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THE FIRST FREEMASONS OF PORT MACQUARIE.

Port Macquarie is a thriving seaside town on the mid-north coast of New South Wales some 320 km north of Sydney.

Known to the local population of about 25,000 simply as 'Port', it is situated mainly on the southern shore of the Hastings River estuary.

The local economy is based on tourism and fishing and timber industries.

Soon after the crossing of the Blue Mountains west of Sydney by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth in May 1813, the governor, Bro. His Excellency Major General Lachlan Macquarie directed the Deputy Surveyor-General, George W. Evans to proceed beyond the furthest point reached at Mount Blaxland which Evans then named. In November 1813 he journeyed west to discover and name the Fish and Macquarie Rivers. On 9 December 1813, he camped at the site of the future settlement of Bathurst.

Evans re-visited the area in 1815 and discovered and named the Lachlan River.

To learn what was beyond these newly discovered areas, Macquarie in 1817 instructed the Surveyor-General, Lieutenant John Joseph William Molesworth Oxley, R.N. to proceed down the Lachlan River. He was forced to turn back by impassable marshes at a point where there is a small township named Oxley. Oxley, accompanied by Evans and Surgeon John Harris of the New South Wales Corps set out again on 28 May 1818, with boats and horses, for the Wellington Valley depot with the intention of following the course of the Macquarie River.

They left the depot on 5 June 1818 but rain had flooded the country and the party was forced to turn east for the coast at a point named Mount Harris. They were about 90 km from the then undiscovered Darling River.

Evans, meanwhile, had made an excursion to the east and had discovered the Castlereagh River, then in flood. Oxley reached the Castlereagh on 27 July 1818 and, after crossing the Warrumbungle Mountains, they discovered the Liverpool Plains, the largest tract of pastoral country so far found in the colony.

The Peel River was crossed on 2 September 1818 and, shortly afterwards, the party crossed the main dividing range where, from a vantage point near the future town of Walcha, they had a wonderful view of the fertile valley with the Pacific Ocean in the distance.

Following the river which Oxley named the Hastings, the party descended into the valley and to the mouth of the river which on 8 October 1818 he named Port Macquarie in honour of the Governor.

They had covered over 600 km from the Macquarie River marshes.

They returned along the coast to Newcastle and thence by boat to Sydney where they arrived in November 1818 having completed the longest journey of exploration undertaken to that time.

Whilst the party was camped at Port Macquarie there was some trouble with the Bipai Aboriginal people who clearly resented their intrusion on their land.

Oxley recorded in his journal:

October 31 (1818). The rain of the night still continuing in the morning, and the tide not being sufficiently low to let us pass round the head, we did not set off so early as usual. Dr. Harris and Mr. Evans had gone to bathe near the point, and within one hundred and fifty yards of the tent. Mr. Evans had already bathed and had begun to dress himself, when four natives, whom we recognized as being among those whom we had treated so kindly yesterday, made their appearance with their spears in their hands, in the attitude of throwing them from the cliffs above. There was scarcely time to parley with them, when a spear was thrown at Mr. Evans, Dr. Harris having leaped down the rock into the sea, and escaped to the tent under its shelter. The spear fortunately missed Mr. Evans, and he likewise escaped with the loss of his clothes, by following the doctor's example.

Lieut. John Oxley (c 1785 – 1828) surgeon John Harris (1754 – 1838) were Port Macquarie's first Freemasons. They were members of the Lodge of Social and Military Virtues No. 227 Irish Constitution held within the 46th Regiment on garrison duty in New South Wales from 1814 to 1818.

They had been local residents initiated in the lodge. George W. Evans (1780 – 1852) although not a mason at the time, later joined The Australian Social Lodge No. 260 Irish Constitution in Sydney.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie (1762 – 1824) had been made a mason 16 January 1793 at Bombay (Mumbai), India in Lodge No. 1, a local number believed to be the Lodge of St. John No. 139 English Constitution.

Oxley named the Hastings River after the Marquess of Hastings, (1754 – 1826) the Governor-General of Bengal and Commander–in–Chief. As the 2nd Earl of Moira, he was Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns) from 1790 to 1812, Grand Master Mason of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1806 and Acting Grand Master of India.
He never visited Australia.

