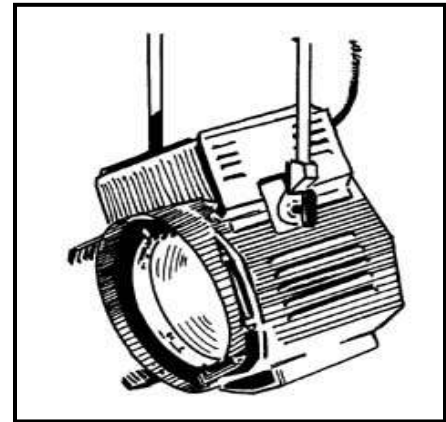


IN THE ~~SPOT~~ TORCH LIGHT

This is the fifth in a series of personal interviews with various BTCA members. This interview was conducted by **Graham Stubbs** in France during one of his European trips. **Michel Duval** and his lovely wife **Daniele** live in Longjumeau, a town just 10 miles south of Paris, France with a population of approximately 18,000 residents. Michel is well known to readers of *The Torch* from his frequent contributions of information and photographs to this newsletter. Like many European torch collectors, Michel is interested in American blow torches; he has examples of more than seventy makes and brands. His latest acquisition is a very rare Z&W nearly all aluminum torch, with a heat shield.



TT: Tell us more about the town where you live.

MD: "Longjumeau" was the name of a notorious "highwayman" during the French Middle Ages. He burned the feet of his victims to force them to say where they hid their valuables. I don't know if "Longjumeau" used a blowtorch to do that. I have lived in Longjumeau for 31 years, and I was born in the Paris region.

TT: Did you see any of final stage of the Tour de France bicycle race in July 2010? I understand that the stage originated in Longjumeau?

MD: Yes, a friend of mine lives on the street across from the start of the final stage, and we watched and took photographs from there.

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TT: Are you and Daniele retired or working?

MD: Daniele is retired from working in a bank and from professional child-care. I trained as a draftsman designer, and I worked for companies that provide industrial testing machines to the likes of Renault, Citroen, Michelin and Boeing. Later I worked for the French blowtorch maker Express, and when that company closed its French manufacturing operations, I started a new career as a driving instructor.



TT: How did you transition from a very technical position to a driving instructor?

MD: In March 2008, when I left my last job at Express, I decided to teach technical subjects (not at a school, but in-house training, a kind of vocational training for adults). I very quickly became unhappy with the training position and decided to look elsewhere. The sister of my daughter-in-law is the manager of a driving school and she was searching for a driving instructor. Why not I said? I attended a one-year training class and I received my diploma.

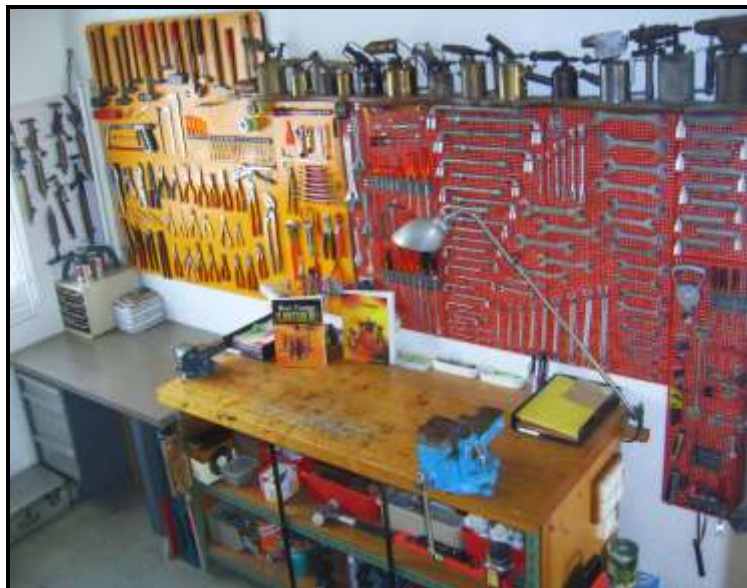


I started as a driving instructor in July, 2010 and I am very pleased with the position. Driving instructors are in great demand in France.

TT: How long have you been collecting blowlamps, and how did you get started?

MD: I started collecting in 1980, when my father-in-law died. He had some old tools and I kept one of them. It was odd, dirty and black and I did not know what it was but I liked it. I cleaned and polished it and I found an Express blowtorch under the grime. Polished brass is very nice so I put my first blowtorch in our house as a decoration. My father, seeing this torch, told me he had my grandfather's torch. It was also an Express. A friend of mine, seeing these two blowtorches, told me he had the blowtorch from his grandfather. He gave it to me, it was also an Express!!! You know that Express blowtorches were very common in France, just as your Otto Bernz or C & L are common in the USA. It was the beginning of my collection...This collection has lasted for 30 years now.

