shown more clearly the size and position of the ‘Great South Land’, and it had been achieved with little trouble and few accidents. All the same, Tasman’s employers were not pleased, because he had not brought back news of any gold or silver or other valuable trading goods.

In 1644 Tasman was given another chance, and with three ships this time, he set sail for Cape York. Missing Torres Strait a second time, he followed the coast from the Gulf of Carpentaria, round Arnhem Land to Shark Bay before returning home. Again he was empty-handed; they had met only ‘naked beach-roving wretches, destitute even of rice, and not possessed of any fruits worth mentioning’, he wrote. The Dutch traders lost interest in this barren and apparently useless country.

Tasman gave up exploring and became a wealthy trader. He lived in Batavia until his death in 1659.

He first came to New Holland as an officer on the Cygnet, near the end of a long voyage of adventure and piracy spanning most of the known world and a good bit of the unknown. On 5 January 1688 he went ashore at Cape Leveque, near what is now Broome, and explored King Sound and the Buccaneer Archipelago. After he got home in 1691 he wrote a book about his travels called A New Voyage Around the World. The book was based on notes carefully stowed in bamboo tubes and sealed with candle-wax so they wouldn’t get wet.

He then persuaded the British Royal Navy to give him command of the warship Roebuck for a further voyage of exploration to New Holland.

The Roebuck set sail on 4 January 1699. Dampier soon quarrelled with the first mate, George Fisher, who objected to serving under a former pirate. Eventually Dampier lost his temper, thrashed Fisher with a cane and then locked him in his cabin until he could put him ashore in South America.

On 1 August Dampier reached New Holland, at Shark Bay, and sailed north-east. In September he discovered and named Roebuck Bay.

A leaky ship and an unhappy, mutinous crew forced Dampier to head for home. At the Ascension Islands the Roebuck sank. When he got back to England Dampier was court-martialed for his behaviour during the voyage and he was fined all his pay. His second book, A Voyage to New Holland, was published in 1703.

As the Dutch lost interest in New Holland, the English moved in.

One of the earliest was William Dampier. He was a sort of seventeenth-century hooligan, a hot-tempered violent man, a pirate and the first person to sail three times round the world.