

# Laperouse

Friends of the Laperouse Museum



Members Quarterly Newsletter

July-August-September 1993 Vol. 4, No. 1

## President's Message

The momentum we are building up is contagious! The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service have commissioned Price Waterhouse to help construct a Business Plan for the La Perouse Peninsula, with a view to the re-opening of Bare Island. I met with their Jenny Rand to discuss implications for the Lap erouse Museum. There are several, and it would seem that the Museum may well play a central role in the broad plan. However, in all the enthusiasm and increased numbers of visitors, it becomes even more important for us to focus attention on our vision for the Museum. I have written to Peter Shadie of NPWS to request an early date for the workshop for the Friends and the Service to construct a Five Year Plan for the Museum.

The Instrument Room renovations are about to start and I am pleased that Guy de Compi gne is our representative on the working party. In Paris next week I meet with Rear-Admiral Bellec to discuss plans for travelling exhibits and other activities for the Museum, and I hope to contact our honorary friend Dr Pierre Amalric. We can also build on the successful visit of Martine Lusardy, so generously arranged by Lyn Tuit of the Australia-France Foundation.

We remain hopeful that Reece Discombe will attend our Annual General Meeting and Grand Pique-nique on Sunday 7 November and present an overview of his involvement with the saga of Lap erouse. We would also hope to arrange an evening for his illustrated talk.

Our link with France, French culture and Pacific history is the very essence of what the Museum is about, and it is Friends such as Fran ois Bellec, Pierre Amalric, Martine Lusardy and Reece Discombe who help keep our vision alive. Perhaps it will be through the structures and activities of a 'new' La Perouse Peninsula that this vision is shared with the Australian community.

Robert Clancy

## Bastille Day 1993



From L. to R. Mr Alistair Howard, Deputy-Director NPWS and His Excellency, Rear-Admiral Peter Sinclair.

(Photo: Glen Blaxland)

On 14 July, France's National Day was celebrated in style on the shores of Botany Bay. The Governor of New South Wales, Rear-Admiral Peter Sinclair AC and Mrs Sinclair graciously accepted the invitation of the Friends of the Lap erouse Museum to attend what has long been a part of the Bastille Day celebration in Sydney, the laying of a wreath at the memorial to the great French navigator who was a witness to the beginning of European settlement in Australia.

His Excellency made a short and eloquent speech (see page 4). Other distinguished guests were the French Consul General in Sydney, M. Michel Legras and Mme Legras, M. Jean-Pierre Sourdin, President of the French Ex-Servicemen's Association in NSW, the Hon. John Ryan MLC, all of whose speeches were short and relevant to the occasion, the Mayor of Randwick, Cllr. Margaret Martin and Mr Alistair Howard, Deputy Director of National Parks and Wildlife Service. The R.A.N. Band provided enjoyable musical accompaniment and gave a spirited rendering of the French and Australian national anthems. The ceremony was

attended by a large contingent from the local community, including Mrs Timbery and primary school children from the area, and of course many Friends.

Afterwards refreshments were served in the soon-to-be-refurbished Instrument Room. Their Excellencies were taken on a whirlwind tour of the Museum. They left, slightly behind schedule, saying how much they had enjoyed their visit. Altogether a morning to remember. And the weather, for July, was clement!

## Coming Events

**Saturday 2 Oct. 1993, 6-8 pm.** Concert by the *a capella* group, Voices From The Vacant Lot. \$15.00 (Friends concession).

**Sunday 7 Nov. 1993, 11.30 am.** Annual General Meeting, followed by Friends Grand Pique-nique. Viewing of Reece Discombe Donation.

### Museum News

July is the busiest month of the year for the Museum and the staff have been occupied with tour programs for mid-year school holidays, and with the organisation surrounding Bastille Day. The ceremony at the Lapérouse Monument was very well attended with much enthusiasm by the Friends, local community and schools. We enjoyed a wonderful ceremony and friendly reception as reported on the front page.

Before leaving **Captain and Mme Le Borgne** hosted a delightful farewell party in the Instrument Room. This was also attended by the current **Defence Attaché Captain Maurice Demoisson and Mme Demoisson**. I welcome them warmly to Australia and hope we will see them often. The Le Borgnes have sent a donation to the Museum. Their thoughtfulness and generosity is greatly appreciated.

The arrival of the **Reece Discombe donation** has concluded several years of negotiation. Assessment and planning is now underway for the much needed

conservation work and the subsequent display of these fascinating relics. They significantly enhance the collection and we are most fortunate to have acquired such items.

The visit of **Martine Lusardy** from the *Musée en Herbe*, Paris, in August has been immensely rewarding for all the staff. It has been a valuable opportunity to discuss curatorial and museological issues as they apply at the Lapérouse Museum and to exchange ideas on the current philosophy and methodology of interpretation or 'mediation' in Australia and France.

