

Chapter 15

Belbin Letters and Petitions

One suspects that James Belbin set much store on the power of the petition. His signature was placed on at least three group petitions, and he appears to have prepared two or three personal petitions; perhaps he played a part in drafting the group requests. The first petition from Norfolk Islands resident, still on the island in 1806, to Governor Bligh, is not reproduced here as it shed little information on Belbin's background and did nothing to change his circumstances. The various pieces of the letter or petition, said to be prepared by Belbin and Dodding at the Derwent in April 1809, were perhaps a little too grubby to retain for official records, however the Settler's petition of the 21 May reached Bligh and posterity, and provides the first of the documents included here. Belbin's petition of 1813 is sandwiched between the letters it triggered, from Admiral Bligh to the Colonial Secretary, and from the latter personage to Governor Macquarie. As we are informed that the settler worked his passage back to England, it was unlikely that Bligh's son-in-law, Colonel O'Connell, played any part in finding a passage as suggested by Calder. Although one or two of the statements Belbin made may have been a little elastic, this document provides much detail on his movements in earlier years. His letter to George Frankland confirms other details of the return of the abbreviated family to Port Jackson and the Derwent.

The letter of 1824 to daughter Elizabeth is very revealing. Several of the tragedies which befell the families of his adult children are uncovered, and although certainly not affluent, Belbin seems to be proud of his achievements. Although it might otherwise seem unlikely, one has to assume that Belbin believed that he could expect Major Abbott and Colonel O'Connell to perform some favour for his family if requested.

The remaining letters throw light on Belbin's various problems and indicate that he certainly was quite literate. All were written in a neat legible hand and are now recorded on microfilm for future generations to admire.

The printed 1788 transcript of Belbin's trial at the Old Bailey is placed at the end of this section, together with samples of his signature, and a reproduction of the wedding certificate for his second marriage at St.Clements Dane in 1814.

1. **Address of Settlers to Governor Bligh**

To His Excellency W.Bligh, Esqre., Govr.-in-Chief, &c.,

May it Please Your Excellency,

We, a part of the unfortunate Settlers late of Norfolk Island, Imprest with a due sense of our Duty and earnest to step forwrd at this momentous period, big with Danger and Difficulty, whilst the wavering Mind fluctuates between hope and fear, we most humbly beg leave to express those Sentiments of Loyalty which are Inherent in our Bosoms by firmly declaring our adherence to your Excell'y as the true and only Representative of our August Sovereign in these his Colonies, and our determined abhorrence of those measures which have been taken by a set of Disloyal and Unprincipled Men, who in the most daring manner have subverted your Government, Prevented those Salutary effects which we are convinced would have resulted therefrom, Involving the Innocent with the Guilty, and by Specious illegal Acts, drawing aside the Ignorant and Unwary, and, that the enormity of their crimes may be obscur'd, introducing anarchy and confusion.

These disloyal, base, and unwarrantable proceedings we most solemnly deprecate, sincerely lamenting from our hearts that Men whom His Majesty had so highly honour'd should so far forget their Duty in overturning that Government they were bound to support, and so we beg leave to assure your Excell'y of our resolution to adhere to our Loyalty and Duty (in any and every pretext to mislead us whatever) to Our most Gracious Sovereign, and to your Excell'y as his worthy Representative, not doubting that you will ultimately Triumph over all your Enemies of Every description, and be received on your return to your Native Land with that Honour and Distinction with which His Majesty is always pleased to reward the Brave and the Meritorious. May Your Excellency enjoy ever Blessing that the Almighty is pleased to bestow, and may your Amiable Daughter find that consolation in her present Afflictions which must evidently result from Parental Kindness and filial duty,- Which is the Sincere and Earnest Wish of Your Obedient and Devoted Servants to Command.

The Derwent, 21st May, 1809.

THOS RESTELL CROWDER	JOHN HALL
JAMES BELBIN	GEORGE BROWN
JAMES DODDING	Wm. SHARDLEY
JOHN BERESFORD	RICHD. PHILLIMORE
THOS. O'BRIEN	THOMAS PRIEST
Wm. HALEY	Wm. BELLAMY
THOMAS FRANCIS	JNO. MAUL
JOSEPH HALL	THOS. GUY
WILLIAM MITCHELL	MICH. LEE

2. **Admiral Bligh to Under Secretary Goulburn**

Durham Place, Lambeth, 19 December, 1812

Sir,

Permit me to solicit your indulgence to a James Belbin, a settler of Norfolk Island, who left that Place agreeable to orders from His Majesty's Secretary of State on the evacuation, and proceeded to the Derwent in Van Diemen's Land. On the rebellion of the Troops in New South Wales he stood a firm and loyal subject to the Government, on account of which he suffered a deprivation of Rights, imprisonment and Corporal Punishment. He came over here expecting to have got redress, but, the Trials being over, he became indigent, and is now in real want with a son of nine Years old.

