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# Hawkesbury-Nepean Chapter Newsletter

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## AROUND THE RIVER BEND

Summertime has come early to the Hawkesbury Nepean Chapter and with it the bushfire season. Hopefully, all of our members will be greeting the New Year 2020 safe and sound whether you live along the Nepean and Hawkesbury Rivers and their tributaries or in the Blue Mountains or on the Cumberland Plain. The smell of smoke in the air reminds us that not everyone is fortunate. We fully are supportive to family and friends who give of themselves by volunteering in the Bushfire Brigades and by the men and women who support them to help protect us at this time.

This past month, we held our excursion to the Parramatta Female Factory led by the very informative Judith Dunn. While it was a warm day, we were quite lucky to move around the property at ease and appreciate the information that Judith passed along to us. A small report by Judith O'Donohue with some photos from the day can be found on our website. In late October, our Chapter hosted the AGM for the Fellowship's main body. It was well attended at the Hawkesbury Museum by members from nine Chapters. It was interesting for our Chapter to be involved in the first ever Fellowship AGM in our area.

This January, the Fellowship celebrates the commemoration of the 231<sup>st</sup> arrival of our First Fleet ancestors. As is said in our meeting welcome during the year: "without whom we would not be here." I often think about that trip leaving Portsmouth in May 1787 and after all those months with many days at sea arriving in late January in the middle of summer without any welcoming accommodation. Many of you will celebrate that arrival with your family at home, in a community celebration hosted by the Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains or Penrith Councils or possibly in a holiday location elsewhere in Australia.

The Fellowship of First Fleeters will formally celebrate with its annual Australia Day Luncheon in Sydney on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Booking information for the event was included with the October-November "Founders." It is a very special occasion each year to join with other descendants and friends. Hopefully, some of you may be able to attend this memorable event in 2020.

Our first meeting in 2020 will be held in the Tebbutt Room at the Hawkesbury District Library in Windsor on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February. Our guest speaker will be Patrick Dodd and his topic is about John Macarthur. As communicated to you previously, our meetings in 2020 will be bi-monthly on the third Saturday, thereby avoiding Easter Saturday in April and the Queens Birthday Holiday weekend in June. Again for updates on meetings and speakers, please check our website under "Calendar".

As we say goodbye to 2019, I would like to pass along our special thankyou to Lois Fisher. Lois is a staff member in the office of Prue Carr, the MLA for Londonderry. Lois provides us with copies of our minutes and newsletters for those without email or Internet and our Christmas Carols sheet for our Christmas Party. This printing saves our Chapter printing and postage costs during the year.

