

The Pleasures of Collecting Books on Cook and Pacific Exploration

The publication of two volumes cataloging the sale of my collection of books relating to Pacific voyages prompted your editor to ask me to reflect briefly on the joys of assembling this collection.

Genesis of the Collection



Anson's Voyage



Dixon's Voyage

My interest in building a collection of books relating to the exploration of the Pacific was sparked by a visit to the annual New York Book Fair where, browsing around, I found copies of Walter's account of Anson's circumnavigation, Kippis' life of James Cook [the Dublin edition], and the account of Dixon's voyage to the North West Coast of America. I had a burgeoning interest in British naval matters, and the prices seemed reasonable, and so I bought them. Without my realizing it at the time, these three books defined, in skeletal form, the scope of my collection.

The official narratives of Cook's three voyages and the accounts of the sailors and scientists who accompanied him, represented in my first modest purchase by Kippis' Life, would ultimately become the heart of my collection, as they must of any serious assemblage of Pacific voyages. My second purchase, the account of the circumnavigation and capture of the Manila galleon by Cook's great naval predecessor, Commodore George Anson, represented the second, and earliest, arm of my collection – the precursors of Cook. Finally my third purchase, the account of the 1785 fur trading voyage of William Dixon, armourer of the Discovery on Cook's third voyage, represented the third arm – those who came after Cook and completed the great work of the Pacific exploration that he initiated.

From this fairly inconspicuous beginning, my collection grew to around three hundred books including almost all the great titles of Pacific exploration.

The Pleasure of Books as Objects

Most readers and scholars consider that the text constitutes the book; the material in which the text is housed, the type, the paper on which it is printed, while perhaps pleasing, is incidental and relatively unimportant to them. For the book collector the reverse is often the case, and the book as a physical object is as important as the text itself.

Many of the books relating to Cook, in particular the official accounts of each of the three voyages, were luxury productions even before being bound – large quarto format, fine heavy paper and lavishly illustrated with maps and drawings. These books came from the bookseller unbound, simply covered in a flimsy paper wrapper. It was for the purchaser to have the text bound in something more sturdy. When the publisher's copy of the text was combined with sumptuous leather binding, profusely decorated in gilt, the result was a feast for the senses.

If well cared for neither leather nor fine paper deteriorate over time, so the fortunate collector can enjoy the book in pretty much the same condition as its original owner.

The Pleasure of Original Condition

Serious collectors want to get as close to the original version of a book as possible, hence the desire for a first edition rather than a later one. In addition to the earliest version of the text, a copy in the condition that it left the printer – stitched together, in plain paper wrappers, with the rough page edges untrimmed, is highly prized. Such copies have their own unadorned beauty.

Paradoxically perhaps, a book in such original condition will command a significantly higher price than the same book in a luxurious, contemporary leather binding. In my own collection highly decorated sets of voyages sit cheek by jowl with very drab appearing books in their original paper wrappers.

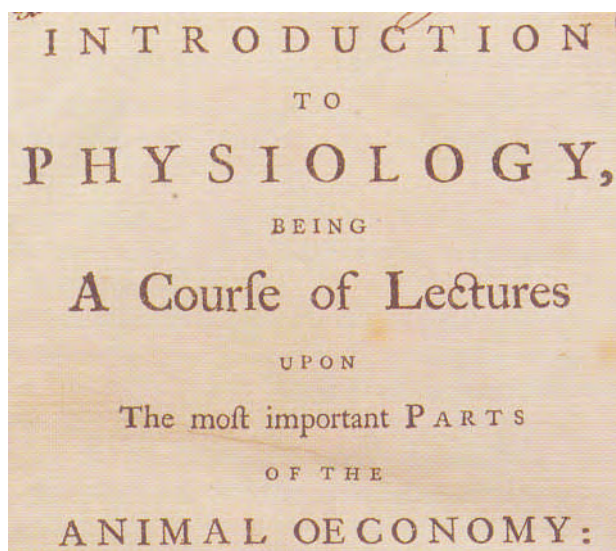
The Pleasure of Editions

Many eighteenth century accounts of exploration were best sellers in their day and, like today's bestsellers, went through many editions. With no copyright laws piracy was rife; Dublin was notorious for this practice. Pirated editions for the mass market often appeared soon after the official editions. Selling for much less, they were printed in a smaller format on cheap paper, often abridged, and with fewer illustrations which were crude re-engravings of the originals. Having been much less cared for, and utilizing much cheaper materials, these books are scarcely things of beauty. Nevertheless, they have their own integrity and reflect how books were used and read.

Foreigners had great interest in English exploration, and soon after publication in England, editions of Cook's voyages began appearing in most major European countries. Those produced in France were very elegant; those produced in the nascent United States often abbreviated and poorly produced. These foreign editions are generally much more difficult to acquire than the multifarious English language editions.

Collecting the various editions of the major texts offers a fascinating glimpse into the dissemination of the texts across both class and geographic boundaries.

