

***George Meredith's whaling and sealing  
operations on the east coast of Tasmania,  
1824-1834***

# George Meredith (1778-1856)

... the “King of Great Swan Port”, was an infinitely proud, domineering, quarrelsome man. Testy and unforgiving, he was easily moved to querulous resentment, and given to pin-pricking revenge. Obstinate and implacable in opposition, he frayed the government’s nerves and temper for more than a decade.

He, inordinately land- and power hungry ... ”

(Levy, p. 170)

*George Meredith* by Thomas Bock, at the  
East Coast Heritage Museum



# George Meredith – early life

- He was born in Birmingham in 1778, the youngest son of a successful lawyer
- In his early teens, he lived at *Castle Bromwich Hall*, a Jacobean mansion that his father leased
- Family legend stated that the Merediths were descended from the Kings of south Wales



*Castle Bromwich Hall*

# George Meredith – Marines

- His older brothers became lawyers, but after his father died, George was packed off to the Marines in 1796, aged 18
- On 7 May 1797, he went on board *HMS Hind* (a sixth rate) at Spithead, Portsmouth, as Second Lieutenant, commander of the 20 Marines on board



*HMS Carysfort, same design as HMS Hind (from a print by Thomas Whitcombe)*

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- On the 8<sup>th</sup> May, the ships company mutinied as part of the general mutiny of the Channel Fleet, against bad pay and conditions



The red flag of mutiny. Source: <https://www.scrimshawgallery.com/product/mutiny/>

