



THE *English Library*

WHAT'S ON IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY

Events are a bit thin on the ground this month but that should give you plenty of time to fulfil all those new year resolutions to start a new hobby, do more exercise, lose weight etc. Anyway whatever activity you take up let's hope 2018 is a happier, more peaceful year.

EVENTS

Friday 12th January and 9th February - Fish and Chips, Gare de Villefranche. As usual, pre-order with Cod en Bleu using their online ordering page at <http://www.cod-en-bleu.com/OrderOnline.aspx> then reserve your table in Le Césarée bar.



Le Growing Groupe gardening club meets on the first Monday of each month. The next meeting will be on Monday 5th Feb. For more details email colandsuereeve@gmail.com or phone Anne Dyson on 05 65 81 47 67 or 0683678781

Quiz night February 23rd. Details to follow

VIDE GRENIERS/BROCANTES/MARCHÉS

Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th February. Vide Grenier Vailhourles (Salle des Fêtes chauffée) 9h-16h

CONCERTS

Sunday 21st January. New Year Concert, Monteils Salles des Fêtes 16h [HTTP://RESONANCEEN-ROUERGUE.COM/](http://resonanceen-rouergue.com/)

Tuesday 13th February, 20h45 Concert - Trios de Beethoven. Le Théâtre Municipal, Villefranche 20€

LIBRARY FACEBOOK PAGE

If you are a Facebook user please join our English Library Villefranche Rouergue page. You will find it is a useful page for getting updates on what's happening in Villefranche and for in-between events and info. Click on this link to go straight to the page and ask to join www.facebook.com/groups/1374046415990276/

This is just a selection of the events going on in our region. For more events visit www.tourisme-aveyron.com or www.villefranche.com

A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Happy New Year to all our readers and thank you for continuing to support the library and events. At the AGM held early in December the programme of activities for the spring was given out. We have two quiz nights booked on February 23rd and April 27th and on March 23rd another "Meet the Authors" is planned at Les Fleurines when local writers Vanessa Couchman and Mandy Jameson will present their recently published books. There may be an option of supper at La Gabelle after this event.

Now, however, is the time for lingering in the cosiest spot in your houses with a good book and on page 3 are some of our favourites of 2017. If you have a book which you particularly enjoyed do share it with others through the newsletter.

As we have money to continue to buy new books, a list will be kept in the library for your suggestions for authors or specific titles which you would like to see on our shelves.

Stay warm, stay well this January.

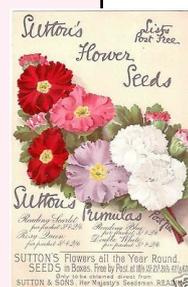
JN

GARDENING

I am not inspired to go outside, it is cold and wet. There is nothing urgent and it is probably too early to be cutting back, as who knows what the weather in February will be like? January is for planning and looking at seed catalogues. If you haven't sown much in the way of seed before, why not try some annuals. They will give your garden extra colour and attract more wildlife. Annuals like nigella, cosmos and any kind of poppy are so easy to sow - just sprinkle direct on to bare soil. April is a good time to sow most, but cosmos might need to wait until the soil really warms up. Cosmos transplants very easily, so this can be sown anywhere where you have a space and then transplanted to where you need extra colour. Every year I like to try something new in the garden and seeds are very cheap to buy. I tend to use English companies as I have far more choice and the postage for seeds is very reasonable.

Once we get into February there are plenty of jobs to get on with, but if it continues to be wet and cold, stay off the soil, you will only compact it. Young trees need checking - loosen tree ties which become too tight and prune out any dead, diseased wood and crossing branches. Autumn fruiting raspberries need cutting back to base and gooseberries and red currants pruned. It is usual with the gooseberries and red currants to cut a few of the older stems to base, to encourage new, young replacement stems. If February turns out to be mild and dry you can really start cutting back the grasses and perennials.

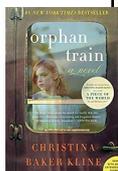
I find the cold, wet weather frustrating, but we needed the rain. My newly planted bare root roses and fruit trees will have had a good start. It isn't all bad, the winter flowering honey suckle is just starting to flower.



MG

SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE BOOKS 2018

Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline.



