

## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NSW

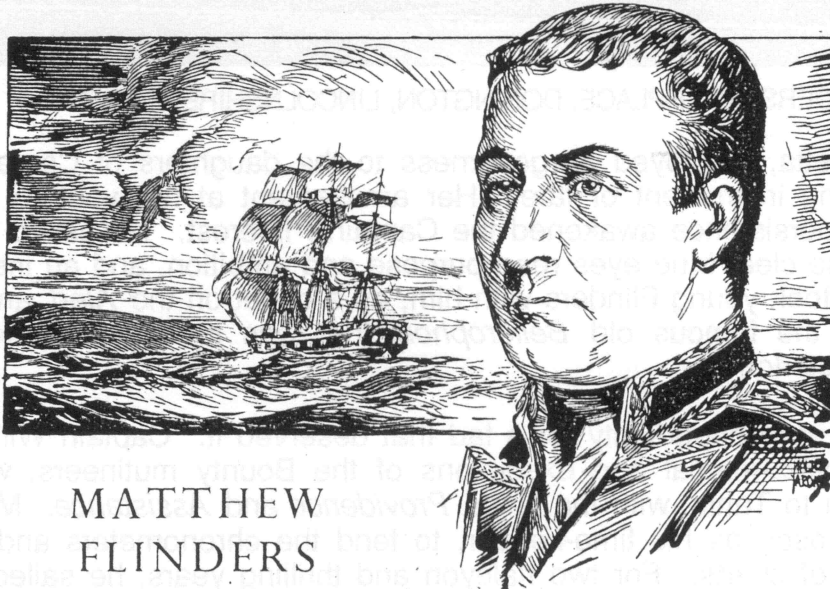
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### CAPTAIN MATTHEW FLINDERS R.N. (1774 - 1814)

"No man that ever lived, even Captain James Cook, more deserves to be held in everlasting remembrance by Australians than does Matthew Flinders, the fearless young explorer who gave to a new continent its appropriate and beautiful name. He was a true hero, as genuine a philanthropist and as high-spirited a patriot as ever bore the English name. . . . The principal streets in every city in the Australian colonies ought to be adorned with a statue of this illustrious man". So wrote David Blair, Victorian journalist and historian some 112 years ago and that opinion must still be shared by all grateful and right thinking Australians today.



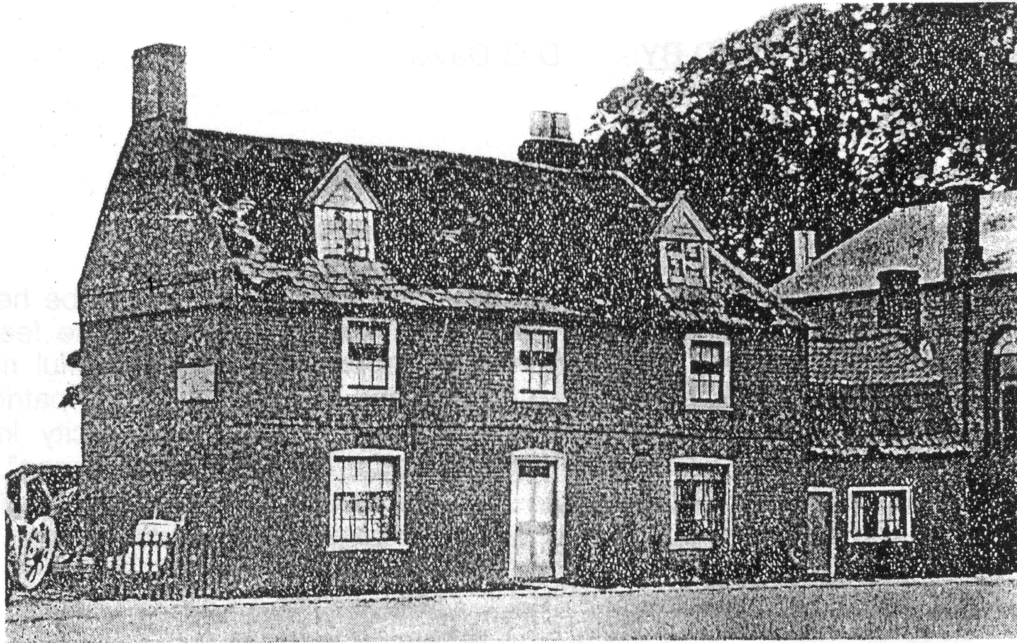
MATTHEW  
FLINDERS

At Donington in Lincolnshire, on 16 March 1774, Matthew Flinders was born.

The eldest son of a country doctor, he was destined to follow his father's profession, and complete the third generation of surgeons and physicians in the county. It may be that his first inspiration for the sea came from the "Boston Stump", as it was called, the tower of St. Botolph's in the big market town nearby, that had been a lighthouse in the old Viking days. It is a striking and romantic fact that the "Boston Stump", commanding the marshes and the dykes for many miles, overlooked Aswarby and Spilsby, birthplaces of George Bass and Sir John Franklin, both distantly related to the Flinders family, and also Revesby Abbey, where lived none other than Bro. Sir Joseph Banks.

