

THE DESCENDANTS OF THE BOUNTY'S CREW,

AS FIRST DISCOVERED BY THE BRITON AND TAGUS FRIGATES.—FROM THE UNPUBLISHED MSS. OF THE LATE CAPT. PIPON, R.N.

On the 17th September, 1814, at about half-past two o'clock in the morning, to my surprise and astonishment, land was discovered, both by the Briton and Tagus, and nearly at the same moment. The ships were hove to, and, on hailing the Briton, it was determined to continue in that situation until daylight in the morning, to ascertain the exact position of the land in view, and, according to circumstances, to reconnoitre it, if necessary. We were then, by our reckoning, in the latitude of about 24° 40' S., and longitude 130° 24' W., the land bearing S.S.E. five or six leagues. As in all the charts in our possession there was no land laid down in or near this longitude, we were extremely puzzled to make out what island it could be, for [Pitcairn Island](#) being, according to all accounts, in the longitude of 133° 24' W., we could not possibly imagine so great an error could have crept into our charts with respect to its situation.

At daylight in the morning we bore up and ran for the island, and as we approached it, were still more surprised at beholding plantations, regularly laid out, and huts or houses, much more neatly built than those we had lately seen at the [Marquesas Islands](#).

As Pitcairn Island was described as uninhabited, we naturally conjectured this in view could not be the place, particularly when, in bringing to, two or three miles off the shore, we observed the natives bringing down their canoes on their shoulders, and shortly after darting through a heavy surf and paddling off to the ships; but our astonishment may be better conceived than described on finding that the inhabitants spoke the English language perfectly well, and that the island was peopled by the descendants of [Fletcher Christian](#), who, in 1788, had mutinied against his [Captain, Bligh](#), conspiring with others to take his ship from him; turning him adrift with nineteen others in a boat, and ultimately retaining possession of the Bounty, (a ship employed by Government to take the bread-fruit tree plant from [Otaheite](#)¹ to the West Indies,) and running away with her to establish themselves in some island in the neighbourhood of Otaheite, least frequented by Europeans.

It appears that, not having been able to effect this, they returned to Otaheite on the 22d September, 1789, when sixteen of the crew having left the ship and gone ashore, Christian, with the remainder, sailed suddenly away in the night-time, cutting their cable, and, as the Missionary account says, have never since been heard of.

The first who came on board the Briton was [Thursday October Christian](#), son of Fletcher Christian, by an Otaheite woman. He was the first-born upon the island, (which must have been soon after their arrival and settling on it,) and was called Thursday October in consequence of his being born on that day of the week, and in that month.

He was, when we saw him, about twenty-five years of age, a tall fine young man about six feet high, with dark black hair, and a countenance extremely open and interesting; he wore no clothes except a piece of cloth round his loins, a straw hat ornamented with *black cock's* feathers, and occasionally a *peacock's*, nearly similar to that worn by the Spaniards in South America, though smaller. He is, of course, of a brown cast, not, however, with that mixture of red, so disgusting in the wild Indians. With a great share of good humour, and a disposition and willingness to oblige, we were very glad to trace in his benevolent countenance all the features of an honest English face. He is married to a woman much older than himself, one of those that accompanied the mutineers of the Bounty from Otaheite. I must confess I could not survey this interesting personage without feelings of tenderness and compassion.

¹ Tahiti

He spoke English in a manner most pleasing, and he was accompanied by another young man, by the name of George Young, a very fine youth of about seventeen or eighteen years of age, who also spoke English perfectly well,—indeed it was their common and general language. These young men informed us of many singular events, but referred us for further particulars to an old man, by the name of [John Adams](#), the only surviving Englishman that came away in the *Bounty*. He was not, by *his own account*, in the smallest degree concerned in the mutiny, he being at the time it happened sick in bed. He is now between fifty and sixty years of age, and on him the welfare of the colony entirely depends; indeed, as it consists at present principally of very young men and young women, with few very old ones of the latter class, they would soon be exterminated, without his advice, assistance, and instruction, for the land, although extremely fertile, will not produce without cultivation. This island having no good anchorage, and the *Bounty*, I imagine, being weakly manned when she arrived here, induced Christian to run the ship into a creek against the cliffs, in order to unload her of such articles as were necessary for their new settlement, as well as to get the hogs, goats, poultry, &c., on shore; and having effected this, he set her on fire, to prevent, doubtless, the escape of his companions, as well as to preclude the possibility of any information being given of his situation.

