

# The Making of a Maritime Explorer: James Cook in Newfoundland, 1762-1767

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*La cartographie de Terre-Neuve effectuée par James Cook de 1762 à 1767 a été indispensable à ses futures expéditions dans le Pacifique. Ses efforts lui ont valu la réputation de maître navigateur et arpenteur fort qualifié pour le commandement. Certains historiens ont examiné si le commandement de l'exploration du Pacifique aurait pu être confié à quelqu'un d'autre. Bien que cette conclusion soit acceptée par ceux qui ont méticuleusement étudié le capitaine Cook, il s'agit d'une conclusion qui est difficilement reconnue publiquement à l'extérieur du Canada atlantique.*

In introducing his book, *Captain Cook's War and Peace: The Royal Navy Years, 1755-1768*, John Robson remarked that "Some writers have asked the question, 'Why was James Cook chosen to lead the Endeavour expedition [into the Pacific in 1768]?'” Robson then suggested that, with a better understanding of Cook's career between 1755 and 1768, the more reasonable questions to ask would be “'Why would the Admiralty have chosen anyone else to lead the expedition?’ and ‘Who else could they have chosen?’”<sup>1</sup> Robson's point is that Cook's career in the Pacific (which for much of the rest of the world is the only James Cook there is) cannot be understood without reference to his accomplishments during the years that he served in the Royal Navy in North America. Those years were absolutely critical to his training as a navigator, a hydrographer, and as a commander.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in his biography of Cook, Frank McLynn declares quite unambiguously that “Even

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<sup>1</sup> John Robson, *Captain Cook's War & Peace: The Royal Navy Years 1755-1768* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press; Barnsley, South Yorks.: Seaforth Publishing; Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009), 4. Robson devotes the conclusion of his book to a reflection on these questions and answers. My paper elaborates somewhat on some of the specifics, but I do not profess to offer a conclusion which differs in any way to that first articulated by Robson.

<sup>2</sup> The standard and most thorough biography is J.C. Beaglehole's *The Life of Captain James Cook* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974). R.A. Skelton provides an excellent appreciation of Cook's evolution as a hydrographer in “The Society's Annual Lecture / Captain James Cook as a Hydrographer,” *The Mariner's Mirror*, XL:2 (May 1954), 91-119

without the Pacific, Cook would have been a great historical figure.”<sup>3</sup> It is a conclusion accepted by those who have studied the man carefully, but it is a conclusion which has difficulty capturing public recognition outside of Atlantic Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Cook had volunteered into the Royal Navy in 1755 while in his twenties, with the rating of able seaman, thanks to several years’ seafaring experience in commercial service, first in the North Sea coal trade and then in trade into the Baltic. Indeed, within a month of joining his first ship, the 60-gun *Eagle* commanded by Captain Joseph Hamar, Cook’s abilities brought him a promotion to master’s mate; within two years, he had earned the rank of master.<sup>5</sup> It was with that rank that Cook served for the next ten years, including all his years in Newfoundland.<sup>6</sup>

For his promotion to master, Cook had to pass an examination before a senior captain and a board of experienced masters. Luck also played a part, for soon after joining the *Eagle*, Captain Hamar had been replaced by Hugh Palliser, the first of several individuals who would play critical roles in preparing Cook for his eventual career as an explorer. Palliser must quickly have recognized something special in Cook, for he provided his master’s mate with particular attention, mentoring him in navigation, chart work, and other essential seafaring skills.<sup>7</sup> It had been with Palliser’s support and encouragement that Cook took and passed the examination which qualified him to become master of one of His Majesty’s warships. It was in this capacity that he joined the frigate *Solebay*, Captain Robert Craig, at the end of June 1757 and then, before the year was out, the 64-gun warship *Pembroke*, Captain John Simcoe.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Frank McLynn, *Captain Cook: Master of the Seas* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 63.

