

Uncovering the story of Rose & Louis de Freycinet: Inseparable companions in troubled times

Part 2

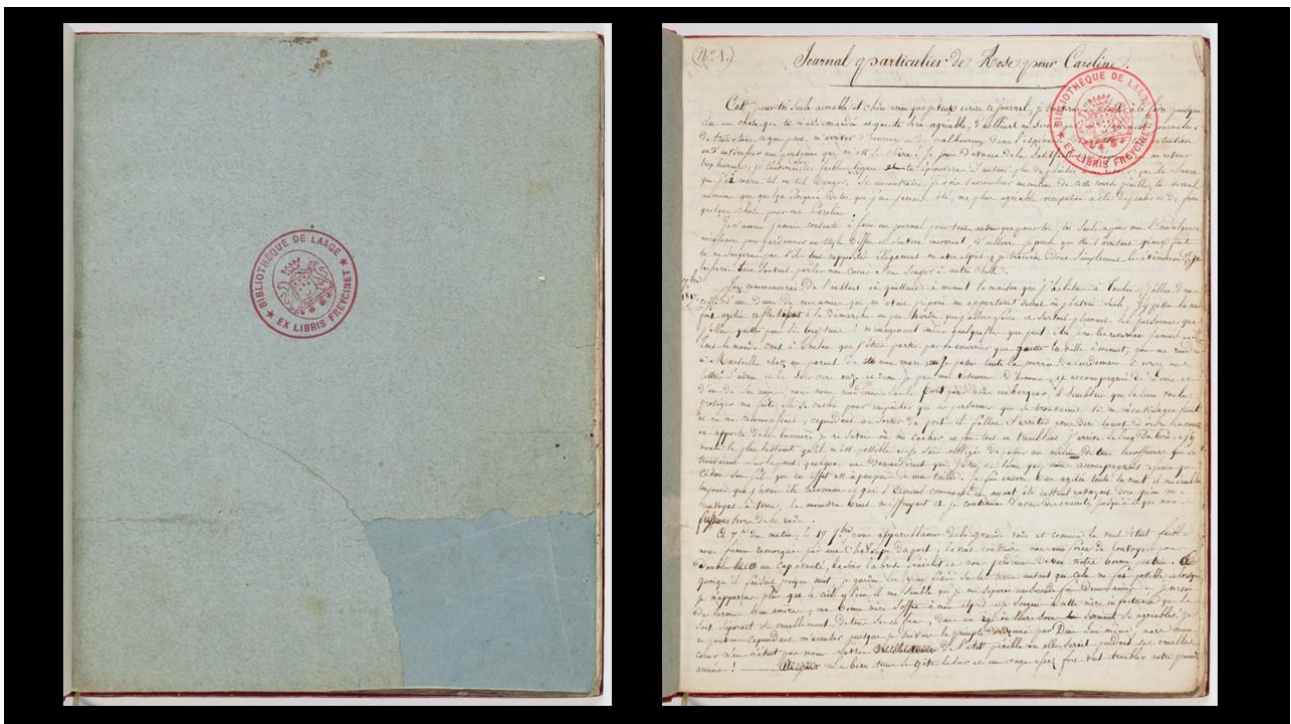
Meredith Lawn
20 May 2023



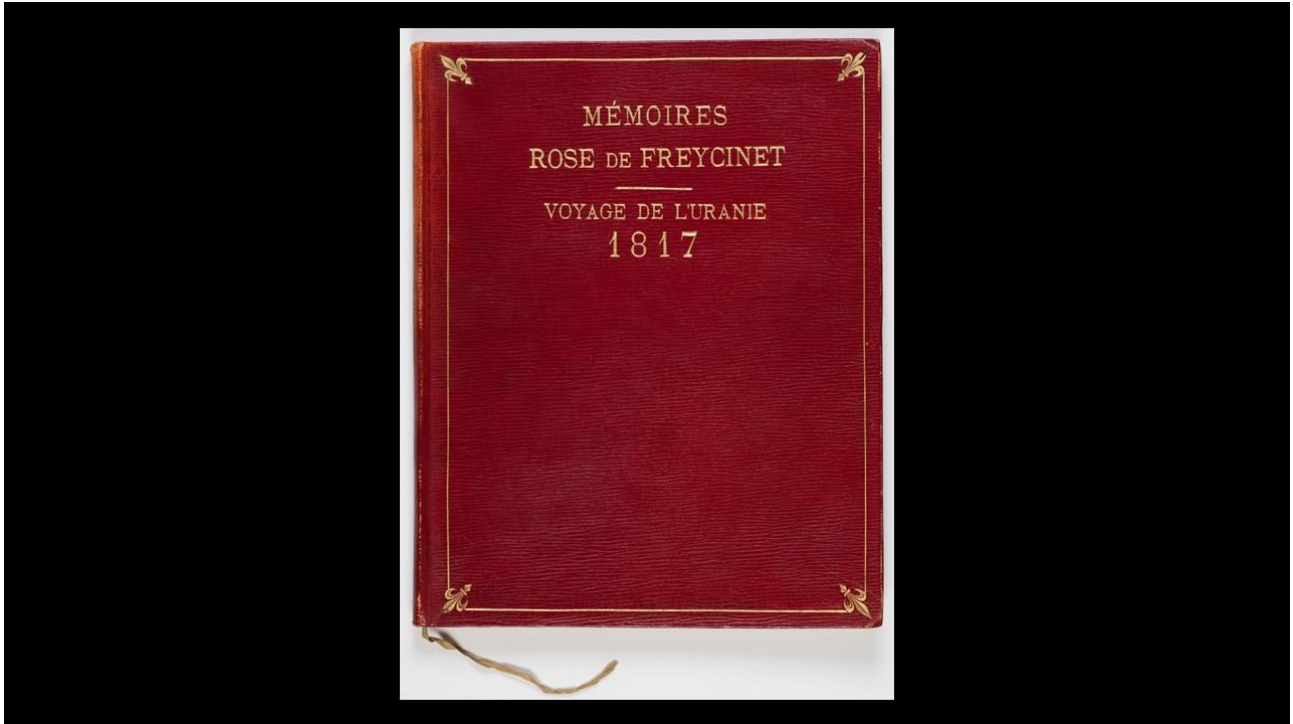
I'm an archivist at the State Library of NSW. I have been cataloguing original manuscripts at the Library for almost 30 years, with a particular interest in music and French collections.

I'm going to continue the story with more of a focus on the Freycinet family and Louis de Freycinet in particular, from an archivist's perspective.

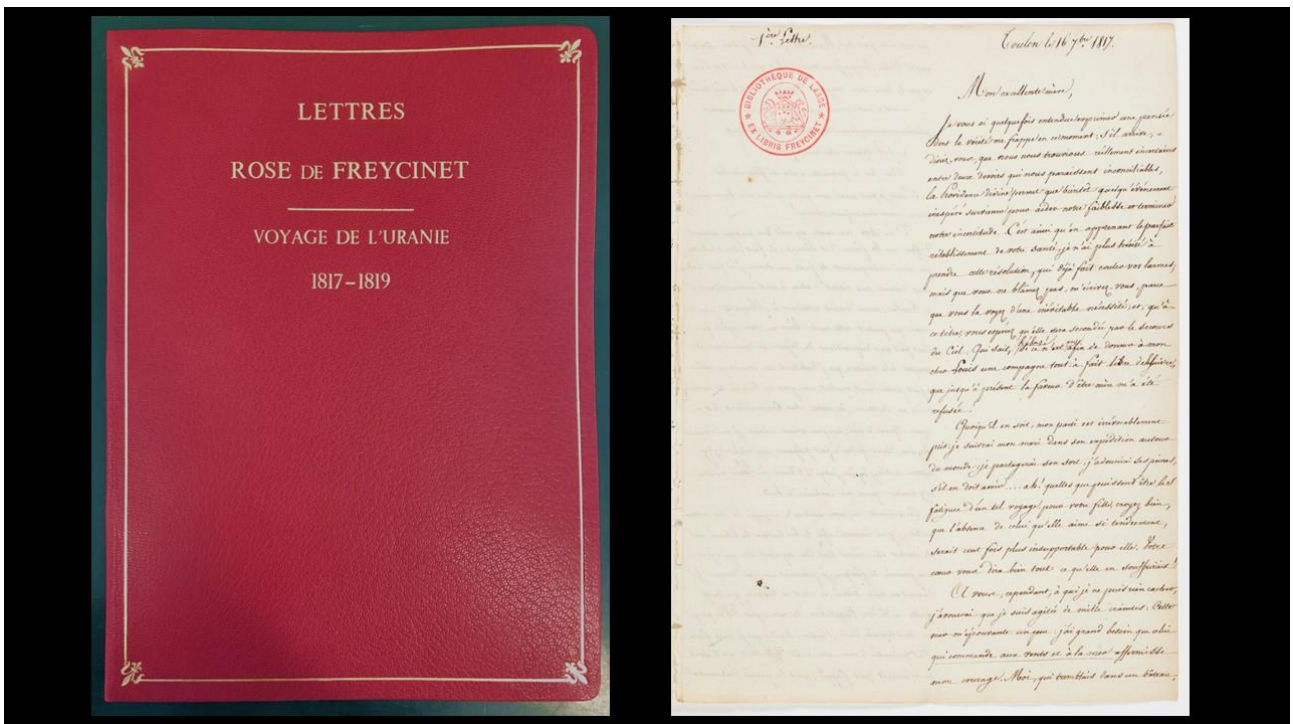
You've heard from Suzanne that Rose de Freycinet was the first woman to leave a record of her voyage around the world. This record was in the form of a journal and letters to her mother. These precious documents were purchased by the State Library of NSW in 2013 & 2014 when they were offered for sale by Hordern House Rare Books in Sydney.



