

LoVe St Or IeS...

C'EST L'AMOUR...

Valentine's Day has long been a day dedicated to romance. Each 14th of February Valentin, le Saint Patron des Amoureux (the Patron Saint of Lovers) is honoured.



"My soul burns with my love for you.
I dream of placing a kiss on your shoulder."

How and when the tradition first arose is a little hazy, although there is no doubt some truth, and some fiction, in the various explanations that have been put forward.

- The earliest explanation dates back to Valentine, the 3rd century Roman priest who performed secret marriages against the direct orders of the Emperor, Claudius II. Reasoning that unmarried men would more easily be persuaded to enlist in his armies, the Emperor's solution was simply to ban the ceremony. Following his capture, legend has it that Valentine wrote a note of thanks to his gaoler's daughter who had spent many hours with him as he awaited execution, signing it "Love from your Valentine"... It is said that he was put to death on February 14th, 269 A.D.

- With the spread of the Empire into Gaule, the Roman festival Lupercalia, in celebration of fertility, was introduced. The

practice of 'drawing lots' to pair up for the festivities was involved, names being drawn at random by men and women from a jar. A pamphlet written in 1698 describes how this practice had evolved by the 17th century in France, with maidens and bachelors writing the names of their loved ones on *billets* which following the draw were worn, sometimes for days, on their sleeves. Hence, perhaps, the expression 'to wear your heart on your sleeve'.

- An 'amorous address' was sent in 1415 by a young Frenchman, Charles, Duke of Orleans, the earliest preserved example of a 'Valentine' greeting. Written to his wife from imprisonment in the Tower of London after capture at Agincourt, they consisted of a number of poems, or rhyming love letters.

- Perhaps the most likely reason for the choice of the date for Valentine's Day is based on the long-held traditional belief that birds select their mates in mid-February. Thus on the 14th of February in France a maiden would decide on her future



Statue in Toulouse
'Le retour'

husband according on the first bird she glimpsed that morning... if it were a robin, her husband would be a sailor. A goldfinch, and he would be rich. If it were a mere sparrow, this signified a happy marriage, although to someone of little fortune.

Today in France, even if the simplicity of the celebration has been overtaken by all the paraphernalia surrounding its commercialisation... roses and champagne, perfume, lingerie... romance is well and truly alive in the small French village that bears the name of Saint Valentin. In the Berry region of the heart of France, made famous by the romantic novelist George Sand, the village has, since 1965, hosted a three day festival with visitors from all around the world coming together to reaffirm their vows - some after 50 years of marriage or more! (www.village-saint-valentin.com)



France and romance are synonymous, according to popular belief. So many famous French figures, historical and contemporary, symbolise that passion and romantic idealism ... typified by the tragic story of *Héloïse* and *Abélard* - the brilliant and controversial 12th century philosopher and cleric who seduced Héloïse, his pupil, 22 years his junior, fathering a baby boy, Astrolabe. They married in secret, but the girl's uncle, Canon Fulbert was so enraged that he had Pierre Abélard castrated. Pierre founded a religious community and Héloïse was sent to a convent. They were never to meet again, but corresponded frequently, Héloïse writing; "The pleasures of the love we have shared have been too sweet, and cannot be banished from my thoughts." *George Sand*, the authoress



whose real name was Aurore, had numerous liaisons, the composer Chopin figuring high on the list. She confessed "Je ne veux pas, je ne peux pas vivre sans aimer" (*I cannot live without love - I will not*). *Edith Piaf* (the 'Little Sparrow') the singer whose 'La vie en rose', or 'Non, je ne regrette rien' won over so many hearts on both sides of the Atlantic, had many loves, none more important to her than the world champion boxer Marcel Cerdan. Little did she suspect when singing 'L'hymne à l'amour', "Si un jour la vie t'arrache à moi" (*If one day life tears you away from me*) that the words would so soon become true. Cerdan died in a plane accident on the way to New York.

From the famous, to the unknown soldier during the Great War; living a hellish life in the trenches, knee-deep in mud, the *Poilus* soldiers - so-called because they had little time for such



niceties as shaving - comforted themselves by writing postcards to their sweethearts or wives. Their words may not survive the test of time, their poetry may be less elegant, but the tender verses of 1914 are all the more poignant when viewed with contemporary eyes...

Aimer, c'est s'élever au dessus de la guerre
To love, is to rise above the war



Age does not protect you from love. But love, to some extent, protects you from age. *Jeanne Moreau, French Actress*

Love is a canvas furnished by nature and embroidered by imagination. *Voltaire*

To love is to admire with the heart; to admire is to love with the mind. *Theophile Gautier*

To love someone is to see a miracle invisible to others. *Francois Mauriac*

Love is like an hourglass, with the heart filling up as the brain empties. *Jule Renard*

Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but looking outward in the same direction. *Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

The heart has reasons that reason does not understand. *Jacques Benigne Bossuet*

Life is the flower for which love is the honey. *Victor Hugo*

A compliment is like a kiss through a veil. *Victor Hugo*