



# THE *English Library*



## WHAT'S ON IN DECEMBER/JANUARY

### EVENTS

There are many, many **Christmas markets, animations and concerts** in and around Villefranche. Check out this link for daily holiday activities.

<https://www.tourisme-villefranche-najac.com/fr/agenda/index.php#ds12%5BglGeo%5D=10~44.36411490254152~1.7468261718750002~45.02597983843737~2.3661804199218754&ds12%5BglDays%5D=tday2158~2-63>

Friday 13th December and Friday 10th January - **Fish and Chips**, Gare de Villefranche. As usual, pre-order with Cod en Bleu using their online ordering page at <http://www.cod-en-bleu.com/OrderOnline.aspx> then reserve your table in Le Césarée bar.

**Le Growing Groupe** - The next meeting is on Wednesday 4th December at 2.30pm at Marion's house at La Motte. The cost will be 6 euros - 3 euros for garden entry and 3 euros for tea and cake which she will supply. The subject is The Winter Garden. For more details email [colandsuereeve@gmail.com](mailto:colandsuereeve@gmail.com) or phone Anne Dyson on 05 65 81 47 67 or 068367878

**Kraft** - you might already be familiar with Kraft, the Villefranche shop that pops up twice a year, July/August in summer and November/December in winter. Once again it's doors are open for you to browse among the handmade objects and maybe find interesting and original end of year gifts. You will not only be supporting local crafts people but also, by shopping locally, reducing carbon footprint and emissions. Apart from that the shop is full of lovely items, such as clothes, jewellery, fabrics, as well as artistic and decorative items. Opening hours 10-12.30 & 14.30-19h Tuesday to Saturday. In December they will be open Sunday 15/12 and 22/12 and Monday 23/12. It is on rue Marcellin Fabre almost opposite Bedel bakery.

### EXHIBITIONS

13-22 December Atelier Blanc - **Lumière Noire**. Hors Cadres is a cooperative printing workshop run by a small group of dedicated artists and printers in Villefranche. Each year HC in partnership with Atelier Blanc organise an end of year show in December. This year the theme is Lumière Noire (ultraviolet light which allows fluorescent colours to shine). The Lumière noire installation will take place in Atelier Blanc on Saturday and Sunday 14 & 15 December & 18 - 22 Dec. (14h-18h) The vernissage is on Friday 13 December at 18h. Why not drop by on your way to fish & chips? The Atelier Blanc is situated by the river further along from the Hotel de Ville. Go down the steps behind the tourist office and the gallery is a few paces along on the right.

Hors Cadre is a non profit organisation that specialises in screen printing and etching. Individual and group courses can be arranged both in English and in French.

### CONCERTS

Sunday December 15th **Choir de Parisot** @17.30 in Parisot church  
Monday December 23rd, 6pm **Carol Concert** Saint Antonin



For more details of local events visit [www.tourisme-aveyron.com](http://www.tourisme-aveyron.com) or [www.villefranche.com](http://www.villefranche.com). Please let me know of any events you would like publicised in future issues ([annpatd@gmail.com](mailto:annpatd@gmail.com))

**A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT**

## Reminder

December 5 is the day of the General Strike across France. Most services will be withdrawn and the Social Centre will be closed on Thursday and possibly Friday so I hope that you don't need to change your books!

There has been so much unrest and violence all over the world, I hope that 2020 will be a significant year for a change of attitude globally and we can all enjoy a time of calm and reasonable behaviour not least from politicians.

Wherever you are enjoy Christmas and have a Happy New Year, travel safely and stay well.

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**FOR SALE**

Following sale of house we have a range of good quality furniture - beds, wardrobes, small tables, chest of drawers etc - for sale at very reasonable prices.

If interested please contact Maggie by email. [garai@btinternet.com](mailto:garai@btinternet.com)

**LIBRARYLIT**

Parisot library, in partnership with Festilitt, presents LibraryLit - a series of literary events throughout the year. The next event at Parisot Library on Saturday 7th December is a talk by Anna Bentinck on 'The Audio Book - A Narrator's Perspective'.

After a career on the stage Anna is now an award winning Audio Book Narrator with over 300 audio books to her name, many of them famous titles including 'Beyond Black' by Hilary Mantel, 'Wide Sargasso Sea' by Jean Rhys, and 'One Day' by David Nicholls.

Sales in audio books are booming and are now the fastest growing area of consumer publishing. Anna is right at the forefront of this publishing phenomenon receiving fantastic critical acclaim and becoming a huge success as a narrator. She has won the Audiofile Earphones Award three times and recently won another for 'The Dark Flood Rises' by Margaret Drabble.

