for heavy polluting ones, registered before 2001 and 1997.

Below we look at the changes that came into force on July 1.

Which cities and zones are affected?

In all, 25 cities and urban zones have already started, or will soon start, using stickers. Only a handful have announced the measures they will take.

The Grenoble conurbation already enforces what it calls an "air protection area". In peak



pollution periods of more than five days, drivers of cars without a sticker will face a fine, as will anyone driving a category 4 or 5 vehicle in the zone.

The rules apply to all vehicles, including foreign ones and, critically, will be in force on the area's motorways, namely the A41, A48, A51 and A480.

In Lyon-Villeurbanne, stickers are now compulsory during

peak pollution periods for all vehicles of more than 3.5 tonnes.

They will allow cars in categories 0-3 to drive in the city's low emission *zone de circulation restreinte* (ZCR) when alternate number plate bans are in place.

From the fourth day of high pollution, category 3 vehicles lose the exemption, and category 5 cars are banned altogether.

The ZCR does not include the

ring road or the A6 and A7 through traffic.

From September, it will be obligatory to display a sticker in Lille's ZCR and cars in certain, as yet undecided, categories, will be excluded. In addition, in the wider Lille metropolitan area restrictions will be applied during peak pollution periods.

Strasbourg's ZCR has yet to be set but stickers are obligatory from September. Cars in some, as yet unknown, categories, will be banned. Restrictions include the metropolitan area.

It will soon be mandatory for all vehicles in the Arve Valley, including Annecy, to show a Crit'Air sticker. Once in force, HGVs over 7.5 tonnes, all commercial vehicles in category 5, and some in category 4, will be banned in pollution peaks.

Private vehicles do not as yet face a ban but stickers are mandatory to speed any new measures. The protected area includes the A40 motorway.

A list of urban areas covered is at tinyurl.com/ybof5myh

Are the stickers only to impose restrictions?

The laws also allow local and regional councils to give lower-pollution vehicles special parking rights, bus-lane access or access to ZCR areas.

Who needs a sticker?

In Paris, Lyon and Grenoble even foreign vehicles must display a sticker in protected zones. Hire cars are not exempt but cars with a European parking card for the disabled are, although not all cities offer blue-badge exemptions.

Once obtained, stickers are valid for the life of the vehicle.

How do I get one?

Stickers are available online on the Crit'Air website at tinyurl.com/z3z9zlx for €4.18. They are sent to the address on the *carte grise* or registration document.

Tuck into a burger with cutlery

WHILE the rest of the world copes with their burgers single or double-handed, McDonald's in France is offering diners plastic cutlery to keep their hands clean.

The innovation was tested in a dozen diners before being extended to all 1,400 in France. The company said it was an "evolution" and not a break with tradition as it already had table service possible in 80% of its diners in France.

Cutlery is only available with the gourmet Signature burger deal, which costs €13.60 compared to €7.50 for a classic deal.

Signature is made with French Charolais beef and McDonald's buys 2,000 tonnes a year. In all, it uses 46,000 tonnes of beef a year, with 25,000 from France.

Burgers are now on the menu in 75% of France's 145,000 eateries and have overtaken *steak-frites* as the favourite meal.

Many hands make bakery work

VILLAGERS who were going to be left without a *boulangerie-pâtisserie* when the baker retired have founded an association to keep the business going until he can find a buyer to take it over.

Baker Jean-Yves Audo said he would carry on making baguettes and croissants voluntarily in Sainte-Eulalie-d'Olt, Aveyron so its 360 residents would not be left without their daily bread.

His move will also allow the association, which has more than 100 people signed up to help, to grow the potential business to surrounding areas and give the new baker a reasonable income.

They are talking of setting up sales points in surrounding campsites and the Sainte-Eulalie-d'Olt mairie is also putting its shoulder to the mill to help lure a new baker

News in brief

University ballot for places continues

DESPITE complaints from student groups, the ballot system used to set places at in-demand universities has been kept in place after it was published in a low-key announcement.

The Conseil d'Etat is to rule in coming months on whether the ballots are a misuse of power as student groups said 3,500 hopefuls could not get courses they wanted last year.

Serious illness will rise in coming years

HEALTH authorities have warned that some illnesses are set to soar in the next two or three years, with strokes, diabetes, asthma, psychiatric problems and inflammatory diseases rising as the population ages.

Caisse Nationale d'assurance-Maladie says an extra 580,000 people will be treated for a long-term illness by 2020.

Summer sales dates are set

SUMMER sales start on June 28 and last until August 8 with border areas such as Alpes-Maritimes and Pyrénées-Orientales starting a week later on July 5 for tourist markets.

Traders are banned from restocking shelves during the six-week period and the "no returns" policy *ni repris, ni échangé* is against the law.

Guide pays €414 tram fine for tourists

A TOUR guide in Nice has had to pay a €414 fine after failing to *composte* (validate) the tram tickets for the 12 tourists in her party. She paid by bank card.

The city's trams cost just €1 per journey if a 10-journey ticket is bought or €1.50 single.

Last year inspectors recovered €850,000 in fines from forgetful passengers – although fare dodging is common.

Price rise on way for croissants

THE cost of croissants is about to rise as rising world demand for butter has seen prices more than double over the past year, from €1,800 a tonne to €5,400.

Boulangeries say that means *viennoiseries* and other cakes will be dearer unless French dairy farms churn out more.

€2m gem thieves say sorry for the mess

THIEVES who grabbed €2-million of diamonds from a Paris dealer left a note to apologise.

They had broken into the diamond dealer's office near the Pompidou Centre from a neighbouring property. Their message, inspired by Albert Spaggiari's 1976 raid on Nice branch of Société Générale said 'No weapons, no violence. Sorry for the inconvenience.'

Accidental Americans want out

THOUSANDS of 'accidental Americans' who face surprise US tax demands and intrusive investigations of bank accounts have called on the new French MP for North America to help them end their problems.

Anyone born in the US has US nationality – and an obligation to pay US tax – even though they may have no links other than the accident of birth.

The Association des Américains Accidentels was founded by Fabien Lehagre, who was born in the US in 1984 and left when he was 18 months. It calls on French banks to stop applying the so-called Fatca legislation where they pass account details to the US tax office.

The legislation is meant to stop money-laundering but can stop people from carrying out usual banking business until they conform and, possibly, pay an unknown US tax demand.

They have spoken to French and European politicians and Mr Lehagre said they raised their concerns with Roland Lescuré, the new French MP for North America, to find a simple way to renounce US nationality.



Pouilly-Fumé wine-maker Alexandre Bain uses carthorses in the vines

Wine-maker beats bureaucrats

by SAMANTHA DAVID

A VIGNERON has won back the right to label his natural wines AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) Pouilly-Fumé and has hit at label inspectors for targeting him in a bid to get him to make a 'standard' wine.

Alexandre Bain's wine from Tracy-sur-Loire was stripped of its AOC label because he missed inspection appointments – but he said he would not have been hard to find as he was outside working on his vines.

He said: "I was targeted because my production methods are natural. I get far more inspections than anyone else, and they are more particular with me."

"They want you to use insecticides, sulphur, yeast, and all sorts of other chemicals. They want every bottle of Pouilly-Fumé

exactly the same so they can market it like Coca-Cola. That's not a wine of the *terroir*, it's not natural... it's factory-made."

A court in Dijon backed his claim that the sanction applied by standards agency Inao was disproportionate and he can now use the AOC label again.

He said: "Inspectors try to scare you, three of them and you alone. You have to pay for inspections, so they waste your money. It takes hours, so they waste your time..."

"But my wine is well-known. I make 40,000 litres a year and sell it all. I'm turning people away. I can afford to fight back."

The quality of wine was never in dispute – even without the AOC label it was in 21 of the 52 best restaurants in the world – and he said: "It's a typical example of the French madness. Out-of-control paperwork, ad-

ministration and bureaucracy which serves absolutely nothing at all.

"AOC is no guarantee of quality any more, it's a guarantee of conformity. Some of the best wines are being sold as 'Vins de France' and in the end that is bad for business, but they think it's good because they think you can sell a standardised product better."

Mr Bain, who uses carthorses in his vines not tractors, says just three people pick his organic grapes, by hand, and he wants to make natural wine to "leave the land alive and healthy, not killed by chemicals".

"My Pouilly Fumé wine is real, authentic fruit of the land."

"When you drink it you get a pleasurable vibration throughout your body. You realise you're drinking something exceptional, not a standardised product."

Where to fly or avoid for delays

FRANCE'S best and worst airports for delays have been revealed with the busiest two – Paris Orly and Paris Charles-de-Gaulle – facing 3.9% and 3.5% of their flights delayed for more than an hour.

Little Chambéry, however, sees nearly one in five flights either delayed or cancelled.

Of the larger airports, Biarritz, Brest, Rennes, Marseille and Strasbourg have the most flights delayed by more than three hours – the time limit for flight compensation. The compensation site Flightright saying these long delays hit 0.2% to 0.4% of the flights from them.

The airports least hit by long delays are Corsica's Bastia and Ajaccio, Paris CDG, Nice and Paris Beauvais.

Brest is the heaviest hit for flight cancellations with 1.8% cancelled. Rennes, Marseille and Strasbourg have 1.6% of flights cancelled while Bordeaux has 1.5% and Lyon 1.4%.

Across Europe, Stansted is the least hit by long delays, then Dublin. Luton is in fifth place. Munich is worst, then Lyon, Orly, Brussels and Frankfurt.

Trump may have won Olympics for... Paris

PARIS could be set to host the 2024 Olympic Games in a historic centenary sports celebration after a statement from its Los Angeles rivals appears to concede that they would be prepared to host the 2028 event.

It comes as influential *Forbes* magazine says it would be politically difficult for the IOC to name Los Angeles for 2024 due to President Trump's "proposed travel ban on citizens from Muslim countries".

The International Olympic Committee is to break with tradition and announce the winners of both the 2024 and 2028 games at one time, at its meeting in September, rather than waiting four years to announce the 2028 host city.

On hearing this, Casey Wasserman, president of the LA 2024 organising committee, said his committee had never said it was "LA first" or "now or never" when looking at 2024.

His comments were quickly

seized upon as evidence that a deal is close that would see Paris host in 2024 followed by Los Angeles in 2028.

Wall Street Journal reported a source close to the LA campaign saying a decision along these lines would be taken by the IOC, which meets in Lausanne on July 11-12, before the September 13 final declaration.

If Paris does host the 2024 games it would be 100 years since it previously hosted them and its third time as host after 1900 and 1924. It lost to London for the 2012 games and failed to win both 2008 and 1992 events.

The Paris Olympic Committee has said it welcomes the IOC Executive Board decision to review the bidding process and possibly announce the 2024 and 2028 winners at the same time.

If the decision is voted through then Paris is sure to have either 2024 or 2028 as no other city will be considered.

A spokesman for Paris 2024 said they could not be 100% confident until after the July decision. He would not comment on whether the "Trump effect" of the planned travel ban on citizens from Muslim countries had given them a boost.

"We cannot say we are confident of winning the 2024 Olympic Games but we are convinced we have the best project."

However, Paris 2024 earlier said they would not be interested in being 2028 hosts – bid co-chairman Tony Estanguet said "now or never" – and the planned Olympic Village would not be available then.

Los Angeles says it has the bulk of the facilities already in place while Paris said 95% of its venues were "already existing or temporary" to cut costs.

The Paris 2024 Olympic Games would be held from August 2-August 18, while the Paralympics would run from September 4-September 15.

Napoleon Bonapark

AFTER Mickey Mouse, Astérix and Le Petit Prince, a theme park dedicated to Napoleon is being planned in Seine-et-Marne. Mayor and MP Yves Jégo said there would be no roller-coasters in the €244million high-tech park at Montereau-Fault-Yonne, which would feature the emperor's battles and 19th century life.

Call to save veg train

A FRUIT and veg train taking daily supplies from Perpignan to Rungis food market near Paris may be stopped due to low loads and delays.

The Train des Primeurs is the only one left of its kind and carries 1,400 tonnes of fresh produce. Unions want more investment to maintain it, saying the train takes 250 lorries off the roads.

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Hypermarket chains 'owe €418bn in unpaid fines'

HYPERMARKET chains in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur alone have accumulated unpaid fines of €418billion according to an association fighting for rights of small shopkeepers.

En Toute Franchise (en-toute-franchise.com) claims its investigations since 1994 have uncovered abuses by all large chains, including shopping centres built without planning permission, or exceeding their allowed surface areas.

Its €418bn figure represents what it says should have been paid if fines had been applied per day. "It's as if you kept going through red lights every day," said founder Martine Donnette.

While the organisation is based in Paca in the south and has focussed on that region, they believe the situation to be similar across France.

They are demanding a parliamentary enquiry and have collected 46,000 signatures.

Ms Donnette, a former shopkeeper, said: "There are two aspects to our work: firstly opposing new developments, because



Martine Donnette
says too many small
shops have shut

there are enough; we are world champions for surface area of hypermarkets. The other is unfair competition because they construct surface area without permission. We denounce the fact the authorities don't do anything to crack down.

"We have had some successes by going to court, but whereas the state could do it straight away, for us it takes years, and our members' money."

She added: "They've always more or less corrupted the local politicians; there's blackmail

over jobs, lying and cheating. For example, projects not respecting the PLU [local plan, designating potential usage of land], or the risk prevention plan, and officials just let it go.

"Even when they've not actually broken the law they connive with the authorities. For constructions of more than 10,000m² firms must have an environmental impact study. At one site they wanted to build 30,000m² so they cut it into five applications. But that can only happen with complicity of

councillors and officials." Those in power often benefit in some way via companies they own, or selling land, she claimed.

Not only is France remarkable for its number and size of hypermarkets, but it has a conspicuous problem with small shops closing in town centres, she said.

"Whether it be Sarkozy, Hollande or Macron, when he was Economy Minister, they've removed a lot of laws that helped create equilibrium between big chains and independent shops."

Ms Donnette said their supporters have been lobbying candidates during recent elections to demand a parliamentary enquiry.

"When the new MPs are elected we will send our petition to all the group presidents," she added.

The association has had recent success at Châteauneuf-les-Martigues, Bouches-du-Rhône, where it alleges a supermarket has exceeded its permitted surface area. "We took legal action to oblige the prefecture to check on their surface area. Until now they always refused."

Pôle Emploi apologises for patronising Facebook post

POLE Emploi had to apologise after sharing a Facebook post which was branded patronising by internet users.

The post, depicting a day in the life of a jobseeker, advised exercise before breakfast to "boost motivation", followed by 10 minutes in the shower "reflecting on objectives and desires" and then a "copious" breakfast "on the balcony" to "profit from the daylight: a natural antidepressant".

Other advice includes a relaxing lunch hour from noon to 13.00, a "well-earned break" from 14.00 to 16.00 ("it is important to pamper yourself") in which you might want to "dedicate yourself to a club" and, from 17.30, "socialising" so as not to "remain alone in your search".

The post was shared by a branch of the Pôle Emploi in Margny-lès-Compiègne, Hauts-de-France who commented it would enable people to "perform well in your tasks", advising it should be applied six days a week until finding a job.

Numerous social network users hit out at the plan, saying it was "infantilising" and "stigmatising". "Listen to Pôle Emploi, you disorganised slob," one Twitter user said, ironically.

The advice actually originated from Bob Emploi, a Pôle Emploi partner owned by the American and French not-for-profit Bayes Impact which aims to use 'big data' to help with social problems, but who posted it with the Pôle Emploi's logo.

It also advises 2hrs 45mins on applying for jobs, responding to offers and updating your CV; an hour applying for 'petits boulots' such as temp positions which could earn you some money even if they don't fit your long-term aspirations, and an hour 'networking' by sending emails to LinkedIn contacts.

Slate.fr said the plan did not so much seem to aim at a "successful search" as being a "successful unemployed person", wholesome, content and well-fed.

It appears to have been adapted from a slightly more demanding version published in English by *Business Insider* in 2015.

The authors of the French version, Bayes Impact, have said it should have been better checked and admitted that "its tone was 'off'".

A national spokesperson for Pôle Emploi said that the branch that posted the list would be "debriefed", adding "it was a clumsy initiative".

News in brief

Opening of naturist area in park put off

PLANS to open a naturist area in the Bois de Vincennes have been put off by the Paris mairie.

The greens group on the council say they were promised it by June this year, but now the council says it will not open before spring 2018 at the earliest.

Commentators said this may be linked to negative reactions to the idea.

Stolen lawnmower was doing 90kph

A THIEF was caught with an expensive robot lawnmower in his car after the mower alerted its owner it was doing 90kmp down the *route départementale*.

The man reportedly stole the mower from the premises of a firm in Indre-et-Loire after cutting a fence to get at it – but had not banked on it being equipped with a GPS tracker.

The owner followed its trace and alerted the gendarmes.

Woman sues state over poor air quality

A WOMAN who claims to have suffered chest pains due to air pollution in the capital is to sue the state for compensation.

Clotilde Nonnez says her health deteriorated since she moved to Paris, despite a healthy lifestyle. The case is a first in France and is supported by several associations.

Queries over Poste's elderly welfare checks

A NEW service by La Poste, in which postal workers check on the welfare of elderly people has been met with mixed reactions from workers and unions.

'Veiller sur mes parents' (Check on my parents) costs €39.90 to €139.90 a month for checking one to six times a week, involving the postman or women speaking to the elderly resident to 'see if they're alright'.

However a union official at the SUD-PTT said not everyone would be able to pay and they were monetising something most postal workers did anyway.

Some workers have also expressed concerns about their ability to know if "the person is alright", as they are not medically trained. One postman said he was disciplined by his superior about this and told: "If he's up-right, then he's alright".

The service includes a telephone helpline for the elderly person (the call centre can call a relative or emergency services if necessary) and a service which helps find workers to do small jobs around the home.

La Poste's personal services head Eric Baudrillard says most postmen and women have had training and are "dedicated, enthusiastic and patient".

One user told *Le Monde* she used it for her father, aged 94. She found it "reassuring" and preferred knowing it was their postwoman who was checking rather than another care worker.

The service could also help people who live far from elderly relatives, including outside France. An adviser said it is possible for a person in another country such as the UK to sign up and have their bank debited.

Pets are one of the family

HALF of French households have a pet, a study by a petfood group has found. There are some 13.5million cats in French homes and 7.3million dogs – however both figures pale in comparison with the numbers of fish people own: 33 million. There are also 5.8million cage birds and 3.4m small mammals such as rabbits.

Cats have increased in number from 10m in 2006, while dog ownership is dropping – there were 9m in 2000 – possibly because dogs are seen as requiring more work.

Nonetheless, numbers of dogs in France increased by 1.1% compared to 2014.

Dog and cat owners usually see their pet as a 'companion' and many view them as a 'member of the family' the survey found (60% of dog owners of 50% of cat owners).

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Generation Brexit project needs views from under-35s

PEOPLE aged under 35 are invited to take part in an online project called Generation Brexit which aims to 'crowdsource' a vision of what future UK-EU relations should be.

The project will go live on the anniversary of the EU membership referendum, June 23, and is hoping to canvass views of tens of thousands of young people, in order to feed into a report that will be sent to the UK and EU parliaments.

The deputy head of the London School of Economics' European Institute, Jennifer Jackson-Preece, said they were inspired by a previous LSE project which gathered ideas about what could go into a future written constitution for the UK.

She said: "The aim is to get as many under-35s as possible, not just from the UK, but from all across the EU, to come together to discuss key themes of significance to the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and EU. The ones we have identified are: political cooperation, economic cooperation, freedom of movement and migration controls, and fundamental rights and values.

"We hope that as many people as possible will engage in conversation and generate proposals, which the crowd will vote up and down. The ones which generate the most support will feed into an event at LSE, which will involve leading participants from the online platform, who we will pay to come to London, as well as leading figures from the under-35s in industry, politics and creative arts, as well as students with support from academics. The aim will be to produce a written report for the UK and EU parliaments. We hope it will be referenced in the final debates that happen there."

Dr Jackson-Preece said they will make interim reports and blog posts to boost awareness of young people's priorities. "We will also take all of this to produce a free educational toolkit which we hope will be



useful to schools and youth groups for 12-18-year-olds who want to understand the referendum and the EU."

She added: "We want to underscore the extent to which under-35s were those most in favour of remaining, with over 70% of the youngest group, under 24, voting to remain. There were initial suggestions in the media that they voted in low numbers, but further research at the LSE has shown that was not the case – the rate at which they went to the polls was comparable to older groups. Every 10 years up, age groups became slightly less in favour, but still a majority of those under around 45-48 were in favour of 'remain'.

"We also want to highlight the fact that it's younger people, who we're calling 'Generation Brexit', who will live longest with the results and be most affected by them but they've not had a significant role in the debate and dialogue so far and their

views haven't really been heard."

Dr Jackson-Preece said they did not want to limit the project to young people in the UK, because Brexit will affect both sides on the UK-EU divide. "The online platform we are using can host tens of thousands and the greater the number of those involved, the greater the possibility for political impact will be."

The project will conclude with an event publicising the findings, on the anniversary of the article 50 trigger, March 29, 2018. See generationbrexit.org

■ An expert in French politics and the political participation of Britons abroad has launched an anonymous survey to find more about Britons living abroad. Visit: <https://goo.gl/aVcbqb> Dr Susan Collard of the University of Sussex will post the results in due course at her new page facebook.com/britonsabroad

French legal action over vote ban moves forward

MORE than 10 Britons living in the EU, including votes campaigner and Second World War veteran Harry Shindler, have volunteered to join legal action by a French barrister against the Brexit referendum.

Many of them agreed after a group of academics and professionals based in the UK and France, called 'Action for Europe', organised a crowdfunding campaign having heard of Bordeaux avocat Julien Fouchet's bid to challenge the Brexit vote. They raised money to pay legal fees for 10 participants.

Mr Fouchet's case, which *The Connexion* broke news of in English-language media in April, aims to show that exclusion from the referendum of expat Britons who had been outside the UK for more than 15 years – means it was illegal under EU equality rules. He will argue the EU should not be negotiating with the UK based on an 'illegal' referendum, and the negotiation directives the EU drew up to outline its objectives for talks should be set aside.

Mr Fouchet hopes the Britons' testimonies about how they are personally affected by Brexit, will help him pass the first hurdle – gaining permission to bring the case.

He says he was prompted to act out of a sense of 'European solidarity' and is charging minimal fees.

Mr Fouchet said he plans to lodge his request with the General Court of the EU before the end of July. He believes it will "cause a big splash".

He said he is encouraged by a recent ruling of the General Court that legal challenges to 'preparatory EU documents' are acceptable. That would apply to his case, which centres on the EU's publication of its negotiating directives.

Mr Shindler said: "We [Britons in the EU27] are more concerned by



the referendum result than others.

"British people in Britain, whatever happens, are not going to have to move, but here we have a situation where two million Brits might have to move – many of us elderly.

"I'm giving full support to anything Mr Fouchet can do for us, especially if it helps get us back our vote."

He added: "I had a letter from David Cameron promising I would have my vote back if he won the General Election – and since then there have been two General Elections and a referendum and in all of these we've been denied the vote. It could happen again if another is called. It is unacceptable."

Another Briton taking part, Nick March from Gironde, came to France in 1973 with his parents, aged 11. Although he is British he has never been allowed a vote.

He said: "Without an EU my life would have been completely different. The referendum wasn't a local, Britain-only matter. It's caused me and many friends so much worry. Were I to have to return to England, I would be in a total mess."

He hopes the case will block negotiations. "The EU will have no mandate to negotiate a Brexit because the Brexit [vote] itself was flawed."

The 'Action for Expat Votes' crowdfunding is at: <https://goo.gl/sbcL6s>

Pensions, health, jobs and property cited as key worries

by JANE HANKS

BRITISH residents in the south-west met academics from Oxford and expat campaigners to air their concerns over life after Brexit.

The meeting, organised by researchers looking into how Britons in France and Spain are responding to Brexit, was at the Franco-British Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), in Périgueux, following a visit by the British ambassador, Lord Llewellyn, the same day.

Campaign groups urged Britons in France to join them to make sure their voices will be heard during the Brexit negotiations.

On the platform were Roger Boaden from Expats Citizen Rights in EU, John Shaw from Fair Deal for Expats, Brian Robinson from Remain in France Together and Paul Fisher of Liberal Democrats in France.

An 80-strong audience expressed concerns over issues including health, pensions, property, employment and children's future prospects.

Attendee David Lakin, 58, who has had a second home in France for 30 years but moved permanently in March as an early retiree with wife Louise, said: "We sold our business in the UK to come and live here and Brexit hit us out of the blue. We haven't got our pension yet and are worried about that as well as healthcare and we want the assurance we can stay.

"We are also worried about freedom of movement of goods. At present we can easily order

from the UK, but what will happen about this in the future?"

Another expat, Sian Delcourt, 40, who has children aged 12 and 7, asked: "When our children are older will they have the right to go to public universities in France without paying as UK children living here now do?"

"This is just one of many issues related to young people. There are many working couples who came here looking for a safe life for their children and they want to be reassured they made the right decision."

As yet these matters remain unresolved, but the groups said they were making sure through meetings and through letters to influential people that expats' concerns do not go unheard.

Dordogne FBCCI delegate Roger Haigh said the ambassador's visit also allowed people to express their worries. "He took notes and was very interested but couldn't – as was only expected – give any concrete answers," he said.

The chamber told Lord Llewellyn they are there to help people in hopes that they will not leave and that others will continue to settle and to create businesses in France.

It is hoped the ambassador will return to Périgueux later in the year.

Campaign groups at the Dordogne event were part of an umbrella organisation, British in Europe coalition (britishineurope.org), or BiE, which has around 35,000 members. They told

attendees there is strength in numbers and they believe the UK has not yet done enough to reassure its citizens living in the EU27 countries.

Roger Boaden, speaking for Expats Citizens Rights in EU (ecreu.com) said the group has almost 9,000 members from 27 EU states with over half living in France. Their activities have included lobbying MPs and Lords and giving verbal and written evidence to select committees. A survey found that in France 69% of their members are retired and 31% work. Healthcare, pension and travel are their biggest concerns.

Mr Boaden said: "We have been writing letter after letter. There cannot be 'no deal'. I'm worried about the position of the Conservative government because they could be giving us promises now. We are collecting data from people telling their own stories and have collected a thousand that we will give to MPs to explain the real worries of real people. We want guarantees, on business, on education, pensions with upgrades and on freedom of movement."

Fair Deal for Expats (fairdealforexpats.com), a smaller group, was started by 30 people living near Bergerac, Dordogne who took action as soon as they heard the referendum result.

Their slogan is: "Individually we are powerless. As a group we are formidable."

They were among the parties to take the legal action that required the UK government to put Brexit to an MPs' vote.

"We feel we are beginning to get a voice," said

John Shaw. "It is important because our children depend on us. They are disenfranchised. What we've enjoyed for 43 years is being taken away. Our job is to fight for them."

Remain in France Together (remaininfrance.org) has over 6,000 members. Its Facebook page acts as an outlet for feelings of grief, anger, fear and betrayal, Brian Robinson said. "We are lobbying British and French MPs and giving evidence to select committees to negotiate for the preservation of all the current rights of UK citizens in the EU. We feel we are dealing with a government disinterested in our well-being."

Leader of the new French branch of the Liberal Democrats (libdemsinfrance.fr), Paul Fisher only joined the party in June last year, as a direct result of Brexit. They now have 500 members but while not as large as Conservative or Labour representation in France he claims his party is doing the most to fight for UK citizens' rights.

■ Another BiE group with many members in France has been named one of the winners of 2017's European Citizen's Prize, given annually by the EU Parliament to people and bodies who have helped European integration.

Brexpats – Hear our Voice was nominated by British Green MEP Jean Lambert.

Member Jan Glover said: "We feel honoured. This award represents our hard work to keep Britain in the EU and representing both EU27 and UK citizens to protect their rights."

EU makes fair offer on rights and tells UK to 'get on with it'

WITH political turmoil in the UK after the election, Brexit talks were still expected to get under way on going to press – eventually.

Three months have already been lost since the article 50 trigger and European Council president Donald Tusk says time is short if a deal is to be agreed, debated by EU and UK parliaments and signed off before March 29, 2019, the expected 'Brexit Day'.

"We don't know when Brexit talks start. We know when they must end. Do your best to avoid a 'no deal' as result of 'no negotiations,'" he tweeted.

The EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier told journalists: "Time is passing quicker than anyone believes... I can't negotiate with myself."

President Macron has told UK Prime Minister Theresa May "the door is open" to the UK remaining in the EU, however he said it would become progressively harder as the talks process continues.

The EU has promised 'maximum transparency' during negotiations and is putting key documents on a website at: <https://goo.gl/0L9LGU>. Among these are 'negotiation directives', which say they wish to guarantee all key rights of Britons in the EU27 and EU27 citizens in Britain for life, including for family

members who join them.

They say these rights should be those enjoyed at the exit date and ones people will only benefit from later, such as ones related to pensions, as well as ones in the process of being obtained. That means a Briton resident in France for two years at Brexit Day should maintain a 'permanent residence' right once they have been there for five.

“

I can't negotiate with myself

Michel Barnier
EU's chief negotiator

Areas protected should include residence and rights of free movement as under the EU treaties, including 'permanent residence' after five years and rights to access healthcare; rights obtained under social security coordination including exportable benefits and pension aggregation; rights such as access to the labour market or to run a business, social

charge or tax advantages and access to training; and rights of workers' family members to education and training.

Continuing recognition of qualifications that were recognised at the withdrawal date should also be maintained, the EU says.

The EU asks that the European Commission retain a monitoring role on expat rights and the ECJ be able to enforce them.

Expat groups British in Europe and The 3million have written to UK party leaders and MPs urging them to reciprocate, to reach an early agreement and to 'ring-fence' expat rights from other matters so even if these fail the expat deal stands.

The chair of the British in Europe coalition, Jane Golding, said: "The EU has made a generous, unilateral offer to UK citizens in the EU and is prepared to guarantee the vast majority of our rights. Now the election is over, we need urgently to know the UK's response so we can see an end to the uncertainty facing thousands of families."

She said BiE is writing to MPs and the prime minister asking for a clear response. She added BiE had held an "encouraging" meeting with the German foreign ministry which sees rights of Britons in Germany as "just as important as those of Germans in the UK".

MEPs fighting for quick solution to problems of expats



'Taskforce' MEPs Sophie in 't Veld and Catherine Bearder

THE RISK of the UK leaving with no deal has lessened since the election, says Catherine Bearder, a British Lib Dem who is part of an MEP taskforce set up to fight for expat rights in the lead up to Brexit.

"Mrs May hasn't got the power now to pick up her papers and walk away," she said.

She added: "I would like to see a cross-party grand committee doing the negotiations that reflect the electoral will of the UK people and that's something the Lib Dems are calling for."

UK chancellor Philip Hammond is thought to want a softer Brexit, which is "good news for all of us," Ms Bearder said.

“

We'll be pushing for ring-fencing so whatever is decided for expats will have to apply even if no agreement is reached on anything else

MEP Sophie in 't Veld

"There is also commitment from Michel Barnier [the EU's chief negotiator] and Guy Verhofstadt [the EU's chief negotiator] that we must deal with citizens first. It's all due to start, but nobody knows the British position. I think they're trying to decide what it is."

She said she is asking for expat rights to be in a "stand alone" agreement but so far EU leaders have not committed to it.

"I think what they don't want is to tie their hands for the final agreement, but it's not beyond the wit of clever people to give certainty to people."

Taskforce founder Dutch MEP Sophie in 't Veld said: "The situation in the UK is complicated and fragile. If you had set out to make a mess you couldn't have done it better."

"The EU's been ready for some time; it's in the UK's hands."

It is unclear what is really meant by a "soft" or "hard" Brexit, she said. "If a soft Brexit is remaining in the internal market, fine, but that means free movement of people which nobody seems ready to accept."

"What is important is there is as little damage as possible, though there will be damage, on both sides. I don't think the 'new era' that's supposed to happen for the UK will ever come, but we'll see, maybe I'm wrong."

As for whether the UK might remain, she said this was "very speculative because there is no indication the British people are about to change their minds."

"Let's assume Brexit will indeed be Brexit. If not we'll be in uncharted territory; we'll see."

"As to citizens in the UK or Britons in the EU, this will have to be resolved as a first priority and we'll be pushing for ring-fencing so whatever is decided will have to apply even if no agreement is reached on anything else. Everybody says 'citizens are very important', but it seems to me the Commission and member state governments think it's quite convenient to keep a card up their sleeve."

The *Financial Times* said UK officials told them the UK will offer to guarantee EU27 expats' current rights. The Brexit Ministry did not confirm this to *Connexion*, but said 'resolving' the expat issue is the first priority.

Ms in 't Veld said another hearing on expat rights will be organised by the parliament's LIBE (civil liberties) committee in September, following the one held in May. There will also be debates about the negotiations, with the parliament aiming to make a new resolution on expat rights to add to its overall 'red lines on Brexit negotiations' one.

Ms in 't Veld said she believes Guy Verhofstadt hopes to 'clinch a deal' soon so a resolution can be passed in September.

The taskforce is still awaiting an answer from the Commission to a query about problems with the issue of residence cards to Britons in countries like France.

'No more elections but UK disarray may mean a Norway-style set-up'

THE WEAKENED position of the UK government may mean a softer Brexit is on the cards, says a leading British politics expert.

The professor of government at Manchester University, Colin Talbot, said he does not now expect another UK election – the rules on calling or triggering one make it "almost impossible" – however Theresa May's government could be forced to abandon 'hard Brexit' plans.

"The Tories are relatively secure, which is not to say Theresa May is – I think she'll be gone in weeks. But my suspicion is to survive politically as a government now – they need to come to a compromise involving us leaving the EU formally but having something like a 'Norway arrangement'."

Norway is in the single market, but not the customs union (thus allowing for trade deals with non-EU countries), but it abides by free movement and pays into the EU.

"People like Boris [Johnson] spoke about it during the referendum campaign," Prof Talbot said. "Now even Farage has said it looks like we're going to end up going for something like that." This would be good news for the expat community, he said.

"I think that they will come up with some formula around the migration issue, which looks like they've 'taken back control', but in reality means it is relatively flexible. A lot of the problems around movement in any case



Professor Colin Talbot

to do with the British government's failure to manage its borders and little to do with what was actually necessary under EU regulations. There were all sorts of restrictions they could have put in place but didn't."

Prof Talbot said this prospect is because "there is a majority in Parliament in favour of a softer Brexit" – including "virtually all of the Opposition", as well as the DUP, the

Conservative Party in Scotland and some other Conservatives. Labour's position has been 'wobbly', but many of their voters, especially the young, want a soft Brexit, so they would be "shooting themselves in the foot" if they tried to do anything else.

However international relations expert Philippe Moreau Defarges, of IFRI in Paris, said he believes a hard Brexit is still more likely, because Europe, having gone through difficult times, will want to pull together and will not want to make concessions.

"I don't think they are going to be interested in offering something like a Norway agreement, because Norway was never a member of the EU. It's a different situation if you are leaving the club as opposed to if you never belonged to it."

He added: "I think that Macron will not favour a soft Brexit because what he wants is European unity above all."

The delays, and the UK's weak government could also mean risks of the country leaving with 'no deal', he said, in which case, it would hurt the EU too, but the EU would cope.

Some arrangement on trade might still be "cobbled together", he said.

"The vote for Brexit was a daft thing to do and I think the British are going to pay for it," he added. "But what is especially tiresome is that the British still don't really seem to know what they want."

Returning Britons could cost NHS twice as much

IF BRITISH pensioners in EU27 countries have to return to the UK because of their healthcare arrangements ending it will cost the UK twice as much as now for their care, says an independent British health charity.

Under the EU's 'S1' scheme 190,000 British expat pensioners have healthcare paid for where they live, reimbursed by the UK at £500million a year. However the same care

in Britain would cost the NHS twice as much, claims a report by the Nuffield Trust.

"Even more difficult would be finding the staff and beds these people might need... 900 beds and 1,600 nurses, as well as doctors, other health professionals, and support staff such as porters... equivalent to two new hospitals." All of this "cannot be brought on stream at will", as the UK is

already short of nurses and beds. While it may not be easy to maintain participation in the S1 form system after Brexit, as it comes under EU social security coordination rules, efforts must be made "to see if a continued deal can be agreed".

If younger expat Britons find work and residency rights in jeopardy, the NHS could be under even more pressure, the report adds.

Rennes / Bordeaux TGVs smash times

TWO TGVs made history when they covered the distance from Paris to Rennes in 1hr26 and Paris-Bordeaux in 2hr08 in tests on the new high-speed lines that will open up the regional capitals for business.

The Rennes train was a minute down on the planned journey time, which saves 35mins on the normal trip, and the Bordeaux train was exactly on time, cutting 1hr10 on its trip.

French dictionaries add 'English' words

MORE English words are starting to appear in French with both Larousse and Robert dictionaries adding borrowed or adapted *mots justes*.

From *uberisation* to *playliste*, *tweete* and *googaliser* the words appear in the 2018 editions to sum up the *post-vérité* age.

Wine museum lures visitors around world

THE year-old Cité du Vin in Bordeaux notched up 425,000 visitors in its first year – drawing tourists from nearly every country on the planet.

Two out of three visitors were from outside the city, with 70,000 from 150 countries out of the 196 in the world.

The giant decanter-like building has also given jobs to 250.

Silent and cool street plan to improve Paris

PARIS is to test new road surfaces on three streets that could cut sound pollution and make the city cooler in summer.

Avenue Général Leclerc in the 14th arrondissement is the only street named so far for the test, to have a sound-absorbing surface laid that will also retain water to 'freshen the air' rather than absorb heat.

Thousands thank Good Samaritans

A FAMILY who escaped with their lives after a burst tyre

flipped over their minibus on the A81 motorway near Le Mans, took to Facebook to thank the many drivers who came to their aid, blocking the road to stop them being hit.

The words of thanks from 'So Guil-brif' have been shared 35,700 times and seen by tens of thousands of well-wishers.

Do not fall for the Microsoft scam call

COMPUTER users have been warned to beware scam phone calls claiming to be from Microsoft and warning of 'a virus in your computer'.

Readers said they had also received calls and had different ways to react – from blowing a referee's whistle to just leaving the caller to speak away.

Scam emails are also on the rise and computer users are also warned not to open pdf files from unknown sources.

Prefect criticises Corsican job plan

PLANS in Corsica to give priority to Corsican residents for jobs on the Ile de Beauté have been criticised by the prefect as 'job discrimination'.

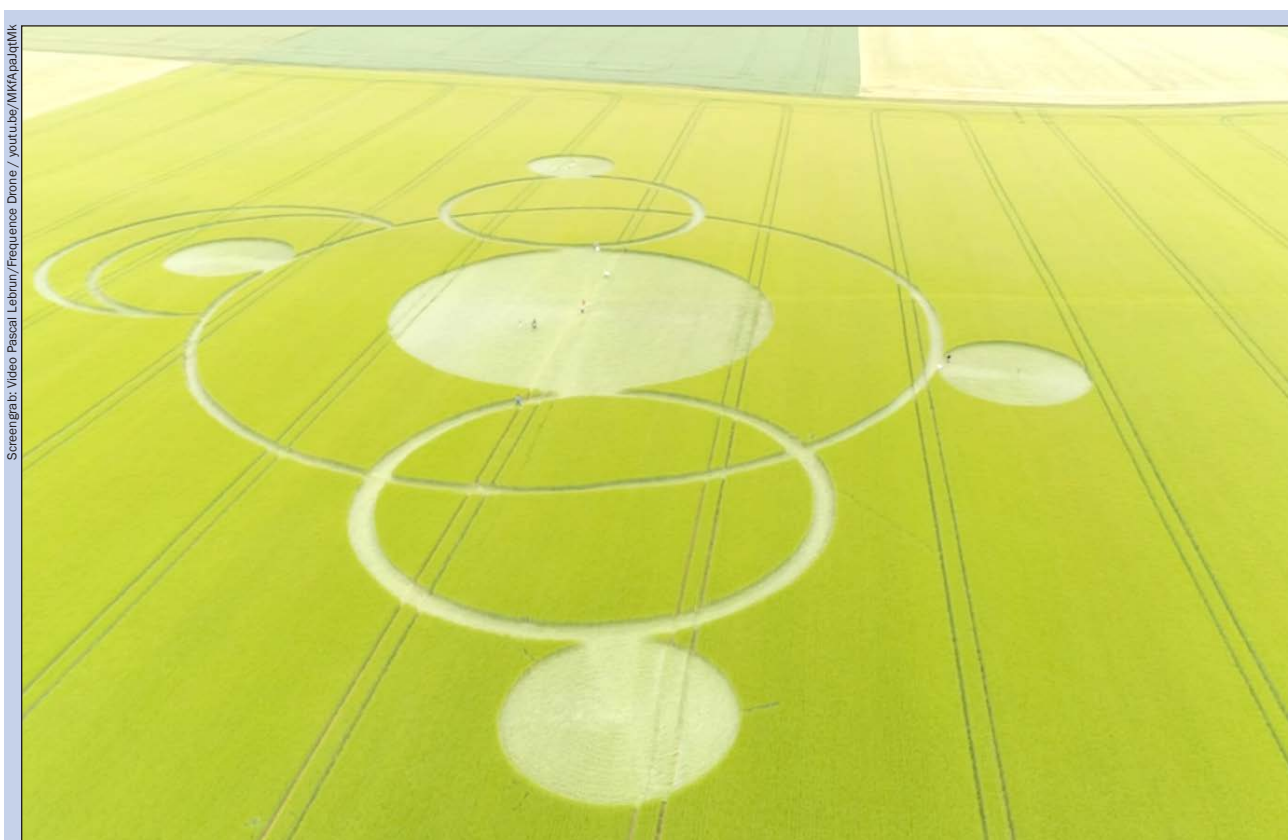
Corsican nationalists have controlled the Assemblée territoriale since 2015 and voted through the policy to cut its 10.5% unemployment list.

The CGT union and Medef employers' group also objected with Medef saying they already employed those they could.

Rugby fans shake the Earth after win

JUMPING fans made earthquake monitors quiver as they celebrated Clermont rugby club's win in the Top14 championship – with celebrations caught on seismometers.

Geologists in Clermont-Ferrand, Auvergne picked up the vibration as fans celebrated in the city's Place de Jaude – with a peak at the end of the final against Toulon when Clermont won 22-16 and the team picked up the Bouclier de Brennus trophy.



