

GOVERNOR'S TRAVELS



A couple of hundred years on, Lachlan Macquarie is still making his presence felt in these parts, writes NEIL JAMESON.

His fingers traced the furrows in the trunk of the blue gum.

They were as clear as the day the youth had taken the knife and etched them in the bark. On one side of the tree he had inscribed "J.M." On the other "L.M. 4 Jany. 1812".

On their first visit to Hunter's River they had pitched their tents here in the encampment ground near Raymond Terrace and the young man had searched around to find a suitable place to mark their passing. The older man had looked on as the youth laboured earnestly with the knife, standing back to admire his work.

Now, six years later, amid the dappled light of the same eucalypt grove, Lachlan Macquarie, career soldier and Governor of NSW, hung his head in reflection. Macquarie's young cousin was gone. J.M. – Lieutenant John MacLaine – had died in Ceylon just six months earlier, on January 13, 1881, shot by Kandyan militia while leading a mounted detachment through heavy jungle. The opinion of the commanding officer, that Lieutenant MacLaine had disregarded the advice of his men not to expose himself to enemy fire, came as no surprise. John MacLaine had always been bold-hearted, some would say foolhardy.

There, with one palm resting on the blue gum's solid trunk, lost in thought, Macquarie may have recalled the time the boy officer had fallen from a ship's mast and broken his arm during a drunken party, or the occasions he had discharged the young man's debts to preserve his reputation.

Returning to his tent, Macquarie opened his diary at August 1, 1818, and, in the words of a gruff soldier plotting a path between duty and emotion, wrote: "Trifling as this circumstance was, I was deeply affected with the recollection of the activity, manliness, and warm affection this noble youth displayed on all occasions during our tour . . ."

Was this the essence of Lachlan Macquarie, the career administrator with a compassionate streak that would ultimately bring him undone?

This year marks the bicentenary of Macquarie's arrival as the fifth governor of the colony of NSW. It has instigated a flurry of research, discussion and historical reassessment of his role as the last autocratic governor. From 1810 to 1821 he shaped the social, economic and architectural evolution of the colony. Some historians credit him as the pivotal figure in NSW's transition from a penal colony to a free



settlement and with laying the foundation for Australian society of the 19th century.

Accompanied by his second wife, Elizabeth, who would play an influential role throughout his career, Macquarie arrived in Sydney and soon set about his vision to raise NSW beyond its beginnings as a penal settlement.

His efforts to expand the colony's boundaries saw Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson find a way over the Blue Mountains in 1813, and the creation of a network of new towns and the transport systems linking them. His search for qualified expertise enabled emancipated convicts like architect Francis Greenway and surgeon William Redfern to emerge as key figures in colonial life. Programs included quality roads and bridges and the erection of more than 200 churches and public buildings including a hospital and barracks, some still in use today. In 1817, he established the Bank of NSW.

Like a boundary rider, the energetic and adventurous Macquarie, often accompanied by Elizabeth and their infant son, Lachlan, made regular visits to the colony's extremities. For weeks, and sometimes months at a time, he would bang about in the environs of Hobart and Launceston, Port Macquarie and Port Stephens, Blackheath and Bathurst, checking the pulse, visiting remote farms, receiving reports, launching projects and encouraging the endeavours of the expanding settlements.

In such style, he made three important visits to Newcastle and the Lower Hunter; the first in 1812, the second in 1818 and the last in 1821, shortly before he left the colony for good.

He diarised these visits in such detail that it is not too much of a leap imagining the man against the backdrop of Nobbys, climbing The Hill to worship at the site of Christ Church, stepping ashore at Raymond Terrace or riding horseback across Wallis Plains.

The clues to his energy, ideas and administrative skills lie in his earlier diaries where he logs his army career. Joining up, aged 14, he would spend years on tours of duty in North America, the Caribbean, Egypt and, most notably India, rising through the ranks. From the ice of Nova Scotia to the heat of India, the experience exposed him to harsh climates and conditions and different cultures.

