

## George Bass: navy surgeon and explorer

George Bass was born in Lincolnshire in 1771, and in his early teens was apprenticed to a Boston surgeon. He obtained Membership of the Company of Surgeons (the highest surgical qualification then available) at the age of eighteen.

The ruling passion of his life was the sea, and so 2 months later, he again appeared before the Court of Examiners and qualified as a Surgeon's Mate, intending to become a Naval Surgeon.

During the next 4 years, he served on several ships and then volunteered for a posting on *Reliance*, which was fitting out for a voyage to New South Wales. On *Reliance*, he met Lieutenant Matthew Flinders, beginning a long friendship that contributed significantly to the exploration of Australia.

Within weeks of their arrival in the colony in 1795, Bass and Flinders began exploring the coast south of Port Jackson.

During their first 9-day voyage on *Tom Thumb* (a sailboat just 2.5m long), they explored Botany Bay and the Georges River. The following year they discovered Port Hacking.

Bass is best known for the whale-boat voyage that he undertook with six other men, which indicated that Van Dieman's land was separated from the mainland by the strait that now bears his name. During that epic voyage, he spent 12 days in Western Port, and his charts show that he



landed on Sandy Point, now part of HMAS *Cerberus*.

With that in mind, Commodore MH Dowsett, then Director-General Naval Health Services, suggested that the members of the Naval Health Services serving in Victoria should recognise that feat, and an enthusiastic group took up the challenge. In 2002, they presented a silver statuette of George Bass to the Chief of Naval Staff — this now forms part of the silver collection of the Wardroom Mess at HMAS *Cerberus*. Sculpted by Damian Park, the likeness of Bass was derived from the only painting of him known to exist.

Thirty-five bronze statuettes were produced from the original model. Each statuette is 30 cm high, on a mahogany gum base, is numbered, and comes with a certificate. They were made by the “lost wax cast” method. One was presented to the Royal Navy in recognition both of the achievements of Bass, and of the contribution by the Royal Navy to the health services of the Royal Australian Navy.

Five of the 35 statuettes are still available for sale. The cost is \$750, with a rebate of about \$100 when all have been sold.

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