

NORFOLK STORY

HISTORICAL SUPPLEMENT TO DUFFY'S GEN

It was on the second and more leisurely voyage of Captain James Cook, extending from 1772 to 1775 and made in the "Adventure" and "Resolution", that he discovered Norfolk Island. Cook himself states that the object of this second expedition was "to complete the discovery of the Southern Hemisphere". In three successive years during the second voyage, Cook sailed to the far south, making three unsuccessful attempts to penetrate the frozen sea, and finally demonstrating that the dream of centuries had no foundation, and that there was no "Terra Australis Incognita" outside the limits of the circumpolar ice. In 1774 he employed his time in cruising among the Pacific Islands, beginning at Easter Island, with its gigantic stone figures, mysterious relics of a forgotten civilization. Thence, after a stay at his beloved Tahiti, he worked westward among the islands to New Caledonia, on his way to make his third and final attempt on the Antarctic Circle. On the 10th October, 1774, as the "Resolution" was slowly ploughing her way from New Caledonia towards New Zealand, land was discovered bearing S.W. It was found to be an island of good height, five leagues in circumference. The island was bounded by rocky cliffs on nearly every side, with 18 to 20 fathoms of water close to the shore. Cook says "I named it Norfolk Isle, in honour of the noble family of Howard."

The boats were launched, and the weather being extremely favourable, the Captain landed without difficulty behind some large rocks on the north east side, near what was afterwards known as the Cascades. Along the shore was a belt of thick scrub, and beyond this a dense forest of a sort of spruce pine, the trees as thick as two men could fathom, and exceedingly straight and tall. The soil was rich and deep, and the Captain found many trees and plants common to New Zealand, particularly the flax plant, growing most luxuriantly by the sea, and much finer than he had seen it in New Zealand. The woods abounded with pigeons, parrots, parrakeets, hawks, and many New Zealand birds. The island was uninhabited. The party from the "Resolution" may have been the first human beings to tread its tangled forests, though it is possible that at isolated periods previously Maori canoes had been driven by heavy south-east storms from the coast of New Zealand, and that shipwrecked Maoris had maintained an existence on the island for years, for in the early days of the settlement two canoes were found on the beaches, and it is said that stone adzes resembling those in use in New Zealand were burned up when the land was being broken up for cultivation. Cook gave but a few hours to the examination of the island, and on the following day sailed away for New Zealand. On the publication of his book, his description, brief as it was, of the capabilities of Norfolk Island, of its rich soil, its dense pine forests, and profuse growth of New Zealand flax, attracted attention to it as a desirable possession. Consequently, when the Government in the year 1787 resolved on establishing a penal settlement at Botany Bay, it was determined to occupy this promising island as a dependency of the principal colony. In the Royal Instructions to Governor Phillip the following passage occurs:—"Norfolk Island being represented as a spot which may hereafter become useful, you are as soon as circumstances admit of it, to send a small establishment thither to secure the same to us, and prevent it being occupied by the subjects of any other European power." The instructions also contain directions to the Governor as to the cultivation of the flax plant, and its use in manufacturing clothing for the convicts and for maritime purposes.

Little more than a week after Governor Phillip had landed on the site of Sydney (6th February, 1788), Philip Gidley King, then a young lieutenant on board H.M.S. "Sirius", received his commission as Superintendent and Commandant of the settlement of Norfolk Island, with orders to take a small party of people and some live-stock to this distant isle, which was intended to serve as a place of seclusion for troublesome characters, and as a possible succour for the main settlement in case of famine. Comparatively few are aware that, with the single exception of Sydney, Norfolk is the oldest English colony in the South Seas. King's party consisted of an officer and surgeon from H.M.S. "Sirius", four seamen and two marines from the same vessel, with nine male and six female convicts. Some time before King's departure, and when the proposal to take women convicts was first mooted, it is recorded that he went aboard the "Lady Penrhyn", the female convict-ship, to consult Lieutenant Bowes, the surgeon, "respecting the character of five or six women whom he meant to take with him."