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David Parsons, *The David Parsons Collection Rare Pacific Voyage Books. Part I: Dampier to Cook*. Sydney, NSW: Hordern House [www.hordern.com], 2005. 128 pp., colour photo-reproductions. AUS \$68, cloth; ISBN 1-875567-46-1.

David Parsons, *The David Parsons Collection Rare Pacific Voyage Books. Part II: La Perouse to Wilkes*. Sydney, NSW: Hordern House [www.hordern.com], 2006. 160 pp., colour photo-reproductions, bibliography, index to both volumes. AUS \$68, cloth; ISBN 1-875567-47-X.

According to the preface in these two books, the British-born David Parsons moved to the United States where he now lives, enjoying a successful career as an actuary. Now retired, he has been able to indulge an interest, stimulated by reading the Aubrey novels of Patrick O'Brian, in the literature of early European exploration. To begin with, Parsons became especially interested in the exploration of the Pacific and he acquired sets of the works of James Burney and George Vancouver, following them with many other volumes.

Parsons admits to an obsession in attempting to assemble as complete a collection as possible of exploration titles and for it to comprise works in the finest condition or with significant associations. A quick inspection shows that he has been mostly successful in achieving his aim. Yet that success meant that his collection has grown to such a size and covers so many aspects of exploration that he has had to make a painful decision to sell off many of his works. The sale will enable him to focus on the area that now interests him, pre-1492 Spanish and Portuguese voyages. An irony of the present situation is that among the volumes Parsons is selling off are those very items that began his collecting.

Hordern House, the Australian booksellers and auctioneers, were given the task of selling the volumes, and these two books are the catalogues produced to assist the sale. The catalogues are more elaborate than usual, being hard-backed on finest quality paper, with colour illustrations on nearly every page. The nature of the illustrations varies. Some show the title page, some reproduce illustrations from the books or, occasionally, an annotation on the book while some are photographs of the outside of the book or set. Each lot is described, detailing its background with its significance and entries are given to the established bibliographies that refer to them. However, an assumption is made that the reader knows what is meant by entries such as "Beddie, 1872" or "Holmes, 79," as they are not explained and only volume two includes a list of the works to which they refer.

It would have been wonderful to have had access to this collection when it was all together but sadly, by now, many, if not all, of the items will have been sold and dispersed to who knows whom and who knows where. It is a great pity that books of this quality will have returned to the relative obscurity of different private collections. We can only hope that some of the material has been acquired by libraries or other institutions prepared to keep them in the public domain.

As for the catalogues themselves, they will appeal primarily to a small number of collectors interested in Pacific history, but are unlikely to have much long-term use or relevance elsewhere. Photographs of a set of leather-bound volumes may look attractive but serve little or no other purpose. Nor do the catalogues really work as bibliographies. Instead, they represent a snapshot in time of one person's collection and, despite his aim to be complete, they still only represent a fraction of the published oeuvre about the Pacific. Had the collection been kept together, then such catalogues would have provided a researcher with the information about the location of a particular copy of a particular title. Instead, the researcher only knows that the copy once belonged to David Parsons.

Hordern House has a deserved high reputation for republishing interesting works dealing with Australian and Pacific history but these two volumes do little to add to that reputation. Instead, the company has produced somewhat over-elaborate and relatively expensive sale catalogues. Then again, if you can afford some of the anticipated sale prices, you will not worry about this expense.

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