

Lapérouse

Friends of the Lapérouse Museum



Members Quarterly Newsletter

February - March - April - May, 1994 Vol. 4, No. 3

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This is a time of changes and a period for important decisions, when the directions for the museum are being determined. In my letter at the end of 1993 I indicated the importance of 1994, largely because of the need for structural changes to allow for dynamic leadership and progression of the principles of the museum.

Unfortunately we still have no report from the NPWS on their business plan and how that will affect the museum. It seems clear, however, that the peninsula is to be seen in a comprehensive way, but many of us are wary about a confusion of objectives, particularly as we do not now have a permanent director. There is, however, much goodwill, and the Friends will need to be at their persuasive best. The promised workshop has yet to be organised, but it is increasingly clear to me that there is an urgent need for an administrative structure with broad representation. Difficult but challenging times.

The good news is that of the Instrument Room: With the help of Guy de Compiègne the NPWS has done a marvellous job in its renovation. I now believe we have the opportunity to do all the things we have discussed "on site" at Lapérouse. It will be a wonderful place for lecture series, rotating exhibitions, social events and meetings. We will be organising an opening as soon as the lighting has been completed. I think it would be best to wait for the completion of the room before we continue our lecture series which got underway so well with the talk by Dr Helen Wallis on *French Discoverers In The Pacific*.

I would also like to thank Patrice Curien who has thrown himself into a membership drive. He and Michèle de Tarlé have been elected Vice Presidents, in recognition of their enthusiasm and help to our organisation.

Robert Clancy

Lapérouse Day

23 February 1994



Illustration by courtesy of Glen Blaxland

Sydney turned on a perfect day for the annual wreath-laying ceremony at the Lapérouse monument, commemorating the time spent by the Lapérouse Expedition in Botany Bay in 1788.

There was a gathering of distinguished visitors for the ceremony hosted by the Hon. Patricia Forsythe MLC, including French Consul General for NSW, M. Legras; visiting French senator M. Jean-Pierre Cantegrit and Madame Cantegrit; Délégué des Français de l'Etranger, M. John MacColl and Mrs MacColl; Commander Townsend RAN; Commandant Boivin, Commander of the visiting French patrol boat *La Glorieuse*; Mayor of Randwick, Councillor Chris Bastie; the Hon. E.G. Whitlam; Mr John Mortimer NPWS; and flag bearers, members of the French Ex-Servicemen's Association of NSW. Speeches were short, thoughtful and moving.

The RAN band entertained spectators with popular airs, then gave a rousing version of *La Marseillaise*, and even made *Advance Australia Fair* sound more inspired than usual. Sailors from *La Glorieuse* and a detachment from the RAN also attended. Friends of the Lapérouse Museum, invited guests, local residents, school children, and some curious tourists made up the audience.

Helen Rosenman

COMING EVENTS

Museums Week: (16 May-20 May). International Museums Day: Wednesday 18 May, annual free entry to Open Day.

11am Bastille Day annual ceremony: July 14.

Museum News

1994 has been an extremely busy and productive year for the Lapérouse Museum to date. The Père Receveur Commemoration Day and Lapérouse Day were both a terrific success and hearty thanks is extended to all those who put so much work into making the celebrations both inspiring and entertaining. We were blessed by glorious weather for Lapérouse Day and the presence of so many honoured guests (see p1).

Tours and activities organised for Senior Citizens' Week, the Easter school holidays and Heritage Week were well attended. A free family day tour to Henry Head on Sunday 10 April was

booked out and the new Children's Discovery Tour was also popular.

There is a new face at the museum: **Sue Jeffrey**, who is temporarily filling **Diana New's** position while Diana is Acting Curator/Manager at the museum. Diana is leaving in May for a five month position as Senior Information Officer at the NPWS Head Office. She will be replaced by **Steven Thompson** who hails from the Justice And Police Museum and has also been with the Historic Houses Trust.

