

Lachlan Macquarie, 5th Governor of New South Wales: His Life & Legacy to Australia

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Abstract

This is the transcript of a speech on the life and legacy to Australia of Lachlan Macquarie, the 5th Governor of New South Wales, that was given at the annual dinner of the Royal Society of New South Wales in 2015 by Professor Dame Marie Bashir.

Dr Donald Hector, President, Royal Society of New South Wales and Ms Sandra Ollington, wife of Dr Hector.

Professor Brynn Hibbert, Vice President, Royal Society of New South Wales.

Dr Mary O’Kane, Chief Scientist of NSW.

Society Fellows, Distinguished Guests and Colleagues.

It is indeed a great pleasure to join you all tonight with my husband Sir Nicholas Shehadie for the Annual Dinner 2015 of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

And may I at the outset affirm my deep respect for the traditional owners of this land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the

Eora nation, their ancestors and descendants, indeed for all Australia’s Aboriginal people who have nurtured this great continent for tens of thousands of years.

Dr Hector, indeed all distinguished contributors to the Royal Society and Fellows of New South Wales, I would like to assure you of my considerable sense of humility, surprise and certainly quiet gratitude on receiving your communication regarding the fellowship with which I have been awarded tonight. And what a privilege I deem it to join your ranks as a fellow.

Since my adolescent years, I have been aware of the august traditions of the Royal Society in Britain and that our New South Wales Society occupies a unique place in the cultural environment of this state as it spans such a

wide range of interests, not only scientific but also philosophical, medical, historical, musical and artistic.

As you know, the Royal Society dates back to the early days of intellectual development of the Colony. Indeed, history records that its precursor was established on 27 June 1821 in the form of the Philosophical Society of Australia. This is a mere 33 years after Governor Phillip first set foot on this land. The legacy of enlightenment of the previous century, I believe, continued well into the 19th century, to our Australian colony. Driven by a trust for continuing engagement despite the distance from Europe, the foundations of widespread enlightenment were laid by Lachlan Macquarie who was succeeded by Sir Thomas Brisbane on 1 December 1821. The 6th Governor of New South Wales, Sir Thomas Brisbane, was offered and accepted the position of inaugural president of the Society.

But we can surely claim that the stage, the cultural direction, here 200 years ago, was set by that 5th Governor, Lachlan Macquarie, whose term of office had concluded and about whom I have the honour to speak tonight.

Increasingly, Australians have come to acknowledge with gratitude the antecedents of modern Australia's success, the builders of this nation. And as we commemorated in 2010, and across this decade, the bicentenary of Lachlan Macquarie's term as Governor, continuing research and studies of the Macquarie era are revealing the extent and richness of this Scotsman's contribution – indeed his enduring legacy to Australasia.

This is a legacy, which has contributed significantly to what we proudly claim to be a distinctive Australian identity.

Following Macquarie's appointment as Governor of New South Wales on 8 May 1809 in London, he arrived at Sydney Cove on 28 December that year. Four days later, on 1 January 1810, he began 12 momentous years in office.

Today, as we look back on Macquarie's life and career, it is striking to note how much of its character remains relevant to the concerns of modern Australia:

- Community inclusiveness,
- The wellbeing of the nation's indigenous people, including access of their children to education,
- The health of the people, including mental health,
- Investment in architectural quality and town planning.

These are but a few aspects of his legacy.

However it is doubtful whether Lachlan Macquarie himself would, or even could have envisaged the high regard – indeed the gratitude – in which he is held today.

It has been remarked before that an aura of failure, frustration and rejection has too often been the reward of many of Australia's early leaders. It was certainly true of many of the best known colonial Governors.

