



Captain Cook, the World's Greatest Navigator

By John Hancox



Andrew Phippen, a volunteer at the Australian National Maritime Museum, talked to a gathering of Members and guests at the Squadron on 26 May about the life and adventures of Captain James Cook. As only Andrew can, he told Cook's story with a flair for captivating his audience that kept guests enthralled until the tragic end of Cook's life in Hawaii.

Born 27 October 1728 in a small village in Yorkshire, his father was a farm worker. James was the second of eight children. At age 17, he moved to the coast near Whitby and found work with a coal merchant.

Cook joined the British merchant navy as a teenager and joined the Royal Navy in 1755. His skills as a seaman and leader were quickly recognised. As a result, he was elevated through the ranks. He saw action in the Seven Years' War and subsequently surveyed and mapped much of the entrance to the Saint Lawrence River during the siege of Quebec which brought him to the attention of the British Admiralty and the Royal Society. This acclaim came at a crucial moment in his career and the direction of British overseas exploration and led to his commission in 1766 as commander of *HMS Endeavour* for the first of three Pacific voyages.

He became famous for his voyages between 1768 and 1779 during which he achieved the first recorded European contact with the eastern coastline of Australia (which he mapped skilfully), the Hawaiian Islands and the first recorded circumnavigation of New Zealand.

In these voyages, Cook sailed thousands of miles across largely uncharted areas of the globe. He mapped lands from New Zealand to Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean in greater detail and on a scale not previously charted by Western explorers. He surveyed and named features, recorded islands and coastlines on European maps for the first time. He displayed a combination of seamanship, superior surveying and cartographic skills, physical courage and an ability to lead men in adverse conditions.

He was attacked and killed in 1779 during his third exploratory voyage in the Pacific while attempting to detain Kalani'opu'u, the ruling chief of the island of Hawaii to reclaim a small cutter taken from one of his ships after his crew took wood from a burial ground.

Cook left a legacy of scientific and geographical knowledge that influenced his successors well into the 20th century, and numerous memorials worldwide have been dedicated to him. Cook married Elizabeth Batts in 1762 and together they had six children, all of whom died before they could marry and have children of their own. His wife lived until age 93 having earlier burnt all of Cook's papers. Such a tragic ending to an amazing career.