

# ONE SUMMER IN NORMANDY

Stephen Cooper

## 1

I turned 16 in January 1964 and started to plan my summer holidays. I had spent three weeks the previous year cycling from Liverpool to Cornwall and back with five friends; but at the time I had a strong desire to do something different, and to do it on my own. My class mates had begun growing their hair, discussing pop music for longer than I thought was interesting, and going to parties. Some of them even had girlfriends. Whilst I would have given my all to have one, I couldn't see any ready or unembarrassing way of doing so. I was at a boys Grammar School, and there was no casual way of forming such a friendship, or for that matter of learning to dance - which seemed to be the pre-requisite for going to parties - so I had decided to immerse myself in study.

I was in the Lower Sixth, having obtained a string of high grades at O level passes, and my A level subjects were History, Latin and French. I was proficient at all these, because I was diligent and had a good memory, rather than highly intelligent, but so many boys had chosen Science rather than Arts subjects that the Lower VIth Arts class was much diminished; and I was regarded as something of a star.

I found Latin difficult, though I could construe it well enough to obtain an A grade. My favourite subject was History; and I also liked French; but the French A level course was very literary, with little focus on the spoken language, so I decided to spend the Summer holidays in France. It seemed like a relatively easy and pleasant way to boost my academic performance and get away from the danger of parties. I was fortunate, in that my father could afford to indulge my whim.

I contacted an organisation which, if memory serves, was called the Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges, and arranged to spend the school summer holidays *En Famille*, with a family in Caen, Normandy, who would provide me with board and lodging, and guaranteed conversation in French for several hours a day. Otherwise, I could spend my time as I wished.

The journey on the coach down from Liverpool to Southampton was long and wearisome because, although I was a keen reader, I have never been able to read on

a bus or in a car without feeling sick. By contrast the ferry from Southampton to Cherbourg, and the train from Cherbourg to Caen started to fill me with excitement. What would I find when I got there? I had been to Paris, but only on a school trip. Six weeks in Normandy, on my own except for the French, seemed like a great adventure.

Madame Dubosq met me at the station. I suppose she recognised me by the style of my 'mac' and my Buddy Holly spectacles, and that certain unmistakable air of Englishness which we all carried with us, before the cultural revolution started to erode our insularity. For my part, I remember being greeted by a small, wiry woman of indeterminate age and a passing resemblance to Edith Piaf, before she finally wasted away entirely.

I think it was Mme Dubosq who drove me home - something which I thought a little unusual since my mother never learned to drive. Home was 64 *Rue de l'Arquette*, a large detached house backing onto the River Orne, perhaps a mile from the Abbaye aux Hommes, with a large garden which one reached by a long flight of steps leading down from the street. I had not been there long when Monsieur Dubosq, who soon discovered my interest in history, explained that *Rue de l'Arquette* was a corruption of *Rue de la Requête* (Request Street). It was thought that the inhabitants had at one time filed some kind of request with the authorities, though whether this had ever been acceded to remained unknown. Looking back on it, I wonder whether the street might rather have been named after a poor man's 'Court of Requests', such as we had in England between 1485 and 1642.

I said that Mme. Dubosq was of indeterminate age; and the same could be said of Monsieur. They had a son who was not long married, and may have been around 28; and they had been spent the entirety of the Second World War (which we always called 'the War') in Caen. So perhaps they were both around 60. Monsieur Dubosq was certainly still at work. Though I did not discover his trade or profession, I would think he worked in an office, possibly as an accountant, or *notaire*, or in insurance. He carried a briefcase, appeared to work office hours, had a car and seemed to live a moderately comfortable, though not luxurious, life.

The Dubosqs had other boys or young men staying with them that summer *En Famille*: Geoff, the only other English person, possibly in his early 30s, who claimed to be perfecting his French, but never seemed to make any progress at it; Michael Hammer, German, around 16; Rainer, a couple of years older, also German; and John Dove, who was the misfit.

