

# George Worgan: Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon (1788)

## Letter to His Brother

*Sirius*, Sydney Cove, Port Jackson  
June 12th 1788

Dear Richard,

I think I hear You saying, 'Where the D—ce is Sydney Cove Port Jackson?' and see You whirling the Letter about to find out the Name of the Scribe: Perhaps You have taken up *Salmons Gazetteer*, if so, pray spare your Labour, and attend to Me for half an Hour—We sailed from the *Cape of Good Hope* on the 12th of November 1787—As that was the last civilised Country We should touch at, in our Passage to *Botany Bay* We provided ourselves with every Article, necessary for the forming a civilised Colony, Live Stock, consisting of Bulls, Cows, Horses Mares, Colts, Sheep, Hogs, Goats Fowls and other living Creatures by Pairs. We likewise, procured a vast Number of Plants, Seeds & other Garden articles, such as Orange, Lime, Lemon, Quince Apple, Pear Trees, in a Word, every Vegetable Production that the Cape afforded. Thus Equipped, each Ship like another Noah's Ark, away we steered for *Botany Bay*, and after a tolerably pleasant Voyage of 10 Weeks & 2 Days *Governour Phillip*, had the Satisfaction to see the whole of his little Fleet safe at Anchor in the said *Bay*.

As we were sailing in We saw 8 or 10 of the Natives, sitting on the Rocks on the South Shore, and as the Ships bordered pretty near thereto, we could hear them hollow and observe them talking to one another very earnestly, at the same time pointing towards the Ships; they were of a black reddish sooty Colour, entirely naked, walked very upright, and each of them had long Spears and a short Stick in their hands, soon after the Ships had anchored, the Indians went up into the Wood, lit a Fire, and sat Around about it, as unconcerned (apparently,) as tho' nothing had occurred to them. Two Boats from the *Sirius*, were now Manned and armed, and the *Governour*, accompanied by Captn.

Hunter, and several other Officers, went towards the Shore, where they had seen the Natives, who perceiving the Boats making towards the Beach, came out of the Wood, and walked along, some distance from the Water-side, but immediately on the Boats landing, they scampered up into the Woods again, with great Precipitation. On this, the Governor, advised, that we should seem quite indifferent about them, and this apparent Indifference had a good Effect, for they very soon appeared in sight of Us, When, the Governor held up some Beads, Red Cloth & other Bawbles and made signs for them to advance, but they still were exceedingly shy & timid, and would not be enticed by our allurements; which the Governor perceiving, He shewed them his Musket, then laid it on the Ground, advancing singly towards them, they now seeing that He had nothing in his Hands like a Weapon, one of the oldest of the Natives gave his Spears to a younger, and approached to meet the Governor, but not without discovering manifest tokens of Fear, and distrust, making signs for the things to be laid on the Ground which, the *Governour* complying with, He advanced, tooke them up, and went back to his Companions; Another, came forth and wanted some of the same kind of Presents, which, were given to Him by the same Method, at length, after various Methods to impress them with the Belief that We meant them no harm, they suffered Us to come up to them, and after making them all presents, which they received with much the same kind of Pleasure, which Children shew at such Bawbles, just looking at them, then holding out their Hands for more, some laughing heartily, and jumping extravagantly; they began to shew a Confidence, and became very familiar, and curious about our Cloaths, feeling the Coat, Waistcoat, and even the Shirt and on seeing one of the Gentlemen pull off his Hat, they all set up a loud Hoop, one was curious enough to take hold of a Gentlemans Hair that was cued, and called to his Companions to look at it, this was the occasion of another loud Hoop, accompanied with other Emotions of Astonishment. In a Word, they seemed pretty well divested of their Fears, and became very funny Fellows.

They suffered the Sailors to dress them with different coloured Papers, and Fools-Caps, which pleased them mightily, the strange contrast these Decorations made with their black Complexion brought

strongly to my Mind, the Chimney-Sweepers in London on a May-Day.—They were all Men & Boys in this Tribe.

