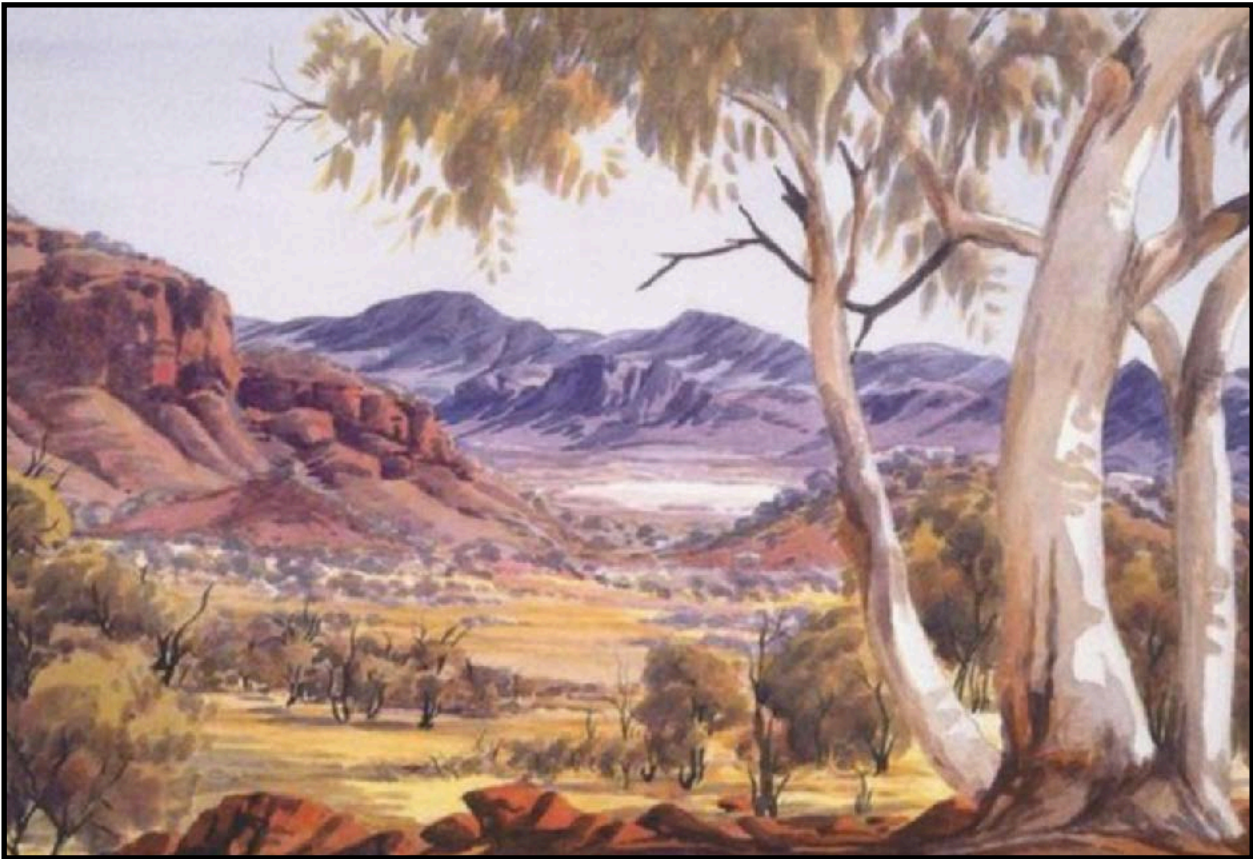


The Story of Our Continent: Australia

The Story of Australia



By Rachel Bubb

Earlier this year I researched and wrote a book about the history of England, picking up where H. E. Marshall left off in her Our Island Story book. Her book finished in 1900 so I wrote the last 120 plus years of history to update the book (called Our Island History (The Last 100 Plus Years) available on the Living Book Press). I really enjoy history and loved doing the research and writing of the book. Months later, I was ready for another project, a history project, a project where I could dive into history and get a feel for how it's like to live in another place in history. I decided to take a look at Australian history. I hope this book helps make Australian history come to life and be interesting for you and your family. It was a pleasure and joy to write it.

