



# Fellowship of First Fleeters

## Hunter Valley Chapter

*"To live on in the hearts and minds of Descendants is never to die."*

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## The Coal River Bulletin

Newsletter No: 24 March 2012



A big thank you to John Risby who was Guest Speaker at our first meeting for 2012.

*John introduced us to his First Fleet ancestor **Edward Risby** who sailed aboard the "Alexander". John was fortunate to be able to trace Edward Risby's family back into history and, though it cannot be officially confirmed, from what information has come to light it is probable that his ancestors originated in Norway as far back as Viking times.*

John's great, great grandfather Edward Risby was born in 1755 into a family who had lived in Uley near Gloucestershire for at least 30 years, an important town with Cottage Industry weaving as its main industry.

Edward married in 1777 and had 3 children at the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain when machines powered by steam replaced the Cottage Industries in the weaving of cotton and wool. Edward was convicted for stealing cloth in 1780 and again in 1783 and perhaps these misdemeanours were a result of his family being robbed of its source of income.

He was imprisoned in the hulks on the Thames and deported in 1788 to complete his sentence in 1791. He survived the 1<sup>st</sup> fleet voyage on the "Alexander", the unhealthiest ship in the Fleet. 11 convicts died of scurvy in the first stage of the voyage from the Thames to Portsmouth. The ship had to be cleaned, limed and creosoted before continuing the voyage.

From Tenerife to Rio de Janeiro 16 convicts died including 11 on the "Alexander".

The ship was inspected and the Master was replaced because the bilges had been pumped only once a week instead of daily and the stench was almost unbearable even on the deck.

*Alexander* – 452 tons  
Largest Convict Transport

Arrived with  
117 male convicts,  
41 marines and 30 crew.



In Port Jackson, Edward worked as a sawyer on the "Sirius" until he was among the first group of convicts sent to Norfolk Island and became a free man in 1791. He married Ann Gibson, a second fleet convict. They had 5 children [1 stillborn] and developed their farm to the extent they could exist without Government "stores".

In Colleen McCullough's book "Morgan's Run" Ed Risby was mentioned as a friend of Richard Morgan, also a survivor of the "Alexander" problems.

When the British Government decided that Norfolk Island would be closed the family was resettled in Van Diemen's Land where they built their new home and developed their land grant to grow beans, 2 acres of potatoes, to have pigs and a small flock of sheep and to be self sufficient as they were on Norfolk Island.

Edward's eldest son Thomas married in 1815 and had 2 children before Edward died in 1823. Edward was in poor health for a few years before his death and the property was worked by Thomas' brothers Benjamin and Joseph.

Edward had lived a life of misery, survived a terrible sea voyage below decks on the very unhealthy ship "Alexander", a lot of very hard work, and to live to an age of 67 was almost unbelievable. Unfortunately he did not live long enough to see the beginning of the very outstanding Tasmanian Company, Risby Timber Industries. The history of this great Company in Tasmania is documented fully in the Limited Edition Book "Above The Odds".

Joseph, Edward's second eldest son and my direct ancestor moved away from Tasmania when the "farm" was sold and settled in Maitland in 1826. He built a small brick-making plant and built a two storey home in Sempill Street near the Hunter River which he called the "The Falls" which later became the first hotel in Maitland and continued to operate as a hotel until 1923. Joseph married Mary Robson in 1838. They had 11 children [3 died in infancy] and Mary made a christening robe for her children. The robe has been used over the generations for many Risby children including myself, my children and my grandchildren and the robe is still in excellent condition and will be used in the future.

It was only very recently that a kind relative returned two very old photos of Risby ancestors and I was delighted to find that the photos were of Mary and Joseph Risby taken probably in about 1860.



John with members Helen Pacey and Jean Paul whose ancestors also sailed aboard the *Alexander*

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### March Trivia from the Past

**1780**

*The state of Pennsylvania became the first American state to abolish slavery.*

**1811**

*The Egyptian King Muhammad Ali Pasha oversaw the ceremonial murder of 500 people*

**1882**

*Queen Victoria narrowly escaped assassination when a man shot at her as she boarded a train in Windsor.*

**1896**

*At the Battle of Adua, 80,000 Ethiopians destroyed 20,000 Italians.*

**1946**

*The British Government took over control of the Bank of England after 252 years*



### Best wishes and a very happy birthday to:

- 12th March: Irma Foster
- 13<sup>th</sup> March: Verna Lumby
- 19<sup>th</sup> March: Carole Almond
- 9<sup>th</sup> April: Nola Field
- 9<sup>th</sup> April: Bob Walker
- 10<sup>th</sup> April: Carolyn Whatson
- 13<sup>th</sup> April: Barry Chaff
- 16<sup>th</sup> April: Isabella Pacey

**COMING EVENTS FOR  
YOUR DIARY**



**OUTING**

**MONDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH:**



**Mission to Seafarers  
96 Hannell Street, Wickham  
Diagonally opposite the Fish Co-Op**

Morning Tea on arrival at 10.30am

Gary Dodd, the Mission Chaplain, knows a lot about Newcastle Harbour. He will also tell us of the current services the Mission provides to seamen who are visiting our Port aboard ships from all around the world.

