

# Lapérouse

Friends of the Lapérouse Museum



Members Quarterly Newsletter

April - May - June, 1993 Vol. 3, No. 4

## President's Message

I am beginning to understand the pressures of being your President — having to say something new with every quarterly newsletter and then being judged by the subsequent newsletter is a very effective pressure. A number of developments portend an exciting and busy future. First, as a result of the hard work of a lot of people, an excellent proposal to focus restoration on the cable station Instrument Room's ceiling has been submitted for the 1993 NSW Heritage Assistance Program. This is a key development for the Museum, as it not only completes the architectural restoration, but provides essential space for the much needed travelling exhibitions and events that will contribute to the vigour of the Museum. Second, we have a conjoint workshop for the purpose of putting together a five year plan for the Museum. Third, we are having the first of what will hopefully be a number of visiting experts from France to spend a month with us in July/August of this year. Her name is Ms Martine Lusardy. We would be delighted to hear from any the Friends who may be able to help with accommodation during this time.

I look forward to seeing you all in the near future. I would like to see a social program organised that would allow us to take advantage of these various visits and events. You will be hearing from us. Please feel free to contribute your own ideas to help make the Lapérouse Museum an even more vibrant focus of interaction.

Robert Clancy

## Coming Events — Bastille Day

At 11.30 am on 14 July, Bastille Day, the Governor of NSW, His Excellency Rear-Admiral Peter Sinclair AC will lay a wreath on the Lapérouse Monument and will give an address, to be followed by a reception in the Instrument Room of the Museum. Members are invited to attend.

## Lapérouse Day

23 February 1993



From L. to R. Mr John McColl, Commandant Beauchesne, M. Georges Brouet, M. Michel Legras, M. Claude Lerma.

Arriving in Sydney for the Lapérouse anniversary, the French Navy patrol boat, *La Glorieuse*, under Commandant **Olivier Beauchesne**, tied up at Garden Island. As a pleasant prelude to the Lapérouse Day celebration, on Friday 19 February, Commandant Beauchesne and crew hosted a cocktail party on board *La Glorieuse*.

Lapérouse Day, 23 February, was a perfect Sydney summer day, and the short but moving commemoration ceremony and wreath laying went off with the usual naval precision. The officers and crew of *La Glorieuse* attended. Also present was le Capitaine de Vaisseau **Pierre Jannot**, Commandant of the French Pacific Fleet. Among the other well-known guests were M. **Michel Legras**, Consul-General for France in Sydney, and Capitaine **Yves Leborgne** and his wife **Pauline**. After the ceremony, a reception in the Instrument Room was graciously hosted by the Mayor of Randwick, Mrs **Margaret Martin**. The refreshments were generously provided by the Randwick Council. The French officers were afterwards taken on a tour of the Museum, with which they were most impressed.

Carole Roussel received this thankyou note from Commandant Beauchesne:

Chère Madame,

En mon nom personnel et en celui de l'équipage, je vous adresse tous mes remerciements pour la gentillesse dont vous et les amis du Musée de La Pérouse avez fait preuve à notre égard. J'ai été personnellement très ému que de me rendre sur les lieux où La Pérouse a débarqué le 26 janvier 1788, et en tant que marin français, très reconnaissant que l'on perpétue ici en Australie sa mémoire. Votre musée est très intéressant et je lui souhaite de prospérer et acquérir une plus grande renommée, car il le mérite, tant par son emplacement que par sa richesse, et surtout par le dévouement des amis du Musée de La Pérouse. Le Capitaine de Vaisseau Jannot se joint à moi pour vous exprimer nos plus sincères encouragements et l'expression de nos hommages les plus respectueux.

O Beauchesne

## Lapérouse Museum News

It has been a busy period at the Museum with many activities taking place in commemoration of Senior Citizens Week, Heritage Week and the Easter school holidays. More activities have been planned for International Museums Week (18-25 May) the highlight being an 'Open Day' on 18 May.

