



THE *English Library*

WHAT'S ON IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH

Winter is a quiet with not a lot happening until the tourists start to arrive around Easter time. However we've found a couple of events to get you out of the house!

EVENTS

Two dates for your diaries - QUIZ NIGHTS at Les Fleurines at 6pm on Fri 24th February and Fri 31st March. Look out for an email from David Sharrock with more info.

Sat 4th Feb - Cod en Bleu will be providing Fish and Chips at le Césarée, V de F to coincide with the England v France rugby match. 'Le Crunch' will be shown on a big screen in the bar. Place your order in advance with Cod en Bleu and contact le Césarée to reserve a table.



CHOIRS AND MUSIC

Irish Folk music in Matou Dell'Arte. There will be two concerts at 5 rue de Crussol, corner of rue d'Anjou, Figeac Friday 03 February 2017 and Friday 03 March 2017 time 21h. There will be a practice session at 18.30 if you'd like to play too. Listen to traditional music with a glass of beer or whiskey the first Friday of every month.

VIDE GRENIERS / FAIRS

It might be worth noting, if you are interested in Flea markets, that there will be a Flea Market every second Sunday of the month all year round in Baraqueville from 7h - 13h. Everything - dishes, furniture, books, pictures, you name it, it's for sale.



Vide-grenier organised by l'Association du Clocher Saint-Martin, 12 Feb, in the Centre Social Polyvalent at Luc La Primaube - Rue de l'Esplanade. 12 Feb 2017 and 26 Feb. Luc-La-Primaube is near Rodez.

VISITS

If you are going to Millau or you guests are, a visit to the Millau Glove factories could be quite interesting. There are two in the centre of the town and their products are high quality. They make gloves for the big Parisian design houses. Maison Fabre is at 20 avenue Gambetta, 12100, Millau, and Maison Causse is at 5, Boulevard des Gantières, 12100 Millau. The latter have a free, self-guided visit of the museum and workshops. Open from Monday till Saturday from 9.30h to 12.30 and from 14 to 19h

EXHIBITIONS & SALONS

Exhibition of reptiles and amphibians in Décazeville - 24 Jan to 17 June.
Salon Chocolat et Vins - Villefranche, Chemin de Treize Pierres. Annual event, this year it's on Saturday 25 March and Sunday 26 March.
Salon du Livres Anciens et Modernes - Allées Aristide Briand, Villefranche, 25 March and 26 March



For other events visit www.tourisme-aveyron.com or www.villefranche.com

A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

By the time you are able to read this newsletter I hope to be at the other side of the world basking in a shady spot sipping something cooling and sending warming wishes to you all in the Aveyron. At the moment I am in a grey, damp and chilly London missing the bright, clear and cold Villefranche. Till we meet again, stay warm and well, have a happy February.

*JN***GARDENING**

It has been cold, but it could have been worse. No doubt some of the plants have suffered, especially some of the evergreens like Phlomis (Jerusalem Sage). Resist cutting back, at least for the moment, winter is not yet over and we could still get another cold spell. Once we get into March you can tidy up a bit, but resist doing a proper prune until April. Unfortunately it was wet just before the cold weather so the frost has probably penetrated quite deep into the soil. Any over wintering dahlias have probably had it, but give them a chance, they might have survived. The same applies to some perennials.

Despite the cold weather, some shrubs have still performed well. The *Nandina domestica* is real star, with the red tinges to its foliage and the clusters of delicate red berries. The *Sarcococca* also looks good and is bravely trying to flower. *Lonicera fragrantissima* is just on the point of flowering, a very sensible shrub as it puts the flowering on hold just until we get another mild spell when it will fill the garden with fragrance.



The bulbs seem very slow to show so if you have any in pots they might appreciate some water. It has actually been very dry so we are going to need a wet spring.

M&YG

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VOLUNTEERS

We have a group of library members who volunteer to man the library either occasionally or on a regular basis but illness, holidays and other circumstances sometimes means it's difficult to find the necessary cover. If anyone would be willing to add their name to the list of volunteers could they please contact Anita (on jessanita@gmail.com) who will be happy to show them the ropes.

PARIS VEHICLE POLLUTION STICKER SCHEME COMES INTO FORCE

Drivers in Paris must display an anti-pollution sticker in their vehicles or face fines in the latest attempt by the French authorities to improve air quality. The sticker scheme, which became mandatory on Monday 16th January includes cars, lorries, motorcycles and scooters, and bans some vehicles from the city during weekdays.

