



Ambassador's Activities

2012

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

on the 30th birthday
of the Alliance française de Cambridge

Cambridge, 19 October 2012

Cher Julian Huppert,
Chère Sheila Stuart,
Cher Xavier Lavry,
Cher Damien Tunnacliffe,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It's a very great pleasure to be among you for the first time in your magnificent city, a global centre of academic brilliance, *chère* Sheila and *cher* Julian. The university is both fascinating and legendary – one of the rare places in the world where everything comes together to create excellence.

I thank the Alliance française, which, by inviting me to its 30th birthday, has finally given me this opportunity to visit Cambridge, as I've wanted to do ever since I arrived in the UK.

Today I've had a marvellous time visiting some of the most prestigious colleges. One can only be impressed by the success of a university that cultivates modernity, research and innovation while respecting a unique secular tradition and the humanist spirit.

This morning I had an opportunity to visit Churchill College. I found it particularly moving to look through the archives about the great man and his discussions with General de Gaulle. The figure of Sir Winston Churchill is revered in France. That our country was able to save its honour and be among the victors in the Second World War was largely thanks to the support Churchill lent from the outset to a young general who was brave enough to refuse to capitulate to the Axis powers, but who was then almost unknown: Charles de Gaulle. It was thanks to the close relationship that would develop between the two great men. Although that relationship was sometimes stormy and conflictual, mirroring our relations for the past 1,000 years and especially – *chers* Isabelle and Robert Tombs – since the Sun King, Churchill and De Gaulle respected and esteemed one another.

Their personal relationship reflected this Franco-British relationship, which has no equal and is made up of sensitivities and prejudices but also profound mutual respect. We're conscious of, and – let's admit it – sometimes irritated by our differences, but we're solid allies, destined to get along, maintain our position together and also create a shared future for ourselves.

After this visit to Churchill College, I had a meeting with the Master of the renowned Trinity College. I then discussed with the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, ways of strengthening cooperation between your university and French institutions.

France can be proud of the many cases of bilateral academic cooperation that already exist. We'd like to continue and extend this momentum, which is so fruitful for the research community and for our two countries. And our ambition – and this is also, in a way, the purpose of my visit here – is for France, her universities, her centres of excellence, to have a greater presence but also be even better recognized in Cambridge. They've already been given tremendous visibility thanks to the dynamism of the *Alliance française*, which has gathered us here this evening to blow out its 30 candles.

Cambridge's *Alliance française*, like every *Alliance française* the world over, is part of a noble mission: spreading our mother tongue, French, which is much more than just a language. As President Hollande said at the recent summit of the International Organization of La Francophonie in Kinshasa on 13 October: "Speaking French is a way of thinking, of looking at the world. It's a message of freedom." So I'm grateful to the Cambridge *Alliance française* for continuing, through its daily activities, to make our language known and share it, in the heart of this remarkable city.

Cultural events and French-language teaching are the two mainstays of the work of what's now a well-established, thriving institution. The university played a decisive role in its creation in 1982, and relations with the Department of French are ongoing and trustful. The success of this *Alliance française* is very well demonstrated this evening by the presence of its many friends, staff and sponsors. It's a model of success for us.

Cambridge's *Alliance française* is 30 years old: the age of maturity. Under the leadership of its very dynamic director, Damien Tunnacliffe, this maturity is also synonymous with growth and development. There are many projects: courses for young children, teenagers and businesses. The *Alliance* proudly flies the flag for the French language. It puts on a variety of activities, attracts new members and forges ever closer ties with local businesses. In this way it is ensuring a future which is just as dazzling as its past 30 years.

Its warm welcome and the professionalism and enthusiasm of its teaching and administrative staff are the key strengths behind its success. It is a jewel in a network of 10 *Alliances françaises* and the two *Instituts français* of London and Edinburgh. My warmest thanks go to this proactive, motivated, friendly and ambitious team for their stimulating greater awareness of France, her culture and language in this city, which leads the way in international thought. They can be legitimately proud of what they've accomplished.

I want to use Cambridge's *Alliance française* as an example to highlight the more general contribution made by the UK's other *Alliances françaises*, which, by integrating into the communities they serve, project a positive, open image of France. The French Embassy is very committed to developing this network, which is represented this evening by Xavier Lavry, Director of the Manchester *Alliance française* and Delegate-General of the *Alliance française* Foundation in the UK.

Thank you for being so dynamic! Thank you, everyone, for your support. Many happy returns to Cambridge's *Alliance française* – may there be many more to come! ./.