

Letter to Charles Mann

J.B.T. Macfarlane

24 February 1838

Introduction

This letter was probably solicited by Charles Mann, the former Advocate General, when he visited Van Dieman's Land on legal business in 1838. He was on the way to Hobart in the *John Pirie* when she was stranded at Encounter Bay by the gale of 21 December 1837. He continued to Hobart on the *John Pirie* on 8 January 1838, returning to Adelaide in April.

Robert Gouger was in Hobart at the time, on his way to London to complain about his dismissal as Colonial Secretary by Governor Hindmarsh. He included the letter in his *South Australia in 1837; in a series of letters: With a postscript as to 1838*, published by Harvey and Darton, Gracechurch Street, London, 1838.

Text

Hobart Town, February 24th, 1838.

Sir,

At your request I hand you over a plain statement of my opinion of Encounter Bay. having had the honour to command the South Australian Company's whaling establishment there during a season of six months, and afterwards to command the South Australian Company's Barque, "South Australian," which unfortunately was lost in a gale from S.E. by E., an accident I could not foresee nor prevent. However, as it was, I rest confident that I should have been equally exposed and in a much more dangerous berth had I chosen the anchorage under Granite Island, or since named Victoria Harbour. I find, in overhauling the South Australian Gazette, some persons have given an account of Victoria Harbour as calculated to moor our British navy;—sorry, most sorry should I feel as a British seaman to see our grand fleet moored there at the time I lost my ship; our foes, if any, would then have a clear ocean to cruize over; but let those persons who give Victoria Harbour such a noble name, ask themselves, in the first place, "are they seamen?" and in the second, "have they been in the bay nine months, and experienced all weathers, night and day, in open boats;" they must say "no." Eighteen years experience as a seaman has taught me to know what a harbour of safety is, and I have no hesitation to say, I would resign command of any ship sooner than again risk her there after August. The bay is quite open from S.S.E. to E., and when a gale sets in from that quarter there is a sea with ground-swell that the finest ship in her Majesty's service never could stand out. I have seen from the mouth of the river Murray to Rosetta Bluff a solid break, and from Rosetta Bluff to the Black Reef, I am sure I never saw a more terrific break; therefore any ship lying there must depend on her ground-tackle. I saw my fate the moment the first bower parted, and was prepared for it; I had lower yards and top-masts on deck to ease the ship from labouring, but sea frequently broke fore and aft. I

afterwards was an eye-witness to the loss of the Solway and John Pirie, the former a total wreck, but the John Pirie being light and small did not strike so heavy, and was afterwards got off. I have given you my candid opinion of Encounter Bay, and remain

Your obedient servant,
J. B. T. MACFARLANE.

Charles Mann, Esq.