

SUTHERLAND SHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Edited by:
M. Hutton Neve

Bulletin No. 8,
July 1968.

"FIRST FLEETERS" IN RETROSPECT

Some of you will have read in the metropolitan press of the recent formation of a "Descendants of First Fleeters" together with a subsidiary group of descendants covering the period to 1820.

The First Fleeters were not a very meritorious segment of the English Lower classes-- most of them were the scum of the Thames hulks (prison ships) and city and county gaols: many were city-bred vagrants and petty thieves living by a variety of dishonest means, unwilling to work for wages. The great majority were amoral rather than immoral -- a vicious and uncivilised rabble. Practically all the women were prostitutes as well as thieves.

One may say that the shocking social conditions contributed to their state, and this is true. Wages were on a starvation level for the unskilled labourer; over-population and sudden industrialisation had created shortages of basic foods, lack of cheap rental accommodation, competition in unskilled employment -- the appalling resultant poverty led to appalling criminality. Laws were harsh and severe, especially in regard to property both real and personal; and sentences on conviction were correspondingly harsh. There were many thousands of these lower classes who were organised in gangs to thief and receive stolen goods, to assault and steal by violence, and to conduct iniquitous gin-dens and brothels: and youngsters were recruited in infancy and trained as willing apprentices. From these town and city hoodlums came the majority of First Fleeters -- an unsavoury lot:

There had to be some selection for transportation to "Botany Bay" for two reasons; first, the gaols and hulks were so packed with convicted law-breakers that it was impossible to transport all of them -- there simply were not the ships or a sufficiency of marine-guards available: second, it was essential that the penal colony be able to support itself by agricultural farming, for only 12 months' provisions were to go with the Fleet.

Consequently the majority of men (and women) chosen for transportation were in general young -- under 40 years -- and of reasonable health and strength.. Nevertheless, some useless convicts were included -- a few aged and sickly, even some, without a limb, and juveniles. In making this selection 'where possible the worst characters in these grows were often chosen, simply to get rid of the 'most troublesome and the most confirmed "old lags". The majority all had "records" for lawbreaking (mainly repeated theft, receiving and prostitution). By transporting the juveniles, a number of incipiently threatening street gangs and thieves' dens were broken up before they could develop into major criminal threats.

Most of the First Fleeters came from London and other large cities; there were only a handful of tradesmen, and less still of skilled farm labourers two types of workmen essential to a successful first settlement. The majority of the men were therefore unskilled, illiterate and unwilling workers, hopeless as potential farmers. This was soon proved by the years of semi-starvation following the initial settlement.

Figures for the first three Fleets vary somewhat, both in the number embarked and disembarked, and allowing for deaths. Approximately 770 were in the 1st Fleet, 1250 in the 2nd Fleet, and 2450 in the 3rd Fleet.

All credit should be given to the minority who did struggle out of the abyss of lawless horror which constituted the foundation of the penal settlement of Botany Bay. But let us realise that the majority were among the worst of the depraved mass of England's gaols, hardly to be recalled with pride: that does not prevent us from acknowledging with admiration the small percentage of inherently decent transportees who did succeed in spite of al-most superhuman difficulties. It is to these minute handful of transportees that we owe the foundation of this colony, as exemplified in the ignorant but hardworking section of "Hawkesbury settlers" of the 1795-1820 period.

So vicious and depraved were many of these First Fleeters that Norfolk Island and later Van Diemen's Land and. "Deal River" were established as prison centres for the most recalcitrant -- those who had committed further crimes after arrival. Their punitive treatment was often sadistic and callous -- but let us realise that their further convictions were the result of their own. follies.

The first Irish political prisoners did not arrive until the end of the 18th century; these (and subsequent political transportees) were a very different type from the initial arrivals, and from them came some of our best settlers. By the early 1800s a more careful selection of prisoners was being made; transportation sentences were widened to include offences not so much vicious as still unlawful -- destruction of property (hayrick burning, poaching), inciting to industrial unrest, etc.. Many of these were at least semi-literate and some were skilled tradesmen and farm labourers -- types desperately needed in the penal colony. From these types can an increasing "convict element" who, as emancipists, became the backbone of the farming and commercial community.

These are the transportees who should be remembered rather than the vicious criminal types of the "First Fleeters".

(From about 1820 onwards, owing to an increasing public objection to the severity of English criminal law, a larger percentage of the criminal type again were shipped out -- instead of suffering the death sentence for their crimes as in the earlier years of transportation).

----- M.H.N.

Campbelltown Visit (Oct.) : the executive council hopes to organise an all-day bus trip to this historic settlement, on similar lines to our successful recent Windsor outing. An excellent booklet to be reprinted by the State Planning Authority, "Historic Buildings Liverpool & Campbelltown", should be available in September. Copies may be obtained without charge from the S.P.A. 302 Castlereagh St., Sydney. It is suggested that applications for the booklet be. made well in advance. of publication date.

