

3

‘Artificial curiosities’ and the Royal Navy

Alison Mann

The Museum of Tropical Queensland’s Maritime Archaeology collection, housed in Townsville, Australia, holds an assemblage of 271 ethnographic objects acquired by the crew of HMS *Pandora* during a five-month voyage through the island groups of Polynesia in 1791. HMS *Pandora* was in the southern Pacific Ocean on a mission for the British Admiralty searching for the mutineers from HMAV *Bounty*. On the homeward stage of the voyage, *Pandora* was attempting to find a route through the then uncharted Great Barrier Reef when the ship hit a submerged reef and sank. This collection with its discrete provenance has been excavated from the wreck site. Historical documentation describes the multiple island groups of Polynesia visited by the vessel and at which of these islands the crew of HMS *Pandora* had contact with island inhabitants. The archaeological record illustrates how both officers and crew of this Royal Navy vessel participated in many forms of acquisition, obtaining a diverse collection of ethnographic objects prior to stowing them aboard *Pandora* in preparation for the return voyage to England.

The voyages of HMAV *Bounty* and HMS *Pandora*

HMS *Pandora* (1791), under the command of Captain Edward Edwards, had been ordered by the British Admiralty on a mission into the Pacific Ocean in 1790 to hunt down and capture HMAV *Bounty*

and the 25 crew who had mutinied and taken control of the vessel (ADM 2/120:478–480). *Pandora* departed Portsmouth, England, on 7 November 1790 (Gesner 2000:1).

Two years prior, the leader of the mutiny, Acting First Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, and his co-mutineers had cast adrift *Bounty*'s Captain Bligh with 19 loyal crew in the ship's longboats. Bligh and crew navigated these small vessels approximately 3,500 km from Tahiti, then known as an island of the Society group, to Batavia (Jakarta) in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) (Gesner 2000:1). Bligh arranged passage for himself and crew to England, finally reporting the mutiny to the Lords of the Admiralty in 1789 (Rawson 1963:3).

In the Pacific, the group of mutineers had separated following an unsuccessful attempt to establish a settlement on Tubuai in the Austral Islands. Sixteen mutineers chose to return to Tahiti, site of the original mutiny (Gesner 2000:1). The remainder, including Fletcher Christian, sailed to Pitcairn Island in the *Bounty*. Acknowledging the British Admiralty would not allow a mutiny on board one of His Majesty's ships to go unpunished, Christian and cohort, to avoid detection, scuttled the vessel and burned *Bounty* to the waterline (Gesner 2000:1).

Pandora visited Tenerife and Rio de Janeiro before rounding Cape Horn and making way into the Pacific Ocean. By March 1791 the vessel had arrived at Matavai Bay, Tahiti (Rawson 1963:16). Within two weeks of being at anchor, 14 of the 25 mutineers chose to surrender or were captured (Thomson 1915:30–34). After 46 days in Tahiti, Captain Edwards abandoned searching the local islands and, following the Admiralty's itinerary, navigated a route through the southern Pacific Ocean. The island groups visited were suspected of being potential hideouts of the remaining mutineers.

Of the many islands in the Pacific, some were sighted, noted in the ship's log and no contact was made with island inhabitants. At other islands *Pandora* dropped anchor and stayed anywhere from a few hours to many weeks (Gesner 2016:335–336).

After leaving the Society Islands *Pandora* sailed for Tonga, Fiji and the Cook, Union and Samoan Islands. By August 1791, with no further mutineers captured or discovered, Captain Edwards made the decision

to cease the search and set a westerly course for Coupang (Timor) via the Torres Strait, the first leg of the return journey to England (Thomson 1915:70–72).

HMS *Pandora* reached the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef, northern Australia, on 26 August 1791. Edwards tentatively explored the outer fringe of the reef in an attempt to find passage through the uncharted waters. *Pandora* struck an isolated submerged reef. Within 90 minutes there was 2.5 m of water in the hold (Thomson 1915:72). Work to save the vessel continued through the night; however, the breakdown of one of the pumps had water flooding the hold. Captain Edwards gave the order to abandon ship. Thirty-one crew and four mutineers drowned when *Pandora* sank in 30 m of water (Edwards' papers, MS 180).

