

NEWSLETTER

Please address all correspondence to the Fellowship of First Publishers,
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From the President

March has been a very busy month for me. I have been a guest speaker on three occasions -- at Drummoyne Civic Centre for the Red Cross, at Willoughby for Lane Cove Evening View Club and at Burwood for Concord West View Club. You can see from this list that the Fellowship, its aims and objects, and the early history of the colony, are reaching an ever-increasing number of people.

I also spent a most interesting day at Caringbah Primary School. It was wonderful to see the enthusiasm of the teacher, who had arranged a "colonial day" for her 5th-form class and a privilege for me to address them. The children were dressed to suit the occasion and presented a play, enjoyed "colonial games" and were fascinated to do their writing with pen nib and ink! Each child was given a day's food ration, as near as possible to the original ration, and cooked it on open fires they had built themselves. They even received a "rum ration" (Coca Cola unbeknown to them!). I'm sure those children learnt much more that day than in the normal classroom.

On Sunday March 18 a group of about 20 Members braved the elements to attend the Dedication of the Richard Johnson Chapel at St Philip's, Church Hill. I was honoured to read a Lesson during the Service.

So many people attended the Lecture by Lord Crathorne at the Mitchell Library that I'm sure I missed seeing some of our Members. It was a wonderful evening, a most interesting talk on Captain Cook, accompanied by a set of beautiful slides. It really was a privilege to attend.

We extend a very warm welcome to Mrs Joan Cox, who answered our appeal for a typist and is now part of our Office Team.

I have had requests for a Coach Trip during the cooler weather. If members can make suitable suggestions as to an interesting place to go, I'll be only too pleased to try to arrange it.

It was with great regret we learned of the death of Mrs Mary Hope-Caten's mother, Mrs Bertha Emily Kevin. Sincere sympathy is extended to all the family.

I look forward to seeing our Members on Lecture Nights. They certainly are popular evenings, so come along and join us.

Beryl Lewis.

"Sydney's First Four Cemeteries"

Our March Lecture was a very interesting and informative one. The topic of the Lecture was the early graves and cemeteries of Sydney, the title being "Sydney's First Four Cemeteries". The speaker was Mr Charles Sweeney, devoted student of Australian history.

Mr Sweeney told us many interesting facts surrounding the various gravestones, and had wonderful slides showing us many early graves, each with a story which could have come from a colourful historical novel. These gravestones include those of George Crossley, a rascally lawyer who was Governor Bligh's legal advisor, and of George Graves, who died on July 10, 1788 — George Graves' is the only existing gravestone from Sydney's first cemetery, dug up at Cadman's Cottage Lane.

We also saw slides of the Town Hall, where tombs and vaults were found

a few years ago when the basement was being renovated. This was the site of one of our original cemeteries. Many of the early graves are at Botany, including that of the famous Mary Reibey.

Mr Sweeney made us all aware of the history one can find from these early graves, and we all felt the need to delve more into the past, and to visit the few remaining pioneer graves. We thank Mr Sweeney for devoting his precious time to this Lecture, and hope to hear him again in the near future.

Our next Lecture Evening is this Wednesday (April 18), at the new time of 7.45 pm. Dr George Bergman from the Jewish Historical Society is the speaker, and the title of the Lecture is "The Tale of Australia's First Rabbi, Joseph Marcus (1767-1828)".

A reminder, too, that there is an inspection of the Great Synagogue in Elizabeth Street this Sunday April 22 at 2 pm.

Sally Kalina.

Membership Committee

The following new Members were passed at the December 1978 meeting:--

Mrs Elsie Melba Sevil, 26/1 Osborne Road, Manly. (Philip Divino; or Divino)
Mrs Rhonda M. F. Barrass, P.O. Box 9, Railton, Tasmania. (Nathaniel Lucas - Olivia Gascoigne)
Nicol Macquarie Gamack, 501 Cavendish Road, Coorparoo, Q. (Frederick Meredith)
Mrs Alma Ellen Dusting and Miss Amanda Jane Dusting, of 1/24 Edensor Street, Epping N.S.W. (Thomas Arndell)
Mrs Doune Maxine DeL. Casimir, 25 Dover Road, Rose Bay (James Underwood)
Ronald Shaw, 7 Raven Crescent, Bidwell. (Nathaniel Lucas - Olivia Gascoigne)
Miss Kylie Jean Shaw (Jnr.) and Benjamin James Shaw (Jnr.), 7 Raven Cres., Bidwell. (Nath. Lucas - Olivia Gascoigne)
Miss Tania Shaw (Jnr.) and Craig Shaw (Jnr.), 1/35 Fletcher Street, Bondi (Nath. Lucas - Olivia Gascoigne)
Mrs Elaine June Maidmont, 86 Alameda Way, Warriewood. (Matthew Everingham)

The following new Member was passed at the April meeting:--

Philip T. Thorne, North Nowra. (Nathaniel Lucas - Olivia Gascoigne)

We are very pleased to welcome all these new Members into the Fellowship.

