



# AFMS NEWS

Winter 2007

AFMS  
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AFMS NEWS  
Charity Number 327706

## A message from our Former President—Dr Nicola Strickland

Apart from wishing all of you a very happy New Year, I would like to thank you for the lovely presents you gave me on my retirement as President last year. The two books on France ('France from the air' by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, and 'One hundred and one beautiful small towns in France' by Simonetta Greggio) live in our sitting room and are often thumbed through in contemplative moments. The Waitrose vouchers were all unashamedly spent on excellent French wines, of which several bottles were very appreciatively consumed over the recent holiday break, including a memorable Chateau Montrose and a fine Pouilly Fume. Thank you very much indeed. I hugely enjoyed my time as President of the AFMS, during which I made many highly valued friends and attended some really fun meetings. I look forward to continuing to participate in AFMS events amongst the rank and file, and I wish Andrew all the very best in his term of office."

## Mont St Michel 2007

Mont St Michel has been confirmed as the next venue for the AFMS conference. The conference will take place from Wednesday 26th to Sunday 30th September. Along with an extensive scientific programme, superb social activities are being put together. A more detailed agenda will be included in the next newsletter

26th September: Delegates Arrive

27th September: Tour of St Malo

28th September: Tour of Mont St Michel and Gala Dinner

29th September; Tour of Mont St Michel Bay and the famous Mascaret

( Changing of the tide )

30th September—Delegates depart



## An article which describes the painstaking processes involved to preserve its status...

Mont St Michel is gradually sinking into the sand of the large bay at the point where Normandy and Brittany join. If nothing is done, the Mont - and its abbey and the picturesque, tourist-thronged, winding streets of its medieval village - will cease to be an island within 40 years. Already some of the majesty has been sapped by the progress of the silt and salt marshes, and by the weed-like growth of car and coach parks over what was once the sea bed.

How do you correct a century of human blunders? How do you get rid of three million cubic metres of silt and sand (enough to stretch, a metre deep, from Normandy to West Africa)? Maids and mops? Giant dredging machines? Even then, what would stop the sand from coming back? Lewis Carroll set out the problem poetically a century ago. France has just adopted a poetic solution which may, if successful, become a model for brain-led, rather than muscle-led, solutions to environmental problems all over the world. The solution is to go back to nature. Work has just begun to restore, and enhance, the natural power of a man-tamed river - the Couesnon - which will flush the sand and silt banks out of the bay over the next 20 years. It sounds simple but nothing like it has been tried before. The project is immense, and at the same time gentle; unassuming; and not especially expensive at €164m (£112m). Francois-Xavier de Beaulaincourt, 50, is the latter-day "walrus" of Mont St Michel, the director of the agency set up by local and regional councils to run the project. "Everyone, journalists especially, insist on calling this a vast undertaking, a pharaonic work," he said. " They tumble over themselves to find even more impressive adjectives. I keep on insisting this is wrong. It is actually a modest project, a humble project. "By modest, I mean that the cost is not vast, equivalent to only 40 kilometres of new motorway. By humble, I mean this is not a question of man imposing his will and vision on nature. It is a question of man recognising his past mistakes and using nature, working with nature, to put things right, to put the clock back." All the same, as M. De Beaulaincourt admits, the stakes, in this vast hydrological experiment, are huge. The Mont is a global celebrity. The ambitious and (literally) ground-breaking attempt to restore the abbey- island's "maritime character" will be globally monitored. There are two keys to the project. The accumulation of silt has been encouraged by a mile-long embankment built in 1879 between the Mont and what the locals call "the continent". This will be bulldozed and replaced with a shorter embankment and a 700-metre low bridge by 2012. More importantly, a dam built 40 years ago at the mouth of the Couesnon, close to the Mont, will be replaced by a dam twice as large by 2008. The latter-day "carpenter" of the Mont is Arnaud Durand, 32, the engineer in charge of the new dam. He said the existing one was built to protect the polders, or reclaimed farmland, to the south from tidal floods. By reducing the natural strength of the Couesnon, the old dam accelerated the build-up of silt between the river-mouth and the abbey-island. The new one will allow seawater to pass up river at high tide, to be stocked in canals and a reservoir (which will provide a habitat for seabirds). At low tide, the accumulated seawater and pent-up river-water will be released once or twice a day in a series of giant "flushing" actions. The force of the water, acting just like a toilet cistern on a large scale, will weaken and sweep away the grassed silt and sand banks over most of the mile between the Mont and the "continent". Half of the silt will disappear within two years after the works are finished in 2012. Eighty per cent will go in eight years, by 2020.... **Continued overleaf.....**

## NEW AFMS NEWS

Welcome to the second new look AFMS news!!!

