

1846 – New Post Office, George Street, Sydney

What we see in this image

This lively streetscape depicts the mid-morning bustle along George Street, the city of Sydney's main thoroughfare, in 1846. The view is taken from the western side of the road, looking onto the brand new facade of the General Post Office with its classical portico, supported by a series of six elegant Doric columns, bearing a crested pediment and the all-important town clock prominently displaying a time of 11.25am.

In the foreground, from left to right, nine pedestrians are portrayed:

a delivery boy, brandishing a parcel, in dark blue trousers and shirt with a boater-style straw hat;

a young woman with a spaniel dog carrying a pagoda-shaped parasol and wearing a fitted, knee-length black jacket over a pale pink dome-skirted dress with a matching deep-brimmed, flower-trimmed, silk-covered bonnet;

a family group comprising a child in matching bonnet and red coat/dress with light-coloured pantaloons visible below the hem, an older woman wearing a 'coal-scuttle' straw bonnet with black ribbon ties and a knee-length black cape over a light-coloured dress, a bearded man in a black top hat and a long-line pale blue cloth coat, with black lapels, over checked trousers, and a second (perhaps younger) woman with red ribbon ties on her straw bonnet, and wearing a red and white diagonally-stripped fringed shawl over a light-coloured dome-skirted gown;

an indigenous man, identified as Bungaree in his characteristic garb of cast-off military dress jacket,

battered hat and ragged trousers;
a bearded soldier in regimental dress with a blue cap, a short fitted jacket of bright blue wool, with gilt epaulettes and red collar, cuffs and facings, worn over red and black panelled trousers with white side stripes, a regimental [pouch] and a sword/sabre slung from one hip;
a food vendor, identified as Sydney character William Francis King, aka 'The Flying Pieman', carrying a portable stand, or podium, and a cloth-lined wicker basket wearing his customary a jockey-style ensemble of white breeches, stockings and leather running shoes, a long-sleeved brown and white striped shirt, and matching striped jockey cap;

Three horse-driven vehicles also travel along the street including:

an official mail coach designated by the government crest on the door carrying one female (inside) and two male passengers (outside);

a gig [or box curricle] driven by a smartly attired young man wearing a colourful suit of matching frock coat and trousers with blue flap pocket and a black top hat;

a transportation cart (labelled 'Sydney to Campbelltown') with one female occupant;

Promenading along the pavement and standing on the steps outside the post office are a strolling

couple, a man in a brown coat, a soldier, a woman standing in profile, two business men in conversation, with a sailor or workman leaning against one of the columns;

What we know about this image

The publication of this lithograph, showing the intended new facade to the General Post Office, was noted under 'Local Intelligence' in Sydney newspaper paper, The Sentinel, on Thursday 7 May 1846:

The Fine Arts – We have been presented with a new lithographic

design, representing the proposed new front of the old Post Office, George Street. It consists of a handsome pediment of the Roman Doric order ornamented with the Royal Arms and supported by pilasters (sic) – the foreground is enlivened by several spirited characteristic sketches, mail coaches and etc. Altogether the design and execution are credible to Colonial talent ... (p.3)

The architectural detail in this lithograph was drawn by Frederick George Lewis (1822-1853), second son of Mortimer Lewis, the NSW Colonial Architect (1835-1849) who was the designer of the building, F.G. Lewis died on 1/12/1853: 'leaving a wife and three children and a large circle of friends to deplore their loss.'

The figures and horses in the foreground of this image were drawn by Edward Winstanley (1820-1849) who was probably taught to paint by his father William. Winstanley had come to Sydney with his family in the Adventure, arriving on 2 May 1833. In October 1834, he joined his father in the partnership of 'Mr. Winstanley & Son' as scene-painters at Sydney's Theatre Royal. By the age of 23, Edward had established a new reputation as a sporting artist. He is best known for his images of racehorses and sporting scenes and was an artistic contributor to the New South Wales Sporting Magazine during the late 1840s.

GENERAL POST OFFICE:

J. Fowles, Sydney in 1848, (July 14, 1848)

We now arrive before one of the most important buildings of the colony, not merely as regards the structure, but as being the centre and focus, the heart, as it may be termed, from which the pulse of civilization throbs to the remotest extremity of the land. We mean the Post Office...works have not yet progressed beyond the erection of a handsome portico. Six Doric columns support an appropriate entablature and pediment, with the royal arms (executed by Mr. Abraham, an able sculptor resident in the colony,) in the centre of the tympanum. The

whole effect is chaste and severe, and much more befitting the aspect of a place of business than a more ornamental and gaudy design would be...

Despite several alterations to the Post Office on George Street, by 1851 the colonial government had established a special Board of Enquiry which concluded that 'the building [is] very ill-adapted for the business required to be carried out in it...'. By 1863 the situation had worsened such that Mortimer Lewis's Doric building had been entirely abandoned and a larger temporary wooden structure erected to serve as a temporary post office in Wynyard Square. James Barnet, recently appointed as NSW Colonial Architect, was instructed to prepare plans for a new General Post Office on the Martin Place segment of the present George Street site.

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Creator
Lewis, Frederick George (1822-1853) and Winstanley, Edward (1820-1849)
Inscription
LHS signed: 'F. G. Lewis & E. Winstanley'
Medium
Hand-coloured Lithograph

Background
The first publication of this image was noted in The Sentinel (Sydney, NSW) on 7 May 1846.
Reference
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