

# THE HISTORY OF THE BRIGHTON AND HOVE FRENCH CIRCLE 1915-2015

## The early days

In the dark days of August 1914, the population of Brighton and Hove was taking to its heart the plight of Belgian refugees who had been bombed and bayoneted out of their homes in Antwerp, Namur and Liege. Many of these refugees spoke only Flemish. Some spoke only French. It was this latter group which drew the attention of the Francophiles in our city.



By 1915, concerts were being given in halls and hotels to aid the refugees. Hostel accommodation was provided at 13 Chesham Place in Kemp Town and 22 St Aubyns, Hove. There were clubs for Belgian working men (5 Manchester Street) as well as one for "ladies" (7 Chesham Place). On 2 October 1915 a Belgian Flag day raised over £832/ 9s/ 5d - enough to keep the community of some 300 refugees fed and housed for nearly 10 weeks.

The main organiser of all this activity was the Belgian Local Relief and Refugee Committee. The stalwarts of this organisation were the indomitable Mrs Bertha Richardson of 4 Adelaide Crescent (who also gave a large part of her home to be a depot for the collection of clothes for the refugees) and Miss Z Ethel Grimwood of 60 Wilbury Crescent.

The plight of French soldiers was not forgotten. A French Flag Day on 14 July 1915 raised over £1,000. The French Red Cross was active in both Brighton and Hove in the form of a contingent of French Red Cross nurses. Co-operation between the Brighton and Hove Red Cross and the French Red Cross continued for many years, latterly through the good offices of French Circle member, the late Geoffrey Spence.

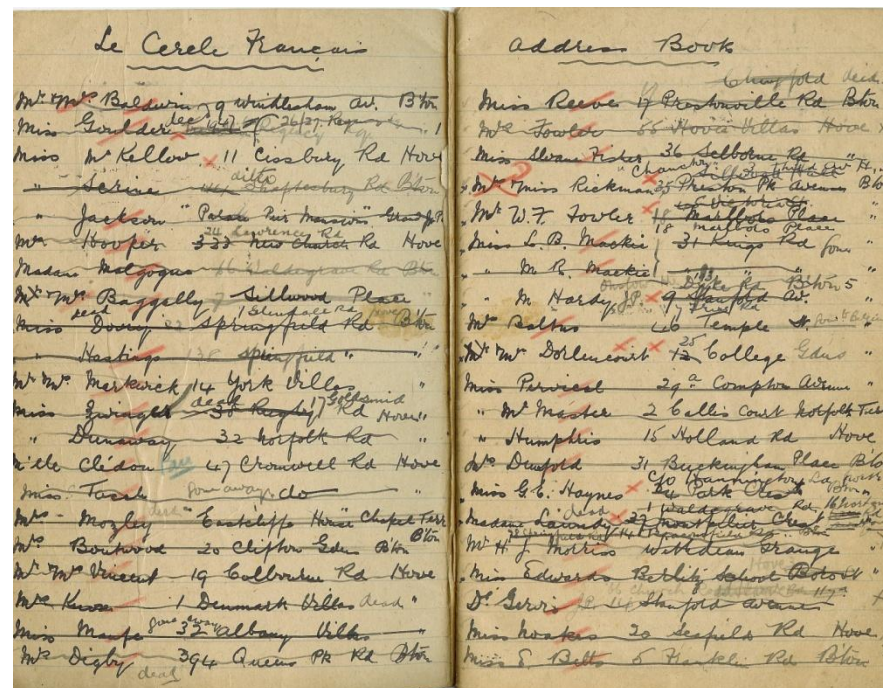
### **The first members**

But many, many more local people had the best interests of the Belgian refugees and the French wounded at heart. For example, Emilie Markwick and her husband Herbert. Mrs Markwick had been born into the Dorlencourt family. The Dorlencourt family had members based in Boulogne (an easy target for the invading forces in 1914), Hastings and Brighton.



*Emilie Dorlencourt / Markwicj in 1915 with her husband and children (Emily aged 7 and Alfred aged 11)*

There was also Mr Edmund Chaplin Baldwin OBE, FCA. Mr Baldwin was an accountant by profession and general manager of the South of England Daries. So keen was he on France and all things French that he became the first President of the Brighton and Hove French Circle in 1915. His Vice-President was Emilie's father, Monsieur Adolphe Dorlencourt. Just as importantly, Mr Baldwin recruited his son, Mr Harry Bardsley Chaplin Baldwin, to be the Honorary Auditor of the Circle.



Above is an image of the earliest membership record still in existence. It dates from about 1929<sup>i</sup> and has the names of Mr and Mrs Chaplin Baldwin at 9 Windlesham Avenue, Mr and Mrs Dorlencourt at 25 College Gardens and Mrs and Mrs Markwick at 14 York Villas.

At first, so the memories of early members have it, the Circle met in the flat of Miss Reeve in Montpelier Crescent. In the membership book above, Miss Reeve is marked as living at 17

Prestonville Road, then as living at Chingford and finally as "dec'd". In 1918, Pigot's Directory shows Miss Reeve at Flat 3, 32 Montpelier Crescent with a Mrs Smither. Until 1917 Mr Smither was the tenant<sup>ii</sup> of the flat but not in 1918. Had he been killed in the war? Whatever happened, it is clear that Miss Reeve was living in the flat by 1918 at the latest.

