



Matthew Flinders: Pathway to Fame

Joe Doyle

Since his death many books and articles have been written about Matthew Flinders. During his life, apart from his own books, he wrote much himself, and there is a large body of contemporary correspondence concerning him in various archives in England and Australia. The bicentenary of the start of his voyage in *Investigator* is so important that it deserves once more, to be drawn to the attention of those interested in hydrography. This paper traces Matthew Flinders' early life and training as a hydrographer until July 1801 when he sailed from England in *Investigator* on his fateful mission to chart the little known southern continent, that land mass which had yet to be named Australia.

Introduction

Anniversaries of two milestones of 'European' Australia occur in 2001. The significant event is the centenary of the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia. It is also the bicentenary of the start of an important British voyage to complete the survey of that continent and from which the term Australia began to be accepted as the name for the country.

July 2001 is the 200th anniversary of the departure from Spithead of *Investigator*, a sloop¹ fitted out and stored for a voyage to remote parts. The vessel, under the command of Commander Matthew Flinders, Royal Navy, was bound for New South Wales, a colony established thirteen years earlier. The purpose of the voyage was to make a complete examination and survey of the coast of that island continent. By the end of this voyage Flinders had explored a portion of the coastline off all the future States of the Commonwealth, and mainland Territories, to the north-east, east, south and south-west. This makes him the only European explorer of Australia that all Australians can relate to their individual general area. It is thus fitting that the Centenary and Bicentenary are coincidental.

Rear Admiral G. S. Ritchie's paper (Ritchie 1975) commemorating the bicentenary of Flinders' birth encapsulates the whole of Flinders' career; the present paper ends at the commencement of *Investigator's* voyage. The complex characters of the large supporting cast, particularly those of William Bligh and Sir Joseph Banks, (who individually have scores of books written about them and in which

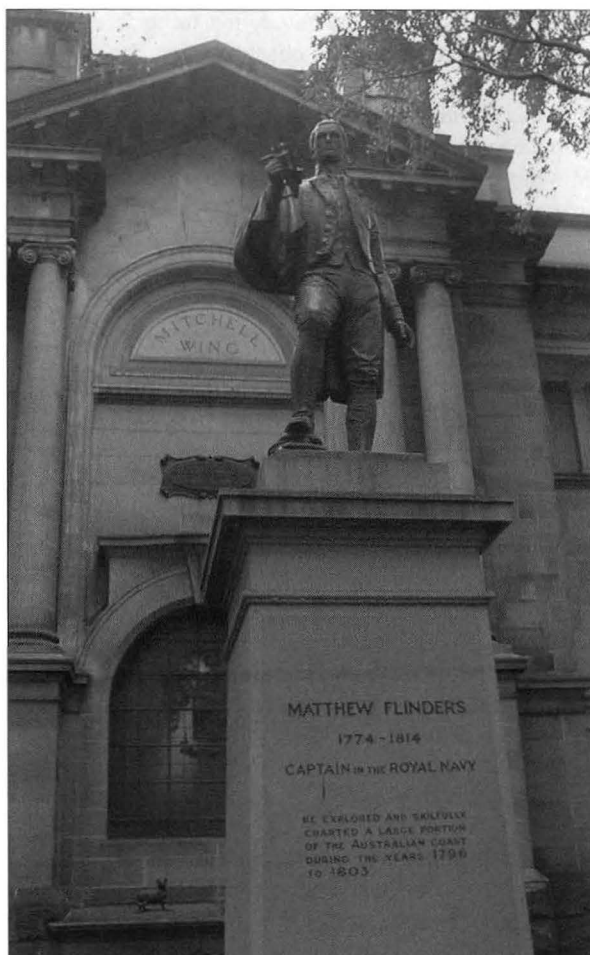
¹ A Sloop is not necessarily sloop rigged. In the British Navy of the early nineteenth century, a Sloop was a ship commanded by a Commander, if the rank of the commanding officer changed, so did the classification of the vessel. The contemporary sloop rigged was a single masted, fore and aft rigged vessel, with a fixed bowsprit and standing forestay

their characters are dissected and reassembled) inhibit their role in this story from being fully developed in the space available.

The exploits of Flinders as an explorer have raised him to a cult figure in Australia. His discoveries are taught in all Australian schools. As noted above, he is the only early explorer who is identified nationally. But parts of Flinders' story have become clouded in myth and are preached as a series of parables. The truth of some points has become blurred, including:

Australia was a name of Flinders' invention;
 The first person to circumnavigate the continent was Flinders;
 All the Australian coastline was charted by Flinders;
 The charts drawn by Flinders are still in use in Australian waters; and
 The first copy of his printed narrative was delivered to his deathbed, but unconscious, he failed to comprehend it.

Flinders achieved high standards; the results he obtained were equal to, or better than, those of his national and international contemporaries; but as these myths, containing less than the whole truth, do both Flinders and others a disservice, detracting from the achievements of both those who preceded him and those who followed closely after him.



Matthew Flinders Statue, Sydney

In Australia many public places (a university, a town, streets, a railway station, etc) bear his name, or are adorned with his statue. His image has also adorned stamps, banknotes and coins. Of the many scores of Australian coastal and inland geographic features and infrastructure which now bear the name Flinders, Matthew Flinders himself only applied the name once and that was to an insignificant island off the coast of what is now South Australia. In this case it was to honour his brother Samuel.

'My Own Destroyer', the title of a book (Baker 1962) indicates an unhappy conclusion to his career and short life, he died at the age of 40.

