

SOME NOTES ON THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CAPTAIN JAMES KELLY

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Perhaps one of the most interesting and active, though sometimes elusive, characters that could be chosen from the early inhabitants of Tasmania was, I think, James Kelly, as far as I can discover the first Australian born white boy to become a master mariner.

According to the inscription on the Kelly family tomb, which still stands in St David's Park, Hobart near the Salamanca Place entrance, James Kelly was born at Parramatta on 24 December, 1791. At the time of his birth Parramatta was the largest settlement in the newly established Colony of New South Wales. This fact came somewhat of a surprise to me during my research, but official figures show that even as late as October 1792, nearly five years from the time of the arrival of the first fleet, Parramatta had 1970 inhabitants while those at Sydney numbered 1170 only.

From Watkins Tench's account of the Colony it seems that Governor Phillip made many excursions in search of land more fertile than that at Sydney Cove. At last in April 1788 he found a spot some 18 miles from Sydney on the northern arm of Port Jackson, just above the head of navigation, which he, having a very fair knowledge of farming, considered a favourable area for agriculture. Instructions were issued, and so, on 2 November 1788, was planted the first settlement out of Sydney. It was named Rose Hill after George Rose, a Secretary to the British Treasury. Astride a small creek which still flows into the estuary at the northern arm, the township began to take shape; but Phillip learning that the aborigines had another name for the locality decided to adopt that given by them in preference to Rose Hill—'thereby' as Dr Lang wrote in his history of New South Wales, 'exhibiting a degree of common sense, combined with correctness of taste which has been but seldom evinced by certain of his more ambitious successors'—and so at the celebration of King's Birthday on 4 June following this decision, Parramatta became the township's official name. At first it was a straggling village of one street about a mile long, on the borders of which were erected mud huts, tents and storehouses in allotments soon to be occupied by many convicts, for Phillip had conceived the idea of placing the industrious ones on the land with a promise that if they behaved well free grants would be made to them. And Tench wrote, 'Sydney has long been considered as only a depot for stores. It exhibits nothing but a few old scattered huts and some sterile gardens, cultivation of the ground is abandoned and all our strength transferred to Rose Hill (i.e. Parramatta).

The meaning of the aboriginal word 'Parramatta' has been accepted as 'the place where the eels sit down' and at the time of settlement and for many years afterwards the nearby estuary was famous for the number of eels caught from its muddy waters. It is not hard to imagine that as young Kelly grew he too would become interested, like many another boy, in fishing for eels. Then no doubt his interest would transfer to the small boats which began to appear, and soon he would seek

an opportunity to board the slightly larger craft which were used to transport stores from Sydney to Parramatta.

We have been unable to gather really authentic information about his parents. J. E. Calder, one time Surveyor-General of Tasmania, who knew James Kelly personally, stated that they were of humble origin. Other statements repeat that his father was an army officer and his mother a Devereaux and a member of a family descended from French nobility. Much searching has not gained the evidence desired to support either theory, nor to prove that the date of his birth as inscribed on the tombstone is the correct one. However, it is not of his parents but of James Kelly that I am to speak.

There seems little doubt that he was a quick-witted child with, as Calder stated, a head full of brains. Very early in life, again according to Calder, he began to teach himself to read and write, and was soon learning something of the mysteries of arithmetic. Activities later in life go to prove that he was no dunce. One statement says that his mother always wrote to him in French, but unless one of these epistles can be discovered or other evidence produced, perhaps it would be wiser to leave the question an open one. Dumont D'Urville, the French explorer, in his *Voyages Around the World* does, however, mention with pleasure that he found many people living at Hobart Town who spoke well in the French language, and of course it is possible that James Kelly was one of these, but that came a little later.

The other story about Kelly's early years refers to the fact that he ran away to sea (even boys of our own day still do this or attempt to) but it is probable that he got no further than Sydney in one of the small boats returning there after carrying supplies to Parramatta. From a document still in existence it is found that at about the age of 12 he was, on 27 January 1804, apprenticed to a shipping firm for a term of five years and served under Captain Siddons. From 1807 onwards more definite glimpses of his life may be discovered, for it was in this year, according to statements he made to Commissioner Bigge, he sailed in the ship *King George* under Captain Siddons for the islands of Fiji to collect a cargo of sandalwood.

