



# The French. Connection



## HIGHLIGHTS AND PICTURES OF THE VISIT TO MONTBAZON 2009 AND OTHER EVENTS OF THE YEAR

Issue No 24

Brentwood/Montbazou Town Twinning Association

### A Message from our Chairman, Beryl Guyatt

As I write, preparations are in hand for our Fete des Rois 2010 and I am hoping that the heavy snow forecast for most of England manages to bypass the Brentwood area. Always a pleasant evening our annual Fete des Rois in early January is an opportunity for us to meet together, wish each other a Happy New Year and look forward to future events. Since I last wrote for "The French Connection" various social activities have taken place and you will read about or be reminded of them in the following pages.



During the year, we were pleased that both Lord Petre and Bob McLintock agreed to accept Honorary Membership of our Association. We much appreciate the interest they have shown and the help that they have given to us over the years.

We have welcomed new members who were able to join in the visit to our Twin Town of Montbazou in August. There, everyone was warmly greeted by French friends and a most interesting and varied programme had been arranged for us. Visits to historical chateaux and lovely gardens were combined with opportunities to join in friendly games of Petanque and Boule de Fort (a game that none of us had come across before). The Mayor and Mayoress of Brentwood, Councillor Tony Sleep and his wife Jean, travelled with us on their first visit to Montbazou. We enjoyed their company as did our hosts.

This year we shall be welcoming our French friends to Brentwood. The Association in Montbazou have a young and enthusiastic President and young fellow committee members with a good many of the established committee are there to support them. They are keen to encourage contact between young people in Brentwood and Montbazou and hopefully this will come about particularly through the schools in both areas.

Please consider encouraging friends and contacts who show interest in our local activities and visits to France, to come along to some of our social events. They will be made very welcome.

**Best wishes to you all.**

Official visitors came from Montbazou to attend the Mayor's Civic Dinner in Brentwood



Organised by Beryl for members and friends, we stayed at a very convenient Best Western hotel right in the centre, a great advantage when it came to finding an evening meal! In fact if your bedroom looked out on the shake hands with the travellers bustling crowds, Christmas and the colourful stalls of the **Place Rihour** provided just the combat the bitterly cold weather.



**Grand Place** you could almost on the **Grande Roue!** The lights, decorations and music **Marché de Noel** in the nearby right air of festive jollity to

Other attractions to occupy our tour of the different parts of the architecture of different styles; a in addition to its large permanent exhibition of paintings by Nordic artists portraying aspects of life in cold northern Europe; and of course, the warmth of the shopping mall had its pulling power.

time were a commentated bus city and its impressive visit to the **Art Gallery** which, collection, had a special

Our trip included a visit to nearby **Ghent in Belgium** where sunshine and blue skies made a walking tour of the town an attractive option, and of course another Christmas market! Quaint old buildings and impressive canal side facades made good subjects for photography.



A late afternoon/evening visit to **Ypres** on Sunday gave us a chance to visit the market of charity and craft stalls held in the old medieval Cloth Hall, and an enticing opportunity to warm up with a glass of mulled wine. Every evening at 8 o'clock at the **Menin Gate** a ceremony takes place with poppy wreaths laid and the Last Post sounded and it was a very moving experience to be part of the crowd that night. The sight of the huge arched Gate with the thousands of names of the fallen from the First World War who have no known grave was desperately mind numbing.

The homeward journey on Monday was broken for a delightful lunch in a country Auberge near **St. Omer** where our coach driver seemed to be a friend of the owners. The whole trip proved to be a very well-organised and friendly affair —Thank You Beryl!

## TEA and SYMPATHY in Lille

Dear Madam Editor,

It has been drawn to my attention that certain malicious rumours are circulating regarding my association with a young woman who came to my room during our Christmas visit to Lille.

As members of our party will know, I was in company with my wife, Sue, secretary of the Montbazou Town Twinning Association, most of the time. However, due either to my nervous disposition to under sea travel in a tunnel, or perhaps a dodgy andouillette the night before, I was not feeling myself the following day and had to take to my bed in our hotel for most of the holiday. In my absence Sue may have been seen on the arm of one, Jeremy Holiday, a long term friend whom I trust to be a true and honourable gentleman. I, in the meantime, remained confined to bed.

It is some time since I thought that a "housewife" was some sort of comfort or initiation for young army recruits a long way from home and I knew full well that a "femme de chambre" is not what us chaps would like to think but a cleaning lady to dust and tidy up your room.

