

Bouquin sur l'hexagone

Foreword

A few years ago, after I had bowed out of my full-time commitments, I thought it might be fun to start a course on the Culture of France. The course concentrated mainly on areas which I had covered during the last decade in my summer evening series of French films. To my initial surprise and subsequent delight, the course attracted some people who stayed for the next chapters of the course. This soon became a voyage of discovery for both them and me.

From Films, we moved on to Music then Geography, Literature, Regions (including food and drink), Art, Famous Women, Sports People of Note, Colonialism, History and finally Philosophy. During the summer break, I found myself considering the fact that all this information might be of interest to anyone wishing to know more about the nearest (and not always dearest) neighbour of the United Kingdom. Prior to the pandemic, and hopefully once things have settled down again, visitors from these shores might go back with renewed interest and enthusiasm to France.

After all what is there not to like about the place. The country has wonderful beaches, stunning mountains, a plethora of museums, ancient buildings which are most definitely worth a visit and restaurants where some of the best food and wines are on offer.

The course when it was delivered face to face led to discussions and it was obvious that not all the participants agreed all the time with each other or with me. One thing we agreed upon is that we all had the right to disagree and that this was sacrosanct. The facts are presented - as far as it is possible to ascertain - and opinions offered wherever I feel there is a need to do so.

The chapters follow the same pattern as the original course and offer the same basic information. Pointers are given in case a reader would like to go deeper into the subject. At the beginning of each section, a wine has been selected which, in my humble opinion, would go well with the contents of the following pages.

Final words of thanks. To Charlier first who, through "Les Belles Histoires de l'Oncle Paul", inspired me as a small child to find out more about the world. The mostly black and white drawings and the short texts did more for my imagination than television ever could. The second person to thank is Melissa who allowed me to develop the course from nothing. Sometimes I feel that she wanted to see how far my madness would go. Well. There it is!