

# Whose Islands? The Cartographic Politics of the Falklands, 1763–1982

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**Abstract** For nearly 250 years a desolate, rocky archipelago between Tierra del Fuego and the Antarctic Peninsula has captivated, inspired, and angered the empires of the Atlantic world. The Falkland Islands have witnessed the clash of cultures and politics, the competing destinies of Britain, France, Spain, Argentina, and even the United States. Although recent tensions between London and Buenos Aires have renewed interest in the Falklands, scholars and commentators alike continue to omit the vital historical and contemporary role cartography plays in this longstanding dispute. This article demonstrates that at significant moments in the Falklands' past, maps and their makers acted both as potent visual manifestations of national propaganda and imperial interest, as well as important tools of negotiation. Ultimately, Falklands cartography proves to be an invaluable asset of historical knowledge as well as a problematic source of friction and confusion.

## 1 Origins

### 1.1 Introduction

This is a story about *cartographic persuasion*; the use of maps to convince allies, foes, and those states and peoples who remain on the fence. It is about an on going, 300 year-old public relations battle to persuade international audiences that their respective assertion to the Falkland Islands, or Islas Malvinas, is the only legitimate claim. Since at least the end of the Seven Years War (1756–1763), a variety of state and non-state actors have commissioned, produced, and circulated maps of the Falklands with a highly particular 'knowledge', or selective version of the historical record to promote their claim (Harley 2009, pp. 129–131).

The Falklands constitute a roughly 200-island archipelago some 300 miles east of Tierra del Fuego in the South Atlantic Ocean. Only the two largest islands, East and West Falkland, contain any sizeable population. Stanley is the archipelago's

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capital and the only substantial settlement (Shackleton 1983, p. 1). Following the 1982 Falklands War, the United Kingdom significantly enlarged the existing Mt Pleasant Airport into a major Royal Air Force base (Taylor 2003, p. 270). Until the development of a tourism industry in the early 2000s sheep herding and woolens sustained the Falklands' economy. Recent evidence of oil deposits within the archipelago's territorial waters continues to fuel antagonism between Britain and Argentina.

The Falklands' early history remains controversial, but the basic chronology is well known. The islands lay uninhabited when Christopher Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492. The following year, Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas, the Papal edict dividing the Americas into respective halves. The Spanish however were unaware of their existence. Englishman Sir Richard Hawkins likely first sighted the islands in 1574, and in 1690 captain John Strong made the first recorded landfall (Clifford 1955, p. 27). During Anglo-Spanish negotiations toward the 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle Lord George Anson, recently returned from a circumnavigation of the globe, pressed the British government to formally settle the islands (Fogg 2001, p. 83; Wallis 1983, p. 276). Eager to conclude the treaty, diplomats rejected his scheme (Archer 1986, p. 18; Hertz 1908, pp. 110–112).

In an effort to resettle some of the Acadians expelled from Nova Scotia and rebuild France's Atlantic colonial presence following the Seven Years War, in 1764 explorer and polymath Louis Antoine de Bougainville established Port Louis at Berkeley Sound on East Falkland (Hodson 2010, p. 256; Hodson 2009, p. 206; Wilhelmy 1963, p. 54). The settlement proved short-lived. As part of negotiations to cement the Franco-Spanish alliance, the French government transferred Port Louis (renamed Puerto Soledad) to Spain on 1 April 1767 (Tracy 1975, p. 45). Meanwhile, Royal Navy captain John Byron established Port Egmont on Saunders Island (immediately northwest of West Falkland), apparently without any prior knowledge of France's concurrent effort. British officials resisted Spain's demand to remove the settlement, but reluctantly withdrew in 1774 in response to the empire's rising financial difficulties stemming from agitation in the Thirteen Colonies. The Spanish maintained a nominal settlement until they, too, entirely withdrew in 1811 in the midst of empire-wide fiscal and political unrest. Neither country renounced their respective claim, and both left metal plaques proclaiming their continued sovereignty over the islands (Freedman 2005, pp. 4–5; Reisman 1983, p. 287; Calvert 1983, p. 409).

