

## “JOURNAL OF A RAMBLER”

### JOHN BOULTBEE IN NEW ZEALAND, 1825-1828

A journal kept by John Boultonbee, 1799-1854, has recently come to the Library through the generosity of Rev. James Boultonbee, Dorset, and Dr Peter Boultonbee, Isle of Man. This record of the adventures of a sealer, describes life on the southwest coast of New Zealand in the 1820s; it deals also with people and other places. The writer made a copy about 1836 of this journal kept “in compliance with the wishes of a dear deceased Father. . . . more for the amusement of my relations and friends than with a view to that of the public.” He visited Brazil and Barbados in 1818-1819, and went to Van Dieman’s Land in 1823. Thwarted in his attempts to make his way to that “Second Elysium” of the South Seas, Otaheite, he was obliged to suffer great danger and privation sealing in Bass’ Straits. After returning to Hobart he proceeded to Sydney and served with the pilot’s crew at the penal settlement at Port Macquarie before joining sealers heading for the southwest coast of New Zealand where he was to remain from 1825 to 1828. Then with Sydney as his headquarters he was engaged in bunkering, salting fish and some whaling before embarking on a vessel which he left at the Swan River settlement, Western Australia. He spent “three wretched years” there, 1830-1833, acting as coxswain to the Governor, Captain James Stirling, amongst other occupations. With £26 in the world he joined a whaling vessel heading for the Timor Sea and later visited Manila before attempting to make his way to Madras by way of Singapore and Colombo where he arrived on 14 May 1834. We have no record of his activities after the end of this year apart from the fact that he died in Ceylon in 1854. This is no simple log kept by a semi-literate sealer but the work of a well-educated man, a keen observer of people, their patterns of life and customs, as well as the flora, fauna and physical structure of the many areas visited.

John Boultonbee was the youngest of nine sons of a Marine Officer who served in the American War of Independence and later became estate manager to the Earl of Macclesfield and others. To the detriment of family finances, Captain Joseph Boultonbee, 1759-1821, actively maintained his military interests until 1815 having raised a troop of volunteer cavalry in 1806 under the threat of French invasion. He retired from the Royal Marines shortly before his youngest son’s birth at Bunny in Nottinghamshire. Young John passed “through the hands of different persons, from the nurse to the schoolmaster” and was sent to a series of boarding schools from which he regularly ran away “being impatient of control, thoughtless and headstrong.” It is possible that this somewhat insecure