

University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law

## UMKC School of Law Institutional Repository

---

Faculty Works

Faculty Scholarship

---

1-1-2007

### The Story of the Court-Martial of the Bounty Mutineers

Douglas O. Linder

*University of Missouri - Kansas City, School of Law*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://irlaw.umkc.edu/faculty\\_works](https://irlaw.umkc.edu/faculty_works)



Part of the [Legal History Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Douglas O. Linder, *The Story of the Court-Martial of the Bounty Mutineers*, (2007).

Available at: [https://irlaw.umkc.edu/faculty\\_works/866](https://irlaw.umkc.edu/faculty_works/866)

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at UMKC School of Law Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of UMKC School of Law Institutional Repository.

# **The Story of the Court-Martial of the *Bounty* Mutineers**

*by Douglas Linder*

The true story of the 1789 mutiny on the *Bounty* is far more complicated than suggested by film versions of the event, which have emphasized the gratuitous cruelty of the ship's captain, William Bligh. The psychological drama that played out in the South Seas starring Bligh, the efficient disciplinarian, and his mate, the sensitive and proud Fletcher Christian, led to, among other things: one of the most amazing navigational feats in maritime history, the founding of a British settlement that continues to exist today, and a court-martial in England that answered the question of which of ten captured mutineers should live--and which should die--for their actions.

The ill-fated voyage of the *Bounty* would never have happened had it not been for the discovery in 1769 of a botanical curiosity, given the name "breadfruit," on the island of Tahiti. On board the *Endeavor*, captained by the celebrated James Cook, as it sailed into Tahiti was some of England's best scientific talent, including botanist Joseph Banks. After the American colonies achieved independence, and the reliable supply of fish they had been exporting to England became unavailable, Banks (named in 1778 as the president of the Royal Society) concluded breadfruit might fill the sudden gap in the diet of English slaves working the sugar plantations of Jamaica and the Lesser Antilles. Support built for an expedition to retrieve and transplant breadfruit, thanks to Banks constantly pushing the idea, and in 1787 Banks successfully petitioned the king to sponsor the effort. A vessel was obtained and a commander, William Bligh, selected. The voyage, however, did not rank high in the Admiralty's priorities--the ship was small, and Bligh was denied the status "master and commander" and the other commissioned officers and security force usually given to the captain of a voyage of such length.

William Bligh's career at sea had a remarkable upward trajectory. By age 22, he had been appointed sailing master (the person in charge of day-to-day management of the ship) of the *Resolution*, captained by James Cook. After rounding the Cape of Good Hope, the *Resolution* spent a year exploring the Pacific from the southern islands to the Arctic north. In the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii), Bligh witnessed Cook being bludgeoned to death on a beach by natives--a shocking event which might have powerfully shaped his own ideas about discipline.

By 1786, Bligh earned command of his own ship, the *Britannia*, and brought on as a young able-bodied seaman Fletcher Christian, a twenty-three-year-old man with connections to the extended Bligh family. On August 20, 1787, Lieutenant Bligh took command of the *Bounty*. When he began to fit-out and man the ship one of the first persons he recruited was Fletcher Christian.

On December 23, 1787, after weeks of delay, the *Bounty* sailed from Spithead, England, bound for Tahiti by way of Cape Horn. Arriving at the tip of South America in late March, the *Bounty* encountered day after day of mountainous waves that finally forced Bligh to order a ten thousand mile detour around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. The *Bounty* reached Cape Town on May 24, where it remained for thirty-eight days as it was

completely overhauled and resupplied. Bligh wrote, "Perhaps a Voyage of five Months which I have now performed without touching at any one place but at Tenarif [Canary Islands], has never been accomplished with so few accidents, and such health among Seamen in a like continuance of bad weather." During the difficult months at sea and the layover on the Cape, Bligh and Christian remained on good terms. In Cape Town, in fact, Bligh loaned money to Christian, a not insignificant act of friendship from someone who himself had to watch every penny.

