



State Library
of New South Wales

HISTORIC HOUSES TRUST



1808

BLIGH'S SYDNEY REBELLION



1808

BLIGH'S SYDNEY REBELLION



A co-production between the **Historic Houses Trust** and the **State Library of NSW**

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Bligh's Sydney Rebellion 1808***

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***The ever memorable
26 January 1808***

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Cover and title page: The arrest of Governor Bligh (detail), 1808, unknown artist, watercolour,
ML Safe 4/5. The figure may represent Lieutenant William Minchin.

FOREWORD



On 26 January 1808 Governor Bligh was overthrown by the New South Wales Corps and placed under arrest. This was a momentous event for the young Colony, just twenty years to the day after the landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove. It was the first and only time military intervention has been used to overthrow a government on Australian soil.

Both the Historic Houses Trust and the State Library are custodians of parts of this dramatic story and we are delighted to collaborate in presenting it afresh in this bicentenary year.

The State Library houses the world's premier collection of books, manuscripts and pictures relating to William Bligh and the rebellion. The Historic Houses Trust is custodian of the Museum of Sydney *on the site of first Government House*, the place where the insurrection occurred. It is also the custodian of Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta, home of John Macarthur, Bligh's great antagonist, where preliminary skirmishes leading to the great drama were enacted. Following Bligh's arrest, Macarthur wrote triumphantly to his wife, Elizabeth, at Elizabeth Farm, that the 'Tyrant is now no doubt gnashing his Teeth with vexation at his overthrow. — may he often have cause to do the like!'

We are presenting various aspects of this event at both the Museum of Sydney and the State Library. These will include an exhibition, installation, debate and lecture, gallery walks, a multimedia installation and a conference. It will be a time to reflect on our path from autocratic British rule to the peaceful development of our modern democracy over the past 200 years.

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NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive
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BLIGH'S SYDNEY REBELLION

Paul Brunton, Senior Curator, Mitchell Library

SYDNEY IN 1806

William Bligh assumed office as fourth governor of New South Wales on 13 August 1806, just a few weeks short of his fifty-second birthday. He had been instructed to administer a penal settlement over which he had total authority. The non-Indigenous population was 6935. Convicts, though, numbered only 1380. The majority of the population were freed convicts or settlers. There were 66 civil officials and 685 in the New South Wales Corps. ¹ The role of the latter was to guard the convicts and provide a police service.

From December 1792 to September 1795, the officers of the Corps had spearheaded capitalism in the young Colony. This occurred under the military governments of Francis Grose and William Paterson, the interregnum between Governors Arthur Phillip and John Hunter. The military officers were given large land grants, convicts victualled at public expense, and monopolised the importation and retailing of food, liquor and clothing.

By 1806, however, monopoly trading had ceased owing to competition from Robert Campbell and the emancipist merchants, and the practice of private enterprise had trickled further down the ranks of the Corps. For example, at times a third of Sydney's publicans were non-commissioned officers, though their wives probably ran the business. ² A third of the general workforce was now self-employed. ³



This group of major and minor capitalists, in which present and former Corps members were prominent, clashed with a government established to run a gaol. Vice-Regal direction had not been accepted since Phillip. As Governor King (1800–1806) wrote:

There is no society where the clashing of duty and interest between the Governor and the governed are more violent than in New South Wales, and more particularly so if the Governor does his duty ... much bearance and forbearance has been reciprocally necessary between the Governor and the officers. ⁴



Hunter (1795–1800) had been broken. King received news in June 1804, less than four years into his governorship, that he too would be recalled.

The following libellous poem, directed at King, was written in Sydney in 1803 and is indistinguishable in language and content from what would later be said of Bligh.

Dejected, here forlorn, by all despised –
Of every human turpitude possest –
He sinks beneath those sins, to none disguised,
A wretch to whom all pity is bereft.
Two years or more triumphant did he reign
And practised deeds – ah! Horrid to relate –
Tyrannical, unjust, oppressive not to name
Such cruel acts as savages outshame.

To every law he, boasting, did defiance,
Made local laws to suit his own occasion;
On honest men he never placed reliance,
As fools and rogues are open to persuasion. ⁵



THE NEW GOVERNOR

In March 1805, Sir Joseph Banks was consulted by the British Government about a suitable replacement for King. On 15 March, he wrote to Bligh requesting him to consider the post. ⁶ He wrote that King's successor must have the following qualities:

... one who had integrity unimpeached, a mind capable of providing its own resources in difficulties without leaning on others for advice, firm in discipline, civil in deportment and not subject to whimper and whine when severity of discipline is wanted to meet emergencies.



Banks proceeded to offer a number of inducements for Bligh to accept. The Governor's salary would be doubled (from £1000 to £2000) and, in addition, Banks believed Bligh need spend less than half this because he would have 'the whole of the Government power and stores' at his disposal. His seniority and pension rights would continue. Banks even added that there would be better marriage prospects for his daughters in New South Wales.

Above: *A west view of Sydney in New South Wales* (detail), c. 1809, John Eyre (attrib.), watercolour, DL Pg50

Below: Sir Joseph Banks (detail), 1811, William Daniell, after an original drawing by George Dance, 1803, soft ground etching, ML PXA 1028 no. 2

Opposite: Philip Gidley King, c. 1800–1805, unknown artist, watercolour on ivory, ML MIN 62

Banks was not simply using his influence to help Bligh, he was exerting pressure on Bligh to accept the governorship. Banks wanted someone who would stand up to the New South Wales Corps. He was not ignorant of Bligh's reputation as a disciplinarian: he chose him for that reason. Banks knew precisely the sort of man Bligh was. So did Earl Camden, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, who wrote to Banks that he was recommending Bligh for appointment because of Bligh's 'merit & ability & of the character he bears, for firmness & Integrity'.⁷

JOHN MACARTHUR

In 1789, John Macarthur, not yet twenty-two, joined the New South Wales Corps with the express purpose of improving his financial position. He arrived in Sydney the following year. His charismatic personality quickly established him as a leader. He greatly benefited financially during the interregnum, from 1792 to 1795.

King sent him to England in November 1801 for court-martial resulting from a duel he had fought with his commanding officer in which the latter was wounded.

King left his superiors in no doubt of his view of Macarthur. He wrote:

His employment during the eleven years he has been here has been that of making a large fortune, helping his brother officers to make small ones (mostly at the publick expense) and sowing discord and strife ... Experience has convinced every man in this colony that there are no resources which art, cunning, impudence, and a pair of basilisk eyes can afford that he does not put in practice to obtain any point he undertakes ... Many and many instances of his diabolical spirit had shown itself before Gov'r Phillip left this colony, and since, altho' in many instances he has been the master worker of the puppetts he has set in motion ...⁸

The army's advocate-general found it impossible to decide Macarthur's case at such a distance. Both parties were criticised but it was made clear to King that no further action should be taken against Macarthur.



Above: John Macarthur, c. 1850s? unknown artist, oil painting, DG 222

Macarthur died in 1834. This portrait may have been painted from an earlier miniature.



Macarthur resigned from the army and, on the basis of wool samples which he had brought with him, obtained, in August 1804, a land grant of 5000 acres to spearhead the wool industry in New South Wales. It was the largest grant ever given to that time.

