



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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**PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL HANDING OVER OF THE BLIGH NOTEBOOK**

Following the mutiny on the Bounty, Captain Bligh and 17 men made an epic 3,500 mile voyage in a 23-foot open boat. This voyage stands as one of the most arduous sea journeys, and one of the most outstanding feats of navigation in British Naval history.

For a considerable period of time, the primary document of that voyage was the journal, held by the Mitchell Library, which Bligh wrote after he reached safety. Recently, the interest of historians around the world has been excited by the emergence of the original note book Bligh wrote in the course of that voyage. This notebook fills an important gap in the documentation of Australia's evolution, complementing and supplementing many other items, both in the National Gallery and other Australian institutions relating to Australia's early settlement. Accordingly, the Government was very pleased to make a special grant, enabling the Australian National Library to acquire Bligh's notebook, and hold it in trust for present and future generations of Australians.

I have only had the opportunity to read extracts from the notebook, but I understand that amongst other things, it provides additional insights into Bligh's character, and an interesting description of Fletcher Christian. Bligh describes Christian as "dark and very swarthy, strong star tatowed on the left breast, and tatowed on the backside. His knees stand a little out and may be called a little bowlegged. He is subject to violent perspiration..."

The notebook includes material Bligh omitted from the journal concerning his emotional state, his prayers of anguish - almost of despair - and his attitudes towards his men who he described as "such discontented people who don't know what to be or what is best for them". It is also interesting that while the notebook carries a plea for mercy for four of the mutineers, no such plea appears in the later journal.

Bligh of course was prominent in another mutiny of sorts. His period of Governorship was one of the most turbulent in the early Colony's history, culminating in his arrest on the petition of over 100 citizens. Bligh returned to England an embittered man and few historians have subsequently treated him kindly. The late Dr. Evatt was one of those few who had some regard for Bligh.

Another historian, noted for his work on Australia's early history with his customary predilection for colourful phrases has described Bligh as "the man who was angry without cause, who bequeathed no monument of achievement to posterity, and tasted deep damnation on earth as the fruit of his disquiet."

The acquisition of the notebook will, I hope, stimulate and facilitate more extensive research into the life and times of Bligh. The acquisition and preservation of items which are part of our national heritage is of fundamental importance to our sense of national identity, to our sense of ourselves and to the historical and human experience which made us what we are as a nation.

Some idea of the collective impact on our national consciousness of the possession and display of records relating to our history can be seen in the exhibition on shipping currently being mounted by the National Library. The fortitude of Captain Bligh as set out in his notebook and that of our early explorers is made vivid by the pictorial records on exhibition of the ships in which the early navigators sailed. We have a responsibility to preserve our national heritage, and it is a matter of concern to the Government that important relics have been lost to Australia in the past. The Bligh notebook will augment the national collections which have recently been added to by other acquisitions made by the Government on behalf of the Australian people.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie's sword and dirk were acquired last year and are currently on display, together with other items associated with Macquarie in the Mitchell Library. They will continue to be displayed around Australia so that as many people can have access to them as possible. Similarly, after the initial display in the National Library, the Bligh notebook will be made available for display in other Australian institutions.

As you know, 1977 marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Federal Parliament in Canberra. The Government has recently further added to the national collections by purchasing the Crossley motor car used by Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of York on that occasion. Their daughter, Her Majesty the Queen, will be visiting Australia this year during her Silver Jubilee Year, and I hope that this historic vehicle may be used in the celebration of these two significant events.

In pursuit of the proper conservation of Australia's historical heritage, the Government has also recently established an independent committee on official establishments. This committee has the responsibility of advising the Government on the maintenance operation, conservation and longer term improvement of the four official residences of the Commonwealth Government - Government House, The Lodge, Kirribilli House, and Admiralty House. These residences are storehouses of Australian history and tradition, and it is essential that their significance be maintained and enhanced. Their decoration for instance, should not be

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determined by the whim of the occupants of the day, but by considerations of the part the establishments have played, and will continue to play, in Australian history, and the ability of future generations to understand that history.

The Government believes that all places and items of real historic value to Australia should be preserved for future generations, and that this goal must be responsibly pursued even in times of great economic restraint. The preservation of our national heritage cannot however be achieved by the Government alone. All Australians have an important part to play and many people are actively contributing to this goal, including the many friends and associates of the National Library who are here today to see the Bligh notebook.

Mr. Director General, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be here to mark the acquisition of the Bligh notebook and to emphasise the role of the National Library in holding the notebook in trust.