This is the first page of Rose's journal, in her own hand. It was originally written in 3 notebooks with flimsy blue/grey paper wrappers. It is remarkable that the notebooks are in such good condition, considering that they accompanied Rose on her voyage around the world and even survived a shipwreck. On her return to France in 1820, Rose gave the journal to her close friend Caroline de Nanteuil, for whom it was written. It remained in the Nanteuil family until it was given by Caroline's granddaughter to the Freycinet family in 1913. At some stage, the three notebooks were bound together to form a single volume with a red leather cover embossed in gold:

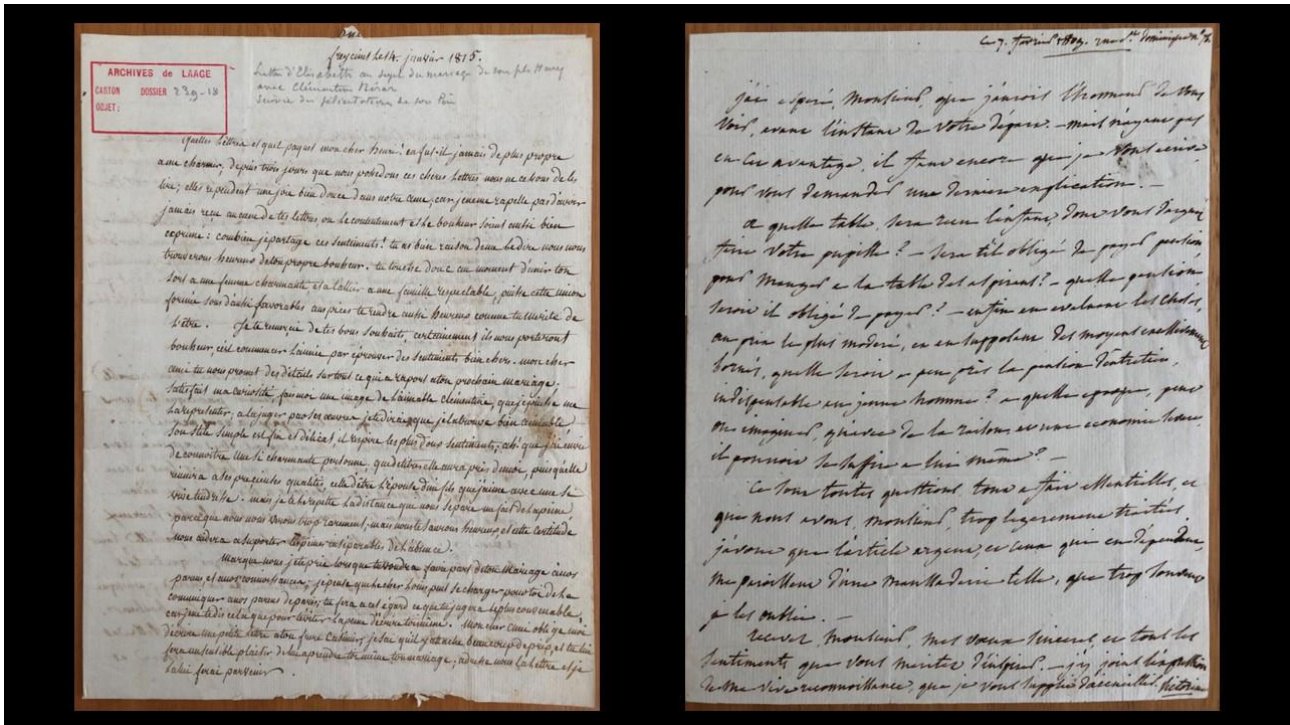


Rose's second account of the voyage is through a series of 15 letters written to her mother, Jeanne Pinon, during the voyage:

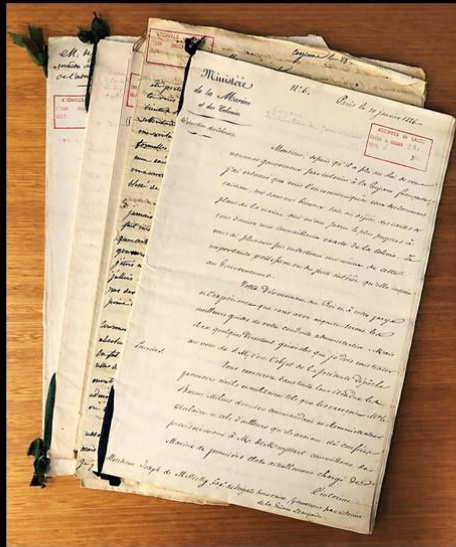


The original letters have not been located, but what we do have are these transcriptions of the original letters made by Louis de Freycinet with the help of a copyist. The transcribed letters were bound by the Library to match the journal.

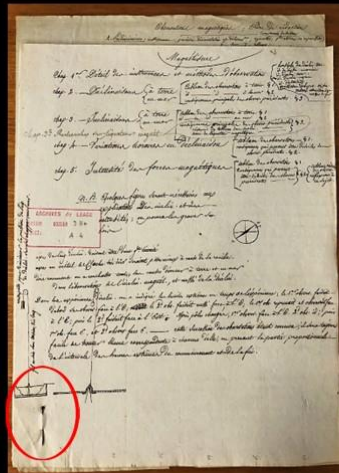
Following on from this significant acquisition, the Library purchased a substantial portion of the Freycinet Family Archive when it came up for sale through Hordern House in March 2019 and another portion from Maggs Bros in London in late 2020. I was assigned to catalogue both collections. Altogether, there were about 350 manuscripts from the early 19th century, some in elegant, legible handwriting and others in an almost indecipherable scrawl, but all in French.



Cataloguing the documents over many weeks, I was transported to a different time and place. I was able to touch the very paper that both the writer and the recipient had held in their hands 200 years before me. Reading the letters sent between family members provided a personal commentary on events as they happened and revealed the writer's character as well as their thoughts and feelings.



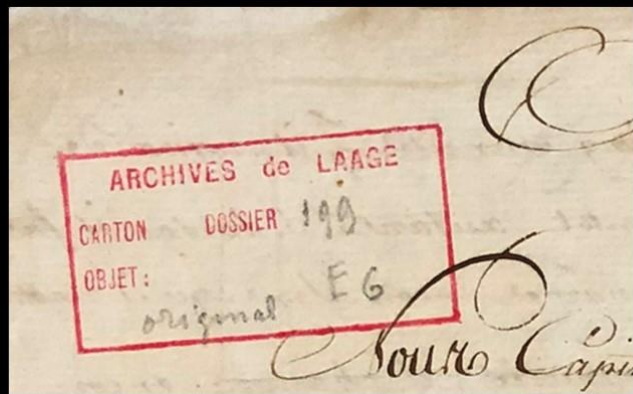
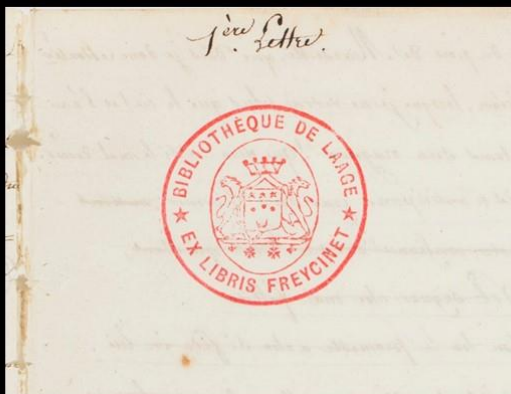
Original ribbons



Original hand-made pin

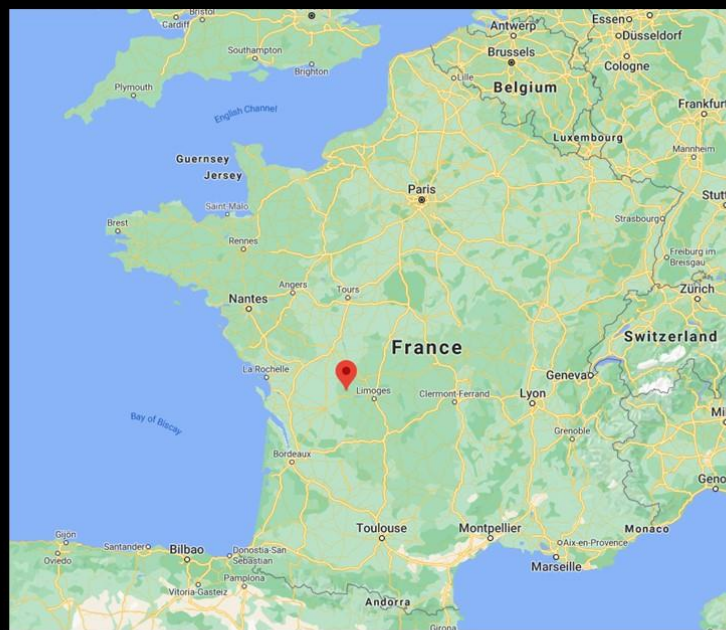


The documents were in remarkably good condition, some with original silk ribbons and even a few handmade pins with no signs of rust. The Freycinet family had preserved the papers on one of their properties, the Château de Laage.



You may have noticed the red stamp on Rose's journal and letters, saying that they were from the Bibliothèque de Laage. In the collections I was working on, many documents were stamped 'Archives de Laage'. The archive was maintained by the descendants of Louis' brother, Henri de Freycinet. Henri had two sons, Louis-René and Charles who married two sisters (on the same day). The Château de Laage was the seat of the women's father, the Comte de la Boissière.

