

INTERVIEW WITH J. G. CORNELL, 17 OCTOBER 1984

COLIN NETTELBECK

CN: I wonder if, for a start, you would mind saying a little bit about yourself? You were born in Melbourne some eighty years ago...

JGC: Yes, and I went to a State school down at Hampton, got a junior scholarship which took me to Scotch College. And there, the French master—he wasn't there immediately, he had to be demobilized after the war—was an old boy of the school named Bowden, and he was there for many years. He was a good teacher of the traditional kind—a young man, but brought up on the good old grammar and translation routine.

And then there joined the staff one F. G. Kirby, Frank Kirby, who had worked at the Public Library. He had never been out of Australia, but he was an enthusiast for French. He spoke with an appalling Australian accent, but he had a good grasp of idiom. It was he who initiated me into the phonetic writing, the phonetic script—but I'm anticipating now, because he discovered that he had a spare period every day, which coincided with a spare period that we fellows had, I think in Leaving: that would be 1920... and he went to the Head, and asked if he might take us for an extra class. So there was I (and others too, of course), having two periods of French a day, week in, week out. Well, it was the same Frank Kirby who introduced me to the Alliance Française. He was a member... Bowden, "Boch" Bowden as we called him, he wasn't a member of the Alliance, but Frank Kirby was, and he got me to join up, a few other fellows, too, and week by week, I would go down to Elizabeth House, where the Alliance had its library in those days, for a little *causerie*. I think it was on a Thursday afternoon after school. I was the only male. I was a schoolboy. There would be a lot of women, mainly middle-aged, if not older, and the presiding genius was somebody who was well known—as I discovered this morning—to a number of older people: Adeline Gay.

CN: So she would have been the mother of Liliâne?

JGC: Indeed, yes. And her husband, Edouard Gay, was a Swiss importer of Swiss watches and chronometers. But she was French, from somewhere like Annecy, somewhere in that part of France. And she was a marvellous person, a marvellous character. And she had this group of ladies (for the most part) around her, and I used to go along and ... *essay* my French conversation. It was all very good for me. I'm sure that they must have had a good laugh at my expense, many a time...

One of the things I remember Frank Kirby doing, too: he got a few of us fellows to go along with him one night to a celebration... It must have been a celebration of the Tercentenary of Molière's birth. Molière was born, what, 1622? and died 1673. It must have been in 1922, which was my last year at school, and the Alliance turned on quite a show, in what was then the Masonic Hall, at the top end of Collins Street, since demolished. They had a stage, and they performed, for example, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, which was short, as you know, and there were some songs, and other things, and after that, a supper, with, I remember, "Quelltaler" wine from South Australia.

Now all this item was probably made possible by the munificence of Louise Dyer. You've heard of Madame Dyer. She had been married to a man who made his fortune in linoleums. He was called the "Linoleum King"—Jimmy Dyer—and had a place in Flinders Lane. But he was also musical, and a patron of the British Musical Society. Well, he married somebody much younger than himself, to wit Louise Dyer—who was Louise Smith, I think. Her father would have been a doctor—a bit of a quack, by all accounts, but that's by the way... She had money to spare, and she found this useful. I remember her giving us a speech on the occasion of this celebration.¹

CN: In French?

JGC: Yes. I think somebody had written it for her. She had the words in behind her fan, and her pronunciation was far from impeccable... A few years after that—I'll just keep up with Louise Dyer for the moment—she lived in France after her husband's death, but she came back, and was hostess for her brother, who at that time was unmarried. He was Gengoult Smith—he was later knighted—I think there was a Saint Gengoult somewhere in the ecclesiastical calendar. He did marry a girl much younger than himself later, but when he was Lord Mayor,

she came out and hostessed for him.² And while she was out here, she again, with her money, put on a performance of *Le Mariage Forcé*, of Molière, in the Comedy Theatre. There was an orchestra, and the orchestra was conducted by William McKay, who was the City Organist at the time. He was later knighted, and became Master of the King's Music, I think, and organist at Westminster Abbey. But he was conducting this orchestra, all in costume, and it was beautifully done. Now, I was not involved in that...

CN: What year was that?

JGC: Oh, it must have been in the middle '30s, the middle 1930s. But she had commissioned the costumes, and later made a gift of them to the Alliance Française... I don't know if you still have these old theatrical baskets of costumes... And many a time, I've worn some of those costumes. Seventeenth-century things, you see: long shoes with square ends to them... Many a time I've worn some of those costumes, because, though I wasn't in the *Mariage Forcé*, I played *jeune premier* roles for years in the Alliance... They would put on performances for the ordinary *soirées*, but also a number for schools. In those days, there was usually a play—it might be a Molière, or it might be a nineteenth-century farce, by Labiche, for example... The Alliance would put that on, which suited the schools quite well, but also suited the Alliance's coffers. They would make quite a lot of money from two or three performances each year of the school play. And in that way, I remember performing in *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon*, for example, and another Labiche farce, *La Poudre aux yeux*, in which I was a young man, and my mother was Andrée McDonald... Madame McDonald. And every time we greet each other... In fact, today I could have been at the monthly luncheon of the French-Australian Association, over which she more or less presides... I've been to some of these, and every time I see her—she's only a few years older than I am—she greets me as *mon fils*, and of course I greet her as *Maman* because that was our relationship in *La Poudre aux yeux*. But I also played Cléonte in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, and I can't remember the name of the young man in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, and I was the young Comte Almaviva in *Le Barbier de Séville*, and so on.

