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CHAPTER V

THE CONVICT PROBLEM IN ENGLAND

Seeking a new convict colony—and defining Australia’s coastline

Significant events in world history have unexpected consequences. It had been the capture of Constantinople by the Turks and the closing of the Middle East caravan routes that had forced Portugal and Spain to seek sea routes to the Spice Islands and that had resulted in the rounding of Africa; the astonishing discovery of the great American continent stretching almost from Pole to Pole; and piecemeal, the discovery of Cape York Peninsula, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the whole coast of Australia.

It had been the wars of the Reformation; the seizure of the vacant throne of Portugal by Spain; and the attempt of the Spaniards to annihilate the heretic Dutch physically and economically, that had led to the Dutch Empire in the Spice Islands.

It was the American War of Independence that suddenly gave “New South Wales” (including Queensland) a new importance and significance to the British Crown, and that led to its deliberate colonisation.

The revolt of the American colonies commenced (1775-6) five years after the discovery of the east coast of Australia by Captain Cook, and ended victoriously for the rebels in 1782-3. The triumphant Americans behaved most viciously towards those of their fellow countrymen who had been loyal to England—their property was confiscated; they were disallowed from any legal rights (e.g., from recovering money owed to them); and were driven ruthlessly from the land where most of them had been born. Fifty thousand of these refugees went to Canada, Nova Scotia and the West Indies; many others returned with the British troops to England, where most of them lived for years in utter destitution. (Many were in London, under the immediate eye of the Government—to its great embarrassment.) For over a hundred years before the revolt of the North American colonies legal transportation of convicts to America had been in operation. As a matter of fact, in the last fifty years there had been contractors willing to take convicted offenders off the hands of the British Government at no expense, knowing that they could sell them to American planters for as much as £20 per head—
a great price in those days. Between 1717 and the American War of Independence at least 50,000 English convicts were thus received into North America, and the Home Government had, indeed, exercised its power of veto in some instances against colonial statutes in America that sought to put an end to this traffic. With the loss of the North American colonies except Canada, English prisons were wholly insufficient to accommodate condemned persons and the Government enquired about several alternative sites in Africa and various other places, all of which, however, were found to be unsatisfactory because of disease, absence of local resources, and so on. Sir Joseph Banks was the first to suggest that Australia might serve to settle the problems of convicted offenders sentenced to transportation. He recommended in 1779 that Botany Bay in New South Wales could be well adapted to this purpose, but the Government was too much engaged with other pressing business at that time to act upon the suggestion.

Immediately after the revolution commenced in America (1776) “hulks” were moored at appropriate places in England to hold persons condemned to transportation and to employ them on “public works” till they could be sent to America. The scheme was not only worthless in practice, but as Rogers (23) points out, “the pupils of these ‘floating Academies’ arose on four occasions in two years and slew, or were slain by, their task masters.” A Committee declared that the hulks invariably made criminals more criminal. Besides, this system was only meant as a makeshift, since the criminals who were there were “in the eye of the law on their way to America.” Although, as mentioned, there was a law by which convicted offenders could be sent to America, there was no law to send them anywhere else. From Stuart times (1618) they could be sent to America as serfs or on “conditional pardon,” and in 1664 and 1665 the judges had attempted to regulate conditions by directing that, to prevent their being perpetual slaves, they should work for four years as pure serfs; for three years, under indenture for wages and should then be free, but they were forbidden to return to England. In some cases, land, in the new areas being opened up in America, was offered instead of wages. (24) Compare the conditions that operated later, here.

In 1783 James Matra, who had, like Sir Joseph Banks, been on the “Endeavour” with Captain Cook in 1770, suggested that the problems, both of the convicts and the loyalists, could equally be solved by settling them at Botany Bay. Lord Sydney (Secretary of State for the Home Department in England, 1782 to 1789), after whom the capital of New South Wales was later to be named, was impressed by the scheme, but a Committee was to sit the following year (1784) to discuss ways and means of implementing a law passed directing the Privy Council to fix a place for transportation “within the Empire or outside it,” so it was deferred to await their recommendations.