We found the colony in a most flourishing state, having abundance of goats, poultry, and hogs ; of vegetables and fruit, very fine yams, plantains, sweet potatoes, turnips, with bread-fruit, cocoa-nuts, bananas, &c.; in short, as Adams expressed himself, they have every luxury to render life easy and comfortable. Sir [Thomas Staines](#) and myself were naturally extremely desirous to learn the fate of Christian and those who followed his fortune, and, for that purpose particularly, we accompanied his son on shore, though the landing was attended with some degree of danger. With the assistance, however, of our conductor and his companion, we reached the shore with only a good wetting; and soon after old John Adams, when he learned we had landed without arms, and were not come to seize his person, met us on the road, and conducted us to his house. His wife accompanied him, a very old woman, blind from age. They were at first extremely alarmed, lest our visit was intended against him, but as we observed to him, we were not even aware of his being then living, and that we had no intention of that nature, he was soon relieved from all his apprehensions. Indeed it would have been an act of great cruelty and inhumanity to have taken him from his family, who would be left in the greatest misery, and the settlement in all probability annihilated. It is impossible to describe the joy these poor people manifested on seeing us, when they were assured our visit was of a peaceable nature. Yams roasted, of a very superior quality, were immediately produced, with cocoa-nuts and such fruits as they possessed. We ate some, which we found delicious, as well as fine fresh eggs, which were to us a great luxury. Old Adams would have immediately dressed a hog, but this we declined, time not admitting of our long stay with them ; indeed we had landed at the risk of our lives, for had the wind increased, it would hardly have been possible for us to embark again, much less to have forced any person on board, so that had we been inclined even to seize on old Adams, it would have been impossible to have conveyed him on board; again, to get to the boats, we had to climb such precipices as were scarcely accessible to any but goats, and the natives and we had enough to do in holding on by the different boughs and roots of trees, to keep on our feet. Besides, from the nature of the island, the inhabitants might retire to such haunts as to defy our utmost search; a measure which they would naturally have had recourse to the moment any intention of seizing any of them had been manifested. The family of John Adams, at that moment, consisted of himself, his wife, and three daughters of from fifteen to eighteen years of age, and a son of eleven; his wife had also a daughter by a former husband; this daughter is a widow, her husband having been drowned while fishing. A son-in-law, who has married one of his daughters, resides with them.

When the *Bounty* arrived here, she had on board nine white men, English, including Christian; eleven Otaheite women, and six black men or natives of Otaheite. The following names of the British were all that I could collect:—Fletcher Christian, John Adams, George Young, —M‘Cay², — Smith³, — Stanfell; this last not certain. All have been either killed or otherwise paid the debt of nature, excepting John Adams; of the women, five are dead, as are all the black or Otaheitean men. The colony now consists of about forty people, exclusive, I believe, of children, so that they have multiplied considerably; the children we saw were very young. The young men born on the island are extremely fine and very athletic. The young women are still more to be admired, wonderfully strong, of most pleasing countenances, and a degree of modesty and bashfulness that would do honour to the most virtuous nation. Their teeth are beautiful, without a single exception; and *all* both men and women, bear strong resemblances to English faces. From so promising a stock, it is natural to expect a progeny of beautiful people upon the island. There is no debauchery here, no immoral conduct; and Adams informed me there is not one instance of any young woman having proved unchaste. The men appear equally moral and well-behaved, and, from every information, there has not appeared any inclination to seduction on the part of the young men: as many of them assured me, they wait patiently till they have acquired sufficient property to marry; and then, if a proper choice is made, Adams performs the matrimonial ceremony; but this, I imagine, is simply giving the young girls away

