

‘With a facility of communication’:
Pennant, Banks and collaborative knowledge-making

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Pennant’s *Voyage to the Hebrides* is introduced by a dedication praising the spirit of scientific generosity and ‘facility of communication’ shown by Sir Joseph Banks, who had provided the volume with a set-piece written and visual account of the basaltic ‘Fingal’s Cave’ on the island of Staffa.¹ Letters written by Pennant to less famous correspondents as he solicited information and detail to layer onto his published tours, similarly praise the ‘communicative disposition’ of recipients. Pennant’s dedication to Banks and dealings with his informants seem to chime with James Secord’s notion of ‘knowledge making itself as a form of communicative action.’² With reference to the exchange of specimens, and written and visual material evidenced by Pennant’s correspondence, this paper will consider to what extent this communicative ideal represented a self-image within the network of amateur collectors and professional men of letters connected through Pennant’s knowledge-gathering efforts. It will also suggest that this mode of intellectual practice came under pressure when it came into contact with the competitive field logic of commercial publishing, at times leading to a resentment that disrupted lines of communication between Pennant and others, including Banks.

¹ Thomas Pennant *A tour in Scotland, and voyage to the Hebrides*; MDCCLXXII [1772] (Chester: printed by John Monk, MDCCLXXIV. [1774]), i, 299-309.

² James A. Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit’, *Isis*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (Dec., 2004), 654-672 (661).