None of them was there for the whole six weeks, and (dare I say it) none of them was as diligent or as good at French as me. I was therefore (once again unjustly) the star pupil, at least Monsieur Dubosq started treating me as such. He called me *Étienne*, and then *Saint-Étienne* (Saint Stephen), which was pleasing at the time, but not a good thing in the medium term, since it gave me a false idea of my fluency and true ability. After a week or two when I took to diving and swimming in the River Orne at the back of the house, which others found too cold, he announced '*C'est Saint- Étienne qui est le plus fort*' ('It is Saint Stephen who is the

strongest'), which really marked me out as the goodie-goodie. To make things worse, Mme Dubosq clearly thought the same. She would say '*Vous parlez parfaitement bien Français*' ('You speak French perfectly well'), and '*Vos parents doivent être très contents de vous*' ('Your parents must be very pleased with you'). Which they were. Note that the Dubosqs always called me '*vous*' rather than '*tu*', which I took as a mark of respect.

In view of subsequent and recent events (I write in 2018, two years after the English and Welsh voted to leave the European Union) I should say something about politics. The British government had elected not to join the EEC (or 'Common Market') when it was negotiated in 1957. The Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan applied to join in 1963, but that application was rejected by the French President Charles de Gaulle (just as Harold Wilson's was not long afterwards). However, so far as the Dubosqs were concerned, Britain was bound to join one day, since international co-operation of this kind was the only way forward. Mme Dubosq explained it to me very simply '*Ça se rapproche, Étienne*' ('We are all getting closer, Stephen'). It was an entirely understandable reaction on the part of a family who had spent four years of their early married life under German occupation; and one that my mother and father (who had lived through the Blitz on Merseyside) sympathised with instinctively.

## 2

I was very green (before the term meant 'eco-friendly'); and unversed in the ways in which France was different. When I first arrived in her home, Madame Dubosq showed me my room at the top of the house, and where the bathroom was; but she did not explain how anything worked. The bed had a duvet, with a single covering over it. I was used to sheets and blankets, and assumed that I should sleep between the thing covering the duvet and the duvet itself. Since I didn't know what a duvet was, I assumed that was part of the mattress, and that only a single sheet was provided, because of the warm climate. When Mme Dubosq went into the bedroom the next day, she found the bed unslept in, and asked me why, and where I had slept, if not in the bed. I couldn't think of any respectable explanation, and I simply blushed and stuttered. She must have thought I was a strange one - *un drôle de garçon* - on this account, at first. She may also have thought it odd that I never left any sign of using the bidet, throughout the whole six weeks I was there; but then I didn't know what that was for either.

My most embarrassing moment was one which I managed to conceal. This occurred because, although Madame fed us very well, I was young and frequently got hungry, especially in the early morning. One day, some weeks into the holiday, when I knew my way around the house, I decided to pilfer some bread from the kitchen. I stole down the two flights of stairs, managing to escape detection, found

the breadbin and a sharp knife, and in the half-light proceeded to saw some distance into the middle finger on my right hand, whilst also cutting myself a large slice of bloody bread. Being somewhat stoical by nature, I managed to suppress both a howl and an oath, wipe the blood up, wash the knife and restore the bread whence it came, without (so far as I know) attracting attention. Having consumed the bread and the strange kind of jam which now flavoured it, the problem then was to staunch the flow of blood and heal the wound. Groping around, I managed to find enough tissue paper to wrap the finger several times round, and tie a rudimentary knot. I went back to bed, and managed to sleep for several hours more. In the morning, the wound had healed, sufficiently that I never felt the need to seek medical assistance, or admit what I had done. Mme. Dubosq never seemed to notice the diminution in the bread supply; but it would probably have been better if I had had the finger stitched because I still bear a scar to this day.