There were four alternatives: America, North-west Africa, South-west Africa, and Australia. Of these, America was soon seen to be impracticable—a contractor for white labour of this kind met so furious a resistance that he found no footing anywhere there and ultimately “dumped his living cargo” in the wilds of Honduras and raised a legitimate storm of fury everywhere as a result. A proposal to “turn the convicts loose in Gambia (N.W. Africa) and see what will happen” and another to settle them in S.W. Africa were defeated by the eloquent opposition of such men as Edmund Burke and by the dire results. How, he asked, could a government justify sending people who had been spared the death penalty to places where they would, in fact, suffer it? The “apparent mercy of transporting those wretched people to Africa might with justice be called cruelty—the gallows of England would rid them of their lives in a far less dreadful manner than the climate or the savages of Africa would take them!” Some hundreds of convicts had actually been landed in Africa as in Central America, but the places were selected with a complete lack of attention to disease or suitability for self-support, and pestilence and famine quickly destroyed these miserable men. In the pother of windy debate, one or two progressive ideas showed for a moment and were promptly lost. Lord Beauchamp, for example, said “Let them place the convicts under civil government on some fertile spot... for the outcasts of an old country will not serve as the sole foundation for a new one.” Sir George Young (1785) was impressed similarly with the idea that convicts should not serve as the sole foundation for a settlement. Like Matra and others he coupled the cause of the Loyalists to that of the convicts; he recommended also that Chinamen be brought in as labourers; and that South Sea Island women be imported too. Lord Sydney was even more deeply impressed by these proposals, but Pitt the Prime Minister was preoccupied with other considerations. It was true that the project, so far as the convicts were concerned, had the prime advantage (or so it seemed) of relative cheapness. So far as the Loyalists were concerned, there was a diplomatic
difficulty. England had not only been fighting the revolting colonists in North America; she was also fighting France. In fact, it was her involvement in frequent war with France that had emboldened the American colonists to take up arms, and it was the active help of France that contributed largely to their success. As previously mentioned, the French were actively competing with the British for new areas to exploit and to colonise after their defeats in Canada and in India, and Bougainville, Surville, Marion and others almost anticipated Cook and his colleagues in their discoveries. If, therefore, the Loyalists established a colony in the Pacific without government support, it was quite likely the French and the Americans would over-run it. If the Government did it, it would, at least, be an official and defensible settlement and, moreover, there were good strategic reasons behind it. If we had to fight France again or her allies the Spaniards, or the Dutch (as indeed happened in the Napoleonic wars at the turn of the century), “New South Wales,” including Queensland and the Northern Territory, would be an admirable centre from which to attack the Dutch and Spanish settlements in the Malay archipelago and the Philippines; and was an excellent flanking post against the French. (This idea coloured policy in Australia for a generation or more.)

The discussions dragged on for years, as discussions with governments have a tendency to do, and the cause of the Loyalists lost force as, in despair, they sought other alternatives. All refugee schemes do. It was not for want of positive aspects in the picture. It was emphasised that there was scope for commerce with India, China and Japan, and that, under British protection, the Loyalists might build up in this southern land estates and fortunes that would replace those of which they had been despoiled in America. On 18 August 1786 the fateful decision was taken; and in January 1787, in the King’s Speech to Parliament, it was announced that a plan had been formed for transporting to “New Holland” a number of convicts “in order to remove the inconvenience which arose from the crowded state of the gaols in different parts of the Kingdom.” The question of rehabilitation and resettlement of the Loyalists, however, was tacitly dropped, the government thus missing the opportunity of comforting and repaying those people who had brought misery and distress upon themselves by loyally supporting it in its losing cause in America. Obviously it also lost the opportunity to people the proposed colony in this country with a sturdy population that was already experienced in colonising and opening up new lands. The establishment of a colony solely for convicts and their guards produced social and economic conflicts that embittered two generations more. Ernest Scott in discussing this decision wrote:

