

# The Légion d'Honneur in Australia

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## Introduction

This article documents Légion d'honneur awards made to Australians or foreigners domiciled in Australia since the first award was made to Sir William Macarthur in 1855. Prior to 1900, there were few awards, all in the grade of chevalier. Since 1900, the number of awards has increased markedly. All ranks have been awarded to Australians, although to date, only one grand'croix has been bestowed. Many well-known politicians have received awards and former soldiers have figured prominently. Approximately seven hundred Australians, including foreigners domiciled here, have received the Légion d'honneur with over seventy percent of awards going to the military.

An appendix to this article covers the history of the local branch of the Société des Membres de la Légion d'honneur from its founding in 1980 to the present day.

## Background

Following the French Revolution, the Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur (the National Order of the Legion of Honour) was founded by Napoléon Bonaparte by the Law of 29 floréal an X (March 1802) as the premier French Order and has remained so throughout subsequent political upheavals.

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In 1963, a second order, the *Ordre national du mérite*, was created by President de Gaulle to address the continuing and constant problem of the excessive number of awards of the *Légion d'honneur*. In 2007, President Sarkozy introduced parity of awards for males and females and the number of awards was further reduced by President Macron in 2017–2018.

These two awards are issued in the name of the President of the Republic (thus they are known as the ‘presidential Orders’). They are awarded across all occupations and ages, although mainly to older recipients, of both sexes. These, and other awards, are controlled by the *Grande Chancellerie de la Légion d'honneur*. This august body also manages the *Ordre de la Libération*, which has been dormant since 1946; the last *Compagnon* of this Order—Herbert Germain—died at the age of 101 on October 12, 2021. The *Grande Chancellerie* also manages the *Médaille militaire* and the *Médaille de reconnaissance pour les victimes du terrorisme*, neither of which is an Order.

In addition to these Presidential Orders, there are other Orders which are mainly occupation-specific and are awarded by Ministers of State. These are known as ‘ministerial Orders’. France had a rich variety of ‘Orders of Merit’, for example *Santé publique*, *Mérite commercial*, *Mérite artisanal*, *Mérite touristique*, and others which were suppressed following the institution of the *Ordre national du mérite* in 1963. There were also ‘colonial’ Orders which were mainly awarded to the military and colonial administrators, as well as to ‘locals’. However, four ‘ministerial Orders’ were retained by de Gaulle—the *Palmes académiques*, the *Ordre des Arts et Lettres*, the *Ordre du Mérite agricole*, and the *Ordre du Mérite maritime*.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years the insignia has undergone several modifications: the example shown (Fig.1) is a modern chevalier cross. In France there are several official manufacturers of the *Légion d'honneur* insignia including the *Monnaie de Paris*, *Maison Bacqueville* and *Arthus-Bertrand*, with the

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<sup>1</sup> In Australia, the only one of these commonly found is the *Palmes académiques*, mainly awarded to university lecturers. Three awards of the *Arts et Lettres* are known, as are three awards of the *Mérite agricole*. There is, however, only one known award of the *Mérite maritime*—to Sgt Donald Hickey in 2012. He was a crewman of a RAAF maritime aircraft searching for Thierry Dubois and Tony Bullimore, yachtsmen lost in the Southern Ocean in 1996–1997.

result that there are slight variations in the actual medal depending on the manufacturer. However, a discussion of the medallic aspects of the Order is beyond the scope of this paper.



Decoration for the modern chevalier award

The functions of the Légion d'honneur are several, but its main roles are both social and political. Its operation makes it clear that the Order is an instrument in the service of the State. Awarded in the name of the President of the Republic, it recognises those who, working for the common good, have displayed 'mérites éminents' and are considered worthy examples to be emulated. The Ordre national du Mérite rewards a lesser achievement than that acknowledged by the Légion d'honneur, i.e. for 'services distingués'. Consistent with the ideals of the Republic, it is an egalitarian Order which is bestowed without distinction of professional or social standing, in all fields of endeavour, both civilian and military.

The Légion d'honneur is awarded to eminent foreigners for diplomatic roles; this dates back to the beginning of the Order when Napoleon instituted it to support French diplomacy. He created the 'grande décoration', which later became the grand'croix, with the specific aim 'of linking the institutions of the different countries of Europe with our own institutions and showing the importance and esteem that I have [...] for our neighbours and friends'. There is a supplementary practice, also initiated by Napoleon, which honours foreign dignitaries who render services to France or who promote causes that France champions.

The Légion d'honneur is a universal Order which honours servicemen and women as well as civilians, French citizens and foreigners. This wide range of recipients and the quality of each recipient, reflect the importance of France and the strength and reach of her diplomatic relations.

### **The Order of the Légion d'honneur**

The Order has five ranks which include three grades, namely chevalier, officier, and commandeur; there are two dignités: grand officier and grand'croix. Requirements for an award to French citizens of the grade of chevalier are that nominees must have a minimum of twenty years of

public service or professional activities plus ‘*mérite éminent*’. For the grade of officier, the French must have a minimum of eight years as a chevalier plus further eminent merit. For the grade of commandeur, they must have a minimum of five years as officier plus further ‘*mérite éminent*’; for the dignité of grand officier, they must have three years in the grade of commandeur plus further ‘*mérite éminent*’ and for the dignité of grand’croix, three years in the dignité of grand officier plus further ‘*mérite éminent*’.



Grand-croix de la Légion d'honneur

While the Légion d'honneur can be awarded to foreigners who have served the interests of France or who give, by their behaviour, a positive image of France, they cannot become members of the Order as induction requires taking an oath of loyalty to France. Foreigners are attached to the Order without becoming members. Foreigners who have been decorated inevitably reflect relations between France and their country.

