

## “A Restrospective on ‘Seven Years of Plenty’”

A talk given by Leslie Jaques OBE at Bounty-Pitcairn Conference 2012  
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It's a pleasure to be here with you all in Angwin and a big thank you to all those who have worked so hard to put this important conference together. It's so good for Pitcairn to have people such as you around the World, who care.

I have visited the campus here at Angwin before, when I was Pitcairn's commissioner I came here to meet with Herb. It's nice to back.

My own background was in finance and merchant banking so what prepared me for Pitcairn, nothing at all. My time as Commissioner was a wonderfully challenging, roller coaster of emotion, joys and sorrows, achievements and failures and above all an opportunity to make a difference. I thank God for that opportunity.

I will never forget my first sight of Pitcairn Island, its volcanic cliffs rising from the South Pacific...A sense of history, a sense of apprehension. I became commissioner on September 14 September 2003 having originally turned down the role, I often wonder what direction life might have taken had I not been persuaded to reconsider, my life would have been so much poorer.

Pitcairn in 2003 had just lost its last regular shipping service, its income streams mainly from philately had reduced significantly over the years with accumulated reserves absorbing the losses until reserves were about to be extinguished. The islands income was less than 10% of the cost of running the island. Pitcairn had been neglected and run down over many years, my predecessor had left under controversial circumstances, and substantial urgent infrastructural development was needed.

Nevertheless we embarked first on a process of regeneration, despite the lack of funds two supply ships with essential equipment for repairs and maintenance were sent to the Island in quick succession, original requests for assistance from HMG were not met with universal support, quite the opposite, the Island council was populated by off islanders to whom many deferred, there was a lack of self esteem within the community and a lack of trust of outsiders, inevitable with people who had seemingly been let down forever.

So we looked at wealth creation, infrastructure and service with the aim to create a more sustainable economy with full employment, higher standard of living, increased discretionary spending and breaking Pitcairn's isolation with affordable regular transport, improved technology, an economy built around tourism leveraging off the bounty legacy, the groups unique flora and fauna, its prehistoric settlements, its Polynesian heritage, and the

development of small scale exports, And above all looking to repopulate without which there would be no future.

But to facilitate all of this an infrastructure had to be put in place. A changing of the guard at DFID saw Martin Rapley take responsibility for Pitcairn, and together with Matthew Forbes the Deputy Governor we became a strong lobbying group spreading a positive Pitcairn message in London and Brussels and raising funds for projects from DFID and the EU.

The first stage of redevelopment, the rebuilding of the slipway and jetty and the construction of a concrete road up the aptly named Hill of Difficulty was completed on time and inside budget in September 2006. The project brought the community together. Heavy equipment for the project came ashore by barge and members of the McConnell Dowel construction team wore breathing apparatus, just in case, Many had said this couldn't be done, many myself included had little sleep the night before, it was an emotional moment.

We rebuilt the schoolhouse, after raising funds by bombarding HMG with a series of photographs of rotting timber and broken windows, we introduced a new satellite communications system providing increased bandwidth, video conferencing facilities a telephone system linked to the NZ telephone system and television with CNN and a movie channel the only English language feeds from French Polynesia. We built a museum to house a collection of Bounty and prehistoric artefacts seeking the return of items from around the world. An eco trail to showcase Pitcairn's eleven endemic plants was created with the support of Trinity College Dublin. A minimum wage was introduced and funding confirmed from the EU to construct an alternative landing at Tedside where work is about to begin. The proposal finally approved by the EU was written in part by Island personnel.

Watching the unloading process on supply ship day showed us that we needed to do things better, the break bulk unloading system was replaced by specially built by 6x6 containers which could be packed in NZ and unloaded from the supply ship onto the longboat and taken up to the edge to be unloaded and distributed, no more sack of flour, split open with the contents spilling out, in appalling weather, into Bounty Bay. We then shipped a 20 ton crane into bounty bay by barge to make loading and unloading easier.

The wind generators for which funding was secured were delayed firstly by the successful bidder, who couldn't actually deliver and now by a rethink which will ultimately lead to a mix and match combination of wind and solar. The funding has been put aside. but this was frustrating.

