**FLOATING GOLD**

**Margaret Muir Robert Hale London 2010**

## In July 1802 Oliver Quintrell, a post captain seeking a new command since France and England ended the war with the Treaty of Amiens, comes across a convict corpse from the prison hulks in Portsmouth at the mouth of the Bembridge River on the Isle of Wight Quantrell muses on the bodies piled up in warfare and yet can still yearn to be afloat, in the Mediterranean, the Horn and further. At this point his steward hails him with the news of a letter from the Admiralty back at his house.

To his wife’s dismay he is required to go the Admiralty and miss a dinner party arranged by her to acquaint him with those of influence about whom the Captain cares little. Only his claw like hand, the result of contact with a four pound shot and time in Greenwich Hospital, gives him any concern for his own appearance.

The gentlemen of the Admiralty, with Admiral Viscount St Vincent First Lord of the Admiralty at their head, inform the Captain that Pitt’s income tax of 1799 did not produce the 10 million pounds but only 4 million so that another war with France would be catastrophic. The Captain is not granted a ship of the line but the command of a frigate the *Elusive* to initially accompany a merchant fleet bound for the West Indies (the owners having paid for naval protection). The Captain is given sealed orders which subsequently direct him and his ship to sail to South America and an island sketched out in the orders which turns out to be Deception Island. On that desolate volcanic island there is treasure to be retrieved and brought back to swell the coffers of the Treasury.

I read *Floating Gold* in a couple of sessions and my attention was clearly caught by the storyline and the detailed description of life aboard the *Elusive’,* the weather patterns, the vivid capture of the atmosphere and sufferings of the crew and the contrast of Maderia and Rio de Janeiro with the icy gales of the South Atlantic. Most engaging of all was the account of entering the lagoon within the mountainous encirclement of Deception Island and the search for the treasure which had me rapt. After that the problems with gales and the Goodwin Sands were almost an anticlimax.

Margaret Muir has woven a tale worthy of a Hornblower epic.Though I wish that Lieutenant Parry the second in command on the vessel had been given more character. Most of all the Captain’s love interest on Maderia, Susanna, gets only a few lines and apart from knowing she has long black hair there is nothing to explain her attraction for the Captain apart from the fact she is not Mrs Quintrell. The book ends with a renewed war with France. Perhaps we could have a sequel to *Floating Gold* including a chapter to the sultry raven haired Susanna. She sounds worth jumping ship for or at least having a refit in Funchal.

**John Livermore**

**Reference**

Maritime Times of Tasmania 2010 Spring(33) 9.