“It would be pleasant if we could attribute to so great a man as Pitt the vision of a far-seeing Imperial statesmanship in the deciding of this issue; but in truth there is no evidence that he had even a glimmering idea that England was founding a great new nation in the southern seas. He was a practical politician immersed in the problems and perplexities of the hour. One of the vexing questions confronting his Cabinet was that of the disposal of the felons, and the Minister responsible—Lord Sydney—recommended the plan of sending them to New Holland. Pitt assented, and showed just such a measure of interest in the project as the head of the Government might be expected to take in a scheme projected by a colleague. . . . He defended the scheme because ‘in point of expense no cheaper mode of disposing of the convicts could be found’—there was no imperial imagination in that, but it was eminently practical. It would have been eternally to Pitt’s honour if, remembering the plight of the American loyalists, he had given precedence to their claims, and had heeded the warning of Bacon that ‘it is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of people and wicked condemned men to be people with whom you plant.’ But he was not consciously planting a colony so much as disposing of a difficulty. Yet, if we estimate the importance of political things by their endurance, their ultimate value, their large and expanding effect upon human affairs, the founding of New South Wales was the most

important of all the policies taken in hand by Pitt's Government at this time. Out of the settlement authorised in 1786 grew the Common-wealth of Australia."

The Penal Settlement in Sydney Cove

Arthur Phillip, a captain in the Navy, was selected to be the first Governor of "New South Wales," which was defined as extending from the southern extremity of Tasmania to the northern tip of Cape York, and westward as far as the 135th degree of longitude. It did not include any of the western half of "New Holland"; it was not, in fact, yet known whether "New South Wales" adjoined "New Holland" or was a separate land. (See Chapter XV.)

Phillip arrived in Botany Bay on 18 January 1788 and, two days later, the total company, consisting of 290 officers, marines, extra hands, women and children, together with 520 male and 197 female convicts, were safely at anchor there. Phillip, however, quickly decided that Botany Bay was an unsatisfactory place and though "Botany Bay" figured for years as a synonym for the convict settlement in New Holland, there never was in fact a convict settlement there! On a hurried survey of Port Jackson (a harbour which Cook had marked upon his chart but had not entered), Phillip described it as "the finest harbour in the world, in which 1,000 sail of the line may ride in perfect security," with a deep cove close to a good supply of fresh water. He named it Sydney. To the north of Port Jackson he entered Broken Bay which, he said, was "the finest piece of water I ever saw, and which I honoured with the name of 'Pittwater' after the Prime Minister."

While the First Fleet was lying at anchor in Botany Bay, two strange vessels were seen approaching, which Phillip correctly guessed were the French exploring ships under the command of the Comte de Laperouse. It was the morning of 24 January 1788, and Phillip was actively transferring his whole company to Sydney Cove. The French remained in Botany Bay until 10 March and then sailed away into the Pacific and into a silence that was not broken for forty years, when it was discovered that they had met their deaths by shipwreck and massacre on the island of Vanikoro. Fortune again failed to favour the French. (See note: p. 46.)

On 26 January 1788 the British flag was unfurled in Sydney, and the colony of "New South Wales"—the mother colony of the Commonwealth—began its official existence.

The State of which Brisbane is now the capital was, for seventy-one years, part of the great northern half of the colony of "New South Wales." To understand its history, it is necessary to outline in some detail some of the facts of the early life of "New South Wales." For many years the authorities in Sydney struggled to establish themselves on the shores of Port Jackson. Several times during the first years of the colony's existence famine almost terminated the experiment; supplies were irregular, living costs were excessively high, labour was incredibly incompetent. (It is said that out of the whole population only one individual could be found capable of directing farming operations, and that this man, whose name was Dodd, died before the first Governor's departure in 1792 from the colony.) All governors, from 1788 until the arrival of Lachlan Macquarie in 1810, were naval "post-captains" reigning in solitary state—but below that pinnacle of vice-regal eminence the military officers of what was soon the "New South Wales Corps" quickly gained an ascendancy that became more and more effective, and that, finally, stifled any attempt at good government or the amelioration of affairs generally.

To the naval post-captains, the first priority after mere survival was the exploration of the coast. Earlier explorations, especially those of the Dutch, and finally Cook's voyage, had, so far as the coastal configuration of Australia was concerned, left only three major geographical questions to be answered.

