

First impressions and the first Australia Day

Letter from Henry Waterhouse to his father, William Waterhouse, Sydney Cove, 11 July 1788, Manuscript 1/187

William Waterhouse was a page to the Duke of Cumberland. He married Susanna Brewer. They had twelve children including Henry, one of whose godparents was the Duke of Cumberland, and Elizabeth, who married George Bass. William Waterhouse corresponded with Henry, Elizabeth and George Bass. Henry Waterhouse wrote long informative letters to his father which now form an important record of early events in New South Wales and Norfolk Island. In his long letter from Sydney Cove, 11 July 1788, William Waterhouse gives a detailed account of the arrival of the First Fleet in Botany Bay and the establishment of the settlement in Sydney Cove, reports Henry Lidgbird Ball's discovery of Lord Howe Island, describes Sydney's Aboriginal inhabitants and the colony's plants and animals, recounts his meeting with the French expedition led by the Comte de La Perouse and retells their story of their encounters with the natives of the Navigators' Islands [Samoa].

Transcript

On the 27th two of our Men were tried by a Criminal Court of Judicature for attempting to murder a man that was on shore with them taking care of the Sirius's garden when each were sentenced to receive 500 lashes on shore, one of which at the first flogging reciev'd 400 & the other 100 when the surgeon order'd them on board till their backs were well then to receive the remainder of their punishment; on the 3rd of June got the ship in order, on the 4th hoisted a flag at each Mast head & fired as did the Supply 21 Guns at sun rise the same at 1 o'clock & the same at Sun Set, the Transports made up the same number between them [indecipherable] one o'clock, the Governor this day gave a Publick dinner at which were all the Officers of the Garrison, The Captain Lieutenants & three Midshipmen, one of which I had the honor to be;

We went on shore at twelve o'clock where the whole Battalion were assembled fir'd three Volleys & gave three cheers as did the Convicts who this day were allow'd liquor: At two o'clock we were all assembled & had a most excellent dinner, after it was over the following Publick healths were drank with three Cheers & the band playing God save the King, - The King - The Queen & Royal Family - The Prince of Wales - Prince William Henry - His Majestys Ministers - The Cumberland Family - the Governor then said he meant to name the County which he call'd the County of Cumberland which was drank - the Governor then went out & his health was drank likewise with three Cheers the healths & toasts then circulated briskly & most did honor to the day, we supp'd at 9 & went on board at 11, the Convicts had made a most amazing fire & the day was concluded on all sides with great festivity, though I am affraid alarm'd the Natives most terribly;

This day the Governor gave a free pardon to all offenders. Since that time two Convicts has been murder'd by the Natives but we suppose the Convicts to have been the aggressors.

George Bouchier Worgan, letter written to his brother Richard Worgan, 12-18 June 1788 Manuscript Safe 1/114

George Bouchier Worgan was probably born in 1757. He joined the Navy in 1775 and was appointed Surgeon on HMS Sirius in November 1786. Musically inclined, he brought his piano with him to the colony. Along with the crew of the Sirius, he left Australia to return to England in March 1791, arriving in April 1792. He had left his piano with Elizabeth Macarthur.

His journal is an account of the first five months of settlement in New South Wales, attached to a letter written to his brother Richard Worgan. He married Mary Lawry, probably after his return from Australia, and they had two sons and a daughter. Both sons eventually migrated to Australia. Worgan died in March 1838.

Transcript

On the Evening of our Arrival (26th January 1788) The Governor & a Number of the Officers assembled on Shore where, they Displayed the British Flag and each Officer with a Heart, glowing with Loyalty drank his Majesty's Health and Success to the Colony. The next Day, all the Artificers & an 100 of the Convicts were landed, carrying with them the necessary Utensils for clearing the Ground and felling the Trees. By the Evening, they were able to pitch a Number of Tents and some Officers, and private Soldiers slept on shore that Evening.