Farmer angry after crop circles appear in barley field

A FARMER has lodged a complaint with police after nearly a dozen circles, the largest 500m in diameter, appeared in one of his barley fields near Sancerre. He says it will cost him about €1,000 in lost crop.

Jean-Paul Millet, who farms near Crézancy-en-Sancerre, was upset that sightseers were walking on the field and said ears of grain

were being trampled into the ground and he would need to use weedkiller to kill them to avoid contaminating next year's crop.

Aerial photographer Pascal Lebrun said he spoke to Mr Millet who was "angry at what he thought was foolish behaviour". Mr Lebrun then launched a drone to video the scene, which he put on YouTube.

Floating solar farm would disrupt wildlife

GREEN groups have criticised an Alsace commune's plan for a floating solar farm saying that covering lakes with panels would disrupt wildlife.

Illkirch-Graffenstaden aims to install 10m x 20m of panels as a test that would give 20kW to help power an animal farm and tennis club nearby.

Alsace Nature said it would destabilise the aquatic ecosystem and was not needed when there were hundreds of empty roofs in the area.

Transhumance of 20 sheep attracts crowds

ONLOOKERS outnumbered sheep as the 'smallest transhumance in France' took place in Berthen, Nord, near the Belgian border. Led by farmer Dominique Delabroye, nearly 2,000 people joined the event to lead a flock of 20 sheep about 6km over a 109m col to the Mont des Cats and their summer grazing.

Russian cyclist fined for motorway jaunt

POLICE arrested and fined a Russian cyclist who had been spotted cycling along the autoroute between Grenoble and Valence.

The motorway was busy with holiday traffic and the woman was seen on security cameras as she weaved between the inside lane and hard shoulder.

Police fined her €22 as she tried to pay the *péage* and gave her a lift to the Euro-cycle route at Romans-sur-Isère.

Energy firms heavily criticised for abuses

ENERGY companies have been heavily criticised by the industry mediator for "aggressive and deceptive practices" over switching suppliers that left poorer and older households worse off or conned.

The Médiateur National de l'Energie singled out Engie and Eni as being to blame for the majority of abuses, which rose by 40% in 2016.

More wolves and wolf packs spotted

WOLF numbers are rising in France with the forestry and hunting agency ONCFS saying it has recorded 360 animals, up from 292 in 2016.

The number of wolf packs has also risen, from 35 to 42, but although wolves were seen in new zones in Isère, Savoie, Bouches-du-Rhône and Hérault they were absent in some previously occupied areas.

Farmers complained about the number of wolves, saying their animals are being killed.

Astronaut told to watch speed



ASTRONAUT Thomas Pesquet was welcomed back to Earth after 196 days in space and police warned him the speed limit is lower in France than at 400km on the International Space Station. In a tweet, police warned he could no longer travel at 27,600kph round the planet.

The astronaut delivered his own warning, to President Trump, saying he should take a trip in the ISS to see that global warming does exist and that the success of the Paris environmental treaty was vital for the world.

€100 fines plan for cannabis users

CANNABIS users may no longer face court cases if caught in possession as the government plans a new law to impose a simple fine to avoid costly court cases.

Interior Minister Gérard Collomb said fines of up to €100 would be imposed.

Police union Unsa welcomed the plan saying it was overdue. The current system was 'cumbersome, time-consuming and ineffective' against trafficking.

No more animals for Paris circus

A PARIS circus has said it will no longer work with animals as "80% of people support the animal cause and if a large majority of families support animals we cannot offer a spectacle that upsets them."

André Bouglione of Joseph Bouglione circus added: "Our animals are getting old so we either get young ones and start again for 10 or 20 years or we do something else."

Free meal deal for over-80s is a success

AN IRISH bar owner who offered free bank holiday meals for over-80s was delighted so many people took him up on his offer, saying: "It was great to welcome them, some we knew well and others were here for the first time but we made sure they had a good time."

Cathal Quigg, 34, who owns the Auberge des Pêcheurs in La Celle-Dunoise, Creuse, with his family and runs it with his sister, Karen, said the "aim was to get people out of their houses when they would not normally go out – and we did it. "We are the only restaurant in the area that opens on a bank holiday so we are usually busy

but this time we had about 100 people with us and about 16 people taking us up on the free meal – and we are very happy with that.

"It was a way for us to be sociable to our neighbours here. A lot of old people live in the Creuse, and a lot of them we don't see, because they don't get out.

"There were about three or four tables that I didn't know and the idea was to try and find a way that people could bring an older person, get them out of the house and come out for a meal.

"We chose Pentecôte because it's the *journée de solidarité* and this is the same sort of idea."

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Railway loiterers put off by classical tracks

CLASSICAL music blasting out of loudspeakers at Rennes train station has cleared the venue of loiterers.

For three months, while building work restricts access, classical extracts have been playing on the south side of the station for 24 hours a day.

Speed fines soar, but road deaths still rise

DRIVERS' groups say speed cameras are being used simply as fund-raisers as fine revenue to the government soared 14% since 2013 but road deaths – the reason given for more 'radars' – have also risen, by 6%.

Cour des Comptes auditors said fine revenue pulled in an extra €131million more than in 2015 and, overall, the government pocketed €1.8billion from parking and speeding offences, up from €1.6bn in 2016.

Warning over high street cosmetics

MORE than 1,000 high street cosmetics should be avoided as they contain 'undesireable' or even 'illegal' substances, consumer watchdog UFC-Que Choisir has warned.

It says 23 readily available products on its list – which has been regularly updated since it was first published in February 2016 – should be pulled immediately as they contain banned chemicals, such as hormone-altering endocrine disruptors.

Worrying increase in underweight girls

OBESITY rates in France have remained constant over the past decade – but the number of young girls who are underweight has increased fivefold. There was a 0.3% fall in obese and overweight adults between 2006 and 2015 but 13% of young girls were underweight in 2015, compared to 8% in 2006. Nearly one in five girls aged 11-14 is underweight, five times more than 10 years ago.



Garde guitarist leads terror tribute

PLAYING electric guitar in full ceremonial uniform, Garde Républicaine band member Maréchal des logis-chef Jean-Michel Mekil rocked the France-England crowd at Stade de France singing the Oasis song *Don't Look Back in Anger* in tribute after the Manchester and London terror attacks.

Tens of thousands of fans at the football friendly joined in the emotional moment which has also been viewed worldwide on social media. It was followed by French and English fans joining to sing God Save the

Queen. President Macron and Prime Minister Theresa May were at the game and joined in, with Mr Macron reading the words from one of the giant screens.

Jean-Michel Mekil, 43, is a trombonist with the Garde band and is a rock fan with a keen love of the Beatles... like Oasis.

The Stade de France tribute harked back to 2015 when English fans sang the *Marseillaise* as a memorial to victims of the Paris terror attacks – with two of the blasts happening outside the stadium itself.

Broadcaster hit by ad ban over 'crotch-grab'

TV CHANNEL C8 has been sanctioned after a prime-time presenter grabbed a female colleague's hand and placed it over his genitals.

TV watchdog CSA banned adverts for three weeks during *Touche pas à mon poste* by Cyril Hanouna, following complaints of sexism and homophobia.

Mayor urges caution over 'wolf attacks'

VILLAGERS in Aveyron have been advised not to take country walks and to take care of children in case wolves attack. The mayor of Cornus issued the warning in a decree as there have been 26 attacks on sheep and experts say 19 may have been due to wolves.

Paintball plan to end caterpillar nightmare

NICE is protecting residents and visitors in one of the city's top viewpoints from processionary caterpillars and the severe skin irritations they can cause. Paintball-firing pest control agents have been brought in to target moths to cut future caterpillar numbers on the Colline du Château.

French keyboard set for digital changes

FRANCE'S Azerty keyboard is set to change, with a new keyboard layout better suited to the digital age. The present layout, which has been in use for more than a century, could vanish if one of the options put forward for a different ergonomic format, called Bépo, is adopted.

Vegans raise a glass to 100% vegan wines

VEGANS can now enjoy wine as vineyards have created wines that do not use animal products to clarify them, as fining is generally done with egg white, milk casein or pork gelatine.

Until last year there was no French vegan wine label but the European Vegetarian Union V-label can be used for 100% vegan wine using vegetable products for fining. Ampelidæ in Vienne was the first vineyard recognised but only about 10 *vignerons* in France can use the yellow and green V-label. They cover areas such as Bordeaux, Beaumes-de-Venise, Corbières, Costières de Nîmes, Côtes-de-Gascogne, Champagne and Muscat.

The Connexion

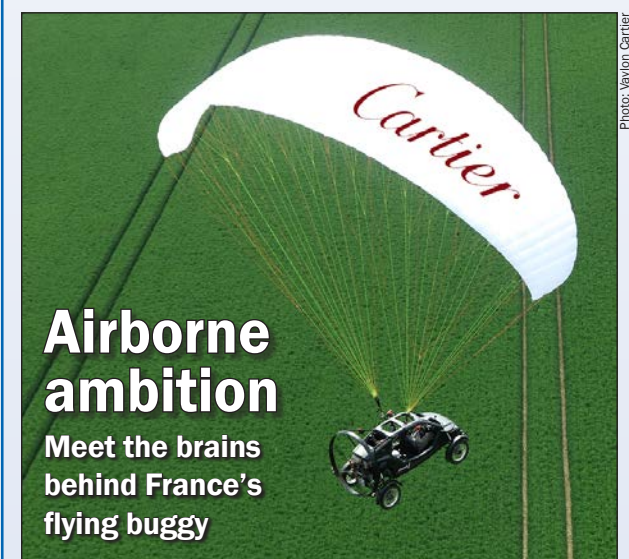
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Low-value Thai coin is €2 con

TOURISTS returning from Thailand have been bringing back 10 baht coins that are being mistaken for €2 coins in France – but are worth just 26 centimes.

The 10 baht coin is strikingly similar to the €2 coin with the same bi-metal construction and the same size and thickness. It is not a copy as it has been in circulation since 1988.

Used to pay parking meters and vending machines but easily spotted in shops, it is difficult for machine manufacturers to deal with as they risk having real €2 coins rejected if they make the coin parameters strict enough to reject the bahts.

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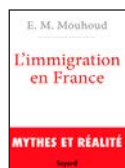


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Contrary to myth, France has one of the world's lowest rates for immigration

WITH the rise of the Front National as well as the UK seeking to cut immigration by almost two-thirds, migration is often in the news. Having reached the second round in the presidentials, the FN was, on writing, the second most popular party in a parliamentary election poll. **Professor El Mouhoub Mouhoub**, an economist from Paris-Dauphine university, examines migration in his new book *L'immigration en France* (Fayard). Oliver Rowland spoke to him about the myths and realities.



Some thought Marine Le Pen could win the presidency, but she did not. Does that mean that the French are not as concerned about immigration as one might have thought?

The real issue isn't so much that the French rejected the FN, but the fact that the FN is constantly progressing.

The problem is that fears become rooted and are then exploited by the far right and right.

Part of this is due to the effects of globalisation; or rather the incapacity of the state to respond to it, for example by providing training and helping people to move [to find work] which means that those who lose, remain losers.

Its effects are very localised, but there are certain areas where people are shocked by business restructuring and outsourcing abroad etc. Some people are badly hit and they stay in the area because they're not mobile.

Because the state fails to compensate, the Front National latches onto accusations about immigration as a supposed solution. They say that if we come out of Europe and strengthen our borders, all the problems will be solved.

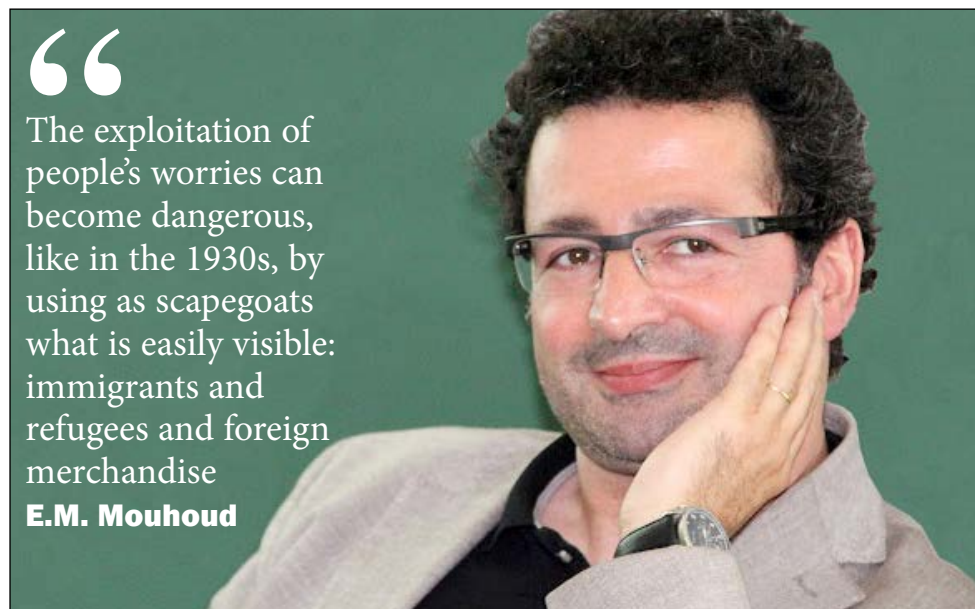
The exploitation of people's worries can become dangerous – like in the 1930s – by using as scapegoats what is easily visible: immigrants and refugees and foreign merchandise, whereas it's to do with factors in the global economy, the finance and services sectors etc.

But the real problems are political failures – structural, in terms of aid to the regions, housing,

“

The exploitation of people's worries can become dangerous, like in the 1930s, by using as scapegoats what is easily visible: immigrants and refugees and foreign merchandise

E.M. Mouhoub



immigration policies that are fair, that are welcoming, that don't yield to the FN, but at the same time that deal with the problems of those who have lost out, and the difficulties in certain territories.

Is France's high birth rate one reason why it has low immigration?

Yes, that may be one of the reasons why it's easier to have restrictive immigration policies in France than elsewhere.

Even if it has lowered, our birth rate is around two children [per woman], compared to Germany, for example where it's 1.3. So of course if you can't replace the previous generations then you could lack workers.

What are the main kinds of immigration?

The main reason for immigration is French people bringing in family members – often from countries outside the EU.

The next major reason is free movement within the EU, which represents 34%, whereas people immigrating from elsewhere to work in France is much less, only around 20,000 people a year and half of those are students changing status to become employees.

It is not easy for a non-EU citizen to come to France to work – you need to have certain desirable skills?

It's very limited. For example if a firm wants to recruit a 'foreign' worker, the prefecture must make sure there is not a French person or resident capable of doing that job.

That does not seem to bode well for British people wanting to come to France after the Brexit, especially as Theresa May says she wants to cut immigration.

It seems that what the British were worried about is EU immigration – Polish or French people etc. not so much immigration from outside the EU.

If the UK leaves, then for a Briton wanting to come to France it will be 'real immigration', with a visa and an application for a *carte de séjour* etc. They won't just be free to come.

I think the UK will lose out – it's a country that receives a lot of immigrants, but also has a lot of emigrants.

the work market... which means certain areas get left behind. I'm thinking particularly of the *banlieues* and *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* [designated areas of cities with social difficulties] where people suffer from multiple inequalities, at the same time ethnic, social and territorial.

That was not so much the case in France before the 1990s – before that there was inequality but it was not so much concentrated in certain territories.

It appears that contrary to what one might think, France does not have a high level of immigration compared to the norm for European countries?

Absolutely not, in fact it has one of the lowest levels among countries in the OECD [group of developed economies], just after Korea and Japan. We have less immigration than the UK, which is around the middle: 0.7% of its population [in number of immigrants annually], compared to around 0.3-0.4% for France.

But what is dangerous is that the conditions that favour the far right are still there, they haven't been corrected, so even if Le Pen didn't win this time, there is a problem if we procrastinate.

If in five years unemployment doesn't drop, there still hasn't been more job creation, if the difficulties of certain territories haven't been resolved... we will have the Sword of Damocles of the FN hanging over us again.

Do you find the proposals of President Macron encouraging?

Yes, some of his ideas go in the direction that's needed. For example lowering the cost of employing people who are struggling to find work in certain areas so they can be employed somewhere else. Instead of creating *zones franches* [specific areas where employment costs are lowered], create low-cost jobs.

He also has some ideas to improve the way immigrants are welcomed. But it'll be pointless unless we strongly reduce mass unemployment and inequalities.

In France what causes controversy too is *travailleurs détachés* [workers posted from overseas]. Their social charges are paid to their country of origin [at its rates], so workers in some sectors, such as building, see them as unfair competition.

That's something that needs more regulation at European level.

Another problem with posted workers is firms not respecting rules on how long people are allowed to work for under the status.

So, it will be up to Macron to seek changes in Europe, to encourage growth and prosperity for countries and less austerity.

We need to create a more progressive federal budgetary policy, otherwise people will continue to target Europe and immigrants as scapegoats. And in France – or Britain – we need to have

SNCF boss: Why we renamed TGV service 'inOui'

SNCF's new strategic planning chief Mathias Vicherat is the brains behind the re-branding of the TGV service as 'inOui'. The name sounds like *inouï*, meaning 'extraordinary' and ties in with other recent branding. Mr Vicherat, who studied alongside President Macron at the prestigious ENA '*grande école*', explains more to *Connexion*.

Was 'inOui' your idea?

It was the customers' idea – because we did market research with focus groups – once we explained to them what the service was about. It's still a TGV, it's called TGV inOui, but the idea is to simplify the offer to customers. So firstly there's the low-cost service with Ouigo, which represents 5% of the high-speed offer at the moment, and will represent 25% by 2020. Alongside this we want a premium-but-affordable service, which corresponds to criteria

including wifi on board, new trains and liveries, or fully renovated and upgraded ones, and a better service with staff trained to, for example, find you a taxi or the best connecting trains. Staff onboard will no longer check tickets – that will be done via new automatic gates on the platforms – so they can focus on service.

InOui will start with 16 Paris-Bordeaux trains in July and it will be 30% of the high-speed services by the end of this year and by the end of 2020 it will be all of the service apart from Ouigo. We have budgeted €2.5bn for these improvements in total.

Is 'oui' meant to sound positive?

Yes, the image our customers have of Ouibus, OuiCar and Ouigo is very positive. For example 93% report being satisfied with the Ouigo service. So the associations are very positive and it's

about expanding the 'oui' concept to our premium high-speed services. We will aim for inOui to be a really good quality service to live up to the name.

Your iDTGV range of long-distance services is coming to an end?

Yes, we want to tidy things up and have fewer offers, but a range that is easier to understand. If you can reserve in good time and you are not too bothered about what services you have on board, you don't mind if there is no buffet car or extra luggage space etc, you might want to go for Ouigo. Overall we hope by 2020 to have 15 million more travellers using the TGV.

This summer you also have two new high-speed services starting – TGV Océane and TGV Ouest?

They start on July 2 – a Paris-Bordeaux service in two hours, more than an

hour faster. And a Paris-Rennes in 1hr23mins, gaining more than half an hour. These are our ninth and 10th LGVs [purpose-built fast TGV lines] in our history. Our aim is to compete with the airlines, notably on the Paris-Bordeaux route. We think that in going down to two hours we offer a more competitive service, notably because you have no break in your journey.

The reservation site is changing?

snCF-voyages.com will become oui.snCF in November, with new services like a 'bargain price hunter' that helps you, if you are not too limited in dates and times, to find the lowest-possible price. There will also be more 'door-to-door' services, to get you from A to B not only by train but by taxi, bus and tram.

Do you feel optimistic about the presidency of Mr Macron?

He was well-advised by transport experts during his campaign and his ideas correspond well with our ambitions. From our point of view it's very positive. He's someone who listens a lot, which is a real strength.

Is there anything you wish to add?

I'd like to tell our British customers that the Gare du Nord has a lot of work going on with new facilities like a coworking space, with many improvements due to be ready in 2019. However they can continue using it and will see changes day by day. A lot has already been done, including a Eurostar business lounge, a new Michelin-starred restaurant called l'Etoile du Nord and a new layout for the mezzanine area

■ For a longer version of this interview see connexionfrance.com

Swearing in second language is easier but it still offends

by SAMANTHA DAVID

DO you find yourself cursing more easily in French than your native tongue? If so, Catherine Caldwell-Harris, Psychology professor at Boston University in the US, knows why: emotional distance.

After extensive research into questions like whether or not jokes told in a foreign language are still funny, she is now studying the emotional impact of second languages and why people curse more readily in non-native tongues.

"Language taps into our memories so when we speak, we draw on those memories. We don't speak word by word, we draw on phrases and concepts which we've heard in that language. It's not well recognised, but language and culture are intimately linked," she says.

"For example, when Korean woman living in the US meet up in groups, you might expect them to speak Korean but they don't. They prefer to speak English because it's less formal, and using it means there is less hierarchy within the group."

She says that swearing in a foreign language is often easier because it has less emotional intensity. "If you grew up in a culture where swearing is more accepted, it has less emotional resonance."

"But in Japan, for example, swearing is so frowned upon that many Japanese people prefer to swear in English."

She says a similar phenomenon is seen in romance: "In some cultures, people never say 'I love you' to their parents, lovers, no-one... but once they are speaking English as a for-



Photo: Catherine Caldwell-Harris

Catherine Caldwell-Harris

eign language, they use it much more freely. So they'll have an entire conversation in Japanese and then finish with "love ya". Switching to another language gives them the freedom to say things they otherwise feel too inhibited to express.

"In such cultures, family is considered to be so close that you are not expected to have to cultivate close relationships with family members. Trying to do so would be seen as strange, seen as indicating that you don't feel close to your family."

"But in societies like in the US, we are all individuals so we have to reach out to our close families and friends to create and maintain close bonds. So in English, it's normal to say 'I

love you" and "sorry" all the time. It doesn't carry the same emotional baggage."

She says it works when we are on the receiving end, too. "When people swear at us in a foreign language, we're not much troubled by it because the words are not loaded with cultural associations and personal memories. They are just words with little emotional resonance."

"But when foreigners swear at us in our own language, it can hurt badly because the use of the swear words evokes an emotional response in us. We feel that they are getting away with it, because they aren't feeling the same emotional resonance."

She vividly remembers being sworn at by a customs official in France once. "He spoke quite quietly, so no-one else heard but he used the c-word and I was completely shocked. I felt completely violated, it was far worse than if an English-speaker had used that language to me. But I had the feeling that to him it wasn't that offensive and that even if he had understood just how hurtful it was to use that word to me, he didn't care."

But she says that to her the memory still hurts.

"What it comes down to is this: language is so linked to culture, memory and background that when a linguistic use shocks you, it's because you've just come up against a cultural shock of one sort or another."

It is a metaphorical slap in the face, just as it is, conversely, when you discover a delightful new idiom or phrase in a foreign language. It's one of the pleasures of learning them.

Found in translation: learning to love the nuances of language

WHEN American journalist Lauren Collins moved to London in 2010, she did not expect to fall in love with a Frenchman and move to France. "I met Olivier almost straight off the plane, and we lived together in London and then moved to Geneva in 2013 and since 2015 we've been living on the Left Bank in Paris," she says.

For Lauren, it was a crash course in learning French, and in her book, *When in French*, she documents her linguistic adventures along the way. The book is amusing and readable, but also contains lots of insights into learning a second language as an adult.

"At first, living in Geneva, I struggled with everything to the point where I thought that French was the problem, but since we've been in Paris everything has changed and I have realised that Geneva was the problem. I love the French language!"

Now married to Olivier, with a small daughter and another baby on the way, she speaks French fluently but still enjoys the differences between the languages. She notices the frequency and moments of deployment of phrases like 'I love you' are different in the two languages, although the underlying feelings are the same. "In the US, we're always saying we love this and the other. In French, it's used more rarely so feels more special."

She also finds that some French words, like *solidaire*, just don't have a simple one-word translation. "Sometimes you need a lot of words to express the same concept. And how do you say *bofin* in English? And *n'importe quoi* – when Macron used it in that TV debate with Le Pen just before the presidential elec-



Photo: Fourth Estate

Lauren says learning French changed the way she thinks

tions, that was a seminal moment. And it just isn't the same as saying 'whatever' in English."

She says learning a new language has in some way changed the way she thinks.

"My life in France isn't in quarantine. When I go back to the States, I still have my new cultural associations, my newly acquired French, my attitudes. It's the same in Paris, I still have all my cultural background." It can lead to unexpected culture clashes.

"When I go back to the US, the lack of a formal way of addressing people is jarring. I like the implied respect that comes with using *vous* and French formality has overtaken US informality as my normal, although when I first arrived in France, I found it snobbish and undemocratic."

"I was very American and thought that everyone is the same so you should speak to them the same way."

She notes that in French the *vouvoyer/tutoyer* rules really differentiate between public and personal life. "When you're out and about, you use *vous* with everyone because it's polite and shows respect, but also you don't need to bother much because you don't really

know those people."

"What I find amusing is the discussion as to when couples stop using *vous* and move to the more intimate *tu*... In books translated from English to French for example, it's often the morning after a couple have been to bed for the first time, which always makes me laugh."

She says she does not believe there are concepts that cannot be expressed in other languages. "That's why we delight in doing untranslatable translations and finding just the right way to express a concept. But it's true that there are neater ways of expressing certain concepts in some languages. And some things always fall through the gaps. There are just some nuances that don't make it through a translation."

The title of her own book is a case in point. When it was translated into French and published in France, the title was changed from *When in French* to *Lost in French*. Both are English titles, but the second is perhaps easier for a French-speaker to understand than the original.

When in French by Lauren Collins (Fourth Estate) is available from all booksellers

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The Connexion

FRANCE'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER
Established 2002

Welcome home, Thomas!

GIVEN that we are in the midst of a resource and pollution crisis down here on Earth, shouldn't we have better things to do than put men and women on top of vertical fuel tanks and blast them at unimaginable expense into space so they can live for a few months in a high-tech orbiting caravan?

Most of us go gaga about space exploration as if it were somehow necessary (it isn't: we can live without the non-stick frying pan) or even possible (it is, sort of: we may make it to Mars but forget about leaving the solar system).

However, there is one point of the exercise, as French returnee Thomas Pesquet, reminded us. Most of us really don't believe that the Earth is lonely, fragile, unique, and worth looking after. Only when you look down from the outside, through the International Space Station's cupola, do you really understand this.

It may be worth sending people into space just so they come back determined to be better Earthlings.

The great Brexit delusion

SUPPORTERS of Brexit almost got away with a magic trick. They nearly convinced everyone they live in the real world.

They were – they told us – courageous, hard-headed pragmatists who would stand up to Brussels bureaucrats and make the UK a better country. All we had to do was leave them to it and not ask questions. Last month's general election exposed the whole charade for what it is.

They will never admit it, but Brexiteers are not realists. They are ideologues of the worse kind, for whom the object was always to win at any cost, except the price of a legitimate divorce bill. They haven't yet managed to tell us how anyone will be any better off after Brexit – even in the vaguest, most speculative terms.

You can always tell an ideologue because premise and conclusion are (illogically) the same: in this case, "all things bad come from the EU". Any argument, whether true or not, can be used in support of the ideology and no claim is too ludicrous to print on the side of a bus.

But credo politics has several drawbacks. The ideologist is better at opposing that which he doesn't like than offering a viable alternative. The end justifies any means, and any casualties incurred along the way. It could only be a matter of time before voters realised that they'd been had.

Someone now has to sort out Britain's future relationship to the EU without slavishly following an ideology that asserts 'Brexit means the most extreme, self-punishing divorce you can imagine - and you should be grateful for it'.

We should start by giving this phase of morning-after regretful politics a name: how about Farrago (we shouldn't forget who instigated the referendum) or perhaps, more appropriately, we should name it in honour of the Prime Minister who let the ideologists out of their cage to try to settle an argument in his own party, Eton Mess?

Boney of contention

WE MUST not allow history to become a sourcebook for theme park designers (*Napoleon Bonapark*, page 5). We make a mistake if we plunder it merely for entertainment.

If we let a figure like Napoleon – as controversial now as he was in his day – become a caricature hero we may as well forget about history offering valuable lessons.

Napoleon was many things: brilliant general, enlightened despot, dictator, megalomaniac, disseminator of humanitarian European values, genius, flawed man. It is easy to romanticise him but we should never do it in such a way that we forget the reality of the man and become incapable of distinguishing his successes from his failure. Simple he most certainly was not.



SIMON HEFFER, the renowned political commentator and historian, turns his gaze to French politics

The clear-out of the Assemblée Nationale accomplished by the victory of Emmanuel Macron's La République En Marche (REM) and MoDem on June 18 is one of the larger in French history.

The number of seats won [308], however, is well behind those of right-wing coalitions in 1958, 1993 and 2002; and the Bloc National, which won power in 1919 with over 400 seats on an anti-Bolshevik platform and the slogan "Make Germany Pay". Making Germany pay partly led to Hitler's rise; the Bloc National had gone by then, losing the 1924 election because of French economic decline under its stewardship. It is a lesson M Macron should note: a huge mandate is no guarantee of delivering on promises, or of things going well. And an abstention of 57 per cent in the second round should concern him deeply, for it suggests that most of France, while fed up with the old political class, finds little appealing in him either.

M Macron was fortunate that the man who probably would otherwise have become president, François Fillon, was crushed by scandal. He beat him and Marine Le Pen despite having no established party. Rapidly, M Macron has made a party, a list of candidates most of whom are now in the Assemblée but with little political experience. One, Marie Sara in the Gard, is a female bullfighter: she narrowly lost. Cédric Villani in L'Essonne, is a mathematician whose dress sense resembles that of the Mad Hatter.

M Macron has kept promises about pursuing gender and race equality – half of REM's candidates were women, and many from ethnic minorities – and he has broken the mould of French politics by reducing the old parties, particularly the Parti Socialiste, to rubble. But that is only the start. The future, in which M Macron and his new friends must transcend novelty and gesture politics, will be interesting.

The new president might have preferred to win less heavily. Great victories create expectations: they suggest anything is possible, and that manifesto promises will be implemented. If, however, they are not, it creates enormous difficulties. The PS declined notably because so many former adherents, disappointed by its failures, joined REM. This time, they expect results. If those are not forthcoming, other political formations will benefit. The Front National, which appears in disarray since Marine Le Pen lost to M Macron, is not a corpse but an invalid. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the defeated far-left candidate in the presidential election, has warned his fellow French that a big majority for M Macron would make him think he could "walk on water" and, effectively, turn France into an elective dictatorship.

M Macron should recall that 49.4 per cent in the first round of the presidential election voted for an anti-EU candidate. Many may be among the abstainers, holding their fire. M Macron, since entering the Elysée, has made no secret of his pro-Europeanism, and so far that has

A lot, a real lot, now rests on promised work reforms

caused no difficulties. If he does not secure reforms that improve the economy – the structural changes to the labour market, for example, that Brussels continually called for during the benighted rule of François Hollande, but to which the trade union movement is resolutely opposed – then anything could happen.

His promised labour reforms are the centrepiece of an otherwise vague programme, but they alone may be enough to derail the whole Macron project. Remember what happened after Nicolas Sarkozy's election in 2007, when he tried, and conspicuously failed, to implement a huge deregulatory project.

M Macron has promised to cut public spending and pensions, which will also aggrrieve the unions and rattle that substantial proportion of the electorate wedded to the idea of a large, generous, interventionist state. He hopes for a classic transfer of resources between the unproductive and productive sectors of the French economy and promises, as a consequence, to increase investment. That, though, will largely be up to the private sector, and how far it perceives a sea-change in attitudes after the Hollande years in which hundreds of thousands of France's most entrepreneurial wealth-creators chose to work abroad. M Macron's predominantly centrist party seems to have no absolute ideological opposition to state inter-

vention. Sadly for him, many of the most successful businesses – whether in France or internationally – do have such an objection. Their boards, used to moving their businesses around the global economy, like low marginal rates of tax for themselves and their employees. France may have accomplished a revolution in its politics; it now needs one in its approach to economics, and economic management.

Since becoming president, M Macron has won a reputation for aloofness, being much more a head of state than a down-and-dirty head of government. That serves a leader well when things are going well; but he should be ready to adapt, or it is a recipe for the fastest personality collapse in history.

A vast parliamentary party will inevitably factionalise: it has no traditional ties of loyalty, and many who find themselves on the back benches or marginalized by the leadership for whatever reason will start to cause trouble. It is the same the whole world over. Then other challenges may confront him: the constant threat of terrorism, the need to conduct a sensitive foreign policy in a world whose uncertainties are dominated not just by Russia and China but also by America; and the threat of continued tensions in the EU over growth, unemployment, debt defaults and banking crises.

Tony Blair and Barack Obama were two world leaders cut from a similar cloth to M Macron's. One is now widely despised and the other, while liked, is regarded as having largely failed. Apart from managing France, M Macron must manage expectations. Given the huge number of abstainers on June 18, he starts with a country overflowing with sceptics. If he succeeds in transforming France, he will become a world-historical figure. But it will not be easy.

Simon Heffer is also a columnist for the Daily and Sunday Telegraphs

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Apart from managing France, M Macron must manage expectations

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Hunting has no part in primary school lessons

Dr Tim Blakemore, a former senior lecturer in Law at the University of Northampton, now living in France, looks at the role of hunting here - and differences with the UK

RECENT news articles in *Connexion* have prompted thoughts about the place of hunting in French society. Hunting is also in the news in the UK, as Theresa May has said she is in favour of fox hunting and will allow a vote to repeal the Hunting Act.

Opinion polls show more than 80% of people think the ban should continue, however, so perhaps she should hold a referendum and abide by the will of the people.

The position in France is a little different, but just as controversial.

Although it is said hunting with guns is the third largest leisure activity, there are several pressure groups campaigning against it. News items suggest the hunting lobby is fighting back, however, in particular by attempting to attract young people.

The background to this strategy is that the numbers joining hunting associations have been dropping year on year, from about 2.5million 30 years ago to around one million now. The average age of a *chasseur* has increased at the same time, as fewer young people are taking it up.

In 2010 the then government agreed to allow visits to schools by hunting associations for the purpose of 'education about sustainable development', which prompted furious opposition from wildlife groups such as Aspas.

In March, the *Connexion* website reported hunting associations in Lorraine attracted 300 new members by offering a year's free hunting. That same month, the paper noted the first students for the new baccalaureat course in hunting.

Started this year, it includes learning about wild animals and how to use a gun, which separately are sure to attract children, while using the gun on the animals is surely the real idea.



Hunters give talks to children, as here in Jury, and also take part in classroom sessions

Photo: Fédération Départementale des Chasseurs du Jura

Is this a deliberate confusion of principles? The item on the 'free hunting' initiative quoted the association as hoping to encourage young people to "enjoy closer contact with nature".

Similarly there are several 'Maison de la chasse et de la nature' around the country and the national agency was re-named the 'Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage'. Why the necessity to add words to 'la chasse' in order to suggest a general interest in nature or wild animals, when the purpose is simply to hunt them?

It is difficult to see how hunting associations can claim any specialised

knowledge. After all, hunters are only experts on wildlife in the same way as pickpockets are experts on clothing.

Surely government approval of the involvement of hunting associations in schools should at least insist on the removal of any pretence that hunters are interested in wild animals apart from hunting them?

But hunting with guns is deeply embedded in French country lifestyle and dates back to the French revolution. Before that, hunting was largely the preserve of the nobility so the right of ordinary people to roam freely and hunt is jealously maintained.

Perhaps it is right children should be introduced to the skills and traditions of hunting in a controlled manner, if it is going to be a part of their life as adults. UK expats tell me their children have French friends who are taken hunting by their fathers, so the skills they pick up might be sketchy at best.

In the meantime, they are surrounded by references to 'la chasse'. Supermarkets have displays of hunting clothing and goods. Most communes have a hunting association with regular social events. At least education might reduce the num-

ber of human deaths and injuries caused by hunters.

It is also much more of a political issue than in the UK, and French governments are certainly influenced by the hunting lobby.

In September last year it was reported hunting was to be restricted in parts of Haute-Savoie, with bans on certain days in certain areas, especially on Sundays, with the agreement of hunting groups. An opinion poll last year showed 79% of French people back an outright ban on hunting on Sundays, so the hunting lobby's agreement was hardly necessary politically.

This is not an argument that hunting should be banned, as not everything which is immoral, distasteful or annoying should be illegal. Only when public disapproval reaches the levels indicated by UK opinion polls on fox hunting should it be time to start talking about serious restrictions.

Hunting may be an important part of French country life, but is it right it should be taught in schools, let alone to primary school children? And should hunting associations be allowed to present themselves as experts on nature and wildlife, let alone with government approval?

A longer version of this article is available for subscribers at the connexionfrance.com website



Cartoon: Macagno/Aspas-nature.org

The village where time has stood still since 1944 atrocity

IN JUNE, President Macron visited Oradour-sur-Glane to mark the 73rd anniversary of a World War 2 massacre in which 642 people died. Here, Samantha David writes about her recent visit to the martyr village

I HESITATED about going to Oradour-sur-Glane because its history is too much to contemplate.

On June 10, 1944, Nazi soldiers herded residents of the Haute-Vienne commune into the central square. The men were sent to a series of barns; the women and children to the church. In the barns, machine-guns were already set up. An hour later, soldiers set off incendiary devices outside the church. Women and children fled the burning building, and were mown down. The soldiers then torched the town.

A new village was built a kilometre away, and today the old town stands as monument to those who perished.

Seven decades of rain and wind have covered Oradour with a film of earth. When we visited, the sun was shining and birds were singing. It is very clean. There is no rubbish, no graffiti, no modern advertising hoardings, no traffic. Just empty streets, silent visitors and the ghosts of the dead.

Close your eyes, and it is easy to imagine what life was like here: the 1930s cars, locked in their owner's garages, the weighing scales, laundry mangles, bicycles and toys.

But the carefully stored cars are rusting in the ruins of their shelters. They were burnt in their garages. Anything wooden is gone. Personal possessions and household items were destroyed.

Oradour-sur-Glane is the location of a human atrocity. But so is the Colosseum in Rome. Oradour wasn't the first site of human slaughter. The tragedy is that it will not be the last.

The same hatred that drove the Nazis still drives terrorism and wars across the world. Here in Western Europe, we see that same intolerance aimed at refugees, immigrants, and outsiders. The others.

A longer version of this article, with several photographs, is available at connexionfrance.com

Something is smelly in French cheese... and it is big business

Multinationals are making a mockery of the appellation system for traditional products, says **Véronique Richez-Lerouge**

FRANCE'S pioneering *Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) certification system began in 1905 with the aim of protecting the country's traditional agricultural products.

The plan was for a spirit of fair and collective economic development for these distinctive products, with defined criteria of both quality and geography.

In spite of a rigorous legal arsenal to stop the production of counterfeit products, France has not been able to prevent the intrusion of multinationals into the scheme.

Even worse, large-scale agri-finance has hit at the heart of the system and



Plenty of choice... but big business has taken over the cheese board by buying independent producers and then smothering rivals

nobody has stepped in to prevent it.

The AOC became the AOP (*Appellation d'Origine Protégée*) with the European Union and in the domain of cheese AOPs the industrial groups now lead the field and have been nicknamed 'the invaders'.

Today, two-thirds of the 45 AOP cheeses are in the control of giant dairy producers, of which Lactalis, the leading cheese producer in the world, is the biggest.

It always uses the same formula: buying out an independent cheese producer, controlling milk collections, developing the sector for its own gain, taking power in the decision-making process and drying up the number of independent producers.

Lactalis started this strategy on AOC cheeses in 1978. Camembert, Roquefort, then Reblochon... the list grew longer and inspired others to do the same thing. More industrialists and

giant co-operatives picked up the scent of this strategy.

France has given them the keys to our local produce, betraying the appellation system with a total lack of vision. Whether due to laxity, naivety or impotence, this situation is unprecedented in the appellations sector.

Domination by industrial producers has been magnified by an agricultural policy wholly devoted to mass production, which has led to a standardisation of products, pasteurisation, the weakening of biodiversity, a downturn in quality, sometimes even a threat to the appellation system itself.

To top it all: being part of the appellation system means industrials can be represented in the public institutions in charge of the controls, and can infiltrate the professional bodies and training structures where they can exert their influence.

The final spoils of war for Lactalis were in Normandy with the buy-out

of Graindorge, which makes Camembert from unpasteurised milk, Livarot, Neufchâtel and Pont-l'Évêque.

This has given the multinational a quasi-monopoly in this region, without the competitions authority lifting a finger.

If these events leave some silenced by fear, others are speaking up, seeing buy-outs continue at a steady pace.

It is time to ask questions about the real meaning of an *Appellation d'Origine*. What was the point of creating it if it has led to this situation?

Should we really allow our traditional skills to be monopolised like this?

Farmers and producers with strong convictions will organise resistance.

Véronique Richez-Lerouge is a journalist who founded the Association Fromages de Terroirs to fight for the recognition of non-pasteurised cheese and biodiversity, and she has created a National Cheese Day.

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Help to ease tablet headache

A CONNEXION reader asked for advice about buying a tablet device, such as a Kindle Fire (right), and whether the default language on one bought in France can be converted to English, or if it would be better to order directly from the UK to ensure English was the device's set language. We put that question to you – and here are a few of your responses:



My partner and I have three Kindles posted to us from Amazon UK to France. **MF**

The Amazon Kindle Fire would have to be brought in or posted by a friend. I had to do that with mine to get an English one. **JB**

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I bought a Samsung tablet in France for my wife.

During the initial setup, a 'Preferred Language' was asked for. I believe that this is common for most, if not all, computer devices. **TL**

British economy desperately needs high EU immigration

WHEN I decided that I, a Conservative voter, could not support Theresa May in the General Election because of her stance on Brexit, I wondered if mine would be a lone voice.

However, a swing of 10%-plus against the Tories in constituencies that voted for Remain at the referendum suggests many 'remainers' have taken the chance to have their say.

Mrs May and her government have done everything in their power to stifle debate on Brexit. The election was a chance to remind her that those who voted to remain in the EU accounted for 48% of the electorate.

No doubt the elephant in this corner of the debate is immigration. Workers from outside the UK make up about 12% of Britain's workforce, and in some sectors the percentage is much higher. UK unemployment is currently less than 5%. In simple

terms, the UK economy is not sustainable without immigration in excess of 100,000.

