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Australia’s First Job Descriptions and the Formalised Management of Convict Labour

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Abstract

Using archival documentation this paper argues Governor Macquarie developed a range of complex and sophisticated management policies, practices and strategies which were designed to motivate convict workers and to positively extract productive labour from them. These practices and strategies must be seen as a rational, systematic and largely humane approach to the management of convict labour. Indeed the range of policies adopted by Macquarie was surprisingly modern and nowhere is this more apparent than in his development of clear job statements and work regulations. In practice these operated, to varying degrees, in a similar manner to the modern Job Description. This paper will examine the regulations developed for the management of the turnpike road from Sydney to Parramatta, for the management of the Sydney produce market and for the management of the Sydney police. Each of these regulations provide insight and detail on how the various tasks and roles associated with the management of road, market and policing were to be performed. Indeed, the detail of the Police regulations was so great that the roles, duties and responsibilities of the whole hierarchy of policing jobs were outlined and specified in a manner that is explicitly akin to the modern Job Description. It is argued that this set of regulations and rules must be seen as the first Job Description in Australian history.

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Introduction

It is widely held that convict workers were lazy and that they had to be brutalised and terrorised into a clumsy and unsophisticated labour process (Clark 1971; Shaw 1966; McQueen 1970; Ward 1974). One social historian goes so far as to describe the colony of NSW as a Gulag in which work was a brutalised, irrational and unrewarding activity (Hughes 1988). In reality there is scope for arguing that it was industrialising Britain which was the Gulag while convict Australia, at least until 1822, represented a new and tantalisingly modern approach to work management (Pollard 1968). Implicit in conventional views is the notion that convicts were powerless in the face of the controls of the state and its managers and that convict workers therefore were some form of slave (Neal 1991). It is also widely assumed that the development of sophisticated human resource management practices like job descriptions is a mid 20th century phenomena and that colonial management was explicitly a simple, crude and unstructured activity (Wright 1995). In addition, while labour process theory offers a systematic framework for analysing the organisation of work, its broad historical sweep has largely dismissed all early labour management approaches as inherently ‘simple’ (Edwards 1979; Braverman 1974). In this way the paper contributes the argument that Labour Process theory is an excellent methodology for analysing the nature of work performance and control and for understanding the dynamics of the interaction between the managers and the performers of work at any given stage of development (Biernacki 1995). However, as a model for outlining or predicting the evolution of stages of labour process development it can be too prescriptive.

This is an ambitious paper in that it contests the idea that convict work was always inherently brutalised and clumsily controlled or even performed. It rejects out of hand the notion that the convict worker needed to be driven and terrorised to his/her work or that management practices and regulations were simple and unsophisticated (Nicholas 1989). It dismisses the view that there was no systematic structure to the way convict labour was organised or controlled and that there was an inherently simple model of labour management in convict NSW. Instead, it is argued here that the management of convict labour under the administration of Governor Macquarie displays a highly conscious and deliberate attempt to regulate, motivate and direct the labour of convicts in ways that were explicitly concerned with improving productivity. In doing this the Macquarie administration developed a range of sophisticated policies and practices such as improving convict supervision so as to tighten the span of control, reducing negative and increasing positive reward systems to improve convict motivation, rationally matching convict skills with convict employment, transforming work measurements into regular and detailed weekly reports and in the rational structuring and delineation of the roles and responsibilities of various convict jobs (MLA A2088 CY Reel 116; MLA A20860A2088). It is on this latter issue that this paper will concentrate; the development of the colonial job description.

What is a Job Description?
The Job Description is now commonly seen as an integral part of the overall function of Job Analysis which is essentially ‘the process of identifying the tasks, responsibilities and context of a role, and the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform them’ (Dessler, Griffiths, Lloyd-Walker 2004:142). The Job Description is now regarded as the job specific aspects rather than the qualities required of the individual job incumbent or candidate. In constructing a Job Description the document involved will identify the job in question; specify a job summary; identify tasks and responsibilities; outline the relationships between jobs, establish authority levels and standards of performance (Gilbreth 1973). In other words a Job Description describes ‘what the job is called, what is done, where it is done and how it is done’ (Byars & Rue 2004: 93).

