

Australian Histories Podcast: Episode 72. Bass & Flinders part 3.

**Note: citations included in this transcript are used more as memory prompts for me in writing the episode than for academic purposes.*

Today we're going to continue on, in our series looking at George Bass & Matthew Flinders. In the earlier episodes we looked at the explorer's backgrounds, and then their first year in New South Wales. Today we'll focus on some of the work they are most famous for, in what Ben Pobjie called "...the Age of Exploration in Australia, one of history's most fertile epochs of adventure, discovery and ignoring Indigenous populations [to] win fame and fortune and some serious petticoat action." (Pobjie, Ben 2016, p. 54)

Following on from last episode, though many felt confident that Bass' previous outing exploring the eastern reaches of the south coast of what would later become Victoria, *had proven* there was a continuous body of water running between Van Diemens Land and the mainland, Governor Hunter wanted to alleviate *any* doubt. They needed to get the passage fully charted and confirmed for the Admiralty, so that vessels could begin using the strait, in the hope of shaving precious time off the tedious months long voyages, that were the necessity when travelling to New South Wales. Hopefully it would also save ships from having to head so far southward, into the treacherous roaring forties, to round Van Diemens Land's southern tip.

I have a really interesting podcast to recommend at the end of the episode today, so listen on for that, but I also want to bring to your attention one I recently discovered, which has some information about the Wollemi Pine, the prehistoric tree that was found hidden deep in the Blue Mountains, that I mentioned last episode. Philip Adams on Late Night Live did an interview with one of the Rangers caring for the trees, so if that Wollemi Pine story from the last episode peaked your interest, this is one to follow up with. <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/latenightlive/berin-mackenzie-wollemi-pine/103897958>

Okay, so resuming the story of Bass & Flinders, we left off last time with Governor Hunter now in possession of the sloop "the Norfolk", which he thought might be just the right vessel to let the ever keen Bass & Flinders use for an important voyage of discovery.

When the *Reliance* and its crew returned from a supply trip to Norfolk Island, they had brought back with them, a sloop built on the Island from the native Norfolk pine there. Governor Hunter felt the 25 ton, vessel, at around 10.6 metres or 36 foot long, and 3.35m or 11 feet wide, might be the ideal craft for Bass & Flinders to use, to sail through the newly confirmed strait and circumnavigate Van Diemens Land, and so he had it fitted out to facilitate just such a journey.

Updating the existing charts, with solid confirmation that Van Diemens Land *was* an Island, with a navigable strait to its north, would allow returning ships to use the new passage and hasten communication and travel for all coming to New South Wales.

For Bass & Flinders, being given such a task was to be the next and most exciting opportunity of their joint explorations to date. Their brief was to sail beyond the Furneaux Islands and "should a strait be found, to pass through it, and return by the south end of Van Diemens Land, making such examinations and surveys on the way, as circumstances might permit", and they were given 12 weeks for the attempt. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 9) (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 71) In other words, they were to circumnavigate Van Diemens Land to prove beyond any doubt, that it was a separate island, and that the previously posited *Bass' Strait* was navigable.

They would begin their explorations in September of 1798, with Flinders in command of a crew of eight volunteers, including one man named Thistle, who had previously accompanied Bass on his first foray into the strait, in that whaleboat. Flinders would undertake much of the charting and mapping work. Bass'

task would be the 'botanising' as they called it, recording and collecting specimens from the natural history sights they would encounter, and otherwise documenting important observations that would be useful to the authorities.

Bass brought his greyhounds along with him, which he took when exploring on land, to help hunt and capture native animals & birds. The dogs would, at one point sniff out an Echidna, "upon which they could make no impression" owing to its spiny exterior, and that it "escaped by burrowing in the loose sand, sinking itself directly downwards, and it's head foremost; thus presenting it's prickly back". (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 72) It seems that Trim, Flinders' cat, was relocated from the *Reliance* to the *Norfolk* too, for duty during the circumnavigation, but did not appear to have been bothered by the greyhounds. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 33)

Once again I marvel at their pluck. I guess they didn't know it, but they would be attempting to sail mostly against tide & winds, through a treacherous strait, and then down the ferocious west coast of Tasmania, where they would make observations but no landings, keeping their distance off shore, due to the winds threatening to drive them aground. Such a voyage in a sailing vessel is still a feat not to be lightly contemplated, even by modern sailors with all the weather & tidal information, back up motors and safety gear available to us today. And yet here they were, in a little sloop, sailing off into the great unknown.

With Flinders doing the heavy lifting sailing wise, Bass was able to focus on recording items of natural history interest, observing native animals, and plants, and recording his thoughts on the indigenous people they observed around the island.

As they set out travelling southwards down the NSW coast, four days out, Flinders recorded a meeting they had with a local aboriginal man while exploring Two Folds Bay, around Eden. Following a tentative encounter with the local man, Flinders wrote that they offered him some biscuit (and here I am assuming it was likely to be some of the awful ships biscuit they carried on board, and not some delicious TimTam). And he remarked that in return, the native gave him a piece of fatty something, possibly whale meat, and noted, "this I tasted, but, watching an opportunity to spit it out when he should not be looking. I perceived him doing precisely the same thing with our biscuit, whose taste was probably no more agreeable to him, than his whale was to me." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012)

After approaching the waters of the strait, they spent some time investigating the Kent group of Islands around the NE corner of Van Diemens Land, before again visiting Preservation Island, (*where the survivors of the Wreck of the Sydney Cove had been recovered, if you recall from the earlier episodes*) and further exploring the Furneaux Group, where they waited for the westerly winds to die down, before they could attempt heading westward, into the strait.

While investigating the nearby Cape Barren Island, Bass noted large populations of kangaroos, and he became intrigued by the wombats there. Indeed, at that time, the wombat was apparently not widely seen in the Sydney region, so it was an unusual animal to Bass, and he collected, dissected and described the mighty 'bulldozer of the bush', for the first time for science. He described it as a "squat, thick, short-legged, and rather inactive quadruped, with great appearance of stumpy strength, and somewhat bigger than a large turnspit dog". (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 33) (*A turnspit dog was a smallish, muscly dog that was used in the grand house kitchens in England, to run on a sort of treadmill, which would in turn rotate the meat being roasted on a spit over a large open fire. (Turnspit dog 2024)*).

Undertaking the first anatomical dissection of the poor creature he'd obtained, he went on to write the first paper on the wombat, thrillingly titled "Some account of the quadruped called Wombat, in New South Wales", (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 93) and he sent 2 skins and a wombat skull to Joseph Banks, in May 1799, along with other specimens he had collected for his curiosity. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 73, 83)

He found many other animals and plants of interest, and was kept quite busy recording all he saw. Another first was his paper on the nesting habits of the white capped albatross there. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xiii) These works and his descriptions of as yet unrecorded plant life from the region, & reflections on the geology, would facilitate his membership into the prestigious Linnaean Society of London. (Estensen, Miriam. 2009, p. 21) (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 42) He also recorded observations on the feeding habits of the swan, and undertook experiments on the effects of venom of a species of snake they had encountered, so lots to do for Bass. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 71)

At the beginning of November the weather finally allowed them to venture westward along the north coast of Van Diemens Land, and soon afterwards they located the Tamar estuary, teeming with black swans, the area afterwards called Port Dalrymple, but which we know today as Launceston. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xiii)

It was a very attractive port, with good prospects for settlement, and they spent a couple of weeks there charting the waters and exploring the shores. Here they found heaps of mussel shells, discarded by the local indigenous people over countless years of meals there, (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 74) and they noted how abundant other food sources were in the area, from fish, to duck & swans, to wallabies.

