

# EARLY GOVERNORS AND EXPLORERS OF COLONIAL NSW and their impact on the settlement of the South Coast

## Part I: Phillip, Grose & Paterson (1788 -1795)

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### Introduction

The purpose of these papers is to give context to what was happening in colonial NSW in its first 40 years. Decisions made by governors in the years prior to 1800 had a big impact on what happened later on the South Coast. These colonial events, in turn, were heavily influenced by the international events of the time, especially wars involving Britain, France and Spain, trade wars with the Dutch, the jealousies between the British Admiralty and military, and the immense scientific enquiry occurring throughout Europe in the eighteenth century.

Many names, especially those of governors and explorers may be well-known to us from our school days, but the inter-connections between them are often not known, nor are the bureaucratic problems that they encountered in trying to make the early colony a success.

Many questions also arise in our minds when we read histories of these times: Why do we say Cook discovered Australia when at least 50 European ships had been here before him? Why did it take 18 years between Cook's discovery of the east coast and the establishment of a colony at Port Jackson? What was the fate of the *Endeavour*? Why was Joseph Banks better known in his time than Captain Cook? Why did Bass and Flinders use such tiny boats to explore the South Coast? Why could someone get 200 lashes just for stealing a biscuit? Who were the first Europeans to walk through this area? What is the connection between the mutiny on the *Bounty* and the establishment of Tasmania's apple industry? When was the name "Australia" first used? How did we almost become a French colony? Why do we call our parrots "rosellas"? How did *Robinson Crusoe* help complete the map of Australia? And what part did Napoleon Bonaparte have in the story of Australia?

### BEFORE 1788: COOK & BANKS

Captain James Cook never held the naval rank of Captain. He had gained the rank of Lieutenant at the very young age of 39, having established himself as a master cartographer and navigator in the wars against the French in Canada. For his sheer skill, he was tasked with helping the British navy achieve what had eluded every seafaring nation: the determination of longitude by comparing two chronometers on board, and observing the transit of Venus in Tahiti. Cook then opened sealed orders directing him to try to find the great south land, long suspected to be part of New Holland whose coast the English and Dutch had both partially mapped a century earlier. His voyage in the *Endeavour* was largely sponsored by the wealthy Joseph Banks who had a keen interest in natural history, especially botany. *H.M. Barque Endeavour*, a former collier, was chosen not just for its stability and

shallow draft, but for storage of the masses of equipment Banks took with him for collecting his natural specimens.

The voyage (lasting 2 years and 10 months) was very successful, enabling Cook to accurately map the east coast of Australia, thus proving there was a large land mass here, not part of New Zealand or New Guinea, and to claim it as the British colony of New South Wales, though it would take years to become official. It was still not known, however, whether the east coast was part of the same land mass as New Holland, but Cook's accurate mapping of the east coast enabled him to claim "discovery" of it. The voyage was also very successful in establishing Joseph Banks as a pre-eminent botanist and scientist, as he unloaded over 3 500 specimens of plants and animals never seen before in England and Europe. He became the talk of Europe, while Cook was royally applauded but then almost forgotten.

Why? Past experiences had shown that colonies were expensive and difficult to maintain, as they caused friction with other nations and with native peoples. They had been kept for strategic military purposes, for trade and for the relocation of undesirables, but the financial cost was immense. When the American colonies rebelled, Britain's convicts (about 1 000 a year) had to be sent elsewhere. Old ships (hulks) moored in the river Thames soon became dangerously overcrowded, and, by the time of American independence (1776) other locations were needed. Britain tried Africa, where her enemies (the French and Dutch) also had colonies, but starvation and disease killed thousands of both convicts and settlers, causing a public outcry in Britain and the end of convict transportation to Africa.

Joseph Banks was now the accepted authority on the great south land, was frequently in the royal court and in parliament, and had suggested that Botany Bay (at a 7-month voyage from England) was ideal: the natives were either "friendly" or "cowardly"; the climate was like the French Riviera; lush vegetation would ensure crops would grow and supply timber; and there was plenty of fish and fresh water. Further, a convict colony here would probably be self-sustainable, costing Mother England little to maintain. There was some interest in his idea, but no action, until a midshipman with Cook aboard the *Endeavour* gave an even more glowing report in 1778: James Matra suggested that NSW would also provide an asylum for British loyalists from their harsh treatment in America, and they could restore their fortunes in a new place, which could also be a strategic naval base in the wars with France and Spain.

But the loyalists migrated to Canada, so settlement of NSW was shelved for another seven years, especially when (in 1784) a series of treaties with France and the Netherlands (The Peace of Paris) were signed, ending the fourth Anglo-Dutch War...at least for a time. France was forced to cede territories in Canada, and the Netherlands gave up territories in India and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). But Sir George Young revived Matra's plan in 1785 after the last attempted convict colony in southwest Africa failed, due to plague and famine. So, in 1786, NSW was finally declared a British Colony, and reported in King George III's speech to Parliament in January 1787.

Meanwhile, James Cook was promoted to the rank of Commander in 1771 and to the rank of Post-Captain (higher than Captain) in 1775, without ever having been a Captain. Cook was beaten to death in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in 1779 on his third voyage of discovery, but not in the *Endeavour*, which was one of 13 ships scuttled in 1778 by the British to block the harbour at Newport Rhode Island against the French. It remains there today, on the bottom of the harbour.

