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# Sydney Cove Journals and Letters

Transcriptions from original manuscripts held in the Mitchell Library

## Letter from Arthur Phillip to The Marquis of Lansdown, July 1788, Manuscript MLMSS 7241

*Arthur Phillip was appointed first Governor of the colony of New South Wales on 12 October 1786. He was commander of the First Fleet which sailed from Spithead on 31 May 1787 and disembarked at Port Jackson, New South Wales, on 26 January 1788. In December 1792, Phillip returned to England, resigning his post as Governor on 23 July 1793. He died in 1814.*

*William Petty, 1st Marquis of Lansdowne and 2nd Earl of Shelburne, was a British politician. Both he and Phillip were associated with a group advocating free trade. In this four page letter signed by Arthur Phillip, Sydney Cove, 3 July 1788. Phillip informs the Marquis that he has named the Lansdowne (here spelt Lansdown) Hills after him, mentions the difficulty of settlement and describes the Aboriginal inhabitants. Phillip explains his reasons for preferring Port Jackson over Botany Bay. Port Jackson offered a water supply and a safe harbour: 'here a Thousand Sail of the Line may ride in the most perfect Security'.*

### Transcript

My Lord,

As I was unwilling to trouble Your Lordship with letters that could only contain assurances of respect, I defer'd writing till I arrived in this Country. the few extracts from my journal, is all the information I am able to give your Lordship, at present, of the Natives; who never come to us & with whom I have never been able to remain but a very short time. the Rains now fall very heavy, & many of the Natives find it difficult to support themselves, as few fish are caught. I shall be able to give a better account of the Country when I have visited Lansdown Hills - they form part of a Range of Mountains that appear to be fifty miles in land & on which I have in a late excursion seen Smoke; which, with my having traced the Natives thirty miles towards these Hills, leaves no doubt but that there are Inhabitants in the interiour parts of the Country. I thought these Hills worthy the Name I have giving them, and at the foot of which I flatter my self that I shall find a River, that communicates with the Sea, at no great distance from Port Jackson, which I have preferd to Botany bay as affording a more eligible Situation for the Colony, & being with out exception the finest Harbour in the World. my reason for thinking there must be a large River, is the having found pools of water which did not appear to be formed in the Rainy Season. the want of time prevented ye tracing them to their Sauce.

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The Woods by which we are surrounded are not removed but with a labour of which no Idea can be formed, & unfortunately the Timber is only fit for fire wood, & I was obliged to fix on this Spot, on account of Water which in the dry Season is scarce, as here are not any Runs of fresh water but what are drains from the Marshes, form'd in the Rainy Season. Botany bay, offerd no Security for large Ships, here a Thousand Sail of the Line may ride in the most perfect Security.

the 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.

It has been my determination from the time I landed, never to fire on the Natives, but in a case of absolute necessity, & I have been so fortunate as to have avoided it hitherto. I think they deserve a better Character than what they will receive from Monsr. La Prouse, who was under the disagreeable necessity of firing on them. I think better of them from having been more with them. they do not in my opinion want personal Courage, they very readily place a confidence & are, I believe, strictly honest amongst themselves.

most of the Men wanting the Right front tooth in the Upper Jaw, & most of the Women wanting the first & second joints of the little finger of the left hand, are circumstances not observed in Capt. Cooks Voyage.

Your Lordship will I hope do me the justice to believe me fully sensible of the polite attention I receiv'd when leaving England, & permit me the honor of subscribing my self with the greatest Respect & esteem

My Lord

Your Lordships

Obliged & Most Obedient

Humble Servant

A Phillip

Sydney Cove

July 3d. 1788.

**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.*

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*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**

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 incorrigible, & that he was persuaded nothing but severity wd. have any Effect upon them to induce them to behave properly in future.

He also assured them that if they attempted to get into the women's Tents of a night there were possitive orders for firing upon them, that they were very idle not more than 200 out of 600 were at work that the industrious shd. not labour for the idle; if they did not work they shd. not eat.