The first Governor, Captain Arthur Phillip who in 1788 brought the first British settlement comprising a fleet of 11 ships, with 759 convicts, and 886 crew, marines and family members to Botany Bay and Sydney Cove, left office a dispirited and exhausted man. Macquarie's predecessor, the 4th Governor, William Bligh (of mutiny on the Bounty fame) had been overthrown in a military coup and, after escaping from house

arrest in Sydney, was living in exile on a ship off the port of Hobart in Tasmania. And sadly, it must be acknowledged that Lachlan Macquarie was another victim of misfortune, denigrated by many of the influential and powerful during his term of office in New South Wales.

And later, following the commission of enquiry, called in 1819 by the British Government because of his humanitarian policies and civic development, he was discredited unjustly in official circles in Britain.

Yet Macquarie stands today as one of the greatest of Australia's leaders, certainly one of our greatest Governors, a true pioneer of the nation, unmatched for vision, magnanimity, compassion, and zest for accomplishment. Many will say the founder of modern Australia. Indeed, he was the first Governor to refer officially to 'Australia' by that name, in 1817, endorsing the name first used by the young explorer Matthew Flinders following Flinders' circumnavigation of the Australian continent (1802-1803).

He was the first to give official recognition to Australia Day. In 1818, he decreed that this date, January 26, which he entitled Anniversary Day, would be a public holiday for government workers. Like so much of his legacy, that observance has endured.

Certainly no Governor came to office with a richer fund of experience nor a deeper apprehension of life's trials and hardships. He was born on January 31, 1762 in modest circumstances in Scotland on the isle of Ulva (in the Hebrides), where he later worked on the family farm. His father was a cousin of the last chieftain of the clan, whom Dr Samuel Johnson and James Boswell had visited in 1773. Some years later, these

travellers recorded that the family had fallen on hard times, requiring them to sell the island which had been in the family's possession for 900 years.ⁱⁱ

Macquarie's father had died when Lachlan was 14 years of age, but his maternal uncle, Murdoch Maclaine, Baron of Moy, had ensured that he received some formal education in Edinburgh. However, the outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1776 brought an end to his schooling, and the following year he received an ensign's commission to serve with his cousin's regiment in North America. At war's end, he returned to the family farm at Mull before leaving three years later to return to the army.

Scholars researching Macquarie's character are convinced also that ideas and values of the Scottish Enlightenment were influential in Macquarie's maturation of character, his humanitarian attitude to convicts and to the marginalised, and influential also in his commitment to civic planning.ⁱⁱⁱ

These Australian academics and researchers have sought to identify the pathways whereby such qualities had developed – those qualities which resonated with the Scottish Enlightenment; for Macquarie's years of military service had not allowed time for reflective studies.

It is noteworthy, however, that association by Macquarie with certain individuals imbued with these ideals and values would have been highly significant.

In particular, mention should be made of Sir James Mackintosh, who had spent 7 years (1803-1811) in Bombay, India, serving as Recorder (that is the senior judge). Macquarie had encountered Sir James during his second

period of service in charge of the British garrison at Bombay, as military secretary to the British Governor there, Jonathan Duncan. As a brilliant and scholarly schoolboy, young Jamie Mackintosh had been described as “a prodigy of learning and talent”.^{iv}

Mackintosh went on to study medicine, practising as a doctor for a few years, subsequently directing his studies to law, a profession through which he believed he could help more individuals. Mackintosh distinguished himself in academia, in philosophy, as an author, and through his involvement in a number of celebrated cases, as well as serving as a member of the British parliament. Mackintosh’s friendship with Macquarie endured over their lifetime and he steadfastly remained supportive after Macquarie’s return to Great Britain from Australia to confront the criticism of the British Parliament after Commissioner Bigge’s enquiry.