The French community continues with its enthusiastic support for the Museum. In April a 'cultural rally' organised by the French community included Botany Bay in the itinerary. Participants had a lot of fun as they unravelled the Lapérouse story.

The Museum has a new clerical assistant, Ms Michelle Clach. A graduate in anthropology, Michelle is presently

attending a part-time museums study course at the University of Sydney. Alfonso Duque-Portugal, Interpretive Assistant at the Museum has been awarded a Master of Arts degree in Cultural Resources Management by the University of Sydney.

Alfonso Duque-Portugal  
Lapérouse Museum  
Botany Bay National Park

## Martine Lusardy

Martine Lusardy is arriving in Sydney in late July to spend five weeks working at the Lapérouse Museum to gather material for her Masters thesis. Her trip is funded by the Australia-France Foundation. The following is a summary of her career to date:

Née le 20 novembre 1954; 1972: Baccalauréat A2 section littérature et langues; 1975: Première année de DEUG en Langues Etrangères Appliquées, à l'Université de Paris; 1985-92: Chargée de mission à la Ville de Paris; et depuis 1990, détachée au Musée en Herbe, où elle est chargée des relations internationales au Musée, et du projet de 'Centre d'Art Européen' (expositions, collaborations et réseaux musées pour enfants, relations avec les différents partenaires institutionnels européens, présentation des activités du Musée en Herbe lors de colloques internationaux etc.)

As our President has indicated, we would be pleased to hear from anyone who could offer accommodation to her for the whole or part of the five weeks she will spend in Sydney.

## Congratulations From Paris

Dear Robert,

It is a great pleasure for me and the Musée de la Marine to know, thanks to the Newsletter, that numerous new members have joined the Friends.

I am extremely pleased to know that you were elected President of the Friends of the Lapérouse Museum Limited on 8 November last. I am sure now of the fresh enthusiasm of those who will help the first pioneers who, with Pierre and Carole Roussel, built up the fantastic project of a French maritime heritage museum in Australia.

I remain ready to help, as far as I can, your personal contribution to the development of the Lapérouse Museum.

Yours sincerely  
François Bellec

Musée de la Marine  
Paris

## Items of Interest

The Museum has received the handsome sum of \$5000 towards the restoration of the Instrument Room from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous. The Committee and Friends and everyone connected with the Museum are very grateful to this shy benefactor.

The Committee of the Friends of the Lapérouse Museum is also grateful to the Paribas Group (Australia) to the Director, **M. Paul Runge**, for generously agreeing to look after the accounts of the Society.

As well, we are happy to have two new corporate memberships from two French companies in Sydney, 1. Australian Water Services Managing Director, **M. Pierre Alla** and 2. Indosuez (Australia) Ltd. Chairman, **M. Jean-Marie Simart**. The Museum appreciates such support.

On Friday 7 May, a small group of the Friends, organised at short notice by **M. Thierry Laloux**, was on the Beneteau yacht *Kama 3*, owned and skippered by **Mr Paul Slayford**, to take part in the annual France-Australia Cup race on Sydney Harbour, and came in a creditable 9th out of 21 entrants. Needless to say, a great day was had by all.

## Reece Discombe Update

There have been some interesting developments in the matter of the relics brought up from the Lapérouse wreck site in 1958 by Reece Discombe. He has

already given some of the artefacts he salvaged to the Queensland Museum and has now sent the rest to the Lapérouse Museum. In a recent letter to me he wrote of his intention to do this:

'[There are] several artefacts that I have in my possession which I took from Vanikoro. As old age is creeping up on us all and I am afraid that when I die (what a nice subject) the family will dump them all, it is only correct that others should see these and [that they] be preserved in the correct place... This material was taken out of the sea with the permission of the government... I have even arranged to have the material sent to Sydney free of charge.'

This man does not waste time. The precious cargo has already arrived cost free on the *Coral Chief*, so will soon be delivered to the Museum. Arrangements are also being made for Reece to come to Sydney, probably towards the end of the year to present, from what I hear, is his well researched and fascinating illustrated talk on the Lapérouse tragedy. (H. R.)