For Australians, there is rarely any promotion in the Order. Two examples from the eleven Australians who have been promoted are Professor Ross Steele AM, who was appointed chevalier on June 14, 1996 and officier on December 3, 2008; and Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC, who was appointed chevalier on June 18, 2013 and commandeur on July 21, 2016.

The award process for Australians centres on the French Ambassador in Canberra who advises the French Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, who in turn proposes the award. The candidates' dossiers are then submitted for the consideration of the Council of the Order, whose opinion regarding the admissibility of the candidate is then submitted to the Grand Chancellor of the Order before being sent to the President of the Republic.

The principle of *parité* (equal numbers of men and women candidates) introduced for the French by President Sarkozy in 2007, as previously mentioned, was recently extended to foreigners, including Australians.

The President of the Republic has the discretion of decorating certain people by notifying the Grand Chancellor but without seeking the opinion of the Council of the Order. Such awardees are usually foreign heads of state, members of their staff, and members of foreign diplomatic corps. Foreigners can be decorated initially at a higher grade than that of *chevalier*, which is impossible for the French.

Appointments to the Order are announced differently depending on whether they are made in France or overseas. Unlike the Australian system where military and civilian awards appear together in the same honours list (Australia Day and Queen's Birthday), France's military awards appear in the *Journal Officiel* in April (for reservists and ex-servicemen) and July (for active-duty personnel), and civilian awards appear on January 1 and July 14 (the former Easter promotion has been cancelled.) For foreigners, including Australians, appointments are usually announced in the first quarter of the year. Such appointments do not appear in the *Journal Officiel* unless the awardee subsequently becomes a French citizen. There are no posthumous awards except for members of the uniformed services killed in the line of duty.

In recent years, the numbers of awards in each grade have been markedly reduced, especially for civilians. In the triennium 2012–2014, for the grade of *chevalier* there were 2,980 civilian awards, with 900 military. For the triennium 2018–2020, these figures were reduced to 1,290 civilian awards, with 825 military. For the grade of *officier*, in 2012–2014, there were 384 civilian awards, with 300 military ones, while, for 2018–2020, the figures are 164 civilian and 226 military. There have been similar decreases in the numbers of awards to foreigners. There is also a geographic aspect of awards distribution—Oceania, of which Australia forms part, receives the smallest share.

In France, awardees have to purchase their medal, which friends and relatives often club together to buy. In 2021, the cost of a *chevalier* medal is 310 €, for an *officier* it is 399 €, and for a *commandeur*, 715 €. For Australians, the French Embassy provides the medal *gratis* along with a

testamur. In Australia, the French Embassy or the Consulate General may stage the bestowal award ceremony and provide refreshments, usually champagne and canapés, or awardees may host their own celebration. These ceremonies are among the many duties of the Ambassador or Consul General. Friends and relatives are invited and the medal is presented, accompanied by a formulaic speech, part of which must be in French. For the French, local officials or friends who hold an equal or higher grade of the Order can perform the bestowal ceremony. However, foreigners cannot do so, no matter what rank they hold.

### **Awards of the Légion d'honneur in Australia before 1900**

In 1871, during the Commune, a fire destroyed the Hôtel de Salm where the archives of the Légion d'honneur were stored. Numerous dossiers were burned and it has not been possible to reconstitute the documents<sup>2</sup>, thus making it difficult for researchers.

The first documented Australian décoré was Sir William Macarthur (1800–1882),<sup>3</sup> who received the croix du chevalier by imperial decree of September 28, 1855<sup>4</sup> for his services as Commissioner for New South Wales at the Exposition Universelle, held in Paris from May 15 to November 15, 1855, the first ‘World Fair’ to be held in France. At the Exposition, he was responsible for promoting NSW agricultural and commercial activities, and opportunities. One of the exhibits was a collection of about 240 NSW native timbers. Macarthur was the youngest son of John and Elizabeth Macarthur, and a notable landowner. He was also an outstanding sheep breeder as well as a vigneron. In 1850, his vineyard at Camden was producing over 60,000 litres of red and white wines, and brandies each year. He also developed more than sixty new camellia varieties and was an honorary member of the Société Impériale Zoologique d’Acclimatation.

Deputy Commissary-General Philip Turner CB received the croix de chevalier in 1856, at the end of the Crimean War. He settled in Hobart and died there on January 17, 1879. Another Crimean War award went to Captain

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<sup>2</sup> Christine Minjollet (Assistante du conservateur, Musée de la Légion d’honneur), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> William Land, ‘Macarthur, Hon. Sir William (1800–1882), French Australian Dictionary of Biography, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/macarthur-hon-sir-william-1800-1882/>.

<sup>4</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, October 1, 2019.

George Richard Browne,<sup>5</sup> 88<sup>th</sup> Regiment, who lost an arm in Crimea and later served in India during the Mutiny. He settled in Victoria where he was later tried for obtaining money under false pretences. His Légion d'honneur was awarded on June 16, 1856, although the grade is not stated.<sup>6</sup>

Dr Louis Thomas Laure (1831–1912)<sup>7</sup> received the croix de chevalier on March 15, 1860, for his services during smallpox and cholera epidemics in La Réunion in 1856. He was a surgeon in the French Navy who arrived in Sydney in early 1868 and was registered to practice in New South Wales on April 7, 1868. He was a visiting physician at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, and founded the French Benevolent Society of NSW. He returned to France in 1900 and died on March 25, 1912 in Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhône).

