Selling a Penal Colony: The Booksellers and Botany Bay

NATHAN GARVEY

Few aspects of Australian history have been as thoroughly explored as the events surrounding the initial years of European colonisation. Since the late nineteenth century, when a burgeoning sense of nationalism led to a reconsideration of the colonial past, the early years of European invasion/settlement/colonisation of Australia have provided a focal point for often contentious historical debate and analysis. One aspect of this period that has not been greatly examined, however, is its book history: the history of the publication and reception of the original published accounts of the colonies. This area of study has the capacity to shed significant new light on these historical debates. For, while there has been a tendency in some Australian historical writing to present the accounts of First Fleet officers as the direct testimony of “witnesses” to the “founding of Australia,”1 it is important to understand that the book trade was highly influential in determining the form and content of these published works. The controversial nature of the Botany Bay scheme, the curiosity of Enlightenment Europe about “Other” cultural and natural topographies, and the initial difficulty in communication between the colonies and London all played their part in making accounts from the colonies a valuable commodity and helped define how these accounts were presented. Moreover, the publication of these works was more influenced by the political controversies surrounding the initial plans for the settlement than Australian historians have previously acknowledged. While it is true that the “voices” of early colonists can still be heard in the early accounts from the colony, it is also true that the London book trade, operating within the wider political and cultural discourses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, played a crucial role in shaping the early literature on Australia.

The British government’s announcement in August 1786 that a penal colony was to be established at Botany Bay in the recently charted territory of New South Wales took place against the backdrop of a vigorous public debate on the question of crime and punishment. With the American Revolution having disrupted the traditional punishment of transporting convicted felons overseas, increasing anxiety over crime led to a swathe of published plans and polemics which argued that the solution to the crime problem was various kinds of legal and social reform.2 But the resumption

1 For a recent example, see Jack Egan, Buried Alive: Sydney 1788–1792. Eyewitness Accounts of the Making of a Nation (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000).
2 See for example Edward Gillingwater, An Essay on Parish Workhouses (London: Robinsons, 1786); Martin Madan, Thoughts on Executive Justice (London: Dodley, 1785); Outline of a Plan for protecting

of transportation was the path favoured by the conservative ministry of William Pitt (the Younger), for whom questions of reform would remain anathematic throughout his long period in power. The energetic public debate proposing new solutions to the crime problem meant the retrograde step of resuming transportation was bound to draw criticism, however, and from its outset the Botany Bay scheme was controversial for this and a number of other reasons. Alexander Dalrymple, a hydrographer and sometime apologist for the East India Company, complained that the establishment of the colony was likely to interfere with the Company’s monopoly on trade with Asia. The parliamentarian Nathaniel Wraxall published an anonymous pamphlet lambasting the scheme as “beneath the disposition of reason, and below the efforts of ridicule,” arguing that convict labour was a national resource that should not be squandered on a doomed expedition—for he believed the convict colonists would “soon emancipate themselves from the feeble restraint imposed upon them ... [and] fill the Chinese and Indian seas, with slaughter and depredation.” Few commentators showed the same kind of concern for the well-being and legal rights of the transportees as the penal reformer John Howard, who pointed out that many of the convicts sent on the original expedition had already been imprisoned for years prior to their departure, and asked whether banishment to such a remote destination, from where return seemed impossible, was not “contrary to justice and humanity.”

With criticism of the Botany Bay scheme coming from these and other quarters, the Pitt ministry took steps to defend its plan. In the first place, the government used its financial influence to insert “paragraphs” supporting the scheme (and attacking its opponents) in the pro-government newspaper press—a common enough practice in the late eighteenth century. But there is also a distinct possibility that Treasury money was used to fund more unusual literary works, which may have helped promote the scheme to a wider popular audience. The Birmingham “poetical publican” John Freeth (1731–1808), well known for his facility in writing topical songs on political themes, wrote at least two songs supporting the Botany Bay scheme in the winter


of 1786–87. Although Freeth had a reputation as a radical, his songs supporting the proposed colony coincided with a period in which he had begun writing verse in support of the conservative Pitt government—and since the ministry was known to have employed the services of ballad writers and singers to promote its interests (albeit usually during elections), it is certainly possible that Freeth’s "Botany Bay" songs were written to order for the government. 8 What is certain is that the Pitt ministry maintained a strong interest in how “Botany Bay” was represented in the press, and, as we will see through the course of this essay, the relationship between the government and the book trade was to play a considerable role in how the early accounts of the colony reached the public.

The surge of interest in the territory of “New Holland” inspired by the Botany Bay expedition also presented clear commercial opportunities for the book trade, and a number of geographical/historical tracts on the subject quickly appeared following its announcement. The first of these was An Historical Narrative of New Holland and New South Wales (1786), 9 a thirty-four-page quarto pamphlet published, at the price of one shilling and sixpence, by the Paternoster Row bookseller John Fielding. Fielding had an established interest in publishing travel narratives, including a share in an abridged edition of Cook’s Voyages (1784), 10 and this put him in a good position to react speedily and market his Historical Narrative when the projected penal colony made the territory again topical. There was of course little original material in such a swiftly compiled publication, and the Monthly Review for December 1786 noted that the Historical Narrative consisted mainly of descriptions “extracted” from the published Voyages of Fernandes de Queirós, Abel Tasman, William Dampier and James Cook. 11 Nonetheless the publication seems to have been popular: Fielding produced at least two editions of the Historical Narrative in 1786, and the work was subsequently reprinted in octavo, but with an identical text, by the Piccadilly bookseller John Stockdale (1787). 12 In late 1784 Stockdale and Fielding had been partners in the abridged edition of Cook’s Voyages, a successful publication that incurred the ire of George Nicol, a prominent bookseller who had recently


