



Paris Branch

Newsletter

N° 21 - December 2023



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Chairman's introduction.

Welcome to our December Newsletter.

As you know it has been an eventful year, with many ceremonies. At last month's AGM all the current committee members were re-elected for 2004 and we are pleased to welcome three new committee members who will all be kept active next year.

2024 will be a very busy year as a number of additional ceremonies are foreseen. Next year being the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, we expect to be invited to attend ceremonies in Normandy.

You may recall that the 2023 dinner dance was a popular success, and we are currently planning another this year. We are also looking at the possibility of "theme nights" in the club house and we look forward to proposing interesting events which, hopefully, will tempt you to take part.

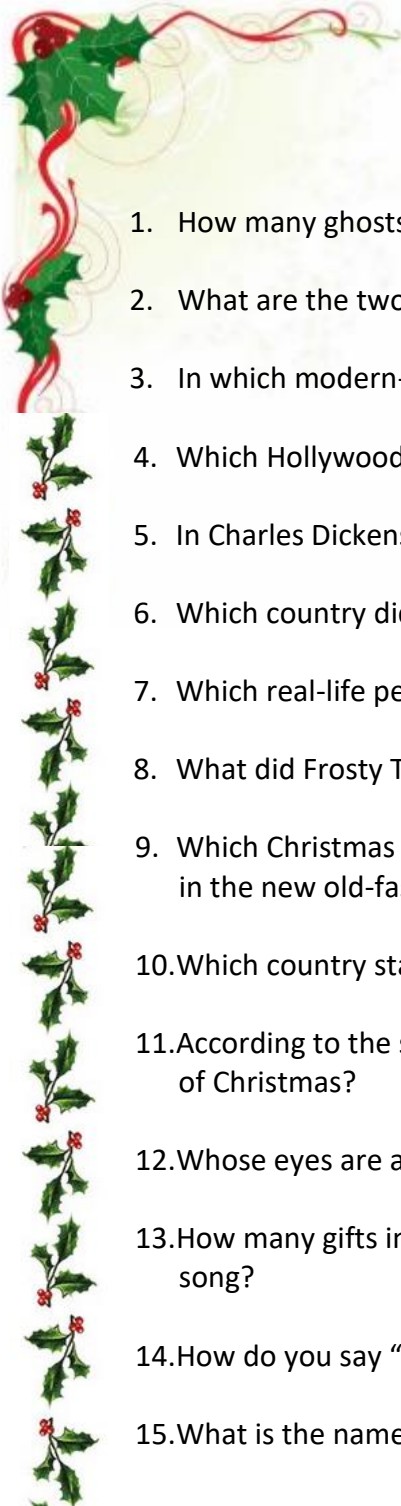
We are also looking to organise a visit to one of the WW2 historical sites which those history buffs amongst you should find interesting.

We would like to hear suggestions from you for other events that we could hold, so please let's hear your ideas. Please also keep sending in interesting stories. Many thanks to those who have already contributed to our Newsletter, website, and Facebook page in the last twelve months.

It remains for me to give a big thank you to all of you for your continued support, and I am sure you will join me in thanking our committee especially our extremely hard-working secretary for the work done over this last year.

**May you all have the merriest of Christmases
and a happy New Year**

Richard Neave



CHRISTMAS QUIZ

1. How many ghosts show up in A Christmas Carol ?
2. What are the two other most popular names for Santa Claus?
3. In which modern-day country was St. Nicholas born in?
4. Which Hollywood actor played six different roles in The Polar Express?
5. In Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, what was the first name of Scrooge?
6. Which country did eggnog come from?
7. Which real-life person is Santa Claus based on?
8. What did Frosty The Snowman do when a magic hat was placed on his head?
9. Which Christmas song contains the lyric "Everyone dancing merrily in the new old-fashioned way?"
10. Which country started the tradition of putting up a Christmas Tree?
11. According to the song, what did my true love give to me on the eighth day of Christmas?
12. Whose eyes are all aglow in (The Christmas Song?)
13. How many gifts in total were given in "The Twelve Days of Christmas" song?
14. How do you say "Merry Christmas" in Spanish?
15. What is the name of the last ghost that visits Scrooge in A Christmas Carol?

Answers on last page

EVENTS

Our Chairman has already mentioned the AGM apart from which the most notable event of the month was our Christmas lunch on Wednesday 13 December: It was most enjoyable: The world was remodelled advantageously in at least three conversations in which I participated and anecdotes and memories were recycled in profusion in the very best Christmas tradition. Crackers were pulled and hats worn. The first, for this year, of those reassuring occasions which are at the heart of all that the Christmas season symbolises. If you weren't there – well, you should have been!