Dr James Patrick Ryan (1840–1918) was born in Ireland in about 1840 and graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, in 1865, later becoming a Member of the King's and Queen's College of Physicians (now the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland) in 1884. He was in Paris in 1870 and served with the Ambulance irlandaise (Irish Ambulance) at Châteaudun (Eure-et-Loir) as part of the Armée de la Loire during the Franco-Prussian War. For his services, he was appointed a chevalier of the Légion d'honneur by the decree of October 17, 1871.<sup>8</sup> He returned to England upon the proclamation of peace but, soon after, migrated to Australia. He was registered in Victoria at the end of 1873. Initially in practice in Richmond, he later moved to Collins Street. In the early 1880s, he was on the staff of the Melbourne Hospital as Honorary Surgeon to Outpatients and also as a specialist in skin diseases. He died on April 9, 1918.

Monsieur Gabriel Simon, the French Consul in Sydney, received the award of chevalier on January 18, 1876. Monsieur Jules François de Sales Joubert was awarded the Légion d'honneur by the decree of November 19, 1878.<sup>9</sup> He was listed as 'Secrétaire de la Commission de la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud'.

Three Australian Commissioners at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1878 were awarded the Légion d'honneur. They were John Joseph

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<sup>5</sup> *Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser*, July 19, 1879, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, March 4, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> William Land, 'Laure, Louis Thomas (1831–1912)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/laure-louis-thomas-1831-1912/>.

<sup>8</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, September 16, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, February 26, 2020.

Casey CMG (1832–1913), a Commissioner for Victoria, the Hon. Arthur Macalister CMG (1818–1883), a Commissioner for Queensland who also served as Premier of Queensland, and Josiah Boothby CMG (1837–1916), a Commissioner for South Australia. Their French awards were announced in London on December 2, 1878, while their awards of the CMG appeared in *The Gazette* of October 29, 1878.

Edward Combes CMG (1830–1895), President of the Society of Artists, politician and engineer, was awarded chevalier on October 19, 1878.<sup>10</sup> He had been educated at the École des Mines and the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, Paris, where he had studied freehand and watercolour drawing. In 1857 he returned to Victoria and subsequently, in 1872, became a member of the NSW Legislative Council. In 1878 he was appointed executive commissioner for New South Wales for the 1878 Exposition universelle. His CMG appeared in *The Gazette* of October 29, 1878.

Another prominent doctor to receive the Légion d'honneur was Dr Charles Duret<sup>11</sup> (1829–1895) of Melbourne. Duret was born in Jersey in 1829 of French parents, but was a British citizen, which is confirmed by the Service des décorations décernés aux étrangers. He received the chevalier of the Légion d'honneur by the decree of January 31, 1884.<sup>12</sup> He returned to France and died in 1895 following a fall in Beaulieu (Alpes-Maritimes).

Georges Biard d'Aunet,<sup>13</sup> the first French Consul General in Sydney (1893–1900), was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1886, and was promoted to officier in 1905.

Denis O'Donovan CMG (1836–1911), Irish by birth, and educated in Ireland and France, had been Professor of Modern Languages and Literature in the Collège des Hautes Études (Paris). In 1866 he migrated to Melbourne and in 1874 was appointed Parliamentary Librarian to the Queensland Parliament. He received his award on February 6, 1897 in honour of his work as an intellectual and librarian.

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<sup>10</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, September 30, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Nettelbeck, 'Duret, Charles (1829–1895)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/duret-charles-1829-1895/>.

<sup>12</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, December 5, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Barko, 'Biard d'Aunet, Georges (1844–1934)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/biard-daunet-georges-1844-1934/>.

A number of awards were made honouring contributions to the Exposition universelle in Paris in 1889. Sir Graham Berry KCMG (1822–1904), the Agent-General for Victoria at the Exposition, was awarded the croix de chevalier on May 4, 1889. Berry was a politician who served as the eleventh Premier of Victoria. It is perhaps noteworthy that Mr W. F. Walker, the Executive Commissioner for Victoria at the Exposition universelle, declined the offer of the Légion d'honneur. Mr Robert Reid, President of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce and Commissioner at the Exposition, was awarded the croix de chevalier on October 30, 1889. Dr T. Aubrey Bowen received his award on November 25, 1889. An ophthalmologist, he served as a Victorian commissioner at the Exposition.

### **Awards of the Légion d'honneur in Australia after 1900: Military awards**

There were twenty-four awards of the Légion d'honneur to soldiers during the Great War, all to officers. *The London Gazette* (LG) dates are taken from *Military Orders* of the Australian Army. There was one award of the dignité of grand officier to Maj-Gen (T/Lt-Gen) Sir John Monash GCMG KCB, in recognition of his role as commander of the Australian Corps (LG January 29, 1919). There was one award of commandeur to Col. (T/Brig-Gen) Hon. James Whiteside McCay CB, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade; he had originally been noted for the award of 'grand officier' but was downgraded to commandeur.<sup>14</sup>

Other award recipients, both Australian and non-Australian, serving with the AIF are listed in Appendix 1.

There were three awards to Royal Navy officers serving with the Royal Australian Navy:

- Captain Oliver Backhouse RN (later Admiral) was appointed officier of the Légion d'honneur on November 2, 1917;
- Captain John Collings Taswell Glossop RN (later Vice-Admiral) was appointed officier on January 25, 1918; and
- Commander Wellwood George Courtney Maxwell RN (later Rear-Admiral) received the croix de chevalier on January 25, 1918.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Gazette*, February 22, 1916.

There is the interesting case of an Australian aviator who served in both the French forces and the AIF during World War 1. He was Lt. Col. Walter Oswald Watt OBE, who was awarded the Légion d'honneur on February 10, 1915, while serving with the Aviation militaire of the Légion étrangère. In 1911, he was the first Australian to qualify for the Royal Aero Club certificate as a pilot. Upon the outbreak of war, he joined the Légion étrangère and flew Maurice Farman aircraft. Due to his great political influence, he transferred to the Australian Flying Corps in 1916 without returning to Australia. He was the first Australian to command an Air Force wing, a unit of command which generally includes three squadrons. He drowned on May 21, 1921 at Bilgola Beach in Sydney.

