



*Naval power and European settlement 1:  
The global extent of European expansion on  
the eve of British occupation of Botany Bay  
(see back endpaper map)*

# **The founding of Australia**

THE ARGUMENT ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S ORIGINS

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## 29 The debate concluded?

Atkinson, Frost and Martin had burst into print independently of each other, and clearly their arguments were at cross-purposes on some points. Martin took up the challenge in 'Economic motives behind the founding of Botany Bay' (30), which drew 'A further comment' from Frost (31) and 'A counter-riposte' from Atkinson. (32).

Readers may wish to compare this exchange with the Blainey-Bolton-Shaw debate a decade earlier. Are historians better informed in the 1970s than they had been in the 1960s? If so, has greater knowledge brought greater clarity? Are we any closer to a convincing explanation of the founding of Australia?

The reader will notice several points in this concluding exchange. Both Frost and Martin appear to modify their positions: is this attempt at consensus successful? Martin accepts that hopes were entertained for a flax supply from New South Wales, but still refuses to see this as a motive for settlement. Frost, while defending the 'flax and naval timber' theory, closes by moving towards Dallas (5) in his new emphasis on Botany Bay as a refitting base. Both Frost and Martin continue to draw freely on unofficial sources, despite Atkinson's stern warning that only government documents can reveal government motives. Atkinson and Frost agree, however, in seeing the East India Company as a powerful force independent of the government. Martin rejects this view: has he perhaps over-stressed the government's power because it is convenient for his argument?

Historians always run the risk of choosing the assumptions and selecting the evidence which best suit their arguments. In fact, they can even draw diametrically opposed conclusions from the same documents, as Frost and Martin have done with the documents published in (28). Once again, only the reader can decide.

## 30 Economic motives behind the founding of Botany Bay

GED MARTIN

After several years of quiescence, the Botany Bay controversy has come to life again, with a series of essays restating the opposed theories that the colony was founded as a depot for naval stores or as a trading base for China. A notable contribution has come from Alan Frost, in two articles which leave all students of the subject in his debt.<sup>1</sup> Dr Frost has undoubtedly presented the most convincing case so far for the theory that 'a central consideration' behind the establishment of the colony was the desire to provide naval stores — flax and hemp for sail-cloth and ropes, timber for masts — for British shipping in eastern waters. In this he has provided the same valuable service for the theories of Geoffrey Blainey which H. T. Fry previously performed for those of K. M. Dallas. In addition Dr Frost has significantly amended Blainey's global hypothesis by emphasizing that the evidence points primarily to the supply of fleets in India rather than export to Europe, and this modification will certainly simplify debate. Besides emphasizing the argument relating to naval stores, Dr Frost has also published fresh evidence on government planning in 1786.<sup>2</sup>

In another important contribution, Alan Atkinson has recently reconstructed the background to the 1786 decision to form a penal settlement in New South Wales.<sup>3</sup> Dr Atkinson differs from Dr Frost in that he places relatively little emphasis on flax and naval timber resources as inducements. The chief merit of his article is that it explains how references to these commodities were carried over into the planning of the Botany Bay settlement from previous projects. Dr Atkinson argues that the plan to settle New South Wales began as a complex scheme worked out in 1785 by Sir George Young and Lord Sydney, which involved the settlement of both Botany Bay and Norfolk Island by a new chartered company. Norfolk was to be exploited as a source of naval stores, and convict labour was to be employed in both settlements. This scheme



was vetoed, however, by the East India Company in June 1785, mainly on the advice of Alexander Dalrymple. Dr Atkinson believes that the government returned to New South Wales more or less in desperation a year later, and this time revised the scheme to meet the East India Company's objections — mainly by deleting plans for private enterprise and running the settlement as a purely government project. This, according to Dr Atkinson, explains otherwise puzzling features in the 1786 scheme — the decision to settle Norfolk, and the vague references to naval timber and flax supplies: they were simply hangovers which hardly survived the first year of the actual colonization.

Dr Atkinson also places both the 1785 project and the controversial East India Company monopoly in the context of contemporary party politics. He lays special emphasis on Young's partner in the 1785 scheme, John Call, a political protégé of Pitt, and a man whose Indian interests were of political importance to the government. From contemporary press evidence Dr Atkinson suggests that the Whig opposition was closely linked with London merchants hostile to the East India Company's monopoly. James Mario Matra, one of the earlier projectors of a New South Wales colony, was closely linked to the Foxite Whigs, which probably explains why he did not appear prominently in the actual founding of the settlement, and may also explain Whig reluctance to launch a general attack on the government's decision.

Dr Atkinson's research establishes that very detailed plans were drawn up between 1783 and 1785 for a colony in New South Wales and Norfolk Island. No historian should discount the extent to which the idea of colonizing that part of the south Pacific was 'in the air'. However, Dr Atkinson only goes part of the way to providing a basis for an appraisal of Dr Frost's writings. His explanation is weakened by his inability to produce convincing evidence that there was a definite connection between the 1785 scheme — which Young and Call drew up and the East India Company rejected — and the 1786 decision — which was made by the government alone. Should we now search for the origins of the New South Wales convict settlement in earlier private schemes for colonizing New South Wales? Or should we look at earlier government schemes for the transportation of convicts? In the case of the former, how do we account for the fourteen-month break in continuity between June 1785 and August 1786? It is open to question, of course, as to how far there was continuity between the Young and Call scheme of 1785 and the government's plan of 1786. Young and Call

