To The Editor of the Australian
Francis Greenway’s Letter of Quotations

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Abstract
In January 1825, the architect Francis Greenway wrote a letter to the editor of The Australian newspaper in which he quoted two letters he had previously written to Governor Lachlan Macquarie more than ten years earlier. The first of these letters, written in 1814, quoted words by the British architect Sir William Chambers. Within the quotation from Chambers was embedded yet another quotation, purportedly from Apelles, a Greek artist from the 4th Century BCE. The letter from Greenway to the editor introduces us to a list of characters both explicit and implicit; Greenway, Macquarie, Chambers and Apelles, but also the editor of the newspaper and the wider newspaper reading population of the mid-1820s. Quotation gives voice once again to the person quoted but concepts of quotation and concepts of source are intertwined. Greenway’s letter opens up an examination of letters to the editor as a means of discourse.
Varieties of Quotations

The word “quotation” can refer to a variety of situations that at their core involve repeating what someone else has said or done. In textual documents, it is used where an extract from one author's work is inserted, into the work of another. This paper will explore this type of quotation through a letter written by one of Australia’s earliest professional architects, Francis Greenway, to Major-General Lachlan Macquarie, then the Governor of New South Wales. Although the letter under discussion was originally written in 1814, Greenway quoted his own letter in a letter to the editor of The Australian newspaper in 1825. This leads to an examination of letters-to-the-editor as a means of architectural discourse in early Australia.

Letters are frequently personal but they are unlikely to be private. The central purpose of a letter is to communicate with others. They may be intended to be read by one individual or by many, or they maybe, as is the case with letters to the editor, intended for the public at large. Francis Greenway’s letter that is the subject of this paper was originally intended for one person, Governor Macquarie, but was later revised to make it available to the wider audience of the newspaper reading public.

Jürgen Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, sees the advent of letters to the editor in Britain and Europe in the early eighteenth century as an early expansion of the public sphere, whereby personal letters were made public in order to provide information that was useful to trade. This extended the discussions held in the coffee houses, beyond the physical buildings and those who frequented them, to a wider literate population.

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen draws on Habermas to explore the role of letters to the editor in journalism and democracy primarily in America. In her book *Journalists and the Public*, Wahl-Jorgensen devotes a chapter to the history of letters to the editor noting that the first English language newspaper The Daily Courant, first published in Britain on March 11, 1702, claimed that it gave no comment or conjectures but rather relied on factual information from contributors. By contrast, other early British newspapers, such as The Daily Spectator, sort to establish a political discourse, making contributions of critical opinion the centrepiece of the newspaper.

There is a similar contrast in early Australian newspapers between The Sydney Gazette and The Australian. The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser was the first newspaper printed in the colony. It set out its aims in an “Address” on the front page of the first issue (figure 1) to be a “source of solid information”, and “no channel to political discussion”. It began as an official publication of the New South Wales government and only ceased to be censored by the government in 1824, the year before Greenway’s letter was published by The Australian. The Sydney Gazette began as a weekly publication of official notices and general orders “under close official supervision and censorship”. The first issue on March 5 1803 unsurprisingly contained no letters to the editor but on the second page a notice advised “correspondents” that “two slip boxes will be put up, in the course of the ensuing week...for the reception of such articles of information as persons who are possessed of the means may think proper to contribute”. This was in effect a call for letters to the editor and the letters came but only those that passed the scrutiny of the government observer were published.

To state the obvious, letters had a greater importance in the nineteenth century than they do today. To put communication technology of the time into context, the telephone, the photograph, and the fountain pen had not yet been invented in 1825. People wrote with quills, steel nibs did not come into common use until the 1830s. Additionally, a letter depends on literacy and it is likely that only about 50% of the population were literate in Australia in 1825. The sending and receipt of letters also relies on a delivery system and New South Wales did not have a regular postal service until 25th April 1809. Even then, the first “letter carriers” did not begin delivering letters around the town of Sydney until
1828, hence the need for the “slip boxes” set up by the Sydney Gazette to gather its letters to the editor.