This paper highlights the main people and events that influenced the development of Flinders, making him the most suitable person available to command such an important expedition. Indomitably, he was to progress the expedition to the limits of his ship in a manner that has kindled the imagination of succeeding generations and propelled Flinders to the status of an Australian Icon.

Matthew Flinder, The Beginning

Matthew Flinders was born 16 March 1774, the son of the surgeon-apothecary in the village of Donington, Lincolnshire. He was educated at local schools and his father tutored him in the classics. He left school

at the age of 14 to understudy his father in the ways of medicine. Reading Defoe's novel "Robinson Crusoe", Flinders became obsessed with far away places and exploration. He was impressed with the career chosen by his older cousin, John Flinders, who had joined the Navy in 1780. Matthew's opportunity came through John's sister, Henrietta, who was employed as a governess in the household of Commodore Thomas Pasley, who offered a vacancy in his ship. Flinders joined *Scipio* in May 1790. Still with Pasley, he moved to *Bellerophon*. Flinders was appointed Midshipman in July 1790. With the personal intervention of Pasley, Flinders achieved the much sought after appointment to *Providence*, soon to sail for the South Seas under Captain William Bligh on the "Second Breadfruit Voyage". Flinders was appointed to that vessel in April 1791. A brand new ship, quickly fitted out, it sailed in August of that year with the tender *Assistant*. Matthew had been in the navy for only 15 months and his Robinson Crusoe dreams were to be fulfilled.

Captain William Bligh, Royal Navy

William Bligh, born in 1754, was 20 years older than Flinders. Although known internationally as Bligh of the *Bounty*, a character well publicised by a number of motion pictures, he was well versed in hydrographic matters and became the first influence in Matthew Flinders' development as a hydrographer and chart-maker. Bligh had been the Master² of *Resolution*, Captain James Cook's ship during the tragic Third Voyage. In his role as Master he was involved in all navigational aspects, assisting Cook with his observations and having input into the charts, particularly after Cook's death (Blewitt 1957)(David 1997). Bligh then honed his skills as navigator during the First Breadfruit Voyage and subsequently during the 3900 mile voyage in *Bounty's* launch after the mutiny. During the voyage in the launch, he sailed through the Fiji Islands, discovered the significant section of the reef strewn, north-east coast of what was then New South Wales which had been avoided by Cook, and made the third recorded European transit³ of what he called Bligh's, now Torres, Strait. Bligh submitted charts for these areas.

By 1791 Bligh was well connected. He corresponded with Sir Joseph Banks and with Alexander Dalrymple, who was yet to be appointed the first Hydrographer. *Providence* was well fitted out; a set of hydrographic instruments and a significant number of publications and charts were supplied to the ship on Bligh's demand. Flinders would have access to these resources under the tutelage of his captain during the next 2½ years.

Providence and *Assistant* proceeded by way of the Cape of Good Hope, arriving in Adventure Bay, Van Diemen's Land, in February 1792. Bligh and his officers conducted surveys of the area, and sketch charts were completed. The vessels arrived at Tahiti in April. The collection and nurturing of two and a half thousand breadfruit plants took three months. During this period Bligh established instruments on shore to observe for position and to rate the chronometers. Flinders, as one of the midshipmen, was involved in an incident when one instrument was handled heavily. He felt the full impact of Bligh's remarkable vocabulary (Ingleton 1986).

On departure, *Providence* and *Assistant* sailed westward. Examining the Fiji Islands, the vessels then made a notable transit through Bligh Straits (Torres Strait). A manuscript chart by Matthew Flinders is preserved in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. It shows the route of *Providence* and *Assistant* through the strait, a most tortuous track between reefs and islands, which took 19 days to negotiate by feeling their way with boats ahead of them and having to fight off the large canoes of the hostile Torres Strait Islanders.

2 *Master of a Ship of War. An officer appointed by the commissioners of the navy to attend to the navigating a ship under the direction of the captain, the working of a ship into her station in the order of battle, and in other circumstances of danger, but he reports to the first lieutenant who carries out any necessary evolution, he is allowed several assistants, who are termed second masters, master's assistants, &c. This officer's station has been termed the meridional altitude of the lower order of midshipmen, but it is requisite that he be both a good officer and a seaman. He ranks after lieutenants according to date, but is subordinate in command to all lieutenants. (Smyth 1867)*

3 *Torres 1606, Cook 1770 and then Bligh 1789. Cook transited the southern route through what he named Endeavour Strait*

The vessels then made their way round the Cape of Good Hope to St Helena where the first of the breadfruit were landed and then on to the West Indies to unload the remaining plants. The vessels arrived back in the United Kingdom in August 1793. With *Providence* paid off, Flinders returned to Pasley in *Bellerophon*. Whilst in this appointment Flinders took part in Admiral Howe's 1794 battle "*The Glorious First of June*" against the French, the only major naval engagement in which he was involved. (Scott 1914).

