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GEORGE VANCOUVER AND THE CONTEMPLATED SETTLEMENT AT NOOTKA SOUND¹

George Vancouver (1757-1798) has been justly celebrated for the exhaustive and authoritative survey he undertook during 1792-1794 of the North West Coast of America, that is, of the intricate coasts and offshore islands of present day Washington, British Columbia and Alaska. This he and his ship's company achieved overcoming the great privations attendant on operating in a severe climate far beyond the support of friendly ports, and for him personally in deteriorating health from the disease that caused his untimely death less than three years after the completion of his voyage. It should also be acknowledged that Vancouver carried out his survey oppressed by the apprehension that he might be thought to have been blameworthy for failing in the other task he had been assigned, that of receiving back from the Spanish commander at Nootka Sound land and property that had been confiscated from English fur traders in July 1789 and of establishing a formal British presence there to support and promote the fur trade. Proposals to establish a British colony on the North West Coast had been discussed in commercial and official circles in the 1780s, encouraged by the success of the project to colonize Botany Bay and Norfolk Island. During the war crisis with Spain that resulted from the arrest of the English fur traders at Nootka Sound, plans were made for a small party of convicts and marines to be sent from New South Wales to make a subsidiary settlement on the North West Coast: one of the ships to be used for this task was to have been the *Discovery*, which Vancouver afterwards commanded during his expedition.

This article argues that Vancouver departed England in April 1791 believing that the object of his expedition was to accept from the Spanish commander at Nootka Sound restitution of the port and associated territory and to make preparations for founding a British colony there that, at least initially, would have had a close connection with the New South Wales colony. He was also instructed to undertake a hydrographic survey of the region to be colonized and attempt to find a seaway leading from it to the North Atlantic: the long-sought North West Passage. A change to a more conciliatory British policy toward Spain after he left England—a result of new challenges arising from the revolution in France—which was not communicated to him, left him in an embarrassing situation in his negotiations with the Spanish commander at Nootka. The quiet abandonment of plans for colonization and Vancouver's embarrassment at Nootka subsequently led to some misinterpretation of his achievement and of British imperial thinking at the time.

Henry Roberts and a voyage to the South Atlantic

George Vancouver joined the *Discovery* in January 1790. The London press had announced on 6 October 1789 that, 'Another voyage to the South Seas, under the patronage of his Majesty, is projected....the object of the voyage is, to explore certain situations which

Endnotes:

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference, *What's new to say about Captain George Vancouver*, Victoria, British Columbia, April 2006. The author gratefully acknowledges the encouragement and advice of Barry M. Gough, who organized the conference, and Andrew C.F. David, the guest of honour. The assistance of the archives and libraries mentioned in the notes, and of their staffs, is also gratefully acknowledged, and also the National Library of Australia for the use of the facilities of its Petherick Reading Room.

are not sufficiently known in those seas'.² *The English Chronicle* for 17 December 1789 reported under the headline, 'Voyage, on Discoveries, to the South Seas':

Sir Joseph Banks, on Saturday last, paid a visit to a new ship, now equipping in Deptford yard, for a voyage on discoveries. This vessel will be particularly laid out for the reception of plants, and such curious productions as may be collected in the course of the voyage, to complete the King's botanical arrangements at Kew. Sir Joseph Banks assisted, by Royal Command, in giving his advice to the Officers of Deptford yard, for the necessary equipments of the ship. Mr. Menzies, a gentleman of skill in botany, will, under the auspices of his Majesty, proceed in this vessel, to make search after, and collect such plants, as are strangers to the Kew Greenhouse. The vessel in question is to be named the *Discovery*, and will be commanded by Mr. Roberts, an officer of great merit, who formerly sailed with Captain Cooke; and, in consequence, he will receive promotion.

Captain Henry Roberts, a veteran of James Cook's second and third voyages, was appointed commander of the *Discovery* sloop on 7 December 1789 to undertake the projected survey and came on board the ship on 1 January 1790. The voyage of the *Discovery* was originally a response to the growing requirement of British whalers for safe harbours in the South Atlantic. The British whale fishery in the South Atlantic, the Southern Whale Fishery, had developed after the end of the American War of Independence in 1783, and especially after May-June 1786, when the English East India Company and the South Seas Company gave permission to them to conduct their activities beyond the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn. The ports and coasts of Spanish America were closed to the whalers, and any attempt to use even the bays of remote Patagonia could lead to clashes with the Spanish. Responding to the pleas of the whalers and sealers and to the ongoing need to find an alternative to the Dutch East India Company's Cape Town as a secure port of call on the route to India, in June 1789 the decision was made to send a ship to explore the waters of the South Atlantic and south west coast of Africa.

The General Evening Post of 22 December 1789 reported that the *Discovery* had been 'built for the express purpose of sailing round the world, and will proceed on her voyage about March next'. George Vancouver and Richard Hergest joined the ship on 6 January as Roberts's first and second lieutenants. It was reported in the *London Morning Post* of 31 December 1789 that 'The *Discovery* sloop, preparing at Deptford for a voyage to the South-Seas, is so far advanced upon, that in about ten days she will be ready to be commissioned'. A report in *The Times* of 4 March 1790 said: 'The *Discovery*, Captain Roberts, will take the route observed by Captain Cook, in his last voyage, so fatal to the celebrated circumnavigator, to clear up certain points, as yet not exactly ascertained, relative to the South Sea Islands'.

The Nootka Sound Crisis and a strategic role for Port Jackson

Plans for a South Atlantic survey were thrown awry by news of the Spanish seizure of three fur trading ships under the command of James Colnett at Nootka Sound on the North West Coast of America in July 1789. This was succinctly described in a letter dated 23 July

2. *The London Chronicle* and *London Evening Post*, 6 October, *The St. James's Chronicle* and *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 7 October, *The General Evening Post*, 8 October, and *The Oracle*, 9 October 1789.

1789 from an officer of the American fur trading ship present at Nootka, the *Columbia*, and published in Boston newspapers in March of the following year:

the Spaniards have taken possession of this sound and erected a fort of 16 guns—they have also here two ships and are determined to take all English vessels that may arrive here—They have already captured three, viz. a snow commanded by Capt. Colletet, a sloop by Capt. Hudson, and a schooner by Capt. Funter all belonging to one company.³

Upon receiving an account of the Spanish seizure of the *Argonaut* and her consorts, the *Princess Royal* and the *Northwest America*, Colnett's employer Richard Etches wrote to Sir Joseph Banks on 6 May 1790, saying:

I am favour'd by my brother with an Account of the arrival of Captain Meares from Canton, who brings official Accounts of the seizure of all our Ships, Craft and the whole of the Establishment on the NW Coast by a Spanish Admiral, what pretensions they can have to such a Act, I am as yet a stranger—except it is that monstrous, and absur'd, claim which they set up in the last Century "An exclusive right to the Navigation, Territories and Commerce of that quarter of the Globe" — When the Spanish Admiral arriv'd—we had founded the principles of a permanent, and regular System of Commerce, on a wide and extensive Scale, there was every prospect of our accomplishing of the long wish'd for object, the Opening an intercourse with the Japanese Islands for the Sale of our Furs, and American produce—the certainty of Establishing a very Valuable fishery was evident—and equally so of it proving a Store of Commercial Wealth to the English Nation—I cannot doubt but that England will claim her just rights, and the limits and boundaries of the two nations will be properly adjusted—and that the Valuable discoveries of Adml. Drake &ca will not be pass'd over.⁴

In notifying the British Government on 10 February 1790 of the seizure of Colnett's ships, the Spanish Ambassador in London, Bernardo del Campo, claimed Spanish prior discovery of Nootka by expeditions led by Juan Pérez in 1774 and by Bruno de Hezeta in 1775, and its occupation by Esteban José Martínez (who arrested Colnett) in 1789.⁵ Home Secretary William Grenville sought the advice of Sir Joseph Banks on the authenticity of the Spanish claim. Banks argued in a letter dated 15 February 1790 to Home Office Under-Secretary, Evan Nepean, that the Spanish had not landed at Nootka in 1775 and that the 'grand ceremony' by which they then took possession of another port seemed to show that 'they did not then consider themselves as entitled to the Whole Coast'.⁶ The way was

3. *The Herald of Freedom*, 9 March 1790; also in *The American Mercury*, 15 March and *The Daily Advertiser*, 19 March 1790.

