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Pomp and ceremony colonial style

By Marcia Osterberg-Olsen

Her Excellency the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, AV CVO, meets the 73rd Regiment. With her is Marcia Osterberg-Olsen

A Vice-Regal event in the Hartley Valley, Blue Mountains, on 30 April couldn't compete with the pageantry of THAT wedding in London the day before. There was no abbey, no carriage and white horses, but there was the lone grave of a child, Eliza Rodd, who died in 1831 within a natural amphitheatre of rolling hills, with the escarpments of the plateau-topped Blue Mountains as a background. There were the archaeological remnants of a military station established in 1816 on the order of Governor Lachlan Macquarie – the first such station west of the Blue Mountains – and an obelisk commemorating the first Anglican service held for Governor Macquarie's party, which camped at the site on 30 April 1815.

The considerable historical significance of the event was that it celebrated the State Heritage Register listing of the Macquarie camp site and Anglican service, the station and the lone hillside grave, all in their way landmarks in the opening up of the western plains. The poignancy of it was that it celebrated the tragically short life of a baby girl linked with the early history of the site, brought into focus by the recent restoration of her grave by the Lithgow Branch of the National Trust. The organisers of the celebration, the Lithgow and Regional Branch of the Trust, assisted by Bradley and Rosemary Barber, owners of the Glenroy property where Eliza is buried, were determined to create an historic occasion which duly recognised the significance of it all in true colonial style.

The 'newly discovered country of the west'

Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson made the first crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 reaching a point they named Mt Blaxland in what is now Hartley Valley.

Surveyor Evans, sent by Governor Macquarie to confirm the report, went as far as the plain which is now the site of Bathurst. Following from that, Macquarie entrusted to Lieutenant William Cox the building of a road from the Nepean to the plains.

Cox, with a gang of 30 convicts, built the required road in six months. Granted, it was dirt track, but an amazing feat through hostile country. Governor Macquarie and his courageous wife, Elizabeth, their retinue and convict servants, were the first to use the road. On 29 April 1815 the Governor arrived at the confluence of two rivers in the Valley. One had been named Cox's River for William Cox. The other acquired the name River Lett because Evans, a fine surveyor but poor speller, had referred to it in his diary as a fine riverlett. Hartley Valley settlers affectionately adopted the name River Lett.

On 29 April 1815, having directed his party down Cox's 'horrific' descent of Mt York, Governor Macquarie camped in a meadow where the Cox and Lett rivers meet. On 30 April 1815 (a Sunday), he had his party assemble for divine service. A small obelisk at the property Glenroy commemorates this event. In 1816 Governor Macquarie ordered a military station to be established for the protection of government cattle pastured there and for travellers going to the 'newly discovered country' of the west.

Who was Eliza Rodd?

Eliza Rodd was the daughter of Colour Sergeant James Rodd of the 39th Dorsetshire Regiment who from 1829 to 1832 had served in Macquarie's Cox's River military station. Rodd was a career soldier who had fought against the French in Canada and whose regiment was sent to France in 1815, just before the Battle of Waterloo. They

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were stationed near the tavern of a farmer named Baudelet – and there begins a romantic story.

James Rodd met, fell in love with, and married the tavern-keeper’s daughter, Judith Joseph Baudelet. Their first two children were born in France; a son, Amboise, followed by a daughter, Marie. When the regiment was ordered to Australia Marie was too young for the long sea journey and was left with her grandmother in France. James, Judith and little Marie were never reunited.

A boy, James junior, was born while the regiment was stationed at Sydney. Meanwhile, a detachment of the regiment in charge of Colour Sergeant James Rodd was ordered to the military station at the confluence of the Lett and Cox rivers. There Eliza was born early in 1831 and was baptised by the Anglican rector for Bathurst area. She died in September 1831 at the age of 8 months and 16 days.

The regiment was transferred to Sydney early in 1832, and there Judith died. It was then transferred to India where James Rodd was killed late in 1832 leaving his boys as orphans. They were adopted into the regiment and became career soldiers. Amboise was invalided out years later but James, who became Colour Sergeant like his father, was with the regiment when it fought in the Crimean War. James died of wounds received at the battle of Sebastopol, leaving a young, pregnant wife. She bore a son who was named James. They emigrated to Australia.

A Colonial celebration is born

In 2004 a National Trust Lithgow Branch tour of the historic cemeteries of Hartley Valley included a visit to Eliza Rodd’s grave. It was a sad site with broken portions of the humble monument scattered by cattle. The Branch made the restoration of Eliza’s grave a project. The owners of Glenroy, Bradley and Rosemary Barber, became fully involved, as did the National Trust’s Cemeteries Committee. The restoration was completed in 2010, after which came the State Heritage listing. And it was time to celebrate!

Contact was made with the direct descendants of James Rodd junior, now living in Western Australia. They supplied their research on the Rodd history, including their contact with the descendants of Marie Baudelet Rodd, left in France when the 39th Dorsetshires were ordered to Australia. Four Rodd descendants, Trevor Rodd, Annette Morgan (née Rodd), Pieta McKeon, and Pieta’s granddaughter Alorah McKeon, aged 10, flew from Western Australia for the event.

Annette’s husband, Bob Morgan, (himself a descendant of Trooper Tollis, one of Macquarie’s bodyguards), brought with him copies of his just published novelette *Colour*, the story of the Rodds as Colour Sergeants of their regiment, which highlights the hardships endured by 19th century British regimental wives. Representatives of other direct descendants included Jenny Freeman

of Lachlan Branch, whose husband is a descendant of Samuel Freeman, a carpenter-bridge builder in Cox’s party, and Barbara MacKay, descended from a John Cox (no relation to William) who was a member of 39th Dorsetshires.

Pomp, circumstance and reflection

Red coat soldiers formed an honour guard and fired a musket salute for the Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC CVO, who represented the Governor General (who was in London for That Wedding) as Administrator of the Commonwealth of Australia. The white vice-regal car was ushered onto the property by an 1830s uniformed police trooper – in real life, John Facchina - whose ancestors settled in Little Hartley in the late 1860s. The Lithgow Town Band, led by musical director Judy Kinnear, which had been entertaining the gathering crowd with 19th century country music, struck up the Australian National Anthem as the Governor arrived. The 23rd Psalm was sung for little Eliza who died so quickly 179 years ago, and the service was given by the Reverend John Gaunt of St John’s, Hartley Historic Village. Throughout lunch the band played on, and the ‘73rd Regiment’ (Macquarie’s own regiment) paraded.

As she stood beside the monument to the first divine service Her Excellency, well-known for her admiration of Macquarie, gave an inspiring talk on the enlightened governor who believed in the future of the Colony and the right of those convicts who had served their time to be accepted as citizens. Without Macquarie we would, she said, not have progressed quickly to the democratic nation we are today.

Marcia Osterberg-Olsen is chair of the Lithgow Branch, National Trust



A gathering crowd. (Photo courtesy Lithgow Mercury)