

John of the *Sirius*

Doris Chadwick



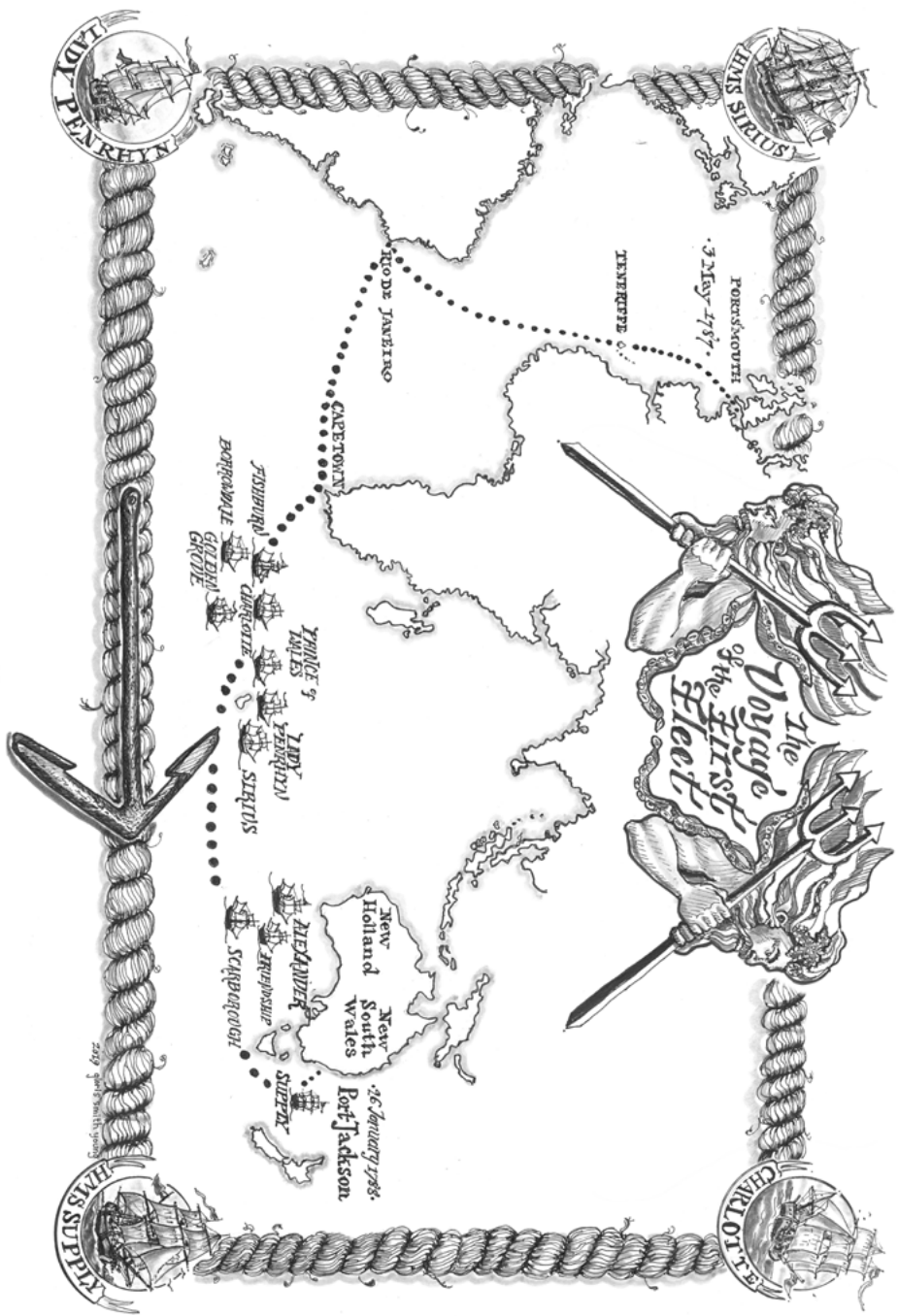
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JOHN OF THE *SIRIUS*

