

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 380. Captain Cook: History's Greatest Explorer

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Thursday 19th. Into PM had fresh gales at south-southwest and cloudy squally weather, with a large southerly sea. At 6 took into top sails and at 1am brought two and sounded, but had no ground with 130 fathoms of line. At 5 set to top sails close reefed. At 6 saw land extending from north-east to west, distance 5 or 6 leagues, having 40 fathoms, fine sandy bottom. To southernmost point of land we had in sight, which bore from us west a quarter south. I judged to lay in the latitude of 36 degrees, zero in its south, and into longitude of 211 degrees, seven minutes west from Timuridion of Greenwich. I've named it Point Hicks because Lieutenant Hicks was the first who discovered this land. Now, Tom, that's an authentic audio archive, isn't it, of Captain Cook, stalwart Yorkshireman. I mean, he sounds a fascinating conversation list. Who wouldn't want to spend three years in a cabin listening to him talk like that? So for those people who like football, he was a very like Neil Warnock, the erstwhile manager of every championship team. Tom, I know you don't know Neil Warnock is. I've got no idea. I was thinking more like Michael Parkinson, late, great Michael Parkinson. Right, or Dickie Bird, the umpire. Dickie Bird, yes, who wears a flat white leather cap. Okay, so listen, this is Captain Cook, Tom. This is the moment when he first sees Australia. It's from his journal entry on Thursday, the 19th of April, 1770. Now, I was tempted to say, this is the moment when Captain Cook discovered Australia. That's what I would have said as a schoolboy. That would be a schoolboy howler. It would be a schoolboy era. So tell me why Captain

Cook did not discover Australia, please. Put me right. Well, first of all, Dominic, the Indigenous peoples of Australia discovered Australia many tens of thousands of years before. But also, hadn't Abel Tasman or somebody had turned up beforehand? He had said round up in an incompetent manner, I think, compared with Cook. He hadn't done the east and better Australia, which is crucial. I mean, what we should be saying is that the reason we're doing Captain Cook is because he is an example of a plucky Englishman going south, down under, to explore the beautiful

landscapes of New Zealand and Australia. Yeah. And Dominic, that is what we're going to be doing, isn't it? Well, Captain Cook was very much about opening up intellectual horizons, as well as geographical ones. And that's exactly what we'll be doing in Australia.

Yes. So this is a New Zealand and Australian inspired couple of episodes on Captain Cook's first voyage down under. He discovers... Well, he doesn't discover, does he?

Yes, he did it again. Well, he does discover a number of islands dotted around the Pacific in due course. But yes, he visits New Zealand and Australia. And this is what we're doing today.

So, hooray. Captain Cook is a controversial figure, Tom. Of course, he's become a symbol of colonialism to some people. And yet, he's a very rich subject of study because he's emblematic of 18th century England, of the Enlightenment, of the Age of Discovery, of the Scientific Revolution, and of this sort of spirit of... There are dark sides to his story, of course, and we'll get into those. But I think Captain Cook is a brilliant window to talk about the mentality of the last sort of third of the 18th century. Don't you?

Well, Dominic, you will well know that I didn't want to do this at all. And I didn't want to do it for two reasons. The first was, I thought that Captain Cook had been cancelled and that we would,

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you know, we'd be straying into sensitive territory. And I didn't really know anything about him. So, to be clear, cowardice. Cowardice? Yeah. Yes, pure funk. But also, I just thought he seemed really boring. No, you did that just because you hate Yorkshire, because you looked down on Yorkshiremen. No, no. So, the Lady Bird books, books that school boys and girls in the 1970s and 80s read, you know, Great British Heroes and things like that. There was one on Captain Cook, and I never read it because I found it so boring.

It was the worst, actually. It was one of the worst. It was absolutely the worst.

Insufficient quantity of fighting for an eight-year-old reader, I would say.

Right. Because basically, oh, it just goes around, and here's another island, and oh, there's Australia. And it just kind of goes on like that. And nothing much seems to happen.

And then I read, you know, I kind of sat down and read a biography of him, and that just seemed really boring. And I thought... Tom, we're meant to be selling the episode. There are probably people switching off at this moment. I know. I know. And, you know, there was lots of kind of rope and spinnakers and, well, you know, top sails and all the stuff that you were reading out in the opening. Fathoms of line.

Fathoms of line.

Sandy bottoms. But then I read a whole series of stuff that actually opened my eyes, and it will astound you to know that I'm now a complete Captain Cook fan, and I've been going around just telling everyone what an amazing story it is.

Yeah.

It's full of great stuff. And I'm all over it. I love it.

Great. You're reviewing your own podcast before you've even done it.

No, I'm all over Captain Cook. I mean, this...

You're reviewing your contribution.

This podcast may be terrible. That would not be the fault of Captain Cook, because I agree. It is brilliant. It's brilliant in the way that I found that Nelson was brilliant, because basically, this is... I mean, it is about the voyage of exploration. So I read a wonderful book by an Australian scholar, Nicholas Thomas, who I think is much... I mean, his focus is on the cultures of Oceania, so all the kind of Pacific Islands and so on. But he wrote a wonderful book called Discoveries, The Voyages of Captain Cook, and he describes Cook as he's still commonly regarded as the greatest sea explorer of all time. And I think that I didn't properly realise how and why it is that Cook deserves that accolade.

But also on top of that, as you said, he is a kind of emblematic figure of the Enlightenment.