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I. The First Peoples of Australia

The story of our great continent starts with the people who first lived here: the Aboriginal people. They have lived in Australia for hundreds of years. We don't know exactly how long they have lived in Australia, but they lived here long before Captain Cook or anyone from Europe ever stepped foot on the land. There are two main groups of Aboriginals: those that live in the Torres Strait and those that live on the main part of Australia (the mainland).



We'll first talk about those who live in the Torres Strait. Take a look at a world map. Look at the northeastern corner of Australia and find Papua New Guinea. The bit of sea between them is called the Torres Strait and there are many islands here, where many Aboriginals live. They are often called the Torres Strait Islanders.

Some people think that many years ago (we don't know exactly how long ago) people moved from Asia

to some of the islands in the Pacific (including the big island of Papua New Guinea) and from there moved into Australia. A few hundred years ago there were perhaps up to 200 languages spoken by the Aboriginal peoples. Most of the Aboriginal people lived



on the coast where they could fish and grow food. They would go back and forth between the coast and coastal rivers. They would

often eat fish or wild yams, which they could grow when they brought in water from the rivers.

Some of the Aboriginal peoples lived inland in the dryer parts of Australia. They were really smart about how to find water and knew the land very well. Their homes were often made of dried brush and they would hunt for their food. Sometimes they would even burn parts of the areas and so that other plants could grow, which would bring in more animals (looking for plants to eat) for them to hunt.

Today the majority of Aboriginal people speak something called Australian Aboriginal English. It's a mix of some phrases from Aboriginal languages and English. Only thirteen Aboriginal languages are still spoken today. Many of the other languages are already dead (meaning that they are no longer spoken) or are only spoken by the older generations (which means that when the older generation dies, the languages die with them). Some people are trying to revive and keep some of the languages alive, but it's challenging.

Nowadays most Aboriginal people live in small towns in remote areas, sometimes on land that they have lived on for years and years. Some of these small towns have less than fifty people and other have just a few hundred. Others live on the edge of bigger towns. A few of them still try to live their traditional lifestyles (but it's very hard).



The Aboriginal Flag

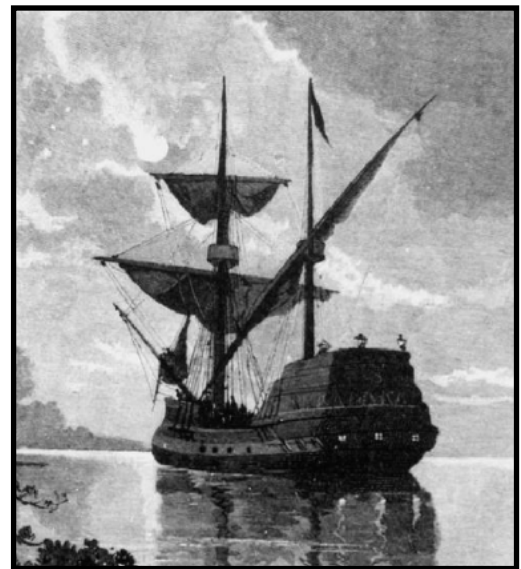
II. First Names

Most of the places you are familiar with today in Australia had different names when they were first discovered. This was many years ago. The first people from Europe who explored our part of the world were the Dutch. They had a colony in what's today Indonesia, not far from Australia, and that's where most of their ships set sail from. The first to explore was a man named Willem Janszoon and the crew with him aboard the Duyfken ship. They landed on our continent in 1606 and thought it was just part of Papua New Guinea. Willem never imagined how huge the continent was. He wanted to call the new land he discovered "Nieu Zelant" - a name that was later used for New Zealand. He wrote that the land was swampy and the people who lived there weren't friendly.

In 1618 he made another trip to Australia, but this time he went to the other side of the continent. He landed in a place called Point Cloates (today just about the only thing that's there is an old lighthouse built later on near Ningaloo in north Western Australia).

