



Paris Branch

Newsletter

February 2023



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Chairman's message

Dear members,

Welcome to this month's Newsletter.

It is one year since the revised Newsletter was launched. A year which will remain memorable for many reasons, the principal change being the loss of our gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth II - and the accession of our new King, Charles III.

We of the Paris branch of the RBL have sadly lost some of our long-standing members, all of whom will be remembered and missed. The latest, this month, was Tony Bennet who died on 25 January. He was a much-appreciated character about whom more later in this newsletter.

On a happier note we have over the last twelve months had some interesting articles included in the newsletter which have been provide by members.

Please keep them coming, we look forward to reading your stories.

Our long-standing member Noreen Riols has received her MBE at the Embassy (see photo). Once again, many congratulations Noreen. Well deserved.

Last year's Poppy Appeal as you will have heard was extremely good as we managed to raise just under 17000.00 euros. Let's hope we can beat that this year.

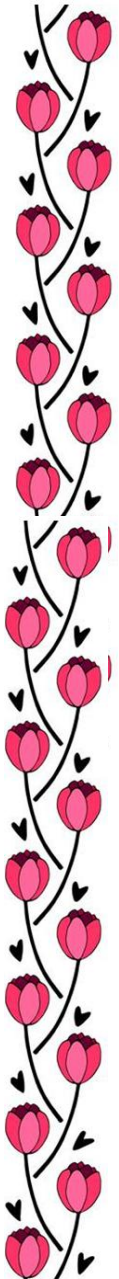
As Mark will mention there is a lunch on the 23rd of this month, and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

All best wishes,



Richard Neave.

Janet's Valentine Quiz



1. *When is Valentine's Day*
2. *Which Roman god is always represented with a bow and an arrow ?*
3. *Who is the Greek god of love ?*
4. *Which UK company manufactures the sweets Love Hearts ?*
5. *In Medieval England, what did women use to place around their pillows on Valentine's day eve ?*
6. *Where was Charles, Duke of Orleans, imprisoned when he wrote a Valentine poem to his wife ?*
7. *If you are born on Valentine's day, which star sign are you ?*
8. *In which country is Saint Dwynwen the patron saint of lovers ?*
9. *What is a love apple ?*
10. *Who sang 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love' ?*
11. *Who wrote this?*
"For this was on seynt Valentynes day
Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make"
12. *Why were a record number of valentines posted in 1840?*

Answers on last page

IN MEMORIAM:

Tony Bennett 13/05/1945 - 25/1/2023

Tony, one of our most well-known and popular members died on 25 January after a long period of painful illness. Many of our more long-standing members will recall him with affection and indeed, since the news was e-mailed to members we have received numerous messages to that effect.



I recall I first met Tony when he was interested in getting a job as an English teacher - back in '89 I think. I asked him to tell me something about himself.

"I used to be a ship's officer and now I'm doing lunches at the British Legion."

"The British Legion? In Paris?"

"Yes. They like curry down there."

"You do curries? I haven't had a decent one for ages! Can anyone come?"

In fact he was doing better with his hugely popular lunches than he would ever have done as an English teacher. Fortunately I was able to persuade him of this - otherwise he might have stopped doing those gorgeous curries and nasi-goring dishes which he and his wife Dorothy served up daily at the RBL in rue Boudreau. Many of the expats working in the offices around the Opera area at the time were in the market for a decent curry - impossible to find in Paris at the time. That's when I became a member of the RBL and used to eat there a couple of times every week. The best lunch deal in the area and, as a bonus, there were some interesting people to talk to. Tony continued, as house manager, to do lunches on a more relaxed, monthly basis when we moved to Acacias and the tradition of monthly lunches continues to this day.

Tony had a great sense of humour and a never-failing fund of seagoing tales with which to regale all present. One which always intrigued me was from when he commanded a cargo ship sailing regularly between Djibouti and Jeddah. "The return trip to Djibouti always took longer than the outward trip to Jeddah." he said.

"That's odd. Why?" I asked.

"It was the pilgrims, all heading for Mecca, mostly sleeping on the deck. Going there was fine but coming back there were always lots who had spent their last penny on the pilgrimage."

"So why would that slow the boat down?"

"Well, they had nothing more to look forward to so there were always a few who threw

themselves off the boat."

"Good lord! But why kill themselves on a boat?"

"They believed that if they died whilst actually making the pilgrimage to Mecca they would go straight to heaven with all the delights of 72 virgins and rivers of wine and honey for all eternity."