A somewhat analogous case is that of Sir Norman Kater, a medical practitioner, grazier and politician who left for Egypt as the Australian Red Cross Commissioner in 1914. He went to France in December 1915, where he joined the French Service de santé militaire as a médecin-aide majeur, deuxième classe, serving at the base hospital at Saint-Rome, near Toulouse, as an assistant surgeon. He was also chief surgeon of the hôpital complémentaire in Toulouse. After two years, he was keen to get closer to the front with the Australians. However, to join the AIF Kater had to return to Australia, which he did in early 1918 when he joined the Australian Army Medical Corps. The war was obviously drawing to a close and Kater was posted to the Military Hospital in Randwick. He later worked as the AAMC adjutant to the Principal Medical Officer at Victoria Barracks, Sydney, as a major. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur and the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française. He was knighted in 1929.

Dr Reginald Laidlaw Davies tried to enlist in the AIF in 1914 but failed the medical examination. He went to France and was employed as senior surgeon to the hôpital temporaire at Villers-Cotterêts (Aisne), serving at the front from Verdun to the Somme. He left the French Army in 1918 and went to England where he was appointed surgeon at the Special Military Surgical Hospital, Shepherd's Bush. He was awarded the OBE in 1918 and was awarded the Légion d'honneur, announced in the *Edinburgh Gazette* of May 12, 1922. On his return to Australia, he resumed his position as gynaecological surgeon at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

Sir Thomas Bilbe Robinson was a shipping manager and public servant who served as Agent-General for Queensland. He was appointed director of

meat supplies for the allied armies in late 1914, following his efforts to coordinate the supply of frozen meat to France and the Middle East. He was appointed KCMG (1913), KBE (1917) and GBE (1920). He was awarded the Légion d'honneur in December 1917.

John Daniel Fitzgerald was a Labor Party politician who, for his assistance to French charities and to Frenchmen passing through Sydney, was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1919.

In the period 1991–1998, surviving World War One veterans were awarded the croix de chevalier of the Légion d'honneur. It is known that forty-seven awards were made to Australian residents, virtually all former members of the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF. Later, President François Hollande announced the award of the croix de chevalier of the Légion d'honneur to survivors of those who took part in the liberation of Normandy, the first such awards being made in 2015. Over four hundred and thirty-nine awards were made to those living in Australia, including Australian, British and French ex-serviceman and a few women. Some award notifications give rank, service and other decorations, but most do not. These awards were mostly to former aircrew, with sixteen awards to the Navy, of which four were to the Royal Australian Navy. There are five known awards to the British Army and two to the Australian Army for Normandy.



Nancy Wake AC GM<sup>15</sup> was a prominent figure in the French Resistance during the Second World War. Born in New Zealand in 1912, she moved with her family to Australia before she was two years old. She left Australia for Europe in 1932 and settled in Paris where she worked as a journalist. She served with the First-Aid Nursing Yeomanry and the Special Operations Executive during World War II, was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1970 and was promoted to

officier on March 26, 1990. She returned to Australia after the war but in 2001 returned to England where she died in 2011.

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<sup>15</sup> Rosemary Lancaster, 'Wake, Nancy (1912–2011)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/wake-nancy-1912-2011/>.

A number of Australian senior military officers have received awards in recent years. These are listed in Appendix 1.

### **Frenchmen with Australian connections**

Some Frenchmen who received the Légion d'honneur for service with the French armed forces in World War 1 had Australian connections. Léon Bourjade, after service as an artilleryman, became France's top-scoring balloon 'buster' with victories over twenty-seven balloons and one aircraft. Post-war, he became an ordained priest and joined the Catholic Sacred Heart Mission on Yule Island, then part of the Australian Territory of Papua. He died in 1924 of renal failure associated with treatment of malaria. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur on June 5, 1918 and was promoted to officier on June 16, 1920.

Maurice Brisbout served with the French Army at Verdun as an artillery officer and was wounded. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur, although this is not confirmed on the French website, which lists all French Légion d'honneur recipients<sup>16</sup> who died before 1977. He later became the French Consul in Western Australia and a wool buyer. Brisbout died in 1973.

Louis Crivelli<sup>17</sup> was a medical graduate of Melbourne University who served with the French 26<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1932. His brother René Gabriel Crivelli was a sous-lieutenant de réserve who served in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Regiment. He was wounded and received the croix de chevalier in 1921.

Stéphane Eugène de Pierres served as a sous-lieutenant in the 371<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment and was killed in action on May 12, 1915 in the Vosges Mountains. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur on June 19, 1920. He spent a year with his brothers on their pastoral lease east of Lake Eyre in 1910–1911.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.napoleon.org/en/magazine/press-review/leonore-legion-dhonneur-archives-online/>.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Nettelbeck, 'Crivelli, Marcel (1859–1948)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/crivelli-marcel-1859-1948/>. Marcel Crivelli was the father of Louis and René.

<sup>18</sup> Paul de Pierres, *Allies Forever, alliés pour toujours*, Wyalkatchem, WA, 2014, 31.

Joseph Flipo served as a captain in the French Army and was wounded at Verdun. He was also a well-known wool buyer and became an officer of the Légion d'honneur in 1961.

Stéphane Henri Emile Playoust was a sous-lieutenant in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment who was killed in action on April 16, 1917 near Juvincourt (Aisne). He was awarded the Légion d'honneur as well as the Croix de guerre. He was a member of the well-known Playoust family of wool buyers.<sup>19</sup>

### **Awards of the Légion d'honneur in Australia after 1900: Civilian Awards**

The Hon. William Arthur Holman (1871–1934),<sup>20</sup> Premier of New South Wales (1913–1920), was made an officier of the Légion d'honneur in 1916. A cabinetmaker by trade, he was a radical socialist and a convinced Francophile. He was a fervent member of the Labor Party and was later admitted to the Bar, becoming KC in 1920. He was also awarded the Belgian Order of the Crown and the Finnish Order of the White Rose.