Seven weeks after leaving the Cape, the *Bounty* anchored off the southern coast of Tasmania. At Adventure Bay on Tasmania the first signs of real trouble surfaced. Bligh criticized his carpenter, William Purcell, for cutting poor quality billets of wood. Purcell responded that Bligh just came onshore "to find fault" and became so insolent that Bligh ordered him back to the ship. Bligh lamented that he was so shorthanded he could not afford to confine or to try Purcell for refusing orders (and flogging was not, for a warrant officer, an available option)--a fact Purcell seemed to recognize as he continued a course of studied disobedience. James Morrison, boatswain's mate, wrote that at Adventure Bay "were sown seeds of eternal discord between Lieut. Bligh & the Carpenter, and it will be no more than true to say, with all the Officers in general." Adventure Bay also brought on the voyage's first death. Able seaman James Valentine contracted an ailment there that led to his being bled by the ship's surgeon, Thomas Huggan. Unfortunately, the bleeding resulted in an infection which led to Valentine's delirium and death. Bligh blamed Valentine's death on the incompetence of Huggan and the indifference of officers who, he believed, should have spotted symptoms earlier.

## **Tahiti**

28,086 miles after leaving England, on October 24, 1788, the *Bounty* rounded a reef on Tahiti's Point Venus. Islanders in throngs of canoes greeted the ship, and "in ten minutes," wrote Bligh, the *Bounty* was so filled with Tahitians that "I could scarce find my own people." Within a few days, Bligh busied himself gaining the permission of various island chiefs to pull up and carry to the ship breadfruit. Bligh's relations with the natives were cordial, and he loved the place, as this entry in his log makes clear: "[Matavai Bay, Tahiti is] certainly the Paradise of the World, and if happiness could result from situation and convenience, here it is to be found in the highest perfection. I have seen many parts of the World, but Otaheite [Tahiti] is capable of being preferable to them all."

The onset of the rainy season meant that the *Bounty* would be in Tahiti for five months. Crew members constructed a compound that served as a nursery for breadfruit, and Bligh gave the breadfruit project nearly his full attention. Discipline problems were fairly minor (although Purcell's insolence continued to be an issue) during the first few months of the *Bounty's* stay on the island, but Bligh's order prohibiting crew members from most trading with natives led to considerable grumbling. Still, crew members couldn't be too unhappy, what with an abundant supply of native women, most of whom seem quite pleased to enjoy frequent sexual relations with their pale-faced visitors for the price of a few nails.

The first serious problem of the Tahitian stay occurred in January, when three crew members (Charles Churchill, John Millward, and William Muspratt) and a considerable amount of arms and ammunition turned up missing. Bligh demanded that his Tahitian friends aid in returning the deserters and their supplies. He warned he would "make the whole Country suffer for it" if they failed to "bring the Deserters back." Bligh's temper erupted a few days after the desertion when he found that spare sails he had ordered out of storage had been left mildewed and rotted. "Scarce any neglect of duty can equal the criminality of this," he fumed in his log. Three weeks after they disappeared, the deserters were tracked down at in a village five miles away from the *Bounty*. The men were subjected to repeated lashings and placed in irons, but they remained grateful that Bligh had indicated that he would not recommend them for a court-martial, a proceeding that might be expected to result in their executions.

Bligh blamed the desertion in large part on Midshipman Thomas Hayward, who had fallen asleep at his station at the critical time. Bligh began compiling a long list of complaints in his own mind of misconduct and neglect by his officers. He complained: "Such a neglectfull and worthless petty Officers I believe never was in a Ship as are in this. No Orders for a few hours together are Obeyed by them, and their conduct in general is so bad, that no confidence or trust can be reposed in them."

With 1,015 breadfruit safely on board, the *Bounty* was readied for its departure after twenty-three weeks in Tahiti. Many of the men did not share Bligh's interest in leaving their island pleasures behind. On the early afternoon of April 5, the ship sailed west.

