

50 YEARS OF THE

**Fellowship of
First Fleeters**

1968 – 2018



by Patricia Kennedy, March 2018
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105 Cathedral Street
Woolloomooloo NSW

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A newspaper article printed in the Sydney Morning Herald on Thursday 21 March 1968 gave the first indication to its readers that a meeting was to be held the following Wednesday to form the Fellowship of First Fleeters. On 27 March 1968 approximately 400 people gathered at the AMP Auditorium, Circular Quay for the inauguration of the Fellowship. Many descendants from the First Fleet were in attendance, the names of some of the First Fleeters included James Squire, Henry Kable, William Nash, Frederick Meredith, Corporal William Tunks and Matthew Everingham just to name a few.



Some of the attendees entering the meeting
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The Sydney Morning Herald



John K Lavett

At this gathering Mr John Lavett, the instigator of the meeting, was elected President of the Fellowship, there was also discussion on forming Divisional Councils that would be set up in the states and territories each being represented on a National Council in Sydney. Sydney, the site of the National's foundation was to remain as headquarters of the Fellowship and from the very beginning its motto has been "To live on in the hearts and minds of descendants is never to die!"

Mr Lavett, at the same meeting, formed a body known as the "1788-1820 Pioneer Association" for descendants of pioneers who had arrived during this time period. The Association's archives are now in the care of the "Biographical Database of Australia". John Lavett, the inaugural President, was a man of high ability who soon had the Fellowship, with the help of the Executive Committee, running smoothly.

The first Executive Committee meeting was held 24 April 1968, and then later on Thursday 13 June the first General Meeting of the Fellowship of First Fleeters was held at the AMP Auditorium. The attendance for the night was 204.

During the first year much was done by the Executive Committee to establish the smooth operation of the Fellowship that we know today. Initially eleven committees were formed, each named after ships of the First Fleet such as *Alexander* contained the Publicity Committee, *Sirius* was the Australia Day Committee and *Lady Penrhyn* contained the Membership Selection Committee. By the end of the

first year the Fellowship had attracted 725 members and had rented office space at 21 Phillip Street, Sydney

During 1968 the Queensland Divisional Council was formed led by Mr Arthur Ingham-Myers, of Toowoomba as the President, this branch ceased to function sometime after 1972.

Sadly 1969 brought with it the first sign of disgruntlement between John Lavett and the Executive Committee. It appears the President had his own hidden agendas which he did not discuss with his Executive. He formulated plans for two competitions in the name of the Fellowship, one for the adoption of a new National Flag and another for a new National Anthem.

John Lavett resigned on 13 March 1970, this was accepted and the Fellowship welcomed Frank Everingham as the second President, a position he held a little over two years before Frederick Daniell became the third President in August 1972.



Australia Chapel
St Nicholas, Bathampton

Under the presidency of Frederick Daniell the Fellowship was instrumental in launching a second appeal in Australia for the finalisation of the Australia Chapel at Arthur Phillip's last resting place at St Nicholas, Bathampton. Three Australian companies, News International Ltd, Consolidated Goldfields Ltd and Rio Tinto-Zinc Ltd each donated £5,000 (English pounds) towards the appeal. Help also came from Federal and State Governments as well as many other Australian organisations and its people.

The dedication took place on 26 January 1975 with two representatives from the Fellowship in attendance, Mrs Jean Mitchell and Mr Arthur Ingham-Myers from Queensland. This appeal was originally initiated by John Lavett but it lost momentum after a short period of time.

Sadly Frederick Daniell died suddenly in February 1973 while still in office and did not see the completion of the Chapel. The Chapel is paved with Wombeyan Marble and furnished in Blackbean wood from Australia. The pair of perpendicular style windows is glazed with arms of the Federal Government and six Australian States.

Edgar Ainslie Kable, a founding member became the Fellowship's fourth President and under his and the Executive's guidance the Fellowship steadily went from strength to strength. With membership rising there was a move into new quarters in the Kembla Building, Margaret Street, Sydney.

One of the most important activities the Fellowship has been involved with is the task of locating and identifying the graves or burial sites of every man, woman and child that arrived on the First Fleet. Once located and permission obtained from descendants and the relevant burial ground administration, a bronze plaque is then provided by the Fellowship. Mr Doug Oakes was the person responsible for this massive task and up until his death in 2001, 114 plaques had been placed. In January 2016 the number of plaques has risen to 123 but as there are many more to go this will be an ongoing project.

