

**Submission  
No 339**

## **INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

**Organisation:** Royal Australian Historical Society

**Date received:** 10 April 2018

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**Thompson Square, Windsor – its historical importance**  
**Statement to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into the**  
**Windsor Bridge Replacement Project**  
**From the Royal Australian Historical Society**

Thompson Square is of outstanding historical and heritage importance because it is the only original surviving foundation site for 18<sup>th</sup> century European settlement in Australia. This space, adjacent to the Hawkesbury River landing place, provided structure to an emerging village and farming settlement. Neither the settlement at Sydney Cove nor at Parramatta developed around a central focal space, despite the importance of their waterfront locations.

In January 1795 Acting Governor William Paterson authorised use of the area as the government precinct. Around its edges, a wharf and storehouse were built, followed by a granary and soldier's barracks. As the settlement developed other official buildings surrounded the precinct providing accommodation for officials (including the governor), a watch house, and later a school and a church. When Governor Macquarie formally proclaimed the town in 1810 the existing square was incorporated into the formal town plan as the first designed urban place. The investment of expensive drainage works confirmed its importance as a functioning hub of the settlement.

This was a space where ideas of authority were put into action by the powerful and were challenged by the convict and ex-convict population. Australia was established as a penal colony by the British in 1788. Yet how was this prison settlement to become a colony? The opportunities for former convicts were an essential component of building a colony. The significance of Thompson Square is physical evidence of the public recognition of the role of emancipated convicts in building this new society. It was from the storehouse and granary that the food for the convicts and officials was issued. It was from the stairway of the government granary that Irish rebel convict Philip Cunningham was publicly hanged in 1804 for his role in the Castle Hill convict uprising.

The name of this space – Thompson's Square – articulates the challenges and achievements of the freed convicts who became Australia's first European settlers. When ex-convict John Harris was illegally detained in 1798, he was held in the Windsor watch house at Thompson Square. He defended his right to free speech and treatment as a free man once his sentence had expired. Andrew Thompson was a convict who became a wealthy and influential colonist. He established a brewery, inn and store complex adjoining the government square, was appointed Chief Constable for the district and was a courageous man, helping rescue people in the floods of 1806 and 1809.

Macquarie's appointment of Thompson as a magistrate in 1810 was highly controversial. It was the first appointment of a former convict to the highest civic rank possible in the colony. Naming the square after Thompson, who died in 1810,

was a mark of personal honour and esteem and announced Macquarie's policy of recognising the achievements of emancipated convicts. It was the first public place formally named by the governor to honour the contributions to the nation of an ex-convict - physical evidence of a society in transition from a penal settlement to a free colony, one that valued the fair go, and judged individuals on what they did rather than who they were. This place demonstrates Macquarie's controversial policy in action.

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April 2018