wished to establish settlements at both Botany Bay and Norfolk Island. In a strictly logical sense, a panic revival of their scheme a year later should have included both the mainland and the island projects. Yet there is no evidence that Norfolk was included in the August 1786 scheme, and some that it was hurriedly added a few months later. Dr Atkinson also places great emphasis on the independent authority of the East India Company. Yet after the India Act of 1784, the Company was subject to the political control of the government, and could have been browbeaten into relaxing its monopoly in peripheral areas as in fact happened in 1786 over the southern whaling industry. While Dr Atkinson's analysis of the play of party politics is important in establishing the relative standing of individual promoters, it is less helpful in its assumption of an independent role for the Company. Ultimately the historian must come to terms with the influences which framed or shaped a particular decision at a high level in the government: as Dr Atkinson remarks, the ideals of lesser men are 'another matter'. In addition, the persuasiveness of Dr Frost's contribution is such that it may continue to distract attention from the weight of evidence which suggests that Botany Bay was established primarily as a distant penal settlement, with its incidental location owing more to anticipated advantages in trade with China than to its potential for producing naval stores.

In any discussion of Dr Frost's contribution, it should first be stated that there is no doubt that there were some notions that the new colony might produce naval stores. What has to be resolved is whether the evidence points to the desire for flax and timber being the crucial causal motive behind the choice of Botany Bay, or whether this was simply a supporting factor which added weight to other motives, or merely a hope which arose after a decision had been made from other motives. Dr Frost considers that Blainey regarded naval stores as 'a (even *the*) central consideration in the decision' but is inclined to reserve his own position. The prospect of naval stores from the south Pacific was 'one of the factors which determined the British Government to choose Botany Bay'. Its importance relative to other factors is 'another question'. This article argues that Dr Frost places too much emphasis on the 'considerable, if indirect' evidence that the possibility of naval resources was 'an important consideration' in the government's decision.<sup>4</sup>

The most that can be said is that there were hopes that the new colony would be a source of flax and possibly naval timber. The evidence may be briefly summarized. Both resources were mentioned in the *Heads of*



perhaps written by Banks, which tentatively suggested that naval stores for India might be supplied from Botany Bay. Sydney's letter to the East India Company, the government's own statement of the project, ostensibly to secure the Company's co-operation, made no mention of this inducement.

Dr Frost also draws attention to the First Fleet narratives, which have been little cited in the controversy. There can, of course, be doubts about the way in which some of the narratives were compiled — 'Phillip' at least was ghosted — but it must be acknowledged that they did not sensationalise the potential of the new settlement for producing naval stores. Neither Hunter nor King, who both spent some time on Norfolk Island, gave much space to its flax. Collins repudially remarked that 'it was hoped some advantages to the mother country might be derived from cultivating and manufacturing it'. An officer reported — significantly to Banks himself — that the Norfolk flax 'is generally believed here will never be of that importance as supposed in England'.<sup>12</sup> Once again this points to no more than a vague notion about the colony — which, as Dr Atkinson roundly insists, is not evidence of government motive. A similar picture emerges in the writings of Watkin Trench, who in 1788 recalled with some bitterness the 'sanguine expectations' which had been current about the colony's flax-growing potential. He recalled 'warm debates' in England 'about the probable advantages and disadvantages' of the new settlement:

Will it not form a depot, I hear someone say, for naval stores, whence the East Indies may be supplied? I well remember such an idea prevailing at home; and I was once myself sanguine enough to believe the plan a feasible one.

It should be remembered that preparations for the sailing of the First Fleet spread over many months. It is not surprising that an enthusiastic young officer should have been involved in 'warm debates' about the advantages of the settlement prior to departure. How far these debates reflected the motives behind the ministerial decision, and how far they were optimistically speculative' is open to doubt. For instance, Trench also wrote:

Previous to leaving England I remember to have frequently heard it asserted, that the discovery of mines was one of the secondary objects of the expedition.<sup>13</sup>

There seems to be no evidence that this was part of the government's immediate intentions, and Phillip flatly stated that the discovery of mineral resources 'would be the greatest evil that could befall the settlement'.<sup>14</sup> Trench's evidence should thus be regarded rather more as the hopes of enthusiastic junior officers than as either government policy or even widespread public opinion. As Dr Frost points out, there has been very little evidence of the 'warm debates' Trench mentioned, especially with reference to flax. The *Daily Universal Register* said little on the subject, beyond the item quoted above — and that report would be more convincing had it been correct in its announcement that Botany Bay had been totally abandoned in favour of Norfolk. The *Register* in fact regarded Nova Scotia as the place where the government should develop flax cultivation. Dr Atkinson's survey of other London newspapers points to a similar absence of debate on flax.<sup>15</sup> News of the Botany Bay scheme was given to Jeremy Benham, who was travelling in Russia, by his friend, the London Alderman Richard Clark:

I am informed that government has just determined to send off seven hundred convicts to New Wales, under convoy of a man-of-war, where a fort is to be built, and a colony established, and that a man has been found who will take upon him the command of this rabble. . . . These wretches are to be furnished with a twelve months' provision, seeds, etc., and then must shift for themselves.

