

THE HAWKESBURY RIVER FLOODS OF 1801, 1806 AND 1809

Their Effect on the Economy of the Colony of New South Wales

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Like so many of the topics that present themselves out of the early history of our nation, this particular one has presented considerable difficulties in preparation; not on account of paucity of material, but rather the reverse. The period in question is almost embarrassingly well documented in relation to the preparation of a paper of this size.

In my paper on the "Macquarie Towns" in the Hawkesbury Valley which I delivered four years ago, I covered the desperate need for suitable agricultural land which led to search and discovery by Phillip of the rich upper Hawkesbury Valley on 6 and 7 July 1789. Almost contemporaneously, Captain Tench, setting out from Rose Hill on 26 June 1789, after two days' travel found a river "as broad as the Thames at Putney and apparently of great depth, the current running slowly in a northerly direction." The river was named Nepean by Phillip, after the then Under Secretary of State in the Home Department.

In May 1791 Tench and Lieutenant Dawes found that the Nepean and the Hawkesbury are, in fact, the one river, the former being but the upper course of the latter.

Hunter, who had accompanied Phillip, in July 1789, and Tench, both noted that their respective discoveries were evidently subject to severe flooding. Hunter spoke of debris lodged in trees thirty to forty feet above the common level of the river. Tench saw similar traces of flooding at least forty-five feet above the ordinary level of the Nepean.

Although Phillip regarded the new discovery as being suitable for settlement provided the proper people could be found to conduct it, Tench had reservations.



GOVERNOR PHILLIP

GRANTS OF LAND IN 1794

No settlement in the Hawkesbury Valley seems to have taken place until 1794, when Lieutenant-Governor Grose made grants of land on the banks of the Hawkesbury to twenty-six settlers "who seemed very much pleased with their farms. They described the soil as particularly rich and they informed me whatever they have planted has grown in the greatest luxuriance."

On 31 August 1794, Grose further reported that the number of settlers on the banks of the Hawkesbury had grown to seventy, that they were doing well, and he had caused a good road to be made from Sydney to the Hawkesbury settlement.

However, settlement at the Hawkesbury and elsewhere was largely at the expense of the public farms which Phillip had established. As a result of complete neglect by Grose, the public farms at Toongabbie and elsewhere were allowed to fall into ruin and decay. A system of private farming by officers, soldiers and some ex-convicts was substituted.

PEASANTRY SCHEME DESTROYED

C. Hartley Grattan, citing Brian Fitzpatrick, says the English Government had evolved an economic plan for Australia which was put into operation by Phillip. Briefly, it envisaged the strong establishment of a small-holding peasantry in the country, the bulk of the peasants in any future then visible to be time-expired and emancipated convicts. This scheme, which may or may not have been wise, was destroyed after Phillip's departure from the colony by the military officers. During the years that elapsed between Phillip's sailing for England in December 1792 and Hunter's arrival in September 1795, when the colony was under the full control of the New South Wales Corps, the officers brought their plan into full operation. Briefly, it was a trading monopoly which was combined with land holding on an extensive scale and the ruthless exploitation of convict labour. Rum became the established medium of exchange, and the monopolists made huge profits. Since



GOVERNOR HUNTER

the officers held in their hands the military power, as well as such minimum civil power as had been developed and the Courts, the addition of supreme economic power made them masters of the community. Their programme was retrogressive, not progressive.

Thus, the system of private farming instituted under Grose and continued by Paterson gave extraordinary advantages to the private farmers in general and the officers and soldiers in particular. Each of the officers who had farms, had granted to them the labour of ten (later thirteen) convicts and lesser numbers for soldiers and other settlers. No payment was required for this labour and it continued to be victualled out of the Government Store. The Government then purchased at high prices the crops grown, and then distributed them to the other inhabitants who were victualled from the Government Stores.

RUM TRADE BEGINS

Phillip departed on 11 December 1792. Within a fortnight the rum trade began. Grose, using the specious excuse that the master of the American ship *Hope* would not sell his cargo of provisions unless he could also sell his cargo of spirits, bought the whole cargo. The spirits were then issued to the soldiers and the amount of the purchase stopped out of their pay. The editor of the *Historical Records of New South Wales* comments: "This may be said to be the starting point of the system of liquor traffic which proved so fatal to the morals of the people."

The Rev. Richard Johnson, writing to a friend in 1794 remarked, with some bitterness:

"Many of our officers have turned merchants, shopkeepers and wholesale and retail traders in spirituous liquors. A convict can go and purchase a Bottle, a Pint of Rum from an officer and gentleman. Some, not quite so open, employ their wash women or others in this way — and in this way many are making their fortunes — spirits, or what shall I call it, a mixture of — or adulterated with water, little better than the sailor's grog sold for forty shillings a gallon."

The careful and industrious amongst the small-holder settlers could make a living above a subsistence level, but many had drunk their crops even before they had ripened.

BARE SUBSISTENCE LEVEL

From 1788 on, the colony had lived on the whole at a bare subsistence level. On more than one occasion the

arrival of Government store ships, or even an individual private venture, American or British, had saved the inhabitants from utter starvation. The expense to the Government had been great; from 27 September 1791 to 31 August 1796 provisions for the settlement cost the Government £101,289/5/1 $\frac{3}{4}$.

Money, in the form of specie, was almost non-existent in the colony and had been so from its very commencement. Phillip had sought to have a quantity of coined money sent out to him, but without success. This chronic shortage of coin was progressively aggravated by the visits of trading ships. For domestic convenience, the inhabitants circulated promissory notes amongst themselves as a makeshift form of currency. These notes, which often carried a nominal value in terms of grain, were of no use whatever when negotiating with visiting ships' captains.

PURCHASE OF CARGOES

The worst effects were felt in relation to the purchase of cargoes. On the arrival of a vessel, the civil and military officers would enter into an engagement with each other not to give more than a certain sum for every article. As the officers were paid in negotiable Treasury bills, or could draw on London for credit, they had command of the colony's purchasing power. If the captain of any visiting ship decided to sell in New South Wales, he had no alternative but to accept their offer. The officers alone could issue Treasury bills for any sum from a shilling to £100 and seldom dealt in specie.

With these bills they could purchase a cargo. The captain then would return the bills to the Commissary, who made each issuer pay the nominated amount into his hands and then issued to the ship's captain or trader a bill drawn on the Treasury (at ninety days' sight), which alone was negotiable at all other British settlements. Thus freed of the competition on the supplier, the officers became the retailers of all necessities. During the very early years of the colony's establishment, a steady 500 per cent profit was not unknown.

MONOPOLISTS "BROKE" TWO GOVERNORS

Once established, the monopolists vigorously defended their methods of exploitation. As Grattan says, they "broke" two Governors, Hunter and King, with an entire lack of scruple, and set a pattern for operations against any successor. The successor of King was, of course, William

Bligh. He had his orders to break up the monopoly and return the small-holding peasant farmers to the place in the community originally planned for them. He set about executing his orders and naturally fell foul of the monopolists. In H. V. Evatt's view, the monopolists did not stick at treason to retain their power.

