

# The Lady Nelson

Our story



# Introduction

The *Lady Nelson*: a little ship with a big history, who calls Tasmania home.

Actor Cameron Daddo discovered that he had an ancestor who sailed on the original *Lady Nelson* whilst filming 'Who do you think you are?' His discovery is by no means unique, thousands of people travelled in the *Lady Nelson* during her 25-year working life, from 1800 – 1825, including convicts, free settlers, sailors and soldiers. Whilst the true number of people, will never be known, it is estimated to be around seven thousand people. For context, the European population of Sydney in 1810 was around 10,000.

Conditions onboard were cramped and uncomfortable. One voyage in 1810 from Norfolk Island to Sydney comprised of 14 crew and 80 passengers, namely members of the 102nd Regiment, their wives, and children; 94 people on a boat with a length of only 16 metres for nine days! It is estimated that over two million Australians have an ancestor that travelled on this little ship although the vast majority have no knowledge of this.

Tasmanians have the highest representation as the *Lady Nelson* brought the first European settlers to the state, and a then sailed a further 14 times to and from the island, with most voyages bringing new residents. To highlight how these figures can be justified consider one man, William Dunshea. He was sentenced for pig stealing and was a convict transported in the *Lady Nelson*. In 2018 he had 2,600 living descendants.

During her lifetime, the *Lady Nelson* demonstrated her versatility and fulfilled a variety of roles including exploration, surveying, forming settlements, shifting goods and people around the colonies and even capturing pirates. She played a pivotal role in the initial European settlement of Hobart, northern Tasmania, Victoria, Newcastle, Port Macquarie and the Northern Territory. Those onboard explored and charted much of Bass Strait, Port Philip, Newcastle, Port Macquarie and (with *HMS Investigator*) the coasts of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland.



# Early European settlement

The Lady Nelson paid a pivotal role in early European settlement of Australia.

## Governors

Many early Governors of the colonies and men who feature large in Australia's European settlement travelled in the *Lady Nelson*. Tasmanian Governors Bowen, Collins, Brabyn, Patterson, Gordon, Richie and Geils all sailed in the *Lady Nelson*. The Tasmanian Governor has been a patron of the replica *Lady Nelson* for the last 20 years.

[Governor Lachlan Macquarie](#) was full of praise for the *Lady Nelson* and referred to her as “*his favourite little brig*”. On one voyage, she was lying to (with no sails set) for four days during a storm in the Bass Strait, and Macquarie recalled “*she stands out the gale delightfully and is certainly the best and safest Sea-Boat I ever sailed in*”. Macquarie did a tour of the outlying colonies in the *Lady Nelson*, naming things mostly after himself and his inner circle as he went.

Right: West side of Sydney Cove with Lady Nelson to the left. This is part of a larger painting from 1809 by George Evans, who sailed on Lady Nelson and Evandale is named after him.



Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales

One exception was Mount Nelson, which he named in honour of the *Lady Nelson*. Whilst in Tasmania he proposed that Hobart should have roads 60 feet wide with eight-foot footpaths set in the current grid pattern. Can you imagine Hobart now if not for Macquarie's vision?

## Artists

Many colonial artists travelled in the *Lady Nelson*, including [Joseph Lycett](#), [Captain Wallis](#), [George Evans](#), and [Ferdinand Bauer](#). Their combined works provide incredible insight into early colonial life and of first nations people. Lycett was a convict transported for the crime of forgery. When was freed, he reoffended. He cut his own throat with a razor to avoid gaol, though he survived and was treated in hospital. The thought of being incarcerated was too much, and he was reported to have ripped open his throat wound with his bare hands to inflict his own death.

Captain Wallis led the Appin massacre in 1816, but later, formed a firm friendship with [Burigon](#), an Awabakal man. He wrote of Burigon “*I have more kindly feelings than I do many of my own colour, kindred, nation*”. Burigon was later murdered by [John Kirby](#), a convict. Kirby was executed for this murder.