While alone and in a semi-delirious state I was raised from my bed by a knock at the door. I opened it to be faced by an attractive dark young woman who asked me the French equivalent of "Can I do yer now, Sir?"

"Of course," I replied and returned to my bed while she fussed around doing what femme de chambres are supposed to do. After carrying out her duties the young lady approached me and offered to make me a cup of tea which I duly accepted. This was beyond the call of duty, and her friendly approach and the tea and biscuits she offered lifted my spirits considerably. Her name was Marguerite, and in my ravings I might have imagined that she soothed my feverish brow, tucked me up in bed and given me a "sweet dreams" kiss. However, I think these extras were just all in my mind.

If anyone dares to think that there may be more in this than I have said all I can say is *Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense*, which I believe is the old age saying when removing or replacing a lady's garter. If anyone continues to spread malicious and defamatory gossip about myself, Marguerite, Jeremy Holiday and above all my wife they must expect the full force of law to fall upon them. See you in court.

*Peter Slanders*

## MON ONCLE - Film night by Margaret Hogan

Such a charming, amusing and eccentric evening — especially after a day when it was feared we might have no heating in the Hall. To our relief when we arrived, we noticed the heating was on but no ceiling lights! However a flick of a switch near the meter and all was well. Our thanks, go to John Norman for providing the screen equipment and Eric for his projection skills, Stephanie for the raffle and last but not least the ladies for the delicious homemade cakes

The film was set in 1958 Paris. Mon Oncle being the incredibly amusing M. Hulot (who we last saw in M. Hulot's Holiday). The story was based around the family of his Banker brother and his relationship with them. The social climbing wife of the banker found it necessary to switch on a fountain, to spring from a fish's mouth, before she opened the gate for a visitor. The bored little son of the household, was made insufferable only by the companionship of his incredibly bizarre uncle. The wonderful atmosphere of life in Paris at this time was set by various characters in the local community and an assortment of dogs dashing around - thoroughly enjoying themselves - I especially loved the dachshund (belonging to the Banker's family, with its attractive fashionable 'coat') — all this together with the typically French background music took us right out of ourselves to another life



## The Fête des Rois January 2009

The prize winning  
'NATIVITY' scene in  
our fun competition -  
tearing paper from  
old magazines



Six 'Kings' from  
the Fete des Rois,  
including  
Honorary Life  
Member Bob  
McLintock with the  
then Mayor of  
Brentwood Cllr.  
Dudley Payne



At the time of writing our annual celebration has had to be postponed due to our **Arctic** weather and road conditions so **Twelfth Night** will be a little late in 2010

Seven members travelled to Montbazon for their commemoration and celebration of **V.E.Day** by five **Val de l'Indre** villages and friends from their twins in Italy, Germany, Belgium, England and Brittany. There was to be a Marche, a Randonee Musicale and a Grand Repas avec Disco.



On **Friday 8th May**, Medals were presented to war veterans at a ceremony outside the Mairie. After this the Fire Brigade Band led everyone to the cemetery.

There the names of the fallen were read out with a group of children repeating “Died for France” after each name.

Afterwards a short reception was held in the **Salon de Fêtes** and we admired a display by primary school children of the flags and statistics of all the countries of the E.U.



With the responsibility for the meal on Saturday night divided among the French villages, Montbazon was to provide the ‘Starters’ so a hard-working but enjoyable afternoon was spent preparing crudités for 200 at the Geay home.



**Saturday** featured a street market in **Artannes** with each group having a stall. The Montbazon one featured English cakes, scones, cheeses and tea. Hot dogs using sausages from Olivers of Hutton were sold and we had a demonstration of marmalade – making. In spite of heavy rain at the start, everything was well-organised and it was a chance to mingle with people of all the different associations.



**John Smith** joined in the **Randonnée Musicale de l'Europe** - here is his report

The walk was organized in the country lanes around Artannes with a choice of 8 or 13 kms. At the first stopping place we were entertained by a choir of some dozen women plus one man, who sang several songs unaccompanied with their conductor using a tuning fork to keep things right. Walking further along the lane past a lonely farmhouse we turned onto a farm track, wet with puddles from the heavy rain of the morning. A kilometre later, under a large tree, we encountered the second interlude -two men playing hunting horns but finding it very difficult to get any tune out of them.