The Château is located in South-Western France near Limoges, shown by the red marker on the map:



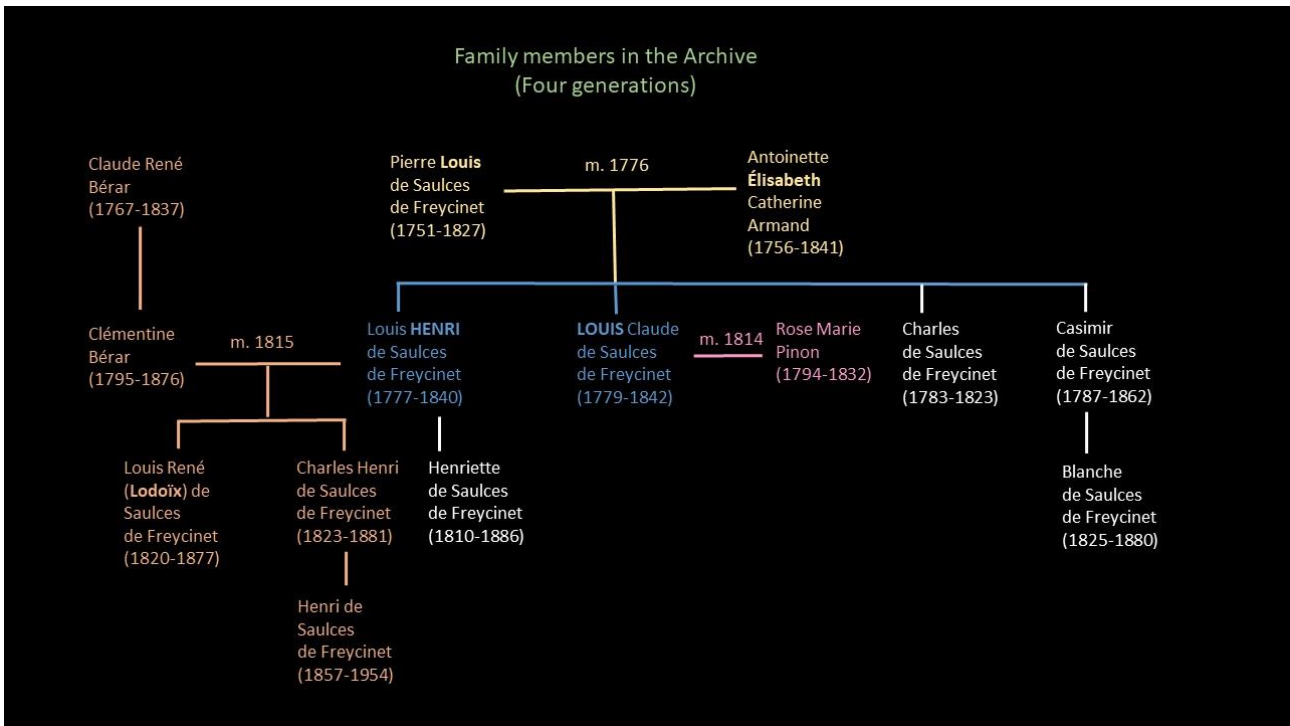
Location of the Archive at Château de Laage

When I was hunting around on the internet for the Château de Laage, I was pleased to find this image of the Château on a postcard dealer's website so that I could visualise where the archive used to be kept:

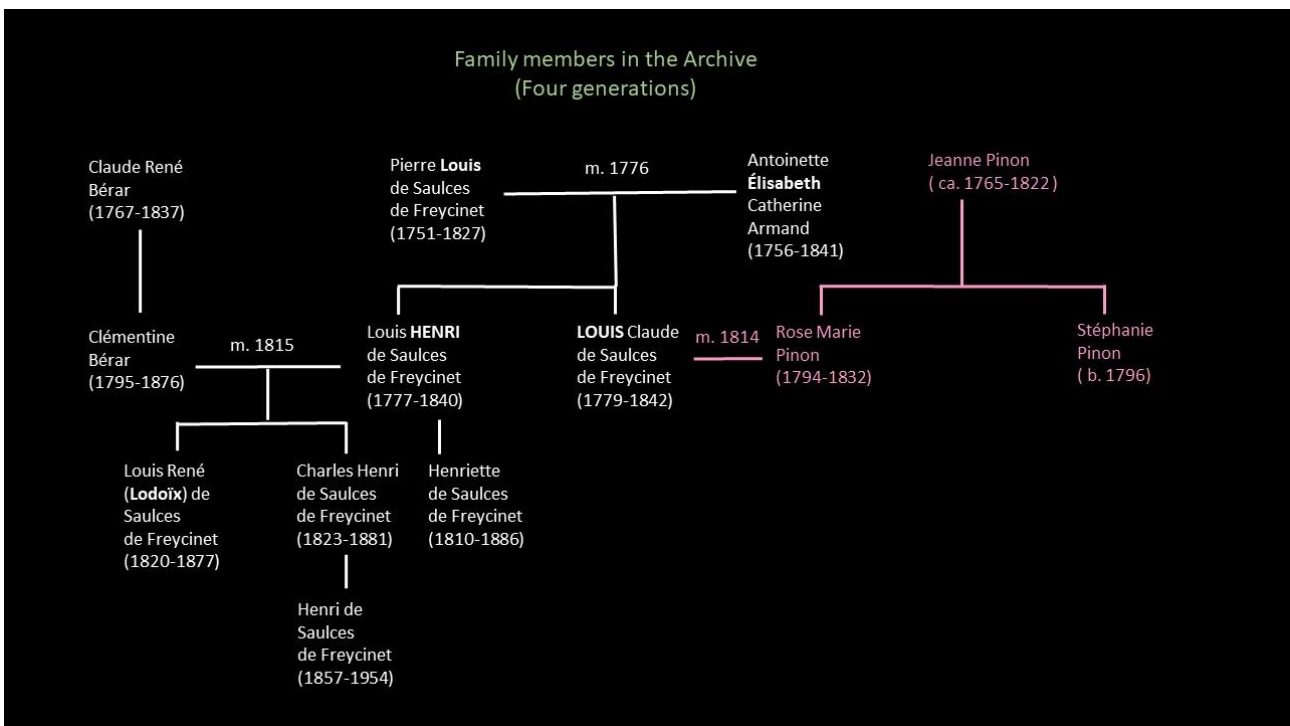


The property remained in the family until 1991 when it was sold to an English couple. By then, the Freycinet archives had been gradually dispersed and sold by the family, from the 1960s to the 80s, mostly to private collectors.

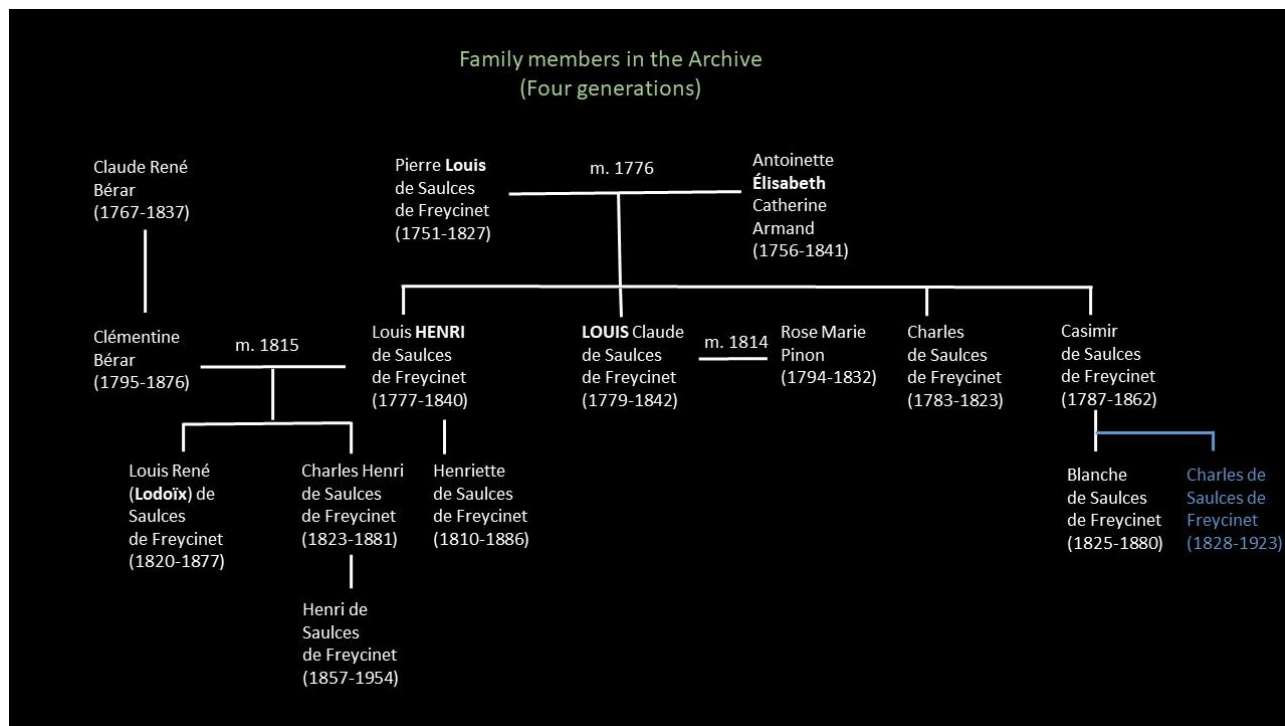
In order to make sense of the collection, I created this diagram of the family members whose papers are found in the collection and the connections between them:



It is not a complete family tree but my diagram shows that four generations are represented in this archive. The collection centres around the two brothers, Louis Henri and Louis Claude, known as Henri and Louis respectively. Above them we have their parents, Pierre Louis and Élisabeth. To the left is Henri's wife Clémentine, as well as her father, their two sons and a grandson. Henri also had a daughter Henriette born to another woman 5 years before he married Clémentine. To the right is Louis' wife Rose. The couple had no children. Rose's mother Jeanne Pinon and her sister Stéphanie make an appearance in the collection too:



In France, the name Freycinet is perhaps better known today in connection with Casimir's son, Charles, who was four times Prime Minister of France. He is not found in the collection but this is where he fits into the family:



