



Paris Branch

Newsletter

N° 31 - December 2024



CONTENTS

Page

- 2 Chairman's message**
- 3 December Quiz**
- 3 Events**
- 6 The Passing of Felix Faure**
- 9 A Word in Your Ear...**
- 10 The Last Laugh**
- 11 Quiz answers**



Chairman's introduction to the December 2024 RBL Paris Newsletter.

Welcome to this latest, year-end newsletter.

An interesting year which began with us receiving a very splendid portrait of his Majesty the King which now hangs on the wall at our clubhouse. There was a very good ceremony at Bennecourt. Olympic events inevitably dominated the summer – with some inevitable modifications to our own events in consequence. The 80th anniversary ceremonies in Normandy were impressive and witnessed by several of our members.

The Pedal to Paris event terminated at les Invalides instead of the Arc de Triomphe this year. Also at les Invalides, our final service of remembrance there proved to be the best since the fire at Notre Dame in 2019 rendered that time-honoured venue inaccessible. Next year you will be pleased to know that we shall be back at Notre Dame for our service of remembrance. It's re-opening a few days ago, with the attendance of America's president elect, our Prince William and so many other dignitaries from across Europe and the world, was another highlight of the year.

Instead of a Christmas dinner we held a Christmas party at the clubhouse which was very enjoyable. More on that below. We hope for an increasing attendance at such evening events planned for the coming year. We also intend to organise a selection of interesting visits. We welcome a number of new members who have joined us this year and hope to attract even more next year. On behalf of myself and our committee we wish you all a very Happy Christmas and look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Richard.

DECEMBER QUIZ

1. In the song *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, what gift is given on the fifth day?
2. Name one of Santa's reindeer whose name starts with "B."
3. What plant is commonly hung in doorways for kissing during Christmas?
4. In *A Christmas Carol*, what is the name of Scrooge's deceased business partner?
5. Who popularised the Christmas tree in the UK?
6. What is the name of the Grinch's dog?
7. In *Home Alone*, what city does the McCallister family travel to without Kevin?
8. What traditional holiday dessert is set on fire before serving?
9. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, what happens every time a bell rings?
10. What is often placed at the top of a Christmas tree?
11. Who wrote the classic Christmas song *White Christmas*?
12. What holiday drink is made from milk, sugar, cream, and eggs?



Answers on last page

EVENTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

On Monday 25th November the Annual General Meeting was held. The turnout was low with 18 apologies.

The Chairman opened the meeting with the Exhortation and Silent Tribute asking all present to remember members who had died during the last year. They were George Graham Scott,

and Michael Stam. Graham Scott, as he was known to us, was a former Committee Member of the Paris Branch and often helped out with the Standard at ceremonies. He was also a member of RAFA. Michael Stam was a keen member who would often attend events, he was a keen golfer and friend to many. Hailing from Liverpool, he had a wicked and dry sense of humour and loved Lonnie Donnegan. He and my husband, also a fan, would often recite parts of songs made popular by Donnegan. We send our deepest condolences to both families, they will be greatly missed.

The Chairman asked all present if the minutes of the last AGM could be signed as a true account. This was agreed and was proposed by Mr. M. Yates and seconded by Mr. T. Lorkin.

The Chairman reported that due to the Olympics in Paris many events were cancelled at the Arc de Triomphe. The Chairman was invited to the Ambassador's Residence on the occasion of the arrival of the British Olympic Team in the presence of H.R.H. The Princess Anne, Princess Royal. Our 4th August Ceremony was one of the events inevitably cancelled at the Arc de Triomphe. Another was the annual Pedal to Paris cycle ride which usually ends at the Arc but conflicted with the Paralympic Marathon. Pedal to Paris riders finished at Les Invalides instead. The Chairman attended to help hand out medals. The Battle of Britain Ceremony took place there with our Standard and Union Flag.

November this year was extremely busy, getting the Poppy boxes ready and sent out, we had a few new outlets which is always good. We do not have the final total for this year's Appeal but will give it as soon as we know. We welcomed the Chelsea Pensioners who came over for our ceremony at Cathedral St. Louis des Invalides. This will, in theory, be the last year we use St. Louis as we are hoping to return to Cathedral Notre Dame. The Invalides cost us €750 this year, in the past Notre Dame had not charged us so we are hoping this will be the case when we return.

