

EARLY GOVERNORS AND EXPLORERS OF COLONIAL NSW

and their impact on the settlement of the South Coast

Part III: King, Barrallier & Meehan

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Introduction

As previously discussed, the early years of the colony were fraught with difficulties caused by the nature of the new country, the lack of understanding of the colony's needs back in England, the constant wars with France and Spain, and the mutual cultural misunderstandings between Europeans and indigenous peoples. In addition, the rivalry between British naval and military personnel, the English/Irish political issues and the sheer distance of the colony from England made life for our early governors unimaginably hard.

Historians view the first governor, Arthur Phillip, as a very able, even brilliant, governor whose tenacity saw the fledgling colony survive through drought and starvation. His successor, Lieutenant-governor Major Grose, allowed the NSW Corps military to establish a monopoly on trade, imposed a military judicial system and allowed the colony's morals to degenerate. The next lieutenant-governor, Captain William Paterson, was unable to restrict the rum trade and the power of the NSW Corps, despite good intentions, but he encouraged exploration of areas around Port Jackson. When Governor John Hunter arrived, he spent his five years trying to undo the bad decisions of Grose, restore the judicial system, continue exploration and establish colonial industries. Hunter took NSW from a penal settlement to an almost self-sufficient colony, encouraging free settlers to establish farming and wool-growing practices, and putting convicts to work on coal and lime mines.

By 1800, Sydney Harbour and the entire coastline south of Sydney had been mapped, Lake Illawarra had been explored, the strategic importance of Jervis Bay had been noted, and land between Sydney and the Blue Mountains had been explored for farming and settlement.

PHILIP GIDLEY KING (Governor of NSW 1800-1806)

Background

Like John Hunter, King had been an officer in the First Fleet (second in command to Captain Arthur Phillip). His appointment as governor of NSW was based on a distinguished naval career in which he had fought the rebellious colonial Americans in 1775, defended the English Channel against the French in 1780, and served with Phillip in India in 1786. It was Arthur Phillip who nominated King as his second lieutenant of the *Sirius* in which Phillip himself was sailing. After the encounter with the French at Botany Bay, on arrival in 1788, it was King who was sent, with 15 convicts and 8 other men, to claim Norfolk Island and settle there for two years. Sighted and named by Captain Cook in

1774 (after Mary Howard, Duchess of Norfolk, who had died the year before) the island once inhabited by Polynesians was deserted but had stands of New Zealand flax needed by the British navy for sails and ropes. The lack of a safe harbour, and infestations of rats, did not deter King, who was soon able to supply a starving Sydney Town with some freshly grown food, as well as building materials vastly superior to what was in Sydney.

In 1790, Governor Phillip had sent King back to England to report on both settlements to the British Admiralty, leaving Norfolk Island in the command of Lieutenant Robert Ross. When King returned there, 20 months later, he found the population had grown to nearly a thousand, but discord and crime were high amongst convicts, settlers, soldiers and officials. King's capable and enthusiastic rule there turned the tide and made the settlement self-sufficient by 1794, but the irascible Francis Grose (in command of the NSW Corps back in Sydney) put in a complaint to London about King's court-martialing of rebellious soldiers in an attempted mutiny. *[King had had a soldier arrested for fighting; ten of his fellow-soldiers mutinied against King for this decision, so King had them disarmed and sent in irons back to Sydney to be tried for rebellion, putting him once more at odds with Grose].*

This affair distressed King's health (he had already been suffering from gout and serious breathing problems), so Governor Hunter sent him back to England in 1796 to recover, (accompanied, of course, with a massive shipment of plants for Sir Joseph Banks) and with a recommendation that King succeed him as governor of the colony of NSW as soon as Hunter could arrange his own departure. *[London was neither wanting nor anticipating Hunter's relinquishing of office; this was what was known as a "dormant commission" to succeed the governor in the event of death or severe illness].*

King arrived back in NSW in 1800, newly commissioned as post-captain, and worked with Governor Hunter on the most pressing demands of the colony which was now relying less on convict labour and more on trade and industry. The rapid growth of the wool industry was both positive and negative: on the one hand, it enabled NSW to be more self-sufficient (which greatly pleased the Colonial Office in London), but, on the other hand, it enabled influential and ambitious pastoralists like John Macarthur to have increased control over trade and (by virtue of the rum trade) some control over the military who were increasingly seeing themselves as the real power-brokers in the colony. An ailing Governor Hunter gave the responsibility of curtailing their power to his soon-to-be successor, Philip King, even though he would not actually assume office until 28th September, 1800.

