

CHAPTER 19

# TOWARDS AUSTRALIA:

## THE COMING OF THE EUROPEANS 1400 to 1788

ALAN FROST

IN THE 1770s, as the maritime nations of Europe seemed on the verge of a global war for the great prizes of trade and territory, and as Captain James Cook's voyages were opening new prospects in and about the Pacific Ocean, the Abbé Raynal began his striking work on the history of European expansion with the observation that

No event[s have] been so interesting to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the New World, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope ... [They have given rise] to a revolution in the commerce, and in the power of nations; and in the manners, industry, and government of the whole world.



### THE PORTUGUESE EXPANSION

Central to modern history, this imperial expansion began in the early decades of the fifteenth century, when Prince Henry of Portugal ('the Navigator') sent ships to reconnoitre the Atlantic islands and the coasts of Africa.

Precisely why the Portuguese began this expansion remains obscure. They were helped by a tradition of moving by sea around the coasts of a mountainous country, developments in technology giving rise to ships capable of sailing open seas and a location at the southwestern edge of Europe, adjacent to Africa and the wind and current systems of the Atlantic Ocean. But these factors do not explain the impulse behind the expansion. For this we must look to less tangible forces such as the desire of noblemen to increase their estates or find satisfying work for their followers and the desire, to the fore in the capture of Ceuta in 1415, to defeat the militant enemies of Christ.

No matter how important the crusading motive was at first, it faded as expansion developed. Trade with the Venetians and centuries of close contact with the Moors of north Africa had given the Portuguese and Spanish a taste for the cloths, spices,

*Cape St Vincent, the end of Europe for seamen, where Prince Henry directed the remarkable Portuguese seafaring exploits.*

A. FROST



*Stone compass rose at Sagres, over 55 m across, with 43 spokes at irregular intervals. Precisely how Prince Henry and his captains used this to aid their navigation is unknown.*

A. FROST



*Form of cross erected by Portuguese captains at each furthest point of return. This survivor was raised by Diogo Cão at Cape Cross, southwest Africa, in 1486.*

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jewels, precious metals and slaves to be obtained from distant parts of the world. Increasingly, the Portuguese struck outwards in the fifteenth century to obtain direct access to the riches of Marco Polo's East.

Besides images of wealth to be gained in the East, contact with the Moors had given the Iberians the means of getting there. In the early fifteenth century, Arab geographers knew what informed European opinion only guessed: that there was an end to Africa, and therefore a sea route to India. And in north Africa and Moorish Spain there were mathematicians and astronomers who could determine latitude well enough to provide a basis for purposeful ocean navigation.

After the capture of Ceuta, Prince Henry turned to maritime exploration. In 1418 and 1419 he had his sailors examine the Canary Islands and Madeira, and ten years later, the Azores. In the 1420s he placed settlers on Madeira and the Azores. His captains, sent down the west coast of Africa, reached Cape Bojador by the mid-1430s. Henry's base was at Sagres, the small port at the southwestern edge of Portugal. There, beside the towering escarpments of Cape St Vincent, more truly the end of Europe than Finisterre, he brooded on his destiny to reveal secret things and pushed his captains further. In 1441 they reached Cape Blanco, bringing back slaves and gold. These gains encouraged further ventures. By 1448 the Portuguese had arrived at Guinea. In the 1450s they extended colonisation of the Azores. In 1456 they found the Cape Verde Islands and explored the coast of Sierra Leone.

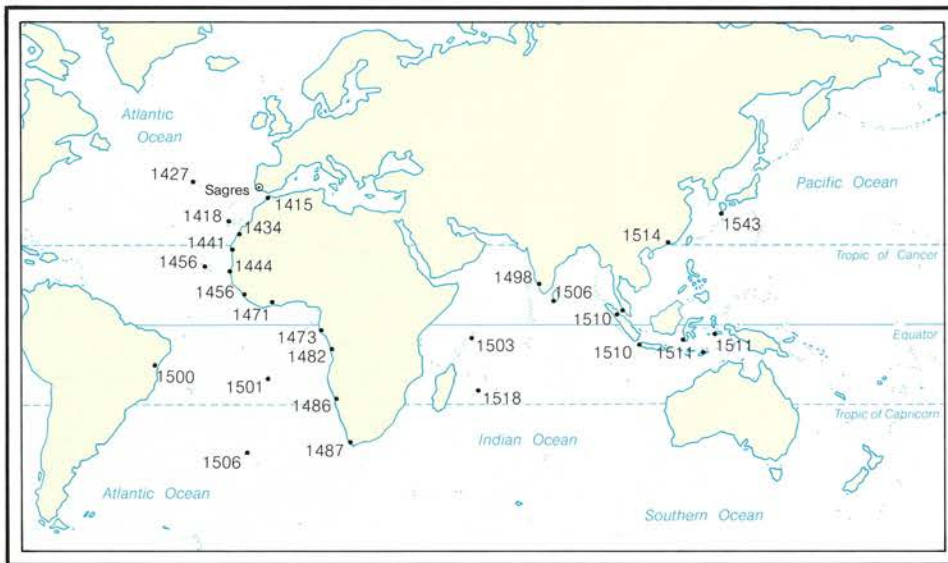
Henry's death in 1460 did not slow the Portuguese thrust along the African coast. In 1462 navigators discovered the seven western islands of the Cape Verde group, which were settled four years later. In 1473 they reached the equator and by 1483 they were at the mouth of the Congo. Five years later Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope, turning back when he found that the land ran northeast. Vasco da Gama completed this movement when he took five ships into the southern Atlantic and, turning east in the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope, passed up the east coast of Africa and on to India's Calicut, where he arrived in May 1498. He returned to Portugal a year later with quantities of spices, woods and jewels.

Having found the sea route to India, the Portuguese moved quickly to gain the riches of the East. In 1500 Cabral took out thirteen ships. Sailing further west than

da Gama's route, he incidentally discovered Brazil. Between 1501 and 1505, more than eighty ships left Portugal for India. Not all returned, but the survivors bore rich cargoes.

The Portuguese aspired to be the masters of all Europe's trade with Asia. To this end, their viceroys sought alliances with local rulers along the coasts of Africa, Arabia and India, built forts, attacked the cities of rulers who refused to accept their overlordship, destroyed enemy fleets and captured the ships of rival traders. Learning from Moslem traders where the most desirable spices were produced, they sent expeditions further east, reaching Ceylon in 1506, Malacca in 1511, and the Banda Islands, Amboina and the Moluccas. By the 1520s the Portuguese had established trading stations in these islands and a route to them by way of northern Timor. By 1514 they had found southern China and by 1543, Japan.

'E, se mais mundo houvera, la chegara', wrote the great poet of this expansion—'if there had been more of the world, they would have reached it'. Did the Portuguese therefore reach Australia? The Moslem traders and Malay pilots on whose knowledge they drew might have known of its existence, and their route past Timor to the Spice Islands put them within a few hundred kilometres of its northern coasts, a distance that curiosity or storms might easily have bridged. These circumstances make it reasonable to suppose that the Portuguese might have sighted Australia, but possibility or probability is not proof.



Portuguese discoveries and contact 1415–1550.

J. GOODRUM

No first-hand record of any early Portuguese discovery of Australia survives, nor have any signs of one ever been found about Australian shores. The best evidence that there was one is offered by a dozen major maps dating from the years 1530 to 1560, drawn by a school of cartographers centred on the northern French port of Dieppe. Deriving ultimately from a lost Portuguese original, these show a mysterious entity called 'Java la Grande', of approximately the right size and in vaguely the right position to be Australia. Various circumstances suggest that the presence of Java la Grande on these maps may indeed reflect an authentic discovery; but who among the Portuguese made the voyage or voyages of discovery and when they sailed remain unknown.

Any Portuguese discovery of the Australian continent had no bearing on future European contact with it. Buried in libraries until the late eighteenth century, the



Lopo Homem, World Map of 1519, showing the results of Portuguese voyages, but not those of Magellan's circumnavigation.  
PORTUGALIAE MONUMENTA CARTOGRAPHICA



Jean Rotz, *The Londe of Java*, 1542: the Asian–Australian hemisphere. Scholars disagree about whether this map indicates any knowledge of the Australian continent.

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Dieppe maps offered no stimulus to later explorations and the more influential imaginative entity of 'Terra Australis' intervened. The later Dieppe maps themselves exhibit this process. From the Harleian map (c 1546) onwards, each shows a progressive loss of clarity as the cartographers join the original Java la Grande to a landmass stretching across the entire southern hemisphere, and fill its spaces with depictions of people, animals and birds having no connection with Australia.

## TERRA AUSTRALIS

The *Terra Australis* that replaced geographical uncertainties in the second half of the sixteenth century had a long history in the imagination of the West. Knowing the world to be spherical, Greek and Roman geographers had thought that there might be habitable land in the southern hemisphere, separated from its northern counterpart by the scorched tropics. Ptolemy set out this scheme in his *Geography* of about 150 A.D., which enjoyed a great revival during the Renaissance, and while the Portuguese discoveries modified classical ideas about the position and extent of *Terra Australis*, belief in the existence of the continent continued, for both physical and religious truth required that it exist. Without a southern landmass to balance the landmass in the north, the world would fall to destruction among the stars; God's perfection necessitated symmetry, which the earth would lack without a *Terra Australis*.

Magellan's circumnavigation of the world in 1519–22 seemed to confirm the continent's existence, for geographers assumed that the islands he found on his left as he passed into the Pacific Ocean were its fringes. They redrew their maps to show the Strait of Magellan, and in doing so merged Java la Grande with the southern continent, which achieved its distinctive Renaissance form when Ortelius and Gerard Mercator depicted it on world maps (1564, 1569), and when Ortelius and Rumold Mercator then represented it in their magnificent atlases (1570, 1587). These cartographers showed a vast landmass, '*Terra Australis Nondum Cognita*', covering the entire southern polar region, extending northwards to 20°S, and having two great capes, the one reaching northwards almost to New Guinea, the other comprising regions to the south of Java named Beach, Lucach, and Maletur.

Simultaneously, through misreadings of Marco Polo, analogies with Europe and the Americas, and simply the desire to have it so, *Terra Australis* gathered attributes. Mercator characterised the region of Beach as a land of gold and Maletur as one of spices. The English astrologer John Dee wrote that Beach '*doth abound with gold and other things to men's great commodity very serviceable*'; and the geographer Roger Barlow told Henry VIII that, concerning the discovery of this fabulous

Desceliers, 'Royal' Map, 1546. This map included all the continents, including a hypothetical Antarctica that enclosed Australia within it. The legend across the bottom of the map is an honest disclaimer—'The Southern Land: not yet discovered at all'.

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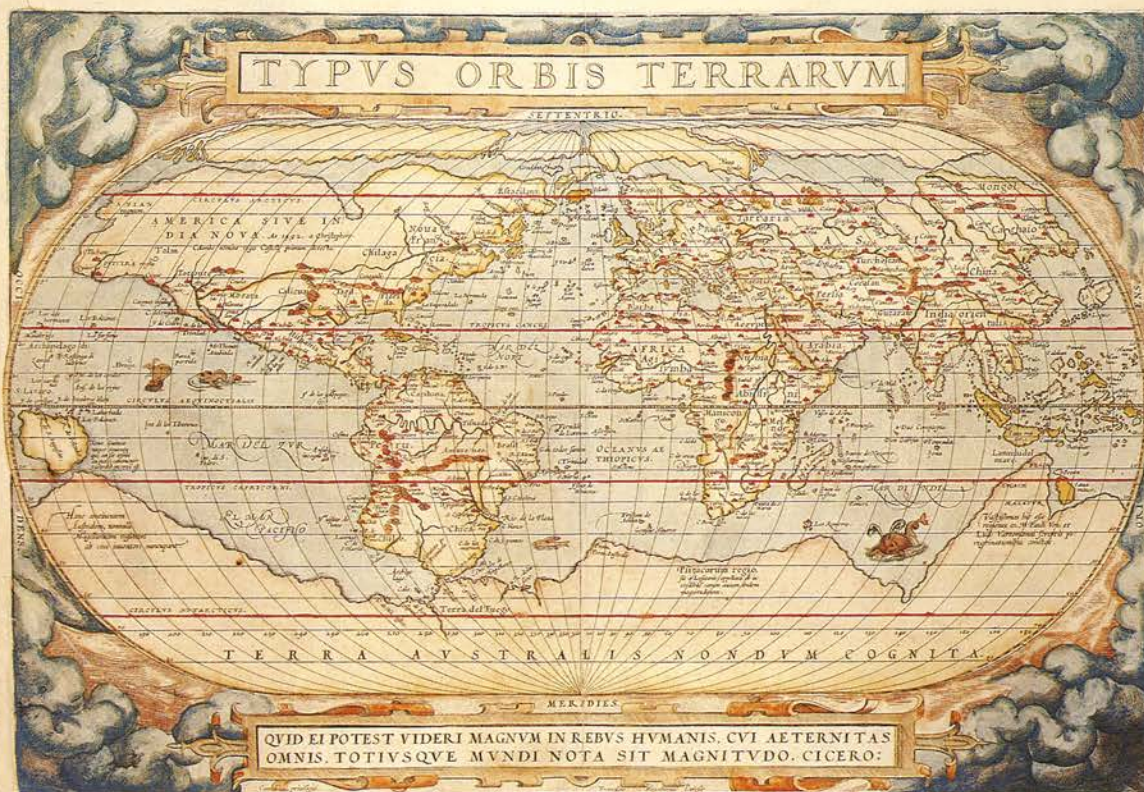
continent, 'No man shuld thinke . . . the labour grete where so moche profyt honor and glory maye folow'.

