

FRANCE – October 2014

Friday 3 October

What a pleasure to arrive at La Maison to find it warm and clean, that is apart from a few cobwebs and spiders. Rick immediately set to mowing the lawns as rain was forecast for tomorrow afternoon. Even the lawns weren't too bad, the geranium's are still going strong but quite a few weeds have appeared on the gravel – never mind, all is easily sorted. However, my big pot of India Yellow paint had toppled over and completely emptied itself on the floor. I couldn't have put the top on properly and now all the other tins that fell into it are well and truly stuck. After my Shepard's Pie it was an early night for Rick as he is worn out after finishing the kitchen roof at home and all that mowing he did here.



Saturday 4 October

It's a beautiful day again. I researched restaurants that we need to try in Alençon and then we set off to buy a calor gas stove for when the weather turns colder. We got a bit carried away at Le Clerc Wine Festival and if a doctor were to spot our purchases he may start prescribing us Nalmefene - the new drug for nearly alcoholics. I did a bit more weeding and picked a bowl full of hazelnuts from the garden. Down came the rain as predicted.

The new calor heater came without a regulator and gas bottle so it was off to Carrouges to sort it out. Rick had to sign loads of forms to purchase the bottle and as he was having difficulty getting the girl to understand he sent her out to me (sitting in the car sheltering from the heavy rain) as apparently I could speak French! Well, I managed to get her to understand but had absolutely no idea what she replied. I did try very hard to complete a sentence rather than just say the important words followed by loads of hand signals. Anyway, it turned out that we could buy a regulator at the shop that was almost next door. We have never ever been to this shop as we thought it just sold old fashioned, dusty souvenirs. We were right, it was about 50 years behind the times. The shop door had a metal bucket with bungee straps attached so that when you pushed it open it scraped along the floor and alerted the shopkeeper to a customer. When the door closed the bungee straps shot it back in place ready for the next customer to enter. Although it was hilarious it was a good find as they do sell lots of interesting bits and bobs.



Back at the house Rick fixed it up but he said it was really difficult and he had to use his full strength to attach the bits to the hose. Never mind, the result was brilliant – we have basked in front of the fire all evening while watching “Strictly” even though its not really cold just a bit wet outside.

Sunday 5 October

Another lovely day, it started off a bit chilly but as the day progressed it turned quite warm. In the morning Rick cemented the drainage gully between us and next door while I took the wire brush to the concrete floor above the outside stairs.



We thought it would be a good day to have lunch in Alencon. There were quite a few restaurants in the centre of the town but we could only find **one** open. Initially there was hardly a soul about, where do they all go, where are they having lunch and how are the holiday makers suppose to find something to eat! It's strange to find everything closed as pubs and restaurants are really busy on Sunday's at home. We had been to this restaurant once before and all the fish had been frozen so this time we stuck to steak and chips -very tough steak. It was pleasant sitting in the sun though. On the way back to the car we saw people, quite a few actually, as the car park was being used for a Vintage Car Rally.



Back at La Maison I painted the bit I had prepared in the morning with a grey sealant, unfortunately I ran out of sealant before I finished. Rick mixed up some cement and took the church door step apart and filled in the gaps. I then tackled the ivy and finished weeding by the house. Pierre came by and showed us a cage with four baby rabbits ready to fatten up for eating. I was conscious of trying to pronounce “lapin” correctly and not make the mistake I made last time by confusing it with “le penis” pronounced very similarly. You've got to get your “le” and “la” right! I asked Pierre if he had been fishing (aller a la peche) but he had been hunting instead. In the garden there was a

huge pile of wood from trees that had been cut down previously and we were hoping to have a bonfire to save us lots of trips to the tip. Bonfires are frowned upon here but we took our chances and lit one about 7pm as we knew if there were any problems rain was forecast. It was brilliant as it only took about an hour to get rid of everything. There was lots of smelly cheese and pate asking to be eaten up while watching the dancing and Downton Abbey. It's great having the television working.



Monday 5 October

We had real lie-in, very nice too. As predicted the rain came and periodically we had to go and check Rick's new gully, I am sure this is a man thing! Rick started sorting out one of the bedroom windows while I played about with my Michel Thomas French course. It's great, really great and I have had loads of French courses over the years. It seems I am doing well, that is until I try it out real time.



Now this is spooky, I have been reading "Bellman & Black" which is about a man who has been spooked since he shot dead a rook when he was ten years old. Rooks came to haunt him throughout his life. Well I finished the book and this afternoon we removed the fireplace cover ready to light the fire. In the basket there are a few twigs, birds do that to see if they can build a nest there. Then in the grate are two dead rooks and the cover that we removed has marks all over it where they tried to get out !!! Horrible, horrible, horrible. Rick said they were very dried out and would be useful to light the fire with! He is not superstitious.

It's a rotten day, rain from 11am onwards. At teatime we went into Carrouges to get Rick a baguette but the Boulangerie was closed as was everything else (usual thing) but we were re-directed to the Prixmo Supermarket where we got the gas yesterday. It always looks as if it is closing down as the shelves and freezers are half empty but the girl is under the impression that I speak fluent French – thank you Rick.

Tonight we are feeling like real “Anoraks” because we are watching the the Motorhome Channel (Free Sat 402). To make us feel a bit more normal we are testing out the wine from the Le Clerc Wine Festival. Best result is “Touraine 2013 Sauvignon at 2 euros 95 that is £2.41 a bottle. Hope it travels as we are going to get loads more tomorrow.