She will outline the whole audio book production process including her own preparation which, unsurprisingly, is rather more of a challenge than merely picking up a book and reading out loud. She promises also to explain how and why she made the jump into audio book narration and to give us some insight into her life as an actor, the roles she has played and the ups and downs of her actor life. She will also read from some of the books she has narrated professionally including 'The Dark Flood Rises' by Margaret Drabble, 'Mr Doubler Begins Again' by Seni Glaister and 'The Missing Sister' by Dinah Jeffries.



## Programme:

10.30	Talk
11.15	Discussion
11.45	Apéros

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## WISDOM OF HINDSIGHT

Working in a London advertising agency, I had several American clients. One was a large food company for whom we were looking at the potential of a line of cattle feed products (heady stuff but I was a junior at the time) and the marketing manager was excited about how these contained additives to make cows grow bigger, faster. In other words, full of hormones.

The second was a producer of 'quick chill' ready meals whose avowed objective was to increase the market penetration of 'food service', in other words anything that didn't involve people creating meals at home from scratch. I can't remember the exact share of 'meal occasions' this market accounted for in 1980s America, but it was around the 40% area I think.



My pride and joy however, was looking after a major producer of carbonated soft drinks. The company was examining the potential of German regional beers in the UK market but the brands they had in mind sadly didn't research well so I was inundated with trial product. I well recall taking much of the stuff home and having a whale of a party with friends demanding to know where they could buy the beer.

Suffice it to say that the client's principal business objective for that year was to install soft drink dispensers in as many public places as possible in an effort to make availability 'ubiquitous' and substitute their product for both tea and believe it or not, tap water.

While it all seemed like a brave new world at the time, wisdom of hindsight points to an uncomfortable sense that the world's largest economy had been spending fortunes influencing consumer behaviour in entirely in the wrong direction.

If we look at the effects in the UK, research published last week suggested that only 11% of British adults cook the majority of their meals from scratch with the remaining 89% relying mainly on takeaways or ready meals. One in ten said that in the past year they hadn't cooked at all. To add to this Diabetes UK claim that the number of adults in England who are obese (body mass index of 30 or more) has gone up from 7 million in 1997 to 13 million today.

It doesn't take a conspiracy theorist to suggest that there are causal links running through all this. And we can surely track this through to current 'existential' environmental concerns. Much of the rubbish we buy is over-packaged; indeed much of it doesn't need to be packaged at all.

I personally can't step away from this; I was part of the process no matter how hard I preach thinking in the opposite direction. It doesn't keep me awake at night, yet.

Have a very good Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Not materially you understand, but spiritually.

**Mystery Shopper**

## BOOK REVIEWS

## PLUCKY BOYS.

'La Belle Sauvage' by Philip Pullman

The long-awaited prequel to "His dark materials" is now out in paperback with the second book in the Commonwealth series out in paperback. It coincides with the new BBC series just started.

I was eager to rejoin Pullman's world and the book started well. Pullman is a master at creating a believable fantasy world with just enough reality to help you to identify with it.

(TV reviews describe his world as "steampunk"). It's a clever blend of past and future: mobile phones do not exist; gentle nuns in priories do. Timeless things such as people drinking in inns and the cosy world of mother's cooking give us reassurance in a world that starts to feel dangerous and full of hints of change. The struggle between a group which wishes to remain liberal and free-thinking is pitched against those who wish to control minds and lives. This is a recurring theme of Pullman's: orthodox religion is rarely portrayed positively but spirituality is. The innocence of children and their ever-changing daemons is contrasted with the fixity of adult thinking, when their daemons have assumed a permanent form.

The hero of this story is Malcolm, an 11-year-old boy: sensible, practical and affectionate. In fact he is something of a paragon. He is fascinated to discover that a baby girl, Lyra, has been placed in the local priory for safekeeping. No one knows why this baby is special but her destiny has been foretold by the witches of the North and she is the child of Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter (familiar to readers of the earlier series).

Malcolm is warned of a great flood that is coming and he prepares his canoe, the Belle Sauvage. His cosy world starts to collapse with the arrival of a sinister man who appears friendly but whose daemon is a three-legged hyena.

A teenaged girl, Alice, works in the pub and has started to look after Lyra in the priory. As the flood continues to rise and the priory is under threat Malcolm and Alice escape with Lyra in the canoe.

The rest of the book concerns their flight down the river towards the London home of Lord Asriel and the dangers they meet. There is plenty of mundane detail about changing nappies and heating milk for the baby.