As they examined further along the coasts, in places the land was recorded as so thick with trees and scrub as to be mostly impenetrable, though again, they did find areas that had been recently burned, which allowed for better access, and in those places they found the remains of fireplaces and other camp paraphernalia, indicating recent and ongoing use of the region by the Aboriginal people.

Bass' reflections on the status of the local aboriginals was pretty disparaging though, as he lacked any understanding or appreciation of their successful local cultural practices. His pronouncements were of the usual kind we know often accompanied the impressions gained by the Europeans, in assuming to assess the intelligence or social status of indigenous peoples by only their own very narrow British standards. Making his judgements on only the extremely brief and limited window he had into their lives, and their actions being so unintelligible to him, and with no *actual* communications, he never the less recorded that he thought they were 'inferior' to the NSW aboriginals, (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 74) though I'm not sure if he recognised how the distinct cultures, climate & environments would have called for diverse approaches to lifestyle, between those very different peoples.

Baudin's French expedition managed to more successfully interact with the Tasmanian aboriginal people they met, and left a more thorough reflection on their cultural practices, lifestyles and artefacts. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xiv)

Still, no doubt the people of Lutruwita would have made similar disparaging assessments of the different waves of white men that were soon to come their way; the whalers, the convicts, the soldiers and settlers, many behaving abominably towards one another, and barely able to keep themselves alive in the land of plenty they had come to.

Exploring the islands and northern edges of Van Diemens Land they witnessed an aboriginal family undertaking a burn-off, and though the men and the ship were clearly noticed by the small group undertaking the burn, they expressed no interest in investigating further, and so Bass & Flinders had no opportunity to communicate with the locals there. Flinders did note that two in that group appeared to be wearing cloaks of animal fur skins, (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 18) something they didn't really see in Sydney, and a real necessity for the Tasmanian climate one assumes.

Not too many days later, noting the odd currents closer to shore, both Bass & Flinders observed that the main tide flood was coming from the west, and they surmised they may not be too far from that imagined western point of Van Diemens Land, and thus the western entrance to the strait. Once again though, opposing winds and poor conditions delayed their progress, and they had to shelter and await better weather to complete their investigations. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 75)

Early December the men finally reached the western most tip of Van Diemens Land and rounded the point there, which they called Cape Grim. “A long swell was perceived to come from the southwest, such as we had not been accustomed to for some time. It broke heavily upon a small reef, lying a mile and a half from the point, and upon all western shores; but although it was likely to prove troublesome, and perhaps dangerous, Mr Bass and myself hailed it with joy and mutual congratulations, as announcing the completion of our long wished for discovery, of a passage into the Southern Indian Ocean.” (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 76)

And so afterwards, they began making their way down the West Coast of Van Diemens Land, “where lofty chains of mountains ran nearly parallel with the shore”, (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 76). As they reached further south it seems they failed to see the narrow entrance to what would later become Macquarie Harbour, a place of dread and peril for many a convict in the future, instead heading onwards south to round the island, soon to head northwards again and complete their circumnavigation on the trip back to Port Jackson.

By Christmas they had made it into the sheltered east coast waters of the Derwent River, in the days before any settlement had been slated for Van Diemens Land of course, and they spent Xmas day there, climbing Mt Wellington. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 77)

They had their first and only encounter with a Tasmanian aboriginal while rowing up the Derwent, near what would one day become Hobart. Greeting a man there on the water’s edge, they made him a gift of a swan they had shot earlier, on the River. Expressing no “signs of fear or distrust” he seemed delighted with their offering, and they apparently had a very ‘cheery’ exchange, by means of ‘*signing to each other*’, as the language was completely different to those peoples from NSW, with which they had at least passing familiarity. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xiv) (Bastian, Josephine 2016, pp. 41–2)

Flinders also noted that the man seemed entirely unacquainted with their muskets, having no fear or interest in them at all, so it seems to that point at least, the clans there had as yet, not had any unpleasant encounters with white men’s weapons, though sealing was very soon to become a big thing all around the island, and this would impact severely and lethally on the local populations. Flinders also wrote of the man’s decorative ‘raised marks’ on his skin, and the red ochre clay decorating his short hair, again demonstrating the different cultural practices here, to those of the NSW clans they already knew something of.

Leaving the Derwent and heading north towards Port Jackson, they passed Maria Island on January 4th, another place we have talked about, in Ep 67.

Crossing the eastern opening of the newly confirmed strait proved challenging on the way back, but soon they were in more familiar waters, arriving in Port Jackson on January 12th 1799. The Governor, at the urging of Flinders, later agreed to bestow the name Bass’ Strait, “as a just tribute to the extreme dangers & fatigues he had undergone in first entering it in the whaleboat”, (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 37) (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 35) on the body of water the men had just confirmed as a thoroughfare.

4 degrees latitude could be saved in avoiding the voyage around the southern point of Van Diemens Land, shaving a week or more off the journey. (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 37) Voyages from the Cape of Good Hope and India could now be completed much more quickly, and it allowed them to avoid the wild weather often encountered south of Van Diemens Land, though how much more safely might be pondered. In the decades to follow, the coasts of Victoria and Tasmania would be littered with the wrecks of those who failed to successfully ‘thread the needle’ through Bass’s Strait, or just Bass Strait as we call it now.

Once back in Sydney, Flinders spent his time redrawing his charts and rewriting his observations, collating his updates with previous work from earlier mapmakers, and creating the first chart showing Van Diemens Land correctly labelled as an island. News of their success was immediately sent to the Admiralty and their information on the navigable Bass Strait was soon afterwards published in the Naval Chronicle. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 43)

Once again their observations made on the soils, water availability, topography and geology helped to confirm the attractiveness of Van Diemens Land, and in the years to follow, to make a claim and to dissuade the French from doing so, settlements were set up on the Derwent at Risdon Cove in 1803, though it was later moved to the site of present day Hobart, and another settlement was transplanted to Port Dalrymple, now Launceston, in 1804. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 79). These men had done a great service for the British Government.

After their return, Bass & Flinders were to witness some of the social upheaval that was occurring around Port Jackson, as a result of the aggravation between past & present Officers of the Rum Corp, and Governor Hunter and his supporters, and Hunter would soon be sent back to England, relieved by Governor King.

That summer saw bushfires and afterwards floods that followed the years of drought, and much of the colony's hard grown food was once again lost. The settlement was still in a precarious state of food security, and many other helpful necessities were perpetually in short supply. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, pp. 80-1) The time was ripe for more trade to assist in provisioning the far flung colony.

After 10 years in the Navy, the last four in NSW, which, as we mentioned a moment ago, had almost the whole time been experiencing food and nutritional shortages, Bass was developing health issues which could no longer be ignored.