He writes: 'All this material was taken from *Astrolabe* in 1958 at Vanikoro underneath coral about one metre thick: and consists of: 1. Two flanged brass pipes, probably used for the bilge pump 2. A mill wheel, for grinding wheat for bread, which was mounted on the stern of *Astrolabe* 3. Lead ingot, for melting down to make lead shot. 4. Brass pulley wheel, probably used for the tiller steering. 5. Brass trumpet. This is in a delicate state. 6. Some wood. We think this is part of the ribs. 7. Shackle brass — could be from any part of the ship. 8. Roll of brass wire, for general purposes or sounding. 9. Brass stanchion, possibly one side of the brackets used for supporting a bell.'

Note: Reece found the wreckage of *Boussole* in 1964. (H.R.)

## Bob Bowdey's Search For *Boussole*

Jean-François de Galoup, Comte de Lapérouse, with Fleuriot de Langle as his second in charge, left Brest on 1 August 1785 in *Astrolabe* and *Boussole* on a four year voyage of discovery to the Pacific. On 26 January 1788 he sailed into Botany Bay as the First Fleet was about to leave for Port Jackson to found a penal colony. Since leaving France, he had rounded the Horn, called at Valparaiso, Easter Island, Maui, Lituya Bay, Alaska (where he lost twenty-three men in a tide race), and Monterey. Then he continued non-stop across the North Pacific to Macao, thence through the Lapérouse Strait between Hokkaido and Sakhalin to the Russian outpost Petropavlovsk. From there he sailed south via Western Samoa, where thirteen men, including Fleuriot de Langle, were massacred. He arrived in Botany Bay four days after the First Fleet.

They stayed six weeks in the Bay, fraternised with their recent enemies, ('so far from home all Europeans are compatriots', Lapérouse wrote), buried Père Receveur, and built two long boats. On 10 March they sailed out of Botany Bay, are known to have called at Tonga, then, in a severe cyclone, were wrecked on the reefs of Vanikoro about May 1788. (H.R.)

Bob Bowdey takes up the story:

'Today we know the location of the wrecks, but there are conflicting stories about the fate of the crews. It is believed that some of the crew survived and got ashore. The island legend is that they built a small boat to escape in, but their fate is unknown. These stories were first told to Captain Peter Dillon, the original discoverer of the wreck sites, forty years after the tragedy.

'In September 1990, the M/V *Coriolis* went to Vanikoro with the Association Solomon from Noumea to try to discover more about the fate of Lapérouse. Nicholas Clark, an underwater archaeologist from Australia, headed the expedition. Two French government archaeologists were to search the island for any record the survivors might have left. Nothing has ever been found.

But underwater, the wreck site gave up a wealth of artefacts. Working with two suction dredges and much diver power in teams of four or five for up to twelve hours a day, in two two-hour shifts of three teams, we excavated hundreds of cubic yards of sand and rock. Among the timbers of the ship were treasures hidden for two hundred years. We found cartons of pewter mugs and pitchers wonderfully preserved. There was a

case of porcelain vases with a delicate blue and white floral pattern. A large porcelain serving platter and soup tureen with whimsical pigs head handles were brought up intact along with shards of broken pottery, like a huge jigsaw puzzle awaiting reconstruction. Glass trading beads, sewing pins, musket balls and gun flints were recovered.

We found a bear claw with a hole for a string and a carved wooden comb with an eagle motif that had to have come from the American northwest. We found dozens of shells, among them numerous abalone shells that probably came from Monterey Bay, California. Also found was a crucifix and pocket watch.

An important find was part of the transit of Langlois, a navigation instrument carried only on *Boussole*. This small circle of brass engraved with Langlois' name settles the long debate about where each ship is wrecked. As it proves the *Boussole* is here, the other site is *Astrolabe*.

Unfortunately at the end of the expedition tragedy struck.

The government of the Solomon Islands refused to allow any of the artefacts to leave the country for preservation. So they are sure to self destruct after two centuries of immersion. As there is no preservationist in the Solomon Islands, it would appear their fate is sealed. How can treasures so obviously belonging to the world's heritage be so callously treated?

