

John Hamilton Mortimer and the discovery of Captain Cook



John Hamilton Mortimer (1740-1779), *Captain James Cook, Sir Joseph Banks, Lord Sandwich, Dr Daniel Solander and Dr John Hawkesworth*, c. 1771, oil on canvas, nla.pic-an7351768

The National Library of Australia holds within its large collection of artworks a most intriguing eighteenth century painting, the bequest of Dame Merlyn Myer. A beautiful work in good condition, the painting is unsigned and lacks its original title. Early research into the painting revealed that it had hung unremarked in private collections for 150 years and then suffered a misattribution to Johann Zoffany which, while initially inflating its value in the art market, had obscured the painting's true identity and significance. Rejection of the Zoffany attribution also cast doubt on the subjects—Joseph Banks and Captain Cook—and the date—1771¹—traditionally ascribed to the work. The reattribution of the painting to John Hamilton Mortimer,² further research into the circumstances under which the painting was produced, and a detailed examination of the painting itself, have proved the key to revealing Dame Merlyn's gift as the earliest portrait of Captain Cook yet discovered, and one of the most important paintings relating to the British exploration of the Pacific undertaken by him.

On 12 June 1771, HM Bark *Endeavour* anchored in the Downs, completing an extraordinary four-year voyage to the previously uncharted reaches of the Pacific Ocean. The ambitions and

achievements of this voyage, which were in equal measure scientific and territorial, had been proposed by the Royal Society and undertaken at the express wish of King George III. Lieutenant James Cook, the *Endeavour's* captain, was a man whose abilities had won him the patronage that his undistinguished background could not. In addition to the crew he had carefully chosen, his ship carried a party of 'scientific gentlemen', chief among them Joseph Banks, who had personally underwritten the considerable expenses for scientific equipment and personnel, and the eminent naturalist, Dr Daniel Solander.

The presence of Banks and Solander on board, and the role played by the Royal Society in formulating the scientific aims of the voyage were unprecedented in a British Naval expedition and created enormous interest amongst polite society as to its outcome, an interest that would quickly spread to the broader public when sailors' tales of 'curious' social customs in the Pacific began to circulate. Amongst those eagerly awaiting the *Endeavour's* return was John Montague, 4th Earl of Sandwich. Five months earlier on January 12, and for the second time in his career, Lord Sandwich had been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty.

Lord Sandwich, who would become something of a byword—even by eighteenth century standards—for the extent to which he employed the vast patronage of his office for personal and political ends, had not been responsible for the *Endeavour's* voyage but was now in a position to benefit from its success. He set about associating himself with the voyage and its principal players in a number of ways: establishing a lasting friendship with Banks, extending his professional patronage to Cook by promoting him to the rank of Commander on 19 August 1771, commissioning Dr John Hawkesworth to edit and see to publication an illustrated, authorised account of the voyage,³ and agreeing to undertake a second voyage to the Pacific along the lines suggested in Cook's detailed postscript to his voyage journal. Sandwich also, as the Library's painting attests, engaged a popular and successful artist—Mortimer—to portray him with Banks, Solander, Cook and Hawkesworth in a painting that celebrates the achievements of the first Cook Pacific voyage and signals the intention to undertake a second.

What sort of artist was John Hamilton Mortimer? How did he come by such a lucrative and important commission and what did he make of his opportunity to paint some of the most lionised celebrities of his age? He was born in 1740, the fifth and youngest child of Thomas Mortimer, a prosperous businessman and mill owner in Eastbourne, Sussex. He trained in London with Thomas Hudson, Robert Edge Pine, the St. Martin's Lane Academy and Shipley's Art School between 1757 and c.1762. While studying with Hudson he met and formed a close friendship with Joseph Wright of Derby. By 1758, both Mortimer and Wright were drawing at the Duke of Richmond's sculpture gallery⁴ under the direction of Joseph Wilton. It was here that Mortimer also met, impressed, and became a protégé of Giovanni Battista Cipriani, who had been appointed by the Duke to instruct the pupils in painting.

In 1759, Mortimer won first prize for a drawing of the *Discobolus*, based on a cast in the Duke of Richmond's gallery. In the same year the Society of Arts began to offer prizes for history painting—100 guineas for first prize and 50 guineas for second—with the subject to be taken from English⁵ history. In 1763 Mortimer submitted *Edward the Confessor Stripping His Mother of Her Effects* and was awarded second prize. The following year his painting *St Paul Preaching to the Ancient Britons*, in competition with an entry by George Romney, won first prize.

Mortimer submitted works for exhibition to the Society of Artists—of which he was elected a Fellow in 1765—each year from 1761 until 1778, when he transferred to the Royal Academy. Despite his prizes, Mortimer received few commissions for history paintings and increasingly turned to portraiture to make a living. From 1770, in addition to his output of portraits and conversation pieces, history paintings and theatrical subjects, a new interest in the monstrous and barbarous (described by Mortimer's contemporaries as his 'horrible imaginings') appears in his work. His fascination with psychological and physical sensationalism places him in the vanguard of the Romantic Movement in Britain.

