

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO FRENCH TRAVEL AND CULTURE

WIN!
Your own row of
vines in France

FRANCE

Britain's best-selling magazine about France December 2011 Issue 159

31

pages of food,
wine and gourmet
holiday ideas

INTERVIEW

Gyles Brandreth
talks Charles de Gaulle,
Countdown and Tintin

**Plan your
own French
Christmas**

Trish Deseine's
quick and easy
festive feast

Winter in Paris

Discover the French capital as it
lights up for the Christmas season

LYON

Explore our
favourite
foodie city

PLUS

France's best chef Joël Robuchon, water-tasting in the Alps, wine,
Stephen Clarke, Champagne driving tour, improve your language



Tale of two towns



Robespierre (pictured above) and the French Revolution. Robespierre was born in Arras and the house he lived in is now owned by the city council, which intended to convert it into a museum but later changed its mind. Ordinary peoples' views on Robespierre vary enormously, but they are often expressed as indisputable facts with no background knowledge to support them. Les Amis de Robespierre would like to redress this situation. Whether we see him in a positive, neutral or negative light, no one can deny that Robespierre was a key figure of the Revolution and as such, he should be better known to the world at large. The museum at Arras can only be a modest beginning to achieve this end. There is a petition online that has already been signed by several eminent writers and historians as well as members of the general public from 26 countries around the world. The link to the petition is www.opc-moe.com/robespierre

Maria-Elena Pickett
Sevenoaks, Kent

Wheel of fortune

While on holiday in Haute-Normandie we had a wonderful experience of French kindness. We were driving the few kilometres from our gîte to the town of Le Neubourg for lunch and noticed some glass right across the road, like a smashed windscreen. By the next village of Émanville a few hundred metres away it was clear something was wrong with the car. We had sustained two punctures, the front and rear wheels of one side. There were no shops open in the village square but there was a Mairie. It was now almost noon and the staff were preparing to close. I managed to explain the problem and Monsieur le Maire said he would ring a tyre centre, which was by then also closed for lunch. He came out with us to see the car and said he also had an Audi and suggested that we may be able to borrow his spare wheel. He then cycled to his house and returned with his car – and set about changing the wheels for us. Lunch in Le Neubourg was very welcome, and when the tyre depot reopened they were expecting *les anglais* who needed two tyres as M. le Maire had left a message. We were so impressed that M. le Maire was willing to help us, trusting total strangers to go off with his spare wheel, as well as actively changing the wheels. I also had an opportunity to practise my French, and had a reminder of how everything stops for lunch.

Helen Grist
Liskeard, Cornwall



The towns of Darlington and Amiens have been united for nearly 60 years but still manage to find new and exciting ways to connect and exchange cultural insights. Tom Nutt, the Chairman of Darlington Town Twinning, tells us more.

Eleven hours by coach from Darlington, via the Channel Tunnel, brings you to the beautiful city of Amiens, our twin town. In the past eight years, members of our Town Twinning Association (TTA) have made this journey four times, always for the *Fête Dans la Ville* in June. We have been captivated by the warmth of welcome, the *fête* entertainment, the *hortillonages* (floating gardens) on the Somme, the Jules Verne experience, the fabulous Hôtel de Ville and, of course, the magnificent spectacle of the laser-lit cathedral.

Why are Darlington and Amiens twinned? This was a question raised with Mayor of Amiens, Gilles Demailly during this year's visit to Amiens for the British tea-party themed *fête*. We concluded that it was to do with the railways. In 1825 Stockton to Darlington was the first passenger railway journey in the world, and a few years later the first French passenger train was from Lille via Amiens to Paris. Over many years frequent exchanges took place between railway workers of the towns.

The twinning of the towns dates back to 1953. The first project was an exchange of school children, arranged through the French Consul in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A formal Declaration of Town Twinning was signed on 8 May 1973 by the two local authorities. Since then there have been many educational, cultural, citizen groups, musical and sports club exchanges. And Darlington presented Amiens with a traditional English telephone box in the 1990s (pictured above). At present the colleges are discussing links between catering departments, both of which have great reputations, and next year we plan to send sports and music groups to Amiens. Last year a group of 12 TTA members cycled from Darlington to Amiens and as the average age was over 60 this was no mean feat! The year 2013 is the 60th anniversary of our successful partnership and we are planning a big celebration to mark this special occasion. The future of town twinning is in the hands of the young people and we hope to involve them as much as possible.

WINNERS

The winner of Les Mots Fléchés in the October issue is **Julie Rayner** from Derby. Congratulations!

Have
your
say

Have you got a travel tale to tell? Share your thoughts, tips and memories with us! Send your letter to: Boîte aux Lettres, FRANCE Magazine, Archant House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, Glos, GL50 1BB or email: editor@francemag.com and please supply your name and address.

Follow us on Twitter@francemagazine or join us on www.facebook.com/francemagazine