
Bulletin !

Although we are all still self-isolating, I am sending out a small Bulletin with some general aspects of life in France, a few events that may be taking place at the end of May, plus some other things of interest.

Thought for the month:

By swallowing evil words unsaid, no-one has ever harmed his stomach.

(Sir Winston Churchill)

Special dates (although they may not be celebrated in the usual way).

Friday 1st *Fête du Muguet* (see below), also *Fête du Travail*

Friday 8th *Victoire 1945* (Armistice Day)

Thurs. 21st *Ascension*

Fête du Muguet (Lily of the Valley)

On 1st May it is traditional to offer friends and family *le muguet* to bring luck and joy. This tradition was started in 1561 by King Charles IX - but some say only the sprigs which have 13 flowers bring luck! May 1st is the only day when people are allowed to sell *le muguet* in the streets without having the authority to operate as a business. This year, of course, for many of us it will have to be a 'virtual' gift!

Something you didn't know you didn't know . . .

During WWI, soldiers from Lancashire who were part of the Burnley Miner's Club in England were stationed in Normandy. They developed a taste for the local herbal liqueur – *Bénédictine* – and brought some home with them. Since then, the club has remained the biggest single consumer of the drink.

Foire des Andaines in Bagnoles de l'Orne – postponed

The 22nd edition of this HUGE 2-day annual *foire/brocante* - between St Michel des Andaines & Bagnoles de l'Orne, with 5km of stalls - normally take place mid-May. It was started in 1999 and attracts around 2,500 sellers and many thousands of visitors each year! The organisers are hoping to run this event on the last weekend of August, depending on the situation with Covid-19. To keep informed, go to www.bagnolesdelorne.com.

Le Refuge Animalier de l'Arche

Le Refuge de l'Arche (the Ark Refuge) near Chateau-Gontier (53) cares for the animals that have been rescued by the Ark Refuge team. The Ark truly is a refuge for all animals, be they exotic or local species, injured, ill-treated or just abandoned because they were too much bother. Behind every animal there is a story – the story of an encounter with human beings that turned out badly. It all began in 1968 when a group of young people brought an injured cormorant to Christian Huchedé, who was already well known for his love of animals. Little by little - first just a nesting-box, then a cage or two - the site has grown and now occupies 14 hectares . . . and that won't be the end of the story! Whenever possible the animals simply pass through the Ark Refuge, just staying until they have recovered their strength. Every year thousands of visitors, both adults and children, happily stroll through the avenues of this ornamental park to meet these animals that have known such suffering, and will be able to do so again when the restrictions are lifted. It is a way of making up to some extent for the barbarous behaviour of certain human beings towards animals. There are three interpretive trails through the 14-hectares of parkland. Normally open all year [except 1st Jan & 25th Dec] but it is not open to the public during the Covid-19 situation. Find out more at www.refuge-arche.org

Emergency services link

Here is a very helpful link if you find yourself in need of emergency services in France – it is a good idea to print off the pages and keep them near to hand: <http://www.paysruffecois.fr/sante/tablet.pdf>

Cheese of the Month

In 2015 I featured a French cheese each month and I have been asked to repeat them. So, here goes! This month: *Saint-Nectaire*

This is an ancient cheese, from the milk of cows grazing in the Auvergne mountains. It was brought to the table of King Louis XIV by the Maréchal de Sennecterre (hence its name). It has a greyish-purple rind with dots and stains of white, yellow and red moulds and a silky texture, heavy on the tongue, melting in the mouth to reveal a slight acidity. It has a nutty and fruity flavour with a touch of salt and spice. It must be ripe before eating for the smell and taste to develop, which takes between 5 & 8 weeks. Around 5 litres of milk are needed for one cheese. A must for the cheeseboard and it goes well with a light and fruity red wine such as a Beaujolais.

French people whose names are immortalised in history . . . and language

This month:- *Chauvinisme*. Today, *le chauvinisme* has misogynistic overtones, but this was not always the case. The word originated with Nicolas Chauvin of Rochefort, a soldier fighting for Napoléon's army, who showed extreme patriotism. The legend of Chauvin – who did not actually exist – was used after the fall of Napoléon, when *le chauvinisme* was applied to ridicule staunchly patriotic soldiers of the Empire who continued to blindly glorify nationalism. Later it was used to refer to any form of bigotry and in particular, male chauvinism.

The return of the railway in Mayenne??

In 2008 and 2013, discussions took place on the possibility of reinstating some of the smaller railway lines in Mayenne, notably between Mayenne town and Laval, which was closed in 1970. But there were two reasons why this would not be possible. Firstly, as a result of the new deviation Mayenne-Moulay, built to help filter large vehicles away from the centre of Mayenne town, it would mean the railway would have to pass under the new road, which would be very expensive; secondly, the entire cost of the reinstatement of the line would be prohibitive. However, an alternative means of transport - a type of Busway (an express bus) currently found in Nantes - is under discussion.

Something for all the family - eventually!

For days out in the future, the 18th century *Château de Craon* (Craon, 53) is an interesting place to go. You can visit the château, seeing the downstairs rooms and learn the history of the family who have lived there since 1828. (Normally it is open each year from 1st July to 31st August - we will wait to hear if the château will be open again this year). Also you can enjoy the Parc of the Château, with its 'English-style' gardens covering 47 hectares, 3 ha. of 'French-style' gardens and 1 ha. of *potager*. There are also 4 km of tree-lined avenues you can walk along, also picnic areas and free parking. For more info go to www.chateaudecraon.fr

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That's all for this month. Hopefully the restrictions will be lifted over the coming months and we can all return to exploring and enjoying the French countryside.

Stay safe.

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