The prayer of his Petition is to be allowed a passage out, and to have an order for the Governor to give him the proportion of land which Government promised to the settlers of his Class.

He possessed thirty acres by purchases in Norfolk Island, and as he had the Character of an industrious Man, I beg leave to request that himself and Son may be allowed their passage to New South Wales in the *Kangaroo*, preparing to sail for that Colony, and that he may be allowed to embark on board the Vessel as soon as possible in order to give him a place of shelter while he remains in this kingdom, for he is in a deplorable situation.

He states that he has nearly 67 Weeks rations of Provisions due to him and five children, besides Slop clothing; a proportion of the latter he humbly solicits may be allowed to him to shelter himself and child from the Weather, and to be deducted from what is due to him when he arrives in the Colony.

I have taken the liberty of addressing you on this subject knowing the Man's great loyalty under my Government, and Am, Sir, &c.,

Wm. BLIGH

3. **Petition of James Belbin**

To The Right Hon'ble Lord Bathurst, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State, &c., &c.

The Most humble Petition of James Belbin, late Settler in Norfolk island in the South Pacific Ocean.

This Petition most humbly Showeth That Pet'r was a resident Inhabitant and Settler on Norfolk Island upwards of 18 years, and till he was removed (with Five Motherless Children) from thence to Hobart town, one of His Majesty's Settlements on Van Die Mans Land, in consequence of the order'd evacuation of the said Island.

That Pet'r shortly after his arrival at Hobart Town, was most unjustly and illegally Persecuted and Imprisoned on account of his adherence and firm support to His Majesty's legal Representative, W.Bligh, Esqr. (our late much abused) Govr. in Chief of His Majesty's Settlements in New South Wales, whilst lying in the River Derwent off the said Town in his Majesty's Ship Porpoise.

That Pet'r was most unjustly and illegally torn from Amidst his family (Five Motherless children), lodged in Confinement in the Guardhouse of Hobart Town for Ten Weeks, deprived of all communication with his Friends (surrounded by all the Systems of Terror) sentenced to an unjust, Cruel and illegal punishment of 500 Lashes, without a legal Tryal of any sort, part of which sentence was inflicted on Pet'r, as far as his state of Mind and health would admit of, and whose Constitution from his long and close Confinement was greatly impaired and injured on his liberation the 15th of Jany., 1810.

That Pet'r after a struggle of upwards of 3 Years to return to his Native Country to seek a redress or a Remuneration for those injuries he and his family has Rec'd both in Mind and Body (and to prevent which many obstacles have been thrown in his way) has at length Arriv'd in England after a tedious and long passage of 7 Months from Port Jackson, and from whence Pet'r was compelled to work his passage home without emolument but his provisions.

That Pet'r since his Arrival in England (with his Son aged 9 Years), his driven to great Distress to support himself and Son, as during his long absence of upwards of 21 Years from his Native land those respectable friends that could have assisted him being all dead, and Pet'r not being able to procure any Employment to do, from being a Stranger and no friends to recommend him.

Pet'r has therefore most humbly to request that some Assistance or Support may be rendered to him to enable him to Support himself and Son till he can be enabled to return to his family at Hobart Town, and also that Pet'r may be restored to his family and to the Rights and immunities of a Settler on the above Settlement, of which he was deprived of for supporting and rendering assistance to His Majesty's legal Representative, W.Bligh, Esqr., whoes certificate of recommendation Pet'r has from his own hand, and who will come forward and prove the facts contained in this petition.

That Pet'r has ever born an honest and respectable Character during his residence in the Colonies can be fully proved by the Certificates now in the possession of Pet'r, and who can call on

Capt. Jno. Piper, our late Comdt. at Norfolk Island, Lt. Col.Fovaux, or any of the Officers or Gentlemen that have resided on Norfolk Island, and who can prove tha he has ever considered it his Duty to support the Crown, having served officially under Capt. Jno. Townson and Lt.Col.Fovaux on the sd. Island. Pet'r has therefore most humbly to hope that his unfortunate case may be taken into consideration and present Relief be granted Pet'r and Petitioner as in

Duty bound will ever pray,

JAMES BELBIN

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4. **Under-Secretary Goulburn to Governor Macquarie**

Downing St., 31 Jan 1813.

