

MACQUARIE THE PROJECT MANAGER

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THIS article aims to throw some light on Lachlan Macquarie from a new angle. While the term ‘Macquarie, the Builder’ has a familiar ring to it, I want to talk about ‘Macquarie, the Project Manager’. There have been several recent biographies of Macquarie, however most have ignored the details of his practical management of the estate.¹

It became apparent that Macquarie’s asset management had been largely neglected while I was researching the architecture of the period for the late Caroline Simpson,² research which was attempting to assess Macquarie’s motivation in his vast upgrade of the Parramatta Government House and its Domain, and in doing so, gain insights into his character and administration. Macquarie’s buildings have been greatly admired, and studied from an architectural perspective, but the way he went about his building program; the sophistication of its organization and the methodologies employed have been overlooked.

Among Macquarie’s initial concerns on arrival in January 1810, was the need to obtain base data on the state of the colony. Infrastructure had been neglected since the Rum Rebellion in January 1808, from when there was effectively no lawful government that could authorize works on the public account. A detailed empirical analysis of the accounts of Richard Rouse,³ who was the

¹ For example, Harry Dillon and Peter Butler, *Macquarie: From Colony to Country* (Melbourne: Random House Australia, 2010).

² Sue Rosen, *Government House, Parramatta 1788–2000: a History of the Governors, their Home and its Domain, Parramatta Park* (Sydney: Caroline Simpson, 2003).

³ Marjorie Lenahan, ‘Rouse, Richard (1774–1852)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: Australian National University / National Centre of Biography, 1967). At: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rouse-richard-2612/text3601>. Accessed 13 December 2017.

Superintendent of the Parramatta Lumber Yard from 1805 until 1821, illuminated this aspect of Macquarie's governorship.

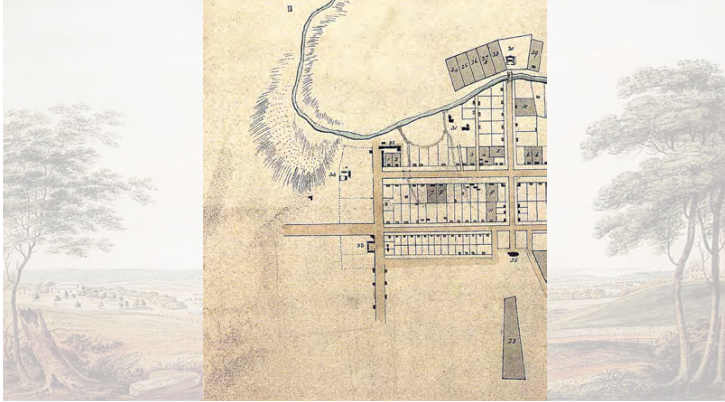


Figure 1

This extract from an 1804 plan by Surveyor George Evans shows the location off the Lumber Yard, down the hill from the Parramatta Government House. The streets in the area were later reconfigured and part absorbed into the Domain. (National Archives, Kew Colonial Office 700).

The Lumber Yard was the nineteenth century equivalent of the Department of Public Works. It was located in the Domain, just down the hill from Government House.



Figure 2

A detailed analysis of the accounts line by line tabulating the allocation of labour, skilled trades and materials against work sites in Parramatta, enabled priorities to be identified and also to sort out the sequence of development at Government House and the Domain. They also reveal Macquarie's priorities, concern for the colony and refute the claim that Macquarie was self-indulgent and self-aggrandizing in the works he undertook at the Parramatta Government House.

Figure 3

Figures 2 and 3 show extracts from the January 1810 survey showing the recommended works for a number of public buildings in Parramatta. It was from this survey that priorities were determined for Macquarie's public works program. [National Archives, Kew Colonial Office Port Jackson Despatches 201/53, pp. 127-128].

Known, colloquially, as the 'Rouse Returns', the accounts embed the story of local public works construction, and provide real insights into the public works program as a whole. They are exemplars of modern economic rationalist accountability, and they use a language and methodology peculiar to the accounting genre, with labour and materials charged against specific projects. It was possible to draw out entries concerning particular places for both labour and materials to conceptualize the construction process and the approach to public works.

Figure 4

This extract from the Rouse Returns dated April 1810 shows the dense detail of the returns and indicates that there were only 34 men available for public works at Parramatta. [ML: Richard Rouse, Returns of labour of the Parramatta Lumber Yard, 1803–1821, FM4/2119 and A2086].

All major public buildings in Parramatta, for example the hospital and barracks, were constructed with an accompanying suite of outbuildings and included landscape elements such as paving, and levelling with gravel and fencing.

