

Basic Detail Report



V00044369

Title

William Bligh's ring and original box

Date

1815-1817

Medium

Metal, Heliotrope, leather

Dimensions

Overall: 23 x 16 x 20 mm, 5.18 g

Name

Ring

History

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries William Bligh was one of the most controversial officers in the Royal Navy. Entering the navy as a boy in 1761, Bligh first went to sea as an able seaman in 1770. He served as a

midshipman before being made Master's Mate in 1775. The following year he was appointed Master of HMS RESOLUTION for Cook's third voyage of exploration, to the Pacific North West and he was present when Cook was killed in Hawaii. On returning to England in 1780 he met Elizabeth Betham and married her in 1781. Elizabeth bore Bligh six daughters: Harriet, Mary, Elizabeth, Frances (Fanny) and Jane and Anne (twins born after Bligh had left on the first breadfruit expedition). She also bore him twin boys in 1795, named William and Henry, but they died within 24 hours. Elizabeth Betham's uncle was Duncan Campbell, a wealthy and powerful ship-owner with plantations in the West Indies. From 1783 to 1787 Bligh commanded Campbell's ships on several voyages to the West Indies. In 1787, with the patronage of Joseph Banks, Bligh was appointed to command HMS BOUNTY on an expedition to transport breadfruit trees from Tahiti to the West Indies, and it was during this voyage that the famous BOUNTY mutiny occurred. Surviving an open boat voyage lasting 43 days, Bligh successfully navigated the BOUNTY's launch containing 18 loyalists to Coupang in the Dutch East Indies, and subsequently returned to England where he was exonerated from any blame in the mutiny. His account of the mutiny became a best seller and Bligh was lionised in the London press. In 1791 he successfully commanded a second breadfruit expedition in command of HMS PROVIDENCE and HMS ASSISTANT. By 1793 England was at war, and Bligh participated in a number of battles - notably the Battle of Camperdown off the Dutch coast in 1797 and the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801. In 1805 he was appointed as the fourth Governor of New South Wales (arriving in Sydney in August 1806), and it was during his term that a rebellion of the NSW Corps under Major George Johnston challenged his authority in 1808. On 26 January 1808, the NSW Corps marched to

Government House and arrested Governor Bligh. Bligh was accused by Major Johnston of tyrannical behaviour threatening the stability of the young colony, and Johnston set up a provisional government pending authority from England. A prominent supporter of Bligh's throughout the rebellion was George Suttor, a small landholder who had arrived as a free settler in November 1800. In 1810 when Bligh sailed for England, he took George Suttor as a witness in the Court-Martial of Major Johnston. Johnston was found guilty and cashiered from the army, while Bligh was promoted Rear Admiral. In 1814 he was made Vice Admiral of the Blue. Bligh died in December 1817 and is buried at St Mary's Church, Lambeth. George Suttor returned to Sydney in 1812 and by the 1820s had taken up land on the Bathurst Plains. He later lived in Elizabeth Street, Sydney. In 1839 he sailed for Europe with his wife and remained there for six years. During this time his wife died (1844) and Suttor returned to Sydney in November 1845. He died in 1859 and was buried at Kelso near Bathurst. The provenance of Bligh's ring is evidenced by an accompanying letter signed by his daughter, Fanny Bligh. Based on the content of the letter, the date of William Bligh's death (1817), and the dates of George Suttor's travels to England, it is probable that the ring was gifted to Suttor between 1839 and 1845.