## THE FIRST FLEET

Following the King's 1787 speech, it was decided to send 7-800 convicts on 6 transports (private commercial ships, commissioned by the Crown) accompanied by 3 store ships and 2 naval ships, under the command of retired Captain Arthur Phillip – an exceptional organiser with an iron will but good people-management skills. During a year of preparation, in which Phillip repeatedly complained about the lack of provision for food and medicine, clothes for the convicts, ammunition and amouers to repair his marines' equipment, he also requested an advance party be allowed to precede the transports by 2-3 months. The constant rejection of his requests led to his disclaiming any responsibility should the settlement fail due to shortcomings in supplies and plans.

On 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1787, the First Fleet set out from Mother Bank, Isle of Wight, near Portsmouth, with Phillip on the flagship, the *Sirius*, and 10 other vessels accommodating 778 convicts (192 women and 586 men), 192 marines and Phillip's naval and civil staff. They took on fresh supplies at Rio de Janeiro, a Portuguese colony. *[In 1385, King John I of Portugal had signed a political alliance with England to resist a takeover by France and Spain. At over 630 years old, it is the oldest political alliance in the world. After more Spanish and French attempts in the 1600s, it was expanded in the 1703 Methuen Treaty that was a military and trade alliance between England and Portugal.]*

At the Cape of Good Hope, the First Fleet took on 500 head of stock (horses, cattle, sheep, pigs and goats) as Phillip transferred to the other naval ship, the *Supply*, hoping to land a month ahead of the rest for a reconnaissance of Botany Bay, but gales and variable winds got him there only one day ahead, on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1788.

And that wasn't his only problem. He soon found Botany Bay was not suitable at all, lacking fresh water and suitable soil for crops. In addition, 46 convicts had died of disease on the voyage and the marines made it clear they were not there to do any physical work (especially under a naval man). In addition, two French ships under Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de La Perouse, arrived off Botany Bay on 25<sup>th</sup> January, just days after the rest of the English fleet arrived there. Although England and France were officially no longer at war with each other (but would be again in 3 years' time), there were mutual suspicions about intentions for the area. On 21<sup>st</sup> January, Captains Arthur Phillip and John Hunter, with another officer, rowed three open boats 14km up the coast to Sydney Cove, to find what he called "the finest harbour in the world", and claim it as a British settlement, while a gale prevented the French vessels from entering Botany Bay.

Once the gale had passed, La Perouse's ships, *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe*, joined the English, anchoring on the north side of Botany Bay, near Bare Island. The crews established cordial conversation, during which the French commander told Phillip's second-in-command, Lieutenant Philip Gidley King, that they had been prevented by storms from landing on Norfolk Island en route to Botany Bay. Upon joining Phillip at Sydney Cove, King informed Phillip of this, so he sent King with 15 convicts, 7 free men and some marines to Norfolk Island aboard the *Sirius* to claim it before the French could get to it. They arrived at Norfolk Island on 6<sup>th</sup> March. Meanwhile, the English entertained, and delayed, the French in Botany Bay, where they stayed for several weeks, even establishing a vegetable garden, an observatory and a stockade there, and holding Catholic masses for both English and French. They stayed for 6 weeks before setting out for New Caledonia.

The cordiality between the French and English may have been due to several factors: the French ships were research ships, not heavy gun-boats; La Perouse had lost 12 men (including the captain of *L'Astrolabe*) who were attacked and killed in Navigator Islands (Samoa); the French were better provisioned; and there was no indication that the French were there to claim Terra Australis for France. Frenchman's Cove at La Perouse is named after the expedition's chaplain and naturalist, Fr Louis Receveur who died in February from wounds sustained in the Samoan attack. He was buried here, the second European to be buried in Australia, the first being Forby Sutherland from Cook's 1770 expedition, buried at Kurnell on the opposite Botany Bay headland. After La Perouse left Sydney, he was never seen again.

*[It wasn't until 1827, nearly 40 years later that parts of his two ships were found off Vanuatu by Irish Captain Dillon, and not until 1964 that the ships themselves were found. What happened to La Perouse and his crew remains a mystery. Fortunately for history, he had sent his journals, charts and letters in a British ship from the First Fleet, the Alexander, back to Europe where they were sent to Paris and published, just as the French Revolution was beginning. Interestingly, also, a 15 year-old Napoleon Bonaparte had applied to join the expedition, but had been rejected. How different world history would have been had he joined La Perouse and disappeared with him at sea!]*

Meanwhile, also in 1788, Lieutenant Commander William Bligh, on *HMS Bounty*, had been sent to Tahiti to get breadfruit plants. En route, he called in to Van Diemen's Land and spent two weeks amongst the aborigines there, having already been there with Cook on *HMS Resolution*. Before leaving, on 4<sup>th</sup> September, his botanist, David Nelson, planted apple and other fruit trees, and Bligh gave gifts to the natives. Less than 9 months later, on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1789, Bligh and 18 loyal crewmen were set adrift from the *Bounty*, as Fletcher Christian led a mutiny of those wanting to return to Tahiti where they had enjoyed an idyllic existence for 5 months. On June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1789, Bligh and his supporters reached Timor in the East Indies after a remarkable voyage of 6 500 km in an open boat.