I narrowly escaped another catastrophe. I probably arrived in early July. The American boy John Dove arrived a couple of weeks later. After a few days, he showed me a magazine he had hidden under his bed, which was an issue of *Playboy*. The sight of semi-naked nubile women, and the fact that there were magazines available to the public where pictures of them were openly displayed, came as a troubling revelation to me. I decided to ignore the magazine if I could, but found myself irresistibly drawn to it, especially on occasions when the family, and John, went out. One evening, I was almost discovered looking at it, and only just managed to hide it in time. Fortunately, temptation was removed before long because John was sent back to England, and took his magazine with him.

### 3

I spent a lot of time walking around Caen, despite the fact that it was a hot summer. I walked to the *Abbaye aux Hommes* and the *Abbaye aux Dames*, and to the Castle and the new University. I was nervous about going into the churches, because they were Catholic and I had been brought up in the Protestant tradition. (I thought that, if I went into a Catholic church, I was obliged to kneel and cross myself; and it was only after I returned to England that one of the masters at my school told me that this was untrue). At the same time, I felt nervous about going into the University buildings, because they seemed to be populated with exciting and excited young people, who went around in couples, and displayed affection for one another in public, of a kind I had never seen my parents engage in.

One day, Madame Dubosq told me that I really ought to visit the Botanical Gardens, because they had a plant there which only flowered once every hundred years, and this was the very year when this was due to happen. I think the plant was called the *Victoria Regia*, presumably because it was originally brought back to Europe by a British collector in the first year of Victoria's reign. Whether it actually

flowered in 1964 in Caen, I cannot remember. I suppose I was not very interested in botany, and probably spent most of the day thinking about other things, like those students at the University who were clearly having such a good time.

I also got a bus to Mont Saint-Michel, in South-West Normandy (in the Middle Ages, it had belonged to the Dukes of Brittany). Among the very few memorabilia I have of that time are the advertisement for this excursion, and the ticket for Mont Saint-Michel, though again I remember very little about it, except that the guide kept repeating that it the building was *Une Merveille* (A Wonder), and that it was certainly a lot bigger than St Michael's Mount in Cornwall.

*Rue de l'Arquette* ran parallel to the River Orne, and on the other side of river from the landing stage from which I swam there was a large, flat open area called *La Prairie* (the field). There was a stadium with a velodrome there, and you could get to it on foot, though only by a long and circuitous route, since not many bridges had survived the bombing and shelling during the War. One day, Monsieur Dubosq told me that a *Nocturne* was to be held there that Saturday, featuring the great French champions; and I walked around there in the evening and bought a ticket, for 5 Francs. (I still have the ticket, dated 25 July 1964 - see Illustrations).

I was a cyclist in England. Though not a member of a club, I went out nearly every Sunday with my friends, usually into North Wales from Liverpool, though sometimes into Cheshire or Lancashire, and on one famous occasion reaching Betwys-y-Coed, and the Swallow Falls. We followed the *Tour de France* avidly, although it was dominated in those days by French riders, and no Briton had ever won it. The Tour in 1964 had been won by the great Norman rider, Jacques Anquetil (for the fifth time!), with Raymond Poulidor in second place and Federico Bahamontes of Spain (the great climber) in third. Imagine how I felt when I found that they were all three riding that night in the stadium at Caen!

I bought a ticket and had a joke with a guy who recognised my accent and said he was from Brittany. So, that gave us something in common:

*Vous, vous venez de la Grande Bretagne.*

*Moi, je viens de la Petite Bretagne.*

(You come from Great Britain.

I come from Little Britain).

I was amazed by the energy and the commitment of the riders, given that they had just raced almost every day for three weeks, and completed over 2,000 kilometres cycling around France. There was a series of races of different kinds throughout the evening, the centre-piece being a stand-off between Anquetil and Poulidor, which attracted extravagant roaring from the crowd - 'ANQU-E-TIL', 'POUL-I-DOR', over and over again, except that POUL-I-DOR was sometimes abbreviated to 'Pou-Pou'. This did not indicate disapproval by the way - it was a term of affection, the French for 'poo' in the lavatorial sense being 'caca'.

