

# NORFOLK ISLAND

## HISTORICAL SUPPLEMENT TO DUFFY'S GEN

NORFOLK ISLAND was discovered by Captain Cook in 1774, and reported to be fertile and uninhabited. Accounts were sent to England of its tall, straight trees and of the New Zealand flax which grew abundantly. These attracted the attention of the authorities engaged in preparations for the establishment of a convict settlement in New South Wales; so that when Captain Phillip sailed in 1787 with the first fleet he was instructed, as soon as circumstances would permit of it, to send a small establishment to the Island to secure it to the Crown. Phillip lost no time in complying with his instructions, and on the 14th February, 1788, despatched the armed tender "Supply" with a party of 23, including 9 male and 6 female convicts, under the command of Lieutenant P.G. King. It was this gentleman who is reputed to have been the first to describe Norfolk as "The Madeira of the Pacific."

The population of the Island, chiefly supplied by the stream of convict ships then employed in removing from British gaols those condemned under the transportation laws of the day, soon mounted to about a 1,000, at which figure it remained for the next fifteen years.

Considerable areas of land were cleared and planted, partly on behalf of the public and partly on behalf of the convicts themselves, whom it appears to have been desired to transform into permanent settlers. Many of these had their homes scattered widely over the Island, and by diligent labour, aided by a most fruitful soil, in a very short time rendered themselves independent of supplies from the public store.

The troubles apparently inseparable from the convict stations of those days - disaffection among the soldier guards and attempted revolts on the part of the convicts - gave much anxiety to the various commanding officers. But it was chiefly the need for all available soldiers and convicts to aid in establishing new stations in Tasmania that led to orders being given in 1803 for the abandoning of the Norfolk settlement. It was not, however, till 1813 that the process of removal was complete and the last settlers left Norfolk.

From 1813 to 1826 the Island remained unoccupied. In the latter year however, it was felt in New South Wales that it would be convenient to resume occupation of Norfolk and devote it to use as a prison for convicts guilty of additional crimes while serving sentences in New South Wales. Accordingly, considerable numbers of these unfortunates, with suitable detachments of soldier guards, were relegated thither. The lands were again made to yield of their abundance, huge gaols and barracks were added, bridges and a structure, half breakwater, half wharf, were built, and many other public works completed.

But within a few years of this second settlement, "hell in full blast was operating on what had been for uncourted ages a solitary paradise." This was the Norfolk Island immortalized by Marcus Clark in his book, "For the Term of His Natural Life." "Under the lash and in the imminent shadow of the gallows they themselves raised, gaunt, fierce, human beasts quarried the stone and built the walls that shut them out from light and air and hope." Like animals they lived, like animals they died; and yet the old cemetery is not their only monument. Of the gaols only the surrounding walls now remain; but there is Bloody Bridge, scene of one of their many insurrections; Quality Row, the old quarters of the garrison officers; and Government House and the Administrative buildings, still used as such to-day. The settlement at King's Town (or Kingston, as it is now called) is one of unique historical interest.

In 1844 the control of the Island passed from New South Wales to Tasmania. It continued to be used as a convict station, but soon after the exposures and agitations of prison reformers led in the first place to substantial ameliorations and subsequently to suggestions that the Island should again be abandoned.

Various reasons, social and economic, were urged for the evacuation, but the adoption of this policy was at least hastened by the fact that there was in waiting a ready-made community anxious and prepared to enter into occupation. Accordingly preparations for removal were expedited and, in May, 1855, the last shipload of convicts, guards and settlers left for Tasmania.

The next occupation, which has continued uninterruptedly to the present day, was by the inhabitants of Pitcairn Island, an isolated spot lying far to the east of Norfolk.

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