On Behalf of the Committee,  
*William Hempel*  
Corresponding Secretary

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

### **DECEMBER 2019 MEETING**

**Christmas Luncheon**

**Date: Saturday 14th December 2019**

**Venue: Hawkesbury Regional Library**

**George Street, Windsor**

**Time: 11am**



### **FEBRUARY 2020 MEETING**

**Guest Speaker: Patrick Dodd**

**Date: Saturday 15th February 2020**

**Venue: Hawkesbury Regional Library**

**George Street, Windsor**

**Time: 11am**

**Topic: John Macarthur**



### **APRIL 2020 MEETING**

**Guest Speaker: John Lanser**

**Date: Saturday 18th April 2020**

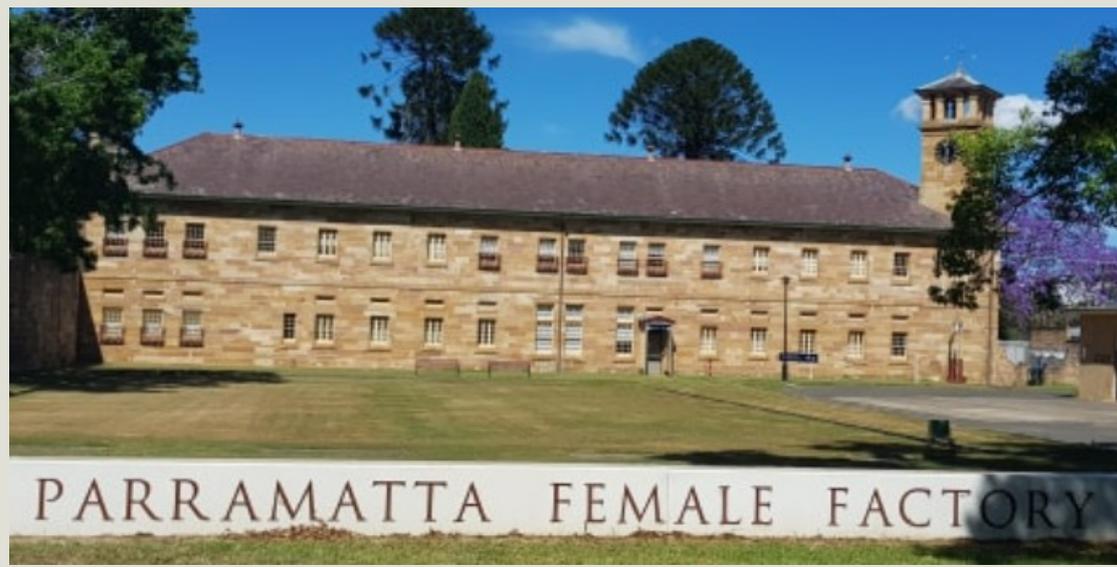
**Venue: Hawkesbury Regional Library, George Street, Windsor**

**Time: 11am**

**Topic: Wreck of the Dunbar**



## FFFHNC visit to Parramatta Female Factory



Members of FFFHNC had a great day when visiting the Parramatta Female Factory where they were guided on a tour by Judith Dunn on Saturday 9th November 2019.

### Quotes from the Colony 1788

#### Thursday 1st December 1788

*...fresh food, including fish, was essential for the hospital. I, as with others, volunteered for daily fishing duty which had become a necessity, rather than a pleasure.*

**Chief Surgeon White**

#### Sunday 3rd Decemeber 1788

*...a female convict who received stolen goods was made a public example of. She was clothed with a canvas frock on which was painted in large characters R.S.G (Receiver of stolen goods)*

**Judge Advocate Collins**

#### Friday 23rd December 1788

*...Yuletide is almost upon us and my hope is by no means exhausted despite the difficulties met with, given time, and additional force, together with proper people for cultivating the land... I know now that I can make a nation*

**Captain Phillip**

## The Sirius Letters (Book review-part 1) by Rae Moore

In the book "The Sirius Letters" edited and commented on by Nancy Irvine, there is a most interesting tale of a First Fleeter Newton Fowell. Newton Fowell was a Midshipman and then a Lieutenant of the flagship of the First Fleet—The Sirius. His letters have a "permanent and public home" in the Mitchell Library in NSW.

To quote the book's foreword..."Newton Fowell has been reunited with his shipmates from the Sirius in that the library holds original journals of Captain John Hunter, Lieutenant William Bradley and Philip Gidley King".

Newton Fowell's letters falling into the hands of Nancy Irvine was serendipitous. During the re-enactment of the 1787 journey in 1987 from London to Portsmouth, Nancy was introduced to a gentleman whose family had bought the home from the Fowell family. The letters lay undisturbed for 150 years. They were then found and read by a convalescing relative and put aside for another 40 years. The gentleman then said to Nancy "I have some letters from a young Lieutenant who sailed on the Sirius...would you like a copy?"

Nancy Irvine became extremely fond of Newton in the reading of his letters. The letters are mainly written to his father whom he addresses as "Hon'd Father" and signs off on many letters "I am, Hon'd Father Your dutiful son, Newton Fowell". He only mentions his mother on occasion but there is a real affection for his mother, his brothers and aunt. "Give my Duty to my mother".

