Chapter 7

George Worgan’s Piano Arrives at Sydney Cove

Eight months and one week after leaving England, having sailed ‘over 24,000 kilometers of poorly charted, angry seas to lodge upon the fringe of an invisible, fantastic land’, ¹ the First Fleet anchored in Sydney Cove. George Worgan’s superior, John White (the colony’s chief medical officer), was so impressed by the refuge afforded by Sydney Harbour that he wrote: ‘I believe [it] to be, without exception, the finest and most extensive harbour in the universe, and at the same time the most secure, being safe from all the winds that blow.’²

In a dispatch written to Lord Sydney on Thursday, 15 May 1788, Governor Phillip wrote that he ‘had the satisfaction of finding the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line may ride in the most perfect security’.³ Fresh from the great harbour at Rio de Janeiro, Phillip had doubtless ‘compared the two well in his own mind before pronouncing judgment so emphatically in favour of Port Jackson’.⁴

Almost immediately after the First Fleet’s arrival at Sydney Cove at ca 7 pm⁵ on 26 January 1788, a ‘number of the officers assembled on shore where, they displayed the British flag’⁶ on a newly erected flagstaff, perhaps made ‘from a sappy pole of eucalyptus’,⁷ ‘and each officer with a heart, glowing with loyalty drank his majesty’s health and success to the colony’.⁸ The summer sun would not yet have set as this joyous occasion took place.

The following day, Sunday, 27 January 1788, the male convicts set up some tents. ‘From his vantage aboard the Friendship, Ralph Clark thought these looked “prety amongst the trees”.’⁹

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¹ Birmingham, Leviathan, p. 44.
² Quoted in Hoskins, Sydney Harbour, pp. 23–4.
⁷ Keneally, A Commonwealth of Thieves, p. 111.
⁹ Quoted in Hoskins, Sydney Harbour, p. 25.
A total of about 1500 people arrived with the First Fleet. Of this number, 1373 have been identified, including 732 convicts, 306 ships’ crew, and 245 marines. There were 22 children of convicts, [and] 23 marines’ children’, ranging in age from Joseph Cox, who was old enough to become a drummer with the marines in June 1788, to eight children who were born on the voyage. There were also 31 wives of marines and 14 other officials and passengers … There would have been a further hundred or more seamen on the transports, for whom no records have been found …

Most were young; incomplete statistics suggest that at least two-thirds were aged 30 or younger.

Only the chaplain, the Reverend Richard Johnson [1753?–1827], and the ‘other ranks’ of the marines—the privates, corporals and sergeants—were allowed to bring their wives to the colony with them. Richard Howe [1726–99], First Lord of the Admiralty, said that permission was denied the officers because the extent of their duties would be ‘as if they were at war’.10

The average death rate for a convict voyage across the Atlantic Ocean was 10 per cent.

The average over an extended period was about 14 per cent. Yet, during a much longer and more difficult voyage, the First Fleet death rate was about 2 per cent. It would have been impossible for Phillip and his officers to have achieved this success if the ships were as poorly equipped and provisioned as [some] … historians have claimed.11

Unloading stores and provisions took many weeks; initially some were ‘put on the ground and covered until storehouses could be built’.12 In this way, much of the food was ‘lost to insects and parasites, many of which were completely new to the European settlers’.13 It took 11 days for all the convicts to be brought ashore, even though Phillip had been told to disembark his human freight quickly so that three of the transports which were under charter … could sail immediately to Canton to get cargoes of tea and other goods for shipment to the United Kingdom. This was an experiment … to determine whether or not the sailing route to China via Botany Bay was practicable and economical.14

10 Egan, Buried Alive, pp. 20–1.
11 Frost, The First Fleet, p. 4.
12 Hill, 1788, p. 156.
13 Ibid., p. 156.
14 Swan, To Botany Bay, p. 159.
We know what food George Worgan ate in the first weeks following his arrival at Sydney Cove.

On landing, [Governor] Phillip … implemented his plan to provide full rations from the two years of supplies the ships had brought. Convicts were to receive an equal share to men and officers—7 pounds of salt beef or four of pork, 3 pints of dried peas, 7 pounds of flour, 6 ounces of butter, half a pound of rice or, if it were not available, an extra pound of flour weekly.

… [S]ome officials disapproved of the democracy of rations.15

Worgan’s journal entry for Tuesday, 5 February 1788 reveals that within 20 days of anchoring in Sydney Cove, ‘all the tents of the battalion, the laboratory, and hospital, and several of the civil officers tents have been pitched,—likewise those for ye men and women convicts, the Governors house [also a tent] got up, a spot of ground enclosed, and some culinary seeds put in’.16 This was a rough beginning for the colony,17 which at this stage of its development amounted to nothing more than an open ‘penal camp inhabited by convicts and their gaolers’.18

It is not known exactly when Worgan’s piano was taken off the Sirius. Given the circumstances, its removal is unlikely to have been placed high on the list of priorities.

Heavy February rains made the building of waterproof accommodation imperative. Worgan reports that ‘[o]n the first day of this month [February], we had a vast deal of heavy rain’.19

Governor Phillip—or his clerk, Henry Brewer (1739?–96)—wrote:

Only sixteen carpenters could be hired from all the ships; among the convicts no more than twelve were of this profession, and of them several were sick … With every effort, it was found impossible to complete either the barracks for the men, or the huts for the officers, as soon as was desired. As late as the middle of May they were yet unfinished.20

15 Keneally, A Commonwealth of Thieves, p. 129.
16 Worgan, Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon by George B. Worgan, p. 34.
17 A watercolour drawing entitled Sydney Cove, Port Jackson. 1788, by William Bradley (1757?–1833), is housed at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney [Call no. ML Safe 1/14, opp. p. 84; Album ID: 823705; Digital order no. a3461012].
19 Worgan, Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon by George B. Worgan, p. 34.
A map of ‘Sydney Cove, Port Jackson’ dated Saturday, 1 March 1788, surveyed by Captain John Hunter—the second captain of the *Sirius*, whose passion for the sea triumphed over ‘competing passions for music, the classics, and the Church of Scotland’—and drawn in the diary of William Bradley, first lieutenant on the *Sirius*, shows the ships of the First Fleet anchored in the cove. The *Sirius* is anchored at the entrance of Sydney Cove, on guard.

Jean-Françoise de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse

The unexpected appearance of two French frigates, the *Astrolabe* and the *Boussoule* ('compass'), each named after a navigational aid, at Botany Bay on Thursday, 24 January 1788, under the command of Jean-Françoise de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse (1741–88), would doubtless have seemed threatening. Captain Lieutenant Watkin Tench feared that the ships were ‘Dutchmen sent to dispossess us’. He describes his astonishment upon hearing of the sighting of the two vessels.

But judge of my surprise on hearing from a serjeant, who ran down almost breathless to the cabin where I was dressing, that a ship was seen off the harbour’s mouth. At first I only laughed, but knowing the man who spoke to me to be of great veracity, and hearing him repeat his information, I flew upon deck, on which I had barely set my foot, when the cry of ‘another sail’ struck on my astonished ear. Confounded by a thousand ideas which arose in my mind in an instant, I sprang upon the barricado, and plainly descried two ships of considerable size, standing in for the mouth of the Bay. By this time the alarm had become general, and every one appeared lost in conjecture … It was by Governor Phillip, that this mystery was at length unraveled, and the cause of the alarm pronounced to be two French ships, it was now recollected were on a voyage of discovery in the southern hemisphere …

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22 The original watercolour, pen and ink map, entitled *Sydney Cove, Port Jackson. The Position of the Encampment & Buildings are as they Stood 1st March 1788. The Transports are Placed in the Cove as Moored on their Arrival*, by John Hunter (1737–1821), is housed at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney (Call no. ML Safe 1/14, opp. p. 84; Album ID: 823712; Digital order no. a138498). The map is reproduced in Bradley, *A Voyage to New South Wales*.
24 An engraved portrait of Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse, by Edme Bovinet (1767–ca 1832) after Pierre Alexandre Tardieu (1756–1844), dated ca 1800, is housed at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney (Call no. DL Pd 773; Digital order no. a928385).
25 Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, p. 50. ‘The Dutch, static and intent on consolidating their assets and influence [in the Far East] to the exclusion of all others, remained in continual friction with the British. But the latter, continually seeking new markets and sources of raw materials, were determined to expand into any region where trade was offering. This Gordian knot was cut finally by the British after the outbreak of the French Revolution and the subsequent occupation of the United Provinces [Holland] by the French in early 1795.’ Swan, *To Botany Bay*, p. 167.
Had the sea breeze set in, the strange ships would have been at anchor in the Bay by eight o’clock in the morning … On the following day [Friday, 25 January 1788] they reappeared … and a boat was sent to them, with a lieutenant of the navy in her, to offer assistance … In the course of the day the officer returned, and brought intelligence that the ships were the Boussole and Astrolabe, sent out by order of the King of France, and under the command of Monsieur De Perrouse. The astonishment of the French at seeing us, had not equalled that we had experienced, for it appeared that [they had] learnt that our expedition was in contemplation.26

Governor Phillip was aware that the situation called for discretion. Wisdom dictated courtesy. This was expressed as consideration, erring on the side of caution. George Worgan, in his journal entry of Saturday, 9 February 1788, reveals the degree of grace and courtesy extended by Governor Phillip to the French officers:

Cap70 [Robert Sutton de] Clonard [1751–88] (the French Commodore’s Captain) came around by water, in a boat from Botany Bay, to wait upon Govr Phillip. He brought with him, from the Commodore, some dispatches for Europe which the Governor, had politely made an offer to forward by the first of the transports that he should dispatch from this place for England.27

Within this context, diplomacy was vital for both the British and the French.

For the French, a recent treaty with Britain granted immunity from military action for scientific expeditions. ‘Sent out by King Louis XVI himself, La Pérouse’s expedition was a South Seas voyage of discovery28—‘for the benefit of world knowledge and French trade29—‘no corner of the region was to go unexplored, no island uncharted’.30

In a letter written by John Paul Jones (1747–92) to Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), dated Wednesday, 5 October 1785, we read that King Louis XVI planned La Pérouse’s expedition ‘and made out all the detail with his own hand before he spoke a word of it to any person. His majesty defrays the expence out of his private coffer and is his own minister in every thing that regards the … operations of his plan.’31

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26 Tench, A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay, pp. 49–51.
27 Ibid., p. 37.
30 Clode, Voyages to the South Seas, p. 13.
France was the customary enemy of England, and misunderstandings could easily arise. ‘Anglo–French relations, as they concerned voyages of discovery, were complicated by the conflicting forces of imperial rivalry and scientific cooperation.’\(^{32}\) (King Louis XVI ‘was a keen geographer, an avid reader of the accounts of Captain Cook’s voyages and a determined rival of Britain’s maritime supremacy’.)\(^{33}\) Both Phillip and La Pérouse played a delicate political game. ‘For all Phillip knew La Pérouse could have received instructions to make a French counter-claim to sovereignty over some part of the coast of New South Wales, New Holland or New Zealand.’\(^{34}\)

Phillip wanted … to fool La Pérouse about the scale of the supplies the British in Sydney Cove possessed by offering him ‘whatever he might have occasion for’.

La Pérouse playing the game Phillip had set up … [said] exaggeratedly that he would be in France in fifteen months time and had three years stores aboard, and so would be happy to oblige … Mr Phillip with anything he might want.\(^{35}\)

In fact, La Pérouse was not as innocent as he pretended. ‘He had been instructed by the French government to call at Botany Bay and discover just what the English were up to. La Pérouse told Judge-Advocate Collins that he had expected to find a town with a flourishing market.’\(^{36}\)

The French Government was intrigued by the colony of convicts located on the rim of the Pacific, perceiving it to be a significant social experiment. In 1789, the French politician and sociologist Pierre-Édouard Lemontey (1762–1826) colourfully remarked:

> Perhaps a strong and hard-working nation will emerge from a vile rabble of convicts, as in other times a swarm of ruffians founded the empire of the Caesars. Life everywhere is born of corruption. It is to fetid dung that we owe both the golden harvests and the dazzling wine.\(^{37}\)

Oddly, even though La Pérouse had been tasked with obtaining information about the new British colony, he never visited Port Jackson, even though he heard descriptions of it from Lieutenant Philip Gidley King, second lieutenant of the \textit{Sirius}, and other English officers whom he met while at Botany Bay.\(^{38}\)

\(^{32}\) Starbuck, \textit{Constructing the ‘Perfect’ Voyage}, p. 119.