Clark's letter was dated the day before the government's advertisement for shipping, the first newspaper announcement of the scheme so far traced. Clark had been Lord Mayor two years earlier: his report was certainly one of the closest in time to the government's decision, and may be in source of information too. Another correspondent, George Wilson, a London barrister, provided a further reflection of general attitudes three weeks later:

Government are going at last to send the convicts to Botany Bay in New Holland; the Hulks being found, by sad experience, to be academies for housebreaking, and solitary confinement to any extent, impracticable from the expense of building. These colonists are not to be turned loose there; but are to have a government established over them, and some troops left; notwithstanding which, I much fear it will end in the ruin of the Friendly and Society Islands, which they will undoubtedly attempt to reach if they can either get or build ships; unless, indeed, the colony should expire, which is not unlikely, as, to 600 men there are but 70 women, and those probably not the most fertile.



Bentham's correspondents were not simply gossiping. They knew that he was a prison reformer who would want to be informed of the scheme (although they did leave him under the impression that Botany Bay was in New Zealand). Nobody told the great Utilitarian that the new colony was intended to produce strategic staples.<sup>16</sup>

The official documents also indicate no very driving determination to push large-scale flax cultivation. Phillip's instructions mentioned that it had been 'humbly represented . . . that advantages may be derived from the flax-plant' growing in nearby islands which 'may ultimately become an article of export' for maritime purposes. Phillip was ordered not to commence large-scale manufacture, but to send home samples 'in order that a judgment may be formed whether it may not be necessary to instruct you further upon this subject'. So far as the export of flax for naval purposes was concerned, the government's preparations were exploratory and minor. The effort invested was consistent with an intention to develop a small local supply of naval stores for the use of shipping calling at such a remote settlement. The degree of attention given by the government to the development of flax in the colony was also consistent with a much more mundane aim — it would be 'a means of acquiring clothing for the convicts and other persons who may become settlers'.<sup>17</sup>

Next it should be noted that while most of these vague allusions refer to Norfolk Island, there is no evidence that the government planned to occupy Norfolk when it decided to send convicts to New South Wales in August 1786. The official letters to the Treasury, Admiralty, East India Company and Irish governments all make no mention of the island. Reports in the *Daily Universal Register* suggest that Norfolk was added to the scheme for political reasons in December 1786, following Dalrymple's attack on the security of a mainland prison colony. It is true that flax was then mentioned as a reason for settling the island, but the rapidity with which Norfolk was relegated to a secondary position when parliamentary attack failed to materialize, would indicate that this was not an important factor.<sup>18</sup> It was, after all, in December 1786 that the Duke of Richmond complained to Pitt that the scheme was 'very undigested', and Dalrymple's pamphlet had by then poured scorn on the idea that Norfolk could supply naval stores to British India.<sup>19</sup> The only previous scheme to settle Norfolk had been put forward by Young and Call in 1785, with the intention of supplying masts and cordage to the East India Company. Their application was rejected. When Dalrymple published in 1786 the letter he had submitted to the Com-

pany in 1785, opposing the settlement of Norfolk, it was solely with the intention of discrediting the government's scheme to settle Botany Bay and of demonstrating his earlier defence of the Company's monopoly. Paradoxically he may have advertised the potential usefulness of Norfolk by attacking it, but he wrote of the New South Wales settlement as entirely confined to the mainland.<sup>20</sup> Thus in considering the motives behind the government's choice of Botany Bay in August 1786, it is important to remember that there is no evidence that they contemplated anything other than a settlement on the mainland. Once Norfolk is removed from the picture, it becomes very difficult to see why the government would have established a colony in New South Wales if what it really wanted was New Zealand flax and New Zealand timber. The known ferocity of the Maoris had not prevented Cook from proposing that settlements be formed on the North Island, and the author of the *Heads of a Plan* assumed that it would be possible to land and cut timber. In any case, there were few Maoris on the South Island, where in 1792-3 a party of sealers spent ten months but saw only three natives. They spent their time building a large boat from the local timber, and making ropes and fishing lines from the local flax.<sup>21</sup>

The documents which Dr Frost has discovered do throw light on other theories to explain the choice of New South Wales. First, there is the problem of disposing of convicts from the British gaols. Sydney's letter to the East India Company opens with alarmed references to the crowded prisons, with 'the greatest danger' feared from escapes and epidemics. Even if it could be proved that the government attempted to send out some people with skills in mining and textile manufacturing, it would still have to be recognized that they chose convicts, not free settlers — and that, overall, clearing the hulks provided more First Fleeters than did any attempts at selection. It would be wrong then to forget the pressure on the government to get rid of the convicts — anywhere. But where? Sydney's letter to the East India Company elaborates what had earlier been stated to the Treasury: the government had intended to form a settlement of convicts in south-west Africa, but had failed to locate 'an eligible situation for these people, where from their Industry they might soon be likely to obtain Subsistence'. There was no suggestion that Das Volgas Bay, the most canvassed south-west African location, would produce either naval stores or ship timber.<sup>22</sup> As in Clark's letter to Bentham, the aim was simply self-sufficiency. It is again difficult to believe that the search for naval stores was the dominant theme in government policy, when Lord Sydney was still



considering reports on south-west Africa as late as 15 August — only three days before informing the Treasury of the selection of Botany Bay. In fact the main recommendation for Das Volgas Bay had been as 'an excellent place for Homewardbound Indiamen' to call. The government then would seem to have been more concerned with establishing convicts on the sea-routes to the east.<sup>23</sup> Dr Frost publishes an important letter from Evan Nepean to the Treasury, written on 10 June 1786. As Under-Secretary for Home Affairs, Nepean was closely involved with the convict problem. His letter is illuminating, first in that he believed the final choice of location would lie with the Prime Minister, Pitt, and secondly, that if Das Volgas Bay proved disappointing, Pitt's intention was that 'some other Spot should be fixed upon to the Southward of the Line'.<sup>24</sup> A general intention to choose somewhere in the southern hemisphere would point rather to a desire to assist trade in the east rather than to a wish to develop the resources of any particular location.