King tackles the rum trade

King decided that both the financial and political power of the NSW Corps could be broken by taking control of the trade in spirits, because it was the principal currency in the colony. Its value was always going up; it was resold for quadruple its import price; even the materials and wages paid for the erection of the church were quoted in terms of quantities of rum or other spirits. King refused the entry of 92 000 gallons of rum and wine in one shipment, to make his intentions clear to both the Rum Corps and the pastoralists, made it necessary to have a government permit to move more than half a gallon of spirits from one place to another, and severely limited the quantity of spirits that could be stored in a home. He also instituted a new set of port and price regulations, instituted a public warehouse as he had done successfully on Norfolk Island, and tried to set up a brewery to offer an alternative beverage to rum and other spirits. The effect was not immediate (as the number

of illegal stills increased), but many of the officers began seeking more honest ways of earning a living, such as using their organisational talents or trying farming.

King also limited the officers to only two free convicts for labour, forcing them to pay £ 15 for extra convicts and requiring them to feed and clothe all convicts in their employ. In addition, he restarted the government farms abandoned by Lieutenant-governor Grose, using convict labour to compete with the NSW Corps officers' farms. This forced down the very high prices for produce that had been rampant for years in the colony, due to the Corps' monopoly on port trading.

Because the NSW Corps controlled trade through ports, it wasn't just rum that they controlled. Non-military settlers complained that the Corps' port duties took away most of their profits from cattle and agriculture, so King bought cattle from India and encouraged small-scale experiments in growing grapes, tobacco, hemp, cotton and indigo, as well as expanding private enterprise in flax-growing and whaling, and requesting permission to trade with China and Tahiti. This put King on collision course with the wealthy pastoralists, especially John Macarthur, even before he became governor.

When Governor Hunter was finally able to leave the colony on 28th September, 1800 (having been too sick to travel for several months prior), Governor Philip Gidley King assumed command. In addition to controlling the NSW Corps, he was keen to replace the rum currency with some sort of coinage, wanted better relationships with the local indigenous population, and realised that this depended on stopping the increasing numbers of convicts from escaping by stowing away on visiting ships, or heading for the bush where they harassed Aboriginal groups and settlers alike.

King introduces the ticket-of-leave

Starting with the problem of convict escapees, Governor King continued Hunter's policy of sending the worst offenders to Newcastle while encouraging others to work towards emancipation and the chance of a new life in NSW that was better than anything they could have hoped for back in Britain. In 1801, he introduced a ticket-of-leave system, enabling reformed convicts to work for wages and choose their own masters. This system freed them from government labour, removed them from dependence on government stores, and permitted them to work for themselves within prescribed districts. It demonstrated the governor's faith in the reform of convicts and reduced the expense of maintaining them. It thus gave hope to many convicts and began to reduce the number of escape attempts. Importantly, it also reduced the number of revenge attacks by Aborigines that had been increasing during the times of the lieutenant-governors, but it also required more severe penalties for unprovoked Aboriginal attacks on settlers. The indigenous population did not understand fences or proclamations, and the settlers did not understand the indigenous concept of being part of the land with no individual ownership, so some conflict remained.

There were still many convicts able to stow away on ships leaving Port Jackson, sometimes with more than a dozen found on one ship. So, on 30th March 1805, King put the responsibility onto the ships' captains, forcing them to put up bonds which they would lose if convicts were found aboard.

Exploration

It was in 1802, during King's governorship, that the boomerang was brought to Sydney. King had sent Ensign Francois Barrallier westwards to try, yet again, to find a way across the Blue Mountains in search of more pastureland. Barrallier set off from Parramatta with 4 convicts, 5 soldiers and an

Aboriginal guide, Cogi, who could speak both Darug and Dharawal, as well as some English, and he knew the land from Sydney to the foothills of the mountains. Somewhere near present-day Camden, Barrallier saw for the first time a boomerang in use and made footnotes about it in his journal, as well as bringing at least one back to Sydney after the expedition had to turn back. Here, Cogi introduced the boomerang to the Eora groups who had not seen one before. One of the characters of Sydney, Bungaree (originally a Kuringgai man from Broken Bay, but seen a lot around Sydney where he acted as translator and go-between for the governors) took a particular liking to the boomerang, became good at throwing it and began giving demonstrations to crews from visiting ships, thus making it known to the wider world. It was Barrallier who also first recorded the Aboriginal use of the call, "Coo-ee!", and was impressed with its clarity and range as a call across distance.

