



Ambassador's Activities

2013

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the garden party of the Maison Française d'Oxford

Oxford, 01 June 2013

Pro-Vice Chancellor,

Madame le Vice-chancelier des Universités de Paris,

Monsieur le délégué régional du CNRS,

Proctors, heads of houses, professors, fellows,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The traditional annual garden party of the Maison Française d'Oxford gives me the opportunity – all too rare for an ambassador who currently meets two ministers a week in London – to visit Oxford in the company of my wife.

The garden party is also an opportunity to meet researchers in residence from the CNRS or on secondment from the university, administrative colleagues and – last but not least – Oxford academics as a whole, the *crème de la crème* of the British academic world, with which the Maison Française works both in the research and scientific cooperation field and in promoting French culture in the United Kingdom. The richness of the MFO's termly programmes testifies to the vitality of both of these.

I'm particularly keen to thank the members of the University of Oxford who sit on the Maison Française's committee and provide it with the wise advice and support without which the Maison Française wouldn't be what it is, and – above all – wouldn't be in a position to do what it does. My greetings also to Mme Anne Simonin, who takes over from our friend Luc Borot and whose first garden party this is as Director of the MFO.

On 25 November 1941, in Oxford – in a speech to which I paid tribute here two years ago in the presence of the great French resistance fighters Daniel Cordier, who became

secretary to Jean Moulin, and Yves Guéna, a former Gaullist minister – General de Gaulle quoted a famous phrase by Maurice Barrès: “There are places where the spirit breathes.” The general went on: “I don’t think he could have imagined a place where the spirit breathes more than in the University of Oxford.”

That the Maison Française enjoys this outstanding environment to take part in Franco-British scientific and cultural exchanges is invaluable. Franco-British ties – both in the field of fundamental research and in that of mutual awareness of our two cultures – must be maintained and deepened, perhaps today more than ever, given that the anti-European discourse is so widespread. In a context where the economic and financial difficulties faced by our respective governments have rarely been so serious, we must explain loud and clear what the EU contributes to the academic, research and student worlds, especially in the UK.

Founded in 1946, the Maison Française, created within these walls in 1967, is a living reminder of the support given by Winston Churchill’s government to General de Gaulle’s Free French forces between 1940 and 1944. The centenary of the First World War and the 70th anniversary of the D-Day Landings will be held in 2014; our two governments are working actively on these commemorations. The Maison Française and the University of Oxford will be closely involved in them, particularly in relation to a symposium to be organized in June 2014 in partnership with the *Institut français* in London: “The Liberation of France: histories and memories”. The commemorations will serve as a reminder that we haven’t forgotten the high price paid by the UK and France in the service of peace and the construction of a Europe based on democratic values.

We are paying tribute to the past; nonetheless, the fact remains that future generations are at the heart of our concerns. Getting Oxford University students and young French people keen to learn about a shared history and kindling their interest in a field of knowledge – the Franco-British relationship – is the most effective way of building, in the medium term, a European civilization based on common values. Home annually to around 30 French students, including those reading for doctorates, the Maison Française is closely involved in helping facilitate access to Oxford University's departments not just for experienced researchers, but French students too. In this increasingly virtual, digitalized world, France still believes that knowledge is really shared only when men and women meet and have the opportunity of actually working together.

But in order to continue its basic activities, the Maison Française will have to make changes. It will have to take into consideration the financial constraints which are putting great pressure on the state, and the special effort which the whole of our public sector is being asked to make. It will have to develop partnerships and find new sources of funding. It will have to develop even closer links with Oxford, which, equally, must appreciate that the MFO's existence is in its interest. I will be attentive to this and I know I can count on the MFO's director to spearhead these necessary and urgently-needed changes. We will be attentive to this because I am confident that the CNRS and the Chancellery of the Universities of Paris is also intent on safeguarding such an important institution.

Thank you for coming, and thank you for listening./.