



**Paris Branch**

## **Newsletter**

**N° 22 - January 2024**



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### Chairman's introduction.

Welcome to 2024! I trust you all had a suitably merry Christmas and wish you all – in spite of the alarming auguries which besiege us, seemingly, on every side: good health, adequate wealth and, in all events, a very happy New Year.

Notwithstanding the chill which has wracked the last week or so, Janet, John Crother and I abandoned our respective hearths and made our way to the branch office with a view to planning the layout for this year's service of remembrance in November which hopefully will save us time later in the year.

We now have the result of last year's Poppy Appeal which is much better than was expected, given the unexpected refusal which met our usual request to have poppies to distribute before Saint Louis Cathedral on the 11<sup>th</sup> November.

The total raised was 16537.89 euros which is just short of the 16721 euros raised in 2022. So well done everyone.

One important issue that seems to be occurring is that quite a number of us have been getting letters and emails from London requesting that we pay our subscriptions. This is annoying when we have already paid. Both Mark and Ian regularly notify London as to who has paid their subscriptions. I am pleased to report that Mark has now sent a strong letter to London telling them that they need to better organise their systems. I am in the process of contacting other RBL branches in France to find out if they have been having the similar problems and, if so, what action they have taken. I will keep you updated as to their response in next month's newsletter.

Finally, I regret to report that we have lost one of our long-time members who served on our committee for a number of years. Graham Scott, whom I am sure some of you will remember, died in December. Your committee has also expressed our sympathy to fellow committee member Caroline Clopet whose father died on Christmas day. I am sure you would wish to be included in our condolences.

**Richard Neave**

## NEW YEAR QUIZ

1. January Jones is an actress best known for portraying Betty Draper in which American TV series?
2. Which astrological sign is between January 21<sup>st</sup> and February 20<sup>th</sup>?
3. In Roman mythology, January is named after which god of beginnings and transitions?
4. On the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1559 who was crowned monarch of England?
5. What is January's birthstone? (Hint: the name comes from the 14<sup>th</sup> century English word meaning 'dark red').
6. What is the common name for *Galanthus nivalis*, which flowers between January and April?
7. Which date in January is the traditional date for the feast of Epiphany?
8. January replaced which month as the first month of the Roman year?
9. Which American federal holiday is observed on the third Monday of January each year?
10. Margaret Thatcher Day is the 10<sup>th</sup> January in which part of the world?
11. Sometimes known as the *gilliflower*, what is the January birth flower?
12. Which British musician, born in 1947, shares his January 8th birthday with Elvis, Stephen Hawking and dictator Kim Jong-Un?
13. A Burns supper is normally held on the poet's birthday on which date in January?
14. What happened on 22 January 1901?
15. On precisely what date did the Victorians celebrate the start of the twentieth century, the 1st January 1900 or the 1st January 1901?
16. Which world city's name means "River of January"?
17. Who stars as Nick Starkey, a smart ex-NYPD detective in the 1989 comedy-thriller film, *The January Man*?
18. On the 17th of January in which year did Captain Robert Falcon Scott reach the South Pole?
19. Who, in January 1649, did the courts deem a "tyrant, traitor, murderer and enemy of the people"?
20. "Up Helly Aa" is a festival held to mark the end of the yule season on the last Tuesday in January in which Scottish town?

Answers on last page

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## In Memoriam



We are sad to learn of the death of Graham SCOTT, an active (and – it is worth noting – a most generous) member of the Paris branch for 26 years.

Ex-RAF, in his professional life he worked for EUROCONTROL which oversees air traffic in Europe. After retiring he moved back to Scotland in 2018 but always remained in touch with the Paris branch

Graham was also Honorary Secretary of the RAFA Paris Branch and, since its formation, the Ile de France Branch.

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## EVENTS

### RBL PARIS BRANCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 2023/2024

At the AGM in November, the following Committee Members were elected and attributed their functions. We welcome new Committee members, Julien Sabouret and Philippe Sechet.

<b>Officers</b>		<b>Committee Members</b>	
Col. Sean CUNNIFF	Hon. President	William BEAUCLERK	House Manager
Richard NEAVE	Chairman	Caroline CLOPET	Public Relations
Pierre QUENOT	Vice Chairman	Didier DUMONT	Events
Ian MCDONALD	Hon. Treasurer	Alain GANET	Link to Arc de Triomphe
Janet WARBY	Hon. Secretary	Alexander LAKE	Standard Bearer
		Tim LORKIN	Events
		Julien SABOURET	Co-Propriétaires
		Philippe SECHET	Souvenir Français Liaison
		Elaine TAYLOR	House Manager
		Mark YATES	Membership Secretary
			Webmaster, Newsletter

Under new RBL London rules the Treasurer is appointed, not elected, but to comply with French Charity Laws Mr. McDonald was elected as well as appointed.

Our Hon. President is invited to our Committee and to attend meetings when he can.

## Onna-bugeisha: Japanese Fighting Women

Japan is known for its male-oriented society, and this seems to have been the case since time immemorial. Nonetheless, there was a period – and a long one – where, exceptionally, some women vied with that traditional archetype of Japanese tradition, the samurai. These exceptional women were the Onna-bugeisha.