4. Etches to Banks, 6 May 1790, (Kew), Herbarium Library, *Banks Correspondence*, Vol. 2, no.11; quoted in David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science & Empire, 1780-1801*, Wellington (NZ), Victoria UP, 1985, p.93.

5. Campo to Leeds, 10 February 1790, cited in V.T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire*, Vol.2, London, Longmans, 1964, p.445; and cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, p.89; also cited in Alan Frost, 'Nootka Sound and the Beginnings of Britain's Imperialism of Free Trade', Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnson, (eds.) *Maps to Metaphors: The Pacific World of George Vancouver*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1993, p.108.

6. Banks to Nepean, 15 February 1790, cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, p.87; also cited in Frost, *Maps to Metaphors*, 1993, p.111.

therefore open to found a settlement that would sustain the right of British traders to operate on the North West Coast, establish the rule of English law, prevent the consolidation of Spanish rule there and put Britain in an advantageous position to benefit from a possible discovery of a sea passage to the North Atlantic. The Spanish seizure of Colnett's vessels at Nootka had demonstrated that the fur traders were unable to form a settlement by their own efforts unsupported by government, although they had been attempting to do so since the first trading ships had been sent out from England by Etches' company in September 1785 under Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon. Dixon, together with the hydrographer Alexander Dalrymple, had in July 1789 urged the need to send a ship around Cape Horn to make a settlement on the North West Coast to ensure that its trade would not be lost to Britain and to prevent the Russians, Americans or Spanish from establishing themselves there.⁷ As was afterwards explained, the Government, 'thought it advisable to take every possible Precaution, to prevent a Repetition of this extraordinary Conduct by the Spaniards, and to maintain the undoubted Right of This Country to an undisturbed Possession of such Parts of the North-West Coast of America, as had been originally settled or visited, for the Purposes of Trade, by the English'.⁸ Under the direction of Lord Mulgrave, the Pitt administration's naval strategist, Home Office Under-Secretary Evan Nepean drafted a letter to the Admiralty in early February 1790, outlining the Government's response to the events at Nootka Sound, saying 'His Majesty has judged it highly expedient that measures should instantly be taken for affording protection to such of His.... Subjects as may have already proceeded to that part of the American Continent'.⁹

The expedition to found a settlement on the North West Coast as first sketched out by Mulgrave and Nepean would make use of the two year old settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales. It was natural for them to think of the colony in connection with supporting the North West Coast fur trade, as the 'Proposal for establishing a Settlement in New South Wales', which had been drawn up under the guidance of Sir Joseph Banks by James Matra in August 1783 and used by Nepean and Lord Sydney as the basis for the Government's decision in August 1786 to form the colony, said: 'our situation in New South Wales would enable us to carry on this Trade, with the utmost facility'.¹⁰ The idea had subsequently been put forward in November 1786 as part of the explanation for the decision to found the colony. *The General Evening Post* of 16 November 1786 printed a paragraph from the semi-official *Historical Narrative of the Discovery of New Holland and New South Wales*:

7. Dixon to Nepean, 14 July 1789, National Archives, (Kew), CO 42/72, f.2431; and at Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Q series, vol.49, p.354, printed in *Report on Canadian Archives 1889*, Ottawa, 1890, p. 29; cited in Barry M. Gough, "The Northwest Coast in Late 18th Century British Expansion", in Thomas Vaughan (ed.), *The Western Shore*, Portland, Oregon Historical Society and American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Oregon, 1975, pp.48-80, p.67; and unsigned memorandum to Nepean on the need to make a settlement on the North West Coast, September 1789, cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, pp.84, 117.

8. *A Narrative of the Negotiations occasioned by the Dispute between England and Spain, in the Year 1790*, London, 1791, p.14.

9. Nepean, 'Sketch of a Letter to the Admiralty' (with emendations by Mulgrave), undated but early February 1790, National Archives (Kew), HO 28/7, ff.48-56; cited in Alan Frost, *Convicts & Empire: A Naval Question, 1776-1811*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1980, pp.155, 221; also cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, pp.88-9.

10. National Archives (Kew), CO 201/1, ff.57-61; British Library Add. MS 47568, ff.240-6; photoduplicated in Jonathan King, *'In the Beginning...' The Story of the Creation of Australia, From the Original Writings*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1985, pp.12-20.

The importance of Botany-bay will appear by all who examine Capt. Cook's chart of his discoveries...Its situation is well adapted for carrying on a trade between Nootka-Sound and Cook's River, on the American coast, and the Islands of Japan and the Chinese Empire, in sea-otter skins; as also to perfect the discoveries made in that part of the globe, a matter which the late Captain King had much at heart.¹¹

As, in Nepean's words, 'the utmost degree of secrecy' was required, the 44-gun frigate *Gorgon*, which was already preparing to take the newly formed New South Wales Corps and stores to Port Jackson, would be employed on the service. Aware that the two well armed men-o-war of the expedition led by Alexandro Malaspina were already in the Pacific, Foreign Secretary the Duke of Leeds had requested the British embassy in Madrid on 2 February 1790, as soon as he had heard of the incident at Nootka, to discover the size and force of 'the Ships which sailed a few months ago for California under the command of M. Melaspina', and whether any other Spanish ships had sailed for the North West Coast.¹² Malaspina for his part was quite ready to employ his ships in offensive operations against the British in the Pacific if need be, as he told the Viceroy the Conde de Revillagigado when he reached Mexico.¹³ In view of the formidable Spanish naval force the *Gorgon* might encounter in the Pacific, the *Discovery* (10 guns) would be assigned to accompany her. As it was public knowledge that the *Discovery* was readying for a voyage of exploration, her departure would 'not be likely to create a suspicion of the intended operation'. It was possible that upon the arrival of the *Gorgon* and *Discovery* at Cape Town they might meet the frigate *Vestal* which had been sent to India in August 1789. If so, the *Vestal* would accompany the *Gorgon* to the North West Coast while the *Discovery* would carry out her original task of performing a survey in the South Atlantic. If the *Vestal* was not met with, *Gorgon* and *Discovery* were to proceed to Port Jackson. There, the *Gorgon*, having sailed from England *en flute* (with only her upper deck guns mounted) would have her lower deck guns re-mounted, ready for action. If HMS *Sirius*, the 26-gun frigate stationed at Port Jackson, was available, she could accompany the *Gorgon* to Nootka. The ships' crews could be replenished at Port Jackson and the Governor of the colony, Arthur Phillip, would provide a party of Marines from the detachment stationed there. As it was intended that the expedition should form a permanent settlement on the North West Coast, Governor Phillip would also provide workers with the requisite skills. It was estimated that *Gorgon* and her partner would be ready to depart Port Jackson in September 1790, whence they would sail to Tahiti for refreshment before proceeding to the North West Coast in time to arrive in the spring of 1791. There, the commander of the expedition could ascertain the facts surrounding the seizure of the British trading vessels, and if any Spanish ships were encountered that had 'been engaged in Hostile proceedings' they might be captured, 'His Majesty being determined to support his right to a free and uninterrupted intercourse, which, from prior discovery and other circumstances may well be justified'.¹⁴

11. *General Evening Post*, 16 November 1786; *An Historical Narrative of the Discovery of New Holland and New South Wales*, London, November 1786 p.53. Captain King was James King who had assumed command of James Cook's *Resolution* after Cook's death in Hawaii and who subsequently wrote the official account of the expedition, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, London, 1784.

12. Leeds to Merry, 2 February 1790, cited in Frost, *Maps to Metaphors*, 1993, p.109; *A Narrative of the Negotiations occasioned by the Dispute between England and Spain, in the Year 1790*, London, 1791, pp.8-9.

13. Revillagigado to Malaspina, 19 January 1791, Museo Naval (Madrid), ms.280, ff.9-11v; cited in Virginia González Claverán, *La Expedición Científica de Malaspina en Nueva España, 1789-1794*, México DF, El Colegio de México, 1988, p.96.

14. Nepean, 'Sketch of a Letter to the Admiralty', February 1790, National Archives (Kew), HO 28/7, ff.48-56; cited in Frost, *Convicts and Empire*, pp.155, 221; also cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, pp.88-9.

