

# Lapérouse

Friends of the Lapérouse Museum



Members Quarterly Newsletter

October - November - December, 1992 - Vol. Three, No. 2

## President's Message

With the approach of the AGM on Sunday 8 November, 1992, followed by the launch of John Winch's Lapérouse Tapestry and the Friends' Pique-Nique, I take this opportunity to inform members that a teaching assignment at the University of Papua New Guinea during November and December will again prevent me from attending the events announced in this newsletter, and that, in the circumstances, I do not propose to seek re-election as President for a further term of office.

I look forward, however, to a continuing involvement with the Friends in 1993, and would like to convey to all members my deep gratitude for their support and participation throughout the past year. In acknowledging the contribution of the members of the Committee, special thanks are extended to Carole Roussel (*Vice President*), Michèle de Tarlé (*Secretary*) and Stan de Hauteclouque (*Treasurer*) for their dedication and assistance in the pursuit of our aim to realise the vision of Pierre Roussel for a worthy memorial to the illustrious voyage of Lapérouse and to age of French maritime discovery in Oceania.

Peter Orlovich

## Twilight Concert and Drinks on the veranda

**Saturday 24 October at 6pm,**  
featuring the Capella Choir "Voices  
from the Vacant Lot".  
Special concession to Friends: \$20

## COMING EVENTS

### FRIENDS DAY - SUNDAY 8 NOVEMBER 1992 A.G.M. -Tapestry Reception - Grand Pique

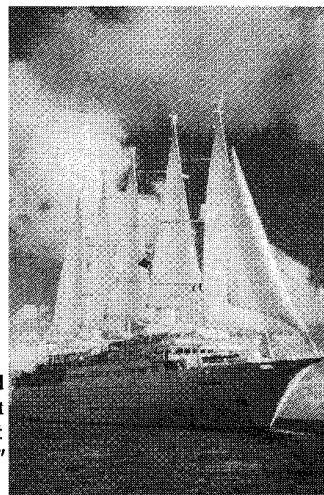
Preceded as usual by the Annual General Meeting at 11.30 am. in the Instrument Room, the Friends' *Grand Pique-Nique* will be a special event this year, so put it in your diary NOW AND MAKE PLANS TO BE THERE.

At 12.30 pm. the Consul Général for France, M. Michel Legras, will unfurl the Lapérouse Museum's latest treasure, John Winch's startling and long-awaited tapestry. Commissioned and designed more than 5 years ago, the *Lapérouse Tapestry* has a much told story. Since the workshop where it was woven is no longer in operation, it is a unique, virtually priceless work of art, both in design and craftsmanship, that can never be reproduced (tapestries are frequently reproduced, often as many as 10 copies being made from the original). Thanks to the artist's perseverance and generosity, the *Lapérouse Tapestry* has been rescued and completed in order to take its place as the centrepiece of the Museum's foyer.

So let the party begin. Friends of Friends are warmly invited too as a prelude to the *Grand Pique-Nique*. There will be music, shade, fine wine and cheese and, we hope, another sparkling La Perouse day to remember.

### Thé Dansant on Club Med II, Thursday 10 December

Have you ever tangoed at tea-time? Treat yourselves to an old romantic French tradition, a thé dansant, on board a fancy new French sailing cruise-ship... CLUB MED II... here in Sydney Harbour on her maiden voyage. The Friends are holding their first big fund-raising party and you will receive a much sought-after invitation. There can be only 150 guests so you must send your reply vite, vite.



### STOP PRESS:

Helen Rosenman will attend the Grand Pique-Nique to sign copies of her latest work, a translation and re-telling of: "*Two Voyages to the South Seas*" by Captain Jules S C Dumont d'Urville

## Museum News

The Museum has had a busy winter - it is a popular time for visiting museums and galleries and we had, as usual, our busiest month this year in July. *Bastille Day* is always a focus for Sydney visitors and the ceremony was colourful and well attended. The Museum staff, and the park workers who prepare the grounds, enjoy contributing to the day.

Recently we have been involved in the National Parks and Wildlife Service 25th Anniversary celebrations which continue throughout October.

