
William WINDLEY - his life in Australia

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William's convict indenture described him as being a labourer from Essex; aged 20; with grey eyes; dark brown hair; a dark, ruddy complexion; who was 5 feet 5 inches tall.

The 'General Stewart' sailed from Portsmouth on 19 July 1818 and arrived in Sydney Cove on 31 December 1818. The convicts on board were so abused, harshly treated and underfed on the voyage that the Surgeon Superintendent laid a complaint against Master Grainger when the ship arrived in the colony. After the convicts were disembarked on 13 January 1819, William was amongst those assigned to a road gang destined for Windsor. He travelled by water to Parramatta where the road party was to commence work.

Three years later William was one of 110 convicts employed at the Government Farm at Longbottom, which was situated on Parramatta Road in the Parish of Concord. The main occupations of the convicts at Longbottom were reported to be burning charcoal; cutting logs and shingles; and looking after the crops and garden. Between 1 December 1821 and 1 February 1822, the sawyers at Longbottom cut 22,028 feet of timber for the Government. However, when a board of Works inquired into the appropriation of government timber, only 20,222 feet of that produce could be accounted for. The Board of Works attributed the deficiency of 1,806 feet to the "indolence or dishonesty of the convict sawyers". It was concluded that either the sawyers had not sawn as much timber as they had claimed or a great proportion of the timber had been smuggled out of Longbottom and sold for private use. Immediately after the investigation, the Superintendent of Longbottom was replaced. One week later, on 3 April 1822, William Windley was transferred from Longbottom Farm and assigned to the private service of William Underwood who owned the 'Halfway House' inn and a farm on Parramatta Road near Longbottom.

William absconded from Mr. Underwood's service during 1822. He was recaptured and was subsequently convicted of being a runaway on 5 February 1824 by D'Arcy Wentworth, the Superintendent of Police in N.S.W. He was sentenced to 50 lashes and transported to Port Macquarie to serve the remainder of his sentence. After receiving 50 lashes, a man's back was described as looking like "a mess of bullock's liver" or "jelly". William would have carried the scars of his flogging for the remainder of his life. Two weeks later, on 20 February 1824, William was transported to Port Macquarie on board the Colonial Brig 'Lady Nelson' with 44 other prisoners.

When William arrived at Port Macquarie he was reunited with his younger brother John who came to the colony on 4 April 1820 on board the 'Coromandel II'. John had been sentenced to seven years transportation after being convicted of larceny at the Essex Assizes on 24 July 1819. He was transported to Port Macquarie on 18 January 1823 following a series of colonial convictions for absconding. Imagine William and John's joy at seeing each other again. William finally heard the news that his mother had remarried to James Day on 29 September 1818.

The two brothers worked on the road gang at Port Macquarie but, being inveterate runaways, they escaped from that settlement during the course of 1824. On 24 October 1824, the Commandant of Port Macquarie reported that "weekly, numbers of convicts forsake the comparative comforts of their situation here, for the miseries, dangers, and starvation of the 'Bush', with the faint and ill founded hope of attaining what they term their Liberty". One danger the runaways faced was the possibility of being killed by the fierce local aborigines who were led by their chiefs Natarra and Monunggae. According to William Windley, that was his brother's fate, between Port Macquarie and Port Stephens, in 1824. However, William did not disclose John's death to the authorities when he gave himself up to the soldiers at Port Macquarie. Perhaps he had already formulated a plan to assume his brother's identity if the opportunity arose.

On 10 December 1824, William was one of 49 runaways from Port Macquarie who were tried before the Bench of Magistrates at Bathurst. They were sentenced to be transported to the grim Macquarie Harbour penal settlement on the isolated west coast of Van Dieman's Land. William and the other convicts were escorted to Sydney Goal by constables to await transportation to Tasmania.

Meanwhile, in July 1824, Lord Bathurst had ordered Governor Brisbane to reoccupy Norfolk Island as "a great Hulk or Penitentiary" where "the worst description of convicts in New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land must progressively be sent". This decision resulted in William Windley being sent to Norfolk Island instead of Macquarie Harbour.

Prior to departing for Norfolk Island, William embarked on the hazardous scam of assuming his brother's identity. Apparently William and John were very alike in appearance. James Devlin, who knew both brothers, stated that they were so alike that "one description would have suited both". The advantage of assuming John's identity was obvious. William had been sentenced to life imprisonment. His future looked bleak - a recurring cycle of 'taking to the bush', being recaptured and receiving harsher and harsher punishments. However his brother John had only been given a seven-year sentence, which was due to expire in 1826. As John, William could be free in less than two years. When William arrived at Norfolk Island on 6 June 1825, he was known as John Windley. He spent the next twenty two months on the Island using this alias.

