

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

COMMODORE JOHN BYRON

Journal, 1764-66

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**National Maritime Museum
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Byron (1723-1786), the son of the 2nd Baron Byron, entered the Royal Navy in 1731. In 1740 he sailed as a midshipman on HMS *Wager* in the squadron commanded by George Anson, on its voyage to the Pacific. The *Wager* was wrecked off the coast of Chile in May 1741 and Byron was only able to return to England in 1746. He was promoted to the rank of captain in the same year. He commanded several ships during the Seven Years War (1756-63). In 1760, while commanding HMS *Fame*, he was sent to North America with a small squadron and supervised the demolition of the fortifications at Louisburg and destroyed a lot of French shipping in the Bay of Chaleur.

In 1764, with the rank of commodore, he was given command of HMS *Dolphin*, and the sloop *Tamar*, on a voyage to the Pacific. It was publicly stated that he would take command of the East Indies Station. His secret instructions directed him to sail to the southern Atlantic Ocean, search for Pepys Island, and take possession of the Falkland Islands. He was then to sail into the Pacific Ocean, sail northwards to New Albion (California) and search for the North-West Passage. After sailing along the coast of Patagonia, Byron looked for but failed to find Pepys Island and decided that it did not exist. He claimed the Falkland Islands for Britain and named Port Egmont, but his exploration was cursory and he was unaware that there was a French settlement on East Falkland. When he reached the Pacific, he ignored his instructions to search for the North-West Passage. Instead, he sailed in a north-westerly direction across the Pacific, with the intention of exploring the Solomon Islands. However, he sailed too far northwards and found very few islands, before reaching the East Indies in November 1765. His voyage was the fastest circumnavigation up to that time and was soon followed by the more successful Pacific voyages of Samuel Wallis and James Cook.

Byron served as Governor of Newfoundland in 1769-72. In 1775 he was promoted to rear-admiral and in 1778 to vice-admiral. In 1778 he led a squadron to North America to intercept a French fleet. He was hampered by bad weather, but the two forces finally met off Granada in July 1779 in an indecisive battle. Byron returned to England at the end of the year and did not take part in any further naval actions.

JOURNAL OF JOHN BYRON

Byron referred to the journal that he was keeping on HMS *Dolphin* in a letter to Lord Egmont, the First Lord of the Admiralty, on 17 June 1764. It would appear that, when he returned to England in 1766, the journal was given or lent to the Admiralty and a copy was made by a clerk. This copy found its way to Hinchinbrooke House in Cambridgeshire, where it remained until 1957. Hinchinbrooke was the home of Lord Sandwich, who was Egmont's predecessor as First Lord of the Admiralty and who again held the office in 1771-82. The journal was purchased by the National Maritime Museum in 1957.

The journal is reproduced in *Byron's journal of his circumnavigation 1764-1766*, edited by Robert E. Gallagher (Cambridge, Hakluyt Society, 1964).

COMMODORE JOHN BYRON

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Journal of Commodore John Byron kept on HMS *Dolphin* on its voyage round the world, 21 June 1764 – 7 May 1766. (231pp)

The journal commences with the departure of the frigate *Dolphin* and the sloop *Tamar* from the Downs. It records the voyage to Madeira, St Jago, Rio de Janeiro (Sept.-Oct. 1764), the east coast of Patagonia, the Falkland Islands (Jan. – Feb. 1765), the Strait of Magellan (March – April 1765), Mas Afuera (Alejandra Selkirk Island), King George Islands (June 1765), Atafu (Duke of York's Islands), Nukunau (Byron Island), Rota (July 1765), Pulau Timoan, Sumatra (Nov. 1765), Batavia (Dec. 1765), Cape of Good Hope (Feb. 1766), St Helena (March 1766) and the Scilly Islands (May 1766). There are a few gaps, with no entries between 25 Dec. 1765 and 10 Feb. 1766.

The *Tamar*, captained by Patrick Mouat, parted company with the *Dolphin* in March 1766, on account of damage to its rudder. It sailed to Antigua before returning to England in June 1766.

Many of the entries are very brief, simply recording the winds, weather, and the ship's position. There are fuller entries when the ship when Byron and the crew landed at Patagonia, the Falkland Islands, the Tuamotu Archipelago, Takaroa and Takapoto (King George Islands), Rota and Batavia. These entries include descriptions of the landscape and coastlines, animals, birds and fishes, encounters with the Patagonians (Tehuelches), the annexation of the Falkland Islands, the passage through the Strait of Magellan, Pacific canoes, conflict with islanders at Takapoto, and dealings with the Dutch at Batavia and the cape of Good Hope.