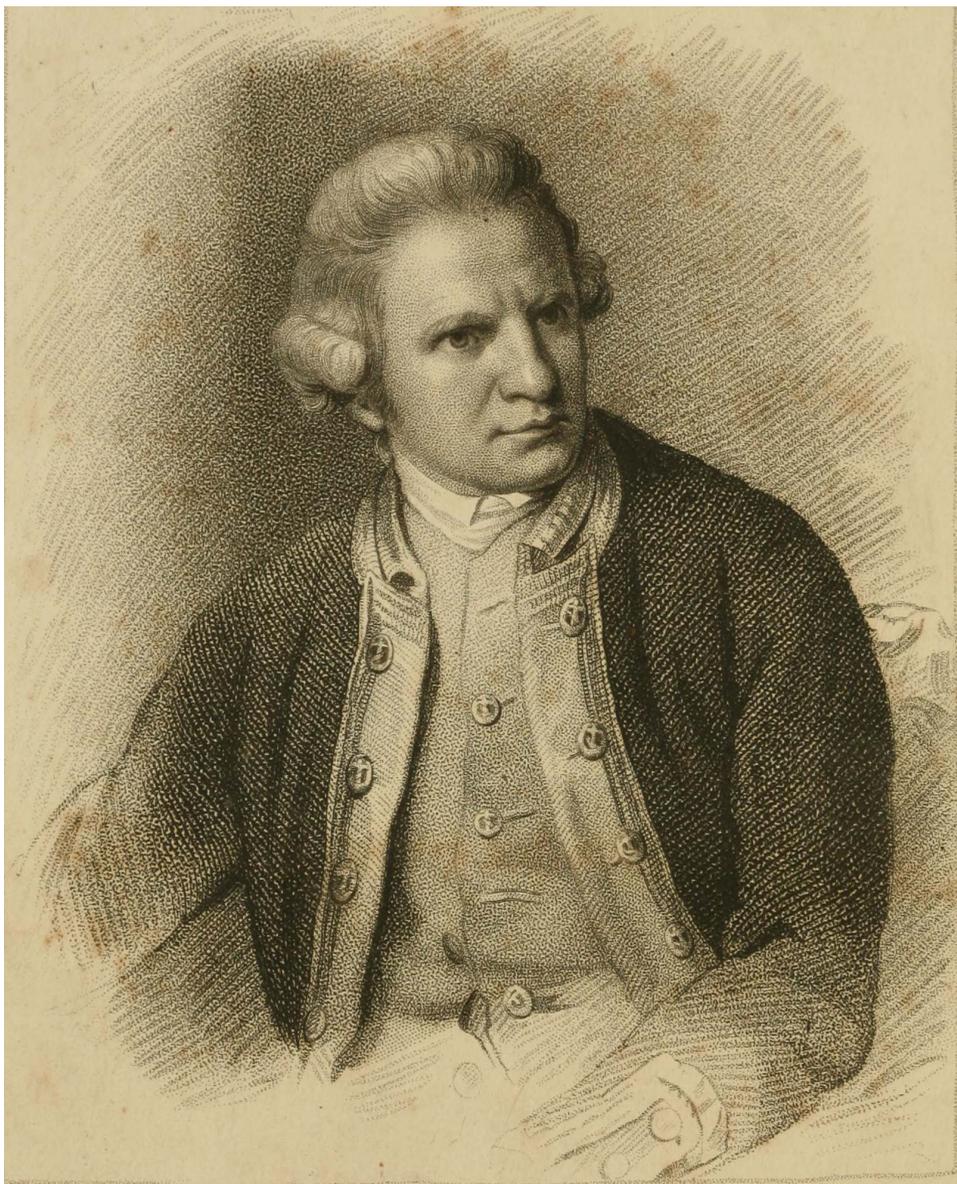
<sup>4</sup> Victor Suthren, *To Go Upon Discovery: James Cook and Canada, from 1758 to 1779* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000); James Lockett, *Captain James Cook in Atlantic Canada: The Adventurer and Map Maker’s Formative Years* (Halifax: Formac, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> He joined *Eagle* at Portsmouth in June 1755; Beaglehole, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Though Cook is invariably referred to as “Captain Cook” by both academics and the general public, during his service in Newfoundland and on the first two Pacific voyages he was captain only in the sense that he commanded a vessel. His actual rank during the years of the Newfoundland survey was that of master. In the words of Dudley Pope, “the rank went with the job;” Pope, *Life in Nelson’s Navy* (1981; reprinted London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), p. 78. Cook did not pass his lieutenant’s exam until 1768; he was not promoted to commander until 1771, and he did not achieve the rank of “captain” until he was promoted in 1775; David Syrett and R.L. DiNardo, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815* (Aldershot, Hamps.: Scholar Press for the Navy Records Society, 1994), 95.

<sup>7</sup> Suthren, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Beaglehole, 25-28; Suthren, 40.



Captain James Cook, from the frontispiece of *The three voyages of Captain James Cook round the world* (1821) from the Internet Archive

Becoming a master in the Royal Navy had been a remarkable achievement. It was probably as high a rank as James Cook would have expected to reach in his naval career. The master played an essential role in a warship. He was responsible for the ship's navigation—setting courses, determining the ship's position, supervising pilotage—and he supervised the young midshipmen in learning the fundamentals of navigation themselves. He was responsible for stowing the ship's

supplies – provisions, munitions, sails and rigging, everything needed by a ship while it was away from port – and he managed the ship’s sail-handling while underway. All this he recorded in the master’s log. More so than anyone else on board, the master was responsible for the overall safety, management and well-being of the ship itself. A master was not, however, a commissioned officer. He was the senior warrant officer in a warship, privileged to mess in the wardroom with midshipmen and lieutenants, occasionally (depending on the size of the warship) even being paid more than the lieutenants, but never out-ranking them.<sup>9</sup>

One role which all masters of warships were expected to perform was to prepare charts of harbours that were unfamiliar to the ship or for which the ship lacked any charts of its own. It was in this capacity that James Cook would excel.<sup>10</sup> But his skills in this regard did not come automatically. Cook almost certainly had a good understanding of navigation and perhaps even a rudimentary comprehension of chart-making before he joined the navy, thanks to his merchant sea service. But it was while he served as master of the *Pembroke* in North American waters for the first time that Cook became familiar with the methods and technology of scientific hydrography.

During the 1758 British campaign to capture Louisbourg, Cook met Samuel Holland, a Dutch-born engineer serving with the British army and assigned to prepare maps of Louisbourg both during and after the siege. It was from him that Cook learned how to use a plane table, a simple device which could be carried into the field, had a flat horizontal surface on which to record measurements that were taken with the aid of a small telescope and an alidade for measuring angles and calculating distances through the use of triangulation. Holland later recorded in detail how Cook mastered the use of the plane table under his tutelage and, perhaps just as important, with the encouragement of *Pembroke*’s captain, John Simcoe.<sup>11</sup> In particular, Simcoe urged Cook to acquire both the astronomical and mathematical

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<sup>9</sup> William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine: Or, A Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms and Phrases Employed in the Construction, Equipment, Furniture, Machinery, Movements, and Military Operations of A Ship* (London, 1780; reprinted Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970), 191; see also Brian Lavery, *Nelson’s Navy: Its Ships, Men, and Organisation, 1793-1815* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 100-101, and A.B[yrne]. McLeod, *British Naval Captains of the Seven Years’ War: The View from the Quarterdeck* (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2012), 82-83.

<sup>10</sup> One biographer points out that the making of charts was, “strictly speaking, ... one of the duties of every ship’s master, [but] there were few who bothered.” Lockett, 113. He might have added that, of those who did bother, few did so with the diligence and precision that Cook applied to this responsibility.

<sup>11</sup> According to Stephen Hornsby, “The working relationship that developed among Holland, Cook, and Simcoe ... was of considerable significance [for it] revealed the navy’s dependence on the army for cartographic expertise”; Hornsby, *Surveyors of Empire: Samuel Holland, J.F.W. Des Barres, and the Making of The Atlantic Neptune* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 19.

knowledge to master the techniques of chart-making that he later applied in Newfoundland and then the Pacific.<sup>12</sup>

Cook's work at Louisbourg was followed by his service, still in *Pembroke*, in the campaign leading to the capture of Quebec in 1759 by the combined land-sea expedition under the command of General James Wolfe and Admiral Charles Saunders. Cook played a key role in meeting the extremely difficult navigational challenge of working the British fleet up the St. Lawrence to the French town. Though his biographers are quick to emphasize that Cook was not alone in preparing the accurate charts of the difficult channel known as "the Traverse," which Saunders' ships had to negotiate in order to carry Wolfe's army to Quebec, there is also considerable evidence that his role was particularly important, perhaps a dominant one.<sup>13</sup> Cook's surveying and hydrographic skills were beginning to attract notice.