He had arrived in Port Jackson four years earlier, a fit and strong man, but by May his Navy documentation records him as being "unserviceable", meaning physically unfit for duty. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 84) It seems an eye complaint in particular, was severely compromising his medical career. His diet had been poor and limited for so long, and he seems to have had a painful and ongoing infection or conjunctivitis in his eye. One source suggests perhaps a corneal ulcer had developed. Either way he seems to have lobbied to suggest that he could no longer undertake Navy work, and his exploring days were over. It was time for Bass to return home to England, and the *Reliance* was expected to sail there via Cape Horn in June, so in May he was furloughed out on extended sick leave from the Navy.

In a letter to Joseph Banks dated around the same time, Bass wrote that his health was so compromised that he had to avoid a return trip home via the cold southern seas on the *Reliance*, instead opting to return via China and India, travelling within the "warm weather passage". (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 83) This meant he would send his goods to Banks on the *Reliance*, expecting them to arrive long before him, while he would take the longer, slower journey north instead. And so Bass headed for China, and continued on to Bombay, where in January of 1800, he found passage from there, back home to England.

Now we don't necessarily want to cast aspersions on Bass' motivations, but it could be suggested it was not *just his health* that encouraged him to take extended leave from the Navy. He was keen to turn his hand to merchant trading. Certainly he would need additional income now he was only on half pay, and he'd already advised his mother that he was looking to trade for his next venture, so it seems likely he might also have been keen to scout for goods, that he could later purchase and bring to NSW to sell, while he was passing through the Cantonese and Indian ports on his journey home. It's perhaps another possible reason for taking that route. Indeed, he wrote to his friend Jamison "I have quitted the *Reliance* invalided. Behold me embarked on trade. I am on board the brig *Nautilus*, bound to China." (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 50) So he was certainly eager to start this new phase of his career.

Food, clothing and comfort goods such as tea etc. were still in short supply in the colony. Undoubtedly there were great needs still unmet, and the government was not keeping up. As Bass was to depart NSW, shortages there included clothing, bedding and other bare necessities of life, along with all the comforts and homely goods that people desired. And all kinds of tools and equipment were in short supply too.

The kind of trade he had seen and heard about from Jamison, on their earlier voyage back from Norfolk Island, must have been playing on Bass' mind, as an opportunity he could get involved in. Those bringing the needed provisions to the country might be richly rewarded. And Bass, invalided out on half pay extended sick leave, now had the leisure to perhaps undertake such entrepreneurship.

Flinders would have been sorry to have this relationship end and their future exploration schemes diverging into different trajectories. Bass, without his old mate Flinders, was about to embark on his new merchant venture, but timing would be everything, (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 91) so we'll pick up his story again shortly, as he reaches England.

Flinders meanwhile, in July of 1799, was given the opportunity for some more coastal exploration, again in the *Norfolk*, this time northwards. He was to 'explore the east coast northward, as far as possible' in the 6 weeks allotted, as nothing much was surveyed north of the Hunter since Cook's first charts. Flinders was hopeful of more closely charting 5 or 6 hundred miles north, in the time allocated, checking especially for harbours and rivers that might allow exploration deeper inland.

His crew would include many of the same men he and Bass took to circumnavigate Van Diemens Land, and notably, would also include Flinders' younger brother Samuel, whom he had been coaching in maritime skills. Unfortunately the record would later show that Samuel never quite took to the demands of the sea like Matthew, and he proved to be a troublesome and ineffective Midshipman, no longer showing much zeal in pursuing a Navy career. Indeed in the future, he would be court-martialled for disobeying orders and not handing back the notes he had compiled on the voyages undertaken for the Admiralty, until forced. And this situation caused Flinders much grief later in life. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xxxii)

Flinders also took on-board a Kuring-Gai man named Bungaree, "a native, whose good disposition and manly conduct had attracted my esteem", (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 34) and who might act as interpreter and diplomat during meetings with aboriginal peoples along the coast. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xiv) Flinders also noted "Of the assistance of my able friend Bass I was, however, deprived, he having quitted the station soon after our last voyage [together], to return to England." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 34) Of course his beloved cat Trim would accompany them too, "to guard the *Norfolks* bread bags", the seafaring cat adding another maritime adventure to *his* resume.

Bungaree came from the Broken Bay group, around the Hawkesbury River area. Following devastating conflicts with white settlers there, he & the remains of his mob came in to Sydney, where it seems that Flinders met him. (The Australian Museum) (McCarthy)

So for this outing, Flinders began his exploring north of Broken Bay, looking for large and navigable rivers that might lead into the interior of the unknown country. Further north he spent time exploring Morton Bay, but sadly failed to note the Brisbane River, which must have been concealed behind mangroves & Mud Island, opening into the coast there.

On the expedition the *Norfolk* had developed some leaks which soon required attention, and they brought the vessel into the channel between Bribie Island and the mainland, to beach the ship on the sands and affect the repairs. This place, at the northern end of today's Morton Bay, they called Point Skirmish, because an initially friendly encounter with the local aboriginal people there, turned aggressive and grapeshot was fired to repel the attackers, wounding at least one man. Apart from the warning shot fired in the Canoe Rivulet near Lake Illawarra, this would be the first time Flinders had had such an unfortunate encounter on his travels. (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, pp. xv, 35)

Still, having no understanding of the extent of the individual language & cultural groups living across the different parts of Australia, Flinders was again surprised to discover that Bungaree knew none of the language of these people so far north. But Bungaree was said to have nonetheless, been a natural diplomat and often, using only sign language and his understanding of the likely protocols that might be expected, he was afterwards able to facilitate many calm and friendly interactions.

Flinders' explorations made it as far north as Hervey Bay, where he spent several days exploring, but the difficulties they had experienced with the leaky *Norfolk* meant they were fast running out of time. Disappointingly he had managed less exploration, particularly inland, than he had hoped, recording "I must acknowledge myself to have been disappointed in not being able to penetrate into the interior of New South Wales, by either of the openings examined in this expedition; but, however mortifying the conviction might be, it was then an ascertained fact, that no river of importance intersected the east coast between the 24th and 39th degrees of south latitude..." (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 38)

So he seemed pretty sure he hadn't missed anything there and once again heading south, he arrived in Sydney August 20th, within days of the agreed time. We know now he missed a couple of river openings on his limited explorations, but at the time, he reported to Hunter that none were evident. He hoped for inland exploration via such rivers had not occurred.

Of course these European men were entirely unfamiliar with the seasonal behaviour of the Australian rivers, drying out in times of drought and surging with excessive power when the wet brought abundant flow. In the times they travelled, they may not have experienced any flood periods. Somewhat disappointing for Flinders no doubt, but there was still much to survey, and a better ship and more time could perhaps yield better results in the future. And such an opportunity would not be too far away for Flinders.

His early charts were sent back to England to be published in late 1800. Bit by bit the coastal details were becoming more visible, and there was discussion between the Admiralty and Joseph Banks about the necessity for a dedicated, lengthy exploration venture to complete the missing data. His work to date would put Flinders in the box seat for just such an outing.