The Blue Mountains seemed an impenetrable barrier to the west and Governor Hunter had opened up the area north for mining and exploration in the region now named after him. So, on 16th January, 1805, King formally recommended also settling the "country about the Shoalhaven", the coastal part of which had already been surveyed and described by Bass and Flinders, tramped through by the survivors of the *Sydney Cove* in 1797, and become the hiding place for many an escaped convict. The area was known to contain coal deposits, stands of cedar and flat areas by coastal rivers – all of which interested Governor King. In February 1805, he sent surveyor James Meehan and Lieutenant Bartholomew Kent to sail in the cutter, *Anne*, to Jervis Bay, following and mapping the Shoalhaven River. They explored overland from near present-day Callala to the Shoalhaven River and upriver for about 18 miles, as far as the Burrier ford, and arrived back in Sydney on 10th March, confirming the abundance of cedar in the area, confirming the abundance of cedar in the area. In 1802, Governor King had banned the cutting of cedar anywhere in the colony without government permission. This was necessary due to the exploitation by cedar getters mostly along the Hawkesbury, so all cedar became government property, and Meehan's confirmation of forests of cedar down south would benefit government coffers.

[James Meehan was an Irish teacher, transported as a political prisoner on the convict transport, Friendship, in February, 1800, under the assumed name of Mahon. He was assigned to Charles Grimes, Acting Surveyor-General, due to his knowledge of practical measurement; he accompanied Grimes and Barrallier to the Hunter to explore it and record it; and in 1803-4 was sent to examine Van Diemen's Land with a view to ascertaining its suitability for settlement. When Grimes was sent back to England from 1803-6, his work was assigned to Meehan. On his return, Grimes was so impressed with Meehan's work, he recommended him to King for an absolute pardon, which he received in 1806.]

The French...again

It was not just local exploration that interested King. Sir Joseph Banks, now considered a European authority on the geography and natural history of the colony, had sent Matthew Flinders back to NSW to complete the map of Australia and determine whether it was indeed part of the same land mass as New Holland. Governor King was, simultaneously, asked to determine French interest in both parts of the continent. It was in his governorship that Flinders: circumnavigated the continent, encountered Nicolas Baudin on a supposed natural history voyage off South Australia; mapped Torres Strait and the Gulf of Carpentaria; and was imprisoned for 6½ years by the French on

Mauritius, as a spy. *[Refer to accounts of these incidents in notes on the two previous talks on NSW Governors and Explorers. Some historians think that British suspicions of French interest in NSW for military purposes has been understated, that the prime motive for establishing a British colony here was actually strategic, not penal, and that only the turmoil caused by Napoleon's rise and fall prevented the French from claiming western Australia and Tasmania for themselves].* We do know that Governor King was very upset that French Governor Decaen on Mauritius did not show to Flinders the same cordial hospitality that he had shown to the French explorers for nearly six months in Sydney. King had even sold Baudin a ship, the *Casuarina*, to take the thousands of natural specimens, collected around Australia, back to Paris. But, in May 1803, tipped off about French plans, King wrote to Admiralty Secretary Evan Nepean: "a principal object of their voyage was to fix on a place in Van Diemens Land for a settlement at Risdon Cove in the River Derwent".

It must be remembered that the Anglo-French wars had been happening for over 450 years. France had supported the American rebels in 1774-5, and had invaded Ireland in 1798 to assist the Irish rebellion against the English, just two years before King returned to NSW. The failed Irish revolt led to the Act of Union in 1801, creating the United Kingdom and a new British flag. The peace between France and Britain (1802 Treaty of Amiens) occurred in King's governorship but was short-lived as Britain declared war on Napoleon in 1803 when he blockaded Europe with his Continental System, forbidding any countries to trade with the UK. Governor King, and Matthew Flinders especially, were caught up in all this, despite the distance of the colony from Europe.

