

**‘FROM THE ISLANDS OF THE SOUTH SEAS, 1773–4’:
PETER GATHERCOLE’S SPECIAL EXHIBITION
AT THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM**

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Introduction

This article is about the special exhibition ‘*From the Islands of the South Seas, 1773–4*’, which opened at the University of Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum on 1 May 1970. Subtitled *An Exhibition of a Collection Made on Capn. Cook’s Second Voyage of Discovery by J. R. Forster*, the exhibition was devoted to the collection of Pacific artefacts given by the natural philosopher Johann Reinhold Forster and his son George to the University of Oxford in 1776, soon after their return from accompanying James Cook on his second famous voyage to the South Seas.¹

The exhibition was curated by Peter Gathercole, and was his major contribution to the work of the Pitt Rivers Museum during his two years as Lecturer in Ethnology at the University of Oxford, from 1 October 1968 to 30 September 1970. Of course, as with any exhibition, ‘*From the Islands...*’ was not a one-man show; in his published acknowledgements, Gathercole (1970) thanks a number of individuals and institutions for their help, including the Forsters themselves! It was, however, primarily Gathercole’s exhibition, and has been regarded as such ever since. Moreover, Gathercole has continued to take a special interest in it. While his plans to publish a definitive catalogue, with Adrienne Kaeppler, were never realised, he has continued to make frequent reference to the collection in his writings, and to use slides of the exhibition in his talks about Cook, his voyages and the associated collections. A discussion of the exhibition in this issue of *JME*, marking Gathercole’s contribution to museum ethnography, is thus particularly appropriate.

Background

‘*From the Islands...*’ followed Bernard Fagg’s *Art from the Guinea Coast* as the Pitt Rivers Museum’s second temporary exhibition. Opened in November 1965, in a newly constructed special exhibition area near the entrance to the museum, *Art from the Guinea Coast* had been designed to show off some of the riches of the collection, and to demonstrate what it would be possible to do with the museum’s collections when Fagg’s ambitious plans for a ‘new’ Pitt Rivers Museum were realised (see Coote and Morton 2000). ‘*From the Islands...*’ was also intended – in part at least – to show off further the riches of the collection, and to help make the case for Fagg’s scheme. Moreover, although ‘*From the Islands...*’ was Gathercole’s exhibition, the idea of having a ‘Cook’ exhibition at the museum was not in fact his. Rather, the idea dates back to at least 5 June 1966 (two years before Gathercole’s appointment to Oxford) when Fagg wrote to the Cook specialist and biographer Professor J. C. Beaglehole expressing his hope that they could meet the next day

and 'continue our conversation about ... our plans for a special exhibition',² and I suspect that the idea had probably come to Fagg as soon as he took up the post of curator of the museum on 1 January 1964 – if not before. It was, of course, hardly an original idea. There were to be a number of Cook-related exhibitions around the world between 1968 and 1979, commemorating the bicentenaries of the voyages, the 'discoveries' and Cook's death in Hawai'i in 1779.³

A fortnight after Gathercole had taken up his post at Oxford, Fagg wrote on 18 October 1968 to another of Cook's biographers, the Oxford-based sailor and author Commander Alan Villiers:

At the beginning of this month a new Lecturer in Ethnology, Peter Gathercole, has joined my staff from the University of Otago. We have talked over the possibilities with him and he is *very keen* to go ahead with the project.... Peter Gathercole would like to lay great emphasis on the scientific and astronomical and historic importance of the occasion.

By 2 March 1969 Gathercole had made sufficient progress in planning the exhibition to be able to compose a two-page, single-spaced typescript memo for the Museum Committee. He reports on progress, what else needs to be done, and the aims of the exhibition:

The main aim will be to mount displays illustrating both the nature of Oceanic cultures at the time of European contact and the effects of that contact on them. A second aim will be to demonstrate the significance of the voyages in the history of science. It would seem appropriate to make the tone of the project restrained, the displays simple, and the accompanying catalogue a worthy contribution to 'Cook Studies'.

At this stage the idea was to use the collections of the museum to mount an exhibition about Cook's voyages in general, rather than about the Forster collection in particular. Given how well-known the Forsters' collection at Oxford is today, this may seem odd. In March 1969, however, the museum had only very partial records relating to the artefacts in its collections that were associated with Cook's voyages, and while the elder Forster's name was associated with many of them, the idea of the existence of a 'Forster collection' had yet to emerge from the vaguer notion of a 'Cook collection'.⁴ It was only after Adrienne Kaeppler's 'rediscovery' in August 1969 of the Forsters' manuscript 'Catalogue of Curiosities sent to Oxford' that the precise nature, extent and importance of the collection became clear,⁵ and it was only with the work on the collection carried out by Gathercole and his colleagues in the Spring and Summer of 1969 that the identification of the collection with the Forsters, instead of vaguely with 'Cook's voyages', took definite shape.⁶ Thus the idea of focusing exclusively on the well-documented collection from the second voyage was formed.⁷

The idea for a 'Forster exhibition' had certainly been formed by 13 September 1969, when Gathercole prepared a three-page typescript 'Aide Memoire on the Forster Collection...' covering 'authenticating the collection', 'the state of the collection', and 'future research relevant to the exhibition in 1970'.⁸ In this he reviews the history of the collection's identification and documentation, before discussing his own work on it and the importance of Kaeppler's discovery of the Forsters' manuscript catalogue. He goes on to discuss the condition of the collection, before rehearsing what needs to be done in order to produce 'an academic and essentially descriptive catalogue'. With colleagues, I have discussed elsewhere some of the complexities of the history of the collection's documentation (see Coote, Knowles, Meister and Petch 1999; Coote, Gathercole and Meister 2000), so will say no more here about that aspect of Gathercole's work, while I will return below to what Gathercole has to say in his aide-memoire about the condition of the collection.