We left Bass underway to England via China and India, and making his plans for a business venture which would bring needed goods to New South Wales and elsewhere across the Pacific & Indian oceans. He would soon set up a consortium with Charles Bishop, whom he had met when Bishop had sailed in company with the *Norfolk* as they were making their way to the Furneaux Islands, when he & Flinders were undertaking their circumnavigation of Van Diemens Land. On that occasion Bishop's men would undertake sealing around the Furneaux Islands, returning to Sydney with their haul, as Bass, Flinders and the *Norfolk* headed west through the strait.

Bass' idea was for a number of people to invest in their consortium so they could purchase suitable goods, particularly seal skins and oil, which, like Bishop on his previous venture, they would then sell in Macao for an excellent profit. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 88-9). Their intention was to sell Bishop's ship, the *Nautilus* there too, before making their way back to England and kitting out a sailing ship full of goods desired in New South Wales.

Now Flinders and Bass, while great friends exploring, must have had their share of frustrations in their relationship at times. Flinders, being the more romantic and emotional of the men, seemed always to feel inferior to Bass and appeared to be deeply hurt by any criticism that Bass might deliver. Indeed there seems to have been some tensions evident around the time of Bass departure, inevitable probably once Bass' focus had moved from exploration alone, to merchant trading, and that Bass does not appear to have extended an invitation to Flinders to join his consortium with Bishop.

Flinders had written Bass a letter lamenting the loss of their closeness and his apparent cooling of their relationship, and the language in the letter seems quite surprising to us today. It seems extremely intimate and even potentially reflecting a letter one might more likely write to a romantic sexual partner, to our modern sensibility today. But we need to keep in mind the commonplace flowery language used at the time, and not infuse it with any modern take perhaps. Flinders, flowery and romantic in much of his personal thinking and communications, wrote this way to many of his acquaintances, and I don't think it necessarily indicates there was any sexual relationship with Bass, though some sources have wondered.

What it does show though, is the high esteem Flinders held for Bass, and the painful inferiority he assumed Bass thought of him, possibly true actually, as Bass was a harsh judge. In the said letter Flinders is mainly lamenting the loss of their close relationship, now that Bass had formed close bonds with other men - traders and business men, rather than his old explorer friend from the Navy. Bass had moved on from his desire to be an explorer and now wanted to be a man who might rake in the money!

So, to the letter..... early in 1800, after their Van Diemens Land circumnavigation, as Bass was considering his next career move, now in close cahoots with Bishop, Flinders seems to have felt rejected and hurt and wrote a passionate letter explaining his feelings to Bass. Clearly he seems to have been feeling a little left out, worried that he had lost the close bond he felt they had preciousely enjoyed.

After what appears to have been a quarrel of some sort, Flinders wrote "It has been my wish, and I have more than once hinted so much to you, that our speculations might fit in and be carried on together; but as this did never appear to meet your approbation, no direct proposal was made; and I now mention the circumstance only, that if you should be in want of a partner and think me qualified for the task, you know when to pitch upon a willing one, should no other plans of mine have proceeded too far for retraction."(Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 89)

Obviously hurt, Flinders correspondence continued "... I [have] been determined to deny you my respect and esteem, when your treatment has been such as said to me, 'you are unworthy of being my friend'; but I have been forced to wince and depart from my resolution. There was a time, when I was so completely wrapped up in you, that no conversation but yours would give me any degree of pleasure; your footsteps upon the quarterdeck over my head, took me from my book, and brought me upon deck to walk with you; often, I fear, to your great annoyance; but your apparent coolness towards me, and the unpleasant manner you took to point out my failings, roused my pride and cooled my ardour." (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 48) (Estensen, Miriam. 2005, p. 90) "It is not clear to me that I love you entirely; Perhaps it is not in human nature to preserve an entire friendship for another, that one knows to be so superior ..." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 90) and so on it went in this intimate manner.

This letter reached the Bass household in England in May of 1801, nearly 6 months after Bass departed on his trading venture, so it's unlikely that *he* ever saw it. His new wife Elizabeth though, read it and had plenty of unflattering things to say about the author! (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 91)

Many sources consider that Flinders felt inferior to Bass and was hurt when Bass expressed the gap in their social standing and intelligence etc. responding to his hurt by writing this emotional letter. Certainly tensions appear to have developed between the two after their last voyage, and Bass was to depart New South Wales, perhaps without a personal goodbye to Flinders, but the letter aside, which it appears Bass never saw as the mail service was so slow, they must have maintained some level of fond relationship, as one source at least intimates that Flinders was invited to celebrate Bass' wedding afterwards in England?

Ah well, Flinders certainly does sound like a wounded lover, but rather I think a wounded puppy who has been too much demanding the attention of his master. Some extreme hero worship, brought to his senses by some harsh truths perhaps? They were not in fact men of equal status, and Flinders was always the panting little puppy, or annoying younger brother in the relationship it seems, though clearly he was the one more dedicated to their early commitment and desire to become famous explorers. When other prospects became more important than the exploring to Bass, Flinders' cloying ways must have sometimes grated. But Flinders' feelings of rejection expressed in that letter must have faded, and they did maintain or recover some of the relationship & fondness they had shared in the few years exploring NSW, as mentioned earlier. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 68) And we'll return to Bass' arrival in England and activities there shortly.

Morgan summed it up by saying "The relationship between Bass and Flinders was complex, and we will never know the extent of mutual involvement. While there is no evidence of a sexual liaison between

Flinders and Bass, it is clear that Bass' wife Elizabeth ... was jealous of the two men's close companionship." She received and read Flinders' letter, making annotations on the cover, intending probably to show it to Bass on his return. Her attitude can be summed up by notes she made on it, declaring, "This George is written by a man that bears a bad character - no one has seen this letter, but I could tell you many things that make me dislike him. Rest assured he is no friend of yours ... farther than his own interest is concerned." (Morgan, Kenneth 2016, p. 39) A bit harsh Elisabeth. Perhaps she is just being protective of Bass and doesn't like him being slighted in the slightest. She needn't have worried. Bass & Flinders attempted some continuing correspondence, but their paths never again crossed in person after they afterwards both left England on separate ventures.

The *Reliance* was slated for a return to England mid 1800, though Bass, as we heard before, had chosen to sail northward on the *Nautilus* with Bishop instead. Flinders however, after his 6 week jaunt up the coast for a bit of quick exploration, *would* make his way back to England on the *Reliance*, after some delay in the departure date. He would use his time on the journey to edit and refine his charts and journals, in preparation for publication in England on his arrival in London, on August 27th. Estensen writes that Bass had arrived a few weeks earlier, where *he* began immediately to make arrangements for *his* trading venture. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 116)

Flinders arranged for the publication of his pithily titled "Observations of the coasts of Van Diemens Land, on Bass's Strait and it's islands, and on part of the coasts of New South Wales; intended to accompany the Charts of the late discoveries in the countries. By Matthew Flinders, Second Lieutenant of his Majesty's ship *Reliance*." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 116)

Flinders intended to further his Naval career in exploration, and would use his time in England to promote himself and his earlier work in New South Wales, particularly to the influential Joseph Banks. And, as it turned out, to consolidate his personal life.

