early ni

anUnbrokenView

early nineteenth century **panoramas**

The Picture Gallery presents highlights
from the State Library's collections.

Front cover: *Panorama of Hobart* (detail), 1825
Augustus Earle (1793–1838)

Inside covers: *Panorama of Sydney* (detail),
1829, Thomas Woore (c. 1803–1878)

Foreword

Panoramas are impressive. They are often large — surprisingly so — and are packed with detail, which repays close examination. Indeed the very comprehensiveness of their view appealed to early colonists, who were their enthusiastic patrons and practitioners.

These days the concept of the panorama is ubiquitous — most modern cameras offer a panoramic mode, and we are all familiar with wide-angled views of public events. Technically speaking, however, the history of panoramas runs closely parallel with the history of the colony of New South Wales. Indeed the word panorama itself — taken from the Greek words meaning all and view — was not created until 1791, when it appeared in an advertisement for a 360° view of

London painted by Robert Barker. Barker had first lodged a patent describing exhibition panoramas — displayed in purpose-built halls — in June 1787, just over a month after the First Fleet had set sail for Australia.

The heyday of the exhibition panoramas — between 1790 and 1840 — mirrors the interest in the much more modest panoramas created in Australia. From the 1850s onwards panoramas were largely photographically based. The State Library's collections are rich in both genres, but this exhibition concentrates on a small selection of early hand-painted panoramas.

Panoramas are often said to be about power, and the illustration of dominance over an entire landscape. While there is undoubtedly truth to this, panoramas are also about satisfying curiosity

about new lands, and their progress, in itself a celebration of the process of colonisation. The panoramas on display in this exhibition seem to have been made largely for family and friends, rather than public exhibition, motivated by an interest in recording colonial achievement.

Juxtaposed against a number of these panoramas are modern photographs from the same location. The sheer extent of development, and the impact that it has had on the original environment, becomes evident in such comparisons. Each individual will bring different interpretations to this evidence, but what it does suggest is the continuing relevance of the Library's wonderful collections to an understanding not only of the past, but also the future.

Wilma Norris

Acting State Librarian & Chief Executive

Chinese export ware punchbowl featuring a scene of
Sydney Cove (detail), c. 1820

Early colonists were very much aware of the cultural and political burden loaded onto their landscape. Where colonists saw beauty, potential, profit, and frequently expressed a real commitment to their new country, Europeans only seemed to see a land compromised by convicts. One way for anxious colonists to address this problem was to commission pictures of the country, which could unambiguously assert its virtues.

Many colonists considered panoramas one of the most effective formats for promoting the colony. While the prospect or expansive view was a long tradition in Western art, panoramas themselves were modern. In its most correct use, the word *panoramas* refers to enormous paintings — some could be six to nine metres high and up to 100 metres long — encompassing a 360° view displayed inside a circular room.

Exhibition panoramas were an integral part of the popular entertainment circuit of the nineteenth century. Viewed from the centre of the room — often in a purpose-built structure called a rotunda — and aided by theatrical lighting and tricks, panoramas were designed to create an illusion of reality, to transport their visitors to another country or drop them into the middle of famous battles. In London in 1828, for instance, it was possible to visit Sydney, Paris, Genoa, and the Battle of Navarino.

Such was the popularity of panoramas that the word was soon applied to any image which depicted a much broader expanse of the landscape than an eye could absorb at a single glance, even if it was never intended to publicly display it. Typically, such panoramas were drawn on a number of sheets of paper. They were often made by amateur artists, eager to record new places and vistas. In the colonial context, there was perhaps also an element of documenting history: did Jane Eliza Currie paint her panorama of Fremantle, for instance, because she could record a settlement of the British Empire in its infancy, even if that record simply remained within her family?