Captain John Hunter, Royal Navy

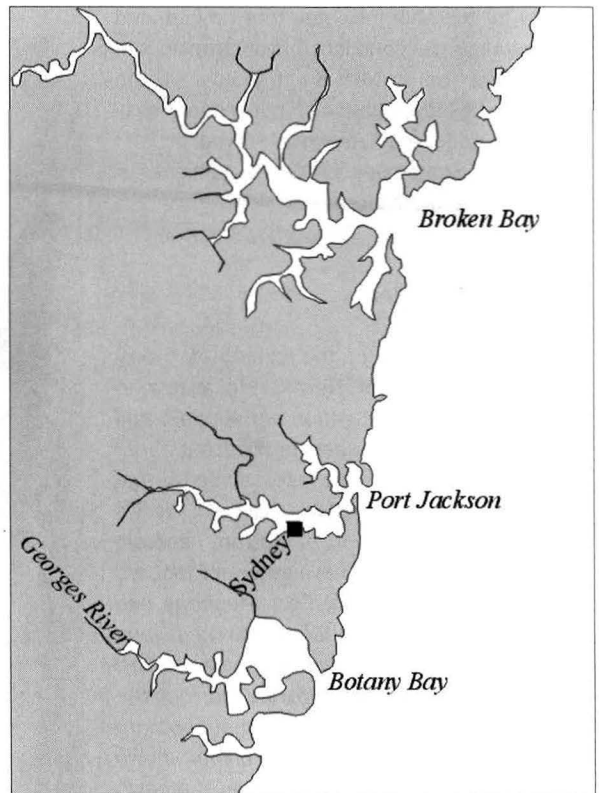
Still a midshipman, Flinders was appointed to *Reliance*. Here Flinders was to come under the influence of Captain John Hunter, his second, but most important hydrographic mentor.

John Hunter, born in 1737, was only nine years younger than James Cook. In 1759 Hunter was a midshipman in *Neptune* (Auchmuty 1966) in the St Lawrence River when James Cook was conducting his notable activities in that river in support of General Wolfe and the British forces ashore that lead to the reduction of Quebec and the defeat of the French forces. Although Hunter passed his examination for Lieutenant in 1760, he was not to be promoted Lieutenant for 20 years. His first appointment as Master was in 1767 and for the next 13 years had many opportunities to conduct strategic surveys in support of the fleet in the West Indies and in North America. Appointed to the flagship, *Eagle*, he was to become Master of the Fleet⁴. In that era, prior to the appointment of the first Hydrographer of the Navy, it is interesting to speculate how a person in Hunter's position attempted to ensure uniform navigational practice throughout a fleet.

Hunter was commended by the Commander in Chief, Admiral Lord Howe, for his survey of the River Delaware and the approaches to Philadelphia conducted in 1777⁵ and he was promoted Lieutenant in 1780 whilst serving under Admiral Lord Rodney, still in West Indian and North American waters.

In 1786 arrangements were in hand for the dispatch of the First Fleet to establish a colony in New South Wales. Hunter was appointed as the second captain of *Sirius*, under the Governor, Captain Arthur Phillip.

Although not appointed the Lieutenant Governor, Hunter held a dormant commission as the successor to Phillip. The First Fleet sailed from the United Kingdom in May 1787, arriving in New South Wales in January 1788.



Captain John Hunter's Three Harbours in New South Wales

- 4 *Master of the Fleet. A master on board the commander in chief's ship and reports to the flag-captain any deviations from rule which he may observe. (Smyth 1867)*
- 5 *This survey, conducted during the American War of Independence, was used by the British Fleet to proceed up to the city of Philadelphia to support British army ashore. An extract of Hunter's chart has been reproduced (Blewitt 1957)*

Now in command of *Sirius*, Hunter had few administrative roles ashore in the new colony. He and his officers devoted some of their time to surveying and constructing maps and charts. Initially a survey of the anchorage at Sydney was undertaken which was then extended to cover Port Jackson. This was followed by surveys of Broken Bay and Botany Bay, to the north and south of Sydney respectively. The settlement on Norfolk Island was established and supported; further survey work was needed there. Regrettably *Sirius* was lost on that island during a gale in March 1790. Hunter and the crew, initially repatriated to Sydney, subsequently returned to the United Kingdom in 1792 in the chartered Dutch snow ⁶*Waaksamheid*, meeting up with Bligh (and Flinders) in *Providence* in Table Bay.

Hunter's acquaintance, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord Howe, supported his appointment to succeed Phillip as Governor in New South Wales and after an inordinate delay *Reliance*, under the command of Commander Henry Waterhouse, sailed for Sydney with the new Governor embarked. Waterhouse, who had also served in *Bellerophon* under Pasley, was well acquainted with Matthew Flinders, now serving as his Master's Mate. Waterhouse had also been Hunter's lieutenant both in *Sirius* and *Waaksamheid*, and of whom Hunter had said that Waterhouse had gained "*the principal part of his nautical education from me*" (HRNSW). John Shortland was the First Lieutenant of *Reliance*, Matthew's brother, Samuel Flinders, joined as a Volunteer and George Bass⁷ was the ship's surgeon. Hunter's selection of surveying instruments, publications and stationery for the ship indicates that he intended to encourage the conduct of hydrographic surveys after arrival in New South Wales. On the voyage out Flinders began to put these instruments to good use. *Reliance* arrived in Port Jackson in September 1795, 2¾ years after the departure of Phillip.

New South Wales

Flinders description of the extent of hydrographic knowledge of New South Wales in 1795 was "*The investigation of the coast had not been greatly extended beyond the three harbours; and even in these, some of the rivers were not altogether explored. Jervis Bay, indicated but not named by captain Cook, had been entered by lieutenant Richard Bowen: and to the north, Port Stephens had lately been examined by Mr. C. Grimes, land surveyor of the colony, and by captain W. R. Broughton of H. M. ship Providence; but the intermediate portions of the coast, both to the north and south, were little further known than from captain Cook's general chart*" (Flinders 1814). With the encouragement of both Hunter and Waterhouse, and when his duties in *Reliance* allowed, Flinders was to instigate changes to this state of affairs.



