



Australian Heritage Database

Places for Decision

Class : Historic

Item: 1

Identification

List:	National Heritage List
Name of Place:	HMS Sirius Shipwreck
Other Names:	
Place ID:	106167
File No:	9/00/001/0023
Primary Nominator:	
Nomination Date:	29/04/2010
Principal Group:	Shipwrecks

Status

Legal Status:	29/04/2010 - Nominated place
Admin Status:	30/06/2010 - Included in FPAL - under assessment by AHC

Assessment

Recommendation:	Place meets one or more NHL criteria
Assessor's Comments:	
Other Assessments:	:

Location

Nearest Town:	Kingston Norfolk Island
Distance from town (km):	.5
Direction from town:	SW
Area (ha):	
Address:	Kingston, EXT, 2899
LGA:	Norfolk Island Area EXT

Location/Boundaries:

The primary shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* is located East of Kingston Pier in Slaughter Bay, Norfolk Island, at a point centred on latitude 29 degrees, 3 minutes and 37 seconds South and longitude 167 degrees, 57 minutes and 18 seconds East. The boundary encompasses the primary shipwreck site and other identified archaeological deposits associated with HMS *Sirius* within Slaughter Bay. These sites are contained within and bounded by an imaginary line;

- (i) The commencement point being the Southeast corner of Kingston Pier at latitude 29 degrees, 3 minutes and 30.63 seconds South and longitude 167 degrees, 57 minutes and 12.11 seconds East;

- (ii) thence East along the mean low water mark of the coast of Norfolk Island to a point where the parallel of latitude 29 degrees, 3 minutes and 34.03 seconds South intersects with the meridian of longitude 167 degrees, 57 minutes and 36.38 seconds East;
- (iii) thence West South West to a point where the parallel of latitude 29 degrees, 3 minutes and 42.36 seconds South intersects with the meridian of longitude 167 degrees, 57 minutes and 20.11 seconds East;
- (iv) thence West North West to a point where the parallel of latitude 29 degrees, 3 minutes and 39.27 seconds South intersects with the meridian of longitude 167 degrees, 57 minutes and 12.09 seconds East;
- (v) thence North along the meridian of longitude 167 degrees, 57 minutes and 12.09 seconds East to the point of commencement.

All geographic coordinates for the location and area are expressed in terms of the Geocentric Datum of Australia 1994 (GDA94).

Assessor's Summary of Significance:

The archaeological remains of HMS *Sirius* represent a tangible link to the most significant vessel associated with early migration of European people to Australia. HMS *Sirius* was guardian of the first fleet during its epic voyage to Australia between 1787 and 1788, which brought the convicts, soldiers and sailors who became Australia's first permanent European settlers. HMS *Sirius* was also the mainstay of early colonial defence in New South Wales and the primary supply and communication link with Great Britain during the first two years of the settlement.

The careers of the first three governors' of the colony of New South Wales, Arthur Phillip (1788-1792), John Hunter (1795-1800) and Philip Gidley King (1800-1806) are closely associated with the history of HMS *Sirius* as all three sailed as senior officers on board HMS *Sirius* during the voyage of the first fleet to New South Wales. Hunter was also Captain of HMS *Sirius* during its last ill-fated voyage in 1790, when it was totally wrecked at Norfolk Island.

The loss of HMS *Sirius* at Norfolk Island on 19 March 1790 was a disaster to the fledgling colony during a period of crisis, when the settlement at Port Jackson was in danger of collapse and abandonment. It can be argued that the adaptability, ingenuity and grim determination to survive, demonstrated by the colonists at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island following this disaster, became an enduring trait of the Australian people.

The archaeological investigations of the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* have demonstrated its significant archaeological potential for research into the cultural heritage of the early European settlement of Australia. The remaining fabric of HMS *Sirius* and associated artefact assemblages represents a "time capsule" of cultural life from the period leading up to its shipwreck in 1790.

The important role played by HMS *Sirius* in the European phase of Australian settlement is widely recognised within the Australian community and is especially significant to the descendants of the first European settlers or "first fleeters" as they are often described. This importance was highlighted with the selection of HMS *Sirius* as a significant archaeological project to celebrate the Australian bicentennial in 1988.

The history and archaeological remains of the HMS *Sirius* are also highly valued by the people of Norfolk Island as the vessel represents a significant phase in the peopling of the

Island and its development as a place of secondary punishment of convicts transported to Australia.

