

# *A Cartographic Conundrum*

a presentation to the

Philippine Map Collectors Society

by

**Christian Perez & Peter Geldart**

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## **Christian Perez :**

Sometime in 2011 I acquired this large English map from a local dealer who could not give me any information about it.

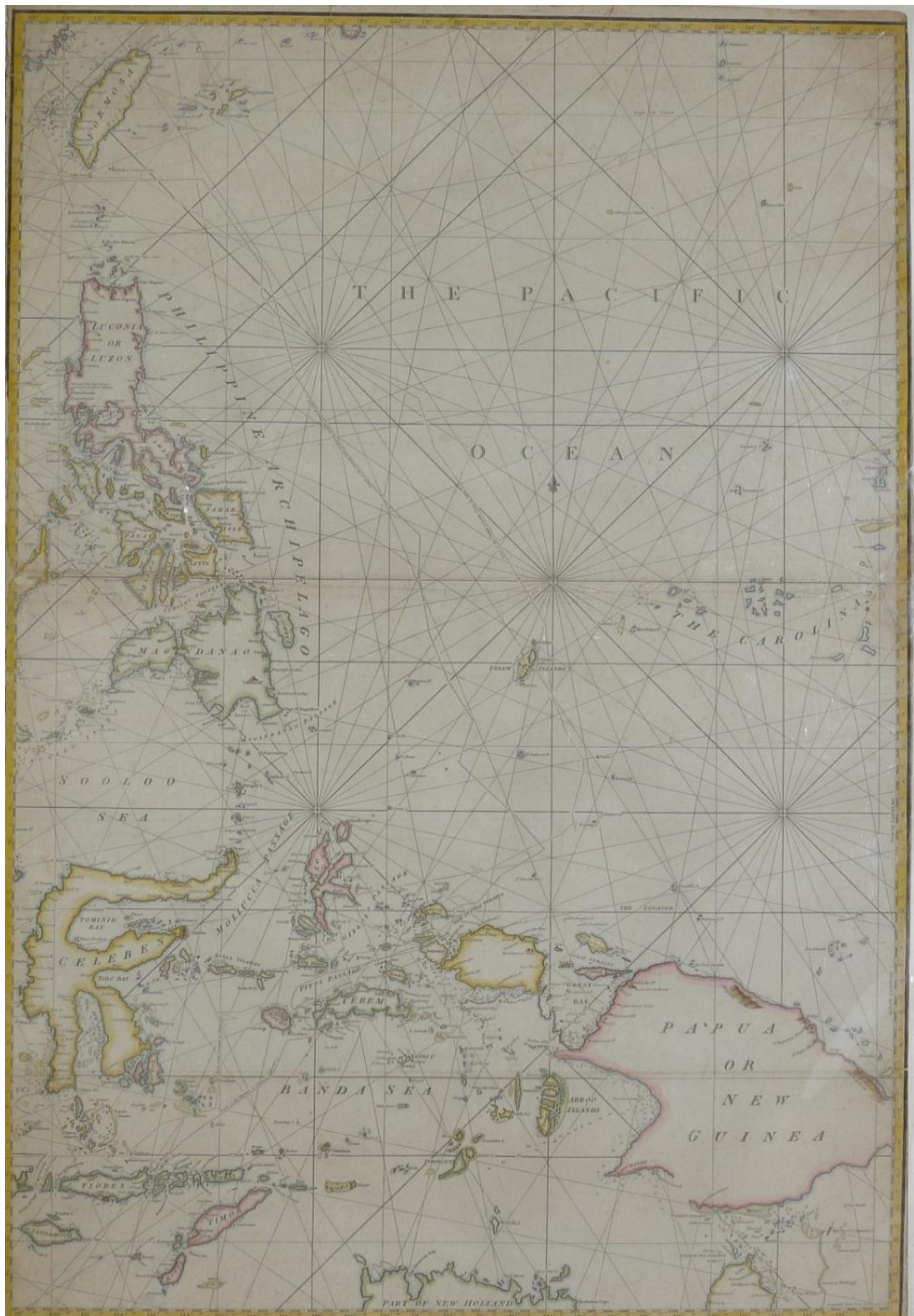
The map has no title, no author's name, no date and no printing location so it was a bit of a mystery. The only mark is "Longitude East from Greenwich". It is a marine chart that appears to be from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century based on its style. It strangely shows the Philippines near the left margin, which makes it look like the second sheet of a larger set.

