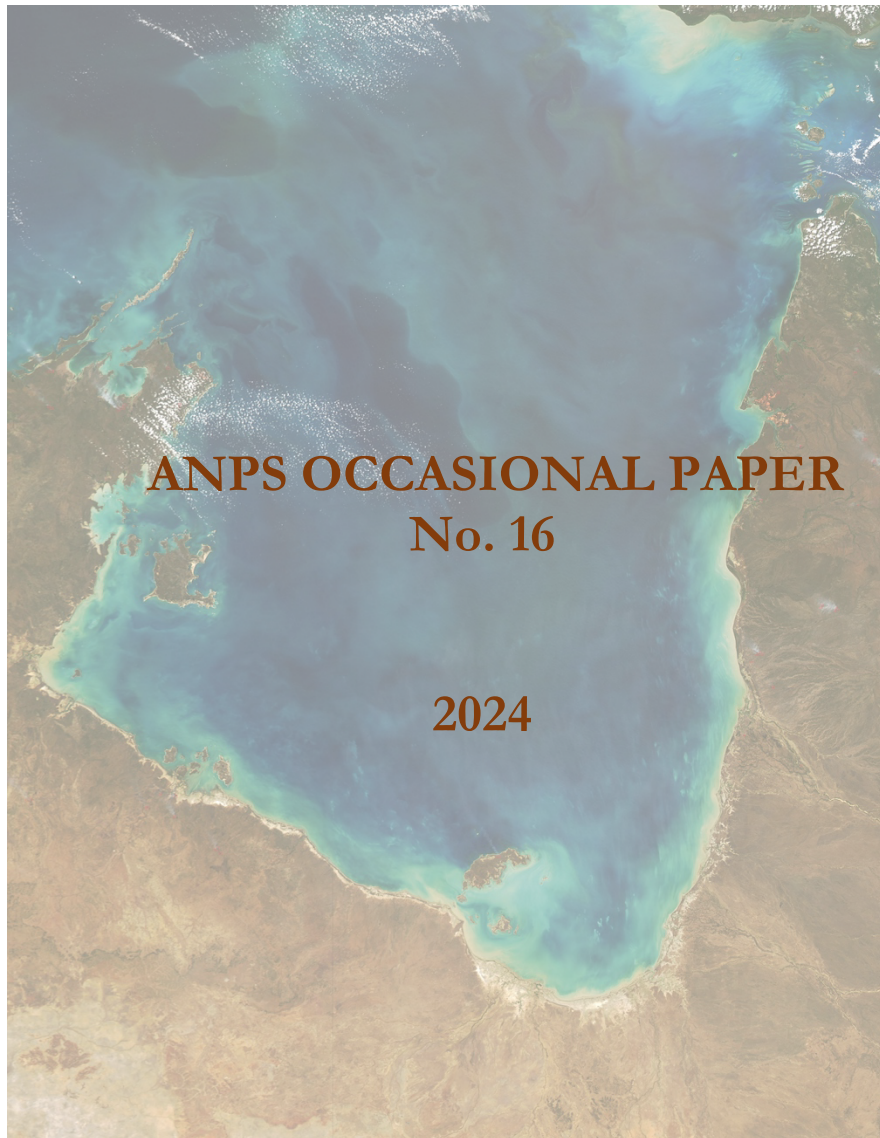


# Who named the Gulf of Carpentaria?



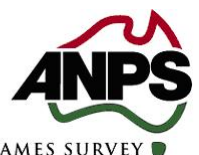


# Who named the Gulf of Carpentaria?

*Jan Tent*

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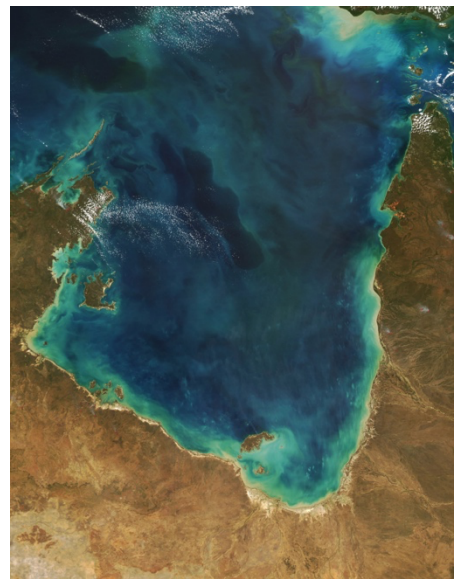
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In *ANPS Occasional Papers* 13 and 14 (Tent, 2022, 2023), I discussed the naming of New Holland and Groote Eylandt, which are usually alleged to be named by Abel Tasman during his 1644 voyage along the northern coasts of Australia. I showed that there is no cartographic or documentary evidence to support those claims.

It is similarly asserted by some that Jan Carstenszoon (aka Carstensz.) was responsible for the naming of the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>1</sup> We see for instance the following declarations:

- ‘Jan Carstenszoon (or *Carstensz*), visited in 1623 and named the gulf in honour of Pieter de Carpentier, at that time the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies.’ (Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf\\_of\\_Carpentaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Carpentaria))
- ‘In 1623 vernoemde Jan Carstensch de golf naar gouverneur van Batavia Pieter de Carpentier.’ [Transl. ‘In 1623 Jan Carstensch named the gulf after Pieter de Carpentier, Governor of Batavia.’]. (Wikipedia, [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golf\\_van\\_Carpentaria](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golf_van_Carpentaria))
- ‘In 1623, [...], Jan Carstensch, visited the region and named the gulf “Carpentaria” after Pieter de Carpentier, then Dutch East Indies Governor-General.’ (WorldAtlas.com, [www.worldatlas.com/gulfs/gulf-of-carpentaria.html](http://www.worldatlas.com/gulfs/gulf-of-carpentaria.html))
- ‘He [Jan Carstensch.] called the gulf after Pieter de Carpentier, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. (Reed, 1992, p. 56).
- ‘The Gulf of Carpentaria was named by the Dutch explorer Jan Carstensch in 1623 after the then Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Pieter de Carpentier.’ (Appleton & Appleton, 1992, p. 60).
- ‘Le premier explorateur européen connu à visiter cette région fut le Hollandais Willem Janszoon lors de son voyage de 1606. Son compatriote Jan Carstenszoon (ou Carstensch.) explora le golfe en 1623 et le nomma en l’honneur de Pieter de Carpentier, à l’époque gouverneur-général des Indes orientales néerlandaises. Abel Tasman explora aussi cette côte en 1644. La région fut ensuite cartographiée par Matthew Flinders en 1802 et 1803.’ (Wikipedia: [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golfe\\_de\\_Carpentarie](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golfe_de_Carpentarie))

[Transl. ‘The first known European explorer to visit this region was the Dutchman Willem Janszoon on his 1606 voyage. His compatriot Jan Carstenszoon (or Carstensch.) explored the gulf in 1623 and named it in honour of Pieter de Carpentier, at the time governor-general of the Dutch East Indies. Abel Tasman also explored this coast in 1644. The area was then mapped by Matthew Flinders in 1802 and 1803.’]

