

National Museum of Scotland: Admiral Cochrane, the Real Master and Commander exhibition



If you've been fascinated by swashbuckling naval heroes such as *Master and Commander's* Jack Aubrey or CS Forester's Horatio Hornblower, then the National Museum of Scotland's new exhibition *Admiral Cochrane, the Real Master and Commander* is for you.

Even if, like me, you've never seen the film *Master and Commander*, the exhibition still sheds fascinating light on a little-known Scottish-born figure, Lord Thomas Cochrane, who had a huge influence both in Britain and on the other side of the world – and served as the inspiration for popular naval heroes in books and films today.

Rising quickly to fame after battling the Spanish in the Mediterranean, Cochrane was notorious for his daring naval missions and unorthodox methods, even going as far as to publicly criticise his commander for a lack of bravery in fighting the French in the Battle of the Basque Roads. After a spectacular fall from grace, Cochrane found fortune again in the emerging independent countries of South America, first as head of the Chilean Navy and then working with the Brazilian navy in the country's fight for independence.

A fascinating film at the start of the exhibition highlights the reverence he is still shown in Chile, and documents from the National Records of Scotland track Cochrane's life and travels, from a sketched map of Brazilian waters to disturbing plans for early chemical weapons.



Dr Tristram Clarke of the National Records of Scotland
with a boatswain's whistle

The artefacts illustrating Cochrane's event-filled life, including an imposing array of boarding weapons, medals and decorations from throughout his life, and portraits of the great man and his associates, are spectacular, and paint a vivid picture of a life at sea. After so many fictionalised versions of Cochrane's exploits, the National Museum of Scotland's new exhibition gives us the real story of one of Britain's great unsung naval heroes.

Admiral Cochrane, the Real Master and Commander, National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, until 19 February 2012.