DORIS CHADWICK

MAP AND COVER BY
GLORIS SMITH YOUNG





The Voyage of the First Fleet



3 May 1787
PORTSOUTH

TENERIFE

RIO DE JANEIRO

CAPETOWN

FISHBURGH
BORROWDALE
GORDON
GROVE

YORKES
TAYLOR
LADY
YENDORIN
SIRIUS

New
Holland
New
Wales

16 January 1788
Port Jackson

THE FLUZZARD
ARUPUSMAN
SCARPOURCH

STURZA

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CHAPTER I
PAPA COMES HOME

THIS is the story of Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandpapa John. Now John lived in a village in England. His home was a white stone cottage with a thatched roof, and way up near the stars he had an attic bedroom to himself. There he kept his hoop and his cricket bat, his marbles and his peg-tops, as well as the quaint little books that Mamma had bought him one day from a wandering pedlar. *Puss in Boots*, *Dick Whittington* and *Tom Thumb* were their names. He had read them all until their covers were dirty and torn.

But John was becoming a big boy, and was beginning to find that Papa's books were more exciting than fairy tales. Papa's books were all about strange lands, and had the most wonderful pictures in them. Sometimes he would take one from the bookcase, and steal up to the attic window with it. There he would sit for an hour in the twilight and sail the sea and visit those strange lands. The one he liked best was called *Captain Cook's Voyages*. Of course he could not understand all the words in it, but the pictures fascinated him, pictures of black men, and strange birds, and a queer hopping animal. He would look at these pictures, and then he would lean on the window-sill and gaze at the stars as they winked and twinkled in the sky, and dream of countries far away and of the time when he would visit them. John wanted to be a traveller when he became a man.

Of course John went to school. Each morning, very early, he started off down the road to the neighbouring village. There, in an old stone building, close by the church, he spent dreary hours learning French and Latin and good manners. His teacher told him none of the interesting things that he read in Papa's books. He was always glad to take the shortcut across the fields, and to hear the welcoming bark of Gyp, his fox-terrier pup, at the gate.

Sue, his sister, had her own pets. She loved her rabbits, Snub-Nose, Button-Tail and Long-Ears. Many an hour she spent at the hutch watching their little mouths nibble, nibble, nibble as they munched their greens, one friendly eye cocked at her all the time. Sue had not gone to school; but Mamma had already taught her to sew, and she had finished one sampler, on which she had worked the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer.

Both John and Sue had but sketchy memories of their father. He was a soldier, a soldier who sailed in a man-o'-war. John knew that he was called a marine. When a landing was to be made in an enemy country, John's father and his men went ashore in small boats and fought. He had been away so much from the children, and they had seen him so seldom that they really did not know him very well. But John secretly worshipped Papa; he was his hero, a man who sailed the seas and saw strange lands.

One night in April, when the weather was chill, the children had gathered with their mother round the fire. Mamma was busy with her knitting, Sue with her sampler, and John, snuggled next to Gyp on the hearth-rug, was sailing the seas with the gallant Captain Cook. Suddenly the gate banged, and there was a rat-tat-tat on the door.

'Papa!' cried John, and jumped up and threw himself into the arms of a tall sunburnt man in scarlet uniform.

'Papa!' piped Sue, squeezing her way between John and the gallant soldier.

'My, how you've grown!' he exclaimed, holding them at arm's length. Then he turned to Mamma, and while the children clung to her skirts he hugged them all.

'Oh, Richard,' cried Mamma, 'it is good to see you again!' and she was so excited that her eyes were wet with tears.

'Well, my dears,' said Papa, 'here I am. And I have a surprise for you. Next time I go away, you are all coming with me.'

'With you!' shouted John, jumping about on the floor. 'Where, Papa, where?'

'Come and sit beside me, and I will tell you,' and with that he took

little Sue on his knee, and with his arm round John, went on, 'I am taking you across the seas—far, far away, to a place called Botany Bay.'

'Botany Bay! That's the place Captain Cook discovered. Oh, Papa, how wonderful!'

'But where is it?' asked Mamma. 'I've never heard of such a place.'

'Away on the other side of the world, Mamma, in a country called New South Wales. It's all in Papa's book.' John was eager to show that he knew.