Geographers and would-be discoverers attached similar characteristics to what were taken to be the continent's offshore islands. In 1521 the Portuguese viceroy at Goa sent Cristóvão de Mendoça to find the 'isles of gold' rumoured to lie southeast of Sumatra. Though he failed to find them, these islands were quickly identified as the land of Ophir, the site of Solomon's fabulous mines. The Spanish in South America heard rumours of a westwards voyage from which the Inca Tupac Yupanqui returned with slaves, gold, silver, a copper throne and the skins of a horse-like animal. These trophies seemed to confirm the existence of Solomon's islands. So did occasional sightings of land, such as that by Juan Fernández in 1563–64. In 1568 the viceroy of Peru sent Alvaro de Mendaña to explore the riches of the Pacific. Mendaña called the islands he came upon to the east of New Guinea the 'Solomons' more in hope than success for, as one Spanish official afterwards complained, he found there 'no specimens of spices, nor of gold and silver, nor of merchandise, nor of any other source of profit, and all the people were naked savages'.

These disappointments did not deter Mendaña and others from trying again. Believing the archipelago he had found to be an outlier of the southern continent,

*Ortelius, World Map, 1570, showing Terra Australis Nondum Cognita. The islands of southeast Asia are becoming better defined and less conjectural.*

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Mendaña obtained permission to colonise it. After many setbacks, he sailed from Callao in April 1595 with a party that included Pedro de Quiros. He reached the Santa Cruz Islands, but illness and dissension soon afflicted the party and when Mendaña died, Quiros took it to Manila.

Now obsessed with finding the southern continent and converting its inhabitants, Quiros sailed again in 1606. This time he came to the island he called *Austrialia del Espíritu Santo* (the New Hebrides or Vanuatu), but gave up his attempt at settlement in the face of Melanesian hostility and some dream of greater discovery. He returned to Acapulco in one ship, while his deputy Torres took the other to Manila through the strait that now bears his name. Whether Torres sighted the Australian mainland is uncertain, and most geographers lost sight of Torres Strait for more than one hundred and fifty years.

The failure of these Spanish attempts to discover *Terra Australis* did not noticeably diminish European belief in its existence. In 1597, Wytfliet wrote: 'the south-land ... the southernmost of all countries, extends immediately towards the Polar Circle, but also towards the countries of the east beyond the Tropic of the Capricorn and almost at the equator its confines are to be found ... it is assigned such an extension by some that it may well appear to be the fifth continent'. Twenty years later, urging another attempt to discover it, a memorialist told Philip III of Spain that 'the land of the southern hemisphere is greatly stored with metals and rich in precious stones and pearls, fruits and animals'. Some cartographers continued to give it an enormous extent until well into the seventeenth century, even as Dutch navigators were greatly reducing its possibilities.

## THE DUTCH DISCOVERIES

The first reliable information about a southern continent came from the sightings of more prosaic Dutch sailors and merchants. In 1602, anxious to share in the wealth of the East, the governing body of the Dutch Provinces granted the Dutch East India Company a monopoly of the nation's trade in the vast area between the Cape of Good Hope and the Strait of Magellan. As soon as it had established itself in the East Indies, the Dutch East India Company began seeking further markets. In 1605 officials at Bantam despatched the *Duyfken* 'to discover the great land Nova Guinea and other unknown east and south lands'. Like the bird sent out by Noah, this 'little dove' came to land—320 kilometres down the western coast of Cape York, between the Pennefather River and Cape Keer-weer. Its captain then struck north to New Guinea, without detecting the strait that divided the two lands. In 1623 Jan Carstensz in the *Pera* landed further along western Cape York, but also failed to find Torres Strait, while Colster in the *Arnhem* found the northeastern fringes of Arnhem Land.

Meanwhile, the Dutch had made extensive accidental sightings of the western and southern coasts. In 1615, as a result of rapidly accumulating experience, the Dutch East India Company had ordered its captains to steer a fixed route to its factories. With the westerlies at their back, they were to sail due east from the Cape of Good Hope for 1000 *mijlen* (approximately 5300 kilometres) until they were in the longitude of the Sunda Strait, when they were to turn north for Batavia. Since the winds did not always appear in the same latitude, and because they could not calculate longitude precisely, Dutch captains were soon striking Australia.

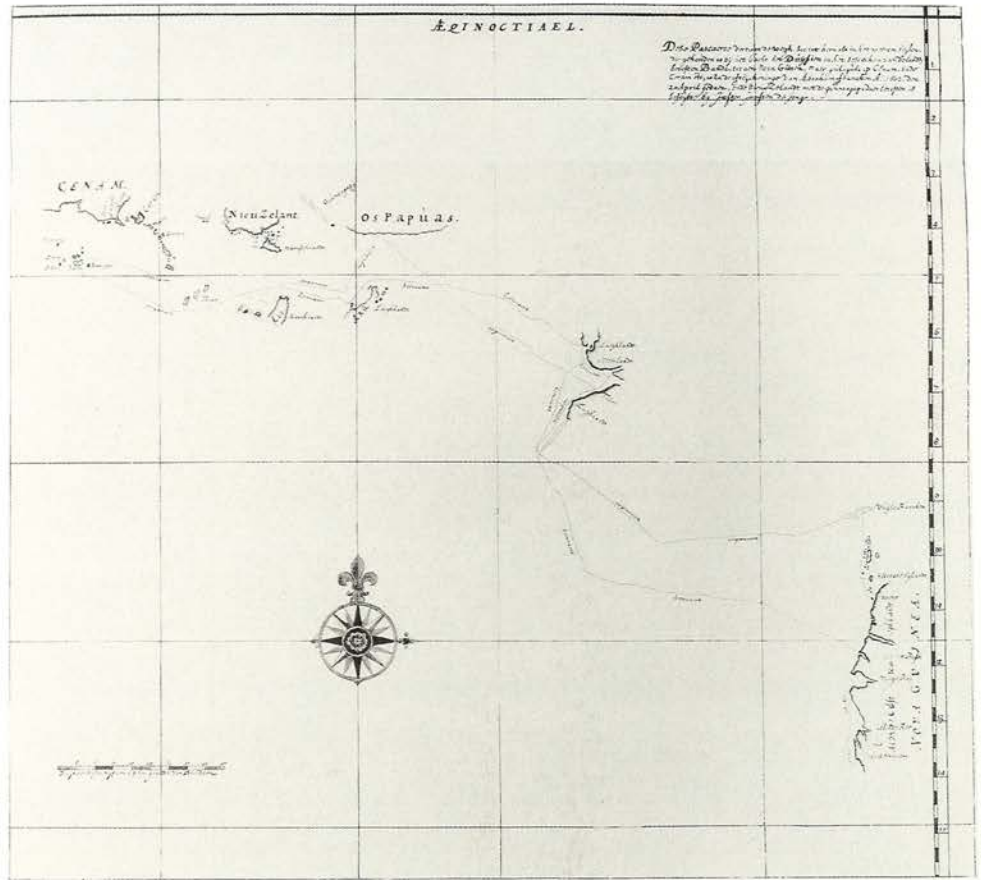
The first to do so was Dirck Hartog in the *Eendracht*, who reached the western coast at Shark Bay in October 1616 and left his famous plate on the island named for him. In quick succession followed Claessoon van Hillegom in the *Zeeewolf* in

ROYAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY



*Australia emerges: the 320 kilometre stretch of the western coast of Cape York discovered by the Duyfken in 1606. The map covers the area between Pennefather River and Cape Keer-weer and is a 1670 copy of the original chart, now lost.*

ÖSTERREICHISCHE  
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May 1618; Jacobszoon in the *Mauritius* in July 1618; Houtman and Dedel in the *Dordrecht* and *Amsterdam* in 1619; and the master of the *Leewin* in 1622. In 1627 Pieter Nuyts in the *Gulden Zeepaard* ran for 1500 kilometres along the southern coast. And in June 1629 Pelsaert's *Batavia* was wrecked on Houtman Abrolhos.

These sightings raised questions about the size of the southern land and its economic potential. In 1636 Anthonie van Diemen, the governor-general at Batavia from that year until 1645, sent two small vessels to obtain further knowledge of the northern and northwestern coasts. In 1642 he sent Abel Tasman to explore thoroughly the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean. Tasman charted sections of the Tasmanian and New Zealand coasts, sailed north to Tonga and Fiji and around New Guinea to reach Batavia again. In 1644 he made further explorations of the northwestern coast.

These voyages at last gave Europeans an authentic perception of the geography of the world southeast of Indonesia. Though its eastern coastline remained unknown, the Dutch discoveries were the first major step towards the accurate depiction of the land they called 'New Holland'.

## TWO SOUTHERN CONTINENTS?

The Dutch delineation of New Holland did not destroy belief in *Terra Australis*. New Holland might be of continental extent, but it could not match the grandeur of the continent Europeans had so long imagined. One geographer in about 1700 spoke for many when he asserted that there were *two* southern continents: the one,



Northeastern Arnhem Land, coasted by the Arnhem in 1623. It includes the Gove area and part of the Wessel Islands. Both of these early voyages failed to note Torres Strait and connected New Guinea with Cape York.

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In 1629 the large East Indiaman Batavia ran aground on the reef of Houtman Abrolhos. Of 250 aboard, 115 people had been murdered by mutineers before the 124 survivors were rescued. Over the past 20 years the wreck of the Batavia has been excavated underwater and its timbers conserved in the Western Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle.

1. Aerial view of Morning Reef, Houtman Abrolhos Islands. The Batavia was wrecked on the reef at lower left. Batavia's Graveyard (now Beacon Island), home of the survivors, lower right.

P. BAKER

2. Uncovering the hull from coral and sediment, at depths between two and six metres. Ship's transom timbers in situ before dismantling and raising.

J. GREEN

3. Some of the 128 large sandstone blocks carried as cargo. They were to form a prefabricated portico for Batavia Castle, but have been erected in the Western Australian Maritime Museum.

J. GREEN

4. Astrolabe from the Batavia, raised in 1975, freshly broken from marine concretions. Various items have clarified Dutch navigation techniques.

P. BAKER

5. German stoneware bellarmine or beardman drinking jug, raised from another Dutch wreck of 1656, the Vergulde Draeck (Gilt Dragon).

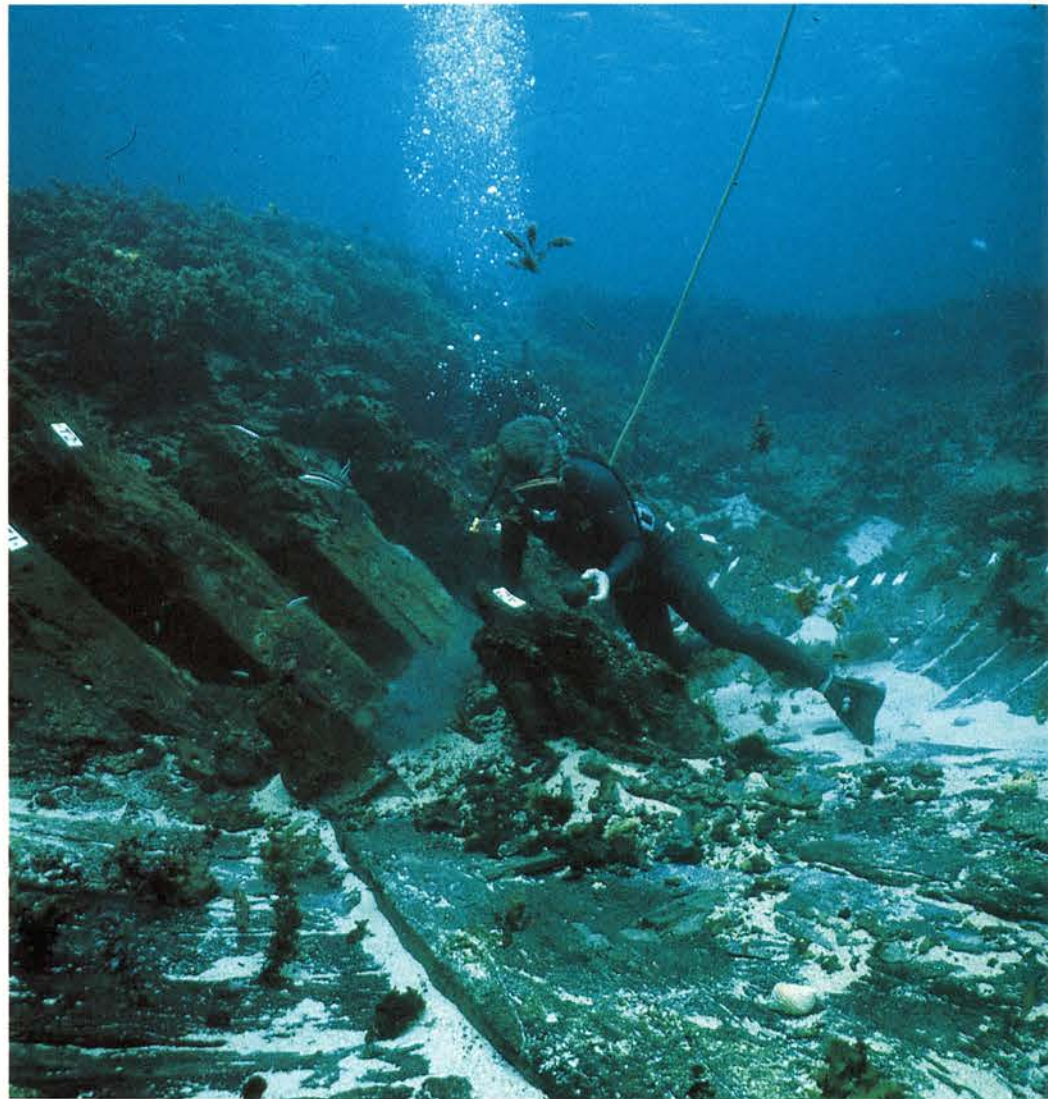
P. BAKER

6. Assemblage of items used by the crew and passengers of the Batavia.

P. BAKER



1.