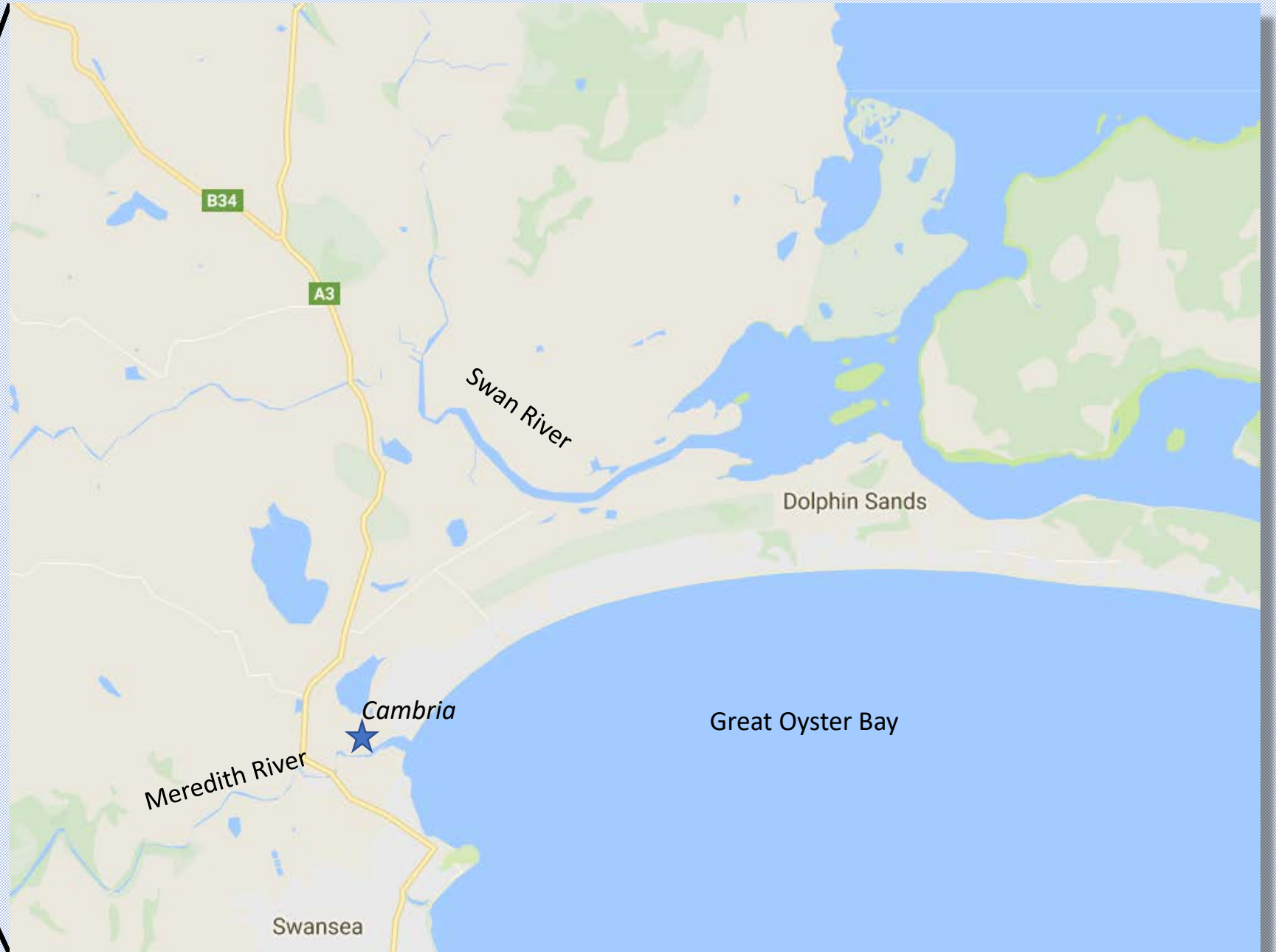
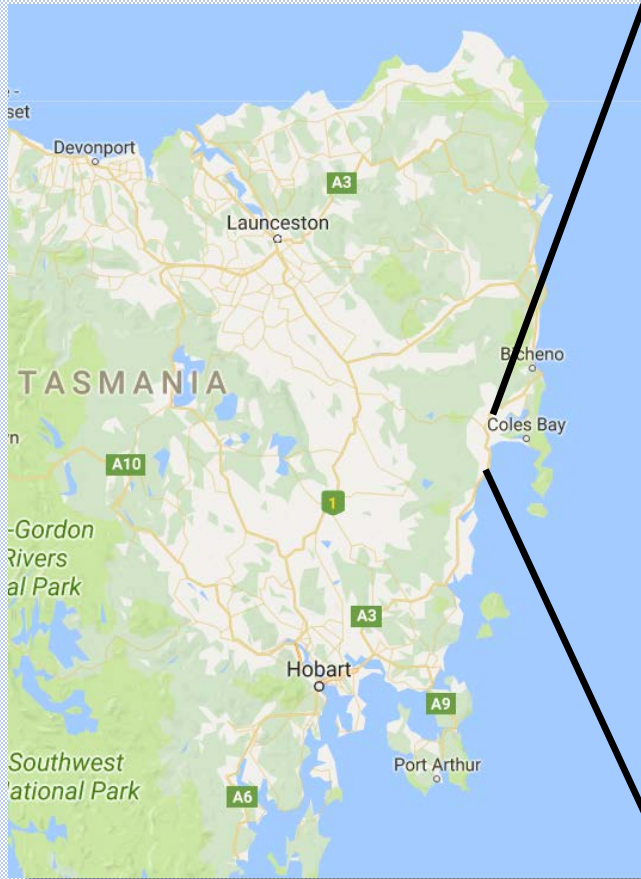
# George Meredith – Marines

- The mutiny at Spithead ended peacefully when the Admiralty conceded all the demands and pardoned the mutineers
- *Hind* then cruised to Nova Scotia, around the Caribbean and to Egypt during the Napoleonic wars;
- Captured some enemy privateers, but no action
- Last voyage was to Alexandria where he liberated the *Cap of Liberty*, a symbol of prior French occupation of Egypt
- He retired, then returned to service in 1804, then on blockade duty

