

**AN INTERIM REPORT ON A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN COLLECTION  
FROM COOK'S FIRST VOYAGE: THE CHRIST CHURCH COLLECTION  
AT THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**

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In *Artificial Curiosities*, her catalogue raisonné of ethnographic objects with a Cook-voyage provenance, Adrienne Kaeppler comments that 'ethnographic specimens that can be traced to Cook's first voyage with any certainty are few' (Kaeppler 1978: 39). In the quarter-century since those words were published, little has changed. While a number of Cook-voyage collections are much better known now than they were then,<sup>1</sup> there is still little that can be traced to the first voyage (1768–1771) with 'any certainty'. Some of the material in the British Museum must have been collected on the first voyage, but there is little significant documentation and the evidence is circumstantial (Kaeppler 1978: 39–42, Gathercole 2004; but see also Newell 2003, Chambers 2003). As things stand, the only well-documented first-voyage collection is that held at the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Kaeppler 1978: 39–40, Gathercole 1998). This was given to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1771 by John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich, who was First Lord of the Admiralty at the time. Crucially, the donation was accompanied by a detailed list that makes it possible to identify the particular pieces in the collection. Given the rarity of such established first-voyage collections, I am pleased to be able to publish here the first account of a small collection of Tahitian and Maori material held at the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum that I believe can be traced to the first voyage, if not as yet with certainty then at least with some confidence.

A detailed account of the collection and its history is in preparation. As it may take some time to complete, however, I have sought to publish this interim report here, so as to bring the existence of the collection to the attention of the wider museum and research community. I intend to provide a fuller account of the collection and its history, here or elsewhere, in the future. In the meantime, full details of what is known about each item in the collection may be found in the relevant entries in the Museum's online, and regularly updated, database at <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases.html>, while colour images of each item may be found at <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/bankscollection.html>. In addition, from March to October 2004 23 of the 29 pieces in the collection will be on display at the Captain Cook Memorial Museum in Whitby in a special exhibition entitled 'Curiosities from the Endeavour'.

Although held at the Pitt Rivers Museum, the collection actually belongs to Christ Church, the Oxford college to which I believe it was given by the naturalist and patron of science and exploration Joseph Banks (1743–1820; Plate 1), who famously accompanied Cook on the first voyage. That Banks made collections of 'artificial' as well as natural curiosities is well known. In addition to this newly discovered collection, there are, for example, the Banks-associated materials in the British



*Plate 1: Portrait of Sir Joseph Banks by Benjamin West (1738–1820); painted 1771–72; oil on canvas, 2340 x 1600 mm. Photograph by Andy Weekes, 2003; © Lincolnshire County Council, Usher Gallery. The cloak Banks is wearing may well be that reproduced in Plate 3.*

Museum, the Pennant collection in Cambridge (which is thought to have been given to Thomas Pennant by Banks; see Gathercole 1998: 110–11, Tanner 1999: 3), and the Banks collection in Stockholm (Rydén 1965); though in all these cases identifying on which voyage individual pieces were obtained is well-nigh impossible, for Banks is known to have acquired much additional material from those who went on Cook's second (1772–75) and third (1776–80) voyages (Kaepler 1998: 39–42).

From 1760 to 1765 Banks had been an undergraduate at Christ Church, where he made a number of good friends, including in particular his fellow student John Parsons (1742–85), with whom he went botanizing both during and after his Oxford days. After further study in London and Edinburgh, Parsons returned to Christ Church in 1767 to take up the newly-established post of Lee's Reader, funded by a bequest from Dr Matthew Lee (1695–1755), as well as a University Lectureship in Anatomy. One of his tasks as Lee's Reader was to oversee the completion and running of the 'Anatomy School' at Christ Church, the centre for scientific teaching (anatomy, physics, botany, etc.) in the University until the creation of the University Museum in the mid-19th century (Sinclair and Ross-Smith 1950: 37). According to Banks's biographer, Harold B. Carter, Banks visited Parsons at Christ Church in January 1768 (Carter 1988: 54), and the two friends are known to have corresponded at least until this time (unfortunately, the present whereabouts of any surviving correspondence from after 1768 is not known). No doubt they met again after the voyage when Joseph Banks, and his friend, colleague, and companion on Cook's voyage Daniel Solander (1736–88), were given honorary degrees by the University on 21st November 1771. Both Parsons and the Anatomy School would have been well established at Christ Church by then, and it may thus have been as a result of this visit to his old college that Banks made the donation.<sup>2</sup> And I am confident that he did indeed make such a donation, for on 16th January 1773

