

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD CHARACTERS (WITH SOME DOUBLING UP)

Male parts

Captain Arthur Phillip
Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark
Major Robbie Ross / Ketch Freeman
Captain Jemmy Campbell / John Arscott
Midshipman Harry Brewer
Captain Watkin Tench / John Wisehammer
Captain David Collins / Robert Sideway
Caesar

Female parts

Dabby Bryant / 2nd Lieutenant William Faddy
Liz Morden / Prompt for Act 1 Scene 6
Duckling Smith / Reverend Johnson
Mary Brenham / Lieutenant George Johnston
Meg Long

Male or Female

Lieutenant Will Dawes / Prompt

First Nations Narrator Killara (male voice over)

OFFICERS:

Captain Arthur Phillip (Governor Phillip) RN. Older man. A captain of the Royal Navy who has been brought out of retirement to serve as governor of the penal colony in Australia. Phillip is a kind and empathetic man who believes that anyone can change for the better. He is often at odds with **Captain Tench** and **Major Ross**, both of whom are strong advocates for capital punishment and think that criminals can't be reformed. Despite this disagreement, Phillip decides to put on a play in the colony, enlisting Lieutenant Ralph Clark to cast and direct the piece. When his colleagues challenge the value of this activity, Phillip asserts that the play will be good for the convicts because it will encourage them to embody a more "refined" way of life. Eventually, Ralph loses heart during the rehearsals, but Phillip inspires him again by helping him see that it's important to give people opportunities to improve themselves. In addition, the Governor also advocates for **Liz Morden** when she gets in trouble for supposedly stealing food. Along with **Judge Collins** and Ralph, he urges her to tell the truth about what happened, suspecting that the only reason she refuses to testify on her own behalf is because she doesn't think anyone will listen to her. In doing so, he demonstrates his benevolent style of leadership.

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark. RM Young man who, unlike his fellow guards, is focused on remaining loyal to his wife, **Betsey Alicia**. This, however, is quite difficult, since Alicia stayed behind in England when Ralph came to Australia to work in the penal colony. A pious man, Ralph says his prayers and writes in his journal, addressing his entries to Alicia and telling her about his life, including his frustration that he hasn't been promoted to First Lieutenant yet. Just before he's about to kiss Alicia's picture a thousand times one night (something he does once a week), **Harry Brewer** visits him in his tent and mentions that Captain Phillip is looking for someone to direct a play in the colony. Because Ralph thinks Phillip never pays attention to him, he tells Harry to let the Governor know that he has some experience in the theatre. As such, he becomes the director of the play, choosing *The Recruiting Officer* by the Irish playwright George Farquhar and beginning the casting. In particular, he's impressed by **Mary Brenham**, whom he casts in the lead role. Throughout the course of rehearsals, Ralph develops a fondness for certain convicts and becomes convinced that the play has a positive effect on them. He even convinces **Liz Morden** to fight harder to prove her innocence when she's sentenced to death for stealing. In one of the play's final scenes, Ralph finds Mary rehearsing on the beach and joins her by reciting the lines of her character's lover. When they eventually embrace, they find that they're drawn to one another in real life. As such, they suddenly begin taking off their clothes, realising they're in love. Mary has Ralph's child, a girl, who he names Betsey Alicia after his wife in England. He keeps Mary in a hut at the bottom of his garden. They both eventually return to England. On a modern map of Sydney harbour you will see Clark island where Ralph had his vegetable garden.

Major Robbie Ross RM. (Doubles as **KETCH FREEMAN**). Ross is the senior Marine in the colony and as such the de facto Chief Constable. Vehemently opposes putting on the play. A sadistic Scot - he bullies the convicts and treats some junior officers, including Ralph, only a little better. Along with **Tench**, Ross is one of *Our Country's Good's* primary antagonists, since he doesn't believe it's a good idea to let convicts rehabilitate themselves by acting in a play. He does whatever he can to interfere with Ralph's rehearsals. When he catches **John Arscott** and brings him back, Ross accuses **Liz Morden** of helping **Kable**—one of the other escapees—steal food for the journey. He also implicates **Wisehammer** in the escape simply because he's Jewish. Despite Ross's best efforts, though, Ralph manages to put on a successful play, and none of the actors are executed.

