

**AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM
WOODEN BOAT SYMPOSIUM 2023
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DECHAINEUX THEATRE, SATURDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2023**

Thank you [for HE introduction] and good morning. I welcome you all to this Australian Maritime Museum Wooden Boat Symposium. I especially give a warm Tasmanian welcome to speakers and visitors from interstate and overseas.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their continued connection to land, sea, and waters. I acknowledge the impacts of colonisation upon our First People and commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

This symposium traces its history back to the inaugural Australian Wooden Boat Festival in 1994, organized by Cathy Hawkins, Ian Johnson and Andy Gamlin. It has become the largest festival of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere and is a pilgrimage destination for wooden boat enthusiasts around the world.

I acknowledge the impressive range of topics to be presented at the symposium over three days, with historical information about early craft and boats, about boat building and restoration, and many more topics.

I thought it may be of some interest to delve back historically to a famed wooden boat associated with our maritime history. That boat is the sloop *Norfolk*, the vessel in which George Bass and Matthew Flinders proved by circumnavigation that Tasmania was an island.

In 1795, Bass and Flinders undertook their first two New South Wales coastal voyages of exploration and charting in very small boats, each named *Tom Thumb* – the first was just 10-foot long and had been brought out from England, its successor 14-foot long and made of New South Wales cedar, with a small sail.¹

¹ Cuthbertson, Bern, *In the Wake of Bass and Flinders 200 Years On*, Sandy Bay, Bern and Jan Cuthbertson, 2001, page 1.

In late 1797, George Bass undertook a third voyage of exploration, travelling as far south as Victoria's Westernport Bay, in a whaleboat with a crew of six. He became convinced that the expansive body of water – later called Bass Strait – indicated that Van Diemen's Land must be an island, not an extension of the southern Australian landmass, as believed since Dutch mariner Abel Tasman's landing at Blackmans Bay in December 1642.

The whaleboat used by Bass was Governor Philip King's personal vessel, of naval design, 28-foot six inches in length, with sails.

This third voyage south to the Victorian coast was, I quote:

“... highly regarded at the time as one of the great feats of seafaring. The whaleboat was left on the shores of Sydney Harbour and regarded as something of an icon by the locals. French naturalist Francois Peron recorded that ‘Some snuff-boxes made from the wood of its keel form relics of which the possessors are as proud as they are careful. [Governor King] himself considered that he could not make a more honourable present to [French exploration commander] Nicolas Baudin than a piece of the wood set in a large silver box, around which were engraved the principal details of the discovery of Bass Strait.’”²

End of quote.

A fourth voyage was then planned, to prove or disprove Bass and Flinders' island theory. This was undertaken in the colonial sloop *Norfolk*, Matthew Flinders commanding. The sloop was so named having been built of Norfolk Island pine by convicts on Norfolk Island and described as a 'decked longboat'.³

Between October 1798 and January 1799, Flinders and Bass sailed through Bass Strait, around Cape Grim and down the west coast of Tasmania, around the southern tip and then back up the east coast and back to Sydney after exploring the mouth of the Derwent River for some days. Their theory had been well and truly proven.

² <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/10413>, accessed 8 February 2023. (The Peron quote is from *Voyage of discovery to the southern lands*, 2nd edition, 1824, translated from the French by Christine Cornell.)

³ Cuthbertson page 73.

No doubt many wooden boat enthusiasts will know all about the bicentennial re-enactment of the Bass and Flinders discovery, undertaken by legendary Tasmanian maritime identity Bern Cuthbertson. His replica of the *Norfolk* was built of Huon pine and celery top pine. He records fascinating details of its construction, which he and others began in 1995. Here are just two snippets:

“Forestry Tasmania donated all the huon pine logs from their stockpile on Lake Gordon with which to plank the vessel from keel to deck ... The logs had been floating in the man-made lake for over twenty years. The logs were naturally very wet but had matured beautifully. The biggest was six metres long and better than one metre diameter. It was between 2500 and 3000 years old ...

“The framework and deck are celery top pine. Because large fitches would have been required for frames, stem and stern post and this was not available, it was decided to laminate. This created much work but saved a great deal of timber and of course the vessel is many times stronger than the original.”⁴

End of quotes.

In 2000, Bern Cuthbertson was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia for services to the community and fishing industry, for the training of sea cadets and for services to Australia's maritime history. He passed away in 2013.

The *Norfolk* replica can be seen in the Bass & Flinders Maritime Museum in George Town, northern Tasmania. I believe that Museum has a presence here at the Festival.

Friends, may I conclude by congratulating everyone involved in the planning, administration and huge hands-on effort in getting this brilliant Symposium together. I particularly thank all the speakers. Thank you also to all the sponsors and partners big and small.

And I now have great pleasure in declaring open this 2023 Australian National Maritime Museum Wooden Boat Symposium. Thank you.

⁴ Cuthbertson pages 74 and 75.