The meetings at Miss Reeve's flat were confirmed in a note to the minutes of the 1931 AGM: "It is with sadness that we have to announce the death of one of our most faithful members, Mrs Hooper, who was one of the founders of the Circle at a time when meetings were held in Miss Reeve's home". Mrs Hooper had died on 18 November 1930.

Émilie Markwick was not the only early member of French extraction. The "Mme Laundry" listed in the membership list is Olive Marie Anne Claeysens (or Claessen) who married Albert William John (or George)<sup>iii</sup> Laundry. In 1918, Mme Laundry was living, apparently *sans* husband, at Flat 4, 37 Montpelier Crescent.

### **After the Great War**

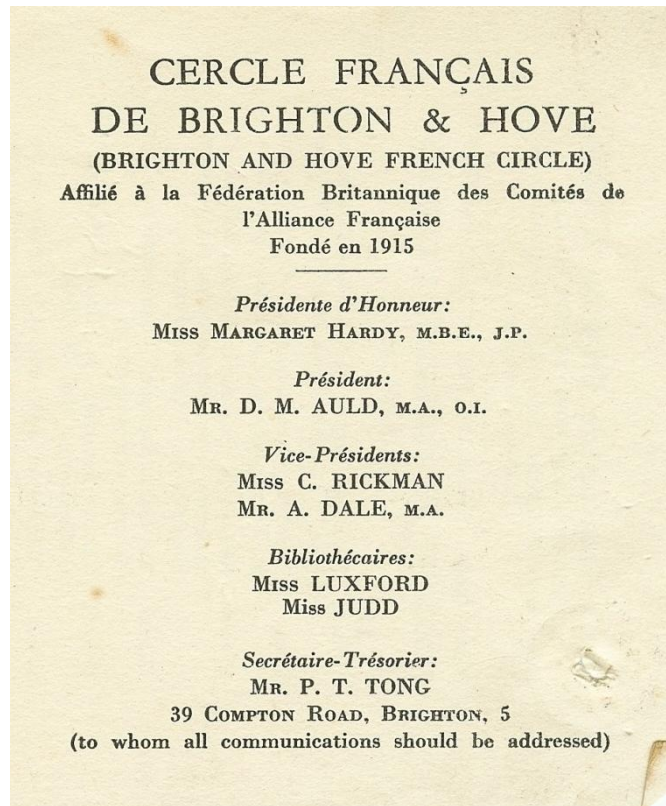
Following WW1, the Circle benefitted from the work of some formidable members.

Miss Margaret Hardy MBE, JP (1874-1954) had been Mayor of Brighton in 1932/3. She had even had a school named after her (later known as Patcham High School).



*Miss Margaret Hardy Président d'Honneur  
1935-1952*

On the election of Margaret Hardy as Mayor, a female correspondent of the Brighton and Hove Herald proclaimed: "*We can prophesy an increasing degeneracy of life in England that will reach its lowest point with the zenith of feminist influence.*"<sup>iv</sup>" Thank goodness the Circle has never taken that attitude for it has always had a high preponderance of women members and "activists".



However, in the early post war period there were two dynamic men who, sadly, both died within a few months of each other in 1954.

Donald Moyes Auld (1902-1954) had been Senior Foreign Languages Master at Lewes Grammar School (now The Priory School) since its founding in 1930. He was instrumental in the twinning of Lewes and Blois. It was in Blois that Mr Auld died during one of the regular school exchange trips to the town in April. It must have been some small compensation that his French-born wife and his daughter were with him in the town when he died.

Mr Auld's "partner in crime" was Percy Thomas Tong (1876-1954). He died a matter of months before Mr Auld in January 1945. He had lived at 39 Compton Avenue since at least 1904 but other than that little is known of him. This is a great pity as both he and Mr Auld worked tirelessly for the Circle. Does Mr Tong appear in the photograph below? Was he instrumental in getting an invitation for Circle members to Lord de la Warr's estate?



*Earl and Lady de la Warr greet French Circle members at Buckhurst Place in 1951*

There were other very active members at this time. Three young people had joined in the early 1930s. To Brighton residents, the best known of these is Antony Dale, OBE (1912-1993), conservationist, writer on the architecture of Brighton and founder of the Regency Society. He was clearly an important member, supporting the aims of the Circle until his death. Already a vice-president of the Circle in 1954, his activities earned him the well deserved Grand Diplôme of the Alliance Française in 1985.



