

# THE Book Collector

---

NIKOLOPOULOS *Nonsense*  
McBurney & FAERIE  
QUEENE  
Houdini BANKS  
& *Folding*  
Nixon  
The Seasons

---

SUMMER 2020

# A Palimpsest of Naturalists:

The Manuscripts of the Linnean Society of London

ANKE TIMMERMANN

Now do I wish our freinds in England could by the assistance of some magical spying glass take a peep at our situation : Dr. Solander settts at the Cabbin table describing, myself at my Bureau Journalizing, between us hangs a large bunch of sea weed, upon the table lays the wood and barnacles; they would see that notwithstanding our different occupations our lips move very often, and without being conjurors might guess that we were talking about what we should see upon the land which there is no doubt we shall see very soon.

Joseph Banks, notes on the approach to New Zealand, *The Endeavour Journal*, 3 October 1769

The rich, colourful flora of Brazil, Tahiti, New Zealand, and Australia had been largely unexplored when Joseph Banks arrived in the Pacific onboard His Majesty's Bark *Endeavour* during Captain Cook's first voyage 250 years ago. Its investigation, description, and depiction by Banks, the naturalist Daniel Solander, and the artist Sydney Parkinson was as historically important as Cook's exploration of the Australian east coast, which would lead to the British settlement of Australia. After the return of the *Endeavour* to England, with thousands of specimens on board, the publication of Banks's botanical findings was just as eagerly anticipated: it really promised to be a 'magical spying glass' into worlds as yet unseen by other Europeans. Among those most excited to learn about Banks's discoveries (but keenly aware of the sheer amount work required for Banks to finish his projected catalogue of the plants discovered in the voyage) was Solander's erstwhile professor, Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778). 'Linnaeus was thus dismayed to learn from his correspondent [the cloth merchant and naturalist John] Ellis that Banks intended to sail again with Cook on another long voyage in the near future. He feared, with justification, that "all their matchless and truly astonishing collection, such as has never been seen before, nor

may ever be seen again is to be put aside untouched, to be thrust into some corner, to become, perhaps, the prey of insects and of destruction”'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, although Banks would concentrate on his presidency of the Royal Society and a life as one of the foremost botanists in Britain rather than embarking on another circumnavigation of the globe, and although he employed Solander to describe the plants as well as a team of eighteen engravers to engrave a total of 743 plates over the course of thirteen years, the long-anticipated work remained unpublished at Banks's death in 1820, apart from some small groups of proof plates.

While disappointing his expectations regarding the projected publication, Linnaeus's 'immortal Banks' would be instrumental in determining the fate of Linnaeus's own collections, and thus in making new botanical worlds accessible to naturalists.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more aware than most of the problems of housing collections – his own had required him to purchase a house on Soho Square in London – and following a failed attempt to acquire Linnaeus's collections after the latter's death, Banks encouraged the young English physician and botanist James Edward Smith to bring the collections to England when they were once more offered for sale after Linnaeus the Younger's passing in 1783. Linnaeus's library was now included in the sale, and it was thus – thanks to both Banks's encouragement and his failure to add Linnaeus's collections to his own a few years earlier – that 3,000 books, a large number of manuscripts, and the correspondence of Linnaeus the Elder (of ca. 3,000 letters) would be among the founding collections of the Linnean Society of London in 1788.<sup>3</sup>

1. William T. Stearn, 'A Royal Society Appointment with Venus in 1768: The Voyage of Cook and Banks in the *Endeavour* in 1768–1771 and its Botanical Results', in Tony Ballantine, ed., *Science, Empire and the European Exploration of the Pacific* (London, 2018), pp. 93–122, at p. 116, referring to a Latin language letter from Linnaeus to Ellis dated 22 October 1771.

