



Paris Branch

Newsletter

N° 35 – April 2025



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Secretary's introduction, April 2025.

Hello everyone,

Our chairman's Internet connection has been down over the last few days. It should be back in operation by now, God and his agents at Orange willing, but, for the moment, favour the phone if you need to contact him. Consequently, as secretary, I have been approached to write this month's introduction to the newsletter.

We used to say our Ceremonial season did not start until the end of April. However, this is no longer the case. This year is clearly going to be a very busy one.

Notably there has been the recent Admiral Ramsey Commemoration at the New Cemetery, St. Germain-en-Laye, more of which below, under "Events". I am happy to report that my brother and his son were able to attend. My brother served on HMS Hermes, to mention but one of the many ships he served on whilst in the Royal Navy. It was thus appropriate that they came over from the UK representing The HMS Hermes Association and laid a wreath on the graves of the Admiral and the others who died in the air crash that killed all aboard.

We have other Ceremonies coming up which we will report on next month.

You will see in this issue my article recounting our family search for information about our great great uncle who was with Canadian troops and killed in 1917 near Vimy Ridge. He had emigrated to Canada before the war and was naturalised Canadian as was his family. We experienced a very emotional visit to the Pas de Calais and made some progress in our search for his remains.

At the end of March, the Paris Branch held a very successful 'Thank You Cocktail' for our Poppy Collectors, our Standard Bearers, other Standard Bearers from British and French Associations and for our new members, providing an occasion for the latter to meet us and other members of our branch. We have had many complimentary mails and comments from attendees who appreciated the event. Thank you to all those who attended.

Due to lack of interest and we suspect Easter, we have cancelled the April lunch. Our next lunch will be in May.

All that remains for me is to wish you all a Very Happy Easter.

Janet Warby
Hon. Secretary

APRIL QUIZ



1. The first British built Concorde made its maiden flight from Filton in April of which year?
2. Former dictator Manuel Noriega was sentenced to 30 years in prison for drugs and Racketeering. Which country had he been the Dictator of?
3. Who was the designer of the Clifton Suspension Bridge. He was born in April 1806?
4. The world's first multi-purposed domed sports arena, the Astrodome, opened in 1965 in which city?
5. In April 1991, Georgia declared its independence from which union?
6. Which filmmaker, who directed classics such as 'Twelve Angry Men', 'Dog Day Afternoon,' and 'Network' died in April 2011?
7. What did the Whitechapel Bell Foundry create in April 1858?
8. RMS Titanic set sail on its ill-fated maiden voyage in April of which year?
9. What is the name of the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel first published in 1925?
10. In 1971 a week-long visit that became known as 'Ping-pong Diplomacy' took place between which two nations?

Answers on last page

Janet Warby

EVENTS

Thursday 20 Lunch

A most successful event with an excellent sauerkraut for which we thank Christiane Benet.

Unfortunately there have been insufficient reservations for this month's lunch – probably due to the Easter break. It was to take place on 17 April. The next lunch will be in May, date to be announced.

Sunday 16 March

Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay RN

On the 16th March the RBL participated in an impressive commemoration of the life of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay RN, the Allied Naval Commander in Chief for the D-Day landings of June 1944. He was headquartered in the Chateau d’Hennemont at Saint Germain-en-Laye (Lycée Internationale) from September 1944 until his accidental death at Toussus-le-Noble airfield on January 2nd 1945 when en-route in his Hudson transport plane for a meeting in Brussels with General Montgomery.



Over 150 people were present in glorious winter sunshine for the ceremony, including the Admiral’s three grandsons. The commemoration was organised by the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserves Paris Branch, assisted by the Ville de Saint Germain-en-Laye and the Société des Membres de la Légion d’Honneur. After speeches, a dedication and a march past the graves of British and French victims of the second world war, an excellent curry lunch was served in the adjacent Salle des Colombes. A reduced party continued afterwards for a smaller ceremony at the Toussus-le-Noble air station where the accident occurred.