\(^{34}\) Swan, \textit{To Botany Bay}, p. 164.

\(^{35}\) Keneally, \textit{A Commonwealth of Thieves}, p. 119.

\(^{36}\) Parker, \textit{Arthur Phillip}, p. 118.


\(^{38}\) See ‘Notes on 1.15 Phillip and Exploration’, in Barton, \textit{History of New South Wales from the Records}, fn. 3.
The peaceful outcome of La Pérouse’s arrival at Botany Bay suggests that both Governor Phillip and La Pérouse possessed the diplomatic skills and restraint that were the unwritten requirements of positions of command.39

Comments made by Lieutenant King and George Worgan reveal the nature of Franco–English relations at Botany Bay. On Saturday, 2 February 1788, King visited the French. On this occasion, he was ‘received with the greatest politeness and attention by Monsieur de la perouse and his officers’.40 Subsequently, King yielded to the sollicitations of ye French Commodore & consented to dine with him & stay the remainder of the ye day & return to Port Jackson next morning41 … After dinner, I attended ye Commodore & other officers onshore where I found him quite established, having thrown round his tents a stoccade, guarded by two small guns.42

According to La Pérouse, his stockade ‘was necessary against the Indians of New Holland, who though very weak and few in number, like all savages are extremely mischievous … for they even threw darts at us immediately after receiving our presents and our caresses’.43

Seven days later, on Saturday, 9 February 1788, Worgan’s journal entry reveals that the day before, a group of his colleagues had

set out for … Botany Bay, by land, to pay a visit to the French officers, from whom, they met with a very polite and cordial reception …

Our gentlemen met with a good deal of swampy, rocky ground in their journey and on the whole it was tedious, but the civilities and hearty, friendly treatment, which they received from the French officers very amply recompensed all their fatigues.44

That La Pérouse had a keen ‘scientific’ eye for detail is revealed by Captain Lieutenant Watkin Tench. When describing the kangaroo, Tench reports:

This singular animal is already known in Europe by the drawing and description of Mr. Cook. To the drawing nothing can be objected but the position of the claws of the hinder leg, which are mixed together like those of a dog, whereas no such indistinctness is to be found in the animal I am describing. It was the Chevalier De Perrouse who pointed out this to me, while we were comparing a kangaroo with the plate,

39 See Groom, First Fleet Artist, p. 40.
41 Ibid., p. 38.
42 Ibid., p. 40.
43 Quoted in Keneally, A Commonwealth of Thieves, p. 104.
which, as he justly observed, is correct enough to give the world in general a good idea of the animal, but not sufficiently accurate for the man of science.\textsuperscript{45} 

Following the departure of the French on ca Monday, 10 March 1788, Captain David Collins commented on the relations that had been established with the French, and the level of respect that had developed for them:

We had, during their stay in this country, a very friendly and pleasant intercourse with their officers, among whom we observed men of abilities, whose observations, and exertions in the search after knowledge, will most amply illustrate the history of their voyage: and it reflected much credit on the minister when he arranged the plan of it, that people of the first talents for navigation, astronomy, natural history, and every other science that could render it conspicuously useful, should have been selected for the purpose.\textsuperscript{46}

Tench reinforces Collins’ feelings for the visiting explorers: during the stay of the French at Botany Bay, ‘the officers of the two nations had frequent opportunities of testifying their mutual regard by visits, and every interchange of friendship and esteem’.\textsuperscript{47}

Tench specifically singles out La Pérouse:

It was no less gratifying to an English ear, than honourable to Monsieur De Perrouse, to witness the feeling manner in which he always mentioned the name and talents of Captain Cook. That illustrious circumnavigator had, he said, left nothing to those who might follow in his track to describe, or fill up.\textsuperscript{48}

Increasing Disillusionment with Captain Cook

That Tench mentions La Pérouse’s respect for Captain Cook testifies to a sense of the continuing influence of Cook that provided ‘the frame of reference for the colonists’ growing sense of self-definition’.\textsuperscript{49} It was generally felt that Cook

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\textsuperscript{45} Tench, \textit{A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay}, pp. 125–6.
\textsuperscript{46} Collins, \textit{An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country}, Chapter II, para. 2.
\textsuperscript{47} Tench, \textit{A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay}, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 97.
\textsuperscript{49} P. Carter, \textit{The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 39.
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was ‘a hero … a practical visionary, resourceful and courageous, a man who restrained his hot temper, eschewed conjecture for accurate observation … [and who] fused curiosity and moral certainty’.50

Tench’s perceptions of Cook eventually hardened into disillusionment. In June 1788, six months after the arrival of the First Fleet, Tench writes: ‘Of the natural meadows which Mr. Cook mentions near Botany Bay, we can give no account; none such exist about Port Jackson.’51

In September 1789, following Tench’s participation in a surveying expedition from Sydney Cove to Botany Bay, he wrote:

Had not the nautical part of Mr Cook’s description … been so accurately laid down, there would exist the utmost reason to believe, that those who described the contiguous country, had never seen it. On the sides of the harbour … we did not find 200 acres [80 hectares] which could be cultivated.52

By December 1790, Tench’s full-blown scepticism of Cook’s description of Botany Bay is revealed: ‘We had passed through the country which the discoverers of Botany Bay extol as “some of the finest meadows in the world”.’ Tench then appends a footnote:

The words which are quoted may be found in Mr Cook’s first voyage, and form part of his description of Botany Bay. It has often fallen to my lot to traverse these fabled plains; and many a bitter execration have I heard pored on those travellers, who could so faithlessly relate what they saw.53

In 1773, three years after Cook’s voyage, John Hawkesworth (ca 1715–73) published his edition of Cook’s *Endeavour Journal*.54 This ‘version of the voyage, hurried into print before the official account’,55 paraphrased Cook’s remarks

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51 Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, p. 120.
53 Ibid., p. 176.
54 J. Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere, and Successively Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Carteret, Captain Wallis, and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour: Drawn up from the Journals which were Kept by the Several Commanders, and from the Papers of Joseph Banks, Esq; By John Hawkesworth, LL.D. In Three Volumes. Illustrated with Cuts, and a Great Variety of Charts and Maps Relative to Countries Now First Discovered, or Hitherto but Imperfectly Known* (London: W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1773), Vols 2 and 3. Cook’s journal comprises a 753-page account of the voyage of the *Endeavour* between 1768 and 1771.
concerning Botany Bay’s notorious meadows. Hawkesworth printed: ‘We found also interspersed some of the finest meadows in the world: some places however were rocky, but these were comparatively few.’

In fact, Cook had written: ‘I found in many places a deep black Soil which we thought was capable of producing any kind of grain, at present it produceth besides timber as fine meadow as ever was seen. However we found it not all like this, some places were very rocky but this I believe to be uncommon.’

The differences between these two descriptions suggest that ‘Hawkesworth hoped to make the notes of an unlettered sailor fit entertainment for a cultivated public’. Editorial ‘sleight of hand [goes] … a long way towards clearing Cook of the charge of wilful inaccuracy’.

Both Tench and La Pérouse took Cook’s—that is, Hawkesworth’s—words at face value. This is not surprising; both were ‘Enlightenment empiricist[s] interested in objective data, not … surmise’. ‘Those who had visited La Pérouse and his officers at Botany Bay were doubtless the last Europeans to see him and his men before they vanished, without a trace for forty years, in the South Pacific ocean.’

The Frenchman’s fate remained a mystery until 1828 when Chevalier Captain Peter Dillon (1788–1847) discovered that La Pérouse’s expedition had been wrecked at Vanikoro in the Santa Cruz Islands. We do not know if La Pérouse departed Botany Bay with the knowledge that the British had brought a piano with them to the new colony.

Spanish Imperial Designs

On Wednesday, 13 March 1793, two Spanish ships, the Descubierta and the Atrevida, arrived in Sydney Cove in order to ‘investigate the scope of Britain’s imperial designs in the Pacific’. The leader of the Spanish expedition, Alejandro Malaspina (1754–1810), subsequently advised his government that the new British port at Sydney Cove represented a threat to Spanish hopes in the region. His warnings

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58 Carter, The Road to Botany Bay, p. 41.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 42.
62 See ibid., p. 174, fn. 31.
were not acted upon due to political rivalries in the Spanish court. As a result, the British enjoyed a breathing space of 14 years before the French challenge reappeared in the form of a scientific exploring expedition in two ships [Le Géographe and Le Naturaliste] under the command of Nicholas Baudin [1754–1803], sent by Napoleon to chart the coasts of New Holland so that they might know ‘the entire coastline’ of what he called ‘the great south land’.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the south-east region of Australia remained largely unknown to Europeans. Solving the mystery of this region was central to Nicolas Baudin’s mission. His exploration of Bass Strait and the charting by his cartographer, Louis de Freycinet [1779–1842], of the section of the south-eastern coastline encompassing Victoria, which he named Terre Napoléon (Napoleon Land), preceded that of the simultaneous British expedition led by Matthew Flinders [1774–1814].

That in March 1788 the Sirius lay anchored as a guard ship to the fledgling colony reflects a cautionary panic resulting not only from tensions that existed between England and France, but also from fear of a French assault (which had the potential to induce a convict uprising).

Was George Worgan’s piano still on board the Sirius as the ship lay at anchor silently watching over the colony? Worgan may have disembarked ashore. If so, it is reasonable to assume that his piano had also been offloaded. The Sirius would, however, have provided a relatively stable environment for the instrument (unlike the tents that had been erected at Sydney Cove). This fact may have convinced Worgan to leave his piano on board. Extant documentary evidence sheds no light on the matter.

Where was George Worgan’s Piano First Housed?

The Hunter/Bradley Map, 1 March 1788

Captain John Hunter’s map of Saturday, 1 March 1788, drawn in the diary of Lieutenant William Bradley, shows the Sirius anchored on guard against the
French at the entrance to Sydney Cove. The map also reveals that tents and shelters erected within the first five weeks of the colony’s existence had been precisely laid out. Unfortunately, the ‘tents were open to spiders and vermin’. On Friday, 1 February 1788, First Lieutenant Ralph Clark recorded: ‘in all the course of my life I never Slept worse … than I did [last] night—what with the hard cold ground Spiders ants and every vermin that you can think of was crauling over me I was glad when the morning came.’

Hunter’s map shows that the marines were located on the western side of the Tank Stream, ‘facing east down the harbour [towards] … any threats that might enter’. The ‘marine encampment’ comprised tents (along with huts and stores) that were grouped around, or positioned in relationship to, a parade ground. ‘[T]he spot of ground that had been cleared for a parade’, mentioned by George Worgan in his journal entry for Saturday, 9 February 1788, was probably this very parade ground. The convicts’ tents were located nearby.

David Blackburn (1753–95), Master of the First Fleet ship Supply, in a letter dated Saturday, 12 July 1788, written to his friend Richard Knight, states: ‘on the 25th [January 1788] saild with the Governor in the Supply for Port Jackson. & next day the whole fleet follow’d & in the evening all anchor’d safe in Sidney Cove. Time was then busily employ’d erecting the tents.’ ‘Officers lived in marquees, and the marines lived in tents.’

Governor Phillip, via his clerk Henry Brewer, tells us that one month after Hunter had drawn his map, huts replacing the officers’ marquees (perhaps including a hut for Worgan) had still not been completed. (Brewer had coarse, harsh features and a habit of muttering to himself; he did, however, have an unswervingly honest and reliable character. Brewer ‘had been hand-picked by Phillip, with whom he had served on several ships previously’.)

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67 Hoskins, *Sydney Harbour*, p. 27.
70 Worgan, *Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon by George B. Worgan*, p. 34.
71 ‘David Blackburn (1753–1795)’, in Discover Collections at Your State Library (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales, Discover Collections, 2008).
73 Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, p. 185.
76 Groom, *First Fleet Artist*, p. 11.
Governor Phillip in his temporary blue-panelled canvas house (‘like some pre-industrial IKEA nightmare’) and at least five administrative officers (described on the map as being the ‘Provost’, ‘Commissary’, ‘Judge’, parson and the ‘Surveyors’) were located on the more sheltered eastern side of the Tank Stream.