Despite his being characterised as a 'fascinating and dangerous companion ... extravagant and dissipated',⁶ Mortimer was a talented and productive artist, and an active member of the Society of Artists, becoming vice-president in 1770 and president in 1774. In 1775, he married Jane Hurrell who appears to have undertaken the organisation of her husband's rather chaotic financial affairs, leaving him time to increase his already impressive output of paintings. In November 1778 he was one of only two artists out of a field of 19 to be elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. He was created a Royal Academician by special grant of George III, but before he could receive his diploma he was taken ill with a fever and 12 days later, on 4 February 1779, he died. Highly regarded by his fellow artists, Mortimer's early death at the age of 38 has tended to obscure his reputation for subsequent generations. Lacking signatures, his works have been attributed to other artists and one more recent commentator has even described his style as 'School of Zoffany'. But this is to ignore the influence on his contemporaries of the skill and originality of Mortimer's work.

Like other successful artists of his period, Mortimer required good social contacts to secure commissions from the fashionable and famous which would in turn raise his own profile and create demand for his work. He had the good fortune to secure the patronage of Dr Benjamin Bates of Little Missenden in Buckinghamshire. Bates, a connoisseur with an extensive art collection, had purchased Mortimer's *St Paul preaching to the Ancient Britons* in 1770, donating the work to his local church in High Wycombe which was then being restored by his neighbour and friend, Sir Francis Dashwood.⁷ Bates took a strong interest in Mortimer, becoming one of his most generous patrons and introducing him to his friends amongst the local gentry, many of whom also commissioned works.⁸ He also lent his house at Aylesbury, Rickford's Hill, to Mortimer and his wife each summer.

Bates had been a member of Dashwood's hellfire club known as the Monks of Medmenham. Named for the old abbey on the banks of the Thames to which the members retreated in summer, the activities of the Medmenham brotherhood were the subject of considerable rumour and prurient speculation.⁹ A third member of this club, and a lifelong friend of Dashwood, was Lord Sandwich. Sandwich was therefore well known to Bates, and it could have been on Bates' recommendation that Sandwich commissioned Mortimer to paint the group portrait. Equally, Sandwich could have seen examples of Mortimer's work at the Admiralty for, in 1770 and 1771, Mortimer was engaged in helping Richard Paton, a marine and ship painter, by painting the figures in his views of the Royal Dockyards at Deptford, Chatham, Woolwich, Sheerness and Portsmouth, 'by permission of His Majesty and from the Admiralty'.¹⁰ It is also possible that Cipriani, engaged to work up Sydney Parkinson's drawings for publication in the *Endeavour voyage Account*, could have recommended Mortimer.

Having secured Sandwich's commission, Mortimer created a highly innovative work which conveys the intimacy of a conversation piece but has the scale and compositional qualities of

a history painting. The conversation piece has been defined as ‘a portrait group of a family or friends in some degree of rapport seen in their home surroundings or engaged in some favourite occupation, usually painted on a small scale’.¹¹ It is regarded as the one essentially British art genre to have flourished in the eighteenth century. Arthur Devis, Johann Zoffany, George Stubbs, Francis Wheatley and John Hamilton Mortimer are considered its chief practitioners.

The large scale of this painting, 120 x 166 cm, is much more in keeping with Mortimer’s history paintings. History painting concerned itself with the depiction of noble subjects, usually taken from the Bible, or classical history or mythology, which gave full scope to the depiction of human passions, endeavours and ideals. Regarded as the highest genre of academic art—being on a par with poetry in revealing the workings of the human soul—History painting was often promoted as an ideal for artists in the first half of the eighteenth century in England. However, few history paintings were attempted by English artists in this period for a number of reasons, including the preference amongst the wealthy for purchasing land and Old Masters’ paintings rather than contemporary art, the Anglican Church’s general distrust of religious imagery,¹² and the lack of a strong, economically powerful monarchy dedicated to commissioning works of art for the purposes of prestige and propaganda.

In the 1760s, with the accession of George III—a monarch actively interested in art—and the establishment of a number of exhibition societies, the situation began to change. John Sunderland¹³ however, draws attention to the distinction between the imaginative history painting—with its focus on the ideal—advocated by Sir Joshua Reynolds¹⁴ and the more matter-of-fact approach of artists such as Edge Pine and Mortimer who concentrated on the events of English national history. While these events were usually drawn from the distant, or even mythic past, the success of Benjamin West’s *The Death of General Wolfe* in 1771 made it more acceptable for painters to depict scenes from contemporary, or near contemporary, history. Mortimer’s history paintings are characterised by his choice of uncommon, at times obscure, subjects and Benedict Nicholson¹⁵ suggests that they represent a desire on the artist’s part to be the first to explore a particular topic. A celebration of the British Navy’s recent Pacific triumph might well have appealed to Mortimer.

As with a number of Mortimer’s conversation pieces, the painting is set in a clearing amongst trees which, together with a marble sculpture,¹⁶ frame the sitters.¹⁷ In this work one sees a large body of water in the background and what appear to be the white cliffs of Dover. The sun hovers just above the horizon. The five figures are arranged in various poses across the foreground of the canvas. Their apparently relaxed interaction with one another masks a very complex set of relationships, so complex that it would be best to identify each of the figures before undertaking further examination of the composition.

