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The Admiral Barrington in the 16<sup>th</sup>

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# **'A Fine Passage': Insights into Early Australian Convict Transportation**

## **Issue 14: Governor Phillip's Journal**

**– Gary L. Sturgess**

The whole number of convicts embarked on board the ten transports, and the thirty embarked on board the Gorgon, were one thousand six hundred and ninety five males, and one hundred and sixty eight female convicts and eleven children, of whom one hundred and ninety four males, four females and one child died on the passage.

### **Summary**

The State Library of New South Wales has recently acquired 20 pages of a journal kept by Arthur Phillip while he was Governor of the penal colony at NSW, covering the months of October 1791 to February 1792.

While there had been one brief mention of a journal, and extracts were published in John Hunter's 'Transactions at Port Jackson. . .', it was unknown what form the journal took, or which parts of Hunter's material had been taken from it. We can now make better sense of the Phillip chapters in Hunter: among other things, it makes clear the Governor's deep personal interest in the Aboriginal peoples of Port Jackson.

## ***Arthur Phillip's Journal***

Until recently, there was only one known mention of a journal kept by the founding Governor of the penal colony established at Sydney Cove in January 1788. The *Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*, a collection of papers published in 1793 by John Hunter, the second captain of *HMS Sirius*, claimed to include extracts from Phillip's dispatches and his journal, but it was not known how much came from each of these two sources, and thus what form the journal took.

The State Library of NSW has recently acquired a 20-page fragment of his journal: it was purchased from an Australian dealer, who obtained it through an auction house in England, which had recognised that it was a First Fleet document but failed to appreciate its full significance. Beyond that, its provenance is presently unknown.

It covers the period from October 1791 to February 1792, with several pages from late December and early January missing. The fragment contains some new detail, but its real significance lies in what it tells us about Phillip's journal-keeping, and the insight it provides in making sense of the Phillip material in Hunter's *Transactions*.

### **Physical Description of the Fragment**

The fragment consists of one folder with 20 pages of manuscript on five sheets, 245mm x 387mm unfolded. Each of the five sheets bears the watermark of the Portsmouth paper-making firm of Portals, the design of which dates the paper to 1785-1790. The State Library has established that Phillip had some of this paper with him at Port Jackson, and used it to send letters to Sir Joseph Banks.

It is the handwriting of an unknown clerk who wrote letters on Phillip's behalf to Sir Joseph Banks from late 1791 through to May 1792, at least.

### **Journal-Keeping**

The journal used by Hunter was sent home on *HMS Gorgon* in December 1791. The SLNSW fragment contains some material which is virtually identical with passages in the *Transactions*, but it also has entries from January and February

1792, indicating that Phillip had a second copy which he continued after the *Gorgon* sailed.

The Phillip material in Hunter commences in June 1790, but given that the first two months were taken from his dispatches, it seems likely that the Governor did not begin his journal until August of that year, presumably due to lack of time. It is reasonable to conclude that it continued until his departure from the colony in December 1792, with the tantalising thought that, like his successor, John Hunter, he might have added further reflections on his way home.

The fragment is written in the first person, one of the ways in which it differs from the *Transactions*, but it is a fair copy, so it was either transcribed from a rough draft made by Phillip himself or dictated to the clerk.

The handwriting in Phillip's letters and the fragment are the only evidence that he employed a clerk at Government House. There is a 1789 mention of a petition being handed to the Judge Advocate's servant, but nothing (so far) about the Governor having such assistance.

Francis Fowkes is the kind of man who might have been employed in this capacity. A former midshipman transported for stealing a greatcoat and boots from an inn in Covent Garden, Fowkes had worked as a tax collector, a secretary to several members of the gentry, and a temporary clerk for politicians in Westminster and the City of London. He made the first map of the settlement in April 1788, and is thought to have directed the first play performed in the colony in June 1789. Fowkes was sent to Norfolk Island later that year and worked in government administration there, and he would subsequently be employed by Hunter when he returned to the colony as Governor in 1795.

The State Library has confirmed that the handwriting in the fragment does not belong to Fowkes, and given that he had just been sent back from Norfolk Island in disgrace, it would be surprising if Phillip had immediately employed him in a position of trust. There were a number of other literate convicts on the First and Second Fleets who might have been used.

