

## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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PREPARED AND DELIVERED BY: D.G. Davis

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### ANTHONY FENN KEMP (1773 - 1868)

Anthony Fenn Kemp, officer of the New South Wales Corps and later a prominent merchant in Sydney and later again in Hobart, was born near Aldgate, London, the son of Anthony Fader Kemp and Susannah, nee Fenn.



Captain Anthony Fenn Kemp of the New South Wales Corps.

He was educated at Greenwich by Dr Knox, and as a youth, travelled extensively in the United States of America for about a year. He then spent some time in France where he became fluent in the French language, and he was there during the most stormy period of the French Revolution.

In July, 1793, he joined the New South Wales Corps, as an Ensign.

This military force, specially recruited under Major Francis Grose in England, for service at Botany Bay, reached the Colony in 1790 where they replaced the marine corps that had accompanied Governor Phillip in the First Fleet. Kemp arrived in the Colony with a detachment of the Regiment in 1793.

During 1795/97 he served a two year term of duty on Norfolk Island. He was subsequently promoted to Lieutenant in March 1797 and Captain in November 1801.

Towards the end of 1800, he left for London on leave, returning during the first half of 1802. On his return to Sydney, he married Elizabeth, sister of Alexander Riley of 'Burwood House' and 'Raby'; the latter being Riley's country property on the Cowpastures Road, between Liverpool and Campbelltown. The Kemps who had seven sons and eleven daughters, received several liberal land grants in different parts of the Colony.

Among the Officers of the New South Wales Corps were many who had served with distinction in famous British Military Regiments, but in coming to Sydney their main objective seems to have been personal material gain and an early return to England as wealthy men.

Like most of his brother officers, and some of the civil officials, Kemp was as much occupied with trade as with his military duties. The superior resources and credit of the officers, backed under Governor Hunter by special permission to board incoming ships, gave them for a time, a monopoly of retail sales, notoriously of rum which became the principal medium of exchange in the Colony.. This was combined with the acquisition of large areas of land and a ruthless exploitation of convict labour.

Throughout the rule of three governors, Hunter, King and Bligh, Captain Anthony

Fenn Kemp is conspicuously identified as an Officer in the New South Wales Corps and one of the most active of the military merchants in Sydney.

In 1799 Kemp applied to Hunter for permission to select and lease a town lot. In November of that year he was granted a site at what is now the north-east corner of King and George Streets, later called the "Golden Corner", at the sum of half-a-crown a year for fourteen years. Here he built a shop.

Kemp was paymaster of his company and later Treasurer of the Committee of Paymastership of the Corps. He was strategically placed to dispose of his wares at high prices and take advantage of the common soldier. His methods are described vividly, though perhaps with exaggeration, in the *Memoirs of Joseph Holt*. 'When a soldier came to collect a month's pay, he would be asked: "What will you have ?, I have a very good tobacco at ten shillings a pound. tea for twenty shillings a pound, and fine prints at eight shillings a yard". If the soldier held out for money, Kemp turned on him furiously, called him "a damned, saucy, mutinous rogue" and threatened to have him flogged for his impertinence. Against this bullying the soldier had no redress; he was forced to take his pay and dispose of the goods as best he could'. Holt estimated that by these methods, Kemp turned in a profit of one hundred per cent.

Activities of this kind, described by Holt in his memoirs, were at that time, common in the British Army serving overseas.

Kemp could be described, in present day terms as a 'standover man'; he had power, wealth and knew the people in high places.

