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*French
Association
3035*

July 2015 Newsletter

*Events, activities, news
and reports for members*



Beynac, Dordogne

GT 2016 Calendar Competition – You could win a prize for your photo as well – see below!

Start sending in your entries for the 2016 GT calendar competition now! The theme for this year is "La Belle France". Your snaps can be of any subject matter which you feel best expresses the beautiful side of France and obviously must have been taken somewhere within France.

The subject matter is wide-ranging, perhaps a favourite view, holiday destination, wildlife, building, pastime, food, sport - absolutely anything - be as creative as you wish!

Each family member may submit up to four photographs. Photographs must be in landscape format (rather than portrait) and your entry must state where in France each photograph was taken.

Closing date for submission of entries is midnight 30th September 2015.

Once the competition has closed, all entries will be displayed on the GT website and members will be invited to vote for their favourites, with the most popular 12 photographs used for the calendar.

*In addition, this year prizes will be awarded for the photograph considered to be the most creative image and also the most voted for picture, this latter will be judged by an independent person.

Full rules of competition entry are available on the GT website.

Book Club / Library	Mon 6 th July	2 – 4.00 pm	Jarzay
Garden Party	Sat 11 th July	12.30 pm	Scille
Reading Circle	Tues 21 st July	2.30 pm	L'Aumonerie
BBQ	Sun 26 th July	12.30 pm	Le Tallud
Walk	Fri 31 st July	10.30 am	Vouvant , Vendee
Book Club/ Library	Mon 3 rd August	2 – 4.00 pm	St Jean de Sauves
Walk	Sat 8 th August	10.00 am	Thorigné
Second Circle	Wed 12 th August	10.00 am	Exireuil
Horse Racing and Games Afternoon	Sat 22 nd August	12 noon	Lezay

- ## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

July's Book Club/Library will be hosted by Margaret Baldwin.

Garden Party, Wine Tasting and Treasure Hunt.

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**Reading
Circle**

Tues 21st July 2.30 pm

L'Aumonerie

Our selection for July is *The Little Paris Bookshop* by best-selling German author, Nina George.

The story moves from Paris to Provence and this recently published novel has been widely acclaimed.

As usual, all our previous reviews can be found on the GT website.

BBQ

Sun 26th July 12.30 pm

Le Tallud



Due to popular demand, this year's GT summer event on Sunday 26th July at 12.30pm will be a BBQ, to be held at the beautiful riverside setting La Buvette, Parc de Loisirs, at Le Tallud. This is a lovely wooded riverside setting with good facilities and a large covered terrace overlooking the river so plenty of shelter from rain or shine.

The Committee will provide a welcome aperitif and nibbles, meat & fish for the BBQ, wine, beer, soft drinks, bread, tea and coffee. Please bring your own accompanying salads and desserts along with your own crockery, cutlery, glasses & mugs. There are tables and chairs at the venue.

The cost per ticket is €10. Each attendee will receive a free raffle ticket for prizes including champers (and of course there will also be tickets available for purchase. We will also organise a few optional activities including a Boules competition (weather permitting).

Walk

Fri 31st July 10.30 am

**Vouvant,
Vendee**

Note later start time!

We will meet at the car park opposite the cafes in the centre of the village of Vouvant. Toilets available.

A walk of approx 7kms. Shorter option available. Walk consists of country tracks, riverside walk and village ramparts. Tracks may be muddy appropriate footwear needed. Limited shade so sun hats and suncream required if hot and sunny. Lunch at Hotel Restaurant Le Lac, Fourchard nr Borneau.

Directions to walk start: From Niort take D148 to Fontenay le Comte then take the D938T to La Chataigneraie. After approx 12kms on this road turn right on D30 to Vouvant.

From Parthenay take D949B via Secondigny to La Chataigneraie. Then take the D938T to Fontenay le Comte. After approx 8 kms on this road turn left on D30 to Vouvant.

Directions to Restaurant: Turn left on leaving Vouvant car park. Continue to the La Chataigneraie / Fontenay le Comte main road then turn left towards Fontenay le Comte. After approx 6kms on this road the Le Lac Restaurant is situated on the right just off the Mervent roundabout. Ample parking.