The children encounter many strange things including a fairy (and here I lost patience with this section). It becomes episodic and lacks the complexity of Pullman's great trilogy. Whereas in "The subtle knife" the relationship of the Angels with each other and with humans is a fully developed part of the story, in this book these meetings are a fleeting and brief danger. If you want to read about malevolent fairies read "Jonathan Norell and Mr Strange" - it's a much better book.

'Crooked Heart' by Lissa Evans.

This novel is about a 10 year-old evacuee who is chosen by Vee as she is always on the look out for a way to make money and thinks she will benefit from taking him in.

The story starts with a prologue where we learn how Noel came to be an evacuee. His godmother, Mattie, succumbs to dementia and dies, leaving him alone in Hampstead, and his world darkens when her relatives take him in. Noel is intelligent and educated, thanks to Mattie and his voice and way of looking at life are brilliantly written by Evans.

Vee is a scrounger but not a very bright one: many of her schemes fail. Her son and mother are lazy, ungrateful and dependent and Vee is always on the run to try and scrounge a living. Then Noel arrives and gradually her feelings about him move from exploitative to fond.

Together Noel and Vee embark on a scam whereby they collect door to door for a bogus charity and keep the proceeds. They tour outer London working the streets with success. However in due course their paths cross those of other, more dangerous, swindlers and Noel is in danger.

Lisa Evans has written a funny and beautifully observed book. It is darkly tragi-comic with a redemptive ending. Her hero, Noel, is more amusing and believable than Pullman's Malcolm.



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**RECIPE**

Mincemeat Bakewell.

I always make lots of mincemeat each year because I love it. Inevitably I then spend time trying out recipes to use up the jars left from making what seems like hundreds of mince pies. One year I made up the following recipe which was a great success and has become a standby after Christmas. Try it and see what you think.

225g plain flour

190g butter (don't be tempted to use a cheap butter, only the best will do, cheaper butters contain too much water. I use President unsalted butter for everything)

Pinch salt

3 tablespoons ice cold water.

For the frangipane:-

110g butter

110g caster sugar

2 eggs, beaten

110g ground almonds

25g plain flour

Half teaspoon baking powder

Zest of half a lemon



Half to full jar mincemeat

25g flaked almonds - to top

First prepare the pastry by combining flour and salt, rubbing in the butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add water which must be very, very cold. Mix but don't over mix. Place in cling film or a poly bag and chill for at least 30 minutes. This quantity will make enough for two 20 cm tart bases, it freezes very well. (You can make the pastry in a food processor just be careful not to over mix or your pastry will be tough). This is the best recipe I know for pastry, it never fails.

Preheat oven to 210C and lightly grease 20 cm tart tin. Line the tin with the rested pastry and bake blind for around 15 minutes.

For the frangipane, beat together the butter and sugar until fluffy then gradually beat in the eggs.

Gently fold in the remaining ingredients.

Remove the pastry from the oven and take out whatever you have used to bake blind, return the pastry to the oven for another 5-7 minutes.

Now spread the mincemeat over the base then spoon the frangipane over the top. Smooth out the mixture and then bake the tart for about 20 minutes. Now arrange the flaked almonds on top and bake for another 5-10 minutes until the frangipane is golden and well risen. Serve warm or at room temperature. I sprinkle icing sugar over the tart just before serving. Creme anglaise or cream is a good addition when serving.

If you want to make a more traditional Bakewell tart instead of mincemeat use raspberry jam or a compote of lightly sweetened fresh or frozen raspberries.

This is a lovely dessert which always receives compliments!

AD

**LIBRARY FACEBOOK PAGE**

If you are a Facebook user please join our English library, Villefranche de Rouergue page for in-between events and info [www.facebook.com/groups/1374046415990276/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/1374046415990276/)

## WITH A BANG, NOT A WHIMPER

These anecdotes date from my time in Germany with the RAF.

My good friend Keith was an RAF Regiment officer and an explosives expert. One day, he was explaining that with the right know-how, you could blow an exact-shaped excavation, then recounted a tale from a posting to Cyprus.

One of his friends had a villa out in the country and wanted to build a swimming pool. Keith offered to excavate for the pool using explosives as an exercise for his team. For several hours, they carefully dug holes, laid charges and inserted fuses. When all was ready, the crew searched the area to ensure nobody was near the site, then lit the fuses and retired.

Seconds before the balloon went up, an elderly Cypriot on a donkey appeared out of nowhere. Powerless to intervene, they could but watch and pray. There was a huge detonation and tons of earth and stones were hurled skywards.

Said Keith: 'I never knew a donkey could run that fast!'



While in Germany, I raced a kart against my RAF colleagues, the Army and local German and Dutch residents. All the tracks were impromptu affairs on closed-off Dutch village streets, airfields or Army parade grounds.

