

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Words that do a job

How do you do ? What do you do ? Do you remember when your identity was the job you did ? When the moment you left a job you were forgotten by colleagues you thought were close friends ?

There are a lot of things that in French are named in honour of the job they do. Important jobs like corkscrews (*un tire-bouchon* – it pulls corks), mundane jobs like key rings (*un porte-clé* – it carries your keys) , tin-openers (*un ouvre-boîte* – it does what it says on the tin !), jobs that add to your comfort (*un chauffe-serviette* – it warms your towel) and that make you feel uncomfortable (*pèse-personne* – it weighs people)

Some run in families – *porte-clés*, *porte-monnaie* (purse to carry your change), *un porte-feuille* (wallet to carries your papers), *un porte-couteau* (to support your knife & fork), *un porte-bonheur* (a lucky charm to carry your happiness). You can even get back to work as *un porte-parole* (a spokesman to carry other people's words) The *porte* family is especially hard-working as lots of things have to be carried or stashed.

The *couvre* family is a bit smaller, but you can extend it at will ! *un couvre-lit* covers your bed, *un couvre-pieds* covers your feet (quilt) , *un couvre-plat* covers a dish etc, *un couvre-chef* covers your head (slangy word for headgear)

A saucepan that cooks everything together is *un faitout* (does everything) and a lay about is *un fainéant* (does nothing)

un chauffe-bain, *un chauffe-lit*, *un chauffe-eau* all things that warm

Some are singletons like *un passe-temps* (a pastime) *un passe-thé* (tea strainer), *un tournevis* (screwdriver – turns screws). *Un taille-crayons* sharpens pencils, *un casse-noisettes* cracks nuts, *un allume-cigares* lights cigars (in a car) and *un grille-pain* produces toast.

In the great struggle to remember whether a word is masculine or feminine, it is easy to remember this lot – they all work hard so they're masculin. *Un* rhymes with *grunt* !

The most wonderful thing is that just like the French, you can make them up as you go along. You know what it does but you don't know the word ? then just say *J'ai besoin d'un nettoie-pipe*, *d'un casse-pierre*, *d'un frappe-clou* The first one's OK, but the rest's rubbish, but they will understand what you mean !

My all time favourite is *un Casse-croûte* – a snack (breaking a crust !) or rather that is after the *tire-bouchon*.....