With Schuyler Jones and other colleagues, Gathercole continued working on preparing the exhibition. Eventually, it was decided to open it on 1 May 1970; by which time, incidentally, Gathercole already knew that he was soon to leave Oxford to take up the post of curator of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (as it then was) on 1 October 1970. The date the exhibition closed is not recorded, but it must have been dismantled some time before 1 February 1972, when the next special exhibition, *Nuristan: The Land of Light*, opened in the same space. Presumably it closed before 16 November 1971, when some scientific instruments, borrowed for the exhibition from the University's Museum for the History of Science, were returned.

Materials

Before considering the exhibition itself, it is worth reviewing briefly the materials that are available for anyone wishing to study it, all of which are either already in the public domain or are in museum files that may be consulted by researchers on request.

First, there is a brief reference in the museum's annual report for the year ended 31 July 1970. Fagg writes:

The first comprehensive exhibition of the ethnographic collections made by Reinhold Forster during Captain Cook's second voyage of discovery, 1772–3, long planned as the second special exhibition to be presented in the new Special Exhibition Gallery, was executed under the direction of Mr P. W. Gathercole, University Lecturer in Ethnology, and was opened to the public on 1 May 1970 by Sir John Wolfenden, Director of the British Museum, and proved an immediate success. Such exhibitions are of special benefit to the Museum in the stimulus which they provide to detailed scholarly research and to (often much needed) conservation studies and procedures. (Fagg 1970: 2)

‘From the Islands of the South Seas, 1773–4’

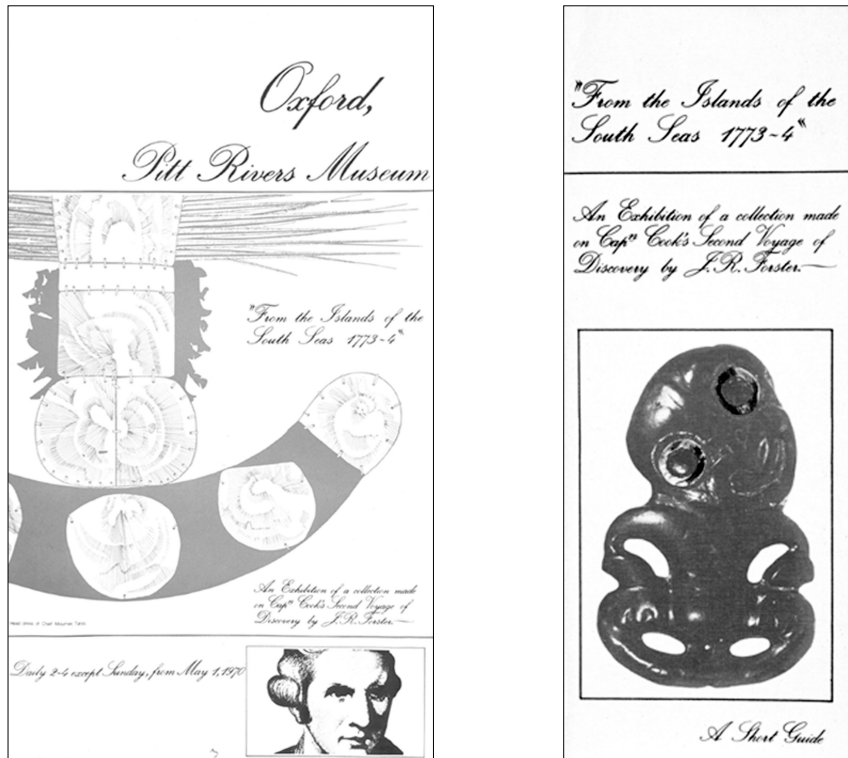


Plate 1 (left). Exhibition poster, designed for the Museum by John Rhodes. The design features a sketch of part of the Tahitian mourning dress in the Forster collection (Forster 1–4, 9–11; PRM 1886.1.1637). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Plate 2 (right). Front cover of the Short Guide, designed for the Museum by John Rhodes. The design features a photograph of the Maori hei tiki in the Forster collection (Forster 120; PRM 1886.1.1167). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

There is also a bulging file containing correspondence, memos, receipts, lists, etc.; from some of which I have already quoted. This file was originally entitled ‘Cook’s Voyage of Discovery’ and seems to have been opened as early as 10 December 1965, for the first item in it is a cutting from *The Times* for that date concerning plans to build a replica of the *Endeavour*. The file was an exhibition file, confirming that Fagg had been planning a ‘Cook’ exhibition for some time.