---

<sup>1</sup> Patronyms such as *Carstenszoon* [‘Carstenson’] and *Janszoon* [‘Johnson’] were generally abbreviated in written texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to *Carstensz* and *Jansz*. A period was placed at the end of the abbreviated name to indicate it was an abbreviation. The latter practice is no longer followed in Modern Dutch.

Somewhat more accurately, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s web entry for the Gulf gives no indication of who named it, but does state after whom it was named ([www.britannica.com/place/Gulf-of-Carpentaria](http://www.britannica.com/place/Gulf-of-Carpentaria)): 'The gulf was named for Pieter de Carpentier, governor-general (1623–27) of the Dutch East Indies.' We shall see below that it was directly named after the coastal region name *Carpentaria*, which was named after de Carpentier.

In the first five of the citations above, the very similar wording suggests they relied on each other for that information—a custom, it has to be said, which is often practiced by lexicographers and encyclopedists.

It should also be noted that when Carstenszoon departed on his expedition on 21 January 1623, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies was still Jan Pieterszoon Coen. However, on 1 February, Pieter de Carpentier was appointed to the position. It is therefore unlikely that Carstenszoon bestowed de Carpentier's name on any geographic feature due to the latter's position as Governor-General. This point is also made by the nineteenth century Dutch historians Jan Ernst Heeres (1898, p. 101, f.n. 6) (see section 6 'Conclusion'), and Ludovicus Carolus Desiderius van Dijk, who in his book *Twee Togten naar de Golf van Carpentaria, J. Carstensz. 1623, J.E. Gonzal 1756* ['Two Voyages to the Gulf of Carpentaria, J. Carstensz. 1623, J.E. Gonzal 1756'], states:

Trouwens, toen Carstensz. zijn togt ondernam, was Coen nog gouverneur-generaal, en er bestond dus volstrekt geene aanleiding om Carpentiers naam zoo bij uitstek te verheerlijken. Aan drie verschillende rivieren evenwel werden door den commandeur zelven de namen van van Speult, de Carpentier en Coen gegeven. Daar nu Carstensz. zelf noch de bewuste baai noch eene landstreek van Australië heeft benoemd en van Speult (niet de Carpentier, noch zelfs Coen) eigenlijk de voorname bevorderaar zijner reize geweest is, ware het veel eigenaardiger den voormelden zeeboezem *Golf van Speult* te noemen, of beter nog *Pera's-golf*, dewijl 's landvoogds naam toch reeds door eene destijds ontdekte rivier gedragen wordt.

(van Dijk, 1859, p. 25)

[Transl. 'Anyhow, when Carstensz. undertook his journey, Coen was still governor-general, so there was absolutely no reason to glorify Carpentier's name so pre-eminently. To three different rivers, however, were given the names van Speult, de Carpentier and Coen by the commander himself. Since Carstensz. himself has not named the bay in question nor any region of Australia, and since van Speult (not de Carpentier, nor even Coen) was actually the principal promoter of his travels, it would have been much more appropriate to name the aforementioned gulf *Gulf of Speult*, or better still *Pera's-gulf*, because the governor's name is already borne by a river discovered at that time.']

Perhaps Carstenszoon knew of de Carpentier's impending appointment; even if that were not so, de Carpentier was very well-known in the Dutch East Indies and worked in close collaboration with Coen, holding various important positions of authority, including Director-General of Trade, Member to the Council of the Indies, and member of the Council of Defence. Carstenszoon would therefore have known of him, if not personally, and he did honour him by naming a river after him (see section 2.1 'Carstenszoon & van Coolsteerd').

Robert Logan Jack, in his 1921 book *Northmost Australia*, declares the coastal region name *Carpentaria* was assigned by Tasman, and even implies the Gulf obtained its name from Tasman as well, although his final incidental statement is ambiguous:

- 'From the Caron Inlet (Flinders River) Tasman passes beyond our ken. By



following the coast he established the CONTINUITY OF THE CAPE YORK PENINSULA (which he named CARPENTARIA) WITH ARNHEMLAND, and incidentally that instead of a passage to the south there was merely the GULF OF CARPENTARIA.’ (Jack, 1921, pp. 72–73).

There is no evidence to support Jack’s contention.

It is important to note here also that most of these references were written by historians or toponymists who were not professionally trained. Misconceptions of placename origins and meanings often find their way into placename dictionaries or popular histories, thereby perpetuating fallacies. Oftentimes, historical misconceptions become wozzles and continue to be disseminated through school history lessons and books, the mass media, popular literature, and even works of art.<sup>2</sup>

It is also to sources such as Wikipedia that the average person will turn when searching for information on a topic. If a factual record the European toponymic history of Australia is to be accomplished, then accurate accounts of who bestowed which toponyms and under what circumstances are needed.

Having said this, it is worth noting that experts can also fall prey to falsehoods. In footnotes, van Dijk (1859, p. 25) and Heeres (1898, p. 101) cite Ulrich Gerard Lauts, a professor of Dutch language and literature, who also credits Carstenszoon for naming the Gulf:<sup>3</sup>

“Ter eere van den landvoogd (de Carpentier) werd (die diepe baai) door Carstens Golf van Carpentaria genoemd, een naam, welke haar tot heden is gebleven.” Lauts, *Nederlanders in Indië*, bl. 214.

Cited by van Dijk (1859, p. 25)

[Transl. ‘In honour of the governor (de Carpentier) (that deep bay) was named by Carstens, Gulf of Carpentaria, a name which has remained to her to this day.’ Lauts, *The Dutch in the Indies*, p. 214.]

