

## John Cooke Terrace and Point Cook



**Commander John Murray Cooke, Royal Navy  
(courtesy of Michele and Bob Cooke)**

Standing at the end of the Altona Pier and scanning the cost line westward, you eventually come to a point of land. This is where the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base, the birthplace of the Australian Flying Corps and the RAAF, is located having been establish in March 1913. The base was constructed at this point of land which is known as Point Cook or Point Cooke<sup>1</sup>as it was originally named in 1836.

It was so named to recognise one of the crew members of the English survey ship *HMS Rattlesnake* which was surveying Port Phillip Bay in 1836 as a component of its journey to deliver Captain William Lonsdale to the settlement of Port Phillip as the first district administrator. *HMS Rattlesnake* was commanded by Captain William Hobson who, whilst surveying the bay with a smaller vessel, named Hobsons Bay after himself and when a small peninsula of land was sighted and surveyed, in the northwest corner of the bay, it was named after the ship's Mate, acting Lieutenant John Murray Cooke.

Today, it is not the only landmark that bears his name, the suburb of Point Cook is so called for its proximity to the headland and then in 1995 a street within the new estate of Seabrook was directly named John Cooke Terrace. But what is known about John Murray Cooke?

John Murray Cooke was born in Hereford, England in December 1814, within in the Parish of All Saints in Herefordshire. John was the second son, and one of four boys, born to the Reverend William Cooke, Vicar of St Peter's Bromyard in Hereford, and Mary Anne Cooke nee Murray. John's father had held many prominent appointments at the Hereford Cathedral. William was also headmaster of the Free Grammar School in Bromyard in around 1835. He was to become the Vicar of St Peter's Church in Bromyard serving the village and congregation from 1843 to 1854, and it was within Bromyard that both Mary and William died and William's deeds within the parish are recognised by the dedication of a stained-glass window within the church building. William Cooke and Mary Anne Murray married on 13



**St Peter's Bromyard, England (courtesy Hugh Llewelyn from  
Keynsham, UK)**

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<sup>1</sup> Originally named Point Cooke, over time the 'e' has been dropped and it is now known as Point Cook.

December 1810 at Saint Mary Magdelene church at Bridgenorth in Shropshire.

Mary Anne Murray was the daughter of Lieutenant John Murray (1737-1793) of the Royal Marines, who had left military service looking for a new adventure and a business opportunity. In 1768, John Murray invested £700 of his wife's money into a publishing business in Fleet Street London and in an instance, he had commenced a family publishing empire that is still in existence today, albeit under the name of Hachette UK.

Very little is known of John Cooke's early days, which is not surprising, given that he entered the navy at the age 12, which was not uncommon during the 1800s. This is not to say that he had no other options, he had quite a choice of callings given his grandfather was in publishing, and had spent time within the Royal Navy, and his father was a vicar, and his elder brother was heading into law.

John Cooke's three brothers chose differing but no less remarkable careers. His older brother William Henry Cooke (1811-1894) became a judge of County Court, QC<sup>2</sup> in London, and several generations of the Cooke family followed him into this same career. Robert Francis Cooke (1816-1891) became a partner of Murray Publishers with his cousin John Murray III. The youngest brother, George Frederick Cooke became Registrar of the Norwich County Court in 1874 and later High Bailiff. When you look at the occupations of his siblings, parents and grandparents, John Murray Cooke would have undoubtedly been able to have a strong career elsewhere had he not chosen the navy, but it also shows the qualities that he had inherited and served him well throughout his naval career.

John Cooke entered the navy on 9 February 1827 as first-class volunteer serving on *HMS Asia* which was the 84-gun flagship of Sir Edward Codrington under whom he fought at the battle of Navarino, 20th October 1827. Sir Edward Codrington had been appointed to a Mediterranean command on the English Royal Navy. He was involved within the war of Greek independence where he was instrumental in obtaining a treaty between Britain, France, and Russia. Codrington favoured the Greeks, and this partiality led to the Battle of Navarino, in which Sir Edward Codrington, in command of the allied fleet, destroyed the Turkish and Egyptian fleets. It was also during the battle of Navarino that John Murray Cooke was recognised for his gallantry during battle. This would have been John Cooke's first foray into battle and all before his thirteenth birthday.



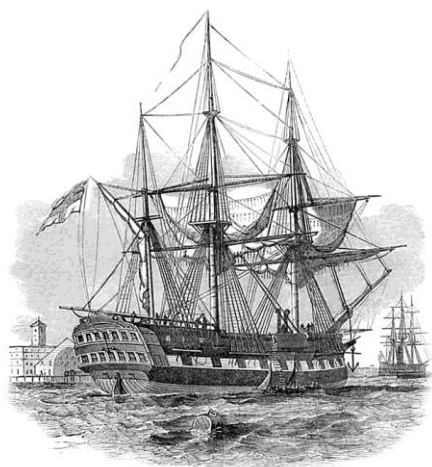
**HMS Asia during the Battle of Navarino**