Please let us have your feedback on this new look or if there is anything you would like to be included in further editions. Please send an email to Tony Ridge at

tonyridge72yahoo.co.uk

## In This Issue

Mont St Michel—Rescue of a Medieval Abbey.

We wish we were French—Britons love affair with France!!!

Chamonix - Winter

Conference—Still places!!!

January 2007—weekend

Course in Medical French—book your place—Last Chance!

Who's who in the AFMS

Back Page Notes

AFMS Quiz—Answers

Thought for the day

## • Meeting and Events

### • January 26th to 28th 2007

14th Weekend Course in medical French, Burton Manor Wirral.

### • February 1st to 4th 2007

9th Winter Meeting

Hotel les Aiglons, Chamonix

### • February 24th 2007

Advanced French Conversation. Stoke

### • May 2007

Manchester Regional Meeting.

Friday 18th May 7pm

### • September 2007

Scientific Meeting. Mont St Michel.

Dates 26th to 30th September 2007

# AFMS NEWS

## Chamonix Winter Meeting February 1st to 4th 2007



### Hotel Les Aiglons

Chamonix is a world class alpine resort, renowned throughout the world. The Society has again chosen the Hotel les Aiglons for the Seventh Winter Meeting – the Hotel Aiglons. The hotel is in the 'Best Western' group. The 3 star hotel is in the area of Chamonix Sud and is a few minutes walk to the Téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi and about ten minutes walk to the centre of Chamonix. The hotel was chosen for its location and its excellent facilities. The lobby area is large with open fires and comfortable sofas while the dedicated conference room is located on the ground floor close to the restaurant. There is a heated outdoor swimming pool, sauna and whirlpool.



*'Chamonix est une station de renommée internationale. Le Mont-Blanc que l'on l'hôtel\*\*\* les Aiglons vous émerveillera. Suite à deux pas du téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi et proche du centre piéton de Chamonix, nous vous accueillons dans un cadre chaleureux et confortable.*

*Les 56 chambres doubles, individuelles et suites, décorées dans un style montagne allient confort et modernité. Elles sont équipées d'une salle de bain et douche, toilettes séparées, sèche-cheveux, TV avec réception satellite, téléphone ligne direct, minibar, coffre-fort individuel. Le restaurant vous fera apprécier les saveurs d'une cuisine de tradition et nos spécialités locales. Salon, bar, terrasse face au Mont-Blanc.*

*Après une journée de ski, de randonnée ou de travail, l'espace forme avec sauna, hammam et la piscine extérieure chauffée avec bains à remous et le salon cheminée vous attendant pour un moment de relaxation'. (Hotel Les Aiglons Brochure)*

Hotel Les Aiglons, 270 Avenue de Courmayeur, 74400 Chamonix Mont-Blanc

Tel : (0033) 04 50 55 90 93 website: [www.aiglons.com](http://www.aiglons.com)

The Conference

Delegates arrive on Thursday 1st February. A welcome evening is included.

The scientific session will take place in the Hotel Conference Room on Friday (2nd) from 18h to 20h, followed by a meal. On the Saturday evening we will be joining colleagues from Annemasse at a local hotel/restaurant for a further scientific session followed by a meal. The conference ends after breakfast on the Sunday morning. Delegates are able to book extra nights at the hotel.



The Conference fee is £ 300 per person based on single room occupancy, three breakfasts, three evening meals with drinks and the two day conference. A person sharing a room in a double or twin will be an additional £ 180. The fee does not include any transport to Chamonix.