Draft Values:

Criterion	Values	Rating
A Events, Processes	<p>The shipwreck site of HMS <i>Sirius</i> has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of its importance in defining events in Australia's cultural history and for its part in development of the processes of Australian migration and defence.</p> <p>The archaeological remains of HMS <i>Sirius</i> represent a tangible link to one of the most significant vessels associated with early migration of European people to Australia. HMS <i>Sirius</i> was guardian of the first fleet during its epic voyage to Australia between 1787 and 1788, which brought the convicts, soldiers and sailors who became Australia's first permanent European settlers. HMS <i>Sirius</i> was also the mainstay of early colonial defence in New South Wales and the primary supply and communication link with Great Britain during the first two years of the settlement.</p> <p>The loss of HMS <i>Sirius</i> at Norfolk Island on 19 March 1790 was a disaster to the fledgling colony during a period of crisis, when the settlement at Port Jackson was in danger of collapse and abandonment. It can be argued that the adaptability, ingenuity and grim determination to survive, demonstrated by the colonists at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island following this disaster, became an enduring trait of the Australian people.</p>	AT
B Rarity	<p>The shipwreck site of HMS <i>Sirius</i> has outstanding heritage value to the nation because it possesses rare and uncommon aspects of Australia's cultural history relating to early European settlement.</p> <p>The archaeological remains of HMS <i>Sirius</i> are the only known remains of a vessel of the first fleet that sailed to Australia.</p> <p>As the first fleet flagship, the story and <i>in-situ</i> remains of HMS <i>Sirius</i> are pivotal to the understanding of aspects of life during the early years of Britain's New South Wales colony. The artefacts already recovered during salvage and archaeological excavations of the site, represent the largest single assemblage of material culture from the first fleet voyage to Australia and the early European occupation of Port Jackson and Norfolk Island during the first two years of the settlement.</p> <p>In an international context, HMS <i>Sirius</i> also represents one of the few located examples of an 18th Century British warship that exhibits the use of experimental construction techniques in the period following the American revolutionary war and along with HMS <i>Pandora</i> is one of only two such naval shipwrecks from this period located in Australian waters.</p>	AT
C Research	<p>The shipwreck site of HMS <i>Sirius</i> has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of its potential to yield information that would contribute to a greater understanding of Australia's history of early European settlement.</p> <p>The existing artefact collections and to the remaining insitu fabric of HMS <i>Sirius</i> contain important physical evidence of key historical</p>	AT

events in Australia's history, including the voyage to Australia and the movement of colonists to Norfolk Island.

Contemporary historical documentation relating to HMS *Sirius* is limited and there remain many unanswered historical and technical questions surrounding the ship and its cargo, especially at the time of its loss on Norfolk Island. The archaeological investigations of the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* have demonstrated its significant archaeological potential for research into the cultural heritage of the early European settlement of Australia.

The remaining fabric of HMS *Sirius* and associated artefact assemblages represents a "time capsule" of cultural life from the period leading up to its shipwreck in 1790, which are relatively free from the effects of cultural disturbance after contemporary salvage ended in 1792.

G Social value

The shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of its strong and special association with the Norfolk Island Community, the descendants of the first fleet settlers and the Australian community as a whole.

The arrival of HMS *Sirius* and the first fleet at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788 is one of the most important moments in our country's history, which is celebrated each year as the "Australia Day" national public holiday. The importance of the role HMS *Sirius* played in the founding of Australia is often reiterated on Australia Day including the unveiling of the HMS *Sirius* memorial in Macquarie Place, Sydney, which contains an anchor and cannon from the ship, which was conducted with great fanfare on Australia day in 1907.

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The important role played by HMS *Sirius* in the European phase of Australian settlement is widely recognised within the Australian community and is especially significant to the descendants of the first European settlers or "first fleeters" as they are often described. This importance was highlighted with the selection of HMS *Sirius* as a significant archaeological project to celebrate the Australian bicentennial in 1988.

HMS *Sirius* is also important to the people of Norfolk Island and is a celebrated part of their island's history, with the artefact collection from HMS *Sirius* housed in the Norfolk Island Museum. The history and archaeological remains of the HMS *Sirius* are highly valued by the people of Norfolk Island as the vessel represents a significant phase in the peopling of the Island and its development as a place of secondary punishment of convicts transported to Australia.

H Significant people

The shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* has outstanding heritage value because of its special association with the lives of prominent Australians who served as officers on HMS *Sirius*.

The careers of the first three governors' of the colony of New South Wales, Arthur Phillip (1788-1792), John Hunter (1795-1800) and Philip Gidley King (1800-1806) are closely associated with the

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history of HMS *Sirius*.

All three sailed as senior officers on board HMS *Sirius* during the voyage of the first fleet to New South Wales; Phillip as Fleet Captain, Hunter as his second in command and King as Second Lieutenant. Hunter was also Captain of HMS *Sirius* during its last ill-fated voyage in 1790, when it was wrecked at Norfolk Island.

Historic Themes:

Nominator's Summary of Significance:

Description:

The primary shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* is located on the outer reef at Slaughter Bay. There are also several secondary artefact deposition sites within the confines of the bay. The calcaranite reef extends along an east-west axis of Slaughter Bay and forms a natural barrier protecting an inshore lagoon from the normal action of the sea. At high tide and during storms waves break over the reef and wash onto the foreshore at Kingston. Like the outer reef, the foreshore is formed by a layer of calcaranite stone. The eastern end of Slaughter Bay is defined by Salt House Point, which is a low promontory protecting the crescent beach of Emily Bay. The western end of Slaughter Bay terminates at Kingston Pier. A break in the outer reef forms a natural inlet to the lagoon. In several areas the outer reef is cut by gutters paralleling the shore. Depths within the lagoon are shallow and average around three metres. The lagoon floor is covered by sand over coarse coral rubble. Artefacts from HMS *Sirius* have been identified at six main locations in the waters adjacent to Kingston (see attached map of sites):

Site 1. The outer edge of the breakers (primary shipwreck site).

