

Most visitors to the Parliament of New South Wales enter through the colonnaded verandah and hallway of the oldest part of the complex of buildings which make up Parliament House. Few fully realise that they have passed through one of the most significant heritage buildings in Australia and part of the nation's first permanent hospital - a hospital built by rum.

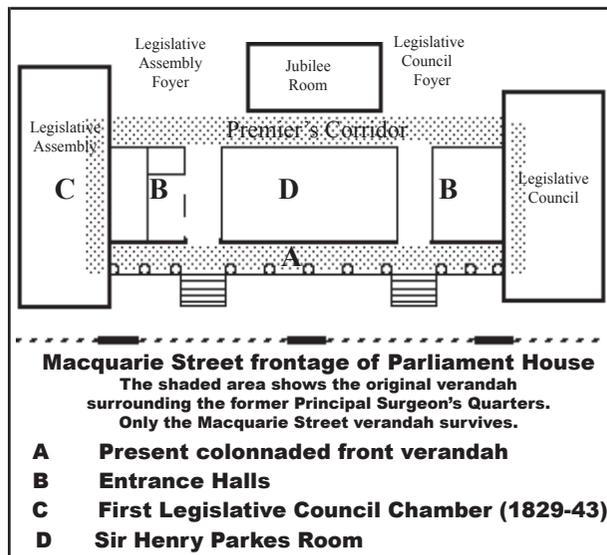
### ***The Rum Hospital***

The colonnaded central part of Parliament House, facing Macquarie Street was completed in 1816 as part of Governor Macquarie's "Rum Hospital". Upon his arrival in the Colony of New South Wales at the end of 1810, Macquarie discovered that the town's hospital was an affair of tents and temporary buildings established along what is now George Street in The Rocks area when the First Fleet arrived in 1788.

Macquarie set aside land on the western edge of the Governor's Domain for a new Hospital and created a new road - Macquarie Street - to provide access to it. Plans were drawn up but the British Government refused to provide funds to build the hospital.

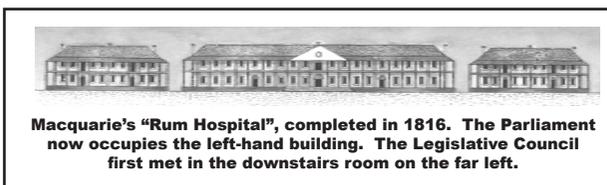
Consequently, Macquarie entered into a contract with a consortium of businessmen - Messrs Blaxcell, Riley and Wentworth - to erect the new hospital. They were to receive convict labour and supplies and a monopoly on rum-imports from which they expected to recoup the cost of the building and gain considerable profits. The contract allowed them to import 45,000 (later increased to 60,000) gallons of rum to sell to the thirsty colonists. In the event, the Hospital did not turn out to be very profitable for the contractors.

Upon completion, the now famous convict architect, Francis Greenway, was asked to report on the quality of the Hospital work. He condemned it, claiming that it "must soon fall into ruin". Short-cuts had been taken with the construction and there were weak joints in the structural beams, rotting stonework, feeble foundations, and dry rot in the timbers. Macquarie ordered the contractors to remedy these defects but many remained hidden away until the extensive restoration of the 1980s.



The new hospital had a large central building, which was the main hospital, and two smaller wings which were quarters for the Surgeons. The central building was replaced in 1894 by the present Macquarie Street buildings of Sydney Hospital, but the smaller wings remain. The former Mint, next to the Hyde Park Barracks, was originally the quarters for the Assistant Surgeon as well as a storage facility, and the northern wing, built for the Principal Surgeon, remains today as the colonnaded facade of Parliament House.

The first Surgeon to reside here was D'Arcy Wentworth, whose other connections with the building are interesting. First, he had been one of the three contractors who had built the Hospital under the "rum contract" with Macquarie, and secondly, his son, William Charles



Wentworth, explorer and journalist, became one of the most important figures in the development of Parliamentary democracy in New South Wales, and is regarded as the "father of the constitution". He is commemorated by artworks in Parliament House.

Another early surgeon to live here was Dr James Mitchell. His son, David Scott Mitchell, was born in the building in 1836. Subsequently, David Scott Mitchell developed an extraordinary collection of Australiana - books, paintings, manuscripts, documents and artefacts - which became the basis of the Mitchell Library collection now held next door in the State Library of New South Wales.

