

Bulletin !

An informal look at life in this part of France, with some snippets of local info and advice.

Thought for the month:

A garden is much more than a place of beauty and delight:
it is an oasis for your spirit and a workshop for your soul

Here's to a better year in 2021!
(well, the only way is up!)

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Walks around Bagnoles de l'Orne (61)

The Bagnoles de l'Orne Tourist Office, located near the covered market, can suggest many walks, from 1.4km to 19.7km, and many routes are clearly marked, many being telechargeable. There are also 12 fitness circuits for running or walking. More info from the Bagnoles de l'Orne Tourist Office: www.bagnolesdelorne.com

50,000 tulips planted

For 'Operation Tulipes Contre le Cancer' the *Lions Club Tinchebray-Condé* planted 50,000 tulip bulbs at the end of 2020. The flowers should be ready for picking in Spring and will be sold to the public to support research against cancer. (Due to the pandemic, the 2020 tulip sales did not take place). For the past 4 years the volunteers have used an old potato planter modified for planting tulip bulbs. The ground was prepared by local farmers in early November and 20,000 bulbs were planted near Tinchebray (61) to add to the 20,000 already there. Then, a week later, 30,000 bulbs were planted at Saint-Pierre-du-Regard (61). The tulips will be sold at local markets, hopefully at the end of March 2021.

In the past 24 years, the *Lions Club de Tinchebray-Condé* has collected more than 295,000€ for several causes including support for sick children and their families.

Le Jardin Public in Fougères (35)

Situated at the base of the château you can discover the secrets of these lovely gardens which offer a view on the medieval quarter and the château. There are actually 3 gardens - an English-style garden, a French-style garden with geometric forms, and a botanical garden - each with its own character. The gardens were formed in 1760, originally just a tree-lined walk, and were renovated in 1865 by *la Société d'Horticulture de Fougères*, with the idea of creating a natural, enjoyable space for the people of the town. You will also find picnic areas and there have often been exhibitions on site.

Taking photos / DVDs of your valuables

A reminder that we are advised to take photos of our valuables in case of theft, fire damage or other damage for insurance identification purposes. However, unless you can prove that the item was actually in the insured house it may not be covered in any claim you make on your insurance policy. So, while taking the individual photos it is a good idea to make a DVD showing the items *'in situ'* to use as proof *'au cas où'* (just in case).

Gorron illuminations and decorated windows

We all enjoyed the Christmas illuminations, and as part of the exhibits in several windows in Gorron there were many dolls in various costumes. These dolls (108 of them!) are part of the collection of 3,000 dolls of Mme Marie-Annick Paillard of Cossé-le-Vivien (53) and they showed a choir, (near the *Mairie*), old trades (in the old nurses' office), a school class from the 1950s (at the PIGE) and a marriage scene (rue de la Mairie). All the dolls wore costumes made by Lucienne Chenus. Mme Paillard says that she didn't have any dolls when she was growing up but she now loves to repair old toys, and she started her doll collection 13 years ago.

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

In English, for practice using all the letters of the alphabet, a typist uses "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog". In French they use: "*Allez porter ce vieux whisky au juge blond qui fume un havane*" (take this aged whisky to the blond judge who is smoking a cigar").

In memory of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who was President of the 5th République of France from 1974 to 1981, died aged 94 on 2nd December this year, sadly from Covid-19. His idea for the new European currency was the *'écu'*.

Don't throw out your old objects

The French government site *longuevieauxobjets.gouv.fr* was launched in Jan. 2020 to help you keep your possessions longer or find a new use for them instead of binning them. It provides a directory of 76,000 associations and companies which can help you share, hire, rent out, buy second-hand, give away or repair items. State agency ADEME says if everyone kept their TV for nine years, not eight, it would reduce emissions by 1.7million tonnes of carbon dioxide, the amount produced in a year by a city the size of Lyons.

Helianthus charity

This registered charity, whose aim is to help local animals in need, has a shop at 97 rue Aristide Briand, Pré-en-Pail (53), on the main road running through the town, sells bric-a-brac, clothes, furniture, books and much more. Open: Weds. 14h-17h and Sats. 9h30 to 12h30. For more info: 02 43 04 97 26, helianthus-asso.org and facebook

Where did the word ‘curfew’ come from?

Amongst the many buzzwords used in the French media during the Covid-19 home confinement period was *couvre-feu*, meaning curfew. It was used in particular with reference to night-time traffic-banning measures imposed in certain towns and cities. *Couvre-feu* originated in the Middle Ages, and the custom it describes was adopted by William the Conqueror. However, it was not an order to stay at home to ward off civil unrest or to prevent virus spread. With the majority of houses at the time made of timber, fire hazard was an over-riding concern. So, at 20h, a curfew bell rang out by order of local *bourgmestres* – the communal authority of the time, like a *maire* – informing residents that it was time to extinguish all candles and fires (in posher houses a *couvre-feu* later became the name of a metal utensil to do this). Officials would scout the towns looking for non-compliants.

