



VOLUME 5



JOURNAL OF THE
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION

OF AUSTRALIA.

<http://naa-online.com>

ETRURIA

BY ROBERT J. KING

On 4 August 1790, His Majesty King George III was pleased, with the advice of his Privy Council, to approve the draught of a Great Seal to be made use of within the Territory of New South Wales and the islands adjacent in the Pacific Ocean, viz:-

Convicts landed at Botany Bay; their Fetters taken off and received by Industry sitting on a Bale of Goods with her Attributes, the Distaff, Bee-hive, Pick-Axe, and Spade, pointing to Oxen Ploughing, the rising Habitations, and a Church on a Hill at a Distance, with a Fort for their Defence. Motto: Sic fortis Etruria crevit; with this inscription round the Circumference: Sigillum Nov: Camb. Aust:!

The draught had been submitted to the King by the Privy Council for Trade and

Plantations, whose most active members included Lord Hawkesbury (the President of the Council), Lord Grenville (Secretary of State in charge of the Home Office), Lord Mulgrave, Henry Dundas, William Pitt (the Prime Minister), Lord Carmarthen (the Foreign Secretary) and (unofficially) Sir Joseph Banks. The Clerks of the Council were Stephen Cottrell and William Fawkener.² The draught had been prepared, at the Council's direction, by Thomas Major, the Chief Engraver of Royal Seals and Arms, between 31 May and 3 August 1790.³ The Council had been ordered by the King to prepare a device for a Great Seal on 21 May 1790, in response to a request from Lord Grenville.⁴ A Great Seal was required by the Government of the new Territory of New South Wales to legiti-



Wax impression of the Great Seal of New South Wales affixed to the deed of grant of land to Edward Varndell, 22 February 1792 (Mitchell Library reference: Safe 1/46 FM1/1077-1078). The original Great Seal, which was made of silver, was brought to Sydney by Philip Gidley King, Lieutenant-Governor of Norfolk Island, in HMS *Gorgon*, which arrived on 21 September 1791. No wax to be used with it had been sent, and until wax was procured some time later, a paper mash substitute was employed. The first Great Seal was replaced in 1817, as a result of a change to the Royal Arms, and was sent back to the Colonial Office in London (Bathurst to Macquarie, 22 April 1817, *Historical Records of Australia*, Series I, Vol.IX, pp.386, 718, 872).

By permission of the Mitchell Library and the New South Wales Attorney General.

1. Public Record Office, London (PRO), Privy Council Register (PC2) vol.135, pp.217, 223; reproduced in Jonathan King, *"In the Beginning . . ." The Story of the Creation of Australia: From the Original Writings*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1985, pp.242-3.
2. Vincent T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire*, vol.1, London, 1952, p.236.
3. PRO, Board of Trade, Minutes of the Committee of Trade (B75) vol.6, pp.238, 240, 264, 370; quoted in O. Gans, "Sydney Views" and the "Great Seal of New South Wales", *The London Philatelist*, vol.57, No. 670, September 1948, pp.153-7.
4. PRO, Privy Council Register (PC2) vol.135, p.76; quoted in Gans, *op. cit.*

mise official documents in the colony. Governor Phillip's Commission issued on 2 April 1787, had noted:

And Wee do hereby authorize and empower you to keep and use the Public Seal which will be herewith delivered to you or shall be hereafter sent to you for sealing all things whatsoever that shall pass the Great Seal of our said Territory and its Dependencies.⁵

The device and motto of the Great Seal are instructive of the ideas held by the Government of King George III regarding the nature and prospects of the New South Wales colony. The words of the motto are drawn from Virgil's *Second Georgic* (line 53), and the full version runs:

*sic fortis Etruria crevit,
scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma
septemque sibi una muro circumdedit arces.*
(so strong Etruria grew, and Rome was made most beautiful of all drawing a single wall around her seven hills.)

