



Remembering the Appin Massacre

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EMMA ALBERICI, PRESENTER: A little known massacre of Aboriginal men, women and children will be remembered this weekend, 200 years to the day after it happened. The killings on the outskirts of Sydney were ordered by one of the most respected leaders in the early period of European settlement, Governor Lachlan Macquarie. The Aboriginal descendants of the victims have struggled for recognition of the event and are still trying to repatriate the remains.

Jason Om reports.

JASON OM, REPORTER: Governor Macquarie's likeness overlooks the famous street that bears his name. A military man and hailed as a visionary, he is one of Australia's most celebrated colonial leaders.

ELISE EDMONDS, CURATOR, NSW STATE LIBRARY: I think when Macquarie came, he really had these grand visions of what Sydney could become, so he set about this whole notion of city planning and city design. Of course, then he went out and actually planned these other towns out - further out into the settlement, like Windsor, Pitt town.

JASON OM: But there's one key decision Governor Macquarie made that still rouses bitter resentment in the Aboriginal community today and it's written in his papers held by the NSW State Library.

EXTRACT OF LACHLAN MACQUARIE'S PAPER: "I have this day ordered three separate military detachments to march into the interior and remote parts of the colony for the purposes of punishing the hostile natives by clearing the country of them entirely and driving this them across the across the mountains."

MELISSA JACKSON, CURATOR, INDIGENOUS SERVICES: There was the proclamation by Macquarie to say that any man, woman or child that these regiments came upon, they could be killed and strung up in the trees.

EXTRACT OF LACHLAN MACQUARIE'S PAPER: "In the event of the natives making the smallest show of resistance or refusing to surrender when called upon to do so, the officers commanding the military parties have been authorised to fire on them to compel them to surrender. Hanging up on trees the bodies of such natives as may be killed on such occasions in order to strike the greater terror into the survivors."

JASON OM: Around this time, white settlers were spreading across the land and often clashed with the Aboriginal people. Governor Macquarie's proclamation was aimed at stopping attacks on the colonists.

ELISE EDMONDS: This was occurring over a number of years. These skirmishes and killings and damaged property, stealing food, et cetera. And so settlers were shooting and killing, wounding Aboriginal people and likewise Aboriginal people were coming and revenging and also killing white people.

JASON OM: Near Appin, south of the colony, the camp of Aboriginal people was to meet its deadly fate. The massacre was recorded by Captain James Wallace.

ELISE EDMONDS: They came upon an encampment and he reports that he heard a child's cry and so realising that there was a group of Aboriginals there, we understand that they basically charged in or came in and started firing at this group, and so you can imagine at 1 am, there was a lot of confusion and surprise and we understand that of course men, women and children were killed in this melee. There were guns being fired, people were being killed and also because of the panic, many of them ran and ended up falling over the edge into this gorge.

The official count was that 14 people were killed, including women and children, but that's the official count. We just don't know how many others had ran over the cliff as well.

MELISSA JACKSON: There was a list of people that Governor Macquarie said were guilty of these payback by Aboriginal people, but it's not clear whether any of those people on that list were part of the 14 people.

JASON OM: 200 years on, a memorial plaque rests not far from the original massacre site, but it's only in the past decade or so that the Aboriginal descendants have gathered here to remember the victims.

GLENDY CHALKER, DHARAWAL PEOPLE: Their spirits are still there. They are still there, and I can feel them when I go through there, and not everybody gets that feeling, but I certainly get it every time I go through there.

It can get emotional, and I get tingles in my skin. Yeah, and knowing what's gone on there sort of adds to that as well.

JASON OM: At an exhibition at Campbelltown, Aboriginal and Canadian artists have reflected on the Appin massacre and Canada's only dark colonial past. One piece draws parallels between the Appin killings and the way war is commemorated.

GENEVIEVE GRIEVES, ARTIST: It's basically reinvokes around flower that you find all across Australia called fringe lily and in Dharawal culture it has a meaning of the need to mourn and remember the past. So it's a really apt flower for this exhibition and this story.

I have a purple poppy representing the fringe lily that audiences can place on the wall, and the reason I'm using this symbolism of poppy is pretty - probably pretty clear. You know, Australians remember a lot of wars with the symbolism of that poppy, but they don't necessarily remember the wars that happened here, and these massacres aren't generally commemorated. There are no memorials to them. They're

really invisible in the landscapes, so it's just amazing to see this community come together and the Campbelltown Arts Centre to actually bring these stories to light. It has to happen a lot more.

JASON OM: The Dharawal people are currently working with the National Museum of Australia to repatriate the remains of the victims. Three skulls have been held there since the 1990s.