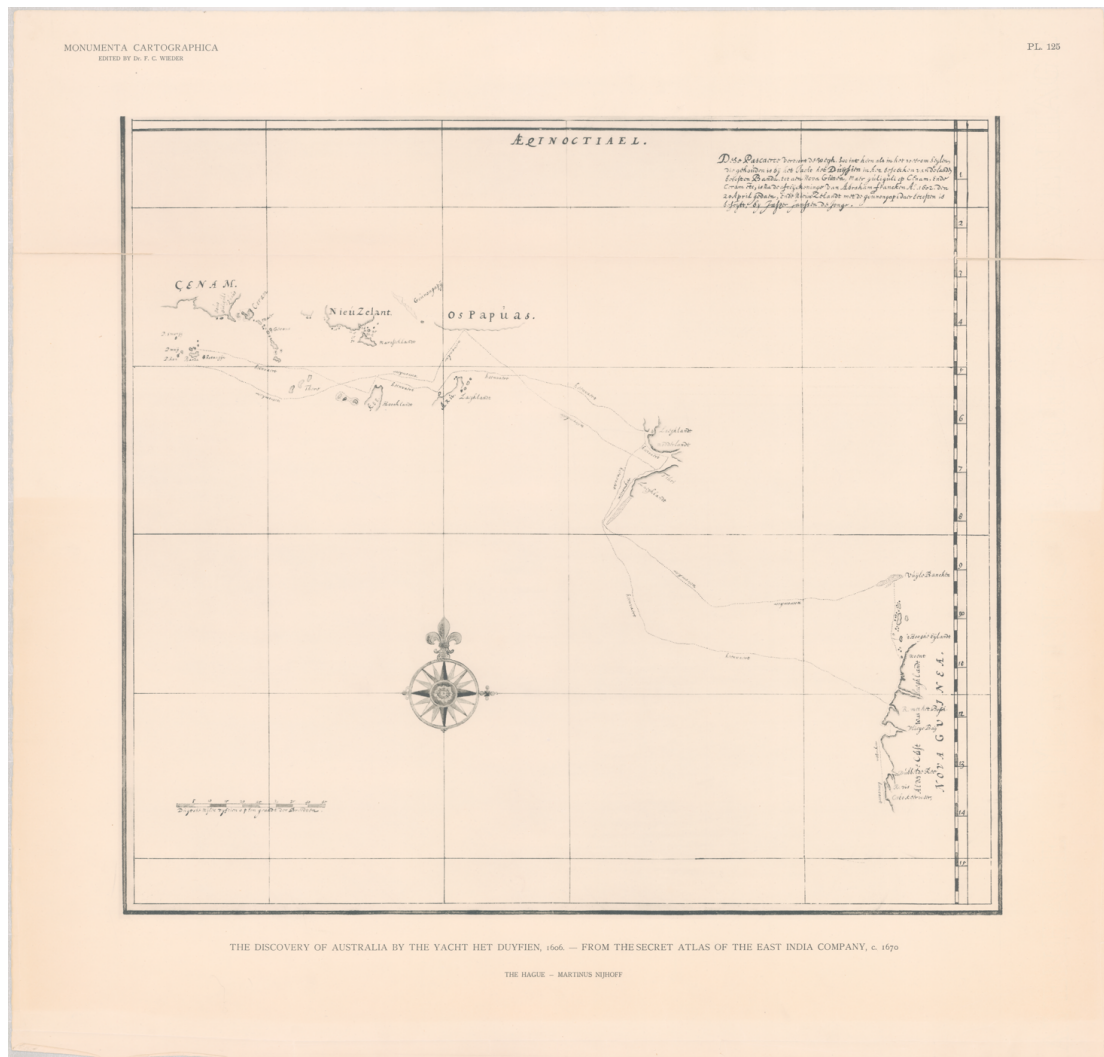
My aim in this Occasional Paper is to offer cartographic and documentary evidence to dispel this wozzle.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The first extant record of a European entering the Gulf of Carpentaria is that of Willem Janszoon in the *Duyfken*, who, in 1606, charted some 300 kms of the west coast of the Cape York Peninsula from Torres Strait (near his ‘*t Hooghe Eijlandt* ‘The High Island’) to his *Cabo Keerweer* (*Cape Keerweer* ‘Cape Turnabout’), and inscribed seven names on his map (**Figure 1**). He was unaware of Torres Strait, and thus assumed the land he charted was part of Nova Guinea.

<sup>2</sup> A ‘wozzle’ (aka ‘the Wozzle effect’ or ‘evidence by citation’) is a widely cited, weak, or unsupported factoid. The term derives from the 1926 book, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, by A.A. Milne. In Chapter 3, Pooh and Piglet follow what they assume to be wozzle footprints in order to catch a wozzle. When the footprints become more numerous, Christopher Robin explains that Pooh and Piglet had been walking in circles, and the footsteps they had been following were their own!

<sup>3</sup> Van Dijk was a Dutch lawyer, historian, academic and archivist; Heeres a professor of Colonial History at the Colonial Institute in Delft.



**Figure 1.**

The 'Duyfken chart'. *Dese pascaerte verthoont de negh, soo int been als in het weerom seylen, die gehouden is bij het jacht Het Duyffien in het besoeken van de lands beoosten Banda, tot aen Nova Guinea.* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1925-1933].

(Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP Ra 265 Vol. 5, Plate 125. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1066939647/view#next-page>)

The next exploration, in 1623, was that of Jan Carstenszoon and Willem van Coolsteerdt (aka van Colster), in command of the *Pera* and *Arnhem* respectively (see section 2.1 below, 'Carstenszoon & van Coolstreerdt').

Perhaps the most important expedition was that of Abel Tasman, who in 1644 charted the entire coastline of the Gulf. He was in command of three ships, the *Limmen*, *Brag*, and *Zeemeeuw* (see section 2.2 below, 'Tasman').

The final Dutch exploration of the Gulf was in 1756 by Jean Etienne Gonzal (in command of the *Rijder*) and Levenne Lodewijk van Asschens (in command of the *Buijs*), which was also the last of any Dutch exploration of Australia. By this time, the name

*Carpentaria*, designating the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, had become well-established (see Table 1).

The next exploration and charting of the Gulf was undertaken by Matthew Flinders in 1802–3. However, by this time the name *Gulf of Carpentaria* had been recognised on maps for about 25 years.

The two expeditions of most interest to us are those of Carstenszoon and Tasman, because they lay the foundation for the ultimate naming of the Gulf.

### 2.1 Carstenszoon & van Coolsteerdt (1623)

In 1623, the Governor of Ambon, Herman van Speult, sent Jan Carstenszoon (van Embden) and Dirck Meliszoon to further explore the islands and coastlines to the east of Ambon (known as *Amboyna* at the time) together with the southern coasts of Nova Guinea. Meliszoon was killed somewhere along the south coast of New Guinea, and was duly replaced by the *Pera*'s second mate, Willem Joosten van Coolsteerdt.

The *Pera* and *Arnhem* continued their way past Torres Strait and along the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. The *Arnhem* suffered a number of mishaps making it much less seaworthy, which prompted van Coolsteerdt to surreptitiously abandon the expedition between Staten River and Nassau River. In order to return as quickly as possible to Ambon, via the Aru and Kai islands, he proceeded directly nor-nor-westwards across what would become known as the *Gulf of Carpentaria*.

Carstenszoon's journal survives together with a chart made by the *Pera*'s first mate, Arent Martenszoon de Leeuw (Figure 2). Another chart is an anonymous copy of 1670 of the chart made on the *Arnhem* (Figure 3). The 'Arnhem Chart' and that of de Leeuw differ considerably, both in their execution and appellations, with the former not having any of those appearing on the de Leeuw chart. Their divergence is testament to the lack of communication between the two ships. This perhaps helps to explain van Coolsteerdt's clandestine abandonment of the expedition, much to the chagrin of Carstenszoon.





