

Per Tingbrand (1937–2020): A Personal Appreciation

Swedish lawyer, yachtsman and historian Per Einar Tingbrand, died on 21 October 2020, aged 83. He did much to expand our knowledge of the Swedish participants in James Cook's voyages, especially Daniel Solander, but also Herman Diedrich Spöring (an ethnic Swede born in Åbo, now Turku, Finland) and Anders Sparrman.

Per was born in Råneå (Norrbotten) on 8 May 1937. His father Karl Einar was originally a farmer, but re-trained as a road engineer because of sciatica. His mother Ethel had worked for a circus in her younger days. Although Sweden avoided invasion during the Second World War, Per's childhood was marked by austerity and anxieties associated with the conflict just beyond his country's borders. He completed his secondary education in Gävle, before doing his compulsory military service in the Royal Hälsinge Regiment (1957–58). Tingbrand was not his original surname. He was born Jonsson, a very common Swedish patronym. When he went to study law in Uppsala (1958–62), he gained approval from his father for a distinctive change. Tingbrand means 'court fire' in Swedish – a great name for a new lawyer! Between 1963–65, Per served as clerk of the District Court of Piteå (Norrbotten). On 6 June 1964, he married his beloved Ulla-Britt Sundell in her hometown of Edsbyn (Gävleborg). Two years later, after serving with the Court of Appeal for Upper Norrland, in Umeå, Per returned to Piteå to establish an independent legal practice. He also became a keen sailor and developed a passionate interest in the history of maritime exploration. On the north-western coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, Piteå was the birthplace of Daniel Solander (1733–1782), the favourite student of Carl Linnaeus and the first Swede to circle the globe aboard HMB *Endeavour*. Per was surprised to discover how little was known about Solander in his homeland, let alone other parts of the world. He set about remedying this. To coincide with the 250th anniversary of Solander's birth, Per co-edited an anthology of essays written by himself, Alf Axelson, Olof Kaijser, Villemo Kaijser, William T. Stearn and Alwyne Wheeler. It was published by the municipality of Piteå in 1983. He also published numerous articles in the *Piteå Segelsällskaps Sjørulla* [Piteå Sailing Club yearbook] about Solander's landfalls, many of which he had visited under sail.

In the mid-1980s, Per Tingbrand visited Australia and New Zealand. Among the ancillary subjects he researched, was the role of the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg in inspiring the construction of the Solander monument at Kurnell, on Botany Bay. It was completed in

1914, two years after Strindberg's death (see Tingbrand, P., 'August Strindberg och Daniel Solander', *Piteå Segelsällskaps Sjørulla*, 1984, pp. 100–4). On 24 February 1986, during his visit to New Zealand, Per gave a well-received lecture on Solander to a joint session of the Royal Society of Wellington and the Sweden–New Zealand Association. It was a similarly passionate lecture to a seniors' education group in Piteå that precipitated the formation of the Solanderföreningen [Solander Association] in 1999 (Per was a life member), and, in July the following year, the opening of the town's Solander Park.

I first learned of Per Tingbrand's work in 1991, when I had tentative plans to write a biography of Solander. I hesitated, thinking that I might end up treading on his toes; so, I telephoned him to discuss the matter. The man who answered my call had difficulty speaking. He soon revealed that he had only recently suffered a devastating cerebral haemorrhage which had changed his life forever and left him with epilepsy, impaired speech and memory loss. Per informed me that writing a detailed survey of Solander's life was now physically beyond him. He was delighted that someone else wanted to write such a biography and offered me whatever assistance he could.

I finally met this tall, bearded and silver-haired man in July 1992. His erudition, generosity, and sense of humour, despite his disabilities, immediately laid the foundations for a special friendship. Per kindly arranged accommodation for my whole family in a vacant schoolmaster's house in Piteå and, in his now unused legal chambers, let me photocopy whatever I wished from his Solander files. He was also a wonderful local guide during our visit and his family was very warm and welcoming.

For the biography, I knew that I had to gather all of Solander's known correspondence, but accurate translation of the Swedish letters inevitably presented me with a serious linguistic challenge. I thought that Per might want to be involved in this task and suggested to him that we co-edit Solander's correspondence for publication in a separate volume. I made this proposal after first discussing the project with Per's loving wife Ulla-Britt. She thought that he would be impossible to live with, if he did not have such a project to occupy him!

Over the next four years, Per and I gathered and edited copies of Solander's correspondence, from libraries and archives all over the world. Inevitably, we generated a great deal of correspondence of our own, as we discussed transcriptions, translations of letters not in

English, and explanatory notes. Per brought a lawyer's precision and meticulous attention to detail to the task. He was always a pleasure to work with.

The earliest surviving letter we found was preserved in the collection of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. It dates from February 1753 and was written by Solander to the physician Johan Gustaf Hallman, apparently when he [Hallman] was still in Padua. It may seem like a contradiction in terms to state that one needs to know what a text is about before one can fully translate it, but this is so often the case. For weeks, Per and I were unable to transcribe, let alone translate, one phrase in the letter. During a two-week period, we looked at the two words with our respective magnifying glasses, again and again, without recognition. Then suddenly, as if a veil was lifted, I read the words *acarus subcutaneous* and immediately realized that here was a reference to the itch mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*, the cause of the skin disease scabies. A whole chunk of the letter suddenly made sense.

