

Strike action

The background was garish, but the foreground was pure fun and frolic when a neat vingtaine of ESC members took to the lanes to try their hand at bowling. The setting was BadBowl Strasbourg and the soundtrack was quietly riotous, much like the ten-pin that ensued. As one experienced bowler put it, "It was just about the cutest bunch of bowling virgins I have ever witnessed."

The garishness was not due to the bowlers, but to the giant screens mounted at the end of each lane, emitting vivid scenes from sports to safari. Surely the massive elephants tearing through the jungle bear some of the blame for the repeated sound of ball meeting gutter, along with the iridescent green pins. The mild cacophony blended chatter with applause, with a piercing back note caused by the *squee!* of an enthusiastic participant (some might point to an excitable American, but she could not be reached for comment, busy as she was writing up the event.)

It takes courage to openly adventure a new sport, and there was courage aplenty on

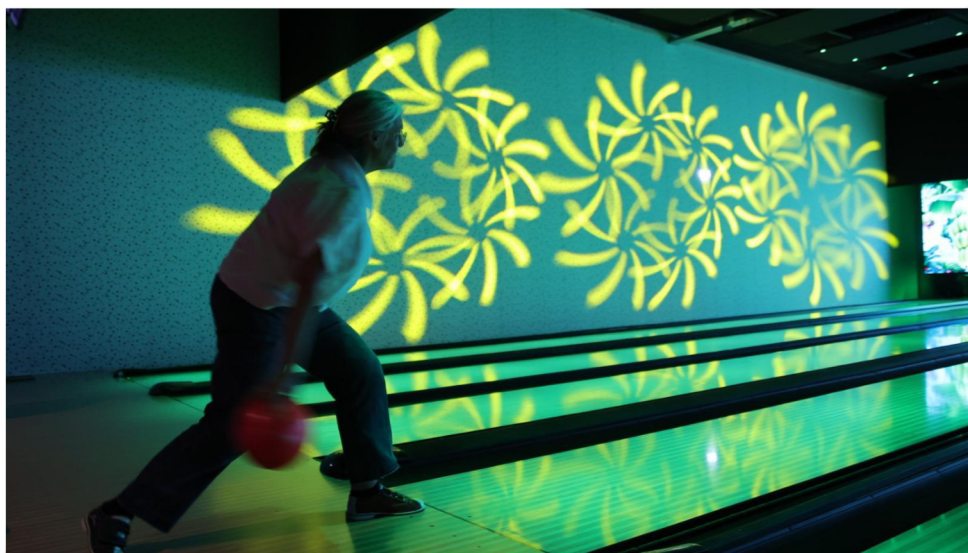
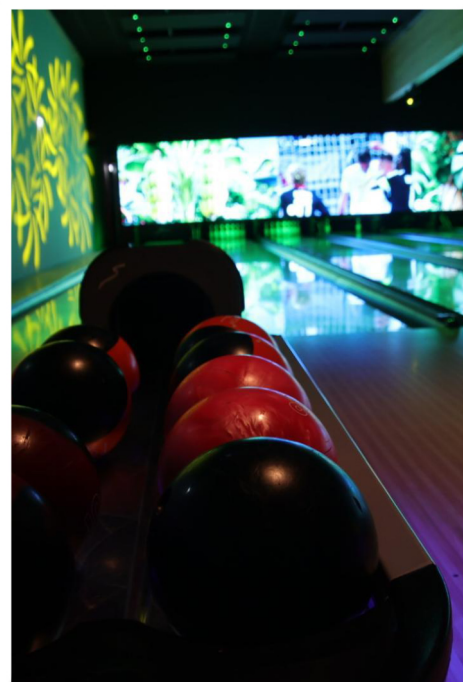
the lanes. There was also a plethora of aches and pains, protest of wrist and back and hip proclaiming an evident lack of spring chickens. The swiftly administered tonic of free drinks lubricated both joints and spirits, and the evening could fairly be described as convivial.

Robots and virgins

It must be said that this was the first time this writer had ever encountered a bona fide robot wheeling up to the lanes to serve beverages. Happily for the mechanical man, the even-tempered ESC members did not seem inclined to argue about the quality of the drinks.

While no trophies were presented, the clear winner was Mike Wraith, aka The Phantom (the bowling virgins will not have realized this, but it is *de rigueur* to take on a pseudonym when bowling). Mike scored 160 on his second game, far ahead of the field. It was proof positive that practice makes perfect, and offered a frisson of hope to the neophyte bowlers.

Kim Broers



Welcome!

Welcome to the English-Speaking Community Alsace; where friends meet friends.

What's Up?, the ESC newsletter, is seasonal, with approximately four issues per year. In it you will find news about our activities as well as reports and photos submitted by members showing some of the most recent events. Let us know what you think, and feel free to send us photos or an article about something you have enjoyed so that other members can get a taste too. Contact details for the committee members can be found on [page 4](#), and more detailed information can be found on our [website](#).

Sue Norman-Fleck
President

Parlez-vous anglais, allemand, italien, espagnol...?