John Cooke remained in the Mediterranean, before being transferred to the brig/sloop *Brisk*, a smaller 10-gun vessel having now been promoted to the rank of Midshipman. He was soon after reassigned to the brig/sloop *Wasp*, at the rank of Mate. Both vessels were commanded by Captain Thomas Smith, so he and John Cooke must have had a good rapport with Captain Smith obviously valuing the knowledge and seamanship that John Cooke brought to his crew. In the 1830s John Cooke transferred onto the English flagship of the Mediterranean fleet *Britannia* under the command of Admiral Sir

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<sup>2</sup> QC – Queen's Counsel or now KC – King's Counsel

Pulteney Malcolm. The *Britannia* was a 120-gun vessel that was serving within the Mediterranean and in Portugal before it was forced to return to England for repairs before it headed back to the Mediterranean. On 4 February 1835 *HMS Britannia* was towed into Portsmouth harbour by the *Salamander*, to be paid off<sup>3</sup> into ordinary service.



**HMS Rattlesnake**

In February 1835, John Cooke was transferred to *HMS Rattlesnake* which was under the command of Captain William Hobson. The *Rattlesnake* was a 28-gun sailing vessel that had been designated as a survey ship with a complement of 170 men. She was also berthed at Portsmouth, in February, and was being refitted for duties in the East Indies. The *Rattlesnake* departed England on 27 March 1835 sailing via Rio de Janeiro en route to the East Indies. Here Captain Hobson received orders to proceed to New South Wales and so sailed there via the island of Mauritius and to Hobart before sailing north to New South Wales. In Hobart, she embarked a detachment of the 28th Regiment and set sail for Port Jackson, arriving there around the 22 August 1836.

It was here in Sydney that John Cooke meet Captain William Lonsdale, who had been advised, on 12 September 1836, by the governor, Sir Richard Bourke, that he had been appointed to the command of a detachment of troops and was to proceed to Port Phillip, where he was to be responsible for administration of the new district.

The *Rattlesnake*, already at anchor in Port Jackson, was engaged. It was arranged for 33 soldiers of the 4th King's Own Regiment, three surveyors, three constables and other auxiliary personnel, to be dispatched on the ship to Port Phillip. On 27 September the *Rattlesnake* arrived at Port Phillip and anchored about 2 miles inside the entrance of Port Phillip Bay. To the crew and passengers, this beautiful and capacious Basin ... the scenery was that of an extensive park. In short, the whole country before them only required to be inhabited and cultivated slightly to render it a most delightful region. The following day, the *Rattlesnake* made sail and proceeded higher up this lovely Bay nearly grounding once, the bay not being yet known, indeed one of the objects of the *Rattlesnakes'* visit was to survey the bay and make known to the world its advantages and disadvantages for colonising.

It was during this surveying work that Captain William Hobson named a bay, in the northeast corner of the larger body of water, Hobsons Bay after himself. As we mentioned within our introduction, on the northwest corner of Port Phillip Bay, a peninsula of land was sighted and named Point Cooke in recognition of Acting Lieutenant John Murray Cooke.

Having spent eleven weeks at Port Phillip, the *Rattlesnake* set sail for Sydney on 11 December 1836 arriving there four days later. In February 1837, the *Rattlesnake*, now with Governor Sir Richard Bourke onboard, sailed south to Port Phillip, as part of his farewell tour. They reached Port Phillip on 1 March and remained there until early April when they returned, with the Governor, to Sydney.

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<sup>3</sup> Paid Off was a common term, during this time, which meant that the vessel had come to the end of its useful life under its current purpose and is to be repurposed or scrapped.



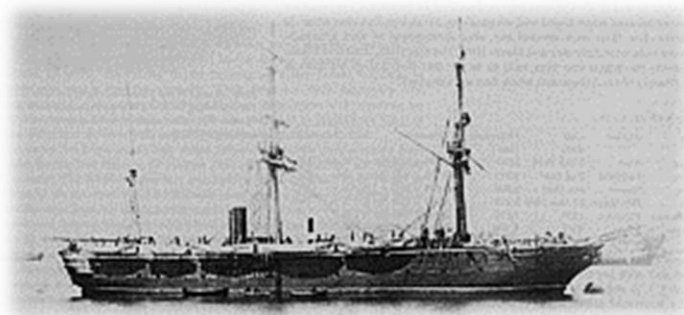
The *Rattlesnake* was now charged with a surveying expedition around part of the northern coast of Australia, making voyages to Cape York, New Guinea, and Torres Strait. It also undertook survey work in New Zealand where it also provided support to English settlers during a Māori uprising.

On his return to England, John Cooke transferred to the *Excellent*, a gunnery-ship at Portsmouth, on 28 July 1839. The *Excellent* was under the command of Captain Sir Thomas Hastings. We understand that the *Excellent* was in Portsmouth being fitted for trial, with a moveable platform, for the purpose of teaching seamen naval gunnery.

