

8

Sir Richard Bourke

(3 December 1831 – 5 December 1837)

Frank Bongiorno

Imperial career

Richard Bourke has figured in NSW history as the epitome of the “good Governor”, recalled as a kindly friend to the people in their struggles against official tyranny and the greed and snobbery of an exclusive caste.¹ In this story, Bourke played the part of midwife in the birth of a modern, secular, democratic and free society. A reaction was perhaps inevitable: and as a new generation of academic historians cast a more sceptical eye over Australian colonial history after the Second World War, an exercise in the debunking of Bourke’s heroic reputation followed.² More recently, scholars have moved beyond any simple dichotomy of “good” and “bad” Governors, laying greater emphasis on Bourke’s Whig ideology, his symbolic performance of authority, the influence of Irishness, the Imperial span of his career, and the role of religion, kin and patronage networks in shaping its contours.³ Bourke’s service in New South Wales constituted just six years in a long life as a reforming landowner, soldier and Imperial administrator. While this chapter will necessarily emphasise his Australian career, in making explicit connections with other phases it will suggest that New South Wales of the 1830s belonged to a “British World” partly constituted by administrators like him as they pursued Imperial service across the globe.⁴

Irishman and soldier

Although of some import to his enemies in New South Wales, Australian historians have not quite known what to do with Bourke being an Irishman.⁵ So complete has been the identification of Irishness with Catholicism in the national historiography, that it has been easy simply to

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.

were not simply the captives of party spirit, and he also claimed to be guided by the wishes of the majority of colonists. These were steps in the direction of representative government and even popular sovereignty, for they at least registered the need for popular consent. But as a good Whig who believed in hierarchy and order, Bourke refused to unleash popular impulses against his local opponents, and he continued to claim scope for personal discretion and initiative within the bounds of justice and impartiality. He believed that he should not be hemmed in on every side by the self-interested obstruction of others. Richard Bourke's growing inflexibility in dealing with his local opponents was not a personal quirk, but came out of a larger understanding of his role, as a Christian ruler within the British Empire, to bring regularity, order and civilisation to a colonial wilderness.

Notes

- 1 Shaw, AGL, *Heroes and Villains in History: Governors Darling and Bourke in New South Wales*, SUP, Sydney, 1966, p 8.
- 2 Shaw, p 8.
- 3 Francis, M, *Governors and Settlers: Images of Authority in the British Colonies, 1820-60*, Macmillan, Houndmills and London, 1992, pp 83-97; Ridden, J, "Making Good Citizens": National Identity, Religion, and Liberalism among the Irish Elite, c 1800-1850", PhD Thesis, King's College, University of London, 1998; Laidlaw, Z, "Richard Bourke: Irish liberalism tempered by Empire", in Lambert, D, and Lester, A (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, CUP, Cambridge, 2006, pp 113-44.
- 4 Lambert, D and Lester, A, "Imperial spaces, Imperial subjects", in Lambert and Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives*, esp pp 21-4.
- 5 See, for instance, Clark, CMH, *A History of Australia, Vol II, New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1822-1838*, MUP, Melbourne, pp 183-5.
- 6 Ridden. The quotation is at p 10.
- 7 King, H, *Richard Bourke*, OUP, Melbourne, 1971, p 6. Unless otherwise stated, I have relied in this section on King, *Richard Bourke*, and her "Bourke, Sir Richard (1777-1855)", in Pike, D (ed), *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 1: 1788-1850*, MUP, Melbourne, 1977 [1966], pp 128-33, for details of Bourke's early life and career.
- 8 King, *Richard Bourke*, p 248.
- 9 On this point, see esp Laidlaw, "Richard Bourke".
- 10 Laidlaw, Z, *Colonial Connections 1815-45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2005, pp 21-7.
- 11 Ridden, pp 60, 167.
- 12 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 55-60; Keegan, T, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, Leicester University Press, London, 1996, p 96.
- 13 Ridden, pp 155-6; Keegan, pp 97-8, 100-2; King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 63-108.
- 14 Keegan, pp 101-2; King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 93-4.
- 15 King, H, "The Humanitarian Leanings of Governor Bourke", in *Historical Studies*, vol 10, no 37, November 1961, p 21; King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 84-6, 97-8, 110-13; Keegan, p 108.