Mrs May has promised a Brexit that works for all. If she is serious about that she needs to broker an agreement that guarantees EU nationals who live and work in the UK can continue to do so for as long as they wish to remain. A reciprocal agreement for UK nationals living and working in EU countries must be part of the same deal.

Moreover, those who do all or most of their business with the EU must be allowed to carry on their trade under the best terms that can be negotiated.

Ideally, the final deal should then be subject to the approval of Parliament.

I consider myself privileged to have been able to live in another EU country, and I am sorry that future generations may find it much more difficult to do so.

Philip CLEWS, Corrèze

My iPad, which I bought in England, has learned how to correct my French, and puts in the accents for me!

I can't recommend it highly enough. **GM**

I have bought both Samsung and iPad tablets here in France and had no problem with language as you can choose that.

I would counsel against a Kindle Fire (which I also bought once, but returned).

I found that it limits your use of apps. And I also found it was very restricting when I want to watch British TV. **JF**

Try www.laptopsdirect.co.uk – they deliver to Europe. I have bought laptops from there with no problems. **DB**

I have an older Kindle and I use my Amazon.uk address. Everything is in English. **JR**

Linky woes

BE VERY cautious before you allow EDF to install the new Linky electricity meters without being assured that everything in your property works afterwards (ie. the pool heater, oven, kettle etc).

Following a 20-day nightmare there was still no resolution. The electricity supply from the new meter keeps cutting supply to the house. We are going round in circles, with everyone blaming one another.

Marilyn & Keith MILES, Nîmes

Editor's note: Linky says this fault could be caused by excess power. To check if this is so, press the '+' key and scroll until you see a display that reads either 'puissance dépassée' or gives a number followed by the words 'puissance souscrite'.

You have to contact your supplier to make any changes

Perhaps my remain vote was a mistake

DR Tim Blakemore (*Connexion* June) outlines EU benefits such as 'support for cross border cultural associations, protection of the environment and encouragement of regional products and characteristics', but it begs the question why the EU does this if national parliaments also perform those functions?

He skates over the cost of the EU project, but the *Sunday Times* shed light on some benefits for 76,000 present and former EU civil servants, with £60 billion of

retirement and healthcare, and average lump sums of more than £700,000. Oh, and that's small change compared to the payout for Jean-Claude Juncker.

One of the prime causes for the Brexit vote was the increasing realisation the EU is run by an overly-rewarded elite, happy to spend your taxes on a lifestyle beyond your dreams.

I voted 'Remain', but I am beginning to wonder if I backed the wrong side.

Richard HARVEY, Kent

No bill to pay to leave EU 'club'

THE claim that anyone leaving a club would still pay for their commitments (Karel Lannoo, *Connexion* June) is fallacious. If I leave a club I simply stop paying my annual subscription. I am not liable for, say, the cost of the new pavilion – even if I voted for

it during my membership.

It will be the legal aspects of which Treaty commitments may have been signed (or not) which will be the key factor. The 'huge' bill is to frighten other member states from following the UK.

Bernard JUBY, Maine-et-Loire

They said it...

With age, I have become modest. Macron is me, only better

Nicolas Sarkozy

The former President voices his opinion on the new man at the Elysée



Photo: European People's Party / CC BY 2.0

Bush was a beacon next to Trump

Douglas Kennedy

The author holds little back in his comparison of two Republican Presidents. Read our interview with the popular writer in *Connexion 2*, pages 8-9



Photo: JohnM83var / CC BY 2.0

It's the fault of the system and our internationals being absent too often

Mourad Boudjellal

The Toulon rugby club owner on why the Wales and Lion fullback Leigh Halfpenny will not be at the club next season

That first breath of fresh air overdoses your system

Thomas Pesquet

The astronaut describes his return to Earth after six months

We share the same responsibility: make our planet great again

President Macron

A message to President Trump

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England was just lovely

WE have just returned from a lovely holiday in England. The people went out of their way to be friendly and the drivers were very courteous.

The food was excellent, either from farm shops or pubs and restaurants and very good value. No sign of plastic food!

Our sons live there with their families and are very satisfied with the NHS. My wife fell ill and I had to call 999. A paramedic arrived within five minutes and was very professional. He wouldn't take any payment.

Our sons say they pay less tax and social charges than here.

We love the National Trust and there is always something to do, whatever the weather. We are taking our next holidays there.

Matthew WATSON, by email

Mothers still get awards

YOUR reminder about Mother's Day (*Connexion*, May 2017) said mothers of large families "used to" receive awards. Well, they still do/can.

My mother-in-law received one only a few years ago. The government does not seem to actively or automatically give them out, but a family member or friend can start the process.

Colette JAY, Lot-et-Garonne

It was just a clinical error

FOLLOWING on from last edition's tales about similar-sounding French words... while living in the Gers I visited a clinic in Auch. The surgeon said I would be admitted at 8am next day 'a jeun'. I said, "I can't be in Agen by that time as I live in Marciac."

Ken ELLISON, Bayonne

I broke the law but my hedgehogs live

I AM sure many people, like me, did not know overwintering hedgehogs (*connexionfrance.com* May) was illegal. I did this first in 2005/6 with three very underweight youngsters. On release in March they were in excellent form, weighing 850, 900 and 1,300g.

This year has been the worst as we found six. The last weighed only 125g and needed bottle feeding. When freed it was 1,147g. They need to be 500-600g to survive.

My 'bible' has been the Pat Morris book *Hedgehogs* and I have also spoken to both St Tiggywinkles UK, and Le Sanctuaire des Hérissons, France, who offered help sheets. My local vet has also been called upon.

I had tried to find a hedgehog rescue centre close by, but no luck.

Thanks to the above book plus many calls to St Tiggywinkles, particularly this winter for the 125g baby, I'm pleased to have had the chance to save a few over the years.

The rules to be allowed to overwinter hedgehogs (have two years' supervision from a qualified hedgehog carer, or a vet, and have done a 20-hour training course) are unrealistic.

I had not heard of the Sauvons les Hérissons group but will sign their petition to the new Ecology Minister, tinyurl.com/mt9czar.

Mike ADDLEY, by email



Bottle-feeding needs care

Letter of the month

MIKE ADDLEY wins the *Connexion* letter of the month and a copy of the *Connexion* Puzzle Book.

Please include your name and address in your correspondence; we can withhold it on request.

The Editor's decision is final.

Write to: The Connexion, Patio Palace, 41 avenue Hector Otto, 98000 Monaco or email news@connexionfrance.com

Farm helped kids in 70s

I READ with interest the interview with François Beiger (*From cancer patients to troubled teens and prisoners, animal contact always helps*, *Connexion*, June 2017) on the therapeutic use of animals.

In the late seventies I worked in Derbyshire in a residential school for boys with special needs. The school had a small farm with donkeys, pigs, rabbits, sheep and chickens.

All the beneficial effects described by François Beiger were well known to us.

However, contrary to his

observations we found that autistic children did not show the same responses.

Peter MULLIN, Saône-et-Loire

Editor's note: The school you describe sounds like paradise and I'm sure the animals' presence was a huge plus.

Our June article was about providing formal training to socio-medical professionals on animal therapy and mediation, which today is a formally recognised discipline involving specific skills which can be taught. That is new to France.

Non-bio labels may be better

IT MUST be better to eat food grown naturally (*More people eating organic*, *connexionfrance.com*), but real progress will come when foods have to be labelled "chemicals used in production" or similar.

Meat and fish are the sticking points, as they are already relatively dear and while vegetables, milk and eggs might cost 50% more at the checkout that totals only a euro or two out of your pocket!

Food grown in the Third World, coffee, chocolate, rice, lentils, etc is an easy choice, as you dread to think what conditions are like for populations growing such foods without the relative protection that the 'Bio' label provides...

H.H. Corrèze

Bye bye Bordeaux!

I ALSO used Bordeaux Airport (*Letters*, June) and echo reader David Asplin's view not to use it again.

Having booked parking I took the ticket but when we returned to Bordeaux the exit machine would not work. No one answered the buzzer so I had to pay again to get out.

I emailed customer service with supporting documents but after several days heard nothing. I telephoned two different numbers and was told there were delays and repayment could be up to two months!

Two months later I called and was again told of 'problems'. I queried this and was told the *directeur* was on holiday and I should email again. I made it clear this was completely unacceptable and unprofessional.

And, yes, the ring road traffic was dreadful.

Caroline ROBERTSON, Lot

Cars are just a con

I DO NOT agree with Jacques Beaugé, president of Les Autos du Coeur who says (*Connexion* June) that "cars aren't luxuries".

I am now 64 years old, and at various stages in my adult life I have lived in Poole, Reading (both UK), Kiel (Germany), Groningen (The Netherlands) and now St-Pol-de-Léon (France). I have never learned to drive: when I choose where to live, I do so on the basis of using public transport – or walking.

Strangely, M.Beaugé has nothing to say about the other expenses of car ownership: driving lessons, licence, maintenance, repairs, depreciation, fuel, tax, insurance, garaging, cleaning, parking, tolls, fines...

And, remember; when I use public transport, I just pay my fare, take my ride and get off: all

those other problems are taken care of by the undertaking.

Most of the time, I walk, thereby getting enough exercise. Car owners initially buy a car to avoid exerting themselves, but usually realise they are becoming more and more unfit.

Then they spend more money going to keep-fit classes, oblivious of the irony: often, they drive to the gym and back! If they walked, they would get enough exercise and there would be no need to go inside the gym.

From where I'm standing, the absurdity is comical.

It isn't necessary to build your lifestyle around car ownership: there are other ways, for those people who don't follow the herd but who think for themselves.

Stephen D. MORGAN, Finistère

NHS care for pensioners

Your article on the need for the UK EHIC card was useful, but I would offer one further point.

When I, as a Briton resident in France, renewed my UK EHIC card, the renewal centre told me that for visits to the UK the EHIC card was irrelevant.

They advised that what I should take with me was a proof of being currently in receipt of a UK State Pension, such as a copy of the annual increase in benefits notice.

I have not seen this advice

quoted elsewhere.

Chris HIBBERT, by email

Editor's note: Under the UK rules on non-residents using the NHS, British state pensioners whose healthcare is paid for via a UK S1 form are entitled to free NHS care, including in hospitals. So it is logical that proof of this may be requested (we would suggest also taking a copy of the S1). It is true that this right is not dependent on having an EHIC card.

Health deals available

READER Susan Trafford wrote (May) the *mutuelle* system is unfair to British pensioners but I would say many of us tend to have illnesses which are 100% covered by the *Carte Vitale* so an exorbitant *mutuelle* does not necessarily make sense.

Many French friends in their 70s have switched to cover at

about €70 a month due to this.


Some insurers have a scheme where selected partners offer price reductions, such as opticians where lenses are 50% off and frames 10-29% discounted.

No, it's not the same as Spain but that's how the French system works fair or not.

Trevor COURT, by email

You said it...

You can debate and comment on articles we carry on our new-look website:

 www.connexionfrance.com or via our facebook page: www.facebook.com/TheConnexion

Here is a selection of recent popular subjects and readers' comments...

Do you see speed camera fines as a tax?

"People are having more accidents because they spend more time checking their speedos and looking for radars than they do concentrating on the road." G.C.

"No! They are a way of catching and penalising those who persist in breaking the law." A.K.

"Not a tax (but pretty handy source of supplementary income!) - but certainly NO useful contribution to any governmental aspiration to reduce road deaths." A.S.

"Either the fines need to be extremely high, or just place some road bumps in strategic places where people tend to build speed." T.F.

"Anyone who thinks speed cameras were EVER about safety is 100% naive." J.W.

What does a hung parliament in the UK mean for Britons living in France?

"At least we will now achieve some sort of soft Brexit, at best we will be given the chance to vote on whatever terms are offered." T.O'C.

"What I find incredible is that anyone who is living permanently as an ex-UK immigrant in France could vote for or agree with Brexit." D.A.

"Worse result ever for Brexit - forget second referendum, actually forget the whole thing as Labour will concentrate on dismantling any progress that was made." S.O-W.

"If you want to do something, anything, you need to know why, what, how and with what anticipated result. You need to be sure of your facts before you start or you go bankrupt.." P.S.

All change for the Azerty keyboard: but as with all things, perhaps not ... do you use Azerty or Qwerty?

"This explqins the reqson why there qre so mqny typos these dqys." R.M.

"As someone who has touch typed on a Qwerty keyboard for 50+ years I would have great difficulty adjusting to any other." V.K.

"The easiest keyboard to use is the one to which you are habituated. Touch typing is an 'automatic' skill and you cannot switch between one and another and be able to do so." A.F.

"I started on QWERTY and moved to QWERTZ which is now our family standard." S.N.

"I use QWERTZ, live on the border by Germany and Switzerland so use that instead." M.D.

What do you think about plans, such as one on the island of Corsica, to prioritise local jobs for local people?

"Excellent, provided of course the locals want the jobs, unlike some other places." A.S.

"Wish the UK would follow their example ...very sensible decision." P.D.

"I do not blame Jean-Guy Talamoni for introducing this initiative as unemployment is high here and most jobs are only seasonal." K.M.

"Makes perfect sense." J.M.

"Is Corsica not a part of France, meaning in EU as well or what..? Whatever...great idea...hope that all jobs will be filled locally." B.P.

"It is only a project, which has already been deemed illegal by the French government." J.L.

Q&A

Readers' questions answered



Send your queries about life here to **Oliver Rowland** by email to news@connexionfrance.com

Tooth filling had to be redone - should I pay?

I RECENTLY had work done on my teeth which included a filling. However, a few weeks later the filling broke while I was eating. The dentist replaced it but insisted on charging me again. Is there no guarantee for dental work? B.W.

UNFORTUNATELY it appears there is no guarantee. Dentists are said to have an obligation of 'means' but not of 'results'; that means they are required to carry out procedures in an appropriate way but they do not guarantee the work's 'effectiveness'.

A spokeswoman for the CNSD national unions group for dentists said dentists should consider "with tact and moderation" whether or not the need to redo any dental work is their responsibility.

"It is possible that a procedure has to be redone because the person's dental health condition has changed in some way, without there being anything wrong with the way the procedure was carried out.

"For example, if the dentist did a filling and then a month later part of the tooth enamel fractured making the reconstruc-

tion less solid. If the dentist has to redo work without being to blame, it is perfectly acceptable for him or her to bill for it."

She added, however, that if you think that the dentist was at least partly to blame then you could have to prove that he or she was at fault (due to clumsy work, negligence, a wrong diagnosis etc), by obtaining an expert opinion. This would be at your own cost and your health *caisse* should have information on suitable local experts.

A spokeswoman for the national dentists' professional body ONCD said it is hard to judge without studying the individual case, including for example details of any *plan de traitement* (document which may be provided by the dentist explaining your dental problem and the proposed work to resolve it) and knowing what the patient was told before the work was done.

However, if you consider you have been the victim of poor practice she said you could address your complaint to the conseil départemental de l'ordre des chirurgiens-dentistes for your department, who may undertake a conciliation process.

How far back can I go with claims for tax credits?

MY FRIEND has noticed she is entitled to a 50% credit on her income tax for work done when she has employed artisans at her house (which has been on several occasions). How far back will she be able to go to submit these invoices? J.K.

WE CHECKED with the government's renovation information service. They said that usually you need to claim the tax credit in the corresponding year's income tax declaration - for example for work in 2016 in the declaration that has just been made. If your friend has missed claiming this year it may not be too late for her to make a corrective declaration. She needs to do this before she receives her *avis d'impôt* income tax statement (usually August-September). This can be done online by going back into the declaration or, by paper, by sending a new declaration headed '*déclaration rectificative, annule et remplace*'.

With regard to previous missed years your friend should contact her tax office to see if a solution can be found.

Note that generally speaking you no longer have to submit actual invoices or other paperwork, although you should have it to hand in case of any questions being asked by the tax office. The credit is claimed by filling in sums spent on eligible matters (eg. in this case home improvements aimed at making the property more eco-friendly) in the relevant part of the income declaration, which this year was a dedicated form, the 2042 RIC1.

It is also necessary that the work completed and the firm used met criteria for a tax credit in the year when it was done (eg. for some kinds of equipment the installer currently needs the RGE label - *reconnu garant de l'environnement*).

Can we prove residence if we live on a boat?



WE MOVED our boat here from the UK but have no French address except for the marina. We do not want to get into trouble but seem to hit a brick wall when trying to gain legitimacy for residence. Do you have any advice? P.E.

WE ASSUME that by 'gaining legitimacy' you mean obtaining a *carte de séjour* thus proving your residence in France?

This is not an obligation while the UK remains in the EU, however many people are looking to obtain one to prove they are established in 'stable and legal' residence in the event of Brexit. A 'permanent' one, obtainable after five years' residence as an EU citizen, is deemed especially desirable.

After Brexit, however, it is likely that having a card will be required (unless it is

decided otherwise in the negotiations). A spokesman for the Direction Générale des Etrangers en France (part of the Interior Ministry) said: "To have a residence card, a proof of residence will be required, as it says in the Code de l'entrée de du séjour des étrangers en France.

"Concerning a person who lives permanently on a boat, one would have to consider the durable nature of the boat being moored in the same place.

"As a result the applicant would have to present, as well as their certificate of ownership or a rental contract of the boat within its validity date, one of the following: An attestation from the *capitainerie* of the port, that you own a mooring space or rent it on a permanent basis, or an insurance *attestation* for the boat."

Is neighbour allowed to let geese roam onto my land?

OUR NEIGHBOUR allows her geese to roam in her garden and they sometimes enter our garden because it is not fully fenced. Recently, our dog got hold of one and, although the goose was not killed, it was hurt. She asked us to have the dog put down (which we refused to do). Someone told me that legally she has no right to let geese roam free; is this true? V.H.



Owners should keep their geese under control...

AN EXPERT in rural law, *avocat* Myriam Gobbé from Rennes, said that the law tends to put you, as the dog owner, in the right in this situation.

She said: "As the attack happened in your garden one may reproach the neighbour for not having taken precautions to avoid the geese leaving her property. Article L211-19-1 of the Code Rural says 'it is forbidden to allow to wander, domestic animals and wild animals that have been tamed or are kept in captivity'. From this point of view the owner is at fault and her goose would not have been attacked if it had remained on her land. If the dog had gone and injured the goose on the neighbour's land then you would have been responsible."

Ms Gobbé said art.1243 of the Code Civil says the owner of an animal or someone who is in charge of it, is responsible for harm caused by it, whether while under his or her guard or while it is lost or has escaped. "However in my view what prevails here is that the harm could not have happened were it not for the negligence of the neighbour who did not sufficiently enclose her land to stop the geese from escaping. Her fault allows an exoneration for the owner of the dog."

The matter of putting the dog down could still arise in such a case if the attack had been on a person. "As such is not the case here, one cannot blame a non-straying dog for having attacked a goose."

Also specialising in rural law, *avocat* Catherine Rousselot from Caen, confirmed this, saying: "The neighbour has the right to leave the geese at liberty inside her property, but she is the guardian of the geese and is responsible for them and should not let them roam outside."

She added if it happens regularly, you could speak to the *mairie*. "In a rural commune the mayor has a municipal police role. You could complain about the geese roaming and the mayor could punish the neighbour who allows them to roam."

What does Bison Futé mean by 'direction of departures'?

WHY does the Bison Futé service (bison-fute.gouv.fr) use the expression 'in the direction of the departures' or 'of the returns' when warning of traffic congestion? What does it mean? P.J.

This expression has been criticised as too Paris-orientated, but basically 'departures' refers to traffic heading from north to south (towards the Mediterranean) or west to east (towards mountain resorts in the Alps); returns is the opposite.

Why was I asked to produce a 'recent' birth certificate copy?

WHY do officials ask to see a birth certificate less than three months old? R.G.

A FRENCH birth certificate - *acte de naissance* - is valid as long as the information on it has not changed in any way (the same applies to death and marriage certificates). However for many common administrative procedures an 'extract' (copy) with an issue date fewer than three months ago is often requested.

This is because French birth certificates may be altered with a *mention marginale* - a note in the margins - which can include: birth of children, marriage, death, gaining French nationality or a change of first name or surname (automatically added by the *état civil* service), divorce or separation (added on request from yourself or your lawyer) or creation or ending of a pacs (on request to the *tribunal d'instance* or a *notaire*).

Certain legal decisions such as a change of matrimonial

regime or a *tutelle* (being placed under legal guardianship) may also be inscribed with the letters 'RC' plus a number - referring to further details stored by the *Répertoire civil*, accessible on request.

As a result of the same rules being applied to everyone, British people are also often asked to supply a certificate of less than three months old. This is despite it usually being irrelevant as UK ones rarely change, with exceptions like finding out your father is not who you thought he was or in the case of a gender change.

However, a spokesman for the national government's Direction des Affaires Etrangères said this is not obligatory. He said: "As far as possible and purely so as to reassure our French bureaucrats who can be a bit picky, we recommend clarifying, in a covering letter, the reasons why the certificate does not meet the usual rules of 'recent issue'. It costs nothing and may gain you time."

**FUTURE QUESTIONS
- SEND IN YOURS...**

The US International keyboard layout helps with accents: How can I set it up in Windows 10?

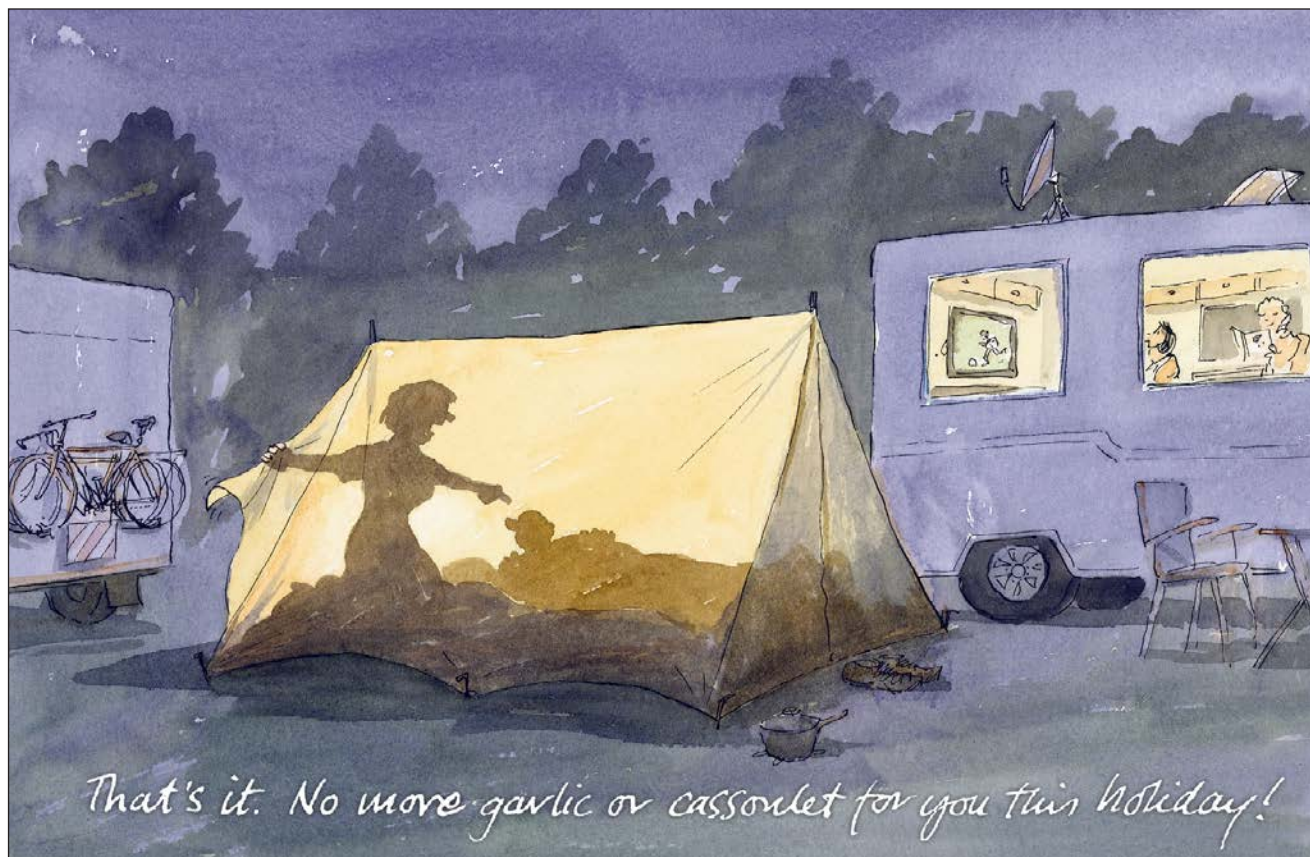
Can I bring my pet tortoise from the UK to my French holiday home - if so what are the rules?

What types of financial help are available towards building or renovating a septic tank?

My husband had a stroke. Is he still allowed to drive here? Are there any special conditions?

To receive the next issue at home... subscribe at www.connexionfrance.com by July 5

Make sense of... Camping in France



A 'traditional' camping experience is still one option - but it may involve some inconveniences...

IF CAMPING conjures up images of cooking sausages on a camp stove, sleeping bags and chemical toilets you might want to think again

SINCE 2010 campsites in France may have a star rating up to five, like hotels, and you can be sure of not having to rough it if you go for one of the high-end options or certain select sites offering a 'glamping' (glamorous camping) experience.

What is more camping no longer just refers to tents, or even to caravans, mobile homes and chalets, but may include a raft of more exotic options to suit every whim.

You might like to consider...

- Yurts – a large round Mongolian tent traditionally covered in felt or animal skin
- Tipis
- Saharan nomad's tents
- Classic 'Airstream' aluminium caravans
- Romany caravans (*roulotte* or *verdine*) or western-style covered 'chuck waggon'
- 'Megapods' – a tent-shaped wood cabin
- Treehouses – often real 'homes in the trees'; another new variant is floating cabins on a lake...
- 'Lodges' – light canvas and wood constructions, with an 'Out of Africa' feel...

Types of campsite

A week's luxury 'camping' might cost a family €1,000 or more but depending on your requirements, of course, basic camping options still exist – including bare pitches to install your own tent or caravan, from around €15 a night.

Camping pitches equipped with water, electricity and a drain are labelled *confort caravane* while ones linked to the sewerage system are *grand confort caravane*.

Some sites stress 'ecological' credentials, such as those with the label La Clef Verte (laclefverte.org). Some other kinds of campsite include:

Aire naturelle – a very basic site with no individual access to electricity, water, drains etc; for tents and caravans only.

Camping rural or camping à la ferme – offered by farmers; often under one of two labels: *Bienvenue à la ferme* (*bienvenue-a-*

la-ferme.com) or *Accueil paysan* (*accueil-paysan.com/en/*). Expect to meet your host and to be offered local products, excursions and insights into their work.

Star system

Not all campsites have to be star-rated, though many are. If a site is unrated it does not necessarily mean it is bad, it has just not undergone the required inspection recently.

You can choose a star-rated site at the official site for French tourism: *classement.atout-france.fr/hebergements-classes*

Here are some of the differences depending on star level (they are cumulative):

- 1* Up to 100 pitches per hectare, with basic, functional facilities and hygiene standards
- 2* Reception staffed in day-time; a room for meetings or entertainment; washroom(s) with 'individualised' sinks
- 3* No more than 90 pitches/ha; a 'major' level of comfort/facilities; staffed 24-hours a day with English spoken at the reception; a children's play area; services such as internet access in common areas, and a bar



Our main image was drawn for Connexion by artist Perry Taylor. For more of his work see www.perrytaylor.fr

- 4* No more than 80 pitches; food shop on site or nearby; extras like washing machines
- 5* Extensive communal living spaces, a pool, internet access at pitches and in communal areas, heated shower and toilet areas; optional extras such as a spa, massage, hairdresser, tennis, fitness training etc.

Many higher-rated *campings* pride themselves on their pool, which may be equipped with slides, hot tub spas etc.

Some will offer a children's club or *crèche* and even '*le baby club*'.

Some locations offering high-end accommodation of a one-off kind, often in beautiful locations, may be described as 'glamping' (see <https://glamping.fr/> for a selection). But these are often smaller-scale places perhaps suited to a romantic getaway rather than an

all-singing and dancing family site with lots of entertainment and water slides.

There is no specific rule on what exact equipment accommodation like chalets or mobile homes must have, and they range from basic (gas cooking facility, fridge and crockery) to ones with dishwashers, freezers and even 'domotics' (remote-controlled shutters and lighting etc).

The same applies to washing or sanitation facilities, which may include fully plumbed-in private loos.

Glamping may offer luxurious beds, high-class outdoor furniture, bikes for all the family, TV with video-on-demand, and private spas. The price-tag of some locations is also partly justified by extensive services – for example some might fill your fridge with food before you arrive, meet you at the airport, offer car rental etc.

When it comes to eating options, many *campings* offer brasserie-style eateries and some even have a gastronomic restaurant.

Things to consider before booking

What type of site do you want? Basic or luxurious? Traditional or exotic? Naturist? Facilities and location – Do you want to be in the mountains or by the seaside? How close will your pitch be to the village or sea? Does it have access to activities like water-sports or riding nearby? Rental price for the period, including *taxe de séjour* and price of optional extras; requirements for a reservation fee, a deposit or insurance. What entertainments or sports are included and are they at limited times of the year? What shops are on site or locally? What crockery or bedlinen is provided? Do they take pets?

There are many websites on camping, but aside from the official Atout France listings (see 'star system') *campingfrance.com* hosts a particularly extensive selection of campsites which you can search by many criteria and it is endorsed by the Fédération Française de Camping et de Caravanning (*ffcc.fr*). Search using the map then use *affiner la recherche* section to narrow down your choice by factors like star-rating, size or types of facilities.



Talking Point

Bob Elliott from telephone and broadband provider, UK Telecom, answers your queries



Q What are some of the different ways to save cash when making calls?

A. Not only can you save money making calls but friends and family can save money when calling you. Here are some good ways.

FaceTime: This is considered the best video chat tool, allowing you to both voice and video call with those you have added to your network. Most people find it convenient to use their Apple phone or iPad, although you may prefer to use your computer. While the service works with the 3G mobile service you can avoid using your data allowance if making your call over the internet. Register your device with your broadband wifi and call in the usual way. You will need a 2Mb broadband speed for good reception. See this link for more: lifewire.com/how-to-download-facetime-2000767

WhatsApp Messenger: This free app can be downloaded on Android, iPhones and others. You can use it to call friends, send and receive messages, photos and videos and more. Make sure you connect this to your wifi

for use when at home. See: whatsapp.com/download/

Skype: This instant messaging service allows you to send and receive messages, including video ones and digital documents. Many people use it to make group video calls as it works on mobiles, tablets and computers. It can also be used to call ordinary phones. See skype.com/en

You can also help those who call you from the UK. At least one provider offers a free service called UKDirect2U that gives savings compared with calling France from a BT landline. A 10 minute call over BT will cost a 12p connection charge and 40p/min, making a total of £4.12p. The alternative service has a 12p connection fee but the call costs 3p/min, making the same 10 minute call cost only £0.42p.

It works by 'translating' your French number to a low cost UK one. It does not affect your normal French number. This service does not require you or a caller to sign a contract or pay a charge but you must ensure the number is used at least once every three months.

See uktelecom.net for more information on services in France.

T: UK +44 1483 477 100 • T: from France 0805 631 632

Euro Sense

Pippa Maile from Currencies Direct, answers a reader question on currency exchange



Q: What does the election of Emmanuel Macron as French president mean for the currency markets and Brexit negotiations?

A: After the surprising political twists of 2016 there was a lot of uncertainty in the build-up to the election. Fears that Marine Le Pen could triumph initially kept the euro under pressure. Her campaign focused on emotive issues of immigration and national security, her desire to hold a referendum on French membership of the EU and plans to remove France from the euro zone.

However, while she made it through to the second round, polls showing that Emmanuel Macron would ultimately win by a significant margin meant euro exchange rates jumped.

As the outcome of the final round of the French election was expected ahead of time, the currency market's initial reaction to Macron's victory was quite muted but since then the euro has been steadily edging higher, and EUR/USD jumped to its best levels since Donald Trump was voted US President.

In his first few days in office Mr Macron gave the euro another boost by appointing Conservative Edouard Philippe Prime Minister and selecting a diverse cabinet based on European unity and gender parity, with a mixture of left and right wingers.

However, while hopes for stability and strength under Macron are lending the euro support, concerns about his views on Brexit could spell trouble for the pound. During his campaign, Macron famously described Brexit as a 'crime'. After meeting Theresa May earlier in the year he also told reporters in Downing Street; 'I am very determined there will be no undue advantages.'

If he takes a hard-line stance during Brexit negotiations and tries to prevent Britain securing a lucrative trade deal, fears for Britain's long-term economic outlook could send Sterling spiralling lower.

■ Email your currency queries to news@connexionfrance.com

For more information about making international money transfers with Currencies Direct visit the website www.currenciesdirect.com/france or call +33 (0)4 22 32 62 40

Erasmus marks 30 years of new opportunities

by JANE HANKS

THE Erasmus exchange programme is 30 this year and although started as a way to open up opportunities Europe-wide for students it has now been expanded to do the same for under-30s and even older people working in education.

Funded by the EU, its aim is to give opportunities to Europeans to study, train, volunteer, or gain professional experience abroad.

When it started in 1987 it aimed to find places for 3,200 higher education students in 11 participating countries... today it is a seven-year Erasmus+ programme with a €1.47billion budget and aims to give opportunities to four million people in 33 countries.

Erasmus+ has been running since 2014 and this programme continues until 2020. It covers not just students but also young people under 30 with or without qualifications, older people

such as teachers and trainers, apprenticeships and internships, volunteer schemes, youth exchanges and sports events. Individuals cannot apply directly for a grant but do so via one of the recognised organisations such as a university or partner group.

Statistics show students who have taken part are twice as likely to have a job one year after graduation compared to their non-mobile peers and that a third of Erasmus trainees will find work in the company where they carried out their internship.

For higher education students, the Erasmus+ grant is a contribution related to living and transport costs and the amount varies according to country. Latest figures available (for 2014-2015) show it averages €281 a month. It is not means-tested.

It is available for any subject area and any study level and students can do traineeships in any organisation or company abroad. Students who spend



Lowri, seen here in Brussels, enjoyed the chance to travel

Lowri Elcock, 20, Exeter University

LOWRI spent a year in Paris as a year abroad was part of her curriculum. Being an Erasmus student was a way to learn about different aspects of culture and other ways of teaching and she found it "both challenging and rewarding".

However, she found it quite hard to socialise with French students as her language was

"not the same kind of French my fellow students speak" – plus she did not like all the paperwork and bureaucracy.

She has no regrets as she knows she might never have such an opportunity again: "The chance to throw myself into a different culture, meet new people, improve my language and travel made it worth it."

time abroad find it widens their horizons, improves language skills and helps them to mature.

In total, more than 5,000 institutions in the participating countries are signed up to provide Erasmus funding

and these include both private and public organisations. The countries included are the 28 present EU member states plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Turkey and Macedonia.

A spokesperson at the European

Commission told *Connexion* that as long as the UK is an EU member, it will continue to be subject to the same rights as a member state. She added: "We cannot speculate on what the future relationship with the UK will be."

Maud Lascaze at the Cliffs of Moher



Maud Lascaze, 20, Brive-la-Gaillarde

NOT all students use Erasmus to sign on at a university and some go for work experience.

Maud Lascaze is French and studying for a management and business degree in Brive-la-Gaillarde, Corrèze. For her course she spent three months in an English-speaking country to improve her language.

She worked on the social media and websites of a music shop in Dublin. It was unpaid, but she managed to support herself with a grant from her

mairie and aid from Erasmus: "Thanks to this experience I improved my English so that when I came back I managed to get a job as an export assistant in a French company."

Maud said: "I have many good memories of Ireland. I lived with a really friendly host family and I loved the Irish culture; the Celtic music in the pubs and the Irish food. Dublin is a dynamic city and I travelled around Ireland every week. I hope to go back soon."

Louisa Becker, 21, Foreign Language Institute, Munich



LOUISA Becker is from Germany and the Munich institute where she is studying has a partnership with the University of Strasbourg.

As she is passionate about the French language she decided to take up the opportunity to go to Strasbourg for six months and immerse herself in French culture.

One month in, she said she was loving it even though she has problems

with the language sometimes and cannot yet speak it fluently.

"The French students are very open and the university offers many programmes to help us develop our French. It also introduces us to French students so we can have someone to speak to and practise."

Louisa thinks she made the right decision to go to France even if it is not always easy: "It is not only the language but I do miss my family and my boyfriend in Munich but, even so, I could easily imagine myself staying in France even longer than planned."

Tax bill is coming: here is what to do if you do not agree

Money Matters

Robert Kent of Kentingtons explains.
www.kentingtons.com



IN THE next month or so tax bills should start to arrive and people are advised to check their *avis d'impôts* as increasingly we are seeing significant errors appearing, nearly always (oddly) in favour of the tax office.

Once you have recovered from the shock of an unexpectedly large bill, what next?

First, please consider the possibility the tax office just may be right, so do not forget to be kind and courteous when speaking to them and explaining your problem. Offer your thanks if they speedily correct the error. It is unhelpful to be on poor terms with your local tax office.

We have seen a wide range of mistakes made, however, the main one has certainly been the application of social charges, mostly to UK rental income, but also to pensions where the payer has a valid S1. In both these cases, social charges should not ultimately be applied, but often are.

For UK rental income, the social charge is calculated and added, however, there should be another line offering a tax credit equal to the calculated social charge. For pensions, it should not show at all, so no credit showing.

If you are absolutely confident that a mistake has been made, what should you do?

Whatever action you decide to take, be quick.

1 Send an email to your tax office. This is one of the best and quickest ways to register your concerns. If you are lucky enough to have an efficient tax office, this can work well. Your tax bill will have their email, which will look like: sip.(town name)@dgfip.finances.gouv.fr

2 The website is another option, impots.gouv.fr. Log in to your account selecting: 'Effectuer une démarche > faire une réclamation > réclamation sur l'impôt sur le revenu'.

3 If you are a competent French speaker, or know one that is happy to help, a visit to the tax office should get the quickest result. If you can get an appointment with an inspector, you will spend far less time waiting. Call or send an email to get an appointment. During very busy periods, just turning up and taking a ticket is the only way.

Often a face to face meeting works well and if you are very lucky you can get a correction, a 'dégrèvement' then and there.

What happens if they disagree and state that the figure requested stands?

1 Send a registered letter. You have met the inspector and they disagree, but you need the tax demand to be placed formally in contention to progress. You can do this with the inspector, but verbal requests may 'get lost'.

A formal letter sent '*recommandée avec accusé de réception*', must be formally acknowledged and cannot be ignored. Once you have written confirmation the demand is in contention, then you can take it to the next step.

2 The '*conciliateur fiscal*'. This is a department of the same tax office. As long as you know why you should not be paying the tax and lay your argument out clearly, they will review the request and will often rule in your favour, offering the '*dégrèvement*'.

This works for us nearly all the time, with hardly anyone needing to go to the next stage.

3 The '*Médiateur*' (the *médiateur des ministères économiques et financiers*). This is not a section of the local tax office, but an office for the region who has the right to overrule the tax office. This can take a long time so the next problem is what to do about the bill, as the payment deadline will often have passed.

This is certainly an area of stress. If the bill is affordable, our advice is often to pay and claim it back. Why pay if it is wrong? Because there is rarely a problem if the bill is in contention with the tax office, but once it gets to the mediator, the instruction to the French treasury is that the bill is due and they will simply take it from your bank account... with penalties! Clearly, penalties will also be reimbursed if the mediator rules in your favour.

If you pay the bill, no nasty surprises, no

penalties and planning is easier. Stressful, yes, but much less so.

Three to four months is typical for mediation but it can take longer, even a year or two.

What next if they say no?

4 Legal action. For us it has never come to this. Mediation is slow but thorough. If mediation rejects your claim you must take professional advice but be absolutely sure that you have a claim before taking the step of moving to legal action. Do this immediately, as you have limited time in which to take this action.

What about next year?

Keep a file of all communication, neat, tidy and in order. It will make any future meetings easier. Log exact dates and times of conversations, with as much detail as possible.

If they repeat the same mistake – and this does happen more often than you might think – then it is good to know that you can easily remind them of what happened last year and save everyone the time and trouble.

We have found that online declarations have fewer issues (in fact my experience is zero issues). This is because there is significantly less human involvement.

If you have completed online this year, then well done! The fact that more people will be obliged to complete online, next year, should reduce the problems.

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Organic is booming but is *bio* a better diet

by JANE HANKS

ORGANIC products have never been so popular, with latest 2016 figures showing more shoppers going “*bio*”, the opening of new specialists all over France, a rise in the range and amount of organic products in supermarkets and the number of farms converting from conventional methods.

Florent Guhl, the director of Agence Bio, a public body created by the Ministry of Agriculture which promotes and develops organic farming in France, says he believes buying organic is now an established trend which will continue to grow.

“I am very confident about the future and I think consumers are now convinced of the virtues of buying organically and that the rest will now follow, even though we will need time to help and persuade enough farmers to convert, and to produce enough.”

A study for Agence Bio found that in 2016, seven out of 10 shoppers bought organic produce regularly; the number of producers rose by 12% from 2015 and an extra 16% of land was turned over to organic. The year also saw sales rise to €7billion from €5.76bn in 2015.

While organic farming remains marginal with just 5.7% of farming land given to organic production, France is in third position in Europe behind Spain and Italy with the UK sixth.

Eight out of 10 shoppers buy *bio* in supermarkets, a third use specialised shops which include the Biocoop chain of organic supermarkets, 28% from the market and the rest buy directly from organic producers.

Biocoop itself saw its turnover increase by 25% in 2016. It now has 431 shops with 52 opening last year and 60 planned for this year.

It is now common for supermarkets to have an organic food section and

Carrefour, for example, boasts 800 different products on its shelves.

So, is supermarket *bio* the same as organic brought from the local market? Mr Guhl says yes, when we are talking about food produced without the use of chemicals and genetically modified ingredients.

“If a product is labelled organic with the European green leaf or the French AB it has been subjected to the same rules and has to have 95% of its ingredients organic with a possible 5% from a tightly controlled authorised list where its inclusion is necessary and there are no organic substitutes.

“The difference is they tend to be more industrialised and less likely to come from a small or local producer.

“People think supermarkets will be cheaper but this is not necessarily true and shoppers should look carefully at the prices.”

However, he welcomes the introduction of organic food into supermarkets because it makes it more accessible to a larger number of people.