Within days of the surrender Cook transferred to the 70-gun *Northumberland*. Alexander, Lord Colvill, who had been *Northumberland's* captain, was promoted to commodore with William Adams as his flag captain and Cook as master. *Northumberland*, together with a number of other ships, immediately headed for Halifax, arriving there in late October. Apart from a brief return to Quebec in April to counter an unsuccessful attempt by the French to recapture that town, *Northumberland* remained in Halifax harbour for nearly two years. Cook's daily routine during this time would have been dominated by what Robson characterizes as the "routines of repairing, cleaning, and maintaining his ship and keeping the crew alert and healthy" – necessary skills, to be sure, but a tedious challenge nevertheless.<sup>14</sup> To all intents and purposes, it appeared as though *Northumberland's* – and Cook's – war was over. The French, however, had a different idea.

In the spring of 1762, France launched an ill-fated raid against British possessions and commerce in the North Atlantic. Four warships and several hundred troops under the overall command of Charles-Henri-Louis d'Arsac, Chevalier de Ternay, slipped through the British blockade of Brest and made directly for Newfoundland. The raiding force was expected to spend a month causing as much destruction to the British fishery there before attacking first Cape Breton Island,

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<sup>12</sup> Suthren, 58-60. Holland's letter was written in 1792 to Captain Simcoe's son, John Graves Simcoe, who was by then Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. Both Suthren and Robson reprint the letter in full; see Robson, 63-64.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Beaglehole, 43-44, Suthren, 77-79, Robson, 81-84. In 1761 Cook received an award of £50 "in consideration of his indefatigable Industry in making himself Master of the pilotage of the River Saint Lawrence, &c." William Whiteley, "Cook, James," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, IV (1771 to 1800), 163.

<sup>14</sup> Robson, 112. On Cook's time spent in Halifax, see Beaglehole, 54-56, Suthren, 108-116, Lockett, 73-83. On Halifax and the naval facilities there at this time, see Julian Gwyn, *Ashore and Afloat: The British Navy and the Halifax Naval Yard Before 1820* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), Chapter 1.

then the Irish and Scottish coasts en route back to France.<sup>15</sup> The Duc de Choiseul, who was both the French Minister of War and Minister of Marine, hoped that Ternay's expedition would pressure the British into negotiating a peace agreement.<sup>16</sup>

It was a reasonable plan and at first, everything went well for the French. The Newfoundland fishery was caught unawares, St. John's was quickly captured, and forces were sent to destroy the fishing outposts north and south of that port. Captain Thomas Graves, the commander-in-chief of the Newfoundland station that year, was still on his way when he learned that St. John's had been captured but he was much too weak to challenge the French directly.<sup>17</sup> Graves therefore diverted to Placentia and awaited reinforcements. And indeed, the Admiralty in London did order a squadron of ships under Captain Hugh Palliser to Newfoundland to add to Graves' forces.<sup>18</sup> But British military and naval authorities in North America were uncertain as to Ternay's intentions, and therefore took no action.

Had Ternay continued with his original mission and avoided staying too long in one place, this uncertainty might have persisted. But Ternay now made the fateful decision to secure St. John's rather than continue with the original plan. Once the British were confident that the French were preparing to remain in Newfoundland, they could act with speed, vigour, and effect.<sup>19</sup> While a military force was hastily scraped together in New York, Halifax and Louisbourg, Colvill sailed from Halifax with *Northumberland* and two other warships for Placentia to rendezvous with Commodore Graves and then organize a blockade of the French in St. John's. In just a few days, the transports arrived and began to land their troops. St. John's was

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<sup>15</sup> "... de ravager et de detruire autant qu'il se pourra, le commerce de la Pesche Angloise dans l'Isle et Sur le Banc de Terre Neuve", Ternay's Instructions, enclosed in Choiseul to Ternay, 30 April, 1762, Library and Archives Canada, Archives de la Marine Série B4/104.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 226. See also Olaf Uwe Janzen, "The French Raid Upon the Newfoundland Fishery in 1762 – A Study in the Nature and Limits of Eighteenth-Century Sea Power," in William B. Cogar (Gen. Ed.), *Naval History; the Seventh Symposium of the US Naval Academy* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1988), 35-54, reprinted in Olaf U. Janzen, *War and Trade in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland* ("Research in Maritime History," No. 52; St. John's, NL: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2013), 129-153.

<sup>17</sup> There were only three warships on station in Newfoundland that year. Graves' flagship, *Antelope* had fifty guns; *Syren* and *Gramont* had twenty guns each. Moreover, *Gramont* was in St. John's harbour when the French appeared, and was therefore scuttled when it could not escape. See Janzen, "The French Raid," for a full account of events.

<sup>18</sup> The squadron comprised *Shrewsbury* (74), *Superbe* (74), *Bedford* (74), and *Minerva* (32). See The National Archives (Kew), Admiralty 1 series (hereafter TNA Adm 1), vol. 2299, VIII, Palliser to Cleveland, 4 August, 6 August, and 22 August, 1762.

<sup>19</sup> Even the British were puzzled by Ternay's decision to stay in Newfoundland. Dull attributes this decision to the Duc de Choiseul himself; Dull, 226. Janzen maintains that the decision was made by Ternay and that Choiseul had little choice but to accept the decision; Janzen, "The French Raid," in *War and Trade*, 140-142.

quickly captured, though not before Ternay's warships slipped out of the harbour under cover of a fog and escaped.<sup>20</sup>

Soon, *Northumberland* entered the harbour; Palliser's warships arrived a day later. In this way, James Cook first came to Newfoundland. Throughout this period, he had served steadily in the prosaic but unheralded role of master of Colvill's flagship. His responsibility had been limited to operating the warship in accordance with the wishes and intentions of his commander. But once the French surrendered, Cook becomes more visible to us again. First, he was sent to Conception Bay in the company of J.F.W. Des Barres who, like Samuel Holland, was a military engineer and surveyor. Des Barres had been ordered by Col. Amherst to assess the damage to the defences on Carbonear Island and to draw up designs for new defence works.