### **Mutiny**

On April 11, the *Bounty* anchored at an island the natives called Whytootackee, one of the Friendly Islands. Soon after leaving Whytootackee, Master John Fryer later reported, Bligh and Christian argued bitterly. According to Fryer, around midnight on April 21, Christian complained to Bligh, "Sir, your abuse is so bad that I cannot do my duty with any pleasure. I have been in hell for weeks with you." The *Bounty* continued to sail westward, landing at Anamooka on April 24. Bligh again had words with Christian at Anamooka, calling him a "cowardly rascal" for letting fear, while he was under arms, of "a set of naked savages" interfere with his work of supervising the keggering of water. The captain became further enraged when a native diver was able to slip the grapnel, a small anchor, off its line. Bligh decided to detain some chiefs that were on board the *Bounty* until the grapnel was returned. In his rage over the lost grapnel, Bligh also chastised officers and crew as "lubberly rascals" who could be easily disarmed by five people "with good sticks." The grapnel never showed up and Bligh, not really anxious to cart the chiefs back to England, returned them to native canoes. The *Bounty* headed north through calm seas toward the island of Tofua.

On the morning of August 27, Bligh concluded that some coconuts were missing from the pile kept between the guns. "Don't you think those coconuts have shrunk since last night?" he asked Fryer. Bligh announced that he would find and punish the coconut thief. He questioned one person after another about the missing nuts. According to

boatswain's mate James Morrison, Christian responded to Bligh's interrogation of him by saying, "I hope you don't think me guilty of stealing." Bligh answered, "Yes, you damned hound, I do--You must have stolen them from me or you could give a better account of them....I suppose you'll steal my yams next., but I'll sweat you for it you rascals. I'll make half of you jump overboard before you through Endeavor Straights." He ended the confrontation with orders that rations for yams be cut in half. Christian was left devastated by the incident. William Purcell reported that Christian left Bligh with tears "running fast from his eyes in big drops." Bligh seemed to shrug off the blowup, and later invited Christian to dine with him--as had been his custom on every third evening--that night.

Bligh described what happened in the predawn hours of April 28: "Just before sun-rising, Mr. Christian, with the master at arms, gunner's mate, and Thomas Burket, seaman, came into my cabin while I was asleep, and seizing me, tied my hands with a cord behind my back, and threatened me with instant death, if I spoke or made the least noise." The mutineers hauled Bligh--still in his nightshirt and naked from the waist down--out of bed and forced him on deck. As others gathered on deck, the mutineers ordered the boatswain to lower the *Bounty's* launch. Eighteen people either were ordered into the launch or entered voluntarily. Bligh by now recognized was about to be set adrift. Assorted provisions were gathered, including twine, canvas, lines, sails, a twenty-gallon cask of water, 150 pounds of bread, a tool chest, a compass and a small quantity of rum. Bligh implored Christian to remember that, back in England, his children had bounced on his knee. Christian, replying with emotion, said, "I am in hell--I am in hell." Bligh, after being ordered into the launch, asked for arms, but only received laughs. At the last minute, four cutlasses were tossed into the twenty-three-foot boat. Bligh reported: "After having undergone a great deal of ridicule, and been kept some time to make sport for these unfeeling wretches, we were at length cast adrift in the open ocean." To three loyalists detained on board the *Bounty* against their will, Bligh called out, "Never fear, my lads; I'll do you justice if I ever reach England!"

### **Tracking Down the Mutineers**

Eleven months after the mutiny, and against all odds, William Bligh reached the home shores of England. Bligh took rightful pride in his accomplishment, and in his *Narrative of the Mutiny*, published just months after his return, he devoted a scant six pages to the mutiny and eighty to the story of his remarkable 3, 618-mile subsequent voyage in an overloaded, under provisioned boat. The *English Chronicle* called Bligh's navigation of "his little skiff through so dangerous a sea" a "matchless...undertaking that seems beyond the verge of probability." A court-martial, routine in cases where captains lose ships, found him innocent of any wrongdoing. The nation hailed Bligh as a hero and within a year he was appointed captain of a new breadfruit expedition, this one with a full complement of lieutenants and marines for better security.