At Horbling Grammar School, Matthew in the early teens could enlighten his tutors in Euclid and trigonometry. His delight was to trace to their sources all the little

streams and runnels of the Witham, and to pore in secret over Robertson's *Elements of Nautical Astronomy*, and Hamilton Moore's *Principles of Navigation*.



FLINDERS' BIRTHPLACE, DONINGTON, LINCOLNSHIRE, ENGLAND.

A cousin, Henrietta, employed as governess to the daughters of Captain Pasley, was the unwitting instrument of fate. Her amusement at her youthful kinsman's eagerness and persistence awakened the Captain's interest. He asked to see the boy, and in those clear blue eyes read purpose and ambition, and an inspired love of the sea. He took young Flinders with him, as a cadet on the *Alert*, and later, on the *Scipio* and the famous old *Bellerophon*, that was to carry Napoleon to St. Helena, after Waterloo.

In 1791 came a rare opportunity for a lad that deserved it. Captain William Bligh, following the courts-martial and executions of the *Bounty* mutineers, was bound southward again to Tahiti, with the ships *Providence* and *Assistance*. Midshipman Flinders was chosen as his time-keeper, to tend the chronometers and help with the compilation of charts. For two halcyon and thrilling years, he sailed the coral islands of romance. Even the crusty old disciplinarian, Bligh, accorded him a grudging word of praise that must have been well merited.

They were back in time for young Matthew, again on the *Bellerophon* with Pasley, to share the honours of the fierce and fiery Battle of Brest. A humorous story is told of his casually setting a match to three loaded and unattended guns, and firing a broadside into a passing "Frenchman" just because the opportunity offered.

"How dare you do that, you young rascal, without my orders?" thundered the Captain, with a twinkle in his eye. "I thought it a good chance to have a shot at 'em sir", said Flinders innocently.

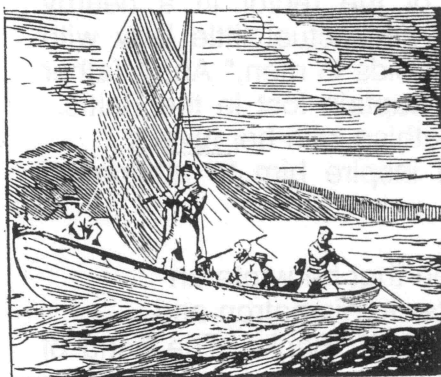
But the triumphs of war struck no deep note in the heart of the Lincolnshire boy. For him, a ship was too sacred and lovely a thing to be the instrument of carnage and destruction. "The vacant spaces of the map" were calling, in those southern sunlit seas he had sailed with Bligh.

Of Cook he wrote, the faintest tinge of boyish envy clothed in hero-worship, "He reaped the harvest of discovery, but the gleanings of the field remain to be gathered."

Afire with ambition, not for himself but for England, throughout his whole life, with all its hardships and bitter disappointments, he never wavered in his ideal.

When he was 21, the great chance came. Accompanying Governor Hunter in the *Reliance*, he was transferred to New South Wales. With him, as a cadet, sailed his young brother Samuel - alas for the hopes of the doctor of Donington, that a son of his should follow in his footsteps. The ship's surgeon, direct from an apothecary's shop in Sleaford, was Matthew's comrade in childhood, George Bass.

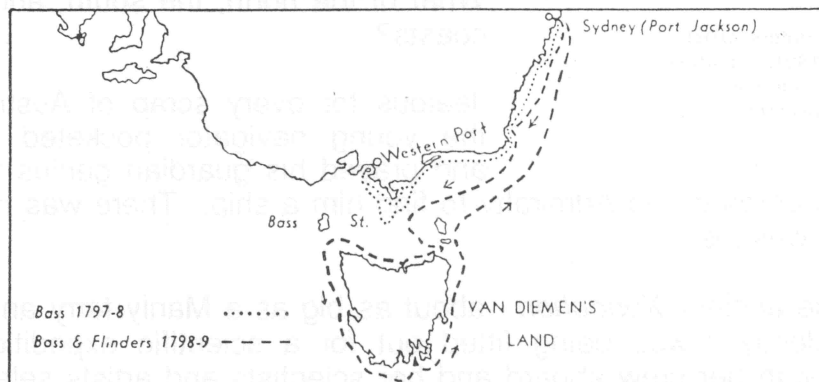
The story of their great achievements is well known. In little ships crumbling to pieces, ships unsheltered from the skies or cramped and crawling with vermin, they unravelled the mysteries of the east coast of the Australian mainland. At the mercy of the elements at sea, and the aboriginals on land, these two were as happy as sand-boys. They wrote the adventure stories of their youth in a nation's history.



The *Tom Thumb*

Everybody interested in Australian history knows the success attending the trips that Bass and Flinders made in the small boat, *Tom Thumb*, exploring Botany Bay and the Georges River and later, after a brief visit to Norfolk Island, going further south to Lake Illawarra. Another of the achievements of these daring young men was in the sloop, *Norfolk*, of 25 tons, built by Captain Townson on Norfolk Island. On 7 October 1798 they set out from Sydney Cove, returning there on 12 January 1799, having circumnavigated Van Diemen's Land and discovering Bass Strait, thus proving Van Diemen's Land an island.