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Plate 2: Tahitian pounder, *penu*, of black basalt; 155 mm high; PRM 1887.1.391. The 'Dr Lee's Trustees, Ch. Ch.' label can be seen clearly, to which has been added in ink the words 'University Museum', from whence the pounder entered the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum. Photograph by Malcolm Osman, 2003; © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

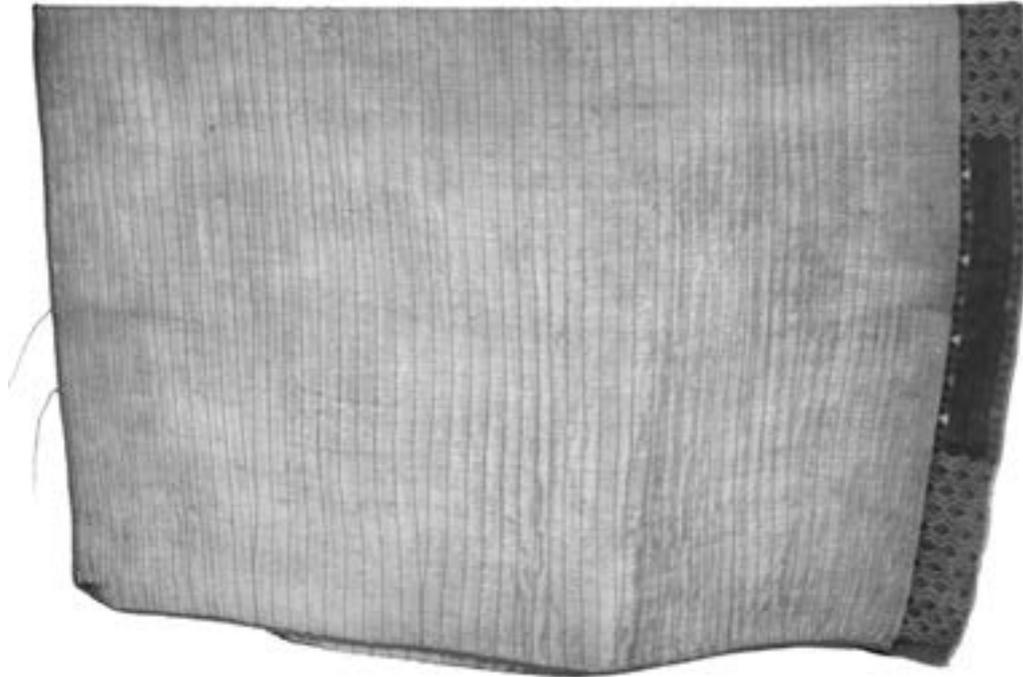


another friend of Banks, the classical scholar and Recorder of Chester, Thomas Falconer (1738–1792), wrote to him from Chester, remarking: 'I was highly entertained at Oxford with a sight of some curiosities you sent from Otaheita & new Zealand'.<sup>3</sup> Falconer does not specify that he saw the 'curiosities' at Christ Church, but his comment may be taken as *prima facie* evidence that Banks had sent a collection to Oxford by 16th January 1773. Thus we have evidence that Banks sent a first-voyage collection to Oxford

and we have at the Pitt Rivers Museum a body of material from Tahiti and New Zealand that was formerly held at Christ Church and that has all the characteristics of a first-voyage collection. It seems safe to conclude that the collection in question was given by Banks to Christ Church after the first voyage.

The collection, numbering 29 objects, entered the Pitt Rivers Museum in two parts. The first part comprises 19 objects (12 from Tahiti and seven from New Zealand), all of which were already on loan to the University Museum when the Pitt Rivers Museum was first founded as a sub-department of it in 1884. Along with other ethnographic material already in the University Museum, these 19 objects were integrated into the Pitt Rivers collections without being formally accessioned, though a partial list was drawn up at an unknown, but early, date. The 19 objects had been loaned by Christ Church to the University Museum on its foundation in 1860, along with the college's extensive anatomical and physiological collections. Each item was labelled 'Dr Lee's Trustees, Ch. Ch.' (see Plate 2); Dr Lee's Trustees being the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, who had legal responsibility for the Lee Readership and the related collections.