Much modern textbook explanation of Job Descriptions concentrate on the many methods used to define and identify the components of a job (Bernardin & Russell 1998: 83-96). On the other hand, it should be noted that these methods are as much a reflection of the professionalisation of the HR practitioner as much as the development of a more systematic and formal approach to the management of labour (Fayol 1987). Professional HR managers or practitioners are not necessarily personally familiar with the nature and content of every job within an organisation. The various methods of observation are therefore replacements for the reliance on the familiarity supervisors and managers of businesses would once have had. Indeed, the person performing a job may still be the most familiar with his or her job tasks, roles and responsibilities. They may, in this respect know more than their manager or supervisor. This skewed job knowledge was such anathema to Taylor that Scientific Management was designed specifically to relocate job knowledge to management and the Job Description must be seen as a mechanism of this transference (Taylor 1967: 111; Braverman 1974: 85-123; Gilbreth 1973).

Clearly the Job Description is a logical, relatively straight forward document which reflects organisational knowledge of a specific job. It is a document also designed explicitly to communicate; specific job roles and details to new recruits and to the rest of the organisation. A Job Description tells a job incumbent where they fit into an organisation and it tells everyone else in the organisation where that specific job fits into the hierarchy of all other jobs (Woodward 1970: 23-25). The formal Job Description is also designed to improve the criteria for recruitment and selection of new staff, to help better define the effectiveness of job performance and to identify consequential HR functions such as training, discipline, termination or promotion and compensation. The Job Description is an integral part of modern Job Analysis and the Job Description is a simple but key feature in the formal structuring of job and task hierarchies within the modern organisation.

**Governor Macquarie’s Regulations**

On the 27 October 1810, just after taking up his appointment as Governor of NSW, Macquarie wrote to Earl Bathurst, Colonial Secretary, indicating his ‘intention to set out from...[Sydney] in the Course of Seven or Eight days to Visit and Inspect the different
Out-Settlements, and interior Parts of the Colony, in order to make myself better acquainted with the Nature of the Soils, and of the Progress hitherto made by the Settlers in the Cultivation and Improvement of the Country... (HRA VII: 347-348). This was by way of a tour of preparation and research on the state of the colony he had just taken over. Prudently Macquarie was intending to observe then reform and transform the colony. In reality his first burst of reformation came relatively early in his administration and this vision of the state of the colony and its needs were quickly addressed in a series of regulations and decrees. Among the first was the construction a new market and, more importantly, the regulation of its operations in October 1810. In this Regulation and Order not only did Macquarie outline the broad layout, functions and manner of operations of the market for livestock, grain and other products but he also appointed a ‘Clerk of the Market and his Assistants’ (HRA VII:413). In a series of detailed ‘Articles” or clauses of operation Macquarie outlined the ‘Rules and Regulations for the better Management and more regular Conducting of the Sales in the public Market in the Town of Sydney’. In achieving this the first article appointed a ‘competent person ... to be Clerk of the Market, with a Suitable Salary, and with an Assistant under him, both of whom shall have the power of Setting and Arranging all Matters tending to the Order, Regularity, Peace and Quietness of the Market’ (HRA VII: 413-414). In a number of the subsequent articles or clauses Macquarie set out some of the duties and roles of the Clerk and to some extent his Assistant(s). In doing this Macquarie was anticipating the more complex and more fully detailed Police work regulations which should now be seen as the first Australian attempt to create an explicit form of the modern job description.

