



Issue No 28

The French Connection

Brentwood/Montbazon Town Twinning Association
www.Brentwoodfrenchtwinning.com



2013 EVENTS

A Message from our Chairman David Minns

Pictured here with

Laurence Leblevec - Jumelage President and
Bernard Reveche, Mayor of Montbazon



We have now entered 2014, the 20th anniversary of the official inauguration of the Jumelage with Montbazon. I hope you will enjoy reading this edition describing what the Association has been involved in over the past 12 months.

Since my election in June, we have had a very successful visit to Montbazon, where we were warmly greeted by our French friends. The memories and the activities we enjoyed whilst there, are covered in this edition, as well as some of the social and fund raising events held throughout the year. In this 20th anniversary year we look forward to the return visit of our French friends to Brentwood from **21st-26th August**. Sheila Hornsby and the Social Committee are working hard putting together a programme we hope they will enjoy.

In an effort to publicise the Association and to encourage membership, a Coffee Morning was held in the United Reformed Church hall in the town with literature and photos of Montbazon set out. Flyers were distributed with an invitation to a free cup of coffee and a warm croissant. The response was not overwhelming, but it was a good opportunity to spread the word about the Association. Those who came were enthusiastic and interested to learn more about Montbazon and Town Twinning with two becoming members

I would like to take this opportunity to thank: Valerie Fletcher, immediate past Chairman, for her commitment during her three year tenure; Emmanuelle Darut, our Secretary, for her enthusiasm and drive; Sheila Hornsby, for running the Social Committee and all the Executive Committee members for all the time they have given.

I would like to give special thanks to Rosemary Smith and Margaret Streather for putting our newsletter together and to those who contributed the articles and photos.

Finally, we are always pleased to see your friends and contacts who show interest in our local activities and visits to France. Please encourage them to come along to our social events. They will be made very welcome.

Good wishes to you all for the New Year.

Fête des Rois

by Anne-Marie & Stanley Ede

Saturday 12th January
THE BELLI CENTRE



ST PETER'S CHURCH,
SOUTH WEALD

What a lovely introduction to the Montbazon Twinning Association.

As new members we were looking forward to meeting other members of the group as well as experiencing this French celebration of Epiphany. Although celebrated more in past times, the 12 days of Christmas are now only remembered in the U.K. by the tradition of taking down all the decorations by the 12th night of the Christmas festivities!

As well as enjoying a lovely meal and looking for the Fève in the galette, we were delighted to see some familiar faces and were introduced to other members.

We know from experience that a lot of time and effort goes into making these events work successfully and would like to thank those in charge for an enjoyable evening. We look forward to future events.

Pie, Pint & Potiphar's Apprentices

by Eileen and Malcolm Bigg

On 16th March, we had a very enjoyable evening in the company of Brentwood Brewery and Potiphar's Apprentices, a folk group. We were given a brief résumé of the history of Brentwood Brewery and then we tasted four beers with a brief description given on each beer. We enjoyed the tasting and we all found it interesting to hear how the beers were made. The Brewery is moving shortly and we will certainly visit to buy some 'chockwork orange', our favourite beer of the evening.

We then enjoyed a tasty Steak and Ale pie and mash and were entertained by Potiphar's Apprentices, a local folk group formed about four years ago, who enchanted us with seven folk songs. The group each played several instruments and we were invited to join in the chorus.

Charles Potiphar was a folk singer from Ingrave who helped Vaughan Williams in his quest for English Folk Music at the beginning of the 20th Century. We were given the history of the songs, some having been adapted by the group. Most of the songs were local from around Ingrave, Herongate, and Mountnessing, one being the fascinating story of a murder which took place in The Plough in Mountnessing.

We had an interesting and varied evening, a thoroughly good time! Thank you to the organisers of this enjoyable event.



A delighted raffle winner

Tennis tour to Montbazon

by Clive Garrod

The tour started on Friday 24th May with just a 65 minute Ryanair flight to Tours airport. The party from Hutton and Shenfield Union Church Lawn tennis club comprised Clive Garrod, Mark Feeley, Peter Mayell and Ian Gunn. We were met at the airport by Valerie Milcent, our Montbazon contact who helped with the hire car and then led us to the Hotel Pic Epeiche. There we were welcomed by Laurence Leblevec, chairman of the Twinning, the hotel owner and a couple of bottles of Vouvray.