All our thanks go Elaine Taylor and to her assistants, Karen Martinovitch and Valerie Chemama pictured here. Two devoted committee members, Janet and Pierre helped with the serving.

CORRESPONDANCE

Robin Sweeney writes to inform us of a most intriguing initiative he has discovered: Souvenir Français - the "Geomemoire"

Last June I was out walking and on my return, came past the village cemetery where I stumbled across an event being organised by the *Souvenir Français*. Intrigued, I wandered over & asked what was going on.



The organiser informed me that it was the inauguration of a new initiative by the *Souvenir Français* to geolocalise the war graves in France & upload the data onto an application for mobile phones or tablets. The cemetery at Neuilly Plaisance was one of the first to be inaugurated, with the Maire, Mr Demuykn, presiding. So I dashed home, smartened up & returned to watch the ceremony. Further questioning revealed that the history teacher at the local school had enlisted some of the pupils to carry out research on those who's graves were before us. This would provide an insight as to who the soldier was in real life and how they came to be here. Thus, each headstone becomes a meaningful lesson in history, so much more than just a relic from the past. As we passed before the different graves, the pupils who had carried out the research explained how they had gone about it and demonstrated the app. on their phones, calling up the history of the soldier who lay there. It was a moving experience.

The objective of the *Souvenir Français* is to gradually roll this out across France to give more information of the fallen, deepening the meaning and the understanding of Commemoration. Clearly an important exercise as with time, the living memories of those conflicts are disappearing and younger generations will not receive the same message that we received from our grandparents.

The Application.

The application can be downloaded onto your mobile telephone or tablet from the following site via google.

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=fr.souvenirfrancaise.geomemoire>

Further information can be obtained from the *Souvenir Français* site.

<https://le-souvenir-francais.fr>



Participating cemeteries carry the plaque illustrated and each grave researched will carry a QR code.

We also hear from Rosemary Rudland, Déléguée de Memoire à l'Ambassade de Canada:

As Delegate of Remembrance of the Canadian Embassy, and vice-président of the Comité Juno Canada Normandie, I have the honour of attending both Commonwealth and French Remembrance commemorations. I am also a member of the Royal British Legion Paris branch and of the Commonwealth War Graves Foundation. However, the isolated Commonwealth graves I personally care for in small Normandy village cemeteries hold a special place in my heart..

Among the many churchyards near my home in the Eure that bear the sign “Commonwealth War Grave”, is one in the ancient village of Bailleul-la-Vallée, that I discovered during Covid-19 restrictions, thanks to an “authorised” outing walking my Jack Russell.

Here I discovered the lone grave of Warrant office (Pilot) John Henry Reeves, set on a corner of the small graveyard among the village people he had given his life for at the age of 24. Almost all of the surrounding graves had mementos, photographs and plants. Not, however, the resting place of young Pilot Reeves. Deeply moved, the next day I filled a jam jar with garden flowers and returned with my posy, and a tiny British flag.

Time has moved on. After meeting the local mayor, and lots of research, I have now had the pleasure of corresponding with the fighter pilot’s family in England and it’s a joy to remind them that their loved-one’s grave is remembered with honour. A Union flag now stands permanently by the cleaned headstone, and a fresh poppy cross and a lovely Remembrance wreath from the Royal British Legion were again recently renewed for Armistice Day. The grave is also annually remembered by the local association of War Veterans.

John Reeves, known as Jack, served with 132 (City of Bombay) Squadron, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, 1263639. On July 14th 1944, his Spitfire IX was involved in a heavily combined air battle over the town of Dozulé (about 20km south from the coast). Tragically hit by a P-51 of the USAAF, and with his plane in flame, the young fighter pilot bravely



managed to stay aloft for a few kilometres but finally crashed in woods overlooking the village of Bailleul-la-Vallée. Reeve’s name is inscribed in stone on the British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer that records the names of the 22,442 servicemen and women who lost their lives during the Battle of Normandy of 1944.

We are happy to include this report from the now revived Normandy branch of the RBL.

**12th NOVEMBER 2023 : ARMISTICE DAY : SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE :
GOLD BEACH VER-SUR-MER**

The 12th November brought many together on the 105th anniversary Armistice day at the British Normandy Memorial. A cold and blustery north west wind did nothing to simplify the task of those administering the Order of Service!

