The Voyage of Captain George Vancouver 1791-95: The Interplay of Physical and Psychological Pressures

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VANCOUVER'S NAVAL CAREER

George Vancouver was descended, through his father, from the honourable Netherlands family of van Coeverden and his mother could trace her ancestry to Sir Richard Grenville, the great Elizabethan sea-dog. That pedigree was no doubt a factor in achieving an introduction to Captain James Cook for, at the tender age of 14, the young Vancouver joined the Resolution to accompany Cook on his second voyage. He obviously acquitted himself well, because he served as a midshipman in the Discovery on Cook's third voyage to the northwest coast of America. Vancouver was personally involved in events that led to Cook's tragic death at Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii, where his knowledge of the Hawaiian language and rapport with the natives helped to restore relationships. It also appears to have influenced subsequent reactions.

On his return in 1780, he passed his Lieutenant's examination and on 18 December was appointed to the sloop Martin cruising in the Channel, where Vancouver was actively employed boarding enemy vessels and sailing captured prizes. Though Martin, engaged mainly along the southeast coast, remained relatively healthy, her encounters with the Western Squadron would introduce Vancouver to the ravages of scurvy and typhus fever. According to Sir Gilbert Blane, 1,457 cases of scurvy and 5,539 fever cases were admitted to Haslar Hospital in Portsmouth during 1780, while in July 1781 Admiral Darby was deploring the lack of sauerkraut which had caused scurvy to make "strong strides in the Channel ships."
In February 1782, the *Martin* took him to the West Indies, where she immediately fought and captured a Spanish vessel off Port Royal, Jamaica. Two men were killed and several wounded. Here, Vancouver was appointed Third Lieutenant of the 74-gun ship *Fame* on 7 May 1782. She had been severely damaged at the Battle of the Saintes on 12 April. Two seamen had been killed and 37 casualties had been sent to hospital where another two men died. *Fame* was an unhealthy ship and had been devastated by an epidemic of typhus fever, introduced by pressed men, before leaving England. Seven had died on board and 63 were discharged to hospital before the ship sailed. Sixteen men died, including the Surgeon's first mate, during Vancouver's first two or three months in her, when *Fame* was based at Port Royal, known to sailors as "the graveyard" because of the high mortality resulting from malaria, yellow fever, and dysentery encountered there. According to Blane, the incidence of scurvy, though diminishing, was still significant in April 1782. In July 1782, *Fame* was so short of hands that she was obliged to impress 38 men in Jamaica and, on her return to Plymouth in June 1783, sent 83 invalids to hospital.

Vancouver then spent 17 months in England before joining the 50-gun *Europa* as Third Lieutenant in November 1784. She encountered similar problems in manning, discharging 57 men to hospital before sailing to the West Indies. Vancouver again found himself based on Port Royal where, during the next four years, *Europa* sent numerous men to hospital, 29 of whom died there, while another 73 were found unfit for further service.

He spent a good deal of time surveying the unhealthy Jamaican harbours with his friend Joseph Whidbey, the ship's master, and his professional competence brought him to the attention of Commodore Sir Alan Gardner who became his friend and patron. Advancement quickly followed. He was promoted to Second Lieutenant in May 1786 and First Lieutenant in February 1788. *Europa* returned to England the following September and Vancouver was appointed First Lieutenant of the *Discovery* under Captain Roberts, who had also sailed with Cook, when an exploring voyage to the northwest coast of America was first mooted. In May 1790, however, Gardner had him appointed Third Lieutenant of his ship, the *Courageux*, when a fleet, known as the "Spanish Armament," was rapidly mobilized to challenge Spain's seizure of English ships and their base at Nootka on Vancouver Island, which Cook had visited in 1778. By August 1790, sickness had become a problem in the *Courageux* requiring fumigation and strict hygienic measures.

