

curing them, and what proportion of labour may be necessary to keep a supply ready for vessels going thither for that article. To assist the gentlemen in forming an idea on this head, a miner who has been there before will accompany them. To examine where the most eligible place would be to form a settlement both with respect to procuring coals and for agricultural purposes."

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 1897

## History of Newcastle

AND THE

### Northern District.

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NO. XXII.

#### THE EXPEDITION TO NEWCASTLE.

HAVING all things ready His Majesty's Tender-box (as the Lady Nelson was designated by Captain Flinders as she was a tender to the discovery ship Investigator) set sail from Port Jackson on the 10th of June, 1801, with the Francis schooner. At the entrance to Sydney Harbour the expedition fell in with the transport Earl Cornwallis, of 784 tons, 20 guns and 72 men under the command of Captain James Tennant, having convicts on board from England. On the next day the weather was variable, and continued so during the four days it took to complete the voyage from Sydney Heads to Port Hunter. The delay was occasioned by the pilot, an official named James, who had previously sailed from Sydney to the river for coals in an open boat, and was represented as a safe navigator. Lieutenant Grant thought he could rely on pilot James' knowledge of the coast, but he was mistaken, as the pilot made the same mistake as Captain Reid, of the *Martha*. The vessels were led into

considerable danger by the ignorance of this official pilot, as she was nearly entering Reid's Mistake at Lake Macquarie through his being deceived by the appearance of an island off the entrance to the lake, which he mistook for Nobby Island off the mouth of the river. Luckily, Lieutenant Grant took an observation, and feeling that it did not agree with that given him at the Naval Office in Sydney for Hunter's River, he discussed the subject with the pilot, who would not be convinced of his error until the vessels got within half a mile of the breakers on the shore. As the weather was fair, and there was 17 fathoms of water, the vessel was brought up with the keedge. The ship's boat was lowered, and Dr. Harris was rowed towards the shore to reconnoitre the inlet. Dr. Harris failed to find the least appearance of any river, and found that the sea broke very heavily on a bar or inlet behind the island. The doctor had the boat pushed in to some rocks, and a native ran down to it vociferating several times the words, "whale-boat, whale-boat," and "Budgerie Dick, Budgerie Dick." Without the slightest hesitation he threw some fish into the boat and then jumped in himself. As he used the words Budgerie Dick, which means "Good Dick," it was supposed that he had been among those who had been searching the neighbourhood for the pirates who had carried off the Norfolk. When Dr. Harris returned to the ship, the new acquaintance, Dick, resumed his cries of "whaleboat" and "Budgerie Dick," as he leaped on board. Lieutenant Grant thereupon introduced him to King Bungaree, who was told to try and find out what the cries meant. Bungaree then pointed to a place and motioned Dick to take his seat there. The habits and customs of the natives require a long profound silence upon the meeting of natives who are strangers to each other before they will converse together in a friendly manner. Becoming impatient, Lieutenant Grant expostulated with Bungaree for not questioning Dick, but all was in vain as the etiquette could not be omitted. At the expiration of 20 minutes, the

two natives drew closer to each other, and by degrees entered into discourse. Some of the men on the vessel were fairly well acquainted with the language of the Sydney natives, but they could not understand Diak's dialect. However, little information was received from Diak, and although he and Bungaree talked vehemently the navigators were inclined to think they hardly comprehended each other. At 2 p.m. the vessel was got under weigh, and at 5 o'clock Nobby Island was seen bearing north eight or nine miles. At 6 a.m. on Sunday, the 14th June, 1801, the vessels were six miles off Nobbys, and at half-past 10 a.m. Lieutenant Grant and Dr. Harris went in the boat to ascertain if they had reached the river and to examine the entrance. They found the mouth very narrow, with a reef on one side and a very heavy surf breaking clean over it. On the other side they saw heavy sand breakers and the passage troubled with a nasty swell. Considering the risk they ran in bringing the vessels in without well ascertaining the channel, the boat's head was turned round to the swell and pulled through, carrying five to four and three and a half fathoms close to the island, which Colonel Patterson called Coal Island. Being just on the pitch of high water they landed on the island, up the steep grassy side of which, near the entrance, they clambered until the top was reached. The other side of the island was perpendicular, in a crumbling state, and falling by degrees into the sea. From the summit of Coal Island they obtained a most beautiful view of the river, which they discovered to extend as far as the eye could reach, and interspersed with islands. Here they hoisted a Union Jack as a signal to the vessels that they had found the right entrance to the river. As it was then the first of the ebb tide, and calm, they hastened on board the Lady Nelson. The boats were then sent ahead to tow the vessel, and with the assistance of the sweeps the brig was towed in and got barely under the lee of the island, where they could bring to with safety.