The wreck was discovered in 1977 and the identity of the vessel as HMS *Pandora* confirmed in 1979 with excavation of the wreck's content recommended (Henderson 1979:33–34). The subsequent archaeological investigation of the wreck site was an opportunity to expand on the HMAV *Bounty* saga and reconstruct the material culture in use in a late eighteenth-century British seafaring microcosm (Gesner 2000:2; Rodger 1986:14). Gesner further commented that this microcosm can be regarded as significant and representative of European exploration in the South Pacific during the European 'Great Age of Exploration'. In the year *Pandora* entered the Pacific there were no European settlements and contact between inhabitants of the island groups and Europeans had been sporadic (Gesner 2016:75; Rawson 1963:14).

Archaeological investigation

The wreck is located within what is now called Pandora Entrance on the outer Great Barrier Reef approximately 140 km east-south-east of the tip of Cape York in north-eastern Australia. The site lies within the reef system surrounded by four small submerged reefs that provide some protection against ocean swells and tidal currents (Gesner 2000:21). An area with a radius of 500 m centred on the site at the intersection of 11°22'40" S and 143°59'35" E was declared a protected zone under Section 7 of the Australian Commonwealth's *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* (Henderson 1979:29–35). Between 1983 and 1999 the Queensland Museum conducted nine archaeological field seasons at the wreck site (Gesner 2016:117–120).

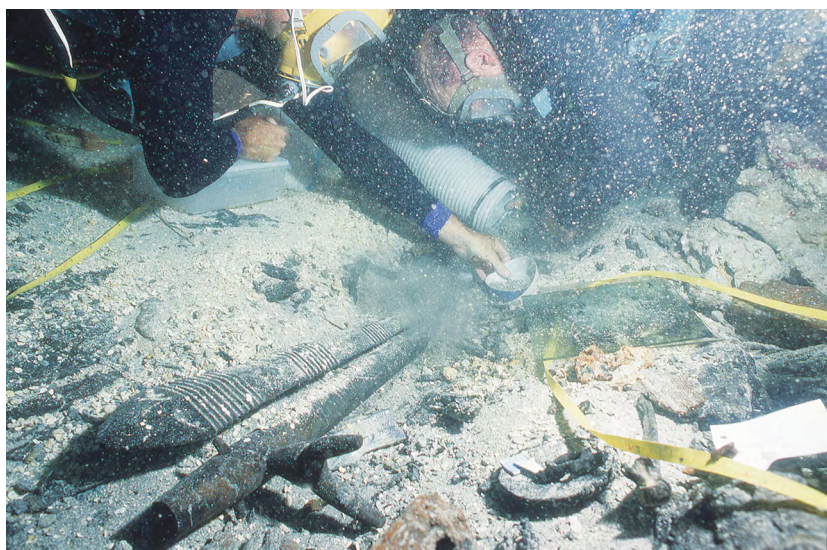


Figure 3.1. Archaeologists using surface supply breathing apparatus excavate wooden clubs from the stern of HMS *Pandora*.

Source: © Queensland Museum, Gary Cranitch.

The remnant hull structure and majority of the artefact assemblage remain buried within a 50 × 20 m (1000 m²) area, under a gentle south-easterly sloping featureless sandy sea floor (Figure 3.1). Depending on tides, the site can vary in depth between 30 and 35 m. During the first field season in 1983 four trenches were excavated, yielding dense concentrations of artefacts in the shallow sediment (Gesner 2000:23–30). These trenches also uncovered hull timbers and hull copper sheathing. Guided by this physical record and historical naval architects' plans, archaeologists were able to determine the orientation of the hull within the site and identified it leans to starboard at an angle of 32 degrees (Gesner 2016:6). To delineate primary excavation areas for the intended field seasons, a grid system was superimposed over the estimated outline of hull remains and the grid squares numbered (Gesner 2000:29).

On the basis of historical research, it was determined excavation of the site would be focused on the bow and stern where evidence of shipboard society and daily life would have been located (Gesner 2000:20). The wreck's amidships area was assigned a low priority for archaeological investigation as it was considered the amidships hold spaces would contain items of nautical technology: this aspect of naval construction and ship stowage spaces was already well documented (Lavery 1987:156–168).

