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Distant Lives & Digital Surrogates:
Historical Research, Electronic Publishing & Collaborative Partnerships in an Australian University Museum

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Abstract

Innovation, outreach and collaboration in university museums can take many forms. In recent years virtual access through websites and electronic publishing have helped to transform university museums into dynamic spaces for teaching, research and community outreach. The Lachlan Macquarie Room, located inside Macquarie University Library, Sydney, (Australia) is a unique heritage museum containing the original timber panelling and fittings from the home in Scotland of the University's namesake Lachlan Macquarie (1761-1824). Since 1995 public use and awareness of The Lachlan Macquarie Room, and its related display items, has been expanded through the development of dedicated websites, public exhibitions, and seminars examining the life and times of Lachlan Macquarie in Britain, North America, Asia, the Middle East and Australia. This paper will examine how curatorial staff at Macquarie University are exploiting web-based technologies to provide 24-hour access to the museum, and describe the initiatives under development to establish national and international research partnerships to promote the history of this unique historical collection.

To the Lighthouse

At the entrance to Sydney Harbour stands the Macquarie Lighthouse. Originally built in 1816-1818 to guide ships to anchorage at Sydney Cove it was an important physical and emotional beacon for sailors and their passengers. It
marked the safe conclusion of the long voyage to Australia and the beginning of a new world of experiences in a strange and exciting new continent. Approximately one hundred and fifty years later this lighthouse became the symbol for the official arms of the newly-established Macquarie University. The consequences of this decision have been significant and profound - not least of which is that it has provided a unique context for engagement within the university, as well as contact with the wider community beyond the perimeter of the university campus.

Engaging the Community

Macquarie University, Sydney was founded in 1964 and opened for teaching in 1967. Thirty-five years later the institution has become a key participant in both the Australian tertiary sector and the international research network, with a tripartite strategic mission (and statutory obligation) to foster teaching, promote learning, and to establish community links. And as such, the University is uniquely endowed with commemorative links to its Scottish namesake, Lachlan Macquarie (1761-1824).

Who Was Lachlan Macquarie and Why Was He Important?

Lachlan Macquarie commenced his governorship of the convict colony of New South Wales in January 1810 and remained in this position for the next 12 years (until November 1821). It was period of autocratic rule tempered by a benevolent paternalism, as well as an ambitious program of public works construction, the establishment of educational and social welfare initiatives, and the foundation of organised commerce and finance. The challenges of a rapidly expanding convict and free settler population were counterpoised against major advances in the geographical exploration of the eastern coast of Australia. Macquarie transformed a distant penal settlement and outpost of British imperial ambition into a thriving commercial entrepôt – with trading links to China, India, South Africa, Britain, and the Americas.

In 1967 Macquarie University received a unique gift from Scotland – the complete timber interior (walls, doors, windows, shutters and fireplace) of Macquarie's original parlour room from inside his house on the Isle of Mull. This parlour is a room approximately 20ft x 11ft in size, with a ceiling height of 8ft 6in. The room was eventually re-assembled and installed within the University Library in 1978 as a commemorative heritage space now known as The Lachlan Macquarie Room.

Today, I would like to examine the curatorial challenges of The Lachlan Macquarie Room under four separate headings:

Place
Space
Context
Collaboration
Historic House Museums are found extensively throughout the world. They come in many shapes and sizes and often act as significant cultural agencies in the preservation of national, regional and local heritage.

At their worst, these buildings may appear to be "three-dimensional autobiographies" commemorating the lives of rich or famous "dead white males". At their best, they can convert dusty, ageing dwelling places into sites of relevance and meaning for a diverse range of people and interests. For the social history of a historic house, with its furnishings and surrounding grounds, can often lead to wider stories of gender, class and race. In particular, such houses can become windows of opportunity for scholarly research and community outreach.

Clearly, after 200 years, historic houses in Australia have the briefest of architectural traditions when compared with heritage buildings in Britain, Europe and North America. The spread of white settlement across this continent was constrained by geographic isolation, economic opportunism, regional rivalries and climatic extremes - and the surviving heritage buildings tend to commemorate the activities of colonial governments rather than those of private individuals. By contrast, indigenous Australians have lived on this island for at least 40,000 years, but have not left any durable erected monuments. Their legacy and culture is encoded and preserved in their remarkable rock art, creation myths and oral traditions.

Consequently, The Lachlan Macquarie Room at Macquarie University is a strange amalgam of displaced architectural traditions and historical interpretations. From the outset it has been an "inner space" seeking a wider heritage context.