The Nootka Convention, which re-established the British position, was signed on 28 October 1790, and the Admiralty mounted an expedition with the dual objective of regaining control of the Nootka base and
undertaking a detailed survey of the northwest coast of America to include a search for a North-West Passage. By this time, Vancouver had become First Lieutenant of the 74-gun *Courageux*, and his knowledge of the coast, his experience with Cook, the patronage of Sir Alan Gardner and his growing reputation as an officer, navigator, and surveyor gained him the command of the expedition consisting of two ships, the *Discovery* and the *Chatham*.

**THE CIRCUMNAVIGATION**

In a voyage of some 65,000 miles lasting over four-and-a-half years, the longest circumnavigation ever undertaken by sailing ships, Vancouver admirably succeeded in his aims. He negotiated skilfully with the Spanish at Nootka and developed a warm personal relationship with the Spanish Commander, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra. He commanded the confidence and respect both of Tahitians and American Indians, and so won the affection of Hawaiians that, in February 1794, he had little difficulty in persuading their king and chiefs to cede Hawaii to Britain. As Godwin has pointed out, he established a special rapport with the Hawaiians who regarded him with awe, because of his integrity, his refusal to sell firearms, and his attempts to resolve internecine conflicts by peaceful negotiation.

Vancouver faithfully carried out his instructions to survey the northwest coast from latitude 60 degrees to 30 degrees north, extending from Cook Inlet to southern California. It was undertaken often in appalling weather conditions and called for feats of supreme physical endurance and the courage to win over hostile natives by the humanity he had learned from Cook. Each inlet was explored by men in open boats, rowing all day and often far into the night, yet cheerfully accepting cold, hunger, rain-soaked clothing, and fitful, interrupted sleep, inspired by the example of a commander who shared their vicissitudes. Over 1,700 miles of convoluted coastline were charted as meticulously as the scope and conditions of the survey would allow, until Vancouver believed he had effectually excluded a navigable North-West Passage. Admiral Bern Andersen has suggested that boat journeys, mostly under oars, added a further 10,000 miles to the survey.

Anticipating Nelson, Vancouver claimed that "the most important of all blessings [was] health" and followed Cook's example with even greater attention to fresh provisions. They included wild plants, fruit and berries. Unlike Cook, however, he relied chiefly upon orange and lemon juice in the cure of scurvy and carried large supplies. When mild scurvy appeared in six seamen after the rigours of the first coastal survey in 1792, he had the satisfaction of finding that the remedy "from
some removed the disorder, and checked its progress in others."24 When it reappeared after the final labourious survey of 1794, he discovered that the citrus juice had lost some of its potency through long storage, so he altered course for Valparaiso25 in order to obtain the fruit and vegetables that he knew would cure his invalids, despite his instructions not to call at South American ports. It is evidence of Vancouver's constant concern for the health and welfare of his men and it is significant that, in the unhappy aftermath of the voyage, there was never a hint of criticism of Vancouver from any of his sailors.

HEALTH OF THE CREW

As a result of this unremitting attention to health and hygiene, Vancouver achieved a remarkable health record. There was a serious outbreak of dysentery at the Cape of Good Hope on the voyage out, contracted from a heavily infected Dutch ship from Batavia which spread this and other contagious disorders to the hospital, the town, and convict transports bound for New South Wales.26 Thomas Keld, Discovery's boatswain, appears to have been a victim and was left at the Cape.27 Cranstoun, the Senior Surgeon, had a stroke.28 Two mild outbreaks of scurvy followed coastal surveys, probably because of hard physical effort associated with environmental stress and the difficulty of procuring adequate antiscorbutics. Cold wet weather brought upper respiratory infections and rheumatism. Two episodes of anaphylaxis resulted from eating mussels and, in Chatham, Puget reported large lumps on the bodies of his men after the 1793 surveys, unresponsive to any form of treatment. They appeared three weeks after opening a box of winter clothes. It suggests a virus infection, possibly glandular fever, since the outbreak was accompanied by great debility and men were off duty for several weeks,29 during which time the tumours persisted. Chatham's boatswain, House, suffered from chronic rheumatism and was sent home with Cranstoun from Nootka via the store-ship Daedalus, Archibald Menzies, the Surgeon-Naturalist, succeeding Cranstoun as Senior Surgeon.30 Four men remained at the Cape when the ships sailed to escape the dysentery outbreak there, and two ailing seamen were transferred to Daedalus for less demanding duties.