Governor Phillip’s ‘first home was an elaborate tent. With a timber frame, it could support some of the “squares” of window glass imported for more substantial dwellings, but the tent leaked and let in the wind.’

Governor Phillip’s tent had been ‘provided by Messrs Smith of St George’s Field’, and ‘cost the Government £130 … though flimsy, [the tent] served Phillip for many months as both office and residence’.

Nearby were stores, as well as a smaller number of convicts’ tents than were on the western side of the Tank Stream.

The Hunter/Bradley map also shows a wharf. This was located directly below the Governor’s house on the south-eastern side of the Tank Stream. This was ‘almost certainly the first artificial … structure placed in the harbour’. Writing to Lord Sydney (Thomas Townsend, First Viscount Sydney; 1733–1800) on Thursday, 15 May 1788, Governor Phillip, in his first dispatch sent from Sydney Cove, remarks that ‘ships can anchor so close to the shore that at a very small expense quays may be constructed at which the largest vessels may unload’. If the scale and details of the Hunter/Bradley map are to be believed, the wharf may have been located where the depth of the water at the shoreline was only 1.2 metres, near the present-day corner of Loftus and Alfred streets.

Sadly for Worgan’s piano, it appears that if the instrument was taken ashore sometime during the first months of the colony’s life, it may still have been located in a tent by ‘as late as the middle of May [1788]’.

The Hospital and the Barracks

In March 1788, two months after the arrival of the First Fleet, construction began on the hospital. The building was 26 metres by 7 metres, ‘divided into a dispensary … a ward for the troops, and another for the convicts. It was …
built of wood … the roof … covered … with shingles.” Because nails were scarce, the shingles were fixed in place using ‘wooden pegs cut by the convict women’.

As a surgeon, George Worgan may have been curious to learn of discoveries made in relation to any medicinal properties associated with plants growing at Sydney Cove.

A knowledge of herbal remedies and medicines was a requisite of eighteenth-century life, demonstrated as a part of normal activities, from the arrival of the First Fleet when ‘every species of esculent plants [including] … wild celery, spinach and parsley … grew in abundance about the settlement’ and were given to those who were sick. A herb called sweet tea ‘was recommended by some of the medical gentlemen … as a powerful tonic’.

Perhaps sweet tea, amongst other herbal infusions, was administered in the colony’s newly built hospital building.

The barracks were begun

early in March; but much difficulty was found in providing proper materials, the timber being in general shakey and rotten. They were to consist of four buildings, each building to be sixty-seven feet [20 metres] by twenty-two [7 metres], and to contain one company. They were placed at a convenient distance asunder for the purpose of air and cleanliness, and with a space in the centre for a parade.

Structures such as the hospital and the barracks would have provided some protection against the elements for Worgan’s piano, but there is no evidence to suggest that the piano was housed in either of these buildings.

Francis Fowkes’ Drawing, 16 April 1788

Three months after the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove, a drawing was made of the settlement as it appeared on Wednesday, 16 April 1788. The drawing returned to England … in 1789. The creator of it remained unknown as the map only has the initials, ‘F.F. delineavit’ appearing in the lower left-hand corner. By a process of elimination, it was deduced that only one

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84 Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country, Chapter II, para. 2.
85 Bridges, Foundations of Identity, p. 11.
86 Barkley-Jack, Hawkesbury Settlement Revealed, p. 413.
87 Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country, Chapter II, para. 2.
person [who] travelled with the First Fleet had those initials: [the convict] Francis Fowkes … The map was published in London in July 1789 by R. Cribb and sold for 1 shilling plain, or 2 shillings [hand] coloured … it is not an accurate cartographical representation but it does provide much detail about the settlement just 3 months after arrival.88

The drawing shows the approximate location of the marine officers’ marquees. Although Worgan was not a marine officer, was his piano moved into one of the officers’ marquees? The notion that a marquee may have been the piano’s first destination ashore is consistent with a journal entry written six months after the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove, by John White, the chief surgeon of the First Fleet: ‘We have been here nearly six months and four officers only as yet got huts: when the rest will be provided with them seems uncertain, but this I well know, that living in tents, as the rainy season has commenced, is truly uncomfortable.’89 ‘White remained [at] … Sydney [Cove] until December 1794, when he returned to England. He was put on half-pay in 1820 and died in 1832, leaving a fortune which today would amount to about £100,000.’90

Was Worgan one of the four officers to be provided with a hut to live in? It seems unlikely; higher-ranking officers would have had first preference, and Worgan was neither a high-ranking nor a marine officer. Worgan’s military ranking (warrant officer) may not, however, have precluded his piano from being taken off the Sirius for subsequent placement in one of the four officers’ huts. Perhaps one of the four officers generously allowed Worgan’s piano to be placed in his hut. After all, it would have been commonly understood that the instrument, being unique in the colony and valuable in cultural and financial terms, needed to be housed protectively and responsibly.

The outline of each of the four officers’ huts ‘might have been drawn by a child; simple square buildings about nine feet by twelve with a central door’, which may or may not have been lockable, ‘on one side and a window each side of it’. The windows were covered with wooden lattice shutters. Posts, girders and rafters were made of sawn she-oak (Casuarina fraseriana). ‘Cabbage-tree palms [Livistona australis] provided material that could be worked—the trunks were soft in texture, easy to fell and roughly consistent in size; unfortunately every cabbage-tree in the vicinity of the settlement had soon been cut down.’

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90 Parker, Arthur Phillip, p. 278.
The cabbage-tree palm drop-log walling was plastered with mud on the outside of the hut. ‘The first roof shingles were made of wood from the casuarinas, known popularly as ‘Botany Bay wood’.’

If the hut was thatched, the roof comprised ‘grass, the reed-like stalks of the blackboy (Xanthorrea) and rushes from the low-tide flats around the harbour’. Inside the hut, there was a packed earth floor.

The Dawes/Medland/Hunter Map, July 1788

A map attributed to William Dawes (1762–1836), ‘drawn with the help of … Thomas Medland’ and Captain John Hunter in July 1788, reveals that a ‘Small House building for the Governor’ had been built to the east of his temporary tent accommodation. The location of other accommodation as shown in the Hunter/Bradley map of four months before—that is, Saturday, 1 March 1788—remains fundamentally unchanged. The map ‘indicates that settlement was close and intensive, production and storage of food were taking place, defence and communal religious activity were important and disease was present in the colony … nine acres [4 hectares] of corn [are] marked on the farmlands’.

Newton Fowell’s Letter, 12 July 1788

The fragility of the housing built immediately following the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove is revealed in a letter dated Saturday, 12 July 1788, written to his father by midshipman Newton Fowell. Fowell writes:

[T]he convicts were constantly employed clearing ground, building store houses for the reception of provisions & which were built of by putting trees about 2 feet [60 centimetres] in the ground so as to touch each other & thatched over with rushes, there are likewise a number of hovels built of cabbage tree for some of the officers & the battalion, they are chiefly thatched with rushes but some are covered with wooden tiles the wood of which these tiles are made of splits something like the ash.
Reverend Johnson’s Letter, 15 November 1788

The Reverend Richard Johnson97 ‘was appointed the first Church of England chaplain to the colony of New South Wales in 1787’.98 Johnson ‘was a humourless, dedicated evangelist [who] … reconciled himself to a martyr’s crown in a far-off land among moral degenerates’.99 Accordingly, he ‘put together a collection of theological munitions’ in the form of 4200100 ‘religious pamphlets, books and Bibles to help straighten the twisted souls of the convicts, most of whom couldn’t read’.101 There was ample supply of

1. *Exhortations to Chastity*, by Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (Tertullian) (100 copies)102
2. *An Exercise against Lying*103
3. Stephen White’s *A Dissuasive from Stealing*104
4. John Kettlewell’s *Offices for the Penitent*105
5. Edward Synge’s *Religion Made Easy*106
6. Josiah Woodward’s *A Dissuasive from Profane Swearing and Cursing Offered to Such Unhappy Persons as are Guilty of those Horrid Sins, and are Not Past Counsel* (50 copies)107
7. bibles (100 copies)108
8. New Testaments (400 copies)109
9. books of psalms (500 copies)110

97 An engraved portrait of the Reverend Richard Johnson by Garnet Terry (fl. 1770s–1790s), dated 1787, is housed at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney (Call no. P1/854; Digital order no. a1528135).
103 *An Exercise against Lying: For the Use of the Charity Schools* (London: Joseph Downing, 1715).
104 See Steele and Richards, *Bound for Botany Bay*, p. 5.
109 See ibid., p. 4.
10. prayer books (100 copies)\textsuperscript{111}

11. catechism books (200 copies).\textsuperscript{112}

Johnson’s optimism was further reflected by his inclusion of 12 copies of Bishop Thomas Wilson’s *An Essay Towards an Instruction for the Indians*.\textsuperscript{113} All in all, this was ‘sufficient to allow each of the … convicts embarked to borrow six at a time’.\textsuperscript{114}

Needless to say, the Reverend Johnson’s attempts to reform the convicts were not particularly successful. ‘Male convicts were known to use Bibles and prayer books to make playing cards; women convicts turned tracts into hair curlers.’\textsuperscript{115} First Lieutenant Ralph Clark, writing in his journal on Tuesday, 1 May 1792, recounted:

> [T]wo sharks were caught the morning—in the belly of one of them was found a prayer book quite fresh not a leaf of it defaced on one of the leaves was wrote Frances Carthy cast for death in the year 1786 and reprieved the same day at four oclock in the afternoon.\textsuperscript{116}

(At his trial held in Bodmin, Cornwall, on 14 August 1786, Francis Carty was found guilty of assault and highway robbery, and sentenced to death. The death sentence was commuted to transportation to Botany Bay for seven years. Carty sailed with the First Fleet on the *Scarborough*.\textsuperscript{117} It is likely that it was Carty who tossed his prayer book into the sea.) Ironically, the

1780s saw the most extraordinary spiritual rebirth in Britain since the 17th century; a great flowering of dissenting faiths and Churches in which the Bible was read … as a proclamation of the doctrine of common humanity, and the gospel of compassion for the poor and downtrodden.\textsuperscript{118}

In a letter dated Saturday, 15 November 1788, written to his friend Henry Fricker, Reverend Johnson reveals that 10 months after the arrival of the First

\begin{footnotes}
\item[111] See Steele and Richards, *Bound for Botany Bay*, pp. 4–5.
\item[117] See *First Fleet Convicts Register—Convict Profile: Francis Carty* (Wollongong, NSW: Centre for Educational Development and Interactive Resources, University of Wollongong, n.d.).
\end{footnotes}
Fleet at Sydney Cove, the physical quality of his housing left a lot to be desired (the Reverend Johnson’s letters ‘are full of … frustrations at the primitive state of things’).\textsuperscript{119} Reverend Johnson writes that with much labour & no small cost we have got our little cabbage tree cottage—no small curiosity it is, i assure you, & could it be placed on bonfire corner but one day, I dare say it would have as many spectators & admirers as ever had Lunardy’s balloon. Am happy, however, that it in some measure answers our purpose, though now and then in excessive rains, we are all in a swim within doors.\textsuperscript{120}

When compared with a tent, Reverend Johnson’s cottage represented a more comfortable and secure type of accommodation. Even so, it is reasonable to assume that if Worgan was presented with the opportunity to place his piano in the Reverend Johnson’s cottage, or into a cottage that was similar, he may not have been keen to place the instrument into such an environmentally harsh context.

**George Worgan’s Piano Remains on the *Sirius***

Following his arrival with the First Fleet, Worgan may have kept his piano on board the *Sirius* for as long as he could, in order to ensure that it was housed in a secure and relatively environmentally stable location.