In 1799 they were parted, never to meet again. Flinders was recalled to duty on the *Reliance*, bound for England. He gained his lieutenancy by examination at the Cape of Good Hope, and appeared before the delighted home-town people in Lincolnshire, after nearly five years' absence, in full naval uniform, with his charts which, shortly afterwards, were published by Sir Joseph Banks.



THE VOYAGES OF BASS AND FLINDERS

George Bass was not so lucky. After trading in the Pacific Islands for two years, he sailed to South America in 1803, where his ship, the *Venus*, was seized by the Spaniards who sent him to work in the silver mines. He was never heard of again. In later years, referring to their association, Flinders wrote : " In Mr George Bass I had the happiness to find a man whose ardour for discovery was not to be repressed by any obstacles, nor deterred by danger; and with this friend a determination was formed of completing the examination of the east coast of New South Wales by all such opportunities of the duty of the ship and procurable means could admit".

There was one<sup>1</sup> outside the Flinders' family circle who looked upon the sunburnt young lieutenant with proud and loving eyes. She was Ann Chappell, a friend of "my charming sisters," a friend of his own in boyhood, and now more than friend, for to her he had written, before his foot touched land. "You are one of those whom it is indispensably necessary for me to see . . . I have long been absent. I must now take a bold step forward, or be a poor lieutenant all my life."



Matthew Flinders, artist  
unknown, 1801, miniature,  
watercolour on ivory.  
(MITCHELL LIBRARY)

Step-daughter of the rector in a nearby village, a highly intellectual little lady with "a distaste for insipids in men," Ann's father had been a sea-captain lost in the Baltic. She could sympathise with her lover's aspirations, and inspire him to attainment greater still.

It was at this time that he wrote an impassioned letter to his patron and neighbour, Sir Joseph Banks. The bond of the newly discovered country was between them. Flinders implored his influence for that land, so little known, now menaced by invasion, for Napoleon was greedy for empire, and the Frenchmen were on the way. Baudin and Hamelin had already sailed on a voyage of discovery. Cook had taken possession of the east coast only. What of the north, the south, and the west coasts?

Jealous for every scrap of Australian soil, the young navigator pocketed his pride, and prayed his guardian genius to use his

influence with the Lords of the Admiralty to find him a ship. There was no time to lose, and no time was lost.

By April, 1801, the ancient *Xenophon* - about as big as a Manly ferry and showing signs of senile decay - was being fitted out for a scientific expedition as the *Investigator*, and with her crew aboard and her scientists and artists selected, was ready for her young commander at Spithead.

Bearing his blushing honours thick upon him, Matthew Flinders hurried home by stage-coach to Lincolnshire, and, in a snatched and blissful moment, the lovers were married at the village church of East Partney, exulting in all the happiness that life could give.

It was Flinders' intention to bring his bride to Port Jackson, there to await him while he surveyed the coasts of New Holland, but he reckoned without his hosts. The Lords of the Admiralty, on their discovery of this iniquitous conspiracy, were adamant. The Nelson-Hamilton scandal was at its height, and women were anathema to the British Navy. Even Sir Joseph Banks was angry. The secret marriage nearly cost the young commander the dearest wish of his heart. Torn between his life's love and his life's loyalty, at last he was beaten. In sadness he wrote, "I shall give up the wife for the voyage of discovery." A few brief broken weeks of honeymoon - grim were the Lords of the Admiralty! - an anguished parting, and he was gone, for ten long sorrowful years.

In July 1801, eight months behind the Frenchmen and dangerously late, the *Investigator* cleared for New Holland with a keen and eager company of loyal 'tars' and brilliant young scientists, some of them later to become distinguished, including, Robert Brown, the naturalist, who spent four years in Australia, returning to England with a rare botanical collection of over 4000 specimens and was the father of Australian systematic botany. Others, were Bauer, the natural history painter; Westall, the landscape artist who left us some fine specimens of his art, and midshipman, Franklin, later the famous Sir John Franklin, who later became Governor of Tasmania and won eternal fame as an Arctic explorer.

In December, Flinders reached Cape Leeuwin, and later landed at King George's Sound. He continued to chart the coast of Australia round the Bight to Encounter Bay, taking in Spencers' Gulf and the Gulf of St Vincent. Now he was indeed on shores unknown. "There will be no need for other men to follow after me," he trusted, and as a cartographer, with a passion for detail and the infinite capacity for taking pains, he transcends all others, even the redoubtable Cook, who ran by night, leaving many a dotted line on a map.

Day after day, creeping along a mile and less from land, the *Investigator* sounded her way through islands and bays and straits and gulfs, the first white sails in those lost horizons. She was a busy ship and a happy one, right down to the youngest midshipman, who happened to be the commander's nephew by marriage, John Franklin. The astronomer had resigned his duties through illness at the Cape of Good Hope, so Flinders and his nephew, Franklin, shared the work. To Matthew the southern stars were all old friends. By a hurricane lamp at night he was pencilling in the outlines of a new world.