This plan was considered at a cabinet meeting on 23 February 1790, following which it was revised.¹⁵ As it was now known that the *Vestal* had already left Cape Town for India, the *Discovery* was definitely to accompany the *Gorgon*. From Port Jackson, these two ships were to proceed to Hawaii instead of Tahiti, where they would rendezvous with a frigate detached from the East India squadron. From Hawaii all three would proceed in May 1791 under the command of the frigate captain to the American coast.¹⁶ For this operation, Commodore Sir William Cornwallis, commanding on the East India station, was placed under the orders of the Home Secretary (as was usual for such secret operations), and instructions on this were drafted to be sent to him and to Phillip.¹⁷ Secret instructions were also drafted for Henry Roberts, which were not to be opened until *Discovery* had sailed. They announced the postponement of *Discovery's* originally designed service and that she would be 'employed on a particular Service in a more distant part of the world'. Roberts was 'to make the best of your way to Port Jackson on the Coast of New South Wales, and on your arrival there deliver the inclosed Packet to Governor Arthur Phillip', under whose orders he was then to proceed.¹⁸

Plans for a convict settlement at Nootka Sound

Instructions were drawn up for Governor Phillip to supply a detachment of Marines under 'a discreet Subaltern Officer' and convict workers—thirty persons altogether, with stores—to an expedition whose object would be to form a settlement on the North West Coast, which would 'lay the foundation of an establishment for the assistance of His Majesty's subjects in the prosecution of the Fur trade from the North West Coast of America'.¹⁹ The party of settlers should include 'two or three of the most intelligent of the Overseers who have lately been sent out, a Storekeeper, and any other persons who may be desirous of accompanying them; together with a few of the most deserving of the Convicts, to whom you may offer a remission of a part of their Service as an inducement to go'. As the North West Coast of America was not one of those places specifically nominated in Orders-in-Council issued under the Transportation Act of 1784 as a place to which convicts could be sent, Phillip needed to be given authorization to be able to provide this detachment. The Transportation Act authorized the sending of convicted felons to any place appointed by the King in Council. When Botany Bay and Norfolk Island were chosen in 1786 as destinations, a series of Orders-in-Council were issued, starting on 6 December 1786, specifying the eastern coast of New South Wales or some adjacent island or islands as the places under the Transportation Act where the sentences were to be served. This authorized the settlement of Norfolk Island in 1788. An act of Parliament passed in May 1790 enabled Phillip to send people to the North West Coast. This was the *Act for enabling his Majesty to authorise his governor or lieutenant governor of such places beyond the*

Vestal left the Cape for India on 17 November 1789, arriving there on 3 January 1790, as was reported in *The Madras Courier* of 9 January and the *Calcutta Chronicle* of 4 February 1790: the Government presumably had learned of her departure by ships coming from Cape Town.

15. Leeds to Pitt, 23 February 1790, cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, p.89; also cited in Frost, *Maps to Metaphors*, 1993, p.109.

16. 'Heads of Instructions', February 1790, cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, p.89.

17. 25 February 1790 and March 1790, cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, p.89.

18. March 1790, National Archives (Kew), HO 28/61, f.249; cited in W. Kaye Lamb (ed.), *The Voyage of George Vancouver, 1791-1795*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1984, Vol.1, p.23; also cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, p.89; and in Frost, *Maps to Metaphors*, 1993, p.107.

19. Nepean to Phillip, March 1790 (draft), National Archives (Kew), CO 201/1, ff.19-24; photoduplicated in Jonathan King, *'In the Beginning...'*, pp.235-240. Also at National Archives (Kew), CO 210/5, f.50.

seas, to which felons or other offenders may be transported, to remit the sentences of such offenders. The new act was referred to in *The Gazetteer* of 8 May 1790:

By the bill passed into law this Session, the Settlement of Botany Bay may be made useful in case of a rupture. The Governor is empowered to remit the remaining term of the sentence of such persons as shall behave well. Under this Act he may therefore embark a number of them on board King's ships, and make them act as soldiers on any adventure.²⁰

The decision to use convicts to form a permanent, national settlement on the North West Coast was a turnaround in government policy. The London whaler and fur trader (and employer of Dixon, Portlock and Colnett), Richard Cadman Etches, had pleaded in vain for such an establishment in 1788 in correspondence with Sir Joseph Banks. He pointed out that his and his associates' original view in 1785 was to establish two small trading factories, but that when Portlock and Dixon arrived on the coast, 'their *Powers* of Government were not competent to the task—nor cou'd they form any Establishment with a certainty of it ever being prosperous, because they had not *Powers* to form any real government for the regulating the People, consequently all wou'd soon have been Anarchy and Confusion'. Etches urged on Banks the advantages of the Government transporting a sufficient number of convicts to form one or two settlements, to be assigned to the fur traders under the overall supervision of a lieutenant of the Navy in command of his own man-o-war who would also 'make a *regular survey* of the whole of the Coast, and Islands from King Georges Sound to Cook's River'.²¹ It is interesting to note the similarity between this proposal and the plans for a settlement and survey drafted in 1790.

The instructions drafted on 31 March 1790 for the captain of the frigate that was to be sent from India by Commodore Cornwallis observed that Malaspina's expedition had been sent 'for the purpose of...exploring the Coast contiguous to Nootka Sound', where the Spanish had established themselves. The intended British settlement should therefore be further North, at Fitzhugh Sound or Queen Charlotte Sound (which George Dixon had recommended for a settlement in October 1789 during the preparations for the voyage of the *Discovery* under Henry Roberts²²). From the rendezvous at Hawaii, the ships were to proceed to Queen Charlotte Sound in the vicinity of 51° North where it was believed there was 'a considerable River or navigable inlet into the interior Country'. If this was found to exist, the settlers were to be landed with their arms, stores and provisions. The ships were then to 'examine the whole of the Coast Northward from the Latitude of 51 degrees, to Cook's River, which is in the Latitude of 60 degrees, and South from the Latitude of 49 degrees, to Cape Mendocino in the Latitude of 40 degrees, carefully examining such Rivers or inlets within the said limits, as you shall judge likely to afford a communication with the interior part of the Continent'. It was pointed out that the *Discovery* had been 'fitted, stored and appointed for the purpose of executing Nautical Surveys', and that she was 'commanded by an officer peculiarly qualified for such an undertaking'. If this survey found a more eligible port, the settlers might be relocated there (as Arthur Phillip had relocated the New South Wales settlement from the originally designated Botany Bay to Port Jackson). In these proceedings, he was to maintain friendly relations with the native people and negotiate

20. 30 *Geo.III* 47, in *Historical Records of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1893, Vol.I, Part 2, pp.67-68.

21. Etches to Banks, 17 and 20 July 1788, quoted in F.W. Howay, 'Four Letters from Richard Cadman Etches to Sir Joseph Banks, 1788-92', *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol.6, no.2, April 1942, pp.125-39.

22. Dixon to Sir Joseph Banks, 20 October 1789, quoted in Richard H. Dillon, "Letters of Captain George Dixon in the Banks Collection", *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol.XIV, no.3, 1950, pp.167-171.

the grant or purchase of the land needed for the settlement with any who appeared to hold sovereignty. The *Gorgon* was to be sent back to Port Jackson at the end of the summer of 1791 and the frigate and *Discovery* were to return to Hawaii to winter, with a view to completing the survey in the summer of 1792. If any Spanish ships were met with they were not to be molested, and any harbour where the Spanish or other Europeans had settled was to be avoided, but if it was found that British ships and subjects had been seized, immediate restitution should be demanded, 'His Majesty being determined to support the right of His subjects to a free and uninterrupted intercourse with the whole of the American Coast lying to the North of the Latitude of 40 degrees, except such parts only as may be actually settled and occupied by any other European power'.²³

Lieutenant William Bligh, 'late Commander of His Majesty's Ship the *Bounty*', having arrived in London on 14 March 1790 to report 'a Mutiny having taken place on that Vessel', the *Gorgon* was ordered to touch at Tahiti and the Friendly Islands (Tonga) on her return voyage to Port Jackson to apprehend, if possible, the *Bounty* mutineers.