- 16 Lester, A, "British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire", in *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 54, 2002, pp 33-4.
- 17 Peires, J, "Matiwane's Road to Mbholompo: A Reprieve for the Mfecane?", in Carolyn Hamilton (ed), *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, Witwatersrand University Press/University of Natal Press, Johannesburg and Scottsville, 1995, p 226.
- 18 Keegan, pp 103-4; King, "Humanitarian", p 24.
- 19 King, "Humanitarian", p 25.
- 20 Laidlaw, "Richard Bourke", p 126.
- 21 Cobbing, J, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", in *Journal of African History*, vol 29, 1988, p 501.
- 22 Lester, A, *Imperial Networks: Creating identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, p 41.
- 23 *Sydney Gazette*, 6.12.1831, pp 2-3; 8.12.1831, p 2; King, *Bourke*, p 166; Diary of Anne Bourke, 6.12.1831, typescript copy, pp 52-3, Bourke Family Papers, National Library of Australia (NLA), Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) M1863.
- 24 The petition, and Bourke's response, is reproduced in "Commentary", *Historical Records of Australia (HRA)*, series i, vol 16, pp 870-2. For an account, see Clark, *History*, vol II, pp 186-7.
- 25 Viscount Goderich to Bourke, 13.5.1832, *HRA*, series i, vol 16, p 646.
- 26 Bourke to Viscount Howick, 28.2.1832, *HRA*, series i, vol 16, p 543; Anne Bourke, Diary, 27.12.1831, p 65.
- 27 Bourke to Goderich, 6.2.1832, *HRA*, series i, vol 16, p 515.
- 28 Bourke to Howick, 28.2.1832, *HRA*, series i, vol 16, pp 542-3.
- 29 Bourke to Goderich, 6.2.1832, *HRA*, series i, vol 16, pp 515-17; King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 156-7.
- 30 Bourke to Right Hon EG Stanley, 2.10.1833, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, pp 236-8; King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 158-60.
- 31 Blair, SJ, "The Revolt at Castle Forbes: A Catalyst to Emancipist Emigrant Confrontation", in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol 64, pt 2, pp 89-107; Roberts, D, and Wiblin, S (eds), "The Castle Forbes Affair: Records of the 1833 Convict Revolt in the Hunter Valley New South Wales Australia", <<http://www.une.edu.au/chr/acf/cf1833/>>, accessed 12.7.2009; Clark, *History*, vol II, pp 204-6.
- 32 Shaw, *Heroes and Villains*, p 20.
- 33 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 161-2.
- 34 Blair, pp 90-1, 93, 96.
- 35 See, for instance, Mudie, J, *The Felonry of New South Wales*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1964 [1837].
- 36 Bourke to Stanley, 15.1.1834, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, pp 313-30; Shaw, *Heroes and Villains*, pp 12-15.
- 37 Bourke to Stanley, 15.1.1834, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, pp 324, 314.
- 38 Foster, SG "Convict Assignment in New South Wales", in *Push from the Bush*, vol 15, 1983, pp 35-48, 57-9.
- 39 Ridden, p 277.
- 40 Hammerton, AJ, "'Without Natural Protectors': Female Immigration to Australia, 1832-36", in *Historical Studies*, vol 16, no 65, October 1975, pp 557-61.
- 41 Bourke to Stanley, 21.1.1834, in *HRA*, series i, vol 17, p 344.
- 42 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 209-11.
- 43 Earl of Aberdeen to Bourke, 25.12.1834, in *HRA*, series i, vol 17, p 616.

- 44 Bourke to Howick, 28.2.1832, *HRA*, series i, vol 16, pp 544-5; Shaw, GP, *Patriarch and Patriot: William Grant Broughton 1788-1853: Colonial Statesman and Ecclesiastic*, MUP, Melbourne, 1978, p 65.
- 45 Bourke to Glenelg, 10.10.1835, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 154-8; Bourke, "Proclamation", 26.8.1835, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 201/247 ff 411 r + v, <<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/scan.asp?SID=287>>, accessed 12.6.2009.
- 46 Bourke to Glenelg, 14.6.1837, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, p 781.
- 47 "Statement of Mr George Langhorne in reference to the establishment of the Aboriginal Mission at Port Phillip in New South Wales and Victoria, in Miscellaneous Papers collected by Harry F Gurner (extract)", in Cannon, M (ed), *Historical Records of Victoria, Foundation Series (HRV), vol 2A, The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1939*, Victorian Government Printing Office, Melbourne, 1982, pp 187-8.
- 48 Roberts, SH, *The Squatting Age in Australia 1835-1847*, MUP, Melbourne, 1964 [1935], p 81.
- 49 Laidlaw, "Richard Bourke", p 127.
- 50 Langhorne, "Statement", p 187; Langhorne, GM, to La Trobe, CJ, 15.10.1839, in Cannon, M (ed), *HRV, vol 2B, Aborigines and Protectors 1838-1839*, Victorian Government Printing Office, Melbourne, 1983, pp 507-8.
- 51 Gascoigne, J, assisted by Curthoys, P, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia*, CUP, Cambridge, 2002, p 148.
- 52 Col Sec's draft memorandum, 9.12.1836, *HRV*, vol 2A, p 162.
- 53 Mr Justice Burton to Bourke, 22.11.1835, *HRV*, vol 2A, p 154.
- 54 Langhorne to Bourke, 26.11.1836, *HRV*, vol 2A, p 158. See also Col Sec's draft memorandum, 9.12.1836, *ibid*, p 162.
- 55 Col Sec's draft memorandum, 9.12.1836, *HRV*, vol 2A, p 164; Holden, GK, to Langhorne, 25.3.1837, *ibid*, p 171; Langhorne to La Trobe, 15.10.1839, *HRV*, vol 2B, p 508.
- 56 Proclamation dated 3.5.1836, published in the *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 18.5.1836, in Jones, P (ed), *HRV, vol 1, Beginnings of Permanent Government*, Victorian Government Printing Office, Melbourne, 1981, p 35.
- 57 Col Sec to John Montagu, 5.5.1836, in *HRV*, vol 1, p 36.
- 58 Laidlaw, "Richard Bourke", pp 129-30; King, *Richard Bourke*, p 192; Bourke to Glenelg, 15.11.1836 and Bourke to Glenelg, 25.1.1837, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 590-1, 656; Glenelg to Bourke, 26.7.1837 (extract), in *HRV*, vol 2A, pp 69-71.
- 59 Reece, RHW, *Aborigines and Colonists: Aborigines and Colonial Society in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s*, SUP, Sydney, 1974, p 53; Christie, MF, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*, SUP, Sydney, 1979, p 49.
- 60 Ridden, ch 2.
- 61 Bourke to Stanley, 30.9.1833, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, p 230.
- 62 Glenelg to Bourke, 30.11.1835, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, p 208; Shaw, *Patriarch and Patriot*, pp 77-8;
- 63 Bourke to Stanley, 30.9.1833, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, pp 225, 227.
- 64 Bourke to Stanley, 30.9.1833, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, pp 227-8.
- 65 Francis, p 95.
- 66 Shaw, *Patriarch and Patriot*, pp 106-8.
- 67 Atkinson, A, *The Europeans in Australia: A History, Volume Two: Democracy*, OUP, Melbourne, 2004, pp 192-3.
- 68 Bourke, R, to Bourke, D, 28.7.1836, quoted in Ridden, p 284.
- 69 Bourke to Stanley, 30.9.1833, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, p 230; Bourke to Stanley, 10.3.1834, *HRA*, series i, vol 17, pp 390-4.