Mary Bailey. Naida Jackson.

(William) Edward Elliott

(This short outline of the life of William Elliott was delivered at his graveside at St John's Cemetery, Parramatta, on March 12, 1978. As there are no Members descended from William Elliott, this information was compiled by the Membership Committee)

Elliott (1752-1822), smallholder, was convicted at Croydon, Surrey, England, on August 18, 1783, of burglary and was sentenced to be transported for seven years. He sailed in the First Fleet in the Scarborough. A farmer by trade, he was among the handful of emancipists and former Marines who settled here in 1791 after his sentence had expired the previous year.

One of the earliest smallholders in New South Wales, he was a pioneer of the Ponds district, an area near Parramatta selected by Governor Phillip for Elliott and 13 other settlers. Being single, Elliott received a 30-acre allotment which he began cultivating in August that year. On September 11 at St John's, Parramatta, he married Ann Smith,

a convict who had arrived in the Mary Ann on July 9. By December he had formed a partnership with one of his neighbours, Joseph Marshall, an emancipist and former weaver who also owned 30 acres. Tools were scarce, labour impossible to procure and the two men joined forces presumably in the hope of making better progress by pooling resources; but by 1796 the partnership had broken up.

Meanwhile he had earned what proved to be a wholly undeserved reputation. In February 1792 David Burton, the Superintendent of Agriculture, singled out Elliott and four others, including his partner, as men "who cultivate their ground in a very slovenly manner, and are very dilatory". Elliott claimed that his soil was poor and unproductive, but by October 1794 he had some six acres under grain and an additional three cleared. In 1796 Collins gave him high praise for having bred a flock of 22 sheep from a ewe Phillip had given him in 1791. At a time when most smallholders quickly disposed of their issue of Government stock this was an outstanding achievement, and distinguished Elliott from his associates, few of whom owned any sheep, and showed him to be a man provident in his ways.

His later career suggests that he must have been unusually diligent and persevering. The thirst for spirits, the high cost of living and the adverse climate which ruined so many smallholders in the Hunter period did not prevent him from making progress. By 1800 his flock included 120 head, making him one of the foremost sheep owners outside the officer class. Six years later he was running 365 head on 96 acres he had bought at Seven Hills. In 1804-05 he was a private in the Parramatta Loyal Association. Although a signatory to the pro-Bligh petitions his fortunes did not suffer during the interregnum, for by the time of Macquarie's arrival he was the owner of 400 sheep.

How he fared during the intervening years until his death on April 19, 1822, is unknown, but his earlier career suggests that he was a man whose personal qualities and achievements justify the preservation of his memory, to which the stone still standing in St John's Cemetery, Parramatta, bears tribute.

Obituary

The death occurred on March 31 at his residence at Cattai of Mr Ronald Macquarie Arndell, a Member of the Fellowship, descendant of Dr Thomas Arndell, a doctor with the First Fleet. Mr Arndell was aged 72. An historian of the Hawkesbury district, he was the author of "Pioneers of Portland" and a couple of years ago gave one of the Fellowship's most interesting Lectures.

As mentioned in the President's Report, the death has also occurred of Mrs Bertha Emily Kevin, a Member of the Fellowship and mother of Executive Member Mrs Mary Hope-Caten, in her 97th year. Mrs Kevin's First Fleeters were John Sumners, Anthony Rope and Elizabeth Pulley.

Starting Time for Lectures

Members please note that the starting time for Lectures is now 7.45 pm instead of 8 pm as formerly. For the benefit of new Members, the Lectures are held in the No. 1 Board Room on the 4th Floor of the Assembly Building, York Street (entrance from Jamison Street) on the third Wednesday of the month. There is supper to follow in the Fellowship's office, Room 312, on the 3rd Floor of the Assembly Building.