" So the boat trip back was their last chance to take Mohamed up on his offer! Hmmm! - but, tell me, why would that slow the ship down?"

"The law of the sea. If you have a man overboard you have to go back and look for him and we always did. Never found any though. The water was full of sharks and they didn't stand a chance."

All our sympathy goes to his Tony's family, his many friends and especially to his wife Dorothy who makes, if possible, even better curries than he did.

EVENT.

Last month we were contacted by **the Association Rossitten Histoire et Mémoire.**

This very active Ploemeur association is based on the farm of Cosquéric where several blockhouses were constructed by the Germans during the Second World War and where the owner, Jean Robic, has installed a museum. The association owns two anti-aircraft guns on this site, one anti-aircraft Schneider model and the other a Bofors.



The Association informed us of a ceremony to be held on 4 February to commemorate the crew of a Wellington ZL-X which fell in Ploemeur on February 4, 1943, 80 years ago. We contacted the Central Brittany branch of the RBL as Ploemeur is a bit off the beaten track for the Paris branch.

We hear that the commemoration was a great success. It was presided over by the Commander of NAS Lann-Bihoué in the presence of Group Captain Anthony McCord, the Air Attaché at the British Embassy in Paris, the daughter and grandson of Barney Thompson, the only survivor of the crash, the Mayor of Lorient, the Mayor of Ploemeur, and many representatives of the patriotic associations of Ploemeur. The Royal British Legion Brittany branch was represented by the Vice chair, Christine Daniel whose husband Colin was standard bearer. Geoff Williams of the Paris Branch also attended.

After the raising of the British and French flags to the sound of God Save the King, a reminder of the historical facts, and speeches by the civil and military authorities, wreaths were laid and a moment of silence was observed. The descendants of Barney Thomson were presented with commemorative plaques including bits of the plane.

Interestingly, in conversation after the ceremony, Colin Daniel discovered that he was actually related to Arthur Templeton, one of the crew members who died in the crash.



A fascinating sidelight is that Flight Lieutenant 'Barney' Thompson who, captured by the Germans, was in Stalag Luft III until the end of the war was instrumental in one of the most famous escape episodes of the Second World War: the Wooden Horse. For more info on that - and his ornithological interests - click [here](#).

Distinguished members from the past.

This month we feature Captain Gilbert Charles Georges Turck. M.C. Croix de Guerre. Légion d'Honneur.

Gilbert Turck was born on September 3rd, 1911 at Le Festoy Vaux/Olse, France. He was the son of the Mayor of the village and his mother was a poet. Gilbert was a student at the Lycée Saint-Louis in Paris, then studied architecture.

However, when world war 2 began he was working at the Chemins-de-fer and was called up and assigned to a unit in the second office where he liaised with section D of the intelligence service, which was to become one of the constituent elements of the SOE. He worked until the fall of France on the sabotage of German plans and material. In 1940, after the French Armistice, he managed to come to England after completing a hazardous journey with a broken ankle.

For more than a year he worked, with the consent of General de Gaulle, as a Headquarters Officer in London while preparing for clandestine work in France. A change of identity was arranged for him and he was commissioned in the British Army from 12th June, 1941 and assigned to SOE until 20th July, 1945, when his commission was relinquished.

On the night of the 6th August, 1941, Gilbert Turck, now known as Captain Tunmer, with a trained radio operator for the FAÇADE mission and Jacques Vaillant de Guélis landed by parachute near Saint-Désiré (Allier), 25 km NW of Montluçon in France. His intention was to meet up with friends in the 5ieme Bureau who still exercised influence in Vichy circles, and

obtain from them any protection in their power for agents passing through unoccupied France. The jump didn't go well. On leaving the plane Gilbert hits his head on a wing and lost consciousness. Landing while still unconscious, he broke a leg but was soon discovered by locals who took him to the local Gendarmerie. From there he was transferred to the Allier military department where he was questioned for two days in Montlucon prison hospital by Vichy officials. Gilbert somehow managed to come up with a convincing story and was released. Recovered from his injuries he left for Marseilles where he settled into the villa des Bois and began to locate safe houses for agents and dumps for sabotage material.

He created a lorry service between Paris and Marseille conveying both agents and sabotage material between Occupied and Unoccupied France and his pioneer work laid the foundation of what became a successful escape line. At one point the arrest of certain Officers sent from England brought his activities to the notice of the Vichy Authorities endangering his position but, rather than return to England, he chose to seek help from his father who provided him with a new identity, false papers and ration cards. Armed with these he went to Paris using the name Georges Delanoé, where he set up a kind of sabotage school and bought the small Loisel transport company, which served as his cover and allowed him to regularly transport men and equipment from the occupied zone to the free zone and vice versa. He appointed his fiancée Solange Crista as his manager.