The mortality was amazingly low for an expedition so arduous and of such length. In Discovery, a marine died during the dysentery epidemic, a seaman from acute anaphylaxis, and three men were lost overboard. Chatham did not lose a single man.

On his arrival at St. Helena in July 1795, where he found England at war with Holland and captured the Dutch East Indiaman Macassar, Vancouver could claim with justifiable pride that, with one exception, "all my officers and men return... perfectly well in health and with
constitutions apparently unimpaired by the extremely labourious serv-
... to which without a murmur they had, at all times, and in all
weathers, uniformly submitted with great zeal and alacrity.31 The
single exception was Vancouver himself, who was now a very sick
man.

THE RETURN

Despite these remarkable achievements, Vancouver found himself
cold-shouldered in England and his voyage aroused little interest
because fears of a French invasion and Howe's great victory the previ-
ous year at the battle of the Glorious First of June had diverted public
attention from the excitement of new discoveries to the excitement of
war. The Admiralty procrastinated over his pay and allowances, while
settling those of subordinates immediately. He became impoverished,
ran into debt, and only received his back pay after two years of corre-
spondence and without reimbursement of the personal expenses he
had incurred during the voyage.32 Menzies, on the other hand, was
paid double the amount that Vancouver received and all his ex-
penses.33 Then officers in St. Helena claimed part of the prize money.
This delayed a settlement and reduced the size of the shares paid to
Vancouver's deserving crews. Lord Chatham declined to accord Van-
couver an audience and there is no direct evidence that Vancouver
received his own share of the prize money before his death. Finally, the
Admiralty refused to allow him the grant for publication that they had
so generously accorded Cook and would pay only the engravers' fees.
Ever the perfectionist, Vancouver employed the best men.34

PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURES

Vancouver, whose friends in high places had secured for him the
command of this most successful expedition, was now finding himself
without a friend in power.35 One reason was that his most influential
patrons were now fighting the French. However, Dr. Kaye Lamb, the
Canadian historian, has mustered an impressive amount of informa-
tion to supplement and annotate Vancouver's own account of the
voyage. It provides new insights into the social and political pressures
to which Vancouver, suffering from a serious illness, was subjected
and puts into proper perspective the criticism of disaffected subordi-
nates.36

Any inference drawn from his response to these pressures must
necessarily take account of Vancouver's enigmatic personality. He was
capable of inspiring men to the heights of human endeavour, and as
capable of arousing violent antagonism. He was gentlemanly, courte-
ous, and generous in his hospitality; patient and understanding in
dealing with native peoples; susceptible to the beauties of nature; sensitive to suffering; motivated by high moral principles; yet harsh and inflexible in the face of dishonesty, disloyalty, and dereliction of duty.

Throughout the voyage, Vancouver experienced a growing sense of isolation. He had kept the admiralty fully informed about the negotiations at Nootka, yet received not a single acknowledgment or instruction. To Vancouver, this must have smacked of disapproval. He lived daily with the vivid memory of Cook's death at the hands of hitherto friendly natives; he had heard of the anarchy prevailing in France after the Revolution. In the South Seas, he had seen some of the consequences of the Bounty mutiny and, at Nootka, had learned of a mutiny in the French vessel La Flavie. He encountered a growing native opposition to their exploitation by South Sea traders and saw the ravages of Western diseases which had been transmitted by the crews of visiting ships. Understanding how volatile native sentiment could be, he kept his young gentlemen on a tight rein, restricted shore leave, and established strict rules for fair and honest trading through the chiefs.