Bill Beauclerc

Foraging

It was in the ‘80s that the term foraging – until then used to describe reindeers scraping up the snow for moss or squirrels looking for nuts – suddenly appeared as part of the “back to nature” movement which eventually became the ecological industry of today. Ever since I ate my first trout (undersize and out of season) I had already been intrigued by the fact that food doesn’t necessarily come out of a shop but could be killed captured or collected free of charge. My tendency in this direction is less bloodstained these days but the latest manifestation of this curiosity occurred a couple of weeks ago. I noticed that the state of the gravel in the garden was becoming deplorable, with grass and odd plants of all sorts growing through. I had a closer look at it and spotted an anonymous looking leafy affair which I thought looked vaguely familiar. Among the 101 largely superfluous apps which clog up my telephone is one called PlantNet and that



one, if you have the slightest interest in botany, I recommend to your attention. It was the work of a moment to take a photo, and ask PlantNet what it was. It was *Mâche* in French, cornsalad or lamb's lettuce in English. I had just bought some in the supermarket that morning and felt somewhat cheated as the same stuff was lying about all over the ground chez moi. So, I picked a few plants and ate some in a salad... Hmmm – tastes just like the supermarket stuff...

Before I came to France in 1968 I spent most of my spare time fishing and



sometimes shooting but Paris life is not really adapted to those occupations. I needed something to encourage me to get out of the city and into the woods. Just “going for a nice walk” is a concept which makes me yawn. The answer seemed to be mushrooms. In the UK (at the time – it’s a bit different now) the only mushroom ever picked for food was the field mushroom. All others were held to be dangerous and potentially poisonous. In Paris, a glance at the market stalls was enough to suggest

that there were other possibilities – not only cèpes and chanterelles but unexpected surprises like the hedgehog mushroom. I realised that mycology was something of a folk study here and started to look into it in more depth. In a couple of years, I was experimenting with all sorts of mushrooms – I would try them out myself, just to be sure, before allowing wife and family to have a go, with many a suspicious look. I now had a good reason to get out into the wild (such as it is in the environs of the capital.) and actually do something. The only problem was that mushrooms tend to appear in their greatest concentration in the autumn months. Certainly, there are some others -the fairy ring mushroom most of the summer, St. George’s mushroom as early as April. (I used to have a few of the latter which appeared in the garden with remarkable regularity around the 23 of April – St George’s day) but mycology was pretty much a seasonal occupation.

What, I thought, about all the other stuff growing out there? Was any of it collectable? In Britain we had always gathered blackberries and, on the Yorkshire moors, bilberries but that was about as far as it went. Information about all the other stuff which was eatable out there in the fields and hedgebacks was, to say the least, thin on the ground. French neighbours quickly taught me that – of all things – dandelions were eatable especially in salads with fried bacon pieces. And then Richard Mabey’s book “Food for Free” came out. This was inspirational and it wasn’t long before we had tried comfrey as a sort of spinach and an interesting salad, purslane (in spite of William Cobbett’s intriguing comment that it was “eaten by Frenchmen and pigs when they can get nothing else.”) which is quite nice I have noticed that purslane even grows in cracks between pavement and wall in Paris streets although I don’t recommend these particular specimens for culinary use. One I would recommend though is elderflower, the flat heads of which can be dipped in batter and deep fried to give a very nice, crunchy result.

Although Food for Free also covers seafood of different kinds (at least in its most recent pocket edition) it doesn't mention razorfish. This is a pity because, although not the tastiest of molluscs, it is the most fun to "fish" for. The razorfish lies deep in the sand in a U tube shaped burrow with a little dent in the sand at each end. Having



located a promising pair of dents all you have to do is pour a little salt into one of the holes. The creature leaps to the surface and is easily grabbed when the shell sticks handily into the air.

It seems strange that it is in France that all these alternative foods are appreciated. During the war and even in the post war years which I recall, the variety of food available in the UK was strangely limited. Why was the topinambour (Jerusalem artichoke) not adopted? It is the only root vegetable, I have read, to produce more food per acre than the potato. The French grew so much of it that it was abandoned in post war years – everyone, I have been told, was sick of them. It is only now coming back here as a "traditional" veg along with the swede and the parsnip.

Of course, there are disappointments – mushrooms which dissolve into a glutinous mess which, though technically eatable is aesthetically off putting. And then there was the experience in Spain, on the Atlantic side at the top. We were camping and, to our surprise, the price of fish locally was quite high – in spite of the entire Atlantic being spread out before us. I had, however, packed a spear gun into the car and announced my intention to investigate the local sub-aqua fauna with murderous intent. There weren't many fish in the midwater layers but there were some smallish flounders, flatfish of edible size hiding in the sand.

