

## **The Shortland Family of The First Fleet**

When researching the First Fleet and finding information on the preparations carried out in England, the voyage out to Sydney and the first months of settlement, the name John Shortland was prominent in all the diaries and reference books. This was initially believed to refer to the John Shortland of Newcastle fame but was later found to refer to his father and that the father and his 2 sons John junior and Thomas George were all part of the First Fleet. This created an interest in all the family, their backgrounds and their future careers. The family and the descendants of the younger son Thomas George played important roles in Australian and New Zealand history.

### **Lt. John Shortland (Senior)**

Lt John Shortland (Senior), after a distinguished career in the Royal Navy in the wars against the French, was appointed Agent to the transports of the First Fleet. This meant he supervised all the transports excluding the two naval vessels. He was responsible for the fulfilling of contracts for supplies loaded on the transports and he was in command of all the Masters (Captains) of the Transports. He had control of the directions for the correct distribution of provisions to the holds of the ships and was responsible for the accommodation of the marines on board as well as the convicts. It was a very responsible position and the success of the whole venture was largely in his hands. He worked closely with Arthur Phillip the Governor designate of the new colony, in these preparations. Phillip gave high praise for his work. He sailed in the *Alexander* and for a time in the *Fishburn* and supervised all Transports during the whole of the voyage.

Lt John Shortland (Senior) successfully completed his duties on arrival at Port Jackson. In Sydney he was kept busy ordering the carpenters of the *Golden Grove* to build the first hospital in the colony and he had to examine all the stores as they were brought ashore to be deposited in the hastily built storehouses.

He departed Port Jackson in the *Alexander* on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1788 accompanied by his youngest son Thomas as Masters Mate. He was also in command of *Friendship*, *Prince of Wales* and *Borrowdale*. He carried important dispatches from Governor Phillip back to the Government in London and perhaps almost as important was the fact that he carried letters from Count de La Perouse to be handed over to the French Ambassador for the French Government. These were the last accounts of the voyage of La Perouse.

The *Alexander* and the *Friendship* anchored at Lord Howe Island to await the arrival of *The Prince of Wales* and the *Borrowdale* but it was later found that they had taken an alternate route. The *Alexander* and the *Friendship* set sail for Batavia and on the 19<sup>th</sup> July Lieutenant Shortland came across an extensive shoal of land which he named Middleton Shoal and 2 days later an island which he named Sir Charles Middleton Island.

By the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1788, the southern limits of the yet undiscovered Solomon Islands were sighted and Lt John Shortland traversed the land mass, named it New Georgia and made detailed records, observations and gave names to various peaks, capes, headlands, and islands.

He was totally unaware that Monsieur de Bougainville, the French navigator had passed the upper extremities of the island in 1768 and named it Solomon Island and the Bougainville Straits.

Towards the end of October 1788 scurvy had reduced the crews of the 2 ships to such an extent that only a small number were fit for duty and being short of provisions and the expectation of monsoonal weather it was decided that things were so bad they could not continue to sail the two ships. Shortland had to make the decision to scuttle the *Friendship* so what was left of the two crews could continue the journey. They struggled on and reached Batavia and reported that they were in such bad shape that they were unable to sail the *Alexander* into port and had to call on the Dutch for help. The sick were sent to hospital and the *Alexander* was refitted for sea and with a fresh crew, setting sail for the Isle of Wight on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1788. On the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1789 the *Alexander* had reached Table Bay where they met Captain John Hunter of the *Sirius* who informed them that the *Borrowdale* and the *Prince of Wales* had taken the southern route.

The *Alexander* arrived at the Isle of Wight on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1789 and Lt John Shortland (Senior) was promoted to Captain in 1790, he retired later that year and died in 1803 in Lille, France.

### **Thomas George Shortland**

Thomas George Shortland the youngest son. of Lt John Shortland (Senior) had entered the Royal Navy in 1785 aged 14 as a midshipman on the *Irresistible* and in March 1787 was moved to the *Alexander*, transport for the First Fleet, to serve as second mate for the voyage. He turned 16, 3 days before the fleet sailed from England.

He then left Port Jackson with his father aboard the *Alexander* on the 14<sup>th</sup> July and the path followed by the *Alexander* from NSW to Indonesia was charted by him. As well he drew the chart of Georgia, now the Solomon Islands, discovered by his father.