It seems necessary at this stage to refer to the egregious John Macarthur. Grattan says that all critical historians consider that Macarthur was "the brains" of the monopoly system, although he was far from being the sole initiator, beneficiary or protagonist. Unfortunately for the clarity of the story, Macarthur was also the outstanding — though here again not the sole — proponent of a third economic programme, which subsequently achieved success. The reference is, of course, to the establishment of the wool industry and the success of this endeavour has blinded many writers to Macarthur's true position in the affairs and economic state of the colony over the years from 1790 to the culminating point in 1808 when the head-on collision with Bligh occurred.

SELF-ENRICHMENT

Like many of the figures in history who are identified with the beginnings of an industry which has subsequently proved a boon to mankind, Macarthur shows no evidence of having been bent on anything else than self-enrichment and, when necessary, defending property and profits, present and future. He did not scruple to support retrogressive — even sabotaging — policies if they coincided with his fundamental aspiration, which was to become as rich as possible as quickly as possible. However, today we know he was on the side of history, while the policy of the English Government sought to be executed through the early Governors from Phillip to Bligh, i.e., the encouragement of small-holding farmers, was doomed to failure, viewed as a means of developing Australia on an extensive scale. Australian farming was not to get on its feet for many decades to come, pending the entry into its purview of such things as railways, dry farming, plant experiments, refrigeration and fast steamships. Neither the Governors nor Macarthur knew anything of this, and to impute such wisdom to Macarthur because of the sheep business is to miswrite history.

Macarthur was an outstanding villain, but he was no more than a *primus inter pares*. It was a peculiarity of the New South Wales Corps that it was not enlisted as a

fighting unit, and its members were content with mere garrison or police service at a remote corner of the world when the relationship of England to the future map of Europe was being decided elsewhere, and by force of arms.

“LIKE THE WRATH OF ACHILLES . . .”

John Dunmore Lang had some justification for stating that the New South Wales Corps “possessed only in a very limited degree, that honourable high-mindedness which should ever constitute the proud distinction of the British officer,” and for his denunciation of the officers of the Corps for

“sullyng their hands with the slime of colonial pollution, and banded together, on every suitable occasion, to maintain, by violence or injustice, what they obtained by the sacrifice of honour . . . the New South Wales Corps was, both in a moral and political sense, the most ill-advised and unfortunate measure that the British Government could possibly have adopted towards their infant settlement on the coast of New Holland; and . . . like the wrath of Achilles to the Greeks, it entailed ten thousand sorrows on the colony of New South Wales.”

By 15 June 1795, Paterson reported that “the number of settlers on the banks of the Hawkesbury, with their families, amounts to upwards of 400 persons, and their grounds extend nearly thirty miles along the banks on both sides of the river.”

The Hawkesbury Valley farms made the first major contribution towards the colony becoming a self-supporting entity; but only after suffering the vicissitudes with which I shall be dealing.

“SEEDS OF THOSE VEXATIONS”

Hunter, who arrived in Sydney on 7 September 1795, reported that he had not long entered upon the duties of his office

“before I was awakened from that dream of comfort and satisfaction in the prospect of which I had so vainly indulged. The seeds of those vexations which had so disappointed me had been sown for a considerable time, and being rather of a prolific nature amongst such people had gained so much in strength that it will require immense labour to grub them up by the root.”

Earlier he had said, “When I arrived in the country I saw only the fair side of everything, and wrote from what I saw.”

On 28 April 1796 he had even fallen into the trap of advocating that more than two male convicts be allowed to each settler (including the officers), as the officers raised more than half the product of the last harvest. As the labour quota was already in excess of two convicts per settler, he feared the withdrawal of the excess could lead to less corn planting, with a consequent price rise on account of scarcity in the following year. But by 12 November 1796 he was informing the Duke of Portland that on his arrival in Sydney he had found that he could scarcely call together twenty convicts for public purposes, as so many had been taken as assigned servants or even allowed to settle and possess property.

“INTENTIONAL EMBARRASSMENT”

Hunter considered that this had very much the appearance of an intentional embarrassment. Collins says that in October 1796, Hunter had compelled 100 convict settlers to return to servitude.

Hunter had already reported that at the Hawkesbury alone the following public buildings were sorely needed:

A large granary for the reception of wheat and maize, the foundations of which were already being laid.

A large and strong storehouse, the present one being too slight to be secure.

A barrack for the military.

A wind or water mill for the convenience of the district.

A strong prison.

A small hospital, as the nearest to the district is twenty miles distant.

He had also made a survey of the state of the area:

District		No. of Settlers	Cultivation	Pigs	Fowls	Debts of Settlers
Richmond River	Hill and N. side of	1793-5	370 acres	126	1,200	£935
		46				
South side of River		1794-5	406 acres	225	2,004	£1,850
		42				
South Creek		1794-5	223 acres	122	552	£1,016
		30				

Summing up, Hunter said:

“It will appear by this statement that the settlers on the Hawkesbury are more in debt than in any other district. . . . The ground of their farms is of a superior quality, although those which lay low are sometimes inundated. The debts have been enquired into as a means of showing the idleness or industry within the different districts. Debts in the main are due to a disposition to

indulge in drunkenness; it has been known that the produce of the labour for a whole year has been thrown away for a few gallons of very bad spirit."

Of the 601 men, women and children in the Hawkesbury settlement as shown by a return of 31 August 1796, only 147 were not victualled from the Public Store. Of the 454 who were victualled, 286 (men) were on the full ration, 98 (women) on two-thirds ration, 43 (children over two years) on half-ration, and 27 (children under two) on one-quarter ration.

"FAR FROM SELF-SUPPORTING"

The colony in general, and the Hawkesbury District in particular, were far from being self-supporting, and the stocks of basic foodstuffs, with flour altogether out, were hardly such as to inspire confidence.

However, in August 1796, the British Government had despatched shipping with enough animal food (meat) to constitute twelve months' supply for the colony.

Nevertheless, it is not to be wondered at that the Governors, over and above provisions sent out from England, had had to spend in purchases from the Cape and India, upwards of £20,000 per annum on the average. The decay of the Government farms during the Grose and Paterson regimes was highlighted by the fact that on account of the labour shortage for public works the Government land had to be left unemployed in 1796; thus nearly one-third of the land available for cultivation in the colony, at that time, could not be used.

During the remainder of 1796 and in 1797, Hunter continued in his efforts to build up the Government work force, but was continually frustrated by the vested interests who were concerned with the retention of their free labour. By 10 June 1797 he had managed to assemble a gang of about 250 of the convicts for public labour of various kinds; but

"the recall of such a number to public labour and the consequence of that loss of labour to private persons has occasioned some ferment. Those who had lost them are displeased."

Some convicts fled to the bush to avoid public labour, whilst others were sheltered by the settlers.

General musters instituted by Hunter had largely controlled the practice of persons drawing rations from more than the one public store, and the institution of what later

came to be known as the ticket-of-leave system brought some measure of control over the convicts; no settler could employ a convict unless he could produce his ticket-of-leave.

