

John Oxley seminar, 13th October 2018. Camden Haven Historical Society
 Dr. Diane Solomon Westerhuis

Overview: Briefly

1. John Oxley bio +
2. Previous explorations 1818,
3. the second expedition
4. Five Days in Camden Haven
5. Legacy of Oxley
6. Sources

His biography is in the ADB and in numerous books, including Rob Tickle's *JOHN OXLEY: A NEW PERSPECTIVE*, please see our webpage for a bibliography and transcript

John Oxley bio

- John Joseph William Molesworth Oxley was
- born at Kirkham Abbey in Yorkshire, England, 1784/ Date of Birth: 01/01/1785 ?
- joined the navy in 1799 as a midshipman.
- In 1802-1805 he undertook survey work on the coast of the colony of NSW.
- returned to Sydney in 1808 as first lieutenant in H.M.S. Porpoise,
- After retiring from the navy, Oxley was appointed Surveyor General in the colony
- SG from 1812-1828.
- Governor Lachlan Macquarie granted him 600 acres (243 ha) near Camden, which he named Kirkham.
- Oxley was active in the new colony:
 - he became a magistrate and
 - one of the five members of the original Legislative Council,
 - was instrumental in forming the Bible Society,
 - was a foundation member of the Philosophical Society,
 - a director of the first Bank of New South Wales and the Bank of Australia,
 - a shareholder of the Australian Agricultural Co.,
 - on the committee of the Female Orphan Institution, the Male Orphan Institution and the Public School Institution.
- Oxley had two daughters by Charlotte Thorpe and one by Elizabeth Marnon.
- He then married Emma Norton (1798-1885) in 1821, and
- they had two sons, John (b.1824) and Henry (b.1826).
- Died: 26/05/1828, aged 42, at his estate, Kirkham, near Camden, New South Wales buried in the Devonshire Street cemetery in Sydney.¹

¹ E. W. Dunlop, 'Oxley, John Joseph (1784–1828)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oxley-john-joseph-2530/text3431>.

Oxley's explorations

- As Surveyor General, Under Governor Macquarie, Oxley undertook surveying expeditions exploring the Lachlan River in 1815 and 1817, northward to the Macquarie River and back to Bathurst.
- 1818, the second expedition travelled through the Camden Haven, where they stayed for 5 days
- These and later expeditions in 1819, 1820 and 1823 'paved the way for the later work of Charles Sturt and Sir Thomas Mitchell.'²

Purpose of the 1818 expedition:

In a letter from Gov. Macquarie to Earl Bathurst.³

... into the Western Country, for the purpose of tracing " the Macquarie River " to its Embouchure, [mouth of the river] Which it is Supposed will be found on the North East Coast of Australia. In order to render this Expedition as effectual as possible, it will be furnished with Six Months Provisions and a proportionably large Supply of All Necessaries for such an Undertaking.

Search for inland sea

The cost 259 pounds were paid to William Cox, '*amount of sundry equipments*' Gazette, 28 November 1818, page 2, plus a first aid kit from William Wentworth. There were also horses and boats to pay for.

² E. W. Dunlop, 'Oxley, John Joseph (1784–1828)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oxley-john-joseph-2530/text3431>.

³ letter from Gov. Macquarie to Earl Bathurst Despatch marked " No. 1 of 1818," 3rd March, 1818

Expedition members:

George William EVANS	5th Jan 1780 - 16 Oct 1852 Commissary-Storekeeper/Surveyor/ Explorer/Book seller-publisher/Art teacher, lived to 72yo -
Charles Frazer/FRASER	Apr.1791 - 22 Dec. 1831 at 40 Soldier / Gardener/Colonial Botanist/ Superintendent of NSW Botanic Gardens.
John HARRIS	1754 – 27.4.1838 at 84 Dr., Naval Surgeon / Magistrate/ Landholder