Site 2. The gully between the outer reef and the high inshore reef platform.

Site 3. East of Kingston Pier on the tidal reef platform.

Site 3A. Slightly East of Site 3.

Site 4. The lagoon in Slaughter Bay (secondary shipwreck site).

Site 5. West of the pier.

Site 6. Stone causeway located between sites 2 and 3.

With the exception of Site 6, the system of site numbering is the same that has been used to identify sites in the HMS *Sirius* archaeological excavation reports. Sites 1, 2, 3, 3A, 4 and 6 are within the proposed place boundary. Site 5, which is located outside the proposed boundary, has been excluded because this area contains the remains of several other historic shipwrecks and it is believed that the majority of artefacts from HMS *Sirius* were removed by local divers prior to the first archaeological expedition in 1983.

Site 1 has been identified as the primary shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius*, which is where the vessel first struck the reef on 19 March 1790 and remained there for 9 days. Light weight objects that were washed inshore from the ship during this period have been located during excavations at sites 2, 3, and 3A. The hull of the ship gradually started to break up and became more buoyant after many heavy objects detached from the hull including two carronades, several anchors and approximately 200 blocks (approximately 60 tonnes) of iron ballast. On 28 March 1790 heavy seas pushed the remains of the vessel closer inshore to the approximate position of Site 4 where much of the contemporary salvage was undertaken between 1790 and 1792.

At Site 6 there appears to be a man made causeway made of calcareous stone between reefs adjacent to the primary shipwreck site. The origins of this causeway have not been discovered and it does not appear on maps of Norfolk Island until 1904. It has been theorised

that it relates to the early mining of stone by convicts for building on Norfolk Island or may have been constructed to assist in removal of the HMS *Sirius* anchor that is now located in Macquarie Place, Sydney. Another possibility for the origin of the causeway is that it was constructed to allow the quarrying of calcarenite stone used for the construction of the Kingston Pier between 1839 and 1847.

Analysis:

The findings in relation to the assessment of the place against the National Heritage List criteria are as follows:

Criterion (a) - The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern of Australia's cultural history.

Defining event in Australia's cultural history

The loss of HMS *Sirius* at Norfolk Island on 19 March 1790 was a disaster to the fledgling colony that happened during a period of crisis when the settlement at Port Jackson was in danger of collapse and abandonment.

By February 1790 the shortage of supplies at Port Jackson had reached a critical stage and there had been no re-supply or communication from authorities in Britain. Governor Phillip was determined to act decisively in order to avert a disaster and dispatched HMS *Sirius* and HMS *Supply* to Norfolk Island with convicts and Royal Marines. It was hoped that conditions on Norfolk Island would be more conducive to self sufficiency and also relieve the pressure on the few government supplies remaining at Port Jackson. HMS *Sirius* would then proceed to China in order to procure supplies and lieutenant Governor King was to make his way from there back to England to inform the British Government of the desperate state of the New South Wales colony. The two ships sailed together on 5 March 1790 carrying 116 male and 67 female convicts, 27 children, and two companies of Marines; 275 people in total. When the melancholy news of the shipwreck of HMS *Sirius* reached Port Jackson a veil of fear and depression settled over the inhabitants. One of the senior military officers wrote: "...you never saw such dismay as the news of the wreck occasioned among us, for the use of a sea term, we looked upon her as our sheet anchor"

(Note: a sheet anchor in nautical terminology was the largest anchor and used to secure vessels in storms or other emergencies).

Notwithstanding the disaster, the decision by Governor Phillip to transfer colonists to Norfolk Island was proved correct, as it allowed the colony to survive the weeks until further supplies from England arrived.

It can be argued that the adaptability, ingenuity and grim determination to survive, demonstrated by the colonists at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island following this disaster, became an enduring trait of the Australian people.

Development of the process of Australian migration

The archaeological remains of HMS *Sirius* represent a tangible link to one of the most significant vessels associated with early migration of European people to Australia.

HMS *Sirius* was guardian of the first fleet during its epic voyage to Australia between 1787 and 1788, which brought the convicts, soldiers and sailors who became Australia's first permanent European settlers.

The First Fleet is the name given to the 11 ships which sailed from Great Britain on 13 May 1787 with about 1,487 people, including 778 convicts (192 women and 586 men), to establish the first European colony in Australia, in New South Wales. The fleet arrived at Botany Bay between 18 and 20 January 1788. HMS *Supply* arrived on 18 January; the *Alexander*, *Scarborough* and *Friendship* arrived on 19 January and the remaining ships led by HMS *Sirius* arrived on 20 January 1788. The first fleet was followed by two similar fleets that

arrived between 1790 and 1791.

Development of the process of Australian defence

HMS *Sirius* was the mainstay of early colonial defence in New South Wales and the primary supply and communication link with Great Britain during the first two years of the settlement. HMS *Sirius* and HMS *Supply* were the only vessels remaining at port Jackson following the return to England of the other vessels of the First Fleet.

