

BOUND FOR
BOTANY BAY:

*What books
did the
First Fleeters
read
and where
are they now?*


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KEEPSAKE

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✎ In this, the year of the Australian Bicentennial, it was extremely surprising to the present authors that so little research had been undertaken on the books that the First Fleeters read and brought to Australia in 1788. In general terms, there are very few surviving First Fleet objects, such as coins, furniture and glassware. Even paintings and drawings are not that numerous. Probably diaries and letters are the 'commonest' items in volume if certainly not in price. The few surviving books that came out on the First Fleet are of considerable historical and commercial interest. ✎✎✎✎✎✎

✎ The Australian National University Library's interest in this element of the First Fleet saga began when it bought from a Canberra second hand bookshop (in an otherwise not very expensive catalogue) Volume four of the *Annals of Agriculture* (London 1785). This volume came out on the First Fleet with Lt. George Johnston, later to become one of the leading figures in the colony. An inscription inside the volume states: 'This book from Colonel George Johnston's library at Annandale House, Annandale, Sydney NSW, was presented to Colonel Johnston by his guardian His Grace the (2nd) Duke of Northumberland before he left England in the First Fleet in May 1787, and with the exception of the Rev. Richard Johnson's (1st Chaplain to the Colony) Bible and Prayer book now preserved at St Phillip's Church Sydney, is the only other book in Australia that was brought out in the First Fleet, as far as I know. (sgd) D. Hope Johnston. 26/1/24.' ✎✎✎

✎ John Thompson, now Director of Australian Collections and Services of the National Library of Australia, verified the authenticity of the item by matching the signature of Johnston against signatures in manuscripts microfilmed by the Australian Joint Copying Project. The Friends of the Australian National University Library, with the aid of an appeal through its late Chancellor, Sir John Crawford, bought the item for Canberra. ✎✎✎✎

✎ The manuscript comments in the *Annals* prompted the question — what books came out on the First Fleet and how many survived? The search did not start in earnest, however, until late 1987 when both writers realised how little had apparently been researched on this topic. We constantly asked 'but surely there must be a list somewhere or someone has published an article?' The answer was in the negative from historians such as the distinguished historian of Australia, Emeritus Professor Manning Clark; Dr Alan Frost, the biographer of Capt. Arthur Phillip; and Dr John Ritchie of the Australian Dictionary of Biography; and from bibliographers such as Victor Crittenden who compiled the bibliography of the First Fleet and Jonathan

Wantrup, whose definitive *Australian Rare Books* was published in 1987. Occasional references to books in the journals were alluded to in general terms but none had made any specific analysis nor knew of any overall work on the topic. * * * * *

✿ We were intrigued when Professor Manning Clark was quoted in *The Bulletin* of September 1, 1987 that 'the First Fleeters brought with them a piano, sheet music of Mozart, an authorised version of the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare — this is one of the things we have to try to remember in telling the history of Australia'. Professor Clark was, however, unable to provide specific references other than 'one of the officers referred often to Shakespeare', so while it is highly possible a collected edition of Shakespeare did come out on the First Fleet, because no exact reference has been found by us it has been excluded from this survey. * * * * *

✿ One of the purposes of this article is to seek the assistance of others in identifying titles of items that were on the First Fleet. It is clear that our list and research is still incomplete and that a number of archives have still to be searched. The project is an ongoing one by the Friends of the ANU Library and will continue well after 1988 to ensure that in Canberra (far from the sea!) the books of the First Fleet are reassembled in one place in Australia. *

✿ The other city in which First Fleet books are known to have survived is Sydney. Manning Clark's 'bible' is held in St Philips Church in Sydney. The Reverend Richard Johnson, the Chaplain to the First Fleet, held the first service in Australia under a tree on the western side of Sydney Cove on February 3, 1788 (they had been too busy on the previous Sunday!). Johnson's King James's Bible (whose title page is now missing) and Book of Common Prayer (Oxford 1784) were used in the service, the former opened for Psalm 116 verse 12 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me'. These both reside still in St Philips Church museum in Sydney, although sadly, but understandably, not on show. Through the offices of the present Rector, the Reverend H.J. Edwards, these volumes were viewed — the Bible has been signed by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip in 1954 and more recently by Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales. They sit next to the Communion Plate given to the Colony by King George III. * * * * *