James (William) BLAKE convict	c1778-1851, harness maker, ex-fisherman, ‘old hand’, wounded by Aborigines 18 Oct 1818,
Barnaby BUTLER convict	c.1771 – 1832, Irish highway robbery, death sentence, Labourer, rec Conditional pardon 1818 , died aged 61
Patrick BYRNE convict	Irish, Huntsman, guide and horse leader, c1778- both expeditions, ab pardon 1818, in the 1828 Census he is recorded at Bathurst, as 50 years of age labourer, the owner of 15 cattle but no land
John DWYER convict	c.1798 – Boat Builder’s Boy Absolute Pardon 1 Dec 1818, left the colony 1819.
Thomas ELLISS	c.1792 Ropemaker/Labourer- can’t locate after 1818
Francis LLOYD	chr.25 April 1791, per Surrey, 1814, assigned to Oxley as Clerk, Chinaware Painter/Mr Oxley’s Man/Teacher Absolute Pardon #332 Dec 1818, departed the colony in 1819, per Surrey, as a free man.
Henry SHIPPEY aka Skippey	c 1791, arr 1813 per ship Fortune (2nd), death-Life, Coach Builder - Rough Carpenter Ticket of Leave #1164 Cond Pardon #1108 Dec 1818 Abs Pardon #414 Sep 1821
George SIMPSON	ch.18.11.1792 – 4.7. 1870, stealing sheep, death/ lifer, both expeditions, Labourer/Chainman to the Surveyors/Farmer, ab pardon 1818, given land grants of 50 acres at Airds, Appin Rd, Campbelltown, married twice,
William WARNER	(c.1772 - 1825) “Admiral Gambier” 1811, Lighterman/Waterman /Servant to John Oxley/Farmer a waterman on the Thames River, was charged with stealing deal (wood). Sentenced to death at the Old Bailey on 6th June 1810. His wife Sophia followed him as a free woman on the same ship as John Oxley in 1812. Abs pardon Dec 1818, in 1841 Warner was farming at Lake Macquarie, selling orange trees.
Richard WATTS	1784 -17 Jun 1878, theft of a sheep, death, commuted to life, arr Anne II, 1810. Servant/Labourer/Farmer* see Richard Grimmond’s account, <i>I went with Oxley</i> , 2017.
James WILLIAMS	56yo - C.1775 – 3rd April 1831 Smith / Farrier Absolute Pardon, 1st Dec 1818
John WILLIAMS	c.1784, Irish, convicted London 16yo, burglary, death- given life. Arr <i>Calcutta 1803</i> , COOPER Conditional Pardon 1st Dec.1818. Absolute Pardon 16 Oct. 1821, worked as a sealer, then 1822 John Williams, financially stable, as a passenger aboard the <i>Castle Forbes, to London</i>

Also *Thomas Thatcher(aka Thacker)*, a private of the 48th Regiment, and *John Hall* travelled with the second expedition for 2½ weeks before returning to Bathurst with a report from Oxley for Governor Macquarie.

George HUBBARD	Boat Builder, later <i>Government Boat Builder, Tasmania</i> , 1790 - d.15 March 1874- <i>Whilst George Hubbard did not go on whole of second expedition he was involved with boat preparation at Wellington Valley and returned to Bathurst on 5th June 1818</i>
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Oxley's second expedition from Bathurst

Whirlwind tour:

- Boats along the Macquarie River, horses and men travelling alongside the river, some of the men in the boats with equipment etc where they could,
- from Bathurst, to the depot at Wellington Valley, which they left on 6th June, 1818
- Arrived Mount Harris 27 June, then proceeded into Macquaries Marshes
- Returned to Mount Harris, then Evans took a small expedition looping around the Castlereagh River,
- then looping back and rejoining Oxley,
- all go west, crossing Castlereagh River to Arbuthnot's (now Warrambungle) Ranges
- On August 26 they climbed a hill and saw before them rich, fertile plains, which they named the Liverpool Plains.
- Continuing east, they discovered the Peel River, near the present site of Tamworth.
- Continuing east they crossed the Great Diving Range (now the Oxley Hway crosses here),
- Climbed Mt Seaview, where they sighted the three brothers, and the ocean
- They followed the Hastings River it to its mouth, which they reached
- October 8th, 1818, Oxley named Port Macquarie, after Governor Macquarie-
- here they and rested four days.

we take up the story with the sighting of the three brothers

The first description of North Brother was by Captain Cook, who recorded in his log of 12 May 1770: Quote: **‘three remarkable large hills lying contiguous to each other and not far from the shore bore NNW. As these hills bore some resemblance to each other, we call'd them ‘The Three Brothers.’**

Coincidentally, there is a story told by local Aboriginal people, which explains the creation of the mountains and they also call them ‘the three Brothers’.

8th-12th October at Port Macquarie, resting, mapping and scouting out the land

12 Oct, They travelled south from PM: *‘After travelling near fifteen miles, we stopped at the extremity of a sandy beach on a point of good land, with an excellent spring of water rising on it, about four miles north of the northernmost of the Three Brothers. [Bonny Hills] ‘Two of our remaining three dogs, had been for the last two days deprived of the use of their limbs: one died this morning; the other, we brought on horseback with us, willing, if possible, to save the life of a valuable and faithful servant. We conjecture that something they had eaten in the woods must have caused so universal a paralysis.’*]

