



To Botany Bay and Back:
The Worldwide Web of Sir Joseph Banks

Tower Gallery, Eton College
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Foreword by Provost

It is right that we remember, and yes, celebrate the memory of that great Old Etonian, Sir Joseph Banks. Of course he put his commitment to science and discovery at the service of the expansion of Britain's trade and Britain's Empire around the world, as did the scholars loyal to the imperial ambitions of the great Alexander or the great Akbar. That we now deplore imperialism does not mean that we should despise Aristotle or turn our backs on the exquisite art and architecture of the Mughals; nor should we fail to give due honour to Banks as one of the founders of modern natural history, the understanding of which is now so vital to the saving of our planetary ecosystem. There is, I think it is true to say, a direct line of descent from Sir Joseph Banks to Sir David Attenborough. Banks played a key part in the globalisation of science, believing in the open spread of knowledge - and it is that kind of globalisation which is more than ever needed to understand and deal with the worldwide problems we now face.

In fact, when one reads the accounts of Banks, one finds oneself admiring his humanity and generosity far more often than one winces at attitudes which now grate on us. His instincts are liberal, in the best sense of the word, even when coloured by the cultural bias of his time. So let us applaud his achievements; and let us use the foundation he helped to lay down of our understanding of the natural history of our world in order to build the policies we need to preserve and protect that world as he would surely have wished.

Lord Waldegrave of North Hill

Provost of Eton and Patron of the Sir Joseph Banks Society



Introduction



William Dickinson after Joshua Reynolds,
Joseph Banks, Esq., mezzotint, 1774
[FDA-E.245-2010]

This exhibition was intended to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of Joseph Banks (1743-1820), an Old Etonian whose influence reached round the world during his lifetime. Another worldwide phenomenon, Covid-19, forced a postponement, not just once, but twice.

The exhibition charts Joseph Banks's global impact through three key themes: Banks at Eton and his early botanising; Banks as plant hunter on James Cook's voyage round the world in the *Endeavour*; and Banks the scientific entrepreneur and promoter of economic botany. The outcomes of the voyage and Banks's subsequent life were immense. The encounters between European explorers and native peoples were sometimes tragic, and the written records often one-sided. In addition, the trade and dominion which developed subsequently provided opportunities for imperial exploitation, the legacies of which continue to this day.

After the *Endeavour* voyage, Banks's plans to join Cook's second Pacific expedition came to nothing, and he only made one other significant expedition. Instead, his influence spread worldwide through his other activities: as scientific promoter and correspondent, President of the Royal Society for 42 years, Privy Councillor and adviser to King George III, and de facto director of the Royal Gardens at Kew. Banks published very little himself, but his activities had a profound impact on the world we live in today. Twenty-five years after Eton's 1997 exhibition *Joseph Banks and Friends: Plant Hunting at Eton and Beyond*, this is a timely opportunity to reassess his contribution in light of changing attitudes.



‘The Great Panjandrum’

Sir Joseph Banks was described recently by Sir David Attenborough as ‘The Great Panjandrum of Georgian Science’. This vivid description reflects the position he held as President of the Royal Society for over four decades, from 1778-1820. At this time Britain was at the beginning of its industrial revolution, described by Richard Holmes as ‘The Age of Wonder’ in the title he chose for his widely acclaimed book on the period.

Banks owned 10,000 acres of Lincolnshire estates. These provided an income that made him one of the wealthiest men in England. Such privilege may have resulted in an indolent pleasure-loving young man. But this was far from the case. Through the fruits of his labour and service Banks was destined for even greater wealth and fame, becoming one of the most eminent figures in Georgian England.

In March 2000 the Britain Australia Society erected a memorial in Lincoln Cathedral to Sir Joseph Banks, calling him the ‘Father of Australia’. Inscribed on the memorial are the words of the Conservative politician Lord Hobart, who wrote to Banks in 1793 that ‘wide as the world is, traces of you are to be found in every corner of it’.

