

The captain's log



In Bligh's Hand: Surviving the Mutiny on the Bounty
by Jennifer Gall
National Library of Australia
\$34.95

THE mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1789 and subsequent epic voyage in an open boat have been well documented, but the latest book release, *In Bligh's Hand*, gives special insights into one of history's great stories.

It features extracts from the saltwater-stained notebook kept by William Bligh on the voyage, detailing the hardships endured and maps of islands they passed.

The Bligh family held the notebook for 187 years until it was bought at auction in 1976. It is now one of the Australian National Library's prized possessions.

Jennifer Gall has done a remarkable job of matching the extracts to the story of the mutiny, the 6700km voyage from Tonga to Timor in the 7m launch, the fate of the mutineers and survivors and Bligh's further adventures.

The book follows in the footsteps of Rob Mundle's recently released *Bligh Master: Mariner*, in which he argues that Bligh was unkindly treated by history.

In Bligh's Hand presents Bligh as a seaman without peer but also details his obviously flawed character. His incandescent rages, his lack of people skills, bluntness and rudeness were the spark that ignited the *Bounty* mutiny.

It is interesting that another mutiny almost occurred during the longboat voyage and years later, while governor of New South Wales, Bligh was at the centre of another mutiny when he was unceremoniously dumped by army officers in the rum rebellion.

Despite his shortfalls in the human relations department, Bligh was promoted to the rank of admiral by the British. Were they perhaps



ODYSSEY: An artist's impression of Bligh and his men being cast adrift from the *Bounty*.

sending out a clear message to other would-be mutineers?

The voyage diary extracts in Gall's book make it clear that only Bligh could have navigated such a small, overloaded boat and delivered his men to safety.

For Bligh, the most important things in life were duty and discipline and at no stage did he have any doubts about making it back to civilisation.

Bligh imposed severe rationing, with an original target of an ounce of bread and a quarter of a pint of water per day per man.

When they reached Coupang in Timor, they were little more than skin and bone but they still had enough food for 11 days.

Mutineer Fletcher Christian refused to give them firearms, so they were unable to land on the many islands they passed and at times they had to outrun hostile natives who chased them in canoes.

Despite the hardships, Bligh was ever the explorer and he discovered and mapped the Fiji islands and made other detailed maps of areas they sailed through which were used by explorers who followed in his wake.

He was a thorough professional and his

notebook shows a man working all the time on navigation, food rationing and ways to keep his men warm and always trying to catch more rainwater and birds or fish for food.

It is unfortunate that such a gifted master mariner was so lacking in social skills.

Gall provides a clue in the book on Bligh's personality disorder. He was just seven years of age when he went to sea as a servant to a ship's captain. His parents died when he was young, so it was hardly an ideal upbringing to teach a young man social skills.

When he was deposed as governor of New South Wales, he was followed by the highly respected Lachlan Macquarie.

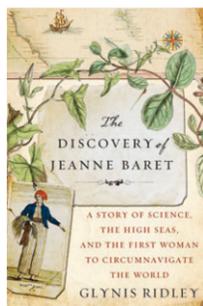
Macquarie regarded his predecessor's temperament as abrasive and lacking social grace. While he could find no crime or brutality committed by Bligh to justify the rebellion, he found the man was universally hated by the population and that his temperament made it impossible to fulfil his duties.

A highlight of the book is the collection of illustrations and maps. All are beautifully presented, along with the excerpts from the notebook.

ROSS GATES

Intrepid woman in a sailor's suit

The Discovery of Jeanne Baret
by Glynis Ridley
Harper Collins
\$29.99



AN interpreter assigned to Matthew Flinders while he was imprisoned on Mauritius was the son – born out of a gang rape – of the first woman to circumnavigate the globe.

That is but one startling revelation in *The Discovery of Jeanne Baret*.

And while it sounds fanciful, author Glynis Ridley presents enough facts to allow the reader to believe this history-twisting theory – and the rest of this amazing tale – just might be true.

What is not in any doubt is that Jeanne Baret was the first woman to sail around the world, starting the journey in early 1767 in France and returning in late 1774 or early 1775.

Ridley has followed Baret's paper trail through a remarkable life and her story sits somewhere between a history lesson and a drama-charged maritime tale.

According to Ridley's investigations, Baret was a herb-woman who caught the attention of a botanising doctor who harboured aspirations of seeing – and making an impression on – the world.

It was this man, Philibert Commerson, who apparently convinced Baret to disguise herself as a man and accompany him on Louis-Antoine de

Bougainville's expedition to circumnavigate the globe.

Baret had been living with Commerson since 1764 and bore him a child but was a stranger to everyone else on board and managed to hide her sex during the early stages of the voyage.

The official account of the discovery that Baret was a woman has it happening midway through the voyage, on Tahiti.

This comes from Bougainville's own diary, which tells of what has been interpreted as an attempted rape by Tahitians that left Baret in tears.

According to Bougainville, Baret then confessed to the expedition leader that she was a woman.

But Ridley pulls apart this version of events piece by piece and establishes her own theory.

She cites the ship's surgeon, who wrote in his account of the voyage that the men on board – 116 living in a space 31m by 10m – had become troubled by rumours of a woman in their midst after only a few weeks at sea.