FIVE DAYS IN CAMDEN HAVEN

October 13.— they enter the Camden Haven Quote: *Crossing the point of land on which we had been encamped, we came to a sandy beach, on which we travelled three miles and a half. At the end of it [NORTH HAVEN BEACH] was an opening safe for boats, (and probably for small craft at high water), into an extensive lake. As we had no canoe by which to cross over, we were obliged to keep along its north shore with an intention of going round it. The lake formed a large basin with a deep channel, which as it approached the base of the northern Brother narrowed into a river-like form, and in the course of a mile it again expanded from the north-north-west to the south-west, to a very great extent. [Here they are travelling around the base of NBrother] Quote: The land on its eastern side was low and marshy (fresh water). To the north and northwest, it was bounded by low forest hills covered with luxuriant grass; and to the southward and south-west extended along apparently the same description of country, nearly to the western base of the Second Brother. [Middle Brother] Quote: The Northern Brother, the highest of the three, ... timber was chiefly black butted gum* , stringy bark, turpentine tree, and forest oak . The stones are chiefly a hard sandstone. On the lake [QUEENS LAKE] were great numbers of black swans, ducks, &c. Various small inlets from the lake much impeded us, and after travelling near seven miles along its shores, we halted for the evening near a small spring of freshwater, in a good rising grass country.*

October 14.—*We were considerably delayed in our progress this day by salt water inlets, which occasioned us much trouble to cross, and at length we were altogether stopped by a very wide and deep one, near the west end of the lake: ... **pitched our tents on the banks near a swamp of fresh water** which borders on it and the lake, from which we were distant about one mile and a half. The inlet was brackish, and must have a considerable body of fresh water near its head. In our route we had disturbed a large party of natives, some of whom were busily employed in preparing bark for a new canoe. There were several canoes on the lake, in which they all fled in great confusion; leaving their arms and utensils of every description behind them. One of the canoes was sufficiently large to hold nine men, and resembled a boat; **of course we left their property untouched, though we afterwards regretted** we did not seize one of their canoes, which we might easily have done. We however determined to send back in the morning for the unfinished canoe, and try our skill in completing it for use. The ground passed over for the last six miles was hilly and very stony, but covered with excellent timber of all descriptions, and also good grass. There were plenty of kangaroos, but we had but one dog able to run; so that we succeeded in killing only a small one.*

October 15.—*A party was sent back early this morning to secure the canoe, while we examined the river. The people returned in the course of the forenoon unsuccessful, as*

the natives had removed it with all their effects in the course of the night, throwing down and destroying their guniahs or bark huts....

We therefore lost no time in returning part of the way to the entrance into the haven, (which we named after Lord Camden), where we proposed to construct a canoe.*

This is the Earl of Camden, John Jeffreys Pratt (1759-1840), Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, a supporter of John Macarthur and the sheep industry, who ordered Governor Philip Gidley King to give extensive land grants in the Cowpastures to Macarthur and to Walter Davidson, also has the town of Camden in western Sydney named after him.⁴ This naming is also a nod to John Macarthur, who had been influential in getting Oxley his job as surveyor general, and whose daughter had been his fiancée.

The natives seem very numerous, but are shy; we saw many large canoes on the lake, one of which would be quite sufficient for our purposes.

October 16 October 17.—*On Friday we returned to the entrance of the haven, and immediately commenced our endeavours to construct a canoe: our first essays were unsuccessful, but by Saturday night we had a bark one completed, which we hoped would answer our purpose; though I think if the natives saw it they would ridicule our rude attempts.*

October 18.—*This morning, the ebb tide answering, we commenced transporting our luggage, and in three hours everything was safe over.*

So they have now crossed the mouth of the Camden Haven, to the Dunbogan side,

Note: the loss of one horse

Quote for the yachties amongst us: *This haven appears to have a perfectly safe entrance for boats and small craft at all times of tide, except at dead low water with a strong surge from the eastward, when it slightly breaks, but is still quite safe for boats if not for larger vessels. When we were in it, there appeared a safe and deep channel through the sand shoals which spread over it: the channel also appeared deep leading into the inner haven.*

*There is plenty of fresh water in swamps, on almost every part of the shore on which we were. The higher lands abound with good timber, the points nearest the sea being covered with *Banksia integrifolia*, of large dimensions, fit for any kind of boat timber.*

[commonly known as **coast banksia**] So they leave Camden Haven

⁴ Camden, first Marquess (1759–1840)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/camden-first-marquess-1868/text2181>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 9 October 2018.

Still October 18.—Quote: *At one o'clock we departed, and by sun-set had accomplished near fourteen miles of our journey. We saw the large lake under the Brothers from a high point on the coast very clearly, and found that on the north it was bounded by the North Brother, and separated from the sea by a strip of low marshy land about three quarters of a mile wide. This lake I think is a fresh water one: it was named **Watson Taylor's Lake**.*

George Watson Taylor (?1770-1841), of Cavendish Square, London, was commissioner of excise, and his patron was Earl Camden.