In 1820 the newly independent Republic of the Río de la Plata, roughly comprising the present-day province of Buenos Aires, declared itself the successor state to all of Spain's existing colonial claims in southern South America, including the Falklands and portions of Brazil and Chile. After a series of diplomatic incidents involving Buenos Aires, Britain, and the United States, in 1833 the Royal Navy re-colonised the islands. Apart from the short but brutal 1982 war, the Union Jack has remained flying since.

Despite this tantalisingly enigmatic and controversial past, Falklands cartography remains chronically under-studied. No book- or atlas-length analysis exists. Jordana Dym and Karl Offen's recent and otherwise superb reader on Latin American cartography entirely ignores the Falklands. Article-length scholarship fares little better. The

notable exception is Argentine historian Carla Lois (2009, 2002), who has authored masterful studies of Argentine, South Atlantic, and Antarctic cartography, politics, and nation-states. R V Tooley's concise 1982 *Map Collector* overview is in dire need of revision. In *Imago Mundi*'s 80-year history, only Francis Herbert (1998) and Jorge Guzmán-Gutiérrez (2010) have paid attention to Falklands cartography.

## 1.2 Conceptual Approach

This article considers three questions when analysing the geopolitical purpose of Falklands maps. First, who commissioned the map(s) in question? Who surveyed, published, and distributed it? Second, what does the map include or omit? Finally, who was the target audience?

Such texts and material objects as maps both intentionally and unintentionally influence culture and decisions beyond their initial appearance or use (Fernández-Armesto and Sacks 2012, pp. 304–305). The collection, production, and dissemination of geographical information can successfully promote an idealised, selective vision of lands and peoples, while deliberately obscuring other claims and realities (Edney 1997). Louis de Vorsej Jr convincingly demonstrated how James Oglethorpe and Benjamin Martyn published and distributed highly selective maps of the southern Eastern Seaboard to successfully 'sell' their new colonial scheme of Georgia. Oglethorpe and Martyn 'borrowed' Thomas Nairne's 1708 map of the Carolinas and Florida (published with Edward Crisp's work in 1711). To convey the region's stability, peace, and fertility, they removed any reference to neighbouring French and Native American settlements and clashes, shifted the Spanish city of St Augustine much further south than its actual location, and exaggerated the size of the Savannah River (1986, pp. 35–38). The ploy worked.

Historians and geographers alike are increasingly cognisant of the influential role cartography plays in geopolitical persuasion, legitimisation, and development. In his oft-cited article 'Three Concepts of the Atlantic World', David Armitage proposed a part-historiographical, part theoretical means of describing the transnational movement of peoples, goods, and ideas in the early modern era. Three intrinsically related forms of circulation existed: *circum*-Atlantic, or as a distinct 'zone of exchange'; *trans*-Atlantic, or comparative; and *cis*-Atlantic, or the development and legitimisation of 'particular places as unique locations' as influenced by other circulations (2002, pp. 16–21). Although the scope and extent of each remain debated between Atlantic and other historical schools, all three types articulate that ideas and peoples only gained legitimacy and influence through cyclical conversations (including cartographic discourses) across space, time, and language. Similarly, Federico Ferretti detailed how, following Italy's 1861 unification, geographers, politicians, and cartographers collaborated to promote the new country as a singular, powerful national entity. In Europe, Asia, and the Americas they circulated maps, pamphlets, and visuals depicting the Italian Peninsula as one nation-state. This public relations campaign successfully replaced prevailing international conceptions of pre-national

‘Italia’ as a weak set of quarrelling city-states with an impression of a strong, united imperial country (2014).