Stewart MILLER, RBL, led the event, supported by Sacha MARSAC, the Memorial's Operations Manager, Rodney CURTIS, Chair – RBL Normandy delivered the Exhortation with Catherine CURTIS (Poppy sales from her wheelchair) , Marian CLARKE and Jacqueline FROST, of the Anglican church, Claude and Sylvie NICOLLE-HUICHARD, of Souvenir Francais. There was a 45 minute commemoration : prayers, readings, observing the Two Minute Silence. Wreaths were laid at both the British and the French Memorials, The two National Anthems were sung. The event was attended by many, some coming cross-channel."

**" This is a simple Red Poppy Wreath,
a reminder to you all
that courage, faith and honour,
will stand where heroes fall".**

Not forgotten in the Service of Remembrance were the British servicemen and women currently deployed, in these troubled times, to Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region responding to the War in Ukraine and, from Cyprus, to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gaza-Israel conflict.

Rodney Curtis, Chairman

Books: a News Flash -

A very recent book which has had substantial problems with its publication has made much of the propriety or not of overheard dialogues in the Palace prior to the production of yet another royal offspring. Report of such a dialogue, which may cast some light on the subject, reaches our ears from one of our enormous team of reporters.

Participants' names are withheld to protect their identities.

C - You know about this baby thing young H and M are expecting?

Q - Yes, of course. One does worry a bit, doesn't one?

C - We're very happy about it of course.

Q - I'm sure you are. We are.

C - Err It does make one speculate though, doesn't it.

Q - Speculate? What is there to speculate about. She's having a baby, that's all! Women do it every day. We've done it ourselves.

C. True. I was just thinking about, well, the hereditary aspect.

Q - You would be; always going on about ecology and Darwin!

C - Well, one does have to consider the genetic element you know.

Q. What on earth are you going on about?

C - Well, obviously there are inherited characteristics which can come out, sometimes after lying dormant for generations.

Q - Oh that. I don't think people would mind. We've had some funny ones in the family before and always muddled through.

C – Indeed. But what I mean is, hmmm, the question of colour...

Q - Oh, I see. Yes. I suppose there is that. When one considers the question.

C - Exactly. Can you imagine if it were a boy and he inherited – I hate to suggest it – but ---

Q. Goodness, yes! His father's red hair. Imagine; another one with that orange mop. And what about the character to go with it?

C - H has never settled down since he left the Army. It took Afghanistan to calm him a bit. Nothing but trouble since.

Q – And it's true, he's not the first. What about Henry the VIII. All those red-headed portraits – and of course his violent behaviour. Look what he got up to!



C - I suppose every family has similar problems one way or another.

Q - Well, it is a bit of a worry but, never mind C. Maybe it'll take after its mother.

Editor's comment: Have they shaved it's head?

Mark Yates

Arctic cruise 2015

Kangerlussuaq - Kangerlussuaq



In August 2015, Roger and I began our Arctic Cruise and Expedition at a town called Kangerlussuaq. We were on *Le Soléal*, one of the ships of the Ponant Company to cruise around the Baffin Sea stopping off at different places along the way before crossing to North Eastern Canada. Some of the places we saw were Sissimut, Ilulissat, Eqj, Ritenbent, Akudleg, Nulisfik, Kullorsiaq and Savissivik before crossing to Canada and Pont Inlet, North Arm Fjord, Icy Fjord,

Scott Inlet, Sam Ford Fjord and Isabella Bay then back across the Baffin Sea to Kangerlussuaq.

One of my abiding memories of this great trip was the huge size of ice floes and icebergs. The bergs looked small at first until, as we closed in they grew to skyscraper proportions: frightening but magnificent. It is almost unbelievable that, however big it seems, the real size of an iceberg is ten times what you can see, 90% being underwater and invisible.



We saw seals, whales and of course

polar bears. Seeing the whales breaching and then their huge tails lifting before going back into the sea was something else. The huge male polar bear looking at us as the ship sailed past his resting place and the mother bear teaching her babies how to swim to get from one part of land to another whilst in the sea, all the time talking and encouraging them to keep up, is something I will not forget.

We were entertained one night by the Indigenous people of Savissimut, who sang, danced, and got us to join them on stage. The children are adorable and the costumes the ladies make from polar bear skin and other local materials are wonderful. We were given the chance to eat Narwal but I declined. A bit too rubbery for me. Roger tried it but refused seconds. We were shown how to build an igloo, not as easy as it looks! We were taken to glaciers and trekked for a couple of miles before getting a zodiac back to the ship. At one stage we were told to get back to higher ground as ice breaking off and falling in the sea would cause a small Tsunami; it did and was quite frightening.



