

Captain Thomas Hansen

After the great fire of London in 1666, a Scandinavian community was established in Wapping, east of the Tower of London. They were responsible for shipping in the large quantities of timber needed to rebuild the city after the disastrous fire. It was most likely at this time that the forebears of the Hansen family established themselves in London.

Parish records from the London church of St George-in-the-East recorded the marriage of Thomas Hansen to Hannah Coats in 1783. Baptismal records from St George-in-the-East show that Thomas Jnr was born on 30th May 1785, and baptised on 19th June, and that Hannah was born on 2nd September 1792 and baptised on 9th September. When Hannah was born, the family was living in the village of Shadwell on the Ratcliff Highway; now known as the A1203. The house was halfway between Tower Bridge and Limestone Pier.

At the end of February 1807, the Hansen family took passage on the *Duke of Portland* destined for the new British colony of New South Wales where Captain Hansen had purchased 250 acres, and had applied for a land grant of another 100 acres. At the time of sailing, Thomas Jnr was aged 22, and Hannah was 15.

After a five month voyage, the Hansen family arrived in the town of Sydney. However, due to political conflict within the government of the colony, Captain Hansen's land grant was not confirmed until January 1810. The land is now in the suburb of Fairfield, Sydney with Bankstown to the southeast, and Parramatta to the northeast.

It seemed that the Hansens were not suited for farming, and Captain Hansen soon sold off his land in anticipation of a return to sea. The Hansens' close neighbour at that time was Rev Samuel Marsden, who was looking to set up a mission station in New Zealand. In order to do so, he had purchased the brig *Active* in March 1814, and had sent it to New Zealand, with Peter Dillon as master, in order to assess the suitability of Rangihoua as a site for the new mission station. When Dillon was unavailable to command the *Active* for the second voyage, Captain Hansen was appointed as master. In this way, Captain Hansen returned to sea, and, along with his family, sailed into New Zealand history.

On 22nd December 1814, the *Active* sailed into Rangihoua Bay, and dropped anchor at the base of Ruatara's pā on the hillside overlooking the bay. Four months later, the *Active* returned to Sydney, leaving behind Captain Hansen's son Thomas, daughter Hannah, son in law John King, and grandson Philip King, who were to form, together with the Hall and Kendall families, the first permanent, European settlement in New Zealand.

The role of the *Active* was to be a supply ship for the mission station. It was also to bring back cargoes of flax and timber to Sydney to help offset the cost of the mission programme. For the next two years, Captain Hansen made numerous trips across the Tasman, sometimes with his wife on board. They were present for the birth of their second grandson, Thomas Holloway King in 1815, and were also there for his baptism.

In 1816, Captain Hansen was dismissed as master. Marsden blamed the influence of the "drunken, infamous" Mrs Hansen for causing the *Active* to run aground at North Cape, and for an unduly long voyage to Tahiti that did not bring in the expected profit. The decision to dismiss Captain Hansen was unduly harsh. The *Active* had run aground in the process of rescuing a party of stranded sailors in an area for which Captain Hansen had no charts. The smaller than usual cargo of pork was due to the Tahitians dislike of the trade goods provided by Marsden, and despite this, only one other ship returning to Sydney in the second half of 1816 had a bigger cargo of pork.

For the next four years, Captain Hansen remained ashore before commencing employment for the government in 1820, commanding vessels that sailed up and down the east coast of Australia as new settlements were formed.

In 1820, Captain Hansen was appointed master of the *Lady Nelson*, a small brig of only 60 tons, measuring 16 metres in length and 5 metres in beam. Along with two other ships, the *Lady Nelson* was to transport convicts and soldiers to the new penal settlement at Port Macquarie. The three ships arrived off the entrance to Port Macquarie in April 1821, but only the *Lady Nelson* was able to safely navigate the dangerous bar and proceed up the Hastings River. The other two ships both ran aground on sandbanks. However, when the *Lady Nelson* had to return to Sydney for much needed supplies in May, it too ran aground. Major damage was done to the keel of the ship, and after it was refloated later that year, it was sent back to Port Jackson for permanent repairs.

After repairs, the *Lady Nelson* continued its busy schedule, delivering convicts and stores between Sydney, Newcastle and Port Macquarie. Captain Hansen was in command for many of these voyages, and he came to regard the *Lady Nelson* as his favourite ship.

While home between voyages, Captain Hansen was present when his wife Hannah died on 23rd May 1823. A service was held two days later, and she was laid to rest in the Sandhills Cemetery.

Captain Hansen continued in his service for the colonial government. In addition to the *Lady Nelson*, he also commanded several other vessels including the cutter *Sally*, a schooner *Isabella*, and the brig *Amity*. He was tasked to transport supplies to the newly established convict settlement in Queensland, and to carry out survey work for Moreton Bay.

In 1826, the government decided to establish another new convict settlement, this time in Western Australia. The *Amity*, with Captain Hansen in command, was chosen to transport the convicts and soldiers to the new settlement. In addition to its normal crew, the *Amity* carried 23 convicts, 18 soldiers, and other military personnel including Major Edmund Lockyer, who was to be the new commandant.

The six week voyage was a difficult one due to the stormy seas and unfavourable winds. The course took the *Amity* through Bass Strait to King George Sound, on the south western tip of Australia, close to present day Albany. The *Amity* arrived at King George Sound on Christmas Day 1826, almost 12 years to the day the *Active* had arrived at the new mission settlement at Rangihoua Bay in New Zealand.

Upon his return to Sydney, Captain Hansen again continued to sail up and down the coast of Australia transporting personnel and supplies. His final voyage was in the *Isabella* on a trip to Norfolk Island.

In 1834, at the age of 74, Captain Hansen finally retired from the Colonial Service after a career spanning 14 years with the Colonial government. Captain Hansen was awarded a pension of £55.00 per annum by the Colonial government, which was about half of his old salary.

Upon retirement, Captain Hansen moved in with the Cadman family in their cottage on the Sydney waterfront; the perfect place for a retired mariner. Captain Hansen had met fellow mariner John Cadman many years earlier, soon after arriving in Australia. Cadman was the assistant to the Government Coxswain, the officer responsible for government boats, their operations and their crews. As such, he would have been in close contact with Captain Hansen. Over the years, the two became close friends. In 1827, Cadman was promoted to Superintendent of Government Craft. This position entitled him to live in the Coxswain's Cottage, which over time became known as Cadman's Cottage. It was to this residence that Cadman's good friend Captain Thomas Hansen retired in 1834.

Captain Thomas Hansen died on 30th January 1837. After a service at St Phillips, he was laid to rest alongside his wife Hannah in the Sandhills Cemetery.