Macarthur wished his grant to be in the Cowpastures — the best grazing land so far discovered. The instruction sent to King did not specify the location of the grant. This enabled King to grant Macarthur the Cowpastures land only provisionally and to refer the matter to London for clarification.

Sir Joseph Banks was not convinced of the soundness of Macarthur's proposals. Banks did not favour a large land grant to one person but thought the wool industry should be developed by an English company.

Banks was well aware of Macarthur's reputation for fractiousness. Whether he actually had Macarthur's grant reduced from 10 000 to 5000 acres is unclear but Macarthur certainly thought so. Banks did try, unsuccessfully, to prevent Macarthur obtaining sheep from the Royal flocks.

Macarthur was in New South Wales and Banks in England. Soon, however, Banks' protégé would be in New South Wales confronting Macarthur direct.

Above: View of the government hut at the Cowpastures, 1804, unknown artist, watercolour, ML SSV1B/Cowp D/1

The new governor was a disciplinarian. He was absolutely immovable when he believed he was right, which was most of the time, a trait he shared with Macarthur. He had a history of using strong language. Banks had, after all, wanted someone ‘firm in discipline’.

On Bligh’s first day he was presented with an address of welcome signed by George Johnston, on behalf of the military; Richard Atkins, on behalf of the civil authorities; and John Macarthur, on behalf of the free inhabitants.

Even an action as seemingly innocent as this caused dissension. A group of 379 free settlers presented a separate petition to Bligh claiming that Macarthur could not speak on their behalf:

We beg to observe that had we deputed anyone, John Macarthur would not have been chosen by us, we considering him an unfit person to step forward upon such an occasion, as we may chiefly attribute the rise in the price of mutton to his withholding the large flock of wethers he now has to make such price as he may choose to demand.⁹

This only confirmed what Bligh would have been told about Macarthur by Banks.

A MATTER OF REAL ESTATE

It would be only a matter of weeks before the first clash between Macarthur and Bligh occurred. Macarthur would later outline an interview he had with Bligh at Government House, Parramatta. Macarthur mentioned his plans for the wool industry and his grant of 5000 acres, the location of which King would not confirm. According to Macarthur, Bligh burst into a violent passion, exclaiming:

What have I to do with your sheep, sir; what have I to do with your cattle? Are you to have such flocks of sheep and such herds of cattle as no man ever heard of before? – No, Sir! ... I have heard of your concerns, sir; you have got 5,000 acres of land in the finest situation in the country; but by God, you shan’t keep it!¹⁰

Macarthur told Bligh that he had received his grant at the recommendation of the Privy Council and by order of the Secretary of State. This, according to Macarthur, led to the following outburst by Bligh: ‘Damn the Privy Council! And damn the Secretary of State, too!’¹¹

Clearly, from the beginning of Bligh’s rule, Macarthur saw him as a powerful obstacle to the realisation of his ambitions.

Early in February 1807, Bligh wrote to William Windham, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, requesting that Macarthur’s grant be relocated. Windham’s successor, Viscount Castlereagh, did not answer this until December 1807 and by the time this was received in the Colony, Bligh had been deposed. Throughout 1807 Macarthur would have been in an anxious state over the land grant — the jewel of his empire.



CONFRONTING THE POPULACE

Bligh had come to administer a penal settlement not facilitate private enterprise. He was affronted by the morality of the Colony — sexual and commercial. His vision was of a rural peasantry: ‘Classes of plain sensible farming men, of moderate expectations, are the most valuable to come here’, as he told London.¹²

Above: *Gov^t House Parramatta*, 1805, George William Evans, watercolour, ML SSV1B/Parr/12

Opposite: *Gregory Blaxland Esq.*, 1820s? unknown artist, pencil drawing, ML 143

Free settlers such as John and Gregory Blaxland claimed that Bligh had no interest in supporting their enterprises and did not give them the assistance which the British Government had promised. Men had come to New South Wales to make money and Bligh seemed oblivious to this. Bligh's insistence — that even those with letters from the Under-Secretary of State, recommending land grants, needed formal approval from London — was unnecessarily obstructive, though it was legally correct. During his time in office, Bligh only gave land grants totalling 2180 acres. King had granted 73 337 acres. ¹³



In his own case, though, Bligh was rather keen on private enterprise. Before he formally assumed control of the Colony, he received from Governor King, without blushing, three land grants totalling 1345 acres. One thousand acres were at the Hawkesbury which he farmed for private gain.

He allocated himself publicly victualled convicts and animals from the public herds and erected buildings at government expense. This was, to say the least, insensitive, but Bligh was never known for his tact. He was 'making hay while the sun shines as fast as he can', as Surgeon John Harris wrote. ¹⁴ It was, though, just as Sir Joseph Banks had recommended. Banks had told him that 'the whole of the Government power and stores' would be at his disposal for his financial benefit.

Bligh confronted people in other ways. Soon after his arrival he replaced most of the officials, many of them from the military, with his own appointments. This did not play well in a small community and did not endear him to the Corps.

He wanted to return to Phillip's plans for Sydney which would involve clearing land on Church Hill and around Government House. He claimed that town leases were invalid, citing Phillip's ban on them. Even if legally correct (which is arguable), King had granted leases. In addition, many emancipated convicts and soldiers had built houses without seeking a formal lease. Bligh ordered some houses to be demolished.

There was a celebrated public clash with Macarthur over his lease on Church Hill which Macarthur played up with consummate theatricality. Even if these measures affected relatively few, this assault on private property was unsettling. People wondered who would be next.

Present and former members of the New South Wales Corps were naturally upset by this interloper *pro tem*. They themselves were not transient, like Bligh. New South Wales was their home and they had financial, social and emotional stakes in it. News would quickly have been passed around that in Bligh's despatch of 31 October 1807 to London he had requested that the Corps be withdrawn in its entirety.

In Sydney, Corps members were more than 10% of the population.¹⁵ They mainly lived amongst the people. Of about 300 men in Sydney in 1808, only 120 lived in barracks.¹⁶ They married or lived with civilians. Many owned property. Moreover, there had been a regular turnover in the Corps, many of whom remained in the Colony upon completion of their tour of duty.¹⁷ The numbers of Corps and ex-Corps members, therefore, formed a substantial and influential group, exhibiting what Governor King called 'the jealousy but too often attendant on professional *esprit de corps*'.¹⁸

It is not true that members of the Corps were recruited from the dregs of society as has often been claimed. They were members of the British working class who had been dislocated by economic change. Over one third were skilled men.¹⁹ Their life in New South Wales was a vast improvement on what they would have had in Britain and they would fight to retain it. They were used to power and influence. But Bligh did not treat them with respect.

George Johnston, the Corps' commanding officer in Sydney, wrote to the Army's Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of York, on 8 October 1807.



Right: George Johnston, 1810,
R Dighton, watercolour, ML 511

He objected to the way Bligh interfered in the management of the Corps, such as selecting officers for court duty without consulting the commander. However, the burden of his letter was that Bligh did not treat the Corps with the dignity it deserved. He spoke roughly to it, criticised it, insulted it: ‘his abusing and confining the soldiers without the smallest provocation’, ‘his casting the most undeserved and opprobrious censure on the Corps’.²⁰

John Macarthur had resigned from the Corps when in London but maintained strong links with it. He had waged a persistent war against previous governors, trying to break them. And he had been successful. Both Hunter and King had been recalled.