Neither of the two charts shows a toponym containing the name *Carpentier* or *Carpentaria*. Robert (1973, p. 15) suggests there was in all probability a third chart drawn up, because Carstenszoon's journal repeatedly mentions another chart. Unfortunately, this chart has not come down to us. Roberts also claims the de Leeuw chart contains '[...] most of the names given by Carstensz to the newly discovered points [...]' (p. 15), thus implying more names were conferred upon that coastline. This is partly borne out by the entry for 11 May 1623 in Carstenszoon's journal, which notes the naming of *de Rivier de Carpentier* (Robert, 1973, p. 106–109; van Dijk, 1859, p. 47):

Den 11n smorgens den wint OZO goet weer, daermede onder seil gegaen, cours NNO langs 't landt, ende des naemiddaachs voorbij een groote revier (daer die van 't Duiffken anno 1606 met de boot in geweest sijn ende een man doort werpen van de wilden verloren) geseijlt, ende leijt op de hoochte van 11 graden 48 min., ende is bij ons in de caert de revier de Carpentier geintituleert.

[Transl. 'The 11th in the morning the wind ESE, good weather with which we went under sail, course NNE along the land and in the afternoon we sailed past a large river (which those of the Duiffken A.D. 1606 went up with the boat and lost a man by the throwing of the savages) and is in the latitude of 11 degrees 48 min., and entitled by us in the chart the Carpentier River.']

Carstenszoon's final words of the entry '[...]' and entitled by us in the chart the Carpentier River' must refer to this other chart kept by him.

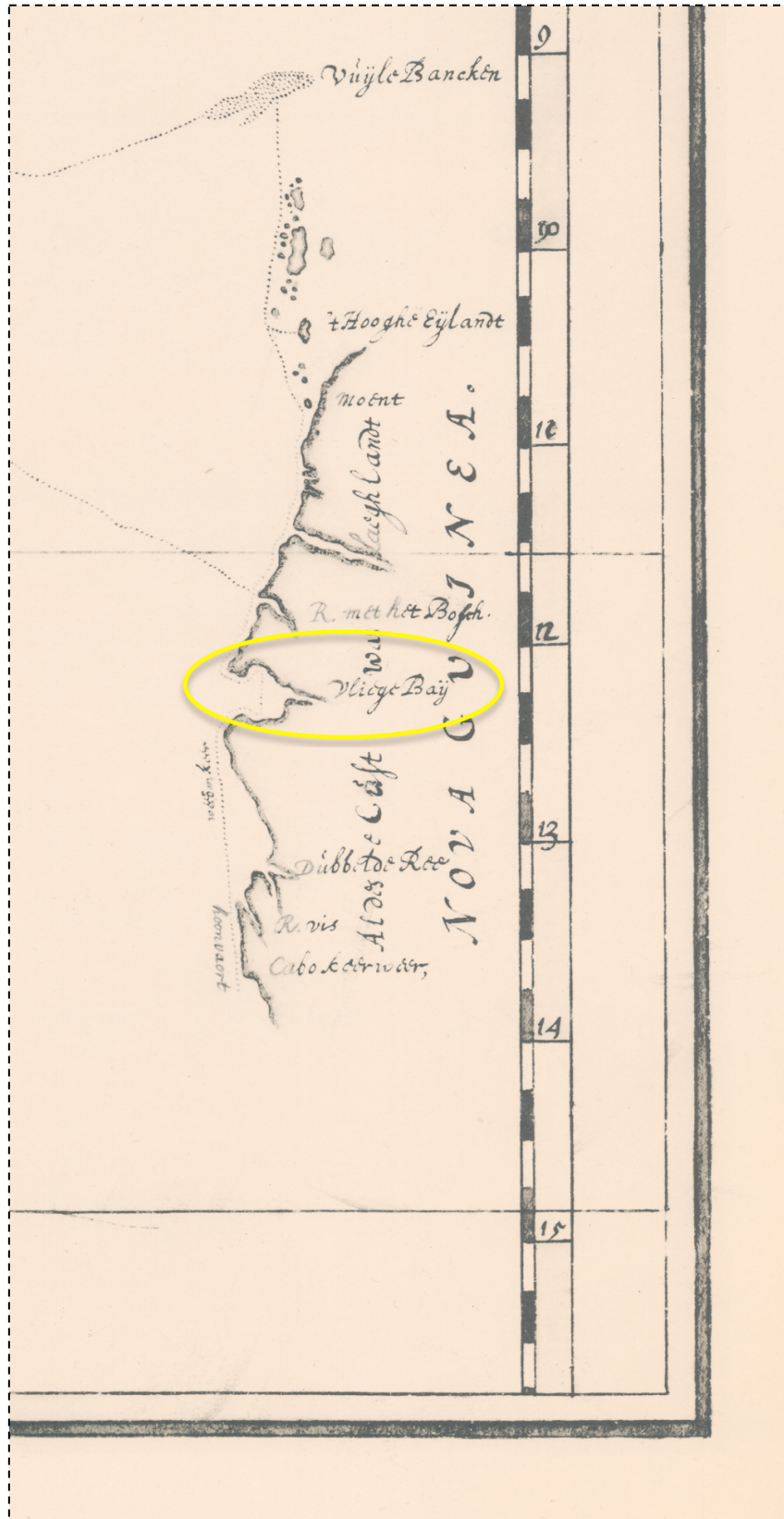
Carstenszoon's description of the river and its location point to it being just north of Janszoon's *Vliege Baij* ['Fly Bay'] (Figure 4); perhaps it is Janszoon's *R. met het Bosch* ['River with Bush/Forest'].<sup>4</sup> *Vliege Baij* was given various appellations due to ambiguous Dutch charting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resulting in a number misidentifications. For instance, in 1756, Gonzal dubbed it *Mossel Baaij* (after Jacob Mossel, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, 1750–61). It is now known as *Albatross Bay*, after the Queensland government steamer *Albatross*.

De Leeuw's chart (Figure 2) labels the bay *Die revier Batavia* ['The river Batavia']. This name regularly appears on subsequent maps of the region. However, on a few it also appears directly below *Rivier de Carpentier*, which is indicative of the confusion that existed on which river had what name (see section 4 below, 'A cartographic confusion').

What is clear, though, is that Carstenszoon did not use the name *Carpentaria* for the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, nor for the waters of the Gulf. His journal continually refers to the west coast of the Cape as *Nova Guinea*, thus following Janszoon's naming of it (Heeres, 1899, pp. 21–48; Robert, 1973, pp. 95–111).

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert (1973, p. 73) speculates that the current Pennefather River may either be Janszoon's *R. met het Bosch* or Carstenszoon's *rivier Carpentier*. See Geoff Wharton's September 2005 *Placenames Australia* article 'Pennefather River, an ever-changing placename' for an exposition of the confusion regarding these toponyms ([https://www.anps.org.au/upload/Sept\\_2005.pdf](https://www.anps.org.au/upload/Sept_2005.pdf)).



**Figure 4.**

Detail of the 'Duyfken chart'.

(Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP Ra 265 Vol. 5, Plate 125. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1066939647/view#next-page>)

### 2.2 Tasman (1644)

Tasman's 1642-43 voyage along the southern coast of Van Diemensland (Tasmania), the western coast of Staeten Landt (New Zealand), and through the Tonga and Fiji archipelagos was considered a failure in the eyes of the *VOC* (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* 'United (Dutch) East India Company') Council in Batavia. In 1644, he was subsequently ordered to follow in the tracks of Carstenszoon and van Coolsteerdt, in order to find a new passage to Chile, and to see if the expanse of water between Arnhem Land and the stretch of coast which was by then named *Carpentaria* led to the southern coastline of the Southland and to the islands of St. Peter and St. Francis.

The route taken by Tasman on this second expedition traced the south coast of New Guinea, thence southeast towards *'t Drooge Bocht* ['The Shallow/Dry Bight'] (Torres Strait). He then followed the route taken by Carstenszoon and van Coolsteerdt along the west coast of the Cape York Peninsula, and continued westwards along the southern coast of the Gulf, before following the coast northwards along its west coast up to Arnhem Land. Tasman therefore established that the stretch of water between Carpentaria and Arnhem Land was in fact a gulf. Unfortunately, neither Tasman's log or original chart of that voyage has come down to us.

The only extant evidence of this voyage is to be found on a small number of maps published in the mid- to latter-half of the seventeenth century. These maps amalgamate earlier maps and charts showing the Dutch discoveries along the coasts of the purported *Terra Australis* or *Southland* with those of Tasman's 1644 voyage.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most famous of these is the so-called 'Tasman-Bonaparte' map, held in the NSW State Library. Extracts are shown in Figures 5a and 5b below. Figure 5b shows both Carstenszoon's *Rivier Carpantier* and Janszoon's *Vliege bay* (circled).

---

<sup>5</sup> The term 'discovery' is a controversial one in the context of European exploration. I use the term here purely in reference to Europeans finding geographic spaces previously unknown to them, even where these were already known to and/or inhabited by other people for millennia.



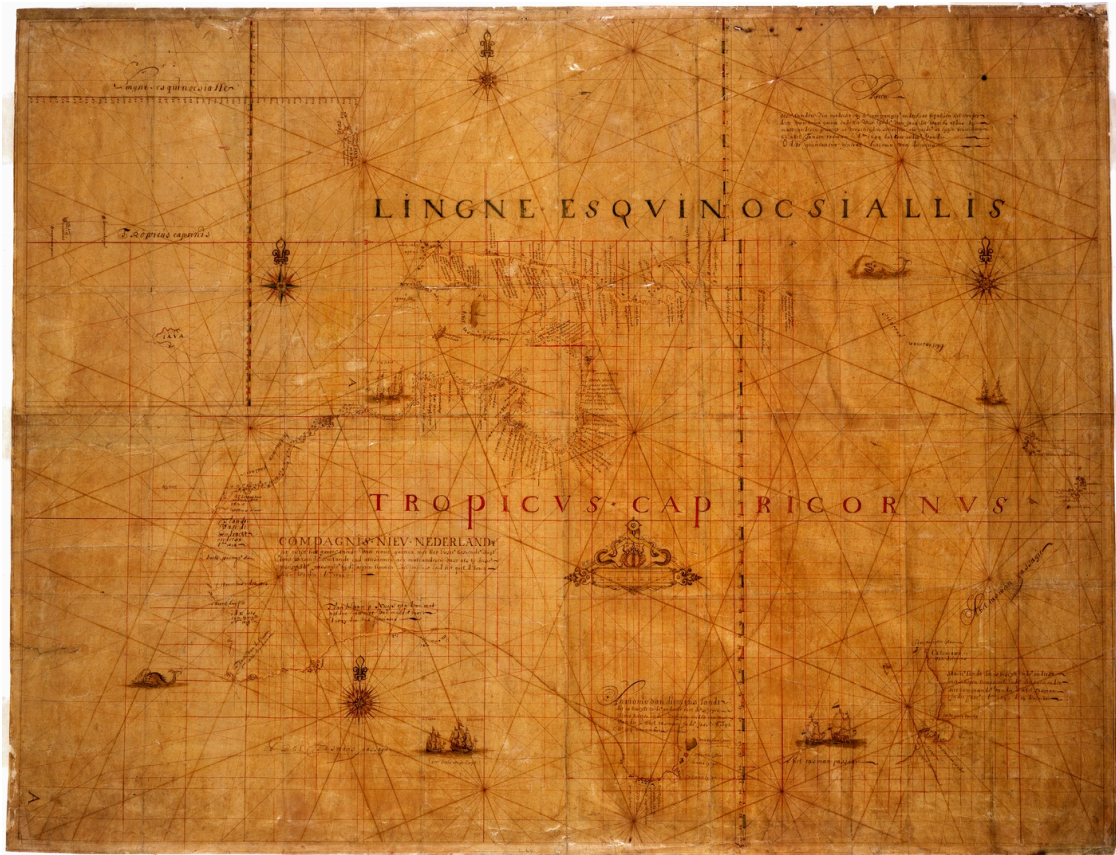


Figure 5a.

Anon. 'Tasman-Bonaparte Map' [1644–1695] showing Tasman's sailing track along the northern coasts of *Hollandia Nova* indicated by dotted line and the legend *Abel tasman passagie*. (State Library of NSW, ML863. <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/tasman-map>)



Table 1.

| Map reference                              | Gulf appellation                             | Region / River appellations          |                               |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|  |  | <i>Carpentaria</i> region name shown | <i>Carpentier River</i> shown |
| Blaeu [1634]                               | N/A  | —                                    |                               |
| Hondius [1636]                             | N/A  | —                                    |                               |
| Anon. [1644-195]<br>'Tasman-Bonaparte' map | —  | —                                    | ✓                             |
| Anon. [n.d. <sup>a</sup> ]                 | —  | —                                    | ✓                             |
| Anon. [de Graaf, I.?] [n.d.]               | —  | —                                    | ✓                             |
| Anon. [n.d. <sup>b</sup> ]                 | —  | —                                    | ✓                             |
| Hondius [1646]                             | N/A  | —                                    |                               |
| Dudley [1647]                              | <i>L'Mare Della Terra Australe Incognita</i> | <i>Fine dell'India</i>               |                               |
| Hondius [1647]                             | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Blaeu (1648)                               |  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Jansson [1650]                             | N/A  | —                                    |                               |
| Anon. [1652]                               | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Anon. [Between 1650 & 1746?]               | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Visscher (1657)                            | —  | —                                    | ✓                             |
| Baudrand (1658)                            |  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Jansson (1659)                             | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Anon. [1659]                               | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Blaeu (1659)                               | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Allard [166-]                              | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Doncker (1660)                             | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| van Alphen (1660)                          | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| van Loon [1661]                            | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Thévenot (1663)                            | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Blaeu (1663)                               | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Duval (1665)                               | <i>Mer de Lanchidol</i>                      | <i>Carpentaire</i>                   |                               |
| Allard [1665]                              | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Goos (1666)                                | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Doncker [1669?]                            | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Anon. [ca. 1670]                           | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Vingboons [1670]                           | —  | —                                    | ✓                             |
| Seller [1675]                              | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| de Wit [1675?]                             | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Duval [1679]                               | <i>Mer de Lanchidol</i>                      | <i>Carpentaire</i>                   |                               |
| van Keulen (1680)                          | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Jansson [1680]                             | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Jacobsz. [1681]                            | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Manesson-Mallet [1683]                     | —  | <i>Carpentarie</i>                   |                               |
| Robijn [1683]                              | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Cantelli [1685?]                           | <i>Mare di Lanchidol</i>                     | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| de Ram [1690]                              | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Allard [1690?]                             | —  | —                                    |                               |
| Goos [1690?]                               | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Seller [1690?]                             | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |
| Mortier [1700?]                            | —  | <i>Carpentaria</i>                   |                               |