The tennis match took place on the Saturday afternoon. We were met by Gerard Dutour the club chairman. As the weather had been cold and wet for most of the day it was decided to play the match on the covered courts. This was played in front of a good natured French crowd of about forty, with Brentwood winning 3 -1. Afterwards Louisa Ferreira very kindly organised some drinks for all involved. Speeches were given by Gerard Dutour and by Bernard Revêche the Mayor of Montbazon. The deputy mayor Sylvie Giner was present as were Valerie and Laurence. The occasion was very relaxed and we were very grateful for the hospitality of our hosts. We have invited Montbazon tennis club back to our club for a return match.

The final two days of our trip were spent driving in the Loire region and visiting the châteaux of Chenonceau, and Villandry which we thoroughly enjoyed. We had some fantastic food on our trip. Two very good meals at La Cassolette in Monbazon which we can thoroughly recommend, were followed by a memorable evening at Le Moulin Fleuri – drinks by the river followed by food of the highest quality beautifully presented. The Hotel Pic Epeiche was clean and not expensive. The owner of the hotel spoke very good English and was very friendly. He booked restaurants, taxis and gave the impression that nothing was too much trouble. All the people we met were very friendly and we were made to feel welcome. We all hope to return to the region again some time in the future.



Fête de l'Europe by Pam Richards



Once again I was lucky enough to go to the Fête de l'Europe held in early May. Especially fortunate as I was able to hitch a ride with Rosemary and John Smith to whom I am very grateful.

This is always an enjoyable visit but this year very different as we took part in a tour of French villages in vintage cars. We all gathered in the car park at the 'Grange Rouge' where were parked a large assortment of beautiful classic cars. Chevrolet, Peugeot, Cadillac, Porsche to name a few but what caught my eye was the shiny silver and blue 'Caterham' Ford. We were told we could choose which car to ride in and as far as I was

concerned there was no contest. I was introduced to Michel the owner of the 'beast' and although he spoke no English we had an extremely fun time racing around the countryside at great speed.

After the exhilarating drive we arrived back at St Branchs for our lunch. This was a combination of dishes prepared by the French but themed to reflect the country to which they are twinned. As usual, a good time was had by all. Other members of Twinning should consider going next year if they are able, I can really recommend it.



... and now Rosemary's account



John and I, along with Pam Richards, were the Brentwood representatives at the Montbazon celebrations this time. As usual, the car was loaded with Michelle's 'shopping requests' for the stall at the Fête de l'Europe being held at St. Branchs (another of the val de l'Indre group). It was good to meet up with our twinning friends and see what had been arranged for this year's festivities. The 8th. May parade in Montbazon was quite low-key as the usual band was not in attendance and the ceremony at the war memorial was curtailed by the heavens opening on it. The parade of dripping umbrellas returned to the Salle des Fêtes for the customary speeches and civic presentations, before the convivial drinks, nibbles and greetings with friends.

The next day Pam & I joined the Rally of 'Voitures Anciennes' at the Grange Rouge. We had been asked to wear traditional costume (or at least a hat) so we did our best, Pam in her jubilee gear from last year and me in Scottish kilt and tam-o-shanter. Around 20 old cars took part in the Rally and we could choose our vehicle from sports and classic cars, all lovingly polished by their owners.. Pam got her wish of the flashy Caterham racer, while Jean Geay and I travelled with a shy young man in a sixty year old Simca.

The Rally set off around the countryside with stops at the various val de l'Indre small towns. Some dedicated participants filled in their quiz sheets at each stop but we just enjoyed waving our flags en route and getting out for comfort stops.