One of Macquarie's earliest instructions was to order Rouse to undertake a survey of public buildings. What you can see in figure 3 is an extract showing the Parramatta survey, found in Colonial Office records in Britain under Port Jackson Despatches, 1810. It lists all the public buildings in Parramatta and their condition, for example the Gaol was in a good state, the hospital in an indifferent state, and the Court House irreparable. It then lists required works and their costs.

Major works required at Government House included:⁴ 1) re-shingling; 2) northern end to be taken down and rebuilt; 3) and a

⁴ National Archives Kew Colonial Office 201/53, Port Jackson Despatches, p. 128.

new stair case (£56). The survey did not assess the coach house and stables as worth repairing.

Macquarie later said, when required to defend the work on Government House, that the house was in danger of falling, and the Kitchen in fact fell to the ground and the stair was extremely dangerous, with 'many persons having got severe falls on it. ...' The Stables were so close to ruin that a horse could not be put into them.⁵

He was universally hampered in rectifying the situation as the number of convicts transported had declined since 1803 due to the Napoleonic Wars, which interrupted shipping. Until post 1815 and their cessation, there was a shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour as convicts completed their sentences and were not replaced by fresh transports.

Responding to the situation, Macquarie ordered a programme of essential repairs to keep buildings standing and functional. The sequence of resource allocation indicates that the work reflected the needs identified in the 1810 survey, and that structures were repaired until, if necessary, entirely new buildings could be constructed. The key factor, in juggling essential maintenance against the need for entirely new structures, was a work force capable of undertaking it. The records make it clear that skilled labourers were in short supply.

In the first half of 1811, there were less than forty labourers inclusive of only two or three carpenters, smiths, two plasterers and no bricklayers or masons. Reflecting the labour situation, the Parramatta Court House, pessimistically described in the 1810 survey as irreparable, was under repair and in May 1811 work commenced on the female factory, also identified as requiring extensive repairs and modifications. Later in the year, the provision store was tackled. As that neared completion, work on the wharf commenced.

⁵ Mitchell Library NSW: Macquarie to Bigge, 18 January 1821, BT Box 26, p. 5733.

By mid 1812, repair to the wharf (commenced in August 1811) had been completed and the focus was on repairs to the military barracks. Labourers had increased to almost fifty men in the second half of 1811 and there were by then up to five carpenters. All the artisans associated with these projects were based in the Domain.

When bricklayers arrived in December 1812, repairs on the hospital were undertaken, and the brickies were subsequently engaged at the factory, the military barracks and elsewhere, for short periods indicative of repair and modification work. The process of work at the Government House stables typifies activity at numerous Parramatta sites; minor repairs were undertaken in November 1811, May, October and November 1812, and April 1813; but they were not ultimately rebuilt until 1817. It was in March 1813, three years after Macquarie's arrival in the colony, that extensive repair work commenced at Government House.

In summary, at Parramatta the priorities for building works in the 1811–1814 period were, in order, the female factory and provision store followed by the wharf. When the Rouse Returns resume in 1817 the major building priorities in order were the new hospital, new barracks, new factory, the church tower, prisoner's barracks and new Lumber Yard.⁶

The pattern of works under Macquarie, beyond the 'repair' stage was for two major construction projects, two road and bridge projects, and a number of miscellaneous undertakings. Project management was sophisticated, as the managers attempted to make the best use of available workers. The pattern that is evident post 1817 is likely to have developed over the period 1815 to 1817 where records have not survived. The first to go onto a site were the bricklayers, followed by carpenters, roofers, glaziers, plasterers and painters. On completion of the work, they transferred to a second major project.

Another feature of the projects was the recycling of materials. All sorts of materials, including bricks and iron, as well as entire

⁶ ML: Bigge Appendix, Evidence of Richard Rouse. BT Box 1, 27 January 1821, p. 334.

buildings were recycled. When the Government brewery in the Governor's Domain (now Parramatta Park) was dismantled in 1811, the associated granary identified in the 1810 survey as being in a 'good state', was re-erected at the female factory. One of many examples of re-use was the use of the hinges from the brewery, which were put on doors at the provision store. In March 1813 when the new store was completed, the old store originally constructed in 1790 was demolished. The bricks were re-used in the construction of a Gardener's house in the Domain. The re-use of these materials has helped confuse the dating of buildings in the so-called 'Dairy Precinct' of Parramatta Park. It is actually the site of Australia's first brewery, established by Governor King in 1804. In 1813 the former Domain malt kiln (identified in 1810 as being in good condition) was converted to a house for the Government Gardener. It is still extant in the Domain today, unfortunately identified as the dairy cottage.