John Curry maintains that ‘at Sydney Cove Worgan lived principally on the ship’.\textsuperscript{121} Worgan may sometimes have slept on board the *Sirius*. There was a precedent for this: after his arrival at Sydney Cove with the First Fleet, First Lieutenant William Bradley ‘lived in the *Sirius* and appears to have taken little part in the social life of the new colony’.\textsuperscript{122} A watercolour\textsuperscript{123} drawn by Bradley, dated 1788, shows the colony’s sparse, rudimentary housing (Bradley used the image to illustrate his journal). Given the basic conditions depicted by Bradley, it is reasonable to hypothesise that Worgan may have kept his piano on board the *Sirius*, where he may have slept—after all, Worgan was a member of the

\textsuperscript{120} ‘Reverend Richard Johnson (1753–1827)’, in *Discover Collections at Your State Library*.
\textsuperscript{123} Watercolouring was relatively new—far cheaper than oil paint, watercolour paint was easily portable and dried faster. A boxed set of watercolour cakes was, however, not cheap, selling for 2–3 guineas. See Menezes and Bandeira, *O Rio De Janeiro na Rota dos Mares do Sul*, p. 221, fn. 2. See also Groom, *First Fleet Artist*, p. 7, fn. 11.
ship’s company, rather than of the settlement. No documentary source, however, indicates that surgeon Worgan led a reclusive life, or that he lived, or as a general rule slept, on board the Sirius. Furthermore, there is no documentary evidence supporting the notions that Worgan’s piano was either immediately taken off the Sirius or remained on board.

George Worgan’s Piano is Taken Ashore

The contextual uniqueness of Worgan’s piano, as well as its social, cultural and monetary value, would have required that moving the instrument from the Sirius to the shore be undertaken with the utmost care. There may have been some awkward effort, if not only because of the instrument’s fragility, but also because of its weight (which was not all that excessive) and its slightly lopsided centre of gravity. Rudimentary wharf facilities would also not have helped. In order to make its journey ashore, Worgan’s piano may have been moved in a shallow-draft rowing boat or a flat-bottomed barge.

Following his arrival at Sydney Cove with the First Fleet on Saturday, 26 January 1788, Worgan had two choices in relation to the timing of taking his piano ashore. First, the instrument could have been taken off the Sirius at any time during the approximately eight months following the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove, and before the ship’s departure on 2 October 1788 ‘for the Cape of Good Hope, with directions to purchase provisions there’.124

Second, Worgan’s piano may have been removed from the Sirius after its return from the Cape of Good Hope on Saturday, 9 May 1789 (assuming that the instrument made the journey with Worgan).

The Sirius Circumnavigates the World

Unlikely as it is, Worgan’s piano may have remained on board the Sirius during its epic global circumnavigation via the Cape of Good Hope and back (Thursday, 2 October 1788 to Saturday, 9 May 1789). If the piano was on the ship during this journey, it may also have been left on board during the 10 months that followed the return of the vessel to Sydney Cove from Cape Town—that is, before the Sirius departed on Saturday, 6 March 1790 for Norfolk Island, where the ship was wrecked 13 days later. This, however, is an unlikely scenario.

In his journal, An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island, Captain John Hunter reveals that prior to the Sirius’s departure from Sydney Cove for the Cape of Good Hope,

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Governor Phillip signified … that it was his intention … that [the Sirius] … might be made as light as possible [and] … he desired I would land eight or ten of her guns and carriages, with any other articles which I judged the ship could spare, for the time she might be absent, and which might answer the purpose of lightening the ship and the making of room. In consequence of this order … various … articles … were put on shore at Sydney-cove.125

Was Worgan’s piano one of the ‘articles’ that was removed from the Sirius prior to the vessel’s departure for the Cape of Good Hope because Captain Hunter had ‘judged’ that ‘the ship could spare’ it?

We know that Worgan was on the Sirius when the ship made its eastward journey via Cape Horn to the Cape of Good Hope. This is because Captain Hunter writes:

[I]n the morning of the 2d of January [1789] … at 10 o’clock … we anchored in Table Bay [Cape Town] … Immediately after our arrival, I directed that sick-quarters should be provided for the sick, which was done; and the invalids, to the number of forty, were landed under the care of Mr. Worgan, the surgeon of the ship.126

The large number of ‘invalids’ cared for by George Worgan had been incapacitated by scurvy. ‘The ship’s company was afflicted with scurvy so badly that at one stage there were only thirteen sailors available to man the watch.’127 Because Captain Hunter had ‘made the controversial decision to take the eastern, rather than the western route to Cape Town, across the southern Pacific and Atlantic oceans [the Sirius arrived] … in Cape Town in a record time of 91 days’.128 Hunter may have taken the eastern route in order to take advantage of the Roaring Forties, which blow consistently from the west; although he travelled further, the wind was behind him all the way. ‘Sailing east, the Sirius had gained a day. The correction was made when the ship crossed the Greenwich meridian in the mid-Atlantic; quite by coincidence this was on the 25 December, and the ship’s company were permitted to celebrate Christmas twice.’129

After spending 51 days at Table Bay, on 20 February, the Sirius departed from Cape Town for Sydney Cove, ‘after having taken on board twelve months provisions for the ship’s company; and, in addition, about six months flour for the whole settlement’130

125 Hunter, An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island, Chapter IV, ‘A Voyage to Cape of Good Hope September 1788 to January 1789’.
126 Ibid., Chapter V, ‘A Voyage to Cape of Good Hope and Voyage to Port Jackson January 1789 to May 1789’.
127 Keneally, A Commonwealth of Thieves, p. 212.
128 Groom, First Fleet Artist, pp. 25–6.
130 Hunter, An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island, Chapter V, ‘A Voyage to Cape of Good Hope and Voyage to Port Jackson January 1789 to May 1789’.
One can imagine the emotions of [the ship’s officers and crew] ... as they sailed from Cape Town and turned towards the east. There was no question, of course, where their duty lay—the settlement at Sydney Cove desperately needed the supplies they were carrying—but it must have been tempting to think that by turning in the other direction they could have been back to the comforts of England within a couple of months.131

The *Sirius* was loaded with ‘various stores for the colony, and many private articles for the different officers, &c. &c. in short, the ship’s hold, between decks, every officer’s apartment, and all the store-rooms were completely filled’.132

We do not know if Worgan’s ‘apartment’ contained his piano along with the ‘many private articles’ that had been procured at Cape Town. Regardless of whether or not Worgan’s piano was stored in his cabin, according to Captain Hunter, Worgan’s apartment would have been ‘completely filled’.

On the evening of 9 May 1789, the *Sirius* ‘entered between the heads of the harbour, and worked up to Sydney Cove, where [it] ... anchored before dark, after an absence of 219 days’.133 Having sailed in the belt of westerly winds known as the Roaring Forties, the *Sirius* ‘had fairly gone round the world’,134 ‘thus pioneering the route’.135

During its epic voyage, the *Sirius* endured a particularly violent storm off the South Cape of Van Diemen’s Land. As a consequence, when the ship arrived at Sydney Cove, it was in a damaged state:

She was missing the upper sections of her masts (the fore-topgallant masts), had split the upper parts of her stem [stern?] and lost the figurehead of the Duke of Berwick … 136

Despite the supplies *Sirius* had brought back from South Africa, by November 1789 the ration had to be reduced by two-thirds again. Amongst other factors, the store-house supplies had proved to be very appetizing to rats and to native marsupials—bush rats, potoroos, bilbies and possums. Nonetheless, said Collins, ‘The governor, whose humanity was at all times conspicuous, directed that no alteration should be made in the ration to be issued to the women.’137

131 Groom, *First Fleet Artist*, p. 27.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Thompson, ‘Statement of Significance’.
137 Ibid., p. 237.
The Wedgwood Medallion

The optimism that must have flowered in the colony immediately following the arrival of the *Sirius* on Saturday, 9 May 1789 was matched, at virtually the same time, in England.

On [Sunday] 16 November 1788 in Sydney Cove, Governor Arthur Phillip sent Sir Joseph Banks\(^{138}\) a box containing red ochre, and also white clay ‘with wch the natives mark themselves, it is found in great plenty, a few feet below the surface … the people use it to cover their houses.’ A second box was described as containing sand ‘found in sinking a well’ which Phillip thought ‘has black lead in it.’\(^{139}\)

Banks, in turn, immediately sent the clay to ‘Josiah Wedgwood to be tested for its suitability for making pottery, which Wedgwood reported was excellent’.\(^{140}\) (Had Banks been informed at the time that Worgan had taken a square piano to Sydney Cove, he would most probably have been disinterested; Sir Joseph did not have ‘the slightest taste for music’.)\(^{141}\)

In 1789 Josiah Wedgwood issued a medallion (Plate 64) made from the marl collected by Arthur Phillip. ‘Modelled by William Hackwood (fl. 1780–d. 1836) after a design by Henry Webber (1754–1826)’,\(^{142}\) the medallion was entitled ‘Hope encouraging Art and Labour, under the influence of Peace, to pursue the employments necessary to give security and happiness to an infant settlement’.

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138 Sir Joseph Banks lived in a house in Soho (or Kings) Square, one block away from the house in which Johann Christian Bach lived until his death in 1782. A portrait of Sir Joseph Banks by Benjamin West (1738–1820), dated 1773, can be seen at [PD Art. Wikimedia Commons. Web Gallery of Art.](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_-_Sir_Joseph_Banks_1773.jpg)


Plate 64 Josiah Wedgwood (1730–95): medallion made from clay collected at Sydney Cove (1789); 6.7 centimetres maximum diameter.

Source: Reproduced with permission of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. Call no. P’68; Album ID 825693; Digital order no. a128978.

The bas-relief image on the obverse side of the medallion is allegorical. The female figure on the left, dressed in Grecian-style robes, represents Hope; she stands beside an anchor, the symbol of hope. Hope is addressing Peace, Art and Labour—all of whom are in classical dress. A basket of fruit, a symbol of plenty, pours forth its bounty at the feet of a female figure, Peace, who holds an olive branch, the symbol of peace. Next to Peace, Art is represented by a female figure holding an artist’s palette; last, standing beside Art, the only male figure on the medallion represents Labour—he wears a loincloth, and supports a sledgehammer on his right shoulder. On the left-hand side, behind Hope, a ship under sail can be seen, whilst on the right-hand side, behind Labour, the land bristles with (church?) towers, and buildings rise.
The word ‘Etruria’ in raised (sprigged) text, along with the date of manufacture (1789), sits beneath the image. ‘Etruria’ refers to the name of Wedgwood’s Staffordshire factory, opened in 1769 (Wedgwood’s stately home was called ‘Etruria Hall’).

On the reverse side of the medallion, the following words are impressed:

Made By
Josiah Wedgwood
Of Clay
From
Sydney Cove

An unknown number of medallions were sent to Phillip at Sydney Cove. On Monday, 26 July 1790, Phillip wrote to Joseph Banks: ‘Wedgwood has showed the world that our [New South] Welch clay is capable of receiving an eligant commission, & i return thanks for the … medallions.’

The medallions were produced in three distinct colours—pale cream, brown and black—depending on which clay was used. It is not known how many medallions were produced, but the number is likely to be small.

The Wedgwood medallion became the inspiration for the First Great Seal of New South Wales, which was approved by King George III on Wednesday, 4 August 1790.

George Worgan Puts His Piano on Land

Worgan’s piano was taken off the Sirius between the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove on Saturday, 26 January 1788 and the departure of the Sirius for Norfolk Island on Saturday, 6 March 1790.

A very long letter written by Elizabeth Macarthur to her friend Bridget Kingdon in London, dated Monday, 7 March 1791, enables us to deduce that George Worgan’s piano (and George Worgan) did not depart with the Sirius for Norfolk Island on 6 March 1790; Worgan ‘remained at Port Jackson assisting Dr. White at the hospital’. Elizabeth writes: ‘I shall now introduce another acquaintance, Mr Worgan to you, a gentleman I have not hitherto named. He was surgeon to the Sirius, and happened to be left at this place [that is, Sydney] when that ship met with her fate at Norfolk.’ The writing of letters was considered to be both

144 ‘General Note’, State Library of New South Wales.
part of ‘women’s work’ and an artform that reflected ‘gentility’. Letter writing was part of the literary inheritance of middle- and upper-class women, letters often being written ‘to be read aloud and to be passed around among relatives and friends’. Clarke and Spender, Life Lines, p. xxvii. As there is no mention in any contemporaneous source that Worgan’s piano was saved from the shipwreck of the *Sirius*, it is reasonable to assume that by Saturday, 6 March 1790, Worgan’s square piano had been taken off the *Sirius*.

