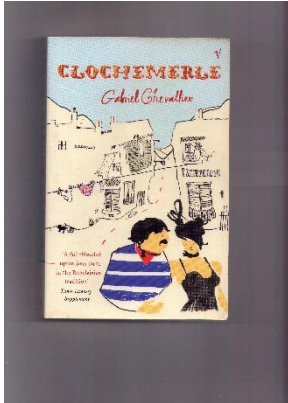


A Book Review by Lynda Jones of *Clochemerle*, a French Classic

On an unusually sunny and dry day recently, I took a walk along the Leas at Minster. Towards the end of my walk, I stopped and looked at the latest addition to our seafront. There, standing proud, wood clad and surprisingly large, is the Island's newest public toilet. This building has caused not a small amount of public dissent amongst nearby residents. Could it not have been positioned somewhere less prominent, was it even necessary? All these arguments brought to my mind one of my most favourite books recommended to me by a friend some 40 years ago and one I have re-read during lockdown.



Clochemerle by Gabriel Chevallier is set in a small, wine producing village in Burgundy, the year being 1922 just four years after the carnage of the First World War. The opening chapter depicts the Mayor and the local schoolmaster/town clerk deep in conversation. The Mayor wishes to erect a monument in the village, a celebration of his time in office. They discuss various ideas, a war memorial or a new fountain perhaps. Then the Mayor has a brainwave. Why not, he reasons, for the broad and moral health of the village, erect a public urinal or as they are known in France a *pissoir*.

The building of this monument and its location, next to the village church, does not all go as the Mayor had originally envisaged and sparks all manner of unseemingly behaviour by some of the village residents. I found the book hilarious but the strongest part of this novel, in my opinion, is in its colourful characterisations of the inhabitants. As the pages unfold, we discover more about *Clochemerle* and the antics and secrets of those who live there, along with all the local jealousies, gossip and sexual escapades. The book is skilfully written and wonderfully illustrated and has stood the test of time. It paints an entertaining and satirical picture of the life and politics in this small French village.

The book is still in print and should you choose to read it I do hope you find it as entertaining and amusing as I do. Happy reading.