Tom Thumb 2 replica

⁶ Snow, a merchant vessel similar to a brig, but differs in the rig of the trysail mast

⁷ Flinders wrote: "In Mr. George Bass, Surgeon of the *Reliance*, I had the happiness to find a man whose ardour for discovery was not to be repressed by any obstacles, nor deterred by danger; and with this friend a determination was formed of completing the examination of the east coast of New South Wales, by all such opportunities as the duty of the ship, and procurable means, could admit." (Gardiner-Garden 1965)

Having heard of rivers discharging into Botany Bay, Flinders and Bass, accompanied by Bass's servant, set off in *Tom Thumb* to investigate in late October 1795. The only details of this boat known was that it "was a little boat of about eight feet keel and five feet beam"⁸ (Scott 1914) which was owned by Bass and others. They spent a week in Botany Bay discovering and exploring the Georges River. Good grazing land was found upstream at what was began to be known as Banks Town. Flinders and Bass were both granted land there by the Governor.

In March 1796, whilst *Reliance* was being refitted, the three were off to the south again in another boat, also named *Tom Thumb*, and of approximately the same dimensions⁹. This expedition extended southward for 45 miles to the coastal area of the Illawarra, the location of the modern day Wollongong and Port Kembla, and the site of the Australian Hydrographic Office. Flinders closed the account of the voyage of the *Tom Thumb* in the following words: "In this little expedition I had no other means of ascertaining the situation of places than by pocket compass bearings and computed distances" (Gardiner-Garden 1965).

The details of these explorations were dispatched to London later that year and subsequently Arrowsmith published "A Topographical Plan of the Settlement of New South Wales. Including Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay. Surveyed by Messrs Grimes and Flinders. Communicated by Lt. Col. Paterson of the New South Wales Corps". This was the first chart published from work undertaken by Flinders.

Flinders returned to his shipboard duties. In the early part of 1797 *Reliance* was at the Cape of Good Hope where Flinders sat for and passed the examination for the rank of Lieutenant.

The growing colony of New South Wales had to be supported by sea. Ships had to bring in the staples of life from the Cape Colony or from India. The corollary of more shipping on an uncharted coast is that more ship losses occur. *Sydney Cove*, from Calcutta, stranded in the Furneaux Group in 1797. After a remarkable two month overland journey northwards to Sydney, the alarm was raised and the schooner *Francis* was dispatched to rescue the remainder of the crew. *Francis* then made a number of voyages to salvage the cargo. Flinders embarked in the schooner for one voyage in early 1798. He was provided with theodolite and sextant but he was not permitted to take a time-keeper or azimuth compass. This was Flinders first opportunity to conduct an independent survey of some importance.



The reverse of the 1998 Australian 50c Coin issued to commemorate the discovery of Bass Strait. (Coin image supplied by Australia's national Mint, the Royal Australian Mint in Canberra)

Bass Strait

At the time Flinders was embarked in *Francis*, Bass was loaned the Governor's whaleboat. With sextant, boat's compass and crew from *Reliance*, he also set out to the south on an expedition. The whaleboat passed the coastal point where Cook in *Endeavour* had first sighted land. It then rounded what proved to be the southern extremity of the continent and proceeded north-westward to Western Port. Bass had examined six hundred miles of coastline. Flinders describes this voyage as "mostly in a boisterous climate, , has not, perhaps, its equal in the annals of maritime history" (Flinders 1814).

⁸ 2.44 metres on the keel, 1.52 metres beam

⁹ A replica built in 1988 had a keel of 10 feet 5½ inches (3.19 metres), beam 5 feet 2 inches (1.57 metres) and a length of 11 feet 8¼ inches (3.58 metres). It is rigged with a dipping lugsail

Hunter considered Bass's discoveries confirmed his view that a strait separated what was then called Van Diemen's Land from the mainland. He directed Flinders to compile the chart titled "*Sketch of the Parts between Van Diemens Land and New South Wales seen in the Francis Schooner 1798. By M. Flinders 2 Lieut. of H. M. Ship Reliance. The Part of New South Wales was coasted by Mr. Bass, Surgeon of the Reliance in a whale Boat & where not seen in the Francis is taken from him*". This chart was forwarded to the Admiralty and Hunter informed Their Lordships that he proposed another southern expedition.

Norfolk, a sloop rigged decked long boat, constructed from the wreck of *Sirius* at Norfolk Island, became available to Hunter. The vessel was provisioned for twelve weeks and an outfit of surveying instruments was embarked. The vessel was considered too small to be entrusted with a timekeeper. *Reliance* was again undergoing refit and her resources could be used for other purposes. Flinders, now being confirmed in his promotion to Lieutenant, was eligible to be appointed in command. Bass embarked, and with eight seamen from *Reliance*, the vessel sailed from Sydney in October 1798 in company with the snow *Nautilus*, Captain Bishop commanding. Hunter gave Flinders personal advice and issued detailed instructions. With the instruments available this would not be restricted to a running survey. Accurate positions ashore were to be observed, latitude with an artificial horizon, longitude by sets of lunars; magnetic variation was also to be recorded, either from theodolite or azimuth compass observations.

Headwinds off the south-east point of the continent forced the vessels to seek shelter in Twofold Bay, which had previously been entered by Bass in the whaleboat. Celestial observations were made, a baseline was measured, triangulation extended over the coastal features of the bay and rudimentary tidal observations made. Obvious dangers were examined. After five days fair winds allowed the vessels to depart for the south with the Furneaux Group again the destination. Flinders made good use of the azimuth compass and he strengthened the control he previously established in *Francis*.