The study visit, supported by the **Australia-France Foundation**, has been important for the extension of professional communication between the two countries. On a personal level Ms Lusardy has been a delightful companion and I am grateful for her intelligent and valuable contribution to the Museum's future programs. I hope we may have an opportunity to work with the Foundation again in the future.

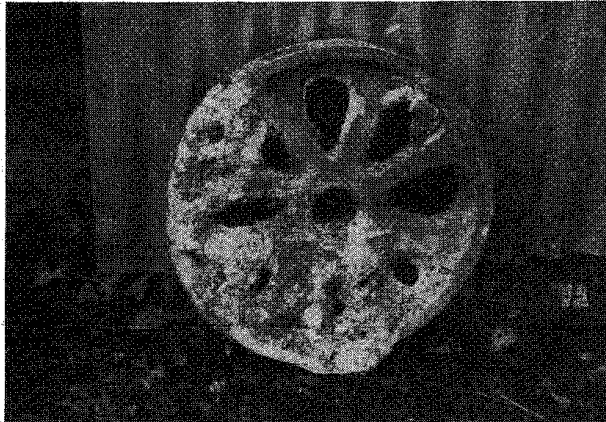
The **NSW National Parks Week** is being held this year from 25 September to 4 October. At the Museum we are holding a **fundraising concert for the Instrument Room on Saturday 2 October at dusk from 6 pm-8 pm**. The *a capella* group, **Voices From The Vacant Lot**, which was so successful last year, will be performing again with a range of songs from throughout the world. All Friends are invited to attend at a concession of \$15.00 each. The Museum will be open and refreshments provided. Tickets are already selling, so **join us in making the concert a success** and contribute to the realisation of the Instrument Room project which, thanks to the Friends, is now underway.

**Contact Lapérouse Museum**  
Ph: 311-3379 or Ph: 311-3765 to book your tickets for **Voices From The Vacant Lot**  
**Saturday 2 October 6 pm - 8 pm.**

We look forward to seeing you there.

Jennifer Carter  
Managing Curator

## The Reece Discombe Donation



**Brass pulley wheel** — diameter 40 cm., weight 70 kilos. 'We found several of these on both ships. Used, we think, for the tiller steering, to guide the ropes from wheel to the rudder, or as blocks for the windlass to pull the sail ropes' [RD]

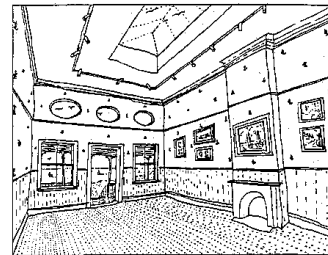
Well, the bureaucratic hurdles were cleared with the Solomon Islands and Reece was as good as his word. Shipped free of charge, the priceless relics he promised the Museum have arrived, and will be on display for the first time on AGM—Grand Pique-nique Day, 7 Nov. 1993.

Not only are we delighted to have these sad remains of a great and tragic enterprise, but we are also promised a visit from Reece himself, with luck it

will coincide with the Grand Pique-nique so we can all have the pleasure of meeting and chatting to this legendary diver of the South Pacific. On the following evening, Mon. 8 Nov. 1993, he could then give the illustrated lecture he has already delivered, with considerable acclaim, in Albi for the bicentenary of Lapérouse and also at Expo in Vancouver.

As soon as arrangements are finalised, the Friends will be the first to know!

## Instrument Room Restoration — A Reality!



The \$50 000, of which \$40 000 was 'inherited' from the **Lapérouse Association for the Australian Bicentenary**, will be stretched to the limit to enable full restoration work to start by late September. Quotes have been called for and received, and **Guy de Compiègne** is at present evaluating them and finalising details in consultation with **Neville Burkitt, Regional Development Co-ordinator, and Doug Miller, District Maintenance Supervisor for NPWS**.

Though hi-tech lighting and exhibition installations have had to be pared down to a minimum for the present, the end result will give the Museum and the Friends the finely restored annexe and entertaining space we so desperately needed. Hooray!

## The Sad Saga of Peter Dillon

'I am the Captain Dillon who was so unfortunate as to discover the fate of the French Expedition commanded by the unfortunate but far-famed Count de Lapérouse...' So wrote a bitter Peter Dillon in 1847 shortly before he died, having exhausted his wealth and energy both in Paris and London lobbying both governments for a position in the administration of any one of their colonies in the Pacific, as a reward for his discovery.