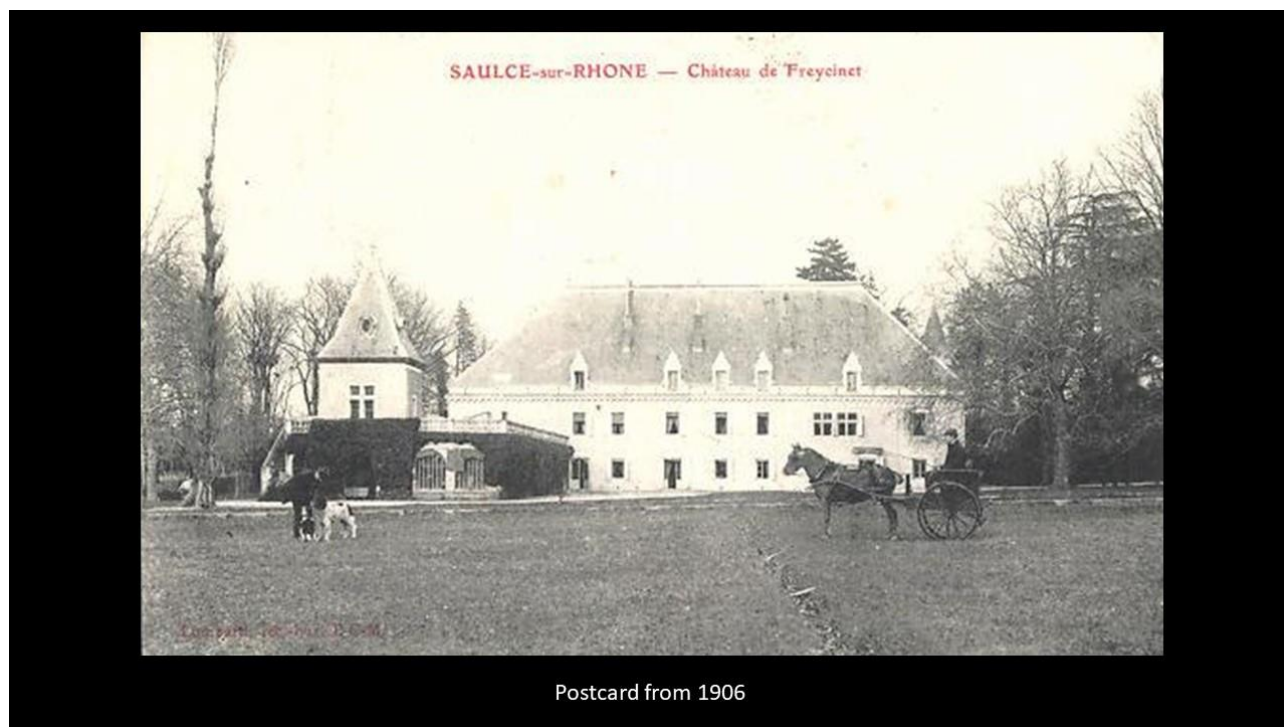
The Freycinet family were a traditionally Protestant family. According to scholar Federico Motta, who translated Rose's journal into Italian, the family became followers of John Calvin sometime in the 16th century when he passed through their region in the southeast of France.

[Motta, Federico (ed.) *Rose de Freycinet: Una viaggiatrice clandestina a bordo dell'Uranie negli anni 1817-20*, Edizione il Frangente, Verona, 2017, p.304]

However, Louis de Freycinet was baptised a Catholic due to the politics of the times. When he was born in 1779, Protestantism was still proscribed (as it had been since 1685). Later generations of the family identified as Protestant, including the politician Charles de Freycinet.

The two brothers Henri and Louis were born only twenty months apart, in 1777 and 1779, at the Château de Freycinet, not to be confused with the Château de Laage where the archive was later kept. The Château de Freycinet is situated near the small village of Saulces-sur-Rhône near Montélimar in the southeast of France.

Once again, I found this image on a postcard dealer's website:



Under their father's supervision, Henri and Louis were privately tutored and both showed an early enthusiasm for the natural sciences. In 1794, when the boys were sixteen and fourteen respectively, their father decided to enrol them in the French Navy at Toulon. As they rose through the ranks, they were virtually inseparable, serving on the same ships or expeditions for the next 10 years.

Later in life, Louis gave a very negative description of his early years in the Navy in a letter to his cousin Jenny:

"Put into the navy while very young without any consultation as to my wishes or preferences, my first four years in navigation were for me an even greater torture because the sea greatly disagreed with me and ever since I have had a tendency to suffer from the motion of large waves; how often did my tears flow during this part of my life! But I was accustomed to obey and swallowed these adversities in silence."

[Letter from Louis de Freycinet to Jenny de Montlovier, 27 September 1832. Ref. MS FB 49/6, State Library of Victoria. Translated by Gerard Hayes]

In 1800, after only 6 years in the Navy, Henri and Louis were appointed to join Nicolas Baudin's voyage of scientific discovery to the southern oceans. Henri, now almost 23, served on the *Géographe*, directly under Baudin, while Louis, aged 21, was appointed to Baudin's second vessel, the *Naturaliste*, under Emmanuel Hamelin.



The *Géographe* and *Naturaliste* at Kupang, Timor
<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+15868>

During the voyage, they explored the western and southern coasts of Australia, the east coast of Tasmania (hence the Freycinet Peninsula) and visited Sydney. While in Sydney, Baudin decided to send the *Naturaliste* back to France, and appointed Louis commander of a newly acquired schooner the *Casuarina*. The brothers returned to France on the *Géographe* in 1804, but without Baudin, who had died in Mauritius on the homeward journey.



Louis de Freycinet, ca. 1804-1810
Engraved portrait, purchased 2018 (P2/577)

This is the only published portrait of Louis de Freycinet, purchased by the State Library of NSW in 2018. It is dated after his return from the Baudin voyage, so Louis would have been in his mid to late twenties.

With Baudin dead, the writing of the official narrative of the voyage was given to the expedition's naturalist François Péron. The first volume and accompanying atlas were published in 1807. However, when Péron died in 1810, Louis was appointed to complete the account and atlas.



The 'Freycinet Map', 1811
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230971556>

The 'Freycinet map', published by Louis in 1811 in Part 2 of the Atlas, was the most complete representation of Australia to that date. It showed for the first time the continent's true shape, with the southern coast properly delineated and Tasmania correctly represented as a separate island. This achievement probably helped to earn Louis the command of his own expedition in 1817.

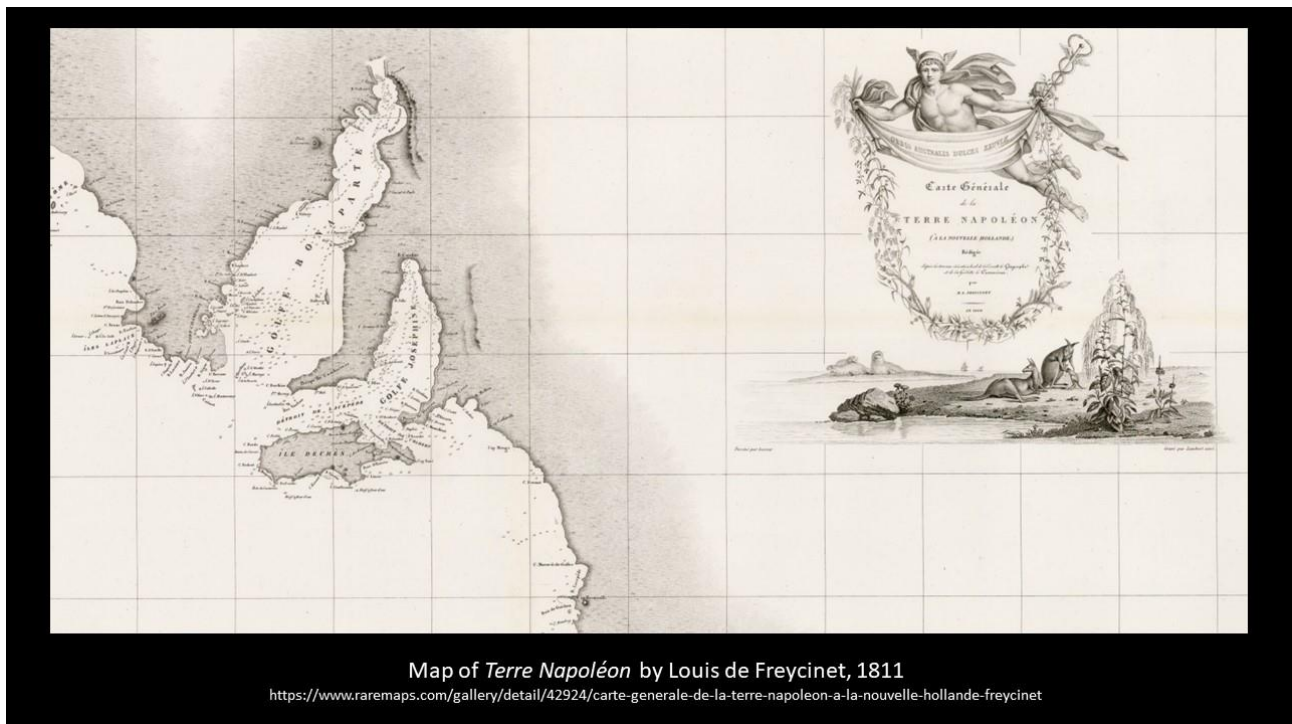


The Uranie at anchor, Rawak Island, Papua
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uranie_mouillage_Rawak.jpg

We have heard from Suzanne about Louis and Rose's adventures on the *Uranie*, so I'll skip now to their return from the voyage in 1820.

Soon after their arrival back in Paris, Louis was required to face a court martial for having lost his vessel in the Falklands. He was unanimously acquitted with his honour intact. Interestingly, Rose's presence on board his ship was not even mentioned.

No doubt Louis was eager to work on compiling the official account of the *Uranie* voyage for publication, but first he was required to issue a revised and corrected edition of the Baudin voyage, with an accompanying atlas, in 1824. Controversy had erupted over the first edition, because it robbed Matthew Flinders of the claim to be the first to complete the map of Australia owing to Flinders' long captivity by the French on Mauritius. Moreover, Freycinet's map had included French names for places that had already been named by Flinders along the south coast.



Spencer and St Vincent Gulfs had been called Golfe Bonaparte and Golfe Joséphine, and South Australia had been called Terre Napoléon, so in Louis' revised edition these were replaced with the names given by Flinders.