At one meeting, I was chatting with some Army lads, who were chortling over the latest escapade of their mate The Indestructible Thompson. Tommo seemed to have a cat-like ability to emerge unscathed from disasters which would have felled lesser mortals. His most recent faux pas had topped them all.

One Saturday morning, the boys were strolling through the barracks and found Tommo in one of the sheds working on an Austin 1100. He explained that he'd bought it cheap and planned to do it up and sell it.

'The petrol tank's a bit rusty, so I'm going to weld on a patch.'

As one man, they yelled 'Don't weld a petrol tank!'

Even petrol tanks that have been empty for years can't be welded, as fuel droplets that have seeped into the metal's pores turn to explosive vapour under the heat of welding.

When Thompson could not be dissuaded, they skedaddled. Scarcely had they closed the door when there was an almighty explosion. They rushed back inside, expecting to find the would-be mechanic dead or seriously injured.

Of the Austin's back end, little remained but twisted steel. To their astonishment, there stood Thompson, shocked but unharmed. Except that he was stark naked where the blast had stripped off all his clothes.

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## GARDENING

Finally, some sunshine after all that rain and the countryside is looking so beautiful. The tree colours seem even more wonderful this year, especially the beech. The garden too is looking good. Evergreens really come into their own at this time of year. The strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) is full of flowers, but it is the different shades of green and textures of the foliage which really stand out. Then there are the berries from the different cotoneasters, the holly and the sprays of berries on the *Nandina domestica* which are beginning to turn red. Many leaves have now dropped, but still there are fantastic oranges and reds on some of the berberis.

It is just too depressing to see a garden abandoned for the winter months. Get out there and rake up all those leaves and if dry enough take the mower over the grass. It is weedy after all that rain, but at least pick up all the supports for the tomatoes and get rid of the remains of all those summer vegetables. There are still lots of lovely things to enjoy in the garden and to look forward to. I can already see the first flower buds on the Hellebores and the perfumed flowers of the *Viburnum bodnantense* are just opening. *Sarcococca* will also soon perfume the garden.

We are now eating parsnips and the Tuscan Kale. There are carrots and spinach and the Brussels sprouts are just fattening up. The days are getting shorter, the season has changed so enjoy what it has to offer while you can.



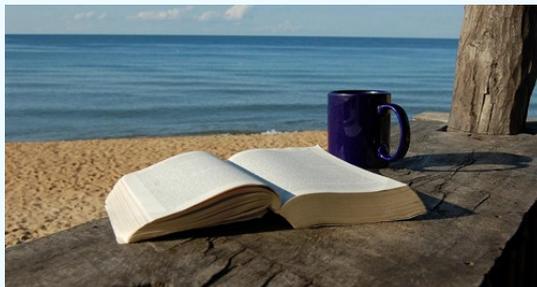
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**DESERT ISLAND BOOKS**

If cast away on the proverbial desert island, which five books would we choose to have with us?" .....



1. A Gentleman in Moscow. Amor Towles.

I have read this twice already, once when given as a present and once for book group. I said at book group that it would be just the book to take to a desert island to keep spirits up, so that's why it's first on the list.

2. London. Edward Rutherford.

The story of London from Roman times to present day. At 1,300 pages it should keep me entertained for quite a while.

3. A Short History of Nearly Everything. Bill Bryson.

Bill Bryson is always amusing and combined with so much information is irresistible.

4. Mapp and Lucia. E. F. Benson.

Part of a series, I'd like the whole series really. The bitchiness of these two ladies and the quality of writing is a delight.

5. Life in the Garden. Penelope Lively.

Not a gardening book as such, more reflections on artist's gardens, author's gardens, and style. For pondering and planning.

The deadline for the February/March newsletter is 20th January. Please send items to the editor Pat Dickinson at [annpatd@gmail.com](mailto:annpatd@gmail.com)

## SERVICES

Ben Naismith, Arborist. Tree and hedge cutting at competitive rates. Tree pruning, reductions, felling, trimming and logging. Contact [bennaismith@outlook.com](mailto:bennaismith@outlook.com) or T: 0565 81 95 34.

Fripaffaires, a charity shop based in Parisot (82) raises funds for Médecin sans Frontières and Restos du Cœur. Situated at the Pole Medical, next door to the pharmacy, the shop is open Tuesdays and Wednesday's 2-6pm and Fridays and Saturdays 10am to 12.30pm. Donations always gratefully received.

The Writing Desk can swiftly turn your ideas into sharp, punchy script. As an author and experienced freelance journalist I have spent many years creating features for business and lifestyle magazines. For great words and a fast service, contact Nigel on: T:05 65 65 81 53 [nigelwild@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nigelwild@hotmail.co.uk)

Gardener and/or cleaner available. Contact Ruth Patterson on 05 65 34 37 88 or 07 80 45 50 46.

