# THE SHIP ROCKINGHAM

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WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY R.H. SHARDLOW

### **PRODUCED BY THE SHIRE OF ROCKINGHAM**



This book, produced by the Rockingham Shire Council and written and illustrated by Ross Shardlow, commemorates the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the ship *Rockingham* to Western Australia on May 14th, 1830.

Under Thomas Peel's colonisation scheme the ship brought out approximately 180 migrants from Britain. In the same year a number of these families established a community they called "Rockingham Town." It is from this settlement, now called East Rockingham, that the present townsite takes its name.

From that humble beginning Rockingham has developed into the rapidlygrowing suburban centre of today.

Officially designated a sub-regional centre by the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority, Rockingham is a focal point for light industry supporting the nearby Cockburn Sound heavy industrial projects, and a residential centre for many of the workers in both these developmental areas. The town has homes which can accommodate about 28,000 people, and facilities include a fully-equipped modern hospital; several pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, plus a Technical College; large sporting Reserves and 2 large major shopping areas.

Rockingham has come a long way since that initial landing, and the Council greatly appreciates the generous contribution by Ross Shardlow to this publication which links the Rockingham of today with those pioneering years.

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THE SHIP *ROCKINGHAM* was introduced into Western Australian history by the ambitious but ill fated colonisation scheme of Thomas Peel.

In 1828 Peel decided to emmigrate from Britain to New South Wales. His attention turned to Western Australia when he met Captain James Stirling, R.N. and he became very enthusiastic about Stirling's glowing reports of the Swan River. Stirling, having explored the region in 1827, was then lobbying the Government to establish a colony there with himself as Governor. Peel, with financial backing from a powerful syndicate, proposed a plan whereby "the Association" would receive a grant of 4,000,000 acres in return for sending out 10,000 migrants. The Association's interest helped Stirling convince the Colonial Office, and on November 5, 1828 the Government ordered Captain Fremantle in H.M.S. *Challenger* to take possession of the Western coast of New Holland.

The Government rejected Peel's plan as too ambitious but proposed a modified agreement with a grant of 1,000,000 acres. Dissatisfied, Peel's backers withdrew their support.

With financial support from a new backer, Solomon Levey, Peel proposed to continue with the scheme. The Colonial Office accepted but laid down more stipulations. A quarter of the 1,000,000 acres would be granted when the first 400 settlers arrived (the balance to be allotted with subsequent new arrivals) but the first contingent had to be landed by November 1, 1829.

Peel purchased the ship *Gilmore* (500 tons) and chartered the ship *Hooghly* (465 tons) and the brig *Industry* (87 tons). Later, on Peel's behalf, Levey chartered the ship *Rocking-ham*.

Peel was beset by inevitable delays. The *Gilmore*, with Peel and 168 settlers, did not arrive in the colony until December 14, 1829-six weeks too late to receive the grant which had already been opened to free selection.

Governor Stirling persuaded the angry, disappointed Peel to disembark his settlers near Woodman's Point at a site later called Clarence in honour of the Duke of Clarence, soon to become King William IV. Meanwhile a new land grant of "better" land fronting the Murray River was negotiated.

Clarence was a barren, appalling site with poor water and hopeless for agriculture. Livestock promised by Levey never arrived, stock purchased from the ship *Norfolk* died within a few days. The situation was compounded when on





The Rockingham was dogged by bad luck right from the start. Having run aground on the Goodwin Sands and losing her sails and foreyard in a storm she put in to Falmouth for repairs. While there newspapers circulated the rumour that Governor Stirling had abandoned the colony. The Rockingham was held up until a public announcement denied the rumours. February 13, 1830 the *Hooghly* arrived with another 173 settlers. Accommodation was only temporary, permanent structures could not be built as the townsite had not been surveyed. People could not be settled on the land until the *Rockingham* brought out the balance of the first 400 migrants, thus fulfilling the conditions of the new grant.

The people at Clarence began to voice their discontent, Peel seemed to show no practical ability and seldom communicated with his people.

THE *ROCKINGHAM*, commanded by Captain E. Halliburton, departed from London in January 1830 with approximately 180 passengers and general cargo consigned to Peel. She was built at Sunderland in 1818 and is listed in Lloyd's Shipping Register as a second class ship of 427 tons, sheathed with copper over felt and boards. Her owner's name was Fotheringham. She had four guns and a crew of 25.

On leaving the Thames she lost her anchor and drifted onto the Goodwin Sands but later floated free on a rising tide. She then had her sails blown out in a fierce gale in the English Channel and had to put in to Falmouth where it took two weeks to refit her.