The journal is an odd mix of fact and opinion, statistics and anecdotes, and it is difficult to imagine who he thought the readership might be – the arrival and departure of ships; an account of the mutiny on the *Albemarle*, a Third Fleet transport; (some of) the comings and goings of the whalers from the Third Fleet;

two visits by Gomebeeree, an Aboriginal from the Hawkesbury; the escape of several groups of recently arrived Irish convicts, who set out to walk to China; Phillip's concern about the exodus of skilled and trustworthy convicts once their sentences had expired; a brief account of one court case; some details on the state of their crops and the provisions in store; part of one muster (the rest of it having been lost in the missing pages).

The *Transactions* is also a hodge-podge, but we knew that Hunter was drawing on a variety of very different sources, so this was not surprising. One significant difference is that the Phillip chapters in Hunter contain a great deal of detailed information about the Aborigines, while the fragment only records Gomebeeree's visit.

It is now clear that Hunter took large slabs of text from Phillip's journal, at least for the period from October to December 1791, changing it to the third person. But there are other differences. The *Transactions* includes the full text of a letter from the whaling captain, Thomas Melvill, written from Sydney Cove to Samuel Enderby, the owner of his ship, while the fragment only has a brief summary. The most likely explanation is that, having transcribed the full document into his 1791 journal, Phillip felt that it was only necessary to summarise it in the second.

The other source against which the fragment must be compared is the journal of the Judge Advocate, David Collins. In addition to presiding over the legal system of the colony, Collins was the Governor's official secretary. He worked closely with Phillip, his home was next to Government House, and in the period covered by the journal, Collins wrote that he was living with the Governor – although given the number of rooms in Government House and the number of servants residing there, it is likely that he slept at home.

Collins' journal is also something of a potpourri, but it was intended to be a detailed chronology of the colony, and given how comprehensive it is, the wide range of different materials does not seem odd.

For the events covered both by Phillip and Collins, there are some similarities in structure and language, but there are also striking differences. In a few cases, they use almost identical language, which could only happen if they had a common source, or one was borrowing from the other. But it is also apparent that in some places they were drawing on different sources.



## Primary Sources

There must have been a substantial amount of paperwork kept at Government House, and stored in some way so that it could be recalled for later use. Among other things: warrants, commissions, orders in council; general orders and instructions issued by Phillip; convict indents and records of convictions and sentences (once they arrived in 1791); commercial documents (contracts, bills of lading, insurance policies and bills of exchange); port records and ship's protests; musters, sick lists, states of the provisions and records of land under cultivation; accounts of explorations; incoming correspondence and letterbooks of outgoing dispatches.

So it would be surprising if Phillip was not relying, in part, on existing documents in the compilation of his journal. Based on the journal and some other records, we can surmise that they included the following:

*States of the Settlements:* The fragment includes detailed population numbers for the three settlements – Sydney Cove, Parramatta and Norfolk Island – for the month of January 1792 (although part is missing). This was based on one of the periodic censuses, summaries of which were sent back to the Home Office as 'States of the Settlements'. But Phillip's data on Norfolk Island are presented differently from those prepared by Thomas Freeman, the deputy commissary on the island: for example, Phillip combines the emancipist settlers with convicts still serving their time to arrive at a higher number for 'convicts', an interesting insight into how the Governor thought about them.

*Official Reports:* Phillip's account of the mutiny on the *Albemarle*, transcribed virtually word for word by Hunter into the *Transactions*, would seem to be based on the accounts given by George Bowen, the master of that ship, and Lieutenant Robert Parry Young, the naval agent on board. It is unknown whether he was borrowing directly from their documents, or from some report prepared in the colony that was based on them.

Collins' account of the mutiny has some structural and linguistic similarities, but he seems to have been drawing directly from the Bowen and Young reports, and not from Phillip (or Phillip from him).

*Dispatches:* Several of the passages in the 1792 journal bear a close resemblance to dispatches sent around the same time. This is not unexpected, given that the

officers often borrowed wording from other letters that they wrote around the same time to different correspondents. It is unknown whether the journal borrows from the dispatches or vice versa.

