

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE LIBRARY

Journals and manuscripts of Australian explorers, 1813-74

Reel M1923

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HISTORICAL NOTE

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which was created in 1968, had its origins in the eighteenth century. It was the successor to several major departments of the British Government: the Foreign Office (1782-1968), the Colonial Office (1801-1966), the India Office (1858-1947), the Dominions Office (1925-47), the Commonwealth Relations Office (1947-66) and the Commonwealth Office (1966-68).

The records of the Colonial Office, including the despatches of governors and letters received from the colonies, were transferred at intervals to the Public Record Office in London (now The National Archives). Many, but not all, of the attachments were kept with the despatches or, in the case of maps, were passed to the Public Record Office as separate consignments. Other enclosures were retained by the Colonial Office Library. In particular, pamphlets and other published works were usually retained in the Library. Some unpublished works were also kept in the Colonial Office, such as the journals of Australian explorers filmed on this reel, and were inherited by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Library was closed in 2008. Many of its collections, including the manuscripts filmed by the Australian Joint Copying Project, are now in the Foyle Special Collections Library, King's College, Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1LR.

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1. Gregory Blaxland. Journal of an expedition across the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, 11 May – 6 June 1813. (copy, 18 pp.)

The journal describes the journey on horseback that Blaxland made with William Lawson and William Wentworth across the Blue Mountains. On the first day they crossed the Nepean River and camped at the foot of the first ridge of mountains. The entries mainly record the distances covered, bearings in relation to Prospect Hill, Mount Banks and other landmarks, the terrain, the vegetation, and the difficulties they encountered as they ascended the mountains. There are references to discoveries of rivers, sightings of kangaroos, Aboriginal tracks, and their deteriorating physical condition of the three explorers. On 28 May they camped on the edge of a precipice (Mount York) and on 31 May they saw 'forest land all around them sufficient to feed the Stock of the colony for the next thirty years'. They began the return journey on 1 June.

A letter is bound with the manuscript:

Gregory Blaxland to James Chapman (Colonial Office), 7 June 1815: sends his journal of the expedition across the Blue Mountains; progress with his vineyard; requests a consignment of best common grapes.

A slightly variant copy of the journal is reproduced in George Mackaness, ed. *Fourteen journeys over the Blue Mountains of New South Wales 1813-1841* (Sydney, 1965).

Gregory Blaxland (1778-1853), who was born at Fordwich, Kent, left England with his family for New South Wales in 1805. He received a land grant from Governor Philip King and further grants from Governor Lachlan Macquarie. His flocks of sheep and herds of cattle expanded rapidly. Unable to obtain more land, he looked for a route to the interior. In May 1813 he set out with William Lawson and William Wentworth and, by following the ridges, succeeded in crossing the Blue Mountains. He spent his later years on his Brush Farm estate near Eastwood.

2. John Oxley. Journal of an expedition into the interior of New South Wales, 6 April – 29 August 1817. (2 parts, 102 pp., 82 pp.)

The exploring party comprised Oxley, the surveyor George Evans, the botanists Allan Cunningham and Charles Fraser, and nine other men. They left Sydney on 6 April 1817 and after a short stay at Bathurst set off westwards on 20 April. The journal describes Oxley's impressions of the Lachlan River, which Evans had discovered in 1815, and his journey downstream until the river divided into branches and became lost in marshes. On 16 May he decided to abandon the Lachlan and travel south-west, hoping to reach the southern coast of Australia at Cape Northumberland. The country was harsh, with impenetrable bush, and days were lost searching for water. On 6 June he changed course and headed west across desolate and barren country. On 23 June he unexpectedly reached the banks of the Lachlan River, which he followed until it again entered marshes. On 20 July he

decided to return, heading north towards the Macquarie River, eventually reaching fine country suitable for sheep. He discovered the Wellington Valley and reached Bathurst on 29 August 1817.

The journal was forwarded by Governor Lachlan Macquarie to Lord Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 13 December 1817.

John Joseph Oxley (1784? – 1828) was born in Yorkshire. He joined the Royal Navy in 1799 and first came to Australia as master's mate on HMS *Buffalo* in 1802. He returned to Sydney in 1808 as lieutenant on HMS *Porpoise*. In 1812 he was appointed surveyor-general of the colony and held the position until his death. In the early years he was engaged on exploring as much as surveying. He led two expeditions following the courses of the Lachlan and Macquarie rivers and he also charted the coasts north and south of Sydney. As well as his official duties, Oxley acted as agent for a number of merchants and was a successful sheep breeder. He was a magistrate and served on several committees.

3. John Oxley. Journal of a second expedition into the interior of New South Wales, 20 May – 5 November 1818. (151 pp.)

The purpose of the expedition was to trace the course of the Macquarie River. Oxley was accompanied by George Evans, Charles Fraser and twelve other men. They left Bathurst on 28 May 1818 and Wellington Valley on 6 June. They followed the Macquarie River in a north-westerly direction through fine country, but by early July they had reached a vast area of lagoons and swamps. Oxley recorded his belief that they were 'in the immediate vicinity of an inland sea, or lake'. Abandoning the Macquarie River, he decided to travel eastwards to the Castlereagh River, which Evans had discovered a few days earlier. They crossed the river on 2 August and journeyed across barren plains for a month until they reached the Peel River, where the country was far more luxuriant. The party then crossed the Great Dividing Range, with its ridges, precipices and gorges, and finally reached the mouth of the Hastings River on 8 October. He named the inlet Port Macquarie. The final part of the journal describes the journey southwards, crossing numerous inlets and rivers, and encounters with hostile Aborigines. Oxley reached Port Stephens on 1 November and Newcastle a few days later.

