

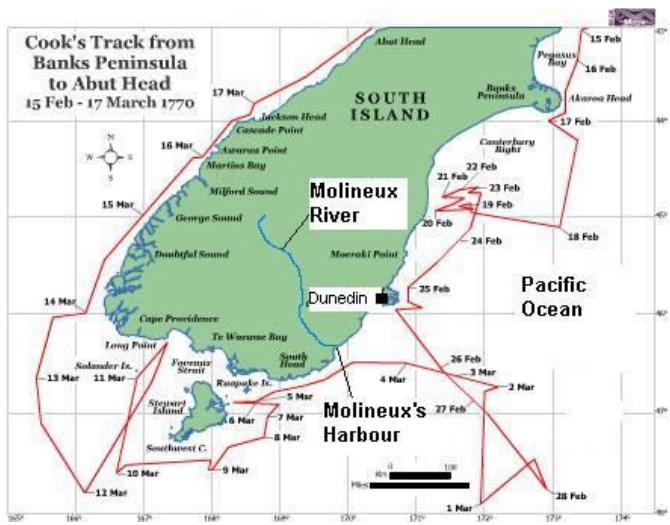
Robert Molineux – Master of Her Majesty's Bark Endeavour



Molineux's name lives on in the southern New Zealand province of Otago in the former name of the country's mightiest river. Here's the story.

The Naming of 'Molineux's Harbour'

In late February 1771 the Endeavour was making it's way southwards down the completely uncharted east coast of the south island. Cook wanted to know whether New Zealand was an island or the northern part of a great southern continent. As he sailed off the coast of what is now the city of Dunedin a storm blew the ship over 100 miles out to sea and it took nearly a week for the ship to resume sight of the coast.



Here's the entry from the journal of **Sydney Parkinson** the ship's artist:

4 March 1770

*'after having beat about near a week, by the favour of a breeze from the north, we got sight of land again, which tended away to the S. W. and by W. and appeared to be of great extent. We had a continual rolling swell from the S. W. and saw the appearance of a harbour, which we named **Molineux's Harbour**, after the name of the master of our ship.'*

It appears **Master Robert Molineux** was not the most temperate of individuals. A year earlier, when the Endeavour was crossing the Pacific, **Cook** made the following entry in his log:

*'My crew seems very healthy and they are extremely productive. There are the occasional outbursts of rowdiness and drunken behaviour. However, the worst offender is **Robert Molineux**. His drunkenness is reprehensible. I must constantly put him to task to keep him off the bottle. Even so, I know he slips drinks in during work'*

Molyneux also seemed rather partial to the local rats in Tahiti. The ship's naturalist **Joseph Banks** made this journal entry while the ship was anchored in Tahiti

*'**Robert Molineux** commented on the good eating that the very fat and tame rats on Otaheiti made.'*

Rat eating and drunkenness apart Molineux held an important post on board. He was the most senior of the warrant officers. His main duty was to navigate the ship, under the direction of the captain. He also acted as surveyor taking soundings and produced several very important charts of previously unknown coasts. He was responsible for 'trimming' the ship – distributing its load so that it sat correctly in the water. He had to ensure the safe anchorage of the Endeavour and oversaw the day to day running of the ship.



New Zealand's 50 cent coin commemorates the Endeavour's first charting of the country's coast

Molineux's Origins

The Endeavour crew list records the Master as *Robert Molineux of Hale, Lancashire* (not to be confused with nearby Hale in Cheshire) a village on the river Mersey just south of Liverpool. It is highly likely Robert learned his trade in the great seaport of Liverpool which was booming in the mid 18th century. A large part of its commercial success was in fact built on the West African – American slave trade until Abolition in 1807.



Liverpool Docks late 18th century

Naval records indicate Molineux had only just returned to England after serving as Master's mate on **HMS Dolphin** under **Captain Samuel Wallis**. The Dolphin had circumnavigated the globe and returned to England in May 1768 after two years at sea. A month later on 17th June Molineux was appointed as master of Endeavour along with several other members of the crew of the Dolphin

Molineux made out his will prior to the Endeavour's departure and sealed it on 18 July 1768. It can be viewed on the Captain Cook Society website at www.captaincooksociety.com/ccsu4160.htm

In it Robert leaves everything to his sister Ellen (from which we can probably conclude he was not married)

'...and then all the rest, residue and remainder of my Goods, Chattels, Credits, ready Money, Wages, Prize Money, Short allowance money, Wearing Apparel, Wares, Merchandizes and all other of my Estate whatsoever both Real and Personal, I do hereby Give, Devise and bequeath the same unto my Sister Ellen Molineux of Liverpool in Lancashire, maiden '

Molineux's Death

Sadly Robert never saw England again. On the return voyage he fell ill in Dutch Batavia (now Jakarta) along with most of the rest of the crew. Batavia was plagued by frequent epidemics of cholera, typhus and especially malaria. It was nicknamed '*the grave of the Dutchmen*'. Ironically it was the Dutch built canals that provided the perfect breeding ground for malaria bearing mosquitoes and water borne bacteria.