On 7th July, 1942 at the Café des Deux Magots, in Saint-Germain-des-Prés he and his fiancée were arrested, one of his sub-agents having betrayed both him and his fiancée to the Gestapo. A Gestapo search of Solange's apartment however, failed to find the explosives stored in an armchair on one of the landings on the stairs of the building. Neither he nor she said anything incriminating and it became apparent that the Germans didn't actually know much about their activities. But this didn't stop them imprisoning Gilbert in Fresnes prison. He made an escape attempt which failed and resulted in his being flogged and put into solitary confinement. On January 14th 1942 he was transferred to the Royallieu camp, near Compiègne, where he was again severely beaten, having intervened to defend a Senegalese from being manhandled by four Germans. He was then deported to Buchenwald by train on January 26th 1942. On route he again attempted to escape but was caught. This resulted in his being stripped naked and thrown into an empty steel wagon where he was left for three days in the freezing cold without food, then he was sent to the Mittelbau-Dora prison camp where he was given back his clothes but contracted pneumonia. The camp doctor who examined him, learning that he was an architect, managed to have him appointed camp architect. Thanks to this Gilbert survived until the camp was evacuated to Bergen-Belsen which was liberated by British troops on the 18th April 1945.

In August 1945. Demobilized, he resumed his profession as an architect. Subsequently, in his spare time, he restored the Château du Frestoy-Vaux and like his father, he became mayor of the village.

He became one of our RBL Paris members in 1977. He died 20th December 2012 aged 101.



Honours. United Kingdom: Military Cross, The 1939-45 star.

France: Croix de Guerre 1939-1945 with palm, Commander of the Legion of Honor, Medal of the Resistance with rosette, Combatant's Cross, Volunteer Combatant's Cross, Volunteer Resistance Combatant's Cross, Resistant Deportee Medal, Commemorative Medal of the 1939/45 war, Free French Forces, Insignia of military wounded.

Identities.

SOE:

Recording: George Christopher Tunmer, Canadian.

Nom de Guerre: Christophe.

Operational Code Name: LIFTED

False identity: Gérard Émile Tambon, architect, born on March 20, 1911 in Paris, residing at 52, rue de la Convention, Paris XV

Another nickname: Crista (this is the name of his fiancée).

Cover in Paris in 1942: Georges Delanoé, road haulier.

Military status:

British army; rank: Captain; general list, registration number 191813. SOE.

Richard Neave

SINGAPORE NOW & THEN

One of the most interesting places I and Roger have lived was our three and a half year stay in Singapore. One cannot help feeling a certain sense of involvement on approaching this small country especially if you are British or from one of the other nations of the Commonwealth which lost so many there in 1941. We certainly did and it seemed somewhat surprising to find ourselves in an implacably modern city-state determinedly oriented towards the future and where the past has been firmly relegated to the past - with respect but not obsession.

Singapore, city of silk shirts, colonial grandeur, Singapore Slings at The Long Bar in Raffles Hotel, peanut shells, Change Alley, merchant shipping and the infamous Merlion, not to mention the best chicken satay anywhere in the world. Nowadays the city is a melting pot of cultures, a haven for ex-pats and a centre of tourism.



Lt. Gen. Arthur Percival about to negotiate the surrender. Lt Col. Ichiji Sugati in centre.

Mind you, it is also called a "Fine City" not only because of the quality of life but also because of the number of things you can get fined for - eating in public, chewing gum, littering and even not flushing the loo... We were lucky, or careful, enough never to fall victim to the hovering police.

However, there is a lot more to this ex-British colony than its culinary expertise, financial finesse and ambition to make it the most law-abiding place on the planet and in a more serious vein, this tiny sovereign island nation was the scene of the largest surrender of British-led forces ever recorded in history.