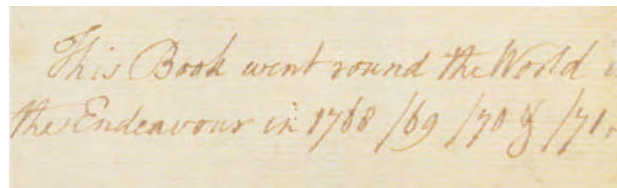
The Pleasure of Associations



Part of the title page of William Perry's book

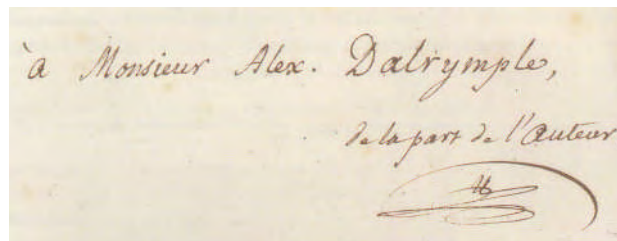
Many books one acquires have indications of prior ownership – some formal engraved bookplates, others simple ink inscription. Some bear a note from the person that gave the book to the first owner. These are often considered an

impediment to value. However, if the person dedicating the book is the author, or if the owner is a historic personage with some association with the author, we have a much more interesting – and valuable – book. Unfortunately Cook was at sea, or dead, when the accounts of his voyages were published, and so there are no known copies of these books dedicated to friends or acquaintances. Indeed such “association” copies are rare in the field of eighteenth century exploration. Two examples from my collection are illustrative of how an association can bring a book alive.



Note at the front of William Perry's book

The first is a copy of an introduction to physiology published in 1759. What transforms this nondescript medical text into something extraordinary is the note at the front - “This Book went around the World in the Endeavour in 1768/69/70 & 71” and the ownership inscription “Ex libris Guli. Perry”. This, of course, is the William Perry who became surgeon's mate on the *Endeavour* after the death of William Monkhouse in November 1770. The book contains many notations in Perry's hand together with a detailed anatomical rendering of the human eye. This book was no doubt consulted frequently on the voyage. Books which accompanied Cook and his crew on any of his epic voyages seem to be unknown, although Joseph Banks' extensive collection which went with him on the first voyage is presumably with the rest of Banks' famed library in the British Library. In many ways this is the most extraordinary book in my collection.



Inscription by Fleurieu to Alexander Dalrymple

The second is a copy of Fleurieu's four-volume account of Etienne Marchand's voyage to the Northwest Coast of America. It is inscribed “A Monsieur Alex. Dalrymple de la part de l' Auteur” and bears the stamp of the Admiralty Office Library. At the time of the dedication Dalrymple was the Hydrographer for the Navy, but he is, of

course, better known for his famous tantrum over the command of the *Endeavour*.

The Pleasure of the Truly Unique

One sub-genre of collecting exploration is that of the art produced on the voyages. A major example of such art is the series of marvelous prints produced by John Webber, the artist of Cook's final voyage. The capstone of my collection is a series, not of Webber prints, but of actual pencil drawings made by Webber on the voyage itself. The series consists of seven drawings, mostly in pencil, made on the return voyage home. Six consist of portraits of the natives of Kamchatka; the seventh is a portrait of a native of Prince William Sound, Alaska. Most of Webber's original drawings are in the British Museum; this Kamchatka series is, I believe, the largest cache of Webber drawings in private hands.

The One That Got Away

There are a few books that I never had the opportunity to buy. There is only one which I could have bought, but turned down, and regret that decision. That book is the collection of 39 specimens of tapas cloth brought back on Cook's voyages and assembled by Alexander Shaw. When I could have acquired it from a bookseller I didn't consider it a real book; when it later came up at auction someone else bid more.

The Pleasures of Completion

To aid him in his pursuit the collector has available to him the great bibliographies detailing all the published works relating to his field of interest. For Cook himself, the two great bibliographies are Holmes,¹ listing 113 major books published in the 18th century and Beddie,² listing almost 5000 books and articles, published from the era of Cook to the present day. For the Pacific in general there is the catalogue of the Hill collection³ covering 2000 titles, 600 of which were published prior to 1830 – the period spanned by my own collection.

These bibliographies are not merely the source of information. Every collector would like his collection to be "complete", that is he wants to own every book that naturally falls within the scope of his collection. This is the impossible dream, but collectors take great, and somewhat guilty, pleasure in measuring the completeness of their collection against the measure of a particular bibliography – even great libraries keep score in this manner. For

Cook, most of the books published in the seventeenth century are not excessively rare so a measure of "completeness" is achievable. My own collection has 62% of the 18th century books listed by Holmes – far from complete, but the result of diligent searching over a number of years.

Time to Move On

My interest in collecting the precursors of Cook has led me back in time to the first great explorer, Christopher Columbus. He and Cook were certainly the two greatest discoverers – combining incredible seamanship with unerring instincts for exploration. Every collector, unless his name be Getty, expands his reach until he ultimately hits a budget limit, and so it is with me. In the interest of strengthening my collection relating to Columbus' discoveries and the colonization by the Spanish of the New World, I made the reluctant decision to sell my 18th and 19th century books. Derek McDonnell, of Hordern House in Sydney, having been the source for many of my best books and having become a good friend in the process, was the obvious choice as the agent for the sale of my collection. The two handsome catalogues Hordern House produced⁴ are a fitting and permanent memorial to my collection. I am told that these catalogues are popular with collectors and have been selling well as reference books in their own right.

David Parsons

References

1. Holmes, Sir Maurice Gerald. *Captain James Cook, R.N., F.R.S.: a bibliographical excursion*. F. Edwards. 1952.
2. Beddie, M. K. *Bibliography of Captain James Cook RN, FRS, Circumnavigator*. Library of new South Wales - Mitchell Library. 1970.
3. Hill, Kenneth. *The Hill Collection of Pacific Voyages at the University of California, San Diego*. William Reese Company and Hordern House. 2004.
4. *Rare Pacific Voyage Books from the Collection of David Parsons*. Hordern House. *Part 1 Dampier to Cook*. 2005 [See *Cook's Log*, page 9, vol. 29, no. 1 (2006)] *Part 2 La Perouse to Wilkes*. 2006 [See *Cook's Log*, page , vol. 30, no. 1 (2007)]

Note

The images depicted in this article are taken from the two catalogues of David Parsons' collection, and remain the copyright of Hordern House. See <http://www.hordern.com/>