I recommend this trip to anyone who gets the chance to do it. It was truly magical. Would I do it again? You bet I would.

Janet Warby

THE INVASION OF THE CAT PEOPLE

Another cat photo! My computer is infested with them. Yours too probably.

Millions of pictures of cats infect the computer world much as pictures of Orwell's "Big Brother" beset the city Airstrip One in his book *1984*.



I suspect it's mainly women who put cat photos up, but I may be wrong: Chat GPT refuses to answer the question. When asked if men or women post more pictures of cats, it snottily replies with a supercilious message sniffing at what it obviously considers a politically incorrect question.

Cats are invasive creatures. When I arrive at my country shack for the weekend two of them immediately appear out of

nowhere (though never together – cats don't waste their winsomeness upon their fellow felines: They save that for the human race). Even the one with the all-over battle scars and missing ears does its damndest to simulate a damsel in distress as it whinges for its milk.

I was looking at some of the more obscure details of the reproductive behaviour of some rather curious creatures the other day and came upon a possible theory explaining the obsession of the human race for cats.

If I might be allowed to wander from the subject of felines for a while, I'd like to point out that it all comes down to Darwin. But there, in my opinion, nearly everything comes down to Darwin if you interpret his theory widely enough. Take the praying mantis' sexual behaviour for example. The female frequently eats the male during copulation (the latter, surprisingly, manages to terminate the act, even if his top end is now being digested by his partner.) And why this somewhat excessive gluttony? So that, a well-nourished mother will produce a fatter and more successful brood. It may be somewhat tough on the male, but it's good for the species!

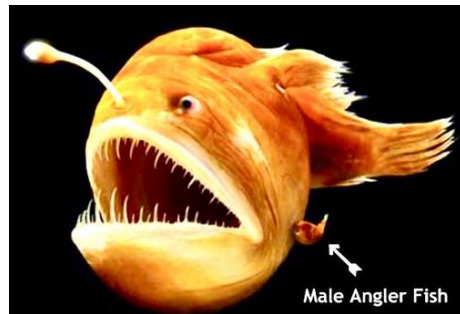


A mantis - and a half.

Numerous creatures lose their reproductive equipment *In flagrante delicto* (a nice phrase, once, legend has it, mistranslated as "in a fragrant bed"). In many bees and wasps, the male reproductive organ is left in the body of the female, blocking access for subsequent suitors.

The female, unharassed, reproduces more successfully. Once again hard luck for the male but good for the species.

The anglerfish has long been one of my favourites with a beautifully Darwinian sexual behaviour. The process begins at birth when all the hatching fry are males, not, one would think, a very promising start. The youngsters all start swimming around looking for a female (hang on a minute; we're coming to that). Females are pretty hard to come by in the anglerfish's world – often the darkest and most inhospitable depths of the ocean. So, when the happy wee creature has the good fortune to come across a female it bites it – and never lets go. Yes, never! In the end it grows into the female's flesh becoming, effectively, an organ of the female who can draw on a supply of sperm as and when required. Eventually the rest of the male sort of fades away leaving nothing but ever-available sexual glands (and if that sounds a little like some women's descriptions of their recent exes, so be it.) Oh yes. The bit I was coming to! The female! If all anglerfish are born male, where does she come from? Well, if the searching young male doesn't find a female in a reasonable time, it simply changes sex and hangs around until another male comes along and latches on. How economical can you get?



Let us move on to the subject of parasitism: The presence of some parasites can change the behaviour of their victims. Rabies is an example. A normally friendly and affectionate dog, affected by the virus, becomes vicious, salivates and bites uncontrollably – the perfect way to pass on the disease. The new behaviour clearly benefits the virus. Darwin again.

Coming back to my original theme of the cat and its behaviour, there is already an example connected to the *felis* genus. Mice and similar rodents can be infected by *Toxoplasma gondii*, but this protozoan can only actually reproduce in cats. The presence of the infection changes the behaviour of an infected mouse making it careless in the presence of cats and even attracted to cat urine. Obviously, hanging about cat-frequented zones is not a good policy for a mouse. It stands a good chance of getting caught and eaten, thus neatly allowing the protozoan to complete its life cycle in its new host. Might there not be a similar, protozoan, virus, or other infection between cats and humans – possibly favouring females, rendered more susceptible by their maternal qualities? Is the irresistible temptation to pick up that kitten, cuddle it and let it lick your nose just a Darwinian adaptation to ensure the future well-being of the creature – and its race, and all its accompanying collection of parasites? Are we all victims of this? And the next step? Infect the whole human race, or at least the female half of it, with another change in behaviour – an



obsession to take photographs of cats and distribute them far and wide in a subtle and dastardly attempt of the virus to increase yet further this insidious predilection for the feline species until every family has a cat, two cats - ten cats. Will they take over the world with the same facility with which they have taken over my computer?