In spite of the 'utmost secrecy' that was observed for the duration of the crisis regarding these plans, it was revealed in *The Times* on 15 June 1790 that, 'One of the objects of Captain Roberts, in the *Discovery*, is to ascertain a proper spot for settlement, in a temperate situation, near King George's Sound'. Following the crisis, a summary of the plans was published in 1791 in *A Narrative of the Negotiations occasioned by the Dispute between England and Spain, in the Year 1790*:

Government thought it adviseable to take every possible Precaution, to prevent a Repetition of this extraordinary Conduct by the Spaniards, and to maintain the undoubted Right of This Country to an undisturbed Possession of such Parts of the North-West Coast of America, as had been originally settled or visited, for the Purposes of Trade, by the English. With this View, Orders were sent, on the 31st of March, to...Commodore Cornwallis in the East Indies, directing [him] to dispatch a Frigate to the Sandwich Islands, (where she was to be met by the *Gorgon* and *Discovery*, ordered to rendezvous there, after calling at Port Jackson in New South Wales) for the above Purpose, with an Injunction to forbear from Hostilities; but, at the same Time, to maintain the British Rights by Force, should it be found necessary. These Orders were recalled on the 30th of April, when the General Preparations for Arming commenced.²⁴

Departure of the ships was delayed by an outbreak of infectious sickness on *Gorgon* in early March. However, *The Public Advertiser* of 2 April 1790 reported:

The *Discovery*, Capt. Roberts, will sail on her voyage to the South Seas about the month of June. This ship will be unusually well appointed. There will be three Lieutenants, the first of whom [Vancouver] was two voyages with Capt. Cook...The infectious disease on board the *Gorgon*, at Portsmouth, is checked, and without any ravages elsewhere.

23. Grenville to Cornwallis, 31 March 1790, National Archives (Kew), HO 28/61, ff.273-290v; cited in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.1, p.24; also cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, p.90; and in Frost, *Maps to Metaphors*, 1993, p.115.

24. *A Narrative of the Negotiations*, 1791, p.14.

The General Evening Post of 22 April 1790 reported that, “The ship called the Discovery, which is going out, by order of Government, on discoveries in the South Seas, &c. Is under sailing orders, and will proceed on her voyage in the course of the next week.” The same edition of the newspaper announced the arrival from China of “Capt. John Mears” on the *Ganges*. Meares claimed that Colnett had been directed by him ‘to erect a substantial house on the spot purchased by [him, Meares] in the preceding year’, and that Colnett’s ships had carried a party of Chinese artisans and labourers, ‘who intended to become settlers in the country, under the protection of the associated company’. He accused Martinez of taking possession ‘of the lands which [he] had purchased and built a temporary habitation upon, *pulling down the British Flag and hoisting the standard of Spain* thereon’.²⁵ Accepting Meares’s claim, the British Government now viewed the Spanish action at Nootka as an eviction from an already established British settlement. The proposed expedition of the *Gorgon* and *Discovery* was cancelled and the Pitt Government decided to send an ultimatum to Madrid, backed by the mobilisation of the entire fleet, subsequently referred to as the Spanish Armament. Events moved toward an international crisis, threatening an outbreak of a general European war. Plans were also made for naval expeditions against Spain’s possessions in the Americas and the Philippines.²⁶ The crisis lasted until October 1790, when a convention settling the issues of Pacific navigation and settlement was signed between Great Britain and Spain.

The Spanish view of the objects of British policy in the Pacific was reported by Alleyne Fitzherbert, Ambassador to Madrid, who said in a letter dated 16 June 1790 to Foreign Secretary Leeds that at a private meeting the Prime Minister, Count Floridablanca:

gave me to understand that he considered our sending Ships to purchase Skins at Nootka as a shallow artifice calculated to cover a real design of making ourselves masters of the Trade of Mexico, that our Southern Whale Fishery covered a like design against Peru & Chili, and as to our colony at Botany-Bay that it must necessarily have been founded with a view to seconding these designs & of adding to our other conquests that of the Philippines.²⁷

Floridablanca could have drawn support for his views from any number of reports published in the English press, such as the selection drawn from *The General Advertiser* and other London newspapers of 12, 13 and 14 October 1786, based on James Matra’s proposal for a colony in New South Wales, sent to him by the Spanish Ambassador, Campo de Alange.²⁸ Floridablanca’s view was shared by the Viceroy of New Spain, the Conde de Revillagigedo, who was convinced that what motivated British policy was not so much the hoped for profits from the fur trade, as the desire that:

San Francisco be the limit of Spanish possessions, to establish from this point what would be common to each nation and freedom to fish a distance of ten leagues from our Pacific coasts. This can be seen as conspiring to encourage

25. ‘Substance of the Memorial presented by Lieut. Mears to the Rt Hon. W. Wyndham Grenville, one of His Majesty’s Principal Secretaries of State. With Explanations’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, June 1790, p.489.

26. These plans are discussed in Robert J. King, “An Australian Perspective on the English Invasions of the Rio de la Plata in 1806 and 1807”, *Sabretache* (Journal and Proceedings of Military Historical Society of Australia), vol.XLIV, no.2, June 2003, pp.37-53.

27. Fitzherbert to Leeds, 16 June 1790, British Library Add. MS 28066, ff.27-28; quoted in Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire*, Vol.2, p.634.

28. Campo to Florida Blanca, 13 October 1786, Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid, *Estado*, legajo 4250/1.

illicit trade and destroying that of New Spain and the Philippines by the clandestine introduction of goods and merchandise from Asia and Europe.²⁹

In the debate on the Convention in the House of Commons on 14 December 1790, Secretary of State Henry Dundas had assured the House that, “Nootka was admitted by Spain to be one of the points North of the northernmost settlement of the Spaniards”, and that therefore he did not believe “there was a doubt in either of the contracting parties of the right of the full restoration of Nootka, in the same state as at the time of our being dispossessed of it”. Revillagigedo could have found sufficient justification for his fears in Dundas’s speech, who said Britain had gained in the negotiation “what had for ages past been denied us”, a right of navigation in those seas, and of settlements in all parts not in absolute occupancy. “Who”, he asked, “would venture to set bounds to British enterprise, or to limit the skill and industry of British Manufacturers—a new sea was opened for them to fish in, and a new Continent to trade with. We wished not to invade the colonial rights of any country, but the spirit of the nation would admit of no exclusion from a market: Trade was the vital spirit of this country”.³⁰

George Vancouver and restitution of Nootka Sound

In accordance with the terms of the Anglo-Spanish Convention of 28 October 1790 settling the Nootka Sound dispute, George Vancouver was sent in command of the *Discovery* to accept the restoration of the buildings and land at Nootka of which Meares claimed to have been dispossessed by the Spaniards, and with the intention of founding a British settlement there, ‘It being his Majesty’s intention,’ as Nepean said, ‘that an Establishment should be formed at one of those ports or places, of which His Subjects have been dispossessed or in such other situation as shall appear to be more advantageous’.³¹ In addition, he was to carry out a general survey of the North West Coast and to attempt to settle the question of the existence of a sea passage to the North Atlantic. As *The World* of 12 January 1791 put it, he was: ‘to make an accurate survey of the North West Coast of America, and, if possible, explore the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and the Western Sea, which extends to the East, and no doubt has a communication with Lake Superior, Long River, &c. or with Hudson’s Bay, by means of Wager Straits, or Nelson’s River’. *The Times* of 6 January 1791 reported: ‘Yesterday Lieutenant G. Vancouver had the honour to kiss the King’s hand at the Levee, on his being appointed to the command of his Majesty’s ship the *Discovery*, of 10 guns, in the room of Captain Roberts’. The London press reported in mid-January 1791:

The *Discovery*, Capt. Vancouver, who sailed with Capt. Cook, and particularly distinguished himself as an Astronomer, has fallen down the river to take in

29. Revillagigedo to Floridablanca, 1 September 1791, Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City), Correspondencia de los Virreyes, vol.164, no.44; quoted in Freeman M. Tovell, ‘The Other Side of the Coin: the Viceroy, Bodega y Quadra, Vancouver, and the Nootka Crisis’, *BC Studies*, no.93, 1992, pp.3-29, p.9.

30. *The Dublin Chronicle*, 28 December 1790, p. 827.