2.



3.



4.



6.



5.

Geertz's map of 1628,  
showing Dutch knowledge of  
Australia's coastline.

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whose outline was known in general terms, lying between the equator and 44°S latitude, and 122° and 188°E longitude, comprising New Guinea, Carpentaria, New Holland, Anthonie van Diemen's Land, and the countries discovered by de Quiros; and the other, lying in the South Pacific between 150° and 170° of which New Zealand was the western extremity, which was yet to be substantially discovered, and to which the 'Title of *Terra Australia Incognita* properly belongs'. Despite the desolation of New Holland's coasts, Europeans also continued to believe that both continents contained matchless wealth.



These views had widest currency in the middle of the eighteenth century, being set forth in substantial publications in which authors described past voyages of discovery and suggested future ones. One of these works was John Campbell's 1744 edition of John Harris's *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*. Campbell urged that the East India Company mount a voyage around New Holland to determine its commercial potential; and that this company or another colonise New Britain, which was fertile, offered abundant potential for development and from which 'a great Trade might be carried on . . . through the whole *Terra Australis* on one Side, and the most valuable Islands of the *East Indies* on the other'. Campbell also advocated the settling of Juan Fernández, on the eastern edge of *Terra Australis*.

Similar ideas were voiced by Charles de Brosses (1756), John Callander (1766–68) and Alexander Dalrymple (1767, 1769). Dalrymple's great ambition was to become the discoverer of the elusive continent. Drawing evidence from fragmentary sightings to support his theoretical premises, he argued that *Terra Australis* extended through 100° of longitude across the southern Pacific Ocean through Juan Fernández's landfall in the east to Tasman's New Zealand landfall in the west—so that it was of greater extent than 'the whole civilized part of Asia, from *Turkey* to the eastern extremity of *China*'. The 'scraps' from its inhabitants' economy, he pronounced, 'would be sufficient to maintain the power, dominion, and sovereignty of *Britain*, by employing all its manufactures and ships'. All that was needed was an explorer with sufficient 'dauntless and perseverant resolution'.

*The Bonaparte map (c 1695) the result of the Dutch discoveries of Australian and New Zealand coasts. This was the state of geographic knowledge before Cook's voyage.*

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Dalrymple had found new details of Torres's voyage, but he was to be doubly disappointed—first because he was not himself to be the discoverer he imagined and second, because the continent he dreamed of did not exist.

### THE BRITISH THRUST INTO THE PACIFIC OCEAN

The British exploration of the Pacific Ocean which began in the mid-1760s had long antecedents. Roger Barlow had argued for the discovery of *Terra Australis* in the 1540s, and John Dee in the 1570s and 1580s. The ears of adventurers were receptive. In 1574 Richard Grenville and his partners asked Queen Elizabeth I to approve a voyage into the Pacific, the purpose of which was 'the discoverie, traffique and enioyenge for the Quenes Majestie and her subiectes of all or anie landes, islandes and countries southewardes beyonde the aequinoctial, or where the Pole Antartik hath anie elevation about the Horison'. Three years later Sir Francis Drake might have added ideas of seeking out 'unknown shores' in the southern Pacific to those of plundering Spanish America. Certainly one of his aims was to find the entrance of the Strait of Anian (supposed to run southwestwards across America from about Hudson's Bay), which would offer an easy route to the East. In 1625 Sir William Courteen asked James I for permission to colonise *Terra Australis*; and Peter Heylyn included a discourse on attempts to discover this elusive entity in the second addition of his *Cosmographie* (1657). In 1697 William Dampier again recommended searching for a northwest passage from the Pacific and the following year, replying to an official enquiry about areas that the Admiralty might investigate, he said that *Terra Australis* most deserved attention.

Interest in Pacific commerce increased in the early decades of the eighteenth century, with the formation of the South Sea Company in 1711 and with that company's ambitious plans for trade and settlement. In 1740 George Anson sailed around Cape Horn to raid the Spanish settlements on the western coasts of America. Four years later he returned, not only with the treasure of the galleon that sailed annually from Mexico to Manila with a shipment of silver, but also with well-developed ideas about how the nation might enrich itself in trade.

Spanish objections and preoccupation with the Seven Years' War prevented any moves in this direction until 1764, when the Admiralty fitted out the *Dolphin* and *Tamar* for a long voyage. In their secret instructions, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty told Captain John Byron that his immediate task was to survey the Falkland Islands in order to locate a suitable site for a port where ships proceeding into the Pacific might refresh and then to explore the great ocean. The accomplishment of these specific purposes was to precede the more general and grander one of acquiring empire in the southern hemisphere. The Lords of the Admiralty began these secret instructions with the words:

Whereas nothing can redound more to the honor of this Nation as a Maritime Power, to the dignity of the Crown of Great Britain, and to the advancement of the Trade and Navigation thereof, than to make Discoveries of Countries hitherto unknown, and to attain a perfect Knowledge of the distant Parts of the British Empire, which though formerly discovered by His Majesty's Subjects have been as yet but imperfectly explored ...

Byron sailed in June 1764. He surveyed the Falklands and decided that Port Egmont on the western island was suitable for a base. Sending this information back, he proceeded through the Strait of Magellan into the Pacific. His idea was 'to make a NW Course til we get the true Trade wind, and then shape a Course to the Wtward in hopes of falling in with Solomons Islands if there are such, or else to make some new Discovery'. This route would have been along the coast of

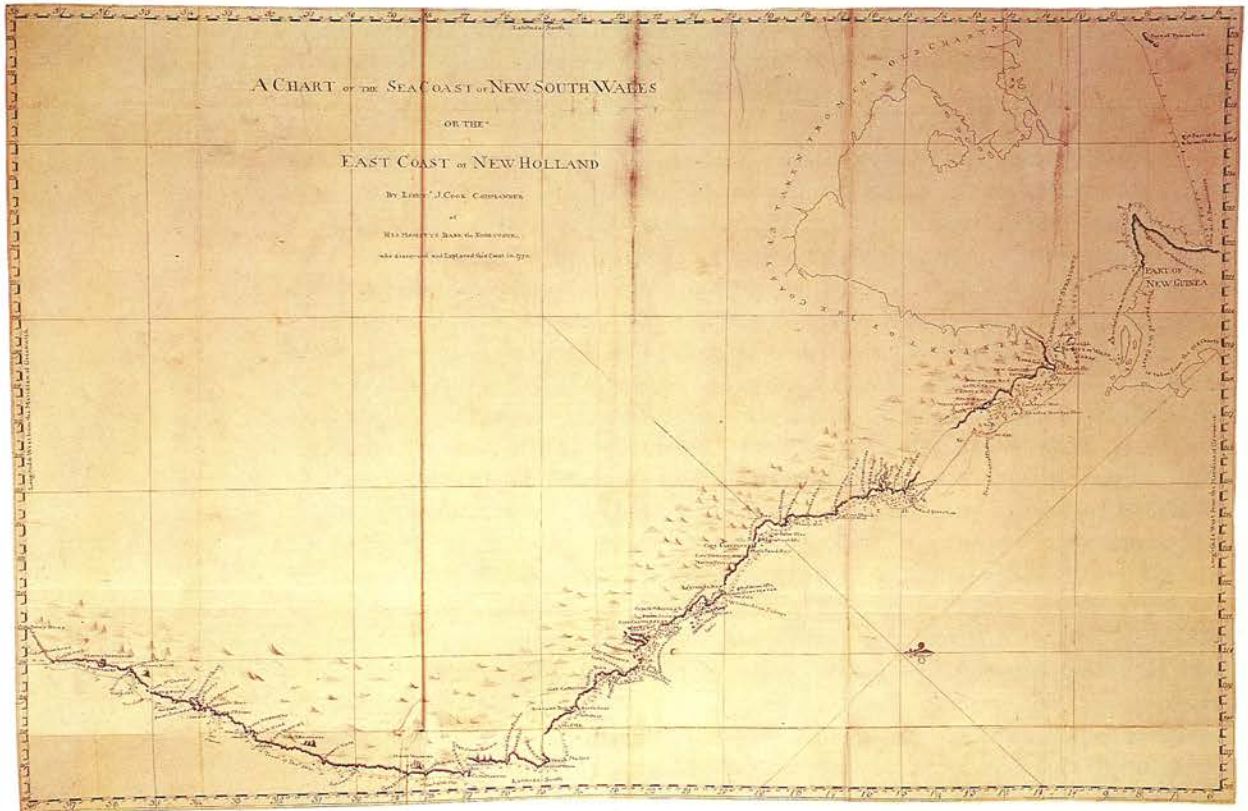
*Terra Australis* as depicted by Ortelius, the Mercators and their successors, but Byron found neither it nor the Islands of Solomon. Striking out into the ocean in 23°S latitude, he crossed it too far north to run among the great atoll clusters of the central Pacific. He reached the Ladrões at the end of July 1765, and then proceeded home via Batavia.

British (and French) interest in the Falkland Islands brought bitter protests from the Spanish court, which considered that Spain enjoyed the right to possess them and to control the navigation of the Pacific. Afraid that Spain might be able to enforce these claims, the British hastened to complete the discovery of *Terra Australis*. In 1766 the Admiralty fitted out the *Dolphin* and *Swallow* for another voyage of exploration, and store ships to resupply the party on the Falkland Islands. Their Lordships gave the commands of the ships to Samuel Wallis and Philip Carteret. Modelling their secret instructions on those they had given Byron, they told Wallis to begin looking for the southern continent, which they supposed to lie between 'Cape Horn and New Zeland', as directly west as possible from the Strait of Magellan. He was to cultivate friendships with any peoples not previously visited by Europeans and, with their permission, 'take Possession of convenient Situations in the Country'. If the continent were uninhabited, he was to take possession of it 'for His Majesty, by setting up proper Marks and Inscriptions as first Discoverers and Possessors'. If he did not find the continent, he was to proceed across the Pacific to China or the East Indies, seeking out islands on the way.

Wallis and Carteret sailed from Plymouth in August 1766. After a routine passage down the Atlantic, the way through the Strait of Magellan was made harrowing by opposing winds and currents. Entering the strait in mid-December, they emerged separately some four months later and did not rejoin company. Though the instructions called for a passage across the Pacific in high southern latitudes, Wallis found that the prevailing westerlies forced him north. In the end, his route lay only a few degrees south of Byron's. These few degrees were crucial, however, for the course brought him through the Tuamotus to Tahiti. The men of the *Dolphin* sighted this magical island on 19 June 1767 and were the first Europeans to savour its pleasures.

Ignoring his instructions, Wallis directly claimed Tahiti for the King. He then failed once again to follow his instructions to seek out the southern continent. This is puzzling, because near Tahiti the sailors had seen what they took to be mountains; and Wallis had afterwards 'often talkt' of standing 'to the Southward, where we was in hopes of finding a much More Extensive Country'. Instead of doing so, he set a course for the Ladrões, reaching England in May 1768.

Meanwhile Carteret had been making a different and much more difficult way. The *Swallow* was twenty years old, ill-equipped and a poor sailer, and the *Dolphin* had deliberately left her in the Strait of Magellan. Short of provisions, with a decrepit ship and without specific instructions, Carteret was forced to proceed across the Pacific alone. Setting a course some degrees south of Wallis', he first sought Davis Land, which was supposed to lie off the coast of Chile (27°S, 80°W) and which was therefore thought to be part of the southern continent. When he did not find it, he stretched across the Pacific, discovering Pitcairn Island. Then, with scurvy and exhaustion ravaging his crew and storms ravaging his ship, he was forced to sail northwards toward the Moluccas as his predecessors had done. Following Quiros' path, he rediscovered Santa Cruz and the outer Solomons, but difficulties with the Melanesians prevented him from replenishing his food and water. In desperate circumstances, with his crew dying and his ship falling apart, he followed Dampier's 1686 route to New Britain and Mindanao, but found little refreshment at either place. He eventually reached England in May 1769.



James Cook's chart of the coast of New South Wales, 1770. Botany Bay and Torres Strait appear.

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There was one notable incident on Carteret's homeward stretch. Three weeks out of Cape Town he was passed by the French explorer Bougainville, who was also completing a circumnavigation. Like Wallis, Bougainville had found his way to Tahiti. From there he had struck out for the east coast of New Holland, had rediscovered Quiros' *Austrialia del Espíritu Santo* and, turning at the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef, had gone north through the Solomon Islands and around New Guinea.