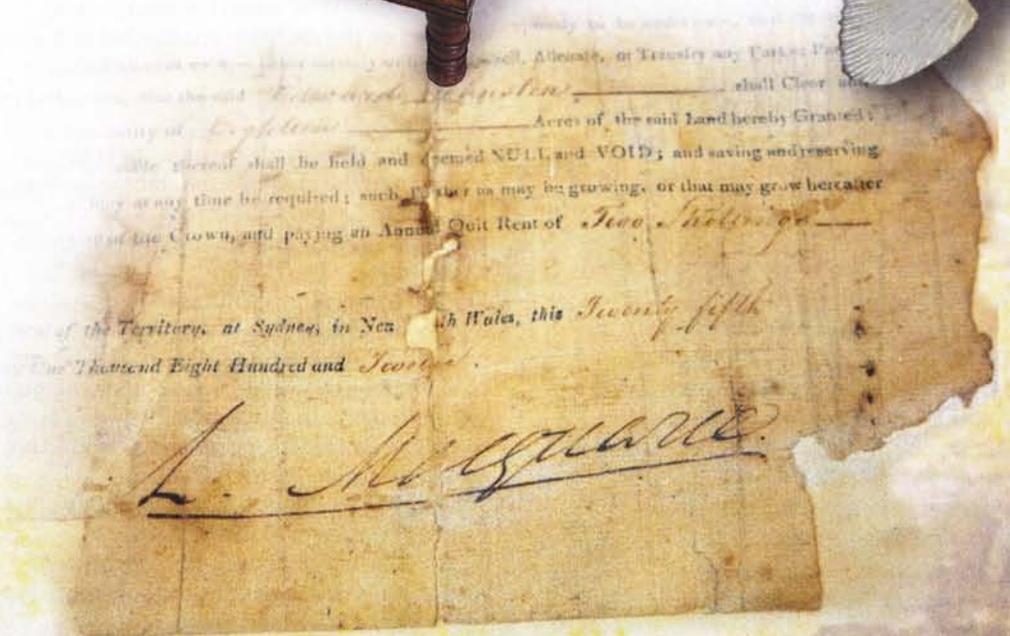
As a member of the general staff while serving with the 77th Highland Regiment in the Bombay Army under Lieutenant-General James Stuart during the 1790s, Major Macquarie's role included financial and logistical support. He took part in three arduous marches from the coast near Bangalore through mountain terrain to lay siege to the fortress city of Seringapatam. On one retreat during the monsoon season he contracted dysentery so bad, it nearly killed

him. By the time he arrived in NSW, almost 49, the tough Scot was no stranger to heat, sickness, isolation and exhaustion, and what it took to survive in such climes. As was the fashion of the day, portrait artists painted a rather foppish-looking governor. It's hard to reconcile that depiction with the frontiersman who slept under canvas, trekked the wilderness and rode and shot as a soldier should.

By the time he arrived in NSW, almost 49, the tough Scot was no stranger to heat, sickness, isolation and exhaustion.



A pervading mood of his diaries is one of impatience; here is a man eager to get on with things. When unfavourable winds prevent his ship entering the port of Newcastle, he takes to his own barge, arriving at the pier a full seven hours before the ship. His progress up river impeded by an ebb tide, he forges on by land. Yet, as the representative of the Crown, he is not averse to a little pomp and circumstance as his July 29, 1818, diary entry marking the start of his trip up the Hunter River suggests: "... at 11 a.m. I set out in my own Barge attended by Capt. Wallis, Capt. Antill, Mr. Meehan, Lt. Macquarie & Ensn. Roberts, accompanied by 5 other Boats having our Provisions Tents & Baggage on board, with 52 attendants of all descriptions - four of whom were musicians and formed our little Band. Mrs. Macquarie not feeling herself sufficiently strong for undertaking so fatiguing a Tour, remained at the settlement with our dear Boy Lachlan - and the Revd. Mr. Cowper. The sight of our six Boats so well manned with the Band Playing, and the Brigs Eliz:-Henrietta and Lady Nelson saluting had a very fine and gratifying effect."



INTRIGUING: Left, Lachlan Macquarie. Above, the Macquarie Chest, housed in the Mitchell Library, is one of the rarest and most exquisite pieces of early 19th century Australiana.



A few historians have dismissed Macquarie as ambitious, vain and humourless but a reading of his diaries depicts a man not without an eye for the absurd, ever ready to acknowledge the deeds and loyalty of others. For instance, when Macquarie is away for months at a time on a trip to Van Diemen's Land, he returns to Sydney to praise his subordinates for how well they had run the settlement in his absence.

Macquarie's interest in the Newcastle region was profound and lasting. That association is being recalled this month with two significant events. One is the search for the foundation stone to Nobbys Breakwall, or Macquarie Pier as it was originally known, laid by Macquarie during his 1818 visit. The other is an exhibition at Newcastle Region Library celebrating the governor's connection with Newcastle.