Fruit and veg are still the most popular purchases closely followed by dairy and then eggs with other groceries and meat following behind.

Cosmetic products are also popular with a smaller proportion opting for organic clothes.

Cost has long been one of the factors dissuading people from choosing organic, but studies show organic consumers are not necessarily richer than those who do not.

Mr Guhl said: “It is more a question of education. It is a lifestyle choice where people decide to put more of their budget into their food bill.

“For years the proportion spent on feeding a family has been in decline but we are beginning to see a change in values and a reversal of this trend. In particular many young families change shopping habits when the first

Photo: Jane Hanks



The organic stall at the market in Souillac, Lot, is busy even when the local fruit and veg offerings are restricted due

baby comes along and they want to give that child the best start in life.”

Agence Bio says the higher cost is due to several factors: crops may be smaller, animals take longer to develop, more space is needed, organic feed is used, more manpower is required...

Organic farms are also on a smaller scale without the economic benefits of mass production and inspection and certification costs are high.

But eating *bio* does not need to be much more expensive as costs are cut when you eat more seasonal fruit, when veg has fewer food miles and is transported shorter distances – and also as organic shoppers eat fewer processed foods and, often, less meat.

Health claims

Agence Bio found that health was the main reason people gave for choosing organic food – although there is no scientific proof that organic food is the healthier option.

A long-term ongoing nationwide study across France and the biggest of its kind is hoping to come up with some conclusive results.

The NutriNet-Santé health study

was started in 2009 and has 150,000 volunteer adults who give regular information on their food intake, health, lifestyle and physical activity via email questionnaires.

Government sponsored, the study's remit into the relationship between nutrition and health is large, including looking into the effect of organic food on health and the environment.

Lead scientist Emmanuelle Kesse-Guyot said: “Around 40,000 of our volunteers are taking part in my area of study which began in 2014.

“We know that farm workers using pesticides suffer a higher level of serious diseases like cancer and Parkinson's than the general population but we don't yet know what exposure to tiny amounts over several years in our food has on the body.

“We have already compared urine samples of organic and non-organic consumers and there are far fewer pesticide traces in people who eat organic food.”

First results are being co-ordinated now for publication later in the year, though one part of the study – that found a link between non-organic

food and obesity – has already appeared in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

Mrs Kesse-Guyot said they compared profiles of organic and non-organic consumers within a group which had a better than average healthy diet – meaning they ate a lot of fruit and vegetables – and found those who ate ‘*bio*’ had a tendency to put on less weight so “pesticides may disturb the body's metabolism leading to weight gain”.

Despite there being no definitive research linking pesticides to serious diseases, she feels it is preferable to avoid them: “There are hypotheses that a mixture of different pesticides consumed over the years can be highly toxic. We will have to wait for some time until we know for sure there are links but, as a precaution, it is preferable to consume fewer pesticides.”

The NutriNet-Santé study is still seeking volunteers to join their *cohorte* (long-term study group). Volunteers will complete questionnaires on their food habits, health, measurements, physical activity and lifestyle (www.etude-nutrinet-sante.fr)

“

I think consumers are now convinced of the virtues of buying organically and that the rest will now follow

Florence Guhl, Agence Bio



Labelled with love: know your organic symbols

THERE are many labels attached to organic products, some of which are stricter than the official European label. Here are some of the most common ones.

European and AB logo The European logo superseded the original French AB logo when it was introduced but both are still used as the AB logo is better known. The product must be 100% organic unless it is a processed product where up to 5% of non-organic ingredients are authorised, because they are not available organically. The logo is compulsory for organic pre-packaged food produced within the EU.

Bio-Cohérence was created to produce a stricter set of guidelines than the European logo. It is



controlled by the same independent inspectors. Farms must be 100% organic and cannot be mixed with conventional farming, they are limited in size, there are animal welfare stipulations, 100% French production and if there are ingredients such as sugar which must come from abroad they must be both organic and fair trade.



Biopartenaire products must be both organic and Fair Trade with stipulations which go beyond the requirements of many other Fair Trade labels. It was founded 12 years ago by organic producers who wanted to conserve their values and avoid what they thought would be the inevitable pressures as demand for organic food grew.

Nature et Progrès has existed since 1964 but decided to remain independent when the European label was introduced and so is not recognised as officially organic. Synthetic chemicals are not allowed within their rules and they have additional criteria such as



limiting the size of a farm, welfare of both animals and employees and selling locally. 900 producers are signed up and their products are sold in organic specialist shops, direct at the farm and at markets and include both food and cosmetics.

Ecocert Cosmos Organic. There are no legal requirements for organic cosmetics but private regulating bodies across Europe have introduced their own label. Ecocert in France, together with organisations like the Soil

Association in the UK introduced this logo in January. A minimum of 20% (or 10% for rinse-off products) by weight must be organic and products have a minimum of 95% of plant-based ingredients in the formula.



Ensemble-solidaires is a Biocoop label (on 700 products) which goes further than organic by also taking into account environmental factors with less packaging, fair



trade, animal welfare, long-term contracts with producers, fair prices paid to farmers and with stricter criteria than the European organic label as GMOs and non-organic flavourings are not permitted and most farms are 100% organic.

for long and healthy life?

Shop boom is a boost for vegans and vegetarians

by KEN SEATON

ALONG with the rise in people switching to organic food in France, some of the shops supplying them have also started to offer vegan and vegetarian foods – and this is a bonus for those who have long struggled to find supplies, especially vegan.

Speaking to vegan and vegetarian readers who contacted us, we found there were several social media groups and Emma Letessier, who founded the English-speaking Vegans in France group on Facebook, said more supermarkets were offering vegetarian or vegan options, even yoghurt and ice-cream made from soya milk.

“If you know how to cook properly you can make full meals – and we amazed cattle-farmer neighbours when we gave them a full vegan meal that they enjoyed... down to the ‘camembert’ made from cashews.”

Based in Oloron-Sainte-Marie in Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Ms Letessier said there was a vegan food truck an hour away and organic shops like the local Epicerie Verte and national Biocoop had lots to offer, while there were also suppliers like theveganshop.fr and boutique-vegan.com online.

While restaurant options were more limited in the south-west, “Paris is great, as is Lyon and Toulouse. Even Dijon is becoming well served.”

She said people should ask about vegan or vegetarian food in the restaurant as well as supermarkets, to stimulate demand.

Ms Letessier, who edits the *Barefoot Vegan* online magazine, said there was a very active community online with plenty of advice and recipes.

Dr Julie Askew, a psychotherapist in Montaudin, Mayenne, who is also a vegan chef, agreed things were much better than they were when they first visited the area 16 years ago.

“Restaurant choices have improved but although vegan would be hard it should be possible to get vegetarian. Local restaurants should be able to offer something if asked and many will put in an extra bit of effort.

“In the last few weeks I have noticed Super U have started a vegetarian section and that is great but when I was in New York to complete my PhD I noticed normal and veggie foods were offered together. You would walk down the frozen burger aisle and the veggie ones would be there alongside the regular ones. Just another burger.”

She said she had been vegetarian for 25 years and vegan for five but, with children aged nine and six, said she would “not make their lives hell over food”. She added: “We have rescue hens and they lay up to six eggs a day. The children love them but, otherwise, they have a plant-based diet and any school lunches are vegetarian.”

Dr Askew said people often ask about vegan food in France but also ask about Quorn. “Forget Quorn. It’s a processed food and there are much better ways to get protein into the diet. Many shops, and especially Asian ones, will have tofu or tempeh.

“I’m getting ready to open a B&B studio this summer (lepetitpoisbnb.weebly.com) and we will offer advice on where best to find vegan or vegetarian food. I

hope to attract more of a veggie/vegan market as it’s tough for people like myself to travel around France and find good food.

“I know the health benefits of changing lifestyle. My parents, my father is a chef, had health concerns with cancer and decided to rethink their diet.

“They drastically cut meat consumption and cleaned up their diet and have seen the benefit.”

Louise Elsom in Haute-Vienne says she became vegetarian as her fiancé, Dave Pegram, is vegetarian and “I certainly wasn’t making two separate meals a night”.

Until then she had hardly even cooked

but she has now opened a pop-up bistro, The Hidden Veggie Kitchen (hiddenvegiebistro.weebly.com), in her own kitchen in Lattierie.

“We’ve built up a regular clientele; British people, vegetarians, vegans and meat eaters (who were impressed with how good the food was. I think they expected a plate of veggies and nothing more!).

“We also cater to people with food intolerances i.e. coeliacs and gluten free. The French are starting to come, too. I’m not here to try to convince people to become vegetarian or vegan, I just want to share the food that I enjoy cooking.

“People are surprised by the variety. Our vegan chocolate mousse is our most popular dessert and people can’t believe that there are no dairy products involved!”

“I want to be at the forefront of showing people in this area that we can offer a huge variety of delicious food, that’s full of flavour and often, totally different to anything you’ve tried before. To me, that’s the excitement of going out to a restaurant.”



to the season – but, year-round, most organic stalls are the usual riot of colour, although some items will be imported

Pioneer farm is still going strong

HAVING been farming organically for the past 55 years, the Pozzer family had a stall at France’s very first organic market, at Villeneuve-sur-Lot in 1975 and Gilbert Pozzer is now 81.

He and wife Claudette at the Ferme bio de Crozefond at St Aubin (Lot-et-Garonne) opted out when other farmers were just starting to use intensive methods. It was a matter of principal.

Son, Vincent, who now runs the farm with his two brothers and their three wives, told *Connexion* he was proud his parents refused to follow the others. “It was very difficult. Their neighbours and friends said they were mad but my father understood that putting chemicals on the land would kill it in 20 years and he was right.

“There are no more worms in the soil and no aeration. Now those same people respect what we are doing and also see we can make more money than they can. Conventional farmers are paid 15 centimes for a kilo of wheat, we can ask for 40.”



The range of organic products offered by the Ferme bio de Crozefond is wide and varied – but the Pozzer family are determined not to grow too large

The higher prices come from higher labour costs but he says his products give greater value: “Our wheat has twice as much nutritional value as wheat from conventional farming, so you don’t have to buy as much to get better benefits.”

Milk from their 100 cows is made into cheese and dairy products at the farm and 80 pigs give fresh meat in winter and *charcuterie* in summer.

Farm-grown spelt wheat makes bread, pastries, pizzas and pasta. They

also grow strawberries and raspberries and make herb-flavoured sorbets including rosemary, mint and lavender – and are the only organic farm in France to grow and press evening primroses for their oil.

Selling on Wednesday mornings at Villeneuve-sur-Lot market and on Thursdays at Bordeaux, they also sell direct from the farm and recently began to supply Biocoop organic supermarkets and other independents.

However, Vincent Pozzer says they do not want to change the way they work: “We are in a good position as we can sell everything we produce and there is more demand than we can provide for.

“There is growing competition from both organic and major supermarkets but we are resisting the temptation to expand as we think it important to stay small to work directly with our customers at both farm and market.

“We also want to make sure we can continue to produce food for our animals and we don’t want to grow just to satisfy demand.”

While optimistic about *bio*’s future, he says there are still too few French organic farmers: “We can do a lot more. More consumers want organic food but it is sad to see a lot of it coming from countries like Spain, potatoes from Israel and dried fruits from Pakistan. We can grow our own organic food. That needs to change.”



Fair-price *bio* juice is on way

FAIR-PRICE label *C’est qui le patron?* is looking to launch an organic apple juice after the recent launch of fruit juice and pizza and the success of its milk where buyers help set the price.

The brand, known as La Marque du Consommateur, pays farmers a fair price after agreeing methods of production with consumers. Its debut launch of milk in Carrefour and then other supermarkets saw 11million litres sold in seven months at €0.99.

Now it has launched apple juice in

Carrefour after consumers agreed to pay €1.62 a litre for French apples, with no added ingredients. Strong demand for an organic version could see one launched in November.

A pizza sold in Carrefour and Inter-marché is based on a price of €4.49 for French flour, AOP raclette and emmental cheese, Provençal tomatoes, and olive oil but no olives.

Readers can join the voting panel at tinyurl.com/zrb6mhz to decide the butter and apple compote they prefer.

Elderly care costs outstrip pensions as demand grows

WITH serious concerns raised in the UK election over the costs of elderly care, a study in France has shown costs far exceed average pensions.

Monthly tariffs for Ehpad homes, for dependent old people, average €1,810 in the private sector and €1,708 in public, but the average pension is €1,376, with women often receiving lower pensions.

Comparison site logement-seniors.com said the bill for dependent older people was nearly €8.3 billion a year with

72% of home residents needing Allocation Personnalisée d'Autonomie benefit to fund a stay.

There is a lack of places and highest demand is where there are few beds. Alpes-Maritimes, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Manche, Mayenne and Loir-et-Cher have 18% of requests but only 5% of Ehpad care homes.

Our Inheritance Law helpguide has a large section on dependency care and retirement homes. Download a pdf for €9.90 from connexionfrance.com

100,000 timetable changes as new TGV services start

THE opening of the new TGV Ouest and TGV Océane services from Paris to Rennes and Bordeaux on July 2 will be marked with 100,000 timetable changes across the north-west and south-west to fit in.

SNCF has rescheduled thousands of services alongside the high-speed trains so people can catch a local TER then a TGV in the morning to reach Paris for business and a TGV and TER to return home at night.

The changes affect both cor-

respondence and transversal routes to improve services.

The 320kph TGV puts Rennes at 1hr25 from Paris, 35min less than before, while Bordeaux travellers save 1hr10 with a trip now taking 2hr04.

Trains have greater passenger capacity and the Bordeaux trains can double-up at peak times, giving increased capacity from 556 to 1,114 passengers.

The services will be the first to bear the new TGV inOui brand name.

Tiny library is a big success



Jean-Jacques Megel-Nuber, bottom right, with some of those who joined him for a book reading

THIS crowded room is perfect for Jean-Jacques Megel-Nuber who had been searching for a new adventure after a life working in the theatre and events – so he set up a tiny

mobile library and bookshop and takes it round festivals.

The library is a wooden Tiny House and Jean-Jacques, 45, who lives near Mulhouse, Haut-Rhin, had it especially built for him.

"I had lots of ideas of how to do something new, even trying archaeology among other things, but I wanted to meet people and to travel.

"A bookshop seemed ideal as I could use it for readings and introduce new ideas.

"Searching for premises I looked at a barge and even renovating an old library but when I read on the internet about Tiny Houses that was it. Just perfect: compact, mobile, and made of wood, so ecological."

The Tiny House was built by Romain Saunier and Pauline Fagué of La Maison Qui Chemine, in Vosges (they are now at Saint-Méard de Gurçon in Dordogne).

"I was able to work directly with them as it was their first project," said Jean-Jacques.

"I'm delighted with it. I took it to Pontarlier in Haut-Doubs



The Vrai Chic Littéraire library at the Pontarlier festival

for the street festival and, although it was quiet at first once people discovered what I was doing through word of mouth it was wonderful.

"I am keen on working with children and for one reading we had 12 children in the Vrai Chic Littéraire as the library is called. It has room for almost as many adults, too!"

The Tiny House is 6m30 long and took six months to build. Jean-Jacques said every penny counted and it cost just under €40,000. He funded it himself with crowd-funding support.

Now he is preparing for summer in eastern France, aiming to visit villages where there are no shops and no bookshop. He sleeps in the Tiny House while travelling and sells books at a 'reasonable' price. The readings are free.

La Maison Qui Chemine has been in business for a year. All are made to measure and made to a budget with local wood that comes from a coop 9km away in Gironde.

Depending on specification, a Tiny House costs €50-€60,000 with France-wide delivery.

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Bank opts for words, not passwords

THE Banque Postale has become the first bank in France to offer voice security technology to secure transactions.

Customers can opt for the service for €10 a year. They record their voice using a bank app, provide a mobile number and then, when paying online, answer a phone call to get a code to complete the purchase.

It is used in conjunction with a dynamic cryptogram function and is aimed at cutting fraud.

Tested over five years with 600 people in the street, office and speaking quietly, the bank said voices were as unique as fingerprints. The Caisse

d'Épargne and Crédit du Nord are testing similar systems.

Tougher penalties for drivers using phones

DRIVERS could face tougher penalties for using phones as a study found 7% of them used phones while driving and 42% had them in their hands and were not using hands-free.

Even on a pedestrian crossing drivers did not stop with a study by Prévention Routière safety group showing 7% continuing their conversations.

The government road safety agency Sécurité Routière has

called for harsher penalties as it says that about one in 10 fatal accidents is linked to people using mobile phones.

Bed bugs are on rise and not just in hotels

FRANCE is facing a rise in hard-to-eradicate bed bugs with a study showing they have infested 200,000 sites.

Pest control federation CS3D said they were no longer confined to hotels, as had been the case for many years. Spread by humans, they could be found in all types of holiday accommodation.



People | places | culture | lifestyle



Splashes of colour for summer
Our pick of 'Open Gardens' to visit in July P5



A brush with the music industry
The man who paints musicians for a living P4

Picturesque plages

... but keeping beaches clean is a constant battle P2-3



INSIDE



"Writers still count here"

Writer Douglas Kennedy is so thankful for France's enduring love for the written word P8-9



Charity with altitude

Meet the walker doing her bit for the poppy appeal – high up in the Pyrenees P6

Retro holidays are so now

Slow-paced breaks and dodgy wifi – if this sounds like heaven, you are on trend P7

Iron man to oyster farmer

A former metal worker who breeds his own bivalves on the Ile de Ré P12

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 **BRITISH AIRWAYS**

'It is shameful that we still have

France's *Pavillon Bleu* was the world's first blue flag scheme for beaches. **SAMANTHA DAVID** finds out what local authorities have to do to be awarded the prestigious tourist mark

WE ALL have our own idea of the perfect beach, but whether it is a wilderness of dunes and open sea, or a cool strip of wet sand covered in donkey's hoof-prints, clean is a priority.

Too many of us of a certain age remember coming home with feet covered in crude oil, and even today tales abound of polluted water carrying viruses. Worse, it is predicted that with 8million tonnes of rubbish entering the world's oceans per year, by 2050 the seas will contain more plastic than fish.

The good news is groups and associations are taking steps to keep France's beaches clean.

The Pavillon Bleu (www.pavillonbleu.org) scheme, set up in 1985, was the world's first eco-label, and Thomas Joly, the director, says that the association is proud of their record.

"The French love their medals and plaques, and in the beginning we simply wanted to encourage elected officials to work harder at preserving the environment by rewarding those communes who were doing better than average."

Today the scheme is set up in 74 countries, and is a mark of excellence when it comes to messing about on the water.

Any commune which has a pleasure port or a beach is eligible (and a fee is payable), but these days the criteria are strict.

"There is a list of around 80 requirements, and a Pavillon Bleu beach has to meet them all to gain the flag.

"The water has to be regularly tested, the beach has to be cleaned daily, there have to be public lavatories, information boards, showers, separate bins for various categories of rubbish, properly managed parking, safety and first aid facilities, life guards, and all sorts of other measures.

"We also require access for those with reduced mobility. We prefer to say that rather than disabled access, because anyone can have reduced mobility at any time – a pregnant woman, a child wearing a cast to heal a broken leg, a man carrying a toddler... our point is that there should be easy access for everyone."

Tourist attraction

When the scheme started, it was not intended as a tool for tourism offices, but as people become increasingly aware of the advantages of visiting a Pavillon Bleu beach, it has also become a way of highlighting rural and sustainable tourism, and is sought after as a way of attracting extra visitors.

The Pavillon Bleu scheme

does not have a ranking within the awards. Either a beach meets the standards or it does not. There are no best or worst beaches.

This year, 173 French communes – many of them inland – have been awarded the Pavillon Bleu flag for at least one beach or port, bringing the total number of beaches in the scheme up to 390.

"Rural tourism is taking off and many of our beaches are on lakesides or riverbanks," said Mr Joly. "And I think there is an interest in the natural world as part of a holiday but there is still much work to be done in educating people to keep beaches clean.

"Too many people still throw litter from their car windows, leave litter on beaches and in other natural beauty spots.

"We have to clean beaches every single day despite all our beaches being equipped with multiple bins and signs requesting people to use them. It's shameful that we have to clean beaches daily, but we do..."

Beach clean-up

Pavillon Bleu reward municipalities that are getting it right, but another association is simply working to keep all beaches clean, wherever they are.

Les Initiatives Océanes, run by NGO the Surfrider Foundation Europe, aims to 'reduce and prevent aquatic pollution related to rubbish by encouraging change in society's attitudes and behaviour'.

Translated, that means they organise cleanups on all beaches, and work hard at persuading people to throw their rubbish in a proper bin.

As part of this year's awareness-raising campaign, and to mark the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, Pavillon Bleu is

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There is an interest in the natural world as part of a holiday but there is much work to be done in educating people to keep beaches clean

Thomas Joly
Pavillon Bleu Director



Photo: Surfrider Foundation Europe

running a photography competition (from June 19 to September 8) to win a holiday.

Photos should illustrate any aspect of sustainable tourism, a cycle ride, a picture of wildlife, flora or fauna, or even an ecologically responsible morning cleaning a beach! (find more details at www.pavillonbleu.org)

The Surfrider Foundation Europe was set up in 1990 by American Tom Curren, a three-time world surfing champion.

It was modelled on the US Surfrider Foundation founded in 1984, and similar schemes operate in Brazil, Argentina, Japan, the US, Canada, Morocco, and Australia as well as Europe.

It has 10,000 members and 1,700 volunteers in Europe – though it is always looking for more. Joining is easy.

There is a list of up-coming rubbish collections on their website (available in English: www.surfrider.eu/en) and if one has not already been organised in your area, you can organise one right there and then using the tools on their website.

This makes volunteering easy if you live near any part of the French coastline, but why not think ahead and include a morning's volunteering as part of your seaside holiday?



Photo: SurfriderEurope

Too much litter is left on French beaches, say Pavillon Bleu

Sea of volunteers

Plage et Mer Propres, an annual volunteer rubbish collection, is another option. It is run by a chain of fishing shops called 'Les Comptoirs de la Mer' situated along the country's north and north-west coasts.

On April 8 this year, they organised nearly 1,000 volunteers who collected a total of 568 sacks (ie 6.5 tonnes) of rubbish from 22 beaches.

The main rubbish collected consisted of fragments of plastic, followed by fishing detritus, cigarette butts, plastic bot-

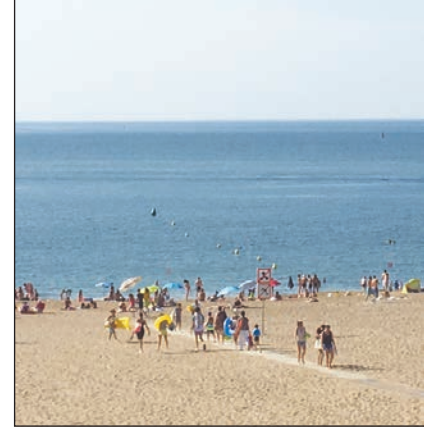
tles and glass bottles.

The aim is not just to clean beaches, but to raise awareness in their shops, visits to local schools, and a quiz on their website to encourage people not to litter anywhere, because 80% of rubbish found in the sea originates on land.

Out of 100kg of rubbish in the sea, 70kg sinks to the bottom, 15kg floats to the surface or is trapped in a tidal column and only 15kg is washed up on to beaches. Up to 95% of the rubbish found on the seabed is plastic.



The Pavillon Bleu flag flies over 390 beaches in France



to clean our beaches, but we do'

Children take part in beach clear-up organised by Surfrider Europe



The Initiatives Océanes believes in changing attitudes from a young age



Lovers of the outdoors spoiled for choice almost everywhere

FRANCE is blessed with beaches, from the long sweeps of wet sand along the north coast, with the English Channel glinting silver in the distance, to the cosy comfort of the strips of sand in the south, where the Mediterranean laps tamely at your toes all day long, and the wild Atlantic coast where waves crash and roar in an apparent effort to gobble the sand dunes and sweep them out to sea.

But it also has amazing city beaches, the first of which was constructed in Paris in 2002. Since then, many other cities, including Grenoble, Toulouse, Metz, Rouen-sur-Mer, Dijon, Lille, Reims, Clermont Ferrand and Strasbourg have followed suit, all of them offering the chance to *lèzarder* (bask like a lizard) in the sun without leaving the city.

There are also a multitude of beaches along the banks of France's lakes and rivers. One of the best known is at the Pont-du-Gard in Hérault, where the river rumbles over large white stones as smooth as eggs, and there is enough space for everyone to splash and swim all day.

The lakes along the Swiss/Italian borders are perhaps best known, but the Lac du Salagou, near Montpellier, with its fantastic red earth and drab-olive scrub is rapidly gaining popularity and summer bathing resorts are being developed all across rural France, turning reservoirs and lakes into favourite destinations for days out.



The Ile de Ré has 110kms of cycle paths to explore, with great access to beaches en route

Best beaches for horse-riders

Horses are famously ridden along the beaches in Normandy, especially near the Mont-St-Michel. An honourable mention goes to *RandoCheval* for their weekends riding the beaches of the Ile d'Oléron, but the top prize has to go to the Camargue.

The beaches at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer are officially out of bounds to horses during the summer months, but the area is so equine-loving that nobody minds a troop of horses quietly hacking along the beach at sunset, even in July and August.

Riders can traverse the marshes, cross the petit Rhône, and spend the day riding along the beach. Organised outings with horse-riding holiday firm Elise includes a picnic on the beach and is guaranteed to satisfy anyone with a yearning to get into the saddle. www.elise-camargue.fr/project/journee-complete-6-heures-a-cheval

Best beaches for people with sensitive skin

The combination of sun, salt and sand can be too much for some people. The answer is simple. Lake water is fresh, and beaches are often surrounded by grass with a fringe of trees to provide natural shade.

Lake Annecy is large enough to boast a selection of beaches, from small sandy coves surrounded with weeds, to the large grassy beach within the town of Annecy. As well as fresh water swimming, there are also pedalos and just a bit further on, boat trips round the lake.

Best beach for artists

Collioure is a beautiful fishing village in the Pyrénées-Orientales, which was discovered by a crowd of modern artists in the early 20th century.

The main beach is small and sandy, and offers a perfect spot to lounge and swim, but for artists, the appeal is the view across the twin bays which

are home to the port and the beaches, and the opportunities to follow in the footsteps of the likes of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Reproductions of some of their most famous works are displayed around the village, in the spots where they were created.

shops, including Yoo Too (www.cycles-yootoo.com) in Saint Martin de Ré, which has a wide selection of cycles for hire from €6 for two hours. You can even hire a penny farthing.

Their distinctive black and white spots adorn bikes for kids, tandems, tricycles, trailers, baby carriers and



Artists have long been drawn to the beautiful fishing village of Collioure

Best beach for cyclists

The Ile de Ré, with 110kms of cycle paths, most of them flat, is paradise for cyclists. The paths weave all across the islands, and many of the golden, sandy beaches, backed by dunes, are best accessed on two wheels.

Take a picnic with you, or stop at one of the many oyster shacks and refresh yourself with fresh seafood and local wines.

The island is packed with cycle hire

even electric bicycles - which make cycling a doddle even if you're not fit.

Best beaches for train-lovers

Corsica is heaven for train-lovers, with two of the most spectacular and iconic railway lines in the world. The line from Calvi which runs along the coast, at some points actually appears to be built on the golden sands. It stops at little beaches along the way, making them paradise for train spotters.

Best beach for activities

La Lac de Vassivière (www.lacdevassiviere.com) which straddles the Creuse and the Haute Vienne, has a "petit train" to get you around the lake and a free taxi-boat which runs visitors to an island in the centre of the lake. It also has children's games and play-parks, picnic sites, camp sites, hotels, and beaches.

There are zones for water-skiing, swimming, canoeing, fishing and sailing. There are cycle paths around the lake and the chateau on the island offers exhibitions, a sculpture park, and a lighthouse.

Best beach for dog walking

Although most beaches are out of bounds to canines, particularly during July and August, there are a select few which allow dogs. Some even allow dogs to be let off their leads.

In Normandy, the Plage de la Grande Dune de Sainte Marie du Mont (just north of the Utah Beach Museum) allows dogs.

A stretch of shimmering sand bordered by dunes, it is a favourite for sand yachting and is also used for exercising race horses and dogs all year. To find other canine-friendly beaches see www.plages.tv/chiens/liste-france

Best secret beach with waterfalls

In an unknown corner of the Gard, locals flock to Saint-Laurent-le-Minier to swim in the deliciously cold waterfall which tumbles off the rocks into a series of pools and cascades.

The most adventurous can edge onto the rocks behind the wall of racing water, but most people lounge in the sun on naturally flat stone slabs, while toddlers play in pebble pools further downstream.

Completely unknown a decade ago, this beach now has a car-park and bar and is listed in the guide books. Best go now before it gets "discovered".

'We are like little mice...'

How did you start doing this?

I have always had a musician's approach to painting. I had some training as a percussionist, so I see my brushes firstly as drumsticks. Then they start to dance, and then they paint. The way I use my brushes shows the musician that I am playing with him.

I love painting musicians and dancers. I have been travelling around doing it since the 1990s, but when I met Seza [partner Seza Querrien, 36], we started doing it more and more.

Then we decided to do a 'reportage artistique': painting and sculpting musicians all over the world.

How did you meet?

I was her teacher at the Conservatoire Gabriel-Fauré les Mureaux, near Paris. I was teaching visual arts to adults. We met in 2005.

Where have you travelled?

We travelled around 12 European countries, and Montréal. Then we went

Artist **VINCENT FONF**, 50, from Brittany, tells **Jessica Smith** about his unusual job – painting musicians live onstage

around the world. We did it in several phases over six years. We have met literally thousands of musicians! However, then we got a bit tired of travelling so we came back to our home near Rennes, Bretagne.

How do you find the concerts you paint?

We have many different ways. We have a huge network, and we also meet a lot of people at festivals.

Otherwise, for example when we went to Ireland we only had one date, so we just went to concerts and asked them if we could work there.

Sometimes, if we see musicians go by with instruments, we will just ask them where they are playing.



Vincent Fonf has a musician's approach to art – and does his best work on stage

Does the audience make you nervous?

No, when I paint alone I feel empty! I find that having an audience is supportive. I am like a musician who needs to interact with other musicians; they can play on their own, but it is not the same.

I can sometimes get very stressed, but I just have to let it go. Results are not the most

important thing, it is how you paint that is important.

What special techniques do you use to paint onstage?

I start by tapping on the canvas with my brushes: I am entering into the music and getting into a state of concentration.

I don't necessarily know the musicians or their music, so the first piece they play is a kind of communion for me.

Next, I will take a light colour and sketch out the movement of the musicians and the composition of the painting. I never know what I am going to do beforehand.

Then I work on bringing out the spirit of the group. I try to work on the entire painting at once: since the concert could stop at any moment, I try to make sure that I can finish the painting at any time.

Do you ever find that paintings don't work out?

Yes, sometimes, but I never throw anything away or paint

over it in white. I cut up the ones that don't work out and make scrapbooks with them.

Do you make a good living doing this?

Yes, we have always managed to live and travel. We sell about half of what we make: some of it we sell at concerts, and some at our gallery on a farm in Iffendic, in Brittany.

What are the advantages of your job?

I'm not sure who else would get the opportunity to see so many concerts!

For example, a concert venue manager might see a lot but they would always be in the same place, whereas a tour manager would always see the same musicians. For five or six years, we saw three or four different groups playing in different locations every week!

And the drawbacks?

When we were travelling we would be asked to participate

in longer projects, but we couldn't because we were always moving on.

We made a lot of acquaintances, but it started to feel a bit superficial.

Sometimes you need to get to know people. It also got a bit competitive: we were always trying to do more and more.

What are your plans for the future?

We want to find more of a balance between short and long-term projects, therefore we have decided to travel in a different way.

We are still planning on going further away, for example we are going to Seville, but we are also going to travel closer to home: to keep the spirit of travelling, but limit the kilometres.

It is the spirit of what we do that is important.

We are like little mice: our job is to go into a place, forget ourselves, and take advantage of what is going on!



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Why not join us? Volunteers are needed in all areas.

Contact your nearest Association for information.

SEZA QUERRIEN (right), 36, travels with Vincent making live sculptures of musicians during concerts.

"I STARTED doing these sculptures when I met Vincent and I would go with him to the performances where he painted.

"First I did drawings, but then I decided to do sculptures because it was more fun.

"So I sought out materials which could be used for sculpting in a live setting without needing to be glued, heated or welded.

"That was how I discovered aluminium and copper thread, cloth and lace.

"When I make a live sculpture, the first thing I do is choose a musician or dancer I really like, unless the concert is long in which case I may choose a few.



"I make the aluminium structure of a dancer or musician, and then the sculpture evolves as I add the layers.

"I love playing with different materials.

"After the concert, I take pictures of the sculptures in different contexts: I use them to tell stories through the photos.

"I take a lot of liberties in

my representation, so sometimes people do not think the sculpture looks exactly like the person – but they will say I have captured their spirit.

"In the future, I'll be working on a project with a storyteller, Carole Lèpan.

"While she tells stories about various women, I will animate them using marionettes."

GARDENS OPEN EVERY WEEKEND IN JULY

THERE is somewhere to visit on every Sunday in the month in the Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts scheme which encourages garden owners of all nationalities to open up their gardens, big and small to the public, to raise funds for charity.

This is the association's fifth season and it expects to have 200 gardens signed up for 2017 in 35 departments across France. It started in 2013 when four British gardeners in the Creuse decided to open their gardens to see if they could raise money for charity and the idea quickly caught on. Visitors buy a €10 membership card which gives them access to any of the gardens for one year or pay €5 for a one-off visit. This year a new style card, the Anniversary card has been introduced. It costs €50 and gives access to the private gardens as well as some prestigious French gardens which usually charge a fee but are offering Open Garden members free entry with the card.

Participating gardens are open for a few chosen days during the year. Last year Open Gardens raised a record €23,000 with €12,000 going to A Chacun son Everest which runs courses in the Alps to help children and women who are in remission from cancer but need help restoring their confidence after treatment. Another €4,000 was split between seven other charities.

President Mick Moat is hoping that the association will keep on growing this year with more gardens, an increase in the number of French participants, more money raised for charity and a presence at more and more flower and plant festivals.

Anyone interested in taking part in the scheme should get in touch via the website www.opengardens.eu

Our pick of gardens to visit this month

Lieu-dit "Le Falgayrenq", Jardin des Amis, La Bastide-l'Évêque, Aveyron

every Sunday in July 14:30-18:30

Owner: Margaret and Yves Geurit



THIS is a very natural-looking organic garden designed to give colour through the summer using drought-loving perennials rather than annuals. When Margaret Geurit moved to the area she noticed there was not much to see

in gardens in July and so she and her husband have experimented to find plants that work. Among the many that they have successfully grown are blue ceratostigma, summer flowering heathers and asters, bupleurum, rudbeckia, and grasses.

La Goupillaire, Saint-Laurent-de-la-Salle, Vendée

Sunday, July 16 11:00-16:30

Owner: Martin Wright



MARTIN Wright has had the good fortune to inherit a garden which has won prizes over the years for the best garden in the area. It is just under half a hectare, split into three areas. The front is gravelled with pots and borders and the rear is

lawned with shrubs and trees. This leads into the main garden, which has mature shrubs and trees, a small pond and a bog garden. This is his first summer in the property but he hopes there will be a beautiful display of hydrangeas in July.

3 Le Plessis, Le Beugnon, Deux Sèvres

Sunday July 2, 10:00-18:00

Owner: Ton Spaargaren



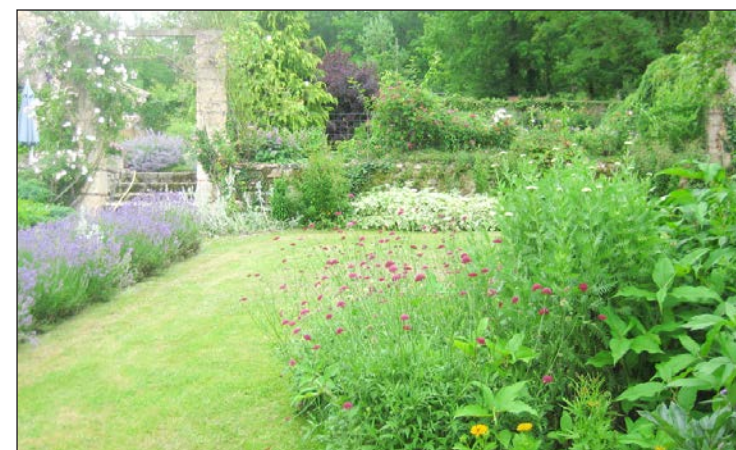
THIS is one of three gardens that can be visited in the commune of Le Beugnon on the same day. It is very natural with a woodland area, pond and prairie-style planting, which will be coming into bloom in July. Ton Spaargaren has been influ-

enced by internationally acclaimed Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf, who is a leading figure in the New Perennial Movement where he uses bold drifts of herbaceous perennials and grasses that are chosen for both their structure and their colour.

Le Cavoux, Saint-Vincent-sur-l'Isle, Dordogne

Sunday, July 9 10:00-17:00

Owner: Elizabeth Oaten



ELIZABETH Oaten's French friends describe her garden as a romantic English garden and she agrees that this is probably a good description as there are no straight lines and plenty of flower beds and lawns. The flower garden is terraced on

three levels, separated by stone walls. On the stone terraces around the house are troughs and pots of flowers and roses. The lowest area is planted with trees and shrubs. On show in July there will be plenty of herbaceous bedding plants.

Trial, error, and an English-style striped lawn are a winning combination

50 Route de Rostrenen, Plouguernevel, Côtes-d'Armor

Every Sunday in July 10:00-18:00

Owner: Malcolm Thompson



MALCOLM Thompson's garden is well known in the local area, particularly for its English-style striped lawn. It has won first prize for the best local garden in Plouguernevel for the past 12 years and also best garden in the region. Hundreds of visitors pass through the gates when it is open for *Bienvenue dans mon Jardin*, an open day for gardens which do not use chemicals held every other year throughout France.

This, despite the fact that before Mr Thompson came to live in France in 2005 after a career running a manufacturing business, he had never done any gardening, and despite the fact that the 3,000m² area was completely overgrown.



"At 58 I was told I would have to give up work due to health problems so I came to France and started something new. It shows you don't need a background in gardening. I succeeded by trial and error.

You have to learn by making mistakes. You can also always ask other gardeners questions as they are always so keen to help."

His garden is divided into three areas. A formal area at the front with his striped lawn, a vegetable garden with raised beds where he grows everything from seed and finally what he calls his 'park', where there is a duck pond and plenty of shrubs including hydrangea and camellias.

He turns all his garden waste into compost which he puts back on the beds every year. He loves vivid colours and has plenty of lilies and dahlias. But his pride and joy is his lawn: "French visitors say they love my lawn because there is nothing else like it in central Brittany."



Attract more wildlife to your garden

Supporters of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts www.vivara.fr/english

Epic walk in aid of poppy appeal charity

A FUNDRAISER for the Royal British Legion is taking part in the annual Freedom Trail, Chemin de la Liberté across the Pyrenees.

The route traces one of the escape routes taken by civilians and military servicemen fleeing the Nazis in the Second World War.

Brenda Vockings, who is in her sixties and organises the annual poppy appeal for the Royal British Legion, Bordeaux and southwest of France, says the 65km hike at high altitude over four days will be a real challenge. But she feels that if injured, malnourished people in fear of their lives could do it in often inadequate clothing, she should be able to manage.

The trek starts at Saint-Girons in the Ariège and finishes at Esterrí d'Aneu in Catalonia, Spain. On the official website of the Chemin de la Liberté, the Freedom Trail Association which organises the annual commemorative hike, warns all participants that they, 'must be physically fit, well-equipped and have done sufficient training to master the mountain conditions and high altitudes involved'.

Mrs Vockings has taken up the challenge because of the respect she has for the work of the Royal British Legion: "This charity supports every one of our service personnel, those who no longer serve, and their families.

“

When you stop and realise how precious life is, it encourages you to go on and do things so you never have regrets

Brenda Vockings
Charity walker

"The charity covers all disciplines, all ranks and also works with other military charities. Their help ranges from Drop-In centres where individuals can discuss problems, financial aid, legal representation to ensure fairness, medical help and of course help and support for families. The list goes on.

"I want to fundraise so that people who need our help stand a better chance of having a more meaningful future. Let's give them the chance to achieve."

Mrs Vockings started doing treks and has even done a skydive after she was diagnosed and treated for cancer, twice. "When you stop and realise how precious life is it encourages you to go on and do things,

Brenda Vockings, who has twice survived cancer, in training for her epic Pyrenean challenge



so you never have regrets."

She was persuaded to do this particular walk by Scott Goodall, who lived in the Ariège, and wrote about the Chemin de la Liberté.

"His stories of escape remind us of the sacrifices of the guides and the bravery of everyone involved," she said.

"In a rash moment I promised that I would do this walk and now I am doing it in Scott's

memory and because I believe that I can do this, even as a pensioner!"

She has been training since November by doing a lot of hiking in Scotland, where she now lives and by going to the gym three times a week. During the walk she will lay a wreath at one of the many memorial cairns along the way: "It will be very interesting and very moving to walk in the

footsteps of those who were escaping and of the brave people who helped them.

"People come from all over Europe to do this pilgrimage – even my Greek dentist here in Scotland knows about it. What a super experience. I am looking forward to it, albeit with a little fear."

If you would like to make a donation, you can do so at <http://tinyurl.com/yblt2sy3>

Feature your local community group here

AS a publication for English-speakers in France, *The Connexion* features news and events from groups all over the country.

We would be pleased to publicise your group or association (non-commercial) – it is a great free way for you to spread the word and bring in new members. Head to the community pages of our website, register or log in and submit your event:

www.connexionfrance.com/Community

Trunk call

A BELGIAN couple who wish to create Europe's first elephant sanctuary at Buisière Galan in the Haute-Vienne are determined to continue with their project despite facing lengthy administrative hurdles.

Tony Verhulst and Sophie Goetghebeur aim to provide a retirement home for old or sick elephants from circuses and zoos and have been working for nearly five years.

Despite needing further permits and certificates, they are still fundraising – get involved at www.elephanthaven.com



The Combined Services Support Group gives a €600 cheque to local firemen

Pompiers to help fair raise money for old soldiers

A SUMMER market with stalls and games is being held in Deux-Sèvres by an association which raises money for retired British servicemen and their families.

