## Hobart Town, 1816: Andrew Bent and fermenting change

CRAIG COLLINS AND SALLY BLOOMFIELD

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N SUNDAY, 28 April 1816, the Reverend Robert Knopwood noted this:

Very unwell. Unable to perform D.V. [Divine] Service. I sent for

Mr Luttrell. Many of the officers calld and sent to know how I was.

A signal was made for a brig from the south. Rain.<sup>1</sup>

The signal seen by Knopwood at Battery Point was relayed by a flag raised on the summit of Mount Nelson, where the guard commanded a full view of Storm Bay and the entrance to the River Derwent. The approaching ship was soon identified as the colonial brig *Kangaroo* under the command of Lieutenant Charles Jeffreys. It was making its second trip bringing convicts down from Sydney to Hobart Town, interposed by a protracted voyage to Ceylon.

Despite the rain, the signal flag would not have escaped the notice of the convict printer, Andrew Bent. He had been appointed government printer in 1815, sometime before November.<sup>2</sup> Around the same time, Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey must have sent a despatch to Governor Macquarie in Sydney with a recommendation or solicitation that Bent be pardoned. By April 1816, Bent would have had every reason to hope that the *Kangaroo* was bringing down from Sydney Macquarie's gift of freedom. On this count Bent was disappointed. Instead, the *Kangaroo* brought news from Macquarie that he was behind in his paperwork and had not yet considered the list of proposed convict pardons.<sup>3</sup> That hope aside, other cargo of significance to Bent was brought ashore from the *Kangaroo*. First, there was a supply of type which was a windfall for a printer on the colonial frontier; secondly,

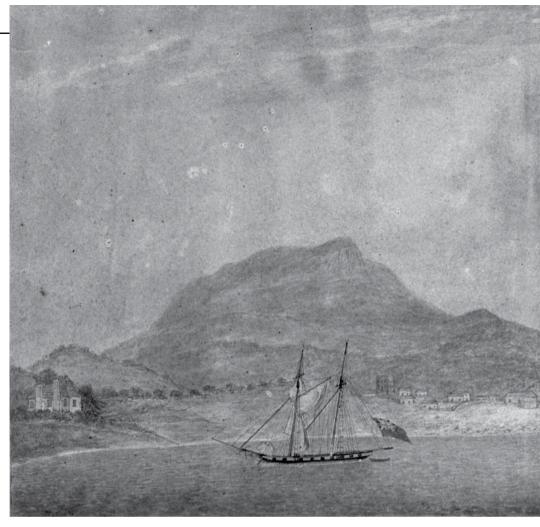
Jeffreys had an important story to tell and a desperate need to publish it; and finally, Bent's future wife Mary Kirk was on board as one of sixty female Irish convicts.

While the *Kangaroo* arrived in rain, conditions deteriorated badly over the next few days as the convicts waited to be disembarked. Knopwood wrote of 'hard rain', 'lightning', and 'heavy snow falling'.<sup>4</sup> The weather was so bad that a week later Knopwood again cancelled divine service, reflecting that 'all the mountains were covered with snow'. Two nights later, on Tuesday 7 May, perhaps with the weather easing, Knopwood attended a 'very great' dinner, ball and supper hosted by the richest colonists, Edward and Maria Lord, for 'all the ladies and gents in the colony' – some fifty people.<sup>5</sup> Within the same week, on 10 May, there was another grand ball, this time hosted at Government House. For the upper ranks of colonists, the flag announcing the arrival of Lieutenant Jeffreys and his wife Jane was really a signal that it was party time.

It is a fair guess that on this evening Andrew Bent was at the government printing press nearby – within earshot of the festivities at government house – preparing the first issue of his new newspaper, the *Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter*. With a break in the clouds, the evening would have been lit by a full moon, perhaps with the snow-capped Table Mountain glistening through the muted darkness.

As our title suggests, we argue that 1816 was for Hobart Town a year of fermenting change. Fermentation is a process or state of agitation or turbulent change, a catalyst. We commonly use fermentation to describe the process of turning hops into beer by adding into the mix living organisms such as yeast.

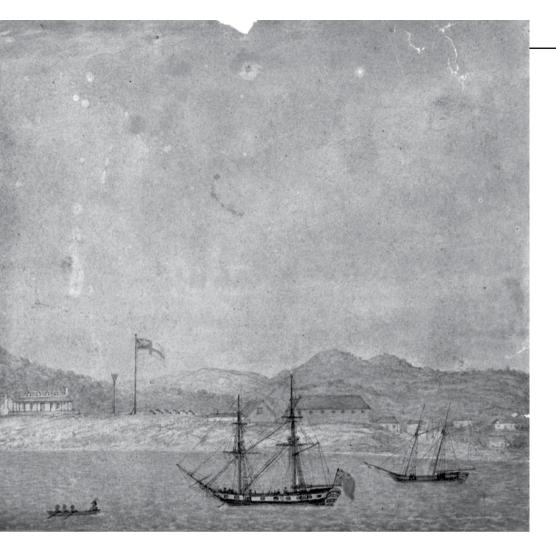
While the arrival of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur in 1824 is widely recognised as the major turning point in the early history of Van Diemen's Land, the significance of 1816 is often overshadowed. Sitting at a hinge point in British history as the Napoleonic wars ended, the fate of Hobart Town was finely balanced between anarchy and progress. Swaggering bushrangers reduced the colony to a lawless frontier while, at the same time, Hobart Town's new status as a free port invited direct trade and immigration. It was during this final year of Davey's short-lived regime that Bent initiated the first permanent newspaper in the colony. This new power of publicity – given both to unbridled violence and untapped prosperity – stoked the policy tensions playing out in London. In this way, we contend that Hobart Town in 1816 started to bubble and surge, culminating with the coming of Arthur in 1824.



'Table Mountain, and part of the Harbour and Town of Hobart in Van Diemen's Land, about 1815', by W.H. Craig (*State Library of New South Wales*)

### Prelude to 1816: a cast of three characters

Our Prelude to 1816 is shaped around a cast of three characters already mentioned: Bent, Davey and Jeffreys. More by their combination than individually, these characters might be imagined as the yeast factor in fermenting change. If this seems too unlikely a catalyst for stirring Hobart Town into life then we admit that nothing was ever going to happen without some external pressure. So we are really talking about a process of pressurised fermentation. For this, we recognise the importance of two other living organisms, Governor Macquarie and the bushranger Michael Howe.