Cook went along because Colvill wanted him to chart the waters adjacent to Harbour Grace and Carbonear. Cook also used his time to draft charts of Bay Bulls, where the French had first landed, and St. John's. When *Northumberland* returned to Placentia in October, Cook used the opportunity to prepare a chart of that harbour as well.<sup>21</sup> By the time *Northumberland* returned to England in company with Palliser's ships, Cook had had ample opportunity to demonstrate his skills at chart-making to his superiors.

The restoration of peace meant that Cook's service as master of *Northumberland* came to an end. When his ship returned to England in October, he was paid off. Yet the contacts and connections that Cook had developed during his service as master's mate and master in the Royal Navy now came forcefully into play. In a letter to the Admiralty secretary, Lord Colvill praised Cook's skills as a chart-maker, remarking on his "Genius and Capacity" and declaring that his work "may be the means of directing many in the right way, but cannot mislead any."<sup>22</sup> Thomas Graves, who would continue to serve in the dual role of governor and commander-in-chief of the Newfoundland station in 1763, had also been very impressed by Cook's abilities as a chartmaker, and urged the Admiralty to employ

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<sup>20</sup> Colvill peevishly regarded Ternay's escape as a "shameful Flight"; TNA War Office 34 series (hereafter WO 34), vol. 42, Colville to Amherst, 16 August 1762. But Captain Hugh Debbieg, the military engineer attached to the expedition, perceptively observed that "Monsieur De Ternai ... shewed his wisdom in retreating from St. John's Harbour the moment we got Possession of the Hills he knew well enough, there was much less risque in meeting with Lord Colville's Fleet, than to remain in the Harbour, where the Fate of his Squadron was so certain..." William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI, Shelburne MSS, vol. 86, Debbieg to the Board of Ordnance, 8 January, 1766.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew David, "James Cook's 1762 Survey of St John's Harbour and Adjacent Parts of Newfoundland," *Terrae Incognitae* XXX (1998), 63-71. Cook recorded his charts of the several harbours in Newfoundland in the remark book that he maintained as master of *Northumberland*. Long kept by the Library of the United Kingdom Hydrography Office, Taunton (hereafter UKHO), Cook's remark book was eventually transferred to the Library of the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, UK (hereafter cited as NMRN); there it is bound into a single volume of eighteen separate remark books and catalogued simply as MSS 20, "Remark Books, 1759-1764."

<sup>22</sup> Beaglehole, 59.

him to survey the coasts of Newfoundland.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Cook's reunion in St. John's during that fateful summer of 1762 with Hugh Palliser, the man who had been both his mentor and who had recommended his promotion to master back in 1757, while quite fortuitous, was also significant, for Palliser would succeed Graves in 1764, and ensure that Graves' efforts to have the Admiralty employ Cook to prepare surveys of the Newfoundland coast would remain well supported.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Cook was fortunate in his timing. Interest in commissioning proper surveys of British North America was particularly acute at this time within the Board of Trade, the Admiralty and the War Office.<sup>25</sup> The sheer amount of territory acquired from the defeated French empire and which now had to be integrated into the British empire was staggering. Labrador, for example, had belonged to France as part of the colony of New France. The British now attached it to the administration of the governor of Newfoundland, Thomas Graves. He in turn was acutely aware that he knew very little about Labrador or, for that matter, many parts of the island of Newfoundland which had been under British jurisdiction since 1713 yet which had been virtually ignored to that point. Nor could Graves rely on French charts of those territories. These were woefully inadequate, even though the French had established a *Dépôt des Cartes et Plans de la Marine* in 1720, and had subsequently undertaken a survey of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the 1730s. Instead, navigation in that region could still be likened by one early eighteenth-century traveller to "walking blind-folded and barefoot in a room of jagged glass."<sup>26</sup>

The survey of Newfoundland and Labrador to which Cook was appointed in 1763 was, therefore, not the only survey commissioned by imperial authorities at this time. Several others, both of coastal North America as well as of the interior of that continent, were commissioned immediately following the Seven Years' War.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Graves to Admiralty Secretary Philip Stephens, 5 April 1763, in TNA Adm 1/1836, cited in Beaglehole, 65. In the concluding sentence of his article, "James Cook's 1762 Survey," Andrew David maintains that "these 1762 surveys led to Cook's appointment as marine surveyor of Newfoundland and ultimately to his appointment to the *Endeavour* and to his three Pacific voyages." Cook himself acknowledged Graves' role in convincing the Admiralty to proceed with the Newfoundland survey: "It is more than probable [that] the Survey of the Island will go on until completely finished, this usefull and necessary thing the World must be obliged to you for." James Cook to Thomas Graves, 15 March 1764, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (hereafter NMM), Graves Papers (hereafter GRV), vol. 106, unpaginated.

<sup>24</sup> Robson (125) also suggests that it was at this time that Cook may have come to the particular attention of Philip Stephens, who became Admiralty Secretary in 1763 and was therefore in a position to influence appointments by the Admiralty.

<sup>25</sup> See particularly the section on "Surveying British America" in Hornsby, 33-43.

<sup>26</sup> James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 21; Ken Banks, "'Lente et assez fâcheuse Traversée': Navigation and the Transatlantic French Empire, 1713-1763," in A.J.B. Johnston (ed.), *French Colonial Historical Society Proceedings* (Cleveland: The Society, 1996), 85.