The difficult bit wasn't so much to harpoon them, it was locating them before they shot off into the distance. With practice I became competent in spotting the only bit of the creatures visibly protruding from the sand – two little eyes – a bit wonky as is their wont, since they wear both their eyes on the same side of their head. I became adept



at locating these and, figuring out which way they were lying and it was relatively easy to get enough for the pot. Then, one day, I noticed what seemed to be a pair of eyes of a somewhat different aspect. They weren't cross-eyed for a start. Curious, I decided to have a go at it and fired an arrow into the sand where I reckoned the body to be. There was a strangely slow flopping about and a ray appeared rapidly moving away, already the entire length of line between the gun and the animal had run out when I grabbed for the end and started to pull the creature in cautiously, in case it was a stingray (these have a very nasty poisonous spike at the base of the tail). It wasn't. It was an electric ray and I felt a violent electric shock. I quickly let go of the line but retained hold of the gun which seemed to be insulated and slowly, with the fish at maximum distance hauled it, first towards the surface and then to the shore. Finally, it lay there flopping a bit. I tentatively touched it again and, yes, got quite a shock for my pains. "What are you going to do with that?" Isabelle sniffed, "It looks

awful and isn't it dangerous?" "No, it'll be ok when it's been dead for a bit and it should be something like ray. We can try "*raie au beurre noire.*" It was a bit tricky cleaning the creature as its jelly-like body continued to give off decreasing jolts of electricity even as I worked on it but eventually, I judged, it was ready for the pot. Into the pan it went. However, instead of cooking like a ray would have done, this creature just went into total meltdown turning into a glutinous mess which even I could not bring myself to taste. Thus ended a particularly unsuccessful experiment. However, I wouldn't like to put you off the gentle art of foraging so don't let it discourage you from having a go. There's a pocket edition of Mabey's "Food for Free" out now. You could always start there.

Mark Yates

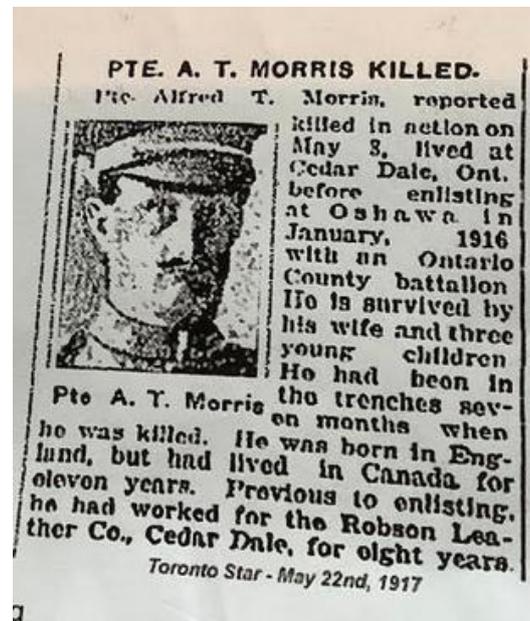
Looking for Alfred

My brother and I have been trying to find the exact spot in the Pas de Calais area where our Great Great Uncle, Alfred Thomas Morris, was killed in World War One. The occasion for some on-the-spot research occurred when my brother Stephen and his son Gareth came from the UK for the recent ceremony for Admiral Ramsey. We met at Vimy Ridge and started our search on 13th March.

Great Great Grandfather Alfred was the youngest of about 11 children, we do not know the exact number as we think there were certain childhood deaths. He was born in Cardiff. His mother was from Bristol and his father from London. He worked on the Cardiff Docks.

Before WW1 was declared, Alfred took his wife and three children to live in Canada to join his eldest brother Arthur. At the outbreak of war both Arthur and Alfred joined up. Both were first put into what was called 'holding' groups or regiments. Then Alfred was sent to the 2nd Battalion which was instrumental with other Battalions in taking Vimy Ridge on 9th April 1916. After Vimy, the Battalion was sent to take the villages of Arleux-en-Gohelle and Fresnoy-en-Gohelle from the Germans. This they did but at a substantial cost to both sides.

