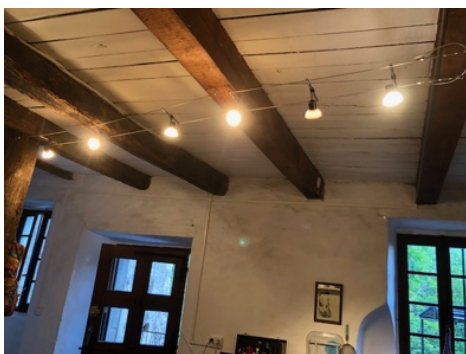


*Happy New Year to everybody and all our best wishes!*

2023 was an odd year and let's hope we all get even in 2024!  
Let us guide you through our long pictorial New Year email which should have been a Christmas one, but we hope you will forgive the delay!

### **Work in Bardou**

Someone had the crazy idea to renovate our house and change the roof, taking inspiration from the local gothic cathedral.



Silla and Alex brought and installed some new lights in the Lower Hostel which are spot on!



Every year we have to inspect and mend the many roofs. Here is Brian hard at work looking for leaks, to our surprise with the help of our new guide dog! ...Don't ask how he climbed up there!

Clearing the Theatrum from the abundant autumn confetti for the Sinfonieta concert in Bardou, demonstrating that many hands make light work.

*Before....*



The 39 steps

*And after... with the cleaning team*



## Music

The season opened in June with the *Strings in Spring*, organised by Jonas Hees, who gave a lovely concert in the music room.



*Selim Mazari* opened the summer season with 4 wonderful concerts. Everywhere Selim goes he is surrounded by groupies, here we have Hannah, Franzzi, Charlotte and her friend who were giving us a helping hand in Bardou at the time.



*Sélim playing in Cassan*

The *clean team* magically transformed themselves into the ***Sinfonietta Bardou*** and gave a lovely first concert in the Theatrum followed by concerts in Villemagne and St Chinian. Their last night will go down in history as one of the most memorable mini parties; after one of Jonas's delicious meals (Jonas makes the best lemon tarts!), we all gathered around David on the piano and Cécile singing with everyone joining in enthusiastically for the chorus!



*The Sinfonietta Bardou concert in Villemagne with David Sofer conducting and Vincenzo Schembri as solist*



***Joanna Doll*** played the alto with the Sinfonietta Bardou but also gave us a very nice piano recital.

**Fritz & Gerswind Kircher**, our virtuoso stars from Vienna, gave 4 beautiful concerts. There was a little drama (which is already forgotten), it was not a question of playing in the wrong key, but starting the last concert without a key... However, with a happy ending and a *smashing* last concert.



They say musical talent often skips a generation, our lack of musical proficiency has been compensated by our daughter **Cécile's** gift for performing folk and alternative popular music. She gave a lovely open-air concert just outside the Taberna.

Photo Angelo Kaunat

The *Ensemble Vocal de Berlin* returned this year with a wonderful program directed by Mäike Bühle. This choir comes with their families and lots of kids and are the living proof that love and laughter can turn chaos into an art form.

...here looking very professional in the gardens of the Château de Cassan...



... here is their casual look. Here are the organisers (and singers), Anna & Philip, with their 4 children and Katrin and Alban (2 wonderful singers) with their 2 daughters.





***Natalia Morozova*** gave 5 magnificent and varied concerts (here in Saint Chinian), for further details please check Instagram.

We were even able to negotiate a concert piano for Cassan which was really appreciated.



***Eunsley Park & Maksim Štšura***

Eunsley started with a lovely recital in The Chapelle de la Voulte which is always iconic. She was then joined by Maksim who came all the way from Estonia to give 4 beautiful concerts together.

The *Chœur de la Jeunesse de Stuttgart* came back again, accompanied by Christine Marx, their wonderful Choir Master, Leader, Cook, Mother... This year they gave 2 wonderful concerts; here they are in front of the church in Mons.

As you can see, this time they had saved up all year for black concert shoes. They brought fun, laughter and beautiful music to the village.



*James Kline* is a man of many talents, a true troubadour combining beautiful classical and authentic Folk music with his own compositions and storytelling. He is also an amazing wood carver. Here he is playing in Villemagne.



The *Académie de Musique de Chambre de Bardou* were the “bouquet final” of this year’s concerts.

Directed by Thomas Posth, Maria Pache and Markus Sudermayer, their concerts always have rapturous applause, this year they even took the roof off the pergola in the Lower Hostel.



## Help & fun

Ing. Leo came for 2 weeks in January and helped us draw up the plans for our renovation (on the computer!). We had some nice evenings together watching Tokyo Vice on our new beamer!

Here he is with Harry who sadly died in November.



Klaus D. comes every year in February to cheer us up during the cold winter months.

