

The genealogy of an error: exploring Sidney Hall's 1828 map of Van Diemen's Land

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Some years ago, I was idly flicking through reproductions of Tasmanian historic maps in a small Hobart shop when one caught my eye. I flicked back to it, and saw a map of Van Diemen's Land from 1828 by Sidney Hall. The detail was clear, the colours were simple, and the writing was legible. It was exactly the type of map one might use to illustrate a historic location or set a scene. I looked more closely, wondering why it had caught my eye. Then I saw it. Macquarie Harbour was shown twice the size of reality. The shop owner told me it was misprinted in an atlas and corrected fairly quickly, but not before enough of the inaccurate version had made it into circulation to still survive today. I bought the reprint, and now it hangs in my living room.

Along with the reprint, I also picked up an obsession with finding these strange cartographic depictions of Tasmania. I have a whole folder called 'strange maps' where I save the miscellany I find while trawling Trove, the Rumsey Map Collection, National Library of Scotland and a multitude of other digitised map collections. One favourite is Marmocchi's 1846 map of 'L'Oceania', which makes Australia's rugged coastline look delicately moth-eaten (Figure 2), but the most surprising discovery is how many times Hall's version of Macquarie Harbour appears in atlases, and whose maps include it.¹

In my mind, at least, it is 'Hall's version'. The reality of attribution is far more complicated and only becomes more so the deeper I dig into it the history of this oversized Macquarie Harbour. Of course, this is not the only mistake on Hall's map, or any others of Van Diemen's Land, but it is immediately visible when flicking through a collection of historic cartography and therefore a convenient starting point for considering the movement of knowledge in the early nineteenth century.

Our starting point is to consider when Macquarie Harbour was first included on maps of Van Diemen's Land. James Kelly and Thomas William Birch 'discovered' the harbour for the Europeans at the end of 1815.² It is therefore unsurprising that all maps before 1816 show the west coast of Van Diemen's Land as bumpy but lacking harbours.³ Matthew Flinders' cartography was no different: in 1814, G.&W. Nichols printed Flinders' map of Van Diemen's Land, ready to be included in his published account of Australia's coast.⁴ It is a fine chart, showing peaks and bays, sailing routes and details taken from other explorers of the land. Only small gaps in the drawn coastline suggest that Flinders did not know everything about this island. After Flinders' death, however, Macquarie Harbour became well known to colonists and it was included in an update to this map in 1825–26. But in – what I am choosing to interpret as – an act of overcompensation, the harbour was drafted as an oversized behemoth.⁵ With the flick of a pen the west coast was transformed.

Other charts of Van Diemen's Land were published between these two editions of Flinders' work: J. Souter printed G.W. Evans' 1821 survey in London, complete with a proportionate Macquarie Harbour.⁶ John Thomson published another version of Van Diemen's Land in the same year.⁷ Thomson's geographer, Jehoshaphat Aspin (a possible alias), might have copied Evans' initial manuscript from Souter, but without any attribution we will never know.⁸ Aaron Arrowsmith included yet another version of the island in his atlas of 1825, with an appropriately sized Macquarie Harbour.⁹ It seems likely that Arrowsmith took details from the 1814 Flinders chart – the entry to the Pieman River is described on both in the same words not found on other charts of the same era: 'Opening like a small river'.

Cartography was rife with plagiarism, although it was not named as such – with very little copyright protection available, cartographers did not have any recourse when other geographers and publishers copied their work. Drafts, proofs and final copies circulated around the geographers living in metropolis publishing hubs.¹⁰ When details were carried from map to map with little change, we can trace that lineage through atlases and see the networks of information (and plagiarism) that underpinned the industry.

Geographers and cartographers were still drawn (if you will pardon the pun) to using the 'most accurate' representations of remote lands. Flinders' work was commissioned and published by the Admiralty, making it a tempting target for his post-humous colleagues. While Arrowsmith may have combined details from Flinders' 1814 and Evans' 1821 charts, it only took a year or two for the influence of Flinders' 1825 update (with its erroneous harbour) to be felt. Within five years, we have Vandermaelen's reinterpretation (1827), Hall's (1828) and Lizars' (1831). The error persisted in atlases until at least the 1840s: the latest in my collection so far is 1849.¹¹

For all that these popular printed maps declared themselves to be 'the most accurate' and containing the 'latest observations', their purpose was not to direct explorers across the country to Macquarie Harbour from Hobart. These maps were constructed to feed the imaginations of the public. Professional pride saw cartographers such as Sidney Hall quickly redraft his chart when the mistake was noticed, but the persistence of the mistake for another two decades reveals that a scale of professional pride affected the cartographical industry of the nineteenth century.

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Captions

Figure 1: Hall's map of Van Diemen's Land. Image courtesy of David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

Figure 2: Marmocchi's map of Oceania, with a lacy-edged Australia. Image courtesy of David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

Figure 3: Flinders' 1814 map of Van Diemen's Land. Image courtesy of the Tasmanian Archives.

Figure 4: Flinders' posthumously updated version of Van Diemen's Land, now including an oversized Macquarie Harbour. Image courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

Figure 5: Lizars' 1831 chart of Australia, with an inaccurate map of Van Diemen's Land inset. Image courtesy of David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

¹ Francesco Constantino, Marmocchi, *L'Oceania : Divisa Nelle Quattro Sue Magne Parti*, Firenze: V. Batelli e Compagni, 1846, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/q2cmlz>.

² John Thomson, *New Holland, Asiatic Isles*, London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1814, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/e0g5z4>.

³ For example, see: François Péron, *Carte générale de La Nouvelle Hollande*, Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1808, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/uu7uj5>; Aaron Arrowsmith and Samuel Lewis, *Australasia*. (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1812), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/26xb50>.

⁴ Matthew Flinders, *Historic Plan 12: Chart of Terra Australis*, London: G&W Nicol, 1814, AF395/1/10, Tasmanian Archives, <https://stors.tas.gov.au/AI/AF395-1-10>.

⁵ Matthew Flinders, *Chart of Van Diemens Land. Sheet VI, South Coast*, Great Britain: Hydrographic Department, 1825, National Library of Australia, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-232592121>.

⁶ G.W. Evans, *Chart of Van Diemens Land, from the best authorities, and from surveys*, London: J. Souter, 1822, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-229965872>.

⁷ J. Aspin, Hewitt, and John Thomson, *New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, Edinburgh: John Thomson, 1821, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/mu097d>.

⁸ G.W. Evans, *Historic Plan 2: General map of Tasmania compiled from various maps and surveys by GH Evans, Deputy Surveyor General*, London, 1821, AF395/1/3, Tasmanian Archives, <http://stors.tas.gov.au/AF395-1-3>.

⁹ Aaron Arrowsmith, *Van Diemen's Land*, London: A & S Arrowsmith, 1825, David Rumsey Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/yb705d>.

¹⁰ Mary Sponberg Pedley, *The Commerce of Cartography: making and marketing maps in eighteenth-century France and England*, University of Chicago Press, 2005, 96–97.

¹¹ Philippe Vandermaelen, *Ile de Diemen. Oceanique No. 58*, Brussels: Ph. Vandermaelen, 1827, 2212386, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/vr1w26>; Sidney Hall, *Van Diemen's Land*, London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1828, 4224037, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/9t88y6>; Daniel Lizars, *Australia*, Edinburgh: John Hamilton, 1831, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/0emn95>.