We walked on further tracks and footpaths, treacherous after the rain, until we reached another road which led us to a farm. There a theatre, hosted a 20-ish piece orchestra in an open barn and we were entertained to several pieces of music, some of which were familiar. To my amusement, in a paddock behind the barn was a bactrian camel (a 2-humper) in good condition with long dark brown fur. It trotted around in time to the music, followed wherever it went by a llama!

We then headed off along the lane and after a couple of minutes heard the orchestra start playing again — presumably a later batch of walkers had arrived. Our walk continued to the Manoir of Vonne (which will be open to the public in July and early August). We arrived there, **our final musical stop**, ahead of the musicians, 3 tenor saxophones, who played several pieces including an Abba number. Walking on we passed a farm where several old Ford tractors were quietly rotting away near the path, also masses of logs maturing —possibly for charcoal manufacture. After this we went down a steep, slippery track through woodland, with wild flowers including some sizeable orchids, then by road back to where the coach was waiting for us whilst the 13 km walkers hiked back along the same road! Our walk, with coach travel, lasted 2½ hours with soft drinks and cakes provided for the walkers, 80 men, women and children, on their return.

On **Sunday** we spent time with our Montbazon hosts and in the evening congregated at the Garbet's lovely home for a 'wine and cheese' buffet – including homemade soups and desserts – what a selection to taste.

The following day we made our separate ways to home or for extended travel in France. Participation in the **Journée de l'Europe** had been a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

## Canal Boat Trip on the Chelmer 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. 2009 by Pauline Myers

Being forewarned by email from Jeremy about road works and a windy diversion we arrived in good time at **Paper Mill Lock**. 'Windy' proving to be the shape of road not the possibility of the car being blown into a ditch! However, by following the main route and finding in fact that the road through Danbury was open the journey to the Lock was easy. Jeremy, on the other hand, did not chance the main route but used the winding narrow country lanes and was so surprised that we had arrived before him!

It was pleasant to sit at a picnic table on the bank by the cafe watching the canal, including seeing our plated food being loaded having been individually chosen beforehand from four varieties of "Ploughman's".

Our party of 40 embarked on the long narrow boat at 1 p.m. Seats were placed in four rows longways down the boat, two rows back to back with either side facing each other. We all managed to find seats next to or opposite our friends and the journey began. It was exciting to watch the water rise or fall in the locks carrying our boat, then the sluice gates opening when the level was reached and journeying on.

No concerns about seasickness on a canal trip – it is so calm and restful – even if it was a clamber to get to the bar and back to your seat without spilling any of your drink or treading on someone's toes! The queue gradually went down, and everyone served – with plenty more where that came from, because Jeremy had forewarned the staff that there were a lot of guzzlers in our party who would need their glasses refreshed!



We cruised slowly from Paper Mill Lock to beyond **Hoe Mill Lock** before returning, with the whole trip taking two hours. There was much chatter and laughter all the way. The canal being quite narrow and the banks high, it was difficult to see over the high grass whilst sitting unless we went forward and stood on the foredeck to 'take the air' and many did.

Our lunch was well organised and very tasty, despite eating it on our laps, a little difficult in a confined space but adding to the fun of the trip, and who cares when wine is being freely passed around by a benevolent friend!

We had all watched the weather forecast promising rain in the afternoon - we surely wouldn't get away with it? - but this came to nothing and we had pleasant sunshine all the way. After Beryl thanked the crew members for taking good care of us, we disembarked to make our way back to our cars. Reaching home a while later, the heavens opened!

It was a happy social occasion and everyone said they enjoyed it.

## Thoughts from First Timers



### *Marjorie Piper*

As a 'first timer' to Montbazon, on my own to boot, I must confess to last minute doubts as to what I had let myself in for. However, any apprehensions were rapidly dispelled upon meeting my hosts, Jean-Pierre and Nicole Goussin, who warmly welcomed and treated me like one of their family. Nicole's 'ami' (her dictionary) and the occasional waving of arms etc soon overcame the language barrier! My faltering French was well tested and I can honestly say that it did improve during the course of the trip. I can even order a coffee with milk!

I soon fell into line with the French lifestyle, the leisurely time spent drinking/eating being just one example. Everyone was kind and hospitable and mixed well. The organisational skills and teamwork of our Montbazon hosts were impressive and must have involved much communication and paperwork to ensure that our stay ran smoothly. All trips were interesting and well planned with a variety of activities for all tastes. Picnics were great and even the sun shone, though even if it had been wet I'm sure it would not have dampened our spirits.

