

Camdens at sea.¹

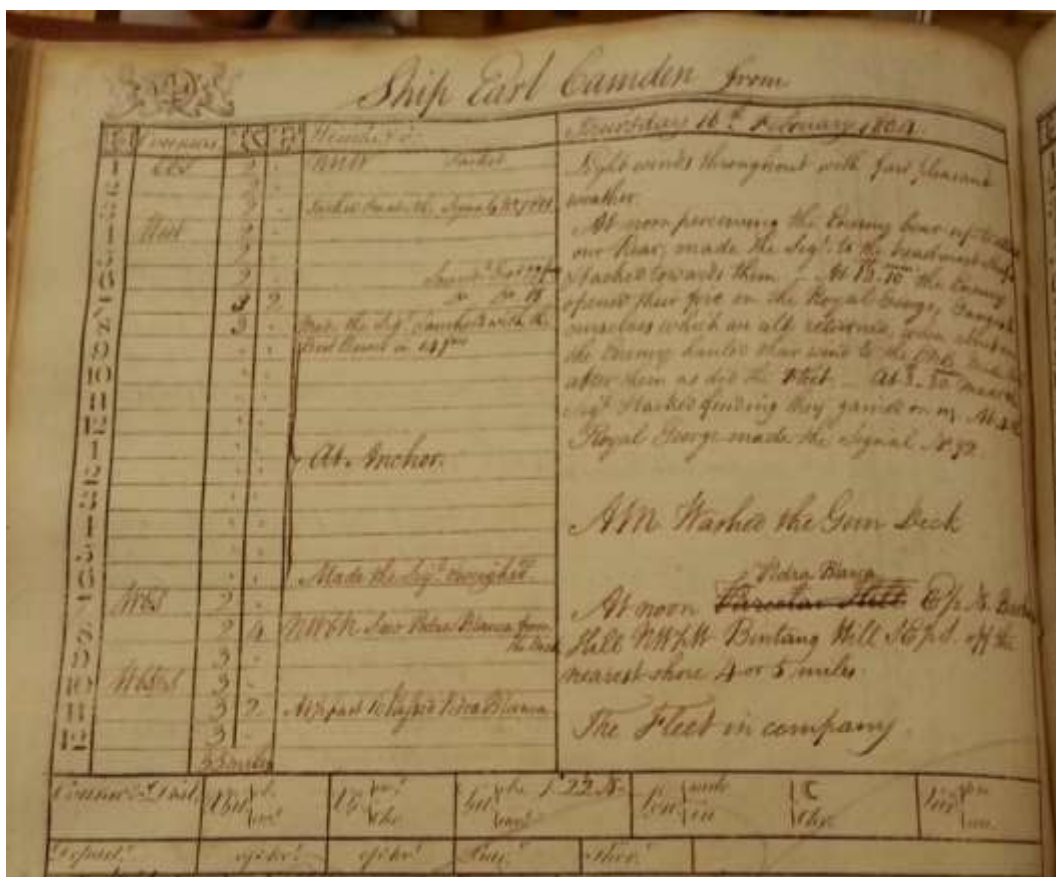
In 1766 the East Indiaman *Lord Camden* made its first voyage. The captain, Nathaniel Smith, was brother-in-law to George Dance – later architect and planner for Lord Camden, and resident of Gower Street. Nathaniel Dance, George Dance's nephew, became captain of a second *Lord Camden*, sailing 1783-1795 for five voyages, and then of the *Earl Camden*, built in Bombay in 1801.



Nathaniel Dance by his uncle, George Dance

During the French wars, the *Earl Camden* led a convoy of heavily-laden Indiamen and other merchant ships back from China. On 15 February 1804 they were tailed by a French war squadron. Dance, as Commodore for the whole merchant flotilla, ran up blue Royal Ensign in four of the Indiamen, including the *Earl Camden*, and turned in attack formation. The French force broke off after half an hour and were, for good measure, then pursued by the British Indiamen for two hours. Saving goods worth, at present value, more than half a billion pounds, Dance returned as the hero of the City. He was knighted, awarded a silver sword, given £5000 with pension – and retired to Enfield Town.

¹ Sources include: British Library East India Office; Lloyds Register; Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyage Database; theshipslist.com; The National Archives; Royal Museums Greenwich



Earl Camden log 16 February 1804

The *Earl Camden* made two further voyages, up to 1809. A successor Indiaman, the *Marquis of Camden*, recorded voyages from England from 1812, but finally wrecked in the Sea of Mindoro, the Philippines, bound from Calcutta to Australia in 1839.

The human Lord Camden, as a politician, had given support to independence in America, where he was celebrated. By contrast, the *Camden*, built in Liverpool in 1760 and registered in London 1776, brought eighty enslaved people from Africa to dig a canal; and a further seventy men in a second journey the following year. The price to the company was from £35 to £100 per person. There were also two voyages by *Camden*, in 1781 and 1783, from Gold Coast to Jamaica, together bringing 1232 enslaved people².

Samuel Barrington offered the Admiralty in 1777 a prize (ie pirated) ship he had gained and called *Lord Camden*, 'one of the completest Ships in every respect that can possibly be built; is of 350 Tons; and will make an excellent Sloop of War, to carry 16 Guns'. No further information given.³

² <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search>

³ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/navy-record-soc/vol77/pt1/pp447-454>

A new *Camden*, built on the Thames in 1799, transported convicts. But Joseph Steret, as the ship's doctor wrote in his journal in 1832:⁴ "It is worth noting that only two men out of two hundred expressed any reluctance to go ... All the rest were happy at the prospect of quitting the country and four or five whom I was obliged to reject begged vehemently to be permitted to accompany us." After four months they reached Sydney. Only two people had died, although "from the Cape of Good Hope, the symptoms of sea scurvy began to manifest themselves ... and some convicts were sent to the hospital on arrival".

Emigration to Australia.—The ship CAMDEN will leave Gravesend the 10th, and Portsmouth on the 18th February, for SYDNEY Direct, and has most superior accommodations both in the poop and steerage. Married agricultural labourers ...

Morning Advertiser, Saturday 30 January 1836

A final *Camden*, an English Post Office 'packet' of 192 tons, built at Falmouth in 1823, was said to be named because of Lord Camden's contribution to improving postal services 'with respect to mail coaches etc'.⁵ It made several trans-Atlantic voyages. In 1838 it was bought by Rev. John Williams for the London Missionary Society. In the South Seas, some islanders were considered cannibals. The web page *Christianity.com* says: "John Williams encountered hostility when he landed on Erromanga, New Hebrides (Vanuatu) on 20 November 1839. He tried to dash back to his ship, but he wasn't quick enough. Swift-footed natives captured him. The missionary who had hoped to feast them with the Gospel became their feast instead." The *Camden* returned to England and was for sale at London in 1844. The LMS built a new larger boat, 296 tons, for their Australia and south seas work – the *John Williams*.

⁴ Journal of Joseph Steret on the voyage of the *Camden* in 1833. Royal Navy Medical Journals, http://www.jenwilletts.com/convict_ship_camden_1833.htm

⁵ <http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/18-1900/C/00789.html>