Lunch includes starter, main course, dessert, wine + coffee for €13.

CHOICES REQUIRED FOR STARTER, MAIN + DESSERT.

Menu as follows:-

Starter Salade de gesiers or terrine de poisson or terrine de campagne

Main Noix de joue de porc confite or Filet de Lieu Noir

Dessert Poire pochee aux epics or croustillant 3 chocolats or assiette de 2 fromages

<u>Book Club</u>	<u>Mon 3rd Aug</u>	<u>2 – 4.00 pm</u>	<u>St Jean de Sauves</u>
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August's Book Club/Library will be held at Chez Sangster.

<u>Walk</u>	<u>Sat 8th August</u>	<u>10.00 am</u>	<u>Thorigné</u>
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This walk will start in the village of Thorigné and is about 7.6 km long with a 5km alternative, which also has cut-offs to reduce it to about 3.5km. It is nearly all on grassy and stony tracks, and passes through a variety of countryside, about half of which is well shaded. The long walk goes down into the Lambon valley, and what goes down also comes up, with a 150 metre climb at 7% (that's quite steep), but there are no other significant hills. There is a stretch of path in the valley that could be muddy if there has been a lot of rain - hopefully not in August. As always, sturdy footwear is recommended.

Thorigné is about 5km NW of Celles sur Belle. From Celles take the D948 towards Niort and after about 2km turn right onto the D304. At the roundabout in the centre of the village turn left and immediately right into the car park by the football pitch. Lunch will be available at Le 4 Saisons in Celles sur Belle. This is situated in the middle of the village at 6 rue Ancienne Mairie, and there is a car park close behind. For three courses, wine and coffee the cost will be €16.

<u>Second Circle</u>	<u>Wed 12th August</u>	<u>10.00 am</u>	<u>Exireuil</u>
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The Second Circle reading group will meet to discuss *The Quarry* by Iain Banks.

<u>Horse Racing and Games Afternoon</u>	<u>Sat 22nd August</u>	<u>12 noon</u>	<u>Lezay</u>
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An exciting afternoon of uproarious fun and games will take place Chez Buckley, incorporating the annual Get Together Horse Racing meet, where your fate and fortune will be totally dependent on the roll of the dice! There will also be table tennis, darts (if the board gets put up in time), petanque on our purpose built court, which is designed to even out the odds, and Molky. In addition, if the day is warm, a small heated pool will be available for the more adventurous - bring your own cossie & towel - no skinny dipping! For the less active, a variety of board games will be available.

Please come equipped with a picnic lunch. A gas bbq can be made available if required. Tables, chairs and parasols would be appreciated, though we can supply quite a few.

More details, including directions to follow in August's Newsletter.

REPORTS ON RECENT EVENTS

Second Circle

Tues 26th May

Scille

Report by Lesley Ritchie

The Second Circle reading group met on 26th May to discuss *Pigs in Heaven* by Barbara Kingsolver.

Some of us had read the prequel *The Bean Trees* instead, so the discussion was quite interesting if a bit confused.

The general feeling was that both books were interesting and showed a marked development in style, and that she is an excellent novelist well worth reading.

There is still room for a couple more people, so let me know if you are interested.

Walk

Fri 29th May

Moncoutant

Report by Annette Green



On a bright and sunny morning, most of us headed north to Pescalis, nr Moncoutant for an interesting walk around the fishing lakes and beyond. The dogs - bless them - had great difficulty crossing the bridges, they tried to find alternative ways to get across - Arran resorted to jumping off the bridge and swimming!! We also passed pretty villages and gardens along the route and at the half way point, we had fantastic views of Moncoutant. Once we

returned into Moncoutant we passed a stunning building, which after further investigation proved to be the 'bibliotheque', how lucky the locals are.

Feeling hungry and thirsty we made our way eagerly to the ever popular Chez Chantale in L'Absie, where we enjoyed a delicious four course meal including aperitifs and wine all for €12.50, such amazing value!