Wallis returned to England just in time to report before the next expedition sailed. In 1768 the Royal Society gained George III's support for its plans to observe the transit of Venus across the sun, which would occur on 3 June 1769. The Society's scheme was to send observers to Hudson's Bay, to the North Cape of Lapland and, as conditions would be best in the southern hemisphere, to an island in the South Pacific. At the King's request, the Admiralty provided a ship for the voyage to the Pacific. Wallis recommended Tahiti as an ideal site.

Having routinely informed Lieutenant James Cook of his tasks in observing the transit, in secret additional instructions the Admiralty Lords told him to seek out the 'Continent or Land of great extent' which they still supposed to lie south of Wallis's track, prefacing the order with their time-honoured rubric about the rewards of discovery.

With the botanist Joseph Banks on board, Cook sailed in August 1768 and entered the Pacific in January 1769. Determined to settle the question of whether there was a *Terra Australis*, he made from Cape Horn 'a far more westerly Track than any Ship had ever done before', but found no land until he neared Tahiti. When he sailed again in July after observing the transit, he ran directly south until the latitude of northern New Zealand, and then west. Again, he found no land; and

by the time he reached New Zealand, though there was still one area where it might be, he no longer believed that the southern Pacific contained an unknown continent.

Having circumnavigated and charted both islands of New Zealand, Cook sailed west for the unlocated east coast of New Holland. He made his first landfall on 19 April 1770 at Point Hicks and on 29 April reached Botany Bay, where he rested for a week. Then he continued to chart the coast northward. Almost losing the ship on a reef, he spent two months in the Endeavour River repairing the damage, after which he proceeded north again for Torres Strait, about which he knew from one of Dalrymple's charts and from a chart in de Brosses' work. On 22 August 1770, knowing that 'on the Western side I can make no new discovery the honour of which belongs to the Dutch Navigators', but confident that 'the Eastern Coast from the Latitude of 38° South down to this place ... was never seen or visited by any European before us', he hoisted the flag on Possession Island and claimed 'New South Wales' for the King.

Cook's first voyage largely completed the delineation of the Australian continent's coastlines, with only the area about Bass Strait remaining obscure. On his second voyage, he proved that there was no other great landmass in the ice-free southern hemisphere and, though he did not touch at New South Wales again, he did discover New Caledonia and Norfolk Island. On his third voyage, he did much to elucidate the geography of the northern Pacific. When his ships returned to England in 1781, Europeans knew the main outlines of the world.

### WAR 1776-83

Between 1776 and 1783 Britain was at war, first with her rebellious American colonies, then with France, Spain and Holland. Conflict was widespread and Europe, the Americas, Africa and the East were the scenes of action by land and sea. In this war, European powers learned as never before the realities of global conflict. The problems of conducting naval campaigns without substantial support facilities were particularly apparent in the East. The long voyage out strained timbers, masts and spars, and wore out rigging and sails; tropical storms and marine borers added to these problems. To keep their ships in fighting trim it was essential for captains to have access to supplies of timber, masts, spars, cordage and canvas, and to dockyards where they might refit their ships. Without a network of bases about India, and along the routes to it, ships could not function effectively.

Captains also needed regular supplies of fresh foods to keep their crews free from scurvy, the scourge of sailors before the nineteenth century. Arising from a deficiency of vitamins, especially vitamin C, it appeared during long voyages because of the lack of fresh provisions, the consumption of salt (used for preserving meat) which broke down the body's stored vitamins and the wet and cold conditions which caused the body to use vitamins at a higher than normal rate. Men with gums swollen over their teeth, mouths ulcerated, skins bleeding, and limbs too enervated even to stand, could not fight against it effectively. Sometimes the death rate was so high that captains could not fight at all. Of the 961 crewmen who reached the Pacific with Anson in 1741, 626 died of scurvy. He lost only four men in battle.

By the 1770s the European nations had established a network of bases to service their ships sailing to and in the East. In South America, the Portuguese possessed the great port of Rio de Janeiro, with its fine harbour and abundant hinterlands. On the west coast of Africa they had São Paulo de Luanda and São Filipe de Benguela, and on the east Sofala and Moçambique. In India they had Diu and Goa

with its good harbour and dockyards; in the East Indies they had Timor, and on the edge of China, they had Macau.

The Dutch had the Cape of Good Hope, a fulcrum for the systems of currents in the southern ocean. Cape Town's two bays together provided anchorage for most of the year, and while the docks at Simon's Bay were not extensive enough for careening or rebuilding, they were adequate for other repairs. Its fortifications were sound, its climate was healthy and its agriculture abundant. On the southeast coast of India the Dutch had Negapatam, which gave reasonable anchorage for half the year and some food; and on the northeast coast of Ceylon had Trincomalee, the only port in European possession that faced the Bay of Bengal and that offered safe anchorage all year-round. Trincomalee had one of the finest natural harbours in the world, but its hinterland was unproductive jungle, and in the eighteenth century though they had fortified it, the Dutch had done little else to develop its naval potential. In the East Indies, the Dutch had major bases at Malacca and Batavia and a network of minor ones. Batavia was notoriously unhealthy, but it stood at the junction of great sea routes and offered sheltered anchorage, efficient dockyards and abundant food and naval supplies. It was therefore strategically important.

France possessed a major base at Mauritius and a lesser one at Bourbon, now called Réunion. Mauritius was not self-sufficient in food, the climate was unhealthy, the weather unpredictable and reefs and prevailing winds made the approach to the island hazardous. It had a good harbour, however, where the French built adequate dockyards they kept well supplied. Bourbon was of limited use, having similar disadvantages and lacking a good harbour. But together the bases lay adjacent to the outward as well as homeward routes, and provided a satisfactory springboard for war or trade further east. In India, the French had only minor anchorages.

Between Europe and India the British possessed only St Helena, a small island with no harbour, only an open roadstead. It was not self-sufficient in food, but dependent on the Cape for supplies. As the winds prevailed from the southeast, it was not easily approached from Europe, and ships using it were vulnerable to attack from the Cape of Good Hope, from which it was directly downwind and down-current. In India, Bombay served the British better, for it had good harbour and dockyard facilities and a large hinterland with food supplies. On the eastern coast, Madras and Calcutta also had extensive hinterlands, but Madras offered inadequate shelter to large ships during the northeast monsoon and access to Calcutta was difficult. Both had poor dockyard facilities.

The Europeans equipped their naval arsenals at these bases in various ways. Brazil offered good ship timber and the Portuguese, less prejudiced than others in favour of things European, built small warships and merchantmen (trading vessels) there. They also built ships of local timber at Goa, but used European cordage and canvas in preference to inferior Asian varieties. As the Cape of Good Hope was deficient in timber, the Dutch sent from Europe building and naval varieties, as well as other stores. At Batavia they made use of both local and imported materials. The French supplied their dockyards at Mauritius almost entirely from Europe, sending out timber, masts and spars, cables, cordage and canvas. So, too, did the British at Bombay, despite the fact that the Indians had established a flourishing shipbuilding industry using teak and other local materials. But saltpetre, used for making gunpowder, was obtained in India by all the European powers.

These shipyards were often unable to meet the calls on them. Materials were not always available in Europe, and sometimes, even when they were, home officials did not send adequate supplies or despatch them in good time. Moreover, store ships bringing them had to survive tempests and shoals and reach their

destination safely. Even the safe arrival of a cargo did not guarantee that stores would be available. Sails mildewed and rotted on the voyage out, cables deteriorated in the tropical heat, masts and spars rotted in the warm ponds, a cyclone might destroy an entire store with no prospect of its being rapidly replaced. In peace, the Europeans drew on each other's resources; in war, the problem of shortages was more difficult to solve.

Never was this clearer than in the early 1780s. When the Dutch joined France and Spain in the war against Britain in December 1780, the strategic balance in the East changed immediately. The British were denied the resources of the Cape of Good Hope and Batavia, and the French could not only use these resources but also call on the help of the Dutch forces. With France having the opportunity to dominate the Indian Ocean, Edward Hughes, the British admiral, knew only too well that 'the Fate of the National possessions in [India] greatly if not wholly depended' on the exertions of his squadron. But in a series of battles in 1782, he found that he could not press home initial advantages because of damage done to masts, spars, rigging and sails, and the lack of materials to repair the damage. In November the onset of the northeast monsoon forced him from the Bay of Bengal. He later wrote that he limped into Bombay in December, with 'Nine Sail on His Majesty's Line of Battle Ships ... [with] not a servicable Lower Mast on board any of them, nor a Fish for a Mast, or a Spar for a Topmast to be found but at Bombay'.

These events threatened Britain with the loss of one trading empire, but the war also opened the possibility of winning a new one. The entry of Spain into the conflict on the side of France in 1779 encouraged the British to think of ravaging Spain's American colonies. By helping the Creole and Indian inhabitants to throw off the Spanish yoke, they might open immense markets to British manufacturers. Lord North's administration received a flood of advice about how to achieve these goals, including a proposal from Sir John Dalrymple, a baron of the Scottish Exchequer, which was the first attempt to use Cook's discoveries to strategic advantage and which advanced what was to become, a few years later, one of the rationales for the colonisation of New South Wales.

Dalrymple wanted the administration to back a scheme he and some Glasgow tobacco merchants had developed: sending a privateering expedition against the settlements on the west coast of America. If the expedition were undertaken from Britain, the force would proceed into the Pacific along the route Cook had pioneered on his second voyage—via the Cape of Good Hope and New Zealand. If mounted from India, it might proceed north via the Philippines or south via New Holland. Any goods or prizes taken on the first sally might be sold in China or India, where the adventurers might refit their ships for another assault.

Lord North's ministry showed much interest in this idea, but decided that the venture should be a government rather than a private one. They therefore adopted a variant scheme put forward by Scottish adventurer William Fullarton and his friends. At the same time, the ministers remained interested in another scheme urged by Dalrymple for attacking the Spanish on the eastern coast of central America, with 'the view ... of obtaining possession of the River St John and Lake Niccaragua and opening through them a communication with the South Sea'.

Administrative delays and contrary winds impeded both schemes. In the middle of 1780, Fullarton revived his and, again interested, the government turned to the British East India Company for help. In September the parties agreed on a plan. A squadron with 2000 royal troops would sail from England and the East India Company would provide more ships and 2000 sepoys or native soldiers from India. After establishing a naval base on Mindanao and a commercial one on the Celebes,

the force would move against the Spanish settlements about the Pacific. The administration gave the naval command to Commodore George Johnstone, the military one to Colonel William Medows and recruited troops. In October and November they added the idea of attacking Buenos Aires on the way out, and sought details of the South American coast from captains Robert M'Douall and Arthur Phillip, who had served in Brazilian waters in 1774–78, while with the Portuguese navy.

At the end of December, however, the British gave up the Pacific scheme, for their declaration of war against the Dutch made the capture of the Cape of Good Hope more important. The government decided that the gathering force should first proceed against the Dutch settlement there, after which part of it should go on to India and part attack Buenos Aires. The expedition sailed in March 1781 but through general ineptitude and its commodore's lack of interest, no attack on the Cape took place. Nor did Commodore Johnstone succeed better in his hope of plundering the River Plate settlements.

Arthur Phillip had a role in the final scheme, but its precise extent is unclear. There are hints that he might have sailed secretly to South America in 1781 to assist in the coming raid. However this was, his role is clearer in 1782, when he helped plan another expedition to attack Monte Video and the settlements on the west coast of South America and commanded one of the four warships that comprised it. The small squadron sailed in January 1783, but the scheme foundered as a result of a fierce storm in the Bay of Biscay and Spain's sudden agreement to peace. With the other ships disabled, Phillip sailed on alone to Brazil and India, returning to England in mid-1784.

In addition to naval and territorial problems of great magnitude, this war also presented Britain with the irritating domestic one of accommodating a growing number of convicts. Previously the government had transported about a thousand felons a year, mostly to the North American colonies, where contractors sold their labour to planters for the remainder of their sentences. The American rebellion of 1775 caused Lord North's administration to suspend this practice and to accommodate felons sentenced to transportation in old ships in the Thames. As these hulks did not have enough space for all the transportees, by the early 1780s many criminals were being held in local gaols, which led municipal and county officials who had to provide for their accommodation to complain about the failure of the central government to meet its responsibilities.

Within a year of peace, various persons, concerned about the naval security of India, the opportunity to open markets in Spanish America, and the need to dispose of convicts satisfactorily, contributed to a scheme that would soon lead to the 'diffusion of the great and surprizing people of a remote European isle, in the most distant extremities of the navigable ocean'.

The scheme represented the merging of a number of interests. The government needed to silence its critics and to carry out the provisions of the criminal law and it wished to strengthen the nation's strategic resources. Merchants and adventurers anticipated advantages for themselves in a British expansion into the Pacific. A scheme for colonisation emerged from a committee chaired by Lord Beauchamp which the House of Commons appointed in 1785 to consider the question of resuming transportation. Taking as their premise William Eden's view that convicts 'might be compelled to dangerous expeditions; or be sent to establish new colonies, factories, and settlement', the members of the Beauchamp committee reported that by founding a convict colony an administration might contribute 'to the interior Police of this Kingdom', and 'promote the Purposes of future commerce or of future Hostility in the *South Seas*'.