If I remember rightly, Anquetil won every race that night, just as he always beat Poulidor in the *Tour de France*. Poor old Poo-Poo was runner-up to him on three occasions, and became known as 'the Eternal Second', yet he was very popular in France, especially South of the Loire, where he came from. Two years after the event in Caen, when I returned to France, I found out why. My friend Jacques Duffau told me that Anquetil would always beat Poulidor, because Poulidor was *bête* (stupid). Yet this was the reason why a large part of the French public loved him: he raced with his heart, not his head.

#### 4

The other Englishman who stayed at 64, *Rue de l'Arquette* that summer was Geoff, a nice fellow who had once been a racing cyclist in France, competing I think in minor events. Now retired and putting on weight, he liked to come back to France periodically, mostly I think for relaxation, though he said it was to improve his French; but Madame Dubosq thought that he did not try very hard, and had made little progress in the language. Nor, she informed me, in the marriage stakes. I think this was because Geoff was shy but perhaps he was simply uninterested in women. At the time, I thought this was unnatural thing (my parents were celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary that year, and went abroad - to Italy - for the first time, to mark the occasion).

Geoff's unmarried state was the subject of conversation at table, when he wasn't there. Madame Dubosq doubted if he was the marrying kind; but Rainer thought he would surprise them all one day: '*Tout a coup, il est marié!*' He said, waving his fork at us over the mashed potato puree. '*All of a sudden, [you will find] he is married!*'

Geoff did me a great favour that Summer, by suggesting that I hire a bike, and coming with me to choose one. I hired a racing bike and greatly enjoyed the freedom it gave me, for the new few weeks. I cycled out often, along major but uncrowded roads, with the help of a Michelin map, fanning out to Thury-Harcourt, Bayeux, the seaside resorts and invasion beaches to the North, and as far as the new bridge at Tancarville to the East. As I pedalled, I practised my French, thought about school, and about my parents and my brother and sister, and wondered whether it might ever be possible to strike up a friendship with a girl, without going to parties. I couldn't conceive of going through life without being married and having children, but didn't know where to make a start in that direction. I also wondered what I might do after I left school, but decided that I would go to University first, so as to postpone the evil day. After all, my brother had done that and had almost immediately met a girl there too.

On my travels, I saw the Bayeux Tapestry, and Pegasus Bridge, and dozens of places in the seaside resorts (such as Luc-Sur-Mer) where they sold *les fruits de la mer*

(sea-food) - not something we ever had at home. I came across a small country *château* and was given the tour by the owner. I said I thought that all the '*aristos*' had been guillotined during the French Revolution. He laughed and said that the violence of the Revolution had been greatly exaggerated. There were many *châteaux*, and their owners, who had survived; and in any case, not every owner was an aristocrat. I came across a *course landaise* (country bull-fight), where the bulls were all cows and the fighters did not kill the animal, but dodged around her, and placed flowers in her horns, or took them off again. All very harmless and appealing to the English sensibility, but at the same time the cows sometimes got quite annoyed. During one *course*, the commentator pointed out that the cow '*n'était pas du tout la vache qui rit*' (not at all like 'The Laughing Cow'). This was a play on words, '*La Vache qui rit*' being a patented kind of soft cheese, like the 'Dairylea' we had at home.

On another occasion, I punctured, out in the country somewhere. I had a repair outfit, and was turning the bike upside down to take the wheel off, when a car stopped nearby, and a typical *paysan* (countryman) got out, wearing a tattered but smart blue denim suit. He walked over to the hedge behind me, got out his penis and pissed against the greenery, with no more regard for his privacy than if he had been in his own bathroom. Then he came over, shook hands, introduced himself and asked if I needed any assistance. I said I could manage, but he pointed out that he lived nearby and I would get on better with some help. Which he would be happy to provide because he could see that I was English, and he liked the English. So we went in his car to a nearby cottage, where he plied me with cider, introduced me to his wife, helped me repair the puncture, and wished me luck. Normandy that year seemed full of people like that, something which I always remember when English people try to tell me that the French are habitually rude.