Many thanks to Michele and Eric for yet another interesting walk, it is always good to see and walk around new areas of the Deux Sevres.

Lunch & Wine Club Tues 2nd June

Exireuil

Report by Leslie Green

On a sunny and slight windy morning, 14 of us gathered for our first wine tasting session, now part of the lunch club. As summer was fast approaching and also the theme for the recipes, Keith gave us four rosé wines to taste, ranging from a dry Rosé de Provence to a sweeter Rosé d'Anjou, we also tried a more expensive Tavel and a Bordeaux, we all had our own favourites but it was interesting to try something different too.

With the sun still shining we moved onto lunch consisting of three starters - salmon mousse, chorizo and vegetable orzo terrine and an aubergine and cheese bake, all delicious. Three desserts swiftly followed with a lemon freeze, raspberry tiramisu and a pineapple and ginger pavlova, these were equally yummy!

Thanks to Annette for hosting the event and we are all looking forward to our next session in October chez Mousdale.



Garden Party

Sat 13th June

Saint Coutant

Report by
Margaret Baldwin

Mary, Mary quite contrary, how does your garden grow? I have no idea but she would need to have pulled her welly boots up to come anywhere near the beautiful garden that came into view as I entered the home of Steve and Noreena Parker. After a warm welcome, the picnic basket was left in the shade and I made a tour of the garden. Back to the start, the English gardener had set out his array of plants, most of the 40+ guests had arrived and were settling down with an aperitif supplied by the GT committee.

As the picnic got under way, the conversations became more animated and the clouds became darker. Fortunately most people had finished their meal when down came the hailstones followed by heavy rain and thunder and lightning.



Not to be deterred the 'Identify the 19 different leaves' competition went ahead, later won by four people who each received a bottle of Cava. The 'boys' played boules, whilst the rest of the party, shading from the rain, entertained them with their version of Singing in the Rain. The two Steve's won and were awarded a cup donated by Jeff and Bev Talbot. It was all good fun and everyone joined in the spirit of the awful weather.

Thank you again Noreena and Steve for a really enjoyable Garden Party.

The day began with our arrival at the *Abbaye aux Dames de Saintes*, where, the tourist brochure assures us, 'the ladies were abbesses, minted money, and carried the staff'. So, I mused as I got out of the car, getting reliable workers was a problem even all those years ago. But, for those of us who had not taken advantage of the motorway services, our attention turned first to the free car park's solitary toilet, which provided the day's initial talking point. A great deal of hilarity ensued when the loo's habit of disappearing into the wall at the critical moment was discovered, bringing a whole new meaning to the phrase being caught with one's pants down! Meanwhile (and by way of pointing out that the site does have other well-maintained and clean facilities), the more intrepid explorers amongst the group had found a water closet in the tourist office which did not run off at the first sign of human presence. Still, I can't help feeling that there was a certain primeval satisfaction to be gained from having to catch your loo before you could use it...

Anyway, enough of the toilet humour and on to the main event. On such a glorious morning, one could not fail to be impressed by the collection of buildings which comprise the *Abbaye aux Dames*. The Abbey was founded in the 12th century, and the church and its associated convent housed Benedictine nuns until their violent expulsion during the French Revolution, at which time the site became a prison and military barracks. The façade of the church and bell tower has been described rightly as 'a jewel of *Saintonge* Romanesque architecture', adorned with a multitude of magnificent stone carvings depicting biblical scenes. The interior of the church represented little more than a blank shell, however, leaving a feeling of disappointment that even the permanent exhibition of modern Jean-François Favre tapestries could not dispel; which perhaps explains why our extremely knowledgeable English speaking guide seemed reluctant to interrupt her discourse on the meaning of life in medieval France and take us inside. Indeed, the same might be said of the interior of the attached convent, where the pristine restoration gave an overwhelming impression of space and light, which seemed strangely at odds with the Abbey's history, either as a place of silent and solitary meditation, or as a dark and brooding prison for the enemies of the Revolution.