# George Meredith – post Marines

- Meredith retired from the Marines in 1805 and married Sarah Hicks of Berkshire and went farming there and later at *Rhyndaston*, Wales
- He sold that farm in 1819 and prepared to emigrate to Van Diemen's Land
- He chartered the *Emerald*, along with Joseph Archer (Archer dynasty) and arrived in Hobart Town with his family in March 1821
- Meredith obtained a 2,000 acre Location Order from Governor Sorell and in April took a small boat to Great Swan Port to explore. He decided on a location at today's Meredith River north of Swansea – he wanted a direct sea route for his produce and no neighbours

# Location





# George Meredith's Estate by the late 1820s

Riversdale – Major Honnor

Belmont – William Talbot and Charles Coghill

Original Cambria grant

Dolphin Sands block

CAMBRIA & RIVERSDALE ESTATES

THE PROPERTY OF

JOHN MEREDITH ESQ<sup>RE</sup>

Scale of Chains

REFERENCE

CAMBRIA ESTATE	1000	1000
BELMONT	200	200
RIVERSDALE	1000	1000
PART OF 2 <sup>D</sup>	100	100
FRONTING ON THE MEREDITH	100	100
WATER COURSE	100	100
SWAMP & SANDS	100	100
1000	1000	1000

Leased lands

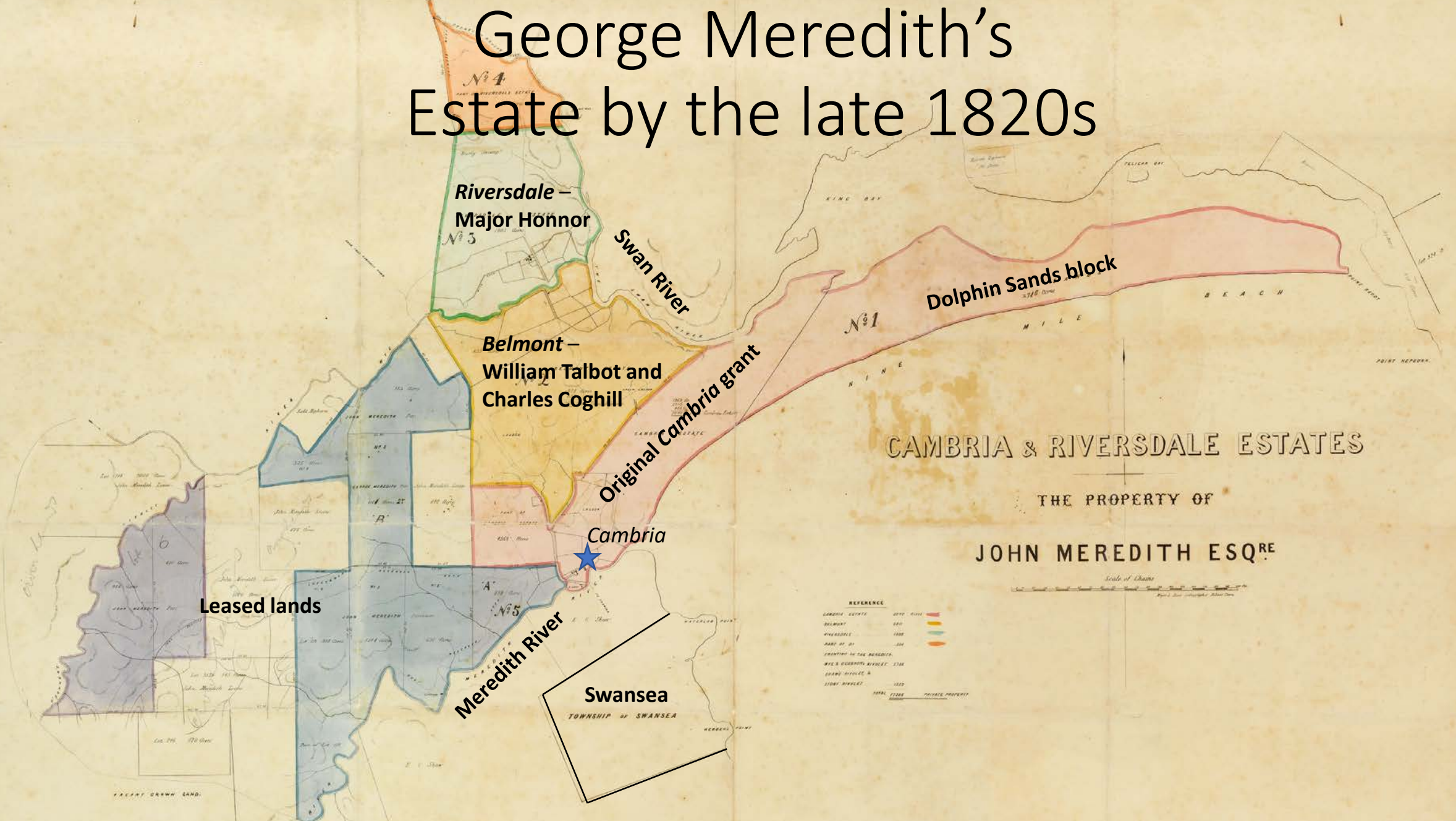
Swansea

TOWNSHIP OF SWANSEA

Meredith River

Swan River

Cambria



# George Meredith – early VDL

- Meredith quickly became embroiled in several legal disputes, the majority of which he lost, and one, against Edward Lord, was expensive
- He was away from his farm for long periods on various matters, so its development lagged