And just as the ships in Nelson's Navy are kind of floating embodiments of the 19th century in an 18th century sea, there is absolutely a sense in which... I mean, there is something

of science fiction about this. It's kind of like a spaceship hovering over New York or something

like that. The sense that Cook... And part of the reason why he's become a controversial figure, I think, is nothing to do with Cook himself. Cook himself, it seems to me, an estimable character.

Following this, we're going to be doing eight episodes on the conquest of the Aztecs.

So Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador. Now, Cortés, he's a wanker. I mean, he's a horrible man.

Can't believe you went there. Wow.

To read about Captain Cook after reading about Cortés, you think,

this is an admirable man. And I think he is an admirable man in many ways.

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But he embodies the tensions and the complexities of the Enlightenment and its relationship with the broader world, because the Enlightenment claims to be universal. Yes.

But of course, it's coming from a very culturally contingent place. It's coming from Europe and Europeans going out and discovering things. And so hence the sensitivity around discovery, because there are lots of people who, of course, they're already there.

And so the interaction of this great European project of Enlightenment with the incredible cultures that Cook visits on the way is fascinating.

It's an amazing story.

Yeah. And to be fair to Cook, one of the things that's fascinating about his story is the way that he outgrows that Enlightenment perspective. You can see his character and his kind of intellectual frameworks developing and growing.

Okay. Listeners will be very disappointed, Tom, if I didn't point out that the key difference between Captain Cook and Ernan Cortés is, of course, that Cook is British.

But let's actually talk about that. So Cook is a Yorkshire man, isn't he? His father is Scottish by birth from the borders, from Kelso.

Yes, very near my Scottish estate.

Yeah. And you, as soon as I said that, I thought, oh, here we go, the Scottish estate.

And sure enough, there it was.

It has an excellent marketplace with a lovely bookshop and a tweed shop.

Kelso. I've heard of the Kelso bookshop, actually.

And a beer shop.

Very good. So James Cook Sr., he moved in the middle of the 18th century, or the early part of the 18th century, I should say, down to towards Cleveland, in North Yorkshire. He meets a girl called Grace. They get married.

And their son James, James Jr., their second son, is born in 1728.

And his father is a labourer, a farm labourer, basically.

So unlike Nelson, the other great British maritime hero, Cook's background could hardly be more humble.

Incredibly humble.

Yeah.

And what's so, in a way, kind of inspiring about his story is that Thomas, in his book, says that he could have vanished among the marine proletariat as common men soon afterwards could vanish into the factories of Manchester and Leeds.

Yes.

So he is someone who could have been part of the kind of the muscle and the victims of the Industrial Revolution that is kind of brewing at this time, incubating.

Absolutely, he could. But it seems that the local kind of Lord of the Manor or whatever saw qualities in him, he was a bright boy, clearly, and paid for him to attend the village school.

Clearly, his father was highly thought of in the community.

When Cook was about 17, I mean, his early life is pretty obscure, isn't it?

And actually throughout, we struggle sometimes, I think, to get a view of Cook's inner life, because he's a...

Reserved man, isn't he?

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Yeah, he's a stereotypical Yorkshire man, actually.
He's quite taciturn, very self-disciplined, a man who believes in rigor and order.
Well, you could see from the journal that you read.
I mean, that's not a huge insight into his emotions and feelings in that.
No, no, not at all.
He's laid eyes on what he thinks may be a new continent,
and he's all about the fathoms and the lion and stuff.
Anyway, he moves to a place when he's a teenager called Stathes on the North Yorkshire coast,
not far from Whitby, and he works as an apprentice in a village shop.
So at this point, a glittering future does not await.
Well, he has nothing to do with the sea, does he?
I mean, that's the salient fact, he's behind a counter.
Exactly, he is behind a counter.
Indeed, he's sleeping under the counter because he doesn't even have a room.
And there's an extraordinary story, one of these foundational legends,
that a woman customer has when she pays for her goods.
One of the coins is an unusually shiny shilling, which is a South Sea shilling
minted in the reign of George I, with a South Sea company stamped on the back.
And the South Sea is the Pacific, isn't it?
The Pacific.
And the story goes that James Cook is so taken with this,
with the romance, the glamour, the excitement of it,
that he takes this shilling from the till
and replaces it with another shilling from his own pocket
because he wants the very shiny South Sea shilling.
But his master had spotted this South Sea shilling
and accuses James of having stolen it, which he hadn't.
So some people, if they were being very caustic, Tom,
and if they weren't going to Australia,
would say this is a foundational moment of Australian history,
allegations of stealing followed by a swift exit towards the South Seas.
But he probably didn't steal it, did he?
Of course not.
He's a figure of immense moral property.
But it foregrounds obviously the South Seas of the Pacific,
where Cook will do his incredible voyages.
But also, actually, the theme of stealing
is a recurrent theme throughout his voyages.
It's true, actually.
It's a kind of flashpoint that keeps coming up.
And of course, critics of Cook now would say,
Cook himself is a symbol of theft and of colonial appropriation of other people's lands.
I think perhaps unfairly.
Well, we will discuss that, Tom.

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I mean, the thing is, because we are familiar with the world that he discovers, we know the size of the Pacific.

We can look on a map and point out all the places and put arrows and things. But I think to be stuck in a comfortable study in London, sneering at a man who goes out and braves his life, it ill behoves me to criticise him.

Very good. I approve of that, Tom.

Slightly my feeling about that.

Anyway, to go back to the shilling, Cook explains to his master, the apprentice master, the guy running the shop what happened.

And he says, listen, what do you want to do with your life, son?

And young James Cook says, to go to sea, sir.

And that's exactly what he said.

And the guy in the shop contacts a friend of his in Whitby, just down the coast or up the coast.

