

The Hakluyt Society

Publisher since 1846 of Historical Voyages and Travels



From the President

31 July 2014

Firstly, on behalf of the Society, may I express my gratitude to Martin Woods for all that he does as our international representative in Australia, and to Robert Cook for coordinating this bulletin and literally ‘compassing the vaste globe’ to keep us in touch. In earlier bulletins Robert has given notice of upcoming events that have given the opportunity to pursue the vision that was mapped out in a meeting with many of you in the National Library back in February 2014: namely to raise the profile of the Hakluyt Society across your great continent and to encourage members to meet together. I was particularly delighted to learn of the good gathering that took place in the margins of the Flinders Map Bicentenary exhibition in Canberra.

At our meeting, now two and a half years ago, we agreed that this bicentenary year offered particular potential for us to exploit, and that an ideal focus would be the launch in country of the society’s edition of the journals of Matthew Flinders in the *Investigator* that was being prepared by Professor Kenneth Morgan. On return home I obtained agreement to pursue a target of launch in the NLA on 6 November 2014 from both Kenneth and from Council, though discussion there revealed that there was only one, unpromising, precedent for such a presidential diktat!

A Voyage to Terra Australis, the published account of the circumnavigation in the *Investigator*, was not a commercial success, and critics complained of the amount of navigational detail. This appears to have been noted by subsequent naval authors such as Francis Beaufort with his classic volume *Karamania*, and William Henry Smyth, who grouped his navigational material in an annex to the acclaimed *Memoir descriptive of Sicily and its Islands*. However, I believe that one particularly important feature of our forthcoming edition of the journals will be the confirmation of how much this navigational content tells us about Matthew Flinders: a man who saw himself as walking in big footsteps, especially those of the already legendary James Cook. The argument and supporting tables in the journals, and in the *Memoir explaining the construction of the charts of Australia* that we have also included in this edition, may only be examined in detail by deep specialists. However, awareness of this detail is essential to understanding the under-tone running through the writings of Matthew Flinders: ‘I hope to escape the censure of those who may think that our investigation has not been sufficiently minute’.

A consequence of our decision to include this level of detail has been that this edition is one of the most complex that the society has undertaken, setting challenges at every stage of editing, type-setting and proof-reading. Thus, despite sterling efforts, not least by Kenneth alongside a demanding university teaching routine, we will not meet my target. The current estimate by Ashgate is that the volumes will reach their warehouse in late February 2015, and be with Australian members by air freight a month later.

Nonetheless, Martin Woods and the conveners at subsequent events in Adelaide and Sydney are in agreement that we can still pursue our vision this November. Our presentations will be designed to explain the significance of the journal and memoir, and will be illustrated with images and maps from the edition. We hope also to bring bound proof copies for inspection. Meanwhile, the society is discussing with Ashgate the discounts that will be offered to help us to attract new members from those attending.

Martin Woods and I would like to take the opportunity to meet with as many of you as possible on the 6th of November. So may I invite you to join us at 3.30pm for afternoon tea (own cost) in the National Library restaurant followed by a discussion period. Please see the details in the Bulletin, with the request to let Martin know by e-mail at mwoods@nla.gov.au, if you plan to be present.