- He needed a source of cash to ‘stay afloat’
- Duties on colonial-caught whale oil received in England were cut in 1824, making it much more attractive to the locals
- Whaling and sealing were an obvious diversification choice for Meredith

# Whaling and sealing on the east coast

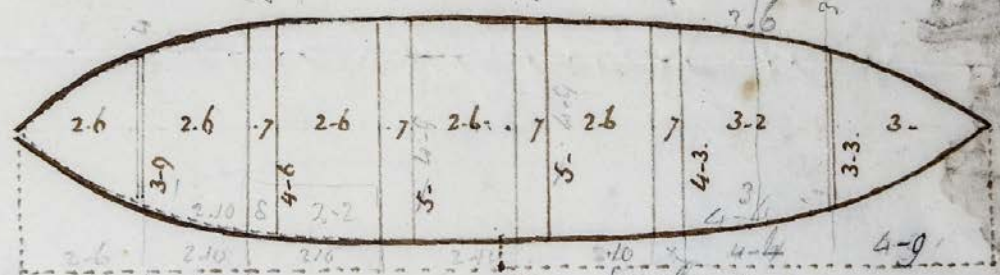
- Whales were observed in abundance down the east coast of VDL since the first voyages there. Bunker took whales there in 1803
- The presence of seals noted also very early – for example at Isle des Phoques / Seal Island or ‘White Rock’. Kelly took seals there about the same time
- A whale was killed in Great Oyster Bay in June 1822 by ‘Captain Greydon’ and oil was rendered from it
- The *Thalia* (Richard Hazzard) was whaling there in May 1824, calling in en route to America. Did Meredith meet him, either there or in Hobart Town?

# George Meredith - Whaling and sealing

- Meredith's time in the Marines and in North Atlantic waters made him not only a 'natural' afloat but also attuned to the economic value of whales and seals
- The earliest recording of his interest in whaling was in May 1824 when a Mr Bishop was building a whaling boat the *Mary* for him
- September 1824 - agreement between Meredith and Sharpe, Baker & Wishart - Meredith supplied the *Experiment*, *Mary* and *Vixen* for them to go sealing in Bass Strait. Meredith would take 1/3 of the seal skins, swan skins and 'feathers'. Similar agreement made with Baker in 1825
- Sometime in 1824, he composed his whaling 'shopping list'