Both broad classes of panoramas — the professional and the amateur — carried with them an aura of truthfulness and accuracy. Panoramas almost functioned as a travel documentary might today,

as comprehensive reports of a foreign town or country. It was this in-built claim of truthfulness which encouraged their commissioning. In 1820 Alexander Riley, a pastoralist and merchant looking for ways to promote the colony, argued:

> It has long been a subject of our consideration in this Country that a Panorama exhibited in London of the Town of Sydney and surrounding scenery would create much public interest and ultimately be of service to the Colony. [1]

Riley, who was unsuccessful in raising this commission, was insistent that the 'view of the Town must be entered into with a minute and Systematic detail … ' because he understood that the value of the drawing lay in its audience believing its authority, and thereby contradicting English prejudices. For most English people, *Blackwoods Magazine* opined in November 1827, Australia was 'ropes, gibbets, arson, burglary, kangaroos, George Barrington and Governor Macquarie'.

Town or cityscapes were important for pre-1830 colonial artists and patrons — much more so than a pure landscape painting of a picturesque scene. They felt that a building-by-building delineation of their settlements — churches, public buildings, significant private residences — offered irrefutable evidence of progress. Eagerly anticipating the London opening of Augustus Earle's panorama of Sydney, the *South East Asian Register* of October 1827 wrote:

> Great credit is due to Mr. Earle … we consider that he deserves the thanks of the community, as their political friend. No possible means could have been devised to render the colony of New South Wales more notorious to the people of Great Britain, than a panorama of Sydney.

Yet even the most appealing panorama could be wilfully misread: when the London *Times* of 20 December 1828 reviewed the Sydney panorama it remained unconvinced by, perhaps even suspicious of, its evidence:

> At first sight we were struck by the beauty of the place … [if the artist has not] heightened the beauties of the scene, one of the finest spots in the universe is appropriated, by a strange inconsistency, to the reception of the very dregs of society.

In Australia many more panoramic drawings were made by individuals for their own interest and circle, rather than for commercial gain or public exhibition. Lieutenant Edward Close's panorama of Newcastle and Eliza Currie's panorama of Fremantle were both made, it seems,

entirely for family interest. Perhaps part of Close's motivation was his desire to settle in the area — his drawings are like an inspection report for the district. Close may also have been influenced by the work of his fellow officer and friend, Major James Taylor. Close's style is strikingly similar — though not identical — to Taylor's, himself responsible for the well-known series of three panoramic aquatints *Views of Port Jackson*, published in London in 1823.

These artists had little interest in the complexity of creating a proper panorama — this was not their intention, and indeed their views rarely extended a neat 360°. These images are, however, obviously informed by the contemporary interest in panoramas, and, in particular, their reputation as a genre of information and documentation.

Unlike a conventional landscape painting, in which an artist imposes a vision on a landscape through their design of the image, panoramas in effect insist that the landscape dictates its form on the artist who is copying it. Of course the artist's creative and technical skills still significantly influence the final ambience, but it is this unusual relationship between the artist and subject which makes panoramas so interesting and informative. Unlike a conventional landscape painting, where the image is everything, panoramas are often heavily inscribed with text — notes or keys about content frequently appear either on the image itself or on its margins. It is no wonder that they lived on the edges of the fine art world. Critics could not decide if panoramas were high art or simply illustration — there is little doubt that most colonial panoramas were more illustrative than artistic.

It is their literalness and apparent refusal to be tastefully composed which is the appeal of panoramas. They suggest the unembellished mirroring of how things once were — it may be an illusion, but panoramas present themselves as a facsimile of the past.