A chief source of grievance toward Macquarie by free settlers was that skilled convict labour was rarely available to them because of the administration's retention of artisans in public employment. Macquarie's use of the skilled workforce was a key factor in the complaints made about his administration that ultimately resulted in the Bigge Enquiry and Macquarie's recall. Certainly, Commissioner Bigge agreed with Macquarie's detractors, who were critical of his retention of the majority of skilled convict arrivals in government service for as long as possible. While the aggregation of statistics for the period can be deceptive, Bigge noted in his *Report on the State of the Colony* that Macquarie was reluctant to disperse the artisans and that of 11,767 male convicts who had arrived in New South Wales between 1st January 1814 and 29 December 1820, some 4,587 were taken by government; 1,587 of those were mechanics, the most skilled and three thousand were labourers.⁷

Macquarie's policy of keeping skilled mechanics together rather than dispersing them made a lot of sense from the government's

⁷ The Bigge Report and Evidence can now be viewed online on the State Library of New South Wales website. The data was published by John Ritchie in 1971 and has been extensively used by Australian historians of the period.

viewpoint: large numbers of convicts and an increasing number of free settlers required more public infrastructure. The demands of the free settlers were self-aggrandising. A large skilled labour force meant that new works rather than repairs could be undertaken. Nevertheless, Bigge recommended otherwise. The clash was one of public versus private interests and the control of a skilled workforce in a rapidly developing private and public economy.

Macquarie, did not undertake even minor repairs to the Parramatta Government House until January 1811 when a plasterer made minor repairs to the kitchen. It was not until March 1813 that more extensive repairs were commenced. From late 1813, the focus of construction in the Domain was on the second gardener's house and as that drew to a conclusion, work began in earnest on Government House. With almost 3,000 feet of fencing specified in the 1810 survey, fencing was an ongoing activity which occupied not only carpenters, but the smiths who repaired tools, and made nails and hinges etc. for the gates, and the sawyers who prepared timber.

Less than six months after Lieutenant John Watts' appointment to Macquarie as Aide-de-Camp, in June 1814 plans for major work began to be implemented. Watts had served in the British Army in the West Indies before his posting to Australia and prior to that had worked for the Dublin architect, Griffin.⁸ Watts has been credited with the design of the government houses at both Parramatta and Tasmania. However, there are a series of plans of the Parramatta Government House and outbuildings in the Public Records Office that link these buildings to architect Francis Greenway.⁹ Greenway, a convict, transported for fraud, arrived in the colony in early 1814.

⁸ Helen Proudfoot, *Old Government House the Building and its Landscape* (Sydney: The State Planning Authority of New South Wales and Angus and Robertson, 1971), p. 30; Morton Herman, *The Early Australian Architects and Their Work* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1954), p. 86.

⁹ National archives, Kew, Colonial Office, Port Jackson Despatches, 201/133, MFQ 236(12).

He was introduced to Macquarie by Surgeon John Harris and had been employed by Harris to extend *Ultimo*, his Sydney residence.¹⁰

The design for the Government House involved the doubling of Hunter's two-storey house and the addition of two single storey wings. The addition to the central section contained the staircase and the front entrance was enhanced by a fanlight and a portico designed by Greenway. The roof became 'M' shaped. The single-storey, hipped-roof wings were linked by corridors or lobbies.¹¹

Finally, after some 22 months of works, Macquarie noted on 2 October 1816, that

The whole of the additions and repairs, some time since ordered to be made to the Government House, Garden and Grounds at Parramatta, being now completed to our satisfaction, we have resolved on passing a great part of our time here in future, especially during the Winter and Spring months.¹²

On 18 November Macquarie arrived at Parramatta intending to take up full-time residence, while Government House at Sydney, which was in a poor state, was under repair. After settling into the house, Macquarie set about landscaping the grounds and erecting outbuildings. Stables were constructed under Greenway's supervision.¹³ With the additions, Government House, Parramatta had again become recognised as one of the colony's most distinguished buildings.¹⁴ While construction activity may have slowed, in 1817

¹⁰ Sue Rosen, *Australia's Oldest House: Surgeon John Harris and Experiment Farm Cottage* (Ultimo: Halstead Press, 2010), pp. 52–53.

¹¹ Proudfoot, *Old Government House the Building and its Landscape*, p. 32.

¹² ML: Macquarie's Diary. 2 October 1816, A773.

¹³ NLA CO 201/133, 'List of Works undertaken, now in progress or completed in NSW and Van Diemen's Land Since February 1810'. Reel 120; Government and General Order July 5 1817; M.L.: The Rouse Returns, A2086.