## 2 Hydrography as Territorial Assertion

### 2.1 *A Neutral Map?*

When in 1773 John Hawkesworth published *Hawkins’s Maiden-Land*, updated with James Cook and John Byron’s recently collected hydrographic and coastal data of the Falklands, Britain’s political elite was still coming to terms with an empire that had suddenly expanded in size, scope, and responsibility (Lockett 2010; Colley 1992). At initial glance, *Hawkins’s Maiden-Land* was a remarkably apolitical map (see Fig. 1). Incorporating the islands’ English, French, Dutch, and Spanish names, the cartouche carefully reflected the Falklands’ disputed status and complex history of sighting and colonisation. Hawkesworth and Byron similarly labelled East and West Falkland ‘Great Malouine’ and ‘Little Malouine’, an awkward but respectable attempt to straddle the parallel English and French settlement efforts (and its Spanish derivative, ‘Malvinas’). They even noted where Bougainville had established his short-lived colony, and included some of his harbour and coastal soundings.

But a deeper examination reveals how Byron and Hawkesworth deliberately conveyed the pretence of neutral comprehensiveness to promote the legitimacy of



**Fig. 1** John Byron and John Hawkesworth, *Hawkins’s Maiden-Land*, 1773. (Courtesy Royal Geographical Society Mr S America S1 27)

Britain's claim. As Lisa Radding and John Western have pointed out, all toponyms are assigned to convey a particular definition. But over time, many place names become 'opaque', or lose the immediacy of their initial meaning (2010, pp. 395–397). Subsequent cartographers, historians, and politicians are free to manipulate, erase, or re-assert them, especially if the toponym's origins have been blurred by memory and time. On the cartouche itself, Byron and Hawkesworth's specific toponymic arrangement reminded viewers of some place names' importance and history, while intentionally obfuscating others. The headline 'Hawkins's Maiden-Land', emboldened in italicised capitals, therefore prompted viewers that an Englishman, not another European, first sighted the islands. Directly linked below, 'Falkland Islands' printed in by far the largest font size, strongly evoked a sense of political continuity. Only afterward, and in considerably smaller italic text, did the authors acknowledge French claims. Spain's assertion, while technically noted, was immediately invalidated by the qualification 'lately by the Spaniards of Buenos-ayres'.

This act of cartographic political persuasion under the guise of mere hydrographic chart making was by no means coincidental. Both Byron and Hawkesworth were involved in the on-going Anglo-Spanish dispute over the islands' future. An intimate of Lord Anson, Byron had returned from establishing Port Egmont convinced of their utility to the Royal Navy. His circumnavigation with Cook (1768–1771) cemented his belief that the Falklands could link the largely British-controlled Atlantic world with the Pacific's untold, exotic opportunities. (Gough 1990, pp. 279–280).

Byron's lobbying excited and concerned MPs torn between expanding imperial trade and maintaining a fragile peace with Spain. Parliament established a committee to ascertain the future of Britain's Port Egmont settlement and asked Samuel Johnson, by then one of Britain's most influential public intellectuals, to author a treatise manoeuvring through this dilemma. Johnson's *Thoughts on the late transactions concerning Falkland's Islands* (1771) agreed with Anson and Byron's case for a way station, but condemned 'war-mongers' with a (ultimately false) declaration of the islands' limited flora, fauna, resources, and climate (Shackleton 1983, p. 1; Clifford 1955, p. 406). Britain however provided little further investment in the diminutive settlement.

To reinforce his position, Byron undoubtedly approached Hawkesworth for his prestigious social connections as much as his publishing acumen. An influential member of London's Georgian elite, he was a long-time editor of its leading periodical, *The Gentleman's Magazine* (Montluzin 1991, p. 272; Reitan 1985, p. 54). A colleague and publisher of Johnson, Edmund Burke, and Benjamin Franklin, he was ideally placed to disseminate Byron's map (Williamson 2004; Abbott 1982; Tierney 1978).