BOUNTY BLIGH

The new Governor, Bligh, had a past — ‘*Bounty* Bligh’, as he was known in some circles, always uttered in a pejorative tone. In 1790, when Bligh had returned to England following the mutiny on HMS *Bounty*, he had been a hero. He had survived an epic voyage in a tiny boat with little food. The family of Fletcher Christian was silent at the ignominious end of a promising son.

While Bligh was on his second breadfruit voyage on HMS *Providence*, 1791 to 1793, some of the mutineers were captured at Tahiti and placed on trial in September 1792. Bligh, being out of the country, could not defend himself.

As a result of the campaigns launched by Christian’s brother and others to justify the actions of the mutineers, the view took hold in certain quarters that it was Bligh’s tyranny which had caused the mutiny. In New South Wales, those who wished to be rid of him realised that this reputation made him vulnerable.

According to Surgeon Edward Luttrell ‘[p]rior to Governor Bligh coming into the colony a clamour [had] been raised against him, and an opposition formed to counteract his government’.²¹

The old rhetoric about tyranny, used against King, could be wheeled out and ratcheted up, after all ‘*Bounty* Bligh’ was a known tyrant, was he not? The accusations, though, were long on rhetoric and rather short on actual examples.

Mrs John Macarthur wasted no time. As early as January 1807, she wrote to her friend at home, Miss Kingdon:

The Governor has already shewn the inhabitants of Sydney that he is violent — rash — tyrannical. No very pleasing prospect at the beginning of his reign. ²²

Lieutenant William Minchin commented:

... a deluge worse than that of the Hawkesbury has since swept off every path to ... industry and happiness ... if a Military Officer might be allowed to use the words Tyranny and oppression, I would inform you that until now I never experienced their weight. ²³

John Harris, the Corps' surgeon, who had been dismissed from his positions of naval officer and magistrate, reported:

... it is completely the reign of Robertspere [sic], or that of Terror ... I have heard much said of Bounty Bligh before I saw him, but no person could conceive that he could be such a fellow ... Caligula himself never reigned with more despotic sway than he does. ²⁴

And John Blaxland, frustrated that his inexhaustible thirst for land had not been satisfied, wrote:



The Governor is behaving so very arbitrary that I do not consider either my person or property safe a single hour; indeed, I think it will not be long before I am sent to gaol ... There have been reasons to suppose they have opened the letters of individuals; in fact, every species of injustice and oppression is exercised in its full force. He openly laughs at the laws of England, and has been heard to say, 'What does he care for them; he will make laws for N.S. Wales which every son of a bitch shall obey'. ²⁵

But even the rebel government, following Bligh's overthrow, could not assuage Blaxland's hunger for land.

Above: Gregory Blaxland, c. 1785–1800, unknown artist, watercolour on ivory, ML MIN 88

In October 1807, the following verse with its direct reference to the *Bounty* mutiny was circulating in Sydney:

Oh tempora! Oh Mores! Is there
no Christian in New South Wales to put
a stop to the Tyranny of the Governor. ²⁶

THE OVERTHROW

In December 1807, Macarthur refused to pay a bond of £900 which he had forfeited because a convict had escaped on one of his ships. The ship was consequently impounded. Macarthur now refused to pay or victual the crew, forcing them to come on shore which was a breach of the landing regulations. In effect, he abandoned a ship worth £10 000 rather than pay a fine of £900.

When Macarthur refused to explain himself, the Judge-Advocate, Richard Atkins, issued a warrant to the Chief Constable at Parramatta, Francis Oakes, summoning Macarthur to appear before the bench of magistrates at 10 am on 16 December.

Oakes went to Elizabeth Farm, Macarthur's home at Parramatta, late in the evening of 15 December in order to deliver the warrant. Macarthur handed Oakes a note which stated:

Mr Oakes, -

You will inform the persons who sent you here with the warrant you have now shewn me ... that I never will submit to the horrid tyranny that is attempted until I am forced; that I consider it with scorn and contempt, as I do the persons who have directed it to be executed. ²⁷

Macarthur was arrested, given bail, and committed to trial before the Criminal Court on 25 January 1808.

On that morning the court consisted of the Judge-Advocate, Richard Atkins, and six officers of the Corps: Anthony Fenn Kemp, John Brabyn, William Moore, Thomas Laycock, William Minchin and William Lawson. Soldiers from the Corps packed the court room, having been rounded up for the occasion by Sergeant-Major Whittle.

Before Atkins was sworn, Macarthur protested against his sitting on the court. He had a number of grounds, read from a lengthy document and towards the conclusion declaimed the following:

You will now decide, gentlemen, whether law and justice shall finally prevail ... You have the eyes of an anxious public upon you, trembling for the safety of their property, their liberty, and their lives. To you has fallen the lot of deciding a point which perhaps involves the happiness or misery of millions yet unborn. I conjure you in the name of Almighty God, in whose presence you stand, to consider the inestimable value of the precious deposit with which you are entrusted.²⁸

He then gave the Corps its rallying call:

It is to the Officers of the New South Wales Corps that the administration of Justice is committed; and who that is just has anything to dread?²⁹

Atkins threatened to gaol Macarthur. Kemp retaliated by threatening to gaol Atkins who left for Government House, declaring that there was no court without him.

In 1803 a similar manoeuvre had been tried. Kemp was defendant in a court case and this time Johnston, the acting commanding officer of the Corps, demanded that the Governor, King, replace the Judge-Advocate, John Harris. King buckled and replaced Harris. Bligh was made of sterner stuff.

During the day, messages went backwards and forwards between the court and Government House over the position of Atkins.

Bligh stood firm: he had no power to remove Atkins and without Atkins there was no validly constituted court.

That was the law. The officers would not serve with Atkins.



Left: Thomas Laycock, c. 1811, unknown artist, watercolour on ivory, ML MIN 322

Laycock was the only casualty of the Rebellion — he fell through a manhole, injuring himself, while searching for Bligh at Government House. He left the Colony in 1810 and joined the 98th Regiment, the uniform of which he wears in this miniature.

At 5.30 pm Bligh wrote to George Johnston, asking him to come to Government House. It is noteworthy that Bligh wrote to Johnston in order to attempt to resolve this impasse rather than immediately resorting to action. Johnston sent a message to say he was too ill.

In the afternoon of the next day, 26 January, Bligh sent a note to the officers summoning them to Government House at 9 am the following morning, indicating that Atkins had charged them with certain crimes — but not revealing what these were. Bligh informed Johnston of his action and additionally told him that the actions of his officers were considered treasonable. As the officers were to appear before Bligh and all the magistrates, this would be a charge under criminal not military law. The charge, if proven, was a capital offence.³⁰

Perhaps this taunting of the Governor had gotten out of hand. The implications for the Corps, with six of its officers on a charge of treason, must have concentrated Johnston's mind wonderfully. It was unlikely that Bligh would have executed the officers; but very likely they might be sent to gaol pending further advice. If this had happened, there would have only remained, apart from Johnston himself, two other officers in Sydney. One of these, Cadwallader Draffin, was mentally unstable.³¹ Johnston afterwards maintained that if the officers had been gaoled, the soldiers would have rioted and perhaps killed Bligh. He arrested Bligh for his own protection.