## Gulf of Carpentaria

|                                |                                  |  |   |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Scherer [1702–10a]             | —                                | —  |   |
| Scherer [1702–10b]             | —                                | —  |   |
| Loots [1709?]                  | —                                | —  |   |
| Renard [1715]                  | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Moll (1717)                    | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| van Braam (1724)               | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| van Braam, J. [1726]           | —                                | <i>T Land van Carpentarie</i>              |   |
| Bowen [1744]                   | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Seutter [1744?]                | —                                | —  | ✓ |
| Ottens [1745]                  | <i>Mare Anchidol</i>             | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Bellin (1753)                  | <i>Meerbusen von Carpentaria</i> | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| van Keulen [1753]              | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Bellin [1753]                  | <i>Golphe de Carpentarie</i>     | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Robert de Vaugondy (1756)      | —                                | <i>Carpentarie</i>                         |   |
| de Broses (1756)               | —                                | <i>Carpentarie</i>                         |   |
| Anon. [1759]                   | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Moll [1763?]                   | —                                | <i>Carpentaria</i>                         |   |
| Whitchurch [177–?]             | —                                | <i>Carpentaria disc.</i><br>1628           |   |
| Anon. [post-1780]              | <i>Golf van Carpentaria</i>      | —  |   |
| Anon. (1787)                   | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | —  |   |
| Lodge (1787)                   | <i>Carpentaria Gulf</i>          | <i>Carpentaria disc.</i><br>1628           |   |
| Dunn (1787)                    | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | <i>Carpentaria discrd.</i><br>1628         |   |
| Anon. [179–?]                  | <i>G of Carpentaria</i>          | <i>Carpenters Land</i>                     |   |
| Anon. [1780–90?]               | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | <i>Carpentaria</i> 1628                    |   |
| Arrowsmith (1790)              | —                                | <i>Carpentaria disc.</i><br>1628           |   |
| Allen (1792)                   | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | —  |   |
| Anon. (1794)                   | <i>G. of Carpentaria</i>         | —  |   |
| Laurie & Whittle (1794)        | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | <i>Carpentaria</i> 1628                    |   |
| Conder [1794?]                 | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | <i>Carpentaria disc.</i><br>1628           |   |
| Canzler (1795)                 | <i>Meerbusen von Carpentaria</i> | <i>Carpentaria</i><br><i>entdeckt</i> 1628 |   |
| Weigel & Schneiderschen (1796) | <i>Meerbusen von Carpentaria</i> | <i>Carpentaria entd.</i><br>1628           |   |
| Anon. [1800–10]                | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | <i>Carpentaria</i> 1628                    |   |
| de Freycinet [1802–03]         | <i>Golfe de Carpentarie</i>      | <i>Carpentarie</i>                         |   |
| Delarochette (1803)            | <i>Carpenters Bay</i>            | <i>Carpentaria</i> 1618                    |   |
| Flinders (1814)                | <i>Gulf of Carpentaria</i>       | —  |   |

### Legend:

N/A ‘Gulf perimeter not shown’.

— Indicates no name shown.

✓ Indicates *Carpentier River* appears on the map.

The entry in the Queensland Gazetteer of Placenames (Department of Natural Resources and Mines) for *Gulf of Carpentaria* provides the following information on the Gulf's name:

Name first appeared on Thevenot's chart of 1663, probably derived from Jan Carstenz (1596?-16??) naming the Carpentier River in 1623 after Peter Carpentier (-), Dutch Governor of Batavia 1623-28, later Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company. The west coast of Cape York Peninsula appears as Carpentaria on the 1663 chart and the name migrated to the Gulf by 1700. Refer G.C. Ingleton. Matthew Flinders: navigator and chart maker. Guilford (UK), 1986, p.209.

(Source: <https://www.resources.qld.gov.au/qld/environment/land/place-names/search>)

The Northern Territory Place Names Register gives the following explanation of the naming of the Gulf:

In April 1644, Tasman named the Gulf after Pieter de Carpentier, a Councillor of the Dutch East India Company and Governor General of the Dutch East Indies (1623 - 1627).

(Source: <http://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/placenames/view.jsp?id=13322>)

The cartographic evidence from above, however, shows that neither gazetteer is correct. Thévenot's 1663 map does not show any appellation for the Gulf (Figure 6). Nonetheless, the region name *Carpentaria* is shown. Moreover, Thévenot's use of the coastal region name *Carpentaria* is predated by at least 15 years, and is shown on seven of the 80 maps:

- Blaeu (1648) *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula* (Figure 7)
- Anon. [1652] *India quae Orientalis dicitur et insulae adiacentes*
- Baudrand (1658) *Nova et Esatta Tavola del Mondo o Terra Vinersale* [...]
- Blaeu (1659) *Archipeelagus Orientalis Sive Asiaticus*

This map includes the text:

Papas landt or Nova Guinea, Nova Hollandia, discovered in the year 1644, Nova Zeelandia or New Zealand reached in 1642, Antoni van Diemens land found in the same year, Carpentaria, thus named after general Carpentier, and still other lands, partly discovered, are shown on this map. [...]

(Schilder, 1976, p. 402)

- Doncker (1660) *'t Ooster Deel van Oost Indien. Streckende van Ceylon tot Japan en Hollandia Nova*
- van Alphen (1660) *Nieuwe Waßende Graade Paskaert van 't Zuydelyckste deel van Asia*
- van Loon [1661] *Pascaerte van't Oostelyckste deel van Oost-Indien*



Figure 6.

Thévenot, Melchisédech. (1663). *Hollandia Nova detecta 1644*. [Paris: De l'imprimerie de Jacques Langlois].  
(Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP RM 4667. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-334686747/view>)



Figure 7.

Detail of Blaeu, Joan. (1648). *Nova totius terrarum orbis tabula*. A Amsterdam, De l'Imprimerie de Jean Blaeu. (Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP Ra 265 Vol. 3, Plates 51-71. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2878374415/view>)

At this point it is also worth noting that the names *Nova Hollandia* and *Nova Zeelandia* appear on maps shortly before that of the coastal region name *Carpentaria* (see Tent, 2022a, 2022b), which may provide a clue as to the naming of the coastal region.