Newcastle University archivist and chairman of the Coal River Working Party, Gionni Di Gravio, believes the quest for the stone he suspects is buried near the current Nobbys roundabout shows that unearthing our past provides pointers for the here and now.

"When Macquarie landed in NSW, the place was in a shemuzzle. He had to fix up the aftermath of the Rum Rebellion and get to grips with the civil disobedience problem caused by alcohol consumption. This is something that should inform what we're dealing with today," Di Gravio says.

The archivist sides with those academics who believe Elizabeth Macquarie, who took a deep interest in the human condition and the welfare of others, exercised a compassionate influence on her husband. As an example, he points out Macquarie's concern for the

Reverend Cowper when the clergyman succumbs to seasickness on the the 1818 voyage to Newcastle.

"His thinking," says Di Gravio, "was to put people back into the equation."

Macquarie had a vision of NSW beyond its penal origins. This idea certainly included the settlement at the mouth of the Hunter where, for a time, Macquarie had an able ally in Captain James Wallis, commandant of Newcastle from 1815-18.

Wallis took on his boss's lead in establishing public works as a key to future prosperity. He

complete our public infrastructure'. By 1833, work on the pier got going again."

Enter an influential figures of his time, the surveyor Sir Thomas Mitchell, whose observations on the effects of wind and tide and selection of materials would prove crucial in the completion of the breakwall. Among other things, it was Mitchell's idea to incline the wall at 30 degrees to encourage the action of wind and surf to build a protective buffer of sand. That buffer became Nobbys Beach.

Although Macquarie's original concept was



POETRY IN MOTION

Historians viewing the emancipist Macquarie and stern jailer Major Morisset as an odd fit would draw a wry laugh from the governor's diary entries of November 1821, detailing the last visit to Newcastle.

Morisset had insisted on hosting his boss for the stay, a seemingly hospitable deed but one that came at a price.

His work in Newcastle completed, Macquarie was chafing to return to Sydney only to be delayed by stormy weather which kept his ship in port. During his confinement he may have had cause to wonder at the quality of Morisset's Sunday night dinners, as indicated by his November 19 diary entry:

"The Weather has cleared up this morning, but the Wind continues still foul, and directly against our getting to Sydney. - Feeling my Bowels rather out of sorts this morning, I took some medicine and kept my Room the greater part of the Day."

laid the original stone for what would become Christ Church, built barracks for soldiers and convicts, a boat house, lumber yard and workshop and laid out the township's original street grid. In 1816, when the Nautilus was wrecked on the southern approaches to the harbour, Wallis conceived the idea of a breakwall running from the south headland to Coal (Nobbys) Island.

Looking at Newcastle today, it could be argued that the breakwall guaranteeing the safety of the world's busiest coal port is the most significant public works project in the city's history.

Yet, in a forewarning of the neglect that has dogged Newcastle in recent times, Macquarie's bold initiative fell into disarray when a report on the colony by a judge, John Thomas Bigge, discredited his expensive public works campaign and his emancipist ways, forcing his termination and return to England.

"By 1821, according to Bigge, Macquarie Pier was too expensive," Di Gravio says.

Work was halted, leaving the constructed section - about a third of its current length - to the ravages of river and sea.

"By the 1830s, there was a clamour from within Newcastle to fix our city," says Di Gravio, chuckling at the contemporary reference.

"Much like today, people were saying, 'Please

interrupted by Bigge's negative report, Di Gravio is content that the 200th anniversary celebrations are putting the governor's deeds into perspective.

"He was an inspiring fellow with a vision of Newcastle as a free settlement. I think this is a good time to come in contact with something that he touched and was meaningful to this town."

That sentiment is alive and well at Newcastle Region Library from now until May with *Curio naturae*, an exhibition celebrating Macquarie's links to our region and featuring rare books from the library's collection and artworks by seven natural history illustrators.

One of the focal points is the Llewellyn Chest, a project by the head of Newcastle University's School of Design, Dr Anne Llewellyn, to represent the Macquarie Chest.

Housed in the Mitchell Library, the Macquarie Chest is one of the rarest and most beautiful pieces of early 19th century Australia. It returned to Scotland with Macquarie in 1822 where it remained in Strathallan Castle before being sold to a private collector. It is one of the State Library's most important acquisitions of recent years.

The chest is constructed of a combination of Australian rosewood and red cedar of the type milled in the Hunter at the time. It opens to