<sup>27</sup> Cook's appointment as "Surveyor" is discussed by Beaglehole, 62-68, 83-85. The Board of Trade commissioned surveys of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and New England by Samuel Holland (1764-1775) and of Florida's Atlantic coast by William De Brahm (1765-1773); the War Office

Though the British Admiralty would not establish a Hydrographic Office until 1795, it was clear that the importance of accurate chart-making had already been recognized.<sup>28</sup>

But to what end? What was the rationale behind the appointment of Cook and the others? As the governor of Newfoundland, Thomas Graves had urged the Board of Trade to appoint a surveyor to his command, the better to collect information and to make charts of the coasts and harbours, so that Graves could become better informed about “the enlargement of his Government.” The surveyor would also be instructed “to report as accurately as he can the conditions, fisherys, and other material particulars of a country at present little known.”<sup>29</sup> This suggests that the survey was as much a resource inventory and a response to administrative needs as it was a gathering of information to benefit commercial navigation. And indeed, Cook took painstaking care to annotate the charts that emerged from his work with detailed observations on the potential for the fishery of the harbours, coves, and bays that he surveyed.<sup>30</sup> These annotations served the Admiralty’s requirement, introduced in 1760, that all masters and captains were to record detailed information about unfamiliar coasts which were recorded in what became known as remark books.<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding the rationales articulated by Graves in promoting Cook’s appointment and the Admiralty in issuing Cook’s instructions, were Cook’s charts intended as navigational aids in the service of trade? The legacy of Cook’s Newfoundland charts is often defined by their perceived service to navigation, even though thousands of mariners had made their way to and from the Newfoundland

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ordered surveys of the Saint John River by Joseph Peach (1762), Philip Pittman (the Mississippi River (1764-1765), and the Ohio River by Thomas Hutchins (1764-1766). Besides Cook’s work in Newfoundland, the Admiralty ordered surveys of Nova Scotia by Joseph F.W. Des Barres (1764-1773), the Gulf coast from Florida to the Mississippi Estuary by George Gauld (1764-1778) and the remainder of Newfoundland and Labrador by Michael Lane (1768-1775) once Cook was sent to the Pacific; see Hornsby, Chap. 1.

<sup>28</sup> G.S. Ritchie, *The Admiralty Chart: British Naval Hydrography in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1967; 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed.; Durham: The Pentland Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>29</sup> Board of Trade to the King, 29 March 1763, cited in Robson, 129; also in Beaglehole, 64.

<sup>30</sup> When Hugh Palliser became governor of Newfoundland in 1764, his orders to Cook directed him to complete a survey of the Northern Peninsula from Quirpon west and down the west coast, “making in your way an Exact Survey of the coasts, Islands, and Harbours; and remark every thing that may be Useful to the Trade & Navigation of His Majesty’s Subjects in those Parts; Particulary noting in your Drafts and Remarks the Beaches and Places fit for Stages and other Conveniences for Landing & Drying of Fish, as well such as have been, or may be used for that Purpose.” Palliser to Cook, 19 June 1764, cited in Robson, 149.

<sup>31</sup> McLeod, 63. Cook maintained a remarks book while serving as master of *Northumberland* but did not maintain one during his survey work in Newfoundland. Instead, his remarks were recorded on the charts themselves. See for example UKHO C54/1, “An Exact Trigonometrical Survey of the West Coast of Newfoundland from Cape Anguille to Point Ferrolle” by James Cook, 1767.

fisheries for centuries without them.<sup>32</sup> And while it was also true that ship masters were increasingly expected to have some familiarity with “scientific navigation,” the chief guides of mariners continued to be, in the words of Ralph Davis, “dead reckoning with compass and log,” supported by years of accumulated voyage experience.<sup>33</sup>

So let us return to the question, what was the rationale behind the hydrographic surveys of Cook and others during the years following the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War? And how does this help us to understand why Cook’s work in Newfoundland led to his appointment to the Pacific voyages? To answer these questions, we must pay closer attention to where Cook was directed to survey first, and why some coasts were treated with greater importance than others.

For instance, even before Cook could begin his first season as surveyor, he was ordered to join the *Tweed*, Captain Charles Douglas, to chart the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, just off the tip of the Burin Peninsula on Newfoundland’s south coast, before they were handed over to the French as stipulated by the Treaty of Paris, signed earlier that same year.<sup>34</sup> He was then sent north to survey the tip of the Northern Peninsula – which was to be restored to the French in accordance with agreed treaty rights – and the Labrador coast immediately across the Strait of Belle Isle. This he completed in late summer 1763 and again during the full survey season of 1764. Only then, in 1765 and 1766, did Cook turn his attention to the south coast of Newfoundland. It had formally been under British control since 1713 but was still poorly understood when the Admiralty appointed Cook as surveyor in 1763. Moreover, imperial authorities had become increasingly concerned by the encroachments on the adjacent Newfoundland coast by the French at St. Pierre and Miquelon, making this a strategically sensitive region.<sup>35</sup> Not until 1767 was Cook instructed to chart the west coast. And never did he have the opportunity to chart those stretches of coast most frequented by British fishermen. In short, the priority

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<sup>32</sup> See for example Lockett, 7, and Suthren, 210. No one denies that the quality of Cook’s surveys of the Newfoundland coasts was exceptional. They would not begin to be superseded, even in part, until the surveys of Captain Henry Wolsey Bayfield in the 1830s; John Robson, *The Captain Cook Encyclopædia* (Auckland: Random House New Zealand, 2004), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1962), 123, 124-5. R.A. Skelton gives weight to Davis’ observation by pointing out that “The construction of charts was in fact neglected in the education of a navigator in the eighteenth century” and that Cook himself recorded in his *Endeavour* journal that “few [seamen] I have known ... are capable of drawing a chart or Sketch of a Sea coast.” Skelton, 95-96.

<sup>34</sup> UKHO, A701/14 Kt, “A Plan of the Road and Harbour of Saint Peters [Saint Pierre]” by James Cook, 1763. Accounts of Cook’s survey of St. Pierre and Miquelon can be found in Beaglehole, 70-73, Robson, *Cook’s War & Peace*, 134-135, Suthren, 129-132.

<sup>35</sup> Olaf Janzen, “The Royal Navy and the Interdiction of Aboriginal Migration to Newfoundland, 1763-1766,” *International Journal of Naval History* VII: 2 (August 2008) [e-journal: <http://www.ijnonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Janzen.pdf>]; reprinted in Janzen, *War and Trade*, 173- 192. See also Hornsby, 36-37.

of government and of Cook's survey of Newfoundland was not determined less commercial needs than by issues of sovereignty and French activities.