The 1983 and 1984 expeditions to the site recovered personal items belonging to the ship's surgeon and one of the commissioned officers from cabins located in the stern living quarters of the vessel. Archaeologists anticipated similar material evidence of shipboard life would be found in the bow, in the living quarters of the ordinary sailors (Gesner 2000:28). The preservation factors of the site enabled excavation of an extensive array of personal possessions and professional equipment: the material culture of the vessel in its functional context. Among these personal possessions was evidence of the ethnographic material acquired from the islands where the crew of *Pandora* had made landfall.

Trading and acquiring

By 1791, when *Pandora* sailed into the Pacific Ocean, 14 European voyages had been attempted since 1767 (Rawson 1963:14). For the vessels that sailed through this relatively unknown part of the world, the activity of collecting or acquiring ethnographic material was well established and carried out by both officers and crew (Gesner 2000:125–127). The largest and best known of eighteenth-century collections from the Pacific was acquired by Captain James Cook during his three voyages between the years 1769 and 1779 (Kaeppler 1978). Collecting and exchanging objects with island inhabitants and crew became such a priority during Cook's first voyage that orders had to be issued to ensure trading for the ship's provisions be completed prior to any personal trading being undertaken (Beaglehole 1968:75).

These ethnographic objects collected by the crew fell into two categories. In the language of late eighteenth-century England the term 'artificial curiosity' was used to describe objects handmade or modified by human action, whereas a 'natural curiosity' was a term that referred to a natural history specimen such as a shell (Kaeppler 1978:37).

For the crew, gathering 'curiosities' presented a number of opportunities. The objects could be souvenirs of a journey to exotic locations, sold at the end of the voyage or exchanged for the patronage of well-connected persons. Gregory Bentham, *Pandora*'s purser, was familiar with the concept of collecting 'curiosities'. Bentham himself was a veteran of Cook's third voyage and had as his patron Sir Joseph Banks (Coleman 1988:44). Banks, who had connections within the ranks of English society, was a botanist, patron of the natural sciences, and president of the Royal Society since

1778. He had sailed with Cook's first voyage from 1768 to 1771 and collected both 'artificial and natural curiosities' (Gesner 2016:261). The extent of collecting activity amongst the crew of HMS *Pandora* has been demonstrated by the range of Polynesian objects excavated from the bow and stern, suggesting both officers and sailors were engaged in this activity (Gesner 2016:142).

While *Pandora*'s logbook contains no entries describing these interactions between the crew and islanders, George Hamilton (ship's surgeon) does describe episodes where the acquisition of objects occurred (Gesner 2016:77–115; Thomson 1915:39, 105). In some islands transactions occurred within a mutually beneficial exchange. At other locations, however, transactions occurred where an imbalance of power and a technological edge in weaponry ensured objects were forcibly acquired from island inhabitants (Thomson 1915:39, 105).

When an exchange did occur, the peoples of Polynesia received items perceived by the Europeans to be of value within their own cultural system; for example, red feathers from Tonga (Kaepler 1978:37) or metal objects such as iron nails, spikes, iron tools and knives. Hamilton noted in his journal the anticipation of such trade as *Pandora* sailed past Rapa Nui/Easter Island on 4 March 1791, prior to any contact at any of the Polynesian islands. 'We now set the forge to work, and the armourers were busily employed making knives and iron work to trade' (Thomson 1915:101). This comment by Hamilton suggests the crew were well aware of the value peoples of the Pacific placed on metal European commodities.

Following 'establishments' – standing Admiralty instructions – living spaces on board ships were clearly defined (Lavery 1987:156–168). Officers were allocated a personal cabin as well as storage space in the officers' store. In the more confined space in the bow lived the ordinary seamen, sleeping in hammocks and sharing stowage space with a greater number of crewmates. It is reasonable to consider the officers then had space to stow large items, whereas the sailors had only small spaces. This allocation of space would have impacted on who collected what type of objects. The strict hierarchy of eighteenth-century shipboard social structure would also impact who would have the greater opportunity to trade, exchange, barter or acquire items by other means.