For the New Year we hope to hold "Themed Evenings" at rue des Acacias which we hope you will come along to. The Chairman said he will be visiting schools to give talks about the Legion and its work and the Poppy Appeal. He also said he hoped to organise a trip the Normandy beaches most probably in late April early May when the figures that were placed on the beach leading to the British Normandy Memorial grounds would be returned. The Chairman reported that the Vice-Chairman had decided to stand down from this post and that of Parade Marshal. The Chairman thanked him for his time with us.

The Treasurer read out his report on the Annual Accounts, all the paperwork for the Treasurer's Report had been sent out to members. He explained that we do not send all the Poppy Appeal money we raise to London as we have been given permission to allot some money to the British Charitable Fund (BCF) who help look after the one remaining client of the RBL Paris Branch. Recipients have to be ex-Service or the spouse of the ex-Service man or woman. We apply each year for permission to continue donating money to the BCF. Our Treasurer, however, has for the last two years been waiting for confirmation of this. Our Independent Auditor had picked up on this, which is his job, and is not very happy about this lack of communication which reflects your committee's opinion. Many e-mails have been sent by the Treasurer with little response. The Treasurer said he would like to thank John Greenwood for his work on our behalf which is pro bono. The Treasurer's report was proposed by Mr. C. Cameron and seconded by Mr. M. Yates. The Treasurer's Report was carried.

Our website and Facebook sites are doing well and attract a lot of attention

The Officers and Committee for the next Legion year were elected as follows:
Chairman, Richard Neave, Hon Treasurer, Ian McDonald and Hon. Secretary, Janet Warby. All had agreed to their names being put forward. They were proposed by Mr. R. Warby and seconded by Mrs. F. Terris. The Committee for the year had all agreed to have their names put forward. They are : William Beauclerk, Caroline Clopet, Didier Dumont, Tim Lorkin, Julien Sabouret, Philippe Sechet, Elaine Taylor and Mark Yates. They were proposed by Mr. C. Cameron and seconded by Mrs. J. Warby. Col. S. Cunniff is our Hon. President. It was confirmed that, under RBL rules from the UK the position of Vice-Chairman was optional

A complete report will be sent out to members in time for the next AGM in November 2025. The next RBL Event discussed was the Christmas Cocktail Party which will have been held by the time you read this. It was decided to hold this instead of a Christmas lunch as the space for sitting down is limited and it is a lot of work for our cook whoever it may be on the day.

The meeting closed at 19h30.

Janet Warby
Hon. Secretary

RBL November Lunch

On Thursday 21st November 18 Members gathered at the Legion for a very convivial lunch prepared by Elaine Taylor. The bar was heavily assaulted, “aperos” flowed and much laughter was heard.



Elaine was aided by Catherine Germain and Carol Morris who helped to serve the delicious food. No one was in a hurry to leave the table after the dessert which is always a good sign that people enjoyed themselves. Many thanks to Catherine and Carol for assisting Elaine who always gives 110% when cooking for us. It is a lot of work and a lot of rushing around but somehow it gets done and everyone is happy. Thank you all, ladies, for giving up your time for the Legion membership.

To round off the lunch the Chairman proposed the Loyal Toast to His Majesty, The King. It was explained that there would be no formal lunch or dinner in December as this was too much work for Elaine or for anyone else to take on. Instead, it was decided to have a Christmas Cocktail Party on Thursday 12th December. More on that later.

Do join us for our next New Year's lunch which will be fun – and a bargain too!

J.W.

Christmas Cocktail

Given the circumstances, lousy weather and a strike in some areas of public transport, a good turnout was achieved, and it was a very pleasant evening – yet another occasion to exchange ideas and opinions with our members who, I found myself reflecting, are from such a wide variety of backgrounds, professions and interests. It all makes for engaging and stimulating conversation.



The Passing of Felix Faure

I think both Baudelaire and Hemingway remarked that it is always a pleasure to cross the bridges of Paris. Of the 37 edifices currently available to those wishing to verify his opinion, one of the most impressive is the Pont Alexandre III.

The bridge was a gift to Paris from Russia. Crossing it the other day I realised that I knew this from having read a scholarly account of the president Felix Faure written by one of our Paris Branch members, Francis Jolivet. Faure was one of the more interesting French presidents and this account is very much based on Francis' account (in French).