This may have been the case, although a number of soldiers, under oath, at Johnston's subsequent court-martial in London, denied this. (On the other hand, perjury at this court-martial was not unknown.) This, however, does not alter the fact that Johnston may have believed it to be true at the time.

Bligh's charge of treason may have been the turning point. Johnston was not particularly close to Macarthur and had in fact been one of the magistrates who ordered Macarthur arrested over the incident that led to this court case. He was an experienced officer, had been in the Colony since 1788, and was apparently highly regarded by his men. What Macarthur had started, Johnston would finish in a way perhaps Macarthur never imagined, though Macarthur would certainly support it.

Johnston, who lived on an estate four miles out of town, now hurried in — not to Government House, but to the barracks where, courtesy of Macarthur, the soldiers had been well lubricated. He assumed, with no legal authority, the title of Lieutenant-Governor.

In the early evening of 26 January, hundreds of soldiers of the New South Wales Corps marched north from the barracks, along George Street and turned right into Bridge Street. They crossed the recently repaired stone bridge across the Tank Stream and proceeded up the hill to Government House.

The regimental colours had been unfurled, bayonets were fixed and the band played ‘The British Grenadiers’. This last was suggested by John Macarthur. The object of this highly theatrical performance was the arrest of Bligh. It was Macarthur who suggested to Johnston he should not arrest Bligh without a written petition to do so. Macarthur wrote it but most of the 151 signatures were affixed after the rebellion.

Bligh was confined to Government House. He remained there for a year as he resolutely refused to sail to England until relieved by lawful authority. In January 1809 he was ordered to relinquish command of his ship HMS *Porpoise* on which he had arrived in the Colony.



Above: First Government House, Sydney, c. 1807, John Eyre, watercolour, ML SV/31

This painting shows the gardens as they were remodelled during Bligh's governorship. John Harris wrote to Anna Josepha King in October 1807: ‘the shrubbery has also undergone a thorough change — no grass now growing in it, all laid out in walks with clumps of trees’.



View of part of the **RIVER OF SYDNEY**
Taken from St. Phillips Point
Dedicated to his Excellency Lachlan Macquarie
Published June 21 1810

Above: *View of part of the river of Sydney ...* 1813, John Eyre (attrib.), engraving by Philip Slaeger (attrib.), published in Absalom West, *Views in New South Wales*, Sydney: A West, 1812–1814, DL F81/21



SYDNEY, in *New South Wales*.
Church Yards.
the Esq: Governour of New South Wales &c: &c: &c:
 Engraved by A. West Sydney.

The building centre foreground, in Grosvenor Street at the corner of George Street, is the guardhouse. The house immediately to the right, in George Street, is the Female Orphan School, used for the trial of John Macarthur on 25 January 1808. To the right is Bridge Street, extending from George Street to Government House. A stone bridge crosses the Tank Stream (Pitt Street). The four-storey house in Bridge Street, on the left, is the home and warehouse of merchant Simeon Lord. Almost opposite, on the right, are the four cottages and gardens of the civil officers: Surveyor-General, Chaplain, Judge-Advocate and the Commissary.



Bligh refused to comply and was placed under guard in the barracks for a week. He agreed to return to England and, once in control of his ship, reneged. He sailed in March 1809 to Hobart where he hoped — vainly as it happened — to enlist the support of David Collins, the Lieutenant-Governor.

Bligh returned to Sydney in January 1810, where he found that a new governor, Lachlan Macquarie, had arrived. Bligh sailed for England in May.

Macarthur and Johnston sailed on 31 March 1809 in order to present their defence. In the event, Johnston was court-martialled and cashiered in June 1811 and returned to New South Wales to civilian life as a farmer. He died in 1823.



Above: The arrest of Governor Bligh, January 1808, unknown artist, watercolour, ML Safe 4/5

This painting of Bligh being dragged from under a bed at Government House was exhibited in Sydney shortly after Bligh's overthrow and was intended to illustrate Bligh's cowardice. The figure on the far right may represent Lieutenant William Minchin and the two soldiers are probably John Sutherland and Michael Marlborough.



Left: Enlargement of the scroll (hanging to the left of the window) bearing the words: 'O Dear what [can] the matter be'. This popular English song first appeared in print c. 1792. It is an intriguing inclusion in this political cartoon.

Macarthur, being a civilian, could not be tried for treason in England. Macquarie had received instructions to place him on trial if he returned to the Colony. This meant exile for him until 1817 when he received permission to return providing he took no part in public affairs. He died in 1834.

Bligh received regulation promotions to Rear-Admiral of the White and Vice-Admiral of the Blue. He received a pension in 1813 and died in 1817. No mention of his governorship of New South Wales appears on his tombstone in Lambeth churchyard.

Notes

- 1 'General statement of the inhabitants of ... the eastern coast of New South Wales ...' enclosure in Governor King's despatch to Earl Camden, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, 15 March 1806. *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, pp. 44–45.
- 2 Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A history, volume one*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 277.
- 3 NG Butlin, *Free lunches Antipodean style; NSW economy, 1788–1810*. Working paper No. 57, Department of Economic History, Australian National University, 1985, p. 3.
- 4 King to Under-Secretary Cooke, 18 June 1808, *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 656.
- 5 A copy of this was enclosed by King in his despatch to Lord Hobart, 9 May 1803, *Historical records of Australia*, 1, 4, p. 167.
- 6 This crucial letter was first quoted, in full, in the *Historical records of New South Wales*, vol. 6, pp. xxxv–xxxvi, published in 1898. The editor, while giving no specific location for this letter, stated that he had had access to manuscripts in the possession of WR Bligh of Sydney, William Bligh's grandson. Bligh presented some of these to the Public (now State) Library of New South Wales in 1902 and they were transferred to the Mitchell Library in 1910. This letter was not amongst the collection and its present location is unknown.
- 7 Camden to Bligh, 18 April 1805, ML Banks Papers, Series 59.01.
- 8 King to Under-Secretary King, 8 November 1801, C.O. 201/20 pp. 177–180. PRO Reel 10.
- 9 *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 189.
- 10 *Proceedings of a general court-martial ... for the trial of ... Geo Johnston ...* London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1811, pp. 178–179.
- 11 *ibid*, p. 179.
- 12 Bligh to William Windham, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, 31 October 1807, *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 354.
- 13 John Ritchie, Introduction to *A charge of mutiny: The court-martial of Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston ...* Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1988, p. xiv.
- 14 Harris to Anna Josepha King, 25 October 1807, *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 347.
- 15 In 1807, there were about 4000 non-Indigenous people living in Sydney (not including Parramatta) including 490 soldiers and nine officers of the New South Wales Corps. John Ritchie, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.
- 16 *Proceedings of a general court-martial*, *op. cit.*, p. 272 and p. 148.
- 17 Pamela Statham (ed.), *A colonial regiment: New sources relating to the New South Wales Corps, 1789–1810*, Canberra: P. Statham, 1992, pp. 10–11.
- 18 King to Under-Secretary Cooke, 18 June 1808, *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 656.
- 19 Tracey McAskill, 'An asset to the Colony: The social and economic contribution of Corpsmen to early New South Wales', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 82, pt. 1, 1996.
- 20 Johnston to Sir James Gordon, military secretary to the Duke of York, 8 October 1807, *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 652.
- 21 Surgeon Luttrell to Under-Secretary Sullivan, 8 October 1807, *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 296.
- 22 Elizabeth Macarthur to Miss Kingdon, 29 January 1807, ML A2908, vol. 2.
- 23 William Minchin to Philip Gidley King, 20 October 1807, ML MSS 681/2, pp. 397–399.
- 24 John Harris to Anna Josepha King, 25 October 1807, ML A1980, pp. 237–248.
- 25 John Blaxland to an unknown correspondent, 16 October 1807. It may have been written to the Under-Secretary of the Colonial and War Office. *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, pp. 308–12.
- 26 John Harris to Philip Gidley King, 25 October 1807, ML MSS 681/2, pp. 401–408.
- 27 *Historical records of Australia*, 1, 6, p. 312.
- 28 *Historical records of Australia*, 1, 6, p. 227.
- 29 *ibid*.
- 30 John McMahon, 'Not a Rum Rebellion but a military insurrection', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 92, pt. 2, December 2006, p. 135.
- 31 Michael Duffy, *Man of honour: John Macarthur — duellist, rebel, founding father*, Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 2003, p. 295.