HMS *Sirius* was the largest and most powerful warship escorting the first fleet to Australia and protecting the colony following its arrival. Cannons removed from HMS *Sirius* before and after its shipwreck on Norfolk Island were used to construct early colonial shore defences including a gun battery at Dawes Point.

It is therefore considered that because of the importance of HMS *Sirius* in defining events in Australia's cultural history and for its part in development of the process of Australian migration and defence that the place might have National Heritage values under Criterion (a).

Criterion (b) - The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history.

The archaeological remains of HMS *Sirius* are the only known remains of a vessel of the first fleet that sailed to Australia.

As the first fleet flagship, the story and *in-situ* remains of HMS *Sirius* are pivotal to the understanding of aspects of life during the early years of Britain's New South Wales colony.

The artefacts already recovered during salvage and archaeological excavations of the site represent the largest single assemblage of material culture from the first fleet voyage to Australia and the early European occupation of Port Jackson and Norfolk Island during the first two years of the settlement. The archaeological significance of the HMS *Sirius* shipwreck site has been compared to that of the remains of First Government House, which was built in 1788 and is also included in the National Heritage List.

In an international context, HMS *Sirius* also represents one of the few located examples of a 18th Century British warship that exhibits the use of experimental construction techniques in the period following the American revolutionary war and along with HMS *Pandora* is one of only two such naval shipwrecks from this period located in Australian waters.

It is therefore considered that because the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* possesses rare and uncommon aspects of Australia's cultural history that the place might have National heritage values under Criterion (b).

Criterion (c) - The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history.

Potential to yield information that contributes to the understanding of Australia's history of early European settlement

The existing artefact collections and the remaining *in-situ* fabric of HMS *Sirius* contain important physical evidence of key historical events in Australia's history, including the voyage to Australia and the movement of colonists to Norfolk Island.

Contemporary historical documentation relating to HMS *Sirius* is limited and there remain many unanswered historical and technical questions surrounding the ship and its cargo, especially at the time of its loss on Norfolk Island. The archaeological investigations of the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* have demonstrated its significant archaeological potential for research into the cultural heritage of the early European settlement of Australia. More than fifteen major research papers and publications analysing the artefacts recovered during excavation of the HMS *Sirius* have been produced thus far, and many hundreds of analytical references can be found in other publications.

Many artefacts associated with the shipwreck of HMS *Sirius* were removed from the area as a

result of contemporary and subsequent salvage or removed by local inhabitants in the time since the shipwreck occurred. Due to the dynamic environment of the site, which is often subjected to intense wave action, it was expected that minimal evidence of HMS *Sirius* would remain by the time the archaeological investigations commenced on the site in 1983.

However, like the site of the VOC shipwreck *Batavia* in Western Australia, which had been excavated prior to the archaeological work on HMS *Sirius*, it was discovered that even though the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* was physically dynamic, sites it contained substantial archaeological remains.

The remaining fabric of HMS *Sirius* and associated artefact assemblages represents a “time capsule” of cultural life from the period leading up to its shipwreck in 1790, which are relatively free from the effects of cultural disturbance after contemporary salvage ended in 1792.

It is therefore considered that because of the known potential of the HMS *Sirius* shipwreck to yield information that contributes to a better understanding of Australia’s cultural history at the time of first European settlement that the place might have National Heritage values under Criterion (c).

Criterion (d) - the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place’s importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of:

- (i) a class of Australia’s natural or cultural places; or
- (ii) a class of Australia’s natural or cultural environments.

It is considered that the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* does not exhibit sufficient unique characteristics of a class of Australian shipwrecks or 18th Century warships and therefore the place does not exhibit National Heritage values under Criterion (d).

Criterion (e) - The place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place’s importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.

It is considered that the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* does not exhibit important aesthetic characteristics that would be of outstanding heritage value to the nation; therefore the place does not exhibit National Heritage values under Criterion (e).

Criterion (f) - the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place’s importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

It is considered that HMS *Sirius* is not sufficiently unique as an example of 18th Century maritime technology to demonstrate a high degree of creative and technical achievement during the period and therefore the place does not exhibit National Heritage values under Criterion (f).

Criterion (g) - the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place’s strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Strong and special association with particular communities and the Australian community as a whole

The arrival of HMS *Sirius* and the first fleet at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788 is one of the most important moments in our country’s history, which is celebrated each year as the “Australia Day” national public holiday. The importance of the role HMS *Sirius* played in the founding of Australia is often reiterated on Australia Day including the unveiling of the HMS *Sirius* memorial in Macquarie Place, Sydney, which contains an anchor and cannon from the ship, which was conducted with great fanfare on Australia day in 1907.

The important role played by HMS *Sirius* in the European phase of Australian settlement is widely recognised within the Australian community and is especially significant to the descendants of the first European settlers or “first fleeters” as they are often described. This

importance was highlighted with the selection of HMS *Sirius* as a significant archaeological project to celebrate the first fleet bicentennial in 1988.