The Combined Services Support Group was set up in 2014 by a group of expats who live in the Saint-Pardoux area who wanted to put on events to raise money for a good cause.

They were originally part of the Royal British Legion but decided to create their own

association because their branch was some distance away.

Since then they have raised between €1,500 and €2,000 a year which they have mostly given to the armed forces charity, SSAFA, and the Royal Air Forces Association, plus donations to the Gurkha Welfare Trust and Combat Stress and to local firemen. They have a widows and children's fund which has helped provide computers and a play garden.

The Pompiers of Saint-

Pardoux were so delighted with the donation that they will be bringing along a fire engine for the summer market which will be held on July 2 from 11:00-16:00. There will also be games including Splat the Rat and Hook a Duck plus a fish-and-chips stall.

Association secretary Terri Laverick says she hopes lots of people will come along. She also says that they would welcome anyone in the area who would like to join the Combined

Services Support Group: "We try to keep our administration costs to an absolute minimum so we can hand over as much money as possible.

"Our aim is to come up with ideas which are as original as possible and as well as an annual Christmas market and quiz nights we are also hoping, for example, to organise a fishing picnic at a local lake.

"We are keen to attract new members. Contact us by email on combinedssg@gmail.com".

Take That and party, Orne

A MAN who once managed concert tours for Take That is using his experience to put on his own festival in the grounds of his property in the Orne.

Gary Roberts hopes the Château Jasmine Festival (www.chateaujasmine.com), at Passais la Conception on August 26, will be a success and wants all proceeds to go to his local village.

"I really want to do something for the local community and make it a family orientated get together where everyone can have a good time. I really want to get it right for the village," said Mr Roberts.

He hopes there will be plenty of music and is planning two stages and would also like to showcase local arts and crafts with a chance for people to have a go at new skills such as weaving.

As well as Take That, Mr Roberts has worked with top stars such as James Bay and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra but says for a first festival he wants to keep it simple and invite local groups and maybe even spot some new talent.

"I think it is very important to bring something to

the village and to embrace an *entente cordiale* particularly in these hard times and I think it is better to start with something low key.

"I have been really pleased that a lot of local people have been so enthusiastic about the idea and I've already had local building merchants offering to donate materials for the construction of stages and a big outdoor cinema screen."

Mr Roberts is calling for volunteers to come and help and for bands and artists to join in.

He says the festival would welcome fun, creative, home-grown and educational workshops, musicians, dancers, gastro-foodies, giant mobile art, procession bands and costume artists to make the event as 'festive as possible'.

He hopes to make it accessible by charging €1 for an entry bracelet with all proceeds going to charity.

And above all he wants the local population of all ages to enjoy it.

Anyone who would like to get involved is urged to contact the team by emailing: chateaujasmine61350@gmail.com

€150k bid to turn ancient ruins into tourist hotspot



The Château de Pouancé is perfect for restoration using traditional techniques, believes Dr Bernard Juby (below, with wife Patricia)

by JANE HANKS

A RETIRED doctor and former chairman of the UK Federation of Small Businesses is spearheading a campaign to restore and rebuild part of a medieval castle at Pouancé in the Maine-et-Loire – using medieval building techniques in the same way as the successful project at Guédelon in Burgundy.

Dr Bernard Juby said the existing ruins of the medieval castle would be ideal for such a project as there are ready-made footings in place to rebuild the old drawbridge and portcullis and its flanking drum towers. The Guédelon project started in 1996 when castle owner Michel Guyot discovered that his property had been built on an existing medieval property.

It is now a major tourist attraction where visitors can see craftsman at work building a 13th-century style castle stone by stone.

Dr Juby would like to see something similar at Pouancé on the site of an already existing chateau which he believes could be restored using old techniques.

He and his wife, Pamela, have lived near and in Pouancé for 17 years and have both long been interested in medieval history. They have taken part in historical enactments both in the UK and in France, and joined *La Ghylde de la Foreyst* set up by the local *Syndicat d'Initiative*, which promotes local tourism, five years ago.

There are 12 in the group who are all enthusiastic about the project and they have the backing of the SI.



Dr Juby said the idea would give a boost to the town: “As well as being a huge tourist attraction it would encourage stone masons, carpenters and builders, as well as apprentices, to learn the old crafts and help soak up some unemployment at the same time.

“We already have the footprint and footings on which to build. It would attract people to the town centre which is much needed since the local authority has moved many facilities to the periphery.”

The project would need initial funding of between €100,000 and €150,000 and

afterwards it would fund itself using revenue from paying visitors.

Dr Juby added that a group of enthusiasts are willing to be involved and that he has written to many people to raise awareness and gain support.

“I have written to the Minister of Culture in Paris, the recently formed Ombre d’Anjou Director of Culture and Tourism and I am in touch with the Duke of Brissac, a leading light in tourism in the Angers area.”

Dr Juby is confident that the idea could work. “The future looks bright,” he said.

“

As well as being a tourist attraction it would encourage stone masons and carpenters, as well as apprentices, to learn old crafts

Dr Bernard Juby
Campaigner

#trending

Our new column assesses an aspect of the French zeitgeist. This month: Retro holidays



There's quite a view at Belrepayre Airstream Retro Trailer Park

by JANE HANKS

STEPPING back in time to enjoy the style and leisurely pace of a retro holiday is trending now in France. You can tour the sites in a classic car, camp in a vintage caravan or tent or take to the lanes on an iconic electric Solex bike.

Four years ago Pascal Pannetier started a magazine for retro tourists. He says that a lot of the attraction of this style of tourism is being able to escape the pressures and speed of modern life: “It is now possible to hire vintage cars, old-style motor bikes or Solex bikes throughout France and travel in a different way by taking the back roads rather than rushing down the motorway. As you have to drive more slowly, you inevitably relax and enjoy taking your time to explore and enjoy the scenery.

“To complete the experience there is an increasing number of campsites with vintage caravans. There is a desire, among a sector of the population, to return to the past – to a time when things were simpler and easier.” (*retro-tourisme.com*)

In the Loire, a couple have based their travel agency on this new way of holidaying. *Rétro-émotion* (*www.retroemotion.fr*) offers organised two-to-five-day trips discovering the Loire valley and its chateaux from the seat of a vintage car. “We have five cars of our own, including a Renault Caravel and a Citroën Traction,” says owner Marquis de Béthune, “but can call on a pool of 100 locally if need be. We suggest itineraries which can be adapted to the desires of the client and the idea is the holidaymaker drives one of these cars during their holiday. It is very sociable as people are attracted to the cars and want to stop and chat.”

Perry and Coline Balfour opened the first-ever retro campsite in France 14 years ago at Manses in the Ariège. Business was slow at first but now it has really picked up: “Retro has been big in the UK for some time,” says Mr Balfour, “And now retro in general has just gone mad in France.”

“

The wi-fi and phone reception is not great and a lot of people like that now

Perry Balfour
Campsite owner

There are 12 original stylish airstreams to rent at the Belrepayre Trailer Park (*www.airstream-europe.com*), dating from the 1940s up to the 1980s. “All our facilities are retro in style and we only play vintage music on vinyl records,” says Mr Balfour. “The wi-fi and phone reception is not great and a lot of people like that.

“We want people to be able to enjoy holidays as they did in the past when they were happy with simple things. We are putting an emphasis on the natural side. We’ve planted flowers and unusual plants everywhere and serve organic food and there are lots of walks starting out from the site.”

The La Gambionne campsite in Goudargues in the Gard (*www.campingretro.com*) is based around the collection of retro caravans and cars belonging to a couple who are passionate about the sixties.

They bought the campsite five years ago and have dedicated an area to their 23 caravans. Campers can also turn up with their own vintage caravan and car. During the summer, there is an exhibition of their collection of household items from that period and twice a month there is a Sixties-style evening.

Véronique Noreux said they opened their campsite because of their own nostalgia for *les belles années* but realised that they aren’t alone and it is something which is becoming incredibly popular: “Our guests are of all ages and when they are here they like to enjoy simple pleasures. There are no TVs and people can meet and chat over a game of *pétanque*.”

'France is one of the few places left where writers still count'

American author in Paris **DOUGLAS KENNEDY** tells **Jessica Knipe** why he is part of the French literary furniture and why writers matter here

AMERICAN writer and France's literary darling Douglas Kennedy owns homes in London, Berlin, Montréal, Maine and New York. But he spends the majority of his time in Paris, and the French love him all the more for it.

Far from the 5^{ème} arrondissement in which one of his most famous novels (*The Woman in the Fifth*) is set, when this rolling stone laid down his hat, it landed in the heart of the 10^{ème}.

Tucked behind the Canal Saint-Martin and the very bridges from which Amélie Poulain flicked her smooth stones, the quartier has become significantly more bobo in recent years.

Tiny restaurants crammed with people eating Korean bibimbap sit opposite vegan canteens, also packed to the rafters. Further along, fashionable 'co-working' spaces rub shoulders with the Liberté boulangerie, where tall people in rolled-up trouser hems and statement eyewear buy their wholegrain *pain de campagne*. It's so hip, it hurts.

But behind the giant wooden doors of Kennedy's Haussmannian building, the bustle of the street fades away. A tidy stone courtyard leads to a winding wooden staircase up to his flat. The door opens, and sounds of opera spill out on to the landing around a man clad entirely in black.

The apartment is impeccably decorated. Antique parquet floors complement modern furnishings, like the imposing purple B&B Italia chair sitting in front of a floor-to-ceiling mirror. "It's simple," says Kennedy. "I like clean lines. Life is chaotic and messy enough. I love that I can come back here and it's quiet."

Kennedy plucks a pencil from a pot on the marble *table basse*, before sitting down. "I always put a pencil in my hand for interviews," he says, "I don't know why... It's equilibrium."

This man's sword is most definitely his pen. "I always hoped I'd be a writer," Kennedy admits. "At first I thought I'd be a theatre director, and I wasn't bad, but I wasn't great. Then I thought I'd be a playwright, and I wasn't bad but I wasn't great. And then I started writing books, and I don't know if I'll say I'm great, but I started thinking, 'this is my calling.'"

His readers seem to agree – after three travel books, 12 novels (soon to be 13) and a memoir, Kennedy has now sold more than 14 million copies of his books, and has been translated into 22 languages.

His most recent book, *Toutes ces grandes questions (sans réponse)*, is a philosophical introspection into his own story, written just after his first divorce. "I had a lot of questions about the nature of the mess that is anyone's

life," says Kennedy. "I'm not unique. Everyone has a degree of 'merde' in their life."

Waxing philosophical

The mood is sombre. Kennedy looks tired. He is in the middle of his second divorce. "Ahhh life," he shrugs, as he heats the teapot before brewing a batch of Kusmi tea. There is something Gallic about his resignation to the trials and tribulations of his existence. And it's not just in his recent memoir – Kennedy's books have had an increasingly philosophical slant recently. "That's the thing about getting older," he muses. "You face up to the fact that time is finite, that you won't be here forever... Which pisses me off actually!"

Through the darkness in his eyes comes suddenly a light twinkle. So life's not all that bad? "Oh yeah, I love life! It's not easy, but I love it! Even when it's really hard, I appreciate it. We are the architects of our own problems. If there's one thing I know, it's that unhappiness is a choice."

Existential questions have always been the fabric of his novels; his entire life is hidden between the lines. But this memoir is the first time that he has taken an honest, unfiltered look at his history.

"I wanted to look directly at my own experience and what it meant, how it

“

Writers here are very much part of the cultural currency. That's wonderful. Bless the French for maintaining that

turned me into what I am," he says, then adds, with a cheeky grin and a wink, "with my manifold contradictions. Everyone is contradictory, it's one of the things I think about when building a character. What's going on with this person? How do they screw up? How

do they repeat? Because we all repeat..."

Perhaps it's Kennedy's training as a historian that has made him so conscious of the world's inexorable repetition of mistakes. "I think there's a degree of this in myself, and I would be the first to admit it," he says. "It's very hard to accept happiness."

Kennedy blames some of his own mistakes on his stormy upbringing. "My parents were at each other's throats all the time. It was a small apartment, my father was travelling a lot and he had a lot of women, it was a genuinely unhappy relationship. They were both cases of arrested development. They couldn't stand each other, and it was all wrong."

"It made me a very anxious man growing up, and I still have that in me. It made me very wary of love because there was not a lot of it around."

This experience has also given Kennedy the capacity to tap into the essence of human nature. His books are an adroit mix of literary sensitivity and popular topics – there's something in there for everyone. And everyone is hidden within

the books, too: Kennedy is always on the lookout for themes and personalities to inspire him. His daily blog, which has 35,000 subscribers, regularly describes someone that he has observed from afar, or someone who has fleetingly played a part in his day, and the psychological impact that it has had on him.

In fact, even before I have had time to ask him a question, Kennedy is already asking me all about me – he is intrinsically interested in others.

An American in Paris

In Paris, as everywhere else, Kennedy leads a normal life. "I'm not somebody who dates actresses or pop stars," he says. "I'm on the TV, people know me, but I'm very low key about it." Kennedy takes the Métro like any regular Parisian, does his shopping locally, doesn't have an assistant. "I don't hide," he says.

"I'm always very friendly with people who approach me and I think that's important. Success has an interesting responsibility to it. *C'est plus simple de rester sympa*," Kennedy peppers his answers with French, as naturally as if they were in his mother tongue.

"Oh no, I have no milk!" exclaims Kennedy. He hasn't stocked up because he is leaving for Berlin early the next day. Tomorrow it's Berlin, today Paris, and last night Kennedy was in London, watching a play with his son. "I have a ping-pong ball life, I'm here and there," says Kennedy.

"There are only two constants in my life – my writing and my children. I'm a perpetual outsider, even at home in



Writer Douglas Kennedy at his flat in the 'so hip it's painful' 10th arrondissement north of

the States."

Kennedy is no stranger in France. Ask most French readers about him, and you'll soon hear: "*Mais je l'adore!*" Kennedy has been a household name in France since books like *Five Days* and *The Moment* hit number one on the bestsellers list. He has been a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* since 2007, and in 2009 he received the first ever *Grand Prix du Figaro*. France loves Kennedy as much as he loves France. "They have such good taste!" he laughs.

Joking aside, "I think it's a couple of things," explains Kennedy. "One, there's a big fascination with America, and everything American. Two, I have the kind of American sensibility that chimes in well here – I'm critical of my own country, I'm critical of the culture, I'm curious."

His success is also a result of him being a master at melding those big-stroke, plot-driven ideas that make you want to turn the page with a more intellectual, reflexive literary style that explores the human condition – anyone reading him can find something to take away for themselves. "I had a French girlfriend who was a student at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*," says Kennedy, "and she liked my books. But my concierge also likes my books. And cab drivers will say 'Ah! Kennedy! *La Grande Librairie!* Or *Vivement Dimanche!*' because they have seen me on TV."

For decades, French literature has centred heavily on ideas, without a great focus on narrative. Kennedy manages to take those same heady ideas and apply them to Hollywood-worthy scenarios, making his novels both a respectable read and a guilty pleasure.

The cinematic nature of the books is not just an impression, either: in 2010, his novel *The Big Picture* was made into a movie with Catherine Deneuve (*L'Homme qui voulait vivre sa vie*), and *The Woman in the Fifth*, based in Paris, became a film with Ethan Hawke and Kristin Scott Thomas. Kennedy will soon be in every French person's living room, too: France's TF1 is adapting one of his books into a TV film, starring Alexandra Lamy. His transition to the French screen is complete.

A French education

So, did Kennedy choose France, or did France choose him? "I've always been a francophile," he says. "I grew up with French cinema, fleeing the domestic warfare at home in the safety of the Cinémathèque at the MOMA in New York... I grew up with the *Nouvelle Vague*: Rohmer, Truffaut, and Godard, even though he's Swiss..."

In his 20s, Kennedy decided to give working in Paris a shot, but writing opportunities led him instead to Dublin and then London. In 1999, though, Kennedy was in Paris again for the promotion of his third book, *The Job*. "I was being taken out to dinner with my publishers," he recalls, "and they were all talking English, just for me. I thought, 'This is bad. You're a civilised, cosmopolitan 45-year-old man, and you only have one language.'"

"So I found a teacher the following year and started learning." It took Kennedy four hours a week for eight years, but he is now fluent, and makes regular appearances on French TV shows without even the shadow of a translator.

Following his decision to learn French,



central of Paris (below, right), which is not far from the Canal Saint-Martin (right)

Kennedy bought a *pied-à-terre* in Paris, in Saint-Germain. "It was a little studio *sous les toits* that I bought for the price of a good car," he recalls. "It was in the same building as the *Editions de Minuit* – the publishers of Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, *les gens comme ça*. I remember running into Jean Echenoz once in the corridor..." While still working full-time in London, Kennedy visited his French pad at least once a month. And the French adopted him.

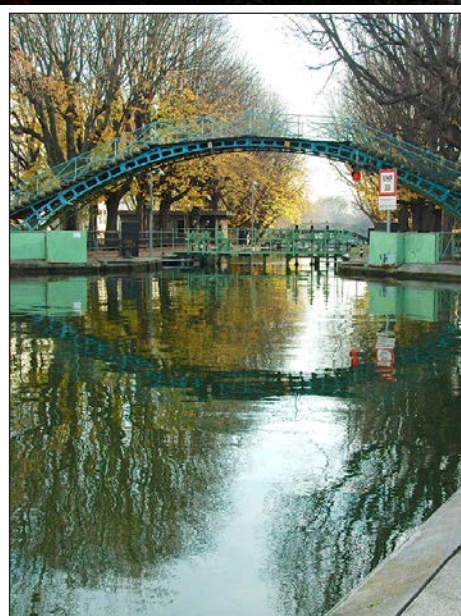
And when the French adopt a writer, they go all the way. France has a deeply engrained reading culture, even if the numbers are not what they used to be. "France is one of the few places left where writers count," says Kennedy. "Writers here are very much part of the cultural currency. That's wonderful. Bless the French for maintaining that, it's crucial."

This support for the arts is important, especially in a world where corporations are buying up publishing houses. "We cannot all reduce down to a Murdoch or a Trump view of the world," affirms Kennedy. "It's a very Manichean view of life – all black or white. But, in the scheme of things, all the great ethical questions are grey. Nothing is right or wrong."

This theme runs through *Toutes ces grandes questions*. "I remember saying it to the two lawyers who helped with my divorce," says Kennedy. "There was a marriage, now there are two competing views – who's right? (Well, me of course! he laughs). The truth is: no one."

With this Kennedy explains his appeal: he's one of us, with all of our faults and foibles. From within the calm, clean lines of his Parisian apartment, Douglas Kennedy is full of the same turmoil, asking the same questions as the rest of us.

Next edition: We interview
Helena Frith-Powell



The secret history of French buildings

No 5. Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, Franche-Comté



Photos: G. Vaille / ADAGP

by EMILY COMMANDER

NOTRE DAME DU HAUT, at Ronchamp in Franche-Comté, eastern France, is a profoundly spiritual place designed by an avowed atheist.

Architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who is better known as Le Corbusier, was initially reluctant when he was approached to redesign the hill-top chapel, but was inspired by its surrounding landscape and the site's turbulent history to create "a place of silence, prayer, peace, inner joy".

The first building on the hill above Ronchamp is thought to have been a strategic camp dating back to Roman times.

Its first Christian usage was probably in the fourth century; in the Middle Ages it became a parish church, and in the 18th century a pilgrims' chapel.

During the French Revolution it was sold as an item of national property, only to be bought back in 1799 by four local families who wanted to restore it to its spiritual glory.

Since then it has twice been partially destroyed: first by fire in 1913, and then by bombing in 1944. Le Corbusier first visited in 1950, and the present building was inaugurated five years' later.

Le Corbusier's design is a fusion of his forward-thinking humanist architectural ideas and the history of the site.

Cloaked within the simple, white arch-like structure of the chapel, for example, are stones used to build the previous church.

The structure is made from brutalist concrete, but because of accessibility constraints was constructed by hand, recalling the adobe, or mud brick, structures of early churches in the Middle East.

Its outward form is sculptural rather than massive, with gently curving walls, which seem to grow out of the ground.

The chapel's sail-like roof, inspired by an upturned crab's shell, appears to float above the walls, allowing a sliver of light to penetrate at the join.

Le Corbusier defied the symmetry of traditional churches by replacing conventional



windows with a series of apertures of different sizes and angles (*above*). These create a dappled light which plays on the pure white surface of the interior walls.

A religious metaphor is created by the larger opening above the cross, which casts a powerful shaft of light across the inside of the building.

The effect is breathtaking: from the outside visitors expect a dark, sombre space: from the inside they experience luminosity.

The chapel is just one of a cluster of buildings that now sit on the hill at Ronchamp.

Le Corbusier also designed a pilgrim's shelter and chaplain's house, and on the ridge of the hill, he built a Pyramid of Peace in memory of the soldiers who died during the liberation of Ronchamp in 1944.

A decade after Le Corbusier's death in 1965, the then-chaplain of Notre Dame du Haut invited Jean Prouvé, an architect, engineer and specialist in ironwork, to create the open campanile that sits on the eastern side of the church.

The structure emulates the simplicity of Le Corbusier's main building, making use of the two large bells that had survived the bombing, and adding a third that was cast for the occasion.

Between 2006 and 2011, the architect Renzo Piano was commissioned to design a monastery for the seven sisters of Saint Clare who have made their home on the hill, and a visitors' entrance pavilion.

After two failed attempts, Notre Dame du Haut entered into the Unesco world heritage listings in July 2016.

Nantes and the new art of interaction

Tour de France, July 1-23

The Tour is one of the most famous sporting events in the world. First held in 1903, it features the world's best cyclists in a three-week race on the nation's roads. More than 10million spectators will gather behind the barriers to watch the race, which is broadcast on TV all over the world.
www.letour.fr

Z'accros d'ma rue, Nevers, July 3-9

Throughout July, the city of Nevers, Nièvre offers more than 200 live events and shows during its *Z'accros d'ma rue* festival. Attractions range from circuses to comedy, and from 'fantasy shows' to concerts and dance events.
zaccros.org

Festival d'Avignon, July 6-26

The Vaucluse city's streets and buildings are transformed into sets and stages, as an estimated 130,000 people head to the city to enjoy performances to suit every taste – from comedy and theatre to contemporary art shows. Strongly recommended to all performing arts lovers.
www.festival-avignon.com/en

Festival International du Film de La Rochelle, July 12-16

A celebration of film with no competition, the La Rochelle, Charente-Maritime film festival has been running since 1973. It explores the cinematic world and meets the artists behind and in front of the lens in presenting 250 contemporary and 'forgotten' films from all over the globe. The festival welcomes international producers, directors, and actors to present their work.
www.festival-larochelle.org



Voyage à Nantes, July 1-27

Voyage à Nantes is an innovative, city-wide trail of discovery for the whole family. It links modern art installations to historic monuments around the Loire-Atlantique capital.
www.levoyageanantes.fr

Ping-pong as art... One of the interactive art installations in Nantes

Bastille Day, nationwide, July 14

The French national holiday is celebrated across the country. Major festivities take place in Paris, with a military parade from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde – passing through the Champs-Élysées. Fireworks will also light up the night sky in most

towns and cities, and there will be concerts and celebrations.

Paris Jazz Festival, July 17-30

With more than 30 concerts spread over eight weekends, the Parc floral de Paris will welcome jazz lovers to honour both the music and legendary musicians. Workshops also

take place, and include topics such as instrument building, and music and language.
www.parisjazzfestival.fr

Nice Jazz Festival, July 17-21

One of the oldest jazz festivals in Europe, Nice has become home to one of the most important international events on the Côte d'Azur. The festival

features a range of well-known artists from jazz and other genres, this year including Mary J Blige, Herbie Hancock, De La Soul and top drummer Tony Allen's tribute to Art Blakey.
www.nicejazzfestival.fr/en

Médiévales Européennes, Bitche, Moselle, July 28-30,

For a medieval themed weekend, do not miss the festival at 'la cité de Bitche' which allows visitors to experience the sights, sounds – and tastes – of days gone by. Visitors can learn all about daily life in medieval France, and take part in workshops and events specially designed for all the family to enjoy. The festival ends, as it has every year, with a dramatic fireworks display.
medievaux-europeennes-bitche.e-monsite.com

Les Nuits de Fourvière, Lyon until August 5

Every year since 1946 the Roman theatre in Fourvière, Lyon has hosted a festival –

Festival d'Art Pyrotechnique de Cannes, July 14-August 24

The festival d'Art Pyrotechnique lights up the Cannes skies for six nights, and features innovative techniques by professional pyro technicians. These artists use the sky as their canvas and compete under their country's flag for the Vestale prize. The public will also vote for their favourite displays.
www.festival-pyrotechnique-cannes.com/en



which today blends theatre, music, dance, opera, circus, and cinema. With more than 60 events taking place, it guarantees visitors a sensory overload with modern creations in a dramatic ancient setting.
www.nuitsdefourviere.com

Rencontres d'Arles, July 3 – September 24

The charming Bouches-du-Rhône city comes alive with photography as more than 60

exhibitions spring up. The works of art are created by homegrown and international artists, with both classic and up-and-coming, contemporary snappers' works on display.
www.rencontres-arles.com

The Connexion works with local tourist offices for the information on this page. Due to possible last-minute changes to programmes and event timing we recommend that you always check with individual organisers before making a trip.



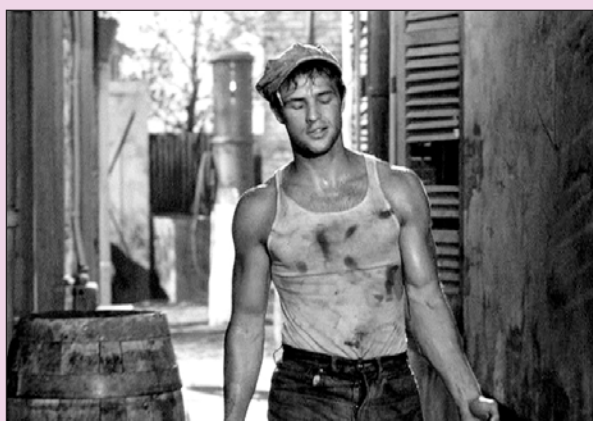
Carcassonne's medieval cité provides a stunning backdrop to the town's summer arts festival

Festival de Carcassonne, July 1-30

The stunning medieval city of Carcassonne, Aude invites you to enjoy an international arts experience which attracts more than 250,000 people. With more than 100 live shows featur-

ing music, theatre, opera and dance, spectators are guaranteed to have a captivating and emotional experience. Confirmed acts include Pixies and Kid Creole & the Coconuts.
www.festivaldecarcassonne.fr/en

Did you know?



Marlon Brando in his *Marcel* in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Marcel – the string vest with original French style

THE *Marcel* is an iconic piece of French clothing with a name that is far more evocative than the English term, string vest or singlet.

It was named after a clothes manufacturer, Marcel Eisenberg who started to produce them after he had seen them used by warehouse workers in Paris in the mid-19th century.

At that time, in the 1860s thousands of men were employed to move heavy sacks of goods in the newly built Les Halles de Paris, which was a huge glass and iron building that served as Paris' central fresh food market.

They wore heavy woollen jumpers which kept out the cold but restricted their arm movements.

The story goes that one day a worker arrived at the market wearing a jumper with no sleeves; he had cut them off himself to make his life easier. The idea soon caught on. Meanwhile, 400km away Marcel Eisenberg ran a hosiery business in the textile town of Roanne, in the Loire,

and on hearing of the popularity of this new garment, he decided to put it into production.

The *Marcel* was first worn by workmen and farmers during the summer but also in winter under their shirts.

During the First World War it became one of the regular provisions supplied to the *poilus* sent to the front to help fight off the cold.

In 1933, the string vest was launched, with its design inspired by fishing nets. After the Second World War its use changed as employees were given holidays and it was worn on the beach.

It soon became more of a fashion item and its notoriety increased in the 1950s, when it was worn by sex symbols such as Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Yves Montand in *The Wages of Fear*.

In the 1980s the word *Marcel* entered the French dictionary and it is now a regular item of clothing for both men and women alike.



Yves Montand sports a vest in *Wages of Fear*



Jewellery is as good as gold

FRENCH gold jewellery creator 'Or du monde' is like no other. He creates all of his pieces in his Parisian *atelier* using recycled gold. Once the process of recycling is complete, the gold is back to its initial purity, and can be recycled forever.

So if you would like to do your bit for the environment, and take part in a less polluting lifestyle, you might be interested in recycled luxurious gold goods that also look stylish and cool.

www.ordumonde.com

Pillow heaven

HOW about an eco-friendly and healthy pillow?

Cocarde Verte's bio pillow, filled with buckwheat or spelt, is more than a green product. Its manufacturer's say it also guarantees a good night's sleep.

The pillow allows you to choose how 'puffy' you would like it, so that it fits your shape and neck length – and it is made to stay dry, ensuring a comfortable night, no matter how sultry the weather.

Price range from €25 to €42.

www.cocardeverte.fr



Making scents

NO AUTHENTIC French *salle de bain* is complete without a bar of traditional *savon de Marseille*, a hard soap made from vegetable oils.

Now you can make your homage to the soapmakers permanent with a soap dish available from French gift provider *Saveur du jour*.

This one measures 14cm x 10.5cm and is available in a range of colours. The lavender seems most suitable when replicating the scented fields of the sunny south of France at home.

www.saveurdujour.com

Meet the bot pollution-buster

THE interior of your home could be very polluted, even if you can't see or feel it.

To fight the risks, French company 'Partnering Robotics' has created the 'Diya One' air-cleaning robot.

The robot moves around the

space, and filters air in areas it detects are over-polluted. Also, it has a specific 'memory' that allows it to always check up on areas that are usually the most contaminated and can harm your health. Prices from €999.

partnering-robotics.com



The USB with a colourful USP

Looking for USB cables at a good price? You might be interested in L'atelier du câble's colourful selection.

The French company offers a wide range of solid and efficient USB cables to fit all your

tech products. It also offers a remedy to Apple users who have broken their charger cables, offering a cable that adapts to iPhones for a very reasonable €19.90.

www.latelierducable.com



Old plastic bottles, new shoes

If you are a fan of casual footwear and a fan of eco-friendly products, Ector are for you.

Entirely ecological, the Ector sneakers are produced by French company Soft'in. The shoes are made out of knitted synthetic fibres that were once recycled plastic bottles.

The shoes are lightweight and

airy, ideal for loafing around on long summer days.

The cost of these environmentally-sound shoes is a bank balance-friendly €99.

The green footwear manufacturer also sells stylish leather shoes and slippers made from recycled material.

www.soft-in.fr



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Tel: 08 05 69 23 23
www.beauxvillages.com



From iron man to Ile de Ré oyster farmer

by SAMANTHA DAVID

THE step from metal worker to oyster farmer is not at first glance an obvious one – but it is just the career change that Didier Fournier made in 2003, when he moved to the Ile de Ré.

But even that was not enough for the iron man with a passion for the sea. After five years, he left the oyster producers he worked for to go it alone. And now, he and his wife Alexandra sell more than 10 tonnes of oysters every year.

“I used to start with nothing and work with metal to make something pretty. Growing oysters is much the same,” he said. “You start with nothing and juggle techniques to produce oysters, just when people want them.”

Traditionally, it was said that oysters were best eaten during the months which contain an “R” – but modern production techniques mean oysters can now be eaten all-year-round.

It takes three years to produce an oyster. They reproduce between May and August, when females emit up to 5million eggs and males emit up to 2.7billion sperm which float around in the sea around the oyster bed. The fertilised eggs develop organs and tissues in just four hours but continue to float around for up to a fortnight before they attach themselves to a hard surface, usually on the sea bed.

Didier makes bundles of plastic tubes which are tied to metal tables which only appear at the lowest tides. The newly fertilised oysters are microscopically small, so can only be seen the following January as the shells begin to form.

The fagots of tubes are then separated and reattached to the tables to allow the oysters space to grow. “In a good season, there are around 250 oysters on each tube,” explains Didier. He places around 6,000 tubes in the sea each summer.

When they are a year old, the oysters are brought ashore, detached from the tubes, and from each other, and graded according to size and weight. Then they are placed into metal cages which look like sacks. These sacks are then placed

back into the sea so that the oysters can continue to grow naturally. At 18 months the sacks are turned, and at two years old, they are re-calibrated using a machine to sort them according to size and weight.

The process continues for another year. “We keep sorting and cleaning them, making them as perfect as possible. And in order to have them ready just at the right times, for bank holidays and New Year, for example, we juggle their position in the sea.

“The deeper they are, they less often they are uncovered by the tide and the larger they grow. Nearer the shore they get fatter inside their shells,” said Didier. “So to produce perfect oysters and to have them ready at all times, we have to keep sorting and calibrating them – and putting them back in different positions on the beach.”

The final stage, when the oysters are three years old, is cleaning. “Oysters filter. That’s what they are, and what they do. They filter seawater and thrive on the plankton.

“So to clean them, we put them in seawater which has already had the sand and other particles filtered out of

it, so the oysters clean themselves and pump out the sand inside them so that they are ready to eat.”

Visitors can watch many of these processes

happening while enjoying the fruits of Didier’s labours at the beach bar he owns with his wife, where tables made out of tree trunks that washed up on shore are set around shallow basins containing sacks of oysters.

At high tide, it is hard to spot the oyster beds, but at low tide you can watch Didier driving his red tractor across the wet sands to tend them as you eat the result of three years’ hard work, accompanied by chilled wine.

There is no official organic label for oysters, because all edible oysters are naturally organic. The sea water around oyster beds is regularly checked for pollution.

They are usually eaten raw but can be grilled or barbequed. But connoisseurs say the best way to eat them is freshly shucked, with a view of the sea.



Didier at work on his oyster beds



“

The deeper the oysters are, the less often they are uncovered by the tide and the larger they grow. Nearer the shore they get fatter inside their shells

Didier Fournier
Oyster farmer



Didier's oyster and wine bar on Ile de Ré

BIRD BRIEFING – July

Old trees are home for woodpeckers

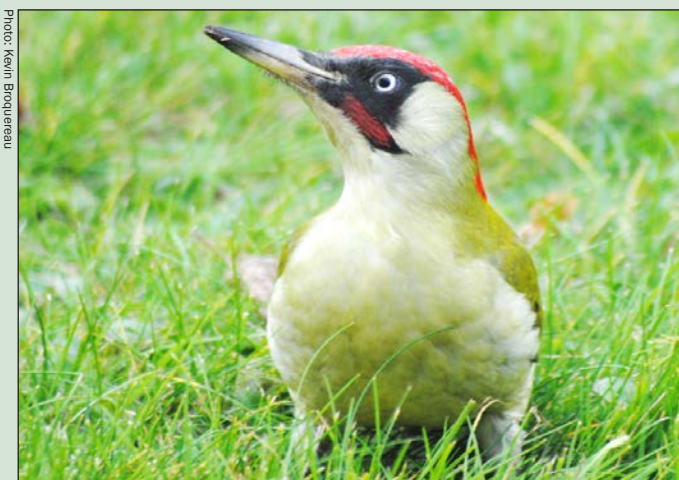


Photo: Kevin Broquereau

MOST people recognise the sound of a woodpecker long before they see it: the tap-tap-tap noise echoing through the woods as it pecks through the bark of rotting trees.

The European green woodpecker does not often peck at trees, however, preferring to hunt for ants on the ground. It uses its long beak to probe into ants’ nests and lick up both adult ants and their larvae.

Their tongues are long enough to reach right over to the back of their heads. In winter, they have been known to dig through deep snow to reach an ants’ nest.

Green woodpeckers have green backs, yellow bellies, and a red crown. Males

have a red moustache and females have a black one, making it easy to tell them apart.

Their preferred habitat is somewhere with old deciduous trees (oaks, beeches, willows and fruit trees are favourites) for nesting, and plenty of nearby ants, ie small woodlands, grasslands, orchards and lawns.

The male excavates a deep nesting space out of the tree, leaving an entrance which is 2-3 inches wide.

Once the chicks are hatched the parents feed them almost entirely on ants, and if you look carefully on the ground

underneath a green woodpecker’s nest you can find their distinctive long oval-shaped droppings, which contain almost exclusively the remains of ants.

The main threat to woodpeckers of all sorts is deforestation and the over-cultivation of gardens, meaning there are fewer and fewer old trees left standing.

Therefore, gardeners hoping to attract woodpeckers should look carefully at old and dying trees before felling them as it is easy to spot signs of woodpecker activity, ie patches of newly pecked wood, and leave the tree in place so as to benefit from having a resident ant-eater.

This column is compiled in association with the bird charity, the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux. To find out more about its work, see lpo.fr



AGIR pour la
BIODIVERSITÉ

Do the French dislike foreign wine?



A year in the vineyard
with Jonathan Hesford
of Domaine Treloar
The Terroirist

NEWS of Languedoc *vignerons* protesting at the importation of cheap Spanish wine recently prompted an interesting discussion on *The Connexion's* Facebook page.

A post linking to the report asked the question: "Do you make a point of only buying French wine? Or would you like to see more imported wines in your local supermarket?"

There were many responses about the limited choice of imported wines, which tastes English-speaking people preferred and criticism of the *vignerons* for not accepting market competition.

British and other English-speaking consumers have become used to a choice of wines from around the world in their own countries. Here in France the choice of imported wine is poor and extremely limited.

One could say that this is down to protectionism. However, I believe it really is about demand. French consumers are simply not that bothered about the wines made beyond France.

There are two main reasons for this: the first is that France produces a huge range of wine styles covering almost every wine made elsewhere. The only exceptions would be those from other European countries with their own, indigenous grape varieties. Personally, I would love to see some good Austrian Grüner Veltliner, Spanish Mencía, or Italian Nebbiolo, and I think it's a shame that French consumers and retailers do not share that desire.

However, when it comes to New World wines, the majority are copies or reinterpretations of French styles. For example, New Zealand Sauvignon blanc is a copy of Sancerre and Argentinian Malbec is a copy of Cahors.

French consumers are proud of their wine culture and value authen-

“

“Vive la différence” I say, though I still wish that included some of the better wines from other countries. I can do without cheap Spanish plonk but I wouldn't say no to a Fino or a Rioja

Jonathan Hesford

ticity, hence the AOP system which protects these wine styles.

The second reason is taste. Many of the wines that are popular in the UK, Netherlands and America are simply not to the taste of French consumers. The “Anglo-Saxon palate” prefers sweeter, smoother, fruitier wines than the Gallic one.

This is mainly due to cultural differences on when wine is consumed. Wines which go well with a meal often seem overly acidic, dry or tannic when drunk without food. But slightly sweet, soft and fruity wines are a poor companion at the dinner table.

Another criticism of French wine made on the *Connexion* thread was that French wine is inconsistent.

I think this view comes from consumers used to buying the big brands such as Echo Falls, Jacob's Creek and Kumala that are popular in the UK.

These wines are made with consistency in mind by blending grapes



There's a reason foreign wine is so hard to find in supermarkets in France, argues Jonathan Hesford, and it has plenty to do with the French palate

from many different vineyards and adjusting the acidity, concentration and alcohol levels to “correct” for vintage variation. That's very different to the French concept that wines should be true to their *terroir* and vintage.

Faced with hundreds of bottles from a multitude of unknown producers, bearing names of obscure appellations, usually with no indication of grape variety or style, it's obvious that the foreign consumer is going to make choices that end up being inconsistent.

Unfortunately for them, choosing French wine requires a fair bit of knowledge about the styles typical to regions, the strengths and weaknesses of particular vintages in those regions and knowing who the respected producers are.

I think French consumers enjoy learning those things and displaying their knowledge.

Wouldn't it be sad if French wine was dumbed down to a handful of varietal wines made by big, corporate producers simply to provide consistency for those who have not learnt the rich panoply of French wine?

Wine should be chosen for the occasion, the food being served and the people who are sharing it.

“Vive la différence” I say, even though I still wish that included some of the better wines from other countries. I can do without the cheap Spanish plonk but I wouldn't say no to a Fino or a Rioja.

Jonathan Hesford is the owner, vigneron and winemaker of Domaine Treloar in the Roussillon
www.domainetreloar.com

Artisan farm cheeses to try

ARTISANAL cheeses offer a taste of the country that giant dairy versions cannot hope to match. Here are two that we have tried in our office and liked.



Langres

This soft cheese with a yellow rind and a ripe flavour has been made in the *Grand Ouest* since the 18th century – it is even mentioned in a chant by monks from the area. It is made in moulds then dried on plane tree leaves. One tradition is to pour Marc de Bourgogne brandy or Champagne into its concave top (its ‘well’), until it soaks in. The shape comes partly from the moulds and partly because it is not turned in the maturing process. The Rémyllet family's farm in Haute-Marne is the last one making it with non-heat-treated *lait cru*.



Tomme fumée

Shepherds invented this cheese in the Middle Ages, to enjoy around wood fires in the summer pastures. They would put half a cheese in front of the fire and scrape the melted cheese onto bread – the origin of the *raclette*. Its buttery, tangy flavour and smoky aroma, which comes from the cheese being left on wooden boards to absorb flavours from beech smoke, means it is still ideal for a *raclette*. It is made in Savoie from unpasteurised cow's milk.

■ **These cheeses can be delivered by post. See laboitedufromager.com**

IN PRAISE OF PRODUCERS: La Maison du Cidre, Morbihan



Bottles of the Nicols' Morbihan cider

Third generation of Brittany cider-makers

LA MAISON du Cidre in Le Hézo, Morbihan is a family business founded in 1928 and is now run by the third generation, Chantal et Didier Nicol along with his two brothers, Jean-Michel and Pascal.

They produce traditional ciders, apple juice, non-alcoholic sparkling apple juice, cider-vinegar, and cider jelly.

They also produce calvados, made by distilling cider, rather than apples, and have a new product, ‘Pommeau’ which is a mix of calvados and apple juice intended to be drunk as an *apéro*.

They have 13 hectares of orchards, including two hectares of guillevic trees, which only grow in Morbihan, and produce their ‘Label Rouge’ Royal Guillevic cider.

“It's made entirely from guillevic apples,

which is rare. Most cider is made of a mix of apples,” says Chantal.

The brothers set up a cider-making museum 20 years ago in response to public demand. “We display a lot of our old equipment as well as some other historical pieces we've acquired through the years, and we also have a 20-minute film which explains how the cider is made. And, of course, there's a shop where people can buy our products!”