Now, Whitby is a crucial port in the coal trade to London. So 1,000 ships a year would go down the eastern coast of England, carrying a million tons of coal for this booming, industrialising capital city.

And Cook joins them.

So when Cook is 18, he's on his first voyage on what's called a cat, and that takes coal from Tyneside, from Newcastle down to London.

And it's there that he learns all the rudiments, doesn't he?

Well, so I've got your notes in front of me.

So by April 1750, he'd completed a three-year apprenticeship.

And you tell me that he had learnt the manual skills of close reefing a sail and holding a luff.

He had.

Would you just, for the benefit of the listeners, Dominic, care to explain what holding a luff is?

I'd love to.

And that will be our next special bonus episode for our Restless History community, the club members, will be about holding a luff.

But I'm not going to waste it on the ordinary bunters.

But listeners should be reassured if they're worrying that after his apprenticeship, Cook couldn't hold a luff, he can.

Well, he can use a hand spike when heaving on the windlass.

He can do that.

And he can take a running fix.

He can read a barometer and predict the weather.

But the key thing is that he can hold a luff.

And this is what sets him up for a glittering future in maritime exploration.

He actually is quite well-travelled, Tom.

Seriously, he had gone to the Baltic, he'd gone to Kiel and Rostock.

He would have gone to Königsberg, to Malmö, maybe as far as Stockholm.

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These ships from the East Coast of England, this was their kind of playground.
And he's good at it.
He's promoted to be a mate by 1752.
So he's in his mid-20s at this point.
And then he's actually offered a ship of his own, a coal ship of his own,
the *Friendship* in 1755 when he's 27.
And the thing is, as we touched on in all the Nelson stuff,
is that to be an experienced sailor, you need to be good at maths, don't you?
Absolutely.
Lots of stuff with compasses, working at angles.
All that shenanigans.
Yeah, all that business.
And he's very good at that.
Absolutely.
He's very good at it.
So he's very good at holding a luff and he's very good at trigonometry and things.
Exactly.
Now, the interesting thing is he decides, so in the 1750s, the Seven Years War,
this titanic global confrontation between Great Britain and France,
of course, with stuff going on in Europe as well, is a fast approaching.
And Cook seems to have decided that he would like to pursue a career in the Royal Navy.
Why we don't know?
We don't have any insight into his inner life.
But I'm guessing adventure, seeing the world.
If that story about the South Sea shilling is true,
I mean, he's not going to see the South Seas, is he?
Taking coal to London and stuff?
No, absolutely not.
But it might, I mean, clearly that story must be apocryphal,
I don't believe it for a minute.
But it speaks, I guess, of an appetite for adventure.
Join the Navy, see the world, must have been there.
Yeah, you must have had an appetite.
I mean, as so many people did.
So in 1755, he goes down to Wapping, London.
He signs on, he volunteers with the Royal Navy,
and he joins the ship *HMS Eagle*,
which is captained by another Yorkshireman called Hugh Palliser.
They patrol the approaches to this channel, don't they?
Palliser's quite, I mean, he's a bit rubbish, isn't he?
He is, but he sees in Cook talent.
So Palliser is not a terribly impressive person,
but Palliser gives Cook special instructions
in navigation and drawing up charts.

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Yeah, because Cook is joined as an able seaman, hasn't he?
And he gets promoted very, very rapidly.
So he's going up the ranks very fast.
But he immediately discovers that he has this,
you mentioned him in Trigonometry,
he has this extraordinary gift for drawing up naval charts
and for surveying things.
He's absolutely brilliant at it.
And it sounds terribly boring to us now.
If you are hoping to become a global power
and you are locked in a global confrontation,
actually knowing where you are and what's going on on the land
and the relationship between all those different places,
really important.
Well, and also, of course, the great focus of
Anglo-French rivalry in North America is Canada
and Quebec, the St Lawrence River.
To get troops down the St Lawrence River,
you need to know where all the shells are
and the bays and everything.
So it's absolutely vital,
absolutely kind of central to the whole war.
It is indeed.
So by 1757, Cook is part of the fleet
that sails up the St Lawrence River towards Quebec.
French held Quebec,
so the Seven Years' War is now in full swing.
And Cook is part of that party
who is seeking to rest control of what we would now call Canada
from the French.
And his key part in this is surveying the river approaches.
So he ends up to team me up with an army lieutenant,
Tom, who rejoices in the name of Samuel Holland.
That's a great name.
Maybe one of my ancestors who knows.
And this guy is a land surveyor, basically.
He will take observations and he will make notes
and Cook sees him doing this
and is completely transfixed by it,
thinks, you know, what a wonderful thing.
I can do this at the coast, every reef, every point,
every cove, every rock, and they become great friends.
And Cook plays a sort of key part
in surveying the St Lawrence River.

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I'm going to say key part.
I mean, let's not overstate it.
He's not the central figure in the conquest of this,
by any means.
He plays an important part.
It's part of the supporting cast.
And it's quite grueling, isn't it?
Because it's that winter of 1758 to 1759
is, I gather, the coldest on record.
So to be out, you know, scanning with your charts and things.
I mean, that's quite tough.
And then when the campaigning season starts again,
you know, it's dangerous because he could be
attacked at any time.
So there's one incident.
And again, it's fascinating in Cook's youth.
There are all these kind of prefigurings
of what is to come.
He's out there with his charts and things.
And suddenly he gets attacked by warriors in canoes.
So canoes will play a very important part
in the story that is to come.
If you like the history of canoeing,
this is absolutely the story for you.
We've got so many canoes.
So they capture Quebec.
He stays on afterwards.
He draws up the charts of Halifax Harbour.
He eventually comes back home again, doesn't he?
He comes back to Stepney, East London.
Very popular kind of sailors haunt.
And he finds a local girl called Elizabeth Batts.
And they get married.
Very nice.
His talent for surveying has already marked him out.
Now that Britain has North America's in British hands,
they want to survey it.
And they send him out to chart the entire coast
of Newfoundland and the southern coast of Labrador.
And how do you pronounce it?
Newfoundland, Newfoundland, Newfoundland.
I sort of mumbled that because as the word approached,
I thought Canadian listeners have given us some kind of
instruction for Newfoundland.