Also in this file are the publicity materials. There is a press release (see Appendix), as well as letters to the press, and related memos and correspondence. Of more visual interest are the exhibition poster (Plate 1) and the exhibition brochure (Plate 2), both of which were designed in-house by John Rhodes. The exhibition brochure, or *Short Guide* as it is generally known, is packed with information. It was, according to the preface, ‘prepared for those visitors who wish to have more information about the exhibition than is available on the labels’ (Gathercole 1970). It contains information about the Forsters, about the history of



Plate 3. Assistant curator Schuyler Jones (foreground) and designer John Rhodes working in the exhibition area. Some of the designs for the layout for the exhibition can be seen on the wall to the right. At the back left is one of the Tongan baskets, at the back right can be seen the handles of six of the Tongan clubs. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R1.9). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

the collection and about the Forsters' own manuscript 'Catalogue of Curiosities sent to Oxford', followed by Gathercole's own listing of the collection, combining the Forsters' descriptions with notes of his own.⁹

Disappointingly, there seem to have been only two reviews, both of them local. That by John Owen, published in a series entitled 'Oxford Treasures' in the *Oxford Mail* the day the exhibition opened, draws at length on the press release and thus has a good deal to say about the Forsters, about Cook and about some of the individual objects, but little to say about the actual exhibition. He concludes, 'It is



Plate 4. Technician Bob Rivers working on the apron from the Tahitian mourning dress. The apron is made of thousands of slivers of mother-of-pearl, a number of missing examples of which were replaced, for exhibition purposes, with slivers of Perspex; they have since been removed. A Tahitian headrest and barkcloth can be seen on the table to the left. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R1.10). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

altogether a remarkable show, another striking example of the riches which Oxford possesses’ (Owen 1970). Slightly more interestingly, he refers to how the ‘relics’, as he calls them, have been ‘skilfully arranged’. The other review, by Andrew Harvey in *Zenith*, a student magazine, also has little to say about the exhibition, concluding rather lamely, ‘although the historical importance makes this exhibition noteworthy, the intrinsic interest of the objects and records on show make it well worth a visit’ (Harvey 1970: 9).

The texts for the panels, captions and labels survive, in the form of the flat copy negative plates from which they were printed. From them it is possible to reconstruct what information was provided in each section of the exhibition, and with which object or group of objects. There are also photographic records: some sixty black-and-white images taken in the exhibition space during the preparation and mounting of the displays (see Plates 3–10), and some forty colour images of the



Plate 5. Student assistant Carroll Anne Hogan and Peter Gathercole in the exhibition area. Note the pile of barkcloth to the left. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R3.2). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

completed exhibition (see Plates 11–12).¹⁰ These provide an invaluable record of the exhibition and its preparation, though they actually give little idea of the completed exhibition as a whole. Compared with the images of *Art from the Guinea Coast*, the museum's previous special exhibition, which Chris Morton and I published in this journal (Coote and Morton 2000: Plates 2, 3 and 4), and which give a clear overall picture of the exhibition in the space, the images of '*From the Islands...*' are much more focused on the displays themselves, and, indeed, on the individual objects. This is probably due, at least in part, to the fact that the photographs of the previous exhibition were taken specifically to show the newly constructed display area; one of them (ibid.: 45, Plate 4), in fact, was taken by a representative from Dexion, the display-case manufacturer, to use in the company's own publicity. In contrast, the photographs of '*From the Islands...*' seem to have been intended as records of the individual displays, as well as of the particular artefacts themselves, many of which had not been photographed at all before, and none in colour.

Finally, there are the recollections of the people involved in the planning and execution of the exhibition. In May 1999 ‘a reminiscence session’ for everyone who worked on the exhibition, and was able to come, was held at the museum. Stimulated by the photographs (many of which they had not seen for almost thirty years, if ever), Gathercole, Schuyler Jones and two of the museum’s technical staff at the time, Ken Walters and Bob Rivers, reminisced about the exhibition and its preparation. The proceedings were recorded and a transcription has been made and placed on file.

The exhibition

So what are we to make of the exhibition after more than thirty years? My interests are in trying to understand it in its own terms, and in thinking about its legacy. No doubt it would be possible to criticize it for not dealing with many issues that are important to museum ethnographers today, but as Morton and I argued for *Art from the Guinea Coast* (Coote and Morton 2000: 40) that would be a rather pointless exercise. The legacy will be dealt with later, but first there are a few points to make about the exhibition itself.

As with *Art from the Guinea Coast*, one of the things that strikes today’s viewer is how many pieces are on open display (Plates 6–10). Morton and I noted how this was being promoted in the museological literature at the time as a good thing (ibid.: 45–6). It was made possible by the number of visitors to the museum then being in the order of forty a day, a tenth of the average number today. A further aspect, more obvious in the file than in the photographs, is the inclusion of botanical specimens. In the exhibition file there is a good deal of correspondence between the museum and various botanic gardens, concerning the availability of living examples of paper mulberry and breadfruit trees, etc., and the assistance of various parties in supplying them is acknowledged by Gathercole in his ‘Preface’ in the *Short Guide* (Gathercole 1970). No doubt the driving force for the inclusion of botanical specimens was Fagg, who had included them in *Art from the Guinea Coast*, and whose vision of the new museum had a plant house as a central component (Coote and Morton 2000: 50).¹¹

Early in the planning process, Gathercole noted that ‘a second aim will be to demonstrate the significance of the voyages in the history of science’. Again, this is not particularly visible in the images, but we know from the files that a sextant, an octant and a ship’s compass were borrowed for the exhibition from the University’s Museum of the History of Science. These were displayed with a model of the first-voyage *Endeavour* (later to be replaced by a model of the second-voyage *Resolution*), also borrowed for the exhibition. That no photograph is devoted to these aspects of the exhibition *might* be taken to indicate that they became of less importance for all concerned.¹² This is another case where the exhibition file is particularly useful for building up a more accurate picture of the exhibition than one might get from the photographs alone.