Flinders returned to *Nautilus's* anchorage on 24th November "but a fair breeze springing up when abreast of it, instead of anchoring we made all sail to the west-south-west for Van Diemen's Land." (Flinders 1814) to continue the main purpose of the voyage; *Nautilus* remained in the Furneaux Group to establish a sealing industry.

Coasting westward Flinders discovered and named¹¹ Port Dalrymple and then surveyed that extensive estuary of what was to be named the Tamar River. The coast still tended west but on 9th December '*Mr Bass and myself hailed it [a long swell] with joy and mutual congratulation, as announcing the completion of our long-wished-for discovery of a passage into the Southern Indian Ocean*' (Flinders 1814), Van Diemen's Land was an island! Flinders sailed down the west coast of Van Diemen's Land, rounding South West Cape and South Cape and then sailing up the east coast. The Derwent River (previously discovered) and Norfolk Bay in the south-east and Oyster Bay on the east coast, were examined in more detail. *Norfolk* returned to Sydney, arriving in Port Jackson in early January 1799.

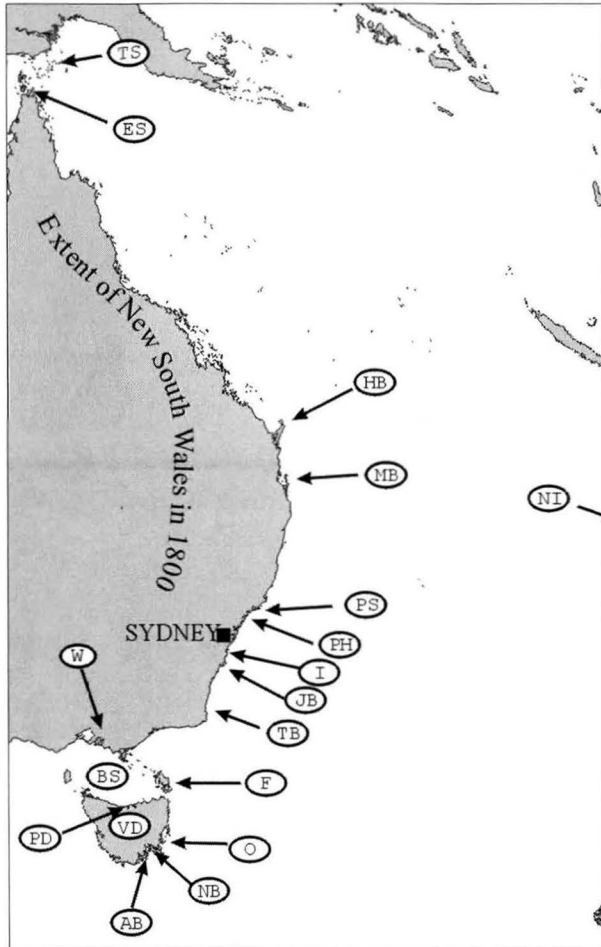
Hunter was delighted with the results. On Flinders' recommendation the Governor bestowed the name Bass Strait on the body of water that separated Van Diemen's Land from the continent. Hunter could envisage a shorter, safer, passage between the Cape of Good Hope and Sydney, even if it only gave a mariner the choice of either turning to the north or to the south when confronted with the unforgiving, iron bound west coast of what is now known as Tasmania. This survey, combined with the earlier Dutch discoveries on the northern, western and southern coasts of the continent, together with Cook's discoveries on the east coast, established the extent and general overall shape of the Great South Land.

In the present era of instant communication, it is sobering to think that Hunter had to wait until August 1799 before the charts and reports could be forwarded to London. The first ship available to transport these documents could even then only get them to the colony at the Cape. The chart "*A Chart of Basses Strait*" was published by Arrowsmith with the date June 1800.

11 In fact Flinders would recommend names to Governor Hunter, who, in naval fashion, as the "Charge Grade Surveyor" would either accept his "Assistant Surveyor's" proposal or substitute his own

North in the Norfolk

Reliance was still under refit and Flinders was directed by Hunter to take *Norfolk* north. The vessel was stored for six weeks, fitted out with instruments, and on this occasion carried a timekeeper. Flinders, accompanied by his brother Samuel, an Aborigine named Bungaree and with eight seamen from the *Reliance*, sailed from Port Jackson in July 1799.