There is obviously plenty to see in and around Montbazon and my only regret was that there was no time to explore properly the town itself - perhaps that will be for a future visit as I would most certainly like to repeat the experience in two years' time.

### *Kathrina Fairgrieve*

**Like the stained glass window of a church, the memories of our visit to Montbazon are a kaleidoscope of events**

**At the pickup point meeting people who would be our companions for the weekend**

**Driving through France past fields of sunflowers ripening in the sun**

**Arriving in the town and being surrounded by people talking and laughing**

**A welcome drink, committee, and speeches**

**Conversing over dinner in French, Spanish, German and English!**

**Goats cheese for sale everywhere but not seeing a goat**

**Large extension for a local school for the growing number of primary age children**

**The cleanest school toilets I have ever seen**

**Over - friendly mosquitoes**

**Amazing châteaux, some renovated as close to the original as possible**

**Others now magnificent hotels but still retaining original features**

**The middle of the marshes (no mosquitoes) but a nymph with a splendid picnic**

**The boatman burning our boat while we were still on it!**

**Finally, Christina, Mark and Christophe, the family who so kindly looked after us and we hope we can host next year in Brentwood.**



We were fortunate to awake to a lovely sunny day for the first day of our visit to Montbazon. It is always good to add another name to the list of châteaux which many of us have now had the pleasure of visiting in the Loire Valley and so it was with anticipation that we gathered soon after 9.00am for our trip to Langeais



Descending from the coach we walked up the main street of this attractive little town towards the château. We crossed the impressive drawbridge, which is opened and closed every morning and evening, to enter the château and explore with the aid of explanatory notes in English

Built in 1465 on the orders of Louis XI it remained a royal residence until the reign of Louis XIII. In 1886 a businessman bought and restored it before handing it over to the Institut de France in 1904. It is decorated and furnished in late mediaeval style with interesting tiled floors, many tapestries and period furniture.

The château's main claim to historical fame is the occasion of the marriage of Anne de Bretagne, aged 14, to the King of France Charles VIII – an event eventually paving the way for the union of Brittany with France. She was brought to Langeais in secret during the night and was married at 7 o'clock in the morning of 6 December 1491. The marriage is brought to life in a tableau and short explanatory film in one of the rooms.

Strolling around the pleasant gardens of the castle we espied the work of the ubiquitous Foulque Nerra – yes the same guy who built the *donjon* in Montbazon! He seized Langeais in 994 and from this stronghold attacked his rival the Comte de Blois in Tours. It is now possible to climb up the reconstructed scaffolding and look back at the château and the town through one of the *donjon*'s windows.

Further exploration of the grounds revealed a lovely panoramic view over the Loire Valley. Elsewhere some of us could not resist the temptation to climb up into a skilfully erected tree house - a delight for any child and some nearer to their second childhood! We were treated to a special demonstration of the workings of the drawbridge and, following an excellent lunch at the Duchesse Anne restaurant, ended our visit to Langeais with a pleasant stroll around the town. An enjoyable and informative time had by all!



## Journée Libre by Rita Anderson

I had a relaxing start to the day with a beautiful country walk but lunch was booked in **Amboise** to meet with some of the others so we had to get going. We arrived in good time and found the restaurant. As we were the first to get there Evelyne and I went off to visit a local art gallery whilst Garry waited for the others to arrive. Robin and Barbara Staines with their hosts Michele and Claude Gallon and attractive young niece Marine; plus Rosemary and John Smith with their hosts Nicole and Jean Lou Lachaux.



It was a beautiful day and very hot. We sat at tables outside and ordered our food and wine. The lunch was slow and relaxed; we were served with massive portions, especially the salad dishes which Michelle and I had chosen thinking that they would be the light option. How wrong we were. I think it is the first time I have been unable to finish a salad!

As we sat at the table we noticed a tourist train running around the town and we decided that we would all take a ride as it was far too hot to walk. Amboise, in addition to having a beautiful royal chateau, is famous as the one time home and final resting place of **Leonardo Da Vinci**. The train stopped for a while at his house and gardens and we all disembarked for a quick look around the exterior. Some of us continued on the train and saw some of the other places of interest in the town while the others toured the chateau (*see Rosemary's account on the next page*) At a small park there was a large bronze statue of Da Vinci in a naked reclining pose and we were amused to see his big toe and a much more intimate part of his anatomy had a high polish, obviously stroked by many admirers.

