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2303 The Legend of William 'Lumpy' Dean – A Colonial Giant

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The Legend of William ‘Lumpy’ Dean: A Colonial Giant

Giants loom large throughout mythologies of the ancient world and modern literature. From Goliath to Hagrid giants have been depicted with a human-like appearance who are prodigious in size and strength or bear an otherwise notable appearance. Some giants evoke terror, as a metaphoric device to remind humans of their physical frailty and mortality. However, the giant can also be someone revered by their peers or from an historical perspective: a person who uses their talents or wealth to create a lasting and beneficial legacy. My four-times great grandfather William Dean was a physical and metaphorical giant of early colonial New South Wales: a man with a suburb, a school, and a custom-made chair named for him.

William Dean was born in Dorking, England in 1778¹ only eight years after Cook claimed the east of the Australian continent for the British Crown, naming it New South Wales. By William’s tenth birthday the colony had become a fledgling work camp for the swelling population of British felons. These facts, that William would scarcely have known at the time, would soon have a profound impact on his young life.

By age sixteen William stood six feet tall², a giant among an undernourished population of Englishmen on average six inches shorter. Employed as a house servant in London, William, found twenty pounds, more than several years’ wages, in his employer’s coat and couldn’t resist the temptation to secrete it into his own pocket. William’s theft was soon discovered, and he stood trial at The Old Bailey in July 1795³, was sentenced to death by hanging, then incarcerated in death row at Newgate Prison⁴. A year later, and on a point of law rather than compassion, William’s sentence was commuted to transportation for the term of his natural life⁵. For the next two years William managed to survive through the overcrowded and disease-plagued life aboard a notorious London floating prison hulk, an ordeal that took the lives of less fortunate men. Finally, William’s life changed forever, when in October 1798 he, along with 297 other men, was forced onto the convict ship *Hillsborough* bound for Sydney Cove⁶.

When the *Hillsborough*, later given the moniker ‘the death ship’⁷, arrived in Sydney in July 1799, Governor Hunter described the convicts as “a cargo of the most miserable and wretched convicts I have ever beheld”⁸. Ninety-nine had died of typhoid en route or within days of arrival. Hunter was appalled that “those who still survive are in the most sickly and wretched state, put on board the ship in England with the cloaths (sic) only in which they

¹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 10 April 2023), July 1795, trial of WILLIAM DEAN (t17950701-27)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ London, England, Newgate Calendar of Prisoners, 1785-1853, Piece 02:1794-Dec-1795 Sept, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

⁵ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 10 April 2023), July 1795, trial of WILLIAM DEAN (t17950701-27)

⁶ New South Wales, Australia, Convicts Ship Muster Rolls and Related Records, 1790-1849, 1799 Hillsborough, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

⁷ Clune, Frank (1965). Bound for Botany Bay: A Narrative of a Voyage in 1798 Aboard the Death Ship, Hillsborough. Angus and Robertson

⁸ Ibid.

stood, consequently arrived here naked”⁹. Disease accounted for most of *Hillsborough’s* death rate of one-in-three, however, it was also partly due to harsh treatment of the convicts. They were kept double-ironed, and when on deck were chained together, so that they couldn’t walk, but only stand or lie. They were inadequately fed and watered and the weather so stormy that they, and their bedding, were constantly damp¹⁰. Almost every convict required hospital treatment after landing, but again, William Dean, now aged twenty was a survivor.

Within days William was aboard another boat sailing up the Parramatta River to serve his sentence labouring in Sydney’s breadbasket, possibly under the supervision of the infamous Reverend Samuel Marsden, the so-called ‘flogging parson’. William kept his head down and remained out of trouble, which was rewarded with a Ticket of Leave by 1806¹¹ and a Conditional Pardon in May 1811, twelve years after arrival¹².

On Christmas Day 1806 William married Elizabeth Hollingsworth at St John’s Church, Parramatta¹³. Elizabeth was a convict who had been assigned to him the year before¹⁴ and when they married, they had one child¹⁵ and were expecting their second¹⁶. The family grew to include another six children over the following seventeen years¹⁷ and all the while William too grew in personality, girth and community standing. This was the beginning of his gigantic transformation.