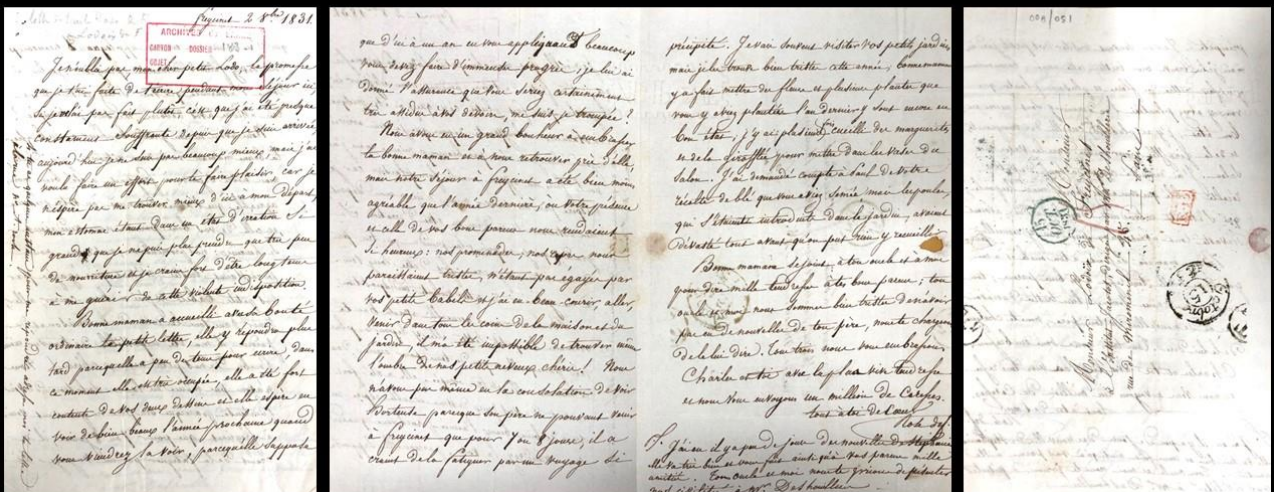
With that out of the way, Louis turned his attention to the writing and publication of the official narrative of the *Uranie* voyage. His ambitious, multi-volume plan for the work was outlined in the first volume. It became a long, troublesome undertaking which would occupy the last 18 years of his life.

Le Voyage autour du Monde par les Corvettes *l'Uranie* et *la Physicienne*, se compose des divisions suivantes :

- 1.° HISTOIRE DU VOYAGE, 2 vol. *in-4.°* et Atlas de 112 Planches *in-folio* ;
- 2.° RECHERCHES SUR LES LANGUES, 1 vol. *in-4.°* ;
- 3.° ZOOLOGIE, 1 vol. *in-4.°* et Atlas de 96 Planches *in-folio* ;
- 4.° BOTANIQUE, 1 vol. *in-4.°* et Atlas de 120 Planches *in-folio* ;
- 5.° OBSERVATIONS DU PENDULE, 1 demi-vol. *in-4.°* ;
- 6.° OBSERVATIONS MAGNÉTIQUES, 1 demi-vol. *in-4.°* ;
- 7.° MÉTÉOROLOGIE, 1 vol. *in-4.°* ;
- 8.° HYDROGRAPHIE, 1 vol. *in-4.°* et Atlas de 22 Planches grand *in-folio*.

Plan for the official voyage account

While Louis was working on his voyage account, Rose must have led a lonely existence in their small apartment in Paris. Her mother had died just sixteen months after her return from the voyage; her sister Stéphanie was still working as a governess in Mauritius, Henri and Clémentine had been posted to far-flung French colonies and Louis' parents were in the south of France. Then something unexpected happened in 1827. The childless Rose was entrusted to look after Henri and Clémentine's oldest son, Louis-René aged seven, a responsibility Rose took extremely seriously and which gave her great pleasure. She looked after him for almost three years, until Henri and Clémentine returned from the colonies and took him back into their care. After this, Rose sank into depression combined with poor health.



Letter from Rose to her nephew Louis René (Lodoïx) de Freycinet, sent from Château de Freycinet, 2 October 1831

This is the last letter we have from Rose. She sent it to her nephew Louis-René (nicknamed Lodoïx), while she and Louis were staying at the Château de Freycinet in October 1831. Rose wrote that she was suffering from a terrible stomach complaint and could hardly eat. She also told Lodoïx that their visit to Freycinet was not as happy as the year before when he and his little brother and their parents had been there with them. Everything now seemed sad to Rose compared to memories of that happier time. The letter reveals the great affection and tenderness Rose had for her nephew, but also her melancholic state of mind.

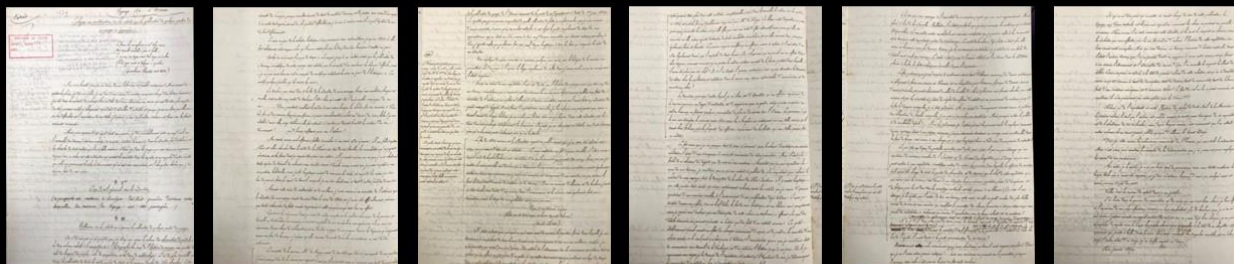


The cholera epidemic in Paris, 1832
<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/cholera/images/a028965.jpg>

Tragedy then struck in 1832, when Paris was in the grip of a deadly cholera epidemic. 20,000 Parisians died, mostly within one or two days of the symptoms appearing. Louis contracted the disease, but Rose nursed her husband back to health before sadly succumbing to it herself on 7 May 1832 at the age of only 37. Louis never got over his loss in the ten years he would live after her death.

The document which gave me the greatest insight into Louis' thoughts and feelings was this six-page manuscript that Louis intended to be published as an Epilogue to his Voyage account:

Louis de Freycinet's proposed Epilogue, 1839



The subtitle is “Considerations on the delays experienced in the publication of certain parts of this voyage”. In these heartfelt pages, Louis recorded the hardships he endured in completing the work and the lack of support from the French authorities.

Je touchois pour ainsi dire à la fin de la rédaction de mon ouvrage, lorsqu'une maladie, longue et cruelle, vint mettre aux portes du tombeau l'être cher qui avait été l'inséparable compagne de ma vie. . . . Dieu, pourtant, semblait la rendre à mes vœux, lorsque le choléra fit son invasion à Paris. Je fus un des premiers frappés; ma femme, à peine convalescente, voulut me donner des soins; hélas! je me rétablis! mais elle, ange tutélaire, elle fut atteinte à son tour, et devint bientôt la victime de son dévouement! peu d'heures suffirent pour me l'enlever!!

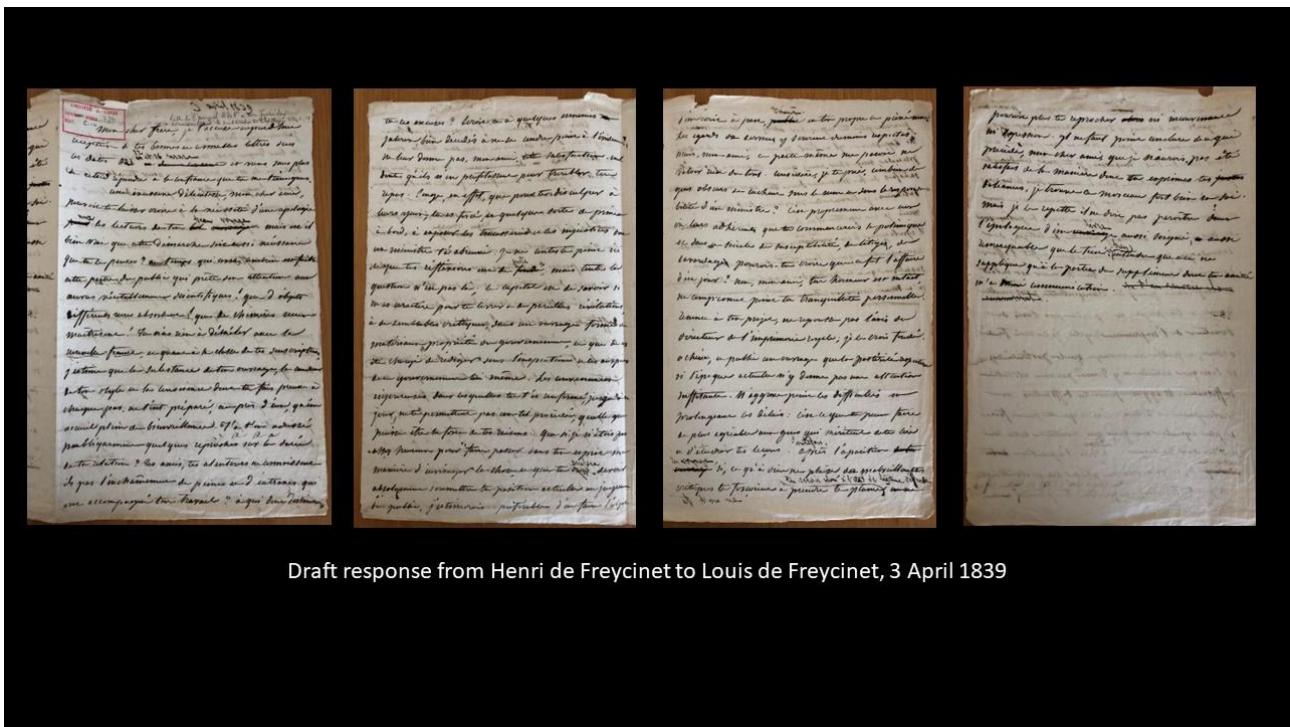
Extract concerning Rose from Louis de Freycinet's proposed Epilogue, 1839

Without naming her, Louis gave a touching description of Rose's death within this Epilogue. He referred to her as “the inseparable companion of my life” and his “guardian angel”. He went on to say that just a month after Rose's death, the Minister of the Navy informed him that all payment of expenses relating to the publication of the voyage would cease from 1 June 1832. At the end of that year, Louis read in the *Monitor* newspaper that he had been officially retired from the Navy

before he was informed of it himself. Thus, his maritime career came to an abrupt end. It meant that Louis only attained the rank of Captain rather than Rear-Admiral like his brother Henri.

