

*Lieutenant Commander
Frederick Bedwell RN
1796 - 1853*



Researched by
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In the little village of Paterson, in the quiet churchyard of St Paul's Church of England, almost against the rear wall of the chancel of the Church, is a headstone bearing the bald inscription "Frederick Bedwell". Inside the Church is a plain brass plaque commemorating him and his wife, Susanna Matilda.

To most people who sometimes wander in churchyards, reading inscriptions and contemplating the past, this simple headstone hardly rates a second glance: yet it records the last resting place of a remarkable man, who in his lifetime contributed in no small way to the history of the world and to that of Australia in particular.

Before coming to the country, Frederick Bedwell took part in the capture of Washington in the American War of 1812; he was Australia's last living connection with the banishment of Napoléon Bonaparte to his island prison of St Helena; and he is generally accepted as having introduced the willow to Australia with cuttings from the tree that stood in the enclosure surrounding Napoleon's tomb.

Bedwell left England for New South Wales in 1817 as a naval surveyor, second in command of the vessels that circumnavigated the continent, discovering and naming many of the headlands, harbours, rivers and islands from Exmouth Gulf around the Gladstone, thus completing the survey of the Australian coastline. His associates were men who helped make the seafaring history of our nation.

His life on the sea over, he became an original landholder in the newly formed Paterson township and, as Justice of Peace and Magistrate, he exercised strong influence on the early settlement of the Paterson River Valley. In the beauty of its setting, he found plenty of scope as a water-colour artist of no mean ability.



John Bedwell
Mitchell Library ML772

Frederick Bedwell was born at Carshalton, Surrey, 5 November 1796 the son of John and Eleanor Bedwell. Lord Valentia was his godfather and he later became a protégé of Sir George Cockburn, who himself had a brilliant career, including the Governorship of St Helena and other appointments, finally becoming Admiral of the Fleet, a Privy Councillor and a Duke of the realm. Lieutenant Bedwell's naval career was one of almost continual action and so valuable were his services regarded that his retirement was subject to recall. He was father of a large family which contributed in turn to the progress of Australia.

Overlooked by historians and his deeds long forgotten, Frederick Bedwell has at least his name on a brass plate on a church wall and a headstone in an out of the way cemetery.

Stat magni nominis umbra - he stands the shadow of a great name

2. His Naval Career

*He sailed all his life,
Till his blood ran as salt as the sea;
His ship was his sweetheart and his wife,
And he passed many an island with no more
Than a glance at the bright white sand of the
curving shore. Betty Riddell*

Lieutenant Frederick Bedwell entered the British Navy on 8th November 1810 nominated by Lord Valentia, and served his first campaign in the Mediterranean on the *HMS Woolwich* as a first-class volunteer. He was promoted to midshipman at the age of fifteen on the 11th December 1811. He then saw service on His Majesty's warships the *Grampian*, the *Sceptre*, the *Albion* and the *Marlborough*. On this last, under Sir George Cockburn (then Captain), he took part in the Peninsular War, including the defence of Cadiz. In November 1812, the *Marlborough* was sent to attack American forces on the Chesapeake River. In almost daily contact with the enemy, the English fought all the way up the river, with heavy engagements at Havre de Grace, Georgetown and Frederick's Town. In 1813, they took part in the capture of Washington. When peace was declared, the *Marlborough* returned to England.

Sir George Cockburn (left) took command of *HMS Northumberland* and evidently had Frederick Bedwell assigned to that vessel also. By this time, he had been promoted to Master's Mate, the equivalent to First Officer. The *Northumberland* sailed from Plymouth on 8th August 1815 with Napoleon Bonaparte on board bound for his island prison of St Helena. In the eleven weeks it took to arrive at St Helena, Frederick Bedwell had become friendly with Napoleon and had sketched him standing on the deck of the ship. This sketch is said to be the only unposed painting of Napoleon Bonaparte in existence. Most likenesses have him on a throne, on a white stallion or in uniform with his hand thrust into his jacket. This sketch shows him as an ordinary small man, with a pot-belly, gazing into the distance. The party arrived at St Helena on 15th October 1815.