TT: How do you display your torches, and do you clean them?



MD: Daniele is very supportive of my collecting. You can tell from the fact that in our home I have one room full of torches displayed on shelving, and a second room has a workshop (seen at left) for repairs and cleaning. After I polish the brass, I apply a coating of "Les Anciens Ébénistes"* buffing wax.

(**TT:** *a cabinet maker's wax, available at: www.classiquehardware.com/waxes.html)

TT: You have provided us with a lot of information and illustrations. Do you also collect other things related to blowtorches?

MD: I have always liked blowtorch literature, and now I am more and more interested in all sorts of "paper" about blowtorches. If we want to increase our knowledge about blowtorches, we have to save the literature. That's why I like very much your Vintage Blowtorches book and I am looking forward to your second book. I know that it is difficult to prepare blowtorch books because I made two of the "Recueil" books (Recueil means collection, in this case of literature) for the French Club.

TT: Do you find time to collect anything else?

MD: Before blowtorches, I had another passion: motorcycles. I got successively sixteen different bikes, among which were a Norton, three Harley-Davidsons, and also French, Italian, German and Japanese ones. I don't have a bike now, but when I retire I plan to ride again. Motorcycles are how Daniele first met. She was looking at a Norton bike, and asked who the owner was; me! (**TT:** Perhaps it's no coincidence that their son Vincent, who is 31, has the same name as a famous British motorbike!) Daniele and I also collect handmade pieces of earthenware from Brittany, the area in the northwest of France where Daniele is from. These pieces are decorated with pictures of traditionally-costumed dancers. →→→

TT: How many blowtorches do you have in your collection?

MD: I always liked the different, makes, brands and trademarks. So I started the same way to collect about the blowtorches. Today, I have 481 different blowtorch makes from 29 different countries. Generally I keep only one blowtorch of each make. In total, I have 550 blowtorches and soldering irons. If I find a second interesting model, I will keep the best one and I will exchange or sell the other one. Big or small blowtorch, brass or steel, vertical or horizontal burner, French or American... is not important for me. Only the MAKE, the new make for my collection is important. Of course, now



it is more and more difficult to find a new make or brand. I would like to reach five hundred; it makes a round number. Just 19 new ones to find; they will be the most difficult. Now, many friends and collectors, French or otherwise, know my particular way of collecting and some of them will tell me about a new make or they'll inform me about a blowtorch on eBay. I am so lucky to have their support!

TT: Do you have any favorite blowtorches?

MD: My favorites are the ones, which are rare manufacturers. Sometimes we know only one or two or three models from a maker. So I like to get one of these models, even if it is not a large or pretty blowtorch: it is a RARE make. Nevertheless, I also have favorite blowtorches because they are esthetic, decorative ones. I like my C.L.

(photo at left) (Clement Liotard and not a Clayton & Lambert...) because it dates from 1891/1892.

It is a French eolipyle with only one tank and it is the only Clement Liotard torch known.

I also like the Swiss Lyss because it uses a combination of copper, brass, steel and bronze materials in its construction.

My third favorite blowtorch is the French Inexplosible N°4 with two burners. →→
I also have a patent copy and an advertisement for the same torch. The Inexplosible make is quite common but mine is the only known example of the N°4 model.



TT: Where do you find blowtorches?

MD: Originally it was at flea markets, but now it is mostly eBay and from other collectors.

TT: What do you consider to be your most valuable blowtorch??

MD: I do not have a really valuable blowtorch. I have never spent a lot of money for a blowtorch but I think that I have, all the same, an interesting collection. It proves that we can get good blowtorches with not much money, but with a lot of patience...

TT: Have you ever fired up one of your lamps?

MD: No, I am not brave enough. Since my restored blowtorches are varnished, the varnish does not like the heat.

TT: Any final comments?

MD: In my opinion, we collect for the pleasure and sometimes we are all like kids. Certainly, I am an old kid because I very much like all kind of "stuffs" related to blowtorches: stamps, post cards, miniatures, figurines, printing blocks, (as seen at right) lapel badges and other things.



I have also a chocolate blowtorch, wooden blowtorch, golden blowtorch, and a porcelain blowtorch. Collecting and studying blowtorches is a really interesting hobby and I will continue up until I reach 500 makes. But there are also the people, the fellow collectors and the friends that I have made in France and abroad.

