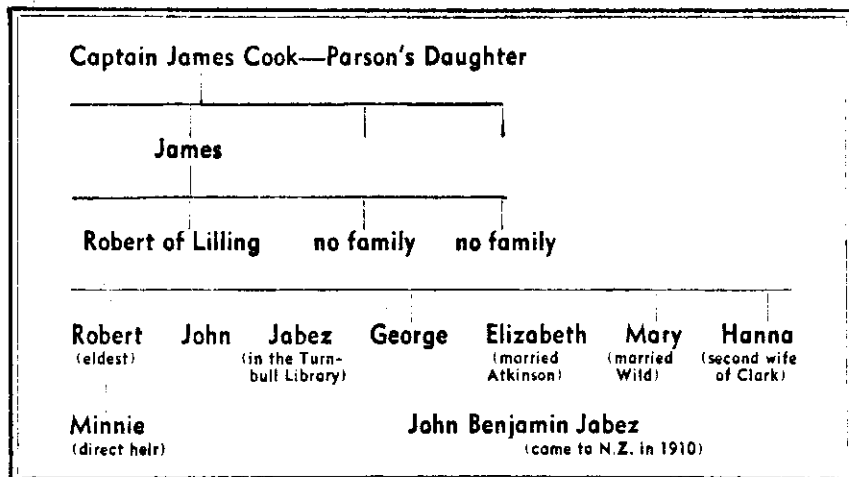


THE COOK FAMILY ATKINSON:



WITH all the bluntness of a forthright Yorkshireman, Jabez Atkinson, of Miramar, Wellington, says he does not care who doubts his story of the family tree of Captain James Cook and his many descendants. He makes no claims to inherited fame. He wants no honours. He has his own doubts about the propriety of some of his ancestors, and does not seek to avoid imputations that one or two of them may have failed to observe the formalities of marital law. But—he does say that the facts on which *The Listener* compiled the genealogical tree on this page are the plain and simple facts, no matter how many historians have ignored them.

History's refusal to recognise that the man who discovered New Zealand left any family does not deter Mr. Atkinson from saying, without unnecessary pride or bravado, that Captain Cook was the ancestor of a very large family, of which he, Jabez Atkinson, is a member.

Captain Cook's Wife

"She was a socially-snobbish old shrew," said Mr. Atkinson, putting his finger on the spot where, he maintains, the English caste system began to kill the idea that Cook left descendants. "It is necessary," he points out, "to understand the full significance of social position in England before you can understand why the explorer's family have not been recognised." The "old shrew" was Captain Cook's wife, a woman who was largely responsible, in Mr. Atkinson's view, for encouraging her husband to be restless and go exploring because he did not feel inclined to stay at home.

Captain James Cook was born at Ayton, Yorks, in 1728. He was the son of an agricultural labourer, without social position. In 1755 he entered the Navy as an able seaman. In four years, in spite of the system, he had won promotion to be a master.

Married Vicar's Daughter

His name was made first through his work in Canadian waters. It was partly his charting that made possible Wolfe's famous raid on Quebec from the St. Lawrence. So when Cook returned to England he was promoted and managed to jump the gate between the labourer's cottage and the Vicarage. In short, he married a parson's daughter, according to Mr. Atkinson. They had three sons.

So far, Mr. Atkinson's facts are fairly well established, although history has not yet recognised his contention that it was a shrewish wife as much as the urge to explore that sent Captain Cook once again away from home—to explore the Pacific and discover New Zealand.

The rest of the story Mr. Atkinson tells has not yet been written into the history books, mainly, he says, because Captain Cook's wife refused to recognise the marriage of her son James to a servant girl. All of Cook's sons died early, and more suddenly

than most men. The son James, who was drowned on January 25, 1794, aged 31, was at the time (says Mr. Atkinson) under the influence of strong drink, and it was for this reason that Robert Cook, of Illing, Yorks, remained throughout his life a strict teetotaler—a most unusual state of affairs in that family, according to Mr. Atkinson.

Before his death, the son, Mister James lived at Lilling Ambro, Yorkshire, near Sheriff

Hutton. Mr. Atkinson says that the parish records contain no reference to James's marriage, but record the baptism of his son Robert.

Robert of Lilling fathered a family of seven. They were Robert (II.), John, Jabez, George, Elizabeth, Mary, and Hanna.

