GOVERNOR
MACQUARIE

DEREK PARKER
Also by Derek Parker:

The Fall of Phaethon (1954)
Company of Two (with Paul Casimir, 1955)
Beyond Wisdom (verse play, 1957)
Byron and his World (1968)
The Twelfth Rose (ballet libretto, 1969)
The Question of Astrology (1970)
The Westcountry (1973)
John Donne and his World (1975)
Familiar to All: William Lilly and 17th century astrology (1975)
Radio: the great years (1977)
The Westcountry and the Sea (1980)
The Memoirs of Cora Pearl (fiction, as William Blatchford, 1983)
The Trade of Angels (fiction, 1988)
The Royal Academy of Dancing: the first 75 years (1995)
Writing Erotic Fiction (1995)
Nell Gwyn (2000)
Roman Murder Mystery: the true story of Pompilia (2001)
Casanova (2002)
Benvenuto Cellini (2004)
Voltaire (2005)
TIMELINE

Year | Events in the life of Macquarie | International affairs
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1762 | January 31, birth of Lachlan Macquarie | England declares war on Spain
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c.1772 | Attends Royal High School Edinburgh |
    | Regulating Act concerning East India Company |
    | Boston Assembly threatens secession from England |
1777–84 | Commissioned Ensign, serves in Canada and America | American War of Independence
1784–7 | Farms on Mull | Peace of Versailles; death of Frederick the Great
    | Lieutenant in 77th Highland Regiment; raises recruits; | Governor Phillip founds settlement at Sydney
    | Sails for India, arrives in Bombay |
1789 | Promoted captain lieutenant | Washington President of U.S.A
    | Serves against Tippoo Sahib in campaign at Travancore | Fall of the Bastille
1790–92 | Campaigning in Mysore; Siege of Srirangapatna | Tom Paine publishes Rights of Man
1793 | Meets and proposes to Jane Jarvis; Married, 8 September | France declares war on Britain
    | Promoted Brigade Major | British seize French settlements in India
    | British occupy Cape of Good Hope | Louis XIV executed
1794 | Move to Calicut |
    | French invade Holland |
1795 | Campaign to Cochin |
1796 | Campaign to Columbo; Governor of Point de Galle | Spain declares war on Britain
    | Jane Macquarie unwell |
1797 | Death of Jane Macquarie | Nelson's victory at Cape St Vincent
    | Campaign to Malabar | Naval mutiny at the Nore
1799 | Campaign to Srirangapatna | Austria declares war on France
    | Tippoo defeated and killed | Visit to Calcutta
1800 | Military Secretary to Governor of Bombay | Bonaparte defeats Austrians at Marengo
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1801 | Campaigns to Egypt | French evacuate Egypt
    | Visits to Calcutta |
1802 | Returns to Bombay; resumes position as Military Secretary |
    | England passes law against child labour |
1803 | Sails for Europe; presented at Court |
    | Britain declares war on France |
1804 | Money-making scam discovered |
    | Bonaparte crowned Emperor |
    | Meets and proposes to Elizabeth Campbell |
1805 | Returns to Bombay; Military Secretary once more |
    | Battle of Trafalgar |
    | Appointed Lieutenant Colonel of 73rd regiment |
1807 | Leaves India, travelling over-land to Europe |
    | France and Russia declare war on Britain |
    | British bombard Copenhagen and capture Danish fleet |
1808  Arrives in London; visits Mull
       Appointed Governor of New South Wales
1809  Sails for New South Wales
       Sir John Moore killed at Corunna
       Lord Liverpool Secretary of State for Colonies
1810  Commission as Governor read at Sydney
       Napoleon annexes Holland
       Dealings with Governor Bligh
       Begins official duties; names Sydney streets
1811  Inspects outlying settlements; plans future towns
       Prince of Wales becomes Regent
       Visits Van Diemen’s Land
       British defeat French at Albuera
       Accused of over-spending
1812  Report on Transportation approves of Macquarie
       Lord Bathurst Secretary of State for the Colonies
       Renews determination to support emancipists
1813  Commissions road over the Blue Mountains
       Napoleon defeated at Leipzig
       Disputes with the military
       Abolition of monopoly of East India Company
1814  Birth of Lachlan
       Napoleon abdicates; retreats to Elba
       Macquarie Expedition over Blue Mountains
       Christianity introduced into New Zealand
       Disputes with Rev Marsden and the Bent brothers
       Reform of legal system
1815  Jeffrey Bent objects to emancipists; closes the courts, refuses to pay tolls
       Napoleon returns; is defeated at Waterloo
       Macquarie threatens resignation, but is vindicated by Bathurst
       46th regiment arrives
1816  Problems with Aborigines; short-lived brutal suppression
       First protective tariff in U.S.A
       First Australian bank established
       Again offers resignation
1817  Reconciliation with Aborigines
       Anglo-Spanish treaty opens up West Indian trade to Britain
       Increased disputes with anti-emancipists
       Illegal arrest of Traveller
1818  First Australia Day celebrated
       Dispute with Rev Marsden reaches apogee
       Native Institution thrives
1819  Welcomes John Thomas Bigge, Government Commissioner
       British found Singapore to enquire into state of N.S.W
       First steamer crosses Atlantic in 28 days
       Serious illness
1820  Increased number of convicts arrive in NSW
       Accession of King George IV
       Puts rights of emancipists in question
       Law suit
1821  Visit to Van Diemen’s Land
       Death of Napoleon
       Receives news of appointment of successor
       Unofficial ‘farewell’ tours of colony
1822  15 February leaves Australia; 1 July arrives England
       Visits the Highlands; leaves on tour of Europe
1823  Tours France and Italy with Elizabeth and Lachlan
       Retires to Mull
1824  Falls ill during visit to London; dies, 1 July
that while Governor Macquarie had certainly supervised the building in New South Wales of some good roads and some handsome buildings (if at far too high a cost to the British taxpayers), under his government the colony had ceased to be what it was required to be – a place with a reputation for cruelty and hopelessness so terrifying that the very threat of being banished there would strike sufficient terror into the heart of a prospective malefactor to make him immediately reject any thought of misbehaviour. Macquarie shared this view up to a point, certainly inasmuch as he saw Australia as ‘a penitentiary or asylum on a grand scale’, but he also saw with a vision shared by few others that the country had the potential to become ‘one of the greatest and most flourishing colonies belonging to the British Empire’.