## EUROPEAN POLITICS IN THE 1780s

After the Peace of Paris in 1763, successive British administrations found themselves in a most difficult situation. Britain had lost her American colonies and achieved no more than a standoff with France and Spain. European allies and friends were alienated: the Dutch and Prussians, whose support the British had previously used to maintain a balance of power; the Russians, from whom they received the bulk of their indispensable naval stores; and the Danes and the Swedes, whose co-operation was needed to freight these stores from the Baltic. Moreover, though subsequent developments were to show the perception wrong, prime ministers Lord Shelburne and William Pitt believed the nation's economy to be severely strained and under further threat; and they were convinced that they needed a period of peace to pursue economic reforms and to strengthen strategic resources. Pitt particularly considered the East central to the nation's future wellbeing, with a continued presence there representing the best and perhaps the only hope of rebuilding a much-diminished empire.

French ministers also found their nation in difficulty, with its economy all but ruined. They too saw the East as being important, where a revitalised presence might lead to France re-emerging as an imperial power. As peace returned, the French government therefore pursued diplomatic moves to strengthen France's position and to weaken Britain's, especially in India. It did so on three fronts: in Europe, in the Middle East and in India itself. Inevitably, Britain sought to counter her neighbour's moves, and the result was an intense diplomatic struggle with consequences as far-reaching as if the two nations had warred openly.

In September 1764 France concluded an agreement with Sweden which gave her the use of Gothenburg for a naval depot near the entrance to the Baltic Sea. In 1764–65, an agreement with the local rulers gave the French trading rights in Egypt, and the right to send despatches and goods via that country to and from India. In April 1765 French merchants re-established a national company to conduct eastern trade. The French government provided this new East India Company with 64-gun battleships made redundant by the peace. These vessels sailed with their lower gun decks cleared, but they could be speedily rearmed. In mid-1765, too, Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de la Pérouse took an exploring expedition to the Pacific.

At the same time, the French moved to strengthen the connection with the Dutch which had developed during the war. In November 1765 the government concluded a treaty of defensive alliance with the Dutch parliament, which opened Dutch bases in the East to French shipping in the event of war, and allied Dutch forces with the French.

After his electoral victory in the spring of 1764, Pitt turned to what he saw as the great tasks before Britain. He reformed administration, revised taxes and began negotiating new commercial arrangements with Ireland, France, Spain, Holland, Russia and the United States. Central to his efforts to revive Britain's fortunes was reform of the nation's East India Company, to bring it under government control and increase its revenues. He also knew that controlling the company would be useless if the nation were to lose its position in India, where his ministers expected the French to launch hostilities in a future war. As he planned, French diplomacy seemed to confirm that a new war was imminent.

Pitt and his advisers therefore sought ways to strengthen Britain's position in the East. At the end of December 1764 Pitt had Earl Howe, the First Lord of the Admiralty, assess a series of proposals, including the building of a harbour in Bengal, the settling of the Andaman or Nicobar Islands and the colonising of New South

Wales. Although Howe's replies were equivocal, the administration had the East India Company survey the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Diego Garcia in 1785 and 1786.

Simultaneously Pitt looked into the possibility of building an equivalent to the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope and in doing so he found a use for the convicts languishing in the hulks and gaols. In 1785 he adopted Captain Edward Thompson's suggestion that Das Voltas Bay on the southwest coast of Africa might provide a suitable site for a settlement of convicts. According to Thompson, there was a good harbour, the area was fertile, and a base there would allow 'our Indiamen to call ... & refit & come up with [the] SE Trade in war to avoid the Enemy'. In mid-year, the administration obtained the Beauchamp committee's endorsement of this idea and the Home Secretary, Lord Sydney, then sent Thompson to survey the area secretly to find the best site.

As Thompson sailed, the government received a similar proposal for a settlement with convicts on the southeast African coast. A base there might offer supplies to Indiamen and support the eastern squadron in wartime. As Pitt himself put it, such a settlement would 'answer in some respects the purposes of the Cape, [and] serve also as a receptacle for convicts'. But his administration did not act on this second proposal. Instead, it prepared to transport convicts to Das Voltas Bay. In June Evan Nepean, the under-secretary at the Home Office, sought preliminary tenders, commenting: 'It seemed to me to be Mr. Pitt's intention at all events that if Cape Voltas was not found to correspond with our expectations for the Settlement of the Convicts that some other Spot should be fixed upon to the Southward of the Line'.

The reasons for Pitt's 'determination' to form a convict settlement south of the equator were the interrelated ones of Britain's need to offer her India ships greater support during their voyages, and to have a base from which warships might sail, either to defend India or to attack enemy possessions at the extremities of the globe. As John Blankett (like Arthur Phillip a naval captain in the administration's confidence) commented, Pitt made the disposal of the convicts a 'Naval question'.

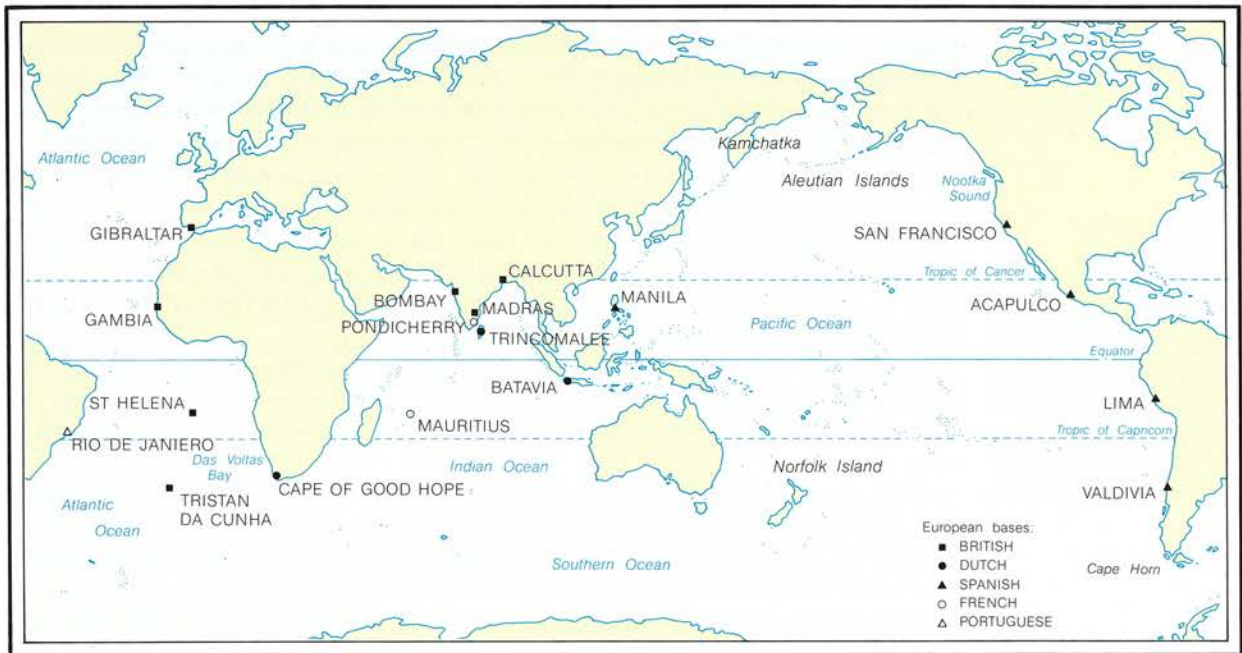
Finally, the Pitt administration did not choose Das Voltas Bay, which Thompson showed to be barren, a site on the Caffre Coast, or Madagascar, which Blankett had suggested. They decided instead to send the convicts to Botany Bay.

## THE DECISION TO COLONISE NEW SOUTH WALES

Many historians have considered that the Pitt administration decided to colonise Botany Bay suddenly and in some despair, solely to rid the nation's prisons and hulks of convicts. The opposite is true. Pitt and his colleagues took this decision after considering carefully the descriptions of the area by Cook and Banks and the arguments for a colonisation advanced by Banks, James Matra, John Call and Sir George Young. Their broad motive for colonising was the same as that for their earlier interest in Das Voltas Bay: Botany Bay was a place where they might use the convicts' labour to protect Britain's position and commerce in the East.

The Botany Bay area seemed to have much to recommend it. First, it offered a sheltered anchorage. Cook described it as 'Capacious safe and commodious', with 'steep rocky cliffs next the Sea' which made it 'tolerably well sheltered from all winds' with an entrance through narrow heads which could be effectively fortified. It had a channel giving twelve to fourteen feet of water (3.6 to 4.2 metres) at low tide, and anchorages of five to seven fathoms (9.1 to 12.8 metres).

Second, the area had the potential to meet colonists' needs and those of calling ships. There were natural resources—on land a sort of 'wild Spinage', a kind of



cherry and 'large' quantities of quails and parrots; in the bay an abundance of shellfish and fish. A number of streams entered the bay, and the surrounding land offered a prospect of infinite improvement. While some of the ground was swampy, there were also areas of woods and 'Lawns'. The woods were 'free from under wood of every kind and the trees are at such a distance from one another that the whole Country or at least a great part of it might be cultivated without being oblig'd to cut down a single tree'. Away from the marshes, the soil was 'a light white sand' that produced 'a quantity of good grass'. There were areas of a 'much richer', 'deep black Soil', which bore 'besides timber as fine meadow as ever was seen', and which might produce 'any kind of grain'. Colonists might cultivate these tracts 'in the Ordinary Modes used in England', Banks said. 'In this Extensive Country', said Cook, 'it can never be doubted but what most sorts of Grain, Fruits, Roots, &c of every kind would flourish here were they once brought hither, planted and cultivated by the hand of Industry, and here are Provender for more Cattle at all seasons of the year than ever can be brought into this Country'. The trees offered an abundant supply of fuel and building material, and the stone was also 'very proper' for building.

Third, the region appeared healthy. Cook observed that the Aborigines of New South Wales lived 'in a warm and fine Climate and enjoy[ed] a very wholesome Air'. Matra told the Beauchamp committee that Cook's party had found the climate 'perfectly agreeable to [the] European Constitution'. Clearly, Botany Bay would be no white man's grave such as Gambia and Batavia were.

Fourth, the British might occupy the area without violating either the dictates of humanity or the decorum of European politics. Banks reported that the coastal districts were thinly inhabited and he thought that the vast interior was most likely deserted. He and Cook had encountered only a few Aborigines during their stay at Botany Bay, never more than '30 or 40 together'. Though given to hostile gesturing, these people had seemed not 'at all to be feared'. They had only flimsy dwellings, and appeared nomadic. He believed that they wandered 'like the Arabs from place to place', setting up shelters wherever they found 'sufficient supplies of

*Naval power and European bases: strategic considerations on the eve of the decision to occupy Botany Bay.*

J. GOODRUM

food', and that they moved on as soon as they had exhausted these, 'leaving the houses behind, which are fram'd with less art or rather less industry than any habitations of human beings probably that the world can shew'. They had no apparent social or religious organisation. According to European political theory, the Aborigines had not established their right to possess New South Wales by mixing their labour with its soil through agricultural pursuits. The region was therefore *terra nullius*—no man's land—to be occupied by Europeans on the basis of first discovery, without purchase from the indigenous inhabitants. So far as Europeans knew, Cook was the first navigator to discover and chart the eastern coast of Australia and to take formal possession of it, so that Britain had first right among her neighbours to settle the region.

Fifth, by settling New South Wales the administration would confirm the preliminary right of possession that Cook had established and thereby prevent the French or the Dutch from taking initiatives that would add to British problems in the East.

Sixth, though Botany Bay was not close to the established routes, the British did not consider it to be inconveniently far from the Indian subcontinent. They thought of it as at least as much on the edge of the Indian as of the Pacific Ocean. Matra had described New South Wales as extending 'from the 44<sup>th</sup> degree of South Latitude, to the 10<sup>th</sup> and from 110, to near 154 degrees of Longitude'. It was 'about a Months run to the Cape of Good Hope; five weeks from Madras, and the same from Canton; very near the Moluccas, & less than a Months run to Batavia'. From it, they might attack the Dutch in the East Indies by a 'safe, & expeditious Voyage', and the Spanish in Manila with equal facility. The colonists might also obtain livestock from Savu and the Moluccas. Sir George Young told Pitt that Botany Bay lay 'not more than about seven Hundred Leagues' from the coast of China, 'nearly the same distance from the East Indies; from the Spice Islands about five hundred Leagues, and about a months run from the Cape of Good-hope'. (He lengthened these distances in later versions, but retained the import of his remarks.)

When newspapers announced the decision to colonise, they described New Holland as being 'in the Indian Seas'. It was also directly on the potential route from Europe, the Cape of Good Hope, and India to the west coasts of Spanish America. As Young put it:

*Botany Bay*, or its vicinity ... is about two thousand leagues from *Lima* and *Baldavia*, with a fair, open navigation; and there is no doubt but that a lucrative trade would soon be opened with the *Creole Spaniards*, for *English* manufactures: or suppose we were again involved in a war with *Spain*, HERE are ports of shelter and refreshment for our ships, should it be necessary to send any to the *South Sea*.