## Scientists

Numerous colonial scientists travelled in the *Lady Nelson*, including [Robert Brown](#), [George Caley](#), [John Lewin](#), George Brown, who were instrumental in documenting and classifying Australia's unique flora and fauna.



# Exploration

Exploration and discovery across the eastern seaboard by a little brig.

The *Lady Nelson* undertook much survey and exploration work around Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales. There are many places named by those on the *Lady Nelson* around Australia's south-eastern coastline including *Lady Nelson* parks and reserves, and places (including bridges, towns, gold mines, wharves and creeks). Memorials are scattered across Tasmania, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and New South Wales. The *Lady Nelson* even features in a reserve as far north as Gladstone, Queensland.

There are, or have been *Lady Nelson* sporting trophies, racehorses, gold mines, wharves, streets, mountains, towns, reefs, bridges and creeks. There are numerous tourist accommodations and restaurants named after the *Lady Nelson*. She even features in Aboriginal rock art. The location is not publicly known but is north of Sydney. *Lady Nelson* has been commemorated in many artworks, coins, plates, stamps and models.

Noted explorers that were onboard included [Matthew Flinders](#), [John Oxley](#), and [William Lawson](#) (of Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson fame). Lawson's third son was born on the *Lady Nelson* whilst sailing between Norfolk Island and Sydney. He was named [Nelson Lawson](#), and he became a member of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. [Henry Hacking](#) and [Ensign Francis Barrallier](#) (both travelled in the *Lady Nelson*) also had tilts at crossing the Blue Mountains prior to Lawson.



Imagery (top to bottom):

1. Joseph Lycett watercolour of a First Nations hunter. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.
2. Weedy Sea Dragon painted by Ferdinand Bauer. Courtesy of the Natural History Museum London.
3. Charcoal drawing, believed to be of the *Lady Nelson*. Courtesy of Paul S.C. Taçon, Chair of Rock Art, Griffith University, Queensland.



# A ship of firsts

The *Lady Nelson* was a ship of firsts, with tales of triumph and tragedy.

The *Lady Nelson* was the first colonial ship to enter Hobart, Port Phillip and the third ship to enter Bell Bay. Today, these ports handle over 56 million tons of freight annually. Surveyors Meehan, Harris and Evans surveyed parts of Tasmania, and all travelled in the *Lady Nelson*. [William Collins](#) (a naval officer) along with George Evans surveyed and recommended the current location of Hobart as a settlement. Previously, Risdon Cove had been the preferred location. Collins started Hobart's first industry, whaling.



There are tales of many people who sailed in the *Lady Nelson* - some bizarre, some sad and some brutal. Some of her passengers have just a single reference to travelling, others have detailed, rich and amazing stories. Two of the first three European residents of the Moreton Bay area were in the *Lady Nelson*. They survived a [26-day open boat voyage](#) with little fresh water to get there.

Over the course of the *Lady Nelson*'s voyages, many Aboriginal adventurers and explorers sailed in her including [Bungaree](#), [Budgerie Dick](#), [John Salamander](#), [Young Bundle](#), [Nanbarry](#), [Yeranabie](#) and his wife Worogan.

## Henry Hacking

Henry Hacking (the namesake of Port Hacking) was the Quartermaster in HMS *Sirius* in the First Fleet. He would later be a marine pilot on Sydney Harbour and in Hobart, and mate on the *Lady Nelson*. The first fleet landed six cattle that promptly wandered off. In 1795, Hacking found the lost cattle at the Cowpastures (Camden), and by 1804 there was a herd of up to five thousand!

Hacking was sentenced to death twice and pardoned for each offence - shooting his wife and theft. He is also believed to have killed the Aboriginal resistance leader [Pemulwuy](#). [Jorgen Jorgensen](#) was also a mate on the *Lady Nelson*, who led a busy life. He fought both for and against the Royal Navy, was a convict, explorer, policeman, pirate, scientist, author, whaler, and briefly King of Iceland! He was reputed to have killed the first whale in the Derwent River whilst in the *Lady Nelson*.