At the end of September we sailed from the Solomon Islands, leaving these treasures in an ordinary gaol cell on Ndeni Island.'

*Note:* In 1828 Dumont d'Urville questioned uneasy older Vanikorans, who said that the survivors built a small boat and sailed away after five moons. Admiral de Brossard, Lapérouse expert, is convinced that they were massacred by the hostile Vanikorans before they left the lagoon, and he is sure the story of the small boat is true, not legend. (H.R.)

**Bowdey on Bowdey:** I am a 44 year old Padi Master scuba diving instructor who specialises in managing live-aboard dive boats. I have a post-graduate degree in drug and alcohol counselling from the University of Utah. The expedition Lapérouse was the first major archaeological expedition I have been part of, and will always be a treasured experience. I have lived in the U.S., the Bahamas, Cayman Is., Mexico, Fiji and Vanuatu. [He says he would like to join the Friends of the Lapérouse Museum if they'll accept a Yank!]



The Païou R. 1839. (Dumont d'Urville)



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the Lapérouse Museum

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Capitaine Yves Le Borgne



Madame Pauline Le Borgne

### Vale Capitaine and Madame Le Borgne

Soon to leave Australia, where he has been Defence Attaché at the French Embassy for the past three years, Captain Yves Le Borgne and his charming New Zealand born wife Pauline will be sadly missed by their many friends here, and certainly by the Lapérouse Museum in which they have taken an active and benevolent interest during their time here.

At our request, Captain Le Borgne has provided details of his naval career since he graduated from l'Ecole Navale in 1965, and a very active and varied career it has been. He served on a destroyer in the North Atlantic, then in 1968 took command of a patrol boat *Audacieuse* in the Cameroons. On completion of an engineering course, he was appointed to *La Bourdonnais*, a destroyer in the Indian Ocean. Next he attended the military nuclear school and was commissioned nuclear engineer on SSBN *Terrible* and SSBN *Foudroyant*, then commanded the patrol boat *Epée* based in the Comores.

In 1979 he served as First Secretary to the Chief Minister in the New Hebrides leading up to independence. Recalled to Paris Naval HQ Logistics, he was appointed captain of the repair warship *Garonne*, based in Martinique. A three year appointment to the Naval Instruction Centre and two years in Naval HQ in Cherbourg preceded his posting to Canberra in 1990.

Madame Pauline Le Borgne, a vivid personality in her own right, has played an active part in the performance of their many and varied duties in Australia, and has also acted as a voluntary guide in the National Gallery in Canberra, an indication of her wide-ranging interests. Their son lives in France.

The Le Borgnes will be hard to replace. Certainly they have been devoted friends to the Lapérouse Museum and we wish them well wherever they go.

### Reciprocal Benefits for AFFM Members

#### As at October 1992:

Free or reduced admission to museums is not automatic. In Australia, reciprocal memberships are offered only to people travelling outside their own town. Benefits offered are information, invitations to events, and hospitality to small groups.

The following offer the use of their Members' Lounges: Museum of Victoria (Tues. and Thurs.); National

Gallery Society, Melbourne; Art Gallery Society of NSW; Powerhouse Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Australian National Gallery, Canberra; Friends of the National Gallery, Canberra.

Old Parliament House, Adelaide: concession entry; The Australian National Gallery: free admission to members of State Art Gallery societies only; the Edith Cowan University Museum of Childhood, Claremont, WA: offers 10% discount at the shop, and coffee; Bendigo Art Gallery: free entry available. Use the membership card of

your society.

#### International Reciprocity

The benefits vary. Members are welcome to events and to use members' rooms at: The Friends of the Royal Academy, Picadilly, (Susie Dawson); British Museum Society, (ask directions at main gate); Victoria and Albert, (ask at Information Desk what is available — there is no friends room); Commonwealth Institute, (write or phone Ms J. Gale); Friends of the Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High St. London W8 6NQ, Ph: 071 603 4535.