

SURGEON'S DIARY TELLS

...ffering territorial claims by the United States and Britain over the discovery of some remote Pacific islands in 1824 may have a better resolution as a result of entries in a diary recently acquired by the National Library of Australia.

Sovereignty over the islands, Phoenix and Cary Ballcott (now known as Canton Island), will be reviewed in 1989; the British and American governments exchanged notes as recently as 1961 over the use of Canton Island as a base for a satellite tracking and communications station.

The discoveries of the islands are noted in the diary of Dr William Dalton, the young surgeon on the English whaling ship, *Phoenix*, during a voyage into the Pacific between 1823 and 1825. The diary is a recent gift to the National Library and recounts two voyages that took Dalton around South America to New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and California.

Dalton, who was born in 1802 and died in 1873, gives an account of the death of Captain Cook related to him in 1827 by 'several old men' who 'pointed out the rock on which he was massacred and said they recollected the event'. He also included a detailed account of whaling practices, together with descriptions of Polynesians and their customs and observations of the original settlement of San Francisco.

The logs of many British ships of the period have been destroyed and Dr Dalton's journal provides a remarkable range of information. The journal was presented to the National Library by Dr Neil Gunson, of Canberra, and is held in the Manuscripts Collection, where it is available for inspection.

craft (-ah-), n. skill; art; trade; cunning

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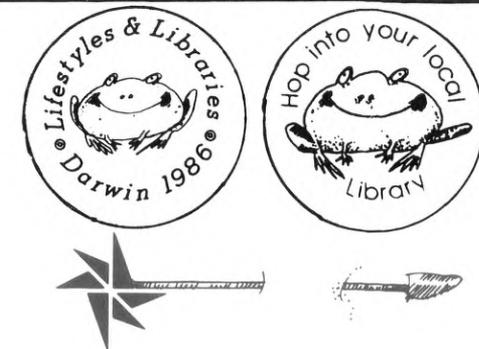
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