Establishing a printery and a colonial currency

For as long as rum was the currency, the NSW Corps could control all trade in NSW, so King was determined to provide an alternative money system in the colony, to overcome the lack of standards in valuing foreign currencies in the colony, and to overcome the frequent forgeries of hand-written promissory notes, King introduced printed forms for promissory notes. On 5th March, 1803, King had produced the first colonial newspaper, the two-sheet *The Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser*, at 6 pence a copy. It was printed on an old printing press bought for only £2, by George Howe, a convict who had produced the colony's first book in 1802: NSW General Standing Orders. He became the first NSW Government Printer. King's printed promissory notes, however, were not popular. *[It was the paper medium that became known as "currency", as opposed to metal money or "sterling". This led to the native-born Australians being called "currency lads and lasses", while those born in Great Britain were "sterling".]* Spanish dollars, equivalent to about 5 British shillings, were used world-wide, but were in short supply, despite Mexican mints issuing over 24 million of them in two decades. King put a specific value on all foreign coins in the colony – English guineas, shillings and pennies; Spanish dollars; Indian rupees and Dutch guilders; and even Asian coins – but there were still insufficient amounts of these in the colony because trading ships' captains would insist on hard currency, not paper notes. It would remain a major problem in controlling the rum trade and the Rum Corps.

Irish rebels

Like the governors before him, King had to deal with the problem that many of the convicts were Irish political prisoners from clashes in Britain, especially the Irish rebellion of 1798. Governor Hunter had feared rebellion from Irish prisoners, so on 7th September 1800 he formed the first NSW Volunteer Corps of settlers, stationing 50 men in Parramatta and 50 in Sydney. Some Irish convicts,

like James Meehan were non-violent men, but others were bent on destroying any sense of English superiority, with violence, if the chance arose. The previous governor, John Hunter, had feared rebellion from Irish convicts, so he formed the first NSW Volunteer Corps from settlers, stationing fifty men at Parramatta and fifty in Sydney. By 1801, there were over 600 United Irish convicts in the colony. They had been deliberately separated into different settlements to prevent large groups of them in one place, but at 8pm on 9th March, 1804, 200 convicts led by Philip Cunningham revolted at Castle Hill settlement, with the intention of gathering a further 1100 convicts and seize Parramatta then Sydney. Major George Johnson took 56 soldiers to quell the revolt. 15 convicts were shot dead, 9 hanged and others flogged. Martial law was declared by Governor King on 5th March; Cunningham was hanged without trial, and the first armed rebellion in the colony was put down.

John Macarthur

Our primary school social studies knowledge of John Macarthur is usually limited to his being the “father of the Australian wool industry”. He was much more than that, for better or worse. In 1789, aged about 22, he joined the NSW Corps as a lieutenant, bound for the new colony. On board the Neptune, even before they reached the Cape of Good Hope, he quarrelled with the master of the ship, had a duel with him, then another disagreement with his successor. Macarthur (with his wife, Elizabeth, and son, Edward) transferred to another ship, the Scarborough. After arriving in Port Jackson on 2th June 1790, he was posted to the Rouse Hill (Parramatta) settlement and soon had to be reprimanded by Governor Phillip for repeated hostilities with others there.

In 1792, newly-arrived commanding officer Major Francis Grose appointed Macarthur as regimental paymaster; and in 1792 (now as lieutenant-governor), Grose made him inspector of public works, giving Macarthur extensive control of the colony’s resources. With illegal grants of land and stock from Grose (including the 100-acre Elizabeth Farm), unrestricted access to convict labour, and a further grant of 100 acres, Macarthur soon became one of the foremost landholders in NSW. Grose also warded off a potential court martial for Macarthur in his arguments with Captain Nicholas Nepean, and had him promoted to captain in 1795. Macarthur was now firmly identified with the military autocracy that was such a problem for Governor Hunter. In his flamboyant manner, Macarthur once offered his resignation to Hunter as inspector of public works. When Hunter gladly accepted the resignation, Macarthur sent criticisms of Hunter’s administration directly to London, while continuing to feud with magistrate Richard Atkins and surgeon William Balmain, whom he also challenged to a duel for calling him a “base rascal and an atrocious liar and a villain”.