William Morris Hughes, Australian Prime Minister (1915–1923), received the dignité of 'grand officier' of the Légion d'honneur on September 20, 1918.<sup>21</sup> Hughes was Prime Minister of Australia (1915–1923) and distinguished himself and brought honour to Australia at the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920). He influenced national Australian politics for many years, initially via the Labor Party and later the Nationalists. He served in the first Commonwealth Parliament of 1901 and remained a record fifty-one years and seven months.

The only Australian grand'croix was awarded to Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, President of the UN General Assembly, and Australian Foreign Minister, awarded by Presidential decree of March 9, 1949.<sup>22</sup> Evatt was a distinguished lawyer who was the youngest appointee to the High Court of Australia. He was also a well-regarded writer who served as Leader of the Opposition in the Federal Parliament.

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<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Dwyer, 'Playoust, Georges (1855–1918)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/playoust-georges-1855-1918/>.

<sup>20</sup> Jill Donohoo, 'Holman, William Arthur (1871–1934)', *French Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://www.isfar.org.au/bio/holman-william-arthur-1871-1934/>.

<sup>21</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, October 21, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, February 28, 2020.



The Right Honourable Dr H. V. Evatt QC KStJ

The Crivellis were a much-decorated Melbourne family. Louis Madeleine Isidore Crivelli was Inspecteur de l'Instruction publique in La Réunion and was awarded the Légion d'honneur on August 2, 1862. His son, Doctor Marcel Urbain Crivelli, was a physician and surgeon in Melbourne who received the same award on 1 January 1904 and was promoted to officier on January 11, 1927. His wife, Marie Louise Charlotte Crivelli (daughter of Dr Charles Duret), was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1947.<sup>23</sup> As previously mentioned, two sons received the Order. René Gabriel Crivelli, a sous-lieutenant de réserve, served with the 22<sup>e</sup> régiment d'artillerie and received his award in 1921, and his brother, Dr Louis Crivelli<sup>24</sup>, a Melbourne GP, received his in 1932. A French cousin, Jean Robert Crivelli, capitaine réserve du 88<sup>e</sup> régiment, was awarded the Légion d'honneur on July 5, 1917 and was killed in action on October 14, 1918.

Another example of husband-and-wife award recipients is Sir Norman and Dame Mabel Brookes. Sir Norman was awarded the Légion d'honneur on May 3, 1928<sup>25</sup> and Dame Mabel on March 3, 1960.

In subsequent years, there have been six appointments of 'commandeurs' of the Légion d'honneur to civilians. The specific dates given are those of the relevant décrets, where known.

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<sup>23</sup> Nettelbeck, 'Duret, Charles (1829–1895)'; Colin Nettelbeck 'Charlotte Crivelli (1868–1956), Patriot and Fund-raiser', *French Lives in Australia*, eds Eric Berti and Ivan Barko (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2015), 338–352.

<sup>24</sup> Colin Nettelbeck, 'Crivelli, Marcel (1859–1948)'.

<sup>25</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, January 31, 2020.

- Rt. Hon. William Alexander Watt, Premier of Victoria and later Speaker of the House of Representatives (September 6, 1933)
- Mgr Abdo Khalife, Maronite Archbishop of Australia (April 26, 1989)
- Edward Idriss Cardinal Cassidy AC (Roman Curia, 1991)
- Rt. Hon. Sir Ninian Stephen KG AK GCMG GCVO KBE KStJ PC QC (20<sup>th</sup> Governor-General of Australia, February 24, 1993)
- Dame Roma Mitchell AC DBE CVO QC (Governor of South Australia, April 10, 1997)
- Mr Stephen Christopher Brady AO CVO (Australian Ambassador to France, April 6, 2017).

In total, since 1900 there have been thirty-eight officers and one hundred and forty-six chevaliers civilian awards, including eleven later promoted to officer.

### **The Ordre de la Libération**

The Ordre de la Libération was created by General de Gaulle at Brazzaville on November 16, 1940. It ranked second behind the Légion d'honneur and was aimed at rewarding individuals and military or civil organisations distinguishing themselves, in an exceptional manner, in the struggle to liberate France. In the order of precedence, it was second only to the Légion d'honneur. Awards were made to 1,038 individuals, 270 of which were posthumous. Military units received eighteen awards and five cities were honoured. Although the Order was closed in 1946, it was reopened for the award to Winston Churchill in 1958 and to King George VI in 1960; this latter was a posthumous award.

A légionnaire of particular interest, as the only holder of the Ordre de la Libération with significant Australian connections, is Stanislas Malec-Natlacen who was born in Ljubljana (Slovenia) on October 2, 1913. He studied philosophy and theology at the Institut catholique de Paris and was ordained priest in 1937. He returned to Paris to undertake doctoral studies and was caught there by the outbreak of war. He eventually reached England and joined de Gaulle's Free French Forces, being posted to the 13<sup>e</sup> demi-brigade de la Légion étrangère as a lieutenant chaplain. He took part in the operations at Dakar, Gabon and Eritrea, and was awarded the Croix de guerre. He was promoted captain and took part in the Libyan campaign

and was again cited for bravery at Bir Hakeim, where he was wounded. He was subsequently wounded again in Italy. Settling in Brisbane in 1951, he took up a position in a governmental soil science laboratory and married a young Australian woman. He died in Brisbane on August 5, 2004. Malec-Natlacen was awarded Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (June 18, 1996), the Compagnon de l'Ordre de la Libération (November 20, 1944) and the Croix de guerre (1939–1945) with two citations.