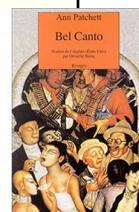
A good read, two wonderful characters. Best of all it's based on historical events about which I knew nothing. Thousands of children, not all orphans, were sent by train from the East coast of America to the Mid West . This went on until the 1920's. Some were adopted, some treated as farm hands. I'm keeping this over Christmas to read it again.

Lesley

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett

This was my favourite book of this year. It's a beautifully written, lyrical story of a group of people gathered together to celebrate the birthday of a Japanese business tycoon enjoying the performance of an operatic singer of great renown when terrorists strike. The ensuing story is so sensitively told and unfolds to reveal a wealth of characters and a most unexpected ending. This was the first Ann Patchett that I had read, we now have several titles on our shelves in the library so please try them!

Jackie



Winter Gardens by Cedric Pollet



My book of 2017 is a big book, A4, and it's heavy and was expensive, £30, but to my mind it is worth every penny. Cedric Pollet travelled around the world taking the most glorious photographs of many gardens in all their winter finery. The book took him 9 years and was originally written in French but my copy is the English version. Every page is a delight, the photography is superb and the accompanying text is clear and informative. This is a book to inspire you to plan and make a winter garden of your own. The fabulous colour combinations, the contrast of forms and the sheer beauty of the gardens pictured will help to while away many a happy hour dreaming up your own small slice of paradise. We often think of the winter garden as one without much colour, this book will make you think again. An unreserved recommendation for a magnificent tome.

Anne

Prussian Blue by Philip Kerr

My book of the year is 'Prussian Blue', the latest story about Bernie Gunther, who started his career as a detective in pre-war Berlin. The stories in the series see-saw from 1920 to the late fifties, taking you from the gathering storm clouds of war to the vengeful aftermath, and peopled with Nazi Russians, British spies and CIA men as well as the motley crew of bohemian Berlin. 'Prussian Blue' begins in the post-war French Riviera, takes you to Hitler's Austria and ends in a chase through post-war France. Kerr has an amusing turn of phrase, a historian's eye for detail and you may find yourself (as I often do) rushing to the computer to find biogs and pictures of the real people who play a part in the story. Be it history or crime fiction, it's top notch with Bernie coming across as a sardonic rough diamond with a noble soul. The series just gets better and better, but try and read them in order, if you can.

Jenny



RECIPES

Having used the theme of seasonal vegetables in 2017 I thought it might be fun to do seasonal fruits in 2018, so here goes.

I've chosen oranges for my first effort, I hope you will enjoy the following recipe which I often make just for me! It's difficult to give quantities and in fact it doesn't really matter, do your own thing and make the recipe yours.

For each serving you will need:

1 orange, all peel and pith removed

1 tablespoon orange liqueur - Cointreau or Grand Marnier work well

3 tablespoons of whipped double cream

About 20g coarsely grated dark chocolate

6 small or 3 large ratafia biscuits (you can use boudoir biscuits but they are not as good, the ratafia ones retain a bit of crunch which is good)

Place the biscuits in the base of your serving dish, you may need to break them up a bit. Now scatter the liqueur over the biscuits, don't drench them you want to keep some crunch. Now add pieces of oranges from which you have removed every last bit of peel, pith and membrane. This is the time consuming part of the recipe but it's worth the effort. Mask the oranges and biscuits with the whipped double cream and scatter the chocolate over. That's it, a bit like a luxurious orange trifle. Enjoy.

My next recipe is for a lovely winter starter.

Serves 4

2 heads of endive

1 orange

Small handful walnuts

Vinaigrette

Slice the endive, thin or coarse as you prefer. Place in a salad bowl. Add slices or pieces of orange segments. Add the broken pieces of walnut and toss with vinaigrette. I cheat and often use the orange vinaigrette made by Maille which gives another dimension to the salad or you can add orange juice along with the vinegar in your own vinaigrette.



AD

The deadline for the March/April newsletter is 21st February. Please send items to the editor Pat Dickinson at annpatd@gmail.com

REVIEWS

As it is the beginning of the year actual gardening is difficult but armchair gardening is not. This can be a time to take stock and plan changes: it can also be a time to do some reading. With this in mind I review some informative books on design, growing and maintenance.