Chamonix is located 80 km from Geneva airport and the transfer takes about an hour. There is a local bus service (Chamonix Bus) to and from the airport or, sometimes car hire can be a competitively priced alternative. Geneva is served by many of the budget airlines. Apart from winter sports there are numerous possibilities for trips for non-skiers including excursions to Italy and Annecy and site-seeing of glaciers and ascent to the top of Mont Blanc by cable car.

Please note that there are still a limited amount of places available for this meeting. Please inform the secretary if you are interested in attending or are interested in making a presentation on the Friday evening.

## AFMS—Course in Medical French -Burton Manor College Hotel The Wirral January 26th to 28th 2007



- Established course, successful teaching format in small groups
- Provides vocabulary and confidence to survive (and enjoy!) working in French-speaking medical settings.
- Suitable for doctors and medical students at all stages, and for the professions allied to medicine
- Consistently rated 'excellent' and 'great value for money'
- Attractive venue, easily accessible
- All grades of linguistic ability accommodated
- Great Fun!!

There are still places available on this course. This established course, now in its 15th year, provides an invaluable background for doctors and medical students intending to work or study in French-speaking countries. Teaching is in small groups, by native French speakers, including doctors. All grades of linguistic ability accommodated. Feedback from the last course was very positive: the teaching, handbook, enjoyment and value for money were all rated as excellent/very good.

Residential fees: £265 for doctors (£215 if within 5 years of qualification); £115 for students. Non-residential: £215 for doctors (£165 if within 5 years of qualification); £95 for students. There are places for 50 doctors and 30 students. Previous courses were highly successful.

Contact: Christine Greenwood, School of Clinical Sciences, Clinical Sciences Centre, University Hospital Aintree, Longmoor Lane, Liverpool L9 7AL. (Tel: 0151 529 5885; Fax: 0151 529 5888).

# AFMS NEWS

## Mont St Michel 2007 continued.....

The new one will allow seawater to pass up river at high tide, to be stocked in canals and a reservoir (which will provide a habitat for seabirds). At low tide, the accumulated seawater and pent-up river-water will be released once or twice a day in a series of giant "flushing" actions. The force of the water, acting just like a toilet cistern on a large scale, will weaken and sweep away the grassed silt and sand banks over most of the mile between the Mont and the "continent". Half of the silt will disappear within two years after the works are finished in 2012. Eighty per cent will go in eight years, by 2020. It is a very neat solution and will not spoil the beauty of the site with dredging machines," M. Durand said. "In any case, it would have been inconceivable to shift so much silt mechanically. The dam itself will be an elegant structure, in keeping with the beauty of the place. It will have a viewing platform and terrace and will be open to the public who will have a marvellous view of the Mont." As part of the project, the car parks beside the Mont will be banished to "the continent". A road-train shuttle will take the millions of visitors to the island. Only approved delivery vans and the 30 permanent residents of the Mont (a dozen monks, two priests, a few hoteliers and an old lady, now aged 93) will be allowed to drive over the bridge.

Much thought is also being given to how to rescue Mont St Michel from the sinking sands of tourism and commercialism. Only one third of all visitors to the island bother to climb the 360 steps to the abbey. Most never go beyond the narrow, main street, in which every 15th- and 16th-century building has become a hotel, restaurant or gift shop. No one wants to scare the tourists away, but renewed efforts will be made to promote the Mont as a site of ecumenical pilgrimage and spiritual retreat.

The Mont has been one of the Seven Wonders of Europe since the early Middle Ages and one of the first places to be placed on the Unesco list of sites of world heritage. A chapel was first carved into the steep granite of the island in 708 after Aubert, the Bishop of Avranches (just across the bay) had a vision of the Archangel Michael in a dream. A Benedictine abbey was established in 966.

