

JCU ePrints

This file is part of the following reference:

Erskine, Nigel (2004) *The historical archaeology of settlement at Pitcairn Island 1790-1856*. PhD thesis, James Cook University.

Access to this file is available from:

<http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/1259>

**THE HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF SETTLEMENT AT
PITCAIRN ISLAND
1790 – 1856**

by

NIGEL ERSKINE

**B.A (University of Tasmania)
Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies
(James Cook University)
Graduate Diploma in Maritime Archaeology (Curtin University)**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology
James Cook University**

STATEMENT OF ACCESS

I, the undersigned, the author of this thesis, understand that James Cook University will make it available for use within the University Library and, by microfilm or other means, allow access to users in other approved libraries.

All users consulting this thesis will have to sign the following statement:

In consulting this thesis, I agree not to copy or closely paraphrase it in whole or in part without the written consent of the author; and to make proper public written acknowledgement for any assistance which I have obtained from it.

Beyond this, I do not wish to place any restriction on access to this thesis.

.....

Signature

.....

Date

Abstract

This thesis examines the historical and archaeological evidence of the mutineer settlement at Pitcairn Island from the time of the arrival of HMAV *Bounty* in 1790 to the removal of the entire population to Norfolk Island in 1856. The mutiny aboard the *Bounty* has been the focus of intense interest since news of the event first reached England in 1790 and a rich literature has substantially documented the subsequent voyage of HMS *Pandora* to capture those mutineers who chose to remain at Tahiti and William Bligh's second (successful) breadfruit mission. By contrast, our knowledge of the community founded by Fletcher Christian at Pitcairn Island has remained enigmatic and obscured by evangelical and Eurocentric interpretations of the survival and development of the settlement. In this respect, the study distances itself from the continuing controversy surrounding the characters of Bligh and Christian and examines the arrival of the *Bounty* and subsequent development of the community by the descendants of the mutineers as a particularly well defined example of cultural adaptation in an environment where many of the controlling parameters are visible. In the microcosm of the mutineer settlement we see an example of European culture confronting an unexplored environment which can be applied generally to a range of frontier situations where institutional authority, cultural identity and environment interact at the extreme range of lines of communication and supply.

The settlement at Pitcairn Island was established by a small, culturally divided group of settlers on one of the most remote islands in the Pacific, and for the first 18 years of its existence it remained totally separated from outside contact. The successful establishment of a settlement in such circumstances is remarkable and this thesis focuses on the process of colonisation at Pitcairn and how contact with European commercial enterprise in the Pacific impacted on the Pitcairn community.

Finally the study compares the process of colonisation at Pitcairn with theoretical models to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of particular models.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The seeds of this thesis were sewn quite unexpectedly when I first visited Pitcairn Island in 1987 and was shown artefacts from the *Bounty* kept in a sack behind the kitchen door by Charlotte Christian. While Charlotte is now dead, I wish to acknowledge the influence that simple episode had in shaping the course of my subsequent career. In the course of researching and writing this dissertation I have inevitably been encouraged and assisted by many people, however special acknowledgement should be made to Dr Peter Veth and Dr Martin Gibbs (School of Anthropology and Archaeology, James Cook University) for their unflagging enthusiasm, support and advice during all stages of the study. For their assistance in field work at Pitcairn Island I wish to thank Dr David Roe (also of the School of Anthropology and Archaeology, James Cook University), Jon Carpenter (Department of Materials Conservation, Western Australian Museum), Mike Nash (Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania) and Dr Peter Sullivan (Australian Antarctic Division). The advice of Mr Leon Salt (Commissioner for the Pitcairn Islands) was invaluable during planning of field work at Pitcairn Island and negotiations with the British Government and the Pitcairn Island Council to allow the work to proceed. The study was made possible by grants from the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology, the Australian Research Council, a Departmental scholarship and Doctoral Merit Awards from James Cook University and financial support from RDF Television and the Queensland Museum. Thanks are also due to Andrew Viduka in the Conservation section of the Museum of Tropical Queensland for conserving artefacts recovered from the *Bounty*.

