



Newsletter

March 2023



Paris Branch



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Chairman's message

Welcome to this month's newsletter.

On the 24th of last month we were informed that another longstanding and valued member of our branch had passed away, Roger Thorn. It was Roger who introduced me to both our branch and to Saint Michaels church way back in 2011. I am extremely grateful that he did so. We became good friends, and it was a pleasure to serve under him when he was Chairman of the branch.

I have sent my deepest condolences to Elizabeth his wife who is a good friend and watched, as I am sure a number of you did, his funeral service which was broadcast live on You Tube. I have to say I found the service very moving. We will remember him.

Moving on you will be pleased to know that we shall be holding our monthly lunch on the 23rd of this month. Some of you have already signed up for this. Those who wish to attend and haven't yet signed up, please email myself or Mark.

On the 29th we shall be holding our thank you cocktail evening for all those who helped with last year's Poppy Appeal. Invites have been sent out.

I am pleased to say that work is progressing on the planned Dinner Dance for the celebration of His Majesty King Charles Coronation. We will keep you posted.

I am including another interesting story from our members archives which I hope you will enjoy.

Just as a reminder if you have a story that you would like to include in the monthly newsletters, please don't hesitate to send it in to Mark.

All best wishes,

Richard Neave.

Janet seems to be raising the stakes with this one. Good luck.



JANET'S SPRINGTIME QUIZ

1. *What are the spring months in Australia*
2. *The first spring day also marks the beginning of Nowruz, or the New Year, in which country*
3. *In the United States, the spring season is culturally regarded as the day after which holiday*
4. *In which country is there a tradition of burning an effigy on the first day of spring and throwing it into the river to say farewell to the winter*
5. *What are the three major religious holidays celebrated in April*
6. *Spring rolls are a popular dish in the cuisine in which country*
7. *In which country Tulip Festival is a spring festival celebrated*
8. *Who was the goddess of spring in the Roman era*
9. *In Greek mythology, who is the goddess of spring and nature*
10. *The wattle blooming is a sign of spring in.....*

Answers on last page

In Memoriam

Roger Thorn 10/08/1937 - 10/2/2023

We are sorry to hear of the death of Roger Thorn who was Chairman of the RBL Paris Branch for 16 years, taking over from Richard Dogget.

Roger was an ex serviceman, a lieutenant in The Royal Signals from 1956 to 1958. Subsequently he followed a career in merchant banking which brought him to Paris. He joined the Paris Branch of the RBL in 1995 and later, as Chairman, represented the RBL in numerous events, notably our annual rekindling of the flame at the Arc de Triomphe on the 4 August and the commemoration at Notre Dame on 11 November. He also organised visits to battlefields in France and



elsewhere in Europe, often joint events for the RBL and the Oxford University Society of Paris where he was also a committee member. He was also an active member of St Michael's church in Paris for 40 years.

Notably, on hearing of his decision to leave the chair of the Paris branch he was granted life membership by RBL HQ.

Several of you have already contacted us with memories and we add one as an example:

I first met Roger at an association lunch, not the RBL, attended by 30 people. He happened to be sitting opposite and in the small talk asked about my background. On hearing I had been a professional soldier he said "of course you will join the RBL in Paris". This was not a request, but an order, and one I was happy to comply with as even in our short exchange it was obvious here was a man with a genuine interest in a practical way helping ex-servicemen in need.

Later when I joined the committee I learnt from his calm, efficient, stewardship of the RBL. Always courteous, yet firm, he had a way of getting things done that was enviable given there were some strong minded individuals around the table. All of them had a great respect for Roger, not surprisingly, given that he was rarely wrong. I am sure I am not alone in missing him, and felt regret when Liz and he returned to England, thus depriving us of his much-appreciated company.

RIP my friend you were, and still are, a great example and an inspiration.

Edwin Gould

All our sympathy goes to Liz, his family and his many friends.

Maurice Delavier - and the Photo in the Loo.

"Have you heard the one about the wedding guest who remarked that it was 'kistomary to cuss the bride. ?'".

Actually it was a French '*contrepetrie*' that Maurice Delavier threw at me as I entered the *Petit Pont* bar where I had coffee every Saturday morning. However, French versions of spoonerisms being inevitably obscene, I hesitate to risk offending delicate feelings by quoting his original French one (much funnier) hence the relatively innocuous English one used here. If the replacement annoys you and curiosity pushes you unbearably, the real one is available on private application.

