



**THE IAN POTTER MUSEUM OF ART MIEGUNYAH
STUDENT PROJECT AWARD 2019**

This report is the outcome of a 2019 Miegurnah Student Project Award, and is the result of independent research undertaken by the student.

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which the Ian Potter Museum stands, and the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the area we now call Sydney, where events in this research took place. I recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Hold Your Tongue, Sir

An investigation into Governor Bligh being hauled out from under his bed

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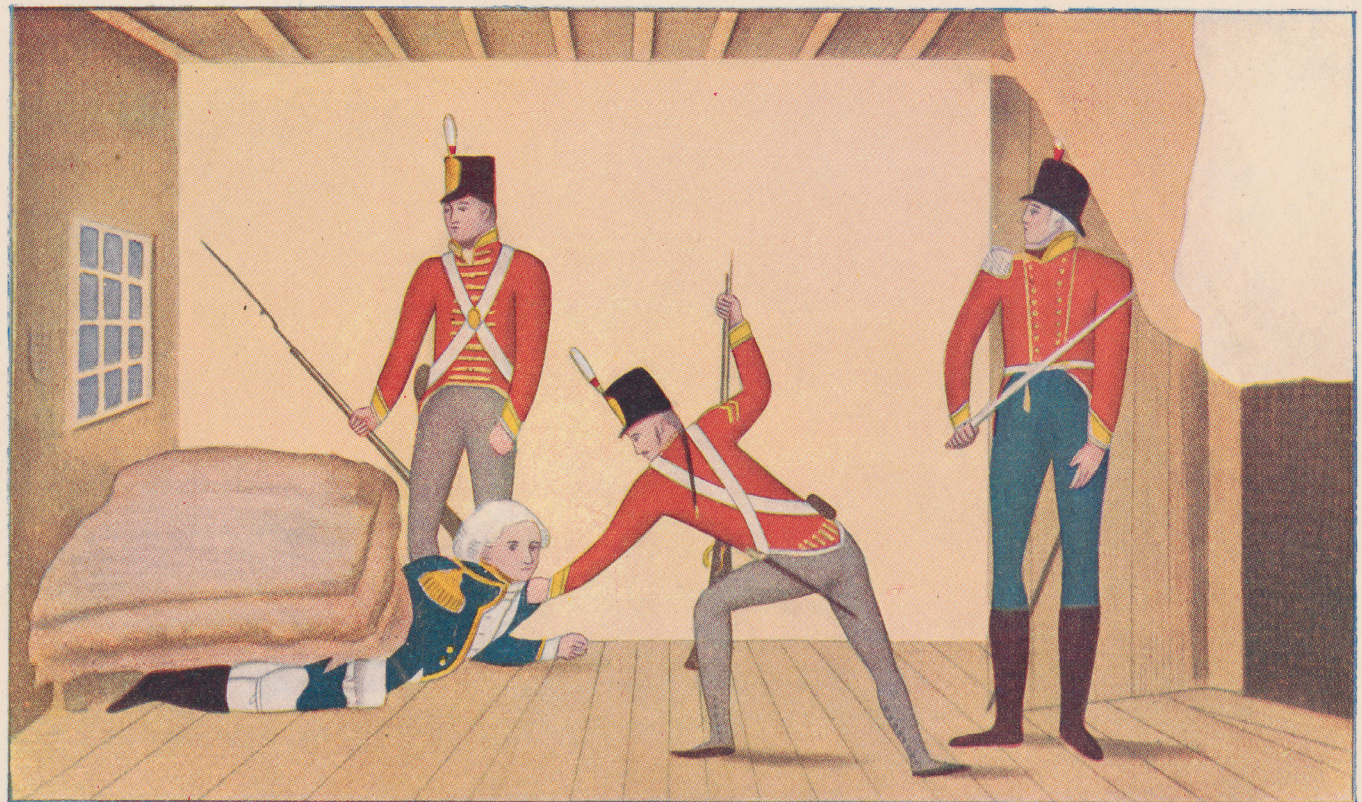
Untitled (The arrest of Governor Bligh) (c.1890). Artist unknown, photo-lithograph reproduction with watercolour, 23.1(irreg.) x 37.1cm. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973. Courtesy of the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

This project investigates the provenance of a propaganda cartoon acquired by the Ian Potter Museum of Art in the Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade bequest, titled *Untitled (The arrest of Governor Bligh)* (c.1890) featuring the arrest of Captain William Bligh, Governor of the Colony of New South Wales from 1806 to 1808. The image depicts a contested account of the only successful armed takeover of government in Australian history and is, in itself, a representation of rebellion against early colonial censorship. The researcher has elected to include a creative response alongside this report, seeing imagery from the cartoon interwoven with witnessed accounts of the arrest, presented in a digital diorama. The project aimed to uncover what is known about further copies of the caricature and the motivation behind its commission. This investigation rests upon the pivotal question: was Governor Bligh hauled out from under his bed?