It is therefore worth looking once again at the choice of Botany Bay in the context of overall British interests in Asia. Two important pieces of legislation in 1784 had affected the control and direction of these interests. First, the India Act had placed the East India Company under a large measure of government control. Dr Frost shows that ministers did not 'consult' the Company about Botany Bay until nearly a month after it had been chosen, and then indicated that their concurrence would be 'acceptable to His Majesty'. In giving their 'permission', the Court of Directors were of course aware that their deliberations would be referred to the Board of Control — which consisted of the same ministers who had made the request.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, the Commutation Act of 1784 had drastically cut the duty on imported tea, which gave a dramatic stimulus to the East India Company's trade with China. Its tea purchases doubled between 1784 and 1787, making it the dominant European trader in Canton.<sup>26</sup> But this trade was not without its problems. The major one was the difficulty of persuading the Chinese to buy anything in return. Most cargoes had to be bought with silver bullion, exported either direct from Britain, where it was earned from trading with Spain, or raised locally in Bengal. This was believed to be not only undesirable in itself — currency debasement had by 1793 made it difficult for the Company to pay its soldiers in Malabar — but it also meant that ships could not be guaranteed a cargo on the outward journey to Canton. By the mid-1780s East India Company ships were carrying an average of £700,000 worth of silver to China each year. In the 1780s there seemed to be three possible areas which might supply

the Chinese market — India, North America and Britain itself. India could yield certain staples for the 'country' or 'inter-Asia' trade. British annexations in western India in the last decades of the eighteenth century were directed towards controlling access to products which could be sold in China. Thus by 1789 Gujarati cotton was exported almost entirely to China, instead of to Bengal as before. Sandalwood and pepper were other Indian products of concern to the British, because of their acceptability to the Chinese. 'India, indeed, from a purely commercial point of view, had dropped from pride of place to being a link in an Anglo-Chinese system.'<sup>27</sup> The Company's activities within India itself were ceasing to be profitable. The China trade was necessary to finance the Company in India, and economic control of India was a desirable prerequisite for trading with China. The other items which seemed promising as exports to China were American furs and British textiles. The fur trade was mainly North American (although the Dusky Bay sealers of 1792 were aiming at China), while textiles were still a hope for a direct Anglo-Chinese trade. All of these possibilities were backed by the government in the 1790s. Henry Dundas, who virtually Minister for India, wrote in 1788

as well in a Political as in a Commercial view, it would be of the utmost importance if the vast Tea Trade now carried on to this Country could be supplied from Indian Resources, without bringing any drain upon the Country. In short if China could be supplied by the sale of British and Indian Manufacture either directly or indirectly finding their way to China, it would render the benefit of our Indian Empire perfect . . .<sup>28</sup>

The Macartney embassy of 1792 was a grandiose attempt to open direct trade between Britain and China. The King George's Sound Company was launched in 1785 to carry furs from western North America to China, and in 1791 the government was prepared to fight Spain for access to the Vancouver Island fur-trade base, Nootka Sound — and even decided to establish a convict settlement there.<sup>29</sup>

Thus British ascendancy in India was interlinked with the China trade, and was sufficiently important to ensure government-backed activity from north-west America to south-west Africa — for Das Volgas Bay had been seen as a port of call for East Indiamen. How does New South Wales fit into this picture? Of the three possible thrusts which the British planned to open up China, Botany Bay could become a primary port of call for direct trade from Britain, and part of an alternative route between India and China. Sir George Young had sketched



the possibility of a China sea-route along the coast of New South Wales in his 1785 plan: East India Company shipping would follow a more southerly route from the Cape, and skirt the continent, proceeding to Canton by way of New Ireland and Formosa. Young was confident that this would prove a 'more short, easy and a safer navigation than the general route of the China ships — from Madraas through the Streights of Malacca'. A settlement at Botany Bay might also form a port of call on an alternative sea-route from India to China, avoiding the East Indies. The *Daily Universal Register* reported that China shipping would be able to use Botany Bay rather than lose time at Batavia from 'missing the trade-wind'.<sup>30</sup> It would also safeguard the China trade should the East Indies fall into hostile hands. It is true, as Dr Frost demonstrates, that Penang off the Malaysian coast was seen by the Company as its port of call to China. But Penang would be useless if the Straits of Malacca were dominated by a hostile power. Here lies the significance of the Dutch political crisis. On 29 July 1786 the *Daily Universal Register* predicted that France and England would be drawn in on opposing sides. On 1 August, Dr Frost notes, Britain's ambassador at The Hague, Sir James Harris, warned of a French intention to occupy part of the Dutch East Indies — and shortly after news from Mauritius indicated a build-up of French strength in India.<sup>31</sup> Harris remained gloomy about the extent of French influence in the Netherlands throughout the winter of 1786-7, and reporting privately to the Secretary of State on trade talks in February 1787 he wrote:

I wish instead of the production of the Molucca's you would instruct me to ask for the Moluccas themselves — if we do not get them the *French* will, as it is impossible, in its present state of disorder that the Republic should preserve its distant settlements.<sup>32</sup>

Thus from late July 1786, when the location of a convict settlement was in the balance, right through the months in which the First Fleet was being assembled, there was concern among British leaders about French intentions in the East Indies.