These measures ensured peaceful relations, but they led to further psychological pressures upon Vancouver, because they aroused deep resentment among some of the young gentlemen, particularly those who had experienced the full blast of Vancouver's terrifying wrath or his punishments, which were nevertheless meted out with scrupulous fairness, without regard to social standing. This polarized opinion into pro- and anti-Vancouver factions and set the juniors at one another's throats. It spelled disaster for Vancouver, because the small vociferous and rebellious minority had influential relatives. They were led by Thomas Pitt, the future Lord Camelford, who was related to the Prime Minister, and they included George Hewitt, the Surgeon's first mate, who had expected to be promoted to Surgeon in the place of Cranstoun when he was invalided after his stroke. Vancouver, however, an excellent judge of character, considered Archibald Menzies, the Surgeon-Naturalist, "the most proper person" to fill the vacancy. Menzies clearly agreed, but the appointment made Hewitt Vancouver's bitterest critic.

It was not an ideal choice, for Menzies had been sponsored by Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, who had negotiated special conditions of service for Menzies, which made him virtually independent of Vancouver. This caused divided loyalties and placed Vancouver, as captain, in an impossible position, for Menzies, by means of private letters, provided Banks and his circle with a biased view of affairs, which Banks related to Lord Grenville, the minister involved. When Menzies later had a blazing contretemps with Vancouver on the quarter-deck, he threw in his lot with the disaffected
and, through Banks, sealed Vancouver's fate. No doubt they were both under stress at the end of the voyage, but Menzies quite failed to appreciate the problems caused to Vancouver by the loss of 17 able seamen to man the prize and provoked a silly and unnecessary confrontation. A more serious criticism is that Menzies, as Vancouver's doctor, portrayed little insight into or sympathy for Vancouver's rapidly declining health. That, too, could be said of Menzies' first assistant, Hewitt, and is perhaps a commentary upon their lack of clinical acumen and interest. It was only as an old man that Menzies could look back to Vancouver with affection and admire his qualities of leadership.

LORD CAMELFORD

Vancouver's stress did not end with the voyage, for he arrived in England to find that his reputation had preceded him and Pitt, now Lord Camelford, challenged him to a duel. He was restrained after Penn, Vancouver's friend, intervened, but Camelford, meeting Vancouver with his brother Charles in Conduit Street, lashed out at him with his cane until Charles, a formidable opponent, intervened to defend Vancouver who was now rapidly declining under his terminal illness. The satirist Gillray lampooned Vancouver in a cruel and libellous attack on his character (Plate 1), which imputed cowardice and avarice, and Sir Joseph Banks collated evidence through Menzies of Vancouver's alleged arrogance, brutality, and exploitation. It was quite untrue, for Vancouver consistently promoted the interests of every officer and man who had contributed to the expeditions's success; his punishment record compared favourably with that of Cook on his third voyage and of Puget in the Chatham, who had dealt similarly with a recalcitrant midshipman, Augustus Boyd Grant. Moreover, detailed examination of the logs of the captains and masters of Vancouver's previous ships, the Martin, Fame, Europa and Courageux, and those of Vancouver himself, do not suggest a harsh disciplinarian. They do provide, however, admirable precedents for Vancouver's controversial actions and no doubt these were the disciplinary procedures he followed.