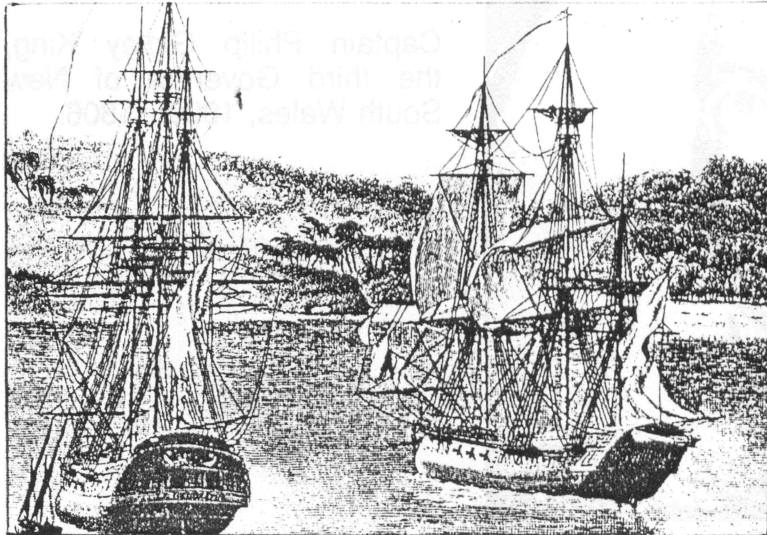
Let us now review the historical background of the period 1802 to 1803.

On 8 April 1802, while Bro. Matthew Flinders in the *Investigator* was pursuing his explorations on the southern coast of Australia, he met, in Encounter Bay, near the entrance of St Vincent's Gulf, a French vessel, *Le Geographe*, under the command of Captain Nicholas Baudin. Flinders was aware that a French discovery expedition had been sent to Australian waters and that a request for a passport for its protection had been granted by the Admiralty in England. Flinders boarded *Le Geographe* and breakfasted with Baudin, discussing with him their respective voyages.

Although Baudin's voyage was not a political one, the effect of the expedition was to create fear that if the English did not occupy other parts of the continent, the French would. King, fearing that Van Diemens Land might be occupied by the

French, sent Lieutenant John Bowen to form a settlement on the Derwent River and in November 1804 he sent Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson, accompanied by Captain Anthony Fenn Kemp, to form another settlement at Port Dalrymple.

Another of the ships in Baudin's exploration fleet was the corvette, *Le Naturaliste* of 300 tons, which, under the command of Captain Emmanuel Hamelin, entered Port Jackson in the month of April 1802. *Le Geographe* followed six weeks later. It was *Le Naturaliste* which figured prominently in the first recorded masonic meeting in the colony.



The ships of Nicholas Baudin's expedition, *Le Geographe* and *Le Naturaliste*.

Anthony Fenn Kemp, as has already been seen, was not one to miss out on a business opportunity. When the *Atlas* arrived on 6 July with a cargo of brandy, Governor King refused it to be landed, but allowed Baudin to buy 800 gallons to stock his ships. Kemp, who had been expecting to share in the profits from the sale of this brandy, led the outcry against the Governor's action and, on the doubtful evidence of a convict named Chapman, accused the French of bringing brandy ashore and selling it for twenty-five shillings a gallon. King questioned two of the French officers, Lieutenants Jacques St Cricq and Louis Claude Freycinet, and was convinced by their declarations of innocence. Some of the French spoke of challenging Kemp, but Baudin restrained them. The incident eventually blew over when, under pressure from his fellow officers, Kemp tendered Baudin a written apology. Here we have a clear indication of Kemp's blindness to considerations other than his own pecuniary interests and his willingness to engage in the most serious of accusations on flimsy or non-existent information.

That Captain Kemp's apology was fully accepted, seems to have been proved by the French officers admitting him to their masonic circle soon after the incident.

Freemasonry, or rather masonic meetings had been banned by Governor King and he even forbade the exercise of the Catholic religion fearing uprisings.

Some students of early Australian masonic history believe they have found allusions to freemasonry being practised on H.M.S. *Buffalo* and *Glutton* when they were moored in Port Jackson in 1802. Well known settlers who were masons are known to have gone on board on several occasions but no official records exist regarding any such lodge meetings.

King's ban was apparently lifted on 17 September 1802 to allow some of his

officers to attend the French Naval Lodge aboard *Le Naturaliste*. So this first recorded Australian Masonic Meeting was not clandestine Masonry nor was it in defiance of civil or masonic authority. The New South Wales brethren were not admitted as visitors but, on the evidence of Kemp's certificate, were full members of the lodge.



