

DINING *with the*

# Association France Grande/Bretagne

SATURDAY, 18 JANUARY 1997

JEREMY COPE records his impressions

## *Our Party*

Leo and Marjorie Wright (fluent French linguists), John Gerrard and self (Un petit peu de francais and that's being generous). Europhiles all. It helps to have the right attitude.

## *Getting to Calais*

Thanks to P & O for a super trip. A VIP bus was laid on at Dover Docks followed by the pampering of club class travel. Our ship was on time. We enjoyed a relaxed chat helped by champagne.

## *The docks to the venue*

Met by Ann and Graham Coffey. (The family attended our Christmas Feast and they were given photographs of themselves at that event.) The trip was through a bustling Calais with a stop to buy coffee for the Wrights. (There were no empty shops and the town looked thriving. Perhaps our planning sub-committee should visit Calais to find out what lessons there may be for Dover. This would of course involve investigating the restaurants.

## *At Les Templiers*

We arrived well in time for the six-thirty for seven start. I counted over sixty people sitting down, including our party. The evening was animated and a very happy, jovial occasion throughout. We were made most welcome.

### *The Menu*

Starter: Soup or prawns in tomato with a mayonnaise dressing.

Main Course: Salmon or entrecôte steak with either Béarnaise or pepper sauce.

Pudding: Sorbet or gâteau

French food is different from ours and to be welcomed.

## *The Company*

I was surrounded by two Frenchmen and two French ladies. The ladies were great fun and laughed a lot. M. Pierre Fayceulle, a member of the Legion d'Honneur, on my left, knew some English from his war-time days with the Free French, certainly more than my French. He spoke better English as the evening went on, mine got worse.

### *The Formalities*

A speech of welcome (not a lot understood but recognised the reference to us). Leo wowed them (and me) with his response. Why didn't I work harder at school? When I explained to my neighbour Lec's teaching background he nodded sagely, "that explains it".

## *Then into Franglais*

We seemed to be able to communicate basic ideas. I only hope there was not too much misunderstanding – anyway, it didn't seem to matter.

Matters touched on: Calais lace trade, a Nottingham forebear who came in connection with lace, marrying the first solicitor in France (that is, the one whose office was nearest to England), Dachau and the Resistance, the war and destruction of Calais, including the thousands of Canadian shells that landed at liberation, fighting for the Free French in UK and the Gold Coast, being a Gaullist, hardly surprising to hear support for a united Europe, shopping in the UK with tea taken in Dickens' Corner and at the Churchill. Oh! and a common view of politicians, the feeling that binds all lesser nationality. Mad cow disease, but this was part of the political bit, Holidays I have taken in France and elsewhere. The Tunnel.

### *The Departure and return Journey*

Rushed farewell kisses and handshakes all round and back to the 10.45 boat with two minutes to spare. Into the P&O club class lounge with feet up and cognac and coffee. Jennifer Gerrard should never have been a nurse; operating a prompt and efficient taxi service is her true métier.

### *Conclusion*

A happy trip and a big thank you to our hosts, and to the Coffeys in particular, for ferrying us to and from the boat. During our trip around Calais to get to Les Templiers the question was asked, how long have Britain and France been apart? The comic response was "for ever". If ever the lie was given to that it was our evening with the Association.

### *Final Conclusion*

They got it right with "La belle France".

## LEO WRIGHT has THE LAST WORD (for the time being)

Ann Coffey whose work in Calais is linked with Ian Gill and the East Kent Initiative came specially to our meeting of 27 January to meet and hear John Moir, Chief Executive of Dover District Council on the subject of the present and future of Dover, so relevant to her work'

Hands across the Channel. Q.E.D.

*A welcome lasting result of these "pioneering" visits is that mutual general invitations are now in place. All members of the three societies are warmly invited to each other's meetings and excursions. If you would like to be invited to cross-Channel events please give your name to Leo or Joan.*

## POSTSCRIPT:

Madame Ann Coffey of the Association France-Grande Bretagne who, with her family were guests at our Christmas Feast (and she also attended our meeting of 24 February) is now actively engaged in the advance preparations for the Dover/

Calais Festival 1998, which is also occupying the attention of the Dover Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The theme would be mediaeval and up to the 16th century.