2. The reference is, more fully, to 'the immortal Banks and Solander', and closes the aforementioned letter from Linnaeus to Ellis, an English translation of which may be found in Joseph Dalton Hooker, ed., *Journal of the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Banks... During Captain Cook's First Voyage in H.M.S. [sic] Endeavour in 1768–71...* (London, 1896), pp. xl–xli, at p. xli.

3. The history of the Linnean Society and circumstances of its foundation were introduced in the first article in this series: Isabelle Charmantier, 'Carl Linnaeus, James

Over the past 232 years they have been joined by further correspondences between naturalists, and their archives, so that the collections now include the papers of figures from Linnaeus's immediate circle, such as the cloth merchants and botanists John Ellis (1714–1776) and Peter Collinson (1694–1768); those of the naturalist and traveller Thomas Pennant (1726–1798), one of the earliest Fellows of the Linnean Society and a correspondent of both Linnaeus's and Smith's; and those of the physician, conchologist, and botanist Richard Pulteney (1730–1801).<sup>4</sup> In the later 18th and the 19th centuries various naturalist-collector Fellows contributed descriptions of new species of plants and animals from across the globe: the papers of Alexander Anderson (1748–1811), the superintendent of the St Vincent botanical garden in the British West Indies, include 148 drawings of plants from the garden; the East India Company surgeon Francis Buchanan-Hamilton (1762–1829) communicated his botanical and ichthyological finds from Bengal, Mysore, and Nepal; and the entomologist Alexander MacLeay (1767–1848, the First President of the Australian Museum at Sydney) and his son William Sharp MacLeay (1792–1865) both sent letters to Smith from Australia.<sup>5</sup> The notebooks of Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) record his travels and researches in the Amazon, North America, and

---

Edward Smith, and the Linnean Society of London', *The Book Collector* (Autumn 2019), pp. 429–442. On Banks, his 1777 purchase of 32 Soho Square, its status in naturalists' circles, and Banks's role in Smith's acquisition of the Linnean collections, see Tom Kennett, *The Lord Treasurer of Botany: Sir James Edward Smith and the Linnean Collections* (London, 2016), pp. 55–60.

4. See e.g. Library of the Linnean Society of London (henceforth: LLSL), MS/275 (Ellis's letters), MS/287 and MS/292 (Ellis's drafts for papers and letters); on Pennant and his representation in the Linnean Society's collections: Dorothy Fouracre, 'Thomas Pennant: Naturalist, Traveller and Letter-Writer', <https://www.linnean.org/news/2018/11/23/thomas-pennant-naturalist-traveller-and-letter-writer> (accessed 17 March 2020); and LLSL MS/30 and MS/31 (Pulteney's botanical work).

5. On Alexander Anderson's *Hortus Sti. Vincentii Tabulae*, see Leanne Melbourne, 'Hidden Treasures...', <https://www.linnean.org/news/2018/10/31/31st-october-2018-hidden-treasure-in-search-of-john-tyley> (accessed 17 March 2020); Francis Buchanan-Hamilton's correspondence appears in Smith's bound correspondence, see e.g. LLSL MS JES/CORR/2/126 (17 March 1806), in which he informs Smith about his imminent departure to India, and that he has materials for a 'Flora of Nepal' in the form of 114 botanical sketches, mostly of orchids, as well as 131 drawings of plants from Mysore. The correspondence received by the MacLeays is included in LLSL MS/237a.



Fig.1 Alfred Russel Wallace, 'Eastern Butterflies' (1854–1862), p. [26]. Library of the Linnean Society of London, MS 181. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Linnean Society of London.



*Charaxes cognatus*. v. Doll. (Moluccas.)

the Malay Archipelago, from where he sent the essay which would be read at the Linnean Society in 1858 and, with Darwin's writings, first posited the theory of evolution.<sup>6</sup> Cumulatively, these written interactions between generations of naturalists form a veritable palimpsest of natural historical knowledge. But given the wealth of the collections relating to Linnaeus and Smith, and by extension Banks and his circle, this article will focus specifically on them.

