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England's Experimental Colony: The First Settlement in Australia

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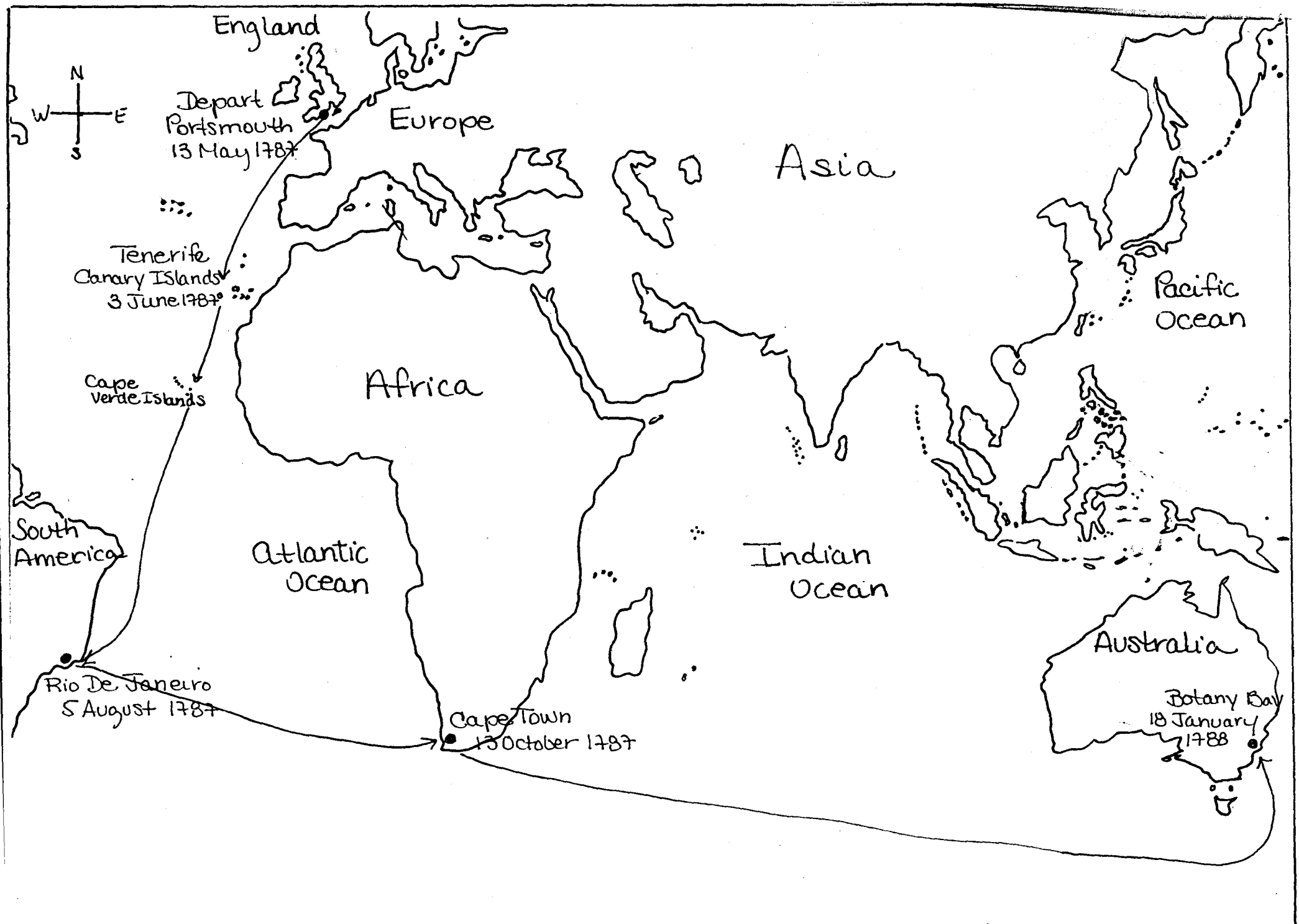
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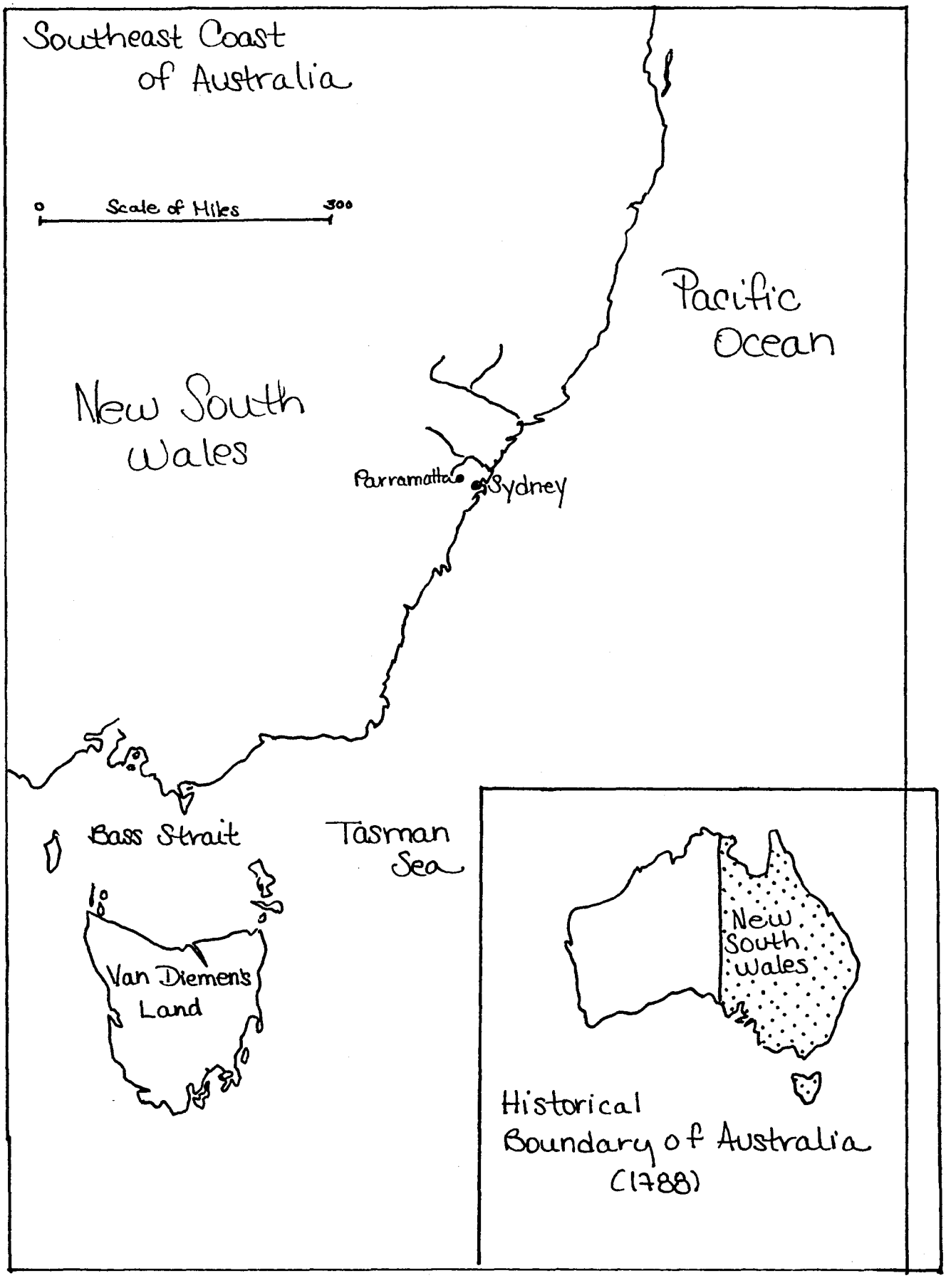