✿ Johnson also came armed in a religious sense with an extensive library provided by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. He had *inter alia* one hundred Bibles, four hundred New Testaments, one hundred

prayer books, two hundred catechisms, as well as numerous tracts such as the Reverend Stephen White's *A Dissuasive from Stealing* and Josiah Woodward's *A Dissuasive from Profane Swearing and Cursing offered to such unhappy persons as are guilty of those horrid sins, and are not past counsel*. The tracts on religious and moral topics were intended for distribution to convicts and 'Dixons Spelling Books' would have been intended for distribution to the colony's children and those convicts who could not read. Twelve copies of Bishop Thomas Wilson's *An Essay Towards an Instruction for the Indians* (13th edition London, 1781) were clearly intended for the Aborigines whom he described as 'harmless and inoffensive'. Nevertheless he found it difficult to minister to them and he wrote back to England requesting that missionaries be sent specifically to assist him. *****

✠ Johnson was increasingly discouraged by his lack of success with the convicts of his preaching and distribution of books. In 1789 he wrote 'Have distributed many books among them (the convicts) but this I fear has done little good. One sold his Bible for a glass of liquor; others tear them up for waste paper; this discourages me greatly. I have no heart to go amongst them'. *****

✠ A curious sidelight on this is found in Lt Ralph Clark's journal in which he writes on May 1 1792, 'Two sharks were caught this morning — in the belly of one of them was found a Prayer Book quite fresh not a leaf of it defaced on one of the leaves was wrote Frances Carthy' (Frances Carty, convict, sailed on the First Fleet on *Scarborough*). This may well have been tossed into the sea by Carty! *****

✠ To return to Lt George Johnston, thought to have been the first man ashore at Sydney Cove on January 26 1788, the ANU Library copy of the *Annals of Agriculture* has a water stain, but only the romantics would argue that it was dropped in Sydney Harbour on that fateful day! Volume one also survives in the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney. It too came from the original library preserved by the Johnston family and their descendants at Annandale House. Clearly agricultural works such as Arthur Young's *Annals of Agriculture* were of practical value for the survival of the colony. The *Annals* gave agriculture due prominence as 'the first and most important of all business' as Young put it. Since Young also advocated modern agricultural practices such as good grazing and new equipment he was widely read. *****

✠ Lt Philip King commented on May 31 1789 on his planting in his 'town

garden' of wheat 'which I drilled as was recommended in Tull's horse hoeing husbandry' — a reference to Jethro Tull's famous agricultural work first published in 1733. This was subtitled *An Essay on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation*. The books of the First Fleeters clearly fell into three categories, the practical, the devotional or moral and the recreational. * * * * *

✎ Several other volumes of Johnston's survive in the State Library of New South Wales, e.g. volumes one, three, four to eight of the 1753 Edinburgh reprint of *The Spectator* (1710–1714) which clearly provided educational and recreational reading. Volume five has Johnston signing the title-page 'Lt Johnston of the Marines 1778' and later 'Annandale Farm 3 September 1820', while Volume six is annotated by him in pencil 'July 12 1787 on board the *Lady Penrhyn* bound to Botany Bay'. July 12 was the day sailors went on strike on the *Lady Penrhyn* according to Jonathan King and the fleet's progress was halted — so there may have been time for catching up on reading! * * * * *

✎ Another item which the State Library also received but which it had not been able to identify as the title page is missing was an item with a subtitle *The Discourse of Epic Poetry of the Excellence of the Poem of Telemachus*. On the verso of the last leaf is written 'Lt Johnston his book the gift of Lt Proctor Portsmouth 11 November 1778' also inscribed by him 'Norfolk Island 1790'. Inspection of this book reveals the translator to be Pierre Desmaizeaux and this in turn using the *American National Union Catalogue* allows the identification of the author as François de Salignac Fenelon and the book as *The Adventures of Telemachus The Son of Ulysses*. This was published in two volumes in 1742 and the State Library only has volume one of this particular translation, which Desmaizeaux says is 'the most popular book that ever was written to form the mind and heart of youth'. A library catalogue of 1766 rates *Telemachus* as one of 'the best of this kind', i.e. of romances and novels and ranks it alongside *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*. * * * * *

✎ The last remaining State Library volume is Brigadier-General Adam Williamson's version of Marshal Turenne's *Military Memoirs and Maxims* published in London in 1740 which would have obvious relevance to Johnston as an aspiring career officer. The State Library volumes of Johnston, the 'stray' *Annals* located at ANU, the St Philip's Church items and a volume belonging to Moore Theological College Library in Sydney which belonged to the Reverend Richard Johnson, namely, Alexander