Any foray into the foundation collections of the Linnean Society will provoke a sense of awe and excitement perhaps reminiscent of the first sighting of Botany Bay: here are riches of international importance, ready to be explored.<sup>7</sup> Here the young medical student Carl Linnaeus spells out, in his own words and hand, his youthful passion for plants and classification systems in a notebook titled 'Spolia botanica' ('botanical treasures'), in which he records plants from three Swedish regions according to the popular classifications of his predecessors John Ray, Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, and Augustus Quirinus Rivinus.<sup>8</sup> Here, too, his own classification system is developed, which earned him the title of father of modern taxonomy, and was first published in Leiden in 1735 under the title of *Systema naturae*. Its refinement and gradual expansion from eleven folio pages into the definitive tenth edition of some 1,400 pages in 1758 unfolds in Linnaeus's own copies of the successive editions, each annotated extensively in preparation for the next to the extent of turning them into working manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> The advancement of

6. Wallace's notebooks, dating from ca. 1848 to 1887, are digitised and available at [http://linnean-online.org/wallace\\_notes.html](http://linnean-online.org/wallace_notes.html) (accessed 18 March 2020). Further on Wallace, Darwin, and the Linnean Society, see the previous article in this series: Mark James, 'Two Indefatigable Naturalists: The Darwin-Wallace Collections of the Linnean Society', *The Book Collector* (Spring 2020), pp. 29–43.

7. The Linnean manuscripts were digitised with the help of a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, as were the correspondence of James Edward Smith and Alfred Russel Wallace's notebooks (see <http://linnean-online.org>, accessed 14 March 2020). The preeminent nature of the Society's collections of specimens, books, manuscripts, artworks, and artefacts was recognised with the award of 'Designated Status' by Arts Council England in 2014.

8. Carl Linnaeus, 'Spolia botanica' (1729), LLSL MS LM/LP/BOT/1/2.

9. Indeed, heavily annotated books are generally classified as manuscripts in the Library of the Linnean Society of London, and annotated printed pages were included in the abovementioned digitisation.

knowledge via the constant evolution of note taking techniques is a recognisable theme throughout Linnaeus's collections. The first of two preliminary manuscripts for the *Species plantarum* (1753), Linnaeus's second seminal work which extended the precision of binomial nomenclature to all known plants, 'resembles a filing system, much like Linnaeus's own herbarium [...] filled [...] on a day-to-day basis, as he encountered relevant information either through his reading, through his correspondence, or through the specimen he received'.<sup>10</sup> The second *Species plantarum* manuscript suffered from the inflexibility of being bound, and shows a correspondingly large number of deletions, insertions, and amendments in Linnaeus's hand, while still making it impossible for him 'to experiment in any way with the classification of new material [...]'. Linnaeus's complaint that he felt like a hen hatching eggs – with its ambivalent meaning of being stuck and carrying on – stems from the period when he was working on this manuscript'.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Linnaeus's flexible note taking techniques developed into his use of paper slips, akin to modern-day index cards.<sup>12</sup>

Many parts of the Linnean manuscript collections provide points of connection between Linnaeus's specimens, correspondence, and works, as well as threads picked up and developed further by future generations. Carl Linnaeus the Younger, for instance, introduced wrap-around folders to his own paper slip system for the organisation of species.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Solander first used paper slips for recording the specimens Banks had gathered during the *Endeavour*

10. Staffan Müller-Wille and Isabelle Charmantier, 'Natural History and Information Overload: The Case of Linnaeus', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43:1 (2012), pp. 4–15, at p. 10.

11. Ibid; apparently the simile appeared in a letter from Linnaeus to Abraham Bäck of 22 February 1752. The two manuscripts in question are Carl Linnaeus, 'Species plantarum' ('1746–1748', but actually begun in 1746 and abandoned later in the same year, and '1753', begun in 1751), LLSL MSS LM/LP/BOT/3/4/1 and LM/LP/BOT/3/4/2 respectively. Manuscripts from before 1762 and ca. 1763 further show Linnaeus's preparation of the second edition of the *Species plantarum* of 1762–1763 (LLSL MSS LM/LP/BOT/3/4/3 and LM/LP/BOT/3/4/4).