Well now, those plays were largely made possible... You need money of course, but you need also a central personality who's interested in the theatre, and that was Marguerite Cockerton.³ She was Secretary of the Alliance for many years. She was French. I think her husband, Charles Cockerton, was English, and they ran a Guest House up in South Yarra. She was a good and energetic Secretary, but her heart was also in amateur theatricals, and of course she would perform in these, and some of the other important roles would be taken by Madame Gay and her husband Edouard, and I remember a little Frenchman—I think he imported perfume—named Laroche. He used to be the *domestique* usually, or have a comic role. I remember him as the *domestique* in *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon*. I'm sure he's gone before us to a better world by now... And there was a Swiss fellow, who went back to Switzerland, Jean Studer... But another principal actor was René Vanderkelen, who was the Belgian Consul. He was also a diamond merchant, but a Belgian Consul for many years. He married an Australian wife, one Bessie Barber, who was the aunt, now defunct, of my son-in-law, David Barber... So those were some of the outstanding personalities in the theatrical ventures...

CN: Now this was going on while you were at university?

JGC: Oh yes, and of course I was away for two years, '27, '28, '29. But when I came back, this is when I started taking these juvenile leads, until I left for Adelaide, at the end of 1937, beginning of '38.

CN: A. R. Chisholm was already in place when you went to Melbourne University as a student...

JGC: Oh yes, of course. Well, if you want me to leave the Alliance for a moment... I went to the university at the beginning of 1923, and Chisholm had only been there a couple of years. And he was "Independent Lecturer", because before that, French had been under the aegis of, I think, the English Department. There had been a Frenchman, named Maurice-Carton...

CN: Did you know him at all?

JGC: Yes, I was examined by him. I was never lectured to by him, because he had already retired. Legend had it that he retired at the age of seventy, and that he had fought in the 1870 war, as a young man...

CN: What memories do you have of him?

JGC: Only that of a rather portly gentleman... a bachelor, if I remember rightly.⁴ In those days, when you sat for your oral, your conversation test... well, at Intermediate you had only dictation; at Leaving, you had dictation and reading; and at Leaving Honours, you had dictation, reading, and conversation... And at the Leaving Honours level, they always had two examiners. So, when I went up for my Leaving Honours... I did Leaving Honours two years running, but only because my Headmaster thought I should go up a second time, in order to become a little more mature... but I did just as well in my first year as in my second... And I remember having to sit in front of Chisholm, who would then be a new man, and Maurice-Carton... And that's the only recollection I have of him.

But Chisholm was Independent Lecturer, and it was only in the 1930s that he became Associate Professor, that post having been created in the University, and I think that was on the strength of his publication of *Towards Hérodiade*, and he didn't get the chair until some years after that. His was the second chair of French in Australia, the first having been that of G. G. Nicholson... Mine, in Adelaide, at the beginning of 1944, was the third chair of French in Australia.

Chisholm, of course, was a G. G. Nicholson product, from Sydney, and he lectured at the Sydney Teachers College before coming to Melbourne. But when I went up there, there were only two men on the staff, Chisholm and Karagheusian.⁵ Nazar Karagheusian. Everybody loved him. He had no particular university qualifications, but he had gone as far as his *baccalauréat*, and he spoke beautiful French. He was a highly cultivated fellow. He had been brought up in a family of bankers. I don't know what his late father had been, but his uncles were bankers in New York, and Istanbul, and all over the place. He came out here more or less to see what Australia was like and set up in Flinders Lane, importing with an Australian partner, fencing palings from Tasmania, and French tennis racquets. And I bought a French tennis racquet from him once... But Chisholm must have caught sight of him...

CN: This was the stage when the French were winning the Davis Cup, and things like that...

JGC: That's true. Yes, I met Cochet and—what was the other man's name?—Borotra. Yes, they came to Australia... So, when Chisholm needed an off-sider, he laid hands on Karagheusian. Karagheusian wasn't a good lecturer, but nonetheless a very entertaining fellow, and everybody loved him. As I say, he spoke excellent French... Chisholm, of course, was the scholarly man. Chisholm's spoken French wasn't particularly French. It was very individual, but nevertheless, he had a tremendous grasp of the language. The one thing I regret about Chisholm—about my studies with Chisholm—was that he had not, then, found his specialty in the symbolists. He was a great admirer of Victor Hugo, and of the *Parnassiens*, and he would prescribe Leconte de Lisle, year in year out, for us. It was only after I had left the University that he developed this interest in Mallarmé—Baudelaire, of course, but more particularly Mallarmé—and then after that, Paul Valéry. And as you know, of course, he engendered a whole series of experts in that field, like Lloyd Austin and Gardner Davies, and Jim Lawler, and so on.

Even when I went to France... You see, in those days, the Doctorat de l'Université de Paris, which you hold—it did exist, but it wasn't very well known in this country. There was a Melbourne chap who had done a thesis on an English poet... It was through him that I actually went to a French family to get digs in Paris... What was his name? McKenzie, Kenneth McKenzie, who I think eventually went to Armidale. I don't think he ever had a chair. English was his discipline... But he'd done a thesis on a minor eighteenth-century English poet. He'd had to write it in French, and he'd got this *doctorat*... But Chisholm, whose overseas studies were more of a practical kind... He'd gone to... I don't know what he did in Paris, but he went to a Tilly Institute in Berlin, which was run by, I think an Australian actually, rather a Prussian disciplinarian, who ran a private school in his own house...⁶ Chisholm tells you all about that in *Men were my Milestones*, the first of his two books of reminiscences... But when I was going, I was the first holder of the David Acheson Travelling Scholarship, and... (I'd won the Mollison Scholarship, but the Mollison Scholarship was greatly reduced in value because of the money that the University of Melbourne had lost through the Dixon embezzlement—that's going back to the early years