### **CAPTAIN ARTHUR PHILLIP (first governor of NSW, 1788-1792)**

Arthur Phillip was a retired naval officer who had become a farmer after 30 years' service in the Royal Navy plus a term in the Portuguese Navy. Apart from himself, there was only one skilled farmer in Sydney in 1788, James Ruse, and only 12 convicts who had ever used a saw. Most convicts were not petty thieves but permanent professional criminals who refused to do any work, preferring instead to receive the lash. With poor soil, in which seed would not germinate, and rocks that broke pick handles and shovels, as well as little local knowledge of bush foods, it wasn't long before the colony was in starvation mode. The local timber was mostly useless for building as it was tough to cut and it warped easily. The four cows and two bulls strayed into the bush and weren't seen again for seven years, leaving the colony with no milk and no manure for the already-poor farming soil. Within 4 months, an outbreak of scurvy, caused by a poor diet, added to Phillip's problems. At one muster, 53 convicts went missing, suspected of escaping into the bush (to get to China, which was believed to be 150 miles away), or stowing away on ships returning to England or Batavia (now Jakarta). Trouble often occurred with the otherwise cordial natives, as convicts attempted to steal canoes to attempt escapes. Rationing of food had to be strict, and Phillip imposed them on himself as well, earning the respect of his staff and the convicts, but not of the marines who thought they

should get a lot more rations than the convicts even though, as soldiers, they also refused to do any manual work or even to supervise convicts. Severe penalties were exacted for stealing food.

As the first governor, Phillip was also the sole judge and law-giver, with absolute power in the colony. He had the assistance of soldiers, David Collins (given the title of Judge-Advocate), and Major Robert Ross (as Lieutenant-Governor), but the courts were staffed by marines and naval officers. Phillip constantly clashed with the marines' commander, Major Ross, who resented being given orders by a naval officer. After complaining to London about the lack of co-operation from Ross and the marines, Phillip was eventually allowed to establish a New South Wales Corps (sent out in 1791 on the Third Fleet) in place of the marines, but for three years he had little support from the military. He even had to establish NSW's first police force, the Night Watch (on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1789), from well-behaved convicts, as the marines refused to work at night. *[When the Third Fleet did arrive, with more convicts in appalling condition, he found the marine replacements were not much better than those he had. He was empowered to use the lash or even hanging for insubordinate soldiers, but he knew that a mutiny would be the end of the colony, so punishment was often being marooned on Pinchgut Rocks (today, Fort Denison), for both convicts and soldiers.]*

If Phillip had not had the foresight to leave England with nearly two years' supply of food, the colony would not have survived its first year. His establishment of a second settlement for farming at Rose Hill (Parramatta), under James Ruse, enabled a small harvest 11 months later, despite the fruit being attacked by parrots they had labelled "Rosehillers". Phillip, as both a farmer and governor, was keen to explore for more farmland; only 3 months after arrival he led an expedition to what is now Prospect, and in June, 1789, had Captain Watkin Tench lead an expedition west from Rose Hill, to discover the Nepean River (which Phillip named after Evan Nepean, undersecretary for the colonies). In 1791, he made the first land grants in the area.

The six private transports and two store ships had left soon after landing the convicts in Sydney; the *Sirius* had made one trip back to Africa for food, returning in May 1789 with four months' worth of provisions, but had then been wrecked on a reef near Norfolk Island; the *Supply* had been sent to Batavia for food; and, by mid-1789, Phillip had no ships at all left in Sydney. Many convicts died of starvation or disease, many more were too weak to work, and threats of the lash were having little effect on convicts or marines. On 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1790, Thomas Halford was given 200 lashes for stealing 3 pounds of potatoes, and William Lowe received 200 lashes for stealing a biscuit. The first criminal hanged in New South Wales was a 17 year-old convict, Thomas Barrett, for stealing food a month after arrival, on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1788.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1790, the *Lady Juliana*, the first vessel of the Second Fleet arrived after a voyage of 309 days, not with the anticipated two years of supplies, but with 222 female convicts and only the remnants of supplies salvaged from the wreck of the main supply ship, the *Guardian*. Dubbed "the floating brothel", the crewmen of this infamous ship had each been paired off with a female convict. In the next three weeks, more supplies did arrive, but so did 750 more convicts, although 267 had died on the voyage as well, and 500 of those who didn't were ravaged by scurvy and tropical diseases. These convicts, like those already in the colony, were not very useful in building the wharves needed for ships and buildings for the new colony. Nevertheless, Phillip drew up plans for a Sydney Town with streets 200 feet wide "placed to admit the free circulation of air"; and, by 1790, he

had housed all his officers and built barracks for the men, as well as granting land to emancipated convicts.

On 18th August, 1791, Lieut. Richard Bowen, in the transport *Atlantic*, entered and named Jervis Bay, after Admiral John Jervis, Earl St Vincent, the patron of Captain Horatio Nelson. These two were giving a combined French and Spanish fleet a hard time in the Mediterranean. Bowen saw Jervis Bay's potential as a naval base for the new colony. Later that month, captain Edward Edwards, on the *Pandora*, captured 14 of the *Bounty* mutineers in Timor, but *Pandora* had then been wrecked on the Barrier Reef, with 35 drowning, including 4 mutineers. Edwards took his longboats to Timor, finding 11 convicts who had escaped from Port Jackson in the governor's longboat in March, led by William and Mary Bryant, convicts from the First Fleet. They were imprisoned in the infamous Newgate Prison. [*Mary was pardoned and released in May, 1793, after her husband and two children died from their ordeal to Timor. She was 28*]. Meanwhile, Captain Bligh, having been honourably acquitted at a court martial for losing the *Bounty*, left London on *HMS Providence*, on his second attempt to transfer breadfruit from Tahiti to the West Indies. On board was a 17 year-old midshipman by the name of Matthew Flinders, learning well his seamanship from Bligh, who, himself, had learned from Lieutenant James Cook on *HMS Resolution*.