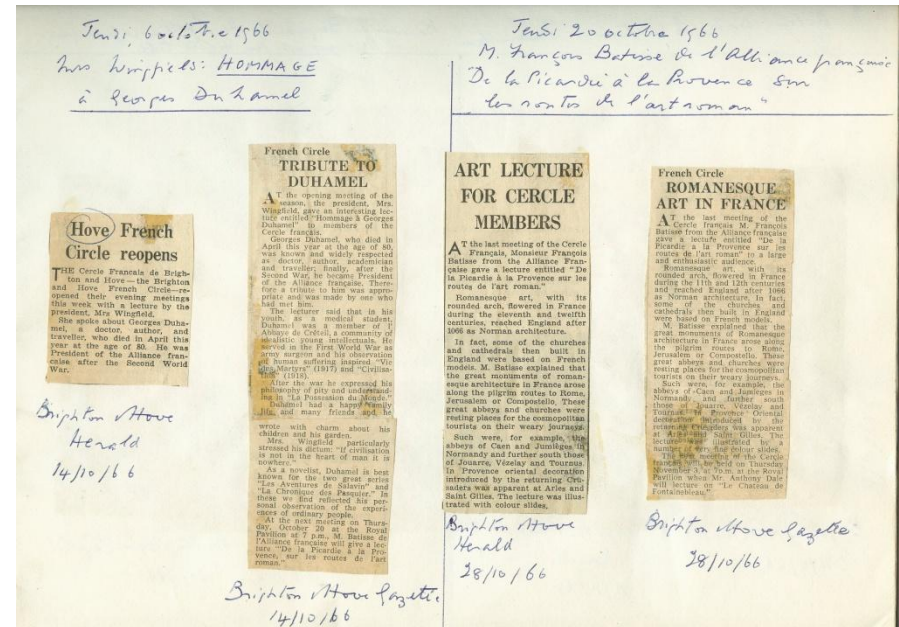
*Antony Dale (2nd from left) with the Mayor and Mayoress of Hove, M. Gérard Gras and Mrs Gill Forte*

The second of this band of youngsters was Miss Edna Grace. Edna (1914-1983) had spent several of her childhood years in Belgium as, according to Edna herself, private education was much cheaper on the continent than in England<sup>v</sup>. Her love of the French language was evident. After her marriage to Henry Dixon in 1947, Edna's flair for organising social events was put to very good use. She even inveigled her husband to become Honorary Auditor of the Circle, a post he held for many years until his death in 1975. Henry was not the only member of the Dixon family to be drawn into the Circle.

Edna's son, Andrew, was not only a teenage recruit, but also did sterling service as projectionist of the Circle's slide projector. Many a time did a speaker drop their slides. Andrew would help out, spending frantic minutes rearranging them just before a meeting.

Last, and by far from least, was Kay (Kathleen Olive) Theis (1912-2010).

Kay had joined in 1931 and was still a member at the time of her death in 2010. Kay had filled every post in the Circle except that of Treasurer. She was a tireless Secretary - one of her lasting, tangible achievements being her bi-weekly reports on meetings. Amazingly, these were published in the local press. Despite being a resident of Hove, Kay was clearly annoyed by the press report which carried the headline "Hove French Circle reopens". Notice the hasty ring round the word "Hove" in the next image.



Kay's achievements and her 70 years of unbroken membership were honoured by the Alliance Française of London which awarded her, exceptionally, a Gold Pin to mark the milestone.



*Kay Theis (right) holding the Gold Pin awarded to her by the Alliance Française, next to Dr Chrystel Hug of the Alliance Française of London*

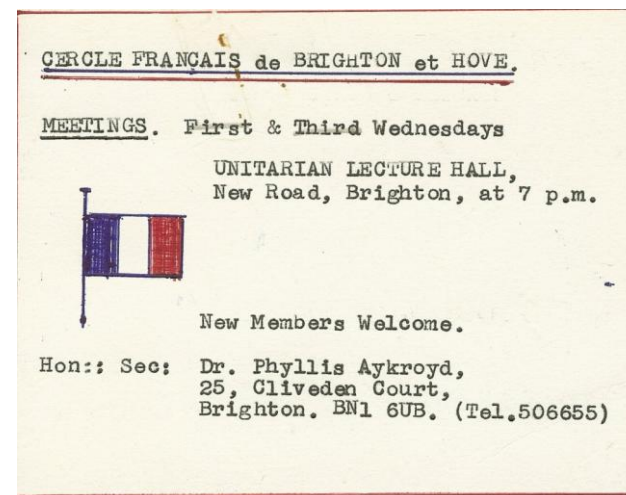
However, this was only the culmination of a series of French awards that Kay had received: much earlier, in 1953, she had already received the *Médaille Belmondo* for services to the Alliance Française, in 1975 she had received the Grand Diplôme of the Alliance Française and a few years later she was awarded the *Ordre des Palmes Académiques*. Yet Kay was no dry academic. She wrote poetry in English and French, she recorded audio books for the blind and she tirelessly supported the Brighton and Hove Stroke

Club, all the while, until her 60s, keeping up a busy career in the insurance industry.

Over the years, the following members have been awarded the Grand Diplôme d'Honneur:

- Mr P T Tong 1949
- Miss Kay O Theis 1975
- Mrs Marie Wingfield 1976
- Mr Antony Dale 1985

The Circle has worked hard over the last 100 years to balance its budget. This has often taken the form of flyers and leaflets. In the days before computers and desk-top publishing, these sometimes looked a little naive:





Dr Phyllis Aykroyd (1898- 1975) was, by all accounts, a rather formidable academic from Dublin. She was Secretary of the Circle from about 1959-1972. It might not be too harsh to suspect that it was not Dr Aykroyd herself who so carefully hand-coloured the Tricolore on the Circle's "visiting card" above. But as an academic (she was Head of the Arts and Social Studies Department of Brighton Technical College) she was generous in giving talks. Her name frequently appears on the programme as do those of Mr Dale, Miss Rickman and Mrs Marie Wingfield.

### **The programme**

"The programme" is at the heart of the Circle's life. From the 1951 programme printed below it can be seen that the 12 events listed from only part of the season's activities. From October to March 1950-1951 a further nine talks, readings and social evenings were organised by the hard working Secretary.