This story of exploration is told in full in some of the most dramatic chapters of Flinders' book, "*A Voyage to Terra Australis*" - the tragedy of the lost boat's crew at Cape Catastrophe; the delights of Kangaroo Island and the naming of Mount Lofty, blue in the distance; the survey of a thousand miles of coast that conferred immortality upon those ungriving Lords of the Admiralty, and translated the memories of Lincolnshire twelve thousand miles to the south, honouring it's own men.

In Encounter Bay the Frenchmen hove in sight at the crucial moment. An impatient greeting, a courteous meeting, and Commander Matthew Flinders, bore a sigh of relief and a smile of triumph, as he presented to Captain Nicholas Baudin the charts he had set out to make!

But for the activities of Flinders there is no telling what the French might have done in establishing colonies in Australia. Though they finally abandoned any pretensions to colonisation here, they were ready enough to claim discoveries which rightly belonged to the English. That claim in itself justified the suspicion of French territorial acquisition. The meeting of the French and English navigators in Encounter Bay on 8 April 1802, was friendly in the extreme, as was shown by the peaceful character of the greetings exchanged, by the exchange visits to one another's vessels, and by the fact that Flinders breakfasted with Baudin the day the ships parted company.

A carefree skimming of his own old tracks, a respite in Sydney Harbour, helping the limping Frenchmen through the Heads to a safe haven, restoring the *Investigator*, and he was off to the north, tracing the channels within the Barrier Reef and through the Torres Strait that was soon to be the trade-route from England.

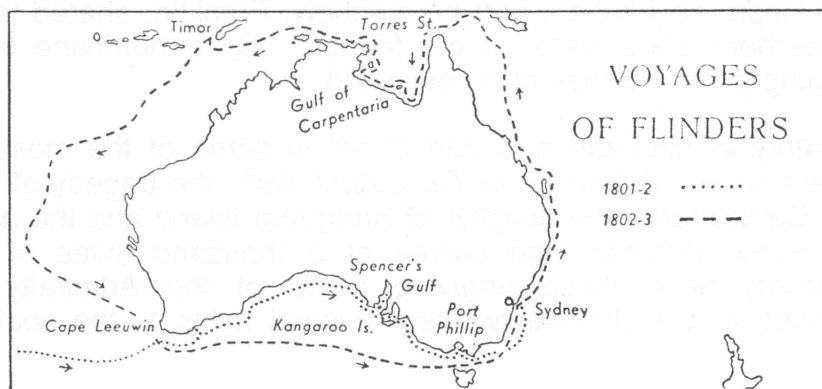
It was in the season of summer hurricanes that he dipped down into the Gulf of Carpentaria, charted those low and indefinite shores - red sand and native smokes - and, careening his ship in the Wellesley Islands, where Flinders found she was falling to pieces.

Through no fault of his own, he faced the bitterness of failure. Months at the masthead had left him almost a cripple. His men were ill of scurvy. You could thrust a cane through the *Investigator's* timbers, her planks were rotten right through. The wet season was upon him, an inferno of gales and beating rain. A hurricane would "crush her like an egg."

Flinders, hoping to find a ship at Koepang to send home his precious charts and papers, and request another ship to enable him to continue the survey from where he had left it, hastened across to the island port, but his luck was out. There was nothing for it but to take the chance of a swift swing round the continent back to Port Jackson, a race with death in a leaking old vessel with her work half done.

Back in Sydney the *Investigator* was condemned as utterly worthless and unseaworthy, and was condemned to be used as a hulk.

