

# The Freycinet Map of 1811



## Proceedings of the Symposium Commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Publication of the First Map of Australia



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200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Publication of the  
First Map of Australia**



*Louis de Freycinet*  
(1779 – 1841)

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## Preface

The Freycinet map was published in Paris in 1811, and was the first map to be published which showed the full outline of Australia as such, preceding Matthew Flinders' map '*Terra Australis or Australia*' by three years. The Freycinet map was the product of centuries of the charting of Australia's coasts by Dutch, English and French navigators, yet few Australians are aware of its existence, or its significance.

The Australia on the Map Division is the history and heritage arm of its parent organisation, the Australasian Hydrographic Society. By highlighting Australia's hydrographic history and heritage, particularly its early history and heritage, the Australia on the Map Division seeks to educate the broader community on the role hydrography in all its forms has played in the life of our nation. This education is undertaken in a variety of ways, such as raising awareness of significant milestones and anniversaries in Australian maritime history, exploration, contact and cartography. Consequently, with 2011 marking the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of what is known as the Freycinet map, the Australia on the Map Division launched a number of initiatives to promote this landmark.

In considering what would be the most effective and appropriate means of promoting the Freycinet map, the members of the Australia on the Map Division formed the view that a lecture series or similar event should form the centrepiece of the commemorations. Deliberations continued for some months, with vital input from Dr Wolf Mayer, who had previously collaborated with the Australia on the Map Division's predecessor (Australia on the Map: 1606 – 2006) in promoting greater recognition of the French contribution to Australia's early history and cartography. Finally it was agreed to hold a symposium to mark the occasion, one that would endeavour to attract a range of well-informed, erudite and interesting speakers who could engage with a wider audience.

Following consultations and negotiations the National Library of Australia agreed to host the event, and the French Embassy to participate and provide some financial support. Once the form and feasibility of the symposium was established, consideration was then given to potential presenters. We were indeed fortunate that such eminent French studies scholars as Professor Margaret Sankey, Professor Jean Fornasiero and Associate Professor John West-Sooby readily agreed to participate. In addition, Dr Mayer willingly offered to share his encyclopaedic knowledge of the scientific activities and achievements of the Baudin expedition, and Greg Eccleston to expound upon the French contribution to the charting of Bass Strait. Other speakers included Peter Reynders and Rupert Gerritsen, who specifically addressed the question of the *bona fides* of the Freycinet map as the first full map of Australia.

One further speaker, Henry de Freycinet, provided a very personal connection with the Freycinet map. Henry is the last male descendant of Louis and Henri de Freycinet, both members of the Baudin expedition. He was brought from France as our guest and gave a presentation on the history of this eminent French family.

As Henry was to be in Australia for the symposium, consideration was then given to the possibility of further events and activities that could take advantage of the history that he personified. A number of options were canvassed and investigated, and we were most fortunate that the Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce, graciously agreed to receive Henry on 16 June and be presented with a copy of the original Freycinet map, signed by Henry.



Henry de Freycinet Presenting Signed Copy of the Freycinet Map of 1811 to Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce, Governor-General of Australia – 16 June 2011

Also in attendance were the Patron of the Australasian Hydrographic Society, Vice Admiral Ritchie, the Ambassador of France, M. Michel Filhol, the Director-General of the National Library of Australia, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, as well as the Chair of the Australia on the Map Division, Rupert Gerritsen, and the Secretary, Peter Reynders.

The symposium took place as scheduled at the National Library on 19 June, the date being determined by its proximity to World Hydrography Day (21 June). It attracted some local and national media attention and approximately 160 people, including a number of distinguished guests, attended in the course of the day. The National Library also arranged a special exhibition of maps, atlases, documents and pictures in the Maps Room.

The symposium commenced with the ‘Opening Address’, given by Counsellor Pierre Labbe of the French Embassy. Vice Admiral Ritchie then spoke on the significance of the symposium and the Freycinet map in relation to World Hydrography Day. He also presented leading maritime historian Miriam Estensen with the Australasian Hydrographic Society’s Literary and Media Achievement Award. Following these formalities, Professor Sankey opened the symposium proceedings with the keynote address. During the subsequent lunch break the participants were invited to view the exhibition, which proved to be very popular. After lunch the other speakers then gave their presentations and the symposium concluded with a plenary session.

As stated earlier, the original intention of the symposium, along with the promotion of other events around the nation, had been to raise awareness of the Freycinet map, and its importance in terms of Australian history and cartography. We trust that the symposium and other promotional activities have ensured that those with a personal, professional or academic interest in the mapping of Australia’s shores are now far more cognisant of the map and its significance.

Specifically the symposium presenters endeavoured to place the Freycinet map in its proper historical context, by documenting the history of French exploration and charting of Australia, culminating in the Baudin expedition. That expedition produced many charts of outstanding quality, not just the Freycinet map, as well as a comprehensive account of the voyage, its

explorations and its scientific discoveries. In the process of preparing and publishing the official journal, illustrated volumes and atlases, Péron and de Freycinet were clearly documenting not only the expedition's achievements, but also formulating a narrative enticing French pride in those achievements. When teased apart, however, the underlying personal agendas, alliances and antagonisms engendered in the voyage, still the subject of much debate, were clearly evident, slanting the resultant works.

Another recurring theme in relation to the iconic map was its intersection with other dimensions of history, strategic, professional and personal. It was born from an expedition that was following a great tradition in scientific exploration, but a tradition that was often also an expression of the competing national ambitions of two powers, Britain and France. Perhaps more remarkably, at times it sailed when those two countries were actually at war. The ongoing controversy over the nomenclature of the expedition's maps, whereby the priority of Flinders and other navigators' claims to their discoveries was ignored, also raises a raft of questions regarding motivation, ethics and professional rivalries, to which a number of presenters alluded. This is not as arcane as some might imagine, it could be argued it set a precedent for similar such debates in modern times over contested discoveries in other fields. And finally, to the personal. The Freycinet map was drawn by a man, his name is forever associated with it. In this Henry de Freycinet drew us back to him, closing the circle so to speak, putting the flesh and blood on an ordinary but remarkable human being, one who produced a map of which all Australians should be proud.

### **Acknowledgements**

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**The full digital version can be accessed online on the Australia on the Map website, at: [www.australiaonthemap.org.au](http://www.australiaonthemap.org.au) [Historical Information > The Freycinet Map of 1811]**