



# The Legacy of Lachlan Macquarie, 5th Governor of New South Wales: His Contribution to the Maturation of Australia

By  
Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO  
Governor of New South Wales

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THE LEGACY OF LACHLAN MACQUARIE,  
5<sup>TH</sup> GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES:  
HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE MATURATION OF  
AUSTRALIA

The Warrane Lecture  
2 September 2009

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GOVERNOR  
MACQUARIE  
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**Warrane College Monograph No.19**

Warrane College is an affiliated residential college for men at The University of New South Wales. It encourages students to prepare for their future roles in society by promoting academic excellence, high personal standards and a spirit of service in a friendly environment. Lectures, seminars, educational programs and work-camps in underdeveloped societies, and local community service projects to serve both the University and the wider community, are sponsored by the College. Opus Dei, a Prelature of the Catholic Church, is responsible for the spiritual care of the College.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Warrane College

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## Warrane Lecture 2009

Introduction to the Governor of NSW

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO

Welcome Your Excellency, and welcome to current Warrane residents, alumni, friends, and visitors. I would also like to welcome back to Warrane: Sir Nicholas Shehadie *AC Kt.cr OBE*, former Lord Mayor of Sydney, and a life-long contributor to many public entities and events in Australia.

The subject of the Vice-Regal address tonight is the first non-Naval Governor of Australia, Lachlan Macquarie, a Scottish Army Officer.

I mentioned the army and navy because the initial Warrane Lecture was given by another Governor of New South Wales, Sir Roden Cutler *VC KCMG KCVO CBE*, an army officer, who officially opened this College about a year after it had actually started to function. That was almost forty years ago and tonight we begin the celebrations for Warrane College's fortieth anniversary.

Sir Roden was a noble man and one can never imagine his doing anything ignoble or mean. He was universally respected and held in great affection by all who came in contact with him. Lachlan Macquarie must have been of that ilk too as Malcolm Ellis quotes in his biography some extracts from the diary of



Elizabeth Macquarie that he, Macquarie, was “not of a nature to wish ill to anyone, much less his own wife”.

Although Warrane is a university residential college, we are not primarily a residence. University colleges are for more than bed and breakfast facilities on campus. We are here to help in the formation of young men to be leaders in the community: good professionals, good citizens, good husbands, good fathers.

This rather longer winded introduction to Her Excellency is by way of saying that our current Governor is very much in the tradition of Sir Roden. Her Excellency is a university person through and through who also understands the ethos of university residential colleges, having been a resident at, and Chair of Council of, Women’s College, The University of Sydney, where Her Excellency is also currently the Chancellor. I look forward, as I am sure you all do too, to what the current Governor will tell us about Lachlan Macquarie’s early contribution to the maturation of Australia. Your Excellency ....

Emeritus Professor Tony Shannon *AM*,  
Master, Warrane College

## 2009 WARRANE COLLEGE LECTURE

It is a great pleasure to join you tonight for the 2009 Warrane College Lecture, following the tradition of fellow Warrane lecturers who since 1971, have shared their insights and reflections on issues as diverse and relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia, as *Ethics in Business*, *Media Ownership*, *Entrepreneurship in Education*, and most importantly, *Social Justice for Aboriginal People*.

At this point, I would like to record my respect for the traditional owners of the land on which we have gathered this evening, the Gadigal people of the Eora clan, their ancestors and descendants, and indeed for all Australia's indigenous people, whose enduring culture has nurtured this continent for tens of thousands of years.

In a world beset by turbulence and anxiety, religious and racial conflict, economic upheaval, the threat of terrorism and for many, the uncertainties of life-sustaining resources and basic rights, Australians today live together as one people in a nation blessed, for the most part, by social harmony, political stability, and abundant resources.