In 1975 one of the Fellowship's longest serving Presidents was Beryl Joan Lewis who took over the reins from Edgar Kable. Beryl proved to be a very capable and conscientious President and with her able Executive much was achieved during her tenure. By now the initial eleven committees had been abandoned as they had proved to be ineffective, their duties had been taken over by the Executive Committee members.

Nineteen seventy five was also the year that the monument Bonds of Friendship had been initiated; originally the concept was put forward by Austin C Spraggs Esq from Portsmouth. The idea was a monument to be erected in Portsmouth, England to mark the departure of the First Fleet from that port. The City of Sydney came onboard for the idea and presented a block of New South Wales granite to the City of Portsmouth. The artist John Robinson was commissioned to sculpt a fitting monument. Then the Fellowship approached the Sydney City Council in 1977 with a proposal to have the same sculpture erected in Sydney to mark the bicentennial of the arrival of the First Fleet.

The next year the Sydney City Council gave approval in principle to the request. It had been envisaged that the project would take at least 10 years but a block of English granite, quarried at Dartmoor, was offered by the City of Portsmouth which shortened the timeframe. When this was revealed in Sydney the Bank of New South Wales offered to donate the duplicate sculpture for the Sydney memorial.



Portsmouth Sculpture



Unveiling Sydney's Sculpture in
front of Custom House

John Robinson's sculptures are two links of a chain representing the start and finish of the voyage undertaken by the First Fleet. The Portsmouth sculpture has a dull painted surface to denote the old

country while the sculpture in Sydney has a highly polished brass finish to symbolize the new country.

Beryl Lewis, along with the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Nelson Meers and his wife, were invited to attend the unveiling of the Portsmouth monument in England on 11 July 1980 by Queen Elizabeth. Later that night the Fellowship's President, Mrs Lewis was very honoured to be invited, in company with the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, to a dinner at the Guildhall with the Queen.

The site for the Sydney memorial was in front of the Sydney Custom House, and was unveiled on 17 September 1980. This memorial to the people on the First Fleet was the first to be erected almost 193 years after they arrived in Australia.



Jessie Street Gardens

During 1997 and the re-development and upgrading of Alfred Street the Sydney Bonds of Friendship disappeared from its original site in front of Customs House. After representations from the Fellowship it re-appeared in Jessie Street Gardens in Loftus Street in 2001, but sadly missing one of

the original plinths.

As the Fellowship moved into the 1980s membership started growing at a fast pace, and by October 1980 membership applications had grown to 1,683. Of course with Australia starting to make plans for the Bicentenary in 1988 many Australians felt the need to research their ancestors. The book, *Roots* which was published in America during the latter part of 1970s inspired many Australians to take up genealogy, so then the need to find a first fleet convict here in Australia took on a new meaning.

Under the leadership of Beryl Lewis the Fellowship started the tradition of presenting, on Australia Day, a Loyal Address to the Governor of New South Wales with the first address presented to the Governor on 26 January 1976. During the 1790s as our first settlements grew groups of free citizens, landholders and others began the custom of presenting any new Governor, or on a visit from a current Governor, a petition or memorial. The Fellowship discontinued this annual event about 1988.



First Loyal Address carried out by the Fellowship

After eight years Beryl Lewis resigned as President of the Fellowship, her resignation accepted with much regret as she had been a wonderful ambassador and was a tireless worker for the Fellowship. Her successor was Roderick Charles Best who served until 1986.

The Fellowship had always recognized the fact that many of the First Fleet descendants had not always lived in the Sydney region, so was

delighted to hear of the formation of a Victorian Divisional Council. The idea came from Jonathan King a member of the Fellowship who was residing in Victoria at the time.

The first meeting was held on 25 May 1984 where Jonathan King was elected as President along with 11 Committee Members. One year later Roderick Best, Fellowship President, travelled to Melbourne for the First Annual General Meeting. In his speech which was reproduced in the Fellowship's June/July Newsletter 1985 he stated the importance of Sydney as the base of the Fellowship Headquarters.

