



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### **BRO. SIR JOHN JAMISON (1766-1844)**

In the N.S.W. Freemason of May 1st 1954, Chester Smith, Editor at the time, published a paper on Sir John Jamison and links between The Royal Agricultural Society and Freemasonry. This year 1998 the Royal Agricultural Society moved from the Showground at Moore Park to new premises at Homebush Bay, the site chosen for the Olympic Games in Sydney in the year 2000. Accordingly now seems an appropriate time to again examine the work and achievements of Sir John Jamison.

Sir John Jamison was born in Carrickfergus, Antrim, Ireland in 1766, the eldest son of Surgeon Thomas Jamison, who was later to arrive in the First Fleet as Surgeon's Mate aboard H.M.S. Sirius.

John Jamison graduated in medicine at Edinburgh and Dublin before joining the Royal Navy, serving in many parts of the world including the battles of Aboukir Bay and Trafalgar under Lord Nelson. In 1809 whilst serving aboard the hospital ship Gorgon with the Baltic Fleet he performed a delicate and successful operation on the Queen of Sweden for which the King of that country awarded him the Order Gustavus Vasa. The King of Sweden also presented Jamison with a very handsome diamond ring. Jamison assisted in preventing an outbreak of Scurvy in the Swedish Navy and for his work in the British Navy the Prince Regent of the time awarded him with a Knighthood.

John Jamison's father, Surgeon Thomas Jamison, returned to England to give evidence at the court-martial of Colonel Johnston over his part in the Bligh rebellion of 1808 and he died there in 1811.

Upon the death of his father, Surgeon Thomas Jamison, in 1811 Sir John Jamison inherited 1,000 acres of land in New South Wales with frontage to the Nepean River together with some other property. He then sailed for Australia on board the "Broxenbornebury", arriving in New South Wales on 28th July, to inspect his inheritance. Following the death of his father and before his arrival in New South Wales his pastoral and other interests inherited from his father were being managed by Doctor Throsby, D'arcy Wentworth and Samuel Marsden.

Sir John Jamison was impressed with conditions in New South Wales at the time and decided to settle here and pursue his inherited pastoral interests. Feeling that he needed more land to expand his interests, Jamison requested Governor Macquarie to grant him land at Emu Island, the early name of Emu Plains. This however had been reserved for Crown use and consequently was unavailable.

In 1813, as we all know, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson crossed the Nepean River at Emu Ford, continuing on to cross the Blue Mountains thus opening up more land for settlers. In 1814 Governor Macquarie sent Surveyor Evans to mark out a road across the Blue Mountains and this road was then constructed in some six months by William Cox.

In 1815 Governor Macquarie with a party of 37 set out to cross the Blue Mountains on the new road to select a spot for the first inland town which was to be called Bathurst. The party breakfasted at Sir John Jamison's farm, the first Regentville. This first Regentville was built on the banks of the Nepean River, later being destroyed by fire. The second and famous Regentville will be mentioned later. Governor Macquarie records in his diary as follows, "On arrival at Regentville we found Secretary Campbell and Mr. Oxley waiting for us. Sir John gave us a very hearty good breakfast, and resting ourselves at Regentville for a couple of hours, we crossed the river; from thence to Emu Plains in the Government Boat "Pheasant" and continued on to Emu Plains. Sir John accompanied us becoming one of the party." Governor Macquarie goes on to report his trip across the Blue Mountains.

Sir John, by now, had become interested in public and official affairs of the Colony and, as well as the above journey, he explored the Warragamba River in 1818.

The Regentville mentioned above was built on a site which formed part of the original 1,000 acres granted to his father, Surgeon Thomas Jamison. Later Sir John Jamison obtained another 600 acres of land which had previously been granted to Reverend Robert Cartwright on the south side of the original grant of 1,000 acres and also having frontage to the Nepean River. It was on this piece of land that, in 1824, Jamison built the second Regentville, which was to become well known for its hospitality. This was named in honour of George the Fourth, the former Prince Regent.

By the 1830s Jamison owned grazing runs on the Namoi and Richmond Rivers, some 11,000 acres at Bathurst and over 18,000 acres at Capertee. During 1825-27 he was a founder and president of both the old Sydney Turf Club and the Australian Racing and Jockey Club. Sir John Jamison was a founder in 1822 of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of New South Wales. He was President of this Society for many years.

At Regentville Sir John Jamison and Lady Jamison held many splendid balls and glittering functions at which as many as 500 guests would attend. The most notable was probably held in 1835 at which 300 guests attended and this was known as the greatest "Fancy Dress Ball of the Era". This cost 800 pounds at the time to produce. Sir John and Lady Jamison also owned a home on the corner of George and Grosvenor Streets in Sydney. He was known as the "Hospitable Knight of Regentville" and Lady Jamison as the "Hospitable Lady".

Regentville was a large two-storeyed building built of dressed stone surrounded by an iron supported balcony. It had a large circular stone staircase, there were large cellars, a coach house, billiard room and various offices in the building.