What more direct evidence links the choice of Botany Bay with the China trade? First there is Lord Sydney's letter, published by Dr Frost, informing the East India Company that the new settlement

will be a means of preventing the emigration of Our European Neighbours to that Quarter, which might be attended with infinite prejudice to the Company's Affairs.

The allusion was presumably to the La Perouse expedition. Perhaps it should not be taken too seriously — although Dr Frost sees it as 'the profound motive' — governments often use foreign policy as a vague *raison d'être*.<sup>33</sup> But it is worth asking why a French settlement would be prejudicial to the East India Company. Why not heave a sigh of relief that the French threat in the far east would dissipate itself on the distant and harmless shores of the Tasman Sea? Sydney's letter did not mention the supply of naval stores to British shipping in India nor would a single French settlement engross the entire resources of New Zealand, New South Wales and Norfolk Island. But if the region was seen as a potentially important trade route, a single hostile base might indeed 'be attended with infinite prejudice to the Company's Affairs'. This impression is strengthened by the letter which George Rose, the Treasury Under-Secretary, sent to the Court of Directors on the same day as Sydney's. He wasted no time on the polite fiction that the Company was being consulted about the location of the settlement. His business was more practical:

It has occurred to My Lords Com.<sup>s</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> Treasury that y<sup>e</sup> charge of sending out the Convicts will be much lessened if the Ships which convey them to the said place can have a freight of Tea home from China, and that a considerable saving will also be effected to the East India Company thereby.<sup>34</sup>

As the *Daily Universal Register* put it:

The advantage is, that the Company and the public will join in the contract for shipping, and by this junction each party will get their loading carried at half their freight. It will also afford a secure asylum for our shipping in case of their missing the trade wind, and will in that case shorten the China voyage.<sup>35</sup>

While the Chinese market remained resistant to western goods, tea ships had to sail out empty. In the pioneer years of a penal settlement, convict ships would have to sail home empty. Naturally it made sense to combine the two. If a direct export trade from Britain to China could be developed, Botany Bay would be a useful port of call on a southern sea-route which would avoid the East Indies. Phillip was instructed to 'cause every possible exertion to be made' to get the three China transports on their way: he queried the wording of the instruction, fearing that the expedition, would arrive at the wrong time of year, but it remained. The *Lady Penrhyn*, *Scarborough* and *Charlotte* were the first ships to be discharged from government service after arrival at Botany



Bay, and detailed accounts of the route taken by the first two were published in the appendix to the *Voyage of Governor Phillip*.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that those historians who have tended to place undue emphasis on the independence of the East India Company have allowed these three ships to sail out of Botany Bay and into a void. They are surely much more of a key to the government's intentions than the scattered references to flax culture in unofficial sources. Who had the idea of marrying convict transportation to tea importation? The idea, according to George Rose, had 'occurred to My Lords Com.<sup>s</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> Treasury'. Most Lords of the Treasury were junior ministers, but the First Lord was William Pitt — the Prime Minister. It was Pitt who had reduced the tea duties in 1784. It was Pitt who, Nepean believed, would make the final decision about the location of a convict settlement. It was Pitt who, Dr Frost states, was in direct control of Indian affairs in mid-1786.<sup>37</sup>

The evidence which Dr Frost has published confirms that convict disposal remained the government's first priority. There was real concern about the security and health hazards of crowded gaols. The government's task, as defined by the *Daily Universal Register*, was to 'make those who have been injurious to the community, of real utility to the state in general'.<sup>38</sup> In August 1786 senior ministers were concerned at the effects of a Franco-Dutch alliance on the British position in India and the east. Unfavourable reports of the south-west African coast led them to switch at the last minute from a scheme for establishing a port of call for East Indian traffic near the Cape to one for a way-station on an alternative route to China which the first convict ships were to pioneer. There were certainly hopes associated with the project that it might produce flax and naval timber, and possibly spices and even mineral wealth. However, the government's initial aim seems to have been simple self-sufficiency. Even if there was some attempt to select convicts for their skills, the one known flax-dresser turned up in the new colony by accident, and official preparations were rudimentary and at most exploratory. Nor did declining optimism about the flax plant in late 1786 cause any major change in the expedition's direction. Dr Frost believes that the prospect of obtaining naval stores was 'one of the factors which determined the British Government to choose Botany Bay' — but how important a factor was 'another question'.<sup>39</sup> I would dissent from the word 'determined', believing that the possibility of naval stores was at most an extra inducement, a possible long-term benefit — but not one which in itself would justify the scale of expedition

projected. Rather I believe that Sydney was founded in 1788 for the same reason that Boston had been lost in 1773, the need to safeguard and extend the East India Company's tea trade.



- 64 See *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, pp. 141-2.
- 65 Michael Roe, 'Motives for Australian Settlement: A Document', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. II, No. 1 (1952), p. 19. The document Roe reproduced is a draft of a letter from an unidentified official to Sackville Hamilton, (CO 202/5). With the quoted paragraph deleted, the letter was dated 24 October 1786 (HO 100/18 f. 369r-372v) [see above, 7] I am grateful to Professor Blainey for this reference.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 67 *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, p. 89.