Location Diagram

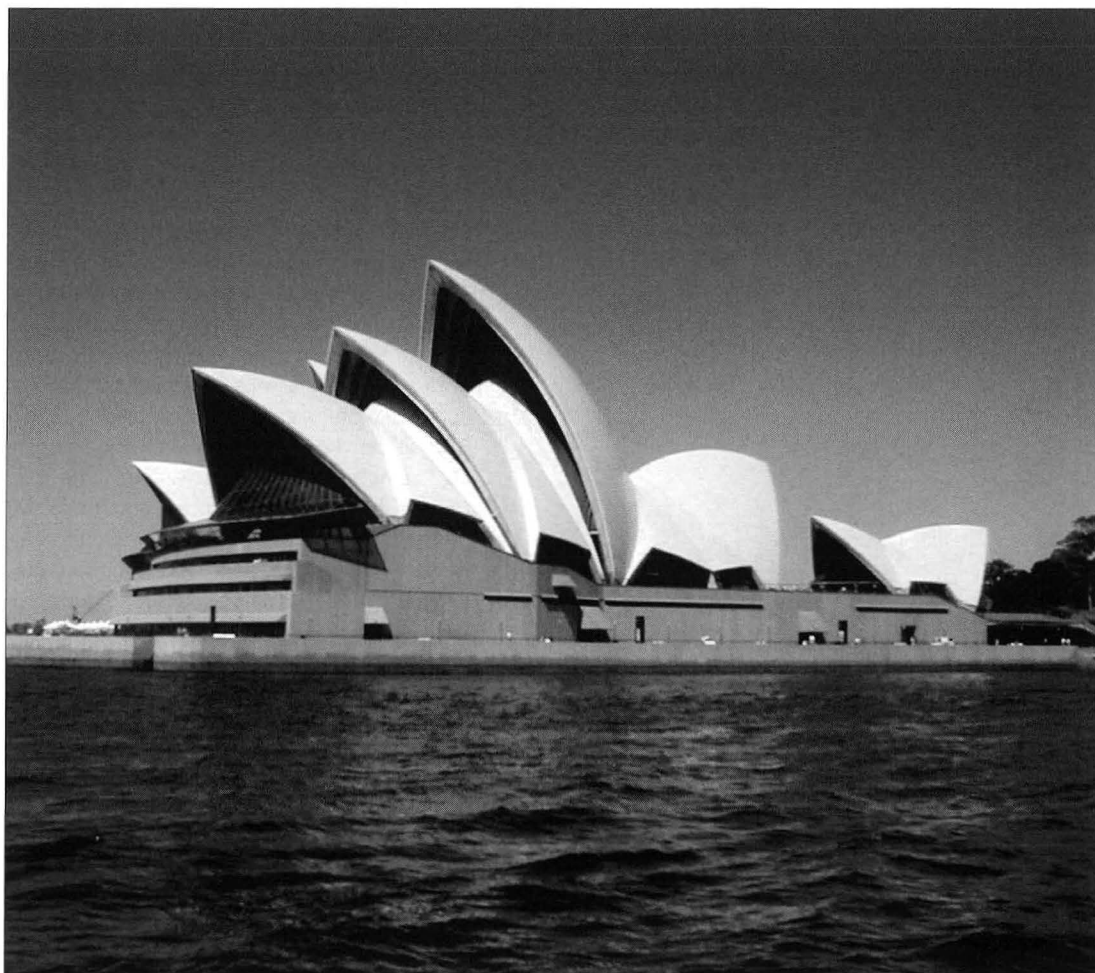
AB	Adventure Bay	NI	Norfolk Island
BS	Bass Strait	O	Oyster Harbour
ES	Endeavour Strait	PD	Port Dalrymple
F	Furneaux Group	PH	Port Hunter
HB	Hervey Bay	PS	Port Stephens
I	Illawarra	TS	Torres Strait
JB	Jervis Bay	TB	Twofold Bay
MB	Moreton Bay	VD	Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land)
NB	Norfolk Bay	W	Western Port

Coasting northward, Flinders checked and verified the detail charted previously by Cook in *Endeavour*. Although keeping close inshore, he failed to find any rivers. He even anchored in the estuary of what was initially called The Big River (now the Clarence River) but he failed to appreciate its significance, naming it Shoal Bay. He then spent over two weeks in the opening named by Cook as Glasshouse Bay. Flinders found it opened to the south and two offshore islands formed the extended bay. Flinders named this discovery Moreton Bay, relocating Cook's correct spelling of Morton to this extended feature. Again he failed to find what was to be called the Brisbane River in the south-western part of the bay, the site of the present city of Brisbane.

In early August he sailed for the opening named by Cook as Hervey's Bay. He spent five days delineating the coastline of the bay and returned to Port Jackson. He reported that no rivers of importance "intersected the east coast between 24th and 39th degrees of south latitude" (Flinders 1814). How wrong he was!

With the refit nearing completion, the Flinders brothers resumed their shipboard duties in *Reliance*. Flinders is not credited with any charting work within Port Jackson. However he had a continuing interest in refining the astronomical position of the observation spot on Cattle Point, a site at which British, Spanish and French explorers had or would take observations. Flinders narrative mentions some details of his observations conducted in 1795 and 1796, together with his later ones in 1802. Cattle Point was renamed Bennelong Point, and the site of the observation spot was subsumed within the construction site of the Sydney Opera House.¹²

12 King (King 1827) lists 13 sets of observations taken at, or reduced to, that spot up until 1822. These include the results of Hunter in 1788 and Bligh in 1806. King states that Flinders observed for latitude in 1795 and 1802, but observed for longitude in the years 1795, 1796 and in 1802



The Cattle Point of Matthew Flinders

Return to Great Britain

Reliance left Port Jackson in March 1800 to return to England via Cape Horn. On the voyage home Flinders prepared his charts for publication. He also began drafting a long letter to Sir Joseph Banks that in its introduction outlined the work that he, Flinders, had undertaken over the preceding five years and concluded with a plan on how future exploration of the southern continent should proceed. This letter was dispatched from Spithead in September 1800.

Delayed for some weeks at Spithead, *Reliance* finally arriving at Deptford on 7th October 1800 to be paid off, 5½ years after having sailed from Plymouth. The vessel was in very poor condition. Matthew Flinders had now passed his 26th birthday, 9 of which had been celebrated in, or approaching, southern waters.

Flinders first task was to lay his charts before the Admiralty. Since he had left London nearly 6 years earlier, the Hydrographical Office had been established and Alexander Dalrymple occupied the chair as Hydrographer. Dalrymple made arrangements to publish Flinders' data.

