

## **Memories of The Albert Road French Club and 1955 Summer School Holidays in France by Ray (Fred) Martin**

I joined the Southern Grammar in September 1954 and joined the French Club run by Mr Burnett who, apart from being a good half back with Gosport Borough FC, was an excellent tennis and table tennis player. In my second year he became our form's French master and it was through his enthusiasm I was able to put languages to use in my later life.

The French Club encouraged us lads to write, in French, to Citroen, Renault etc expressing our interest in their latest models and requesting literature, lapel badges, stickers and price lists which we duly received!! If only these manufacturers had known our ages and backgrounds, rather than assuming we were potential buyers! Our letters were probably the forerunners of spam e-mails.

The summer of 1955 was to be the highlight of our French activities. Mr Burnett accompanied by Mr Russell (music/French) organised a week's vacation in Deauville. It has lived in my subconscious ever since as it was the first time I tasted alcohol! It's a bit like being asked "Where were you when Kennedy was shot?"

We assembled outside the Albert Road school on an August Friday evening complete with battered suitcases or our Dads' wartime naval holdalls - 'grips' if you were RAF I'm told. Where was the promised charabanc? It then arrived like the Mary Celeste and looked like it too. It was signwritten as 'The Little Wonder Motor Coach, Petersfield'. My mother said it was a little wonder it had made it all the way from Petersfield!

Still we didn't care and we were off to Southampton docks to catch the late night 'car' ferry to Le Havre. Just as well the coach wasn't coming with us as each vehicle was being individually loaded by crane onto the boat as deck cargo. There were no seats available (we didn't have cabins either - this was 1955 remember) so we grabbed deck chairs and sat up on top. Nobody slept that night for many reasons. Damp, noise and French schoolgirls returning home come to mind.

In Deauville we were accommodated in a senior boys' school built post-war. It had novel toilets, to say the least. For anybody who has ridden an Indian train you will appreciate their design. Each morning's breakfast was identical - coffee, sliced plain baguette and jam. This was followed by a walk to the beach for volleyball or a trip to somewhere interesting such as the Bayeux Tapestry museum and Arromanches.

We were free in the afternoons until 4pm before getting back to school for our main meal. One or two of the lads were a year or so older than me and found a local shop where wine was cheap. At this point I have to change a name to protect the guilty but 'Sam' bought a bottle of red, gave a fisherman a swig in return for the use of a corkscrew, and promptly drank the rest! When roll-call came 'Sam' was missing and was found by Mr Russell behind a Deauville fountain in no fit state for dinner. Once sober he was warned as to his future conduct and a letter written to his parents. As for me, I did taste some wine and was wholly unimpressed. The next time I tasted anything near it was in a NAAFI in Germany and they called it Red Barrel.

When we eventually arrived home I explained to my mother, who had been a cook, that we had eaten a particular meat at most meals. The meat had always been the same i.e. tender, fine texture with a quite pleasant taste. My mother said "horse meat". It was 1956 and France, after all. Anybody know what happened to Shergar?

Ray (Fred) Martin  
March 2010