We built on the small home loan scheme introduced by my predecessor offering interest free loans of up to \$40k for first time builders and \$20k for home improvements and also introduced a small projects loan for small ticket items like outboard motors, many indeed most in the community have taken advantage of this. We gave honey producers the opportunity to develop their hives and brought an apiarist to the Island for three months to work with the community and further develop their skills and with the invaluable help of Glynn Christian we successfully marketed Pitcairn honey, the purest in the world to gourmet delicatessen stores in the; UK Partridges and Fortnum and Masons.

We reintroduced the ANZAC Day dawn ceremony to honour members of the Pitcairn community who served in Two World Wars.

Pitcairn took its rightful place among other UK overseas territories and as part of the wider EU community. We worked with the SPC in defining objectives and developing a joint country strategy for development.

We developed relationships with our nearest neighbour French Polynesia writing an MOU which opened up trade and exporting possibilities. When the FP President Oscar Temaru invited me to share a Pizza with him in Copenhagen en route to an EU conference in Greenland I readily agreed, I do not eat seafood of any kind so when Oscar ordered a seafood Pizza with extra anchovies I managed to eat the pizza while conversing and feeling physically sick. The things we do.

For a number of reasons the airstrip couldn't happen, the length of available flat land for a runway, the size of the aircraft as a result and the myriad of compliance issues for passengers transport meant the project had to be parked, we are still not able to provide affordable transport for Pitcairner's as the current service is simply too expensive. It may be in time that an airstrip is possible, and certainly affordable transport for Pitcairner's has to be possible.

And then in 2007 we sought to restructure the governance and government, devolving operational responsibility to the community with the creation of GPI the Government of Pitcairn islands and the Pitcairn Development Team. PDT brought together members of the community from across the political spectrum and wrote over 30 policies and procedures to underpin the new structure. Four operating divisions were created run by divisional managers and the structure itself became known on Island as "The Christmas Tree". The off islanders no longer sat on Council that wasn't a reflection on the calibre of the people but rather that it is Pitcairn's Council. The new structure went live in 1 April 2009 with a new constitution implemented on 1 April 2010.

Sometimes when I think back all of this seems remarkable, particularly so given the background against which it was achieved. At times it wasn't easy, there were down days but we never gave up. There were lots of prayers. Public meetings sometimes became public riots, I often thought of the days way back of the wild west when the US was taking shape, wild meetings in saloons with people firing bullets through the ceiling, but we kept focussed and kept on task, Pitcairn was always the bigger picture. Drawing a line and moving on became a bit of an overused cliché but that's what we had to do, all of us, and most of us did.

A changing of the guard of HMG personnel presented fresh challenges and left me at times, bewildered. Commitment and attitude can vary, and then they move on. Pitcairn was most fortunate indeed to have had the support of such excellent advocates as Martin and Matthew and Phil Mason the head of OTD at DFID during this time of change. I was grateful to the many people at the FCO and DFID who cared about Pitcairn for their support and their encouragement. What changed, people changed. New people didn't agree with the direction we were taking and things became difficult as a result. There were even an attempt to stop the

alternate harbour project but thanks to the support of DFID and others within the FCO the project went ahead.

On Pitcairn, public dinners are a shared meal, everyone contributes, for my farewell dinner, the then Governors representative on Island sought permission from her superiors in Wellington to supply sausages found in her freezer well past their use by date. A fascinating and highly amusing exchange between the govrep and the Governor's office on the contribution of out of date sausages was forwarded to me. It's the sort of thing one frames and hangs on the bathroom wall, but it showed what the relationship had become.

Pitcairn's new Governor Vicki Treadell and Deputy Governor Kevin Lynch are good people, all we can ask of them is that they are fair.

Pitcairn's structure is now into its third year, Overall things are going well but the promised training for the community, an essential part of the process, was never delivered, with opportunities lost and good governance at times floundering as a result. Empowerment will come with training as will proper performance appraisal and job satisfaction an important part of the process, but these things do take time and a training programme will begin before year end.