One day, Monsieur Dubosq asked me where I was going to cycle to next. I said I wasn't sure; but I needed to 'fill up some gaps on the map of my travels' (since I used to trace my rides on the Michelin). I had come across the word *réseau-routier* (street network), so what I actually said was '*Je vais remplir quelques brèches dans mon réseau-routier*'. ('I am going to fill up the breaches in my street network'). Bear in mind that at school, the French we were taught was literary, historical and even military. Dubosq laughed: '*Vous employez le style noble*', he said ('You use a noble style'). '*Un Français aurait dit "Je vais boucher des trous"*'. ('I am going to stop up the holes').

## 5

John Dove was a New Yorker, aged about 15, at private school in Bembridge, Isle of Wight, who had been sent to Caen to improve his French. This did not work, because he had no desire to learn, and evidently little aptitude. His vocabulary seemed to be limited to one expression, which was *Comment dit-on?* (How do you

say? So, in reply to a question as to what he had been doing, he would say 'I have been *Comment dit-on?* walking in the *Comment dit-on?* park.

Madame Dubosq did not approve of John and made this plain from the start. She pointed out that his parents had sent him to Normandy to learn French and he appeared to be making little effort to do so. He made no attempt to explain himself, if he was criticised, simply asserting instead that 'people' were 'getting at him'.

He liked to drink Coca-Cola, with every meal, whereas our usual drink at lunchtime and in the evening was cider - a flat and not unpleasant variety which the Dubosqs bought in bulk (and may even have brewed themselves) and served out of plain bottles. I drank it with gusto; but John wouldn't touch it. Instead, he went to the local shop and bought huge bottles of coke for himself, putting them ostentatiously on the table at every meal-time.

'John' said Mme Dubosq 'your insides will turn black, and it isn't good for you. You ought to try some *cidre*.' He took no notice, seeing no reason why his insides should turn black, when the French drank black coffee and this had no similar effect on them. I saw his point but wasn't going to support him, especially when I disliked Coca-Cola anyway.

The differences of opinion with Mme Dubosq were not limited to Coca-Cola, since John did not much like her food either and constantly asked for chips, which she also thought unhealthy. She complained to me about his behaviour, which I found embarrassing, since he looked on me as some kind of friend; but, when I talked to John, I soon learned that we had nothing in common. He was brash, in that way that some Americans can be, and clearly thought the U.S.A. was God's own country, and the American way of life centuries ahead of anything else.

For John, the Republican Party was indeed the GOP (Grand Old Party). The Democrats (whom my father regarded as kindred spirits) were a bunch of communist sympathisers. The Americans had won the War single-handed. Europe was 'some place they had taken over at the end of that War'. The Russians were a bunch of godless commie bastards. Now, on the last point, my father had always questioned why the Russians and the Americans had fallen out in the late 1940s, after being allies during the War; and was fond of saying that the Soviets were not as black as they were painted. He asked, rhetorically, whether it was not possible that they simply had a different view as to how society ought to be organised, rather than being necessarily our enemies. As for God, well, my father did not believe in a Creator, being a pharmacist and a man of Science; and I had shed my childish Christian beliefs by the age of ten. But when I tried to persuade John that the U.S.S.R. was much misunderstood, he would shake his head and ask if I really wanted to work in a field, with a man with a gun at my back, as he believed that all the Soviets had to.

If John had no time for the French or the Russian way of life, he had little time for the British either. He thought that the British accent indicated that we were all either 'stuck-up' or effeminate, or both. He particularly disliked our way of

abbreviating words, so that when I referred to a handkerchief as a 'hankie', he couldn't stop laughing.

