

of Public Orator at Kent University, a role that involves making speeches about individuals selected to receive honorary doctorates from the university. "I gave about 50 speeches in total over the years, including those for Richard Attenborough (we had lunch at The Savoy) Frank Muir and two Archbishops of Canterbury when they were given honorary degrees".

Royal command

However, it was through the publication of the first edition of his book *Best of Enemies: Anglo-French Relations Since the Norman Conquest* that Professor Gibson and his wife came to meet the then French President Jacques Chirac and the Queen at a state banquet at Buckingham Palace.

"When the invitation arrived we weren't sure if it was a practical joke by one of my former colleagues," he smiles. A subsequent phone call from the Lord Steward confirmed the authenticity of the invite, however, and the Gibsons attended the grand occasion - gold plates and cutlery - with only one slight faux pas by Sheila. "Wrong footed by the presence of Prince Philip next to the Queen instead of Prince Phillip she said 'Oh, hello' rather than giving the required curtsy, much to the amusement of everybody," he recalls.

Best of Enemies has just been completely revised and updated and is available in paperback for the first time, published

by Exeter-based Impress Books. It gives a lucid and lively account of the love-hate relationship between the English and the French that has lasted more than a thousand years and is richly illustrated with cartoons from both sides of the Channel. Copies are available from bookshops including Paragon Books in Sidmouth priced £16.99, ISBN 0954758609.

Professor Gibson's latest title, to be published in July this year, *The End of Youth: The Life and Work of Alain-Fournier*, priced £30.00, ISBN 0954758641, draws on new material about the acclaimed French author, including photographs, passionate correspondence between Fournier and his last great love, unfinished plays, drafts of his second novel and the recent discovery of his body in a wood near Verdun, where it had lain since his disappearance in action in the First World War.

It is the definitive work on the author, drawing on material made exclusively available to Professor Gibson by Fournier's sister. Moved by his interest in her brother and his novel, she decided to make the author's rough drafts and unpublished material available to him. He spent 8 weeks transcribing everything (in a time before photocopiers), staying at her home in sight of the Pyrénées. This unprecedented access to material has undoubtedly made Professor Gibson the world authority on the author.

Despite his glittering academic career and rubbing shoulders with some of the world's great icons, Professor Gibson is very down to earth in his consideration of his greatest achievement. "I was most fortunate in meeting and marrying Sheila and in spending 50 years with her," he smiles.

And his plans for the future? "I want to write a memoir about growing up in the thirties and forties," he enthuses. "It will also provide a full and detailed answer to the question I'm often asked as to why I first became interested in Alain-Fournier and what I told his sister about myself that prompted her to put all his papers at my disposal and so help launch my academic career." No doubt it will be written, by hand, glancing out at those stunning views of Lyme Bay that his cliff-top house commands.

Holmesley Nursing Home

Holmesley is a privately owned and run nursing home fully accredited and registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection for 34 Nursing and Residential care beds. The home is set in over 2 acres of its own beautifully landscaped grounds away from any noise. This attractive setting offers views over the Sid valley and down to the sea.

This part of East Devon is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and boasts some of the finest views in Devon. The local village of Sidford, half a mile away, offers local shops, pubs, two churches, physiotherapy clinic, a chemist shop and health centre visited by all the local GPs.

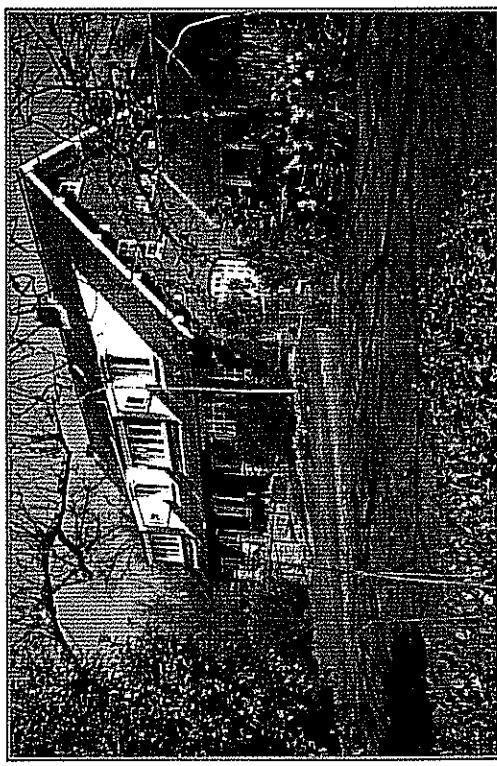
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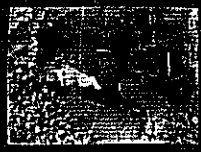
Best of Enemies

Anglo-French Relations since the Norman Conquest

Revisited

The End of Youth

The Life and Work of Alain-Fournier



ROBERT GIBSON