

# Friday 13<sup>th</sup>



## Life under lockdown on MARGARET WROUGHTON II



*MWII is berthed at the Port de Plaisance, Cambrai, France – but for how long?*

Friday 13th March was the day that coronavirus changed everything here. Within the space of 4 days, the country went into progressive lock down by Presidential Decree. M. Macron told the nation that France was on a war footing: at noon on Tuesday 17th normal life came to a complete halt.



March had got off to a promising start. The storms of February were replaced by bright sunshine; we set off from Arras towards Amiens, intending to pick up friends at Cambrai for the journey along the Canal St Quentin. MWII berthed in the Port de Plaisance on 9th March, with all systems running well. In readiness for their visit we got the bikes out on to the quay and retrieved our car from Arras.



*Under way near Arras on the Scarpe Supérieure*

# AUX HALLES



Life seemed fairly normal and during that week we were still able to provision in the local markets.

*Oysters and scallops are considered an essential part of local cuisine in northern France*



Les Halles (Market Hall) at Cambrai, on Saturday 14th March

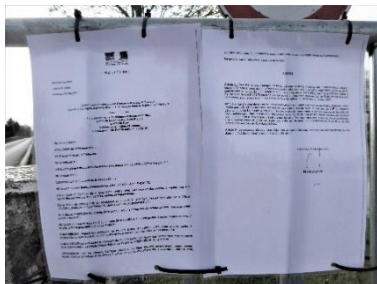
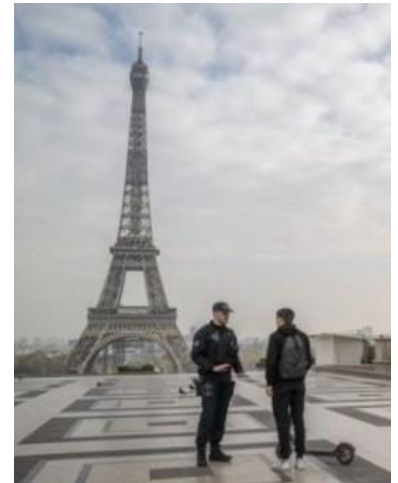




*Hotel de Ville, Cambrai*

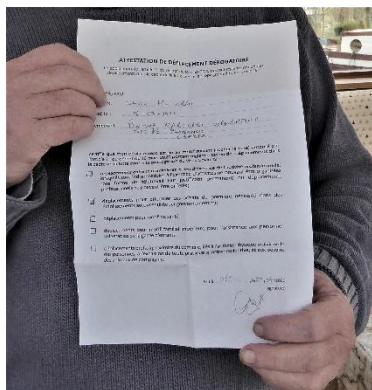
However, immediately after noon on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup>, the streets emptied as the freedom to leave home became curtailed, non-essential travel was banned and the canal system was shut to leisure traffic. Our friends wouldn't be able to visit any time soon and *MWII* would have to stay in Cambrai for at least a month.

Now, personal exercise outside is only allowed for just 1 hour per day within 1 km of home. Every time we step off *MWII* we must carry a signed and dated 'attestation', bearing name, date of birth, address, saying why we're out of doors and when we left the boat – to the minute. There's little reason to go ashore anyway, as almost nothing is open except for food stores and pharmacies. In theory this is a great time to get on with those long overdue jobs on board, but with all the hardware shops firmly shut, that's not so easy unless you already have the necessary supplies on board.



*The canal and towpath are shut by official order of the Préfet du Nord*

Make no mistake, these rules aren't advisory, they're the law. So far, police in France have carried out about 6 million spot checks and issued more than 400,000 fines to people breaking the confinement rules. Persistent offenders are even facing gaol terms.



*A ministerial decree states that the going out 'attestation' must be carried at all times*



*Police roadblocks were set up to check on people's movements, especially at the beginning of the lock down, and at least twice each day a patrol van comes by the Port de Plaisance*



*In the local park, adult exercise equipment is still accessible, but the children's playground is locked by order of Cambrai's mayor*

France has a good health care system, but it's been under a lot of pressure. Here in the north, things aren't too bad, so far, but eastern France has been particularly hard hit. Fortunately, the centralised system of government here has facilitated the evacuation of critically ill patients from Alsace in the east to hospitals with spare beds in the south and west of the country.