Another example of the thorough and meticulous approach of Macquarie to the management of the assets and infrastructure of the colony was the detailed contract and agreement given to the contractors regulating the construction of the Sydney Hospital (HRA VII: 401-405). This building was often referred to as the Rum Hospital because the payment for its construction by Garnham Blaxcell, Alexander Riley and D’Arcy Wentworth was not calculated in cash but as a monopoly for the importation and sale of rum in the colony (Evatt 1965). What is of interest here is the detail of this document which not only set out the specifics of the transaction but also some detail on the actual work of the carpenters and joiners employed on the project. This was not a job description but this document illustrates Macquarie’s more systematic and documented approach to the management of a project and the labour employed in it.

In March of 1811 Macquarie also set out the regulations for the management of the turnpike road from Sydney to Parramatta, the two chief settlements at this time. What is of most importance here is the appointment of a Gate Keeper and an assistant and the brief outline of their duties in the management of the road (HRA VII: 417-420). Again this is not a job description for these positions although there are some explicit and even more implicit notions about their roles and activities contained in the document. On the other hand this is further evidence of the bureaucratic approach Macquarie brought to the management of the colony. As a military officer in the Royal Engineers, Macquarie would have completely understood the chain of command and the separation and delineation of the authority and roles of each of the ranks within the British Army. It was a bureaucratic organisation. As early as the seventeenth century the British Army had relied on the development of formal, if sometimes idiosyncratic, manuals outlining the responsibilities of various ranks. The Earl of Marlborough was also instrumental in reforming the army to reflect clearer and more rational lines of command.
and action (Young & Lawford 1970: 14-15; 25-29). Similar clarity of the role and duties of the various ranks in the Royal Navy had also evolved to the point of job descriptions by the time Macquarie was appointed Governor (Rodger 2004). Macquarie was therefore part of a tradition of bureaucratic documentation, of formality and clarity of role and responsibility. In other words, he understood the purpose and possibility of the written job description and in his administration the imperative he gave to this is more apparent and more visionary than any Governor before or after him.

**Governor Macquarie’s Police Job Descriptions**

The first unambiguous and detailed job description in Australian history was contained in the Regulations for the Police of Sydney in 1811. This in-depth and complex document was produced by Macquarie in order to outline the roles of individual police officers, to delineate the levels of responsibilities as well as make clear the structures of command. While these were ostensibly about the reformation and rationalisation of the function of policing in Sydney they were, in practice, much more than a law and order issue. It is argued here that the detailed descriptions of each of the jobs created or clarified by Macquarie were in fact job descriptions. They were part of an imperative to control and manage the convict labour process. That social historians have never reflected on this work related aspect of Macquarie’s bureaucracy is not remarkable: social historians have rarely brought to their analysis the theories or practicalities of the management of workers. It is only with the tools provided by human resources and industrial relations and with the focus of Labour Process Theory that the practical implications of Macquarie’s details make sense. They are in fact are part of Macquarie’s more systematic organisation and control of convict labour. They are not merely expressions of personality or previous occupation. They are a methodical reform and they are designed to make convict labour more productive. Indeed it is efficiency rather than punishment that motivates Macquarie in the writing of his Job Descriptions.

In the reorganisation of policing in Sydney Macquarie divided the town into Five Districts and created a range of new or more clearly delineated police positions. These are set out in the diagram below. From this it is apparent that Macquarie created or reformed the police hierarchy into the positions of Police Superintendent, Chief Constable, District Constable, Night Constable and Ordinary Constable (c/w Tobias 1972: 268-275). In explaining and detailing the roles and responsibilities of each of these functionary positions Macquarie was in fact writing their job descriptions. A few years later it seems the Superintendent and the Chief Constable were both given assistants (HRA VIII: 190-191). The Assistant Superintendent of Police was a reasonably responsible position for the incumbent, Robert Jones, was paid £60 per annum in 1814. On the other hand the role of the Assistant Chief Constable was clearly less complicated and presumably more menial because the incumbent in 1814, William Thorne, was paid the convict wage of £10 per annum (HRA VIII: 190-191). Assistants are not however, part of the hierarchy of 1811.
Diagram 1