In the summer of 1790 Captain Edward Edwards assumed command of the 24-gun frigate *Pandora*, with orders to sail to the Pacific and bring back whatever *Bounty* mutineers he and his men could round up. On board as his third lieutenant was Thomas Hayward, a *Bounty* midshipman who accompanied Bligh on his legendary journey in the 23-foot

launch. The *Pandora* arrived in Tahiti in on a fine March day in 1791. Three *Bounty* crew members, anxious to rebuild their lives back in England, swam out to the *Pandora*. Peter Heywood, who was just seventeen at the time of the mutiny, and Joseph Coleman and George Stewart, after announcing that they were formerly of the *Bounty*, were arrested and placed in chains.

Coleman informed Captain Edwards of events after the mutiny. He explained that Fletcher Christian left sixteen men on Tahiti and then departed with the other mutineers in search of a safe tropical haven. Of the sixteen left in Tahiti, Coleman said, two men, Charles Churchill and Matthew Thompson, had been murdered. From talking with curious Tahitians that had climbed aboard the *Pandora*, Edwards learned the probable whereabouts of the eleven remaining fugitives on the island.

Edwards mounted a roundup effort with the help of local leaders. By the second day, able seaman Richard Skinner was in chains. A party dispatched to arrest a group that had recently sailed in a schooner on the south coast discovered that the mutineers, having heard of the *Pandora's* arrival, and fled into the mountain forests. The search party found three mutineers, James Morrison, Charles Norman, and Thomas Ellison, asleep in a shelter and returned them to the *Pandora*, where they were placed in a newly constructed prison hut on the quarterdeck. "*Pandora's* box" became the name of the eleven by eighteen foot space. About the same time, Michael Byrn, a fiddler who was nearly blind, became the eighth *Bounty* crew member captured. Within the next ten days, the last of the Tahitian fugitives were rounded up. Searchers discovered Henry Hilbrant and Thomas McIntosh in the hill country near Papara. In the same area the following night, they found the last four men: Thomas Burkett, John Millward, John Sumner, and William Muspratt, the cook's assistant.

From journals taken from the captured men, Captain Edwards pieced together the story that unfolded after the mutiny. Tensions erupted, it seemed, shortly after Christian took control of the *Bounty*, with some of the men complaining that Christian and his closest friends "were always served better than these who were thought to be disaffected." The ship anchored first on the island of Tubuai, some 350 miles south of Tahiti. Quarreling among the men increased, with claims to native women the most intense source of disagreement. Within a week, the *Bounty* sailed from tiny island back to Tahiti for supplies. With a load of pigs, goats, plants, chickens and--most significantly--nine Tahitian women, eight Tahitian men, and seven boys and one girl, the ship sailed back to the Tubuai. For three months, the mutineers struggled to build a community in Tubuai, but by September tensions had become unbearable among the various factions. The decision was made to split up, with some men to be brought back to Tahiti, while the others would sail with Christian in search of a new place of safety. On September 21, 1789, after dropping off sixteen men, each with a musket and seventeen pounds of powder, Christian and eight of his followers bid a final farewell to Tahiti. Where they sailed and what became of them, no one knew. He had told the men he would "search for an unknown or uninhabited island in which there was no harbour for shipping" and there would run the *Bounty* ashore--but that was the only clue as to the party's whereabouts.

For the next three months, Edwards took the *Pandora* from one Pacific island to another, in a dogged search for the remaining fugitives. Trouble developed in the Samoas during a June rainstorm, when a vessel carrying nine men was lost. In August, with Christian's party still uncaptured, the *Pandora* finally turned toward England. On Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the *Pandora* ran aground and broke up. Thirty-one crew members and four of the fourteen prisoners (Skinner, still in handcuffs, Hilbrant, still in irons, and Sumner and Stewart, struck by a falling gangway) went down with the ship. The other ten prisoners, scattered among four lifeboats, eventually reached Coupang and, finally, England in March 1792.

