

## PITCAIRN ISLAND STUDY GROUP

Welcome to the island of the Mutiny on the Bounty! Our society consists of two groups, One in the US and one in the UK.

The US group publish a quarterly journal Called the PITCAIRN LOG. The most recent Issue is seen at right. The UK group has a Twice yearly journal

A typical article is seen below. We cover Pitcairn, the Bounty story and Norfolk. Our journal features stories about stamps, postcards, life and history of Pitcairn



THE PITCAIRN LOG

PAGE 9

### Matavai Bay BY STEVE PENDLETON

Of those locations involved with the *Bounty* story, few rival Matavai Bay in Tahiti for interest. I have been lucky to walk its black volcanic beaches twice. Both times were in the company of PISG and PISG-UK members.

The first impression you get of Matavai Bay (at least from the land) is that it isn't much of one. It is really a small indentation in the coastline of Tahiti, lying about five miles east of present-day downtown Papeete. This may sound like it's out in the country, but the whole area between the bay and the city is built up and very congested. Don't even think about driving between the two, unless you have a lot of spare time.

The bay is actually a protected anchorage inside the reef, on the west side of what is today called Point Venus. This is a somewhat rare piece of flat land which juts out of the island mainland, and actually constitutes its northernmost point. Luckily there are several passes through the reef which made the bay a good place for sailing ships to shelter.

In pre-European days this area was called Haapape. To the west was Arue (today's Papeete). On the east was Papeenu. That district was one of the largest areas on the island, though much of it was mountainous. Each of these, along with several others, were really minor kingdoms who were constantly feuding with each other.

The first European to anchor at Matavai Bay was Samuel Wallis, in 1767. Cook was here on June 3, 1769. One of the reasons for the voyage was to observe a transit of Venus-hence the name of the point. And of course Captain Bligh landed here as well. On Oct. 26, 1788, after a harrowing voyage from England, Bligh and the *Bounty* made landfall at Matavai. The purpose was to collect breadfruit. This task should only have taken a few days, but as we know, the ship stayed several months. After the mutiny, the *Bounty* returned to Matavai for supplies and women.

Since then Matavai Bay has been mentioned in many histories as a popular landing place for whalers, missionaries, and other visitors. Today the bay is

popular with both locals (it seems to be a 'top optional' facility) and tourists. If you want to see it the easiest way is to hire a cab in Papeete. However, this is liable to put a severe dent in your vacation budget.

For a relatively small fee (a few dollars in French Polynesian currency) you can ride the infamous "Le Truck." Simply find the street in the middle of downtown which serves as the informal terminal (ask at the tourist kiosk). You need to ask for the Mahina Truck. By the way, these are what they are named-trucks. The beds have been remade so that rows of benches line the sides. There aren't any windows, so a/c is by breeze. I very much doubt they ever change the springs. Since these are meant for the locals to ride, you may be accompanied by Tahitian families, people going to or from markets-and carrying the produce either live or dead-or other visitors who may be from anywhere.

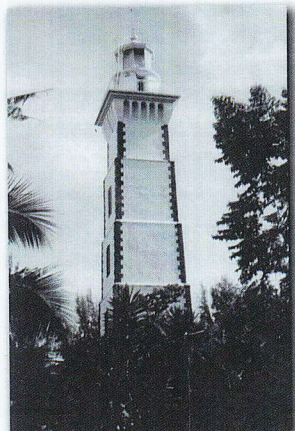


Figure 1 - Lighthouse at Matavai Bay



### The Bounty Story Keepsake from the Pitcairn Islands Philatelic Bureau (see page 19)

PAGE 9

You should also know that, being independent operators, the drivers go home in the evening. Make sure you have a return 'truck' or you may find yourself hitchhiking back. Don't laugh, it happened to some of our folks on my first trip. The truck takes about half an hour to get out to the point. You pass a beautiful church, and if you are very lucky you might hear some of the singing for which Tahitian choirs are famous.

