

History

Their ancestor ruled Australia. Sex and servitude split the family

Australia's third governor had children by his wife and mistress. Now their descendants meet for the first time to heal old wounds.

By Sue Williams

JANUARY 25, 2025



The King family in 1799, including the future governor, Philip (right), wife Anna (left), and two children born from his relationship with his mistress, Ann Inett. FAIRFAX ARCHIVES



Listen to this article

6 min

They are both descendants of a founder of modern Australia, but they came from different sides of the blanket. One was a legitimate heir of the early colonial governor Philip Gidley King and his wife; the other a descendant of his long-time affair with a convict.

Under most circumstances the pair would never meet. But today, with a new book out about the third governor of what became Australia, the two sides of the family have been tracked down and brought together to share the tale of sex and servitude.

“I was really keen to meet someone from the other side of the family,” said historian Jonathan King, 82, the great-great-great-grandson of Gidley King, who ruled the nation from 1800, and his wife Anna Josepha.

“I’ve got a very soft spot for the descendants of his mistress. After all, she kept him comfortable and loved and was an important confidante for him.”

Primary schoolteacher Madison Fazio, 25, the fifth-great-granddaughter to Gidley King and his lover Ann Inett, was also excited to meet a relative from the more “respectable” side of the family.



Madison Fazio and Jonathan King share an ancestor in the third governor of Australia, Philip Gidley King, but have only just met. DOMINIC LORRIMER

“But I take huge pride in our side,” she said. “Ann Inett was transported to the ends of the Earth for simply stealing a dress, and yet she survived the First Fleet and everything that came after.

“She was a strong, independent woman who overcame significant hardship and heartbreak to build her own life and make a success of it.”

Inett was 28 and a single mother-of-two when she was arrested for burglary in England’s Midlands. She was found guilty, without the chance to testify, and sentenced to hang, a punishment later converted to transportation, and forced to give up her son and daughter.

When she arrived in Port Jackson in 1788 she was one of five convict women handpicked by naval officer Gidley King to accompany him to Norfolk Island, where he was tasked with setting up a second colony. He asked her to become his housekeeper, a duty that apparently included warming his bed. Inett bore him two sons, who he named, rather unimaginatively, Norfolk and Sydney.

In time, Gidley King was sent back to England to report on the progress of the new colonies, but he pledged to return. And return he did – with a new wife on his arm, pregnant with his next son.

Worse for Inett, the newlyweds then declared their intention to bring up her boys as part of their own family as they'd be able to give them a better life.

“I think that would have been so hard for Ann,” Fazio said. “She then lost her second set of children, oh my god! And his wife was his first cousin ... ew! He shouldn't have married her. But I suppose desperate times called for desperate measures, and times were different then.”

To others, sloughing off the mistress and marrying a “respectable” woman was a necessity for career advancement and, no doubt, helpful in Gidley King's quest to become governor, following Arthur Phillip and John Hunter.

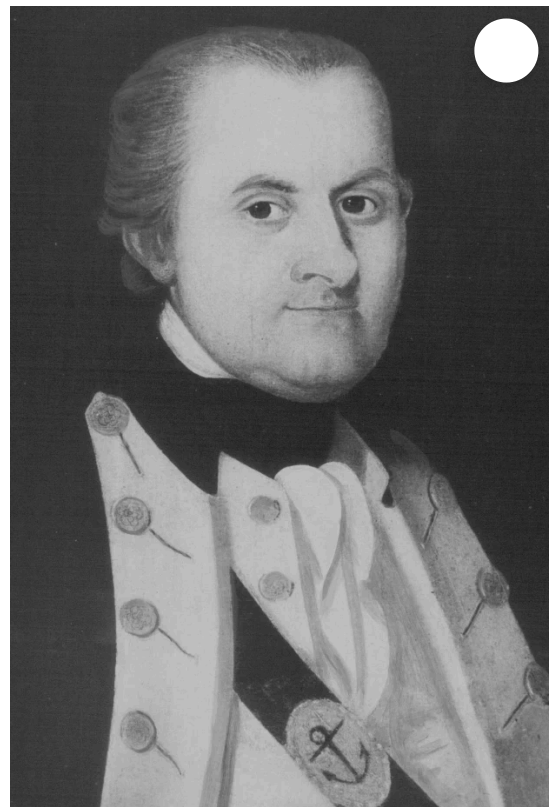
However, King, who organised the re-enactment of the First Fleet voyage for the 1988 bicentenary, commended his ancestor for treating all his children the same. He'd urged the boys to stay in touch with each other when they left for their schooling back in Britain and then embarked on their naval careers.

“He was a devout Christian and he thought it was his Christian duty to look after Ann Inett and her children,” King said. “Anna Josepha was even more devout, as we can see in the way she also set up orphanages, sheltered workshops and homes for prostitutes who didn't have anywhere to live.”

Sex was certainly a keenly sought-after commodity in all aspects of the new colony. During the voyage there, seamen cut through the bulkheads separating them from the women convicts and propositioned them, offering them part of their rum ration and then meat, if that didn't work, to seal the deal. Ironically, none of the women had ever been transported for prostitution, although many of them were then, through circumstances, forced into it.

There was also trouble on board when one favourite female convict fell ill with the pox – syphilis – sparking panic among the men who'd preyed on her.

Other women prisoners were promised the world by their jailers, mariners or officers in return for favours. One, Ann Green, was taken by the captain of her ship into his quarters and then unceremoniously dumped, with child, when he set sail back for London. Another,



Nancy Yeates, was abandoned by her sailor beau when he discovered she'd fallen pregnant to him.

Governor Philip Gidley King returned from England with a new wife on his arm.

FAIRFAX ARCHIVES

Later, she became the lover of David Collins, the deputy judge advocate of the new colony, and bore him two children, which, tragically, did not stop him from returning to England and to his wife in 1797.

There are also stories about the first landing of the fleet at Sydney, often denied but which still endure, when after a terrible storm, and extra rations of rum, there were scenes of wild debauchery and rape.

One of the few female convicts who can be said to have truly prospered from a sexual relationship with the colony's masters was Esther Abrahams. She had an affair with soldier George Johnston and became the de facto first lady of the colony after he led the "Rum Rebellion" against Gidley King's successor, William Bligh. Later, he married her.

For Ann Inett there was no such fairytale ending to her own sexual surrender, although when Gidley King became governor he did give her the odd land grant and a pardon in acknowledgment of her favours.

Yet it was an exceedingly hard life, missing her two sons, just as she'd grieved the loss of her first two children when she was sent to the colony.

She would have had no notion that one day, 240-odd years on, one of her descendants would be meeting one of her love rival's heirs, to broker a fresh peace.

Sue Williams is the author of a new book about Philip Gidley King, *The Governor, His Wife and His Mistress*, published by Allen & Unwin, RRP \$34.99.

Start the day with a summary of the day's most important and interesting stories, analysis and insights. [Sign up for our Morning Edition newsletter.](#)



Madison Fazio and Jonathan King in front of the replica of the First Fleet ship Southern Swan at Circular Quay. DOMINIC LORRIMER



Sue Williams is a Sydney-based freelance travel writer, author and journalist who's filed for newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations around the world.