

## An Australian Link to the Bells – Captain James Cook



One of the greatest **navigators** of his age, Captain James Cook paved the way for the English settlement of what we now know as Australia.

Born a farmer's son in Yorkshire, England he began as an apprentice in 1745 at the age of 16 in a fishing village grocery shop. He didn't enjoy working in a shop but came to love the sea and instead became an apprentice in the merchant navy in 1747.

After his three year apprenticeship he progressed towards commanding a merchant ship until 1755 when he enlisted in the British Royal Navy.

He was quickly promoted, showing talent for **navigation**, **surveying** and **cartography**, eventually coming to the notice of the **Admiralty** (the department of the British government that once had control over all naval affairs).

In 1766, the **Royal Society** (full name is the **Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge**) hired Cook to take a group of scientists to the Pacific Ocean to observe and record the **transit of Venus** across the Sun. A transit of Venus takes place when the planet Venus passes directly between the Sun and the Earth. During a transit, Venus can be seen as a small black disc moving across the face of the Sun. The astronomical observation of this event was used to calculate the distance of the Earth from the Sun.

Cook was given command of the Barque (a kind of sailing ship) **Endeavour** and sailed from England in 1768, rounded the southern tip of Africa and continued westward across the Pacific to arrive in **Tahiti** (an island in the South Pacific) on April, 1769, where the observations were to be made on June 3.

Having completed the Transit observations, Cook sailed again to attempt the second mission for the voyage given to him by the Admiralty. This was to search the South Pacific for signs of the suspected great southern continent of **Terra Australis** (*southern land* in latin).

This was the supposed continent once thought to exist in the South Pacific in order to balance the land area of Europe and Asia in the northern hemisphere. Cook showed it did not exist on his second great voyage, 1772–5. However Australia derived its name from this imaginary land mass thanks mostly to **Matthew Flinders** whose book of maps of his voyages around Australia from 1801 was titled *Terra Australis*.

Cook reached New Zealand on 6 October, 1769, only the second European to do so after the Dutch seafarer **Abel Tasman** in 1642. After mapping the complete New Zealand coastline he headed west to **Van Dieman's Land** (now called Tasmania) but the ship was blown northward to the southeastern corner of Australia sighting the coast on 10 April 1770.

Cook continued north and anchored in a shallow inlet on April 29. Here Cook and his crew made their first landfall on the Australian continent and claimed the east coast of Australia for the British.

Cook first called this Stingray Bay but later changed it to Botanist Bay and finally Botany Bay after the unique specimens collected by the botanists on board, Joseph Banks, Daniel Solander and Herman Spöring. The specimens collected at this time provided the first European scientific recording of Australian plants and wildlife.

He continued north but ran aground on a shoal of the Great Barrier Reef on June 11, 1770 seriously damaging the *Endeavour*. After making repairs on the beach for seven weeks, the voyage continued north past New Guinea and up to Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia) for further repairs, then on back to England.

During his voyage on the *Endeavour*, Cook applied the new naval policy of supplementing the diet of the crew and officers with citrus fruit such as lemons and limes as well as sauerkraut (cooked cabbage) to prevent the disease called **skurvy** caused by the lack of **vitamin C**. The introduction of this policy was thanks to the work of naval doctor **James Lund**, who in 1747, showed that scurvy, which killed many sailors at this time, could be cured and prevented by the eating of such foods. This innovation in naval medicine ensured that not a single man was lost to scurvy during Cook's first voyage which was a practically unheard of achievement in 18<sup>th</sup> century long-distance sea faring.

On his return to London in 1771 the bells of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the bells of the Admiralty, rang out to welcome back this hero of the Age of Discovery. These are the bells you can see on level 4 here at the Swan Bells. Imagine what it would have been like to have been away at sea for three years, much of it in completely uncharted waters.



Captain James Cook's First Voyage.

He sailed again in 1772, this time on His Majesty's Ship *Resolution* on his second voyage in which he **circumnavigated** the globe taking him south of the **Antarctic Circle** and returning to England in 1775.



Captain James Cook's Second Voyage.

Once more in 1776 he set sail on the *Resolution* and became the first European to visit the Hawaiian Islands and continued on to explore the west coast of North America up to Alaska. He returned to Hawaii in 1779 where he was killed during a skirmish with native Hawaiians.



Captain James Cook's Third Voyage.

The voyages of Captain James Cook added a huge amount to the existing European knowledge of the geography, biology and peoples of the Pacific Ocean as well as providing the first step of the English settlement of eastern Australia.



**Link to the Curriculum Framework**

**Learning Area:** Society and Environment

**Strand:** Time, Continuity and Change

**Substrand:** Time and Change

**TCC 3.1** The student understands that there have been significant events, people and ideas in communities and societies at particular times in the past.

**Substrand:** Understanding the Past

**TCC 3.2** The student understands that at particular times there are various factors which result in change.