He returned a relatively poor man with none of the collections his accusers had themselves accumulated. Indeed, a lampoon of the infamous Lord Cochrane gave the lie to the charge of avarice, for it disclosed that Vancouver was never repaid for helping Cochrane out of financial difficulties as a midshipman. Camelford, who started it all, quickly disgraced himself. His violent passion brought him before magistrates because of attacks on innocent citizens. It caused him to lose his first command after he had shot and killed a fellow officer and finally ended his turbulent and unmourned life in a duel in 1804.
Plate 1
The Caning in Conduit Street. Satire by James Gillray
By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum
Nevertheless, Gillray and Banks destroyed Vancouver and his health never recovered. The chief medical interest of the Gillray lampoon is that it endorsed the observation of Manby in January 1793 that Vancouver "has grown quite fat," which implied that it was of recent development. Menzies told Banks that he had prescribed for Vancouver throughout the voyage and Midshipman Barrie mentioned that he had been suddenly stricken with some illness before leaving Spithead. He was recovering by the time the ships reached Falmouth in March 1791 and reported improved strength and a good appetite. He had lost his appetite again by the time Teneriffe was sighted and Menzies told Banks that he had "saved Vancouver's life" by putting him on a nutritive diet "when he thought himself within a few days of dissolution." He fell victim to the dysentery epidemic at the Cape, and both Tahitians and Hawaiians commented on his prematurely old appearance. Kanekapolei, widow of the deceased Hawaiian chief Kalaniopuu, found "his person so altered that it was some time before she was quite reconciled to the change that 14 years had produced."

During the second year, he developed a cough and put on weight and, in January 1793, Barrie reported his having been laid up with "gout." That was often a lay description of any inflamed joints and Vancouver himself had reported an outbreak of rheumatic complaints following mild scurvy after an exhausting surveying season.

He became less communicative and increasingly irritated by inefficiency and disobedience. Explosive, unpredictable outbursts were associated with language that seemed to shock his officers as though it were a new and unexpected feature of his deteriorating physical condition. The stress under which he was now labouring was also reflected in loss of stamina on boat expeditions. During the last series of surveys in 1794, he was too ill to accompany the boats. On 14 July he made an attempt to do so, but by midday experienced the "most violent indisposition" which terminated in a "bilious colic" and he was treated in his cabin for several days afterwards. On the voyage home he was still capable of driving himself to bursts of extraordinary energy, but they were followed by acute physical exhaustion. At Monterey, the weakness which had now assailed him for eight months forced him to decline invitations to take physical recreation. Thereafter, he was rarely able to go ashore and, in January 1795, found himself in "a very feeble and debilitated state." Yet, at Valparaiso in March, he was able to muster enough energy to undertake an arduous two-day ride on horseback over a high mountain road, in order to pay his respects to the President and Captain-General of Chile, Ambrosio O'Higgins.
On his return, he seems to have consulted his old friend Dr. John Hunter, who had been Superintendent of Military Hospitals in Jamaica while Vancouver was serving in the *Fame,* and Vancouver probably came under his care after his first exposure to West Indian mosquitoes at Port Royal. By 1795, Hunter had become an eminent London physician and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He published his *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Jamaica* in 1796 and, in 1788, a paper on hot springs, so it is not surprising to find Vancouver receiving treatment at Bristol Hotwells in January 1796 where, according to Kentish, one of the physicians there with naval connections, hot vapour baths were used to treat chest diseases, bowel conditions, diabetes, rheumatism, and dropsy. Kentish also mentions the report of Johnson, a naval surgeon, that the vapour bath had been introduced into the Royal Navy to treat cases of yellow fever.

**TERMINAL ILLNESS**

Vancouver then rented a house in the village of Petersham on the Thames, which he shared with his brother John, who helped him to prepare his journal for publication. It was conveniently close to Richmond, where he could draw upon the resources of his old friends Granville Penn, a Quaker and grandson of the founder of Pennsylvania, and Sir David Dundas, Serjeant-Surgeon to George III. They both witnessed his will. He did not improve, however, and by 15 March 1797, John was writing letters on his behalf because, as Vancouver explained to his agent, James Sykes, “writing is exceedingly pernicious to my present indisposition.”