The second part of the collection comprises 10 artefacts (five each from Tahiti and New Zealand) recorded as having been transferred to the Pitt Rivers Museum from Christ Church in 1886, possibly via the University Museum and/or the Ashmolean Museum (the records are unclear). At the time, they were thought to be North American and to have come from the collection of Dr Charles A. Pope of St Louis, Missouri, whose son John O'Fallon Pope was at Christ Church from 1868 to 1871.<sup>4</sup> The artefacts were quickly identified by the Museum's first Curator Henry



*Plate 3: Maori cloak, kaitaka, of Phormium tenax with a taniko border and dog-skin strips (not visible); 1780 mm x 1270 mm (only one half of the cloak is shown here); PRM 1886.21.20. Photograph by Malcolm Osman, 2003; © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.*

Balfour as being Polynesian in origin, but all connection with Banks and the other Christ Church material seems to have been lost. Indeed, it was not until my recent ‘discovery’ of the ‘Dr Lee’s Trustees’ component of the Banks collection that the true origins of this other part of the collection were appreciated. Until then it had been a puzzle how Dr Pope, whose acquisition of North American material is well documented, had acquired such obviously early Pacific material; now the question was why the material had ever been ascribed to him. What I surmise is that the unknown person who found the 10 items at Christ Church in 1886 knew about Dr Pope’s collection of North American material that had been handed over recently and quite reasonably assumed that this additional ‘ethnographic’ material also came from his collection. The fact that the four pieces of Tahitian barkcloth and the piece of matting in this part of the collection were all labelled ‘North America’ supports this.

There are other grounds for assigning these 10 additional pieces to the Banks collection. First, like the material on loan from ‘Dr Lee’s Trustees’, they are all quite clearly early pieces that show no evidence of contact or post-contact techniques, styles, or materials. Secondly, one of the pieces of barkcloth has embedded in it small black feathers that appear to have come from the breast ornament on loan from ‘Dr Lee’s Trustees’.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, without the second part the collection would feel incomplete. This is difficult to explain, but without the two cloaks and the three belts,



*Plate 4: Tahitian breast ornament (gorget), taumi, of cane, plant fibre, sennit, shark-teeth, feathers, dog-hair, and pearl-shell; 510 mm wide; PRM 1887.1.392. Photograph by Malcolm Osman, 2003; © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.*

as well as the barkcloth and matting, it would feel like a *partial* collection; the cloaks and the belts, in particular, help to 'round' it out, as it were, and make it feel more like a Cook-voyage collection. As with a number of other Cook-voyage collections, this collection can be seen as typological in structure and to have been selected so as to provide examples of different types of object: for example, four types of Tahitian barkcloth of different thicknesses and colours, three types of Maori belt of different widths, and one example of each type of the range of Maori cleavers. Finally, it now seems extremely likely that one of the Maori cloaks in this part of the collection (Plate 3) is the one Banks is wearing in the well-known portrait of him by Benjamin West (Plate 1).<sup>6</sup> Taken together, these factors seem to establish that the Tahitian and Maori materials once ascribed to Pope in fact form part of the collection given to Christ Church by Banks 100 years earlier.

Having outlined the history of the collection and my reasons for assigning it to Banks and to Cook's first voyage, I now briefly describe each piece.

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The first part of the collection (i.e. that recorded as being on loan from 'Dr Lee's Trustees') comprises 12 artefacts from Tahiti and seven from New Zealand. The Tahitian material comprises (in accession number order):<sup>7</sup>

PRM 1887.1.10: adze blade, *faoa*, of black basalt; 175 mm long, 60 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.378: shark-hook; of wood, with a separate point (also of wood), bound with sennit; 355 mm long.

PRM 1887.1.380: canoe baler, *tata*, of wood; 410 mm long, 145 mm wide (see Oliver 1974: 199, fig. 8.7).

PRM 1887.1.382: head-rest, *tuarua*, of wood; now badly broken; 292 mm long, 120 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.383: barkcloth beater, *i'e*, of wood; 330 mm long, 38 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.384, 1887.1.385, 1887.1.386: three barkcloths, '*ahu*'; currently unlocated.<sup>8</sup>

PRM 1887.1.390: chisel, *tohi*, of bone set in a wooden handle bound with sennit; 210 mm long.

PRM 1887.1.391: pounder, *penu*, of black basalt; 155 mm high (Plate 2).

PRM 1887.1.392: breast ornament (or gorget), *taumi*, of cane, plant fibre, sennit, shark-teeth, feathers, dog-hair, and pearl-shell; 510 mm wide (Plate 4).

