

Les Bâisseurs de l'Île Maurice

Pierres et Patrimoine
de Port-Louis

***Une découverte historique au plein
centre de Port-Louis***

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Heritage, Tamarin, Ile Maurice

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Foreword

Mauritius has been continuously occupied since 1722, for 285 years. Port Louis has never ceased developing since then and nowadays it is easy to blithely ignore the early years when visiting the busy capital city with its high-rise buildings and traffic. That is what makes the exceptional discovery of Père Gabriel Igou's tombstone so important. He was one of the founders of Mauritius, caring for the spirituality and mitigating the hardships of those early inhabitants whether itinerant sailors, humble slaves or government servants sent to administer this faraway French colony. What is also remarkable is that modern, dynamic Port Louis, unbeknownst to the busy citizens, is literally built on the mortal remains of those hard-working men and women, in what was the *Cimetière de L'Enfoncement*.

Although we had predicted the possible discovery of the cemetery at stakeholder meetings many months prior to building works, once the tombs and human bones had been unearthed, it still took some time to prompt action. In this role the Press played a crucial part and the construction company also reacted positively. The Government authorities became concerned and finally all parties - including parastatal and non-governmental institutions - participated in a collaborative project to research and preserve this early Mauritian heritage. From salvage archaeological studies and local archival research, the project widened to include foreign experts. Local specialists included museum curators, historians, forensic scientists, archaeologists, engineers, civil servants and heritage activists. The very positive synergy of effort created by these individuals and their institutions was encouraging, especially for the future of heritage protection in Mauritius.

The research shed light on both the origins and the occupations of those buried in the cemetery. This window on the early years of Mauritius' history shows the wide mix of people whose days ended in the port. The people were from Asia, Africa and Europe, they were men, women and infants, they included slaves and soldiers and many of them had laboured hard. The detailed study of the site, its historical context and its physical remains shows just how valuable the site is for understanding the present society of our country. Official recognition by Government of the heritage value of the site and its contents was achieved by the decision to confer national heritage status on the tombstone and to incorporate part of the bone collection in the national repository.

It is our wish that the *Cimetière de L'Enfoncement* with the three recovered tombs, is seen and appreciated by all modern Mauritians as THEIR heritage, part of the fabric and fibre of our present existence and our common past.

*Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière
Marie-France Chelin-Goblet
Marie-Josée Martial-Craig*

Back Cover

All Souls Day, 2nd November 2005 – the incredible discovery of a tombstone with a Latin inscription on a building site in Port Louis – it turned out to be that of Father Gabriel Igou, first parish priest in Isle of France who died in 1764. The re-discovery of the original cemetery of the early settlement, with human bones and three tombstones, stimulated immediate reactions from the authorities and other stakeholder institutions who agreed: the heritage must be saved !

This publication in English and French, contains a series of eight articles on this early heritage of Mauritius, from the early history of the Catholic Church and Gabriel Igou's part in it, to previously unpublished data on the "inhabitants" of this now defunct cemetery, and the archaeological and forensic investigations of the site and bones – the first systematic study of human bones in Mauritius - all put into the context of preserving heritage in 21st century Mauritius.

La Toussaint, le 2 novembre 2005 - la pierre tombale du premier curé de Port-Louis re-surgit, 241 ans après sa mort. Le Père Gabriel Igou, qui a passé presque un demi-siècle à l'Île de France, meurt en 1764 à l'âge de 86 ans, et est enterré au cimetière de L'Enfoncement. De nos jours, des édifices représentant l'Île Maurice moderne se sont élevés aux alentours de ce site. C'est pendant des travaux sur un chantier que les ouvriers découvrent des ossements humains.. Les ONG's s'activent ainsi que la Presse et les autorités, réagissent. Il faut sauver les pierres tombales historiques, et conserver les ossements des bâtisseurs de l'Île Maurice !

Cette publication décrit la découverte de ce patrimoine ancien au plein centre de Port-Louis, ainsi que des études archéologiques et historiques. Une expertise sur les ossements - une première à Maurice – montre la dureté de la vie d'antan. L'histoire de l'église catholique, de Gabriel Igou et du cimetière sont décrits dans le contexte de la sauvegarde du patrimoine dans la jeune république de Maurice.

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