To situate the Onna-bugeisha (or Onna-musha) it is worth first summarising what exactly the samurai were. The name comes from the verb 'samurau', which means 'to serve' in Japanese. The samurai as an organised class, originated at the end of the twelfth century. However, their origin goes back much further, to the Heian period (794-1185), with the creation of private armies to protect the interests of the nobility. There were other classes of mercenary warriors, but only the samurai served at the imperial court.



*Minamoto no Yoritomo*

The samurai eventually organised themselves into groups, led by warlords with political power. They took over from a weakened imperial court in the 12th century, under the command of chiefs such as Minamoto no Yoritomo. From the Kamakura period (1185-1333), a new system of military government was founded dominated by warriors and led by a shogun (military dictator) until the 19th century.

The Kamakura shogunate was effective until the end of the 16th century. However, once the Tokugawa shogunate had restored order, from the 17th century onwards, the samurai became a closed, useless, and parasitic caste. They finally disappeared with the revolution of 1868 and the modernisation of Japan and its army.

The ancient battlefields of Japan have revealed, through DNA tests, that the Onna-bugeisha were present during the country's greatest wars. Separating legend from reality is difficult in defining the role they played in the history of the Empire of the Rising Sun. Popular memory preserves the story of the oldest renowned female warrior, a fighting empress named Jungū Kōgō, who is said to have led one of the armies that invaded the Three Kingdoms of Korea in the year 200, under the orders of her husband, Emperor Chūai. Chūai was killed in battle, but the empress fought on to victory. Historians are less than unanimous about the details, but Empress Jungū is nonetheless a symbolic embodiment of the first female warrior. Reliable history attests to women warriors appearing during the Heian (794-1185) and Kamakura (1185-1333) eras. Women, however, could not lay claim to the title "samurai". That was reserved for men.

Thus, although traditional tasks for women were secondary, logistical support, protecting the home and family during war, some did play important roles on the battlefield itself, fighting



*Katana*



alongside samurai and distinguishing themselves in battle, demonstrating as much courage and offensive and defensive skills as men.

Unlike the samurai, who fight with a katana the Onna-bugeisha preferred the naginata. This weapon resembles a spear with a curved blade at the end. It can be up to two metres long. This keeps the enemy at a distance, while inflicting very serious wounds. Onna-bugeisha also fought with the kaiken, a small sword similar to a dagger, and mastered the art of Tantojutsu (knife fighting). They were obliged to carry the weapon - given to them when they married - at all times. The blade symbolised the bond between wife and husband and for a woman to lose her weapon would be a great dishonour. This knife was also used for jigai, the female equivalent of seppuku (suicide by disembowelling as practised by the samurai). The art of combat for women also included equestrian archery. They were versatile fighters, capable of hand-to-hand combat and fighting at a distance.



*Onna-bugeisha with naginata*



*Tomoe Gozen*

Among the best-known historical Onna-bugeisha is Tomoe Gozen, who lived in the 12th century. Her exploits have been recounted and amplified, to the point where we no longer really know what the reality is. There's no doubt that she left her mark on people's minds through her bravery and her battles, not all of which are legendary. Tomoe Gozen fought alongside her master, Minamoto no Yoshinaka, whose mistress she is said to have been. She was appointed captain of the Minamoto clan, making her the first onna-bugeisha to attain this military position. Her story is told in the Heike monogatari (or 'The Tale of the Heike'), a poetic chronicle considered one of the great classics of Japanese literature, recounting the struggle between the Minamoto and Taira clans for control of Japan in the 12th

century. In it Tomoe Gozen is described as endowed with extraordinary beauty and talent with white skin, long hair and exceptional charm. She was also a remarkably strong archer and, as a swordswoman, she was a warrior "worth a thousand men, ready to take on a demon or a god, on horseback or on foot". Whenever a battle was imminent, Yoshinaka Minamoto sent her out as his first captain, and she performed more deeds of valour than

any other warrior. The Genpei War, between the Minamoto and Taira clans, raged from 1180 to 1185. Tomoe Gozen led more than 1,000 combatants to victory and beheaded seven of her master's greatest enemies. Tragedy struck, however, and during the final battle of Awazu, on 21 February 1184, she commanded 300 samurai against 6,000 Taira soldiers. Defeat was inevitable. She was one of the last 5 survivors of her clan when Yoshinaka Minamoto, mortally wounded, ordered her to flee. She decided, for the sake of honour, to make a last attack in which she killed the strongest enemy warrior with a single blow before cutting off his head. The story ends here and there is no historical record of what happened next. Legend has it that she became a Buddhist nun or, in a more heroic version, that she walked into the ocean carrying the head of her last enemy, before drowning herself in memory of her master.