The term ‘Father of Australia’ now feels dated, out of place, and no doubt insulting to indigenous people. The Australian federal budget in 2018 allocated \$48.7 million to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Captain James Cook’s voyage to Australia. But even well-intentioned celebrations can be fraught with difficulty, and the plans sparked widespread controversy and sometimes protests. Commentators reminded us that the mistreatment of indigenous people has been ignored while the effects of colonisation have been reinforced. Similar celebrations were repeated in New Zealand when a replica of the *Endeavour* sailed into Gisborne Bay (Tuuranga-Nui). There were many demonstrations and protests, which is hardly surprising considering that nine Maori were killed when Cook landed there 250 years ago.

The 26-year-old Joseph Banks was haunted by what happened at Gisborne Bay, writing about the incident in his journal:

‘Thus ended the most disagreeable day My life has yet seen, black be the mark for it and heavan [sic] send that such may never return to embitter future reflection.’

The young Banks also had an instinctive dislike of slavery. Patrick O’Brian noted in his biography that in the middle of April 1771 Banks and Solander sailed from Cape Town for St Helena. ‘Banks did not think much of the place or the people ... and he loathed the presence of slaves, even more their cruel treatment.’

But what do we know about Banks's views on British colonialism and imperialism? Later years saw the eventual settlement of Europeans in both Australia and New Zealand. Some of this settlement was recommended by Sir Joseph who, as President of the Royal Society, reported to a House of Commons committee that:

‘...he apprehended there would be little Probability of any opposition from the Natives, as, during his Stay there in the Year 1770, he saw very few and did not think there were about Fifty in all the Neighbourhood and had Reason to believe the Country was very thinly peopled.’

He was justifying the settlement based on Terra Nullius or the ‘empty land’ theory, but it clearly was not uninhabited. Eighteen more years were to pass before the first fleet of settlers went to Australia. According to Toby Musgrave in his excellent book, *The Multifarious Mr Banks*, Sir Joseph took a huge interest in the settlement and development of New South Wales. However, he did not generally involve himself with what at the time was called the ‘civilising process’ of newly subjugated indigenous peoples. Nor did Banks support the oppression of subordinated peoples as a labour source. However, slave-owners did benefit when Banks arranged for breadfruit trees to be transferred from Tahiti to the West Indies to provide cheap food for the enslaved workforce.

Banks, as a man of the Enlightenment, had no difficulty with the idea that white, European, Christian societies and beliefs could live peacefully alongside non-white non-Christian civilisations. He did not believe in the superiority of one society over another. But by the time of Banks's death in 1820, Europeans had embraced imperialism and industrialisation; they were less inclined to value other cultures.

Today, evidence of Banks's legacy can be found in some of our great institutions such as the Royal Society, the British Museum, the British Library, the Natural History Museum, and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. There are also many locations around the world which are named after him.

Banks was an extraordinary figure, and this fascinating exhibition at Eton explores the range of his accomplishments in the service of King and Country. Originally planned for the bicentenary of Bank's death in 2020, we can finally celebrate his life in the fitting surrounds of Eton, the place where his botanic adventures began.

Paul Scott

Trustee and Honorary Curator, Sir Joseph Banks Society



Banks at Eton

The son of a wealthy landowner, Joseph Banks spent his early years at home on the Lincolnshire fens where he developed a passion for the outdoors. At the age of 9 he was sent to Harrow, where he ‘cared mighty little for his book’, and four years later to Eton. Here his tutor Edward Young noted his ‘great deficiency’ in Greek and Latin, ‘great inattention’, and ‘immoderate love of play’, but found him otherwise ‘a very good-temper’d and well-disposed boy’.