10 That is, A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean; Undertaken by Command of his Majesty, For Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere: Performed under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780, 4 vols. (London: John Stockdale, Scatcherd and Whitaker, John Fielding, and John Hardy, 1784).


published the official account of Cook's final voyage for the benefit of the late explorer's family. Stockdale and Fielding (and their two other partners) successfully defended their publication after Nicol brought a legal action against them, but by the time the *Historical Narrative of New South Wales and New Holland* was published, their careers had moved in very different directions, with Stockdale becoming an increasingly influential and successful publisher of prestigious works, while Fielding was verging on insolvency. Advertisements suggest that Stockdale's version of the *Historical Narrative* was published in or after February or March 1787, and, since the frontispiece still bears Fielding's imprint, it is likely that Stockdale acquired the copyright to the work directly from Fielding, who went bankrupt around this time.

The widespread public interest in the Botany Bay scheme was also reflected in the publication of chapbooks and short pamphlets that radically rehashed and digested older travel accounts. An eight-page *Description of Botany Bay* ([1787]) was printed in Lancaster by Henry Walmsley, and L. Naylor of Bristol printed a twenty-four-page chapbook *History of Botany Bay* ([1787]). Works such as these probably had little reach beyond the local markets of their provincial printer-publishers, however. At the other end of the market, Stockdale published two editions of a "new" work, *The History of New Holland*, which was produced on a scale more suited to his increasingly exclusive clientele—the first edition sold for six shillings and the second, despite being textually almost identical to the first, for twelve shillings. Despite the price difference between the chapbook productions and Stockdale's *History of New Holland*, there was little difference in terms of original content. Stockdale padded his narrative by means of additions such as "An Introductory Discourse on Banishment" (an excerpt from William Eden's *The Principles of Penal Law* (1771)), but the major differences lay not in the quality or originality of information but in its quantity, and in the relative elegance of Stockdale's books compared to the flimsy chapbooks and pamphlets.

John Stockdale was to become a pivotal figure in the publishing of the early literature on the New South Wales colony. Although he had only been in business since 1781, by the middle of that decade Stockdale had established himself as an important publisher and a staunch ally of the Pittite Tories. His connections with

---

13 The official account was published as *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Undertaken, By Command of His Majesty, For Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. To Determine the Position and Extent of the West Side of North America; its Distance from Asia; and the Practicability of a Northern Passage to Europe. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Discovery. In the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780, 3 vols.* (London: Printed by W. and A. Strahan, for G. Nicol, and T. Cadell, 1784). For the controversy over the abridged version of Cook's *Voyages*, see Stockdale, *'Tis Treason My Good Man*, 255–59.


15 Ferguson 21, 23.

16 Ferguson 24, 25.
the government were strong enough in the first years of the English colony in New South Wales for him to have acted as something like the official publisher to the settlement, producing two of the most important and extensive accounts of the First Fleet voyage and the founding of the colony: *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* (1789), and John Hunter's *An Historical Narrative of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* (1793). These works were clearly published with the support of the ministry, and relied heavily on official despatches from colonial officers to the Admiralty and other government bodies. There was nothing especially unique about this arrangement: since the majority of voyages of discovery departing from Britain were at least partially funded by the Admiralty (and made therefore at public expense), the government of the day usually maintained an interest in the publication of an authorised account, aimed at the enfranchised elite, which represented the aims and outcomes of these expeditions in a positive light. Yet, as John Edwards has pointed out, these semi-official publications were sometimes delegated in an arbitrary fashion.17 In a concession to the initial controversy over the Botany Bay scheme, the Pitt ministry seems to have deliberately been more careful with the handling of the authorised account of this particular expedition.

In any case, the government found in Stockdale a publisher who was thoroughly prepared to toe the party line, and the official account of the First Fleet voyage, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, was a production that celebrated the expedition as a successful exercise in nation-building *ex nihilo*. While this work has often been attributed to Arthur Phillip, it is unlikely that the colony's first governor knew of the work until after its publication, as it was compiled from the official communications of Phillip and other officers "outsourced" to Stockdale and edited into a single narrative. The publisher also went to some lengths to embellish this account of the expedition. The apparatus for the work featured an introductory poem by the noted naturalist and litterateur Erasmus Darwin, "The Visit of Hope to Sydney Cove, near Botany Bay," which imagined a glorious future for the colony as a model neo-classical city-state (and, in the process, employed what Deirdre Coleman has called "a wilful amnesia about the origins and grim purpose of Botany Bay").18 The title-page featured an engraving of an allegorical medallion designed by Josiah Wedgewood, reputedly made from "a small piece of clay brought from Sydney Cove," depicting "Hope encouraging Art and Labour, under the influence of Peace, to pursue the employments necessary to give security and happiness to an infant settlement."19 There were also some fifty-five engraved plates and folding

19 *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* (London: Stockdale, 1789), iv. For a more detailed reading
maps, lengthy appendices of nautical charts and weather records, and a list of the names and crimes of the original convict colonists. The main narrative described the successful voyage and the impressions made in the first few months of settlement—thus avoiding the more complicated and worrying longer-term realities of the colony. In short, the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* was conceived and executed virtually as the commemorative edition of a successfully completed government initiative. Although it is unlikely that the publisher himself had done the editing work necessary to transform the various despatches into a single narrative, the dedication to the work was signed by Stockdale, presumably in an attempt to further his own credentials as a Pittite literary man and promote what Hester Lynch Piozzi later called “his loyal Shop.”