Another recipient of the Ordre de la Libération was Roger Armand Lévy who was a very active and successful Commercial Counsellor at the French Embassy in Canberra. He was a trainee lawyer who took part in the Norwegian campaign. He was promoted sous-lieutenant and posted to the Régiment de tirailleurs sénégalais du Tchad. He was wounded in action in North Africa, losing a leg, and was captured by the Italians. He was awarded the Compagnon of the Ordre de la Libération on December 10, 1943 and Commandeur of the Légion d'honneur. He also held the Croix de guerre avec palme.

### **Unconfirmed awards**

One unconfirmed award is to Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller, a distinguished botanist. He is credited with the Légion d'honneur in several publications but this award is not confirmed by the Service des décorations.<sup>26</sup> What is confirmed is the fact that he was awarded Officier of the Ordre du Mérite Agricole (South Australian Register, June 28, 1889) at a time when it was second in importance to the Légion d'honneur.

Another is Dr Charles MacCarthy who served with the Ambulance irlandaise in 1870. According to an honours board in St Vincent's Hospital (Sydney), he was awarded the Croix militaire for his services in the Franco-Prussian War. However, enquiries have failed to confirm the award of the Légion d'honneur.

### **La Société d'entraide des membres de la Légion d'honneur (SEMLH) : Société des membres de la Légion d'honneur (SMLH)**

The SEMLH was founded in Paris in 1921. In 2012 the name was changed to Société des membres de la Légion d'honneur (SMLH). Details of the Australian chapters of the SEMLH are included in Appendix 2.

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<sup>26</sup> Laurent Blondeau-Georges, in discussion with the author, March 4, 2021.

## **Visits to Australia of the Grand Chancelier de la Légion d'honneur and other dignitaries.**

The Grand Chancelier is head of the Grande Chancellerie which administers the Légion d'honneur and the Ordre national du mérite. There have been two visits to Australia by the incumbent Grand Chancelier. The first took place on November 1–6, 2015, when the 32<sup>nd</sup> Grand Chancelier de la Légion d'honneur et Chancelier de l'Ordre national du mérite, Général d'armée, Jean-Louis Georgelin visited Sydney and Canberra. His successor, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Grand Chancelier, Général d'armée Benoît Puga and his wife Isabelle visited Sydney and Canberra on November 12–18, 2018. These visits were very successful, with both Grand Chanceliers taking advantage of their presence in Australia to bestow Légion d'honneur awards, mainly upon ex-servicemen.

There have been two visits of Général Alain Picard, Administrateur des sections de l'étranger of the SEMLH, who visited Canberra in March 2009 and Sydney in July 2011, on his way home after setting up a combined SEMLH/ANMONM<sup>27</sup> Section in New Zealand. His visit was followed by a longer visit by his successor, Général François Lœuillet, and his wife Françoise, in November 2016.

In May 2014, Commissaire général de division Régis Outtier and Secretary General of the SMLH, visited Sydney to bestow upon H. E. Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, Governor of New South Wales, the Croix d'officier of the Légion d'honneur. He also awarded the above-mentioned Médaille du Président de la société des membres de la Légion d'honneur to Professor Ross Steele AM.

## **Conclusion**

The Légion d'honneur has had a continuing presence in Australia since the first award was made in 1855. These awards have been a public recognition of the links between our two countries over that time. France is the only country to have awarded so many of its highest decoration to Australians.

In France, awards honouring the role of nonprofit organisations, the life achievements of persons of modest origins and the place of women through strict gender parity in civilian awards, has been increasingly marked.

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<sup>27</sup> See page 49.

These factors are not so prominent in Australia. All Australian awards are to individuals, only a few of whom would be regarded of ‘modest origins’. Gender parity is claimed, but in practice, there are so few awards that this is difficult to discern. Of the forty-six members of Section Australie of the SMLH at this time (2021), fourteen are female (five French and nine Australians).

This article has documented the presence of the Légion d’honneur in Australia for one hundred and seventy years and has explored the range of fields within which these awards have been made, as war, commerce and diplomacy have brought the two countries together with a common purpose. Over the years the award has evolved to take account of changing social mores and expectations, introducing the criterion of parity between men and women.<sup>28</sup>

*Sydney*

### **About the author:**

William Land AM was President of the College of Dermatologists from 1997–1999. In 2000, he completed a PhD at the University of Sydney with a dissertation titled *La dialectique d’aliénation et d’assimilation de deux écrivains juifs français : Julien Benda et André Suarès*. He was appointed Honorary Research Associate in 2005 in the Department of French Studies, University of Sydney, working on the Baudin project. He received the award of Officier de la Légion d’Honneur in 2015.

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## Appendix 1 Military Awards

The following Australians serving with the AIF during the First World War were awarded the Légion d'honneur:

- Major Michael Frederick Bruxner DSO, 6<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, chevalier (LG May 18, 1918);
- Lt. Col. Cecil Arthur Callaghan CMG DSO, Australian Field Artillery, chevalier (LG December 15, 1919);
- Major William Joseph Robert Cheeseman MC, 30 BN, chevalier (LG July 13, 1917);
- Lieutenant Robert Gordon Chirnside, HQ 1 Aust. Div, officier (LG March 28, 1916);
- Lt. Col. Sydney Ernest Christian CMG, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, officier (LG February 22, 1916);
- Lt. Col. Montague Christian Corlette DSO, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Engineers, chevalier (LG January 29, 1919);
- Lt. Col. Edwin Thayer Dean DSO, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, chevalier (LG January 29, 1919);
- Captain Richard John Dyer DSO, 1<sup>st</sup> Field Company Engineers, officier (LG February 22, 1916);
- Lt. Col. Charles Hazell Elliott CMG DSO, 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, chevalier (LG August 17, 1918);
- Maj. Gen. John Gellibrand CB DSO, commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Aust Div, *officier* (LG January 29, 1919);
- Maj. Gen. Thomas William Glasgow CB CMG DSO, commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Aust Div, officier (LG January 29, 1919);
- Captain Sydney Charles Herring, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, officier (LG February 22, 1916);
- Major (T/Lt. Col.) Austin Claude Selwyn Holland, 56<sup>th</sup> Battalion, chevalier (LG January 29, 1919);
- Major Robert Edward Jackson, 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, chevalier (LG July 13, 1917);
- Captain Douglas Murray McWhae, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance, officier (LG February 22, 1916);