Above: Elizabeth Bligh, 1785, John Webber, oil painting, private collection

William Bligh married Elizabeth Betham in February 1781. Mrs Bligh did not accompany her husband to New South Wales but dutifully looked after his affairs at home, keeping him informed of those actively working for his recall.

THE EVER MEMORABLE

26 JANUARY 1808

Gary Warner, Artist/Guest Curator, Historic Houses Trust

When the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales invited me to develop a Museum of Sydney exhibition for the 200th anniversary of the Rum Rebellion, I was thrilled. Then I started the research ... like Alice heading down that rabbit hole, things rapidly became convoluted, extraordinary characters made unexpected appearances; intrigues piled up and melted into one another; conjecture wrestled with hearsay. Something else became apparent: artists have largely ignored Australia's only military coup.

In fact, a single simplistic image — the 'Bligh under the bed' cartoon — has come to represent the entire complex narrative. Created within hours of the event and directed toward a largely illiterate (and inebriate) populace, it was a satire on the governor of the day that has enjoyed a longevity unimagined by its anonymous creator. But its persistence is easily, if somewhat paradoxically, explained — Australians love to see authority humbled, hubris transmuted to ignominy (... is this where all that began?). The paradox lies in the fact that the cartoon represents a clash between two authorities — the civil and the military — to which the majority of the people were mere spectators.

In 1928 the artist Raymond Lindsay made a series of large-scale history paintings inspired by Bligh's overthrow. One of these depicts Major George Johnston proclaiming Bligh's arrest to an astonished crowd of Sydneysiders. It was bought by Dame Nellie Melba and presented to the Geelong Gallery in Victoria which has kindly loaned the picture for the Museum of Sydney exhibition. Conserving it for the exhibition revealed a second painting by Lindsay on the back of the canvas, painted over by the artist and previously unknown. It depicts John Macarthur being chaired around Sydney on the shoulders of NSW Corps soldiers.

The paintings are jaunty, theatrical, with a sense of playful social commentary — Lindsay was obviously captivated by the dramatic potential of the Rum Rebellion narrative. I wonder why more artists haven't been similarly inspired?

In the heady days following the 1808 insurrection, Daniel McKay — a gaoler, dismissed by Bligh as too brutal, then a pub owner — erected a sign outside his public house. It showed on one side a Highland officer thrusting his sword through a snake while a female figure of liberty presents him with a cap; on the other side, written in large type, was the phrase 'The Ever Memorable 26th January 1808'.¹

Today, in 2008, 26 January is sanctioned as Australia Day, commemorated as Invasion Day,² but perhaps forgotten as the day of denouement for a drama whose first act played out when the 22-year-old Lieutenant John Macarthur stepped ashore at Port Jackson on the Second Fleet in 1790.

The Australian Government Australia Day website³ has a reference to Manning Clark noting that in 1808 the 'anniversary of the foundation of the colony' was observed in the traditional manner with 'drinking and merriment', and citing 1808 as the 'first recorded celebrations on 26 January'. But this appeal to the words of 'Australia's most famous historian'⁴ by the capital-A authorities obscures the reason for that 'drinking and merriment' — the arrest and overthrow of Governor Bligh. (Clark was perhaps writing with tongue-in-cheek?) On that night, a fleeting sense of liberation from authority ignited a carnivalesque atmosphere that pervaded the town. Bonfires were lit, grog flowed freely, ad-hoc transparencies glowed in imperfect windowpanes, effigies of Bligh and others were paraded about — and the NSW Corps officers also paraded about, having toppled the obstacle to their feckless profiteering.

There were no celebrations of a nation that summer's night, rather a kind of drunken carnival of anarchy.

In developing this project, the sheer volume of primary and secondary written source materials has been, frankly, overwhelming. The two central protagonists alone generated a voluminous network of handwriting carrying observations, thoughts, plans, opinions, pleas, confidences — all using quill and ink. The installation at the Museum of Sydney reflects upon this, the central role of the handwritten word in the machinations of empire (State or personal), and the ongoing examination of those primary sources to interpret and communicate the emanations of the past to successive generations — the project of history.

As an independent worker in the field of culture, it is always rewarding to collaborate with institutions such as the Historic Houses Trust and the State Library of New South Wales. I hope visitors to these complementary exhibitions are inspired to reflect upon and further explore this unique moment in our shared colonial history.

Notes

- 1 *Historical records of New South Wales*, 6, p. 670.
- 2 The first Aboriginal 'Day of Mourning' was 26 January 1938; the first official Australia Day was 1946 — before that it was known as Anniversary Day and Foundation Day.
- 3 www.australiaday.gov.au
- 4 Graeme Davison and others, *The Oxford companion to Australian history*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

THE INSURRECTION TIMELINE



1788

First Fleet, First Governor

26 January — Captain Arthur Phillip, first Governor of NSW, lands 1500 men, women & children at Sydney Cove — *Warrang* to Aboriginal people living there. Lieutenant George Johnston, NSW Corps, first person ashore.

Bligh at Adventure Bay

21 August — Captain William Bligh, en route to Tahiti, anchors HMS *Bounty* at Adventure Bay, Van Diemen's Land, for provisioning.

1789

Mutiny on the *Bounty*

28 April — Shortly after leaving Tahiti, mutineers on HMS *Bounty* seize the ship; Bligh & 18 men abandoned at sea in open boat. Bligh keeps men disciplined; navigates 5800 km to reach Timor six weeks later.

1790

14 March — England — Bligh arrives back after *Bounty* mutiny ordeal.

John Macarthur arrives in NSW

28 June — Sydney — John Macarthur, 22, arrives on Second Fleet as lieutenant with NSW Corps; accompanied by wife Elizabeth & infant son Edward.

