

Slide #1 Drawing Australia, from Hughes to Eyre: recording and the question of accuracy

INTRODUCTION

During the Tahiti - New Zealand leg of Cook's first expedition, Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander are sitting in a shared cabin writing their journals and discussing the detritus they had fished from the ocean that day, standing back from the conversation for a few moments Banks wrote "I wish that our friends in England could by the assistance of some magical spying glass take a peep at our situation"

In saying this Banks didn't only anticipate live broadcast and satellite TV but perhaps more important acknowledged the limitations of pen and ink and his

"journalizing" as he called it, to reliably capture the volume of significant events that surrounded him each day.

Beyond volume Bank's must have also had concerns over his ability to adequately describe his discoveries. Would his journal be read as an embellishment of the fact, possibly even fiction?

Both questions I suspect must have concerned him and another explorer of his time.

With these thoughts in mind it seems reasonable to (in the first instance at least) assume that the drawings and notebooks of those involved in discovery are usually made with the best intentions.

JOHN WEBBER: ARTIST COOK'S 3rd EXPEDITION

To set the scene I have chosen four drawings by the artist John Webber, each is concerned in one way or another with the exotic, exploration, travel and the business of trying to make accurate records.

John Webber RA the son of a Swiss sculptor [i]was born in London in 1752. He first studied art in Bern then Paris then finally London at the Royal Academy Schools. At the age of 24 he exhibited a portrait of an artist (identity unknown) at the Royal Academy which so impressed the botanist Daniel Solander that he arranged for Webber to be appointed as the official draftsman on James Cook's third voyage of discovery. During the four years the expedition lasted Webber made our first three images:

Slide #2. King Penguin, John Webber, made some time between 1776-1780 in watercolor, over graphite of a King Penguin from Collection: Sir Joseph Banks now British Library.

The first A King Penguin most probably drawn from life (or a dead specimen) in the Southern Atlantic is typical of drawings made by any reasonably well trained artists of his day. It's a clean straight forward drawing that is a success because it looks just like a king penguin.

Slide #3. Portrait of a New Zealander, ca. 1777 / John Webber, drawing - 44 x 32 cm. Unsigned and undated Titled from pencil note on reverse in an unknown hand, Call no.DL Pe 214 Mitchell and Dixson NSW

The second which is to my mind a more sophisticated drawing , is certainly drawn from a living person in pen and ink. The drawing sets out to provide an accurate record of the facial appearance of a tattooed man and I suspect does just that.

At first sight the drawing appears to use a convention from the draftsman's shorthand , that of drawing only half of what seems to be symmetrical , reckoning the rest can be filled in later. Webber however, according to DR Simmons is not using an abbreviation he is recording what he sees - a partial tattoo[ii].

Partial tattoos are not common, Maori facial tattoos usually cover the entire face, with the right side telling a matriarchal history and the left covering the patriarchal side .

A fact that Sydney Parkinson's (1769-70 pencil drawing on the left , British Library) clearly didn't appreciate ,his first voyage sketches where he worked with the assumption that Maori facial tattoos were symmetrical, resulted in the finished drawing he made from this sketch giving the impression to anyone who could read facial tattoos that the man he drew either lived in a hall of mirrors or had two mothers.

[Slide 4 Tattooed Unangan woman of Unalaska Island, Alaska, 1778. Drawing by John Webber. Alaskan State Library](#)

The third drawing and accompanying engraving picture a woman from Alaska , with stitched facial tattoos [iii] . The drawing clearly demonstrates Webber's ability to draw from life , record detail quickly and elegantly and in short produce useful drawings that achieve their goal.

[Slide #5. Rhinoceros, undated John Webber . British Library](#)

The fourth puzzlingly bad drawing Webber describes as 'An exact figure of the Rhinoceros that is now to be seen in London'; standing facing to left, with tree trunk behind to right, " . With an excellent provenance that took it directly from Sir Joseph Bank's Collection to the British Library it seems unlikely that it's not by Webber . On the verso another inscription reads: "attack, Capn. Gordon was shot by him at the Cape of Good Hope - the size of the drawing is about one inch to a foot" which makes the animal about 14 feet long too long for a Rhino but about the right size for a Hippo , a curators notes in the British Library Catalogue reads, "Despite the description, this is a hippopotamus, not a rhinoceros" .

Now within the confines of this paper I don't intend taking this or any other of the issues raised by Webbers drawings any further , but what I hope I have done is demonstrate how a trained and practiced observer can produce images that are unintentionally misleading.