Flinders wrote to Joseph Banks, promoting his work in the earlier charts he had to date created, and lobbied to command the next proposed discovery expedition, which might complete the discovery of Terra Australis, along it's coasts at least. He also suggested to Banks that the huge assumed landmass may even be entirely *divided by water*, New South Wales to the east, the New Holland section to the west, suggesting that the lack of rivers found terminating on the east coast might mean vast inland rivers flowed westward instead, which in a way they mostly did, but into an inland sea or strait in his theory. No one had any idea how arid the majority of the inland was, and the effects of the seasonal massive downpours that suddenly swelled and filled dry riverbeds and lakes, transporting massive amounts of water vast distances across the country.

Flinders wrote "Probably it will be found that an extensive strait separates NSW from New Holland by way of the Gulph of Carpentaria Should such a strait exist ... advantages .. would result [including] expeditious communication[s]. It cannot be doubted, but that a very great part of that still extensive country remains either totally unknown or has been partially examined at a time when navigation was much less advanced than at present. The interest of geography and natural history in general, and of the British nation in particular, seem to require, that this only considerable remaining part of the globe should be thoroughly explored." (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 64) (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 51) He would add that *he* was the man for such a job.

He explained his desire to Banks saying "I have too much ambition to rest in the unnoticed middle order of mankind. Since neither birth nor fortune have favoured me, my actions shall speak to the world. Although I cannot rival the immortalized name of Cook, yet if persevering industry, joined with what ability I may possess can accomplish it, then I will secure the second place..." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 112)

Yep, this would have pressed all Bank's buttons. If Flinders could convince Banks to be his champion in this venture to attempt a full circumnavigation of the giant land mass, all his desires might materialise,

and he might get to explore inland as well. As it turned out, and as Flinders probably already knew, Banks was already well on board, and indeed Flinders was already the most likely contender being considered. So things were looking promising.

A circumnavigation of the *Terra Australis* landmass would be of great benefit to the British. Not only was it of great naval and scientific interest, but in naming and potentially claiming more of the coasts and lands, such a venture would hopefully help keep the French out, or at least relegate them to status as second comers. And Banks was well aware the French were already preparing their own scientific exploration of the South Pacific and the great southern lands.

Indeed Banks had been instrumental in arranging for a freedom of movement passport for the French expedition, soon to be heading south for exploration and scientific research. With the war still going on it was imperative in the age of enlightenment, that men of science might still be able to pursue their work, unencumbered in adding their gathered information to the sum of humanity's knowledge. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 70) Or as David Hunt put it "Sir Joseph Banks had sponsored the *Investigator's* mission as part of a scientific arms race against the French. Although Britain and France were at war, both believed in science and issued passports to each other's poindexters." (Hunt, David 2016, p. 197)

The French Expedition, under the command of Nicolas Baudin consisted of two ships, *le Géographe*, captained by Baudin, and *le Naturaliste* captained by Jacques Hamelin. A number of zoologists, botanists, artists and men of science accompanied the ships' working crew. Napoleon had authorised the expedition "to the coasts of New Holland", for the express purpose of "observation and research relating to Geography and Natural History." As a scientific expedition Banks had helped arrange for the British to issue passports for their safe travel in June of 1800, despite the countries being at war. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 71) The two French ships departed Le Havre, on October 19th 1800, expected to head directly to Il de France, also known as Mauritius, and onwards to the coast of New Holland. (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 124) So Banks and Flinders were aware they would now be in a race to be first to chart many of the blanks around the coast, with the French underway before them.

Estensen wrote that the *Age of Enlightenment* had encouraged some much needed common sense during the ongoing wars, noting "The importance given by European society to the acquisition of knowledge transcended in some ways the barriers of political rivalry among nations." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 121) Communications amongst the scientific elite remained open and cordial even though the two countries were at war.

The *Institut National de France* developed their program to build on the earlier explorations of Bruny d'Entrecasteaux and la Perouse, and Nicolas Baudin, an officer in the French merchant service, who had more recently lead specimen collecting expeditions, and with his particular interest in natural history, was to lead the French expedition, with the approval and support of Napoleon himself. "A successful voyage of exploration could only glorify the cultural image of a new, progressive French nation." Estensen added though "There was no overt suggestion of territorial aggrandisement. Official instructions included no requirement to claim or recommend locations for settlement. The question nevertheless arises as to whether, in giving his approval, Napoleon Bonaparte had any military or political designs on the southern continent." (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 123)

The passport was a good will gesture that would support science, but clearly it was somewhat of a threat to the British to have the French scouting so near their new colonies. The British had eyed off that whole quadrant of the South Pacific, and even a non-political expedition could provide opportunities to the French. There was an imperative to act with haste and get their own expedition underway, charged with completing the mapping of the unknown coasts and being first to name the associated coastal and land marks, allowing the British to make claims on the valuable areas. Scientific good will can only go so far, obviously.

Banks was of course the man of influence for anything related to Australia, as the government time and again acted on his instructions. He lobbied strongly that they should be supporting their own British scientific discovery venture. Ideally, they should act quickly and get their expedition back to New Holland and begin a full circumnavigation before the French might arrive, or more realistically, that the French would at least not have the coast *all to themselves*, and so his plans were soon enacted.

The brig the *Lady Nelson*, already on its way to Australia, had been suggested as the vessel to facilitate such a venture, but Flinders explained to Banks that the *Lady Nelson* would be “very inadequate to the task”. (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 51) He further suggested, not only should it be himself who might best command any such exploratory voyage, but ideally, that a larger and more suitable ship should be found for the task, which, like the French, might travel in companion with a second vessel. The companion ship idea was perhaps a gambit too great, but he seems to have made *some impression* with his arguments.

He wrote to Banks, asking “if his Majesty should be so far desirous to have the discovery of New Holland completed And the late discoveries in that country should so far meet approbation as to induce the execution of it to be committed by me, I should enter upon it with that zeal which I hope has hitherto characterised my services.” (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 21) Actually Banks had already earmarked Flinders for the project, as Flinders probably already knew, though he may have still been awaiting for any official advice and orders. But the lobbying for a more suitable ship was still imperative.

A larger ship Flinders argued, would be able to accommodate more scientists and artists, who could examine and record all they saw as they travelled, an attractive addition to any voyage of discovery as Banks would agree, and once again, he got lucky. (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 21) Banks was convinced, but the war with France was still in full swing and every ship was wanted for war duty. Two ships for exploration might not be possible, but Banks was able to convince Earl Spencer to authorise and equip one larger, more suitable ship than the disagreeable *Lady Nelson*. With Bank’s influence, the *Xenophon*, later renamed the *Investigator*, was allocated to Flinders’ task, to be operated with a volunteer crew.

Flinders appears to have been Bank’s golden boy just at that time, and with Spencer providing the 334 ton, 100 foot sturdy collier, Flinders would have been delighted. Cook had done his best work in a repurposed north country collier, so the omen alone was good, and the *Investigator* proved to be roomy and comfortable.

With Banks’ influence and support, the preparations began in early November, at great speed. The vessel, recently repaired and coppered, was nonetheless re-surveyed and refitted as new, appropriate for such a long voyage, and suitable charts & instruments required for the mapping work were gathered.