In 1814 and 1817 William received land grants totalling 150 acres¹⁸ along the Western Road, 11 miles from Parramatta, from Governor Macquarie on the recommendation of Reverend Marsden. There William grew wheat and raised cattle to supply the government stores¹⁹. With the assistance of convict labour²⁰, William built a large family home named Hollingsworth House in honour of Elizabeth. He was granted a further fifty acres on the condition that he “maintain and keep a house of entertainment for travellers, otherwise the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convicts Musters, 1806-1849, NSW General Muster 1806, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

¹² New South Wales, Australia, Convicts Registers of Conditional and Absolute Pardons, 1788-1870, Conditional 1810-1814 (Reel 601), accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

¹³ Marriage Certificate 345/1806 William Dean and Elizabeth Hollingsworth, District of Parramatta St John’s, NSW Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages

¹⁴ New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convicts Musters, 1806-1849, NSW General Muster 1806, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

¹⁵ Birth Certificate 1530/1805 William Dean, District of Parramatta St John’s, NSW Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages

¹⁶ Birth Certificate 2239/1807 John Dean, District of Parramatta St John’s, NSW Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages

¹⁷ Birth Certificates 2238/1810 Sarah Dean; 811/1812 Thomas Dean; 890/1813 Mary Dean; 2/1816 Elizabeth Dean; 7793/1822 Ann Dean; 7794/1823 Martha Dean, District of Parramatta St John’s, NSW Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages

¹⁸ New South Wales, Australia, Register of Land Grants and Leases, 1792-1867, Vol 2 1810-1821, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

¹⁹ New South Wales, Census and Population Books 1811-1825, NSW Land and Stock, 1818, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

²⁰ New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convicts Musters, 1806-1849, NSW General Muster 1823, accessed on 10/4/2023, <https://ancestry.com.au>

grant reverted to the Crown²¹." As areas to the west were beginning to open to settlers and it was a seven-hour ride from Sydney there was a need for a resting place. William opened *The Bush Inn*²² on the southern side of Western Road which quickly became a popular stopping point and local landmark as well as an extremely profitable venture for William.

By the 1830's a small village, eventually known as Eastern Creek²³, had grown around *The Bush Inn*. William had grown too, into a gigantic man of twenty stone (130 kg)²⁴, or even more, known throughout the colony as '*Lumpy Dean*', a "host of infinite jest and pleasing conversation who could dance a jig as well as any man half his age or size"²⁵. William had an oversized oak chair custom-made (figure 1) to accommodate his immense girth and cheekily renamed his establishment *The Corporation Inn*²⁶ in celebration of his corpulent body.



Figure 1: *Lumpy Dean's giant red cedar chair*²⁷

By the time of his death in 1847²⁸, William Dean was a very wealthy man known for his generosity of spirit and philanthropic support for educating the poor²⁹. Hundreds attended his funeral and burial at St John's Church, Parramatta³⁰ and he, and his Inn, were fondly

²¹ The Pike Family of Eastern Creek (1934, September 20). *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate (Parramatta, NSW: 1888 - 1950)*, p. 16. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article104568521>

²² Classified Advertising (1819, February 19). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser (NSW: 1803 - 1842)*, p. 3. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2179285>

²³ ECCLESIASTICAL JURISDICTION. (1848, February 4). *New South Wales Government Gazette (Sydney, NSW: 1832 - 1900)*, p. 182. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article230129445>

²⁴ THE MARKETS. (1836, May 21). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser (NSW: 1803 - 1842)*, p. 3. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2204439>

²⁵ HISTORIC HIGHWAY. (1913, September 24). *The Sun (Sydney, NSW: 1910 - 1954)*, p. 10 (FINAL EXTRA). Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article229690600>

²⁶ Ancient Landmarks (1909, September 25). *Nepean Times (Penrith, NSW: 1882 - 1962)*, p. 3. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article101333710>

²⁷ William 'Lumpy' Dean's chair. Blacktown Memories, accessed 10/04/2023,

<https://blacktownmemories.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/6537>, [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

²⁸ Death Certificate 622/1847 William Dean, District of Parramatta St John's, NSW Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages

²⁹ Allen, Margaret Learmonth. *William Dean: A Colourful, Colonial Character* / Compiled by Margaret Allen. M. Allen, 1999

³⁰ 1847 'PARRAMATTA.', *The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842 - 1954)*, 11 November, p. 3. , viewed 10 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12897359>

remembered for decades thereafter³¹. Over a century later, the New South Wales government honoured this colonial 'larger-than-life' giant whose life epitomises the rags-to-riches and sinner-to-saint archetypes, by naming the western Sydney suburb Dean Park³² and the William Dean Public School³³ in his memory.

³¹ HISTORIC HIGHWAY. (1913, September 24). *The Sun (Sydney, NSW: 1910 - 1954)*, p. 10 (FINAL EXTRA). Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article229690600>

³² Blacktown City Council, List of Suburbs, accessed 10/04/2023, <https://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/About-Council/Our-city/Our-suburbs>

³³ William Dean Public School, Our School, accessed 10/04/2023, <https://williamdeap.schools.nsw.gov.au/about-our-school/school-history.htm>