God forbid!

Mark Yates

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

This photo of the month may seem a little banal.

The rue de Lagny runs almost directly from east to west and, in the evening often presents a view of blinding and colourful evening sunlight in a surprising variety of colours.

My neighbour, Colette Stéphan took this photo and what is interesting is that another neighbour, Anne Chateau (a regular reader of our newsletter) saw it. Now Anne is a painter of some talent and was inspired to do a version of the photograph in oils. I find it interesting to compare the photographer's view with the painter's. - I hope you do too



The photo.



The painting

A Word in your Ear...

Yuletide

My dictionaries of British origin firmly mark this as archaic or dialectal, which will come as a surprise to all the journalists, advertisers and Christmas card scribes who cheerfully borrow it as a useful alternative name for the Christmas season. Traditionally, it's true, it has been more a Northern English and Scots word than a common southern English one, and you will be very unlikely to hear it casually used at the supermarket checkout.

The terms Yule and Yuletide do not refer only to Christmas day but to all the traditional twelve days of the Christmas feast. "Yule" goes back to a time before the Christian festival had been thought of. It derives from the Old Norse jól, which was the name of a pagan festival at the winter solstice (and which survives in the modern Scandinavian greeting god jul, Good Yule or Merry Christmas). The beginning of that festival was marked with the ceremonial lighting of the Yule clog or Yule log, a big log laid across the hearth and kindled with a piece of wood from the previous year's log. A traditional Scots dish was Yule brose, the seasonal version of a kind of porridge made from oats on which was poured the juices from boiled meat.

In a tradition which may well be connected with that of putting a silver (well, it was silver in my day) coin in the Christmas pudding, the Edinburgh Magazine reported in 1821 that it was usual to put a ring in the communal bowl of Yule brose; It was said that the person who had the luck (or misfortune?) to discover it in their spoon would be the next of the company to be married.

Maxine Arnoult

The Last Laugh:



Emergency at the Casino

Gambler 1 - Quick. Call an ambulance!

Gambler 2 - It's OK. The manager is already calling for one. But what happened back there?

Gambler 1 – See that blonde at the roulette table? I was sitting next to her when she just toppled over and collapsed.

Gambler 2 - Has she had a heart attack or something?

Gambler 1 - No, I don't think it's serious. She's just in shock. She was coming round when I left the table, but you'd better get that ambulance just in case.

Gambler 2 - Sure. It's in hand. What do you mean she was in shock? Did she have a huge win or something?

Gambler 1 - On the contrary. She was complaining about losing every time. She put her money on her house number, the date, her post code, her car number - and she lost every time.

Gambler 2 - Yes, you get some people like that. They'll bet on anything. - Not like me. I have a sure-fire system.

Gambler 1 - I'm sure you have. Everyone in this place seems to have. Anyway, this dame turned to me and said "I've tried everything. I don't know what number to put my money on now. What would you suggest?"

Gambler 2 - So, did you come up with something original? What did you say?

Gambler 1 - Nothing special I just said, "Have you tried your age?" and she said, "Good idea." and put \$100 on number 37.

Gambler 2 - Then what happened?

Gambler 1 - Number 43 came up and she fainted.

Mark Yates

Janet's Christmas Quiz: Answers :

<i>1. Four,</i>	<i>6. England,</i>	<i>11. Eight maids a milking,</i>
<i>2. Kris Kringle and Saint Nick,</i>	<i>7. The bishop St. Nicholas,</i>	<i>12. Tiny Tots,</i>
<i>3. Turkey,</i>	<i>8. He began to dance around,</i>	<i>13. 364,</i>
<i>4. Tom Hanks,</i>	<i>9. Rocking Around the</i>	<i>14. Feliz Navidad,</i>
<i>5. Ebenezer,</i>	<i>Christmas Tree,</i>	<i>15. The Ghost of Christmas</i>
	<i>10. Germany</i>	<i>Yet to Come.</i>

Comments & contributions to mfyates@gmail.com

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