22 October — England — Bligh honorably acquitted for loss of HMS *Bounty*.

1792

February — Sydney — Major Francis Grose arrives as Lieutenant-Governor & commanding officer NSW Corps; appoints Macarthur to influential position of Regimental Paymaster for Corps.

Phillip departs for England

11 December — Military assume temporary command of colony — Major Grose, Acting-Governor; Captain William Paterson, Administrator.

1793

Rise of Macarthur's influence

January — Grose appoints Macarthur Inspector of Public Works; awards him land grant of 100 acres (40.5 hectares) — Elizabeth Farm. Using convict labour, Macarthur clears 50 acres; in 1794 receives further 50 acres grant. Macarthur now wealthy & influential, under Grose patronage.

July — England — Arthur Phillip resigns NSW governorship due to ill-health.

1795

6 May — Macarthur promoted to Captain.

Second Governor — John Hunter

September — Sydney — Captain John Hunter arrives to assume office as NSW Governor.

1796

February — Macarthur clashes with Hunter; resigns as Inspector of Public Works. Later, Macarthur imports Spanish sheep from Cape Colony (South Africa); breeds them for wool.

1798

March — Hunter sends detailed account to England of civil grievances about extortionate trading practices of NSW Corps officers.

1800

Third Governor — PG King

3 September — Partly due to Macarthur's 'perturbations', Hunter recalled to England; hands over to Lieutenant-Governor Philip Gidley King.

1801

September — Governor King appoints William Paterson as Lieutenant-Governor. Paterson is good friend of Joseph Banks.

Macarthur arrested, deported

14 September — Macarthur falls out with Paterson; wounds him in poorly conducted duel. Paterson is Macarthur's commanding officer & Macarthur is arrested.

November — Governor King orders Macarthur sent to England for court-martial. Macarthur takes samples of Elizabeth Farm wool to England.

1802

December — Macarthur arrives in England but it is determined he cannot be tried there for duel in Sydney; censured & remanded to rejoin regiment.

1803

Macarthur promotes NSW wool

July — Still in England, Macarthur meets with clothing industry representatives keen to find new sources of wool (Napoleonic wars block Spanish supply; prices hugely inflated).

Though Joseph Banks is sceptical, Macarthur receives official support to develop NSW wool industry. Lord Camden permits him resign from Army; awards NSW land grant of 5000 acres (2025 hectares); allows purchase of sheep from 'His Majesty's Spanish Flock'.

Bligh selected fourth Governor

24 May — At Joseph Banks' recommendation, King George III appoints William Bligh to replace PG King as NSW Governor. Bligh instructed to curtail barter with alcohol, restrict trade monopolies, end corruption in NSW Corps.

Macarthur starts wool industry

8 June — Macarthur returns to Sydney with sheep from Royal flocks & instructions from Lord Camden to Governor King to grant Macarthur not less than 5000 acres; to annoyance of Governor King, Macarthur selects prime pasture land; names new property Camden.

Bligh leaves England

28 January — Bligh leaves England bound for NSW, accompanied by eldest daughter Mary Putland & her husband Lieutenant John Putland. Bligh's wife Elizabeth & their five other daughters remain in England.

Disastrous Hawkesbury flood

March — 15 000 hectares flooded — many farms destroyed, causing hardship & shortages of grain, meat. Price of food skyrockets.

August — England — Banks outlines case against Macarthur to Board of Trade.

Bligh arrives in NSW

6 August — Sydney — Bligh arrives on HMS *Lady Madeleine Sinclair* with escort HMS *Porpoise*. En route Bligh had chain-of-command disagreement with Captain Short of *Porpoise*. Bligh orders Short back to England for court-martial. Short's wife & child die on return journey; Short financially ruined, agitates against Bligh in England for many years.

Unusual land grants

10 August — Before resigning as Governor, PG King grants Bligh three parcels of land, total 1345 acres (542 hectares). Bligh names them Camperdown (at Petersham), Mount Betham (at Parramatta), Copenhagen (near Rouse Hill); grants are irregular & later contested.

Bligh sworn in, welcomed

13 August — Bligh, 51, assumes office of Governor; is presented with address of welcome signed by Judge-Advocate Richard Atkins for civil service, Lieutenant-Colonel George Johnston for military, John Macarthur for free settlers. Soon after, 379 free settlers separately petition Bligh, distancing themselves from Macarthur.

Bligh gets to work

4 October — Bligh forbids departing ships from leaving crew members behind; new port regulations secure government control of ships & boat building.

1 November — Bligh issues general orders forbidding barter in goods.

3 January — Bligh proclaims all promissory notes, i.e. loans, to be payable only in sterling, not kind.

7 February — Bligh writes to England requesting relocation of Macarthur's 5000 acres land grant.

14 February — Bligh outlaws importation of stills for alcohol production & bartering with spirits.

28 February — Bligh declares all goods shipped to NSW be unloaded at Port Jackson only.

Disputed still

March — A still arrives in Sydney for Macarthur, sent unannounced by his London agent. Bligh impounds it as illegal. Macarthur successfully argues to have copper body, with goods inside, sent to his private store.

Macarthur vs Thompson

July — (Andrew Thompson — pardoned convict, became Chief Constable under Hunter; successful farmer, businessman, builder, trustee for Hawkesbury settlers; manager of Bligh's farms, received land grants from Bligh.)

Before 1806 floods, Macarthur bought debt owed by Thompson, made out in bushels of wheat. After floods, price of wheat up tenfold. Macarthur tries to enforce payment in wheat (now ten times price when debt was made) but court determines debt is for original *value*, not *amount*, of wheat. Macarthur appeals — Bligh intervenes, dismisses appeal.

Another unpopular order

23 July — Bligh orders removal of houses in Government Domain built on short-term leases given by PG King. Bligh wants strict town planning within Domain. Offer made of alternate sites but order causes dissent.

Campbell's fumble

October — Colony Naval Officer Robert Campbell sends nephew to retrieve still from Macarthur's store for return to England under Bligh's order. But nephew has no official status — Macarthur sues for wrongful seizure and wins.

Bligh's premonition

October — Bligh sends letter to Banks — suggests NSW Corps be sent to India, concerned they may become 'a dangerous militia'; also, critical of alcoholic Judge-Advocate Atkins, requests his replacement.

Arrest of the *Parramatta*

December — Macarthur is co-owner of trading ship *Parramatta* sailing between Sydney & South Pacific. *Parramatta* left Sydney for Tahiti, June 1807; convict John Hoare, hidden on board, escaped in Pacific Islands.

When ship returns December 1807, owners liable for £900 bond to NSW Government for assisting escape. Macarthur refuses to pay; ship is impounded. Macarthur declaims against ship, ceases provisioning crew.

Macarthur defies Atkins

14 December — Crew of *Parramatta* illegally come ashore seeking provisions; approach Judge-Advocate Atkins who sends letter to Macarthur requesting explanation. Outraged, Macarthur sends angry reply declaring contempt for Atkins & government. Atkins issues warrant for Macarthur's arrest.

Arrest of Macarthur

16 December — Macarthur arrested near Government House at home of friend Surveyor-General Charles Grimes. Macarthur demands to be brought before bench of magistrates. They grant him bail on condition he appears again the following day.