By the time we reached the destination - a car park at St. Branchs - a musical presentation was finished and other members (including John) who had opted to go on a 13km walk had arrived. A very well organised picnic lunch for 300 people followed. Thank goodness it didn't rain as we were all sat at long tables in the park of the leisure centre. The menu was an interesting one incorporating foods from all the different European twins: Italy, G.B., Cyprus, Belgium, Germany and France. The sun came out and youngsters enjoyed roller-skating and archery. The old cars were on show and the market stalls did good business. English tea, beer, custard powder and 'Mamade' seemed to be appreciated by customers and the unseasonably cold weather did not cool the friendly community spirit. Cadging lifts back to Montbazon to spend the evening with our genial hosts was the finale of our brief visit before setting off home the next day.



WHAT A SPREAD! by Marjorie Piper



On 11th June about a dozen of us met up with Colin and Sue Miers, together with Tim, their 1 year old, very well behaved, black Labrador, to go for a walk around Blackmore. It was a cloudy evening but no rain thankfully. The walk took us over and around the edges of ploughed fields and we all managed to negotiate, with a bit of shuffling and heaving, the one rather high stile en route.

About an hour later, others joined us at the Prince Albert Pub for what I expected to be a fairly light supper - not so. The newly appointed chef had really pulled out all the stops in providing us with what was the mightiest and most magnificent Ploughman's supper I've ever experienced. It would be easier to list the items not included in the meal!

We were each presented with a large platter consisting of cold chicken, ham, cheese, sausage, chicken wing, home made terrine, a large mixed salad (tomatoes, cucumber, pickled onions, gherkins etc etc. Separately there were vast quantities of different types of rolls and bread and the pièce de resistance were the bowls of hot sizzling potato wedges - just in case you didn't already have enough on your plate! Wow, what a feast - in hindsight I reckon we should have gone for our walk after supper.

Thanks to Colin and Sue for organising the evening - when's the next one?

The Zoo on Friday by Anne Long

On the coach to Montbazon, Sue Sanders optimistically passed around a sheet with a song for us to sing as an entertainment on the last evening.... 'Going to the Zoo tomorrow¹'. This was very appropriate, as we set off for the famous Beauval Zoo the next morning in glorious weather.

The Jumelage was very generous giving us vouchers for lunch (informing us that it all must be spent as there were no refunds). Off we all went to find our favourite animals, birds, etc. a great variety, but I think the most popular attraction was the famous pandas

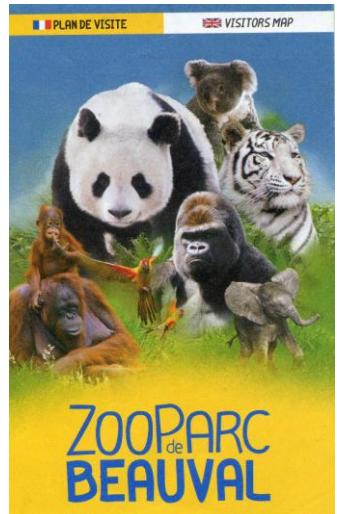


described as the only two pandas in Europe. I queried this pointing out (politely I might add) that the UK had two pandas in Edinburgh Zoo. After some thought it was decided that this was probably correct as Scotland isn't part of mainland Europe. The Zoo had a special area where the pandas and red pandas were housed and also a Chinese restaurant making it feel very oriental. Our lunch was delicious.

After visiting all the tropical birds, (my favourite) the best part of the day for me was the display of large birds of prey over the sea lion pool. It was spectacular as they started by small eagles and then went on introducing even larger birds, vultures, bald eagles and condors. The sea eagles caught pieces of fish from the pool. After that the sea lions performed which was a delight for the children, an excellent afternoon entertainment albeit on a very hot day.



Needless to say the seating in the shade was the premium place to be and our host Valerie Milcent collected ice creams which



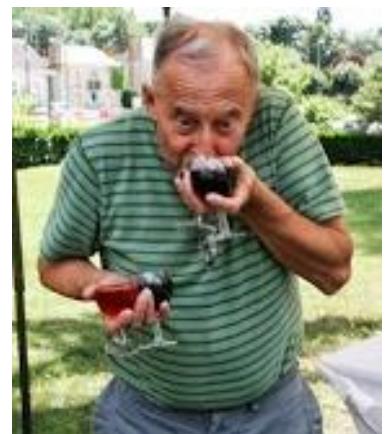
she rushed back to us, rapidly melting and already dripping. We moved on to see some very grumpy rhinoceros and then to watch the monkeys and apes do what they always do . . the orangutans just pulled up their bedding over their heads and went to sleep. I could empathise as it was a very hot day. It was one of the best Zoos I have visited and a really fun day out.