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And I can't remember what it was.

And I can't remember what it was.

Newfoundland, I think it is.

Yeah.

I think it's a roof.

Anyway, how off he goes to that part of Canada.

And he spends four years.

I mean, this is one of the extraordinary things about Cook's story.

When you're reading his biography, it will say, for the next four years Cook did it.

And it's such a long period of time.

And you can imagine him talking about it.

And then the next day I went out and I charted it.

And again.

And then next day I went out and I charted it.

And so it goes on.

So, yeah.

So four years of hot chart action.

Which we will skip, I think.

Maybe we'll save the details of that for the bonus episode.

Definitely.

Together with the huffing of love for whatever it is he was doing as well.

People will definitely know that the rest of his history is running out of material when we announced the six-part series on the surveying of Newfoundland.

By which point, presumably, we will know how to pronounce the name.

So, yes, he does this.

These charts are absolutely amazing.

If you like nautical charts, you will know how fantastic they are.

So, he comes back home again.

And they're a great success, aren't they?

So, the Admiralty is absolutely thrilled.

They praise him for his pains and attention beyond my description.

Yes.

You know, he's established himself as the best in the business.

And the thing is, and I think why it's important to emphasise this.

So, you mentioned Hernán Cortés.

Hernán Cortés is a greedy, ambitious man who wants to make money.

And he wants to have adventures and stuff when he goes to Mexico.

But, you know, he's self-interested.

Yeah.

Cook is a servant for a greater cause.

And he is somebody who is a man of science,

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is a man of learning and precision.

But he's also a craftsman, isn't he?

Yeah.

You know, because he's come up, he's risen from the ranks.

He's done all the holding lofts and stuff.

Yeah.

But now he's a technician, I suppose.

A technician, exactly.

Throughout his career, Cook's, the meaning of his life seems to have resided in, doing a job and doing it really, really well.

There's no sense of individual advancement,

particularly, actually, individual self-aggrandizement or ambition with Cook, is there?

He's part of a team.

He likes being the top dog and running the team.

But it's always the job that matters to him.

I'm not sure.

I mean, as listeners will discover, he does have an inner life, but it's very, very kind of private.

I think he does think about things very deeply.

And he certainly has emotional hinterlands.

But as with all Yorkshiremen, Dominic, I mean, you know, we know Yorkshiremen, don't we?

We do.

They like to keep things close, buried.

Well, also with him, though, he's a man of the service, isn't he?

Yeah.

The camaraderie, the rules of the Navy.

He has absolutely internalized all that sort of stuff.

He's a creature of the service.

I mean, he's a kind of an embodiment of the discipline, I suppose, that makes the Royal Navy so effective in the 18th century.

If Nelson is the embodiment of the glamour and the swagger and the dash and the daring, Cook is about the methodical, the workaday, the solid characteristics, which I think is why his story is obviously less flamboyant than Nelson's saying.

Well, that's why children find Nelson more exciting, because we're drawn to the flamboyant, the star quality of Nelson.

Cook doesn't have star quality.

And that's in a way why I suspect it's been relatively easy for people to cancel him, because he doesn't have passionate advocates,

because there's not something immediately viscerally appealing and charismatic about him as there is with Nelson.

And I'm aware that we're not entirely selling this.

But I think we should take a break now.

And when we come back, we will look at the great turning point in Cook's career

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when he gets appointed to an expedition to the South Seas.

But also the people and indeed the animals who accompany him on this trip makes it all very, very dramatic.

So we will see you back after the break.

Hello. Welcome back to The Rest is History.

We are talking Captain Cook and Dominic.

More specifically, we're now going to do what I know is a great passion of yours, which is astronomy, isn't it?

So Cook has come back to London.

He's got this blended reputation as a solid man who's good with a chart.

And it so happens that just such a man is needed because of an exciting astronomical occurrence.

So would you like to tell the listeners what this exciting astronomical occurrence is?

Tom, I absolutely would.

So as the listeners will know, the 18th century is a high point in kind of mapping and categorizing and classifying things.

One of the things people want to map and categorize and classify is the solar system.

And a key element of that, Tom, is to work out how far apart things are.

Of course.

And the great astronomer, Emmond Halley.

As in the comet.

As in the comet.

Halley's comet.

As in 1066.

Correct.

He had, I think it's fair to say, Tom, just trying to think of the best way of putting it.

Maybe the best way of putting it was for me to say that he had worked out that the rare and unevenly spaced transits of the planet Venus, which is, of course, the closest to the Earth, that the transits of Venus across the face of the sun would offer, through relatively simple calculations, you would be able to.

Yeah, go on.

Venus is going to move across the sun, Tom.

I don't know why you find this so funny because actually, I relish the opportunity to talk about science on the rest of history.

It's actually quite a serious business.

Yeah.

The transits of Venus across the sun.

It's going to move across the sun.

And if you can observe it from different points on the Earth, you'll have all kinds of benefits.