In the early part of the Nineteenth Century, Sandalwood was much used by the Chinese and the inhabitants of India, to make boxes, fans, and other articles as well as for incense and scents, and a considerable trade eventuated for shipowners in its collection. It is recorded that loss of life in trying to obtain this pleasantly scented wood was as great as the loss of life suffered by those sailing for whale oil, and there is little doubt that much of the Sandalwood trade was of a piratical nature. It may be remembered that John Williams the highly regarded member of the London Missionary Society lost his life largely due to native retaliation against white men who stole this wood from them, or maybe were involved in similar piracies. The people by whom James

Kelly was employed however, were thought to have used legitimate means to obtain their quota, and he stated that they had bartered iron, whales' and elephants' teeth and hardware in exchange for the wood which was brought by the natives to the water's edge. Despite the fact that the inhabitants of Fiji were well-known to be cannibals, young Kelly did venture ashore with other members of the crew and go inland. Because he had this experience he was later able to tell Commissioner Bigge that Sandalwood trees grew no larger than 18 inches in diameter, were not tall and generally flourished in ravines and in water runs protected from the sun. Often it took six months for the vessels to collect the quantity required. If taken to China £100 *per* ton could be obtained for the wood whereas in Sydney it brought from £50 to £70 only. The *Sydney Gazette* of 6 October 1810 records that Mr Reibey disposed of his shipment of Sandalwood at Whampoa for 16½ dollars a Pekul. Crews in these ventures received no more than £4 *per* man *per* month, but more often the pay was nearer £3. From this it will be gathered that with a quick turnround the profit to shipowners or charterers of those days could amount to a considerable sum.

During the year 1809 in the *Governor Bligh* under Captain Grono, who was later to become well-known for his shipbuilding, James Kelly made a long voyage on a sealing expedition. Then in April of 1810 he sailed in the *Marian* to India. Also during 1810 it was that Captain Hasselberg sailing south in the *Perseverance*, discovered Macquarie and Campbell Islands; soon rumours of the number of seals to be found there caused more than one shipowner quietly to fit out an expedition to obtain a share in the profitable industry. Among these was the firm of Kable and Underwood, owners of the *Campbell Macquarie*, a fine vessel of 248 tons. Young Kelly, because he had proved his ability to accept greater responsibilities even though not yet twenty-one years of age, was under Captain Siddons appointed her chief officer. On 23 March 1812 the *Campbell Macquarie* sailed from Sydney for Macquarie Island and had collected only some 200 skins when she was compelled to seek shelter from a severe storm near the island. Caught in a sudden squall on 10 June she was driven ashore and soon went to pieces. Her crew (12 Europeans and 30 Lascars) was able to get ashore and salvaged three suits of her sails but the 2000 skins, 36 tons of salt, 118 tons of coal and most of the stores she carried were lost. Hasselberg two years earlier had found wreckage of an unknown vessel there but the *Campbell Macquarie* has the doubtful honour of being the first vessel known by name to be wrecked on Macquarie Island. About the time of this disastrous affair it so happened that the *Perseverance*, the vessel from which the island had been discovered, was again in these waters. Her commander (not Hasselbergdel, for he had been drowned off Campbell Islands on 4 November 1810), gave all the assistance within his power to the crew of the ill-fated *Campbell Macquarie* but was not able to take more than two or three survivors on board. James Kelly was one of these. The others were compelled to remain until rescued by a special vessel sent down from Sydney. The *Perseverance* meanwhile continued sealing. It was October before the Coast of New South Wales was reached and even then bad weather prevented entry into Port Jackson. They made for Broken Bay and reached that Harbour on the 29th.

Kelly landed as soon as he was able and hurriedly made his way overland to Sydney. It is possible that he was to give first-hand information to the owners of the fate of the *Campbell Macquarie* but it is more probable that he was anxious to report his own safety to his sweetheart, for he was then about to undertake the further responsibility of matrimony. The Banns were published and within three weeks, on 17th November, 1812, to be precise, he was married to Elizabeth Griffiths, a young lass of 17 years. He was almost 21. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. William Cowper at St Philip's Church of England, Sydney, Kelly being described as a bachelor whose occupation was that of mariner; the witnesses who signed the register were Thomas Corbitt (or Cubitt) and Mary Griffiths, the latter apparently the bride's sister.

Having now a wife to support there is little doubt that he gladly accepted an appointment as Master of the *Brothers*, a sealing vessel, and in her as Captain Kelly, with a crew of 10, he left Sydney Cove during the first week of January 1813 to go on a sealing venture in Bass Strait. On the way down they met bad weather, lost the vessel's foregaff and decided to run for King Island. Here they cut a new spar and effected the necessary repairs. They then sailed for Western Port where some 750 seal skins were collected. All the best known rocks or other likely spots for seal rookeries in the area were in turn visited and after having taken and salted some 7090 skins during the four months they were out the *Brothers* reached Sydney again on 31st May. It is practically certain that this was the first trip Kelly had had in Tasmanian waters as a master of a vessel, and the proceeds of the voyage could be considered extremely satisfactory.