Wine tasting at the Grand Rouge by Brian Davis

On the Sunday morning of our visit, after a near sleepless night due to thunder storms and high winds we had a leisurely breakfast. Those of us choosing wine tasting over walking, no choice really, assembled at the Grange Rouge for a tasting session conducted by Bertrand Leblevec. Bertrand advised, with the very able assistance of Valerie Milcent as translator, that we would be tasting four wines in a blind tasting. He explained that each wine was produced 100% from one grape variety and we had to decide from experience or guess which grape was used to produce each wine. He provided tasting notes on each of the wines; where it was grown, its main aromas plus a short commentary on each. The grapes were Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Pinot Noir and Syrah (Shiraz). Small pieces of bread and goats cheese were available for palate cleansing between each tasting, also Slop Buckets were provided for unconsumed wine; much to the disappointment of some, one comment was 'Is there such a thing'?

The first wine was served and I found myself immediately confused between Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc. The majority of Cabernet Franc wines that I have tasted has been acidic and dry to my palate, so that was what I was looking for. This wine was however smooth and not very acidic so I scored it 7/10 and decided it must be the Pinot Noir. WRONG it was Cabernet Franc. The second wine proved to be very similar. I judged to be more acidic and not quite as smooth as the first. Scoring it 6/10 and deciding it was Cabernet Franc. WRONG again it was Pinot Noir. Bertrand had found a very good Cabernet Franc.

Wine number three I found to be very fruity, well rounded, not too acidic and with a smooth finish, gave 8/10 and decided correctly it was Syrah (Shiraz). Incidentally by this time many were complaining that the slop buckets were getting rather too full and there was a perfectly good cocktail of wine going to waste! Wine number four arrived and this one I found not quite as fruity as three, less acidic but still with a smooth finish. This one I judged from my 'marvellous palate' was Malbec; not difficult as I only had one choice left. Correct again, giving me a mark of 50%.



Needless to say the wines had now all been tasted and our choice of grapes made before Bertrand gave us the answers. I have to admit that it was the Cabernet Franc that foxed me, this wine like most can have good, bad and ugly variations. Bertrand had provided the very good and I must re-evaluate my opinion of the Cabernet Franc grape. Much praise and thanks were given to Bertrand and Valerie who both did a grand job throughout, without having one drink between them. Advised that it is customary to wash up one's own glass we duly did and went happily on our way to enjoy lunch (and more wine) provided by the Mayor Bernard Revêche.

A trip on the river by Monica Donegan

As I remember the words of the song are “Cruising Down the River on a Sunday Afternoon - - - -” and that is exactly what we did!

It wasn’t cruising but canoeing. I sat in the middle with Peter, le chauffeur at the front and our host Claude at the rear.

We went as far as the water wheel, spotting dragonflies with black and blue wings, all the way down. An hour of total delight

A Sunday Morning Walk by Christine Minns

A walk or wine-tasting was on offer for the Sunday of our visit to Montbazon. David and I chose the walk as we thought it would be nice to familiarise ourselves again with some of the landmarks of Montbazon. The starting point was the Place A. Delaunay in front of the Mairie where a large enthusiastic group was assembling with Evelyne Houpert our leader and Jacqueline Enault our "back marker", impressively dressed in yellow day-glo tabards.

Evelyne shepherded us across the busy Rue Nationale, then up the many steps – was it 99? – behind Place Brentwood and on into Rue Bafauderie. We gradually left houses behind as the road ascended, becoming more countrified and leafy. Eventually arriving at a junction Evelyne directed us along a little lane. After five minutes the Chateau d'Artigny came into view in full sunshine, an imposing sight so impressive for those who had not seen it before. We dutifully



posed for a group photo in front of the grand fountain playing in the formal gardens in front of the chateau. The chateau, once owned and rebuilt by Coty the perfumer a hundred years ago in 18th century style, is now a very up-market hotel.