Hierarchy of Command of Sydney Police, 1811

- Police Superintendent
- Chief Constable
- District Constable
  - Night Constable
  - Night Constable
  - Ordinary Constable
  - Ordinary Constable
  - Ordinary Constable
  - Ordinary Constable
The head of policing was the Superintendent who had ‘the general ordering and Control over all Constables’ and was responsible for overseeing the whole of the policing operations (HRA VII: 410). It was to him, for example, that all of the police reports were brought and any reports on the behaviour or effectiveness of the constables. The Superintendent appears to have been paid £100 per annum which was amongst the highest in the government bureaucracy at that time (HRA VII: 668). However this was not simply a managerial role for the Superintendent was required to be a Magistrate. There was a curious lack of separation between his powers for supervising the police and his role as judge. The Superintendent was in command of the police while at the same time, as a Magistrate with ‘the power of punishing every Prisoner’ by ‘publick [sic] Whipping, not exceeding Fifty Lashes, and also by confining such persons to Hard Labour for any time not exceeding Thirty Days’ he was in a position of judgement (HRA VII:410).

Interestingly, in Macquarie’s first draft of these regulations the power of the Superintendent and the police in general was to fall with equanimity on convict and free citizen alike. Any person suspected of misconduct or actually charged with an offence could be subjected to a public flogging or hard labour. It was only on the objection of Earl Bathurst, Colonial Secretary for the Colonies, that this was modified to fall less powerfully on the free settler (HRA VII: 666). Nevertheless the Superintendent's broad powers essentially remained intact in that he was required to ‘Carefully Keep a Book’ on all those charged and to ‘keep a Register, in which he shall enter the Names and places of Abode of every Housekeeper in the Town of Sydney’ (HRA VII: 411). He was also able to record ‘the Names of their Children and Servants, and also the Names of such Strangers or other persons as shall be resident with them’ (HRA VII: 412). The control the state exerted over the citizens, free and convict, of Sydney was highly significant at this time and contrasts with the much fewer public controls over the citizens of British towns. In this way it is apparent that the controls of Macquarie were penal in inspiration and purpose although the world was, in fits and starts, later to emulate him (Tobias 1972). Indeed, Macquarie’s policing controls now have a strong modern flavour to them.

The Chief Constable was the more strategic manager of policing in Sydney and was paid £50 (HRA VIII: 190-191). He was in charge of all five Police Districts and for the rostering and management of the District Constables attached to each although he did not directly control the rostering and supervision of District staff. On the other hand he was required to deal with any constables whose conduct was reported to him by the District Constable. In this way he had disciplinary functions. In practice he seems to have been more the direct intermediary between the constables and the Superintendent and was required ‘to do his utmost ... to preserve Publick [sic] Decorum’ (HRA VII:409). In doing this he was required to compile all the written reports given to him from each District and present them to the Superintendent and to oversee the operation of licensed premises, prevent the operation of houses of ill repute and keep up to date the register of convicts (HRA VII:409).
The next and probably the most important position within the Macquarie hierarchy of police was the District Constable. He was both a direct supervisor of all subordinate constables as well as, when needed, an operational constable himself. In other words he had both managerial and operational duties. As can be seen from the diagram of Police in Sydney in 1811, the District Constable was in charge of a District of Sydney and had six subordinates below him. He rostered constables to the various positions and duties and directly supervised their conduct giving ‘them such Instructions as [he] may deem necessary’ (HRA VII:407). In maintaining discipline he had to rely on his official power to ‘report every Instance of Disobedience, Misconduct, or other Negligence in the Constables under him to the Chief Constable’ (HRA VII:407). In supervising the constables he would have observed their activities on patrol and in his regular visits ‘to the Watch-house of his District’ (HRA VII:407). The District Constable was also directly responsible for conveying any prisoners in his custody to the Superintendent. The District Constables were required to collect the written reports of the Night Constables at 7 O’Clock each morning and take these to the Chief Constable. Indeed, the District Constables were also required to ‘attend at a certain hour every Afternoon at the House of the Chief Constable to hear and receive such other Instructions as the Chief Constable may give’ (HRA VII:407). In an 1814 Enclosure on salaries paid to persons engaged in government positions it seems the District Constable was paid ₤10 per annum, which was the normal convict salary (HRA VIII: 190-191).

