

# *Alliance française de Ballarat*

## **November 2020 Newsletter**



### **Christmas soirée**

*Alliance française de Ballarat* is back!

And we are celebrating with an end-of-year Christmas soirée and dinner.

This meal is free for current members of the Alliance and will cost \$50 a head for guests.

It will be held at the newly-refurbished Canberra Hotel, (corner Macarthur St and Creswick Rd) and will comprise a welcome drink with canapés outside, followed by a sit-down meal offering choices of two mains and two desserts. Drinks and coffee will be at your expense.

The evening will be extra special with a Life Membership awarded to past president and long-serving committee member, Richard McRoberts.

This event is 'bookings only', so be sure to RSVP to [afdeballarat@gmail.com](mailto:afdeballarat@gmail.com) ASAP to reserve your place, as there are only a few more left.

### **Les Santons de Provence**

In the meantime, do you know the story behind the *Santons de Provence*?

These 'little saints' are beautifully-made and painted small *terre cuit* (terracotta) figures which make up not only the Christmas crèche, but represent all the people of towns, villages and rural areas in Provence - the artisans, farmers, the mayor, the policeman, butcher, baker and cheesemaker, the clergy, children and even the animals.

It was following the French Revolution, during the period known as 'The Terror' – when churches were torn down and people were reduced to worshipping in secret – that crèches were established in people's homes rather than the church. They 'disguised' the religious nature of the nativity by including figures from the town and country.

Originally, these *santons* were made from whatever was to hand, such as wood, clay, bread dough or plaster. The tiny figures were painted and dressed in fabric clothing.



**A Christmas crèche of santons.**

Of course, now it has become a tradition of the south, with a huge market held in Marseille each year since 1803 throughout December and you can see them in markets in many of the smaller towns.

Much of the terracotta is sourced from areas around Rousillon in the Luberon and skilled craftspeople mould and individually paint *santons*. You can visit a *santon* craftsman in Aix en Provence – and I'm sure there are others throughout Provence.

Being hand-made, the tiny figures are not cheap, so acquiring a collection of genuine *santons* for a Christmas display is quite an investment.

The Church of St Jean Baptiste in Les Arcs-sur-Argens (Var) has a beautifully-crafted crèche of *santons* on display all year and for a €1 donation, you can watch trains, waterwheels, farmers at work, women spinning, folk dancing with musicians and religious processions as the clockwork town wakes, works, then sleeps throughout a 24-hour day.

Have you seen any *santons*? Maybe you have bought one or two or watched a craftsman making them.

NOTE : If any members have photos and/or stories they would like to share in subsequent newsletters, please email them to [afdeballarat@gmail.com](mailto:afdeballarat@gmail.com)

