



The Bligh Name

by David Ransom and Maurice Bligh

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My great great grandfather Henry Ransom was a Linen Draper in Islington, London. Henry was 34 years old at the time of the 1851 Census on which is also listed one Robert Blight who was Henry's servant and an assistant draper. Robert was 23 years old, born in Bideford, Devon.

I wrote to Maurice Bligh to see if he knew of any connection between the Blighs and the Blights. I said that I have seen Bligh incorrectly printed as Blight at times, but that I knew of the surname Blight as well. The following is Maurice's very interesting reply:

"The name Bligh has undergone much 'corruption' or misspelling over the centuries, but this form appears as far back as anyone knows. Other spellings have been Bly, Blye, Blighe, Blyth, Blythe, and Blight.

"I know of one family of Blight who discovered the extra 't' had been placed on their name in early Victorian times for reasons unknown. However, I also know that the 19th century Census people who went from house to house gathering the info they needed, played a part in the misspelling of names. In the case

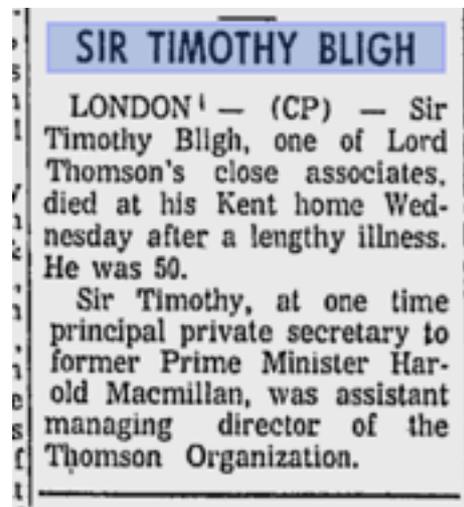
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of another family, their Bligh name had definitely been corrupted from one census to the next. It had shifted from Bligh to Bliss.

“Easily done. Some literate person like a schoolmaster, armed with a census board, arrives at a house, and there's no-one home. He goes next door and asks 'do you know the name of your neighbours, and who lives in the house?' Yes, say the neighbours, they are the Blighs. How do they spell their name, asks the census gatherer to illiterate people, and receiving the obvious 'don't know', proceeds to write down B l i s s.

“In the case of the Blight family, it was the grandfather of a Sir Timothy Bligh who discovered the error and removed the offending 't' from his name.

“Incidentally, this anecdotal story goes back to the late 1960's when I was planning my trip to the South Pacific, and stuff started to appear in the newspapers. Sir Timothy phoned me from his home in Swanley, Kent, and explained the circumstances, as above. He told me he was recuperating from an illness, and said that when he was better, I should pay him and his family a visit at their Manor House in Swanley. Only a couple of weeks later, sadly, his obituary appeared in the *Times*.



This newspaper clipping is from *The Montreal Gazette*, March 14th 1969, source news.google.com

“Some months later his widow invited me to tea, and her son was there too. It appeared that Sir Tim was a Royal Navy hero who in WW2 captained ships to and from Russia, and was known as 'Bligh of the Baltic'. Back in civilian life he became involved in merchant banking, and later entered the diplomat corps. He was PM Sir Alec Douglas-Hume's PPS. When I once met Douglas-Hume (who came to Sittingbourne) he well remembered Tim, and spoke highly of him.

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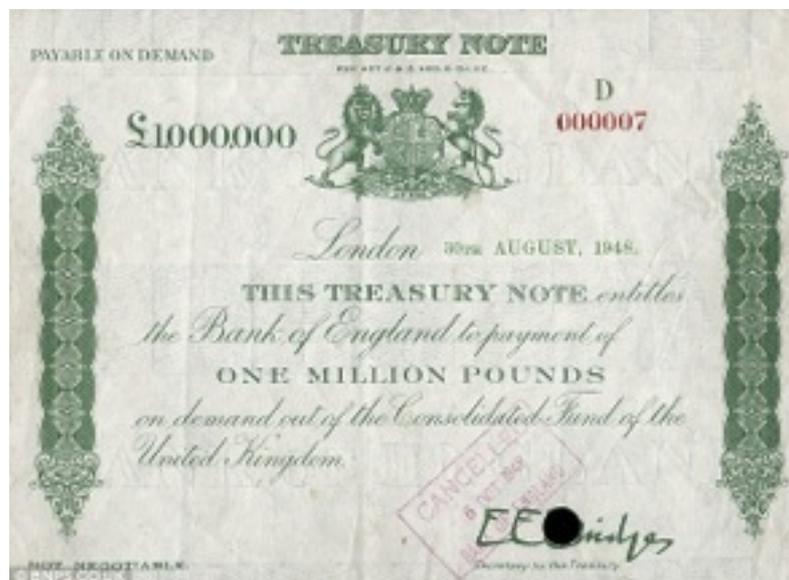
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“A footnote to my meeting Tim's widow and son:

“When I was supping at their tea table, they planted in my hand something I would never have expected to see ... a genuine MILLION POUND BANKNOTE!

“This was given to Sir Tim as a memento after he negotiated some bank business with a oil-sheik somewhere, and the sheik wanted cash. Eventually the note found its way back home, and the Treasury duly cancelled it by an official indelible stamp, plus a bullet-hole type punch through the famous printed signature of the-then Bank of England Chief Cashier. The note actually read: 'I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of one million pounds.' It's all on record that the Royal Mint printed something like 15 such banknotes for this sort of purpose, and this one in my hand was numbered 000009, I think.

“Many years later Lady Ruth Bligh wrote to me, and I phoned her to discover that she had auctioned the note in a London sale. It fetched £12,000, I believe.”



Example of a one million pound note, cancelled through the signature.

Weblink:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Bligh