Meanwhile, the 46th Regiment had left New South Wales for duty in India and were replaced by the 48th Regiment with Lodge No. 218, Irish Constitution held within the Regiment.

When Surveyor–General John Oxley had returned to Sydney in 1818 he reported favourably to the Governor on the potential of the inlet he had named Port Macquarie for development as a settlement. The possibility of establishing a penal settlement there caught Macquarie's interest. It was remote from the other settled localities, 320 km north of Sydney, and was accessible only by sea. He ordered Oxley to return to Port Macquarie in 1819 with the navigator, Lieutenant Phillip Parker King R.N. and botanist Allan Cunningham, to survey the inlet and its approaches and to make further assessment of its suitability for settlement.

Both Oxley and King reported on the difficulty of passing the bar at the entrance to the inlet but both believed the difficulty not surmountable. Cunningham found the surrounding country to offer great promise for agriculture.

Governor Macquarie was still undecided whether to open up Port Macquarie as' ... New Settlement as a secondary place for punishment ... 'or to settle for Jervis Bay, 120 km south of Sydney. Unfavourable reports on Jervis Bay and the receipt of a dispatch from Earl Bathurst which authorized the settlement at Port Macquarie, brought Macquarie closer to a final decision. He sent Oxley to make yet another examination of the inlet in December 1820. This time the Surveyor-General was accompanied by Captain Francis Allman, of the 48th Regiment, the officer selected to command the establishment. Another favourable report was submitted by Oxley so, with the concurrence of Commissioner John Thomas Bigge, Governor Macquarie resolved to set up a settlement at Port Macquarie 'without further delay.'

The main activity of the 48th Regiment during the early months of 1821 was the planning and preparation for the new settlement.

The Port Macquarie expedition embarked at Sydney on 17 March 1821 on the colonial vessels *Lady Nelson, Prince Regent* and *Mermaid* but contrary winds delayed their departure from Port Jackson. Allman carried with him the governor's instructions. As well as six months' provisions of salt meat, one bull, two cows, stores and tools, the new commandant was provided with a copy of Oxley's latest report and his chart of Port Macquarie. Although the aim in establishing the settlement was to open up a place of secondary punishment, the governor reminded Allman that the convicts initially accompanying him were selected, generally as volunteers, with a promise of tickets of leave or conditional pardons after eighteen months' satisfactory service. The instructions included directions for the siting and construction of temporary and permanent accommodation, agriculture, the employment and control of convicts and the control of entry of vessels to the settlement.

Allman was reminded of his duties as magistrate and forbidden to inflict more than fifty lashes as punishment. For minor offences he was to make solitary confinement on bread and water or extra hard labour the punishments. An imposing list of registers was to be kept and returns submitted quarterly. Captain Allman was to administer 'Justice with Clemency' and, as at Newcastle, Macquarie was anxious that soldiers and convicts alike should bathe frequently in the sea as this practice was ' ... so very conducive to cleanliness and good health ...' .

Having cleared the Heads, it was almost one month before Allman and his command were able to enter the inlet at Port Macquarie, again due to adverse winds. When conditions did allow the expedition to cross the tricky bar the *Prince Regent* ran aground and the *Mermaid*, on which Allman and his family were passengers, struck a rock, unshipping its rudder. The Allmans lost all their household linen and the childrens' clothing, their baggage swept from the deck when the *Mermaid* struck. The *Lady Nelson* successfully negotiated the bar but its turn around to Sydney was delayed also because of adverse winds and when it did sail on 2 May the *Lady Nelson* ran onto rocks on the south side of the inlet and was virtually wrecked. By cannibalizing the *Lady Nelson* the *Prince Regent* was repaired but it, to, was unable to weather the channel to the open sea. With food beginning to run short, bread was already restricted to a half ration, on 16 May Captain Allman agreed that the Master of the *Mermaid*, Richard Neave, with a volunteer crew, should try to reach Sydney in the largest boat available, carrying despatches advising of the shortage of rations.

In spite of the anxiety created in Sydney by the lack of news from the new settlement, on 4 April Governor Macquarie sailed for Van Diemens Land on his final tour of inspection. He knew that he was shortly to be replaced. So it fell to Colonel Erskine, fulfilling, at last, the role of Lieutenant-Governor, to despatch the sloop *Betsey* to Port Macquarie to ascertain whether or not the new settlement was surviving. The *Betsey* intercepted Neave at Port Stevens and shortly returned from Port Macquarie with Allman's reports.

