

Brooks, Richard (1765–1833)

by Vivienne Parsons



Richard Brooks (1765?-1833), mariner, merchant and settler, was born at Topsham, Devon, England, the son of an impoverished clergyman. He had little formal education, entered the East India Co.'s service at an early age, and rose to command his own ship. During the first French revolutionary war he traded to Oporto, the Mediterranean and the Baltic, carrying a letter of marque, but later returned to the East India service. He began his association with New South Wales in 1802 when he captained the convict transport *Atlas*. After this voyage he earned the censure of Governor Philip Gidley King for the high death rate among the convicts in his charge, which was largely due to his negligence and to the overcrowding on board caused by his large personal cargo. The surgeon, Thomas Jamison, brought a civil action for assault against **Brooks**, and the transport commissioners threatened him with

prosecution, but he escaped punishment. In 1806 he was captain of another transport, the *Alexander*; thereafter he made a number of trading trips to the colony, in the *Rose* in 1808, the *Simon Cock* in 1810, and the *Argo* in 1811, and built up large interests in the colony.

As a partner of Robert Campbell, who was part-owner of the *Rose*, he was opposed to the rebel government after the deposition of Governor William Bligh and refused to give a passage to Captain Symons R.N., the bearer of Joseph Foveaux's dispatches to England. Foveaux then ordered the *Rose* to be seized for trading in violation of the East India Co.'s monopoly, but this was a subterfuge, and he allowed her to proceed when **Brooks** agreed to take Symons on board. He entered into a bond for £4000 to account for any irregularity in their trading, but as **Brooks** was easily able to show that he had been duly licensed by the company, it is perhaps not surprising that he was heard using 'some highly disrespectful expressions towards the present government of the colony'. **Brooks** also carried letters on behalf of Bligh and, after the *Rose* sailed, he had Symons confined as a deserter, and the rebel supporter, John Blaxland, who was also on board, arrested at the Cape of Good Hope.

In February 1813 **Brooks** was on his way to England in the *Isabella* when she was wrecked near the Falkland Islands, and he sailed to Buenos Aires in a long-boat for help. In July he asked for permission to go to New South Wales as a free settler; he said he had already established a large herd of cattle there, and could increase it if he were granted land. Allowed to go, he arrived in March 1814 with his wife Christiana, née Passmore, daughter of another East India captain, and children in the *Spring*. He exchanged his brig for a house at the corner of Pitt and Hunter Streets,

and set up business with her cargo. Lachlan Macquarie granted him land at Cockle Bay (Darling Harbour) in compensation for a grant promised at Farm Cove which had been incorporated in the government Domain, and he began a profitable business supplying meat and provisions to ships, to the public and to the government store. He was also an agent for Lloyds of London and for shipping which called at Port Jackson.

He suffered during the depression which followed, but this was only a temporary setback. Although in 1816 Governor Macquarie upheld Commissary David Allan in his charge that **Brooks** was among the most prominent of those settlers who withheld stock during the drought and thus profited by the rise in prices, in January 1817 he granted him 300 acres (121 ha) in the Illawarra district, and in August appointed him a justice of the peace. Meanwhile he had strongly supported the establishment of the Bank of New South Wales, and in January 1819 he was on the committee of landowners and merchants who petitioned the British government for the repeal of commercial restrictions. In 1823 he moved from Sydney to Denham Court, a property near Liverpool which he had acquired from **Richard** Atkins more than ten years before in settlement of debts.



For the rest of his life he lived there, a prominent settler, a member of the New South Wales Agricultural Society, a vice-president of the Benevolent Society, member of the committee of the Bible Society, and a strong supporter of religious charities of all denominations. He owned properties in Sydney at Cockle Bay and Surry Hills and had extensive holdings in the Illawarra, Williams River and Lake George districts. He died on 16 October 1833, after being gored by a bull; with his wife, who died on 12 April 1835, he was buried in a vault at Denham Court and the church of St Mary the Virgin was built to enclose their remains.

Of their seven children, his sons **Richard** and Henry became prominent settlers in the Monaro; his daughter Christiana married Thomas Valentine Blomfield; another daughter, Honoria, married William Edward Riley of Raby.



Years of Christians Gathering...

The church building, St Mary the Virgin Denham Court, was originally built in 1838 as a private chapel in memory of Richard and Christiana Brooks of "Denham Court". Richard Brooks died in 1833 having been gored by a bull. Christiana died shortly after in 1835. The church building was erected over their graves

The building was modelled on and named after the church building in the English village of Denham. It was designed by the prominent architect John Verge and built in the "Early Regency Gothic Style". It was completed by the Brook's daughter, Christiana Bloomfield. It was consecrated on August 25, 1838 by Bishop Broughton and was "staffed" by clergy from St Luke's Liverpool.

The Bell Tower has a bell from the convict ship the "Earl St. Vincent".

The original rectory was built in 1846 and the Parish of Denham Court was established.

The building has been restored a number of times since being built most recently in the early 1990's. Denham Court is currently a Provisional Parish and the home of a growing congregation of God's people.

We hope that you join us in Denham Court's future.

If you would like more information a copy of "The Story of St Mary the Virgin Anglican Church" may be purchased from the church office for \$5.