## 28 The East India Company and the choice of Botany Bay *Alan Frost*

- 1 William Pitt the Younger, First Lord of the Treasury (i.e., Prime Minister); Lord Sydney, Home Secretary; Lord Carnarthen, Foreign Secretary; Lord Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty.
- 2 That the decision was a Cabinet one is indicated by Cabinet's having previously considered the convict problem (see the Chronicle, for June, *Edinburgh Magazine*, 3 (1786), 473), and by the opening paragraph of Sydney's letter to the Treasury, the Admiralty and the East India Company.
- 3 See *Historical Records of New South Wales*, I ii, pp. 14-16, 20-2. [see above, 2]
- 4 Miscellaneous Letters Received, E/1/79, India Office Records. Unpublished Crown Copyright material in this article from the India Office Library and Records appears by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- 5 *IOR*, E/1/79.
- 6 *IOR*, Minutes of the Court of Directors, B/103.
- 7 *IOR*, Minutes of the Committee of Correspondence and the Whole Court, D/1.
- 8 *IOR*, B/103.
- 9 *IOR*, Minutes of the Board of Control, F/1/1. W. W. Grenville was a Privy Counsellor, and sometime Lord Lieutenant to Ireland.
- 10 *H.R.N.S.W.*, I, ii, p. 87.
- 11 See H. T. Fry, '“Cathay and the way thither”: the background to Botany Bay', *Historical Studies*, vol. 14, No. 56, 1971, p. 503. [see above, 20]
- 12 *H.R.N.S.W.*, I, ii, 91.
- 13 Extract of a General Letter from Bengal, 25 March 1786, P.R.O. 30/8/358 (Chatham Papers), fol. 110, Public Record Office.
- 14 *H.R.N.S.W.*, I, ii, p. 19. [see above, p. 00]
- 15 'Copy of a Letter from Captain Tench of the Marines', in *Sydney's First Four Years*, ed. L. F. Fitzhardinge, Sydney: Angus and Robertson in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society 1961, p. 335.

- 16 Among the reasons were a build-up of French naval forces, and the (defensive) alliance the French concluded with the Dutch in November 1785. I intend to enlarge on this aspect in a future study.
- 17 Nepean to Thomas Steele, 10 June 1786, T. 1/632, P.R.O.
- 18 Nepean had sought such estimates at various times in 1785, and in January 1786.
- 19 The British Embassy in Paris sent details of La Perouse's instructions in May and June 1785: see G. C. Bolton, 'The Hollow Conqueror: Flax and the foundation of Australia', *Aust. Econ. Hist. Review*, vol. 8, March 1968, p. 14. [see above, 14]
- 20 Harris to Carnarthen, 1 Aug. 1786, O. 37/11, P.R.O.
- 21 This is an adaptation of the original 'France certainly under the name of flutes can soon collect a considerable naval force in the East Indies' — The King to Lord Sydney, 16 August 1786, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, ed. A. Aspinall, Cambridge 1966, vol. 1, p. 244.
- 22 *H.R.N.S.W.*, I, ii, p. 19.
- 23 See the Committee's report of July 1785, *House of Commons Journal*, vol. 40, 1785, 1163-4.
- 24 Marra, for one, asserted this, in the copy of his proposal which he sent to Charles James Fox in August 1784. B.M. Add. MS. 47568.
- 25 Philip to Nepean, 28 Oct. 1786, H.O. 42/9, P.R.O.

## 30 Economic motives behind the founding of Botany Bay *Ged Martin*

- 1 Alan Frost, 'The Choice of Botany Bay: the Scheme to Supply the East Indies with Naval Stores', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 15 (1975) and 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 16 (1975). [see above, 27 and 28]
- 2 Dr Frost amplifies G. Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance* (Melbourne 1966), pp. 26-33 [see above, 13]. H. T. Fry, 'Cathay and the way thither': the Background to Botany Bay', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 14 (1969-71), [see above, 20] provides evidence for some of the theories in K. M. Dallas, *Trading Posts or Penal Colonies* (Hobart 1969). A summary of the debate is to be found in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London 1975), pp. 44-74.
- 3 Alan Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 61 (1976). [see above, 25]
- 4 Frost, 'The Choice of Botany Bay: the Scheme to Supply the East Indies with Naval Stores', pp. 2, 20, 18. [see above, 27]
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 6 Philip to Sydney, 28 September 1788, *Historical Records of New South Wales* [cited as *H.R.N.S.W.*], Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 186; L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed.), *Sydney's First Four Years* (Sydney 1961), p. 78; D. Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* (London 1798, facsimile Adelaide 1971), Vol. 1, p. 14. Morley accompanied King to Norfolk in February 1788, and returned to England in 1791. He was assistant store-keeper on the island and rarely appears in contemporary accounts.



Presumably he came out as a seaman: he may have been related to the convict Joseph Morley, a silk dyer, who was tried at Winchester, not far from Portsmouth where the First Fleet assembled. *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 2, p. 548; Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 481; J. Cobley, *The Crimes of the First Fleet Convicts* (Sydney 1970), p. 192.