Although Per took on the task of translating the Swedish letters, we did make some rigorous comparisons with previous unpublished translations by the remarkable English scholar Anna Gurney (1795–1857), now held by the Linnean Society in London. We also benefited from transcriptions of Solander's correspondence to his friend and colleague Joseph Banks, undertaken by Mary and Hannah Turner, between 1833 and 1845. (Their father, Dawson Turner (1775–1858), never fulfilled his ambition to write a biography of Banks.) In our division of labour, I assumed responsibility for deciphering the embedded names of authors, books, and plant and animal species, in virtually all of Solander's correspondence, regardless of whether the letters were in English, Swedish, Danish, Latin or German. Without doing this, it was frequently impossible for us to make sense of a text. One letter that we found in the Uppsala University Library, was written in Latin and addressed to the great Swiss polymath Albrecht von Haller in December 1760. Both Per and I had studied some Latin at school, but even with the help of more experienced classical scholars the letter stubbornly resisted clear translation. The introductory first page was missing and the remaining sheets were full of abbreviations, page numbers and a puzzling mélange of botanical and seemingly entomological terms like *insectifera*, *arachnoideas*, *muscas*, *araneas*, *scarabaeus*. It was only after consulting the first edition of Linnaeus's *Species plantarum* (1753), that the code was broken. Solander was discussing orchids whose specific epithets often allude to spidery and insect-like flowers.

When Solander moved to England, he continued to make important and influential friends one of whom was Benjamin Franklin. Our first hint of this was a letter that the Quaker naturalist Peter Collinson wrote to Solander in October 1767. Unfortunately, for a time, the location and full text of this letter was a mystery. Per had noted the existence of Collinson's letter to Solander in a working calendar of correspondence, but, after his stroke, he simply could not remember (or find his note for) its repository. Shortly before we were obliged to hand our completed work to our publisher Melbourne University Press, he suddenly remembered that it was among Benjamin Franklin's papers in the American Philosophical Society's collection in Philadelphia. Desperate to offer our readers a comprehensive collection of Solander's surviving correspondence, I sent an urgent fax to Philadelphia explaining our project and our looming deadline, but was very disappointed to learn that the letter could not be found. Then the librarian remembered that there was a photostat, dating from the 1950s, in the Franklin Collection at Yale University Library. It is hard for me to describe the surreal pleasure and relief that I felt on receiving that eighteenth-century letter from Yale the following morning: it is not often that one receives a fax from someone who has been dead for two and a half centuries telling you that Benjamin Franklin is coming for the weekend!

The results of our scholarly collaboration, *Daniel Solander: Collected Correspondence 1753–1782*, was published in 1995 by the Miegunyah Press (an imprint of Melbourne University Press) and Scandinavian University Press in Oslo. It remains in print, albeit in paperback (for Ian Boreham's review see *Cook's Log*, vol. 19, no. 4, October-December 1996). *Nature's Argonaut*, my biography of Solander, was published three years later by MUP and dedicated very gratefully to Per. In the decades that followed, Per sent numerous Solander pilgrims my way. I probably hold the world record for escorting Swedish gynaecologists to the Solander monument at Kurnell. Once, I even climbed the monument at Per's behest (and under the noses of the National Park staff) to measure it for a proposed, but never initiated, replica in Piteå!

Per's other consuming interest was the history of the island of Saint-Barthélemy, in the Lesser Antilles, which he first visited aboard a chartered ketch in 1976. He became an authority on the island's Swedish period: from 1784 until its return to France in 1878. Fluent in French and English, Per wrote many articles and several books about the island, including the 633-page reference work *Who Was Who in St. Bartholomew during the Swedish Epoch* (Swedish St Bartholomew Society, 2001). He was made an honorary citizen of the island in 1999. It was

one of several important honours he received. In 1989, he was elected a member of the *Kungliga Skytteanska Samfundet* (the northernmost Swedish academy). In 2006, the University of Umeå awarded him an honorary doctorate.

In 2001, Per and Ulla-Britt decided to move to Dalarö, in the Archipelago of Stockholm, to be closer to their twin daughters Helena and Katarina, youngest daughter Teresa and ultimately four grandchildren: Wilmer, Arvid, Anna and Evert. Although his travelling days were over, he frequently shared remarkable reminiscences of his journeys on land and sea. In the year he moved to Dalarö, the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan and Per surprised me by telling me that he had visited these monumental sculptures in his youth. Naturally, he was outraged by their destruction. He once said to me, that practicing law he had learned not to be surprised by aspects of human behaviour; yet, his sensibilities were always progressive and compassionate. Despite failing eyesight and dependence on a wheel chair, he remained in good spirits in the embrace of his family. His loved one were beside him when he passed away at home, in Dalarö, on 21 October. He was a remarkable man and will be deeply missed.

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