of this century... An accountant, I think he was, or the Registrar, made off with a lot of securities, when the auditing was not as strict as it is these days. And the University had a very thin time for many years... So my Mollison Scholarship, which was meant to be a travelling scholarship, wouldn't have taken me very far.) But in 1927, this David Acheson—David Acheson was a man of Scottish origin, who had been a pastoralist and amassed a fortune—gave the money to the University to found a travelling scholarship which was worth £350 a year, renewable for a second year. £350 was more than any schoolmaster would have been earning in those days, I think. A University lecturer, when I eventually came back to one, earned a salary of £400. Now the £350, especially at a time when the French franc had been devalued—1927, '28, '29 ... these were pre-Depression years, just pre-Depression years... Sterling was still on gold, and the Australian pound was on a par with sterling, but the French franc was worth twopence...

CN: This would be the *franc Poincaré*.

JGC: This was the *franc Poincaré*. I'd only been in France a few weeks, I think, when Poincaré, who by this time was Prime Minister (he'd been President during the war), fixed the *taux d'échange* at 120.04 francs to the pound sterling. Which meant that the franc, instead of being worth tenpence, as it had been for generations, was worth twopence. Now eventually, of course, prices would catch up with that, but while I was there, prices hadn't caught up, and you could get a very good meal for, say six or seven or eight francs, a very good bottle of claret, you know, *vin de marque*, not just your *vin ordinaire*, let's say for half a dozen francs. The current novel was selling at round about three or four francs. And I remember—I don't know if I've told you this before—buying one of Le Divan editions of Stendhal. I bought his *Racine et Shakespeare*, which wasn't available in any other edition, and that cost me all of 25 francs, which of course in Australian terms, would be 4 bob.

So I was able to live very well. By that, I don't mean that I lived luxuriously, but I could acquaint myself with, say, French wines to some extent. I bought a whole lot of books. In those days you travelled by sea, and you could bring trunkloads of books back, which I did. And also travel. My wife was with me: we were engaged at that time, and she had

a free passage... That's another story, because she travelled first class and I travelled steerage, which was genuinely steerage, not tourist, in those days... but I mustn't go on about that.

But then I came back, and in those days you see... I was telling you that Chisholm really advised me to do a *licence*, because—what was my future? I'd be a schoolmaster. And he thought that a *licence* would give me a better coverage than, say, a specialized degree such as a *doctorat*. And this would have been so, I think, because you had to do *quatre certificats*—one of those, for me, was English literature, French literature, of course, French philology... I can't remember what the fourth one was, off hand... It had to do with language... It may have been something called *Grammaire et philologie*: it's so long ago, I can't remember, but you got *quatre certificats*, which represented the equivalent of one semester's work. But you didn't have exams in each semester. You could take two *certificats* at the end of first year, say, or you could even save up all four, and do them at the end of the second year. But I did them two by two.

CN: What was your training at Melbourne, before you went over? What form did the course have in those days?

JGC: Well, *travaux pratiques* of course: translation into French, from French, and lectures in literature. Basic exercises in French. I thought they were very good. I still think they were very good...

Well, when I came back, with the prospect of a schoolmaster's career in front of me, I accepted a post at Knox Grammar School. But I was only there a term. While I was there, Chisholm advertised a lectureship, so that the department was going to be a three-man department from that time on. And I applied, and got this. The headmaster at Knox Grammar, I think, was possibly glad to see the back of me, so he let me off at the end of the first term. I didn't have to give him any longer notice than that. And from the beginning of second term 1930, I was a lecturer at the University, and I was there until the end of 1937, when I was appointed to Adelaide. I don't think you want me to pursue my life-story beyond that point. We were talking about the Alliance... I don't know whether there's much more I can tell you about the Alliance...

CN: Well, you would have had then two periods of contact with the Alliance: one before you went away to France, and then another when you came back. Do you recall what sorts of activities the Alliance was involved in? Did you take part in any of the examinations?

JGC: No, the Alliance Française didn't conduct exams in those days. It may have begun to do so toward the end of my lectureship in Melbourne. I don't even think so. But I mentioned the school play. And then there would be the *soirée mensuelle*, and usually a one-act comedy. That was where Marguerite Cockerton came into the picture very strongly, because she would often have a role to play, and I think I played in a few of those. And there would also be talks, and there would be music. Somebody would sing. You mentioned Liliane Gay: she sang very nicely. There was a Monsieur Turc—no, not Turc... no, the name's gone out of my mind... Turc was the French Consul for many years... Oh, I can't remember the name, it may come back to me. He sometimes helped with tutorials at the University, and he was a very cultivated man, spoke excellent French, I lost his name... René Turc was the French Consul, and he took a lively interest in the Alliance, too, of course. But once a year, on the Fourteenth of July, there'd be the *Bal du 14 Juillet*, which of course was an ordinary dance, but with a very good supper, and it always ended with the *Farandole*, as they called it. René Vanderkelen, who was the President, would lead off with his partner, and we would all form in twos behind them, and we would wind around the dance floor, usually in the form of a spiral, and then out again, you see, and this was the wind-up of the evening. It was always very good fun.

CN: Where were they held, the balls?

JGC: Well, I'm trying to think. I think sometimes possibly in the Masonic Hall, no longer there, but there must have been other places, too. I doubt whether they were in the Melbourne Town Hall, I don't think so, but there were other halls, around the city.