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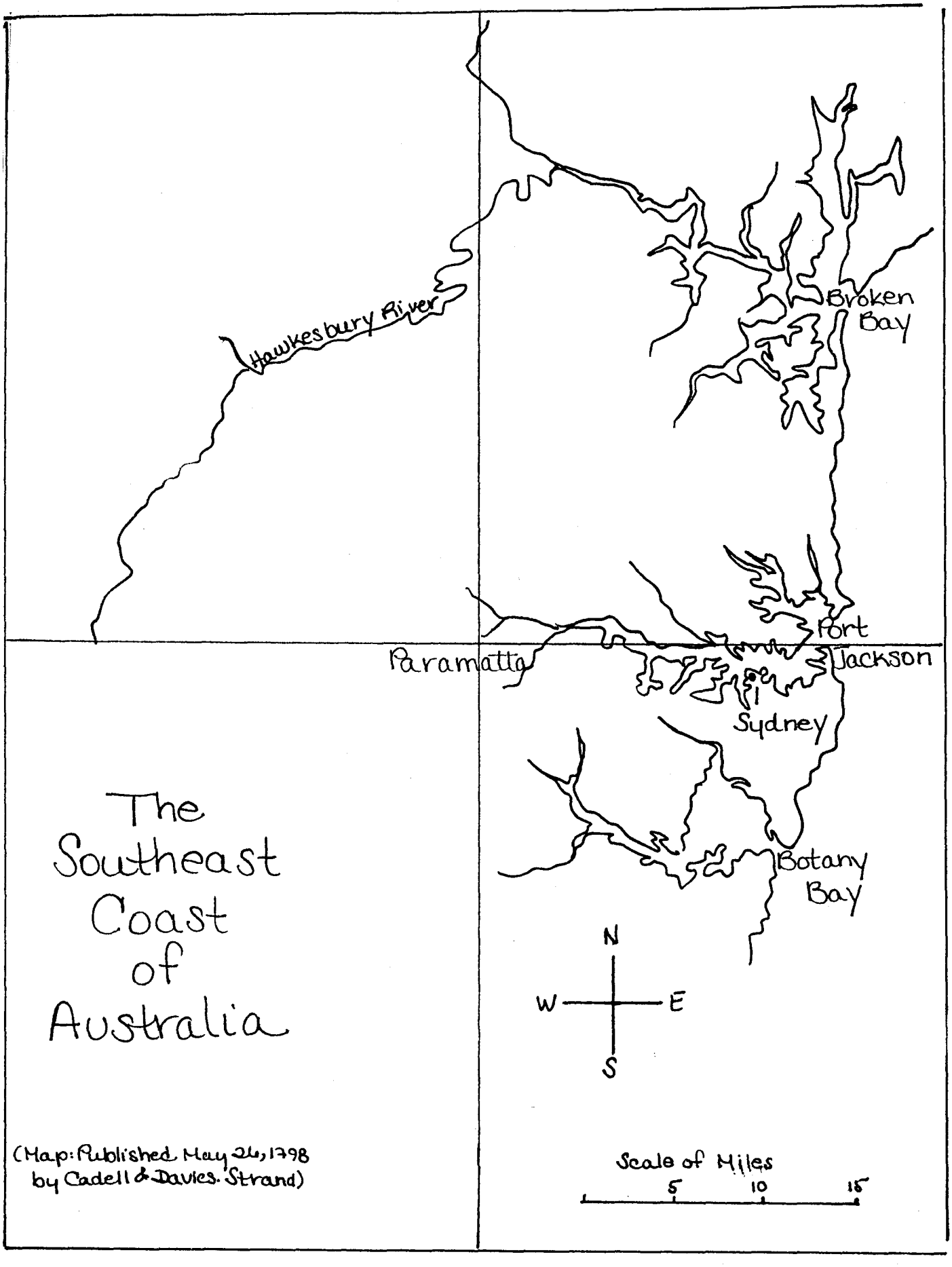

The Southeast Coast of Australia

(Map: Published May 26, 1798 by Cadell & Davies. Strand)

"All social problems of all countries can be got rid of by extirpating the inhabitants."

