

## Putting Broughton Islands on the Map, 1770-1851

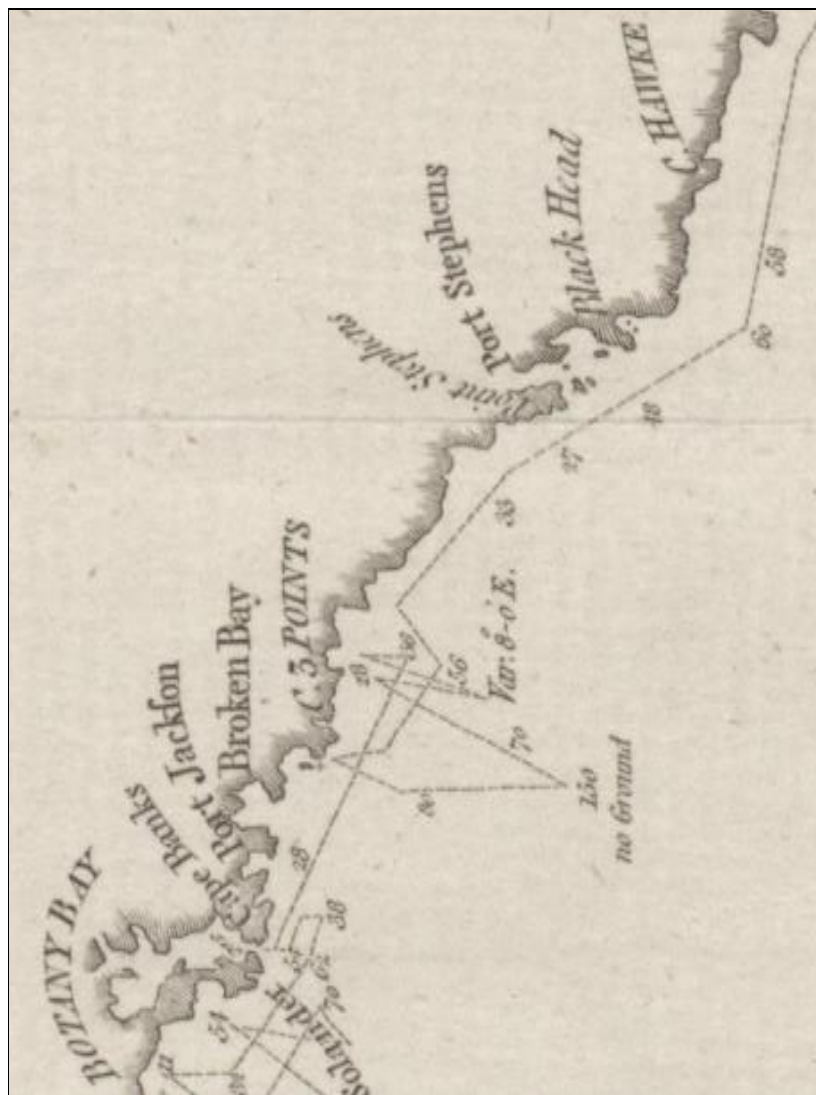
### Map Matters

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Although the east coast of Australia was placed on the map by James Cook during the voyage of His Majesty's Bark Endeavour in 1770, it took a long time for the individual features of the coast to be accurately identified and surveyed, as may be shown by the case of Broughton Island.

Broughton Island with its associated reefs and islets, Little Broughton Island and Looking Glass Isle, North Rock and Inner Rock, is located approximately eight nautical miles north east of Port Stephens and is a part of the Myall Lakes National Park. It is an island of sandy beaches, volcanic peaks and stunted, wind-swept vegetation. During the summer, tourist cruises to the island depart from Nelson Bay, Port Stephens. Many visitors come for what lies below the water: snapper, drummer, kingfish, flathead and groper. For scuba divers there are undersea caves, coral, sponge gardens, boulders, sandy gutters, ledges, sheer walls and marine life of every type. Just recently, there has been a successful campaign to rid the island of non-native rats and rabbits. Archaeology indicates that the Worimi Aboriginal people inhabited the island for at least 2,000 years, but their name for it does not seem to have been recorded.