The surgeon's diary, corroborated to a certain degree by two other accounts, indicates that Baret was raped by her fellow sailors on the island of New Ireland.

Ridley follows the paper trail to Mauritius and the birth of a child, which she believes was conceived during the incident.

It was this child who was to later come into contact with Flinders during his imprisonment on the French-controlled island.

Ridley is a fierce champion of Baret, sometimes trying too hard to convince the reader that this remarkable woman deserves far more credit than has ever been offered her.

She claims that Baret did most of the work credited to Commerson – including the discovery of the Bougainvillea – and describes imagined scenarios where Baret would do the botanist's work while he enjoyed a more leisurely time.

With so much of the story coming from the mind of the author, Ridley often uses devices such as "easy to imagine", "guessed at" and "presumably" to separate fact from her idea of what could have happened. While it's important to make the distinction, this technique detracts somewhat from what is a remarkable story woven from threads of facts.

ALLAN DE WEYS

Top 10 books

- 1. The Wise Man's Fear** Patrick Rothfuss
- 2. The Lightkeeper's Wife** Karen Viggers
- 3. A Kingdom Besieged** Raymond Feist
- 4. The Leopard** Jo Nesbo
- 5. Five Bells** Gail Jones
- 6. Win & Clyde** Janet Fenton
- 7. Henry the Goat** Ella Watkins
- 8. Bird Cloud** Annie Proulx
- 9. The Messenger** Yannick Haenel
- 10. Daughters-in-Law** Joanna Trollope

● Compiled from lists supplied by Angus & Robertson, Fullers, the Hobart Bookshop, Dymocks Hobart, Book City Hobart, Kingston and Eastlands, and Ellison Hawker.



BOOKchat

PM offers words of wisdom

JULIA Gillard can knit but admits her mother's great cooking skills didn't rub off on her. She says she can't think of one big mistake in particular she has made but she has learned from "decisions that could have been made differently".

The Prime Minister probably has no advice on how to "micro-manage" her man or how to measure her lunch-time martini limit.

However, she shares her tips for success and wellbeing in one of two vastly different books released to celebrate womanhood just in time for the centenary of International Women's Day this Tuesday.

From Australian journalist and social commentator Karen Phillips comes the very serious but worthy *Women's Words of Wisdom, Power & Passion* (KP Media, \$34.95). The book profiles 50 of Australia's most influential women, from model Miranda Kerr to Gillard, in a series of question and answers.

But if you're tired of spiel and spin, Canadian Rosemary Counter offers a very different feminist manifesto, *The Decadent Housewife: How to Live Lavishly on his Budget* (Wakefield Press, \$24.95). Perfecting a lavish lifestyle takes practice, Counter says.

Women's Words, to be launched by Governor-General Quentin Bryce on Tuesday, takes its role models from fashion, the media, sport, business, politics and – unlike Susan Mitchell's similar, groundbreaking *Tall Poppies* in 1984 – everyday life.

Phillips says she has spoken to thousands of women from Cairns to Hobart and Sydney to Perth at leadership forums. But she does not include any Tasmanians in her book.

"Women of all ages hunger for wisdom, mentors and new opportunities to learn," she says. "No one understands women better than women. So who better to give advice than 50 of Australia's finest?"

Kerr advises: "Listen to your intuition, trust in your abilities and love yourself just the way you are – you are totally unique and incredible in your own right." The Governor-General says it in fewer words: "Be bold. Be brave. Believe in yourself."

Phillips' other role models include Olivia Newton-John, Carla Zampatti, Gai Waterhouse, Terri Irwin, Maggie Beer, Cathy Freeman, Collette Dinnigan, Julie Anthony, Kasey Chambers, Margaret Ollie, Tara Moss and doctor Fiona Wood.

Her online forum at www.womenswords.com invites women to view, share, learn and "embrace what being a woman is all about". A percentage of the book's profits will go to Newtown-John's Cancer and Wellness Centre.

Counter, meanwhile, could be accused of setting the feminist cause back 100 years with her guide to the art of idleness and the business of party-hopping. But she does so with wicked tongue-in-cheek irony.

"From the moment you send your man off to earn his keep, the housewife's day should be swamped with beauty, fashion, delicious food and drink, mingling and general fabulousness," she says.

Counter's advice includes what sexual positions to best avoid, how to polish your alibi, perfecting the art of "the superficial clean", the various uses of "kitchen gadgets and doodads" and outrageous – and perhaps illegal – medicine cabinet must-haves. The rewards of decadence, she concludes, are low blood pressure and wrinkle-free faces. Her book comes with equally funky, retro illustrations.

Literary events

Today: Readings at the Republic Bar & Cafe, 3-5pm, will feature poets Stuart Solman and Karen Knight, followed by the open section.

Thursday: Glenorchy Mayor Adriana Taylor will launch Jennifer Houghton and Janet Fenton's book *Hatastrophe!* at 5.30pm at the Hobart Bookshop, Salamanca Square.

Friday: Kelsang Dornying will discuss *Modern Buddhism*, the latest book by his teacher Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, at Fullers from 6pm.

● Send literary news to Carlene Ellwood, ellwoodc@dbl.newsttd.com.au