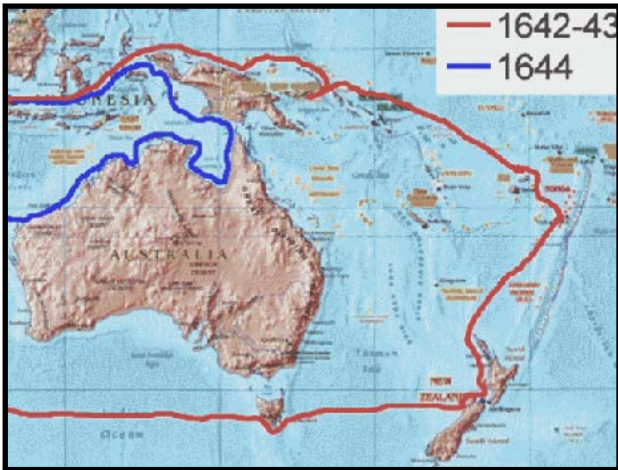
He went up the coast a little and then left. He thought he had landed on some big island. Of course, if he had continued to go along the coast, he would've found out that this wasn't just an island but something much larger.

Soon another Dutch man, Abel Tasman, came exploring this part of the world, but instead of exploring more of the continent, he discovered Tasmania. He wanted to name the island Van Diemen's Land after Van Diemen, the governor of a big company called the Dutch East Indian Company. As you probably have guessed by now, the island wasn't named this at all but Tasmania



The Duyfken Ship

(after the man that discovered it). For most of the trip, they had bad weather. At one point he wrote in his journal (most sea captains kept journals in those days) that they had almost crashed. The only thing that helped him get through it was his



compass. In December they landed on the South Island of New Zealand and named the land “Staten Landt” (which means “in honor of States General” which was the Dutch parliament). He made another trip to Australia and explored the northern coast of the continent. He was looking for a trade route but didn’t find any. When he returned with the

news of no new trade route, everyone gave up exploring the land for over a hundred years.

The next person from Europe to come to our continent was a British man named Captain Cook. His ship was named the Endeavor. Many people on ships around this time (and before) got sick and died from not having enough fruit and vegetables to eat. When the Endeavor set off, Captain Cook made sure there were lots of fruit on the ship to keep the crew healthy and strong. Whenever the ship landed anywhere, he tried to pick up more fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat.

His first trip started out in 1769. He was going to the island of Tahiti to take notes of something in the sky: the planet Venus was going to pass between the earth and the sun. He was interested in astronomy and wanted to see it for himself, but he also took some scientists and artists



A drawing of a plant from one of the artists on the ship.



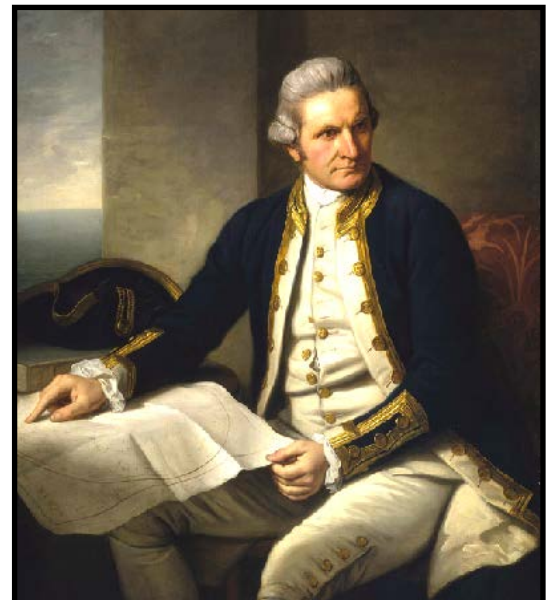
The Endeavor

with him on the ship to draw what they saw. After they made it to Tahiti and stayed for some time, they went by New Zealand. Since the Maoris peoples weren't friendly they continued on and finally reached the eastern coast of Australia. He landed on Botany Bay (He named it that and this time the name stuck!). Today Botany Bay is part of Sydney.