There were precedents for this. Although Beaglehole and Robson both claim that Cook's work was the first British survey of Newfoundland since the late seventeenth-century, this was not in fact the case.<sup>36</sup> In 1716 the Admiralty had commissioned a survey of Newfoundland's south coast from Placentia Bay to Cape Ray by Lieutenant John Gaudy in the sloop-of-war *Swift*, Captain Thomas Durell. This survey was intended to provide the British government with knowledge of a stretch of coast which, until 1713, had been part of the French domain. When that coast was turned over to the British in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the same need arose to support British rights of sovereignty with comprehensive knowledge of the coast as would arise after the close of the Seven Years' War.<sup>37</sup>

In a sense, what the South Coast had been in 1716, Labrador was in 1763 – a region quite unfamiliar to the British who were now expected to administer it – and it speaks volumes about the rationale behind Cook's survey work (and implicitly, about the high regard and trust with which imperial authorities came to regard Cook) that Labrador received so much immediate attention.<sup>38</sup> The British hoped to develop this new territorial acquisition as a seasonal fishery, similar to what Newfoundland itself had once been.<sup>39</sup> British interest in learning more about Labrador was already evident before the Seven Years' War came to an end. In 1760, they had sent the *Antelope* to reconnoitre the coast of Labrador. Captain John Webb, commodore of the Newfoundland station ships and governor of Newfoundland, was in command. Captain Lieutenant David Rogers of the Royal Artillery, who prepared a meticulous chart of Chateau Bay, or York Harbour as it was known to the British, was on board.<sup>40</sup> Over the next few years, York Harbour

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<sup>36</sup> Beaglehole, 63; Robson, *Cook's War & Peace*, 127.

<sup>37</sup> Olaf U. Janzen, "'Of consequence to the Service': The Rationale Behind Cartographic Surveys in Early Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord* XI: 1 (January 2001), 1-10; reprinted in Janzen, *War and Trade*, 17-29. Gaudy's chart of the South Coast is now held in the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, England; see NMRN Vv2, Mss 368, "A Chart of the Sea Coast of New Foundland from Cape Race to the Ids. Bergaux Survey'd in His Majtys. Sloop Swift by Capt. Thos. Durell comander Anno 1716." Though Durell is given credit for the chart, the actual work was by Lieutenant Gaudy.

<sup>38</sup> A more tangible indication of the government's regard and confidence in Cook was the level of his pay – ten shillings a day, the same as that of a captain of a fourth-rate warship; Beaglehole, 67.

<sup>39</sup> Imperial plans for Labrador were discussed by William Whiteley in "Governor Hugh Palliser and the Newfoundland and Labrador Fishery, 1764-1768," *Canadian Historical Review* L: 2 (June 1969), 141-163, and "James Cook, Hugh Palliser, and the Newfoundland Fisheries," *The Newfoundland Quarterly* LXIX: 2 (October 1972), 17-22, as well as by R.P. Crowhurst, "The Labrador Question and the Society of Merchant Venturers, Bristol, 1763," *Canadian Historical Review* L: 4 (December 1969), 394-405.

<sup>40</sup> See NMRN Vv2, Mss 368, "Miscellaneous charts & maps of America," including No. 3, "Plan of York Harbour, on the Labrador Coast, Situated in 52d. 15m. N Latitude taken in August 1760, By David Rogers Capt. Lieut. in the Royal Regiment of Artillery, Then on Board His Majesty's Ship *Antelope*." An image of Rogers' chart appears in Marianne P. Stopp's, "Chateau Bay,

would be charted repeatedly – by Cook in 1763, by Joseph Gilbert in 1767 as part of a comprehensive chart of the Labrador coast, and again by Michael Lane in 1769.<sup>41</sup> The attention given to Labrador by these surveys, and the effort Cook put into charting the Northern Peninsula in 1763 and 1764, reflects the degree to which all of the surveys undertaken during the 1760s served the needs of government more so than the navigational needs of British maritime commerce.

This was further affirmed by the assistance Cook gave in 1764 to Hugh Palliser in refuting French claims to Newfoundland's west coast. Since 1713, French fishing rights in Newfoundland had been confined by treaty to a stretch of coast extending from Cape Bonavista to Pointe Riche.<sup>42</sup> By 1763 the French had begun to insist that Pointe Riche and Cape Ray were one and the same, a claim which, had it been accepted by the British, would have entitled the French to several hundred additional miles of fishing zone. Palliser, who would begin serving as governor of Newfoundland in 1764, was directed to find evidence in support of the British interpretation of the geographical limits of the French Shore in London map shops. Being well acquainted with Cook's chart-making skills and his knowledge of Newfoundland, he pressed the Yorkshireman into assisting him.<sup>43</sup> Together, the two compiled a list of maps and atlases which confirmed that French claims concerning the coincidence of Pointe Riche and Cape Ray were unfounded.<sup>44</sup> The British Board of Trade's report on the geographic limits of the French Shore was based on Palliser's and Cook's findings.

In yet another assertion of sovereignty, the Admiralty began ordering regular patrols of Newfoundland's west coast. In 1763, the *Lark*, Captain Samuel Thompson, became the first warship ever to be stationed there, and Thompson seized the opportunity to make charts of key locations such as the Bay of Islands.<sup>45</sup> Governor Palliser himself went to the west coast in the *Guernsey* and several others of his station ships in 1764.<sup>46</sup> While Cook was busy charting the northern limits of

Labrador, and William Richardson's 1769 Sketch of York Fort," *Newfoundland & Labrador Studies* XXIX: 2 (Fall 2014), 244-271.

<sup>41</sup> UKHO B193/Ah4, "A Plan of York Harbour, Surveyed by order of his Excellency Thomas Graves Esquire Governor of Newfoundland by James Cook, 1763; UKHO B191/Ah4, "Part of the coast of Labradore ... By Joseph Gilbert, 1767, by order of Commodore Hugh Pallisser Governor of Newfoundland; UKHO C54/2, "A Chart of Part of the Coast of Labradore from Shecatica to Chateaux, ... surveyed by order of the Honorable Commodore Byron Governor of Newfoundland, Labradore etc by Michael Lane, 1769.

