

3.4 Explorations...Events...Ordered to Destroy and Abandon.

life at westernport was full of orders, actions, and hard work.

"What! We don't have any bricklayers. How can that be?" Captain Wright sounded angry.

"I don't know sir," answered Lt. Burchell. Mr. Collman has the list of convicts and their previous occupations here for you to examine"

"Read them to me Mr. Collman."

"Captain, according to the staff of the Colonial secretary, they had a ratio of one soldier to one convict. By my questioning of Matthias Maher, and the convicts we have the following.

2 Carpenters, 2 sawyers, 1 brick maker, 1 stone mason, 1 blacksmith, 1 shoe maker, 1 tailor, 1 clerk, 1 butcher, 1 harness maker, 3 boatmen, 1 boat maker, 1 gardener, 1 boot maker and 2 labourers, and 1 labourer assigned to Mr. Hovell.

We also have down Matthias Maher, as Constable, and Henry White as Surgeon."

Lt. Burchell spoke up. "Captain Wright, two of my soldiers have had some experience in bricklaying, and have volunteered to carry out that task, if you order it. They can cease when sufficient bricks have been made, or until bricklayers can be sent from Sydney or Launceston.. It will mean a reassignment of soldier's duties as well as depleting the manning of the guard and gate house."

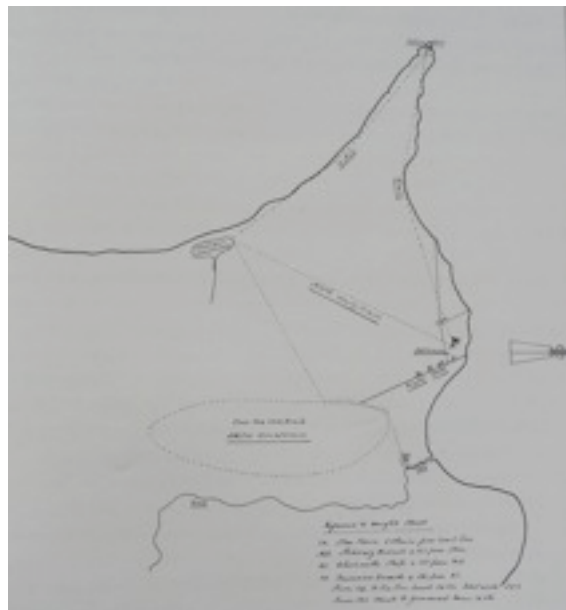
It appeared that bricklaying had been forgotten about when selection of convicts had taken place in Sydney.

Bricks were being made from clay and native straw grasses, mixed together then cooked in a kiln. Empty marine shells, were being collected at

low tide on Sandy Point. Crushed and then burnt in fires to make lime for cement. Permanent huts and houses could be built, but not without bricklayers..

Captain Wright, with myself, two labourers and two soldiers, over a few days quickly paced out and marked on trees and posts, where he wanted settlement roads built. Also where he wanted the living and store huts, privies, cook houses and bathrooms to be built. A small bridge was to be built over the fresh water stream. He even indicated where he wanted the Government House built, and of course that would make use of the windows and doors that had been brought aboard the *Dragon*.

I had the task of drawing his plan on some of his paper. He was extremely critical, and it meant I had to constantly rub out the pencil lines and start again. He needed a copy for Lt. Burchell, and the Colonial Secretary.



Original layout of the Settlement at Corinella, by Captain Wright.

The big day arrived. Mr. Hovell was ready to commence explorations.

Captain Wright had decided that Mr. Hovell and he would find Mr. Bass's river and trace it to its source. The small foraging parties had not been able to

find other fresh water sources, only a small marshy soak about two miles distant from the settlement.

Captain Wright, and Mr. Hovell were mounted. The two pack horses were laden with supplies and a small tent each for Captain Wright and Mr. Hovell. The two soldiers, two convicts and myself would have to make do with a blanket and a leafy branch cover. Luckily it was very hot during the day and night.

We struck off in a south easterly direction towards the hills in the distance. One of the ships boats had rowed up the river a considerable distance, and we hoped to start our exploration at that spot.