It follows numerous spikes in pollution in which smog has descended over the French capital, forcing traffic reduction measures and the introduction of free public transport on the worst days.



The six different coloured Crit'Air (air criteria) stickers indicate the age and cleanliness of a vehicle. Certain vehicles – including petrol and diesel cars registered before 1996; vans registered before 1997; pre-2000 scooters and motorbikes; and lorries, trucks and buses from before 2001 – are banned from the city between 8am and 8pm Mon-Fri.

Foreign-registered vehicles have been given until March to obtain their stickers, which cost €4.18 each, payable online. The scheme was unveiled last year and stickers have been available since July. The French government announced 1.4m Crit'Air stickers had been ordered through the official website, but a police check carried out across Paris last week found only one in 50 vehicles stopped had the stickers. About 600,000 vehicles are estimated to drive in and around the city every day. Those found without stickers can be fined €68 for cars and €138 for lorries. It is intended that the scheme will be extended to other major cities, including Toulouse, by 2020. For further info go to www.crit-air.fr.

PD

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

BACK IN THE DAY WE
HAD JOHNNY CASH,
STEVE JOBS, AND BOB
HOPE. NOW WE HAVE
NO CASH, NO JOBS,
AND NO HOPE. PLEASE
DON'T LET ANYTHING
HAPPEN TO KEVIN
BACON!

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MYSTERY SHOPPER

In July 1973 I was taken to the JC Penney store at Roosevelt Field, Long Island in a massive gas-guzzler called an Oldsmobile Delta. This was the very place Charles Lindberg had commenced his historic solo transatlantic crossing in 1927, but that wasn't why I was there. Ron was the store manager and the cousin of a friend who'd kindly agreed to put me up for a few days. After proudly showing me round we hurried from the chilly air-conditioned vestibule through a stifling wall of humidity back to the car. Within seconds of firing up the V8 engine the interior was cold. Later that trip I borrowed a small Toyota sedan but the effect wasn't the same – it took much longer for the interior temperature to adjust.

The point of all this, and hear me out, is that American cars are built for Americans and the American climate. As a result GM, Ford and Chrysler never really bothered to export: why would they when their domestic market was the largest in the world? Worse, their quality was well below European and Japanese standards. The cars were solid but badly made and the handling awful. Even these days when Detroit's biggest success is the pickup truck, relatively few go abroad. So when Trump tweets complaining that Germans have no Chevrolets on their driveways the German response is "build better cars". And that's the problem: the inferiority of US-made consumer products means that Americans have grown used to buying from China, to the massive detriment of their balance of trade.

I can think of only a handful of American-made products that I own: Weber BBQs and Briggs & Stratton lawnmower engines come to mind. These are good products with strong market positions, but they're the exception that proves the rule. If the new US administration does succeed in transferring production of consumer goods to the continental mainland, the cost of labour is going to rule out the mass-market. The success of Wal-Mart is built on Chinese-made products so Yanks, please don't complain too much. You still pay next to nothing for petrol and most things are cheaper in your backyard than in Europe. Strangely too your unemployment rate is the lowest for many years, so apart from re-employing coal miners in West Virginia what's the fuss all about?

You've probably never heard of Vivarte but you may have bought shoes from its subsidiary La Halle aux Chaussures or clothes from just plain La Halle. Saddled with colossal debt from over-ambitious acquisitions the group is now in serious trouble. The restructuring plan involves selling upmarket brands André and NafNaf and closing 147 shoe stores with the loss of up to 16000 jobs. Competition from foreign-owned groups like Primark and Zara have seriously impacted sales in recent years and going into one of their stores you can't help feeling that they've been caught napping. Layouts are dull, products are cheap-looking and the value for money nowhere near what it used to be. Furthermore as is often the case in France, staff training places little importance on customer-friendliness. The CGT union is as usual in banner-waving fury but this is not a state industry and if the group is to survive, such drastic surgery is unavoidable.

Personally if I'm in the market for shoes I go to Decathlon for anything outdoor or sporty and to Toulouse for style. Or if I'm feeling flush I go to herringshoes.co.uk for British-designed chutzpah. You'll be paying a lot more than in the stores but ease of repair means that in the long term while you won't be saving money over the high street the combination of durability and style will be worth it, believe me.

Finally are you plagued by nuisance calls on your landline? If so you might like to try the government's new service www.bloctel.gouv.fr. It claims to tackle this scourge and is free to use. Let's hope it works; it's long overdue. Personally I always say I rent my house and don't own a car or a computer!

A la prochaine alors!