By September, 1791, the colony was in severe drought, so Phillip ordered "tanks" to be cut in the bed of the stream that was Sydney's water supply, giving it the name Tank Stream. More tanks had to be cut in March, 1792, to contain 8000 gallons of water, and people were forbidden to use it for other purposes.

Phillip also had a respectful and conciliatory attitude towards the aborigines, promising punishment for anyone who mistreated them. He tried to befriend them and learn from them, and this worked for some months, until, on 30th May, 1788, two rush cutters were speared by aborigines in reprisal for a stolen canoe. Even after he was himself speared in the shoulder at Manly, Phillip continued to try to get the aboriginal people on side, and both cultures to understand each other. He regarded the "Indians" or "natives", as they were called, as curious rather than hostile, and quite unlike those in any of the other colonies. He wanted to learn their language and customs as well as their survival techniques, unlike most of the governors who followed him. To that end, he captured and kept with him four aborigines, Arabanoo, Bennelong, Colbee and Yemmerrawannie, in an attempt at cultural exchange. Only Bennelong seemed interested in learning European ways, and he called Phillip "Beenena" (father). Colebee was always trying to escape, and eventually succeeded.

Ill-health forced Phillip to resign his governorship and to leave Sydney, with Yemmerrawannie, Bennelong, and two convicts whose sentences had expired, in December, 1792, after nearly five years in Sydney. He advised London that NSW would not work as a penal colony, but that free settlers with enterprise were needed urgently so that "this country will become the most valuable acquisition Great Britain has made". Port Jackson, he said, was already "the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line may ride in the most perfect security". As for the land, "fifty farmers would do more to render the colony independent than a thousand convicts", he wrote. However, the first free settlers would not arrive until 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1793, after Phillip's governorship. Back in England, he was made rear admiral in 1799, and admiral in 1814, though retired. He died three months later.

History regards Phillip as one of the best and most brilliant of the early governors – a man of principle and great skill, hampered by bureaucracy and by military incompetence and jealousies. In his five years as governor, he granted land totalling 3 000 acres to emancipated convicts and marines who showed initiative and drive. Those convicts who would work had a better life in the more fertile Parramatta settlement; those who were disruptive were sent to hard labour on Norfolk Island. He saw opportunities for convicts to rehabilitate, for others in England to start a prosperous new life, for Britain to strengthen its place in trade and as a sea power, and for a new era of relationships with native peoples.

### **The Colony's earliest historians**

Fortunately, skilled artists and journalists from the earliest days of the colony have also left us with interesting records that we can compare with official accounts, most notably those of Watkin Tench, one of Phillip's officers, who graphically described the difficulties of early colonial life, as well as the exploration of lands around Sydney. He was fascinated with both the Australian bush and its native people, as well as the land to the north, south and west of Sydney. Did the Hawkesbury/Nepean River start in the Blue Mountains? What lay beyond the Blue Mountains? Was this eastern Terra Australis connected to the western New Holland, or was there a sea between them? Would Norfolk Island and New Zealand provide the flax for the sails and ropes, and the wood for the masts, of Britain's ships? Was Van Diemen's Land an island or part of Terra Australis? Watkin Tench returned to England a year before Phillip left Sydney, but he wanted answers to these questions... and so did Sir Joseph Banks, back in London.

A friend of Tench, and fellow military man, Lieutenant William Dawes also left detailed records of life in the early colony, and was also keen on exploration of areas around Sydney. Together, their notes became the basis of the first three books published on NSW, revealing a perceptive and literary account, as opposed to the required dispassionate accounts by the governor, that make up the official records. In addition, John White, the chief surgeon of the First Fleet, recorded the first impressions of the natural history of NSW, in specimens, drawings and descriptions of plant and animal life. He received a land grant (at Petersham) and died in Parramatta in 1837, after producing his first book and with a second in preparation.

### **MAJOR FRANCIS GROSE (lieutenant-governor of NSW, 1792-1794)**

In contrast with Phillip's strength and determination, the second governor has been judged to be weak and vacillating, willing to sacrifice principle for popularity, as he became more of a tool of the NSW Corps than its leader.

The Third Fleet had arrived in 1791 with the NSW Corps to replace the marines. Major Francis Grose, already in the colony with the marines, was put in charge of them by Governor Phillip in February, 1792, and he was made Lieutenant-Governor of the colony on 11<sup>th</sup> December with Phillip's departure. In his first week, he reduced rations to convicts. Within a month, he suspended the sittings of the justices of the peace, bringing everything under the jurisdiction of the military court. Despite the colony constantly being on the verge of starvation, Grose refused to buy goods from an American ship in case it upset the NSW Corps' monopoly on British shipping.

The first free settlers, requested by Phillip, arrived in the colony in February, 1793, with a free passage, a grant of land, tools from the public store, two years' provisions and the service of two convicts whose food and clothing was supplied. They consisted of four farmers and their families, a gardener, a baker, a mill-wright and a blacksmith. The families settled at Liberty Plains (near Homebush). Grose did grant a further 15 000 acres of land, but mostly to officers of the NSW Corps, including 100 acres to Lieut. John Macarthur at Parramatta, though he was not entitled to do so. These officers controlled trade by forming a body which compelled settlers to sell them goods at low prices, which were then on-sold to the government stores at much higher prices, netting the officers a handsome profit. They maintained this control by issuing permits for access to government stores and cancelling them if they wished. Aiding and abetting them in this, Grose abolished the jurisdiction of the magistrates and gave their power to senior military officers.