So began, for Nancy Irvine, a wonderful journey through Newton Fowell's letters, about the life of a young man, keen for advancement in his career, the excitement of the journey, the ship he sailed in, the crews and the convicts. Not least of all to a destination called Botany Bay in New South Wales.

November 1786-Newton's first service in the service of his country was on HMS Ardent but his great wish was to be on a ship in foreign service where the chance of promotion would be greater. He has passed his exams and was now a midshipman. In his second letter to his father, he first mentions that "the Botany Bay Scheme" had apparently been postponed til spring.

December 1786- He writes to his mother and through her family connections and according to Nancy Irvine, she has "clout" which results in Evan Nepean acting on his behalf regarding his joining the Sirius.

Newton Fowell was then nominated by Evan Nepean to Captain Arthur Phillip (1st Captain) who in turn it appears, has given "directions" regarding Newton to Captain Hunter(2nd Captain).

In the class driven time of the day it was important to know the "right people" to make the connections and speak in the favour of the applicant.

February 1787- until things settled, Newton often requested his father send funds, to pay for his mess (an area where naval officers would socialize, eat and live), and various other "necessities", as he was not yet "on the books" to receive pay.

Newton "would be obliged" if his father would send him 10 guineas for his mess and 3 guineas for a quadrant. During his previous service on the "Berwick" in 1782 and the capture of a French ship, he was entitled to a share of the spoils. He requested that his father make application for this "prize money". He has left his "power of attorney" with his father along with his "Last Will and testament". "...if I die".

February 27 1787- Captain John Hunter in his letter to Dr Palmer writes "that Mr Fowell whom you mention has joined the Sirius and will receive from me every civility in my power as well as your recommendation as that of Capt. Ourry". (a friend of the Fowell family).

March 1787- In his letters he tells his father he has purchased a hammer, saw and chisels. He doesn't expect he will be able to get any of these at Botany Bay.

March 27, 1787- Newton is now happily settled on the Sirius and although Capt. Phillip is still in London, with no knowledge of when he will return, Newton declares to his father "I am all ready and the sooner we sail the better".

He gives a short report of the ship and the officers and writes "I like the Sirius and all the Officers very well". Captain Hunter is a very agreeable man at table as well as on service". He then gives a short description of some of his fellow officers for whom he has great respect. Newton comments: "In short I have had civilities shown me that I could expect from people who are strangers to me so I live very happily".

April 17, 1787– Still no news of sailing time, and with reports from London they are not going at all. He fears his clothes are wearing out in the wait. Capt. Phillip is still in London.

And then a most unusual request from Newton to his father. That “he would be much obliged if you could send me a pot of clotted cream, if you could make it convenient , I should think it the best present of the sort you could send me”.

At the end of this letter to his father, Newton noted after signing off “Your Dutiful Son”.

### “Sirius Bound for Botany Bay”

At last, for Newton Fowell his longed for adventure and duty had begun.

Despite being unable to carry out his correspondence with his father, he continues to write.

His last letter, dated a week after the First Fleet sailed away, was sent with official mail, by a naval frigate the “Hyaena” that had sailed with the Fleet from Portsmouth and then returned to England.

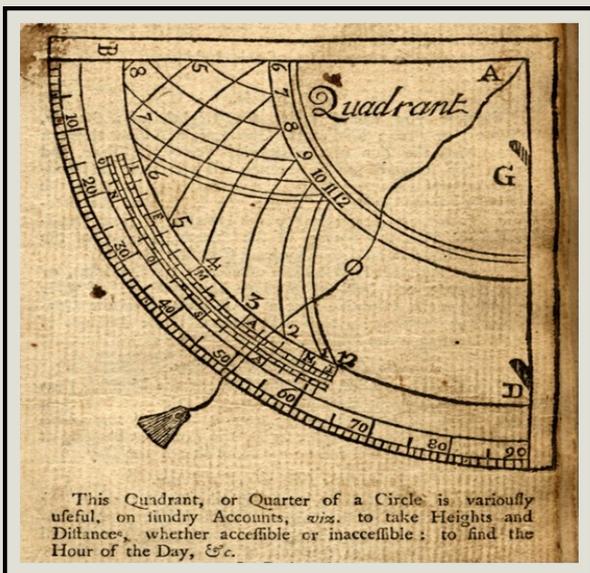
Last sight of land-next stop Teneriffe.