Finding the river was not a problem, but after two days of trying to follow it we had to give up and return to the settlement. It was just about impossible for us to try and clear a track for the horses, because the trees and scrub on either side of the river were very dense. Our axes and cutlasses kept getting blunt, and our arms sore from constantly swinging them.

"Mr. Hovell, I don't believe this type of countryside will lend itself to allow settlement expansion . I must admit, Lt. Oxley shared my estimation in his report to Governor King, some time ago in 1802, and this is 1826.Nothing has changed."

"I must admit Captain Wright I have seen better. I would like to travel further to the south west on my next expedition towards Cape Paterson. Sailing along the coast, to this Port, I thought the land there looked quite good."

"I must then head north east from the camp site, and follow the Port around to the west. I must find where Mr. Hume and myself completed our overland journey. That land area appeared exceptionally good for expansion."

I did not go with Mr. Hovell on his exploration of the Cape Paterson area. He discovered and brought back to the settlement, lumps of coal. He

demonstrated its good quality by burning some on a camp fire. Captain Wright took me and we accompanied Mr. Hovell, exploring Phillip Island as far down as the Sealers Cove. This was only a small trip, having to be rowed to the island, and then walking. I think it was more of a familiarization with the island than an exploration.

In the north eastern part of the Port, four small streams were discovered and charted. From the reports of the boat crews charting that area, the land appeared marshy, with large tufts of grass, mangrove swamps, and scrubby trees, ten to twenty feet tall. The swamps blocked Mr. Hovell's desire to circumnavigate the Port. Some of the natives we talked with seemed to suggest the area was home to blackfish, and was called Kuwerup. Anyway we caught some and they were quite nice to eat. they filled our bellies.

The swamp. What a terrible time we had. Take a step forward, push in a stick to see if was soft, take another step and sink up to your waste, covered in thick oozy mud. The mosquitoes, millions of them, in huge swarms. We scratched and scratched. The weak tea leaves we put on the bites only made them a bit more bearable. Sweat and scratch, sweat and scratch. At night it was hard to find a dry spot. By the time the horses and ourselves were fed, we just covered ourselves with a blanket over the head. The horses and men soon tired. At last after a convict, who could not swim had gone up to his neck in muddy water and nearly drowned before we could get a rope around his chest to pull him out, Mr. Hovell gave up so we returned to the settlement.

On a later expedition to find the Yarra river, Mr. Hovell made arrangements for a sealers boat to land his exploration party on the north west top end of the Port, to avoid the swamps, and also be available to collect the party some time later. The horses were proving to be an unnecessary hindrance.

"Lt. Burchell, I have decided the settlement can now do without my leadership."

After taking possession of Corinella on the December 12th 1826, Captain Wright announced his intention to depart from the settlement January 10th, and return with Captain Wetherall to present a report on the suitability of this area to support a settlement to Mr. MacLeay.

"What would you like to do Benjamin. Return with me to Sydney?"

I had been dreading this conversation. I didn't want to return to Sydney to find employment, but what would I do here.

"Perhaps I could intervene Sir," spoke Lt. Burchett.

"Benjamin's clerical talents would assist Mr. Rosier in the stores commissary, particularly in the management of the botanical plants and seeds to be sown, and he could also assist my secretary Edward Collman."

"What would you like Benjamin?" asked the Captain.

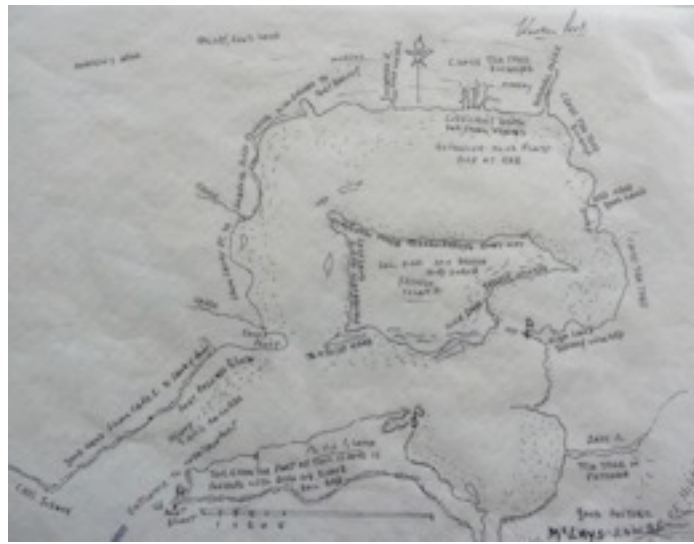
"I would like what Lt. Burchell has proposed Sir."