By 1825 *The Gazette* was run by Robert Howe the government printer and it began to be issued twice a week. Howe had become a staunch Methodist and morality and religion became the main themes of the paper. Howe's religious outlook coupled with the Gazette’s traditionally government stance opened it up to attack due to its “servility”. As Phyllis Jones has noted, this did not cause *The Gazette* financial harm whereas *The Australian* and *The Monitor* who were critical of the government were fined and on occasion editors were imprisoned. The Gazette had refused to publish some of Greenway’s submissions. One letter of Greenway’s that *The Gazette* did publish, related to the courthouse in response to a paragraph that had appeared in the paper previously and was critical of the design, one of Greenway’s. At the conclusion to the letter Greenway notes that the editor of *The Gazette* had previously objected to his explaining and publishing documents for the public, “for reasons best known to himself”.

![Figure 1: The first page of the first issue of The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser Saturday March 5 1803.](image)

In contrast to *The Gazette*, *The Australian* Newspaper of 1825, which is not the same as *The Australian* today, was prepared to publish Greenway’s letters. *The Australian* newspaper was published in Sydney between 1824 and 1848. It was a weekly newspaper founded by Robert Wardell and William Charles Wentworth and began circulation in October 1824. In the first issue the editor proclaimed, “A free press is the most legitimate, and, at the same time, the most powerful weapon that can be employed to annihilate influence, frustrate the designs of tyranny, and restrain the arm of oppression”. The paper voiced liberal views often opposing the Governor.

Because letters have emerged directly from the writer, they bring us close to who the person was and the events that they were recording. They have immediacy and it is tempting to see them as recording the facts impartially as they happened, but letters only present the past from one individual’s point of view. Letters to the editor are intentionally public communications and therefore can be contrived, as
we will see with Greenway, to justify the writer’s behaviour or opinions and even to act as an advertisement for their services. In this regard it is significant to note that whilst it was common for authors of letters to the editor to use a pseudonym, Greenway signed his own name, although he may have also sent letters under a pseudonym.

If a letter is written sometime after the events it recounts, there is a danger that the content is framed with the knowledge of hindsight and as Ellis has noted of Greenway,

… no genius of Mr Greenway’s romantic calibre could be fully satisfied with a tale of such unadorned pettiness. He therefore, many years afterwards, provided his own version of his rise in which he harnessed the primal forces of the universe to his specific actions and adventures.

He goes on to say that “Mr. Greenway told many things which the Governor and others appeared to have neglected to write down”. Many of Greenway’s accounts of his own life and his interactions with Macquarie and others were written some time after the actual events occurred. It is perhaps significant that Greenway’s letters to The Australian seem to pause after July 1825 following a letter to the editor from James Smith the favoured builder of Reverend Samuel Marsden in which Smith claims that Greenway’s view of events “bear strong features of misconceived representation.”

Let us turn now to Greenway’s letter, but to which version? There are three versions of this letter that we know about, each show some variations. One version is contained in the Colonial Secretaries Correspondence, held by the State Records Authority of New South Wales (figure 2). This is likely to be Greenway’s original letter, dated July 27 1814 and was written prior to Greenway being appointed to the position of Colonial Architect.

Figure 2: Letter from Greenway to Macquarie, 27 July 1814. NRS 905 4-1752 reel 6052 p85.

A second version forms part of the Greenway Papers held by the State Library of New South Wales and the third version was part of the letter that was sent by Greenway to The Australian Newspaper and published on Thursday the 20th January 1825. The letter from the newspaper is particularly useful as it provides us with some revealing context. Greenway’s letter in The Australian begins as follows;
TO THE EDITOR OF THE AUSTRALIAN
Sir, ENCLOSED I send copies of two letters, for insertion in your Independent Paper. One Written to Governor Lachlan Macquarie before I accepted the office of Colonial Architect; the other on my acceptance of that office, as a ground work of some necessary explanation to the Government and the Public, feeling it a duty I owe them, as well as myself, for circumstancs that occurred during this administration, as well as that of Governor Macquarie. Your obedient Servant, F. H. GREENWAY.

The first thing Greenway does in his introduction is to acknowledge the newspapers independence. This is an important point for him because he wants to explain, even to justify, events that happened under the administration of two different Governors. This letter is certainly "political discussion", not something The Gazette would be likely to publish.

