

The Founding of Melbourne

On 30th August, 1835, the schooner *Enterprize* was moored to a tree on the north bank of a remote river on the south coast of New Holland. The expedition from Launceston on the island of Van Diemen's Land (VDL) was organised by the diminutive and fiery Johnny Fawkner, publican of the Cornwall Hotel, Launceston.

Fawkner, born on the 20th October 1792 in Britain, had a middle-class upbringing and education at Mr Edward's Academy in London until the age of ten, when his father, a 'metal reformer', was convicted of processing stolen silver. The family was transported to the new settlement on Port Phillip, where Fawkner spent a year at Sullivan's Cove (now Sorrento) on the Mornington Peninsula in 1802-03 with his convict father and free mother. The Commandant, Lieutenant Governor David Collins, then transferred the party to Hobart, VDL. In Hobart, the ever-active Fawkner was a remarkably idealistic and compassionate young man and, despite a stifled education, was constantly reading of past heroes of freedom. Experiencing the drunken behaviour of all classes (including that of his father) in the violent convict settlement, he developed a life-long hatred of drunkenness and drunks. As a young man, Fawkner ran a bakery in Hobart using grain from his father's small farm, employing convicts who told stories of harsh treatment at the hands of the government.

In 1814, Fawkner arranged for a few convicts to build a boat, which he called *Liberty*, in secret at remote Recherche Bay; the aim was to help the convicts sail to freedom in South America. As arranged, they sailed off without Fawkner, but were forced to land soon after, as their water kegs leaked – they were discovered and Fawkner was betrayed. While most of the others received little or no punishment, he was sentenced by the Reverend Richard Knopwood, JP (whom Fawkner knew to be a drunken and debauched priest) to 500 lashes and three years hard labour for assisting the escape of convicts.

It is doubtful whether Fawkner received all of the 500 lashes, which probably would have killed this diminutive man, only 159 cm tall. In later years, Fawkner wrote that flogging ...

... is a worse than death Punishment, that cruel torture which forever ruins the sufferer in his mind and body. Perish this punishment and may the record be forever blotted out from the face of the earth.

Fawkner was transported to Coal River (Newcastle, NSW). Working in irons and under brutal supervision, he was set to cutting and sawing huge cedar logs. As additional punishment, he was also involved in burning oyster shells for the lime; the lime burned into his back as he carried it to the boats. After two years, he was set free in Sydney, penniless. By good fortune he was able to obtain a free passage to Launceston from where, without papers, he traversed through land which was full of bushrangers, hostile Aborigines and truculent soldiers. On the way he was apprehended by a soldier, but Joe Wright, at the halfway house, recognised him and he was freed to travel on to his family in Hobart. Fawkner was always very reluctant to talk about his time as a convict, but the experience burned into his nature



**John Pascoe
Fawkner**