The first mention I have been able to find of the Gulf's name is on two of Jacques-Nicolas Bellin's maps, both dated 1753. On the first, possibly published in Leipzig, we see the Gulf labelled as *Meerbusen von Carpentaria*, and on the second, published in Paris, *Golphe de Carpentarie*. Bellin was a renowned French hydrographer, geographer, member of the Académie de Marine and of the Royal Society of London, and member of the *Encyclopédistes*, a group of eighteenth century intellectuals who compiled the 35-volume *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* ['Encyclopaedia, or Classified Dictionary of Sciences, Arts, and Trades'] edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (Blom, 2004).

Without further evidence, it is currently impossible to declare with any certainty when let alone who first employed the name *Carpentaria* for the Gulf, suffice to say it was probably the middle of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the French are responsible for the name, but it is impossible to tell.

Table 1 shows us that by the late-1870s the name had become well established on maps.

#### 4 A CARTOGRAPHIC CONFUSION

As the illustrations of the seventeenth century charts and maps in the Figures above show, they vary considerably in their execution and accuracy. The skill of the chart maker, or lack thereof, is the first reason that springs to mind. Another is the difficulty in calculating coordinates, especially longitude, during this era. Many an explorers' journal of the time comments on the uncertainty of identifying rivers when sailing along previously explored and charted coastlines. Newly drawn charts often conflict with earlier ones regarding the location of rivers, with those along the Carpentaria coast serving as excellent cases in point.

One example concerns Carstenszoon's *revier de Carpentier*, which only appears on seven of the maps listed above. The possible reason is that its naming was 'hidden' in Carstenszoon's journal and does not appear on de Leeuw's chart, which probably served as a model for most subsequent maps.

We also see, for instance, a *Revier Carpentier* on the 'Tasman-Bonaparte' map just above Janszoon's *Vliege baij* (Figure 5b), in addition to the maps of Anon. [n.d.<sup>a</sup>], Visscher (1657), Vingboons (1670), and Seutter [1744?]. Carstenszoon's journal lists, in order from south to north, the names he gave to rivers and watering places along the Carpentaria coastline. They accord very well with the south-to-north names on the de Leeuw chart (Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
Carpentaria appellations—south to north

| Carstenszoon's journal    | de Leeuw chart               |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| —                         | <i>De Staten rivier</i>      |
| <i>Revier Nassauw</i>     | <i>De rivier Nassau</i>      |
| <i>Waterplaets</i>        | <i>De Waterplaets</i>        |
| <i>Vereenichde revier</i> | <i>De vereenighde rivier</i> |
| <i>revier Coen</i>        | <i>De rivier Coen</i>        |
| <i>Waterplaets</i>        | <i>De Waterplaets</i>        |
| <i>revier Carpentier</i>  | <i>Die riviere Batavia</i>   |
| <i>Revier van Spult</i>   | <i>Die revier van Speult</i> |

Given Carstenszoon does not mention *Die rivier Batavia*, and the almost identical order of names, it is tempting to speculate that *revier Carpentier* and *Die riviere Batavia* are one and the same river. If I am correct in this assumption, then it seems little wonder that *revier Carpentier* is shown on so few maps.

The van Dijk map (1859) (Figure 8), acknowledges the ambiguity by applying the label: 'Rivier Batavia of Rivier de Carpentier' ['Batavia River or de Carpentier River'] for the river. Heeres (1898, p. 90), also airs an uncertainty of identity:

In the course of this part of the Duifken's voyage, she *inter alia* sailed up, in 11° 48', the river afterwards named Carpentier (Batavia) by Carstensz.



## 5 AN ALTERNATIVE NAME FOR THE GULF

An alternative name for the Gulf was proposed by van Dijk in his 1859 book on the voyages of exploration of Carstenszoon and Gonzal to the Gulf. Needless to say, van Dijk's name never caught on, not even in the Netherlands.

Van Dijk's book contains Carstenszoon's journal, which according to Schilder (1976, p. 85) was the first time the journal was published. At the end of the book, van Dijk includes a curious map of the Gulf (Figure 8).

The map is rather peculiar, even for its time. For one, it does not include the southern coastline of the Gulf, even though this had been charted some 215 years prior. The second curious feature is that, with the exception of four names, all the toponyms on Cape York Peninsula and Northern Territory are Dutch. By the time the map was published, numerous British toponyms had been bestowed along the Gulf's entire coastline and that of the now Northern Territory. The four non-Dutch names are restricted to the Torres Strait region and are: *Torres Straat*, *Duncans Archipel.*, *Kp. York*, and *Cooks Eil.* However, the most curious features of the map are:

- its ostensive title: *Golf van Carpentaria of liever Pera's Golf* ['Gulf of Carpentaria or preferably Pera's Gulf'], which appears in the Gulf itself
- the west coast region of Cape York Peninsula which had been known from at least 1648 as *Carpentaria*, is labelled *Carstensz. Land*
- the question *Waarom?* ['Why?'] after the toponyms: *Arnhemsland*, *Wezel of Wesseleiland* ['Wezel or Wessel Island'], *Arnhems baai* ['Arnhem's Bay'], and *Kp. Arnhem* ['Cape Arnhem']

Explanations for these curiosities are found in the book's introduction, where a *raison d'être* for the book is provided, as well as the stance van Dijk assumes. He claims his objective was to rectify what he saw as historical inaccuracies; however, in so doing he allows his personal prejudices to overshadow the facts as he sees them. In this regard, he displays the widespread anti-British sentiment that existed in the Netherlands at the time—an attitude which was certainly not unique to van Dijk.<sup>6</sup>

The ostensive title of the map also does not shy away from van Dijk's belief that the leader of the 1623 expedition should have had the honour of *Carpentaria* being named after him, and the gulf after his ship, not after de Carpentier. Van Dijk's inclusion of the adverb *liever* ['preferably; rather'] is unusual. If a place has alternative names or was known by a previous name, it is normal practice just to use the conjunction *or* (in the case of Dutch, *of*). The job of an historian or cartographer is to be objective and not to express his or her own predispositions on the merits of the name(s) of a place.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Anti-British sentiment in the Dutch Republic and later the Kingdom of the Netherlands was endemic throughout the seventeenth to late-nineteenth centuries. This was due to the rivalry between the two nations' desires to secure trade routes to enable colonial expansion. This rivalry culminated in many skirmishes throughout the world, including the four Anglo-Dutch Wars, the battle of Camperdown, and the Boer Wars. The literature on Anglo-Dutch rivalry and the wars they fought is copious.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive treatise on van Dijk's map, see Tent (2019).