Eton in the mid-18th century was a sympathetic environment for budding botanists. Three of Banks’s contemporaries in his boarding house, Jourdelay’s, under the care of the Dame, Frances Yonge, went on to become natural historians. Years later, Banks described his Damascene conversion to botany to the surgeon Sir Everard Home, who recounted it in his Hunterian oration. River-bathing with friends one fine summer evening, the young Joseph had lingered in the water, and dawdled back to school by himself along a flowery lane in the evening light: ‘he stopped and looking round, involuntarily exclaimed, How beautiful! After some reflection, he said to himself, it is surely more natural that I should be taught to know all these productions of Nature, in preference to Greek or Latin.’ He began to teach himself botany, paying the women who gathered medicinal plants for apothecaries’ shops for useful information. Back at home in Lincolnshire, he found an old copy of Gerard’s *Herball*, illustrated with woodcuts of plants he recognised, and carried it back to school in triumph. Home supposed that it was ‘probably this very book that he [Banks] was poring over when detected by his tutor, for the first time, in the act of reading’.

Item list

Dr Barnard’s account book as Head Master, 1754-1765 [ECA, COLL P 18 06]

Reproduction: Extracts from a letter from Edward Young addressed to William Banks, 6 February 1757 [National Library of Australia, MS 9/3/141]

Paul Sandby, *Windsor Castle from the river*, watercolour, undated, probably 1760s [FDA-D.478-2010]

Reproduction: Sir Everard Home, *The Hunterian Oration in honour of surgery ... delivered in the theatre of the College [of Surgeons] February 14, 1822*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822 [Wellcome Institute, EPB/C/29265]

John Gerard, *The herball, or Generall historie of plantes*, London: London, 1636 [ECL, Gh. 1.06]



Paul Sandby, *Windsor Castle from the river*, watercolour, undated, probably 1760s [FDA-D.478-2010]

John Gerard, *The herball, or Generall historie of plantes*, London, 1636 [ECL, Gh. 1.06]





The Endeavour

After leaving Eton in 1760 Banks went up to Oxford. His father's death in 1761 made him one of England's wealthiest men, and this allowed him to arrange his own botanical lectures with a tutor from Cambridge, Israel Lyons. After leaving Oxford in 1763 he pursued his passion for botany at what is now the Chelsea Physic Garden, adjacent to his mother's town house, and at the British Museum.

At that time, most young men in his situation might have embarked on the classic Grand Tour to southern Europe, but Banks set his sights on a voyage of discovery, embarking on a survey of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1766 as an unofficial ship's botanist. In 1768 he persuaded the Admiralty to let him join James Cook's expedition to the South Pacific at his own expense with a team of eight collectors, artists and servants, including the Swedish naturalist Daniel Solander, a pupil of Carl Linnaeus. On the *Endeavour*, Banks and his colleagues collected over 30,000 specimens of plants and animals, including around 1,400 species previously unknown in Europe.

On their return to London in 1771, Cook and Banks became instant celebrities. Cook's careful charting of the New Zealand coast and the eastern seaboard of Australia were to be of great importance to Britain, and the scientific observations and collections of Banks and his team would eventually challenge the Eurocentric view of nature and mankind's place in it. Accounts of the expedition's reception in Tahiti captured the public imagination, creating a popular image of the South Sea islands that endures to this day.



Model of H.M. Bark *Endeavour*,
20th century [NHM.32-2015]



Engraving of the 'Kangaroo' in John Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken ... for making discoveries in the southern hemisphere, and successively performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook*, London, 1773, vol 3 [ECL, Ag.5.05]

Item list

Model of HM Bark *Endeavour*, 20th century [NHM.32-2015]

Cooking apparatus used by Joseph Banks on his voyage round the world in HM Bark *Endeavour*, 18th century [on loan from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)]

Rennoldson, engraver, after Sydney Parkinson, *View of Endeavour river, on the coast of New Holland, where Captain Cook had the ship laid on shore, in order to repair the damage, which she received on the rock*, London, 1787 [NHM.81-2016]

Specimen: Coral, *Ctenactis echinata* [NHM.MC.17-2015]