Diana New
Acting Managing Curator,
Lapérouse Museum

DR HELEN WALLIS LECTURE

Dr Helen Wallis, for many years Map Librarian at the British Library, has retired, but not to vegetate. She is now sharing her expertise with libraries as well as lecturing in other English speaking countries, and was in Australia until April 13. For four weeks she was scholar-in-residence and adviser to the Mitchell Library in Sydney.

On March 4 Dr Wallis gave a fascinating illustrated talk at the Alliance Française on mapmaking and the history of maps of the Pacific for the Friends of the Lapérouse Museum. A resumé of this will be published in the next newsletter. During her busy and all-too-short visit she also lectured at the State Library, Sydney University, the National Maritime Museum, Newcastle University and in Hobart and Adelaide.

Père Receveur Commemoration

This annual ceremony, with its Latin chants and prayers taken from services held in bygone days, was held on Sunday 13 February 1994 on the grassy slope near the tomb of Père Receveur. **Mr Frank Carleton**, convenor of the Père Receveur Committee, welcomed Commandant Demoisson, Defence Attaché to the French Embassy in Canberra, and other faithful participants gathered to honour the memory of the Lapérouse expedition's courageous chaplain and botanist.



Boys from the local church carry in the cross before Mass.
Père Receveur Celebration Mass
Sunday 20 February 1994

Two Catholic communities with their leaders, **Father Pat Hurley** in his home parish of Malabar and **Père Francois Roesch** chaplain of the French-speaking community, were accompanied by the Mauritian choir from the Catholic parish of Campbelltown. More than 400 people in all gathered together to celebrate mass and to receive communion on the lawn in front of the verandah of the museum.

In a moving sermon Father Pat traced the history of the Lapérouse expedition and paid homage to the devotion and bravery of all those who left their homes and loved ones in search of new lands and greater knowledge. He gave poignant details of the life of Père Receveur, recalling his service to science and devotion to God, years so brief, yet so rich.

The celebration closed with prayers around Père Receveur's tomb on which children from both communities laid armfuls of flowers. Many stayed on to visit the museum, share a picnic lunch and sing traditional songs to the lively strains of Georges Halambou's piano accordion.

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COMING EVENTS

International Museum Day: Wednesday 18

11am Basilide 1994 annual ceremony: July 14

Robert Clancy

Lapérouse in Macao

Lapérouse disliked Macao. By now he didn't like anywhere much; the disaster at Lituya Bay weighed heavily on his spirits, and he had lost some of his most experienced men. Although the accident had not been his fault he knew that ultimately the buck stopped with him.

The monotonous three month journey from Monterey across the northern Pacific, broken by only one short call in the Marianas, imposed a tremendous strain on relationships. The tense and tired Lapérouse complained in a letter to Fleurieu about the civilian contingent, especially the naturalist-cum-anthropologist Lamanon: "these theoreticians . . . they are so pretentious, . . . they have such an exaggerated opinion of their reveries and are basically so ignorant . . . they have completely exhausted my patience . . ." This outburst from one of the most even-tempered and admired officers in the navy, gives an indication of his frayed nerves and state of mind.

So they headed to Macao, which they reached at the end of January 1787. This small territory had been a Portuguese Treaty Port since 1557 and remains so today. In his letters from there to Fleurieu Lapérouse was critical of the Portuguese administration. He had initially been amused by their undisciplined indolence in tiny Trinidad Island off Brazil, but here where resolution and probity were needed they were lax and slipshod, more interested in building a cathedral than a fort. (Perhaps this was to their credit, except that a fort would have been more practical at the time, given their tenuous occupancy of Macao).