In 1816, Bedwell, graduating as a marine surveyor, was promoted to Lieutenant and attached to *HMS Weymouth*. His career in the northern hemisphere ended when in 1817 he accompanied a survey expedition on the transport vessel, *Dick*, leaving England for New South Wales. On board with him were Lieutenant Philip Parker King and family and another surveyor, John Septimus Roe. They arrived in Sydney 3rd September the same year.

On 22nd December 1817, the eighty-four ton cutter *Mermaid*, left Sydney with nine months provisions, Captain Philip Parker King in command, Lieutenant F. Bedwell, Second-in-command, J.S. Roe, Third Officer, a crew of twelve seamen, and two boys, along with Allen Cunningham, botanist, and Bungaree, an aboriginal. Their orders were to survey the North Coast of the continent. They sailed via Bass Strait and on 7th January 1818, Frederick Bedwell and Allen Cunningham climbed Table Mountain Hobart. On 16th April 1818 they named Raffles Bay and later on the two Alligator Rivers. On 19th May they had reached Apsley Straits and Bathurst Island and then proceeded to Vernon Island and Clarence Strait. On occasions they had to withstand native attacks. They arrived back at Sydney 29th July 1818, having surveyed five hundred and forty miles of coastline.

The second voyage of the *Mermaid* began on 18th December 1818, this time via the East Coast and Torres Straits. They surveyed Port Macquarie, named Rodd Bay near Gladstone, Escape River, Liverpool River, Cambridge Gulf before arriving back in Sydney 12th January 1820.



Mermaid at anchor, Endeavour River 1819.
Watercolour by Phillip Parker King
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW PXC-767f86

Heavy weather damaged the *Mermaid* after it began its third expedition on 14th June 1820 and the ship put back to Sydney for repairs. On this trip the party named Prince Frederick's Harbour, York Sound, Coronation Islands, Port Nelson, Mt Trafalgar, Careening Bay, Brunswick Sound and Prince Regent's River. The *Mermaid* was wrecked on 13 June 1829 whilst under the command of Captain Samuel Nalbrov east of Frankland Reefs. The wreck was found by Australian National Maritime Museum divers in 2009.

Their replacement vessel was the *Bathurst* which sailed on 26th May 1821. Three days out a girl stowaway was discovered on board. She had fallen in love with the boatswain and had stowed on board to be near him. As it was not convenient to return and the boatswain agreeing to share his rations with her, the *Bathurst* sailed around Australia and arrived back in Sydney on 25th February 1822. The woman's story should be told some other time for she would have been the first female to circumnavigate the continent.

Lieutenant Frederick Bedwell was then selected as one of a party of surveyors sent to lay out the settlement of Port Essington to accommodate convicts. They took formal possession of the North-West coast of Australia between 129 and 136 degrees east of Greenwich.

The last service of Lieutenant Bedwell for the British Navy was to help quell serious disturbances between whaling crews and Maori chiefs at Waitamata Bay, Auckland. He then retired from active service in 1823, liable to be recalled if needed. After retirement he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander, a well deserved reward for a very active naval career.

3. His Post Naval Career

*Sound the clarion fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life.
Is worth an age without a name*

Sir Walter Scott

The exact date of Bedwell's return to England in 1823 is unknown as his name does not appear on any list of passengers leaving the country, nor is he shown as returning, which might indicate that, as a seaman, he had worked his passage both ways. He took with him many specimens, skins, stuffed animals and so on, including a very young kangaroo, the first of this species to reach England alive, as a gift for his godfather Lord Valentia. His movements in England, from arriving until he sailed again are unknown. The *Andromeda* left London 14th October 1826, calling at Hobart, leaving there 18th March 1827 and arriving in Sydney on 27th March 1827.

4. Land Grant

He applied for a grant of land on 11th April 1827, naming Mr Oxley, the Surveyor General, Mr Icely and Mr Thomas Raine of the firm of Messrs. Raine and Ramsay as his referees.