“The ten-minute gardener” series by Val Bourne.



This covers, in 3 books, flower, fruit and vegetable growing. I was originally drawn to the series by the title and because it sets out month by month what tasks need to be done at that time. However I soon became confounded by the title - I still am. Most of the tasks would take far longer than 10 minutes to do and some of them are just mad. For example Bourne recommends thinning bunches of grapes in June: “Cut up into the bunch removing most of the interior grapes and any very small ones.” etc. I mean, who has the time or the inclination for that sort of thing even if you do get good grapes?

Having said that the books are appealing to look at and read. They have an old-fashioned feel, being small, well-bound hardbacks with a few simple line drawings. Bourne is keen on organic gardening, which one can only applaud as one watches the wildlife wreak havoc on your potager. There is usually a piece about organic tips and an interesting section called “Did you know?” which can cover the history of a plant or other facts.

All in all it is an enjoyable series, but 10 minutes? No.

“Gardening with shape, line and texture” by Linden Hawthorne

What a perfect name the author has for a writer of gardening books. The concept behind the book is how to design with plants. Chapters are named after the type of job a plant would do in a design eg:

- verticals and diagonals
- horizontals and tiers etc.

Her opening chapter is almost unreadably baffling as she covers some design concepts (Divine proportion, the Golden Ratio and so on). She manages to make the whole thing so complex that even my engineer reader had trouble with it. However when she gets to the plants she is entirely comprehensible.

Obviously her choices cannot be exhaustive, it is not an encyclopaedia after all, and plant varieties are constantly being expanded. However she is very good at identifying the particular varieties of each plant which will perform well for the grower. She also neatly gets round the metric/imperial issue by giving the heights in relation to the human body (knee height, waist height etc) which tends to make it easy to visualise and plan.

As with many garden books in English this one is written with a more temperate climate in mind than the one we enjoy here. Hawthorne does cover what soil and conditions are needed to help a plant to thrive so it is up to you how much risk you want to take. You can't say you haven't been warned!

Of course it is frustrating to fall in love with a plant and then discover that it is unlikely to be available locally. There are some good mail order growers (one based in the Pyrenees) who stock most things.

Enjoy your planning.

EM



MYSTERY SHOPPER

Let's hope that 2018 is a return to some form of normality after the upheavals of the last 12 months. Strangely though, just when everything political seems to be in the air, worldwide economic indicators are pointing in a positive direction.

One of the biggest challenges facing the world in 2018 is distribution of wealth. The rich are getting richer and the poor aren't sharing the cake. In countries with weak rule of law and questionable democracy this is mainly down to what Americans call graft: corruption to you and I. This happens either by political leaders grabbing state assets or by the elite siphoning off foreign aid. Either way it clobbers growth and fuels unrest. In more developed countries it's about unchecked pay increases for top management at a time when staff wage growth has stagnated and though headline inflation is still low in most countries the prices of essential goods, most notably food, are rising faster. There are masses of published statistics showing how imbalanced all this is and while 'Reaganomics' in eighties America purported to show that giving tax breaks and other incentives to the super-rich has a trickle-down effect on wealth creation, this is still very much a matter of opinion (Mr Trump please listen).

For those that don't know the hit musical *Les Misérables*, the plot is set against the backdrop of the 1848 European revolutions. These were an inevitable backlash against the restoration of monarchies post-Napoleon, spearheaded by students and supported for a while by the proletariat. Sadly it was harshly put down but the threat posed by the mob merely returned later. It's still the case today and whether you believe in right-wing populism or the resurgence of the left, no leader can rest easy.

So my big hope for 2018 is, funnily enough, France. Who would have expected the complacent, corpulent scooter-boy François Hollande to be replaced by a centrist banker leading a party with no political experience? He's getting to grips with the country's labyrinthine labour laws and challenging those pesky *partenaires sociaux*, the unions, not to mention engaging frankly and forcefully with the new world political order. He even wants to put the French language back in a prime position worldwide. I say bravo M. Macron!