### The Sirius Letters

The Complete Letters of Newton Fowell

Midshipman & Lieutenant aboard The Sirius Flagship of the First Fleet

Edited & with commentary by Nancy Irvine 1988.



Left:

A quadrant or quadrant of a circle:

To take heights or distances weather accessible or inaccessible: to find the hour of the day.

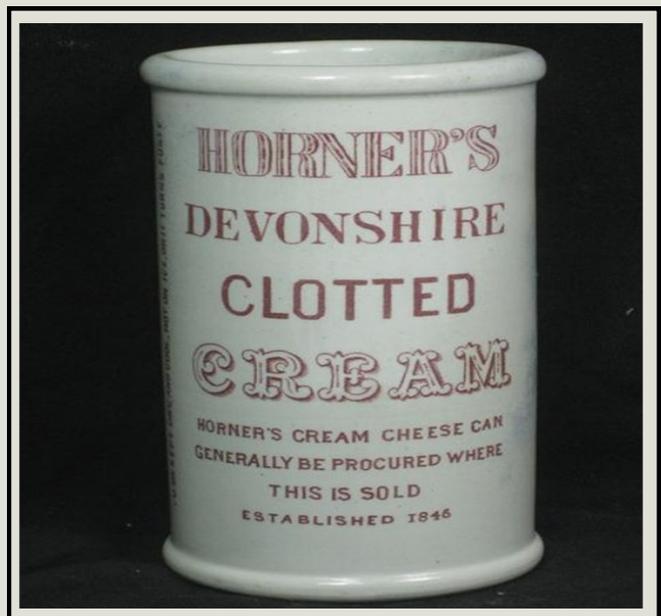
Right:

At the end of the letter to his father, Newton noted after signing off “Your dutiful Son”

For contributions to the Newsletter please email to

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Website: [www.fffnc.com](http://www.fffnc.com)



## A Glance At Margaret Dawson

Margaret Dawson was born around 1770 and arrived on the First Fleet as a convict. She was transported from Great Britain to New South Wales in 1787. Margaret developed a long-term relationship with surgeon, William Balmain and is considered one of Australia's 'founding mothers', whose descendants still live in Australia today. Margaret returned to Britain which was unusual for a transported convict. She died in England 1816.

In 1786 Margaret was employed in London as a house servant in the premises of Joseph and Frances Shetley. In February 1786, while her employers were out of the house, it is believed Margaret collected a large quantity of clothing, jewellery, and money, and left the house. When Mrs Shetley returned home and found the house in disarray and the servant girl missing, she sent for Mr Shetley. He then tried to follow Dawson that evening. Knowing she came from the Liverpool area, he asked after her at the Golden Cross at Charing Cross and was told that a girl of her description had boarded the coach for Chester in the north at 7pm. Mr Shetley took a post-chaise with a Mr Lowe and overtook the coach at St Albans. Dawson was found on the roof of the coach, apprehended, and taken into a local Inn where she handed over the stolen goods from her pockets and two boxes. All goods were recognised by Mr Shetley, the only item missing being the one guinea coin she had used to pay for the coach. When asked if she had acted with an accomplice, she confirmed she was travelling alone. Dawson was then taken back to London and Mrs Shetley identified the items of clothing.