Here perhaps I might mention that the first reference to an attempt at sealing in Australasian waters I have been able to discover is in a letter to Secretary Stephens written by Governor Phillip on 18 November 1791, strangely enough within a month of Kelly's birth. In this letter Phillip stated that the *Mary Ann* and the *Matilda* had been driven by bad weather from the south ward where they had gone in search of seals but had not seen any fish. The first worthwhile catch recorded is the one at Dusky Sound, New Zealand. Here a gang of 11 men had been landed by William Raven, master of the *Britannia* and at the end of 12 months had collected 4500 skins. The first really great sealing ground in Australasia was in Bass Strait where the industry was commenced by Captain Bishop of the *Nautilus*. The *Nautilus* you may remember for a time accompanied Bass and Flinders in the *Norfolk* when the Strait was discovered. Bishop with his men landed at Kent Bay on Cape Barren Island, built huts, formed gardens and not only grew the first potatoes in the Territory but were actually the first white men to make a settlement within the limits of what we now know as Tasmania. By 1802 something over 200 men were employed in various sealing gangs on Cape Barren, King and other islands in the Strait and the practical extermination of the seal had begun.

But to return to Captain Kelly. His next venture was more hazardous than that in the *Brothers* and is mentioned because during it he probably made his first visit to Hobart Town. In September 1813, he left Sydney in

command of the *Mary and Sally*, a brig of 130 tons. Records indicate that she belonged to William Collins, first pilot, harbourmaster or port officer at the Derwent, and was being sent by him to Macquarie Island for oil and seal skins. Macquarie Island lies some 850 miles south-east of Tasmania and is subject to severe batterings by sudden storms, during one of which as previously mentioned Kelly had been caught when chief officer of the *Campbell Macquarie*; this time he would have been well prepared, and despite the heavy weather again encountered, the *Mary and Sally* reached the protection of the island after a voyage of 14 days. Men were put ashore with stores for themselves, a good supply of salt, for salt was indispensable for curing skins of fur-bearing seals, coopers' gear and hoops and timber for casks or barrels. Weather conditions were not favourable and Kelly on numerous occasions had to change his anchorage, in one case losing an anchor. On 28 January, he put his people on a reduced ration of one pound of 'bread' (biscuit) *per man per week*. It was 19 February before the return voyage was begun. Three weeks later Hobart Town was reached. It seems that this snug little town, at the foot of the mount we now call Wellington, and its proximity to sealing and whaling areas so appealed to him that he mentally decided to make it the site of his future home. For two years, however, he accepted employment from Dr Birch and in the recently completed *Henrietta Packet* sailed for him between Sydney and Hobart Town and other colonial ports.

The year 1815 saw Kelly building his famous 'Rock House. Some may remember the quaint stone and brick building perched on the rock bank overlooking the Hobart Rivulet near the intersection of Campbell and Collins Streets. The outlet from the one time car park to Campbell Street between the hospital buildings and the rivulet would be near where the building once stood. Before his wife and family, then living at 22 Cumberland Street, The Rocks, Sydney, came to settle permanently in Hobart Town, James Kelly took part in what is his best known exploit, namely the circumnavigation of Tasmania in an open whale boat. There are three known accounts of this venture, one in Kelly's handwriting held by the Royal Society of Tasmania, another in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, not written but believed signed by him, and the third in London with a letter dated 16 April 1816 from T. W. Birch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Before giving some details of this epic voyage perhaps possible reasons for its undertaking might be suggested. It will be remembered that Matthew Flinders and George Bass in 1798 in the *Norfolk* had proved the existence of Bass Strait and sailed completely round Tasmania, but because of bad weather and poor visibility were unable to sail close enough to the south-western portion of the island to obtain very accurate information. That area was still very much 'terra incognita' up to 1815. After settlement at the Derwent various short expeditions only had been made in that direction. On one of these the Rev. Robert Knopwood records that he with others had visited the Huon River and on the way had discovered a new and curious wood. Because it was first found in this locality it came to be known as Huon Pine. Its qualities and value were soon recognized. A little later Surveyor Oxley came upon a

great quantity of the pine piled up on Huon Island and he made the suggestion that it had come down the river during some violent flood; others thought it had come from the West Coast. Despite its usefulness no effort appears to have then been made to discover the locality from which it had come. An enterprising resident of New Norfolk decided to explore the South and West Coasts. *The Sydney Gazette* published the following report:

'On 21st November, 1815 the *Geordy* Mr McCarthy, owner and master, sailed from Hobart Town for the purpose of narrowly examining the South West of the Island of Van Diemen, intending as our correspondent informs us to run through Storm Bay Passage [now known to us as D'Entrecasteaux Channel] past the South Cape and bestow particular attention on the Coast facing the Island of De Witt and thence round Cape St Vincent, inspecting every Bay and Inlet that shall present itself on that part of the Coast'.