He was a tall red-head with a violent temper, born in 1788 in Martinique to Irish parents who returned to Ireland in 1791. As he was anxious to be taken for a well-born gentleman, he was always vague about his early life. In 1806 he sailed to Calcutta as a seaman. Brave, intelligent, self-confident, he was soon a shipmaster trading in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, eventually becoming a rich shipowner and merchant, hobnobbing with the wealthy in Calcutta, Sydney and Valparaiso. He spent some months in Fiji in 1808, going native to learn the language. While his great height, red hair, legendary rages, forcefulness and fair trading earned him respect from the Pacific Islanders, he still had some hair-raising adventures, including in 1813, being bailed up with his crew atop Dillons Rock on the north-west coast of Vanua Levu by hostile natives who feasted on those of his companions who fell into their hands, as illustrated.

He roamed the Pacific on prosperous trading ventures, married in Sydney, then in 1816 moved to Calcutta and success.

In May 1826, on a trading voyage in the *St Patrick* he called at the island of Tikopia where earlier he had landed a Prussian, Martin Buchert and a lascar, Joe. Buchert told him he had seen on Tikopia articles of French manufacture, plus a sword and a cross of Saint Louis. Joe was wearing a silver sword guard around his neck. All this had come from two big ships that had been wrecked on the nearby island of Vanikoro. Joe had been there and talked to two white men. Dillon left for Vanikoro, but was becalmed, so changed course for Calcutta, where he persuaded the hard-headed Court of Directors of the East India Company to give him the good ship *St Patrick* to investigate Vanikoro.

Unfortunately for Dillon he had bad crew, as well as the unstable (but well connected) Dr Tytler, 'gentleman', aboard as a doctor whom, after several violent rows about his laziness and incompetence, he confined to his cabin under guard. When the *St. Patrick* called at Hobart, Tytler brought a complaint against Dillon for assault. The Hobart Establishment was solidly for the 'gentleman' and Dillon was found guilty, fined £50 and given a two month prison sentence, which was suspended because of possible inconvenience, not to him, but to the East India Company. Dillon, now £521 out of pocket and delayed, sailed to sympathetic Sydney where he was known and liked, thence via Tikopia to Vanikoro. There he showered gifts on the natives, and articles from the wreck appeared. At Peu on the southern shore where the first ship had struck the reef in a night of wild storm, he was shown a clearing where the castaways had built their escape vessel, but his hosts would not be drawn on the massacre of survivors from the first

ship. They told Dillon they thought the Frenchmen were evil spirits because they had projections from their foreheads or noses a foot long — their spyglasses presumably — and their chief beckoned to the sun and stars. Dillon believed, wrongly, as Reece Discombe discovered in 1964, that the second ship had been lost on the Vanu reefs off the north-west coast.

He acquired a ship's bell with the inscription *Bazinn' a fait*, brass guns, a lead cistern, and a copper sheet. His crew became eager treasure hunters. He wanted to search for two survivors said to have remained on the island, but with the ship leaking and malaria taking its toll of the crew Dillon left, mission incomplete. From the Bay of Islands (N.Z.) he sent to the *Sydney Gazette* a list of his finds, which was published on 5 December 1827 and reprinted as follows in the *Hobart Town Courier* on 5 January 1828. 'We copy the following from the

*Sydney Gazette*' [list follows]. ... [it] seems to be implicitly believed by our Sydney neighbours, we must take the liberty of saying that we do not believe a word of it... A week later the smug Hobart scribes had to eat their words!

Dillon now had great expectations. He arrived in France two months ahead of d'Urville in 1829, was presented to King Charles X, made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour — from then on he called himself 'Chevalier' — and was granted an annuity of 4,000 francs (about £160 at the time) for life. In 1829 he also published an account of the expeditions, but he made little money out of it.

In London and Paris he was mixing with the rich and powerful and hoped for some official position in the South Seas. In Paris in 1829 he was promised the consulship to French commercial establishments in Oceania, but Charles X's abdication after the 1830 Paris uprising dashed his hopes of any French public office. He offered his services to the Belgians for the Congo, then to the British for the colony of South Australia, wrote a cogent treatise arguing for the British takeover of New Zealand, with a place for him in the administration, but he never made it into the charmed circle of power and influence. These jobs were not for 'not quite gentlemen' like poor Peter. He was shabbily treated in London and Paris to judge from the evidence in the archives of *Affaires Etrangères* inspiring the sour quote at the head of this article. Also, in France after 1830 he was upstaged by Dumont d'Urville back from his expedition which had included Vanikoro.

He died in Paris in 1847, aged 59, cantankerous and almost penniless. His wife had died in 1840. The French government parsimoniously paid the passage back to Sydney for his unmarried daughter to join her maternal grandfather Patrick Moore. She died in 1850. In the 1940s two great grandsons of Peter Dillon were living in Sydney, both unmarried, so no *known* descendants exist of this interesting character from our early history. But maybe somewhere in the Pacific Islands ... ?