It had been arranged in advance that we would take morning coffee and refreshments in the salon so in we trooped, looking somewhat incongruous in our shorts and sunhats against the smart clientele and uniformed staff. Before coffee we were ushered up to the first floor to the "must-see" trompe-l'oeil fresco of a very grand firework party on the ceiling of the rotunda. The illusion was very realistic and impressive, one could almost hear the jollity. After twenty minutes we were shepherded down the stairs to toilets (for "pipi" – Jacqueline), then coffee and refreshments – in the form of elegant little cakes and miniature fruit salads.

After coffee we were marshalled once more to the rear terrace to take in the panoramic views over the valley of the Indre before retracing our steps down the little lane and taking a different route onto a footpath bordering the built-up area with open fields on one side. Back into Montbazon, passing Place Brentwood and the Grange Rouge we were in plenty of time for Monsieur Le Maire's al fresco reception laid out under the trees.

THE PICNIC IN THE PARC

by Diane Matthews

Out came the gazebos, the trestle tables, the wine glasses, red, white and rose all on tap! Out came platters full with pates, breads gherkins, onions, salads, yet more of chicken slices, beef slices, quiches and other savoury delights, followed by bread with a delicious variety of fresh goat and cow cheeses. France has over 365 different varieties of cheese, with most on these tables! All this was topped off with French pastry desserts, **Oh la, la!**





Serenading us were a couple playing piano accordion and saxophone. There must have been at least 60 people joining in the party, 28 being the English and the rest being the French families who were hosting us. No-one wanted to leave, the weather was glorious and we were all happy and relaxed.

Thank you Montbazon for such wonderful entertainment not only this day but during the whole of our visit to you. I recommend Town Twinning to anyone interested in making international acquaintances which can grow into long exchanges and friendships. You don't even have to speak French - although a little knowledge can help- as of course everyone involved speaks at least enough English to get by. It can be a great way to improve your French too. I am now looking forward to next year when you all come to us
..... **A bientot**

The Gardens at Château du Rivau by John Smith

Our final daytime outing of the 2013 'twinning' was to the Château du Rivau and its 'enchanted' gardens, old enough to claim to have been visited by Joan of Arc; she certainly got around, did she not?

The enchanted gardens are many and various, a total of 14 on the coloured brochure. In addition to these there are whimsies such as trees adorned with rather posh-looking necklaces! Nursery rhymes and fairy tales feature in the names and contents of several of the gardens, for example Gargantua's vegetable garden in the outer courtyard of the Château, Tom Thumb's garden in the woods, Alice's Labyrinth (a hornbeam maze) and Princess Rapunzel's garden (mixed borders with waving grasses).

Adjacent to the vegetable garden is an enormous and decrepit boot - the old woman who lived in a shoe. Other large artworks are to be found in various gardens, including 'Big Boots' —two very large green wellies (both for left feet) and a 10 foot high red flower pot. In the



woodland area artworks include outsize running legs (possibly to fit the wellies?) and a small aviary with a phoenix on its top. Also within the woodlands is the 'Flowerpot Family', where terracotta pots of various sizes are combined together with steel rods or old garden tools to make statues of farm animals, birds and humans. Several of these are very effective and amusing.

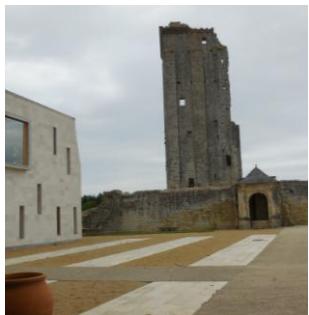


Most of May and the first half of June had been as unseasonably cool and dull in this area as it had been at home. This was shown by the 'gargantuan' vegetables (especially the pumpkins) being far less advanced than they should have been. Also, in the orchard there were still ripening cherries on trees (a full month late). Fortunately some single-flush roses were still in bloom, so there was more scent than normal for late July (a bonus!).

All in all, there was a most interesting array of different kinds of garden where one could lose oneself for hours; in my case I never had time to visit the Royal Stables or the grape-pressing exhibition. On a final point, the scent from the lavenders in their knot gardens along the entrance/exit route was a fine start and finish for the visit to the 'Jardin Remarquable'.