George Bernard Shaw

Almost 200 years ago, the first white settlers stepped on the shores of Australia. They were not there for freedom or opportunity, but rather for punishment. England's prisons were overflowing and their solution was sending the convicts away and forgetting about them. Australia's history and first eighty years of development began in this shadow. From 1787 until 1867 the English Government transported convicts to their penal colony in Australia. In all over 160,000 convicts were sent.

The initial settlement and the reasons behind it were unique. England's attempt to establish a self-sufficient convict colony was the first of its kind. And even though this colony was not extremely successful, it laid the foundation for the growth and subsequent development of Australia.

Beginning in the mid 1700's, England experienced difficulties with its penal and criminal justice systems. The root of these problems lie in the country's transition. England was changing from agricultural and preindustrial to industrial and modern. Traditional English society could not withstand the strain and the country suffered.

Agriculture, the predominant industry, was still based on the traditional, medieval, open-field system. England was a modernizing country and the three field rotation system was outdated as well as wasteful. With the death rate decreasing and the population increasing, England began to export less and less corn due to the increased consumption of its larger population.1 In general, England needed to produce more food. As the country matured, the agricultural industry had to be modified or people would starve. The solution to this problem was the enclosure of individually owned tracts of land. Enclosure was primarily accomplished through Parliamentary legislation by rich landowners. The issuing of these enclosure acts increased greatly after 1760; before 1760 244 acts had been passed. Sixty years later, at the end of George III's reign, the number was nearly 4000.2 The enclosure of land and consequent development of compact farms proved successful. It increased overall productivity, cut down on waste and made some landowners very rich. At the same time, enclosure forced small landowners off the land. Many of these people migrated to the cities looking for jobs, especially in the newly built factories resulting from the rise of industrialism.

The stresses from the growth in industrialization, which began in the mid eighteenth century, resulted in the further disruption of the previous system and social structure. With the initial expansion of the cotton industry, developments in the iron industry and steam engine improvements, industry grew at a quick and continuous rate. Once industrialization began, it was impossible for society to remain the same. A new class of people,

city laborers, emerged as industry grew. Many of these laborers had worked on the land, but, because of enclosure, were forced to find work in the cities.3

These two developments, enclosure and industrialization, resulted in many changes and strains within England. One the most important consequences was the rapid growth of the cities. People emigrated to cities at higher rates then ever before. London's population was 575,000 at the beginning of the eighteenth century. By 1760 the population had reached 750,000, ten percent of the country's population.4 As cities grew, people concentrated in crowded slum areas, especially in London.5 This overpopulation had direct consequence on the frequency of crimes committed and the rise in the crime rate.

The standard urban living condition was horrible. Shacks and decaying buildings crowded the cities edges. Open sewers ran throughout London until 1765 and rats made their homes in any available space. Health conditions improved and the death rate decreased despite the poor quality of living conditions. These improvements made over populated areas even more crowded. Many solved their problems by turning to gin, causing a rise in drunkenness and alcoholism. These masses also frequented ale-houses and unregulated public houses, further corrupting themselves. Education levels were low and most city residents were uneducated, illiterate, unskilled laborers, who had emigrated because no jobs existed in the country. Large numbers of people could not find work and they did whatever they could to survive. An increase in crime was the direct end result of these conditions and the tough

competition for employment. Offenses of every description had their origin in the "vicious and immoral habits" of the people, and in the "facilities which the state of manners and society, particularly in vulgar life, afford in generating vicious and bad habits."6

During this time, social controls; laws, courts and the penal system, did not effectively deter the growing incidents of crime or punish the criminals. In London and Middlesex the total number of prisoners was 4,379 in 1779, 4,439 in 1782 and 7,482 in 1788.7 Crime kept increasing, although, by 1769, at least 160 crimes were punishable by death. The English Government, falsely, believed that capital punishment would deter crime. One reason for the system's failure was England's lack of an effective police force. Very few criminals were apprehended. Another problem with the system, according to Patrick Colquhoun, was the severity of England's laws. The punishments did not justly fit the crimes. Because obligatory sentences were too extreme, juries tended to let criminals off, which resulted in a high number of acquittals that released criminals back on the streets.8 Frequent pardons and inefficient police removed the fear of being punished or being caught.9 Also, even when people received jail sentences, they usually served shortened terms. This was because of the ineffectiveness and inconsistency of the courts and the overcrowded conditions of the jails.10 Overflowing prisons were breeding grounds for crime, not reformatory institutions. Beginning in 1776, with the Hulk Act (16 Geo.III, c.43), hulks docked in the Thames housed men who could not be accommodated in prisons. The

problems still persisted. The system needed reform in order to end the increase in crime and a location needed to be found to accommodate the prisoners. Transportation of criminal to Australia became the solution.

Transportation was based on the idea of banishment. Execution was quicker and cheaper, but merciless; and exile was chosen as an alternative. Transportation was also easily justifiedby the government, they believed it not only removed undesirables from society and was more humane than execution, but also that it tended directly to rehabilitate the convicts and make them good citizens, because of honest work and labor.11 The idea of transportation had its roots in a 1597 law, 39 Eliz. c. 4, that ordered, obdurate idlers to "be banished out of this Realm...and be conveyed to such parts beyond the seas as shall be...assigned by the Privy Council."12 George I officially established transportation in 1717 with Parliamentary Act 4 George I, c.2. With this act, felons were transported to the American colonies and used as a source of cheap labor. By the outbreak of the American Revolution, transportation had become a major part of the English criminal system. When England lost the war, it could no longer use America as a criminal dumping ground and it internal system could not handle the strain. Overcrowded prisons and an increased crime rate forced the government to find a new location to send convicts. The government in 1784 revived the system of transportation and passed a new act, Act of 24th Geo. III. Stat. 2. cap. 56. This parliamentary act not only reestablished transportation, but also stated that a colony could be set up solely for penal purposes:

> "...which empowers the court, before whom a male felon shall be convicted, to order the prisoner to be transported beyond seas, either within his Majesty's domains or elsewhere."[13]

Vague proposals suggested the West Indies, Honduras, Florida, Nova Scotia, the Falklands, and the East Indies as prospective sites for penal colonies. In the late 1770's extensive reports proposed sending convicts to several areas in Africa, but ultimately these too were rejected. Finally, after much debate in government, a location was chosen that seemed appropriate for the new penal settlement. Sir Joseph Banks, before the House of Commons, suggested Botany Bay, in New South Wales, the future Australia.