¹⁴ *A Description of Sydney, Parramatta, Newcastle, &c. Settlements in New South Wales with some account of the manners and employment of the convicts in a letter from John Slater to his wife in Nottingham published for the benefit of his wife and four children* (Nottingham: Sutton & Son, Bridlesmith Gate, 1819), p. 5.

Macquarie was not living in an isolated pastoral idyll. In August, while the plasterer worked on the stable, six labourers worked in the garden and another thirty-one were in the Domain. Macquarie, at breakfast, was likely to look across at a busy scene of activity with people passing on their way to work or in their employment. It is not surprising that trespassing was a problem and privacy difficult to achieve.¹⁵ It was a working estate at which raw materials—such as stone, slate and clay were extracted for use on public infrastructure in Parramatta. Charcoal was burnt for use by the Lumber Yard smiths and bricks were moulded and fired.

A deposit of slate discovered in April 1788 on the first exploratory trip into the area, was being extracted for use in road works and on paths. In April 1818, some dozen men were employed digging slate for the Sydney Road, and by the end of year, paths in the Domain were formed using this material. In the Domain, construction of the Dam to supply water to Parramatta had also begun and work on the Domain Bridge commenced in November and four bricklayers commenced work on the Pigeon House. A town cart was continually engaged in drawing wood and water to Government House and dung to the garden. By early December, the bricklayers employed on the pigeon house had been replaced by four carpenters and two plasterers, and work on the bridge had progressed sufficiently for it to be painted. Stone was being quarried for the Dam, where six members of the Town Gang and twelve other labourers were occupied. More gates for the Domain were being made. Three carts were busy drawing the slate and gravel, taking loam and lime to the pigeon house. A timber carriage was drawing logs to the dam.

During 1819, the Domain remained a busy workplace, usually, at least a 20 strong Town Gang was employed in the Domain on such tasks as infilling ditches, getting stone and gravel or removing earth. The construction of gates and fencing, including a new stone wall, were underway. A dwarf wall had been constructed in front of the

¹⁵ SRNSW Col. Sec., CGS 897, Main Series of Letters Received, 1788–1826, 4/1744, p. 338.

Government Domain.¹⁶ Invalids were pulling cotton trees that had become a pest—a legacy of the agricultural experimentation, practiced in the Domain from its earliest days. The scene was being set for the house, where the Macquaries were now spending a considerable part of their time.

In fact, Government House and its Domain at Parramatta rather than being an isolated retreat, was the very center of public works during Macquarie's governorship. At times, and for considerable periods, for example across 1819, there were never less than 50, and up to 90 men employed there and the sight and sound of them as they moved about their tasks was unavoidable. Other workers such as the Government House house-keeper, laundress, and stable hands further added to the numbers.

The Lumber Yard was situated only a short walk down the hill from Government House, in the Domain, near present day Pitt Street, between Hunter and Macquarie Streets. Aside from Government employees, prior to 1820 there were an unknown number of land owners whose properties were absorbed into the core of the Domain, that core remains today as Parramatta Park.

In addition to George Salter, an early resident whose house was located in the maltings/garden area from late 1796, there was, for example, George Howell who operated a mill on the Domain Creek from around 1814 to 1820, George lived in the Domain with his large family, employees and servants (George had some 9 children by 1822).¹⁷ Others who lived in the Domain in the Macquarie period were the government gardeners and after 1817 the dairyman, stockmen and shepherds.¹⁸

¹⁶ ML: Bigge Report Appendix, BT Box 1, p. 17.

¹⁷ SRNSW: Col. Sec., CGS 905, Main Series of Letters Received, 1826–1982, 2/7884, Letters Re: Land, Howell 18 March 1820.

¹⁸ SRNSW: Col. Sec., CGS 898, Special Bundles, 1794–1825, 4/1819, Coroner's Inquests 1809–1822, p. 273.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the Rouse Return it can clearly be demonstrated that Macquarie was not setting himself up as some sort of colonial laird, as portrayed by his enemies, who had their eye on the skilled workforce that Macquarie so carefully fostered and put to public use. He was a master planner, project manager and strategist in very difficult circumstances.

As a centre of agricultural activity and experimentation, since its inception in 1789, and with many convicts at some time having worked in the Domain, Parramatta residents were familiar with its extensive grounds and this remained the case during Macquarie's governorship. Government House Parramatta and its Domain, under Macquarie was a working estate, not an isolated, exclusive country retreat. It was the hub of his public works program.