PRM 1903.130.20: nose-flute, *vivo*, of bamboo; 413 mm long, 344 mm maximum diameter.

The Maori material comprises:

PRM 1887.1.379: fish-hook, of wood with a bone point and attached cord, bound with plant fibre; 180 mm long (excluding cord) (Plate 5).

PRM 1887.1.381: canoe baler, *tihuru*, of wood; with *manaia* forms on the handle and end and four indigenous repairs made with *Phormium tenax*; 500 mm long, 320 mm wide, 145 mm high.

PRM 1887.1.387: cleaver, *patu paraoa*, of whalebone; 478 mm long, 94 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.388: cleaver, *patu*, of wood; 365 mm long, 100 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.389: cleaver, *kotiate*, of wood, in the form of a 'figure-of-eight'; 380 mm long, 130 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.393: cleaver, *wahaika*, of wood, 'crescent'-shaped; 440 mm long, 100 mm wide.

PRM 1887.1.714: cleaver, *patu onewa*, of basalt; 343 mm long, 100 mm wide.

The second part of the collection (previously erroneously associated with Dr Pope) comprises five artefacts from Tahiti and five from New Zealand. The Tahitian material comprises:

PRM 1886.21.16: barkcloth, '*ahu*', thin, cross-ribbed, dyed brown; 1900 x 1920 mm.

PRM 1886.21.17: barkcloth, '*ahu*', of medium thickness, yellowish with a (deliberate?) splattering of brown spots; 2610 x 3040 mm.

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Plate 5: Maori fish-hook of bone, wood, and plant fibre; 180 mm long (excluding cord); PRM 1887.1.379. Photograph by Malcolm Osman, 2003; © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



PRM 1886.21.18: barkcloth, *'ahu*, thick, felted, lightly stained red on one side; 2070 x 1040 mm. It is in this barkcloth that some small black feathers, believed to come from the Tahitian breast ornament (PRM 1887.1.392), have become embedded.

PRM 1886.21.29: barkcloth, *'ahu*, thin, finely ribbed, white; 1220 x 3450 mm.

PRM 1945.11.130: matting, of plant-fibre (bark?), fringed along one long edge.

The Maori material comprises:

PRM 1886.21.2: belt, *tatua*, of *Phormium tenax*, finely woven, with plaited tying cords, the edges stitched with strips of dog-skin; 1800 mm long (excluding ties), 130 mm wide.

PRM 1886.21.3: belt, *tatua*, of *Phormium tenax*, woven in two colours, with plaited tying cords; 1360 mm long (excluding ties), 55 mm wide.

PRM 1886.21.4: belt, *tatua*, of *Phormium tenax*, woven, with plaited tying cords; 1250 mm (excluding ties), 75 mm wide.

PRM 1886.21.19: cloak, *kahu-waero*, of *Phormium tenax* with a deep *taniko* border, decorated with white dog-hair tassels and a *taniko* border; 1300 x 1030 mm (Plate 6; see also Roth 1923: 94 (fig. 75), 95, 122, and pl. xviii opp. 96). I am informed by Patricia Wallace that this is apparently the only extant example of this highly valued type of chief's cloak.

PRM 1886.21.20: cloak, *kaitaka*, of *Phormium tenax* with a *taniko* border edged in places with narrow strips of dog-skin; 1780 x 1270 mm (Plate 3; see also Roth 1923: 63, 70 (fig. 48), 120, and pl. iv (top)). It is this cloak that I am suggesting is the one Banks is wearing in West's portrait (Plate 1).

Few of the pieces in this collection were previously known to scholars and their history not at all. So far as I am aware, only three of the pieces have been published



Plate 6: Maori cloak, *kahu-waero*, of *Phormium tenax* with a deep *taniko* border, decorated with white dog-hair tassels; 1300 mm x 1030 mm (PRM 1886.21.19). Photograph by Malcolm Osman, 2003; © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

previously or even referred to in the literature. As indicated in the descriptions, of the Tahitian artefacts, only the canoe baler appears to have been published, and then only as a line drawing (Oliver 1974: 199, fig. 8.7). Of the Maori artefacts, only the two cloaks appear to have been published. They were included by H. Ling Roth in his account of *The Maori Mantle*, where they appear as his numbers 50 and 12 respectively (Roth 1923; see above for details). At the time I began to research the collection in 2002, only the Tahitian barkcloth beater and nose-flute and the two Maori cloaks were on display, though there is evidence that some of the other pieces had been exhibited in the past. Interestingly, an old Museum label for the nose-flute says that it was collected on Cook's first voyage, though without mentioning Banks. This is one of a number of tantalising 'echoes' of what I think might be some earlier awareness on the part of earlier members of the Museum's staff of aspects of the history of the collection.

