

Rose Hill/Parramatta settlement

Letter received by John Fowell from Newton Fowell, 31 July 1790, Manuscript ML MSS 4895/1/21

Born Newton Digby Fowell (1768-1790) in Devonshire, England, Fowell joined the First Fleet as a Midshipman on 25 February 1787. He had been recommended to Captain Arthur Phillip by Evan Nepean and he quickly impressed Phillip. He was befriended by Philip Gidley King who, during the voyage to New South Wales, confided his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Norfolk Island. In December 1789 Fowell was appointed 2nd Lieutenant on the Sirius following King's appointment to Norfolk Island. After the Sirius was wrecked at Norfolk Island in March 1790, he was posted to the Supply. Newton Fowell observed and described the voyage to New South Wales, and the early founding years of the colony, observing and describing discipline in the colony and on Norfolk Island, flora and fauna, the local Aboriginal people, food shortages and public buildings. In a letter dated 12 July 1788, he recorded that Phillip named the settlement Albion rather than Sydney on 4 June 1788, the King's birthday.

In late 1789 Fowell was sent on board the Alexander to Cape Town where the ship remained for six weeks taking provisions for the colony. In April 1790, prevented by bad weather from landing at Norfolk Island as had been planned, Fowell was forced to continue to Batavia on the Supply, again on a mission to procure supplies. In Batavia, Fowell contracted fever and died at sea on 25 August 1790. His last letter, written to his family on 31 July 1790, reached England in December 1790. Fowell's letters were preserved in the family home, Blackhall in Devon, until 1987.

Transcript

A Settlement had been made at the Head of the Harbour and about 40 Acres of Ground Cleared, it is called Rose Hill, The Greatest Part of it this last Year was Sown in Grain & Yielded about 4 Fold, The Ground thereabout is much clearer of Wood, & the Soil much richer than about Sydney Cove Good Garden have been made thire, & Vegetables grow very fine, Cabbages grow to a large Size, for on the Kings Birth Day 1789 A Cabbage was Cut & Sent to the Govonor which weighed 27 Lbs Several have been cut Weighing from 15 to 20 Lbs, but it is a general opinion Potatoes Degenerate very much. Melons & Pumkins thrive astonishingly. At Rose Hill a Suborltern Officer & a Small Party of Marines Reside there & are Releived every Month, It is about 14 Miles from Sydney Cove.

The Govonor had likewise during our Absence taken one of the Natives by Stratagem, as he found it impossible to bring them among us any other way, and by treating him well he was in hopes to convince them it was not our intention to do them any harm. This was Arooboonew, he was a very good Natured Fellow and gave a vast deal of Information Respecting their Manners. Soon after he was taken the Small Pox waged among them with great Fury and carried off great Numbers of them. every boat that went down the Harbour found them laying Dead on the Beaches and in the Caverns of Rocks, forsaken by the rest as soon as the Disease is discovered on them, They were generally found with the remains of a Small Fire on each Side of them & some Water left within their Reach How this Disease got among them it was impossible to tell, but it is Conjectured that it was among them before any Europeans visited the Country, as they have a Name for it, When we arrived not a Canoe was to be seen, the Natives

having all left the Harbour and fled to the Northward, Boats were often Sent down the Harbour for no other Purpose than to Bury Dead Bodies, in one boat a Man and his Son who were found very ill were brought up, and tho every Assistance was given the Old Man he died in a few Days The Boy Recovered and is still alive, and seems happy in his Situation not having the least wish to return to his former way of living His Name is Nanbarry, Bolderry Bockenbau. he is always called Nanbarry

Rose Hill

Letter from Arthur Phillip to the Marquis of Landsdown, July 1788

Clearing the ground will be a Work of time & it will be four Years at least, before this Colony will be able to support itself, & perhaps no Country in the World affords less assistance to first Settlers. Still, My Lord, I think that perseverance will answer evry purpose proposed by Government, & that this Country will hereafter be a most Valuable acquisition to Great Brittain from its situation.

Journal entry, Arthur Bowes Smyth January-February 1788

In England theiving poultry was not punish'd wt. Death; but here where a loss of that kind could not be supply'd it was of the utmost consequence to the Settlement, as well as every other Species of Stock, as they were preserved for Breeding therefore stealing the most trifling Article of Stock or Provisions wd. be punisheting d wt. Death.

Letter from Reverend Richard Johnson, November 15, 1788

As to the Country in general, I confess I have no very great opinion of nor expectation from it. The greatest part of it is poor & barren & rocky & requires a great deal of labour to clear it of trees, roots ... & to cultivate it, & and after all, the corn that has been sown hitherto looks very poor & unpromising. I think I can say none has given it a fairer trial than myself.

William Bradley journal: A Voyage to New South Wales, December 1786 - May 1792, October 1788, pp. 143-44

Towards the upper part of Port Jackson the Country opens & is cover'd with long grass growing under the trees, there are some spots of clear ground round P Jackson but none of considerable extent until near the head of it, from which, along by the flats & creeks it improves & near the fresh water at the top of the creek it is a fine open Country & good soil, to this part which is called Rose Hill & is about 12 Miles above Sydney Cove, it is intended early in the present Month to detach a Capt & Company of Marines with a proportion of Convicts for the purpose of clearing & cultivating that part of the Country, which will no doubt be of great use to the Settlement.

The Stock brought to Port Jackson has turn'd to little account, the sheep nearly all dead, the Bull & Cows missing, either killed by the Natives or run wild in the woods. Hogs which appear to thrive the best will be lost for want of food, before grain can be raised for their support, the cabbage tree affords good food while it lasts but there is

great difficulty in getting it. All kinds of poultry thrive very well & Goats particularly well, the great want is grain to support the stock.

Brown Bark'd Gum Tree, exceeding good Timber for large uses, grows in the Kangaroo Ground & about Rose Hill, to the height of 80 to 100 feet without a branch, some have been cut which were 9 or 10 inches diameter at about 80 feet from the base & quite sound, it is fit for very large beams &c. boards for flooring, door frames & for every use in common

John Hunter – journal kept on board the *Sirius* during a voyage to New South Wales, May 1787 – March 1791

When we return'd from our Voyage, I went up to see what progress had been made at this Farm, which had been nam'd Rose Hill; It certainly very much exceeded My expectations, the quantity of ground prepar'd for receiving grain ... was considerable, a Number of Hutts Built – Gardens in tollerable appearance and altogether every prospect of, in due time a very extensive farm, We now know, that if we had people enough, to labour, it might be carried at least twenty Miles to the W:ward and every foot of the ground apparently as good as that on which they are now at Work.

John Hunter – journal kept on board the *Sirius* during a voyage to New South Wales, May 1787 – March 1791

There has been several attempts by the Gentlemen here who have little farms in the Neigh'hood of Sydney Cove, to raise grain of different kinds for the purpose of feeding a few pigs, Goats & Poultry, but altho their endeavours seem'd for a time to promise ample reward ... but it no sooner form'd ... than the Ratts, with which as well as much other Vermin this Country is over run - destroy'd the whole of their prospect.