Finally I wish to thank the people of Pitcairn Island for allowing me to follow the study and for their ever-generous assistance in fieldwork and for answering my many questions with great tolerance and humour. In the end this study could not have been achieved without the encouragement and involvement of my wife and children and I dedicate this work to them as small repayment for their love.

For Sally, Toby and Zoe – finally!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Statement of Access	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	ix
Statement of Sources	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Chapter One	
Introduction	1
Research aims	3
Thesis structure	4
Chapter Two	
The context of colonisation at Pitcairn Island	6
European entry into the Pacific	6
The Pitcairn Islands: Location and settlement	8
Historiography of Pitcairn settlement	16
Development of colonisation theory	18
Chronological outline	24
Chapter Three	
Sources of evidence	27
Historical sources	27
Archaeological fieldwork at Pitcairn Island	32
The study area defined	42
Survey and identification of sites	48
Description of Adamstown sites	52
Maritime survey and excavation	74
Chapter Four	
Analysis of artefacts from Adamstown	76
Foodways	83
Clothing	110

	Personal	113
	Labour	120
	Architectural	123
	Post-depositional processes	127
	Agents of deterioration at Adamstown	127
	Effects of identified agents on material classes	130
	Cultural formation processes	132
Chapter Five	Interpretation of the evidence	138
	Interpretation of the Historical evidence	139
	Interpretation of the Archaeological evidence	169
	Building technology	185
Chapter Six	Interpreting the historical archaeological evidence in relation to the research aims	197
	Identification of Polynesian and European cultural Influences	197
	Mechanisms of contact and exchange	209
	The nature of isolation at Pitcairn Island 1790-1856	215
Chapter Seven	The colonisation of Pitcairn Island 1790 – 1856	229
	The maritime frontier of Pitcairn Island - Discussion	239
	Summary and Conclusions	244
Bibliography		250
Appendix A.1	Register of artefacts from terrestrial sites	267
Appendix A.2	Analysis of cups, saucers, mugs, bowls and plates from Adamstown sites by decoration and body	321
Appendix A.3	Analysis of alcohol bottles recovered from LF0029	334
Appendix A.4	Illustrations of artefacts from terrestrial sites	338
Appendix A.5	Register of personal marks used at Pitcairn Island	369

Appendix B.1	Details of archaeological investigation of <i>Bounty</i>	375
Appendix B.2	Register of artefacts from <i>Bounty</i> site	386
Appendix C.1	Details of Oeno survey	392
Appendix C.2	Details of vessels wrecked in the Pitcairn Islands	394

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Location of Pitcairn Island	9
2.2	Location of the Pitcairn Islands	9
2.3	View of Pitcairn Island	10
2.4	Map of Pitcairn Island	11
2.5	The Swiss Family Robinson model of colonisation	22
3.1	View of village at Pitcairn, W.Smyth, 1825	35
3.2	House of John Adams, Pitcairn Island 1825, F.W.Beechey	36
3.3	Map of Pitcairn Island, F.W.Beechey 1825	38
3.4	Detail of village at Pitcairn from Beechey's map	38
3.5	View of Adamstown from <i>Christian's Cave</i> 1999	39
3.6	View of Adamstown from <i>Christian's Cave</i> 1906	40
3.7	Adamstown study area	43
3.8	Vegetation and areas of restricted access in the study area	47
3.9	Location of all archaeological sites in study area	51
3.10	Plan of excavations at Thursday October's house	54
3.11	View of excavations at Thursday October's house	56
3.12	View of excavation at LF0003	57
3.13	Section through LF0003 indicating layers	58
3.14	Plan of LF0029	63
3.15	East section LF0029	64
3.16	View of LF0029, unit 1	65
3.17	View of LF0036	66
3.18	View of LF0037	67
3.19	Location of LF0037	68
3.20	West section of test pit LF0037T2	69
3.21	Plan of LF0040	71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page	
3.22	Plan of cemetery showing location of LF0042	72
3.23	View of LF0044 and other described areas from the sea	73
4.1	Location of collection areas at Adamstown	77
4.2	Chinese Export porcelain plate	84
4.3	Mocha Ware mug	87
4.4	Grapevine border mug owned by John Adams	90
4.5	Personal mark of John Adams on base of mug	91
4.6	Stem glass	96
4.7	Personal marks on bottles from LF0029	99
4.8	Gunflints	110
4.9	Pressed metal lion's head	114
4.10	Pitcairn men 1936	133
5.1	Map of Pitcairn place names by Hardwicke Knight 1964	151
5.2	Cultural groups at Pitcairn 1790-1856	161
5.3	Cultural groups and shipping at Pitcairn 1790-1856	162
5.4	Origin of ships at Pitcairn 1838 – 1853	163
5.5	Population and shipping at Pitcairn 1790-1856	166
5.6	Copper and zinc content of copper alloy nails	182
5.7	Interior of a Pitcairn house, W. Ebrington 1853	184
5.8	Thursday October Christian's house	185
5.9	Plan of Thursday October Christian's house	186
6.1	Principal Pacific Ocean sailing routes in 1800	218
6.2	Principal Pacific Ocean sailing routes in 1825	219
6.3	Principal Pacific Ocean sailing routes in 1850	220
6.4	Principal whaling grounds in the Pacific Ocean	222
7.1	Swiss Family Robinson model of colonisation	234
7.2	Pitcairn Island colonisation process	243