CN: Grand occasions?

JGC: Oh, full thing, yes. They're very happy memories, those. You've brought that back to me now. Some more questions?

CN: I think I have seen at Colette Reddin's house a photograph of a play in which you played with her?

JGC: Yes, I should have mentioned Colette, and I have a bad conscience about her, because what you're now getting me to do, she tried to get me to do years ago. Except that she wanted me to put it down on paper. Tape recording's much easier, and if she had suggested tape recording, I might have obliged her, which I didn't do, because it would have meant sitting down, by the hour...

CN: She's helping very much with this archival work that we're doing at the Alliance, and she has a very fine collection of things herself.

JGC: Yes. I saw her last at one of the French-Australian luncheons, within the last year or two. Please remember me to her. Of course, she was much younger, but I remember playing opposite her.

CN: Another person you must have met was Manuel Gelman.

JGC: Oh yes. He was a student of mine, if I can say "of mine", when I was the junior member of a three-man team. So also, of course, were Ron Sussex and Lloyd Austin, and Joe Hanson, whom Louise Dyer eventually married. He was about as much younger than she, as she had been younger than her first husband. And when she died (and I think he's now dead), he carried on the *L'Oiseau Lyre* musical editions, and also gramophone recordings. They had their headquarters in Monaco... So, he was a student. When I first went there, he was just about finishing his studies, and then he went and got a *doctorat* in Paris. So also did Ron Sussex, and the one credit I can claim for myself about Ron Sussex was I immediately detected in him a future academic, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was heading for Law, and he took his Law degree, but it wasn't very long before he decided that specialization in French was what he wanted to do. And then Lloyd Austin. Lloyd Austin, let me see now. Yes. I was succeeded in my lectureship by Alan Carey Taylor, from Sydney, and then I think Lloyd Austin succeeded him, when he went off to a chair at Birkbeck College.

CN: What about families like the Crivelli: did you know them?

JGC: Dr Crivelli, yes. Many a time we were entertained at their house in South Yarra, and that's where I met the French tennis players, I remember. Another French personality who came out here just before I left Melbourne for Adelaide, and therefore, of course, just a couple of years before the war, was Jean Giraudoux. He was an *inspecteur des services consulaires* or something of that sort. He was a *fonctionnaire*.

CN: Do you have any memories of that visit?

JGC: No, only that there was a party for him, and I remember speaking a few words to him. I was immensely impressed by... I was going to say his urbanity, that's not quite the right word. I had the feeling that he was a very *wise* man. Very sensitive, of course. He was still in middle life, you know, and I just had this feeling that he was... that he would be a source of wisdom, if one could cultivate him personally.

CN: That must have been about the time he was writing *La Guerre de Troie*, just before the war?

JGC: Possibly before, because he wrote *La Guerre de Troie*, of course, with the European situation in view... As a student, I went to the very first one of his plays. It was a dramatization of his novel *Siegfried et le Limousin*, and it was dramatized as *Siegfried*... Louis Jouvet directed it, if he didn't perform in it, and Valentine Tessier, a very beautiful actress as she was then... And I still think she was beautiful in old age. I saw her many years later, in 1972 it must have been, in Dürrenmatt's play, *Le Retour de la Vieille Dame*.

CN: Did you go to the stage door and tell her that you'd seen her earlier?

JGC: I did not. Perhaps I should have. But I'll tell you who was in *Siegfried*, and that was Pierre Renoir, who later became famous as an actor, and who was the son of Auguste.

CN: He was a brother of Jean, wasn't he.

JGC: A brother of the *cinéaste*, yes. Oh, they were great days in Paris. But do you want me to talk about that?

CN: Well, I wanted to get you talking mostly about the Alliance, if I can, on this occasion. We can catch up on Paris later, perhaps. When you went to Adelaide, you went in '37?

JGC: The beginning of '38.

CN: You must just about have been starting there while I was being born, in Streaky Bay, South Australia. The beginning of '38. Was there any trace left there, at that stage, of Madame Mouchette?

JGC: No. I only ever heard of her. Someone who could tell you much more about her is Keith Borrow, an Adelaide solicitor, now retired, who's made it his business to enquire into the past years of the Alliance Française. Madame Mouchette, I think, must have been one of the founders of the Adelaide branch.

CN: She was the founder of the Melbourne branch, and after her time here (she ran into some trouble with the committee here), she went to Adelaide. And she may well have founded the Adelaide branch at that stage. Are the records over there reasonably intact?

JGC: No. The early minute books were lost. I remember when I went there, the secretary was Edith Puddy, Mrs Puddy, and she was secretary for many many years, and she once told me that the minute books were lost. And so we couldn't even be sure in which year the Alliance had been founded. But I think Keith Borrow is now satisfied that it was round about 1910.

(At this point, CN showed JGC the minute books of the Alliance Française de Melbourne to see if any of the names recorded evoked any memories.)

JGC: Miss Monash, yes. She was a sister of Sir John Monash, I think I'm right in saying that... Leon Jona, he was a doctor in Collins Street—that's his wife... Miss Davies... 1929... that was probably

Margaret Davies. She was an exact contemporary of mine at university, as a student. She then went over to Paris, I think on her own savings, and she taught at the *Maison d'Education de la Légion d'Honneur* at Saint-Denis. And she came back and taught for many years at the Church of England Girls Grammar School in Anderson Street, South Yarra—Merton Hall as we used to call it—and then she was here at Monash, as a Senior Tutor. Died of cancer. And I just happened to be in Melbourne in time to go to her funeral... She was a great friend. And she used to sing a number of those *pastourelles* and *bergeronnettes* of the eighteenth century, you know, and I used to accompany her. Or, she sometimes accompanied herself on the ukelele. Oh, she was a lovely person.