His letter is as follows:

Sydney
11th April 1827

Dear Sir,

I arrived here from England in the ship Andromeda about a fortnight ago with a letter from Lord Bathurst to His Excellency, the Governor. I am Lieutenant in the Royal Navy upon half pay and I have come out with the intention of becoming a bona fide settler in the colony, having been before employed here during a period of five years under Captain King in the Navy in surveying the sea coast of this colony, in consequence of which I was given to understand at Lord Bathurst's office that my service on the occasion should give me a preferable claim to a grant of land, on my arrival here as it would in some measure be considered as a reward for my service under Captain King.

It is my intention to reside on such grant of land as His Excellency the Governor may be pleased to order me, as I mean to remain in the colony. I beg leave to refer to Mr Oxley, the Surveyor General, to Mr Thomas Raine of the firm of Raine and Ramsay or to Mr Icely, for such further information as may be required.

*Yours etc
Frederick Bedwell*

He lists his schedule of Property as follows:

30 head of cattle, under the care of Mr Bell, Police Magistrate at Windsor @ £5 each	£ 150.0.0
150 ewes at Van Diemens Land under the care of Mr Eadle on the banks of the Macquarie River @ £ 1 each	£ 150.0.0
Ready cash in hands of Mr Nicholson, The Master Attendant at the Dockyard	£ 500.0.0
One year half pay as Lieutenant in the Royal Navy	£ 91.5.0
I have power to draw on my father, John Bedwell Esq At Messrs Rule and Co, Lime St, Fenchurch St, London @ 31 days notice	£ 300.0.0
I have besides permission to draw on the Earl of Mountnorris payable at the banking house of Sir Scrope Mawland and Co., Pall Mall, London for £400 if I should require it	£ 400.0.0
Total	£1591.5.0

His application went to the Land Board on 13th April 1827. Both the Surveyor General and Mr Raine spoke highly in favour of him. The question was raised, however, by the Land Board that he could not produce sufficient evidence in writing of being able to

draw money of his father and Lord Mountnorris. Whether proof was forthcoming or the Governor overlooked the matter, permission was given to him to choose a grant of 1200 acres of land.

5. Selection of land

Bedwell wrote again to the Surveyor General from Sydney -

Sydney
20th December 1827

John Oxley
Surveyor General

Sir

His Excellency the Governor having been pleased to grant me an order to select 1200 acres of land, I beg to inform you of my having chosen the same at Smith's Rivulet (native name Wybong) on Hunters River about eight miles to the South of Oxleys Peak adjoining Mrs Fennel's proposed selection and within a few miles of Mrs Forsythe station.

I have the honour, Sir, to be

Your most obedient servant
Frederick Bedwell

It can be assumed that between April and December of 1827, he was looking around and selecting his land. He does not appear to have gone to live on it, however, as during 1828 he is busy as Master of the vessel *Lucy Ann* travelling between Sydney and Port Macquarie.

6. Marriage & Family



When or if he went to his grant *Swyndon*, Wybong is not known as no records exist on him until 7th February 1932, when he married Susanna Matilda Ward, second daughter of the late Lieutenant William Ward of the 1st Regiment of Royal Guards (The Blues) and niece of General Hawksure of the Honorable East India Company's Service. The marriage was conducted by the Rev Richard Hill at St James, Sydney. His wife Susanna, to judge from her portrait in the Mitchell Library, was a delicate beauty. She had been born at Cintra, on the border of Spain and Portugal on 4th January 1812. Bedwell's address at this time was Windmill Street, Sydney and he seemed to have been involved in a patent slip or dock.

Portrait signed W W Thwaites
1850 ML694 (Walter William)
Donated by Bedwell descendants

Frederick and Susanna were to have eleven children:

Matilda	1832
Zorayda Anne	1836
Clara Georgina	1838
Elizabeth	1839
Crawford Robert	1842
Sarah Alice	1844
Charles William	1845
Edward Albert	1847
Caroline Eleanor	1849
Emily Susannah	1851
Fredericka Matilda	1853

In the Baptismal register, when Caroline Eleanor was born Frederick's address was given as Lostock.