Samedi, le jour libre (an individual day planned by each of the hosts)

Fermé le Chateau! . . . by Pauline Myers



Our hosts, Jacqueline & Jacques, took us to an ancient donjon an hour's drive away, where there is a newly built Museum of prehistoric artefacts. We were especially looking forward to seeing the flints. Alors! On arrival we found that the Museum was closed due to two lightning strikes on the tower the night before, and their computer and security systems were put out of action and they could not open to the public. But to our rescue came a gallant young Canadian member of staff, who of course spoke fluent French and English. He very kindly spent time telling us about the history of the Chateau, and even demonstrated throwing a spear, Aboriginal style! Our journey was not wasted, a perfect visit!



Golden Wedding Celebration by Rosemary Smith

Our Free Day happened to be the Golden Wedding of our hosts. We felt very privileged to be included in their guest list for the celebratory six course meal at the Restaurant de la Ferme, way out in the country.

A feast of local produce, each course was beautifully presented and served, from langoustines through fish, steak, cheeses and the gorgeous raspberry gateau which arrived with 'sparklers' to blow out; and all accompanied by the appropriate wines. We were glad someone else was driving us home! After a short rest the festivities continued with an evening buffet at home in the garden – mostly the same guests attending but with the addition of the family's three dogs. How lovely to be able to sit outside until nearly midnight.

A Special Morning in Tours by Chris Lacey



We arrived in Tours when the morning was fresh and cool, the seats in the park still damp with overnight rain and a smell of breakfast coffee drifted from the first open cafe. After a few moments of questioning whether we were in the right place our carriage appeared drawn by two white horses. We introduced ourselves to the horses and passed the time of day with the driver as he checked the horses and equipment and then we were off.



The tour took us around the streets of the *vieux ville*, the medieval town centre. We saw La Place Plumereau, the stately Grand Theatre, the impressive Cathedral St Gatian, and the colourful flower market, giving us lots of places to visit next time we are in town. Morning is the best time of day to visit the city without too many people. Everywhere we drove the driver was recognised and given a friendly wave. We had only been going for five minutes when he stopped for his first coffee of the day. It came in a plastic cup complete with a straw to avert any accidents as he drove. Like me he didn't seem to be a morning person needing a further cup of coffee from the crêpe shop five minutes later.

As we went around the town, I snapped away happily with my camera so at the end of our ride my memory card was full and an impromptu visit to a local photographic shop was necessary. Next a visit to the Musée Du Compagnonnage, a testament to the skills of craftsmen over the centuries, especially some wonderful exhibits from master carpenters. Finally we were back at the square for a wonderful lunch of crêpes filled with ham, cheese and eggs, followed by a flambée version washed down with cider served in cool pottery bowls, a Breton speciality.

From respectable grandmother to Hells Angel – C'était très excitant!!
By Rita Anderson



I knew that my hosts Evelyne and Gary Houpert were a very busy, energetic couple who like to live life in the fast lane but I never expected to be travelling in that lane with them. Gary and Evelyne have both ridden motor bikes for many years and Evelyne has often told me of how she used to ride her motor bike around the rues de Paris. Although both car drivers now, they still own motor bikes and use them frequently.

On my first evening with them Evelyne was showing me her sparkling red motor bike and I mentioned that I had once ridden as a pillion passenger but that was when I was 14 years old. However, there seemed to be a miscommunication and Evelyne interpreted what I said as "I am an experienced pillion rider and would really love to ride pillion again"! She promptly went and sourced a spare crash helmet which seemed a perfect fit for me and we were set to ride into Montbazon the next day.

The next morning, when we arrived at the car park to get the coach to the zoo, my fellow travellers largely ignored the motor bike as it pulled up. However, we soon got their attention when we removed our helmets and they saw who it was. The only thing I thought missing was a leather outfit. That was remedied the same evening when I went into Tours with Gary and Evelyne and they decided to use their motor bikes. Gary loaned me his very substantial leather jacket and some leather gauntlets. This time I was to ride pillion on Gary's Kawasaki. We rode the 18 kilometres into Tours at speeds sometimes reaching 110km per hour. Once I lost my nervousness I found I really enjoyed the ride and looked forward to the return journey. That was a trifle more exciting as it was dark on our return journey but I felt very safe behind Gary.