“IGNORED OR EVADED”

With the trade in spirits, his Government and General Orders banning their import without his permission were either ignored or evaded, and large quantities of spirits continued to enter the colony, with the dire effects on its economy already noted. In desperation, he requested the Duke of Portland, on 6 July 1797, to insist that a clause be inserted in the charter of all ships bound for the colony which would prevent such occurrences. The Secretary of State acceded to this on 10 April 1799, but of course, Hunter did not receive this despatch until months later.

In addition to shortages of foodstuffs, the lack of clothing and tools was an embarrassment; they even lacked the iron and steel bars and plate from which tools could be made.

With the effluxion of time, convicts' sentences expired and these men, with other free labour that had immigrated to the colony, raised difficulties in regard to the wages to be paid. On 10 March 1797, Hunter issued a Government and General Order fixing wage rates, but although there was a prohibition on overpayment, the vested interests were again enabled to outbid the small settler in the labour market.

MONOPOLY IN PURCHASE

In June 1798 occurred the officers' most remarkable effort to maintain their monopoly. They persuaded Hunter to issue a General Order forbidding the boarding of newly-arrived ships by any person until the ships had been secured in Sydney Cove. Immediately this order came into force the whole of the officers and some of the principal residents entered into an agreement not to compete against each other in the purchase of cargoes, with dire penalties, including ostracism, for anyone who breached the agreement. The parties to the agreement thus obtained collectively a complete monopoly in the purchase of imported goods.

On 10 June 1789 occurred another event of some import. Robert Campbell, of Campbell, Clarke and Co., of Calcutta, merchants, arrived in Sydney. This tough Scotsman was to play a large part in the establishment of commercial free enterprise in Australia. His command of capital, his perseverance and adaptability, allied with his skill at unlocking

the resources of the colony, were a factor that helped to break the monopolists' hold on the economy of the colony.

INSTRUCTIONS IN AGRICULTURE

In 1806 the indefatigable George Howe published his *New South Wales Pocket Almanack and Colonial Remembrancer, for the Year of Our Lord and Saviour 1806*. This contained, amongst the usual almanac information, instructions for agriculture in the new environment. In January—

“The farmer should now be diligent in cleaning his maize, and breaking up the ground he intends to sow with wheat and barley. Experience has shown that no certain crop can be produced if the ground is not ploughed or broken up two or three months before seed time . . . Should he neglect (this) till near seed time, the weeds will overrun it . . . and, should the autumn prove wet, they may prevent him from sowing the ground he intended.”

In February the farmer should sow his winter or Cape barley for green feed for stock, which will keep in constant vegetation for three or four months. This is also the best month to prepare the ground for wheat.

WHEAT SOWING

From the middle of March to the end of April, all forest land (i.e., from which forest has been cleared) should be sown with wheat. As the late maize is not ripe enough to gather in March, some farmers sow their wheat among the standing maize; this is very bad husbandry and ruinous to the farmer, who should let his maize stand until ripe and then prepare the ground for next season.

The notes for April are important.

“The farmers settled upon the banks of the Hawkesbury and Nepean should consider that from the middle of April to the end of May is their best season for sowing wheat. . . . The farmer should guard as much as possible against every danger to which his crop is exposed while in the field; and the best precaution is early sowing.

“The farmer should continue to sow wheat all through May, but should finish his sowing before June. He should also commence sowing his spring barley at this season right through to the end of June, but only in properly prepared ground. . . .

“October should see the farmer plant his maize in order that he may finish his planting before his harvest

sets in. He should also clean and earth-up his potatoes. If this work is not done now, he will not have time to attend to it when his wheat is ripe; and by that means his future crop will be greatly injured. Maize and potatoes are such very essential articles of food, as well as almost certain crops, that the farmer cannot be too anxious and diligent in their cultivation; as, should his other crops fail, these will furnish him with the certain means of support for his family."

The notes for November and December emphasise the need for getting in and securing the wheat harvest.

The farmer is also warned against sowing the stubble ground with maize, for this is very bad husbandry:

"A practice that can never answer for any length of time . . . this custom tends eventually to deceive and ruin the farmer. . . . He lives above his income, and contracts debts with a false hope of liquidating them in harvest; when to his own and his creditors' disappointment his crop has failed."

The haphazard husbandry of the preceding decade, resulting in the ruin of so many smallholders, is sought to be remedied by sound advice to the small farmer. Then the wheat-planting season, with special address to the farmers of the Hawkesbury Valley, is laid down. The importance of maize and potatoes as staples of life is emphasised and the agricultural notes end with a homily on the evils of careless over-cultivation.

PROTRACTED DROUGHT

The summer of 1798-1799 was remarkable for one of the most protracted droughts on record. For ten months scarcely a shower of rain fell. As early as 25 September 1798, Hunter was expressing real concern to the Duke of Portland that

"the very flattering prospect of an ample crop which he had every reason to expect would have furnished a supply of wheat for at least twenty months to come, exclusive of considerable crops of maize, is at present in a very precarious state from an uncommon and tedious drought, attended with very sultry weather, and there is now a great probability of wheat being scarce during the ensuing season."

On 1 May 1799, Hunter is still complaining of the drought. He reports that the maize crop has completely failed and that the wheat harvest will be one-third only of what could have been expected. The whole country has been in a blaze

of fire. Pasturage for a time has been destroyed and the streams of fresh water almost exhausted. It was a time of general want, one of those recurring periods which characterised the colony's early years, with no clothing or bedding in store and a general insufficiency of stores, as no sufficient supplies had been received since the arrival of the *Sylph* on 17 November 1796.

FLOOD OF MARCH 1799

But by one of those paradoxes for which the Australian climate is notorious, in the midst of drought, the Hawkesbury area had been devastated by a severe flood early in March 1799. The river rose fifty feet above its common level, the banks were overflowed with vast rapidity, and the torrent was so powerful that it carried all before it. The Government Store and all it contained were swept away. Settlers' houses and furniture, livestock and provisions, were alike carried off and the whole country looked like an immense ocean. One life only was lost, but the inhabitants had been left in the greatest distress for want of the bare necessities.

However, Hunter consoled himself that the flood "will be the means of that land in the Hawkesbury area which has been inundated producing, for a year or two to come, uncommon crops, and thereby the loss at present occasioned to the people will be recovered."

He made available supplies of seed wheat to the people who applied for it to prevent the continuance of the scarcity.

The local drought finally broke on 4, 5 and 6 June 1799, when a heavy south wind brought incessant rain which deluged the colony; partially erected buildings in Sydney and elsewhere were wrecked, but Hunter hoped to replace them all within twelve months.

"WHOLE CROPS UNDER WATER"

The colony was far from recovered from the twin catastrophes of drought and flood of the previous summer when, on 20 March 1800, Hunter again had to report

"and now at the time we are about to gather in our maize, it is likely to be ruined by a similar cause, for at this moment of writing, the River Hawkesbury has again overflowed its banks and has had the whole crops under water — has swept away some of the savings of our last wheat harvest there, with a considerable number of hogs and poultry."

He feels sure, however, that these untoward circumstances

are such as may not happen again in many years and therefore they should not create alarm. However, he stresses that the continual hand-to-mouth existence forced on the settlers by these disasters has undermined their will to work hard on their farms. He also views with concern the adverse effect this must have on the preservation of livestock. He has been blamed for the expense incurred in victualling the colonists, but he feels that this has been due to circumstances beyond his control.