Speakers (conférenciers) have always been drawn from likely and unlikely sources: members of the Circle; speakers on the Alliance Française circuit (still a mainstay of the Circle programme in 2015); local academics; translators; writers; journalists (from both the newspaper and broadcast media) and representatives from many Francophone embassies (for example, Haiti in 1965; Quebec, Luxembourg and Senegal in 1990) .

Certain evenings were very adventurous: "L'Histoire du Ballet (avec danseuses) in 1970, a bagpipe recital in 1990 stand out as being highly unusual.

Talks have been interspersed with quizzes, wine and cheese tasting; play readings, *Disques pour une île déserte*, as well as various social evenings (*Fête des Rois; Soirée des Treize Desserts*). Alas, *La Grande fête du 14 juillet* seems to have fallen by the wayside after about 1985. It has largely been replaced by a *Matinée en plein air* in June. The *Matinée* is a summer outing which has taken members to such varied venue as the Rare Books collection of the Jubilee Library, the Middle Street Synagogue and Volk's Railway in Brighton. In Shoreham-by-Sea, members have visited the charming Martlets Museum and the Art Deco Airport; the now-defunct vineyard in Ditchling was popular with members, as was the visit to the stately home and motor museum at Bentley in Mid-Sussex.



A "Matinée en plein air" in the evening in the 1980's. Left to right: Geoffrey Spence, unidentified man, Cicely Spence, unidentified lady, Kay Theis, Brenda York, Ken Gloyn, John and Muriel Hutchinson

For many years, members seem to have had rather a love-hate relationship with "conversation evenings". The Committee is often asked for more "conversation" and yet, when a conversation evening is on the programme, turn out tends to be disappointingly low.

## Cercle Français de Brighton & Hove

(BRIGHTON AND HOVE FRENCH CIRCLE)

Affilié à la Fédération Britannique des Comités de l'Alliance Française

36ème Année ; Session 1950/1951 ; "Royal Pavilion"

### PROGRAMME DES CONFÉRENCES & CAUSERIES

(Mars-Juillet 1951)

1951

- 1 mars. "Contacts Anglais de la Révolution Française." Conférence par Miss Penne-Thorne.
- 15 mars. "Les Basques et leur pays." Conférence par M. Yves Arramond, L.ès L. Avec projections.
- 29 mars. Récitals de Chansons Française Anciennes et Modernes, avec commentaires, par Madame Sophie Wyss. (Alliance Française).
- 12 avril. "Le Maroc Français." Conférence par Miss Roberts, avec projections.
- 26 avril. "Alain Fournier; le Grand Meaulnes." Conférence par Mrs. Wingfield.
- 10 mai. "Les Arts et la Décoration." Conférence par M. Jean Bonnaveau (Alliance Française) avec projections.
- 24 mai. "Molière, le Farceur." Conférence par Mademoiselle A. Lion, B.Litt., Ph.D., de Roedean School.
- 7 juin. "Les visages contradictoires de Napoléon III." Conférence par M. François Bedarida (Alliance Française).
- 21 juin. Conversation et Quiz.
- 5 juillet. "Tennyson et Victor Hugo": deux poètes, deux peuples une époque. Conférence par M. Félix Rose (Alliance Française).
- 19 juillet. Assemblée Générale.

MEETINGS : every other Thursday, 7 till 9 p.m. (October-July).

SUBSCRIPTION : 10/- yearly.

HEADQUARTERS : "Royal Pavilion, Brighton."

LIBRARY : a collection of French books is at the Members' disposal; they can be borrowed at a nominal fee.

### The French Circle's "homes"

As can be seen from the programme above, "home" was the rather grand Red Salon at the Royal Pavilion . Meetings appear to have been held there from about 1926<sup>vi</sup> until that fateful day in 1958 when the rent increased from 7/6d (37½p) to more than £1/9/9d (£1.48½p) - an intolerable burden.



*The glorious Red Salon of the Royal Pavilion became far too expensive*

This rent rise forced a move, first to the more prosaic Conference Room 3 on the Pavilion Estate. Andrew Dixon well remembers the room: *"in the 60s they still had an ancient power supply system which used an odd type of plug for which they had to supply an*

*adaptor. My brother, being an electrician, sourced our own adaptor".* What would the "Health and Safety brigade" have to say about that today.

Eventually the Circle was then ousted from that room on the Pavilion Estate as it was needed to serve as a Coroner's Court... and anyway, that rent had gone up to £3/8/0d. Another mover was required. The Unitarian Church in New Road seemed highly suitable. It did indeed suit for several years (1959-1973) but as the evening meetings seemed to be ever more plagued by the cold in the vast hall and as membership dwindled, the Circle moved home once again, this time to 65 Holland Road, Hove seen here during a low period of its history.

During the time the Circle rented the hall, the property was owned by the Hove Conservative Association. The Association was run by the formidable but generous Colonel Exley.

The building had had a chequered history as a Young Women's Christian Institute (1870's to 1905), a Barnardo's Home for Convalescent Boys (1907-1938) and then as a temporary synagogue (1958-1968) during the building of the Reform Synagogue in Palmeira Square



*65 Holland Road, Hove, home to the French Circle from 1973 until 1989*

The main feature of the premises which was the large hall behind the building. Whilst waiting for the arrival of a speaker, members of the Circle could gaze up at the exposed metal beams of the hall. On one joint of each beam was pretty roundel representing a young woman's face. How many young girls had met in that hall for prayers, to eat or as part of a sewing bee. The hall has been demolished and is now no more than a concrete space serving as a car park, but the building itself has found a new lease of life as residential flats.