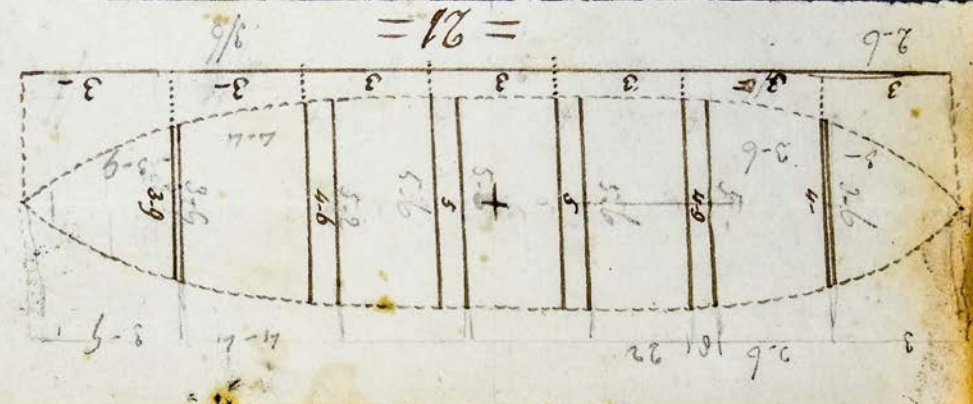
Memo. of outfit for Whaling 1844

30	2	Boats. average £200. each - one in hand -	£ 600 -
	2	Cable Whaler Lines 145 fathoms each at 140 per cent	16 -
	2	Say Pots 105 Gall. each. gross weight.... @ 1/6 per lb	35 - 5 -
	10	Harpoons - @ 10/- each	9 -
	10	Lines - @ 10/- do	9 -
	6	Whaler Spades @ 10/- do	3 -
	2	do Hooks - @ 7/6 do	15 -
	2	do Forks - @ 7/6 do	15 -
	6	Quilt Hooks - @ 5/-	1 - 10 -
	6	Boat Hooks - @ 5/-	1 - 10 -
	2	Boat Axes - @ 10/-	1 -
	2	Boat Anchors - @ 2/-	4 -
	1	Skimmer & Lead - @ 2/-	2 -
	2	Blocks 20 inch. three fold - @ 25/-	2 - 10 -
	2	do - 20 do - two fold - @ 15/-	1 - 10 -
	1	do - 15 do - three fold - @ 20/-	1 -
	1	do - 15 do - two do - @ 15/-	15 -
5		Stathens of Strong Rope for Casting Fish	5 -
70		Hats - Sinker & Spinning do - Whaler Sinks do	20 -
			50 -
20		Cables - @ 50/- per Box	20 -
		Webber. Cuckenters. Lineths. books	20 -
			£ 244. 10 -

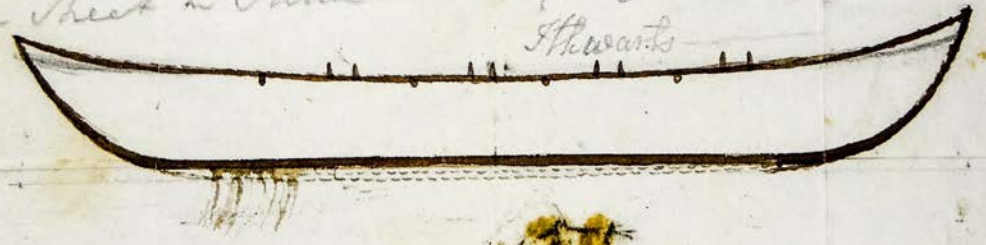


3-  
 3/6  
 1-5  
 2-5  
 3-5  
 4-5  
 5-5  
 4-4  
 3-9  
 2-10  
 4-9  
 2-9  
 3-0  
 4-4  
 4-9  
 3-3  
 2-10  
 4-6  
 2-2  
 5-2  
 4-3  
 3-3  
 4-9

Plan of a wherry built back for Queen Park  
 - George River & Laysons to it -



Whole boat count is  
 Stem to fore part of Stone Sheath } 2-6  
 To after part } 2-10  
 From sheer to thwart } 2-10  
 From thwart to plank } 2-10  
 Plank to stem } 4-6  
 Stem Sheath to stem } 4-6  
 Aftwards