The words were first linked to the New South Wales settlement by an anonymous

writer to the London *Morning Herald* in late March or April 1789, who said in a letter defending the expense of its establishment: "The settlements we are making at Botany or rather Jackson's Bay, remind us of the origin of the Roman Empire, which sprang out of a nest of robbers. Hence Juvenal, in lashing the family pride of the Romans, concludes one of his satires:

*Majorum primus quisquis fuit ille tuorum
Aut pastor fuit, aut illud quod discere nolo.*⁶

The *Thief-colony* may hereafter become a *great Empire*, whose nobles will probably, like the nobles of Rome and other empires, boast of *their blood*. If we may be permitted to apply another classical phrase to the sequel, we might appropriately add "Sic fortis Etruria crevit."⁷

The analogy between the foundation of Rome by a band of robbers and the new colony in New South Wales had already been drawn by Sir Nathaniel W. Wraxall, who early in 1787 published *A Short Review of the Political Condition of Great Britain at the*



Bronze cast of the third Great Seal, designed for King George IV by Thomas Wyon, Chief Engraver to His Majesty's Seals, in October 1826 (Mitchell Library reference p*74). Wyon had followed Major's design for the obverse of the seal, but had modernized the dress of the ex-convicts standing before Industry. Indeed, according to his invoice requesting payment for the work, Industry had become Britannia, so perhaps the fashionably attired standing couple are intended to represent free settlers (Wyon's invoice is quoted in Gans, "Sydney Views", pp.156-7).

5. *Historical Records of New South Wales (HRNSW)*, Sydney, 1982, vol.1, pt.2, p.63.

6. Juvenal, *Satire VIII*, 274-5: "That first ancestor of yours, whoever he was, Was either a herdsman or something I would rather not say."

"discere" in the quotation is a misprint of dicere".

7. George Mackaness, *Admiral Arthur Phillip, Founder of New South Wales, 1738-1814*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1937, p.187.

beginning of the Year 1787. Discussing the proposal to establish a settlement of convicts at Botany Bay, he observed: “Rome, the queen of nations, sprang from as obscure, one almost as infamous an origin.”⁸

The notion seems to have been common at the time. The Rev. Weeden Butler wrote in a letter to his nephew, Daniel Southwell (a junior officer on the *Sirius*), on 25 May 1789: “In the District afterwards called Rome, a Band of Men were assembled; who or what they were might perhaps do no credit, even to a Daily Register. But those venerable Fathers of the History of the World, were Beings, how poorly furnished in point of natural Information or acquired Intelligence, when compared to the Men who our laws have in an Hour of Mercy entrusted to the care of your able Govr? What superior and more rapid progress then may we not expect from them? *It will be so.*”

The “Etruria” theme was taken up in the design prepared in June 1789 by Henry Webber, the sculptor employed by Josiah Wedgwood, for an issue of cameo medallions made from clay sent back from Sydney Cove by Governor Phillip. Phillip sent the clay by the *Fishbourn* transport to Sir Joseph Banks, who received it in May 1789 and sent it to Wedgwood!⁹ Webber’s allegorical design for the medallions showed “Hope encouraging Art and Labour, under the influence of Peace, to pursue the employments necessary to give security and happiness to an infant settlement”, and bore the legend “Etruria, 1789”.

“Etruria” was the name of the estate where the Wedgwood potteries were located. The village had been given this name when it was founded in 1768, at the suggestion of Wedgwood’s friend, Dr Erasmus Darwin, because



Detail of a wax impression of the Great Seal prepared after the accession of Queen Victoria in 1838 (Mitchell Library reference: R241E). The Chief Engraver at this time was William Wyon, Thomas Wyon's nephew. Major's original design has been further modified by the omission of the motto.

8. *op. cit.*, p.82; quoted in Lloyd Evans and Paul Nicholls (eds), *Convicts and Colonial Society, 1788-1868*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 2nd. edn., 1984, p.23.
 9. British Museum Add. MS 16381, p.42; quoted in Alan Frost, “Towards Australia; the Coming of the Europeans, 1400-1788”, *Australians to 1788*, Sydney, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1986, p.410.
 10. Philip to Banks, 16 Nov. 1788, Mitchell Library, Bonwick Transcripts, C.213; Wedgwood to Banks, 12 March 1790, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, vol.80, pt.2, 1791, p.306; *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, London, Stockdale, July 1789, title page vignette and epigraph, and Erasmus Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation*, London, 1791, p.87; L. Richard Smith, *The Sydney Cove Medallion*, Sydney, The Wedgwood Society of Australia, 1978, pp. 7-9.



The Sydney Cove Medallion, by Wedgwood, 1789 (Dixon Library reference: ZP*68), the design was by Henry Webber, and the medallion was modelled by William Hackwood. Josiah Wedgwood received the sample of Sydney Cove clay from Sir Joseph Banks in May 1789, and sent the first batch of completed medallions to London in November to be carried to New South Wales by the Second Fleet. Banks was involved with the production of both the medallion and the Great Seal.