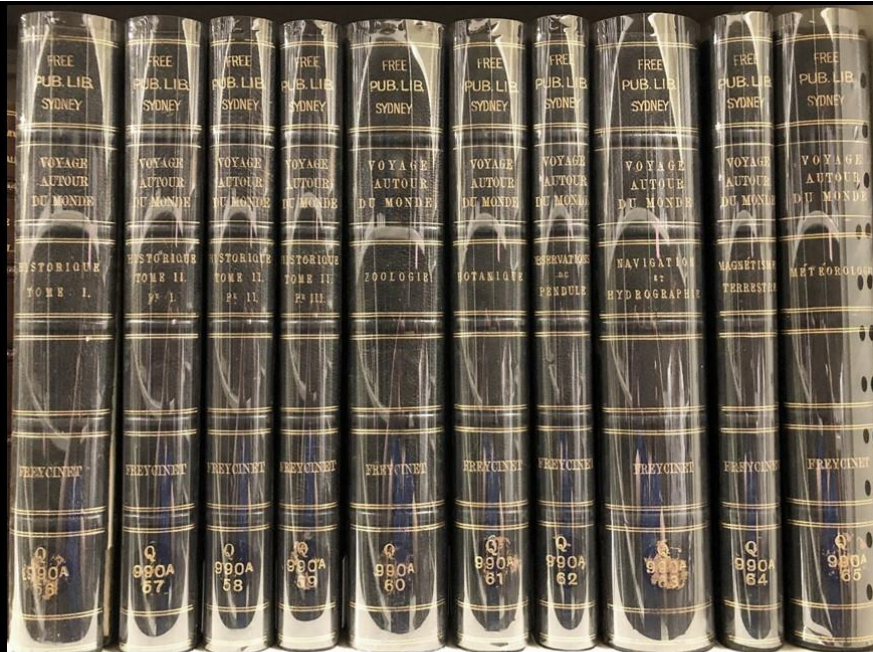
Despite this lack of official support, Louis decided to press on to complete the description of the colony of Port Jackson. His problem was that the details he had gathered on his voyage were by now terribly out of date and he felt the need to gather the most recent information available. Louis' expanded review of the colony filled almost the entire last volume of the voyage account and took him seven years to finish.

In January 1839, nearly two decades after the expedition's return, Louis sent his draft Epilogue to Henri. In this response from Henri to Louis, the wise older brother recognised that Louis' open attacks on the Ministry would be counterproductive and urgently advised his brother not to publish it, saying "Publish a book that posterity will respect even if our current era doesn't pay it the attention it deserves".



Draft response from Henri de Freycinet to Louis de Freycinet, 3 April 1839

The collection includes Louis' reply to Henri accepting his brother's advice and the Epilogue was never published. I can only hope that the process of writing it had been therapeutic for poor Louis. Had the epilogue been published, it would have contained Louis' tribute to Rose as the inseparable companion of his life, providing the only hint of her presence on the voyage in the official narrative.



Voyage autour du monde by Louis de Freycinet et al., 1824-1844

So here, sitting on a shelf in the State Library's Rare Books stack in clear protective jackets, is the result of Louis' blood, sweat and tears. Louis died of heart failure in 1842 at the age of 63, so the final two volumes, *Terrestrial Magnetism* and *Meteorology*, were completed posthumously by Louis' nephew Lodoix and the husband of his niece Henriette and published in 1842 and 1844. The planned, but never completed, study of the language of the Marianas, remains unpublished.

This description of Louis' character, published a year after his death, certainly rings true based on a study of his papers:

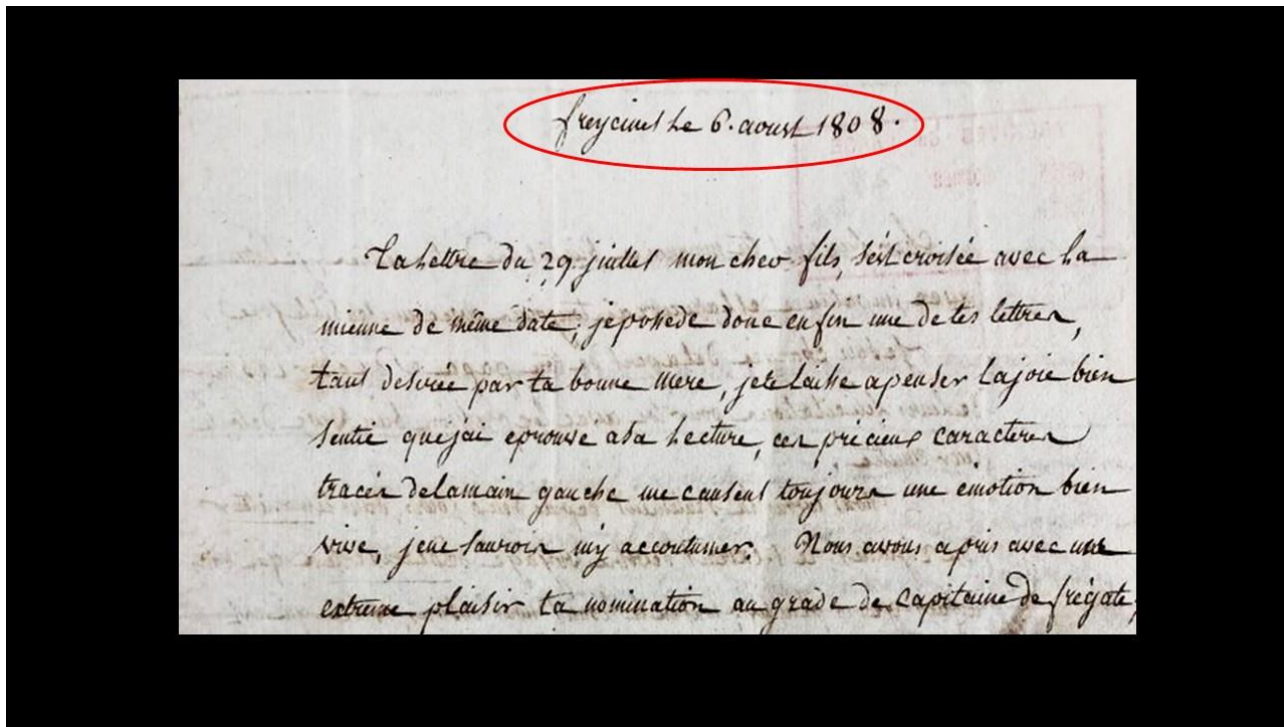
D'un caractère grave, réservé, et même un peu sévère, quoique naturellement bienveillant, Louis de Freycinet, excellent marin et savant distingué, était extrêmement laborieux.

M. De la Roquette, Bulletin of the Société de géographie, 1843, Vol. 40, p. 532

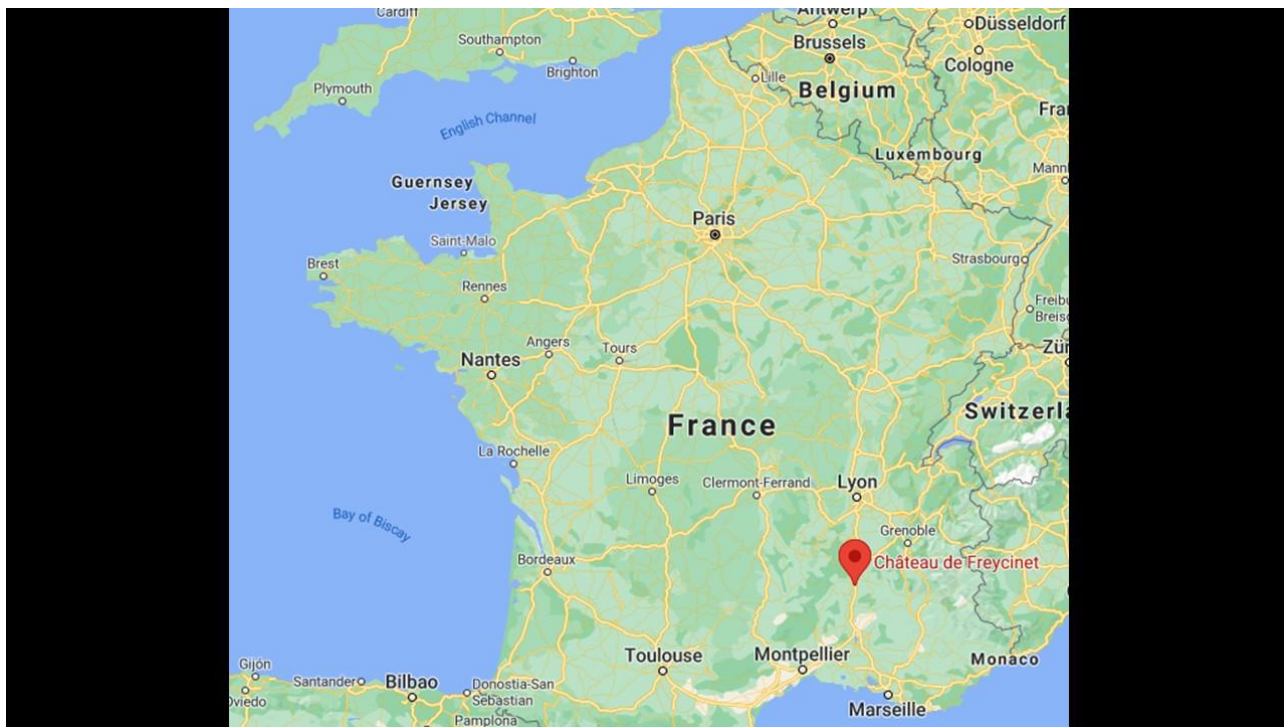
Of a character serious, reserved, and even a little severe, although naturally benevolent, Louis de Freycinet, excellent sailor and distinguished scientist, was extremely hardworking.

You could say that he embodied the Protestant work ethic!