### HUGH BIRCH SPREADS NEWS OF LAPEROUSE TO VANUATU

11 September 1992

"I have just returned from Port Vila where I had been invited by Air Vanuatu and the editor of the magazine *Pacific Paradise*, Elwyn Tania. The object of the visit was to relate to service organizations such as Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs the story of Qantas flying boat operations from Sydney to Nouméa, Vila and Espiritu Santo with occasional extensions to Vanikoro in the late 1940's.

Great interest was shown by these audiences in the Lapérouse Museum and the Friends who support it. The *Pacific Paradise* magazine would like a story of about 1000 words on the Museum and its activities together with some colour transparencies.

As a result of these talks I was invited to meet **Reece Discombe** who was one of the original divers on the wrecks of *Astrolabe* and *Boussole*. He showed me some of the items he had recovered which included a beautifully restored

We began with an *Open Day* on Saturday 3rd October to promote the fascinating history of the suburb of La Perouse and the role of Lapérouse's expedition in the new colony of Australia. Mr Frank Carlton contributed with a collection of books with a French flavour for sale over the week-end and we hope this will continue every week-end, initially during October. **Two fund-raising concerts for the Instrument Room project** are being held on Saturdays 10th and 24th October and we hope to be able to hold more such events in the future if these are a success. I look forward to seeing many Friends at these concerts.

cannon, a pipe and a pair of navigational dividers. In addition, he showed me some other artifacts including what appeared to me to be a very heavy piece of lead ballast from *Boussole* but which he said was probably used for making lead shot. He also had some other artifacts at another location but I was not able to see these as he had other commitments and I was leaving Port Vila. The editor of *Pacific Paradise* magazine however will view them and report on their suitability for the Museum.

Mr Discombe can arrange for all these latter objects (not the cannon, pipe etc...) to be transported to Sydney by ship for free. Our expense would be getting the stuff from the wharf to the Museum.

Enclosed you will find an article by **Bob Bowdey**, master of the *MV Coriolis* which was used in the Vanikoro dives plus some photocopies of maps from the book "*From Hudson Bay to Botany Bay*" by Russell C. Shelton. Given his permission, it would make interesting reading in the next issue".



A number of distinguished visitors have appreciated the Museum recently - the past Prime Minister of France **Mr Michel Rocard** visited with the Consul Général **Mr Michel Legras**, **Mr Dominique Bellinger** from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs was introduced to the Museum by **Mrs Carole Roussel**, as also the Senator **Mr Durand-Chastel** and **Mr Jean Terrassin**, Délégué des Français de l'Etranger from Adclaide and **Mr Gary Simpson**, Chairman of the New South Wales Arts Advisory Council. It is gratifying to note the interest of the French government and the commitment of the Friends committee to safeguarding French maritime history and its ties with Australia.

### REECE DISCOMBE RESPONDS ...

Dear Hugh,

Many thanks for your letter and cutting about the **Sir Rex Nan Kivell** Exhibition in the Hyde Park Barracks until 29 November... The monument at Vanikoro is of great interest to me. The only monument that was ever erected there was by Dumont D'Urville in 1828. The other one that is still there and recognised by all was made by myself. What would be the chances of getting a copy or snap of this monument for me please ??? (not mine)... I sent a complete list and photos of what I have for the Lapérouse Museum several months ago to Jennifer Carter... I hope that you can assist with these relics that I hold, as if I drop dead, then the family won't know what is what and will probably dump them all.

I am still interested in showing all the Lapérouse followers my set of slides that I showed at his bi-centenary at Albi, and also at Expo in Vancouver.

Kind regards, Hugh and my very best to Madame Roussel. Sincerely...

## Booking Essential!



### Anne Sullivan's Designed Tours

#### Discover France's unique contribution to early Australia!

Walk with me as part of a small group (10-12) through Sydney's history and hear stories of French navigators, scientists, settlers and convicts. Morning tours include printed outline in French and tea.

*Circular Quay - Dawes Point - The Rocks Walk \$ 25 --- Macquarie Street Walk \$ 25*

(Special Rates for larger group) For Bookings, telephone (02) 327-2954 or fax (02) 327-1639

## THE IMPACT OF LAPÉROUSE ON MAPPING OF THE AUSTRALIAN-PACIFIC REGION BY THE FRENCH (Part 2)

Address given by Rear-Admiral François Bellec at the NSW State Library on Monday 18 November, 1991

The accuracy of the sea chart depends on two main elements: first, on the geographic adjustment of the skeleton map and second, on the precision of the coastal surveying and of the hydrographic soundings. In short, nautical cartography is first and foremost a cartography of the gap. I mean that the dimensions of the empty spaces are as important as the outlines of the shore itself. Before the development of modern navigation and detection systems, when ships still relied on visual and astronomical navigation, the distances between landforms were vital information. Depending on the accuracy of this measurement, deduced from the difference between the geographic coordinates, land sighting after days and days of dead reckoning could be safe, dangerous or catastrophic.