CN: Well, Jim, I have you here as a member of the Alliance Committee, in 1936–37. At that stage you were living at 12 Rochester Street, in Kew.

JGC: That's right. A house since demolished and replaced by units.

CN: Well, on the committee, there was Miss Monash still, Miss Bernadou, Jona, Laroche, Mme Mortil...

JGC: Mortil, yes. She was Russian. She had trained as a ballet dancer, and she'd married a man we always called Freddie Mortil, who had made a fortune in the carrier business. He sold his business to Yellow Cabs—not the taxi part of it, but the transport part of it. Oh, they often entertained people too, because they had a lovely house at the bottom end of Hawthorn... Power Street, I think.

CN: Yarra Street.

JGC: Yarra Street, yes.

CN: Dr Maurice Belz?

JGC: Yes, well. I've seen his widow, Marjorie, a couple of times since I've been over here. I may see her again tomorrow. They're old friends. Maurice was a lecturer in physics, then became a lecturer in

mathematics, and eventually had the first chair, in Australia, of statistics, at the University of Melbourne. And he became, after Chisholm, the president of the French-Australian Association. Now, he died some years ago now, and his widow still lives in the same house, in Burke Road, Hawthorn... Camberwell, and I see her every time I come to Melbourne... I don't know the origin of his name, but there's actually a town, Belz, in Brittany, and his wife has a picture of him standing at the foot of a *poteau indicateur* pointing to Belz...

Monsieur Watson, I see here... I haven't thought of him for many years. I can see him now. Tall, sandy-haired man, a very fine fellow.

CN: He was at the bank?

JGC: Yes, I think he was treasurer for many years.

CN: Mr Athol Wilson?

JGC: Yes, he was a student at the University in my time. I think he was in business. Another red-head, if I remember rightly... Something happened to him during the War... Was he a war casualty? You see, I've lost track of these people, but I have very kindly recollections of the time...

CN: There's an H. B. Perry.

JGC: Yes. His father was in business, and I think he followed his father in business. And he used to act in some of the plays. I can't remember his Christian name, though. And a cousin of his, a girl, who lived in Lyon, came out for a visit once, and she performed in *La Poudre aux yeux*, and I was her suitor.

CN: Mrs James Dyer is given here as living in the rue Scheffer in Paris, and is noted as *Présidente à vie*.

JGC: Yes, that would be right. Going off at a slight tangent here, I can tell you something interesting. Elliott Forsyth, whom you know, who was a student of mine, later a colleague, and became the first holder of

the chair of French at La Trobe... I told him, when I was going off in 1961 on study leave, that I wanted to buy some French music, and he told me a place to go to. Near the rue de Rennes, the metro Saint-Placide: Ploix-Musique. Well I went to Monsieur Ploix, and bought some music, and told him how I'd come to be there—because I was an Australian, and had been recommended by Elliott Forsyth—and he then went on to tell me that he had been in very close association with Madame Hanson-Dyer, as she was by this time. And in fact, when the Germans occupied Paris, she and Joe—she always called him Jeff—they went off to England. I think they ran the Maison Française in Oxford, and entertained de Gaulle there, and so on, but coming back to Paris, it was Monsieur Ploix who had charge of her flat, with all its treasures... Because she was a rich woman, she collected pictures, she had Picassos, and other treasures there. And he took it upon himself to put all these in one room, at the end of the flat, and wall up the door. The flat became the living quarters of some high-ranking German officer, but either the blocked-up door was never discovered or, at any rate, it was respected, and when the war was over, and Louise and Jeff returned to Paris, Monsieur Ploix was able to hand them over the flat with all its treasures intact.

CN: A fantastic story... That corner, at Saint Placide, was where I lived, too.

JGC: Yes, well I visited you once in your digs. We were living just around the corner in the Hotel Jean-Bart. I've remained in touch with Jean Lequesne, who's the proprietor of the hotel.

CN: When you went over to Adelaide, you went as...

JGC: Lecturer-in-charge. It was really a senior lecturer. But in Adelaide, what Melbourne would call a senior lecturer was a lecturer, and what Melbourne called a lecturer was an assistant lecturer. I was lecturer-in-charge, on the princely salary of £600 a year, plus £50 by reason of the fact that I was running a department. But I was appointed there with the understanding that there would eventually be a chair. And the chair was created in 1943, and I took it up from the beginning of 1944.

CN: So the chair was created during the War, then.

JGC: Indeed it was.

CN: And you were working for the Free French cause at that stage.

JGC: I became the president of the Alliance Française over there just before the War, in 1939. I was president for 21 years, and saw fit to resign when I was going off on study leave in 1961.

CN: So you were president when I made my two or three appearances in the Alliance there.

JGC: Yes, indeed. And MacMahon Ball, Professor MacMahon Ball (he wasn't Professor in those days, he was a lecturer in political philosophy) was given charge of the propaganda broadcasts of Radio Australia, and had an office in Capel Court. And he got me to give a weekly broadcast. I would write a weekly talk, meant to be a pep talk, I'm afraid the intellectual value of them would have been nil, but I wrote a weekly talk, which I called a *causerie à bâtons rompus*... And I would write this in Adelaide, take it along to a man in the ABC in Adelaide, who was empowered to censor this, and then it would be recorded on an 18" acetate disk, and sent over to Melbourne... Now, what made me tell you that?