### **Andrew Bent**

Andrew Bent was born into the overcrowded and crime-ridden parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields, London. He was baptised in the parish church on 24 October 1791.<sup>6</sup> He and his younger brothers were orphaned when Andrew was about fourteen.<sup>7</sup> The parish found apprenticeships for the younger boys as paupers.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, the three brothers would be reunited in Hobart Town in the mid-1820s – all courtesy of His Majesty's convict transportation service.

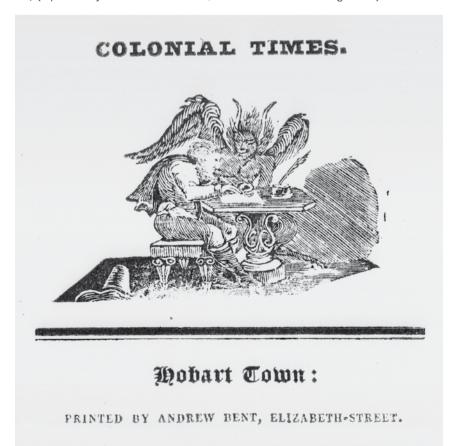
Bent had virtually no formal education and his speech betrayed his lower class cockney origins. Gilbert Robertson claimed that Bent could neither spell nor speak the English language 'except in the *lowest* dialect of Cockneyshire' and mocked him for referring to himself as a 'wictim' of persecution. There are few physical descriptions of Bent although we

know that he was very short and, like his brothers, 'awkwardly made'.'¹ Calder's recollection of Bent as 'lame, little, and ugly' reinforces earlier hints about a limp, a possible club foot, and other 'bodily defects'.¹² James Fenton remembered Bent as 'a small, square-built, ruddy-faced' man and by another source we are left with an impression of the printer 'toddling' along to Government House wearing 'the sign of his profession', a green, baize apron.¹³ The only likely image of Bent shows him as a short, hunchback figure sitting with a pen in hand, in a woodcut printed circa 1829 for the title page of Henry Savery's *The hermit in Van Diemen's Land*.

One explanation for Bent's short stature and skeletal deformities is that he suffered from severe rickets, a childhood disease prevalent in the slums of St Giles. For all of that, one well-known cockney trait was a black and ironic sense of humour. Referring to his own stature, Bent once wrote that a certain writer's style 'is as much like [noted journalist] Cobbett's, as we are to Hercules'.'4

Although no apprenticeship records have been found, Bent was well trained in his craft as a printer in London in the early 1800s. According to Calder, Bent was apprenticed to the *Times* newspaper at a young age

Woodcut of 'Mr Cockatrice', Gamaliel Butler (right) and Andrew Bent (left), printed by Andrew Bent, 1829 (Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office)



Lachlan Macquarie by J. Opie, about 1805 to 1824 (Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)

although Newgate records indicate that, at the time of his conviction in 1810, Bent was 'a boy belonging to Mr. Crowder'. John Crowder was the printer of the *Public Ledger* newspaper. John Pascoe Fawkner also knew of Bent's connection with the *Public Ledger*, describing him as an 'errand boy' there. All three accounts could be true, allowing for various jobs across the 1800s and a transfer of indentures. Printer apprenticeships commonly began at fourteen years of age and were not fully served until reaching 21, although pauper apprenticeships often began at a much younger age.



Bent was twenty years old when tried at the

Old Bailey on 1 November 1810, so he was probably close to completing his apprenticeship.<sup>17</sup> He was caught early one Sunday morning trying to sell stolen clothing, boots and shoes in the taproom of the Sugar Loaf public house, within sight of St Giles' church. Bent and his accomplice Philip Street were charged with breaking and entering the shop-house to which these items were traced. Lord Ellenborough condemned both 'well known characters' to death but both sentences were commuted to transportation for life.<sup>18</sup> Later, with Bent already at sea en route to New South Wales, Street's sentence was further commuted to a full pardon. He walked free from Newgate following a petition by his more respectable connections.<sup>19</sup>

Bent arrived in Sydney on 18 January 1812.<sup>20</sup> Once landed, he and the rest of his shipload of convicts came face-to-face with Governor Macquarie. After asking about their treatment on the voyage, Macquarie made a promise to the convicts: the past would be forgotten; they had their future in their own hands; only by good behaviour could they win indulgence or secure any mitigation of their sentences. Good behaviour meant industry, sobriety and honesty.<sup>21</sup> For Bent, given his background, the promise of a fresh start and the chance to make good was no small gift. And if his future conduct is any guide, Macquarie's promise was heard by at least one receptive ear.

The arrival muster typically concluded with the superintendent of convicts reading out from a list the name of each convict and their allocated destination. Perhaps because of his trade, Bent was one of eighty convicts allocated to the next ship bound for Van Diemen's Land. The *Ruby* sailed



Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey (Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office)

two weeks later, also carrying the new interim commandant of Hobart Town, Major Andrew Geils, a guard of fourteen from the 73rd regiment and substantial provisions. <sup>22</sup> This was all part of Macquarie's package for the immediate needs of the southern colony, then a ramshackle settlement just eight years in the making. One of Macquarie's instructions to Geils was to establish the number and names

of the bushrangers running rampant across the interior of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>23</sup> Fixing this list would be no easy thing, especially with each new batch of convicts potentially adding to their number.