Macarthur committed for trial

17 December — Magistrates, including George Johnston, commit Macarthur to criminal trial & he is bailed to appear in January. Court does not define charges.

Denial of Macarthur's lease

December — Bligh challenges Macarthur's lease on Church Hill, given by PG King despite Phillip's order of no private leases in Sydney town.



Above: Sydney Cove (detail), 1808, John William Lewin, watercolour, ML 59

4 January — Bligh's son-in-law Lieutenant John Putland dies of tuberculosis.

Macarthur's perturbations

January — Macarthur tries to recall debt he holds against Atkins; Bligh refuses Macarthur's requests to assist his recovery of debt.

14 January — Macarthur starts work on fence around lease, using soldier labour.

20 January — Bligh orders demolition of fence at Macarthur's lease.

22 January — Johnston requests Corps mess dinner on 24th — Bligh agrees.

NSW Corps mess dinner

24 January — Officers, soldiers, civilians gather for night of drinking, music, camaraderie — & plotting?

Macarthur's criminal trial

January 25 — After six NSW Corps officers sworn in, Macarthur loudly protests against Atkins' suitability to try him because Atkins owes him money. Officers refuse to swear in Atkins as Judge-Advocate. Atkins reports this to Government House in writing; appeals to Bligh to intervene. Officers also write to Bligh, requesting Atkins be replaced.

12.30 — Bligh replies he has no authority to remove Judge-Advocate from office, nor to provide substitute.

13.00 — Officers reply they will not try Macarthur with Atkins.

14.15 — Bligh demands officers return court papers to him outlining charges against Macarthur, & provide him with paper Macarthur read out to crowded courtroom.

15.30 — Officers refuse; advise Macarthur seeks military protection due to unspecified threats.

15.45 — Bligh again demands papers.

17.00 — Officers offer to make copies of papers for Bligh but demand they retain originals for use by substitute Judge-Advocate. They advise court is adjourned & Macarthur freed on previous bail. Macarthur leaves court with military escort.

17.30 — Bligh sends request to George Johnston to meet him at Government House without delay. Johnston at his Annandale house, has not attended day's proceedings; reportedly fell from carriage after mess dinner, is too injured to write or travel — declines Bligh's request.

Rebellion!

26 January

09.00 — Bligh issues warrant for Macarthur's arrest to Provost-Marshal William Gore; Macarthur arrested & jailed.

10.00 — Military officers insist Atkins be replaced; ask for release of Macarthur on bail.

15.00 — After no reply to their request, officers adjourn court.

Atkins and adviser George Crossley define officers' actions as treason. (Crossley is ex-convict but only person in colony with legal training.)

Bligh sends summons to each officer demanding appearance before him the next day.

16.00 — Bligh sends memo to Johnston advising of officers' summons.

17.00 — Johnston immediately travels to Corps barracks in town; orders release of Macarthur, signs himself as Lieutenant-Governor but has yet to meet with either Bligh or Macarthur.

Macarthur released, quickly joins Johnston at Barracks. After private discussion with Johnston, Macarthur writes petition appealing to military to arrest Bligh as a tyrant.

Bligh arrested

18.30 — Four officers sent ahead to Government House, followed by Johnston & officers leading NSW Corps marching from barracks in High Street (now George Street) up Bridge Street with colours flying & playing 'The British Grenadiers' on fife and drums; reportedly followed by 200 onlookers. Officers resisted at gates by Mary Putland (recently widowed daughter of Bligh) but make entry to Government House.

After long search, Bligh arrested & deposed by Johnston — a bloodless rebellion! Martial law declared by Johnston.



Above: *Major Johnston announcing the arrest of Governor Bligh*, Raymond Lindsay, 1928
Collection: Geelong Gallery, gift of Dame Nellie Melba, 1928

© Estate of the artist



Above: John Macarthur being chaired by members of the NSW Corps, February 1808, Raymond Lindsay (attributed). Discovered during the 2007 restoration on the verso of *Major Johnston announcing the arrest of Governor Bligh*.

Collection: Geelong Gallery, gift of Dame Nellie Melba, 1928

© Estate of the artist

1808

Wild scenes in Sydney

27 January — With Bligh confined at Government House, Johnston declares himself in charge, revokes martial law & dismisses officers of Bligh's government including hated Atkins & Provost-Marshall Gore.

All-night celebrations across Sydney include drinking & dancing around bonfires, burning of effigies, satirical posters, oil-lamp transparencies in windows, & 'Bligh under the bed' cartoon displayed in soldier's home.

2 February — Macarthur acquitted of charges brought by Bligh; chaired around Sydney on shoulders of NSW Corps.

Rebel retribution

12 February — Bligh supporters sentenced harshly by rebel government e.g. Provost-Marshall Gore gets 7 years for causing arrest of Macarthur.

Macarthur appointed to new post of 'Colonial Secretary'.

28 July — Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Foveaux arrives from England; assumes command of NSW.

Bligh and Mary Putland under house arrest in Sydney for 12 months.

1 January — Despite Foveaux's requests, Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson, living in Tasmania, is reluctant to assume command in Sydney; finally leaves Port Dalrymple (Launceston).

Paterson refuses Bligh

9 January — Paterson assumes command; refuses to reinstate Bligh; insists Bligh & Johnston go to England for justice. Bligh & Mary Putland removed from Government House, placed under guard at Surgeon's cottage. One week later, Bligh agrees to return to England on HMS *Porpoise*.

29 March — Macarthur, Johnston & others sail for England to participate in Johnston's court-martial for mutiny.

Bligh's ruse

30 March — Bligh on *Porpoise* doesn't sail for England but to Van Diemen's Land to enlist help of Lieutenant-Governor David Collins. When Collins forbids anyone to provide assistance, Bligh attempts to stop maritime traffic into the Derwent River. Some settlers who sympathise with Bligh are harshly punished.

9 October — Macarthur and Johnston arrive in England.

Fifth Governor — Lachlan Macquarie

31 December — Lachlan Macquarie arrives in Sydney from England with orders to reinstate Bligh for 24 hours, before himself becoming Governor. Bligh is absent, so reinstatement doesn't occur.

1 January — Macquarie proclaimed Governor of NSW; declares 1808 insurrection to be illegal; nullifies all court sentences & land grants of rebel regime.

17 January — Adventure Bay, Van Diemen's Land — Bligh learns British Colonial Office has condemned his overthrow as mutiny; sets sail for Sydney.

Bligh returns to England

12 May — Following stay in Sydney, Bligh sails for England with recalled NSW Corps soldiers & witnesses including Atkins & Paterson for trial against Johnston. Mary Putland, recently remarried to Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice O'Connell, remains in Sydney. Paterson dies en route.

25 October — Bligh arrives in England.

3 April — The recently proclaimed Prince Regent (later George IV on the death of his father George III) orders Johnston's court-martial.

Johnston's court-martial

7 May — Fifteen high-ranking officers + Judge Advocate General convene court martial — trial considered important. It runs 13 days, with 22 witnesses plus Bligh for Crown, 18 witnesses for Johnston.

The verdict

5 June — Johnston found guilty of mutiny; given lenient sentence — cashiered from military; returns to civilian life as gentleman farmer in NSW.