At 65 Holland Road, the Circle benefitted from a tiny but well fitted out kitchen and, most importantly, a very large cupboard to store The Library.

### **The Library**

The Library appears to have started in 1936 and was ruled over for its first twelve years by Miss Hall and Miss Grace (Edna Dixon). *"It was, at one time, housed in a purpose built cupboard in the ladies' cloakroom adjoining the Red Drawing Room of the Royal Pavilion. On those occasions when the cloakroom was in use, men members had to submit their requests for books via the ladies. When the Circle left the Red Drawing Room to go to Conference Room 3, the bookcase was relegated to a back staircase and finally refused space anywhere in the Pavilion. For some years, the*

*librarians nobly housed the books in their own homes, taking orders and lugging the books to the next meeting.*

*"This pitiful situation was brought to an end in 1970, when books were removed from the care of the surviving Librarian, Miss Judd, and offered for sale, first to members, then, after gifts to Sussex University (21 books), Brighton and Hove High School (49 books) and Brighton and Hove and Sussex Grammar School (58 books) to Hove Public Library, who purchased the balance for £10.*

*"Now (c1973) that we are in the happy position of being once again able to own a library, we are building up our stock of books thanks to a number of generous donors<sup>viii</sup>."*

In 1990 the Circle (and its books) moved to St John's Day Centre in Palmeira Square. The chairs were very comfortable - but comfortable armchairs have the disadvantage of having high backs. The first row was really the only row from which members could have any hope of actually seeing the speaker. However, the café area was much appreciated, as was the kitchen. Two more moves followed, first to the rather large and lofty St Christopher's School Hall, then to the even more barn-like St Leonards Church Hall in Glebe Villas, Aldrington. As membership dwindled, the Committee became convinced that the Circle had moved too far away from the Centre of the City. The advantages of relatively easy parking were

outweighed by several other factors, so the move was made to the Grace Eyre Centre. Our welcome was warm at first, but gradually we were made to feel that we were not good tenants. Our Centenary year brought us back virtually to the heart of the City ; St John's Day Centre.

### **The Treasurer**

Vital to the running of the Circle, indeed a key officer, has always been the Treasurer. The doughty Mr Percy Tong seems to have held the post from time immemorial (or at least, the typescript of the history of the Circle gives no start date to his tenure) until 1953. Miss Yvonne Burley held the post from 1953 until 1966 and then again from 1973-1979.

Geoffrey Spence served (after two years as President) from 1980-1985. Geoffrey and his wife Cicely remained members of the Circle until Geoffrey's death in 2012. Geoffrey made a great impact on the Circle: always the perfect gentleman, always quietly spoken and always talking sense. Few members of the Circle realised that Geoffrey was not only a stalwart employee of the local Red Cross, but the Chair of the Bench, holder of the MBE and founder member, with Cicely, of the highly successful amateur Little Theatre in Brighton.



*Cicely and Geoffrey Spence on stage at the Little Theatre,  
Clarence Gardens, Brighton c 1940*

The most recent holder is the present incumbent, John Loveridge who took up the reins in 1989 and has thus broken all records for longevity as Treasurer. John has consistently ensured the financial good running of the Circle. He must, indeed, be counted as a scourge of banks: no bank has ever made an error against the Circle's account without John demanding (and receiving!) compensation. The generous funding received from the City Council's Communities Festival Fund were the result of John's hard work. An unbroken innings of 26 years and counting.

### **Fund raising**

Despite the excellent efforts of all of the Treasurers throughout the history of the Circle, there has always been the need to raise funds. The members of the Circle are enthusiastic organisers of fund-raising events. These events have ranged from the lavish, three course banquets catered entirely by the members of Circle and which hosted the Mayor of Brighton or of Hove to a simple "*déjeuner en plein air*" in a member's garden (indoors if wet!).



*This "déjeuner en plein air" had to retreat to the member's living room. Far left, Antony Dale chats to Mrs Marie Wingfield (1980s)*

Despite the fact that Circle members are keen Francophiles and love France, they are nevertheless, almost exclusively British in their background. Members of the Circle excel at standing for hours, selling bric-a-brac in the teeth of a cold early May Day.



*Mrs Cicely Spence (left) and Miss Kay Theis at "the longest bric-a-brac stall in the world" on Hove Promenade, May 1988*

In later years, the Circle made the decision to limit stock to books. Thanks to the specialist knowledge of Mrs Loveridge, the stock on offer at sales (donated almost exclusively by members) was always of the highest quality. Unfortunately the high quality of the books and the hours spent by members in Hove Park at Hove Lions (later

The Martlets) Carnival have not always been rewarded with high takings, especially, as in 2014, when rain stops play.



*Suzanne Hinton attempts to interest the very few customers to purchase a Gallic cock while Geoffrey Spence is in heaven with a cup of coffee and a good book. 1988*



*Come rain, Lili Wilson, Hazel Morris, Ray Ager and John Loveridge turn out to sell books (c 2010)*



*...or shine. John Loveridge, helped by Valerie Cook*



No social even at the Circle is complete without a lottery and for many years, Hazel Morris was unsurpassed in wheedling a pound here and a pound there out of the pockets of members.



