

# *Alliance française de Ballarat*

## **September 2020 Newsletter**

*Alliance française de Ballarat* is still 'idling' – but we hope that with a possible staged 're-opening' in regional areas, we may see some movement. Your committee cannot say whether or not we will meet later this year or whether *Alliance française de Ballarat* will need to pause until 2021. However, we will keep you informed, as things progress.

In the meantime, enjoy a short piece on the beautiful tiles of Provence

### **Roof Tiles and Floor Tiles**



***Rooftops of Nice Old Town***

Who isn't enchanted with the roof tiles of Provence?

And enjoyed walking on the cool *tomettes* inside a *Provençal* house on a hot day?

Or visited the 'Red Village' – *Rousillon* – and admired the ochre pits?

These tiles – both the distinctive roofs which make up so many of the houses and buildings in Provence and the floor tiles that work to keep the house interiors cool through the hot summer days – are part of the joy of visiting those regions that make up PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur).

And it is no surprise that the tiles reflect the amazing ochre colours that are found in various parts of the region with ochre pits located, generally in the Luberon and central Var areas.

Most tile works were conveniently established where the clay was extracted – at *Rousillon (Luberon)* and *Aubagne (Bouche-de-Rhône)* and *Salernes (Var)*, where there is also a *Musée Terra Rossa* detailing the history and production of these wonderful products of the earth that have been around since Roman times.



***Ochre pit at Rousillon***

A good roof tile must have no visible lime spots so as not to crack in the first frost. It also had to be capable of bearing the mason's weight without shattering. Finally, it had to yield a clear sound. Its colour depended on the clay from which it was made and also the temperature at which it had been fired.



***A mix of old and new roof tiles on a house at Les Arcs-sur-Argens (Var)***

Each tile is different, and colours these days blend with moss and lichen that often grow over them, giving the traditional roofs across Provence the kind of colourful mosaic that visitors love to photograph.



***Display of tomettes' production at Draguignan (Var) museum.***

Floor tiles like the square *mallons* or the hexagonal *tomettes*, being porous and unglazed, have a significant advantage in that they can absorb moisture, which is then released when the weather is hot, helping to keep rooms cool. It is believed the *tomette* was so named because it looked like a flat cheese, known as '*toma*'.



***Tomettes – cool underfoot in summer***

These tiles require a finer earth with fewer impurities and they are cut from the flattened clay paste, then left in the open air until they reached the right texture, ready for baking.

The design of the *tomette* helped to solve production problems. The drying process is critical in the production of the earthenware tiles, but with the corners of square tiles often drying faster than the centre, the tiles tend to warp, so cutting off the corners to create the hexagonal shape helped eliminate that problem.



***Red ochre dust coats the town of Rousillon***

In *Rousillon*, the whole town is dusted with red, like its stunning ochre quarries. These quarries are no longer operational and people are able to wander through the red walls of the pit as well as visit the museum which explains the history and process of tile making.

*Aubagne* produced the curved roof tiles and *Salernes*, which is known as '*la capitale de la tomette*', obviously produced the floor tiles.

These days, with the market dwindling for original tiles because of their labour-intensive production, many of the original tile works have been converted to create other earthen ware like the large, distinctive olive and garden pots. They have also developed beautiful glazes to make interior wall tiles and exterior paving and other decoration.

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)