Captain Philip Gidley King,  
the third Governor of New  
South Wales, 1800 - 1806.

It is interesting to note where this first meeting was held. The French were welcomed in Sydney "in the name of humanity" but Governor King was well aware that England was at war with France and any day, he or Baudin could receive a communication from London or Paris that could alter the truce and commence hostilities.

So he selected a suitable area that he could allocate to the French. It had to be beside deep water so they could moor their ships but it should also be possible to attack it at short notice should this be necessary. Finally, and for the same reason it should be within easy range of the gun battery that defended Sydney. The site he chose meeting all these requirements, was a spit of land known as 'Bennelong Point' and this became known as 'Little France'. It is now better known as the site of Sydney's Opera House.

In an article by Noel Griffiths in *The Sun* newspaper on 21 January 1980, he wrote: "Thus the first recorded masonic meeting in Australia was held on 17 September 1802 on the site of the Sydney Opera House. Its members were international and included the Colony's British Artillery Officer, George Bridges Bellasis, a senior French Naval Officer, Jacques St Cricq, a Captain of the New South Wales Corps, Anthony Fenn Kemp, the French Ship's Surgeon, Jerome Bellefin, and other brethren from France and England. They met in brotherly love to admit a Candidate who had previously wronged the French members of the Lodge.

It is recorded that Anthony Fenn Kemp was greatly honoured at being invited to join the lodge and the French Officers explained to him that the lodge was not properly constituted but, under the Metropolitan Chapter of Paris, it was regularly assembled and that his admission to it was valid. Kemp, who had previously waited on the western foreshore of Sydney Cove for a boat to be sent from *Le Naturaliste* to escort him to that vessel was entertained at a light repast before the meeting.

At the close of the ceremony, after the mysteries of the order had been explained to him, he was welcomed by all the brethren at a banquet which followed. Here Kemp enjoyed the finest French wines that had survived the storms and French dishes prepared especially for the occasion. The first Australian Loyal Toast would not have been to 'King and Craft' but to 'Napoleon Bonaparte, Protector of Freemasonry'. There can be little doubt that the British Officers would also have proposed a toast to 'His British Majesty, King George III'."

Kemp's Masonic Certificate is now in the possession of the Mitchell Library in Sydney. This important masonic document was discovered by the Library's Foundation Librarian, Hugh Wright in a number of manuscripts procured from Tasmania in 1915. The certificate is written in French and the English translation is as follows:-

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*We, Knights of the Rose Croix, Master Masons and Companions of the same order, certify having received in Lodge not regularly constituted, but properly assembled, and presided over by Sovereign Prince J. St Cricq, member of the Metropolitan Chapter of Paris, the dear brother Anthony Fenn Kemp, Captain of the New South Wales Regiment, stationed at Port Jackson into the grade of Ancient Masonry.*

*In faith of which we pray the Masons of both hemispheres to recognize and aid him in this capacity.*

*17 September 1802*

*J. St Cricq,  
Sovereign Prince of Rose Croix,  
Member of the Metropolitan Chapter.*

*George Bridges Bellasis,  
G.D. 15<sup>o</sup>*

*Bellefin  
Sovereign Prince Rose Croix*

*Anthony Fenn Kemp.*

*Capt. Kemp.*

This certificate has caused some controversy over the years as to whether in fact, Kemp was admitted to the Rose Croix degree, but it is now of the opinion that he was made a Master Mason and this was in fact, his Master Masons Certificate.

Soon afterwards Kemp was involved in the notorious pamphlet war which so plagued Governor King. In January 1803 a paper containing a scurrilous attack on King was found in the yard of Kemp's barracks. King ordered the arrest of Kemp and two junior officers, Nicholas Bayly and Thomas Hobby. The subsequent court martial of Kemp had hardly begun when Major George Johnston, who was temporarily in command of the corps, ordered the arrest of Bro. Surgeon, Dr John Harris, the officer acting as judge-advocate, on the grounds that Harris had disclosed the votes of the members of the court at the earlier trial of Hobby. At first King refused to replace Harris and ordered the court martial to dissolve, but

Johnston replied that the officers would continue to sit until they had delivered a verdict. The governor then yielded and appointed Richard Atkins to act as judge-advocate in the case. Needless to say, Kemp was acquitted.