*‘Occurrences of the Day’*: Given the details of events, organised chronologically, which appear in both Phillip and Collins, it seems reasonable to conclude that one of the clerks had been charged with keeping a daily journal, from which both drew. This is confirmed by a letter which Phillip sent to Evan Nepean, the permanent under-secretary at the Home Office, in March 1791 enclosing ‘an extract from a book in which the occurrences of the day are set down’.

*‘They are such as may not admit the attention of the Ministers, and as they never were intended, so they certainly are not calculated for the eye of the publick, having been put down in haste, and merely for the inspection of a friend; and so far from having had time to make any correction, they have been more than once, as they will now be, sent away without my having time to read them over.’<sup>1</sup>*

*‘Account respecting this Country & the Natives’*: As noted above, the Phillip material in the *Transactions* and the fragment contain a large amount of fascinating detail about Phillip’s interactions with Aboriginal groups of Port Jackson and the surrounding waterways. Prior to March 1791, Phillip had sent home ‘an account of those little circumstances which I thought might tend to give any information respecting this Country & the Natives’.<sup>2</sup>

Given the detailed information in the *Transactions* about the visits of Bennelong and his clan, and Phillip’s explorations up country, including an account of his spearing, and the new material in the fragment about the visits of Gomebeeree, we might speculate that Phillip continued to keep a separate book or collection of reports about the indigenous peoples, as well as the native flora and fauna.

## **New Insights**

*Phillip’s Relations with the Aborigines*: As an intellectual exercise, it is interesting to convert the text of the Phillip material in Hunter’s *Transactions* – particularly those passages describing his early interactions with indigenous Australians – into the first person, as they would read if they had been taken from his journal. We cannot be certain how much *was* from that source, but it makes these events, and particularly Phillip’s evolving relationship with Bennelong and

Yemmerrawanne, the two men who would accompany him to England in December 1792, highly personal.

*Gomebeeree's Visit:* Understandably, the State Library has paid significant attention to the visit of Gomebeeree and his indifference to the Europeans' gifts – except for some hatchets, an obligation he was careful to acquit by sending back spears. Phillip wrote of him: 'like all the rest he appeared to think he had enjoyed every good this world affords before we came amongst them. . .'

He also wrote that Gomebeeree spent the night down at Bennelong's camp at 'Tubugulha' (elsewhere spelt 'Tubowgule'), on the eastern point of Sydney Cove (today known as Bennelong Point). That the Governor referred to this site by its indigenous name suggests that he understood, to some extent at least, that the British were invaders. Gomebeeree and Bennelong 'had a dance' that night, and one is left to wonder what the European residents of Sydney Cove were thinking as they heard these strange sounds drift across the water.

*Returning Convicts:* With the arrival of the Orders in Council in July 1791, Phillip finally had official records about the sentences of individual convicts, and confirmation of those whose terms had expired. This had been a difficult subject in the colony over the previous two years, with an increasing number of First Fleet convicts claiming (all but a few of them honestly) that they were out-of-time and entitled to all the rights and privileges of the King's subjects. But without formal documentation, Phillip's options were limited.

In the fragment, Phillip writes that by January 1792, 25 male and female convicts had left the colony on the returning Third Fleet ships; this probably does not include five time-expired convicts who left Norfolk Island on the *Barrington* and the *Queen*. We know that there were also a number of escapees hidden away on these ships.

Some of the men had found employment as seamen or ships' carpenters, but Phillip wrote that those who lacked marketable skills had paid eight or ten guineas for a passage. This is now the earliest evidence of time-expired convicts purchasing a berth on the returning ships.

Lieutenant Governor King wrote in late May 1792 that 30 of the time-expired convicts on Norfolk Island had applied to the master of the *Pitt* to take them

away, offering £10 to £20 'to land them at the first Port they made in India'. Only two succeeded, so this price was at a premium.<sup>3</sup>

Phillip's comment also provides us with evidence of the amount of capital which some of the First Fleet convicts had accumulated in the four years they had been in the colony, some of them possibly with funds sent out from England.