What an unexpected experience, and my grandchildren are so impressed with the photo of their leather clad Grandmother sitting astride a Kawasaki!

'I can see the Milky Way', said the small person holding my hand as we stumbled out into the midnight darkness at the Forteresse du Faucon Noir, of Foulques Nerra of Anjou, on our last night at Montbazon. Passing a medieval maiden juggling firebrands and with flaming torches lighting our way we said goodnight after a 'Soiree Inoubliable.'

It had started hours earlier with a visit to the dark, dank, dripping dungeons of this 12th Century fortress, the oldest stone keep in France, where gruesome methods of torture were explicitly explained. After slithering back into the daylight our medieval maiden led us into the ancient ruin, partly built by our King Richard the Lionheart and thence on to an exhibition of man to man combat by two of her colleagues. (No arms legs or private parts to be touched.) Finally, the then ultimate weapon, the trebuchet was vividly demonstrated when a large white water-filled balloon missile was fired and successfully found its target high on the walls of the fortress.

As the evening light dimmed we took our seats and a banquet it truly was. Rillettes, three sorts, followed by feuilletees of salmon, spinach and a sort of eggy rice. 'These are nice' (small person). The plateaux bore in not just the serveuses but a sumptuous meal of ham hocks served with dishes of beetroot, grapes and raisins. Impossible to describe, but delicious. Games of thumb and fore finger, triangles and squares, jongleurs with poles, sword fighting and dancing added salt and pepper to our meal which continued with goats' cheeses from Ste. Maure and yummy tart, all washed down with honey spiced mead, and wine (or Coca Lite for the small people). Served in earthenware cups of course.

David and Laurence exchanged gifts. We sang la Marseillaise and Saved the Queen. The chefs took their bows. It was too late for coffee. We all had to pack! As we finally stumbled out to find the pitch black car park, below the 20 tonne Virgin and Baby Jesus, it had been indeed an unforgettable Soiree to end a wonderful visit to Montbazon.

Now some comments from Lucy aged 10

I went to Montbazon on the coach with Nanna and Papa. I met five girls there and they were my friends, Kathryn was English and the four French girls were Clemence, Morgan, Elsa and her cousin.

I enjoyed going to the Zoo, I got a Panda called Clemence. Also we went to Mamie Bigoud and I had a MASSIVE burger. I liked Michelle's swimming pool and playing with Tabou.

There was an EPIC thunderstorm. The shutters banged in my bedroom all night. I hope I can go again



A MAIDEN VISIT by Dave Williams & Judy Ripley

We found out about the Town Twinning Association from Rita after the meeting held for marshals of the Brentwood Half Marathon in March, and we joined at the Twinning coffee morning held in April. Since we are both Francophiles, we welcomed the opportunity to develop a more personal relationship with French people than is possible on an ordinary holiday. We were delighted to be included in the exchange this year and looked forward to revisiting an area where we had both spent happy times many years ago. In advance of the trip, the organisation was very efficient and we were pleased to exchange emails with our hosts.

After the early start and long journey, the warm welcome we received from the Montbazonnais convinced us that we were going to have an enjoyable few days. Bernard and Josée were an excellent match for us, and we got on very well together from the start. The programme of events was varied and interesting, enhanced by the visits undertaken with our hosts on the free day, Saturday and the memorable lunch with the Mayor at the Grange Rouge on Sunday. The visit to the Fortresse du Faucon Noir on our final evening certainly was "une soiree inoubliable", giving us the opportunity to look round the impressive attraction and to enjoy the delicious Medieval banquet.

We were sorry to leave, but returned home with a full appreciation of the hard work and skilful organisation which had gone into the exchange, even down to the weather and thank the organisers for their part in making the visit so successful. We are very much looking forward to the opportunity to return the hospitality extended to us by the Montbazon group next year and to being involved in the various fund-raising and social activities in preparation for their visit.