Plate 6. The Tahitian section of the exhibition. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R6.8). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Plate 7. The Marquesas Islands and New Zealand sections of the exhibition. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R5.11). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Plate 8. The Tongan section of the exhibition. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R6.5). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Moving on from these perhaps less ethnographic aspects of the exhibition, we can begin to address some aspects of its intellectual content. First, it is very strikingly devoted to one collection, that of the Forsters.¹³ While not Fagg's original intention, the work carried out by Gathercole and Kaeppler made such a focus historically and intellectually desirable, if not inevitable. Secondly, it draws on the Forsters' own accounts of the voyage and the artefacts they observed and collected, giving their understandings of the individual objects a key role in their exhibition. Gathercole seems to have decided on this aspect of the presentation quite early on. Referring to the information that can be garnered from the voyage-literature as 'documentation', Gathercole remarks, in a memo to Fagg dated 21 April 1969:

I have been thinking a good deal about labels. There is so much documentation on the objects in general, that we could use quotations for almost every label. But I think this would be tiring for the general visitor. I therefore suggest that we use labels made on the electric typewriter as a rule, and blown up where necessary. For very rare or important objects, I suggest that we make off-set copies of the relevant quotations, which would get across the flavour of European reactions to these objects.



Plate 9. The Easter Island (Rapanui) section of the exhibition. Note the small wooden figure of 'Captain Cook' (see note 13). From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R6.7). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

From the surviving panel and label texts, we know exactly which quotations were used, and from the photographs we know how they were placed in relation to the artefacts (for example, see Plate 11). This goes along, of course, with the use of contemporary illustrations – maps drawings and paintings – to help contextualize the artefacts. A number of such illustrations can be seen in the photographs of the exhibition (see Plates 8, 9 and 12).

'*From the Islands...*' was, of course, a cultural display, rather than a typological one. This was part of the point of Fagg's new special exhibition area at the museum: to be able to do different sorts of displays from the typological ones that characterize the museum.¹⁴ *Art from the Guinea Coast* had also been a cultural display (or to be more accurate, with objects from as far afield as Guinea and Nigeria, a multi-cultural display) and most special exhibitions in the museum since have followed suit. '*From the Islands...*' was organized by island or island group; while the dates during which the particular islands were visited were included in the displays (see Plates 6 to 10), so that it could also be seen as a record of the voyage.

‘From the Islands of the South Seas, 1773–4’



Plate 10. The New Hebrides (Vanuatuan) and New Caledonian section of the exhibition, to the right; part of the Tongan section, left. From a black-and-white photograph taken by Peter Narracott in April 1970 (PRM neg. no. R6.4). Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Overall then, the exhibition may be seen as providing a contemporary, eighteenth-century context for the artefacts the Forsters collected. In the ‘state of the collection’ section of his 1969 ‘Aide Memoire...’ referred to above, Gathercole remarked

There are only a handful of objects needing much treatment. But many more need strengthening and cleaning to give them even an echo of their former richness. What I want to aim for here is something of the dazzle of colour that provides the unforgettable lustre to Hodges’ oil of the war fleet at Tahiti. I want to evoke the brilliance of an utterly non-European group of related cultures by the setting and arrangement of the objects themselves, so that visitors unconsciously repeat the emotional experience of Banks during his first days ashore at M[atavai] Bay.¹⁵