Mystery Shopper

HEAVEN'S NEARER THAN YOU THINK

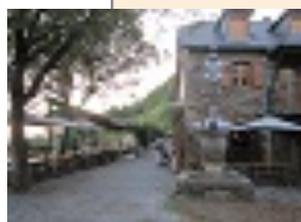
Looking for a couple of days away to celebrate a birthday and not too far to drive, I began investigating the Dourdou valley and the historic town of Conques. Situated at the confluence of the Ouche and Dourdou rivers, this Romanesque jewel was a main stop for pilgrims en route to Saint Jacques de Compostelle. Surfing the web, I found one chambres d'hôtes with rave reviews. Le Ponsonnet, perched on the side of the valley overlooking nearby St Cyprien, was apparently the bee's knees: it was.

Our welcome from Marie Jo and Gilbert was very warm, our bottle of champagne whisked off to their fridge and a vase offered for the birthday bouquet. À l'Ombre d'un Chêne offered us a chic and well-appointed double room with king size bed and an en suite like something out of Homes and Gardens, with bath, Italian shower, ample mirrors, fluffy towels and L'Occitane toiletries. French windows gave breathtaking views over St Cyprien and the Dourdou valley. We unanimously agreed they'd thought of everything.



Outside, the large garden sported a sizeable infinity pool, a siesta area with hammocks and a summer kitchen for guests to make their own food. For those arriving by plane or train, an electric car is available to explore; for the more energetic, there are bikes.

We spent a couple of very relaxing hours in the pool before setting off for L'auberge du Peyral at La Vinzelle. The Dourdou corkscrews through the valley and the road is an endless series of bends joined by the occasional short straight. Take your time and hire a mountain goat for the climb up to La Vinzelle. L'auberge specialises in local cuisine of tarts and salads, excellent but unusual fare and we enjoyed an alternative dinner. The rosé d'Entraygues et du Fel was outstanding, but seems only available locally, we can't find it in Villefranche.



Back at Le Ponsonnet, we shared our champagne with Gilbert. He told us that Marie Jo had run an hotel in St Cyprien for 35 years. On retirement, they sympathetically extended their house, creating a kitchen, lounge/diner and three double rooms. Both speak only French, although Gilbert understands some English.

Breakfast on the terrace was to die for, a different fruit cocktail by Marie Jo each day, complemented by viennoiserie, breads, home-made preserves, yoghurts, cheeses and delicious coffee, all served on elegant crockery.

At Marcillac, we strolled around the bustling Sunday market, gathering food and wine for an evening picnic chez le Ponsonnet. Seeing our feast, our hosts immediately set a table on our bedroom terrace, complete with linen napery. Merveilleux. We never made it to Conques!

If you're looking for heaven, then it's nearer than you think. You can book direct via their website, but they accept only cash or cheques, no credit cards.

NW

BOOK REVIEWS - Portrayals of alienation and integration.

'The Son' by Philipp Meyer

This is an epic story of Texas, which ranges from the 1890's to the 1980's and is told through the eyes of three generations of the McCullough family.

At an early age Eli, the family founder, is kidnapped by the Comanche Indians. He learns their ways and their ethics and comes to love and identify with them. After his band falls prey to disease and hunger he returns to the life of a white American. He retains his respect and feeling for his former tribe and he develops a ruthlessness which grows as he establishes himself in the region.

The other voices are those of his son and great-granddaughter. His son shares none of his father's values and is appalled by the extermination and treatment of the Mexican population. His life is marred by having this moral compass.

The great-granddaughter shares the acumen of her ancestor and can see the "coming thing." She heads the family during the period of the oil boom in Texas and her life is a struggle between happiness and pursuit of business success. She is a woman out of her time and that does not help her.

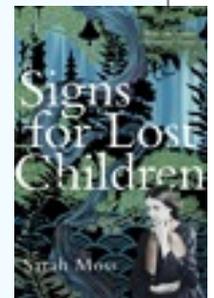
This is a powerful, absorbing story with the voice of Eli being particularly vivid and well realised. About 70% of the way through the book I felt it was losing momentum and direction. It became very sequential and the voice of Peter dragged a bit. The ending is fitting but not particularly conclusive (but perhaps that mirrors life.) Descriptions of an idyllic Texas as it was and what it became are well done. In the wider sense it is the story of what

man and his greed do to the earth and how successive peoples have conquered and lived in places only to be overcome in their turn. Since Texas once belonged to Mexico it is hard not to wonder if Donald Trump has read his history.