HMS *Sirius* is also important to the people of Norfolk Island and is a celebrated part of their island's history, with the artefact collection from HMS *Sirius* housed in the Norfolk Island Museum. The history and archaeological remains of the HMS *Sirius* are highly valued by the people of Norfolk Island as the vessel represents a significant phase in the peopling of the island and its development as a place of secondary punishment of convicts transported to Australia. This importance is recognised through a 1984 agreement between the Norfolk Island and Commonwealth governments stating that Norfolk Island should be the principle repository for the artefacts recovered from the HMS *Sirius* shipwreck. Clause one of the agreement states:

“...The Norfolk Island and Commonwealth Governments recognise that the wreck and relics and associated articles from the wreck are of historic significance to the people of Australia, and particularly to the residents of Norfolk Island. Accordingly, the Governments agree that the protection, preservation and conservation of the wreck and relics and associated articles from the wreck is of paramount importance”

It is therefore considered that because of its strong and special association HMS *Sirius* has with Australian communities at many levels that the place might have National Heritage values under Criterion (g).

Criterion (h) - the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

The careers of the first three governors' of the colony of New South Wales, Arthur Phillip (1788-1792), John Hunter (1795-1800) and Philip Gidley King (1800-1806) are closely associated with the history of HMS *Sirius*.

All three sailed as senior officers on board HMS *Sirius* during the voyage of the first fleet to New South Wales; Phillip as Fleet Captain, Hunter as his second in command and King as Second Lieutenant. Hunter was also Captain of HMS *Sirius* during its last ill-fated voyage in 1790, when it was totally wrecked at Norfolk Island.

It is therefore considered that because of the special association of HMS *Sirius* with the lives of the first three governors of the colony of New South Wales that the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* might have National Heritage values under Criterion (h).

Criterion (i) - the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

It is considered that the shipwreck site of HMS *Sirius* is not part of any known Indigenous traditions and therefore the place does not exhibit National Heritage values under Criterion (i).

History:

HMS Sirius and the first fleet

HMS *Sirius* is one of Australia's most important shipwrecks because of its principal role in the foundation of the first British settlement in New South Wales. On 13 May 1787, a fleet of 11 ships, sailing with convicts, weighed anchor and left England's shores. The departure of the fleet, bound for Botany Bay on the east coast of Australia, attracted little public attention despite the magnitude of the venture. A decision by the British Government, in 1786, to establish a settlement in what was then a scarcely known region of the world and remote from the recognised trade routes of the period, marked the beginning of a new era in British colonial expansion.

The 511 ton, sixth rate naval frigate HMS *Sirius* was commissioned to lead the First Fleet

under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip, with John Hunter as second captain. A former Navy transport of 170 tons, HMS *Supply*, was also chosen as an armed tender under the command of Lieutenant Henry Ball. Escorting a convoy of six transports and three store ships, the *Sirius* embarked upon the eight month voyage via Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro and the Cape of Good Hope, arriving at Botany Bay in January 1788. After exploring the neighbourhood of Port Jackson, Phillip chose Sydney Cove as the site for the new settlement. Within three weeks of arrival, on 15 February 1788, the *Supply* set sail for Norfolk Island, where Lieutenant Philip Gidley King had orders to establish a satellite colony. The *Sirius* was thus left as the main defence vessel for the New South Wales colony, its means of obtaining supplies and its communication link with the outside world.

Although the contract for the First Fleet expedition provided for two years supply of provisions, defective packing and bad stowage damaged a considerable quantity of the foodstuffs on the outward passage. By September 1788 the shortage of food and equipment at Sydney Cove was causing such concern that Phillip decided to send the *Sirius* to Cape Town to purchase additional stores, especially flour and medicines. Under the command of John Hunter, the *Sirius* sailed an easterly course with the prevailing wind, surviving dangerous seas off Cape Horn and terrific storms off the east coast of Tasmania on the return voyage. On its return to Port Jackson on 9 May 1788 the ship was closely examined and spent the following four months undergoing repairs to storm damage and other defects.

Meanwhile, the situation at Sydney Cove was becoming critical as the settlement was failing in its attempts at self sufficiency and fresh supplies had not arrived from Britain.

HMS *Guardian*, dispatched from England in September 1789, was to have re-supplied the colony, but never reached Australia. Soon after leaving Cape Town the ship struck an iceberg and was badly holed, eventually returning to port after jettisoning or losing much of its cargo. As soon as the *Sirius* was fit for sea, Governor Phillip made a crucial decision: to send both the *Sirius* and *Supply* to Norfolk Island with a substantial number of convicts and marines in an attempt to lessen the demand for scarce resources, and the *Sirius* would then proceed to China to purchase supplies.

Norfolk Island is an isolated volcanic outcrop in the South Pacific Ocean, lying 1,500 kilometres north-east of Port Jackson. Rising abruptly from the Norfolk Ridge, the island's coastline consists almost entirely of sheer surf lashed cliffs up to 90 metres high, and water depths drop off rapidly to more than 2000 metres. Not surprisingly, early European navigators found it a daunting experience to find a suitable landing place around the island. Even today Cascade Bay on the north-east side of the island and Sydney Bay in the south are the only two places where landing can be made with any degree of safety, given favourable weather and sea conditions. After a stormy passage, the *Sirius* and *Supply* arrived at Norfolk Island on 13 March 1790 and managed to send the marines and most of the convicts ashore at Cascade Bay before being forced out to sea by bad weather.

