



Ambassador's Activities

2012

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58 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7JT London
E-Mail: press@ambafrance-uk.org
Web: www.ambafrance-uk.org

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

At the garden party of the Maison Française d'Oxford

Oxford, 26 May 2012

Pro-Vice Chancellor,
Professor Pancracio,
Proctors, heads of houses, professors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The annual garden party of the Maison Française is always an enjoyable occasion for a French Ambassador: in a pleasant setting, he greets the people who represent and, as it were, showcase French academic research in Oxford, and all those for whom and with whom they work. This the second time my wife and I have had this great pleasure, and we'd like to thank you all for this opportunity to come to Oxford. Earlier this afternoon I visited a fascinating research centre, Diamond Light Source, the UK's national synchrotron science facility, located at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire, where I met a number of French researchers. Afterwards I visited Lady Margaret Hall, a few hundred metres from here, where the young Elisabeth de Gaulle, the General's beloved daughter, began her history studies. There I had the chance to see some original letters she exchanged with her parents during the war, which have been found in the college's archives.

As you may know, Oxford is also the only place in Britain to host a French research institute for the social sciences and humanities. Yours is one of 26 such institutes in the world, and I know it's of the highest importance to the University of Oxford that this bustling hub of academic cooperation should remain and prosper, even though we're all in the midst of difficult times. The presence of so many leading figures from the academic community reflects your commitment to our and your Maison Française.

Last November, I came here to share the commemoration of General de Gaulle's Oxford speech, 70 years after the event. It was an opportunity for me to catch up with two key figures in the Free French Forces, Yves Guéna and Daniel Cordier, who were among the very first young men to join the General in his London exile. Their stories fill every French heart with pride, but they also illustrate the British virtues which made our wartime cooperation so fruitful, leading to a successful outcome.

Another thing we learned in November was that a group of exiled French fighters dreamed up the utopian project of a French academic residence in Oxford where students of

the two countries could share experiences in new ways. At the end of the war, the Maison Française was created.

It's essential for our cooperation that this small but efficient working community should be energetically supported by the Oxford community at large, but more particularly by scholars working in the area of the humanities and social sciences, whether they work on France and things French or on other topics in partnership with France-based academics, sharing the approaches developed in French research centres.

Now that the whole programme of our *Initiatives d'Excellence* projects has been revealed, some French universities, not least in Paris, have acquired powerful resources to develop international cooperation. We know that several such university clusters are looking at the Maison Française as a means of gaining a foothold in Oxford. In the Director's quest for a wider institutional base in France, this is a major asset. In Oxford's search for French cooperation, it's another opportunity to exchange and share scholars and projects for our common good.

Some of you may know that Professor Luc Borot is about to leave Oxford to rejoin the University of Montpellier, where he'll be resuming his academic career after four years at the helm of the Maison. I'm sure we all agree that he's led this institute with great diligence and effectiveness. His constant attention to developing links with French and British research institutions and his support for innovative projects initiated in Oxford and France have strengthened this institute's position as a major venue for academic collaboration between our two countries.

Today, if you'll allow me, I'd like to say a wholehearted "*grand merci, cher Luc*" and assure you that you'll be deeply missed – by your colleagues, of course, but also by me. I wanted to tell you this sincerely and in person. I wish you well for the next stage of your career. The academics and students at the University of Montpellier are extremely lucky to be having you back. But I do hope you'll visit us often in Oxford and London.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm confident that you'll give equal support to Luc's successor, Professor Anne Simonin, who will join the team in September./.