Richard Neville

Original Materials Branch

[1] Alexander Riley to Edward Riley, *Riley Papers*, A 110, p. 15

Chinese export ware punchbowl featuring a scene of Sydney Cove, c. 1820

This enamelled porcelain bowl forms one of the more extraordinary of all colonial panoramas. Painted in China in the late 1810s, presumably on commission from a Sydney colonist (whose damaged monogram sits between the two ends of the panorama), the external surface of the bowl is decorated with a view of Sydney Cove, based on a drawing by colonial artist John Lewin. The view begins on the eastern shore of Sydney Cove, with the octagonal cottage of former water bailiff and Governor Macquarie's favourite

boatman Billy Blue in the foreground, now the site of the Opera House ①. Fronting the sandy beach is First Government House where the Museum of Sydney stands today ②. On the far side of Sydney Cove is the Rocks, dominated by the long low military barracks (now Wynyard) ③, St Philips Church ④ and windmills. The yellow three-storeyed Commissariat Store, now the site of the Museum of Contemporary Art ⑤, can be seen on the foreshore. Just to the left of Dawes Point (now the site of the Sydney

Harbour Bridge pylons) is the warehouse and residence of merchant Robert Campbell ⑥.
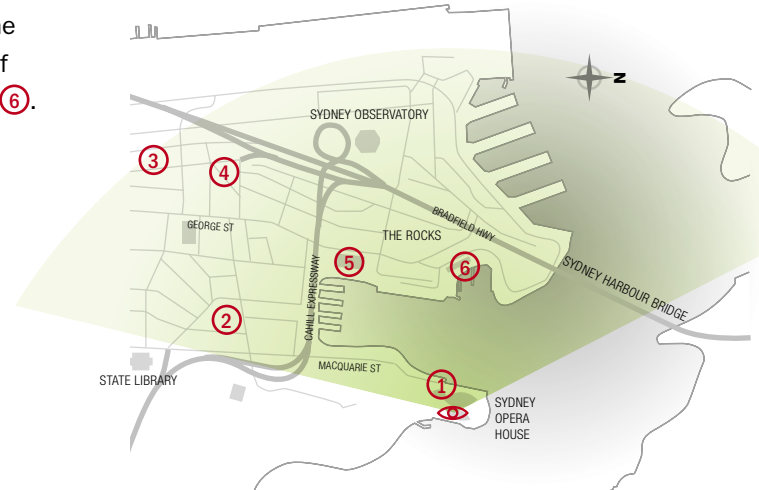
Sketch of the Inundation in the Neighborhood of Windsor taken on Sunday the 2nd of June 1816

On display between 10 June and 9 August

This watercolour looks out across the floodwaters from Windsor, at the height of the flood — some 13.8 metres above its usual level and one of the higher floods on record — which inundated the Hawkesbury and South Creek in early June 1816. According to the *Sydney Gazette* of 8 June 1816, the floods peaked on Sunday from rains which had begun on Thursday, but due to the slow rise of the water, most locals were able to crowd into the higher grounds of Windsor. The panorama, by an anonymous artist, appears to have been taken from adjacent to the grounds of the Government Cottage (situated near the present day Thompson Square on 'rising ground, commanding a beautiful view from the rear, of the Hawkesbury River'), and was intended to form a 360° view — note how each end of the panorama is keyed 'A', to indicate that the two ends should join. Despite its dramatic extent, damage from the flood was less than expected, and many farmers benefited from fresh deposits of sediment on their farm land.

NORTH NORTHEAST EAST

Panorama of Newcastle June 1821

Edward Charles Close (1790–1866)
possibly

The identity of the artist of this panorama is by no means clear, with it more recently being attributed to Sophia Campbell, the aunt of Close's wife, who also made a number of sketches and watercolours of Newcastle. However Close, an engineer with the 48th Regiment, signed the drawings and was in Newcastle in June 1821, only two days after the panorama was finished, asking Governor Macquarie for a land grant in the district.

The panorama, looking down from The Hill, near the present day Obelisk (the site of the windmill) ①, is enlivened only by the town of Newcastle, then a settlement of some 1169 people, 1001 of those convicts. Christ Church, completed in 1818 and the site of the current Christ Church Cathedral ②, overlooks the town. Stockton Beach can be seen behind its spire. The lumber yard ③, an important facility in a district known for its cedar and rosewood, dominates the foreshore of the Hunter River. Nobby's ④, with the recently commenced breakwater inching towards it, is also visible. The Gaol sits prominently on the headland, overlooking the settlement. The Ocean Baths ⑤ are now to the right of the Gaol, on the spit beneath it. Close included an Awakabal corroboree, but curiously chastised himself beneath the scene, writing that it has ' … no business here as it is never danced in the day-time … ' Its presence, however, is a reflection of the often fairly uninformed, but genuine, colonial interest in Aboriginal customs and culture.