At the point itself is a nice beach. There is a grove of palms, in which has been built a lighthouse. It was first used in 1867, but no longer serves that function. In 1969 a plaque commemorating Cook's visit was installed. But of the *Bounty*'s visit, only the breadfruit remains.

#### Matavai on Stamps

French Polynesia has shown the place on several stamps. In 1981 Scott C187 (Figure 2) was issued, showing a painting of the bay by William Hodges. The lighthouse is featured on 481 (Figure 3), issued in 1988.

Two Pitcairn stamps also show Matavai. Scott 320c (Figure 5) shows the crew collecting breadfruit. Though it doesn't mention the bay, this action took place in the vicinity. Scott 321a (Figure 4) does mention the bay, as the *Bounty* was leaving it.

Ile of Man 391 (Figure 6) shows Peter Heywood, but the background is the bay-with a magnificent native canoe on it.

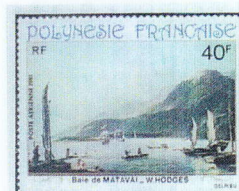


Figure 2 - Scott C187



Figure 3 - Scott 481

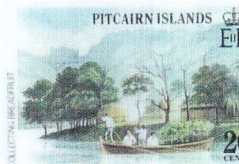


Figure 5 - Scott 320c



Figure 4 - Scott 321a



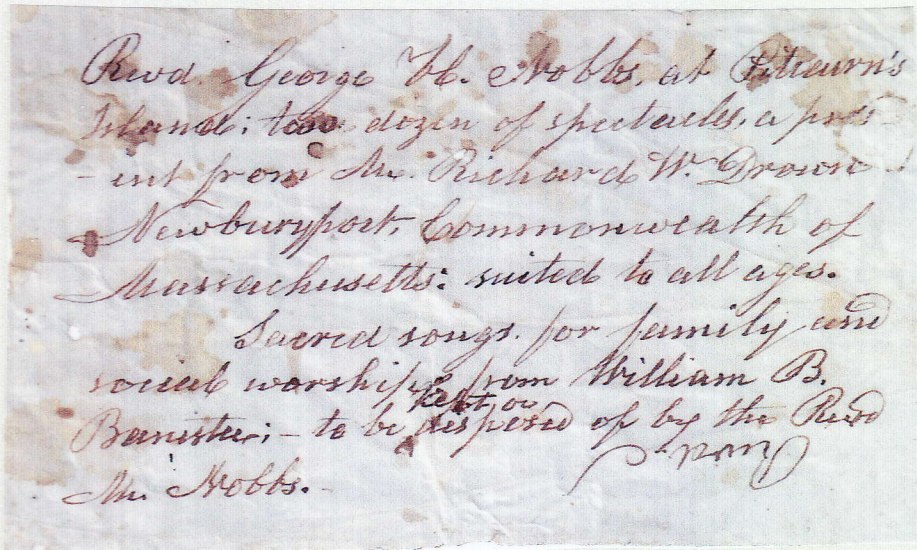
Figure 6 - Scott 391

In the 1935 version of "Mutiny on the Bounty" San Miguel Island off the California coast was the stand-in for Pitcairn.



## EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

### NINETEENTH CENTURY MAIL TO AND FROM PITCAIRN



Rev. George H. Nobbs, at Pitcairn's  
Island; two dozen of spectacles, a pres-  
-ent from Mr. Richard W. Brown  
Newburyport, Commonwealth of  
Massachusetts: suited to all ages.  
Sacred songs, for family and  
social worship, from William B.  
Branister; - to be <sup>left on</sup> disposed of by the Rev.  
Mr. Nobbs.

Until very recently very few-perhaps only two or three-19<sup>th</sup> century letters to or from Pitcairn were in private hands.