- Lt. Col. Leslie James Morshead DSO, 33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, chevalier (LG January 29, 1919);
- Maj. Gen. Sir Charles Rosenthal KCB CMG DSO, commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Aust. Div., officier (LG January 29, 1919);
- Lt. Col. Arthur George Salisbury, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, chevalier (LG July 13, 1917);
- Colonel William Walker Russell Watson CB CMG VD, 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, chevalier (LG December 15, 1919);
- Lieutenant Frank Windsor, Machine Gun Corps, chevalier (LG July 13, 1917).

The following non-Australian officers, who served with the AIF, were also decorated:

- Lt. Col. William Livingstone Hatchwell Burgess DSO, NZ Staff Corps, who was on exchange with the Australian Army as an artillery officer when war broke out. He was awarded officier of the Légion d'honneur (LG May 1, 1917). He returned to New Zealand, later becoming Commandant of the New Zealand Military Forces (1931–1937).
- Major Stuart Milligan Anderson DSO, Royal Artillery, was attached to the AIF and became an officier of the Légion d'honneur (LG February 22, 1916).
- Flight Lieutenant Sydney Vincent Sippe, RNAS was born in Lambeth (UK) to Australian parents, both of whom came from Sydney, hence his Christian name. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur<sup>29</sup> for one of the very first long-range bombing missions on November 21, 1914 when he successfully attacked the Zeppelin sheds at Friedrichshafen. He was awarded the DSO in the New Year Honours List of 1915 and the OBE in 1919.

The following senior Australian military officers have received awards in recent years.

- Air Chief Marshal Sir A. G. (Angus) Houston AK AC (Mil) AFC received the award of commandeur on June 21, 2006.

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<sup>29</sup> Awarded on December 4, 1914; Laurent Blondeau-Georges, discussion with the author, March 4, 2021.

- Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC became a commandeur of the Order of the Légion d'honneur on July 21, 2016, having already been awarded chevalier on June 18, 2013.
- General the Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC was promoted to officier on June 30, 2005 for service with INTERFET.
- Vice-Admiral Ray Griggs AO CSC, RAN received the award of officier on June 18, 2013.
- General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC became an officier on July 17, 2011.
- Lt. Gen. David Morrison AO was awarded officier on July 8, 2014.
- Vice-Admiral Tim Barrett AO CSC RAN, officier on April 8, 2017.
- Air Marshal Gavin Neil 'Leo' Davies AO CSC, officier on September 13, 2018.
- Brigadier Mark Smethurst AM DSC, chevalier in 2012 for service with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.
- Vice-Admiral Michael Noonan AO, RAN was awarded the Légion d'honneur (chevalier) in 2018.

## **Appendix 2: La Société d'Entraide des Membres de la Légion d'honneur (SEMLH) : Société des Membres de la Légion d'honneur (SMLH)**

The first section of the SEMLH in Australia was created in Brisbane on January 31, 1980 at a meeting held at the United Services Club, Spring Hill. Those present were Henri Auclair, Charles Freyri, James Mahoney, Ian Palmer and Pierre Perdraut. Charles Freyri was elected President, James Mahoney was elected Vice-President and Pierre Perdraut was elected Secretary/Treasurer. The other committee members were Henri Auclair and Ian Palmer. The Ambassador and Consul General in Sydney were advised accordingly. The President of the parent society, Médecin général inspecteur Louis Armand Petchot-Bacque, advised on February 22, 1980 that the Paris Conseil d'administration had recognised the Australian Section and ratified the election of its president. Advertisements were placed, asking for new members.

The new section held its next general meeting on March 1, 1981 at Kallangur, Queensland; no change in the committee occurred. It was suggested that légionnaires wishing to become members should contact the President or the Secretary. Helmut Loofs-Wissowa, having been awarded the croix de chevalier on March 26, 1982 and living in Canberra, was approached to become a member of the Brisbane Section, which he did on June 21, 1982.

The second Section to be set up was that in New South Wales, including the ACT, which was formed on December 4, 1985. This took place in the offices of the TOTAL group of companies at a luncheon hosted by Phillip de Boos-Smith, the managing director. The inauguration was attended by Charles Freyri and Pierre Perdraut from Brisbane; the local NSW attendees were: Phillip de Boos-Smith, F. Chamberlain, Cam. Dezarnaulds, George Everard, Paul Fischer, George Lean, Joe Manrique, Marcel Rista, John Stanbury and Maurice Timbs. Phillip de Boos-Smith was elected President, Maurice Timbs became Vice-President and Marcel Rista Secretary/Treasurer.

The third section to be established was that of Melbourne on October 10, 1986. The President was Sir Rupert Clarke, the Vice-President, Jacques Vauzelle, and the Secretary/Treasurer, S. Baillieu Myer.