By his journal entry for 22 November Knopwood confirmed that McCarthy had actually sailed on the venture. Then on 4 December, he wrote that Mr McCarthy had 'come up in his boat having lost his schooner off the South Cape. A gale came on and she parted both her cables and he ran her on shore'. Questions immediately arise. How far did McCarthy go? Did he find any pine? And had James Kelly gone with him? For eight or 12 days later, according to which log book record is accepted, James Kelly set out on his remarkable voyage of circumnavigation in a whale boat. One cannot help wondering whether McCarthy's attempt had stirred Kelly into action or whether McCarthy had attempted to forestall a projected expedition about to be made by Kelly and/or Birch. There is no newspaper notice until 2 March 1816 when the *Sydney Gazette* commented that 'a very fine harbour has lately been discovered by Mr Kelly in the *Henrietta Packet* . . .' Comments about the voyage appeared in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 15 June and as this paper had only just commenced publication and the information a little late we are dependent on the details written by Kelly himself. From an examination of his journal held by the Royal Society of Tasmania it becomes apparent that it could not have been written during the circumnavigation voyage. It is reasonably neat though at times the colour of the ink varies. Comments about events subsequent to the voyage indicate that it was written some 10 or more years after his return. The *Hobart Town Courier* in 1854 published a series of articles headed 'some unrecorded passages in the history of Tasmania from a very old stager' and these appear to have been copied from the Journal now held by the Royal Society. J. E. Calder, the one time Surveyor-General, considered the articles important and asked for them to be reprinted in Parliamentary Papers. This was done in 1881. Then in 1920 the Council of The Royal Society decided that because of their historical interest the actual records made by Kelly should be published in the Society's own *Papers and Proceedings*, and this was done in December. The copy of the Journal held by the Mitchell Library is somewhat similar to the third account of the voyage enclosed with the letter from Dr Birch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Royal Society's copy of Kelly's Journal begins: On 12th December 1815 James Kelly sailed from Hobart Town in a small sized open five oared whaleboat to examine the then unknown West Coast of Van D. Land accompanied by the following named four men as crew: John Griffiths, a native of the Colony, George Briggs, ditto, William Jones, Englishman, Thomas Toombs, ditto.'

He then goes on to relate that on attempting to land at Recherche Bay next evening they were met by a large body of natives who gave them a volley of stones and spears and in consequence the boat party was obliged to retreat to the other side of the Bay. Next day to the North of De Witt Islands they were again met by a large group of aboriginals but this time given a friendly reception. Presents of sugar and biscuits were given them, but Kelly comments disgustedly on the fact that these people seemed to prefer vermin taken from their heads and beards to eating the biscuits and sugar. Five days later he recorded that he entered a large inlet 'which was named Port Davey in honour of the then Lieutenant Governor'. The word 'then' indicates that the account was written after the retirement of Davey at least. Time was spent preparing two rods of rich ground in which seeds were sown and the locality consequently named Garden Point. Sounding and sketching the extent of the harbour and in collecting a quantity of wild fowl, eels and fish took another three days. The eastern arm of the harbour was named Bathurst in honour of Lord Bathurst, a point on the inner west was named Point Lucy after Lieutenant-Governor Davey's daughter, and so on. On 22 December they hauled up in a snug cove near High Rocky Point and here remained weatherbound for three days. On Christmas Day he wrote:

'This day we had a glorious feed for dinner two black swans, one roasted (stuck up) the other a sea pie a three decker in the large iron pot a first rate Christmas dinner on the West Coast of, Van Diemen's Land—after dinner we named The Cove Christmas Cove by throwing a glass of brandy into the salt water and three hearty cheers for the occasion.'

In his book on Western Tasmania Charles Whitham says: 'This is the most extraordinary thing that has ever occurred on the West Coast. As Kelly was the first so also was he the last to throw away good liquor. The pioneers I have met knew only one way to dispose of it.' At midday on 27 Kelly passed Point Hibbs (so named by Flinders after the master of the sloop *Norfolk*) and the following day under cover of a pall of thick smoke entered the narrows of an inlet. During the afternoon the smoke cleared a little and the explorers found themselves 'in a large sheet of water near a small island.' Next morning the name 'Elizabeth' was given the island in honour of Mrs Gordon, wife of James Gordon of Pittwater, and the harbour called Macquarie in honour of the *then* Governor of New South Wales. (Macquarie's administration, you will recall, ceased in December 1821). On the mainland almost opposite Elizabeth Island a fresh supply of fat black swans was obtained and the four remaining from those they had brought from Port Davey were released. The area was then called Liberty Point. [This name had nothing to do with convicts later in the vicinity as is sometimes sug-

gested.] An island about 25 miles up the harbour was named Sarah in honour of Mrs Birch, the wife of Thomas William Birch, Kelly's employer. This island later became headquarters for the penal station and was for many years generally known as Settlement Island. Modern maps have the original name.