Sir,

I am directed to inform you that in conformity to the Request contained in a Letter from Rear-Admiral Bligh, of which a Copy is herein enclosed, his Lordship has been pleased to order that the Bearer of this Letter, James Belbin, should have a free Passage to Van Diemen's Land, where he has been settled, having been one of the Norfolk Island Settlers.

It is his Lordship's wish that he should be sent from Port Jackson to the Derwent free of Expense, and if he has not already received the Grant of Land and other advantages promised to the Settlers removing from Norfolk Island, you will see the propriety of giving directions that he should be put upon the same footing with other Persons, who were brought from that Island. I have, &c.

HENRY GOULBURN

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5.

Sydney, Nov 1 1817

Hond. Sir,

I trust you will pardon the liberty I have taken to addressing you has (sic) the anxiety of Mind I labour under from being so long detained from my Wife and family induces me to trouble you. Hond. Sir I beg leave to state to you that in Compliance with His Excy. Govr. Macquaries instructions to His Honor Lt Govr Sorell and regular Subpoena signed by Your Honor to attend at a Court Martial to be held at this place on Depty. Asst. Commiss. Genl. P.G. Hogan Esq. under charges preferred by his Excy Govr Macquarie I embarked on board His Majesty's Colonial Brig *Elizabeth and Henrietta* by orders of His Honor Lt Govr Sorell (by letters on Service) on the 14th Septr last for this place, where I arrived on the 2nd day of last Month, since waiting for the proceedings to take place and Hond Sir I have to regret that I have no prospects at present of soon returning to my Wife and family who must sustain serious injury should I be obliged to remain much longer here at an expense highly injurious to myself and them having left a wife and four children at Hobart Town whoes whole reliance rests with myself for their Maintenance and Support. And the Confidential Situation I held in the Concerns of E Lord Esq Merchant of Hobart Town of the order of 200 £ pr annum having ceased on the 10th of last Month, Requires more particularly my being at Home with my family. Hond. Sir I have further to state for your Consideration that from the time of my leaving Hobart Town to the present Date both on the passage here and since my arrival I have never received any Pay, Assistance or Remuneration for the Expenses involved in Victualling myself on the Passage and for my Board & Lodging and other expenses involved since my arrival. Hond. Sir I have humbly to request your advice in which manner I am to apply for Payment, Allowances or Remuneration of such Expenses or any part of them so that myself & family may not suffer so materially has (sic) by my bearing the Whole while I remain here. ----- to their great loss and Injury. Trusting Hond. Sir that your goodness will induce you to comply with my request, I beg leave to Subscribe myself with all Respect,

Your Honors

Most Humble & Obedient Servant

James Belbin

The Honble T Wylde Esq.
Judge Advocate
of
New South Wales

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6.

Sydney NSW, Dec 31, 1817

Sir,

I hope you will forgive the liberty I have taken in addressing you has (sic) I am lately to return to Hobart Town. I have to request you will have the goodness to grant me a copy of the Letter of Instruction to His Honour Lt Gov Davey dated in the Month of November 1813 respecting my claims has (sic) a Norfolk Island settler. Sir I beg to state to you that I arrived here in the *Earl Spencer* from England in the month of October 1813 and Embarked from this place on the ship *Windham* for Hobart Town where I had left my children till my return. On my arrival here I delivered to His Excy Govr Macquarie, Lord Bathursts letter respecting myself & family, and I recd by His Excys instructions a letter from your hands, Sir has above to his Honor Lt Govr Davey and has (sic) I have not recd a part of the said claims of 2 Governments means to be victualled and clothed by the Govt for 2 years (agreeable to the Ministers instructions to the Second class) has (sic) the enclosed Certificate from under this the hand of Lt Gov Davey here will provide. Sir my motive for applying for a copy of the letter arises from His Honor Lt Govr Sorells reply to me on applying to him for the said claims at a Genl Muster has took place prior to my leaving Hobart Town for this place (to attend has an evidence on a Genl Court Martial) saying that amongst the documents handed over to him by Lt Col Davey respecting claims etc prior to his assuming the Government Mine was not amongst them, and my not being able to see Lt Col Davey before leaving Hobart Town the same could not be rectified. And Sir I trust you will be kind enough to grant my request so that I may be able to produce the same for His Honor Lt Govr Sorell on my return so that my claims may not be lost to my family. It is now upwards of 2 years since I was given to understand that the said letter with one I had at the same time from Lt. Col O'Connell of the 73rd Regt was either lost or mislaid after I delivered both to Col Davey on my landing there. Sir your kind Compliance with my request (if not irregular) will greatly oblige. Sir

Your Humble & Obedient Servt
James Belbin

Mr John Campbell

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7.