The ideological differences were less important than the differences in temperament and personality. I was an habitual reader. John was not (though we had both been hugely amused by Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*). I liked France and the French. John did not (he might almost have used President Bush's phrase about them - 'cheese-eating surrender monkeys', thirty years before the President coined it). At 16, I had never been out with a girl, or seen a copy of *Playboy* whereas at 15, John was a pursuer and a purchaser of each. One day, he saw a girl in a skirt cycling towards us in the *Rue de l'Arquette* and claimed that she had deliberately flashed her knickers at him in an inviting way. He suggested that we go after her and see if she wanted to come round. I gave him some excuse for my lack of enthusiasm for the idea, and suggested he pursued her on his own, if he wanted. Which he did, without (I think) much success.

Unwittingly, I was able to make one joke at John's expense. One of his quirks was that he was allergic to cats; but the Dubosqs had one they were very fond of. They compromised, by ejecting the cat from the room each time we sat down to eat, though at other times, the cat was allowed to roam and sit where it liked. One evening, it happened that John was absent from dinner, and the rest of us gathered for our cider and Normandy pork. The food was delicious and the conversation flowed freely. The cat being present, M. and Mme. Dubosq started to discuss John, and Mme. (for once) sympathised with him. Speaking of the allergy which led to the frequent ejection of the cat, she said '*Non, mais la condition doit être embêtant pour John*' ('No, but the condition must be annoying for John'). I remarked '*Et pour le chat, aussi.*' ('And for the cat as well').

I had intended this as a simple statement of fact, but Monsieur Dubosq thought the remark was a hilariously funny witticism. If so, it must rank as one of the few witty things I have ever said in my life.

Two things led to John's premature deportation from the family hearth. The first was Madame Dubosq's discovery of that copy of *Playboy*, under his bed. She considered his possession of this filthy piece of pornography to be a sign of serious depravity, a clear signal that John needed to be taken in hand by his school. The second was John's theory that the food Mme. Dubosq was giving us was making him ill. The circumstances here are worth relating, for it was not - as you might think - a shortage of chips which was the source of complaint.

One day, John took me to one side and said that he had something confidential to tell me. 'Steve', says he, 'the thing is, I've just taken a dump and there was a little worm wriggling in the shit, when I looked down'. I affected concern, whilst inwardly praying to my non-existent God that I wouldn't have to take a look myself. He said he thought it must be the meat we had been given in recent days which had caused it. Fortunately, he didn't ask me to back him up or even to give him advice, because he had already decided he was going to mention it to Madame D. When he did, she said the problem must have been caused by all the Coca-Cola

he had been drinking. It was mutually agreed that it would be better for all concerned if John returned to the Isle of Wight forthwith, to seek medical advice. Her conclusion about the whole affair was: '*C'était un drôle de garçon*' ('He was a strange boy'). She clearly considered that he needed psychiatric treatment. Whereas I thought that, whatever one concluded about the origin of the maggot, his fascination for *Playboy* was, at the least, understandable. But I kept quiet about that.

## 6

At the grammar school, our reading prior to the 'O' level exams in 1963 was largely Dickens and Shakespeare; but in the Lower Sixth, our horizons were expanded by a young and enthusiastic teacher called Hilken (a Cambridge graduate in English, as I remember), who taught us for the new Use of English paper. The four set books were Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. I enjoyed all these tremendously; and they gave me a new and exciting vista as to what literature was about. I recall feeling, for the first time, what the inspirational teacher in Alan Bennett's *History Boys* told his pupils many years later, "The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours."