When the gale moderated on 19 March they attempted to enter Sydney Bay opposite the main settlement. The master of *Supply* was familiar with the conditions and had already landed his portion of the provisions when the *Sirius* approached. On shore, the raised signal flag still indicated that longboats could be launched without danger. But by the time the boats from the *Sirius* were in the water and loaded with stores, the ship had begun to drift rapidly shoreward. Acknowledging a warning from Lieutenant Ball of the *Supply*, Hunter set sail in the smaller vessel's wake, but an unfortunate wind shift prevented the ships from weathering the western end of the bay. The *Supply* managed to tack and headed out to sea, but the *Sirius* remained embayed, and the onshore wind and current made it impossible for the ship to avoid a reef lying a hundred metres from shore. Unable to tack against the prevailing wind, the *Sirius* was thrown backward on to the reef and in less than ten minutes the hull was stove in.

An anchor was let go to steady the ship, and Captain Hunter ordered the masts cut away as

the heavy surf rolled in. Although some of the men had to stay on board the *Sirius* overnight, the crew and remaining passengers were rescued by means of a travelling block and hauling lines rigged from the wreck to a pine tree on shore and aided by the ship's boats. Over the ensuing weeks, provisions, livestock, equipment and other goods were salvaged from the wreck with the assistance of convict labour, but this did little to relieve the hardships of the survivors. To ensure peace and good order on Norfolk Island, the lieutenant governor declared martial law and ordered half allowance of provisions. The loss of the *Sirius* left the settlers at Norfolk Island and Sydney Cove feeling utterly devastated and close to panic. They had considered the *Sirius* their insurance against starvation and adversity, but now with only one seaworthy ship left, plans for re-supply from the Cape and communication with England were even more tenuous. The Sydney colonists had barely three months worth of supplies remaining, even after their rations had been substantially reduced, and the people on Norfolk Island had hardly any provisions to feed them after the loss of *Sirius*.

The situation was not relieved until June 1790 when the store ships and convict transports of the Second Fleet from England arrived at Port Jackson and cargoes were obtained from such ports such as Batavia and Calcutta. Captain Hunter along with the other officers and crew of the *Sirius* were forced to remain at Norfolk Island until February 1791, when they reached Port Jackson on board the *Supply*. Most of the officers and crew returned to England in April 1792 on the Dutch vessel *Waaksamheyd*, minus a few men who had remained in the colony. The following month a court martial was held on board HMS *Brunswick* to try the officers for the loss of the *Sirius*. All were honourably acquitted when it was found that everything was done that could be done, to save the ship.

The archaeology of HMS Sirius

The approximate location of the *Sirius* wreck had always been known, as the hull did not entirely disappear for almost two years after it struck, and it was depicted on contemporary and later charts of Norfolk Island. An anchor remained visible on the site until 1905, when it was removed for permanent display at Macquarie Place in Sydney and another anchor was recovered in 1973, but generally the human disturbance of the site remained minimal. In 1982 ideas were being sought for projects to commemorate Australia's Bicentenary, and the *Sirius* shipwreck, with its First Fleet connection, appeared to be an ideal candidate. The archaeological investigation of the *Sirius* was an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment, which was then responsible for the administration of the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

Documentary research and an initial inspection of the site in 1983 by staff from the Western Australian Museum provided sufficient background information for the project to proceed. Funding for the project was provided by the Australian Bicentennial Authority and was supported by staff from a number of institutions around the country. The people of Norfolk Island have a strong association with the shipwreck of HMS *Sirius* and therefore support from the local government authority and suitable arrangements for the repatriation of conserved artefacts were critical for the success of the project.

The anticipated environmental conditions on the wreck were a major concern as the survival of any archaeological material was uncertain. Using the predictive model developed by British archaeologist Keith Muckelroy, the *Sirius* fell within the most difficult category of underwater site; possibly having no structural or organic remains and only a few scattered objects on the seabed. However, previous work in Western Australia on the Dutch East India Company shipwrecks, such as the *Batavia*, had shown that substantial archaeological materials could still remain on shallow water reef sites subjected to high energy wave action. With this site conditions in mind it was necessary to use experienced archaeological divers, as the exposed wreck location was hazardous in most sea conditions. The majority of survey and recording work was carried out with scuba diving equipment from small inflatable dive

boats anchored seaward of the surf zone. With water depths of less than 4 metres, the underwater dive times were limited only by air supply and site conditions.

Three seasons of fieldwork during 1985, 1987 and 1988 demonstrated that the wreck site had greater archaeological potential than was initially anticipated. Excellent conditions for diving during the 1987 expedition gave access to areas of the reef normally prohibited by breaking surf. This allowed the site to be accurately surveyed and mapped over an area measuring 50 metres by 80 metres, and swim searches also located material outside this main deposition zone. The use of a magnetometer to detect iron, even while hidden in coral concretions, assisted with the survey of the inner lagoon area and the parts of the reef not directly affected by breaking waves. Because of the shallow depth of water and position of the wreck relatively close to shore, it was also possible to accurately link the underwater recording to known survey control points on land.