SEPTIMUS ROE: MIDSHIPMAN

For the last two hundred years at least it has been common for both artists and critics to

express a belief in the limpid honesty of drawing, it seems to me however, the “transparency” that is so admired is often better hidden in the work of practiced draftsmen especially those who choose to work with established systems of rendering.

For this reason I have focused my study of drawn records on aspirant and struggling draftsmen rather than the already accomplished.

In 2002 a paper by Felix Driver and Luciana Martins researched issues relating to quality and accuracy in the drawings of 18th and 19th Century sailors. Their paper focuses on a set of at first sight quite accomplished drawings that were made during May 1817 in the south Atlantic from the troop ship *Dick* by a twenty year old midshipman, John Septimus Roe.

Slide #6: Septimus Roe , Sugar Loaf Mountain, ships log 1817

While discussing Roe’s drawings Driver and Martins stress the importance of learning to draw not just for Roe but for every young man training to be a naval officer .

“ The art of navigation [they say] involved a variety of skills, notably sketching and mapping: to recognize and reproduce coastlines was an essential aspect of the surveyor’s task, providing a record of the ships voyage and enabling others to follow in their tracks. The costal view was an integral component of maritime charts and log-books, part of a common visual code rendering the maritime world intelligible to navigators”.[iv]

By the end of the essay Driver and Luciana had come to the conclusion that : “ Roe was no Humboldt:..... he was always under the eyes of superior officers, and constantly in search of their approval.....Roes watercolours were both experiments in a way of seeing and attempts to secure a place in the world. Viewed in this way rather than as finished products, they appear less triumphal and more fragile, drawing our attention to the vulnerability as much as the power of the cartographic eye”[v]

With this vulnerability in mind and with a view towards identifying what , if anything separates , the drawings made by skilled reporters from those made by less tutored hands this paper compares the drawings of a prospector, a sailor and a convict who in spite of their varying degrees of competence appeared to share the same ambition - to record as accurately as they could, the appearance of their new world.

The assumption I have worked with is that until the birth of modern art there were just two types of drawing: the drawings that came out of a draftsman’s desire to make “a picture” , and the others that are the result of a draftsman taking the shortest route to recording a set of facts, figures and or ideas on paper. Although most draftsman have the ability to function within both categories and very often move between the two- “sketching” by day in the field then making “pictures” in the evening at a table. These two kinds of drawing remain in my mind as distinct and different.

The first group certainly includes Septimus Roe and an artist we will finish up with John Eyre, my starting however is a man who worked exclusively in the second group who is possibly the least skilled draftsmen I could find in an established archive , the prospector John Mills Hughes .

Bad Drawing

Before I look at any specific works I feel I owe it to you to say something if only in very broad terms about quality and drawing.

There are at least two points of view that come to bare on a drawing, the view of the maker during and after its production then the view of the audience, which usually comes into play once its made.

For the maker I suspect its all about expectations, and judgement they exercise during and after the making , their bad drawings are the ones that either fail to represent what they are trying to picture, or in a less black and white way – simply don't look or feeling right to them.

For the viewer the question of good and bad is more complex, the viewer doesn't need to share the makers expectations. The viewer can raise and lower their bench mark of quality to match their mood or sence of generosity at will. A viewer who is unburdened by a draftsman's expectations can for example find an image appealing or intreaging for reasons unconnected with the draftsman's intentions. So a drawing that was a near miss or possibly a complete failure for its maker can please and capture the imagination of a viewer . A drawing that falls for me into this slot ,is my starting point.

JOHN MILLS HUGHES: PROSPECTOR

My best example of what I will describe as bad drawing that I could find in an Australian archive was made on Monday 7th February 1873 on page .5 of the diary of an English mining engineer whilst prospecting for gold in Australia.

[Illustration #7. Waterfall drawing from My Life on Wakamori, VOL. 8, p.10 Box 2707, MS 10718 Monday 7th February 1873 \(p.5-10\)](#)

When I first saw this drawing I was flicking through Mills's predominantly written journal not reading but looking for images , what stopped me was not just that it was another, slightly larger than the rest , not very well drawn image, but that I had no idea what Mills was trying to draw. The central vertical image was beyond the fact that it was vaguely topographical totally ambiguous. The drawing had neither a clear sense of scale nor subject matter, the central component could have been either a tree trunk or a road running up a hill . The text that accompanied the image read:

Monday 7th February 1873 *“ Time divided between working the claim, study , and collecting provisions.....gold scarce.... Decided to spend a week prospecting source down creek, first day very rough, climbing ended at foot of tremendous water fall, came to beautiful country and likely gold bearing soil... tried several hopeful places near camp and Wilson Creek but no gold”*

Once the subject matter was nailed by the written component of the journal we had a sense of scale and I had dispensed with the possibility that Mills was willfully working with ambiguity I began to wonder if the picture was drawn from life or memory?

