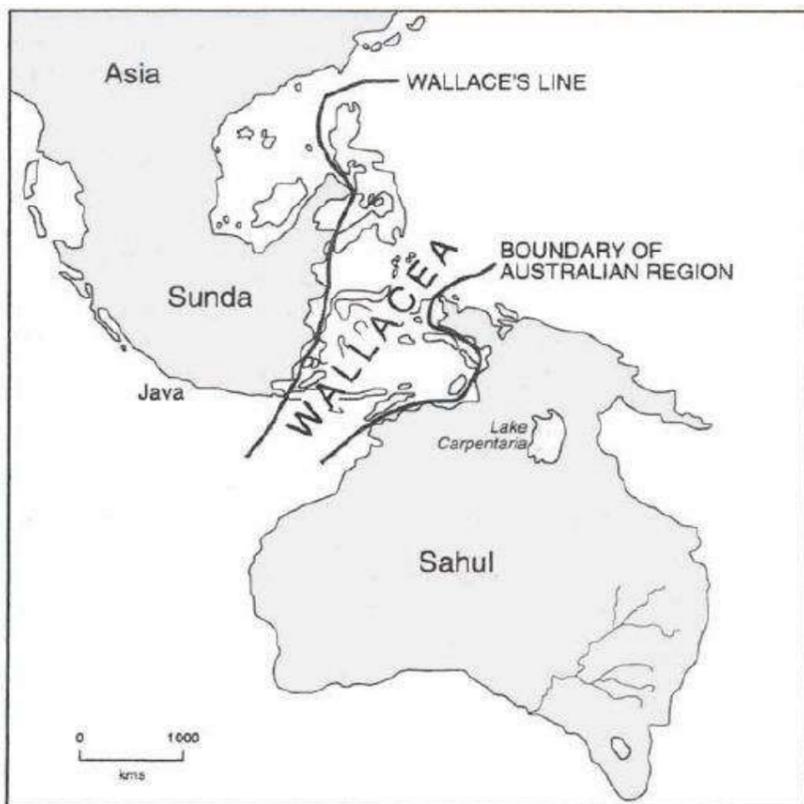


Australia's Maritime History

Early Settlement and Trade

Some 60,000 years ago, the continental coastline extended much further out into the Timor Sea, and Australia and New Guinea formed a single landmass (known as Sahul), connected by an extensive land bridge across the Arafura Sea, Gulf of Carpentaria and Torres Strait. Nevertheless, the sea



still presented a major obstacle to the aboriginal people that commenced arriving in Australia.

Island visitors have been visiting the Australian continent for centuries. They came to fish mainly for trepang (sea-cucumbers or sea-slugs) which

were considered a delicacy in Indonesia and China. The Papuan people regularly travelled to the Cape York Peninsula and Arnhem Land across the Torres Strait to trade in dugout canoes, ornamental masks and grave posts, spears and other ornaments and weapons.



European Expansionism

Portugal: In 1498, Vasco da Gama reached India and in 1556 Dominican friars established themselves on Timor just to the north of Australia.



Figure 1: Hollandia Nova by Joan Blaeu 1859

Spain: In 1606 Luis Vaez de Torres came very close to landing in Australia by passing through the strait that separates Cape York from New Guinea, now called Torres Strait.

Dutch East Indies: Dutch sailors were the first recorded Europeans to land in several parts of Australia, and named the land 'New Holland'. In 1606, the Willem Jansz sailed in the *Duyfken* from the Dutch East Indies explored the Cape York Peninsula and landed at the Pennefather River.

Dirk Hartog set sail in January 1616 and using the strong westerly winds known as the "Roaring Forties" as a quick route to Java, made landfall at an island off the coast of Shark Bay, which is now called Dirk Hartog Island. He left an enscribed plate that was later recovered and replaced by Willem de Vlamingh in 1697.

In 1623, the Dutch captain Jan Carstensz was sent to sail around the Gulf of Carpentaria and Captain Abel Tasman was the first European to land on Tasmanian soil in 1642.

