

No 89

December 2008 - January 2009

Dear Christian Friends,

Norah Bowen

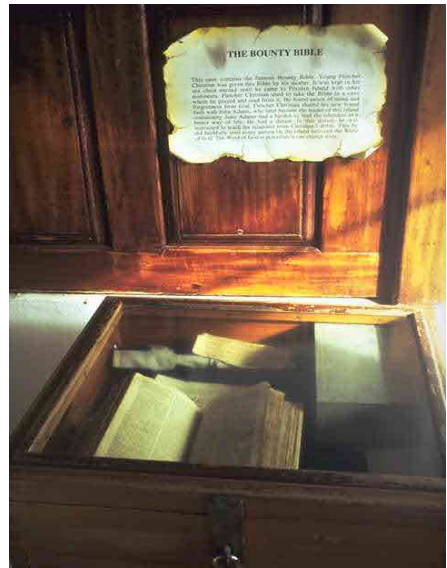


Mrs Norah Bowen, who worked as personal assistant to Martin Hines and his predecessor, Bernard Dodd, died on 12 October. She was a great friend and colleague to many at Radstock House, serving both NMAFBS and Scripture Gift Mission for many years.

We are grateful to her daughter, Mrs Ruth Scott, for passing on donations received at the funeral, to our Society.

The power of the *Bounty* Bible

Everyone knows the story of the mutiny on the *Bounty* which took place in April, 1789 in the South Pacific. Less well known is that, according to one historian, before *Bounty* sailed from Spithead two years earlier, a Bible was placed onboard by the Naval & Military Bible Society. Possibly the oldest Bible surviving from our Society, it is believed to be the one on display in Pitcairn Island museum. www.government.pn. See picture:



After setting the ship's commander, Lieutenant William Bligh, and loyal crew members adrift, Fletcher Christian sailed *Bounty* to Tahiti. Later that year, he and eight other men from *Bounty*, with six Tahitian men, eleven women and one child, sailed from Tahiti and landed on the uninhabited Pitcairn Island. There they settled and burned the ship to escape detection.

The story of *Bounty's* Bible is a testimony to God's word in saving a fledgling society from chaos. With no law to guide them, the mutineers turned Pitcairn from a paradise into a living hell of sexual abuse, drunkenness and murder. Within four years, all of the Tahitian men and all but four of the Englishmen were murdered. The only survivors were Alexander Smith (alias John Adams), Edward Young, Matthew Quintall, William McCoy, some women and children.

McCoy learned how to distil liquor and the men became drunk most of the time. Fearing for their lives, the women and children moved to another part of the island and build a fort for protection. McCoy threw himself over the cliffs while drunk. Quintal became insane and threatened the lives of everyone else, so Smith and Young axed him to death

for the safety of the others. Smith finally destroyed the still and all the liquor and went through several months of withdrawal from alcohol. The women nursed Young who was dying of consumption. Living alone, Smith discovered a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer from the remains of the *Bounty*, but he was illiterate.

When Young and the women were reunited with Smith, Young used the Bible to teach Smith to read before he died in 1801. Over a period of several years, Smith read the Bible and began to understand the importance of its message and the need for the others to learn it. So first he taught the children how to read followed later by some of the mothers.

Using the Bible, Smith then taught everyone about the Christian faith and instituted a daily prayer time, grace before meals, and Sunday worship. He was transformed into a kind and respected leader, so much so that he was not arrested for mutiny but permitted to remain on the island when it was visited by Royal Navy ships searching for surviving mutineers in 1814.

Alexander Smith's repentance and conversion and his legacy of a

peaceful Christian community is testimony to the saving power of the Living Word of Christ, which *will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire.*

Isaiah 55:11 (NIV)

Whether or not it was a Naval & Military Bible that God used to convert the Pitcairn Islanders, or perhaps a second Bible*, that Fletcher Christian's mother had given him, is not important. The moral of this story is the motto: *'Never miss an opportunity to give away God's Word'.*

Modern day pirates?

There are currently up to a dozen ships, including a VLCC tanker, hijacked off Somalia. Pirates don't use swords and canons any more (like the *Bounty* mutineers) but rocket launchers and machine guns. Please pray for all those who are held hostage and their families who anxiously await news of their release – this is the picture the TV news never gives - the innocent families who really suffer under this atrocious evil. The hijackers board from fast power boats that operate from mother ships which may be loitering hundreds of miles offshore.

Some of the sailors held are known to Seafarers' Mission's Chaplains, as mentioned in a recent letter from Captain Andrew Payne CA,

Mission to Seafarers in Sri Lanka.

And never miss an opportunity to pray for someone!

RN ships and RFAs will no doubt be involved in anti piracy patrols off Somalia over Christmas. So please pray for them and their families as well as service men and women deployed on land.

A padre, back from Iraq, told us that a certain soldier always came to his tent asking for prayer just before he was sent out on patrol, yet he always had an excuse for not coming to a Sunday service. When his six month deployment was nearly over the soldier came to the padre and said, "Please now tell me how I can really get to know Jesus Christ."

Pray that people would look for Him this Christmas.

Derek joins me in wishing you a relaxing Christmas and a fruitful and prosperous New Year.

In the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,



Richard Prendergast

*Note: A Bible, printed at Edinburgh 1764 and brought aboard the ship *Bounty*, Dec. 23, 1787, by a sailor, and to Pitcairn Island in 1789, where it remained until 1839; was presented May 24, 1924 to New York Public Library by the heirs of Rev. Daniel Miner Lord, the Bible's last private owners.

“Suffer me not O Lord to waste this day in Sin or folly. But Let me Worship thee with much Delight. Teach me to know more of thee and to serve thee better than ever I have done before, that I may be fitter to dwell in heaven, where thy worship and service are everlasting. Amen”

A prayer by Alexander Smith (alias John Adams), redeemed *Bounty* mutineer.

Items for Praise and Prayer

- **Praise** God for his provision of prayer and financial support for NMAFBS and pray that this would continue in 2009 despite the economic downturn.
- **Pray** for protection for service personnel facing daily danger in Afghanistan and Iraq or deployed elsewhere and separated from their families this Christmas and for service Chaplains providing spiritual guidance at home and abroad.
- **Pray** for those returned home, injured in both mind and body, those who care for them at Selly Oak and Headley Court, and for bereaved families and friends.
- **Pray** for the work of SASRA Scripture Readers on Army and RAF bases and RSR Chaplaincy Support Workers, also CESSAC, **Mission to Military Garrisons** and **Sandes Centres** through whom so many of our Bibles and other literature is distributed.
- **Pray** for the work of Chaplains in the three cadet corps.
- **Pray** for the **Armed Forces Christian Union (AFCU)** and its many associate prayer groups and the **Naval Christian Fellowship (NCF)** serving the needs of Christians within the armed forces.
- **Pray** for provision for the needs of all homeless ex-service personnel on the streets and for the Christian charities who care for them, providing food for the soul as well as food and shelter for the body.
- **Pray** for the quick release of crews held onboard merchant ships or ashore by Somalian pirates and for their waiting families, and for RN and RFA crews at sea on anti-piracy patrols.
- **Pray** for the work of Port Missionaries and Chaplains from the **Apostleship of the Sea, Mission to Seafarers, Sailors’ Society** and **Seamen’s Christian Friend Society** visiting ships and distributing Christmas parcels to crews away from home over the Christmas period.

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