For his subsequent services in China, John Cooke was assigned to the *Blenheim* (28 December 1840) where he witnessed all the chief operations of this conflict<sup>4</sup> including the capture of the forts in the Boca Tigris and the fall of Canton. It was here that he obtained his commission to the rank of Lieutenant on 8 June 1841. With his new commission, John Cooke joined the crew of *HMS Nimrod*, a 20-gun corvette class vessel and remained with her until January 1845, when the vessel was paid off. During this period, Lieutenant Cooke and the *Nimrod* were operating around the coast of China, Formosa, and Macao, supporting efforts during the conflict in China.

John Cooke's next posting was aboard *HMS Pelican*, a 16-gun brig/sloop which was commanded by Captain Philip Justice. The vessel served in the East Indies, and John Cooke remained in its company for about twelve months. On 25 February 1846 John Cooke was appointed as First Lieutenant on board *HMS Electra* which was patrolling throughout the West Indies and along the east coast of North America. It was during this time that, due to the illness of its commander Captain William Heriot Maitland, Cooke acted as the commander for eight or nine months.

It was from his role as acting commander of the *Electra* that Lieutenant John Cooke gained his commission as a Commander<sup>5</sup> on 18 December 1852. On 18 December 1856 Commander John Murray Cooke was appointed in charge of *HMS Simoom* which was an iron hulled frigate that had been launched in 1849 and was now being utilised as a troopship transporting English infantry troops from England to outposts around the empire.



**HMS Simoom (1849)**

The *Simoom* had just undergone refitting in Portsmouth when John Cooke took over command. His first orders (1857) were to sail to Dublin to board 26 officers and 689 men of the 33rd Regiment (Duke of Wellingtons or West Yorks) that were to be transported to Mauritius. Here the *Simoom* boarded members of the 5th (Northumberland) Fusiliers bound for Hong Kong. On 19 June 1857 the

*Simoom* arrived in Hong Kong only to be told that they were to revert to Calcutta, India due to the Indian Mutiny taken place and requiring reinforcements.

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<sup>4</sup> First China War - Between 1839 and 1842, English Indian forces fought a war with Imperial China that served the interests of opium smugglers. Their resulting victory opened the lucrative Chinese trade to English merchants.

<sup>5</sup> In the Navy, commander is a senior-grade officer rank which is above the rank of lieutenant commander and below a captain.

On 16 August, John Cooke and the *Simoom* sailed to Madras to collect more troops that were required in Calcutta. From there they sailed to Galle, Ceylon and boarded 1000 men of the 79th Highlanders and 60th Rifles, that had arrived prior on smaller vessels, and these were transported to Calcutta. Having completed these missions, John Cooke and the *Simoom* sailed via Cape Town back to London, it was now March 1858.



**Painting of HMS Simoom towing 99th Regiment to Hong Kong  
 (Courtesy of Michele and Bob Cooke)**

In April 1858 they once again sailed for Calcutta with members of the 73rd Regiment (Highlanders) onboard and arrived there in the June. The following month they sailed from Calcutta with 150 sick and wounded, plus passengers bound for Cape Town where they were landed. The *Simoom* then sailed on back to London arriving November 1858. Here they quickly onboarded 33 officers, 832 men of the 31st (East Surrey) Regiment, plus 14 women and 16 children bound for Bombay, India. They arrived there towards the beginning of February 1859.

They remained in port for just over a month to replenish provisions and onboard new passengers, 4 officers, 33 NCOs, 207 soldiers plus 16 women and 30 children from various regiments who boarded for the return journey to England, where they arrived on 6 June 1859. Following a short stay in England, Commander John Cooke and the crew of the *Simoom* began transporting troops to China to help quell the current uprising there.

John Cooke served as the commander of the *Simoom* until his untimely death on 4 August 1861, which occurred onboard his ship at Woosung, China. At the time of his death, Commander John Murray Cooke was in his thirty-fifth year of service with the Royal Navy and was only forty-seven years old. Commander John Murray Cooke was buried within the Shantung Road Cemetery, Shanghai, however this cemetery no longer exists, and it is believed that the graveyard was dug up. However, there is a brass memorial tablet in the northwest corner of Bromyard Church, Herefordshire, England that commemorates the life of John Murray Cooke.



John Cooke had an illustrious career within the English Navy rising through the ranks to the command of his own ship serving during the many conflicts that England found itself in across its extensive empire. What John Cooke might have thought of having a landmark in Port Phillip Bay named after him we will never know, but for us it is a memorial that acknowledges an accomplished mariner.

**Research:** Graeme Reilly (ALHS 2024)

### **Acknowledgement**

Research into the exploration of Australia benefits greatly from the amount of material that has been made available online by major libraries and historical databases, but nothing better than the knowledge and materials held by family members that has been passed down through the generations.

I would especially wish to thank the generous contribution of information, dates, names, images, and material that was provided to me by the family of the great great grandson of John Murray Cooke's younger brother. Their clarification of my research assisted in the recording of the exceptional life of Commander John Murray Cooke of the Royal Navy and his lasting connection to Point Cook and Port Phillip Bay.

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