It was also in the Lower Sixth that we had a master, called Groarke, who introduced us to the idea that films were not just entertainment, but were part of our culture. Whether that would have included one of the smash hits of 1964, which was *The Great Escape*, starring Steve McQueen, I doubt; but *The Great Escape* was playing in Caen that Summer, under the title *La Grande Évasion*, and I went to see it with the two German boys, Michael and Rainer. I must say it's a great film, at least for boys, with plenty of action, including Steve McQueen jumping (or attempting to jump) over high barbed-wire fences on a motorcycle. (The thing that everyone knows about this is that he did his own stunts). But it was bit rich to expect us Brits to accept yet another story in which the Americans claim the credit for almost everything; and, as for the German boys, they hated it. Michael's view was that the scene where the Gestapo trick, arrest and shoot Richard Attenborough at the railway station, was totally unrealistic, because it was the job of the Gestapo to round up German dissidents, not foreign combatants.

More generally, Michael thought that the British had a false idea about Germany's responsibility for the War. Hitler, in his view, was simply a madman, an untypical German (in fact, of course, he was Austrian) who had been lucky enough to take over the State and use it for his own insane ends. Surely, he *must* have been insane to attack the whole world, including the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. in the same

year? This was not my father's view. He thought the average German rejoiced in Hitler's successes, while they lasted; and they deserved all they got in the carpet bombing which followed. (Very little was known or said in the 1960s about the mass rapes which were carried out by the invading Red Army, when the Russians invaded Germany in 1945. These were only given wide coverage by Antony Beevor, 60 years later).

The Dubosqs had stayed in Caen during the German occupation of 1940-44, and in 1964, only twenty years had elapsed since *Le Débarquement* (or 'D-Day' as we called it), and the Liberation of France. Their memories were very fresh; but they were not quite as I would have expected. Predictably, they bemoaned the destruction of their city - '*Quatre-vingt pour cent détruit*' (80% destroyed) Monsieur would say, shaking his grey head. What surprised me, though, was that he blamed the Allies, and especially the Americans for the destruction. And this proved to be more accurate than I realised at the time. The fact was that Germans had not done much damage to Caen in 1940 - their onslaught that Summer was a walkover; but they put up a terrific fight four years later; and Montgomery was pinned down by the *Panzers* before Caen for two months. The Americans' response to resistance was to send in the bombers when they could and to smash a place to smithereens before they committed ground troops; and (according to Dubosq) they helped Montgomery to do the same to Caen. Understandable tactically, but very hard on the remaining civilians.

Madame Dubosq had two stories about the occupation and the liberation. One day, a German officer walked down the steep steps into her garden and caught her attention. He asked her politely to sew a button back onto his uniform. She said she was sorry but she hadn't got a needle and thread to hand. He pulled out his revolver and said 'I don't think you heard me, I asked you to sew a button on my uniform.' She soon found a needle and thread.

The other story concerned her treatment by a British officer, once Montgomery's men had set up camp on the *Prairie*. This fellow spoke no French, but was the quintessential British gentleman. Although his primary duty was to supply his own men, he came around regularly and asked Madame 'is there anything you require?'; and she had only to ask, for him to supply food, medicines, and whatever he had.

But how they survived the occupation, without falling into the trap of collaboration, I am not sure. Perhaps they just kept a low profile. Something tells me they were not in the Resistance - or they would surely have said so. In fact some of the things Monsieur Dubosq said made me wonder about his politics. For example, on one occasion he said that he didn't think that every Tom, Dick and Harry should have the same right to vote as, say, 'my' Winston Churchill had - which was clearly to say, that he did not believe in democracy. On another occasion, he indicated his disapproval of De Gaulle's call to arms in 1940, as the Germans were overrunning France and the French Government was getting ready to sign an armistice - something which has since been pinned up in every French town as a

badge of honour. 'All very well for him to say that' said Dubosq 'he was sitting pretty in London.'

## 7

After six weeks, I was ready to go home. I was looking forward to seeing my parents again, and even to seeing my brother and sister, though we were no longer little children who could play together. I took my father some Calvados and some particularly foul *Gitane* cigarettes. I am sure he enjoyed the Calvados but he probably ditched the *Gitanes*, preferring the Virginia tobacco he had been deprived of during the War. (I would have taken my mother something too, but have forgotten what it was.)

