

## Rare fragment of Governor Phillip's long-lost journal now in NSW State Library hands

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A rare fragment of Governor Arthur Phillip's long-lost journal has recently been acquired by the State Library of NSW and will go on public display for the first time, from 13 July 2024.

No existing journals of NSW's first Governor have survived; this newly discovered 20-page journal fragment\* from the late 18th century, acquired from a dealer, is the first Phillip material to appear on the market in nearly 20 years.

According to State Librarian Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon: "The compelling story behind this extraordinary find enhances the invaluable new insights the fragment offers into our early colonial history, particularly around British interactions with Aboriginal people."

In 2022, an Australian dealer purchased a 1791 Third Fleet document from a UK auction house, which was selling it for an anonymous bookseller in rural England. The dealer undertook extensive research using the State Library's First Fleet collection to authenticate the document.

The first 10 pages (Oct–Dec 1791) closely mirror accounts — some verbatim — from Arthur Phillip's journal chapters included in the 1793 publication *An historical journal of the transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* compiled by John Hunter, captain of the First Fleet ship HMS *Sirius*.

"This is hugely significant because it confirms Phillip kept a personal journal," says Senior Curator Sally Hone. "This fragment has a different tone to his official reports and contains historically significant details — we learn that out-of-time convicts paid 8–10 guineas for a return voyage. These and other new details will excite many researchers."

For Damien Webb, Head of the Library's Indigenous Engagement Branch, the last 10 pages (Jan–Feb 1792) provide an "important layer of new information about this complex, contested part of our history".

The most significant new information contained in the journal is Phillip's account in January 1792 of a previously unknown visit to Sydney by Gomebeere, an Aboriginal man he had met in the Hawkesbury region only nine months prior. Phillip wrote:

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*... like all the rest he appeared to think he had enjoyed every good this world affords before we came amongst them, and what we had to give except the hatchets was received with indifference. He past the night with Bannelong and those who live amongst us at Tubugulha where they had a dance, and left them early the next morning to return to the banks of the Hawkesbury.*

“It’s a fascinating excerpt and Gomebeere appears to have some agency in his interaction with Phillip,” says Damien. “We’re continuously building on our understanding of history, and material like this can be crucial for mob to examine and integrate with Community and cultural knowledge. Uncovering fragments like these provides us with more depth, grit and nuance in our understanding of Australia’s complex history.”

The journal fragment joins the State Library’s small yet significant collection of original Phillip letters — to Joseph Banks, Lord Sydney and Lord Lansdowne. See this new acquisition on display in the Library’s Amaze Gallery, from 13 July to 1 December 2024.

Community interested in viewing the fragment after the display period should contact the Library’s Indigenous Engagement Branch.

\*This fragment appears to be a fair copy — that is, a clerk or secretary has made a clean and corrected copy from the original draft that was presumably written in Arthur Phillip’s own hand (or possibly dictated).

**Sally Hone and Damien Webb are available for interviews.**

## **MEDIA INQUIRIES:**

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