Learn French in a friendly, fun atmosphere at So'Happy School in Villefranche. All levels/all ages. Qualified, motivated teacher with excellent OFSTED reports and 15 years experience. Small groups: 18 Euros/1h30 lessons; individual lessons: 22 euros/hour. Contact Sophie on 07963050236 or [sohappyschool@gmail.com](mailto:sohappyschool@gmail.com)

Domestic services - based near La Fouillade we, an English couple, offer a range of domestic services including garden maintenance, cleaning and gîte change overs. If we can help, contact us via email at [kevinandcherylpower@gmail.com](mailto:kevinandcherylpower@gmail.com) or phone us on 0784599553.

English - French translations of documents and interpreting during meetings. Help with French administration and/or with official French letters. Also one to one French lessons or French conversation, contact Jacynth Crozier, Tel. 06 30 31 13 00 [contact@crozier-traductions.com](mailto:contact@crozier-traductions.com) <http://www.crozier-traductions.com>

Mon Plaisir Chambres d'Hotes. Tranquil, rural but easy access to Villefranche de Rouergue. 3 en suite rooms, €69-79 per night, inc breakfast for 2. Splash pool, river view decking, free wifi. Full info on: [www.monplaisirfrance.com](http://www.monplaisirfrance.com). Book now! Phone: 05 65 57 18 43 or email: [monplaisir@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:monplaisir@hotmail.co.uk)

Stained glass. Book an afternoon workshop near Belcastel & make yourself a stained glass sun-catcher. Sessions from 1.30 - 5.00pm including tea/coffee & cake €15 euros per person. Also items for sale. Contact [libbydowle@gmail.com](mailto:libbydowle@gmail.com) or T. 05 65 80 47 19 or 0604441425

## SERVICES continued

Iyengar Yoga. Tuesday afternoons 2.30 - 4.00 and Thursday mornings 10.15 to 11.45 in Villefranche de Rouergue. Qualified Yoga teacher. First lesson free. Contact Penny Mackey on 05 65 81 74 58 or email: [penny.mackey@orange.fr](mailto:penny.mackey@orange.fr)

Qualified hairdresser with 30 years experience. From a simple cut to a complete restyle, colouring and highlighting, I can attend to your hair care requirements in the comfort of your own home. T. Jayne on 0632842384 or [jhpn@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jhpn@hotmail.co.uk)

Does your house, holiday home or gîte need finishing? All kinds of interior and exterior work undertaken e.g. skirting boards, wood trims, tiling, painting, decorating etc. Contact: Tim Fortune on 0565454814 or mail [f.design@outlook.fr](mailto:f.design@outlook.fr)

Holiday apartment to rent in beautiful Nerja, Andalusia, Spain. A modern, 2 double bedroom, ground floor apartment with terrace and spectacular sea and mountain views. A superb location 300m from Nerja's most popular beach Burriana, with a choice of bars and restaurants and only a short walk to the old town centre. For details contact Lynne Harding 06 65 50 95 37 or email: [lafage.harding@gmail.com](mailto:lafage.harding@gmail.com)

Home from Home welcomes your dogs to board with us & our Golden Retrievers in our home (not kennels). British experienced owners and breeders offering TLC to your pet when you cannot be there. Between Villefranche de R. and Figeac, phone us on 06 27 72 01 07 or email at [amber-sclan.goldenretrievers@orange.fr](mailto:amber-sclan.goldenretrievers@orange.fr). Or see [www.amber-sclan.com](http://www.amber-sclan.com).

Experienced gardener specialising in natural organic design and maintenance. Affordable and flexible - References available. Contact: Kathryn: 05 65 65 78 01 / [mon-tagnac@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mon-tagnac@hotmail.co.uk)

## ITEMS FOR SALE

Manure For Sale Contact Bridget Blunsdon 05 65 65 78 60

Contemporary Sculptural Mirrors. Go to [www.fortunedesigns.co.uk](http://www.fortunedesigns.co.uk) for details. Free delivery and fitting within 20km of Villefranche de Rouergue. Ideal for a special gift. T: 05 65 45 48 14 or email [f.design@outlook.fr](mailto:f.design@outlook.fr)

## BUILDERS &amp; TRADESPEOPLE

Carpenter/joiner, 40 years experience, city and guilds qualified. Many aspects of building work carried out at reasonable rates. Contact Phil Needham on 0565635878 or [jhpn@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jhpn@hotmail.co.uk)

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