Watkin Tench provides evidence that Worgan was not on board the *Sirius* when it made its journey to Norfolk Island.149 The *Sirius* foundered at Norfolk Island on Friday, 19 March 1790. The officers and crew of the *Sirius*—having been stranded on Norfolk Island for 11 months—departed from the island for Sydney Cove, on board the *Supply*, on Monday, 7 February 1791. They arrived at Sydney Cove on Sunday, 27 February 1791. Tench reports that in August 1790—five months after the *Sirius* had been wrecked, and six months before the officers and crew of the *Sirius* returned to Sydney Cove—

in company with Mr Dawes and Mr Worgan, late surgeon of the *Sirius*, I undertook an expedition to the southward and westward of Rose Hill [Parramatta]150 ... Except the discovery of a river (which is unquestionably the Nepean near its source) to which we gave the name of the Worgan, in honour of one of our party, nothing very interesting was remarked.151

Worgan therefore cannot have left Port Jackson for Norfolk Island on what was to be the final journey of the *Sirius*.

Cobley152 and Edwards153 assert that Worgan left Port Jackson on the *Sirius*, and subsequently ‘spent a year on Norfolk Island after she was wrecked there’.154 There is no evidence to support either Cobley’s or Edwards’ claims—claims that contradict the obvious implications of Tench’s report.

Whatever the exact date Worgan’s piano was moved from the *Sirius* to the shore, no direct evidence has been found to show where the piano was housed

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147 Clarke, ‘Life Lines’.
149 See W. Tench, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, in New South Wales, Including an Accurate Description of the Colony; Of the Natives; And of its Natural Productions* (London: G. Nicol & J. Sewell, 1793), Chapter 7.
151 Ibid., p. 133.
154 Cobley, ‘Worgan, George Bouchier (1757–1838)’. 
immediately after its removal from the ship. The instrument most probably began its life in Australia in a tent, in conditions that were both confronting and crude.

With the passing of time, Worgan’s piano may have been located in his residence. It is not known exactly where Worgan resided. He may have lived with the other surgeons at the hospital, or he may have lived at the barracks.

**Was George Worgan’s Piano Placed in Governor Phillip’s House?**

Because of its value, perhaps Worgan’s piano found its way into Governor Phillip’s home. The foundation stone for Governor Phillip’s house—‘a small cottage on the east side of the cove’—was laid on Thursday, 15 May 1788. (‘The Lieutenant-Governor, Major Robert Ross, had begun his stone-built cottage a month before.’)

**The King’s Birthday Celebrations, 4 June 1789**

On Thursday, 4 June 1789—‘the anniversary of his majesty’s birthday’—not only did Governor Phillip receive a large cabbage (weighing 12 kilograms) that had been grown at the newly established vegetable gardens at Rose Hill (soon renamed with its Aboriginal name of Parramatta), but he also ‘received the compliments due to the day in his new house, of which he had lately taken possession as the government-house of the colony, where his excellency afterwards entertained the officers at dinner’.

Robert Jordan provides compelling evidence to support his hypothesis that not all the officers in or near Sydney on 4 June 1789 dined that evening with

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155 A possibility identified by the eminent Australian historian Joy Hughes during a conversation held with the author on Friday, 6 March 2009.
158 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country*, Chapter VII, para. 21.
Governor Phillip to celebrate the King’s birthday (the 12-kilogram cabbage would doubtless have featured at the dinner). Jordan suggests that Governor Phillip entertained ‘45 or so’ dinner guests.\footnote{Jordan, \textit{The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788–1840}, pp. 281–2.}

Government House ‘was only one room deep with back skillings’—that is, slight additions to the outside of the cottage.\footnote{Broadbent, \textit{The Australian Colonial House}, p. 4.}

There were ‘six main rooms—two front rooms downstairs, two skilling rooms and two rooms upstairs—plus the upper and lower halls, the stairhall and, possibly, subsidiary rooms in the upper part of the skilling.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 3.}

‘The front rooms were approximately 20 by 16.5 feet [6 metres by 5 metres], the hall approximately 9 feet [3 metres] wide. The ceiling height on the ground floor was 9 feet, the height to the top of the double-hung sash windows was 7 feet [2 metres].’\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.}

There would have been more than enough room to install Worgan’s square piano in one of the downstairs front rooms of Governor Phillip’s new home.

The King’s birthday of 4 June 1789 was celebrated with volleys from the marines, and 21-gun salutes from the ships in the harbour.\footnote{Parker, \textit{Arthur Phillip}, p. 168.} Captain David Collins, the colony’s Deputy Judge Advocate and Secretary to the Governor,\footnote{Collins formed a close bond with Governor Phillip. This is reflected in his statement concerning the Governor, ‘with whom I have now lived so long, that I am blended in every concern of his’. ‘Collins, David (1756–1810)’, in \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography Online} (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University) [First published in \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography}, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 1966], Vol. 1.} tells us that the King’s birthday ‘was observed with every distinction in our power; for the first time, the ordnance belonging to the colony were discharged; the detachment of marines fired three volleys, which were followed by twenty-one guns from each of the ships of war in the cove’.\footnote{Collins, \textit{An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country}, Chapter VII, para. 21.}

‘David Collins was a tall, broad-shouldered man with fair, curly hair.\footnote{An engraved portrait of Captain David Collins by Antoine Cardon (1722–1813), dated 1804, is housed at the National Library of Australia, Canberra (Pictures Collection, nla.pic-an9483647).} He was described as “remarkably handsome and his manners extremely prepossessing” with a “most cheerful disposition”.’\footnote{Egan, \textit{Buried Alive}, p. 88.}

Collins’ account of the first eight years of the colony is arguably the most comprehensive of the several accounts of life at Sydney Cove that were published towards the end of the eighteenth century.
Collins’ duties ensured that he had ‘a close relationship with Governor Phillip and his role of keeping official records and drafting dispatches made him very well informed to document the state of the colony’.}

George Farquhar’s The Recruiting Officer

Collins continues by revealing that during the evening of the King’s birthday, ‘some of the convicts were permitted to perform Farquhar’s comedy of the Recruiting Officer, in a hut fitted up for the occasion. They professed no higher aim than “humbly to excite a smile,” and their efforts to please were not unattended with applause.’

On Thursday, 4 June 1789, after Governor Phillip had ‘entertained the officers at dinner’ as part of the King’s birthday celebrations, not all of his dinner guests—following their culinary adventure with the 12-kilogram cabbage—would have attended the ensuing performance of The Recruiting Officer.

Hypothetically, over forty of the sixty audience-members could have been drawn from the ruling elite. Although the actual number may have been below that, there still remain those immediate adjuncts of the ruling order, the storekeepers and superintendents, the marine sergeants (some of whom had brought their wives to the colony) and their naval equivalents, such as the bosuns and master-gunners. Tench’s reference to an audience of ‘various descriptions’ suggests some common folk were present; but the few places would not have gone far among the theatre-loving sailors and soldiers. There may well have been no convicts whatsoever in the audience, only convicts performing for the delectation of their betters.

This production of The Recruiting Officer, a play written in 1706 by the Irish dramatist George Farquhar (1677–1707), was the first play to be seen in New South Wales. Sadly, we know virtually nothing about the production or who was involved in it.

Though The Recruiting Officer was sufficiently popular to justify its selection on that ground alone, it was also a play that had a special

171 Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country, Chapter VII, para. 21.
172 Ibid., Chapter II, para. 2, and Chapter VII, para. 21.
174 Parker, Arthur Phillip, p. 168.
appeal to the military. Its choice may have been a calculated attempt to flatter those who were expected to dominate not only the audience but also the lives of the players.  

Within the context of late eighteenth-century political correctness, however, it is astonishing that both Governor Phillip and the NSW Corps allowed the convict actors to present The Recruiting Officer. The play ridicules the officer class: Captain Brazen, the principal comic figure in the play, is not only a loud-mouthed fop but also an idiot.

In 1797, several English newspapers reported that John Gay’s (1685–1732) The Beggar’s Opera had been performed in Sydney:  

'It is said that the Citizens of Botany Bay, begin to turn their hands towards theatrical amusements. The Beggar’s Opera, we hear, is the favourite Play.’  

It seems unlikely that The Beggar’s Opera would have been performed at the colony, ‘since it was widely seen in Britain as politically subversive and a dangerous celebration of the life of crime’. (Besides, there may not have been available an instrumental ensemble large enough to provide the prescribed accompaniment for the singers.) The Beggar’s Opera worked on the principle that if you can destroy the … respect paid to rank and station, those distinctions … may be speedily swept away. On 13 May 1805 the Morning Chronicle reported a disturbance during a production of the work at Drury Lane, where Gay’s version of ‘Greensleeves’ (Air 67) ’produced a torrent of applause of an extraordinary kind’ and was encored three times:

Since laws were made for ev’ry degree,  
To curb vice in others, as well as me,  
I wonder we ha’nt better company,  
Upon Tyburn Tree!  
But gold from law can take out the sting;  
And if rich men like us were to swing,  
’Twou’d thin the land, such numbers to string  
Upon Tyburn Tree!

It is unlikely the ruling authorities at Sydney Cove would have welcomed such sentiments being espoused on the convict stage.

176 Oracle, 14 July 1797; Morning Chronicle, 18 July 1797; True Briton, 20 July 1797; Star, 27 July 1797; Crafts, 26 August 1797.  
178 Ibid., p. 106.  
179 Ibid., p. 307, fn. 58.
It is not known who brought a copy of *The Recruiting Officer* to Sydney Cove. It is possible that marine officer First Lieutenant Ralph Clark may have possessed a copy of the play. Clark, ‘a rather prim [and] neurotic officer had volunteered’ for service in Botany Bay ‘in the hope of promotion’.180 We know that during his journey on board the *Friendship*—one of the transports for female prisoners—First Lieutenant Clark spent time reading. ‘He enjoyed … stories in copies of [the] … women’s magazine [Lady]. He … also possessed a copy of *Lady Jane Grey*, a play by Nicholas Rowe (1674–1718), ‘first produced in 1715’.181

In his journal, Clark informs us that on Saturday, 8 December 1787, he ‘read the remainder of Lady Jane Gray—could not help shedding tears for so good a young lady to come with her fond husband to so untimly an end as she did’.182

Watkin Tench provides a much more elaborate account than Collins of the production of the first play to be performed in the colony.

Tench recounts:

The anniversary of His Majesty’s birthday was celebrated, as heretofore, at the government house, with loyal festivity. In the evening, the play of *The Recruiting Officer* was performed by a party of convicts, and honoured by the presence of His Excellency and the officers of the garrison. That every opportunity of escape from the dreariness and dejection of our situation should be eagerly embraced will not be wondered at. The exhilarating effect of a splendid theatre is well known; and I am not ashamed to confess that the proper distribution of three or four yards of stained paper, and a dozen farthing candles stuck around the mud walls of a convict hut, failed not to diffuse general complacency on the countenances of sixty persons of various descriptions who were assembled to applaud the representation. Some of the actors acquitted themselves with great spirit and received the praises of the audience. A prologue and an epilogue, written by one of the performers, were also spoken on the occasion; which, although not worth inserting here, contained some tolerable allusions to the situation of the parties, and the novelty of a stage representation in New South Wales.183

The prologue and epilogue of which Tench speaks have not survived. By referring to ‘the novelty of a stage representation in New South Wales’, Tench implies that he was well aware of the cultural significance for the colony of the production of *The Recruiting Officer*.

**Incidental Music for *The Recruiting Officer***

The addition of a prologue and epilogue to the *The Recruiting Officer* produced the structure of entertainment typically found in many English theatres of the time. ‘The usual preliminaries would have comprised an extended musical introduction from a small instrumental ensemble, followed by an actor advancing in front of the curtain to deliver a prologue.’

If there was ‘an extended musical introduction’, this may have involved the use of George Worgan’s piano. It seems unlikely, however, that Tench would have failed to mention the presence of the piano had it been part of the event in any way (not to mention the presence of its player, George Worgan).

The prologue would almost certainly have been written locally for the occasion. It was commonplace in England for companies touring the provincial towns, as part of the process of ingratiation, to offer such pieces, normally replete with local references. Similarly, special events, such as the opening of a new theatre, were accorded the same treatment.

Typically for late eighteenth-century English theatre, the conclusion of the prologue led immediately into the main play, which was usually taken from the standard repertoire. The main play was commonly followed by an epilogue, a farce or a pantomime, a dance and/or a song, an elaborate scenic spectacle or a combination of all these afterpieces (depending on the resources available at the theatre).

In 1792—three years after the performance at Sydney Cove of *The Recruiting Officer* on 4 June 1789—the text of Farquhar’s play was printed in London. According to this printed text, singing is called for at several stages in the play.