Captain Cook and his crew, one of whom was Sir Joseph Banks, claimed New South Wales in the name of George III on August 22, 1770. Cook had been sent to conduct astrological observations in Tahiti and to survey the South Pacific area. After Cook's initial visit, Australia remained undisturbed for eighteen years, until England's loss in the American Revolution. At this time no other European country claimed the land and the English saw Australia as the perfect solution to their crime problem. It was remote, and far enough away that inmates could not escape and return to England. As Sir Joseph Banks pointed out; the area was fertile, and the relatively few natives inhabiting the land seemed friendly. He believed that a colony would certainly need a few years' supply of provisions, but afterwards, with some industry, would be able to maintain itself.[14] Because of these positive characteristics, the English Government decided on Botany Bay as the location of the new penal settlement.

The prospect of settling Australia had importance beyond a penal settlement to some Englishmen. With the Pacific opening up during the eighteenth century, British interest in the area increased. Many saw the possibility of two economies for England. Commercially, Australia was in a central location for Far Eastern trade and militarily, it would be a valuable naval station in case of war with Spain. Its proximity to New Zealand also added to its appeal. In New Zealand, it seemed, flax, cotton, coffee, indigo and many other crops could be grown abundantly.15 These economic prospects, however were not pursued as the first fleet of ships readied for departure from England.

On July 8, 1786, Lord Sydney, the Secretary of State who was in charge of the First Fleet, officially announced that Botany Bay on the west coast of New South Wales had been selected as the sight of England's penal colony.16 After the decision to dispatch a fleet, the next step was finding a man capable of commanding the fleet and governing the new settlement, as its first governor. On October 12, 1786, Lord Sydney chose Captain Arthur Phillip, a naval officer, as the commander. Captain Phillip was forty-eight when he received his commission; he had been in the navy on and off since the age of sixteen, and saw service during the Seven Years' War. He had separated from his wife twenty years earlier and lived a solitary life. Phillip was a competent, efficient, reliable man and because he had no family, would be dedicated to his job . He was just the type of man who was needed to run the penal settlement if it were to succeed. Captain Phillip thus began six months of preparation for the fleet's

departure. After much debate with the government, Phillip finally acquired decently equipped ships and sufficient provisions for the journey. The fleet consisted of eleven ships: the frigate Sirius commanded by Captain Phillips, the brig Supply, three storeships carrying provisions for the voyage and for the future settlement until it became self sufficient, and six transports carrying the convicts. These eleven ships departed Portsmouth on May 13, 1787 with 1030 men, women and children on their way to establish a penal settlement for Britain.17

The 736 convicts, on the First Fleet, came from all over England, with most coming from London. Their crimes varied, but all were crimes against property:

OFFENSE	NUMBER
Minor Theft	431
"Privy theft", including breaking and entering	93
Highway robbery	71
Stealing cattle or sheep	44
Robbery with violence (mugging)	31
Grand larceny	9
Fencing (receiving stolen goods)	8
Swindling, impersonation	7
Forgery of documents, banknotes, etc	4
Other	35
Total of known indictments	733 (18)

The oldest convict was Dorothy Hanland, an eight-two year old rag dealer, who received seven years for perjury. John Hudson, a nine-year-old chimney sweep, was the youngest. The judge sent him to Australia because he felt in England the boy would only go back to his old ways.19 John had stolen some clothes and a

pistol. Both Dorothy and John were serving seven year terms, as were most others. Some had fourteen year sentences and a select few were sentenced for life. These convicts were not dangerous criminals, like rapists or murders, or political prisoners; they were victims of a very harsh penal code.20 Phillip was sent to establish a colony not with experienced, determined settlers, but rather with a motley group of unfortunate petty criminals.

Eight months and one week after Captain Phillip and his fleet departed Portsmouth, the 15,063 mile journey ended. "In every journal connected with the First Fleet the most evident satisfaction was expressed on the happy conclusion of the venture."21 Things went exceptionally well, the weather was good and there were adequate supplies of fresh food. Captain Phillip was able to provide fresh bread and one and a half pounds of meat to each convict daily.22 The ships stopped to replenish supplies in Tenerife, Canary Islands on June 3, 1787, in Rio De Janeiro on August 5, 1787, and in Cape Town on October 13, 1787, making the journey more bearable. The convicts were well-behaved, not only because they were chained and seasick, but also because they had been warned that any attempted escape meant death. Convicts stayed below deck the entire voyage, and despite the close, crowded, unhealthy conditions, there were only thirty-six deaths.23 Finally, on January 8, 1788, the Australian coast was spotted and ten days later the ships arrived at Botany Bay. Captain Phillip and his crew had successfully accomplished the initial stage in England's unprecedented attempt to establish a colony. Never had country founded a colony so far from itself or in such ignorance

of the land it would occupy.24

This ignorance was apparent from the first landing at Botany Bay, for everything that had been reported about Australia was incorrect. Immediately Captain Phillip knew Botany Bay was ill-suited to establish a colony. The ground was low, unfertile and swampy. The harbor was unprotected, the waves were rough and little fresh water was available. Faced with this flat, barren, dry landscape, Captain Phillips, on January 21, exercised his option to find a more suitable location for the settlement. While Phillip and three small boats headed north to explore other areas described by Cook, those left behind made contact with the native Australians, the Aborigines, whose first words to the colonists were "warra, warra!", meaning, "Go away!"25 Under orders from Phillip, they were directed to befriend the blacks. During the Captain's absence, conflict was avoided and a little trading was done.