Opposite the southern end of the largest of the Hunter Islands it was decided to land to enable the boat's crew to take a much needed rest and Kelly wrote:

'We had just got a fire lighted when we saw a large body of natives, at least fifty . . . standing at the edge of the bush . . . they were all armed with spears and waddies . . . we brought the arms from the boat and put ourselves in a state of defence near the fire they began to advance slowly towards us we held up our pieces and made signs . . . not to come any closer they held up their spears in return with loud-laughing and jeering at us as if they thought we were afraid of them . . . all of a sudden they laid down their spears and waddies . . . and holding up both their hands . . . at the same time making signs to us to lay down our arms which we did . . . they then began to come to us one by one . . . we kept a good lookout that they had no spears between their toes . . . twenty-two came to the fire (we made signs that no more should come) upon that being understood two more came from the bush together one of them seemed to be a chief a stout good looking man about six feet high 30 years of age the other an old man about six feet seven inches high with scarcely 'a bit of flesh' on his bones. When the chief came he ordered them all to sit down . . . the old man to dance and sing as if to amuse us which he did making ugly faces and putting himself into most singular attitudes. While the old man was engaged in his dancing and singing we found out it was only to take our attention off what the chief and his men were doing he ordered them to gather pebble stones about the size of hens eggs and put them between their legs where they sat for the purpose as we supposed to make an attack on us . . . our men began to get alarmed . . . we planned to give them a few swans . . . Briggs brought two swans from the boat one under each arm. When the chief saw them he rushed at Briggs to take the swans from him but did not succeed he then ordered his men to give us a volley of stones . . . and a severe volley it was. I had a pair of large dueling pistols in my coat pocket loaded . . . and seeing there was no alternative I fired one amongst them which dispersed them the other I fired after them . . . the chief and his men ran into the bush and was quickly out of sight . . . after they had all run away we found the 6 feet 7 inch dancing gentleman laying on his back on the ground we thought of course he was dead but on turning him over to examine his wounds found he had not a blemish on him his pulse was going at 130 . . . We then set him on his feet to see if he could walk he opened his eyes and trembled very much we led him a few steps . . . he stood up straight looked around him and took one jump towards the bush the next leap he was out of sight . . . we measured the first jump the old man took it was exactly 11 yards but the second one must have been more this was more like the jump of a kangaroo than a man.'

As a matter of interest I can add that in **Wild Life** for 1951 it is stated that forty-two feet or fourteen yards had been covered by a forester kangaroo. Olympic long jump record still stands at 26½ feet or nine yards so that fear must have helped the old aboriginal make a jump of eleven yards if Kelly's account can be accepted.

Not long after this incident the boat party sailed from Circular Head for Port Dalrymple and George Town, where no sooner had they landed than they were placed under arrest. The military guard had mistaken them for bushrangers thought to be in the vicinity. Evidence of identity proving satisfactory they were released and Kelly stated that the Commandant then invited him 'to come up to the Government Cottage and accept of a knife and fork and a bed at my quarters while you remain at George Town,' and to his Sergeant said 'let his men live with the soldiers give them plenty to eat and grog but don't let them get drunk.'

On 12 January the whaleboat voyage was continued. At noon the following day he records that they landed at Ringarooma Point. Because I personally think that the name Ringarooma was not used until after the wreck of the *Sally* nearby in 1826 it is my belief that the journal from which I have quoted was not completed before that year, and was probably written up from a rough log book, or that Kelly was drawing on his memory. At Ringarooma Point as he called it they were again greeted by aborigines whose leader wished him to assist in a raid upon a tribe near Eddystone Point. To avoid this Kelly offered to take his boat to a nearby island to ask sealers to take part. This offer was accepted and they were allowed to leave but Kelly had no intention of keeping his promise for he could see that without some such ruse he and his crew would never have escaped. On 14 he reached Eddystone Point where for a time contact with the natives known to be in the vicinity was delayed because of the belief that bushrangers were with them. Some sealing was done but the seals becoming shy a visit to the aboriginals for fresh water was suggested. On hearing that the seals were scarce Tolobunganah the local chief suggested that they should take some of the women of his tribe to assist and six were detailed to go. Kelly then describes the 'singular mode' they followed. After a stay of nine days during which some 172 seal skins and 246 kangaroo skins were collected, the whole said to be worth £180 in Hobart Town, Kelly's party left to complete his voyage. At noon on 30 January they passed Iron Pot Island and reached Hobart Town at four p.m. after a voyage of discovery lasting forty-nine days, 'without meeting with any accident or danger further than what was contained in the Journal,' as he put it. The report of the circumnavigation attached to Birch's letter to the Secretary of State, referred to earlier, gives a reason for the voyage being made in a whaleboat. It reads:

'We layed the schooner *Henrietta* up to make the first attempt in a whaleboat, we well knowing what we must expect if a gale came on from the westward and being then on a most dangerous lee-shore—the loss of the schooner and all hands, but in a boat might get a chance and save our lives by beaching her or running under the lee of an island where a vessel could not go'.