Captain Jemmy (Jeremy) Campbell RM. (Doubles as **JOHN ARSCOTT**). Campbell is Ross's inarticulate Scottish sidekick, permanently angry and often drunk, he spends much of his time sucking up to Ross. A comedy role with several scenes and lines (not one of which makes a proper sentence!). Although he always aligns with Ross, he can't quite hide how amused he is by *The Recruiting Officer*.

Midshipman Harry (Henry) Brewer RN (1739-1796) Age: 30s/ 40s A low-ranking officer in the Royal Navy, Harry has worked for **Governor Phillip** for a long time, though he isn't involved much in the penal colony's decision-making. His focus is on Duckie (**Duckling**), of whom he's quite possessive. Duckling has had other lovers and Harry is extremely jealous. Harry played a part in her late lover's execution, helping hang a marine named **Handy Baker** who was caught stealing from the colony's food rations. Since then Duckling has been quiet and cold to Harry, though she lives in his tent. Harry knew Duckling in London and was partly responsible for commuting her sentence of hanging to transportation to the colonies. As a result she became his mistress. Harry complains to **Ralph** that having sex with Duckling is like "fucking a corpse." He feels responsible and haunted by Handy's ghost, which visits him more and more throughout the play. In an attempt to get Duckling to forgive him, Harry encourages her to join Ralph's play. Harry is increasingly tormented by the ghosts of Handy and the other men he helped hang. On his deathbed, Duckling confesses her love to him but he dies. In real life, Harry was 49 when he landed in Australia. Previously a carpenter, then studied architecture. Lost job and joined navy aged 40. Became Provost-marshal (military police). **Governor Phillip** found him useful: a good clerk who could draw architectural plans. Brewer died on 8th July 1796 aged 57. His name lives on in Brewer Street, Concord. His epitaph is in Edward Spain's 'Reminiscences': 'if honesty merits heaven, Harry is there'.

Captain Watkin Tench RM. (Doubles as **JOHN WISEHAMMER**) An unsympathetic officer and one of the primary antagonists of the play. He is contemptuous of the prisoners. Unlike **Governor Phillip**, Tench believes that criminals can't be reformed. In keeping with this, he thinks it's a waste of time to let the convicts participate in a play, upholding that they should only be exposed to punishment and labour. He also believes that all of the prisoners in the colony deserve to be treated harshly. A strong advocate of capital punishment, he has a hard time understanding why Phillip opposes the spectacle of public executions.

Captain David Collins (Judge Collins) RM. (Doubles as **ROBERT SIDEWAY**) Collins had been chosen to fulfil the position of the colony's judge. As a judge, he helps **Phillip** create a moral and just society. At first, he appears to endorse the practice of public execution, suggesting that the convicts won't behave unless they're stricken by the "mortar of fear." However, he later helps Phillip and **Ralph** convince **Liz Morden** to advocate for herself in order to avoid the death sentence, saying that it would be very unfortunate if convicts like her came to see the justice system in Australia as incapable of recognising the truth. In this way, then, he helps her avoid the death sentence while also contributing to Governor Phillips's efforts to create a well-functioning society.

Admired by Ralph as a fair and reasonable man, the real Davey Collins had no experience of the law before his eight-year stint as Advocate General of the colony.

Second Lieutenant William Faddy RM. (In Act 1, scene 6 only) (Doubles as **DABBY BRYANT**) Before joining the First Fleet he was stationed in Plymouth, Devon. Died in action at the Battle of the Nile 1799. The same rank as Ralph Clark and suspicious that Clark is using the play to angle for promotion.

Lieutenant Will Dawes RM. (In Act 1, scene 6 only) (Doubles as **PROMPT**). Has few lines and is peripheral in this play, but the real life Will Dawes was the subject of Kate Grenville's novel *The Lieutenant*. A scientist and stargazer at his observatory. Was under the Opera House end of the Sydney Harbour bridge.. He compiled the first dictionary of aboriginal languages.. Uninterested in Ralph's play - he won't attend anyway as it will clash with a lunar eclipse.

Lieutenant George Johnston RM. (In Act 1, scene 6 only) (Doubles as **MARY BRENHAM**). He has a convict mistress and as such is generally supportive of the women convicts in the play.

Reverend Johnson (In Act 1, scene 6 only) The penal colony's sole reverend. (Doubles as **DUCKLING SMITH**). Generally ambivalent about the play. His primary concern is whether the play will propagate in the convicts immoral thoughts or behaviour.