Although the voyage and initial contact with the Aborigines went well, many knew that a new area had to be found if this haggard, unwanted group was to survive, let alone be a self-sufficient asset to England. On January 24, two days after Captain Phillip began his search for a new location, he returned to Botany Bay reporting he had found the perfect area for a settlement. It was situated twelve miles north at a harbor Captain Cook called Port Jackson. Phillip had discovered a port suited in every way to his needs and also, as he soon realized, one of the most beautiful and convenient harbors in the world.26 It was deep and wide, yet well protected with many coves and hidden bays. The selected

harbor was also advantageous for maritime communications and commerce.27 With the decision to move north, the First Fleet moved on to its final destination.

The fleet arrived at Port Jackson on January 26, 1788, ready to establish a new home. They anchored just off the head of the cove, near a run of fresh water,

> "which stole silently along through a very thick wood, the stillness of which had then, for the first time since the creation, been interrupted by the rude sound of the labourer's axe, and the downfall of its ancient inhabitants;-a stillness and tranquility which from that day were to give place to the voice of labour, the confusion of camps and towns and 'the busy hum of its new possessors.'"28

On January 26, Captain Phillip formally took possession of the whole eastern part of the continent as far west as the 135th degree of east longitude in the name of King George III. Along with claiming this land, Phillip also took control over New Zealand, Tasmania and many other islands in the South Pacific. The colony, to be called New South Wales, as defined by the British Government, was 1,584,998 square miles in area. Although Phillip governed this whole area, he actually only ruled the small harbor settlement. In commemoration of the man who sent them to Australia, Lord Thomas Townshend Sydney, Phillip named this area Sydney Cove.

The disembarkment of the 548 males began upon arrival. These men had been kept below deck since before the May 13th departure from Portsmouth. They had not seen day light or breathed fresh air for over eight months. Temporary tents were erected and used as convict quarters until permanent buildings could be

constructed. On February 6, the 188 female convicts came ashore. Not only was this the first time for both groups to be released from the dark confines of the hulks, it was also the first time since confined they had visual contact with the opposite sex. The night proved to be a disaster, for the rigorous separation that had been possible on the ships was impossible to enforce on land. To make matters worse a terrible storm hit and the settlement was out of control, tents blew down and couples snuck off into bushes and behind rocks. The night was "a scene of debauchery and riot."29

Captain Phillip, quite upset with the endeavour and the first night's antics, assembled the entire population the following day, February 7. From the start, Phillip wanted the convicts to be acquainted with his commission from King George III. Judge-Advocate David Collins unsealed and read the Royal Instructions, which gave Captain-General Phillip, the Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales, the power to administer oaths, appoint officers, convene criminal and civil court and emancipate prisoners. Phillip could raise armies, execute martial law and build "such and so many forts and platforms, castles, cities, boroughs, towns and fortifications as he should judge necessary."30 Phillip also had the power to pardon all offenses, except willful murder and treason, but even then he had the power to reprieve. The Governor had virtually complete control over the new settlement. The instructions given to Phillip, and his successors, made them almost total autocrats.31 Phillip planned to run a strict and military like settlement. New South Wales was not a colony of free men,

but rather a penal colony. Captain Phillip knew that without strict laws, harsh punishments, organization and cooperation his hapless prisoners would never survive, because their knowledge of the area, food, supplies, labor and the desire of the convicts to work were insufficient.

Upon arrival to Australia, the settlers had enough food to keep them alive for approximately two years. All men, whether convict, officer or soldier received the same ration of food per week. Phillip believed that if everyone was alloted equal amounts, it would, at least temporarily, eliminate some conflict between freemen and convicts. The weekly ration was seven lbs.of biscuit, seven lbs. of flour, seven lbs. of beef or four lbs. of pork, three pints of "pease" and six ounces of butter. Women received two thirds of the men's weekly ration.32 The First Fleet had also carried over with livestock to begin a self sufficient supply of meats, because they had no knowledge of what would be available. The following animals survived the voyage to Australia:

Stallion	1
Mares	3
Colts	3
Bulls	2
Cows	5
Sheep	29
Goats	19
Hogs	49
Pigs	25
Rabbits	5
Turkeys	18
Geese	29
Ducks	35
Fowls	122
Chickens	87

(33)

Phillip imposed very harsh punishments for stealing food and livestock. These crimes were believed to be the worst crimes, not just against individuals, but against society as a whole because food was the most valuable item in the settlement. According to Captain Phillip, the life of a breeding animal was worth the life of a man.34 Even stealing small amounts drew severe punishments. One man , for example, received 300 lashes and six months in chains for stealing three pounds of potatoes and another 1,000 lashes for taking three pounds of tubers. Phillip also rewarded convicts for helping to apprehend food thieves. After Thomas Yardley caught a man stealing vegetables, he received sixty pounds of flour.35

The food and animal supply the original settlers brought with them was inadequate. There was not enough food and the food did not last. Animals butchered one night would be crawling with maggots the following day.36 Within one year of the fleet's arrival, Phillip had to cut rations. People now received only four lbs. of flour, two and a half lbs. of salt pork and one and a half lbs. of rice per week.37 With the prospect of starvation in the near future, people began to realize that the land was not totally barren. Native plants and animals were used as dietary supplements. They made a drink from the root of sarsaparilla plants, used red gum from eucalyptus trees to treat scurvy and caught birds, fish and game. These supplements were helpful, but the colony needed to organize and farm if it were to survive.