In theory the Portuguese were in charge, but in practice the Chinese Mandarins of Canton made the rules. All official appointments to Macao were arranged by the Viceroy of Goa, the Portuguese enclave in south-west India; inefficiency and nepotism were the norm and the mostly incompetent and corrupt Portuguese officials were held in contempt by the Chinese. Lapérouse wrote that there was a Portuguese night patrol which was forbidden to arrest any Chinese person, even one caught red-handed breaking and entering. The latest edict, he wrote incredulously, was that if a sepoy - a member of an Indian contingent brought from Goa for police duty - killed a Chinaman, even by accident, the Portuguese would execute him in the presence of two mandarins from Canton, who would be accorded a two-cannon salute on disembarking at Macao. On the other hand, if a Chinese killed a Portuguese he must be handed over to the Chinese authorities who would stage a solemn, but farcical trial, then set him free.

Lapérouse's letter listed further examples of indignities heaped by the Mandarins on the Portuguese "foreign devils" then indignantly recounted to Fleurieu the most recent incident: an English gunner, in firing the usual salute on entering the harbour, had accidentally killed a Chinese fisherman in a sampan, which had sailed unnoticed into range. The Chinese Governor of Canton had demanded that the innocent culprit be handed over by the Portuguese Governor, promising no harm would come to him as he was not guilty of any crime. This was done and the unfortunate man was immediately hanged. To the European Lapérouse this was the last straw; he wrote that national honour demanded such contempt be punished by bombardment of Canton and the arrest of the perpetrators, but the Portuguese supinely turned the other cheek.

Then there were the otter and bear skins they had bartered from the

Tlingits in Lituya Bay: four of the finest otter skins were to be taken to France and presented to Queen Marie Antoinette. Lapérouse expected to dispose of the rest for a good price in Macao and divide the profits on a pro rata basis among his crews. But to his chagrin and shame - he wrote to Fleurieu - of the two French agents one was burnt out, manic-depressive alcoholic, and the other, if in Europe, would have been gaoled for corruption. Between these two the deal fell through. Also the price of otter fur was nearly at rock bottom due to British and Russian overkill in Alaskan waters.

Lapérouse thought he would have to carry the furs back to France, but help was forthcoming from M. Elestockenstrom, an honest and energetic Swedish agent, who brokered a reasonable deal in the circumstances, promising to remit the money to Ile de France (Mauritius). Did it ever get there, and from there

to France, and if it did, who got it? And did the Queen get her furs before the Revolution? Why do historians so rarely explore the fascinating trivia of history?

For all their shortcomings the Portuguese were very hospitable. The new Governor, M. Bernardo Alexis de Lemos, told Lapérouse of his frustration at the arrogance of the Canton Mandarins and the venality and incompetence of the Portuguese officials. Food however, was

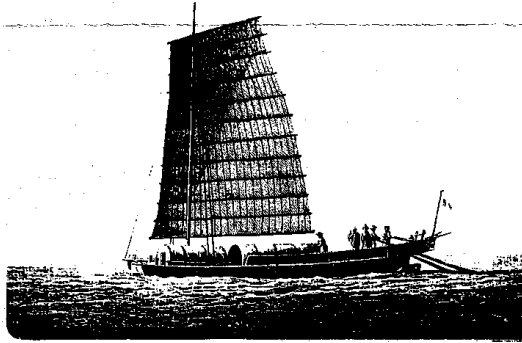
plentiful and cheap, and other supplies were abundant as Macao was the entrepot for Europeans engaged in the rich trade of tea, porcelain, silk and sandalwood through Canton.

An observatory was set up for them in the Augustine monastery where Dagelet the hydrographer fixed his longitudes and adjusted the chronometers. After the rigours of the previous six months rest and abundant food restored most of the crews to health. Lapérouse reported with pride that there was no scurvy in his ship, but later it would appear insidiously and one of their cooks would die from it on the voyage south from Petropavlovsk (if anyone could escape scurvy surely it would be the cook!). Lapérouse would write to Eléonore from Botai Bay that she would hardly recognise him; he had aged so much, his teeth were loose and his hair falling out, both an indication of incipient scurvy.