Following the ride we drove to **Chenonceau**, where we boarded a boat for a trip along the **River Cher** which took us under the famous Chateau that spans the river. Lots of photo opportunities there. The ride took a couple of hours and was very pleasant as the temperature was more comfortable on the water. However we needed a drink to cool us before starting on our drive home, so we sat for a while at one of the waterside cafes.

Arriving back at Evelyne and Garry's home, 'You have 20 minutes to have a shower and get ready for the Mayor's Reception' I was told. Another quick change. Oh well, I didn't come on this trip to relax! We had certainly made the most of our Journée Libre and I enjoyed every minute of it.

## Our afternoon

by Rosemary Smith

Leaving the others to rejoin the train, John and I next toured the **Château de Clos Luce** which had been the last home of Leonardo from 1516 until his death in 1519 at the invitation of his friend Francois I. We were keen to see the working replicas of his famous inventions but first toured the chateau, furnished in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century style and displaying some of the Da Vinci manuscripts and drawings with the basement housing reproduction models of his engineering inventions.

Outside the working models were fascinating, with the replica designs and sketches on large transparent canvasses hanging among the trees having quite an ethereal effect. After resting at a shady table of the Medieval Café we faced the long walk back to the riverside car park as we had missed the return trip of the Petit Train. Back at home after a refreshing cup of tea (we are educating our hosts in English ways) a rest and a change of clothes and we were ready for the evening reception at the Mairie.

## Mayor's (Official) Reception by Anne Long

On an almost tropical evening English visitors and our French hosts met in the gardens behind the Town Hall for the formal welcome and reception by the Mayor of Montbazou, Bernard Reveche.

Both he and Tony Sleep, Mayor of Brentwood made short, light hearted speeches with Sheila Hornsby doing an excellent job translating for Tony. Official gifts were exchanged before the serious business of eating, drinking and enjoying each other's company.



Moving the tables into larger groups created a convivial atmosphere to encompass both languages. The food was, as usual, superb, and the wine flowed. This was accompanied by a lady playing the accordion weaving between the tables with renditions of French and English tunes. Towards the end of the evening the National Anthem and La Marseillaise, were sung with great enthusiasm. Then it was off to bed to get up very early on Sunday for the visit to Venise Verte.



## Trip to Le Marais Poitevin

Sun. 23Aug by Pam Richards

To be honest most of us seemed shocked by an 8.0.a.m. start with no chance for a Sunday lie in but the early start plus another 5 hours in a coach were all worth while. The peace and calm of '**La Venise Verte**' (Green Venice) a marshland area in the Vendee made for a very relaxing day, extremely hot but bearable with shade from overhanging trees



We set off from **Arcais** on punt like boats and travelled slowly through an elaborate criss cross of canals, stopping for a delicious panier maraichin (picnic). This included the local delicacies mojettes, butter beans with cream and a baked spinach and mixed vegetable dish plus as usual, a seemingly endless supply of wine !



Back on board after another hour on the canals the boats stopped as if for a serious problem. There were flames all around one of them but this was all part of the experience as the water, when stirred up, released gases which set alight..... Quite impressive!

Once back on dry land, we explored the village and tasted a liqueur and jam made from locally grown angelica. There was a lovely church and time for a coffee or beer before setting back on the coach after a really restful, interesting day in another beautiful place.

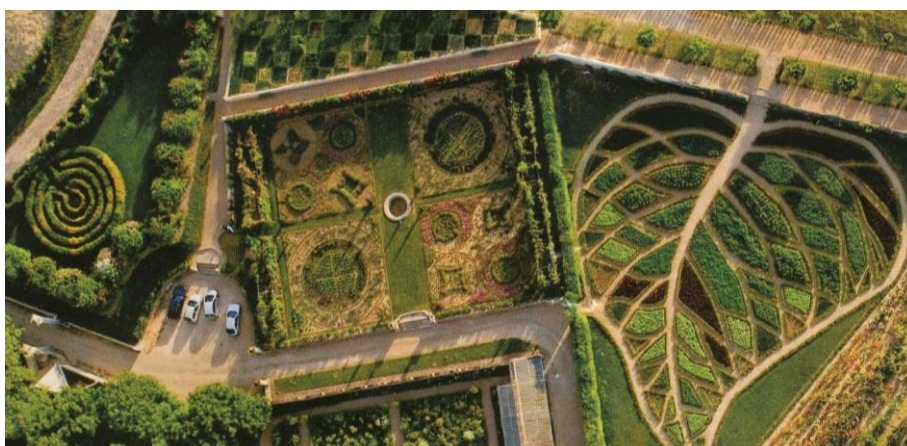
## The Gardens of the Château de Chatonnière by Pam Maule

On the last morning of our visit we awoke to the unfamiliar pattering of rain outside the shutters: but by the time we reached the Jardins de la Chatonnière the skies were blue again though with rolling clouds that would occasionally alarm us and refresh the gardens with light showers throughout our visit.