Eventually the *Prince Regent* reached Sydney and on the return trip carried the Surveyor General, John Oxley, who buoyed the entrance channel and erected navigation signals on the shore to make access to the port' … easy and secure for Vessels drawing not more that nine feet of water … ' Allman reported that work was going on slowly at the settlement because the workers had been on short rations.

Allman had under his command 40 soldiers and 60 convict artificers and labourers. The Muster Books and Pay Lists of the 48th Regiment for 25 March to 24 June 1821, show the names of two sergeants, two Corporals, one drummer and 32 privates in the Port Macquarie detachment.

Three of these were Freemasons. They were members of the Regimental Lodge No. 218 Irish Constitution. They were the first Freemasons resident in Port Macquarie.
They were Sergeant William Clayton, Corporal John Kelly and Private Richard Evans.
Sergeant William Clayton had enlisted, aged 20 on 25 June 1803 at Preston, Lancashire. His occupation was weaver. He was discharged in India on 22 August 1828 due to partial loss of sight. He was awarded the Military General Service Medal 1793-1814 in 1848.

John Kelly and Richard Evans both sailed with their Regiment to India following their service in New South Wales and, in John Kelly's case, Van Diemens Land as well. The Settlement, after an inauspicious start, eventually found its feet, land was cleared, accommodation erected and the convicts set to work.

There was some trouble with the aborigines. On 25 October 1821, a cedar-cutting party working 40 km up-river from the settlement was attacked. Two convicts were speared, one of whom died.
A boat party sent to the site next day was also attacked. Later, in July 1822, an Aborigine was shot and killed.

There were also convict escapes, but, with nowhere to go, they were unsuccessful.

On 5 November 1821, Governor Macquarie arrived at the settlement in the *Elizabeth Henrietta* for a tour of inspection. The Governor was well satisfied and planned to leave for Newcastle and Sydney on 8 November but wind, and the notorious bar caused a three day delay. It was Macquarie's final tour before his departure from New South Wales.

More convicts arrived and the settlement began to expand.

The foundation stone for St. Thomas' convict-built Anglican Church was set in 1824. The Church was designed by Lieutenant Owen, acting engineer but with a marked influence of convict architect Francis Greenway. The first Service was held in 1828.
At the time Australia was part of the Anglican diocese of Calcutta.

The building was commissioned by the Governor Bro. Sir Thomas Brisbane a member of St. John Kilwinning Lodge No. 173 at Largs, Scotland.

The Church was built during the reign of King George IV, a Past Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Bro. Francis Greenway was made a mason on 3 June 1822 in the Australian Social Lodge No. 260, Irish Constitution in Sydney. There is no evidence that he ever visited Port Macquarie.

In 1830, the settlement became a hospital for convicts and it was closed as a penal establishment in 1847.

Timber-getting had become the main activity and a road to the New England region opened the port despite the hazardous entrance.

The town which had developed became a municipality in 1887 and, in 1981, amalgamated with the Shire of Hastings.

On 18 September, 1878, a meeting of masons resident in Port Macquarie decided to start a Masonic Lodge in the town. As a result, Lodge Macquarie No. 630 Scottish Constitution was begun on 15 November 1878. There were 14 foundation members with Wor. Bro. Albert Crossman the foundation Right Worshipful Master.
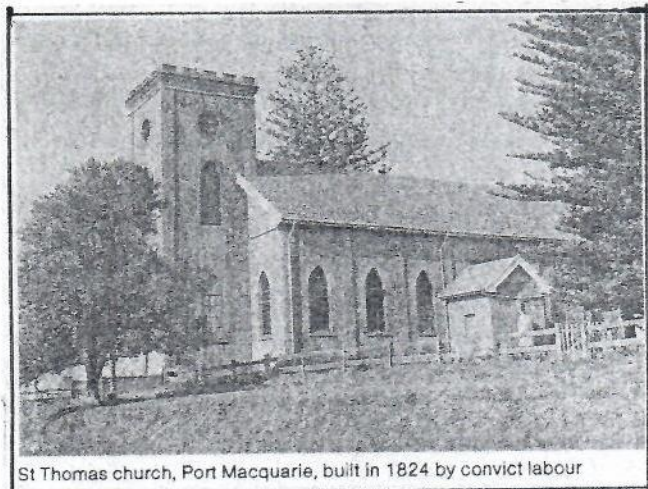
In August 1888 with a change of name, Lodge Hastings No. 69, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales came into being.