In Britain there's a stew because the New Year saw rail fares rise by an average of 3.4%. I don't know how many of you use the railways but I'm a fan, both sides of the channel. The big difference between Britain and France is speed and travel comfort; even the Figeac-Villefranche-Toulouse service has trains that would shame British mainline trains and of course the TGV system is still one of the world's best. The downside it has to be admitted is poor profitability on non-TGV main lines and that is the SNCF's big challenge currently.



The problem in the UK goes back to privatisation in the nineties. I won't go into the complications of infrastructure and operating companies as I'll be showing my age but research suggests that a majority of people would like a return to state ownership but whether this would actually work better is a source of hot debate. No matter: it's recently become apparent that the operators themselves make very slim profit margins and several companies have pulled out of the industry altogether. Those that remain don't invest enough in rolling stock which outside main routes is often old, slow and uncomfortable. My father-in-law travelled on the south Wales main line before Christmas and the train was a single coach, packed to the ceiling with luggage and passengers to the point where it was almost impossible to 'alight'. Don't bother to ask transport minister Mr Grayling: he was abroad at a conference at the time, and taking no calls.

continued on next page

Has anyone been down to the central shopping district of Toulouse recently? The biggest building site is the new Primark store. That's really going to put the cat among the domestic retail pigeons. I await the outcome with interest.

Bonne année à tous!

Mystery Shopper

HEAR HERE

For several years, I'd been suffering from age-related deafness, a natural and irreversible loss of function. While low frequency sounds were fine, middle and high frequencies had become more of a struggle. We actually take in between 25 and 50% of what is said, our brain fills in the rest. That's fine in our native tongue, for a foreign language, we just have to hear more.

I was still doing OK in both English and French, until a party balloon burst loudly by my left ear. I was almost completely deaf for two days and even after 10 days, there was only a small improvement. I took a couple of online hearing tests, which confirmed moderate audibility loss in the middle and higher ranges. Life became miserable, I felt so cut off and unable to take part in conversations or to hear the TV.

The ENT consultant gave me a full examination and tests, then pronounced the damage as permanent. He presented me with a copy of the results chart to take to a hearing aid centre.

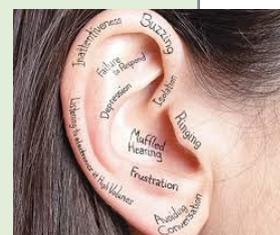
Aides auditives in France are very expensive, something like €3000 a pair. CPAM and the rump of mutuelles pay very little towards such devices. President Macron is promising to introduce free aids, because so many French citizens need them but can't afford them.

I contacted a UK internet company which offers a range of types and prices. Essentially, there are two varieties, in-the-ear, ITE and behind-the-ear, BTE. I can't have ITE because of my strong response to low frequencies. I had several discussions with their audiologist and emailed my chart.

I chose a pair that has three functions, one for a quiet room and TV, a second for noisier environments and a third for T-loop, the wireless signal system found in theatres and railway stations. Each aid has two microphones, one forward-facing to pick up speech and a second to collect and cancel ambient noise. A rocker switch allows volume changes.

The unit clips behind the ear and is connected to the canal via almost imperceptible thin tubing. On the end of the tube is a soft silicon dome, available as standard, tulip and power. You have to experiment to find which suits you best and prevents any feedback. Batteries last around 7-10 days, and there's an audible low battery warning. Cost? About a third of the price in France.

It took me a good week to get used to my new 'ears', but they are a substantial improvement; noisy areas still present some difficulties. Many people are reluctant to have aids because they fear them being unsightly. Let me assure you that they're all but invisible. Don't suffer in silence – get it sorted!



NW

FIGEAC DOG/CAT REFUGE

The Refuge at Figeac could really do with your help. Cindy Lance, the young manager there, is doing a great job looking after and encouraging re-homing of the dogs and cats in her care and conditions there are better than ever.

Thinking of adopting? Have you time to help exercise the dogs? Have you spare bedding? Check out their website - <http://refuge-de-figeac.wifeo.com/>

Like and follow their FB page - refuge de figeac (46100)

Call the refuge and ask for Cindy - 0565341907

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An Englishman, Irishman & Scotsman are all sentenced to live in a pit for 20 years.
Keep Calm And Oh Feck It Enjoy Some Craic
They are told that they are all allowed to take one thing with them.
 The Englishman says, "I'll take 20 years' supply of beer."
 The Scotsman says, "I'll take 20 years' supply of whisky."
 The Irishman says, "I'll take 20 years' supply of cigarettes."
 They are released 20 years later.
 The Englishman staggers out and falls down dead from alcoholic poisoning.
 The Scotsman staggers out and falls down dead from alcoholic poisoning.
 The Irishman walks out and says, "Anybody got a light?"