- 7 Occupational descriptions are not easy to trace for the convicts. No information, for instance, is available for Lincolnshire convicts. In some cases two descriptions are available — Thomas Oldfield of Lancashire is described as a labourer and woollen-dresser, Jane Parkinson of Cheshire as a milliner and as having 'no trade'. For women, 'spinster' may have had a double meaning. A brief survey of Cobley, *Crimes of the First Fleet Convicts*, reveals Sarah Davies, glovemaking, Mary Harrison, silk-winder, Ottwell Hindle, weaver, Ann Innet, mantua maker, William James, stocking weaver, Peter Wilson, silk weaver and Nancy Yates, milliner. The frequency of textile thefts among crimes committed suggests that more convicts were involved in the industry. Two Devon convicts, John Rice and Richard Widdicom, were sent to Norfolk as rope-makers. In 1773 it was estimated that one-third of England's flax was grown in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. J. Hunter, *An historical journal of the transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* (London 1793, facsimile Adelaide 1968), p. 348; J. Horner, *The Linen Trade of Europe* (Belfast 1920), p. 234.

- 8 *Daily Universal Register*, 6 December 1786. For the Register's coverage of Botany Bay, see 'A London Newspaper on the Founding of Botany Bay, August 1786 to May 1787', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 61 (1975). [see above, 23]

- 9 Heads of a Plan in *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, pp. 14-20 [see above, pp. 00]. Frost, 'The Choice of Botany Bay: the Scheme to Supply the East Indies with Naval Stores', p. 2, cf. *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, pp. 4-5; Vol. 2, p. 781; *Daily Universal Register*, 5 December 1786.

- 10 D. L. Mackay, 'Direction and Purpose in British Imperial Policy, 1783-1801', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 17 (1974), p. 490; *Commons Journals*, Vol. 37, p. 311.

- 11 Draft letter to Irish government, 24 October 1786, M. Roe, 'Motives for Australian Settlement: a Document', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers*, Vol. 2 (1952), p. 19 [see above, 7]; Sydney to East India Company, 15 September 1786, Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', pp. 606-7 [see above, 28].

- 12 Collins, *English Colony*, Vol. 1, p. 14; *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 401. A convict woman wrote in 1788: 'We are comforted with the hopes of a supply of tea from China, and flattered with getting riches when the settlement is complete, and the hemp which the place produces is brought to perfection.' *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 747.

- 13 Fitzhardinge (ed.), *Sydney's First Four Years*, pp. 74, 335, 66.

- 14 Phillip to Sydney, 28 September 1788, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 190.

- 15 Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', p. 610 [see above, p. 00]; *Daily Universal Register*, 3 November 1786; Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', pp. 301-7. [see above, 25]

- 16 Clark to Bentham, 31 August 1786; Wilson to Bentham, 24 September 1786; Bentham to Wilson, 19 December 1786, I. R. Christie (ed.), *The*

*Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham* (London 1968), Vol. 3, pp. 487-93, 513-18.

- 17 Phillip's instructions, 25 April 1787, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 89.

- 18 Cf. 'A London Newspaper on the founding of Botany Bay' [see above, 23].

- 19 Richmond to Pitt, 3 December 1786, quoted by Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', p. 307 [see above, 23]; A. Dalrymple, *A Serious Admonition to the Public on the Intended Thief Colony at Botany Bay* (ed. G. Mackanness, Sydney 1943), pp. 18-24.

- 20 Frost, 'The Choice of Botany Bay: the Scheme to supply the East Indies with Naval Stores', pp. 16-18 [see above, 27]; Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', pp. 294-9 [see above, 25].

- 21 For the Dusky Bay sealers, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 2, pp. 94-6. It is true that little was known of New Zealand, and that Phillip wished to land convicts guilty of capital offences there to be eaten by the Maoris, as a more dreadful deterrent than hanging. (*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, pp. 52-3). However, this referred to individuals, not to an organized colony. It remains reasonable to suppose that if ministers crucially wanted New Zealand products, they would have found out more about the country and risked the lives of those who had escaped the English gallows.

- 22 Sydney to East India Company, 15 September 1786, Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', p. 606. [see above, pp. 00]

- 23 Mackay, 'Direction and Purpose in British Imperial Policy', pp. 489-90; *Commons Journals*, Vol. 40, p. 1164.

- 24 Nepean to Steele, 10 June 1786, Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', p. 610. [see above, 28]

- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 606-8. Cf. Dalrymple, *Serious Admonition*, p. 19: 'The East India Company might have had an opportunity of enforcing their objections, if the Ministry could not have done away those objections, by the weight of their arguments, instead of the force of their Power.'

- 26 V. T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793: II, New Continents and Changing Values* (London 1964), p. 533.

- 27 P. Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India 1764-1806* (Cambridge 1970), pp. 23, 98-100; V. T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793: I, Discovery and Revolution* (London 1952), p. 63.

- 28 Dundas to Cornwallis, 13 July 1788, Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India*, p. 50.

- 29 Harlow, *Founding of the Second British Empire*, Vol. 2, pp. 423-4, 441-62. *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 13 [see above, 2]; *Daily Universal Register*, 18 October 1786.

- 30 Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', pp. 609, 611 [see above, 28]; *Daily Universal Register*, 29 July 1786.

- 31 British Library, Leeds Papers, Egerton MS 3498 (4), Harris to Car-marthen, 6 February 1787.

- 32 Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', pp. 607, 610. [see above, 28]

- 33 Rose to East India Company, 15 September 1786, Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', p. 607. [see above, 28]

- 34 *Daily Universal Register*, 15 November 1786.

