

Leaders and Larrikins
Great Australian Stories

Christopher Reynolds

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Preface

Content

Introduction [to be rewritten]

Interesting Stories

Story 1 William Dampier

Story 2 James Cook

Story 3 The First Fleet

Story 4 The Secret Plan behind the Australian Settlement

Story 5 Arthur Phillip

Story 6 Henry and Susannah Kable

Story 7 The Settlement of New South Wales

Story 8 George Cribb

Story 9 John Macarthur

Story 10 The Rocks

Story 11 The Irish Rebellion of 1804

Story 12 Lachlan Macquarie

Story 13 Hamilton Hume

Story 14 Matthew Flinders

Story 15 Archibald and Caroline Chisholm

Story 16 Gold

Story 17 William Wentworth

Story 18 Thomas Wills

Story 19 Daisy Bates

Story 20 The BHP

Introduction

In 1786, the French were building their navy and preparing for war. The British East India Company was concerned that the French were planning to increase their interests in Asia and Southeast Asia and thereby threaten their enterprise. Captain Arthur Phillip, working as a British spy for the Secret Service of the Office for War and the Colonies, relayed information to Lord Sydney in 1785 that the French had sent two ships into the Pacific. Baron James Harris, Britain's Ambassador to The Hague in Holland, wrote letters from 1786 to 1787 expressing his concern for the French naval build up: Britain would have to take action immediately, he said. Prime Minister Pitt gathered a small group of friends at his home to discuss the matter.

A decision was made to establish a military base at Botany Bay in James Cook's New South Wales, New Holland. But, under international law, to claim land to be a British possession, the law required that a settlement be established: A military outpost was insufficient. Unlike the American colonies where a Royal Charter was granted to private joint stock companies to establish colonies, there was no commercial interest in establishing a colony in New Holland where no viable agriculture could be determined and where no foreseeable return on investment could be imagined. The government would have to pay for the creation of a settlement themselves. Further, people sentenced to transportation to be managed by accredited overseers would have to be reassigned to the oversight of a governor of the colony in order to populate and develop it.

People sentenced to transportation by the British courts were not criminals, as such, because 'transportation' was a judicial designation to give a person a 'second chance at life' - a determination to reform a person to find and build for themselves a better life. The law intended to get people out of their deprivation and transport them to another place, for their own good. Until otherwise dispersed, transportation effectively made offenders into something similar to 'indentured servants' of the governor of the colony. Transportees were treated by Governor Phillip in the same way as the marines; the transportees lived in barracks rather than prisons; transportees were allowed to live with their families; a transportee could bring a case before the New South Wales courts; transportees could start their own businesses; and even possible for families to travel with transportees to Australia and start a new life.

There were three kinds of people arriving in Australia with the First Fleet: The military officers and marines; the transportees and their families; and free settlers - people who came of their own accord. Within a decade or so there emerged a fourth cohort of people: the Caucasian, or White, native born. These people were nicknamed 'currency lads and lasses' (as to 'Sterling' which signified the English born). Aboriginal, or Indigenous, people began to live among the settlers from the second year of the settlement in Sydney and added to the montage of people who forged out a new society.

In consideration of the tribes of natives living in Australia, there could be no treaty with them as they were considered across the world as a divided war faring people with no national leadership: a collection of stone age societies and 'the most primitive people on earth'. However, Britain would make them all British subjects with full British benefits and services and protection under the law. They would take care of them.

The collection of interesting characters and stories in this *Leaders and Larrikins: Great Australian Stories* tell of people and the contexts in which they lived during the first 120 years of settlement in Australia.

The material here presented in this *Leaders and Larrikins* is taken from the primary publication entitled *What a Capital Idea – Australia 1770-1901*.

Story 1

William Dampier

Harold Underhill stepped from the coach at the docks of Plymouth Harbour, England. It was July, the summer of 1843. The sea air was fresh. The sun danced across the water providing a morning glow as seagulls circled the dock looking for scraps of food. Harold's trip down from Birmingham had concluded without incident, despite the condition of the roads being what they were. He was on vacation from his employment as a mathematics teacher at the Birmingham Public School and looked forward to spending time with his uncle at the seaside. His uncle was a retired naval officer, Captain George Underhill, and a veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar in the Napoleonic Wars, some 35 years earlier.