Grose's intention was to grow the colony by creating a class of rich people who could pay high wages to entice convicts to work the land. He established a settlement of 22 settlers on the Hawkesbury River, and within a year it had extended to 40 km on both sides, with a population of 400. But he dismissed their concerns about flooding, only for their crops to be destroyed by an 8m high flood, within a year. He abandoned government farming and control of imports in order to encourage private farming and merchant trade, but the shortage of coinage allowed rum and other spirits to become the currency, and these were under the control of the NSW Corps. The Corps managed to squeeze 52 of the 73 free settlers off their land holdings by their permit system and by their control of rum, giving them the nickname, the Rum Corps. In order to appease his military, Grose did little to control their power. He appointed Lieutenant John Macarthur as inspector of public works, increased weekly rations to the NSW Corps, and improved their housing. Meanwhile, on Norfolk Island, Captain King quelled a mutiny of soldiers and convicts on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1794; but, instead of commending him, Governor Grose castigated King for disarming his military men there. In Sydney Town, the morals of the colony deteriorated as rum proliferated and the NSW Corps told the governor what to do. Free settlers wrote back to London demanding not only a new governor, but also an end to the Rum Corps' control of the colony. Captain John Hunter, back in London, was given the commission as NSW Governor; Grose was stood down in December, 1794; and Captain William Paterson was asked to be administrator of the colony in the interim.

### **CAPTAIN WILLIAM PATERSON (lieutenant-governor of NSW, 1794-1795)**

Paterson knew he was just a stand-in for 9 months, until Governor Hunter could arrive in September 1795, so he had little drive or inclination to make any improvements. As a result, the officers of the NSW Corps increased their power and control in the colony. Paterson did recognise the need for expansion and allowed Henry Hacking and two companions to search for a way across the Blue Mountains. They failed, but, in November 1795, found the missing cattle from 1788, now numbering over 100 and thriving in the Camden area, so they reported on this potential farming land to the south-west of Sydney, which Governor Hunter would name Cowpastures. Meanwhile, Paterson seemed powerless to stop increasing numbers of convicts escaping on visiting ships, absconding into the bush and stirring up trouble with aborigines. Upon Hunter's arrival as governor, Paterson was, however, left in charge of the NSW Corps, as he had not participated in the trade of spirits at all. He left for England on sick leave in 1796, but was ordered to return in 1799.

## Part II: Hunter, Bass and Flinders

[Presented to GDHS on 26th August, 2017]

### **CAPTAIN JOHN HUNTER (governor of NSW, 1795-1800)**

John Hunter was a sound choice as governor of a colony in turmoil. He had been an officer in Phillip's First Fleet, and he had made the first chart of Sydney Harbour, as well as doing the surveys of Botany Bay and Broken Bay. He had left the colony, along with Phillip and Bennelong in 1792, providing valuable information about NSW to the Colonial Office in London. Hunter returned to Sydney in 1795, aboard the *Reliance*, along with Bennelong who could not learn to live as a white man in London, sick in body and homesick for his people; Yemmerawannie had died in England. On the voyage out here, Bennelong was still very ill and was treated by the ship's surgeon. That surgeon was George Bass, aged 24, who used his time tending Bennelong to learn from his aboriginal patient some of the language of the Sydney natives. He was also accompanied by William Martin, (a young boy of 14 or 15, described as Bass's "servant") and a young lieutenant, Matthew Flinders, aged 21.

Upon arrival in Port Jackson, on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1795, Hunter was horrified to find that, in the three years since Phillip's governorship, the NSW Corps had vastly increased the prices of everything in the colony, since they controlled all trade. In 1795, the population of the colony was 3 211, of whom 59% were convicts. The remaining 41% were military, administrators, a few free settlers and some emancipated convicts. With no way of controlling the NSW Corps and the merchants in league with them, illegal land-grabbing would increase under Hunter's governorship a further 28 650 acres. But, on arrival, he immediately restored the power of the civil magistrates that Grose had suspended, putting himself, as governor, at loggerheads with the military, once more. To reduce the NSW Corps' monopoly on trade, Hunter encouraged independent free traders to move to the colony. The first was Robert Campbell, a Scottish trader who had a successful business with his brother in India from 1790. Hunter gave him land at Dawes Point. To reduce the Corps' control of rum and other spirits, Hunter also ordered an end to distilling and trading in spirits by Corps officers.

Having worked closely with Governor Arthur Phillip, Hunter decided to continue his policies of exploration and encouragement of convicts to make productive farms at the end of their sentences, thus opening up the Newcastle and Wollongong districts for exploration and farming.

### **Bass and Flinders**

Hunter also sent Bass and Flinders on their voyages of exploration further down the coast, having learnt on their voyage out here that they were keen adventurers – Bass having an intense interest in nature, and Flinders being an excellent cartographer. Both were also keen to know whether Van Diemen's Land was an island or not. Bass was a surgeon and Flinders had served on the *Providence*, 1791-93, with William Bligh, and on the *Belerophon* in 1794 against the French. *[His intense sense of adventure at sea began as a child, reading Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (published in 1719), based on the true story of Alexander Selkirk, marooned off Chile in 1704, and rescued in 1709 by William Dampier. Now Flinders was living his dream.]*

Bass had even brought his own small boat – *Tom Thumb* (about 3m long in the keel and 1.5m wide) – and within weeks of landing in Sydney he convinced Hunter to let him explore south of Port Jackson. With Bass and Flinders was a boy (14 or 15 years old) named William Martin, who was a “loblolly boy” – an assistant to a surgeon in feeding the sick and cleaning up the messes of surgery. They sailed into Botany Bay and up the first 30km of the George’s River, finding the surrounding countryside very fertile. Hunter was delighted, and founded a satellite colony there, naming it after Joseph Banks – Banks Town.