*Robert Williams:* The journal has new information about the robbery and violent assault of a convict tradesmen in 1792. Robert Williams had been convicted of horse stealing at Launceston in Cornwall, but the fact that his crime had been committed near Portsea, and that Williams had previously served on a ship of war, suggests that he was 'used to the sea' (as the saying went). His sentence would not expire until March 1793, and yet he was employed as a sawyer on the *Sirius* as early as July 1789, working with the ship's carpenter. One early source refers to him as a carpenter, suggesting he was more than just a sawyer.

By January 1792, Williams had erected a hut 'at some distance from the town where he could have a little garden ground' – the soil around Sydney Cove was rocky and not ideal for growing vegetables. David Collins wrote that two villains had turned up at Williams' hut one night that month and attempted to rob him: when he resisted, one of them struck him on the arm with a hatchet, hacking through a tendon.

The Phillip fragment provides us with new detail about this incident. The Governor describes Williams as 'a very good man', which helps to explain why he had been employed on the *Sirius* and why he had been permitted to build a house and garden at some distance from the camp. He confirms Collins' report that Williams was likely to lose the use of one hand, adding the disappointing news, which Collins had failed to report, that 'the villain got off'. (This seems to mean that he could not be identified, rather than that he was tried and acquitted.)

## **The Lost Records**

The discovery of this fragment raises questions about what other source documents relating to the First Fleet are out there. Where is the remainder of this journal, and what other new information might it contain? Has the earlier version sent home on the *Gorgon* survived? What happened to the 'Occurrences of the Day' and the 'Account respecting this Country & the Natives'?



We know that the descendants of John Marshall, the master of the *Scarborough* on both the First and Second Fleets, have a memoir which he wrote late in life. Fragments of it have been published in various forms, and we know that it contains a detailed account of an attempted mutiny on the *Scarborough* on the Second Fleet. What else might it tell us about the First Fleet?

George Worgan, the surgeon of HMS *Sirius*, wrote a journal of which we only have a small extract sent home to his brother. What happened to the papers of Major Robert Ross, the commandant of the marine contingent? Among other things they should include transcripts of the courts martial, of which we only have copies, in whole or in part, of four. Where are the official papers of the Judge Advocate, David Collins?

The original journal kept by Philip Gidley King, second lieutenant on the *Sirius* was probably destroyed when the fair copies were made: a copy of this journal from the Cape of Good Hope onwards recently surfaced in the Royal Collections (although it is yet to be published online), but we do not have the equivalent for the first part of the voyage, which he sent home to the Admiralty from the Cape.

The journal of the *Sirius* kept by First Lieutenant William Bradley, was recently acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum, but it is a fair copy, made around 1802. The original was possibly destroyed, but he also seems to have kept a narrative journal, of which we also have a fair copy made in later years.

The UK National Archives hold abbreviated copies of the ships' logs for the nine merchant ships used for the First Fleet: have any of the originals survived? The log of *HM Armed Tender Supply* for the outward voyage is not in the archives at Kew.

We only have an extract from the journal kept by Lieutenant John Watts, a supercargo on the *Lady Penrhyn*, which relates to the homeward voyage. We have astronomical observations and some paintings made by George Raper a midshipman on the *Sirius*, but not his journal, and we have tantalising fragments from the journal of Richard Williams, the second mate of the *Borrowdale*, published as a broadsheet on his return.

Hundreds of letters were sent home by the mariners and marines, the civil officers and convicts, throughout the voyage and then from the colony as the

transports sailed for home and the *Sirius* and *Supply* made their way to the Cape or Batavia for provisions. Almost none of Phillip's personal correspondence is known to have survived.

Given that almost everyone involved in the First Fleet understood its historical significance, many of these documents must have been kept, for a time at least, but only a handful are in the public domain.

We know that some are in private hands. In the 1980s, the First Fleet historian Alan Frost copied a few official records kept in a private collection, the transcripts of which are in his archive of transcribed First Fleet papers held by the State Library of NSW.

But what else is out there?

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip to Nepean, 26 March 1791, UK National Archive, CO201/6/67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> 'Journal of Philip Gidley King while Lieutenant Governor of Norfolk Island, 1791-96', National Library of Australia, MS70, p. 25.