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# A navigator's last journey

Bringing Matthew Flinders home

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More than 200 years after he died, explorer Matthew Flinders has been laid to rest in his home town in Lincolnshire, UK. By Margie Brophy of the Bass and Flinders Maritime Centre in George Town, Tasmania.

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ON 13 JULY LAST YEAR I was fortunate enough to be a part of history being made. I attended the reburial of Matthew Flinders in Donington, Lincolnshire, UK. How could this be possible, you might ask, when he died in 1814?

Matthew Flinders was originally buried in the churchyard of St James, Piccadilly, but as the city grew, Euston Station was built on top. People knew he was there, but was he under platform 4 or platform 7? In 2019, as a new line of the London Underground was being created, archaeologists dug the site and, among the 60,000 graves, found Matthew Flinders' coffin. It had a lead breastplate on top with the words 'Captain Matthew Flinders RN died 19th July 1814 Age 40 years'.

A committee, called Matthew Flinders Bring Him Home, was formed in Flinders' home town of Donington to organise a reinterment service and celebrate his life. When we arrived in July, the village was decked out in style, with window displays and flowers and flags from both Australia and the UK lining the streets. We arrived a couple of days early so we could meet with schoolchildren and chat with locals. Everyone was very welcoming – in fact, local people couldn't believe we had come from the other side of the world to take part. The Bass and Flinders Maritime Centre in George Town, Tasmania, had established an initial relationship with the village back in March, when we cut two birthday cakes simultaneously – one at the centre and another in Donington – to celebrate Flinders' 250th birthday.

Matthew Flinders' coffin being lowered into the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood, Donington. Image Stephen Daniels

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The Hon Nick Duigan MLC gave us a Tasmanian flag to present to the committee, and it is now proudly hanging in the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood next to the stained-glass window commemorating Matthew Flinders, George Bass and Joseph Banks.

The day arrived with sunshine and church bells. Crowds gathered as we were interviewed by BBC, ITV and Lincolnshire Independent. There was a real buzz as officials assembled at the church and service people lined the streets. The Bishop of Lincoln Cathedral, The Right Rev Dr David Court, led the procession, followed by The Hon Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia; mayors and deputy mayors from Lincoln and Boston, in the UK, and Port Lincoln, South Australia; the Australian Deputy High Commissioner, Elisabeth Bowes; and naval officers, including Dr (Capt) Peter Martin from Hobart. The flag draped over the coffin was half British and half Australian, to represent the strong links between the two countries.

After the coffin was lowered into the grave inside the church, sand from three different beaches in South Australia was poured in, along with soil from London and Donington. Laurie Bimson represented Bungaree, the Eora man who circumnavigated Australia with Matthew Flinders. Into the grave Laurie placed a boomerang engraved with a stingray, Bungaree's totem, and the choir sang Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' with special additional verses about Flinders.

Later, descendants Susie Flinders-Beatty and Rachel Flinders-Lewis presented the breastplate from the original coffin to the South Australian governor to be taken to South Australia for touring and display purposes. We hope one day to have an opportunity to bring the breastplate to Tasmania.

Finally, a marble grave ledger will be placed over the grave, recording Matthew Flinders' voyages – including his circumnavigations of Tasmania and Australia – and depicting his beloved cat Trim draped over the top.



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Luckily, the marble carver's father in-law is Tasmanian and mentioned, 'Whatever you do, don't miss King and Flinders islands off the map!', and I'm pleased to say they are both there.

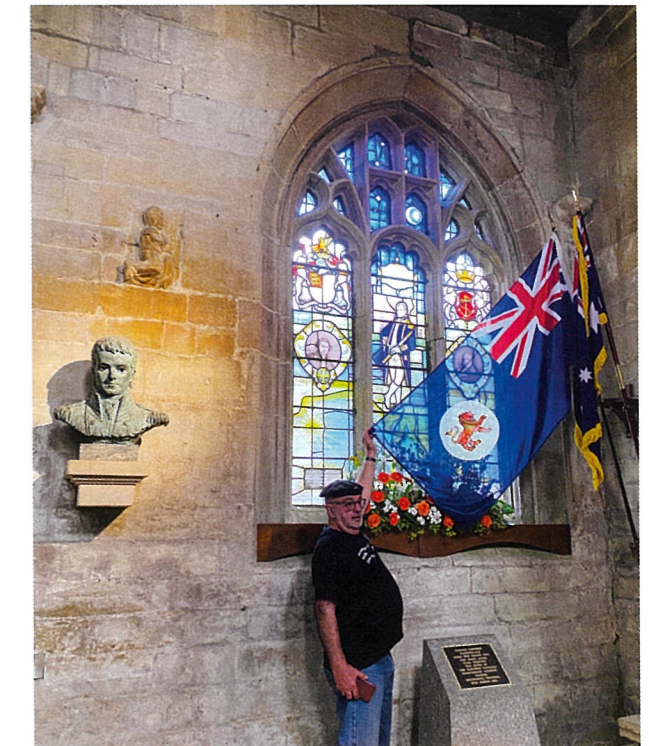
It was an amazing opportunity to be present, along with volunteers Vince Brophy, and also Craig Dixon and Tom O'Byrne, who helped to build the replica of Flinders' boat *Norfolk* and sail its replica voyages. Craig said that for him:

*This is such a highlight after having been involved with the replica Norfolk for 30 years. It's just a shame Bern Cuthbertson [who re-enacted all of Norfolk's journeys in the replica vessel] wasn't around to enjoy it as well.*

Now we feel an extra link to our replica *Norfolk* here at the Bass and Flinders Maritime Centre in George Town. Why not come for a visit yourself? We'd be delighted to tell you more stories.

[bassandflindersmuseum.com.au](http://bassandflindersmuseum.com.au)

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Craig Dixon and Margie Brophy, from the Bass and Flinders Museum in George Town, Tasmania, being filmed by the BBC.

Images Vince Brophy unless otherwise stated

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Her Excellency the Hon Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, and other dignitaries enter the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood for the reinterment service.

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The coffin plate from Flinders' original grave, which was uncovered in 2019 under Euston Station in London, and has now been presented to South Australia. Image Flinders University

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Craig Dixon inside the church with a Tasmanian flag presented by the Tasmanian visitors to the Matthew Flinders Bring Him Home Committee. The stained glass window commemorates Flinders (centre), Joseph Banks and George Bass.