Reluctant though one may be to agree with any of Mr Bigge’s conclusions, which were as myopic as might have been expected from a career civil servant totally devoted to serving his masters and producing a result convenient to them, but otherwise entirely unqualified for the task set him, there is of course a sense in which he was right. Lachlan Macquarie entirely lacked the ability to view any except the very worst offenders in his care as irredeemably lost to society. He was as friendly to a repentant or emancipated convict whom he saw as useful to the colony as he was scornful of the ‘gentlemen settlers’ who were good for nothing except using the free convict labourers to help them to a fortune, or of those who declined to accept the emancipists on equal terms. Indeed, ‘if they are too proud or too delicate in their

FOREWORD

Like Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie returned to England on his retirement to an indifferent and inattentive reception. Neither man received the formal acknowledgement he might have expected and certainly deserved; both died in virtual obscurity, Macquarie without a knighthood or the Government pension he had been promised, his funeral ignored by the state except for the presence of a symbolic empty coach commissioned by the Secretary for the Colonies.

This neglect is not quite as puzzling as it may seem. If the general population of England knew anything at all about Australia it was simply as a remote colony used as a receptacle for the dregs of society, from petty thieves to forgers to Irish political agitators. It was generally thought useful only in that it placed nefarious malefactors out of sight and out of mind, ridding English harbours of the stinking disease-ridden prison ships which had, a generation previously, been a blot on the marine landscape and at worst a positive danger to health. Why should its ex-Governor be of interest?

As for official acknowledgment, Macquarie was courteously received on his return by the Minister responsible for the colonies, but as far as the Government was concerned he had failed in his duty – this was clearly documented to official minds in the recent report compiled by Commissioner John Bigge, which concluded
feelings to associate with the population of the country,' he declared, 'they should ... bend their course to some other country.' This made him popular with no-one except a few emancipists, who on the whole regarded him as an easy man of whom to take advantage.

Those ‘free settlers’ who saw themselves as the only proper recipients of his respect and encouragement were at best disappointed and at worst insulted by his notion that once a man or woman had served their sentence they should be free to again take up the place in society they had occupied before their transgression, considering themselves as the equals of those who had led a lifetime of respectability. Where was true punishment for crime if after a few years the felon was to be considered on a par, socially, with the voluntary immigrants?

The view that emancipists should be free to rejoin society at the level they occupied before their transgression was actually the official attitude of the British government – at least up to a point; the Colonial Secretaries at home in London supported the Governor somewhat half-heartedly when faced with wails of affronted pride from the ‘free men’ of Sydney who found themselves seated, at Government House, at the table with ex-convicts. But they did nothing to trumpet their approval of the policy to those who violently objected to it; they supported Macquarie in principle, but too discreetly to be of any real assistance. He himself did not help matters by refusing to give way by so much as a word to those who disputed his views on the matter.

