

## Bulletin !

An informal look at life in this part of France, with some snippets of local info and advice.

### Thought for the month:

A birthday is just the first day of another 365-day journey around the sun. Enjoy the trip!

Special dates (although they may not be celebrated in the usual way).

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> *Fête du Muguet* (see below), also *Fête du Travail*

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> *Victoire 1945* (Armistice Day)

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> *Ascension*

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> *Pentecôte* (Pentecost)

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> *Lundi de Pentecôte* (Pentecostal Monday)

### *Fête du Muguet* (Lily of the Valley)

On 1<sup>st</sup> May it is traditional to offer friends and family *le muguet* to bring luck and joy. This tradition was started in 1561 by King Charles IX - but some say only the sprigs which have 13 flowers bring luck! *Le muguet* came to France from Japan in the Middle Ages.

May 1<sup>st</sup> is the only day when people are allowed to sell *le muguet* in the streets without having the authority to operate as a business. This year again, of course, for many of us it may have to be a 'virtual' gift!

### *Les Jardins du Ridrel* in La Ferté-Macé (61)

Installed 40 years ago on rue des Ridrels in La Ferté-Macé, these 1,500m<sup>2</sup> delightful gardens have been open to the public for the past 15 years. They were closed in 2020 due to the pandemic, but the owners are hoping to be able to open all Sundays in May, and on fête days, with visits in the rest of the year by reservation (02 33 37 15 73). On the weekend of 8th/9th May all proceeds from the entry price (3€) will go towards Neurodon. [Neurodon's ground-breaking technology has enabled the development of therapeutics for major diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's, diabetes, and more]. Open: Sat. 8<sup>th</sup> May: 14h to 18h30; Sun. 9<sup>th</sup>: 10h-12h & 14h-18h30.

## Town of the month : Villedieu-les-Poëles (50)

In this town, translating literally as “God’s Town of the Frying-Pans”, located in the Cotentin peninsular, the making of pots and pans was a local activity as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. For a long time the great round-bellied copper milk flagons (*cannes*) found on every Norman farm came from Villedieu; today the craftsmen make copper or aluminium boilers for household and industrial use, as well as souvenirs. Other local industries include a bell foundry (well worth a visit, when allowed to) and leather tawing. The town has retained many medieval aspects with attractive inner courtyards, stepped streets, abbeys and old houses. Since 1655, every 4 years in June a possession known as the *Grand Sacre*, with members of the Order of Malta, recalls the town’s history.

It was in Siennêtre, as the town was then known, that the first Commandery of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem was established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Henri Beauclerc (Henry I of England, the younger son and successor to William the Conqueror). In 1530 the Knights changed their name to Knights of Malta and they renamed the town Villa Dei (or Villedieu in French). For more info go to [www.ot-villedieu.fr](http://www.ot-villedieu.fr)

### *La Vélo Francette* cycling itinerary

*La Vélo Francette* is a 630km signposted route that provides cyclists from the north of France with easy access to the Loire and beyond, passing through 7 *départements*, including 3 national parks. With your bike you can discover many of France’s charming villages and proud ancient towns. It also provides addresses for overnight stops, picnic areas, restaurants and information bureaux. For more info google ‘*La Vélo Francette*’.

### Snakes in France are now protected

It is now illegal to kill any snake in France, including poisonous vipers, and anyone who does so risks a fine of €150,000 or 2 years in prison. The new law follows a change in awareness of how important snakes are to the eco-system, said a snake expert with the organisation *Cistude Nature*. There are 4 types of viper in France, the most common being the *viper aspis*, which is usually between 70 and 90cm in length and is mainly found in the south of France. The most common snakes in France are *couleuvres à colliers* (grass snakes) which are not poisonous to humans, although they do have a venom which kills mice and other small creatures. If you get close enough to see their eyes, the pupil of a *couleuvre verte et jaune* is round, as opposed to the slit of the viper’s.

### A Burger King is opening in Mayenne (53)

The building of the new Burger King in Mayenne started at the beginning of February 2021, with a possible opening date of mid-August (current restrictions depending). Employment for 50 staff is being offered. It will be sited at the side of Hyper U, where the Hyper U ‘Drive’ car park was located (now moved) between Hyper U and ‘*Intersport*’.

## Lest We Forget : Domfront under attack

As the first bombs fell on Domfront (61) railway station in 1944, Vital Desnos became one of the first victims when his house was destroyed by the flames. Vital was working for the electrical company Sodex when the Domfront *gare* (railway station) was targeted one Sunday at the end of May 1944. He remembered: “The Allies were trying to destroy the Caen to Laval railway line, also the Domfront to Alençon & Domfront to Avranches lines which were used by the German military. We heard the planes, then the bombs - mainly incendiaries - and the sky was black with smoke. I ran into the ditch of a nearby field when my house and the next farm were hit by the bombs and completely destroyed”. This strategic area was bombed every 2 or 3 days and the fatalities mounted; his wife, Suzanne, helped at the hospital which had been temporarily moved to the *Château de la Guyardière* at La Haute Chapelle (61). Although Vital remembered the curfews, the rationing and blackouts, he preferred to remember the support of his neighbours who gave them food and clothing as they had lost everything they owned, but luckily not their lives.

## Booking the tennis court in Gorrion (53)

To book the outside tennis court (near the hard sports pitches, behind the *pompiers* station) you can call (02 43 08 52 93) or visit the *Accueil* (Reception) of the *Parc de Loisirs de la Colmont* (off the Gorrion by-pass). 10€ per hour, rackets and balls not provided. ID cards/passport taken in exchange for the access card.