The journey out was otherwise uneventful and she arrived off Garden Island in heavy weather on the afternoon of May 13, 1830. She rode out the night at anchor on the seaward side of the island. The following morning the weather was still blowing hard but a naval officer from one of His Majesty's Ships, then at anchor in Cockburn Sound, went out to the *Rockingham* to pilot her through the Challenger Passage to a safe anchorage off Clarence.

Peel, impatient and dissatisfied with the proceedings, ignored the bad weather and made his way out to the ship to "assist." He was later accused of having interfered with the handling of the ship and giving senseless orders. As the *Rockingham* lay at anchor the weather deteriorated further, yet it was at this inopportune moment that Peel demanded the disembarkation to proceed. For reasons unknown he ordered all the single men to be sent to Garden Island in four of the ship's boats. However, they were unable to row against the gale and were blown ashore on the mainland and swamped in the surf. Fortunately there were no casualties.

The ship fared no better. While easing out the cable in order to bring her closer inshore to facilitate unloading, the pitching seas put such a strain on the capstan that it broke. John Morgan, Government storekeeper on Garden Island, stated in a letter dated July 14, 1830 "The Rockingham would not have gone on shore if she had not broken her capstan—in veering cable—an accident which might have happened even at Spithead if a ship had brought up too near the shore, which perhaps was the case in this instance, for the convenience of landing stores upon a beach where there is no wharf."



The ship drifted out of control and ran aground, broadside on and nearly on her beam ends. A passing upturned boat was secured and righted but those who managed to scramble aboard were thrown into the sea when it capsized. Other passengers clambered down the side of the listing hull and were helped to safety through the surf by the single men, who had recovered from their similar ordeal. Miraculously all managed to make the shore without loss of life. Fearing the ship would break up the stores were hurriedly brought off and the cattle were swum ashore only to wander off into the scrub.

There was little shelter at Clarence. Most of the people tried to huddle in a small, wooden house washed up from the ship. Others had to sleep in barrels, boxes and under sacks or pieces of canvas.

THE SHIP REMAINED STRANDED on the beach for nearly two months. Labour could not be spared to get her off as the storms had caused much flood damage in the Perth-Guildford areas. Of the ten ships then at anchor in Cockburn Sound six went ashore or got into difficulty, and four were totally wrecked.

Peel took his anger and frustration out on the commander of the *Rockingham*, Captain Halliburton, blaming him for the stranding. Apparently Peel challenged him to a duel either on Garden Island or on one of the warships (Peel often kept company with the Naval officers). If such a duel did take place then Peel came out the loser. He received such a wound to his right hand after an alleged shooting accident, that, "...nothing but the very excellent medical attention he received from the King's ships saved his arm from an amputation."

Peel became a recluse, he was fed up with Clarence and made preparations to shift to the Murray. He also sent a small group of families to an area several kilometres south of Clarence to set up a community and to farm the richer soil there. By August 1830 this settlement was known as "Rockingham Town," taking the name from the ship that brought many of them to the colony. The present townsite of Rockingham, about six kilometres from the original settlement, was first opened to selection in 1847 as a timber port although it was not until 1873 that this development came to fruition. Although Peel alleged that the loss of the use of his right hand was due to a shooting accident it seems likely that he was shot by the Captain of the Rockingham in a duel. In an earlier incident he was reported to have fought a duel with Captain Geary of the Gilmore. Geary took time off on the voyage out to be married to one of his passengers at Cape Town. This delay outraged Peel, especially when, on arriving in the colony he discovered that his land grant was forfeited because he arrived too late.





Within months of the establishment of Clarence 28 people had died from dysentry, scurvey and other diseases, even though there were three doctors in attendance. The doctor of the Hooghly was "...distracted by domestic strife," while Doctor Langley of the Rockingham became "deranged" after the stranding and had to be confined to the prison hulk Marquis of Anglesea. By July 14 the *Rockingham* had been refloated with little apparent damage except to the rudder. She was taken to Garden Island for repairs where it was found that she was worse off than was at first believed, her timbers were rotten and she was leaking badly.

After repairs, Captain Halliburton announced on October 11, 1830 that he was sailing for Batavia. When the ship met the ocean swells past Rottnest Island the leak sprang again and, with men at the pumps, she put back.

Halliburton applied to the Governor to have the *Rocking-ham* hove down to H.M.S. Sulphur to have the leak repaired but a further survey condemned her and she was laid up. Halliburton left the colony on December 30, 1830 in command of the ship *Orelia*, taking the *Rockingham's* certificate of registry back to the Collector of Customs in London.