It was early 1969. I had been in France but a few months and my grasp of the language was still inept and bungling. I looked at Maurice curiously and waited for an explanation, an affair which would take some considerable time as he had decided to teach me French by means of these spoonerisms - of which he had a vast collection. I cannot recommend it as a method but it sort of made you think about the language in a different way.

It was in the *Petit Pont* that I had got talking to Maurice one Saturday morning and our coffees and croissants had turned into a sort of ritual. He turned out to be quite a character and was the first French person that I had really got to know (apart from Josette, the girl I had met a year before on the steps of the British Museum). He was full of stories and what made me think about writing a little about him here is that he was an artist – had done les Beaux-Arts in the twenties - and had spent part of the war in German captivity in Stalag 6A. There he had used scraps of paper to sketch what was around him and, after the war, 60 of his sketches were published in a loose-leaf file entitled – what else ? 'Stalag 6A.'

He hadn't spent the entire war there. He was another of those who 'got out and came home' whether officially or unofficially I never learned. There was still some reticence in 1960s France in sharing detail about wartime reminiscences. He must have been in the stalag some considerable time though, for the volume of his production is impressive. He gave me a copy of 'Stalag 6A' and, going through it for the first time, I stopped at one of the illustrations – a view of the prisoners' toilets. I liked that one so much that I took it out, had it framed and hung it – in the loo of course.



I happened to mention this to my son Frank for some reason last week and to my surprise he had a photo of the picture on his cell phone. It occurred to me that some of Maurice's wartime pictures were worthy of a wider audience and, collectively, you constitute the widest audience available. Since many of you have, like me, chosen to live in this country with all its fascinating, horrible, heroic and intriguingly complicated history, I would like to share some of these pictures with you. Firstly, there is the one currently decorating the loo. For me it summarises effectively the promiscuous nature of life in a Stalag – the inability to find a moment of privacy, acceptance of the inevitable and the need to conform and comply with regulations imposed, by the Germans of course, but also by one's fellow prisoners in a mutual effort to make the best of what would normally be an unthinkable situation. Here is a selection of his other sketches.



Maurice was an able man in a crisis. When Frank was born I decided to have him christened. My first problem was to persuade my wife, Isabel, to accept the idea. As a devoted 'soixante-huitard' who had done service on the barricades of that uncomfortable period she was, like most, ferociously anti-clerical. Nonetheless I got her, reluctantly, to accept the idea and, armed with her promise to, at least, attend the ceremony, I trotted round to find the local parish priest. The fellow turned out to be a most unsympathetic character with a concept of christian charity redolent of the middle ages. Not bothering even to invite me to sit down he informed me that he would baptise the child only if the mother would attend a course of catechism training. I told the man what I thought of that and of him and went home simmering with rage.



The next Saturday I was in the 'Petit Pont' with Maurice recounting the miserable tale. Maurice said if I didn't mind it taking place in another church he could perhaps arrange something. "Sure," I said, adding inappropriately, "I don't give a damn where it is!". A few days later he phoned.

"I've made an evening appointment with the Bishop."

"Bishop? I didn't know you knew a bishop."

"Yes, a neighbour. But he's a Melchite Bishop. You don't mind do you?"

"Melchite? What's that?"

"It's a Syrian church and they practice the orthodox rites."

"You mean a whole different religion! ? That's not quite what I....."

"No, hang on a minute. It's only the way they do things that's different. The Melchite church accepts the authority of the Pope. It's a sort of branch of the Catholic church." So we went to meet the Bishop. A charming man of great erudition, he welcomed us into his flat where, surrounded by a collection of glorious icons, he firstly served us a glass of port and then explained the Melchite rite. Isabel bristled a bit when he said that the normal practice was baptism by total immersion and muttered something about 'drowning the baby' but he quickly reassured her that it was quite possible to effect baptism in the usual way and, mollified, she even waxed enthusiastic. It was a very pleasant evening. This, I decided, was true Christianity. But maybe it was the port that convinced me.

The Melchite church in Paris is St Julien le Pauvre. Just opposite Notre Dame, on the Right Bank, its construction began at the same time as the cathedral opposite. It was finished first however and thus can claim to be the oldest church in Paris. Without my knowing its connections it was already amongst my favourite spots in the city.

So Frank was christened there. A longer ritual than usual. I liked it. We were all issued with candles and walked in procession round the font as the Bishop chanted. There were quite a few observers, tourists I thought, but later Nancy, a friend who took part, said "Did you see who was at the back of the church?"

'No.' I said.

"That Russian author. Wrote the *The Gulag Archipelago*. What's his name? Yes: Solzhenitsyn.."