<sup>42</sup> See James K. Hiller: "Utrecht Revisited: The Origins of French Fishing Rights in Newfoundland Waters," *Newfoundland Studies* VII: 1 (Spring 1991), 23-39.

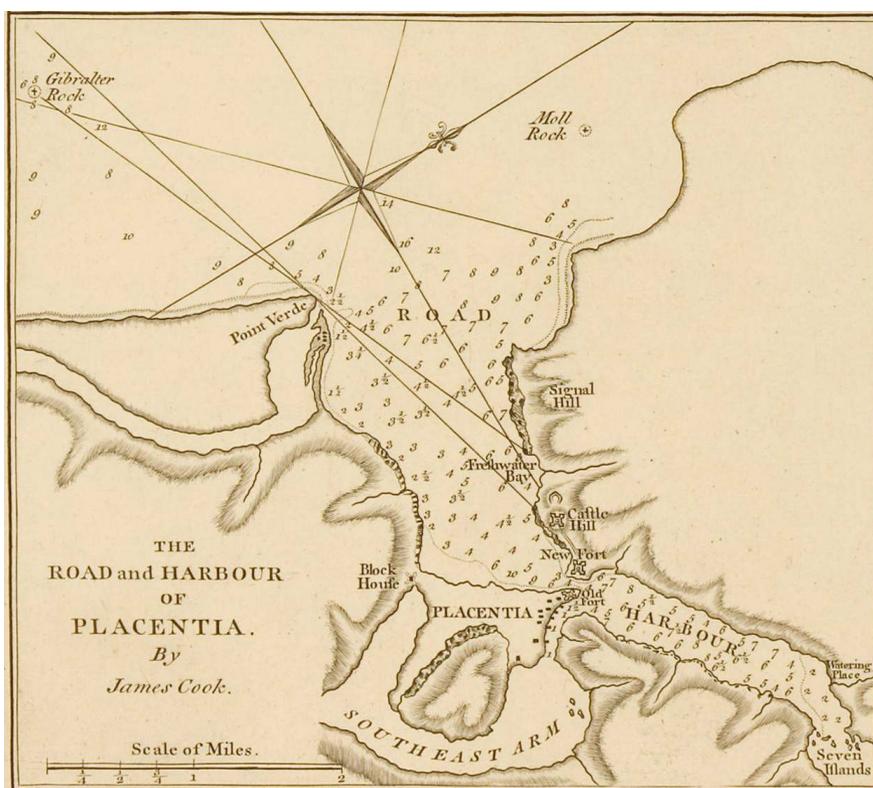
<sup>43</sup> See Beaglehole, 62-66.

<sup>44</sup> Beaglehole, 77. See James Cook to Palliser, 7 March 1764 and "A List of Maps and Charts in which Cape Ray or Pointe Riche or both have been inserted," 15 March 1764, both in TNA Adm 1/2300, No. 9, Captain Palliser's Letters; Beaglehole reprints Cook's letter in its entirety.

<sup>45</sup> NMRN Vv2, Mss 368, No. 27, Codroy Island by Captain Samuel Thompson, 1763, and No. 29, Bay of Islands, also by Captain Thompson, 1763.

<sup>46</sup> See Olaf Janzen, "Showing the Flag: Hugh Palliser in Western Newfoundland, 1764," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord* III: 3 (July 1993), 3-14.

the French Shore, *Guernsey's* master, Joseph Gilbert, was preparing his own chart of the Bay of Islands.<sup>47</sup> He used the opportunity to attach names to the features of that bay which were clearly British, in part to reaffirm Palliser's findings which challenged French claims to that same region. Gilbert's charts were much better than the crude rendition made the year before by Captain Thompson, but they were still based on his ability to represent on paper what he saw visually. This was typically how charts were made by many sailing masters. They did not therefore match the quality of Cook's own work three years later. For his chart of the Bay of Islands in 1767, Cook used the surveying techniques and technology that he first learned under the tutelage of Samuel Holland. A comparison of the three charts, all drawn within four years of each other, shows clearly how much better Cook's work was than that of his contemporaries.



Detail from James Cook, *Trepassey with Mutton and Biscay Bays; The Road and Harbour of Placentia; St. Mary's Harbour*. London: Laurie & Whittle, 1794. (Memorial University of Newfoundland)

<sup>47</sup> Gilbert's chart is held by the British Library (London) and catalogued as BL Add, 17,693A, "A plan of the Bay of Three Islands in Newfoundland. With its compound Harbour and Rivers taken on board Her Majesty's HMS *Guernsey*. June 1764."

In short, Cook's surveys of Newfoundland and Labrador were intended to provide imperial authorities with a comprehensive knowledge of coasts that had been acquired from, or were contested or used by, the French, and which would enable imperial authorities to administer the newly acquired territories and to forestall French attempts to extend their claims beyond those allowed by treaty. While the surveys compiled an enormous amount of information about economic potential and included detailed sailing directions, they were first and foremost exercises in sovereignty, and of all the charts prepared for these purposes, those by Cook were by far the best.

