

— shows that Hough either has not listed or rather — as I suspect from a detailed reading of text and sources — not consulted as thoroughly or as widely as he might have done amongst the rich and complex literature which now comprises 'Cook scholarship'.

Hough's is essentially a conservative rather than an interpretive or revisionist presentation of Cook's life and achievements. His grasp of the impact or significance of Cook's landings throughout the Pacific alone does not impress. After all whose 'culture' was being discovered, raped or preserved? He consistently mis-spells the names of two main characters in the story, sometimes offers long since discarded or worn-out interpretations of characters and events and is not always comfortable with Pacific place names and usage.

Since 1788 every couple of decades, on average, a book or significant biographical essay has appeared on Cook. No biographer of standing can neglect the prior writings on his subject. Is Cook such an icon of history that only the Antipodean can attempt to interpret him satisfactorily? Beaglehole will always remain the yardstick against which standard conventional biographies will be measured. We await with some anticipation the revisionist (perhaps demythologizing) antidote that puts Cook into the undoubtedly important place he has in Pacific and, thus, New Zealand history.

MICHAEL E. HOARE

Police Centennial Museum, Wellington

Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment: Useful knowledge and polite culture. By John Gascoigne. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. 324 pp. Price: \$A49.95. ISBN 0-521-45077-2.

VIEWED FROM one perspective Joseph Banks had all those characteristics typical of the English landed class. Following a period at Eton and as a gentleman commoner at Oxford, he went on his own equivalent of the Grand Tour before taking up the life of the 'wealthy unemployed'. With substantial revenues from estates in Lincolnshire, Kent and Derbyshire, he maintained a central London house as well as one at Heston on the outskirts of the city. In the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in common with many of his class, he sought to increase the revenues from his estates by a programme of steady improvement, including drainage, enclosure and some of the new forms of crop rotation. He was very much the pillar of county society, accepting the obligations as well as the authority, which that conveyed.

Socially and politically Banks was a conservative, sharing some of the rural gentry's suspicion of central government politicians. Although pressed on occasion, he never entered Parliament, nor accepted positions which would make him beholden to government, believing that this would compromise his scientific activities. However he embraced all the social and political perquisites of power, presiding over local county society, becoming closely involved in its administration and militia and deploying considerable reserves of patronage.

In common with many other landed gentry he was a Tory in social and political terms. He was a strong supporter of the monarchy and the established church, largely for reasons of social order. By the 1790s he was a Tory in the Pitt mould (although he never had much

time for the younger Pitt as a person), resolutely set against the excesses of the French Revolution, believing that reform was inappropriate. He was also involved in the work of local patriotic societies in London and Lincolnshire.

This is not the Joseph Banks which most readers will be familiar with. Twentieth-century biographies of him have concentrated on his fame derived from Cook's first voyage, his reputation as a natural historian and President of the Royal Society, and his role in the foundation and early years of the penal colony in New South Wales. John Gascoigne's book is not strictly a biography, but it is the first work to evaluate properly Banks in terms of the milieu and changes of this critical period in the history of British science. The unwieldy, undocumented and unfocused hagiography by Carter, published in 1988, established the extraordinary range of Banks's activities, but it never assessed him in terms of the scientific traditions, culture or paradigms of the day. Gascoigne establishes Banks as very much a transitional figure bridging the gap between the period when the Royal Society exemplified the unity of science and the possibility of individuals embracing all its significant elements, and the nineteenth-century fragmentation of science into separate, specialized and increasingly professionalized disciplines, largely beyond the comprehension of lay individuals.

Gascoigne shows that Banks's attachment to natural history, his first love, derived partly from his landed background. In his fascination for collecting rare and unique species he embodied much of the eighteenth-century archetype of the virtuoso. However, although suspicious of too much abstract theory he had an intolerance for unsystematic collecting and undisciplined curiosity, latching on to the Linnean taxonomy with avidity, since it took botany in particular beyond the realms of the herbalist into that of the empirical sciences.

It was in his interest in the varieties of human society that Banks was most obviously a creature of the enlightenment. No doubt the voyages to Newfoundland and the Pacific shaped his perspectives in this respect, moving him beyond the characteristic, polite, eighteenth-century fascination with antiquities to a more anthropological approach to non-European societies. His voyage around the world and dominance over British exploration until his death in 1820 sharpened his sense of the 'great map of mankind' and although he was never drawn to the systematic theorizing of the German and French anthropologists he did view the study of human species as a new and legitimate natural science.

Banks remained a scientist in the Baconian mould. One of the great strengths of Gascoigne's book is that it locates his concern for improvement in the context of his class and the political ideology of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. The principal role of science was to serve utilitarian purposes and Banks regarded the Royal Society as the institution responsible for maintaining and articulating this tradition. In Britain and throughout the empire science would play its part in increasing trade and improving the condition of life. Gradualism was the approach appropriate to scientific, social and political change. Radical theories and remedies were to be avoided: the excesses of the French Revolution were held up as a counter model. Seen in this light Banks was a social and scientific conservative, but as this fascinating book shows, in many respects the great scientific patron laid the institutional, political and attitudinal groundwork for some of the great scientific advances in the years after his death.

DAVID MACKAY

Victoria University of Wellington