The museum has been such a success that it now regularly welcomes tour groups. “I think people are turning away from industrially-made convenience foods, towards more natural, locally-made products. People want to know where their food and drink comes from and who makes it, and I think this is a trend that is set to stay.”

La Maison du Cidre's products are not organic, but Chantal says that's mainly because of the bottling requirements. “Our apples are grown with the minimum of fertilisers and are pollinated by the bees from our own hives in the orchards.”

The apples are not picked from the trees, but gathered from the ground.

“We wait for them to fall naturally, so that they are perfectly ripe and then we gather them from the ground. It doesn't matter if they are bruised or have an insect bite. As long as they have no trace of rot, it's fine.”

La Maison du Cidre does have a website (www.museeducidre.com), but as postage is very expensive, it is best to either buy in bulk (perhaps with other friends or neighbours) or to visit the shop in person.

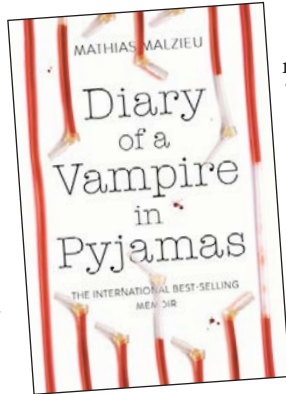


Diary of a Vampire in Pyjamas, Mathias Malzieu, Quercus, £16.99 ISBN: 978-1-78648-034-7

TO SAY hospital changed Mathias Malzieu is an understatement: he went in for tests, discovered he had a life-threatening blood disease and came out with a new blood type and different DNA.

As a best-selling writer in France, his months in a sterile isolation room proved fruitful and this wry, spirited, hopped-up but never depressing book tells of his battles both internal and creative.

Mathias is massively tired after he and his band Dionysos finish the music video for their single Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart and he goes for a blood test to find out more. A little old lady overtakes him as he walks home...



The squeamish may have difficulty with the bone marrow test... but not half as much as Mathias. "Impaled," "stabbed with a banderilla," and, as the doctor pulls it out, "it's like she's trying to tear out my ribcage." As he is given the results "the haematologist-with-the-kind-voice is walking on eggshells and the cracking is getting louder by the second."

For a man who invents true stories for a living, his life and near-death story is a rampaging bullock of a biography infused with rebellion, charm and humour. It does not feel very French – except in the speed and capabilities of the health staff that surround him – and, there, it excels.

James Baldwin – Escape from America, Exile in Provence, Jules B Farber, Pelican, \$23.96, ISBN:978-1-455620-944

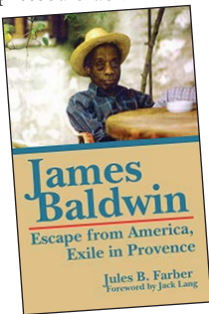
PERSONAL recollections from musicians, artists, literary figures and celebrities litter this look back at the life of the American writer who lived his last years in St Paul de Vence overlooking the Riviera.

Born in Harlem, he became a voice of oppressed black people.

He fled America for self-imposed exile in France and people such as Sidney Poitier, Bill Wyman, Maya Angelou and Harry Belafonte join friends, neighbours and lovers, to tell how they were drawn into his friendship.

Their views and his own words give an insight into a man whose convictions have been used increasingly to explain the Black Lives Matter movement and, more recently, the rise of Donald Trump.

His criticisms of American society are as relevant today as they were in the 1960s but this book highlights the differences he found in France where he integrated into a society that was utterly foreign.



The 20-minute book review

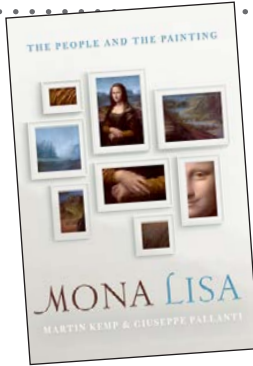
Connexion journalists read the latest French releases. In the interests of fairness, each gets 20 minutes' reading time

Mona Lisa – The People and the Painting, Martin Kemp & Giuseppe Pallanti, Oxford, £25, ISBN: 978-0-19-874990-5

HANGING in the Louvre, the Mona Lisa looks out at the jostling, Instagramming mass of visitors and her little smile hides the secrets that this book claims to unveil.

Discover Lisa Gherardini and her husband, Francesco del Giocondo; discover Leonardo and his mother, Caterina di Meo Lippi, discover the real story of Mona Lisa is 'even more astonishing than the Mona Lisa of legend'.

Martin Kemp is a leading authority on Leonardo da Vinci and he and art researcher Giuseppe Pallanti have unearthed previously unseen tax documents, letters and other papers that mock previous theories on the Mona Lisa – and Leonardo's 'birthplace' in Italy.



As a scholarly account, this is not 'unputdownable' but it is remarkable engaging on a quick flick through: Lisa meeting one of the Medici family in "a little hut" (we are assured nothing would have gone on); Her husband not being quite the Florentine silk trader history has given us but closer akin to a slave

trader and not a very likable person (which gave rise to the 'hut' story); A touching description of the painting and how Francis I was dissuaded from selling "the finest painting" in the kingdom to the Earl of Buckingham; How Leonardo was involved in the drawing of what has come to be called the 'Nude Mona Lisa' and how he created this pose; And, lastly, the surprisingly most instantly readable section on the way science has given a new view on the painting.

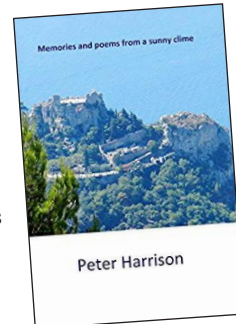
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea Jules Verne, Macmillan Collector's, £9.99 ISBN: 978-1-5098-2787-9

MORE people will have heard of this book than will have read it – they may have seen a film with Kirk Douglas or Omar Sharif – but this pocket-sized original is worth a new look. Not just for the story, which was first launched as a magazine serial in France in 1869, but for the flight of imagination and invention that it takes. It opens with seafarers worldwide being horrified at tales of a giant new sea monster and three adventurers setting off to kill it. They discover not a monster, but a submarine – and its dangerously determined skipper, Captain Nemo.



Memories and Poems from a Sunnier Clime Peter Morrison, PublishNation, £6.99 ISBN: 978-1-326-91615-2

GENTLE, amusing and easy to read, this stroll down Memory Lane is a curious introduction to one of the best-known areas of France, the Riviera, and its people. It is about an English chef who became a butler or majordome to a retired English architect in Monaco who seems to spend every moment watching tennis. He is a skinflint, so if you need to know how to get into Kew Gardens for free, how you can save €8,000 in Monaco by installing a swimming pool and how to get your speedboat and trailer cleaned for free... then read on.



Glass Half Full, Caro Feely, Summersdale, £9.99 ISBN: 978-1-84953-991-3

THIS is Caro Feely's third book on the reality of running a Dordogne vineyard and, like the others, it leaves a yearning to taste the wine for yourself, if not for the struggle to create it.

Juggling raising two children, running a 24/7 business and taking on the chemical-laden orthodoxy, Caro and husband Seán have created an organic wine that is literally the fruit of their labours.

This is no feel-good manual but it is a wonderful read as a down-to-earth insider's view of the stresses and strains that take their toll on emotions.

While just 4% of the French

wine area is organic, the Feelys' Saussignac neighbours have their various reasons for looking at what it can offer and 20%

of the area's wines are now organic.

It is a remarkable turnaround from the couple's early days but the opening chapter shows that chemicals – or lack of them – are not the answer to all the winemaker's problems. There is also hail, which can destroy grapes, future wines and future incomes.



Language notes



A picture paints a thousand words

WITH THE annual Les Rencontres d'Arles photography festival kicking off this month (see page 10), here we look at some useful photo-related phrases and French expressions.

Where else could we begin but with the selfie, obligatory every ten seconds by today's smartphone-wielding youngsters. Once upon a time, taking one's own image for posterity was a more considered affair, and had the grander name of *un auto-portrait* in France. Today, though, *un selfie* will do the trick.

While the most common way of saying 'to have your picture taken' is *se faire prendre en photo*, it is also common to hear *se faire tirer en photo*. It can also be used when describing 'having a photo opportunity'.

Commanding a group to adopt a grin for a photo has 'say cheese' in English – but this is obviously not translated into *dites fromage* as this would not produce the required mouth position. Instead, the French will ask you to make like a marmoset by enthusiastically saying *ouistiti*. This opens the mouth into a perfect grin shape.

Popular advertising slogans often find their way into the French lexicon – and "*clic-clac, merci Kodak*" is a famous one. Stemming from an ad for the US firm's Instamatic – in which the word Kodak is cunningly rhymed with the sound of a shutter closing – its usage has morphed beyond mere snapping. It is now uttered by those who have completed a little job quickly, easily or without bother.

If someone appears to be staring at you a little too intently, you might say with a hint of passive aggression and a touch of irony: *tu veux ma photo?* (do you want a picture?). Be warned, though: witty teenage wags might reply '*oui, pour mon album de singes*' ('Yes, for my album of monkey photos').

Finally, if you take a 'head to toe' or full-length photo of someone, it is called a *–portrait en pied*.

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SEE PAGE 11

French films

Our pick of the latest ciné releases



Marie-Francine

Dir: Valérie Lemerrier; 90 mins

NOT ONLY is she one of France's most popular comedy actresses but Valérie Lemerrier is also a dab hand behind the camera lens. She fulfils both duties with amusing aplomb in this slight charmer of a domestic comedy – her fifth directorial effort.

Lemerrier plays Marie-Francine, a fifty-something who finds herself rejected by both her husband (who favours a younger model) and her boss (ditto) and is forced, with much self-loathing, to move back in with her elderly parents.

The trouble is, they still treat her like a child, waking her in the mornings with puppet shows. But there is a solitary ray of light in all this gloom: at the e-cigarette shop where she finds a new job, Marie-Francine meets the sweet Miguel, a chef who – you guessed it! – is also down on his luck and living with his folks...

Also out: *My Life as a Courgette* (DVD) Stop-motion orphan animation described by its director as 'Ken Loach for kids'.



French Quiz

Test your French knowledge in our *Connexion* quiz with a twist

- 1 What language, other than French, is spoken by well over 100,000 inhabitants of Roussillon, at the eastern end of the Pyrenees?
- 2 Which French theme park's most popular attractions include It's A Small World, Big Thunder Mountain and Phantom Manor?
- 3 How many people, in various states of dress/undress, can be seen in Edouard Manet's 1863 painting 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe'?
- 4 Since its first lines were opened in 1900, the decoration of concourses on the Paris Métro have corresponded to which artistic style?
- 5 What city in Africa was the destination for a field of assorted vehicles which gathered for the first time at the Place du Trocadéro, in Paris, on Boxing Day, 1978?
- 6 What was the first name of Pierre and Marie Curie's daughter who, due to her work in the field of artificial radiation, was, like her parents, a Nobel chemistry laureate?
- 7 Which 'Loire chateau', actually on the river Vienne, underwent a spectacular 21st-century restoration and shares its name with a former Japanese camera maker?
- 8 Shortly after the Second World War, London-born Susan Travers became the only official woman member of which military body in its (now) 185-year history?
- 9 Known in France as 'Télécran', what lineographic drawing toy, invented by Frenchman André Cassagnes, first went on sale in 1960?
- 10 In which country's October 2014 F1 Grand Prix, did an accident in very wet conditions lead to the death of French driver Jules Bianchi?
- 11 Which horse with a French name was the first in post-war years to win both the Cheltenham Gold Cup and the Grand National?
- 12 What slang word for a female comes from a character in the title of an Emile Zola novel, who cut a swathe through Paris society, before dying of smallpox?
- 13 In his book *Neither Here nor There: Travels in Europe*, who mused, "... and let's face it, the French army couldn't beat a girl's hockey team"?
- 14 The commercial launch of which legendary French car was delayed for nine years by the Second World War?
- 15 Complete this lyric from a very famous French song: "*Quand il me prend dans ses bras, il me parle tout bas, je vois...*" (4 words)
- 16 Pollux, Zébulon, Ambroise, and Azalée the cow are characters from a French children's TV show which transferred to the BBC in 1965 under what title?
- 17 In a French rugby line-up, what role is played by the 'talonneur'?
- 18 Born near Boulogne around 1170, Eustace the Monk may sound like a man of the cloth, but was more famous in what other sphere of activity?
- 19 Which Cornish actress, who studied at Paris's ENSATT National Theatre School, was made a Dame of the British Empire in 2015?
- 20 What is the name of the Pacific atoll nearly 800 miles south of Tahiti, where France conducted a long series of controversial atomic tests between 1966-96?

Find the anagram! Take the first letter from the answers to the questions above and rearrange the letters to spell out the name of a famous French novel. When a person is the answer, use the first letter of their surname. Questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14

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Bilingual cryptic crossword

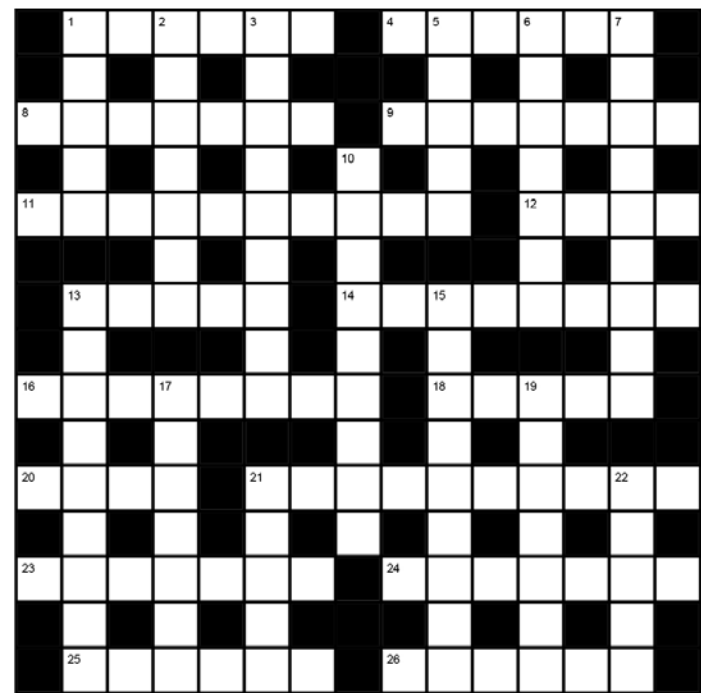
by Parolles

Answers are in French and English
ACROSS

- 1 Bound to become warped (6)
- 4 Translation of ear and lip is the same in French (6)
- 8 Out of time to find cheese in Bordeaux (7)
- 9 Identify nasty smell coming from a pharmacologically inactive medicine (7)
- 11 Bill upset by note cutting supplies of flowers (10)
- 12 Reportedly go to get unguent primarily for Elodie's skin (4)
- 13 Fellow obtaining volume of Germinal perhaps (5)
- 14 Orange peel maybe stuck in German soprano's teeth (8)
- 16 Nice of Colette to have the same opinion about keeping fit for the most part (8)
- 18 Attendant describing length of a beach in Cannes (5)
- 20 Olivie's handsome boyfriend (4)
- 21 American almost certain to collect good price for a vacuum cleaner in Rennes (10)
- 23 Foreign artist's touring France initially (2,5)
- 24 Wine's provided by charitable donations accepted by me and Thierry at the end (7)
- 25 Impersonate king taking in oddly neglected Brummie to sleep in Versailles (6)
- 26 Waits for Amelie to object after a race (6)

DOWN

- 1 Country singer's debut broadcast over a year before (5)
- 2 Loves to maintain fellow discov-



ered in mobile home comes from Nicholas II's family (7)

- 3 Near to opening time before weapon is found in disco for instance (9)
- 5 A sailor coming up for a book of maps (5)
- 6 Chimp getting into key cupboard eventually broke free (7)
- 7 Give a false impression about current support to have Irish bookshop in Paris (9)
- 10 Has a strong desire to hug office worker for a long time in Nice (9)

- 13 Disregarded information about shot heard outside European court (9)
- 15 Of great significance on both sides of the Channel (9)
- 17 Study French imperialism's origin in a composition by revolutionary leader (7)
- 19 One mat you said to break Luc's fall (7)
- 21 Famous mathematician beheaded on island is also French (5)
- 22 Affect greatly with well-informed conclusion (5)

ACROSS: 1 Spring, 4 Pirelli, 8 Fromage, 9 Placebo, 11 Carnations, 12 Beau, 13 Novel, 14 Grinders, 16 Agréable, 18 Plage, 20 Beau, 21 Aspirateur, 23 At first, 24 Malmsey, 25 Dormir, 26 Attend. DOWN: 1 Syria, 2 Romanov, 3 Nightclub, 5 Atlas, 6 Escaped, 7 Librairie, 10 Longtemps, 13 Neglected, 15 Important, 17 Etudier, 19 Autisme, 21 Aussi, 22 Upend

French-themed crossword

by John Foley

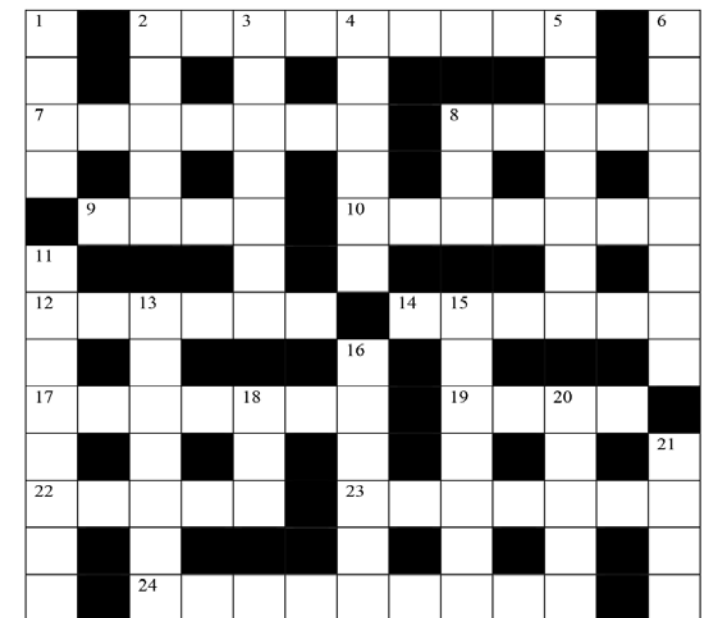
Note: all answers are words or names associated with France

ACROSS

2. Philosopher best known for the statement 'Cogito ergo sum' (9)
7. *Petite boîte* (7)
8. Artist of *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (5)
9. *Caractère d'imprimerie* (4)
10. Montmartre-born painter best known for his cityscapes (7)
12. Have expensive tastes – *avoir des goûts* ____ (2,4)
14. *Appellation pour avocat* (6)
17. English word for a lightweight, hooded waterproof jacket – from French for balaclava (7)
19. *Grand cervidé* known in English as an elk or moose (4)
22. *Empreinte*, left by the *cervidé* above perhaps (5)
23. *Fuite devant le danger* (7)
24. Term for a girl or woman beginner or novice (9)

DOWN

1. Beer glass for 25cl (4)
2. Guillaume ____, 15th-century Franco-Flemish composer of church music (5)
3. Adjective for an *air grave* (7)
4. 'Etre ____, c'est pour moi une manière de changer de vie tout le temps: jouer rapproche de l'enfance' – Marion Cotillard (6)
5. Spasmodic contraction of the



throat, accompanied by tears (7)

6. Riviera town on whose beaches Brigitte Bardot once frolicked (2,6)
8. *Ouvrage de maçonnerie qui sert à délimiter un espace* (3)
11. *Qui concerne l'éducation* (8)
13. Michel ____, Paris-born composer and three-time Oscar winner for film scores (7)
15. Normandy commune, capital of

- the Orne department and birthplace of St Thérèse de Lisieux (7)
16. Most widely planted grape in Bordeaux (6)
18. She's one (3)
20. Ridge of rock in mountainous regions – after the French for 'fishbone' (5)
21. Northeastern city at the confluence of the Moselle and Seille rivers (4)

French quiz and French themed crossword answers

ANAGRAM: CANDIDE
FRENCH QUIZ ANSWERS: 1 Catalan, 2 Disneyland Paris, 3 Four, 4 Art Nouveau, 5 Dakar (Paris-Dakar rally), 6 Irène, 7 Chinon, 8 French Foreign Legion, 9 Etch-a-sketch, 10 Japan, 11 L'escargot, 12 Nana, 13 Bill Bryson, 14 Citroën 2CV, 15 la vie en rose, 16: The Magic Roundabout (Le Manège Enchanté), 17, Hooker, 18, Piracy, 19, Kristin Scott Thomas, 20, Moruroa/Mururoa
FRENCH-THEMED CROSSWORD SOLUTION:
ACROSS: 2 Descartes, 7 coffret, 8 Manet, 9 type, 10 Utrillo, 12 de luxe, 14 Maitre, 17 caquille, 19 élan, 22 trace, 23 lâcheté, 24 débutante
DOWN: 1 bock, 3 sérieux, 4 acteur, 5 sanglot, 6 St Tropez, 8 arete, 11 éducatif, 13 Le grand, 15 Alençon, 16 Merlot, 18 une, 20 mur, 11 éducatif, 13 Le grand, 15 Alençon, 16 Merlot, 18 une, 20



Laurent and Lisa get to grips with a hefty Chambord chandelier before re-hanging it after repair (clockwise, from above)



Photo: Ombres et Facettes



A modern design from the company's showroom

Chandelier-maker thrilled to 'bring light' back to Chambord

by SAMANTHA DAVID

A contemporary chandelier-maker was thrilled to be asked to help with the restoration of historic lighting at the famous Château de Chambord in the Loire Valley.

The team at Ombres et Facettes, based near the chateau at Saint-Laurent-Nouan, Loir-et-Cher, is more accustomed to creating exclusive modern lighting for wealthy private clients around the world.

But they were delighted to assist in the mould-making, polishing and re-hanging of Chambord's 'Hollandais' chandeliers.

"We would never have imagined being asked to carry out restoration work at Chambord," company co-founder Valérie Bouloche told *Connexion*. "As well as the obvious prestige, we were also excited to give back a little light to a chateau that we love. Our employees, our children, they all love the chateau."

The company was founded in 1994 by Valérie and husband Laurent, along with Jordane Le Déan and Lisa Cauwet, and all were inspired by the crystal and bronze chandeliers of the 18th century.

At that time, the French Royal Court was

at the peak of its splendour and the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles was the height of ostentatious home-deco fashion.

Modelled on chandeliers of that époque, the work of Ombres et Facettes is very much in demand.

They design chandeliers from scratch, working in silver, gold or nickel, assembling everything and wiring it to produce perfect lighting for billionaires in Russia, the US, UAE, Hong Kong and the UK as well as in chateaux across France.

They also made chandeliers for the 2007 wedding of Tony Parker and Eva Longoria.

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Work to save tower fit for a king

The Cordouan lighthouse was conceived as a beacon and a palace. After centuries of saving lives, continuous work is needed to protect this historic monument

by SAMANTHA DAVID

ENGINEER Louis de Foix was so consumed by the construction of the Cordouan lighthouse, 7km offshore on a small islet near the Gironde estuary, that he poured his entire fortune into the project. Destitute, he died before it was finished, having dedicated decades of his life to the project, which was finished by his impoverished but equally enthusiastic son.

The Cordouan lighthouse, constructed between 1584 and 1611, is the oldest in France. Small beacon towers had existed on the site since 880 and a wooden structure had been erected there in the 14th century. But the construction of the lighthouse was ordered as the dangers of navigating the estuary were affecting the Bordeaux wine trade.

Engineer and architect Louis de Foix was commissioned by Henri III to design and oversee the construction, which was to be a "royal work", part lighthouse, part palace, part fort. It is constructed on a 2.4 metre high circular base, 41 metres in diameter, on top of which are four more floors, each slightly narrower than the one below, like a wedding cake.

The ground floor provided living quarters for four lighthouse keepers, with a richly decorated central entrance hall. Above that was the king's apartment, including a drawing room, anteroom and some other smaller closets. Above that is a chapel with a stunning mosaic roof, above which was a secondary lantern, topped by the main one.

The original light (oak chips burning in a metal container) was 49 metres above the sea and could be seen from approximately 6km away.

The entire building was constructed not only to last but to be as impressive as possible, decorated with gilt, carved wood and stone, arched doorways and statues. Constantly battered by the Atlantic Ocean, the lighthouse always needs repairs. Parabolic lamps were added in 1782, and major renovations were carried out between 1782 to



Around 22,000 visitors cross the 6km to the lighthouse during low tide in the summer when it is open to the public, but helicopters do the heavy lifting

1789 during which the 30 metre tower was heightened. In 1790 the topmost lantern was 60 metres above the sea and was equipped with the very first turning light (designed by a watchmaker in Dieppe) fuelled by a mix of whale, olive and rapeseed oil. In 1823 a rotating design using rapeseed oil pumped into the lantern by a suction and force pump was installed.

It was renovated again in 1855 and became a historical monument in 1862. Now 68 metres above the sea,

against the lighthouse incessantly, damaging the stonework and even the foundations, meaning that maintenance is ongoing. The current round of repairs has been taking place every winter for the last four years, and it still is not finished. Replacing the stone blocks takes great skill and patience as each one has to be replaced individually and many are highly decorated and carved. The techniques used are reasonably straightforward, says the architect in charge of the works, Franck Lamendin.

"Working on a lighthouse means there are extra difficulties with access and supplies, and managing the team because we're out at sea, working at great heights in all weathers," he said.

He and the stone masons can only access the lighthouse at certain tides, and only then in good weather.

"The team generally try to travel to the lighthouse on Monday morning and come back to the mainland on Friday afternoons, and every one of them volunteered for this job.

The next two winters will be spent repairing the north facade and then a year for the west facade, and after that there may be plans to restore the interior. "It is sumptuous, amazing, the most extraordinary building," says Mr Lamendin, who is as absorbed and passionate about the lighthouse as was its creator Louis de Foix.

"A lighthouse is more than mythical and iconic, it's a person, a real personality to me. It defends humans.

"It's a fantastic gift, at the end of my career, to be working there. It's the same for everyone else on the team. We love this place."

Around 22,000 people visit the building every year, which is open to the public from April until the end of October, and climb the 301 stairs to enjoy the breath-taking view from the platform surrounding the lantern. According to the tides and the weather, access is only possible on certain afternoons from 2.30pm to 4.30pm and almost always involves a short ferry rides followed by 20 minutes of wading through knee-high waves and scrambling over slippery rocks.

Only 30 people at a time can visit and get a taste of what life is like there. (The keepers also have a Facebook page detailing their lives in the lighthouse. During the winter the keepers rotate, two of them spending a week there, and then a week ashore, and in the summer the rotation is a fortnight in the lighthouse and one week ashore.)

To arrange a visit see www.phare-de-cordouan.fr



The lighthouse was automated in 2006, the current round of winter repairs replacing stonework has taken four years

the lamp was finally converted to gas in 1907, then to electricity in 1948 and in 2006 it was fully automated and still functions today.

Lighthouse keepers are still employed, partly to show tourists around, but also to maintain the building and prevent vandalism.

Nature however is as destructive and violent as ever. The ocean crash-

“

We're out at sea, working at great heights in all weathers
Architect Franck Lamendin

"You couldn't force people to do it, they have to want to," he says. One of the trainee stone masons this winter was a woman and he says it is an increasingly common career choice for women.

This winter the weather was reasonably clement, the waves were not too high, the winds not too strong, and the work advanced well.



With free ski passes, cheap fitness activities and much more, sport is not just for the young

French people are seriously in love with the great outdoors and it is a great place to stay fit and young. **Sally Ann Voak** discovered the benefits of being active when her family moved to the Alps and speaks to others on their ways to keep healthy

THE Gallic passion for enjoying activities in the fresh air is part of their national identity and extends into the "golden years".

The opportunities for trying something adventurous are limitless at any age. To maintain or even improve your *bien-être*, the best medicine is *le sport*, and it is fun to combine sport passion with seeing more of France and sampling different local cuisines.

I am 75 and an enthusiastic skier and after 40 years of sitting on my bottom as a journalist, I decided I would rather spend my seventies up a mountain than up the pub!

In the Grand Massif, as in many other ski stations, ski passes are free for over-75s and my free pass is as precious as my London bus pass!

It means I can glide down 140 pistes next season without paying a euro and, as my family have shown me the benefits of real cardio activity in the mountains, in summer, it gives free access to mountain-top *randonnées*.

La randonnée pédestre is an obvious choice of activity for retirees, but climbing, cycling, white water rafting, orienteering, canoeing, skiing and snow shoeing are not seen as daft or risky for a healthy older person.

But, as I have found, there are many other options and, when back in the UK, I have even taken up ice skating after 60 years...

Maggie Fletcher, Manche

MAGGIE Fletcher says that the exercises that she has been using are helping to keep her body supple and have proved a great social idea, too.

Former primary school teacher Maggie, 70, says: "Yoga and Tai Chi Keep my body supple."

She and husband David, 73, retired from Hampshire nine years ago to a small village near Mortain, Manche.

They have a son, daughter and four grandchildren who love to visit.

Manche department in Normandy is popular with golfers with eight courses (from nine to 18 holes), some playable all year round, which is perfect for keen golfer David.

Maggie says: "I was keen on hatha yoga in England, but never had time to do many classes."

"Now I try different types of classes



Sally Ann Voak shows her free ski pass with son, Tom, who has a holiday business in Samoëns, Grand Massif

Sue and Malcolm Hudson, Haute-Savoie

SEVEN years ago Sue Hudson, 71, moved from Northamptonshire to Samoëns, Haute-Savoie, with her husband, Malcolm, 73, and they are enjoying their leisure time so much they "feel ready to tackle anything".

The couple worked seven-day weeks in the UK running their successful shoe business, so did not have time for taking up sport properly, although they both enjoyed cycling.

"It became more and more of a hassle because of increased traffic and lack of time so I sold my bike," Sue said. "When we moved here to be near our son and daughter, who run chalet holiday companies in the Alps, the first sport I tried was snow-shoeing"

"Our elderly guide offered his flask of a potent local liqueur to flagging stragglers. When he led us behind a breath-taking waterfall the stragglers soon sobered up!"

"I felt free and energised."

"Malcolm got straight into skiing and disappears every morning during the season. I don't ski but found I loved exploring the trails through the mountains, so I bought snow shoes and went walking with pals while our other halves hit the slopes."

Malcolm encouraged Sue to get back on her bike and she bought a lightweight model. He said: "When spring arrived, with all the wonderful villages to explore, we tried the flat roads in the valley. One day, we put the bikes on the car roof rack and cycled around Lake Annecy: heaven!"

"Now, we go on cycling holidays with some close friends, all expats and all over 70. This year, we've explored the Camargue together."



Kate and Mark Banks have a gîte business in Les Ecrins but love their active days in the hills

"There's great cycling for all levels in France with special traffic-free roads which you can research on the internet and at tourist offices. Sue prefers the gentle gradients, while I am into the more challenging routes."

Malcolm added that, despite general thinking, "we older folk don't 'slow down'. In fact, we have more responsibilities than ever. When Sue and I get home from a cycle ride, we feel ready to tackle anything."

Kate and Mark Banks, Haute-Alpes

KATE and Mark Banks summed up their new lifestyle in France, saying: "We have 300 days of good weather here, so what's not to love about winter sports, hiking and kayaking?"

The couple have lived in the beauti-

ful Les Ecrins national park area near Briançon for 17 years where they have built up a successful gîte business.

Now aged 55 and 52, with three children, all educated in France, they cannot imagine their later life without sport and adventure.

"If we had stayed in Hertfordshire, we would have had to go to the Lake District to pursue our love of kayaking and climbing," says Kate.

"Instead, it is readily accessible and as we get more leisure time, we are making the most of it."

"I walk our two Border Collies two or three times a week, we go on *randonnée* hikes with friends, sail in summer, ski in winter and Mark loves mountain biking and kite surfing."

"Briançon is the highest city in Europe, with 300 days of sunshine each year, so we are never put off by bad weather."

"The health benefits for both of us are excellent, and we are full of energy. We went back to the UK recently, and my arthritis played up!"

The couple enjoy introducing their visitors (their accommodation is mainly in old houses in the historic Ville Vauban, renovated by Kate, Mark is a lawyer) to the huge variety of sports in the region.

"We have roughly half and half French and British guests. Many Brits come for the kayaking and climbing, then find other sports they enjoy."

"Newcomers are surprised at the choice and accessibility of sport, especially the older guests. In the UK, you have to travel, and the weather is unpredictable. Here, we have wonderful terrain: mountains, lakes, rivers, good weather. In winter, there's skiing and snow shoeing."

"There is a strong ethic in France that everyone should be able to enjoy our beautiful country, young and old alike. We really love that feeling."



Tai Chi teacher Katy Hamlett and Maggie Fletcher get in form



Dressage events keep Diana Costes Brook fit but she warns that falls hurt... a lot



Sue and Malcolm Hudson have enjoyed cycling holidays as well as having great rides near home

Diana Costes Brook, Eure

AS A horse rider, Diana Costes Brook was delighted to find the level of riding and access to good trainers and horses is very high in France. "I loved riding in England and when I moved to France I specialised in dressage and now compete regularly."

Diana, 57, says: "If you enjoyed riding as a youngster and want to take it up again in retirement or are just a beginner, there are plenty of opportunities and wonderful places to explore."

"The Grande Randonnée 35 runs for about 180km from Verneuil-sur-Avre to Seiches-sur-le-Loir and is right on my doorstep, so I ride out two or three times a week. I moved here from the south of England and riding is part of Normandy life. I now compete on my own horse with some success in dressage at a high level. You are never too old to improve!"

Diana and French husband Bruno acquired Château de la Puisaye in Eure, Normandy, in 2002, renovated it and now run a successful B&B and gîte business – plus keep sheep, hens, three horses and a donkey.

"Properties usually have more land in rural France, so keeping a horse or pony is a possibility, but you must find out from your mairie whether you can build or convert an outbuilding into a stable – not always possible because agricultural-use only restrictions are strict in France."

"If you take up equestrian sports in retirement, remember your body is not the same as it was. Falls hurt more and you can do more damage!"

"However, I find riding keeps me fit and helps me relax. Dressage is a skill I could have developed in the UK, but it fits in so well with the country lifestyle here. I love it!"

Now try it for yourself...

IF YOU want to try something new, look in your library or médiathèque, which will have contacts for many sports groups. Here are some sites:

Fédération Française des Clubs Alpains et de Montagne (www.ffcam.fr)

A good starting point for more on climbing, hiking, skiing and ski-touring, vélo, télémark, snow-shoeing, Nordic walking, and handisports (mountain sports for the handicapped). There are 420 clubs and the site has links to them all, plus upcoming events and videos.

Fédération Française de Cyclisme (www.ffc.fr)

Contact a club for BMW, road biking, vélo or touring on this site that has a special section for women. For more on cycling, Yorkshireman Richard Peace is the author of four guides to cycling in France, including the Avenue Verte from Dieppe to Paris and, next year, Paris to Mont-Saint-Michel. He recommends electric bikes for older people. "You can buy one for about €500 but hire first to try. Many retirees have found the extra power has rekindled their love of cycling!" Find bikes to hire, including electric at www.freewheelingfrance.com

Fédération Française d'Equitation (www.ffe.com)

This site has a complete list of riding schools; just type in your postcode. If you enjoyed riding as a youngster and fancy returning to a gentle, convivial form of the sport, explore France via group pony, horse or carriage trips along the trekking routes which criss-cross the country, (with accommodation en route). Relearn basic equestrian skills first with a group or one to one lesson.

Fédération Française de Canoë-Kayak (www.ffck.org)

With more than 700 clubs and divine rivers and lakes to explore from the Ardèche to the Canal du Midi and the northern canals, this is a great site for info. If you live in Manche area, kayakavanches.fr is hosting an escorted, day-long kayak trip to the Chausey archipelago.

Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre (www.ffrandonnee.fr)

The club's philosophy is "One day on a footpath, eight days of good health" and the site follows this up with clubs, maps, health and safety information, types of walking and hiking (including Nordic Walking) diet and hydration tips.



Photo: Nono VII CC BY-SA

Did you take up sport when you retired? Maybe you whizz across a beach on a sand yacht, have gained your parapente licence or enjoyed open-water swimming?

Tell us about your activity, and how it has improved your health, lifestyle and *joie de vivre*! Email us at news@connexionfrance.com and send photos...

I wish more of my UK patients could be as keen on health

MEDICAL writer, GP and TV health expert Dr Rosemary Leonard is a senior partner in a South London surgery, has a holiday home in the Alps, skis with her two sons and loves to cycle as much as possible.

Rosemary, 60, says: "I am inspired by the French love of sport. I wish more of my UK patients were as enthusiastic! You can do so much to improve your health and mobility in retirement if you get moving."

"For instance, loss of skeletal muscle mass (sarcopenia) is a huge problem in old age, and can cause as many fractures as osteoporosis, as well as a flabby bum! It's also a major cause of obesity as muscle tissue burns calories more efficiently than fatty tissue."

"Depression is another health problem which can increase and is helped by exercise. Over-60s like me have more fun and live longer if they get active."

"If you have an underlying medical

“

You can do so much to improve health and mobility in retirement if you get moving

Dr Rosemary Leonard



Photo: billwaters 355(L)

condition you must obviously check with your doctor and be cautious about doing too much too soon.

"But, these days, exercise is prescribed for rehabilitation after heart attacks and other problems, so it could be just what you need to help your recovery."

"Driving everywhere becomes a habit, so as you now have more time, cycle or walk instead."

"My French friends think Londoners are potty to struggle through traffic jams to a sweaty gym when they could be exercising in a local park."

"Sedentary oldies are more susceptible to diabetes, high blood pressure, breathlessness. I know the score, so it makes sense to avoid those problems."

"If you're are lucky enough to retire to France, copy the locals!"

■ Anyone starting regular sport should speak to their GP. Events such as cross-country runs, ski tours and cycle rallies have strict health and safety rules. Sports authorities, or fédérations, have affiliated medical advisers and organisers often demand a medical check-up or certificate.



Dr Rosemary Leonard has written a book, *Menopause: The Answers*

Payment problem hits sport prescription plan

SINCE March, doctors have been able to prescribe sport or other regular activities for patients suffering long-term illnesses such as heart and lung problems, diabetes and others.

However, although the activities have been shown to improve patients' quality of life and, in many cases, allow them to reduce their medication, no financing for this *activité physique adaptée* has been put in place.

Some towns, such as Strasbourg where the idea started and where it has been tested with success since 2012, fund sports facilities and coaches for patients and around 15 other towns do similar.

Funding can also come at a regional level through various health initiatives while associations can also offer activities funded from their own resources.

For many other patients, their *mutuelle* complementary health insurance

may pick up part of the bill (as an example, Maif reimburses €500 per patient each year while CNM offers €200 and SwissLife will pay 50% of the costs).

About 10million people in France suffer from a long-term illness (a list of officially recognised ones is at tinyurl.com/ycxkxpgm) and the sports prescription is written by a GP or specialist who feels a patient will benefit.

Most doctors already recommend that their patients be more active but not many GPs have sufficient sporting knowledge to direct a patient towards the best activity and there is, as yet, no network of sports/medical professionals to give information.

The government's Conseil National des Activités Physiques et Sportives has costed some of the benefits of exercise, saying that for diabetes it cuts care costs by 50%.

DIRECTORY



Use these pages to find English-speaking tradespeople and firms across France.
For your security, we check that all French businesses listed in this section are registered.
The listings are arranged geographically by the 5 landline telephone zones of France.

P29 All of France All Tel Codes	P32 North France Tel Codes 01 - 03	P32 South East France Tel Code 04	P33 South West France Tel Code 05	P34 Classifieds	P37 Property
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Why using a bilingual insurance broker in France gives peace of mind and saves money

From car and house insurance to health insurance top-ups, from school insurance to business, finding the right insurance cover is a vital part your expat life in France – and key to your peace of mind.

ASTRAL's bilingual team has been helping expats with their insurance needs and concerns for nearly 15 years. Its staff understand the concerns that expats may have and are ready to help – with everything from advising on the best policies to handling claims.

They can help you with all types of insurance and work with many different companies to find you the best deals with the best cover, service and price.

We asked the company's Nick Chubb about some of the key areas that might affect expats looking for insurance cover and how Astral can help.

How does a broker work for you and add value?

A broker is your single point of contact for all potential insurance policies, to save you going to different individual companies.

By sourcing quotes from a panel of insurers, and fully understanding the client's particular requirements, the broker can find the best quality and best price.

What are the benefits of using a bilingual broker?

Our team speaks French, which gives access to the best deals, and can help you to get the forms right when you need to make a claim.

Which insurers do you work with?

We work with a considerable panel of major French insurers and some from overseas. Because of the close working relationships we

have with insurers, we know their pros and cons in certain areas of insurance. We get the best deals and can process claims smoothly and quickly through our personal contacts.

Does a broker usually recommend just one insurance company for all types of cover?

No, we work with many different companies so we can get the right package for everyone.

The key to using a broker such as Astral is that we can provide bespoke cover for a range of needs, allowing us to cherry pick on your behalf the most suitable insurer for each type of cover.

Conversely, should all of your insurance needs be perfectly met by a single insurer, Astral would also recommend this to you too according to your best interests and requirements.

What happens when I need to make a claim?

When you need to make a claim, Astral take

the pressure and stress away by handling the negotiation with the insurer on your behalf.

Our dedicated claims handler will deal with any claims you make, so you have peace of mind that everything is being done correctly and you don't have to worry about any of the complicated paperwork.

Trusting a company when you first buy insurance is one thing, but the real interaction between client and insurer is at the time of a claim.

So the broker helps with the forms and translating documents?

A broker can add value and really help in putting together the correct documentation to present to the insurer. France has different processes and obligations on claims processing and it is important that the correct procedure is followed.

For instance, in the case of car insurance, the correct completion of the Constat Amiable at the time of an accident by both

parties is essential for the right outcome of a claim. The appropriate boxes on the Constat must be ticked to accurately reflect responsibility and therefore where blame should be attributed. If not done correctly, the wrong responsibility could be applied to the detriment of the client.

Can you guide me through the claims process?

Yes, this is where the advice and direction of the broker or agent comes to the fore. We can advise you fully on the whole process to make sure your claim is successful.

Next month: Nick will pick a topic in more detail to share with readers.

Astral is fully ORIAS-registered. It operates throughout France and has offices in Marseille and the Minervois. For further information, please contact Nick.