The record then follows with much less detail the routine given in the account held by the Royal Society but with variations in the dates of discoveries and naming of features. The most noticeable disagreement between the accounts is the time taken to make the voyage. Birch's account said it took thirty-three days while Kelly's journal records forty-nine. For the expense Birch incurred in fitting out the expedition the Government compensated him by granting the sole right for twelve months to take timber from the two harbours discovered. Kelly later received a land grant of one hundred acres on Bruny Island.

The next outstanding event for Kelly no doubt was 'settling in' his wife and two daughters at 'Rock House', late in 1816. The family lived here for eight years the first three of which Kelly spent as master of the *Sophia* sailing on further trips to the West Coast for pine and other timbers and plying between ports in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales, and making a sealing voyage to New Zealand. Considerable importance has been given to the records of this sealing venture, and the discovery of the *Sophia's* original logbook would even today be an event of great interest to archaeologists and anthropologists, for up to the present they have depended on newspaper accounts of an incident in which Kelly was involved. When reading a paper before the Otago Institute on 11 June 1895 Mr A. Hamilton stated that he thought the published account of this incident which happened near Otago had been written in a guarded manner. He had therefore made many enquiries of old residents and finally had written to Mr Taylor, Librarian of the Public Library Hobart, for confirmation of Kelly's statement. In reply Mr Taylor had sent him copies of the original newspaper article, had confirmed the dates of the *Sophia's* clearance for New Zealand and of her return, adding that the vessel and her owners were well known and he had every reason to believe the account was a correct one. The article referred to by both Hamilton and Taylor appeared in the *Hobart Town Courier* on 12 April, 1858. It was headed 'Adventure at Otago forty years ago', and begins:

'The *Old Stager* has handed us a narrative of events that happened to him on the South East Coast of New Zealand, part of which was published on his return to port in Bent's *Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter* of 28 March 1818. Full details of the narrative were not furnished but now for the first time are completed from his 'ancient log'.

The old stager was of course James Kelly and the ancient log could possibly have been that of the *Sophia*. The *Sophia* it seems had sailed from Hobart Town on 12 November 1817 on a sealing voyage, on 11 December had anchored at Port Daniel (later known as Otago) and Kelly with a boat's crew had gone ashore to barter for potatoes. They met with a friendly reception, in part attributed to the fact that one of their number—William Tucker—was remembered from a previous visit. The Maoris called Tucker 'Wioree' which in their language would I think mean 'tail' possibly from the fact that he was wearing an old time sailor's pigtail. A similar reception was given them the following day and Kelly met and talked to a lascar who offered assistance in bartering the potatoes. Many natives meanwhile had assembled near the house of the

chief from whom the potatoes were to be obtained. Suddenly there was a vicious war cry yell or call and the Maoris attacked. Kelly, John Griffiths and a man named Viole were thrown to the ground. Tucker, Wallon and Dutton managed to break through and ran for the boat, when thinking it impossible for the others to have escaped, launched it. Meanwhile Kelly was engaged in a dreadful contest but by good fortune having a billhook with him swung it to such purpose as to enable him to make his escape. He reached the boat and was dragged through the surf. Tucker still impressed with the friendly reception he had received remained on the beach but was soon cut down. Griffiths and Viole were not seen again. Kelly and his three men on reaching the *Sophia* found an estimated one hundred and fifty Maoris on board. Though appearing to be friendly they were apparently planning to take the vessel. Kelly called his men to quarters and formed a square under the main boom. He ordered his men to draw their sealing knives, each man carried two. This had the desired effect the Maoris fled, some jumped overboard were caught in the tide rip and drowned, some were wounded and others got ashore. Their chief was captured and held on board. That night a careful watch was kept. Early next morning the chief was taken on deck. When the Maoris on shore saw him there was great rejoicing. He called to them it was thought to bring a large canoe load of potatoes to pay for his liberation. Two men paddled the canoe to the brig. It was then seen to be full of men, nearly forty of them covered by mats. Those attempting to board the brig were shot down, and the attack was abandoned. Next morning Maoris were seen to be launching their war canoes and Kelly thought it better to stop them if possible. Two boats were manned, arms and ammunition taken and rowed close to where the canoes were lying. On the boats approaching the shore, the Maoris fled over the bank. The crew from one of the *Sophia's* boats landed, while those in the other kept them covered. The shore party then sawed each canoe into three sections. There were forty two canoes, large and small and all were destroyed, many pieces being taken to the brig for firewood. Kelly decided to land and fire the Maoris' town. He recorded that it was 26 December and a fine clear summer's day with a fresh hot wind blowing from the North-West. Nine men were put ashore and the two boats kept afloat. 'On our approach' he wrote, 'the natives ran to the rising hills and left us in full possession of the town. This town consisted of about six hundred fine houses and perhaps a finer town was never seen in any part of New Zealand. The fire was lighted at the weather end and in about four hours the beautiful city of Otago, as we called it, was laid in a heap of ashes.' Kelly's report of the destruction of this town is still of much interest to present day archaeologists. Although seemingly exaggerated it gives them a firm date to use in connection with excavations for pre-European Maori civilization. They believe that if the original log-book of the *Sophia* could be found it would give them an exact description of the site of the village destroyed.

