

Calling all Blighs! Australian National Maritime Museum invites descendants of Captain William Bligh to High Tea on the High Seas

For such a controversial historical figure, descendants of Captain William Bligh are passionate about their genealogical links with this complex but compelling character. Having survived two mutinies during his career, it's interesting that generations of family members and supporters still proudly claim a direct lineage to him.

On Sunday 8 September, Pyrmont resident, John Bligh, will join fellow descendants to share stories and sort fact from fiction, celebrating Bligh's 265th birthday with a High Tea at the Australian National Maritime Museum. In an interesting twist, Trent Christian, a descendant of Bligh's nemesis, Fletcher Christian – who would have celebrated his 255th birthday this month - will also be in attendance.

Another former NSW Governor and enthusiastic scholar of Bligh, Professor, The Hon. Dame Marie Bashir, will be special guest at the high tea which will be followed by a special tour of the new exhibition '[Bligh: Hero or Villain?](#)'. The Museum is calling on descendants of both Bligh and Christian as well as maritime history enthusiasts to attend what will be an afternoon of lively historical debate.

"We are keen for as many descendants of Bligh or Christian to join us to reflect on the amazing and often controversial events that occurred during their era in Australia's maritime history," said John Mullen, Chair of the Australian National Maritime Museum and Bligh aficionado.

"Whatever your opinion of Bligh, he was certainly an influential man of his time, for better or worse, often walking a thin line between hero and villain."

Bligh was appointed Governor of NSW in 1805 before being overthrown by the rum rebellion and still holds the dubious title as the only Australian leader to be overthrown by a military coup. Upon the anniversary of Bligh's 265th Birthday, the Museum will celebrate with descendants of Bligh and Christian and other history enthusiasts, unravel truth from fiction, and continue the debate: Hero or Villain – or was he just a man of his time?

The high tea will be held at the Australian National Maritime Museum from 3.30pm on Sunday, 8 September 2019. For bookings and further information contact the Museum Foundation 9298 3619 or visit <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/celebrate-all-things-bligh-on-his-265th-birthday-tickets-67941622221>

Things you may not know about Bligh...

William Bligh joined the Navy at 16 years of age.

At 22, Bligh had impressed Captain James Cook who appointed him master of the HMS *Resolution* and sailed with Cook on his third voyage of exploration.

At 25, Bligh witnessed Cook's death in Hawaii and assisted in getting three ships back to England.

At 26, he married Elizabeth Betham and had eight children. Bligh collected shells for Elizabeth throughout his travels and she amassed an excellent collection.

In 1787, Bligh took command of the *Bounty* where 2 years later, after the famous mutiny, Bligh performed one of the most spectacular navigation feats in history. With 18 loyalists, Bligh travelled 3,618 miles (5,822kms), over 47-days, in a 23-foot (7m) open boat and landed in the Dutch settlement in Timor. Only one crew-member was lost during the epic voyage. Bligh returned to England and survived his first court martial.

In 1805, Bligh became governor of NSW and was overthrown. Upon the arrival of Lachlan Macquarie Bligh was reinstated to governor for 24 hours before Macquarie took over the position.

Former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has 'Bligh' as a middle name – a family tradition passed down from his ancestor, John Turnbull, a colonist and land owner on the Hawkesbury who named his son William Bligh Turnbull in honour of the recently deposed NSW Governor.

*The **Australian National Maritime Museum Foundation** is the philanthropic arm of the Australian National Maritime Museum. The Foundation assists the Museum to achieve its priorities, especially around building and preserving the National Maritime Collection, telling stories about Australia's migration history, furthering our understanding through maritime archaeology and highlighting the importance of Indigenous connections to our seas, rivers and waterways.*

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