### **Thomas Davey**

Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey must have known that his time was up as he hosted his grand ball at Government House on 10 May 1816. It was no secret that Macquarie wanted to be rid of him. Over a year before, Macquarie had asked for Davey's removal in a despatch to Lord Bathurst, the secretary of state for war and the colonies. He complained about Davey's 'dissipation and profligacy' and referred to reports that he spent 'almost his entire time in drinking'. Macquarie scathingly described Davey as 'idle, indolent, and totally incapable of executing the Public Duties of his Station'. And even as his grand ball was under way, a return despatch from Bathurst to Macquarie was crossing the ocean, advising that Colonel William Sorell was commissioned to replace Davey as Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land. Execution 10 May 1816. It

Davey arrived in Van Diemen's Land in February 1813. Davey's vessel had left England in company with the *Indefatigable* which had Michael Howe among its involuntary passengers. While Davey sailed directly for Sydney, where he was given extensive briefings by Macquarie, the *Indefatigable* ended her voyage at Hobart Town in October 1812. Howe's name was added to Macquarie's list of bushrangers, as he quickly became the most notorious among them. Howe magnified his power and influence by assuming for himself the title 'Governor of the Woods', relegating Davey's jurisdiction to 'Governor of the Town'. The problem of Michael Howe and his gang was one cause of the rift between Macquarie and Davey. Although Davey issued

a proclamation shortly after taking up his post, the bushranger problem went from bad to worse. On 14 May 1814, Macquarie issued a proclamation of his own, naming 29 bushrangers, Howe included. They were each offered a full pardon for all crimes short of wilful murder, provided that they surrendered to the government on or before 1 December 1814.<sup>26</sup>

Howe read Macquarie's proclamation with all the care and attention of a bush lawyer. He reached the conclusion that the bushrangers could rampage with impunity for the next seven months before applying, on the due date, to be pardoned for all crimes. With Macquarie micro-managing things from afar, the bushrangers made a mockery of Davey's government in Hobart Town and there was little Davey could do. There were no criminal courts, nor even civil courts for claims of any significance. Court action had to be heard in Sydney. Few settlers, let alone witnesses, could spare the time and expense to go to Sydney for a court case. Things came to a head when Charles Carlisle and another man died in a bushranger raid on 24 April 1815. The next day, Davey declared martial law.<sup>27</sup> This meant the bushrangers could be tried and capitally punished by a local military tribunal. Davey took this radical step without reference to Macquarie, who was furious. Davey must have known that he would be held accountable in London for his actions.<sup>28</sup>

It was in this context that, in September 1815, the earliest known pamphlet printed by Andrew Bent was struck off - an address by the settlers in support of Davey's declaration of martial law.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps it was during this time that Davey dismissed the government printer, George Clarke, and appointed Bent in his place. According to Fawkner, Bent had for some time assisted Clarke at the government press as his assigned convict servant. Fawkner described Clarke as 'given to drunkenness', an impression not dispelled by frequent printing errors.<sup>30</sup> Clarke was quite capable of misdating a government order as 1831 instead of 1813 and even misspelling his own name in type.<sup>31</sup> As both a sober man and a better printer, Bent could be relied upon by Davey to produce quality work at short notice. By late 1815, his printing skills had become valuable as Davey began bypassing Macquarie and sending despatches directly to London. Their cleanly printed enclosures helped to create a polished impression on the far side of the world. In his new capacity as government printer, Bent was soon required to print a proclamation ending martial law, as Macquarie instructed Davey to do. Bent did well for himself during Davey's time and later described Davey as 'a very old and gallant officer' who, though 'an eccentric character, was nevertheless always remarkably cheerful, [and] universally beloved by the Colonists'.32

### **Charles Jeffreys**

Lieutenant Charles Jeffreys, our third character, had an even worse relationship with Macquarie. He, too, must have known that his time was up by the night of the governor's ball in May 1816. Macquarie had already advised Bathurst of his intention to send both Jeffreys and the *Kangaroo* back to England and was biding his time pending any contrary response.<sup>33</sup> The *Kangaroo*'s protracted and expensive voyage to Ceylon, although undertaken at Macquarie's behest, had fuelled the governor's rage. This voyage began badly as, soon after the *Kangaroo* set sail through the Sydney Heads, an incredulous Macquarie learned that Jeffreys had taken his wife Jane on board to sail with him, in flagrant disobedience of Macquarie's written order that she was not to go.<sup>34</sup>

Even before this incident, Macquarie was constantly frustrated by the tendency of Jeffreys and the *Kangaroo* to go missing for long periods of time. For instance, in 1814 the *Kangaroo* set out on a routine trip from Sydney to Hobart Town with a batch of convicts but, more than two months later, the brig returned to Sydney not actually having reached Hobart Town. She did, though, spend some weeks at Port Stephens to the north.<sup>35</sup> Jeffreys' delays and strange movements were often explained by storms and unfavourable winds or by his wife's curiosity to explore remote coves and shores. This was the very thing which provoked Macquarie's order that Jane was not to go to Ceylon. Such movements, though, would more readily be explained by Jeffreys' smuggling operations. And so, as Macquarie concluded to Bathurst, the *Kangaroo* as a vessel and Lieutenant Jeffreys – 'a vain, conceited, ignorant young man ... totally unfitted for such a command' – were both incapable of rendering any useful service at all to the Colony.<sup>36</sup>

#### 1816: fermentation

With our three yeast elements now introduced, and something of the external pressures brought to bear upon the mix by Howe and Macquarie, we turn to 1816. While the year began with news of Napoleon's defeat, it ended with Davey embracing a kind of Waterloo of his own. News of the Duke of Wellington's victory over Napoleon only reached Hobart Town six months after the event. On the evening of 16 January 1816, the town was illuminated by lamps and lit up by fireworks in celebration.<sup>37</sup> For the British empire:

The battle of Waterloo was ... a decisive culmination of a period in British history, but also a hinge point in it: a short, sharp break between the distant worlds of the eighteenth century and the modern, scientific, technological age, as contemporaries saw it, of the nineteenth. A single day's battle ... had changed Britain irrevocably.<sup>38</sup>

By the start of 1816, the demobilisation of the British military had long been under way. With soldiers paid out and jobs scarce, a new crime wave began across Britain, forcing the government to examine the effectiveness of its policies. In early April 1816, the House of Commons debated the Offenders' Transportation Bill, with member Henry Grey Bennett arguing that 'despite the exorbitant financial outlay, transportation had failed to punish, deter or reform'.<sup>39</sup> This sentiment, combined with growing unease that Macquarie was too lenient and extravagant, caused the Colonial Office to adopt a far more interventionist stance towards the colonies. In time, this same sentiment led to a commission of inquiry by John Thomas Bigge.