Five months later, Hunter sent the same three further south, as the coast between Botany Bay and Jervis Bay was known only from what had been charted from the *Endeavour* and the *Sirius* at sea. This time it was in a slightly larger boat, also named *Tom Thumb* (about 5m long and 1.7m wide) – both boats were yawls, but the second *Tom Thumb* was built in Sydney at Campbell’s Cove. [They were not called I and II at the time; that came later, to distinguish between the two boats and their voyages]. Because of attempts by convicts to escape by boat to sea, the governor had decreed that only boats shorter than 5m could be built in the colony; the larger existing ships were guarded by marines. So, in yet another small boat, and with ten days’ provisions and two muskets, they set out on a mission to explore a large river reported by Henry Hacking, quartermaster of the *Sirius*, just south of Botany Bay.

Flinders, of course, kept detailed journals and maps. The trio wanted to spend the first night in Botany Bay, but strong winds pushed them much further south and they had to spend the night in the boat. Next morning, as they tried to make fast, the boat capsized and they got swept into a “bending in the coast” probably (Bulli Beach) through an undertow, losing some equipment, and were forced to keep bailing out sea water while spending another night in the boat. Impressed with young William’s successful bailing efforts, Bass and Flinders named the area “Martin’s Isles”, and one of the islands “Martin Islet” on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1796. They are now known now as Five Islands.

Out of fresh water (the water had been stored in a used wine barrel and had gone off, and they were just relying on five water melons), they steered *Tom Thumb* into the shore (probably the south shore of Towradgi Point) as two aborigines appeared out of the bush, calling in the Sydney aboriginal language. Although Flinders suspected they could be cannibals, they were armed only with fishing spears, and Bass was a very adept learner of the language (he was also fluent in Spanish and Latin), so he could converse in basic phrases. They swapped two handkerchiefs and some potatoes for fresh water and two fish, and, to show amicability, Flinders cut their hair and beards with a pair of scissors. Using hand signs as well, they indicated their need for more water, and the aborigines pointed south.

Bass and Flinders headed south for 6km, with the two extra passengers, until they came to a lagoon which they named “Tom Thumb’s Lagoon” (Lake Illawarra) and the entrance to it “Canoe River”. [It is likely this is **not** the small area near Port Kembla now called *Tom Thumb Lagoon*]. Their clothes were soaked, Bass was badly sunburnt and blistered, the rods of their muskets were rusted in their barrels, and only one powder horn was dry. They were wary of the twenty or so other aborigines who had appeared as they landed, but the two friendly ones showed the effects of the haircuts and persuaded Flinders to do the same for another dozen or so, while Banks tried to dry the powder, repair an oar and get the wet sand out of the guns. At one point, it seemed the aborigines were trying to distract them away from the boat and equipment, Flinders expecting they were trying to

take it, and Bass was forced to fire the only working musket to keep them at a distance. Once more, they spent the night in the boat for their safety's sake.

The next day, 28<sup>th</sup> March, with a favourable breeze and some rowing, they ventured further south until they could land at a small beach and sleep on shore for the first time, as well as cooking some food (probably near Bellambi Point). As they set out in the afternoon, a violent thunderstorm sent them hurtling down the coast until they could pull into and anchor in a cove, which they called Providential Cove, "but by the natives it is called Watta Mowlee" (now Wattamolla). Once the storm had gone, they headed north until, finally, they reached Port Hacking, their intended destination. Here, they tried to fish but were bothered by sharks, so they went ashore once more and were met by two friendly aborigines. After a night being bothered by mosquitoes, they explored Port Hacking next day, decided it was too full of shoals to be good for shipping, and left the next morning for Sydney, to report to Governor Hunter.

### **The wreck of the *Sydney Cove* in 1797**

Because of the difficulty of getting reliable supplies of food and equipment to NSW from Britain and Cape of Good Hope, the British Government, in 1790, allowed the colonial governor to get supplies from India. The government store-ship *Atlantic* left Sydney in October 1791 for Calcutta and returned with supplies next June. The first private vessel to bring supplies from India to Port Jackson was the *Shah Hormuzier* in February, 1793, followed by four other ships before 1796.

The 250 ton wooden merchant ship, *Sydney Cove*, from the merchant house of Campbell & Clark in Calcutta, left Bengal in November, 1796, under Captain Gavin (Guy) Hamilton, with 53 crew (8 Europeans and 22 lascars), with 7 000 gallons of alcohol as well as rice, sugar, tobacco, salted meat, tea, livestock and other goods. For two months, they were battered by severe storms which killed some crew and eventually wrecked the ship in Bass Strait on 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1797, at what they later called Preservation Island, in the Furneaux Islands. Here they were able to salvage most of the cargo. Hamilton ordered a party of 17 to take the longboat, which was still in fair condition, 800km up the coast to Port Jackson for help. After about 160km, the longboat was wrecked, off the mainland near Cape Everard in eastern Victoria (probably also what Cook had called Point Hicks), and on 15<sup>th</sup> March they started trekking up the coast, building rafts to cross rivers (including the Snowy), wading through swamps and hacking through dense bush, assisted occasionally by friendly aborigines who fed them fish.