2-10  
 2-10  
 2-10  
 2-10  
 2-10  
 2-10  
 -6  
 4-6  
 3-6  
 25-

This agreement was made the first day of September 1824 -  
 between the Group Merchants of Great Britain & Port. Cape of the one  
 part - and John Parker - John Parker & Messrs. W. & J. Dent -  
 and others of the other part - on the other part. It is hereby  
 that the said Group Merchants having agreed to provide  
 certain boats to be used for carrying the goods along the Coast  
 of Van Diemen's Land to the Islands in Cape Ports - to  
 the purpose of the said - to the Islands in Cape Ports - and the  
 said John Parker - John Parker - Messrs. W. & J. Dent - and others  
 agreed to provide in the said Boats the necessary provisions  
 such as Flour - Sugar - &c. and to carry provisions. It is hereby  
 the same with the assistance of the said Group Merchants -  
 or at Islands - or Ports - at the Islands of help -  
 provided for - for the benefit of all parties concerned -  
 It is hereby mutually and lawfully agreed by & between  
 the said parties - on the terms & conditions upon which the  
 said Group Merchants be carried on - and by which the same  
 of the said parties shall be regulated - That in consideration of  
 the said Group Merchants providing the three Boats as

1824  
 sealing  
 agreement

List of Boats

Large Boat "Experiment"	2 Spite Sails & Yls	4 Cars	Steer car
Small Boat "Mary"	1 Large Long Sail	5 Cars	Steer car
Old Small Boat "Viper"		5 Cars	Steer car

UTAS RS G4/9 GM to his wife 21 April 1825

G4/9

having taken away on side of paper. in the usual style of my Correspondence with you  
I must now proceed to other subjects. and I am sorry to say that as yet I have  
written very little correspondence with the business upon which I came up. Mr. P. acts  
for Mr. B. in the Belona & promised to attend to it as to release me as  
soon as possible. but has not done any thing beyond promising. and  
however it being further protracted I shall move Mr. B. to fix appoint-  
ments & advise the matter officially. As to the whale fishery, I have  
suggested Sherbold as headsman. & several others to complete the party. I do  
confess I am rather sanguine as to the result this season. Sharpe has  
been in a constant state of intoxication since his arrival & has caused  
me much annoyance. without affording the smallest assistance.

Townsend, Purkins & Dutton go down with the boat. & with Sharpe. under  
his daily employment in bringing over shells from the shootens & land them so  
as to be most convenient for burning & carting away. I think our do-  
servicing places will be best. carrying them up to the flat north of the Hill. or  
some way be taken to the other side the creek & send the cart crossing the  
water. however be sure to explain to Sharpe that I expect a trip a day & a good  
load. which they do nothing else. if they are prevented going over any day they  
may dig out & level the blubber hole. I have told them that until the fishery  
commences they must live as now our people do. but you may allow them 10y  
instead of 9. & the same of meat with Cheese. Turnips &c. once a day -  
The new whale boat must be hauled up & covered over with bushes.  
As to the new men. Attention is a proper Governor. & will be constantly employ-  
ed as such. under your direction & discussion. for I am sorry to add that although

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allow them 10 lb instead of 9 lb flour & the same of  
meat with greens, turnips etc once a day...

... The new whale boat must be hauled up and  
covered over with bushes.



... the next boat will be ready for launching next Tuesday week the 2<sup>nd</sup> May ... George Scrivenger is a sensible and steady man ...

... Scrivenger must be considered the responsible person & head of the party. Such things as are issued – he will sign a receipt for & a regular account kept as also of any implements they may require to erect the works. Huts etc over at the Schootens. Thatch may be found over there ...

... I believe that we have a good & civil set of men as could be expected & as we shall man three boats & have the vessel the whole season. I do promise myself success ...

... the slops may be issued to such of the men as require them. Big jackets, trousers, red & blue shirts & caps and also tobacco. The striped shirts are for our own people ...