It is worth pointing out that the editing of the official despatches by Stockdale or his agent(s) was not always convincing. The colonial officer William Bradley later criticised the book “published by Stockdale & said to be compiled from papers furnished by the Publick Boards” for its representation of an incident where a sailor drowned at Norfolk Island. The *Monthly Review* initially evinced scepticism over the authenticity of the work's sources, and it was not until the appearance of the third edition of the book that it announced: “we now understand, on good authority, that the editor was favoured by government with copies of Governor Phillip's dispatches, and with the journals of other commanding officers.”

While the government clearly facilitated the publication of the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* by the provision of official despatches, the work was also a commercial publication that Stockdale produced in a number of forms in the hope of its returning maximum profit. The main means of supporting the elaborate production probably came through its sale in a quarto subscription edition, which Stockdale marketed to an elite clientele and sold at the expensive price of £1. 11s. 6d., or with the plates hand-coloured, at £2 12s. 6d. The list of subscribers to the *Voyage of Governor Phillip*, which itself could be seen as reinforcing the work's prestige and “official” status, included eighty-three members of the House of Commons, along of the medallion and its significance, see Glynis Ridley, “Losing America and Finding Australia: Continental Shift in an Enlightenment Paradigm,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 26:3 (2002): 207–9.

20 Quoted in Eric Stockdale, *Tis Treason My Good Man!*, 363.


with some fifty-six baronets and titled aristocracy and one hundred and twenty-five other gentlemen designated with the honorific "Esq." But trade connections remained important for the success of even such an exclusive publication as this: booksellers constituted the main buying group.24 This quarto subscription edition was published at the end of 1789—Stockdale lodged nine copies of the work for copyright purposes at the Stationers' Hall on 3 December25—but its appearance in this form was preceded by the publication of the entire work in weekly parts, priced at one shilling apiece, through the second half of 1789. As Jonathan Wantrup has suggested, Stockdale's decision to issue the work in parts may have been an attempt to limit the delay in communicating his elaborate account of the Botany Bay voyage to the public, but it also allowed him to add further information from the colony as it arrived in the later months of 1789—thus strengthening his claim that the work included "all that is yet known of the settlement at Sydney-Cove."26

There was enough interest in Stockdale's authoritative account for the publisher to seek subscribers for a second edition—which he expanded by incorporating his 1787 *History of New Holland* into the text—and this too appeared both as a quarto volume and in weekly parts. By late 1790 Stockdale had published a third quarto edition (which returned to the text of the first edition), along with a version of the "third edition," with only twenty plates, in large octavo.27 At least two piracies of the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* appeared in the same year, and by 1791 the work had been published in French and several German translations.28 The multitude of different forms in which the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* appeared has led one modern editor of the work to claim "there could be few readers of books in the British Isles who did not have the opportunity to learn about the problems of Britain in the South Seas."29 This is certainly an overstatement, however—and Stockdale himself had little interest in popular publishing *per se*. Collecting all twenty-one weekly parts of the work at one shilling each would have been an expensive undertaking, and even the cheapest version of the work, the octavo "third edition," was priced at 10s. 6d.30

24 An analysis of the subscription list of the first edition of the *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* shows that one hundred booksellers in London and the provinces ordered eleven hundred copies of the work between them. Booksellers who bought in bulk, such as the leading Paternoster firm of the Robinson family (who subscribed for two hundred copies of the work) could of course expect a sizeable discount, but the evidence still suggests that the subscription first edition of the work was predominantly sold to other booksellers.


26 [Dedication], *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* ([n.p.], 1789); Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788–1900*, 61.

27 Ferguson 90–92. For a fuller discussion of the various forms of the *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, see Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788–1900*, 61–64.

28 See Ferguson 93–95, 112–15, 142.


Neither Stockdale nor the government contacts who provided the materials for the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* had any real interest in distributing the work beyond the propertied classes who made up the enfranchised nation.

John Stockdale would become a controversial figure within the London book trade. As the work of William St Clair and others has shown, the late eighteenth century was a time of profound change for the book trade, a period characterised by great growth in publishing output, innovation in bookselling practices, and the gradual supplanting of the traditional power structures and relationships within the trade. Many of the booksellers who rose to prominence in this era seemed to personify the bourgeois ideal of the self-made man in their rise, apparently by hard work and determination, from obscurity to importance and fortune in an expanding and rapidly changing trade. The Strand bookseller Thomas Cadell, for example, came from an impoverished background in Bristol, but managed to work his way up to a situation of great prosperity. James Lackington, whose "Temple of the Muses" in Finsbury Square was considered one of the sights of London, was the son of a journeyman shoemaker. George Robinson, dubbed "King of the Booksellers" by one of his contemporaries, hailed from Cumberland and received only "scanty" education before travelling to London to seek his fortune; his family's premises in Paternoster Row would eventually become renowned as a hub of book-trade and literary sociability. Stockdale himself, the son of a Cumberland blacksmith, very much belonged to this generation of "new men" whose entrepreneurial acumen was helping to reshape the trade. Yet his chief clientele was drawn from the ranks of genteel and aristocratic society, and his publications typically embraced Tory politics and conservative values. Given the Pitt administration's repressive measures towards the opposition and radical press, it was easy for Stockdale's enemies to paint him as pandering to the establishment for personal gain. One of Stockdale's most implacable enemies was his brother-in-law and former employee James Ridgway. A bookseller of very different political persuasions, Ridgway was responsible for a

---


vituperious biographical sketch which denounced Stockdale in both political and personal terms, as a "puppet" controlled by those who penned works "calculated to delude the public" and an "ignoramus" who could barely read or write, ultimately claiming that he owed his success to dishonest dealings. Even this scandal-mongering piece was certainly a libellous exaggeration, it does seem that there was something in Stockdale's character and business practices that rankled his peers, and he was frequently embroiled in disagreements and public spats with his rivals in the trade. Even an obituary in the Gentleman's Magazine noted Stockdale's "eccentricity of conduct, and great coarseness of manners."

