

THE OCTOBER MEETING

CAPTAIN COOK

A talk by Harry Ward - Reported by Merril Lilley

The first indoor meeting of the autumn was held at St. Mary's Parish Centre on Monday, 24th October, with a talk on Captain Cook, an appropriate topic for 'the year of the sea'.

Our speaker began by saying that, in his opinion, Cook was as a seafarer, without doubt, 'the best thing to come out of Britain', a combination of cartographer, explorer and seaman, the best the world had ever seen.

James Cook was born on 27th October 1728 in a little village in Yorkshire. When he knew he wanted to go to sea his father arranged for him to go to Whitby to a ship owner called Walker, who took him in and taught him his trade. Young Cook worked on several ships, some taking coal from Newcastle to London. He worked his way up to the position of mate, and could have become the captain of a Whitby trawler. However, he turned this down and in 1775 he went to Wapping and joined the Royal Navy as an able seaman.

As his talk continued Mr. Ward gradually built up on some display boards a series of pictures to illustrate his story. He also told many anecdotes which added interest to the topic. For instance, in the year Cook joined the navy, 1775, his father had a cottage built. This cottage now stands in Melbourne, Australia, where it was transported brick by brick. In return they sent back 30 cases of granite used on the site where the cottage once stood.

In the navy Cook did well. His captains thought highly of him and he became a master, responsible for navigation, charts, stores and the ship's log. He went to Trinity House for his interview for the post. On a voyage to Canada he charted the

St. Lawrence and was mentioned in despatches by General Wolfe. These charts were sent to London to the Admiralty. They were published there and were still in use 120 years later.

When he got home Cook married Elizabeth Banks and, despite Cook's frequent absence from home, the marriage produced six children. Sadly, James and Elizabeth never had any grandchildren. Two of their sons were drowned at sea in tragic accidents when they were in their twenties.

Cook got his first command of the *Endeavour* and set off on his first voyage to the southern hemisphere. Some maps had been made by a cartographer called Dalrymple and the Admiralty wanted to send an expedition to find out if an undiscovered land mass existed. There were other reasons. Members of the Royal Society wanted to observe the transit of Venus and Joseph Banks, one of the party, wanted to collect botanical specimens.

The *Endeavour*, together with the *Adventure*, sailed for the Pacific in 1768, and proceeded, by way of Madeira, Rio, Tierra del Fuego, Cape Horn and Tahiti, to the South Pacific. They saw the transit of Venus, then headed west and reached New Zealand where they landed in several places, naming them and making charts wherever they went, the South Island, Queen Charlotte Sound, Cook Strait, Stuart Island. Striking west they reached Australia and landed at Botany Bay, (named by Banks who collected a profusion of plants). Sailing north they reached the Barrier Reef and later returned home via Indonesia and St. Helena. Having lost no men from scurvy

in all this time Cook now lost a third of his crew from typhoid on the homeward voyage.

Cook's second voyage was on the *Resolution* in 1772. This expedition explored Antarctic waters and the New Hebrides, going further south into the ice than any other ship. Once again they visited Tahiti, New Zealand, Tasmania and Easter Island, always discovering, charting and naming. Returning home via South America and South Georgia they saw an abundance of whales. On his return Cook received great acclaim and was made Captain of Greenwich Hospital. He took time to write up all his voyages to date.

In 1778 the *Resolution* set sail again, in company with the *Discovery*. They went to Tasmania, New Zealand, the Friendly Islands, Tahiti and Christmas Island, charting, as ever, as they went. Then they headed for Oregon, followed by Alaska and explored the North Pacific and attempted to find a north-west passage.

However, this was to be Cook's last voyage. Returning to Tahiti he was killed there in an incident with the natives and his ship returned home without him.

The talk lasted for the whole evening, with the customary break for refreshments and raffle, now organised by Adeline Reidy. Harry Ward infected us all with his enthusiasm for his subject. His told countless anecdotes and provided a comprehensive collection of pictures and maps to illustrate his talk. He ended by showing us his own collection of rare stamps associated with Captain Cook.



An offering before Captain Cook in the Sandwich Islands



View of Christmas Harbour, in Kerguelen's Land



A view of Karakakooa in Owyhee



The Resolution in Christmas Sound