Cruden's *A Complete Concordance to the Holy Scriptures* (3rd ed. 1769) are the only volumes that we believe that *have survived the First Fleet journey*. As mentioned earlier, if others survive in public or private libraries, the authors would be most interested to hear of them. * * * * *

☛ The above are the books that survived, but we know there were others that came out on the First Fleet as documented in the journals or letters. In the same vein as *The Spectator* are volumes of *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-) and *The Lady's Magazine* (1770-) which accompanied members of the First Fleet such as Clark. Both were popular items in the 'circulating libraries' of the time. Surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth tells on December 19 1787 of Captain Hunter sending 'Mr Waterhouse, a Midshipman of the *Sirius*, on board with us a parcel of Magazines of June last . . . this afforded us a great treat'. It's clear that just like families on holidays in the rain much exchange of reading matter went on to while away the long nights. It is also clear, contrary to the comments on this subject, that many more books were on board the ships than has previously been suggested. * * * * *

☛ While many of the marines and convicts could not read or write a significant number could. The late eighteenth century was a boom period for publishing — a growing reading public would have been reflected on the First Fleet. Particularly popular was drama, fiction and travel collections. Thomas Keneally has recently novelised *The Playmaker*, the performance of George Farquhar's famous drama *The Recruiting Officer* on June 4 1789. John West in his *Theatre in Australia* wonders 'what theatre lover packed *The Recruiting Officer* into his gear to bring to a God-Forsaken place like Botany Bay. An officer perhaps. If it was Tench he does not admit it'. It seems unlikely to have been Tench who tells us of the pleasure this gave even with the rudimentary set of 'three or four yards of stained paper and a dozen filthy candles stuck around the mud walls of a convict hut'. * * *

☛ The 'Theatrical Amateurs' took up twenty percent of one bookseller's catalogue in the late eighteenth century. Thus along with *The Recruiting Officer* must have gone other plays but we have only been able to identify positively two items: John Home's *Douglas — a Tragedy* first published in 1757 and Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Gray* (first published in 1715). Concerning this latter play Lt Ralph Clark was reading on Friday 7 December 1787 'part of the play of Jane Gray . . . she did love her husband but not half as much as I love my adorable Alicia . . . I wish to christ that I was but once got back to her again'. He finished the play off on December 8

and 'could not help shedding tears!' * * * * *

✎ It is difficult to ascertain also what other literature the colonists had. Captain Watkin Tench, for example, could quote Milton's *Paradise Lost* from memory and therefore it is unclear if he had a copy on board for reference. Tench quoted often from Shakespeare and the Latin and Greek classics and had a good grounding in contemporary English and French literature, some of which he must have brought out with him, e.g. Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* was a favourite. Shakespeare we have mentioned earlier and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* may well have been on board. With reference to Dawes we have recently identified, by courtesy of Victor Crittenden, the bibliographer of the First Fleet, Dawe's logarithmic and navigational books but not his 'leisure' type reading material. In another vein, George Worgan, a somewhat eccentric First Fleet surgeon, took a piano on board the *Sirius* on which he played Mozart amongst other musical pieces but the sheet music would hardly have survived if he did not play from memory. * * * * *

✎ In the utilitarian area, Dr Robert Dixon in his award winning recent book *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788-1860* tells us that Professor Adam Ferguson of Edinburgh University was 'an author well-known to the officers and gentlemen of the First Fleet' notably Watkin Tench. Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* 'was among the mere handful of books considered necessary for the edification and diversion of the expedition'. Ferguson's intention in this 1767 publication was 'to set the ancient discipline of moral philosophy upon a 'modern scientific foundation'. The First Fleet officers were thus able to intertwine the Scottish traditions of moral philosophy with the reality of the 'noble savage' they encountered in Australia. In the first round at least the Aborigines could be presented as embodiments of the primitive virtues. * * * * *

✎ Dixon also indicates that James Burnet's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-1792) had an influence on the First Fleet authors as great as Ferguson but it is unclear if this was brought out to Australia. One work which had a decided influence was Oliver Goldsmith's *A Natural History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, first published in 1774, and one of the ten most borrowed books in the Bristol Library from 1773-1784. It had both practical value and an underlying Christian interpretation of progress. In the first context Watkin Tench tells us of his comparison of his sighting of

an emu with Goldsmith's account which he referred to. *****

☛ Laurie Fitzhardinge has said Goldsmith's *Natural History* 'seems to have been the only book on the subject with the First Fleet' even though Samuel Johnson is reputed to have remarked that if Goldsmith 'could tell a horse from a cow that was the extent of his knowledge of zoology'. John White's journal does make a reference to John Latham's *General Synopsis of Birds* published in three volumes between 1781 and 1785 in connection with parrots, cockatoos etc. but as a recent editor of the journal has said: 'White is scarcely likely to have had Latham's *Synopsis* with him and these therefore were probably added by White's London editor.' *****