Off we set, detailed guide in hand, to explore the 12 different gardens laid out on the terraced side of a valley. Their names ranged from the **Garden of Sciences** (where few could resist fingering the 40 medicinal (and culinary) plants to release their characteristic scents and where an Angelica plant provided a rare sight) to the **Garden of Romances**, unfortunately its willows and grass looking damp and uninviting after the earlier downpour.



Very appealing was the **Garden of Abundance** – a mini-Villandry – its geometric design formed by thriving cabbages, chard, aubergines, peppers, herbs and celery. Above them, the last roses of summer in the Crescent of Fragrances still filled the air with their lovely perfume. Higher still, a climb to the rim of the valley afforded a delightful aerial view of the château with its gleaming slate turrets, set in immaculately maintained gardens of lawns and clipped box, much in contrast to the romantic and exuberant plantings outside this inner sanctum which was guarded by four large Alsatian dogs.



### Poires Tapées by Pam Maule

After this very agreeable visit, we continued to **Quincay** where our hosts met us with a most welcome picnic in the French style, involving tables, chairs, glasses, wine, napkins plus entrée, plat & dessert . . . . . Marvellous Next came a fascinating account of the ancient art of Preserving Pears, still practised at 37 Rivarenes. It was a highly labour-intensive process to produce these dried pears which contain the very essence of the fruits' taste. After watching a demonstration of the device used to tap or hit the pears to remove air and pips (from which originates the name 'Poires Tapées') we tasted some samples and then enthusiastically entered the troglodyte cavern where an amazing variety of products containing the pears could be bought. . . . An excellent day out!

### Another View Anon

The sun was hot, the picnic was excellent, the wine . . . . . The young lady had a pleasant voice but the history of pears is not the most enthralling chapter to retain one's attention.

A quiet hum arose from the group of gentlemen in front of me. I looked up and noted seven heads dropped, seven pairs of eyes tightly shut and seven chests rising and falling to a gentle rhythm

Ah the delights of rural France . . . . .



## La Boule de Fort by Bob McLintock

There can be few games where the first essential item of equipment is a pair of carpet slippers. Or where the balls move down the court at a pace which is a fraction of walking speed. La Boule de Fort is that game.

Our introduction into La Boule de Fort was an interesting experience. The game has its origins in the boats and boatmen of the Loire who played the game in the holds of their boats when the wind was too light for them to sail.

The game is now played on purpose built areas (I'm not sure if they are called pitches, courts, rinks or whatever), which are approximately 20 metres in length and have a rise and fall which resembles the hull of a river barge.



The playing surface is polished to a very smooth finish and the game is played with wooden balls that have a metal band around their circumference. The balls are also weighted in the same way as our own bowls so that the bias of the bowls affects the roll of the bowl.

The combination of a highly polished floor and a polished metal band means that there is very little friction to slow the bowl and as a result the pace of the bowl when it leaves the bowlers hand is critical. Bowling is best described as a delicate and sensitive skill and as “new boys and girls” many of our efforts were too hard and hit the end stop, or too soft and stopped half way. However, there were some that followed the Goldilocks tradition and “were just right”.

The game is scored in exactly the same way as English bowls or French petangue with points awarded to the team (two players) whose bowls were nearest to the jack. It is unlikely (probably impossible) that the game will ever feature on television. There is an exciting part when the players will “fire” their bowl at an opponent to remove it from a position near the jack. However, if its excitement you're after, Boule de Fort is not the game for you.

I did think a variation which would become popular would be how much beer could be drunk from the bowl leaving the bowlers hand, its meandering journey down the court until it eventually stops and topples onto its heavier side. However I decided the participants would probably be too legless to negotiate the smooth slope of the court in their carpet slippers and I abandoned the idea even though it would make for more enjoyment for spectators.