31. Nepean to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 28 December 1790, National Archives (Kew), HO 28/7, ff.392-9, quoted in Alan Frost, ‘Science for Political Purposes: the European Nations’ Explorations of the Pacific Ocean, 1764-1806’, Juan Carlos Luna *et al.*, *Spanish Pacific: from Magellan to Malaspina*, Madrid, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Lunewerg Editores, 1988, pp.89-105; and in Roy MacLeod and Philip F. Rehbock, (eds.) *Nature in its Greatest Extent: Western Science in the Pacific*, Acts of the 17th. International Congress on the History of Sciences, University of California, Berkeley, 1985, Vol.VII, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1988, pp.27-44; also cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 1985, pp.96, 119.

her guns. She is destined to make a survey of the North-west Coast of America; for which purpose Capt. Vancouver (who has chosen his own officers) has Mr. Whidbey for his master, who is esteemed one of the most able Marine Surveyors in the Navy. This ship was to have gone some time ago on this voyage of discovery, under the command of Capt. Roberts, but from the fate of the *Guardian* and *Bounty*, Ministers are aware of the impolicy of sending a single ship on so distant and long an expedition. Now two ships are to be sent, if not three, of which Capt. Roberts is to be Commodore, and by this means, Mr. Vancouver, who was Lieutenant to Capt. Roberts, has got the rank of Master and Commander, and the Midshipmen of the *Discovery* are made Lieutenants. Capt. Roberts will follow the *Discovery* in a few weeks.³²

This was corrected in an article in *The Star* of 12 January 1791, which said that, ‘Captain Roberts, we understand, is also to sail; not as Commodore of the little squadron, but on a different destination from that of Captain Vancouver’. It was initially intended that Henry Roberts would be given another vessel to undertake the South Atlantic survey in 1791, but this did not happen.³³ In the context of worsening relations with Russia and Sweden, he was sent in early 1791 in a task force to the Baltic to survey the entrances to it in case a British fleet needed to be sent there. *The Times* of 13 May 1791 reported:

Captain Roberts, the Gentleman who was appointed to go on a voyage of discovery, is one of the officers sent on this examination [of the entrance to the Baltic], and his experience on a business of this nature must prove very valuable to his country.

The *Times*’s reference was to the fact that during the crisis with Spain of the previous year, Roberts had been sent with a fellow naval captain to Sweden to check on the Swedish fleet, in case that country should combine with Spain against Britain.³⁴ Instead of Roberts, James Colnett was sent to undertake a voyage in 1793-1794 in command of the *Rattler* to survey islands and whaling grounds in the South Atlantic and southeastern Pacific.³⁵

Discovery was accompanied by the *Chatham* under the command of William Broughton, and supported by the chartered storeship *Daedalus* sent out later in August 1791. The London press reported that, ‘The *Discovery* and *Chatham* are destined for Nootka Sound, prior to any attempt at discoveries. These vessels, it is intended, shall form a settlement at Nootka, in conformity to the Articles of Convention concluded upon with the Court of Madrid’.³⁶ A report in *The Times* of 14 January 1791 said:

Capt. Vancouver will in a few weeks sail in the ship, though not altogether on a voyage of, *Discovery*...The immediate object of this gentleman’s voyage is,

32. *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Star*, 10 January, *The Public Advertiser*, 11 January, *The Times*, 12 January, *The Gazetteer*, 13 January 1791; *The Calcutta Gazette*, 28 July 1791.

33. Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, pp.43-45, 54-5, 84, 117).

34. Orders to Lawford and Roberts, 15 August 1790, cited in Frost, *Maps to Metaphors*, 1993, p.117.

35. ‘A Voyage for Whaling and Discovery Round C. Horn into the Pacific Oceans made under Protection of the Rt. Hon. Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, Performed in the Merchant Ship *Rattler* by J. Colnett, Lieut. in the R.N., 1793 and 1794’, British Library Add. MS 30,369.

36. *The General Evening Post*, *The St. James’s Chronicle* and *The Whitehall Evening Post*, 3 March, *The Star*, 5 March, *E. Johnson’s British Gazette*, 6 March, *The Diary*, 7 March 1791 ; re-published in *The Mail* (Pennsylvania), 4 June 1791; *The Connecticut Gazette*, 9 June 1791; *The City Gazette* (Charleston, SC), 21 June 1791.

to establish a settlement on the North West Coast of America, as far to the Southward as the late treaty with Spain will admit of.³⁷

The owner of the *Daedalus*, Alexander Davison, anticipated the growth of a thriving trade following the re-establishment of a British presence at Nootka: he wrote to the East India Company's supercargo at Canton that he had instructed the ship's master, Thomas New, when he reached Nootka 'to purchase as many Skins as he possibly can' and after arriving at Port Jackson to consign them by another ship or take them himself in the *Daedalus* to Canton for sale by the supercargo. 'I expect this business may become an object of much consideration and benefit, and as it may be successful or otherwise, the more or less shall I be disposed to extend it', wrote Davison. He mentioned that he had also written to Governor Phillip upon the subject.³⁸

A vision of New Georgia

The master of the *Discovery*, Joseph Whidbey, indicated his understanding that a settlement was to be made on the North West Coast in a letter he wrote from Monterey on 2 January 1793, when he wrote: 'I am informed Botany Bay 'as not answered its expectations—the Convicts who have served their time of punishment and instead of returning to England to become a fresh prey on the Public, to be sent to this Country and settled at the Head of Fuca Straights'.³⁹ Whidbey presumably reflected his commander's understanding of the British intention to colonize the region, and this view seems to have been shared by the expedition's botanist, Archibald Menzies, who wrote to Sir Joseph Banks from Monterey, 'the sooner settlements are established there [at the North end of Queen Charlotte's Isles] and at Nootka to put this Trade [the fur trade] under some regulations, the greater will be the advantages that may be expected from it'.⁴⁰

Vancouver sailed from the Cornish port of Falmouth on 1 April 1791 with the expectation of receiving from the Spanish at Nootka Sound title to "the whole of the lands, harbours, &c. contained in, or surrounding Nootka Sound, with a port sixteen leagues to the Southward, called Port Cox, or Clioquet" and of forming a settlement to sustain the fur traders.⁴¹ In anticipation of this, prior to arriving at Nootka he had while at Admiralty Inlet (the entrance to Puget Sound) on 4 June 1792, the King's Birthday, taken formal possession near Possession Point at the southern end of Whidbey Island of all the coast and hinterland contiguous to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, including Puget Sound, under the name of New Georgia.⁴² The new territory was described by Menzies as 'a delightful level country chiefly covered with Pine forests and abounding here and there with clear spots of considerable extent, forming excellent pastures favourable for new settlements'.⁴³ Menzies had been instructed by Banks to pay particular attention to the climate, soil, and natural products, in case it should at "any time hereafter be deemed expedient to send out Settlers

37. Also in *The London Chronicle*, 15 January 1791 and *The State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 21 June 1793.

38. Alexander Davison to Thomas Parry, 1 August 1791, British Library Additional Manuscript 79200, f.33; cited in Martyn Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, London, Bantam, 2004, p.80.

39. Joseph Whidbey, letter of 2 January 1793 at Monterey, quoted in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.4, p.1637.

40. Menzies to Banks, Monterey, 1 and 14 January 1793; quoted in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.4, p.1620.

41. *The Daily Advertiser* (New York), 28 September 1793.

42. Lamb, *Vancouver*, p.569. See also Tovell, 'The Other Side of the Coin', 1992, p.19. The name New Georgia had already been put on the charts by John Shortland, who in command of four ships of the First Fleet on their return voyage from Port Jackson in August 1788, had applied it to an island in the Solomons archipelago.

43. Menzies to Banks, Monterey, 1 and 14 January 1793, quoted in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.4, p.1619.

from England”.⁴⁴ Vancouver seems to have taken possession of New Georgia confident that the written instructions he expected to receive from London by the *Daedalus* would authorize him to do so, as this had been the tenor of discussions public and private prior to his departure. Those instructions, presumably, would also set out in detail what measures he was to take in making Nootka into a permanent British settlement, who was to be its governor, and so on. He apparently thought he would be ordered to send the *Daedalus* to Port Jackson after she had unloaded her stores and supplies for the Nootka settlement, where she would take on board a company of time-expired or pardoned convicts to form the initial population of the new settlement, in a manner similar to that set out in the plans drafted in March 1790 for a settlement and survey of the North West Coast. In the meantime, Broughton was to remain in command at Nootka with the *Chatham*.⁴⁵ The American fur trader, Joseph Ingraham, was present at the time, and recorded in his journal: ‘We understood it [the *Daedalus*] was next bound to Botany Bay for convicts to settle the place’.⁴⁶ Ingraham presumably gained this understanding from conversation with Vancouver’s officers and crew, if not from Vancouver himself. A letter written by one of the officers of the *Chatham*, sent from Monterey on 9 January 1793 and published in the *Morning Herald* and *St. James’s Chronicle* on 20 July, described what took place:

When our demand for the cession of Nootka Sound was first made to the Spanish Governor, Don Quadra, he appeared to have no intention of refusing, but desired that he might remain in the command and possession of the place, till the vessels for transporting himself and his garison [sic] could be prepared for sea.—One of the houses was then cleared, and the greatest part of the stores, brought over in the *Daedalus* transport, were lodged in it, till they could be deposited in the store houses, which the Spaniards were to evacuate. For about three weeks, letters passed almost daily between Capt. Vancouver and the Spanish Governor; at the end of which it was understood that the latter agreed to leave the place, but would not surrender the claim of himself, or of any officers, impowered by the court of Spain, to return when they pleased. Capt. Vancouver would not receive the place, upon the terms of admitting any such claim, and said, that should the Spanish Governor persist in making it, he would reload the stores already landed, and return. In a few days afterwards, the *Daedalus* took her cargo on board. On our arrival in California the Spaniards offered to send any intelligence home by way of Mexico, and this has prevented the voyage of the *Chatham* home. Lieut. Broughton is appointed to make the journey across this continent.⁴⁷

The Spanish commander at Nootka when Vancouver arrived there in August 1792, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, was able to argue persuasively that the land in question amounted to what Vancouver described later as ‘a small chasm in the rocky shores of the spacious Port of Nootka; which chasm not a hundred yards wide in extent in any one direction being the exact space which the house and brestwork of Mr. Mears

44. Banks to Menzies, 22 February 1791, quoted in Glyndwr Williams, “George Vancouver, the Admiralty and Exploration”, in Stephen Haycox, James K. Barnett and Caedmon A. Ligurd, (eds.) *Enlightenment and Exploration in the North Pacific, 1741-1805*, Seattle & London, University of Washington Press, 1997, pp.38-48, p.44.

45. Lamb, *Vancouver*, p.669.

46. Joseph Ingraham, *Joseph Ingraham's Journal of the Brigantine Hope on a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America*, Mark D. Kaplanoff (ed.), Barre (Massachusetts), Imprint Society, 1971, pp.232, 242.

47. *Morning Herald* and *St. James’s Chronicle*, 20 July 1793; re-published in *The Daily Advertiser*, (United States) 26 September 1793.

occupied'.⁴⁸ Bodega had established good relations with the local Mowachaht people and, with the assurance of their goodwill, was able to point to the first article of the Anglo-Spanish convention of 28 October 1790, which simply said that: 'the Buildings and Tracts of Land, situated on the North West Coast of the continent of *North America* or on Islands adjacent to that Continent, of which the Subjects of his *Britannick Majesty* were dispossessed....shall be restored to the said British Subjects'. Fortified with the support of the Mowachaht chief, Maquinna, he took this to refer only to the shed or house John Meares had temporarily erected on the beachfront at Meares Cove in Nootka Sound.⁴⁹ This strict interpretation of the terms of the convention was in accordance with the instructions he had been given by the Viceroy of New Spain, which advised that although Spain must surrender the site of Meares's camp on the north side of Friendly Cove, there was no obligation to give up the Spanish settlement and coast to the south of it.⁵⁰ Astonished and baffled at this narrow interpretation of the Convention and of Bodega's instructions, which was so contrary to what his own instructions referred to as the 'buildings or tracts of Land on the N.W. Coast of America', Vancouver later expressed his frustration in a letter he wrote from Monterey to Evan Nepean: 'Can this chasm possibly be considered the districts and parcels of land intended to be ceded to me on the part of His Britannic Majesty?' Had he accepted 'that small pittance of rock and sandy beach', he said to Nepean, 'there can be little doubt I should either [have] proved myself a most consummate fool or a traitor to have acceded to any such cession without positive directions to that effect'.⁵¹

Daedalus was re-loaded and sent to Port Jackson, and Vancouver and Bodega referred back to their respective governments for clarification of the action to be taken regarding restoration of the site to the British. Aware that he might be accused of failing in his mission, Vancouver set out his understanding of his Government's intentions regarding Nootka in the 'Narrative of My Proceedings in His Majesty's Sloop Discovery' he wrote out there on 26 September 1792:

considering the principal object His Majesty had in view in directing the undertaking of this Expedition was for facilitating and requiring commercial advantages, and at one view seeing the importance of this station, situated in the very centre of the commerce of N.W. America....and the nature and quantity of articles of traffic and other stores sent out in the *Daedalus*, from the Secretary of State's Office, together with such conversation as I had formerly been present at in that office, induced me to believe an establishment was in contemplation shortly to take place some where on this coast, though I had not received a single line from that office on that or any other subject.⁵²

48. Vancouver to Nepean, Monterey, 7 January 1793; quoted in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.4, p.1578-81. See also Tovell, 'The Other Side of the Coin', 1992, p.23.

49. Vancouver to Bodega, 13 September 1792, George Vancouver, 'A Narrative of My Proceedings in His Majesty's Sloop Discovery', p.23; quoted in Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973, p.373.

50. Revillagigedo to Bodega, 29 October 1791, cited in Cook, p.327.

51. Vancouver to Nepean, Monterey, 7 January 1793 [original spelling]; quoted in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.4, p.1578-81; also quoted in George Godwin, *Vancouver: A Life, 1757-1798*, London, Philip Allan, 1930, pp. 219-223.

52. George Vancouver, 'A Narrative of My Proceedings in His Majesty's Sloop Discovery', *Report of the Provincial Archives of the Province of British Columbia for the Year ended 1913*, Victoria (B.C.), 1914, Appendix I, 'Papers relating to Nootka Sound and to Captain Vancouver's Expedition', p.18, quoted in Cook, pp.367, 388.

The nature of the ‘commercial advantages’ envisaged to be derived from trade to the North West Coast had been described in an article in *The Times* of 29 November 1790:

We may hope to see a very extended trade pursued to this part of the world, as Captain Meares, we understand, gave very specific instructions to the commanders of some of his vessels to open a communication from thence with the Japanese Empire, which was partly effected, and would have been carried into execution, had not the ships been captured by the Spaniards, and Mr. Meares himself obliged to return to Europe. But as such a violence to British vessels is not likely again to happen, we may still hope to see this new branch of Commerce again revived, and those who attempted it amply compensated for their past difficulties and labour.



Meares Cove, Nootka Sound, a parcel of land, ‘little more than a hundred yards in extent any way’. Photographed by the author, June 1998.

London’s new policy: no more colonies

Vancouver had not been given specific instructions on the restitution of the buildings and land at Nootka before he departed British shores in April 1791. These were not finalized until August 1791, and were sent to him on the *Daedalus*, which he met at Nootka in August 1792.⁵³ They were not precise, and the confusion created by Bodega’s refusal to hand over more than a small parcel of land a hundred yards square at Meares Cove caused Vancouver to send Lieutenant Zachary Mudge back to London on the brig *Phoenix* to report and seek clarification on the action to be taken at Nootka. The confusion went back to a change of policy between December 1790, when Nepean prepared the above-quoted first draft of Vancouver’s instructions, and the following February, when Grenville drew up a revised version. By then Grenville was most unwilling to disturb the good relations with Spain that had been reached with the convention of 28 October 1790. Britain and Spain were both alarmed at the development of the revolution in France.⁵⁴ Consequently, in the instructions Grenville drew up for Vancouver on 11 February 1791, maintenance of good relations with the Spanish in the areas he was to visit was given priority, and no mention was made of a British settlement to be made on the coast or of assistance to fur traders.

53. Instructions dated 11 February 1791, ADM 1/4156: 14 and HO 28/8, ff.17-24 and HO 28/61, ff.394, National Archives (Kew); cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, pp.99, 119.