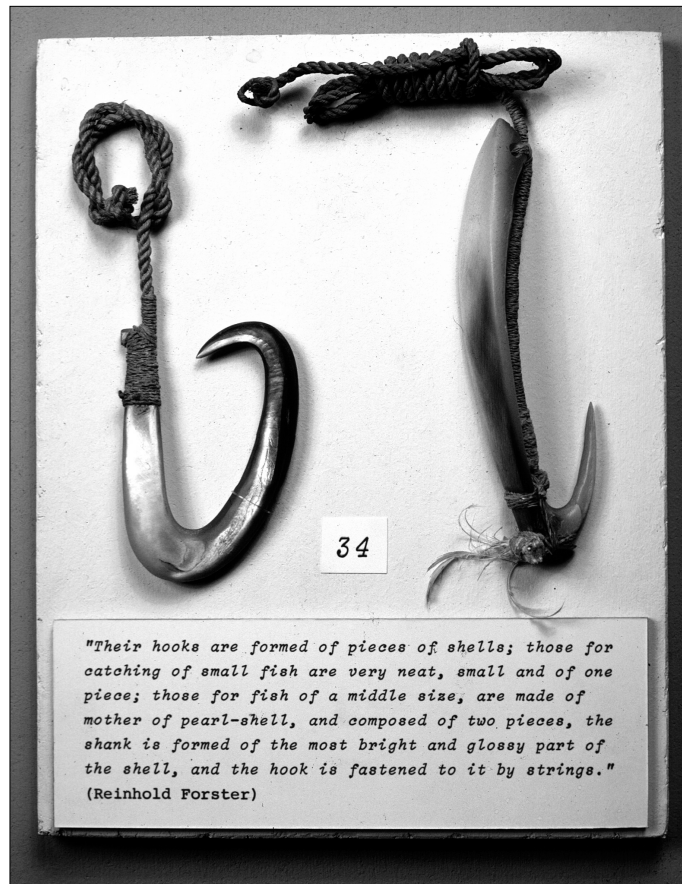


Plate 11. Two Tahitian fish-hooks (Forster 34; PRM 1886.1.1282, 1886.1.1292.1) on display in the exhibition. From a colour transparency (slide) taken by Peter Narracott in or after May 1970. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Why Gathercole refers here to the first-voyage experience of Banks, rather than the second-voyage experiences of the Forsters or Cook himself, I do not know; perhaps he had just been reading Banks's journal (Banks 1962). But the point is plain: by this time Gathercole had got to grips with the objects, the voyage literature and the works of the voyage artists, and he wanted to communicate something of the excitement that putting these three things together, intellectually, had produced in him. It seems to me that it is this original intellectual and aesthetic excitement that has driven Gathercole's interest in Cook's voyages and the collections ever since.

Typically, Gathercole himself noted the limitations of this approach in an account he gave of *Captain Cook in the South Seas*, one of the other bicentenary exhibitions, held at the British Museum's Museum of Mankind almost a decade later in 1979–80. 'It is fair to ask', he writes, 'if the exhibition should have been presented primarily from an eighteenth-century point of view' (Gathercole 1980: 17). Referring to this 'technique', Gathercole notes that 'we used it at Oxford in

‘From the Islands of the South Seas, 1773–4’

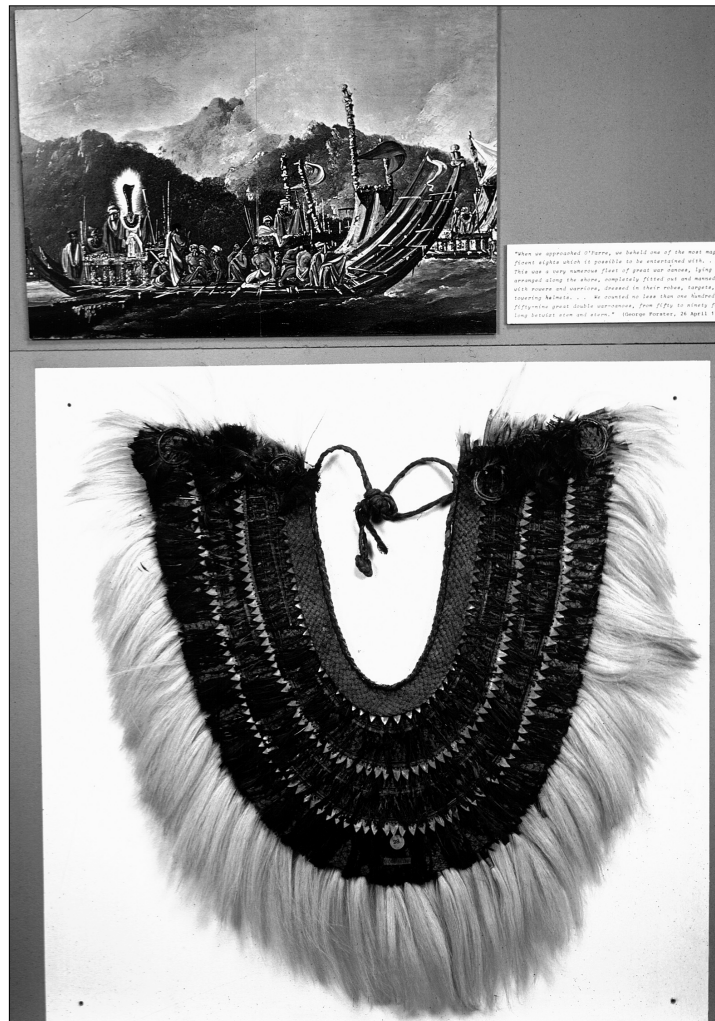


Plate 12. Tahitian breast-ornament (not a Forster piece, but from the Beasley collection; PRM 1954.3.24) on display in the exhibition. Note the reproduction of William Hodges' well-known painting Review of the War Galleys at Tahiti (see note 15). From a colour transparency (slide) taken by Peter Narracott in or after May 1970. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

1970 when mounting the Forster Collection', and goes on to remark how 'it is an obviously appealing technique because, through the labours of J. C. Beaglehole and others, we can draw on much excellent documentary material in order to present an eighteenth-century view of Polynesia' (ibid.).¹⁶ While recognizing that 'it is much more difficult', he argues that it is 'increasingly necessary, because of the present-day pattern of research, to provide also a survey of Polynesian ethnography over 200 years' (ibid.)