SERVICES

Qualified hairdresser with 30 years experience. From a simple cut to a complete restyle, colouring and highlighting. I can attend to your hair care requirements in the comfort of your own home. T. Jayne on 0632842384 or jhpn@hotmail.co.uk

Home from Home welcomes your dogs to board with us & our Golden Retrievers in our home (not kennels). British experienced owners and breeders offering TLC to your pet when you cannot be there. Between Villefranche de R. and Figeac, phone us on 06 27 72 01 07 or email at ambersclan.goldenretrievers@orange.fr. Or see www.ambersclan.vom

The Writing Desk can swiftly turn your ideas into sharp, punchy script. As an author and experienced freelance journalist I have spent many years creating features for business and lifestyle magazines. For great words and a fast service, contact Nigel on: T:05 65 65 81 53 nigelwild@hotmail.co.uk

NovasolHoliday Rentals. We can find tenants for your home, visit your property, provide insurance etc. Tel Rose Dodd - 0565 641270

Learn French in a friendly, fun atmosphere at So'Happy School in Villefranche. All levels/all ages. Qualified, motivated teacher with excellent OFSTED reports and 15 years experience. Small groups:18 Euros/1h30 lessons; individual lessons: 22 euros/hour. Contact Sophie on [0781959201](tel:0781959201) or sohappyschool@gmail.com

Art Lessons - Basic drawing, Perspective, Acrylics, Oil and Watercolour. €20 for 2 hours. T. 0565648515

Monplaisir Cookery Classes. For visitors or permanent residents, beginners to advanced, come and have fun developing your cooking skills in groups of 3 to 6 people. For more information call Marion on [0787 53 29 68](tel:0787532968).

English - French translations of documents and interpreting during meetings. Help with French administration and/or with official French letters. Also one to one French lessons or French conversation, contact Jacynth Crozier, Tel. 06 30 31 13 00

SERVICES continued

Iyengar Yoga. Tuesday afternoons 2.30 - 4.00pm and Thursday mornings 10.15am to 11.45am, Villefranche de Rouergue. Qualified Yoga teacher. First lesson free. Contact Penny Mackey on 05 65 81 74 58 or email: penny-mackey@orange.fr

Stained glass. Book an afternoon workshop near Belcastel & make yourself a stained glass sun-catcher. Sessions from 1.30 - 5.00pm including tea/coffee & cake €15 euros per person. Also items for sale. Contact libbydowle@gmail.com or T. 05 65 80 47 19 or 0604441425

Machine and Hand Sewing. Clothing alterations, curtains etc. Prices from €10. T: Lesley: 05 65 63 8108 or ltruchet@hotmail.com

ITEMS FOR SALE

Manure For Sale

Contact Bridget Blunsdon 05 65 65 78 60

Contemporary Sculptural Mirrors. Go to www.fortunedesigns.co.uk for details. Free delivery and fitting within 20km of Villefranche de Rouergue. Ideal for a special gift. T: 05 65 45 48 14 or email f.design@outlook.fr

BUILDERS & TRADESPEOPLE

Carpenter/joiner, 40 years experience, city and guilds qualified. Many aspects of building work carried out at reasonable rates. Contact Phil Needham on 0565635878 or jhpn@hotmail.co.uk

All sorts of DIY projects and odd jobs including metalwork, pergolas, welding, electricity, plumbing etc Also - Stained Glass Windows, Sun Catchers etc. T: Harvey on 05 65 63 81 08 Email: ltruchet@hotmail.com

Nicolas Powell - Maçon du Bati Ancien Marin 12260 Sainte Croix T. 0620551040

Does your house, holiday home or gîte need finishing? All kinds of interior and exterior work undertaken e.g. skirting boards, wood trims, tiling, painting, decorating etc. Contact:Tim Fortune on 0565 454814 or mail f.design@outlook.fr