

The Governors of New South Wales, 1788–2010

David Clune and Ken Turner (editors) | The Federation Press | 2010

The colony and later the state of New South Wales has had 37 governors. We are well served by the recent issue of *The Governors of New South Wales 1788-2010*, edited by David Clune and Ken Turner. It contains lively and informative accounts by a range of different authors; the work as a whole is a major contribution to the social, political and constitutional history of New South Wales. The fairest way to review 37 lives is via the clerihew, the four line rhyme biography invented by Edmund Clerihew Bentley. Given that the colony was founded during the reign of King George III and developed into a liberal state, I start with two of Bentley's own.

George the Third
Ought never to have occurred.
One can only wonder
At so grotesque a blunder.

John Stuart Mill,
By a mighty effort of will,
Overcame his natural bonhomie
And wrote *Principles of Political Economy*.

Arthur Phillip
Had more than a fillip
Getting a most important appointment
Yet being refused the salve of official ointment.

John Hunter
Crossed Macarthur
So while an able naval officer
Is something of a martyr.

Philip Gidley King
Gave his sons a local ring
One was 'Norfolk', one was 'Sydney'
Charles Darwin thought of him ideally.

William Bligh
Went awry
Mutiny on land, mutiny at sea
Two answers to his tyranny.

Lachlan Macquarie
The first governor from the army
For this his bicentennial year
The Bents and Mr Bigge shed no tear.

Thomas Brisbane (Sir)
Descendant of a Scot Chancellor
The woosack sets the family's tone
The family name means 'to bruise the bone'.

Ralph Darling
Took a mauling
From Whigs at home and interests here
Conservative aloofness cost him dear.



Sir Richard Bourke
Of flexible Irish liberal quirk
His daughter married the scion
Of the only PM to suffer assassination.

Gipps, Sir George
Did fiscal sense forge
Which stood him in good stead at home
Which sunk him in the squatters' loam.

Sir Charles Augustus Fitzroy
A surname suggesting a bastard boy
A colorful career, more leaps than bounds
His estate coming in at just twenty pounds.



Sir William Thomas Denison
Was governor during our self-imposed denization
From its start in '56 till he went in '61
He saw six ministries having fun.

Sir John Young
His reputation rests upon a high rung
Is this because he was a bureaucratic star
Or because he read as a barrister?

Somerset Richard Lowry-Corry, Earl of Belmore
Was not himself an auditor
But he martialled some ministerial tact
To leave as his legacy, the Audit Act.

Sir Hercules George Robert Robinson
The exemplar of colonial administration
He presided over seven governors' tables
Resisting not one of Augeas's stables.

Sir Augustus William Frederick Spencer Loftus
Was tagged by Disraeli 'a mere Polonius'
He supported Dalley's Sudan contingency
And died, aged 86, in bankruptcy.

Charles Robert Carrington, Baron Carrington,
Supported Parkes and federation
His greatnephew was later High Commissioner to Australia
Later still, Foreign Secretary to Margaret Thatcher.

Victor Albert George Child-Villiers, Earl of Jersey,
With his wife was rather choosey,
Like Carrington he befriended the Australian delegation
Who left as colonists, who returned a nation.

Sir Robert William Duff
Part naval part politico stuff.
Kind, honest, able, no sense of malefice
The first governor to die in office.

Henry Robert Brand, Viscount Hampden
Great great grandfather of Sarah Ferguson
His sole premier was Yes-No Reid
Unpreparing for a peaceful cede.

William Lygon, Earl Beauchamp
Was something of a scamp
Later known for manservants with whom he flirted
The model for Marchmain in Brideshead Revisited.

Sir Harry Holdsworth Rawson
Sailed through any imperial maelstrom
He had the running of the Anglo Zanzibar war
At 37 minutes from first shot to last, the shortest by far.

Frederic John Napier Thesiger, Baron Chelmsford
Grandson of a Lord Chancellor
Himself at one stage a barrister
He became Viceroy of India.

Sir Gerald Strickland, Count della Catena
A combative wartime governor
Recalled for ignoring a non-interventionist mantra
He regrouped to be prime minister of Malta.

Sir Walter Edward Davidson
Honest and dignified imperial man
So to some, a couple as square as two cubes,
For the Prince of Wales, 'such hopeless boobs'.

Sir Dudley Rawson Stratford de Chair
The first to taste Mr Lang's constitutional fare
Descended from Huguenots
He coupled dignity with repose.

Sir Philip Woolcott Game
Asked Lang to quitclaim
For some a constitution-wrecker
He became Metropolitan Police Commissioner.

Sir Alexander Gore Arkwright Hore-Ruthven
Took a VC in the Sudan
He would become our longest serving governor general
So five prime ministers found him vice regal.

Sir David Murray Anderson
Along with Duff and Davidson
Sadly died in office
In his case, on just six weeks' notice.

John de Vere Loder, Baron Wakehurst
With his wife proved that last is first
An outstanding vice regal duo
The last appointees from a Whitehall bureau.

Sir John Northcott
Gets the 'first Australian-born' spot
His wife is commemorated by a Manly ferry
He, by his work with disability.



Royal visit to Government House, February 1954. L to R: Miss Elizabeth Northcott, Governor Northcott, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Sir Eric Winslow Woodward
The first with a NSW umbilical cord
He had little taste for high society
Happy to convey a modest propriety.



Sir David Murray Anderson

Sir Arthur Roden Cutler
A veritable viceregal showstopper
A shot off leg, a VC, more than six foot three
He balanced colour and dignity.

Sir James Anthony Rowland
War hero, concerned for the working man
A governor for the bicentenary
The third last military man in our memory.

Sir David Martin
Descended from the Rum Corps administration
Appointed with a smile and a sense of auspice
He died with great dignity after exposure to asbestos.

Peter Ross Sinclair
Led the Nyngan recovery affair
He led not from the person but by the office
But the office, for some, had become surplus.

Gordon Jacob Samuels
Had legal nous in amples
Living in a private house
Did not make him an ex officio mouse.

Marie Roslyn Bashir
Is here
A model governatrice
With not one thing done amiss.

Reviewed (and composed) by David Ash