The first of these was the question whether "Van Diemen's Land" (Tasmania) was part of Australia or not; the second was whether the Gulf of Carpentaria was merely a gulf or was a strait separating the east part of Australia totally from "New Holland" or Western Australia; and the third was whether such a strait, if it existed, joined the southern ocean between the Great Australian Bight and Tasmania, or if not, what lay there.

Matthew Flinders was prominent in the solving of all three.

He had come out as a midshipman with Governor Hunter in 1795 in the "Reliance." With Dr. Bass, a close friend who had come out as surgeon on the same boat, Flinders in 1798 in the "Norfolk," a colonial sloop of twenty-four tons, entered Bass Strait and charted the north coast of Tasmania, including the estuary of the Tamar.

(26) Bass and Flinders in an eight-foot boat, the "Tom Thumb," made two earlier trips down the coast from Sydney. On one of these, they explored George's River and reported so well of it that Governor Hunter established Bankstown there. On the second, in a second "Tom Thumb," they ran south to Pt. Hacking which they explored. Flinders was sent to Norfolk Is, on duty and Bass' next two trips alone, included the discovery of coal at Coalcliff, twenty miles south of Sydney. Coal has yielded an enormous return of wealth ever since from the huge deposits discovered in that area and others.

On the second expedition, Bass rounded C. Howe and proceeded west far beyond Cook's first landfall (in 1770). He surveyed the coast, now trending west, so far, that he felt certain there was a strait separating Australia from Tasmania and, finally, reached a great bay which he named Bass Strait. It was this discovery that prompted Flinders in 1798 to suggest Bass' name for the strait. Bass later returned to England, invested in the "Venus" and embarked on a trading career in the Pacific—a mixture in those days of trading, smuggling and privateering—fell foul, it is said, of the authorities in South America and was said to have died a prisoner in the mines there. The story was never confirmed.
River (on which Launceston was to be built later); then rounded
Cape Grim, and ultimately coasted the whole island, noting also
Storm Bay and the River Derwent (upon which Hobart was
ultimately established). They thus closed the first of the three major
gaps in the coastal configuration of “New Holland,” and proved
“Van Diemen’s Land” an island.

The following year (1799) Flinders turned his attention north-
ward to what is now Queensland. The only deliberate exploration
in these areas had been a short journey inland up the Endeavour
River that a few of Captain Cook’s men had made when their ship
lay there for repairs in 1770. Cook’s journals had themselves posed
various questions. He had, for example, suggested that if anyone
wished to determine whether there was a river entering Morton Bay
he might commence by locating the Glasshouses in latitude 26° 53’ S.

Flinders, at his own suggestion, was now sent in the “Norfolk”
as Collins tells us:
“to explore the Glass House and Hervey’s Bays,” two large openings
to the northward, of which the entrances only were known. He (Flinders)
had some hope of finding some river discharging itself into one of
these bays and of being able to use it “to penetrate further into the
interior of the country than had been before effected.”

The importance of this lies in the last line: this was the first actual
exploration into Queensland territory and, as such, it demands some
detailed attention.

Flinders sailed from Sydney on 8 July 1799 and discovering
Shoal Bay on 11th (but overlooking the Clarence River that enters
it), he dropped anchor on 15th in the northern part of Moreton Bay,
which Cook had called “Glass House Bay.”

Flinders in Queensland

Next day (16 July 1799) he landed on Bribie Island and attempted
to make friendly contact with a group of naked natives who
approached from the scrub near the southern shore. At first
timid, they soon became childishly inquisitive about the appearance
and clothing of these strange beings. They were greatly intrigued
by the excellent weaving of a hat Flinders wore and, having no
notion of property in the personal sense, demanded it for examina-
tion and then boisterously attempted to snatch it with the aid of a
stick with branching twigs. To the natives this was normal and
amusing; to the white men it was tinged with menace (as it well
might be) and, in any case, it was repulsed. As instantly furious as
ill-bred children (but much more dangerous) the natives seized sticks
and Flinders was forced to threaten them and then fire a shot to free
his party. In the affray one of the aborigines was wounded, giving
the place the name “Skirmish Point.” It is the south-west (not south-
east—as usually shown) point of Bribie Island, and to-day a week-
Pt. Skirmish is correctly shown on the S.W. and not, as now, the S.E. end of Bribie Is.; which is shown as part of the mainland; as Macleay, Karragarra, and Russell Is. in the south end of Moreton Bay are also. The disputed “Sixth Island” is Coochie Mudlo where a blurred anchor marks his overnight anchorage. It will be noticed that “Moreton Bay,” as Cook marked it in error in 1770, is Rouse Channel.

Flinders had discovered that Cook’s “Morton Bay” was, in fact, only a channel between Moreton Island (which Cook thought part of the mainland) and Stradbroke Island, and that “Glass House Bay” extended south for miles. He himself traced it thirty-four miles from the outer sea. He noted pumice in the strait separating Bribie Island from the mainland (he thought it was a small river mouth and named its sea end: “Pumicestone River”). He thought the pumice indicated that the Glass Houses were volcanic areas and decided to pay them a visit as soon as he had done some essential surveying of the bay.

Going slowly south he anchored off a point, which from the redness of its cliffs he called “Redcliff Point” (probably Woody Point) and successively noted and charted what we know as Mud Island, St. Helena Island, Green Island and tiny King Islet. Keeping warily away from the coast he failed to see the mouth of the Brisbane River, which is virtually invisible at one mile owing to islets and broken coastline. Further south, passing wide of what are now Cleveland and Raby Bay, he charted Peel Island and anchored for the night near a “sixth island,” which was probably Coochie Mudlo. He wrote:

“I judged favourably of the country, on the borders of which seemed to be a river falling into the head of the Bay, both by its thick covering of wood, and from the good soil of the sixth island which lies at the entrance.”

(The river he suspected is, in fact, the Logan River, which enters from behind Lagoon Island.)

Returning to Skirmish Point, Flinders took his boat up into Pumicestone Channel about five miles to a sandy stretch on the west side of Bribie Island: made the necessary repairs, and crossing the channel and going further a little (to the site of Donnybrook?) made his visit to the Glasshouses.

On 26 July 1799 he took the boat up a small creek that pointed towards the peaks (Elimbah Creek, upper branch) and left it at a point where this creek doubles back and at high tide forms with the lower inlet two mangrove-covered islands. Accompanied by two seamen and the native interpreter Bongaree (from Sydney) they steered N.W. by W. through low swampy country till stopped by Glasshouse Mountain Creek. Bearing away S.W. till they reached fordable headwaters, they crossed and steered between N. 50° and 60° W., catching sight at times of the “flat-topped peak” (Tibrogargan) which was considerably nearer than the highest peak (Beerwah). Beerburrum, however, “a round mount with sloping sides” was nearer still and Flinders and his party altered course, reached it and climbed to the top (980 feet).
The mountain was studded with stones and thick with blady grass, but difficult of access as it was, rewarded these first climbers of any of the Glasshouses with a magnificent view of the Bay in the bright afternoon light. The head of the Bay near the sixth island appeared at S. 24° E. and Flinders thought he saw a line of water at S. 12° E. which was, maybe, the river he was prevented reaching "with the sloop, from the intricacy of the channel" (and unfavourable wind). At S. 72° E. he saw several branches that entered Pumicestone "River" (actually the junction where the channel winds to enter the sea at Caloundra).

Using a telescope (as he doubtless did) these points can be identified with ease; though the naked eye is limited, naturally, to closer range.

From Beerburrum, Beerwah lay about four miles N.W. and Tibrogargan one and a half miles away. They made for the latter, but when they had gone a mile the sun was already below the treetops, so they camped for the night on Tibrogargan Creek (at a waterhole close to the present Bruce Highway). At seven next morning they found themselves under the steep cliff of Tibrogargan, which "utterly forbade all idea of reaching the summit." Steering S.S.E. they set out on the return journey; altered course to cross "a broad stream of fresh water which fell in lower down" (Elimbah Creek) and walked three miles (to where the road from Caboolture to Donnybrook now crosses the creek) to reach the waterside, and so reached their boat—nine miles from the mountain—"a more laborious and tiresome walk of the same length would seldom be experienced." It was the evening of 27 July, and the party waiting had cooked, to celebrate their return, a most acceptable black swan!

On 31 July 1799 Flinders beat out of Moreton Bay (which he renamed thus), transferring Cook's name to it and naming Moreton Island, also, in the belief that the great navigator would have named it so "if he had been aware of its insularity."

During August he made a cursory examination of Hervey's Bay to a point beyond Big and Little Woody Islands (the latter he named "Curlew Island"), but was brought to a halt by shoals. Veering away N.W. he crossed Cook's course again at Bustard Bay—Cook's first landing place in Queensland; his second in Australia. From that point Flinders returned to Sydney, his trip completed.

He revisited England in 1800 and his maps of the Queensland coast were much admired. He was promptly given command of the former "Xenophon" (renamed the "Investigator") and sent to make a thorough investigation of the whole coastline of Australia to clear up the remaining doubts as to coastal configuration. What did it matter that the "Investigator," crazy and unsound, was almost a "floating coffin"? Flinders had the opportunity of his all-too-short life and he used it nobly.

At the end of the same year (3 December 1800) a sixty-ton brig, the "Lady Nelson," the first vessel with a sliding centre board, built by Captain John Schanck (whose name is commemorated by the southern cape between Westernport and Pt. Phillip in Victoria), was sent to Australia under the command of Lt. James Grant. She sighted the coast at C. Banks, near the present boundary between South Australia and Victoria, and discovered and named the coastal points and other features as she moved easterly—the first vessel to pass through Bass Strait from the west. In a later trip the ship, under Lt. John Murray, explored Pt. Phillip which, from its great depth, was thought by those wedded to the idea that Australia was traversed by a great channel from north to south, might be its southern exit. Murray's visit dispelled this possibility and on 8 March 1802 he took possession of the area for England, the first time that the Union Jack served that purpose. (27) He wrote:

"At 8 o'clock in the morning the united colours of the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland were hoisted on board, and at 1 o'clock, under a discharge of three volleys of small arms and artillery, the port was taken possession of in the name of his sacred Majesty George the Third."

Meanwhile Flinders had reached "New Holland" near the Leeuwin (Western Australia) on 6 December 1801 and anchored in King George's Sound (Albany). With "consummate seamanship and wonderful accuracy in detail," he proceeded to map the south coast of the continent, which was unknown beyond the eastern end of the Great Australian Bight. Very soon he reached Spencer's Gulf and turning northwards sailed to its extremity—well over 200 miles—and returned along its eastern coast, sighting Kangaroo Island and exploring St. Vincent's Gulf also to its northern endpoint. On turning south along its eastern coast, in its turn, he found Kangaroo Island, an island, indeed, and passing through the unexpected strait at its eastern end ("Backstairs Passage") found himself in Encounter Bay with a foreign vessel in sight. This was a French ship, "Le Géographe," under the command of Captain Nicholas Baudin, and though Flinders believed England was at peace, the absence of any source of news caused the cautious captain to clear for action. Baudin, however, was on a perfectly peaceful mission and the two exchanged greetings and news. The French had explored what is now the coast of Victoria and that of South Australia as far as Encounter Bay, but the only area of new discovery was the 150 miles

(27) The Union Jack was adopted only in 1801 by the inclusion of the Irish cross (St. Patrick's) with those of Scotland (St. Andrew's) and England (St. George's); the latter two had been united in 1603 by James I and by the Act of Union in 1707.)

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lying along the South Australian coast from Encounter Bay to C. Banks. Flinders in the “Investigator” and Grant in the “Lady Nelson” had accounted for the rest and all, between them, had closed one other of the three gaps—that there was no inland channel cutting Australia in two. Australia was one vast continent.

One matter that did attract the active interest of the French was the surprising growth of Sydney’s importance. “They saw coal ships ready to sail for India and the Cape of Good Hope; well-armed smugglers bound for Peru; adventurers bound for any wild privateering voyage in the South Sea Islands; and boats bound for China, New Zealand, America; American vessels which were never lacking, whalers, sealers from Bass Straits and Tasmania, and dozens of smaller craft on coastal and river runs.