Interestingly convicts were employed in this position even though it carried significant responsibility.

The Night Constables were the charge officers. They ran the District station or watch house and they received whatever prisoners were brought in. In this capacity they were required to process those charged with offences, record all details of their offence, particulars and behaviour. They were also responsible for the proper care and restraint of each prisoner and for handing him or her over to the District Constable in the morning. The Night Constable also wrote a report of the operations of their district watch house and was required to hand this to the District Constable by 7 O’Clock every morning. A Night Constable was paid ₤10 per annum, the convict salary, making him almost certainly a convict.

Armed with a cutlass and a rattle the Ordinary Constables patrolled the streets and called the time at every half hour interval. They were expected to ‘stop every prisoner and suspicious person who was out after the curfew of 9 O’Clock and arrest them if they had no good reason for their nocturnal wanderings (HRA VII: 408). These prisoners were to be taken to the watch-house and left in charge of the Night Constable. The Ordinary Constables were given the ‘discretionary power of Calling at the house where prisoners reside or any other Suspicious Houses, at any time during the Night’ (HRA VII:408). In the event of ‘any fray, Riot or Disturbance’ the Ordinary Constables were to ‘do their utmost to restore the peace’ and if the emergency was beyond their individual capacity to resolve they were expected to ‘Spring their Rattles’ which was a call for assistance to all other patrolling constables (HRA VII:408). All were expected to give assistance. In patrolling the streets the Ordinary Constables were required to check the security of houses and government offices or buildings to ensure they were locked and undisturbed. They were also required to enforce the licensing laws for public houses and were given the authority to enter houses they thought to be of ill repute. Naturally, they were also required to pursue any one they thought to be a burglar or housebreaker.
or ‘Riotous and disorderly’ (HRA VII:409). Ordinary Constables were serving convicts and as such were paid an annual salary of £10.

This document is a Job Description because it provided considerable detail on the specific duties and responsibilities of each person appointed to one of these positions. It was not written in the style of the modern verb dominated job description document but this is a minor if not irrelevant difference. It was a Job Description because it established the hierarchy of command, made clear reporting channels and mechanisms, established starting and finishing times (at least for the lowlier positions) and made a distinction between regular duties and those which might have arisen from time to time. The document was intended to guide the behaviour of each of the incumbents and to allow each person to understand where they fitted into the chain of command. It also allowed a more formal and structured degree of scrutiny of each of the constables and so allowed more objective criteria for judging performance and effectiveness. Finally, by formalising policing duties and functions this document added to the authority and status of the positions. This document had a range of purposes but the most central was guiding the activities of the hierarchy of constables.