Here with Bianca contemplating the mountains.

Franz has been one of the pillars of Bardou for over 40 years and every year he comes with a dream team who set about doing maintenance work throughout the village like other people butter toast. They have been the authors of numerous projects throughout the years (we owe them all the dry toilets, stairs in numerous houses and much more!)



*Pfarrer Franz Meurer and his brother Peter with Martina and sister Barbara with her husband Georges.*

In May, Jasper came to help with protecting trees from the mouflons and reconstructing the Berlin wall around the garden (once again!).



Clara & Herwig come give a hand in the spring and we always enjoy their company ... and their philosophical discussions.  
P.S. Clara is Charlotte's sister who came to help when Selim was there.



Mike, Brian's brother, and his wife Christa also came in the spring. Brian always looks forward to Mike coming because he is very active and enjoys working in Bardou. This year he also helped lay the concrete floor in our new house renovation.



Kirsten leads one of the 3 therapy groups that come to Bardou every year. The other 2 are led by Frank & Gerda in the spring and Axel at the end of the summer.

Kirsten has also been coming now for the second year in a row to help get all the houses ready for the season. She is a fantastic help and great company. This year she was not able to come as early as she had hoped so her partner Frank came for 2 weeks to help me get the houses ready. It was lovely to get to know him better and to share the work load with him.



Cécile & Bianca & John-Robin were in Bardou most of the summer which was marvellous!



They also brought several friends, here with Caro and Carmo, but there were many more who livened up our days.



Ing. Leo, Brian and Jasper collecting donations for Eunsley after her concert in La Voulte. Jasper was part of Thomas Post's choirs but found time for us too.





End of October, Susanne came to help us look after Bardou so that we could go away for a few days. She got along very well with Seamus and took him on long hikes.



In November, Max came with a massive present that his brother Jonas had received as a donation! Great for carrying materials, collecting wood, and more! Max has a Bardou project, but you will have to wait till next year for that!

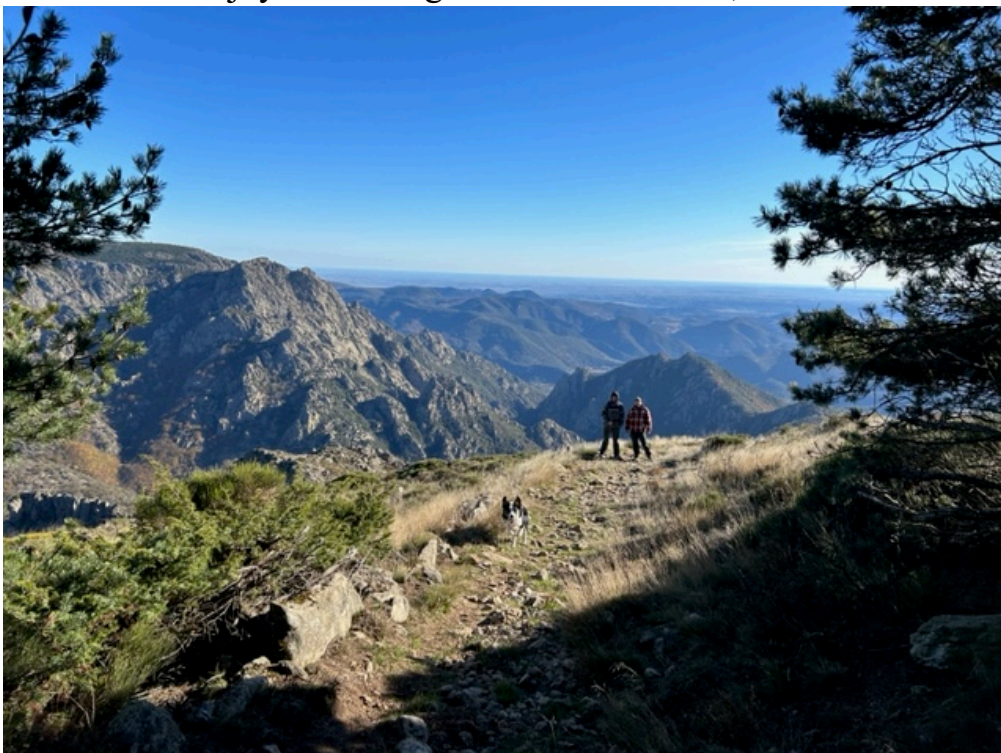


Ken has been helping us every week since the end of the summer, he's a strong man! Here you can see him lifting a dinosaur tooth.



Markus and Heike also came in November, all the outdoor furniture got taken in, the fruit trees trimmed, and Bardou got a general tidy up.

Seamus also enjoyed the long hikes with Markus, Max and Brian.



