



Book Review

J.C.H. Gill, *The Missing Coast — Queensland Takes Shape*. Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1988.

The Sunday magazines are fond of speculating on early discoveries of Australia, sometimes on the flimsiest of evidence. An Egyptian coin found in a ploughed field, and Aboriginal paintings having an alleged Egyptian style, are cited as “proof” of early Egyptian visits to Australia. Or else an old Portuguese chart may be fancied to resemble the Queensland coast, “proving” that the Portuguese knew all about the Whitsunday Passage and Fraser Island. What credence should we give to these speculations?

Connal Gill’s book *The Missing Coast* helps to answer this question as far as the Queensland coast is concerned. He has assembled and researched the documentary evidence of early discoverers and explorers on this coast, ranging from Torres in 1606 to the renowned Cook and Flinders and their followers, and the marine surveyors such as Wickham and Stokes who meticulously completed the charting of our capes and bays.

Gill tells their stories in a lively and informative way. His book is soundly based on facts; he discusses cautiously the speculations of others, but tries to avoid wild speculation of his own. As he states in his Introduction, “I have sought to avoid intuitive leaps and to keep to the facts with properly reference sources.” He has done for Queensland history what Samuel Eliot Morison did for the history of the Americas in his two-volume work *The European Discovery of America*, published in 1971 and 1974.

No Egyptians are known to have reached our shores in ancient times, but the possibility that the Portuguese reached Australia during their imperial expansion is fully considered. In the chapter entitled “Did the Portuguese find Australia?” Gill notes that one of the first to speculate on this was Matthew Flinders. Gill traces the debate that continued through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, culminating in some ingenious guesswork as recently as 1984, but he wisely decides to remain agnostic on this issue.

The book is a useful source of information on the origin of place names in the Pacific. Papua was named by the Portuguese in 1526, while New Guinea was named by the Spaniards. The Solomon Islands were named by the Spaniards about 1586.

Opinion is divided on whether the French-born Torres actually sighted the coastline of mainland Queensland as he passed through

the Torres Straits in 1606. Nevertheless he seems to have been the first European navigator to sail in Queensland waters.

Be that as it may, in that same year the Dutchman Jansz, of the United East India Company, charted the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. The name Coen (now a well-known weather station) dates from that period; Coen was the Governor-General of Batavia at that time. Other voyages by the Dutch followed, culminating in Tasman's chart of the Gulf in 1644. It is interesting to reflect that during these events North America was being settled by Europeans, but the Gulf of Carpentaria did not attract settlers; the explorers reported that it seemed unproductive, and the natives were hostile.

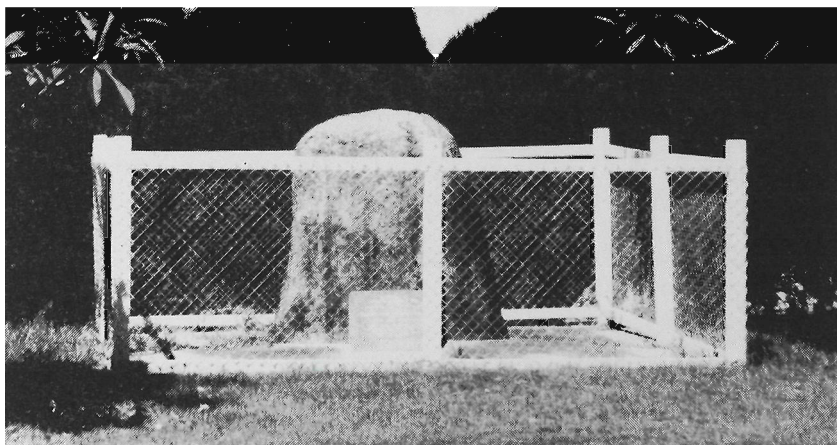
Many found the Captain Cook exhibition at Expo 88 an awesome experience. Three chapters of *The Missing Coast*, covering the Cook saga, brought back the Expo experience to this reviewer.

The second half of Connal Gill's book tells of the navigators who filled the gaps, such as Bligh at Cape York and Flinders in the Coral Sea. It concludes with the discoveries that opened up coastal Queensland to settlement and trade.

Excellent features of the book are the well-presented charts that illustrate each voyage, and the imaginative drawings that enhance the text; these bear witness to splendid cooperation between the author and the staff of the Queensland Museum.

This book is a must for history buffs, and a good read for a holiday on the coast.

J.G. Steele, January 1990.



The Bancroft Memorial at Captain Cook Parade, Deception Bay erection to the memory of Joseph and Thomas Lane Bancroft; much of their research and experimental work was done in this neighbourhood.