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WITH 20 years of experience, Cowling Agriculture supplies tractors and machinery to smallholders and farmers in the UK and Europe.

The company keeps 80 to 100 tractors in stock, both new and used, along with a comprehensive range of machinery. It also has a well-equipped workshop and proficient staff who service and repair used tractors and machinery.

It specialises in putting together tractor and machinery packages for first-time tractor owners. Kim Cowling from the company said: "We take the time to listen to customers' requirements so that we can

supply a competitively priced and suitable package. We are often able to supply tractors and machinery to customers in France for a much lower price than they could source them locally. We pride ourselves on our friendly advice and excellent aftersales service."

Cowling Agriculture has been a dealer for the Landlegend range of tractors – which Kim says are the best value and most popular compact tractor on the market – for more than 10 years.

"The Landlegend 25hp tractor provides a very good spec for a very good price," she said. "It is £5,395. It can easily be fitted with a 4in1 loader and backhoe, making it ideal for farmers, smallholders, self-builders and equestrian yards. Our second-hand tractors start from around £2,500 and come fully serviced, checked over and with a minimum of six months warranty. We can team these

up with toppers, chain harrows, logsplitters or rotovators."

For customers in France wanting to see the tractors and machinery in action, the company can put them in touch with one of its many existing tractor owners. Kim said: "We have 50-plus Landlegend tractors working in France, plus many other used tractors and individual machinery items. We have many customers who come back to us to add new machinery."

The company regularly has deliveries covering the UK, Ireland and France and the driver is able to fully demonstrate the tractors and machinery on arrival.

It keeps machinery for all seasons and often runs special seasonal offers. The stock list can be viewed on the website.

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COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Houses on Internet: A Global Property Network

Houses on Internet – Global Property Services (hereafter referred to as “HOI-GPS”) is the internet/marketing company that helps people sell their French property to buyers worldwide.

RICHARD KROON, founder and director of the company comments, “The number of responses from prospective buyers and sales keep rising. One of the reasons for this is undoubtedly because we have been able to increase our worldwide advertising budget and reach more prospective buyers than ever.”

In the last year HOI-GPS has sold to people from 12 different countries, including Australia, Belgium, Holland, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Canada and of course France.

Richard continues, “Our continuous global marketing is definitely paying off and guarantees a worldwide exposure of your property to buyers wherever they live.”

The actual work all starts with the presentation of a property as, if that is not good enough, all other marketing efforts will be useless. HOI-GPS photographers usually take between 150 - 200 photos of a house and in addition request any good (summer) photos clients may have taken themselves. Around 50 - 60 of these photos are then selected, enhanced and presented on a dedicated website which is created for each property.

The accompanying text does not just describe the house, garden and outbuildings, but includes information about shopping, schooling, airports and leisure etc.

Richard explains further, “When the website for the house is online, it is firstly connected to our main HOI-GPS websites which attract over 135,000 visitors from 40+ countries each

month. Most of these people find us through Google and additional Google advertising.

“To reach an even larger audience, a summary of the presentation of the house is also placed on several other leading property websites. These adverts are also connected to the dedicated website of the house, making it all one big global property network.

“As the property market has become a global one, a prospective buyer can be at the other end of the world while the seller is in bed sleeping. With our approach the buyer does not have to wait for information but can see the entire property whenever he wants so at the very moment he is interested in it.”

For more information on HOI-GPS or to market your property with them please visit the website.

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Richard Kroon is director of Houses on Internet – Global Property Services

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Company owner Andrea Watson said: "If you want to order a new sofa or something from somewhere that offers free UK delivery, why not get it delivered to our warehouse in Lincoln? There is always

someone available to accept deliveries and we will keep them safe and bring them straight to your door."

The firm is also offering 60-days of free storage for people who use the transport service, which could be very useful if you are moving to France but either haven't found a new property yet or your new home isn't ready for all your belongings.

With Watson European, you can rest assured that your belongings – and your stress levels – will be looked after. Andrea said: "For us, it's the small things that make the big difference. Moving home is often a stressful experience where the best-laid plans can take a sour turn. Many of our clients remark how having our friendly staff available at the end of phone is one of the most reassuring aspects of our service. Being there to deal with the smallest of detail is what our job is all about."

With weekly services to and from France, the team is there to assist every step of the way. Its services include relocation services, from partial house removals of pre-packed items to a complete packing and delivery service of a full home. The company's specialised vehicles ensure your goods arrive in perfect condition.

Watson European also specialises in vehicle transportation, including cars, vans, motorcycles and plant equipment. Andrea added: "A wise man once said 'you can't buy experience', so why not take advantage of our 20-plus years in road haulage? For more information, please visit our website or get in touch for a no-obligation quote."

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With comprehensive sales and marketing strategies, and second to none advice, **ARB French Property** run by Adrian and Jacqui Bunn specialises in helping vendors promote properties on-line to find English speaking buyers.

TO HELP sellers find UK and International English speaking buyers, ARB French property employs an array of pro-active methods. ARB French Property promotes private for sale properties throughout France.

As well as a presence on the ARB site,

the company's marketing ensures every property is also seen on a range of leading UK web sites, plus international sites to attract buyers from Holland, Belgium, Sweden, USA and others.

Adrian comments "It is our philosophy to offer the same high standard of marketing for all properties year round. All homes for sale on our web site benefit from up to 30 photos, room by room description and free floorplan.

"Using our extensive experience, we help sellers by creating the advert for them. Our newly introduced silver service is proving to be very popular. It offers the biggest savings compared to traditional agency rates, and includes a visit to photograph.

Jacqui explains "We want all our vendors' homes to look as good as they can, so they attract as much interest as

possible from the potential buyers out there. This is why we are always pleased when we receive such positive feedback".

Some recent client comments to ARB French Property include "All completed yesterday, thanks so much for the introductions" while a satisfied buyer wrote "recently completed a purchase of a property discovered on your site, thoroughly delighted with the experience."

If you are struggling to get the interest your home deserves, are thinking of selling your home, and want a pro-active marketing approach and extensive coverage along with sound advice on how best to present your home, please call or email Adrian or Jacqui.

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We're a joint venture company, which is owned by Mary Hare School for deaf children and a large multi-national hearing aid company. 50% of our profits go to Mary Hare School, so by having your hearing aid repaired with us you're actively supporting the education of hundreds of deaf children and young people.

Our highly trained technicians have many years of experience in repairing all brands of hearing aids including: Widex, Phonak, Starkey, Oticon, Unitron and Siemens.

We offer a clear pricing structure with no hidden extras. So if a repair is going to cost more than our standard charge we won't proceed until you've given us the go ahead. Our standard repair comes with a 6 month warranty against component failure, excluding amplifiers and RIC units. You can also send us your hearing aid for a free, no obligation quote. And if you decide not to go ahead with the repair, we'll return it to you at no extra cost.

We understand how important it is for you to receive your hearing aid back quickly and working to its full potential. We use original parts, unless they're discontinued due to the age of the hearing aid, and the turnaround time for most repairs is 2 - 3 working days.

If your hearing aid isn't working don't replace it – repair it. But don't just take our word for it. Here's what our customers say:

"The hearing aid arrived today! One week turn round from France - amazing! Fantastic price and excellent service! Thank you so much for your excellent, helpful and inexpensive service, I will recommend you everyone I know. You have saved my sanity and the last of my savings!"

"Wonderful service - quick, comprehensive and very cost effective - I would recommend them to any hearing aid user!"

"Amazing turnaround 48hrs. Great service from HARS. Friendly and helpful correspondence and I would highly recommend them. The only place I go to fix my hearing aids."

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Complete solution to fosse septique problems

There's little worse than a smelly or blocked fosse septique, but there is a simple, ecological and cost-effective treatment, say **Eco-tabs Europe** founders Shelly and Tim Burns-O'Regan

WITH costly emptying charges and the potential to smell or get blocked, fosse septiques can be a homeowner's nightmare.

But an innovative product now exists which not only takes away the need to empty your fosse, but also removes odours and reduces blockages.

Eco-tabs are purely bacterial-based, not a combination of enzymes like many competitive products. They help to increase overall system efficiency, reduce costly maintenance and eliminate the need for toxic chemicals

and special handling procedures.

The tablets work by oxygenating the water in the fosse, removing hydrogen sulfide odours, preventing corrosion, and initiating aerobic biological breakdown of organic sludge, including oils and grease.

Store bought products that are enzyme based liquify the solids for them to reform later. So you will still need to pump out your tank. Eco-tabs degrade the solids and remove those pesky odours.

Company founders Shelly and Tim Burns-O'Regan say: "Our company is founded on the core belief that eco-friendly, non-toxic waste treatment products have become a necessity in today's environmentally sensitive and fragile ecosystem. We also provide excellent customer service and follow up as fed back from our customers."

An eco-tabs Clean out Pack starts at 66€ (exc TVA, p+p) for a standard 3000 litre tank compared to the cost of a pump out

truck ranging from 125€ up to 400€, this is a no-brainer.

"Simply flush a tablet down the toilet each month to maintain a healthy fosse septique. Or, as an alternative to pumping out, use two tabs and one bag of our Shock powder and watch the magic."

"Not only do the tabs oxygenate the water, which removes the odours, the sludge is eaten away by the bacteria. The result: a clean fosse which does not need to be pumped out... all that remains is water."

Eco-tabs are compatible for old septic tanks right through to the new microstation systems.

To ensure that you are only buying the products necessary for your tank, we offer a Personalised Treatment Plan which will recommend the ideal products for you. Visit: www.eco-tabs.biz and click on the link for a Personalised Treatment Plan.



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"IT IS shame when house sellers who have tried so hard to achieve the best price for their house then relinquish an unnecessary chunk of these funds by using old fashioned, expensive banking methods to repatriate their money back into sterling, dollars or whatever", says Harris Raphael, Managing partner of France-based Pioneer France.

"The seller often relinquishes thousands which could have been so easily avoided

had they used a specialist Foreign exchange broker. Our historic data shows that the average loss is around €3,500", comments Harris.

Historic data shows that sellers are much less likely than buyers to use the services of such a specialist. Harris believes that this is primarily because the profile of a typical seller is usually older than that of a buyer, with sellers more likely to have traditionally used a bank for their transfers, while being reluctant about using 'newer methods'.

"I understand this completely, especially when it concerns one's major asset!", says Harris "However, Pioneer France's foreign exchange brokerage has been operating for over 35 years, is one of the world's largest, trading over €13billion on behalf of over 20,000 clients a year, in over 80 currencies.

"It is also one of the very few that is fully authorised and regulated by the FCA, with

the right of establishment in France".

"As such, our brokerage can provide our clients with security of funds and can give expert currency exchange guidance to aid our client's decision making, which the banks are not licensed to do", advises Harris.

Pioneer France was recently voted number one for foreign exchange rates and service, so contact Harris and his team to find out more about saving thousands.

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The Pioneer France FX team, from left: Harris, Simon, Tanya, Zoe, James and Steven



Transport company delivers on old-fashioned values

Finding a reliable delivery company that will look after your possessions as well as you would is hard to find. But **George White European** is renowned for providing a removals service that exceeds expectations again and again

MOVING to France or from France, and having goods delivered between the two countries, is often a process that is thwarted with problems. Belongings being delivered to the wrong destination, late arrivals, meaning ferry bookings are missed, and, in extreme cases, a lorry load of possessions getting "lost" en route – these are all horror stories that have been heard time and time again.

Reliability, trustworthiness and respect – these qualities are all cornerstones of the service that George White European provides to its customers.

"At George White European we pride ourselves on our old-fashioned values," said George. "We really look after all our clients,

offer a bespoke service to each and every one, and always ensure that goods and belongings are delivered on time, safely and without any problems."

Having started driving over 30 years ago – and obtaining an award from the European Road Transport Union for three million kilometres of safe driving – George White is highly knowledgeable about French and British roads, and always delivers and picks up when expected, and at the agreed price. Over the years the company has evolved into a trusted network of like-minded owner drivers. The team consists of Ray, who has a panel van; David, Mark and Mick, who have large

multi-purpose 40-tonne articulated lorries; and Lee who drives a large low loader.

It is not just removals that George and his team transport to and from France, the company delivers anything from new furniture, kitchens, cars, fencing, horse feed and building materials to even tractors. All customers need to do is contact George for his depot address, which is near Nottingham, in the UK, and then arrange for their goods to be delivered there. In addition, as the company is based near a B&Q trade outlet, George also offers clients an easy way to order goods from B&Q: via his own trade account.

"Customers can place orders through George White European which we then pick up from B&Q and deliver to the customer," he said.

"And, as a special bonus, any customer having goods delivered from our depot can also order a supermarket shop as an

Using large multi-purpose vehicles allows George White European to cut charges to customers



added extra."

Depending on the areas being collected from and delivered to, the minimum load could be as little as 2 linear metres of removals, (which is 2.6m tall and 2.4m wide), and from as little as £440 + VAT. At the other end of the scale, a full 13.6m-long load (max 24 tonnes) of domestic removals can be handled for around £2,500 + VAT and fuel surcharge, depending on the locations involved. As the team typically operate along routes

to and from south-west France, the costs are kept low as the vehicles can be filled with other goods for much of the journey.

"George gives great service at a great price," said a recent customer. "Do not be fooled into thinking that he is too cheap – he is just honest."

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- ▶ URSSAF: English-language website: **www.anglais.urssaf.fr**

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- ▶ SOS Help: similar to the Samaritans, with listeners who are professionally trained. Tel: 01 46 21 46 46 (open 3pm–11pm daily) or **www.soshelpline.org**
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- ▶ Elizabeth Finn fund: help for Britons and Irish people facing hardship, including for residents of France. See **www.turn2us.org.uk**
- ▶ BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT NETWORK: for those grieving for a loved one and needing to talk. Tel: 04 94 84 64 89 / 06 32 35 31 24 or email **info@bsnvar.org**
- ▶ THE BRITISH CHARITABLE FUND, PARIS: provides financial help to British residents in France. Tel: 01 47 59 07 69 or email **britishcharitablefund@orange.fr**
- ▶ Alzheimer – Bergerac English help group at France Alzheimer: Tel: 05 53 27 30 34

More community events

Château de Josselin



Photo: Emmanuel Berthier/CRTB

The AIKB – a non-profit making association that helps newcomers to settle into their new life in Brittany – is planning a visit on June 29 at 2pm to the Château de Josselin, Morbihan, its gardens and fabulous collection of 5,000 dolls and children's games (the biggest in France). This historic castle offers a thousand years of history, a fairy tale castle with three mighty towers, and majestic reception rooms open to the public. Château de Josselin, Place de la Congrégation, 56120 Josselin. Price for AIKB Members €15, Guests €18. www.aikb.fr

Marilyn le Moign opens her garden on July 1 & 2 as part of *Rendez-vous au jardin*. Located in central Gouarec, the 8,000 sqm garden is divided into different themes. The €5 entry fee (children under 12 free of charge) – will benefit les Compagnons de l'Abbaye de Bon Repos. Address: 16 rue au Lin, Gouarec.

Troupe Arlequin will present *Fumblings at Friar's Bottom* – a hilarious farce set in a slightly decaying private school in 1956 – in Gouarec, Côtes-D'Armor from July 7-9.

Set in a classroom, the play follows the exploits of the teaching staff on Open Day. With the school under threat of re-development by an American property tycoon, will the vicar's plan save the school?

A light meal, cake and drink is included in the €9 price (advance only). For the Sunday matinée, afternoon tea will be served. Collège Notre Dame, 4 rue St Gilles, 22570 Gouarec at 7.30pm, Friday and Saturday (doors open at 6.45pm), Sunday at 2.30pm (doors open at 1.45pm). Tickets are available from www.aikb.fr

Created in 2015 by the Association Les Amis du Festi'Val de Musique and the British company Love to Sing Opera, the **Festi'Val de Musique** in Le Val, Var, encourages cooperation, friendship and cultural relationships between French and British by working together to produce a high-quality musical project within a fortnight.

In July, they are staging two abridged operas: Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and Puccini's *Suor Angelica* with double bills on July 19 at Jardin Théâtre, Le Val; July 20 at Théâtre de Verdure, Correns; on July 21 at Château de Vins-sur-Caramy and July 22 at Château de Carcès. 8.30pm start, €10 entry.

They will also be performing at two free mixed music concerts on July 13 (including a performance of Fauré's Requiem) and 15 in Le Val. For details on participating visit lovetosingopera.com/le-val-music-festival

Let readers know about your community event

Let readers know about your association / club / church or other community group via the community page at www.connexionfrance.com/Community

You can also list your association there. All listings and event postings are free

We will also place as many as space permits on this page each edition (For commercial events contact us via sales@connexionfrance.com)



Photo: US Bierry

THE CSSG summer market, with stalls and live music plus La Vendée Chippy, takes place on July 2 at Cham-bord, La Bourchère in support of ex-services charities in France. Contact Terri on 05 49 64 07 24 or email terri.laverick@outlook.com to book a stall.

A day out for green-fingered Brittany residents: Owen and Sue Cake invite AIKB members to an open day to **discover their nursery garden** with its wide range of David Austin roses. Sue is offering to hold a floral workshop using flowers cut from the garden to make floral gift posies and table decorations. She always has plenty of home-made cakes to keep everyone going – also tips on cuttings and plant division and over-wintering techniques. Please reserve, limited numbers. Meet at the garden in Lostanien, (direction Chapelle du Mur) 29270 Clédén-Poher, Finistère. August 3 at 2.30pm, price €6.



The grandparents of a baby who tragically died after being born 15 weeks early decided to take on a 1,600km **fundraising challenge** – for UK premature baby charity Bliss – in her memory.

Kathy, 69, and Hugh Carmichael, 68, cycled through the Alps with their friends Steve Wilshaw and Christine Johnson, both 65, and completed a number of challenges based on figures from Chloe's life. They cycled 1,565km (Chloe weighed 1,565g when she died) and climbed 12 mountain passes – one for every week that she lived.

'We reflected on our good fortune to be doing what we do and got on with our task of trying to hit the targets,' said Steve on his Just Giving page after a difficult day in the saddle with temperatures of 41C.

You can still donate at www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Chloe-Cycling-Challenge

The Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) **Summer Hog Roast** takes place on Sunday July 23 at 4pm at the Château du Petit Marais, 17400 Saint-Julien de L'Escap, Charente-Maritime, in support of the welfare work in SW France of the Sud-Ouest France Branch of RAFA. The cost is €20 per person (free for under-16s) and includes aperitif, starter, Hog Roast, cheeses, dessert and all drinks. To join in contact Terry Dennett on 05 46 95 38 89 or RAFASOF@Orange.fr on or before July 9.

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€85,000

Grignols : Aquitaine

Character 18th century 2-bedroom house (around 120m²). Possibility to extend into the attic. Mains drainage & structural works done (roof+walls). Close to all amenities. French 0033 5 57 46 34 34 English 0033 5 53 58 49 44

REF: IFPC28453



ENERGY RATING = not given

€550,000

Saint-Coulitz, Brittany

Charming 15 bed holiday complex. There are 3 cottages, a bourgeois house, a barn, a hangar, a well and gardens. Sold fully furnished and equipped. Very good income! Tel: +33 (0)2 98 86 03 55

REF: IFPC28545



ENERGY RATING = not given

€360,000

Campagnac: Midi-Pyrénées

Lovely renovated 5bed farmhouse. Large kitchen, living room and large detached study. Gite accessible from main house, sleeps 6. See www.danslepre.eu for more details. Tel: +33 (0)5 63 40 59 82

REF: IFPC28596



ENERGY RATING = G

€66,000

Moncoutant: Poitou-Charentes

Charming detached three bedroom property on three levels, in need of refreshment, within walking distance of all amenities of Moncoutant. The property is 18km from Bressuire and 30km to Puy du Fou (tourist attraction), 100km to the sea, 80km to Poitiers airport. REF: FP-68707CLN79



ENERGY RATING = F & G

€77,000

Courcité: Pays de la Loire

Suitable as either a permanent or holiday home this is a detached 3 bedroomed house with attached barn with garaging set in it's own grounds of just over 3/4 of an acre in a country hamlet. Courcité offers local amenities with bakery, bar/restaurant, grocer and school. REF: FP-68530KTR53



ENERGY RATING = E & D

€89,000

Vittel: Lorraine

Independent authentic 5 bedroom house located on the edge of a small village near Monthureux sur Saône. Roof in good condition! Adjoining barn/garage and stable. Heating with wood stoves. Pleasant private backyard. The ideal location for nature lovers, hiking and biking. REF: 1384



ENERGY RATING = F & B

€99,000

Spézet: Brittany

The 4 bedroom property has had new UPVC double glazed doors and windows fitted throughout. Great views of the countryside from nearly every bedroom window. It is situated just a stone's throw from the town centre containing shops, restaurants etc. REF: FP-69044SSM29



ENERGY RATING = E & F

€108,000

Salies-de-Béarn: Aquitaine

This three storey 2 bedroom town house is ideally situated within walking distance to all the shops, bars and restaurants of this lively thermal spa town. In good condition throughout, the sitting room opens onto a pleasant courtyard garden. REF: 1184



ENERGY RATING = E & C

€123,200

Saint-Sornin-Leulac: Limousin

Pleasant house with basement comprises: entrance hall, dining room, kitchen, living room, 3 bedrooms, gym, bathroom, WC. Oil fired central heating and wood burning stove. Garage and cellar. Adjoining land of 2641m² overlooking the countryside. REF: 14185



ENERGY RATING = E & E

€136,525

Lezay: Poitou-Charentes

Situated in a village in between the market towns of Melle and Lezay. This super character south west facing 5 bedroom property has been renovated, has light airy rooms and offers 186m² of habitable space. All but the garage is double glazed and the roof is in excellent condition. REF: 3541



ENERGY RATING = C & A

€145,000

Castelnaudary:

Languedoc-Roussillon
20 minutes from Castelnaudary, A beautiful 3 bedroom village house of 135m². In good condition with a lot of character, renovated to keep the authenticity. There is a small south facing garden of about 65m².

REF: 830036305522

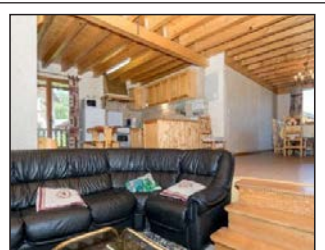


ENERGY RATING = E & B

€168,000

Les Chapelles: Rhône-Alpes

This is a charming 4 bedroom village house renovated in 1993, in the centre of Les Chapelles, a village just 7km from Bourg St Maurice where all amenities can be found. It has easy access to Paradiski - La Rosière - Val d'Isère and Ste Foy. Has beautiful mountain views. REF: E00243



ENERGY RATING = F & D

€189,000

Langoëlan: Brittany

Opportunity to purchase an established pizzeria with separate self-contained 3 bedroom owners' accommodation and good-sized garden. This superbly-renovated stone and slate building is situated in the centre of a village close to the church and town hall. REF: LBVImmo1192



ENERGY RATING = C & B

€201,400

Saint-Priest-de-Gimel: Limousin

Located in a green setting, stone building with slate roof. Composed of an entrance, kitchen, cellar, WC, spacious living room. An office, a room with bathroom to renovate. Four bedrooms, two of which have a toilet, one with ensuite. Independent bathroom and toilet. REF: TE2473ia



ENERGY RATING = G & D

€214,000

Carentan: Lower-Normandy

In a pretty village located 12km from the beach, typical French stone house in a lovely setting. It comprises at the ground floor hallway, living-room, kitchen, sitting-room; 1st floor with landing, 4 bedrooms, bathroom; large attic above. 2 main large outbuildings. REF: 22633

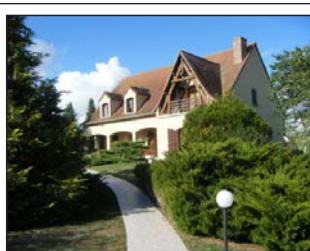


ENERGY RATING = C & D

€234,300

Argenton-sur-Creuse: Centre

This super 5 bedroom property is located just 10 minutes from the medieval market town of Argenton sur Creuse. The 255m² house has a large basement comprising a summer kitchen/utility room and a vast garage area, a cellar and 3 other rooms. REF: 1541



ENERGY RATING = E & C

€258,000

Pluvigner: Brittany

A beautifully renovated 5 double bedroomed house situated in a rural hamlet, close to a small town. Traditional beams, chestnut flooring and exposed stone walls have been retained, whilst adding a new kitchen, bathrooms, complete insulation. Garden with pool. REF: LBVImmo618



ENERGY RATING = D & C

€292,000

Domfront: Lower-Normandy

Superb entirely renovated house. Ground floor: large fitted kitchen, living room opening onto a sunny terrace with pergolas. Laundry room with WC. 1st floor: landing, two rooms with ensuite. 2nd floor: two rooms with ensuite. Attic and barn. Garden of 4052m². REF: 680



ENERGY RATING = E & F

Avocat specialising in International Family Law helps Britons in France

What are the consequences of Brexit on Family Law? What will happen to British nationals wanting to divorce in France? **Me Aurore Cressent** outlines the position

FIRST of all, pursuant to article 3 of Brussels II Bis EU Regulation, British nationals will keep the opportunity to get a divorce in France, provided:

- the spouses are habitually resident in France, or
- the spouses were last habitually resident in France, insofar as one of them still resides there, or
- the respondent is habitually resident in France, or
- the applicant is habitually resident in

France if he or she resided there for at least a year immediately before the application was made.

Brussels II Bis EU Regulation is part of French Law and applies without consideration of the nationality of the spouses. Indeed, even if the UK comes to be out of this Regulation it will still apply to British nationals residing in France seeking a divorce in France. In the same way, French courts will have jurisdiction over the children residing in France on

parental responsibility matters such as residence of the children and contact rights, pursuant to article 8 of the said Regulation.

On child abduction cases, Brussels II Bis Regulation shall not apply any longer if the UK is no longer an EU member state and no agreement is found to maintain the application of the said Regulation. Practically, the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction will be used and its provisions are similar to those of Brussels II Bis Regulation.

Enforcement of French court decisions in the UK shall go through a mechanism of recognition to be set in the UK which will no longer be bound by an automatic recognition.

As far as divorce is concerned, the real change for British nationals residing in

France will not come from Brexit but from the national reform of French divorce which came into force on the 1 January 2017. Since that date, divorce by mutual consent is no longer decreed by the judge. Since it is no longer a judicial decision its enforcement might be difficult to be obtained abroad.

Aurore Cressent who is an Avocat specialised in International Family Law involving British nationals helps you to go through all your Family Law issues.



Me Aurore Cressent specialises in International Family Law

For more details:
<http://www.cressent-avocat.com/en>

Independent buyer's agents across France

"Although buyers are well protected in France from a legal viewpoint, the property listing system and lack of market transparency can make property hunting here a challenge," explains independent buyer's agent Sophia Mose of **The French Property Finders**.

AFTER a career as a corporate lawyer in New York and London, Dutch-born Sophia moved to France with her family in 2005. She runs property search agency The French Property Finders (TFPF) and with her team covers southern Provence, the Côte d'Azur and the Dordogne. TFPF's partner buyer's agents are based in Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, the Alps, the Gard, the Gers and the Ariège.

"Most of our clients had been looking for a while without realising that independent buyer's agents existed in France." Sophia summarises the challenges for house hunters that led to the emergence of this relatively new profession in France: no central property database for agents; no automatic commission sharing among agents; buyers usually list with multiple

agencies; limited property details are provided; and actual prices paid are not publicly available. Also, agencies that list properties must obtain the highest possible price for their client, the vendor. As a result of all this, house hunters are unable to determine fair market value. Because of these stumbling blocks, there was a strong need for independent professional buyer's agents in France. In Paris, the first *chasseurs immobiliers* emerged in the late nineties and it is now an established profession. Buyer's agents must hold the same real estate license and professional responsibility insurance as listing agents. They also must satisfy continuing education requirements and comply with the profession's code of conduct.

The TFPF buyer's agents are all fluent in at least French and English and have years of experience with extensive local market

expertise and invaluable contacts. "Once clients find us, they inevitably tell us that they wish they had known about us earlier and hadn't wasted time and money looking on their own." TFPF agents work with all vendor agencies and also look for private sales and off-market properties. They pre-visit properties for clients and provide detailed and frank reports with tons of photos. "We organise the client's shortlist viewings and accompany them, we negotiate the price and assist throughout the entire purchase, and beyond. We always continue to share our contacts and information and remain the client's trusted local expert."

Contact Sophia on
+33 (0)652 36 06 64
contact@thefrenchpropertyfinders.com
thefrenchpropertyfinders.com



TFPF buyer's agents represent your interests and ensure you don't overpay.

Family business provides the A – Z of groundwork services in SW France

SC ASPHALTE Groundworks is a family business which is based in SW France and has met clients' needs for 20 years.

FOUNDER Stuart Cruikshank says "I have actually known the region for 40 years as my parents bought an old farm house here in 1978. A lot has changed in that time, Les Landes and Les Pyrénées Atlantiques are up-and-coming with new shopping malls, Sunday opening, Christmas decorations and lights in the big towns. In one way it is a little sad to see the old traditions being lost but it's great for the younger generations to come and enjoy the area with its sea surfing, mountains, walking, skiing..."

Stuart continues, "However the landscape is still the same; the houses are still cheap enough to buy and do up slowly and that's

why we have been successful over the last 20 years by specialising in all types of groundwork and meeting client needs. Whether you are a house owner or a professional, we are one contractor offering a wide range of groundwork skills to clients in south west France including, resurfacing - tar and chip, garden paving, coloured gravel and chippings, red or black tarmac, asphalt. Digger work, excavation and rubble infill.

"We also undertake drainage work - pipework, septic tanks and drains, demolition including site clearance, small building works for example edgings and pillars, together with the related garden work

you would expect, tree and hedge cutting, and root removal."

SC Asphalte Groundworks can landscape your property from A to Z starting with the excavation of the land, digging and laying the foundations of your house, install ducts, cables, pipes, create a temporary access for bricklayers and carpenters, install your sanitation (septic tank, grease tank, sand filter) and connect you to the mains drainage. They can also create and landscape your garden, create, improve or renovate your paths / lanes / parking with borders of all kinds and undertake the drainage and evacuation of water, lay gravels of various colours, tar with black or coloured chippings, black, red or even beige tarmac.

The company's expertise goes beyond this. As Stuart says, "We can also build your gateway foundations and posts and install electric gates, concrete slabs, erect fencing,



concrete, aluminum, pvc etc.

"Major works we have recently undertaken include clearing and contouring land for building, laying drains and putting in septic tanks, resurfacing driveways, laying the hard standing for cars, digging the hole for swimming pools and removing trees.

He concludes, "We also assist with smaller works such as urgent callouts when clients' drains fail, small external building works and

doing those things which finish work off - delivering the chippings for drives, installing the edging, putting up shutters, gutters etc." SC Asphalte Groundworks serves Dax, Orthez, Mont-de-Marsan, Pau, Bayonne and their surroundings.

Web: www.sc-asphalte.fr
Tel: 05 58 98 81 75

High achieving school's underlying philosophy is happiness in education

The Old School is an independent international Collège and Lycée, recognised by the Academie de Bordeaux RNE 0471040A. The Old School specialises in positive education outcomes for children, young people and families.

THE qualified specialist team at The Old School place equal share on maintaining academic achievement and the development of emotional intelligence, personal and social education. This approach underpins the professional strategies to assist children, young people and families when making the transition to France.

The Old School is not just about academic success, although it is a high achieving

school. The focus is on the holistic needs of the learner. An underlying philosophy is happiness in education. An open and transparent approach, where staff work for, and on behalf of, children, young people and families. This cooperative and empowering professional relationship enables success and high achievement.

Whilst the teaching is in English, The Old School is committed to social cohesion and is fully embedded within

its local French community. This unique opportunity allows meaningful and real cultural experiences, assistance from reliable sources to enable successful relocation, language development and genuine cultural experiences.

True education empowers the individual to effect positive change. Education challenges prejudice, hatred, and enables empathy and positive emotional intelligence to achieve success.

The Old School is an approved Edexcel examination centre, with facilities for external students to take iGCSE, GCSE and A level examinations whilst in France. We are proud of our consistently excellent examination results.

We are delighted to announce that The Old School is expanding because of the recognised, increased demand from families relocating to France.

In addition to our high achieving Art & design school we are pleased to announce, from September 2017, the launch of new departments.

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Cut your hair short and boost charity that helps cancer sufferers

IF YOU have long hair and want to get it cut short you could donate your locks to an association which helps cancer sufferers on low incomes buy attractive, comfortable wigs after chemotherapy.

The founder of Solidhair, based in Val d'Oise, Sophie Bouxirot, had long hair and decided to have it cut off after the birth of her first child. She wanted to do something useful with it and discovered a Belgian association with the idea she has taken up.

She runs the association from home with a friend and husband Patrick as secretary. They sort hair and do paperwork after the children have gone to bed.

Mr Bouxirot said: "We receive 2-3kg a day and have helped 84 patients buy a decent wig. They are very grateful and often send us letters of thanks.

"Social security gives €125 towards a wig but cheap ones can be scratchy and uncomfortable. We give €300 to anyone who earns less than €1,500 a month." The figure is increased by €200 per dependant for people with children.

They receive hair from individuals and 940 hair-dressing salons, which is sold to four wig makers, with the resulting money being used for the grants which people then use to buy a wig locally.

Hair should be at least 25cm long. It is suggested to put it into ponytails before getting someone to cut them. Then roll the hair into kitchen paper and post it to Solidhair, 14 Rue des Fauvettes, 95450 Us-en-Vexin. Alternatively go to a partner hairdresser (see association-solidhair.fr) who also offer deals to supporters, such as free cuts.



Workers set to benefit in social charge reform plan

ONE OF the more controversial proposals of President Emmanuel Macron is raising the social charge the *Contribution sociale généralisée* (CSG) by 1.7% as part of a redistribution of charges aimed at benefitting, in the main, people in work.

The measure is expected to come at the expense of retirees (but not those with the smallest pensions) and those receiving income from rents.

CSG (see column right) is – as its name suggests ('generalised contribution') – levied on all kinds of income, apart from certain social benefits such as family allowance or RSA income support.

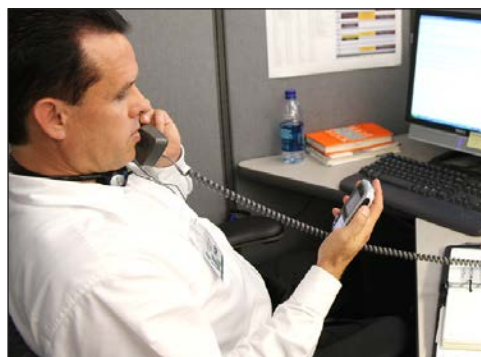
This 'flat tax' (it does not rise in bands like income tax) was introduced in 1990 at a mere 1.1% and has since periodically increased.

The plan is to increase it on most kinds of income, though not small pensions or unemployment benefit, with the proceeds going to compensate for a linked plan to end the employee's part of *cotisations sociales* for healthcare and unemployment for private sector workers. As a result, claims the En Marche! (Macron's party's) website, "social protection will no longer weigh so heavily on salaries, and will be financed in a fairer way".

The main beneficiaries would be private sector workers: for a person on the Smic, removing the health and unemployment part of the charges (respectively 0.75% and 2.4%) would mean a gain of around €46 per month, while the additional CSG would represent just €25 less, meaning a net gain of €21, or just over €250 a year.

Up to a certain very high level (there are maximum income ceilings beyond which no unemployment *cotisations* are payable) the amount saved would increase as salaries increase.

However for the lowest-paid workers it is pro-



Workers may have more at the month end

posed that the measure would also be boosted by a 50% increase to the *prime d'activité* benefit.

A way of compensating for the increased CSG is being worked out for public sector workers and the self-employed, for whom the measures would not be so beneficial. Self-employed workers do not pay unemployment *cotisations* and *fonctionnaires* do not pay them for health and only pay a reduced rate for unemployment.

The losers would include retirees who pay full-rate CSG (eg. single people with annual pension income of more than €14,375) and people on very high salaries (more than €156,912/year). People who receive capital incomes may also lose out – probably not interest and dividends for which a new fixed rate levy is planned, but, notably, income from renting out property. However a government spokesman said plans to remove *taxe d'habitation* would help balance out the effect.

The plans are yet to be approved by MPs and may also pass to the Senate.

What is the CSG?

CONTRIBUTION sociale généralisée (CSG) is a tax that helps finance the social security system. It is levied on salaries and bonuses at 7.5%, pensions and unemployment benefit at 6.6% (3.8% for those on low incomes), property and investment income at 8.2% and certain kinds of gambling at 9.5%.

The government refers to it as a tax – which makes sense because unlike the *cotisations sociales* that workers pay towards healthcare, family allowance etc, no direct benefit is gained by the payer. However it is a grey area because it is also considered (and often called) a kind of 'social charge', a view which was confirmed in the 2015 De Ruyter case in the European Court.

This said residents of other EU countries owning properties in France, and others who are not 'affiliated' to the French social security system such as British retirees who have never worked in France and whose healthcare is paid for by the UK, should not have to pay CSG (or some other similar charges). This is because Europeans should not have to be affiliated to, or pay into, more than one social security system.

This resulted in the possibility of refunds of charges that had been paid on property and investment incomes by these groups since 2012, when France started making the charges on non-residents.

However, as of 2016, France is levying the charges on everyone again, having changed the way that the CSG on property and investment income is used. It now goes to the *Fonds de solidarité vieillesse*, which funds the Aspa pension top-up benefit for low-income pensioners, a non-contributory benefit for which you do not need to be 'affiliated' to social security.

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How are capital gains calculated on shares purchased in the UK?



Photo: Artur Gabrysiak - Fotolia.com

WE ARE selling shares we bought in 1972 and these are showing considerable capital gains (purchase price £2, current price £22). Are capital gains for these shares calculated on their UK purchase price or value at time of taking residence in France? R.M



Send your
financial queries to
Hugh MacDonald at
news@connexionfrance.com

SINCE you are resident in France and not the UK, the Double Tax Treaty gives the benefit of taxing the gain to France.

The gain is based on the purchase price. So, you need to convert the acquisition cost into French francs in 1972 and then convert the francs into euros at the rate of 6.55957:€1, and convert the sterling sale price into euros at the rate on the day of the sale.

Please note that in light of owning the shares for more than eight years, you are entitled to a reduction of the capital gain of 65%.

Do we have to declare returned loan from our daughter?

OUR daughter in the UK recently sold her house and returned some of our input which was given as a gift to us. This money has been returned to my wife and I in France but we wonder if we are meant to make a declaration to the French tax office? D W.

NO, the return of capital on a UK loan is not declarable.

How is 'income' defined for official procedures in France?

MANY French formalities, such as paying to join Puma (former CMU) or applying for social security benefits, ask for your 'income' figure. How is this defined? B.R

The figure is often the *revenu fiscal de référence* as indicated on your income tax assessment. This is usually found at the end of the details on the inside pages of your assessment (*avis d'impôt sur le revenu*). It is sometimes also reproduced in the box on the front.

It is calculated by the tax office based on your net taxable income, give or take a few adjustments: it may be increased by the addition of certain kinds of income that were exonerated from income tax or that were subject to a fixed levy of tax at source, or certain abatement amounts or deductible expenses. The *revenu fiscal de référence* is used for formalities such as students applying for means-tested grants or for gaining exonerations from local property tax.

When it comes to the income for working out 'Puma' payments for the healthcare of early-retirees, this is a new scheme, with the first payments

only payable later this year, so it is being clarified. The texts refer to 'capital' incomes, but this seems to be being taken as referring essentially to incomes other than from work (note that if work income goes over a certain minimum the Puma *cotisation* is no longer applicable). From information received from the social security authorities (see column right) *Connexion* understands that it is going to be essentially the *revenu fiscal de référence* that will be used, as was the case with CMU which it replaces (though logically it should be minus any amount for part-time work). The authorities reserve the right to apply a higher figure if your lifestyle is conspicuously luxurious compared to your declared income.

Some official procedures use slightly different income calculations, for example certain Caf welfare benefits so you need to check case by case. As an example, RSA or ASPA income support take account of all money coming in during the previous three months, minus certain non-declarable sums (for ASPA this includes financial help received from children).

Does Brexit endanger tax 'benefit' of owning a UK property?

I AM British and live in France and am considering investing in property in the UK.

One favourable element is that, based on the existing UK France tax treaty, UK rental income is taxed in the UK (including a UK tax free allowance) rather than in France.

I understand that the UK France double tax treaty is outside of the Europe and Brexit scope. However I was wondering based on recent events, if you thought there is an increased risk of losing this benefit at some point in the future? A.C.

YOU ARE correct in that article 6 of the double tax treaty states that the rental income is

taxable in the UK, however article 23 also applies. This article enables the French to take the UK rental income into account so as to push up the tax rate that will be applied on the income that the French can tax.

Here is an example:

If you have French taxable income of, say, €26,818 (excluding any 10% abatement that may be applied, for simplicity), €9,710 of your income will be taxed at 0%, and the balance of €17,108 will be taxed at 14%.

If you then add into this UK rental income of €10,000, while it is true that in the UK this will not be taxable since it will fall under the per-

sonal tax allowance, the French will take it into account to compute the French tax. As a result, total tax due (after deduction of a tax credit for the UK income) will be €3,930 as opposed to €2,395 without the UK income.

You might think it is unfair but in fact it is correct, since this measure removes the advantage that you would otherwise have had of benefiting from two sets of personal allowances and two sets of tax bands and rates.

As such, therefore, it is not really an advantage, and since the double tax conventions are outside of the scope of the EU, the measure as stated above will remain after Brexit.

Social security chiefs answer your queries

We put questions from readers to the office of Thomas Fatome, director of social security. Several relate to Puma, which replaced *CMU de base* for people such as early-retirees who have not worked in France. For a fuller version with extra questions see connexionfrance.com (this is subscriber-only content).

My husband and I are British retirees. He worked as a *commerçant*, but I have not worked so I am his *ayant droit* (dependent) for healthcare. Now that this status is being abolished, do I have to do anything? What will happen to my rights in the future?

If you were already recorded as your husband's *ayant droit* at the end of 2015 you may keep this status until December 31, 2019. At any time you may ask to be attached to the *assurance maladie* on a personal basis by contacting your healthcare *caisse*. By the end of 2019 (at the latest), the *assurance maladie* will undertake measures to update your dossier and attribute rights to you personally and no longer as an *ayant droit*. This change has no effect on your healthcare rights.