On 30 March 1800, Hunter again wrote to the Duke of Portland:

“It is much to be lamented that in establishing this settlement on the Hawkesbury, the people who fixed it there had not considered the signs of those floods which had appeared to the first discoverers, and to have erected their dwellings, etc., on the higher grounds, or that the inundations which have lately happened had not taken place at an earlier period when there were but few settlers. Those overflowings which have lately happened none formerly had any idea of; they exceed in horror and destruction all we would have possibly conceived.”

However, cf. *H.R.N.S.W. II, p. 320*, where Grose, on 16 September 1795 had informed the Hon. Henry Dundas that it was evident the settlers on the Hawkesbury would never be secure from inundation.

“SUCCESSION OF ILL FORTUNE”

Hunter asserted further:

“The settlement . . . is yet too young to be able to withstand such a succession of ill-fortune without its being felt in some degree an inconvenience and an expense to the Mother country. . . .”

Hunter, that brave and honest, but weak and indecisive man, was already under recall, as he was to find out when his replacement, King, arrived in the *Speedy* on 15 April 1800, from England.

In the uneasy period that followed between King's arrival and Hunter's departure in *H.M.S. Buffalo* on 28 September 1800, the two men had some, at times sharp, differences of opinion. On 5 July 1800, for example, King wrote to Hunter and asserted “it is to the Hawkesbury we are to look for our supplies.”

Hunter, weary and despondent, replied:

“If you are to look chiefly to the Hawkesbury for support, it will ever be a precarious dependence, as the last two years have evinced.”

King was not to be so easily put down. On 6 July he wrote again to Hunter:

“On what you say respecting the importance of the Hawkesbury, I agree with you as to its precarious state on account of the floods; but still there is a great quantity of unthreshed wheat there, which will one way or another find its way to the public stores, and I do not despair of purchasing wheat next year at 6s. per bushel.”

The price of wheat per bushel during Hunter’s regime appears to have been maintained at ten shillings, despite his efforts to bring about a reduction.

“AGGRESSIVE APPROACH”

King sought to bring an aggressive approach to bear on the problems of the colony. In a letter written to Sir Joseph Banks on 5 June 1802, he said:

“There are two things that set me much at variance with those about me — first, my determination that the public shall not be cheated; and next, that the King’s authority shall not be insulted. . . . The former systems of monopoly and extortion I hope are now eradicated. Of spirits I think the inundation is going off, and industry begins to know her produce will not be sacrificed to the infamous wretches that have preyed on the vitals of this colony.”

The Hawkesbury area, at the time of Hunter’s departure, was the residence of 141 men, 82 women and 183 children victualled from the Store, whilst those who supported themselves comprised 488 men, 63 women and seven children.

In four years the population of this area had increased from 601 to 964, whilst the number victualled by the Store had decreased from 454 to 406; of more significance is the fact that the number of adults supported had been reduced from 384 to 223, a difference of 161.

KING ATTACKS PROBLEMS

At the commencement of his Governorship, King had brought great energy to bear on the problems of the colony. A series of Government and General Orders had sought to remedy the principal abuses. Assigned servants were to be fed and clothed by their masters; food and clothing were to be available from the Store at fixed prices; port orders sought to control the promiscuous boarding of vessels newly arrived, and a table of legal tender, *i.e.*, the value of the coinage circulating in the colony, was published.

A guinea	£1/2/0	A pagoda	£0/8/0	A copper coin	
A Half-Johanna	£2/0/0	A rupee	£0/2/6	of 1 oz.	£0/0/2
A gold mohur	£1/17/7	A Dutch guilder	£0/2/0	A copper coin	
A Spanish dollar	£0/5/0	An English		of $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	£0/0/1
A Johanna	£4/0/0	shilling	£0/1/8	A copper coin	
A ducat	£0/9/6			of $\frac{1}{4}$ oz.	£0/0/0 $\frac{1}{2}$

Copper coinage ceased to be legal tender in payment for any sum exceeding £5, and the exportation or importation of copper coinage by private persons for any sum in excess of £5 was prohibited.

King had hoped to end the lack of prosperity occasioned by the Hawkesbury floods of 1799 and 1800, but on 10 March 1801, he had to inform the Duke of Portland "of one of those calamities with which it pleases God sometimes to afflict mankind, and which no human foresight can avoid. . . . Fair prospects by some settlers had been defeated by three successive inundations of the Hawkesbury since last December; the last of which happened the 2nd and 3rd instant, had swept away half the stacks of wheat and destroyed nearly the whole of the corn and swine at the place.

"DEPRIVED OF COMFORT, CLOTHING OR SHELTER"

"Thrice in four months have they been drove from their habitations to save their lives in trees and pieces of floating wood, until the floods subsided, when they found themselves deprived of every comfort, clothing, or shelter; their wheat that was housed, that in their stacks, and their growing corn totally destroyed; and what is greater public calamity, their stock of swine nearly all drowned."

King goes on at length to detail the dependence of other parts of the colony on the Hawkesbury for grain, the need to victual the distressed settlers (upwards of 500 in number) in that place who were hitherto self-supporting, and foreshadows the need to import grain.

However, a report by Surveyor Grimes dated 7 March 1801, while presenting a black enough picture of loss, does not appear to convey the sense of total disaster that pervades King's report. Grimes sets out losses and the probable quantity of wheat remaining and the proportion that may be offered to the store:

Bushels of wheat lost	3,589	
484 acres of wheat, estimated at 20 bushels per acre	9,680	
		13,269
1,354 acres of maize lost, estimated at 20 bushels per acre		27,080
Hogs lost		104
Bushels of good wheat remaining		19,221
Bushels of good wheat which may be offered the store		7,500
Acres of maize remaining		500
Hogs remaining		2,509
Acres of wheat intended to be sown this season		1,405

On the subject of animal food, King explains to the Duke how unequal the resources of the colony are to supplying sufficient of this for its needs. Out of 5,515 inhabitants, 2,736 (equal to 2,309 full rations) support themselves at no expense to the public, and 2,779 (equal to 2,348 full rations) are necessarily supported by the Crown.

As the Public Store then held only twenty-eight weeks' salt meat at full ration, King had to take steps to import more cattle, and entered into a contract with Robert Campbell for the supply of 150 cattle from Bengal, and ten tons of sugar to be brought by the ship that brings the cattle.

King estimated that the 2,348 full rations would cost the Crown, after allowing for the value of grain raised by the Government and exclusive of stores clothing and Superintendents' salaries, the sum of £26,706/16/3 in the ensuing year.

SALT MEAT SITUATION

To help remedy the salt meat situation, King showed his resourcefulness in initiating a commercial enterprise that was to be a feature of the colony's economy for upwards of the next thirty years. In 1793, the *Daedalus* (Lieutenant Hanson), under orders from Vancouver, had sailed from the north-west coast of America for Port Jackson, and en route had purchased 100 hogs at Tahiti, eighty of which were landed alive at Sydney on 20 April 1793.