He went on to say that Sydney was where the Fleet came to anchor; Sydney was where the majority of the First Fleeters lived and Sydney holds more of the primary records of the fleet than any other city in the Commonwealth of Australia.

The Fellowship welcomed the revival of Divisional Councils, especially in Victoria as in this state there are many descendants from First Fleeters who settled there. Roderick Best concluded his address to the Victorian Divisional Council by saying:

“Let us therefore work as one toward establishing that Fellowship comprised of those who descend from the First Fleeters – not merely as part of the 1988 celebrations but, beyond that, as a continuing force within the nation which our ancestors founded so that at all future times across the nation we will be able to say through our one organisation that we can be identified by relatives.”

Sadly a Victorian Divisional Council was not to be, shortly after the visit to Melbourne by the Fellowship the Victorian members made the decision to form their own First Fleet Fellowship and now is a completely separate identity to the Sydney based Fellowship of First Fleeters.

In 1986 the Fellowship lost their capable President, Roderick Best, when he resigned from his position due to his work commitments.

The Fellowship had hoped that Rod would lead them into the Bicentennial year but that was not to be. Peter Christian was elected as President who took on the daunting task of guiding the Fellowship into 1988.

During 1987 a member of the Fellowship, Margaret Thomason of Clayfield, Brisbane wrote to the President, Peter Christian, with her suggestion that for the Fellowship to survive it must expand. In part her letter stated; “the benefit of fellowship is heavily weighted in favour of those who live within the few hours’ drive from Sydney”. This idea was already in motion.

The Fellowship had always recognised the need to expand their membership to include descendants from all parts of the country. One way to do this was the formation of Chapters throughout the country to provide members and prospective members the opportunity to become active within the Fellowship without having to travel to Sydney.

The first of these Chapters was Canberra; the inaugural meeting took place on Friday 31 July 1987 with the President of the Fellowship, Peter Christian, in attendance. Northern Rivers Chapter followed a few months later on 15 November, then the Hunter Valley on 21 November 1987.

Nineteen eighty seven proved to be a demanding period for the Fellowship, much was happening in the lead up to the Bicentennial which put a great deal of pressure on the Executive Committee. In July alone 180 members had joined the Fellowship which added up to approximately 1,000 new members in the previous 12 months.

To kick start the Bicentennial a First Fleet Re-enactment project had been started some years earlier. Although the Fellowship was not part of the First Fleet Re-Enactment Company Pty Ltd, it did follow the progress and the trials and tribulations in getting the massive project underway.

Four Executive Committee members of the Fellowship travelled to Portsmouth to witness the departure of the ships taking part in the re-enactment. They were Joyce Cowell, Alice Clarke, Lloyd Allchin and Hugh Morgan.



Portsmouth, England before the sailing of the First Fleet Re-enactment.

Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh saw the departure of the Fleet aboard the Royal Navy destroyer *Sirius*, namesake of the flagship of the original First Fleet.

Joyce Cowell reported back to the Fellowship on the events leading up to Wednesday 13 May 1987 and to inform the Fellowship of her invitation to a reception given by the Queen at Osborne House, one of Queen Victoria's homes. Joyce was also presented to the Queen later that night and said the Queen asked a few questions about her Australian ancestors.

When the Fleet reached Rio De Janeiro the funding had dried up and the re-enactment was doomed until Mike Carlton of Radio 2GB launched an appeal raising \$950,000 within three days. The

Fellowship donated \$1,000 to the appeal and the re-enactment was saved by the generosity of the Australian public. The pandemonium and mayhem of the welcome given to the First Fleet Re-enactment on 26 January 1988 in front of an estimated 2 million people has never been surpassed. What a difference to 26 January 1788.



Sydney Harbour 26 January 1988
<http://commons.wikimeadia.org/W/index>

As 1988 was drawing closer the Fellowship came under tremendous pressure and knowing that their present offices were totally inadequate the decision was made by the Executive Committee to find alternative accommodation. As the present offices' rental for the next ten years would amount to approximately \$60,000 to \$80,000 the search was started within the City for somewhere the Fellowship could call home.