I understand that even though the *ayant droit* is being abolished, people whose spouse works [as long as they earn more than 10% of the *plafond annuel de la sécurité sociale*, PASS, ie. €3,923] will still have no Puma payment to make. Please can you confirm that this will still be the case in 2020, after the *ayant droit* status has completely stopped?

Yes, that is correct.

The rules for the Puma *cotisation* refer to your 'income from capital'. We have British private pensions, but not state pensions. Will this be taken into account as part of our income for calculating our Puma contribution or not? Secondly, the *cotisation* is calculated on sums above €9,807 [25% of the PASS] – does this figure apply individually for each member of a couple, applied on half the household income for each?

According to an initial analysis it appears that yes, this kind of income may be taken into account. On the second point, this amount applies for the couple's income and not individually.

It seems there were no payments for the *CMU de base* in 2016 and that the first Puma *cotisations* will only be at the end of 2017, based on 2016 income – is that right?

Yes, that's right. The official name of the Puma payments is *cotisation subsidiaire maladie*.

AFTER Brexit, could Britons access Puma?

In theory yes, if they are in legal residence. by payment of a Puma *cotisation* on their *revenu fiscal de référence*.

The Connexion welcomes queries and publishes a selection with answers every edition. However, please note that we cannot enter into correspondence on money topics. Queries may be edited for length and style. Due to the sensitive nature of topics we do not publish full names or addresses on these pages.

The information on these pages is of a general nature. You should not act or refrain from acting on it without taking professional advice on the specific facts of your case. No liability is accepted in respect of these articles. These articles are intended only as a general guide. Nothing herein constitutes actual financial advice.

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Double tax treaty is key to inheritance plans

This column is by Bill Blevins of Blevins Franks financial advice group (www.blevinsfranks.com), who has written for the *Sunday Times* on overseas finance. He is co-author of the *Blevins Franks Guide to Living in France*



ESTATE planning is a key cause for concern among UK nationals in France. French succession tax and law are complex pieces of legislation, and it becomes more of a minefield when you have to take the UK regime into account as well. Make sure you get it right if you want your assets to be distributed according to your wishes and your heirs to be as protected as possible from inheritance taxes.

The domicile issue

The UK domicile regime, with its 'domicile of origin', 'domicile of choice' and 'deemed domicile' statuses, is particularly complex.

Generally, the liability to UK inheritance tax depends on domicile, not residence. You can live outside the UK for years and remain UK domiciled, potentially making you liable for death duties in two countries.

The situation is different in France though. France and the UK have a specific tax treaty on inheritances, designed to avoid double taxation.

Both countries tax worldwide assets but under this treaty, UK nationals who are long-term residents of France are deemed to be domiciled in France for inheritance tax purposes. Tie-breaker rules will determine domicile if you are considered domiciled under both UK and French rules.

Take care, however, now with the EU regula-

tion 650/2012, the "Brussels IV" law, covering cross-border inheritance issues which allows foreign nationals living in France to opt for French or their national succession law to apply on their death. If you choose UK law HMRC says you may not be deemed French domiciled (it is one factor it may consider), and so UK inheritance tax will apply to your worldwide estate as well as French succession tax. Depending on your circumstances, there may be other ways of circumventing French succession law.

French residents leaving or gifting worldwide assets

- If you live in France permanently, any assets you gift during your lifetime or pass on death are subject to French succession tax, subject to any tax treaty. Provided you do not elect for UK succession law to apply to your assets, you are not liable for UK inheritance tax on assets outside the UK (lifetime gifts may still have UK inheritance tax implications).

French residents leaving UK assets - In this case tax is due in both countries. However, credit is given in France for any tax paid in the UK. So you do not pay tax twice, but do pay whichever is the higher amount.

French residents receiving an inheritance or gift (general rule) - If you have lived in France for at least six out of the last 10 years, you generally have to pay French succession tax on inheritances or gifts you receive (subject to tax treaty terms). This applies even if the donor and assets are outside France. There are severe penalties for failing to declare such inheritances/gifts.

French residents receiving an inheritance from the UK - Under the tax treaty, you do not need to pay any French succession tax, provided the deceased was UK domiciled and there are no

French assets. The inheritance will have been subject to UK tax.

French residents receiving a gift from the UK - The France/UK treaty only applies to inheritances. So if you receive a gift from a UK domicile you have to pay tax in France if you have been resident here for six of the last 10 years.

UK residents owning assets in France - As a UK resident, assets you own in France are liable to French succession tax and also form part of your estate for UK inheritance tax purposes, though your heirs are entitled to a credit for tax paid in France.

Key differences between UK and France inheritance taxes

In the UK, tax is calculated on your estate as a whole and paid by the estate. Spouses are generally exempt, but otherwise it makes no difference who the beneficiaries are. The fixed 40% tax rate after a fixed £325,000 allowance apply to everyone.

The UK has just introduced an additional "residential nil rate band". Starting at £100,000 for this tax year, it increases to £175,000 by 2020/21 (after which it should rise with inflation). This is a welcome reform but there are limitations.

It only applies to residential property you have lived in, and only where received directly by descendants (so excluding many trusts). The relief tapers away for estates worth over £2million, so, on its introduction, estates over £2.2m do not receive any residential nil rate band at all.

In France, spouses/civil ("PACS") partners also receive inheritances tax free, but do pay tax on gifts. Tax is calculated on, and paid by, each beneficiary. Every person you leave assets to has to

personally pay the tax due. The rates and allowances vary according to beneficiary, with immediate family being much better off than distant or non-relatives.

For example, children pay tax at progressive rates starting from 5% to 45%, after a €100,000 allowance. On the other hand, non-relatives pay a fixed 60%, with only €1,594 being tax free.

Note that "non-relatives" includes unmarried partners (unless you have entered into a PACS) and step-children.

If you have adult children from a previous relationship, you may not think of them as your spouse's step-children. But if you leave assets to your spouse, who then passes them to your children when he/she dies, this is giving assets to step-children/non-relatives.

Your children will therefore pay tax at 60% and lose the €100,000 allowance. Research all your options to see how you can protect both your spouse and children.

For British expatriates, estate planning may be the most complicated part of living in France. There are too many possibilities to get it wrong, resulting in unwelcome surprises for your family. But there are also planning opportunities to achieve your wishes and lower taxation for your heirs. A little time and effort, with specialist, professional advice, will prove extremely beneficial and provide peace of mind.

■ Tax rates, scope and reliefs may change. Any statements concerning taxation are based upon our understanding of current taxation laws and practices which are subject to change. Tax information has been summarised; an individual is advised to seek personalised advice.

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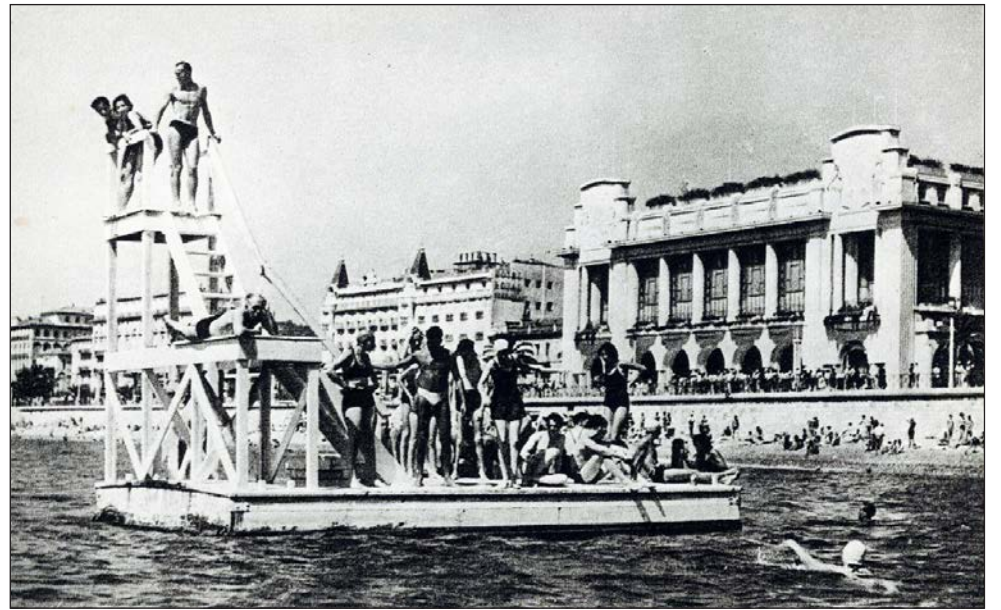
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Wealthy American visitors meant Nice was already well supplied with US-trained doctors and it was here that many wounded soldiers recovered during and after the Great War and where many US soldiers spent some long overdue recreation time



American playground is tourist hotspot

by LAMA HODEIB

KNOWN world-wide for its 7km Promenade des Anglais, Nice also has strong links with the US – dating from the 1780s when future president Thomas Jefferson paid many visits while ambassador here and advised Americans to “spend a few days here”.

Other future US presidents who loved Nice include Theodore Roosevelt, who visited as a youngster with his family in 1869-70, and Harry Truman who came as a US soldier on leave at the end of the First World War.

Mr Truman said in a letter to his wife: “The view from my window is simply magnificent. There isn’t a painting in existence that could do it justice. There is no blue like the Mediterranean blue.”

Now a global tourist destination, many Nice streets bear the names of wealthy Britons and Americans who spent their winters by the sea.

The US boom started after the First World War and now, as part of the war centenary commemorations, an exhibition, 1917: Nice l’Américaine, looks back to the year when America joined the fighting.

Just as the Promenade des Anglais was named for the British who paid for the seaside walk to be improved, another part of the seafront was named for Americans, with Quai du Midi becoming Quai des Etats-Unis as thanks for the US turning the tide of fighting that seemed without end.

It was a popular rest and recreation point for US troops and word quickly spread of its attractions.

Great numbers of Americans arrived on the French Riviera after the war and ended up outnumbering and outspending the British aristocrats who, helped by the patronage of Queen Victoria, had created what the city of



Nice says in its recent Unesco heritage bid was the first holiday destination.

The Americans brought with them waves of culture and art, creating a jazz scene that is still much-loved, American bars, American writers, painters, celebrities... and money.

Wealthy investors played an important role in the start of tourism in the city in the 19th century when multi-millionaires like the Vanderbilts, Spangs, Morgans, Cornells, Hamiltons and Gordon-Bennetts spent regular and long holidays

They helped create a new cultural and leisure scene and many joined

clubs such as the Club Nautique (Yacht Club), Tennis Club, Bridge Club – which had as many American members as British.

It was said that as many as 180,000 British and 50,000 Americans spent their winters in the area at the time.

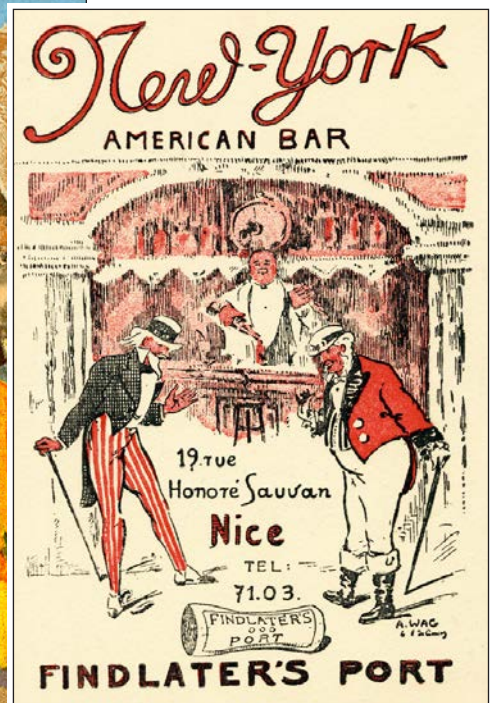
In the 20th century, Americans opened bars, restaurants and organised opulent, in-demand events.

The jewel of the seafront was the luxury Palais de la Méditerranée hotel where Harry Truman stayed (now owned by Hyatt Regency) opened in 1929 by millionaire Frank Jay Gould. Its white marble Art Deco facade

made the Promenade des Anglais so popular it supplanted Cimiez above the city where wealthy Britons lived. The Americans were popular along La Prom with their pyjama-style outfits.

They made their mark in other ways too with the first dog water fountain, the American church, an eye hospital... it was also in Nice that dancer Isadora Duncan died in 1927, strangled as her scarf caught in her car’s rear wheel.

Nice made a name in US arts as painter John Singer Sargent, writers Henry James, Louisa May Alcott, Frank Harris, Edith Wharton, Henry Miller and Ernest Hemingway all hol-



Postcards and posters tell the story of American Nice, with the Palais de la Méditerranée hotel flying the Stars and Stripes

idayed there before film-makers such as Rex Ingram and Orson Welles used the Victorine Studios in Nice to film.

The 1917: Nice l’Américaine exhibition at the Palais de Marbre in Fabron gathers archive documents with photos, paintings, event posters and letters. It continues until September 28.

Guided walks are hosted on the theme ‘Swing and Red Cross’ and the event marks when Nice had its own New York American Bar, but also Thomas Jefferson’s 18th century visits and his love of the city’s Bellet wine, which he gave as “the best table wine in the world” at the White House.

Millionaires in Riviera films

ONE cultural event during the exhibition will see the city’s Cinémathèque arthouse cinema focus on US millionaires with two films in English:

Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife (1938) set in Nice with Gary Cooper and Claudette Colbert and *The Great Gatsby* (1974) with Mia Farrow and Robert Redford which F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote on the Riviera.



All change for troops

ALTHOUGH US troops mostly saw the Riviera as a few days’ rest after action in the trenches, many discovered France in the Centre region where there were vast US training camps.

But the largest site – the world’s largest air base – was built in 1917 at Issoudun in Indre where Uncle Sam trained its air crew, including aces such as Eddie Rickenbacker.

Issoudun aimed to please *l’armée du million de dollars* and its 10,000 ‘Sammies’... so became American-French.

Some of its 24 cafés, 12 inns and 21 clubs stayed French but many opted to become American; Bar Américain at Boulevard Nicolas-Leblanc and the American Bar on Rue des Alouettes, others included Teddy Room, Criterion Bar, Liberty Shop, Au Rendez-vous des Sammies and the Café des Alliés.



First steps begin in plan to reform Code du Travail

FRANCE'S new government is set to move ahead this month with the first steps in its plan to reform labour laws, the *Code du Travail*, using edicts called *ordonnances* to cut delays.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said they would introduce enabling legislation to the new parliament and MPs and senators would be asked to vote on the plan to "entrust the government" with the job of drafting edicts.

If passed, the first edicts will be issued "before the end of summer".

The aim is to avoid the months of conflict and bitter debate in the parliament that ended with the last government forcing through its *Loi Travail*, by speaking directly to company heads, unions and labour representatives to get their views on change.

Mr Philippe said the edicts would contain "the fruits of these discussions" which would be "intense and complete" – but added that he was "determined" there would be change.

The first meetings, held in May, showed the government's priorities would be to:

- Set a limit on retrospective compensation claims by ex-employees after losing their jobs, except in the case of harassment or discrimination.

- Allow companies to call a staff referendum over a deal agreed with a minority union.

- Create a single system for representing staff across all business types and sizes, to stop problems where companies cannot hire or fire staff as it would change their staff representation needs (this varies with different rules for firms with 1 - 10 employees, 11 - 49 and again from 49 upwards).

The initial talks revealed a desire to move and the government said it was open for other matters to be brought in as a way to encourage compromise.

One issue bosses want but unions oppose is the *compte pénibilité* under which staff in strenuous jobs can retire early. Firms see it as being too complex to administer.

All the world's a stage for *métiers*

CRAFTS in focus

Métiers d'art are ancient ...and protected in France

by EMILY COMMANDER

IN THE theatre actors are key but they can get vital help from the *scénographe-décorateur* who provides the stage that is essential for their performance.

Both stage design and the costumes they wear are the *scénographe-décorateur's* responsibility and scenography is one of the broadest disciplines to have official recognition as a *métier d'art*.

It is a catch-all term for a series of distinct, specialist *métiers*, including carpentry, metal-work, scene-painting, and the mechanics of moving elements of any set (although sound and lighting, and costumes and props, are usually treated as separate, distinct, *métiers*).

A *scénographe-décorateur* may work on theatrical productions but also on film, opera, dance, concerts, public events, exhibitions, and even trade shows.

Scenographers need a love for, and good understanding of, staging and need to be creative, with a strong sense of colour, dimension and material. One key is to find imaginative



Photos: Elektra Berghaus Huhn

Breaking away from a 'flat' stage takes flair and engineering

solutions to technical or artistic problems and, unlike many *métiers d'art* which can be solitary, a scenographer needs to work well in a team.

Adaptability is also highly valued in this profession.

Some scenographers work for private companies who hire out their services to theatres, concert halls and, often these days, to exhibition spaces.

The film industry is a big employer, with the majors to be found in *Bellevue*, the

national directory for film and audiovisual entertainment.

Some private firms cover the entire spectrum of scenographic work; others are more specialised, focusing on a single element.

Some of the biggest arts centres, including the national theatres and operas, have their own workshops with a mixture of permanent and contractual staff, from which teams will be selected by both director and producer to design and build

sets for each new production.

Outside this, however, work for a *scénographe-décorateur* can be sporadic, making it difficult to manage their salary and budget.

For this reason, under certain conditions, they may qualify for an *intermittent du spectacle* employment status, which means they pay a higher proportion of their salary in social charges, but receive better 'unemployment' pay during non-working periods. You can find out more about this via Pôle Emploi or an accountant.

The broad scope of the scenographer's work means there are a wide variety of training options available, mostly post-Baccalaureate (or equivalent).

There is a two-year *brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS) in spatial design while Scaenica, the European centre for arts and techniques of performance in Montpellier, has a one-year specialist set-design course.

Degrees, taking between two and five years to obtain, are available from the *Ecoles Supérieures des Arts Décoratifs* in Strasbourg and Paris. The *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts et Techniques du Théâtre* in Lyon offers a three-year scenography degree, as does Fémis, the French film and TV school in Paris and, in Avignon, the *Institut Supérieur des Techniques du Spectacle* offers a wide range of degrees across the full spectrum of technical stage disciplines.

Small business and tax advice



Q: I am self-employed but want to have better welfare cover in case of possible illness or unemployment. Is there a way I can pay for this as a separate cover as I do not have access to that provided for other workers?

A: There is a law for small businesses called the *Loi Madelin* that gives you a tax deduction for taking out a range of insurances.

It is aimed at those running small businesses and some limited companies but not generally for *auto-entrepreneurs* or, as they are now called, *micro-entrepreneurs* as they have social welfare cover included in their *cotisations sociales*.

The system is aimed at encouraging people to take out illness protection policies and even pensions to fill gaps in social cover and has been running since the 1990s. You need to check that the cover that any policy you take is suitable for your needs and also that the cost is reasonable.

Premiums are deductible from your taxable income (and this applies whether the business is set up to pay *impôt sur les sociétés* or income tax) but not on your *cotisations sociales*.

Policies can include a top-up health cover for both you and your dependants; involuntary unemployment cover; illness or accident payment protection cover that will replace work income or insure against death or incapacity, and a private retirement pension.

There are limits on the tax deduction that can be made – and, as a tax deduction, can only be of full benefit if you are paying a certain amount of tax. The deduction limit for 2017 is €39,228, which is a rise from €38,616 in 2016 and €38,040 in 2015.

In all cases, the limits are based on the *Plafond Annuel de la Sécurité Sociale*.

Auto-entrepreneurs can get one benefit from the *Loi Madelin* as it has led to a *contrat mutuelle Madelin* being offered and this may be cheaper than some other health insurance policies.

■ Email your tax questions to news@connexionfrance.com

This column was written by Olaf Muscat Baron who is a Fellow of the Chartered Association of Accountants UK, a French expert comptable and an international tax advisor. He is the principal accountant of Fiscaly, an accountancy firm based in the Dordogne which serves individuals and businesses in or out of France. See www.fiscaly.fr or call 09 81 09 00 15

From boats and luxury homes to a new life 'behind scenes'

ALTHOUGH Jean-Charles Scottis is titled deputy technical director at Lyon Opéra, the *Responsable des ateliers* is in charge of the opera's workshops, where the carpenters, metal-workers and painters who make the sets can all be found. There are about 15 permanent members of his team, with up to 27 extra on a contractual basis.

He has always had an interest in scenography and did technical work for theatres when free and brother, Jean-Christophe, is a sound and lighting specialist – but his career has not always been in the arts. As a master carpenter he worked on boats, before moving into luxury properties, which was "not particularly engaging".

A season as head carpenter at the international music festival in Aix-en-Provence was inspiring and he jumped at the chance to take up his current post at the Opéra when someone recommended him for it.

Now, he would not think of leaving.

"Let's be clear: my job is 90% technical, and 10% creative," he says. He is, however, often surprised by how objects made in his workshops can be transformed on stage.

He gives the example of wings, constructed as simple box walls with one plain black face and one decorated face, of which the workshops have churned out hundreds of examples over the years.



Complex stage designs like this must be robust, safe and do the job needed

"Sometimes, when I see how the wings are used in a production it bowls me over, and yet we spent months working on a very technical piece of stage on which were mounted hundreds of flowers, each capable of being separately lit, and when I saw it on stage I was underwhelmed."

But the way Mr Scottis ended up in his career is becoming less and less possible. "If you want to work in this *métier*, you need to give yourself a very strong technical grounding, preferably taking a degree specific to the craft you want to pursue. After that it's up to you to be persistent in applying for work."

At Lyon, he regularly takes students on work experience, and there are always apprentices in the workshops. People with unusual CVs may also be taken on trial.

There is a surfeit of people wanting to

work in some of the technical areas, many extremely well-qualified, but one area where skills are lacking is in painting.

"We recruit people who have trained in the *beaux arts*, and they have had perhaps 10 days working on set painting a year during their course."

Such courses are not specialised enough and scenographic painting is particular, with canvases up to 10m x 17m, and painters must create a continuous scene across different materials, without anyone seeing the joins. "We need more people who have trained specifically to do this work."

For Mr Scottis, those painting, carpentry or metal-working skills can give "the pleasure of bringing an idea to life": that moment when all the technical questions have been resolved and the curtain goes up for the first time on another world.

Photo: Marie-Caroline Lucat



Photo: Marie-Caroline Lucat



Sited above a 5m retainer wall for the village, the house offers views down the valley and bright, airy terraces to enjoy

Make the best of what you have

WHEN you have a difficult site to work with – perhaps it is hemmed in by other buildings, on a restricted piece of land or in the teeth of the wind – you have no option but to make the best of it.

That is where an architect can turn a difficult project into a distinctive building that sits comfortably in its surroundings while keeping the family comfortable inside.

Hérault practice Artelabo in Gignac has just won the 2017 ADC Award from ArchiDes-ignclub for a €230,000 private home on a restricted and very windswept but spectacular site at Tressan overlooking the Vallée de l'Hérault.

Sitting cheek-by-jowl with a large vineyard *grange* and a villa, the house both stands out with its stark white appearance, but takes design cues from sloped Provençal tiled roofs to produce an unexpectedly light and airy home.

Architect Nadine Fayard from Artelabo said the site “is



The fort-like impression falls away once inside with the airy feel and spectacular views

different as it is a tight space in an old village and we had to abide by planning bylaws while still creating a worthwhile home with usable space.”

The oblong site is above a five-metre containment wall and is itself walled around, giving a slightly fortress-like appearance. Foundations are dug 3m deep to stand on solid rock.

The interior is anything but stark and austere as the four 3m x 4m rooms are offset left-right to create individual interior patios that allow plenty of light and open up the panoramic views that are visible throughout the property.

Ms Fayard said: “It is a very small site and people cannot believe it has only 80m² of

space but we bring the outside inside to create great living spaces for my husband and I.”

The peaked roofs give an impression of a tight-knit group of houses and, inside, there are two bedrooms with bathrooms, an open kitchen in the dining room, the living room and a 40m² outside terrace that looks along the valley.

HOME SWEET HOME

“The garden, the space, the bees, the fun times with family and friends, the kindness of our neighbours; all make for a place that is very special **Lin and Trev Griffiths**”

WE ASKED readers living in France to tell us what they like most about their home – here **Lin and Trev Griffiths** speak about their house and garden in Côtes d'Armor

OUR little home in Brittany is more than just a home, it's a retreat, far from the madding crowd. We may be here for only half the year but bought it back in 2003 not realising how important it would become.

We are retired teachers from Wolverhampton and first came to France on holiday with a tent and met French friends on our first visit, to Arcachon.

We thought about buying and checked estate agents before spotting our *longère* in Côtes-d'Armor.

Supported by our friends Daniel and Hervé, we plunged into buying, then came the renovation, then the garden...



Tell us in 250 words what makes your home in France special and send a photo of it and yourself to news@connexionfrance.com. Any we publish will receive a year's free subscription or a year's extension if already a subscriber!

then the bees and, throughout, friends and family came to visit our quiet village.

Yes, and our French improved dramatically, and

not just because our French friends of 35 years came to stay often. In fact, they even lived here when work brought them to Guingamp!

And over the last eight years our bilingual grandchildren have spent lovely holidays here... a far cry from their city life in Paris.

So, after all this time, is it still home sweet home? Yes, without question.

There is the garden, the space, the bees, the fun times with family and friends; the kindness of our brilliant neighbours, all make for a place that is very special to us.

We fell hopelessly in love with the house, small, basic but absolutely great.

Best moment? Difficult to say... so many, but perhaps having the four granddaughters and our French friends' granddaughter here in August 2015 for a birthday party.

What more could one ask? Our home in France is a place to relax and chill, to *déstresser*, and also to enjoy the good life with good people round us.



Property Watch

Burgundy



REGIONAL CAPITAL: Dijon

DEPARTMENTS: Côte-d'Or, Nièvre, Saône-et-Loire, Yonne

MAIN CITIES: Chalon-sur-Saône, Nevers, Auxerre, Mâcon, Sens, Le Creusot, Beaune, Montceau-les-Mines and Autun

THE NAME sparks thoughts of wine and agriculture takes up about 60% of the Bourgogne land area, making it the country's second largest beef producer after neighbouring Auvergne.

Industry is also strong, producing from nuclear power station segments to TGV units, soaps, mustard and electrical goods and there is also a bustling small industry sector.

Tourism and gastronomy are major employers and there are many well-known vineyards, plus chateaux and lots of kilometres of walking and cycling trails.

Côte-d'Or, with its capital Dijon, is the most expensive part of the region to buy property in, with the average house selling at €161,100 in a very mixed market, where most of the properties selling have five or six-rooms.

Saône-et-Loire is considerably cheaper, with the average house costing €116,400 and again larger houses dominate.

Further north, in Yonne, house sales are equally split between 3,4,5 and six room properties but they average €110,000 in what is a very slow-moving market, where prices are still falling.

Nièvre was for a long time the geographic centre of the Euro-zone but even that glimpse of fame has moved away and calm has descended on its rivers, canals and lakes. Property, too, is slow-moving with prices averaging just €76,000 although the market is starting to rise.

Do you live in this area?

Tell us why you love your home (and send a photo!) to news@connexionfrance.com and we may include it in our Home Sweet Home feature (below left) in a future issue

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€99,950 Ref: 72746MS87

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€189,000 Ref: 71943ELI58



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Next month: We look at the Aquitaine



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SOLICITORS & FRENCH LAW SPECIALISTS

Barbara Heslop of
Heslop & Platt
answers a reader
query

Q: We have lived in France for almost 13 years and have a French usufruit will signed 5/6 years ago but are not sure of our situation.

My husband wants my grandchildren to inherit his share: can he do this? He has no children.

If he dies before me, do all proceeds go to me and then to my relatives in future or would his will dictate what happens?

I will leave my share to my two sons, but what share would be given to the grandchildren if I were to die first and what inheritance tax would they pay? M.A.

A: It sounds as though you have French Wills drafted by a notaire under which you each leave a life interest (*usufruit*) to the survivor.

Given they are more than five years old and as they create a tax liability for your grandchildren which you had perhaps not fully understood, we recommend you make new wills.

We understand that under your will the legal ownership (*nue propriété*) goes to your children (their right in French law) with *usufruit* for your husband, and in his he leaves his share to your grandchildren (who are not

his blood relations), subject to your life interest...

As he has no children he can leave his share to anyone he wishes, (assuming no *tontine* clause in the purchase deed and you have no French marriage contract).

If he dies first, the *usufruit* to you as survivor is exempt from inheritance tax; but an age-linked value is attributed. If, for example, you are 71-80 this is 30% and the grandchildren's share is 70%.

As they are not his blood relatives they face 60% IHT on assets over €1,594.

You are French-resident so your worldwide estate will be assessed for French IHT. On your subsequent death, your estate passes to your children; your grandchildren already have the other part.

If you die first, your husband has a life interest, your sons inherit the *nue propriété* (with *usufruit* valued as before). Your sons each benefit from €100,000 tax-free and then sliding-scale IHT from 5% to 45%.

When your husband dies, your grandchildren inherit his share. Your children have already inherited your share.

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Sarah Bright-Thomas
of Bright Avocats
answers a reader query



Q: We no longer use our car and have no more need for our garage so, as it is built on to the house, would it be possible to turn it into a spare room for visitors?

Can you say how we should go about it and what formalities we need to complete? T.M.

A: Turning your garage into a spare room is easier and cheaper than building an extension and the formalities are not complex as long as your garage is not too large.

If the work will cover an area of more than 5m², which it will for a garage, you must make a *déclaration préalable de travaux* to your mairie. If it will cover more than 20m² you should check with the mairie if you need to apply for a *permis de construire* building

permit and also ask if this is needed if changing the garage door counts as modifying the exterior appearance of the property.

The *déclaration préalable* has been made simpler and quicker this year and you can ask the mairie for the form to complete and to confirm if there are any restrictions in the *plan local d'urbanisme*, if there is one, such as making sure a parking space is still available.

As you are turning a garage into a room, you should also think about suitable insulation for its new usage and, perhaps, heating.

There will be some effect on your local taxes, with the extra floor space perhaps increasing your *taxe d'habitation* plus you may face the *taxe d'aménagement*.

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If you have a legal query send it to news@connexionfrance.com
We select questions for answer every edition

France dreams of life in a fine old house



Photo: © Paris Tourist Office - Photographer: E. Boucher

BEING the owner of a fine, old and fully-renovated house is the dream of the vast majority of people in France with two out of three saying they would prefer a house to a flat.

Young people aged 18-24 already see themselves as property owners with 95% saying it is their dream – but they will need to work hard over their lives as 89% also say they want the property to be in Paris, where prices are high and expected to near €9,000/m² this month.

But the study of dream properties by website Bien'ici found wide variation in where people wanted to live and generally splitting depending on their age group – with young adults (18-24) and middle-aged (55-64) being most polarised.

The desire to be home-owners fades quickly with only 65% of 25-54 year-olds feeling they need to own a property. Older heads then start to see the value in having an inheritance or some savings in 'bricks and mortar' to boost a pension, with the number rising to 75% for the 55-64 year-olds and hitting 94% for the over-65s.

Bien'ici managing director David Benbassat said it was "easy to understand" why the home-owner desire faded as people aged 25-54 "were caught by the difficulties of being a young home-owner".

Although France is seen as having a low home

ownership rate, Eurostat figures show at the end of 2015 it had 64% of people owning their own homes – with the UK suffering from rising prices and the arrival of 'generation rent' and having a rate of 63.5%, down from a high of 73%.

The Bien'ici survey showed that 76% of women and 71% of men dreamed of becoming owners although more men opted for a "splendid house" rather than a "fabulous flat".

Possibly for reasons of accessibility, 86% of over-65s opted for a flat. And while 56% of women preferred a new-build 86% of men said they would prefer an older renovated home.

In all, 35% of people said they would prefer to be in an urban area with Ile-de-France as No1.

But preferences changed with different age groups and the study showed that as people grew older they dreamed of moving from Paris.

The 18-24s opt for Ile-de-France with 96% while the 25-34s have 34% for Ile-de-France and 31% for Normandy; 35-44s go 33% for Auvergne Rhône-Alpes and 22% for Ile-de-France; 45-54s are split between Ile-de-France 25%, Nouvelle Aquitaine 24% and Occitanie 23%; 55-64s go 35% for Occitanie and 23% Nouvelle Aquitaine.

Once into retirement, 29% of over-65s look to Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur and 23% for Nouvelle Aquitaine.

Nine out of 10 young people dream of living in their own house in Paris and not a flat, so village-like areas such as La Butte aux Cailles (13th arrondissement) may be what they will look for, quiet by day and popular at night

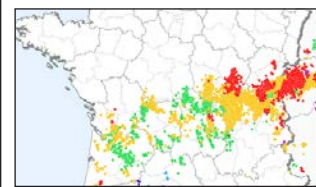
Weather site offers proof of lightning for insurers

THIS time last year, Paris was picking itself up after its highest Seine flooding for years and each summer France faces storms that dump months of rain in a few hours along with lightning strikes that can kill – or destroy property.

Insurers mostly keep abreast of these weather disasters but in some cases, especially with thunderstorms that can be very localised, they may demand proof of the weather event.

Météo France offers a service where it provides proof of the weather conditions across the country and these *certificat d'intempéries* are accepted by all insurance companies.

The certificate covers two



Keraunos site shows where lightning has struck

days, which may be useful for second-home owners who may not know exact timings.

For lightning, it has an *attestation de foudroiement* which, while not confirming a strike on your home, gives proof of lightning and thunderstorms.

To support this, the research site, keraunos.org studies lightning strikes and offers historic maps of impact areas.

Certificates can be ordered from services.meteofrance.com and cost €73.20 each.

Property updates

Cities eye up extra cash from Airbnb landlords

MORE cities are starting to oblige landlords to declare themselves to their mairie if they are using online booking platforms such as Airbnb for holiday rentals.

Following Paris and Bordeaux, Nice and Strasbourg have also said they will act on the so-called 'Airbnb law' that forces the owners of holiday rentals to register in communes around Paris and communes of more than 200,000 inhabitants.

Another 62 cities including Toulouse, Nantes, Montpellier, Lille and Rennes are said to be considering the step, which allows them to ensure people renting their main home do not do so for more than the legal limit of 120 days and pay taxes due.

Airbnb says the average owner rents out their home for just 26 nights a year and it has started to collect the *taxe de séjour* from travellers in about 50 towns.

'Exclusive' agent contracts may be shared to boost sales

MORE independent estate agents are starting to look at sharing 'exclusive' contracts with other agents in a bid to broaden the appeal of their properties and, perhaps, seal a sale in which they will share the fees.

While long opposed to sharing contracts,



Yurts are for rent in Seine-Maritime

the independent agents' federation Amepi is rethinking its position after sales figures showed properties under exclusive *mandat* took an average of 157 days to sell... while those that were shared took 99 days.

There is a financial motive, as agents who shared 'contracts averaged an extra €84,000 a year in fees. Selling fees are divided between the two agents if one holds the contract and the other clinches the sale.

Opening up the process could also make it simpler for buyers to find the location of houses, usually kept secret by the agent.

The higher the floor, the higher the price

HIGHER floors mean higher prices with a survey showing that flats on the top floor of a building will sell for 19% more than

those on the ground-floor *rez-de-chaussée*, but only if the building has a lift.

Top-floor properties are sought-after for open views, sunnier location and height above street noise and that comfort has a price – with a 50m² ground-floor flat averaging €380,750 in Paris, while the *dernière étage* one six floors above costs €454,700.

The 19% price difference rises to 25% if the top flat has a *chambre de bonne* spare room in the roof space, as is often the case.

Sébastien de Lafond, of MeilleursAgents.com, which carried out the survey, said that ground-floor flats were less in demand as they faced more problems – but for the same budget could offer an extra room.

Yurts face property taxes in new ruling from taxman

FASHIONABLE yurts, the Mongol tents that are appearing on more and more campsites, have been ruled as permanent structures by the tax office and liable to both *taxe foncière* and *taxe d'habitation*.

Seen as semi-permanent structures as they are not easy to dismantle and erect quickly, they face *taxe foncière* if they are 'fixed to the ground or on concrete bases with electricity and water connections'.

They will also face *taxe d'habitation* if they are furnished and can quickly be made habitable, like mobile homes.

Old ways of working still have their place

by KEN SEATON

MASON Jan Minne is taking a step back in time to work to restore old properties in traditional ways because he says old building practices are still relevant – and could even be included in new environmental regulations for new buildings in France.

Mr Minne, who is based near Dieppe in Seine-Maritime, is a former archaeologist who retrained as a *ouvrier professionnel en restauration* and mason to work with building materials such as clay (what is called *adobe* in Spanish countries), *chaux* lime mortar and *bauge*, *pisé* and *torchis*, or cob.

“They are more ecological compared to working with cement and concrete and we have many, many very old buildings in Normandy where these are exactly the techniques needed to keep them ready to last hundreds of years more.

“Below our topsoil here there is clay and this is sterile, pretty solid and ideal for use in building... that is why it is used so much here and elsewhere.

“I like to use *terre crue* [unbaked clay] and it has no vegetable matter in it, unlike normal soil. The fact it has no humus means there are no seeds or other things to weaken it.

“It is much in use around here and in the north of France – and although I only started my business a year ago there is a lot of work as it is common.

“What encouraged me to start was I took a year out with my partner and we got involved in ‘woofing’ where we worked on environmental projects and we found these traditional mate-



Jan Minne works on pointing with lime mortar and the photo, right, from Ateliers de la Bergerette shows the interest in learning lime rendering methods



rials such as cob were still being used and had stood the test of time.

“Cob building is used in many places, especially in hot countries, and we worked on a new-build cob building.

“In France, it is called *bauge* and is a mixture of clay, sand and straw with water and often made in frames to build thick solid walls.

“*Torchis* is a different method [like cob] and it is used as infilling between timber frames, where *la bauge* is built up on a stone base because the mate-

rial is affected by humidity. We say in French, and they do in English as well, that it needs both *bonnes bottes et un bon chapeau* which is a solid and waterproof foundation and a good roof over the top.

“For the outside of many very old buildings we see that there are serious problems because people have used cement to do repairs or to redo the pointing between stones.

“It is completely the wrong material and they must use a lime mortar,

called *chaux*, that is capable of moving with the building and allows humidity to escape. Cement resists humidity much better than solid stone and can even mean the rock cracking.”

Mr Minne has taken part in several workshops to show people how to use some of these techniques and says that in summer the traditional thick walls make a big difference.

“They have a great thermal inertia and that means they are slow to heat up in summer and slow to cool down

in winter – so the inside of a *bauge* building can be cool in summer and need little heating in winter, making them very economical.

“At present this is not recognised in construction regulations and especially not in the *réglementation thermique* which governs buildings’ insulation although it is under test and could well be included in future versions to give the traditional industry a boost.

“There are different techniques in use all over the country and you can find a traditional artisan or more information through the Maisons Paysannes de France association which protects our historical rural buildings and has a list of artisans who are skilled in local techniques.”

Since setting up his business Six Pieds Sur Terre he has been involved in projects as varied as restoring a wooden lintel and collapsing wall over a window and building a new clay roof for a communal oven.

There is a lot of interest in the techniques and a group in Beauvais, Les Ateliers de la Bergerette, offers classes in using lime mortar and ecological renovation.



Jan Minne was called in to save this wall where the timber lintel was failing and sinking, meaning all the stonework above was at serious risk of collapse

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Sir Roger filmed at my castle near Bordeaux

Franco-British castle owner Sébastien de Baritault told **CONNEXION** his memories of a filming visit from Roger Moore, who died recently

"THERE were some bedroom scenes and we had to take my unmarried great, great aunt, who was 100, into town so she didn't get shocked," said Count Sébastien de Baritault, whose family has lived at Château de Roquetaillade near Bordeaux for 700 years.

"It was a bit risqué for someone who grew up in the 19th century!" he said.

The count, whose mother is English and who was sent to school in England at seven, contacted us following the death of Sir Roger Moore on May 23, in Switzerland, to tell of the time when he filmed at the castle.

He said the director of *Sunday Lovers* (*Les Séducteurs*), made in 1980, picked it as it resembled a British castle and Sir Roger, who was living in Switzerland, could not spend more than six months a year in the UK for tax reasons.

Count Sébastien said one of the popular *Fantômas* crime thrillers had been filmed there in the 1960s and he was used to seeing stars. "It was supposed to be a Scottish castle in that one. It is Anglo-Gascon built. Bordeaux was English and the castle was built [in the early 14th century] with permission of King Edward I. The architects built



In *Sunday Lovers*, filmed at the Château de Roquetaillade (right), Roger Moore is a chauffeur who pretends to own a castle to seduce an air hostess

Bodiam Castle in Sussex afterwards."

The film is in four parts, though a *New York Times* review said the first, *An Englishman's Home*, was the only good one. It called it a "breezy farce about a chauffeur who spends his weekends seducing unsuspecting airline hostesses in the castle of his absent employer".

Filming spread over three weeks, also featuring other well-known faces such as Lynn Redgrave and Denholm Elliott.

Count Sébastien, now in his 50s but a teenager at the time, said the small cast and crew gave the proceedings a 'family-like' feel. "By the end of the day, they would hang out, eat and drink wine until early morning.

"Some of them stayed at the castle sometimes because the hotels were too far away. Roger Moore didn't always end up in his hotel – sometimes he stayed at Roquetaillade and sometimes other people's hotels."

He was fond of Armagnac and a cigar, he said, and enjoyed the south-west food. In the evenings they would act out sketches until 4am. "He was charming and funny, but never vulgar. He was always joking about girls and asking me how my love life was."

Sir Roger spent part of his later years in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, Alpes-Maritimes, and latterly divided his time between Switzerland and Monaco.

The castle is open every afternoon.

"We had to take my great, great aunt out so she wasn't

shocked by the bedroom scenes
Count Sébastien de Baritault



Photos: film Sunday Lovers

"How can I avoid the restrictions of French succession law? Should I use Brussels IV?"

Talk to the people who know.

UK nationals can now use the EU succession regulation to opt for UK succession law - but take personalised advice first to make sure it is the best thing for you! It may have unexpected consequences, like negatively affecting your existing estate planning, and it does not help heirs like stepchildren avoid the higher succession tax rates.

Blevins Franks can advise on other options to avoid forced heirship and establish the most effective cross-border estate plan for your family.

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