With that I committed myself to the settlement, its way of life, and some of the friends I had been making.

Captain Wright left for Sydney, and Lt. Burchell took command.

Soon Mr. Hovell also left for Sydney, when the next store ship arrived.

Mr. Hovell believed he found the area where he and Mr. Hume camped. After his return from that journey he then left on the next supply ship that called, because his report on the topography of the area was urgently awaited by the Government in Sydney



My copy of Captain Hovell's and Captain Wright's, maps of Westernport.

Overtime, at Corinella, I got to know three people pretty well, Mr. Rosier, Mr. Maher and Mr. White, and of course I had small conversations with the convicts and soldiers. I was told quite plainly, not to get too friendly with the convicts, because when and if they were to be punished I could compromise that situation. However most of them were very agreeable to me.

Being so isolated from a large population, the visits by supply ships like the *Amity*, *Phillip Dundas*, *Isabella* and *Lucy* were happy occasions. The ships were paid by the Government to ply the routes of Sydney to Port Macquarie, Newcastle, Launceston at Port Dalrymple and Hobart. Every time they called in at Corinella to unload stores, soldiers and convicts, and take aboard returning persons or redundant items, it was of great interest to all of us to discover what was going on in the greater world.

Our world was composed of daily hard work in building the settlement, obtaining and using food, occasional visits by the natives, and the occasional running away of convicts and their return to the settlement for punishment when they found they could not exist alone in the bush. Very hot in the summer, very cold in the winter. Many, many snakes and other things that bit.

Mr. Collman, began asking me questions about the quantities of stores items, and some of the figures that I had been writing up, and about Mr.

Rosier's handling of the commissariat. Eventually Mr. Rosier was replaced by Mr. Ord who came from Sydney. Maybe Mr. Rosie was fiddling with the supplies for his own purposes with others in Sydney. I just thought he was a bit careless. Although he never seemed to get a complaint from the soldiers regarding their daily grog ration.

I got on better with Matthias, than with Mr. White. Matthias used to show me his meticulous records in the journal he kept for Government inspection. It contained the names of the convicts and what hours they spent daily and on what tasks It also included dates of what vegetables were planted and when they were cropped.

Matthias ,joined the navy at ten, as a midshipman, and had ten years of active service in several sea battles, with a very proud record, and reached the rank of Acting Lieutenant .

He was injured, put ashore took to the drink and found a lot of bad friends. He then committed a forgery, and was sent for trial. He went mad for awhile and was put into an asylum for the insane. He got better, went to trial, was sentenced to hang, but the sentence was commuted for transportation to Sydney as a convict for life.

On the ship out to Sydney, he acted as surgeons mate. His time in the navy had familiarized him with that work. In Sydney, he obtained a couple of good references based on his past naval life, and Governor Macquarie appointed him Constable on the Parramatta road. From there he was sent with us to Corinella.

Mr. Henry White, as a practicing surgeon in England was a man of substance and money. He forged an important document, was convicted and sent to Hobart to serve a life sentence as a convict, never to be released. He

was sent to Sydney, then assigned to the settlement at Westernport. He always acted as if he was the most important person in the settlement.

Lt. Burchell, was recalled to Sydney with his regiment, and replaced with Lt. Taylor and his men. Within weeks of Lt. Taylor and his men arriving, the momentous news arrived.

Destroy and evacuate the settlement!

That news immediately put the settlement into disarray. What would happen to all of us?

Most of the persons in the settlement were to be sent to Launceston, and only the scheduled last ship to arrive would take the remainder back to Sydney

I had listened intently to tales of Launceston, and Hobart. That added to my knowledge gained when I worked for Mr. Howe on his newspaper. Maybe I could get some type of paying work there.

I was good at figures and writing. Why not give it a go?

I did!