While the preparations had started with vigour after the expedition was agreed to in November, traditional delays soon set in and got longer and longer. Even with Bank’s influence, in wartime many items were difficult to come by. A great deal of provisions would be needed for a 3 year outing, and their inventory included spares for the ship, small boats for exploration and reprovisioning duties, water casks, and the long life food stores usual for a sailing voyage. Fresh food and provisions would be replenished at every available port of course. During their outings tents and equipment for land excursions would be required, and a plant house on board for housing specimens. Items to trade with any indigenous peoples they encountered were taken on board, along with a library of scientific reference books, the most up to date sailing charts, navigational instruments and stationary, including “three types of ink and 2000 quills”! (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 82)

Flinders recorded “I was anxious to arrive upon the coasts of Terra Australis in time to have the whole of the southern summer before me; but various circumstances retarded our departure, and amongst others, a passport from the French Government, to prevent molestation to the voyage, had not arrived.” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 44) They were close to ready by April, but further delays, including the still outstanding passport, continued to see them stalled at port, while the French were more than well

underway. A most frustrating period no doubt, but Flinders personal life was humming along during these months too.

Soon after Flinders had first arrived back in England, as he was awaiting a response from Banks, and any official orders he might be hoping for, he made time to begin rekindling his personal relationships, writing letters to his family and fond acquaintances, in anticipation of soon being able to visit some of them.

One correspondent in particular was a friend of his sister, one Ann Chappelle. Clearly she had been in his thoughts over the past 4 years in New South Wales, as he had named some sites around the Furneaux Islands after her - Mt Chappelle and the Chappelle Isles. Once in England he wrote "My imagination has flown after you often and many a time You are one of those friends whom I consider it indispensably necessary to see", though he expected he would be stuck in London attending to duty and the advancement of his career, for 2 or 3 months before he could travel to Lincolnshire. (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, pp. 10–11) (Bastian, Josephine 2016, . 65)

To excuse his delay, he explained his necessity in awaiting orders from Banks & the Admiralty as crucial to his opportunity for advancement. "You see I make everything subservient to business. Indeed, my dearest friend, this time seems to be a very critical period in my life. I have been long absent, have done services abroad that were not expected, but which seem to be thought a good deal of.... I may now perhaps make a bold dash forward, or may remain a poor lieutenant all my life." (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 11) (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 65) But despite his absorption in business matters, a courtship of sorts between them, seems to have begun.

By mid December he had still not received his official orders, (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 54) but he was able to manage some visits home, and their long friendship began to blossom into something more serious. Clearly they had considered the possibility of marriage, but he was concerned he did not yet have the income to offer her the life she deserved, and she had advised him she would have no dowry to contribute to their future. There was also considerable concern on her part about the venture he was preparing to embark on. One that would leave her home alone for three or possibly up to five years, and this did not seem like a fair or viable arrangement to start a married life with.

He wrote, explaining his ship was being readied for his big exploration venture, and that he understood that wasn't compatible with a married life, saying "Let us then, my dear Annette, return to the sweet calm delights of our friendship. Let us endeavour to return to that serenity of mind which thou possessed but lately. I must call ambition to my assistance since it must be so; and in a life of activity and danger put out of my mind but that we are friends." (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, pp. 13–14) So then, give up his pursuit of their love, and leave her free to marry a man who might be able to give her the attention a husband owes a wife perhaps??

Apparently Ann's father had been a sea captain, leaving her mother alone for much of their marriage, until she was, perhaps predicably, widowed. That was not a life Ann aspired to. That prospect seemed too cruel, and though there seems to have been discussions, at their meeting at last in January, he did feel that she was much less committed than himself to a romantic attachment with such obstacles, and they agreed to give up on a romantic relationship, and return to simply being warm friends.

"Forget me Annette, put everything from thee that may recall forth recollections. However dear to me thy thoughts are, still is thy happiness dearer. Of love I must not think..." (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 16) But he couldn't stop the thinking, and was truly heart broken.

His letters to her afterwards showed him to be entirely distraught about their reassessment and conclusion. "My feelings are almost too powerful for me" he wrote, asking her to let him know when she did marry, and wishing her all the happiness he wished he could have provided, "whilst I am tossed by winds and waves, on various coasts and in various climes ... I am torn to pieces It is seldom that I have written a

letter in tears.” (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 137) No calm, reserved man Flinders. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Flinders seems quite the man of zealous feelings and this turn of events hit him hard.

His promotion had come through by February and he then felt more financially secure, considering he would have the means to support a wife, but at the same time he was now quite committed to the exploration venture, “instructed to explore and chart the unknown southern coast of Terra Australis, filling in the blanks from his hero Cook’s charts” (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xv), and so that long separation remained the point of difficulty. Ann did not want to be married, only to be left home alone for years on end. And who could blame her?

However she must have been moved by his letters expressing his loss and heartbreak at their situation, and their return to a platonic friendship alone. More optimistically, she indicated she would be more disposed to marrying him if she might be able to travel with him, rather than being parted all that time, and in April of 1801 he wrote “I think I see a probability of living with a moderate share of comfort [I] have an accommodation on board the *Investigator*, in which as my wife, a woman may, with love to assist her, make herself happy.” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, pp. 17–18) (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 65) Ah, so he was inviting her to travel with him as his wife...

He suggested if the arrangement suggested were acceptable, she should travel to London where they would marry. But he had noted in his letter that “It will be much better to keep this matter entirely secret. There are many reasons for it yet, and I have also a powerful one. I do not exactly know how my great friends might like it.” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 19) (Brunton, Paul 2002, p. 66) And he was right to be nervous.

So lets just return to see how Bass was faring in England too. George Bass had also been in London around the same time, arriving just a couple of weeks before the Flinders, and he also seems to have hit the ground running, throwing himself into his new life as a merchant venturer.

After the sales of their seal pelts and oil, Bass & Bishop intended to form another investment company and raise capital to purchase desirable goods, with the aim of bringing them to Port Jackson, for commercial sale there. The idea seemed so attractive that his mother & sister invested, along with Bass’ previous naval captain and friend Waterhouse, along with many others. With healthy investment funds of just over 11,000 pounds they began looking for a suitable ship, selecting the 142 ton *Venus*, gathered a crew of 16, and began selecting cargo suitable for sale in the new colony.

Like Flinders, Bass felt that if all went well, this next period was going to make him, and his fortune, telling his mother he would then be able to support her in comfort. He had a great belief it would all work out. He was hopeful of departing at the end of the year and travelling via Brazil, where he would do some additional trading, before arriving in Sydney to sell it all and realise his expected profit. On the way home he would gather more sealskins to sell in China, and arrive back in England happy, healthy and rich, to share the success with his investors. Seemed like a viable plan, and it should have been, but, as we said earlier, timing was everything.

And in jolly old England, romance was in the air for Bass too. In spending his time with Waterhouse and his family, Bass got to know his sister, Elizabeth, and a very fond bond developed immediately between Elizabeth and himself. He was, by then, bound to undertake the voyage around the Pacific for the investment company he had been instrumental in setting up, but he did promise to return to England and settle down with her if she would care to marry and wait for him.

Bass was an attractive and highly interesting gentleman. He was an unusual and charismatic man, with an interest in many of the social issues of the day, including his reading the four volumes of feminist Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘The Rights of Women’. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 51) So that’s a positive kind of enlightenment to add to his natural science reading too then. Elizabeth seems to have been besotted immediately.