William was one of 57 convict mechanics sent from N.S.W. to rebuild Kingston Town at Norfolk Island. The abandoned settlement was in a state of ruin with only a few chimneys of rude construction and some foundations remaining. The convicts' first job was to construct a garrison of thatched huts for their officers and themselves. Six months later additional convicts arrived and the work force began clearing ground at Longridge for cultivation. The hours of work were from 7 o'clock in the morning until 4 or half past in the afternoon. Their task was to break up 6 rods of new ground to a depth of 18 inches. No breakfast or dinner was allowed. The rations of 1 lb. flour and 1 lb. salt beef or 10 oz. salt pork were served every afternoon. Although eighty gallon boilers were set up to cook the meat, the majority of the convicts did not use them because they could not recognise their own victuals after they had been boiled. Instead the meat was frequently eaten raw after it had been washed in the freshwater stream which ran through the camp and then softened by pounding it with a round piece of wood. The flour was mixed up and cooked in the ashes of the boilers. This produced one meal and completed the cooking for the day.

The convicts' dissatisfaction with these conditions resulted in an unsuccessful mutiny by 55 convicts in September 1826. Unfortunately, their conditions worsened when supply ships were unavailable to replenish the Island's stores for a ten month period. On 25 March 1827 the government brig 'Macquarie' arrived bringing a relief of troops. It returned to Sydney on 3 April with twelve prisoners, including 'John Windley', whose period of transportation to Norfolk Island had expired.

Two days later William was discharged from Hyde Park Barracks and the following day he obtained a Certificate of Freedom in the name of John Windley from the Colonial Secretary's Office. After nine years of servitude William was free but, for heartstopping minutes, it must have seemed that his patient planning had failed. According to their convict indents, William was 5 feet 5 inches tall whereas his brother John was only five foot one inch. When William's description was taken at Hyde Park Barracks and compared with John's indents, the discrepancy in their heights was discovered. William had his height measured three times before he was finally discharged a free man.

By November 1828 William was employed as one of three sawyers clearing Isaac Williams' 225 acre property at Kissing Point (now Ryde). He had already met Martha Nichols, who was aged 19, and was planning to marry her. Martha and William chose to be married at Christ Church, Newcastle on 6 January 1829. The wedding was a family occasion with Martha's mother and at least four of her sisters present. Neither the bride nor the groom could sign their names so they made their 'x' mark on the register instead. The marriage was witnessed by Martha's sister Amelia and her brother-in-law Charles Hughes.

Following the wedding, Martha and William returned to Sydney where William was obliged to fulfil his contract to Isaac Williams. Their first child, William jnr, was born in Sydney on 22 May 1829. Three years later William jnr was baptised at St. Helier's. His father's name was given as John Windley who was assigned to Lt. Colonel Henry Dumaresq. It is not clear whether the term 'assigned' in this instance meant that William had committed another colonial offence and was a convict again or whether he was a free man working for Lt. Colonel Henry Dumaresq under a contract.

St. Helier's was a 13,000 acre property near Muswellbrook and was considered to be one of the best regulated estates in the Colony during the 1830's. There was a neat village of whitewashed cottages on the property. Each cottage had a front verandah and well-kept garden. Prizes were awarded to those who kept their cottages in best order. William worked as a sawyer in this district for the next few years.

Sawyers like William worked in pairs. They employed a labourer or two who felled the trees, cross cut them into logs and built the scaffold pit ready for the sawyers to break down the logs into planks for shipping to Sydney. William and Martha would have shifted their camp regularly whenever local timber became exhausted or a particular type of timber was required by a settler, cabinetmaker or merchant. Few women went to live in the bush before the late 1830's. Martha was one of the exceptions. Her son John and daughter Ann were born in the Patricks Plains district but did not survive infancy.

By 1836 the Windley family had returned to Sydney and were living in Sussex Street where Martha gave birth to her son Thomas on 22 September 1836. Although William had succeeded in maintaining his false identity in the obscurity of the bush, it was inevitable that his true identity would be recognised in Sydney. This occurred circa 1837 when a former associate, James Devlin, who had worked on a road gang with the Windley brothers, saw William Windley being led from the Sydney Police Office to Hyde Park Barracks in handcuffs. Later that day, Devlin recognised William in Market Street and called out to him by name. William confessed to Devlin that he went by the name of John Windley and showed Devlin his Certificate of Freedom.