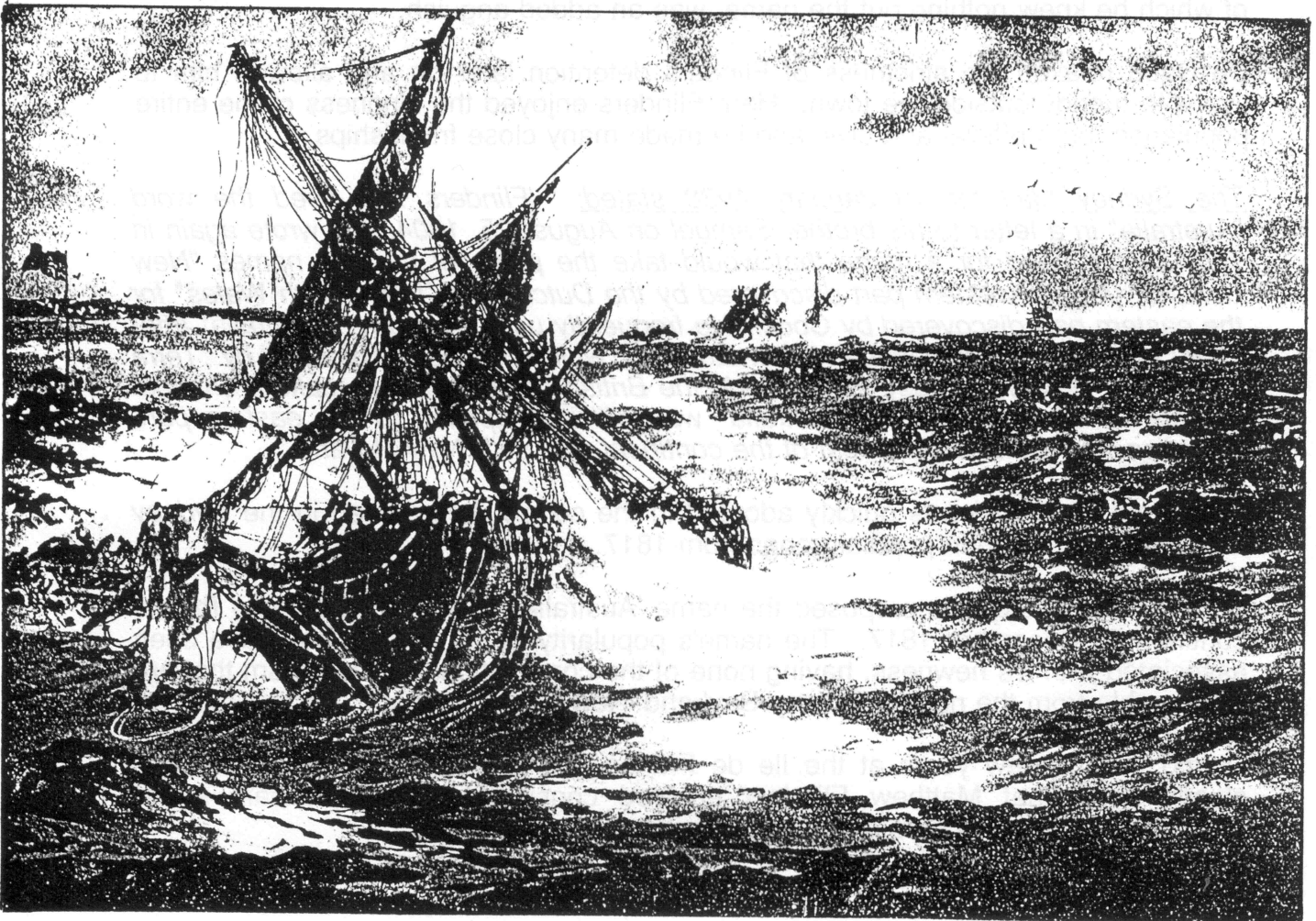
THE VOYAGES OF  
MATTHEW FLINDERS



In Sydney Flinders was told that George Bass had been murdered in the silver mines of Peru, and home letters were awaiting him with the news that his father had died.

Governor King had no ship to give him. So niggardly was the Imperial Government in the matter of ships that the colony was starving. Other than the *Cumberland*, a 29-tonner built by the convicts, there was owned nothing under sail, and visiting Ships were few. The *Cumberland* was the navy and mercantile marine in one. Already it had routed the Frenchmen from the coasts of Tasmania, and it could not be spared. *H.M.S. Porpoise* was in the harbour, and a couple of traders with her, about to leave for England. Flinders secured a passage on the *Porpoise*, and shipped his expedition, to plead with the Admiralty to give him something that would float. So he embarked for home. The *Porpoise*, the *Cato* and the *Bridgewater* set out together.

Some six weeks later, the lookout at South Head was surprised to see a little cutter beating down from the north, her men in sorry plight, and Matthew Flinders at the prow. In this open boat, pulling day and night across 700 miles of angry sea, in hunger and thirst and desperation, they brought the news that the *Porpoise* and the *Cato* were hopeless wrecks on a reef near Keppel Bay. The *Bridgewater* beat out to sea, and the crews stayed on a sandbank awaiting rescue. The *Cumberland* was the only hope, and with Flinders in command she sailed with the trader *Rolla*, bound for Canton. The castaways were duly picked up, and most of them, in the *Rolla*, shipped to China.



*The Wreck of the Porpoise and the Cato*

With amazing heroism, Flinders sailed on in the *Cumberland* for England, 12,000 miles of wind and wave in a frail 29-ton schooner. He carried despatches from Governor King, and these, of political bearing, were his undoing.

Six thousand miles of misery and tribulation were behind him when, sorely in need of water and food, he called in at the French colony of the Ile de France (Mauritius), to find that England and France were again at war. Refusing to honour his passport as that of a scientific expedition, General De Caen, the governor, treated him as a spy, confiscated those precious papers of his life's great work, looked upon him as a dangerous enemy, and kept him prisoner through six and a half long years of illness and mental agony that were the beginning of the end.

De Caen must have known of the care given at Port Jackson to the many sick in *Le Geographe* and *La Naturaliste* and of Flinders' personal help at the friendly meeting in Encounter Bay, for he had received a letter from Captain Nicholas Baudin asking that assistance be given to any English ship forced to call at the Ile de France, in return for the hospitality his expedition had received.

The hand of a cruel destiny lay heavy upon him. Not all the untiring efforts of his friends at court, Bro. Sir Joseph Banks and Bro. the Duke of Wellington among them, not even the sympathy and the written reprieve of Napoleon himself, could set him free. The years dragged on in hope deferred, and his heart and his body were sick. He believed that the Frenchmen had stolen his charts and papers, of the land he had mapped for Britain. The publication of Peron's "*Terre Napoleon*," of which he knew nothing but the name, was an added anguish.

