

- 19 Richard A. Trueswell, 'A Quantitative Measure of User Circulation Requirements and Its Possible Effect on Stack Thinning and Multiple-copy Determination.' *American Documentation* 16 (1965): 20-25.

ONE (OR TWO) FRENCH PRIESTS AND THE "CATHOLICS OF NEW SOUTH WALES" IN 1788

Frank R.L. Carleton

When published at the end of 1988 J.H. Donohoe's *The Catholics of New South Wales 1788-1820 and their families* (Sydney: Archives Authority of New South Wales, 1988. viii, 432 p. ISBN 0 7240 7974 2)¹ was advertised in the *Catholic Weekly*² and available at \$19.95 through the Government Information Service in Hunter Street, Sydney. According to the preface, which bears the names of the Principal Archivist and the Chairperson of the Archives Authority of New South Wales:

The Archives Authority believes that the present work - involving 10,000 names - is an important contribution to the documentation of the individuals who made history. It should be of value to family historians, Catholic historians and scholarly researchers alike. (p.iii).

¹ "Compiled and edited by James Hugh Donohoe in association with the NSW State Archives and Government Records Repository ("Kingswood"), O'Connell St., St Marys, 2760, and the Archives of St. Mary's Cathedral (sic), St. Mary's Cathedral Road, Sydney 2000" (titlepage verso)

² *Catholic Weekly* 7 Dec. 1988 p.21. Curiously, and despite its imprint, this publication did not appear in the June, 1989 list of its publications issued by the Archives Authority, but was advertised again in a letter by the Coordinator of the New South Wales Bicentennial Archives Program which was published in the November, 1989 issue of *Footprints*, the quarterly journal of the Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission (*Footprints* 6 (12) Nov. 1989 p.36).

The volume consists chiefly of a long unreferenced list of convicts' names, plus, in the cases of numerous women, their husbands (pp.53-420), followed by two appendices - Appendix A : 'List of convict ships arriving in New South Wales 1788-1820' (pp.421-431) and Appendix B: 'The Editor' (a 6-paragraph autobiographical summary p.432) at the end. Appendix A is reproduced from Guide to the State Archives of N.S.W. No. 14 - *Guide to Convict Records ...*" (p.422). My attention was drawn to several sentences in an initial 6-page section preceding the list, which is entitled, 'Editor's Historical Observations' (pp. 5-10). These sentences, which are quoted below, contain an oblique reference to a priest on the Laperouse Expedition which sojourned in Botany Bay, where a fortified encampment was established, from 26th January to 10th March, 1788 - that is, during the initial weeks of the First Settlement.

There were a number of priests in the colony before Father Therry.^{2A} Their involvement is well documented [but no evidence is cited]. Unfortunately the whole picture may not be known as fully as it may have been [meaning as it once was?]. The first priest actually recorded was a member of La Perouse's expedition [no record is referenced]. (p.8).

The priest assigned to the Astrolabe, the second ship of the expedition was designated in the 'Etat général et nominatif des officiers, savans, artistes et marins ...', or lists of personnel embarked under the orders of Laperouse, as follows:

Le Père Receveur, Religieux Cordelier, naturaliste, et faisant les fonctions d'aumonier.³ (Father Receveur, Conventual Franciscan friar, naturalist and doing the duties of chaplain).

The Boussole and the Astrolabe entered Botany Bay on the morning of 26th January, 1788 as the first fleet was departing for Port Jackson and reached the anchorage it had vacated about 9 o'clock.⁴ The exchange of courtesies then initiated by Captain John Hunter of H.M.S. Sirius was succeeded by a round of cordial visits by British parties to the French at Botany Bay and

^{2A} John Joseph Therry (1790-1864) and his senior clerical colleague, the Revd Philip Conolly (1786-1839) were the two first official Catholic chaplains appointed to New South Wales. They arrived in Sydney in May, 1820.

³ Reproduced in facsimile in *La généreuse et tragique Expedition Laperouse*. Ed. by François Bellec. Rennes : Ouest France, 1985, pp.47-50.

⁴ Laperouse, quoted in Henry Selkirk 'La Perouse and the French monuments at Bontany Bay' *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and proceedings* 4(7) 1981, p.338.

by French parties to Sydney Cove while the French ships remained.⁵ As Surgeon Worgan wrote in terms similar to the writers of other First Fleet journals :

... there was a constant succession of mutual good offices passing between us. We visited each other frequently, sometimes the parties going by water, sometimes by land (for it is only 8 to 10 miles over) and the little difficulties and fatigues which ye voyagers or the travellers underwent were thought amply compensated if they could obtain a social intercourse with one another.⁶

As recorded by Phillip, King, Collins, White, Tench, Clark and Worgan absconding convicts who tried for admission to the French ships were firmly rebuffed.⁷

According to Lieutenant King:

Monsieur De La Perouse informed me that a number of ye convicts had been to him and offered to enter, but he had dismissed them with threats, and gave them a day's provision to carry them back to ye settlement.⁸

Père Receveur features in King's gratified account of an early February visit to Botany Bay, although the French friar is inaccurately designated as an abbé, the title for a secular, not a religious, priest:

An abbe, who is also on the expedition as a collector of natural history appears a man of letters and geniality.⁹

Some three weeks after the Laperouse Expedition's arrival, on February 17th, Père Receveur died - not, it seems, as the delayed result of wounds

⁵ These visits are tabulated in *The road to Botany Bay: the story of Frenchmans Road, Randwick through the journals of Laperouse and First Fleet writers*. Comp. and introduced by Alec Protos. Randwick & District Historical Society, 1988, p.8.

⁶ George B. Worgan *Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon*. Sydney: Library Council of New South Wales, 1978, p.31

⁷ For the relevant extracts from the journals of these writers see *The road to Botany Bay ... op.cit.* pp.15-16.

⁸ Quoted *ibid.* p.15.

⁹ Philip Gidley King *The journal of Philip Gidley King : Lieutenant, R.N. 1787-1790*. Ed. by Paul G. Fidlon and R.J. Ryan. Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1980 p.39.

sustained in Samoa as has sometimes been supposed.¹⁰ Mystery surrounds the nature and circumstances of his death. In two letters written only a few days before the friar's death Laperouse reported on the good health of all his men. In the second he observed:

Our crews arrived at Botany Bay in a better state of health than they enjoyed even at their departure from Brest.¹¹

Neither his brother priest, the Abbé Jean André Mongez, nor the officers of the *Boussole*, who visited Sydney Cove together between 20th and 22nd February, just three to five days after Père Receveur died, and then again on 4th March, seem to have spoken of his death. Nor did Captain John Hunter, who came over to Botany Bay between 26th and 28th February, nor Captain Shea of the Marines, who followed on 7th and 8th March, report the death of the Conventual Franciscan naturalist.¹²

In the words of François Bellec:

Whether sick or mortally wounded by a native the first priest to die on Australian soil carried away one of the lowly and terrible secrets of the Laperouse Expedition.¹³

This was forever lost when the expedition foundered in the Solomon Islands within weeks of leaving Botany Bay.

What is well reported by several of the First Fleet writers, but with varying degrees of accuracy, and only after the departure of the French ships on March 10th, is the Latin inscription fixed above a humble grave. According to Surgeon White, who visited the site on 1st June, 1788, it was "distinguished only by a common headstone stuck lightly into the loose earth which covered it."¹⁴ The inscription was painted on a board nailed to a tree above the grave. Either its obvious impermanence as White noted,¹⁵ or its removal by the aborigines as Tench asserted,¹⁶ inspired

¹⁰ National Parks & Wildlife Service *Bare Island Historic Site* (brochure). Sydney 1975.

¹¹ Quoted Selkirk *op.cit.*, p.346.

¹² For this succinct summary of salient facts from several sources the writer is indebted to François Bellec 'Rendez-vous a Botany Bay' *Neptunia* 170, juin 1988, p.5.

¹³ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁴ John White *Journal of a voyage to New South Wales*. With a biographical introduction by Rex Rienets. Ed. by Alec H. Chisholm. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962, p.136.

¹⁵ *Loc.cit.*

Phillip to have the inscription engraved on a sheet of copper and nailed to the same tree near to, or on the site of, the French observatory.¹⁷

White, Tench, Phillip and Collins each recorded the text of the inscription in their published journals.¹⁸ The transcription by Collins is probably the most accurate. It recorded the name 'L. Receveur', the 'L' standing for 'Laurent', Père Receveur's name in religion, instead of 'Le Receveur', a corruption of his surname by the other three writers. This transcription reads:

Hic jacet
L. Receveur
Ex F.F. Minoribus
Galliae Sacerdos
Physicus in Circumnavigatione Mundi,
Duce D. de la Perouse
Obiit Die 17th Febr., Anno
1788¹⁹

What then did either priest of the visiting French expedition have to do with the "Catholics of New South Wales" in 1788? One did not visit Sydney Cove. There is no record in the First Fleet journals of any religious ministrations by the other priest, the Abbé Mongez, when he did. And any religious ministrations, however casual or incidental, would have been remarkable as Catholicism was a proscribed religion within the British jurisdiction. On February 13th Phillip, in the presence of the Judge Advocate, took the Oath of Abjuration against the Catholic Eucharistic doctrine of Transubstantiation.²⁰

¹⁶ Watkin Tench *Sydney's first four years ...* With an introduction and annotations by L.F. Fitzhardinge. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961, p.55.

¹⁷ Loc.cit.

¹⁸ Selkirk quotes in full and examines the text of the inscription as rendered by each of these writers, noting their errors. Selkirk op.cit. pp.347-348.