Conclusion

The management of convict labour during the Governorship of Lachlan Macquarie was systematically organised, rationally motivated and relied on elaborate controls and mechanisms of administration. It was not motivated by the penal imperatives that guided the administrations of his successors, Governors Brisbane and Darling (Molesworth 1838). The motives behind the Macquarie approach were productivity, order and a reformation of character through effective and rewarding labour. In looking at the Macquarie approach it is easy to think it relatively benign. There is certainly no sign that his administration created a Gulag. There is considerable evidence of convict resistance to aspects of Macquarie’s administration and signs that he modified his regime of labour controls in response to convict protest (Hirst 1983; Robbins 2000). The labour process was not created by Macquarie in isolation. It was created by the interactions and behaviours and attitudes of the convicts as well by management. Convict resistance was both covert and overt while in the majority of cases there seems to have been a strong degree of acquiescence or in the words of Michael Burawoy (1979), a manufacture of consent. Although few if any convicts left documentation confirming this attitude there was certainly none of the widespread and desperate discontent so evident in the late 1820s and early 1830s (White 1995). The endemic spread of bushranging so evident during Governor Darling’s administration is widely regarded as an expression of convict resistance and hostility to his harsh rules and work organisation; a system motivated mostly to inflict pain and punishment. There was none of this desperation under Macquarie. His Goal Gang, for example, only contained 100 men in 1820 whereas under Darling 1,600 men worked in chains or were incarcerated in penal stations like Norfolk Island (CO201/119 Reel 106-107; HRA XV:386). In any case, the British government thought Macquarie’s administration of convicts to be too benign and the in-depth report it established under Commissioner Thomas Bigge (1822) came to a similar conclusion.
The point though is not that Macquarie’s administration can be seen even today as more lenient than the administrations of those who followed him. It is the purpose of this leniency that is critical. Macquarie may have been more egalitarian than most governors and he may even have been personally a humanitarian but he was still an authoritarian ruler with sweeping powers (Ellis 1958). In any case his personality is not essentially why the convict labour process was so distinctively benign and productive. Macquarie wanted to transform Sydney into a vibrant and attractive city and NSW into a peaceful and productive colony. To do this he needed to build infrastructure. Building this required a compliant if not cop-operative workforce which went about its labour in a productive and reasonably efficient manner. To create such a workforce when there was a shortage of labour probably did need a personality such as Macquarie’s but more than that it needed the rationality of his military engineering background. As a consequence Macquarie created a series of policies and practices that ensured a rational allocation and control of convict workers.

The regulations outlined in this paper are illustrative rather than a comprehensive list of the regulatory imperatives and innovations of Governor Macquarie. In this way the creation of job descriptions should not be seen as an aberration but as a logical consequence of Macquarie’s background, his objectives and of the colonial circumstances within which he worked. It should also be noted that the Police Job descriptions of 1811 were not unique. As already indicated there was sufficient detail guiding the roles of the Clerk of the market in regulations governing the operations of the new Sydney market of 1811 to give it the status of a quasi job description. In addition, Macquarie wrote an even more comprehensive and detailed descriptions of the role, functions and responsibilities of the Superintendent of Government Stock in 1813 (Robbins 2006). There is also some evidence that under Macquarie at least one gang was given a fairly detailed outline of its duties (Bigge 1822).

There can be no doubt now that the convict labour process of colonial NSW was not simple and brutal until it was deliberately made so by government policy and actions after 1822. There is now overwhelming evidence that during Macquarie’s administration the convict labour process between 1810 and 1821 was elaborately complex and rationally structured. The development of clear job descriptions for a range of work roles during Macquarie’s administration is further evidence of a deliberate bureaucratic system of labour management. Under Macquarie the convict labour process was relatively benign because it was designed both as a response to the imperative to extract labour effort and as a concession to the aspirations of convict workers.

This paper argues the need to better understand the changing nature of the administration of the public labour of convict workers. Convict labour before 1822 was not unstructured and simplistic and nor was it similar to a slave labour process. Indeed, this study suggests that the development and application of such modern management strategies as the Job Description are not simply a 20th century phenomena. Logically it may be that any large scale administration of a labour process will demand formalised HR functions and structures and that modern management theory or practice is not as modern as normally considered. However, while this is self evident in an analysis of the Macquarie convict administration this assertion needs to be further explored by the systematic analysis of the operations of other colonial enterprises such as the Australian Agricultural Company, the Burns Philp Company, the colonial railway enterprises and other large-scale colonial manufacturing and rural organisations. In this way it will be
apparent whether the bureaucratic labour process approach developed under Macquarie was unique or part of a wider but neglected aspect of colonial labour management.

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