As the *Sirius* was extensively salvaged, it is perhaps surprising that some of the ships navigational and scientific instruments were found, including a sextant, dividers and a brass pantograph for copying maps and charts. Very few ceramic or glass items were located due to the exposed nature of the site, but at least some bottle fragments appear to have been from the equipment of the ship's surgeon. Other material included equipment from the Marine contingent such as uniform buttons and belt plates, as well as musket parts and ammunition. One unexpected artefact found on the wreck was an edge ground stone hatchet head, made and used by Australian Aboriginals from around the Nepean River, West of Sydney. It has been suggested that this may be part of a collection of 'curiosities' made by one of the officers on board, similarly to the Polynesian objects found during the excavation of HMS *Pandora*.

A number of artefacts were recovered from concretions found on the reef, primarily consisting of a variety of metal fittings and equipment, including keel bolts, hull fastenings, sheathing, pump parts and rudder straps. The items connected to the fastening and sheathing of the timber hull were of particular interest as they are clear examples of the application and adaptation of new technology in naval vessels during the late 18th Century. By the time the *Sirius* was being fitted out for the voyage to Botany Bay, the Royal Navy had been experimenting with the use of copper sheathing as an antifouling device for more than twenty years. Due to the damaging galvanic reaction between the copper sheathing and the iron fastenings used to secure ship timbers, the Navy was also progressively introducing new types of copper alloy fastenings to its fleet.

It is known that the *Sirius* was originally constructed with iron fastenings, but copper alloy fastenings had been introduced during its First Fleet refit and possibly during repairs at Port Jackson in 1788. It was also recorded that the *Sirius* was carrying spare copper fastening bolts to be used experimentally for testing their durability under the copper sheathing en route from England. This is consistent with research and artefacts recovered from HMAV *Bounty* at Pitcairn Island. The bronze metal (copper and tin) used in ship fittings and fastenings from the period has a distinctive metallurgical composition, and this information was used to identify some artefact material raised from part of the site that was clearly from later shipwrecks in the area. Additionally, it was possible to distinguish two distinct batches of copper alloy sheathing used to protect the hull of the *Sirius* from the relative proportions of metals in samples tested from the site.

The project also recorded more than 200 of the cast iron ballast pigs originally located at the lowest point of the ship's hull to aid stability. Also known as 'kentledge', iron ballast came in a number of standard sizes and weights. The individual ballast pigs were laid fore and aft along each side of the keel and overlaid with rock shingle ballast, which provided a more suitable surface for stowing the timber casks in which provisions were kept. A few tons of ballast iron were usually kept spare for shifting about to alter the vessel's trim, and this was

made easier by the location of holes at each end of the pigs to attach ropes or lifting tackle. Eleven ballast pigs were recovered from the wreck site, and these appear to represent three different sized types; the largest weighing approximately 155 kilograms. From documentary evidence on the amount of ballast that the *Sirius* was carrying, it is clear that approximately two fifths of the original ballast iron from the shipwreck has still not been located.

During the 1985 expedition the last of the ship's three main anchors was raised, and its conservation treatment was completed at Norfolk Island by 1988. Two smaller anchors were also recorded lying on the reef, and these badly damaged examples are believed to have made up the full number carried by the ship. As a rated naval vessel, the *Sirius* also carried a complement of iron cannon. Originally twenty guns were aboard, but some had been removed to supply the garrison at the Port Jackson settlement. It is not known how many cannon the *Sirius* was equipped with when it went aground, but most of the guns were retrieved from the wreck by contemporary salvage operations. In the initial search for the exact location of the *Sirius*, archaeologists recorded a remnant of a stone causeway running out from shore to the reef. The origins of this causeway have not been discovered and it does not appear on maps of Norfolk Island until 1904. It has been theorised that it may be a roadway built during the salvage work in 1791, that it may relate to the early mining of stone by convicts for building on Norfolk Island or may have been constructed to assist in removal of the HMS *Sirius* anchor that is now located in Macquarie Place, Sydney. Another possibility for the origin of the causeway is that it was constructed to allow the quarrying of stone used for the construction of the Kingston Pier between 1839 and 1847. The two remaining guns on the site, 18-pounder carronades or 'smashers' designed for close range actions, were recovered in 1985 and 1993. There are only several known examples of this type of gun still in existence.

Further work on the *Sirius* site was conducted in 2002 through an initiative by the Norfolk Island Government. This project concentrated on the excavation of sand gullies between the reef and the shore, where a considerable range of artefact material was located. Local personnel under expert supervision have conserved the majority of the *Sirius* artefact collection at Norfolk Island, but some of the more complex items were returned to the Western Australian Museum for more detailed conservation and recording. Major artefacts such as one of the carronades that required complex treatment and analysis has now been remounted in a replica gun carriage for local display on Norfolk Island. The majority of the *Sirius* artefact collection is housed and displayed on Norfolk Island at the main colonial settlement of Kingston, close to where the ship was wrecked. Some of the archaeological material, including the anchor recovered in 1985, is now on permanent exhibition at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney.