Phillip tried hard, from the start, to make the settlement self-sufficient, but it was more difficult than anyone expected. The

land at Sydney Cove not was very fertile and the soil was rocky and poor. Even when arable land was found, it was difficult to clear because of the large trees, overgrown brush and lack of tools. The settlers had no ploughs to turn the hard, sun baked land and the few tools England did supply them with, shovels, hoes and spades, were all very poor in quality. Also few of the convicts knowledge of farming and no one really knew anything about the land and climate in Australia.

Despite the many barriers before them, the settlers finally planted a crop. Most of the seeds planted in the initial cultivation were attacked by weevils and the whole first crop had to be kept as seed for the next planting.38 Land in the general vicinity of the harbor proved worthless for farming and, in November 1789, the colonists pushed West. Suitable land was found about twelve miles from Sydney in Rose Hill, later renamed Parramatta, its native name. With this discovery, the agricultural base of New South Wales moved.

Another problem, just as serious as the threat of starvation, was the lack of labor. When England shipped convicts to Australia, they were under the complete control of Governor Phillip, until their sentences expired. Phillip, in turn, attempted to organized them into occupational groups, even though most had no profession or job training. He wanted to establish a communal colony independent from England. Initially, convicts received payment in the form of food, housing and other necessary provisions, but since these were received whether convicts worked or not, this policy was not extremely successful. Although over 700 convicts arrived on the First

Fleet, very little was accomplished. Motivation and productivity was low; the convicts lacked the desire to work, for most had spent their lives stealing and were unaccustomed to working. Phillip wrote in his journal, "Experience has taught me how difficult it is to make men industrious who have passed their lives in habits of vice and indolence."39 Many convicts and officers found it much simpler to steal what others had produced than to work themselves. Therefore harsh punishments were necessary and strict guard was kept over the supplies at all times. At first Phillip had the convicts work from sunrise to sunset, not only to get the work done, but also as part of their punishment.40 When this policy failed to overcome indolence, Phillip defined certain tasks as each days work and if the individual completed these he was free to work his own garden, do other tasks to make extra money or just do as he pleased.

Aside from farming, some convicts were assigned to do other jobs. And again there was the same inefficiency and lack of motivation. Construction neeed to begin on huts, then stores, military quarters and a hospital. Phillip needed men with experience, but only twelve carpenters and sixteen craftsmen had been transported.41 There were many problems. Just as with farming, the workers lacked proper tools to clear the densely wooded area land; and good building lumber was difficult to find. Only one type of suitable lumber, cabbage-tree palms, could be utilized in the Sydney Cove area. These were straight and easy to work with, but all were cut down within one year of settlement.42 The first buildings, huts constructed as temporary living quarters, were

boxes about nine feet by twelve feet, with a thatched, hipped roof and two windows on either side of the door. Despite being weak and poorly built, these huts served their purpose and across the settlement began to replace the even less durable tents that had served as makeshift homes. These thatched building were easy to destroy and sturdier building were needed, especially for the stores and storage buildings. It was several months before James Bloodworth, the only brickmaker, found suitable clay and some crude, uneven bricks were made. The first permanent building in Australia was constructed with these bricks and mortar from the lime in oyster shells. This building, the Government House, had glass windows and a tiled roof, it was the only one of its kind in Australia for many years.43 The convicts constructed other buildings with a mixture of sheep's and mud. By July, an observatory, a hospital and two storehouses were completed, but there were sill no permanent barracks for marines or convicts.

Sydney began to grow into a small town, but its crime satistics were more like that of overpopulated, trouble ridden London. People in England assumed that if convicts were transported to Australia they would reform or at least productively contribute to their own support. These naive people were wrong. Despite the strict disciplining and punishments, crime was rampant. As the food situation worsened, crime increased and more severe measures needed to be taken. The settlement had been divided into four quarters, each of which had three patrols with the power to enter any hut and arrest anyone suspicious prowling after "the taptoo had beat." Judge-Advocate David Collins kept a very detailed

report of all the crimes committed during his time in New South Wales. Within the first few days of settlement, three men were found guilty, two of robbery and one of assault. The first man hanged was a seventeen-year-old boy, Thomas Barrett, for stealing some butter, dried peas, and salt pork. Stealing, especially of food, was the predominant crime, and when Phillip cut rations he noticed an increase in crime. Marines and convicts were treated alike; six marines were hung for stealing rations and one, caught raping an infant, was executed.45 Crimes of other sorts also occurred, not surprising with such a large group with such little morality. Collins attributed the high crime rate to the people's concern for food more than morality.

With crime being a large problem in the initial settlement, Phillips had to act immediately to exercise the complete authority he had been given to establish civil and criminal courts. He knew he had to be strict, but consistent and fair, a combination that had been missing in England's criminal justice system. Civil court consisted of one deputy judge advocate and two persons appointed by the governor. Appeals could be made to the governor and finally to the King if the case involved 300 pounds or more. Civil court was not nearly as important as criminal because it was utilized less often. Criminal court was made up of a deputy judge advocate and six inexperienced officers nominated by the governor. These men heard and determined all criminal cases, punishing the convicts according to English law as nearly as possible, considering the circumstances of the settlement and the inhabitants.46 Even though Captain Phillip did not make the decisions, he still

had ultimate control over this system. He decided on appeals and when sessions could be held, and he had the right to pardon. Initially, the court could only impose two types of punishments: death or corporal punishment. Corporal punishment was usually a lashing, with a typical sentence being 200 lashes, called a "feeler." Even worse than this punishment was the medical treatment. The convict got a bucket of sea water thrown on his back after the lashing. This was referred to as "getting salty back." 47 The death penalty was seldom used because Governor Phillip felt it did not deter crime and because there was already a shortage of labor. As an alternative, the offenders were transported from the Sydney Cove settlement to Norfolk Island.