## Meeting up with friends and family

The year started at Jenny and Patrick's, our friends from many years with 2 other couples we have known since before we had children: Valery and Alex and Paula and Eric.



*Here with Patrick, Valerie, Brian, Paola, Elizabeth, Fanny (a friend of Valerie's) and Jenny*



*With Jenny and Patrick at their house near St Raphael*

## Elizabeth's Birthday



All 3 kids (Sean, Bianca and Cécile) came for my birthday – (what more can you want!) and cooked a paella!



Meeting up in Paris with some of our Cinemorph theatre group friends and Cécile



Ben, who went to University with Brian, has a lovely place in Summerset. He and his wife Sonja organise a music festival every 2-3 years. It is always the most amazing weekend with music and great food!



Liz and Steve came to visit us in Bardou, they are also friends from Brian's Exeter days. Here they are in front of the Chapelle de St Martin du Froid.



My Cousin Debbie and her daughter Autumn came to visit us in Bardou in June. We spent a few days also touring Normandy and visiting the Mont St Michel.



After a concert with Klaus (the one who came in February) and Norma, who is like an aunt to me, I have known her as far back as I can remember, and she was a witness at Klaus & Jean's wedding.

A bit of singing at the Fête du Lau with Charlie, Cécile and Bianca.



Of course, there were pizza evenings, here a some of our pizzaiolos, Ing. Leo and Jasper.

The grape harvest in La Voulte is always a great success. Here we have: *Johnny, a local, Rafael, Bianca's friend and Bianca, Brian and Elisabeth (Léo's Mom), Cécile, Léo with Seamus!*



In October, the Cologne group (connected to Franz Meurer) as they do every year. We had a nice meal together in the Taberna, reminiscing about the good old days and of course the great days yet to come.





We made a trip to England in October to help Bianca move to Falmouth where she is doing a masters at Exeter University, we had a great weekend and really liked Cornwall.



Falmouth

Cécile and I (Elizabeth) also got to spend a nice morning catching up with Barbara Lascelles (Sean's godmother) in Wandsworth Common, it was so nice to see her!

On the way back to France, we helped Sean move to France with his 2 doggies. Sean and Shannon plan to stay in Villennes for a year before moving to Australia.



To round off the year, we had a **Christmas meal** on the 17 December. The weather was chilly but beautifully sunny, so we decided to eat outside with Gilles and Ginny, Hans and Karen, from Le Lau, Sabine and Rainer from Tailhos (Seamus's grandparents!), Birgit and Emile from Vieussan, And Heike and Carsten who come several times a year and have been coming for Christmas since we have taken over Bardou to keep William company while we were away with family. This year again, they came to look after Bardou over Christmas so that we could spend time with our children in Villennes.



## Our difficult moments

In March, Brian spent a week in hospital for an operation. Hopefully, a stitch in time saves 9.



Cécile and Bianca came to sing, sunbathe, and cheer Brian (and Mom) up.

Sadly, William passed away end of October after 6 difficult months in hospital. Here he is with Wolfgang. William was in Bardou for close to 30 years and became friends with many of the old-timers who come regularly to Bardou. He always had time for everybody, and his dry sense of humour will not be forgotten by those who knew him.

We plan to do a memorial ceremony for him in the spring for which we will send details to anyone interested.



William with his cats



*Photo TKKR*

## Bardou animals

We were given Seamus beginning of August by Sabine and Rainer who had 6 puppies. Since then, he has been adjusting to life in Bardou and learned not to chase cats, peacocks and chickens and loves the Bardou hikes and sticks! It was hard choosing only 3 photos, we have millions!

Oh, and we forgot to say that of course he is the loveliest, most handsome dog that walked this earth!



Seamus 2 months old



Seamus with Brian

Seamus age 6 months – now too big for a bag!



Harry has left us but Noushka is doing well and the chickens keep on reproducing. They are so cute when they are chicks but then they grow into big fat roosters, out of these 10 chicks we only have 3 hens!



They look pretty but not everybody is a fan of the peacocks! However, it's difficult to imagine Bardou without them.



## Villennes & family

Cécile turned 30 in November and had a big party in Villennes. The theme was anything starting with C, so Cécile started out as Cinderella and ended up as Cruella, Bianca chose Carmen, Sean and Shannon dressed up as their dogs (Cedric and Casper), there was also a cameraman, a cow-boy, a cat, a cow, Christ, Ceasar, Cleopatra and a Connard.



Give us a song Cruella!



*Photo Leo Kruse*

Christmas in Villennes with all the children (Sean & Shannon, Cécile, Bianca), Brian's brothers John and Mike, Christa (Mike's wife) and Johnny, their son.



Happy New Year and we hope to see you all in 2024!



Brian and Elizabeth





*Photo Brian Nolan*

If you look carefully, you can just see 2023 disappearing into the mist...