*Hazel Morris's method of painless extracting funds from members.*

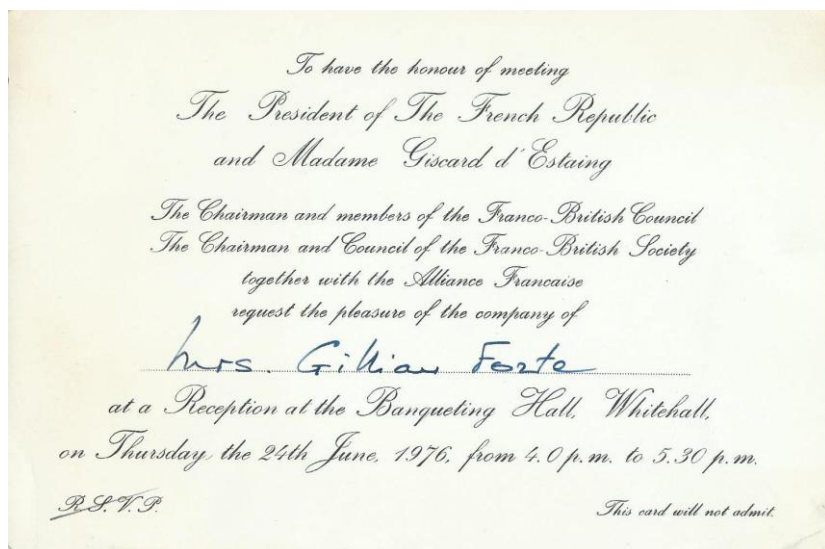
The words of Kay Theis are perhaps fitting here: *"We have had our crises, and we have often skated on thin ice, financially, only raising our subscriptions when driven to do so, but we have proudly maintained our standards, and I think that if our founding fathers, who worked so hard for the Circle and for the furtherance of Anglo-*

*French relations, were to return today, we need not blush before them, and they might even say, 'Well done'."*

### **Alliance Française de Londres**

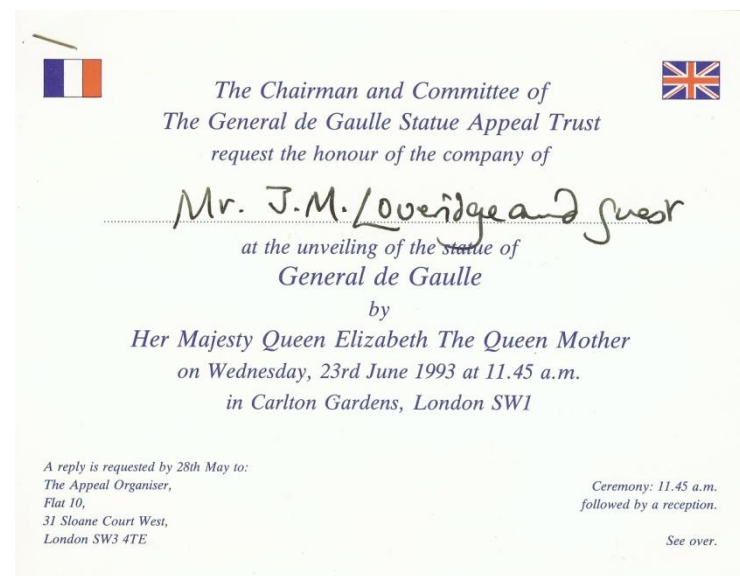
There are no records to show how long the Circle has been connected with the Alliance Française de Londres. Suffice it to say that this organisation, completely independently of the Alliance Française in Paris, has been a constant support in the activities of the Circle throughout our history. Members of the Circle were regularly invited to the London AGM at which they could meet potential speakers on the Alliance list or catch up with colleagues and friends from Circles in other parts of the country. Swapping tales of excellent (and sometimes not so excellent speakers), organisational difficulties and any little problems formed a great bond throughout the Francophile land.

The Alliance has also been instrumental in including members of the Brighton and Hove Circle in invitations to major events such as a guided tour of the French Ambassador's residence in Kensington Palace Gardens and the dinner in the presence of President Giscard d'Estaing in 1976.







On the death of Edna Dixon in 1984, the Circle was proud to be able to sponsor a white rose in her honour. The rose was named "Alliance". Aptly, Saturday 14 July was chosen as the day for the rose to be "officially" planted in St Anne's Well Gardens in Hove.

In 1993, again, thanks to the Alliance Française de Londres, John Loveridge was invited to yet another prestigious event, the unveiling of the Charles de Gaulle Statue in Carlton Gardens.



It is also due to the generosity of the Alliance Française in London that many members have been awarded medals and diplomas. Indeed, it is thanks to the Alliance that Kay Theis was nominated for the French national award, the Palmes Académiques. The Circle is always delighted to promote France and the French language, but also much appreciates recognition from the Alliance as well as from the French state.

## Centenary Celebrations

Sponsors

Bom-Bane's Café, Brighton  
[www.bom-banes.com](http://www.bom-banes.com)

Cave à Fromage, Hove  
[www.la-cave.co.uk](http://www.la-cave.co.uk)

Brighton & Hove City Council  
Community Festivals Fund

Helen Stanton  
[www.helenstantonillustration.com](http://www.helenstantonillustration.com)

# 100 years

CERCLE FRANCAIS


invites you to join in  
with its centenary  
celebrations.