I eventually settled on it being made from life and the view that Mills was all the time looking beyond the page, struggling to record “ best he could” the appearance of something that was before him not simply making a picture for his diary.

If I'm right the image becomes an excellent example of "bad" drawing – "excellent" because any ambiguity is unintentional, "bad" because without the text it more or less totally fails to communicate what the draftsman intended.

John Mills **HUGHES** was born in 1839 and died in 1905, his Australian diaries cover the period 1866 - 1894, when he lived predominantly in Australia and for a short time New Zealand. They are 12 x 9 inches, cloth bound and marbled covered exercise books, written and drawn in "the field" in a fairly scratchy pen and ink

What makes Hughes's diaries interesting to me are the discrepancy that exist between the quality of the writing and drawing, Hugh's who was clearly an educated man drew like a seven year old.

Nothing much happens in the drawings, important events take place in words, the drawings simply serve to give a sense of place, and without meaning to, allow us a view some of the gaps in our otherwise sophisticated diarists ability to picture events in his new world.

Mills's was not an important person, so his expectation of what would happen to his diaries would be modest, Unlike Cook's or Bank's Journals there was publishing contract, they were, simply, a means by which Mills could collect his thoughts and remember his days prospecting overseas.

[Slide # 8: Thursday 9th June 1873 p.103, Box 2707, MS 10718](#)

Some quite neatly drawn mining equipment

[Monday 10th August, 1873,p. 118 ,Box 2707, MS 10718](#)

Caption " My residence/ dam and workings at Stringers Point" depicting some interesting smoke rising from mining huts. He wrote " this sketch will explain my dam workings and hut" the next day he wrote " On the dam all day filling it with clay.... evening study" then the next day " I finished the dam today"

The use of the word " interesting" throws into focus the possibility that despite Mills's lack of skill as a draftsman and his apparent preoccupation with his search for gold not art or culture his drawings may be the product of him simply enjoying the appearance of things, so less about proving a point than to enjoying the moment.

The next two drawings were made, I suspect to simply illuminate the page, with quite interesting text surrounding them any long term importance they may first appear to have as images is quickly diluted.

[Slide #9 : Friday 24th December 1875, p.141 Box 2707, MS 10718](#)

[A badly drawn boat, captioned " Queen Charlotte – sound N.Z"](#)

Diary entry leading up to the drawing and after : "Got tea and went to church in Picton then took passage on a steam boat for Wellington. Passage uneventful.... We crossed the straights in fine weather and after a pleasant passage arrived in Wellington by

8am”.... The trip concluded with him dating a young lady without her parents permission “ Kissed Amy for the first time and took the steamer to Picton”

Slide # 10: Sunday 7th May 1876, p.59, Box 2707, MS 10718

“Panama House Late residence of the Duke of Edinburgh Nelson New Zealand”

Another example of a simplistic , but perspectival drawing of a building, diary entry goes some way to explain why he drew it.

“ Mad dog found in Panama House after church on Sunday and did great damage before being killed by P/man. Down beach to see repairs to Yacht.....visited Asylum to look at patients, as also new building”

Interesting how he has very little eye for detail outside of prospecting – seeing everything in both text and image as broad detail.

In a space where neither rhetoric nor mediocrity have a much of a role to play Mills’s drawings sit on the edge of competence struggling to simply tell what seems to him to be the truth. Although motivated by different ambitions and clearly shaped by a more or less untutored hand in so far as they are struggling to record the appearance of things they are not so different from Webber’s 3rd voyage drawings.

GEORGE RAPER: ABLE SEAMAN

Still trying to tell the truth but more involved in drawing systems and the conventions of picture making is GEORGE RAPER who joined the Sirius as an able seaman to sail with the First Fleet to Australia.

Raper’s wavering degrees of competence make his drawings more complex, than Mills’s totally amateur work.