*A specially adapted high-speed TGV train transports patients across France to the Loire. The train is operated by volunteer crews from SNCF (French National Railways), working alongside medical teams.*



*Loading patients on board at Strasbourg station*



*As in other countries, the efforts of French health care workers have been recognized by a grateful public each evening with applause and music.*

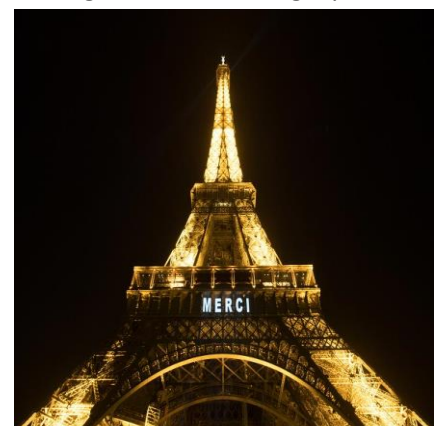
*A special message of thanks lights up the Eiffel Tower*



*A French Air Force Morphée A330 Airbus flew patients from Basel-Mulhouse airport to Marseilles. The plane is specially configured as a long-haul intensive care unit.*



As part of 'Operation Resilience', German military aircraft and Army helicopters have also been used to move patients to hospitals in Germany, Switzerland and Luxembourg. This process has been made possible by the European Air Transport Command, created in 2010 to share the airlifting capacity for transport, supplies and medical evacuation of seven countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, and Italy.



So, we're sitting out coronavirus in Cambrai. The Port de Plaisance is currently home for the 6 British and 3 French boats that have residents on board; other barges await the return of their crews who are grounded in other countries. The harbour master lives afloat and his de facto deputy has a house on the quayside - both are very helpful and keep us up to date.

The liveboards are within sight of each other and together we've formed a small self-help community, in the way that boating folk all over the world do. Whilst the current rules mean that we're not allowed onto each other's boats, it's easy to speak to our fellow bargees electronically, or as they go by on their daily walks. In fact, 2 metres is the usual distance for talking from shoreside to someone on deck, or vice versa.



*PEKE, the blue barge on the right, is the home of the French Capitaine du Port. The other blue boat is the British barge FOWEY BELLE.*



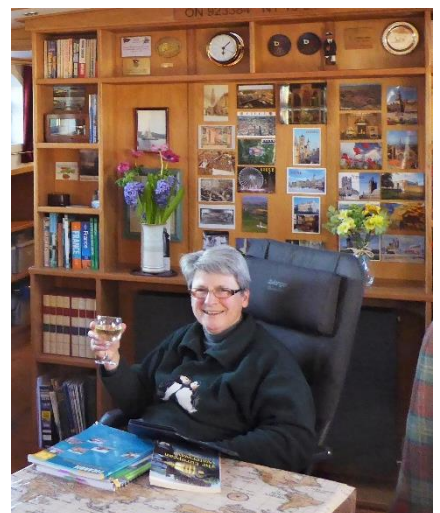
*The locks remain firmly shut to all but essential commercial traffic*



*Our nearest neighbour is a British narrowboat, VECTOR. The British skipper is here, but his Belgian partner isn't allowed to return at present. Close by are British barge LINDA and French barge PERIDOT, both with resident crews*



*And cocktail hour is a solitary affair!*





*Social distancing...*



Ashore, most people seem to be adhering to the social distancing rules. Employees in shops wear protective gloves and masks, with screens separating checkout staff from customers, whilst the rest of us simply keep well apart when shopping or exercising. Some stores limit the numbers going in at any one time, for example small boulangeries or greengrocers, but supermarkets aren't that busy and shelves are generally well-stocked after

some initial shortages. President Macron has exhorted people to 'buy French' wherever possible, to ease pressure on supply chains and support the country's agricultural sector. Meanwhile, some expensive or exotic products that are more usually found in the restaurant trade are now being sold at a discount by carrier supermarket chains.



*A rare site on a usually busy boulevard alongside the canal*



*Staff at work in our local Aldi - there's plenty of stock here..... for now...*



Fortunately, there are far worse places to be stuck than here in Cambrai. Having only recently returned from a short visit home to Cornwall, we never seriously considered returning to the UK. The French seem to be well organised, but we're preparing for the long haul as the peak of the infection period has yet to arrive. If China is anything to go by, we reckon we shall have to stay on board here until at least mid-summer – if not longer.....



**Georgie and Gavin McLaren**