When beginning this research and browsing through the text, artworks and objects in the Miegunyah archives, it was clear that the Grimwades were captivated by Pacific exploration, botany and early Australian colonial history. Discovering this, it was of little surprise that Russell Grimwade had an appetite for the tale of Governor Bligh, who had been in the company of Captain Cook when he was murdered in Hawaii. Bligh himself was a master navigator, having kept eighteen men alive after being exiled from his ship off the coast of Tahiti—a story widely studied, known as the ‘Mutiny on the Bounty.’¹ On further inspection of the archives, the extent of Russell’s interest unravelled—found within the Grimwade Collection are over thirty-five titles dedicated to Captain Cook and his voyages, as well as an additional sixteen texts concerning Governor Bligh.

Russell Grimwade was a man who valued research, therefore there was reason to examine his collection of texts in search of information regarding the political cartoon. Indeed, a richly coloured version of the picture was found in Russell’s 1943 edition of *Rum Rebellion: a study of the overthrow of Governor Bligh by John Macarthur and the New South Wales Corps*, yet the text contained no reference to the commission of the caricature or its provenance.²

An illustration of the political cartoon printed verso the title page of, *Rum Rebellion: a study of the overthrow of Governor Bligh...* Artist unknown. Herbert Vere Evatt. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1943, c1938. Courtesy of University of Melbourne, Baillieu Library, Rare Books, Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade Collection.



COPY-BOOK TRADITION—“THE ARREST OF BLIGH”

The above facsimile of a painting exhibited at Sydney shortly after the Rum Rebellion, illustrates the virulence of the anti-Bligh campaign of defamation. The charge of cowardice against Bligh is analysed and refuted in Chapter XXXI.



Alexander Huey, *Portrait of Rear-Admiral William Bligh*, 1814, watercolour on ivory, 11.5 x 8.4 cm. Bligh is depicted wearing the uniform of a Flag Officer and the Captain's Naval Gold Medal for the Battle of Camperdown. The miniature was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1814. Courtesy of National Library of Australia.