- 70 Glenelg to Broughton, 1.12.1835; Broughton to Glenelg, 3.12.1835, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 698-701; King, *Richard Bourke*, p 231; Shaw, *Patriarch and Patriot*, pp 108-14.
- 71 Bourke to Rev John Jebb, 12.5.1832, Bourke Family Papers, NLA AJCP M1863.
- 72 Anne Bourke to Mary Jane Bourke, 1.7.1833, Bourke Family Papers, NLA AJCP M1863.
- 73 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 166-71.
- 74 Anne Bourke, Diary, 6.12.1831, p 53.
- 75 Anne Bourke, Diary, 6.12.1831, p 172; Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*, pp 67-8, 72-80.
- 76 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 174-6.
- 77 Foster, SG, "A Piece of Sharp Practice? Governor Bourke and the Office of Colonial Secretary in New South Wales", in *Historical Studies*, vol 16, 1975, pp 403, 405-6.
- 78 Bourke to Glenelg, 1.3.1836, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 333-41; Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*, pp 77-8.
- 79 Bourke to Glenelg, 28.2.1836, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 306-9; Francis, pp 93-4.
- 80 Bourke to Glenelg, 8.8.1836, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 469-70.
- 81 Bourke to Under-Secretary Hay, 1.2.1836, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 286-7; Atkinson, A, "The Parliament in the Jerusalem Warehouse", in *Push from the Bush*, no 12, May 1982, pp 81-4.
- 82 Bourke to Glenelg, 26.12.1835, Bourke to Glenelg, 3.2.1836, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 246-50, 288-9.
- 83 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 216-17.
- 84 Foster, "A Piece", pp 403-6, 412-13, 417-24; Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*, pp 77-8; Shaw, *Heroes and Villains*, p 27; Bourke to Glenelg, 8.8.1836, 16.9.1836; Bourke to McLeay, 30.8.1836; McLeay to Bourke, 2.9.1836; Bourke to Glenelg, 3.1.1837; GK Holden to McLeay, 26.12.1836; McLeay to Bourke, 29.12.1836, Bourke to McLeay, 30.12.1836, *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 475, 477-8, 543-4, 637-41.
- 85 Bourke to Glenelg, 2.12.1835; CD Riddell to Bourke, 7.11.1835; McLeay to Riddell, 25.11.1835; Riddell to McLeay, 26.11.1835; McLeay to Riddell, 1.12.1835; Bourke to Glenelg, 2.12.1835; Bourke to Glenelg, 26.12.1835; Glenelg to Bourke, 11.8.1836 (i); Glenelg to Bourke, 11.8.1836 (ii), *HRA*, series i, vol 18, pp 216-24, 250-1, 479-84; Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*, pp 78-9.
- 86 *Sydney Herald*, 4.12.1837; *Sydney Gazette*, 7.12.1837; *Australian*, 5.12.1837.
- 87 King, *Richard Bourke*, pp 244-54.