

Robert Dawes – Scindian Convict # 35

Robert Dawes was living in Lynn, (now King's Lynn) Norfolk, in September 1847, when he and co-conspirator, William Potter, slaughtered a sheep and carried away the carcass. This crime was not Dawes' first. In March 1842, when aged 20 years, he was convicted for stealing some iron, an offence for which he served 2 months imprisonment. Shortly after being released from prison Dawes committed a second offence, stealing mackerel, and due to his previous felony was awarded a sentence of 7 years' transportation. He clearly was released before the full sentence had been completed. However, this third crime proved Dawes had not yet learned his lesson, and he was sentenced to 14 years' transportation.

Dawes had spent 16 months in separate confinement before arriving in Western Australia aboard the first convict transport ship, the *Scindian*, on 1 June 1850. The Convict registers recorded his physical description: height, 5' 3", with light hair, light grey eyes, a full visage, fresh complexion, and of stout appearance. He was 28 years old. He received his ticket-of-leave on 28 February 1851 and spent his initial period working in the Perth district. He was reported in the newspapers twice during 1852 for drunkenness, the first time in February, the second in December:

Inquirer and Commercial News, Thursday 2 December 1852, p 3

"Police Intelligence, Perth

Robert Dawes, t.l., drunk and neglecting his business: fined 5s and costs."

The Reconvicted prisoner register records a conviction against Dawes on 23 December 1856 for failing to repay his passage money. He was discharged once more on a ticket-of-leave seven weeks later on 12 February 1857. The practice of making the convicts repay the £15 cost of their passage out before issuing them with their conditional pardon was abandoned in 1857 as impracticable. Essentially requiring the convicts to repay the passage money raised the cost of labour for colonists hiring ticket-of-leave men, and, in addition, the convicts objected to paying for a voyage they did not undertake voluntarily (Battye, *Western Australia*, p 237). Dawes received his Conditional Pardon on 10 December 1859.

By 1859, Dawes is recorded in the York Census as aged 35 years and working as a groom at the premises of Joseph Monger. Joseph Taylor Monger, the son of merchant and agriculturalist J.H. Monger, in 1859 was working breeding horses for sale in the Indian market on behalf of his father, who was away in England at the time. An advertisement in the Perth Gazette the following year states Joseph T. Monger was an auctioneer, valuer, and general and commission agent in York.

Drunkenness was still a problem for Dawes as was reported in the *Inquirer and Commercial News*, Wednesday 1 April 1863, p 2:

"Perth Police Court

Robert Dawe, expiree— Drunk and ill-treating a horse; fined 10s or 7 days' imprisonment with hard labour.”

He likely paid the fine on this occasion as there is no record of him returning to the prison. After this, there is a twenty-year gap in the documentary record where Dawes presumably got on with working. There are no records to indicate that he either married or had children. He was however thought to be surviving on support from the government from around 1884 as is reported in the newspaper when he was found dead in Kojonup on 10 December 1900.

The *Albany Advertiser*, Friday 14 December 1900, p 3

“*Local News*

SUDDEN DEATH AT KOJONUP. An old man named Robert Dawes, aged 82 years, who has been receiving Government relief for the past 16 years, was found dead about half a mile from Kojonup at 6.30 p.m. on Monday last. The deceased was seen by several of the residents at 11 o'clock in the

morning and then appeared to be quite well. The Resident Magistrate from Katanning, Mr. Shenton, and Dr. Wilson went to Kojonup and examined the body, and the doctor pronounced death; to be due to natural causes. The deceased, who had been a resident of Kojonup for a great number of years was interred on Tuesday.”

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Sources:

Battye, J. S. *Western Australia: a History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*, facsimile edition, Nedlands, UWA Press, 1978 (first published Oxford, Clarendon Press 1924), p 237;

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Perth Gazette, Friday 6 July 1860, p 4;

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Portland Prison Register, PCom2_383, courtesy of Bevan Carter;

State Library of Western Australia: British Library Newspapers Online:

Cambridge Independent Press, April 2, 1842, Volume XXXIII, 1544, p 1;

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State Records Office of Western Australia, Convict registers: Cons 1156 R10, R17, R21A, R21B, S1-S3, Cons 488-30, page 31, letter 317.