## Improvements to Lidl in Mayenne (53)

After 11 days of works, Lidl, on rue Louis-Blériot, now offers a 30-space covered parking area, mounted with 530 m<sup>2</sup> of solar panels (which supplies 15% of the electricity for the supermarket). There are also 60 parking spaces created with drainage for rainy days, and 40 trees have been planted. Inside, the area has increased from 990 m<sup>2</sup> to 1,400 m<sup>2</sup>, and the 17 members of staff are increased by 5.

## Something you didn't know you didn't know . . .

Ladybirds (*coccinelles*) are said to be lucky in France. A 10<sup>th</sup> century legend has it that a man who was accused of murder was saved from a beheading by one – either because it kept sitting on his neck or because on seeing him move one gently off the chopping block so it was not harmed, the judges decided he could not be guilty. Thinking that God sent the insect, the crowd nicknamed it '*la bête à Bon Dieu*' (the Good Lord's creature) which it is still known as today.

## Darling buds of May

There is much to do in the garden in May, such as airing your greenhouse on warmer days, protecting tender plants in case of late frosts and then, later in the month, planting out summer bedding (unless you live in a colder corner of France). If your daffodils, or other spring bulbs, are clumped together too much you can simply lift and divide them. And then, of course, the lawn needs mowing . . .

### *La Roseraie* (rose garden) in Lassay-les-Châteaux (53)

Lassay-les-Châteaux doesn't just have three châteaux, a medieval garden and pretty streets! In this *petite cité de caractère* you will find an area of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> with 350 varieties of ancient & modern roses, both bushes and trees. Open all year and free entry, the roses are very pretty from May onwards, with June being the best month. There are plenty of parking spaces nearby.

### Security and accessibility works near Gorrion (53) church

There are major works in progress in the area around the Gorrion church, place de l'Eglise. The trees in the church car park and outside the school have been removed as the roots had lifted the bitumen, making parking and accessibility difficult, especially for people with reduced mobility. However, 38 younger trees will replace those cut down. The small stone building behind the church (used for garaging the hearse) will be demolished, as will the white house nearby, providing more parking spaces and clearer views of the access to the Salle Jeanne d'Arc. These works will cost 32,180€ (50% of which will be covered by the State).

### Trial for trains to run on colza (rapeseed oil)

For a trial period of 3 months, SNCF has replaced diesel with colza oil on the Paris to Granville line – the first in France. The drivers have not noticed any difference in performance. The 15 trains of the Paris-Granville line will be running on this 'experimental' carburant and this biofuel required no modification of the trains. Colza is a 'clean energy' fuel and can help to reduce greenhouse gases by 60%.

### A reminder to carry ID on you at all times

It is the law in France that you must be able to prove your identity at all times – for example, if asked to do so by a *gendarme*. Valid documents include a driving licence or passport, *carte vitale* (showing your photo) or elector's card. A spokesman for the *Préfecture de Police de Paris* said they recommend if you are not French that you carry a photocopy of your passport and leave your passport in a secure place at home.

### The Ice Saints

A cold snap in May - are the saints to blame? St Pancras, perhaps best known in Britain as a railway terminus, is a member of a trio known as the Ice Saints. The others are St Servatius and St Mamertus. Their chilly collective name comes from the traditional belief that their days – 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> May – bring cold weather and the last frost of the year. Some gardeners in France will not plant until the Ice Saints have gone. They are also well known in Germany, Poland, Austria & Switzerland.

The alleged mid-May cold spell was investigated by some pupils of Galileo, who diligently recorded the weather from 1655 to 1670. They reported a marked cold snap over the days of the Ice Saints, and later studies seemed to confirm their finding. In meteorological terms, the last winter cold fronts do tend to pass by around this period. A review of Kew Gardens data from 1941-69 showed that 13<sup>th</sup> May was usually the warmest day of the month, but was followed by a sharp drop in temperature. Whether unreliability and lack of punctuality are enough to dispel all confidence in the Ice Saints is left to personal judgement.

## Domfront Tourist Office offers their latest guide.

This latest tourist guide, with details of more than 100 great circuits in France, is available at the Tourist Office in Domfront (61). The guide features 185,000 examples of '*les plus beaux détours en France*' (the most beautiful circuits in France) and is available from the Tourist Office and also in some restaurants in the town, when they are open again. Featuring a practical guide with many illustrations, it offers a chance to discover - or re-discover - France's beautiful towns of 2,000 to 20,000 inhabitants, amongst which is Domfront-en-Poiraie.

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Advance Notice: - for August 2021 (hopefully)

To commemorate *la Liberation de la Mayenne* (the Liberation of Mayenne), a reconstruction will take place in August 2021, organised by *l'Association Mayenne-WW2*. As in summer 1944, a column representing the 90<sup>th</sup> American Division will travel along the roads of the department to celebrate the end of the German occupation. More than 30 communes can watch the passage of more than 130 members (in the uniform and equipment of the time) and around 30 US vehicles from the WW2, from Jeeps to a Sherman tank. The convoy will spend the nights in the 5 communes travelled by the 90<sup>th</sup> Division, leaving Fougerolles-du-Plessis, through St Denis-de-Gastines, ending at St Jean-sur-Erve and Chammes, a total of about 100km, with several memorial ceremonies along the way. Depending on the Covid situation at the time, the public may be able to visit the overnight camps and share several moments together.

And finally,

Q: How much should you spend on a bottle of wine?

A: I don't know . . . half an hour?

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Although we are still not completely free to move around yet, here you will find some things that can be done and seen outside, as well as other items of interest. Enjoy!

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