The journal of Joseph Banks in the Endeavour, Guildford: Genesis in association with Rigby, 1980, vol 2 [NHM.66:2-2016]

Reproduction: George Stubbs, *The Kongouro from New Holland*, oil painting commissioned by Joseph Banks, 1772 [Royal Museums Greenwich, London]

Specimen: Skeleton of a kangaroo, *Macropus sp.* [NHM.838-2022]

John Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken ... for making discoveries in the southern hemisphere, and successively performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook*, London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1773, vols 3 [ECL, Ag.5.05]

Reproduction: Dennis Adams, cutaway view of HM. Bark *Endeavour*, n.d. [collection of George Fussey]

William Dickinson after Joshua Reynolds, *Joseph Banks, Esq.*, mezzotint, 1774 [FDA-E.245-2010]

Reproduction: Tupaia, *Maori trading a crayfish with Joseph Banks*, drawing, 1769 [British Library, Add MS 15508, f. 12]

James Gillray, *The Great South Sea Caterpillar, transform'd into a Bath Butterfly*, London, 1795 [on loan from Joe Studholme]

James Perry, *Mimosa: or, The sensitive plant; a poem*, London: W. Sandwich, 1779 [ECL, Cq.1.1.19]

Reproduction: Matthew Darly, *The Botanic Macaroni*, engraving, London, 1772 [Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Minnich Collection, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund]



The Florilegium

One of Joseph Banks's most substantial scientific achievements was only completed long after his death. Working from original drawings of the botanical specimens collected during the *Endeavour* voyage, Banks had planned a 14-volume illustrated botanical work to present his discoveries. Between 1773 and 1784, Banks and the naturalist Daniel Solander oversaw five artists and 18 engravers preparing engraved copper plates based on Sydney Parkinson's drawings and sketches of 753 selected species of plants from the voyage, to be accompanied by scientific descriptions by Solander. Despite spending a vast sum of money on the project, Banks failed to publish it in his lifetime, possibly due to Solander's untimely death in 1782 and Banks's many other commitments. The illustrations and engraved plates remained among his collections, now at the Natural History Museum in London.

After Banks's death in 1820 there were several proposals or attempts to publish at least part of his *Florilegium*. Finally, between 1980 and 1990 Alecto Historical Editions under the direction of Joe Studholme, another Old Etonian, completed the monumental task of printing 100 sets of the 738 surviving copper plates, using historical printing techniques touched up with hand colouring. This section of the exhibition presents the stages of the process from plant through to print.



Banks' *Florilegium*, plate 608 '*Luffa cylindrica*', Alecto Historical Editions, 1990 [FDA-E.2916:29/5-2016]

Item list

Herbarium sheet: *Luffa cylindrica* var *leiocarpa*, collected on the *Endeavour* voyage [on loan from the Natural History Museum, London]

Sydney Parkinson, finished watercolour of *Luffa cylindrica* completed on board *Endeavour*, 1769 [item on loan courtesy of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London]

Copper plate of *Luffa cylindrica*, c.1773-1784 [on loan from the Natural History Museum, London]

Banks' *Florilegium*, plate 608 '*Luffa cylindrica*', Alecto Historical Editions, 1990 [FDA-E.2916:29/5-2016]

Two specimens: *Luffa cylindrica* [on loan from the Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew]

Colour printing instructions for *Florilegium* plate 130, '*Rotala mexicana*', Alecto Historical Editions, n.d. [on loan from Joe Studholme]

Stage proofs of *Florilegium* plate 114, '*Callistemon viminalis*', Alecto Historical Editions, n.d. [on loan from Joe Studholme]

Printer's notebooks for the *Florilegium*, Alecto Historical Editions, n.d. [on loan from Joe Studholme]

John Frederick Miller, finished watercolour of '*Corynocarpus laevigatus*' after drawing prepared by Sydney Parkinson on board *Endeavour*, 1774 [item on loan courtesy of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London.]