Members of the three committees comprising Section Australie met in the rooms of TOTAL Holdings (Australia) on March 20, 1987. The French Ambassador, Monsieur Follin, was present, as were Lt. Col. Freyri (President of Section Australie and the Queensland Committee), Pierre Perdraut (Federal Secretary/Treasurer), Phillip de Boos-Smith (President, NSW Committee), Sir Rupert Clarke (President, Victoria Committee), Pierre Alla (Secretary/Treasurer, NSW Committee) and ten other members. Phillip de Boos-Smith announced that he would leave Australia in April 1987 to take up the position of managing director of TOTAL (Italy). A new committee was elected with Maurice Timbs as President and Marcel Rista as Vice-President and Secretary/Treasurer.

In January 1990, Pierre Perdraut noted the setting up of a Committee in Canberra at the suggestion of Charles Freyri. It was thought that Canberra was the most favourable and accessible place for future meetings. The foundation President was Maurice Campana, the Vice-president, Helmut

Loofs-Wissowa, and the Secretary, Mme Marina Simakoff. Following Campana's return to France where he died on April 13, 1993, Loofs-Wissowa became President in Canberra.

In May 1990, the first of what became a prominent feature of the Sydney scene, the 'déjeuners de solidarité' took place at the American National Club, when sixteen members of the SEMLH and the Association National des Membres de l'Ordre National du Mérite (ANMONM) met under the presidency of Maurice Timbs. At the annual general meeting of the Sydney Committee held on October 15, 1996, only four members were present with five apologies. This, it will be remembered, was during the height of the anti-French feeling caused by the nuclear testing in the Pacific at Mururoa and Fangataufa.

Other committees have held similar 'solidarité' functions. Brisbane continues to have a lunch once yearly. In 2005, Baillieu Myer instituted 'déjeuners for décorés' at the Melbourne Club once yearly. These continued under the auspices of Dacre Smyth but ceased after his death in 2008. Rex Lipman held dinners once yearly at the Army, Navy and Air Force Club in Adelaide, which ceased with his death in 2015. The luncheons are attended by members of the SMLH, ANMONM, anciens combattants and occasionally by holders of other French Orders. From 2012 onward, speeches given by occasional speakers have addressed various contemporary issues.

In Sydney, William Land organised a series of 'dîners de solidarité', instituted and held at the Australian Club. The first was held in 2005, and the orator on this occasion was Mr Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG of the High Court of Australia, who spoke on 'France, Science and the Human Genome'. Each year an eminent speaker is engaged and the talk is now titled the 'George Everard Memorial Oration' in honour of the late George Everard, a former President of the Australian Section of both the SMLH and ANMONM.

The *Bulletin d'Information de la Section Australie* of the SMLH was instituted by George Everard in 2003. A second issue saw light in 2004, there was no issue in 2005, the following one being in 2006. The ANMONM had produced one *Bulletin d'Information* in 2006. However, it became obvious that rationalisation was called for and in 2007, a grouped *Bulletin d'Information*, embracing both National Orders, appeared for the first time.

This has been produced annually ever since under the editorship of William Land. In it, the texts of various talks including the Everard Orations are reproduced, constituting a valuable addition to Franco-Australian literature.

One of the biggest problems facing the SMLH in Australia is lack of numbers. The total membership has varied from thirty-five to fifty-five; currently (2021) it is forty-six. Of these, fourteen are women and there are eight French people, one Dutchman and the remainder are Australian. There is also a maldistribution—Sydney has twenty-six members, Melbourne six, Adelaide seven, Brisbane three and Canberra two, with Perth and Hobart one member each. The result is that there are only four committees—Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. As is the case in France, not all newly decorated people join the SMLH. The award of the *Légion d'honneur* to approximately 480 ex-servicemen in Australia resulted in only five new members of Section Australie, members of which tend to be older than members of the ANMONM.

Relations with the Paris headquarters of the SMLH are very warm. This close relationship has resulted in several visits of important figures from Paris. As part of its charitable activities, Section Australie has also taken part in several projects initiated by the Paris headquarters, notably *Honneur en action*. This was promoted by the President of the SMLH, General Hervé Gobilliard, and is a means of offering to those honoured with the Legion of Honour the means to demonstrate their involvement with, and support of, those who need it most. A label (*Honneur en action*), which indicates the imprimatur of the SMLH, can be given to certain projects following the decision of a selection committee. Such a label was awarded in 2017, for the creation of the *École Charles Bean*, a Franco-Australian school at Pozières. Apart from the moral support of the SMLH, this also permits the recipient organisation to use the SMLH logo, giving the project much prestige in the eyes of French and other companies. Support was also given by Section Australie to the visit of children from the *Collège Sainte-Marie* of Déville-lès-Rouen to Sydney and Melbourne, as part of a school exchange with Tarneit College, Tarneit (Victoria).

In 2014, Professor Ross Steele AM, President of Section Australie of the SMLH, was awarded the *Médaille du Président de la Société des Membres de la Légion d'Honneur* for his devotion to the cause of Franco-Australian relations over forty-five years. The medal has been awarded less than sixty

times in the 100-year history of the SMLH, and this was the first time it had been awarded to an Australian.

Close relations have been forged between Section Australie and other Sections of the SMLH, especially with the Section de la Somme and its President, Bernard Lepers, who was the maire of Belloy-sur-Somme. In 2017, William Land, as President of Section Australie, visited Pozières, Belloy-sur-Somme and other places on the Western Front. Both Sections provide the other with letters for publication in their respective magazines. In March 2017, William Land (President of Section Australie) and Mary Macken (Hon. Secretary/Treasurer) were invited to Nouméa by Lt Col Yann Carpentier, President, Section Nouvelle Calédonie, to attend the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of the Nouméa Section. The Australian delegation was the only 'foreign' group present.

The various activities of the Australian sections of the SMLH, both local and international, have contributed to strengthening the links between France and Australia, created through the bestowing of the Légion d'honneur to Australians and non-Australians domiciled in Australia.