'Signs for Lost Children' by Sarah Moss

This is the second book in a planned trilogy. I think it can be read without reading the first, "Bodies of Light", since this is what I did as I thought the latter sounded too downbeat for my mood. "Signs for lost Children" is set in the 1880's and has two strands: one of Ally, the new bride, the other of her husband Tom. Ally has escaped from an unhappy early life to become a doctor: Tom is an engineer who designs lighthouses. Early in the marriage they move to Cornwall but then he is offered a chance to go to Japan for six months to advise on a lighthouse project and Ally opts not to go, but to work in a local asylum.



From then on the book is split into alternating stories: Tom's experiences in Japan and Ally's in England. Without Tom's stabilising influence Ally begins to doubt everything, particularly herself. Her mother's malign influence reaches out once again to engulf her and her attempts to do good in the asylum founder. Tom is also struggling with feelings of alienation and integration. He is fascinated by Japan and Ally seems increasingly unreal to him. Both characters are sympathetic but I found myself willing Ally on in her attempts to escape her difficult past. Her puritan conditioning does not allow her to take the easy option - ever. The ending is rather abrupt and unsatisfactory and out of keeping with what has been built up during the novel. The author's wish to write a sequel is all too apparent. Having said that, Sarah Moss writes well. I suspect her portrayal of Ally as an innovative psychiatrist is anachronistic. If such women did exist in England in the 1880s, they were not well documented.

EM

RECIPE

In season at this time of year is one of my favourite vegetables, the unpretentious, some may even say boring, endive. It's a versatile vegetable which is good either cooked or raw and it's cheap! Lidl sells packs of baby endive which are superb but every supermarket or market stall has this delicious veg on sale. Here are three easy-peasy recipes to get your taste buds tingling. No title to any, make up your own.



Recipe no. 1

For each person you will need 1 endive or 2 if they are small and/or you are greedy. 1 slice of jambon blanc (supermarket packet ham is fine here), a thick cheese sauce made with half cantal and half Parmesan with a scraping of nutmeg added, 1 tablespoon freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

Method :- set the oven at 180C, steam the endive for around 5 minutes - you don't want to fully cook them at this stage and steaming is best as they seem to hold lots of water. Now wrap the half cooked endive in a slice of ham (cut into two if the endive are very small, it's up to you). Place in an ovenproof dish and mask with the cheese sauce, sprinkle with the grated cheese and place in the pre-heated oven for around 30 minutes when the top will be golden brown and the contents sizzling. Enjoy.

Recipe no 2

For each person you will need 1 endive, half an orange, peeled and sliced, about 6 walnuts, vinaigrette (or use the delicious 'velours agrumes' made by Maille. If you haven't tried this dressing give it a go, it's superb and obtainable from most supermarkets)

Method :- slice the endive thinly, horizontally and place in a salad bowl, add the orange cut into smallish pieces (if serving to guests you might want to go to the trouble of removing the pith of the orange) add walnuts and dressing. Mix well and serve. A lovely fresh tasting winter salad.

Recipe no 3

For each person you will need 1 endive, around 10g butter, 2 teaspoonful runny honey, a small quantity feta cheese, and, optional, 1 teaspoon sesame seeds or za'atar spice.

Method:- set oven at 180C. In an oven proof dish, place the butter and allow it to melt in the oven. Now cut the endive in two vertically and place cut side down in the dish. (Use a dish large enough for each half endive to be in contact with the bottom of the dish) Drizzle the honey on top of the endive and place in the preheated oven for 15 minutes. Now crumble the feta cheese on top of the endive retaining some slightly larger pieces of the cheese. Add salt, not too much as the feta is salty, and freshly ground black pepper and the other spice if you are using this. Return to the oven for another 15 minutes. You can add all sorts of vegetables to this dish, though I often leave out the honey if I have a good mix of veg - carrots, parsnip, spinach, savoy cabbage, kale, onion, tomato, courgettes are all good with the feta cheese.

Watch out for the next set of seasonal vegetable recipes in this new series.

If you have any cooking queries I'm at the end of a phone and happy to help. T: 0683678781.

AD

SERVICES

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

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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

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

Do you keep trying the same thing, with the same result? Are you chipping away at your confidence a little more each time? If you want something different you have to do something different. Whether it's health, business or relationships, find out which obstacles are getting in your way and discover how to overcome them. Base: Villefranche de Rouergue. Mail: jane.ahern@outlook.com

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

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SERVICES continued

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

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

ITEMS FOR SALE

Manure For Sale
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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

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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 05 65 45 48 14 or mail f.design@outlook.fr