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1 Imperial measurements	5
2.1 Settlers arriving at Pitcairn in 1790	13
3.1 Areas of restricted access within the study area	44
3.2 List of all sites in survey area	50
4.1 Adamstown collection area codes	76
4.2 Excavation volumes	78
4.3 Excavation Collection	78
4.4 Corrected weights of material	79
4.5 Adamstown surface collection areas	80
4.6 Material classes by weight	80
4.7 Relative density of material classes at Surface Collections	81
4.8 Functional Typology	82
4.9 Foodways – 1a Service	83
4.10 Summary of identified vessel forms	85
4.11 Sites listed in Table 4.12	93
4.12 Distribution of decorated forms across Adamstown sites	94
4.13 Foodways - 1a Service	95
4.14 Foodways - 1b Storage glass	98
4.15 Collar dimensions of black bottles from LF0029	102
4.16 Foodways – 1b Stonewares and cask iron	103
4.17 Foodways – 1c Preparation	105
4.18 Foodways –1d Faunal remains	107
4.19 Clothing – 2a Buttons	111
4.20 Personal – 3a Beads	113
4.21 Personal – 3b Distribution of clay tobacco pipe fragments	115
4.22 Personal – 3b Distribution of toys	116
4.23 Personal – 3c Distribution of cosmetic material	117
4.24 Personal – 3e Distribution of material in Medical category	119
4.25 Labour – 4d Distribution of stone tools	122
4.26 Architectural – 5a Construction	123
4.27 Architectural – 5b Furnishings	126

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
4.28	Average monthly relative humidity at Pitcairn Island	128
4.29	Potential effects of agents of deterioration	132
5.1	Principal Polynesian uses of plant resources at Pitcairn Island	139
5.2	Principal birds at Pitcairn since 1790	140
5.3	Principal marine fauna available at Pitcairn	141
5.4	<i>Bounty</i> establishment	143
5.5	Colonial shipping at Pitcairn 1849	164
5.6	British Naval vessels at Pitcairn 1790-1856	165
5.7	Chemical analysis of copper alloy nails from Adamstown	181
6.1	Prices of articles at Pitcairn 1834	210
6.2	First national representatives in the Pacific Islands	216

STATEMENT OF SOURCES

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

.....

Signature

Date

ABBREVIATIONS

ADM	Admiralty
BL	British Library
DL	Dixson Library, Sydney.
ML	Mitchell Library, Sydney.
Mss	Manuscript
NAA	National Archives of Australia, Canberra
NIM	Norfolk Island Museum
NLA	National Library of Australia, Canberra.
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.
PMB	Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Canberra.
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.
QM	Queensland Museum
WAM	Western Australian Museum
WAMM	Western Australian Maritime Museum