### **Court-Martial for Mutiny**

All ten of the *Bounty* prisoners (Burkett, Byrn, Coleman, Ellison, Heywood, McIntosh, Millward, Morrison, Muspratt, and Norman) faced the same charge: mutiny. Under the law of England, it mattered not whether a man actively participated in seizing command of the ship or took no action to oppose the mutiny. As Nessy Heywood, sister of one of the charged men, Peter Heywood, was reminded in a letter, "The man who stands Neuter is equally guilty with him who lifts his arms against his Captain." The President of the court-martial announced that all ten men would be tried together. Rejecting requests for separate trials, Lord Hood proclaimed, even before the proceeding began: "The *Bounty's* Mutineers being charged with and were guilty of the same atrocious Crime, committed at the same time."

The court-martial of the *Bounty* mutineers opened on the gray morning of September 12, 1792 in the captain's great cabin of Lord Hood's ship, the *Duke*, moored in Portsmouth Harbor on England's southern coast. William Bligh, already a national hero, was far from Portsmouth on that day: As captain of the *Providence*, he was on his way back to the South Pacific on another breadfruit-gathering mission. The ten defendants in the court martial, each charged with violation of Article XIX of the Articles of War, knew that conviction meant probable death. The law read: "If any Person in or belonging to the Fleet shall make or endeavour to make any mutinous Assembly upon any Pretence whatsoever, every Person offending herein, and being convicted thereof by the Sentence of the Court-martial shall suffer Death."

Judge Advocate Moses Greetham, handling the case for the British Navy, opened the proceeding by describing the long series of events, beginning with the breadfruit commission, that led to the court-martial. The jury of twelve naval officers in blue coats and gold buttons listened as Greetham continued by reading William Bligh's detailed report of the mutiny.

The prosecution's case took only a few days. The key witnesses, unsurprisingly, were *Bounty* loyalists. After each witness testified, the defendants themselves--a rather uneducated lot with no special knowledge in the ways of the law--were given the opportunity to cross-examine them. One defendant, however, did have both helpful connections and sound legal advice. Young Peter Heywood (just fifteen at the time of the mutiny), acting on that legal advice, reserved his defense until the prosecution had closed its case.

The prosecution based its case against the mutineers on three fundamental mistakes they made. First, in the prosecution's view, they took no actions to directly thwart the mutiny. Second, they did not get into the *Bounty's* launch with Captain Bligh. Finally, the prosecution noted, none of the men made any determined effort to return to England after the mutiny, but instead many went into hiding in Tahiti.

Master of the *Bounty*, John Fryer, testified first for the prosecution. Fryer, who occupied a cabin opposite Bligh's, described being awoken by shouting just before dawn on the night of April 28, 1789. Mutineer Matthew Quintal stepped into his cabin and warned him that if he said anything he was a dead man. Fryer testified that he looked out his cabin door and saw Christian holding a cord that tied that hands of his nightshirt-clad captain. "Damn his Eyes," he recalled a mutineer saying to Bligh, "put him into the Boat, and let the bugger see if he can live upon three fourths of a Pound of Yams a day." Fryer told the court that he pleaded with Christian to abandon his mutinous ways, but Christian replied that he should "hold his tongue" and that "Bligh has brought all this on himself."

Fryer offered damning testimony concerning some of the defendants. John Millward, he said, guarded him with arms. When Fryer suggested to Millward that he "knock down" the mutineer standing next to him, Fryer said, Millward cocked his musket and pointed it at Fryer with the warning, "Mr. Fryer be quiet; no one will hurt you." Fryer also reported seeing Thomas Burkett carrying a weapon during the mutiny. The *Bounty's* master told the court that we encouraged James Morrison to turn against the mutineers, Morrison replied, "It is too late." Finally, Fryer reported that he observed Thomas Ellison obeying Christian's order to loose the top gallants.

Fryer's testimony was helpful to several of the other defendants, however. Fryer noted that Joseph Coleman "called out several times to recollect that he had no hand in the business," and he testified that during the mutiny he saw Thomas McIntosh and Charles Norman leaning against a rail, apparently crying.