Bedwell also had an illegitimate child in 1820 the result of a liaison with Louisa Calcott when he was in Sydney. She appears in the 1828 Census as Eliza Bedwell, eight years of age, at the school of Mrs Love, Lovedale. Although Eliza appeared in the 1828 census as Bedwell when she married Henry Pearse in 1867 she did so under the name of Callcott.

7. Quest for Government Position

In 1833 he applied for three convicts and received none. He again applied for four and received three. Now that he had responsibilities, his first child Matilda having been born in 1832, he was seeking a permanent Government position and evidently appealed to his godfather to use his influence. Lord Valentia wrote to the Colonial Secretary as follows:

*20 Norfolk Street
7th June 1833*

*The Colonial Secretary
R W Hay*

*My dear Sir,
The person in whose favour I requested your recommendation to the Governor of Australia is Lieutenant Frederick Bedwell RN. He was a protégé of Sir George Cockburn and served with him in the last American War. He was afterwards employed with Captain King in the survey of the coast of Australia and received a grant of land. He has since been occasionally employed in a storeship from Sydney to the New Settlements. Should it be in your power to assist him in attaining any situation in Sydney or elsewhere I should feel very much obliged.*

*Believe me etc
Mountnorris*

R W Hay in a despatch to Governor Bourke wrote:

*Downing Street
10TH June 1833*

My Dear Sir,

At the request of Lord Mountnorris, a copy of whose letter is enclosed, I beg leave to introduce to your notice Lieutenant F Bedwell of the Navy who is now residing in New South Wales and is desirous of obtaining a situation in the colony; I should wish you to understand however that I had not held out to Mr Bedwell any hope of employment and you should consider this merely as a letter of introduction.

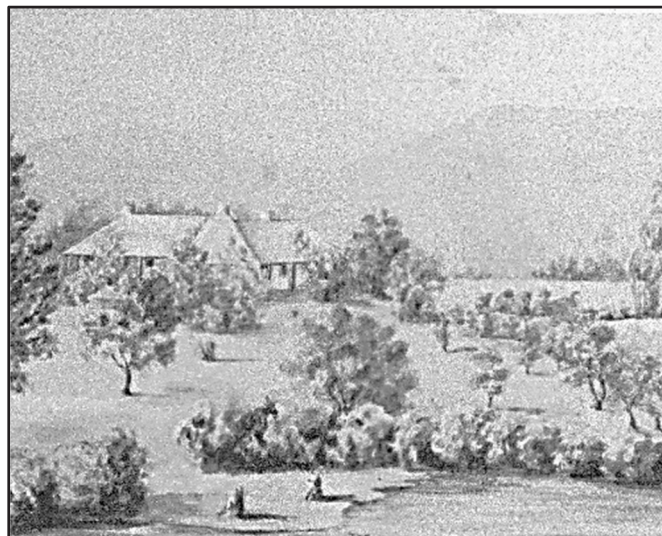
*I remain Dear Sir
Yours very faithfully
R W Hay*

His application proved unsuccessful.

8. Settling Down

In 1833 Bedwell purchased three blocks of land in the newly laid out town of Paterson, Allotment 49 for £12.50, Allotment 50 for £14.13.4 and Allotment 52 for £20. On 11th May 1836, he applied for land on the Williams River, giving his address as Paterson. This land turned out to be the land marked out for the village reserve of Wallarobba. His application was refused.

During this same year, he signed a petition against the Summary Punishment Act and on 11th October sold his original grant, *Swyndon*, Wybong, to Archibald Bell Jnr. for £450. He was well acquainted with the Bell family as at one stage they were caring for his cattle and family records positively state that Frances, sister to Archibald Jnr, was for a while his fiancée.