THE *ROCKINGHAM* went up for auction. Captain Dance, commander of H.M.S. *Sulphur*, drew Governor Stirling's attention to the *Rockingham's* four guns which he thought would be good for mooring buoys. A prominent citizen of the time, George Leake, hoped to buy the ship and use it as a careening vessel. Leake was outbid by a certain Captain Henry Willet, commander of the brig *Faith*, which had recently arrived from Batavia. His successful bid was £250.

Captain Willet took the *Rockingham* and the *Faith* to Careening Bay, Garden Island, where he spent two months repairing her, hoping to make her seaworthy again to sail back to Batavia.

He took on a crew of Lascars (Malays) from the *Emily Taylor* which was wrecked in the same storm in which the *Rockingham* went aground. The men were required to man the *Rockingham's* pumps day and night. Willet did not treat his men kindly, they were only paid half their wages and were not fed satisfactorily, at one stage they went three days without food. The crew demanded their wages and asked to have their grievances heard by the bench of Magistrates at Fremantle, but the Captain would not let them leave the ship.

In desperation the men mutinied. Letting themselves down the side of the ship they swam ashore at Garden Island and went bush. Willet and his officers armed themselves and set off after them. In the ensuing skirmish four of the Lascars were wounded, one receiving a horrible wound to the head from a pistol ball fired by Captain Willet.

The crew managed to procure a boat from John Morgan, colonial storekeeper stationed on Garden Island, and made their way to Fremantle. The Magistrates, however, did not redress their grievance and the local newspaper announced, "Perhaps they have now taken the law into their own hands – the affair demands the strictest enquiry." Another account describes the men-as, "handcuffed and led to the beach where the boats were waiting to take them back to the *Rockingham*."

With the pumps unmanned the *Rockingham* settled on the bottom in shallow water. Willet set about dismantling her, selling the timbers for building materials in Fremantle, but it was only possible to remove the upper works as they could not work below the waterline.

As well as not paying his crew Captain Willet was in trouble for not paying wages to his brother. He abandoned the *Rockingham* and the colony and sailed away in the *Faith*.

IN MARCH 1833 the hull and the masts and rigging were offered for sale by public auction. In a letter to the *West Australian* John Watson recalls seeing the ribs of the *Rockingham* protruding above the water at low tide in 1863. In another letter Mr. F. Sweetman describes how his father, around 1880, salvaged the rudder, gudgeons and copper sheathing. While removing the copper he relates that his father was attacked by a tiger shark. The gudgeons were melted down and reformed and used on the schooner *Annie Agnes*.

The remains of the *Rockingham* have not been positively identified and presumably lie buried somewhere in Careening Bay.



#### Passenger list of the Rockingham ~1830

Dr Nicholas W. Langlev Mr & Mrs Bates and 5 children Mr & Mrs Fletcher and 1 child Mr & Mrs Robinson and 1 child Mr & Mrs Cato and 5 children Mr & Mrs Tapper and 2 children Mr & Mrs Lacey and 4 children Mr & Mrs Rawlins and 5 children Ann Crocker & A. Williams and 2 children in care of Mr Williams Mr & Mrs Palmer and 2 children Mr & Mrs Pollard and 2 children Mr & Mrs Edwards and 4 children Mr & Mrs Partons (Parsons?) and 3 children Mr & Mrs Powis and 2 sons Mr & Mrs Leeder and 5 children Mr & Mrs Mews and 4 children Mr & Mrs Rowes and 2 sons Mr & Mrs Dodds and 5 children Mrs Coombs (Coombes?) and 4 children Mr & Mrs Martin and 3 children Mr & Mrs Ambrose Mr Clvde (Glvde?) and 4 children Mr & Mrs Sheppard and 2 children Mr & Mrs Escot (Eacott, Ecott?) and 1 child Mr & Mrs Read **Charles Read** Marie Read Mark Read Athold Read Emma Read Mr & Mrs Cook and 3 children Mr & Mrs Adams and 2 children Diana Morgan, servant to Mrs Coombes Margaret Maney, servant to Mrs Greene Mrs Henry Hook (Cook?) Mr Henry Cook Richard Waller (Walker?)

Mr & Mrs Greene Mr Edw, Shaw Mr & Mrs Williams Mr Tuckev and 2 sons Mr & Mrs Rose Mr Wm. Martin Titus Ware Thomas Morris **Richard Morris** William Cook Rt. J.C. Rogers Samuel Cox John Light Robert Light **James Forward** Thomas Battrass Thomas Cook John Farris (Ferres?) John Hall John Hurrell James Hodges Benjamin Smith Robert Dennis Wm. Ledgard John Balls John Stoner John Jovce Thomas Glover **Richard Barber** Robert Field George Smith Zacariah Long Thomas Long John Graham William Barnes Kevin Quin Patrick Ryan Samuel Livingston (Swinstone?)

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