William Cole, the boatswain, testified next. He described visiting the seamen's quarters to awaken three of the defendants, Morrison, Millward, and McIntosh, after discovering Christian had taken the ship. None, he said, wanted anything to do with the mutiny, but while he was talking to them one of the mutineers, Charles Churchill, walked into the room and "called out to Millward, desired him to come upon Deck immediately to take a Musquet." Millward, Cole testified, complied with the request. Cole also recalled seeing the prisoner William Muspratt "with a Musquet in his Hand." Asked by the court whether he observed any of the defendants actively resist the mutiny, Cole answered that he did not. The court also asked Cole, "You have said that Coleman, Norman and McIntosh were retained in the *Bounty* against their will--Have you reason to believe that any of the other prisoners were detained against their inclinations?" Cole responded, "I believe Mr. Heywood was."

The court swore in William Peckover the next morning. Peckover testified that Burkett, who was carrying arms, called down from the *Bounty* to the overloaded launch to see if



he needed anything else. When Peckover said that he had "only what I stood in, a shirt, and a pair of trousers," Burkett left and returned ten minutes later with additional clothes, which he tossed into the boat. Peckover testified that except for Coleman, Norman, McIntosh, and Byrn, he "had every reason to suppose" that the other six defendants supported the mutiny.

Witness William Purcell described, in his testimony, how he succeeded in changing Christian's mind, convincing the chief mutineer to allow the *Bounty* loyalists to have the larger and safer of the two available launches. Christian also relented to the ship's carpenter's demand that he be allowed to take his tool chest. Christian's concession on the tool chest prompted other mutineers to urge that Purcell be ordered to stay on the *Bounty*, as he with his tool chest might secure the loyalists "another vessel in a month."

Purcell was the first witness to offer evidence that incriminated young Peter Heywood. Purcell testified that he saw Heywood on the booms with "his hand on a cutlass." When the carpenter called out to Heywood, "In the name of God Peter, what do you do with that?", Heywood "instantly dropped it." Purcell undid some of his damage to Heywood's case, however, when he described him as "a person confused and that he did not know that he had the weapon in his hand." Members of the court had a great number of questions concerning the cutlass, including one as to whether Purcell thought the mutineers would have knowingly allowed a person "well disposed to the Captain" to touch such a weapon.

Several additional witnesses rounded out the case for the prosecution. They included midshipmen Thomas Hayward and John Hallett, able seaman John Smith, and Lieutenants Larkan and Corner of the *Pandora*. The prosecution rested its case on Friday, and the court allowed the defendants the weekend, as Caroline Alexander writes in *The Bounty* (2003), "to prepare and rehearse the words that would damn or save them."

### **The Defenses**

The four men who Bligh had previously described as having been detained against their will, Norman, McIntosh, Coleman, and Byrn each offered short prepared defenses. The defenses included--for Norman and McIntosh--personal letters from Bligh declaring them innocent of mutiny. In the cases of these men, the court-martial was more a formality than a threat, and their eventual acquittal a virtual certainty.

For three other men, execution no less likely than acquittal for did for the four detained loyalists. Thomas Burkett, for example, faced the damning testimony of more than one prosecution witness that he, with musket in hand, escorted Captain Bligh from his cabin. His long shot defense consisted of accusations against Fletcher Christian forced him to participate in the mutiny against his will and suggestions that he desired to retake the *Bounty* and return it to England--but never had the support to pull it off. Millward and Ellison also confronted long odds, having been described by witnesses as being armed with cutlasses at the time of the mutiny. In his defense, Ellison called Christian "a mad man" and said that he feared what would happen if he attempted to thwart the mutiny.

Millward, in his prepared statement, claimed that he--like Burkett--had hoped to retake the *Bounty* at an opportune time, but that the time never came. Unfortunately for Millward, when prosecution witness William Cole, was asked by Millward to confirm his story of a conversation about retaking the boat, Cole failed to recall any such discussion.

Genuine doubt existed only as to the fates of the three remaining defendants, James Morrison, William Muspratt, and Peter Heywood. Morrison mounted a tenacious defense. He succeeded in getting witnesses to support his argument, that he had wanted to join Bligh in the launch, but had been prevented by mutineers from doing so. He also pulled off something rare in the court-martial in successfully impeaching two witnesses that testified against him. Muspratt had to contend with incriminating testimony that placed a musket in his hands at the time of the mutiny. He attempted to call two of his fellow defendants, Byrn and Norman, as witnesses to confirm his claim that he expressed displeasure with the mutiny as it was in progress, but the Court denied his request.