"There you are, young fellow," said Captain George enthusiastically. "Survived the coach trip, I see. Nothing broken?" he laughed.

Harold shook hands with his uncle, returned the laugh with "No, nothing broken."

"Now come along, I have our afternoon all planned out. James here, will take your bags up to the house and we will set off to look through the seaside markets. It only happens once a month. There's always some little treasure of interest. Then, we will head off for an early tea at a delightful public house along the way where we can catch up. That is, if you are up for it young fella'?"

Yes, Uncle, I'm up for it," replied Harold with a smile.
"Good, then off we go."

James nodded to his master, picked up the bags and strolled off towards the house.

The market was always of interest to the old sea dog. The two men casually wandered through the stalls looking at knickknacks.

"Look at this Uncle. An old Spanish sword. It must have seen some action," said Harold.
"Yes, it is an old one, all right. Not a naval issue but, still, a novel design," replied George. As he looked across the table at what he thought was useless old junk, George saw something that caught his eye – a ship's bell. Corroded and tarnished, there was still something fascinating about it. He rubbed away the dirt to read the name of the ship from whence it came. It read 'Duke 1795'. He turned to the woman who sold the wares. "How much do you want for this?" he asked.

The old woman looked at George's face, detecting his level of interest. "Oh, I couldn't be parting with that one for less than £2 (US\$300).

"That's outrageous," protested Harold.

George stared at the old crow, who had no idea what it was she had for sale. Their eyes, however, were locked in the bargain at hand. Neither spoke.

"Done," said George. "Here's ya' £2."

Come, laddie, I think we're finished with our shopping for the day. Let us depart for our tea," said George.

As Harold quickened his stride to keep up with his uncle's pace, he protested the purchase again. "Uncle, why did you pay that outrageous sum for that old bell?"

"Outrageous, you say," replied George. "Many would have called the man who sailed her 'outrageous'. And that he was, and, a lot more than that. But there never was a finer sailor or more adventurous pirate sail the seas."

"Pirate? Uncle, who are you talking about?"

"None other than the notorious pirate, Captain William Dampier. Never a ship crossed cannon with Dampier and came away the victor," said George as they reached the door of the public house. George strolled in, familiar with his surroundings, and chose a table near the front window where they could observe the human traffic on this fine evening. The men sat down. George placed the bell on the table and signaled to a waitress to come near.

"We'll have two pints of ale and two serves of your fine Irish stew with fresh bread, if you please."

The waitress nodded and departed to obtain their supper.

Harold looked at the bell as it caught the afternoon sun. Harold had never heard of Dampier but his uncle's enthusiasm for the pirate stirred his interest to know more. "Can you tell me about this pirate, Uncle?"

"Aye, he was the pirate's pirate. A master of the sea, an adventurer and an explorer. He circumnavigated the earth three times when other sailors still thought they would fall off the edge somewhere. He wrote three books about his explorations of New Holland. He inspired other authors and explorers. But, the great mystery was, and remains, where did he hide his treasure? Tens of thousands of pounds in Spanish gold disappeared when he was Captain of the *Duke*. You may not know of Dampier, but I am sure the Spanish are cursing him still."

The waitress returned with ale, stew and fresh bread and placed it all before her customers. The men lifted their putter mugs to clink as they touched across the table, with 'Cheers', as they acknowledged each other's friendship.

Having taken a swig of the ale and then lifting fork to mouth, Harold felt unsatisfied with hearing just a summary of the pirate's adventures, and, of hidden treasure. He had to know more. "Uncle, tell me the tale of William Dampier and his treasure."

George put down his mug. "Dampier was born in England in 1651. At age 22 he joined the British Navy for a short time and then went to sea as a navigator on a pirate ship called the *Cygnets*, under Captain James Swan. Swan plundered Spanish ships and ports in Panama and Peru on the west coast of South America. Other sea captains came to join Swan and at one stage they had 10 ships in their pirate fleet. On a trip across the Pacific, Swan decided to stay and live in Mindanao, in the Philippines.