**Figure 8.**  
 van Dijk (1859). *Golf van Carpentaria of liever Pera's Golf*. Koninkl<sup>c</sup>. lith. v. C.W. Mieling te 's-Gravenhage.  
 (Nat. Lib. of Australia, MAP RM 816. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231314481/>)

## 6 CONCLUSION

Apart from Carstenszoon's naming the river just north of Albatross Bay *Rivier Carpentier*, no evidence exists (documentary or cartographic) to suggest that he named the western coastal region of Cape York Peninsula as *Carpentaria*. The latter may have derived from his *Rivier Carpentier*, although that seems unlikely—as the maps in Table 1 reveal, only five of them show the river name, and in any case, that toponym soon disappeared from most maps by the mid-seventeenth century. Only the Vingboons [1670] and Seutter [1744?] map bear the name after this.

So, whence does the name derive? The region name, *Carpentaria*, started appearing on maps from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, shortly after the naming of *Nova*

*Hollandia*, *Nova Zeelandia* and *Groote Eylandt* by, as I have proposed (Tent, 2022a, 2022b), the VOC Council either in the Netherlands or in Batavia, or by a VOC cartographer. It is therefore tempting to suggest that *Carpentaria* was similarly named.

Once it was shown that the stretch of water between 't *Drooge Bocht* or the *Rivier van Speult* (near the tip of Cape York) and *Aernhems Land* was the mouth of an extensive gulf, as determined by Tasman, it cried out to be named. And, in following the standard toponymic convention of naming gulfs, it was named after an adjoining region. In evidence of this idea, I cite the Wikipedia entry 'List of Gulfs' ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_gulfs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_gulfs)). The list contains 68 names of gulfs in the world, 59 (87%) of which are named after an adjoining country/region name, river, or city. Of the remaining nine, eight (12% of the total) are named after an individual. Only one seems to be named after another entity, the *Hauraki Gulf* (New Zealand), which takes its name from the Māori term *Hauraki* 'north wind' (<https://teara.govt.nz/en/1966/hauraki-gulf>).

Intriguingly, four of the eight gulfs named after an individual are found in Australia: *Cambridge Gulf*, *Exmouth Gulf* (both named by Philip Parker King), *Spencer Gulf*, and *Gulf of St Vincent* (both named by Flinders).

If we apply to the Gulf of Carpentaria the general principle of naming gulfs after a neighbouring region or major geographic, we can presume it was named after the coastal region *Carpentaria*, which was itself undoubtedly named after Pieter de Carpentier. The region name *may* have been derived from the *Rivier Carpentier*, though this is by no means certain, and seems, to me unlikely, given the relative obscurity of that river name, especially on maps.

As to the naming of coastal regions in Australia, a simple count of the types of names bestowed upon them, firstly by the Dutch, we see that all 12 are eponymous—nine (75%) after an individual, and three (25%) after a ship. All four of the French coastal region names are after individuals, as are the three British coastal region names (see Tent, 2017).<sup>8</sup>

In spite of van Dijk's nationalistic and subjective sentiments, he makes the following factual claim (1859, p. 25):

Ook blijkt nergens uit, dat Carstensz. aan de kust of aan den zeeboezem, welke hij bezocht, den naam van Carpentaria heeft gegeven.

[Transl. 'Nor is there any evidence that Carstensz. gave the name Carpentaria to the coast or to the gulf which he visited.']

In a lengthy footnote, Heeres (1898, p. 101, fn. 6) also raises the question of who named the Gulf:<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I have not included *Paaschavonts Landt* ['Easter Eve Land'] and *Paasdachs Landt* ['Easter Day Land'] in this count because they only appear on the anonymous chart of the *Arnhem*, and were not taken up on any other map.

<sup>9</sup> Details of the references Heeres mentions are as follows:

Lauts, Gerard. (1852). *Geschiedenis van de Vestiging, Uitbreiding, Bloei en erval van de Magt der Nederlanders in Indië*. Vol. I. Groningen: Van Boekeren.

[6] G. LAUTS, *Geschiedenis van de vestiging, uitbreiding, bloei en verval van de magt der Nederlanders in Indië*. Groningen, *Van Boekeren*, 1852, I, p. 167, says that Carstenszoon “has given its present name to the Gulf of Carpentaria.” As is so often the case, Lauts here too gives no authority for his surmise. VAN DIJK, p. 23, has already pointed out its improbability, but it is still maintained, e.g. by BIRDWOOD, *Report India Office*, p. 188, where are found more mistakes. He erroneously places the discovery of Carpentaria in 1628, as does JAMES COOK in his chart of the Southern Hemisphere (*A voyage towards the South Pole and round the world*, I, London, *Straban and Cadell*, 1777), which chart has other mistakes besides. When Carstenszoon *set out* on his expedition, it was not De Carpentier, but Coen who was Governor-General (Coen resigned February 1, 1623). He had therefore little reason to christen the coast after De Carpentier. It is not unlikely that the name of Carpentaria, which occurs in very early charts (*inter alia* in the Nolpe-Dozy chart of 1652/3, and in Thévenot’s chart, but not in Swart’s reproduction of the Bonaparte one), was given to the coast at a somewhat later period, when, regard being had to the dates of the DISCOVERIES only, which took place within De Carpentier’s term of office, it was deemed fitting to make the latter dignitary stand sponsor. Most probably the gulf was afterwards named after the east-coast. RAINAUD, p. 361, is not quite clear, when he says: “Quant au nom de golfe de Carpentarie, it n’apparut que plus tard, sur les cartes du deuxième voyage de Tasman.” What maps does he mean here?—Of course I cannot dwell upon the mistakes and blunders of THÉVENOT (I, Avis) and others, where, for example, they consider De Carpentier and Van Diemen, not as the promoters of voyages of discovery, but as the discoverers themselves.]

Heeres also highlights the erroneous date of discovery of Carpentaria, *viz.* 1628, as shown on most of the post-1870 maps itemised in Table 1. This example underscores how a falsehood can so easily be perpetuated by relying on the words of another without scrutiny of their veracity. Even Cook followed suit. Heeres also correctly notes that the gulf was probably ‘named after the east-coast’.

To summarise:

- There is no evidence to suggest that Carstenszoon named the Gulf of Carpentaria.
- He could not have, given it was not known the Gulf existed until after 1644, 21 years after he sailed down the west coast of Cape York Peninsula.
- He did, however, name a river *revier de Carpentier*, as mentioned in his journal, even though the de Leeuw chart does not show it.
- It is possible that it is one and the same river as de Leeuw’s *die reviere Batavia*, which appeared on most subsequently published maps, whilst ‘Carpentier River’ appeared only on a select few maps thereafter.
- The coastal region name, *Carpentaria*, materialises post-1648, likely assigned by the VOC, first appearing on the VOC cartographer Joan Blaeu’s map of that year.
- The Gulf’s designation first emerges a century later, on two of Bellin’s maps of 1753, *viz.* *Meerbusen von Carpentaria* and *Golphe de Carpentarie*.
- Although the Gulf’s naming is probably a natural corollary of the region name *Carpentaria*, it is still not clear who instigated the name.

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