

Letting off steam!

Dear Reader

Welcome to the third edition of my 'less-ambitious' *Binns Breaks (BB)* series. *BB3* and the *Mountain Magic* supplement provide you with 100 pages of varied touring ideas, in both France and Britain. But first, let me 'steam' a bit.

Healthy Britain I – but only if we say 'No' to the Euro

We're told when we meet five 'economic' tests we can vote – though two cynical 'possibilities' may yet delay a referendum beyond 2005. Did Blair do a pre-election deal with Murdoch? Is Brown a closet sceptic? However, if we do get to vote will all voters really understand the full ramifications of a 'Yes'?

One of myriad ramifications: what £-to-€ rate will be set-in-stone if 'Yes'? Europe wants the equivalent of Dm 3.2; British business Dm 2.6-2.7, a 20% devaluation. Any devaluation will bring inflation. This, coupled with massive planned Government spending hikes and non-stop house price rises, or falling growth rates, or even recession, would require, as in the past, instant +/- interest rate changes. That's not possible when we have one EU rate. For Blair 'No' is 'unpatriotic', 'could devastate the country', and 'millions of jobs depend on adopting the €' (yet we're out now and our jobless total is Europe's lowest); and some businessmen claim a 'Yes' would 'enhance our sovereignty'. Before the election Brown claimed he had created 'stability' and 'a sound economy'; the very reasons then why we should not risk the alternatives!

Les frivolités – a euphemism for 'testicles' – to them all. Many of us are only too acutely aware of the EU harmonisation octopus threat: Schröder wants the 'full Monty'; Jospin asks for 'one economic government'. Arguably, the € will lead inexorably, drip-drip, year-by-year, to a single state 'Europe'. The EU cannot, long-term, sustain one currency without drawing together all the strands of fiscal, monetary, employment and most other policies: one currency, one bank interest rate, one set of VAT rates, common levels of tax for fuel, companies and individuals, and one set of laws for almost everything.

We're told we cannot survive on our own. Consider the proud Swiss. On every account, compared with the EU, they thrive: lower unemployment, a stronger currency, higher per capita income, larger financial surpluses, and so on. They earn more from the EU than we do (and we are 'insiders'). They have no Common Agricultural Policy; no Social Chapter; and no harmonisation. They have independence, sovereignty and financial strength. No wonder that 75% of them rejected closer EU ties a year ago. We are the world's fourth largest economy; of course we can survive on our own. Give Blair a 'Harvey Smith': vote 'No'.

Healthy Britain II – but only if we adopt improved eating régimes

For 30 years I've been a *cuisine moderne* fan – ever since I first encountered the welcome changes taking root in French kitchens. Now commonplace, 'modern cooking' ensures basic ingredients count most and rich sauces are a thing of the past. Flour, butter, cream and saturated fat are used far less; but, in reality, nothing like as sparingly as they should be.

During the last 30 months I have had to wake-up, urgently, to the benefits of a healthy eating régime. Much too late but never too late! Modern cooking has not gone anything like far enough down the healthy eating road. Cancer, heart problems, obesity, general ill-health; so much good would come from a wider awareness of the commonsense habits needed to improve eating régimes.

Everybody involved with food, from growers and producers to chefs, whether the latter be amateurs at home or paid cooks in restaurants, cafés, pubs, bistros, fast-food outlets, food factories, hospitals, canteens or wherever – and most certainly all cookery writers and the panjandrum band of TV chefs – must lead the way, and conspicuously at that. We must adopt more commonsense habits.

The monumentally tragic BSE and foot and mouth crises have exposed the suspect ways most livestock have been fed during recent decades. Chemicals, hormones, contaminated feed, kitchen slops; anything and everything foul (including fowl) has been fed to and/or injected into livestock or sprayed on plants. Food suppliers, from farms to factories, have made us all pay a heavy price for their 'modern-day' production and processing 'methods'.

Modern cooking, with its propensity for presentation, is too often utterly out of sync: too few vegetables and too much protein are just two examples. Other major flaws are that the 'benefits' gained from courses one, two and/or three go overboard when the cheese platter or trolley are rolled out, followed by the dessert offerings – both more often than not large doses of saturated fat disguised in irresistible clothes. We are all guilty, but especially TV chefs; we adore the saturated fat trilogy of dairy produce, pastry and chocolate.

Every child, man and woman should eat, wherever the food is consumed, far less red meat, far less saturated fats, and far more fruit, vegetables and fish – and that's just a start. Everybody involved with food must lead the way – NOW!

Blockades – the French variety

When does summer begin and end? When the French 'blockade' season starts and finishes. Fishermen, lorry drivers, seamen, dockers, farmers, pilots, air-traffic controllers: year-in, year-out, they play the game – primarily with Brits as their victims. To be fair 2001 has seen few problems.

However, last year's varieties caused horrendous problems and costs for readers – and for me too; but especially for those with children and jobs to return to. The hostility encountered at blockades by some of my readers made awful reading. France needs a Mme Thatcher to sort out the nation's industrial relations.

Last but not least

Please keep writing and fill me in on any aspect of your travels in both France and Britain. I'll always reply. My address is 6 Chandlers House, The Moorings, Leamington Spa CV31 3QD (different from the one in *FLF*). My website is www.richard-binns.co.uk The latter will keep you up-to-date on my health problems and has an A4 page of 'Good Prostate (and Breast) Health' eating régime notes. These are also available from me; send a s.a.e. please.

Keep well. Enjoy life!