HUNTER RIVER

HUNTER ST

NEWCOMEN ST

WATT ST

UNION ST

DARBY ST

THE HILL

N
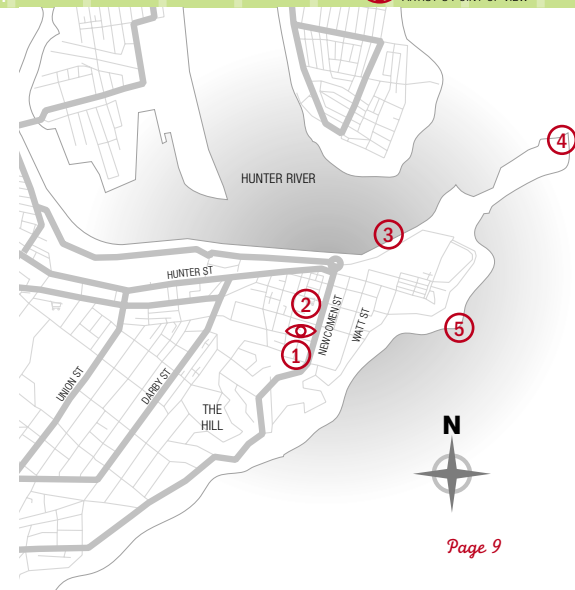
Panorama of Hobart, 1825

Augustus Earle (1793–1838)

Augustus Earle, a wonderfully observant and adventurous artist, arrived in Hobart in January 1825 from Tristan D'Acunha, but left for Sydney four months later. It seems likely that he painted this panorama during this period. Taken from Battery Point (Mulgrave Battery can be seen in the right foreground (1)) near the Flagstaff, it looks north into central Hobart, Sullivans Cove (2) and the Old Wharf (3). Mount Wellington dominates the left of the image (4). Earle has

carefully noted in the lower margin of the drawings Hobart's most significant features and buildings.

Earle later completed a panorama of Sydney, which opened in London in 1828 at Robert Burford's well-known Panorama in the Strand. The Hobart panorama, also by Burford and based on these watercolours, opened in 1831. Comparison with a published key to the panorama — *Description of a view of Hobart Town … and the surrounding country … painted by Mr R. Burford*, 1831 — suggests one watercolour (the last sheet on the right) in the series is missing. This sheet included a rare depiction of a chain-gang, a subject avoided by most colonial artists. Had it been complete, this panorama would have given a 360° view of the town and the Derwent River. *The Times* of 19 March 1831 reported favourably on the 'beauty of the prospect', although it noted that the buildings — so carefully delineated by Earle — of the town itself were 'not very remarkable', and that they had therefore sensibly been 'thrown [by Burford] considerably into distance'. Contrary to the hopes of colonists, most English reviewers seem to have been more interested in the look of the landscape rather than the worthy appearance of colonial buildings.

Panorama of Sydney, 1829

Thomas Woore (c. 1803–1878)

On display between 9 August and 15 October

Thomas Woore, a surveyor and mid-shipman on HMS *Zebra*, made this panorama in 1829 when his ship was in Sydney. Probably taken from the top of one of John Palmer's windmills (on the site of the present day Governor Phillip's statue in the Royal Botanic Gardens), the panorama sweeps around from the Light Horse Barracks on Macquarie Street (now the site of the State Library) ①, over the Military Barracks at Wynyard ②, then the back of First Government House (now the Museum of Sydney) ③,

then across to the Government Stables (now the Conservatorium of Music) 4 up the Harbour (Macquarie Lighthouse is visible on the horizon) and finally back to Hyde Park Barracks 5, also on Macquarie Street, having traversed near to 360°. This panorama provides an information rich view of a Sydney (with a population of about 11 000) described by Austrian traveller Baron von Hügel as like a 'big European town … it seems incredible that … such a confused townscape, in which the buildings have been built pell mell without either plan or directive, could have come into being within living memory'. [2]