And just to finish, here is a sketch Maurice drew on a scrap of paper the Saturday morning in the "Petit Pont" when I announced that Frank had been born.

[Click here to see fuller versions of these pictures and many more from "Stalag 6A"](#)

Copy this link into your browser if the above doesn't work.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/195766627@N02/albums/72177720305451140>

Mark Yates

A word in your ear...



Maybe learning a second language makes many of us develop an interest in the more abstruse aspects of our first. Etymology is one of the more intriguing of these. So here, on an etymological theme, is the origin of the word:

PLONK.....,

A disparaging term for cheap wine, especially cheap red wine, widely used in the UK and to a lesser extent in the USA. It's so fixed a part of British English that many people are surprised to hear that it got here from, or at least through, Australia. In that country you will inevitably encounter references to plonk bars and plonk shops - meaning wine bars or shops, especially cheap and cheerful ones. Plonk-up means a party, and if you're plonked-up you are intoxicated. (I am told the latter terms are now somewhat dated).

There's also plink, which was once a joking variation, which has led some writers to guess that plonk is an imitative invention from the sound of a cork being pulled from a bottle.

However, the evidence indicates an origin in the fighting in Europe in the First World War, when troops from various British Empire countries who spoke only English came into contact with the French language. The result was weirdly transmogrified expressions, such as napoo from "*il n'y en a plus*", or san fairy ann from "*ça ne fait rien*", toodle-oo from "*tout à l'heure*".

In a similar vein, Plonk is a tortured version of "*blanc*", as in "*vin blanc*", white wine.

The Tommies in France certainly drank local wine; lexicographer Jonathon Green told me about the memoirs of Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, published in 1964, which says about that period: "Ving blong was very cheap ... a man could get a decent pint and a half bottle for a franc."

The term didn't thrive in the UK after the War, since virtually no wine was then made in Britain and there was no tradition of wine drinking except among upper-class or cosmopolitan people. However Australia did already produce wine at this period, nearly all of it consumed in the country, and so I would guess there was more opportunity for the term to be preserved there. Several humorous or mangled versions of the phrase are recorded in Australia in the decades after the end of the War, such as vin blank, von blink, point blank, and plinketty plonk. By the 1930s the word had begun to settle down into our modern form, though to judge from a comment in "The Bulletin" in Sydney, dated 1933, it then referred to some sort of rotgut or moonshine: "The man who drinks illicit brews or 'plonk' (otherwise known as 'madman's soup') by the quart does it in quiet spots or at home."

So in fact the term "Plonk" arrived in the UK only later, in the 1950s, when wine (of whatever colour) became a commonplace drink. There was also an increased exposure to Australian English, with large numbers of young people from the Commonwealth - especially in London - and one further factor may have been use of the term "Plonk" in Nevil Shute's hugely popular 1950 novel about Australia, "*A Town Like Alice*".

Maxine Arnoult



**Don't forget
to book in for
this month's
lunch.**

**Thursday 23 March
12h15 for 12h30
Only €23 - Pay on the day
(in cash please)**

Contact Richard at 06 45 10 47 70
or
richard.neave05@gmail.com

*Reserve early to be sure of a place.
(Cancellations up to 48h before)*



LUNCH MENU 23th March

Aperitif

STARTER

Tarte à l'ognion

MAIN COURSE

Shrimp Tagliatelle

(To be confirmed)

DESSERT

Fruit Tart & Ice cream

Wine served with the meal

Coffee or tea

From our archives

This month I would like to introduce you to the story of Mary Lindell who was a member of the Paris branch from 1976 until 1980. It may have been longer, but our records are incomplete.

Mary Ghita Lindell was born in Sutton, in Surrey, England in 1895. She had an impeccable upbringing coming from a wealthy family. When WW1 started she trained and became a nurse. She first served with the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD)



where, headstrong from the start, she once had the unenviable task of cleaning some rather well used bedpans. The Matron commented that Mary didn't know how to clean them. Mary didn't reply which incensed the Matron. The next day during a similar task, the same Matron remarked loudly 'Of course, it won't be properly cleaned if one of these VADs is doing it'. In response Mary Lindell swiped the Matron across the lip with her cleaning brush

leading to her being imprisoned for one night in a stable block. Later she joined the "Secours aux Blessés Militaires", a branch of the French Red Cross. Whilst there, In 1917, during one of the battles at Soissons, she volunteered to stay behind and help the wounded. She was out of contact with her superiors for five days and a message was sent to the Red Cross HQ in Paris, presuming her dead. A journalist from the Daily Mail picked this up and in England the headline 'British Nurse Killed on French Front' was printed, which sent her mother into shock. She was, however, alive and well., and was decorated for gallantry under fire with the French Croix de Guerre with Star and the Russian order of St. Anne for dedication to the French and Russian wounded.

