Reading the News: Pitcairn Island at the Beginning of the 21st Century Lisa Fletcher School of English, Journalism and European Languages University of Tasmania, Australia HYPERLINK "mailto:Lisa.Fletcher@utas.edu.au" Lisa.Fletcher@utas.edu.au

Abstract In the first five years of the 21st century, Pitcairn Island has received more attention in the news media than at any other time in its history. This essay examines the representation of Pitcairn and its community in contemporary Australian, New Zealand and British newspapers. In particular, it analyses the reporting of the trials and convictions of seven men before the Supreme Court in late 2004 for sex offences against women and girls over a thirty year period. The aim of this paper is to measure the force of linguistic and textual norms to manage our thinking about place. It identifies and interrogates dominant patterns in descriptions of Pitcairn Island in the news in order to consider the vested question of the relationship between the reality of islands and their representation. Keywords: Pitcairn Island, islands, news, isolation, sex offences, Bounty © 2008 — Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada

Pitcairn Island, the only inhabited island in the Pitcairn Group, is a small, remote island in the South Pacific Ocean. It is a British Overseas Territory with a population of approximately 50 people who are descendants of the mutineers from the HMS Bounty and their Polynesian companions who settled there in 1790. The island is well known for its isolation, its small population, its unique culture and its history of mutiny and murder. Since the 1970s, however, Pitcairn has been in the news for a number of reasons, including the visit of Prince Charles in 1989, the arrival of satellite television in 1991, the sale of postage stamps to fund the island's infrastructure, and the trial and conviction of its male population for sex offences against women and girls over a period of more than thirty years. In the first five years of the 21st century, Pitcairn Island has received more attention in the news media than at any other time in its history. This essay examines the representation of Pitcairn and its community in contemporary Australian, New Zealand and British newspapers. In particular, it analyses the reporting of the trials and convictions of seven men before the Supreme Court in late 2004 for sex offences against women and girls over a thirty year period. The aim of this paper is to measure the force of linguistic and textual norms to manage our thinking about place. It identifies and interrogates dominant patterns in descriptions of Pitcairn Island in the news in order to consider the vexed question of the relationship between the reality of islands and their representation.

Introduction

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