My research into the collection and its history—including these 'echoes'—continues. Further documentary evidence may await discovery, but my efforts will be

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concentrated on generating detailed descriptions of the individual artefacts, for which I hope to be able to continue to draw on the expertise of visiting researchers and colleagues around the world, and in trying to link the individual artefacts to specific passages in the extensive voyage literature. One other area of research that seems likely to be fruitful is in making comparisons with other established Cook-voyage collections. It will be particularly rewarding to compare this collection with the other established first-voyage collection in Cambridge, with other Banks-associated collections, as well as with such established second-voyage collections as the Forster Collection at the Pitt Rivers. Such comparisons will involve not only comparing individual pieces, but also reflecting on the composition of the collections and the patterns of donation that seem to emerge. For example, previous understandings of the history of the Forster Collection at Oxford (see Coote, Gathercole, and Meister 2000) must be revised in the light of this new knowledge that when the Forsters gave their collection to the University in 1776, there was a significant, if smaller, collection in the city already.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>For example, an illustrated catalogue of the extensive second- and third-voyage collections at the Institut für Ethnologie at the University of Göttingen was published in 1998 (Hauser-Schäublin and Krüger 1998), while a web site devoted to the Forster collection from Cook's second voyage at the Pitt Rivers Museum was launched in 2001 at [www.prm.ox.ac.uk/forster](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/forster) (see also Coote, Gathercole, and Meister 2000).

<sup>2</sup>Banks may have given the collection jointly with Solander, with whom he often shared credit for work and collections associated with the voyage. Given the lack of any further evidence, however, it seems safer to regard Banks as the sole donor. I have yet to explore the possibility

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that Banks gave natural history, or anatomical, specimens to Christ Church at the same time or later, but I am not aware of any evidence that he did.

<sup>3</sup>The original of this letter, which I have yet to examine, is in the Banks Correspondence in the Library of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (B.C.: I.32), while a copy exists in the Dawson Turner Copies at the Natural History Museum, London (D.T.C.: I.49–50). So far as I know, the first published reference to Falconer's account of having seen Banks' Tahitian and Maori artefacts in Oxford is in Warren W. Dawson's *Calendar* of Banks' correspondence, where the contents of the letter are recorded (Dawson 1958: 318–19) and it is noted that Falconer 'has seen at Oxford some of the curiosities brought by B. from Otahiete and New Zealand'. That previous students of the collections made on Cook's voyages missed Dawson's reference to the letter is understandable, but it is very puzzling that no one seems to have paid much if any attention to the quotation from the letter in Bernard Smith's highly influential *European Vision and the South Pacific* (Smith 1960: 87).

<sup>4</sup>For an account of the Pope collection, see the dissertation by Lindsey Richardson (2001) who has kindly shared the results of her work with me. Further work on Pope's North American collection and its history is being carried out by my colleague Laura Peers.

<sup>5</sup>If that is their source, it would not be at all surprising. It is known that barkcloth was used to wrap other ethnographic material. The breast ornament may have been wrapped in that piece of barkcloth to protect it on its journey to Oxford, or perhaps even earlier to protect it on its journey from Tahiti to England. It may even have been given to Banks in that way in Tahiti, as it is known that gifts were presented wrapped in barkcloth.

<sup>6</sup>None of the other artefacts to be seen in the painting is in the Banks collection at Oxford. The Tahitian war helmet is assumed to be the one in the British Museum (Kaepler 1978: 128). The present whereabouts of the other items are uncertain.

<sup>7</sup>The accession numbers were assigned retrospectively. I will attempt to explain the apparent inconsistencies in a future publication. In giving Tahitian and Maori names for types of object, I have followed, respectively, the usages in D'Alleva 1997 and Starzecka (ed.) 1996. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to reproduce macrons on the Maori terms, for which I apologise.

<sup>8</sup>There are four barkcloths in the second part of the collection. It may therefore be that these three barkcloths are not actually missing but were somehow accessioned twice. For various reasons, I continue to doubt this, but trust that further research will resolve the matter.

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