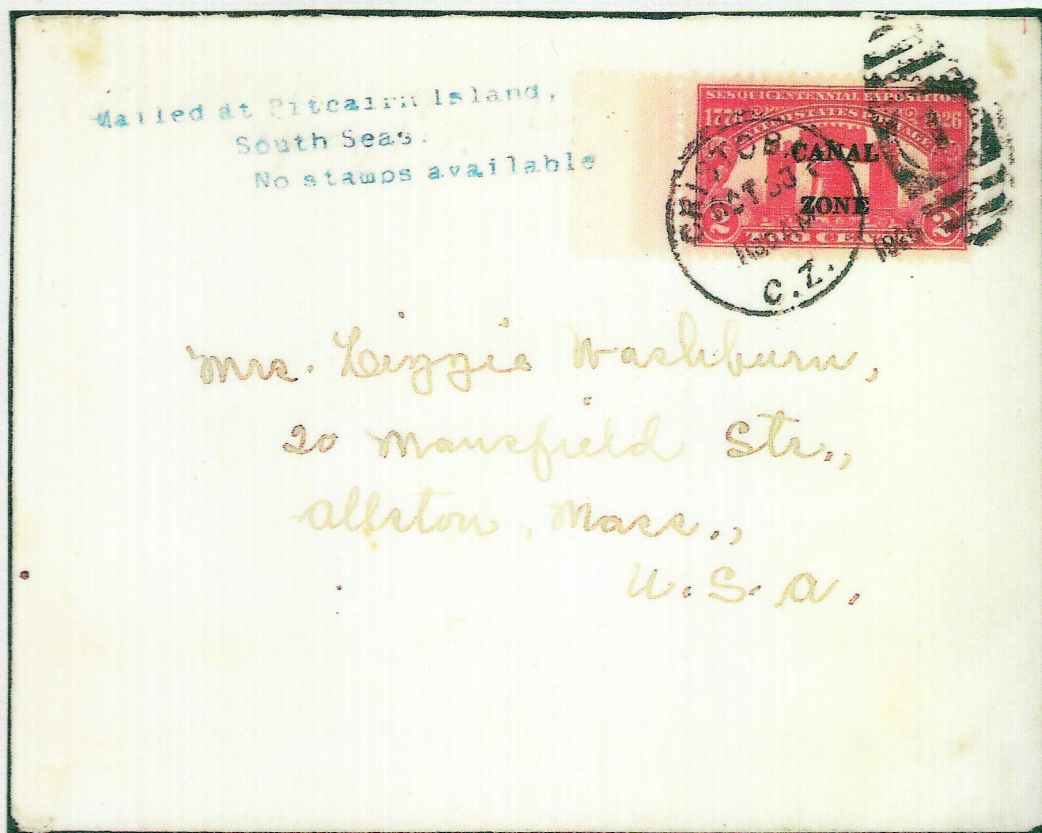
A few years ago a hoard was auctioned in Australia. The covers and letters-much the worse for wear-were found in a tin under a roof of a building on Norfolk Island. They were a correspondence of a Rev. Nobbs. He had lived on Pitcairn, but migrated to Norfolk when Pitcairn had become overpopulated.

The above letter is a fragment of one sent to Nobbs on Pitcairn about 1851. It came from Massachusetts, and concerns sending him spectacles, as well as copies of 'sacred songs for family use'. Nobbs had served as a pastor on the island.



## EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

### THE 'NO STAMPS AVAILABLE' PERIOD

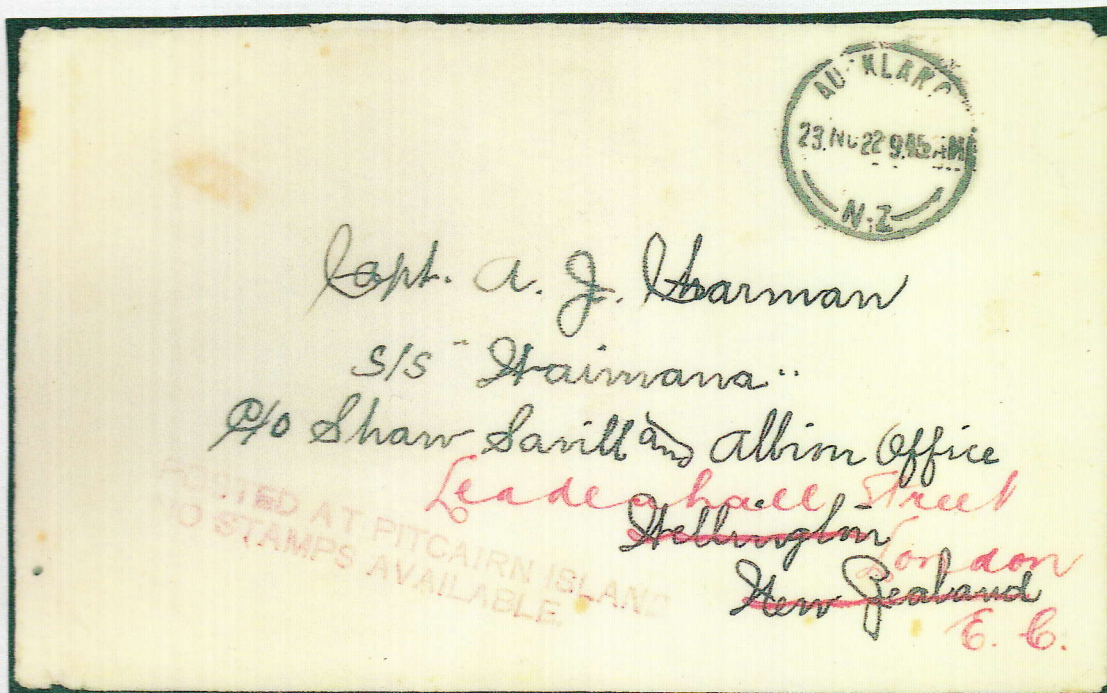


Between about 1915 and 1927 over twenty semiofficial cachets were applied to mail from Pitcairn Island. They are all rare and some are unique. This cover was sent to the US in 1926 without stamps. Postmaster Gerald Bliss of the Panama Canal Zone—a great friend of the islanders—applied a stamp to the letter as well as a cachet noting that the letter had been mailed from the island.



EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

THE 'NO STAMPS AVAILABLE' PERIOD



Ships have played a vital role in Pitcairn's history. Since whaling days passenger ships have stopped at the island, if only for a few hours. The islanders come out to the ships in their longboats, packed with curios to sell to the visitors.