12. See Müller-Wille and Charmantier, 'Natural History and Information Overload'. The paper slips are call number MS LM/LP/BOT/3/8 at the LLSL.

13. Linnaeus the Younger, LLSL MS LM/LF/BOT/3/9.





Fig. 2 Carl Linnaeus, 'Spolia botanica' (1729), frontispiece and title (both in Linnaeus's hand). Library of the Linnean Society of London, MS LM/LP/BOT/1/2. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Linnean Society of London.

voyage, then for Banks's herbarium specimens, and finally for cataloguing specimens in the British Museum, to which his successor, Jonas Carlsson Dryander (1748–1810), added over time.<sup>14</sup> Linnaeus the Younger's visit to England in 1781–1782 is responsible for a delightful assortment of related documents in the Linnean Society's manuscript collections, which provide many interesting insights into the life of Banks's immediate circle, that would soon include the young James Edward Smith.<sup>15</sup> In London, during his frequent visits to 32 Soho Square, Linnaeus the Younger met both Solander and Dryander, and his surviving papers from the period include notes on the *Endeavour* voyage; botanical records, sketches, and a map (possibly of Kew gardens); a fragmentary diary and miscellaneous observations on English vs. Swedish vegetables, chickens, the women in England, and a French cure for gonorrhoea; a description of Solander's brain haemorrhage and death in May 1782 (during which he was present); and medical prescriptions possibly intended to cure the illness that would kill him after his return home in the following year – just five years after his father's death.<sup>16</sup> Linnaeus the Younger's contact with the Banks circle in London likely influenced the fate of his father's collections: when the Linnaeus family's agent sought a buyer for the collections in the following year, he wrote to Dryander asking him to press Banks (who had been offered first refusal) for a response. Banks's decision to decline the collections but to direct Smith towards them led to the latter's acquisition of the materials which provided the foundations of the Linnean Society. This example serves to demonstrate the manner in which these comprehensive collections illuminate the lives of figures such as Linnaeus, Banks, Smith, and those around them, which can also be seen in Smith's Botany Bay specimens. It was his knowledge, important collections, and networks of naturalists that directed plant specimens from Australia towards Smith when the First Fleet arrived in the country to establish a penal colony at

14. See Isabelle Charmantier and Staffan Müller-Wille, 'Carl Linnaeus's Botanical Paper Slips', *Intellectual History Review* 24:2 (2014), pp. 215–238.

15. Carl Linnaeus the Younger, 'Notes from England' (1781–1782), LLSL MS LM/LF/PP/6/5.

16. The prescriptions (1782) are LLSL MS LM/LF/PP/6/4.

Botany Bay in 1787. The surgeon John White sent seeds and plant specimens to a Fellow of the Linnean Society who, in turn, gave them to Smith, who would eventually count 379 of these specimens in his herbarium:

at the end of 1791, he reported having just opened a box of specimens from Botany Bay ‘so very new we can hardly settle the Nat[ura]l Orders of some of them’. Smith’s first published accounts of the Australian flora appeared in White’s *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, published in 1790 [...]. Smith provided the botanical descriptions for seven new plants featured, including three new *Banksia* species, the genus named by Linnaeus the Younger in 1782 for Sir Joseph Banks.<sup>17</sup>