Flinders and Baudin had met on 3 April 1802, and Flinders arrived in Sydney ready to commence, at once, that circumnavigation of Australia that, once and for all, would clinch the matter of the unity of “New South Wales” and “New Holland.”

He left Sydney on 22 July 1802 in his ancient sloop, the “Investigator,” with the “Lady Nelson” as a tender, for the Queensland coast. Acting upon the impression he had formed that no river of importance entered either Shoal Bay or Moreton Bay, he sailed past those openings and reached Hervey’s Bay in nine days. He found little of value there. Port Curtis was his first notable discovery, and he explored the channel between that harbour and Keppel Bay in some detail. This discovery of Port Curtis was to have significance later (see p. 131). Shoal Water Bay and Broadsound he also examined with care and says:

“There seems indeed to be a considerable extent of land about Broadsound and on the peninsula between it and Shoal Water Bay which, if not calculated to give a rich return to the cultivator in wheat, would support much cattle, and produce maize, sugar and tobacco; and cotton and coffee would grow upon the more rocky sides of the hills—and, probably, even on Long Island.”

He discusses at some length the best site for docks, the value of the timber and the probability of metallic production, with a terse directness that, as has been pointed out, contrasts favourably with the “flowing platitude of the bulk of exploratory description.” Having finished these examinations, he sailed for Torres Straits (thus missing the Fitzroy and the fine country thereabouts) in order that he might commence the survey of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Flinders coasted down the western shore of the peninsula, and on 22 November 1802 anchored in the channel between Bentinck’s and Sweer’s Islands, which he named Investigator Road (see p. 85). Here, on examination, his crazy ship proved to be rotten from stem to stern, and the master and carpenter jointly reported that there was scarcely a sound timber in her, but that if she “had fine weather and no accident, she might run six months without much risk.” Nevertheless, Flinders determined, if the ship would hold together at all, to finish his survey of the Gulf of Carpentaria to settle the last of the doubts about the coastal configuration, and, when fair weather came, to proceed right round Australia by the west and south to Port Jackson. If this should prove too dangerous, he meant, in the last resort, to make for the nearest point in the East Indies at that time. Accordingly, he coasted past Groote Eylandt and Cape Arnhem (examining the bays as he passed with such accuracy that his charts were still in use until recently), and actually circumnavigated Australia, arriving in Port Jackson on 10 June 1803. A survey of the “Investigator” now found her “not worth repairing in any country, and impossible to be made fit for sea.”

Flinders had proved (1801-1803) that “New South Wales” and “New Holland” were not two or more land masses separated by an inland sea, but both parts of one vast island continent. Its coastal configuration was fully established. He suggested it be called “Australia,” but acceptance of this idea was delayed first by Flinders’ own misfortunes, and secondly by the somewhat surprising opposition of Sir Joseph Banks and others. It was thought the name Australia was inappropriate, because de Quiros had already applied a very similar name (“Australis”) to the New Hebrides (1606), and because Dalrymple had used it for part of his imaginary continental “Southland,” which he supposed fronted the Atlantic (in the neighbourhood of Graham’s Land and the Falkland Islands). Flinders reluctantly agreed to substitute “Terra Australis” in his account of his voyages. But this account itself was delayed until 1814.

Leaving for England as a passenger he was wrecked on the Barrier Reef in the “Porpoise,” and after an astonishing journey by open boat reached Sydney, where all that he could be offered to bring off other survivors and to proceed 15,000 miles to England was another of the colony’s worm-eaten crazy tubs: the “Cumberland,” a cutter of twenty-nine tons! Forced by necessity to call in at Mauritius (then French), he was held prisoner until 1810—six and a half long years—and after his release and return to England only lived long
enough to put his manuscript through the Press. He died the day
the book was issued in 1814, but was unconscious and never saw it.

The name "Australia" was officially adopted in 1824, but the
second of our great explorers had then been dead ten years!

Note: While this book was on the press, the ancient wrecks of "L'Astrolabe"
and "La Boussole" were discovered by underwater frogmen on coastal reefs at
Vanikoro (June 1959), after 170 years.