De Caen relaxed the strictness of Flinders' detention later on and allowed him to live with friends outside the town. Here Flinders enjoyed the kindness of the entire population, both official and civil, and he made many close friendships.

*The Sydney Mail for 19 January 1938 stated: 'Flinders first used the word "Australia" in a letter to his brother Samuel on August 25, 1804. He wrote again in 1807 of the need for a name that would take the place of the two names "New Holland" (for the western part discovered by the Dutch) and "New South Wales" for the eastern part discovered by Cook. He frequently used the name "Australia" after 1804; previously he had written "New Holland," which had been preceded by "Terra Australis." It was not easy to persuade the British official mind to make a change. As late as 1849 the name "Australia" was officially applied to the eastern part, including Tasmania; but the rest of the continent was still "New Holland."*

The name 'Australia' was quickly adopted in the colony, being used in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1816 and in popular songs from 1817.

Bro. Lachlan Macquarie proposed the name 'Australia' as the official name for the continent in December 1817. The name's popularity in the colony may have been associated with its newness, having none of the connotations of convictism that are inseparable from the names 'Botany Bay' and 'New South Wales'.

During the last few years at the Ile de France, the entries in his *Private Journal* clearly show that Matthew Flinders enjoyed considerable and pleasant social activity with his neighbours and friends from town.



He gained intellectual stimulus from the company of his men friends - the Pitots, Chazal, Labauve, Charles Baudin, Charles Desbassayns and his brothers, and many others.

Although music did attract him to those ladies musically inclined, he was not swayed by romance; there is no indication that he engaged in an amorous association with any woman in either New South Wales or the Ile de France. He was completely loyal to Ann - indeed no evidence can be found to show otherwise.

He was also attracted to freemasonry which was very much in vogue on the island at that time. A reference in his *Journal* in July 1807 records: 'Saturday, 18. Today we had the company of Messieurs Curtut and Pepin. Come to celebrate tomorrow the fete of St John at the Freemason's Lodge established here. My friend Labuave prepared himself to enter into our society.'

There were three lodges meeting at Port Napoleon, and one, called *The Friendly Cultivator*, meeting at Plaines Wilhems, where he resided, and is the one to which he, most probably belonged. Here, one Sunday in July 1808, the brethren from the town lodges were invited to a masonic feast; and at the conclusion of which, Flinders recorded in his *Journal* (31 July 1808), the visiting brethren '*on their return at 10 pm drank a glass of Madeira in my pavilion.*'

Although no record has been found to date, it is believed by most masonic historians that Matthew Flinders was accepted into freemasonry during his stay on the Ile de France. Several entries in his journals indicate this. Indeed, in her widely-read historical novel, *My Love Must Wait*, Ernestine Hill tells of one of Matthew Flinders' masonic experiences: 'On 22 July, Labauve was to be initiated into the Freemason's Lodge at Mocha, and Matthew rode over to officiate'.

It was on 14 June 1810 that he set sail back to England, a broken man. He was promoted to Post-Captain although he lost health and hope. The last wan gleam lay in those long-lost papers, returned to him intact and unexploited. There remained but the ashes of achievement, and the deep unchanging love of the woman who had waited. A little daughter now blessed their union, Ann Flinders, whose only son, Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, the great archaeologist, kept the illustrious navigator's name alive.

Matthew Flinders was among the world's most accomplished navigators and hydrographers, though his explorations were mostly made in unsuitable, leaky or rotten ships. He is remembered not only for his achievements in the realm of discovery but also for great improvements in the science of navigation, for his research into the action of the tides, and the affinity between the height of the barometer and the direction of the wind and also for his practical investigations into the deviation of the compass through the presence of iron in ships, since controlled by compensating devices such as the bar of 'soft iron' which stabilised the compass and which was named 'Flinders' Rod', after him. Some of his observations in this field were published by the Royal Society in London.

The last painful years of his life were spent in the writing of "*A Voyage to Terra Australis*," each day the gallant struggle of a doomed man, a breathless prayer for time. The old Latin names and the Dutch names of the new continent jarred upon

