

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chère Annie,

I'm very pleased to welcome you at the French Residence this evening, surrounded by your family and close friends, who have come from Bristol and France.

During my many trips outside the M25, I've had the opportunity to get an idea of the calibre and dedication of all our honorary consuls, but we're gathered this evening to reward one of the most outstanding.

Annie Burnside, your involvement with Bristol began in 1970 in the context of your study of humanities. Since then you've worked tirelessly to promote our culture.

First of all, through your work as a teacher of French language and civilization at the University of Bristol, where you brilliantly climbed the academic ladder. In 2004, you successfully ran for the post of Deputy Marshal there.

Not content to just teach, you also contributed to the influence of the institution by putting your heart and soul into the renovation of Clifton House, an 18th-century building that became one of the university's conference centres.

But your commitment to the French community and your passion for teaching were even more strikingly displayed when, along with two other teachers, you devoted yourself to creating the Ecole Française de Bristol, the first French nursery and primary school in the UK. You led it for nearly 18 years, from 1980 to 1998. Thanks to you, hundreds of children and parents were able to cultivate their French and become part of a big extended family.

I had the pleasure and the huge privilege of inaugurating the school's new premises alongside you, when I visited Bristol in March.

You've constantly supported and worked for the success of this relocation, shrewdly using your local network: letters, meetings, organizing visits – nothing can stop you when it's a matter of this school, which owes you so much. So many abortive negotiations and discussions! But when one door closes, we can be sure there's a window of opportunity you won't take long to open!

The relocation is a very great success which guarantees the school a stable future, an unrivalled working environment for the staff and a warm and friendly welcome for the pupils.

Furthermore, the relocation fully signals the success of the school's incorporation into Bristol's educational landscape.

So, Annie, Bristol owes you its French school, but not only that – its *Alliance française* too! You founded it in 1983 and, from 1982 to 2006, you chaired the south-west section of the *Union des Français de Grande-Bretagne*.

Quite logically, after so many years devoted to the spread of the French language, you agreed in 2003 to become France's honorary consul in Bristol, to help French people far from the Consulate in London, always with great generosity of spirit.

You've been a tireless mediator between the Consulate and French people in the region, and you've managed to combine the two great qualities of an honorary consul: influence – and goodness knows you're influential, Annie! – and administrative rigour, two qualities which are sometimes hard to reconcile.

The French community in Bristol is always full of praise for you. They emphasize your tireless dedication, your ever-present smile, your unlimited kindness and your ability to forge ties of friendship and solidarity within the French community.

I must add that my predecessor, Bernard Emié, also received many letters of congratulations and thanks from the French community in Bristol when it was announced that you had been awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*.

All the French institutions in Bristol, and institutions which are friends of France, owe you a debt of gratitude. You're an indefatigable champion of the French language, a devoted ambassador of our country, and you've used your huge talent to serve your country.

For all these reasons, *chère* Annie, today I have the honour and privilege of presenting you with this prestigious distinction.

Annie Burnside, au nom du Président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur.