

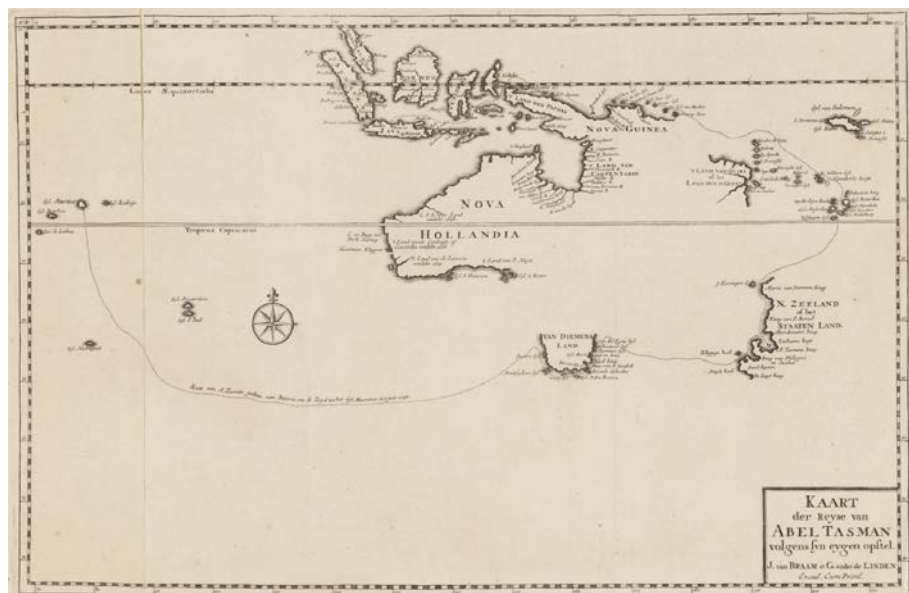
Lying for the Admiralty

By Margaret Cameron-Ash

The title of this book is fierce, and at first glance, unbelievable. We quickly see that the book is about Captain Cook and the first *Endeavour* voyage which resulted in the discovery of the east coast of Australia and the landing at Botany Bay on 28 April 1770. But this book is different from any other about Cook and the *Endeavour*. This book focusses on the author's 'discovery' and thesis that contrary to recorded history, Captain Cook must have not only landed at Botany Bay, but also walked overland and discovered our beautiful Sydney Harbour. Further, that he did in effect discover Bass Strait, realising the separation between 'Van Dieman's Land' and 'New Holland', i.e., Australia. This 'thesis' is not recorded history. History tells us that Captain Cook landed at Botany Bay, went ashore there, missed Sydney Harbour and never realised that there was in effect, Bass Strait. The author notes-

A few years ago, a veteran of the Sydney to Hobart Race...told me he couldn't understand how Captain Cook had 'missed' the strait where he sailed several leagues into it in 1770. Soon after, another old salt wondered how a mariner as curious and diligent as Cook had resisted the temptation to sail through the majestic heads into Sydney Harbour, particularly after the dangerous shallows of Botany Bay. Both these sailors implied-but dared not say-that the great navigator was a bit of a fool who had failed to observe coastal features the dullest sailor would have noticed. I was intrigued...

We know that at the time of Captain Cook's first voyage, this was a time of great sea adventures and there was a race, between the Spanish, the French, the English and maybe anyone else, to discover new lands, especially in the Southern seas. This was akin to the Russian American space race in 1961, the author notes. But this was also a time of fierce 'Anglo-French rivalry', based on the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and the Anglo-French Cold War (1763-1776), which resulted in European nations racing to explore the Southern Hemisphere, by sea, for empire expansion and the benefits of strategic ports and the potential



'valuables' that were there. Accordingly, the British Admiralty may well have wished if not ordered, that certain sea discoveries should be kept secret, such as a highly strategic and valuable harbour in the 'great southern continent', at least initially. This is what the author argues in this book.

We are in effect, taken on a journey, as the author details all the steps taken which brought Cook and the equally famous Joseph Banks, to Botany Bay. The author tells this story based on her examination of Admiralty records as well as Cook's original manuscripts (digitalised), which include his erasures and alterations. She also tells us what his journals say, what the charts looked like, and what others have written about him, in particular, Cook's main biographer John Cawte Beaglehole. She compares Cook's own documents i.e., the journals, charts and related commentaries to the 'authorised' versions published with Admiralty approval. She says:

I began to suspect that some of the 'errors' blemishing Cook's legacy might be deliberate attempts to obscure his discoveries, or that the Admiralty had altered details in the pursuit of its own agenda.

We are told of the original main purpose for the *Endeavour* voyage i.e., to observe the 'Transit of Venus' in the southern hemisphere (a rare celestial event). However, there was no doubt that the Admiralty wanted to make use of this voyage to explore the largely unknown Pacific Ocean. And so we learn of 'the main man' at the Admiralty, Philip Stevens and the Anglo-French rivalry; other main discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere at this time including Tahiti; what the French were doing at this time in the Pacific Ocean, in particular, Capitaine de Vaisseau Louis Bougainville; what the maps looked like in 1770; who were Cook and Banks and their unique relationship; what the Admiralty's real instructions to

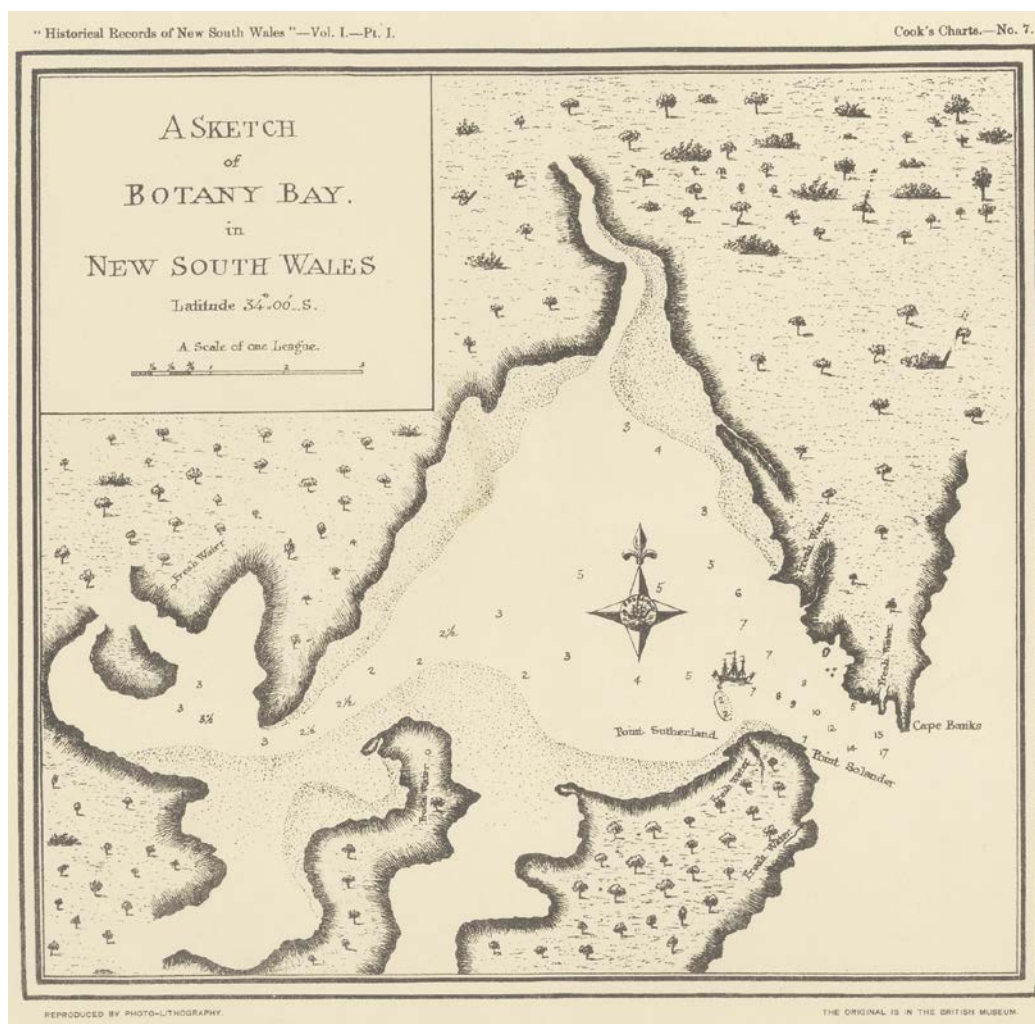


Cook must have been; cartographic secrecy; and what really happened at Botany Bay.

The author is a lawyer who has practised as a barrister, and she has used these skills to research and analyse all the documents thoroughly, such that she makes a persuasive argument. One of the most interesting points is as follows:

Cook has been criticised for 'missing' Sydney Harbour in 1770. But there is both documentary and circumstantial evidence to suggest that he had already seen it. While the ship-and the men-were moored in Botany Bay, Cook found Sydney Harbour by walking overland, following Aboriginal tracks connecting the two inlets. He concealed the prize from his crew by not sailing into it, and from his readers by not mentioning it in his journal. But as soon as the *Endeavour* arrived back in England, he rushed to the Admiralty to report his discovery in person.

The clue to Cook's secret discovery is a memorandum written by Captain Arthur Phillip, governor designate of New South Wales. Before leaving Britain with the First Fleet in May 1787, Philip



tives are very expert in setting fire to the grass, the having an Island to secure our Stock, would be a great advantage, & there is none in or off Botany Bay.

The author asks, how did Philip, sitting in London in 1787, know of 'a good harbour' nearby and 'several islands' (there were 13 islands in Port Jackson at the time)? He must have got this information from some European and that person could only have been Cook, who told the Admiralty secretary, Philip Stephens, who told Governor Philip.

The book is full of research and analysis showing much circumstantial evidence which points to her main argument. It is beautifully written, has some wonderful historical pictures and is incredibly interesting. She says:

Botany Bay would become one of the most successful decoys in history, equal to the Greek's gift of the Wooden Horse to Troy. In the decades following the *Endeavour's* visit, the term 'Botany Bay' became a coast, a country, a continent in the British consciousness. The inlet was the single focus for all European discourse concerning New Holland. There was little or no discussion about the much richer country Cook saw to the

north and south of the bay.

In reality, Botany Bay remained a remote swampy wasteland for decades, while the regular appearance of its name in European newspapers, shipping manifests and history books suggested a metropolis. The phantom colony was initially created by the British authorities as a decoy to protect Sydney Harbour from prying eyes until it could be defended. By then, however, the lyrical name had taken on a life of its own and became synonymous with British Australia for more than a century.

I recommend that you read it and make up your own mind!

Review by Caroline Dobraszczuk

discussed his plans with the Home Office, commenting:

It must be left to me to fix at Botany Bay, if I find it a proper place-if not, to go to a Port a few Leagues to the Northward, where there appear'd to be a good Harbour, and several Islands-as the Na-