

OLD SEA DOG POINTS THE WAY TO THE FUTURE AT THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

The Scottish National Portrait Gallery is delighted to announce the acquisition of *James Coull* (1786-1880) by Scottish portrait painter James Irvine (1822-1889). The painting was acquired through Peter Johnson of Ackermann and Johnson based in London and is the final acquisition before the Portrait Gallery closes for refurbishment on Sunday 5 April 2009.

The portrait shows an Ordinary Seaman, one of tens of thousands who manned Britain's Merchant and Royal navy's during the age of imperial and economic expansion. James Coull's story is one which will be told in the new Portrait Gallery when it reopens in November 2011.

In the past the Portrait Gallery has looked at history through the eyes of the great and the famous rather than, in this case, the sailors below deck. *Portrait of the Nation*, the Portrait Gallery's exciting renovation project, will change that. This is why the purchase of James Coull's portrait is of such importance.

James Holloway, Director of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, said "*James Coull's eye view of life at sea in the nineteenth century is as valuable as that of the admirals who were his superiors. Press-ganged into the British navy, James Coull fought the French at Trafalgar, was wounded by the Americans at Chesapeake Bay and manned Arctic Whalers. His portrait is a particularly valuable acquisition for the Scottish National Portrait Gallery because it is such a rare portrait of an ordinary seaman who lived long enough to become an international celebrity. At his death both the London and New York Times published his obituary.*"

James Irvine was a successful Scottish portrait painter born in Menmuir, in the region of Angus in 1822. After displaying a natural, artistic flair for painting he was sent to serve an apprenticeship with acclaimed artist, Colvin Smith, also from the same area. Irvine went on to establish himself in a studio in Edinburgh but continued to work in the areas of Arbroath and Montrose.

His subject James Coull was also a local man and a subject with a very compelling past. Coull was born near Montrose in 1786. The death of his father at a young age left his family destitute and Coull was forced to work at sea as a cabin boy at the age of eight years old. An apprenticeship in navigation skills

left Coull trained as a Quartermaster and many an adventure ensued Coull's life at sea. He fought alongside Lord Nelson in historical naval battles like the Battle of Copenhagen (1801) and the Battle of Trafalgar (1805). The War of 1812 between the British Empire and the United States of America, in which Coull was Quartermaster of the victorious Royal Navy vessel HMS *Shannon*, saw Coull badly wounded by a musket ball to the arm. The injury resulted in Coull losing his left hand and having to retire from the Royal Navy with an annual pension of £16. However, a handicap could not keep Coull from the seas and he continued his naval life as a ship's cook on Montrose whaling ships. He died in Montrose at the age of 95, 'a very popular and much loved man' and was buried with full military honours.

Irvine painted 'Old Coull' five times and obviously found him to be a fascinating man and subject. Undoubtedly anecdotes of Coull's adventurous naval life kept Irvine entertained whilst he focused on Coull's craggy and expressive face. This painting is likely to be the same picture Irvine exhibited in 1874 at the Royal Scottish Academy with the title: *Coull, Quartermaster, one of the boarders of the Chesapeake*.

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