In 1804 King appointed Kemp second-in-command to Colonel Paterson of the proposed new settlement at Port Dalrymple.

From August 1806 to April 1807, while Paterson was absent in Sydney, Kemp administered the settlement in his stead. During this period provisions ran low and for a time, early in 1807, hunting and fishing were the only sources of food. Disaffection grew and an insurrection was averted only by arresting the leaders of the dissidents.

In August 1806 Governor William Bligh arrived in the Colony to replace Governor King. Both Hunter and King had failed in their duty to break the hold the military had on the trading monopoly and the sale of rum, which was by then the established medium of exchange. This method of exploitation was vigorously defended. The monopolists had 'broken' these two governors with an entire lack of scruple and set a pattern for operations against any successor. Given the task of upsetting this vicious economic system in New South Wales, Bligh bent his attention on the task. He found his main opponent to be John Macarthur who was very like Bligh in character, self-confident, self-righteous and having a violent temper. When two men so similarly constituted found their interests opposed, there was bound to be a violent collision. That collision became known as the 'Rum Rebellion', and Anthony Fenn Kemp found himself playing a major role in it.



GOVERNOR BLIGH



JOHN MACARTHUR

Macarthur's and Bligh's attitude of distrust to one another harboured confrontation at every opportunity and this ultimately led to a charge of sedition against Macarthur.

In 1807 Anthony Fenn Kemp returned to Sydney. He was the senior officer in the Criminal Court which assembled on 25 January 1808 to try John Macarthur on the sedition charge.

He and the five other officers of the court supported Macarthur when he declared that Judge-Advocate Atkins was unfit to appear in the case.

Next morning when the officers asked Governor Bligh to restore Macarthur to bail and requested Atkin's replacement, Kemp appeared to be one of the most extreme of the governor's opponents.

When Johnston decided to depose Bligh, Kemp and three other officers were sent ahead to summon him to resign his authority and to assure him of his personal safety.

On 26 January 1808, twenty years after the founding of the colony, Johnston, Macarthur and the officers and men of the regiment marched from the barracks and forcibly ejected Bligh from his government.

On 28 May, Johnston, acting as governor, appointed Kemp, who had certainly been one of the leaders in the attack on Bligh, as acting deputy-judge-advocate. In that capacity he was a member of the illegal Criminal Court which tried the provost-

marshall, William Gore, for perjury, although four of the Court's members, including Kemp, were among the defendant's accusers.



Major George Johnston

In December, 1808 Kemp was appointed commandant at Parramatta and thereupon relinquished his position as acting judge-advocate.

In 1810 he returned to England when the corps were sent home. He was one of Johnston's witnesses in 1811, at the court martial for his part in the Bligh rebellion. Kemp was more fortunate than his superior in not being tried himself. He was able to sell his commission, but his magistrate's warrant and most of his land grants were cancelled. He became a partner in a commercial and shipping agency, though this apparently did not prosper, for he moved into and out of bankruptcy before receiving permission in 1815 to return and settle in Van Diemen's Land.

Kemp arrived back there in January 1816 and in April, Governor Bro. Lachlan Macquarie appointed him a Justice of the Peace. A year later, Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey granted him 700 acres at Green Ponds, 32 miles north of Hobart Town, the first grant to be made in the district. By 1829 Kemp had two adjoining grants, making a total of 2000 acres. Soon afterwards, in consideration of his improvements, a further 1000 acres were leased to him, and he bought more, as well as renting large areas in the Lakes district.

