



Paris Branch

Newsletter

N° 23 - February 2024



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Chairman's introduction.

Welcome everyone to this month's newsletter.

First off, I am sure you will all have heard the sad news that our committee member, Caroline Clopet, whose father passed away less than a month has now lost her mother who passed away this month.

On behalf of myself and all the committee we wish her our deepest condolences at this difficult time.

It has been a quiet month so far. Janet and I have been going in each week to check the post. We were informed by the BCWA that we have now acquired a new non-paying member, namely a resident mouse. Needless to say, we are looking to have him or her evicted.

We have seventeen people due to attend this month's lunch on the 15th. If you haven't booked a place you need to do so.

Hopefully we shall be holding our Poppy Appeal thank you evening on the 14th March. We will keep you posted.

I have written to Notre-Dame Cathedral expressing our desire to be able to attend there next year for our 11th November service. I await their response and will let you know the result.

We have cancelled our 40s night until, possibly, March. Again, we will keep you posted.

Just a reminder to our committee members that we have a meeting on the 19th of this month. I would like to see a full attendance.

Have a good month, keep safe and well.

All best wishes.

Richard Neave

JANET'S FEBRUARY QUIZ



1. On what date is Valentine's Day celebrated?
2. What Star sign are you if you were born in early February?
3. What is the flower for the month of February?
4. What is the traditional birthstone for February?
5. February gets its name from the word 'Februa', which comes from what language?
6. On 16th February 1659, what was used for the first time in Britain when Mr. Nicholas Vanacker settled a debt?
7. Which popular tradition is celebrated in the United States and Canada on February 2?
8. In the poem called 'The months' by Sara Coleridge, if 'Hot July brings cooling shower' what does February bring?
9. How often does February have 28 days?
10. Which awards ceremony normally occurs at the end of February?
11. What country's New Year celebration often lands in February?
12. The February revolution was the first of two revolutions which took place in Russia in which year?
13. Which human rights leader was assassinated on February 21, 1965?
14. On which date in February is Superman's birthday in the DC Comics?
15. Who was beheaded at the Tower of London on 12th February 1554?
16. It is possible to have Easter in late February. Yes or No?

Answers on last page

EVENTS

This month's lunch takes place on the day of issue of this newsletter.

Your next opportunity to join us will be on Thursday 28 March.

Two Painters and a Funeral

Jean-Pierre Liberman, who died in 2019, was a retired doctor and a valued member of the RBL Paris branch. I sometimes went to see art exhibitions with him as we both found them more interesting when observations and opinions



Marquet: Notre Dame

could be shared. One such was an exhibition of Marquet's works in which I was particularly interested for an odd reason. Maurice Delavier, who was one of my first French friends, and godfather to my son Frank, was a painter, an "*ancien des Beaux Arts*" who had known quite a few well-known artists in what must have been the thirties and the forties. He lived in a flat at 19 Quai St Michel which had previously belonged to the

painter Marquet. From the window Marquet did many of his studies of Notre Dame, (to the right) and the Pont St Michel, (to the left). Matisse, I believe, had also lived in the same flat before Marquet so it has quite a history. The first time I saw the flat was when Maurice asked me to come along one Saturday to keep an eye open during the visit of a *conférencier* whom he had allowed to show a group around while he talked about Marquet and other painters. "It's just to make sure they don't make off with the spoons", said Maurice.



Marquet: Pont St. Michel

For those who are interested, in the March '23 Newsletter there is an article about Maurice Delavier's works done in a German prison camp. Here's a link to the issue containing it just in case you'd like to have a glance. Go to: [The Photo in the Loo](#)



M. Delavier: *Notre Dame*

Anyway, despite all this I was unfamiliar with Marquet's work and what I had seen of it hadn't impressed me. This exhibition though, was something of a revelation. Sometimes his colours are remarkable (when he can get away from misty Paris quaysides) and he has a grasp of painting water which is exceptional – Maurice once told me that getting the water to look right was one of the most difficult things for any artist, and I can believe it: He never got the water quite right himself!

Mentioning Maurice reminds me of my son Frank's Christening at the church of *Julien le Pauvre* which I also mentioned in the "Photo in the Loo" article.

However, on a much sadder note, it brings to mind another event which I attended at *St Julien le Pauvre* some years later. It was Maurice's funeral – an unusual affair dogged by misadventures worthy of an undertaker's nightmare.

As I have also mentioned somewhere, in my early days in Paris I used to meet Maurice on Saturday mornings at the "Petit Bar", a modest and long-since extinct café next to the Petit Pont - nothing to do with the establishment that has usurped its name since then. I have also mentioned Maurice's penchant for teaching me French by means of spoonerisms (*contrepéties*), not a system that I can recommend to prospective language teachers looking for original approaches but with a certain appeal to anyone aware of the mild pornography French Spoonerisms almost always invoke. There is little of the original Spooner's supposedly involuntary but harmless convolutions: "You have tasted a whole worm and will leave by the town drain" (Spooner was an Oxford don) and more of "L'evêque qui...." No, I had better refrain from French examples in this respectable publication.