Why?

Well, you'll know the distances between Venus and other planets, and the sun and Mercury, whatever stuff.

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Whatever stuff interests you.

You'll know all this.

Right.

And the Royal Society writes a letter to the king.

They say, listen,

Venus doesn't move across the sun very often
because it's not going to happen again until 1874.

Correct.

It did it in 1761, but we made a massive haulix of it.

So this was during the Seven Years' War, I think, wasn't it?

Yeah.

And the Great Powers had said, let's do it, even despite the war,
and they'd made a mess of it.

So they said 1769 is the one year we can do it.

They said to George, listen, several of the Great Powers in Europe,
particularly the French, Spaniards, Danes and Swedes,
are making the proper dispositions for the observation thereof.

The British nation, they say, has been long renowned for its love of astronomy,
in which we are inferior to no nation on Earth, ancient or modern.

Would it be very dishonorable if we didn't also observe the transit of Venus?

I think these are admirable reasons for doing it, isn't it?

Excellent.

The love of science and putting down the French.

So basically, what they need to do, the Royal Navy needs to send a ship out.

The best place to see it is from the South Pacific.

Let's crack on.

Let's go over there, observe the transit of Venus.

We need a ship, and we need somebody who's good at trigonometry.

And that man is Captain James Cook, and they pick him, and they pick the ship,
which is, of course, the Endeavour, Tom.

Tis the Endeavour.

So Endeavour will be well-known to anyone who's ever watched Inspector Morse.

It's his first name.

Yeah.

And the name, I gather, that Cook had nothing to do with the choice of the name.

It's just kind of one of those random things.

Yes.

And Nicholas Thomas in his wonderful book points out that the ship could just as easily
have been called the racehorse or even the carcass, which was the name given to other vessels
that were sent out on scientific expeditions the following year.

So Captain Cook's voyage is on the carcass.

Wouldn't have had a tool, the heft or resonance.

The racehorse would be quite fun.

But Endeavour, obviously, is perfect.

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I mean, it's expressive of everything that not just the expedition, but Cook personally embodies. I mean, Endeavour is what he is about.

Exactly.

So it's a solid ship.

It's not big by any means.

And it has guns, but it's not a fighting ship.

It's not a warship, is it?

It's not a warship.

No.

So Cook has, I mean, he's been in one battle, I think, hasn't he?

Yeah, he's been under fire.

He was commanded by Admiral Bing, who ended up being shot on the deck to encourage him.

He's not really a fighting man.

He's going out there to survey.

And they decide that if they're going to Tahiti, then obviously they've got to get to the Pacific.

They do, exactly.

So Tahiti is the place they're going to make for to build this astronomical station so they can see Venus doing whatever it's doing.

They're going to go off to the Pacific, just on the Pacific.

It's not totally unknown, is it?

Because, of course, Balboa saw it in Panama.

So we'll be talking about this in the Cortez episode.

Exactly.

In the 16th century, Magellan had sailed into it.

And lots of such people...

Drake had been across it.

Yeah.

Francis Drake.

People had sort of nibbled away at the edges, hadn't they?

Particularly Spanish mariners and then later on the Dutch.

But the key thing is that there are vast expanses of it.

People have no idea what is there.

And there is a kind of theoretical argument that is seriously advanced, that if there is Eurasia and Africa in the Northern Hemisphere, there must be a balancing continent in the Southern Hemisphere.

Yeah.

And, I mean, the British Admiralty are not publicly saying this.

You know, it's all about science.

It's all about astronomy and the transit of Venus and so on.

But secretly, they're thinking, we can combine the trip to Tahiti to track Venus with a kind of land grab of this huge continent if we can only find it.

That's right.

So the name that people give to this, they talk about the existence of the Great Southern Continent or Terra Australis.

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Named actually supposedly because there was a letter to the king of Spain whose dynastic name was Austria.

And Portuguese navigators said, you know, when we do discover this land, we will call it Australia after your majesty.

And the thing is, as you say, Tom, first of all, they think,

it's an age when people are fascinated by the idea of symmetry and balance, isn't it?

Because it's the scientific revolution because people are drawing up maps and they appear to see, you know, the Americas being a sort of mirror image of Europe and Africa.

And they become convinced, as you say, that there's something out there.

Now, at the same time, Dutchman like Tasman, Abel Tasman in the 1640s, he had sailed around Australia and New Zealand.

He didn't really understand the relationship between Australia and New Zealand.

People know there was something there.

What they don't know is how large it is.

How large it is.

And they don't know whether Australia and New Zealand,

this land that they've kind of vaguely glimpsed, are these islands?

Or is this part of this Great Southern Continent?

Or is Terra Australis something else between Australia and New Zealand and Antarctica?

Yeah.

So all of this is unknown.

And it's a particular focus of British interest.

So there are two kind of key figures that are fostering the sense that there might be something out there to discover.

And one of them is a ship's captain called Samuel Wallace, who is from Cornwall.

Yes.

And who in 1767 had set off in a ship called the Dolphin.

And he had kind of ventured into the Pacific regions where perhaps this continent might be lurking.

And claims to have kind of, what is it, seen in the distance?

Peaks.

You see peaks?

Peaks topped by clouds and...

Yeah.

And he sees the peaks through the fog, but then the fog closed in.

And the site was lost.

He landed on an island vaguely nearby where he said, the verdure is as fine as that of England.

There was great plenty of livestock.

And it abounds with all the choices, productions of the earth.

And he called it King George's land.

Of course, we would know it as Tahiti.

So he's in that kind of neck of the woods.

