CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2023

2318 Who was the First Person to Land from the First Fleet?

by Deborah Martin

Who was the first person to land from the First Fleet?

Who was the first person from the First Fleet to step on land in the new colony? I was told that Henry Kable, a First Fleet convict and my fifth great grandfather, carried Captain Arthur Phillip to shore.

Versions of this story appeared in several newspapers in the early twentieth century. The earliest version appeared in 1917, 71 years after Henry's death. The *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, in an article about the Hawkesbury district, mentions:

> "It has been said that this Henry Kable was the first man to land from the First Fleet."[i]

When Henry's grandson George Kable died in 1923 his obituary appeared in several newspapers[ii]:

> "His grandfather, Henry Kable, came to Australia as a free settler in Governor Phillip's first fleet in 1788. As the story is told, when rowing ashore the boat grounded on the sand and Henry Kable, taking Govrnor Phillips on his shoulders carried him ashore to Sydney Cove This was the first landing."

As Kable descendants scattered across the east coast of Australia, the story spread with them. This article from the *Bowen Independent* in 1947 about another descendant, Mr Eric Burnett Maclean, says[iii]:

> "Henry Kable landed at Port Jackson as a member of the staff of Governor Phillip in the first convoy in 1788. It is recorded that Captain Kable, of the Royal Marines aboard H.M.S. Sirius, jumped into the water as the boat carrying Governor Phillip grounded at Sydney Cove, and helped the Governor ashore dryshod."

Various First Fleet journals and letters provide accounts of the First Fleet's arrival in the new colony.

On 18th January *HMS Supply*, carrying Captain Phillip, arrived in Botany Bay. Around 4 pm that day the Governor, attended by several officers, went in two armed boats towards the shore where six Aboriginals were sitting. The Aboriginals guided the boats towards a freshwater stream where the boats landed. The Governor and officers tasted the water and handed gifts to the Aboriginals [iv].

Henry Kable was a convict on the *Friendship*, which arrived in Botany Bay the following day, 19th January[v]. He could not have carried Governor Phillip ashore the previous day.

On 21st January 1788 Governor Phillip set out from Botany Bay in three open boats with Captain Hunter, Captain Collins, a lieutenant, the master of the Sirius, and a small party of marines. They went north up the coast to Port Jackson, where Phillip decided to fix the settlement [vi] [vii] [viii]   All the reports agreed that convicts were not part of this expedition, so Henry Kable could not have carried Governor Phillip ashore in Sydney Cove on 21st January.

On 25th January HMS Supply arrived at Sydney Cove, carrying Governor Phillip with a company of Marines and some artificers selected from among the seamen of the

Sirius and the convicts. The officers, guards and convicts on the *Supply* were landed the next morning (26th January) to clear an encampment in preparation for the arrival of the rest of the fleet [ix] [x].

On 26th January Phillip went ashore on the west side of Sydney Cove with some Grenadiers and convicts to take formal possession of the land. [xi] [xii] [xiii] [xiv] By the evening of 26th January the remainder of the fleet was anchored in Sydney Cove. Time was then busily employed erecting the tents and landing the provisions, soldiers and convicts [xv]. It's possible that Henry Kable was one of these convicts if he had been transferred from the *Friendship* to *HMS Supply*.

I conclude that Henry Kable was not the first man from the First Fleet to set foot on land in the new colony, as this happened on 18th January at Botany Bay before the rest of the Fleet (including the *Friendship*, on which Henry was transported) arrived. He might have carried Governor Phillip ashore on 25th or 26th January but there is no evidence to support this family legend.

[i] 1917 'SOME OLD RIVER HISTORY', *Windsor and Richmond Gazette (NSW : 1888 - 1965)*, 7 December, p. 10. , viewed 16 Apr 2023, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article85883138

[ii] 1923 'Personal', *National Advocate (Bathurst, NSW : 1889 - 1954)*, 24 December, p. 2. , viewed 16 Apr 2023, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article159135664

[iii] 1947 'AMONG THE PIONEERS', *Bowen Independent (Qld. : 1911 - 1954)*, 11 July, p. 7. , viewed 16 Apr 2023, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article195693486

[iv] University of Sydney, Australian Digital Collections, George B Worgan, Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon, 1788, https://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/worjour.pdf accessed 26 April 2023

[v] University of Sydney, Australian Digital Collections, David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, Volume 1, https://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/colacc1.pdf, accessed 26 April 2023

[vi] University of Sydney, Australian Digital Collections, David Blackburn Letters and Papers – David Blackburn – letters received by Richard Knight, 12 July 1788, 19 March 1791.
https://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/view?docId=ozlit/xml-main-texts/blajour.xml;chunk.id=d769e102;toc.depth=1;toc.id=d769e102;database=;collection=;brand=default.
Accessed 26 April 2023

[vii] University of Sydney, Australian Digital Collections, John Hunter, An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island. https://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/hunhist.pdf. Accessed 26 April 2023)

[viii] University of Sydney, Australian Digital Collections, Philip Gidley King, The Journal of Philip Gidley King. https://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/kinjour.pdf . Accessed 26 April 2023

[ix] David Collins, op cit.

[x] David Blackburn, op cit.

[xi] University of Sydney, Australian Digital Collections, George B Worgan, Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon, 1788, https://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/worjour.pdf accessed 26 April 2023. Letter (June 12 – June 18 1788)

[xii] Philip King, op cit.

[xiii] John Campbell, Letter to his parents, 9 August 1789, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, digitised at: http://www.acmssearch.sl.nsw.gov.au/search/itemDetailPaged.cgi?itemID=442905, quoted in Michael Flynn and Gary Sturgess, "New evidence on Arthur Phillip's first landing place 26 January 1788", Royal Australian Historical Society, 2015.)

[xiv] David Collins, op cit.

[xv] Philip Gidley King, op cit.