12 November — Bligh publishes his account of Johnston's court-martial.

William Bligh was promoted to Rear-Admiral of the White and Vice-Admiral of the Blue, but never fully recovered his reputation after the mutiny on the *Bounty* and his deposition in NSW. After the death of his beloved wife Elizabeth, he retired to Kent with his unmarried daughters in 1813, and died in 1817. His story and its various legacies continue to fascinate, argument today being played out on the Internet between his descendants and those of *Bounty* mutineers.

There are 22 public roads, a suburb and primary school in Sydney named after Bligh. In 2007 the inner city electoral district of Bligh was renamed Sydney.

The Museum of Sydney is built upon and preserves the remaining foundations of first Government House — the home, offices and seat of authority for the first nine governors of New South Wales. The mutinous arrest and deposition of Governor William Bligh took place on this site on 26 January 1808.

George Johnston returned to NSW to become a civilian farmer on the properties received as land grants during his time in the NSW Corps. He died in 1823.

The suburb of Annandale was named for his farm and, among other place names and references, Johnston Street, the main thoroughfare of Annandale, commemorates him.

John Macarthur could not immediately return to NSW after Johnston's court-martial because Governor Lachlan Macquarie was instructed to arrest and try him if he did. He remained in England as a virtual exile, separated from his wife Elizabeth, his sons and his farming interests, until 1817. He then returned to NSW under an agreement to refrain from public affairs and continued his successful career as a pastoralist grazier and entrepreneur. Declared insane in 1832, he died at Camden Park in 1834 and is buried there. There are 21 public roads and a federal electorate named after him in Sydney.

Elizabeth Farm is now a property of the Historic Houses Trust. Preserving connections to the early years of the colony and commemorating the family life of John and Elizabeth Macarthur, it is open to the public.

ITEM LIST

All items are held by the State Library of New South Wales unless otherwise indicated. Titles of works appear in italics; where the title has been ascribed, it is not italicised.

SYDNEY IN 1808

John Eyre (attrib.)

East view of Sydney in New South Wales, c. 1809

Watercolour
Bequest of Sir William Dixon, 1952
DL Pg49

John Eyre (attrib.)

A west view of Sydney in New South Wales, c. 1809

Watercolour
Bequest of Sir William Dixon, 1952
DL Pg50

THE NEW GOVERNOR

Henry Aston Barker

Portrait of William Bligh, 1805
Pencil drawing
Purchased 1994
ML MIN 351

Artist unknown

Portrait of Mary Putland née Bligh, c. 1805
Watercolour on ivory
Purchased 2003
ML MIN 399

John William Lewin

The night hawk ... 1807
Wash drawing
Purchased 2005
ML V/112

John William Lewin

Echidna, 1807
Watercolour and pencil
Purchased 2003
ML PXD 942/1

John Jeffreys Pratt

1st Marquis Camden
Letter to Sir Joseph Banks, 18 April 1805
Original manuscript
Purchased Sotheby's, London, 1929
Banks Papers, Series 59:01

William Bligh

Letter to Sir Joseph Banks, 5 November 1806
Original manuscript
Purchased 1884 by NSW Government from Lord Brabourne; transferred to Mitchell Library, 1910
Banks Papers, Series 40:070

JOHN MACARTHUR

Artist unknown

Portrait of John Macarthur, c. 1850s?
Oil
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1935
DG 222

George William Evans

Gov^{nt} House Parramatta, 1805
Watercolour
ML SSV1B/Parr/12

Artist unknown

View of the government hut at the Cowpastures, 1804
Watercolour
ML SSV1B/Cowp D/1

Proceedings of a general court-martial ... London:

Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1811
Bequest of Sir William Dixon, 1952
DL 81/42

CONFRONTING THE POPULACE

James Meehan

Plan of the town of Sydney ... 1807, c. 1898
Photolithograph
NSW Government Printing Office
ML ZM2 811.17/1807/1

John Blaxland

Letter to Henry Waterhouse, 23 October 1807
Original manuscript
Purchased Christie's, London, 1998
ML MSS 6544/3

Artist unknown

Portrait of John Blaxland, c. 1785–1800
Watercolour on ivory
Presented by Rev. Canon Cuthbert Blaxland, 1926
ML MIN 88

George Johnston

Draft letter to John Schank, October 1807
Original manuscript
Purchased Hordern House Rare Books, 2002
ML MSS 7199

John Macarthur

Letter to John Piper, 11 October 1807
Original manuscript
Piper Papers
ML A256 pp481-484

BOUNTY BLIGH

John Harris

Letter to Anna Josepha King,
25 October 1807
Original manuscript
ML A1980/2, pp. 237-248

Elizabeth Macarthur

Letter to Miss Kingdon,
29 January 1807
Original manuscript
Donated by Colonel
JW Macarthur-Onslow and
Miss RS Macarthur-Onslow,
1940
ML A2908

William Minchin

Letter to Philip Gidley King,
20 October 1807
Original manuscript
NSW – Colonial Secretary's
Papers
ML MSS 681/2

A CHARGE OF TREASON

R Dighton

Portrait of George Johnston,
1810
Watercolour
Donated by Mrs CA Johnston,
1931
ML 511

John Eyre

First Government House,
Sydney, c. 1807
Watercolour
Purchased with assistance from
the AL Caldcleugh Bequest and
Mr and Mrs Sam Cullen, 1994
ML SV/31

Artist unknown

Portrait of Thomas Laycock,
c. 1811
Watercolour on ivory
Purchased 1989
ML MIN 322

THE ARREST

Artist unknown

The arrest of Governor Bligh,
1808
Watercolour
Donated to the NSW
Government by Mrs Fanny
Johnston, c. 1898, transferred
to Mitchell Library, 1934
ML Safe 4/5

Requisition to Major Johnston
to assume control of the Colony,
1808
Original manuscript
Donated to the NSW
Government by Mrs Fanny
Johnston, c. 1898, transferred
to Mitchell Library, 1934
ML Safe 4/5

Statement of Michael
Marlborough, Lance Corporal,
sworn before E Abbott,
11 April 1808
Original manuscript
Donated to the NSW
Government by Mrs Fanny
Johnston, c. 1898, transferred
to Mitchell Library, 1934
ML Safe 4/5

John Eyre (attrib.)

Philip Slaeger (engraver, attrib.)

*View of part of the river
of Sydney ...* 1813
Engraving
Published in Absalom West,
Views in New South Wales,
Sydney: A West 1812–1814
Bequest of Sir William Dixon,
1952
DL F81/21

DENOUEMENT

Proclamation by George
Johnston announcing the end of
martial law, 27 January 1808,
Sydney: Government Printer,
1808
Donated by Mr Morton, 1915
ML Safe1/87 item 7

John Macarthur

Letter to Elizabeth Macarthur,
1808
Original manuscript
Donated by Colonel
JW Macarthur-Onslow and
Miss RS Macarthur-Onslow,
1940
ML A 2898 pp2-5

Item displayed in the Mitchell vestibule:

John Webber

Portrait of Elizabeth Bligh,
1785
Oil
Private collection

Item at the Museum of Sydney:

Raymond Lindsay

*Major Johnston announcing
the arrest of Governor Bligh*,
1928
Collection: Geelong Gallery,
gift of Dame Nellie Melba, 1928
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