

## Manly, Warringah and Pittwater: First Fleet Records of Events, 1788-1790

### No. 5: Survey of Middle Harbour: 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1788.

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*The discovery of Middle Harbour above the Spit, and in particular the report by Captain Hunter of a run of fresh water feeding into the upper part of it, apparently led to Governor Phillip's expedition of 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1788, which began in the Manly area and proceeded overland until the run of fresh water was reached. Our article, 'Finding the right track' deals with the exploration, 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> April. Another consequence of the discovery was a survey of Middle Harbour, carried out by Captain Hunter, Lieutenant Bradley, and James Keltie, the master of the Sirius.*

*Seaman Jacob Nagle was a member of Governor Phillip's boat crew. When this crew was not needed, Phillip used to send them out fishing at night. Nagle claimed that on one such excursion they found Middle Harbour, above the Spit:*

*"On one of these excursions, one night shooting the seen [seine] at the head of Middle Harbour, as we supposed, and shifting a long a rising sandy beach towards the north side, we found a narrow entrance, and going over the bank of sand, we discovered an other branch runing to the westward, full of coves, though we ware as far as this beach when surveying with the Govenor but did not discover the entrance of this branch. When we return'd, we inform'd the Govenor, and he came down, and it was surveyed likewise."*

*The following was recorded in the log of the Sirius (naval time has been adjusted to conventional time):*

*"Sunday April 13<sup>th</sup>... A.M. Capt. Hunter Govr. and Sevral Officers went down the Harbour with ten Boats.*

*P.M. Govr. Capt. Hunter &c Returned haven Discovered a part of the Harbour Not Kenowen befor."*

*Governor Phillip reported the discovery in his official dispatch to Lord Sydney, dated May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1788:*

*"In going to examine a Cove near the entrance of the Harbour (Shell Cove) I found a passage that had not been observed by the Officers, when a rough Survey was made of*

the Harbour. Round a Sandy point, at the bottom of the Cove, was a passage with deep water into a branch of the Harbour, that runs to the Northwest, and finding on examining that there was a run of Fresh Water that came from the Westward, I went a few days after to examine its source.”

*Lieutenant William Bradley recorded that the discovery took place on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1788, and a survey was made between 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April, after Phillip’s land exploration of the area:*

“Thursday. 10<sup>th</sup>: The Governor & party being in that part of the Harbour round Middle Cape, found an entrance round a long sandy point into a very extensive peice of water which branched away in three directions & good depth of water after having pass’d over the flat at the entrance.

Sunday. 13<sup>th</sup>. The Governor went down the Harbour to visit the Coves in the lower part of it, He crossed the neck from the No. Cove & found at the end of the beach at the back of it a peice of stagnate brackish water.

Monday. 14<sup>th</sup>: Capt. Hunter traced the No.most branches of the Middle Harbour, to endeavour to know if they had any communication with that peice of water found yesterday, the No.most branch was found to end in a flat, dry at low water & about 2 miles above it a large run of fresh water.”

*A week later, after Phillip had returned from his exploration, the following was recorded in the log of the Sirius:*

“Monday 21<sup>st</sup>... A.M. Capt. Hunter Mr Bradlys Lieut & Master with Longe Boat a Gig went to Survy the Arm Newly Discovered.”

*Bradley gave the following account of the survey:*

“Monday. 21<sup>st</sup>. Captain Hunter with the Officers who had before assisted him, went with two boats to survey the branches of the Middle Harbour.

Tuesday. 22<sup>nd</sup>. On a point where we landed, found the earth thrown up in the manner of a Grave, which we turned up & found the ashes of some deceased person & by the burnt wood laying near it we suppose it to have been consumed on that spot, the ashes appear’d to be heap’d together on the surface of the ground & cover’d with earth, some pieces of bones were found not quite consumed but too much so to know what part of the body they belonged to: from a greater quantity of the ashes at one end than at the other, I suppose the body to have been laid at length before the fire is applied to the Pile & conclude that they dispose of the dead in the same manner. Saw very few of the Natives.

