

Celebrating early Swedish link

Ever heard of Sporing Island? It used to be found just east of Tolaga Bay, and for many years the Maori name Pourewa coexisted with the name Captain James Cook bestowed on the island. Swedish historian MARGIT BREW writes of her country's link to Cook's first voyage to New Zealand in 1769... and the fact Swedish was the second European language spoken on New Zealand soil.

IN the late 1860s a decision was made in London that Captain James Cook was to sail to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus and then head southwestward to further explore the South Pacific.

The wealthy English philanthropist Joseph Banks, a keen botanist, contributed a large amount of money towards this undertaking. It was his decision that the official botanist on the Endeavour should be none other than the world-famous Swede Dr Daniel Solander who — like Banks — was a Fellow of the Royal Society. They knew each other well, as Dr Solander had lived in London for some years.

Dr Solander chose another Swede as his assistant, Herman Spöring — who likewise was living in London. Spöring was a qualified instrument maker and draughtsman, as well as a naturalist and artist. His father was professor of medicine at Turku University in the Swedish duchy that today is called Finland.

On the voyage to the South Pacific, Captain Cook benefited from using the recently-invented sextant — which ensured more accurate measurements of latitude and longitude. It is reported that an irate Tahitian chieftain grabbed hold of the sextant and broke it. However, as the Endeavour headed south, Spöring was able to repair the valuable instrument. It would be of great assistance some weeks later, during observations of the Transit of Mercury, so it was small wonder that Captain Cook was grateful.

Fourteen months after leaving England, New Zealand was sighted by Nicholas Young on October 7, 1769 at present-day Gisborne. Misunderstandings ensued that led to the shooting of several Maori, and Cook and his men were unable to resupply their ship.

Captain Cook named the area Poverty Bay and decided to sail further south, in the hope of finding food and water, but the shoreline offered no suitable landing. The Endeavour sailed along the unpromising coastline, past Cape Kidnappers, until a decision was made to head north — naming the turning point "Cape Turnagain".

The Endeavour sailed back past Hawke Bay, then Poverty Bay and finally dropped anchor at Anaura Bay. The friendly local Maori told Captain Cook to head south again where there was a suitable cove for dropping anchor at Uawa, sheltered from easterly winds by an island.

The Endeavour crew spent some six days in the area which we today know as Tolaga Bay. They rested, many of them enjoyed the company of Maori maidens, and Dr Solander and Mr Banks had time to record and collect plants. Herman Spöring sat down with paper and pencil to immortalise various objects — the intricately carved details of a Maori canoe as well as many sketches of the island called Pourewa by the locals, which a grateful Captain Cook named Sporing Island.



SWEDISH ENDEAVOURS: Thanks to the efforts of historian Margit Brew, the bust of Dr Daniel Solander (above) — the official botanist on Captain Cook's Endeavour voyage — was brought down from a research library on the top floor at Auckland University and placed outside the office of the professor of the School of European Languages. His assistant Herman Spöring (right) now flanks him on the other side of a large, beautifully leaded window.



The bust of Dr Solander was donated to Auckland University in 1986 by the Solander Society in Piteå — the town where he was born. It was sculpted by Tora Ceder, who lives in the far north of Sweden. The bust of Hermann Spöring was sculpted by Joanne Sullivan-Geesler of Auckland and unveiled in February of last year. Along with a copy now at Turku University in Finland, the work was paid for by the Helsinki Foundation.

named Sporing Island. The drawings are so detailed that contemporary archeological botanists have, by studying them, been able to deduce what plants were cultivated on it.

A further important happening took place in the Tolaga Bay area. It is officially acknowledged that the Endeavour crew were the first Europeans to walk on New Zealand soil, making English the first European language spoken in the country. When on their own, the two Swedish scientists would have spoken their own language.

Thus, Swedish is the second European language spoken on New Zealand soil — certainly not French, as most of us would have guessed.

In 1769 Captain Cook did his best to distinguish and repeat the name Uawa spoken by local Maori. Over time it has become Tolaga. The bay is surely one of the loveliest bays along the coast between East Cape and Gisborne.

