



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

*A Pirate of Exquisite Mind: The Life of William Dampier: Explorer, Naturalist and Buccaneer* by Diana & Michael Preston. Doubleday, London, 2004, 372 pages. Hardback, ISBN: 0385607067, price about \$46.

A brilliant presentation of Dampier, who to most Western Australians is looked upon as one of our important explorers, whose writings of his visits in 1688 and second visit in 1699 are basic to the State early history and are so well described in this history with previously unrelated anecdotes.

This book brings Dampier to life on his other journeys and in different guises, including his pioneering achievements of mapmaking, particularly the mapping of the oceans and the tides for the first time. His buccaneering exploits are wonderfully well described as well as his cultural descriptions of places and people. Also his observation of places and natural features, many of which bear his name, is covered in detail as they are encountered in his travels. In the Prologue alone (page 1), the way in which Dampier's descriptions of all aspects of the natural wonders he encounters for the first time, exemplifies 'the detail and delicacy of his descriptions would gladden any modern ornithologist' yet he points out, 'The flesh is lean and black yet very good meat'. These culinary additions to most of his wildlife descriptions continue throughout the book.

Dampier's adventures begin when sailing around the Cape of Good Hope to Java. After returning to England he next sets sail for Jamaica, which was then in English hands and as an enemy of England, piracy of gold laden Spanish galleons was not discouraged. All the following voyages, that included a foray into America to exploit the tobacco trade, are similarly treated and the entire book is a compelling read, and as such is more an adventure story than many traditional histories.

Some of the medical remedies to which Dampier alludes are vile in the extreme but many of the severe conditions are survived in spite of the unusual methods and instruments used.

Several of Dampier's partners in crime are vividly portrayed on all three of his circumnavigations of the world. In spite of his buccaneering and piracy of Spanish galleons and the ignominy of surviving a court martial, he was presented to Queen Anne prior to the commencement of his 1703 voyage to the West Indies.

Dampier married his wife Judith, about whom very little is known, and departed on his next voyage within months of his marriage and did not return for twelve years.

The maps and various illustrations, notes, bibliography and index are very acceptable.

*Margaret Hamilton*

Editor's note: This book note is reproduced courtesy of the [Professional Historians Association \(WA\) Inc.](http://www.pha.org.au) Margaret is a PHA member who wrote the book note for its November 2004 newsletter. The book is available in both hardback and paperback, with a children's version available in paperback (289 pages, ISBN: 0385607059, price about \$33).