In 1807, whilst in India and contemplating new horizons, Mackintosh had written of his desire to be and I quote “...the lawgiver of Botany Bay. If I could rescue at least the children of the convicts from brutality and barbarism by education With a store of school masters from Lancaster, with some good Irish priests for their countrymen, and good Methodists for the rest, I should most joyfully endeavour to introduce law and morality into that wretched country, and give it the fit constitution for a penal colony, which was to grow into a great and prosperous community....”.^v

Macquarie was 15 when he joined the army as a volunteer. He served during the American War of Independence in New York and Charleston, – in the 71st Highland Regiment – also in Canada and Jamaica. Later he served

in Egypt, in late 1801 against Napoleon’s armies – after having accompanied his regiment on his first posting to India in 1788 (the year the Australian colony was born). There, in 1793 he had married his first wife, Jane Jarvis, whom he had met in Bombay. But with the deterioration of her health from tuberculosis, they journeyed to Macau in the hope that the change of climate would bring about improvement. Sadly, her deterioration continued and Jane died in 1796.^{vi}

By the age of 40, Macquarie was already a seasoned traveller – hardened by war, very much a man of the world, and well known in influential circles in London. Returning to Britain in April 1807 after a further period of service in India, he narrowly escaped drowning when a freak wave capsized the small ship into which he had transferred in the Persian Gulf. He came ashore extraordinarily, at a place called Büshehr.^{vii}

Unable to travel through the Mediterranean because of the war with France, Macquarie journeyed overland via Baghdad, through Persia and north to St Petersburg where he called upon the Czar, Alexander I, then via Denmark and Sweden to London. Clearly, he was a man of high resilience and an exceptional immune system. After such adventures, a mere six-month voyage to New South Wales would have seemed almost routine.

Yet for all his outstanding qualifications, he was not the British Government’s first choice for the job. The man chosen as Governor Bligh’s successor was Major-General Miles Nightingall, who had resigned his appointment citing health problems before his departure for New South Wales.

Macquarie, already designated to be Lieutenant Governor to the Colony, offered

himself as Governor and was subsequently appointed. He was now 48 years old. In November 1807, he had married his second wife Elizabeth Campbell, who would prove to be an ideal partner.

Elizabeth Henrietta Campbell was born in 1778 at Airds in Argyll. Elizabeth's older sister Jane was married to Macquarie's maternal uncle Murdoch Maclaine who had been so significant in ensuring Macquarie's education and his subsequent entry into the army. Fatefully, Elizabeth and Lachlan had first met in 1804 at the bedside of his dying uncle Murdoch, the last Laird of Lochbuy. The following year 1805, Macquarie returned to a further posting in Bombay. However, he remained in contact with the intelligent and independent highland girl who had won his admiration and his affection. On his return to England at the end of 1807, they were joined (November 1807) in a marriage that was to be mutually enriching throughout their lives. Eighteen months later, on 22nd May 1809, they sailed from Portsmouth bound for Sydney Cove.

Macquarie's 12 years of service was the second longest term of any Governor in Australia's history.

In assessing Macquarie's achievements – and his legacy – we must take account of the Colony as he found it — chaotic, demoralised, divided — following the coup d'état by Lieutenant George Johnston and the New South Wales Corp, against the 4th Governor, Captain William Bligh. Bligh, whose reputation from his role in the mutiny on HMS *Bounty*, as a dictatorial and volatile Captain had preceded him, had been humiliatingly placed under house arrest for attempting to curb the excess of the New South Wales Corps members, and their

wealthy land-owning friends, such as John Macarthur.

Of particular concern to Bligh, had been the flagrant importation of, and trade in rum and other spirits, an alternative to currency! Understandably this anarchic event has been termed “the rum rebellion”, and the New South Wales Corps “the Rum Corps”. A state of virtual anarchy existed, with members of the Corps illegally acquiring substantial land grants.

In Macquarie's own somewhat dismissive words, the Colony “was barely emerging from an infantile imbecility.”

M.H. Ellis, one of the Macquarie biographers, has written:

“The country was divided by faction as a result of the Bligh rebellion, and was almost starving; its morals were in ‘the lowest state of debasement’. Public buildings were in ruins; roads and bridges were impassable. There was no ‘public credit or private confidence’. Macquarie's first step towards mending these depressing conditions, Ellis went on, was to bring together the warring sections of the Colony through the institution of official gatherings and community functions, among which the Colony's first horse races and agricultural fairs were notable.”^{viii}

That was Macquarie's way two centuries ago – reflected still, I believe, in the Australian preference for conciliation and consensus, for negotiation, discussion and community involvement rather than the brute exercise of authority.