Plate 13. View of the permanent display devoted to the Forster collection on the lower gallery (first floor) of the Pitt Rivers Museum; the Tongan section in the foreground, the Marquesan section in the background. From a photograph taken by Malcolm Osman in 2000. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

In his memo of 2 March 1969 quoted above, Gathercole had noted that the aims of the exhibition were ‘to mount displays illustrating both the nature of Oceanic cultures at the time of European contact and the effects of that contact on them’. Arguably, neither of these aims characterize the exhibition as it eventually took shape. Certainly, there seems to have been very little, if anything, in the exhibition about ‘the effects of that contact’, and rather than the displays ‘illustrating ... the nature of Oceanic cultures at the time of European contact’, they illustrated the way in which those cultures were perceived by the European observers at the time of contact. This is not to criticize Gathercole or the exhibition. That the aims changed

as Gathercole researched the collection, the available literature and related materials is just what one would expect. Moreover, as I have just curated an exhibition of a first-voyage collection in which copious use is made of contemporary illustrations and quotations from Joseph Banks’s voyage journal, it would be a bit rich of me to point a finger at Gathercole for taking such an approach.¹⁷

Legacy

The most visible legacy of the exhibition is the permanent display devoted to the Forster collection in the museum’s lower gallery, containing rather fewer objects, and less text, but nevertheless recognizable as a version of the special exhibition (Plate 13). According to Fagg (1971: 2), plans to permanently redisplay the special exhibition were well advanced by July 1971, but I am not yet clear when the decision had been taken. It was a decision for which many are grateful, however, for it has meant that a representative sample of material from the second voyage has continued to be permanently available to the general public as well as visiting researchers.¹⁸

Then there are the related publications. The *Short Guide*, already described, provided the first published transcription of the Forsters’ ‘Catalogue of Curiosities’ and the first publicly available listing of the collection. Less well-known is the booklet by Commander Villiers about Captain Cook himself. Entitled *Captain James Cook: A Tribute* (Villiers 1970), this was published by the museum as a companion to the *Short Guide* in order to provide the non-specialist museum visitor with an accessible introduction to the man and his achievements. Another publication, which may be seen as – in part at least – a by-product of the exhibition, is Adrienne Kaeppler’s article ‘Eighteenth-Century Tonga: New Interpretations of Tongan Society and Material Culture at the Time of Captain Cook’, published in *Man* in 1971 (Kaeppler 1971). The published article was a revised version of a special lecture, given in Oxford on 19 May 1970 in association with the exhibition, that demonstrated how material culture collections, and in particular the Forster collection, can be used to further understandings and interpretations of eighteenth-century Tongan society.

Gathercole’s work on the collection also led to an important paper of his own, ‘The Significance for Polynesian Ethnohistory of the Forster Collection at Oxford University’, presented at a seminar held in Canberra in January 1971.¹⁹ In it Gathercole begins to explicate the ethnohistorical and anthropological significance of Cook-voyage collections in general, and the Forster collection at Oxford in particular, and to grapple with their evidential nature. He attempts to formulate the necessary questions and outline the methodological issues. He stresses the need for careful documentary work (and intelligent use of the contemporary voyage literature) to establish well-provenanced collections that can be used as the basis for comparative work. In turn, he argues, this can lead to the identification of ‘base-line’ assemblages of type specimens. He also anticipates later developments by discussing the collecting process itself and the ‘social and psychological factors’, as well as the individual taste and ‘accident of events’ that affected it. In the last thirty

years, there has been an immense growth in the relevant literature, but much of what Gathercole has to say continues to be pertinent and much more work along the lines he laid out remains to be done. Although he began to prepare the paper for publication, from the time of its original presentation in 1971 until January 2004 it was only available to a few specialists. Its recent publication on the Forster Collection website (Gathercole 2004) has made it available to a much wider public than the original audience in Canberra and the few scholars who have had the benefit of possessing copies of it in the meantime. It is a significant legacy of the exhibition and Gathercole's work on it.

These publications are significant, but they would have paled into insignificance if the publication that was planned had been completed. For, as mentioned above, Gathercole and Kaeppler planned to publish a definitive catalogue of the Forster collection. This prospective catalogue – trailed in the 'Preface' to the *Short Guide* (Gathercole 1970), the museum's annual report (Fagg 1970: 4), and in too many other places to mention without causing embarrassment – would have established the Forster collection as the best-known Cook-voyage collection in the world at the time. Indeed, it would have led to the collection becoming *the* type collection (arguably exactly as, being natural historians, the Forsters would have liked).²⁰ Both Gathercole and Kaeppler, however, moved on to other things: Gathercole moved to Cambridge, and became very involved in – amongst other things – attempts to compile inventories of Pacific artefacts in museum collections (see Specht and Bolton, this volume), while Kaeppler embarked on the work that was to lead to '*Artificial Curiosities*', both the exhibition and the catalogue raisonné (Kaeppler 1978), and beyond. As a result, the project to publish the definitive catalogue of the Forster collection at Oxford was shelved. Of course, much of the work carried out by Gathercole and Kaeppler in identifying the collection, both before and after the exhibition was mounted, found its way into the entries in '*Artificial Curiosities*' and/or, thanks to their help, has since found its way into the entries on the Forster Collection website; which, for the time being at least, must serve as the 'definitive' catalogue.

It should also be remembered that when he embarked on the exhibition, Gathercole was a novice in 'Cook studies'. He had spent the previous ten years in New Zealand, where there are few authenticated Cook-voyage collections, and his work had focused on New Zealand prehistory and what was beginning to be called ethnohistory. When he arrived in Oxford, Gathercole knew little about Cook's voyages or about the eighteenth century. An important legacy of the exhibition, therefore, has been his continuing interest in the subject and his important work on both the Oxford and Cambridge collections,²¹ as well as the inspiration his work has given others.