I should have told You, that the Governor, left the *Sirius* soon after we sailed from the *Cape of Good Hope*; and Embarked on Board the *Supply Brig* & Gave up the Command of the Convoy to Captn. Hunter, in order that he might proceed on before the main Body of the Fleet, but he arrived in Botany Bay, only two Days before Us. In this Time, He had obtained an Intercourse or two, with some Natives on the *North Shore*, but, as the Means which he took to gain their Confidence, and effect a Parley, were much the same as those, I have given you an account of, I shall only mention a few singular Circumstances that occurred in these Intercourses. The *Supply Brig*, arrived in the *Bay* about 2 °Clk in the Afternoon, of the 18th January and at 4 °Clock, The Governor, attended by several Officers, went in two armed Boats towards a part of the Shore where, 6 of the Natives, were, and had been sitting the whole time the *Supply* was entering the Bay, looking and pointing at Her with great Earnestness; When the Boats had approached pretty near this Spot, two of the Natives got up, and came close to the Waters-Edge, making Motions, pointing to another part of the Shore and talking very fast & loud, seemingly, as if the Part to which they pointed, was better landing for the Boats, they could not however, discern any thing unfriendly, or threatening in the Signs and Motions which the Natives made.—Accordingly the Boats coasted along the Shore in a Direction for the Place, to which, they had been directed, the Natives following on the Beach. In the mean Time, the Governor, or somebody in his Boat, made Signs that they wanted Water, this they signified by putting a Hat over the Side of the Boat and seeming to take up some of the salt Water put it to his Mouth, the Natives, immediately, understood this Sign and with great Willingness to Oblige, pointed to the Westward, and walked that Way, apparently with an Intention to show their Visitors the very Spot. The Boats steered towards the Place, and soon discovered the Run of fresh Water, opposite to which, they landed, and tasting it found it to be very good. The Natives had stopped about 30 Yards from the Place where the Boat landed, to whom, the Gentlemen made signs of thanks for their friendly Information, at the same time offering Presents, and doing every thing they could think of, to make them lay aside their

Fears and advance towards them, but this point was gained only, by the Methods that I have mentioned: and when they did venture to come and take the things out of the Governor's & the other Gentlemen's Hands, it was with evident Signs of Fear, the Gentlemen now having distributed all their Presents among them, returned on Board.

Thus, was our first Intercourse obtained, with these *Children of Nature*.—About 12 of the Natives appeared the next Morning, on the Shore opposite to the *Supply*, they had a Dog with them, (something of the Fox Species); The Governor and the same Gentlemen that were of his Party Yesterday went on Shore, and very soon came to a Parley with them, there were some of their Acquaintances among the Number, and these advanced first (leaving their Spears with their Companions who remained behind at a little Distance) as they had done Yesterday; They all of them in a short time became Confident, Familiar & *vastly funny* took anything that was offered them, holding out their Hands and making Signs for many things that they saw, laughed when we laughed, jumped extravagantly, and grunted by way of Music, & Repeated many Words & Phrases after Us. The Gentlemen having passed about an hour with them, returned on Board, but could not induce any of the Natives to accompany them there. A Party of Us made an Excursion up an Arm in the North part of the *Bay*, where we had not been long landed before we discovered among the Bushes a Tribe of the Natives, who at first did not discover such an inoffensive & friendly Disposition, as those I have spoke of, above; for these rude, unsociable Fellows, immediately threw a Lance, which fell very near one of the Sailors, and stuck several Inches in the Ground, we returned the Compliment by firing a Musket over their Heads, on which I thought they would have broken their Necks with running away from Us. about an hour after, we, in our Ramble, fell in with them again, they stood still, but seemed ready for another Start. One of Us, now laid down the Musket and advanced towards them singly, holding out some Bawbles, and making Signs of Peace; In a little time they began to gain Confidence, and two of them approached to meet the Gentlemen who held out the Presents, the Introduction being amicably settled, they all joined Us, and took the Trinkets we offered them; The same Emotions of Pleasure, Astonishment, Curiosity & Timidity, appeared in these poor Creatures, as had been observed in our first