With regard to the accuracy of their coastal surveying, Lapérouse's topographers Monneron, Bernizet and Lieutenant Blondela were still using graphometers and magnetic bearings, carrying out their surveys in accordance with the best methods in use at this time. The hydrographic revolution would come twenty-three years later, thanks to the publication of new rules formulated by the hydro-

grapher **Beautemps-Beaupré**. A man of brilliant mind, Beautemps-Beaupré was a student in the French Hydrographic Service, called the *Dépôt Général des Cartes et Plans*, when the Lapérouse Expedition was being planned and prepared. He was already fully aware of the unsatisfactory results of surveys dependent on magnetic bearings, and he proposed to base every hydrographic work on geometric combinations of angles and circles, and on the exclusive use of reflecting circles developed in France by **Captain Borda** and **Etienne Lenoir**, an illiterate instrument maker of pure genius.

Fortunately for science, Beautemps-Beaupré was not granted his wish to join Lapérouse's staff. But he sailed six years later in 1791 with the rescue expedition commanded by **Admiral d'Entrecasteaux**. This voyage was a medical and psychological disaster (eighty-nine men died out of two-hundred-and-nineteen, between half and a third of the crew). Nevertheless, Beautemps-Beaupré, only twenty-five years old, achieved innovative results using for the first time the methods he had devised and recommended, entirely based on the geometry of circles and angles dissociated from magnetic bearings. He was given the opportunity to complete Cook's work along the southern coast of Tasmania, initiating in Storm Bay his new method of segments of circles between 22 April and 14 May 1792. It was something like the birth of modern hydrography and probably the first accurate large scale map of a part of Australia. Beautemps-Beaupré published his results and explained his methods in 1808. Though he admitted to having been inspired by the ideas of **Dalrymple**, the British Navy with high regard for his publications recommended the adoption of his methods.

We consider Beautemps-Beaupré to be the father of modern French hydrography. His methods were only superseded by to-day's modern radio-electric procedure.

After Beautemps-Beaupré, French surveys in the Pacific could be carried out with far greater accuracy. **Captain Baudin** sailed too early to be able to use these new methods as he surveyed the Australian coast between 1801 and 1803. He signed thirty-two maps and surveys of which thirty concern Australia and Tasmania. Baudin and **Flinders** almost completed the mapping of Australia's coastline begun two centuries before by the Dutch explorer **Willem Janszoon**. Unfortunately Baudin chose to spend such long

periods at sea that his expedition was one of the most disastrous from a medical point of view, due to scurvy.

Then **Louis de Freycinet** sailed across the Pacific from 1817 to 1820 onboard *Uranie*. Our Hydrographic Service retains records collected by *Thétis* and *Esperance*, under the command of **Hyacinthe de Bougainville**, between 1824 and 1826, some of which concern Sydney and Port Jack-

son Bay. **Dumont d'Urville** charted the Pacific from 1816 to 1829, and then from 1837 to 1840, with *Astrolabe* and *Zelée*. Being our greatest sea explorer, he reached south to Antarctica, amassed important data from along the coasts of Australia, New Zealand, the Fiji Islands, New Caledonia, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, before joining the Indian Ocean via Melanesia. In all, some hundred maps appeared for the first time in the Atlas published after Dumont d'Urville's voyages.

As the commanding officer of a patrol ship, I was given twenty-two years ago the privilege of navigating through Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands on sea-charts drawn by Dumont d'Urville. The fascinating map of Vanikoro is most impressive when you remember that Dumont d'Urville anchored on the 21st February 1828 in Tevai bay, east of the island, moved on the 2nd March into Manevaï Bay and sailed away only fifteen days later, his men stricken by fever and disease. The cartographic work achieved in such a short time by the officers under the command of **Sub-Lieutenant Gressien** is outstanding. Actually, I must acknowledge that I discovered a few years ago, while researching the disaster of the Lapérouse Expedition, that the Vanikoro chart has been amended several times since 1828, in order to correct some enormous errors regarding the coral reef. These errors explain for instance the huge misunderstanding between Dumont d'Urville and **Peter Dillon**, the discoverer of the Vanikoro tragedy, regarding the narrow passages through the coral reef and consequently the exact location of the wrecks of the two frigates. (to be continued next issue)



## LAPÉROUSE

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Friends of the Lapérouse Museum

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### Friends of the Lapérouse Museum Limited (A.C.N. 003-547-699)

was established in 1989.