Singapore is a sovereign island nation, sandwiched between Malaysia and Indonesia in South-East Asia. In the thirties it was considered by the British as their Gibraltar in the Far East, assumed to be just as impregnable and certainly as valuable as it's European counterpart. Singapore was, and indeed remains, the gateway to the rest of Asia. The



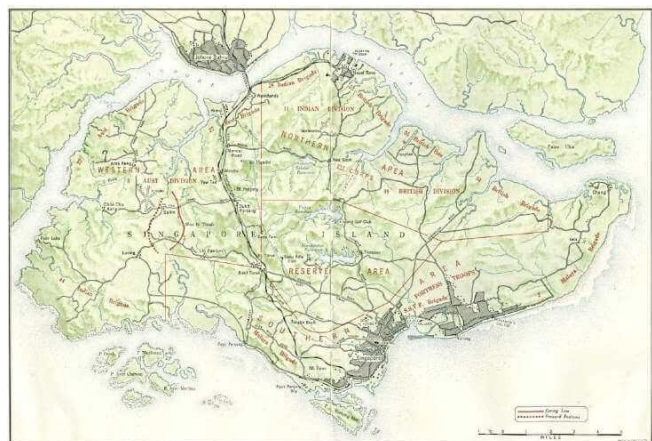
Yamashita demanding unconditional surrender. Percival (right) between his two officers.

British forces stationed in Singapore at the time epitomized the British military idea of officers and gentlemen. The atmosphere was very much one of colonial sociability. The Raffles Hotel was as much a part of military life for many officers as the heat, tin hats and khaki uniform - and the ever-present Japanese threat. However, as prevalent as this

threat may have been, there was an air almost of lethargy among the colonial forces stationed there at the time. An attack was expected, but victory for the British forces was considered a foregone conclusion. Singapore was designed as a formidable fortress and thought impregnable. This arrogance was to contribute to its eventual downfall.

When the Japanese attack came, it displayed all the military prowess in the region at the time. Their soldiers were ruthless, brutal and fearless, and it occurred with a speed and savagery that took the British forces completely by surprise. Encouraged not to take prisoners but simply to execute those in their path, the Japanese swept through Singapore with the force of a tsunami, leaving shock and destruction in their wake.

At the beginning of December 1941, on the same day that Japan was attacking Pearl Harbour half a world away, the Japanese simultaneously bombed the Royal Air Force bases to the north of Singapore on the Malay coast, thereby eliminating the Air Force's ability to either



retaliate or protect the occupying troops on the ground. Their tactics were shrewd and incredibly well thought out. Before any Japanese soldier set foot on Singaporean soil, Britain's naval and aerial capabilities had both already been destroyed. When the Navy responded by sending the battleship 'Prince of Wales' and the battle cruiser 'Repulse' at the head of a fleet of ships, both were torpedoed and sunk in the South China Sea. This left Singapore defenceless in the face of assaults from both air and sea. Britain and Singapore's only hope was in the British Army and Commonwealth forces. It was obvious that the Japanese attack would come from the sea. So obvious that, at huge expense in the 1930's, Singapore had been fortified with huge gun placements that pointed straight out to sea. The Japanese, however went round and attacked from the landward side. No-one expected an attack through the treacherous jungle, mangroves and swamp there. Over-estimating the defensive nature of the jungle was a grave mistake that left the British-led forces completely outmanoeuvred. The British commander at the time, Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, had 90,000 men at his disposal. His forces consisted not only of British, but also Canadian, Indian and Australian forces. The fighting began in the north in Malaya. Here Percival's troops were soon humiliated at the Battle of Jitra between the 11th and 12th December 1941. On January 31st 1942, overestimating the size of the enemy forces, the British retreated to Singapore, falling back over the causeway that separated it from the mainland. Meanwhile the Japanese swarmed south, some on stolen bicycles, through the jungle from Kota Bahru towards Singapore, which lay over 600 miles south. Percival, aware of the seemingly unstoppable Japanese pursuit, ordered his men to spread over 70 miles in order to face the oncoming onslaught. This proved a fatal mistake. With his forces, although far superior in number, spread so thinly, they were unable to repulse the Japanese and were completely overwhelmed. The leader of the Japanese forces, Yamashita attacked with only around 23,000 troops and on 8th February 1942, they entered Singapore. Just seven days later on 15th February 1942 Singapore fell to their savagery and tenacity. Percival surrendered in a futile attempt to prevent further loss of life. An estimated 100,000 people in Singapore were taken prisoner, some 9,000 of whom were said to go on to die building the Burma-Thailand railway. The estimated deaths of those under Japanese control in Singapore range from a Japanese estimate of 5,000 to that of the Chinese of 50,000. Whatever the exact figure, it is undeniable that thousands lost their lives under Japanese occupation.