It is said that all ancient buildings have a voice, but that of the *Abbaye aux Dames* appeared stifled by the unsympathetic nature of the restoration: and, as a result, I could hear neither the murmur of nuns at prayer, nor the tortured cries of those unfortunate souls awaiting the pleasure of Madame Guillotine in later times. In short, the exterior of the Abbey speaks volumes; but the interior, sadly, has little to say.



The contrast between the highly decorated façade of the Abbey, and the almost sanitised emptiness of the interior rooms provided much food for thought and

discussion at lunch, which – judging by the additional merriment involved – was greatly enjoyed by all. After lunch, we took a stroll along the main thoroughfare, impressively lined by shops, restaurants and cafés, to the riverside. There, in the shadow of Saintes' *Arc de Germanicus* of 18-19 AD, the group boarded the *Ville de Saintes*, to enjoy – in the words of the brochure – a trip on a 'traditional wooden boat and discover the wildlife of the River Charente, along with its history and that of its sailors'. I'm sure few of us would disagree with that sentiment. All in all, our day in the enchanting town of Saintes was a great success, and a tribute to David and Rebecca, and Jeremy and Jackie, who put so much effort into organising the event.

NON GT ITEMS OF INTEREST

Concert of English and French songs by The Keynotes Singers at the Church in the centre of La Caillère St Hilaire, 85410. On Sunday 5 July 2015 at 15.00 hrs
Entrance 3 Euros Under 18 yrs free

Refreshments available.

All profits will go to Jeunes Sapeur Pompiers de La Caillère for training equipment.

The Combined Services Support Group is holding a fund raising event at the home of John Blair on the 19th July starting at 11am and finishing at 5pm. Money raised goes to people injured whilst in service with the British military or the French Pompiers.

On the day there will be the Keynotes Singers, the band 3 plus 1, Real fish & chips, refreshments, Paperback Cindy and lots of craft tables, brocante, trees and plants and games for the young and not so young. If you would like to book a table for your crafty stuff or just to recycle your household surplus let me know or just come along at about 10am.

The route will be marked from the centre of Saint Pardoux 79310.

Come along and join in the fun and please tell your friends!

Spring Short Story & Poetry Competition 2015 – Winning Poem

Judge's Comments:

'From a small selection I had no difficulty in choosing "Garlic and roast tomatoes" as the winner. The tranquil atmosphere is sustained by the use of couplets which provide casual layers between a series of dreamy observations. But there is something elusive in the poem, a shadowy element introduced by the dead dog and echoed in the tomb of the final stanza.

The use of the senses enhances the reader's absorption of the setting and the time of day, with their gentle blending of stillness and movement. The bell's tolling brings an unexpected recollection, altering time and location, leaving us hovering between worlds. Moreover, the tenderness between the couple is conveyed without a trace of sentimentality.

Like many a good poem, we are told enough to invite our questions.'

Thank you to everyone who entered, I hope you will submit entries for the competition in spring 2016.

We raised the sum of €164 for Pepis Dog Refuge, which will buy flea and tick treatment for some of the 80+ dogs.

Garlic & Roast Tomatoes by Kate Rose

Shutters close as a scooter creeps through the square
steering its way around the hilltop.

A drinking man says he's found
a dead dog by the river. You look up and smile.

Someone tells him to leave be, it's an omen.

The barman laughs, pours our wine,
unfurls umbrellas, moves tables into the shade
near the kitchen, where smells of garlic
and roasting tomatoes mix with cigarette smoke
from our neighbour, almost asleep in the sun.

The noon bell rings. You take my hand,
brush it with your lips. Like that time in Santa Croce,
we lit a candle near Michelangelo's tomb
while outside boys shouted and kicked a ball against the walls.

Judge - Gordon Simms

Gordon Simms is a prize-winning poet who, with his wife Jocelyn, runs the Segora international writing competitions. The couple also co-founded the St Clémentin Bilingual Litfest and are members of the North Deux-Sèvres Writers' Circle. See www.poetryproseandplays.com for courses, workshops and readings.

Beryl Brennan

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