Seventh, the islands in the southwestern Pacific Ocean offered the prospect of a supply of naval materials. Hopes ranged from New Caledonia to New Zealand, but centred on Norfolk Island, about sixteen hundred kilometres to the northeast of Botany Bay. This small island was of volcanic origin, with two peaks of about three hundred metres, and was some thirty-six square kilometres in area. Its coastline was abrupt and jagged, offering a reasonable landing at only one spot. Shoals and reefs clustered about it. La Pérouse, who was unable either to anchor or land there, described it as 'only a place fit for angels and eagles to reside in'. But Norfolk Island had other attributes. Cook and William Wales, the *Resolution's* astronomer, reported that it was 'uninhabited and near a kin to New Zealand', that the native flax *Phormium tenax* so covered its shores that it was 'scarce possible to get through it', and that the 'Spruce Pines' which grew there 'in vast abundance and

to a vast size, from two to three feet diameter and upwards', were superior to those of New Zealand and New Caledonia for 'Masts, Yards, &ca'. Here was an island, they said, 'where Masts for the largest Ships' might be had, and Cook fashioned one tree into a yard for the *Resolution*.

The timber and flax of the southwest Pacific attracted attention in London. As Nepean wrote:

Some of the Timber is reported to be fit for Naval purposes particularly Masts, which the Fleet employed occasionally in the East Indies frequently stand[s] in need of, and which it cannot be supplied with but from Europe. But above all, the Cultivation of the Flax Plant seems to be the most considerable object. This Plant has been found in that neighbourhood in the most luxuriant state, and small quantities have been brought to Europe and manufactured, and, from its superior quality, it will it is hoped soon become an article of commerce from that Country.

Finally, the British could decide to colonise New South Wales without further investigation, an important point given the political situation in Europe and India. Cook and Banks had surveyed, botanised and observed the New South Wales coast only sixteen years before and Cook was the greatest and most accurate explorer of his age, while Banks was pre-eminent in European science and a trusted government adviser. The Pitt administration had no reason to suspect that their descriptions would be unreliable. 'Do you think Government would run any Risk in Attempting this plan without further Examination than you or any body you know could give them of that Country', the Beauchamp committee had asked Matra, who had replied, 'I think they would not'.

The government had estimated the likely cost of transportation to New South Wales. Nepean had obtained it at the beginning of the year, when he had suggested sending out one 40-gun ship, a tender and two transports with six hundred convicts and two companies of marines, and had asked Duncan Campbell, the convict contractor, for estimates for transporting the convicts out, feeding and clothing them in New South Wales for a year and equipping them for agriculture. If the transports returned empty and the round voyage took fifteen months, Campbell thought that the cost of carrying each convict outwards would be more than £50, but added: 'Should the Ship be Permitted to take in a Load at China for Britain in that case the Contractor might be able to obtain a handsome profit by the Voyage, & of course to Relax in [his] terms'.

It would be wrong to say that Pitt and his colleagues saw a colony at Botany Bay as being as desirable as one at Das Voltas Bay, had that site been otherwise suitable. Botany Bay was off the main shipping routes and the cost of transporting convicts there was inevitably greater. Botany Bay was a second choice. Still, it had attractions, especially those of naval stores and broad strategic position and, given the administration's general purpose for the convicts, these made it a satisfactory prospect.

## THE MOUNTING OF THE FIRST FLEET

The Pitt administration decided to colonise New South Wales on 19 August 1786. Two days later, the Home Office asked the Treasury for the money necessary to transport officials, some seven hundred and fifty convicts and two hundred marines and their families to Botany Bay, together with implements, seeds, animals, and two years' supply of food. In the next weeks, the Home Office and Treasury officials followed up this first announcement with others to the Admiralty, the East



*Reports by Cook and Banks of the luxuriant fibre plant (flax), on Norfolk Island and manufactured samples they obtained in New Zealand led experts in England to expect great potential for canvas and cordage on Norfolk Island.*

A. FROST

India Company and the Irish government, appointed Captain Arthur Phillip to be governor and chose other officials.

The Home Office's intention was to have this 'First Fleet' sail in mid-October 1786, but it did not leave until mid-May 1787. Historians have traditionally taken this as one of a series of signs of clumsy organisation and lack of official concern for the founding colonists. Such an interpretation ignores both the magnitude of the task of adequately equipping a large expedition for so distant a colonisation and the extent of efforts to do so.

There was no substantial precedent in recent British or, indeed, in European history for the Botany Bay venture. The European colonies in Asia were usually strictly limited in extent. They drew on resources created by local populations, and did not rely on large territorial acquisition. To some degree, this was also true at first of the Portuguese and Spanish ventures in the Americas, and where there were originally few or no local resources, extensive colonisation had followed only after their development by pioneers. Similarly, the English and French ventures in North America had developed either from the small beginnings of fishermen and fur traders or from those of small groups banded together in search of profit or freedom of religious expression and they, too, had made use of local resources.

Only West Indian ventures—particularly the colonisation of Jamaica by Cromwell's army in 1655—offered any substantial precedent for the Botany Bay settlement. Also the periodic despatch of expeditionary forces to the West Indies offered the nearest precedent for sending a large colonising expedition to the Antipodes. 'The marines and Convicts to be sent to Botany Bay', the Home Office announced, should 'be victualled in the same manner as the Troops serving in the West India Islands, excepting only the Allowance of Spirits—The Women to have two thirds of the quantity of Provisions supplied to a Man'.

But these precedents could only be imperfect ones. The voyage to the West Indies was much shorter than that to New South Wales and the Jamaican colonists had been able to turn for help to experienced settlers in adjoining islands. Later, expeditionary forces came to islands lush with produce. As Phillip took pains to point out, any similarly equipped expedition to the Antipodes would be inadequate. But the significant point is not that the Navy Board and its contractors should have initially approached the business in their customary ways. Rather, it is that there were some (Phillip and his surgeons) who saw better what was needed; and others (Nepean at the Home Office, George Rose and Thomas Steele at the Treasury, Philip Stephens at the Admiralty, Sir Charles Middleton at the Navy Board) who knew that Phillip's advice made sense. Eventually, the expedition sailed as well equipped as it could have been, given the limitations of the contracting system and the lack of experience of the country to be settled. Indeed, Arthur Bowes Smyth, the surgeon of the *Lady Penrhyn*, commented that 'few Marines or soldiers going out on a foreign Service under Government were ever better, if so well provided for as these Convicts are'. The low rates of illness and death on the voyage and in New South Wales testify to the accuracy of this appraisal.

Myriad arrangements were necessary to begin the colony. A legal basis had to be created, and officials selected. Two Royal Navy ships, six transports and three supply ships had to be obtained, fitted out and assembled at Portsmouth. The marine guard had to be recruited and provisions for the voyage and the first years of settlement ordered and loaded. There were implements and seeds to be obtained and people to be embarked on the ships and then kept healthy.

As they arranged to transport 1000 people 19 000 kilometres to the other side of the world and to equip them for the tasks of settlement, the officials did not lose sight of the larger reasons for the venture. They employed officers skilled in

18<sup>th</sup>  
 Whitehall 18<sup>th</sup> August 1786.

My Lords,

The several Goals and Places  
 for the Confinement of Felons  
 in this Kingdom being in so  
 crowded a State that the  
 greatest danger is to be  
 apprehended not only from  
 their Escape, but from  
 Infectious Distempers which  
 may hourly be expected to  
 break out amongst them; -  
 His Majesty desirous of  
 preventing by every possible  
 means the ill consequences  
 which might happen from  
 either of these causes has  
 been pleased to signify to  
 me His Royal Commands  
 that measures should  
 immediately

First page from the first draft of a Home Office letter to the Treasury in August 1786, announcing the decision to colonise Botany Bay. Though Lord Sydney signed the finished letter, it was drawn up by Evan Nepean, the under-secretary at the Home Office. This draft shows that the letter was written on 21 August and then backdated to 18 August, the last day on which the Treasury Board sat before rising for the summer-autumn recess.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE,  
 LONDON

surveying, who would gather more details of the coasts of New South Wales and of the seas about it. From a hemp manufacturer, Nepean obtained advice as to how the convicts should work the New Zealand flax; he recruited Lieutenant Dawes and the 'master weaver' Roger Morley as persons competent to oversee this work and obtained instruments and machines to facilitate it.

The Pitt administration made a sweeping territorial claim to the lands and waters of the southwest Pacific—to New Holland ('New South Wales'), eastwards from 135° between the latitudes 10° and 43°S, and to 'all the islands adjacent in the Pacific Ocean'. While the full extent of this claim is unclear, it probably stretched across the Pacific to Tahiti to include Norfolk Island, New Caledonia, three quarters of New Zealand and the Fijian and Tongan groups. 'As soon as Circumstances will admit of it', Phillip was to send a 'small Establishment' to Norfolk Island 'to secure the same to Us, and prevent it being occupied by the Subjects of any other European Power'. This was because of its potential as a supplier of naval material. The King's instructions to Phillip ran:

As it has been humbly represented unto Us that Advantages may be derived from the Flax Plant which is found in the Islands not far distant from the intended Settlement, not only as a Means of acquiring Cloathing for the Convicts, and other Persons who may become Settlers, but from its Superior Excellence for a variety of Maritime purposes and as it may ultimately become an Article of Export. It is therefore Our Will and Pleasure that you do particularly attend to its Cultivation.

Phillip sailed to found a colony that would satisfy the intertwined purposes of establishing an economic system of transportation and a base that would add to Britain's ability to protect its position in the East and to mount expeditions against Spanish America. The first governor expected to return after three years or so from a colony so developed 'as to repay Government the Annual Expence' of transporting convicts and maintaining them there, and from its 'situation', to be 'of the greatest consequence' to Britain.

What did the 759 convicts who sailed think of the venture? Historians used to portray them as the rather innocent victims of poverty and a harsh penal code, but modern research has cast a somewhat different light upon them. While some had no doubt turned to crime simply to survive, others were city dwellers who practised it as a way of life. Many were sentenced to transportation after being convicted of serious offences and after repeated convictions.

As most of the convicts were illiterate, there are few records of their thoughts, yet we may surmise some of them. Only the few literate ones could have had any real idea of the magnitude of the voyage they were going on. For the vast majority, the distance to New South Wales would have been as unimagined as that from New South Wales to China (supposed by some to be 250 kilometres). The town criminals, particularly, would have viewed without enthusiasm the prospect of hard labour in a country offering none of the 'necessaries of Life', let alone luxuries. Whether any saw the voyage as offering a chance of social redemption is impossible to say.

Still, there is evidence that convicts sensed something momentous about the enterprise. As the ships assembled at Portsmouth, 'great numbers' of persons, among them many thieves, flocked to the town, 'some to take leave of their acquaintances amongst the convicts, others out of curiosity to see the fleet put to sea'. It is doubtful whether the convicts considered themselves 'true patriots all' for leaving their country for their country's good, but it is reasonable to suppose that 'The Convict's Farewell to Old England' expressed their general sentiments.

What if the parting day is at hand  
 Never at fate be railing,  
 Though from a rich and plentiful land,  
 We must be quickly sailing;  
 Let not our bosoms fear dismay,  
 Future events concerning,  
 Tho' we are going to BOTANY-BAY,  
 Never from thence returning.  
 Food that's as good as heart can wish,  
 Soon may be there acquir'd,  
 Finest of FOWL, and sweetest of FISH,  
 What can be more desir'd?  
 Labour apart—where every day  
 Nature is kindly giving,  
 Plenty to have, and nothing to pay,  
 That is the land to live in!  
 We'll not for England care a pin,  
 If when abroad well treated;  
 Give us good store of Holland's gin,  
 Then is the work completed.  
 Care, who the Great Ones will attend,  
 Seldom the mind perplexes,  
 When through the year there's no demand  
 Either for RENT or TAXES.  
 Laws which made here the MAKERS shame  
 Every year want mending,  
 When afar off, about the GAME  
 There will be no contending:  
 Pheasants, and Hares, and Ducks we'll kill,  
 All with the sport delighted,  
 And not a soul, go where he will,  
 Ever shall be indicted.  
 Having these glorious things in view,  
 Why any dread at starting?  
 Hang'd be the wretch whose heart can shew  
 Any regret at parting;  
 Over the waves our course we'll bend,  
 Glad the fond hope to cherish,  
 Better to range in a foreign land,  
 Than in prison perish.

*Windmill Tavern, Newgate-street, Jan. 6, 1787.*

## THE VOYAGE

Phillip and the officials planned the fleet's route with the needs of the voyage and of the coming colonisation carefully in view. The ships would be loaded in England with provisions, seeds and some plants and animals and Phillip would add to this store as he proceeded. He might take on wine at the Canaries and the Cape Verde

Islands, plants and seeds at Rio de Janeiro, more plants, seeds, and especially animals at the Cape of Good Hope. At all these stations he would obtain fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables to keep his party free of scurvy.

