

Arrowsmith's Australian Maps

John Arrowsmith was an eminent British cartographer who produced the most up-to-date, state-of-the-art maps, mostly in the first half of nineteenth century. He joined his uncle Aaron Arrowsmith's mapmaking business in 1810 as a 20 year old and eventually took over in 1834. The maps he then produced cemented his reputation, being noted for their accuracy and careful execution.

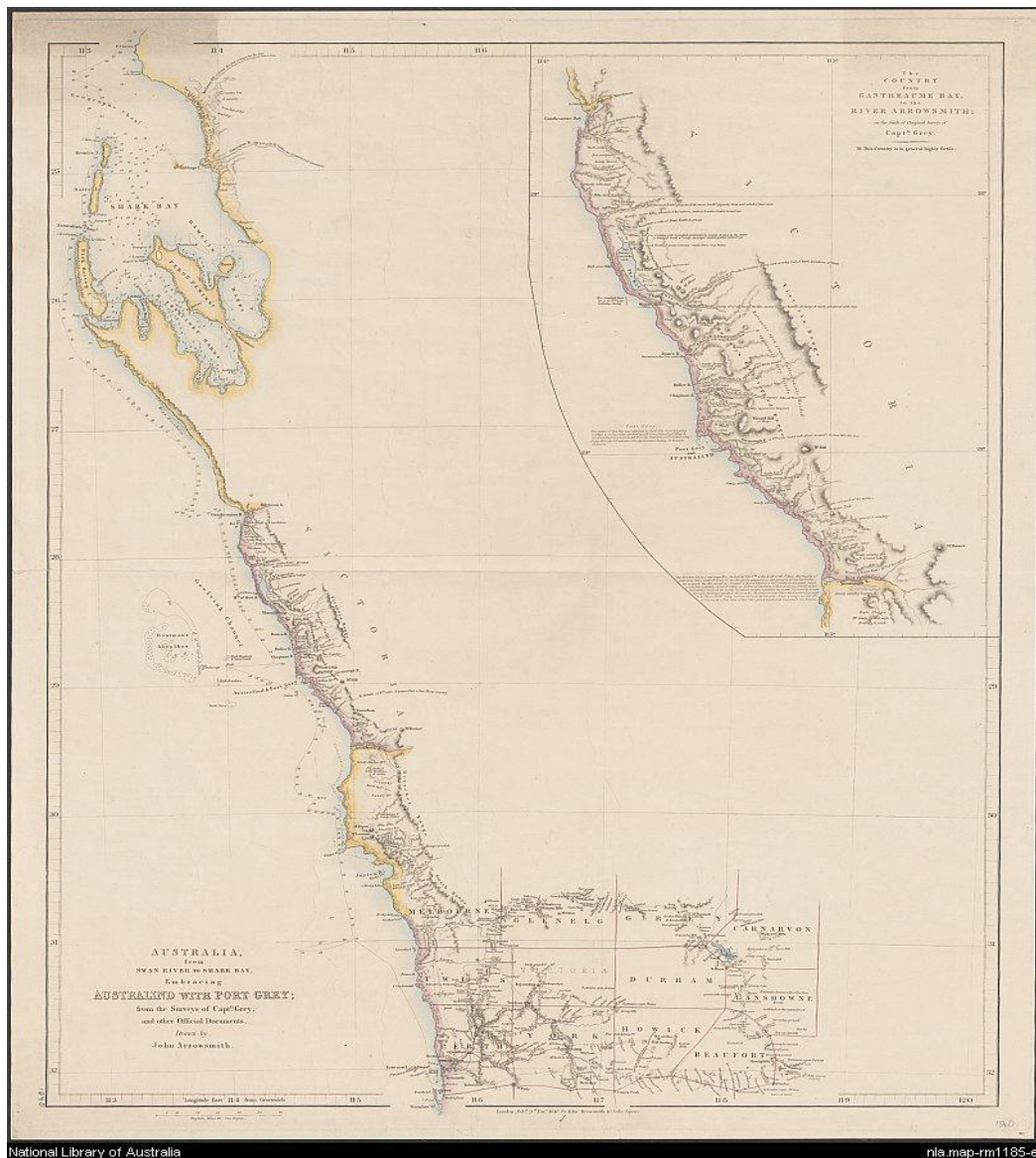


John Arrowsmith

He is remembered in twelve Australian placenames, ten of which are found in Western Australia, such as Lake Arrowsmith and the Arrowsmith River. The Arrowsmith River, a grand name for what is really just a creek, is situated in the central west coast region of Western Australia and is perhaps one of the more unusual watercourses in Australia, it disappears into the sand before it reaches the sea.

Recently Dorothy Prescott AOM, as her latest contribution in her distinguished career as a historical cartographer, created a website dedicated to Arrowsmith's maps of Australia. These were published in successive editions of Arrowsmith's *London Atlas* between 1834 and 1858 and are now all accessible by following the link to the website: <http://www.asmp.esrc.unimelb.edu.au/>. This beautifully crafted website does justice to Arrowsmith's maps, as well as making them highly accessible through links to digital versions held in the collections of various institutions around the world, from the Bodleian Library in Oxford to the National Library of Australia. It is well researched and has a wealth of detail providing highly relevant historical context for the man and his maps.

One of my favourite Arrowsmith maps is "Australia, From Swan River to Shark Bay", published in 1840. It incorporated the latest cartographic information and is the first map to show the Murchison River. It also has an unusual inset in the top right corner, "The Country from Gantheaume Bay to the River Arrowsmith", that bears witness to the amazing story of survival of a small expedition led by Lt. (later Sir) George Grey, who went on to become Governor of South Australia, New Zealand and the Cape Colony at various times.



Arrowsmith's "Australia, From Swan River to Shark Bay" (1840)
 (National Library of Australia: RM 1185)

<http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/cdview/?pi=nla.map-rm1185-v>

Grey had been charged in February 1839 with exploring and charting the coast between North West Cape and the fledgling colony at Swan River, now Perth. They were hit by a cyclone at Shark Bay and it was decided to abandon the expedition and return to Swan River. At Gantheaume Bay, near the mouth of the Murchison River, their two remaining boats were swamped. It was then decided to walk back to Swan River, a distance of 500 kilometres. They had little food or water and experienced great privation, but Grey still managed to keep a detailed journal and mapped their route, although not always accurately. He mistook Hutt Lagoon, a coastal salt lake, for an estuary into which the Hutt River flowed, for example.



Part of "The Country from Gantheaume Bay to the River Arrowsmith"

Some of the ethnographic observations he recorded in his journal, of extensive yam fields and large villages occupied by the local Nhandu people for example, find their way on to the map, such as "Warran (native Yam) ground of the natives ..." in the portion above.

Through resolute leadership by Grey, and with the assistance of their Nyoongar guide Kaiber, they managed to reach the British settlement after a month, with the loss of only one man.

Rupert Gerritsen