## Lapérouse

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Friends of the Lapérouse Museum

**Editor:** Carole Roussel  
**Tel:** (02) 389-8010  
**Publisher:** Friends of the Lapérouse  
Museum  
C/- Lapérouse Museum  
Anzac Parade, La Perouse 2036  
**Design:** Bill Stinson

Friends of the Lapérouse Museum Ltd.  
(A.C.N. 003-547-699) was established  
in 1989

**Patron:** The Hon. E G Whitlam  
**President:** Prof. Robert Clancy  
**Vice-Pres.:** Guy de Compiègne  
Carole Roussel  
**Treasurer:** Yvonne O'Shea  
**Secretary:** Michèle de Tarlé  
**Committee:** Carol Abela  
Hugh Birch  
Camille Dezarnaulds  
David Elfassy  
Marie-Hélène Gilly  
John McColl  
Helen Rosenman  
Ass. Prof. Ross Steele

**NPWS:** Peter Shadie  
**Curator:** Jennifer Carter

### Visit From French and Belgian Rotarians

On Tuesday 5 October 1993 some 50 French and Belgian Rotarians, of whom 75% are 'inner wheels' (i.e. women members) have arranged to visit the Museum at 4.00 pm. Any Friends who would like to help entertain them briefly for sunset cocktails on the verandah after their visit, please come and join Carole and Helen in making them feel welcome. Some are bound to speak English. They are attending an international Rotary convention at Darling Harbour on 7-11 October.

Museum events proudly  
sponsored by

ORLANDO



TRILOGY

### Martine Lusardy Writes



From L. to R. Martine Lusardy and  
Jennifer Carter

Sydney le 2 septembre 1993

Mon séjour à Sydney s'achève et je  
voudrais dire à quel point j'ai aimé  
l'Australie.

J'y ai laissé des amis qui m'ont réservé  
un accueil rare et chaleureux: Carole  
Roussel, Jennifer Carter, Robert et  
Christine Clancy, Helen et David  
Rosenman, John Winch et M. et Mme  
Newton. Je remercie aussi tous ceux qui  
m'ont consacré beaucoup de leur temps  
pour me faire découvrir de façon  
authentique leur pays.

En un mois j'ai eu l'occasion de visiter  
les musées de Sydney, Canberra et  
Melbourne, et j'ai été impressionnée par  
la qualité des collections, des expositions  
et de la muséographie.

Le Musée Lapérouse, pour lequel j'ai  
maintenant un attachement tout  
particulier, est un lien entre la France et  
l'Australie, issu de l'histoire bien sûr,  
mais aussi de la volonté actuelle de tous  
les amis du Musée.

Je continuerai bien sûr, de Paris, à  
consolider ce lien.

A bientôt.  
Martine Lusardy

### Introducing Le Commandant Maurice Demoisson

**Capt. Demoisson** took over from our  
great friend **Capt. Yves Le Borgne** as  
**Defence Attaché** with the French  
Embassy in Canberra on 21 July 1993.

Having entered l'Ecole Navale in 1967,  
Capt. Demoisson graduated to serve in  
the Atlantic Ocean and the  
Mediterranean. In 1987/88 he was  
captain of the despatch vessel  
*Commandant Deunig* on service in the  
Indian Ocean, then took command of the  
frigate *Protet* during operations in the  
Gulf. He has also served at various times  
as staff-officer and instructor in French  
naval schools and Training Centres.

A graduate of l'Ecole Supérieure de  
Guerre Navale and the Greenwich  
Royal Naval Staff College, Capt.  
Demoisson also recently attended a  
course at the Canberra Joint Service  
Staff College. A Chevalier de la Légion  
d'Honneur at de l'Ordre National du  
Mérite, the new Defence Attaché holds  
two citations as well as the Croix de  
Guerre de Théâtres d'Opérations  
Extérieures.

He and his wife Danielle are delighted to  
have found a house in La Perouse St,  
Canberra! They have two children,  
Natalie, who is with them in Australia,  
and Christophe who is continuing his  
studies in France.

We do hope they will join us on Grand  
Pique-nique Day.

### ABC Radio National Highlight

The *That's History* program is currently  
broadcasting a six part series titled  
'France Australie'. It looks at some  
intriguing connections between France  
and Australia. Some of these go back a  
long way, others are more recent.

*That's History* is broadcast on Radio  
National (576) each Friday evening at  
7.10 pm and repeated on Sunday  
afternoon at 2.05 pm. The first episode  
went to air on 17.9.93. Usually these  
cassettes are available for sale from ABC  
Radio Tapes after the series has been  
broadcast.