With these reverberations in mind, we return to the key period – that very wet, cold and snowy two weeks between the arrival of the *Kangaroo* on 28 April 1816 and Bent's first newspaper on 11 May 1816. One gets a sense of Jeffreys, Davey and Bent combining in a kind of huddle. Jeffreys and Davey shared a sense of borrowed time. Both had common cause against Macquarie. They probably had commercial interests in common too. Macquarie strongly suspected Davey of 'having been privy to and sanctioning a great deal of clandestine trade and smuggling of Spirits' – something that Jeffreys was known to do.<sup>40</sup> And their tool, the printer Bent, could work wonders with ink and type.

The story Jeffreys wanted to lock into print concerned a feat of navigation unrivalled, so he claimed, since the time of Captain Cook. On her voyage to Ceylon the *Kangaroo* had threaded a passage through the Great Barrier Reef without sinking. With his return to London in mind, and the need to explain his disobedience of Macquarie's orders, Jeffreys was keen to cultivate the persona of a man of immense nautical talent. Balanced against this larger achievement, Macquarie's long list of complaints might weigh more lightly with Bathurst.

Jeffreys initially tried to publish his story in the *Sydney Gazette* but, just hours before publication and with the type already set, the colonial secretary ordered the printer, George Howe, to withdraw it.<sup>41</sup> The story's appearance, unsigned and in a paper 'published by authority', might imply official commendation of Jeffreys, at the same time as Macquarie was sending a rather different message to London. For Jeffreys all was not lost. He knew of another printing press some 630 nautical miles to the south, under the authority of his friend Davey. When he last visited in 1814, the *Van Diemen's Land Gazette* – Hobart Town's second newspaper – was being

printed by George Clarke. Jeffreys knew that conditions were primitive at the Derwent and the only small printing press was that brought out by David Collins in 1804. Besides taking the proof copy of his unpublished article, Jeffreys seems to have armed himself with a supply of old type from the *Sydney Gazette* office. By the time the *Kangaroo* arrived in Hobart Town in April 1816, Clarke's short-lived *Van Diemen's Land Gazette* had been defunct for eighteen months. It is possible that Jeffreys' arrival and desperate need to publish his story was the impetus for the start of Bent's *Hobart Town Gazette*. Alternatively, Bent already might have gained Davey's approval to start another newspaper, with Jeffreys' arrival just an opportune moment for launching his project. Either way, Bent claimed that the *Gazette* was his initiative, conducted at his own risk and expense. Dr Luttrell, who had called upon the 'very unwell' Knopwood on 16 April 1816, supported Bent's claim by stating that the:

Lieutenant Governor, Colonel Davey, was pleased to permit the words, "Published by Authority," to be printed on the front of the ... "Hobart Town Gazette," because and only because His Honor considered they might so tend to increase the sale of the same, as to remunerate and recompense ... Mr. Andrew Bent, for his patriotism, trouble, and expense, indicated and incurred by him, in instituting, compiling, printing, and publishing the same, at his sole cost, and by his own direction.<sup>42</sup>

On 11 May 1816, the lead story of the first Gazette began as follows:

We are happy to lay before our Readers the following very interesting Journal of Lieut. JEFFRIES, of H. M. armed brig KANGAROO, on her Voyage from Port Jackson to Ceylon; which is highly creditable and meritorious to the nautical abilities of Lieut. Jeffries.<sup>43</sup>

Several features of this first number are worth noting. It was printed on a single sheet of laid paper rather than on the china paper used by the *Gazette* from June 1816. This suggests that only a few copies of the May issue were struck off and that it was not a regular issue. The masthead has an official look and is virtually identical with subsequent issues. It includes the royal arms, the words 'published by authority' and a notice that 'all Public Communications ... signed with any Official Signature, are to be considered as Official Communications'. Yet no government notices appeared in the May issue. Nor were there any advertisements, although the printer explained that several were omitted from want of type and would appear in an extra *Gazette* the next Monday. No copies of this extra

Gazette are known. And the only apparent explanation for the extraordinary numbering - 'Volume the Third ... number 158' - is that this was intended to create the impression that Jeffreys' story was accepted and published by a well-established official newspaper.

In the Mitchell Library copy of the May Gazette the title word 'Town' is awkwardly placed above the royal arms, suggesting that it might have been overprinted some time later. It was at about this time that Macquarie directed the full form 'Hobart Town' should always be used rather than 'Hobart'. Occurrences of the word 'Hobart' elsewhere in the issue were not changed. The English newspapers which reprinted Jeffreys' article all cited the 'Hobart Gazette', so any copies taken away by Jeffreys remained unaltered. Both sides of the paper are printed. The Kangaroo article takes up over three of the paper's four columns and the remainder of the second page has shipping and general news. Reports of the two recent lavish balls and a brief note on the forward state of the new gaol were probably designed to portray Hobart Town as a well-established, respectable and thriving settlement. Reinforcing our fermentation theme, a further short paragraph praised the local climate, noting its suitability for the cultivation of hops and the potential for using Van Diemen's Land barley for brewing beer. This prompted a reader signing himself 'Pro Bono Publico' to send in a lengthy contribution on the cultivation of hops which Bent printed in five instalments beginning with the Gazette for 22 June.

Hobart Town Gazette, 11 May 1816 (Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



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and Bengal, be-

The first official issue of Bent's newspaper was published on Saturday, 1 June 1816. The masthead describes this as 'Volume the First ... number 1'. This issue was printed on one side only of a sheet of china paper. There was much less content, with the type spread out more thinly across the page than for the May *Gazette*. The June issue included one government notice, one advertisement, some shipping news and a brief court report. A curious anecdote about Frederick of Prussia, obviously copied from some other publication, was used to fill up space. The social news had been exhausted in the May issue and things had quietened down with the departure of the *Kangaroo* to Sydney.