Three charts were to be published by Arrowsmith; firstly, a new edition of the June 1800 chart was pub-

lished as "A Chart of Bass's Strait Between New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land; Explored by MATTHEW FLINDERS 2nd Lieut. of his Majesty's Ship *Reliance*. By order of His Excellency GOVERNOR HUNTER 1798-9", the new chart "Chart of Part of the Coast of New South Wales, from Ram Head to Northumberland Isles, by M. Flinders etc" and the third chart was a sheet of four plans of Twofold Bay, Port Dalrymple, the southern part of the Furneaux Group and Bass's plan of Western Port. The three sheets were all published in February 1801, possibly only three months after the data was in the hands of the engravers. A 42 page memoir was produced to accompany these charts, the dedication of which is addressed to Sir Joseph Banks.

Continuing French Interest in New Holland

This paper on hydrographic matters has not addressed the fact that Great Britain was at war with France and Europe was ablaze. *Reliance* had to be escorted in convoy both from, and into, Home Waters on departure in 1795 and return in 1800.

Nicolas Baudin, a French national and naval officer, had commanded several scientific voyages. In 1798 he proposed to the Institut National in Paris that a scientific voyage to the South Pacific be undertaken. When Napoleon Bonaparte became First Consul, November 1799, the Institut put the proposal to him; he agreed. In June 1800 two ships were selected and re-named *Le Géographe* and *Le Naturaliste*.

In that month the French applied for a passport for the expedition from London. The English were officially alerted to the expedition. Commercial interests could be put at risk, the East India Company, based in London, having previously expelled the French from India, feared a renewed French presence in that hemisphere. Nelson's *Battle of the Nile* had been fought and won in 1798, but Napoleon was still threatening the Middle East. In 1800 the British forces in Egypt were being reinforced and the French garrison on Malta had surrendered. Although Britain controlled the sea route to India, a shorter Mediterranean/Middle East route was still under threat.

The instructions for the French expedition included an examination of the newly discovered Bass Strait, together with south, west, north-west and north coasts of New Holland and to include the western part of New Guinea. The expedition sailed from Le Havre in October 1800, the month that *Reliance* paid off.

Flinders' letter to Banks had been timely. With remarkable speed, the armed ship *Xenophon* was selected as the larger vessel for the British counter¹³ to the French expedition. Directions were given in November to slip and inspect the vessel. Built in 1795 she was reasonably new but she had been weakened in conversion from collier to armed vessel in 1798. The vessel was renamed *Investigator*.

The Choice of Commander

With the pending voyage of discovery to New South Wales the decision on who was to command became critical. Apart from Flinders, there were other candidates. Bligh again came into the picture. Bligh's track chart of 1799 in *Director* from Great Britain to St Helena had been published and at the end of 1800 Bligh was completing surveys of the harbours at Dublin and at Holyhead. He transferred from *Director* to *Glatton* in March 1801. Although only on that ship for a month, he distinguished himself at the *Battle of Copenhagen* fought on 2nd April 1801 and for which action Lord Nelson personally thanked him. The Admiralty would deem that Bligh was too senior for command of *Investigator*. Broughton was a strong con-

13 The British had already dispatched the specially designed *Lady Nelson* to New South Wales for survey and exploratory work; she would be available to accompany *Investigator*. If the two vessels were involved in the expedition, the rank of who commanded the expedition had to be considered. It had been intended that Matthew Flinders would take command of the *Lady Nelson* when it arrived in Sydney, but Flinders had already left the colony in *Reliance*.

tender for the posting. He had returned from the Pacific the year before and was writing his narrative and preparing his charts. Henry Waterhouse, Flinders' captain in the *Reliance*, now promoted, would have been a contender; John Shortland, the *Reliance's* First Lieutenant may well have been in the running¹⁴. However Sir Joseph Banks pressed Flinders' case. Flinders, on the 18th February, wrote to Banks that his commission to H.M.Sloop Investigator "came down here this morning, and for which, Sir Joseph, I feel myself entirely indebted to your influence and kindness" (Maiden 1909).

Flinders promotion to Commander and in command of *Investigator* at the early age of 27 was the cause of some resentment within the navy. Many thought there were more deserving of promotion in a 'wartime' navy. His mentor, Hunter, had to wait 20 years before promotion to Lieutenant, yet Flinders was now a Commander with only 10 years service, and then only with 2 years seniority as a Lieutenant!

His results and legacy are testament to his selection. This author, is certain that the right choice was made. Flinders had first hand experience in New Holland, from its southern extreme in *Norfolk* and its northern extreme in *Providence*. He had been tutored well by his mentors. Although some concern could be expressed about his health, in 1796 Bass had diagnosed a kidney complaint, he was young and capable of coping with the hardships ahead.

Marriage and Misadventure

For a number of years Flinders had been corresponding with Ann Chappelle (Retter & Sinclair 1999), a friend of his cousins, the Franklins, and who lived at Partney, a town within striking distance of his home in Donington. Ann was four years older than Matthew. The affair had extended over a number of years, commencing before *Reliance* sailed in 1795. During 1798, in *Francis* and *Norfolk*, Matthew had selected the names *Mount Chappell* and *Chappell Islands* for features in Bass Strait.