CN: Well, I was asking you about that. Now, where would you have been getting your own information?

JGC: Well, short-wave broadcasts from the BBC. But I know why I told you that, also. Because you were asking what part I had to play in the Free French movement. Mac Ball got me over here [to Melbourne] to take over for a fortnight from the two men that they had doing these broadcasts. They had a Frenchman called Gschaedler, who was out here recently, within the last year, and rang me up, and he, with his Alsatian accent, was considered not to be the right person to speak. But he translated the news bulletins. And Grace Martin, who had been a student of mine—I still see her when I come to Melbourne—I think she's a fairly assiduous attendant at these monthly luncheons of the French-Australian

Association... She is now Mrs Miles... Anyway, as Grace Martin, she would take down dictation, for translation, which would have to be done at sight, of the news bulletins, and then a man of Breton origin, whose English was not good enough for translation, but whose voice was considered right for the broadcasts, would actually speak these broadcasts. And the same texts would go out—with a few alterations accordingly as the news came in—three times, to catch Tahiti, and later in the day New Caledonia, and still later, *L'Indochine*... And while I was over here, Mac sent me up to Sydney, to see if I could recruit some people up there who might broadcast. And while I was there, I made it my business to call on André Brenac. He was an importer in Sydney, and he had started the Free French movement in Sydney. And I said to him: "You'd better come over to Adelaide and start it there." Which he did, eventually. And so, that was my connection with the Free French movement, which was called the *Mouvement de la France combattante*. I was a member of the committee of it. They regard me in Adelaide as having been the founding father of it, because it still exists of course, as it does in Melbourne, as "l'Association Franco-Australienne". I'm still associated with that. They still hold meetings, and dances and so forth. But my connection goes back to that year when I met André Brenac. He later on became a consul, when all the consular services were *bouleversés* by the change of government after the War.

CN: I think Manuel Gelman was telling me that during the War, here, there was a problem with the Consul, who had been pro-Vichy...

JGC: He was, yes.

CN: He got into a bit of a battle with the Alliance, because the Alliance...

JGC:... would have been declaring for de Gaulle. You see, that would have been very early. I remember that in Adelaide, we had a street collection, selling buttons and flags, and so on, to raise money for the French Red Cross. Now the French Red Cross had been very active in Adelaide during the First World War. The wife of the then Governor, I think she was a Lady Galway, had taken on the patronage of this fundraising in the First World War, and I think a room in Government

House, Adelaide, was the headquarters of it... So, in the Second World War, there was a man named Gonsel, William Gonsel, who was a well-known lawyer, he had been active in Lady Galway's fund-raising activities... and he and I, and a few other people got together to organize this street collection. Only to discover, when we had written off to the headquarters of La Croix Rouge in Paris, that between the two wars it had been decided—there was an international agreement—that particular national Red Crosses would not operate in foreign countries. Because I think that in the First World War, there'd also been a Belgian Red Cross, and there may have been some others... So there was no longer to be a French Red Cross. And it required an Act of Parliament in Adelaide to appropriate these funds which had been raised in the name of La Croix Rouge française, and by this time, events had been happening on the other side of the world, and eventually, the Act of Parliament empowered us to send this money to de Gaulle, in late 1940... I think the money was held in trust for some time. It may have been late 1940 or early 1941 by the time the money was sent over there.

CN: Do you recall there being any anti-French feeling during the War?

JGC: No, there was bound to have been some, but I wasn't conscious of it. Oh, some people would feel that the French had let us down, and so on, while many of the French side felt that the British had let them down.

CN: No, it's just that Colette Reddin said that after the War, it was very difficult to get any sort of publicity about French things into the papers.

JGC: I don't remember that in Adelaide at all.

CN: That's all been very interesting. I'd like to explore many of these lines much further.

JGC: You've exploited my loquacity.

CN: Not at all... not at all enough, really. I have the feeling that if I knew more at this stage, I could ask you more about particular people.

JGC: Well, you've raised a number of names from these minute books. I won't have time to go through them now, but I'd love to.

CN: Are there any other people around Melbourne that you remember as being associated with the Alliance?

JGC: That's where my memory is defective. You've revived my memory, by showing me these minute books. I remember some of the teachers of French in the schools... Only last night I was greeted at a concert by a woman whose name I didn't catch, but who had been a student of Frances Bachman, Franny Bachman we always called her, who had been a teacher of French at Melbourne High School, MacRobertson Girls High School, but I don't think she was particularly active in the Alliance Française. She was a very prominent teacher.

CN: I've just realized that you're down here in 1932, having been elected to the committee, and at that stage you were living in 74 Tivoli Rd, South Yarra.

JGC: Yes, that's right. We had a flat there. And the flat actually belonged to F. G. Kirby, the French master that I was telling you about, and he produced a students' grammar of French, and consulted me about it, and honoured me by naming me in his foreword.

CN: You went away, you said, in 1927.

JGC: I taught at Melbourne Grammar, between graduating and... in those days, your finals were in two parts. Part of your finals were in December of your third year—the honours course only lasted for two years, but you took the second half of your finals in February. And as soon as they were over, thanks to Chisholm I think, I was appointed a part-time teacher at Melbourne Grammar School while I took a Diploma of Education course.

CN: That would have been in...

