

## WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

### Two ways of looking at time

Have you noticed that when the cashier in the supermarket greets you she says "*Bonjour*" and when you have paid and are saying good-bye she says "*Bonne journée*". It's not wishing you a safe drive home, but is the equivalent of the American "Have a nice day". So why are the two words different?

You'll see this again around the Fêtes de Fin d'Année. New Year's Day is *Le Jour de l'An*; it starts *le Nouvel An*, but all the cards say "*Bonne Année*". So why two words for Year?

Well it depends on how you are looking at the day or the year. If you are counting them, or if you are remarking on its being day rather than night, then *jour* is your word. *L'an prochain nous allons passer huit jours à Rome*. Someone is planning for 2008 already. *Vivre au jour le jour* is to live from day to day. But if you are interested in how the day is spent, it suddenly becomes a *journée* – a period of time to enjoy, work or hate. "*Quelle belle journée*", you might say after a wonderful day out. "*Nous avons passé la journée sur la plage*" (we spent the day on the beach) etc

The year is the same. If you are going from year to year, or asking which year something happened in, then you use *an*. But if you are mainly interested in what sort of a year it was, what happened in the course of the year, or it seemed to go for ever, then you use *année*. The Queen's *annus horribilis* would have been *une année horrible* that seemed to last forever, rather than *un an horrible* she could shrug off.

There are two other word pairs that work in the same way:

Matin – *matinée* for the morning and  
Soir – *soirée* for the evening.

There is only one word for afternoon, literally *après midi*.

*Matinée* for many British people will recall the Saturday Matinees of childhood, where for a shilling or less, depending on how old and nostalgic you are, you had a blissful morning or afternoon of film watching in the local Odeon or Gaumont fleapit. It has come to be abused with the use of the word for afternoon or early evening performances in the West End. I like to *faire la grasse matinée* – to lie in in the morning. *Soirée* has drifted into English as a social evening, sometimes a bit special like a *soirée musicale*. In both, one is enjoying the time the morning or evening gives.

If you have something delivered and ask when it will arrive, the chances are it will be *en fin de matinée* (at the end of the morning) or *en début d'après-midi* (at the beginning of the afternoon), i.e. either before or after the delivery man has his lunch. He's using the *-ée* word because he's thinking of his delivery schedule and how best he can use the morning, and your delivery is at the end of it, because most deliveries seem to come from Bordeaux or Clermont Ferrand.

*An, jour, matin, après-midi* and *soir* are all masculine and *année, journée, matinée* and *soirée* are all feminine. I wonder if anything can be read into this.

*En début de, en milieu de* (mid-) and *en fin de* can be added before most feminine periods of time, including *semaine*, which doesn't have a masculine equivalent. Which brings us back to the Fêtes de Fin d'Année.

Je vous souhaite à tous un joyeux Noël et une bonne année 2008