On 20 May 1801, King ordered the *Porpoise* (Lieutenant Scott) to sail for Tahiti to purchase and salt as much pork as the ship would hold. Scott was furnished with Cook's and Vancouver's pork-salting recipes and instructed also to investigate the prospects of future supplies from this source. Bass and his partner Bishop, in October 1801 and subsequently, became engaged in the Tahitian pork trade. King was convinced that he was procuring salt pork at a cheaper rate per pound than it could be brought from England, but H. E. Maude demonstrates that his accounting was rather faulty.

King's return of livestock and acreages, in or to be in cultivation, compared with the figures of twelve months earlier, is of interest:

Date	Sheep	Cattle	Horses	Goats	Hogs	Wheat	Maize
July 1800	6,124	1,044	203	2,182	4,026	4,065 acs.	2,930 acs.
30 June 1801	7,046	1,242	241	1,259	4,766	5,333 acs.	3,864 acs.

One wonders what had happened to the goats; they must have suffered a lot of casualties in the floods and the cooking pot!

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE NO SINECURE

Before he had been a year in office, King found, as Hunter had done before him, that his office was no sinecure. By 8 November 1801, he was writing to Under Secretary King in these terms:

“Situated as this Colony was when I took the command, every step I took clashed so much with the interest of trading individuals, both commissioned as well as un-commissioned, that all set their wits to work, not only to thwart my exertions, but also to use every measure that art, cunning, and fraud could suggest to impede my efforts. Mere opposition, my conduct and orders will plainly evince, I have not only withstood, but I have also the satisfaction to see that these measures of mine have generally succeeded in rescuing the inhabitants and the public purse from the monopolies and extortions that have been so long practised on both, to the enriching Capt. McArthur, Mr. Balmain, and the late Acting Commissary, with a few other favoured individuals.”

Later in the same letter he refers to “that *bon homme* Paterson,” who had written to Sir Joseph Banks alleging that King’s too great economy had been the cause of the present scarcity in the colony. King claims that his economical government had saved the Crown a large sum and instances the efforts made to have him raise the price of wheat from 8/- a bushel to 15/-, which he had refused to do, despite the scarcity of this grain. With some bitterness he says . . .

“Had I preferred ease and quiet, and chosen to continue Captain Macarthur Arbiter of the Colony, you would have heard nothing of this. If it appears I have done no more than my duty, I cannot doubt the most decided support. I shall close the subject by observing that if Captain Macarthur returns here in any official character it should be that of Governor, as one-half the colony already belongs to him, and it will not be long before he gets the other half.”

Macarthur was already under arrest for his duel with Paterson, and on the eve of being sent back to England for trial by court-martial. He sailed for Europe via India in the barque *Hunter* on 15 November 1801, and King had the pleasure of his absence until 9 June 1805.

The Hawkesbury did not flood in 1802 and a more hopeful tone as to the future of agriculture there pervades King’s despatches. A return of 17 August 1802 shows a

general improvement (except for the goats, which seem to have suffered a further depletion in numbers):

Acres Cleared	Acres Wheat	Acres Maize	Acres Barley	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Hogs
10,184	4,945	3,135	263	293	1,856	8,661	1,146	5,233
Bushels	of grain	in hand	comprised	wheat	13,793	and maize	17,107.	

PRESERVATION OF BREEDING STOCK

The preservation of breeding stock had again exercised the Governor's mind, and Government and General Orders of 16 March 1802, and 31 July the same year, prohibited disposal by settlers of Government stock lent to them for breeding purposes; licensed butchers alone would be allowed to kill and vend meat to the public, provided that male stock alone might be slaughtered, and regulated the prices at which meat might be sold.

To further encourage agriculture and stock-breeding, King, by Public Notice dated 10 December 1802, laid down stock premiums for 1803. It appears that in November 1801 or thereabouts, he had rewarded industrious settlers with gifts of one or two ewes. In July 1802, he put these stock premiums on to a proper footing. Gifts of stock were made for the highest production achieved in the grain crops, for swine breeding and flax crops and manufacture. The Notice of December 1802 even called for entries by candidates for premiums being lodged with the District Magistrates and fully defined the conditions of the contest.

In 1803 King established a Government Brewery at Parramatta and also encouraged a private individual, presumably one W. Stabler, to brew beer as a commercial enterprise. The availability of beer, it was hoped, would decrease the demand for spirits and would operate for the general welfare of the colony. Hops were in short supply, but barley and even wheat were used as substitutes. The good seasons at the Hawkesbury left grain available for this use.

SUPPLY OF GRAIN

On 30 December 1803, King issued a Government and General Order calling for tenders for the supply of grain. The order contained an observation that wheat and maize prices would be reduced, having regard to the fact that there had been no floods for the past two years. Furthermore, the increased productivity of the Government farms had lessened the dependence on private grain growers. In the upshot, the wheat price was fixed at 7/- per bushel delivered at the Store at the Hawkesbury, and 7/6 at Sydney and Parramatta. Care was taken that no person had more than

a proportionate part of his crop received into the Store to the detriment of the small producer.

The 1803 wheat crop at the Hawkesbury showed some sign of being affected by blight and smut, and a Government and General Order of November 1803 urged farmers to take precautions against these potential dangers.

Livestock and acreages in cultivation again showed satisfactory increases (this time the goats had increased by nearly 50%) in the Returns of August 1803:

Acres	Acres	Acres	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Hogs
Wheat	Maize	Barley	358	2,450	11,275	1,738	9,105
7,110	4,388	524	Bushels of grain in hand comprised wheat 22,041 and maize 56,439.				

The large stocks of maize in hand indicate the abundance of this grain available for animal feed, and it must have assisted materially in the substantial increase in livestock numbers.

At the end of 1803, provisions in stock showed the following quantities in hand:

Salt Beef	.....	252,182 lbs.	Flour	.....	612,760 lbs.
Salt Pork	.....	1,248,620 lbs.	Sugar	.....	12,238 lbs.
Suet	.....	24,093 lbs.	Hops	.....	2,242 lbs.

The stock of salt meat was sufficient to furnish 2,663 full rations for 143 weeks. A vastly different position from that of the desperate days of 1788 to 1801.

By 12 July 1804, the population at the Hawkesbury totalled 1,687. Because of the poor land communications (the road to Parramatta left much to be desired), a considerable water traffic had grown up between the Hawkesbury and Sydney for the carriage of produce to the latter place. As early as February 1803 a Government and General Order had been necessary to control the malpractices, such as overloading and wetting of grain to add to its weight, which had grown up.

Boatbuilding was also a rising industry. Andrew Thompson, up to 28 February 1804, had built three sloops at the Hawkesbury, whilst John Palmer had had one sloop built three.

INCESSANT RAINS

Early in 1805 there were very heavy and incessant rains. Although the River Hawkesbury rose slightly, it caused inconsiderable damage to crops; however, the rain itself rotted and destroyed most of the maize crop before it could be saved. The wheat crop had also suffered from rains in late 1804, and the ravages of the "fly moth" (probably *Tineae granella*). However, despite these misfortunes the situation was not critical by any means, and the people and livestock were in thriving condition.

The seal and oil fisheries had drawn many men away from the agricultural labour pool, but this did not appear to have materially affected the quantitative production of grain and livestock, which remained at a satisfactory level up to the end of October, 1805.