Following his acknowledgement of the newspaper’s independence, Greenway then goes on to provide reasons for his letter. He wants to explain to the Government and the Public events that happened when Macquarie was Governor and also under the current administration of Major-General Thomas Brisbane. But why does he need to do this? He feels he owes it to the public he says, but also to himself. Greenway had been dismissed from Government service in 1822, he was fighting to hold onto the house that he had been allowed to live in with his family and he had few private commissions. He wants to remind the public and potential clients that he still exists, how important he is and how skilled an architect. In short, he wants to justify himself in the eyes of the public.

Greenway’s letter to The Australian continues with a version of his letter to Macquarie in 1814:

To his Excellency Lachlan Macquarie, Esq. Governor, &c. &c.
I have sent to your Excellency, according to my promise, my portfolio. Among the designs, there is one for a market-house and town hall, which would answer the purpose required, with a little alteration. I will immediately copy the drawing your Excellency requested me to do, although it is rather painful to my mind, as a professional man, to copy a plan of a building that has no claim to classical proportion or character.

We need to remind ourselves at this point that Greenway in 1814 is a convict. Yet he is telling the governor, the King’s representative in Australia (King George III was on the throne in England) that the architectural plan the governor has selected is poor, implying that the governor has bad taste and that copying such a plan is painful to Greenway…yes, the convict, who has been sentenced to seven years transportation for forgery in lieu of a death sentence.

In the first version of the letter, the one that was sent to Macquarie, Greenway had written that it was “painful to my feelings” but crossed out the word feelings and replaced it with “painful to my mind”. As McGregor has pointed out, the word “feelings”, although crossed through in the letter, shows the emotional state Greenway was in when writing. He does not seem to be thinking at all about the status of the person he is writing to or the possible consequences of his actions. Perhaps this is the reason Greenway is frequently lauded as the first “Australian” architect, his lack of respect for authority and his being seemingly unaware of status.

Greenway goes on:

I must here take leave to quote the elegant treatise on architecture, of Sir William Chambers. “Let it not, however, be imagined, that building merely, considered as heaping stone upon stone, can be of great consequence, or reflect honour either on nations or individuals. Materials in architecture are like words in phraseology; having separately but little power; and they may be so arranged as to excite, ridicule, disgust, or even contempt;
yet when combined with skill and expressed with energy, they actuate the mind with unbounded sway. An able writer can move even in rustic language; and the masterly disposition of a skilful artist will dignify the meanest materials; while the weak efforts of the ignorant, render the costliest enrichments despicable. To such the compliment of Appelles may justly be applied, who, seeing a picture of Venus magnificently attirel, said to the operator: "Friend, though thou has not been able to make her fair, thou hast certainly made her fine."

What does Greenway intend by the use of this quotation from William Chambers? He is quoting the King’s own architect to support his position. So perhaps Greenway is aware of status after all. He quotes Chambers to display his knowledge. He is trying to impress on Macquarie that he knows more about architecture than Macquarie. Greenway is implying that his own thinking on architecture is in line with that of the King of the British Empire.

Greenway then proceeds to try to persuade the governor of the benefits of his own design on classical principles:

An elegant and classical pile of building of either of the orders in architecture, may often be carried into effect by an able architect possessing integrity, for a less sum of money than the meanest production of pretenders whose only object, is to gain as much as they can by those who are weak enough to trust them. It should therefore be seriously considered, before any plan is hastily entered into, on all public occasions as well as private, or they may have, when too late, serious reasons to regret such hasty and inconsiderate proceedings. Your Excellency having now an opportunity of carrying into effect a public building of one of the Greek orders, without it being attended with more expense, perhaps not so much as a building that would reflect little credit upon the promoters, that you will assent to my proceeding accordingly: and if your Excellency will grant me the power as an architect, to design and conduct any public building or work, I will exert myself in every way to do your Excellency credit as a promoter and encourager of the most useful art to society; which will add to the comforts of the Colony, as well as the dignity of the Mother Country, whose real interest and glory I shall on all occasions readily exert myself to promote.

I remain, your Excellency’s most obedient Servant, July 27, 1814 F. H. GREENWAY.

