

FOREWORD

After another long hiatus—during which the new Editorial Committee of *Explorations* has worked most effectively to bring out the 1997, 1998 and 1999 numbers of the magazine—we are filling in the remaining gaps in our programme. Overall the theme of the present issue continues our interest in France's consular officials in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australia. It is hardly necessary to add that what our authors have discovered from both Australian and French sources demonstrates once again what a fascinating group of people the consuls were. In one case, that of Castelnau, the material the Editor has been bringing together is so extensive that it has outgrown *Explorations* and will have to be presented, however provisionally, in monograph form in the next year or so.

Apart from our ongoing preoccupation with France's diplomatic representatives, we return to the pervasive influence of French culture in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia. As Robert Dessaix has just reminded us ("Parlez-vous my language?", *The Age, Extra*, 16 October 1999, pp. 6–7), in the days before "multiculturalism" was a quasi-official dogma young Australians of Anglo-Celtic background were routinely given the opportunity to study a range of foreign languages at secondary school. France was a central element in that breaking out of the monocultural mould. The fortunes of a now largely forgotten author and the reading recommended to the customers of a radical bookshop illustrate in their different ways the fact that Melbourne and Sydney horizons were wider than the English-speaking world.

W. K.