14.00 to 18.15 on Saturday  
14 March 2015 The Hove Club,  
28 Fourth Avenue, Hove  
BN3 2PJ

Free entry.  
Members of the public welcome.

PROGRAMME

14.00 Jane Bom-Bane et amies ; chansons françaises  
14.25 Dansez-Français ; danses folkloriques françaises  
14.50 Jane Bom-Bane et amies ; chansons françaises  
15.15 Dansez-Français ; danses folkloriques françaises  
15.40 Jane Bom-Bane et amies ; chansons françaises  
16.05 André Nicolas ; Bourvil : un artiste aux  
multiples talents  
16.40 Jane Bom-Bane et amies ; chansons françaises  
17.05 Dansez-Français ; danses folkloriques françaises  
17.30 André Nicolas ; Bourvil : un artiste aux  
multiples talents  
18.00 FINISH



Preparations for the Centenary Celebrations started in 2013 when the Committee debated such topics as "open air" versus "indoors", March versus July, formal versus informal. The decision was finally made to hold informal entertainment on the afternoon of March 15 in The Hove Club, to be followed by a formal dinner at the same place. This would be expensive.

John Loveridge set about the long task of applying to the Brighton and Hove City Council's Communities Festival Fund for financial support. John's careful application won vitally-needed funds of £1500 for which the Circle is most grateful. This subsidy paid for the hire of the hall, the entertainers and various other incidentals.

But the fun had by all involved and the increase in awareness of the Circle was well beyond any financial considerations.



*Jane Bom-Bane and friends encourage audience participation*



*Thanks to our sponsors, the raffle was a huge success: Michon Welton (estate agents), Helen Stanton (illustrator), Bom-Bane's Restaurant (Brighton), La Cave à Fromage (Hove) and the Brighton and Hove City Council Community Festivals Fund*



*Each dinner guest received a small memento of the event*



*Dance group "Dancez Français" show the audience how it's done in Brittany (en Breizh)*



*M. André Nicholas recounts the life of Bourvil whom he met when the star was filming in Le Havre near M. Nicholas' home*

### List of officers and their tenure

The post of Président d'Honneur is one with which the Circle is not always at ease. It would appear that before about 1935, when Miss Margaret Hardy was elected, this post had not existed. Then, between 1945 and 1953, both Miss Hardy and M. Dorlencourt were joint Présidents d'Honneur. The post then fell into abeyance after the death of Mr Dale.

For political reasons, the role of President has been subject to fluctuating terms of tenure, with the constitution being amended several times over the years (always with the approval of an Assemblée Générale). From the mid-1960s to the early years of the 21st century, the presidential term of office lasted only two years. Many of these Présidents, whilst not relishing the idea of holding the post, gave up their valuable time for a couple of years to support the Circle. On the other hand, the Circle remembers with gratitude the work of the very active Mr Neville Schooling (1971-1973) who was later instrumental in attracting the Alliance Française to Brighton in 1983 for its AGM; Mr Richard White (1990-1992) during whose time membership rose to nearly 100 and the indefatigable Mrs Gill Forte whose energy and enthusiasm ensured the success of the Circle's Centenary events in 2015.



*Photo courtesy of Bernard Sasso*



*The Committee 14 March 2015 (l - r) Gill Forte (Présidente),  
Suzanne Hinton; John Loveridge, Valerie Cook; Lili Wilson,  
Val Betts, Beccy Bebb*

### **Présidents d'honneur**<sup>viii</sup>

Alderman Miss Margaret Hardy	? - 1953
M. Adolphe Dorlencourt	1945 - ?
Miss C Rickman	1949 - 1961
Mr A Dale OBE	1969 - 1993
Dr Phyllis Aykroyd	1974 - 1975

### **Présidents**

Mr Edmund Chaplin Baldwin OBE	1915 - 1926
M. Adolphe Dorlencourt	1926 - 1945
Mr Donald M Auld	1945 - 1954
Miss C Rickman	1954 - 1956
Mr Antony Dale OBE	1956 - 1967
Mrs Marie Wingfield	
Dr Phyllis Aykroyd	1967 - 1969
Miss Kay (Kathleen) Theis	1969 - 1971
Mr Neville Schooling	1971 - 1973
Mrs Edna Dixon	1973 - 1975
Mr Neville Schooling	1975 - 1978
Mr Geoffrey E Spence	1978 - 1980
Mrs Suzanne Hinton	1980 - 1983
Mrs Gill Forte	1983 - 1986
Mr Peter Stone	1986 - 1988
Mr Ken B Gloyn	1988 - 1990

Mr Richard White	1990 - 1992
Mrs Gill Forte	1992 - 1994
Mrs Patricia Kendall	1995 - 1996
Mr Ken B Gloyn	1996 - 1998
Mrs Val Betts	1998 - 2000
Mrs Brenda Crowther	2000 - 2002
Mrs Lili Wilson	2002 - 2004
Mr Ken B Gloyn	2004 - 2006
Mrs Val Betts	2006 - 2008
Mr Ken B Gloyn	2008 - 2009
Mrs Gill Forte	2009 - 2015