At the start of Act 2, Scene 3:

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185 Ibid., pp. 38–9.
KITE sings.

Our 'prentice Tom may now refuse
To wipe his scoundrel master's shous,
For now he's free to sing and play
Over the hills and far away. Over, &c.

[The Mob sing the chorus.]

We shall lead more happy lives
By getting rid of brats and wives
That scold and brawl both night and day,
Over the hills and far away. Over, &c. 188

A little later in the same scene:

Enter PLUME singing.

Over the hills and over the main,
To Flanders, Portugal, or Spain;
The king commands and we'll obey,
Over the hills and far away. 189

Near the end of Act 2:

Plume. Very well. Courage, my lads Now
we'll

[Sings.] Over the hills, and far away.
Courage, boys, it is one to ten
But we return all gentlemen;
While conq'ring colours we display,
Over the hills, and far away. 190

Towards the end of Act 3, Scene 1:

Enter PLUME, singing.

Plume. But it is not so
With those that go
Thro' frost and snow
Most apropos
My maid with the milking-pail. [Takes hold of Rose.] 191

188 Ibid., p. 38.
189 Ibid., p. 40.
190 Ibid., p. 45.
191 Ibid., p. 57.
Apart from singing, the sound of a drum is also required in the play towards the beginning of Act 1. The 1792 printed text shows:

> All Mob. Huzza!
> Kite. Beat drum.

[Exeunt shouting, drum beating a Grenadier’s march.]¹⁹²

When describing the performance at Sydney Cove of *The Recruiting Officer*, both Collins and Tench make no observations in relation either to singing or to the use of musical instruments in the play. If any instruments were used at all, their presence may simply have been taken for granted. Traditionally, the English regarded music and spectacle—scenery, costumes and spoken dialogue—as being of equal importance. As the seventeenth-century playwright Peter Motteux (1663–1718) states: ‘English gentlemen, when their ear is satisfy’d, are desirous to have their mind pleas’d, and musick and dancing industriously intermix’d with comedy or tragedy.’¹⁹³ There is no evidence that this attitude changed markedly between the seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries.

In late eighteenth-century London’s playhouses (as in opera houses), musical instruments were not always placed in front of the stage but could be located outside the stage picture. The location of musical instruments was a flexible affair, and was often determined by the needs of the play; accordingly, music could be heard coming from ‘heav’n’ (above the proscenium), from ‘hell’ (beneath the stage) or was made visibly (or invisibly) behind, in front of or beside the action.

The fact that neither Collins nor Tench mentions singing or the use of musical instruments in the production of *The Recruiting Officer* may be because the presence of these elements was not regarded as being anything special or particularly out of the ordinary. Certainly, it would have been an easy matter to procure at least a drummer (as is required in the 1792 printed text) from the regimental band (‘three marine fife-and-drummers landed with the … *Sirius* in 1788’).¹⁹⁴

If singing took place within the context of the production of *The Recruiting Officer*, it is possible that a fife—or fifes, if not too loud combined—from the regimental band(s) may have (visibly or invisibly) doubled or improvised basic counterpoint against the vocal melodic line.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 13.
¹⁹³ Quoted in M. Greenhalgh, Liner Notes for *Henry Purcell: King Arthur or the British Worthy* (Harmonia Mundi France, 1979), vinyl disc, HM 252/53, p. 3.
Although there is no evidence to reinforce the notion, there remains the remote possibility that George Worgan’s piano ‘was carefully carried down to the hut where the performance took place in order to add its voice to those of the actors’.  

How large was this hut? Based on the commonly assumed ratio of 0.23 square metres per person, an audience of ‘sixty persons of various descriptions who were assembled to applaud the representation’ of The Recruiting Officer results in a total area of 23.23 square metres. Such a floor area seems large for a small convict hut, and there is only one early reference that could point to the existence of something larger. In April 1788 ‘a range of huts’ for women prisoners was begun west of the stream. These sound more like barracks than individual dwellings, but no dimensions are given. However, by November 1790 Parramatta boasted 32 convict barracks, apparently built as part of the expansion of the town in that year and housing 10 to 14 men each. These were ‘of 24 feet by 12 [7.3 metres by 3.6 metres] each, on a ground floor only, built of wattles plaistered with clay, and thatched’. They were distinguished from the ‘small huts’ where convict families of good character were permitted to reside and were divided into two rooms. In April 1792 the work in progress included ‘building brick huts at Sydney for convicts, consisting of two apartments, each hut being twenty-six feet [7.9 metres] in front, and fourteen feet [4.2 metres] in width, and intended to contain ten people’. Despite the paucity of the records the probability is that Sydney had been building cabbage-palm or wattle-and-daub convict barracks from April 1788, using the model then taken up by Parramatta … These … structures … could have had a floor space of 288–364 square feet [27–34 square metres], sufficient (if unencumbered) to accommodate the production.

If Worgan’s piano was used in the performance of The Recruiting Officer, George Worgan would have been the one to have played it. Had this been the case, such a novel occurrence would probably not have gone undocumented. Watkin Tench only recalls that ‘the play of The Recruiting Officer was performed by a party of convicts’. There is no mention of surgeon Worgan playing his piano. Given the lack of evidence concerning all things musical in relation to the performance of The Recruiting Officer, one can only speculate that Worgan played his piano as part of the performance.

195 Parker, Arthur Phillip, p. 168.
Australia’s earliest existing printed document is a playbill advertising an evening’s entertainment to be given ‘[a]t the Theatre, Sydney, On Saturday, July 30, 1796’. The playbill ‘was printed by the Government Printer, convict George Hughes, using a small wooden screw press brought to Port Jackson by Captain Arthur Phillip’. The evening’s program comprised ‘Jane Shore (1714), a play by English dramatist Nicholas Rowe … recounting the tragedy of the fictionalized mistress of King Edward IV … The Wapping Landlady, a comic dance … depicting a rotund, capering barmaid and a pair of sailors … [and] The Miraculous Cure, a farce written by Brownlow Forde in 1771’.

The ‘comic dance’—most probably of a slapstick and ribald nature—was performed by George Hughes, the government printer, and convict Richard Evans; both of these gentlemen took on the roles of sailors. The painter W. Fowkes took on the role of the plump ‘Wapping Landlady’, Mother Doublechalk.

It is highly unlikely that the ‘comic dance’ would have been presented without accompanying music. It also seems unlikely that the same instruments that accompanied the dance would not also have been used within the context of the play and the farce that were part of the program.

That music is not specifically mentioned on Australia’s earliest playbill does not mean that musical instruments were not heard during the performance—after all, the use of musical instruments in a play was not regarded as being odd; no mention would need to have been made on the playbill of their use. A precedent may already have been set: it is possible that a similar situation had been contrived within the context of the performance given seven years before on 4 June 1789, of The Recruiting Officer.

If Worgan’s piano was used during the performance of The Recruiting Officer, and if, as Parker suggests, the instrument was ‘carefully carried down to the hut where the performance took place’, from where was the piano carried? Governor Phillip’s house? Tench recalls only that ‘the play of The Recruiting Officer was performed by a party of convicts’. He does not mention that Worgan’s piano was used within the context of the performance, nor does he shed any light on the instrument’s whereabouts.

On 4 June 1788, was Worgan’s piano housed in Government House? Given the uniqueness of Worgan’s piano in the colony, one would expect that at least

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200 Ibid., p. 40.
201 Ibid., p. 40.
202 See Russell, The Playbill and its People, p. 16.
203 Parker, Arthur Phillip, p. 168.
one comment would have been made in relation to the instrument’s presence in Government House. Contemporaneous documents remain silent on the matter, suggesting that it is unlikely that Worgan’s piano was ever placed in Government House, and that it was not used to enrich any of the celebrations held on 4 June 1788.

A theatre—possibly located somewhere on the way to Parramatta—existed in Sydney in 1794. On Saturday, 16 January 1796, a playhouse with a capacity of between 180 and 200 people was opened with a program comprising Edward Moore’s (1712–57) tragedy *The Revenge* and Thomas Vaughan’s (fl. 1772–1820) *The Hotel.*

The construction of the playhouse in Sydney coincided with a boom in theatre-building throughout the British Isles and the British Empire, following the relaxation of regulations relating to theatre in the late 1780s … Theatres sprang up in garrison towns and ports across the British Empire, including Sydney, to entertain Britain’s soldiers and sailors. More than ever before, in the 1790s play-going was the dominant pastime for Britons across the globe and the theatre was the leading cultural industry.

It is clear that ‘despite cultural isolation and an uncertain future, the Australian stage was laying its foundations with resourceful optimism and a vibrant repertoire’.

**The Effect of the Weather on George Worgan’s Square Piano: Weather at Sydney Cove**

The extremes of temperature and rapid changes in humidity that attended the First Fleet during its journey from England to Sydney Cove may well have caused significant damage to Worgan’s piano (cracks in the soundboard and bridge of the 1780/86? Beck square piano bear witness to the effect of such climatic extremes). Following the piano’s arrival at Sydney Cove, the vagaries of the weather were equally as menacing.

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206 Ibid., p. 2. See also D. Collins and P. G. King, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, Volume 1. With Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country. To which are Added, Some Particulars of New Zealand; Compiled, by Permission, from the Mss. of Lieutenant-Governor King* (London: T. Cadell, jr & W. Davies, 1798), Project Gutenberg eBook, No. 12565, Chapter XXX, January, para. 7.
209 See ‘Soundboard: Condition and Bridge—Condition’, in Appendix A, Volume 2 of this publication.
The weather within which Worgan’s piano found itself at Sydney Cove is described in detail by a rich body of accounts dating from between 1788 and 1793. These accounts are contained in the journals of government officials, as well as diaries, and include observations made by Lieutenant William Bradley, Captain David Collins, Lieutenant William Dawes, Second Captain John Hunter, Governor Arthur Phillip, Captain Lieutenant Watkin Tench and Surgeon George Worgan. William Bradley’s ‘daily noon temperature measurements (Fº)’ were taken on board the Sirius, as it lay at anchor in Botany Bay (between 20–26 January 1788) and then in Port Jackson (Sydney Cove) (between 27 January to 13 September 1788). The Board of Longitude supplied the thermometer to Arthur Phillip. ‘Captain Phillip gave a receipt … [for the thermometer], promising to return [it] … to the Board (the dangers of the sea & other unavoidable accident excepted) at his return.’ The thermometer was located in the great cabin, where the timekeeper ‘for keeping the longitude’ was also kept. Bradley reports that William Dawes was ‘always to be present at the winding’ of the timekeeper, ‘at noon’. The reason for this is twofold. First, ‘as is well known … clocks … were crucial to accurate navigation … Secondly, [the timekeeper] had been made in response to the British state’s demand for accurate and robust instruments, and it was the duty of the state’s servants (Admiralty naval officers …) to use them, test them, and protect them.’

A precedent had recently been set concerning the level of care that was considered appropriate for the security and protection of a shipboard timekeeper.

210 Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, pp. 378–94.
211 Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales: From its First Settlement in January 1788 to August 1801.
213 Hunter, An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island.
214 Phillip, The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay.
215 W. Tench, Sydney’s First Four Years: Being a Reprint of a Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and a Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson … with an Introduction and Annotations by L. F. Fitzhardinge (Sydney: Angus & Robertson in Association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 1961).
220 Ibid., Frame 11, April–May 1787.
221 Ibid.
In 1772—the year that Western Australia was ‘claimed for France and [King] Louis XV by the intrepid seafarer’ Louis François Marie Aleno de Saint Aloüarn (1738–72)—the Admiralty ordered Captain Cook to ensure that, within the context of his second voyage to the Pacific, the timekeeper should have three locks. The key for the first lock was to be ‘kept by the commander … the [second] by the 1st lieutenant [and] … the third by one of the [astronomers]’. Thus, as in the launch of a nuclear missile, no single person was entrusted with the use of … [the timekeeper]; when [the machine] … was to be wound and its dial to be read, all three men had to gather around the box that contained the watch, unlock its three separate locks, check each other’s readings of the time that the watch displayed, and make sure that the watch was wound correctly.

At Sydney Cove, Dawes’ weather records comprise up to six daily observations of temperature, barometric pressure, winds and weather remarks … from [Sunday, 14] September 1788 until [Tuesday, 6] December 1791 … a weather journal with comparable detail for this period anywhere in the world is a rare find. For the Indo-Australian region, Dawes’s weather journal is only matched by the English East India Company observations made in Madras (Chennai) … from 1796 onwards.