The crop and stock figures for 30 July 1804, and 14 August 1805, can be inserted here:

	Acres Wheat	Acres Maize	Acres Barley	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Hogs
1804	8,245	4,066	1,080	434	3,264	16,501	2,980	14,308
1805	6,777	4,827	1,058	517	4,325	20,617	3,810	23,000

The wheat acreage is the smallest since 1802, although still well above the figure for that year; it would appear that the effects of disease and insect pests were being felt.

On 27 October 1805, the *Sydney Gazette* reported heavy rain had fallen for the last week, with consequent flooding in South Creek and the inundation of 1,000 acres of land bearing wheat and maize. The Hawkesbury rose nearly to bank level and a general inundation was feared. The Governor sent the whole of the Government labourers at Sydney and Parramatta to plant as much maize as possible at Castle Hill in order to help meet any contingency that might arise. However, the weather cleared and a week later it was reported that there had been no damage to crops apart from those on the banks of South Creek.

On 6 November 1805, the inhabitants of the Hawkesbury were subjected to another scare. This time, without any evident cause, the river rose twenty-seven feet in nine hours; the Creek farms were again inundated, but, fortunately, the river did not overflow its banks, and the waters once again receded. As in March 1799, heavy rains in the interior had swelled the stream in its lower reaches.

RAVAGES OF BLIGHT

Apart from the flood losses on South Creek, concern was expressed at the state of the crop due to the ravages of blight, smut and rust. Farmers were urged to make every effort to preserve their crops and maintain their livestock, as any diminution would be a serious calamity.

On 9 March 1806, a supplement to the *Sydney Gazette* expressed concern at rains, which at first were welcomed to revive the languishing maize crops, but continued in such torrents that the South Creek lands were again flooded and a considerable rise in the Hawkesbury was caused, which inundated the lower lands and destroyed a great quantity of maize. However, the waters fell before more extensive damage could be caused.

DISASTER STRIKES

Then, on 22 and 23 March 1806, disaster struck. The first intimation occurred on Thursday, 20 March, when the river rose several feet; but by Friday the rise had abated. The apprehensions of the inhabitants were allayed. However, "the incessant rains on Friday . . . night gave a new turn to expectations; and by daylight on Saturday morning a scene of horror presented itself in every quarter. It was by this time nearly as high as on the 2nd of March 1801; many farms were then under water; the rain continued without intermission, and a rapid rise was in consequence observable. The measures adopted by Thomas Arndell Esq., for the preservation of lives, were actively carried into execution by Mr. Thompson, Chief Constable, who, in one of his boats, saved the lives of a hundred persons, whom he took from the tops of houses and rafts of straw floating on the deluge. He had two more boats employed in the same humane work, and by means of this also a number of lives were saved.

"Mr. Thomas Biggers, often at the risque of his own life, saved upwards of 150 men, women and children; and others who possessed boats, particularly the District Constables, were very active in this benevolent duty."

The account goes on to say that in the course of "this dreadful day," upwards of 200 wheat stacks were swept into the stream and carried down the river; stock of all descriptions were seen floating about. . . . The boats of Messrs. Thompson, Biggers and others were constantly employed taking the settlers' families from the roofs and ridges of the houses, where many had for whole hours clung despairing of assistance, expecting to be shortly washed into the watery waste.

"The distress and horror of that evening can neither be described nor imagined. The day was heavy and gloomy, the night fast approaching, torrents of rain pouring with unabating fury. . . . Muskets were discharged by the settlers from trees and roofs all day, and great numbers had been taken up, and been left in safety on the higher grounds; but many were devoted to undergo a night of horror the most inexpressible. . . . On Sunday morning the rigor of the weather abated. . . . Nearly 300 persons, saved from the deluge by the humane perseverance and incredible exertions of their rescuers, were released from a state of actual famine by a supply sent from the Green Hills in consequence of His Excellency's request to Mr. Arndell to afford the sufferers every assistance and relief."

ENORMOUS LOSSES

The loss of food, livestock and buildings was enormous. An area of 36,000 acres was flooded. In many parts the water lay from twelve to eighteen feet deep. It was estimated that 23,606 bushels of wheat, 59,450 bushels of maize and 4,145 bushels of barley, valued in the aggregate at £22,368 were swept away. Livestock, comprising 3,560 swine, 16 horses, 47 sheep and 296 goats, valued at £7,454, were drowned. The buildings destroyed were valued at £5,425; but no estimate was made of the personal property which was lost. In all, seven persons were drowned (five men and two women).

The grain alone (calculated on the low rate of 50 lbs. per bushel) would have been sufficient to serve out a ration of 12 lbs. per week to the whole population for twelve months. Vessels were sent from Sydney to carry supplies up the river, but they were forced to return, finding it utterly impossible to contend against the strong current when the tide was ebbing, or the confused sea and masses of debris when the flood tide met the out-running stream.

The *Sydney Gazette* of 30 March 1806 (which also contained the first full account of the flood) urged the colonists to increase their means of subsistence by intensive industry in their vegetable gardens; the Government and General Order of 28 March 1806 reduced the weekly ration; and the Governor's letter of 2 April 1806 to the Judge-Advocate and Bench of Magistrates directed that private bakers be licensed and the sale of bread to private persons be controlled.

In an endeavour to secure grain for the Government Store, a Government and General Order of 26 March 1806 directed the Commissary to receive storeable wheat from those who owe Government debts, and who have it to spare, at fifteen shillings, barley at eight, and maize at six shillings a bushel; to those who owe no Government debts, wheat at twelve, good barley at seven, and maize at six shillings a bushel.

RICE CARGOES LOST

King, by 7 April 1806, when he wrote a despatch to Earl Camden, had made agreements with the owners of the vessel *Sydney* and the captain of the *Tellicherry* to bring cargoes of rice from India and China within six months. Unfortunately, both vessels were lost on their respective outward voyages. He also expressed the intention of engag-

ing a small, fast vessel of Campbell's to bring 180 tons of rice from Madras in a quick round trip of four months.

Camden was asked to send from England 100 to 300 bushels of good seed wheat between July and September so that it would arrive in the colony in time for the sowing season in March and April 1807.

In 1805, King had asked to be relieved. His request was granted, and on 6 August 1806, Governor William Bligh arrived in Sydney; King, however, after handing over to Bligh, had to wait in the colony whilst *H.M.S. Buffalo* was refitting, and did not sail for England until 10 February 1807.

King had to contend with great difficulties during his term of office; on his arrival the monopolists were virtually in control of the colony. He did much to curb them, but in the end his health was ruined by the strains of office. An able, fearless and upright administrator, he did not receive the full support he deserved from the British Government. He died in England on 3 September 1808, aged forty-nine years.

BLIGH ASSUMES OFFICE

His successor, Bligh, a man of irascible temperament and undoubted personal courage, has been one of the most controversial figures in Australian history. The mutiny of the *Bounty* and the Rum Rebellion have caused him to be vilified, but he has also had his champions. As Dale Carnegie was still a century away in the future, Bligh's principal trouble seems to have been that he had no one to instruct him in the art of winning friends and influencing people.

