

*Matthew  
Flinders*

THE LIFE OF MATTHEW FLINDERS

MIRIAM ESTENSEN



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*For Arvid, Erik and Axel  
and also*

*To the memory of the brave men who sailed on unknown seas  
to discover the shape and form of our world*



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The inspiration for this book lay in three areas: a love of ships and the sea that stemmed from family circumstance, a fascination with history and a desire to bring to life an Australian explorer who did not always receive his due in history books in Australia or elsewhere. The work of Matthew Flinders came towards the end of the story of the men and ships who sailed uncharted seas to discover the shape and form of our world. Yet his achievement was considerable: he was the first true circumnavigator of the Australian continent and the first to chart and otherwise record great sections of its shoreline. An intriguing personality as well, he can fluently tell much of his story in his own words.

The track I followed in tracing the life of Matthew Flinders led me, not surprisingly, across the face of the world—to England’s little Lincolnshire towns where he was born and grew up, and to London, to explore the streets and squares that he knew and a Thames River that he would have recognised despite the changes. In Mauritius there were the Port Louis harbour, the mountain peaks and the waterfalls he described. I followed long stretches of the Australian coast that he charted—from King George Sound, Western Australia and Tasmania to Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands—and wandered downtown Sydney to mentally reconstruct the settlement he had known. There were visits to existing ships of the period or their replicas and interviews with knowledgeable sailors. Across the world, too, I spent long periods in libraries, archives and museums with their masses of pertinent documents—logs, diaries, letters, certificates, pictures. From all of this there emerged a vivid image of Matthew Flinders and a sweeping picture of the people and circumstances of his life.

I owe very special thanks to Pamela Cook of Flinders’s birthplace of Donington, Lincolnshire, whose enthusiasm and effort opened unexpected avenues of information, and to David Simpson of Boston,

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And to my husband and our sons, my utter gratitude for patience, contributions, and every possible kind of support and cooperation.

# CONVERSIONS



## LENGTH

- 1 inch = 2.54 centimetres
- 1 foot = 30.48 centimetres
- 1 yard = 0.91 metres
- 1 fathom = 1.83 metres or 6 feet
- 1 chain (surveyor's or Gunter's chain) = 66 feet or 20.1168 metres
- 1 mile = 1.61 kilometres
- 1 league = varied in different countries and periods, but usually estimated at approximately 3 miles or 5 kilometres

## WEIGHT/MASS

- 1 ounce = 28.3 grams
- 1 pound = 454 grams
- 1 ton = 1.02 tonnes

## AREA

- 1 acre = 0.4 hectares

## TEMPERATURE

- Fahrenheit =  $9/5$  degrees  
Centigrade + 32

## VOLUME

- 1 pint = 0.568 litres
- 1 quart = 1.1 litres
- 1 gallon = 4.55 litres

## CURRENCY

- 1 shilling = 12 pence
- 1 pound (£) = 20 shillings
- 1 guinea = from 1771 21 shillings; not issued after 1813
- 1 dollar = term generally used by English-speaking people for the Spanish peseta or peso, international currency at the time; the peseta was issued in Spain, the peso generally in Spanish American colonies.

Note: Modern values for currency in use in the past can only be estimated.

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Model of HMS *Investigator*

William Westall, c. 1820

Views of the South Coast, Australia, by William Westall

King George Sound, by William Westall

Lucky Bay, Western Australia, by William Westall

*Grevillea banksii*, by Ferdinand Bauer

Platypuses, by Ferdinand Bauer

Sydney, c. 1803, unsigned watercolour

Aboriginal rock wall painting, Chasm Island, Gulf of Carpentaria

Captain-General Charles Mathieu Isidore Decaen

Sir Joseph Banks, c. 1808

Ann Flinders, her sister Isabella Tyler and her daughter Anne

# GLOSSARY



- ALOFT—up above; up a mast or yard or high in the rigging
- ANCHORS—bower, the biggest anchors; stream, the next largest anchors; kedge, smaller anchors for special purposes, usually stored below
- AZIMUTH COMPASS—a compass that measure azimuth or bearing clockwise from due north
- BARICA—a small barrel
- BEAT—sailing as closely as possible to the wind by alternating tacks
- BILGE—the curved part of a ship's hull next to the keel
- BILGED—when the bilge is broken
- BREAKER—a small water cask
- BRIG—a two-masted square-rigged ship
- CHAINS—the leadman's station under the bowsprit
- COLLIER—a ship for carrying coal
- CRANK—liable to heel too easily, top-heavy and unable to carry much sail
- DRAUGHT—the depth of water needed to float a boat or ship
- EPHEMERIS—a table showing the position of a heavenly body on a number of dates in orderly sequence
- FLAG RANK, FLAG OFFICER—an admiral's rank, an admiral
- FLOG AROUND THE FLEET—to be whipped on board each of a series of ships
- HEAVE—to haul in
- HEAVE DOWN—to pull over a boat or ship to inspect or repair the bottom
- HOGSHEAD—52 gallons; cask or other container with 52 gallon capacity
- INDIAMAN—a large merchant ship in trade with India
- IN ROOM OF—in place of, instead of

LEAD—a cone or pyramid-shaped piece of lead with a line secured at the top and a small hole in the bottom for picking up samples of the sea floor formation; with measurement markings used to take soundings

LEADSMAN—a sailor stationed in the chains under the bowsprit to heave the lead

LITTORAL—coast or shore

MAKE WATER—to leak

PAY A SHIP'S SEAMS—to seal a ship's seams with pitch after they have been filled with oakum or cotton

PUNCHEON—a large cask, usually with a capacity for 500 litres

QUIRE—a set of uniform sheets of paper of a specific number

ROAD, ROADSTEAD—an anchorage that is some distance from shore

ROOM—space, place; in room of—in place or instead of

SHIPS-OF-THE-LINE—the largest naval warships; also called 'line of battle ships'

SNOW—a small sailing ship resembling a brig

STAND FOR—to sail onwards

STAND OFF AND ON—to sail towards and then away in order to maintain position; usually at night or while waiting

STEM—the vertical timber at the bow of a ship that supports the bow planks

STREAK, STRAKE—a ship's side plank

STRIKE—to lower, e.g. strike into the bold

SUPERCARGO—an officer on a merchant ship who is in charge of the cargo and commercial concerns of the trip

SWEEP—a large oar

SWING ONTO A LEG—to turn onto one of the straight runs that make up the zigzag course of a ship as it tacks

SWIVEL GUN—a gun mounted so that it can be swung from side to side

THEODOLITE—an instrument for measuring horizontal or vertical angles

TREENAILS, TRUNNELS—wooden pegs used in place of metal nails

TREND—to tend to take a particular direction

WATCH ON WATCH—shifts in which watches alternate every four hours

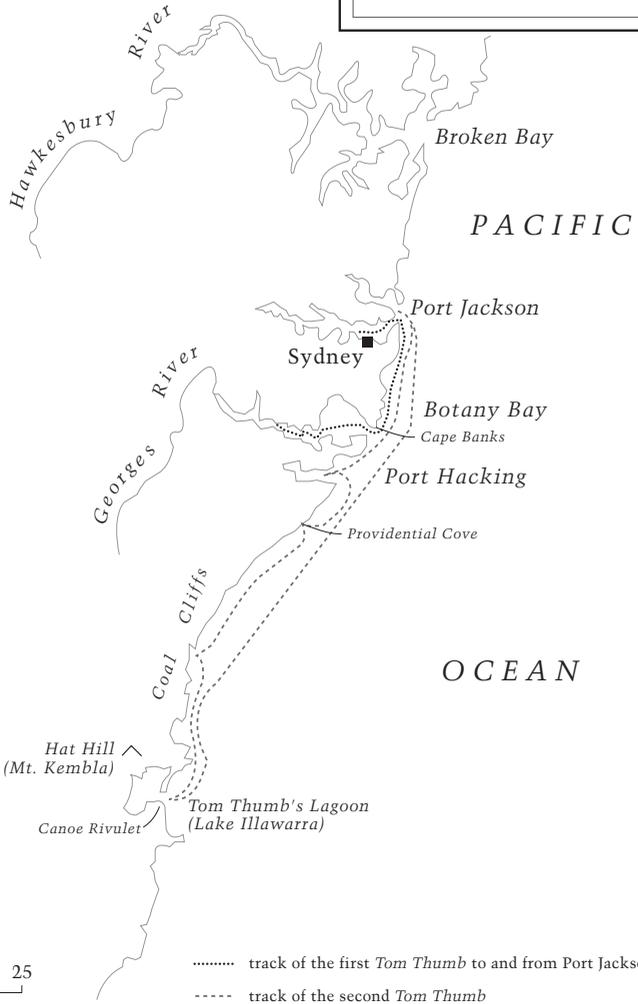
WEIGH—to raise anchor

WOODING—obtaining firewood



**THE TOM THUMB  
JOURNEYS  
1795 - 1796**

NEW  
SOUTH  
WALES



0 25  
KILOMETRES

0 25  
MILES

(Scales are only approximate)