## 2.2 *Flying the Flag*

As *Hawkins's Maiden-Land* aptly demonstrated, cartographers and politicians gradually conceived of hydrographic surveying as a potent means of asserting territorial claims. The diverse activities of the Dépôt des Cartes et Plans de la Marine,

established in 1720 and greatly expanded under Jacques-Nicolas Bellin and the Delisle-Bauché dynasty, illustrated hydrographic charts' multifaceted purposes and audiences (Pastoureau 1993, p. 66; Chapuis 1992, p. 90). First and foremost, they were essential navigational aids. The accuracy of a particular chart's depth soundings could mean the difference between safe passage and destruction on a shallow reef or basin. But to achieve this level of accuracy, hydrographic charts required men, ships, supplies and time. Most sailors, hydrographers, cartographers, and scientists involved were military officers in their own right, and needed additional protection. From the mid-eighteenth century the Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies institutionalised hydrography as a tool of imperial assertion, sending such specialists as Jean-Baptiste D'Après de Manneville to survey the waterways around France's Indian Ocean possessions (McClellan and Regourd 2000, pp. 37–38), at once advancing French scientific knowledge and signalling to other European powers its regional colonial ambitions.

En route to the Pacific Northwest, in 1789 the Spanish naval vessels *Descubierta* and *Atrevida* arrived off the waters off Port Egmont. Commanders Alejandro Malaspina and Jose Bustamante y Guerra's mission was twofold: to deepen hydrographic knowledge about the Pacific coasts; and to re-assert declining Spanish power in a part of the Americas already falling under British (and some Russian) influence (Cutter 1991). Little is known about this surviving manuscript map, now held at the Royal Geographical Society (see Fig. 2). However, its detailed, even exacting depth soundings of Byron Sound and the passages between Saunders, Keppel, and West Falkland Islands suggests two key motivations. Certainly, there existed a genuine need to obtain a more complete understanding of the archipelago's safest navigational passages. But such information also proved valuable intelligence in the event of a possible British return to the Falklands. Like most hydrographic charts, the *Descubierta/Atrevida* map would have been available only to a few privileged eyes within the Spanish Admiralty.

Nearly 150 years later, the Royal Geographical Society and private sponsors tasked the British Graham Land Expedition with a similar scientific exploratory mission: to obtain the scale and extent of Graham Land, Antarctica, and to determine whether it was a peninsula or a series of large islands. On their way to Antarctica, John Rymill and Robert Ryder executed a precise survey of several Falkland inlets and bays, including William Sound. The expedition continued onto Antarctica itself, discovered that Graham Land was indeed a peninsula, completed detailed surveys, meteorological, geological, and biological experiments, and returned to Britain in 1937 (British Graham Land Expedition 1936, p. 166).

Although adventurer Henry Watkins initially proposed the exploration of Graham Land, the Colonial Office soon joined the Royal Geographical Society in sponsoring the scheme. The 16-strong party included at least six naval officers, three surveyors, and two engineers. Rymill himself declared that the entire region was 'British territory', and in subsequent years various British administrations cited the expedition in their Antarctic territorial claim over Graham Land (Rymill 1938, pp. 297–300). New topographical features were named for British monarchs (notably King George IV Sound) and explorers; the process of circulation that



Fig. 2 Plano del Puerto Egmont en las Islas Malvinas, 1789. (Courtesy Royal Geographical Society Mr Atlantic Ocean S48)

subsequently occurred in *The Geographical Journal* and *The National Geographic Magazine* served to propagate, publicise, and hence legitimise international conceptions of the Graham Land as British sovereign territory.

At first glance the Falklands hydrographic surveys appeared to be a sideshow given the Graham Land Expedition's context and stated goals. Three factors however conspired to motivate the group to undertake new soundings. The presence of so many specialist surveyors, hydrographers, engineers, and naval officers in the islands' vicinity at one time provided an ideal opportunity to update long out-dated Admiralty Office coastal charts. But rapidly changing geopolitics likely played as significant a role. The British Empire's dissolution could already be sensed. Since the First World War, Ireland, Egypt, and Iraq had already gained independence, and in India a strong, largely peaceful resistance movement threatened the Raj. In 1931 the Statute of Westminster officially proclaimed the White settler colonies of Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa—historically the

backbone of Britain's international leverage—fully autonomous within a Commonwealth and on equal terms with the United Kingdom. Closer to home the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) Party had seized absolute power in Germany. In such an unstable international climate, as Klaus Dodds forcefully argued, the United Kingdom needed to reassert its hegemonic spheres of influence, including the South Atlantic (2002, p. xvii).