I recently directed a couple living in Oslo, Norway — who are keen members of the James Cook Society — to Tolaga Bay, that they may visit the island once named after a fellow Scandinavian. They enjoyed the walk from the township to Cooks Cove but were unable to walk on to the island, as high tide covered the sandbank which makes it possible to cross the narrow strait.

Pourewa, meaning watchtower, is a very suitable name for the island. Few vessels would be able to pass on either side of it without the inhabitants being forewarned. A more suitable name than Sporing Island — but let's not forget Herman Spöring's

was also reminded of the bronze bust of Daniel Solander brought here by some of his countrymen in 1986.

Wondering where the bust was now, I learned from the professor of the School of European Languages at Auckland University that it was in their research library on the top floor. "On a special shelf by the door," was the reply. It sounded lonely, dusty and forgotten.

"Well, I think there should be a bronze bust of his friend Herman Spöring that they may continue speaking Swedish with each other," I said.

"Great idea but we don't have any money," was the reply.

I then contacted professor Olavi Koivokangas in Turku, Finland, who also thought a bronze bust of his countryman (Sweden lost Finland to Russia in 1809) would be a great idea. But, like the university here, no money was available.

However, knowing there are foundations that give money for cultural pursuits, I made contact with an Auckland sculptor and was told two bronze busts would cost 5000 euros. As I had expected, a Helsinki Foundation provided the money. On completion, the sculptor and I delivered one bust to the university and the other was air-freighted to Finland.

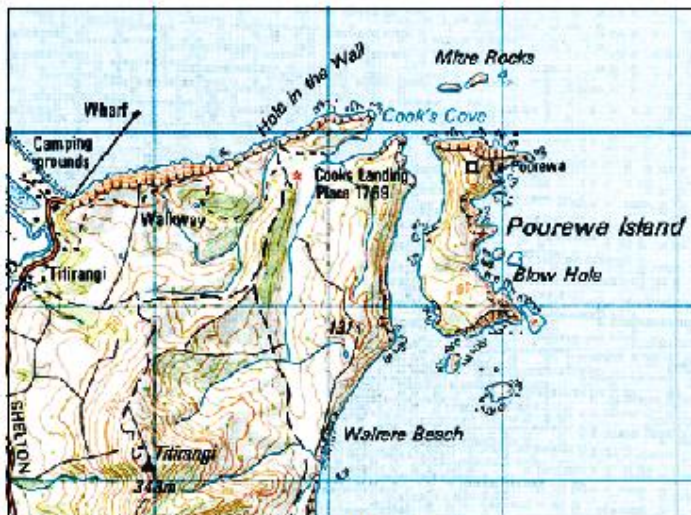
The unveiling at the Auckland University took place in February last year, with a specially-invited audience. Dr Solander was brought down from his shelf on the 7th floor and placed on an attractive new shelf outside the professor's office. His assistant Herman Spöring flanks him on the other side of a large, beautifully leaded window. The area where the two bronze busts are displayed is also decorated with prints of some of Spöring's drawings as well as a photo of a large, waxy yellow flower named Solandria maxima. The chief botanist at the Auckland's War Memorial Museum had told me about it. I found it in a hedge by the Wintergardens — a bit of good luck, as it was the last Solandria maxima to flower for the season. Clicking the shutter gave me great satisfaction.

The ambience of the area outside the office of the professor of the School of European Languages is attractive and offers a tasteful reminder of how the very first Scandinavian Vikings left their footprints on the history of New Zealand as early as 1769, alongside the English.

invaluable contributions towards Captain Cook's much admired map-making.

In the far south, Solander Island and Little Solander Island — north-west of Stewart Island at the western approach to Poveaux Strait — also remind us of the Swedish input on the Endeavour voyage.

Well, all this happened some 240 years ago. Why bring it to the fore now? One thing readily leads to another... In my research for Scandinavian Footprints, I read up about Dr Daniel Solander, Herman Spöring and in general about the Endeavour voyage. I



WATCHTOWER: Pourewa Island at Cooks Cove, Uawa.



THE UNVEILING: Bernadette Luciano, Auckland University's head of the School of European Languages and Literature, speaks at the unveiling of the bust of Herman Spöring in February last year.

SCANDINAVIAN FOOTPRINTS: Margit Brew is pictured at the unveiling with her book Scandinavian Footprints, research for which inspired her to commission the sculpting of two busts of Herman Spöring.