Valentia

Original painting held at the Museum of Rural Life, Glenbawn

Late in the following year on 6th September 1837 he purchased from his mother-in-law, Susanna Matilda Ward, fifty-two acres of the *Cintra* estate for £150, calling it *Valentia* and the house he built on it - *Valentia Lodge*. *Cintra* had been a grant to Susanna Matilda Ward in trust for her children. By the ship *United Kingdom* he received a Bounty passenger, Catherine McAloon, 29 years of age, house servant who had been engaged at £13 per year with board and lodging and by the ship *Templar* he received a married couple, Robert and Hannah Peck, at £16 a year and rations. He settled down with his little family not far from his wife's mother. In 1837, he signed an address from the residents of the Maitland area to the Queen on her accession to the throne and on 31st January 1839, he acted as executor and administrator for Frederick Garling and his wife Elizabeth for 960 acres in the County of Cook.

Frederick Bedwell and his wife, Susanna, on 10th December 1840 sold to Bishop Broughton for church purposes Lot 52 in the Paterson Township for the same sum they had paid for it, £20. On 1st May 1841, he sold a building lease to George Wilkinson and George Armstrong to build a brick house in the occupation of Patrick O'Brien for £100 a year and sold one of his original purchases, lot 49, to Charles Penfold for £70. Again information on him in any form is strangely absent from 1841 until he was made a Justice of the Peace in 1851. In 1851 he would have acted as magistrate on the Paterson Bench. Just a few months before his death Frederick is recorded as having been the Returning Officer for the elections for the County of Durham in which Alexander Park was duly elected a member of the Legislative Council for Durham.
Ref: *Maitland Mercury* 23 February 1853 page 2.

9. Death

Frederick Bedwell died on 1st May 1853 and was buried in the churchyard of St Paul's in Paterson. It would have been a most traumatic time for his wife and family those first few days of May 1853. Matilda, their daughter who was crippled, died on 3rd May and was buried with her father on the same day. His wife Susanna was pregnant and facing a future with nine children to rear without a father, the oldest seventeen, the youngest just eighteen months and another one on the way. The strain may have proven too much for her as she died the following year leaving nine orphans. The task of rearing these children would have fallen to the oldest girls since many women in those times at the same age had married and started families. There would have been housekeepers to help; moreover, their grandmother, Susanna Matilda Studdert, lived close by. Even when the older girls married they moved only a few miles away to Maitland, East Maitland, Morpeth and Dungog.

Because of lack of evidence, it is hard to form a word picture of Frederick Bedwell. His history as a naval officer in the British Navy is just a cold register of facts with no person glimpses of the man. The only human episode recorded in the part of his life is from the ship *Bathurst* in 1821, when he presented Captain Piper with a gift of a small box for the kindness he had shown towards him. His referees in his application for land spoke highly of him. The fact that he did not play an active role in public life suggest that he was of a retiring character. But until more solid information is found, we cannot know exactly what his was like. The one thing we do know however, is that he contributed his share to the history of Australia.



The grave in St Paul's churchyard at Paterson that contain the remains of Frederick Bedwell, his daughter Matilda, his wife Susannah Matilda and his mother-in-law Susanna Matilda Studdert.



9. Recognition



Bedwell Bay - Photograph per Flickr

Bedwell Bay, in the Townsville City Council area, was so named in *Government Gazette* 19 February, 2010 No. 39 page 369. Frederick Bedwell and Phillip Parker King, and others, came ashore at this spot just over 200 years before the naming. They visited this area on the third voyage of the *Mermaid*.

10. The Legend of the Willow Tree

It has always been an accepted legend that on a voyage to Australia, Lieutenant Bedwell called at St Helena to pay his respects to Napoléon. He took some cuttings there from the tomb enclosure and brought them out to Australia to be our first willow tree. Nobody puts a date on this event but an analysis of the voyages he made suggests that the incident may have taken place on his return to Sydney on the *Andromeda*. Newspaper articles state that this original tree stood in the hollow below *Valentia Lodge*. Slips from it were taken by people wanting quick shade and planted elsewhere and when they reached the watercourse they spread rapidly. If Bedwell did indeed bring us the willow tree, then he has left a lasting memorial behind him for which we too should be grateful.



Painting of Napoléon's funeral on St Helena showing clearly the willow trees in the area. Napoléon's remains now rest in the Chapel at Les Invalides, Paris, under the magnificent dome.

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