#### **Secretaries**

Mr Percy Tong	? - 1951
Miss Kay Theis	1951 - 1964
Mr Phyllis Aykroyd	1964 - 1970
Mrs Edna Dixon	1970 - 1973
Miss Kay Theis	1973 - 1975
Mrs Gill Forte	1975 - 1979
Mrs Suzanne Hinton	1979 - 1982
Mrs Dorothy Woolliscroft	1982 - 1988
Mr Peter Stone	1988 - 1989
Mrs Suzanne Hinton	1989 - 2015

#### **Programme Secretaries**

Mrs Marie Young	1999 - 2000
Mrs Val Betts	2000 - 2005
Mrs Lili Wilson	2005 - 2015

#### **Treasurers**

Mr Percy Tong	? - 1953
Miss Yvonne Burley	1953 - 1966
Mrs D Steer	1966 - 1967
Mr F Checksfield	1967 - 1971
Mr R Bray	1971 - 1972
Miss Kay Theis	1972 - 1973
Miss Yvonne Burley	1973 - 1979
Mrs Patricia Hills	1979 - 1980
Mr Geoffrey Spence	1980 - 1986
Mr David Woodcock	1986 - 1989
Mr John Loveridge	1989 - 2015



Over the years, the Alliance Française has awarded the following medals to our members:

1951	Mr D M Auld	Médaille d'argent
1952	Miss C Rickman	Médaille de bronze
1953	Miss Kay O Theis	Médaille de bronze
1957	Mr Anthony	Médaille de bronze
1958	Mrs Marie Wingfield	Médaille de bronze
1959	Mrs Edna Dixon	Médaille de bronze
1966	Dr P Aykroyd	Médaille de bronze
1972	Mr Nevil Schooling	Médaille de bronze
1978	Mrs Gill Forte	Médaille de bronze
1989	Mr Geoffrey Spence	Médaille Dropsy
1991	Mr Ken Gloyn	Médaille Belmondo
1992	Mrs Suzanne Hinton	Médaille Belmondo
1993	Mr Richard White	Médaille Belmondo
1995	Mrs Patricia Kendall	Médaille Belmondo

## Subscription fees

As with many small groups, the Committee has clearly taken a policy of hesitating to put up the subscription rates for as long as possible. The members then are faced with an increase of as much as 50% (1988 to 1989). Increases in subscriptions echo UK inflation, although somewhat belatedly. The crises of the mid 1970s worked their way through to subscriptions only in the late 1980s. The inflation peak of 1990 was not reflected until 1993, and then only modestly.

1951	10/-
1953 - 1957	15/-
1969	£ 1/10/0 = £1.50
1972	£ 1.50
1983	£ 5.00
1984	£ 6.00
1988	£ 9 00
1989	£10.00
1993	£12.00
1998	£17.00
2007	£20.00
2013	£25.00

Text of the short history written (probably) by Miss Kay Theis in the 1970s and updated in the 1980s:

*"The Circle Français de Brighton et Hove was founded in 1915 with a membership of ten, and the first informal meetings were held in Miss Reeve's drawing room in Montpelier Crescent.*

*When the membership increased, it was necessary to remove to more suitable premises, and from 1924 onwards, the Red Drawing Room in the Royal Pavilion became the spiritual home of the Circle. By 1936 the membership had increased to 86, with an average attendance of 46 (60 for illustrated talks).*

*Meetings in the early years, up to the outbreak of war, were held once week, and the year extended from 1st September to 31 July. After 1945, for reasons of economy, the meetings were held fortnightly, and the year was cut to end in June instead of July.*

*The Circle was affiliated to the Alliance Française in 1915.*

*It is a matter of wonder now as to how the programme of 48 weeks could possibly have been set up, but there was a conversation evening, lecture de morceaux choisis, and a play reading each month and only one talk. Also in the period immediately preceding the war, we had a number of younger members (the names of Anthony Mann, Roger Martin, Aida Flower, Maud Newman and, of course, Antony Dale, Edna Grace and Kay Theis spring*

*to mind), and we wrote our own material and sometimes had a 'soirée jeunesse'.*

*A coach outing was a regular feature of the summer season. In fact, we were at that period much more of a social club and less of a lecture society.*

*Our membership actually went above 100, and in 1954/5 it stood at 70 with two schools as corporate members and 101 visitors during the season.*

*Our subscription pre-war was ten shillings, and this was not increased until 1953, when an increase was forced on us by rising costs."*

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<sup>i</sup> Mrs Laundry had left Montpelier Crescent by 1929 (Pike's Directory)

<sup>ii</sup> Pike's Directory 1917

<sup>iii</sup> In both cases, it depends on which version of Ancestry is consulted.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://bizarrebritain.com/a-monstrous-regiment-of-women/>

<sup>v</sup> as also described by Simona Pakenham in "Pigtails and Pernod"

<sup>vi</sup> Brighton and Hove Herald 9 January 1926: "at the Royal Pavilion. Next Thursday at 7.45 pm a talk on the subject *Une visite à Verdun* by Councillor Baldwin. "French speaking friends cordially invited. P T Tong 39 Compton-rd Brighton Hon Sec.

<sup>vii</sup> Typescript of the history of the Brighton and Hove French Circle. Author: possibly Kay Theis. Part of this typescript appears to have been written in the mid 1970's and updated 10 years later.

<sup>viii</sup> Facts up to 1982 courtesy of the late Miss Kay Theis