



Photo: Dean McNicoll

IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

# captain john gore

Can you believe so little is known about the first recorded person in Cook's *Endeavour* journal to shoot a kangaroo? The same person who took command of the *Resolution* after Cook was killed and Clerke had perished from illness? A new donation to the National Museum has provided an opportunity to tell the story of this fascinating maritime explorer, Captain John Gore.

Captain John Gore was born in America, possibly in Virginia, in 1729 or 1730. No record of his birth or baptism has yet been recovered. Little is known about his early years until August 1755 when he joined the *Windsor* at Portsmouth, England, as a midshipman. We know he took his Lieutenant's examination on 13 August 1760 and was appointed Master's mate of the *Dolphin* in 1764 – this was his first voyage around the world. On his second tour of service in the *Dolphin* in 1766, this time under the command of Captain Samuel Wallis, the expedition laid claim to the island of Tahiti.

Captain Gore's service on the *Dolphin* meant he was an ideal crew member for the *Endeavour* voyage in 1768. Cook's official task as commander of the *Endeavour* was to track the transit of Venus. Tahiti was considered the ideal location to perform these observations and there are many references to Gore's role in the observation work. However, Gore was more than just a member of the *Endeavour's* crew: he also has the dubious distinction of being considered the first recorded person on the expedition to shoot and kill a person of Maori descent, after an altercation over a piece of cloth on 9 November 1769. Gore is also recorded as being the first person on the expedition to shoot a kangaroo for scientific research. Sir Joseph Banks records this event in his *Endeavour* journal of 14 July 1770.

After the *Endeavour* returned to England, Gore accompanied Banks on a private scientific expedition to Iceland in 1772. It appears from documents in the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand that Banks



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was more than just a colleague: he also acted as Gore's patron and was the guardian of Gore's child and the executor of his will.

On 10 February 1776 Gore embarked on his next maritime adventure. He joined the *Resolution* as Cook's First Lieutenant. The expedition's secret instructions were the northwards tracing of the west coast of the North American continent to assist in the search for the North-West Passage. This was Cook's last voyage, as he was killed in Hawaii on 14 February 1779. Captain Clerke was given command of the *Resolution* and Gore was given command of the sister ship, HMS *Discovery*. Clerke died on 22 August 1779: Gore assumed command of *Resolution* and consequently became responsible for the command of the entire expedition.



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In recognition of Gore's service the *Resolution's* official artist, John Webber, painted his portrait in 1780. The portrait is in the National Library of Australia's collection. Gore's achievement was also acknowledged when he was made a Captain of Greenwich Hospital, where he was given the rooms left vacant by Captain Cook. Captain John Gore died at Greenwich in 1790, survived by a son who would make a new life for himself in Australia forty years later.

Captain John Gore's celestial telescope is a commanding object that takes one back to a time of courageous adventurers and 'trigger happy' individuals. So thanks to the generosity of the donor, Jack Gallaway, I am now embarking on my own research journey to uncover the unknown details of this fascinating character.

What did this explorer see through this telescope and how long did the view last after Europeans arrived in Australia?

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