With a closer look, the chart shows the tracks of two ships: "Track of the *Canton* towards China in 1797" and "Track of the *Glatton* to China in 1796 and 7".

- The *Canton* was an East Indiaman of 1198 tons in service from 1790 to 1811; on her third voyage (of eight), under Captain Abel Vyvyan, she sailed from England on 12 April 1796 bound for China via St. Helena and India, and returned on 23 October 1798.
- The *Glatton* was an East Indiaman of 1200 tons in service from 1796 to 1815. On her first voyage (of eight), under Captain Charles Drummond, she sailed from England on 11 August 1796 bound for China, and returned on 11 July 1798. The *Glatton's* passage through the Straits of Flores in 1796 is documented on the chart, during which she captured a Dutch prow.

For a long time that was all I could gather about this map. So one day I showed it to Peter as our expert on English maps, and after a few months he came back to me with all the answers. So here he is to talk about it.

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**Peter Geldart :**

As Christian says, on seeing this map I agreed with his deductions that it is one sheet of a larger English sea chart of c1800, but in the absence of either a title cartouche or a publisher's imprint <sup>(1)</sup> the challenge was to discover which one.

From the scale and style of the chart I was sure it was published neither by the East India Company nor by the Hydrographical Office of British Admiralty, and that this must be one of the so-called "blueback" charts produced by private publishers in London from c1760 until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The name "blueback" comes from the greyish blue or (later) royal blue manilla paper which private chart publishers used to strengthen unbound charts; "blueback" subsequently became a generic term to describe any privately published chart (whether or not it had a blue backing) as distinct from the new "official" Admiralty charts and the semi-official EIC charts. A typical blueback chart was a small-scale chart covering the largest area possible, with the title set in a decorative florid script, and rhumb lines criss-crossing the whole chart; later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century bluebacks would also incorporate coastal views and inset plans of ports and narrow passages.

The numerous EIC charts published by Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808) have a very distinctive style and for the most part are on a much larger scale than the blueback charts; those published by his successor James Horsburgh (1762-1836), also have a characteristic and less ornate style than the blueback charts of the period. The first Admiralty chart was published in 1800 (by Dalrymple, who had been appointed as the first Hydrographer to the Admiralty in 1795). However, Admiralty charts were first put on sale to the public only in 1821, and were very different from the (more expensive) bluebacks, with "a new modern look, undecorated and functional in appearance, and finely engraved to show detail effectively". Admiralty charts were printed on heavy woven paper and were never backed with blue paper; by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they had largely superseded the blueback charts.

In 1800 there were about half-a-dozen commercial chart publishers in London, of which four (all of which produced charts of the East Indies) were possible candidates for the source:

- Robert Laurie (1755-1836) & James Whittle (1757-1818) <sup>(2)</sup>;
- John Hamilton Moore (1738-1807) <sup>(3)</sup>;
- David Steel (1734-1799) <sup>(4)</sup>; and
- William Heather (1764-1812) <sup>(5)</sup>.

I started my search by looking at the charts published by Laurie & Whittle, on the grounds that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century their *East India Pilot* had become the leading English guide to eastern seas (since its original publication by Sayer & Bennett in 1778-81); these are the blueback charts of Asia produced in the largest numbers and most commonly found today. But none of the Laurie & Whittle charts matched Christian's.

I then looked at charts published by John Hamilton Moore and David Steel, which was more difficult as few of these appear to have survived and even fewer are available for viewing on the internet. Although they were produced in significant numbers, working sea charts from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are inherently rare; as a result of their use aboard ships, the vast majority of them were lost at sea, destroyed by use, or intentionally discarded when updated, corrected and more accurate editions were obtained. Again, none of the charts by Moore or Steel I could find matched Christian's.

Finally I concentrated on William Heather, in 1800 an established chartmaker whose business was subsequently acquired by J.W. Norie (1772-1843). Heather's beautiful charts are also significantly rarer than those of Laurie & Whittle, and in looking for examples I ran into the problem that many are held in collections (e.g. at the British Library) that are not freely available online. There was also the challenge of trying to find a picture of a chart without knowing its title.