The seated figure in the immediate foreground on the left of the painting can be confidently identified as Joseph Banks. His features correspond almost exactly to the profile portrait of Banks modelled by John Flaxman for Josiah Wedgwood in 1775. There is also a strong resemblance to the portrait of Banks in Charles Tomkin’s print of Reynolds’ *Society of Dilettanti*.¹⁸ Banks holds a book in his left hand and gestures lightly with his right hand towards the abundant plant life below him. Banks’ great passion was botany, and iconographically speaking, he ‘reads from Nature’s book’. His hat lies on the bank behind him and we can see that he—like the other figures in the composition—appears to be wearing a wig known as a Scratch bob. With the exception of a brief period around 1765, wigs were worn by all classes in the eighteenth century up until the 1790s when the introduction of a tax

on hair powder killed the fashion. Scratch bobs were usually the colour of natural hair and covered only part of the head. The wearer's own hair was swept back from the forehead and mingled with that of the wig and the two were 'fixed' together with pomatum.

The clothes worn by Banks, who was young, fashionable and very wealthy, tend to fix the date of the painting to the early 1770s.¹⁹ The buttonholes on jackets began to angle downwards and the front line of the jacket began to slope away to the hips from 1770. The slope of the jacket front became exceedingly marked by 1773, a point not yet reached in any of the jackets depicted. Waistcoats continued to be quite long until the early 1770s but began to shrink in length quickly thereafter, being just below the waistline by 1775. Jacket, waistcoat and breeches all of different fabric began to replace suits all of a piece from 1770, with suits such as that worn by the man dressed in blue at the back of the composition, becoming distinctly unfashionable by the early 1770s and only worn thereafter by physicians, apothecaries, lawyers and those unconcerned with, or unable to follow, fashion.

The figure behind Banks leans upon a walking stick, the length of which can only be guessed at, but which may be similar to the one used by the man in blue. 'Walking sticks as long as leaping poles'²⁰ were fashionable from 1762. Mortimer was well known for a lively and ironic sense of humour, and having seated Banks upon a bank, he may also have used supporting staffs as props to indicate the support staff. Given his proximity to Banks, I would suggest that this figure represents Dr Daniel Carl Solander, the scientist who accompanied Banks and Cook to Tahiti and who was employed by Banks as his librarian/curator after their return to England in 1771. Solander had been near death after contracting fever at Batavia on the voyage home and took some time to recover his health.²¹

The only portrait of Solander that appears to exist for this period is a satirical engraving published under the title *The Simpling Macaroni* by Matthew Darley, dated 13 July 1772. In this engraving, Solander's generous belly already hints at the extraordinary weight gain he would achieve by 1774 when Omai, who had first met Solander at Tahiti in 1769, was able to recognise his voice, but not his person. The lines of verse that accompany the image:

Like Soland Goose from frozen zone I wander,

On shallow Bank's grows fat Sol*****

further assert, amongst other things, that Solander is already overweight by 1772. Most portraits of Solander date from around 1774 and show him as a corpulent man. Despite the differing positions of the head, both the engraving and the Mortimer portrait have strongly marked eyelid creases and rather fleshy chins. There is also a strong similarity between the two images around the mouth area.

Solander is soberly dressed in a rather old-fashioned double-breasted coat, although his waistcoat does appear to be of a different cloth. He wears the black military stock at his neck, a style generally affected by sporting young men for riding. Unlike Banks, Solander was not independently wealthy, and had to work for his living. His social rank was below that of Banks, but his status as a scientist (especially as a student of the famous Dr Linneaus) and member of the Royal Society would have allowed him to move in the same circles as members of the gentry and nobility, particularly if he was able to attract sufficient patronage.

The figure on the far right of the canvas is the Earl of Sandwich, as can be seen by comparing Mortimer's portrait with Robert Stewart's mezzotint of *Lord Sanwich* [sic] of 16 September 1779. The similarity is unmistakable, especially as the print portrait is also in full profile and depicts Sandwich wearing the same type of wig. Another good resemblance, particularly in the strong nose and slight air of hauteur, is found in the portrait of Sandwich in full court dress and powdered wig by Johann Zoffany and reproduced in mezzotint by Valentine Green in 1774. Sandwich is fashionably dressed for country pursuits. He wears expensive riding boots and has his collar folded down in the manner appropriate for an 'undress frock coat', worn for recreation or sport. His waistcoat is particularly fine, made of very rich fabric, and his coat is a good example of the understated elegance favoured by the country aristocracy. He lolls somewhat against the sculpture with his dogs, including a pregnant bitch,²² at his feet. While consistent with the depiction of country pursuits, the dogs are also favourite emblems of devotion, and suggest that their owner is one who commands the loyalty of others. More prosaically, Sandwich was passionate about hunting and kept his own kennels.

Due to the lack of contemporary portraits for comparison, we are forced to rely more strongly on circumstantial evidence and the internal evidence of the painting for an identification of Cook and Hawkesworth. With Cook, in particular, the lack of early portraits for comparison is a major problem. The earliest authentic portrait is considered to be William Hodges' oil portrait of Cook, painted on the second voyage to the Pacific in 1775 or 1776, and known only from an engraving for many years.²³ Hodges was directly under Cook's command, unlike the artists of the first Pacific voyage,²⁴ and was employed, in part, to create illustrations for the journal of the second voyage which Cook hoped to publish himself (or at least retain the editorial control and profits thereof). Cook effectively cast himself as the hero of his own narrative, and in the series of *Landings* paintings,²⁵ Hodges portrayed him accordingly. The stern eye, resolute jaw and noble mien established by the prints based on Hodges' paintings,²⁶ and continued by the artist of the third voyage, John Webber, became the standard upon which our idea of Cook's appearance is based. But Mrs Cook always complained that their portraits made her husband look far too harsh, and failed to capture his true nature.