## Petanque and Hippopotamus by Elizabeth Guyatt

An early evening game of Petanque heralded our final evening in Montbazon with pitches busy as opponents eager “to have the point” sought to land their boules closest to the cochonnet. Contest over, reflections on the game were accompanied by a refreshing aperitif and the treat of delicately fried whitebait.

It was soon time for the farewell dinner. Four delicious courses followed with wine and conversation flowing. The meal was interspersed with music and dancing. Sylvie and Patrick Cretenier, playing clarinets, were accompanied by John Hatt on keyboard and all present joined in a rendition of “He’s got the whole world in his hands”.

A local dance group “K’Danse” showcased their repertoire, quickly gaining more participants, and before long a conga line was snaking around and outside the hall. Led by Gary Houpert its first incursion into the kitchen was swiftly repelled by the tea towel wielding ladies of Montbazon who were waiting to serve dessert, but on the second circuit the kitchen was taken.



On the outward coach journey opinions had been canvassed as to a suitable song for the English visitors to sing. After one short rehearsal, and with a little trepidation, now was our moment. As we took up our positions John turned the volume on his keyboard up to maximum. With the front row gently swaying in time to the chorus, “The hippopotamus song” was enthusiastically performed and received – we had nailed it!

Now it was time for the evening’s formalities. With Valerie Milcent interpreting for the English, Beryl Guyatt thanked the Montbazon committee for arranging the programme for the visit and the host families for their generous hospitality. The customary gifts were exchanged between committee members and the Mayor of Brentwood, Tony Sleep added his thanks and appreciation of his first visit.

As the evening drew to a close the Hornsby and the Minns led a rousing chorus of “Lily the pink” and the festivities concluded to the refrain of Auld Lang Syne. All that was left was to reflect on friendships both new and renewed, and to speculate on who would have a sore head come the morning and the journey home.



The thirteenth trip to Montbazou to play our annual match against their veterans XI left Brentwood Town Hall at 5.30 am Friday morning and we were blessed with trains on time and roads without traffic problems. Using a quicker route through Rouen (not suitable for coaches) and a motorway lunch meant first beers at the **Grange Rouge** by 3.30 pm. At the traditional friendly welcome on Friday evening we caught up with our French opponents where there was lots to discuss. Dinner at Marlene's followed and Chinon flowed.

Saturday dawned cloudy but the temperature steadily increased. Lunch provided by the Twinning Association at Jean's (with fantastic river views) included a definite campaign to give us copious amounts of alcohol. Unfortunately, even the commitment to play football that evening failed to deter the team from accepting the hospitality, and with several deciding to swim back to our tents it was obvious we had drunk even more than usual.

Was it the lunch, our liquid intake, temperature above 30 degrees or a French determination that we would not win 3 years in a row? The French appeared with a number of younger players who played very well so the match did not go to plan.. We actually scored first but then conceded 5 goals and the after match clubhouse celebration was probably the friendliest ever.

Sunday is always an enjoyable day and this year a 'cultural' trip to **Villandry** prompted complimentary comments and we found an excellent restaurant for lunch. Our boules tournament was played out to the accompaniment of the band that provided music for Marlene's dancing event. That evening the Mayor, Bernard Raveche with Anita, Claude and Annie joined us for dinner chez Marlene, a bitter sweet occasion as Marlene's final function at the Grange Rouge. The food and drink were better than our singing but a great time was had by French and English and despite consuming 30+ bottles of Chinon all the tents were packed before the 9 am breakfast on Monday when we gave our farewells to Marlene, Guy and Marlene's dog Rex.

We did say this might be our last trip, however after such a fine weekend I'm not so sure. Maybe 2010 will be the last!

### **Coffee Morning**

**Sat 14<sup>th</sup> November**

Margaret Hogan hosted this very successful event at her home with members braving the elements despite an early thunder and lightening storm There they were plied with coffee and cakes by the diligent band of helpers, with the ubiquitous raffle adding a goodly amount to our funds and everyone enjoying the chance to chat to friends old and new.

### **Dinner at the Red Frog**

**Tues 8<sup>th</sup> December**

Our final social event was an evening meal at "The Red Frog" a newly established French Restaurant in Brentwood High Street. This was organised by Sheila and Neil through their wine link there. Meals had been pre-selected, allowing the staff to more easily serve the thirty members and friends who attended. Of course there was plenty of chat, including discussion on the various menu items we had chosen, all of which were very tasty and beautifully presented.