¹⁹ This translates: Here lies L. Receveur, from the Friars Minor, priest of France, scientist in the circumnavigation of the world; under the leadership of Laperouse. Died the 17th day of February in the year 1788.

²⁰ Quoted in C.M.H. Clark *A history of Australia*. I. From the earliest times to the age of Macquarie. Melbourne UP, 1963 p.89. Ironically the visit of the Laperouse Expedition, because of the presence of its two priests, is traditionally associated with the inception of the Mass in Australia, whether said aboard ship, or ashore, in Botany Bay.

J.H. Donohoe does not state the relationship between one (or two) priests of the Laperouse Expedition and the "Catholics of New South Wales" in 1788. The allusion may be a gratuitous irrelevance in his prolix preliminary matter which is characterised by the following features:

- obscurity of expression (see the foregoing quotation from p.8)
- infelicities of style e.g. the first sentence: "Ever since I began to research my roots ..." (p.1)
- unreferenced assertions: note again the quotation from p.8 and inter alia, "It has been acknowledged by historians, based on reasonable statistics collected during the Colony's first half century, that Catholics represented about 30% of the population ... (p.1). (Neither the historians nor the statistics are cited).
- no apparatus of footnotes or other precise citations
- absence of reference to standard works of Australian and Australian Catholic history and to the whole periodical literature of Australian history (see the meagre bibliography of inchoate citations on pp.41-42 for obvious gaps)²¹
- no apparent acquaintance with the literature of eighteenth century English Catholic Recusancy, notwithstanding the writer's speculations about the number of Catholics in the First Fleet (pp.1-2)
- extraordinary, if not hilarious, anachronisms like "family reunions" (p.3) and "marriage celebrant" (p.4)

²¹ An example of glaring omissions is provided by the four paragraphs entitled, 'The miracle of Father Jeremiah O'Flynn' on p.13 with facing fanciful illustration.

The Revd Jeremiah Francis O'Flynn (1788-1831), an Irish priest and ex-Trappist monk arrived in Sydney, without official permission, in November, 1817. Following a legendary semi-clandestine ministry to local Catholics he was expelled from the colony by Governor Macquarie in May, 1818.

The bibliography does not include Eric O'Brien's well known study of Father O'Flynn's career, *The dawn of Catholicism in Australia* (Sydney 1928) nor any of the following relevant periodical articles:

- W.H. Grattan Flood 'Rev. Jeremiah Francis O'Flynn, second Prefect-Apostolic of Australia (1816-1819)' *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 5th series 6 (576) Dec. 1915 pp. 603-609.
- C. Duffy 'The leaving of the consecrated Host by Father O'Flynn' *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 2 (2) 1967 pp. 1-20.
- Cathaldus Giblin 'James Dixon and Jeremiah O'Flynn, two prefects-apostolic in Australia' *Collectanea Hibernica* 25, 1983 pp.63-85.

Even more surprisingly perhaps, the text makes no reference to an original autograph letter, signed by Father O'Flynn, written in London and dated 27 March 1817 which survives in the Sydney Archdiocesan Archives at St. Mary's Cathedral. This writer has a photocopy.

It would require an article of considerable length, or a page by page list, to detail all the stylistic, bibliographical and historical solecisms with which the preliminary matter teems and to examine its obscurely explained methodology and the utility of the unreferenced lists which follow.

The correctives adduced above could prove salutary for users of a publication, produced at public expense, which has enjoyed some currency. According to a letter of 19th December, 1988 to this writer from the Principal Archivist, Archives Authority of New South Wales:

The total expenditure from the Bicentennial grant upon *The Catholics of New South Wales* was about \$25,000, the great bulk of which was direct printing costs. It is confidently expected that this expenditure will be more than recouped from sales. And indeed, you will be gratified to know that hundreds of copies have already been sold. (file reference AO 87/109A).

Gratified users of this publication may care to advise the publishing body of their satisfaction.

Frank R.L. Carleton

PERSONNEL UPDATES AND NEWS

LIBRARIAN SEEKING POSITION:

Lyn Elsholz, recently returned from Christian Leaders Training College in PNG seeks position anywhere in Australia. Contact Lyn on (02) 899 2612 or (02) 651 1270; Address: 59 Jaffa Road, Dural, NSW, 2158.

STAFF MOVEMENTS:

Corpus Christi College in Melbourne has seen the following changes. In June 1992 Kay Cole retired and has been replaced by Virginia de Crespigny, formerly at Deakin University Library. At the end of the year Jean Leggett resigned. Lorraine Chapman and Judith Harker have joined the CCC team. Farewell and welcome respectively!

Ruth Millard, Ridley College, Melbourne, begins maternity leave at the end of May. Best wishes to Ruth and husband Ian. Welcome to Kerrie Hunter who fills Ruth's position for several months.