Stockdale's greatest rival in the trade was his Piccadilly neighbour John Debrett. Debrett and Stockdale had both been employees of John Almon, the noted liberal and radical Whig publisher. When Almon retired in 1781, Debrett took over his former employer's business at 178 Piccadilly, while Stockdale set up a rival establishment a few doors down, at 181. Along with several other bookshops in the fashionable West End of London, Debrett's and Stockdale's shops quickly became popular places of resort for those gentlemen with literary inclinations, and were "much frequented about the middle of the day by fashionable people, and ... used as lounging places for political and literary conversation." The close physical proximity of the shops of Debrett and Stockdale did not prevent a great political divide arising between the two establishments, however. While Stockdale soon established himself as a leading Pittite bookseller, Debrett preferred to maintain the goodwill of the Whig clientele which Almon had developed. The political temper of the two establishments was certainly reflected in their publications, and both booksellers became noted producers of the polemical pamphlet literature that exploded at the end of the eighteenth century. The rivalry between Stockdale and Debrett was also said to have boiled over into acrimonious personal disputes on several occasions.

The politically-charged competition between Debrett and Stockdale also manifested itself in the issue of the Botany Bay expedition. Whether or not Debrett was aware that Stockdale was to be the publisher of the official account of the voyage, he actively sought to obtain and publish accounts from New South Wales which would be suited to the political and literary preferences of his Whig clientele. Debrett's most significant contribution here was his publication of Watkin Tench's Narrative

---


39 See also Stockdale, 'Tis Treason My Good Man!, viii, 117–35.


of an *Expedition to New South Wales* (1789), Tench has justly been acclaimed as one of the most interesting and perceptive writers on the early history of the colony, but recent republications of his *Narrative* in combination with his later work, *A Complete Account of the Settlements at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* (1793), have tended to obscure the fact that these narratives were published under very different circumstances and consequently have significantly different characters. Tench's *Narrative of an Expedition* was sent to England by the returning First Fleet transports and was published in much rawer form than his later work; indeed there would have been no time for editing in London as Debrett immediately put the Tench *Narrative* to press. Whether the publisher's intention was to trump the official account of Stockdale, or whether he was simply acting out of the desire to publish the work at the point of the colony's greatest topical interest, the Tench *Narrative* appeared within a few weeks of the first news from the settlement arriving in March 1789—some six months before the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* was complete. The publication of the work, moreover, had clearly been arranged between author and publisher prior to the departure of the First Fleet. In his unpublished journal, the colonial surgeon G. B. Worgan alluded to Tench's *Narrative* as "a Publication by Debrett in Piccadilly, which gives an impartial Account of the Voyage, and a Description of this Country"; this entry from Worgan's diary dates from July 1788, about the time Tench sent his manuscript to England.

Tench's *Narrative* was a work marketed in a very different way from Stockdale's official account of the expedition. While the *Voyage of Governor Phillip* was elaborately presented with all the accoutrements of a work of self-conscious historical importance, Debrett issued the Tench *Narrative* as an octavo pamphlet in paper covers, pricing it at only 3s. 6d. The unassuming style of the work was one reason for its unspectacular reception at the hands of the literary reviewers. Although the work was reviewed favourably in the *Monthly Review*, which found it "a very satisfactory

---

42 Reproductions of Tench's work in this combined form include L. F. Fitzhardinge's annotated edition, *Sydney's First Four Years: Being a Reprint of A Narrative of an Expedition to Botany Bay, and A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, ed. L. F. Fitzhardinge (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961; Sydney: Library of Australian History, 1979) and, more recently, Tim Flannery's *1788: Comprising A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (Melbourne: Text, 1996). Flannery makes a number of editorial alterations designed to "modernise" the language of Tench's original, further confusing the historical context of Tench's writing.


general account of the voyage" and "an interesting narrative ... written in a very proper style," it was given only brief attention in the "Monthly Catalogue" section of the journal.\textsuperscript{45} But a lack of interest from reviewing journals did not mean the work was not a success;\textsuperscript{46} on the contrary, all indications are that Tench's \textit{Narrative} was a very popular work at the time of its original publication. Debrett produced three editions in 1789, and the work quickly appeared in French, German, Dutch, and Swedish translations, and in a Dublin reprint.\textsuperscript{47} Part of the success of the Tench \textit{Narrative} can be put down to Debrett's marketing. Perhaps in deliberate contrast to the ponderous and exhaustive official tome being prepared by Stockdale, Debrett presented the Tench \textit{Narrative} in much the same style as the political pamphlets he sold—as a work of mainly topical interest, written by a talented officer of middle rank, through which the interested reader might gain a perspective on the Botany Bay expedition uninfluenced by the government line.