A restive Argentina also concerned the Colonial Office and the expedition's private business sponsors. Although never a formal part of the British Empire, Argentina constituted a vital link in the United Kingdom's informal empire, or what John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson famously termed 'the imperialism of free trade'. By 1913, for instance, at least 25% of all British overseas investment was directed to Latin America, much of it to Argentina (1953, pp. 9–10). Even into the early 1920s British investors controlled Argentine dockworkers, transport firms, and railroads (Pineda 2009, p. 550; Adelman 1993, p. 90). But by the 1930s British fortunes were rapidly changing. Britain largely lost its trade of industrial and consumer machinery to American and German companies, and Argentine elites increasingly looked to break free of their previous subservient bilateral relationship (Pineda 2009, pp. 554–556). The Falklands had not been on Argentina's 'radar' during the nineteenth century; officials were far more concerned with the conquest and settlement of Patagonia. It was only in the 1930s, when Argentine sentiments shifted towards such rivals to British power as Germany, that the Falklands again became a national issue (Chehabi 1985, p. 222). The presence of the Royal Navy, surveyors, and expedition aircraft would have sent a message to Argentine officials, even if the hydrographic survey's results remained confidential.

### 3 Popular Cartography

#### 3.1 *The Letts-Stanford Atlas*

By the mid-1870s, the Falklands' population was self-sufficient, largely employed in whaling, sheep herding, and the maintenance of Royal Navy vessels. At home, the islands had all but disappeared from the national consciousness—a tiny outpost serving *Pax Britannica* (Royle 1985, pp. 210–212). Cartography however held a more enduring interest for Britons. The London Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge's significant efforts to produce high quality, inexpensive maps for Britain's burgeoning working and middle classes highlighted both heightened public interest in Britain's global role, and the Society's interest in promoting a 'British World Order' (Barrow 2004, p. 677; Cain 1994, p. 151). In 1836, the Society produced an inset map of the Falklands as part of their 'Islands of the Atlantic' plate (see Fig. 3). Apart from the plate's evident (and truthful) networking of disparate-appearing Atlantic island colonies, the publisher added the following, surprisingly neutral and dispassionate caption:





Fig. 3 1865 Falklands Inset Map, London Atlas of Universal Geography. (Courtesy David Rumsey Associates 2326059)

These islands have been colonised and abandoned by France, England, and Spain successively, but are now in the possession of the English. They contain many excellent ports, some good soil, innumerable horned cattle, rabbits, game and fish; and though no wood plenty of peat fuel (126).

Such references of natural harbours and inlets, ‘good soil’, ‘game and fish’, and ‘peat fuel’, mimicking contemporaneous descriptions of Ireland, served to familiarise general readers with an otherwise exotic archipelago 8000 miles distant.

In 1848 the Society ceased to exist, a victim of rising costs and changing domestic politics. Its valuable cartographic plates were sold to Letts, reappearing in the *London Atlas of Universal Geography*, this time directly marketed to educated middle class Britons and citizens of the White settler colonies. The original caption nonetheless remained unchanged in post-1848 editions. Geography publisher Stanford took over the production of the *London Atlas*, releasing its first, revised issue in 1887 (Herbert 1989, p. 106). But accounting for the changing geopolitical dynamic, Stanford’s cartographer quietly changed the Falklands’ caption, replacing the apolitical description with a triumphant expository on the islands’ position at the intersection of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Antarctic:

They [the Falklands] are now of considerable value for provisions and repairs on the route to our Australian colonies, this becoming every year more apparent. The population...is rapidly increasing. Port Stanley is the harbour most frequented.

Few, if any viewers would have bothered to compare descriptions. With a single stroke Stanfords altered the meaning of their Falklands map without changing the base layer, much as Oglethorpe and Martyn had manipulated Nairne's map nearly two centuries previously. As the atlas's inset frontispiece advertisements for fashionable goods evidenced, the future political leaders increasingly targeted by *The London Atlas* would have seen the revised description without any knowledge of the original's existence.