Analysis and significance of the HMS Sirius shipwreck

Although the exposed position of the *Sirius* shipwreck had resulted in the destruction of all but the most robust artefact material, there is enough evidence from the underwater survey and contemporary historical accounts to account for the final movements of the doomed vessel. When the *Sirius* struck the reef on 19 March 1790, it went stern first as the crew attempted to drop an anchor to arrest the ship's progress. The prevailing wind and current then forced the hull broadside against the reef as the masts were cut away, dragging two guns over the side. The anchor raised in 1985 and the carronades recovered from the site mark the orientation of the hull at this point. That evening the rising tide pulled the ship taut on the anchor chain, and it swung around again with its bow out to sea, the crew apparently dropping another anchor near the stern to steady the vessel.

In this position the *Sirius* remained relatively intact while the initial salvage efforts were under way, but on 28 March 1790 the ship had again swung broadside as the iron ballast began to fall out of the ruptured hull. Next day the now much lighter hull progressively

moved further up on to the reef away from worst of the surf. Finally, the rising tide turned the ship's bow towards the land, then threw it 'more than her own length near to the shore'. The final resting place of the wreck, approximately 70 metres away from where it had first struck, is now marked by a large quantity of ballast iron. This iron ballast may possibly protect some surviving hull timbers, but problems with the exposure of any fragile material to such a destructive marine environment have so far limited further investigations.

Analysis of the results of the *Sirius* project has also shed new light on the construction of the vessel and raised challenging questions concerning the debate as to why Botany Bay was chosen as a penal settlement. Convict ships are frequently depicted as being rotten old tubs, and contemporary criticisms of the *Sirius* by some of the officers and crew have led historians to assume that the ship was poorly constructed, unsuited to and ill-equipped for the voyage to Botany Bay. Given this hypothesis, it has been argued that the settlement at Botany Bay was merely a temporary expedient to relieve England's overcrowded gaols following the American Revolutionary War, rather than part of a considered, well executed strategic plan to establish and maintain a permanent British presence in eastern and South Pacific waters.

As part of the project, the records of the British Navy departments that organised the First Fleet voyage were examined in 1987. Contrary to previously held beliefs, the *Sirius* had originally been built as a Baltic trader or East Country ship and not an East Indiaman.

Constructed at Rotherhithe on the River Thames as the *Berwick*, the vessel had been purchased on the stocks by the Admiralty in November 1781 for use as an armed naval store ship during the final stages of the American conflict. It was standard practice in the British Navy to draw up hull plans of all its craft, and the surviving plans and descriptions of the *Berwick* show that it was a relatively short, beamy and deep vessel with good cargo carrying qualities similar to the collier barks chosen by Captain James Cook for his voyages of exploration to the South Seas. A bronze spectacle plate that formed part of the ships rigging, which was recovered from the wreck site at Norfolk Island, bears the name 'BERWICK', thus confirming the identity of the shipwreck as the *Sirius*.

The documentary research produced sufficient information about the original construction and conversion of the *Berwick* to show that the building and outfit were of a high standard for the period. An account written by one of the *Berwick's* officers also indicates that the ship had above average sailing characteristics when compared to its contemporaries. Although the *Berwick* was laid up 'in ordinary' (or mothballed) in 1785, the records showed that the vessel received an extensive overhaul during late 1786 specifically for its role in the First Fleet voyage. By the time the newly renamed *Sirius* was ready, costs for the refit and supplies came in at more than £7,000, which was expensive for the period and indicative of a thoroughness of preparations for the naval contingent of the expedition.

In March 2001, the then Governor General of Australia, Sir William Deane, unveiled a new memorial to HMS *Sirius* on Norfolk Island that was built from bricks transported from the ruins of Captain Arthur Phillip's house in Hampshire, England. The location of the memorial, close to where the *Sirius* had been wrecked in March 1790, is particularly evocative of the dangers faced by the early European occupiers of Norfolk Island. In his address, Sir William not only recalled the history of the ship and its loss but also emphasised the significance of sites, relics and monuments as touchstones in our concept of Australia. He stated that 'For those of us who gather, this is a precious site in the history of our nation and this island. The relics retrieved from the wreck offer us a rare insight into the world of our past.'

Condition:

Artefacts belonging to HMS *Sirius* have been discovered imbedded in the coral rock of reefs, lodged in cracks, or buried in deep gutters between the reefs. The archaeological excavations

undertaken between 1983 and 2002 recovered a substantial number of significant artefacts and the surveys indicate that a considerable number of artefacts remain *in-situ*. Some areas in Slaughter Bay are particularly susceptible to the rough sea conditions and have yet to be archaeologically investigated for further evidence of HMS *Sirius*. Artefacts recovered from HMS *Sirius* are now located in several places and collections including:

- Norfolk Island Museum (which holds the principle collection of artefacts);
- At various locations around Norfolk Island;
- Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, New South Wales;
- Macquarie Place, Sydney, New South Wales.

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