As McGregor has noted, this is a letter written to someone whom Greenway addressed as if they were an equal.13 Ellis explains:

Having regard to the times, it was a remarkable letter. In it there is no trace of any feeling of inferiority on the part of a convict writing to the King’s deputy. Mr. Greenway was to show again and again that his conviction had destroyed neither his self-esteem nor his sense that, as an artist, he was no man’s serf, and that he regarded his fetters, not as emblems of disgrace and downfall, but as casual inconveniences detached from his real life and imposed upon him by the machinations of designing men.14

This version of the letter published in The Australian is the easiest for the general public, both then and now, to access and the general public was Greenway’s intended audience. Lachlan Macquarie had died in London the previous year and John Thomas Bigge who had undertaken the royal commission to enquire into the effectiveness of transportation as a deterrent to convicts and in the process investigated Macquarie’s administration and governorship, had moved on.15 There were few people in Sydney who could dispute Greenway’s version of events.
Francis Greenway (1777 – 1837) is generally considered to be Australia’s first “proper” architect although there were others practicing at the same time who had formal architectural training such as Henry Kitchen. Greenway had been convicted of forgery in relation to a building contract in England and transported as a convict to New South Wales arriving in February 1814. As we may surmise from his letter, Greenway was not a typical convict. He was literate and he could draw and paint. Whilst the only known portrait of Greenway (figure 3) is by an unknown artist it has been speculated that this may be a self-portrait.

![Figure 3: Francis Howard Greenway, pencil portrait by unknown artist 1814-1837. State Library of New South Wales](image)

Greenway was highly educated compared to his fellow convicts and it is probable that he brought a copy of Chamber’s *Treatise* with him to Australia. He was a professional architect before he was transported, had some funds and some influential friends. He had arrived with a letter of introduction to Governor Macquarie from Captain Arthur Phillip, the first governor of New South Wales who Macquarie greatly admired. Greenway also had a wife and children who came out to Australia so as to remain with him during his sentence.

We are able to quote Greenway because he put his thoughts in writing and the original letters have been preserved. Greenway ensured not only their survival but also their wider exposure by submitting them for publication in a widely read newspaper of the day, perhaps he was even framing the letter for posterity, certainly its reach now extended far beyond Macquarie.

Major-General Lachlan Macquarie (1762-1824) was the Governor of New South Wales from 1810 to 1821 (figure 4). His role and that of his wife Elizabeth was pivotal in the urban design of the colony and has determined much of the form and appearance of Sydney. Elizabeth had brought with her from England a collection of architectural pattern books and it may be a design from one of these that Greenway was asked to copy that prompted the letter under discussion. Macquarie had been requesting an architect to be sent to Australia for some years without any luck so when Greenway arrived, Macquarie no doubt wanted to assess his abilities before putting him to work. The request to copy the design of the building may have been a means for Macquarie to assess Greenway’s drafting
skills and he did get the copy of the building that he wanted, but he also got a lecture on architecture that quoted the thinking of Sir William Chambers.

Figure 4: Lachlan Macquarie, Richard Reed 1822. State Library of New South Wales

Figure 5: Sir William Chambers, 1728-1798. Francis Cotes, chalk on paper, 1764. Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Sir William Chambers (1723 – 1796) (figure 5) was a British architect who worked as architectural tutor to the Prince of Wales who later became George III and thus Chambers became Architect to the King. His “Treatise on Civil Architecture of 1759 [was] the standard classical textbook of late eighteenth century England”.16 In it Chambers discussed the use of the classical orders and decorative elements rather than dealing with issues of construction.17
The words of Sir William Chambers that Greenway quotes in his letter to Macquarie have been widely quoted, sometime with acknowledgement and sometimes without.\(^{18}\) Within the text that Greenway quotes from Chambers is embedded the quote from Apelles of Kos.

Apelles, was a Greek painter from the 4th Century BCE. The quote attributed to Apelles; “Friend, though thou hast not been able to make her fair, thou hast certainly made her fine”, is more difficult to trace but it also has a history of being quoted both in relation to Sir William Chambers and elsewhere.\(^ {19}\) Most of our knowledge of Apelles comes from Pliny the Elder. Pliny wrote about Apelles in *The Natural History*, but investigations for this essay have been unable to find this quote there.\(^{20}\) The alliteration of the words friend, fair and fine in the English version of the quote helps to make it memorable and to perhaps become more of a saying, than an actual quotation.