BY-WAYS OF HISTORY:

The South Coast: there were several early land grants made along the coast-al area south of Port Hacking, some of which were surveyed in 1825 by Surveyor James McBrien. In 1824. Moses Brennan had received permission to occupy 800 acres in a small tract of land named 'Bullambi'. In 1842 the "Bullambi Estate" was offered for sale, and the Village of Bullambi (Bellambi) was then laid

Stanwell Park: north of Bulli is Stanwell Park, part of a grant promised to Matthew John Gibbon in 1824, the grant itself comprising 1000 acres as a grazing run, It is thought that the land was named after the Village of Stanwell in Middlesex, England. The property was later acquired by Sir Thos. Mitchell, passing later to Judge Hargrave.

Royal National Park: the Park was established when the Parkes/Robertson Government in 1879 declared 18,000 acres a public reserve; the following year another 18,300 acres was added.

Audley: (Royal National Park) named after a surveyor who was carrying out work in this area in 1855 -- Lord George Edward, the Rt. Hon. Lord Audley --who was one of several surveyors listed officially in 1355 as "Unlicensed Government Surveyors".

St. Phillip's Anglican Church, Sydney: this church has recently been added to the "A" Register of the Historic Buildings recommended by the National Trust as being essential for preservation. It was designed by Edmund Blacket and built between the years 1848 and 1858. The original St. Philip's was a wattle-and-daub structure built by the Rev. Richard Johnston in 1793 on the corner of Hunter, Bligh and Castlereagh Streets, but was burnt down in 1798. The first St. Philip's on Church Hill was consecrated in 1810 but by 1846 it was too small and the present site was set aside by the Governor Sir Chas. Fitzroy for the new building. Well sited on the crest of the ridge which divides, Sydney Cove and Darling Harbour, it is a dominant feature in the northern approach to the city. The design is in English Perpendicular Gothic Revival, and is built in sandstone with a slate roof. It has a fine tower and dignified nave. The interior is dominated by the large east window which gives intensity of light to the chancel with its intricately carved stone 'fittings. As the church of Australia's oldest parish, it is a most significant building.

-- National Trust Bulletin, Feb. 1968..

First Military Wireiess Message (Heathcote): "It was a dreadful night in the wild bush beyond Heathcote on the night of April 20, 1911. Major Geo. Augustine Taylor was in a makeshift tent, and two miles away a small group of army specialists were all ears waiting for the magic of a message borne on the air. At both ends George and his men fiddled and fiddled and then the miracle happened --- Major Taylor had transmitted the first military wireless signal in Australia, It wasn't even a memorable phrase -- just a few dit--dit--dah-dits".... Major Taylor is long deceased, but his widow, Mrs. Florence Taylor, CBE, the first woman in Australia to get degrees in architecture and engineering, is still living in Macleay St.; Potts Point. On April 20, 1968, a plaque donated by Mr. Kerwin Maegraith of Double Bay, was unveiled at Heathcote en the spot where the historic massage was sent.

-- Daily Mirror, Sydney: 4/4/'68.

BY-WAYS OF HISTORY (contd.):

"Common Land": this was the "folkland" belonging to the people of a particular area but owned by no particular individual, being open land for the pasturage of the villagers' stock as well as having certain other 'common rights'. The overall title was usually (in England) vested in the Lord of the Manor -- out here, the King; but Common Land is private property. In 1804 the Governor allocated six Commons to cover certain settled Districts, varying from 2000 to 5000-odd acres; some others were added later (from Crown lands adjacent) as settlement increased in outlying areas. Common Land was established in these areas where were the "small farms" of the settlers, for communal grazing. Two Common Lands fairly adjacent to Sydney are still in existence, Wollombi and Macdonald Valley Commons, both north of Wiseman's Ferry. Although "outsiders" camp on these, fish and shoot, etc., they are trespassing and may be legally sued by the Common owners; and this may be done if "outsiders" do not first seek permission to camp, especially on the Macdonald Valley or Wallambine Common. This Common has been in use since 1824, when Governor Bourke allocated it, but the title deeds were not granted until 1853. Owing to the increasing number of illegal campers at the Wallambine Common and the damage they are causing, the local trustees have been discussing ways and means of checking the invasion, especially at Christmastime.

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown: on Saturday June 15 a Society outing was arranged to inspect this old church and its historic Camperdown Cemetery --but only a handful of members turned up, scarcely twenty. The church, opened in 1874, is considered one of the finest examples of Revival Gothic Architecture in the colony. It was formerly a much smaller church known as St. Stephen's Camperdown, situated in Stephen St. on land given by Mrs. Elizabeth Bligh, widow of the Governor, and was completed in 1845* Blacket also being the architect (as of the first church). The whole area comprised the Historic Camperdown Cemetery (13 acres), with nearly 18,000 interments of Sydney pioneers. In 1948 the State Government resumed nine acres for a Rest Park, preserving most of the headstones; the remaining four acres now comprise the Church of St. Stephen and Cemetery. Three interments are of particular interest to us, viz, John Connell (sen.) of Kurnell, who arrived in 1802, and was granted several hundred acres at Kurnell in 1821; he died in 1849 at the age of 81 or 82 (the headstone incorrectly states arrival as 1799, and age at death as 90 years); he arrived free (although his wife was transported) at the age of 34 years.

Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, DCL (Oxon.), Surveyor-General of the colony 1828-1846; he was responsible for the building of the "Great South Road" which ran from Newtown to the "Five Islands" of Wollongong, in 1842-45; part of this road, now known as the "Old Illawarra Road", passes through this Shire above the headwaters of the Woronora River and includes Woronora Rd., Engadine; the Prince's Highway today mainly follows the old line of road. Sir Thos. Mitchell was also responsible for the engineering construction and road over the Victoria Pass in the Blue Mountains; and for the "Great North Road" (now the "Old North Road") from Wiseman's Ferry through to Wollombi, Robert Dixon, who surveyed the southern shores of Botany Bay round to Port Hacking and parts of the Woronora in '1828, is also buried in this cemetery -- he died 8/4/1858.

BY-WAYS OF HISTORY cont..."

"The Elizabeth Farm Museum Trust" has recently been formed to preserve Australia's oldest dwelling house for the nation. It was built in 1793 by John Macarthur. The Royal Australian Historical Society and the Parramatta Trust have combined to set up the "Elizabeth Farm Museum Trust". The trustees will soon launch an appeal to raise \$100,000 to buy the property (on which an option has been secured). After restoration it will become a permanent museum.

-- Sydney Morning Herald, 13/6/168.

Kentish Historical Coincidence: a story with an amazing coincidence was reported recently in an English provincial newspaper (Tonbridge Free Press, Kent). A Tonbridge town councillor, Mr. L. Willard, and his wife purchased a lovely old two-storeyed cottage built in the late 15th century. A fire occurred in the lounge-room chimney, and on pulling away some charred wood the firemen discovered that a large and spacious inglenook had been boarded in. The great beam supporting the chimney-breast is believed to be an old ship's timber. At the back of the fireplace is a small cupboard which used to house precious salt and shot to keep them dry.

Then, a passing amateur historian one day stopped to chat with the new owners, and told them the story of the house. To their further amazement it was learnt that the cottage had been built by the then ironmaster of Tonbridge -- David Willard, an ancestor!

Sutherland Shire about 1920: Population = 7,500: Dwellings = 2,200: Revenue = £24,000: Unimproved Capital Value = £1,065,000. The steam train to Sydney commenced from the Township of Sutherland: 1st class return fare = 3/8d; 2nd class return fare = 2/3d; there were 35 trains daily with extra services on Saturdays and holidays; the "fast" trains took 55 minutes to reach Central Station, Population of Sutherland township and inclusive area = 2100: population of Cronulla = 2157. An "ocean wharf" had just been completed at Cronulla (Port Hacking end), and "fine steamers of the "North Coast Co. make excursion trips to Cronulla every Saturday afternoon in summer. Return fare 3/-."

First Englishman to Sight Australia?

N.B.: The Bulletin Editor recently came across an old copy of the Royal Geographical Society's magazine (1934) in which was the following interesting article (condensed herein).

.....

Until quite recent years it generally believed that William Dampier was the first Englishman to sight the mainland of Australia in his ship the "Cygnet". Dampier and his crew, having stolen the "Cygnet", had been engaged in buccaneering and piracy in the China Seas, and so great had been their depredations that they wished to lie up safely for a while cut of the way of the Dutch and Spanish, and so they sailed south to the Dutch-described coast of "New Holland", landing at Shark Bay (W.A.) in 1688,

The Dutch had first sighted the northern part of the Australian coast in 1606 when Willem Jansz, master of the "Duyfken", had explored the Gulf of Carpentaria: in 1616 Dirk Hartog in the "Eendracht" had already landed in Shark's Bay -- and left his now historic piece of plate nailed to a post. Abel Tasman arrived in 1642 to discover Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land) and the west coast of New Zealand (Staete Landt).

According to records of the Royal Geographical. Society (1934) the first known Englishman to land on the Australian coast was John Brooke, master of the "Trial", and his crew. They had left London in March 1622 with a full cargo and 143 seamen, bound for Java via the Cape of Good Hope. The ship penetrated too far south and was wrecked on the north coast of W.A. in the following May. A number of the crew perished on the inhospitable coast, but some of them camped there for about a week or so to prepare the ship's longboat for the sea. Capt. Brooke and his men arrived safely at Java, and brought charts and reports of the new land when they reached England; none of these charts has apparently survived, although the information has.

The reef on which they were wrecked was named the Tryal Reef, and formed part of the Monte Bello Island group, opposite the Exmouth Gulf. In 1681 John Daniel in the ship "New London" arrived off this part of the coast and charted part of the area, later handing his charts to the historian Alexander Dalrymple.

It was not until 1770 that the next English explorer took any interest in this southern land, when Capt. James Cook arrived to explore and chart the east coast of NSW.

In 1820 the Admiralty in London gave Lieut. Phillip Parker King instructions to sail for the west coast of Australia and to make a minute survey of the area. He was thus able to establish beyond doubt that Barrow Island and the numerous surrounding reefs (adjacent to Monte Bello Islands) were the original Tryal Rocks of the ill-fated John Brooke and his ship the "Trial".