Between his official duties, and provisioning and repairing the ships, Lapérouse and de Langie each had made for them porcelain dinner services. Lapérouse's was decorated with his coat-of-arms, a rearing horse, a pictorial pun on his family name, de Galaup de Lapérouse. Many other articles of Chinese manufacture were found in 1990 on the sea floor off Vanikoro by scuba diver Bob Bowdley some distance from where Reece Discombe discovered the actual Boussole wreck in 1964. There were perfectly preserved blue and white porcelain dishes and vases from Macao, cases of pewter mugs and pitchers, all of which are languishing in a gaol cell on Vanikoro Island because the government of the Solomon Islands will not allow them out of the country, even for preservation.

Post script: Macao is still Portuguese, but will revert to China in 1999, two years after Britain hands over Hong Kong. Goa was returned to India in 1950.

Helén Rosenmån



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Friends of the Lapérouse Museum

Editors: Carole Roussel
Jen Rosenberg
Publisher: Friends of Lapérouse
Museum, c/- Lapérouse
Museum, Anzac Pde
La Perouse NSW 2036
Typsetting: Jen Rosenberg

**Friends of the Lapérouse Museum
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established in 1989.

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Editors' Footnote

Carole Roussel and Jen Rosenberg have co-edited this issue but subsequent newsletters will be edited by Jen while Carole takes an "extended sabbatical".

Please forward any articles of interest to Jen or write to her with your ideas and suggestions for contents:

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She would also be pleased to receive any enquires regarding advertising. Rates are as follows:

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Business Card	\$ 50	\$ 160
Card (1/12th)		

The Instrument Room - We're Almost There

Almost, but not quite . . . After more than four years of anticipation, planning, discussion and negotiation, the restoration of the Instrument Room is almost complete. The lantern ceiling opens the room to the sky, flooding it with natural light, the oval windows add extra height to the walls either end and the fireplace almost glows. Only the floor remains to be sanded and polished and some changes are to be made to what is, at best, a most unfortunate choice of paint colours.

The Friends nevertheless look forward to enjoying the use of this room for lectures and functions, and to the Museum being able to receive temporary exhibitions at last.

Carole Roussel

French Exploration of the Pacific from 1766 to 1840

Helen Rosenman, our authority on the above, a most active Committee member and valued contributor to the Newsletter, is leader of this course. It is held on alternate Mondays 10am-12 noon from 18 April-11 July at the Senior Citizens Centre, corner Warringah Rd and Starkey St Forestville. The same course is offered at the War Veterans' Village, Collaroy Plateau on the same days from 1.30pm-3.30pm.

Helen will cover in detail the voyages of Bougainville, Lapérouse, d'Entrecasteaux and Dumont d'Urville in some detail. For more information telephone Helen Rosenman on 02 816 5271.

The President and Friends congratulate Carol Abela - Secretary of the Friends - for the community service award she received on Australia Day from Randwick City Council in recognition of her participation in community groups and her services in the La Perouse community.



CORRESPONDENCE:

From Pauline and Yves Leborgne (Le Havre)

"How is the museum? Life is much quieter here, which is not a bad thing, but I miss the regular activities. Australia is never far from our thoughts. Right now talk is of the D-Day celebrations throughout Normandy. Yves is busy as it adds to his workload.

Kind wishes to all,
Pauline."

Yves adds: "I miss Botany Bay and the Lapérouse Museum."

To Carole Roussel from Docteur Pierre Amalric, Membre de l'Académie Nationale de Médecine (Albi).

Bien Chère Amie,

Je viens de recevoir votre merveilleux petit bulletin où, comme pour les précédents, vous n'oubliez pas vos amis.

J'ai revu récemment, au cours d'un congrès, le Professeur Crock de Melbourne. Nous avons évoqué l'Australie et une visite possible à Sydney.

Je souhaite que, si vous avez l'occasion de venir en France, vous veniez nous voir à Paris ou à Albi.

Veillez croire à la fidélité de mes sentiments amicaux.