On his reduced Navy pay he was unlikely to have been an attractive prospect for a bride's parents, but he was certain that the voyage he was about to embark on could consolidate a helpful sum for their future. And her family must have thought so too, because they were amongst the investors in his consortium. Still, it seemed Bass was reluctant to go down the usual path of asking her father's permission to marry. Instead, despite their rather hasty courtship, and risking potential displeasure from her family, George & Elizabeth *did* quietly marry, on October 8th, 1800, less than 8 weeks after first meeting, with her brother and sister as their witnesses. (Bowden, Keith Macrae 1952, p. 95) (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 117)

Some sources suggest there is no evidence Bass & Flinders met while in England, but Bastian writes, not only did Flinders attend the Bass' wedding breakfast, but Bastian says Trim came along, tucked into his coat too! (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 68) A weird plus one for the reception? Okay, Flinders is sounding more and more the eccentric to me now!

Elizabeth's poor parents had to make do with the brief letter Bass sent afterwards, by way of discovering their marriage. Bastian writes of a little concern she had about the wedding though. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 69) She wondered if Elizabeth actually knew prior to the wedding that George would be departing on his long trading venture so soon afterwards? For Ann considering marrying Flinders, she seems to have resisted the marriage until Flinders suggested she could travel with him, rather than be stuck at home, alone for years on end. Regarding Elizabeth and Bass, I think it likely she would have known that he was about to embark on a long trading trip, seeing as her family members had invested in it the venture. Hard to think that much of the discussion around the family table would not have been about the venture. But I suppose they would have assumed the journey would not take much more than two years, and bring a good return. Despite her disappointment, she must have been willing to be parted for that time, on the expectation that it would bring them both financial comfort in the future.

Bass did appear to intimate more of these kinds of journeys might be in his future though, and even that she might come with him on future voyages, if she could refrain from having babies! Bass implied a couple of times in later correspondence that it would be impossible to continue his plan to travel with her if Elizabeth were to get pregnant, though I'm pretty sure he would play a part in that happening, so surely that kind of restraint should fall to him? More likely it was an excuse for why they might not travel together in the future. Once he was underway he didn't seem to pine for her in the way Flinders did for Ann. Did Elizabeth fully understand what kind of a future he was offering her then?

Bass & Bishop had purchased the 140 ton brig the *Venus* to carry their intended trade goods, and they began purchasing and loading the goods they thought saleable in NSW. Bastian lists the inventory as including "paints, oils, glues, items of clothing, boots and shoes, fabrics, feathers, looking glasses, household goods of every kind; tons of food, rum, tobacco; muskets and flints, swords and pistols ... and they noted 'the little brig is as deep as she can swim and full as an egg.'" (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 73) And still they had the provisions required for the journey to add; food, livestock & fodder, firewood, water and so on.

Bass was ready to sail towards the end of December, and though there seems no record, it is perhaps possible that Bass & Flinders at some point may have said their farewells as they embarked on their separate ventures? Elizabeth was there to see her husband off, staying in lodgings nearby, until the weather finally allowed Bass to depart English shores, on January 9th 1801. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 75)

Meanwhile, the provisioning of Flinders ship continued, while they awaited the necessary passport from France. Banks recruited the civilian men of science & arts needed for the expedition, and Flinders would see to the sailing crew. Flinders wanted only crew who volunteered for the project, hopefully ensuring less difficulty, unhappiness and friction during their long expedition, from those most enthusiastic about it's assignment. He found a great many did volunteer to join him, over 200 men for the 11 positions Flinders still had to fill, (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 44) and he was able to pick often known, tried & true, and mostly young fit men to crew the *Investigator*. Thinking he was doing his brother Samuel a great favour, he included him in the crew also, though in the end it was probably not a task Samuel had any interest in!

In all, with crew and the scientific contingent largely selected by Banks, the *Investigator* would carry more than 80 persons on board, (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. 45) and Trim the cat of course. And after that last letter to Ann, clearly Flinders was hatching plans to take along a wife too

Flinders seems entirely delighted about the expedition coming together, recording “my greatest ambition is to make such a minute investigation of this extensive and very interesting country that no person shall have occasion to come after me to make further discoveries.” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 27) His commitment seemed total, and he was so enthusiastic that Banks sent “sincere good wishes for your future prosperity, and with a firm belief that you will, in your future conduct, do credit to yourself as an able investigator, and to me as having recommended you.” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 27)

But Banks cannot have understood the desperation Flinders felt at the prospect of losing Ann, and the lengths he would go to, to secure her hand. Retter & Sinclair wrote that Flinders was a man torn between competing longings. “He was obsessed with achieving his place in history through feats of discovery and navigation, in the manner of his hero Captain James Cook. He was also a man deeply in love. ... Even flawed solutions are the torch bearers of hope, and he resolved to marry Ann and take her on board the *Investigator* in secret.” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 22)

Ann must have decided that she would prefer to face the inconveniences aboard a ship, travelling with her husband, than to stay at home alone, waiting for him. The calculation made and the shipboard accommodation offered, she seems to have decided such an arrangement was acceptable. When the long delayed ship’s departure seemed imminent, Flinders went ahead and married the “sweet, perfect temper[ed], witty [and] generous” Ann Chappell, (Flinders, Matthew. 2012, p. xv) in her local church at Partney, near Boston, on April 17th 1801. Despite no expectation of a dowry, Ann’s stepfather had been able to deliver a dowry of sorts, giving Flinders %150 (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 83) to put towards the costs in kitting her out for married life on their ship & at NSW.

It was of course, against the rules to take women aboard, but on occasion such arrangements were prudently ignored by the Admiralty, and this was what Flinders expected would happen in his case, expecting to be on the water perhaps before it even became known. But he had failed to ensure his greatest patron was supportive of the plan before going ahead, and this would prove disastrous.

As suggested earlier, it was not an entirely uncommon thing for commanders and senior officers to bring wives along on such long journeys, with the Admiralty usually turning a blind eye if everything was discreet, (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 84) and Flinders expected he might be able to do so with Ann, particularly if they had sailed pretty much straight away, as he’d hoped they would. But an unexpected visit by commissioners of the Admiralty found Ann aboard, looking quite settled and at home on the ship. For goodness sake – it was reported she was found “in the captain’s cabin without her bonnet”!!! (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 28) The horror, the scandal, the disgrace! The prospect of turning a blind eye was made very difficult in the face of that behaviour. No doubt their surprise would have been immediately conveyed to Banks. If only Flinders had kept his wife quietly in accommodation on shore until right before sailing.

Banks would have heard the news elsewhere too. Her family had made the mistake of a newspaper announcement, and when Banks found out Flinders had married, he was furious. No fan of the married sailor, he made a giant fuss about Flinders considering taking his wife aboard the admiralties ship, and threatened that Flinders would be removed from duty should he try. Flinders had to work very hard to even keep his commission.

It was clear Banks would not be sympathetic to their desires in any way. The newlyweds had to reconcile themselves afterwards to the long separation that Flinders’ voyage alone would necessitate, after just 3 short months of marriage. Indeed their separation would be for much longer than either could have anticipated. Ah... act in haste, repent at leisure or something isn’t it? Banks had such a great degree of

influence within the navy you must imagine he could have smoothed things over with the Admiralty had he been supportive, but that was not to be.