Deeply depressing conditions, however, existed in the Colony he inherited, which he immediately set about transforming. In the years that followed, he led the Colony into a

period of unprecedented progress. And in many ways, he set the pattern, and defined the priorities of enlightened public administration for the modern era.

He built schools, hospitals, roads. And a beautiful lighthouse at the ocean approach to Sydney Harbour. Indeed, he built on a scale not seen before. It was he who instituted a system of public and private education. And his influence can be seen today in the continuing emphasis given to education by all Australian governments. Indeed, two hundred years ago, he saw the critical role of education in building a nation, and made it one of his first priorities. At the end of his period as Governor, one-fifth of the Colony's revenue was being spent on educational services. It is so appropriate that a fine and progressive university in Australia now bears his name.

To a large extent, Macquarie established the nation's economy – encouraging free enterprise and creating an environment in which commerce and manufacturing could flourish.

In 1813, he introduced coinage. He arranged the purchase of 40,000 Spanish silver dollars valued at £10,000 pounds. Cutting out the centre, two new coins were created – a holey dollar and a dump with a value of 15 pence.

In 1817 the Colony's first bank – the Bank of New South Wales – opened its doors. The highly successful Macquarie Bank, established in 1985, creatively has adopted Macquarie's 'holey dollar' as its defining emblem.

Under Macquarie, the Colony acquired its first courthouses, its first magistrates – some emancipated convicts – its first places of public worship, its first independent newspaper. When he left office in 1821, he

could point to 265 public works carried out during his term, many designed by Francis Greenway, the former convict appointed civil architect:

- Hyde Park Barracks,
- The Governor's stables (Greenway's plan), now the Sydney Conservatorium of Music,
- The lighthouse near the entrance to Sydney Harbour.

Roads to Parramatta and the Blue Mountains were constructed, and the five planned Macquarie towns – Richmond, Pitt Town, Castlereagh, Wilberforce and Windsor – built beyond reach of floodwaters from the Hawkesbury River. Wilberforce he named after the great reformist whom he admired. Campbelltown, now a satellite city 50 km beyond Sydney, was established and named after his wife.

On looking around the city of Sydney, one sees evidence of his creativity and zeal. Many of Sydney's streets bear the names he chose, including the fine thoroughfare named after himself, which faces the Botanic Gardens, Parliament House, the State Library and the elegant colonial buildings constructed in the Macquarie period. And across the State, in rural areas the Macquarie name is proudly enshrined – Port Macquarie, the Macquarie River, the Macquarie Marshes – to name but some.

It is already acknowledged that Elizabeth's taste and influence in these developments were substantial. Research suggests that Elizabeth may have brought with her to the Colony one – or even two – architectural pattern books by Edward Gyfford, 'designs for elegant cottages and small villas' printed in London in 1806, and also 'designs for small

picturesque cottages and hunting boxes' published in 1807.^{ix}

But Macquarie's vision extended far beyond Sydney. He encouraged exploration to expand the supply of pastoral land – famine being an ever-present threat in a Colony still relying on shipments of food.

Following several failed earlier attempts, but with continuing encouragement, the successful crossing of the Blue Mountains had been achieved in 1813 by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth. The road was commissioned the following year and built in an extraordinary six months as a gateway to the pasture lands beyond, heralding the future of a prosperous rural Australia. Further exploration flourished. It can be claimed that the inland city of Bathurst, named after Earl Bathurst, the British Minister of State for War and for the Colonies, was essentially Macquarie's creation.