Smith’s own correspondence of some 3,500 scientific and personal letters (most of which were presented to the Linnean Society by his widow Pleasance Smith, 1773–1877) is as varied and substantial as that of Linnaeus, and covers his interactions with others as, successively, a student, naturalist, and founder and first president of the Linnean Society. His correspondents include many important figures of his time – from the traveller George Annesley, Viscount Valentia, to Smith’s early mentor and close friend Thomas Jenkinson Woodward – and Linnaeus’s ‘apostles’, from Adam Afzelius to Carl Peter Thunberg. A relatively recent addition to the Linnean Society’s holdings of Smith’s manuscripts deserves particular mention. This octavo volume, comprising a number of slim fascicules bound together in an attractive calf binding, written in Smith’s even hand and illustrated with a few charming sketches, is the travel journal Smith kept during his tour of the continent from June 1786 to November 1787.<sup>18</sup> This did not come to the Society with the other Smith materials, but was given by Smith’s widow Pleasance to his nephew Studley Martin in 1869. In the 1970s it was rescued from a builder’s skip, and in 2012 the Linnean Society acquired it, thus enabling it to be reunited with other items from Smith’s library after nearly 150 years.

Happily, it is now possible to study the manuscript, the published journal of 1793, and Smith’s surviving correspondence together,

17. Kennett, *The Lord Treasurer of Botany*, pp. 186–187, citing a letter from Smith to Woodward (19 December 1791), LLSL LS JES/COR/18/51.

18. James Edward Smith’s ‘Tour’ (1786–1787), MS, LLSL.

To her kind friend  
Mr Studley Martin  
A Memorial of his  
Uncle Sir J E Smith  
From  
Pleasance Smith  
Lewesht  
3 August 1869.

Fig. 3 James Edward Smith's 'Tour' MS (1786–1787), dedication. Library of the Linnean Society of London. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Linnean Society of London.

which reveals the important interrelations between them.<sup>19</sup> In 1785, the year before his departure for the continent, Smith had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, of which Banks had been president since 1778. During his grand tour of 1786–1787 Banks's letter of introduction would open the doors of many botanists for Smith. After having dispensed with the official purpose of his trip – he received his MD in Leiden (appropriately, the city in which Linnaeus had published his *Systema naturae* more than 50 years earlier) – Smith continued to Amsterdam, where he wished to visit Nicolaas Laurens Burman, son of the botanist and physician Johannes Burman, who had also been a correspondent of Linnaeus's. Smith's manuscript journal simply records for 3rd July 1786:

With much difficulty having met with Professor Burman I made myself known to him. I signified a desire of consulting his collection[;] his engagements would not that day admit of it, nor did he seem much inclined to find an opportunity, so I took my leave.

In the printed journal of 1793, however, the same day's events unfold with some embellishment:

The Dutch in general seem still to retain that extravagant rage for buying rarities at an exorbitant price, for which they have long been famous; and when they do not lock up such rarities from those who are worthy to behold them, no well-wisher to science can lament their possessing them. [...] I called on Dr. Burman, Professor of Botany, whose Herbarium I was very anxious to consult for the purpose of ascertaining a few plants among the *Plantae Africanae* in the sixth volume of Linnaeus' *Amoenitates Academicæ*. The plants of that dissertation were described by Linnaeus from dried specimens lent him only by this Dr. Burman, and are consequently among the few species mentioned in his works, that are not to be found in his own collection. [...] Unfortunately however the Professor was so much engaged in the practice of physic, and so averse to entering on botanical subjects, that notwithstanding the recommendation of my good friend [the Leiden professor of botany David] Van Royen, I was obliged, after repeated appointments, and as many disappointments, to give up my object, though the business might have been done in ten minutes, as I did not wish to take up

19. James Edward Smith, *A Sketch of a Tour on the Continent, in the Years 1786 and 1787*, 3 vols (London, 1793).

the Professor's time by any conversation with himself. If the reader is shocked at this disgraceful anecdote, let him remember, for the honour of science, it is the only one of the kind he will meet with in the course of my tour.<sup>20</sup>