Anyway, this café was only a hundred yards from *St Julien le Pauvre*, the earlier mentioned church and this was where Maurice's well attended funeral took place. We were several dozen mourners from all walks of life: his friends from the art world, colleagues from Rungis where he had a wholesale flower business, and even an author, for whom he had illustrated a book cover. The only person missing was Maurice. The trestles installed to support the coffin at

the front of the church were strangely empty. The crowd in the church leaked out into the street in search of an explanation. A roaring and shouting which had been barely perceptible in the church was revealed to be a massive students' demonstration marching slowly, oh how so slowly, down the *bd. St Michel*. Stuck in the middle of it was Maurice's hearse with the heads of the visibly uncomfortable undertaker and his staff bobbing occasionally above the crowd. Slowly the vehicle eased its way through the amassed students as they waved their arms and shouted their loudest. For a moment, the ridiculous idea passed through my mind that Maurice – an eternal student with, as you may have gathered, a slightly out of gear sense of humour, might somehow have orchestrated his arrival himself.

With Maurice finally installed on the trestles, the Melchite bishop (once again I must refer you to that previous article if you want an explanation) officiated at the service with the impressive ceremony of the orthodox rite. When we emerged from the church, the students' demonstration had disappeared and we were loaded into a series of black cars.



Iconostasis - St Julien le Pauvre

Everything progressed normally and the undertaker's team had regained their calm. The burial was to take place at a cemetery some 30k away at Soisy sur Seine. We drew to a halt in front of the gates and the undertaker went solemnly to open them. They were locked. There was no office or building nearby so, once more stricken with consternation, the black coated figures went off to make enquiries. A local chap passed by. The predicament explained, he scratched his head and said, "Maybe it's the old cemetery you want." He gave directions. We all piled back into the cars and went up to the top of a hill where, yes, there was an old cemetery of sorts but this too, if you will excuse the expression, held no sign of life. There was, however, a house nearby and the householder, appealed to, expressed the opinion that it couldn't possibly be at that cemetery – it hadn't been used in decades. In something of a quandary, the undertakers got us back in the cars and the cortege returned hesitantly to square one. More insistent interrogation of the natives finally revealed the holder of the key of the cemetery and he was begged to hurry and open it. With considerable sighs of relief on the part of the organizing team, and a little disappointment on the part of the mourners who were beginning to enjoy the unexpected surprises

which this expedition was successively unveiling, the grave was located. It was the same as that in which Maurice's wife had been interred some years before. The trials of our undertaker were not, however, terminated. The stone plaque covering the tomb had not been removed! The coffin was laid down and the holder of the key to the cemetery, appealed to, revealed the name and the address of the local artisan employed as gravedigger. One of the black cars driven by one of the once more unnerved attendants zoomed off at a turn of speed rarely observed at a funeral. Soon he was back, a somewhat puzzled but helpful workman in tow. "I thought it was tomorrow," he said. "I've chipped all the cement away and the slab just has to slide to the side. I didn't want to leave it open all night", he added.

A couple of the more able-bodied assistants were irritably nominated by the undertaker to help the gravedigger slide the slab away. This unexpectedly physical occupation was clearly not to the taste of the functionaries in question, their normal task at such events being limited to looking sad. Why, you might enquire, did not the guests themselves volunteer assistance. The



inadmissible truth was that by now everyone was enjoying the spectacle too much. However, at last Maurice's final resting place was revealed.

By now the sun was setting, gloriously, over the Seine gliding by at the bottom of the hill and the atmosphere amongst the mourners

had lightened, jokes were told and retold, I repeated a couple of Maurice's favourite spoonerisms, and everybody chatted lightheartedly as Maurice's coffin was finally laid to rest. All was as he would have wanted it.

It had been a long day, and I went to sleep in the undertaker's car as we drove back to Paris. I awoke as the driver shook my shoulder. "All right if I drop you here?" I looked out of the window. There we were, parked just in front of the café where, soon after I arrived in Paris, I had first met Maurice: "Le Petit Bar". "This'll do" I said.

Mark Yates

Photo of the Month –

Thanks to A.J. William Parr who sends this photo with the commentary below.



Here is Festung [Fortress] Königstein, which I photographed in 2018 from the railway line which links Dresden with Prague. There is a very beautiful journey alongside the river Elbe and both cities merit several days' visit.

An aerial photo of the fortress can be seen here (you can see the railway): [File:Aerial photo of Festung Königstein, October 2008.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

On 31 May 1940 the French General Jean-Baptiste Molinié and some 35 000 soldiers surrendered at Lille, on the sixth day of a siege. Said Sir Winston Churchill: *“These Frenchmen, under the gallant leadership of General Molinié, had for four critical days contained no less than seven German divisions which otherwise could have joined in the assaults on the Dunkirk perimeter. This was a splendid contribution to the escape of their more fortunate comrades of the British Expeditionary Force.”*

The German General Alfred Wäger likewise recognised the French achievement, according military honours to the surrendering defenders. Wikipedia says Hitler then dismissed him for this!