Broughton Island (or, more strictly, Broughton Islands) is named after William Robert Broughton who, in command of His Majesty's Frigate *Providence*, visited and surveyed nearby Port Stephens in August 1795. Providence Bay, between Port Stephens and Broughton Islands, commemorates his ship (which had previously been commanded by William Bligh on his second breadfruit voyage to Tahiti in 1790-92). Broughton was taking the *Providence* from England to the North West Coast of America to assist George Vancouver in his exploration of the coasts of that region: he needed to rest and refresh at Port Jackson but adverse winds carried the *Providence* north past Sydney to Port Stephens, which he took the opportunity to chart before proceeding to Sydney. An edition of Broughton's journal of his voyage has recently been published by the Hakluyt Society of London.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent from his journal that Broughton himself never visited Broughton Island. James Cook's biographer, J.C. Beaglehole, notes that it was seen by Cook on the evening of 11 May 1770: in the poor light with the sun setting behind it he mistook it for a headland and called it Black Head. It was apparently not discovered to be an island until much later: it appears as Black Head Island on John Oxley's 1822 map of New South Wales.<sup>2</sup>

Its insularity was officially recognized on the 1852 Admiralty chart, *Australia, East Coast. Broken Bay to Sugarloaf Point, from a Running Survey by Capt. J. Lort Stokes, H.M.S. Acheron, 1851*, where it is called Broughton Islands, retaining the name Black Head for a point on the island. Providence Bay also appears for the first time on this chart.



John Lort Stokes, in command of HMS *Acheron*, performed a running survey of the coast of New South Wales from Sydney northward to Sugarloaf Point to the north of Port Stephens during June-July 1851, following his extensive survey of the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Stokes report on this survey to the Colonial Secretary, written in Sydney, 20 July 1851, was published in *The Maitland Mercury* of 11 December 1852. In it, he said:

Having the advantage of Captain King's company, who had surveyed Port Stephens and the adjacent coast, we were, by his valuable assistance, enabled to extend the survey, with little delay, to Sugarloaf Point, beyond Port Stephens.<sup>3</sup>



It would therefore appear that the re-naming was done by John Lort Stokes in 1851, perhaps in consultation with the naval hydrographer and first Australian-born Admiral, Phillip Parker King, son of Governor Philip Gidley King, who was then residing at Port Stephens as local manager of the Australian Agricultural Company. Stokes visited King at his residence at Tahlee in Port Stephens. Previously Stokes had visited Port Stephens in June 1839, as Lieutenant and Surveyor on HMS *Beagle* under the command of John Wickham. He remarked in the book he subsequently wrote that: “We found the Admiralty chart of the coast in the neighbourhood very defective, some islands being completely omitted, whilst others were much misplaced”.<sup>4</sup>

Stokes’s journal of his 1851 voyage in the *Acheron* is held at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and there is a copy at the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin: it has not been published. It would be interesting to know if he mentioned in it his identification of Black Head as an island and his naming of it after Broughton. And if King was involved.<sup>5</sup>

This one example goes to show that the process of putting Australia on the map has been a lengthy one, with not all the steps in it clearly on the record.

### Robert J. King

1. Andrew David and Barry Gough editors, *William Robert Broughton's Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific 1795-1798*, London, Hakluyt Society, distributed by Ashgate Publishing, 2010, p.240.
2. John Oxley, *A chart of Part of the Interior of New South Wales*, London, Arrowsmith, 1822.
3. Stokes to Colonial Secretary, Sydney, 20 July 1851, *The Maitland Mercury*, 11 December 1852.
4. J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia: with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle, in the Years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43*, London, W. Boone, 1846, Book 1, p.312.
5. Journal of Captain John Lort Stokes, HMS *Acheron*, on the surveying voyage from Plymouth to New Zealand, 1848 to 1851, transcribed by Sheila Natusch, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MRF/113. See also George Albert Hansard's journal of the voyage of the *Acheron*, transcribed by Sheila Natusch, Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, MS-0968.