The Rocks was the first choice, however there was nothing suitable for the price range that they had in mind. Past President Rod Best was persuaded to attend an auction and bid for a property at Woolloomooloo. The bid was successful at \$144,000 for a two storey building at 105 Cathedral Street, Woolloomooloo; the building had a downstairs meeting room, annex and kitchen, whilst

upstairs there were three good sized bedrooms a bathroom and balcony. The previous use of the building had been a green grocery.

At the same time Peter Christian was invited to the opening of a refurbished Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac) at the Rocks. After being introduced to the General Manager, the President was able to convince him to lend the Fellowship the balance of what was owed on the property at Savings Bank Interest.

The mortgage of \$70,000 was to be repaid at \$933.00 per month; this debt was substantially reduced due to the “Buy A Brick” Fund which put the Fellowship on a sound financial footing.

In October 1987 Peter Christian wrote to the Premier of New South Wales, Mr Barrie Unsworth expressing concern that the Fellowship of First Fleeters was being overlooked for the Australia Day Celebrations at the Opera House. Initially the Fellowship was allocated 300 seats but after further requests ‘several hundred’ had been allocated.



Members of the Fellowship preparing for the parade.

Nineteen eighty eight started with a flourish of activities for the Fellowship, the first on 9 January was a parade through Sydney to mark the opening of the historic restoration of Macquarie Street, Circular Quay and The Rocks. Members in period costume took part walking along side and in

the replica of the gig belonging to Captain Arthur Phillip which is being presented to the City of Sydney by the City of Portsmouth.

Earlier in the day the Premier unveiled the first of the Fellowship's Bicentennial Plaques at First Fleet Park, Circular Quay.

The twenty sixth January began at 7.30am with a Flag Raising Ceremony in front of Custom House which was attended by many Fellowship members. Later that morning the several hundred members who were lucky enough to obtain tickets entered the forecourt of the Opera House to watch as Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales help Australia celebrate their bicentenary. The whole day and the fireworks display later that evening would live with the Fellowship members that attended for the rest of their lives.

Nineteen eighty eight was a significant year for the Fellowship, not only did it witness the Bicentennial year but also their twentieth birthday. The most important was the purchase of First Fleet House and then a Bicentennial grant had been approved for the sum of \$10,000 for computerisation of the Fellowship records. This would not have been an easy task for the members as computers in 1988 were not exactly user friendly.



Saturday 2 July 1988 the Governor of New South Wales, Sir James Rowland officially opened First Fleet House. The day was well attended by Fellowship members including three past Presidents.

Sir James Rowland cutting the ribbon
To First Fleet House.

Nineteen eighty eight also saw the formation of a Chapter in Tasmania under the Presidency of Roy Peck. The first meeting was held on 3 July 1988 but this Chapter did not survive closing sometime after.

During 1988 representatives from the Fellowship travelled first to Norfolk Island, the Fellowship's second visit, and then later in the year a visit to Tasmania to place Fellowship Memorial Plaques. By now plaque ceremonies were becoming more frequent due to the excellent work done by the Graves Convenor, Doug Oakes, who during the early years carried out much of the research by himself.

During the Bicentennial year the Fellowship awarded three life memberships, they were Doug Oakes, Joyce Cowell and Barbara Townsend.



Left to right: Doug Oakes, Joyce Cowell & Barbara Townsend.

In 1989, Peter Christian informed the Fellowship that at the next Annual General Meeting he would be stepping down as President. Peter Christian's last official duty on the 24 September 1989 was to deliver a speech at the dedication of the First Fleet Memorial at Brighton-Le-Sands, Botany Bay.

At the Annual General Meeting on 19 November 1989 James Hugh Donohoe was elected as the eighth President of the Fellowship. James Donohoe was a wonderful choice as President, not only did he have the credentials to lead the Fellowship; he also was a wonderful researcher and genealogist and the author of many books and genealogical indexes.

After the exhilarating years of the bicentennial 1990 was a time of reflection for the Fellowship. Consideration was given to creating

more Chapters throughout the country specially where there were large groups of members; the Fellowship started writing to the various members in the hope more Chapters could be formed.

By the middle of 1990 President Donohoe was able to inform all members that the mortgage on 105 Cathedral Street had been reduced by \$10,000 over the previous 2 years and now stood at \$58,000. This has been achieved by the generosity of members and the “Buy A Brick” appeal.