JGC: '26. Then, in '27, I was a resident master, full time, at Melbourne Grammar, but I left at the end of second term to take up this David

Acheson Scholarship, and I was away until almost the end of 1929. Then in Melbourne in May 1930 as a lecturer under Chisholm. Married in May 1931... I've been trying to remember the name of the man who did some private teaching in the city, and also did some tutoring for Chisholm... Ah, it's come back to me. Rouel, Théodore Rouel, I think it was...

CN: And what was he doing?

JGC: He ran the Berlitz school, and would sometimes give a talk at the Alliance, especially if someone was being commemorated. For instance, I remember his giving a lecture on the naturalist Jean-Henri Fabre... It could have been the centenary of Jean-Henri Fabre's birth, or the anniversary of his death, or something of that sort.

CN: Did you know someone called Paterson Grounds?

JGC: Oh yes. Stanley Paterson Grounds, S. P. Grounds, was at Melbourne High School while I was at Scotch, and in both my years of Leaving Honours, he was first in French, and I was second in the examinations. When we were at the University, we tied for first place for a couple of years, and in the last year I just beat him. I got the Dwight Prize as being first on the final honours list. Then he went abroad, but he went to England, and I think he's still living. He married an heiress, a rich heiress, and I've lost track of him. How does his name crop up there?

CN: Well, he was Secretary of the Alliance in 1927.

JGC: Oh, well that was while I was away. Though he certainly went abroad while I was away, because I called on him in London. We were not close friends, but we were good friends. We were not enemies. And I remember calling on him in his digs in London... One name that might crop up there is Alfred Stirling. He had a minor part in *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon*. Now he had been at Scotch: His last year there was my first. He was dux of the school in 1918. He went on to have a very distinguished diplomatic career. He became secretary to Robert Menzies, and then went on and occupied various posts abroad, and when our

diplomatic service was finally organized after the war, he became High Commissioner or Ambassador in various places. He was Ambassador at The Hague in 1951—I called on him there. And he was subsequently Ambassador in Paris, and Manila. And I think his last post may have been Rome. And he died only a couple of years ago. I see his sister, Dorothy, from time to time. He was unmarried, and she, likewise unmarried, and used to act as hostess for him in various diplomatic posts.

CN: Yes, he's here as a member of the committee in August 1930... And there's a Campbell here: does that mean anything?

JGC: Yes, he was a businessman. He was in the Commonwealth Sugar Refinery. A very lively fellow. A great tennis player. But I can only remember him as being a very congenial man in all sorts of Alliance activities. I don't think he ever performed in plays.

CN: There's a Stawell, too: E. Stawell?

JGC: Yes, Elizabeth Stawell. She was a student when I was a young lecturer. Her father was, I think, Sir Richard Stawell, a well-known physician or surgeon in Melbourne.

CN: And there's an A. Pullman. Would that be Dr Pullman of the Association Franco-Australienne?

JGC: Yes. I saw him this morning. It was through him that I learned that there was the monthly luncheon today at the Hotel Australia. I asked him to give my regards to *Maman* from her *filis*!

CN: Some of the plays were in the the Kelvin Hall?

JGC: Sometimes. But I remember some of the school plays being given in the Playhouse. Now the Playhouse was over the river, across Princes Bridge, and of course would have been demolished when the present complex was built...

CN: Gosh, I think it must have gone before that.

JGC: Perhaps it did. And then there was another hall...

CN: There's mention here of gramophone records. There must have been *soirées* with records...

JGC: Yes... Billy Mortil... not "Freddy" as I said earlier... he had an enormous collection of gramophone records. He had an enormous HMV gramophone, it must have stood four or five feet high. You still had to turn the handle... And I remember listening to records at his house in Yarra Street, Hawthorn.

CN: Do you remember if *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon* was actually played in the Bijou Theatre, as suggested by the committee?

JGC: No... But you wouldn't know about the Bijou Theatre, you're too young. But it was a variety theatre, of the same kind as the Tivoli, which was also in Bourke Street, but I should think several rungs lower than the Tivoli. That's where Stiffy and Mo used to act—I'm not sure if it was at the Tivoli or the Bijou.

CN: Do you remember how you came to join the committee?

JGC: Well, I'd been attending the *soirées*... I don't think I was active before I went abroad. I had been a member since about 1920... And I would attend the *soirées*, and I suppose that as a new recruit to the French Department at the University, I was more or less eligible...

Incidentally, I think the place in Exhibition Street was where Paul Biberon ran a dancing school, for ballroom dancing, not ballet... And I think it was possibly on his premises that we had our *soirées mensuelles* for a number of years. It was just down from Collins Street, a few doors on the west side.

CN: Paul Biberon is here as "un des fondateurs et membre à vie de l'Alliance Française"... He's just lost his mother...

JGC: His was *the* school of ballroom dancing in Melbourne in those days.

CN: Now I wonder what talk you gave here. You were asked to give "une petite conférence", which you accepted with pleasure.

JGC: I have no recollection of that. I can guess, I think. I may have talked about mediaeval theatre... because I'd done that more than once, and may have on that occasion...

CN: What you've had to say has been very illuminating... I remember that later, you went and stayed at the Alliance in Paris.

JGC: That was in 1961. They had an apartment for guests in the Maison de l'Alliance. We were staying in the Hotel Jean-Bart, but for a fortnight we occupied the apartment. It was subsequently abandoned because they needed to extend their teaching space.

CN: Here's your lecture... Madame Wilkinson...

JGC: Oh yes... that was Mireille Wilkinson. Her husband was considerably older than she. He was a businessman. She was French, and I was talking about her only the other day to Catherine Ball, that's MacMahon Ball's wife, and we were wondering if she were still alive. I don't think she lives out here now. She used to sing. I can remember her singing "L'Invitation au Voyage", in the Duparc setting of Baudelaire. She sang beautifully. She didn't have a big voice, but she sang very intelligently, artistically.