The Jamisons entertained lavishly and there were frequent visits from members of the regiments stationed in Sydney and crews from visiting English warships. A very popular attraction was horse racing which took place on a full racecourse. Convict labour was used at first on the estate but later free settlers were employed. Among these were Sir Henry Parkes, a farm labourer in the period 1839-1840 and Sir Thomas Dent, later to become Premier of Victoria.

Jamison also erected on the estate a woollen mill and imported spinners and weavers from Scotland and commenced manufacturing tweed. Very little now remains of Regentville as the interior was destroyed by fire in 1869, the stones later being removed and used to erect a large house in the main street of Penrith.

The Jamison home in Sydney also has an interesting history, beginning with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. Lieutenant Governor Major Ross, Commandant of Governor Phillip's Marine Corps selected the spot as the site for his house with the thought that this street would be the main thoroughfare of Sydney. This did not happen as after Governor Phillip's departure Sydney did not grow as was then planned. The house was then successively occupied by Major Grose, Captain Paterson, Garnham Blaxcell, a some time partner of John Macarthur and finally by the Jamisons. In 1820 the house became the Sydney Hotel and Coffee Palace. In 1831 Sir John Jamison sold the property and a new street was cut through from George Street to York Street and this was called Jamison Street. Governor Macquarie also named the beautiful Jamison Valley in the Blue Mountains after him on 16th May 1815.

Jamison was very prominent in civic affairs and at first was very friendly with Governor Macquarie but the relationship soured later. In 1817 he was one of the founders of the Bank of New South Wales and at this time requested the British Government to appoint him to any proposed Colonial Council. However he fell out with Macquarie in 1817 when he objected to the Governor's emancipist policies. Macquarie named him one of twelve intriguing and discontented persons. In 1819, however, Macquarie appointed him as a Justice of the Peace and Governor Brisbane continued this in 1821. Jamison was in trouble in 1822 when he made allegations of immorality against convicts at Emu Plains which were not able to be proved and he remained *persona ingrata* with the Colonial Office for a period. Governor Darling in 1826 gave orders that Jamison was on no account to be employed in Civil Office under the Crown. Jamison appealed against this ruling but it was not until 1831 that that he was restored to the Magistracy and in 1832 Governor Bourke recommended Jamison for a place in the Legislative Council in place of John Macarthur but it was to be 1837 before he took his place in that Council. He remained a member until 1843 when he and Robert Campbell were not nominated by Governor Gipps because they were both "by years and infirmities unable to continue their services to the Public."

Jamison always exhibited great public spirit and was involved in movements aimed at improving conditions. During the 1830s he was involved in many meetings to push for representative Government and trial by jury. He was also the first President of the Australian Patriotic Association. Among his other public activities he was President of the Sydney College, later Sydney Grammar School, in 1830, a life member of the Benevolent Society and a Member of the Australian Museum and Botanical Gardens Committee.

In February 1844 Jamison married his housekeeper, Mary Griffiths, by whom he already had two sons and five daughters. Their eldest son, Robert Thomas (1829-1878) was a Member of the first three Parliaments under responsible Government.

The Bank of Australia, of which Jamison was the second largest shareholder, collapsed in 1843 and Jamison died on 29th June 1844 a comparatively poor man. His wife died at Hunters Hill in 1874 at the age of 74. Sir John Jamison was buried at St. Stephen's, Penrith and his wife at St. Stephen's, Newtown. Their daughter, Jane in 1836, laid the foundation stone of St. Thomas' Mulgoa.

In 1972 John Jamison, a grandson of Sir John, opened a historical exhibition of the Royal Agricultural Society at the Sydney Showground at Moore Park.

Chester Smith states that Sir John Jamison was made a Mason in England. Further evidence now available shows that he was registered with the Grand Lodge of Ireland on 6th April 1818 as a member of the Lodge of Social and Military Virtues, No. 227, Irish Constitution held within the 46th Regiment, at that time serving in New South Wales. This indicates that he probably became a Mason in New South Wales. He became the Worshipful Master of The Lodge of Australia, No. 820, English Constitution for 1834 and 1835. Because of his many commitments he was not a regular attender and it is believed that he attended only two meetings during those two years. This Lodge in 1888 became No. 3 on the Register of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales. In 1817 Jamison was admitted to the Royal Arch Chapter, Mount Olive, No. 227 under the Register of Ireland. Whilst this is an earlier date than his Craft Registration the difference would be due to the fact that it would have taken up to 18 months after his initiation for Registration to be recorded in Ireland.

The early connection between Freemasonry and the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales continued in later years when V. Wor. Bro. John Dugald Robertson of The Scots Lodge, No. 822 and Lodge Kiama, No. 35 was for many years financial controller of that Society. John Robertson is also a member of Minnamurra Chapter, No. 216 A. & A. R.

V. Wor. Bro. John was also a Member of the Order of the Secret Monitor for some time. He is now living in retirement in Gerroa..

Ref:

The New South Wales Freemason, May 1, 1954 and June 1, 1954.

The Australian Dictionary of Biography

Historic Camperdown, History of St. Stephen's Church, Newtown