**Greenway’s Letter in Australian Architectural Historiography**

This particular letter of Greenway’s has been used by numerous historians examining the early history of Australian architecture. M. H. Ellis in 1952, Morton Herman in 1954, J. M. Freeland 1968, Howard Tanner 1981, James Broadbent and Joy Hughes 1997, Chris Johnson 1999 and Alisdair McGregor 2014 have all quoted from or used this particular letter in an effort to discover the personalities behind the beginnings of European architecture in Australia. The majority of the authors have come to the conclusion that despite the inappropriate tone of this letter from a convict to the Governor, Macquarie engaged Greenway because of his skill and because he had no choice, there being few people with architectural skill in the colony and none that he could control in the same way as he could theoretically direct a convict. Morton Herman observed;

> Macquarie had chosen from a book a design which he asked Greenway to copy. [Greenway] wrote a letter to Governor Macquarie in the terms of an equal, and, in architectural matters, even a superior, offering to do work far better than anything Macquarie’s taste could achieve. The Governor’s consequent censure quietened him for a while, but not for long. Macquarie needed him and that probably explains his tolerance of the bumptious convict architect’s behavior\(^ {21}\)

J. M. Freeland was of a similar view:

> Greenway’s cocky reply pointed out that, in matters of architectural taste and knowledge, the Governor had a lot to learn from the convict. Macquarie, as a military man and by nature, was not used to insubordination. He curtly but tolerantly censured Greenway for his presumption. The governor was in a position to enforce his will. Greenway had to make the copy anyway but otherwise went unpunished for his temerity.\(^ {22}\)

Yet at least one author sees it differently, Chris Johnson wrote in 1999, “Greenway’s manner evidently impressed Macquarie, for by 1816 he was appointed Acting Civil Architect".\(^ {23}\) Johnson sees Greenway as being engaged because of his manner rather than despite it. These contrary views of the situation between Macquarie and Greenway illustrate that although a quotation comes directly from the hand of an historical figure, the way we interpret it in the present may not reflect the reality of the situation. Even a direct quotation can only take us so far.

**Letters to the Editor in Australian Architectural Historiography**

Many historians have quoted from this particular letter of Greenway’s as a means to examine the relationship between Greenway and Macquarie, the development of architecture in Australia and the nature of Greenway himself. However, it can also contribute to an investigation into the role of letters to the editor in the architectural historiography of Australia. During the early years of the colony, from 1803 with the establishment of The Sydney Gazette, letters to the editor raised topics on both overseas architecture and the buildings in the colony. Discussions on buildings in the colony
addressed some common themes; what buildings were required, what buildings were being constructed, the quality of the buildings being constructed, the cost of labour for construction, the nuisance and inconvenience to the public of building materials being stacked on the footpath, architectural taste and how to improve such towns as Parramatta and Maitland.  The letters were active discussions with correspondents replying to the letters of others primarily using pseudonyms some of which were straight forward and logical; “An Old Settler”, “A Master builder” a “Denizen”, others more cryptic, or in Latin and a few like Francis Greenway used their own name.

Greenway’s quotation in full presents his own letters to Macquarie and in doing so takes a piece of personal correspondence and exposes it for display to the public eye. Greenway wants to explain and justify his own actions. In the letter he quotes, he uses Chambers and through him Apelles to support his own argument to Macquarie, that he, Greenway knows architecture and aesthetic matters better than the Governor. This explanation is extended through time to the reading public of 1825 and finally to us.

The particular letter of Greenway’s that this paper has examined, illustrates a multi-layering of quotations and shows Greenway invoking the words of others to reinforce his own arguments on architectural taste. The circumstances surrounding the publication of the original letter encapsulated in a letter to the Editor of the Australian brings to light the development of newspapers in the early colony and the factors that caused the development of two newspapers, The Sydney Gazette and The Australian with very different styles and objectives.
QUOTATION: What does history have in store for architecture today?

Endnotes

4 Victor Isaacs and Rod Kirkpatrick “Two Hundred Years of Sydney Newspapers: A Short History”, (North Richmond, N.S.W: Rural Press, 2003), 4.
21 Morton Herman, *Early Architects and Their Work*, (Sydney, London: Angus and Robertson, 1954), 44.