Mortimer, unlike the artists who served under Cook—and who were therefore bound to him by shipboard dynamics of command and obedience—would have seen Cook as more of a social equal, in that they were both employed by Sandwich and were both men whose specialist skills made them valuable to their 'betters'. Accordingly, he has portrayed Cook as an engaging, open-faced and robust man, alert and attentive to Sandwich in particular.

Another element in the painting which supports the identification of Cook is the uniform he wears. When Sidney Myer purchased Mortimer's painting²⁷ from R. Blumenthal (Art Dealers) in 1932²⁸ he was also provided with the opinion of Professor Geoffrey Callender, from the Department of History, Royal Naval College, Greenwich, who confirmed that the central figure in the composition was wearing the uniform of a Commander of 1771, the year in which Cook was promoted to that rank.

In the months following the *Endeavour's* return, Cook would be constantly in contact with Sandwich and Banks, involving himself very closely in each detail of the preparations for the second voyage. Banks had received permission from Sandwich to accompany Cook on the voyage and Cook was particularly solicitous of Banks' requirements for both himself and the large party of artists, scientists and servants he intended to take with him. There is also the entry for 1 October 1771 in Fanny Burney's diary:

My Father spent a few days lately at Hinchinbrooke [sic] at Lord Sandwich's, to meet Mr Banks, Captain Cooke [sic] and Dr Solander, who have just made the Voyage round the World, & are going speedily to make another.²⁹

In a painting which can be dated to around 1771 on the basis of costume details alone, what naval officer other than Cook would be depicted in such close association with Banks, Solander and Sandwich? Mortimer's portrait, then, represents the earliest extant image of the navigator, before he became famous,³⁰ and before his health—physical and mental—suffered from too many years at sea.

Mention of Dr Charles Burney brings us to the identity of the fifth man in the Mortimer painting, so long a stumbling block in attempts to accurately identify the work. Also present at that Hinchinbrooke party was Dr Hawkesworth, of whom Fanny says, 'he should not have been there, but for my Father'. She continues:

My father has had a happy opportunity of extremely obliging Dr Hawkesworth. During [Burney's] stay in Norfolk, he waited upon Lord Orford, who has always been particularly friendly to him: He there, among others, met with Lord Sandwich. His Lordship was speaking of the late Voyage round the World & mentioned his having the papers of it in his possession ... & said that they were not arranged, but meer rough Draughts, and said that he should be much obliged to anyone who could recommend a proper Person to *Write the Voyage*. My Father directly named Dr Hawkesworth, & his Lordship did him the honour to accept his recommendation.³¹

The National Library holds an enthusiastic letter from Hawkesworth to Lord Sandwich, dated 19 November 1771,³² thanking him for the commission. Despite his humble origins and undistinguished formal education, Hawkesworth had earned a reputation as a man of letters. He had contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* from 1744 and, after the last number of Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* appeared in 1752, he, Johnson, Bathurst and Warton started the *Adventurer*, a short-lived but very successful series of published essays. In 1755 he published *The Works of Jonathan Swift ... with some account of the Author's Life, and Notes Historical and Explanatory*,³³ and the following year Archbishop Herring of Canterbury conferred upon him the Lambeth degree of LLD in recognition of his merit as an essayist and biographer. This honour, no doubt very pleasing to Hawkesworth and an asset in advertising his wife's school, was less acceptable to Johnson, who perceived in it a slight to himself. This had led to a rift between the two men and cut Hawkesworth out of Johnson's future projects.

The presence of all five men together at Sandwich's house suggests that the proposed publication of the voyage was being discussed. It would also have provided an opportunity for Mortimer to undertake preliminary sketches for the painting. The only portrait of Hawkesworth easily available for comparison is the James Watson engraving after Reynolds, published in 1776 three years after the author's death. In it, Hawkesworth is portrayed in three-quarter profile, engaged in the act of composition. His gaze is fixed on his source of inspiration and does not engage the viewer's eye. This pose makes comparison with Mortimer's fifth man more difficult. Even so, there are a number of similarities, particularly around the mouth and eyes, and as a close reading of the composition of the painting reveals, the internal evidence of the painting helps to substantiate this claim.