It is therefore only fitting that we acknowledge the antecedents of this bounty, the builders of our nation, those whose legacies have contributed significantly to what we proudly claim to be a distinctive Australian identity and a sense of purpose. So this evening I have chosen to speak of one such outstanding individual, one of my

predecessors in the oldest public office in the nation, and his legacy — Lachlan Macquarie, 5<sup>th</sup> Governor of New South Wales — the bicentenary of whose appointment is occurring this year.

Macquarie was appointed to be Governor of New South Wales on 8 May 1809 in London. He arrived at Sydney Cove on 28 December that year, and four days later, on 1 January 1810, began 12 momentous years in office. I should add that among his many innovations, he was the first Governor to give official recognition to Australia Day – in 1818, —and decreed that this date, which he entitled Anniversary Day, would be a public holiday for government workers. Like so much of his legacy, that observance has endured.

And 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,  
to name but a few aspects of his legacy.

As evidence of my admiration, I number among my most treasured possessions, a land-grant document signed by Macquarie in 1812 – although I doubt that this

allows me, 198 years later, to claim legal ownership of a large part of George Street.

It has been remarked before that an aura of failure, frustration and rejection has too often been the reward of many of our national leaders. It was certainly true of many of the best known colonial governors. Phillip left office dispirited and exhausted. Bligh had been overthrown in a military coup. And sadly, it must be acknowledged that Lachlan Macquarie was another victim of misfortune – denigrated by some during his term of office in New South Wales, essentially the band of so called Exclusives, — soldiers and powerful free settlers who deeply resented his policy of emancipation.

And later, following the Commission of Enquiry called because of his humanitarian policies and civic development expenditure, he was discredited in official circles in Britain.

Yet he stands today as one of the greatest of Australia's leaders for his time, certainly one of our greatest governors, a true pioneer of the nation, unmatched for vision, magnanimity, compassion, and zest for accomplishment. He was, I believe, 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 Matthew Flinders following Flinder's circumnavigation of this continent.

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 in modest circumstances in Scotland on the tiny isle of Ulva in the Hebrides, where he worked on the family farm.

His father had died when Lachlan was young, but it is recorded that his uncle ensured that he had some education. And scholars researching Macquarie's character<sup>1</sup> are convinced that ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment were influential in Macquarie's humanitarian treatment of convicts and the marginalised, but influential also in his commitment to civic planning.

These Australian academics and researchers have sought to identify the pathways whereby Macquarie's qualities derived — those qualities which resonated with the Scottish Enlightenment; for his years of military service had not allowed for higher studies such as philosophy.

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

In particular, mention should be made of Sir James Mackintosh, who had also spent time in Bombay, India, and with whom Macquarie had enjoyed a trusting and life-long friendship.

In 1807, and still in India hoping for new horizons, Mackintosh had written of his desire — and I quote — to be “...*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.....*”<sup>2</sup>”

Macquarie was 15 when he joined the army as a volunteer. He served during the American War of Independence in New York and Charleston, — also in Canada and Jamaica and later in Egypt against Napoleon’s armies — before accompanying his regiment on his first posting to India in 1788, the year the Australian colony was born. He had married his first wife, Jane Jarvis, and taken her with him to 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 1793.

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 his second period of service in India, he narrowly escaped drowning when a freak wave struck his ship while crossing the Persian Gulf. This, extraordinarily, was at a place called Bushire.

Unable to travel through the Mediterranean because of the war with France, Macquarie journeyed overland via Baghdad, through Persia and north to St Petersburg, 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 routine.

Yet for all his outstanding qualifications, he was not the British Government's first choice for the job. The man chosen as Bligh's successor was Brigadier-General Miles Nightingall, who resigned through ill health before his departure for New South Wales.

Macquarie, already designated to be Lieutenant-Governor, offered himself as Governor and was subsequently appointed. He was then 48 years old.

In November 1807, he had married his second wife Elizabeth Campbell, who proved to be an ideal partner.

Macquarie's 12 years of service was the second longest term of any Governor in our history. Only Sir Roden Cutler — in very different times — had a longer tenure in office.