This was in 1688, and Dampier, now the Captain of the *Cygnets*, along with the other pirate captains, decided to sail west in the belief they could reach Batavia (Jakarta) in Indonesia. They came through islands south of New Guinea and followed the coast of New Holland southwest for a time. The *Cygnets* needed repairs so Dampier pulled into the shore at a place he called Kings Sound. The other pirate captains would not wait for Dampier and so moved on, sailing north. It took three months to repair the *Cygnets* and Dampier made notes in his journal regarding the animals and vegetation he saw, as well as the Aborigine, or, indigenous people, – which means the same thing.

The repairs completed, Dampier sailed north towards Indonesia. But, a terrible, nah, ferocious storm blew up: A tornado.

‘Look smart ye swabs
Yelled the Captain from the wheel
The wind has changed
We swing about
This storm will test our keel

Ye scallywags
Climb up the mast
And tie the sails firm
Make all secure down below
We’re running from the storm’

And run he did. The storm raged for 12 days. Dampier could do nothing but drive forward. In the dark of the storm, he could take no bearing from sun nor stars. He knew not where he was nor where he was going. Three men washed overboard. The crew thought they would all perish as the ship climbed the mountainous waves before them only to fall into the valleys beyond. Time past, the crew spied land, the storm abated, but tempers remained high.

‘We’re pirates, not explorers’, declared the quartermaster. The parrot on his shoulder mimicked what he said: “Aye, we’re pirates. Pieces of eight. Pieces of eight.” The men had had enough of Dampier and his note taking and map making. In the early hours, men burst into Dampier’s cabin and hauled him on deck. ‘We’re taking over the ship and putting you and your mate, Moody here, ashore on yonder island. We’ll give you food and water and you can take ye’ swords with ye’, said the quartermaster. Dampier quickly sized up the situation. There was not a man to stand with him other than Moody. ‘You don’t value my notes, as you say,’ said Dampier. ‘If I can have my books I will cause you no trouble.’ The quartermaster considered the request, grunted, and said, “Aye, ye’ can have ye’ books, for what they’re worth to you on an island.” He laughed. The two men were marooned on the island and the *Cygnets* sailed away.

Dampier and Moody were left on an island north of Sumatra. There were natives on the island and Dampier befriended a young fellow by the name of Giolo. He was covered in tattoos from head to toe. He was a prince in his tribe.

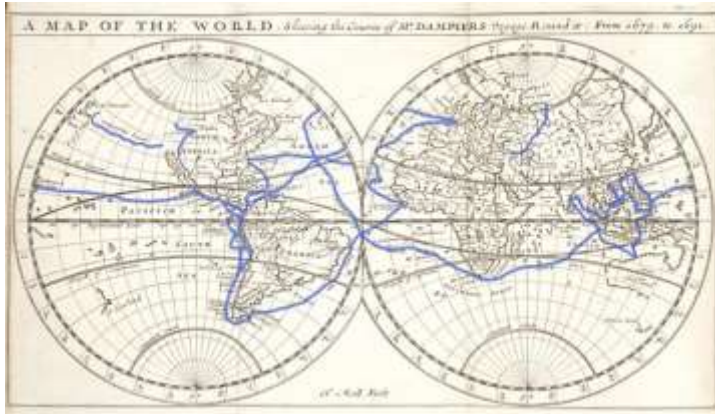
In discovering where he was, Dampier persuaded Giolo to travel with him back to England. The three men made their way to Sumatra and Dampier took work with a British East India Company outpost as a military gunner. Moody travelled alone further south. It was now 1691 and time to return to England. A ship, the *Defence*, came into the harbour. But the governor of the outpost was not about to let Dampier leave. He would be shot for



Giolo

desertion if he was caught. Dampier struck a deal with the ship's captain and he and Giolo stowed away on the *Defence* until it was safely out of the harbour and away from trouble.