Margaret Dawson's trial record remains silent as to her motive for the heft. Historians can only speculate as to whether her actions resulted from her treatment by her employer, a family crisis pulling her back home, a threat from an unknown person, or a simple failure to resist the temptation of an empty house. At her trial at the Old Bailey on 22 February 1786 for "feloniously stealing" goods to the value of £12 4s 1d, Mr Lowe stated that she was so changed in appearance that he would not have recognised her. In her defence, Dawson said "I have nothing to say, I have no witnesses." She was found guilty and sentenced to the mandatory sentence of death. The prosecutor and jury recommended mercy on her because it was her first offence and because she was only fifteen years old. After ten months in Newgate Prison, in conditions where malnutrition, filth, and violence were common, Dawson was returned to court. Here, on 4 January 1787, her death sentence was commuted "on condition of being transported for a term of seven years to New South Wales".

On 26 January, she was delivered from Newgate to the *Lady Penrhyn*, then moored in the River Thames. Conditions here were no better than in prison, with the women on board described as "almost naked and so very filthy" and "where there are very many venereal complaints". She sailed with the Fleet for New South Wales from Portsmouth on 13 May 1787, arriving after a cramped and unsanitary voyage of seven months. After the time needed for land to be cleared and huts built, Dawson and 189 other female convicts went ashore on 6 February 1788. Here, it was reported by one onlooker "the convicts got to them very soon after they landed, and it is beyond my abilities to give a just description of the scenes of debauchery and riot that ensued during the night.

In August 1789 the convict John Hayes received fifty lashes in a flogging ordered for his "infamous behaviour" towards Dawson. Perhaps it was this event that brought her to the attention of the assistant surgeon, William Balmain. It is not known whether she assisted Balmain in tending to the large number of sick convicts who arrived in mid-1790 in the Second Fleet. In November 1791, Dawson and Balmain travelled together, with Philip Gidley King, to Norfolk Island on Atlantic, where Balmain was going to take up the post of Lieutenant Governor. Dawson's penal sentence expired in January 1793, and soon after she signed a receipt for payment for some grain sold to the government stores, indicating she was literate, free, and farming some land. Her first child, a daughter, was born on Norfolk Island in May 1794. Dawson and Balmain returned to Sydney in August 1795. There, Dawson had two more children, a girl and a boy, with Balmain. Their older daughter died on 4 September 1797. The family left Sydney in August 1801, and arrived in London in March 1802, an absence for Dawson of just under fifteen years. In May 1803 Dawson, now pregnant again with their fourth child, and the children, were sent to Ormskirk, near Liverpool.

On 17 November 1803 William Balmain died. In his will, dated four days before his death, he left a yearly sum of £50 to "my dear friend Margaret Dawson, otherwise Henderson ... whose tenderness to me, while in ill health, claims my warmest gratitude and by whom I have had two natural children and who is now ensient". No doubt due to her convict status, in contrast to Balmain's professional position, he felt unable to marry her. She and her children had taken the surname 'Henderson', which was Balmain's mother's maiden name.

Dawson left Ormskirk and gave birth to the fourth child in London. Little is known of this baby, except that it was a girl, and still living with the family at Clement's Inn in January 1807.

With a settled income of £50 a year, and rent from properties in New South Wales, it is unlikely that Dawson would have had to earn a living after Balmain's death. With the help of his friends she continued to encourage her son John William Henderson's education, and he eventually returned to New South Wales in January 1829 as a surgeon, like his father. On 16 February 1816, while living at St James's, Westminster, Dawson died, and was buried in the churchyard of St-Giles-in-the-Fields, where Balmain had also been buried. Following her death, Balmain's executors paid £12 10s for her "last sickness and funeral expenses".

### References:

Reynolds, Peter, *William Balmain and John Gilchrist: family and property*, Balmain Historical Monograph No. 5, Sydney, Leichhardt Historical Journal Inc., 2003.  
Gillen, Mollie, *The Founders of Australia: a biographical dictionary of the First Fleet*, Sydney, Library of Australian History, 1989.