Most public attention focused on the case of Peter Heywood, the lone charged officer. Heywood's youth, and his upbringing in a wealthy and well-connected British family (one of the court-martial judges, in fact, was related by marriage to the Heywood family), invited considerable speculation. Heywood's connections were also responsible for landing him a post on the *Bounty*, a letter of recommendation on his behalf came from William Bligh's own father-in-law, Richard Betham. Representing Heywood was the well-respected barrister, Francis Const.

Heywood based his aggressive defense on three main arguments: (1) his "bitterly deplored...extreme youth and inexperience" prevented him from acting wisely at the time of the mutiny, (2) that he had desired to join Bligh on the launch but was sleeping below and did not arrive on deck until most of the action had occurred, and (3) when he finally did have an opportunity to get into the launch, it had become so severely overloaded that his joining the loyalists would have only increased the long odds that the launch could eventually make it to safety. On this last point concerning the launch's overloaded condition, Heywood wisely drew support from Bligh's own published statements on the matter. Const tried to present Heywood as the likable young victim of a series of unfortunate events. He counted on the captains sitting in judgment of Heywood to remember either their own early years as untutored midshipman.

## Verdicts

Testimony in the *Bounty* court-martial ended on September 18, and the twelve post-captains began what would be several hours of deliberations over their fates. The ten defendants assembled in the great cabin to hear Lord Hood announce the verdicts of the court. As anticipated, Coleman, Norman, McIntosh, and Byrn received acquittals. The other six defendants were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. In the cases of Heywood and Morrison, however, the court "in consideration of various circumstances" did "earnestly recommend" them both "to His Majesty's Royal Mercy." A few weeks later, the King pardoned both men. Muspratt, too, eventually gained his release, with the granting of his petition for a pardon based on his having been denied the opportunity to call his desired witnesses.

On October 29, 1794, at 11:26 in the morning, Burkett, Millward, and Ellison were hanged by the yardarm aboard a British naval ship the *Brunswick* in Portsmouth Harbor. The bodies remained hanging from the yards for two hours in the rain.

### **Pitcairn Island**

On January 15, 1790, Fletcher Christian and his band of mutineers and Tahitian wives and six male servants ran the *Bounty* on shore on uncharted Pitcairn Island, where the ship broke up. It would be twenty years before the outside world would hear from them again.

The admiralty journal *Quarterly Review* contained in an 1810 the notice that the American sealing vessel *Topaz*, under a Captain Folger, stopped at Pitcairn and discovered an Englishman, Alexander Smith, who claimed to be the last surviving *Bounty* mutineer. Smith presented Captain Folger with a chronometer, that proved to be the one assigned to the *Bounty*, thus confirming his unlikely story. The report included Smith's (a.k.a Adams) claim that Christian was the "leader and sole cause" of the mutiny. Christian, according to Smith, was murdered "in the neck with a pistol ball" around 1793 in an uprising of jealous Tahitian men. The thirty-five survivors on Pitcairn "acknowledge Smith as father and commander of them all" and, the report noted, they "have been educated by him in a religious and moral way." Among the thirty-five was Thursday October Christian, Fletcher's twenty-year-old son, and the island's first-native born resident.

Today, the population of Pitcairn numbers about fifty, nearly all of whom are descendants of the original mutineers. Dark-skinned with both European and South Pacific features, the Pitcairn natives use a unique language that combines elements of English and Tahitian. The British Empire incorporated Pitcairn in 1838.

Pitcairn made news again in 2004, with the indictment of seven island men on various sex charges. One of the seven was Steven Christian, a lineal descendant of Fletcher Christian, and the elected mayor of Pitcairn. Christian admitted to having sexual relations with at least three girls under the age of 16.

<https://www.famous-trials.com/bounty>