Not long after his return to Hobart Town, on 8 April 1818 to be precise, some convicts boarded and escaped from the *Derwent* in the Government launch. Birch, Kelly's employer, immediately offered his vessel with Kelly in charge, to assist in capturing the pirates.

Twelve days were spent with an armed detachment searching the East Coast. Eventually the absconding men were caught at Port Sorell on the North Coast and Kelly had the doubtful pleasure on 24 May of taking them in the *Sophia* to Sydney for sentence. His next adventure followed very quickly. The *Sydney Gazette* of 20 June reported that a daring attempt had been made by a set of ruffians in a boat to board and carry off the *Sophia* lying in Sydney Cove. It seems that for some time previously, merchants of Sydney, ship-owners and others had suffered from similar attacks by piratically minded bands of marauders. Information had reached the police that an effort was to be made to capture Kelly's vessel when next she came to port. Soon after her arrival a story was allowed to circulate that Kelly was about to go on a visit to Parramatta. Police were alerted on shore and a close lookout kept by the crew of the *Sophia*. Very early in the morning the expected attempt began. Kelly, having returned secretly directed proceedings from the brig. A brisk discharge of musketry indicated that the would be pirates had reached the vessel, gave warning to the waiting party on shore and wounded some of the attackers. A well-manned boat under the direction of the Governor's coxswain set out to capture the desperadoes, but they escaped. A detailed description of the affair in the *Sydney Gazette* was followed by the comment:

'We hold to public view and admiration the bold spirited faithful conduct of Captain Kelly which cannot be too highly commended or appreciated and the masters and crews of the Colonial Shipping are called on by every principle of duty to show an equal zeal in defence of the persons and property entrusted to their charge . . . it is with no little satisfaction we understand that it is in contemplation with the merchants and shipowners of Sydney to present Captain Kelly with a handsome piece of plate inscribed with the record of his manly and successful exertions in repelling a strong and desperate party of sanguinary pirates, and we hope a liberal consideration will also be extended to the meritorious crew.'

Trouble in Hobart Town with the increasing number of convicts arriving caused Lieutenant-Governor Sorell to give serious consideration to the establishment of a small settlement in which the worst of them could be detained. He appointed Thomas Florance to make a survey of Macquarie Harbour and engaged Birch's Brig *Sophia* to take him round. Sorell of course knew that her Master James Kelly could and would give valuable assistance by pointing out channels, landing places, obstacles to shipping, indicate where best stands of timber would be found and also advise on the treatment of some aboriginals living in the area. Sorell had a very high opinion of Kelly's seamanship as well as his knowledge of the coast and so in April 1819 when the appointment of a harbourmaster was under discussion Kelly's name was mentioned. When Sorell informed Macquarie that such an office was necessary to combat smuggling and the seizure of small vessels he pointed out that Kelly's zeal, steadiness and good character were already known to the Governor-in-Chief himself, who on 15 May readily confirmed the appointment. For twelve years Kelly then held the dual position of harbourmaster and joint pilot at Hobart Town. Near the end of this period a steady increase in shipping entering the port and the frequent need to

call upon the water bailiff to act as pilot caused Governor Arthur to review the position. He consulted Kelly and they both agreed that the duties of one or other of his offices should be transferred. Kelly decided to relinquish harbourmaster responsibilities. Then shortly afterwards, possibly because of the death of his wife following the birth of a child, he asked to be relieved of the duties of pilot, as well.