It was no easy task to combine ink and paper. Bent's set of type was especially short of the lower-case letter 'a' – offering a weekly challenge to say the same thing in different words omitting that letter. Sometimes towards the end of a page of print, capital 'A' type would substitute for the lack of any lower case 'a'. Paper was costly and of poor quality. Bent annotated his own copy of the 1 June *Gazette* at the top: 'This chit china paper cost 2 [guineas] per ream!!!'44 Further, there was little news 'where the only intelligence bore reference to crime' and Bent's entire readership could be found in some thirty or forty dwellings.<sup>45</sup> Writing in the 1840s, Bent reflected upon his early struggles to establish the *Gazette*:

Few, except himself, can comprehend even a tithe of the difficulties which thirty years ago he had to grapple with in commencing his diminitive [sic] Journal ... His press was very small in size, and his type was so limited in quantity that he could not compose, at once, more than is contained in two or three of these [very small] pages! With the same type, after distributing it, he had to set up the other side of his novel little paper. And for the major part of these printing materials, Mr. Bent was indebted to the kindness of Lieut. JEFFREYS, R. N., then Commander of His Majesty's armed brig *Kangaroo*; from whose nephew, who amused himself in printing on board, Mr. Bent, purchased the same, on his own account.

Speaking of his early discouragements sourcing ink and paper, Bent continued:

There was then no printing ink in the Colony but what he was necessitated to manufacture in the best possible manner for

Opposite: Hobart Town Gazette, 1 June 1816, with handwritten annotations and signature by Andrew Bent (National Library of Australia)

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# THE HOBART TOWN

GAZETTE, and

SOUTHERN REPORTER: PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY.

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SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 1816.

INUMBER 44

HOROR the LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR has thought proper to direct, that all Public Communications which may appear in the BART TOWN GAZETIE, and SOUTHERN REPORTER, figned with any Official Signature, are to be confidered as Official Communications made to thole Perions to whom they may relate.

By Command of His Honor.

THOMAS ALLEN LASCELLES, Secretary.

### Government & General Orders.

- TORC 3000 --

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, HOBERT TOWN. SATURDAY, 18 JUNE, 1816.

TUESDAY Next, the 4th Inftant, being the Anniverfary of Bis Majasty's BIRTH-DAY, it will be observed as a Holiday mughout the Settlement.

The Troops will parade at Twelve o'Clock in front of Governmt House, and fire a Feiu de Joie : after whie : a Salute of Twento Oue Guns will be fired from the Platform, in Honor of the Day.

The Deputy Affiliant Commissary General will cause to be illued b each of the Non-commissioned and private Soldiers, One Pound af Freh Meat, and Halfa Pint of Spirits, to drink His Mejefty's

The Deputy Affistant Commissary General will, also, cause to be iffued to the leveral Superintendants, Overleers, Conlable, and other Perf as in the auctual Employ of Government, the Pound of Fresh Mear, and Haif a Pint of spirits each, on the har Occafion.

The Government Mechanics and Labourers will be exempted Work on Tuelday nex .

By Command of I is Honor the Live enant Covernor, THE MAS ALLEN LASCRILES, Secretary,

ONSALE, at W. Januara's, Collins-Ricci, a quantity of the bell Brazil tobacco, at 7. Reiling per pound.

#### HOBART TUNN. - CHE 300 PM

SITIERS MAGISTRATE. A. W. H. HUMPHRAY, Fig.

At a Bench of Magistrates on Saturday last, Benjamin Nokes, a er holding a ticket of leave, was charged with feloniously from John O'Neil, a priloner (who lately came from Syd. in the brig Kargaroe), one pair of nankeen trowlers, knowing be it ien; and, alfo, receiving from David Vye, one ; yard Clah, and two vieces of nankeen; alto, illegally receiving I m O'Neil ( he above-mentioned person), with intent to dethe owners thereof, a remnant of green Cloth, and two & I brown wooden Cloth, the property of Mr. William Maum Steph Lefter, for which the Court found him guilty, and from him to work in the good gang nine kalendar months, to lorleichio picket of leaves

A. Hent

ANECDOTE of FREDERIC the II, the late King of Paussta .-A Lieutenant-colonel in the Pruffian fervice having been diffunded at the end of the feventh year of the last continental war, importuned His Majesty by his daily folicitations to be reinstated. Tired with the incellant clamours of his troublesome vestion, the King forbade his being ever admitted to his prefence. Some weeks elapled, when a most levere libel was published against His M jestv. The Monarch was to nettled at the audacity of the writer, that through a fricit of indignation and reverge, he caused a reward of fifty gold Frederics to be proclaimed, for any one who floor t difcover and apprehend the author. The next day after the publication of fo tempring a reward, the same Lieutenant colonel obtained an audience under pretence that he had a fecter of the utmost importance to reveal. Being admitted into the King's prefence, Sire," faid he, "Your M j ft., on a fresh occurence, his promised fifty Frederics; I am come to claim the recompence; benotum me the author of the libel; my life 1 Treely tortest; but temember your royal promile, and whill you punth the gusty, transmit to my poor wite and her definable charinen, the reward que to the informer."

The King, who stready knew the real au tofad extremity to which the brave officer had been reduced. No matter, he acknowledged himself guilty; "Go you inflantly to the formels of Spendau, and there a wait a fentence proportioned to my just referement." " I obey, replied the culpru, " but the lift; rederies." " Within two hours your wife thall receive them. Take this letter, give it to the commanding officer. He is not to open it till after dinner."

The Lieutenant-colonel arrived at Spendau, conflicutes himfelf a prisoner there; but how j stully disappointed in his fed expectation ons, when the Governor epening the letter at the moment preferi bed, he read aloun me moving v

" To the bearer I give the command of Spendau, his wife and children, with the fifty Frederics; I will be with him in a few dars, The former Governor is to take the command of Berlin, to which I promote him as a reward for his patt fervices."

"FREDERIC." (Signed)

SHIP NEWS.

To-morrow is expedied to fail the thip Frederick, Capt. With-MAMS, for Port Jackson.