I should also like to say something about the legacy of '*From the Islands...*' for exhibitions in the Pitt Rivers Museum and elsewhere, but I am not sure I can, as I am not sure the information is available. As Morton and I said of the exhibitions at the Pitt Rivers that followed *Art from the Guinea Coast*, 'those that followed soon after ... were no doubt directly influenced by it, though that direct influence can be assumed to have waned by now' (Coote and Morton 2000: 51). Beyond the Pitt

Rivers Museum *‘From the Islands...’* may have been influential on those who saw it, and thus on the later exhibitions commemorating the bicentenaries, as well as on other ethnographic exhibitions. As things stand, however, I have no evidence on which to draw any conclusions. Much more work needs to be done on the more recent history of museums in general, and of ethnographic displays in particular, before such questions can be tackled.

Finally, the legacy of the exhibition and the work that went into it in 1969 and 1970 is now inextricably bound up with the further work that has been carried out on the Forster collection in the past decade. Since 1994, I have tried to take forward the work that Gathercole began, to make the collection, its documentation and its history accessible to the widest possible public. While in the 1990s and 2000s there are still good reasons to publish conventionally, the internet offers greater opportunities for sharing well-illustrated information widely and quickly. Most recently, in the development of the ‘Pacific Pathways’ project – which allows anyone with access to the internet to add their own texts, images, audio and video clips to the Forster Collection website – it has been possible not just to make illustrated information accessible to the wider community, but also to facilitate the reinterpretation and recontextualization of the Forster collection by, amongst others, Pacific artists.²³ Such developments were not foreseeable thirty years ago, but the work that was done then has made possible what we can do now. In all the recent work on the Forster collection carried out at the museum, Gathercole has been personally, professionally and politically involved. His support has been invaluable.

Conclusion

In the late 1960s Bernard Fagg saw the ‘Cook’ collection as a means to an end, using it to raise the profile of the museum in order to make his – ultimately unrealised – vision of a new museum a possibility. Since 1994 the ‘Cook’ collection has again been a focus for the museum. In part this has been because of its intrinsic interest, but there is no denying that it has also been a good hook on which to hang grant applications; the museum’s ‘Cook-voyage collection’ continues to be a catalyst for museological developments. With Gathercole’s help, the legacy of *‘From the Islands...’* has been reinvested since 1994. The recent success of the Pitt Rivers Museum in securing Designated Status and thus Designation Challenge Fund support, as well as other government grants and research funding from various sources, is due in no small measure to the Forster collection and the work we have been able to do with it recently, thanks to what was done so imaginatively and so efficiently – in such a short space of time – more than thirty years ago.

Appendix

Press Release for '*From the Islands of the South Seas...*'
Prepared by Peter Gathercole, April 1970.

On Friday, 1 May, a special exhibition will open at the Pitt Rivers Museum of an important ethnological collection from the South Pacific, obtained during Capt. Cook's second great voyage of discovery between 1772–5. This collection was obtained by Reinhold Forster and his son George, official scientists on the voyage, and presented by Reinhold to the University of Oxford in 1776 or 1777. He had previously received the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law, on 22 November 1775.

The collection comprises objects from Tahiti, Tonga, New Zealand, Easter and the Marquesas Islands in Polynesia, and New Hebrides and New Caledonia in Melanesia. It consists of weapons, tools, clothing, musical instruments and ornaments, some of which are rare. The most striking object is the mourning dress of barkcloth, decorated with shells and feathers, from Tahiti. About ten of these elaborate garments were brought back to Europe, and five complete examples survive. From the island also came a warrior's cane headdress, as tall as a Guardsman's busby and equally decorative, which is decorated with white, black and yellow feathers. Other rare objects include a whale bone breastplate and wooden breadfruit pounder from Tonga, a piece of barkcloth from Easter Island and a headdress of cock's feathers, pearl- and turtle-shell from the Marquesas. In the New Zealand section are excellent examples of Māori carving, some of which were reproduced in Cook's official account of the Voyage, published in 1777.

The exhibition includes reproductions of numerous maps, drawings and paintings done during the voyage. The majority of the labels comprise quotations from the accounts of Cook, the Forsters and other members of the expedition. The exhibition will remain open for at least six months. It is hoped that it will prove particularly attractive to school parties and other organised groups of visitors, for whom a guide could be provided by prior arrangement.