He was still under the care of his friend Dr. Hunter and no doubt also being visited by Dundas because, on 9 May 1798, John informed the Earl of Dundonald that

> ... my poor brother the Captain has been for these six weeks very dangerously ill and is at length so much reduced that Dr. Hunter and our medical friends cease to give me hope that there is any probability of his recovery. His disorder has been and still continues unabated, a violent inflammation in the stomach attended with a fever that nothing has been able to subdue. For these last thirteen days he has appeared to me to have been sinking ... and I fear that we shall not have him many days amongst us.

Vancouver died at 4 a.m., on 12 May 1798, at the age of 40 years, and was buried on the 18th in Petersham Churchyard (Plate 2).
There is no record of any illness when Vancouver was serving in the West Indies but that is not unusual, for an officer’s absence was not officially recorded until it extended to six weeks or more. For instance, the first mention of the illness of Captain Marsh of the Europa is of his death. Nevertheless, there are some indications that Vancouver was indeed ill in the West Indies. He named Hunter Point on Graham Island after “my very particular friend and physician,” which suggests he was under Hunter’s care while he was in the sickly Fame on first arriving in Jamaica. It may also be significant that the logs of both the captain and master of the Europa show that Vancouver accompanied Whidbey on surveys of the Jamaican harbours on every occasion except in early March and in July 1788, when Whidbey carried out the survey alone. There is also a cryptic note in the captain’s log and Vancouver’s own that he “returned in the yard schooner” on 31 May.
1788, a year with a high sickness rate and an emphasis upon fumigation and hygiene. It was a phrase used in connection with sick returning from hospital.

In his book, Hunter observed that ships might avoid malaria and yellow fever by anchoring well away from shore, but men working in small boats were invariably affected and supplies of cinchona bark were never adequate for their protection against malaria. It is significant that Europa was moved out of Port Royal Harbour in November 1788 to lie for two months at its entrance while sickness was at its height. While a cure was often brought about by return to Europe, this was not always the case and when attacks of fever persisted he had noticed that "the stomach and bowels were often disordered." He remarked that "the remittent fever, after repeated attacks, often procures dropsy, or swellings of the liver or spleen, and frequently a complication of these disorders" and added that "the same thing holds true of intermittents." In such cases, he prescribed squills as a diuretic and administered mercury with cinchona bark. No doubt that is what he gave to Vancouver. He also recommended riding on horseback and this may have been the reason why Vancouver, ill as he was, undertook the journey through the Andes in 1795.

All things considered, Vancouver's medical history suggests that he probably suffered from abdominal complications of a recurrent Jamaican fever. Malaria is the most likely, but it does not account for all his symptoms, particularly his premature aging, sudden outbursts of irritation, his prostration after physical exercise, and his problem with writing. However, both malaria and yellow fever may damage the thyroid and adrenal glands. In 1874, Sir William Gull published the first paper on myxoedema, which he attributed to thyroid insufficiency, and, in 1888, the Clinical Society of London described over 100 cases, many in an advanced state, with florid manifestations rarely seen today.