Macquarie's journal recording his first view of this region gives indication of his delight, as he rode with Elizabeth over the Blue Mountains and looked down upon the plains "expanding for many miles on both sides of the Macquarie River, and surrounded at a distance by verdant hills, is truly grand, beautiful and interesting, forming one of the finest landscapes in any country I have yet visited".^x

I quote Ellis again – "Macquarie promoted many cultural and civil amenities... he can be accounted the first vice-regal supporter of local literature as well as art" and artists including former convict Joseph Lycett – "and the only Governor in history to appoint a "poet laureate – Michael Massey Robinson, whose stipend was the welcome annual gift of two cows".

In regard to an association of Macquarie with New Zealand and adjacent Pacific Islands as implied in the word Australasia, Macquarie's domain of responsibility as Captain-General and Governor in Chief of New South Wales included the whole of Eastern Australia, Van Diemen's Land – Tasmania, the adjacent Pacific colony of Norfolk Island, and New Zealand.

Indeed, it may be claimed that Macquarie had a direct connection to the establishment of the New Zealand dairy industry.

In 1814, the Reverend Samuel Marsden, with missionary zeal, travelled again to New Zealand to meet with Maori tribes.^{xi} He took with him the first dairy cows introduced into the country. These cows were shorthorns, known at the time as durhams and were taken from the New South Wales crown herd, a gift from Governor Macquarie. For many decades afterwards, this was the most popular breed in New Zealand, and therefore a precursor of New Zealand's rich dairy industry.^{xii}

Another of Macquarie's priorities – another link with the Australia of today – was his emphasis on public health. He showed a concern for the sick, the poor, the neglected and the marginalised far beyond anything required by the duties of office.

With the inspirational support of Elizabeth, he took a particular interest in the welfare of children, especially the destitute and abandoned.

These children represented all groups within the wider community, the children of convicts, children whose parents had died en route to Australia, even Aboriginal children referred by colonial clergymen. A beautiful site for the Female Orphan School was

chosen, with views sweeping down to the river, a scene which evoked in Elizabeth memories of Airds, her home in Scotland. And from the architectural pattern books of Edward Gyfford, a gracious building was chosen which stands today restored to its original beauty, proudly part of the campus of the University of Western Sydney.

The Female Orphan School was the fledgling Colony's first building created for a charitable purpose, and on land originally granted by Governor Phillip to surgeon Thomas Arndell in 1792. It is said that Elizabeth and Lachlan even designed the pinafores for the children.

There can be no doubt that Macquarie and his wife were aware of the links between poverty, disadvantage, sickness and crime. Elizabeth's intellectual independence and acumen proved major strengths in the implementation of Macquarie's reforms. His undisguised admiration for his wife's abilities was evidence, I believe, of the value he placed on women as equal partners in both marriage and society at large.

Early in his administration, encouraged by the Reverend William Cowper, of St. Philip's Church (Church Hill, Sydney), he presided over a meeting to set up the Benevolent Society, which was later detached from the church to function as an independent agency. The Society's aims were "to relieve the poor, the distressed, the aged and the infirm, and to encourage industrious habits among the indigent poor ..."

To this day, the Benevolent Society serves the community with diligence and compassion, and for many years, this responsibility included the provision of a university teaching hospital in obstetrics, a centre of excellence.

For a contemporary Governor, especially one with a professional interest in mental illness and the plight of the traumatised, Macquarie's example continues to be an inspiration. In 1810 he established the Colony's first psychiatric hospital, the Castle Hill asylum, which received its first 30 patients from Parramatta Gaol. It is remarkable that, 200 years ago, Australia had a Governor with an insightful and sympathetic understanding of the needs of the mentally ill, and the not infrequent association of mental illness with imprisonment.

Macquarie's attitude to Aboriginal people was similarly enlightened, though it is important that this not be exaggerated. He established the first school for Aboriginal children, and made the first official attempts, though unsuccessful, to settle native people in agriculture; and he awarded a certificate of merit to those who had responded appropriately. But it must be remembered that Macquarie was a military Governor, a man of his time, and in the words of his biographer Ellis, "he did not hesitate to instigate military measures against the Aborigines in 1816 when they mistook his friendliness for weakness."