Fortunately I was able to locate a digitised copy of Heather's catalogue, published in 1803, entitled *A new catalogue of the best charts, pilots, & navigation books : sold wholesale, retail, and for exportation by W. Heather, at his sea chart, map, and mathematical instrument warehouse, No. 157, Leadenhall Street, near the Royal Exchange, London*. Looking at the charts listed in the catalogue, I decided the most likely candidate for Christian's was:

***To the Honorable the Court of Directors of the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies this chart of the China Seas is most humbly dedicated by their mostly humbly obliged and dedicated servant William Heather 1799.***

All I now needed to confirm my tentative identification was to find a picture of the elusive chart, and this was again a challenge. The British Library in London, the National Archives in Kew and the National Library of Australia all hold copies of this chart, from which I could confirm that it consists of "1 chart on 2 sheets ; each 92 x 65 cm." (which tallied with the size of Christian's map) – but no picture was available.

But finally, I reached the end of my search at, surprisingly, the website of the *Fundação Biblioteca Nacional*, the National Library of Brazil – *Eureka!*

Heather's chart was not sold for many years; by the time his successor J.W. Norie published his new catalogue dated Feb.1, 1816 <sup>(6)</sup>, Heather's chart had been replaced by a new chart entitled *A general Chart of the China Seas from the Bay of Bengal to Canton, Formosa, the Phillippines, and Carolinas, including Penang, Malacca, &c.*





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**Notes :**

- (1) Pursuant to the Engraving Copyright Act of 1734/5 and the Prints Copyright Act of 1777, the line "Published according to Act of Parliament ..." or "Published as the Act directs ..." (or similar wording), followed by the date of publication and the name (and often the address) of the publisher, appears at the bottom of most English maps and charts (other than those published in books or magazines) from 1735 onwards and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- (2) Robert Sayer (c1725-1794) took over his brother's print-selling business, and expanded into chart publishing after acquiring much of the stock-in-trade owned by Thomas Jefferys (1719-1771) on the latter's bankruptcy in 1766. In 1777 Sayer entered into partnership with his servant John Bennett (d.1787), who became insane in 1783. Sayer & Bennett's *East India Pilot*, published in 1778-81, became "the standard English guide to eastern seas for the next forty years". On Sayer's death in 1794 the business was continued by his assistants Robert Laurie and James Whittle. Laurie & Whittle re-issued many of Sayer's plates with their own imprint, and expanded the *East India Pilot* with the addition of new charts. Laurie retired in 1812 and was succeeded by his son Richard Holmes Laurie (1777-1858), who became sole proprietor of the business on Whittle's death in 1818.
- (3) John Hamilton Moore first made his name as an author of navigational textbooks. He began publishing his own charts in 1784, but specialised in charts for the North Sea and Atlantic trades and did not challenge Robert Sayer's dominance in publishing charts of eastern seas. He was sued for infringement of copyright by Robert Sayer in 1785 (the first case concerning maps to be brought under the engraving copyrights acts), by David Steel in 1789, and by his former employee William Heather in 1798. In 1804 Moore formed a short-lived partnership with his son-in law, Robert Blachford (c1775-c1851), whose firm was subsequently acquired by the great 19<sup>th</sup> century blueback chart publisher James Imray (1803-1870).
- (4) David Steel was a respected nautical publisher who began publishing charts and sailing directions in 1778. When Steel died in 1799 the business was inherited by his son, also David; and on the latter's death in 1803 it was taken over by his widow, Penelope, and her second and third husbands (William Mason and Stanley Goddard respectively). However, the once-prestigious firm went into decline, and in 1819 Steel & Goddard went bankrupt and was acquired by J.W. Norie & Co.
- (5) William Heather was apprenticed to George Mitchell, an engraver and bookseller, and then worked for John Hamilton Moore. In 1793 Heather opened his own business "at the sign of The Little Midshipman, No. 157 Leadenhall Street". His earlier charts were produced first for the British coasting trade, and then for the American trade, but by 1805 Heather had added 23 charts covering the route to Asia and was in a position to compete with Laurie & Whittle. When Heather died in 1812 the business was acquired by one of his trustees, John William Norie, in partnership with George Wilson (1789-1837). Norie became a prolific chart publisher and author of navigation textbooks and pilots. After Norie's death the firm was taken over by George's cousin, Charles Wilson (1807-1882).
- (6) *Catalogue Of the latest and most approved Charts, Pilots, and Navigation Books, Published and sold Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation, by J.W. Norie & Co. (Successors to the late William Heather) Chartsellers to the Admiralty, and the Honourable East India Company, at the Navigation Warehouse and Naval Academy, Leadenhall Street, London.*

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**Reference :**

**Susanna Fisher**, *The Makers of the Blueback Charts: A History of Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson Ltd*  
Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson Ltd, St. Ives / Regatta Press Limited, New York, 2001.

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