SYDNEY HARBOUR

DARLING HARBOUR
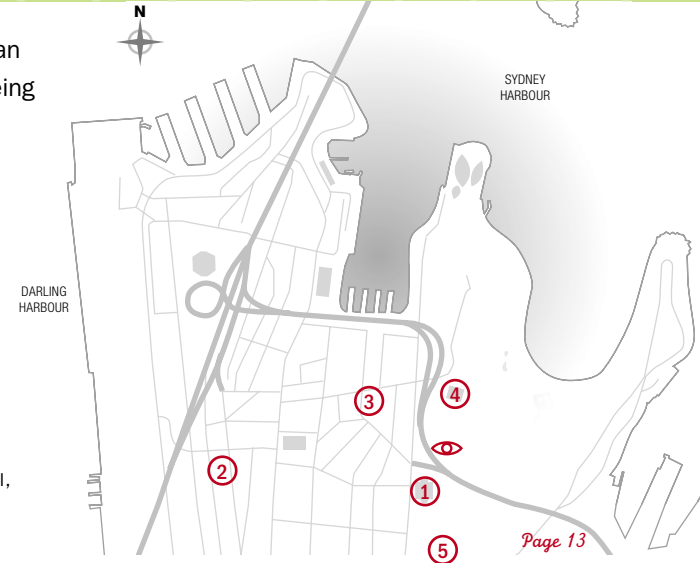
[2] Dymphna Clark ed. Baron Charles von Hügel, *New Holland Journal*, 1994, p. 180

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Panoramic view of Wollongong from Elliott's Family Hotel, 1851

John Rae (1813–1900)

John Rae was a man of wonderful energy and curiosity. By profession a public servant and administrator, he was also passionately interested in art, and curious about technology. Perhaps aware of his limitations as a fine artist, Rae concentrated on documentary images of Sydney and its townscape. In 1848 he described to a friend making an optical device — effectively a camera obscura. This device could either project a scene onto a sheet of paper for him to copy, or

be reversed and allow him to display his drawings — laid onto canvas and scrolled across beneath the lens.

This panorama of Wollongong — encompassing about 180° — was taken in 1851 from Elliott's Family Hotel (formerly the Governor Bourke and now the Oxford Hotel), on the corner of Corrimal ① and Crown ② streets. St Michael's Anglican church ③, now demolished, can be seen in the distance. The distortion of perspective caused by

his camera is particularly evident in the curved fence in the foreground.

Panoramic view of Sydney Harbour taken from Macquarie Lighthouse, 1859

John Rae (1813–1900)

In 1883 *View of Sydney Harbour taken from Macquarie Lighthouse*, and other panoramas by Rae, including his view of Wollongong, were sent to the Calcutta International Exhibition. In reporting his contribution to the exhibition, the *Daily Telegraph* of 6 October 1883 commended his panorama of the Harbour, 'The perspective … is perfection itself, and the artist has done justice to the noble theme, the boast of the Colony — "our Harbour".' Rae was keenly aware of, and actively promoted, the

historical importance of his images. For the Calcutta International Exhibition his panoramas were displayed with contemporary photographs taken from the same spot. This panorama was taken from the Macquarie Lighthouse and encompasses near to 360°. The Lighthouse Keeper's Cottage can be seen at the left end of the drawing, and still stands today (1).

John Rae's own pen sketch of his camera, which he built himself. The device helped him make drawings or display panoromas. He wrote in 1848:

> The Camera has been finished for some time and consequently, I have got tired of it. You must have known that I made a very good job of it. I call it a camera but it answers also as a small Panorama. I made it all with my own hands and tools.