# A most important ship

A little ship with a big contribution to our history.

Based on the number of people transported and their contribution to early Australia, *Lady Nelson* may be one of the most important ships in Australia's European history. If you have European ancestry from the colonial period, there is a high likelihood that you have a connection with this little ship. Tasmania is incredibly fortunate to have a replica of the *Lady Nelson* which is available for everyone to visit and sail in.



# About us

The Lady Nelson fully crewed by volunteers and is instantly recognisable on the River Derwent.

## What we do

The *Lady Nelson* is operated entirely by volunteers and is self funded, relying upon the generosity of the public to keep her sailing. She has featured on numerous TV shows, broadcasts and commercials, including 'The Amazing Race', 'Who do you think you are?', and has hosted the 'Today Show' and ABC radio broadcasts.

We cater for a variety of different groups and have taken onboard groups of adventurers, youth groups, families on holiday, university courses, veterans, artist's residencies, history trips, workplace teambuilding and school voyages.

The *Lady Nelson* was voted by ABC listeners to be the letter L in the [Hobart A to Z](#). Pictures of the *Lady Nelson* feature in the advertising of several local businesses. There is a constant stream of visitors taking photos with the *Lady Nelson*, who is synonymous with the Hobart waterfront. She has been commemorated in many artworks plus coins, plates, stamps and models.

## What we achieved April 2023 to March 2024



# Get involved

We have a range of ways for you to get involved with the Lady Nelson.

## Volunteering

We are always looking for volunteers who are ready to learn and teach the art of sailing. All you need is enthusiasm, a love of sailing and be able to contribute a few days of your time each month. We will show you the ropes and provide you with all the training you require.



## Make a booking

You can charter the Lady Nelson for a range of events and occasions. We cater for all groups and a range of events, including:

- Multi-day charters.
- Adventure voyages.
- School charters.
- Day sails.
- Work functions.
- Weddings.
- Birthdays.
- Funerals.



## Sponsorship

The Tasmanian Sail Training Association operating the Lady Nelson is a non-profit entirely volunteer organisation with no government funding. With operating costs exceeding \$100,000 per annum, we rely entirely on revenue from our short harbour sails, longer voyages, charters and donations. We accept donations of any amount, including bequests.





# Contact information

Contact us to learn more and to get involved.



[The.Lady.Nelson](https://www.facebook.com/The.Lady.Nelson)



[@theladynelsontallship](https://www.instagram.com/theladynelsontallship)



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LADY NELSON  
TASMANIA



# Stories from the Lady Nelson

## Rachel Wright – a lady with a life of hardship.

Rachel Wright was born around 1790 in Ireland. She went to Glasgow, Scotland in 1808 to find an Uncle and Aunt, presumably because she thought her life would be better there. She could not find her relatives, but ended up in a house that sold spirits, where she met two women who had a small child, around two years of age. The women gave the child to Wright, along with a sixpence for bread, before leaving her along with the child. Rachel went into a field of cut hay and slept the night with the child and decided to bring the child up as her own. She set off to Ayr to get back to Ireland. She got as far as the Prestwick Toll (which now houses a Post Office and Chinese takeaway) where she was stopped by suspicious toll staff and taken to Ayr.

At Ayr it was found the child was the missing Flora Amos, the daughter of a Glasgow Shoemaker Archibald Amos. Wright was taken to Glasgow and tried for stealing a child. She was found guilty but the Glasgow Court referred the case to a Higher Court in Edinburgh, as there was uncertainty over how to sentence Wright. The Higher Court upheld the guilty verdict and Wright was sentenced to *“be hanged by the neck, by the hands of the common executioner, upon a gibbet, until she be dead”*.