CONVICTS:

Ketch Freeman (James Freeman) An Irish convict in the penal colony. (Doubles as **MAJOR ROBBIE ROSS**). Along with **Handy Baker**, Ketch is part of the group that steals from the colony's food supply at the beginning of the play. Unlike the others, though, he avoids the death penalty by accepting a job as the colony's hangman. This upsets him deeply, but since he was only going along with the plan to steal food, he thinks he doesn't deserve to die. Still, though, he admits to **Ralph** that he's worried God won't forgive him for **hanging** his co-conspirators. Furthermore, his role as the hangman has made him wildly unpopular in the camp. Because of this, he pleads with Ralph to be cast in the play, hoping he'll be able to redeem himself by joining the production. At first, the other actors only continue to resent him, refusing to act alongside him. By the end, though, they stop giving him a hard time.

John Arscott. One of the convicts in the penal colony. (Doubles as **CAPTAIN JEMMY CAMPBELL**). **Ralph** casts **Arscott** in *The Recruiting Officer*, but the prisoner runs away with **Henry Kable**, **Black Caesar**, and several others before the first rehearsal. However, he's caught, brought back to the colony, and placed in jail, where he complains to **Liz** and **Wisehammer** that the "compass" he bought from a sailor failed him (the compass, it turns out, is just a piece of paper with the word "North" written on it). Because of this failed attempt, Arscott becomes rather hopeless, insisting that there's no "escape" from the colony. Later, though, he becomes immersed in *The Recruiting Officer*, feeling as if the theatrical experience gives him an opportunity to forget about his own life.

Robert Sideway A convict in the penal colony, and an actor in **Ralph's** play. (Doubles as **CAPTAIN DAVID COLLINS**). Sideway is a smooth-talking and well-mannered man who presents himself as a sophisticated gentleman. A pick-pocket by profession, he has a great appreciation for the theatre, since he used to go to plays quite often in England. Because of this, he convinces Ralph to cast him, and when he begins rehearsals, it becomes clear that his grandiose style will get in the way of his ability to act, as he presents himself as a lauded thespian and overacts every piece of dialogue. At the end of *Our Country's Good*, he announces that he plans to start his own theatre company when he's no longer a convict. He did actually go on to form Sydney's first professional theatre.

John Wisehammer (Doubles as **CAPTAIN WATKIN TENCH**) A convict in the penal colony, and another actor in **Ralph's** play. Wisehammer isn't initially cast in *The Recruiting Officer*, but **Mary** encourages him to join when he talks to her about his literary knowledge. Having stumbled into her while she's practicing her lines, he tells her that he has read every word in the dictionary up to the letter L. Later, **Major Ross** accuses him of being involved with Arscott's escape simply because he's Jewish, though he—like the others—is still allowed to act in the play. On opening night, he asks Ralph if he can read a prologue he wrote before the production begins, but Ralph says what he's composed is too political. Because of this, **Sideway** promises him that they can use it in the company he's going to start when they're all free.

Caesar A convict in the penal colony who hails from Madagascar. Possibly a French African accent. **Caesar** is never officially cast in *The Recruiting Officer*, but he decides that he simply must be involved. After initially running away with **Arscott** and **Kable**, he decides to turn back, at which point he goes to Ralph's first rehearsal and declares that he'll play a servant. Though Ralph doesn't like this idea, Caesar refuses to leave, ultimately making his way into the final performance. He almost ruins the first night by turning up drunk due to stage fright.

Duckling Smith (Doubles as the **REVEREND JOHNSON**) A convict in the penal colony. Age: 20s - 40s. Duckling is romantically involved with **Harry Brewer** and even lives with him in his tent, though she resents him because of how controlling he is. Indeed, he doesn't let her fraternise with the other convicts or guards, thinking she'll have sex with them. Harry Brewer knew Duckling in London and was partly responsible for commuting her sentence of hanging to transportation to the colonies. As a result she becomes his mistress. Duckling resents Harry because he played a part in the **hanging** of **Handy Baker**, her other lover. Throughout the play, she is terse and cold to Harry, though momentarily affectionate toward him and reminds

him how much he likes having sex with her. In an attempt to make her happy, Harry encourages her to join **Ralph**'s play—something that pleases her. Not long thereafter, though, Harry falls ill, and though she pleads with him to stay alive by telling him that she loves him, he dies. Nevertheless, Duckling goes through with her role in the play, refusing to step down because of her grief.