Faure took his role as representative of France very seriously. He it was who invited Tsar Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna to Paris in October 1896 to confirm the alliance initiated by Nicholas II's father, Alexander III, by laying the foundation stone of the of the bridge which carries his father's name. The following year, Faure himself travelled to Russia at the invitation of the imperial couple to open the Trinity Bridge, the third over the Neva at St

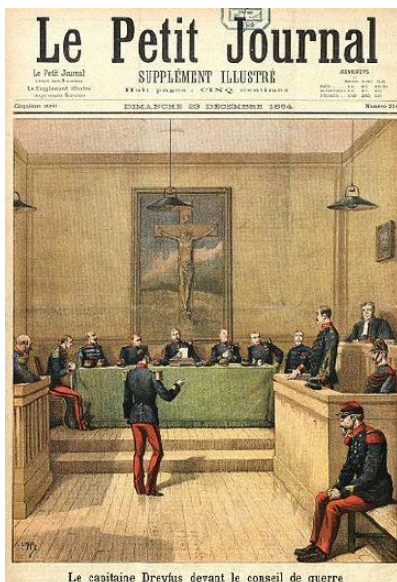


Petersburg, and to sign the Kronstadt agreement, sealing the Franco-Russian alliance, confirmed in 1904.

The Fachoda Affair was not a brilliant moment for France but credit must be granted to Faure for navigating a crisis which almost led to war between Britain and France. France, playing its part in the Scramble for Africa by basically trying to join up its part of the West coast with its part of the East coast ran into the British/Egyptian army, busily trying to connect its Egyptian possessions in the North with its possessions in the South of Africa. When the two armies crossed in the middle of the continent at Fachoda, it caused a most stressful situation back in Europe. The French eventually backed off, notably because they were faced with an army ten times bigger than theirs. To counterbalance this, Faure did, however, manage to bag Madagascar for the French.

In France, the Dreyfus affair was in full swing. The Jewish officer had been convicted and France was torn apart, between his supporters and those of the anti-Dreyfus camp, who were mainly anti-Semitic and supported by the extreme right. The trial, which began on 19 December 1894, ended three days later with Dreyfus found guilty of providing intelligence to a foreign power. He was sentenced to the maximum penalty: lifetime imprisonment in a penal colony. After being degraded on 5 January 1895 in the main courtyard of the École Militaire, he was held at the Ile d'Yeu penal colony (this current tourist attraction being perhaps even better known as the prison in which Petain finished his days), and then sent to French Guiana. The anti-Dreyfusards were jubilant.

An excellent detailed account of the “Dreyfus Affair” can, by the way, be seen in



the Jewish Museum in the Marais in Paris. If you visit it, keep your eyes open for the building. It is discreet for a museum and I walked past it many times wondering what the enigmatic “mahJ” could be (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme). Subsequently, Félix Faure supported the opponents of the retrial, rather blotting his copybook in the light of Dreyfus’ eventual 1906 retrial, pardon, release and reinstatement as a major in the French Army. However, he was not to know this as events overtook him: It was in 1899 on 16 February. The President was not on the best of his form. He is reported to have been tired, nervous and confused. He had two important meetings

with the Archbishop of Paris, François-Marie-Benjamin Benjamin Richard, and Albert I of Monaco, both of whom had come to ask him to order a review of the interminable Dreyfus affair. The newspapers, the politicians, the journalists and the whole country were arguing: Félix Faure equivocated, prevaricated and tried to gain time by any means. His silence on the subject however, did nothing to protect him. On the contrary, it provoked the press and politicians of all colours.

The Élysée Palace was relentlessly assaulted from all sides. Still Faure refused to support a new trial.

Another aspect to Faure's history in a more personal vein is his penchant for sumptuous parties which he gave at the Elysée Palace. A handsome man, in what some might consider the best traditions of the French presidency, his reputation as a ladies' man was a matter of public knowledge.

On that 16 February 1899, the President was waiting for 'his friend' Marguerite "Meg" Steinheil, wife of a fashionable painter, Adolphe Steinheil and a 'cocotte' whose qualities you might appreciate in this sculpture of her currently exhibited in the Musée d'Orsay.