The Endeavour took on contaminated fresh water on leaving Batavia and as dysentery spread around the ship 23 of the crew of 70 died on the journey to Capetown including the artist Parkinson, the astronomer Green and the ship's surgeon Monkhouse. Robert died just after the ship left Capetown and was buried at sea on 15th April 1771. If my research above is correct he would have been 31 years old when he died.

John Hawkesworth's official account of the voyage makes this comment on his death

'a young man of good parts, but unhappily given up to intemperance, which brought on disorders that put an end to his life'

Molineux's Legacy

The crew of the Endeavour did not realise that Molineux's Harbour was in fact the mouth of a mighty river known to the Maori as the Mata- Au ('surface current'). This river has the greatest average annual flow in New Zealand. It is fed by the glaciers and snow of the Southern Alps. As the early European settlers moved inland in the early 19th century they called the Mata-Au the **Molineux River**. In the 1860s this remote province's population swelled hugely in a gold rush that moved inland along the Molineux. The miners (many of whom could not swim) feared and respected its tremendous power and boiling currents and deferred to it as the 'Mighty Molineux'.

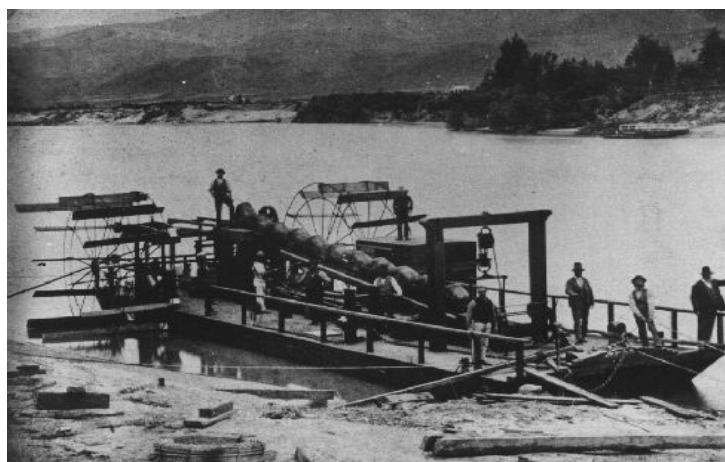


The first waves of gold miners were individual opportunists mainly from Australian Irish and Chinese extraction. They were out to make their fortune. Instead many perished in the extremes of the Otago winter.

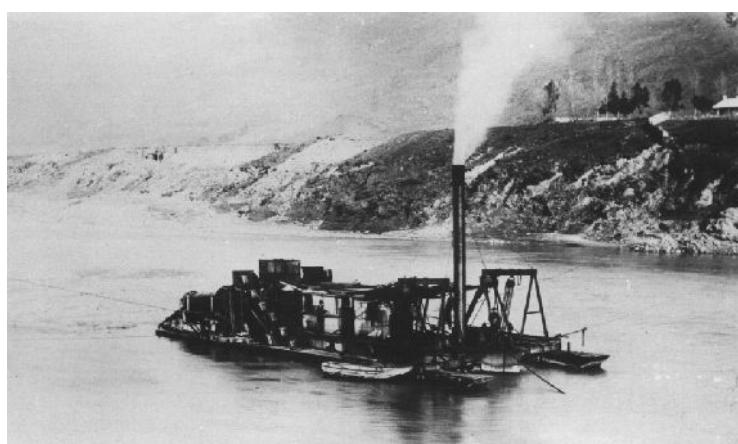
Later bigger, more organised schemes took over. They used 'sluicing' – blasting the soil out of hillsides with water cannon or 'dredging' the Molineux River itself. These schemes went on well into the early 20th century and there is still commercial gold mining in Otago today.

Chinese gold miner feeding a sluicing box

The suggestion of officially changing the name of the river from Molineux to ‘Clutha’ (Scottish Gaelic for ‘Clyde’) was first made in 1846 at the time of the first organised Scottish settlement projects in New Zealand. The change took a long time to be accepted and it the Molineux name persisted well into the 20th century.



Early ‘current wheel’ gold dredge on the Molineux River, Otago



The first steam gold dredge ‘Dunedin’ on the Molineux



Early 20th century gold dredge ‘Endeavour’ working the Molineux



The Molineux River is now known as the 'Clutha'



The dredges are gone but the Clutha turns gold every year thanks to the poplars brought to New Zealand by the early European settlers

The Author

I am a family doctor practising in Dunedin – the capital of Otago. I am originally from English Midlands. This article stemmed from my curiosity about place names. I have always held that place names are not just labels but ‘pathways through history’ and gateways to tremendous stories. While reading about Otago’s gold rush the name Molineux kept appearing. It was out of context with the rest of Otago’s place names which are predominantly of Scottish or Maori derivation. I was curious how a Norman English name had made it to the opposite side of the globe. Well now we know.

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