The worst defeat of all time for British-led forces, it was not only lives that were lost but the idea of European superiority in war. Churchill himself was said to remark that the very honour of the British Empire was at stake in Singapore. That honour and reputation was undoubtedly tarnished. During the fighting and immediately afterwards, civilians were murdered, soldiers decapitated, prisoners were burnt alive, hospital patients slaughtered where they lay. There was a brutal occupation and massacre of the local Chinese population. The savagery was truly shocking to British colonial troops, especially those who, until this battle, had never been in action. Those prisoners who survived and were interned as


prisoners of war were subjected to three years of pain and torment: many British, Australian and Canadian troops never made it back to the homes, even after the war ended.

During our stay in Singapore, I visited a variety of museums and amongst them was the Battle Box. Built on, or rather 30 feet under, a hill upon which Stamford Raffles built a residence many years ago, the Fort Canning Bunker, was the Headquarters



Malaya Command Operations Bunker. The waxworks there are remarkable, I found myself transported back to the day when Percival and his officers surrendered to Yamashita head of the Japanese forces. Sentosa Island at the southernmost tip of Singapore was where most British troops were stationed. A theme park now dominates the site but one can still see some of the gun emplacements. Changi prison is where the prisoners of war were taken and can be visited. Changi beach was the scene of a massacre of the Chinese. From a historical perspective these three sites, the Battle box, Sentosa and Changi are perhaps the most significant and, for anyone with even a passing interest in wartime history, should figure high on their list of things to see in Singapore.

Janet Warby

 <p>Don't forget to book in for this month's lunch.</p> <p>Thursday 23 February 12h15 for 12h30 Only €23 - Pay on the day (in cash please)</p> <p>Contact Richard at 06 45 10 47 70 or richard.neave05@gmail.com</p> <p><i>Reserve early to be sure of a place. (Cancellations up to 48h before)</i></p>	 <p>LUNCH MENU 23th February</p> <p><i>Aperitif</i></p> <p>STARTER <i>Terrine de <u>legumes</u></i></p> <p>MAIN COURSE <i>Chili con carne, <u>rice</u>, <u>green salad</u></i></p> <p>DESSERT <i>Moelleux au chocolat glacé</i></p> <p><i>Wine served with the meal</i> <i>Coffee or tea</i></p>
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The late Patrick Noble, whose obituary appeared in our December edition, sent me, shortly before his death, a last contribution to our columns. You saw the first part in the January edition. Here is Part 2:

**THE RAILWAY NAVVIES:
UNSUNG HEROES OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

The Navvies Cross the Channel (Suite of last month's article)

Back in the early 1840s. France was somewhat late in starting the construction of railways, so that for its first line, from Paris to Rouen, it had to call on British expertise



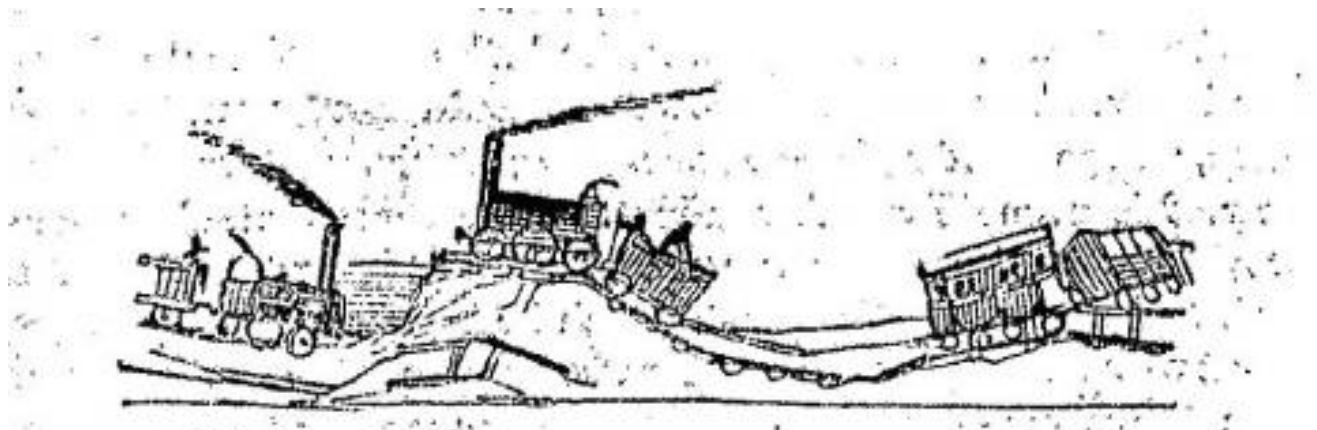
and experience (as well as British capital). Joseph Locke was appointed as supervising engineer, and the construction contract was awarded in 1841 to Brassey in partnership with Mackenzie. 5 000 navvies were brought from England, landed in Le Havre and were deployed along the Seine Valley. The teams were completed by 5 000 others, mostly