Men and provisions were first sent to Norfolk Island, 1000 miles east of Botany Bay, because the English believed the large pines and naturally growing flax would be economically advantageous. They also wanted to gain possession of the island before another foreign power did. Governor Phillip, on February 12, 1788, commissioned Phillip Gidley King to settle, study, and cultivate Norfolk Island. King left Sydney Cove with twenty-three people and provisions on a journey that would ultimately be a failure. Salt and wind destroyed the first crops and rats ate the provisions they brought. Agriculture and naturally growing plants proved to be worthless. The pines were not as strong as expected and could only be used to construct huts. Flax was not plentiful and even when they collected it, no one knew how to dress it.48 Life on Norfolk Island was much worse than in Sydney. Famine came quicker and crime was worse due to hunger and isolation. With increased

crime, punishment became harsher. Norfolk Island became the penal settlement within the convict colony. It was an excellent place to transport the worst convicts. Life there, especially for a convict who had been transported for committing a crime, was horrible. Prisoners worked from dawn to dusk regardless of weather. Their food was usually rotten and their punishments severe. A favorite punishment, besides "feelers" and "getting salty backs," was making the convicts' leg irons smaller each month in order to pinch the flesh. The ultimate torture on Norfolk Island was a water pit below ground. Prisoners were locked below ground in the water for forty-eight hours at a time and had to stay awake or drown. There were only two ways out of "the old hell", as it was called, death or committing a crime that justified being sent to the mainland for trial.49 Even though conditions in Sydney were horrible, compared to Norfolk Island, the bleak life was appealing.

First among Philip's concerns after initial order and settlement were the health problems, the natives, and famine. Few people had died on the voyage to New South Wales, but upon arrival at Port Jackson, many were sick and needed hospitalization. Scurvy was rapidly spreading throughout the settlement by March 1788.50 Many others were too old or unfit to work and became nothing more than burdens on society. People did not receive enough food, and therefore lacked the nutrients and vitamins needed to remain healthy and, in some cases, to survive. The thatched roofs of the huts leaked and harbored colonies of bugs and spiders. The overall health and sanitary conditions were atrocious.51 The

settlement lacked adequate medicine and there was only one surgeon. After one year of settlement in New South Wales, there were a total of seventy-nine deaths, sixty-nine of which took convict men, women, and children.

The English not only had problems with death from sickness and malnutrition, they also experienced attacks by the Aborigines. Within the first year of settlement, four convicts' deaths were definitely attributed to natives and fourteen others were reported missing, possibly due to the Aborigines.53 Initially, the contact between whites and blacks was violence-free, with Phillip's emphasis on the necessity for peaceful coexistence. Phillip's hopes were shattered in May 1788 when a convict working on a government farm was found speared to death in a bush. The incident sparked a conflict that did not end despite Phillip's pleas and harsh punishments for retaliatory actions. The convicts hated the Aborigines, as did the military. In the eyes of the convicts, people exiled from their homes, the lowliest of the low, the native Aborigines were a group in the new world that they believed to be inferior to themselves.54 They aimed their anger and frustration towards the natives, who, in turn, were fearful and violent. They did not understand white man, his tools, or his habits. Their death rate had increased due to the exposure to cholera, influenza, and other germs. Black corpses could be found everywhere, making the natives scared and hesitant. Phillip tried to set a good example by befriending one man, Bennilong. Their friendship was close and each learned a lot about the other's culture. One day, Bennilong took Phillip to meet a few

other natives. As Phillip approached one to shake his hand, the scared native hurled a spear through Phillip's collarbone.55 Despite this incident, Phillip became even friendlier in order to set an example for the rest of the settlement. Phillip's efforts were useless, for when the English first arrived in Australia, the natives' legal rights were better than they would be for the next 150 years.56

Famine was the major problem for the settlers. These initial white Australians lived their first few years on the edge of starvation, while the natives lived in the midst of abundance.57 Because of the convicts' ignorance and lack of motivation, along with bad weather, insects, animals and poor land crop after crop was lost. Phillip, fearful of the colony's end because of starvation, kept sending requests to England for food and free settlers to no avail. Rations were cut until they were below subsistence level and the population grew beyond the island's capacity. In general, the communal system could not support the people.

Phillip's solution to the land problem and unproductivity was the giving of land grants. King George had instructed Governor Phillip to give land to all emancipated convicts whose good conduct made them deserving. Single men received thirty acres, married men fifty acres; for each child at the time of the grant, ten more acres were received.58 The idea behind land grants was to convert convicts into useful members of society. This did not help initially because there were no emancipated convicts and very few free settlers. The colony needed experienced farmers from England who wanted to settle in Australia. Governor Phillip

estimated that fifty farmers would do more for the country than one thousand convicts.59 Phillip wrote England numerous times asking for assistance with no success, so he began to give grants to free settlers along with non-commissioned officers and marines who wanted to stay in Australia. Free soldiers received one hundred thirty acres and retired soldiers eighty acres. Married men were granted an additional twenty acres and ten more for each child.60 This transformation from a communal society to an exchange economy helped Australia move towards self-sufficiency.61 Men now owned their own land and had a opportunity to accumulate wealth and have a better life than they could ever have expected in England. The first ex-convict to receive a land grant was James Ruse. He was successful. Within one year, Ruse no longer needed to receive goods from the communal government supply stores. His easy success has made many underestimate the difficulties of the first convict farmers, but Ruse had been a farmer in England. He was also industrious and when food was short, sold his surplus profitably.62 By 1791, there were eighty-six land-grant farmers between the Port Jackson and Norfolk Island settlements, with Parramatta being the center. Forty-four were emancipated convicts, thirty-one ex-marines, and eleven seamen. These people were cultivating an average of six and a half acres, but all were still a drain on the settlement's resources.63

Just as agriculture began to supplement the diminishing supplies, the Second Fleet arrived, putting further strain on the colony. On June 3, 1790, the Lady Julianna arrived after a nine month voyage from Portsmouth. The ship had few provisions, which

the colonies needed to keep themselves alive, and 221 female convicts. By the end of June, three more ships (the Surprise, the Neptune, and the Scarborough) transported 683 male and 67 female convicts from England.64 These three ships brought some provisions, but not even enough to feed the new convicts for a year. Also, the second group of transportees did not fare as well as the first, for 267 died during the voyage. The voyage of the Second Fleet was the worst in history: twenty-six percent died in transit and 488 were sick with scurvy, dysentery, and infectious fever when they landed.65 Within six weeks of the Second Fleet's arrival, eighty-six more people died. Phillip was now experiencing more problems than ever before. He had so many new convicts to support, many of whom were too sick to work or contribute to their own upkeep.