After he returned to England he had an impressive career in the Royal Navy serving on many ships and in many areas. From April 1816 to April 1819 he was Captain – Superintendent to the “ships of the ordinary” at Hamoaze Plymouth and during this period obtained the approval of the Admiralty for his meritorious conduct and for his zeal and ingenuity in forming a system to make telegraphic communication by shapes in lieu of bunting flags or semaphore.

On 14<sup>th</sup> July 1825 he was appointed resident Commissioner of Jamaica where he died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1827 of yellow fever. He had married in 1799 and had 9 children.

His 4<sup>th</sup> son **Peter Frederick Shortland** joined the Royal Navy in 1827 aged 12 and in 1836 – 1837 served in Australian waters on the *Rattlesnake*. The first settlement of Melbourne was taking place at that time and Peter Shortland and Thomas Symonds charted Port Phillip Bay and Symonds named the entrance to the bay Shortland Bluff. This was changed to Queenscliff in 1853 in honour of Queen Victoria.

**Willoughby**, the second eldest son of Thomas George Shortland joined the Royal Navy at 14 in 1818 and after 21 years service he accompanied Lieutenant Governor William Hobson to New Zealand as Colonial Secretary. In 1842 he became acting Governor until 1843. He then took up the position of President of the Island of Nevis in the Leeward Islands in 1845. He became Governor of Tobago from 1846 to 1854.

**Doctor Edward Shortland**, the 3<sup>rd</sup> son of Thomas George studied medicine in London and at his brother Willoughby's request went to New Zealand as Private Secretary to Governor Hobson in 1841. In August 1842 he was appointed the Protector of Natives. He studied the native languages and became a profound Maori scholar. He settled finally in Auckland where he practiced medicine until he returned to England in 1889 and he died at Plymouth in 1893. His 3<sup>rd</sup> son Thomas Willoughby Shortland ventured to Sydney in 1880. He married in Newtown in 1887 and lived and raised his children in Sydney until he died in 1927. He was the grandfather of John Willoughby Shortland, a First Fleet Fellowship member and the author of “*The Shortland Family of the Royal Navy and Australasia with particular reference to The First Fleet*”.

### **Lt. John Shortland (Junior)**

Lt. John Shortland (Junior) was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1769, the eldest son of John Shortland senior. In 1781, aged 12 he took his first voyage to Quebec with his father who was employed as Agent for Transports providing services between England and North America.

During 1787 he served in West Indian waters and when he returned to England in 1787 was appointed to the First Fleet expedition to New South Wales, first as 2<sup>nd</sup> mate on the *Friendship*. He was transferred to the *Sirius* on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1787 as an Able Seaman and then as Midshipman and finally as Master's Mate just before the *Sirius* arrived in Botany Bay. On the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1788 the *Sirius* set sail for the Cape of Good Hope and at Table Bay took on provisions and returned safely on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1789. At Table Bay the *Sirius* met up with the *Alexander* and John Shortland senior.

He was in the *Sirius* when it was wrecked off Norfolk Island in March 1790 and spent eleven months 'exiled' on the island until the *Supply* returned to Norfolk Island on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1791. He arrived back in Sydney on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1791 and accompanied Captain John Hunter back to England in the Dutch ship, *Waaksamheid* on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1791.

John (Jnr.) was promoted to Lieutenant on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1793 while serving aboard the *Arrogant* where he remained until 1795.. However he returned to Sydney in 1795 as First Lieutenant aboard the *HMS Reliance* with Captain Hunter as the new Governor and shipmates Doctor George Bass and Masters Mate Matthew Flinders.

Two years later on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1797, the vessel *Cumberland*, a colonially built vessel, engaged in the carrying of supplies between the Hawkesbury and Sydney was seized by a party of convicts. No description of the *Cumberland* has been located, but it is described as being the "largest and best" boat in the colony. (This description suggests that the *Cumberland* was larger than its contemporary, the other colonially built vessel, a 44 ton sailing schooner named *Francis*).

The loss of one of the colony's only two sailing vessels must have been a severe blow to the near starving settlement. As the *Francis* was unavailable, at the time performing duties at Norfolk Island, Governor Hunter dispatched two armed whale boats in pursuit sending one north and one south. Shortland was in charge of the boat sent north.

Shortland had no luck in capturing the escapees and after reaching Port Stephens returned south and in the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup> September sighted Nobbys Island. He decided to seek shelter from the southerly gales and passed through the narrow passage between Nobbys and the mainland. On entering the harbour he experienced a strong current indicating that he was in fact at the mouth of a river.