Yet despite the fact that public access is limited by location and staffing restrictions, the Room is rich in a sense of personal connection. One of the historical ironies of this Room is the fact that its shape and appearance commemorate the achievements of Macquarie's wife, Elizabeth, not the man himself. She refurbished the room in the months of May/June 1824 as a "homecoming surprise" for her husband who was absent in London. However, Macquarie died there without ever seeing her efforts or the extra rooms that she had added to the house. She brought his coffin back to the Isle of Mull, held his wake in one of the new groundfloor rooms and buried his remains 300 yards from the house. Eleven (11) years later she would join her husband.

Not only does the Lachlan Macquarie Room recreate the original dimensions and ambience of the parlour room, it also contains several unique objects belonging to the Macquaries: dining chair, dinner platter, book of poems; or items linked to their lives: C17th map of Mull, regimental colours [replica] of the 73rd Regiment of Foot, C19th engraving of the Macquarie lighthouse at South Head, Sydney. All these items form part of a permanent public display inside the Library building.
As early as 1995 Macquarie University Library was embracing the use of the World Wide Web as a means of promoting the existence at the University of Lachlan Macquarie's original parlour room inside the library building. Remote access via the Internet to heritage spaces and unique museum objects was seen as an ideal way of describing the history of the space and in establishing broader links with the community.

**The Lachlan Macquarie Room**


The success and popularity of the Lachlan Macquarie Room website led in 1997 to the establishment of a joint initiative with the State Library of NSW to prepare a collection of full text transcripts of the original journal entries of the Macquaries in Australia in the period 1809-1822 (with associated historical notes/links).

**Journeys in Time 1809-1822**

This public website provided the first electronic access to the writings of the Macquaries as well as providing a mechanism for discussion and critical comment:

http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/all/journeys/menu.html

The value of cyberspace and the recognition of its ability to facilitate the publication and distribution of scholarly findings has led to the creation of two additional websites at Macquarie University Library documenting other aspects of Macquarie's life in India and Sri Lanka.

**Seringapatam 1799**

Originally launched in 1999 Seringapatam 1799 provides full-text transcripts of Macquarie's account of the British military campaign in southern India in 1799 against Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore; and, in particular, the assault upon Tipu's fortress and capital at Seringapatam (Srirangapatna or Srirangapattana):


**Under A Tropical Sun**

This was followed in 2003 with the website entitled Under A Tropical Sun which transcribes Macquarie's letters and journals describing his experiences in Ceylon in the year 1796 and his dealings with the Dutch East India Company:

www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/under

These electronic initiatives have not happened in a vacuum. They run parallel to numerous outstanding examples around the world of researchers and curators who
have recognised the opportunities offered by electronic publishing and sought to expand the field of scholarly endeavour. Noteworthy examples include:

Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War
http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/

The William Blake Archive
http://www.blakearchive.org/

American Memory
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amhome.html

TANAP: Towards A New Age of Partnership
A Dutch - Asian - South African Heritage Programme
http://www.tanap.net/

Electronic Beowulf
www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/English/Beowulf/eBeowulf/guide.htm

The Papers of Sir Joseph Banks

Picture Australia
http://www.pictureaustralia.org/

The Tiger and the Thistle: Tipu Sultan and the Scots in India
http://www.nationalgalleries.org/tipu/index.html

**Scholarly Context**

Biographical research and textual analysis of personal diaries and correspondence is a complex and demanding area of scholarly activity.

The National Library of Australia has enunciated (July 2001) a broad statement of intent in relation to the preservation of the cultural and historical materials recording the history of the nation. Similarly, the State Library of NSW has initiated a broad program of cultural and scholarly activities in the decade leading up to 2009 and the celebrations commemorating the establishment of the Mitchell Library.

Macquarie University Library has been systematically developing its collection to enhance scholarly access to research materials that describe, analyse and illuminate the period of the late C18th and early C19th. In particular, the clash of empires and polities in Europe, North America and Asia that form the backdrop to Lachlan Macquarie's life. Library funding has been committed to the purchase of manuscript and newspaper sources on microfilm, as well as a wide cross-section of print and out of print materials.
How could such a scholarly framework become important for international research?

Today, I would like to share with you two small examples that relate to the United States. Amongst the family bibles and prayer books now held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney is an important Macquarie family keepsake and heirloom. It belonged to Lachlan Macquarie's elder brother, Hector, who died of "pleuratic fever" as prisoner of war of the American revolutionaries in 1778. Amongst the inscriptions found in the two volumes of The Holy Bible is the following inscription in Macquarie's handwriting [see Volume I] that reads:

"This Bible Belonged to Hector McQuarie Lt. in the N. York Volunteer Regt. of Foot; - who died a Prisoner with the Rebels in America 7th. Jany. 1778. This Bible was then in his possession -- and was carefully kept by a faithful Friend of his Lt. John Stewart, till delivered to his Brother the present Owner [from?] Charlestown S. Carolina." 8.

