

# Woollahra Library Local History Centre



## Macquarie Lighthouse



### **Governor Philip**

The Macquarie lighthouse designed by Francis Greenway, architect, in 1818 was the first lighthouse built in Australia. Many convict and supply ships needed to access Sydney Cove, so Governor Philip recognised a need for some sort of signal to direct ships through to Sydney Cove.

### **Lighted Beacon used before lighthouse built**

Before the lighthouse was built, a lighted beacon established at South Head in 1793 was the only light to guide ships to the entrance to the harbour. The increasing number of ships using Port Jackson led to the realisation that a lighthouse was needed.

### **Governor Macquarie**

Governor Lachlan Macquarie, initiated the building of a Light tower and commissioned Francis Greenway as the architect of the Macquarie lighthouse.

### **Francis Greenway**

Greenway arrived in Sydney on General Hewitt, a convict ship in 1814. He was later granted a conditional pardon from Governor Macquarie. Greenway was responsible for many of our early buildings in Sydney including Government House stables and Hyde Park Barracks.

### **Completion in 1818**

On July 11, 1816 Governor Macquarie laid the foundation stone for the lighthouse. Constructed in sandstone quarried at the site, the lighthouse was completed in 1818. The light used was powered by oil burning lamps on a falling weight device, the light flashed once a minute and was noticeable for 35 kilometres.

### **Robert Watson – Macquarie Lighthouse Keeper**

The first lighthouse superintendent at the site was Robert Watson, formerly a harbourmaster – which was how Watson's Bay got its name. He died one year after being given the job. He was replaced by Harry Cole.

### **Lighthouse Deteriorates**

Over time the condition of the lighthouse had deteriorated, as the quality of the sandstone had been poor. This along with developments in lighting technology eventually prompted the government to approve the construction of a new lighthouse to replace the existing tower.

## **New lighthouse Built – James Barnet**

James Barnet, who was the Colonial Architect, designed the new lighthouse. The new structure was similar to the Greenway design but incorporated larger apparatus. It was sited about 12 feet to the west of the original lighthouse, which was slowly demolished after the new building commenced operation in 1883.

## **Electric Light**

In order to run the light by electricity magneto-electric dynamos were used. Their engines were driven by gas, which was stored in a tank near a corner of the lighthouse. Gas was also used to light the Head Keeper's quarters. Its light could be seen for 72 kilometres.

## **Who runs the lighthouse today**

The lighthouse is run today by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the light has been fully automated since 1976 and a lighthouse keeper no longer maintains the building. Macquarie Lighthouse still lights the entrance to Sydney Harbour.

## **Sources**

- Broadbent, James and Hughes, Joy. *Francis Greenway, Architect*. Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Glebe, 1997.
- Geeves, Philip, *Philip Geeve's Sydney*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981.
- Interim Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, *Reflections on a maritime city: an appreciation of the trust lands on Sydney Harbour*. Mosman, 2000.
- *Macquarie Lighthouse, 1818 – Present*, AMSA – Australian Maritime Safety Authority. Pamphlet
- *Macquarie Lighstation, Vaucluse NSW: Plan of Management*. Australian Government Publishing Service for the Dept. of Administrative Services, Canberra, 1993.
- *Dinkum Aussies, Architecture, Francis Greenway*, 1999. Viewed 28.02.2003.  
<<http://www.dinkumaussies.com/ARCHITECTURE%2FFrancis%20Greenway.htm>>
- *Lighthouses of Australia: The Macquarie Lighthouse, Australia's First Lighthouse Lighthouses of Australia inc.* 1999, viewed 12.2.2003,  
<<http://www.lighthouse.net.au/lights/NSW/Macquarie/Macquarie.htm>>.
- *Sydney Harbour Trust Sites: Macquarie Lightstation* 2001, viewed 12.2.2003,  
<[http://www.harbourtrust.gov.au/topics/sites\\_macquarie.html](http://www.harbourtrust.gov.au/topics/sites_macquarie.html)>
- *Environment Australia: Macquarie Lighthouse Backgrounder – Historic Handover for Sydney Landmark*. 2001, viewed 28.02.2003.  
<http://www.ea.gov.au/minister/env/2000/mr3jun00att.html>  
**\*Photograph by Bruce Crosson, 1992**

Woollahra Local History Centre  
Sherbrooke Hall  
Sherbrooke Avenue  
Double Bay NSW 2028  
☎ 02 9362 0044  
Fax: 02 9362 0111

[Localhistory@woollahra.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Localhistory@woollahra.nsw.gov.au)

April 2003

