

The *Institut français du Royaume-Uni* is 100 years old!

12 January 2010: The French Ambassador to the United Kingdom officially launches the centenary celebrations

In 2010, the *Institut français du Royaume-Uni* (The French Institute in the UK) is celebrating its centenary with a series of special events.

At the opening reception hosted at the *Résidence de France* on 12 January 2010, French Ambassador Maurice Gourdault-Montagne will be introducing the eminent British and French members who have agreed to serve on the centenary celebrations honorary committee.

Based in South Kensington in London, the *Institut français du Royaume-Uni* is the official French government centre for language and culture in the UK. Beyond its primary mission to promote French language and culture, the *Institut* is committed to encouraging educational cooperation, nourishing new talent and supporting cultural diversity. *Ciné lumière*, its recently refurbished cinema, was reopened by Catherine Deneuve in January 2009.

Founded in 1910 by a young visionary, Marie d'Orliac, the *Institut français du Royaume-Uni* is one of the oldest of the 150 institutes worldwide. Many great figures have passed through its doors, among them Jean Renoir, Eugène Ionesco, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jacques Lacan.

At the forefront of the landmark centenary events is the creation of a digital platform giving public UK-wide access to new cultural and educational resources.

During French Language Week (15-21 March), the *Institut* will organise a series of events celebrating the French language with its Francophone and education partners, during which thousands of schools across Britain will take part in a creative competition based on French words.

The *Institut* will put special emphasis on cross-cultural exchange, which it has always encouraged. A series of encounters, '*les dialogues du centenaire*', will bring together well known British and French authors and film directors to discuss a wide range of challenging topics.

Ciné lumière will screen a special series of films to mark the occasion. There will also be a programme of concerts and live events, culminating with the Exhibition Road Music Day Festival between 19 and 21 June, a popular annual festival attracting thousands of people.

The centenary will also feature in a series of conferences, including 'France in the British Mind 1910-2010', which will look at the history of relations between France and the UK. A seminar entitled 'The French in London' will consider the history of the French presence in London and a conference on '100 Years of Teaching French as a Foreign Language' will bring together numerous universities.

The centenary celebrations will extend beyond the *Institut* to other venues around the UK, notably in the fields of visual and performing arts.

Witness to history, the *Institut* actively continues to encourage Franco-British exchanges, support European and world culture and contribute to London's artistic scene. Through a pioneering, passionate and thought-provoking cultural programme, the *Institut* is geared resolutely towards the future.

Note to the Editors

History of the Institut français

The adventure of the *Institut français* began thanks to the determination of a **young 19-year-old Frenchwoman: Marie d'Orliac**. With the immediate **support of British personalities** such as **Lord and Lady Askwith, Mr and Mrs Emile Mond**, and **French public figures** including the French Ambassador **Paul Cambon**, d'Orliac created the **Université des Lettres françaises in 1910**. From the very start, the new institution set out **to promote the best of French culture, encourage exchanges and teach the French language**. **Three years later**, the institution was integrated with the University of Lille under the name **«Institut français du Royaume-Uni»**.

During the First World War, faced with an influx of French and Belgian refugees, the *Institut français* opened its classes to French-speaking pupils. This was the **beginning of the Lycée français**, which French and British companies helped to finance.

Under the patronage of the French President and members of the British Royal Family, the years that followed were culturally very active. *Institut* directors were alternately French and British: André Maurois, André Citroën, TS Eliot, Katherine Mansfield... The address of the *Institut* changed several times, but soon its premises were too small and a new building was designed containing classrooms (*Lycée français*), a library, theatre, ballroom and café. **The amazing Art Deco building that now houses the Institut français was inaugurated in 1939.**

The Second World War put a brutal stop to these efforts. The *Lycée*, like all other schools in London, was evacuated. Denis Saurat, the then director of the *Institut français*, joined General De Gaulle. **The Institut was made available to the Free French Forces**, as was Saurat's knowledge of England. English language lessons were given to French people who had fled France. Cultural activities continued under the leadership of Denis Saurat, who prided himself in keeping the *Institut français* open every day throughout the war. The *Institut* survived thanks to the generosity of the British and their government, the French in London, and some Francophile benefactors.

After the war, the *Institut français* was **permanently attached to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs**. Well-known personalities visited regularly: Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud, Jean Renoir, Abel Gance, Darius Milhaud, Valéry Larbaud... The *Institut* and the *Lycée* were definitively separated in 1963, and the teaching of French as a foreign language became an important activity at the *Institut*. From then on, the building at 14 Cromwell Place was dedicated to French language courses.

In 1995, the library was completely renovated and made fully accessible to the public. The cinema, which had put on memorable screenings during its time as a *ciné-club*, now became a fully-fledged cinema, the **Ciné lumière, inaugurated by Catherine Deneuve in 1998, and again in 2009, after it had been renovated** and equipped with a digital projector.

The Institut français Today

The *Institut français*, today directed by Mrs Laurence Auer, exists to promote French language and culture, and to encourage cross-cultural exchange and cultural diversity. Comprising a language centre, multi-media library, a cinema, Ciné lumière and a French Bistro, it welcomes thousands of people each year.

At the heart of the *Institut français*' mission is the **teaching of the French language**. The language centre, which attracts 7000 students every year, offers traditional language courses as well as business French and courses on various aspects of French culture and current affairs.

Audiences at the *Institut* can keep up to date with the latest French thinking and the most recent publications in French and English translation thanks to its **extensive programme of talks, seminars and book launches**. Visitors can also take part in debates with speakers from both sides of the Channel meeting regularly to discuss a wide variety of topics.

The multimedia library, a distinctive Grade II listed venue, is also a window on contemporary France and holds the **largest free-access collection of French material in the UK**, covering all aspects of French culture and society. Visitors can access about 60,000 items ranging from novels, comic books to feature films and magazines. A **digital platform**, to be officially launched in May, will allow audiences across the UK to access an extensive digital library.

Recently refurbished and reopened by Catherine Deneuve, **Ciné lumière** has established itself as **one of London's top repertory cinemas**. With a particular emphasis on French, European and World cinema, its programme combines new releases, repertory screenings, previews and exclusive on-stage events attended by directors and actors. Recent guests include Stephen Frears, Sophie Marceau, Agnès Varda, Mathieu Amalric, Fanny Ardant and Patrice Chéreau.

The Institut occasionally showcases **new musical talents** and participates every year in the Exhibition Road Music Day, which attracts thousands of people each year.

The *Institut* also **presents and supports external events**, in collaboration with British partners, particularly in the **visual and performing arts** and promotes Franco-British **academic cooperation**.

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