A Convict Named Cooper Handy

(Material supplied by Membership Committee)

Cooper Handy (or Handley) was a Yorkshire man, a weaver by trade, who was convicted in March 1783 with two other men for stealing 21 shillings from one Thomas Wilshire. He was sentenced to be hanged, but received a reprieve and was ordered to be transported to America for seven years.

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Cooper Handy (Continued)

Cooper Handy was again sentenced for taking part in a mutiny on the ship Mercury and for escaping from the Mercury. In March 1787 he was moved from the hulk Dunkirk to the Friendship, which sailed from Spithead on Sunday May 13, 1787.

After arrival at Sydney Cove he went about the work assigned to him in such a way that no complaints were made against him for either idleness or dishonesty.

In October 1788 Cooper Handy went out with an armed party to find vegetables and sweet tea leaves, but strayed from his companions. The soldiers found him lying in their path later in the day. He had been horribly murdered by the natives.

This poor man had disobeyed orders to stay with the party for safety. Marines and convicts buried him in the place near the scene of his death.

Early Encounters Between Europeans and Aborigines in N.S.W.

(A further instalment of Ena Harper's papers on the subject, reprinted by kind permission of Ashfield Historical Society and Ena Harper. In the previous couple of instalments published in this Newsletter, the authoress was discussing why the Aborigines appeared to be completely indifferent to the coming of the Endeavour)

To me the explanation is that their culture had been static for thousands of years. Their social and religious beliefs and customs had been handed down by word of mouth, unchanged for hundreds of generations. The world around them remained the same, and they had the explanations for natural phenomena given them by the elders' sacred legends. The elders' authority was completely unchallenged. They were all in a groove. Scientific curiosity was never stimulated and remained completely undeveloped. So when the Aborigines looked at the Endeavour it was outside their range of knowledge. So it just did not register.

This seems to be borne out by an incident in a book called "My Crowded Solitude", by Jack McLaren. The book was written in 1911 when McLaren lived among the Aborigines near the tip of Cape York. In a chapter entitled "The People Who Stood Still" occur these words:

"I had a lugger-captain who occasionally came my way bring me an acetylene-gas outfit and piping....so that when all the jets were lit the place was one white blaze of light.

"I had thought that at least this light would surprise the natives out of the nonchalance with which they accepted unusual things. But after a gasp of astonishment at the first quick flaring of the jets, they made neither remark nor comment, but regarded the light as idly as though this turning of night into day was the most ordinary circumstance of their lives. The fact was that they considered the thing inexplicable, and it was not their fashion to attempt solving the inexplicable. They merely accepted it as something beyond their understanding, and let it go at that".

How immeasurably wide was the chasm dividing these people and men like Cook who lived for the discovery and charting of new seas and lands, and the scientific team under Banks, collecting, sketching and classifying new specimens of plant and animal life, eager to enlarge scientific knowledge.

And the Europeans felt themselves to be superior. Banks thought that the Aborigines were "but one degree removed from the brutes".

But Banks did not know all there was to be known about them. If their minds were primitive and undeveloped in one direction, they were very acute and knowledgeable in another. Here is another passage from "My Crowded Solitude":

"....they had a remarkably intimate knowledge and understanding of the

bush and the ways and the life of the bush. Indeed, they were more conversant with their environment than any natives I had seen. In New Guinea a man might know a deal about fish and crabs and other creatures of the sea, and but little about the creatures of the land, because he was a member of that section of the tribe which did little else than fish. In the Solomons a man might have an immense knowledge of the animal- and bird-life of his island, and but a superficial knowledge of its vegetable-life. These Cape York People all knew all there was to know of their surroundings -- a circumstance due to the fact that being nomads who lived on what they could catch or find there was need to know where these things could be found, and be informed of their edible or non-edible qualities, for in the matter of food-hunting it was mainly a case of each man for himself. Though in some ways they lived communally, in this way they were strongly individualistic.

"But this wide knowledge of theirs was in no wise ragged or untidy. It was systematized and regulated. For each department of animate and inanimate nature they had a system of nomenclature as comprehensively complete as that which any trained scientist could have devised; and they knew the relationships of the various departments, and the significance of the relationships one to another. And all this information they carried in their heads, they having no means of writing whatever, and so indelibly was it impressed upon their memories that any one of them, even the children, could at any time deliver an impromptu and most enlightening dissertation regarding, say, a weed plucked haphazard, telling of its flowering and seeding times, its habitats and habits, of its preference for one kind of soil and aversion from another kind of soil, with the reasons for this preference and aversion, and so on through a multitude of details, all told with a simple matter-of-factness tinged with wonder that I should need to be told these things at all. I think they thought me a most ignorant person".