With an escalation of attacks on settlers and the burning of some farms, Macquarie ordered retaliation, hoping to discourage continuing provocation. One of the most regrettable of these retaliative expeditions took place in 1816 at Appin, south-west of Sydney, resulting in the death of 14 Aboriginal people.

John Ritchie, another of Macquarie's biographers, has given a touching account of Macquarie's final parting, just prior to leaving Australia – his parting from the aboriginal chiefs he had grown to know and respect. In the last days of his Governorship, he went

with Elizabeth to say goodbye to the clans gathered at Parramatta. Ritchie wrote: “as the Aborigines feasted on roast beef washed down with copious draughts of beer, he examined the children of the native institution [which he had established at Parramatta in 1815]. He knew that the rapid increase in British population and the progress of British agriculture had driven these people from their ancient habitations”;..... and “how contact with Europeans in the townships had degraded the blacks”.^{xiii}

I believe that Macquarie felt a sense of shame for the plight of Australia’s Aborigines, subject to the effects of colonisation, and that those sensibilities set in train the long process of reconciliation, culminating in the historic apology of 2008, made on the nation’s behalf by the Australian prime minister of the day with the support of all political parties. Some may claim perhaps that there was condescension and even calculation in Macquarie’s treatment of the first Australians. But there was also, I believe, a genuine benevolence, an innate goodness of heart.

It was, however, Macquarie’s treatment of the convicts in his charge that earns continuing respect and admiration today. This was more than humanitarianism; it was nation building based on merit. The Colony was in need of a workforce, the larger the better, and Macquarie believed that when a prisoner had discharged his debt to society he should be “eligible for any situation which he has, by a long term of upright conduct, proved himself worthy of filling.”^{xiv}

It is noteworthy that Macquarie’s predecessor, Governor William Bligh, had granted only two pardons during his term as Governor. Macquarie, between 1810 and 1820, granted 366 pardons, 1,365 conditional pardons and 2,319 tickets of leave.

According to the biographer Ritchie, the policy of emancipation was “the child of Macquarie’s heart, more instinctual than theoretical”. “In his softer moments” – Ritchie wrote in 1986 – “he viewed the convicts as children of misfortune. Believing in the intrinsic worth of individuals, he offered them hope; he aimed to encourage redemption, to promote self-respect and, ultimately, a social regeneration. He nurtured a dream of what the new country might become ... in raising people to positions of trust and authority, he drew no distinction between the free and the freed; his object was to eliminate faction and to introduce harmony.”^{xv}

And in such an environment considerable prosperity grew, including for many emancipated convicts, such as Simeon Lord, who became an international trader, which in turn contributed to the burgeoning wealth and stability of the Colony.

In Macquarie’s example of tolerance and humanity, I am convinced that we can see the beginnings of the Australian tradition of the ‘fair go’ – the spirit of egalitarianism, the sense of fair play that many regard as our defining characteristic as a people. He believed that everyone deserved a second chance, whatever his past deeds or reputation. However, to a large extent that belief was his undoing. And destructive repercussions to his reputation and visionary leadership would emanate from an unexpected source.

For despite the relief and jubilation in Britain engendered by the victories over Napoleon by 1815, and the end of years of war with France, there were significant negative social consequences for the victorious nation.

Hundreds of men who had been pressed into army and naval service to counter Napoleon's aggression, now found themselves without employment, without income and consequently vulnerable to criminal behaviour for survival. The British Government expected and hoped that the spectre of transportation to a cruel and punitive convict colony would act as a harsh deterrent to criminality. They could not countenance that their penal colony, offering emancipation and humane opportunity, would represent an attractive alternative.

