

JAMES KELLY

James Kelly (1791-1859) was born in Paramatta, N.S.W., went to sea in 1807 and made several sealing voyages to the Bass Straits and New Zealand. In 1814 he was appointed master of the schooner "Henrietta" owned by T.W. Birch (1774-1821), a whaler and merchant of Hobart, and later commanded Birch's brig "Sophia". In 1818 he was engaged in searching the East Coast for escaped convicts and in 1821 in transporting convicts to Macquarie Harbour in the "Sophia". He was Harbour Master of Hobart from 1819-1829. He also engaged in whaling and sealing, had a small farm on Bruny Island and property in Battery Point, Hobart. He married Elizabeth Griffiths in 1812 and had ten children. (see A.D.B.vol.II, pp. 36-37)

NARRATIVE OF A VOYAGE

RS.99/

- 1 "Discovery of Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour" and voyage round Tasmania by James Kelly in 1815-1816. N.D.

Narrative written and signed by James Kelly entitled "First discovery of Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour by James Kelly". The manuscript is undated but it was written some years after the events described, certainly after 1821, but probably this version was written for publication in the Hobart Town Courier in 1854. It was published serially in that paper, with only minor editorial corrections or footnotes, between 3 April and 14 April 1854 under the heading: "Some unrecorded passages in the history of Van Diemen's Land (from a Very Old Stager)".

The narrative is written in the third person and begins: "On the 12th of December 1815 James Kelly sailed from Hobart Town in a small sized open 5 oared Whale Boat to examine the then unknown West Coast of Van D. Land, accompanied by the following named four men as the crew: John Griffiths, a native of the Colony, George Briggs, ditto, William Jones, Englishman, Thomas Tooms, ditto". According to this narrative they arrived at the inlet, which they named Port Davey "in honor of the then Lieutenant Governor", on 17 December. They spent the following three days there, camping on a point on the north side of the inlet where they cleared 2 rods of scrub and planted garden seeds. They took soundings and made a sketch of the inlet's extent, naming the eastern arm, Bathurst Harbour in "honor of Lord Bathurst secretary for the colonies". They also caught a "great quantity of wild fowl, black swans, ducks and plenty of eels and fish".

They reached Macquarie Harbour on 28 December, naming it in "honor of the then Governor of New South Wales" and landed on an island which they named Elizabeth Island in "honor of Mrs. Gordon wife of James Gordon of Pittwater", and another island about 25 miles up the Harbour, was named Sarah Island

after the wife of Thomas William Birch of Hobart. They named the large fresh water river Gordon River "in honor of James Gordon, esq. of Pit Water, he having kindly lent his boat for this particular voyage of discovery round Van D. Land" and the inlet beyond "Birch Inlet" after T.W. Birch. They made a sketch of the harbour but found it to be a Bar Harbour only for vessels of a light draught. Kelly also noted plenty of Huon pine growing on the banks.

The voyage continued right round V.D.L., calling at the Hunter Islands and at George Town, where the commandant took them to be the bushrangers, Michael Howe and his fellows, until shown their port clearance. While sailing along the north east coast they met native followers of Lamanbunganah and later his brother Tolobunganah, friends of the crew member, George Briggs, a sealer. Women of the tribe helped them to catch seals, which the crew skinned, giving the carcasses to the tribe in exchange for kangaroo skins.

There are many references to meetings with large numbers of natives at most of their overnight camps, some friendly to whom they gave sugar or black swans, others hostile who threw spears and stones. Kelly refers to the great height of some of the men and describes some of their customs, such as trailing spears between their toes and eating vermin from their hair and beards.

This manuscript is written neatly in two notebooks composed of account ruled paper (39cm x 14cm) folded in the centre to form a booklet ("reporter's" notepad style) and 35 sheets were used. A few pages include a portion of the Britannia water-mark. Another, much briefer, manuscript is in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, and may be of earlier date. This contains some differences in the dates and events described and more precise details about wind and weather.

The narrative, as published in 1854, is obviously written long after the events referred to, shown by such references as Macquarie "the then Governor of New South Wales". There is indeed some doubt about the accuracy of the reminiscences. The editor of Historical Records of Australia, series III vol. II includes the following note (p.778, No.115)

In his evidence in 1820 before the commission of inquiry into the state of the colony (see volume III of this series), T. W. Birch stated that he discovered Port Davey in the schooner *Hearutta Pocket* in the year 1816; that he was accompanied by James Kelly; and that Kelly proceeded along the coast in a boat from Port Davey and discovered Macquarie harbour. Birch also stated that, as a reward for this discovery, he was granted by Governor Macquarie the exclusive privilege of obtaining Huon pine from Macquarie harbour for a period of one year. Kelly also gave evidence before the commission of inquiry, but made no reference to any discoveries by himself.