When Bligh assumed office, the Colony was still in considerable want of grain. Seed grain was scarce and the vessels that had arrived were short-victualled in the hope of obtaining plentiful supplies locally, which circumstance was a further embarrassment to the Colonial Government. He considered it would be some years before the colonists could be got back to their previous standards of opulence and comfort. Due to overheating, grain seed sent out in the *Sinclair* had failed to germinate.

On 20 December 1806, the price of wheat and barley was confirmed at 15/- and 8/- for Government debts prior to 13 August 1806, but debts after that date were allowed to be liquidated at 14/- the bushel of wheat and 7/- for barley. Tender prices for wheat at Sydney and Parramatta were fixed at 14/9 a bushel and 13/9 at the Hawkesbury.

On 7 February 1807, Bligh reported to the Right Hon. W. Windham that

“both wheat and maize will be very scanty to provide seed and food until next year. . . . There were 5,046 acres of wheat sown, and its produce I calculate to be 53,198 bushels . . . deducting 12,000 bushels for seed, there remains 41,198 for consumption. There were 3,120 acres of maize planted, which may produce 59,475 bushels . . . deducting 500 bushels for seed, there remains 58,975 bushels for consumption.”

About a week later, the *General Wellesley* arrived from India with timely supplies of rice and wheat. She had been sent by the contractor in place of the shipwrecked *Sydney*.

In the open market, wheat was selling at 20s. to 24s. per bushel. The traffic in spirits as a medium of barter had revived, and Bligh expressed his determination to endeavour to stamp it out.

On 5 July 1807, a paragraph in the *Sydney Gazette* dealt with the grain shortage and its effect on commercial transactions.

“The extraordinary fluctuations that have taken place in the price of wheat since the flood in March 1806, have given rise to many litigations which a little sincerity might have superseded.”

The editor of the *Sydney Gazette* refers to the Government and General Orders of 1 November 1806, and 3 January 1807, which provided all outstanding notes payable in copper coin and colonial currency are to be considered as sterling money and payable or sued for accordingly. Grain was a species of colonial currency and therefore the Orders applied to notes expressed in bushels of grain.

SEEDS OF MACARTHUR-BLIGH QUARREL

About the time that the foregoing was written occurred an event that was to have far-reaching consequences. Macarthur sued Andrew Thompson, Bligh's bailiff, for money lent and secured by a promissory note to be paid in wheat. At the time the note was given, wheat was about 7/6 per bushel, but when it came due, the price of wheat had increased to 30/- per bushel. The question arose as to whether payment of the note should be made in the value of the wheat at the time the note was given or at the time when it had to be paid. Macarthur contended it should be the latter, for if wheat had fallen in price he would have had to accept payment at the lower amount. The case was

ultimately brought to an Appeal Court before Bligh, who decided in favour of Thompson. In the light of the General Orders, Bligh considered Macarthur had no case and would not even allow him to put forward his arguments. The date was 11 July 1807, and from this point on an open quarrel between Bligh and Macarthur commenced. The Colony divided itself into Bligh and Macarthur factions; for obvious reasons, the New South Wales Corps was with the latter. The events had been set in train which led to Bligh's being deposed by the Corps and its supporters on 26 January 1808. Bligh's subsequent struggle and plotting to regain command do not concern us in this paper.

In the hullabaloo that followed Bligh's deposition, the records are full of accusations and counter-accusations, but little as to how the colony was faring under Major Johnson's administration with Macarthur as his "Colonial Secretary." However, on 11 April 1808, Johnson, in reporting Bligh's arrest to Viscount Castlereagh, mentions that Macarthur and he have been successful in causing 300 persons, who were formerly victualled from the Store, to maintain themselves, and many of the most able of these people have been distributed amongst the settlers to assist in the cultivation of their lands. One cannot help wondering how many of these found their way to Macarthur properties.

Fresh meat for the soldiers and grain for the prisoners was issued in lieu of salt meat, and cows were distributed amongst the steadiest of the settlers in return for grain for the Store. By these means, Johnston was able to keep the expenses of Government down, but, of course, it was at the expense of the Government livestock.

TRANSPORTS BRING SUPPLIES

On 24 July and 28 July 1808 respectively, the transports *Recovery* and *Sinclair* arrived at Sydney with "very great supplies," but both Bligh and the Commissary, Palmer, assert that, as Macarthur had control of the Government Store, little of these supplies came the way of the colonists generally, and the lot of the colonists became "more and more wretched."

Yet on 4 September 1808, Foveaux, in his first dispatch to Castlereagh, speaks of the great increase expected in the livestock, and of the abundance of grain of every kind throughout the settlement; in fact, maize, for want of a market, was being allowed to remain unhoused and rot. To check this, and cause the maize to be used for hog feed, he had determined to pay one shilling per pound for swine

flesh for the Store. He considered the ensuing abundance of pork would bring about competition and a reduction in price. Government cattle at £28 per head had been exchanged for wheat at 10/- per bushel and maize at 6/- per bushel by Johnston, and this "judicious exchange" had put 12,000 bushels of wheat into the Store. He thus approbated the actions of Johnston and Macarthur.

The crop and stock figures at 24 November 1808 reveal:

Acres	Acres	Acres	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Hogs
Wheat 6,877	Maize 3,389	Barley 544	940	9,004	33,258	2,975	19,368

Except for cattle and sheep, these figures show little improvement on those for 1805, and in some cases an actual decrease; so Foveaux's optimism is at least questionable.

COMPLICATED MANOEUVRES

The complicated manoeuvres that went on between Bligh, Foveaux and Paterson do not call for comment here; nor does the sailing of Johnston and Macarthur for England in the *Admiral Gambier* on 28 March 1809, except to remark that it was probably fortunate for them that they were no longer in Sydney when Macquarie and the 73rd Regiment arrived. A court-martial and a criminal court constituted from the officers of the 73rd would have probably not taken as lenient a view of proceedings as the New South Wales Corps had.

However, prior to the arrival of Macquarie at Port Jackson on 28 December 1809 (he did not set foot ashore until 31 December), the colony had to endure the hardship of more disastrous floodings of the Hawkesbury River. On 3 December 1808, Foveaux had fixed the price of wheat for the Store at 10/- per bushel, but by 23 March 1809, Paterson complained to Castlereagh of the paucity of wheat available for the Store at the fixed price and that it cost him 15/- per bushel to buy privately for consumption by his own family. The reason for this was that heavy rains in November and December 1808 had caused smut to injure the wheat crop, resulting in a poor harvest, whilst rains had again interfered with the 1809 sowing season; the prospects from the next harvest were poor, therefore, and Paterson, on 22 May 1809, informed Castlereagh that he deemed a considerable importation of grain would be necessary.

ANOTHER FLOOD DISASTER

It is against this background of gloom that we read the first hint of disaster in the *Sydney Gazette* to the effect that

on Tuesday, 23 May 1809, the Hawkesbury perceptibly began to rise and continued to do so until Thursday, 25 May, when the greatest part of the settlement was inundated, but the water thereafter fell several feet. Such was the report received 28 May.