Continuing complaints were sent to London by the Exclusives – free settlers, from the Reverend Samuel Marsden known justifiably as the flogging parson and an implacable enemy of Macquarie, together with affluent land holders including John Macarthur, father of Australia's wool industry but described by some as a "dedicated troublemaker".^{xvi}

A list of Macquarie's enemies from the Governor's dispatches of 1817, is held in the archives of the State Library of New South Wales and includes many of these seditious individuals.

Eventually a combination of many factors led to the appointment in 1819 of J.T. Bigge as Commissioner, to conduct an inquiry into Macquarie's colonial administration.

Bigge had been given explicit instructions by, the British Secretary for the Colonies, Earl Bathurst: "... transportation should be made an object of real terror and any weakening of this by ill considered compassion for convicts in the humanitarian policies of Governor Lachlan Macquarie should be reported".

Bigge's damning report (the most censorious elements of which included judgemental

accusations about the Governor being too compassionate and spending excessively on building construction) was deeply wounding to Macquarie's pride and reputation. But never did he abandon his faith in human decency and the principles of fairness for which he stood throughout his term.

Generosity to others was also a mark of his character and in many ways the central theme of his administration.

One aspect of Macquarie's legacy which is infrequently described, was his ecumenical spirit, and particularly his attitude to the dissenters, and the Catholic citizens of the Colony for whom the Exclusives showed neither acceptance nor respect. Research of historical documents reveals that Macquarie provided land at Parramatta for the first Wesleyan chapel.^{xviii}

And as early as 1810, the first year of his Governorship, Macquarie had already acknowledged the importance of St Patrick's Day to the Irish immigrants and exiles, and had instituted an annual celebratory dinner. Indeed, it is reported that at the request of the leader of a gang of around 50 Irish convicts engaged in work at Government House, Elizabeth granted permission for a short break for them to observe St Patrick's Day. On their return later they were greeted with a table of traditional Irish fare of stew, molasses pudding and "weak grog" – a touching example of Elizabeth's humanity, and so early in the Macquaries' term of office.^{xix}

And further, on 3rd May 1820, Fathers John Therry and Philip Conolly arrived in Sydney to celebrate mass officially for the first time since 1804 following the rebellion of the Irish convicts and the battle of Vinegar Hill on the outskirts of Sydney. Later, "Macquarie gave land for their chapel in Sydney, donated 20

guineas to the building and laid its foundation stone..... on the 29th October 1821”. Promising to support the religious liberty of Father Therry’s flock, this was met with spontaneous applause. ^{xx}

Perhaps the true grandeur and pathos of Macquarie’s story are best summed up in his own words. All that he passionately believed about his policies of emancipation, the motivating impulse of charity and love that underlay all his actions, were poured out in the submission he wrote to commissioner Bigge.

Here, I present, part of what he wrote to Bigge – “At my first entrance into this Colony, I felt as you do ... that some of the most meritorious men ... most willing to exert themselves in the public service, were men who had been convicts! ... Do you not know that above nine-tenths of the population of this Colony are or have been convicts, or the children of convicts. You have yet perhaps to learn that these are the people who have quietly submitted to the laws and regulations of the Colony, altho’ informed by some of the free settlers and officers of government that they were illegal! These are the men who have tilled the ground, who have built houses and ships, who have made wonderful efforts ... in agriculture, in maritime speculations and in manufactures. These are the men who, placed in the balance ... in the opposite scale to those free settlers ...you will find to preponderate [in character, both moral and political].” ^{xxi}

Macquarie’s words would have little effect on Bigge’s decisions. Bigge had been influenced by the malcontents and the disgruntled. Increasingly dispirited, Macquarie had tendered his resignation on three occasions. This eventually took effect in 1821.

But there is a pleasing irony in the thought that were it not for the conflict of these men, New South Wales might have waited much longer for the rudiments of a parliamentary system. Bigge recommended that no future Governor should be allowed to rule as an autocrat, so a Legislative Council was appointed to advise the next Governor. (However it was not until 1856 that the Council was granted legislative powers).