..... and also from Kathryn aged 14

When my grandma asked me to go to France with her I was most worried about the food and if I would like it, but I did. The coach journey wasn't boring as I sat with Lucy (who is 10), we laughed a lot as we did a quiz and made up all the answers. In the end we got 4 right. YAY!!!

I stayed with the Lacorne family, and their daughter Clemence is just a little younger than me. We had a lot of nice days out but my favourite was the Chateau du Rivau. I also went to the local river and went swimming with Clemence. We visited houses in the evening, and whilst we were there we swam and went canoeing. It was great fun.

I'm not great at French but it wasn't a problem. Altogether it was a great week and I had a fantastic time experiencing France for the first time.

Shoeless in Montbazon

by Charles Myers

When filling my suitcase prior to getting on the coach I did two things. First I forgot to pack in my mains adaptor plugs to enable me to use my hosts' electrical mains supply. The second was to decide to take with me an almost new pair of shoes. These I decided to put on. They looked quite smart.

It was at the first stop in France for our initial break that I realised that my right shoe had started to disintegrate, and was no longer wearable. Malcolm Long was quite certain that it could be repaired, but I showed him that this was in fact not so. He remains firm in my eyes for his steadfast faith in miracles! At our next stop I was able to extract my (best quality) leather sandals from my suitcase, so, I had wearable sandals, as long as we had no rain and to buy an adaptor for our three-pin plug Must do better on the next trip



Quiz Evening by Anne-Marie Ede

Many thanks to all involved with the Quiz Night at Courage Hall, our final get-together of 2013. A mixed selection of questions (thanks to Mike le Surf), a full house, excellent raffle and an enjoyable meal in good company produced a helpful boost in excess of £500 for our funds in advance of next year's visit from our French friends.

During the year three Conversation Evenings were held in two members' homes. These evenings offer an opportunity to speak and hear French spoken in an informal setting, with refreshments. Those who attended found these events very enjoyable

The Fête des Rois (12th Night celebrations) will again start our events for the year.

Plans are now underway for the Fête de l'Europe on 12th April and the visit from the French August 21st to 26th

The magic of cycling along an empty winding country road, shaded and following the Indre on a warm summer's day

Hot, sunny days, followed by spectacular storms during night. . . the way it should be

Learning some new French sentences! Good for my age!

KEEP CALM DEAR
A bat in the bedroom!
Swift exit by me
Gentle help from my hero
for the chauve-souris !

Relaxed Sunday morning walk - refreshments in elegant Chateau d'Artigny, inspirational

Visit to Terra Botanica at Angers on Free Day. Having set off in monorail carriage for two people finding that we had to pedal like mad to make it go. Better than a session at the gym

Was it the orang-utan with the fresh straw or watching the penguins dive and fly under water?

Playing with fire on the last night

So many new friends in such a short time

Clever organisation to arrange for the storms to be at night and the heavy showers while we were inside eating!

The best part of this trip was swimming in the river with Clemance

No such thing as an early night to bed - always well after midnight

As ever a very enjoyable visit the company and laughter were great

Were there legs with trees or trees with legs in the 'jardin des fées' at the Château de Riva?

Convoi exceptional in

*Do you think that Michelle would cook our school dinners?
She's better than Jamie Oliver*

Castles, castles and more castles, all different, all beautiful, perhaps a few more next time

A delicious lunch at 'Le Chapeau Rouge' in Chinon. Sitting under the trees on a hot day in a pretty, typically French square was delightful.

Speaking with the Mayor about the current financial state of our mutual economies he suddenly said "at least you have George". We immediately launched into the virtues or otherwise of George Osborne, only to realise some minutes later that he meant 'Baby George'

Cheese, cheese and more cheese ...wonderful!! Unfortunately back on the diet now.



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Have you visited this website, set up by our secretary Emmanuelle to keep us all aware of the activities which the committee plan for us throughout the year? There are also links to other interesting sites you may find useful.

Just click on Newsletter within the Home Page to find a list of previous editions of this annual 'French Connection' reporting the year's events, including of course the annual exchange visits with our 'Twins' in Montbazon. Produced as a reminder of past events for current members, it would be of interest to recent and prospective members. Browse and see some of the lovely places in the Loire Valley that we visit and the programmes enjoyed when they visit us.