The island became a fortress, which resisted Viking raiders and English invaders, and repelled three long sieges during the Hundred Years' War. During the French Catholic-Protestant wars in the 16th century, it changed hands bloodily several times. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it became a kind of French Alcatraz, an offshore prison. The Mont today is a breathtaking collage of fortress, village and pinnacled abbey, built mostly from the 12th to the 16th centuries, all carved on, or into, a lump of rock 240ft high. It is 70cm (roughly 2ft) lower in the sand of the bay than it was in the 19th century. The water, which races dramatically across the sand at high tide, surrounds the island for only a couple of days a year. In truth, the embankment means the Mont is never cut off. After the new dam is finished and the causeway removed, in 2012, the Couesnon will flow either side of the island. The bridge will end in a submergible jetty. By 2020, for the first time in 150 years, the Mont will become a genuine island again during the highest tides. But will it work? All sorts of other schemes to remove the sand and silt, including laborious dredging operations, have been considered over the past 90 years. The ingenious plan to use the natural power of a revitalised Couesnon was adopted after 10 years of scientific study. It is a plan invented by a committee. No one person had a flash of genius. The plan was adopted only after eliminating all other possibilities.

A large-scale model of the bay was built by a consulting firm in Grenoble, in the French Alps. This model, at 1,000 sq metres or the size of four tennis courts, replicated the forces produced by tides, currents and river, recorded in the bay over four decades. Nothing was left to chance. Four months were spent haggling over the correct consistency of the "model" silt and sand. The first idea tested on the model was to remove the causeway and the existing dam. That helped but only very, very slowly. The second idea was to remove the embankment and convert the old dam to channel and strengthen the flow of the Couesnon. That also worked but over decades rather than years. Finally, the scientists agreed that scrapping the causeway and doubling the size of the dam would do it.

The French government has agreed to pay half the cost. The European Union will contribute. The rest of the money, and the political direction, will come from a "joint committee" of local councils and the regions of Lower Normandy and Brittany.

M. De Beaulaincourt says he is "utterly confident" the scientists have got their calculations right. He rejects the complaints of some locals that the dislodged sand will clog up other parts of the Baie Mont St Michel. Monumental though the quantities are, they will make only an infinitesimal difference to the other sand banks in a bay stretching over 400 sq miles. "Everyone who has worked on this project has been inspired to get it right, precisely because it is Mont St Michel," he said. "I am a Catholic and, to me, the Mont is an inspirational place. But you find that, even for non-believers, they feel a responsibility to do their very best work. This may be partly because it is such a publicly visible project, but it is also something to do with the mystique, the aura, of the Mont itself."

That mystique is global. There is only one Mont St Michel and the precise details of the project could not be repeated elsewhere. But the spirit of the project - the use of brain-power, rather than mechanical or financial power, to work with, rather than against, the grain of nature - offers a model of "sustainable development" which could apply to scores of schemes around the world. If nothing else, the Mont St Michel project should make the world's politicians sit up because it is so gargantuan and yet so, relatively, cheap. As Lewis Carroll nearly said: "Take care of the sense and the pounds will look after themselves." ( reproduced with kind permission from the Independent Newspaper )

## **Manchester Meeting—18th May 2007**

**The 11th North West Regional Meeting will take place on Friday 18th May.**

**The venue is likely to be the Alliance Francaise office in central Manchester and will start at about 7pm and finish about 9.30pm. Full details will appear in the next newsletter.**

**The AFMS would welcome any members who would like to make a presentation / or from students who would like to present on their electives.**



# Back page Notes

## How times have changed: Britons want to be French.....

A famous wit once observed there were two reasons for the British to dislike the French. Firstly, they are too logical and secondly they own France - "a country which we have always judged to be much too good for them".

How times have changed. Now it seems that Britain's middle-class love affair with all things Gallic has reached the point where a fifth of Britons now actually want to be French. A study of attitudes towards our closest neighbour has found that Britons would prefer to work in France or retire to France above any other country, including their own. The ICM survey found that if given a choice of nationality, just over half of Britons under 50 would retain their British passport. But 22 per cent would rather ditch their British status altogether and opt to become French. The findings come amid an upsurge of Francophilia in Britain. Britons now own £4.6bn of property in France and have bought some 51,000 homes across the Channel since 2000. The last French census in 2004 recorded a 50 per cent increase over five years in the number of Britons who live permanently in France to 100,000. About 500,000 Britons spend more than six weeks in France every year. Experts say that the allure of France as a wine-quaffing haven with improved climate, cheaper housing and a higher standard of living has not been dented by the country's stubbornly high unemployment or evidence of social schism following last year's rioting in major cities.