Banks' *Florilegium*, plate 427 '*Corynocarpus laevigatus*', Alecto Historical Editions, 1990 [FDA-E.2916:21/7-2016]

Banks' *Florilegium*, plate 285 '*Banksia serrata*', Alecto Historical Editions, 1990 [FDA-E.2916:13/18-2016]

Banks' *Florilegium*, frontispiece to part IV, Alecto Historical Editions, 1990 [FDA-E.2916:4/1-2016]

Banks' *Florilegium*, plate 1 '*Dillenia allata*', Alecto Historical Editions, 1990 [FDA-E.2916:1/4-2016]



Economic and Scientific Legacies

Before James Cook, visits to the Pacific Islands and observations of their peoples by Europeans were limited and sporadic. Cook's voyages set a new standard and went beyond mere navigational and geographic surveys. Thanks largely to Banks, surveys of resources were systematic: animals and plants were collected, and peoples, their behaviour and customs were described and compared with other indigenous populations.

Banks intended to join Cook's second circumnavigation in 1772, but when the Admiralty refused to meet his demands for improved living quarters and scientific provisions, he made only one further voyage, chartering a ship to make the first British scientific expedition to Iceland. Instead, his influence spread far and wide through his positions of scientific patronage and his worldwide web of correspondence with friends, colleagues, travellers and plant collectors. His London home in Soho Square became a centre of scientific study, open to anyone who wished to consult his collections. Remarkably, herbarium specimens collected by Banks on the *Endeavour* voyage are still being used by scientists today to analyse the processes of climate change.

As long-serving President of the Royal Society, Privy Councillor, and unofficial director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Joseph Banks was in the vanguard of those who understood that trade could be transformed by deliberately moving economically useful plants and domestic animals around the globe. He also promoted colonial expansion and recommended European settlement in Australia. The persistent injustices perpetrated against the Australian First Nations are another legacy of the fateful landing of *Endeavour* at Botany Bay.

A Far from Pacific Ocean

Banks's promotion of the voyage of HMS *Bounty* in 1789 to transplant the breadfruit from Tahiti to the West Indies as a nutritious food source for enslaved people on British plantations had unintended consequences for the indigenous islanders. The subsequent infamous mutiny resulted in 16 mutineers remaining on Tahiti, and their interventions in tribal conflicts led to considerable disruption and loss of life. Following his loss of the *Bounty*, Captain Bligh repeated his voyage of transplantation successfully in 1791, winning the Royal Society medal provided at Banks's instigation.



At Tahiti as elsewhere in the Pacific, European contact resulted in the introduction of devastating diseases that decimated many populations, and subsequently led to colonial exploitation and lasting injustices. Banks's role as the lead advocate for a penal colony in New South Wales also had repercussions for the peoples of the Pacific. To provide food for the Botany Bay colony in its early years, voyages were made to Pacific islands to obtain salt pork, amongst other commodities. As islanders learned to trade food that would otherwise be eaten, the economic and social disruption changed ways of life forever.



John Jacobi after Joshua Reynolds, *Omai, a native of the island of Utiitea*, mezzotint, London, 1780 [FDA-E.196-2014]

Item list

Herbarium sheet: *Corynocarpus laevigatus* Forst. [item on loan courtesy of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London]

M.F. Large, H.R. Nessia, E.K. Cameron, & D.J. Blanchon, 'Changes in Stomatal Density over time (1769-2015) in the New Zealand endemic tree *Corynocarpus laevigatus* J. R. Forst. & G. Forst. (Corynocarpaceae)', *Pacific Science*, vol 71(3), 2017

J. Brodie, G. D. Fussey, J. Wilbraham, & M. D. Guiry, *From Sir Joseph Banks to the world's seaweed colloid industry: the discovery of original material and typification of the marine red alga Gloiopeltis tenax*, *Journal of Applied Phycology*, vol 27, 2015

