

## MATTHEW FLINDERS

Matthew Flinders was born in Lincolnshire England on 16th March 1774. He joined the Royal Navy at the age of sixteen and sailed with several well-known naval men. As a midshipman on the "PROVIDENCE" he sailed with Captain William Bligh from Spithead in August 1791. With the "ASSISTANT" as support vessel, Bligh was sailing for Tahiti to complete the bread fruit voyage interrupted by the mutiny on the "BOUNTY" in 1789. Both vessels arrived back in England in August 1793. At this time two ships were fitting out to sail to Port Jackson with Captain John Hunter who was to replace Captain Arthur Phillip, the founding Governor of the settlement. The ships were the "RELIANCE" (394 tons) and the "SUPPLY" (382 tons). "RELIANCE" was under the command of Lieutenant Waterhouse and "SUPPLY" had Lieutenant Kent as her captain. Although having the same name this was not the brig, "SUPPLY" which had been a member of the First Fleet

Flinders joined "RELIANCE" as a midshipman and made a firm friendship with the ship's surgeon, George Bass, who had on board a Thames dinghy of about ten feet over all length. Because of its small size this dinghy was jokingly named, "TOM THUMB". They arrived at Port Jackson in September 1795. As they sailed up the east coast of Van Diemen's Land and the south coast of New South Wales the usual discussion concerning the possible existence of a strait between Van Diemen's Land and the mainland would have taken place. Others who had passed that way had considered the possibility that Van Diemen's Land was an island, but Flinders undertook exploratory work which ultimately resolved the mystery.

Along with the boy, Martin, Bass and Flinders first voyage of exploration in the "TOM THUMB" Botany Bay and Georges River, between October and November 3rd 1795. On March 25, 1796 they made a second voyage. This was in "TOM THUMB II", a larger dinghy of fourteen feet, built in Sydney of New South Wales cedar. They sailed as far south as Lake Illawarra, near Port Kembla and returned to Sydney on April 2nd.

On December 3, 1797 Bass sailed from Port Jackson with a crew of volunteers from "RELIANCE" in Governor Hunter's whaleboat. He reached Westernport and on his return to Port Jackson in February 1798 reported open water beyond Westernport. In February 1797 the "SYDNEY COVE" was wrecked on Preservation Island and this had a significant influence on the ultimate discovery of Bass Strait, for Flinders had visited the site of the wreck on board the schooner "FRANCIS" and in addition to salvaging some of the cargo he had undertaken some survey work. Flinders' observations of tide flows around Preservation Island and Bass' report of open water beyond Westernport indicated the existence of a strait but this could only be proven by actually sailing through it. Hunter was sympathetic to their desire to attempt such a voyage but no vessel of suitable size was available.

However in June 1798, while Bass and Flinders were away in "RELIANCE" delivering provisions to Norfolk Island "a decked longboat of thirty three feet length of keel and displacing approximately sixteen tons" arrived at Sydney from Norfolk Island. Both vessels obviously had passed at sea without sighting each other. Frustrated by months of no contact with Sydney, Captain Townson, the commandant on Norfolk Island had decided to have the longboat built and decked in for the purpose of carrying despatches to and from Sydney. Governor Hunter was not impressed by Townson's initiative and as it was forbidden to base any boat at Norfolk Island which might be stolen by convicts and used as a means of escape Hunter refused to allow the longboat to return to the island.

It is believed Hunter named the boat "NORFOLK" and on the return of Bass and Flinders he made it available to them to fit out and prove once and for all whether a strait existed between New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. With stores for twelve weeks and a volunteer crew of eight seamen from the "RELIANCE", the "NORFOLK" sailed from Sydney 1798 on a voyage which was to guarantee it a permanent place in Australian history.

After encountering strong winds and gales, Bass and Flinders discovered and entered the Tamar River on November 3, 1798. They spent seventeen days sounding and charting the river upstream as far as Swan Point. Flinders' charts of the area are an excellent example of his brilliance as a chart maker. As they sailed west Flinders named the obvious headlands, Table Cape, Circular Head and Three Hummock Island. As they approached this area they noted that the coastline was tending to the north west. This fact suggested to Flinders that Van Diemen's Land could in fact be connected to New

Holland. His fears were largely removed however when he observed that the tide was flooding from the west. He knew that in the Flinders Island and Low Head area the tide flooded from the east.

They anchored under Three Hummock Island to ride out a strong westerly for the night but were able to continue the next morning and on rounding the northern tip of the island the "NORFOLK'S" head began to rise and fall to the moderate south west swell rolling in. All hands were overjoyed because they realised that they were in the Southern Ocean. Bass landed on what Flinders named Albatross Island and climbed to the highest part. From there he could see the coast was tending to the south with clear ocean to the south west and west. On rounding the north west tip of Van Diemen's Land, Flinders named Cape Grim. To me, passing this point gives a feeling of how they must have felt.

Heemskirk and Zeehan mountains were named by Flinders in honour of Abel Tasman discovering the island in 1642. Point Hibbs was named after the sailing master as they passed. Owing to strong winds in Storm Bay they entered and named Norfolk Bay before finally entering the Derwent on December 21st. They stayed for twelve days and on Christmas Day, 1798 Bass climbed Mt Wellington, the first white man to do so. "NORFOLK" finally moored back in Sydney Cove on January 12, 1799.

Over the next two years a replica of "NORFOLK" will be built at Ellendale in the Derwent Valley. Along with nine other men, I hope to sail in the replica from Sydney on October 7, 1998, exactly two hundred years after Bass and Flinders set off, and re-enact their historic voyage. During the past two years suitable plans have been obtained from the Greenwich Museum, Huon pine logs have been donated by the Forestry Commission and many long hours have been spent in discussion with Richard Davis, the builder, as to how the vessel will be built. Richard has already constructed a large shed on his property in which "NORFOLK" will be built. Unfortunately the very wet winter delayed progress but it is now hoped that the keel will be laid some time in March [1995. Ed.]

It is hoped to have open days for public viewing during construction. Watch Jocelyn Fogagnolo's boating column in the [Hobart] Mercury for announcements concerning these viewing times. I will also make progress reports through this magazine. At the moment we do not have any Sponsors.

Schools will be encouraged to bus in children to witness the construction of the "NORFOLK" and to learn the true history of Bass and Flinders. I want all Tasmanians to get

to know our own Tasmanian history. It is really very interesting and there is certainly a great deal of it. This project concerns one very important part of it for "NORFOLK" proved Tasmania to be an island in 1798.

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