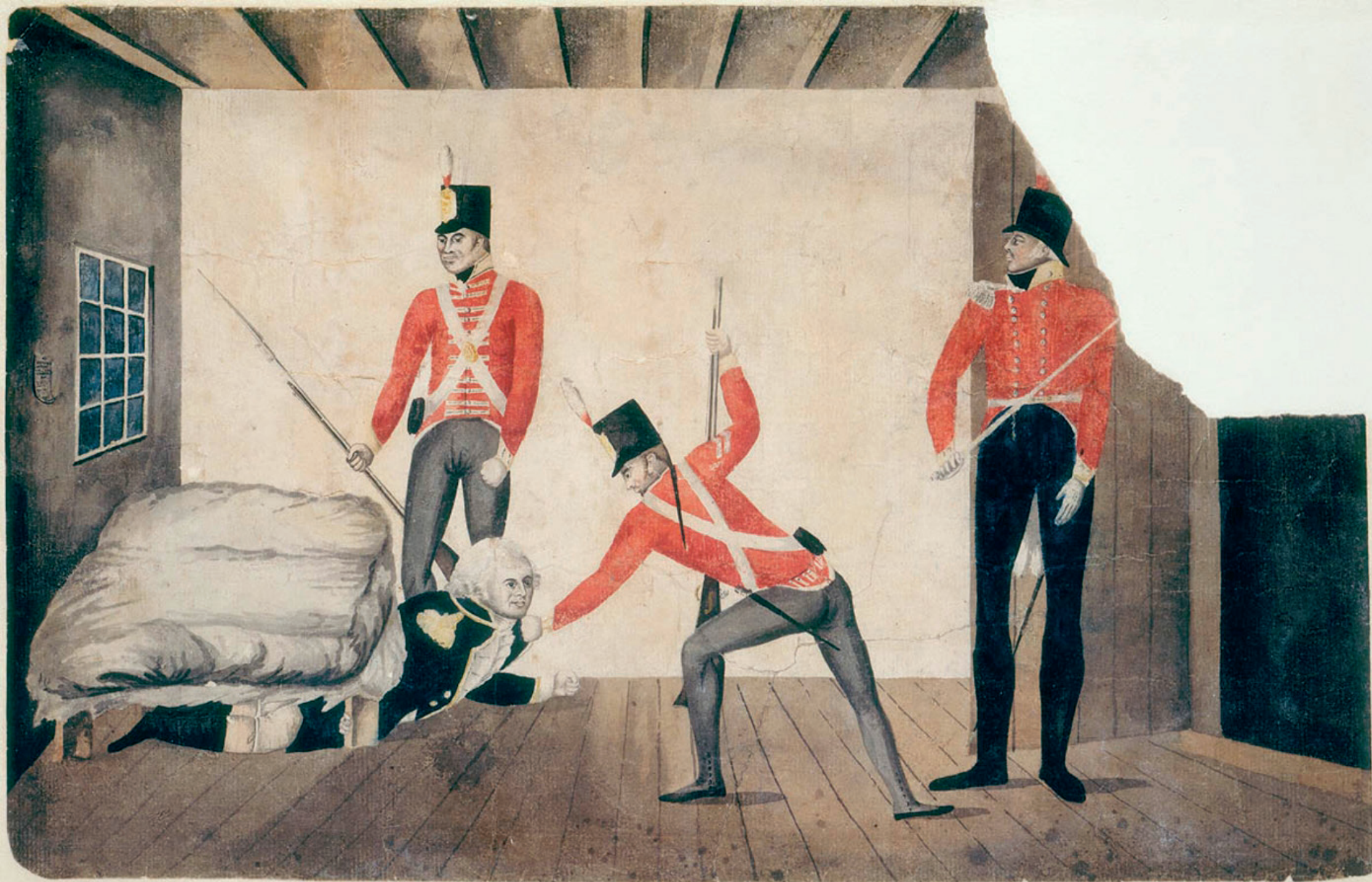
Bligh was purportedly an unpopular public figure, described as: “hot- and short-tempered, violent in language, ‘rude’ in his relations with his associates, unjust in speech (but just in action), a severe disciplinarian, and strongly self-confident and self-righteous.”³ Appointed

Governor of New South Wales in August 1806, his confrontational manner and explosive temper led to ongoing friction between himself and his subordinates. The Grimwade caricature captures the moment when this tension reportedly came to blows, in the showdown between Bligh and the Rum Corps, illustrating what is known as the ‘Rum Rebellion.’ Bligh banned the use of rum as a barter commodity early in his governorship, which came to represent the overzealous government control of trade distribution in the Colony.⁴

The dispute against Bligh was led by a collective of antagonists, namely wealthy landowner John Macarthur and NSW Commander Major George Johnston. In a coup d’état, between three and four hundred members of the New South Wales Corps marched to Government House to arrest Governor Bligh under the orders of Major Johnston.⁵ After a frustrating search (between one to two hours—accounts differ), Bligh was eventually located in a remote servant’s room.⁶ Following the arrest, eyewitness reports claimed that Bligh had to be hauled out from his hiding place under a bed, proving that the tyrant was a coward. Lieutenant Minchin and Corporal Marlborough, both notable characters in the rebellion, were among those who were alleged to have discovered Bligh cowering under the servant’s bed on the day of the arrest.⁷ Rebuttal

to this claim often cites the bed being of unusually short height, with no more than eight inches of clearance beneath, making it near impossible to conceal a man of Bligh’s build.⁸ In *Bligh Master Mariner* (2016) Rob Mundle argues in favour of Bligh’s assertion that he was not hiding, rather “sorting through personal papers and confidential documents... when the officers burst in and arrested him.”⁹ David Hill’s account of the arrest in *The Making of Australia* (2014) confuses the story further in claiming that Johnston implied Bligh was found in the lavatory.¹⁰

Irrespective, a watercolour caricature of Bligh being dragged out from under a bed surfaced and quickly became part of an anti-Bligh propaganda campaign. The image was erected outside of a public house by celebrating rebels and is thought to be the first political cartoon produced in Australia.¹¹ Details about the commission of the work are sparse and the artist remains unidentified. This anonymity is likely due to the strict government censorship of art during the early colonial period, particularly in cases of slander or images critical of government regimes.¹² A dispute between Bligh and Sergeant-Major Whittle, however, may have encouraged the commission of the caricature. While the facts are tenuous, there are accounts of Bligh personally ordering Whittle to demolish his house, as it stood on sections of land needed for town improvements.¹³