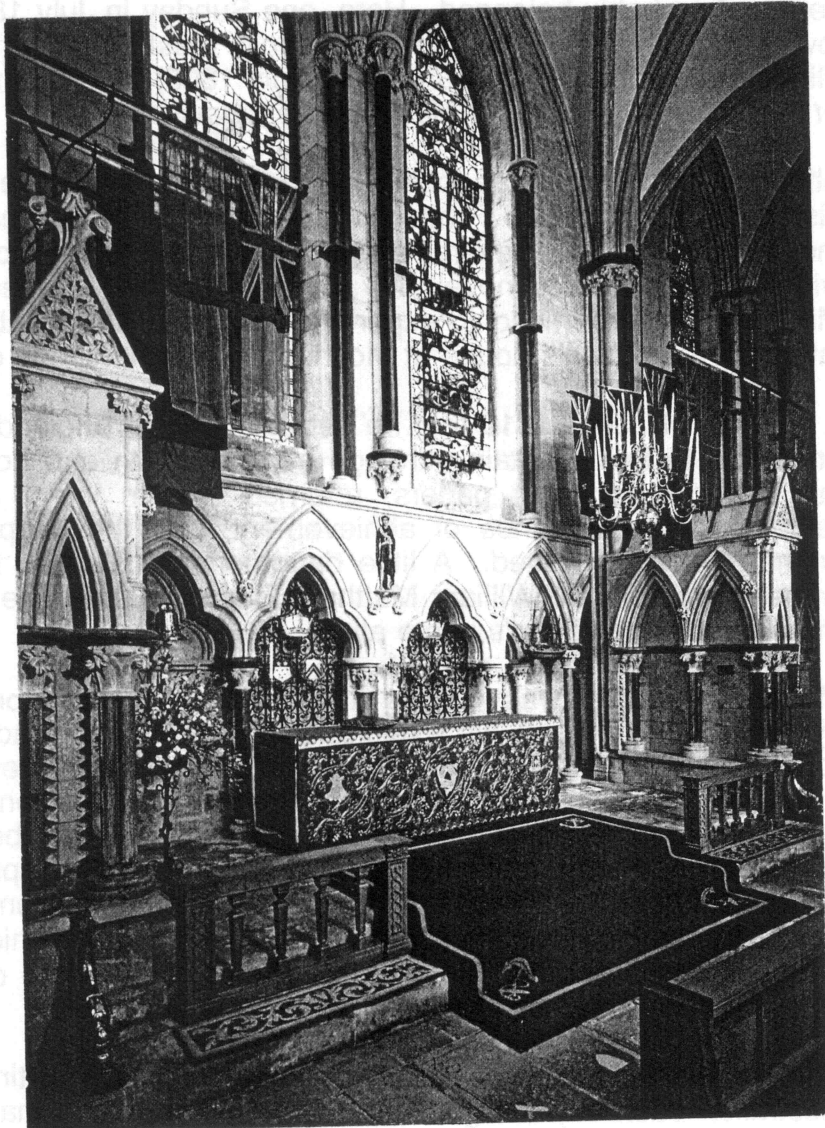
him, even as he wrote them. For euphony's sake, he pleaded for "Australia," but even this was denied. It was not until after his death that this country itself honoured his choice.

"My papers!" he cried in his delirium, living again those fevered years in the "green and shady" Ile de France. In his dying hours, the book was delivered from the publishers. His wife placed his hand upon it, but he was unconscious. He died on 19 July 1814.

The graveyard at St. James, Hampstead Road, London, was obliterated long ago, with little thought of his memory until it was too late, but in his well-loved Donington is a marble tablet, a shrouded urn, and the billowy sails of an old-time galley, with the life-story of a hero written beneath - "an affectionate husband, a tender father, a kind brother, and a faithful friend."

In Lincoln Cathedral a memorial window has been dedicated to Bass and Flinders and a model of the *Investigator* hangs over the right hand side of the altar.

THE BASS AND FLINDERS  
MEMORIAL WINDOW IN  
LINCOLN CATHEDRAL.



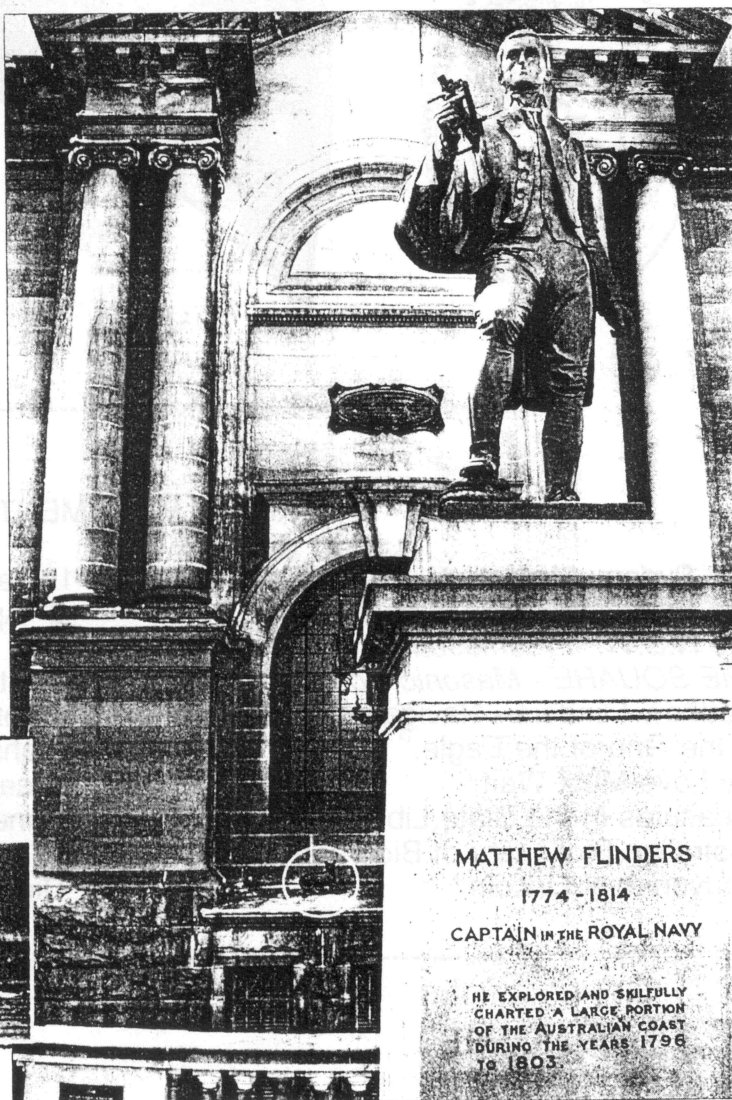
Matthew Flinders was very fond of his cat, Trim, which accompanied him on his voyage to Australia and the subsequent circumnavigation of the continent. Next to Flinder's statue in Sydney, set in the pavement, is a small plaque, which reads: "To the memory of Trim - the best and most illustrious of his race - the most affectionate of friends, faithful servant and best of creatures. He made the tour of the globe and a voyage to Australia which he circumnavigated and was ever a delight and pleasure to his fellow voyagers." These words are taken from Matthew Flinders' diary in memory of his cat.