It's important that the relationships established with other overseas territories are built upon and not neglected. UK Overseas Territories have much to offer and many experiences to share. There is much we can learn.

The minimum wage of \$10.00 has become the maximum with efforts made to prevent reward for hard work, salary levels overall remain low with many struggling to make ends meet, performance management and an incentive structure will address this. With a workforce of just over 30 Pitcairn will only survive if everyone is prepared to pull their weight. There is still much work to be done, everyone has a part to play and everyone must be encouraged to play it. Like communism, if the wage for producing one shoe is the same as that for producing ten then where is the incentive to produce ten. This must change.

Seven years passed so quickly, so much has been achieved, there have been so many positive changes to Pitcairn's governance and infrastructure. I had the good fortune to bring together a number of ideas and turn them successfully into worthwhile projects for the benefit of the community. We now have firm foundations on which to build and Pitcairn must take the opportunity before it is too late.

We are moving rapidly, demographically to an ageing population, we have to attract young families both from the traditional Diaspora and from outside. We must allow children to come. We must make "outsiders" welcome and look at the realities of what will happen if we don't. I detest the word "outsiders". Pitcairn needs to conquer its own xenophobia but the people who come must have the right skills and contribute positively to the community.

My most lasting memories of my time as commissioner will be simple ones, like being Santa for the children at Christmas, like the remapping of the cemetery and locating every known grave since the return of the Pitcairners from Norfolk Island in 1858. This took extensive

research of the births and deaths registers and the hard work and local knowledge of a number of seniors without which this project would not have been possible. Almost the entire community came together to tidy the cemetery and to place a simple bronze plaque to mark every grave. The rededication of the cemetery on Pitcairn Day 3 July 2011 was a wonderful occasion, and after the ceremony, graves were visited and a number of wonderful stories told of times and people gone by.

I remember the first time the Pitcairn community was able to watch the Olympic Games on TV, it became the talk of the Island, and it didn't matter to anyone that the Polynesian feed was in French, a special memory, a special moment. No one believed it was possible.

Devolving operational responsibility to the community always meant that I would be working myself out of a job but few things gave me greater pleasure. I still have a role to play and enjoy being secretary to the Council.

I could not write a retrospective on my time as commissioner without thanking my colleagues at PIO for their support and encouragement, and to say thank you to the people of Pitcairn Island who supported me initially and then those who followed. That made the difference. I worked with Jacqui during this time and we became close, I returned to Pitcairn in December 2010 as her partner and have settled into Pitcairn life. Jacqui and I mowed lawns and collected rubbish to make ends meet, I never thought collecting rubbish could be such an enjoyable experience. There were many jokes about my turning up to collect rubbish in a suit.

Jacqui and I began Pitcairn Travel to try to attract more tourists to the Island, its early days yet but three charters ran this year with more planned for 2013. These trips contribute to both the government and private economies of Pitcairn so a win win for everyone.

When representatives of the Overseas Territories were invited to Buckingham Palace to meet The Queen in 2006, Her Majesty was remarkably well briefed on Pitcairn affairs and showed interest and support for Pitcairn's future. It is a sense of how far Pitcairn has come that members of the Pitcairn Community now take their rightful place at important conferences around the world. There was a time not long ago when Pitcairn did not even know the International Treaties to which they had become a signatory. Pitcairn language and culture is now an important part of the school curriculum, a long way from the days, not that long ago when Pitcairn was not even allowed to be spoken at school.

It's a small community that must repopulate to survive; Can we build a world where this small community can live peaceably together? Can people put away their differences and work together? Can I? Can Pitcairn's fledgling Government evolve into a credible partner with HMG?

I stepped down as Pitcairn's last Commissioner on 31 March 2010.

Just prior to my leaving the island the community held a public dinner, almost everyone attended, a slide presentation was run at the dinner which you will see now, it covered some of the achievements during my time as Pitcairn's Commissioner, the presentation was called "Seven Years of plenty".....

At my farewell dinner on Island the community sang that beautiful Pitcairn Anthem “In the sweet bye and bye” A whole raft of thoughts went through my mind, joys and sorrows, emotion and above all HOPE for the future....