The child's parents opposed the death penalty and asked for Royal clemency. They said *“At the period when the Offence was committed, the prisoner was young, destitute, and friendless, in a part of the Empire far removed from her own home – she was ignorant, and inexperienced, - equally unable to direct her own conduct, and to find friends to advise and assist her.”* The clemency was granted, and Wright escaped the gallows but was transported for the term of her natural life.

Wright arrived in the *Friendship* convict ship in September 1811, and in July 1812 she was sent to Port Dalrymple on the *Lady Nelson*. By 1816 she is listed as a hospital nurse and had formed a relationship with a convict, Timothy Quinn. It is assumed that Quinn received his ticket of leave as he was listed as farming his own land near Launceston. The couple had three children: Jane (1816), Frances (1817) and John (1819). Quinn's farming endeavours are unsuccessful, and the family spiral into debt. By 1824, creditors are visiting the farm. In 1824, a creditor comes to the farm with his companions and *“knocks Rachel down”*. Within a few days both Wright and Quinn were incarcerated, and the three children left to fend for themselves. Their period of incarceration is unknown.

In March 1827, Wright is recorded for her first public drunkenness offence: there may have been earlier offences, but they were not recorded. It becomes a pattern of drunkenness and Wright is either fined a few shilling or spends a few hours in the stocks. She was once fined 10 pounds for *“exposing her person”*. In 1828 she received a 28-day term in the House of Correction. Houses of correction were not gaols but were run on strict lines and took those which society didn't know what to do with, including orphans, insane, infirm and those who couldn't work. Wright had three offences for drunkenness, where she lost her liberty, including a term in the Female Factory at Georgetown.



# Stories from the Lady Nelson

## Rachel Wright – a lady with a life of hardship.

Quinn was released in January 1831. Wright is sent into correction for six weeks in February but is still being held come June. Quinn was also a drunk and lost the farm. Timothy was also a drunk and lost the farm. . The children suffered terribly during these turbulent years. At one point their son, John lived in the bush and had not tasted any other food than possum flesh for three weeks. In 1835 their daughter Jane complained to authorities that her father was “beating her and *“taking liberties with her person”*”.

Quinn died in 1839. In 1838, after 33 years in Tasmania and 27 offences Wright was admitted to the asylum at New Norfolk. She was granted a ticket of leave in 1845 but kept in the asylum. In 1846 she was described as *“complaining bitterly of her situation, and talking incoherently about her husband and children, at the same time threatening vengeance and violence to anybody - she has however never been known to commit the smallest act of violence”*.

Her health began to fail and she died at the asylum in August 1848. The authorities had not finished with her however, and in 1853 she had her ticket of leave revoked for not reporting to the police!



The fate of Quinn and Wright’s children, John and Jane are unknown. Frances resided briefly with George Hobbler, who built the first Hobbler’s Bridge across the North Esk River and was the owner of the property *Killafady*. George said of Frances: *“she is friendless, her father being in gaol for debt, and nothing but ruin before her, without a home, and 14 years of age only”* - she returned with him rather sulkily; *“but I am glad she is once more so far saved from the streets; her sister and brother are two as depraved urchins as can be found; her conduct has been quiet and steady, although apparently almost reckless what is her fate”*.

Frances married John Jordan and they had 17 children. She died at 80 years old in 1897 in Launceston. Frances had many grand children; one of her sons had 14 children. There are thousands of people in northern Tasmania, and elsewhere who have Rachel Wright as one of their ancestors.



# Stories from the Lady Nelson

## Thomas Pamphlet – a tale of survival.

Pamphlet was a brickmaker in Manchester. He stole a horse and some woolen cloth and was transported to Australia in the *Guildford*, arriving in 1812. He worked in the Brickfields Hill area (today, the location of the cinemas in George Street, Sydney), and lived in The Rocks. He and others stole windows from a house in Balmain (which at the time was the only house in Balmain). He was sentenced to 100 lashes and incarcerated for six months in the Sydney Gaol in double leg irons. After four months he absconded, only to be recaptured and put in the carpenter's gang, but he escaped again.