He sailed north along the coast but didn't get far because the ship was damaged by the Great Barrier Reef.

It took some time to repair the ship and they finally started back home in 1771. The famous ship that he traveled in was almost forgotten about when he landed back in England. Another sea captain took charge of it and sailed on four more trips before being wrecked close to Rhode Island in the United States.

Later on Captain Cook made two more trips (on a different ship called the HMS Resolution), one to some islands in the Pacific Ocean and close to Antarctica, and the other to find a Northwest Passage in the Arctic. On his last trip a fight broke out on the ship and he was killed.



A painting of Captain Cook in 1775, after his first trip to Australia.

III. Claiming The Land

By this time maps were being made of this great land which Captain Cook had explored a few years before this. In 1788 a group of French settlers came to Australia, planning to say that the land was theirs. However, the French were too late. The day



before they landed a group of British settlers put their flag down and said the land was theirs. Only one day! Can you imagine how it must've been for the French settlers, to travel so far only to find out that you were late by one day?

When the group of people came to Australia to fly the British flag and claim the land as theirs, they

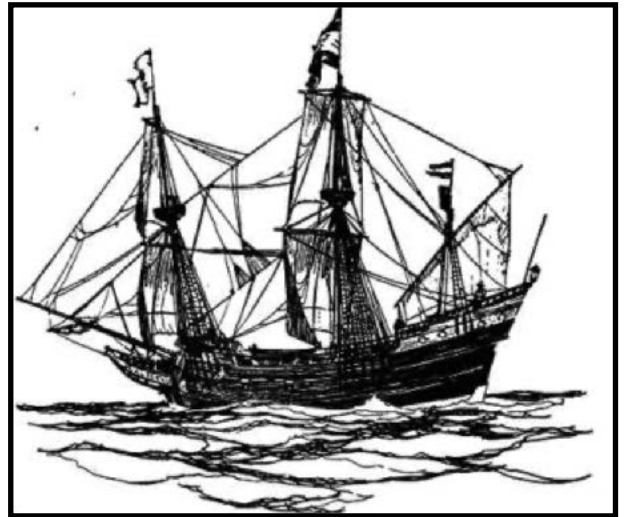
intended to live there for a long time. They came with eleven ships that were called the "First Fleet." They landed in January. Most of the people aboard these ships were people who had gotten into trouble back in England. The prisons were overcrowded and one solution was to send them to places like Australia. It must've been a strange sight to see so many prisoners and guards get on ships to start a new life somewhere far away. Their families were very sad to see them go, but they had no choice. They had to go.

The eleven ships were full of sailors, soldiers to guard the prisoners, the prisoners themselves, food, and animals. Yes, animals. It was very loud and smelled horrible on the ships because of the animals. They had cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, horses, chickens, tools for farming, seeds, and food on the ships. The ships were very crowded. They left in May and finally landed

in January the following year, which is a long time to be on a ship (especially with so many animals).

When they landed in Botany Bay (the same place that Captain Cook landed a few years before this), they found out that they weren't alone in this new land.

There were many, many Aboriginal people. They started the long task of building homes and starting new lives. Life was hard and there was often not enough food. Actually, they had to send a ship out to South Africa to bring back food, which returned in May of the following year. A second group of ships came with more prisoners in 1790 and



then more ships came again in 1791. They first lived in wooden homes but later on made more proper houses out of brick.

Soon the little establishment was quite a big town. It was named Sydney, after Thomas Townsend (who was called Lord Sydney). He was the Secretary of State in England and had recommended England to start a colony in Australia. The city started to grow fast and soon there was a church and even newspapers called the Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser.

Over the years, many more prisoners would be sent out to Australia. All in all, more than 160,000 prisoners would be sent to Australia. There were also quite a few other people who moved to our continent from England: almost 200,000 of them settled down before the year 1850 had ended. For many prisoners, life in prisons were hard. There are several places throughout Australia that are historical sites where you can see the remains of prisons and get an idea of how life was like for them.