Mortimer has used a number of the compositional conventions of History painting in this work. In particular, he has created a strong pyramidal structure in his placement of the figures, with Solander, Banks, Sandwich and Hawkesworth describing the four corners of the base of a pyramid and Cook's head indicating the apex. A triangle is formed by the figures of Solander, Banks and Cook, referring to their association together in the *Endeavour*. Another triangle is created between Cook, Hawkesworth and Sandwich which relates to the connection between the first voyages to the Pacific, the role of the Admiralty and the plan to present these feats to the public. The placement of Hawkesworth at the back of the composition, whilst adding to the depth of field, isolates him from the primary relationships established by the positions of the other figures. The shadow obscuring most of his body emphasises the line between Cook and Sandwich, but also suggests that his role is not to star in his own right, but to be Cook's shadow (or ghost) writer.³⁴

Hawkesworth is the only figure in the painting who looks out into the viewer's space, towards, perhaps, the intended audience for his *Account*, and also towards the fame he will secure for both its principal actors and himself. Relegated to the back of the group, Hawkesworth is further isolated from the other figures by his apparent un-ease. He clearly is not part of the world of the other characters and the rather odd expression on his face gives the impression of one trying to maintain a semblance of composure in the face of conflicting feelings of utter glee and social discomfort.³⁵ Certainly there is evidence that Hawkesworth's recent appointment represented a wonderful improvement in his fortunes. Fanny Burney mentions that her father's recommendation of Dr Hawkesworth was 'extremely obliging' to him, while J.C. Beaglehole baldly states that Hawkesworth 'had time and could do with the money'.³⁶

The chief triangle described by the composition is that which includes Banks, Sandwich and Cook, with Cook located on the exact vertical mid-line of the composition and again forming the apex. With his right arm, Cook appears to gesture with his hat towards the sea, an action which reinforces the line of connection with Banks, and which can also be read as a reference to the intended second voyage. It has a further meaning however. That honour is a practice that has largely died in Western cultures—with the exception of the armed forces (where the salute is a vestigial remnant) and at degree conferring ceremonies—with the decline in hat wearing and increased social mobility. But the convention that 'inferiors' should render 'hat honour' by baring their heads to their 'superiors' was an important part of eighteenth-century etiquette. What Cook is performing is an act of deference, as the description of the correct way to doff one's hat below shows:

The right Arm must rise to the Hat with moderate Motion sideways, the ... hand turn'd and its palm shown, the Fingers must be on the brim, and the Forefinger extended on the Crown of the Hat, and the Thumb under the Brim ..., and whilst taking it off, let the Look and Action be complaisantly address'd to the Person to whom the compliment is intended; the left Arm should fall neither backward nor forward (both of which would look disagreeable) but be gently by the Side, ... and holding the glove in an easy, careless Manner.³⁷

Rather than a glove, Cook holds a chart in his left hand, a prop which could refer equally well to his extraordinary cartographic achievements of the first Pacific voyage (and earlier in North America)³⁸ or to his stated desire to complete the map of the Pacific by finally proving, or disproving, the existence of Terra Australis Incognita with a second voyage.

The ‘Person to whom [Cook’s] compliment is intended’ is Lord Sandwich. Cook, being in the centre of the composition, is the figure to whom the eye is initially drawn, but his gaze directs you to Sandwich. Banks, to whom Cook’s arm directs your gaze, looks at Sandwich. Solander, the last of the recently returned Pacific voyage trio, looks at Sandwich and, as our eyes follow these various compositional devices created by the artist, so do we. Not the most imposing figure in the composition (Cook was over six-foot-tall, and Sandwich’s height seems to have been sacrificed a little in order to emphasise the line between his head and Cook’s, a line further emphasised by his extended left arm), Sandwich is nevertheless the focus of the painting. Banks and Solander gaze at him with an air of expectancy, as if awaiting his decision or response. A strong light falls squarely upon him (clearly not being cast by the pallid sun at the back of the canvas, which was perhaps intended to symbolise the new opportunities for Britain now dawning in the Pacific) and the tension created between his own apparent nonchalance and the attentiveness shown to him by others, emphasises his power and importance. Mortimer has taken good care to give his patron full satisfaction by making his power, wealth and social importance clearly evident to anyone viewing the painting.

A further example of hat honour can be discerned in the way in which the two socially superior figures in the painting, Banks and Sandwich, are uncovered, but their various employees are not. Penelope Byrde writes that ‘The three cornered hat, fashionable until the 1780s ... was often not worn, but carried under the arm as a mark of good breeding’.³⁹ However, just as removing one’s hat was an honour owed to one’s superiors— young men to their elders, sons to fathers,⁴⁰ subjects to Monarch—‘grantees could pay pleasant compliments by waiving the custom’.⁴¹ Lord Sandwich was well known for flouting social conventions and, in particular, for the way in which he distinguished men of lower rank, such as Hawkesworth and Cook, by treating them with the familiarity usually reserved for social equals. Ultimately, he was accused of ‘turning’ the heads of both Hawkesworth and Cook.

One of the difficulties in correctly identifying the painting has been the obscurity into which the work was plunged after completion. A painting celebrating the achievements of Banks, Solander and Cook, at a time when Banks and Solander, in particular, were enjoying huge celebrity in English society would have attracted great interest had it been shown at any of the exhibiting societies, raising the prestige of its sitters further and enhancing the reputation of its painter considerably. In spite of these possible advantages, it does not appear to have been shown publicly. Unfortunately for Mortimer, problems associated with the second voyage preparations robbed him of the opportunity for self-promotion such a display would have provided. And those problems were considerable.