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He's seen something vaguely near Tahiti, but he doesn't know what it is. And he returned from that voyage just before Cook left in the endeavor. So it's possible that Cook would have met him and talked to him.

Oh, I think more than possible.

I think he does for a reason that we'll come to in due course, because Samuel Wallace gives Cook something wonderful and crucial, which we will come to.

Oh, I don't know what that is.

I can't wait to find out.

And what's the other person?

You were going to talk about another person.

So, Willie Dalrymple, star of our sister show Empire.

He has hundreds of ancestors, basically endlessly teaming all over the British Empire.

And this ancestor is a guy called Alexander, who is a geographer.

And he is the guy who is really pushing this idea that there's a huge continent waiting to be found.

And he hasn't himself been there, but he has read all the available sources from previous voyages, so Drake's, but also Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch ventures there, and kind of synthesizing them.

And he's very desperate to go and lead the endeavor.

He's very, very hopeful of it.

And so, when Cook gets appointed instead, he's a bit upset about that.

But he doesn't go off in a complete half.

You know, he's still contributing papers and ideas and proposals to the expedition.

So, he's another guy who is kind of pushing this idea.

So, this is the kind of the secret mission.

After watching the transit of Venus, Cook is basically going to be told to go down and have an explore in the southernmost reaches of the specific.

But there is a further dimension to the voyage, which is that it is committed to the idea of knowledge for knowledge's sake.

Because if you are going to lands that are unknown, there will presumably be all kinds of rare plants and animals.

And if these rare plants and animals are going to be gathered, you need someone who is qualified to collect them.

Yes.

And it's at this point that an absolutely tremendous character pops up and enters the story.

And this is a man called Joseph Banks.

So, Tom, if you...

I mean, I know you are now in love with the books by Patrick O'Brien.

So, Joseph Banks is clearly an inspiration for the character of Stephen Maturing, isn't he?

And the relationship between Auburn and Maturing is Coggin Banks.

Patrick O'Brien wrote a biography of Banks.

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Yes.

But Maturing is quite a sober, serious character.

Banks, I think it's fair to say, is not.

Banks is what Charles Darwin would have been if he'd been a massive lad.

So, he's very, very wealthy, probably one of the 200 wealthiest families in the country, from Lincolnshire Gentry, went to Harrow, then went to Eaton.

Went to both Eaton and Harrow.

At Eaton, he shot a swan and baked it in a pie.

So, that's very much the kind of the measure of the kind of guy he is.

That's the kind of botany he enjoys.

Absolutely.

So, he inherits his father's fortune and the expectation is, of course,

if you're a wealthy young man, he's been to Eaton,

he goes on to Christchurch at Oxford, where rather than studying classics,

he studies botany, which is very unusual.

I think the guy who teaches botany at Oxford is generally reckoned to have been the worst teacher in the entire history of Oxford University.

Right, again, that is saying something, Tom.

He had one lecture that he just gave over and over again every week for 30 years.

But this didn't put Banks off at all.

And so, rather than go on the Grand Tour, he scorns that.

He says that every blockhead does that.

My Grand Tour shall be one round the whole globe.

And so, his ambition is to go off and see the world.

So, his first venture, actually Black Captain Cook, he goes off to Newfoundland.

But rather than going around looking at Bays and doing charts,

he is there to spot birds and things.

So, in the course of his scientific trip to Newfoundland, he sees penguins,

he sees large species of other bird, and he sees the scalp of a fisherman who'd been killed by an Eskimo, as he calls it.

So, an Inuit.

Crikey.

That's exciting.

And also, and this is very Banks, he learns to play the guitar.

If you think of somebody doing a gap year being really annoying.

Gap year.

You went to the gap year, didn't you, Tom?

I did. I went to India.

You went to India?

Yeah. I did the classic.

Because of surprise.

Yeah, you did.

So, I very much identify with Joseph Banks.

I thought you would.

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I think he's a tremendous chap.
I am the cook and you are the Banks of this podcast.
I think it's fair to say.
Yes, I think that's probably true.
Anyway, so he picks up on the fact that the endeavor is going off on this trip.
And he thinks, this is my chance.
I can absolutely do this.
And by great good fortune, he was at school with the first Lord of the Admiralty.
The Earl of Sandwich, right?
The Earl of Sandwich.
He can't have been at school with him, actually.
But anyway, he knows him.
And so, he pulls strings and he gets a birth,
which is quite bad news for Cook because the cabin is very, very small.
I mean, tiny.
Oh, the boat.
It's stuffed with guns, food, astronomical stuff.
He's also got to take astronomers to do all the calculations that we
so beautifully described.
And now he discovers he's got to take this posh botanist.
Plus, Banks has got all these cronies and hangers on, hasn't he?
Well, they're not cronies.
I think you could call them assistants, scientific assistants.
So, this is really the first ever scientific research team.
The idea that you go off on an expedition
and you don't just have one kind of gentleman.
You have a whole crew.
So, painters who can record things and all kinds of stuff and all kinds of kit.
So, very extravagant claims are made for the value of the kit that Banks takes.
So, one report is that it costs him £10,000.
And I think the whole kind of fitting out of the endeavor in the expedition
and he costs £3,000.
So, basically, it's probably closer to £6,000.
But Banks' luggage is worth more than twice the endeavor itself.
Well, I mean, he's got...
So, on the assistants, there's a guy.
There's a Swedish poet called Dr. Solander, who was a pupil of Linnaeus.
And possibly a spy, a Swedish spy.
Yes. There's also a bloke who's there just to paint all the flowers, isn't there?
Sidney Parkinson.
He's a Quaker.
He's not a massive barrel of laughs, I think it's fair to say.
So, there's this huge team, but also the cook has to fit in this huge crew.
About 100 people, I think, in the crew.

