

The Life of Captain Bligh By Anthony Bell

On 22 August the Cruising Division enjoyed an exceptional presentation by Dr Nigel Erskine, Curator of the Maritime Museum, who shared his passion for the achievements of William Bligh. 83 RSYS cruisers were entertained not by a bland historic record but an enthusiastically told story with which Nigel has had a lifetime association.

We were fortunate to have in the audience descendants of Bligh himself, and the evening started with them presenting the compass that Bligh used to traverse the western Pacific from the mutiny aboard the *Bounty* to Kupang in Timor, some 3000NM.



The audience was captivated by the breadth of Bligh's career and that at only 22 years old had been a Master aboard Cook's *Resolute* (Cook's final voyage.) Without doubt this voyage had a large impact on Bligh's life. This appointment, support from Joseph Banks and his understanding of the South Pacific played a large part in the choice of Bligh to command the *Bounty* for the voyage for breadfruit in 1787.

The evening became more light-hearted when we heard that Bligh took only bachelors for his crew to Tahiti to avoid distraction (seemed like a good idea at the time) but we quickly fell silent when we learned that the mutiny took place a mere three weeks after leaving that island.

Bligh clearly was a master navigator, perhaps second only to James Cook, and he even took the opportunity to chart parts of the northern Queensland coastline on his desperate voyage to Timor. It was truly amazing to hear that on returning to England, Bligh returned to Tahiti to complete his quest for breadfruit - this time successfully.

After captaining nine more ships and being awarded by Nelson for his efforts in battle, Bligh became Governor of the Colony of NSW in 1806 but left an unfortunate legacy, having clashed with the Rum Corp and John Macarthur. He returned to England, was promoted to the rank of Admiral and died in 1817.



John Taylor thanked Dr Erskine

It was a wonderful evening and we thank Nigel for sharing his passion for William Bligh with the RSYs Cruising Division.

Next presentation 26 September

'Practical use of VHF and AIS radios' by Peter Lowndes.