They were obliged to let go a second anchor to prevent their being drawn into the surge.

#### A DANGEROUS ROADSTAD.

It is within four years of a century since the Lady Nelson, a brig of 60 tons, and the schooner Francis, of 40 tons, visited Newcastle Harbour, and one experienced a high and intellectual curiosity in studying the dangers of navigating the port at that remote period with the easy pilotage and safe anchorage of ships entering the harbour nowadays. The writer has before him one of Lieutenant Grant's vivid pictures of the Lady Nelson and the Francis sailing into the harbour round the north side of the bold rocky island at the entrance. The entry was made at half-past 1 o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday, the 14th of June, 1801; when a light breeze sprang up from the eastward, which with boats ahead and sweeps enabled the Lady Nelson, with the Francis towing in after her, to stem the tide with less difficulty. By the time the vessels had approached the entrance close to the reef and abreast of the island the ebb tide had set strongly out and ran with such force that they could not stem it therefore the Lady Nelson let go her best bower anchor, but not having sufficient room to veer out any scope of cable the vessel drifted. The small bower anchor was then let go, and the vessel steered to it with the strength of the tide. By dint of warping the vessels were brought up under the lee of the island for the night, in  $3\frac{1}{2}$  fathoms of water. During the night, at the strength of the tide, they let go a second anchor under foot, and steered the vessel to it. Speaking of the hazardous anchorage, Lieutenant Grant writes:—"Here we found the tide run strong and in eddies, which I am of opinion is occasioned by the heavy surf which breaks between the main and the island meeting the outside surf, which must make this place a very unsafe roadstead for any vessel to lay in when it blows from the eastward, more especially as there is no room to veer out any scope of cable, nor ought any vessel to stop here unless necessity requires it."

Messrs Francis Baxendale, a first class navigator, surveyor, and engineer, who made the first elaborate survey of the port, also decried on the difficult entrance to the harbour and the dangerous lee shore. At that period the risk of entering the port was great during moderate and dangerous during bad easterly weather, particularly as there was no breakwater to protect the bar from heavy seas and to straighten the run of current over it. Contrasting the port then and now, it is interesting to note Grant's description of the site of the breakwater, wherein he says:—"Between the island and the main there is an opening of about three cables length, which is full of rocks with a heavy surf breaking over them, the effects of which are felt from side to side of the river. On this side therefore it would be dangerous to attempt a passage with a vessel, since, should there be any channel found, it must necessarily be narrow and crooked; vessels then must go round the island on entering, as the appearance of the Lady Nelson and Francis in the picture shown are doing." Originally Nobbys and Signal Hill were joined together, but they became separated by some convulsion of Nature. Grant remarks that "opposite the chasm the different strata of coal are discovered exhibiting a chequered-like appearance. The rocks, from the disposition in which they now stand and the strata of coals on the island, show the connection which once subsisted between the mainland and it."

#### FRESHWATER BAY IN 1801.

The vessels were moored under the lee of Nobbys, and within pistol shot of the shore, but as the anchorage was unsafe, at daylight on Monday, the 15th June, 1801, they were warped into a safer berth round Pirate Point (Stockton), so named by the pursuers or capturers of the pirates who seized the Norfolk in 1800. In his journal Lieutenant-Governor Patterson remarks that the Lady Nelson was warped "round what is called Pirate Point, where there is a small bay and fresh water, which I named Fresh Water Bay." It may be interesting to record that so far back as April, 1876, the