Check out the dead rooks



Tuesday 6 October

Poured with rain all day yet again. Revisited the Le Clerc Wine Festival and topped up with loads of wine. We're determined to find somewhere good to eat and tried out one of the Trip Advisor recommendations “Dans Ma Cuisine” in the centre of Alencon. Good thing is that you can park in the centre for free between the hours of 12:00 and 14:00. Disappointed with the restaurant though as it was quite modern, therefore had a younger trendy clientèle and although everything was fresh and cooked to order it was really just an upmarket burger bar. I explained that I couldn't have anything with flour and she seemed to understand but my chicken came on a huge slice of bread, then to top it all she offered me gateaux. Oh, well keep on trying.



It's strange but one side of the house is uphill and the other is downhill. The rain has been belting up and down both sides. Apples keep turning up at the kitchen door as they are rolling down from the trees up the hill.

The rain was unbelievable, Rick came in the kitchen door after an unsuccessful internet church visit and the rain came flooding in. There's also a leak in one of the lounge windows.

Had to light all the fires and snuggle down.

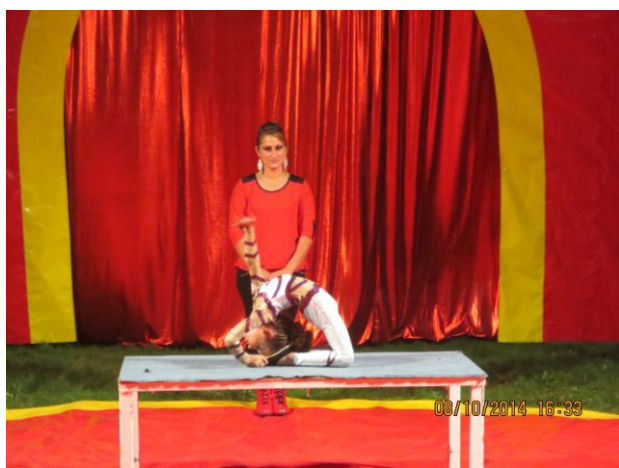
Wednesday 7 October

Still raining but there have been a few breaks and its not so cold. Rick has been busy finishing off rubbing down the windows and re-puttying them and I am putting the wood stain and preserver on. Rick has also started tiling the last lounge alcove.



For days we have been watching a circus camel sitting on the verge in Alencon and for years I have been wanting to go to a French Circus. Today Rick relented and I had such a fantastic time, I really loved it. It was so much smaller than we anticipated and really was a family affair with an audience of about 50. **I would have loved it even if I hadn't been asked to join the clown in the ring !** We were the only couple without any children. They had a beautiful pony, and a tiny fat miniature pony, a llama and the highlight was the enormous brute of a two hump, shaggy camel that grinned at you and went lolloping around the ring. They put on a good show with high wire stuff, juggling and balancing acts. I know lots of people wouldn't have liked the little, double joined girl (about 6 years old) all done up with make-up and an elaborate hairstyle and costume but she entertained us with such poise and elegance. Her mother, the trapeze artiste, looked so proud of her. It was only 10 euros to get in and you could buy popcorn for 2 euros.

Then we struck gold, as we finally found the best restaurant in Alencon. It's by the Brico Depot and we have been eyeing it up for quite sometime, it's called L'Alezan. Probably it should be kept for special occasions but lunchtimes are reasonable.

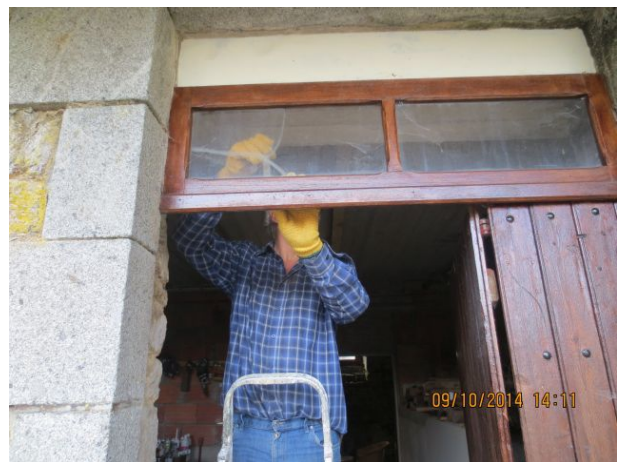


I now know what my next volunteer job is going to be – it's the circus !!!!

Thursday 8 October & Friday 9 October



It was a day for finishing the jobs, that is the bedroom windows, alcove tiling, cleaning out the garage, replacing the workshop glass and a trip to the tip. We've also tried to get most of the ivy off the church wall and back stairs. The church wall needs rebuilding in parts but its a job for next year. Rick's had a go at filling in the edges around the lounge window that leaked. We took a walk up the hill hoping to gather some chestnuts but we were either too early or it's not a good year for them.



We found a bus stop by "The Marie" it takes you into Alencon for about 1 euro, 50 but you have to order it by telephone the day before. We finished off the week with my Beef Bourguignon and stocked up with smelly cheeses to take home.

Next year we start our most exciting French project yet, that is installing the staircase and opening up the loft space. It's been a very enjoyable week when we have been able to mix a bit of work with a bit of pleasure. Rick's been very quiet about his betting, he says it's in test mode.

Bye for now – I'm off to join the Circus !!!