Dawes’ measurements were taken at his observatory, which was ‘located at the western side of Sydney Cove, approximately where the southeastern pylon of Sydney Harbour Bridge stands today’. The location ‘became Point Maskelyne in honour of the astronomer royal. Ultimately it would bear the name of the young Lieutenant who worked there’: Dawes Point. This is ‘only 500 meters from the modern day Observatory Hill weather station’. Dawes’ observatory was made of wood and canvas, and ‘comprised several well ventilated rooms’, with a conical canvas, revolving roof (containing a canvas shutter for Dawes’ telescope) over an octagonal quadrant room. Such ‘a tent-observatory was a common portable building for eighteenth century scientific travellers’.

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228 Hoskins, Sydney Harbour, p. 23.
229 Gergis et al., ‘A Climate Reconstruction of Sydney Cove’, p. 84.
An adjacent wooden building served both as accommodation for Dawes ‘when he stayed there overnight to make evening observations’\textsuperscript{231} and as a storeroom for instruments. ‘It also had a shutter in the roof.’\textsuperscript{232}

None of the observatory’s rooms had a fireplace, nor were they airtight or exposed to direct sunlight. Dawes’ barometer was probably ‘located inside with a thermometer attached, as was standard practice at the time’.\textsuperscript{233}

Lieutenant Dawes was an amateur astronomer.

He had been recommended for inclusion [in the First Fleet] … by the Astronomer Royal, Dr Nevill Maskelyne. He took with him a number of instruments provided by the Board of Longitude, and was particularly entrusted with instructions to observe a comet which was expected to appear during the voyage [to Botany Bay]. He … was intelligent and widely popular.\textsuperscript{234}

‘Dawes spent his time in his lonely little … [observatory,] where he … constantly peered through his telescope for a comet that never appeared.’\textsuperscript{235} Crucially, Dawes would have not only checked the chronometer, but also ‘established the local time so critical for navigational calculations. The new settlement was, thereby, drawn “into the world” of European sailing routes.’\textsuperscript{236} Dawes had already performed this task whilst the \textit{Sirius} lay anchored in Rio de Janeiro Harbour. He calculated the local time by

reading the sun and by fixing the exact time of an eclipse of Jupiter’s third moon and comparing it with the astronomical tables which gave Greenwich time for such eclipses. By this means, Dawes found that there had been only an insignificant loss of clock time since leaving Portsmouth.\textsuperscript{237}

‘Long afterwards, Dawes received £100 from the Board [of Longitude] “as an allowance for my observations made in New South Wales”.’\textsuperscript{238}

The climate measurements made by Lieutenants Bradley and Dawes are the earliest weather records kept in the colony.\textsuperscript{239} Comparison between Bradley’s

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{231} Ibid.
\bibitem{232} Ibid.
\bibitem{233} Gergis et al., ‘A Climate Reconstruction of Sydney Cove’, p. 85.
\bibitem{234} Parker, \textit{Arthur Phillip}, p. 69.
\bibitem{237} Keneally, \textit{A Commonwealth of Thieves}, p. 74.
\end{thebibliography}
and Dawes’ observations reveals an average difference of 2.1ºC. The lower temperatures recorded by Bradley (on the *Sirius*) during the short period of overlap with Dawes’ observations (14–30 September 1788) are due to the ‘influence of water on daytime temperatures recorded offshore’.

Unlike twenty-first-century meteorological instruments, late eighteenth-century thermometers did not have Stevenson screens. Stevenson screens ‘shield meteorological [devices] … from the influences of direct heat radiation and provide … ventilation, moderating the registration of extremes’. The absence of Stevenson screens on the meteorological instruments used by Bradley and Dawes resulted in data that are ‘useful for examining relative (rather than absolute) climate variations experienced during the [colony’s] first years’.

Cool and wet conditions predominated from January 1788 to winter 1790, and hot and dry weather, a drought, was more prevalent from about the middle of 1790. In all likelihood, this was a reflection of the [El Niño Southern Oscillation] cycle at that time, initially a La Niña [above-average rainfall] and then the onset of a strong El Niño [drought].

1788

Four days after arriving at Sydney Cove, on Wednesday, 30 January, Smyth remarked that ‘the heat during the whole night was almost intollerable’. The next day, Thursday, 31 January 1788, First Lieutenant Ralph Clark noted ‘what a terrible night it was last of thunder lighting and rain was obliged to get out of my tent with nothing on but my shirt to slacking the tent poles … remarkably hott’. Six days later, on Wednesday, 6 February, Smyth described a storm that was so extreme that Arthur Phillip and David Collins also mentioned it in their records: ‘one hour after their landing & before they h{\d} adjust their tents in order for sleeping in them, there came on the most violent storm of lighteng thunder & rain I ever saw: the lighteng was incessant during the whole of the night, & I never heard it rain faster.’

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240 For further discussion, see Gergis et al., ‘A Climate Reconstruction of Sydney Cove’, pp. 83–98.
242 Ibid., p. 5.
243 Ibid., p. 6.
244 Ibid., p. 20.
Captain David Collins, in February 1788, wrote: ‘The weather during the latter end of January and the month of February was very cold, with rain, at times very heavy, and attended with much thunder and lightning.’

In his journal (written during the six-month period from Sunday, 20 January to Friday, 11 July 1788), George Worgan describes a wide range of rapid temperature and humidity fluctuations.

Worgan observes:

It was January that we arrived here which in this part of the globe is midsummer, the weather has been, for the greatest part of the time, serene, moderate & pleasant, & warm tho’ at times the vicissitudes from serenity to squalls of wind, rain, accompanied with terrible thunder & lightning are sudden, and violent and from a dry sultry heat, to a chilly dampness (occasioned by heavy night dews) considerable. The thermometer on shore in the shade has been up to 85 & 90 [29 and 32ºC] at noon and by sunset has fallen to 50 or 60 [10 or 15ºC], the fall of 25 or 30 degrees is common.

On the other hand, Captain Lieutenant Watkin Tench felt (initially at least) that the climate was very desirable to live in. In summer the heats are usually moderated by the sea breeze, which sets in early; and in winter the degree of cold is so slight as to occasion no inconvenience; once or twice we have had hoar frosts and hail, but no appearance of snow. The thermometer has never risen beyond 84 [29ºC], nor fallen lower than 35 [2ºC], in general it stood in the beginning of February at between 78 and 74 [25 and 23ºC] at noon … On the whole, (thunder storms in the hot months excepted) I know not any climate equal to this I write in. Ere we had been a fortnight on shore we experienced some storms of thunder accompanied with rain, than which nothing can be conceived more violent and tremendous, and their repetition for several days … led us to draw presages of an unpleasant nature. Happily, however, for many months we have escaped any similar visitations.

Tench’s ‘thermometer, whence [his] … observations were constantly made, was hung in the open air, in a southern aspect, never reached by the rays of the sun, at a distance of several feet above the ground’.

248 Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country, Chapter 1, February, para. 33.
250 Tench, A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay, pp. 130–1.
Nor was the cold and particularly blustery winter of 1788 any less uncomfortable. Sometimes the temperature fell to 10ºC at noon. 252 ‘August [1788] started with rain-storms so severe that all work had to stop for some days. The brick-kiln fell in under the torrent and a large number of bricks was destroyed.’ 253 In a letter to the Undersecretary of State in the Home Office, Sir Evan Nepean (1752–1822), Governor Phillip remarked that ‘this country requires warm clothing in the winter; the rains are frequent and the nights very cold’. 254

At the very beginning of October 1788, William Bradley described weather that can only have been detrimental to the fabric and stability of Worgan’s piano: ‘We found very great & sudden changes in the degree of heat a shift of wind would rise or lower the thermometer 14º[f] in less than 10 minutes on board the Sirius & on shore considerably more.’ 255

Watkin Tench commented that: ‘In the close of the year 1788 … the thermometer has been known to stand at 50º [10ºC] a little before sunrise, and between one and two o’clock in the afternoon at above 100º [37.7ºC].’ 256

1789

Following this summer, the winter of 1789 evidenced extraordinary cold. William Dawes’ measurements reveal that, on Friday, 12 June, the temperature fell to –13.9ºC. (‘The lowest official June temperature recorded at Sydney’s Observatory Hill since 1876 is 9.7ºF [–12.38ºC], on June 13, 1899.’) 257

1790

‘By September 1790, the settlers were fast realising just how unpredictable Australia’s weather could be.’ 258 ‘Drought-affected gardens yielded little … and the haul from the Harbour did not offset the hunger. “Fish is by no means plenty”, wrote a miserable Captain William Hill in July 1790 … “should one be offer’d for sale, ’tis by far too dear for an officers pocket.”’ 259 (The fish in the

252 See Parker, Arthur Phillip, p. 155.
253 Ibid., p. 155.
255 Bradley, A Voyage to New South Wales, Frame 145, October 1788.
256 Tench, A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay, p. 130.
258 Gergis et al., A Climate Reconstruction of Sydney Cove’, p. 94.
harbour had been disappearing since April 1788, this may have been due to the extreme El Niño Southern Oscillation event, which replaces ‘cold water with nutrient-poor warm currents’.

**Summer 1790–91**

Even though, in 1788, Tench initially thought the climate to be ‘very desirable’, during the summer of 1790, in December, the temperature soared to 40ºC. On Monday, 27 December 1790, Tench described the wind as feeling ‘like the blast of a heated oven’, and the heat as ‘intolerable’.

The extremes of temperature and humidity within which George Worgan’s piano sat during the summer of 1790–91 are described by Elizabeth Macarthur, in a letter written to her friend Bridget Kingdon dated Monday, 7 March 1791. Elizabeth reveals that the environment surrounding Worgan’s piano was (to say the least) extreme:

> The intense heat of the weather … has not permitted me to walk much during the summer. The months of December, and January, have been hotter than I can describe, indeed insufferably so. The thermometer rising from an 100 to 112 degrees [38–44ºC] is I believe 30 degrees above the hottest day known in England. The general heat is to be borne, but when we are oppress’d by the hot winds we have no other resource but to shut up ourselves in our houses and to endeavor to the utmost of our power to exclude every breath of air. This wind blows from the north, and comes as if from an heated oven. Those winds are generally succeeded by a thunder storm, so severe and awful, that it is impossible for one who has not been a witness to such a violent concussion of the elements to form any notion of it … it is so different from the thunder we have in England … a thunder storm has always the effect to bring heavy rain, which cools the air very considerably.

The heatwave summer of 1791 was even hotter. On Thursday, 10 February and Friday, 11 February 1791, David Collins observed that ‘the thermometer stood in the shade at 105º [40.6ºC]’.

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260 Sydney Harbour ‘still has one of the largest and most diverse range of fish in the world’. Hoskins, Sydney Harbour, p. 3.
261 Ibid., p. 40.
262 Tench, A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay, p. 130.
263 See Duffy, Man of Honour, p. 77.
265 Ibid., p. 234.
Two months later, in his journal entry for April 1791, Watkin Tench lamented: ‘I scarcely pass a week in summer without seeing [the thermometer] ... rise to 100º [37.8ºC]; sometimes to 105º [40.6ºC]; nay, beyond even that burning altitude.’

Tench observed that the weather ‘is changeable beyond any other I ever heard of ... clouds, storms and sunshine pass in rapid succession ... torrents of water sometimes fall ... I have often seen large hailstones fall ... Frequent strong breezes from the westward purge the air’. These conditions were all potentially disastrous for Worgan’s piano.

1791

In 1791, the thatched wattle-and-daub huts making up the majority of dwellings in the colony would have been very cold during the winter months. We know that Worgan’s piano was housed in one of these huts, in a dwelling occupied by John Macarthur (1767–1834) and his wife, Elizabeth. Because a fire in the colony’s blacksmith’s shop had resulted in the loss of many irreplaceable tools, a law was subsequently passed that made it illegal to have a chimney in any house that had a thatched roof. The Macarthurs’ thatched wattle-and-daub hut would therefore have had no fireplace for heating during winter.

