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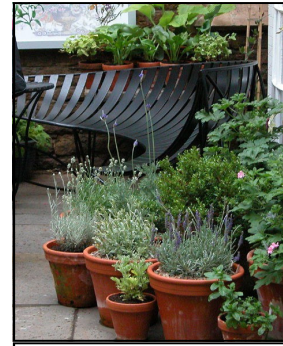
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Voyage of Discovery:
A new exhibition at North Lincolnshire Museum
- Steve Thompson

Friday, 25th June was a big day for us at the North Lincolnshire Museum, as we opened a new temporary exhibition, but one with a difference. Most of our temporary exhibitions are almost entirely home grown, and a few are hired in ready made. This time we have home grown the exhibition, but almost all the objects are borrowed, and the heart of the exhibition is very special, being a set of twenty five of the original plant illustrations from the first Cook expedition to the South Seas. These have been borrowed from the Natural History Museum, and many of them have not been on public display before, so we are absolutely delighted to be able to do this.

This project came about originally as part of our aim to pick up on the fact that this the Royal Horticultural Society's Year of the Garden. Within the service we already have a painstakingly reconstructed Victorian walled kitchen garden, at Normanby Hall, and just a few weeks ago, we opened at the museum a courtyard garden, making use of a courtyard area that had until then been simply used as dumping ground.

For this exhibition, we drew on the fact that the country's greatest botanist and horticulturist, Sir Joseph Banks, was a Lincolnshire man. This suggested to us, and particularly to Julie Bunclark, our Exhibitions Officer, the idea of borrowing from the NHM some of the paintings made between 1768 and 1771 on the first Cook expedition to the southern hemisphere. This was principally funded by Banks himself, and amongst its many great achievements, it was the first truly scientific voyage of exploration. It has a further topical resonance in that the original impetus was to make the first good record of the transit of Venus, from Tahiti, a very rare astronomical event which, by coincidence, took place just a few weeks ago, for the first time in 120 years. This time it was of greater interest than importance, but the readings taken in 1769 helped to establish the size of the Solar System.



The courtyard garden at North Lincolnshire Museum

The paintings borrowed come from throughout the voyage, and have been chosen partly for their beauty, but also because they show in many cases plants that have now become familiar to gardeners in this country. The exhibition shows the enormous effort undertaken at that time, in the name of exploration and understanding. Neither of the two expedition illustrators made it back to England, both succumbing to disease on the voyage, not a fate that today's botanists would expect to face, and certainly not a problem contended with when popping down to the garden centre for a Hibiscus.

It has presented a challenge for us, in that the environmental, security and insurance implications were far more significant than we normally have to contend with, but I am pleased to say that we have been able to meet all of those requirements. (It may be of interest to people, however, to learn that the Government Indemnity Scheme does NOT cover loans from the National Museums, which came as something of a surprise to us.) The staff and Trustees of the NHM have, for their part, been extremely helpful, and we are most grateful to them for their efforts. I hope they are pleased in turn at the chance to have these wonderful items on show to the public. All we need now is for the public to take up the opportunity, but the signs are looking good at the moment as the level of interest from the local media has been better than for almost anything we have done in recent years. Here's hoping.



The new Voyage of Discovery exhibition at North Lincolnshire Museum