For some years the Wednesday Ladies Group would meet at First Fleet House to tackle the huge volume of mail, sending out newsletters, keeping accounts, answering the correspondence plus many other chores. One of these ladies was the late Norma Dawson, the mother of Sharon Lamb, a current Board Member.



Sir David Martin
Governor of NSW

August 1990 was a very sad time for the Fellowship, when their Patron and Fellowship member Rear Admiral Sir David Martin KCMG, AO, died on 10 August 1990. Sir David was the Governor of New South Wales from 20 January 1989 until he resigned just three days before his death on 7 August 1990. His State Funeral was attended by many Fellowship members including President James Donohoe and past President Peter Christian

was represented by his son Timothy.

One task the Fellowship took pride in was the search for the burial sites of First Fleeters, this had been mainly carried out by Doug Oakes since 1976. By 1990 seventy nine had been located and

identified and for two years Joyce Cowell and Rod Best had been documenting and photographing all the information and research. They soon turned this into a book titled *Where First Fleeters Lie*, the Fellowship then organised a Book Launch at First Fleet House Saturday 25 August 1990 at 2.00pm. The afternoon was very successful with approximately eighty people in attendance. Afternoon tea was supplied by the Ladies of the committee and their helpers.

Shortly after the publication of *Where First Fleeters Lie* a federal grant had been received by the Fellowship for \$8,000 to support the heritage program and historical graves research.

The grant enabled the Fellowship to engage Gordon Brown a stonemason from Penrith to clean and re-black memorials at St John's Cemetery, Parramatta. Mr Brown had successfully restored many tombstones at St John's and other cemeteries. The tombstones of Nathaniel Lucas, Eleanor Frazer, Frederick Meredith and William Broughton, located at Liverpool, NSW were to be investigated to see if they could be restored.

After the Bicentennial membership applications had slowed just a little but the Membership Committee was still very busy processing all of the requests. The Fellowship had, for some years, been compiling First Fleet Family Trees and these did help with any new application. If an applicant is descended from a First Fleeter that the Fellowship did not already have, then documentation right back to the First Fleeter for each generation is required.

The Fellowship's work in locating and identifying the graves of First Fleeters did not stop in Australia. Early in 1991 the Fellowship voted a monetary grant for the restoration of the inscription on John Hunter's tomb at St John-at-Hackney, England.

Alice Clarke, Vice-President of the Fellowship travelled to England to represent the Fellowship at the unveiling of the memorial plaque

which took place Sunday 16 June 1991. John Hunter was the second Governor of the Colony.

After completing three years as President of the Fellowship, James Donohoe had to stand down due to the many work commitments he had. At the November 1992 Annual General Meeting Peter Christian again took the chair as President.

March 1993 Alice Clarke organised a tour of Norfolk Island for twenty one descendants and associates. They flew to Norfolk Island for the 205th Anniversary of Lieutenant P G King's landing on the Island on 6 March 1788. The members came from Adelaide, Canberra, Wollongong, Newcastle, The Blue Mountains and Sydney.

The same year was also the Silver Jubilee of the Fellowship which was celebrated in style in the form of a cocktail party at Parliament House on Wednesday evening 31 March. Peter Christian spoke of his keen and hard working Executive Committee who had expertise in various fields.

Membership applications had grown to over 6,200 and the President was proud of the fact that the Fellowship was still committed to identifying and suitably commemorating the final resting place of 71 First Fleeters. The "Buy-A-Brick" appeal was slowly reducing the mortgage with \$35,000 left to pay.



After three years as Head of the Defence Staff in London, Fellowship member, Commodore Paul Kable returned to Australia in 1995 to take up duties in Canberra as the Director of General Force Development (Sea).

Paul Kable is now a Vice-Patron of the Fellowship.

Commodore Paul Kable and his wife Anne laying a wreath at the Arthur Phillip Memorial in Bath representing the Fellowship of First Fleeters

Over the next couple of years members of the Fellowship took annual trips together visiting areas such as Macksville and Dubbo. By the close of 1997 one hundred and one plaques had been placed on First Fleet graves at various locations throughout Australia. Over twenty of these were Commemorative Plaques that had been placed at St David's Park in Hobart, Emily Bay Norfolk Island and St Matthew's Windsor just to name a few.