Raper clearly received some tuition as a draftsman, and with a daily routine that required him to keep records of the voyage he would have had plenty of opportunity to practice. The best of his drawings in common with the drawings of most semi skilled draftsmen are of subjects that appear more or less “flat”: these include charts, costal profiles and drawings of not very thick birds and plants. His least successful drawings being those that depend upon an ability to describe space , such as his views of the colony and the settlement of Norfolk Island .

Slide 11: "Views of Norfolk Island" Raper, George 1790 32.2 x 50 cm Raper Drawing - no. 20 Natural History Museum

This page of Raper’s log shows two views of Norfolk Island, as two flat shapes , in elevation with navigational information in bands below. The top view is of the northern shore with Mount Pitt to the right, the lower, the north-western coast, with Mount Pitt to the left , this probably quite accurate , drawn from life pair of costal profiles use a more

or less the same , but less “finished “set of conventions as Septimus Roe used when he drew the sugar loaf at Rio some thirty years later.

If you have ever spent any time trying to improve your drawing it will not come as a surprise to see the fairly steady decline in quality of Raper’s representations once he steps out of the comfort zone of his well practiced costal profiles and into a world that has thickness, depth, atmosphere and light.

A problem that is demonstrated perfectly in Rapers rendering of The First Fleet anchored in Rio

[Slide 12: "Entrance of Rio de Janeiro \(Brasil\) from the Anchorage without" Raper, George \[1790\] 32.6 x 48.5 cm Raper Drawing - no. 8 Natural History Museum\[vi\]](#)

This drawing, is most probably an accurate record of the positions and appearance of the eleven ships that comprised the First Fleet with the flagship HMS Sirius at their centre they are pictured as a commemorative image , together in the harbour of Rio de Janeiro. The relationship between the fleet and the coastal profile beyond is problematic because Raper had never learned to unify these different elements within one image.

[Slide 13: The Melancholy Loss of H.M.S. Sirius off Norfolk Island March 19th 1790 watercolour on paper; 18 x 22.8 cm National Library of Australia PIC 3312/1](#)

By way of a contrast we see Sirius a few month later, run aground on rocks off Norfolk Island[vii]. Sirius is pictured having already struck rocks, as the captain’s log records - in a churning incoming tide with the masts cut away to lighten her, sails flapping and rigging in the process of snapping.

Raper reaches out in this drawing , working beyond his training and the tightly topographical he explores the atmospherics of picture making– to a point where he is no longer simply recording but balancing fact with invention to reconstruct not simply record an event.

[Slide 14: "Chief Settlement on Norfolk Island April 1790 Raper, George 1790 32.4 x 49.3 cm Raper Drawing - no. 24 Natural History museum London](#)

My final Raper drawing was made after The Sirius was wrecked and during the eleven months he was stranded on Norfolk Island .This beautifully clear image of what land appropriation involves (first planting flags then turning trees into houses and woodland into fields), demonstrates perfectly the draftsman mariners dilemma once he finds himself on dry land . Raper had been taught a system for drawing boats and coastlines but not trees and houses in spaces from the deck he saw everything in profile, on land he was in a 360 degree world . So mid way between a picture and a map this drawing stands as one of the earliest images of settled Norfolk island .

A less skillful draftsman who at first sight might sit closer to Mills than Raper is the convict artist John Eyre. His unsophisticated but apparently honest drawings of Norfolk Island have all the qualities of meticulous on the spot reports. Born in Coventry, England, in 1771 and that at the age of 13 he was apprenticed to his father a wool comber and weaver. We know he arrived in Sydney on the transport *Canada* in December 1801 how after being sentenced two years earlier at Coventry Assizes to seven years transportation for housebreaking. We also know that at some point between the ages of 13 and 28 he most probably studied drawing under the artist Joseph Barnes. Clearly reasonably well behaved Eyre's was granted a conditional pardon on 4 June 1804, and a month later advertised that he would buy a box of water-colours.

