

## Solomon Birkett – Scindian Convict #19

Solomon Birkett/Burkett was one of four men, (including Samuel Brakes #26) who on the night of 3 January 1848 entered the home of James Ogden and his wife, shopkeepers of Glinton, Peterborough, stealing a large amount of money, silverware, clothing and tea. The burglars had coverings over their faces and one carried a gun, another a bludgeon and Solomon Birkett was identified as carrying a lantern. James Ogden was over 80 years of age and the couple, lying in their bed, were threatened by the gunman that he would blow their brains out if they did not give up their money immediately. Later testimony from witnesses stated that the gun was owned by Birkett. The robbery seemed to stem from Brakes' having delivered coal to Mr Ogden earlier that day and in dispute over the quantity delivered, Brakes felt he had been underpaid.

Birkett was described as being a man of Spalding, a market-town on the River Welland in Lincolnshire. A shepherd and labourer, Birkett was 44 years of age and married with four young children when he was convicted and sentenced to 15 years' transportation. His wife Elizabeth and the children, (aged at the time of conviction), William (12), Sarah Jane (8), Elizabeth Jane (4) and John Thomas (1); were one of the few families who elected to follow husband and father out to the Swan River Penal Colony. Having been advanced the £15 passage money by the Union, they were one of three families of ticket-of-leave convicts who arrived aboard the emigrant ship *Anne Maclean* on 6 November 1852. Solomon was responsible for repaying the debt.

Birkett was one of the older men among the seventy-five convicts of the Scindian, the first convict ship to arrive in Western Australia on 1 June 1850. The convict registers describe him on arrival as being 5' 4" tall, with brown hair, light hazel eyes, an oval face and a fresh, fair complexion. He obtained his ticket of leave on 17 June 1851, just over a year after arriving.

Irma Walters has researched Solomon Birkett's move to Bunbury for employment after his ticket of leave was issued.

*After receiving his Ticket of Leave in June 1851, Solomon travelled to Bunbury on the Typo and was immediately employed by Marshall Waller Clifton. Clifton's journal records make it evident that Burkett was a valued employee, due to his experience as an agricultural worker, with skills that were highly sought after by the settlers. He was employed by Clifton at a variety of jobs, ranging from digging potatoes and caring for sheep to thatching roofs. He must have been a reliable worker because both Clifton's son Robert and Thomas Little competed to hire him next, with Robert Clifton succeeding in engaging Burkitt on 15 March 1852.*

Birkett was issued with his conditional pardon on 13 January 1855, 7 years after the crime had been committed. The following year he purchased 10 acres of land in the Wellington district near Bunbury, and later employed two ticket-of-leave men to work on his property between 1863-1865. Tragedy struck the family when Birkett's wife Elizabeth died on 18 August 1856 in Picton leaving him to care for two children under the age of twelve years.

Solomon Birkett died on 23 February 1868, aged 64 years, and was buried in the Picton cemetery at St Mark's Church, about 6kms east of Bunbury. The Inquirer of 4 March 1868 detailed Solomon's sad demise:

*An inquest was held yesterday on the remains of an unfortunate man named Birkett, who has for many years past been stone-blind, and recently shown signs of mental aberration. His sons missed him on the evening previous to his death, and searched for some hours in vain. On the following morning, to their horror, they found he had committed suicide by hanging himself in the stable, which he must have affected after midnight. A sincere feeling of sympathy is felt for the sons and daughter of deceased, who have ever treated their unfortunate relative with the utmost kindness and attention. The jury returned a verdict that the deceased committed suicide while in a state of temporary insanity.*

By the time of Birkett's death his daughter Sarah Jane had been married for ten years to John Bridger (aka Joseph John Bridges), convict #2664 from the *Sea Park* which arrived in WA in May 1854. Birkett and Bridger had been convicted for the same offence, robbery with violence. Sarah and John had five children together although only the first was born in Picton. By the time of their second child's birth in 1859, the couple had relocated to Gingin. Their final child Arthur John was born at Williams Bridge in 1867.

The year of his father's death, William Burkitt married Susan McGuire in Bunbury. While nothing has been found on the couple relating to the birth of any children, an advertisement placed by William the year following Solomon's death may relate to his father's property:

Freehold for Sale, AT PICTON NEAR BUNBURY.

COMPRISING 10 Acres of Land, on the Banks of the Preston River, near the Ford Bridge, eight acres of which are good wheat land, and a quarter trees; together with a five roomed cottage, weatherboarded, and in excellent repair. TERMS £65 CASH. Apply to the owner, WILLIAM BURKITT, Picton, near Bunbury, 4th Jan. 1869.

*The Herald* (Fremantle) Sat 6 Feb 1869, p 2. (The same advertisement ran in both the *Herald* and the *Perth Gazette* for several weeks in January and February 1869.)

A further article in the *Perth Gazette* gives a clue as to what William may have been up to around that time. The Bunbury races were a gala affair on 25 February 1869 and Burkitt's horse named "Lady Star" took two second places.

Solomon's daughter Elizabeth appears to have never married, and died in Perth in 1927. Son John Thomas married Ann Pearce in Perth in 1881 and the pair had three children. Around the turn of the century John Thomas (who was known as Tom) was working as a master of one of the Melville Park Ferry Boats which transported people between the city of Perth and Melville. Evidenced by family notices following his death in April 1921, Tom and wife Annie were living at Cannington and their married children living in the nearby areas of Belmont and Kenwick.

Sources:

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Births, Deaths, Marriages, Western Australia;

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Fremantle Prison Convict Database;

National Library of Australia, Trove Digitised Newspapers:

*Perth Gazette*, 12 November 1852, p 4;

*The Herald* (Fremantle) Saturday 6 February 1869, p 2;

*Perth Gazette*, 5 March 1869;

*The West Australian*, 29 April 1922;

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*Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury*, 14 April 1848;

State Records Office of Western Australia, Convict Registers: Acc 1156 R17, R21A, R21B, Cons 488-31, letter 231, page 71;

Walter, Irma, Harvey History online biography for Solomon Burkett (Birkett), [https://www.harveyhistoryonline.com/?p=4450#\\_ftn12](https://www.harveyhistoryonline.com/?p=4450#_ftn12).