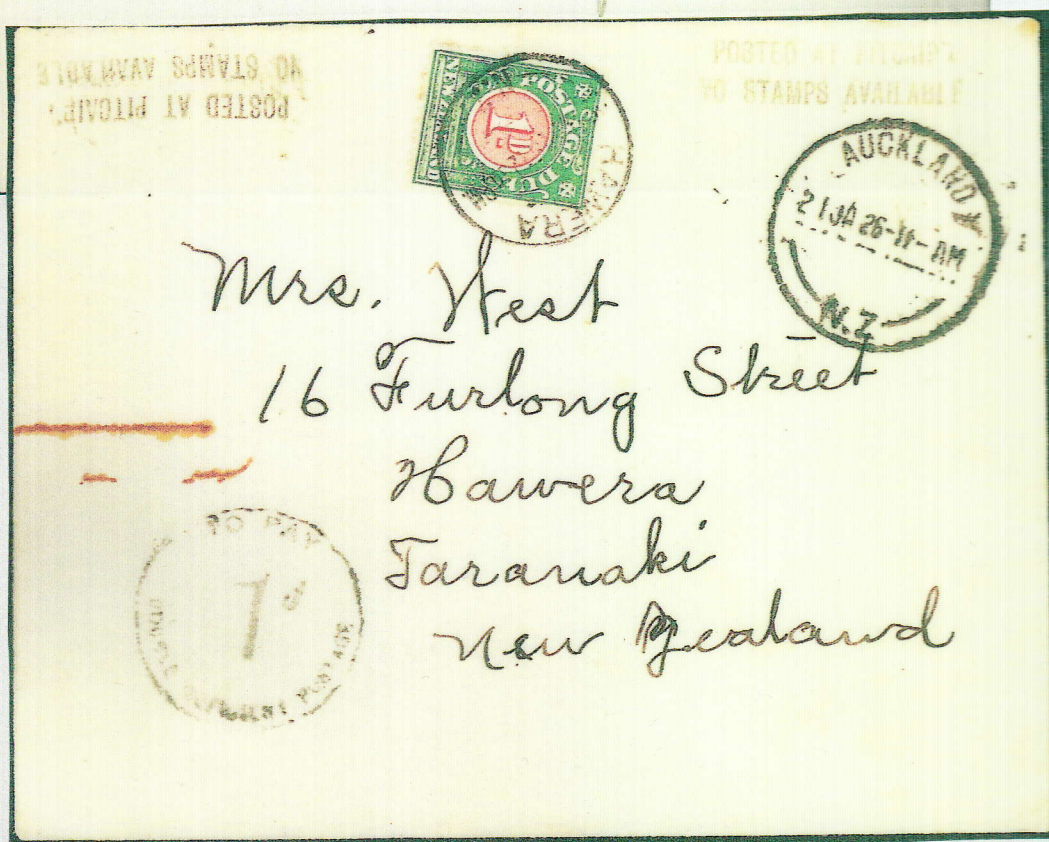
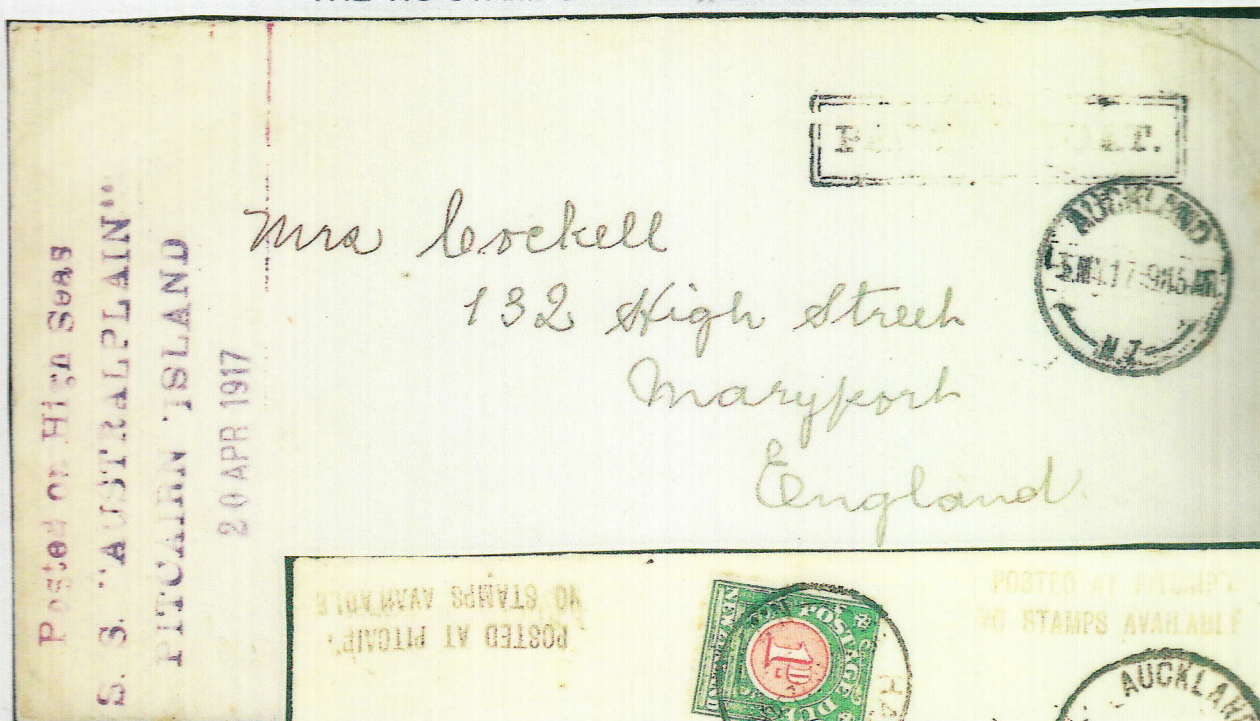
The Blue Star Line and the Shaw Savill Lines were famous for stopping at the island. They came to know the islanders well, and often did favors for them.

