

# What's in a Name?

WITH PHIL BIANCHI

**Mr E has retired and hung up his keyboard, leaving a hole in Western 4W Driver magazine's content. I was asked if I could continue with the column and I agreed, but realised that his are big shoes to fill. My approach will be to tell the story behind the origin of WA place names. Please be patient with me while I have my L plates on.**

## CAMDEN HARBOUR

This ill-fated settlement was established in 1864-65 on the Kimberley coast, some 220km north of Derby as the crow flies.

In 1864, 200 settlers, mostly from the Ballarat/Bendigo area, 4,500 sheep and 36 horses left Victoria in three ships to establish a settlement at Camden Harbour. They were sold a dream of rich soil with the best pastoral country which was thinly wooded with numerous streams and rivers. And it was only 200 miles north of Perth. The promoters, or should I say scoundrels, needed to raise capital of £20,000 from the settlers before they could leave port. They claimed having 4,000,000 acres of suitable

country and offered 200 shares at £100 or £160 each. Each share entitled the holder free passage to Camden Harbour, a year of rations, and a lease for 12 years of 20,000 acres with 20 head of cattle. Sounds good doesn't it?

The settlers arrived on 18th December to searing heat and humidity. When landing they didn't find 'the finest grazing land' but thick mud, rocky shores and the country covered in stones and dust.

Sadly, the settlers, unaware of the nine metre tides, left their food, stores and equipment on the beach, while setting about marking out their land and establishing dwellings. Most of the stores and equipment were ruined by the tides.

*Sheep Island viewed from Camden Harbour settlement site.*





▲ *Mary Pascoe's grave.*



Clearly the artist had never ▲  
been to Camden Harbour.

On nearby Sheep Island there are seven graves including that of Mary Jane Pascoe. She died during childbirth and her baby died soon after.

The Camden settlement was a failure as all the stock had died, they were unable to raise crops and clashes with indigenous tribes were becoming more frequent. The settlers had lost everything and a number, their lives. In October 1865, the government agreed to resettle the unfortunate settlers at Cossack.

In May 2021 I visited this remote site by *Kimberley Explorer*, a charter boat skippered by Greg Prouse, because there is no access to the area via land. I can confirm that they had been ripped off and sold country which was impossible to settle and farm, country with rocky ridges and very little soil. In my opinion they could not have found a worse spot to build a settlement. While visiting Sheep Island, Greg Prouse told me that Mary Pascoe's grave used to have a wrought iron surround, however it was stolen in the 1990s. It beggars belief

▼ *Camden Settlement ruins.*



why someone would come to such a remote spot and desecrate a grave. I found a small plaque on the boab. It told of Police Constable Walter Gee, aged 29 years being speared to death while on duty at the settlement. Also on the boab tree under which Pascoe's grave sits was graffiti 'I was here' style, by an Australian army group completing training exercises in the area. Why people need to do this is beyond me.



*Mermaid tree, Careening Bay.* ▲

## CAREENING BAY

Was named by 28-year-old Captain Phillip Parker King during his third survey of the northwest of Australia in 1820. Before departing Sydney Cove and in preparation for the journey his ship the *Mermaid* was careened, recoppered and caulked and then it was immersed in water for several days to destroy the cockroach and rat infestations. This attempt at 'fumigation' didn't work, the cockroaches and rats soon reappeared.

His Majesty's Cutter the *Mermaid* sailed north on 14th June 1820. While heading up the east coast she ran aground at Bowen, the damage was extensive but repairable. In September 1820, while surveying between Admiralty Gulf and Brunswick Sound on the Kimberley coast she began leaking badly. She beached near Port Nelson. The crew spent ten days repairing her. Leaving the Kimberley, King sailed southward around the coast, across the Great Australian Bight to Sydney Cove, arriving on 9th December. He nearly did not make it; the *Mermaid* was almost wrecked off Botany Bay.

While they were at Careening Bay the ship's carpenter blazed, in large letters, a nearby twin boab 'HMC Mermaid 1820'. This blaze was rediscovered in 1984.

I visited this remote spot in May 2021 by the charter boat *Kimberley Explorer*. The blaze was still clearly visible and a raised walkway, constructed by Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, protects the tree from people getting too close and compacting the soil around it. It's a great site to visit and it isn't far from the beach, but don't swim there as you could be dinner for the snappy handbags or men in grey suits.

Thankfully, Careening Bay is so remote no one has engraved the tree with 'I was here' type graffiti and long may it remain so.

Who was Phillip Parker King? He was an amazing navigator, born on Norfolk Island in 1791 (yes Norfolk Island). He was schooled in England, joined the Royal Navy in 1807 and was a lieutenant by 1814. Between 1817 and 1822 he undertook four major voyages surveying Australia's waters and coastline. He is without doubt an unsung hero in Australia's exploration history.