

BOOK REVIEW

***Marine Officer, Convict Wife – The Johnstons of Annandale* by Dr Alan Roberts
Barbara Beckett Publishing, ISBN 978-787589121-4
RRPS29.95**

I found this book enjoyable and absorbing on four levels. It is an important Australian history book dating from the First Fleet till Johnston's death in 1823 and then the subsequent development of his properties until 1905. Second, the book is enjoyable as a record of a family saga, settlers, developers and pastoralists. Next, I enjoyed the book as an account of the social development of the colony and the impact of a marine officer, ultimately a Lieutenant Colonel and his convict wife and the mother of his children who had been at the time of the First Fleet a woman milliner of Jewish origin working in London. Lastly, I found the book enjoyable as an account of a very important Scottish Australian who was always aware of his Scottish origins.

The big historical event in Johnston's life which has had repercussions in Australian history was the so called "Rum Rebellion" and the arrest and deposition of Governor Bligh. The account in this book of the arrest of Bligh I found very informative, it detailed extensively the way in which Governor Bligh alienated all parts of the colony to the extent that then, Major Johnston was persuaded to act as Lieutenant Governor to take over the administration of the colony. The character of Bligh has been described in many publications but I enjoyed the detailed incidence of Bligh's tyranny – cancellation of grants, discharge of leases and unconcerned breaches of ordinary legal rights. I think the book is moderate in looking at the facts and his assessment of the other characters in the drama, particularly Macarthur. Although I used to know one of the most established historians of that period, Malcolm Ellis, quite well I thought Roberts's difference as to Ellis's assessment convincing.

The court martial of Johnston arising from his arrest of Bligh and his ultimate cashiering from the Army: was covered convincingly. Johnston's optimistic hope that he might be acquitted or alternatively re-instated in the Army and the depression of his disappointment of that hoped for result are covered well. It is understandable to any reader how unreasonable Johnston was in hoping for a better result. Of course Bligh did not fair much better. Although he was in due course promoted by seniority to become a Rear Admiral he never again was given any command or any position of

authority. After he returned to the colony from the court martial as a private citizen the story gives another aspect of Macquarie's years as Governor.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the book is that it includes a large number of photographs, paintings and maps of the story, places and people. Some of them have been seen in many places for example the well-known cartoon of 1805 showing the arrest of Bligh by pulling him out from under a bed, artist unknown. The photographic and reproduced material in the book very helpfully described for example the available material as to whether Bligh was actually pulled out from under a bed.

The paintings or photographs of Johnston's home at Annandale and the information about that property at Annandale, like other parts of the book gives us the establishment of names and places that are still important features of Sydney, particularly between Circular Quay and Parramatta. The importance of Parramatta Rd is illustrated a number of times during the story. Another big event in Johnston's life in the colony was the Castle Hill rebellion by a large group of convicts.

The book is very attractively presented apart from the extensive illustrations. The print is very clear and readable, the chapter headings and capital letters use a very attractive font. The footnotes and references are extensive and very useful. There is a family tree which shows that there must be now living quite a large number of descendants in Sydney and New South Wales from Johnston and Esther, his wife.

Malcolm D. Broun