CN: What about Mlle Lambert?

JGC: She may have been a sister of Raymond Lambert, who was a very well-known pianist. And his father, who was Belgian, Edouard Lambert, led the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He was the first violin for many years.

CN: In 1934, you were on the committee with Monsieur Cau. He was one of the early people in the wool trade, wasn't he?

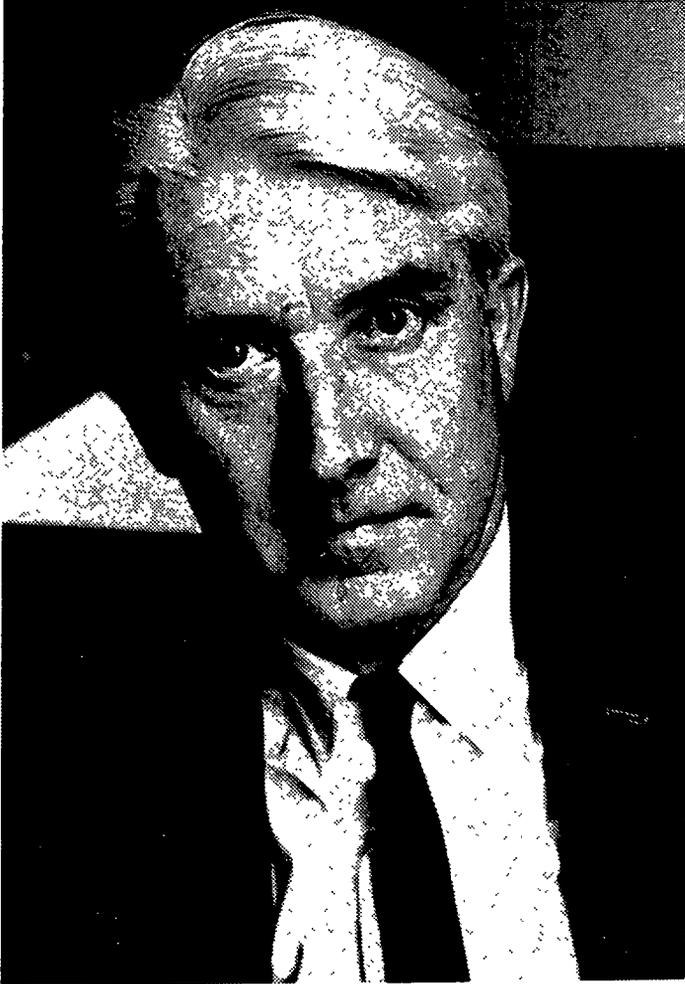
JGC: Yes, and you're bringing back to my memory another wool buyer... I can't remember his surname, but his wife's name was

Gilberte... That reminds me of another play: we played *Les Romanesques* d'Edmond Rostand. Gilberte was the *jeune première* and I was the *jeune premier*. I was still playing *jeune premier* roles into my middle thirties!... Oh, they were delightful people. They lived in Adelaide subsequently, their son went to school over there... You could get their name from a programme of *Les Romanesques*.... One doesn't hear so much these days of one-act plays, but there was quite a demand for them. They lent themselves very much to this sort of association, and this sort of occasion. And in the Alliance Française in Adelaide, we often had one-act plays. They're not too hard for a group of amateur actors to perform, and it doesn't go on for very long. You can have a programme where someone started off singing, and then a one-act play, and then supper... Gaillet, that was the name. Gilberte Gaillet... And the name of that secretary was Vera Fricke, or Fricker. But she was the office secretary and she would be the one you would go to when you wanted to change library books... So it's all coming back.

Monash University

Notes

1. On Louise Dyer see Jim Davidson's article in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8: *1891-1939 C1-Gib*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981, pp. 392-393. A book-length biography is due out shortly. On her father, Louis Lawrence Smith (1830-1910), see Guy Featherstone's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 6: *1851-1890 R-Z*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1976, pp. 151-152.
2. Harold Gengoult Smith married Cynthia Brookes on 6 December 1933. His second given name came from the maiden name of L. L. Smith's mother.
3. See Colette Reddin, "A Frenchwoman in Melbourne: her Contribution to the Alliance Française", *Explorations*, n° 1, May 1985, pp. 22-27.
4. On Fernand Isidore Maurice-Carton, see the late Jean Rosemberg's Monash M.A. thesis "Studies in the French Presence in Australia", 1985, pp. 70-95.
5. See Stan Scott, "The Incomparable 'Kara' (1898-1968)", *Explorations*, n° 4, March 1987, pp. 3-10.
6. On William Henry Tilly, see Philip Thomson's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 12: *1891-1939 Smy-Z*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1990, pp. 231-232.





The photograph of the cast of the Alliance Française production of Labiche's *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon* on 23 and 24 July 1931 at the Playhouse, Melbourne is not accompanied in the archives by any newspaper clippings. Identification of the players is therefore difficult. Some people are easy to recognize, one or two are unknown and at least one other is conjectural. The Editor would welcome further information from readers. As noted in the "Foreword" to this number, the original was kindly supplied for copying by Miss Colette Reddin.

Seated: unknown; J. G. Cornell; Albertine Gay

Standing: N. Karagheusian; W. H. Frederick; Edouard Gay;
René Vanderkelen; unknown; Helen Cornell (née
Martin); T. Rouel; Alfred Stirling (?); H. Laroche.