The greatest harmony now prevails, and in all their dealings they are perfectly honest; bartering a hog for a goat, &c., with each other in a most friendly manner. In their general intercourse they speak the English language commonly, and even the old Otaheitan women have picked up a good deal of it. The young people speak it with a most pleasing accent, and their voices are very harmonious. Their habitations are extremely neat, infinitely superior to those we saw at the Marquesas Islands. The little village at Pitcairn forms a pretty square. John Adams occupies the house at the upper end, and Thursday October Christian one opposite to him; the centre is a fine lawn where the poultry wander; but it is fenced in so as to prevent the intrusion of hogs, &c. It was easily to be perceived that in this establishment the labour and ingenuity of European hands had been exerted; we never witnessed any regular plan in laying out the ground or forming plantations on the other islands we visited. In their houses they have also a good deal of decent furniture, consisting of beds, and bedsteads, and covering; they have also tables and large chests; their clothing and linen are made from the bark of a certain tree, and this is the employment of the elderly women: the bark, after being soaked, is beaten with square pieces of wood of the breadth of one’s hand, hollowed out into grooves, until fitted for use. The younger of the females are obliged to attend with old Adams and their brothers to the culture of the land; and it is on this account, doubtless, that this old director of the work does not countenance too early marriages, for, as he very properly observed, when once mothers, they are not so capable of hard labour, but obliged to attend to their children, and, from all appearance, they would be very prolific; indeed I do not see how it could be otherwise, considering the regularity of their lives, their simple, though excellent way of living, their meals consisting chiefly of a vegetable diet, with now and then excellent pork, and occasionally good fish.

The women, or rather the young girls, although they have only the examples of their mothers to follow in their dress, (who are Otaheitan women,) are much more modestly clad than any of the females we saw at the Marquesas. They have invariably a piece of linen reaching from the waist to the knees, and generally a mantle, or something of that nature,

² Possibly [William McCoy](#), one of the mutineers who committed suicide in 1797 or 1798

³ Records show only a single crewman on the *Bounty* surnamed Smith, one John, an able-bodied seaman and Bligh’s servant, who returned safely to England.

thrown loosely over the shoulders, and hanging as low as the ancles (*sic*); this, however, is frequently thrown aside and often entirely off, so that it is intended to shelter them more from the heat of the sun, or any severity of weather, than for the sake of modesty, for frequently the upper part of the body is entirely exposed, and it is not possible to behold finer forms. Whilst speaking of their dress, one must not omit mentioning with what taste and quickness they form a bonnet of green leaves, &c., which they wear to keep the sun from their eyes. I was a witness to the making of one of these, by one of the young girls who was about to accompany us to the boats, and it was wonderful to see with what alacrity and neatness it was executed. I am convinced our fashionable dress-makers in London would be delighted with the simplicity and yet elegant taste of these untaught females. This young girl did accompany us to the boat, carrying on her shoulders, as a present, a large basket of yams, through such roads, and among such precipices, as, I mentioned before, we could scarcely climb with the help of our hands.

We lamented that our time did not permit us to visit the more lofty parts of the island, and the fine plantations there, as well as the other habitations. It had, however, a very picturesque appearance, when we first beheld these at a great distance. But what delighted us most, and excited my greatest admiration, was the manner with which John Adams has impressed on their minds the necessity and propriety of returning thanks to the Almighty for the many blessings they enjoy. They invariably say grace before and after meat, and frequently repeat their prayers. They know the Lord's Prayer and, I believe, the Creed. They frequently call upon our Blessed Saviour, saying, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son"

This, I may imagine, was early taught them by Christian, with reference to the shameful part he had acted, both against God and his country; but it was truly pleasing to see, that these poor people are so well-disposed as to listen attentively to moral instruction, and believe in the divine attributes of God.

By all the accounts we could collect from old John Adams, they have been upon the island about twenty-five years; but it was impossible to ascertain with certainty the date of their arrival. He had kept, it is true, a journal; but it chiefly contained the manner and work they were employed about, as well as what was due from one to the other, of provisions, &c.—for, it appears, they had a regular established allowance, and they frequently exchanged salt for fresh provisions. Again, when their ship stock was expended, they mutually assisted each other with meat, and repaid punctually the first good opportunity. All this was carefully noted down in the journal.

I made it a point to inform myself particularly, respecting the name of the island, and from the information I received from John Adams, it appears Fletcher Christian certainly considered it to be Pitcavia, (which is very extraordinary,) for what we call Pitcairn's Island in our charts is laid down three degree of longitude to the westward of this, and nine miles difference of latitude. Our longitude was ascertained by three good chronometers, which differed very little; it is therefore, certain there must be a great error in the laying it down in our charts.

It appears, that the unfortunate and ill-fated Fletcher Christian was never happy after the rash and inconsiderate step he had taken; but became sullen and morose; and having, by many acts of cruelty and inhumanity, brought on himself the hatred and detestation of his companions, he was shot by a black man whilst digging in his field, and almost instantly expired. This happened about eleven months after they were settled on the island; but the exact date I could not learn. The black man, or the Otaheitean man, who murdered him, was himself immediately after assassinated.