English films in Gorron (53) cinema

To find out the films to be shown in this cinema (when they can again be run) go to www.gorron-cinema.fr. You can request the programme by email at cinema@gorron.fr

Comptage des oiseaux de jardin (Counting the garden birds)

In Normandie at the end of each January, 1,742 communes take part in this counting of birds. Last January, 78 species were spotted in gardens, parks and school grounds. *Le rouge-gorge* (robin) was the most observed, present in 86% of the gardens, followed by *le merle noir* (blackbird) at 79.8% and *la mésonge charbonnier* (great-tit/tom-tit) third at 78.1%. *Le moineau* (sparrow) was the most common with an average of 7.2 per garden, *le mésonge bleu* (blue-tit) in 2nd position and *le mésonge charbonnier* in 3rd place. *Les pinsons des arbres* (finches), the 3rd most seen in 2019, has dropped to 5th place in 2020, followed closely by *l’étourneau sansonnet* (starling)

The next counting event: ‘*Grand Comptage des Oiseaux de Jardin*’ is on the 20th & 31st January 2021. For more info you can contact GON (*Groupe Ornithologique Normand*), 181 rue d’Auge, Caen (14); www.gonm.org, 02 31 43 52 56.

We can all help by providing food in winter for our feathered friends. We may choose *un distributeur de graines* (seed dispenser) or *un support bloc/boules de graines* (fat ball/block support). A generic term for a feeder is *un nourisseur*, while a bird box is called *un nichoir*. Generic bird food is called *aliments pour oiseaux* – look out also for *un melange de graines* (bird seed mix). Most of these products are widely available in garden centres and home improvement stores. [taken from The Connexion, Nov. 2020].

Circus family in the Parc de la Colmont, Gorrion (53)

For the past 25 years, the circus troupe Venissia, owned by the Dumas family, have overwintered in Gorrion. It is a family business with a dozen people working there, including 7 circus artists with juggling, rope gymnastics & trapeze, and there are a few domestic animals (performing dogs, miniature horses). Their main aim is to make people laugh. However, years ago youngsters would enjoy the spectacles, but now with internet, social networking and TV it takes more to amuse people. Each year the family invite children and adults to join their initiation classes for circus acts, puppet theatre and applying children's facial make-up. They spend the winter months practising new acts, and in the past have put on a couple of shows in the huge red and yellow circular tent which can hold 300 people (but not this year).

Is the word *paysan* insulting in French?

The French word '*paysan*' and English word 'peasant' have the same origins but do not convey the same sense. The English word, like the French one, comes from medieval French meaning 'local inhabitant' - someone from *le pays* in the sense of 'the local area' as opposed to the usual modern sense of 'the country'. Whereas the English term now suggests someone uneducated, the French one mostly refers, not necessarily insultingly, to small scale, traditional farmers, especially with old-fashioned mixed farms, as opposed to those who run large industrialised mass-production ones. Some people take pride in being a *paysan* as it can be seen as implying authenticity and being down-to-earth and close to the *terroir* traditions. On the other hand, farmers who see themselves as modern and upwardly mobile might take offence.

Tour de France 2021 will be passing through Liffré (35)

Le Grand Boucle passes through Liffré on Tues. 29 June 2021 during the 4th stage between Redon and Fougères. The cyclists will arrive from Noyal-sur-Vilaine (D92) and will go through Liffré on their way towards La Bouexière. The support teams (*caravane*) are expected to arrive in Liffré around 13h50, with the *peloton* arriving between 15h30 and 16h.

Cheese of the month: *Pont l'Evêque*

This is one of the world's ancient cheeses and probably the oldest Norman cheese still in production. It dates back to the 13th century when it was called *Angelot*, but it later took the name of the village near the coast of Normandy where it was mainly produced. *Pont l'Evêque* is a small square-shaped cheese of a pale yellow colour with a white/orange rind, made on small farms using rich, salty and almost pasteurised cow's milk. It takes 3 litres of milk to make one 350-400g cheese. Best when eaten at room temperature, it goes well with Pinot Noir, Pomerol or Saint-Emilion wine, and also with cider.

EuroMayenne French classes

A few places are available in the EuroMayenne weekly French lessons (January to April sessions) with a qualified French teacher, well-respected and popular since 2004. For more info: <https://www.euromayenne.org/french-lessons> or frenchlessons@euromayenne.org

Lest We Forget

This year there was a small ceremony at the *calvaire* (cross) at La Geraumière, near Perrou (61), which was erected in memory of Paul Vivien of the French Resistance. Captured by the Germans on 22 January 1944 at the age of 24, he was taken to the Neuengamme concentration camp, south of Hamburg, and died on 7 June 1944. The *calvaire* was erected by locals in memory of his work with the Resistance, but over the past 74 years it had become covered in vegetation, so the president of the *Combattants Volontaires de la Resistance de l'Orne* had organised for it to be cleaned up, as it was on private property.

Accrobranche course soon to be in Fougères forest

At Chênédet, in the forest of Fougères (35), this Spring (postponed from last year) will be another site for this popular tree obstacle course and high wire adventure [similar to the ones in the woods at the Parc de la Colmont in Gorrion (53) and Bazouges-la-Pérouse (35)]. There will be a choice of 11 tree obstacle courses catering for all ages & sizes, the highest being 12m, and covering 2 hectares. They hope to open a horse-riding centre there also. More info from the Fougères Tourist Office (www.ot-fougères.fr)

A *brocante* has opened in Ambrières-les-Vallées (53)

After being unoccupied for 5 years, the business '*Tout Sourire*' has been taken over by Florent Collet who has created a *brocante*. You will find all sorts of items of home decoration, bric-a-brac, clothing, tools, glassware and china, and very low prices. There is a corner where the parents can amuse their children. Mostly filled with his own items, Florent will be adding to his stock over the coming months. Opening hours: Thurs to Sundays 10h to 19h. 06 22 54 70 88.

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And finally,

A thief has removed all motorway signs in Yorkshire. Police are currently looking for Leeds.

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That's all for this month. There are a few outdoor activities here for us to enjoy to blow away some cobwebs during the confinement. Stay safe!

Judy Skinner

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