Trim, who was being cared for by a French woman while Flinders was in prison, disappeared, never to be found. He also wrote this charming piece about his marvellous companion who had sailed with him for over four and a half years. It read in part: "My sorrow may be better conceived than described. I would, with pleasure, have given fifty dollars to have my friend and companion restored to me. All research and offers of recompense were in vain, poor Trim was effectively lost; and it is but too probable that this excellent unsuspecting animal was stewed and eaten. . . . ."

When Trim disappeared in 1804, Flinders dreamed that he would one day erect "in the most retired corner a monument to perpetuate thy memory and record thy uncommon merits. And this shall be thy epitaph".

Now, almost 200 years later, the New South Wales public and the Mitchell Library have granted his wish. A sculpture of Trim, by artist John Cornwell, has been completed and now stands on the windowsill of the Mitchell Library behind the statue of Matthew Flinders in Macquarie Street, Sydney.

Trim (below and circled right) patrols the windowsill of the Mitchell Library while keeping an eye on his master, Matthew Flinders.



MATTHEW FLINDERS  
1774 - 1814

CAPTAIN IN THE ROYAL NAVY

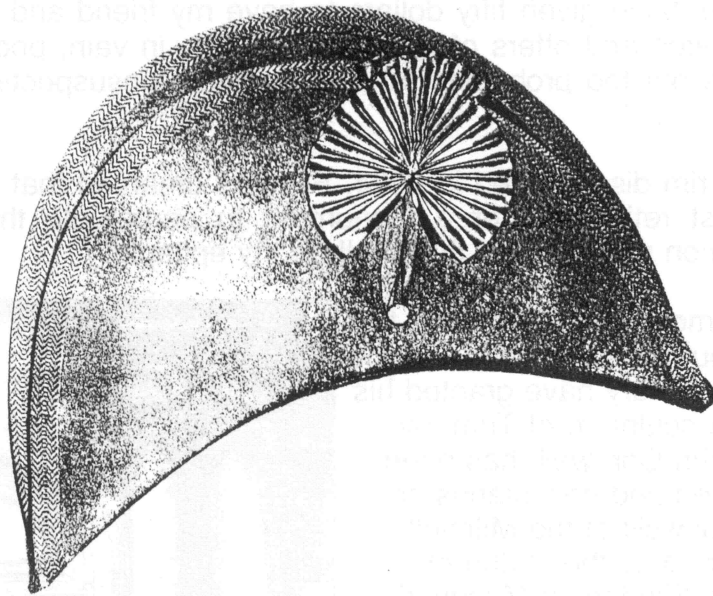
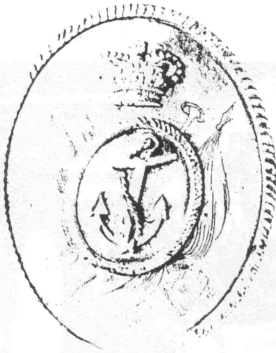
HE EXPLORED AND SKILFULLY  
CHARTED A LARGE PORTION  
OF THE AUSTRALIAN COAST  
DURING THE YEARS 1796  
TO 1803.

Bro. Matthew Flinders is immortalised in Australia in many ways - streets in the capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide are named after him, as are numerous landmarks, parks, a university and other important places. Fittingly the HMAS Flinders Naval Establishment in Melbourne is named in his honour as is Flinders Island off the east coast of Tasmania.

Memorials to his work abound in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia and there are statues of him in Melbourne, Adelaide and in Sydney in Macquarie Street adjacent to the Mitchell Library.

For Bro. Matthew Flinders, an island called Australia is his greatest memorial.

Matthew Flinders' cocked hat and coat badge which were presented to the Library by Flinders' grandson, Sir Matthew Flinders Petrie. (MITCHELL LIBRARY)



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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Sydney Mail.*

*The Sydney Morning Herald.*

*The N.S.W. Freemason.*

*THE SQUARE - Masonic Home Journal.*

'Matthew Flinders - Navigator and Chartmaker.'

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