William's brush with Devlin and the law may have dampened his enthusiasm for living in Sydney. In 1838 William, Martha and their two sons moved to Jamberoo where Martha's oldest brother John had a leasehold. William worked as a sawyer and by this time William jnr, who was aged nine, would have been able to fell a medium sized tree and work as a labourer for his father.

On 7 June 1839, a son Joseph was born at Jamberoo. Just over a year later the Windley household was thrown into chaos when William was summoned to Sydney to appear before the Executive Council, headed by Governor Gipps. He was required to give evidence regarding illegally obtaining a Certificate of Freedom from Thomas Ryan, Chief Clerk in the Office of the Principal Superintendent of Convicts, by bribery. On 21 December 1840, William's deception was finally

exposed to the authorities and he lost his free status again.

The Revd. W.D. Meares wrote a recommendation to Governor Gipps on William Windley's behalf. It resulted in William being permitted to return to live with his family in the Illawarra District as a Ticket of Leave man. Having a Ticket of Leave meant that William could employ himself for his own benefit and acquire property, provided he notified the clerk of the local Bench of Magistrates within seven days of any change of address; he did not travel any more than ten miles from his residence without a pass; and he attended Worship weekly.

In March 1841, William had returned to his family at Hell Hole Forest, Jamberoo, where he was in charge of clearing the timber from Mr. A.B. Spark's property. The Windleys were living in a typical settler's slab hut which William would have built in a clearing in the forest. The hut would have been dominated by a large fireplace, made from bush stones at the base for safety, with a flat slab of rock in the middle of the fireplace for baking. According to William Windley's census return, there were six people living in William and Martha's home in 1841. Apart from themselves and their children, there was a free woman, aged over 60 years, who had neither been born in the Colony nor arrived free. This general description could be applied to Martha's mother Ann Nichols. Perhaps Ann came to stay with Martha whilst William was being detained in Sydney for the Executive Council Inquiry.

Within twelve months of obtaining his ticket of leave, William appeared before the magistrates for aiding "Big Jem the Welshman" Morgan pass a false cheque for ?25 purported to be drawn by a Mr. Wesdom of Woodstock, Ulladulla. The Sydney Morning Herald of 4 January 1842 reported that Abraham Abrahams gave evidence against William Windley. It appears that William's role in the crime was simply that he was in company with Morgan on a Sunday morning having a drink at Michael Hyam's public house at Jamberoo. Apparently Morgan owed William some money and paid him by purchasing clothes to the value of ?7/10/- from Mr. Hyam. Hyam wouldn't accept a cheque but took a neighbour's order which he knew was 'good'. Since William was indebted to Hyam for rations he brought back ?3/10/- worth of the same clothes and Hyam allowed William the full price for them. Although William was remanded he was permitted to return to his family. This was most fortunate for Martha as she gave birth to their son Charles the following week on 11 January 1842.

The early settlers in the bush had to invent their own entertainment. For the children there were outdoor activities like fishing, swimming in the creeks or hunting wild ducks and brush turkey as well as attending Sunday School. For the family there were visits to the neighbours to yarn over a cup of tea, picnics, evenings spent round the fire singing and playing musical instruments like the jew's harp and concertina plus the socialising that went hand-in-hand with attending church on Sunday. The bushmen enjoyed gambling and drinking and these activities were most agreeable with the sawyers when they were combined with the popular sport of horse-racing.

In 1844 Michael Hyam, who owned the 'Harp Inn' at Jamberoo, conducted a race meeting, on the flat near his inn, which was immortalised in the poem "The Song of the Jamberoo Races". In verse seven the poet refers to the "members from Hell" (Hell Hole Forest) - Jack Hunter, Billy Winley, Dick Lett and Charles Fell. Richard Lett and Charles Fell were a pair of sawyers who had been employed on A.B. Spark's 'New Country Brush' property at Jamberoo since 1841. Jack Hunter may well have been William Windley's partner at Hell Hole Forest. Verse ten of the poem also mentions William Windley and describes the two horses participating in the race:

"There was sporting old 'Jerry', the horse you all know;
That once drew the black cart at famous Channel Row;
Against Billy Wright's 'Pedro' a hardy old dog;
That drew a turf-cart in Allan's Great Bog;
Old Jerry put foot to amaze us
Says Billy Windley, 'He's running to blazes'
'He is' says Ned Ryan 'by Jazes',
At the races of famed Jamberoo."