UK & France: William Dampier was the first English expedition leader to visit Australia. In 1688, he landed in King Sound (near Derby) to clean and repair the *Cygnet*.

In April 1770, Lieutenant Cook sailed the *Endeavour* into Botany Bay. Botany Bay was so named because Joseph Banks found so many plants there.

In 1785 a French expedition led by Commordore Jean-François de Galaup La Pérouse explored the Pacific and met the First Fleet to Australia at Botany Bay on 24 January 1788. La Pérouse spent 6 weeks in the colony establishing an observatory, making geological observations, and establishing a garden before disappearing off Santa Cruz. French expeditions to our region continued.

Commander Matthew Flinders, navigator and cartographer, was the first to circumnavigate Australia and fully identify it as a continent. On 8 April 1802, while sailing east, Flinders sighted the *Géographe*, a French corvette commanded by the explorer Nicolas Baudin, who was on a similar expedition for his government. Flinders and Baudin met and exchanged details of their discoveries, Flinders named the bay Encounter Bay.



Figure 2: State Library of NSW

British Australia in the Asia-Pacific Region

Following settlement along the east coast, Britain consolidated its claim over Australia by establishing independent colonies in Western (1829) and South Australia (1834) and directly from Britain.

These states have their own ‘First Fleet’ stories.



Australian interest in the region expanded with settlement on

Norfolk Island (1788), Papua (1884) and Antarctica.

Douglas Mawson was an Australian who led a series of expeditions to Antarctica from 1911. Our ongoing interest led a (disputed) claim of over one third of Antarctica and three bases (Mawson, Casey and Davis) and Macquarie Island.

From the first days of colonisation in 1788, Australia was closely associated with sealing and whaling. By 1792, Sydney Cove was the centre for the whale trade and sealing



commenced in Bass Strait in 1798. Seal skins, seal and whale oil to China became the first viable export from the new colony.

Pearling began seriously at Shark Bay, Western Australia in the 1850s and in the Torres Strait in 1868 with 16 pearling firms operating on Thursday Island in 1877. By 1910, nearly 400 luggers and more than 3500 people were fishing for shell in waters around Broome.

The 1909 Imperial Conference resolved that Britain would withdraw its naval protection and that Australia would need to take responsibility for protecting regional shipping and ports. This galvanised Australian governments in a way that no other issue had leading to the creation of the Royal



Figure 3 State Library Victoria

Australian Navy in the extraordinarily short time of 4 years. The naval force was appropriate to its time with a balanced fleet of a battle cruiser, cruisers, destroyers and submarines. British

shipping companies and Australian offshoots dominated trade to and from Australia throughout much of the 19th and early 20th Century. However Norwegian, Danish and German shipping firms also operated within and outside conference and cabotage arrangements. Australian companies imported British built ships but there was also a local shipbuilding industry with around 13 major shipyards. By the end of the 20th century the British influence on shipping had but almost gone along with our large ship shipbuilding industry.

However, Australian ship building of leisure craft, naval ships and innovative ferries continues albeit in fits and starts.

Other Themes in Australian Maritime History

- Exploration, Settlement and Coastal Shipping
- The Heart of Maritime Life: Australia's Ports and Port Cities
- Bridging the Oceans: Ships, Cargoes and Passengers
- Australians Offshore: Harvesting the Sea
- Maritime Workers and their Unions
- Independent Australia: Security and the Dilemmas of Self-reliance
- A Culture of the Sea
- The Sea in Australia's Life

One of the seven vessels Austal has built for Australian Border Force.

Austal has delivered the seventh Cape Class patrol boat to Australian Border Force (the former Australian Customs and Border Protection) under a \$330 million eight-vessel contract. The Cape Wessel is named after the most northerly point of Rimbija Island in the Arafura Sea



Figure 4 Austal Ships Website



Key Sources:

John Bach: *A Maritime History of Australia* (published 1976)

Frank Broeze: *Island Nation* (published 1998)

Austal Ships



*The Australian Association
for Maritime History Inc.*