June, 1997 also saw a new Chapter formed known as the North Coast Chapter serving areas such as Boambee, Coffs Harbour, Dorrigo, Woolgoolga, Ulmarra and Urunga.

By the year 2000 First Fleet House was in need of some renovations, when the building was first acquired there was no spare money available, as a result only the downstairs front room was repainted. The most urgent repairs were replacement of timber frames around some doors and windows, the backyard was tiled and the entire house was repainted throughout. The mortgage on First Fleet House was finally discharged during 2000.

In March 2001 many members and friends of the Fellowship travelled to Norfolk Island for Foundation Day on 6 March. The Victorian First Fleet Fellowship was also represented, with Peter Christian stating he was delighted to meet up with the Victorian Fellowship at long last.

Peter Christian accompanied by Ric Stonehouse, President of the Victorian Fellowship, greeted the Governor-General Sir William Deane and Lady Deane and escorted them to Cemetery Bay. His Excellency then unveiled four plaques, during the commemoration the boundary of the cemetery was lined with Army, Navy and Air Force Cadets.

Three more Chapters were formed in 2001; the first was on 19 May which was the New England Chapter covering Armidale and the surrounding areas, sadly this Chapter closed 6 August 2016. The second on 2 June was the North-West Chapter which covered

Tamworth and surrounding areas. The third on 7 August was the South Coast Chapter covering Engadine to Burrill Lake.

As the years went on more and more Chapters are being formed throughout country New South Wales. On 25 November 2004 the Southern Highlands Chapter was formed, covering the Moss Vale, Mittagong and surrounding areas. Then two years later on 17 June 2006 the ninth Chapter was formed in the Central Coast Region covering Gosford, Tuggerah Lake, Wyong and Budgewoi areas.

The Fellowship was to lose their President, Peter Christian when he decided to step down in November 2006. Peter had been President from 1986 to 1990 then was elected again in 1993 and became the longest serving President to date. John Haxton was elected as President with Peter Christian and Roderick Best as Vice-Presidents.



40th Anniversary
Celebration

L to R: John Haxton
current President,
Roderick Best, Beryl
Lewis and Peter
Christian, past
Presidents at the
Celebration.

In 2008 the Fellowship celebrated their 40th Anniversary on 27 March with a Cocktail Party held at Parliament House, Sydney, at which 130 people attended.

Joan Ross, a foundation member, spoke on the day of the present activities of the Fellowship such as the regular office staffing, the library, the website, the Chapters, the Daytime Fellowship, the Soup

and Damper Day, the tours, *Founders*, the guest speakers and the Australia Day Luncheon.

The tenth Chapter formed 5 April 2008 was Eastern Farms, the first to be formed within the Sydney region. The Chapter covered Ryde, Eastwood, Parramatta, Kings Langley and Pennant Hills. Lachlan Macquarie Chapter followed 20 September 2008 which took in a large area, Orange, Bathurst, Parkes, Dubbo, White Rock, Cowra and Kelso. Sadly this Chapter has been in recess since 6 August 2017.

Now that the Fellowship had ten Chapters, John Haxton, Fellowship President and Chapter Liaison Officer, Jean Mortimer convened the inaugural Fellowship of First Fleeters Chapter Conference. This was held on Saturday 30 August 2008 at the Castlereagh Inn, Sydney. Members from nine of the ten Chapters with eight Board members were in attendance to exchange ideas and views on a range of procedures. The Conference proved to be so successful another was planned for the next year.

During his term as President, John Haxton also initiated the War Service Nominal Roll, which involved members placing on the Roll names of First Fleet descendants who had been involved in the various theatres of overseas war and peacekeeping.

The twelfth Chapter for the Fellowship was the first one established outside of New South Wales. The Moreton Chapter held its first meeting 14 March 2009 and covered all South East Queensland. Then the thirteenth Chapter, Arthur Phillip Chapter started the next year on 13 August 2010. This Chapter took in the area of the North Shore from Milsons Point to Brooklyn and east to the northern beaches.

In December 2009, under the guidance of director Ron Withington, First Fleet House had a change made to the facade with an installation of a hanging sign which consisted of a two sided shingle.