For some years Eyre appears to have done little more than keep his head above water as a professional an artist and draftsman. Taking odd jobs that included painting the numbers on newly built houses at sixpence a time and on one occasion painting a constables' staffs of office for twelve pounds. By 1812 however he had met the emancipist and brewer Absalom West, who began to publish his views of Sydney, as engravings by Philip Slaeger. On 15 August 1812 however Eyre advertised his intention of leaving the colony. And after selling a considerable number of drawings to West who later published them, purchased his ticket home

Slide 15 : View of Sydney from the West side of the Cove, Eyre, John, b. 1771 Date of Work: 1806 , NSW Library : DG XV1/26, watercolour - 45.5 x 76.5 cm

One of Eyre's polished views of Sydney, clearly based on observation but drawn in the comfort of a studio.

slide 16: A view of Queenborough on Norfolk Island / attributed to John Eyre b. 1771 1804? Original : DL Pd 397 19.7 x 33.2 cm Mitchell and Dixon Collections , Sydney

What's different about his views of Norfolk Island are that they are neither done directly from life as I assume Webber's drawing of the Alaskan woman was, nor polished up after the event in a ship's cabin from a rough sketch as Roe's seagull embellished drawings of the Sugar Loaf mountain clearly were. Eyre's drawings of Norfolk Island are fabrications. With no evidence of Eyre ever visiting the island it seems the three three signed views of Norfolk Island, in the Mitchell Collection, are either copies or inventions based on the drawings made by William Neate Chapman, or even Raper some ten to 15 years earlier. I suspect the tree are the biggest give away. Norfolk Island Pines are remarkably easy to draw, Raper did a reasonable job, but then like a game of Chinese whispers Eyre completely misses the point.

Slide 17 : Norfolk Island Pine Photo Stephen Farthing

Slide 18 Norfolk Island Pine Detail Raper

Slide 19 : Norfolk Island Pine Detail Eyre

Slide20 : Capricorn one poster

Eyres's drawings take one big step back from what was the the final frontier, away from honesty and the trustworthy eye witness accounts of Mills and Raper into a kind of airport art that's closer to Peter Hyams' scam trip to Mars in Capricorn One than Banks's magical spying glass. Although Eyres is by no means a unique amongst "artists" in his desire to both make and fake first hand accounts, I suspect he is quite unusual and the limpid honesty of an amateur like Mills is more usual amongst the first visitors to new places.

To conclude I would like to briefly revisit my first assumption, which was that the drawings of early mariners, explorers and settlers attempts to record what they actually saw should be taken as honest, unless that is they are proven to be otherwise.

This paper has provided me with the opportunity to work with a mixed ability group of draftsmen. From the beginning I expected to end up with an argument for tying enhanced drafting skills to a notion of greater accuracy or honesty, it seems however, there is no not much of a case to support this argument. Eyre who is to my mind not much better than self less self taught but arguably more skillful than Mills but considerably less trustworthy. Webber the Royal Academician is uneven he draws an elegant limpidly honest portrait of an artic woman then confuses everyone with a rough drawing of a pig like beast that he says is a Rhinoserous There probably is however an argument for accepting the written word as a very useful part of drawing and as a means of clarifying ambiguity within a specific drawing, here I'm thinking of Mills's Waterfall.

[i] elected Royal Academician 1791 just two years before he died

[ii] D.R. Simmons, TA MOKO: The Art of Maori Tattoo, Reed Publishing NZ,p.42 "the lines from the ear to the lower cheek spiral indicate that the wearer was originally a slave, while the nose forehead and mouth rays indicate that he was given his freedom to live amongst another tribe as a surety for an agreement.

[iii] It is thought that the peoples of the Aleutian Islands used medicinal tattooing for complaints in their joints
The Russian priest Veniaminov wrote around 1830 that Unangan women from Unalaska Island (Alaska) wore skin-stitched tattoos across their faces and bodies because, "the pretty ones and also the daughters of famous and rich ancestors and fathers, endeavored in their tattooings to show the accomplishments of their progenitors, as for instance, how many enemies, or powerful animals, that ancestor killed."

[iv] Felix Driver & Luciana Martins, Visual Histories, John Septimus Roe and the art of Navigation, c.1815-1830, History Workshop Journal, 2002, Issue 54 p.145

[v] Felix Driver & Luciana Martins, Visual Histories, John Septimus Roe and the art of Navigation, c.1815-1830, History Workshop Journal, 2002, Issue 54 p. 150

[vi] The Raper collection of drawings held at the Natural History Museum contains 72 watercolour drawings, together with a hand-colored title-piece also by Raper.

[vii] By 1790 the colony had run short of supplies, as a result Governor Philip sent 200 convicts

with some marines to Norfolk Island on Sirius in the expectation of them finding favorable conditions to support themselves. Norfolk Island was a difficult place to make a landing and HMS Sirius was wrecked on a reef. After eleven months on the island, Raper was collected along with other officers and crew by HMS Supply. Back in Portsmouth on the 22 April 1792, the officers were court-martialed for the loss of the Sirius then honorable acquitted.