Oxley commented that: *The country west and southerly of the Brothers consisted of low forest hills; the country being to that range very low with marshes. 'On the beach where we halted we found a small boat nearly buried in the sand, but quite perfect. It had belonged to a Hawksbury vessel, belonging to one Mills, which had been lost some time ago, and the crew of which perished.'*

October 19.—continuing down the coast **found the remains of a hut, which had evidently been constructed by Europeans, the saw and axe having been employed on it.**

On reaching Harrington Inlet *About four miles farther on the beach, towards Cape Hawke, our progress was stopped by a very extensive inlet, the mouth of which was nearly a mile wide. the boat which had been washed on the beach suddenly occurred to us... twelve or fourteen miles distant from it, carry her that distance on men's shoulders, but to persons in our situation such difficulties were as nothing.*

October 20.—*At four o'clock the people [twelve men] set out to bring the boat, and at two o'clock they had brought her safely to the tent, quote: the tide answering, we began towing the horses over, which we safely effected by half past eight. I consider the discovery of this boat most providential, for without its assistance we should never have been able to transport the horses: The last inlet was named Harrington Lake, in honour of the noble earl of that title.*

General Charles Stanhope, 3rd Earl of Harrington (1753 –1829), a British Army officer and politician October 23.— *The men voluntarily undertook to carry the boat on their shoulders until we should pass Port Stephens—*

October 24.—bad weather, . another inlet was discovered about four miles in advance. *We named this lake Farquhar's Lake, after Sir Walter.*

Sir Walter Farquhar, 1st Baronet (October 1738 – 30 March 1819) prominent Scottish physician to the Prince of Wales (Prince Regent) and to the Prime Minister William Pitt.

October 25.—Quote: *At a mile along the beach we found the wreck of a small vessel, which was recognised to be the Jane, of Sydney, belonging to Mills, before mentioned as the owner of the boat in our possession.*

October 26.— *we saw the wreck of the brig Governor Hunter, One of the men, 'William Blake'** was speared.

[actually James Blake,⁵ but Oxley was a fan of **William Blake** (1757 –1827) was an English poet, painter, and printmaker Various encounters with Indigenous people, good and not so good, .

November 5.— Port Stephens The commandant of Newcastle Captain Wallis despatched a large boat to pick them up, they retr ned to Newcastle then Sydney.

Legacy of Oxley

James (William) Blake survived thanks to Dr Harris, returned to Sydney, received an absolute pardon, married and lived to the age of 73 (Crampton 2008, p.21).

six of them had been sentenced to death but received life sentences, and lived to a good age (although Oxley died too young)

Many of these given pardons for their contributions during either or both expeditions of 1817, 1818 See Rob Tickle and Tim Crampton both give a good account of the convicts

There were 12 convicts, there were 9 whose ages at death we know, average at death, =68, (Richard Watts lived to 94- see Richard Grimmond's book about Watts).

Oxley always gave credit e.g. 5th December 1818, public letter by Oxley published in the Sydney Gazette, page 2, Dr Harris, Mr Evans, and

quote: 'Mr Charles Frazier, the Colonial Botanist, has added near 700 new specimens to the already extended Catalogue of Australian Plants, besides many seeds, &c. and in the Collection and Preservation he has indefatigably endeavoured to obtain your Excellency's approval of his services.'

Addendum: John Oxley was a very well-read man, with a huge library, auctioned after he died, although many books went to the Sydney 'lending library'.

One of his books was by the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Idea into The Origins Of Our Ideas Of The Sublime And Beautiful*. which became influential at the time.

Burke introduced a system based on a list of

- physical occurrences seen as likely to produce strong emotions,
- dimensions of scenery as grand or rugged, magnificent, or which suggests infinity', Julia Horne pp37-38.
- 'became influential in its application to the descriptions of certain types of natural scenery throughout the English-speaking world', adopted by Burke and his followers,

⁵ Crampton, Tim, +20 [Electronic Resource] : *Remembering the Forgotten : Rewriting Australian History : The Untold Stories of John Oxley's 1817 & 1818 Expeditions*, Lake Tyers Beach, Vic., Tim Crampton, 2008., p37.

- and it was ‘an important resource’ for Oxley⁶ –
- we know Governor Macquarie required detailed description of lands surveyed.
- We find this language in Oxley’s diary
- for example, descriptions often use Burke’s terms of grand, terrible, awe, picturesque, etc ‘Sept 10 ‘Our prospect from it was exceedingly grand and **picturesque.**’

The outcome is that although Oxley named many places after his patrons, he also named our Camden Haven, as a haven, which I think suits us sublimely.

Thank you You will find a map in the Oxley display in the museum

⁶ Horne, Julia, *The Pursuit of Wonder: How Australia's Landscape Was Explored, Nature Discovered and Tourism Unleashed*, Carlton, Victoria., Miegunyah Press, 2005.

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Note: Oxley's Journal is available electronically, as an ebook at The Project Gutenberg, on kindle and at Mitchel Library.

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