On 14 May 1772, it became clear that the alterations made to the *Resolution*⁴² to accommodate Banks’ party had rendered the ship unseaworthy. The vessel was now so top-heavy that she could hardly carry any sail without risking capsize. The first lieutenant, Cooper, wrote to Cook that the ship was ‘exceeding dangerous and unsafe’.⁴³ Charles Clerke wrote even more pointedly to Banks the next day:

by God I’ll go to Sea in a Grog Tub, if desir’d, or in the *Resolution* as soon as you please; but must say, I do think her by far the most unsafe Ship, I ever saw or heard of: however, if you think proper to embark for the South Pole in a Ship, which a Pilot ... will not undertake to carry down the River, all I can say, is, that you shall be most cheerfully attended, so long as we can keep her above Water ...⁴⁴

On 19 May, Cook wrote to the Admiralty secretary that the fault with the ship lay with ‘the large accommodations for the Several Gentlemen Passengers’ and these additions were ordered removed.

Banks proceeded to Sheerness to see the effect of these changes and was enraged. He had personally spent over £5000 in fitting the ship to his wishes and considerably more of the capital of his reputation on this project. He wrote an impassioned letter to Sandwich on May 30, in which he expostulated:

Shall I then my Lord who have engaged to leave all that can make Life agreeable in my own Country and throw on one side all the Pleasures to be reaped from three years of the best of my Life merely to compass this undertaking pregnant enough with Dangers and difficulties in its own Nature, after having been promised every security and convenience that the art of man could contrive without which promise no man in my situation would ever have undertaken the Voyage be sent off at last in a doubtful Ship with Accommodation which I saw actually built for me? Will the Public be so ungenerous as to expect me to go out in a Ship in which my People have not the room necessary for performing the different Duties of the Professions a Ship apparently unhealthy and probably unsafe merely in conformity to the Official Opinion of the Navy Board who purchas’d her without ever consulting me and now in no degree consider the part which I have taken in the Voyage or the alterations which on my Remonstrance they concurr’d with me in thinking necessary, but now have taken away of should I embark could anything material be done by People under Circumstances so highly discouraging?⁴⁵

Banks railed against the Navy Board’s decision to persevere with a ship he had not thought adequate to his needs, and even suggested that if Cook were committed to the *Resolution*, perhaps another captain could be found to undertake the voyage instead. Sandwich, it seems, did not quite share his wealthy young friend’s self-interested view of the intended purpose of the voyage. Banks and all his party withdrew from the voyage and, although he subsequently mended his argument with Sandwich and Cook, he never forgave Hugh Palliser, Navy Comptroller, for thwarting his plans and denying him the glory of a second voyage to the Pacific.

Clearly, Mortimer’s painting would have become something of an embarrassment to Sandwich after the rift with Banks. The painting entered into a kind of limbo for many years. Emma Hicks, an art researcher employed by the National Library to investigate the painting in 1987 established a link between the Nathan family, who sold the work at auction in 1928, and the Vache, a country house at Chalfont St. Giles in Buckinghamshire.⁴⁶ Mortimer had produced a number of works for the Kenyon family who lived at the Vache, and as the painting seems to have been part of the furnishings of that house for a number of generations, Hicks thought that this might have some bearing on who commissioned the painting, although there appeared to be no link between Cook and the Kenyons. However, Sir Hugh Palliser bought the Vache in 1777, and his connections with both Cook and Sandwich were considerable.

As governor and commander-in-chief at Newfoundland from 1764 to 1766, Palliser directed a survey of the coasts which was carried out by his fellow Yorkshireman, James Cook. Palliser was also instrumental in Cook’s appointment to the command of the *Endeavour* and is generally credited with playing a major role in promoting Cook’s career.⁴⁷ Palliser was appointed Navy Comptroller in 1770 and, under Sandwich, was created a baronet in 1773 and

promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral in 1775. Shortly afterwards, he was appointed one of the Lords of the Admiralty. After moving to the Vache (if not before), Palliser may have met Mortimer who, as we know, was introduced to the Aylesbury gentry by Bates. He was in a position to rescue the painting of his friend Cook and his patron Sandwich from either Mortimer's studio or from the Admiralty, and have it hung at the Vache.

While the apparent abandonment of the painting was unfortunate for Mortimer, I do not think he was entirely dropped by Sandwich after Banks and his party withdrew from the voyage, for his friend, Thomas Jones, was the Admiralty's first choice to replace Zoffany as voyage artist. It would be interesting, in light of the facts now at hand, to re-examine what further evidence exists about Benjamin Bates' relationships with Mortimer and Sandwich, and to examine Palliser's and Sandwich's papers for references to the painting. After nearly two centuries of obscurity, Mortimer's importance as a painter is now being rediscovered. His painting held by the National Library of Australia can now be confidently dated to 1771, positively identified as the first portrait of Cook, and should now be known as *James Cook, Joseph Banks, Lord Sandwich, Dr Daniel Solander and Dr John Hawkesworth*. A major art find of enormous importance, Mortimer's painting is one of the most significant works relating to the Cook voyages of exploration to the Pacific bequeathed to an Australian cultural institution.

