

Batchelor's Grave The Oldest Known Grave in Tasmania

Richard Lord

At the northern end of Tarooma Beach, just above high water mark, is the oldest known grave in Tasmania. It was declared an Historic Site by the Australian Heritage Commission on the 21st March 1978.

Here lies Jas. Batchelor who was the First Officer of the Schooner "Venus" of 350 tons, according to a shipping return of 30th April 1810. The "Venus" traded between Calcutta, Sydney and Hobart Town between 1808 and 1810. She was built at Chittagong, India and registered in Calcutta. Her owner was Mr J.C. Burton with Capt. E. Bunker as Master, along with a compliment of 50 men and an armament of two guns.

The passage of time obviously took its toll on the original inscription and many years ago when it was first painted the lettering must have been difficult to decipher, and so slight alterations were made in the Commander's and Owner's names and these have been perpetuated to the present day with many coats of paint.

Original

Jas Batchelor
1st Offa
S h Venus
Eber. Bunker
Comr.
J.C. Burton
Ownr.
O B Jan 28th
1810

Today

Jas Batchelor
1st Offa
S h Venus
Jas. Bunker
Comr.
T. Bunker
Ownr.
O B Jan 28th
1810

The short but fascinating story of the schooner "Venus" opens in a letter written by

her owner Mr J.C. Burton to Under Secretary Goulburn from Calcutta on 6th November 1815 with regards to a grant of 500 acres 20 miles from the town of Sydney, and in it he writes¹:

In the year 1809 (*sic*) [1808], I was under the necessity of proceeding to New South Wales for the benefit of my health, then much impaired with a long residence in India. On my arrival in Van Diemen's Land and subsequently at Sydney, I was much pleased with the salubrity of the climate and certainly formed very sanguine ideas respecting the future prosperity of those Colonies; I consequently formed a determination to exert myself to the utmost, as an humble instrument towards the forwarding of this important subject; shortly after the period of my arrival, an alarming Scarcity threatened the Colony, and Colonel Patterson (*sic*), then in charge of the Government, requested of me to proceed in a small schooner of 45 Tons (called the 'Antipodes') to Bengal through the dangerous Straits of Torres, for the sake of greater expedition, for the purpose of Carrying down a Cargo of Grain for the relief of the Settlements, which I immediately agreed to, and having landed safe in Calcutta purchased a Ship called the "Venus", and arrived in sufficient time at Sydney to avert the expected Calamity; as a kind of remuneration, Colonel Patterson (*sic*) presented me with a Grant of Land of 500 Acres about 20 miles from the Town of Sydney which I got regularly Surveyed, and paid the customary fees on the Grant, Etc.

This importing of grain by Mr J.C. Burton in the "Venus" was reported to Viscount Castlereagh by Lt. Gov. Paterson in a despatch dated Sydney, 9th July 1809²:

I most sincerely lament to be under the necessity of acquainting your Lordship that a Calamity, similar to that which on former occasions has involved the Settlement in the deepest distress, namely the flooding of the Hawkesbury, has again unhappily occurred, and has rendered it absolutely necessary for me to ensure, by an Importation of Wheat from Bengal, a sufficiency of that indispensable article, to prevent the Colonists from suffering the Horrors of a Famine, as they did from the same unfortunate event in the year 1806.

Almost the whole Stock of Grain which had been saved from the scanty produce of the last harvest was swept away by the overflowing of the River on the 28th of May last; but I am sorry to add that the small quantity of seed which the inclemency of the weather had allowed the



*Batchelor's Grave, Taroona Beach, with the Shot Tower in the background,
looking south, December 1986.*

PHOTO J.C.S. BOWLER.



Batchelor's Grave, 1986.

PHOTO J.C.S. BOWLER.

Farmer to get into the Ground, has, by the same misfortune, been completely destroyed.

Although every possible exertion was instantly made to alleviate the distresses of the Sufferers, and to enable them, by re-cropping them, to lessen the evils to be apprehended from the Induration; and although I am happy to state that these efforts promise as much Success as could be hoped for — yet I have felt it my duty, as perfect reliance cannot be placed on the produce of the ensuing year to guard against the possibility of a distressing Scarcity, and have consequently authorised the Acting Commissary to conclude an Agreement with Mr J.C. Burton, Merchant, of Bengal, for the importation from thence into this Colony of 200 tons of Wheat of the best quality, at the moderate price of 8s. per bushel, 50 tons of which is to be landed at the Derwent.

On the 11th December 1808 the “Venus” sailed from Sydney for Hobart Town with Government Stores, Mr J.C. Burton’s 50 tons of wheat, as well as a despatch written the day before by Lt. Col. Foveaux to Lt. Gov. Collins³:

I send you a proportion of the last investment received from England, the invoices of which are forwarded to you by the Acting Commissary, and which contain a Supply of all the Articles sent out, except of earthenware, for which there is not sufficient room in the Venus. I have also sent three hundred bushels of Maize, and a Supply of Medicines, agreeable to your requisition.