Alfred, we think, was a 'runner' taking messages back and forth to camps along the route to the villages. During one of these he was shot in the stomach. This happened between the two villages of Arleux and Fresnoy. It would appear that stretcher bearers were sent to pick him up and that, on their way back to the First Aid Centre a mortar shell exploded killing all three. Eight days after the Canadian forces took the area, the British relieved them and promptly lost it back to the Germans!



Alfred has no known grave but we discovered his name is on the wonderful memorial at Vimy Ridge.

I had contacted the Mayor of Fresnoy to see if the village had any graves of Unknown Canadian Soldiers from the First World War. M. le Maire who, I can't help mentioning in passing, bore more than a passing resemblance to Asterix le Gaulois, kindly received us and gave us access to the archives but told us there were no graves of unknown soldiers in the village. All bodies found were buried in one spot and then transferred to one of the many Commonwealth Cemeteries in the area. Just outside Fresnoy and Arleux is Orchard Dump Cemetery which we next visited on our way home. Here we found Portland headstones with



inscriptions saying 'It is possible that so and so, soldier of the Canadian Army, is buried in this Cemetery. Known Unto God'. We were unable to confirm that Alfred and the Stretcher Bearers are in Orchard Dump, but it is highly likely. We will be looking into getting a stone or a plaque there commemorate him. We also hope to contact relatives of Alfred's children in Canada and let them know what we have done.

Alfred left behind a wife, one son called Arthur and two daughters, Gwendolene and Beatrice. All these names have continued in our family. Our search continues.

Janet Warby



A Word in your Ear....

It was whilst eating a Pavlova desert last week that it occurred to me that there must be more recipes named after women. Here are a few of them:

Queen Victoria Sponge Cake

The queen was a big fan of afternoon tea and a sponge cake with a jam filling was one of her favourites.

Pavlova

This meringue and whipped cream desert was named after Anna Pavlova in the 1920s. It was while she was doing a tour of Australasia. It is unclear whether it was invented in Australia or New Zealand.

Peach Melba

French chef Auguste Escoffier named this confection after **Nellie Melba**, a famous Australian opera singer.

On a less sophisticated plane I feel I should include that French desert (the only one which I would qualify for the honourable term “pudding”):

Tarte Tatin

This upside-down apple tart is named after the *Tatin sisters*, who ran a hotel in **Lamotte-Beuvron** in Sologne. Stéphanie, one of the sisters, invented it quite by accident.

Personally given the choice I’d give the last, the accidental one, the prize.

M.Y.



The Last Laugh

The Surgeon and the Garage Mechanic.

Surgeon: Is my car ready?

Mechanic: Yes doctor. All done. It was an injector.

S: Oh. So it was quite simple?

M: You're joking! I had to take all six of them out. Of course it was the last one which turned out to be faulty! It's always the last one.

S: So what's the damage?

M: You're speaking metaphorically I hope! All the real damage is repaired. If you mean your bill, here it is.

S: Wow. That's a bit steep isn't it?

M: A bit less than any other garage round here might charge. Tell me, do your patients often say that to you? I know you're a heart surgeon and I bet your bills are a lot bigger than mine!

S: That's a bit different! A car and a human body are hardly the same thing!

M: It depends how you look at it. A car engine consists of electrical circuits, liquid circuits for fuel, lubrication and cooling, and some moving parts - and any of them can have to be repaired or replaced.

S: Hmm. I see what you're getting at. You can look at the human body as a machine with electrical circuits, the nerves, and liquid circuits - blood, lymph and the heart, my specialty, is certainly one of the moving parts.

M: Exactly. So on a working day you go into somebody's heart and replace a leaking valve with one taken out of a pig and I go into a cylinder and change a leaking valve too - much the same thing as you do, really.

S: That's an interesting point of view. I've never heard anyone put it that way before.

M: So how come that my bills are only in the hundreds of Euros - at best - whereas yours are certainly in the thousands when we're basically doing the same job?

S: Hmmm. Tell me: Have you ever tried mending a car without stopping the engine?

M.Y. (25)

April Quiz: Answers:

1. 1969	7. Big Ben (or more correctly; the Great Bell.
2. Panama	8. 1912
3. Isambard Kingdom Brunel	9. The Great Gatsby
4. Houston, Texas	10. USA and China
5. Soviet Union	
6. Sidney Lumet	



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