The decision to take Cook away from Newfoundland following the completion of the 1767 survey season, and to reassign him to the first of the three Pacific voyages, is usually attributed to the quality of his surveying skills. Cook had also been fortunate in having the tutelage of Samuel Holland, the mentoring of John Simcoe, and the support of Lord Colvill, Thomas Graves, and Hugh Palliser. Certainly the quality and thoroughness of Cook's surveys must have been key factors in the decision. Yet Stephen Hornsby also emphasizes that "Cook was the only viable candidate in the navy who could both survey a coastline and command a ship."<sup>48</sup> Cook had been assigned a New England schooner in 1763 which Thomas Graves had purchased so that Cook would not be dependent on vessels on loan from the navy. This was the *Grenville*, and the schooner – soon re-rigged by Cook as a brig on the sensible grounds that the square rig of a brig was better suited for the close inshore work demanded by his survey work – served him well through his years in Newfoundland.<sup>49</sup>

Those years were not without incident. In August 1764, a powder horn exploded in Cook's hand, causing him immense suffering until the burns healed; the scars never completely disappeared, and provided conclusive identification of his body when he was killed in Hawai'i in 1779.<sup>50</sup> Later that month, members of *Grenville's* crew got drunk while making spruce beer in 1764 and had to be disciplined.<sup>51</sup> The vessel ran aground in 1765, and had to be repaired with the resources at hand.<sup>52</sup> And at all times, from 1763 to 1767, Cook was more or less entirely on his own. Apart from the occasional fishing vessel or merchant trader, and, even less frequently, a

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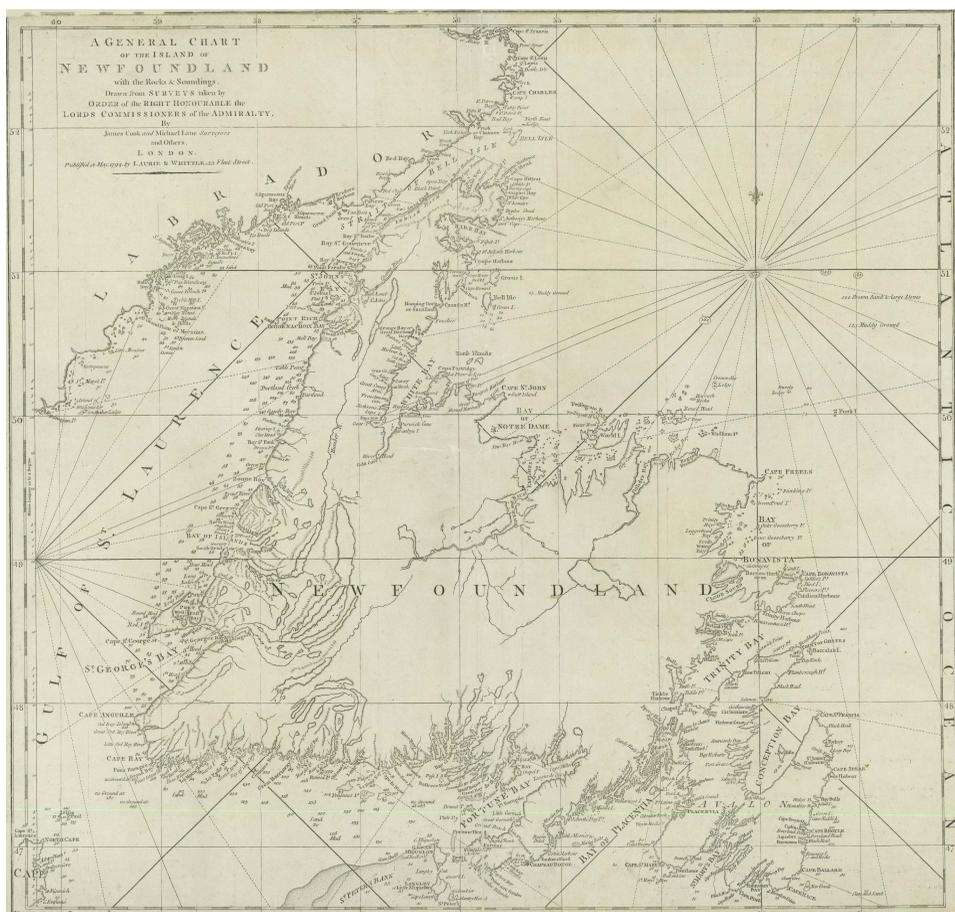
<sup>48</sup> Hornsby, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Cook justified *Grenville's* conversion to square rigging in a letter to the Navy Board, dated 22 January 1765: "...I Cannot help thinking but that it will enable me to Carry on the Survey with greater Dispatch, and less Danger of Loosing the Vessel..."; cited in Beaglehole, 82.

<sup>50</sup> See Beaglehole, 80, 676.

<sup>51</sup> Spruce beer was an anti-scorbutic made of black spruce boughs, molasses, and water which could be transformed into a weak alcoholic beverage by adding barm or beergrounds, or a stronger one by adding rum or brandy. Joseph Banks recorded a recipe for spruce beer in the journal he kept during his visit to Labrador in 1766; see A.M. Lysaght, *Joseph Banks in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1766; His Diary, Manuscripts and Collections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 139-140. The incident with Cook's crew is described in: Beaglehole, 80-81; Suthren, 142-143; Robson, *Cook's War and Peace*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> See Beaglehole, 83; Suthren, 147; Robson, *Cook's War and Peace*, 161-162.



*A general chart of the island of Newfoundland.* Surveyed by James Cook and Michael Lane, and "publish'd according to Act of Parliament by Thomas Jefferys Geographer to the King, 1775. (Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland)

warship assigned to the Newfoundland station, *Grenville* rarely came into contact with other ships. Almost every coast was uncharted, and as Robson recognizes, "Extra responsibility was quickly thrust upon Cook's shoulders.... Working this way in isolation was ideal preparation for taking a ship to the Pacific."<sup>53</sup> Few of Cook's biographers give Cook's command experience its due when explaining the decision to appoint him to the Pacific.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, critical to his appointment to the Pacific voyages was Cook's service in Newfoundland, beginning in 1762 with his role as master of *Northumberland* during

<sup>53</sup> Robson, *Cook's War and Peace*, 126.

<sup>54</sup> Hornsby is blunt: "Neither Beaglehole nor Skelton recognized this vitally important qualification." Hornsby, 37, note 88 on p. 231. Robson is therefore one of the exceptions.

the British response to the French raid on the Newfoundland fishery. This was then followed between 1763 and 1767 by his service as the consummate surveyor and hydrographer that he proved himself to be. His Newfoundland experience also provided him with essential command experience – an experience that proved critical to the next great transition in his life. By 1768, Cook's performance and the quality of his work on the Newfoundland survey had so impressed the Admiralty that they would terminate his service in Newfoundland before it could be completed, sending him instead – as a newly commissioned lieutenant of the Royal Navy – on the first of three great voyages of exploration into the Pacific.