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NOTES

1. Recent work has made clearer the role of the younger Forster in the acquisition of the collection and its donation to the University of Oxford. Originally housed at the University's Ashmolean Museum, in 1886 the collection was transferred (along with other ethnographic material) to the University's newly founded Pitt Rivers Museum. For what is now known about the collection and its history, see Coote, Gathercole and Meister 2000; see also the Forster Collection website at <www.prm.ox.ac.uk/forster>. For what the Forsters did with the other artefacts they collected on the voyage, see Kaeppler 1998.
2. The museum's copy of this letter, like the other unpublished documents drawn on in this article, is kept in the exhibition file at the museum. This may be consulted on request.
3. So far as I know, no one has yet compiled a comprehensive listing of the relevant exhibitions and publications, and related events and productions; nor is this the place to publish my own, partial, list. Gathercole provided a brief overview in *Pacific Arts Newsletter* (Gathercole 1980), but there is a doctoral thesis waiting to be written on that moment, or series of moments, in the history of the study and presentation of Cook's voyages, their importance and aftermath. Given that it is now not much more than a decade before the commemoration of the 250th anniversaries will begin in 2018, here is a great opportunity for a budding museum ethnographer to carve out a career.
4. As well as the Forster collection, and the recently identified collection from Cook's first voyage – the existence of which was unknown until 2002 (Coote 2004a and 2004b), there are a small number of other objects in the museum's collections that have at one time or another been attributed to Cook's voyages. Research into the provenance and history of these objects continues.
5. For the 'rediscoverer's' initial account of the 'rediscovery', see Kaeppler 1972: 195. For a discussion of what is now known about the circumstances of the manuscript's disappearance and rediscovery, see Coote, Gathercole and Meister 2000: 185.
6. Arguably, the objects given by the Forsters to the University in 1776 are still in the process of becoming 'the Forster collection'. The 1970 exhibition, the permanent display, recent publications and the Forster Collection website have all contributed to its continuing emergence as a highly significant collection.
7. With the change of focus, the exhibition was now in a sense premature, as it was to take place before the bicentenary of the second voyage, which did not set sail from Plymouth until July 1772.
8. It was also presumably around this time that Gathercole submitted his entry for the museum's annual report for the period ending 31 July 1969, in which it is noted that he has 'undertaken a detailed study of the museum's much valued Polynesian collection made by Reinhold Forster on Captain Cook's Second Voyage of Discovery (1772–4), in preparation for a catalogue for the proposed Cook Exhibition planned for 1970' (Fagg 1969: 4).
9. All the information contained in the now out-of-print *Short Guide* is available on the Forster Collection website.
10. It is not possible to reproduce them all here, but they are all accessible on the Forster Collection website.
11. A recent example of the inclusion of botanical specimens in an ethnographic exhibition was provided last year by the presence of a living paper-mulberry tree in *Second Skin*:

Everyday and Sacred Uses of Bark Worldwide, an exhibition held at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. A branch of the tree can be seen in one of the plates illustrating Morwena Stephens's review of the exhibition in the previous issue of this journal (Stephens 2004: 187, Plate 1).

12. The model of the *Endeavour* is just visible at the middle left of Plate 7. The scientific instruments were in the same case.

13. Two pieces that do not form part of the Forster collection were included in the exhibition. A Tahitian breast ornament from the Beasley collection (PRM 1954.3.24; see Plate 12 here) was used as a substitute for the two breast ornaments given by the Forsters that have apparently not survived. A wooden figure from Rapanui (Easter Island) that has long been said – on unknown evidence – to be a representation of Captain Cook himself (PRM 1886.1.1271; see Plate 9 here) was also included in the exhibition. This piece has no association with the Forster collection; presumably the temptation to include it in a 'Cook' exhibition was just too great to resist.

14. Apparently, Gathercole and his colleagues were not aware that the 'Cook collection' had in fact been exhibited separately – rather than 'scattered typologically' – from the time of its transfer from the Ashmolean to the Pitt Rivers in 1886 until its removal from the museum for safe-keeping during the Second World War; see Coote, Knowles, Meister, and Petch 1999: 54, fig. 8; Coote, Gathercole, and Meister 2000: 181, fig. 1.

15. Gathercole refers here to William Hodges' well-known painting *Review of the War Gallies at Tahiti*, a reproduction of which can be seen on display in the exhibition in Plate 12.

16. Gathercole has in mind here Beaglehole's editions of both Cook's and Banks's journals (see Beaglehole (ed.) 1955–74 and Banks 1962); as well as the Forsters' own accounts, which at the time he was writing were only available in their eighteenth-century editions, see George Forster 1777 and Johann Reinhold Forster 1778.

17. The exhibition *Curiosities from the Endeavour: A Forgotten Collection—Pacific Artefacts Given by Joseph Banks to Christ Church, Oxford after the First Voyage* was held at the Captain Cook Memorial Museum, Whitby through the summer of 2004. It comprised a small collection of twenty-three Tahitian and Māori artefacts from Cook's first voyage contextualized by reproductions of some of the works of the artists on the voyage and liberal quotes from Joseph Banks's journal (for the catalogue, see Coote 2004a; see also Coote 2004b).

18. For a brief, critical account of the 'permanent' display, which is however misinformed about its historical and contemporary uniqueness within the museum, see Adams and Thomas 1999: 168.

19. For this paragraph I have drawn on my editor's introduction to the online version of Gathercole's paper (Coote 2004c).

20. In our discussion of *Art from the Guinea Coast*, Morton and I noted the importance of exhibitions and catalogues for establishing the 'canon' of African art (Coote and Morton 2000: 51–2). Similar points can, of course, be made about Pacific art, but with Cook-voyage collections in particular there is also a special interest in establishing earliest attested examples. The importance of the Forster collection at Oxford as a sort of type collection has been stressed by Adrienne Kaeppler a number of times, most recently in her statement that, because of the first-hand nature of its documentation, 'the Oxford Collection is the key to

understanding all collections from the second voyage’ (Kaepler 1998: 88). More specifically, the Māori fern-root beater in the collection (Forster 173; PRM 1886.1.1605) has recently been treated by Helen Leach and Carla Purdue as the type specimen for this artefact (Leach and Purdue 2001).

21. In addition to the works already mentioned, see Gathercole 1976, 1997, 1998 and 1999.

22. For the Pacific Pathways project, go to the Forster Collection website and follow the links.

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‘From the Islands of the South Seas, 1773–4’

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