Unfortunately our Lunch venue has had to be changed as the *The Olive Branch Café* is not open on Mondays. We will now enjoy our lunch at the nearby **Albion Hotel**.

**Look forward to seeing you there!**

Please book in with Yvonne on 4957 4758 as we need to let both Gary Dodd and the Hotel know numbers attending for catering at morning tea and lunch.

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***Your Invitation to our next Meeting***

***Date:***

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

***Time:***

**10am for 10.30 start**

Morning tea on arrival

***Where:***

**Senior Citizens Hall**

153A Brunner Rd, Adamstown

***Guest Speaker:***

**Historian Suzanne Martin**

***Topic:***

**Governor Lachlan Macquarie**

His Newcastle connections



**Meeting Fee: \$5 pp**

**It would be appreciated if you could bring along a small plate of finger food to share as we enjoy an informal lunch together.**

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**Our Chapter will celebrate the  
224<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the sailing of the First Fleet  
from Portsmouth  
with a lunch at**

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**Kotara Bowling Club  
on  
Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2012  
All welcome to meet from  
12 noon for 12.30pm lunch**



## Did you know?

Before 1750 the Julian calendar year in England commenced on Lady Day, which was the 25<sup>th</sup> March.

Most of Western Europe used the Gregorian calendar which began on January 1st. This caused many problems especially in business dealings with countries that had different calendar systems - also there were eleven days more in the Julian calendar.

As early as October 1582 Pope Gregory XIII first adopted a correction to the existing Julian calendar. However, adoption of the Gregorian calendar outside of Catholic countries was delayed as the Protestant Reformation was still ringing strong enough in 1582 to make most Protestant countries resist "bowing" to any Papal decree. Only after the problems had been growing and causing great concern for a further 200 years did Great Britain adopt the Gregorian calendar.

In the year 1750 the British Parliament and King George II corrected several problems with their current Julian calendar and a new calendar was implemented across the years 1751 and 1752. To allow for the change from the old system, eleven days had to be removed so the calendar was advanced by 11 days:

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1752 was followed by Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September 1752.<sup>[2]</sup> This caused problems as people said that they would die 11 days earlier than they should have! Even then you couldn't please everybody!

Other changes brought about by Gregory were also adopted, including better rules to deal with Leap Years and for the future dates of Easter. Great Britain was actually an early-bird in the list of Protestant countries adopting the Gregorian calendar.

The year 1753 started the calendar years as we know them today, though various people have been pushing for yet more changes to be made.

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Your Editor – *Judy Aubin*



# Australia Day 2012



The weather was the greatest concern for our Australia Day celebrations this year – widespread rain was causing flooding in the north of the state and was slowly moving south. However, there must have been a large umbrella over Newcastle as the rain fell north and south of us and we had a dry day even if overcast!



Committee members arrived at our allocated site early to erect our ‘marquee’ and by 8.30am our greatly enlarged stall was ready for business.

Each year we aim to improve our display and presence on the Newcastle Harbour Foreshore but our efforts in 2012 will be hard to beat!

The Committee decided to really get into the spirit of the occasion this year and if possible “dress up” in colonial outfits.

The ladies looked the part in their mob caps, aprons and long skirts and the men in their convict gear with broad arrows looked great and were readily recognisable even if they weren’t of the 1788 era!



It was unanimously agreed that our soldiers stole the show, especially Bob Walker who had his ‘uniform’ made especially for the occasion. Props such as ball and chains, cat-of-nine-tails and a musket added that final touch. Thank you also to our member, Yvonne Bullock, who provided two period outfits she had made years ago and which included small handbags and gloves. Photos were much in demand throughout the day of the lads and lassies but mainly of soldier Bob - or Bob with a lassie or two - or Bob with the owner of the camera!

Our efforts caused great interest among the passing public many of whom stopped for a chat. Also there were those who had heard President Barbara’s radio interview on the ABC or had seen the article in the Newcastle Herald the day before and purposely sought us out. They were interested to learn more about early convict history in NSW - the history of the Fellowship - and to see if they maybe had a First Fleeter. Those who had already done lots of research wanted to know how to confirm their eligibility and become members.

The Maritime Festival is also held on the Harbour on Australia Day and included lots of activities which went on around us all day. This included such things as a harbour swim, duck races, speed boat races, biplane aerobatics, jet fly pasts from the RAAF, and the sail past of the tall ship *James Craig*. Cannons from Fort Scratchley also boomed behind us on the hour.

We had planned to have a BBQ lunch together in a 'lull' and also for any members who popped in for a visit but people kept coming and coming so we had to cook our sausages and grab a bite when we could. Even having a cuppa with members and family visitors was a challenge at times! We were also delighted that John Shortland travelled up from Sydney by train to join us.

The day was a great PR exercise hopefully contributing to the awareness and knowledge of the First Fleet as well as the history of the early days of the Colony.

*Altogether an amazing day!*