The report was one of the best accounts of untreated myxoedema which has yet been published. It showed that the disease commonly occurred in women between the ages of 30 and 50, although 15 percent of cases were males. The condition was unrelated to alcohol intake, but 14 percent of all cases had had syphilis, although this may only have reflected its incidence in the social class from which the sample was taken. There is certainly not the slightest evidence that Vancouver ever suffered from venereal disease or that his social activities would have placed him in danger of contracting it. Increased bulk and weight were found in 92 percent of patients, who tended to become round-shouldered. The face was heavy and full and often showed a benign expression; the eyelids were puffy and the skin pale, often with a purple malar flush. Hair was sparse and the outer one-third of the
eyebrows was lost. Premature aging was pronounced. There was swelling of the abdomen and extremities and thickening and coarsening of the skin with grooved brittle nails. The appetite was poor and constipation common. Almost all were profoundly intolerant of cold. The voice was hoarse and deafness common—symptoms hardly worthy of comment in a sea captain shouting orders through a speaking trumpet and exposed to gunfire. Some described altered sensation in the limbs and 30 percent found writing impossible because of pain due, as is now known, to the carpal tunnel syndrome caused by compression of the median nerve at the wrist by myxoedematous tissue. Myxoedema alone may not account for Vancouver's increasing prostration after physical effort. However, it could have resulted from concomitant adrenal insufficiency, since Addison's disease is associated with a high incidence of myxoedema and thyroid autoantibodies may be found at high titre in the blood in both conditions. Addison did not describe the disease which bears his name until 1855 but, just 10 years after Vancouver's death and at about the same time in the morning, Jane Austen died at her Hampshire home with terminal symptoms closely resembling those of Vancouver. She was just one year older and her illness had begun insidiously, about 12 months previously, with headache and digestive disturbances, which she had described as "bilious." Profound exhaustion followed physical and mental activity and she had suffered intermittent bouts of fever. Like Vancouver, her writing had deteriorated, though through fatigue and not because of pain, and Cope has made a retrospective diagnosis of Addison's disease. When Addison described the disease, he emphasized its insidious onset in middle age, the general malaise, anorexia, marked fatigue on exertion, and a large, bulky frame tending to fat and flabbiness. What Jane Austen had, which is not recorded in Vancouver's history, was the characteristic skin pigmentation, but we only know about that because of Jane Austen's preoccupation with her looks.

THE DISPUTED PORTRAIT

A presumed portrait of Vancouver was acquired by the National Portrait Gallery, London, in 1878, and was said to have been painted by Lemuel Abbott (Plate 3). A former Curator at the gallery, John Kerslake, believed that the portrait (listed as number 503) was not the work of Abbott and he doubted whether the sitter was Vancouver, because he looked older than his years and was not wearing a naval uniform.

There are, however, several pointers to its being that of Vancouver and the arguments in favour have been discussed elsewhere. It had
belonged to a West Indian planter named Brooke, who may have been a friend from Vancouver's Caribbean days. The books on the shelves are of the voyages of Magellan, Drake, and Cook, to all of whom Vancouver refers with deference. The globe displays the northwest
coast of America that he charted, and a Bible lies on the table, indicative of the spiritual feelings he expressed in his account of the voyage and his link with Quaker friends. When compared with a miniature of his brother John, which was loaned by the kindness of Mrs. Caroline Bundy of Norfolk, a direct descendant of John, there is a striking family resemblance (Plate 4). There are the same arched eyebrows and Meaney pointed out that George's eyebrows were "remarkably short."\(^8\) Loss of the outer ends of the eyebrows often accompanies thyroid deficiency. Both have sharply defined noses tending to turn up at the tip. The angles of their mouths are similar and both have light brown eyes and full cheeks. In fact, it is quite possible to see, in the miniature of John, the young midshipman George, waving his hat on the bowsprit of Cook's Resolution off Antarctica to claim that he had travelled further south than anyone in the world.\(^8\)
But there the similarity ends. John’s hair is fine and abundant, while George is wearing such a tight-fitting wig that suggests he can have little. George has a thick neck and double chin, he is obese, and his coat, allowing for the faulty memory of the artist who may have completed the details later, suggests that of a captain’s undress uniform. It is stretched to its limit around his ample girth. His eyelids are puffy as are the backs of the hands and, in the original, the artist has faithfully portrayed coarse and puckered skin. As his friends had observed, he looks older than his years.