## 4 Argentine School Maps

In his 1946 election manifesto Juan Perón stressed the importance of the Argentine nation and the end of its economic reliance on the United States and Western Europe. Decree 8,944 of 1946 prohibited the publication and distribution of any national-scale map of Argentina that did not include its claims to the Falkland Islands and Antarctica (Troncoso and Lois 2004, p. 294). The 1951 creation of the Instituto Antártico Argentino—a response to Britain's establishment of permanent scientific bases in Antarctica (1943) and the Falkland Islands Dependency Survey (1946)—reinforced this legislation (Dodds 2009, p. 506; Hattersley-Smith 1986, p. 369; LeShack 1963).

The Institute's maps, like those produced by the military (with which it enjoyed an intimate operating relationship), were collected and distributed by the Instituto Geográfico Militar to public institutions, primary and secondary schools, and universities. Frequency of publication and dissemination underscored the official *Mapa de la República Argentina's* effectiveness. Annually revised, and distributed in a diverse array of pamphlets, school atlases, wall charts, and posters, the *Mapa de la República Argentina* soon became a fixture of Argentine historical, cultural, and political education. These national maps at 1:10,000,000 scale were supplemented by both institutes' projections of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica, and the South Atlantic islands at 1:5,000,000 and historical maps at 1:4,000,000 (Royal Geographical Society collections).

### 4.1 Subliminal Maps

To publicise and legitimise their respective claims, both British and Argentine authorities, as well as the Falkland Islanders themselves, have used maps in unconventional, even subliminal settings (Davis 1985). In 1992 Walter Klinefelter examined a little noticed but on-going stamp war between the Argentine Post Office and the Falkland Islands Philatelic Bureau. Argentina fired the first shots in 1964 during Operación 90, a major military-scientific operation to promote its South Atlantic claim. This particular stamp depicted the province of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica, and the South Islands. Tierra del Fuego's prominence on the stamp deliberately suggests an elegant 'geographical flow', a continual connection from Andes, down



Fig. 4 2014 50 Peso Argentine banknote. (Courtesy The Telegraph 3 April)

through Ushuaia and the Straits of Magellan, on to the South Atlantic islands, and finally to the General Belgrano Research Station and the South Pole. The 4 Peso stamp is beautiful cartographic propaganda: simple, straightforward, aesthetically pleasing, and containing only just enough information to hammer home its central point (Klinefelter 1992, pp. 7–8).

The Falkland Islands' government responded in kind, printing a series of stamps to weave a narrative of continuous British control. Byron and Hawkesworth's *Hawkins's Maiden-Land* reappeared on the 10 Pence stamp. Only the archipelago's outline was visible, the words 'Hawkins's Maiden-Land' gracefully stretched across both West and East Falkland. Argentina's retort came into the form of a memorialisation to Jacinto de Alto Laguirre, a late eighteenth century Spanish governor of the islands, replete with a period map with 'Malvinas' across both islands. In 1977 the Falklands Philatelic Bureau embarked on a different tack, celebrating 50 years of wireless communication. In this 'map of the airwaves', the radio transmitters at Fox Bay (West Falkland) and Stanley (East Falkland) appear to seamlessly connect with one another and the archipelago's entirety.

Subliminal cartographic propaganda continues to be an effective weapon in the Falklands dispute. On 3 April 2014 the government of President Christina Kirchner announced the release of a 50 Peso banknote with an obverse map of the Falklands (see Fig. 4). Evoking the 1964 4 Peso stamp, the 50 Peso banknote is an exercise in cartography beauty. The Falklands' emboldened outline is seamlessly draped over a faded relief map of Tierra del Fuego, binding the regions together in a graceful, natural, unbroken curve (Perry 2014). In the lower right corner, the Argentine Mint placed the official *Mapa de la República Argentina* familiar to school children and their parents. The cartographic struggle over the Falklands continues.

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