However one may admire him for his principles, the confidence Macquarie had in the emancipists was in fact often misplaced, and he was either slow to see this or reluctant to acknowledge it. He had on the whole a clear understanding of the motives of others, but too often failed to see their consequence. He has been accused of too freely taking men and women at their face value, and while this is a likable trait its effects are sometimes troublesome.

There is no escaping the fact that he was an indifferent administrator. The British Government, in mind that the previous Governors – all naval men – had not been altogether successful, had decided to try the hand of a military officer, thus perpetuating their erroneous belief that an officer must necessarily be as good at commanding a civil population as at commanding a ship’s company or a regiment. They would have done better to look for a good civil servant. Macquarie approached civil government with the same attitude as a military commander, expecting complete and instant obedience. While he paid lip service to opposing arguments he remained intolerant of those he saw as inveterately opposed to his own views and the views of the Government and (he believed) continually plotting to subvert them. Continual opposition could irritate him to the point at which his judgement failed.

The future Duke of Wellington thought that in the end Macquarie lacked the ability to see and make the right decision in really complex and difficult circumstances. The weakest of his decisions were occasionally the result of his hypersensitivity to criticism. Certainly in the case of the ‘flogging parson’, the Reverend Samuel Marsden, he was driven in the end to an uncharacteristic display
of ill-temper. He was also incapable of understanding the virulence of the opposition of the military, violently anti-emancipist to a man, who failed to give him the respect or in some cases the obedience due to him. His sensitivity to any public show of disrespect seems to indicate a degree of self-doubt; he could not afford to show this, and never did so, but he may have felt it. At one time, certainly, he confessed that he believed that his talents and judgement were not adequate to the task of improving conditions in the colony to the extent that he saw as indispensable.

His honesty and straightforwardness were unquestionable and he expected to find the same qualities in others – just as he expected his own courtesy and good manners to be a benchmark for general behaviour in the colony. When those expectations were disappointed he could become brusque and dismissive. Courteous and affable even to those he saw as his enemies, he was capable under duress of being cold and distant.

Though he was never well off – except when, in India, he somehow contrived to make a considerable amount of money in a manner no doubt learned from his military colleagues – he was always generous: on one occasion for instance giving up part of his salary as military secretary to the Governor of Bombay in favour of an impecunious former secretary dismissed for incompetence. In such cases his natural sympathies were no doubt reinforced by his Christian faith, which was strong and sometimes strongly expressed.

His qualities as a husband and father were commonly acknowledged. He recognised the virtues and qualities of Elizabeth, his second wife, who was clearly the best sort of consort for a governor, and the birth of his son was a great delight to him. He has been accused of being less devoted to Elizabeth than to her predecessor – his first wife, Jane – but a beautiful wife who dies within only a few years of a marriage and when both partners are young is one thing; a second wife married when both are considerably older is another, and it would have been surprising if Macquarie had written as passionately about Elizabeth in his journals as he did about Jane.

Macquarie’s journals of course present valuable material to anyone considering his life. They are not confessional, except at very special moments – such as the birth of young Lachlan, when the father’s joy bursts onto the page – but can sometimes be infuriating – silent on just the matters on which one longs to know his feelings and opinions. However, at his best (describing his extraordinary journey overland home from India, for instance) he is an excellent journalist. His daily entries often show a deep interest not only in the various aspects of life in the colony and his admiration for its strange beauty, but demonstrate his careful and sometimes meticulous plans for its future.

I have quoted freely from the journals, as from Macquarie’s dispatches and the other records of his life in Australia – the many remarkable documents recorded in the series of Historical Records of Australia, published with foresight by the Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament and now available on CD-ROM. Macquarie in his own words is considerably
more interesting than Macquarie edited or re-written, and in that sense I have attempted what is almost a documentary life, as well as a book which is intended to tell the story of Macquarie’s life in as straightforward a manner as possible, without undue over-simplification. I have left the extracts from the journals unedited except in two respects: I have reduced the capitalisation which he used so freely – though even more freely in his correspondence with London than in his journals – and I have very occasionally adjusted his punctuation when it seems to get in the way of his meaning.