In assessing Macquarie's achievements, we must take account of the colony as he found it — chaotic, divided, demoralised following the coup d'état by Lieutenant

George Johnston and the New South Wales Corp, which had deposed Governor Bligh.

In Macquarie's own 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.<sup>3</sup>*

That was Macquarie's way — reflected still 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 instituted a



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

He built schools, hospitals, a beautiful lighthouse, and roads. Today, we call these infrastructure; he built on a scale not seen before. It was he who instituted our system of public and private education. And we see his influence today in the 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.

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

In 1813 he introduced coinage. He purchased some Spanish silver dollars and punched out the centre, thus creating two new coins and doubling the value. Macquarie Bank so appropriately has adopted Macquarie's 'Holey Dollar' as its defining emblem.

In 1817 the colony's first bank — the Bank of New South Wales — opened its doors.

Under Macquarie, the colony acquired its first courthouses, its first magistrates, 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 — roads to Parramatta and the Blue Mountains, the five planned towns, including Richmond, Liverpool and Windsor, built beyond reach of floodwaters from the Hawkesbury River. Campbelltown was established and named after his wife. We have only to look around us to see evidence of his creativity and zeal. Many of Sydney's streets bear the names he chose, including the fine thoroughfare named after himself — a privilege no politician would dare exercise today.

But his vision extended far beyond Sydney. He encouraged exploration to expand the supply of pastoral land — famine being an ever-present threat in a colony relying on shipments of food.

After the successful crossing of the Blue Mountains 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, initiating the future prospect of a prosperous rural Australia. It can be claimed that the city of Bathurst was largely his creation.

I quote Ellis again –

*Macquarie promoted many cultural and civil amenities... He encouraged the establishment of a benevolent society, a savings bank and a library. He can be accounted the first vice-regal supporter of local literature and the only*

*Governor in history to appoint a “poet laureate” – Michael Massey Robinson,  
whose stipend was the welcome annual gift of two cows.*

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 beyond anything required by the duties of office.

With the support of Elizabeth, he took a particular interest in the welfare of children, especially those of the destitute and abandoned. I have 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 ...”

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, almost 200 years ago, we 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.

His attitude to Aboriginal people was similarly enlightened, though it is important that this not be exaggerated. Macquarie was a military governor, a man of his time, and in Ellis's words, "*did not hesitate to instigate military measures against the Aborigines in 1816 when they mistook his friendliness for weakness.*" But he established the first school for Aboriginal children, and made the first official attempts to settle native people in agriculture.

John Ritchie, another of Macquarie's biographers, has given a touching account of Macquarie's final 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 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; he also knew how contact with Europeans in the townships had degraded the Blacks ...*"<sup>4</sup>

I believe that Macquarie felt a sense of shame for the treatment of Australia's Aborigines, and that his feelings towards them set in train the long process of reconciliation culminating in last year's historic apology, made on the nation's behalf with the support of all political parties. Perhaps some may claim that there was condescension and calculation in Macquarie's treatment of the first Australians. But there was also, I believe, a genuine benevolence, an innate goodness of heart.

Manning Clark, with his usual note of ironic detachment, recorded in the second volume of his *History of Australia* that many Aboriginal parents had enticed their children away from the Parramatta institution because, as Macquarie noted with regret, "*the natives ... had not sufficient confidence in Europeans to believe that the institution was solely intended for their advantage and improvement.*" Given what we know today, one can hardly blame them.

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. The colony needed 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.*"

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 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.”*

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. And to a large extent that belief was his undoing.

Continuing complaints to London by the Exclusives — free settlers, affluent land holders including John Macarthur — led to the appointment of J. T. Bigge as the commissioner to inquire into the colonial administration. Bigge’s damning report (which included judgemental accusations about being too compassionate and

overspending 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 — reflected today in Australians reaching out to the people of our region — the readiness of individual Australians to open their hearts to the victims of natural disaster, the spirit of volunteerism, individuals who assist without thought and recompense, a culture that did so much to make the 2000 Olympics such a successful and memorable achievement.