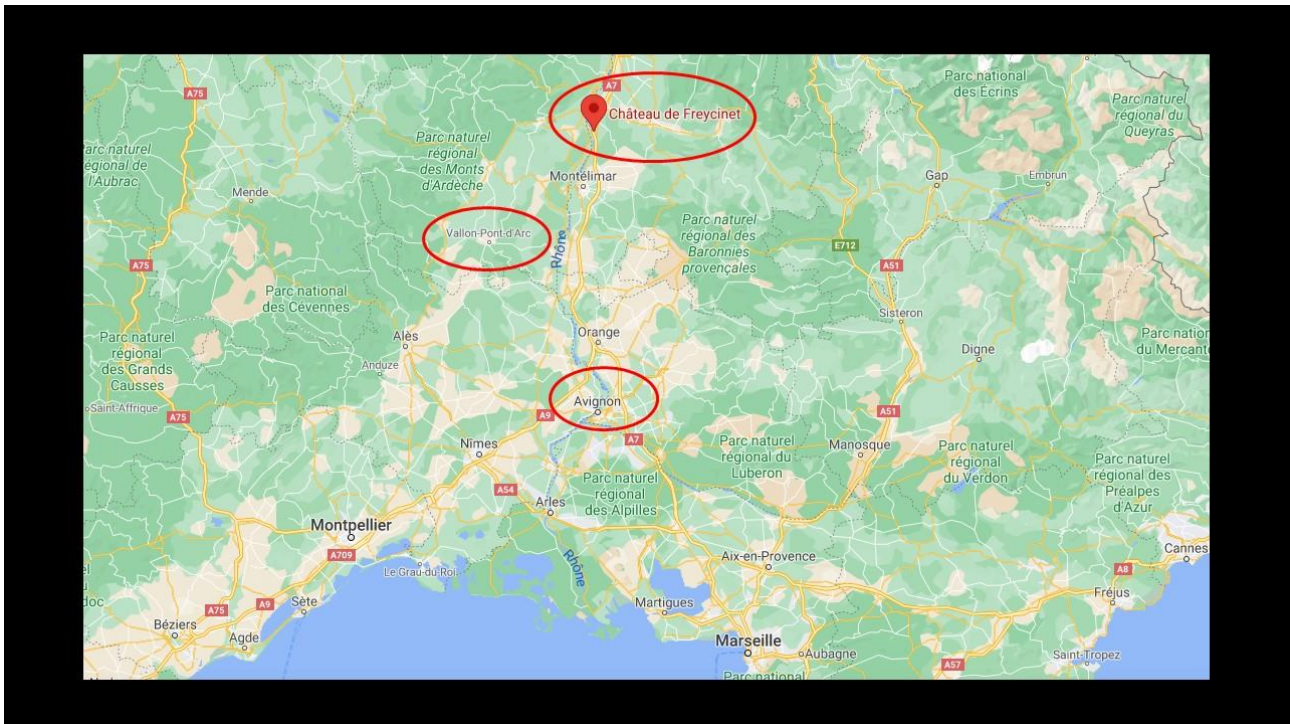
Well before being assigned to work on the Freycinet family archives, I had already booked a trip to Provence and the Ardèche region in the South of France for September 2019. While working on the Freycinet collection, I saw letters written by Louis and Henri's parents sent from 'Freycinet', referring to the family Château at Freycinet. It was the hub where Élisabeth the mother, as anchor of the family, received and wrote all her letters, and the place to which the family kept returning throughout their lives.



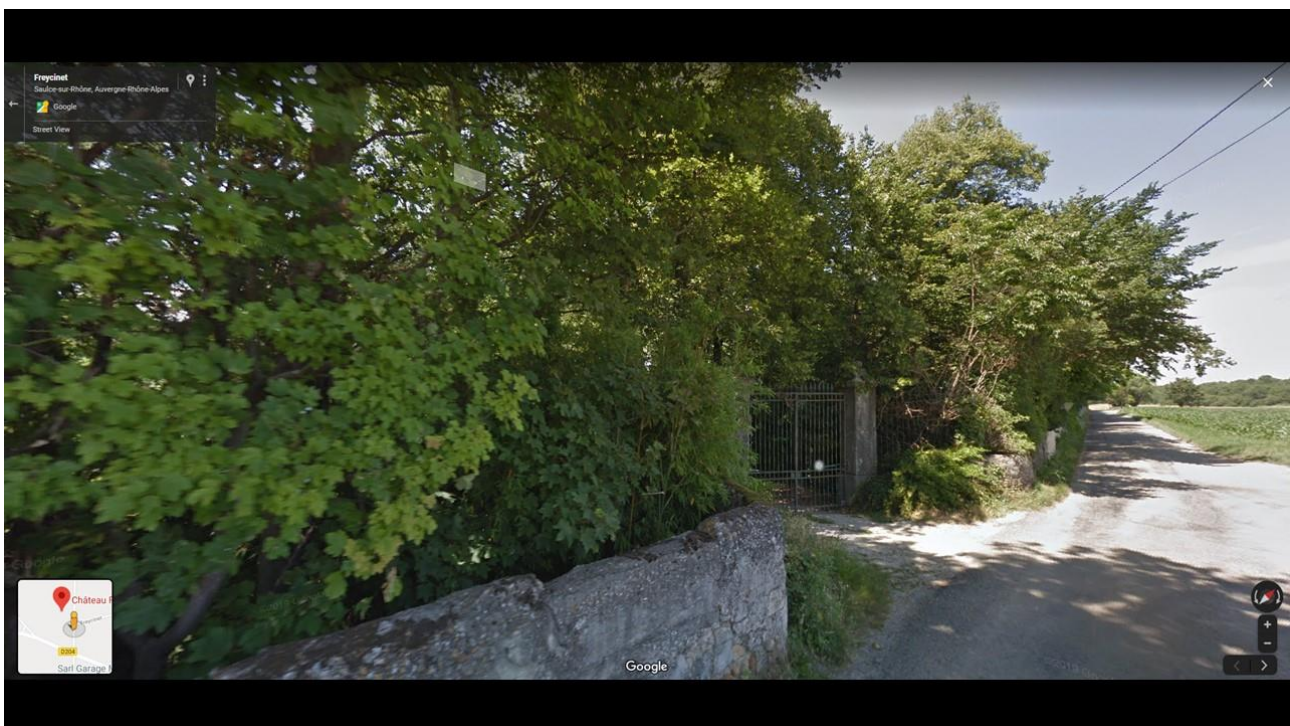
I googled the Château de Freycinet to see its location:



As I zoomed in, I was surprised to see that it was only about an hour north of Avignon by car:



As luck would have it, we were planning to hire a car from Avignon to go to the Ardèche region, so it would be a relatively short detour to visit the Château de Freycinet (at least that's what I told my husband).



Using Google street view, I could see the gates to the property but it was impossible to see down the driveway and a thick row of trees all along the street prevented any view of the Château. The Château was privately owned and no longer in the Freycinet family, so I was not planning to knock on the door, but I hoped to see through the gates down the driveway and possibly get a glimpse of the Château. I also hoped to find Louis' grave.

Finally we were on our holiday and heading for the small village near the Château, called Saulce-sur-Rhône.



We even found this sign on which you can just make out 'Freycinet':



Then we saw the small village cemetery, wedged between two roads:

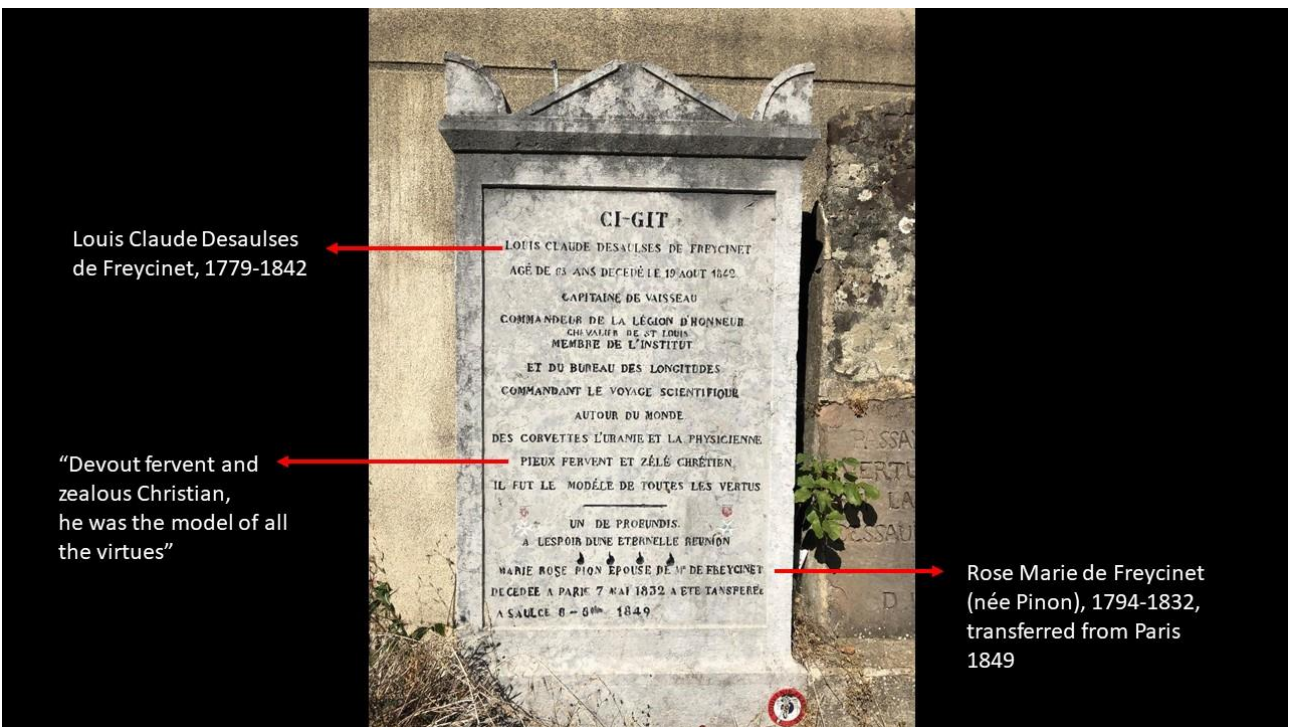


Just inside the main gate, on the right, were three Freycinet graves.