One of their number, supercargo William Clark, kept a diary of their ordeal. By 16<sup>th</sup> April, a month after starting out, 9 of the 17 were now very frail and had to be left behind as the six others continued on, starving, dehydrated, injured and nearly exhausted. Just south of Jervis Bay, they were attacked by more than 100 aborigines, and three were speared. By 30<sup>th</sup> April, they reached Shoalhaven River where they were helped by six friendly aborigines. On 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1797, they thrashed their way, ragged and barefoot, through the bush and along Seven Mile Beach, over Black Head (Gerroa headland), then through Gerringong and Kiama - the first Europeans ever to walk through the area. For the next two weeks, they struggled up the Illawarra escarpment, as one more died. They found coal at Coalcliff, and used their musket flints to burn it for warmth and cooking. On 15<sup>th</sup> May, 62 days after the wreck in Bass Strait, only Clark and two others were picked up in a small fishing boat off Wattamolla, 20 km south of Botany Bay; the other three had been too weak even to crawl, and had to be left in the bush.

On hearing the news, Governor Hunter immediately despatched a crew in a whaleboat to find and rescue these three – unsuccessfully, as only bloodied clothing and remains were found. He also sent Flinders on the schooner, *Francis*, accompanied by a decked longboat, the *Eliza*, to rescue Hamilton and the other survivors in Bass Strait, which he did. A few survivors were left to guard the rescued cargo, but the longboat, the *Eliza*, got separated from the *Francis* and disappeared on the return to Sydney. Hamilton died in Sydney shortly after, on 20<sup>th</sup> June. Bass, who had gone with the *Reliance* and the *Supply* to buy livestock for the colony from South Africa, returned to Port Jackson just 6 days after this, and heard the report of coal in the area. Once the remaining two survivors had recovered, Bass went with them, on 5<sup>th</sup> August, in Hunter’s own whaleboat, to find it. *[The venture to find the Sydney Cove itself was unsuccessful; the wreck was not found until 1977, 170 years later, by amateur divers, and it has been declared an historic wreck site].*

It was on this trip that Bass became the first to describe Kiama’s blowhole. He returned after eight days with coal samples and reports of its abundance at Coalcliff. He also described how different the vegetation was here, compared with around Sydney, especially “*cabbage trees nearly in resemblance of plantain but yet a true cabbage...for it is to distant appearance a cabbage, but upon a close inspection the leaves are found to be a fern*”. Earlier settlers had cut down all cabbage trees within 12 miles of Sydney in the first 3 months of settlement, to make houses, before Bass arrived. He had here described the tree that is the meaning of “Dharawal” and the origin of “Thirroul”.

The wreck story also convinced Bass that Van Diemen’s Land was an island, and asked Hunter for permission to explore and prove it. If true, it would cut days, even weeks, off easterly voyages to NSW from Africa. Hunter gave him an open 8.7m long whaleboat, built in Sydney from banksia and cedar. *[Unlike the two Tom Thumbs, whale boats had pointed bows and sterns, and could accommodate 6-8 rowers.]* With 6 volunteers and 6 weeks provisions, he left Port Jackson on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1797. In the next 11 weeks, he travelled over 1900 km, found the Shoalhaven River, and went down the coast to Wilson’s Promontory and Western Port, deducing from the huge swells and currents that it was, indeed, a strait. But he had to wait until 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1798, to set out with Flinders on the 25-ton sloop, *Norfolk* (built on Norfolk Is.), to circumnavigate Tasmania, chart its coastline and thus prove it was, in fact, an island. *[It should be remembered that what we today call Tasmania and Victoria were regarded as all part of the colony of New South Wales in the 1700s – as was New Zealand until 1841 - and, therefore, the NSW governor had jurisdiction over all of them.]*

Meanwhile, Flinders returned from Bass Strait to Sydney, in February 1798, with the remains of the stores left by the wreck of the *Sydney Cove*, including a supply of spirits and rice, and an animal that the natives “have called a Wom-Bat”. He noted that the survivors lived chiefly on wombats and fish on Preservation Island. George Bass, as a surgeon, was keen to explore the anatomy of this new animal, and wrote a detailed paper on it for Sir Joseph Banks (awarded a knighthood in 1795) who recommended Bass be made a Fellow of the Linnaean Society.

### **What became of Bass and Flinders?**

In June of 1796, George Bass had also made an attempt to cross the Blue Mountains by a south-west route, at times using grappling hooks and climbing irons to scale cliffs. After 15 days, he admitted defeat. The long explorations of the south coast of NSW, Victoria and Tasmania by Bass and Flinders were their last together. From here on, Bass and Flinders led separate lives in the colony. Bass was tired of poor pay and wanted to become a trader. The *Reliance* was docked in Sydney undergoing

massive repairs, under Flinders' watchful eye, when, in 1799, Bass decided not to wait for its repair, but to join Charles Bishop, a successful trader who had arrived in Sydney aboard the *Nautilus*. The two sailed to India and the Dutch East Indies, trading there, selling the *Nautilus*, buying other ships and returning to Sydney in 1801, only to find no market for their goods because of the control of trade by the NSW Corps and the oversupply of goods from the many traders now realising opportunities in the colony. In 1803, he set out on his ship the *Venus*, for Tahiti, and perhaps Chile, to buy salted pork for the colony. He was never seen again. There were some unsubstantiated stories that he was captured by the Spanish in Chile where he was put to work in the mines, but this is unlikely. In January, 1806, the Admiralty officially listed him as "lost at sea".