Replica in the hillmar, the fill to have a sen and a sen and a sen a sen

himself, and at an enormous expense; and for common China chit paper, no more than half the size of foolscap, and of which he had to paste two sheets together for each copy of his publication, he had to give *two guineas* per ream; and when this description of paper could not be procured, *blue* and other coloured paper had of necessity to be used. All these impediments and discouragements were, however, at last triumphantly surmounted.<sup>46</sup>

Bent worked to his own recipe for making ink, probably by substituting whale oil for the usual vegetable oil. He later exported ink to Sydney, claiming that his own men preferred it to supplies from England. James Ross praised the quality of Bent's ink but, as a rival newspaperman, he could not help remarking that it was one thing to make good ink but quite another to put it to a good use.<sup>47</sup> That jibe aside, the benefits of turning hops into beer was one of the recurring themes of the early *Gazettes*. On this point, Bent differed from the spirit importers, Jeffreys and Davey. As the *Gazette* asked rhetorically: 'How much more delicious ... would be the cheering and spank!ing [sic] cup of Ale to the draught of Grog? What sums of money would be left in the colony?'<sup>48</sup> The *Gazette* of 29 June 1816 further promoted signs of colonial progress:

Nothing can show more, the fertility of Van Diemen's Land, than the exuberance of our last Harvest, already 25,000 Bushels of Wheat have been exported to Port Jackson ... from this earnest of industry and seniority in so young a Colony, and with so small a population, the mind is led to contemplate, on its prosperity and happiness at a remote period.<sup>49</sup>

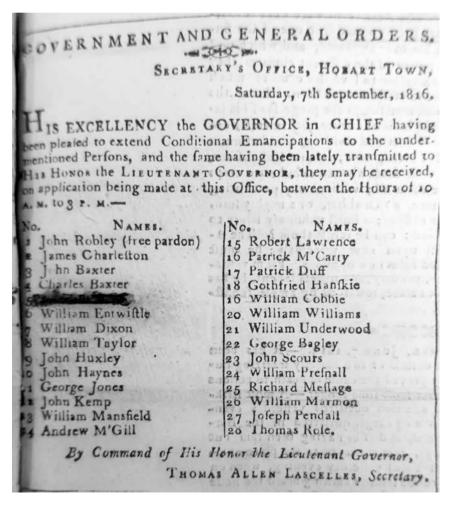
The *Gazette* of 21 September 1816 noted the arrival of the whaler *Adamante* with free settlers and supplies of merchandise for sale – the start of many such accounts to come, as word spread that Hobart was now an open port. The usefulness of Bent's *Gazette* to new arrivals was noted by James Ross:

It contained ... a very full and circumstantial account of the goods for sale in the town, and the various articles that had arrived from England or elsewhere, and afforded me considerable assistance. It detailed the measures of government, the appointments of public officers, general notices and regulations, agricultural meetings, and indeed almost everything which a settler required or wished to know.<sup>50</sup>

More generally, Heaton noted that 'the *Gazette*, though small in size and circulation, strove to exert a powerful influence for material and moral progress' in Van Diemen's Land'.<sup>51</sup>

Three months after starting his newspaper, Bent must have felt much satisfaction when setting the type for the *Gazette* of 7 September 1816. A government order advised that pardons received from Sydney could be collected from the secretary's office. As one of 28 men listed, Bent was at last granted his conditional pardon.<sup>52</sup> Over time and with his subsequent wealth and elevation in society, the satisfaction of receiving his pardon must have been diminished by the shame of any public record of prior convict status. In Bent's own copy of this newspaper his name is rubbed out to the point of causing a tear in the page.

Hobart Town Gazette, 7 September 1816, list of pardons from Andrew Bent's copy with his own name rubbed out (National Library of Australia)



On 19 September 1816, just twelve days after collecting his freedom, Andrew Bent married Mary Kirk, a nineteen-year-old convict from Dublin. It is a fair guess that Andrew offered more by way of his position and prospects than by his looks. John West offers a vivid account of the 'pairing off' which so quickly occurred after landing:

During Davey's government, two hundred female prisoners were brought down from Sydney, in the brig *Kangaroo*: proclamation was made, and the settlers were invited to receive them. There was little delicacy of choice: they landed, and vanished; and some carried into the bush, changed their destination before they reached their homes. Yet such is the power of social affections, that several of these unions yielded all the ordinary consolations of domestic life!<sup>53</sup>

The timing of Bent's marriage suggests some hurry to get married, especially by choosing to pay for a marriage licence rather than waiting out the three-week period attached to banns. In Knopwood's register Bent is recorded as 'Free' and the space for naming his convict transport is left blank. Fortified by Macquarie's promise and his delivery on that promise, Bent must have taken comfort that he could now put his convict past behind.

Some months later, while scanning the London papers, Bent presumably saw some London news evoking the precarious line between opportunity and death. Philip Street, Bent's fellow burglar back in 1810, was caught again. This time his connections could not save him. On 14 June 1816, Street was hanged at Newgate before a large crowd.<sup>54</sup> Handbills of his last speech and dying behaviour – printed in advance of course – were sold to the crowd.<sup>55</sup> Fortune's wheel had taken a turn.

On Christmas Day 1816, bushrangers plundered Davey's farm at Coal River. By year's end, having at last received Bathurst's invitation to resign his post, Davey sent a despatch to his nemesis, Macquarie, referring to this 'pleasing intelligence'.56 Just before, Davey had received a letter signed in blood from the bushrangers threatening to set the whole island on fire, among other things.57 From now, though, Howe and the other bushrangers would be someone else's problem.

### Postlude to 1816: news spreads of Hobart Town

When Colonel William Sorell arrived in April 1817 to take over from Davey, he found the colony little better than 'a wilderness, with here and there a little knot of settlers'.58 Macquarie portrayed the colony as in a 'Most

Wretched State of Disorganisation, Anarchy and Confusion'.<sup>59</sup> Among Sorell's early impressions, he found Bent already established at his press 'with a little type, some of his own, some remains of former government supplies'.60 Sorell later said that he found Bent always to be very humble.

