

**AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT**

**DAVID BLACKBURN**

**Papers, 1785-96**

**Reel M971**

**Mr T. Grix  
Burgh next Aylsham  
Norfolk**

**National Library of Australia  
State Library of New South Wales**

**Filmed: 1976**

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

David Blackburn (1753-1795) was born in Newbury, Berkshire, the son of the Reverend John Blackburn. After his father's death in 1762, the family moved to Norwich. In 1779 he joined the Royal Navy with the rank of midshipman. By 1785 he was the master on HMS *Flora*, serving in the West Indies.

In April 1787 Blackburn was appointed master on the tender *Supply*, commanded by Lieutenant Henry Ball, bound for Botany Bay as part of the First Fleet. The ship arrived in Botany Bay on 18 January 1788 and a few days later Blackburn was in the party that explored Port Jackson. In February 1788 the *Supply* sailed to Norfolk Island to establish a penal settlement. Blackburn visited Norfolk Island again in September 1788 commanding the transport *Golden Grove*. In 1790 the *Supply* sailed to Batavia for provisions and, following its return to Sydney, Blackburn commanded it on two visits to Norfolk Island.

In May 1792 the *Supply* returned to England and Blackburn was discharged. He joined HMS *Dictator* in 1793. He died at Haslar Naval Hospital.

## THE LETTERS OF DAVID BLACKBURN

The original letters written by David Blackburn to his sister, and the other papers filmed by the AJCP, were acquired by the State Library of New South Wales in 1999.

The letters were reproduced in Derick Neville. *Blackburn's Isle* (Lavenham UK, 1975).

## DAVID BLACKBURN

### Reel M971

Margaret Blackburn (Norwich) to Blackburn, 3 April 1785: mismanagement of their brother; plans of mother and herself to offer board and education to a few young women; seamen and balloons.

Blackburn (London, Portsmouth) to Margaret Blackburn, 12 March – 9 May 1787: disappointment at appointment as master of *Supply*; purchase of clothing and charts; likely to be away for 3-4 years; Lieut. H. Ball; arrival of Capt. A Phillip; possibility of charting New Holland coast; imminent departure. One letter is addressed to his mother Elizabeth Blackburn. (10 letters)

Blackburn (Teneriffe) to Margaret Blackburn, 5 June 1787: arrival at Teneriffe; convicts in good condition; proceeding to Rio de Janeiro and Cape of Good Hope.

Blackburn (Rio de Janeiro) to Margaret Blackburn, 2 Sept. 1787: progress of voyage; impressions of Rio de Janeiro; convicts in healthy state (only 22 deaths); humanity of Capt. Phillip.

Blackburn (Cape of Good Hope) to Margaret Blackburn, 9 Nov. 1787: loading of livestock; expects to reach Botany Bay in February or March.

Blackburn (Sydney) to Margaret Blackburn, 12 July 1788: quick passage from Cape of Good Hope; arrival at Botany Bay; discovery of Port Jackson; voyage to Norfolk Island and discovery of Lord Howe Island; unproductive gardens at Sydney; impressions of Aborigines; earthquake (22 June); healthy climate.

Blackburn (Sydney) to Margaret Blackburn, 15 Nov. 1788: impressions of colony; swamps and rocky hills, poor soil; trees; harbours; canoes, weapons and food of Aborigines; their lack of curiosity; fauna, including kangaroos; productivity of Norfolk Island; lack of a harbour; departure of transports.

Margaret Blackburn (Norwich) to Blackburn, 9 Sept. 1789: family news; death of brother Thomas Blackburn in 1787; hopes *Guardian* will bring 'many necessaries'.

Blackburn (Batavia) to Margaret Blackburn, 12 Aug. 1790: healthy climate of New South Wales; poor soil; vegetables do tolerably well; limited contact with Aborigines; Bennelong; shortage of supplies; wreck of HMS *Sirius* at Norfolk Island; voyage to East Indies; discovery of islands; impressions of Batavia; hopes of returning to England. Letter continued at Port Jackson, 17 March 1791: return to Port Jackson in Oct. 1790; Blackburn's command of *Supply* on voyage to Norfolk Island; fir trees rotten at heart; visit by Aborigines to Sydney; conflict between tribes.

Capt. A. Phillip to Blackburn, 25 Sept. 1788: directs Blackburn to take *Golden Grove* to Norfolk Island, land people, stores and provisions and receive on board spars and deals.

Capt. A. Phillip to Blackburn, 17 Jan. 1791: directs Blackburn to take command of *Supply* and proceed to Norfolk Island and load stores and provisions.

Peter Martineau (London) to Elizabeth Blackburn, 10 Feb. 1791: meeting with Lieut. P.G. King; speaks of Blackburn in highest terms; Blackburn's illness; cannot explain why he has not written to his family.

Capt. A. Phillip to Blackburn, 19 March 1791: directs Blackburn to take command of *Supply* and transport settlers, officers and supplies to Norfolk Island.

Capt. A. Phillip to P. Stephens (Admiralty), 18 Nov. 1791: commends Blackburn who commanded *Supply* when Lieut. Ball was ill. (extract)

Blackburn to R. Harper (Plymouth), 27 Sept. 1793: appointment to HMS *Dictator*; requests that his things be sent by London wagon.

Testimonials commending Blackburn written by Lieut. H.L. Ball, 7 April 1788, 8 April 1789, 8 April 1792, 15 May 1792.

Letters received by Margaret Blackburn and her mother Elizabeth Blackburn from friends and relatives in response to questions about the whereabouts of Blackburn and giving details of his death, January 1795 – April 1796.