I intended to keep in touch with Michael Hammer, and we corresponded for a while; but not for long. He was a serious boy with serious interests, in opera for example, though he also went ski-ing in Southern Germany. We had certainly lost touch by the time I went to University; and I never saw him, or any of the others again.

I kept a notebook when I was in Caen and had it in a drawer somewhere until recently; but now it has gone missing, along with the very few photographs I took. I have therefore re-constructed everything I have written here from memory; and once again I have found that I can remember some things that happened then better than I can remember some of the things that happened last week.

Does travel broaden the mind? I certainly used to think so, when I was young. Now, I think that when we are old, we take too much of ourselves with us, for the same to be true.

My final, and most poignant memory of that Summer was of something that happened on the way home, on the train from Caen to Cherbourg. Madame Dubosq had given me some grapes and I sat in the railway carriage eating them (too quickly, since they re-appeared in different form on the rough sea-crossing from Cherbourg back to Southampton). Suddenly, a couple appeared in the corridor. They were only a very few years older than me, or so it seemed. The boy took hold of the girl and commanded her '*Embrasse moi, Chérie*' ('Kiss me, Darling.'), just before their lips met.

It made all my experiences that Summer seem paltry.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**Les COURRIERS NORMANDS**  
La Compagnie des Chemins de Fer Secondaires  
**Les Cars DUCLOS**



**VOYAGES  
TRANSCAR**  
**ÉTÉ 1964**

# Les Belles Excursions

AU DÉPART DE  
**CAEN**

**TOUS LES DEPARTS SONT GARANTIS**

**Inscriptions à l'avance**  
**Places numérotées**

**RENSEIGNEMENTS ET INSCRIPTIONS** au BUREAU DE TOURISME DES COURRIERS NORMANDS, Gare Routière, tél. 81.33.73 — à l'AUTOGARE, place de la Gare S. N. C. F., tél. 81.49.49 — à HAYAS TOURISME, 80, rue Saint-Jean, téléph. 81.33.40 — à l'OFFICE DE VOYAGES de "PARIS-NORMANDIE", place de la Résistance, tél. 81.43.05 — aux CHEMINS DE FER SECONDAIRES, 144, boul'd Leroy, tél. 81.57.61 — aux Cars DUCLOS, 74, quai Vendeuvre, téléph. 81.34.59, et au SYNDICAT D'INITIATIVES, place Saint-Pierre, téléph. 81.45.89.

**REDUCTIONS POUR LES ENFANTS ET POUR LES GROUPES**

Sauf indications spéciales, les prix mentionnés (établis au 1-1-64) ne comprennent que le transport aller et retour depuis le point de départ; les repas, pourboires et frais de visite des curiosités, étant facultatifs, restent à la charge du touriste.

◆

**LE MONT SAINT-MICHEL PAR VIRE** — (Une journée)

**CIRCUIT A1** — Les 7, 9, 11, 12 Juillet. Tous les jours du 15 Juillet au 29 Août (sauf les Lundis et les 31 Juillet, 1, 15 et 30 Août). A lieu également les 1, 3, 6, 8, 15 et 18 Septembre.

CAEN départ de la Gare Routière à 8 h. 25, Aunay-sur-Odon 7 h. 55, Villers-Bocage TRANSFERT et départ à 8 h. 50, VIRE, Villedieu 10 h. 20, Avranches (visite du Jardin Botanique), LE MONT SAINT-MICHEL (déjeuner et arrêt prolongé jusqu'à 16 h. 30), retour à Villedieu vers 17 h. 15, Pontfarcy, Villers-Bocage vers 18 h. 40, CAEN arrivée vers 19 h. 15.

**PRIX** au départ de : CAEN, 23 F; Villers-Bocage, Aunay-s/Odon, 21 F.

**B**

Advert for the excursion to Mont Saint-Michel



Tickets for the *Nocturne*, the Mont Saint-Michel and the Bridge at Tancarville