The journal is bound with the journal kept by George Evans of an expedition in the vicinity of Mount Harris, during which he discovered the Castlereagh River, 8 – 18 July 1818. (8 pp.)

The journal was forwarded by Governor Lachlan Macquarie to Lord Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 1 March 1819. The two journals of Oxley, and also the diary of George Evans (July 1818), were published under the title *Journals of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales undertaken by order of the British Government in the years 1817-18* (London, 1820).

4 George Evans. Sketch of Van Diemen's Land, 1820. (52 pp.)

The manuscript begins with the discovery and early history of Van Diemen's Land and provides information about the colony's climate, topography, mountains, rivers, lakes and ponds, coasts, harbours and anchorages, the interior of the island, and horses, cattle, sheep and other stock. Some passages are duplicated in the early sections of Evans's book, *A geographical, historical, and topographical description of Van Diemen's Land, with important hints to emigrants* (London, 1822).

The manuscript was forwarded to the Colonial Office by Commissioner John Bigge in 1822.

George William Evans (1780-1852) arrived in Sydney in 1802 and worked in the Survey Department in 1803-4. In 1812 he surveyed the shores of Jervis Bay and led a party overland to Appin and later in the year he went to Van Diemen's Land to assist the surveyor-general in re-measuring land grants. In November 1813 he crossed the Blue Mountains and discovered the Macquarie River. In the next ten years he worked in both New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, exploring country west of Bathurst, discovering the Lachlan River, accompanying John Oxley on his inland expeditions, and journeying overland to Macquarie Harbour on the west coast of Van Diemen's Land in 1822. His administration of the Survey Department in Van Diemen's Land was lax and he resigned in 1825. He spent his last years in Hobart.

The report is preceded by an undated letter from Evans to Governor Lachlan Macquarie submitting 'the following lines to your patronage'.

5. Allan Cunningham. A brief view of the progress of interior discovery in New South Wales, 1832. (154 pp.)

The manuscript begins with a survey of early exploration in New South Wales, including the crossing of the Blue Mountains (1813), the expeditions of John Oxley and George Evans, the penetration of the Monaro, and the journey of William Hovell and Hamilton Hume to Port Phillip Bay (1824). The bulk of the paper is devoted to the explorations of Cunningham in 1827-29, when he traversed the Liverpool Plains, discovered the Darling Downs and Gwydir River, and examined the country near Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River. His explorations were followed by the journeys of Charles Sturt of the country between the Macquarie and Darling Rivers and his descent along the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers to Encounter Bay (1828-30). At the end of the paper Cunningham sums up the current geographical knowledge of New South Wales and suggests possible future expeditions along the Darling River and to the country north-west of Moreton Bay.

The paper, which has some deletions and corrections, was subsequently published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 2, 1832, pp. 99-132.

Allan Cunningham (1791-1839) was born in London and worked for some years at the Royal Gardens at Kew. In 1816 he was sent to New South Wales as a botanical collector. He took part in both inland and coastal exploration, joining John Oxley on his first expedition and accompanying Captain Phillip King on his voyages round the northern and western coasts of Australia in 1817-22. He travelled widely in New South Wales collecting botanical specimens and also visited Norfolk Island and New Zealand. In 1831 Cunningham sailed to England and organised his herbarium and published papers. In 1837 he was appointed colonial botanist and returned to Sydney.

6. Peter Egerton Warburton. Journal of Messrs. Elder and Hughes' exploring expedition from central Australia to Perth, 15 April 1873 – 18 May 1874. (90 pp.)

The journal is signed by Warburton and dated 18 May 1874 and appears to be a shortened copy of his original journal. The expedition, which left Adelaide on 21 September 1872, was funded by two leading South Australian pastoralists, Thomas Elder and Walter Hughes. Warburton's party comprised four Europeans, two Afghan camel-drivers, and an Australian Aborigine. After a short introduction, the daily entries begin on 15 April 1873, when the party left Alice Springs. They first followed the overland telegraph line northwards before heading west to Mount Hay. The long journey was generally in a north-westerly direction and covered extremely arid country. The entries,

which are often brief, describe the terrain and refer to the constant search for water and feed for the camels, sinking wells, the gradual loss of all but two of the camels, encounters with Aborigines, dust storms, the heat, snakes and ants, shortages of food, illnesses, the likelihood of death by starvation, and the search for the Oakover River (discovered by Frank Gregory in 1861). Warburton reached the Oakover on 7 December 1873 and De Grey Station in the Pilbara on 11 January 1874.

Sir Anthony Musgrave, the governor of South Australia, sent a copy of the journal to Lord Carnarvon, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 8 September 1875. Warburton's journal, edited by Charles Eden, was published under the title *Journey across the western interior of Australia* (London, 1875).

Peter Egerton Warburton (1813-1889) was born at Northwich, Cheshire. He served briefly in the Royal Navy and for twenty years in the Bombay Army, retiring in 1853 with the rank of major. He then went to South Australia where he was appointed commissioner of police and led a number of exploring expeditions to the northern and western regions of the colony. He was dismissed in 1867 and accepted the lower post of chief staff officer of the Voluntary Military Force of South Australia, with the local rank of colonel. In 1872-74 Warburton led an expedition which sought to link South Australia and Western Australia. Leaving Alice Springs with 17 camels, the party crossed the Great Sandy Desert and after eight months reached Roebourne in northern Western Australia. Warburton lived in Adelaide for the rest of his life.