From 1829, when the first Legislative Council moved into the building, meeting in the northern downstairs room of the Surgeons' Quarters, until 1848, the Surgeons continued to occupy about one third of the space. The two Assistant Surgeons, being unhappy with the accommodation, wrote to Governor Macquarie complaining that, of the eight rooms, six were occupied by the Principal Surgeon and only one of the remaining two rooms were allotted to each of the Assistant Surgeons and that in addition to this the grounds behind the house were also almost entirely occupied by the Principal Surgeon.

Before the Legislature took over the entire building in 1852, rooms were sometimes occupied by government officials, such as the Principal Supervisor of Convicts.

A new Constitution, in 1843, increased the Legislative Council to 36 Members (two-thirds of them elected). A larger Chamber was needed and was constructed on the northern end of the building. This is the Chamber now used by the Legislative Assembly. The former Chamber was used as a committee room until taken over by the Parliamentary Library in 1850. In 1944 it was divided into rooms for the use of the two "lady members", but after both were defeated in the 1950 elections, the rooms returned to administrative use. Today, the room nearest the Legislative Assembly Chamber has been restored and renamed as, The Wentworth Room. It is used as an annex to the Chamber on sitting days and a meeting room on non-sitting days.

### ***The Sir Henry Parkes Room***

When the Legislative Council moved into its Chamber in 1829, some other parts of the building were taken over for offices, including part of the central ground floor rooms. Originally these were two rooms with a corridor running alongside the Macquarie Street wall. The rooms were later combined into the present single room. Originally the two entry halls had staircases leading to the upper floors. Amenities such as toilets and kitchen were located outdoors behind the building.

When restoration of the room was undertaken in the early 1980s, the hinged interior window shutters (nailed shut for decades) were discovered to be in almost “as new” condition, complete with the original paintwork. However, due to many breakages over the years, the original small glass panes that made up the windows, have been replaced with modern sheets of window glass.

From 1829-50 the rooms were mainly used for administrative purposes, housing the Clerk of the Executive and Legislative Councils and other public servants. For the period from 1831 to 1836, the Clerk, Edward Deas Thomson, had the added responsibility of curator of a small natural history museum – the first Australian museum. He delegated this responsibility to his messenger, William Galvin, and later also had the assistance of an assigned prisoner, John Roach, who had worked in London as a taxidermist. In 1836 the collection of stuffed birds and animals, botanical specimens and other curiosities moved out to become the nucleus of the Australian Museum in College Street.

After 1840, the new Parliamentary Library used part of the area but by 1852 had moved to the old Council Chamber. A Refreshment Room was located in the rooms until 1869 when a new Dining Room was erected behind the Rum Hospital Building and the expanding Library moved back into the room, staying until 1980.

### ***Twentieth Century Changes***

In 1906 a purpose-built reading room, the Jubilee Room, was completed for the library (see *History Bulletin 3*) and the old central rooms continued as the Parliamentary Librarian’s rooms and “Front Reading Room” of the

Library. At this time the back veranda of the original “Rum Hospital” was enclosed creating what is now the premier’s Corridor (*History Bulletin 6*). The Jubilee Room was erected behind the this area.

Like the rest of the historic buildings of the Parliament, the Chambers and the Jubilee Room (the original Surgeons’ Quarters) were renovated and restored, during the 1980s refurbishment with such contemporary touches as air-conditioning, additional power and phone lines added without obvious impact on the rooms themselves.

Today the room is used for small meetings and events. In 2001, as part of the Parliament’s commemoration of the Centenary of Australian Federation, the room was renamed the *Sir Henry Parkes Room* to honour the man often called the “Father of Federation”, and who, as Premier of NSW five times in the nineteenth century, was associated with the room.

The upstairs rooms of the former Surgeon’s Quarters are today the offices of Hansard, the Parliamentary Reporting Staff (*History Bulletin 7*).

In 1915 minor alterations were made on the Legislative Council side of the building, the old lower back verandah was removed and a Lounge and Ministers’ Rooms erected. This is now the Legislative Council Lobby. The western room of the old “Rum Hospital” is now the Legislative Council Members’ Room.

By 1984, restoration of the old Rum Hospital building was complete. Together with its “twin” the former Mint, it remains the oldest building in Macquarie Street and the oldest public building in the City of Sydney. It can fairly be said of the former Principal Surgeon’s Quarters that no other building in New South Wales has played a longer and more central part in the affairs of this State.



# PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

## HISTORY BULLETIN 1

### The Heritage Buildings of Parliament House



### The Sir Henry Parkes Room today, inside the former Rum Hospital building