The ESC organises conversation groups not only in English, but in French, German, Spanish and Italian.

English

by Maryline William-Smith

The English conversation group (ECG) met regularly during 2025. We meet every fortnight on a Friday afternoon.

Most of the meetings are hybrid now. We meet in-presence at our lovely hosts' home, Chantal and Philippe Krafft and we benefit from Nigel Permaul's technical experience to set up a Zoom link. Nigel's contribution is particularly advantageous as he can send the Zoom session recording to all ECG members inscribed on our e-mail list. Those recordings enable people who could not attend to catch up with our news and discussion topics. A typical hybrid session involves eight to twelve participants present and up to four members online.

At the inception of this English conversation group, some ground rules had been defined: we decided years ago to try and keep a very friendly, relaxed, open-minded and cheerful atmosphere. Therefore we will refrain from discussing politics or religion. During the Covid episode, we kept very much in touch through our Zoom connections, which was highly appreciated and felt to some like a lifeline.

The Zoom sessions enabled us to venture into electronic presentations of various topics, which took us over the years on fascinating visits to various cities/tourist sites/countries

We still apply this alternate fortnight principle, one fortnight devoted to general discussion and the next fortnight's session devoted to topic presentations, all according to our members' inspiration or recent adventures/holidays.

The group also sometimes goes to restaurants to celebrate special occasions, we have also enjoyed cinema (VOST of course) and exhibition outings (latest being wonderful Van Gogh) together.

In 2025 the ECG met 18 times in sessions, and went sometimes on other leisure outings. We have currently 38 members on our e-mail list. We would be delighted to accept further members willing to contribute to our lively sessions.

The ECG is led by Nigel Permaul, Maryline William-Smith and Chantal and Philippe Krafft.

Spanish

by Melva Carteron and Catherine Manini



Month after month, the Spanish conversation group continues to grow not only in size but also in spirit. Since September we've welcomed four new Spanish-speaking members, whose presence has much enriched our discussions.

The conversation usually rolls on, with between six and twelve participants discussing our hobbies, recent travels, the latest films in the cinema, etc., all while enjoying a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Two recent meetings were particularly memorable: one in January, sharing generous slices of galette at our regular shelter, Le Michel in avenue de la Marseillaise, to welcome the new year; and another with Donatella who warmly invited us to her home to celebrate her 85th birthday. She delighted us with stories about her Franco-Italian family, told of course entirely in Spanish, turning the celebration into a beautiful moment of sharing, culture, and connection.

We look forward to many more conversations, discoveries, and celebrations together. In 2026 our leader Maria will try and offer two or three dates in the month to choose from with the technical help of a WhatsApp poll.

La Tavola Italiana

by Juliana Schiesari

Our Tavola Italiana in Strasbourg is slowly taking shape again, like a familiar melody rediscovered after a pause. After some time away, I am delighted to gather once more—this time in the gentle, open beauty of the Orangerie, a setting that invites both conversation and reflection.

At its heart, our group is about language, yes – but even more about connection. We come together to speak Italian, to listen, to laugh, and to share moments of life. Conversation flows freely, sometimes guided, sometimes spontaneous, always enriched by good humour and curiosity. Italian, after all, is not only a language to be learned, but one to be lived.

We enjoy weaving into our discussions the charm of Italian proverbs – those small capsules of wisdom that reveal so much about culture and human nature. From time to time, members may offer short presentations, bringing a personal interest, a literary fragment, or a cultural insight to the table. Participation is always open and informal: one speaks when one wishes, contributes as one feels inspired.

Looking ahead, we imagine expanding our shared experiences beyond conversation alone. We hope to watch Italian films together, read and discuss a book, exchange thoughts on current events, or simply share vignettes from our own lives – those everyday stories that, when spoken in another language, take on new colour and meaning.

The level of Italian in the group tends toward fluency, yet inclusivity remains essential. We make a conscious effort to ensure that those still learning feel at ease and fully part of the exchange. The table is open, patient, and welcoming; mistakes are not interruptions but part of the music of learning. In this way, each participant, regardless of level, finds both a place and a voice.

As for the rhythm of our meetings, it is still evolving. We have not yet fixed a regular schedule, allowing instead for a certain flexibility as the group reforms and finds its natural cadence. Like many good things in life, we prefer to let it grow organically.

What matters most is the spirit we bring: a shared love of language, culture, and human connection. Around our tavola, Italian becomes not just something we practice, but something we inhabit—together.

We look forward to welcoming both familiar faces and new ones, and to seeing where this renewed journey will lead us – together.

alian. Here's a look at some of their activities.

German

by Bronwyn Harrowfield

The German Conversation Group meets at fortnightly intervals at 2 p.m., in Cafe Pierrod, Hauptstrasse Kehl. The venue is spacious, and (usually) quiet. A WhatsApp poll is sent out in the interval prior, to determine that the date proposed is suitable for a minimum of four attendees.