On reaching England, Dampier had not a penny. Giolo was an instant celebrity because of his tattoos and Dampier made enough money showing him off to the public to keep him and the boy in reasonable comfort while he wrote up his notes as a book. In 1697, Dampier had his first book published: *A New Voyage Around the World*, for he had, indeed, sailed around



William Dampier's First Circumnavigation of the Earth

the world. Dampier himself, was now the celebrity. He found himself invited to dinners with the aristocracy. 'Now tell me Captain Dampier, do you enjoy being a pirate? I mean, all that cannon fire, bullets and blood?' went the conversations."

"Uncle, that is amazing. He sailed across the Pacific, faced mutiny and desertion, escaped from Sumatra and then wrote a

book!" exclaimed Harold.

"Aye, but the story is just getting started," said George.

"Dampier's new book was the first book written about New Holland. The Admiralty was extremely interested in Dampier's explorations. In 1698, they gave Dampier command of *Roebuck*, a 26 gun naval ship with the mission to go back to New Holland on a scientific expedition to explore the coastline and take further notes about the country, with particular interest in possible environments for defence."

"But all did not go well right from the start. You see, half the crew were navy seamen and the other half were of Dampier's choosing. The navy crew liked things done to regulation but the pirate had no care for regulations. Trouble

was inevitable. Dampier sailed down the African coast then headed across the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil. Seamen, whether merchant, naval or pirate, enjoyed the weather and the delights of this Portuguese party town and Dampier stayed there for a month."

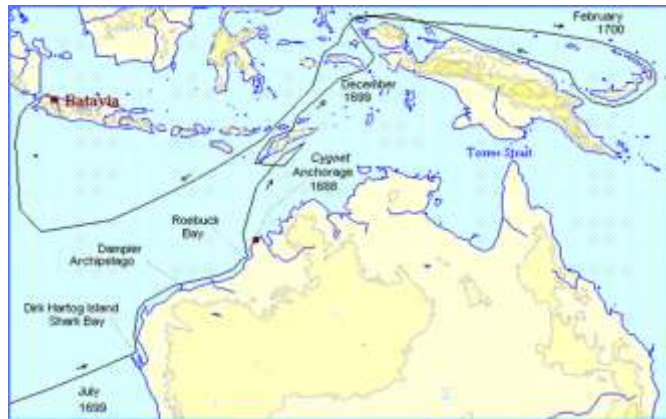


The Roebuck

"Dampier's second in command was a naval officer: First Lieutenant George Fisher. In Brazil, Fisher argued with Dampier to the point that it became a fight. Dampier beat Fisher badly and then had him thrown into the local prison. Dampier left port without him and sailed around Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean to the west coast of New Holland, stopping at a place he called Shark Bay. He spent months taking notes and making maps of the coastline. He sailed to Timor and around New Guinea and if it hadn't been for

the need of ship repairs, he would have managed to discover the east coast of New Holland, some 70 years before James Cook.”

“The *Roebuck* journeyed to Batavia and then headed home to England but the rot of the timbers of the ship was so bad that it had to be run aground on Ascension Island., 100 miles (200 kilometres) from the west coast of Africa. So there was Dampier and his crew sitting on the beach of an island waiting to be rescued. After five weeks, an East India Company ship came past and rescued Dampier and his men. Dampier was back in England in 1701. However, Fisher had made it back to England before him and had lodged formal complaints to the Admiralty. When Dampier arrived he was court marshalled and stripped of his pay for his journey. Again, he was penniless. But, again, he published. This time his notes were published in two volumes: *A Voyage to New Holland*, in 1703 and 1709.”



Dampier's Second Circumnavigation of the Earth

He was told by his publisher that they needed a portrait of him to put on the cover of the books so he was to clean himself up, comb his hair and get some new clothes. He looked good for the portrait but he didn't look at all like William Dampier, the pirate.”



