



Merewether Historical Society

"A society aimed at recording memories of the past for the benefit of the next generation."

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The Chronicle

September 2024

Meetings: Next meeting will be at the Merewether Bowling Club Caldwell St, on Tuesday 10 September, 10.30 for a 10.45 start. All are invited to join us for lunch at the end of the meeting.

Guest Speaker: Peter Lucas will talk about the James Craig

Birthdays in September: Flower and Birthstone are Aster and Sapphire. Best wishes to Dennis Hinchliffe, Suzanne Martin and Loretta Laffey and other members who celebrate this month.



Mudgee Tour: Could members travelling to Mudgee please let Denise know if they have lost their name tag lanyards so a new one can be ready for the trip.

The 1827 Newcastle notebook and letters of Lieutenant William S. Coke, H.M. 39th Regiment | Living Histories



Aged just 22, Lt William Coke was sent to the Newcastle settlement in January 1827, as second in command, a sparsely populated area of approximately 200 inhabitants – storekeepers, inn-keepers, carpenters, bricklayers, brickmakers and

blacksmiths plus those working in the Government mines. There were no more than thirty private houses but a number of public buildings, including a fort commanding the entrance to the harbour.

His responsibilities included the control of convicts at the garrison. He also learned to stuff birds and draw them, thus continuing the cultural tradition of collecting and drawing as a common pastime of the earlier Commandants."

Shortly after he arrived Lt Coke began keeping a daily notebook of events, mostly describing the weather, interaction with the natives and the pursuit of hunting, fishing and 'stuffing' animals and birds, presumably taxidermy. Very little of his notebook however included details of his actual role! Excerpts follow, giving an overview of the daily life of an administrator in "Our Town" in the early Nineteenth Century. Coke believed the 'Natives' were his "best friends. There are a number of the Natives always about us, they carry each a Spear and Club but have no Covering, they go out a shooting or fishing with or for us and are very honest and never steal.

He became close to a local Aboriginal, Desmond and his tribe, spending much of his time with him.



Desmond

Sun 4/2/1827 Thermometer shade 106, in sun 122 – terribly hot.

Wed 7 amused myself throwing spears with the natives.

Fri 9 I went out shooting in the Bush, saw numbers of kangaroo, killed two – I returned home very tired having lost myself for 5 hours in the bush, and it being very sultry and hot.

Sat 10 Staid (sic) at home, bathed in the Sea. Desmond did not come, having beaten his wife was obliged to stand Punishment. Natives dancing their wild dances...driving the thunder and lightning away by their yells – they had a stone fight after burying a dead man – painted themselves white for mourning.

Tues 13 News of the Wellington having been seized by 66 prisoners although under charge of 16 soldiers going to Norfolk Island.

Wed 21 Rather cold, dull day. In the evening when walking out fell in with a Camp of Natives, they were Corroberry (sic). The men performed war gestures whilst the women sung and beat time on the ground with their hands. About an hour before there had been a bloody fight, we saw several with blood flowing from their heads. Whilst we were talking with some of them a spear was thrown by some person which had liked to have killed man. All were in Arms in a moment.

Thurs 13/9 Went out shooting accompanied by my servant. My gun being in Sydney I took the Black's musket.

Fri 14 Saw the wreck of the sloop **Charlotte** ** 2 miles off in the Bight. All lives were lost. Had coffee with Wright

Sun 16 Weather fine, no Divine Service. *Liverpool* arrived with orders relieving me and mine.”

Last entry in Journal – and a cryptic one!

Fri 19 Sailed for Sydney. Savage life undoubtedly preferable to civilised”.
<https://environment.gov.au/shipwreck/public/wreck/wreck.do?key=353>

****Charlotte** on 7 September 1827 “the 10 ton wooden sloop Charlotte sailed from Sydney with a cargo of timber (cedar), wheat, eggs, butter, maize and other perishables. At some point between then and the 21st of September the sloop was discovered lying on the beach about 6 miles north of Newcastle, a total wreck and the cargo scattered on the beach “in a melancholy confusion. The crew, two men, were not found and neither were the two passengers (a 'native' youth and a man called Malcolm). It is presumed that the Charlotte was overcome by the storm that broke out soon after leaving port. Due to the buoyant nature of its cargo, it is supposed that the vessel was lifted by the violence of the gale.”

Point to Ponder: The mind is the key to health and happiness *Sai Baba*

2024/25 Committee:

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