

*Blighia*

*Sapindaceae*

*Blighia* commemorates an English naval officer, Vice-Admiral William Bligh (1754-1817). He was appointed Sailing Master on HMS *Resolution* in 1776 on Captain Cook's last voyage to the Pacific and had served as Lieutenant on several ships by the time he was appointed to HMS *Bounty* in 1787. His task was to pick up breadfruit plants (*Artocarpus altilis*) from Tahiti and transport them to the Caribbean as a trial food crop for slaves. With some delays the first stage was eventually achieved but after the cutter had left Tahiti there was an unanticipated mutiny on board during which Bligh, caught unawares, was bound and eventually (together with 14 of the loyal crew members) ordered into a 23 ft. launch without charts or a compass to find their own way to dry land. (The reason for the mutiny is still debated.) Remarkably after 41 days and 3618 nautical miles (6701 km) they landed in Timor (and only one crew member had died and that when they, unarmed, were attacked in Tofu in Tonga, the only landfall made in the entire voyage). In March 1790 Bligh reached London and in the October he was court-martialled and acquitted. Tahiti saw his return in 1792 when he carried breadfruit plants successfully from there to the Caribbean. 1797 was the year of Bligh's involvement in the Nore Mutiny (the Royal Navy anchorage in the Thames Estuary) which embraced a number of naval vessels. This had been caused by unrest over impressment, leave entitlement, unequal pay and poor rations and afterwards Bligh gave his full support to the members of his crew. At the beginning of the 1800s he fought in naval battles during the French Revolutionary Wars before being appointed Governor of New South Wales in 1805. It is debated whether this appointment was primarily with a view to controlling the New South Wales Corps. Certainly records display considerable disagreement between the new Governor and a local politician who was supported by the commander of the Corps and this must have fuelled the successful Rum Rebellion of 1808. On his return to England Bligh received further promotions, the first backdated to Rear Admiral and then in 1814 to Vice-Admiral. St. Mary's, Lambeth, where Bligh was buried in a tomb bearing the sculpture of a breadfruit in the family plot in 1817. The church was deconsecrated in 1792 and the site is now the Museum of Garden History where the tomb can still be seen. From most accounts William Bligh seems to have been dogged by a prickly, dogmatic personality which contradicted his care for the health and wellbeing of the men under his command and the fact that, unlike some of his peers, he relatively rarely resorted to whiplashing as punishment.