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## EXHIBITIONS OF INTEREST TO LOVERS OF EXPLORATION AND NAVIGATION



### A DISCERNING EYE

#### SELECTIONS FROM THE REX NAN KIVELL COLLECTION

A National Library of Australia  
Travelling Exhibition  
19 September - 29 November 1992  
Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney  
10am - 5pm daily (02) 223-8922

The late Sir Rex Nan Kivell was a founding partner of London's famous *Redfern Gallery*, where he was the first dealer to first show the early works of Matisse, Picasso and Max Ernst. A New Zealander by birth, he nevertheless sold or bequeathed to the National Library of Australia his life-long collection of paintings, maps, notebooks and objets d'art pertaining to European discovery and settlement of the Pacific.

### THE FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY LIBRARY in conjunction with THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY GUIDED TOURS

invite all Friends of the Lapérouse Museum to join a special discovery tour

#### "Images of an Era"

on Monday 2 November 1992  
10.30am - 3.30pm

*Meeting Place:* under the Clock Tower

*Cost, including lunch:* \$30

*Bookings:* (02) 692-4002 Ms Judy Lee

Then, linger in Fisher Library's Rare Book Collection - Level 2:

#### "Driv'n by the Spheres"

The influence of the heavens on science and society as reflected in print from the 15th-20th centuries. *Until 2 January 93*

#### "THE PACIFIC EXPLORER"

by Professor John Dunmore

This book is now for sale at the Museum. Regular Price: \$24.95

**Special Offer to Friends  
ONLY \$ 21.95 (Save \$ 3.00)**

*Letter of support for the Instrument Room project from H.E. the Australian Ambassador to France, Mr Kim Jones to the Director, Heritage Branch, Department of Planning*

I understand that the Lapérouse Museum has applied to the Heritage Commission for assistance with respect to the restoration of the Instrument Room at the Museum.

The Lapérouse Museum is an important symbol of the bilateral links between Australia and France and as such has generated considerable interest in both France and Australia. Indeed, its establishment in 1988 was made possible due to the joint support of the French and New South Wales' governments.

I understand that the Museum is in need of additional financial assistance to enable it to undertake the renovations necessary for the Instrument Room to be made into an exhibition area, which would also be available for community activities.

Given the historical importance of the Lapérouse Museum and the valuable contribution it has made in developing awareness of the early relationship between France and Australia, I endorse the museum's application for assistance.

*Letter of thanks to the Editor for information, photographs and Museum poster sent to M. Philippe de Lapérouse and family:*

Je vous remercie infiniment pour les documents et l'affiche que vous m'avez envoyés concernant le musée "Lapérouse" à Botany Bay. J'ai essayé sans succès de vous répondre pendant votre séjour à Paris mais j'espère avoir le plaisir de vous rencontrer à Sydney un jour. Veuillez croire, chère Madame, à mes salutations les plus distinguées.

The Friends are honoured by the *Life Membership* of Mr Peter Curtis, Consul-General for Australia in New York and former Australian Ambassador to France.

### NEXT ISSUE

*Bob Bowdley's article from the  
MV Coriolis, Vanuatu  
"In Search of Boussole".*

Also Part III of Rear-Admiral Bellec's address given at the International Cartography Conference, Sydney on Monday 18th November, 1991.

## SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

For those who have NOT YET renewed their subscription or who wish to join the Friends for the Calendar Year 1993, please use the form enclosed for your convenience.

N.B. *Bankcard, Mastercard & Visa* are now accepted. Thank you in advance for your support!

## ADVERTISING RATES

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1/6 page	\$ 125	\$ 400
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**EDITORIAL NOTE:** Thank you for your many interesting, informative and entertaining letters. Sometimes only small extracts are printed, others not at all, but the Committee always reads, notes and appreciates their contents.