Nick Wall, editor of France magazine, said: "Issues such as the riots are seen as totally separate. I think the British now have a deeper understanding of France and the French. "People like the footballer Thierry Henry or film stars such as Audrey Tatou who have become household names. There is a drift towards France - you go on holiday there, perhaps buy a second home there and ultimately take the decision to move there permanently. "At a time when more Britons are looking to buy abroad, for example in the emerging east European markets, France is an established and attractive option. "The ICM survey, conducted to coincide with a marketing campaign for French wine, found that 32 per cent of Britons would choose France if they were given the choice of moving family and friends to a new location. Some 23 per cent would choose Britain - just four per cent more than would choose Spain or Italy.

France is the favoured place for retirement with 37 per cent wishing to eke out their days in "l'Hexagone" as opposed to 30 per cent opting to stay in Britain. One per cent said they would retire to Germany. The icons of France also seem to be more recognisable to Britons than some home-grown sights with more people able to identify the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe and the Louvre than the Blackpool Tower, Marble Arch or the National Gallery. French cuisine has also increased its stranglehold on British ideas of sophisticated dining. Almost two thirds of people consider a good breakfast to consist of coffee and a croissant, twice the number who choose toast and a cup of tea. Some 40 per cent also believe wine is the perfect drink to accompany a meal. But even British Francophilia has its limits. Separate market research figures suggest that when it comes to wine at least, "les rosbifs" are no longer so enamoured with "la vie française". Britons now drink more Australian wine than French, glugging down 3.5 million cases last year compared to 3.4 million cases of French.

## Advanced French Conversation

There is a French Conversation class ( although this is not organised by the AFMS ) with Dounie Evans which will take place on Saturday 24th February at Wedgwood Memorial College , Barlaston Village, STOKE.

The cost is only £25. Interested parties should call the college on 01782 372105/ 373427 or email the college [Wedgwood.memorial@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:Wedgwood.memorial@stoke.gov.uk) ( [www.sgfl.org.uk/wmc](http://www.sgfl.org.uk/wmc) ).

Please note that this course is organised by the college itself.

## AFMS QUIZ—Answers

Each question contains the initials of the words that make it correct. Find the missing words.  
Answers in next edition

Example I6 = O in a P. Answer I6 Ounces in a Pound.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) 26 = L of the A - Letters in the alphabet                 | 6) 9 = P in the SS — Planets in the solar system  |
| 2) 7 = W of the W - Wonders of the world                     | 7) 88 = K on a P — Keys on a piano                |
| 3) 1001 = AN - Arabian Nights                                | 8) 18 = H on a GC - Holes on a golf course        |
| 4) 12= SOF THE Z -Signs of the zodiac                        | 9) 90 = D in a RA – Degrees in a right angle      |
| 5) 54= CIN A D ( WITH THE J) - Cards in a deck with the jack | 10) 3= BM ( SHTR) - 3 blind mice see how they run |

## Interesting But True

Around a dozen Japanese tourists a year have been reported to need psychological treatment after visiting Paris as the reality of unfriendly locals and scruffy streets clashes with their expectations!!!!

## Committee

**Dr Andrew Hassan**

( President )

**Dr James Taylor**

( Treasurer )

**Dr Helen Sykes**

( Membership Secretary)

( [helen.sykes@nhs.net](mailto:helen.sykes@nhs.net) )

**Robyn Hughes**

( Webmaster )

**Dr Mark Savage**

**Dr Nicola Strickland**

**Dr Mark Cottrill**

( co-opted member)

**Dr Colin Mumford**

**Dr Helen Mackay**

**Dr Rex Melville**

**Dr Emma Reynish**

**Dr Andrew Leitch**

Student Representatives

Laurie Hanna

## Obituary

The AFMS would like to pass on its sympathies to the family and friends of Dr Helen

Annis who died on December 7th 2006.

## Administrative Secretary

Please send details of any change of address, incorrect addresses, subscriptions and changes in email to

Tony Ridge

Admin Sec AFMS

9 Babbacombe Road

Childwall

Liverpool L16 9JN

[tonyridge72@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tonyridge72@yahoo.co.uk)