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 by a member of the Hawkesbury Historical Society<sup>5</sup> reveals that Macquarie provided land for the first Wesleyan chapel at Parramatta.

And further, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1820, Fathers John Therry and Philip Conolly arrived in Sydney to celebrate mass officially for the first time since 1804 following the Irish rebellion and the Battle of Vinegar Hill..... *“Macquarie gave land for their chapel in Sydney, donated 20 guineas to the building and laid its foundation stone..... on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1821”*, promising to support the religious liberty of Father Therry's flock, which was met with spontaneous applause.

In 1822, following his retirement as Governor, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie travelled to Europe, visiting Rome where they had an audience with Pope Pius VII, and subsequently they attended a celebration of High Mass. Macquarie, in 1810, had already acknowledged the importance of St Patrick's Day to the Irish immigrants and exiles, and an annual celebratory dinner was instituted.

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.

Macquarie's words would have little effect on Bigge's decisions. Bigge had been influenced by the malcontents, the disgruntled free settlers, the Exclusives. 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 Governor – though it was not until 1856 that the Council was granted legislative powers.



Reading Macquarie's submission to Commissioner Bigge today, one senses not only the depth of its passion and sincerity; we hear, 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.

Here is part of what he wrote to Bigge (and for the printed version of this address I have adopted modern conventions of punctuation) –

*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! ... You already 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].<sup>6</sup>*

On the eve of his departure, thousands gathered in the streets of Sydney to farewell him.

Today, as I travel the length and breadth of the State in my official duties, I see the legacy of Lachlan Macquarie in so much of our lifestyle and shared values. I see it in the courage of our farmers, the men and women on the land as they contend with drought and other trials and misfortunes. I see it in the spirit of our fighting men and women abroad, who, like Macquarie, serve their country with dedication and professionalism. I see it in the character of our people – their warmth and friendliness, their lack of pretension, their pragmatism, their rejection of vainglory and superficial status, the belief of most in the ‘fair go’.

However, we must never assume that because of the blessings of our nation that we ourselves are perfect and are adequately meeting the societal challenges which confront us, as did Lachlan Macquarie.

We speak of the need for social inclusion, but do actions match our aspirations? Researchers in recent years have drawn our attention to the fact that the health of a population is *“better in societies where income is more equally distributed”*. Further, they have identified that *“other social problems including mental illness, violence, imprisonment, lack of trust, teenage births, obesity, drug abuse and poor educational performance of children are also more common in more unequal societies.”*<sup>7</sup> Many within these groups would qualify as marginalised, alienated or at risk of so being. These findings have been established from rigorous analysis of United Nations data.

One of the lead researchers in this field<sup>8</sup>, is currently in Australia presenting these observations. In a media interview a few days ago, he repeated this confronting interpretation, and I quote — *“Despite Australia’s view of itself as an egalitarian society with a “fair go” ethic, it has one of the biggest income disparities between wealthy and poor in the developed world.....sitting fourth out of twenty-three countries in terms of unequal income distributions with only Britain, Portugal and the US worse”*.

Can we invoke the spirit of Macquarie and reactivate his legacy, to examine more deeply the predeterminants of those social problems in unequal societies.

Macquarie recognised from the outset — 200 years ago — that challenges would always exist not only for his infant colony but for the nation which would subsequently develop, and he provided a model of courage, determination and practical innovation which continues to inspire.

It is heartening to know that following deliberations of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health<sup>9</sup>, a proactive approach in Australia, in terms of policy and practice, is underway to close the gap of those at risk and the wider population.

The Australia of today, whatever the challenges we face, would have been a source of great satisfaction, indeed of pride, to Lachlan Macquarie. Sadly, however, he returned to England a broken-hearted man and died in London on 1 July 1824.

In *The Australian*, the newspaper established during Macquarie's term, William Wentworth — 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 ...*

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 example we recall with gratitude in this period of his bicentenary.

May I, in conclusion, thank the many Australians, some with us tonight — 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.

Thank you.

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