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 punished wt. Death. That however, such severity might militate against his Humanity & Feelings towards his fellow Creatures yet tho Justice demanded such rigid Execution of the Laws & they might implicitly relye

### **Letter from Rev. Richard Johnson to Mr. Henry Fricker, Manuscript Safe 1/121**

*The Rev. Richard Johnson was appointed as the first chaplain to the colony of New South Wales in 1787, an appointment he held until 1800 when he returned with his family and Governor John Hunter on HMS Buffalo. For the first five years Johnson was solely responsible for performing services throughout the colony. Johnson performed baptisms, marriages and burials. He supervised the colony's schools, attended executions, worked among the convicts and organised and funded the building of the colony's first church, opened in 1793. Johnson also worked extensively with the Aboriginal population. A young Aboriginal girl, Abaroo, lived with his family and Johnson gave his daughter an aboriginal name, Milbah. Before attending university Johnson was a farmer and teacher in Yorkshire. These farming skills were valuable to the new settlement. Johnson supplied grain, vegetables and meat to Sydney from the lands that he cultivated around Brickfield, Canterbury and Ryde. Johnson was an early pioneer of the citrus industry in Australia. On the voyage out with the First Fleet he collected*

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*orange seeds and successfully grew the fruit on his property at Kissing Point, near Parramatta.*

*In November 1788, Richard Johnson wrote to Henry Fricker of Portsmouth, England, a friend of the Johnson family. Amongst personal news Johnson describes the arrangements for religious observances at Rose Hill, the Governor's reluctance to build a church and the irreligious lives of the convicts. The letter is from a series of correspondence from the Rev. Richard Johnson to Henry Fricker between May 30, 1787 to August 10, 1797.*

### **Transcript**

Sydney Cove, Port Jackson,  
In the Country of Cumberland,  
New South Wales, Novr. 15th, 1788.

My dear Friends,

Am happy that another opportunity offers of writing to you to inform you of our health & welfare. Have already given you at least two Letters since our arrival at Port Jackson, & hope that before I write again, shall be favoured with a long letter from you among the rest of my der fds in England. I most sincerely & anxiously wish & desire to hear from you, to hear how you do, how you go on, how my fds Hausty & Miles do -what success in fishing [indecipherable]

'Tis now near Ten Months since we first arrived at this part of the world. I travel much about home; wish much Labour & no small cost we have got our little Cabbage tree Cottage -no small curiosity it is, I assure you, & cd it be placed on Bonfire Corner but one day, I dare say it wd have as many spectators & admirers as ever had Lunardy's Balloon. Am happy, however, that it in some measure answers our purpose, though now and then in excessive Rains, we are all in a swim within doors. —My little Garden also begins to flourish & supplies us daily with either one kind of vegetable or other. 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, &c, & to cultivate it, & after all, the corn that has been sown hitherto looks very poor & unpromising. I think I can say none have given it a fairer trial than myself.

Have been at work in my little farm for a day together, burning wood, digging, sowing, &c, but do not expect to reap anything nearly adequate to my labour. Others seem to be in the same predicament & all almost, at least with but few exceptions, are heartily sick of the expedition, & wish themselves back safe in old England. I hope I have said enough to diswade you from ever emigrating to this part of the world. You will act more wisely to stay at Bonfire Corner & (one thing excepted) I shd be most heartily glad again to see you on that side of Southern & Atlantic Seas - and what without? Why the pity and concern I feel for these poor people with whom I am here connected. Happy would I be were I to live upon Bread & water and to suffer the most severe hardship, did I but see some of those poor souls begin to think about their latter end. Am sorry to see so little good yet done amongst them. They neither see nor will be persuaded to seek the Lord of Mercy and Compassion of God. They prefer their Lust before their Souls, yea, most of them will sell their souls for a Glass of Grogg, so blind, so

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foolish, so hardened are they.

The Colony begins already to be a good deal dispersed. About seventy or eighty are gone to settle in New Norfolk. This took place soon after our arrival. Ships have been backward & forward, & the last particularly brings us a flattering promising account of that island as to wood, garden stuff, &c. Others have been lately sent

to the top of this harbour to cultivate the ground. Understand that I am sometimes to go thither to perform Divine Services. The distance is 12 or 14 miles by water, which will make it very inconvenient & unpleasant.

**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.

**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.

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 the whole of their prospect.