John Rae, *Letterbook*, MLMSS 6998 p. 678

Panorama of the Swan River settlement [Fremantle] c. 1830

Jane Eliza Currie (c. 1794–?)

Jane Currie arrived in Perth with her husband in June 1829, part of the first contingent of settlers in that colony. Because of her husband's position as Harbour-Master of Fremantle, her diary notes frequent visits to the settlement there, but unfortunately makes no reference to the execution of this panorama. The watercolour is dominated by the stone jail, completed in 1831 and now known as the Round House, high on Arthur's Head ①. The wreck of the *Marquis of Angelsea* can be seen on the rocks below ②. It is unlikely that Currie has aspirations for this panorama beyond her immediate family, and indeed its recording washing being hung out to dry suggests a more domestic sensibility. It is worth noting, however, that Lieutenant Robert Dale (best known for his *Panoramic View of King George Sound*, 1834, published by Robert Havell) was also living in Perth at this time. They would have moved in the same circles, and it is interesting to speculate if either influenced the other.

Item list

1 Chinese export ware punchbowl featuring a scene of Sydney Cove, c. 1820
Enamelled porcelain
17.7 cm high, 45.5 cm diameter
Presented 1926
XR 10

2 Artist unknown
Sketch of the Inundation [sic] *in the Neighborhood of Windsor taken on Sunday the 2nd of June 1816*, 1816
[On display between 10 June and 9 August]
Watercolour, 27.8 x 173 cm
Some sheets are watermarked 'Phelps + Son 1809'.
PX*D 264

3 Edward Charles Close (1790–1866) possibly
Panorama of Newcastle June 1821, 1821 [reproduction]
Watercolour, 41.5 x 364 cm
Inscribed at bottom: 'N.B. This Corrobory [i.e. corroboree] has no business here as it is never danced in the day-time. Taken at and finished in Newcastle on Hunter River. June 11th 1821. E. C. Close'
Purchased 1926
PXD 576

4 Augustus Earle (1793–1838)
Panorama of Hobart, 1825 [reproduction]
Watercolour and pencil
54.3 cm approx. x 222 cm
Some sheets are watermarked 'Whatman 1826'.
Presented by Sir William Dixson, 1951
DGD 14

5 Thomas Woore (c. 1803–1878)
Panorama of Sydney, 1829 [On display between 9 August and 15 October]
Pen & ink and pencil
24.3 x 225.7 cm
Some sheets are watermarked 'J Whatman 1825'.
Presented by TWF Busby, 1936
SV1/1829/1a-f

6 John Rae (1813–1900)
Panoramic view of Wollongong from Elliott's Family Hotel, 1851 [reproduction]
Watercolour, 23.6 x 225 cm
Signed & dated lower right 'J. Rae 1851'
Presented by Sir William Dixson, 1951
DGA 7