Also held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney is a copy of a Statutory Declaration sworn by Agnes Flockhart in New York on 18 June 1914 before her attorney, Thomas Mills Day, attesting to her ownership of eight (8) items that she had inherited from her father. She claimed that they had originally belonged to General Macquarie and that her father, Robert Porter, had been employed as a manager on the Macquarie's "Jarvisfield" estate on the Isle of Mull for twenty years. It is unknown what happened to these items - but they do not appear to have reached Australia. This is a major disappointment, for the items included a mysterious portrait described as:

"the only Painting in existence of the General's Maorian Body Servant who is buried at his master's feet" 9.

This "Maorian body servant" was in actual fact Macquarie's Indian-born manservant "George" whom he had purchased in the slave-market at Cochin, South India for 85 rupees in 1795 [aged 6 years]. "George" travelled and lived with Macquarie for the next thirty years, sharing the hardships, privations, and later, the benefits of life in vice-regal quarters. For me, there could perhaps be no greater outcome of international scholarly co-operation than if this portrait was located - in the US, or elsewhere - and returned to public view and its association with other Macquarie primary source materials.

**Collaboration**

The bulk of Macquarie's personal archive of writings is held by the Mitchell Library (State Library of NSW, Sydney) and State Records (NSW). For this reason, in 2003, a joint partnership has been established between Macquarie University and these two institutions to create The Lachlan & Elizabeth Macquarie Archive (LEMA). Its aim is to provide substantive scholarly access to relevant transcripts, digital reproductions, indexes and historical notes. 10.

The year 2009 will provide the opportunity for commemorating a unique series of bicentennial celebrations relating to Lachlan Macquarie's governorship of the
penal settlements of New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land and Norfolk Island. In particular, it will provide a window of opportunity for Macquarie University to become a major initiator in the preparation and provision of electronic text transcriptions of original Macquarie source materials held in Australia and the UK and become a host institution for maintaining digital access to these extensive collections.

**Future Directions?**

Technological innovation continues to provide new directions for museum curators and custodians of cultural heritage objects. The Turning the Pages Project at the British Library is an award-winning interactive display system developed to increase public access to rare and valuable materials, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels, Leonardo da Vinci's Notebook, or Sultan Baybars' Qur'an. Using highly realistic touch-screen technology and animation, remote visitors can virtually "turn" the pages of these items, magnify the resolution of images and read or listen to notes explaining the significance of each page.

Turning the Pages

There are other features specific to the individual books. For example, in the case of Leonardo's Notebook, his famous mirror handwriting, can be reversed using a mirror button so that the text becomes legible. Turning the Pages allows more pages to be viewed and examined than is possible in a glass display case. Most importantly, neither the original nor any facsimile is damaged during the process.

This technology may become a suitable template for the digitisation of Macquarie manuscripts and the reproduction of portraits and historical photographs for the Macquarie Archive.

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**References**

1. Construction of the Macquarie lighthouse at South Head commenced in 1816 based upon the design prepared by noted convict architect, Francis Greenway. The lantern became operational in 1818. For a detailed history see: P. Bridges, *Foundations of Identity: building early Sydney, 1788-1822*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995; for the social significance of the lighthouse see C. Faro, "To the Lighthouse! The South Head Road and Place-making in early New South Wales."


6. The Macquarie Mausoleum on the Isle of Mull was gifted to the people of New South Wales on 6 October 1948 by Mrs Pamela Pelham (6th Countess of Yarborough), the owner of the 'Jarvisfield' estate (1948-49) through an Australian Trust consisting of the Union Trustee Co. of Australia and the Royal Australian Historical Society (and later transferred to the National Trust of Australia (NSW). The mausoleum is currently maintained on its behalf by the National Trust for Scotland.


9. Original held in Mitchell Library, Sydney. [Ref: ML Am 17/30, CY Reel 3768]. The items listed included: "Water Color Painting — Sydney Harbor. 1793; Book. Steel Engravings – Scotch Castles etc.; Skean Dhu – or black Sword –
worn by the General when in full 'Highland Dress'; The General's Library Candle Sticks and snuffer tray; Sheffield Plate (four); Four Pictures by the General's wife, who was Miss Campbell of Jura; 2 Beautiful old Maorian Chiefs Clubs, one finely carved; One very old Library pen Tray (Sheffield Plate); and the only Painting in existence of the General's Maorian Body Servant who is buried at his master's feet."

10. There are additional, and important, holdings to be found within Australia at the National Library of Australia, and the Tasmanian Art Gallery & Museum. Overseas there are documents held in the National Library of Scotland, the Scottish National Archives, and the National War Museum of Scotland (Edinburgh Castle), and the India Office Library, and the Public Record Office (in London), as well as related holdings in India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, as well as possibly in Canada and the United States.