He made some soundings, determined that there was deep water then sailed around to a sandy bay to search for a supply of fresh water. This he found at the head of the bay flowing from a hillside covered by dense scrub. The fresh water flowed from a creek later to be known as Freshwater Bay. He made camp there and a tent was erected at Signal Hill now known as Fort Scratchley

While Shortland was exploring the foot of Signal Hill he found an abundance of coal scattered about and he collected samples to take back to Sydney. He then climbed to the top of Signal Hill which he named Braithwaite Head after a naval friend of his father, Lieutenant Robert Braithwaite.

From the top of Signal Hill he viewed the surrounding countryside and observed the entrance of the river and called the point of Nobbys Island, Hacking Point after Quartet Master Hacking of the *Sirius*. He called the river Hunter after John Hunter and the harbour Coal River.

Later that day he made a short trip around the harbour up to the mangroves and returned to camp. He named the two points now the site of the Newcastle Dyke, Point Bass after Doctor George Bass and Port Flinders after Matthew Flinders, his two shipmates on the *Reliance*.

In his sail around the harbour he landed 5 times, at Nobbys, the inside point of Stockton he called Point Kent after his friend on the *Reliance* Lieutenant William Kent, on the Stockton foreshore, at a point north opposite Mangrove Island and at the camp site at what is now the foot of Market Street..

He returned to Sydney on the 19<sup>th</sup> September and his news of the coal and also the vast amounts of valuable timbers, particularly cedar growing along the river banks was received with considerable enthusiasm by the Governor and traders.

He continued his duties as a member of the Courts of Criminal Jurisdiction and was assigned a housekeeper Catherine Farrell. His friend William Kent was also assigned a housekeeper, a convicted felon Elizabeth Powell who in 1799 purportedly gave birth to a daughter by John Shortland named Margaret Shortland. After John Shortland's departure from Sydney in 1800, Margaret went to Van Diemen's Land in 1818 and

married James Boyce at Hobart in 1819. There are now many descendants of Margaret Shortland now living in Australia.

For their efforts and the extra duties undertaken for the colony, John Shortland Senior and John Shortland Junior received government land grants of 25 acres at Liberty Plains and 380 acres at Bankstown. The Shortland land lay unused for nearly 80 years after the death of John Shortland junior, their descendants being unaware of the grants and its value. It was covered in thick scrub, although along one edge Liverpool Road had been built and Prospect Creek had been spanned by the Lansdowne Bridge. About 1887, four Sydney men discovered Lieutenant Shortland's heir's at law and negotiated with them to purchase the land which was later developed and subdivided as Lansdowne Gardens, Bankstown.

John Shortland returned to England in 1800, and after receiving various commands was promoted to Captain of the *Squirrel* on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1805.

In December 1809, while captain of the *Junon*, he was mortally wounded in action against the French and died of his injuries 6 weeks later on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1810 and buried at Basseterre cemetery, Guadeloupe. The story of Captain Shortland's battle against overwhelming odds took first rank in British Naval history and was vividly recorded in the Naval Chronicle of the day.

Captain Shortland also had a favourite dog named Pandore who was with his master when he was injured and Pandore was said to be constantly with his master from when he was injured until he died.

Captain Shortland's servant brought the dog back to England where it was immediately stolen. A crew member recognised the dog and was later given possession of Pandore to take back to Captain Shortland's mother Margaret Shortland.

There have been several commemorations to John Shortland junior since his discovery of Newcastle.

In 1897, the centenary of Newcastle, the Shortland Memorial Fountain was placed in his honour on the ocean front of Newcastle Beach. This fountain was subjected to the ravages of an unforgiving sea spray and was moved to Christie Park Newcastle adjacent to the City Hall.

In 1926 a memorial stone was placed on the Longworth Building in Scott Street Newcastle in honour of the landing site of Lieutenant John Shortland in 1797.

Also in 1947 to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Newcastle, Australia Post issued a special 2 penny stamp. However the stamp issue was in error as it was of Lieutenant John Shortland senior not his son.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1997, during the Newcastle Bicentenary, the Fellowship of First Fleeters placed a plaque on the Shortland Memorial Fountain.

The First Fleet Shortland Family and their descendants certainly played prominent roles in naval sea battles, troop and convict transports, exploration and discovery and the colonisation of Australia and New Zealand.