Michelle Hetherington

Pictures Branch

Footnotes

1. A plaque with date has been affixed to the back of the frame at some time in the past.
2. After the painting came to the National Library of Australia in 1987, the opinions of Sir Oliver Millar, Master of the Queen's Pictures, Jacob Simon, Curator of Eighteenth Century Portraits, National Portrait Gallery, London and John Sunderland of the Courtauld Institute were sought as to the Zoffany attribution. It was their opinion that the painting was clearly the work of Mortimer. Mortimer seldom signed his paintings. Of the paintings shown at the Iveagh Bequest Mortimer exhibition in 1968, less than 5% were signed, and these featured the monogram 'JHM'.
3. John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages undertaken by order of his Present Majesty for making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere, And successively performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour: drawn up from the Journals which were kept by the several Commanders, and from the Papers of Joseph Banks, Esq.* London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell ..., 1773.
4. Charles Lennox, 3rd Duke of Richmond, opened a school for the study of painting and sculpture at his own house, in Privy Garden, Whitehall, soon after his return from the Grand Tour. A feature of the gallery was the large number of plaster casts 'moulded from the most select antique and modern figures at that time at Rome and Florence'.
5. Wording changed to 'British' in 1761.
6. Samuel Redgrave, *A Dictionary of Artists of the English School*. Reprint of the 1878 London Edition, G.W. Hissink & Co., Amsterdam, 1970.

7. Bates is described as Sir Francis' personal physician by George Martelli in his book on the Earl of Sandwich, *Jemmy Twitcher* (1962).
8. In the obituary for Mortimer published in the *Monthly Magazine and British Register*, February 1796, Dashwood—given his title Lord le Despencer—is listed amongst the families in the neighbourhood to whom Mortimer was introduced by Bates. The other families were those of Mr Kenyon(s), Mr Drake, Colonel Scottowe, Esq., and Mr Grubb.
9. James Laver has described the Medmenham Monks as yet another 'Hell-Fire club' and 'an example of that strange blend of debauchery and satanism so characteristic of the period'. The Monks' motto was *Fay ce que tu voudra* (do what you will) and was adopted from Rabelais' Abbey of Thélème. See page 75, *The Age of Illusion: Manners and Morals 1750–1848*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972.
10. Benedict Nicholson, *John Hamilton Mortimer ARA 1740–1779*. Eastbourne: Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art in association with the Towner Art Gallery, and the Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood, 1968, p.44.
11. Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, p.121.
12. An associated factor in the paucity of English history paintings prior to 1760 was the suppression in England of the Roman Catholic Church, a major commissioner of history paintings on the Continent.
13. John Sunderland, *John Hamilton Mortimer: His Life and Works*. Leeds: Printed for the Walpole Society by W.S. Maney & Sons, 1988.
14. The complexity of Mortimer's response to Reynolds' *Discourses* can be seen in his anonymous ironic critique of his own work in *Candid Observations* (1772), 'It appears evident here, the Painter has carefully read Sir Joshua Reynolds's last lecture and has perhaps too closely adhered to the Principles of the Bolognian School.'
15. Introduction to his catalogue *John Hamilton Mortimer ARA 1740–1779*, 1968.
16. This marble sculpture is further evidence that Mortimer is the artist of the work in question. Known as *Nymph with a Shell*, the original was at the Villa Borghese during Mortimer's lifetime, but is now in the Louvre. The sculpture appears in *An Academy by Lamplight* (c.1768–69) by Joseph Wright of Derby, and was no doubt drawn by him from a copy at the Duke of Richmond's gallery. That Mortimer also made a copy at that time is suggested by Wright's inclusion of his portrait amongst the students drawing from the sculpture.
17. See for example his paintings *Edward, John, Richard and Apphia Witts* 1769, *The Seventh Earl of Cork and Others* c.1770, and *Sergeant-at-arms Bonfoy, his son (?) and John Clementson, Snr.* Early 1770s.
18. The Society of Dilettanti was yet another society founded by Dashwood, this time for the promotion of the arts.
19. Mortimer's access to his subjects was limited between June 1771, after the voyagers' returned and before the end of May 1772, when Banks withdrew from the second voyage.
20. C. Willet Cunnington and Phyllis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*. p.263.
21. Banks had also been ill, and this may account for his pallor, or the artist may have been giving him the required pale and gentleman-like complexion one would expect in a man of his position. However, as none of the seafarers are portrayed with the deep tans they would surely have acquired from four years at sea, it is possible that Mortimer downplayed the changeable, temporal reality in favour of a more ideal treatment, befitting the importance of the events he was commemorating.

