

recent acquisitions

TRIO OF COOK COLLECTABLES

Captain James Cook's renowned skills as a navigator, astronomer and mathematician are well illustrated in the Museum's latest booty of Cook *realia*. A magnifying glass, a plane table frame used for surveying and two embroidered maps were recently successfully snapped up at a Christie's London auction for a total of \$201,000.

A dedication to the astronomer, William Bayly, who sailed on the second and third of Cook's three Pacific journeys is inscribed on the ornate silver case of the tortoiseshell-mounted magnifier. While the script asserts that the magnifier was a gift from Cook to Bayly, there is a suggestion that the glass may have been purchased by Bayly as a memento when Cook's effects were 'sold before the mast' following his death.

The surveyor's plane table frame with rule and square protractor was a simple, portable and accurate instrument for surveying. Cook, one of the most brilliant navigators of his time, charted the first accurate maps of much of the Pacific region and was a pioneer in adapting military land surveying techniques for naval coastal surveys, in which a plane table was an integral tool.

Cook's three Pacific voyages are delicately tracked through both hemispheres in the pair of late eighteenth-century silk embroidered maps. Embroidered maps became increasingly popular in Britain as more of the world was accurately charted. The maps are both an intimate celebration of Cook and a reminder of the limited avenues of devotional expression open to the women who were left waiting at home.

LATE GEORGE III BEEF WOOD AND TULIPWOOD BANDED PEMBROKE WORK TABLE



Photo: Dragi Markovic

Discovered in a corner of an English country residence, this unusual winged work table is a quizzical piece in Australia's colonial cultural heritage.

The conundrum commences with a cracking clue: a handwritten label pasted to the table's underside by the table's original owner, Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, '*Sent from Botany Bay by Doctor White, Surgeon of the Navy – in Planks of this Table made up in London – Beef Wood*'.

Beef wood was a local name given to *Allocasuarina torulosa* (Forest Oak or Rose She Oak), one of the rarest and most valuable timbers from the new world and native to the northern shores of Port Jackson. How then did a hunk of it arrive back in old Blighty and who was the good doctor?

Dr John White was appointed Surgeon-General to the First Fleet in 1787. Born in County Fermanagh, Ireland, White has been called 'Australia's First Irishman'. A competent doctor and able administrator under the most trying circumstances, he was well regarded for his humanity and interest in natural history. His *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* was published in 1790 and is a valuable record of the early settlement at Port Jackson, with descriptions of local exploration, of the Aborigines and flora and fauna. But why did White want to woo Hamond with planks of exotic timber?

Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, Comptroller of the Navy and Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia for three years, had many political connections, having won the King's favour on account of his 'many creditable exploits' in the American War of Independence. In 1786, White was surgeon on board HMS *Irresistible*, one of Sir Andrew Snape Hamond's many commands. Hamond was a keen supporter of White, and when Hamond lobbied for White's appointment to the proposed fleet to Botany Bay his influence carried the day.

A sign of appreciation to a patron, the wood was reincarnated in the neo-classical style popularised by Thomas Sheraton. From Botany Bay, to a prestigious piece in a British parlour, White's intriguing gift is back in the land of its original creation, nestling neatly in the Museum's National Historical Collection.

This article was compiled by Eleanor Palmer from collection notes prepared by the Museum's curators: convict tokens, Rebecca Nason; Cook material, Michelle Hetherington; Pembroke table, Rebecca Nason, Michelle Hetherington and Martha Sear.

CONVICT LOVE TOKENS

When this you see remember me, when I am far from thee
 Athazagoraphobia, the fear of being forgotten or ignored was perhaps a forgivable condition for those banished to an unknown end of the earth. Relegated to hulks and awaiting transportation, many convicts whittled away the time industriously and inventively trying to ease this fear of separation.

By filing down and engraving low denomination copper coins, they worked or paid to give material form to their last words and sorrow. Intended for family members and sweethearts, these 'leaden hearts' or 'postcards before sailing' were painstakingly scratched and stippled in a bid to convey the pain of parting and demonstrate a desperate need to be remembered.

when in captivity time goeth very slow, but free as air to roam now, quick the time doth go

The Museum has purchased three of these rare relics. They are extremely valuable examples of colonial material culture and a tangible record of a convict's own voice.

One of the few examples of items made by, or made for, convicts which have survived, love tokens speak of a convict's own understandings of incarceration and transportation to Australia.

Convict love tokens were made over the duration of the transportation period in New South Wales and Tasmania, with the majority produced during the 1820s and 1830s. Sadly, not all love tokens were cherished as their creators intended, with some examples defaced or destroyed in an effort to remove the 'convict stain'.

These three customised coins offer a poignant, personal insight into the transportation system and are a touching example of how human creativity can survive even against the most daunting odds.



THE INAUGURAL AUSTRALIAN SYMPOSIUM ON

furniture history

Convened by the Furniture History Society and the Friends of the National Museum of Australia.

24-25 March 2007 at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

A two-day symposium devoted to the history of furniture, including influences on style, timber and construction, dating methods, and facts on specific objects. This is the first forum of its kind to focus on Australian furniture.

Presentations from more than sixteen speakers will offer an opportunity to learn more about the subject of furniture history – from a First Fleet table to Chinese cabinet makers, and from screws, locks and metal technology to furniture designed by Ruth Lane-Poole and Walter Burley Griffin, and many other topics.



Registration fee is \$160 per person and includes all sessions and field trips, morning and afternoon teas, lunches, and bus transfers to all field trips. The registration fee also includes a bound set of Symposium papers. An optional Symposium dinner will be held on the night of Saturday 24 March.

For further information see the FHS website www.furniturehistory.org.au or ring Greg Peters and Jim Kennedy on 0414 710 573 or 0418 449 655 respectively.