In the midst of all this, Macarthur was starting to cross-breed sheep from Ireland and Bengal to produce a finer grade of wool. Back in 1793, he had illegally imported 30 Bengal sheep from Calcutta, and in 1794 bought a further 60 Bengal lambs and ewes as well as two Irish ewes and a ram. This gave him superior wool, but he wanted still better quality, to rival the world’s best from Saxony. Macarthur had a stroke of luck in 1796 when Governor Hunter sent his 2-I-C, the future Governor King, to England to report on the colony. With King were his commissar and Captains Waterhouse and Kent. King and his commissar were each given 3 merinos as a gift, at Cape Town, and King persuaded the captains to buy the remaining ones, giving them 13 each, to take back to Sydney. Only 8 or 9 survived the voyage back to Sydney where Macarthur offered to buy them.

Waterhouse and Kent initially refused, but later sold them and their progeny to Macarthur, Marsden, Cox and Rowley, as all were experimenting with improving wool quality.

By the time King arrived back in the colony, in 1800, Macarthur was ready to sell his land and stock, and move back to England, but King wasn't willing to buy it. Macarthur urged his fellow soldiers to ostracise King by not attending any social functions at Government House, then tried to enlist support from his superior officer, now Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson, to discredit King; but Paterson refused, reported him to King. Macarthur secretly went through the personal papers of Paterson and his wife and informed Paterson that he had embarrassing information he could make public. Incensed at this underhandedness that now involved his wife, Paterson challenged Macarthur to a duel! So, on 14th September, 1801, Macarthur shot Paterson, wounding him in the shoulder. King arrested Macarthur, and, realising that a home trial could make a martyr of Macarthur and stir up more trouble from his NSW Corps supporters, sent him back to England for court martial. Macarthur sailed from Port Jackson on the *Hunter* in November, leaving his wife, Elizabeth, to run his extensive estates, but taking with him some wool samples from his flocks, at a time when there was a crisis in the British wool industry due to the Napoleonic wars.

For the next four years, Macarthur strongly advocated to Sir Joseph Banks and others that he was the man to save the British Empire by producing wool at least as good as the best from Spain. Banks was sceptical, but Macarthur managed to convince Lord Camden, the highest colonial authority in London, to let him resign from the army and return to the colony to develop its wool industry... along with a grant of a further 5 000 acres of the best pastureland in NSW at Cowpastures, and possibly another 5 000 acres if successful, and by allowing him to obtain rare sheep from Spain's royal flocks.

Macarthur returned to Sydney on 8th June, 1805, without having been court martialled, aboard the *Argo* (appropriately named and with a golden fleece figurehead!) No longer under military command, but operating as a free settler and entrepreneur, he presented his letters of patronage to Governor King who was still trying to get a court martial against Macarthur and have him banished to Norfolk Island. King was also still fighting the NSW Corps over the rum trade and port monopolies. Macarthur, with the assistance of 34 convict labourers to work his now extensive properties, added insult to injury by proposing that he also be put in charge of managing the government herds of cattle at Cowpastures. To add insult to injury, Macarthur called his new estate "Camden Park". It all took its toll on the already ailing Governor King who deferred the latter decision and the matter of the court martial to his successor, Governor Bligh.

King asks to be recalled from his governorship

As early as 1803, King had asked to be relieved of his duties in the colony; his ailing health and the constant battles with his own military were taking their toll on him. Meanwhile, Macarthur's criticisms of him in letters, and for years in person back in England, had presented a poor picture of him as colonial governor, despite laudatory reports from other influential men in NSW. It was not until 15th August 1806 that he could embark on the *Buffalo* to return to England, but even that didn't go smoothly: once on board, he completely collapsed and had to delay his departure until 10th February, 1807. Less than 18 months later, he was dead, aged just 50.

Governor King deserves more credit for his efforts than is usually given. Nobody who knew him doubted that he always aimed at promoting “the prosperity of the colony, and giving a permanent security to the interests of its inhabitants”. He had set up factories for making leather, canvas blankets, rope and beer, overhauled the land grants scheme, and established permanent government buildings. He left the colony much better than he had found it, in terms of its economy, the state of the convicts, the relations with indigenous populations, and the establishment of better trading arrangements. He is regarded by historians as an efficient, level-headed administrator, cultured and well-read, quick-tempered but with a good sense of humour – a man who gave his all, but died too young from the trials of his office.

As King finally left NSW, Macarthur must have thought he was now truly in charge of the colony; but he had not reckoned on the tenacity of the next governor, the infamous Captain William Bligh.
#

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