In a history of Lodge Hastings No. 69 by Wor. Bro. Dr. N. E. McLaren published in 1938, he wrote:

> Although it is probable that many members of the Masonic Craft resided in Port Macquarie from its inception or soon afterwards, the first authentic record of organized Freemasonry in this town of Port Macquarie is that of a meeting held on Wednesday, September 18th, 1878, at Williams' Royal Hotel with John Ducat (of Lodge Star of Macleay No. 600 S.C.) in the chair, and it was decided to found a lodge under the name of Lodge Macquarie.

Now they know -

G.H. Cumming.

St Thomas church, Port Macquarie, built in 1824 by convict labour

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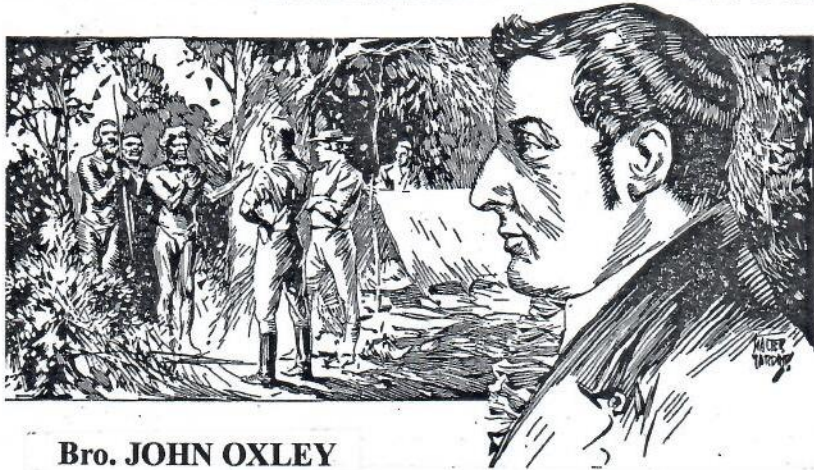Privately published, Sydney, 1992.

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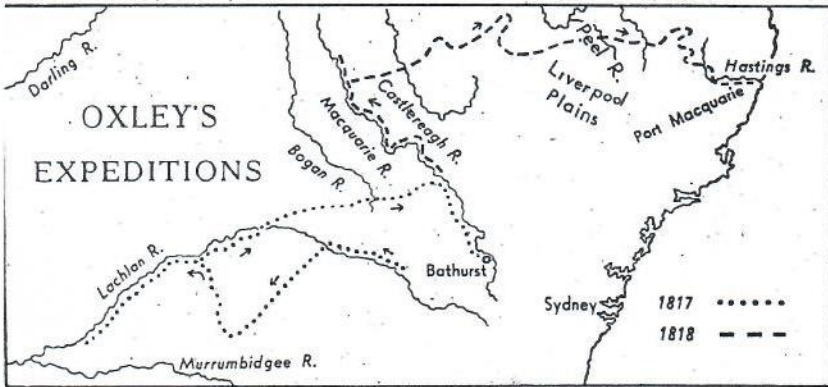Bay Books Pty. Ltd., Sydney,1977.

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PICTURES OF PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PAPER

Bro. JOHN OXLEY

OXLEY'S EXPEDITIONS

Darling R. — Macquarie R. — Castlereagh R. — Bogan R. — Lachlan R. — Murrumbidgee R. — Bathurst — Sydney — Liverpool Plains — Peel R. — Hastings R. — Port Macquarie

1817 ......
1818 - - -

FRANCIS, EARL OF MOIRA, LATER 1ST MARQUESS OF HASTINGS
Acting Grand Master, 1790–1813

Bro. JOHN HARRIS

Bro. FRANCIS GREENWAY

Bro. GOVERNOR LACHLAN MACQUARIE