In December 1800 Matthew informed Ann that he was likely to get command of the forthcoming expedition but that she could not accompany him to New South Wales. To the distress of his father, Matthew spent that Christmas with the Chappelle family. His promotion to Commander was costly. He sold his grant of land in Sydney and the Court of the East India Company agreed to pay Table Money, this alleviated his immediate financial difficulties. In a letter dated 6th April he suggested that Ann accompany him in *Investigator*. Asking for an extension to his leave, he journeyed to Partney and married on 17th April 1801. His father was told of the event the following day. On return to London Ann lived onboard. This was a secret that could not be kept. Sir Joseph Banks, living on his estate only 10 miles from Partney, read of the marriage in the local paper. Ann's living arrangements onboard would be difficult to hide. Sir Joseph confronted Matthew on the matter by letter. Matthew admitted his intention of taking Ann to New South Wales in *Investigator*. He then wrote to the Admiralty, pleading his case for her to



The site of H. M. S. *Investigator's* grounding, 28th May 1801

¹⁴ John Shortland's shipboard duties as First Lieutenant would have been more demanding than Flinders. He did however conduct survey work in parallel with Flinders. Also using the Governor's whaleboat, Shortland, pursuing escapees, discovered and surveyed Port Hunter, north of Sydney. There he discovered coal, which then led to the establishment of a settlement to extract that mineral, the present Australian city of Newcastle

accompany him. This incident, for one so new in the rank, and inexperienced or uneducated, in the ways of the bureaucracy, had an adverse effect on his relationship with both Sir Joseph Banks and with the Admiralty.

Investigator sailed from The Nore in the early hours of 26th May with Ann embarked. After proceeding through The Downs, the pilot disembarked at Deal. As the ship worked its way south-west it grounded on an inshore tack on Roar Bank¹⁵, south of Hythe and 6 miles north-east of Dungeness, in the evening of 27th May. Matthew was below with his wife. The vessel refloated with the tide. After the subsequent slipping and underwater inspection *Investigator* was stated to be unharmed, the Navy Board would be unlikely to admit that their conversion had weakened the ship and Flinders would be at great pains to prove that he had not damaged it during the grounding. Flinders had learnt a lesson for on arrival at Spithead, he wrote informing the authorities that "Mrs. F. will return to her friends immediately that our sailing orders arrive" (Ingleton 1986). What disappointments the future held!

My Love Must Wait¹⁶

At 10.00AM, Saturday 18th July 1801, *Investigator* weighed and departed from Spithead with 88 men, a variety of livestock and with at least one cat¹⁷ embarked. The great voyage of discovery, and heartbreak, had begun.

Matthew Flinders was not to see England, or his wife, for another 9½ years.

References

- Auchmuty, J. J., 1966. 'John Hunter', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 1.
- Baker, S. J. , 1962. *My Own Destroyer, A Biography of Capt. Matthew Flinders R. N.*, Currawong Press, Sydney
- Blewitt, M., 1957. *Surveys of the Seas*, MacGibbon & Kee, Great Britain
- David, Andrew, 1997. *The Charts & Coastal Views of Captain Cook's Voyages, vol 3, The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776-1780*, The Hakluyt Society, London
- Flinders, M., 1814. *Voyage to Terra Australis*, vol 1&2, Nicol, London.
- Flinders, M., 1985. *A Biographical Tribute to the Memory of Trim, Isle de France, 1809*, John Ferguson Halstead Press Sydney.
- Gardiner-Garden, C.W.,1965. Observations on some of the Historical Aspects of the Prominent Geographical Features of Illawarra. [Paper to Illawarra Historical Society, 4th December 1952],,,Wollongong.
- Hill, E., 1941. *My Love Must Wait*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

15 Two contemporary charts showing differing detail of the area were available. *Investigator* was reputedly issued with the one that did not show Roar Bank. In 1803 Bligh re-surveyed the area in the brig *Swallow* confirming the position of the bank (Blewitt 1957)

16 The title of a novel based on the life of Matthew Flinders (Hill 1941). G. C. Ingleton suggested the title. These words particularly, and together with the story, captured the imagination of many of the tens of thousands of troops, both Australian and American, massing in Australia to prosecute the war in the South West Pacific, the book became an Australian best seller, the 1st edition going into many reprints

17 Trim, Flinders' cat, was from a litter born when *Reliance* was returning from the Cape Colony. The cat was Flinders' companion in *Reliance*, *Investigator*, *Porpoise* (there surviving shipwreck) and *Cumberland*, and finally in detention in Mauritius (Ile de France), where to Flinders great distress it was reputedly eaten. (Flinders, 1985)

Historical Records of New South Wales, vol 2.

Ingleton, G. C., 1986. *Matthew Flinders, Navigator and Chartmaker*, Guildford.

King, P. P., 1827. *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia performed between the Years 1818 and 1822, vol 2*, John Murray, London.

Maiden, J. H., 1909. *Sir Joseph Banks, Father of Australia*, Government Printer, Sydney.

Retter, C. & Sinclair, S., 1999. *Letters to Ann*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Ritchie, G. S., 1975. First Matthew Flinders Memorial Lecture, *Maritime Monographs and Reports, No 21-1975*, National Maritime Museum, London

Scott, E., 1914. *The Life of Captain Matthew Flinders, R. N.*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Smyth, Admiral W. H., 1867. *Sailors Word Book*.

Biography

Joe Doyle joined his first survey ship of the Royal Australian Navy's Hydrographic Service in 1958. Then followed 31 years in uniform and a further 11 years in the Nautical Information Section of the Australian Hydrographic Office, he retired in July 2000. He spent the majority of his naval career at sea, thus able to follow Matthew Flinders work around the Australian coast, and even as far as Mauritius. Joe is a Past President, and Fellow of the Australian Institute of Navigation and a Life Member of the Mapping Sciences Institute, Australia.