54. Tovell, ‘The Other Side of the Coin’, 1992, p.14.

Grenville's negligence in omitting to advise Vancouver of the revised policy on settlement of the North West Coast left him in what he described as 'a very embarrassed situation' in his negotiations with Bodega. The instructions on the restitution of the land and property at Nootka sent to him later in the *Daedalus* storeship simply referred, in the words of the Convention, to the restitution of the 'Buildings and Tracts of Land...of which the Subjects of his *Britannick Majesty* were dispossessed'.⁵⁵ Prior to leaving England Richard Hergest, who had been appointed the Naval Agent on *Daedalus*, had been instructed to deliver to Vancouver a copy of Floridablanca's instructions for the Spanish commander at Nootka 'relative to the Restitutions, and to put himself under his direction for the execution of this Service, in order that Capt. Vancouver may be impeded as little as possible in the progress of his intended Survey'.⁵⁶ However, no guidance was given to Vancouver on what action he should take once the land and buildings at Nootka had been turned over to him, as he complained to Nepean: 'In what manner should I act, whether to contriving some mode of retaining them or evacuating them....I was left totally in the dark in what measures to pursue'.⁵⁷

Grenville became Foreign Secretary in April 1791, handing over the Home Office to Henry Dundas. In his new office, Grenville's views on the inadvisability of making settlements in the Pacific which he knew would give offence to Spain strengthened. When he saw in the draft instructions drawn up by the Admiralty for the *Rattler* voyage that Colnett was to take possession of several of the islands he was to survey and leave men upon them, he warned Lord Hawkesbury, who had succeeded Dundas as Home Secretary, that the formation of a settlement 'would in fact necessarily form such a depot for smuggling with Peru as must drive Spain into a War the first moment she finds it possible'.⁵⁸ Hawkesbury consented that no islands should be claimed in the South Seas. Perhaps recalling Floridablanca's outburst to Fitzherbert, Grenville had learned from the Nootka dispute that Spain would take offence at any attempt to make settlements on the western coasts of North or South America and, as Foreign Secretary aware of the imminent likelihood of war with revolutionary France, he was most anxious to avoid any action that would 'raise useless Jealousy', as he put it, on the part of Spain.

Lieutenant Mudge arrived back in England from Nootka (by way of Canton, where he took passage on the East Indiaman, *Lord Macartney*) with Vancouver's despatches in mid-June 1793⁵⁹, followed a month later (by way of Mexico, Cuba and Spain) by Broughton with additional information. Underlining the evaporation of official interest in a permanent settlement, Dundas lamented that Vancouver had not accepted the small parcel of land offered to him by Bodega, saying that while national honour demanded a restitution, 'the *Extent* of that Restitution is not of much moment'.⁶⁰ All very well to say when all Vancouver had for guidance was a copy of the letter from Floridablanca to Bodega instructing him to hand over 'the Buildings and Districts or parcels of Land' which

55. Instructions dated 10 August 1791, cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, pp.107, 119.

56. Dundas to Admiralty, 6 July 1791, Adm 1/4156, no.50, National Archives, (Kew), quoted in Williams, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, pp.43, 48. Hergest never reached Nootka: he was killed by natives on 11 May 1792 while *Daedalus* was taking on water at Oahu.

57. Vancouver to Nepean, Monterey, 7 January 1793 [original spelling]; quoted in Lamb, Vol.4, *Vancouver*, pp.1578-81.

58. Grenville to Hawkesbury, 23 November 1792, ADM 1/4156, National Archives (Kew); cited in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, pp.50, 56.

59. *The London Chronicle* and *The Sun*, 11 June, *The True Briton*, 12 June 1793.

60. Dundas to Grenville, June 1793, quoted in Cook, p.411; in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.1, pp.108-9; and in Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, p.111.

had been occupied by British subjects in April 1789 at Nootka and at Port Cox fifty miles to the south of Nootka! As Vancouver said in his letter to Nepean of 7 January 1793 from Monterey, such a description led him to expect a much more extensive territory than the 'chasm' in the rocks of Friendly Cove that was all Bodega offered to him. 'You my good Sir may easily figure to yourself the disappointment I experienced', he complained to Nepean at not receiving the promised additional instructions by the *Daedalus*.

When Mudge and Broughton arrived back in England, preparations were being made for a company of Marines to be sent to Nootka in anticipation of the place having been handed over to Vancouver as expected.⁶¹ As a result of the news they brought back of the impasse reached by Vancouver and Bodega in their negotiations, further discussions took place in Madrid between Spain and Britain, the outcome being agreement on a convention which was signed in Madrid on 11 January 1794 with effect that both powers should abandon Nootka for ever. Thomas Pearce, a lieutenant of the Royal Marines (who had been on HMS *Providence* under William Bligh during the 1791-1793 voyage to Tahiti), was sent to Nootka in a Spanish ship, and his report on the actions carried out there in fulfilment of the terms of the convention was published in *The European Magazine* for October 1795:

I proceeded from Monterey to Nootka, in company with Brigadier-General Alava, the Officer appointed on the part of the Court of Spain, for finally terminating the negotiations relative to that Port; where, having satisfied myself respecting the state of the country, at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, preparations were immediately made for dismantling the Fort, which the Spaniards had erected on an Island that guarded the Mouth of the Harbour, and embarking the Ordnance. By the morning of the 28th [of March 1795], all the Artillery were embarked; part on board of His Catholic Majesty's Sloop of War Activo, and part on board the San Carlos Guard Ship. Brigadier-General Alava and myself then met, agreeably to our respective instructions, on the place where formerly the British building stood, where we signed and exchanged the Declaration and Counter-Declaration for restoring those lands to his Majesty, as agreed upon by the two Courts. After which ceremony, I ordered the British Flag to be hoisted in token of possession, and the General gave directions for the troops to embark.

George Vancouver at Nootka

Vancouver's mortification that one of the main aims of the expedition, namely to receive back the territory seized by the Spanish at Nootka and establish a new British settlement there, had not been achieved, caused him to write a letter of exculpation from Monterey to Nepean which, he emphasized, was not for 'communication' unless 'my conduct shall fall under Sensure'.⁶² This failure also influenced the way he and his brother, John, afterwards wrote up his account of the voyage to minimize in hindsight the importance of this aim. Readers taking his published account of the voyage as an indication of his thinking during it could therefore be misled as to the initial aims of his expedition.

61. Grenville to Dundas, 10 June 1793, National Archives (Kew), CO 5/187, f.50; cited in Barry Gough, Introduction to Andrew David (ed.), *William Robert Broughton's Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific, 1795-1798*, London, Hakluyt Society, Third Series, Vol.22, 2010, p.xxv.

62. Vancouver to Nepean, Monterey, 7 January 1793; quoted in Lamb, *Vancouver*, Vol.4, pp.1578-81.

The period during which Vancouver's expedition was conceived and undertaken was one where government priorities changed rapidly but, once he had left the shores of England he was practically out of communication and unable to keep abreast of the changes. He was not the only one to be kept in the dark: as late as April 1793, Meares and Etches petitioned Dundas to be allowed under the East India Company's revised charter to send three ships annually to trade between the North West Coast and China, in the expectation that 'they now have it in contemplation to Retake Possession of their said Lands and Territories pursuant to the first Article of the Convention, and thereby, to renew this Commerce, which at the time of its interruption offered to your Petitioners and the Public the most advantageous Prospect'.⁶³ Vancouver arrived at Nootka, which he described as 'the general rendezvouse of the Vessels of all nations employed in their mercantile pursuits on that Coast', with the expectation of receiving from the Spanish commander there, Bodega, title to 'the whole and in toto the Lands and territories' appertaining to Nootka and Port Cox as he expressed it to Nepean and of making it into a British colony to sustain the fur traders. This amounted to what has been described as 'a substantial claim to British sovereignty on the Northwest Coast, from San Francisco northward at least as far as Nootka'.⁶⁴ This was certainly what Bodega came to understand to be Vancouver's intention during his negotiations with him. 'England,' he wrote to Revillagigedo, 'not only aspires to special dominion and right to trade but also to sovereignty which Vancouver claims to be founded on Article I of the Convention'.⁶⁵

The founding of a colony in New South Wales had been seen by some as a first step toward making a settlement on the North West Coast that would support and promote trade with China and Japan, but by the time Vancouver arrived at Nootka attitudes in official circles had grown unfavourable to new colonies. The colony in New South Wales had taken much longer to consolidate and been much more expensive than had been promised when the decision to found it had been taken in 1786, and there were calls in Parliament for it to be abandoned.⁶⁶ The subsidiary settlement of Norfolk Island was already proving to be an expensive failure and a consensus was forming that it should be abandoned, as it was progressively between 1807 and 1814.⁶⁷ The Spanish government had made clear their opposition to any British settlements on the West coasts of North or South America or on the adjacent islands, and Spain's attitude was to be respected in the context of the confrontation developing with revolutionary France. The outbreak of war with France in February 1793 caused the Pacific Ocean to be relegated to a low place in the scale of government priorities. War also had an adverse effect on British ability to

63. John Meares and Richard Cadman Etches to Secretary of State Henry Dundas, April 1793, British Library, India Office Records and Archives, *Miscellaneous Letters Received*, vol.89, no.165; also at British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria, GR-0333.