N.S.Wales Hobart Town, Van Diemens Land, June 7th 1824

Daughter Elizabeth,

I Recd your letter by the hands of Mrs Roe (she having the misfortune to lose her husband who died on the voyage out).

She told me she saw you just before leaving England, and that you was in health and had three children - your brother James and sisters Sarah, Kitty, & Susan are all in good health at present as well as my own family - having 4 girls myself by my present wife - your brother & sisters think you have behaved ungrateful to them in not writing before to them if you did not think proper to write to me - In your letter you seem to wish to come back here. I have written to Col.O'Connell who ere this must be in some part of England having left Ceylon - and you must make enquiry at the Agents for the Army, Messrs Greenwood & Cox's Craig's Court Charing Cross - where he his to be found and write to him directly you find where he resides as I have written to him to interceed to get you out in some of the Female Prison Ships - and the Captain of the Ship or any persons coming out that will let you have any little necessities you may want to the amount of Ten or Fifteen pounds - I will (pay) them on your arrival here. Any further I cannot afford on account of my young rising family - Your brother James is lately married to Mr Nicholls Daughter Caroline your sister Sarah as now living Kitty as been twice married her first husband Brown was drowned leaving her with four children, She as married again since which she as buried her eldest boy 7 yrs old - Sarah as also lost one girl 7 years by being burnt while stopping at my house in town her cloaths catching fire while playing with our children Susan his married and as 2 children having buried one - so that you may see they have all had there share of trouble as well as myself. I (am) certain if your husband exerts himself to come out he may get to come - as I have two or three friends officers now leaving this for England in the ship Guilford.

His Honour Lt Gov Sorell our late Governor under whom I have served five years in the situations I now hold - and our late Depty Judge Advocate Edward Abbott Esq late of the 102nd Reg who has known me many years, he promised me he would use his interest to get you out to this to your family therefore I trust if you wish to come to apply to Col.O'Connell who with the other two gentlemen Lt Gov Sorell and Edward Abbott Esq - I have no doubt but you may succeed and any assistance in my power to render you comfortable I will do for you and your family - your brother and Sisters as send their love to you - and hope to see you once more if it should be so ordained if not we trust you will not fail to write by every opportunity. Your friend Mrs Roe is at present a widow with two children she brought with her - but I believe will not long remain so as is talked of that she will be married to a young man a Mr Brian that came in the ship with her - Direct for me in Hobart Town Van Die Mans Land - Superintendent of Govt Slaughter Houses & Inspector Stock here - write an answer as soon as possible.

I remain your
affectionate father
James Belbin

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[Ref CSO 1/305/7353, P262/63, AOTas]

8.

Treasurer's Office
October 24th 1825

The Lieut Governor Arthur

Sir,

I am much concerned to be obliged from a source of publik (sic) duty, to complain to your Honor of the extreme unprovoked insolence and abusive language of Mr James Belbin the Inspector of Govt. Slaughter Houses - Most fortunately for me the matter occurred in the presence of the Acting Naval Officer, The Sheriff, and Mr Whitcombe, Mr Hamulton's Clerke who can explain the whole transaction and can state what my cond't was on the occasion. At such a moment as the present I have great reluctance in adding to your Honors cares, but conceive delay would be an abandonment of my duty - and surely at such a moment, the servants of government ought not to be rebels to legitimate Authority. Feeling assured that your Honor will afford every support and protection to your Officers in the discharge of their duty -

I have the honor to remain

Sir

your Obedt Humble Servant

Jocelyn Thomas

Acting Col. Treasurer

Acknowledge this, and say I will attend to it as soon as possible, but at present I have no further information before me than this letter conveys. I would wish for particulars from Mr Thomas himself, and then if Mr Belbin denies, the statement may be confirmed by the Sheriff.

26 Oct

G.A.

9. [Ref LSD 1/12, P407-408, AOTas.]