Debrett was evidently also keen to compete with Stockdale at the more prestigious end of the market for Botany Bay material, however. A few months after the publication of Stockdale's \textit{Voyage of Governor Phillip}, Debrett published the journal of John White, chief surgeon to the New South Wales settlement, as \textit{The Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales}. The White \textit{Journal}, which included some sixty-four plates illustrating "Nondescript Animals, Birds, Lizards, Serpents, curious Cones of Trees and other Natural Productions" and a lengthy appendix containing scientific descriptions of these antipodean curiosities, was a production emanating from and clearly marketed towards genteel natural science circles. The editor of White's \textit{Journal} was Thomas Wilson, a London friend of White's, who encouraged the surgeon to keep the journal and was subsequently sent the manuscript, along with a number of specimens of Australian flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{48} Wilson used his contacts within the

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Monthly Review} 81 (April 1789): 362.
\textsuperscript{47} See Ferguson 48–55.
\textsuperscript{48} Wilson has been described as a "minor naturalist." He was elected to membership of the Linnean Society in 1792 (possibly on the strength of his work with the White \textit{Journal}), and the Society noted his death in 1829. The dedication to the published \textit{Journal} was addressed by White to Wilson; here the author credits Wilson with encouraging him to write the journal, and claims that the "principal Object" of the work was to "afford [Wilson] some amusement during [his] Hours of Relaxation," expressing also the hope that "the Specimens of Natural History may tend to the Promotion of [Wilson's] favourite Science." Wilson's role as editor of the \textit{Journal} is confirmed in a manuscript note on the flyleaf of a presentation copy of the book now in the collection of the National Library of Australia. See Alex H. Chisholm, \textit{ed.}, \textit{Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales}. By John White (Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society in association with Angus and Robertson, 1962), 13–14; and Christine E. Jackson \textit{Sarah Stone: Natural Curiosities from the New Worlds} (London: Merrell Holberton, 1998), 140–41.
London natural science community to develop a detailed scientific apparatus that formed an important part of the published *Journal*. White’s botanical samples found their way to the herbarium of James Edward Smith, founding president of the Linnean Society, who provided descriptions for the *Journal*, while descriptions of the (stuffed) specimens of fauna were provided by the similarly eminent scholars John Hunter and George Shaw. But although Wilson played a major role in editing White’s work for publication, Debrett’s role as the producer and distributor of the work should not be underestimated. The plates illustrating the natural productions of New South Wales were engraved from the drawings and watercolours of no fewer than five artists and hand-coloured for publication, and the expensive process of illustrating the work in this comprehensive manner was likely to have been financially supported by Debrett.\(^{49}\) Like the *Voyage of Governor Phillip*, the White *Journal* was produced in a subscription edition, which would have offset the expenses of illustrating and producing the work, and Debrett’s connections with the book trade certainly helped make the subscription process viable: some seven hundred copies of the work were purchased by about one hundred and twenty subscribers, with the majority of those ordering multiple copies being booksellers.\(^{50}\)

Natural history in the late eighteenth century was largely the preserve of the elite. In one of his many attacks on Sir Joseph Banks and his fellow gentleman naturalists, the celebrated satirist on Sir Joseph Banks and his fellow gentleman naturalists, the celebrated satirist John Wolcott (“Peter Pindar”) drew attention to the rarified character of organisations like the Royal Society by humorously proposing that they in fact gathered to eat the rare specimens they acquired.\(^{51}\) Curiosity about exotic life and indigenous cultures certainly went well beyond these exclusive circles, however, and it is not surprising that printers and publishers from the lower reaches of the book trade rushed to supply the popular market with accounts of cross-cultural encounters and hitherto unknown natural phenomena from New South Wales. Occasionally, this widespread interest manifested some outlandish publications, such as broadsheets which reported the arrival of “a wonderful large WILD MAN, or monstrous GIANT, BROUGHT FROM BOTANY-BAY.”\(^{52}\) Broadsheet tall stories

---

\(^{49}\) The artists who illustrated the White *Journal* were Sarah Stone (ca. 1760–1844), Frederick Polydore Nodder (1751–ca. 1801), Edward Kennion (1744–1809), Charles Catton (1756–1819), and an obscure artist, whose surname was Mortimer; the engraving was done by Thomas Milton (1742/3–1827). The engravings were completed by 29 December 1789, and the original watercolours were exhibited at Debrett’s shop about this time. See Jackson, *Sarah Stone*, 77–78, 102, 140–41.

\(^{50}\) The Robinson family alone subscribed for sixty copies, though the majority of the booksellers on the list subscribed for three, six, nine, or twelve copies. “List of Subscribers,” in John White, *A Voyage to New South Wales* (Debrett, 1790), [vii]–[xiii].

\(^{51}\) [John Wolcott], *Peter’s Prophecy; or, The President and the Poet* (London: Kearsley, 1788), 24–26, 40–43 and passim.

\(^{52}\) Two different versions of this broadside, describing the capture and transportation of the giant by the crew of the fictitious ship *Rover*, survive in the collection of the Mitchell Library. Dates on the two versions suggest multiple versions of the same piece were issued in 1789–90 (see ML SV/44 and Dixon Drawer Item 140).
such as these were clearly at the opposite end of the literary spectrum to the subscription works sold by Stockdale and Debrett. But there were many publications which ranged between these two extremes, catering for the many readers who were either not able or not willing to spend the large sum required for an authoritative work, but who still sought information on the voyage and colony. Accordingly, a number of pamphlet and chapbook accounts of the Botany Bay expedition were published in 1789–90. These works, universally described as “Authentic Narratives” and attributed to anonymous “Officers,” were in fact all derived from newspaper accounts or works like the Fielding Historical Narrative—or pirated from each other. The reviewing press, ever alert for “travels performed up three flights of stairs,—so common in this book-making age,” had little time for “catchpenny compilations” such as these.53 But derivative as they were, these tracts had the significant advantage of being only a fraction of the cost of the subscription works, and it is reasonable to assume that readers from the middling and lower ranks of society would have contented themselves with these “catchpenny” accounts as an affordable source of information on Botany Bay.