7 John Rae (1813–1900)
Panoramic view of Sydney Harbour taken from Macquarie Lighthouse, 1859 [reproduction]
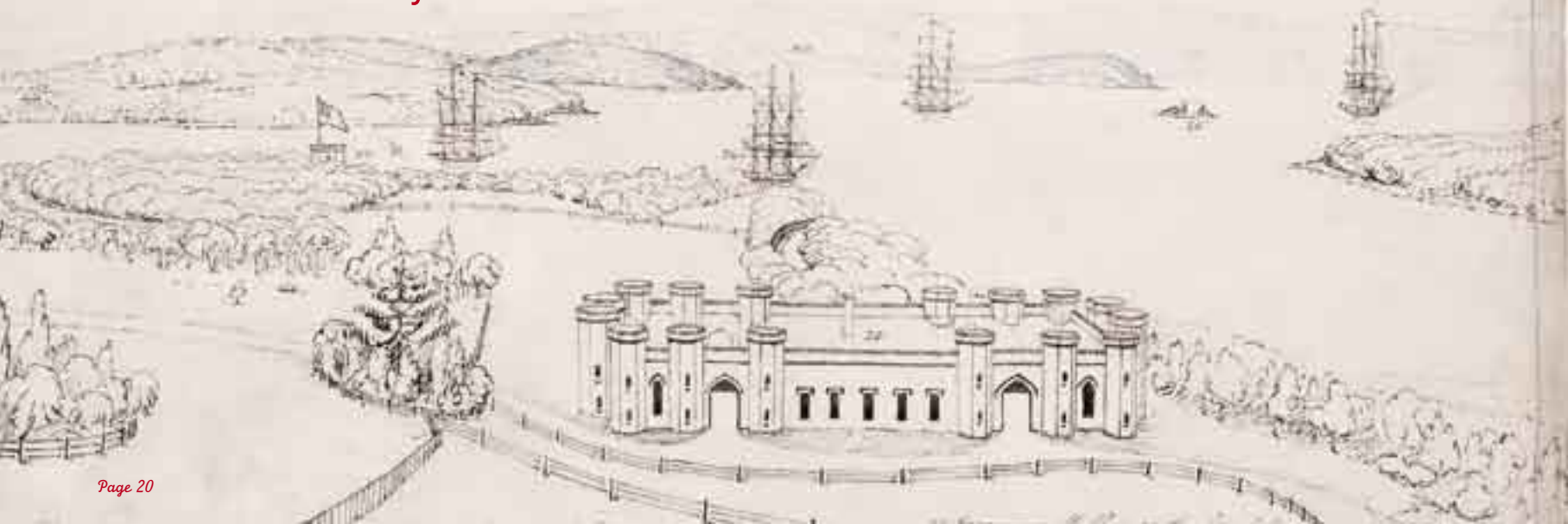Watercolour, 23.8 x 334.6 cm
Signed & dated lower right 'J. Rae 1859'
Presented by Sir William Dixson, 1951
DGA 9

8 Jane Eliza Currie (c. 1794–?)
Panorama of the Swan River settlement [Fremantle], c. 1830 [reproduction]
Watercolour, 25.5 x 293.5 cm
Purchased from MR Macrae, 1944
ML 827

early ni

Take your favourite panorama home

All the panoramas in this exhibition are for sale as unframed facsimiles.

They are faithful copies, approximately half the original sizes, digitally printed on archival quality art paper.

All sizes are approximate. We can also print full size on request.

The panoramas can also be supplied ready for hanging printed on canvas on a stretch frame.

1. 'Unwrapped' Chinese punchbowl scene of Sydney Cove, c. 1820
(see pages 4 & 5)
This digitally 'unwrapped' print is available as a single full colour print.
1.1 m x .165 m
Paper $195 canvas $345

2. *Sketch of the Inundation [sic] in the Neighborhood of Windsor taken on Sunday the 2nd of June 1816*
(see pages 6 & 7)
.55 m x .2 m
Paper $90 canvas $160

3. *Panorama of Newcastle June 1821*
(see pages 8 & 9)
1.8 m x .2 m
Paper $265 canvas $465

4. *Panorama of Hobart*, 1825
(see pages 10 & 11)
1.6 m x .2 m
Paper $255 canvas $450

5. *Panorama of Sydney*, 1829
(see pages 12 & 13)
1.1 m x .12 m
Paper $165 canvas $290

6. *Panoramic view of Wollongong*, 1851
(two views)
A .82 m x.1 m
Paper $135 canvas $235
(see pages 14 & 15)
B 1 m x .12 m
Paper $135 canvas $235
(view not shown)

7. *Panoramic view of Sydney Harbour taken from Macquarie Lighthouse, 1859* (see pages 16 & 17)
1.6 m x .12 m
Paper $190 canvas $335

8. *Panorama of the Swan River settlement [Fremantle], c. 1830*
(see pages 18 & 19)
1.5 m x .13 m
Paper $210 canvas $370

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