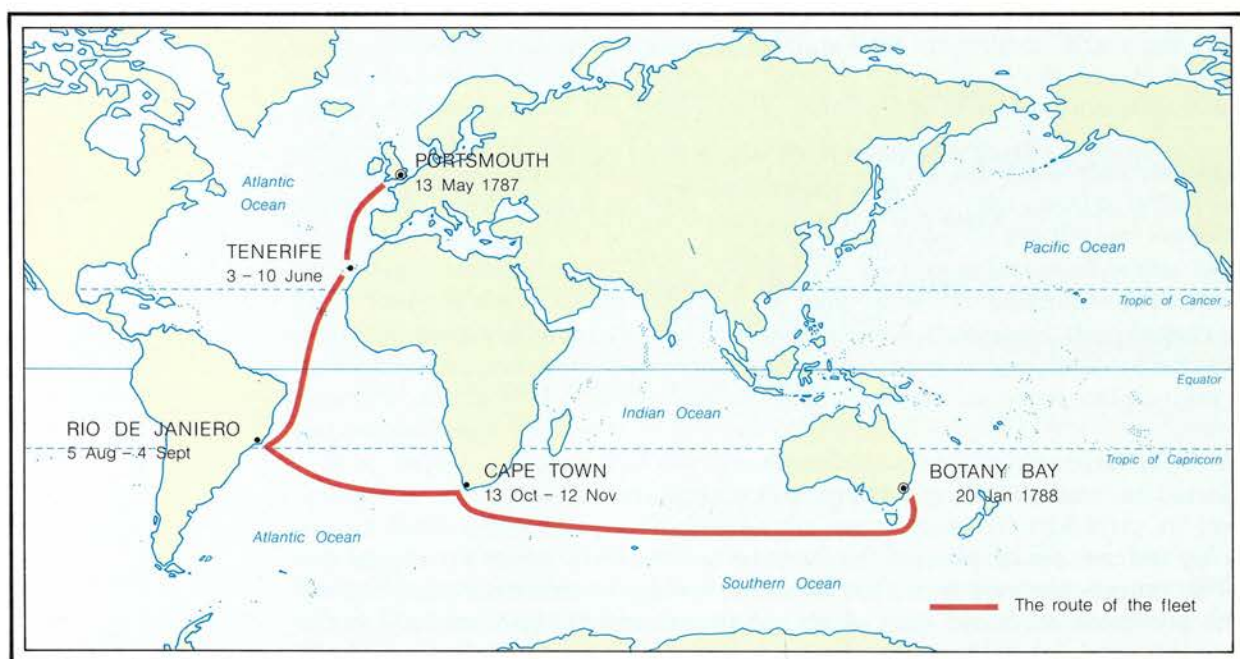
In a plan of January 1787, Nepean estimated a three-week passage to Tenerife, four months via Rio to the Cape and two months from there to Botany Bay—seven months sailing time in all. The officials then expected that the fleet would sail early in March so that it would reach New South Wales at the 'latter end of Octo<sup>r</sup>. or beginning of November, the Spring of that Country'. To make the best use of this assumed ideal season, Phillip would sail on ahead from the Cape with part of the fleet to raise buildings for the stores, huts for the women, yards for the stock and vegetables for the sick.

Arthur Phillip took the eleven ships out from Motherbank, off Portsmouth, on 13 May 1787. The voyage began auspiciously. The previous time Phillip had left Europe, winter storms had shattered his squadron in the Bay of Biscay and he had been forced to proceed alone. Now he sailed in 'fine' weather with a 'good breeze' at ESE. Five hundred kilometres into the Atlantic he farewelled the *Hyena*, a naval vessel sent in case convicts mutinied within reach of land.

Sailing down the route that thousands of voyages had made second nature to European navigators, the fleet headed for the Canary Islands. The fine weather continued. Phillip and his surgeons paid particular attention to diet and hygiene, and people were healthier than expected, especially the convicts. After three weeks, not only were they 'not so sickly as when [they] sailed', they were in general 'in good health & Spirits'. And already, in their behaviour, they showed the benefit of change in circumstance. There was a brief worry with some rogues on the *Scarborough*, but the officers quickly forestalled their intended mutiny. Indeed, Phillip found so little cause for concern that he gave permission for the males to be unfettered and for all to be allowed above deck at intervals. He reported after three weeks: 'in general, the convicts have behaved well ... They are quiet and contented'. Preparing for the tasks of colonisation, he gathered details of their 'different trades and occupations'.

*The route of the fleet, May 1787–January 1788.*

J. GOODRUM





The fleet came among the Canaries in the first days of June. Lying across southerly winds and currents, these islands were ideally situated to offer refreshment for ships sailing to the West Indies, South America, Africa and India. After settling them in the fifteenth century, Spanish colonists had quickly provided for the demand, raising animals and poultry, vegetables and fruit. In time they also produced goods for the European mainland—first sugar, then wines. By the 1780s Santa Cruz, the chief town on the main island of Tenerife, had become the group's central port, with a population of more than six thousand.

Having sighted the famous Peak of Tenerife the previous day, the fleet reached Santa Cruz on 3 June, where the governor received Phillip helpfully. For the next week the Captain provided for the party's present and future wellbeing, giving the marines and convicts one pound (450 grams) of fresh beef per day, with rice, wine and whatever vegetables and fruit were available, and taking on fresh water. During these days the officers inspected Santa Cruz and its surrounding districts. They found the town to be 'very irregular and ill-built', but to have some 'spacious' and 'convenient' houses; and were shocked by the 'restless importunity' of the beggars and the brazen prostitutes.

The officers did not see the Canaries at their best. Vegetables were scarce, and fruits not in season. Still, in the solidity of Santa Cruz, the fertility of the environs, the production of wines, dye, cotton and silk and the establishment of a regular government over the mixed population, they saw enough to gain a sense of how

*Knut Bull, Aboard the convict transport John Calvin in the northeast trades near Madeira. This is a rare painting, because convicts were not a subject for artists.*



William Bradley, Santa Cruz on the SE side of Teneriffe: Sirius & Convoy in the Road, June 1787, watercolour. Santa Cruz on Teneriffe was the chief port of the Canaries, where ships sailing from Europe would refresh so as to keep their crews healthy on the long voyage to the East. Bradley, first lieutenant on the Sirius, provided a series of views of the voyage of the fleet.  
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a small-scale European colonisation might succeed. Tenerife was the first in a series of such experiences during the voyage to remind the pioneers of the business they were undertaking and to give them vivid insights into the possibilities before them.

Phillip took the ships to sea again on 10 June. A week later, when off the Cape Verdes, he decided that the voyage was going well enough for him not to stop again, so he pressed on for Brazil. Despite some tropical heat and storms, the weather continued favourable and the party healthy. The waters swarmed with fish, with which the voyagers varied their diet. When they reached Rio de Janeiro early in August, only fifteen convicts and one marine's child had died, many fewer than might have been expected given the confined shipboard conditions.

The arrival at Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the Portuguese empire in South America since 1763, was something of a homecoming for Phillip. While based there as a captain in the Portuguese Navy between 1775 and 1778, he had become familiar with its majestic harbour, colourful town and romantic surrounds, and had won for himself an impressive reputation and the friendship of the viceroy. Now another viceroy greeted him as an equal, saluting him with thirteen guns, accommodating him on shore, and making the country's resources available to him. Luís de Vasconcelos e Sousa also allowed the British officers to move without military escort about the city and its surroundings—an unusual gesture and a personal tribute to Phillip.

In their days at Rio the officers strolled about admiring the new and imposing civic square, the aqueduct that ran past the city to the harbour and the richly gilded



*Leandro Joaquim, The square before the viceroy's palace, Rio de Janeiro, c 1780. With the imposing presence of the viceroy's palace, the central square open to the harbour and the watering facility there for ships, late-eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro demonstrated the principle of town planning considered appropriate to colonial ports. It was therefore one of the models for the Sydney that Phillip planned.*

MUSEU NACIONAL DE BELAS ARTES, RIO DE JANEIRO

churches. They joined the throngs at lively festivals, enjoyed displays of fireworks, and sought out 'tender' attachments. More aware of what lay ahead, Phillip avoided these pastimes and wherever possible also avoided the ceremony the viceroy extended. He spent his time obtaining fresh foods, which he found abundant, good and cheap and he gathered those plants and seeds that he expected to flourish in New South Wales, such as fruits, vines, coffee, cocoa, indigo and cotton.

Brazil showed the British party how a colonisation might succeed on a grand scale. The harbour at Rio de Janeiro was one of the finest in the world, combining with the fertility of the surrounding province to offer splendid facilities to shipping. Though it had become the capital only 24 years before, the city with its grand civic buildings, churches and sumptuous private mansions bore impressive testimony to the wealth of produce, metals and jewels that the Portuguese drew from their American empire.

The company refreshed, the ships reprovisioned and stocked with some of what they would need in New South Wales, Phillip sailed for the Cape of Good Hope on 4 September. On the face of things, the party's good fortune continued. The passage did become somewhat rougher, but the people remained extraordinarily healthy. When they reached the Cape, there were about one hundred sick, but Phillip did not find it necessary to land these, who 'were perfectly re-established in three or four days' on fresh food. Although certain items were in short supply and the Dutch merchants charged dearly for others, Phillip was able to get most of the additional supplies and animals he needed. The Cape colony had a population of about twelve thousand Europeans, who worked their slaves to produce large herds and crops. And as in Brazil, example made for optimism. 'The Cape is situated in a fine Climate', one officer wrote, '& Yields most of the necessarys of Life, and some of the Luxuries—We have good hopes of B<sup>y</sup>. Bay—it being in Nearly the same Latitude'.

But a distinct sobering of outlook also accompanied the company's arrival at the Cape of Good Hope and the narratives of the voyage show a loss of optimism and the growth of a sense of menace. The Cape colony itself brought the first indications. Though prosperous enough, Cape Town was no Rio de Janeiro. Here

were no environs 'abounding with the most luxuriant flowers and aromatic shrubs', but rather the forbidding Table Mountain, on whose bleak rocks renegade slaves took refuge. Here were no taverns for the officers to lodge at, provisions were dear, and the governor was uncertain about allowing the British access to them. Though substantial enough, the buildings were laid out with a severe regularity that bespoke the Calvinism of the inhabitants. Here were no exuberant festivals. Here ladies did not let passion slip past enticing veils, throw nosegays from balconies, gather at the gates of convents to encourage assignations or mingle with the festival crowds to achieve them. Rather, they sat demurely in the middle of austere churches, with the men surrounding them around the walls. Couples were married only on Sundays, wearing black. Here, slaves moved about the streets in fear.

The British constantly felt the presence of violence and death. A few weeks before their arrival, an unhappy Malay had run amok, murdering fourteen men and desperately wounding another thirty. His fate, to be broken alive on the wheel, was the criminal's typical one. Phillip's officers learned that the colony's principal law officer had 'People under his directions, who constantly patrol the streets armed, for the apprehending all disorderly persons; Every 14 days Offences are tried'. The punishments inflicted were: 'Breaking upon the Cross, upon the Wheel [,] impalements, flogging to that degree that Death is frequently the effect of the severity'. Over the door of 'a small Wooden House, wherein are kept the Instruments of Execution' was inscribed: 'Happy is the Man whom other Mens misfortunes make wary'. Along the shore and in front of the town were 'many Gallows & other impliments of punishment ... There were also Wheels for breaking Felons upon, several of wh. were at this time occupied by the mangled Bodies of the unhappy wretches who suffer'd upon them'.

Instinctively, moreover, the British knew that to leave the Cape of Good Hope for the southern Indian Ocean was to leave the familiar world. As Cook had written from there to his old master John Walker in November 1772, 'having nothing new to communicate I should hardly have troubled you with a letter was it not customary for Men to take leave of their friends before they go out of the World, for I can hardly think my self in it so long as I am deprived from having any Connections with the civilized part of it, and this will soon be my case for two years at least'. Now Phillip also faced this reality. Knowing himself destined for a region 'that does not furnish any of the necessaries of Life', he shifted people from one ship to another, crowding them together to make room for the stalls, which he filled with animals. The company at large felt something of this urgency. 'This is the last port we touch at in our Way to the New Settlement', one officer wrote, '[and it] has been a Time of constant Bustle—indeed it is right to take every advantage of it, for the leaving behind of any of the many Articles that are requisite, and necessary, would be now irreparable'.

This feeling did not arise simply from awareness that the 'coarse fare and hard labour' of an infant colony would soon replace the 'refreshments and the pleasures' of developed ones. 'The land behind us was the abode of a civilized people', David Collins wrote as they prepared to sail, 'that before us was the residence of savages. When, if ever, we might again enjoy the commerce of the world, was doubtful and uncertain'. In this sobering atmosphere, the voyagers clung to the comforting simplicities of their world. Some of them had received letters just before they sailed again; and as the ships moved away from the Cape, they encountered the whaler *Kent*:

On our first discovering her, as she seemed desirous of joining or speaking to the fleet, we were in hopes of her being from England, probably to us, or at

least that we might get letters by her; but our suspense on these points, a suspense only to be conceived by persons on long voyages, was soon put an end to by hearing she had been so many months out.

This disappointment made final the move from the Cape. 'We weighed anchor', Watkin Tench of the marines wrote, 'and soon left far behind every scene of civilization and humanized manners'.

The ships were now crowded with cattle, sheep, pigs, horses and poultry, and loaded deep with food and extra water for these beasts and the Brazilian plants, and Phillip's own cabin was like 'a Small Green House' when they sailed on 11 November. Phillip now decided to go on ahead to prepare for the main party's arrival. Shifting into the *Supply* and taking artificers with him, he set off with three of the faster ships. This departure of the governor led to more psychic dislocation and a deepening of the company's mood. John Hunter, Phillip's subordinate captain, now responsible for seven ships and about a thousand people, became excessively cautious; Major Robert Ross, the lieutenant-governor, grew bitter. To preserve water for the animals and plants, everyone was limited to three pints a day. The convicts became unruly.