FINAL ENIGMA

This painting must therefore seriously be considered as that of George Vancouver, and suggests that hypothyroidism was at least one of the complications that may have followed malaria contracted in Jamaica and that plagued him for the remainder of his life. Associated adrenal insufficiency would explain the other features of his illness. However, just to confuse the diagnosis further, there is one other intriguing factor. Hunter, his physician, also drew attention to the prevalence in Jamaica of a syndrome he described as “dry belly ache” characterized by abdominal colic, puffy swellings, muscle pain, weakness and wasting, especially in the upper limbs, and occasional palsies. For this, he recommended treatment in warm natural springs. He showed that the condition was due to lead poisoning through drinking Jamaican rum that had been distilled from cane sugar in contact with lead during the process of manufacture.88 This, however, is unlikely to be relevant, for Vancouver never exhibited the characteristic neurological symptoms. In any case, he appears to have been too abstemious for contaminated Jamaican rum to have had a lasting effect and Hunter’s published cases do not suggest long-term complications. Such a diagnosis would leave his recurrent bouts of fever and many other symptoms unexplained so we must therefore conclude that Vancouver died from complications of Jamaican fever which damaged the thyroid and probably also the adrenal glands. It is also significant that, before sailing from England, Vancouver obtained a huge quantity of “best Peruvian bark.”89 It was very costly, but it was just the sort of precaution that a captain with personal experience of its efficacy in fevers might be expected to take.

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NOTES

4 London, Public Record Office (hereafter, PRO), Adm 52/2396/1, Master’s Log of HMS Martin, 1 December 1780-30 November 1781.
7 PRO, Adm 52/2396/3, Master’s Log of HMS Martin, 1 December 1781-23 December 1782.
8 PRO, Adm 52/343/6, Captain’s Log of HMS Fame, 1 October 1781-24 April 1782.
10 PRO, Adm 36/8848, Muster List of HMS Fame, 4 September 1781-28 February 1783.
11 Blane, Observations, p. 60.
12 PRO, Adm 81/343/7, Captain’s Log of HMS Fame, 25 April 1782-2 July 1783.
13 PRO, Adm 52/2299/6, Master’s Log of HMS Fame, 23 May 1782-2 July 1783.
14 PRO, Adm 36/10660, Muster List of HMS Europa, 1 November 1784-28 February 1789.
15 PRO, Adm 52/2294/10, Master’s Log of HMS Europa, 22 September 1787-21 September 1788; National Maritime Museum (NMM), ADM/L/E/155, Captain’s Log of HMS Europa, 8 September 1787-7 September 1788, and Vancouver’s Log, HMS Europa, 24 November 1787-8 August 1789.
17 PRO, Adm 51/206, Captain’s Log of HMS Courageux, 22 July 1790-15 February 1791.
20 Godwin, Vancouver, p. 87-88, 121.
21 Andersen, Surveyor of the Sea, p. 213.
26 Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery*, vol. 1, p. 18-19; PRO, Adm 55/27, P. Puget, Log of *HMS Discovery*, 16 July 1791.


29 PRO, Adm 55/17, P. Puget, Log of *HMS Chatham*, ff. 40-47.


32 PRO, Adm 1/2629, Vancouver to Nepean, ff. 313-15, 4 July 1796.

33 PRO, Chatham Papers 30/185, Vancouver to Lord Chatham, 7 April 1796.

34 Lamb, *Voyage*, vol. 1, p. 228-29.

35 PRO, Chatham Papers 30/185, Vancouver to Lord Chatham, 7 April 1796.

36 PRO, Adm 1/2629, Vancouver to Nepean, ff. 313-15, 4 July 1796.

37 PRO, Adm 55/17, P. Puget, Log of *HMS Chatham*.

38 University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Special Collections, T. Manby, Notes on interleaved page margins on a copy of Vancouver’s *Voyage*.


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42 PRO, Adm 2/1344, Secret Orders and Letters, 1790-1792, London, Board of Admiralty to Vancouver, 8 March 1791.

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71 PRO, Adm 1/2629, f. 303, Vancouver to E. Nepean from Bristol, 6 January 1796.
77 PRO, Adm 51/294, Captain’s Log HMS Europa, 1787-1789.
78 PRO, Adm 52/2294, Master’s Log HMS Europa, 1787-1788.
84 London, National Portrait Gallery, J. Kerslake, Notes on portrait number 503.