A manuscript is preserved in the library of the royal society of Tasmania, which is undoubtedly in the handwriting of James Kelly and written some time after the year 1821. In this manuscript, Kelly described a voyage in a whale-boat around Tasmania, and stated that he entered Port Davey on the 17th of December and discovered Macquarie harbour on the 28th of December, 1815. The manuscript begins with the account of the departure from Hobart town on the 12th of December, and terminates with the return to that town on the 30th of January following.

A manuscript in the Mitchell library, Sydney, contains a brief journal of the same voyage, but commences with the departure from Hobart town on the 16th of December, and terminates with the return on the 24th of January. This manuscript is not in the handwriting of James Kelly, but is signed by him.

In a letter dated 11th April, 1816, preserved in the record office, London, T. W. Birch transmitted an account of this voyage, which records the departure from Hobart town on the 16th of December and the discoveries of Port Davey and Macquarie harbour on the 22nd and 26th of December, 1815.

It is impossible to explain satisfactorily the discrepancies in these accounts.

Melville's Van Diemen's Land Almanack for 1833 includes (pp.161-162) a brief description of the discovery of Macquarie Harbour and Port Davey "furnished by the kindness of Kelly himself". This states that James Kelly sailed from Hobart "in a common sized open whale boat, accompanied by four men to row it", stayed three days at Port Davey, then went on west, and entered Macquarie Harbour on 28 December, remaining there five days, exploring and naming various points and then sailed round V.D.L. in 39 days. When examined by the Commission of Inquiry in 1820 Kelly made no mention of this voyage but stated that he had been seven times to Macquarie Harbour and was familiar with it and was questioned about Huon pine. He also stated that he had been employed in the Seal Fishery in Bass Straits for five years and had commanded a vessel in the seal and whale fisheries off the coast of V.D.L. for seven years. (H.R.A., III vol.III, pp.458-466). It seems probable that the 1854 "Old Stager's" narrative includes events and stories from other expeditions made by Kelly; for example clearing two rods of ground and sowing garden seeds at Port Davey seems a big task for a brief visit of five men in an open row boat. Some of the descriptions of natives and sealing and bushrangers, etc. may also be drawn from his experience as a sealer or his 1818 search for escaped convicts. The original discovery of Macquarie Harbour was probably as Birch states, made in a boat from the "Henrietta". Birch died in 1821.

The 1854 narrative from the Courier was reprinted in the Tasmanian Parliamentary Papers of 1881, including the editorial comments and corrections. J.E. Calder in presenting it in 1881 describes it inaccurately as the "log". The manuscript was transcribed and published in the Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania for 1920.

MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS OF J. KELLY

RS.99/

- 2(a) Receipt for £1312 for the purchase of the Prince Leopold
12 July 1833.

Being £1250 for the purchase of the ship from the Government
by Messrs. Kelly and Lucas in July 1831 and £62 interest.

- (b) Also duplicate (in glass frame)
(2 papers)

- 3 Articles of Agreement 31 March 1834.

Thomas Evans to sail in the Brig Mary & Elizabeth, owner James Kelly, as officer and headman in killing whales, for a seventeenth share of oil and bone, to be purchased from him by Kelly and sold with Kelly's share. Signed by James Kelly, Thomas Evans (by his mark), witnessed by Sophia Kelly.
(1 paper) in frame (glass front, perspex back)

600 ft.

..4.

- 4 -

- 4 Letter from James Reibey to James Kelly 9 January 1835.
Introducing his friend and partner, Mr. Penny, and asking
for help in purchasing whaling gear.
(1 paper)
- 5 Letter (draft) from James Kelly to Thomas Hewitt, manager of
the Derwent & Tamar Assurance Co. 23 April 1841.
Being about to proceed to New Holland in the brig "Amity" to
establish a whale fishery in one of the bays between Port
Phillip and Sydney Kelly requests information on life assurance.
(1 paper)
- 6 Articles of agreement, James Hatherall to James Kelly
26 March 1844
Hatherall to serve Kelly as farm worker and also in whale boats
for 1.10.0 per month and 1.10.0 for every whale caught,
Bruni Island, 26 March 1844. Signed by James Kelly and the
mark of James Hatherall, witness Laurence Pigeon.
(1 paper mounted-on-card).
- 7 Typed copies of above documents and 2 copies of 'First
Discovery of Port Davey & Macquarie Harbour by James Kelly',
Royal Society of Tasmania, Papers and Proceedings, 1920.
- 8 Share certificate for building a theatre 1834.
(*Colour copy photostatic 36 mm*)
- 9 Articles of agreement, Hugh Fleming Roache to serve as master
on schooner Australian, for taking cargoes of timber or other
produce and if required in whaling, for seven months. 1844.
(1 paper)
- 10 "Some unrecorded passages in the History of Van Diemen's Land
from a very old stager", photocopy from Journals of the House
of Assembly, Tasmania 1881: "Papers ordered to be printed".
Also copy of description from Melville's Van Diemen's Land
Almanack for 1833.
(*Colour copy*)