22. If one were so inclined, the inclusion of this animal in the painting could be interpreted as a reference to Sandwich's notorious womanising. In addition to his almost constant patronage of prostitutes, Sandwich's principle mistress, Martha Ray, acted as hostess at Hinchinbrook where his wife also resided. Miss Ray bore Sandwich five children before her death at the hands of an admirer in 1779.
23. The book in which this engraving first appeared is entitled *A voyage towards the South Pole, and round the World: Performed in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the years 1772, 1773, 1774 and 1775*, Vols 1 and 2. London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777. The oil portrait on which it was based is in the collection of the National Maritime Museum. It is important to bear in mind that Hodges was not trained as a portraitist and was engaged as a landscape painter for the voyage. However, during the course of the voyage he created numerous portraits which are highly valued today largely because Hodges did not – indeed could not – produce a 'conventional' portrait. Flattery was beyond him, and his intensely observed portraits have an intimacy and honesty more beguiling (to modern tastes) than many of the smooth productions of his contemporary professional portraitists.
24. Sydney Parkinson and Alexander Buchan (and after Buchan's death, Herman Spöring) were employed by Banks, and took their orders from him.
25. William Hodges, *The Landing at Mallicolo*, c.1776, and especially *The Landing at Tannac*.1775–76.
26. The complexity of facial expression in many of Hodges paintings is lost to an extent in the prints.
27. Myer was under the impression that he was purchasing a work by Zoffany and had been supplied with a number of written endorsements to this effect.
28. George G. Blumenthal had purchased the painting from Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods' auction of the Natham family collection, 20 April 1928. It was described in the auction catalogue as Lot 150, 'A Naval Officer, with four gentlemen friends, and dogs by a statue on the seashore'.
29. Lars E. Troide, (ed) *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney Volume I, 1768–1773*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp.172–173.
30. Cook's reputation and importance in the modern estimation tends to blind us to his relative obscurity in 1771. What we now consider Cook's first Pacific voyage was more properly considered Banks' scientific triumph by contemporaries and it was Mr Joseph Banks Esq. that the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the newspapers wrote about. It was not until the publication of Hawkesworth's *Account* in 1773 that Cook achieved any kind of public profile and even then, despite the central role given him by Hawkesworth, there were no images of Cook in the publication, for the voyage artists, being in Banks' employ, had made none.
31. *Ibid*, p.173.
32. John Montagu, 4 th Earl of Sandwich, *Papers 1771–1784*, MS 7218/1, National Library of Australia.
33. John Hawkesworth, *The Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D. Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, accurately revised ... : with some Account of the Author's Life, and Notes Historical and Explanatory* . London: printed for C. Bathurst, C. Davis, C. Hitch and L.Haws, J. Hodges, R. and J. Dodsley, and W. Bowyer, 1754-55.
34. Hawkesworth's position at Cook's back takes on slightly sinister overtones when you consider the ventriloquism he practised on Cook in his role as editor. He placed so many of his own philosophical musings in Cook's mouth, that readers of the *Account*,

- such as Boswell, were amazed to find Cook ‘a grave steady man’, quoted in John Abbott, *John Hawkesworth: Eighteenth Century Man of Letters* (1982) p.159
35. Glee was not an unreasonable response when one considers the enormous fee—£6000—Hawkesworth was able to negotiate with the publisher Stockdale for the rights to print the book. But it would also prove premature, for ‘his greatest work yet’ would also be his last as he was hounded in the press for his failure to attribute the *Endeavour*’s preservation from destruction to Providence, amongst other lapses against the sensibilities of his times. Hawkesworth would be dead within six months of the *Account* going on sale.
 36. J.C. Beaglehole, *The Life of Captain James Cook*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, p.289.
 37. From F. Nivelson, *The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1937) pp.29–30. Quoted in Penelope Corfield ‘Dress for Deference and Dissent: Hats and the Decline of Hat Honour’ in *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society*, No. 23, 1989, London. p.71.
 38. See R.A. Skelton and R.V. Tooley, *The Marine Surveys of James Cook in North America, 1758-1768: particularly the survey of Newfoundland: a bibliography of printed charts and sailing directions* (1967).
 39. Penelope Byrde, *The Male Image: Men’s Fashions in Britain 1300–1970*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1979. p.182.
 40. In his painting *Self Portrait with Father and Brother* (early 1760s) Mortimer shows appropriate deference to his father by depicting Thomas Mortimer wearing a hat, while he and his brother are shown hatless.
 41. Corfield, op. cit., p.71.
 42. One of the two ships selected for Cook’s 2nd Pacific voyage. The other ship was the *Adventure*.
 43. Cooper’s letter dated 13 May, 1772, was forwarded to the Admiralty Secretary to the Navy Board by Cook the next day. Letter quoted J.C. Beaglehole, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery*, Vol II. Cambridge: published for the Hakluyt Society by the Cambridge University Press, 1961, p.929.
 44. Mitchell Library, Banks Papers, 2.f. I. Quoted in J.C. Beaglehole (1961), p.930.
 45. Quoted in *Sir Joseph Banks K.B., P.R.S.: The Autocrat of the Philosophers* by Hector Charles Cameron, London : The Batchworth Press, 1952. pp.288–289. Punctuation was not one of Banks’ strengths.
 46. After Palliser’s death his estate, including the house and most of its contents passed to his illegitimate son and then to Thomas Allen of Newlands Park, who purchased the house in 1826. Thomas Allen’s son, Thomas Newland Allen inherited the house in 1829 and lived there until his death in 1898. He left the Vache to his adopted daughter Florence Ada Stevens ...[who] sold the estate in 1902 to a Mr Robertson who married into the McCalmont family. The Robertson’s daughter inherited the house in 1940 and in 1955 sold it to the present owners, the National Coal Board. The McCalmont family ... also owned the Hodges portrait of Cook (which was purchased by the National Maritime Museum in 1986).’ Ms Hicks speculates that some of the contents of the house were sold in the early years of the twentieth century ‘including [the Mortimer painting] which passed into the hands of a stockbroking family, the Nathans...[the] painting was in the sale of the contents of their residence at 59 Harley Street, London W1 on 20 April 1928.’ From Emma Hick’s report on the painting, NLA File No. 204/14/45-01, folios 185–192.
 47. Palliser was also godfather to Cook’s first son, who was named Hugh in his honour.

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