Wednesday. 23<sup>rd</sup>. Examined all the No.most branch & moored the boats below the flats leading up to the large run of water, pass’d several of the Natives on and fishing off the Middle Cape.

Thursday. 24<sup>th</sup>: As the tide flowed we went over the flats in the small boat, found many winding reaches with holes of 2 & 3 fathom water in some of them: as we went up we saw one Old Man setting upon the rocks by his Canoe, at about ½ flood we got nearly up to the fresh water in the boat: when we returned we found the Old Man with our people, they entertained him with dancing, combing his hair & beard & shew’d him how to smoke a pipe, two or three whiffs perfectly satisfied that part of his curiosity, & set him coughing. We gave him roasted Oysters which he eat as fast as he could get them & on giving a bunch of them roasted he open’d them with his thumb as easy as we could

with a knife. He got into the longboat & examined every part of her attentively. All the Natives in this part of the Harbour, except the Old Man were very shy & would not come near us we did not find any Huts, they were in Caves formed by shelving rocks, at the outer part they make a fire which serves both for roasting their Fish & giving them heat during the night.”

*Captain Hunter gave a description of how the Aborigines dealt with their dead:*

“Their dead they certainly burn, of which I have been well convinced lately, when employed on the survey of a distant branch of Port Jackson. Some of my boat’s crew having, when on shore, discovered a little from the water-side, upon a rising ground, what they judged to be a fresh grave, I went up and ordered it to be opened; when the earth was removed, we found a quantity of white ashes, which appeared to have been but a very short time deposited there: among the ashes we found part of a human jaw-bone, and a small piece of the scull, which, although it had been put in the fire, was not so much injured, as to prevent our distinguishing perfectly what it was. We put the ashes together again and covered it up as before; the grave was not six inches under the surface of the ground, but the earth was raised the height of our graves in Europe.”

*Surgeon George Worgan recorded the following:*

“April Sund.13<sup>th</sup>: the Governor, & Captain Hunter accompanied by some other Officers, went on an Excursion down the Harbour, and made a Discovery of an Inlet which led into an extensive Space of Water forming a fine spacious Harbour, they likewise fell in with some Water which they had Reason to suppose was a Lake.

Mond. 21<sup>st</sup>. Captn. Hunter & Lt. Bradley & the Master of the *Sirius* set out this morning to take a Survey of the new Part of the Harbour, which was discovered on the 13<sup>th</sup> Inst.”

*Midshipman Newton Fowell reported thus:*

“On the 11 of April the Governor & Capt. Hunter went down the harbour to have a Conference with the Natives/ in one of the Coves they found out a small Narrow Channel of about 100 yards which led up to a Large Arm/ they did not go to the head of it this new discovery took up his attention so much that he paid very little attention to the Natives/ he returned the same Night/ 15<sup>th</sup> The Governor accompanied by several officers went from the New Discovered Arm into the Country for a few Days. They returned on the 19<sup>th</sup> having found a very fine country when he was about 3 Miles from the waterside, but near the water it was very rocky. 21<sup>st</sup>. Capt. Hunter employed Surveying the New Discovered Arm... 25 Capt. Hunter finished the Survey/ he found it very Spacious but at some places very shoal/ the Cove it runs out of is rather shoal just at its entrance having at low water only 2 Fath at some places/ but when you pass this which is not very broad you have 10 Fathom Water”

*The Judge Advocate, David Collins, did not show great enthusiasm when he referred to Middle Harbour, in a general statement for April 1788, in his journal:*

“In Port Jackson another branch extending to the northward had been discovered; but as the country surrounding it was high, rocky and barren, though it might add to the extent and beauty of the harbour, it did not promise to be of any benefit to the settlement.”

**Authors' Note:**

This monograph should be read in conjunction with our '*Finding the right track: Governor Phillip's inland exploration from Manly to upper Middle Harbour and westwards: 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1788*', in order that the quotations cited may be more fully understood.

The lake mentioned by Surgeon Worgan appears to refer to Manly Lagoon, afterwards encountered by Phillip on his 15<sup>th</sup> April expedition.

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