After the First World War she married the Count Marie Joseph de Milleville, a member of the French aristocracy and lived in a luxurious apartment in Paris. They had three children: two boys, Maurice (born 1921), Octave, and a daughter, Marie, whom she called Barbé. When Nazi Germany invaded France in May 1940, her children were in their teens and her husband was on a business trip to South America.

With the evacuation from Dunkirk and the surrender of France, many British soldiers and airmen were stranded in occupied France. Mary decided to take action. She stitched her First World War medals onto her Red Cross uniform, placing the UK

ones first thus ensuring that there was no doubt as to her nationality and allegiance, With the help from a friend she found a farm near Sauveterre-de-Béarn which straddled the boundary between occupied and unoccupied France. She met a retired British officer, a Major William Higgins who lived in nearby Mauléon-Licharreher, and he agreed to help Mary in her quest to get stranded army and airmen across the border to safety in neutral Spain. Mary, with her children and Michele Cambards, the teenage girlfriend of her son Oky, began escorting soldiers and airmen by train from Paris to Sauveterre. Being a nurse, she approached General von Stulpnagel, the German Commander in Paris and through bluff and boldness managed to obtain petrol and permits in order to travel freely on humanitarian grounds.

Mary, although not trained, smuggled many escapees over the demarcation line, usually linking up with the Pat O'Leary Line based in Marseille, directing her charges to the seaman's mission there, run by Donald Caskie. By the end of 1940, her family and associates had assisted about 25 English and 50 Frenchmen to escape capture.

However, her luck ran out in early 1941 when the Abwehr police arrested her in Paris and she was sentenced to 9 months solitary confinement in Fresnes prison. At about the same time her son Maurice was arrested and sentenced to 11 months prison. At the end of her sentence in November 1941 she was not released with other prisoners, but a sympathetic French wardress opened her door and released her without authority, warning her that additional paperwork, to detain her again, was already in the pipeline. Mary became ill with pneumonia and when the Germans returned to arrest her with their new papers they were informed that she was dying and should not be moved. They left and Mary quickly arranged for her children to leave Paris and stay in a safe house in Ruffec. Now under sentence of death in Paris and wanted throughout France, she disguised herself as an elderly French governess then followed her own escape route to Marseille, where on the way she met up with an American Vice Consul named George Whittington in Lyon, who obtained an exit visa from Vichy for her, describing her as a "stranded English governess".

She arrived safely in London in July 1942 where she joined Airey Neave and Jimmy Langley of M19 and was trained with them, after which both Airey and Jimmy convinced her that she should return to France. She was flown back on the night of the 26/27 October 1942 in a Lysander piloted by P/O Bridger of 161 (Special duties) squadron, to an area near Limoges. The new line was named the Marie-Claire Line and was based on the area around Ruffec. Within 24 hours of her landing, Mary had aircrew escapees moving south along the line.

Following a visit to Lyon in December 1942, Mary and a companion were cycling on their return journey when a car, full of collaborators, rammed her bike. Mary was badly injured and feared dead but on arrival in hospital she was found to be alive and treated then hidden in a cellar. The Gestapo had been informed of the incident and

searched all local hospitals. In Mary's absence, her family and other helpers continued to move aircrew survivors down the line.

In early January 1943, Major Haslar and Marine Sparks, the RM Commando survivors of operation Frankton, the canoe raid on shipping in Bordeaux Harbour, (Cockleshell heroes) arrived in Ruffec. After visiting a café for soup and asking the waitress for help, they were taken in hand by Marie-Claire and given food and accommodation. Both men eventually reached Gibraltar. Things became continually more difficult for the organisation and Mary was advised to change her alias to Comtesse de Moncy as she was being sought by the Gestapo.