Wedgwood had rediscovered a technique of non-vitreous encaustic painting used in ancient Italy, it was thought, by the Etruscans.¹¹ The Etruscans, to Darwin, and to Eighteenth Century Europe generally, were understood to have been the direct ancestors of the Romans and not, as is now understood, a separate nation. As a result of Sir William Hamilton's excavations at Herculaneum, the ceramic ware of Magna Graecia (ancient southern Italy), under the name "Etruscan ware", became widely admired, as did the "Etruscan" civilization which produced it. Wedgwood's first production from his new pottery in 1769 bore the legend: "Artes Etruriae Renascuntur" ("the Arts of Etruria Re-born").¹²

At Wedgwood's request, Erasmus Darwin wrote a poem to accompany the issue of the Sydney Cove medallions, which he called "The Visit of Hope to Sydney-Cove near Botany Bay".¹³ Wedgwood sent a consignment of the medallions to Sydney Cove with the Second Fleet in January 1790, with the object of encouraging the colonists to use their local

clay to establish a pottery industry.¹⁴ Darwin also referred to the medallion in his *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791), saying:

"The bold Cameo speaks,
To stay Despair's disanimating sigh . . .
Or with fair Hope the brightening scenes
improve,
And cheer the dreary wastes at
Sydney-cove!"

Meanwhile, Webber's design (minus the legend, "Etruria 1789"), and Darwin's poem, had been used as vignette to the title page, and epigraph, to *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, which was published in instalments between July and November 1789 by John Stockdale, using documents supplied by the Admiralty and Home Office.

The notion of the "Thief-Colony" becoming in time "a great Empire" (as the correspondent to the *Morning Herald* put it in 1789), had not been foreign to John Call, whose 1784 proposal for a colony in the South Seas had formed the basis for the Government's Botany Bay project. Call had said:

11. Darwin, *op. cit.* pp.85-88, 107.

12. Desmond King-Hele, *Doctor of Revolution; the Life and Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, London, 1977, p.74.

13. *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, epigraph.

14. *ibid.*, "Account of the Vignette"; Darwin, *op. cit.*, p.87; Wedgwood to Banks, 12 March 1790.

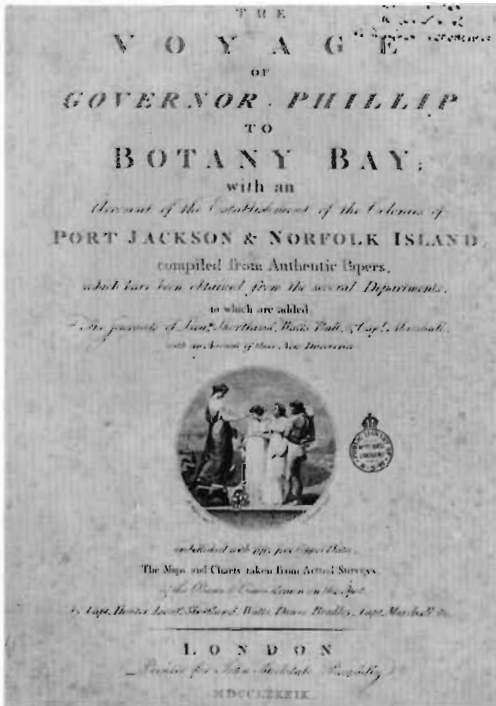
“ . . . supposing that 50 men and as many Women, or any given Number of Convicts of both Sexes, were sent to any part of New Zealand or New South Wales, or any part of the new Discoveries proper for the Experiment, and there landed with Animals, Seeds, Implements, and other Necessaries of life proper for the Climate and Country. it is easy to foresee that tho’ they might at first quarrel and commit Outrages on each other, yet in a short time mutual convenience Security would unite them into social bonds, and some form of Government would take place even tho’ none should be given them . . . In short, if the whole Sea Coast and interior Parts of New Holland were peopled in any comparative degree with Europe, Asia or America, it

would receive and return Objects of Commerce equal to any Quarter of the Globe.”¹⁵