Anyway, to return to Botany Bay.

It was unwise for the Englishmen to despise the Aborigines just because they were primitive or backward in certain aspects. They should have been impressed by the fact that these natives were in a state of balance with nature. The Aborigines were confident and self-reliant, showing no signs of neurosis. There were many things they could have taught the white man.

As it was, the gap between them was too great. It was glaringly apparent in the attitude of the two groups of people, those on the ship and those on the land, as the Endeavour sailed into Botany Bay. There was one lot, thousands of miles from home, plunging on into new worlds of experience and knowledge, acutely interested in all that was strange and new; there was the other almost inexorably bound to their tribal territory, indifferent, almost dead, to anything outside it. Yet they were supreme specialists in their minute knowledge of nature, and were wise in the relationship between man and nature, man and man, man and the spiritual world.

Europeans and Aborigines. The two races encountered each other at Botany Bay. They were just human beings, people with common needs, but so wide was the gap between them in experience and ideas they could have been beings from separate planets.

It was a pity....

On Sunday April 29, 1770, Captain James Cook set out in a small boat with Mr Joseph Banks, Dr Solander and Tupia the Tahitian for the shores of Botany Bay. He was accompanied by other boats from the Endeavour. In his Journal he says there were men, women and children on the south shore and he went there "in the hopes of speaking with them". What happened?

All the people ran away except two men who were obviously opposed to the

strangers landing on their territory. Cook continues: "I ordered the boats to lay upon their oars in order to speak to them but this was to little purpose, for neither us nor Tupia could understand one word they said".

Banks writes of it in even more graphic fashion: "They called to us very loud in a harsh sounding language of which neither us or Tupia understood a word, shaking their lances and menacing, in all appearance resolved to dispute our landing to the utmost though they were but two and we 30 or 40 at least. In this manner we parleyed with them for about a quarter of an hour, they waving to us to be gone, we again signing that we wanted water and that we meant them no harm".

What facts emerge from these eyewitness stories?

1. The majority of the Aborigines were very timid and shrank from meeting the strangers face to face. Their answer to the threat of invasion was flight.
2. We cannot but be intrigued by the sight of two men who refused to panic and stayed behind to confront the Englishmen. It would be interesting to know if they stayed because of their position in the tribe, or because they were more aggressive personalities, more outstanding individuals in what appears on the surface a standardized society. At any rate we can only wonder at their courage.
3. Right here at the beginning is highlighted the difficulty that arose between the two races -- the inability to communicate.

On the other hand, we cannot but admit the right of the natives of the land to mistrust the newcomers. True, Banks said they wanted only water, but Cook, though purely an explorer, had secret instructions. One of them stated:

"You are also with the Consent of the Natives to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Gt Britain or: if you find the Country uninhabited take Possession for his Maj^y by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions, as first discoverers & Possessors".

Banks says they tried to show the men they meant them no harm but they could not convince them. In his words, "They remained resolute".

This seems to indicate that there was deep distrust of the newcomers, and we cannot but query whether they would have been made any more welcome even if there had been a common language. After all, the Englishmen had fraternised with the Tahitians. It seems to me that the Australian Aborigines regarded their land in a much more personal intimate way than the Polynesians, and as being sacred to their tribe, and so they would be more emotionally disturbed by any outsider setting foot thereon.

Despite this, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the inability to speak any common language led to antagonism and problems right from the start.

This would appear a fitting place to consider the language of the Aborigines in general. In his book Professor A. P. Elkin gives a detailed account of Aboriginal linguistics, but we can only deal with some major points.

(To be Continued in the next Newsletter)

Coming Events

- April 18 (7.45 pm): Lecture by Dr George Bergman, "The Tale of Australia's First Rabbi, Joseph Marcus (1767-1828)".
- April 22 (2 pm): Inspection of the Great Synagogue, Elizabeth Street.
- May 16 (7.45 pm): Lecture by Dr Peter Reynolds, "Horbury Hunt -- Architect Extraordinaire".