This 1922 cover was sent by a Pitcairner to Capt. A.J. Charman of the SS 'Waimana', a Shaw Savill liner. It bears a typical 'no stamps' cachet.



EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

THE 'NO STAMPS AVAILABLE' PERIOD

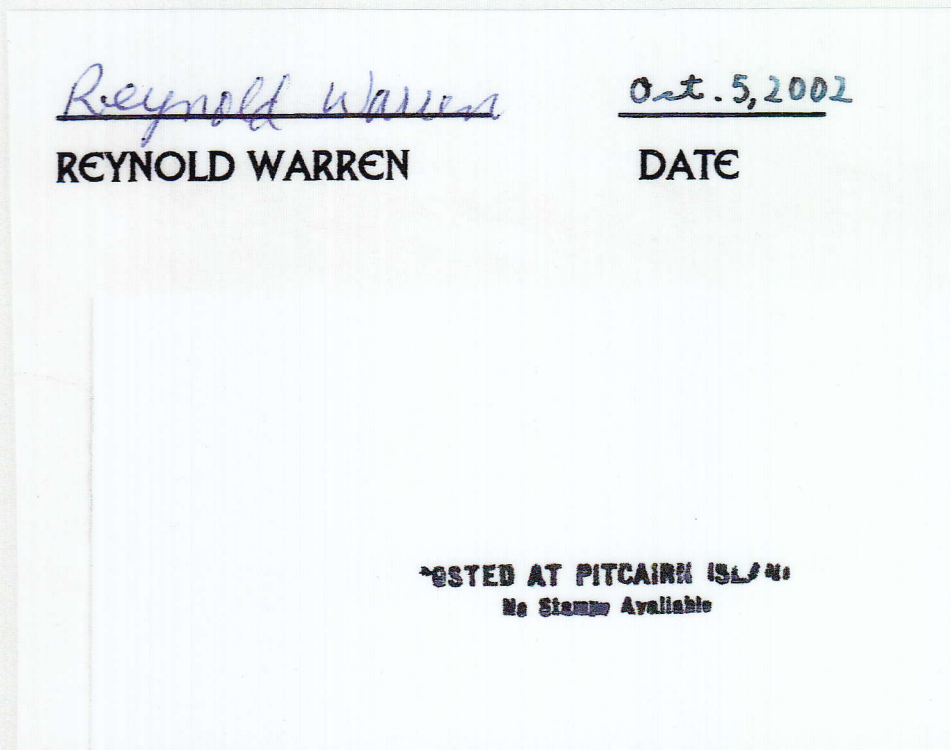


The top letter was sent from Capt. George Cockell to his wife in England. The cachet is the earliest such known from Pitcairn and is believed to be unique. The bottom example from 1926 bears two 'no stamps available' cachets. It was sent to New Zealand and got a postage due stamp, which was quite unusual.



EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

THE 'NO STAMPS AVAILABLE' PERIOD



A RECENT FIND

For many years it was believed that no examples of the actual rubber stamps used for the 'no stamps' cachets had survived.

However, in the late 1990s one came to light. Instead of being made with movable rubber letters, this one was cast in one piece and glued to a wooden handle. This item was discovered when a Pitcairn islander was engaged in tearing down a house which had been willed to him. It had fallen inside the structure's walls.

The islander did not know what the rubber stamp represented. He brought it with him on a trip to the US, where a specialist collector recognized it for what it was. A few cards were cacheted with it as souvenirs.

The rubber stamp itself was sold to a collector at the Washington international, and all funds were sent to the islander. The stamp was later sold at another auction.



# EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

## THE POST OFFICE PERIOD 1927-1940

Beginning in 1927, Pitcairn Island had an official post office. However, it was actually a New Zealand Postal agency (similar to those found on Fanning and Washington Islands in the Line Islands). Officially New Zealand stamps were used (although unofficially stamps of quite a few Pacific colonies and dominions got cancels).

During the 1930s souvenir covers, especially those created by Ms. Alta Christian (see top cover), were popular with visitors and collectors.

There were also many correspondences between islanders and outsiders, especially those belonging to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Most of the islanders had been converted to that belief in the 1800s. The letter at bottom is from such a correspondence. Note that even in the 1930s much island mail was routed through the Canal Zone.



H.R. Richards,  
57 Durant Ave.  
San Leandro, Calif.  
U. S. A.





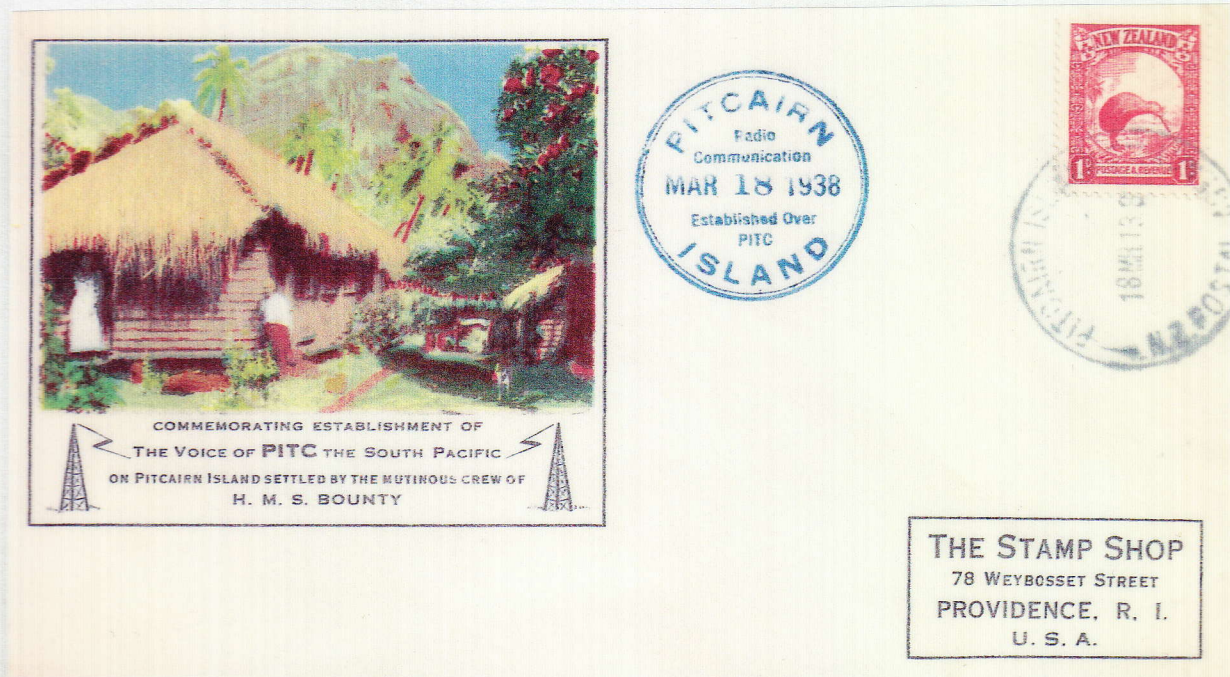
# EARLY PHILATELY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND

## THE POST OFFICE PERIOD 1927-1940

The biggest problem facing Pitcairn has always been its isolation. In the 1930s the islanders learned about amateur radio. In 1938 an American expedition brought radio transmission equipment to the island. An islander, Andrew Young, was trained in its use.

The expedition created cacheted covers with a circular rubber stamp as well with preprinted envelopes. Some of these were returned to Rhode Island, where they were damaged in a huge flood.

Today the island has satellite communication, but many islanders still have 'ham' radios.



A view of Pitcairn today-  
still a rugged, faraway  
place