The last known Onna-bugeisha was surprisingly recent. The last of the empire's female warriors. Nakano Takeko died in 1868 when she was still teaching martial arts. She was responsible for creating a unit of seasoned women to protect the shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu who, in opposition to the emperor's clan, was the last bastion against modernity in Japan. As such, the Tokugawa clan opposed British and American forces in a number of major confrontations over several years. Westerners, including French officers sent by Napoleon III, came to support the emperor's drive for modernity, in particular the modernisation of the Japanese army.

In autumn 1868, during the Battle of Aizu in the Boshin War, Nakano Takeko and her female fighters went to the front defying the formal order not to mix with the men. She single-handedly killed six soldiers but, in the end modern weapons won the day and Nakano Takeko, aged just 21, fell mortally wounded by a bullet in the chest. She asked her sister, Nakano Yuko, to behead her to prevent the enemy from taking her head as a trophy.



The participation of women warriors in Japanese warfare was exceptional but its existence has the merit of contributing something of a nuance to a country still essentially dominated by a male culture. The Onna-bugeisha, the historical female warrior, may yet provide something of a role model as contemporary Japanese women struggle to emancipate themselves from the domestic straitjacket.

*Nakano Takeko*

Francis Jolivet  
(Translation Mark Yates)



Photo of the Month - The Prague Orloj





Janet sends us this photo, taken a couple of years ago when visiting Prague.

What, I wondered was “orloj” - funny language Czech – and then realised, as I said it to myself that the etymology was pretty evident to any French speaker – provided you say it and don’t write it!

The clock is, Janet says, a delight to see. First installed in 1410, it is the third oldest astronomical clock in the world and the oldest still in operation. It has three dials (one is inside another). One, which is effectively an astrolabe (the ancestor of the sextant) gives the current astronomical constellation and the phases of the moon. The dial uses Roman figures for the hours and a version of Arabic numerals for minutes.

The clock was hit by gunfire and artillery fire in May 1945 during the Prague Uprising and was reconstructed in 1948. Popular folklore has it that the skeleton statue on the clock (top right) will nod it’s head if the clock stops working and the city will be threatened by disaster until it is fixed.

“The highlight for me”, says Janet “was seeing the clock strike the hour and the skeleton ringing his bell while the saints were moving above him.” Janet watched the head carefully and decided that Prague would survive at least until they went back home.

If you would like to see more about the clock check out this link:

<https://www.discoverwalks.com/blog/top-10-facts-about-the-prague-astronomical-clock/>

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### Extra:

Helen Warby, Janet’s daughter, sends us a commented photo-essay about the exceptionally beautiful woodland near her home in Ireland. The pages can be seen on the link here.:



[http://www.rblfrance.org/extra/hw\\_ ness\\_ woods.pdf](http://www.rblfrance.org/extra/hw_ ness_ woods.pdf)



## Christmas dangers

That kinky new toy wee Johny got for Christmas ...

Don't let it anywhere near your expensive new hair-do.



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## A Word in your Ear...

### Gossip



This is a very old word with a relatively modern meaning. It comes from the Old English **godsibb**, meaning a godparent or baptismal sponsor. It is a compound of god + sib (meaning blood relation as in sibling).

By the 14th century, the term was being used to mean a close friend, one you might chose to be godparent to your children. It was applied to both men and women, although in later uses it came to be applied only to women.

By the mid-16th century, gossip was being used to mean a flighty woman, one who would engage in idle talk.

Maxine Arnoult

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## The Last Laugh:



## 2020 White house Dialogue: Melania and a Friend:

**F:** When's Donald's birthday, by the way?

**M:** It was last month, June 14. Didn't you see the tweet?

**F:** Must have missed that one... He must be a hard guy to buy presents for.  
He's already got everything.

**M:** Yes, but I had a real brainwave: I bought him a parrot.

**F:** Really? A boy or a girl parrot?

**M:** The shop said it's a male bird. He said they talk better.

**F:** Not like humans then... Can he actually say anything?

**M:** Not half! He's incredibly smart. Never stops talking.

**F:** What's he say? "Pretty Polly?", I suppose...

**M:** You're joking! Donald has already taught him to say over a hundred words.  
He can say lots of things.

**F:** Remarkable! Of course, they're just sounds to him. There's no real meaning.

**M:** True. But the way he does it is impressive.

**F:** Sure. But you do realise he hasn't the foggiest idea what he's saying?

**M:** Well of course I do. That's obvious.

**F:** The words just come out any old how. They're quite meaningless.

**M:** Oh, I know that – Odd really. It's just the same with the parrot!

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*Janet's New Year Quiz: Answers :*

1. Mad Men,
2. Aquarius
3. Janus
4. Elizabeth 1
5. Garnet
6. Snowdrop
7. January 6<sup>th</sup>
8. March
9. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
10. Falkland Islands
11. Carnation
12. David Bowie
13. 25<sup>th</sup> January
14. Death of Queen Victoria
15. 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1901
16. Rio de Janeiro
17. Kevin Kline
18. 1912
19. King Charles 1
20. Lerwick (the largest town on the Shetland Islands)

*Comments & contributions to [mfyates@gmail.com](mailto:mfyates@gmail.com)  
Back numbers: [rbfrance.org/](http://rbfrance.org/) then "Paris Branch Newsletters"*