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And they're a real, you know, as Dr. Solander would call them, no doubt, they're a smorgasbord of people, Tom.

They are.

And not only that, but there are animals.

So, I mentioned that the likelihood that Cook had met Captain Wallace, who was charged with the dolphin.

And we know this because Captain Wallace had taken a she-goat that supplied milk the whole way around the course of the three-year voyage and had been right the way around the world.

And he suggests that Cook take this goat.

Same goat?

Yeah. And Cook is absolutely delighted.

She was three years in the West Indies and was once around the world before in the dolphin and never went dry the whole time.

So, Cook thinks, this is brilliant.

I have milk with my tea.

Fantastic.

So, the goat is put on.

There is also a cat to catch rats.

Yes.

And Banks, of course, takes two dogs.

A greyhound and greyhounds.

So, greyhound on a ship.

I mean, they're grey in a closed space.

And another dog called Lady.

Oh, that's nice.

So, you know I love dogs on ships.

So, it's a packed vessel.

Yes.

And by the way, the sailors are from all over the place.

I mean, they're not just British, are they?

They're from Corgan Island.

They're from...

It's a Brazilian.

There's a Venetian.

There's some New Yorkers.

Yeah.

It's a real mixture.

Yeah. So, lots of fun.

And they get ready to go.

And Cook takes leave of his wife, Elizabeth, who is pregnant and the three children.

So, it's goodbye, wife.

Goodbye, children.

Is that what he said?

I'll be seeing them.

And off he goes.

Meanwhile, Banks.

And I quote here from Toby Musgrave, who's written a very entertaining biography of Banks, The Multifarious Mr. Banks.

In the midst of his exhilaration and hasty departure, Banks had behaved like a cad towards a certain Miss Harriet Blosset.

So, you know, his guitar, his dogs.

It's very expensive luggage.

And now he's behaved like a cad.

So, it's a tremendous send-off.

But actually, Cook and Banks get on very well.

Maybe because they're so different.

Maybe because they're not competing.

Yeah.

Banks is much younger, of course.

I mean, it's about 13 years younger, I think.

Yeah.

But I think he's fun.

Yes.

I think he's a kind of enjoyable companion.

Though Cook is not fun, Tom.

No.

It's fair to say.

Cook is serious.

No.

But I think perhaps that Funster that Banks is.

Yeah.

Maybe he coaxes Cook out of his shell or something.

Possibly.

Have you seen what they took on board?

Four tons of beer, 185 pounds of Devonshire cheese, tons of meat and salt beef.

But the thing that Cook particularly believes in, that he's always forcing people to eat a sauerkraut, obsessed with sauerkraut.

Because this is to keep scurvy at bay, isn't it?

So this is also part of what he's trying to do, is research whether it's possible to stop scurvy from happening.

So people have just been forced to eat sauerkraut morning, noon and night.

Because Cook believes, quite rightly, that a healthy diet is crucial.

He's not wrong.

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He's not the first person to think of this.
But there is an argument that he's the great popularizer
of the kind of anti-scurvy.
Well, and again, people who've listened to our episodes
on Trafalgar will remember that we said that
a Royal Navy ship is probably the healthiest place in the world,
counter-intuitively.
Because the research into public health is so intense there.
Because obviously, disease or scurvy or whatever,
can wipe an expedition out.
And Cook plays a key role in ensuring that,
by the time you get to Nelson's generation,
these ships are unbelievably healthy.
Dominic, just on the topic of food matter that is taken,
breads, packs, a very delicious Cheshire cheese,
and a cask of porter.
And I want listeners to bear that in mind,
because it will reappear later in the...
Oh, exciting.
He's taken it for a specific reason that I will not yet reveal.
Anyway, they set sail at two o'clock on the 26th of August,
1768, pull out to sea,
and inevitably, breads start hurling everywhere.
He's violently, violently seasick.
Yeah, he is.
But he must have recovered a little bit,
because by the time they get to Madeira,
which is the sort of classic stop that you make,
breads is well enough to go ashore and interfere with plants
and do whatever he's doing.
Yes, and he's doing that thing that Martin is always doing,
where he's kind of laying nets out and scooping up
kind of insects and stuff like that.
Sea creatures and things.
They cross the equator, don't they, on the 26th of October.
This is an occasion for much jollity,
much nautical jollity,
because anyone who crosses the equator for the first time
has to get dunked in the sea or pay a fine in alcohol.
On a kind of frame.
There's like a frame, isn't there?
And they're dunked in the sea on the end of a rope.
Three times deep into the sea,
which kind of could be quite fun or quite frightening.