Mary Brenham A young convict in the penal colony. Age: 20s/30s. A central role. (Doubles as **LIEUTENANT GEORGE JOHNSTON**). Mary begins the play painfully shy and embarrassed and can hardly speak. By the end she is Ralph's mistress and a leading lady showing acting talent. Unlike many of her fellow convicts, Mary went to school until she was ten. Because of this, she's able to read, which sets her apart. Lieutenant Ralph Clark seeks her out when casting *The Recruiting Officer*, knowing she's perfect for the lead role. Mary's friend Dabby makes fun of her, saying she should sleep with Ralph. Mary doesn't like this joke. Dabby had pimped Mary on the convict ship to get herself more food. Mary helps fellow convicts learn their lines. Mary falls in love with Ralph, and they make love on the beach shortly before the play's opening night. When Dabby reveals a plan to run away in the commotion of the play's final scene, Mary tells Dabby that Ralph will be held accountable for her disappearance. She and her fellow players convince Dabby to stay. In real life, Mary gives birth to Ralph's child, a girl, who he names Betsey Alicia, after his wife in England. Ralph and Mary later return to England.

Dabby Bryant A convict in the penal colony. (Doubles as **SECOND LIEUTENANT WILL DAWES**). Has a Devonian accent. Age flexible. A loud and crass individual, Dabby is **Mary**'s closest friend. **Ralph** gives Dabby a small role, and Mary helps her learn her lines, since she can't read. Just before the first performance, Dabby tells her fellow players that she intends to sneak away while everyone is taking a bow, but Mary and the others convince her to stay, saying that it would only make life worse for everyone else. In real life she did manage to escape back to Devon. Dabby, her husband and 2 children made the longest voyage then recorded in an open boat when they escaped.

Liz Morden One of the convicts in the penal colony. Age flexible. Cockney accent. The only fictional character. Her compelling monologue opens Act 2. (Doubles as **REVEREND JOHNSON**). Liz is the most insubordinate prisoner of the entire group, often tempting the guards to punish her by misbehaving or speaking out of turn. It is for this reason that **Governor Phillip** wants **Ralph** to cast her in the play, eventually explaining to him that he wants to make an "example" out of her—not by executing her, but by spotlighting her "redemption." However, he encounters some difficulty with this plan when **Henry Kable**, **John Arscott**, and several other prisoners try to escape. This affects Liz because a soldier claims to have seen her when he was drunk the night before the group ran away. Indeed, this soldier upholds that Liz helped Kable steal food for the journey. Because of this, **Major Ross** insists that she should be hanged. During her trial, Liz doesn't advocate for herself, thinking that it won't matter what she says. Luckily for her, though, **Judge Collins** and Governor Phillip suspect that this is why she doesn't try to defend herself, so they give her another chance, ultimately convincing her to explain her innocence and thus avoid the death penalty.

Meg Long (In Act 1, scene 5 only) A convict in the penal colony known for sleeping with the guards. Mature woman "Shitty Meg"—as everyone calls her—tries to audition for *The Recruiting Officer*, but Ralph refuses to cast her.

CHARACTERS WHO ARE REFERRED TO BUT WHO DON'T APPEAR IN PERSON:

First Nations narrator Killara Voice over at various moments throughout the play - delivers brief monologues about the arrival of the British in Australia, outlining how the area's indigenous population perceives the newcomers. By the end of the play, Killara and his people are dying of small pox.

Thomas Barrett A seventeen-year-old convict who is hanged along with Handy Baker for stealing food from the colony's rations. Along with Handy, Thomas's ghost comes back to haunt Harry Brewer.

Handy Baker A marine who thinks it's unfair that the officers and the convicts get the same amount of food. Because of this, he steals from the food supply with **Ketch** and several others. Handy Baker is one of **Duckling**'s lovers, a fact that gives **Harry Brewer** extra motivation to hang him. In the aftermath of this execution, Harry is haunted by Handy's ghost, who visits him periodically and torments him by saying sexually explicit things about Duckling and guilt-tripping him about his involvement with the hanging.

Henry Kable A convict in the penal colony. Although **Ralph** casts him in *The Recruiting Officer*, Kable runs away on the same day as the first rehearsal. Taking **Caesar**, **John Arscott**, and three other prisoners with him, he sets off into the woods, but he and the unnamed other three convicts are the only ones to successfully escape. In the aftermath of this event, **Liz** is accused of having helped Kable steal food before the journey, though this didn't really happen.

Betsey Alicia Ralph's wife, who has remained in England while he goes to the Australian penal colony.