**Robert Eley - Scindian Convict #14**

Robert Eley was one of the younger convicts sent out to Western Australia aboard the first convict ship the *Scindian* arriving 1 June 1850. Just twenty years of age when convicted in Durham, he was an unmarried sailor and was convicted for the theft of a copper funnel on 25 February 1848. The court heard that Eley had several prior convictions. His case was reported on briefly:

*The Newcastle Courant etc* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), Friday, March 3, 1848

*“NORTHUMBERLAND AND NEWCASTLE SPRING ASSIZES.*

*Robert Eley, (20), was found guilty of having stolen, on the 13th of January last, at Hartlepool, a copper funnel, the property of Thomas Moffat. Several previous convictions were proved against him, and he was sentenced to 14 years, transportation.”*

According to the Convict Establishment’s chaplain’s notes on Eley, he had been disorderly for a long time. He had recorded against him a period of criminal activity for at least 18 months or so between July 1846 and February 1848. His convictions were all for larceny and it was basically three strikes and you’re out. His first term of incarceration dated from 23 July 1846 when he was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment with hard labour for stealing a sovereign. His second offence was larceny from the person in which he stole £6 15s, a silver watch and other articles. Clearly, he was becoming more brazen in his actions and for this he was convicted on 4 January 1847 and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. Finally, his third conviction on 28 February 1848 for the theft of a copper funnel saw a judgement of transportation, as he was obviously not learning his lesson or amending his ways. His mother, father and friends were all recorded as living in Woodbridge, Suffolk, quite some distance from where his crimes were being committed in Durham. The information provided in the Wakefield Prison register revealed that he had been imprisoned five times before being sentenced to transportation.

Once in Western Australia, Eley was issued with his ticket-of-leave on 29 April 1851, almost eleven months after his arrival. His occupation was listed at this time as that of a labourer, although on conviction he had been described as a sailor. He had poor literacy skills, most of what he had learned had been whilst in prison. His age was 22 years. His physical description as transcribed in the convict records was: height 5' 3 1/2", with dark brown hair, grey eyes, an oval visage, dark complexion, and being of stout appearance. It has not yet been discovered what Eley did in the next five years until his conditional pardon was issued on 10 May 1856.

It is thought that Robert Eley possibly left Western Australia upon receiving his conditional pardon. There are no further records or reports for him in Western Australia. A death record for a Robert Eley in Parkside, South Australia who was about the same age when he died in March 1889 is unlikely to be him, based on family research details.

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Sources:

Ancestry.com, England and Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892: HO 27, piece 78, p. 219; piece 81, p 251 and piece 84, p. 269;

Erickson, R., O’Mara, G., *Convicts in Western Australia 1850-1887 : dictionary of Western Australians.* Volume IX, p 173;

Fremantle Prison Convict Database;

National Library of Australia, Trove Digitised Newspapers:

*Perth Gazette*, 22 Aug 1856;

State Library of Western Australia, British Library Newspapers Online:

*The Newcastle Courant etc* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), Friday, March 3, 1848;

*Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, 1 August 1846, p 7;

*Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, 9 January 1847, p 5;

State Records Office of Western Australia, Convict Registers:Cons 1156 R17, R21A, R21B, 488\_30, p. 58, letter 395, 30 April 1851;

Wakefield Prison Register, HO 24\_13, p. 57, courtesy of Bevan Carter.