'And will we go in a ship, Papa, and live in a ship for a long time?' Sue piped.

'Yes, we will go in a ship called the *Sirius*, and we will live in it for weeks and weeks and months and months.'

'Will I be able to take my rabbits?'

'Rabbits!' laughed Papa, hugging her again. 'Have you some rabbits?'

'Yes, Mamma and I gave them their names. We call them Long-Ears, Snub-Nose and Button-Tail.'

'Maybe I'll try to squeeze in some rabbits.'

'And what about Gyp?' asked John.

Papa paused for a moment. 'Let me see,' he said, 'Gyp is your dog, isn't he?'

'Yes.'

'I don't know. There won't be much room in the boat, and food will be scarce. Would you be prepared to give him some of your meat?'

'Of course.'

'And when we get to that country, he'll have to catch his own. There are only wild woods—'

'And black men in the woods, Papa, and a hopping animal. Captain Cook tells about them in his book.'

'But, Richard,' protested Mamma, 'how can we take the children to such a place?'

'It will be all right, dear. They will have the time of their lives. We are going in a fleet of eleven ships, to be the first white people to settle in the new land of New South Wales. Until Captain Cook visited it some years ago, only the Dutch had gone there—'

‘And Dampier, Papa, he went there twice,’ added John.

‘There you are; the boy knows more about it than I do.’

Mamma was not satisfied. ‘How many children are going?’ she inquired.

‘About a dozen children of the marines.’

‘Then John and Sue will be lonely. And what about their schooling?’

‘We’ll arrange for that somehow. There will be so much to see and do, the children will learn more in the next twelve months than they ever would at school. Won’t you, my boy?’ and he tweaked his son’s ear.

‘Are we going in a man-o’-war?’ John asked breathlessly.

‘Of course; and when we get to New South Wales, the marines are to guard the settlement, and keep it safe from the enemy. And they are to look after the convicts—’

‘Convicts? Who are they?’

‘Prisoners whom we are taking from England. They have done wrong and broken the laws, and we are taking them to New South Wales to punish them.’

‘I’m afraid I’m not very happy about it, Richard,’ Mamma said, laying aside her knitting to prepare supper. ‘It does not seem to me to be a fit place for children.’

‘Oh, but, Mamma, just think; we are going in a man-o’war, and we shall see lots of strange things.’ John’s eyes were alight. ‘Papa, I can take Gyp, can’t I?’

‘I think so.’

He whooped with joy. ‘When do we sail, Papa?’

‘From Portsmouth, and we must be there in a week’s time.’

CHAPTER II
DOWN TO THE SEA

FOR the next few days all was bustle in the cottage. The big trunks came down from the attic, and into them went all manner of goods—Papa's precious books, and John's toys, and all their clothes, as well as lots of things that Mamma thought might be useful. They had to take their own beds, their own mugs and knives, chairs to sit on and tables from which to eat.

'There are no shops in that country,' Papa told them, 'and no ships will follow for many a long day.'

Sue was concerned about her dolls. 'Here they are, Mamma,' she said as she laid them beside the trunk.

Mamma picked up Betsy, the most ragged of them all. 'You can't take that old doll,' she announced. 'It's too old. Rosie and Jane, and Cuddles and Mary Ann will be enough.'

'But, Mamma, I like Betsy best of all,' and Sue waited until Mamma wasn't looking, then packed the doll herself, way down in the bottom of the trunk.

John spent his last days visiting all his friends. 'No more school for me,' he told them. 'I am going to the end of the world. Away and away to Captain Cook's land.'

'Farther than America?' they asked.

'Yes, farther than America, farther than Africa, right on the other side of the world.'

He enjoyed their envious glances.

Papa fixed up a basket for Sue, in which she was to carry her rabbits. It was a basket with a handle in the middle, and two lids that closed over the top, just the thing for carrying rabbits.

A great lumbering wagon came and took away their trunks and baggage. John stood in the road and watched as it jolted over the rough stones.

‘Only two more days,’ his heart sang to him, ‘and I shall be going too.’

When the great day came he was up with the dawn. ‘Wake up, Sue,’ he cried, pulling the bedclothes off her as she slept on the floor. ‘The coach comes by at nine.’