The following week's *Gazette* contains a full account. On the afternoon of 25 May, the river commenced to rise at the rapid rate of four feet per hour until the water began to spread over the banks. The magistrates mobilised all the boats they could for flood rescue service. About 4 a.m. on Saturday, 27 May, the water reached its greatest height, three hours after which it gradually fell again. Had the waters continued to rise for another hour, the flood level would have equalled that of 1806. The clearing and re-sowing of the grounds inundated was put in hand immediately. Losses were reported as 1,769 bushels of wheat, 785 bushels of maize, 212 bushels of barley, 233 acres of maize, 264 pigs and a few sheep and goats. There was no loss of life. The losses of grain and stock were not comparable with those of 1806, but for the reasons already given they made a threatened scarcity an actuality. Thus we find Paterson reporting to Castlereagh on 9 July 1809 that he has taken steps to obtain 200 tons of wheat from Bengal. To encourage Mr. Burton, the merchant who was to supply the wheat at 8/- per bushel, Paterson gave him a permit to land 13,000 gallons of spirits (of which, he says, there was a great want in the Colony). However, a fortnight earlier the *Sydney Gazette* had stated that the activity of the flood relief gangs had resulted in between 2,000 and 3,000 acres more being put into cultivation than were actually cultivated before the May flood.

“DREADFUL CALAMITIES”

But nature had yet to visit a further misfortune on the Colony. A Government and General Order of 5 August 1809, referring to “the late inundations of the Hawkesbury and George’s River, which there is reason to fear has been more extensively destructive than on any former occasion,” enjoins all garden owners to raise as great a quantity of vegetables as possible, to reduce the consumption of bread and alleviate the results of “the dreadful calamities” by which the Colony has twice, in the space of two months, been visited. A warning is also issued that any inhabitant of the Colony attempting a monopoly of grain with a view to escalating prices during the scarcity will be severely dealt with.

The *Sydney Gazette* of 6 August 1809, says that "heavy rain had fallen continuously from Saturday evening, 29 July, until Monday morning, 31 July. The waters of the Hawkesbury began to rise between 10 and 11 p.m. on Sunday, 30 July, and reached their greatest height about noon on Tuesday, 1 August, after which they receded five or six feet. Further "deluges of rain" that fell in the evening and night of Tuesday caused the waters to rise again several feet. . . . By noon Thursday they were ten feet below the highest level that they had reached. At least three men, a woman and two children appear to have lost their lives. One settler alone, a Mr. Benn, lost 300 swine, 100 sheep, 1,000 bushels of wheat threshed or in stack, a stack of barley; he also lost two chests of tea and a ton of sugar which he had received only a few days prior from Sydney. Andrew Thompson and Mr. Biggers again played leading roles in saving life."

"BACK TO SUBSISTENCE LEVEL"

The rise of waters was determined to be six feet above the highest level of the 1806 flood. This had been said to be eighty feet above common level, but modern observations tend to reduce this to fifty feet. However, irrespective of whether the highest level reached in August 1809 was eighty-six feet or fifty-six feet, it sufficed to put the colonists back on what was virtually a subsistence level again. The Lieutenant-Governor imposed a ban on the export or shipping of bread, flour, wheat or of any other kind of grain whatever from the settlement.

In his dispatch to Castlereagh on 14 October 1809, Paterson advises that the flood of 1 August carried away more than half the grain saved or resown after the May floods. The season being too far advanced to admit of the lands being sown a third time, a most distressing want of wheat was inevitable, unless prevented by the timely arrival of supplies contracted for from India and Rio de Janeiro. He also discourses on the imprudence of depending on settlements lying on the banks of rivers as the principal source of supplies of grain; in the light of experience gained he had given every possible encouragement to the cultivation of forest lands.

Some days after the flood of 1 August had abated, further heavy rains served to cleanse from a good deal of the cultivated land the silt deposited there by the flood, and thus gave the growing wheat thereby uncovered a chance

to grow to maturity. However, the quantity of wheat thus fortuitously saved was insufficient to affect the general position, and there was a considerable rise of basic foodstuffs

The abatement in the wheat and potato prices at the end of 1809 can be attributed to the harvests being brought in and affording temporary relief. Maize remained expensive as the harvest was not due until March 1810. A rise in the price of meat indicated a reluctance on the part of growers to part with their breeding stock after the losses of what would have been surplus stock in the floods.

SCARCITY OF WHEAT

That the scarcity of wheat was only temporarily abated by the 1809 harvest is evidenced by Macquarie's first dispatch to Castlereagh on 8 March 1810. He says he found the public stores almost empty of dry provisions. . . . To bring some measure of relief, he ordered 300 acres of Government ground to be prepared for a crop of early potatoes and wheat, and intended to put the troops and all other persons victualled by the Crown on to a reduced ration. However, the arrival of the ship *Marian* and the brig *Experiment* within a few days of each other, with contract wheat from Bengal, relieved him from the necessity of resorting to the "very unpleasant expedient" of reducing the ration.

As far back as 30 January 1802, Lord Hobart had recommended to King that he should move the Hawkesbury settlers' habitations on to higher ground, but this advice was not acted upon. Paterson had stated he was endeavouring to encourage settlers to cultivate the forest lands, but he wanted them to vacate the rich alluvial flats altogether. He was, however, too ineffectual a person to bring this about.

MASTERLY MEASURE OF COMPROMISE

It remained for Macquarie, with his firmness and resolution, to bring into effect a masterly measure of compromise by which the settlers and their livestock and harvested crops could be brought safely above flood level, but they could continue to cultivate the river flats. His Five Towns (the Macquarie Towns) achieved this result; he realised the river flats were too valuable to abandon entirely. By bringing habitations out of the danger areas, the dangers to human life, livestock and harvested crops would be obviated and the disorganisation resulting from the floods of earlier years

would be substantially reduced. That his scheme was of substantial merit is amply illustrated by the fact that, although the character of the crops grown has changed, it is still basically operative 160 years later.

The Colony still had far to go before it achieved economic self-sufficiency; but with the advent of Macquarie, the successful crossing of the Blue Mountains barrier in 1813 and territorial expansion in other directions from Sydney and its immediate hinterland, the problems that had beset the Colony for the first twenty-one years of its existence began to be resolved. The monopoly was broken and the demon rum, although still a problem, ceased to exert its earlier malign influence over the lives of settlers and convicts alike. It was perhaps Macquarie's (and the settlement's) good fortune that Macarthur was compulsorily kept from the scene until 1817. When the latter did arrive back in New South Wales it was by then too late to put the clock back, although he retained a considerable nuisance value until his death in 1834.

The Hawkesbury, in its own way, had made the economic climate as unstable as did the worst efforts of the monopolists, and the instability of the political sphere served to enhance the economic fluctuations. Strong political leadership, such as that Macquarie had to give, did much to stabilise the economy of the Colony, whilst to the extent that man is able, he also in some measure tamed the Hawkesbury by reducing the extent to which it could wreak devastation on the settlers, their homes, their livestock and their harvested crops.

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(Because of its length, it has been necessary to condense Mr. Gill's paper considerably. The typescript omitted includes several pages of references. These can be consulted in a copy of Mr. Gill's paper, which is in the possession of the Oxley Memorial Library.—EDITOR.)