I have also omitted the plethora of exclamation marks which have puzzled more than one student of the journals. These come in ones, twos and threes; sometimes they mark a day which was clearly of significance – such as the days marking his arrival in New South Wales, his marriages or the birth of his son. But what are we to make of the days on which nothing of note is recorded, but which are marked with two or three exclamation marks? It has been seriously suggested that in some way they are connected with his sexual life, but this is almost certainly not so. In any case there is little point in speculation; we shall never know. In any event for the most part I have omitted them.

Finally, in what is essentially a popular biography of Lachlan Macquarie I hope that I have done something to bring into focus for a new generation a man who not only left his vision stamped on the landscape in the shape of buildings, roads and towns, but did much to lay the foundation for the open, free and tolerant society of modern Australia.

The island of Ulva lies just off the west coast of Mull in the Scottish Inner Hebrides, surrounded by a scattering of small islands and rocks with such names as Eilean na b-Uamh (island of the cave), Eilean Bàn (fair island), Eilean a’ Bhuic (island of the buck) and Bogha MhicGuar has ‘MacQuarrie’s rock’). It was on Ulva that Lachlan Macquarie was born on the last day of January, 1762. His father, who bore the same forename, was a cousin of the last chieftain of his clan. Little is known of him – there is dispute as to whether he was a miller or a carpenter – some indication that the clan had fallen on bad times was observed by Dr Johnson and his companion James Boswell when they visited Ulva in October of 1773, for they described the chieftain’s house as ‘mean’, and heard that the island was soon to be sold to clear his debts. M’Quarie himself was, however, ‘intelligent, polite and much a man of the world’, and the travellers were entertained by his conversation. Among other things he told them that Ulva was probably the last place in the British Isles where the ancient custom of Mercheta Mulierum still applied: that ‘the lord of a manor, or a baron, had to have the first night of all his vassal’s wives.’ However he confided that in these modern times he exchanged the honour for payment of five shillings or a sheep.

The visitors were given a room for the night, with
two ‘elegant’ beds – Johnson’s, however, was too short, so that his feet stuck out at the bottom. Next day, ‘being informed that there was nothing worthy of observation in Ulva’, they left. Shortly afterwards they heard that the island – which M’Quarrie told them had been in the family for 900 years – had indeed been sold, and Johnson was sad that ‘the MacQuaries had been turned out of their hereditary island.’ M’Quarrie was battered but not broken – at the age of sixty-three he enlisted in the army, served in the American wars, returned safe home to die in bed at the age of a 103.

If eleven-year-old Lachlan Macquarie saw the lumbering figure of the doctor and his sprightlier companion wandering aimlessly over the landscape he would probably have remembered the experience – there was nothing much else to remember of growing up on Ulva and the doctor’s visit would have been a major event of a mild winter (the Gulf Stream makes Hebridean winters relatively bearable). Nor, presumably, did Lachlan encounter Joseph Banks, recently returned from Botany Bay, who also spent some time on Ulva, and ‘discovered’ Fingal’s Cave on nearby Staffa. A meeting with him would have been a strange presage of things to come for the small boy.

Lachlan’s father must have died while he was still a child; fortunately his mother was a strong and determined woman – the daughter of a chieftain of the second most important branch of the Maclean clan, of Lochbuy, on Mull, and the half-sister of Murdoch Maclaine, present chieftain of Lochbuy. Besides her husband she had already buried two sons, and rented and farmed a small holding on Mull, at Oskamull, where she lived with Lachlan and his brothers Donald and Charles.

Lachlan’s uncle Murdoch proved his good angel. It seems almost certain that it was he who paid for the boy to study at the Royal High School at Edinburgh, one of the oldest schools in the world, founded in 1128 as a seminary of the Abbey of Holyrood and already famous in 1584 when Edinburgh’s town council instructed its headmaster ‘to instruct the youth in pietie, guid maneris, doctrine and letteris’. By Lachlan’s time it was known throughout Europe, and among his classmates were probably boys from Russia, Germany, Switzerland, the Barbadoes, St Vincent, Demerara and the East Indies, besides England and Ireland. Though he never mentioned it, and the absence of records for the period makes everything about his time there guesswork, there is a tradition that Lachlan studied under the school’s most famous rector, Alexander Adam, in which case the influence on his character would have been considerable. We know that he left the school able at least to read and write, though to call him a scholar would be exaggerating – he himself admitted that he had no particular love of study, to which he was ‘not able or inclined to attend’.

His education was interrupted by the outbreak of the American War of Independence. Unsurprisingly, a large number of highlanders went off to fight – not for any love of England or the First Earl of Chatham, who recruited widely in the north, but simply because they thought it worth gambling what money they had on buying a