64. Freeman M. Tovell, *At the Far Reaches of Empire: The Life of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra*, Vancouver, U. British Columbia Pr., 2008, p.265.

65. Bodega to Revillagigedo, 24 October 1792, Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City), Historia, Vol.20, AT, no.408; quoted in Tovell, 'The Other Side of the Coin', 1992, p.19.

66. The New South Wales colony was under sustained attack in the House of Commons on the grounds that it was an expensive as well as an unjust response to the problem of overcrowded prisons in Britain. The attack was led by Sir Charles Bunbury, former Chairman of the Select Committee on the Transportation of Felons, assisted by the penal theorist Jeremy Bentham, who pressed his alternative of the "panopticon" penitentiary. The House of Commons debated the matter on 9 and 21 February 1791, and 15 February and 4 May 1792; see Parliamentary proceedings reported in *The Whitehall Evening Post*, 10 and 22 February 1791, *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 20 February 1792 and *The Public Advertiser*, 5 May 1792.

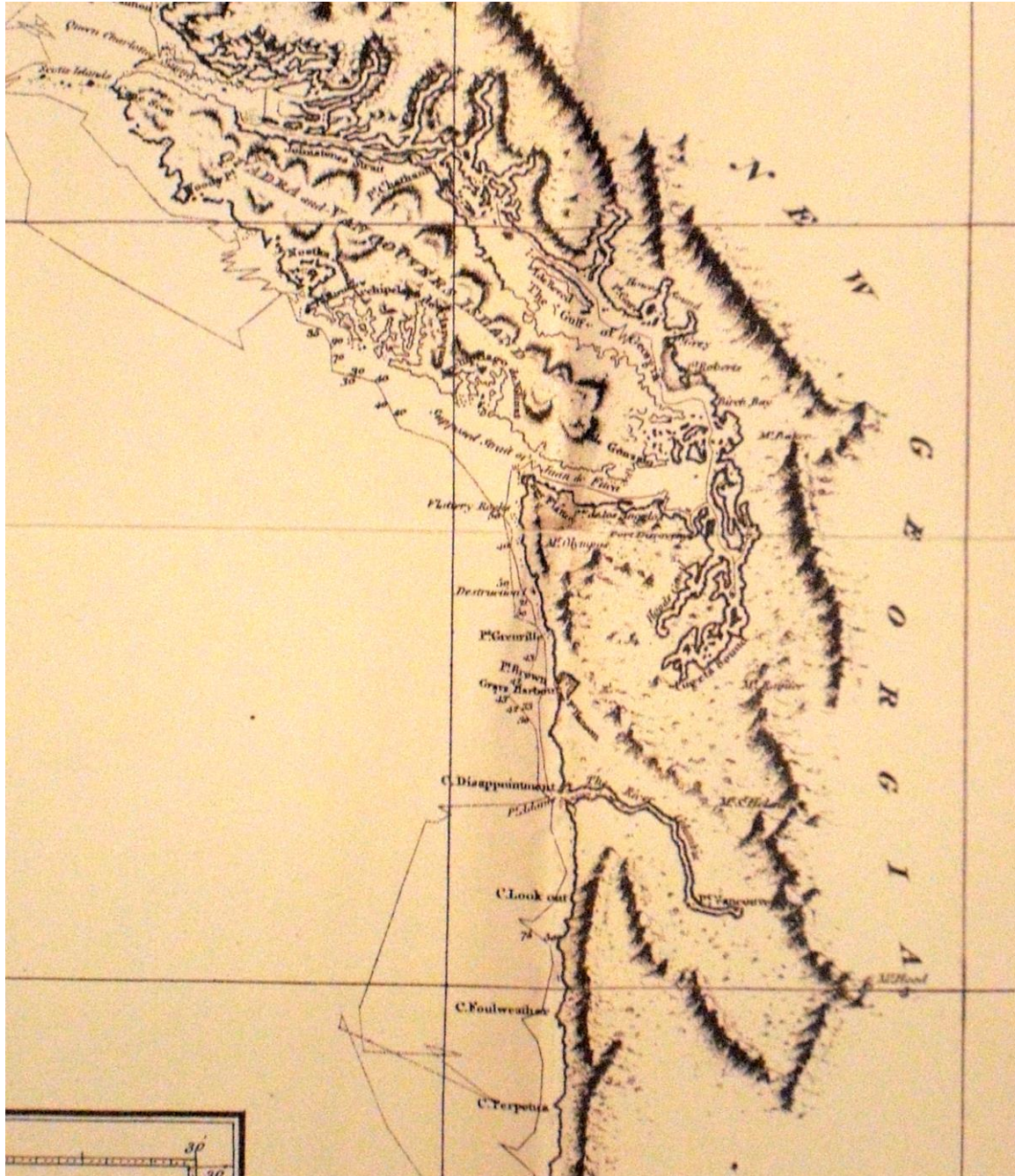
67. Robert J. King, 'Norfolk Island: Phantasy and Reality, 1770-1814', *The Great Circle*, vol.25, no.2, 2003, pp.20-41.

participate in the maritime fur trade, to which the Japanese market also remained closed.⁶⁸ Finally, Vancouver's meticulous survey established that there was no navigable North West Passage. The 'commercial advantages', which he understood to be 'the principal object His Majesty had in view in directing the undertaking of this Expedition', could not therefore be realized. His vision of a new British colony of New Georgia with its seat at Nootka Sound, which he seems to have beheld in his mind's eye when he took possession of the region on the King's Birthday 1792, remained a fantasy, his act of possession an empty gesture with no more substance than Francis Drake's proclamation of Nova Albion in 1578. New Georgia faded from the map, leaving only the Strait of Georgia as its ghost. In this context, as Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnson wrote in 1993, 'Both Vancouver and his published account, *A Voyage of Discovery*, failed to receive the attention they deserved in the years following his return to Britain'.⁶⁹ In the course of time the value of his cartography was recognized when in 1846 his charts were used in defining the border between British and United States territory in the Pacific North West,⁷⁰ although the crown colony that was established in 1858 was called 'British Columbia' (from the Columbia River) rather than 'New Georgia'.

68. Robert J. King, 'A regular and reciprocal System of Commerce' — Botany Bay, Nootka Sound, and the isles of Japan', *The Great Circle*, vol.19, no.1, 1997, pp.1-29

69. Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnson, (eds.) *Maps to Metaphors: The Pacific World of George Vancouver*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1993, p.11.

70. Andrew David, 'From Cook to Vancouver: The British Contribution to the Cartography of Alaska', in *Enlightenment and Exploration in the North Pacific*, pp.116-131, p.129.



Vancouver's *New Georgia*
Edward Roberts, *Coast of N.W. America... by George Vancouver*, London, Stockdale, 1795.

Appendix: Article from the *Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant*, 18 July 1793

There is news from Captain Vancouver, who is on a voyage of discovery with two Ships in the still unknown parts of the North West Coast of North America, to whom our Ministry sent orders on a storeship to take back from the Spaniards, in accordance with the Spanish Convention, the lands and territories around Nootka Sound from which the British subjects were expelled in 1789. Captain Vancouver, having received these orders, arrived in Nootka last August and had, in fulfillment of this Convention, demanded in the name of His Britannic Majesty the full possession of the lands etc. named in and around Nootka Sound and another Harbour sixteen miles farther south.

But the Spanish Governor, regulating his conduct by the first Article of the Convention, to which his secret orders perfectly corresponded, said that his duty did not allow him to surrender the ownership and possession of a land to Great Britain, which the Letter of the Treaty did not give him authority to do. As the Articles of the Convention did not exactly specify the place or places of which the British subjects had been deprived, it was necessary for him to take account of the most accurate information as to what they possessed. This had turned out to be a piece of land, 100 Rods square, in a small Bay on which a hut had stood, which he was inclined to return.

Various letters were exchanged about this, and Captain Vancouver was at odds with the spirit of the Convention and, faced with his orders, refused to hoist the British Flag on that piece of land. He would leave at the end of September for a South Sea island, to spend the winter there. Among the passages that he has followed on these coasts has been the Strait of Fuca, which he sailed into at 47 degrees North Latitude and returned to the open sea at 51 degrees 20 minutes.