The Polynesian material culture objects acquired during those five months in 1791 and now excavated from the site have been grouped and described as basalt adzes, chisels, shell adzes, wooden clubs, poi pounders, fishing lures, fishing hooks, octopus lures, modified triton shells, pieces of personal ornamentation and components of a Tahitian mourning dress (Gesner 2016:266–284; Illidge 2002:70–71). There is a group of ‘other’, to date unidentified, objects comprising shell, bone and organic material.

Of specific interest for this volume are the 23 stone adzes excavated from the site. It is noted that no adzes have been excavated still hafted to their wooden handles. If they were originally collected in that form in 1791 the hafting material, a twisted or plaited fibre, was organic and therefore susceptible to deterioration in the marine environment. All adzes have been identified as a fine-grained basalt (Campbell and Gesner 2000:127; Gesner 2016:267).

Preliminary identification of these tools following Duff’s typology of Neolithic adzes from Eastern Polynesia suggests that 18 of the 23 adzes demonstrate a close resemblance to Types 3A and 3E, with origins in the Society Islands and Tubuai of the Austral Islands (Duff 1959:134–136). The large number of these two specific styles in the assemblage could be explained by the 46 days *Pandora* was anchored in the Society Islands (Tahiti), allowing opportunities for trade, exchange and acquisition. Of the remaining five adzes, all have physical characteristics that made them difficult to ascribe to the groups of Duff’s typology. Further investigation is required (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Analysis recently undertaken in late 2018 on these objects has moved on from using a typological analysis of the stone tools. For the first time, *Pandora*’s basalt adzes have been examined using the nondestructive geochemical portable x-ray fluorescence (pXRF) technique (Michelle Richards pers. comm. 2018). Results from this analysis will add to the body of data on Polynesian exchange activities, formal or informal, and the social and geographical dissemination and movement of stone tools between the different island groups of Polynesia (Weisler 1993:61–62).

4506



Figure 3.2. Adze.

Source: © Queensland Museum (MA4506), Gary Cranitch.

7721



Figure 3.3. Adze.

Source: © Queensland Museum (MA7721), Gary Cranitch.

Poi pounders, also manufactured from basalt, are easily identifiable in the artefact assemblage. Stylistically, the six poi pounders recovered from the site, although worked from a single piece of fine-grained basalt, have differently shaped handles and all show evidence of use wear, with pitting in the base. Research has yet to be completed on identifying the geographical origin of these artefacts. As with the adzes, these basalt objects were recently analysed using the pXRF technique.

Five intact decorated carved wooden clubs (Figure 3.4), attributed to Tongan manufacture, were excavated lying close together parallel to the hull in an area of the wreck determined from Admiralty establishments as being the cabin belonging to First Lieutenant John Larkan (Campbell 1997:8). The appearance of the clubs at excavation suggests they were stowed neatly for transport back to England. The clubs range in length from 800 mm to 1300 mm. Further evidence that these clubs were the property of Lt Larkan was the recovery of a lead name stamp with legible lettering of 'LARKAN' in mirror image. This object was located with the clubs (Campbell 1997:4). Fragments of a further 14 clubs in various stages of deterioration have been recovered from this same area of the hull. Most have diagnostic carvings and markings that with further research may be traced to their islands of origin.



Figure 3.4. Detail of carving on club.

Source: © Queensland Museum (MA4743), Gary Cranitch.

There are a number of individual shell pieces and coconut discs. All have been modified for use, with the objects having been shaped for a purpose and having varying numbers of holes drilled through them, suggesting an original decorative or ornamental function. These holes would have been how the fashioned pieces were attached to another component of attire. Many of these pieces have been identified as decorative components of a Tahitian mourning dress (Illidge 2002:71). What is missing from the archaeological record are the delicate organic materials of the mourning dress, the multiple feathers and organic fine cordage that was used to attach the fashioned pieces to the dress.

The Polynesian fishing equipment recovered from the site includes components of the trolling lure assemblages, individual fishhooks and octopus lures (Fallowfield 2001:5–28). The general construction of the trolling lure consisted of a bone shank attached to a worked sliver of pearl shell (*Pinctada margaritifera*) with a shell or bone hook attached to the ‘back’ of the bone shank. The fishing twine or cord has not survived in the archaeological record. There are a variety of individual fishhooks of differing styles and material types. Octopus lures are also prominent in the collection, with their parts being a worked shell or bone shank and a ‘kauri’ (*Cypraea tigris*) shell with drill holes to enable the shank and shell to be attached (Gesner 2016:274).

