

Tamalous, guinguettes and saleuses : everyday life in Entre-deux-Eaux November - December 2024

Now we are into December, with Christmas fast approaching, the Christmas cake mixed, roundabouts lit up with Christmas trees or miniature Eiffel Towers, and local Christmas markets this weekend, we thought we'd send a short non-festive newsletter before we all get engulfed. So here are three French words to sum up our last two months in E2E: *tamalous*, *guinguettes* and *saleuses*.

These were not words that featured in our distant school French lessons. *Tamalous* cropped up during a chat with our neighbour Daniele about local hospitals. The system here has long been that your GP writes a prescription for further investigations or treatment and the patient contacts a specialist of their choice to arrange an appointment (increasingly difficult, though GPs are now doing more direct referrals, especially in urgent cases). This inevitably leads to much comparing of notes over the relative merits of different consultants, surgeons, departments and hospitals. Daniele laughingly observed that we were becoming real *tamalous* and explained that the word refers to people, usually elderly, who are always complaining about aches and pains in one part of the body or another and whose first question on meeting an acquaintance is “*t’as mal où?*” - “where do you hurt?” or “what's wrong with you?”

As both Daniele and our other village Scrabble-playing friend had Covid in November, Marie-Therese suffering from a more severe, lingering new strain, there had been frequent phone queries as to the current state of hearing loss, headaches, coughs and loss of appetite. The prevalence of Covid in the village was also why Helen avoided the cream cakes and *crémant* at the November club gathering of village elders, who have reverted to the germ-spreading habit of kissing on both cheeks. However, a few days after the board and card games and cake, the club also held its annual tea dance, which we hear was a great success with over 150 participants.

There are a lot of skilled dancers in the village. Apparently when they were young, a popular way of meeting prospective husbands or wives was at the dances held in villages on the day of their patron saint. Our neighbour Gerard used to cycle for miles to get to distant villages to meet their girls and dance. And in novels, films and paintings of the nineteenth century the characters might be seen at riverside *guinguettes* drinking, dancing and dining on freshly caught fish. It's a quaint sounding word - possibly from *guinguet*, a type of cheap wine. And there was indeed wine and some fish when we went last Friday (after a hospital appointment for one of us two *tamalous*) to a village restaurant south of Nancy. *Au Bon Accueil* in Richardmenil calls itself a gastronomic restaurant nowadays, but its website says that at the start of the twentieth century it was a waterside *guinguette* whose clients would come for its fried fish, fish stew, skittles and the local wine. Through its archway we found a large car park by the canal above the River Moselle - perhaps that was once the dance floor. Alas we found no dancers or skittles, the fish was a

sardine served with pigs trotter as a starter, the wines were not from the village hillside and there were only five other diners. It was a lovely sunny day despite the cold, and we took the slow cross-country route home on pretty winding roads through the rolling pastures. We drove past a sign for the *Maison de Mirabelles*, but did not pause to explore the plum orchards and distillery or to sample their *eaux de vie*, whisky or mirabelle jam. A pleasant sortie after a hospital appointment.

The third word that was not taught at school but which was useful this November was *saleuse* or salter/gritter. When Helen had a 9.30 eye appointment in Saint Dié after the first overnight snowfall of the year, it was a relief to find that our commune employee Mickael on his tractor had gritted our narrow road in good time for people to get to work and school, and of course the departmental roads closer to town were well treated. However, the Saint Dié pavements were very slippery, and another client rang the orthoptist to cancel her appointment blaming their commune's *saleuse* which had not yet cleared their steep hill.

Having returned safely from that appointment, Helen needed to drive to Sainte Marguerite after lunch, as it was her turn to provide the exercises for the brain-storming group, and equally importantly, the refreshments. That commune's *saleuse* had done a great job of clearing the large car park in front of their Mairie, sports hall and communal rooms. Surprisingly most members of the group had also made it through the snow, though their faces fell on hearing that the first exercise would be in English because we had just returned from England. They were relieved to find it was a fairly easy word search for some of the lyrics of Elton John's Crocodile Rock - though they might never have occasion to employ words like "bopping", "hopping" or "crocodile" again. Another exercise was more topical - a visual one involving snowflakes. Just before leaving the UK, we had stocked up with English pastries, so the session concluded with hot drinks and a choice of Bakewell tarts, mince pies, apple and blackcurrant tarts, and individual Battenberg cakes and everyone seemed happy comparing notes - "try the apple and blackcurrant one next, it's delicious", "this marzipan is very good and such pretty pink and white colours" and "did John make the mince pies?" John was far too busy to make mince pies as he was struggling with recalcitrant electronic equipment, exploring reasons why his computer might not be starting and why the linking the TV and AV amplifier to work with a universal remote was problematic. The TV's issues were solved, but the computer resisted all attempts. A new one should be delivered tomorrow.

We are planning to return to the UK next week. We joke that all our UK trips and holidays have to be arranged between increasingly hard to get medical appointments. So we will set out after next week's dental and audiology appointments and return in time for the rheumatology one. We hope that the gritters will have been working hard as more snow is forecast before then.

Jokes about *tamalous* aside, we know how many friends are affected this year by poor health and losses, and we send you all our very best wishes and hope

that despite everything you have an enjoyable Christmas and wish you all the best in 2025.