General Molinié became a prisoner-of-war in Festung Königstein. His name, and the men he commanded, should be remembered.

In 1945 Wäger was able to surrender Baden-Baden (the German Harrogate) to advancing French forces, sparing the town from destruction. A bridge was later named after him.

A.J.W. Parr



A Word in your Ear...

Valentine

Who was this mysterious saint? And why is the festival celebrated with such enthusiasm? Although the truth behind the festival is doubtful, there are a few stories of interest. It is said that Valentine was a priest who served during the 3rd century in Rome. Claudius II announced that single men made better soldiers than those with families and wives, he outlawed marriage for young soldiers.



Valentine went against this injustice being done to young men and started performing secret marriages for young lovers. When the emperor found out, he ordered that the saint be put to death. Another tale suggests that the saint may have been killed while helping the

Christians escape harsh Roman prisons, where they were tortured.

Gradually, Saint Valentine became so popular that couples all across the world started celebrating Valentine's Day as the day of love. During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in **France and England** that February 14th marked the beginning of birds' mating season. This association of love and romance

contributed to the holiday's significance. It is believed that the first-ever Valentine's Day card originated in France, when Charles, the Duke of Orleans, sent love letters to his wife from the prison in 1415.

One village in France has the name Saint Valentine, in the Berry region. It becomes the epicentre of romance between 12th and 14th February. Gardens, trees, and homes are decorated with cards, roses, and proposals for marriage. It must be one of the most charming Valentine's Day traditions.

In Romania the day is celebrated on 24th February. It is the day when young couples get engaged and is really a mix of Valentine's Day and the celebration of the spring season.

Young men and women pick colourful flowers: Hardier couples wash their faces with snow to bring good luck!

In Japan, on 14th February women buy gifts and chocolates for their male companions or lovers. Men can't offer gifts until March 14th, which is called the "White Day".

In Wales, Valentine's Day is celebrated but not on the 14th February !. The country celebrates its day of love on Jan 25th, St. Dwynwen's Day. Lovers exchange unique and beautifully handcrafted wooden spoons with each other. This tradition has existed since the 16th century.

On Valentine's day in England, women used to place five bay leaves on their pillows to make them dream of their future husbands.

It isn't all about Valentines, flowers and red hearts though, In Ghana, on February 14th one can attend performances, music events, and restaurants that have themed menus on the special day. It is a relatively recent phenomenon, introduced by the Ghana government in 2005 to increase tourism in the country. However, Ghana being among the largest cocoa-producing countries in the world, they decided to call it National Chocolate Day. Wikipedia informs us that one of the aims was to shift *"the attention of youth from engaging in sexual activities towards showcasing love through a gift of chocolate"*. It probably didn't work.



Postbox at St Valentin



Maxine Arnoult



**The Last Laugh:
But I'm not fishing!**

Game Warden - Ahoy there!

Lady in boat - Hi. Nice boat you've got there. What can I do for you?

GW - I'm the game warden madam. May I see your license?

Lady - My license? What kind of license?

GW - Your fishing license madam. It's a serious offence to fish from a boat in a natural park without one.

Lady - Well that lets me out. I don't need a license to sunbathe, do I? I'm just out here to lie in the sun and get a nice tan.

GW - So you say madam but isn't that a rod and a reel I see in the stern of your boat.

Lady - I guess so. My husband's crazy on fishing. I took his boat when he wasn't looking.

GW - But the fishing gear is in the boat.

Lady - Oh dear. He'll be mad when I get back!

GW - But you have the boat now, so you get a ticket for fishing without a license.

Lady - But you can see I'm not fishing, can't you? I don't even know how to fish.

GW - The evidence says otherwise madam. You have all the equipment with you in your boat.

Lady - That's ridiculous! If you dare to give me a ticket for that I'll take you to court and accuse you of indecent assault!

GW - What? You can't do that madam. I haven't even touched you!

Lady - Maybe, officer. But you have all the equipment with you.

Mark Yates

Janet's February Quiz: Answers :



1. 14th February
2. Aquarius
3. Violet
4. Amethyst
5. Latin
6. A cheque
7. Groundhog Day
8. Rain. Thaws the frozen lake again.
9. Every four years (*unless the year is divisible by 100 but not divisible by 400 - but we'll let you off that!*)
10. The Academy Awards (or the Oscars)
11. China.
12. 1917
13. Malcolm X
14. Superman's birthday is 29th February.
15. Lady Jane Grey
16. No (March 22 is the earliest Easter can fall on)

**Comments & contributions to mfyates@gmail.com
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