TAHO NS123/1/1 GM to his wife 22 April 1826

Saturday Night 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1826

My dear M.  
Gratifying as it ever has been to my feelings – upon every occasion of our separation from each other – to sit down to address – and thus really to enjoy your Society & think of home – I do confess that on the present – I do so with pain. because not only do I anticipate all the disappointments you will experience on my return to the ship but your resolution to leave will be greatly increased to find I have broken my promise – by writing down the letters before me. That you will feel all this – when my letter is put into your hands – instead of myself being present to receive your ever affectionate welcome – I well know – but when the first breath of disappointment is given – & you reflect upon the necessity which may retain me from those I must necessarily – visit – you will yield to the pressure of circumstances & cheerfully submit – once more – & I do trust – for the first time – to disappointment –

How I have been surprised & annoyed – lately – & what trouble I have had to bring things to head – so far – you will have fully when it is seen – particularly to write – and as I am previous the next boat will be ready for launching on Tuesday week the 2<sup>nd</sup> May – & having people here waiting to accompany me down – another paragraph – I must write in haste – to part again – George Scrivenger is a steady – sensible man – & to his – and Williams – I shall leave it to address you or either George – when you will write to ask letters – especially of the whalers – Charles & Lewis will appear singly upon the scene – but without offending him.

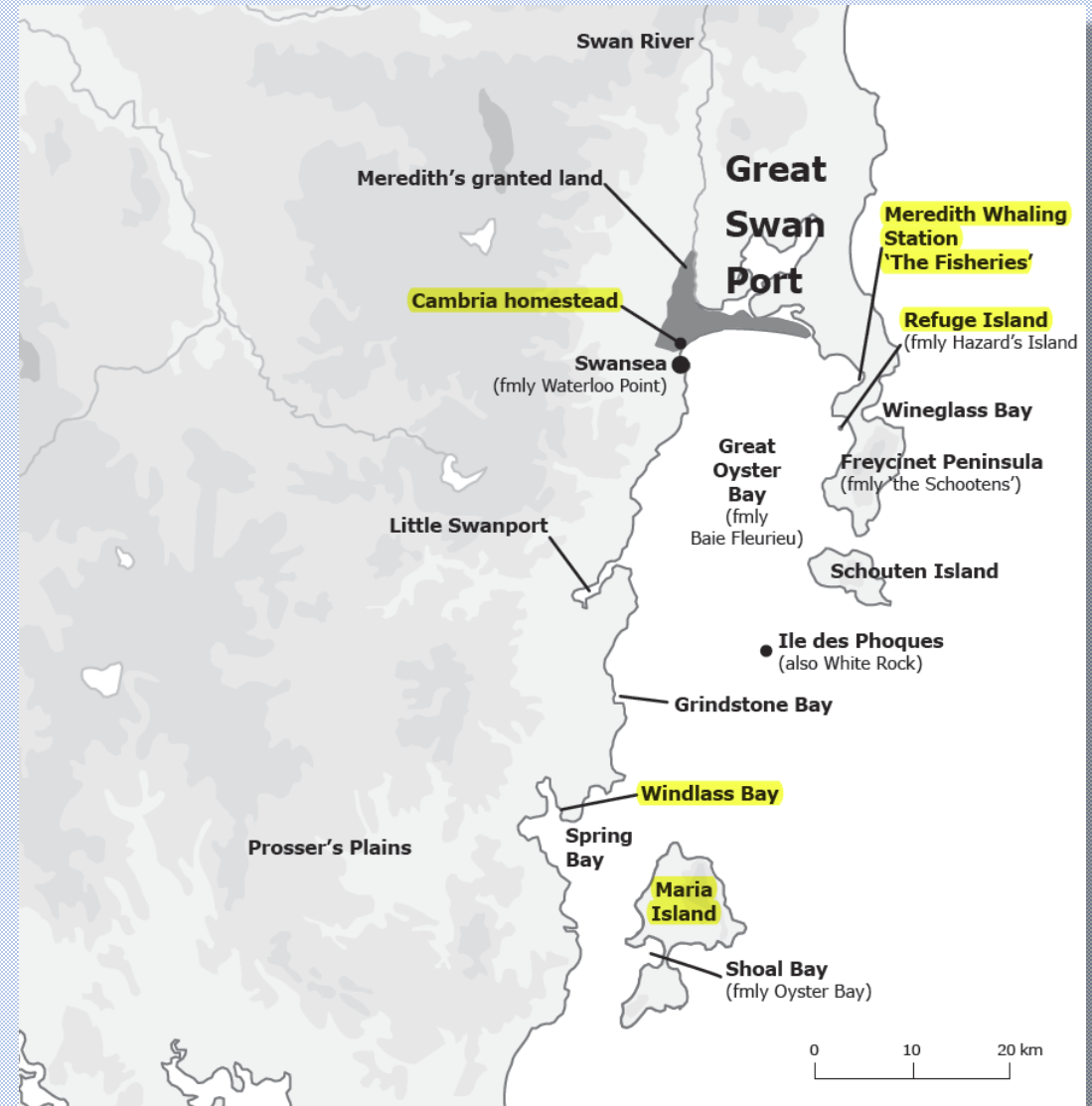
Captain Briggs proposes to purchase of W. Meredith 30 Tuns of  
 Oil at £21 per Tun. to be ready for delivery at Oyster Bay in  
 ten days from this date. To pay for the same by 2500 Gallons  
 of Rum per Admiral Cockburn at 4s. per Gallon. & 12 Chests  
 of Tea at 12.10.0 per Chest - and provided the Oil nets -  
 more than £25. per Tun at Sydney. W. M. to receive one third  
 of all profits -

