

**AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT**

**SIR EDMUND DU CANE**

**Letters, 1851-56**

**REEL M835**

**Mr A. Pullan  
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**Filmed: 1972**

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Edmund Frederick Du Cane (1830-1909), the son of Major Du Cane (d. 1832) was born at Colchester, England. He entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in 1846 and obtained his commission as a second lieutenant in the Royal Engineers in 1848. In 1851 Du Cane was sent to Western Australia to direct the work of convicts employed on public buildings, under the command of Captain Edmund Henderson. He built a house at Guildford and was responsible for public works in York, Toodyay and the eastern district. In 1852 he accompanied Governor Fitzgerald on a journey on horseback to Champion Bay. He was later a visiting magistrate. In 1855 he married Mary Dorothea Molloy, the daughter of Captain John Molloy and his wife, the botanist Georgiana Molloy. They had eight children.

Du Cane and his wife returned to England in 1856. Under the Inspector-General of Fortification, he was responsible for the design of new defences of dockyards and naval bases in southern England, including Dover and Plymouth. In 1863 he was appointed director of convict prisons and an inspector of military prisons. In 1869 he succeeded Edmund Henderson as Inspector-General and Surveyor-General of Prisons. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general in 1873 and was knighted in 1877. He retired from the Army in 1887 with the rank of major-general.

### Reference:

Alexandra Hasluck. *Royal Engineer: a life of Sir Edmund Du Cane* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1973)

## SIR EDMUND DU CANE

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15 letters from Du Cane to his mother, Eliza Du Cane, and his brothers Arthur and Richard, 1851-56. Many of the letters are lengthy and some contain sketches and plans.

The letters were not filmed in date order.

Du Cane to Eliza Du Cane, 13 Sept. 1851: departure from England on the Anna Robertson.

Du Cane (off Cape Verde Islands) to Eliza Du Cane, 30 Sept. 1851: account of the voyage since leaving England; fellow-passengers including Bishop Brady; drawings.

Du Cane (Fremantle) to Eliza Du Cane, 19 Dec. 1851: arrival at Fremantle; quarantine.

Du Cane (Fremantle) to Arthur Du Cane, 7 Jan. 1852: arrival at Fremantle; the Swan River; impressions of Fremantle and the bush; absence of shops; Captain E. Henderson; unlimited money for public works. Includes an extract from a letter from Captain Henderson to General Sir John Burgoyne.

Du Cane (Guildford) to the family, 20 Feb. 1852: journey to the north with Governor C. Fitzgerald; inspection of Champion Bay; Australian Aborigines, 'settlers shoot them down like dogs'; fires lit by Aborigines; attractions of Guildford; building works; requests books.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Eliza Du Cane, 18 April 1852: receipt of newspapers and letters; weather; construction of his house; monthly visits to York and Toodyay; isolation of settlements; property investments in Adelaide.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Eliza Du Cane, 5 July 1852: tour of convict establishments; condition of inns; Aboriginal trackers; plans of house and garden; food prices; country cannot support a large population.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Eliza Du Cane, 12 Sept. 1852: wreck of *Eglinton*; sends sketches; advice on sending mails; his garden; Captain Henderson; 'many gentlemen emigrants have lived in huts for years and only now are making some money'.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Arthur Du Cane, 1 March 1853: rumours of cessation of transportation; requests items of clothing and other goods, including beer; arrival of HMS *Torch*; social events; Captain Henderson's home the best in the colony; investments.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Arthur Du Cane, 29 May 1853: public works; lack of warders; bridge over the Swan and road being constructed across Darling Range to Toodyay; cessation of transportation would destroy the colony; possibility of importing goods; requests books.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Dick Du Cane, 21 Aug. 1853 : investments ; economic conditions in the colony ; continuance of convict transportation ; criticisms of the British Government ; convict accommodation ; lack of security in inland prisons.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Arthur Du Cane, 15 Dec. 1853: construction of Du Cane's house; the Governor's envy; problem of flies; Catholic bishops J. Brady and J. Serra; only three Anglican clergy in the colony.

Du Cane (Guildford) to Arthur Du Cane, 15 Oct. 1854: receipt of letters and newspapers; W.A. Sandford, the Colonial Secretary; Governor C. Fitzgerald; Du Cane's garden; sketch of house and garden.

Du Cane (Guildford) to a brother, n.d.: his garden; possibility of famine, almost out of flour; possibility of war. (incomplete)

Du Cane (Fremantle) to Arthur Du Cane, 7 Jan. 1856: imminent departure on Esmeralda; tired of continual heat; Lieut. H. Wray, Capt. Henderson; death of Mary Henderson; decision to leave Western Australia.

Testimonial of Governor Arthur Kennedy on good conduct of Lieut. Du Cane in all his duties, 23 Feb. 1856.