We usually discuss an article from the *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, or another magazine, or a short story. At the moment

we are enjoying a book of short humorous travel stories, which Brigitte provided, and Graham J. has the task of choosing a story for each session. There is usually a half-hour or so of conversation before we tackle the reading matter. We are very lucky to have two native German speakers, Brigitte and Christine, who are able to iron out difficulties and provide extra input. At the moment I am seeking a replacement to co-ordinate the group. If you are interested, please let me know.



tion of Scottish desserts.

Formalities over, Sheila Roberts and Elizabeth Hunter took to the stage to call the ceilidh, where everyone was able to work off the calories in a selection of traditional dances for a couple of hours, ending with my personal favourite, the Orcadian Strip the Willow – think of a particularly chaotic rugby match with a hundred players set to music, and you'll get the picture! To end the evening at midnight, everyone gathered holding hands in a large circle on the floor while firstly the pipers played, and then we sung, possibly Burns' most famous work – *Auld Lang Syne*. From the smiles on everyone's faces as they crawled to retrieve their coats, it seemed a good time was had by all.

Tireless workers

As well as the performers on the evening, special thanks are due to Maggie Vautheney, Pauline Kaspar, Pauline Taggart-Bertram and Andie Swan, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes for months on everything from selling tickets, preparing the logistics and providing vegetarian and gluten-free alternatives to the traditional Scottish food.

Next January will be a milestone event: the 25th time we will have hosted the event since taking over the organisation from the Aumônerie anglicane, who continue to support the evening by providing the drinks and bar led by Maryline and Anny. Watch out for the announcement of the date, and how to obtain your tickets.

Auld acquaintance

by Alasdair Hunter

In keeping with a Scots tradition begun more than 200 years ago, six score and ten of us met in Offendorf on January 24th to celebrate the life and times of Robert Burns (1759–1796), known as the Bard of Scotland and renowned as one of the world's most loved (and translated) poets and songwriters.

As always, guests were met at the door by our trusty pipers Yannick and Nathanaël, and were soon seated to be welcomed by our Chairman for the evening, Jonathan Crow and ESC President Sue Norman-Fleck, before watching demonstration dances by the Strasbourg Scottish Country Dancers, co-ordinated by Stefan Kleinsorge.

We hae meat

For the business end of the Burns Supper, we recited *The Selkirk Grace* together (not easy, even for native English speakers, as Burns wrote in the Scots language) before tucking into the hearty starter of

Scotch broth. The guests then got to try The Gay Gordons, a popular ceilidh dance, before the haggis was piped into the hall and duly addressed and consumed with neeps, tattles and "Scottish gravy". Jonathan and Sue gave the traditional Toast to the Lassies and Reply, accompanied by a wee dram of single malt before the meal was concluded with a "Gaelic Gourmand", our take on a selec-



ESC coffee mornings live on

“Coffee leads men to trifle away their time, scald their chops, and spend their money, all for a little base, black, thick, nasty, bitter, stinking nauseous puddle water.”

Extract from: *The Women's Petition Against Coffee*, 1674

The above diatribe, though vigorously expressed, had little effect in stemming a tide of caffeine consumption which overtook Europe even before the advent of Starbucks. The ESC monthly coffee morning also has a long history, with its origins rooted in the need for social contact and support for a generation of UK expat mothers and their children. Indeed, regular attendees from that era still get a little dewy-eyed when reminiscing about the relief of finding some sympathetic company, a cuppa and a safe space for pre-school kids to play together.

As time went by the association evolved into a more multinational, multi-generational affair and the coffee morning gradually transitioned into a meeting place for those not burdened by the need to work on a Thursday morning, evolving *ad hoc* chat groups and an enviable reputation for home-made cakes. A popular and enduring addition was the 'book-swap' – a library at which members could donate and borrow books in an informal way, providing the raw material for literary discussion around the pastries.

Years passed by, social patterns changed, and the numbers regularly attending gradually reduced such that the coffee urn became just too big for purpose, and it became difficult to justify the hire of the cavernous meeting room at L'Escale. For a while a smaller room was tried and, though it matched the size criterion and provided a refuge during the difficult Covid years, the acoustics were such that com-



peting conversations would quickly become difficult to sustain. As the room hire cost again increased, it became evident that a new solution was needed and with a slightly heavy heart we began to look around for commercial options.

Struck lucky

There is no shortage of coffee shops in Strasbourg, but few of those are large enough and flexible enough to offer us a regular booking. Eventually however we struck lucky at the 'Ici et Là' café – part of the Ibis Hotel in Les Halles. This is convenient for transport (trams, buses and car parking), and during the mornings from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. there is ample, comfortable free space and a friendly welcome for our regular group of between ten and twenty members.

Meetings take place on Thursday mornings – usually the second Thursday of each month. The ESC covers the cost of one drink per person and the conversation flows easily. Perhaps we'll see you there? Contact [Maggie Vauthenay](mailto:Maggie.Vauthenay@esc-alsace.org) for details.

by Mike Wraith

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newsletter@esc-alsace.org.

As a guide, for half a page, count 1 500 characters (with spaces); one full page is 2 500 to 3 000 characters. When submitting pictures please attach them to your e-mail rather than including them in a document.

Let us know what you think of our new publication

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