The colony suffered an economic depression during the 1840's and William's employer A.B. Spark was one of the casualties. By November 1844, when Martha gave birth to their daughter Frances, William was employed as a sawyer on Michael Hyam's estate 'Sarah Valley'. Shortly afterwards Hyam sold his 'Sarah Valley' property to Robert Owen who divided it into smaller acreages for tenant farmers to clear and cultivate.

By the late 1840's all the accessible cedar had been cut out of the Illawarra region. Sawyers like William Windley had the option of going further south or to the far north to follow their trade or, alternatively, they could become leasehold farmers. William chose the latter. When Martha gave birth to their daughter Elizabeth on 4 April 1847, William was already a tenant farmer at 'Otter Farm' Stoney Creek, Jamberoo. Both Martha and William had practical experience at farmwork in their youth. After clearing their land they would have planted potatoes, to break up the ground, followed by maize and wheat. In addition they would have grazed a few dairy cattle and kept poultry for a fresh supply of milk, butter and eggs.

On 1 October 1848 William was granted a Conditional Pardon which meant that he was legally a free man at last, almost

31 years after he committed the crimes which resulted in his exile to N.S.W.

In April 1849 an unnamed child of William and Martha was baptised at Jamberoo. There is a possibility that his registration refers to the birth of their last surviving child George. Three months later, Martha's mother Ann Nichols died at Phillip Street, Sydney where her eldest daughter Ann Kellick resided.

In June 1850 the Windley family celebrated the marriage of William jnr to English born immigrant Sarah Ann Knight. Martha would have been only 41 years old when her first grandchild, also named William Windley, was born the following year at Stoney Creek. It is not known whether Martha lived to see and hold her first grandson. Martha's date of death and the circumstances in which she died remain a mystery. No official registration of that event exists today. However, Martha's husband William Windley remarried in June 1855. This places Martha's death between mid 1850 and mid 1855. When Martha married William Windley she gave up the comparative comfort of her family home in Sydney for the hardship of being a sawyer's wife. She lived in isolated places, in the midst of forests, amongst sawyers who had a reputation for being the "roughest of rough" men - "hard livers, hard workers, hard drinkers and hard swearers". Only six of Martha's children reached adulthood. Sadly the younger ones would have had no recollection of their mother unless their father or older brothers chose to keep her memory alive.

William was 57 years old when he married Charlotte Arnold, a widow aged 36 years who had recently arrived in N.S.W. from Essex, at Stoney Creek on 22 June 1855. Their marriage was witnessed by Sarah Ann Knight's older brother and sister Joseph and Kate Knight. William and Charlotte's first son Walter was born on 17 October 1857 at Jamberoo where William was employed as a leasehold farmer on the Curramore Estate.

In May 1858 William and Martha's son Thomas married Irish born immigrant Mary Jane McGillick at Christchurch Kiama. Between 1856 and 1875, approximately half the brides and grooms marrying at the Kiama Church of England, were born in Ireland.

William and Charlotte's son Abraham was born at Kiama, on 16 February 1860, where William was employed as a carter.

In 1861 the N.S.W. Government passed the Free Selection Act which made it possible for settlers to choose land for a small initial deposit and then pay off the remainder of the purchase price in small annual instalments. This opportunity may have prompted William to move his family to Ulladulla where his son John was born on 4 May 1862. Ulladulla was the southern limit of the cedar tree. When William and his son Charles arrived in the district they resumed their trade as sawyers and may have worked together as a pair until Charles' untimely death in 1870.

William and Martha's daughters Frances and Elizabeth married at Ulladulla in 1865 and 1871 respectively and their last child George married at Milton in 1873. Frances' marriage was the first wedding in the Windley family where both the bride and groom were Australian born.

By the early 1880's William had returned to Kiama to live. He died on 29 January 1885, aged 86, from a disease of the liver. His numerous friends were invited to attend his funeral the next day at the Old Wesleyan Burial Ground at Jamberoo where it is assumed Martha was buried over 30 years earlier.

William lived in N.S.W. for 66 years and resided on the South Coast for almost half a century. He survived his harsh convict years to become a skilled bushman. He helped to clear the fertile Illawarra district for the pioneer settlers and even experimented with farming himself. He was survived by three sons and two daughters from his first marriage to Martha and by three sons from his marriage to Charlotte.

On 2 January 1906, William's second wife Charlotte Windley who was aged 86 years died of dropsy at Benandra Station, near Moruya, where her sons were employed. She was buried in the Mogo Cemetery.

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