Frustrated with his continued escapes, authorities sent him to Newcastle on the *Lady Nelson* in October 1814. Within a few weeks he escaped again was recaptured and received 50 lashes. He received another 50 lashes in October 1815 for neglecting government work. In 1820, he requested and received a conditional pardon and went to live with his wife and three children, though it is not known if they came from England or if they met in Australia. In 1822, he was sentenced to seven years at Port Macquarie Gaol for stealing from a house, however, was let off after being deemed as having an unsound mind.

Pamphlet and three other men two with tickets of leave convicts and a full convict (Thompson, Finnegan and Parsons (who were also on the *Lady Nelson*)) were hired by William Cox to cut cedar trees in the area that is now Wollongong. These trees were found all along much of the east coast and could grow to 60 metres tall. The four departed Sydney in an open boat (29 feet long) to get to the forest and start their new jobs. To sustain them they had casks of flour, salted pork, water (four gallons), and of rum (five gallons) and other supplies.

Within sight of their destination, a violent westerly gale sprung up and blew for five days. Even when the gale abated the sea was so high, they could not make way for another six days. When the gale abated the foursome were out of the sight of land and hopelessly lost. With no compass, they assumed they had been blown down towards Tasmania. Using the sun as their only navigational aid they started to head in a northerly direction.



# Stories from the Lady Nelson

## Thomas Pamphlet – a tale of survival.

They quickly ran out of water. They managed to catch some small amounts of rain in the sails, but they were salt drenched, and the water was undrinkable. Instead, they survived by drinking small amounts of rum. In desperation, Thompson drank sea water and became delirious. Eventually, on day 18, they caught some potable rainwater, bringing much needed relief to their parched throats.

On the 21st day, they sighted land just before nightfall. Thompson who had been bound with rope by his shipmates to prevent him from jumping overboard died that night. By morning they were close to land but could see natives on the beach so decided to keep clear of them. By the morning they were closer to shore but could not land due to the heavy surf. The stench of Thompsons's body on the boat was offensive so he was thrown overboard.

On day 26 they saw a bight in the coast and anchored several hundred metres offshore. Pamphlet the best swimmer proceeded ashore with the aid of an empty cask and a rope. Once onshore he drank his fill from a freshwater stream. In the meantime, the wind sprang up and the anchored boat was wrecked. His two companions made it ashore and drank water until they vomited. They had a pint tankard with them (from the boat) and one of them claims to have drunk this 13 times. Having lost their clothes in the swim, they were now all naked on the beach with no supplies.

The next day they found some flour and a few other things washed up from the boat. They were marooned on a large island, and with help from the local Aboriginal people they survived and journeyed to the mainland. Over the following eight months they lived with local aboriginal people. They were treated kindly and fed by their hosts. However, the three men fought with each other, so they lived with separate Aboriginal groups. One day, the Aboriginal people started shouting at Pamphlet and dragged him to the beach. There was a ship out to sea. It came ashore and Pamphlet signaled them.

The ship was *HMS Mermaid* and onboard was the explorer John Oxley, who was there to survey for the site of a new penal colony. They were in Moreton Bay area, and not south of Sydney as they had thought. Finnegan was rescued a few days later and Parsons after about a year. The island they landed on was Bribie Island and where Thomas was rescued was thought to be near present day Toorbul.

Once he returned to Sydney, Pamphlet stole some flour and was sentenced to seven years transportation to the new convict settlement of Moreton Bay, an absolute irony. He served his time and returned to Sydney and died in Penrith at the age of 50. There is a monument to these three men at Wynnum. There is also a Thomas Pamphlet Bridge which crosses Oxley Creek as it flows into the Brisbane River.



Thank you