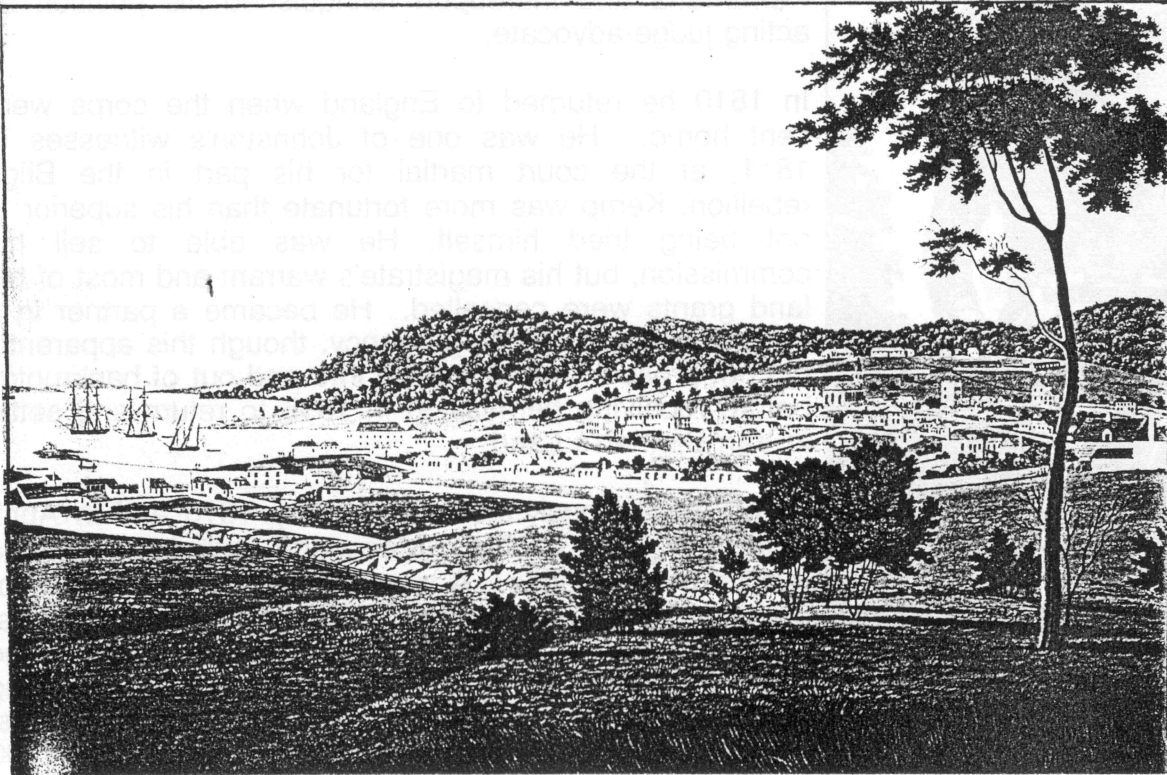
In 1817 and 1819 he was involved in a series of quarrels, first with Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey and then with his successor, Lieutenant-Colonel William Sorell. In June 1818 Macquarie confirmed Kemp's suspension by Sorell from the magistracy. In 1820, Kemp, critical as always, testified at length to Commissioner Bigge about Sorell's immorality, discriminatory administration and the excessive consumption of spirits, but by the time Sorell was recalled one of Kemp's daughters, Elizabeth, had married Sorell's son, William, and Kemp, true to his nature, had swung around to a profound appreciation of the Lieutenant-Governor's virtues.

In January 1824, Kemp was chairman of a 'Committee appointed at a Public Meeting of the Landholders, Merchants and Free Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land' to draft a petition to the King that Sorell's tenure of office be extended, but this was unavailing.

At Green Ponds, Kemp bred first-class sheep and helped to pioneer the Tasmanian wool industry. He also bred horses and cattle and about 1831, introduced a hardy, drought-resistant variety of dwarf American corn known as 'Corbett's corn', which was suitable for swine, poultry and horses.

However Kemp was better known as a merchant than a grazier. He was a foundation director and later president of the Van Diemen's Land Bank. Soon after his arrival in Hobart Town he had established the firm of Kemp & Gatehouse which was changed to Kemp & Co. about 1823 when Richard Barker was taken into partnership. After this was dissolved in 1829, Kemp continued the shipping,

mercantile and importing business from a central Macquarie Street store. In 1839 he sold this property and limited his activities to his premises in Collins and Argyle Streets. In 1844, during the general depression, he sold his last city block, and a fellow merchant, Richard Lewis, bought his residence and store.