Reflecting upon Macquarie’s submission to Commissioner Bigge today, one senses not only the depth of its passion and sincerity; one hears, in the cadences of his prose, with its measured repetitions and rhetorical emphases, the language of modern political discourse. As in so many ways, he was ahead of his time. Macquarie had committed himself throughout his years of office to a vision of what Australia could become and in doing so he laid the foundation for the harmony and the prosperity that would follow.

At the inauguration of his successor Governor Thomas Brisbane on December 1st, 1821^{xxii} Macquarie farewelled the Colony which he had come to love, beginning with the words “fellow citizens of Australia...”. He predicted that Australia would, in less than 50 years, become “one of the most valuable appendages of the British empire”. Further, he declared, “I shall not fail on my return to England, to recommend in the strongest manner I am able, to my Sovereign, and to his Majesty’s Government, their early attention to the amelioration of this valuable rising Colony, and to extend to it their paternal support and fostering protection.” ^{xxiii}

By 1880 it was estimated that Australia had “the most fastest – growing economy and the highest per capita income in the world”. And

that “almost 40% of Australia’s borrowed capital came from Scottish banks”.^{xxiv}

On the eve of his departure, February 11, 1822, thousands gathered in the streets and around the coves of Sydney to farewell him, described by the Governor himself in these moving words – “...a most affecting scene, and could not be viewed by Mrs Macquarie or myself without the deepest emotion, after a residence of upward of twelve years amongst these poor attached people”.^{xxv}

In my years as Governor – the 37th – and in the months that have passed since that period, as I travel the length and breadth of the state of New South Wales in various duties, I see the legacy of Lachlan Macquarie in so much of our lifestyle and shared values. I have seen it in the courage of our farmers, the men and women on the land as they contend with drought and other trials and misfortunes who never give up. I see it in the spirit of our service men and women, peace keepers abroad, who, like Macquarie, serve their country with respect for others, with dedication and professionalism. I see it in the character of the Australian people — their warmth, their lack of pretension, the absence of artificial social boundaries, their pragmatism, their rejection of vainglory and superficial status, the belief of most in the ‘fair go’.

The Australia of today, whatever the challenges, would have been a source of great satisfaction, indeed of pride, to Lachlan Macquarie. Sadly, however, with Elizabeth and young Lachlan, he returned to Britain a broken-hearted man and died exactly two years later in London on 1 July 1824.

The news of Macquarie’s death, received some weeks later in Sydney, produced outpourings of sadness and four days of

official mourning were announced. And on the same day, news was also received that the parliamentary bill which would restore civil rights to emancipists had been given the Royal Assent. Little wonder that convicts and former convicts were calling:

“Macquarie was the prince of men!
Australia’s pride and joy!
We ne’er shall see his like again.
Bring back the old viceroy!”^{xxvi}

And, in *The Australian* newspaper of the 11 November 1824, the newspaper established during Macquarie’s term, William Wentworth – who is often referred to as ‘Australia’s greatest native son’ – quoted these lines of Alexander Pope in homage to the late Governor:

Statesman, yet friend to truth! Of soul sincere,
In action faithful, and in honour clear,
Who broke no promise, serv’d no private end,
Who gained no title, and who lost no friend.^{xxvii}

It was a fitting tribute to a man who turned a squalid penal colony into an infant nation – a fledgling democracy, robust, self-confident and proud – and whose life and legacy is being remembered with gratitude in this decade of his bicentenary.

May I again, in conclusion, thank the Royal Society of New South Wales for the honour they have paid me in creating me a Fellow and in accepting this presentation of a most outstanding individual. And may I also thank the many Australians, some with us today — members of the Macquarie 2010 Committee, as well as those historians, researchers and teachers who are determined that the Macquarie legacy will not only be remembered, but will serve to light the way in

whatever challenges lie ahead for our nation,
Australia.

I thank you all.

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