Untitled [The arrest of Governor Bligh, 1808], 1808. Artist unknown, watercolour, 23.3 x 37cm. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

After some protesting, Bligh responded with verbal abuse, potentially motivating Whittle to seek revenge and produce the image after Bligh's arrest.¹⁴ Positioned on his mantelpiece with a lamp on either side, the watercolour was displayed as part of a celebratory shrine in Whittle's home and made open for public inspection in what was probably the first public exhibition of art in Sydney.¹⁵ While there are reports of the exhibition on record, Whittle denied any knowledge of the effigy.¹⁶

There is no remaining documentation from the acquisition of the Grimwade cartoon, however, there is evidence to suggest that the picture is a reproduction of a watercolour recently on display at the Australian National Maritime Museum, on loan from the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.¹⁷ This watercolour was presented to the New South Wales Government in 1898 by Mrs Fanny Johnston, a descendant of Major George Johnston.¹⁸ The State Government Printer produced hand-coloured photo-lithographs of the watercolour in the 1890s, which are often confused with the original.¹⁹

The cartoon in the Grimwade Collection has been hand-coloured, making it difficult to discern if it is an original or a print. The missing upper right section has been added to the image, suggesting it is a photo-lithographed facsimile of the watercolour in the Mitchell Library.²⁰



Untitled (The arrest of Governor Bligh) (c.1890). Artist unknown, photo-lithograph reproduction with watercolour. Corner detail. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973. Courtesy of the Ian Potter Museum of Art.



*Arrest of Governor Bligh, January 26, 1808: copy of the original manuscript records (c.19–). Artist unknown, colour illustration, NSW Government Printing Office, 27 x 44 cm.
Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.*

A facsimile of the watercolour was acquired by the National Library of Australia in 1978. Little is known about the history of this picture; however, it is most likely a transparency or a photo-lithograph produced in the 1890s from the Mitchell Library watercolour.²¹



Helen Johnson, *History Problem*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 250 x 180cm. Courtesy of Sutton Gallery.

The creative response submitted alongside this research aims to highlight the fickle nature of recorded histories while maintaining the facetious tone of the propaganda cartoon. Painter Helen Johnson identifies humour as a powerful tool for artists, one that can gain the attention of an audience and invite them into an artist's trajectory.²² Johnson makes a pointed reference to the watercolour in the painting *History Problem* (2013), reflecting on how historical facts are constructed, often privileging one side of a story and pushing another into the background.

It is clear that in propagating the cartoon the rebels aimed to portray Bligh as a coward to undermine his authority; Bligh in turn refuted their claims to defend his position. As Johnson emphasises, this predicament is one of bias where conflicting accounts of events create a tug of war between Bligh's truth and that of the mutineers. Since the majority of this story is a case of hearsay, recorded accounts of the arrest from Colonel Johnston's court-martial are used in satire to animate an argument between characters.²³ The cartoon is lifted from the page, becoming the digital diorama *Hold your tongue, Sir: accounts from the arrest of Governor Bligh* (2019). Due to the libellous nature of the image, the dialogue is obscured using a distortion technique common in witness protection recordings.

Yet, the question remains: will we ever know for sure if Bligh was hauled out from under his bed? Conflicting motives and disputed eyewitness accounts leads to no definitive answer. Nevertheless, what can be gleaned from this research and the multiple reproductions of the propaganda cartoon, is that the interest in the arrest of Bligh was, and remains, wide-reaching, as noted by the sizable collection acquired in the Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade bequest.

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¹ For detailed accounts of the Mutiny on the Bounty see Peter FitzSimons, *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2018); Diana Preston, *Paradise in Chains: the Bounty mutiny and the founding of Australia* (NY, London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Caroline Alexander, *The Bounty: the true story of the mutiny on the Bounty* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004); Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: passion, power and theatre on the Bounty* (Oakleigh, VIC: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and from Bligh's ledger: William Bligh, *A voyage to the South Sea, undertaken by command of His Majesty, for the purpose of conveying the bread-fruit tree to the West Indies, in his Majesty's ship the Bounty ... : including an account of the mutiny on board the said ship* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, facsimile edition, 1969).

² Herbert Vere Evatt, *Rum Rebellion: a study of the overthrow of Governor Bligh by John Macarthur and the New South Wales Corps; Including the John Murtagh Macrossan Memorial Lectures delivered at the University of Queensland, June 1937* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1943, c1938). University of Melbourne, Baillieu Library, Rare Books, Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade Collection.