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Of course, lots of these people can't swim, can they?
I mean, it's one of the great things about Royal Navy.
A lot of them are frightened of swimming.
This comes up again and again in Patrick O'Brien's novels.
Banks refuses to do this, so he has to forfeit.
Well, so does Cook.
Because Cook hasn't been over the equator.
Yeah, but it would look terrible for Cook
as the captain to be dunked by his...
I would, I mean, I'd pay a fine in that situation, I think.
Oh, I did the dunking.
Would you? You'd be a man of the people, I wouldn't.
I think the dunking would be an experience in and of itself,
wouldn't it?
Been an exciting experience.
Yeah, maybe.
Maybe.
So you forfeit four days grog if you don't do the dunking.
They do the dunking and they keep going.
They go all the way down to Rio.
Again, a sort of fairly standard stop on this sort of route.
They're received very suspiciously at Rio.
So they say, you know, we are on our way to observe the transit of Venus.
They give exactly the same explanation
of the astronomical details that we gave.
But you did.
Yeah.
But the Portuguese bizarrely aren't convinced.
No, they're very, very suspicious.
They obviously lacked your facility with astronomy.
They did.
Anyway, they were able to get away unscathed.
And down they go towards Cape Horn and towards Tierra del Fuego.
And on the way, Banks has a bit of a strop with Cook
because Banks wanted to stop off at the Falkland Islands.
Well, you know what Dennis Thatcher said of the Falkland Islands?
Mars and Mars bugger all.
Yeah.
So Dennis Thatcher would very much be a Cook.
He'd be team Cook.
Yeah.
And then they reached Tierra del Fuego, don't they?
Yes. And I see that you've made this note about the man who fell overboard.
Yeah. It's a terrible moment.

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So he gets swept overboard.
And as you said, they can't swim.
And his fellow sailors have to watch him, but they can't help him.
And Cook writes that they report that he might continue sensible
for a considerable time longer and of the horror attending
his irretrievable situation.
Does that concentrate the mind?
It would.
Watching that.
So now they have their first great interaction.
We're moving towards the end of this episode,
but we should have their first interaction with Indigenous peoples
because they land at Tierra del Fuego and they meet the Fuegians,
who are now, I think, extinct, aren't they?
I mean, if a people can be extinct, I'm not sure that's the right word.
The Fuegians don't really exist anymore, I think,
because they were ravaged by disease.
Yeah. So all the full 19th century horrors visited on them.
They would cover themselves with seal oil from the moment they were born.
And it would keep you whole.
Your parents would cover you.
And you would be covered in oil for the rest of your life.
But the downside is you were very foul smelling.
Well, it's only a downside if you're from England.
I mean, for them, they're all used to it.
Yes. No, no, no. Absolutely. A downside.
It's a downside if you're in company.
I think it's fair to say.
If you're an international company, which generally the Fuegians aren't.
But it's a place that hasn't been...
I mean, Magellan obviously visited it,
but not many people have been there.
And it's still believed back in England that the Fuegians are giants.
So this is one of the things that Cook has gone is to discover whether they're giants or not.
And they're not.
They just kind of go around smelling of oil and fat.
Banks is all over it.
I mean, he's off kind of collecting plants.
And Cook is a little bit sniffy about this.
So Cook reports, at nine, they returned on board,
bringing with them several plants, flowers, et cetera.
Most of them are known in Europe.
And in that alone, consisted their whole value.
So he's not very impressed.

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But Banks quite enjoys the interactions with the locals, doesn't he?

He says he and his team were received with many uncooked signs of friendship.

And Richard Hoff in his biography of Cook says,

it's not clear what those signs were, but it's very possible.

They may refer to the naked male Fuegians making much play with their penises, especially when greeting one another.

Yeah. So I think Banks would have enjoyed that.

Cook is not impressed.

And what's interesting is that at this point,

Cook has no real interest in what we might now call anthropology,

a sense that the people he's meeting are not simply worthy of kind of study, but that they might have any value.

So he sees them as absolutely kind of beyond the pale

that they're wearing this stinking fat that they seem to have a terrible life.

Whereas in fact, they actually have a brilliant life

because they're following, there's lots of birds, lots of food, seasonal, they can migrate.

And in due course, Cook's understanding of this will evolve.

And that's what's so interesting about him, I think.

There's a point where some of the Fuegians come on the ship, isn't there?

And there's one of the Fuegians who they think may be an exorcist or something

because whenever anything catches his attention, he shouts aloud to himself.

But randomly, Cook and his crew think that there's maybe some sort of incantation because he's disturbed by what he's seeing.

So there's a slight incomprehension there.

Yeah. But again, what will happen in due course over the course of Cook's voyages is that he will become increasingly fascinated by these kind of...

Yes, exactly.

...expressions of different ways of understanding the world, the cosmos and whatever.

And what now in Tierra del Fuego seems to him incomprehensible barbarism, in time he will become much more interested in it.

This is one of the really striking things about the Captain Cook story just to anticipate

is that when you read his journals and what he made of the people that he met,

he is much more open-minded than the stereotype of an 18th century embodiment of colonialism.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

And so he's on Tierra del Fuego and he is kind of the stereotype,

perhaps of what people might think of a blinkered 18th century Englishman, contemptuous of abroad and foreigners.

But over the course of what will follow, this will change because from Tierra del Fuego,

Cook, he's left the Atlantic and he can go into the Pacific

and ahead of him lies this extraordinary journey,

which will be the subject of our next episode.

When we get to Haiti, we get to New Zealand and we get to Australia.

So Tom, we have shipmates of our own, don't we?

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Members of the Restless History Club.
We regard them very much as our crew, as our comrades.
So Tom, they can listen to the next episode right away, right now, this very minute.
They can be out in the Pacific.
They can be heading for Australia, New Zealand as I speak.
There's all kinds of thrills coming.
But if people have not embarked on that particular ship,
they can do so at RestlessHistoryPod.com
because otherwise they will just have to wait till Thursday.
At Tierra del Fuego, where it's very cold.
Exactly. You'll be on Tierra del Fuego till Thursday.
But if you want to move on, do so now at RestlessHistoryPod.com.
And that is very much in the spirit, the polite and commercial spirit
of 18th Century England, isn't it, Tom?
It is.
That's what we're all about.
And on that bombshell, we say thank you very much.
We'll see you next time. Goodbye.
Yo-ho.