For five months in 1791 HMS *Pandora* was on a specific mission, searching the islands of Polynesia in the southern Pacific Ocean for a group of mutineers. This mission exposed the peoples of those island groups to the growing experiences of contact with European sailors. The archaeological record of HMS *Pandora* has revealed the crew collected objects through exchange, trade or other means: items of material culture from the inhabitants of the islands they had contact with. The basalt stone tools form a discrete group within this larger ethnographic collection. Typological analysis can identify a geographical origin for many of the adzes. Geochemical x-ray fluorescence of the basalt tools will add to data that will allow researchers to further understand trade, exchange and migration throughout Polynesia and the southern Pacific Ocean.

Objects highlighted in this chapter have been on display at the Museum of Tropical Queensland from April 2020 and will remain on display until November 2022.

References

- Admiralty, Lords' letters: Orders and instructions. ADM 2/120. The National Archives, Kew, UK.
- Beaglehole, J.C. (ed.) 1968 *The journals of Captain James Cook: The voyage of the Endeavour, 1769–71*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, J. 1997 Eighteenth century wooden clubs from HMS *Pandora*: A preliminary analysis. *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* 21(1&2):1–8.
- Campbell, J. and P. Gesner 2000 *Illustrated catalogue of artefacts from the HMS Pandora wreck site excavations 1977–1995*. Memoirs of the Queensland Museum, Cultural Heritage Series 2(1). Brisbane: Queensland Museum.
- Coleman, R.A. 1988 The currency of cultural change and 18th century Pacific exploration. *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* 12(1):37–45.
- Duff, R.S. 1959 Neolithic adzes of Eastern Polynesia. In J.D. Freeman and W.R. Geddes (eds), *Anthropology in the South Seas: Essays presented to H.D. Skinner*, pp. 121–147. New Plymouth: Thomas Avery & Sons Ltd.
- Edwards, E. Papers. MS 180. National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth, UK.
- Fallowfield, T. 2001 Polynesian fishing implements from the wreck of HMS *Pandora*. *Bulletin of the Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* 25:5–8.
- Gesner, P. 2000 *HMS Pandora project – a report on stage 1: Five seasons of excavation*. Memoirs of the Queensland Museum, Cultural Heritage Series 2(1). Brisbane: Queensland Museum.
- Gesner, P. 2016 *Pandora Project Stage 2: Four more seasons of excavation at the Pandora historic shipwreck*. Memoirs of the Queensland Museum, Culture 9. Brisbane: Queensland Museum.
- Henderson, G. 1979 Report to the Department of Home Affairs and Environment on the 1979 expedition to establish the identity and archaeological potential of the *Pandora* wreck. Unpublished report prepared by Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum.
- Illidge, P. 2002 The Tahitian mourner's costume from HMS *Pandora*. *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* 26:65–75.

- Kaeppler, A.L. 1978 *Artificial curiosities: An exposition of native manufactures, collected on the three voyages of Captain James Cook, R.N.* Bernice Bishop Museum special publication. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.
- Lavery, B. 1987 *The arming and fitting of English ships of war 1600–1815*. London: Conway Maritime Press.
- Rawson, G. 1963 *Pandora's last voyage*. London: Longmans.
- Rodger, N.A.M. 1986 *The wooden world: An anatomy of the Georgian navy*. London: Collins.
- Thomson, B. (ed.) 1915 *Voyage of HMS Pandora; being the narratives of Captain Edward Edwards and surgeon George Hamilton*. London: Francis Edwards.
- Weisler, M. 1993 Provenance studies of Polynesian basalt adze material: A review and suggestions for improving regional data bases. *Asian Perspectives* 32(1):61–83.

This text is taken from *Uncovering Pacific Pasts: Histories of Archaeology in Oceania*, edited by Hilary Howes, Tristen Jones and Matthew Spriggs, published 2022 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/UPP.2021.03