Although some early colonists may have written their journals and letters with the expectation that they would be published, the difficulties of communicating between the far-distant colony and London meant that the manner in which these writings were presented to the British public was largely beyond the authors’ control. This situation changed, to a degree, from 1792, when colonial officers began returning from their tours in New South Wales. Watkin Tench was one returned officer who was able to use his free time in England to refine his views on the colony in New South Wales. Tench had arrived in England with the rest of the Marines detachment in July 1792, and seems to have spent at least part of the remainder of that year concerning himself with literary matters, possibly with a view to furthering his reputation as an officer and literary gentleman. As Adrian Mitchell has pointed out, the added leisure that Tench had to work on his writing is evidenced by the greater length and improved quality of his second book, A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, with the idiosyncratic “vignettes” of his earlier narrative now developed into “more elaborately depicted tableaux.”54 Tench also found new publishers for this more ambitious book, with the prominent booksellers George Nicol and John Sewell handling the work. Nicol, of Pall Mall, and Sewell, of Cornhill, were not trading partners, and their decision to jointly publish Tench’s Complete Account was probably based partly on the success of the writer’s first book, and partly on the subject’s capacity to interest their respective client bases. Nicol, Bookseller to the King over the period 1781–1820, enjoyed a distinguished aristocratic clientele, while Sewell’s business was patronised particularly by merchants.55 Nicol and Sewell

55 See Maxted, London Book Trades, 201. See also Vivienne W. Painting, “George Nicol (1740–1828),”
produced Tench's *Complete Account* along more decorous lines than the earlier *Narrative*, as a bound quarto book priced at 10s. 6d., and although it would not have had the same popular reach as Tench's much cheaper and more topical first book, this publication attracted more interest from the literary reviewers. But if this attention was part of what Tench hoped to achieve with his new book, he may well have been disappointed by the reviews themselves. While conceding that Tench's narrative contained "much entertainment and information," the review in the *British Critic* damned him with faint praise as a "respectable" writer who had "sometimes permitted his narrative to be tinged with the impatient feelings of the moment," and criticised him for his negative treatment of events in the colony.56 The *Monthly Review* was even more critical of Tench's "constant propensity to exhibit the dark side of the picture," and suggested that his *Complete Account* "ought, perhaps, to be read cum grano salis [with a grain of salt], as his painting ... is obviously of a sombre hue, from one end of the book to the other."57

While officer-writers like Tench probably received some modest financial gain from their books, there were also clear benefits to publishing in terms of the promotion of the author's reputation. With advancement through the civil and military ranks still dependent on the patronage system, a noteworthy publication could certainly help the careers of ambitious officers. One colonial officer who published at the time he was seeking promotion within the ranks was John Hunter. Hunter had been second captain on the First Fleet voyage under Arthur Phillip, and, on Phillip's assumption of the role of governor, had taken command of the colony's flagship, HMS *Sirius*. After the *Sirius* was wrecked at Norfolk Island, Hunter was left without an official position and returned to England in April 1792. But he was aware that Phillip had sought leave to retire on the grounds of ill health, and began petitioning to be his successor as governor of New South Wales.58 It seems likely that part of Hunter's efforts at self-promotion was the publication of his colonial journals, issued by Stockdale in 1793 as *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*. Although the work as a whole was credited to Hunter, Stockdale padded out the Hunter narrative by combining it with the journals of Philip Gidley King, a lieutenant on the *Sirius* who had been commanding officer of the settlement at Norfolk Island. The publication was produced and marketed by Stockdale in much the same way as the *Voyage of Governor Phillip*. It was produced initially by subscription in a quarto edition, with an exhaustive apparatus of plates, maps, nautical and weather charts, and then subsequently issued, with the text slightly abridged, in large octavo format at a reduced price.59


59 The quarto subscription edition was published in January 1793: Stockdale registered the work at
Unlike Tench, Hunter and King played little part in the process of reshaping their work for publication. The work of editing their manuscript journals into the published form of the *Historical Journal* seems to have been undertaken by George Chalmers, a Scottish lawyer who had become an active writer of loyalist and pro-Pitt pamphlets, several of which had been published by Stockdale, and who seems also to have been involved in editing the *Voyage of Governor Phillip.* On 22 October 1792, Chalmers wrote to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and highly regarded expert on Botany Bay affairs, reflecting on his work on the *Historical Journal*:

Stockdale put into my hands Captain Hunter's Historical Journal to, and from Port Jackson; and Mr. Stephens entrusted me with Liet. King's book, which I consider myself bound to return safe and Sound. I had marked out those convenient resting places, called chapters; and Stockdale employed a Carpenter [i.e. printer] to execute the work, which was sent to me at Cowes, as it came from the press. I broke the paragraphs a little, changed the points, and put out a word and put in another. This little service might be carefully concealed as all the bad would be given to me and all the good to anybody else.

Chalmers certainly seems to have downplayed his role: an examination of one of Hunter's manuscript journals shows that significant editing and rewriting had taken place before the publication of the work, changes which, as Victor Crittenden has observed, "have a tendency to make more ponderous the more clipped expression of the original," though admittedly more in line with the grandiloquent style which characterised Stockdale's "official" publications. Chalmers's letter to Banks draws attention to the somewhat complicated nexus between author, editor, publisher, and the authorities (both official, such as Philip Stephens, Secretary to the Admiralty, and unofficial, such as Banks himself) in Stockdale's publications. Philip Gidley King also wrote to Banks from Norfolk Island after the master of a visiting ship had "let me run over Hunter's publication," and thanked him for his agency in arranging for his journals to be made part of the work:

Stationers' Hall on 18 January. A newspaper advertisement in June 1793 announced the sale of the octavo edition at 7s. 6d. in boards, noting also that there remained "a few copies of the above Work at large, in 1 vol. royal 4to. Consisting of 600 pages of close letter press, price £1 11s. 6d. in boards, or on a superfine vowe royal, £2 2s." *RWCS, "Entries of Copies"* 1792–96 [Microfilm, Reel 8]; *London Chronicle,* 20–22 June 1793, 596c. See also Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788–1900,* 68–71.