# George Meredith - Whaling and sealing

- Meredith became one of the four significant shore-based whalers up to 1830, the others being Walter Bethune, Kemp and company and Thomas Lucas (Nash, *Bay Whalers*)
- As with his land, he tried to monopolise the fishery at Great Oyster Bay. When William Maycock started whaling there in 1828, Meredith complained. Hazard/Refuge Island was partitioned between them
- In 1828 he had the 40 ton *Black Swan* built from Huon pine. It was wrecked off Flinders Island in 1830
- All through Meredith's time whaling, the supply of casks seemed to be a recurring issue

# George Meredith - Whaling and sealing

- Meredith kept expanding his whale fishery into the 1830s, with bases at:
  - Maria Island, leased for a year in 1833 for £11 and run by his sons George and Charles
  - Windlass Bay (Spring Bay)
  - the 'Schootens' ('The Fisheries')
  - Refuge Island (Great Oyster Bay)



# George Meredith - Whaling and sealing

- January 1827 – Meredith sent 99 casks of oil and a ton of whale bone to Hobart
- 1832 – 60 tuns of oil shipped from Oyster Bay, value £900
- November 1832 – shipped 174 casks of oil and 140 bundles of bone to London
- 1833 – 90 tuns of oil produced by Meredith

# George Meredith - Whaling and sealing

- Records of Meredith's participation in the whaling industry stop at 1834, although he was probably still sealing after that
- Why leave the industry?
  - By 1834 his two oldest sons had left for their own pursuits
  - Increasing competition from others, who could afford larger boats and crews
  - His farming at last was more profitable and he began building his grand homestead, *Cambria*
  - Note that in 1842, Meredith applied for a grant of 20 acres at 'the Fisheries' and this was granted to his son Charles

# George Meredith – his vessels (incomplete)

- *Vixen*, ‘small vessel’, in service 1824
- *Experiment*, in service 1824
- *Mary*, in service 1824 ‘new whale boat’; traded or lost by crew 1824
- *Cygnet*, built 1824, possibly lost 1827
- *Comet*, in service 1825
- *Black Swan*, 40 tons built Great Swan Port 1828, registered in Hobart by GM. Lost off Flinders Island January 1830 (Broxall p. 17)
- *Independent*, 33 tons built Great Swan Port 1832 registered in Hobart by Charles Meredith (Broxall p. 261), sold 1844