French, but also including men of many other nationalities. A *lingua franca* evolved being a mixture of English and French with elements of the other languages present. The navvies became an amusing spectacle for the French who came *en famille* to watch them working, with their extravagant dress and manners. Very quickly the navvies found that alcohol was cheap and readily available, so true to form on payday they became drunk and rioted. However the French gendarmes proved to be a much tougher proposition than the British police, so their excesses were brought under control. Concerning safety, French law made the contractors completely responsible for any accidents and made them pay compensation.



Some injured navvies even took their employers to court when they considered the compensation paid to be inadequate. The Paris – Rouen line was finished and opened to traffic on the 3rd of May 1843 and to celebrate the event 600 navvies were entertained to a feast where a whole ox was roasted. This is what the

magazine *L'illustration* said about them - *Un repas en harmonie avec les moeurs anglaises, et qui rappelle les festins des héros d'Homère. Quelle plus douce récompense peuvent désirer ces rudes travailleurs, qui en deux ans ont attaché leur nom à une œuvre immortelle.* However during the celebration units of the French National Guard were mobilized "just in case", but for once the navvies behaved themselves.



**TRAIN ON A FRENCH RAILWAY, CONSTRUCTED BY THEMSELVES
AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE ENGLISH WORKMEN.**

In 1848 nonetheless there was something of an insurrection against English workmen - not only on the railway but in the textile industry - as the accompanying cartoons illustrate :

There was to be a strong presence of British engineers, contractors and navvies when the line was extended to Le Havre, Dieppe, Caen and Cherbourg. They were also present to a lesser extent in the construction of other lines, in particular those from Paris to Amiens and Boulogne. However little by little the French accumulated experience such that by about 1850 railway construction in France was more or less a 100 per cent French activity.

The British railway construction industry throughout the 19th Century continued to work all over the world, across Europe, in the Americas, in Africa, in India and Australia, but times were changing. Construction methods were becoming more and more mechanized, so there was no longer a need for armies of navvies wielding pick and shovel. As the years past the navvies disappeared from the scene, and the few that were left were just old men sitting in pubs, sipping their pints of beer and telling tales of their days of glory. In turn these passed into eternity to be buried in now long forgotten graves.

The Navy Legacy

The navvies have gone forever, but they have left behind them across the face of the earth majestic works, beautiful for the eye to behold. In looking at them let us give a thought to that exuberant, dashing race of men, full of panache and daring, who made it all possible.

Patrick Noble

The Last Laugh:



The surgeon and the garage mechanic.

Those - numerous amongst our members - who have cardiac problems may wince a little at this dialogue in a garage:

Surgeon: Is my car ready?

Garage Mechanic: Yes doctor. All done. It was an injector.

S: So what's the damage?

M. You're speaking metaphorically I hope! All the real damage is repaired. If you mean your bill, here it is.

S: Wow. That's a bit steep isn't it?

M. No it's not! Tell me, do your patients often say that to you? I know you're a heart surgeon and I bet your bills are a lot bigger than mine!

S: That's a bit different! A car and a human body are hardly the same thing!

M. I don't know! After all a car engine's got electrical circuits, liquid circuits, fuel, lubrication and cooling, and some moving parts - and any of them can go wrong and have to be repaired or replaced.

S: Hmm. I see what you're getting at. The body is a sort of machine with electrical circuits and liquid circuits - blood, lymph and moving parts like the heart - my specialty.

M. Exactly. So on a working day you go into somebody's heart and replace a leaking valve with one taken out of a pig and I go into a cylinder in a Volvo and replace a leaking valve too. Same thing really.

S: An interesting point of view. I've never heard anyone put it that way before.

M: So how come that my bills are only in the hundreds of Euros - at best - whereas yours are certainly in the thousands when we're basically doing the same job?

S: Hmmm. Tell me: Have you ever tried mending a car without stopping the engine?

M Y

Janet's New Year Quiz

Answers

- 1. 14th of February*
- 2. Cupid*
- 3. Eros*
- 4. Swizzels Matlow*
- 5. Five bay leaves wetted in rosewater*
- 6. Tower of London*
- 7. Aquarius*
- 8. Wales*
- 9. Tomato*
- 10. Queen*
- 11. Chaucer*
- 12. The penny post (with the penny black stamp) was introduced.*