While Sorell's main challenge was finding a strategic response to Michael Howe and the other bushrangers, a more immediate problem presented itself. A flag was raised on Mount Nelson giving warning that a brig was entering the Derwent. The Kangaroo sailed into view. Macquarie had finally despatched her to England with express written orders that Jeffreys, under no circumstances whatsoever, was to stop at Hobart Town.<sup>61</sup> Jeffreys claimed he diverted to the Derwent because he had 'lost a Boat and suffered some slight damage in a Gale of Wind'. 62 He was less transparent about the two thousand gallons of rum he had to unload. He was also carrying a prominent Sydney merchant fleeing from his creditors, not to mention some other runaway convicts from Sydney.<sup>63</sup>

Sorell found Jeffreys' conduct to be 'entirely subversive of all law, order and authority'.64 He sent orders for him to leave immediately. But Jeffreys just took his boat further down the estuary and anchored again. When Sorell sent down a boarding party Jeffreys again defied authority

Handbill: 'The Execution and Dying Behaviour of Philip Street, for House-breaking', 1816 (private collection of S. Bloomfield)

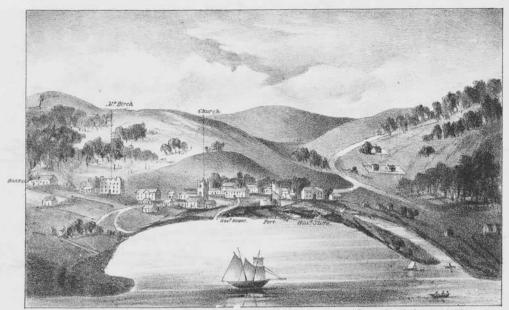
Esq commonly called the Earl of Rose-

berry: about nine o'clock in the night of the 5th Feb. and stealing therein 2 coats,



company, constantly treading the path of

guilt, and the committing of one had crime



HOBART TOWN IN 1817.

Drawn by Lieut CH! JEFFREYS, R.N.

Hobart Town in 1817 with the government schooner, *Kangaroo*, by Lieutenant Jeffreys (*Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales*)

by, 'with his Sword drawn, cutting on the head, beating and abusing the Commander of the Boat, dragging him a Prisoner with his boat's crew on board the *Kangaroo* ...[and] placing him in double Irons on the Deck'. <sup>65</sup> After discharging his illegal cargo and taking on board bundles of the *Hobart Town Gazette* up to the latest issue – amongst other things both known and unknown – the *Kangaroo* finally sailed for England.

The return of the *Kangaroo* to England is an important link in the chain of communications, as Jeffreys conveyed copies of the *Hobart Town Gazette* to various British newspapers. The *Public Ledger* (Bent's old paper), the *Morning Advertiser* and the *Caledonian Mercury* were among those that copied news extracts from Hobart Town.<sup>66</sup> Jeffreys' return to London was also preceded by publicity about his nautical prowess. He had sent an advance copy of the May *Gazette* to his father who arranged for it to be published in the *Hampshire Chronicle*. Jeffreys' account of his Ceylon voyage was copied from Bent's newspaper, with the addition of the following unsourced comments:

The Governor of Van Diemen's Land regarded the discovery as of the utmost importance to the nautical world, and passes the

warmest enconiums on the meritorious perseverance displayed by Lieut. Jeffries throughout the arduous undertaking. He also *directed* the journal to be inserted in the *Hobart Gazette*, for the information of the commercial world [emphasis added].<sup>67</sup>

The *Hampshire Chronicle* also quoted the May *Gazette*'s comments on the fine climate of Van Diemen's Land, the prospects for a good harvest and the potential for brewing. This impression was conveyed to the British public even as Sorell was finding his new post to be little better than a wilderness.

After Jeffreys' return to London, his story was also published in the radical London newspaper, the *Statesman*, and its Sunday stablemate, the *Constitution*. The *Statesman* included a letter from an unknown author, 'Audentia' – probably Jeffreys himself – describing the suppression of the *Sydney Gazette* article and castigating the New South Wales authorities for their actions. The *Statesman* also made the false claim that Jeffreys' journal extract was published in the *Hobart Gazette* accompanied by 'engraved charts and drawings'. When finally taken to task in London about disobeying Macquarie's orders, Jeffreys escaped punishment. We cannot be sure how much the May *Gazette* account assisted him. But with the decision taken in April 1817 to pursue the Bigge commission, the politics of the time meant that Macquarie's critics were gaining influence in London. Jeffreys only added to their number.

One curious filler published much later by Bent concerned the origins of the word 'news':

'News' is not, as many imagine, derived from the adjective *New*. In former times it was a prevalent practice to put over the periodical publications of the day the initial letters of the cardinal points of the compass, thus:—

N E W S

importing that these papers contained intelligence from the four quarters of the globe, and from this practice is derived the term newspaper. $^{70}$ 

In this way, Bent's *Gazette* helped to put Hobart Town on the map as his press became the hub of a network, itself tapped into the much larger

network of his former London connections and the dispersed fraternity of printers. Bent's press drew in news from all directions and, through his exertions with hand-made ink, thin china paper and patchy type, he sent news forth in packaged form both locally and abroad. Even the bushrangers of the interior boasted of their connectedness. Howe claimed he could read about himself, and the governor's response, within five hours of the ink drying on any printing of the *Gazette*.<sup>71</sup>

Bent's network linked the bushrangers of the remote island interior with the lives and imaginations of the more literate classes in faraway Britain. One of Bent's most significant early achievements was the publication of the first work of general literature in Australia, a little book titled, Michael Howe: The last and the worst of the bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land. Published in March 1819, this work was soon noticed in England. In May 1820, the Quarterly Review described it as 'the greatest literary curiosity that has yet come before us – the first child of the press of a state only fifteen years old!'<sup>72</sup> The reviewer correctly predicted that this modest little edition would become a great rarity and an esteemed prize for collectors. The review also included a favourable description of Van Diemen's Land and its prospects, noting that the colony 'is not, as has been supposed, the Botany Bay of Botany Bay'.73 Of the four known surviving copies of Michael Howe, two reached England soon after publication. In 1821, Bigge's secretary, Thomas Hobbes Scott, presented a copy to the Bodleian Library in Oxford. In the same year, Macquarie sent a copy to Sir Walter Scott as a gift. Scott had asked for a copy, perhaps after reading the book review in the journal he helped to establish.74

By 1818, with his first child Elizabeth newly born, Bent was becoming an established inhabitant of Hobart Town. The allocation of pews at St David's Church offers some insight into the pecking order. Members of the congregation were assigned a place according to their rank and property by the governor, the chaplain and the deputy judge advocate. Jeffreys, by now returned from England, was included in the first pew with his friend Edward Lord. Davey, still in the colony as a private settler, was also at the front in pew two. Bent was in pew eleven of thirteen, beside the superintendent of convicts and ahead of the general body of troops and servants. By his sobriety and industry over subsequent years, and riding the wave of growth and development as free immigrants poured in beside convict transports, Bent accumulated more wealth and standing.