Then in 2010 the whole front of First Fleet House was completely re-vamped with a complete list, arranged by ship, of those who arrived on the First Fleet. John Boyd, the Fellowship Researcher, gathered the list of names with the assistance of all Board members.

The information is superimposed on a colour-screened version of a 1937 painting by Algernon Talmage of the Founding of Australia. The project was designed by Edward Whitton descendant, Erin Tomkin, and installed by Signarama.



Ian Palmer cutting the ribbon to the new facade

The Official Launch of the new facade took place on Friday 28 May 2010 and the honour of cutting the ribbon went to the Records and House Maintenance Officer, Ian Palmer. President John Haxton then presented Erin Tomkin with a Certificate of Appreciation for her work.



Peter Christian OAM

The Annual General Meeting in November 2010 past President, Peter Christian did not re-nominate as a member of the Board. His health was becoming a problem and after 30 years of service to the Fellowship, 22 years as President, Peter decided to call it a day. For many years Peter was the backbone of the Fellowship, giving an astonishing number of various speeches on the subject of the First Fleet. He stated that in 2008 he had given forty-three speeches, an average of nearly one a week.

Ron Withington interviewed Peter on his retirement which was printed in *Founders* January/February 2011, Volume 42, No.1. A Farewell Morning Tea was held for Peter at First Fleet House on 16 April 2011.

The fourteenth Chapter of the Fellowship commenced on 19 March 2011 in Western Australia. Known as the Swan River Chapter it covers Perth and surrounding areas. 19 November 2011 another Chapter was formed, called the Albury-Wodonga District Chapter takes in both sides of the Murray River, the total number of Chapters now stood at fifteen.

On a Wednesday morning 10 October 2012, John Haxton, Fellowship President, attended the Rocks Discovery Museum in Kendall Lane to re-dedicate a First Fleet Plaque for First Fleeter George Greaves. The original Plaque was installed on 10 September 1988 at the State Archives Office in Globe Street. The Headstone for George Greaves was inside a glass display case as it is the oldest headstone in Australia, George Greaves died 10 July 1788.

A Fellowship member, Mrs Joan Phipps discovered that the Headstone and Plaque were no longer at the Archives Office and alerted the Fellowship. Enquires by Research Director, John Boyd located the Headstone at the Rocks Discovery Museum but the original Plaque was now missing, State Records then agreed to replace the missing Plaque.

After six years as President, John Haxton did not seek re-election to the Board at the Annual General Meeting which was held at the Central Coast Chapter, Wyong. John had joined the Fellowship in 2003 and was elected onto the Board late in 2004, then as Assistant Treasurer from 2005 and as President in November 2006.

John Haxton, during his term as President, attended many Plaque ceremonies and was instrumental to the commencement of the Chapter Conferences. He also oversaw the creation of six new Chapters including one in Queensland, one in Western Australia and one in Victoria.

Ian Palmer, the next President, is a foundation member joining the Fellowship at the age of 24 years. His First Fleet ancestor, John Palmer was the Commissary for the Colony taking up the position in June 1791; First Fleet House at Woolloomooloo is situated on part of a land grant obtained by John Palmer.

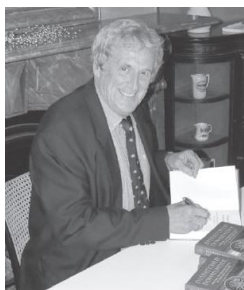
For many years, before his election as President, Ian Palmer has been involved with the maintenance and equipment associated with the operation of First Fleet House and as Records Officer he is also responsible for transferring all the family records to the computer generated genealogy files.

In 2009 Ian Palmer was responsible for a full scale revamp of the Fellowship's data processing capacity when three new computers were purchased by the Fellowship. These new computers were interconnected via a wireless network system which mean that they could be placed anywhere with the building.

Three more Chapters were formed while Ian Palmer was President; the first was the Derwent Chapter in Tasmania which opened 3 August 2013, then the Mid North Coast on 14 April 2015 and the last the Hawkesbury-Nepean Chapter on 9 May 2015.

Over the decades the Fellowship has been proud of its research in locating the burial sites of the First Fleeters and the placing of Memorial Plaques. This led in 1990 to a permanent record of the Fellowship's activity with the book *Where First Fleeters Lie* by Rod Best and Joyce Cowell.