In December, in the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean, the passage grew worse. The ships wallowed in the great swell and ran into fogs and fierce gales. Disease and cold killed many animals, and their fodder also began to grow short. More people fell ill and there were frequent injuries from equipment shifting as the ships pitched and tossed. As they entered the longitudes of New Holland, the officers pored over charts deriving from Cook's voyages to learn when their own would end. At Christmas, they were engulfed by nostalgia for a country and friends half a world away.

George Raper, Table Bay, 1787.

BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY)

*'Exactly 2 minutes before 6 o'clock p.m. we drop'd Anchor in Table Bay, directly before Cape Town & the Table mountain. The face of the Country appears beautiful, the Town is back'd by very lofty Mountains many of wh. are cover'd wt. verdure, & great flocks of Sheep feeding thereon, particularly that called the Lyon's Rump. The Town is pretty large & appears to have many exceeding good houses in it. There are many Gallows & other impliments of punishment erected a long shore and in the front of the Town. There were also Wheels for breaking Felons upon, several of wh. were at this time occupied by the mangled Bodies of the unhappy wretches who suffer'd upon them.'*

Arthur Bowes Smyth, Journal.

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Then came those portents they were longing for. Some of the plants from Rio began to bloom and on 6 January 1788 they sighted the southern coast of Van Diemen's Land. Cook's charts allowed them to identify their position and the captains distributed wine. They swung away from land again but were not disheartened, for they knew this was necessary to have a safe run up to their destination. On 19 January they reached the coast of New South Wales just south of Botany Bay. The wind was 'fair', the sky 'serene, though a little hazy', the temperature 'delightfully pleasant', and the coastline as Cook and Banks had described it.

The next day they entered Botany Bay to find the ships that had gone ahead. These had arrived only one and two days before, so Phillip had not been able to prepare as he had hoped. He had, however, overseen an eight months' voyage of eleven indifferent sailors, carrying some 1350 people, many of whom had originally been in poor health. And while numbers of the party were then suffering from scurvy, Phillip had lost only thirty-two during the voyage.

If Cook had led the voyage, we would see these achievements as further signs of his greatness. Phillip's enterprise was less glamorous than Cook's, but it was not less demanding. As David Collins observed:

Thus, under the blessing of God, was happily completed, in eight months and one week, a voyage which, before it was undertaken, the mind hardly dared venture to contemplate, and on which it was impossible to reflect without some apprehensions as to its termination . . . in the above space of time we had sailed five thousand and twenty-one leagues; had touched at the American and African Continents; and had at last rested within a few days sail of the antipodes of our native country, without meeting any accident in a fleet of eleven sail, nine of which were merchantmen that had never before sailed in that distant and imperfectly explored ocean: and when it is considered, that there was on board a large body of convicts, many of whom were embarked in a very sickly state, we might be deemed peculiarly fortunate, that of the whole number of all descriptions of persons coming to form the new settlement, only thirty-two had died since their leaving England.

Phillip quickly found that Botany Bay was not as fertile as Cook and Banks had described it and that it was not a suitable site for a large settlement. He therefore went to investigate Port Jackson, twenty kilometres northward, where he 'had the satisfaction of finding the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line [might] ride in the most perfect security'. As the site for first settlement, he fixed on a cove into which ran a good spring of water, and 'in which the ships [could] anchor so close to the shore that at a very small expence quays may be made at which the largest ships may unload'. He then began transferring the convoy from Botany Bay to Sydney Cove. On the morning of 26 January 1788, in a small clearing, as a sailor hoisted the union flag, Phillip and his officers toasted their King's health and their future success, and marines fired their muskets in a '*feu de joie*'.

## EXPECTATIONS

With a motley group of convicts to begin it, those who planned the New South Wales colony understood that it would only slowly become a civilised society of the kind they knew in Europe. But they did hope and expect that it would be self-sufficient within three years, and they foresaw the development of a society in which marines who had completed their term would take Polynesian wives, convicts who had regained their liberty would marry, and both groups would cultivate small plots and raise families to follow in their footsteps.

Only in one particular did the officials have a grander immediate expectation of the venture: a self-sufficient colony would be able to refresh ships proceeding into the Pacific; Norfolk Island pines and the New Zealand flax would supply naval materials to refit ships in Sydney Cove and in the Indian dockyards; a sturdy yeomanry would supply recruits for the army and navy in wartime, making New South Wales a strategic outlier to India and a way station to the west coasts of America. In these ways New South Wales could become, in Phillip's words, 'of the greatest consequence' to Britain.

Yet the British did not limit their expectations of the venture to such short-term considerations. On the low atolls of an immediate reality, seemingly so unpropitious, they nurtured a tropical growth of expectation and aspiration deriving from lingering notions of *Terra Australis* and grand visions of Europe's colonial destiny.

While the Dutch navigators and Cook had diminished the once-great *Terra Australis* to New Holland, late-eighteenth-century commentators pronounced on the new entity only a little less grandly than had their Renaissance predecessors on the old. 'The existence of a Southern continent, of which New Holland was to form a part, [was] found to be only imaginary, yet this country, for its vast extent, may itself alone very justly be styled a continent' wrote its would-be historian. Sir George Young observed:

The variety of Climates included between the forty forth and Tenth Degree, of Latitude gives us an opportunity of uniting in one Territory, almost all the different Productions of the known World. To explain this more fully, it will be necessary to point out some of the Countries which are situated within the same extent of Latitude on either side the Equator. They are Chini, Japan Siam, India, Persia, Arabia-felix, Egypt, Asia-minor, Greece, all Turkey, the Mediterranean-Sea, Italy, Spain, the South of France and Portugal, with Mexico, Lima, Baldavia, the Society and Friendly Islands, and the greatest part of the Pacific Ocean, to which may be added the Maderia, Canary, Azore, & Cape do Verd Islands, with the Cape of Good-Hope, &c. &c. &c.

Less precisely, Banks thought that 'it was not to be doubted, that [such] a Tract of Land', which was larger than 'the Whole of *Europe*, would furnish Matter of advantageous Return'. Analogy showed that amongst this 'Matter' would be spices, minerals, and precious metals. Possession of New South Wales might give Britain the riches of the world.

Another set of grand expectations arose from Enlightenment views about the way nature, nurture, and property moulded personality. One of the arguments for continuing the practice of transportation was that 'it tended directly to reclaim the Objects on which it was inflicted and to render them good Citizens'. Those condemned to transportation had by their transgressions forfeited the right to enjoy the benefits of one society, but they might regenerate in another environment, especially one secluded and rural, without 'the Temptations . . . which occasioned their Offences at Home'. 'It is sufficiently proved by ancient and modern history', pronounced George Forster, that thieves 'cease to be enemies to society whenever they regain their full human rights and become proprietors and cultivators of land'. In the inchoateness of New South Wales, James Matra forecast in 1784, the convicts could have 'no temptations to Theft', and would therefore 'work or starve'. If not 'reproached for their former Conduct', and if given 'a few Acres of ground . . . with what assistance they may want to till them', he believed, 'they will be usefull, and] it is very possible they will be moral subjects of Society'.

History nourished such expectations. What, after all, had Rome been at first? Had not Western civilisation itself emerged from a coalition of bandits? 'In the

District afterwards called Rome', the Reverend Weeden Butler reminded his nephew on the first fleet,

a Band of Men were assembled; who or what they were might perhaps do no Credit, even to an [Ordinary] Daily Register. But those venerable Fathers of the history of the World, were Beings, how poorly furnished in point of natural Information or acquired Intelligence, when compared to the Men who our laws have in an Hour of Mercy entrusted to the Care of your able Gov<sup>r</sup>? What superior, and more rapid progress then may we not expect from them? *It will be so.*

And what at first had America been? In proposing the venture, John Call reminded the ministers both that the 'first Projectors or Undertakers' of schemes that had brought the nation great advantages 'have been deemed little better than Madmen or have acted in a Character bordering on Piracy'. The British colonies in North America had also begun inauspiciously, he argued.

Who would have thought from the Appearance of the Country, and Nature of the Climate, when the Infant colonies were first attempted in North America, and frequently destroyed by Famine, Disease or the Natives; or the surviving few were obliged to retire, that in the Space of about two hundred Years or less, such unpromising beginning and in many instances such inhospitable Climates, should at this day have produced and supported thirteen New States who possess a Tract of cultivated Land much more extensive than Great Britain? and are regarded in the most important Light for a commercial Intercourse by all the Maritime Powers of Europe?

By their rebellion, Weeden Butler again observed, the Americans had lost that benefit that those in New South Wales would enjoy—'the Romulus of a Britain to inform, to plough, to dig, to denshire, and to manure them'. In America, the editor of Phillip's *Voyage* pointed out, it frequently happened that, 'during the period of their legal servitude, [convicts] became reconciled to a life of honest industry, were altogether reformed in their manners, and rising gradually by laudable efforts, to situations of advantage, independence, and estimation, contributed honourably to the population and prosperity of their new country'.

Underlying these expectations of regenerated people forming themselves into a society increasingly prosperous and civilised was a sense of the great business of creation itself. In distinct stages, God had wrought cosmos out of primordial chaos. In the more limited sphere of New South Wales, the British might emulate this achievement. As the Aborigines were thought not to have worked the land—New South Wales seemed 'a Virgin Mould, undisturbed since the Creation'. Agriculture would introduce the fruits and grains, husbandry might introduce the cattle of the old world, and bring about 'a capital Improvement . . . in the southern Part of the New World'. All that was needed was the creative European hand; civilisation would inevitably follow. William Eden told Banks that the nation's activities about the Pacific were 'imperial works, & worthy of our Sovereign'. Phillip believed he was founding an empire. Banks saw 'the future prospects of empires and dominions which . . . cannot be disappointed', and asked, 'Who knows but that England may revive in New South Wales when it has sunk in Europe'.

In the beginning, then, all the world had been Rome before Romulus, America before the *Mayflower*. An epic story might unfold in New South Wales, too. In November 1788 Phillip sent Banks a small box of 'the white Clay with wch: the [Port Jackson] Natives mark themselves'. Banks gave it to Wedgwood, who manufactured it into a cup and some medallions, which Banks then sent out to



*The end of the voyage.*  
William Bradley, Botany  
Bay: Sirius & Convoy  
going in: Supply & Agent  
Division in the Bay, 21 Jan,  
1788.

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Phillip in New South Wales. When Phillip saw 'Etruria 1789', with its motif of 'Hope encouraging Art and Labour, under the influence of Peace, to pursue the employments necessary to give security and happiness to an infant settlement', he commented: 'Wedgwood has showed the World that our Welch Clay is capable of receiving an Elegant impression'. The Pitt administration adapted the design for the colony's first Great Seal; and Erasmus Darwin elaborated on Wedgwood's statement, having 'Hope' predict of Sydney Cove:

*There shall broad streets their stately walls extend,  
The circus widen, and the crescent bend;  
There, ray'd from cities o'er the cultur'd land,  
Shall bright canals, and solid roads expand.——  
There the proud arch, Colossus-like, bestride  
Yon glittering streams, and bound the chafing tide;  
Embellish'd villas crown the landscape-scene,  
Farms wave with gold, and orchards blush between.——  
There shall tall spires, and dome-capt towers ascend,  
And piers and quays their massy structures blend;  
While with each breeze approaching vessels glide,  
And northern treasures dance on every tide.*

Before this vision might become reality, there had to be an ordering of elemental chaos—the chaos of scarcely travelled seas and almost unknown coasts, of an unfamiliar land and its Aboriginal inhabitants alien in so many ways, of the dissoluteness of the first colonists, of dead animals and failed crops, of minds disordered by distance and by time. Success awaited the patient work of days and months, years, decades, generations, two centuries. It began in those moments when Cook drew the first charts of the eastern coastline and gave the first English names to it, when Banks and Solander first described plants and animals, when Phillip selected Sydney Cove and his party cut down the first trees. It began ceremonially on the morning of 7 February 1788 when, led by their band and with their colours flying, the marines marched into a clearing to encircle the seated convicts, and Phillip stood at the centre, bareheaded, in company with his principal officers, for all to hear the deputy judge-advocate establish the colony and Phillip's governorship over it; when Phillip, now empowered as giver of law and mercy, exhorted those in his charge to moral reform and useful industry; and when the marines edged these solemnities with discharges of muskets and the playing of 'God Save the King'.



*Josiah Wedgwood, Etruria 1789. Late in 1788, Phillip sent Sir Joseph Banks a sample of white pipeclay used by the Aborigines as decoration. Banks asked Wedgwood to prepare medallions from it with the object of showing 'the inhabitants what their materials would do, and to encourage their industry'. Etruria was the region in which bandits clustered, the ancestors of the Romans. The allegory shows 'Hope encouraging Art and Labour'. In the background are shown agricultural pursuits and a church, signs of industry and moral regeneration.*

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Entrance Port Jackson 27 January 1788, a  
watercolour painted by William Bradley, first lieutenant  
aboard the *Sirius*. Bradley was on the convoy which  
arrived from Botany Bay after the flag-raising ceremonies  
at Sydney Cove.

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