During his term as harbourmaster and for a time afterwards his affairs had prospered and he enjoyed a certain amount of publicity. He owned several vessels, reaped a harvest of oil from whaling and sealing expeditions, increased agricultural areas and cattle raising interests on Bruny Island and was able to afford the expense of having two of his boys educated at the Bath Grammar School in England. He held a seat in pew number ten at St David's Church, Hobart, contributed to funds being raised for the erection of St George's Church on Battery Point, became a shareholder in the organization formed for the purpose of erecting a theatre in Campbell Street and was elected one of the first directors of the Derwent and Tamar Fire and Life Insurance Company at the inaugural meeting held in the Freemasons' Hotel on 28 October 1838. So his life was both active and his interests varied.

In addition to port duties he had been called upon to assist in the establishment of the Penal Settlement at Macquarie Harbour by taking the Commandant, Lieutenant Cuthbertson, his staff and a number of convicts round in the *Sophia*. In 1825 in his whaleboat he took Lieutenant Murdoch to inspect the proposed site for a secondary penal station on Maria Island. With four others in 1826 he formed the Derwent Whaling Club for the purpose of sharing in whaling ventures and rewarding the person who gave them first news of a whale entering the river. The profits made by this club were divided into seven parts, one part went to each member, one part was devoted to charities and the remaining part was presented to a youth born in the Colony who displayed the greatest expertness as a whaleboat headsman. In 1828 he assisted in the establishment of a military station at Waterloo Point near Swansea and in 1838 when Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin suggested that a carnival should be held to commemorate the discovery of Van Diemen's Land by Tasman, James Kelly was one of the first members of the committee appointed to organize the function soon to be known as the Anniversary Regatta, a carnival which as you know, even after the lapse of one hundred and 30 odd years, is still recognized as one of the most popular aquatic events in the Southern Hemisphere. On the one occasion when Vice-Regal patronage was withheld because of some unseemly behaviour by certain people on Pavilion Point, James Kelly was elected Chairman and the Regatta was held at and from Chaffey's Point, Sandy Bay, now well known as Wrest Point.

There is only one known, rather poor portrait or sketch of James Kelly which is now held by the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston, but several word pictures enable us to visualize something of his personality. Widowson, in his *Present State of Van Diemen's Land* published in 1829, when referring to their vessel's arrival at the entrance of the Derwent, commented on Pilot Kelly's size and his unequivocal appetite.

Calder said 'Kelly was one of the most active, daring and resolute of the old class of Tasmanians—a class of men who as colonists had no superior'.

And in the *Bulletin* in 1927 a contributor 'M.H.' wrote:

'My grandparents lived next door to Captain Kelly, Hobart's first harbourmaster. I have a vicarious mental picture of the old captain, jovial, portly and autocratic, back from one of his successful sealing or whaling expeditions, titivating before a mirror in preparation for some social fray whilst his dutiful daughters fluttered round him. He bulked large in the public eye physically, no less than socially, and once won a bet that his trousers would hold five bushels of wheat.'

During the 1830s Kelly's good fortune began to deteriorate, perhaps due to his own actions as well to circumstances beyond his control. First in 1831 he lost his wife. Then in 1834 his rather fine little vessel the *Australian* was wrecked on Bruny Island and he lost the proceeds of what was a favourable whaling season. In 1839 he became involved in an affair which led to court action and the payment of somewhat heavy damages. In 1841 his eldest son James Bruni Kelly while on an expedition died from the effects of a blow from a whale. In 1842 Thomas, his third son, was drowned when the boat he was in on the Derwent capsized. During the same year Kelly was compelled to assign the greater part of his real estate to creditors. Then he was severely hit by the commercial depression during the years 1842 to 1846 and his remaining assets soon melted away.

During celebrations which followed the launching of the *Lady Emma* from the shipbuilding yards of Degraives in December 1848 a Mr Lewis proposed the toast 'Captain Kelly, the father and founder of whaling in Tasmania' and added that the captain had lost his all in the pursuit and was now a poor man; and while he had expended his means in establishing the fishery others were making fortunes by just following the example he had set them.

It was a sorry statement to have to make, for the early activities of the captain had given promise of ease and comfort in his old age, and although he attempted several times to re-enter the whaling business, his circumstances did not improve and he was glad to accept employment in some of the humble tasks offered by port authorities.

And so, on 20 April, 1859 as he walked in Argyle Street, Hobart, with a Mr Holland, to arrange for the funeral of a relative, he suddenly stopped near the Jewish Synagogue, exclaimed 'I am falling' collapsed and before help could be given at the nearby hospital, breathed his last.

Despite his shortcomings, and there were quite a few, there was something brave and attractive about Captain James Kelly and I think it will be admitted readily that he was an outstanding character during the days in which he lived.

His name, as I think most will know, is perpetuated in the famous steps and street on Battery Point, as well as in two basins inside Tasmania's West Coast, the stormy coast he knew so well.