During the winter of 1791, on Tuesday, 19 July, Captain Lieutenant Watkin Tench wrote:

[A]t a quarter before four in the morning [the thermometer] ... was at 26º [–3ºC]; at a quarter before six, at 24º [–4ºC]; at a quarter before seven, at 23º [–5ºC]; at seven o’clock, 22.7º [–5.17ºC]; at sunrise, 23º [–5ºC] ... Nothing but demonstration could have convinced me, that so severe a degree of cold ever existed in this low latitude. Drops of water on a tin pot, not altogether out of the influence of the fire, were frozen into solid ice, in less than twelve minutes.

Only 11 weeks earlier, Worgan’s piano had been subjected to temperatures of 40.6ºC. The sheer extent of temperature fluctuation cannot have been favourable for Worgan’s fragile, atmospherically sensitive and vulnerable piano.

269 Ibid., p. 235.
271 See Parker, Arthur Phillip, p. 155.
273 See ibid., p. 183.
1792

A year later, on Wednesday, 30 May 1792, Deputy Judge Advocate Richard Atkins (1745–1820) wrote: ‘Fine frosty weather and cold.’²⁷⁴ A few days later, on Sunday, 3 June, Atkins described conditions as: ‘Fine, with a hard frost at night.’²⁷⁵

Seven months had passed when, during the summer of 1792, Atkins wrote, on Wednesday, 5 December:

A burning westerly wind, obliged to keep the windows shut, unless we have rain soon the late crops of Indian corn will be totally burnt up. 10 o’clock a heavy gale of wind from the w. ward and as hot as the mouth of an oven. At 12 o’clock the therm[ometer]: in the shade 94° [34.4°C] and in the air 114° [45.6°C]. It begins to thunder.—Light showers.²⁷⁶

The Drought Breaks

From August 1794, the drought began to break. By January 1795, heavy rains began to soak the floodplains of the Hawkesbury River. By this stage, ‘more than 8,500 hectares of land around Sydney Cove had been appropriated by the colonists’.²⁷⁷

David Collins observed:

In consequence of the heavy rains, the river at the Hawkesbury rose many feet higher than it had been known to rise in other rains … At Parramatta the damage was extensive; the bridge over the creek, which had been very well constructed, was entirely swept away; and the boats with their moorings carried down the river. At Sydney some chimneys in the new barracks fell in.²⁷⁸

John Macarthur, writing to Captain John Piper (1773–1851) at Norfolk Island, described the havoc caused by the ensuing floods:

A tremendous flood has swept away and spoilt almost all the wheat at the Hawkesbury and the crop of Indian corn at that settlement is entirely destroyed. Pigs innumerable have been drowned. In short, it is

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Cobley, Sydney Cove 1791–1792, p. 264.
²⁷⁵ Quoted in ibid., p. 268.
²⁷⁶ Quoted in ibid., p. 348.
²⁷⁸ Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country, Chapter 2, para. 8.
a calamity that threatens the very existence of the colony and let what will be done to alleviate the general distress many unhappy families must be ruined.279

‘The first major drought experienced by … European settlers had finally come to an end.’280 Food remained a major problem for the colony ‘until after the breaking of … the drought … when farming began to prosper’.281

1796

The logbooks of the ships at Sydney Cove provide a reasonably clear picture of the summer weather for mid-January 1796. On Tuesday, 12 January, there was a violent storm with thunder and lightning. By the sixteenth the clouds were building up again and over the next few days the lightning returned, then squalls, developing into another violent storm. It was classic semicyclonic Sydney January, with the rain or threat of rain keeping down the temperatures a little, but … causing the most appalling humidity.282

From the first days of the colony, the weather was ‘changeable beyond any other I ever heard of’.283 ‘There can be little doubt that the climatic extremes to which Worgan’s piano was subjected during its first few years at Sydney Cove would have resulted in significant and potentially damaging levels of stress being imposed upon the instrument (especially upon the soundboard). At the very least, extreme changes in humidity levels and temperature would have resulted in some degradation of the instrument’s cloth and leather components.

Protective Measures for Pianos

In 1810, Captain Thomas Williamson recognised that the soundboards of pianos located in India—where an environment similar to that found at Sydney Cove may be encountered—were particularly vulnerable to extremes of temperature and humidity. As a protective measure, Williamson suggested vigilance and the use of heavy blankets:

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279 Quoted in Wannan, Early Colonial Scandals, pp. 88–9.
281 Dunn and McCreadie, ‘Australia’s First Fleet—1788’.
Much may certainly be done … by clamping the case with metal, both within and without; but … this has little connection with the sounding-board; which cannot be much strengthened without considerably deteriorating the tone, and causing a piano to be condemned, for want of that richness which cannot be given to one whose vibrations are obstructed. The only chance is, to keep a piano well covered with blankets during the heats, as also in very damp weather, and to un-cloathe it gradually, when about to be opened for performance. By such precautions, the instrument may remain tolerably in tune, and not sustain much injury from the variations of seasons; after two or three years, the danger may be less; but it will be prudent never to relax in point of prevention, lest the instrument should suddenly fail.284

Sometimes, the insulating effect of heavy blankets was augmented by the type of covering advertised for sale in the Sydney Gazette, and New South Wales Advertiser on Tuesday, 2 April 1839, as ‘rich Oil Cloth Covering for Piano Fortes’.285

Oilcloth was often made from cotton duck, linen or cotton canvas that had been impregnated with linseed oil. ‘The canvas could be coated in oils, waxes, clays, or other materials to make it waterproof, and then used to wrap valuable materials for sea journeys or to make weather resistant outerwear.’286 It was sometimes dyed, painted or printed in a limited range of colours prior to the oil treatment, but was principally ‘designed for function, rather than beauty’.287

Purpose-made oilcloth coverings for pianos acted as an impervious barrier to fluctuations in humidity, and made up the outermost layer of temperature-insulating blankets.

Captain Williamson also recommend that structural alterations be made to any pianos that were bound for extreme climates:

I have … found that the instruments made for exportation could never be depended upon, unless clamped at every joint with plates of brass, and secured, in the more delicate parts, by means of battens well screwed and cemented to the sound board. Experience has satisfied me,

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285 Sydney Gazette, and New South Wales Advertiser, 2 April 1839, Vol. 37, p. 3.
287 Smith and Harris, ‘What is an Oilcloth?’. See also Amistaadt, ‘Making Oil Cloth’.
that the pianos most appropriate for hot climates are made by Clementi, Kirckman, and Tomkinson, at their respective manufactories in London.

For some years, Clementi added metal-strengthened corners to instruments that were destined for Russia; this provided protection against the potentially destructive expansion and contraction resulting from the overheating commonly encountered in Russian salons. The only extant Clementi ‘Russian model’ grand piano is currently part of the keyboard instrument collection owned by Mr Ralph Schureck, Berowra Heights, Sydney; the piano was made in ca 1806–10, and was taken out of Russia just prior to the Napoleonic invasion of 1812.

During the mid twentieth century, the only other extant Clementi ‘Russian model’ grand piano was the instrument that had belonged to the composer Mikhail Glinka (1804–57); Glinka’s Clementi piano was destroyed by the SS, for no reason other than spite, during World War II.

In the 1830s, perhaps with extreme climates and certainly sound in mind, Ignaz Pleyel made square pianos whose soundboards comprised three very thin crossed layers (rather than a single layer), the top layer being of mahogany.

The first mention in Sydney of a piano specifically made for extreme climates is found in an advertisement printed in the Sydney Gazette, and New South Wales Advertiser dated Saturday, 14 December 1816:

To be sold by auction by Mr. Bevan, at the Residence of the late judge advocate, on Thursday the 19th of December, at eleven precisely, the very valuable household furniture … Also, a very superior toned fashionable piano forte, made by Broadwood, particularly suited for a hot climate.

The next mention occurs 22 years later, in the Sydney Gazette, and New South Wales Advertiser of Saturday, 26 May 1838: ‘A handsome Spanish mahogany round cornered ornamented square pianoforte, with grand piano touch, adapted to any extreme climate by late improvements and metallic plates.’

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288 This surname is an error (sometimes observed in the literature), and should be ‘Tomkison’. Thomas Tomkison (fl. 1798–1851) was an important London piano maker, who built more than 9000 pianos. See Clinkscale, Makers of the Piano, Vol. 2, p. 378.
290 See ‘Grand Piano by Clementi & Co. (London, ca 1806–10, Serial Number 526)’, in Appendix J, Volume 2 of this publication.
291 This information is derived from a conversation held between the author and Ralph Schureck.
292 I am indebted to Gavin Gostelow for this information. Gostelow’s relatively small but significant keyboard instrument collection is housed at his home in Canberra.
There is no evidence that George Worgan had any radical structural modifications incorporated into his piano to protect it from climatic extremes prior to his departure with the First Fleet. Perhaps he selected the instrument from already completed stock at Frederick Beck’s workshop. And yet, the uniqueness of the campaign-furniture-inspired hinged cabriole legs of Worgan’s piano allow for the supposition that he requested the legs to be included prior to his taking delivery of the instrument. We may never know why Worgan did not at the same time commission additional structural elements to be incorporated into his piano in order to protect it from damage resulting from climatic extremes. Perhaps his reticence was based on financial considerations.

Worgan cannot have known about the atmospheric conditions at Sydney Cove. He would, however, have been aware of the sudden changeability of weather at sea, and would have heard about the extremes of temperature and humidity in India (which had been adversely influencing the structural integrity and sound of harpsichords there for more than 50 years). In London, not only would there have been talk concerning the ‘impregnable monopoly’ on trade enjoyed by the prominent and influential East India Company (‘also known as John Company’), but also tales of life in India would have been recounted by those who had spent time there.

The return home was an integral part of the Anglo-Indian experience. Most employees of the [East India] Company went out with the intention of making sufficient money to live in comfort after their return to England. It was by no means unusual … to make a second trip to India to replace a lost fortune. Few … thought the possibility of remaining in India an option worthy of consideration.

By the 1780s,

the Calcutta piano trade was founded on well-established lines of supply. London piano makers would sell, sometimes at a discount for bulk purchases, to officers of East India Company ships … who had

295 Protective structural elements evolved during the nineteenth century. Worgan’s piano was a typical late eighteenth-century instrument, and therefore did not incorporate structural modifications designed to protect it from climatic extremes. In late 2014, an extremely rare example of a ‘tropicalized’ eighteenth century square piano by Longman & Broderip, serial number 435, was sold in England. ‘There is no veneer nor inlay used on this piano—nothing decoratively extraneous that could cause problems in a hostile climate. There are a number of strategically placed bolts/fixings, reinforcing the piano’s construction’. Email from Ian Pleeth to the author, 24 July 2014. ‘This piano was used by the BBC in its … period production “Captain Collins”; the story of the First Fleet and the transportation of the first convicts to Australia in 1788’. ‘Square Piano by Longman & Broderip Serial Number 435’, in Antique Keyboard Instruments (n.d.).


purchased an ‘investment’ in a Company voyage. Each officer had an allowance of space on his ship, and his ‘investment’ would be stored during the voyage … Upon arrival in Calcutta … officers would notify by post those for whom they had specific commissions, and then an extraordinary scramble would take place, as they sought to off-load their investments … For artifacts such as pianos and harpsichords, a quick sale was absolutely essential, because of the speed with which [owing to climactic extremes] the product could become unsaleable.299

In 1810, Captain Thomas Williamson observes that the climate in India ‘is unfavourable to instruments of every kind, especially to pianos, and offers a most formi-dable bar to the indulgence of a musical ear’.300

At the time Worgan purchased his piano, all London piano makers (and doubtless Worgan himself) would have been aware of the climactic extremes found both at sea and in India. ‘Everyone knew what a few years in India could do to the tone of instruments.’301 Based on this knowledge, Worgan may have privately entertained concerns that the as-yet-unknown weather at Botany Bay would prove to be hazardous, if not disastrous, for his new piano.

The crudely repaired cracks in and downwards movement of the soundboard of Worgan’s 1780/86? Beck square piano, as well as the crack in the curve of the bridge, testify to the deleterious effects of the weather on the instrument.302 It is not known if these cracks appeared during the voyage from England to Sydney Cove, during the first few years of the instrument’s life in the colony or at a later date.

300 Williamson, East India Vade-Mecum, Vol. 1, p. 211.
301 Woodfield, Music of the Raj, p. 25.
302 See ‘Soundboard: Condition’ and ‘Bridge: Condition’ in Appendix A, Volume 2 of this publication.