Acquaintances—There were some Old and young Women in this Tribe, whom the Men seemed very jealous & careful of, keeping them at Distance behind some young Men, who were armed with Spears, Clubs & Shields, apparently as a Guard to them. We could see these curious *Evites* peeping through the Bushes at Us, and we made signs to the Men, who were still with Us, that We wished to give some Trinkets to the Women, on which, One of their Husbands, or Relations (as we supposed) hollowed to them in an authoritative Tone, and one of these Wood-Nymphs (as naked as Eve before she knew Shame) obeyed and came up to Us; when; we presented her with a Bracelet of blue Beads for her obliging Acquiescence; She was extremely shy & timid, suffering Us, very reluctantly, even to touch Her; Indeed, it must be merely from the Curiosity, to see how they would behave, on an Attempt to be familiar with them, that one would be induced to touch one of Them, for they are Ugly to Disgust, in their Countenances and stink of Fish-Oil & Smoke, *most sweetly*.—I must not omit mentioning a very singular Curiosity among the Men here, arising from a Doubt of what Sex we are, for from our not having, like themselves, long Beards, and not seeing when they open our Shirt-Bosoms (which they do very roughly and without any Ceremony) the usual distinguishing Characteristics of Women, they start Back with Amazement, and give a Hum! with a significant look, implying. What kind of Creatures are these?!—As it was not possible for Us to satisfy their Inquisitiveness in this Particular, by the simple Words. *Yes* or *No*. We had Recourse to the Evidence of *Ocular Demonstration*, which made them laugh, jump & Skip in an extravagant Manner.—In a Tribe of these funny, curious Fellows, One of them, after having had His Curiosity gratified by this mode of Conviction, went into the Wood, and presently came forth again, jumping & laughing with a Bunch of broad Leaves tied before Him, by Way of a Fig-leaf Veil.—Before we took our leave of the Tribe that threw the Lance; they endeavoured to convince Us, that it was not thrown by general Consent, and one of them severely reprimanded the Man who threw it, and several of them struck him, but more to shew Us their Disapprobation of what he had done, than as a Punishment for it.

During our stay at *Botany Bay*, the *Governor* had made himself well acquainted with the Situation of the Land Nature of the Soil &c. &c.

which he not finding so Eligible, as he could Wish, for the Purpose of forming a Settlement, He determined, before he fixed on it, to visit an Inlet on the Coast, about 12 Miles to the Northward of this *Bay* which, our great Circumnavigator, *Captn. Cook*, discovered, and named, (in honour of one of the then Commissioners of the Navy) *Port Jackson* accordingly, the Governor, attended by a Number of Officers went in 3 boats, on this Expedition, and the third day, they returned, gave it as their Opinion, that *Port Jackson* was one of the most spacious and safe Harbours in the known World, and said they had already fixed on a Spot, on which the Settlement was to be formed. In Consequence of this Success, the Idea was entirely given up, of establishing a Colony at *Botany Bay*, and three days after, the Wind favouring our Designs, the Fleet sailed for *Port Jackson* and in the Evening of the Day of our Departure, We arrived, and anchored in one of the many beautiful Coves which it Contains, which *Cove Sir*, the *Governor* has, (in honour of *Lord Sydney*), named *Sydney Cove*.

Though the Description given by the Gentlemen who first, visited this *Port* was truly luxuriant, and wore the air of Exaggeration, Yet they had by no means done its Beauties and Conveniences Justice, for as an Harbour, None, that has hitherto been described, equals it in Spaciousness and Safety. the Land forms a Number of pleasant Coves in most of which 6 or 7 Ships may lie secured to the Trees on Shore. It contains likewise a Number of small Islands, which are covered with Trees and a variety of Herbage, all which appears to be Evergreens. The Whole, (in a Word) exhibits a Variety of Romantic Views, all thrown together into sweet Confusion by the careless hand of Nature. Well, Dear Dick, now I have brought you all the way to *Sydney Cove*, I must tell you what we have done, since our arrival in these Seas, & in this Port—what we are doing, what has happened &c. &c.

On the Evening of our Arrival (26th January 1788) The Governor & a Number of the Officers assembled on Shore where, they Displayed the British Flag and each Officer with a Heart, glowing with Loyalty drank his Majesty's Health and Success to the Colony. The next Day, all the Artificers & an 100 of the Convicts were landed, carrying with them the necessary Utensils for clearing the Ground and felling the Trees. By the Evening, they were able to pitch a Number of Tents and some Officers and private Soldiers slept on shore that Even-

ing. In the Interval of that time and the Date of this Letter, the principal Business has been the clearing of Land, cutting, Grubbing and burning down Trees, sawing up Timber & Plank for Building, making Bricks, hewing Stone, Erecting temporary Store-houses, a Building for an Hospital, another for an Observatory, Enclosing Farms & Gardens, making temporary Huts, and many other Conveniences towards the establishing of a Colony. [...]