60 See Eric Stockdale, *'Tis Treason My Good Man,* 263–65. In the introductory Advertisement to the *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay,* Stockdale lists "Mr. Chalmers" among the list of "noblemen and gentlemen" whose "kind assistance and free communications" facilitated the publication (*Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* [1st ed.], iii).


however indifferent I was to my Journal being published, I now feel the weight of the Obligation I lye under to you & Mr. Stephens ... it certainly carries Truth with it as it was wrote with no other design than to serve as [?] Minutes.63

Two weeks later King wrote again to Banks thanking him "for your permitting the publication of ... my ill wrote but faithfull Journal," though here he is far from complimentary about Hunter's contribution, describing it as "that bundle of Jaundiced detraction that proceeds it."64 Whether or not King was uneasy about having his journal combined with Hunter's, he probably recognised the benefit to his reputation of his name being attached to the work, even in this secondary role. Hunter and King would in fact both go on to become governors of New South Wales.

Outside of Stockdale's establishment, there were some in the book trade who continued to publish works opposing the New South Wales colony as a failure of government policy. At the same time as he was dealing in the narratives of Tench and White, Debrett published pamphlets drawn from parliamentary debates, in which the exorbitant costs of maintaining the colony were revealed.65 James Ridgway, Stockdale's embittered brother-in-law, also weighed into the debate, publishing a tract entitled Slavery and Famine, Punishments for Sedition; or, An Account of the Miseries and Starvation at Botany Bay (1794). This pamphlet was purportedly produced from an "Extract" from the journal of George Thompson, a gunner on the convict transport Royal Admiral, and was edited for publication by the radical writer George Dyer, who claimed he had "heard the ... narrative rehearsed" while visiting a prison hulk in 1794.66 Dyer's "Preliminary Remarks," which consisted mainly of extracts from Tench's Complete Account and the Hunter Historical Journal dwelling on the descriptions of dearth in the years 1790–91 and offering a cynical view of the colony's prospects, was more than twice the length of the Thompson "Extract." The main purpose of the work was to publicise the plight of the so-called "Scottish Martyrs"—members of radical corresponding societies who had been recently sentenced to transportation for their activities.67 Ridgway himself was

65 Debrett published at least two such pamphlets in 1791: Extracts of Letters from Arthur Phillip, Esq. and Extracts of Letters, &c. and Accounts Relative to the Settlements of New South Wales. See Ferguson 116–17.
serving a four-year sentence in Newgate prison at this time—a victim of the Pi
ministry's repression of the publishers of radical literature—but incarceration ha
the paradoxical effect of putting radical works at the top of his publishing agenda.
In deliberate opposition to the official works of Stockdale, *Slavery and Famine* w:
a conscious attempt to represent the colony as both a failure of public policy and
cruel and unnecessary punishment—at least for the respectable, political-prison
friends of Dyer and Ridgway.

Another radical publisher found a more novel way to subvert the official put
lications on the New South Wales colony. This was Henry Delahay Symonds,
Paternoster Row bookseller who was imprisoned along with his friend Ridgwa
for his role in publishing Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791) and Charlie
Pigott's anti-aristocratic satire *The Jockey Club* (1792). In early 1795, Symonds pu
lished perhaps the most interesting and unusual "Botany Bay" book: *A Voyage, New South Wales*, an account of the voyage and colony spuriously attributed to
celebrity convict George Barrington.68 The work was actually an ingenious mix o
plagiarism and novelisation in the "imaginary voyage" tradition, and the attributio
Barrington, a notorious pickpocket who had attained a unique celebrity stat
over a long period in the public eye, was an inspired move. Barrington's apparent
reformation and subsequent employment as a minor government functionary in th
colon—suitably antipodean transformation, it seemed—was widely reported i
the British press, and his new-found official status allowed the compiler(s) of th
spurious *Voyage to New South Wales* to position the narrative in much the same way:
the accounts of other colonial officers, with the added attraction of being ostensi
narrated by and centred on the famous Barrington. In fact, the authoritative per
pective and information on the colony given in *A Voyage to New South Wales* w:
really that of Hunter's *An Historical Narrative*, from which the "Barrington" *Voyag*
liberally borrowed. To this plagiarism, which particularly consisted of the par
from *An Historical Narrative* describing Aboriginal culture and episodes of cross
cultural contact, the "Barrington" *Voyage* added just enough of a fictionalised vene
to sustain the illusion that it was actually Barrington's narrative—a ruse that als
made the work more interesting and accessible to a popular audience. A credul
notice in the *Monthly Review*, which opined favourably on the work's authenticity,

