



Photos: Dragi Markovic

*Snuff box (detail)*  
National Museum of Australia.

## PHILIP GIDLEY KING'S SNUFFBOX

# the right snuff!

**Fit for a King!** Exploration, navigation, threat of invasion, colonial administration, settlement, patronage, duels and trials are just some of the stories packed into the small silver snuffbox purchased by the National Museum from Sotheby's in May 2006.

Philip Gidley King's snuffbox arrived at the National Museum of Australia almost exactly 205 years after it was presented to Governor King by Lieutenant James Grant. The oval box is engraved with King's initials PGK with the underside of the lid bearing the inscription: LT. GRANT To GOVERNOR KING JUNE 4 1801.

The maker's mark on the inside of the lid was unknown, and the box could have been picked up by Grant on his way to Australia, perhaps in India, as it lacks standard English silver hallmarks. The engravings were most likely done in Australia. Throughout European and colonial history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a snuffbox was often given as a gift to men and was a reflection of their personal status. Made from a variety of materials, snuff boxes were often engraved with the owner's initials, inscribed message or a miniature portrait of the giver, representing a lasting souvenir.

Second Lieutenant Philip Gidley King (1758-1808) arrived in Port Jackson with the First Fleet in January 1788. King came from humble origins and advanced through naval positions in the East Indies and America during fighting in the American War of Independence. In October 1786 Captain Arthur Phillip chose King as second lieutenant on the *Sirius*, in which he was sailing to establish the penal settlement at Botany Bay.

In March 1788 King was selected by Phillip to establish a second colony on Norfolk Island, with an initial party of twenty-three people including nine male and six female convicts. Ann Inett, one of the convict women on the island, became King's housekeeper and mistress, bearing him two sons – Norfolk and Sydney. In December 1789 he was made lieutenant-governor, but was recalled by Phillip and sent to England in the *Supply* with dispatches. He arrived in London in December 1790.

King was promoted to the rank of commander on 2 March 1791 and returned to Norfolk Island, where he resumed his duties. King's new wife, Anna Josepha, who was pregnant with their first child, Phillip Parker, accompanied him. King's second term on the island was marked by efforts to create harmony within the community, deal with mutineers, improve conditions and create a degree of self-sufficiency. By December 1795 King was seriously ill and obtained leave to go to England, sailing in October 1796 with plant specimens for Sir Joseph Banks.

In April 1800 King returned to Sydney with his wife as the new Governor of NSW. His appointment had been supported by Banks and Phillip, who had wanted King appointed as his successor. Faced with the same difficulties as Governor Hunter, King fought against the traffic in spirits, encouraged exploration, supported the development of trade including the wool and coal industries, made financial reforms, and refused to allow increases in the price of food. The colony during King's time slowly began to emerge from the miserable conditions of the early years to become self-supporting.

King's efforts to suppress the monopolies of the NSW Corps were appreciated by the free settlers; however he had difficulty dealing with the military officers, who were determined to maintain their vested interests in the colony. In particular, King sent John Macarthur back



*Snuff box*  
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Snuff box inscription  
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to England to be court martialled for his role in a duel with Colonel Paterson. King was replaced as Governor in 1806 by Captain William Bligh, and died in England on September 1808.

In 1799 Scottish naval officer Lieutenant James Grant (1782-1833), commander of the new vessel the *Lady Nelson*, was given instructions to proceed to New South Wales to survey and discover unknown parts of the coast of New Holland. Grant's appointment to command the *Lady Nelson* was supported by his friend Captain John Schanck, a commissioner of the Transport Board, and the influence of Sir Joseph Banks. The *Lady Nelson* had been designed by Schanck for surveying in shallow waters. It was planned that the vessel would be handed over to Flinders when it reached Australia. Grant would then take command of the *Supply*.

Leaving England in March 1800, Grant sailed to the Cape of Good Hope where he received further instructions from the Duke of Portland to sail through the new discovered Bass Strait. Sighting the coastline near the present boundary of South Australia and Victoria on 3 December 1800, Grant constructed a 'plain chart' of the passage to Sydney, naming the different capes, bays and mountains for distinction, including Mount Gambier after Admiral Lord James Gambier, and King's Bay after the new Governor. King thanked Grant, but declined to accept the compliment, renaming it Port Phillip Bay after the first Governor, Arthur Phillip.

King was eager to pursue exploration and establish settlements along the coast. Fearful of the threat of French colonisation the British Government gave King

the ability to embark on an ambitious exploration plan. With Matthew Flinders in England gaining support for his scheme to circumnavigate the continent, Governor King reappointed Grant to the *Lady Nelson*, instructing him to return and survey the deep bay which he had sailed across in the Bass Strait. He was to be assisted by Francis Barrallier, a refugee from the French Revolution with engineering, surveying and navigation skills, who King later sent on a mission to the 'King of the Mountains', exploring the Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney. Grant left on 6 March 1801 and got as far as Western Port of which a survey was made, returning to Sydney on 14 May.

On 10 June Grant sailed to the Hunter River with Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson to look for a suitable site for settlement and to assess the extent of the coal deposits reported by Shortland in 1797. He was accompanied by Paterson, Dr John Harris, Barrallier and the natural history artist, John Lewin. The voyage discovered extensive coal layers. Although Grant and Paterson named the site Kingstown, King again turned down the honour and named the site where he planned to establish a new settlement 'Newcastle'.

After his return to Sydney, Grant sat on the bench that tried Lieutenant Marshall R. N. for an alleged assault on two captains of the NSW Corps, Edward Abbott and John Macarthur. Marshall was convicted and in August 1801 Grant asked permission to return to England. On approval of his application, Grant's biographer Arthur McMartin notes that King 'spoke very favourably of Grant's abilities as an officer and a seaman'.

Grant left Sydney on 1 November 1801 carrying a copy of King's dispatches on the conduct of Macarthur, but at the Cape these were discovered to be missing. He arrived in England in April 1802. After his return Grant published his *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery* in 1803 which was translated into German and Dutch. Grant was promoted to Commander in January 1805. He died on 11 November 1833 at St Servan, near Mt Malo, France. An unflattering fictional portrait of Grant appears in Patrick O'Brian's novel *Desolation Island*, part of the Aubrey-Martin *Master and Commander* series.

Lieutenant Grant presented Governor King with the small silver snuffbox three weeks after he returned from his exploratory survey of Western Port Bay, and six days before he undertook exploration of the Hunter region which led to the settlement of Newcastle. The snuff box may have been a gift to King as appreciation for his patronage, or perhaps Grant was trying to maintain some favour with the Governor.

Curatorial staff will be working with Conservation and decorative arts experts to further establish the origins of the snuff box and its place in Australian silver history.

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