The arrival of this cargo is acknowledged in a despatch from Lt. Gov. Collins to Lt. Gov. Paterson⁴:

Govt. House Hobart Town
Van Diemens Land 11 Feb 1809

Sir,

I have the Honour to acquaint you that the Venus Schooner arrived here from Port Jackson on the 29th December last, [1808] having on board 300 bushels of Maize, a quantity of Slop Cloathing (*sic*) and Bedding upon Government Account, and a small investment for Barter. [Wheat and Spirits] I did not acknowledge by her the receipt of these Articles as the Master informed me he should be at least three months on his return to Sydney, previous to which period I though it extremely probable I should find a more direct conveyance for my communication with you. Such has now offered by the departure of the Brig Hibernia, which arrived here on the 4th instant from Calcutta, with a Cargo on Speculation.

However, Mr Burton was not allowed to land the 50 tons of wheat and spirits that he hoped to sell on speculation, and the reason for this can be found in a despatch dated 8th March 1810 from Gov. Macquarie to Lt. Gov. Collins⁵:

I regret that you did not receive the Wheat and Spirits from the Ship Venus, according to the contract of Colonel Paterson with Mr. Burton, which specified that a certain proportion should be landed at the Derwent for the use of that Settlement, and of which, you appear by your Letters to the Late Lieut. Governor to have been fully apprized.

The receiving of Provisions thus contracted for by the Head of the Government here would not have been departing from the Spirit of Lord Castlereagh’s Instructions.

In future, when the Settlement over which you preside is in actual want of Provisions, You have my consent to purchase such as may be absolutely necessary on the most reasonable terms they can be procured, without waiting for my approval.

By April 1809 the “Venus” had returned to Sydney and was ready to sail once again for Van Diemens Land so Lt. Gov. Paterson took the opportunity to send five despatches to Collins one dated 9th April 1809, two dated 15th April 1809, one dated 19th April 1809, and one dated 20th April 1809⁶.

After leaving Hobart Town she sailed for Calcutta for a cargo of merchandise to sell in Sydney and it was on this return voyage that she put into Hobart Town to bury the body of Jas. Batchelor on the 28th January 1810. One is left to visualise the scene on that sad day. We see the “Venus” turning into the wind to come to anchor off Crayfish Point, the ship’s boats being lowered, in one the body of Jas. Batchelor sewn up in sailcloth, the other manned by his shipmates ready to tow it ashore.

Then a short wait whilst a grave was dug just above high water mark, the Burial Service read by the Ship’s Captain, the spot marked by a temporary wooden cross made by the Ship’s Carpenter, and then up anchor for Hobart Town. From Hobart Town she sailed for Sydney which place she reached on the 28th February 1810⁷ with the following cargo⁸:

General Cargo of Ship Venus: 190 bags of sugar, 546 Do. of wheat and rice, 31 Boxes of Mixed Candles, 5 tons of Iron, 13 tubs of Sugar Candy,

23 Chests of Tea, 22 Casks of Hogs Lard, 500 Raw Hides, 37 Bales and 1 Chest of Piece Goods, 4 Boxes of Fish Sauce, 7 Trunks of Boots and Shoes, 9 Packages of Canvas, 88 Coils of Coir Rope, (3 cases of Holland, private), 132 Casks of Rum and Brandy and Half a Pipe of Madeira Wine.

Having unloaded this cargo, her Master E. Bunker handed over command to one Joseph Leigh, who prepared the ship for sea by taking on a load of ballast as well as 10 extra men to bring her compliment up to 60 before sailing on the 14th April 1810 for her home port of Calcutta⁹.

From here, Historical Records of Australia, Series I and III, lose sight of the "Venus" and her Owner, Mr J.C. Burton, until 6th November 1815 when he wrote his letter to Under Secretary Goulburn which opened our story.

References

1. H.R.A. Series I, Vol. 9, p. 148.
2. H.R.A. Series I, Vol. 7, p. 167.
3. H.R.A. Series I, Vol. 7, pp. 10-11.
4. H.R.A. Series III, Vol. 1, p. 411.
5. H.R.A. Series III, Vol. 1, p. 436.
6. H.R.A. Series III, Vol. 1, pp. 416-418.
7. H.R.A. Series I, Vol. 7, p. 320.
8. H.R.A. Series I, Vol. 7, p. 321.
9. H.R.A. Series I, Vol. 7, p. 426.



Postcard of Batchelor's Grave, c1946.

LENT BY DIANNE ALLEN.