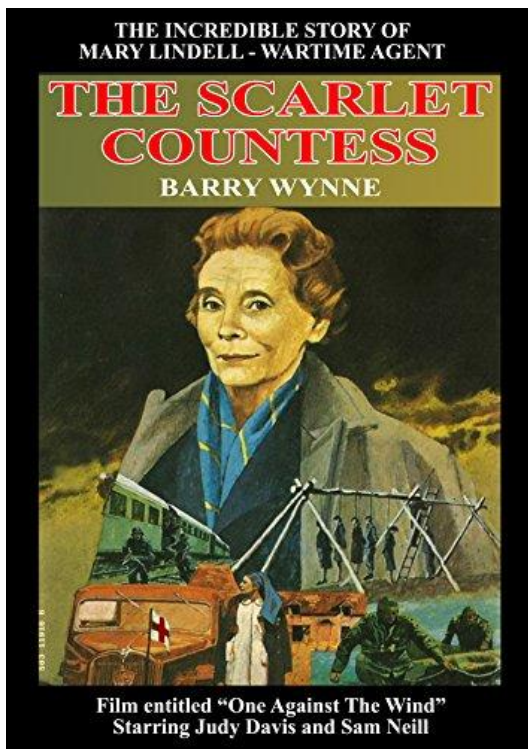
In the summer of 1943, tragedy happened; four airmen were caught by the Gestapo on the Toulouse-to-Pau train. In interrogation, the courier, Ginnette, gave nothing away. Unaware of the arrest, Mary was waiting for the train at Pau station when she was arrested by the SD. Initially taken to Biarritz, she was then placed on the train for Paris with two guards. Under the pretext of needing to use the train toilet Mary escaped and jumped from the train. The guards reacted quickly and opened fire, shooting Mary in the head and face. Unconscious, she was returned to the train and taken to hospital at Tours to undergo a six-hour operation by a Luftwaffe surgeon, which saved her life. Six weeks later, transferred to Dijon prison, Mary was placed in



solitary confinement. She was finally sent to Ravensbruch concentration camp at the beginning of September 1944 where her attribution to a job in the camp hospital spared her life. On 25th April 1945, Mary was handed over to the Swedish Red Cross and the indomitable, unbreakable lady walked free.

It's difficult to place an exact figure on the numbers of escapees who passed through the Mary-Claire line, but it is estimated to be several hundred.

After the war, Mary became the Royal Air Forces Escaping Society's (RAFES) representative in France. She lost her son Oky, who having been arrested and put into a concentration camp never returned. Her other children survived.



Mary was awarded the Croix de Guerre, with star, France, World War 1. The Russian order of St. Anne for dedication to the French and Russian wounded. Croix de Guerre France, World War 2. Order of the British Empire. Medal of Freedom, United States.

Mary died on 8th January 1987 in Germany.

Those interested in learning more about this remarkable woman may like to read her biography of which details here.

Richard Neave

The Last Laugh:



The Memory Clinic

(An elderly man is chatting to an elderly lady...)

Liz: I hear you and your wife went to a memory clinic last month. What was it like?

Harry: It was great Liz. A lovely place up in the hills. Good food too.

Liz: What about your memory? Did they do anything interesting? Did it actually work?

Harry: Oh Yes: There were all sorts of courses on psychological techniques to preserve and improve your memory.

Liz: Really. Now that's interesting. My own memory isn't very good these days and my husband's is bad too.

Harry: Well, maybe you two should try the same clinic. There are lots of practical exercises. And my memory's definitely improved!

Liz: These exercises. What did you actually do? Can you give me an example?

Harry: Well, some were based on visualisation where you created mental images. But the best ones for me were word association. Very effective.

Liz: It sounds really interesting. Tell me, what's the clinic called?

Harry: It's... It's... Just a minute... err... What do you call that pretty flower that grows on bushes? It has thorns on the stem.

Liz: Do you mean a rose?

Harry: That's right. Thanks. *(He turns to speak to his wife sitting nearby)*
Rose! What was the name of that memory clinic?

Mark Yates

Afterthought

Whilst having lunch today with Irene in a cooking school which we regularly frequent, we found ourselves talking about curious details which differ between cultures. The one which attracted our attention this time was related to the fact that, whereas the gratin dauphinois was fine, the tournedos and three accompanying vegetables were cold. Why, we asked ourselves, do the French never serve food on pre-heated plates. My mother would never have dreamed of serving up the Sunday lunch on a cold plate and I'm pretty sure that must be the same for most of you.

The idea came to mind of asking you to send in your observations of other cultural differences. I suspect we all have our favourites and I would like to make a compilation of them - if you will let me know what they are.

So please, take five minutes to send me a quick note on what Irene calls "pet peeves".

(to mfyates@gmail.com)

Mark Yates

Janet's Springtime Quiz

Answers

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. September to November | 6. Viet Nam |
| 2. Iran | 7. Canada |
| 3. President's Day | 8. Flora |
| 4. Poland | 9. Persephone |
| 5. Ramadan, Passover, and Easter | 10. Australia |