A view of Hobart Town in about 1825.

From 1824 to 1836, Kemp found the authority of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur as irksome as that of his predecessors. Kemp expressed republican sympathies, and opposed many official measures through the press, public meetings, petitions and correspondence, he advocated the independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales (granted 1826) the establishment of an elected Legislative Council, the abolition of press censorship, and the adoption of the English jury system. It is not surprising that Kemp was never appointed to the nominee Legislative Council of 1826 - 1850. It was suggested that Kemp was a republican, but the evidence is slender.

In 1837 Governor Arthur's successor, Sir John Franklin, who was more sympathetic to the development of free institutions, appointed Kemp to the board to enquire into applications for secondary grants, and in October, Franklin reappointed him a Justice of the Peace.

In 1851 a semi-elected Legislative Council, and five years later a fully elected system of government, were introduced. But by then Kemp was well into his seventies. His political opinions were in any case too radical to permit an attachment to any existing party and he seems to have taken no part in the election campaigns.

Anthony Fenn Kemp died on 28 October 1868, in his ninety-fifth year, at 'The Bertrams', his residence in Hawthorn Place, Sandy Bay. He was buried in St George's Church of England Cemetery.

His wife had predeceased him in October 1865, aged 79 years.



Of his family, George Anthony became the first warden of the Green Ponds municipality and Edward followed the example of the 'pipes' of Governor King's time by writing a bitter attack on Lieutenant-Governor Wilmot in satirical verse in *A Voice from Tasmania* (1846).

Of Kemp's eleven daughters, nine were known to have married. Elizabeth Julia became the wife of William Sorell, registrar of the Supreme Court of Tasmania; Sophia, the wife of William Seccombe, medical practitioner; Fanny Edith the wife of Captain Algernon Burdett Jones, visiting magistrate and superintendent of the Queen's Orphan Schools; and Ellen, the wife of James Henry Young, member of the New South Wales parliament.

One of the Kemps' children, Anthony Fenn Kemp Junior, who died at Cumberland Street, The Rocks, in Sydney in 1824, provides an interesting sidelight and illustrates the commercial morality of that period. He was interred in the old Devonshire Street Cemetery. When the old cemetery was closed in 1901 to make way for Central Railway Station, the remains of Anthony Fenn Kemp were removed to La Perouse. It was then found that the headstone bore two inscriptions, one on top and one on the bottom, buried in the ground. The discovery was then made that the hidden inscription was to no less an exalted person than Judge Advocate Ellis Bent, who had come to the Colony with Governor, Bro. Lachlan Macquarie in December 1809, and died in November 1815. Ellis Bent had been buried in the old cemetery in George Street, now the site of the Sydney Town Hall. Later his remains were placed in a vault on Garden Island from whence they were finally removed to St Thomas' Churchyard, North Sydney.

Presumably the headstone came into the hands of a monumental mason who kept it until the opportunity came to use it again. The top part was inscribed :

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'Sacred to the memory of Anty. Fenn Kemp,  
Son of Anty. Fenn Kemp who departed this  
Life  
Aged 23 years and 6 weeks. December 22nd, 1824.  
Also Judith Simpson, Aged 61 years.  
Died March 31st 1836.  
James Lucas Simpson, Aged 40 years.  
Died April, 1846.'

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Anthony Fenn Kemp has been remembered by having the Tasmanian town of Kempton and the Sydney suburb of Kemp's Creek named in his honour.

We also remember him as being the first man to be admitted into Ancient Masonry in the colony of New South Wales.

He may be better remembered for his notorious early exploits in New South Wales, but he also played a notable pioneering role in Van Diemen's Land, both as merchant and grazier, where his 'inherent aversion to despotism' was harnessed to some worthwhile causes.

## Acknowledgements

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