While the elaboration on Burman's herbarium is certainly informed by Smith's familiarity with Linnaeus's materials (which he had acquired shortly before his departure for the continent), his sharp undertone can be better understood through his related correspondence in the Linnean Society's manuscript collections. Two letters are particularly pertinent: first, Smith's to Woodward, written just a few days after the Burman (dis)appointment, in which he opines that 'Burman shelters his ignorance under his professorial dignity, & is very difficult of access [...] nor did he seem to be acquainted with some very well known botanical facts'.<sup>21</sup> And second, there is Banks's letter to Smith, now at Paris, in the following month, in which he responds to Smith's frustrated plans: 'I had no hope that Burman would be propitious[;] indeed it is not to be expected that any man will be such a fool as to expose his own ignorance which he must have done had he submitted to have been asked the questions you could not have faild to have put to him in looking through his herbarium'.<sup>22</sup> Whether one considers him precocious or a prodigy, the young Smith and his burgeoning knowledge of the botanical world are revealed vividly through these letters, his journal, and the published account.

Finally, Smith's annotated books are an important and fascinating component of his collections, particularly since they are not restricted to volumes bearing marginalia in his own hand. For example, Smith's copy of Albert von Haller's *Nomenclator ex historia plantarum Helvetiae* (Bern, 1769) was apparently annotated by the botanist Edmund Davall, a friend and avid correspondent of Smith's, and one of the original Fellows of the Linnean Society. Interestingly,

20. Smith, *A Sketch of a Tour on the Continent*, vol. 1, pp. 28–30.

21. James Edward Smith, letter to Thomas Jenkinson Woodward (14 July 1786), LLSL MS JES/COR/18/27.

22. Joseph Banks, letter to James Edward Smith (5 August 1786), LLSL MS JES/COR/1/47. Other substantial letters in the series written from Banks to Smith and relating to his grand tour are dated for 16 June 1786 (LLSL MS JES/COR/1/46), 24 September 1768 (MS JES/COR/1/48), and 11 May 1787 (JES/COR/1/50).

his admittance as a Fellow had been proposed by Banks's librarian Dryander, and Davall's name appears on the first page of the signature book of the Society.<sup>23</sup> Born in England, Davall had returned to his parents' native Switzerland after his father's death, and had worked with von Haller in 1787. The 48 letters preserved at the Linnean Society document the two botanists discussing, among other things, Linneaus, von Haller's work and library, and Smith's 'Treasures !!!!! from Botany Bay'.<sup>24</sup> Davall's final, unfinished letter was forwarded by his wife Henriette together with his death notice on 13 February 1798, and her following letter of 21 September 1799 informed Smith that Davall had left his herbarium to him.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that this copy of von Haller's *Nomenclator* accompanied this bequest and that Smith would have valued it particularly for Davall's annotations.

*This is the third in a series of four articles on the Linnean Society of London. I would like to thank Isabelle Charmantier for sharing her knowledge on the Linnean Society's collections so generously and Liz McGow for introducing me to James Edward Smith's travel journal and its history.*

23. See G.R. de Beer, 'Edmund Davall, F.L.S., an Unwritten English Chapter in the History of Swiss Botany', *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London* 159:1 (1947), pp. 42–65, at p. 42.

24. Letters from Edmund and Henriette Davall to James Edward Smith (12 November 1790) and from Davall to Smith (14 April 1794), LLSL MSS JES/COR/14/26 and JES/COR/14/68 respectively (the quotation is from the latter). Davall's annotated copy of von Haller's *Nomenclator* is one of a number of volumes in need of conservation, and is cared for under the Linnean Society's AdoptLINN scheme, through which individuals can sponsor the restoration of a book or manuscript from the Society's collections: <https://www.linnean.org/support/adoptlinn> (accessed 15 March 2020).

25. Henriette Davall to James Edward Smith (21 September 1799), LLSL MS JES/COR/14/90.

# THE Book Collector

---

Beloved by bibliophiles for nearly seventy years, The Book Collector is a quarterly journal and digital archive filled with erudite articles, illustrations, reviews, news, sales results and more.

[www.thebookcollector.co.uk](http://www.thebookcollector.co.uk)

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

