



*PRÈS CET ARBRE  
REPOSENT LES RESTES DU  
P. LE RECEVEUR VISITÉ EN  
MARS 1824*

*Engraved—crew of the Coquille in  
1824.*

In 1825, while on a visit to Port Jackson, Baron Hyacinthe de Bougainville arranged for the construction of a monument to Lapérouse and a tomb for Receveur.

The project was supported by Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane who allocated land for the monument and tomb. In an official dispatch to the Minister for the Navy, Bougainville wrote: “I discussed my plans with Governor Brisbane who welcomed them all the more since on the opposite side of the bay, he himself had arranged for a plaque to commemorate the arrival of the immortal Cook. H.E. had no hesitation in granting me the requested site and has kindly agreed to entrust the creation of the mausoleum to the Government architect”.



*Père Receveur's Grave at La Perouse*

#### THE LAPEROUSE MUSEUM

The Lapérouse Museum which provides the Story of the Lapérouse Expedition, is located in the historic Cable Station built in 1882 to facilitate telegraph communication between Australia and New Zealand.

**Open:** Sundays 10.00AM to 4.00PM

**Admission:** Gold coin donation

**Information:** [www.laperousemuseum.org](http://www.laperousemuseum.org)

**Location:** La Perouse is located on the northern headland of Botany Bay, 30 minutes from Sydney's CBD.

**Produced by the Friends of the Lapérouse Museum**  
PO Box 457 Matraville NSW 2036



## La Perouse

### BIRTHPLACE OF CATHOLICISM IN AUSTRALIA



### Procession to the Grave of Père Receveur

## LAPÉROUSE AND THE FIRST FLEET

After landing at Yarra Bay on 18 January 1788, Captain Phillip quickly decided that Botany Bay was unsuitable for settlement and set off with a small group to investigate Port Jackson to the north, which had been named but not explored by James Cook. Upon entering Port Jackson, Phillip declared it “*the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand ships of the line may ride in perfect security*”.

The two ships of the Lapérouse expedition, the *Boussole* and the *Astrolabe*, were sighted off Botany Bay on 23 January and landed on 26 January, the same day as the First Fleet’s departure and landing in Port Jackson. Members of the Lapérouse expedition remained on the northern headland of Botany Bay for six weeks, at the same time as the British Colony was being established at Sydney Cove.

The Lapérouse expedition included two Catholic priests, Abbé Jean-Andre Mongez and Fr. Claude-Francois Joseph Louis Receveur, a Conventual Franciscan friar. At that time, the Conventual Franciscan branch of the Friars Minor occupied the *Grand Couvent*, in Paris. Fr. Receveur served as naturalist and astronomer as well as chaplain. He was also a skilled botanist, geologist, chemist, meteorologist and philologist.

Fr. Receveur had sustained an injury in the Samoan Islands, which caused his death on 17 February. In death, he holds the distinction of being the first Frenchman, first Catholic priest and first scientist to be buried in Australian soil. His funeral service is believed to be the first Roman Catholic Mass celebrated in Australia.



**Blessing of the Altar Stone replica by Father Paul Ghanem—  
18 November 2012**

On June 1st 1788, John White, Surgeon-General of the First Fleet and the Port Jackson settlement visited the site of Receveur’s grave and recorded the following in his *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*: “*After breakfast we visited the grave of the French Abbé who died whilst the Count de Lapeyrouse was here. It was truly humble indeed, being distinguished only by a common head-stone, stuck slightly into the loose earth which covered it. Against a tree, just above it, was nailed a board, with the following inscription on it:*

**HIC JACET**

**LE RECEVEUR**

**EX F.F. MINORIBUS GALLIA SACERDOS**

**PHYSICUS IN CIRCUMNAVIGATIONE MUNDI**

**DUCE D. DE LA PEYROUSE.**

**OBIIT DIE 17TH FEBR. ANNO 1788**

*As the painting on the board could not be permanent, Governor Phillip had the inscription engraved on a plate of copper and nailed to the same tree; and at some future day he intends to have a handsome head-stone placed at the grave”.*

On 10 March, Lapérouse sailed for Tonga, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands, leaving behind letters and reports for the British to send on to France. The expedition was due to return to France via Torres Strait and Mauritius later in the year, but nothing more was heard from it.

## THE SEARCH FOR LAPÉROUSE

In 1791, Admiral Bruni d’Entrecasteaux was sent in search of Lapérouse. After sailing to Tasmania, the expedition sailed north to the Islands of Santa Cruz. It was there he named an uncharted island “Ile de la Recherche” but ironically did not stop to explore it. The island would later be renamed Vanikoro. It was not until 1826 that the adventurer, Peter Dillon established that this group of islands held the secret of the fate of the Lapérouse expedition.

When d’Entrecasteaux reached the East Indies he learned that Lapérouse’s patron, Louis XVI, had been delivered to the guillotine. As he climbed the steps Louis was said to remark: “*A-t-on des nouvelles de monsieur de Lapérouse?*”

Other French explorers followed d’Entrecasteaux. In March 1824, Louis-Isidore Duperrey visited the headland and a young French officer carved an epitaph on the trunk of the eucalyptus tree which marked the grave.

The tree was later removed for preservation and the engraved portion presented to France. In 1988, a replica as well as many other objects were given by the French Government as a Bicentennial Gift to Australia for the establishment of the Lapérouse Museum.