Matthew Flinders went back to England with Hunter, in 1800, at the end of his governorship. Almost immediately, Sir Joseph Banks sent him back to complete the map of Australia by circumnavigating it, and to determine whether New Holland and New South Wales were part of the same land mass. He set out in the *Investigator*, without his new wife (by order of the Admiralty), now still aged only 26, but had to repair the old ship in Cape Town in November, 1801. He then encountered French explorer, Nicolas Baudin, in *Le Geographe*, looking for its sister-ship *Le Naturaliste*, which had become separated in a gale off South Australia. Flinders thus called this part of the coastline Encounter Bay. The two explorers amiably compared maps and notes (after all, their two countries were no longer at war), thus giving both French and English names to parts of the coast, including Flinders' naming of St Vincent's Gulf after Admiral John Jervis, and also Kangaroo Island.

In 1802-3, Flinders, again in the *Investigator*, sailed through Torres Strait and into the Gulf of Carpentaria, thus completing the map of Australia's coastline, and proving that Dutch New Holland and British NSW were all part of one continent. He left NSW with his completed maps for Sir Joseph Banks, in a small schooner, the *Cumberland*, calling into Mauritius en route. Here, the governor, General Charles-Mathieu-Isadore Decaen, told him that Britain and France were once more at war with each other (since Britain had declared war on Napoleon after he tried to have European countries blockade Britain), and that Baudin had called into Mauritius three months earlier but had died of tuberculosis, on 16th September, 1803. Flinders was, therefore, Decaen's prisoner. *[Decaen's failure to return the hospitality shown by the English to the French in Sydney appears to be due to his suspicions that Flinders was a spy – arriving in a different ship from that stated in his papers (Cumberland, instead of Investigator) and having read Francois Peron's report recommending an attack on Port Jackson.]*

Flinders was incarcerated for more than six years here, allowing Baudin's 200 000 collected specimens to get to France on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1804, together with his maps and journals to be published ahead of Flinders' charts. Flinders was not released until 1810, on orders from Napoleon Bonaparte, who was impressed with the work that Baudin and Flinders had done, together and separately, in mapping the southern continent, yet who was also angry that Baudin had not claimed parts of Australia for France. It had taken 196 years to finish mapping Australia's coast. So, the first completed map published was that (allegedly) done by Louis de Freycinet, one of Baudin's lieutenants and commander of the *Casuarina* (a ship bought from Governor King by Baudin during a long stay in Sydney, in late 1802).

Prematurely aged by the ordeal of his nearly seven-year incarceration on Mauritius (and even losing his beloved cat, Trim, presumed eaten by island slaves), Flinders arrived, sick in mind and body

(though aged only 40) back in England to publish his monumental account of his travels and explorations. The first copy of *A Voyage to Terra Australis* came off the presses on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1814, and was rushed to his home where his wife placed it into his hands. He was unconscious, and died the next day. But in his book, across the completed map of the combined New Holland and New South Wales he had labelled the whole island “Australia”, just as he had referred to it in his letters to Sir Joseph Banks since 1804. [*Banks preferred the name Terra Australis, and it wasn't until Governor Macquarie started using “Australia” in correspondence, in 1817, that it was accepted in England*].

### **Hunter's Governorship**

The difficulties facing Hunter in NSW were compounded by the tensions and wars back in Europe. Increasing numbers of Irish convicts, transported here for insurrection, were stirring up religious tensions among settlers. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1796, convict transport *Marquis Cornwallis* arrived with 233 Irish convicts, having survived a planned mutiny, abetted by the draftees of the NSW Corps aboard. The leaders had been put in chains, and a sergeant and six others had died from wounds in the fight. In 1798, French forces invaded Ireland to assist the Irish rebellion against England and the Irish loyalists. The rebellion failed, leading to the Act of Union, and creating the United Kingdom in 1801, but also creating further ill-will within groups of convicts, military and settlers. It took its toll on Hunter who asked to be relieved of his governorship in 1799, but whose departure for England was delayed for six months as he was too ill to travel. When he did leave, aboard *HMS Buffalo*, on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1800, he was given a full military send-off. On board with him was a box of wool from John Macarthur's flocks for Sir Joseph Banks' inspection. There were 6 000 sheep in the colony but only a few merinos; still, there was hope for a permanent and sustainable wool industry.

Under Hunter's governorship, the colony's migrant population had doubled, the production of wheat had made NSW largely self-supporting, the wool trade had begun, and the first consignment of cedar to India was sent on the *Experiment* in 1795. At the end of his commission, in 1800, there were 59 free settlers to every 49 convicts in NSW. As a penal colony it relied on convict labour, and Hunter's decision to send the worst of the convicts to work the lime pits and coal mines around Newcastle had allowed the beginning of an export market in coal, as well.

### **CONCLUSION**

By 1800, the penal settlement had become a largely self-supporting colony, with free settlers outnumbering convicts; the whole continent had been renamed “Australia”; the wheat, wool, cedar and coal industries had begun; the entire NSW coastline south of Sydney had been mapped; Lake Illawarra had been partially explored; and the first Europeans had walked on Seven Mile Beach, across Gerroa and through Gerringong.

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