Macquarie Street, 26 March, 1832

Sir,

I trust you will forgive me for troubling you with regard to my Town Allotment in Macquarie Street which I at present occupy with my premises thereon and beg leave to state for your general information that it was originally part of an allotment located to Mr W Baker now Cryer to the Supreme Court, who sold to the same to a person of the name of James Hemmings (now in the Colony) who after erecting the frame of a house thereon, again sold the same to a person of the name of John Beacho a native of Bengal (formerly a servant to a Mr Macnealance decd) from whom I bought the land and the frame of a house thereon, and paid him and hold his receipt and transfer for the same as well as Mr W Baker's and Jas Hemmings' are in my possession, therefore no person or persons as (sic) any claim thereon, the house Building and other Improvements have been done by myself - Since May 1818 when I purchased the land, and has been in my possession ever since. Sir my motive for purchasing the said allotment of Land I wish fully to explain to you for your information, as I expected a grant to have been issued to me years back, being entitled to the same by Lord Windham's instructions on that head, dated 31st December 1806 with regard to the Evacuation of Norfolk Island, (of which I was a settler for many years). Sir before my removal from the said Island (myself with 5 motherless children) I was in possession of a Town House and Allotment of ground in the Township, independent of my Farms and other Buildings thereon, as

my own Bona fida property, all by purchase with the exception of my Town Allotment from the Govt - and no one had a claim thereon for one sixpence. The same I was obliged to resign up thru Government and Lord Windham's indemnifications of remunerations for my property ... for the same has been adhered to, I know to my regret as well as my family -- On my arrival here in the year 1808, circumstances occurred with me and the then Lt. Gov of the settlement, that caused me to leave this and proceed to England to wait on the Home Government, with regard to myself and family (leaving 4 motherless daughters behind until my return) and taking my youngest, a son with me. I therefore Sir left all my Norfolk Island claims unsettled until I could return, which I did to Sydney in the year 1813, and to this in 1814, when instead of taking my Town Allotment of 1/2 an acre which I should have received for my Town Allotment I gave up there when I left the Island. I purchased my present piece of land, in lieu of same, has being more convenient to myself and family, than the allotment at the time, and on which I have expended a good deal of money and labour thereon. My own hands erected my house and the ground laying low and in the hollow, I was at considerable labor and trouble to make it as comfortable as it is, and should my my (sic) means ever enable me (with my large family) I intend to build one of brick and stone if it should not involve me in debt. I hope you will be kind enough to inform if I can receive a grant for the same for the benefit of my children, and should you not sir be empowered to issue such to me, you will candid enough to inform me as soon as convenient, as I may be enabled to apply to Gentlemen my Friends at this time in England, to apply to the Home Govt for same -- as was directed from them by Lord Bathurst instructions by letter to the late Governor Macquarie, which I delivered into his hands on my arrival from England to Sydney in the *Earl of Spencer* transport in 1813 with my present wife (& son that I had taken from this) as Government passengers free of expences, and the said letter contained Instructions to the Govr in Chief to remunerate me for my claims and losses sustained by removal from Norfolk Island, as well as for persecution and ill usage myself and family had sustained on this land before proceeding to England -- Sir I hope you will forgive the length of this letter feeling my family interested in my application and for upwards of 40 years that I have been in these Colonies and 34 years ago serving the Govt. at the hand of the Police under Commandant Capt J Townson and Col Foveaux (now Lt Gen in England) Lt Govr at the time at Norfolk Island -- I have never solicited for one favour in any shape during that period, therefore cannot think that my property altho but little will be secured to my children agreeable to Lord Windhams Instructions on that head --I beg leave Sir

to subscribe myself
your Obt Humble Servant
James Belbin Senn

Geo Frankland Esq
Survr Genl etc etc

Extract from the Diary of G.T.W.B, Boyes

3 Jan 1840.

At my office.... Old Mr Belbin called and as usual full of his important office, and the situations of trust he had filled with Govr. King, Sir Maurice O'Connell, Govr. Bligh etc. He was a Settler at Norfolk Island and came away with a heavy heart at a time when a partial "Vakiation" took place.

The seas as high as St. David's Tower rolled in upon the shore and threw up and down the beach stones as large as this room, as though they had been so many cricket balls. He had always given satisfaction to the officers, except those two, Thomas and Hamilton, who were what he called "private assassin-ators". They tried to persuade Col Arthur that he (Belbin) had been abusing the trust reposed in him, which arose out of the kindness and consideration he had shown to the settlers. When the meat they had turned into the store upon their contracts was rejected on account of its quality, he used to have it salted and sent up to their farms for their own consumption, and the "surplus" meat he did the same with. Upon this coming to the knowledge of the two "private assassins" they went and told the Lt. Govr. that the rejected meat was salted and received into the Commissariat Magazine by Mr Moodie to be issued to the troops and convicts, and of course charged to the public as meat of the best quality. He was never intoxicated in his life. He takes sometimes two tablespoonful of brandy of a morning to keep the cold out of his stomach, and the same quantity with his tea at breakfast. These he calls "infant draughts", and another dose before he goes to bed, and sometimes a bottle of Ginger Beer with his dinner, but he never drinks no other beer or wine, or anything of that sort.