William Dampier

“In 1701, to Dampier's good fortune, war broke out between England and Spain. The Admiralty could see an advantage in letting Dampier loose to plunder Spanish ships. So they gave him the *St George*, and licensed him as a 'privateer', which meant that he was an 'authorised' pirate and British ships would leave him alone. The *St George* was a 26 gun battleship with a crew of 120 men. The Admiralty also gave him a second and smaller ship, the *Cinque Ports*, to accompany him. The *Cinque Ports* was captained by the 23 year old quartermaster, Alexander Selkirk. Six months into the voyage, Selkirk complained that his ship was unseaworthy. Dampier would hear nothing of his complaints or stop for repairs. Selkirk argued with Dampier, refused to sail with him any further and asked to be put ashore. Dampier stopped in the Juan Fernandez Islands, off the west coast of South America and had Selkirk put ashore, with food and supplies. The *Cinque Ports* later sunk, by the way, and the eight survivors were captured by the Spanish.”

“Dampier had limited success off the South American coast and decided to sail for home via Indonesia. He journeyed around Cape Town and returned to England in 1707.”



The Duke and Duchess

“A year later, Dampier was off again. This time for a private consortium who would have Dampier as sailing master over two ships, the *Duke* and the *Duchess*, to plunder Spanish gold. And here lies the novelty of the bell that sits before you on the table,” said George to Harold, with a smile.

“But to continue. Dampier left England in 1708. The ships sailed around Cape Horn to the west coast

of South America to begin their conquest. In January, 1709, the ships were sailing through the Juan Fernandez Islands when the crew spotted smoke. Dampier drew to shore to take a look and discovered Alexander Selkirk, still alive, after four years. He was dressed in goat skins, including a goatskin hat and boots, and carried a crudely made umbrella. He could hardly speak, having no company for the four years. Dampier took him on board.”

This story is unbelievable, Uncle,” said Harold.

“Oh, it is believable, young Harold,” said George as he lifted his mug to finish his second ale. “While you are just now hearing of William Dampier, you may be familiar with stories that have been written with Dampier’s adventures in mind: Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.”

“What, Swift and Defoe used Dampier’s stories to write their books?” asked Harold.

“Oh, and several other writers as well. Then Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks were heavily influenced by Dampier’s writing, to mention just two. But here comes the best part of the story,” said George.

“The *Duke* and *Duchess* continued to engage the Spanish in sea battles. While sinking ships as they went, they captured two ships that remained in seaworthy condition and Dampier had them join his fleet. Now, in one of these battles with the Spanish, they crossed cannon with a galleon off the coast of Mexico. The battle went on for quite some time. The galleon was a taller ship so Dampier had get up in close so that its cannons were too high to cause him much damage. At the same time, being in close meant that he could fire directly into its hull, causing the lower decks to flood and slowly sink. The galleon may have been a larger ship with three levels of guns but Dampier had his victory and captured £147,000 (US\$40 million) of Spanish gold.”



The Buccaneers by Frederick Judd Waugh

“The ships returned to England in 1711 but there was no treasure to be handed to the consortium. They wanted not just their share, they wanted the lot. An argument ensued and Dampier left the ships and cargo to them but that wasn’t the last of it. There was no proof that Dampier had taken the gold. Aye, that was the point: while the consortium and captains alike suspected that Dampier had stolen the treasure, there was no evidence to the fact,” said George.

George stopped talking, drew a swig of his ale and looked at the passersby in the street through his window, and smiled.

“What do you think happened, Uncle?” asked Harold.

George turned and looked at his nephew. His eyes lit up with excitement. He leaned forward and whispered, “Dampier may have circumnavigated the world three times, drawn maps of New Holland, he may have been an explorer, an adventurer, and even a genius, but, laddie, he was still a pirate. He did what pirates do with treasure: He buried it. But where? On which island? You’re not the first to ask, and ye’ won’t be the last. Someday, someone will write a book about it all and call it ‘Treasure Island’, you wait.”

“To be sure, to be sure, me heartie, there’s a mystery to be solved yet,” whispered Captain George with a glint in his eye and the knowing smile of a pirate.

George put his hand on the bell as if it could speak and sound out a clue to the tale. “Where is Dampier’s treasure?”

Looking back to Harold, he said, “Wouldn’t ye’ like to know?”



Dampier hides his Gold