On the left, was Louis' grave:

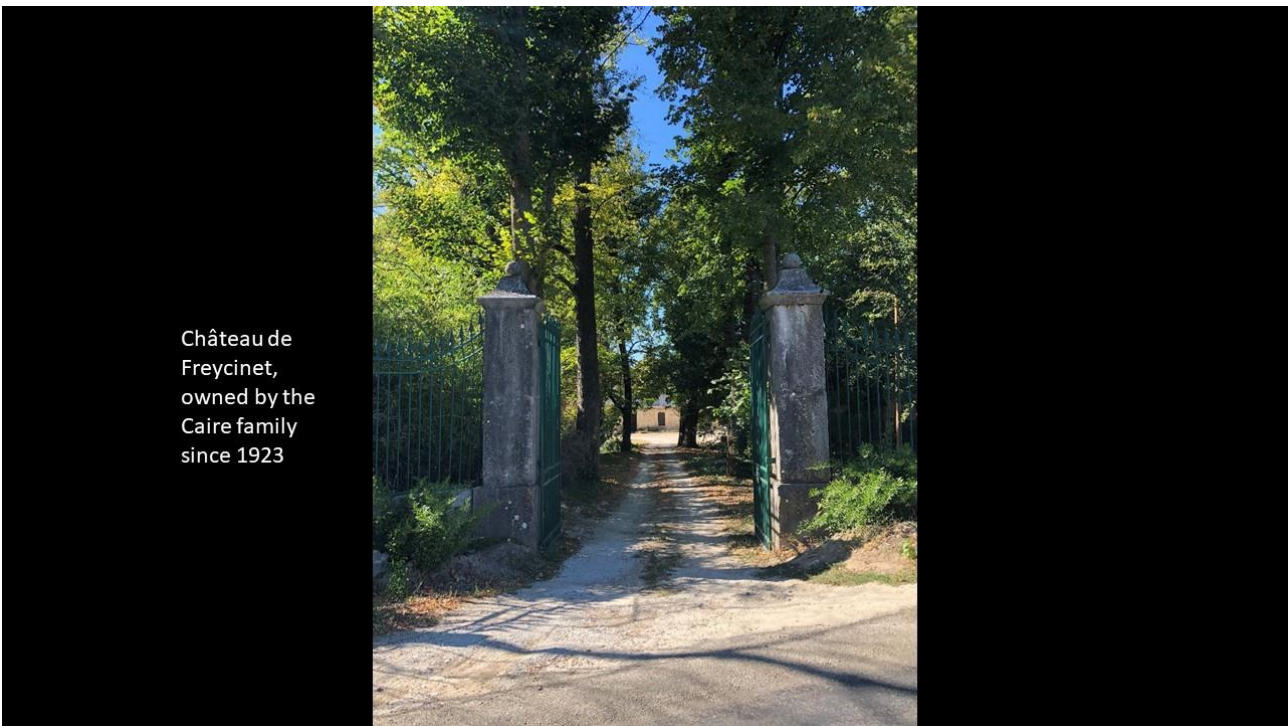


Amongst other things, the headstone described him as a “Devout, fervent and zealous Christian, he was the model of all the virtues.” There is a certain Protestant quality to these virtues. Rose had been buried in Paris in 1832 but her remains were transferred here in 1849 to be with her husband. They were inseparable in death as well as life. Her section of the headstone mentions the Catholic prayer for the dead, the *De Profundis*, based on Psalm 130 “Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee”.

The Château was just a short distance from the cemetery, as this aerial view shows. You can see the triangular-shaped cemetery in the middle:



In no time at all I was standing in front of the gates, and to my great delight –they were open!



We boldly walked down the drive to get a better view of the Château.



This was as far as I dared to go:



So now I was standing right in front of the Château.

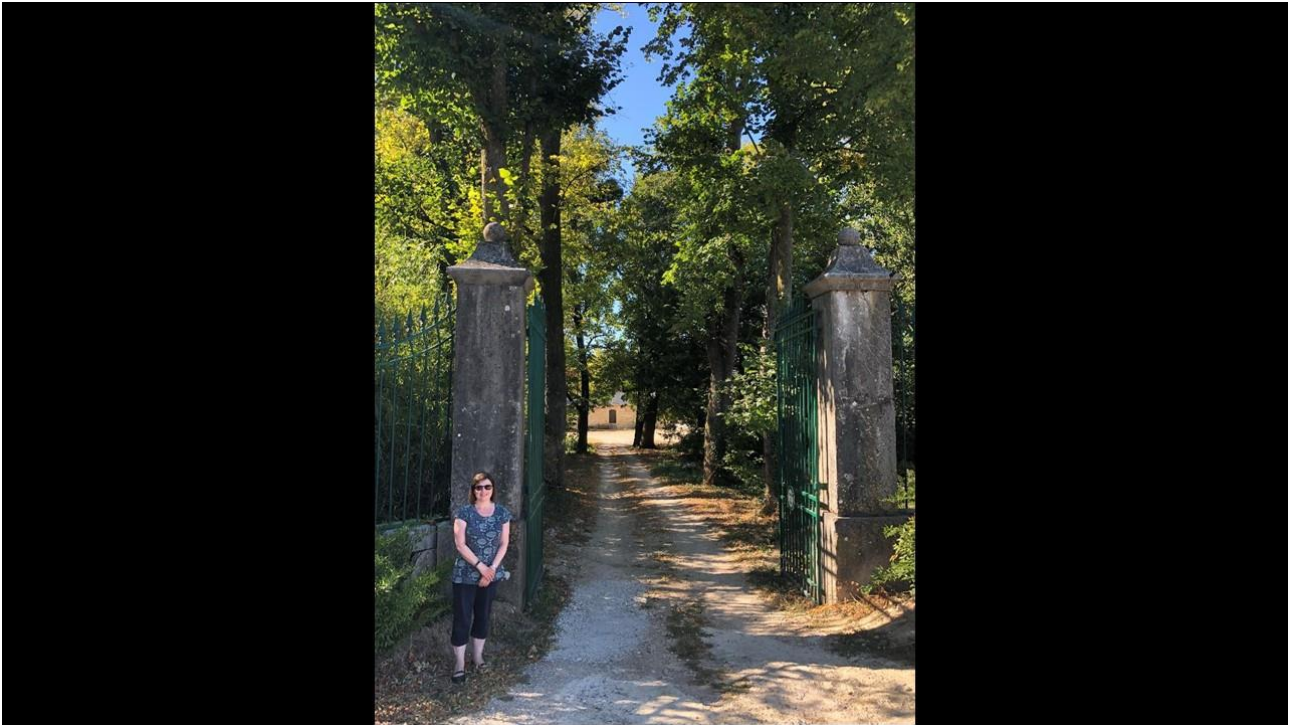


It was just like the postcard I showed you earlier, only the shutters were all closed.



I could hardly believe that I was at the very place where Louis and Henri were born and where they spent their childhood. Louis and Rose visited Louis' parents and stayed here at various times too. It was also the place where Louis spent his last days, as he had moved back to the family Château after his mother died. It was while I was contemplating these things that, to my horror, I heard the sound of a car coming down the gravel drive. The owner had returned and we were trespassing. I did my best to explain in French the reason for our visit and then we made a hasty retreat.

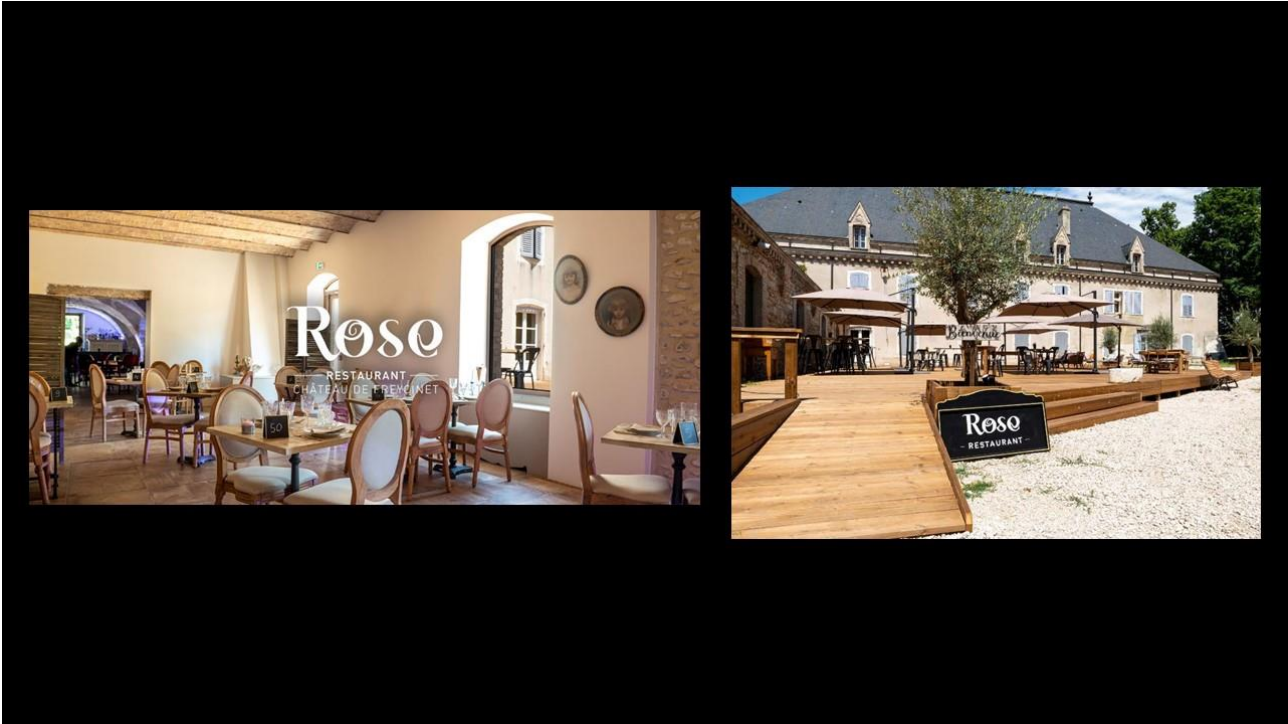
But not before one last photo by the gate:



I needn't have worried. After my visit, the ownership of the Château changed hands again. In July 2021, they opened to the public by hosting a summer music festival:



And in 2022, they opened the Rose Restaurant:



Obviously, I'll have to go back!