³ Herbert Vere Evatt, *Rum Rebellion: a study*

of the overthrow of Governor Bligh by John Macarthur and the New South Wales Corps (Hawthorn, Victoria: Lloyd O'Neill, 1978, c1938), ix.

⁴ Preston, *Paradise in Chains*, 263.

⁵ Preston, *Paradise in Chains*, 265; To retaliate, in 1811 Bligh instigated the publication of Major Johnston's court-martial: *A Charge of Mutiny: The Court Martial of Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston for deposing Governor William Bligh in the Rebellion of 26 January 1808*, edited by John Ritchie (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1988, c1811).

⁶ Preston, *Paradise in Chains*, 265.

⁷ For witness statements at the trial of Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston see *A Charge of Mutiny*, edited by John Ritchie. This includes accounts from Lieutenant Minchin (pp.242–243), Sergeant Whittle (p.369) and Corporal Marlborough (p.268).

⁸ Russell Earls Davis, *Bligh in Australia: a new appraisal of William Bligh and the Rum Rebellion* (Warriewood, NSW: Woodslane Press, 2012), 139.

⁹ Rob Mundle, *Bligh Master Mariner* (Sydney: Hachette, 2016), 331.

¹⁰ David Hill, *The Making of Australia: from a tiny struggling convict settlement to the remarkable nation it is today* (North Sydney:

Random House Australia, 2014), 69.

¹¹ For the account from a witness (George Sutter) recalling the painting hung outside of a public house see *A Charge of Mutiny*, edited by John Ritchie, 120; "Governor Bligh's Arrest, 1808," State Library of NSW, <https://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/events/exhibitions/2010/onehundred/100-objects/Exhibit-026.htm>.

¹² Mitchell Librarian Richard Neville covers the history and provenance of the State Library of NSW reproduction in Richard Neville, "The Arrest of Governor Bligh: Pictures and Politics—of the watercolour, now in the Mitchell Library." *Australiana*, v.13, no.2 (May 1991): 38–42.

¹³ Neville, "The Arrest of Governor Bligh," 40.

¹⁴ Ibid. It is unlikely that Whittle is the artist behind the effigy, as he could neither read nor write. *A Charge of Mutiny*, edited by John Ritchie, 370. It is more likely that Whittle had the piece commissioned, as heard from soldier Isaac Champion, who reported that Whittle had stated, "he had got the old tyrant and old villain's picture drawn in a proper manner, and that he would expose it." Ibid., 114.

¹⁵ Neville, "The Arrest of Governor Bligh," 40.

¹⁶ For witnessed reports of the exhibition see *A Charge of Mutiny*, edited by John

Ritchie, 114, 121, 117, and Sergeant Thomas Whittle's statement denying all knowledge of the watercolour and exhibition, 370; It should be noted that it is unclear as to whether it was a watercolour, transparency or drawing of the effigy that was on display.

¹⁷. The Mitchell Library watercolour, known as *untitled [The arrest of Governor Bligh, 1808]*, was on display in the exhibition *Bligh – Hero or Villain?* (26 July 2019–2 February 2020) Australian National Maritime Museum. Much like the dualities in the accounts of Bligh's arrest, the exhibition explored divided perspectives of Bligh's notoriety and character. Australian National Maritime Museum, Curators Dr Nigel Erskine and Dr Stephen Gapps, accessed October 2019, <https://www.sea.museum/whats-on/exhibitions/bligh>.

¹⁸. Neville, "The Arrest of Governor Bligh," 38.

¹⁹. Ibid. The watercolour came into the possession of the Art Gallery of New South Wales from the descendants of Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston, the man who ordered the arrest of Governor Bligh in 1898. It was transferred to the Mitchell Library in 1934. Attached to the left wall in the image, is a sheet with the text: "O what can the matter be". This detail is omitted from the reproduction in the

Grimwade Collection.

²⁰. Ibid.

²¹. Exhibited in "Inked: Australian Cartoons", National Library of Australia, March–August 2019.

²². "Helen Johnson – '*Humour is a Powerful Tool for an Artist*,'" Tate, October 26, 2018, video, 05:27, <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/helen-johnson-the-mca-and-tate-international-joint-acquisition-program/>.

²³. This includes transcribed accounts from John Sutherland, Lieutenant Minchin and Bligh. It is thought that the stories from the trial were the basis for the design of the original watercolour. *A Charge of Mutiny*, edited by John Ritchie, 369.

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