Bent's kind of success was double-edged. There were competing interpretations about whether his sort of achievement was good or bad. For Macquarie, Bent was an exemplar of the kind of rehabilitation which

# MICHAEL HOWE,

THE LAST AND WORST OF

The Bush Rangers

OF

VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.

NARRATIVE OF THE
CHIEF ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY THIS

Great Murderer

AND HIS ASSOCIATES,

IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.

FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES OF INFORMATION

HOBART TOWN:

PRINTED BY ANDREW BENT

Title page of Michael Howe: the last and worst of the bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land, 1819, printed by Andrew Bent (National Library of Australia)

would create a prosperous society – transforming criminals into useful and productive members of society. The contrary view, with the Bigge commission vindicating Bennett's earlier arguments, was that as a system of punishment and deterrence convict transportation was failing dismally.<sup>76</sup> For the criminal classes in Britain, Bent's example recast the prospect of transportation into a sweet temptation.

Macquarie's promise of freedom involved drawing a hard line between convict and freeman status. He promised that once convicts were made free, the past would be forgotten. In Van Diemen's Land, Macquarie's promise would be undone by Sorell's successor, Lieutenant-Governor Arthur. Under Arthur, Bent was no longer entitled to the full status of a free man. As an emancipist, he could be treated as something less and he would no longer be allowed to forget his convict past. Within days of taking up his post in 1824, Arthur referred to the government printer's convict origins, noting that 'Mr. Bent seems to forget the situation of life in which he came to this Colony'.<sup>77</sup>

And so, from the fermenting brew of 1816, and with the unfolding shift and contradictions in British government policy between punishment and prosperity, two trajectories were set in motion on a collision course. This culminated in Bent's battle for the freedom of the press in Van Diemen's Land in 1824–25. This later period represents another Bent story. Suffice to say that, through an imbalanced power struggle, Bent suffered severe persecution by Arthur.

### Conclusion: living legacies

The year 1816 was a major turning point in the life of Andrew Bent. He was granted freedom, became married, and – with the backing of Davey and Jeffreys – gave birth to the first permanent newspaper in the colony. Bent would later refer to this time as the point at which '[I began] raising my head in the world'.<sup>78</sup> In 1825, his achievement was recounted in the overblown language of the then *Gazette* editor, Evan Henry Thomas:

undaunted by the hazard of a total loss, we cast our typographic "seed on the water," with hopes of "seeing it after many days." We contrived to send forth our boat of enterprize on the untried ocean of colonial vicissitude; and thanks to the oars kindly furnished by Colonel Davey, who was then Lieutenant Governor, as well as to the originally small, but progressively increasing breeze of public encouragement, we have hitherto in triumph stemmed the waves – our cable secure, and our anchor uninjured.<sup>79</sup>

Writing in 1828, Robert Lathrop Murray said that few men exceeded Bent in industry and it was 'to his zealous attention to his business – to his anxiety to produce a Newspaper somewhat worthy of the appellation – we are indebted for the Press of Tasmania as it now exists'. Nuch later, Calder gave an assessment of Bent's skill as a printer, noting that 'many of the publications that [Bent] brought out ... in this town, were, as far as the printers' art is concerned, superior to anything that is produced at this day [1881] in any of the Australian colonies'.

For Hobart Town, if 1816 ended under Davey in a 'Most Wretched State of Disorganization, Anarchy and Confusion', as Macquarie wrote, then this year also carried the yeast factors for transformation. One catalyst, the birth of a viable newspaper, supplied an avenue for progress. As West noted, Bent 'brought into permanent action an agency which has promoted as well as recorded the advancement of the community'. <sup>82</sup> The power and reach of publicity also meant that words and imagery depicting Hobart Town and the colony at large worked their way into the thoughts, imaginations and discourse of people in faraway Britain. Perhaps too optimistically seeking to dispel the threat, Michael Howe was portrayed as the 'last and the worst of the bushrangers'. From a low base, trade, immigration and convict labour started to flow – and increasingly so – as the colony was taken in hand by Sorell.

Andrew Bent left two remaining legacies. First, there is a connecting thread from the newspaper he initiated to today's Hobart *Mercury*. The *Hobart Town Gazette* ran from 1816 until 1825, when Bent changed its title to the *Colonial Times*. In 1857, the *Colonial Times* was absorbed by the *Hobart Town Mercury*, which announced with obvious pride that, from that day forward, it would incorporate 'the oldest journal in the Colony'. <sup>83</sup> The second legacy is the many descendants of Andrew and Mary Bent. Their eleven surviving children left a large number of descendants, including the present authors.

As early as November 1816, Bent had sufficient vision to link his efforts with future generations. Newly pardoned and just married, he spoke of the aspirations he shared with others to 'have the satisfaction when called to pay the debt of nature of leaving [our] children in a state of independence'. Bent paid the debt of nature in 1851, aged sixty – right on the verge of convict transportation ending, colonial democracies being proclaimed and gold-rush contagion spreading. West expressed regret that Bent, 'an undoubted benefactor of the colony, [was] left to an indigent old age, cut off from the prosperity to which his early labours contributed'. Bent paid the prosperity to which his early labours contributed'.

It must have seemed implausible that an ugly, deformed and very little cockney convict – a 'wictim' of circumstances, born into the rookery of St Giles and crushed by years of poverty, servitude and persecution – would have much to say to the people of Hobart two hundred years later. But William Hazlitt gave voice to the cockney never-say-die attitude and democratic spirit as follows: 'Let him be as low as he will, he fancies he will be as good as anybody else'. There is little doubt Andrew Bent fancied that on history's page, he – just as much as anybody else – could make his mark.

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#### **ENDNOTES**

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- 7 Most likely burial for the mother is Elizabeth Bent of Stewart's Rents, off Drury Lane, buried at St. Giles in the Fields on 10 February 1805: LMA, burials, July 1788–March 1815, X105/024– P82/GIS/A/04/007; brother Benjamin's admission records to the Philanthropic Institution in January 1808 describe him as an orphan of the parish of St. Giles: Surrey History Centre, 2271/10/2–3LM.
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