A Journal of a voyage from Portsmouth to New South Wales and China in the Lady Penrhyn, Merchantman William Cropton Server, Commander by Arthur Bowes Smyth, Surgeon, Jan-Feb, 1788 Manuscript Safe 1/15

Arthur Bowes Smyth (1750-1790), known as Bowes while in the colony, sailed with the First Fleet as Surgeon on board the Lady Penrhyn. He was responsible for the women convicts. Bowes Smyth took a great interest in natural history, collecting specimens and making drawings including the earliest extant illustration by a European of the emu. It is probably not the first sketch of an emu, as has sometimes been claimed; this may have been drawn by Lieutenant John Watts, also of the Lady Penrhyn, reproduced in Arthur Phillip's published account of the First Fleet and now lost.

He returned to England on the Lady Penrhyn travelling via Lord Howe Island, Tahiti, China and St Helena. On Lord Howe Island he described or drew six of the islands birds. Three, including, the white gallinule, are now extinct, and a fourth is rare. Bowes Smyth arrived in England in August 1789. He died some months after his return and was buried on 31 March 1790 in Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Essex, where he had been born

Transcript

27th. This mornng. by day light a Long Boat full of Convicts from the Scar borough were set on Shore to assist in cutting down trees & clearing the ground &ca. -- The Thermometer at 74 -- Many Tents pitch'd this day on Shore. -- Upon our entering the Harbour mouth, we saw many Natives on the top of the high rocks, none of them have appear'd since we anchor'd. No boats suffer'd to go out of the Cove, nor any Sailors to be on shore after sunset.

28th. Two boat loads more Convicts from the Scarborough & Vz the Marines landed. This day Lieuts. G. Johnstone & Wm. Collins took their leave

28th. of the Ship & pitched their Tents on Shore: very hot. The Governor has appointed several coves for the different Ships boats to go to, to haul their Seynes, upon first calling on board the Sirius to let them know the Boat is going & either the Master himself or one of the Mates must be in the boat -- in general the boats were very successful in catching a great number of fish of variety of sorts.

All the rock near the water are thick cover'd with oysters, wh. are very small but very finely flavour'd; they also adhere to the branches of the mangrove trees, I frequently brot. the branch of a tree thus loaded wt. oysters, on board. This day visited Capt. Campbell in his Marquee who presented me wt. some curious insects &: a Lorique... .

This morng. at 11 o'Clock all who cd. leave the Ships were summon'd on Shore, to hear the Governor's Commission read; & also the Commission constituting the Court of Judicature. -- the Marines were all under arms & reed, the Governor wt. flying Colours & a Band of Music -- he was accompanied by the Judge Advocate, Lieut. Gover- nor, Clergiman, Serveyor General, Surgeon General &ca. After taking off his hat & Compting. the Marine Officers, who had lower'd their Colours &: pd. that respect to him as Governor wh. he was intitled to, the Soldiers marched wt. music playg. Drums & fifes & formed a circle round the whole of the Convict Men & Women, who were collected together --

The Convicts were all order'd to sit down on the ground; all Gentlemen present were desired to come into the Centre, where stood the Governor, Lieut. Governor, Judge Advocate, Clergyman, Surgeon &ca. &ca. -- a Camp table was fixt before them & 2 red leather Cases laid thereon, containing the Commissions &ca. wh. were open'd & unsealed in the Sight of All present & read by the Judge Advocate (Capt. Collins) constituting Arthr. Philip Esqr. Governor General Commander in Chief over all those Territories, belonging to his Britannic Majesty Geo: Hid. King of Gt. Britn. France & Ireland & call'd New South Wales & Parts adjacent with full power & authority to build Forts, Castles & Towns, & to erect Batteries &ca. &ca. as shall seem to him necessary, with full power also to appoint &: constitute Officers of every kind as he shall judge proper.

In short I shall not attempt to follow the Commission thro' its various parts, I shall only observe that it is a more unlimited one than was ever before granted to any Governor under the British Crown. -- After the Commission was read the Governor harangu'd the Convicts, telling them that he had try'd them hitherto to see how they were disposed; that he was now thoroughly convinced there were many amongst them incorrigable, & that he was persuaded nothing but severity wd. have any Effect upon them to induce them to behave properly in future.