Specimen: Red alga (Rhodophyta), *Fucus tenax*, now *Gloiopeltis tenax* [NHM-HH:1.213-2010]

Specimen: Lambert nut [on loan from the Linnean Society of London, Carpological Collection]

Specimen: Nankeen cotton [on loan from the Linnean Society of London, Carpological Collection]

Specimen: Refined Demerara sugar [on loan from the Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew]

Sugar cane walking stick belonging to Joseph Banks, 19th century [on loan from the Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew]

Joseph Banks, autograph letter to James Edward Smith, 15 February 1796, discussing the professorship of Rural Economy at Oxford [on loan from the Linnean Society of London, JES/COR/1/56]

Joseph Banks, autograph letter to James Edward Smith, 24 September 1807, discussing the King's flock of merino sheep [on loan from the Linnean Society of London, JES/COR/1/78]

Jonas Dryander, *Catalogus bibliothecae historico-naturalis Josephi Banks, tomus III, Botanici*, London, 1797 [on loan from the Linnean Society of London]

Morris, engraver, after Sydney Parkinson, *A view of Otaheite with several vessels belonging to that island*, London: Alexander Hogg, 1787 [collection of George Fussey]

John Jacobi after Joshua Reynolds, *Omai, a native of the island of Utiitea*, mezzotint, London, 1780 [FDA-E.196-2014]

Specimen: Sliced breadfruit [on loan from the Economic Botany Collection, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew]

Sir Francis Chantrey, *Sir Joseph Banks*, plaster cast after original marble at Petworth House dated c.1837 [on loan from the Illustrations and Artefacts Collection, Library and Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew]

Reserve Bank of Australia, commemorative five-dollar banknote, first issued in 1967 [NHM.839-2022]

Joseph Banks (1743-1820)

Timeline

1743

Born 13 February in London

1745-1751

Living at Revesby Abbey, Lincolnshire

1751-1756

Attends Harrow School

1756-1760

Attends Eton College, living in Jourdelay's House with
Dame Fanny Yonge

1761

Inherits estates in Lincolnshire (Revesby) and Derbyshire
(Overton Hall) and substantial wealth at his father's death

1764

Arranges botanical lectures at Oxford given by
Israel Lyons and starts to view British Museum natural
history collections

1766

Expedition to Newfoundland and Labrador with
Constantine Phipps OE

1767

Admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Society

1768-1771

Endeavour voyage with Captain James Cook

1772

Becomes scientific advisor to King George III on the Royal
Botanic Gardens at Kew; undertakes expedition to Iceland

1774

Portrait painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds

1777

Takes up main residence at 32 Soho Square, London,
spending most summers at his home at Spring Grove,
Middlesex, and most early autumns at
Revesby, Lincolnshire

1778

Elected President of the Royal Society

1779

Marries Dorothea Hugessen in Holborn; recommends
the colonisation of New South Wales (Botany Bay)

1781

Made a Baronet

1782

Engravings for Banks's *Florilegium* are complete,
but the 743 plates are not printed

1785

Gives evidence to House of Commons Committee
in favour of the settlement of convicts at Botany Bay,
Australia

1788

Linnean Society is founded by James Edward Smith;
Banks is a Founder Fellow

1785

Imports Merino Sheep for the King's flocks at Kew and
Windsor; descendants of these sheep were sent to Australia

1795

Made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KB)

1797

Made a Privy Councillor

1804

Co-founds the (Royal) Horticultural Society

1807

Health starts to fail, but remains active in scientific and
imperial matters

1820

Dies 19 June at Spring Grove, Middlesex, survived by his
wife; buried at St Leonard's Church, Heston

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Jonathan Farley, Senior Conservator, Library, Art & Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

John and Clare MacDonald of <https://captain-cook-continent-of-smoke.com/>

Eton installation team: Catrina Brizzi, Bryan Lewis, Sara Spillett



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