The cause of these disturbances and violence is thus accounted for by John Adams: that the conduct of Fletcher Christian towards the people soon alienated them from him, and in consequence they divided into parties, which ran very high, seeking every opportunity on both

sides to put each other to death. Old John Adams himself was not without his enemies, having been shot through the neck; as, however, the ball entered the fleshy part, he was enabled to make his escape, and avoid the fury of his pursuers, who sought his life. Another circumstance had arisen, which gave, particularly the Otaheitean men, still more discontent, and roused their fury to a degree not to be pacified. Christian's wife having died, he forcibly seized on one belonging to the Otaheitean men, and took her to live with him. This exasperated them to a degree of madness; open war was declared, and every opportunity sought to take away his life, and it was effected in the manner described.

Fletcher's connexions were extremely respectable, and his talents and capacity were of an order to have rendered him an ornament to his profession had he adopted another line of conduct.

We could not learn, precisely, the exact number of blacks or whites who were killed whilst this kind of warfare continued; certainly, however, many must have thus perished, and only old John Adams remains of the men that landed on the island with Christian.

The island has only been visited by one ship since their settlement on it—an American, called the *Topaz*, of Boston, Mayhew Folger (master); this took place on the 6th of Feb. 1808. The master landed, and procured all manner of refreshments the island afforded, such as hogs, goats, poultry, and such fruits and vegetables as were then in season.

A ship appeared off the island on the 27th of Dec. 1795, but did not approach very near, neither could they make out by their colours to what nation she belonged.

A third appeared, but did not either come close or communicate.

A fourth came sufficiently near to see the natives and their habitations, but did not send a boat on shore; this is not to be wondered at, from the ruggedness of the coast, there being scarce any shelter, and the sea, with the least wind, breaking with the greatest violence against the cliffs. Its longest part extends north and south, so that the periodical or trade-winds, that blow either from the eastward or westward, occasion continually a great sea on either side. I was informed there was a better landing-place on the north side than the creek we went into with our boats.

On our arrival here we found that John Adams was mistaken in the day of the week and month: he considered it to be Sunday, the 18th of September, whereas it was Saturday, the 17th. By his account he had been misled by the American captain of the *Topaz* when she touched here; and it was pleasing to observe, that they made the Sabbath a day of rest, and set it apart for particular prayer and devotion. Unfortunately, the day we were here was very tempestuous, which prevented our assisting these people with many valuable articles. We may well observe, that here, necessity is the mother of invention: for the forge they landed from the *Bounty* being now out of order, if not completely useless, by dint of labour and assiduity they have got into a method of making their own agricultural tools, of solid iron, which are really very well executed, and from all appearances they are not in want of implements of any kind; their chief desire was for a few muskets to kill the wild hogs, that are very abundant on the island. Sir Thomas Staines and myself having some French pieces, we supplied their wants, and gave them powder, as well as cooking utensils; of this latter they were quite destitute; but the weather was too boisterous to comply with all their wishes; notwithstanding, Thursday October Christian, a most active and expert swimmer, contrived with George Young to convey many valuable refreshments through the surf, such as a few small pigs, yams, cocoa-nuts, bananas, &c.

I was informed by John Adams, that from a root on this island, he could extract a spirit equal, if not superior, to our Jamaica rum. Apprehensive, however, that it might be detrimental to this young colony, were it known, he has very prudently abstained from making any lately.

I should imagine the island is about six miles long, and perhaps three or four miles broad, covered with wood; the soil appears very rich, but as the ground must be cleared before it can be cultivated, it will be many years ere this is effected.

In closing this cursory and hasty account of what I could learn whilst I was on the island, it is but justice to John Adams to say, he would have been happy to have accompanied us to England, could he have removed all his family: but it would have been a heart-breaking circumstance to have torn him from those he most dearly loved, as well as cruel to a degree, to have left a young colony to perish without such a protector and adviser as he was in all their concerns, both with respect to the tilling of the ground, and the private and domestic concerns of all. Considering, however, that a small colony well organized is now settled upon this island, that may hereafter supply ships trading across these seas, or driven there in search of provisions, with considerable refreshments, it remains to be determined, whether it would be politic to withdraw them from the settlement and destroy it altogether. In my humble opinion, such an act would be very unwise.

After this most interesting day, we returned to our ships, about three o'clock, in fine, though rather cloudy weather; so strong a gale succeeded that, had it occurred sooner, would have prevented our visiting Pitcairn's Island.

Extracted from the *United Services Journal 1834 Part I*, published by Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, London.