There were scrambled eggs for breakfast. John loved scrambled eggs, but could not eat a tiny bit. He kept bounding out to the gate every minute or so to see if the coach was coming.

Yo-ho! Yo-ho! There it was! The shrill note of its horn floated over the clear morning air, and down the road it came, gay in a new coat of scarlet and black.

‘The coach!’ cried John, for the tenth time, and rushed out into the road, with Gyp on his lead. ‘Oh, Papa, may I sit with the driver?’

‘Why, yes,’ the man drawled in reply to Papa, ‘all boys love to sit here. I guess we could make room for a boy and a dog—and perhaps yourself, sir.’

Then heigh-ho, and up went John into the front seat, when Mamma and Sue were seated inside, and there he sat, with Papa beside him and Gyp clutched tightly in his arms. It was good, he thought, to be up on the top of a coach, like being on the top of the world.

‘All ready,’ cried the guard, blowing his horn, and away they went, trot, trot, trot down the road.

‘Woof, woof!’ barked Gyp, as he sat up straight beside his master.

Oh, wasn’t he a lucky boy to be going so far away with a Papa who was a marine, and on a man-o’-war, too!

It was a clear spring day, and the sun shone brightly on the green carpets of the meadows, and the pale green of the oaks and elms as they waved their leaves in farewell.

Over the rough roads, through mud and slush, across fords and bridges, the coach groaned and creaked on its way.

A village came into sight. ‘Let me sound the horn,’ begged John of the guard.

'Here you are, lad.'

Yo-ho! Yo-ho! Into the village they rushed and along the cobbled streets, as the people paused in their work and looked up, but in a flash they were gone, on, on, once more between the hedgerows and out on the open road.

At noon they drew up at an inn-yard.

'Down you get, John,' ordered Papa. 'It's time you had something to eat.'

'Something to eat!' For the first time that morning John felt hungry. He hoped there would be lots of food in the inn, mountains of it, he felt so ravenous.

'Come on, boy,' he called to Gyp. 'You shall have some of my dinner,' and he led the way to the inn door, while Mamma and Sue followed with the precious basket.

In the dining-room a feast awaited them; roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, apple dumplings and cream. John ate four dumplings and even wanted a fifth.

'No,' said Mamma, very firmly, 'if you eat another, you might be sick, and if you are sick you won't be able to ride on the top of the coach.'

So John had to be content with four. He did not think it fair, because he had given a big slice of his roast beef to Gyp.

'I must have a peep at my rabbits,' whispered Sue, when she and John stood once more in the inn-yard. She bent down and undid the catch, and as she lifted the lid of the basket Long-Ears was too quick for her. Out he jumped and away he sped, past the waiting coach, the pawing horses, the busy ostlers.

And then what a chase there was!

'At him, Gyp!' shouted John, and off they ran, Long Ears with his white tail bobbing, Gyp barking as loudly as he could, Papa covering the ground in leaps, and John panting at the rear. But Long-Ears was smarter than them all; they lost him in a gutter, and never another glimpse did they have of his pricked ears and button-tail.

Yo-ho! Yo-ho! It was the guard's horn.

'We must go back,' called Papa. 'The coach is waiting.' He whistled to Gyp, and the dog came obediently at his call.

Up again in the driver's seat, the fresh horses tugging at the reins, and in the wonder of it all John soon forgot the lost Long-Ears. But not Sue; her eyes were wet with tears.

'Never mind, dear,' consoled Mamma. 'Long-Ears wasn't a traveler. He did not want to see the world. You still have Snub-Nose and Button-Tail.'

Hour after hour the coach pounded over the roads, up hills and down dales, through toll gates and past market towns, stopping here and there, on, on to Portsmouth and the sea.

It was John who saw it first, the beautiful blue of the sea.

'Oh, Papa, look!' he cried. 'There's a ship! And another!' His heart seemed to be bursting with excitement.

Yo-ho! Yo-ho! With a jerk the coach pulled up at the quayside. Portsmouth, the great port of England, where the King's Navy was wont to ride! For John it was a great dream come true.