- 35 *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. 1, Pt ii, p. 87; Vol. 2, p. 692; *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* (London 1789, facsimile Adelaide 1968), appendix,



- pp. xxxiii-liii. Phillip's queries are in O. Rutter (ed.), *The First Fleet* (London 1937), pp. 104-6.
- 37 Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', p. 610. [see above, 28]
- 38 *Daily Universal Register*, 31 July 1786.
- 39 Frost, 'The Choice of Botany Bay: the Scheme to Supply the East Indies with Naval stores', p. 20. [see above, 27]

### 31 Botany Bay: a further comment *Alan Frost*

- 1 Alan Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 61 (1976) [see above, 25]
- 2 Ged Martin, 'Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 16 (1976). [see above, 30]
- 3 There is some evidence that Sydney did not have any great ambition for the convicts, but then, Pitt took the responsibility for the decision of how to dispose of them from him. And while on the topic of Lord Sydney, much of the emphasis given to his warning about typhoid and escape in the preambles of his letters of 18 August to the Treasury, 31 August to the Admiralty, and 15 September 1786 to the Court of Directors, has surely been misplaced. This warning does reflect a certain reality, of course — there were regular outbreaks of 'gaolfever', and felons did escape; but rather than of a Government admission of a raw nerve, Sydney's warning deserves the status of an epic formula. He first sounded it in a letter of 29 May 1784 to the Admiralty, and repeated it on appropriate occasions thereafter.
- 4 These details come variously from B/101: 40-9 (IOL); V. T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793* (London 1952-64), Vol. II, pp. 419-25; and V. T. Harlow and Frederick Madden, *British Colonial Developments 1774-1834* (Oxford 1953), pp. 21-7.
- 5 These details come variously from Add. 38218:344-5 (BL); BT 5/3, 6/93, PRO 30/8/353 (PRO); E/1/78, D/1 (IOL); Harlow, *Second British Empire*, Vol. II, pp. 300-6; HCl 14.
- 6 See the King's Instructions to Phillip, 25 April 1787, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, pp. 85-91; Phillip's Instructions to P. G. King, 12 February 1788, and Phillip's Instructions to Ross, 2 March 1790, *ibid.*, pp. 137-8, 314-16.
- 7 See my 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 16 (1975), p. 609. [see above, 28]
- 8 Harris to Carmarthen, 19 August 1785, FO 37/7.
- 9 Henry Dundas, 'Considerations on the Subject of a Treaty between Great Britain & Holland re: to their Interests in India', PRO 30/8/360: 184-6 (my italics).
- 10 *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, p. 91.
- 11 Dundas to W. W. Grenville, 30 May, 1 July 1790, *HMC: Forrescue* 1, pp. 588, 591.
- 12 Eden to W. W. Grenville, 16 August 1806, *ibid.*, 8, p. 284.
- 13 I take Banks to have been distinguishing, on the one hand, between items that the colonists would produce, either for their own consumption or for

the provisioning of visiting ships, and, on the other, goods they would export to other parts of the empire.

- 14 Nepean's draft of his letter to Sakville Hamilton, of 28 October 1786, is dated 24 October, and is in HO 100/18:369-72.
- 15 Phillip to Sydney, 28 September 1788, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, pp. 186-7; Phillip to Ross, 2 March 1790, *ibid.*, p. 316.
- 16 Buckingham to W. W. Grenville, 16 November 1806, *HMC: Forrescue* 8, pp. 435-6.
- 17 Pitt made his remark of an October 1787 proposal to station four more of the King's regiments permanently in India (PH 27:65-5). It think it appropriate to apply it to other such measures.
- 18 Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', p. 291 [above, p. 000].
- 19 Banks' draft of his original scheme is in HO 42/11:67 [ff. 1-4].
- 20 See Banks to Nepean, 9 September 1787, HO 42/11:115 [f. 3].
- 21 Phillip to Nepean, 1 March 1787, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, p. 55.
- 22 HO 42/11:67 [f. 1v].
- 23 The King's Instructions to Phillip, 25 April 1787, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, p. 89.
- 24 [ ] to Banks, 5 July (1788), Brabourne Papers 3:11 (Mitchell Library).
- 25 Phillip to Sydney, 28 September 1788, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt ii, p. 186.
- 26 Banks, Cook, and Furneaux had brought seeds of the *phormium tenax* home in the 1770s, but Banks's plantings of these did not succeed, and William Aiton did not list it in the first edition of his *Horae Kewensis* (1789). Aiton did, however, include it in the second edition (1810-13). I am grateful to Mr H. B. Carter for this information.
- 27 Martin, 'Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay', p. 143. [see above, 30]
- 32 Botany Bay: a counter-riposte *Alan Atkinson*
- 1 Ged Martin, 'Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 16 (1976). [see above, 30]
- 2 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 61 (1976). [see above, 25]
- 3 'Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay', p. 129. [see above, 30]
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', pp. 296, 297-300. [see above, 25]
- 6 Martin, 'Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay', pp. 129-30. [see above, 30]
- 7 Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', p. 299. [see above, 25]
- 8 Alan Frost, 'The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 16 (1975), pp. 610-11. [see above, 28]
- 9 See also E. Nepean to T. Steele, 10 June 1786, quoted *ibid.*, p. 610.
- 10 Martin, 'Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay', p. 130. [see above, 30]
- 11 See Atkinson, 'Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay', p. 300. [see above, 25]