☛ On December 1 1787 James Smith, the only free settler in the Fleet, gave his friend Surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth a present of the four volumes of the 'Dictionary of Art and Sciences' (possibly *A New Royal and Universal Dictionary of Arts & Sciences* (London 1771-2)). George Johnston gave Smyth a present of the two folio volumes of 'Hamilton Moor's Voyages and Travels' on New Years Day 1788 — a reference to John Hamilton Moore's derivative collection *A New & Complete Collection of Voyages & Travels* (London, 1778-80). *****

☛ The First Fleet must have carried a number of voyages and travels collections for practical purposes. Cook's *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (3 vols, London, 1784) was clearly on board from references by Tench, Bradley and White and it is strongly suspected that the Hawkesworth 1773 collection, one of the most popular travel works of the century, was on board. *****

☛ According to Dr John Cobley in the December 1987 issue of *The Medical Journal of Australia* 'our knowledge of the drugs and instruments that were available for the surgeons is sparse' — these included 'bleeding porringers' and 'stump caps'. If this was the case for instruments then the information on books is even less. No mention is apparently made of medical tracts in the journals and writings of the surgeons. The first inventory of medical supplies in the colony, prepared by William Balmain in 1795, mentions '4 Hospital Books'. These presumably were hospital registers, and not printed texts. *****

☛ M. Barnard Eldershaw in 'their' *Phillip of Australia* stated 'the first settlers brought no lawyers with them nor libraries of law books to guide them. The English law that they brought with them . . . was simply the law that existed in their memories and their traditions'. However, noted lawyer

and historian Mr Justice Rae Else-Mitchell has found the reference to Judge Advocate Collins' list of 16 legal books which included Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (fifth edition Oxford, 1773) and Sir Matthew Hale *Historia Placitorum Coronae* (London, 1736 and 1778) which travelled with the First Fleet. Else-Mitchell has also commented on the problems arising from no lawyers being on board except for 'a couple of convicted felons' and on the difficulties some of the legal technicalities in these books would thus have caused! * * * * *

✚ All of the items cited to this point are in English. Many nationalities were represented on the First Fleet including Germans, Dutch, French, Spanish and Italians, although Dr Robert Pascoe in his recent book *Buongiorno Australia* (Sydney, 1987) is quoted as saying the latter were pirates who had been captured by the British and shipped out as convicts. *

✚ Mr John Lowes, Assistant Surgeon on HMS *Sirius*, carried with him a number of works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Those books entrusted to him were about the Bible, the nature of God and the Spiritual World (Heaven and Hell) and were distributed amongst the officers and crew. John Lowes reported the safe arrival of the books in a letter written to a Robert Hindmarsh of London, one of the early Receivers of the religious teachings contained in Swedenborg's theological writings. Curiously we have not found any books read by women! Again perhaps the search has only just begun. * * * * *

✚ Once the ANU Library had a preliminary list of First Fleet items that it knew had been on the First Fleet it contacted a number of major antiquarian booksellers in England in late 1987 to search for the *actual* eighteenth century editions — without letting them know the 'raison d'être' of the list. The apparent randomness of the items drew some puzzled comments from the dealers. The 'hit rate' to date, given the nature of the subject content of the material, has been better than expected and the prices very reasonable. In this context the authors at times wondered if they shouldn't have cornered the market and sold the 'First Fleet Library' on the streets of Sydney! * * * * *

✚ Any person requiring a complete listing of the items identified to date can obtain this by writing to Colin Steele, University Librarian of the Australian National University Library, GPO Box 4, Canberra, ACT 2601. The authors would also be grateful for the identification of any other First Fleet material that readers of this pamphlet can provide. In addition, an

appeal has been launched for sponsorship of the First Fleet books collection and any support in this context is most welcome. Details again can be provided by Colin Steele. The surviving Johnston and Cruden items are included in the National Library of Australia's Bicentennial Exhibition *People, Print & Paper: Celebrating the Books of Australia, 1788-1988* curated by Michael Richards which is on tour throughout Australia until mid-1989. ✻