Governor Phillip had written in his first dispatches that transportation should be halted until the colony could sufficiently support itself. Once again, the English government did not listen to Phillip. Just as he was trying to straighten out the problems of the Second Fleet's arrival, a third fleet docked at Port Jackson. Eleven more ships came during 1791, transporting 1696 male and 168 female convicts. One of these ships, carrying 147 convicts, was the first one sent by the Irish government. In general, the quality of the living conditions in the Third Fleet was better; only 198 people died. And even though deaths were fewer, at year's end 626 prisoners were under medical treatment, 576 of which had arrived during 1791.66

By the end of 1791, there were too many people in New South

Wales. Phillip had to feed and clothe 2570 male convicts, 608 female and 161 children in the Sydney Cove area and 737 on Norfolk Island. There were only 30,560 lbs. of flour, 21,010 lbs. of beef and pork, 179 bushels of peas and 1432 lbs. of butter in supply.67 When it seemed matters could not get worse, 1,500 bushels of the 1792 harvest, which produced 5,000 bushels of wheat despite a drought, vanished while being transported from the fields to the granary.

By 1792, New South Wales was a failure by any standards. According to bookkeeping records kept by the Colonial Office, farming in New South Wales had already cost the English Government 67,194 pounds, fifteen shillings and four-pence three farthings, or about 3.35 million pounds in modern money.68 It cost approximately forty-five pounds to support a convict in New South Wales and by 1792 the government had spent over 400,000 pounds transporting convicts to Australia.69 Economically, Australia supplied nothing. No settlement was established in New Zealand, Norfolk Island was a disaster and New South Wales could not even support itself, let alone ship goods to England. In 1792, the convict colony was still a drain on England and in no way advantageous, except as a foothold in the South Pacific the French did not have and as a location to send convicts and forget about them.

In Parliament, however, it was decided that despite its cost the convict colony would remain because it was still England's only solution to its crime problem. The only change would be that its first Governor, Captain Arthur Phillip, would be recalled. Phillip had spent the last five years of his life trying to

establish Australia as a self-sufficient colony for England. He began by requesting the government to adequately supply the First Fleet and was successful, but this initial success did not continue. Phillip wrote to the government numerous times asking for the food England had promised to send twice a year. These requests were ignored for the second set of ships did not arrive until two years after the first. Phillip took it upon himself to send ships to Cape Town and Calcutta in hopes of avoiding famine. When Phillip wrote requesting the much needed free settlers, these letters were ignored. No one in England really cared what happen to people once they departed for Australia, a remote and unknown land, just as long as it was there to transport convicts. In 1789, Phillip's journal, The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay, was published in England, but this too did nothing to arouse opinions about the conditions of the penal settlement. Phillip once wrote,

> "It has been my fate to point out wants from year to year, it has been a duty the severest I have ever experienced. Did these wants only respect myself or a few individuals I should be silent; but here are numbers who bear them badly; nor has the colony suffered more from what we have not received than from supplies we have received not arriving in time."70

Phillip isolated and forgotten, requested to be sent back to England, beginning in 1790. His wife was sick and her wanted to see her. He also believed he could help the colony better in England and planned on returning to New South Wales. On December 10, 1792, Governor Arthur Phillip departed Sydney Cove with two aboriginal companions, Bennelong and Yemmerawannie, never to

return to the penal colony again.71

Phillip's departure from New South Wales marked the end of the initial colony in Australia. The settlement was now under the New South Wales Corps, a group of specially trained men sent to replace the marines, and its commander Francis Grose. Grose was a much different man than Phillip. He did not forget his superior position and the convicts' inferior status. Convicts no longer received the same rations as officers and freemen. Officers also had the economic advantage. They were given large land grants, could raise capital against their pay and seized a monopoly on most goods coming in to the colony.72 The most important change resulting from Grose's rule was the assignment system. Now, when land was granted, the recipient also got a set number of convicts to cultivate the land. This was the biggest step away from the initial communal society and towards a self-sufficient society. From now on capitalism was a large part of life in New South Wales.

After 1792, the New South Wales penal colony became self-sufficient. It took twice as long as Banks predicted for the experimental colony to succeed, but through hardship and starvation the colony was supported. These first few difficult years and the people who helped to establish the colony, were the roots of what would later become Australia, the last continent to discovered and settled by white men.

Endnotes

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56 Hughes, p.94.

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64 K.S. Inglis, The Australian Colonists, An Exploration of Social History 1788-1870 (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1974),p.7.

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67 Shann, p.11.

68 Hughes, p.108.

69 Shaw, p.61 (information on convict support) and O'Brien, p.291 (information on transportation costs).

70 O'Brien, p.177.

71 Hughes, p.108.
(Captain Arthur Phillip died twenty-two years later in Bath. He never returned to Australia, but did kept in touch with the experimental colony he fathered for England.)

72 Hughes, p.109.
(Francis Grose begin his career fighting in the American Revolution. After the war, Grose was commissioned to recruit and train the New South Wales Corps. Grose then went to NSW in late 1792 to replace Governor Phillip.)

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