68 A detailed analysis of the milieu of the Newgate publishers can be found in the work of Ia
McCalman, especially "Newgate in Revolution: Radical Enthusiasm and Romantic Counterculture
Eighteenth Century Life 22.1 (1998): 95–110. See also *Newgate in Revolution: An Anthology of Radia
(New York: Continuum, 2005).
69 A fuller discussion of Symonds and his role in the publication of the "Barrington" *Voyage* is giv
in my essay "Under a Deception Mask": H. D. Symonds and the Publication of Barrington's *Voyag
to New South Wales*,” in "Books and Empire: Textual Production, Distribution and Consumption
may have helped the initial entrance of the “Barrington” *Voyage* into the literary
marketplace, and in the succeeding years the work proved wildly popular, spawning
an impressive series of revised editions, chapbook abridgements, reprints, piracies,
and translations.71

While the “Barrington” *Voyage*, in all its multivariate forms, has generally been
dismissed as a historical source on the basis of its inauthenticity, the work remains
important from a book-history perspective as probably the most wide-reaching
account of the early history of New South Wales. “Barrington” the author, moreover,
became a brand through which a series of further works were published, by a
number of different booksellers, in a book trade phenomenon which lasted well into
the nineteenth century. When the last significant account of the foundation years of
the New South Wales colony—David Collins’s *An Account of the English Colony in
New South Wales*—was published in 1798,72 it too was plundered to fashion a *Sequel*
to the “Barrington” *Voyage*. The firm of Sherwood, Neely and Jones (successors to
the business of H. D. Symonds) even went so far as to publish the “Barrington”
*Voyage and Sequel* in an expanded edition, dedicated to no less a personage than
the king, which closely resembled the authoritative histories the work had plagiarised
—completing a curious journey for a text that had been first conceived in Newgate
prison not ten years earlier.73 News of the original imposture apparently reached
Barrington in the colony, and he was said to have expressed his chagrin that such a
work was being published “under a deceptious mask.”74 From the other party
injured by the publication of the original “Barrington” *Voyage*, there was a more
curious response. There is no indication that John Stockdale attempted to seek

71 See “Appendix I: Bibliography of the Barrington Books,” in Nathan Garvey, “‘Under a Deceptious
Mask’: A Publishing History of George Barrington” (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2007), 335–89,
and passim.

72 Collins’s *Account* was published by the firm of Thomas Cadell (Junior) and William Davies in the
Strand, along much the same lines as the Tennch *Complete Account* had been published five years earlier.
It was produced in a large quarto volume of over six hundred pages with fourteen plates, and priced
at a guinea (£1 1s.). One advertisement offered for sale “a few copies ... printed on fine paper, with
early impressions of the plates, price £3 3s. in boards” (*The Times*, 12 July 1798, 2a). Cadell and Davies
published a second volume of Collins’s work in 1802, and in 1804 they published an abridged edition
of the two volumes in one (the abridgements made by Collins’s wife Maria).

73 Sherwood, Neely and Jones published their expanded version as *An Account of a Voyage to New South
Wales, by George Barrington* (1803), following their production of a new “Barrington” work (which was
also heavily plagiarised from the *Account of David Collins*), entitled *The History of New South Wales*
(1802). Both the *Account of a Voyage* and the *History* were initially published in weekly parts at one
shilling each, and subsequently produced as large octavo volumes bound in boards. Sherwood, Neely and
Jones made every effort to revamp the work for sale in a more exclusive market than the Barrington
name had previously been aimed at, yet it is still remarkable that these publications were actually more
expensive than the works they were plagiarised from. The new-publications catalogue in the *Monthly
Magazine* for July 1803 notes the publication of the *History*, bound in two octavo volumes, at £1 7s.
See *Monthly Magazine* (July 1803): 569.

74 D. D. Mann. *The Present Picture of New South Wales* (1811; facsimile repr., Sydney: Library of
redress for the breach of his copyright to the Hunter Historical Narrative through the channels of the Stationers' Company and the Court of Chancery. Instead, in the twilight of his career and with his eminence as a bookseller considerably diminished Stockdale published his own "Barrington" work—which was actually the Histor. of New Holland he had published some twenty years earlier, with a new title-page claiming Barrington as the author.75

While in one sense part of a long tradition of eighteenth-century literary genres, the "Barrington" Voyage along with the other derivative works published on the subject of Botany Bay represented an emerging trend in book publishing. As the British reading nation expanded through the romantic period, the demand for cheaper and more entertaining works began to supplant the old publishing styles based on the patronage of a small audience of readers from the upper strata of society.76 Voyage narratives published for a circumscribed genteel readership certainly experienced their heyday in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century semi-official accounts of the kind produced by Stockdale, with their superabundance of arid detail and claims to empirical completeness, were displaced by travel account with a greater emphasis on personal observation and experience. The variety of the Botany Bay publications from the late eighteenth century illustrates the point at which these traditional and emergent publishing trends converged, and, as we have seen, their point of departure was often defined by the individual publisher's relation to the political ascendency of the day. It would be unreasonable to suggest that colonial authors did not play a major role in communicating their experiences in the colony of New South Wales, but, on the other hand, the extent of their agency has sometimes been overstated. Colonial officers such as Phillip, Hunter and King wrote journals and letters for the information of their superiors, which were subsequently transformed into literary works over which they had little editorial control. While there were writers such as Tench and Collins who did maintain a greater involvement in their publications, it remains true that the London booksellers, with their political agendas and rivalries, and their trade practices and connections, were crucial in shaping the early literature on the colony. Their role in the formation of these works has great significance not only for how "Botany Bay" was perceived by contemporary readers, but also for the nature of what we now take to be historical sources on the founding of Australia.

University of Sydney,

75 In 1808 Stockdale republished his earlier work as The History of New Holland . . . By Geo. Barrington The Second Edition. A close examination of the work reveals that it was made from remainder stock apart from the title leaf, the sheets are identical to those of the earlier (1787) "second edition."