Phillip was also conscious of his imperial role, even if he did not allow that the convicts were to be the progenitors of an imperial race: “As I would not wish Convicts to lay the foundations of an Empire;” he said in early 1787, “I think they should for ever remain separated from the Garrison and other Settlers that may come from Europe, and not allowed to mix with them, even after the 7 or 14 Years for which they are Transported may be expired.”¹⁶ When the First Fleet sailed from Portsmouth in May 1787, a captain of one of the ships observing their departure is recorded to have said to a young midshipman: “mark those vessels well, and remember them: they are going to lay the foundation of a great empire.”¹⁷

“Extent of Empire demands grandeur of Design!” exclaimed Captain Watkin Tench when the limits of the boundaries of the Territory of New South Wales were revealed when Phillip’s Commission as Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of the Territory was read on 7 February 1788 at Sydney Cove.¹⁸ The Territory comprised half the continent of New Holland, eastward from the meridian of 135°E of Greenwich, and included all the islands of the South Pacific Ocean between the Latitudes of 10°37’S (the Latitude of Cape York) and 43°39’S (the Latitude of the Southern tip of Van Diemen’s Land).

Sir Joseph Banks wrote to Governor John Hunter on 30 March 1797: “You have a prospect before you of no small interest. To the feeling mind, a Colony just emerging from the miseries to which new colonists are uniformly subjected, to your abilities it is left to model the rising State into a happy Nation, and I have no doubt you will affect your purpose



Title page of the first (serial) edition of *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, London, Stockdale, July 1789 (Mitchell Library reference: Q991/P). The design of the Sydney Cove Medallion is used as a vignette. Under the vignette is printed “H. Webber inc[is]it” and “T[homas] Medland Sculp[t]it”. The attribution of the design to Webber was dropped from later editions. John Stockdale’s publishing house was habitually used by Sir Joseph Banks and the Home Office, and the Banks connection probably explains the use of the medallion design as a vignette.

15. PRO, Home Office, 42/7, pp.49-57, “A Proposal for a Colonisation of the South Pacific”, National Library of Australia microfilm.
 16. PRO, Colonial Office, 201/1; reproduced in King, *op. cit.*
 17. *Daily News*, 23 October 1853; quoted in Ged Martin, “The Foundation of Botany Bay”, Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, *Reappraisals in British Imperial History*, London, Macmillan, 1975, p.44.
 18. Watkin Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years* (L.F. Fitzhardinge, ed.), Sydney, 1961, p.57.

. . . I see the future prospects of empires and dominions which now cannot be disappointed. Who knows but that England may revive in New South Wales when it is sunk in Europe!"¹⁹

Banks had finally been sworn as a Privy Counsellor on 9 March 1797, and appointed to its Trade Plantations Committee (where he had sat as an unofficial adviser since its formation in 1784), and to its Coin Committee. He was a lifelong coin collector, and had been involved with the production of the Royal Society's Cook medal by the Royal Mint between 1780 and 1785, and with the design of Wedgwood's medallion commemorating the discovery of the planet Uranus by William Herschel between 1783 and 1785. He had also been a close friend and correspondent of Sir William Hamilton, British Ambassador to Naples, from the time of their first meeting in 1772, and an enthusiastic exponent of the

neo-classicism stemming from the Etruscan, Roman and Greek antiquities collected by the Ambassador.

Upon learning of the safe arrival of the First Fleet, John Linton had written to Banks on 9 April 1789, saying: "In search of our new Rome fewer disastrous Events have attended the Emigrants from this Country, then befel the followers of Aeneas in the flight from Troy to the founding of their City . . ." ²⁰

One classical allusion that was not quoted at the time were the words attributed to Aeneas by Virgil (*Aen.*, xii, 191) on the occasion of the conclusion of the treaty of union between the Trojans and the Aborigines of Italy: "paribus se legibus ambae invictae gentes aeterna in foedera mittant" ("let both peoples, unconquered, with their own laws equal, enter into an eternal union").

Photographs by the Mitchell Library Copying Service and reproduced with the permission of the Mitchell Library.



Wax impression of the Great Seal of New South Wales affixed to the Commission of Lieutenant Charles Menzies, first Commandant at Newcastle, 15 March 1804. This document is discussed in an article by T.S. Champion, "Historic Document at Newcastle", *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, vol.24, Pt.3, 1938, p.185-8. Photograph by Gordon Finn.

By permission of the Newcastle City Library. The author acknowledges the assistance he received from Corinne Taylor, Local History Librarian, Newcastle City Library.

19. *HRNSW*, vol.III, p.202.

20. Harold B. Carter, *Sir Joseph Banks, 1743-1820*, London, British Museum (Natural History), 1988, p.234.