The president had asked the usher to ring two bells on her arrival. The two bells rang, and he hastily swallowed a tablet of Yse, the Viagra of the time. But the usher had made a mistake. It was the Cardinal, Archbishop of Paris, who entered the Elysée Palace with the Prince of Monaco. They had come to plead Captain Dreyfus's case but unsurprisingly, in the circumstances, found the President in a bad mood and unreceptive. When the usher rang again, they were given short shrift and sent on their way. In an adjoining chamber Faure found time to swallow a



second dose of Yse in anticipation of the arrival of Meg who duly appeared. It was shortly afterwards that, upset, excited and impatient, Félix Faure suddenly succumbed to a fatal attack of apoplexy in the arms of Meg.

A doctor was called but could do nothing. The President was now more in need of a priest. The Abbé Renault, who miraculously happened to be passing by on his bicycle, was intercepted. Without knowing how serious the situation was, he was sent to give extreme unction to Félix Faure. Addressing one of the guards he enquired "est-ce que le President a toujours sa connaissance?" To which the reply came "Non, elle est partie par la porte arrière". The ambiguity of the word "connaissance" in French explains his misapprehension, giving rise to the legendary anecdote recounted regularly before this rather picturesque president's tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery.

The situation further allowed Georges Clémenceau to make this remark: 'He wanted to be a Caesar, and he died a Pompey'. ("Pompée" being "Pompey" the assassinated Roman general, as well as a participle of the verb "to pump" in French) « *Il voulut être César, et il mourut Pompée* » The modesty surrounding the reputation of this publication prevents me from a more detailed explanation of this play on words. I can but refer you to a dictionary.

Whatever his shortcomings, Félix Faure illustrates some of the most notable characteristics of France in the last decades of the 19th century, not only for his role in international affairs, but also for the picturesque aspects of his presidency and personality.

Should you be tempted to refer to Francis' original article (in French) he will be glad to email you a copy. His publication appears regularly, and I am sure he will also add anyone who wishes to his distribution list. francis-jolivet@orange.fr

F. Jolivet & M.Y.



A Word in your Ear....

The word "**plonk**" leaps readily to mind at this time of the year. Certainly, when I was a student, if you were invited anywhere, it was more or less obligatory to bring a "bottle of plonk". The term is probably on the way out amongst today's youngsters in favour of the incredible variety of intoxicants now available instead. I should be sorry to see it go completely though, as the word is a survivor from the military slang of the 14/18 war.

The most basic knowledge of French was beyond most of the recruits who was picked up and dumped into the chaos of Northern France. With little pay and an understandable need for distraction, white wine was quickly elected as the replacement of the native pint of beer.

The transition from "un verre de blanc" to a simplified version « plonk » is obvious. For me the image brought to mind of a furiously needful soldier bellowing "plonk" across the bar in the remains of the local bistro is irresistible.

M.Y.

The Last Laugh:



Newlyweds

Mary - What are you doing darling?

John - Oh just changing the plugs and checking the timing.

Mary - Oh. Still working on your motor bike, huh?

John - It's not just a motor bike, love. It's a Harley. My Harley.

Mary - Yes. Well I've been thinking..

John - Oh. Thinking eh?

Mary - Yes. Well, now that we're married maybe it's time to quit spending all your spare time out here in the garage.

John - I don't think I spend all that much time...

Mary - You know, if you sold the bike and that welding equipment we could decorate the spare room with teddy bear wallpaper.

John - Teddy bear wallpaper?! Surely you're not...

Mary - No darling. But one of these days... Who knows. And what about that boat? It's a lot of ongoing expense you know.

John - But if I didn't have the boat I wouldn't be able to go deep sea fishing!

Mary - And your gun collection! It's dangerous. And you spend entire days in the woods in the fall.

John - Yes but not in the close season.

Mary - And really you should get rid of all those stupid model airplanes and your home brewing equipment. Come on - What do you think?

John - I think you're beginning to sound like my ex-wife.

Mary - Ex-wife?! You never told me you were married before!

John - I wasn't.

December Quiz: Answers:



1. Five gold rings	7. Paris
2. Blitzen	8. Christmas pudding
3. Mistletoe	9. An angel gets its wings
4. Jacob Marley	10. Star (or angel)
5. Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's consort)	11. Irving Berlin
6. Max	12. Eggnog

**Comments & contributions to mfyates@gmail.com
Back numbers: rblfrance.org/ then "Paris Branch Newsletters"**