We know the admiralty always did pretty much what Banks said. When Banks asked if his suggestion for a physical alteration to the *Investigator* might be approved, the authorities replied “Any proposal you may make will be approved. The whole is left entirely to your decision”, (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 78) so we have to assume the outrage about Ann joining Flinders was more his than theirs. Had he lobbied for the authorities to turn their heads and quietly allow Flinders to take his wife, they would surely have acquiesced.

No, clearly it was Banks that was so opposed to men having wives with them. Indeed if he had his way none would marry at all! His correspondence shows earlier disappointments related to other men he had championed in the service, Banks writing of one, “Till he married, which he unfortunately did about two months ago, he was a very great favourite of mine.” In discussing this other underling who had had the temerity to fall in love and marry, Banks wrote “This marrying has been often in my way ... I did not hire him to beget a family in NSW” ...! (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 87)

To Flinders he wrote “*news of your marriage, which was published in the Lincoln paper, has reached me. The Lords of the Admiralty have heard also that Mrs. Flinders is on board the Investigator, and that you have some thought of carrying her to sea with you. This I was very sorry to hear, and if that is the case I beg to give you my advice, by no means to adventure to measures so contrary to the regulations and the discipline of the Navy; for I am convinced by language I have heard, that their Lordships will, if they hear of her being in New South Wales, immediately order you to be superseded, whatever may be the consequences, and in all likelihood order Mr. Grant to finish the survey.*” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 28) (Wikipedia: Matthew Flinders 2024)

Nowhere near enough discretion applied by Flinders and his wife then. Bastian reminds us when the French commander *Captain Louis de Freycinet* brought his wife Rose aboard the *Uranie* in 1817, he had the wisdom to smuggle her on the night before they sailed, dressed as a man! (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 86) And so the round the world exploration was experienced by the Freycinet couple, and he took his meagre punishment like a man when they got back to France and was admonished. Seems it didn't affect his career trajectory much though anyway, so that was good for them. Flinders was *tre naive*. And English!

In his immediate response to Banks Flinders wrote “It is true that I had an intention of taking Mrs Flinders to Port Jackson, to remain there until I should have completed the voyage, and to have then brought her home again in the ship, and I trust that the service would not have suffered in the least by such a step. ... [but further explained that if their Lordships reservations and objections] should continue the same [after he explained that no impairment would come to the expedition by Ann being on board] “whatever may be my disappointment, *I shall give up the wife for the voyage of discovery*; and I would beg of you, Sir Joseph, to be assured that even this circumstance will not diminish the ardour I feel to accomplish the important purpose of the present voyage....” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 29) When forced to choose, Ann came second. A bit of information I bet she wished she knew before she agreed to the marriage! Bastian suggests they would have talked it over and that Flinders agonised, (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 86) but it must have been heartbreaking all the same, particularly for Ann who was now trapped living the very life she initially rejected; married and abandoned.

So sadly, instead of joining her man in his adventures, Ann instead waved her new husband off in July, knowing he would be some years in completing his mission, and feeling pretty duped no doubt. Just how many years he would be in *actually* completing his mission would be a sorry misfortune for both of them. Ever the romantic, Flinders afterwards wrote to a friend “It is certain, I should not have married but with the idea of taking her with me, others had been allowed this privilege and I could not foresee that I should not have been denied it Yet I am by no means sorry for having married. If you knew her worth you would not.” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 32) He wrote regularly and affectionately to Ann over the years, though her replies have not survived.

Flinders would very soon have been distracted by the demands of his work on board. Ann though was so distressed she sank into a depression that worried her friends, (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 33) and his promise of gathering “riches and laurels with which to adorn thee” (Retter, Catherine, Sinclair, Shirley 1999, p. 34) were no compensation for the years of loneliness she knew she must endure. She would have necessarily had a very limited and closed life for the 3 to 5 years his expedition was expected to take. But even more tragically, his return it transpired, would take much longer than that.

Flinders having finally received his sailing orders and the required French safe passage passport, he sailed without much further communication from Banks, save a brief, few sentence long farewell wishing him success. Not much consolation for breaking the heart of his wife, though of course the expedition itself would still have been a great thrill for Flinders.

Trim had not been a happy comfortable cat on land, so his fond master Flinders would have been happy to be casting off with his little companion aboard at least. Flinders felt this was an opportunity of a lifetime. His work undertaking would put him up there with the greats and would really provide valuable information for future seafarers, explorers, potential settlers and the government. And he may well become the Cook of his generation.

The French Passport he had waited so long for was of course written in French, which Flinders could not read at the time, but it was inspected by “by one of our gentlemen on board the *Investigator*, who understands the language a little”, and they noted that it was made out “for the protection of *HMS Investigator*, under the command of Captain Matthew Flinders.” (Estensen, Miriam. 2002, p. 168) At that time they could not imagine how the pedantic interpretation of such a document might bring them trouble, being made out to the *Investigator*, the ship, and not Flinders, the captain. (Bastian, Josephine 2016, p. 89) Though he may not have worried about that minor discrepancy at the time, this would have awful consequences for Flinders in the future.

So Flinders is underway on his voyage of discovery, to circumnavigate Terra Australis and chart and map all the missing details of the waters and coasts. If he could speed to his destination he may well beat the French to some of the discoveries, pleasing his English overlords, so in the next episode we'll look at what Flinders was able to achieve despite leaving so long after the French expedition had set off. And we'll see how Bass fared on his trading venture too. I'll try and get the next out as quickly as I can.

Podcast Recommendation

This episode I wanted to let you know about a really fun podcast I found recently. Called “Bamboo History”, it's described as “Chinese & East Asian history by an Australian bloke - informative, hectic, full of surprises and it's bloody awesome!” Steven is a young Australian bloke of Chinese background, who has loved Chinese history from a young age. His podcast was developed as a primary way for him to connect with his Chinese heritage. The content of the episodes are eclectic and always interesting, from the Opium Wars to the origin of Dumplings! There's a great range, always informative and entertaining. Have a look at the many episodes available. I'm sure you'll find something of interest. As always, I'll provide a link in my show notes. <https://www.bamboohistorypodcast.com/episodes>

Thanks so much for listening. I'll continue working on Bass & Flinders adventures and achievements. The next one should come together much more quickly as much of the work has already been done. Now we just have to keep the colds at bay....

So take care, and I'll talk with you again soon. Cheers.

(Cooper, H.M. 1966)

(Norbury, J&M, Hibbert, D&D 2013)

(Rääbus, Carol, ABC Hobart 2017)

(Finders, Matthew, Sandall, Philippa, Dooley, Gillain 2019)

MUSIC:

- Intro/Exit music modified from: 'Grand Canyon' by Löhstana, DAVID [CCFM Music]
- Background sounds: <https://freesound.org/people/ianmccurdy/sounds/645968/>
<https://freesound.org/people/Supertyv2/sounds/166753/>
- Bass compass - Pocket compass sundial used by George Bass on the whaleboat expedition that explored the coast of Victoria as far as Westernport Bay, 1797-98.
<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1800589>

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