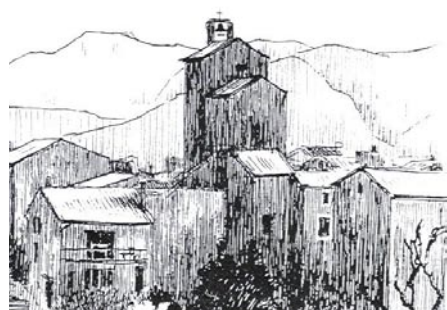


THE DOUBLE LIFE OF JEAN AND DONALD CREASY: Part 2, *vive la difference – and the similarities!*

The population of Marcham is ten times that of Molières village itself where the temperature is 5°-10° higher and the views are of mountains all round instead of the flat plains of Oxfordshire. So perhaps it is surprising to find that in many ways life in the two villages is very similar. As we have become more and more part of the community we have found that it is made up of the same mix of people – with the same pleasures and the same worries; unemployment is high and there is concern for the care of the elderly. Family support is very strong – stronger perhaps than in UK – and not



many folk fail to rendezvous for Sunday lunch with parents or relations. There are active church and chapel congregations and a very lively parish council which in France has the duties equivalent to those of the district councils in England, including also upkeep of the village roads and public buildings, sewerage and water supply. Local government is very much a grass roots affair – those responsible are fellow village people. The church clock can be heard throughout the village and the valley below. It strikes the hour and then repeats it two minutes later – and for good measure tolls the angelus at 8am, noon and 6pm. So at mid-day it strikes 42 times! Molières primary school has a well-deserved reputation and has about the same number of children as Marcham School, but they only attend four days a week; Wednesday is always a holiday.



There are now no shops left in Molières, but several travelling vans come to the village – a bread van every day except Monday, and a butcher, a fishmonger and a greengrocer once a week. They hoot and park by the

fountain and we come and make our purchases. It's a time to chat and exchange news – the retired men gather there for up to an hour before the bread van arrives, even on Mondays when it doesn't come! Some other things are different of course; we drive on the other side of the road, but most of the roads in Molières are too narrow to get a car down at all so there is a parking problem, just like in Marcham. Most families have a car because the minibus runs only twice a week into Le Vigan, our market town, which is about the same distance away as Abingdon is from Marcham.

Although much smaller than Abingdon, Le Vigan is very well equipped with shops and services – eight dentists, twelve doctors, nine hairdressers, four chemists, three supermarkets, etc. The huge Saturday market is a delight, and includes lots of local produce and craft stalls. We enjoy the friendliness here. You always say hello to anyone you meet in the street and if you know them you always shake hands (or kiss!). And although people are more laid back – why put off until tomorrow

what you could equally well put off until the next day! – the opportunity for a knees up or other jollity is seized with both hands! For example VE Day is a bank holiday and after the simple ceremony at the war memorial performed by the mayor (no clergy are present) we all troop off to the village hall for aperitifs provided by the parish council. When we celebrated our Golden Wedding we put a notice up by the fountain inviting people to join us for a drink that evening and about 130 turned up, effectively closing the road for a couple of hours. On 13 July (eve of National Day) there is a village feast in the square below the church and fireworks afterwards. This enables one to go into Le Vigan the next day to enjoy the celebrations there.



There is a village club, Les Olivettes – a bit like the Marcham Society – which organises walks, fêtes, concerts, social evenings and so on. We join in all these, sometimes initiating events ourselves. For several years a Craft Fair was held annually in Molières and we served 'English Teas' on our front lawn. Jean plays the harmonium in the church once a month, shakes a tin for the Red Cross outside the supermarket on their flag day, goes to a sewing circle one afternoon a week, belongs to a walking group (for those of 'a certain age'), visits the elderly and the sick, and Donald plays bridge more frequently than in Marcham.

And twice each year – in the spring and again in the autumn – we pack our bags and say, "We are going home".