Since 1990 a painstaking rewrite of *Where First Fleeters Lie* was carried out by Ron Withington, a former editor of the Fellowship's *Founders* magazine which brought the records up to date of the additional ceremonies since 1990.



Ron Withington's book *Dispatched Downunder, Tracing the Resting Places of the First Fleeters* was launched on Tuesday 17 December 2013 at History House, the home of the Royal Australian Historical Society. About thirty members of the Fellowship attended which included four past and present presidents.

Ron Withington signing copies of his book on 13 December 2013

At the launch Ron Withington spoke of the dedicated work of previous researchers in identifying the graves of Australia's First Fleeters. In particular Ron paid acknowledgment to the late Douglas Oakes who ensured that plaque ceremonies were properly carried out.

The Fellowship regularly held an Australia Day Luncheon on the Saturday nearest to 26 January; in 2015 the luncheon was held in the Ibis Room at the Pullman Hotel, College Street, Sydney. On this day

past President, John Haxton, was given Life Membership to the Fellowship in recognition to his service to the Fellowship.



Ian Palmer as most people will find on a Thursday at FF House

The Annual General Meeting in 2015 which was held at the South Coast Chapter, Dapto saw a change of President. Ian Palmer had been a Board Member for ten years with the last three as President. The Fellowship had not lost the services of Ian as he agreed to stay on as the Thursday volunteer at First Fleet House.

Jon Fearon then became the Fellowship's eleventh President; Jon was elected to the Board in 2010 as Chapter Liaison. At the beginning of 2013 Jon became the editor of the *Founders* magazine and also took the role of Chapter Development while Karys, Jon's wife, was elected to the Board as Chapter Liaison.

The Fellowship's President is indeed a busy man; a member of the Central Coast Chapter, Jon took on the task, in 2008, of producing a quarterly newsletter for the Chapter titled *Boora Boora*. In 2010 Jon was elected as Secretary of the Chapter as well as his duties on the Board of the Fellowship.

Jon started 2016 with the Fellowship's annual Australia Day Luncheon held on 23 January at the Pullman Hotel, College Street Sydney. On 29 April he, as had presidents before him, attended the annual Meeting of Two Cultures at Kurnell on the site of James Cook's landing; the event hosted by the Sutherland Shire Council.

13 May 2016 Jon and Karys Fearon were present at the opening of the First Fleet Memorial Garden at the Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park at Matraville. In Jon's report printed in *Founders* estimated that of the 300 people present many were members of the Fellowship.

The Annual General Meeting for 2017 was hosted by the Hunter Valley Chapter where it was announced two Directors would retire, Therese Luck, the Fellowship's Office Manager/Secretary/Facebook and Tony Holden who managed the Family Trees/Database.

As the Fellowship concludes its five decades of operation it has, as in the past, a very capable team that will lead them into the next 50 years with:

Jon Fearon – President and Chapter Development

Denis Smith – Vice President, Events and Maintenance

Kevin Thomas – Treasurer and Secretary

John Boyd – Research and Web Site Co-ordinator

Karys Fearon – Chapter Liaison and Membership

Bob Lamb – Archives

Sharon Lamb – Archivist and Events

Karen Lovett – Minute Secretary and Library

Chris Counter – Plaques and Membership.

Val Counter – Office Manager and Membership.

At the beginning of 2018 total current membership for the Fellowship stands at approximately 1,750 with only 193 First Fleeters identified. To date the membership of the Fellowship has 17 foundation members who attended that night back in March 1968.

There have never been an accurate number of people who arrived on 26 January 1788 however a figure of 1,384 has been estimated. Given the fact that many would have died without any issue and some may have travelled back to England there are still many Australians out there who are unaware they are descendant from a First Fleeter.

First Fleet House continues to operate three days a week relying on volunteer staff. Over the years many have given their time, Lois Cook, Bonnie Saville and Phyllis Selby just to name a few. Then there is Elaine Bennett who has attended First Fleet House one dayweek for nearly 20 years. The Fellowship acknowledges all volunteers, past and present for their dedication.



Jon and Karys Fearon with
Dame Marie Bashir, Patron of the Fellowship and Sir Nicholas Shehadie
At the Australian Day Luncheon 2017