Heir to Title

The daughter of Robert (II.), Minnie, was in Canada when Mr. Atkinson last heard of her. As the oldest child of the oldest son of the only son, of Mister James, she would be the heir to whatever title to fame remained in the explorer's family after the refusal of the socially conscious distaff side to recognise them.

Jabez also comes into Mr. Atkinson's story, for some old photographer produced a wonderfully good daguerreotype of Jabez. It was sent to Canada at the time when Elizabeth was there with her husband, Mr. Atkinson's father. Elizabeth treasured it. It was clear, a good likeness, colour-tinted, and showed, as nearly all the family portraits show, an unmistakable resemblance to extant pictures of Captain James Cook. That daguerreotype is now one of Mr. Atkinson-of-Miramar's possessions. He has lent it to the Turnbull Library, where it may be inspected on application by authorised persons. Unfortunately, it is not quite suitable for reproduction on *The Listener's* paper.

A Great Explorer

Fame also came to Mary, who married a Wild. Frank was their eldest son. Believing he would continue the tradition of the great sailor, they brought him up in hope that some day he would become an explorer.

The hope was justified. Frank Wild became, in the words of the radio commentator "Coranto," who knew him: "one of the world's gallant adventurers, a man whose name is graven for all time in the annals of Antarctic exploration. . . He belonged to a heroic age long since past, the age of Cortes, say, or of Drake."

Wild's story was told in *The Listener* on September 29; and how he had died penniless and disillusioned in Rhodesia.

New light is thrown on this story by Mr. Atkinson-of-Miramar's statement that he had heard of his cousin Frank's misfortune as a planter. He had written to him in Rhodesia, with an offer of work in New Zealand, on the sea, through the good offices of the Wellington Harbour Board. No answer was

received to that letter and the next news that came was the brief cable announcing the death of Commander Frank Wild.

Frank Wild's Status Recognised

First through his association with Shackleton, Commander Wild became known as a descendant of Captain Cook's. His status as such was recognised, says Mr. Atkinson, by two kings, Edward VII. and George V. But still official history refused to accept the facts. During anniversary celebrations in the Pacific (probably in the Sandwich Islands; Mr. Atkinson is not certain) a search was made for relatives to represent Captain Cook (who was clubbed to death by natives when he returned to the Sandwich Islands a year after discovering them in 1778). Commander Wild was suggested and was ready to make the trip when the old hitch about the refusal of social recognition to Mister James's wife persuaded the organisers that there was insufficient authenticity in the facts for them to go ahead.

Shackleton's Interest

Shackleton took an interest in the story and investigated Wild's ancestry. In Admiralty papers he found samples of Cook's handwriting and identified them with the writing on a letter in the possession of Robert of Lilling.

In actual fact, Commander Wild has rather less claim than Jabez Atkinson, if claims are to be made. For Mr. Atkinson's mother, Elizabeth, was older than Commander Wild's mother, Mary.

Although none of the family has ever pressed the claim beyond making it a point of historical interest, some stronger claims were once advanced by one Charles Henry Clark, the son of the Clark who married Robert's daughter Hanna. However, Hanna was shown to be Clark's second wife, while Charles Henry was the son of his first, so the incident lapsed.

Another distant relative is a prominent local politician in York, the town which once shared with London the honour of having a "Lord" Mayor, instead of a plain Mayor. A year ago C. J. Hutchinson was elected Mayor of the oldest city in England. He is now an Alderman, at least. He was the son of the sister of the wife of Robert (II.).

Mr. Atkinson has suggested that this fact be confirmed and any other information secured by communication with Alderman Hutchinson. A copy of this issue of *The Listener* will be sent to him for comment.

"Hankering After the Sea"

Although he says all his family "have a hankering after the sea," Mr. Atkinson himself did not even see a big ship until in 1910 he boarded one to come to New Zealand. He lived in Auckland for about three years, but since then has made his home in Wellington. Now retired (at 65 years of age), he lives happily in a pleasant home at Miramar. His eldest son, John Noel, takes out his "hankering" on the yacht *Avalon* in Evans Bay, and will go overseas shortly as a signaller for the first echelon, with a hope that somehow he may get on a minesweeper.

Grey haired, but clear eyed, Mr. Atkinson makes no bones about his story. "I make no claims," he says. "As far as I know, those are the facts. They are not hearsay, or invention. We just know that those are the facts, and it doesn't worry us what people might say about them. These historians, you know—" (There is a twinkle in his eye. . .) "These historians write their books and their notes and their lectures. I believe they don't want to recognise our story because it would mean making too many alterations."