

John Dobson – Scindian Convict #36

John Dobson was an unmarried, semi-literate labourer, aged 27 years, when he found himself convicted for the crime of larceny from the person and sentenced to be transported for 14 years and sent to the Swan River Colony. His crime was briefly described in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* on Wednesday, 9 January 1847, under the heading *Highway Robbery, at Leek*:

Staffordshire Quarter Sessions

John Dobson, alias DOBBS, aged 27, and Thomas Carty, aged 19, were indicted for stealing from the person of Henry Bailey, at Leek, one sovereign, one shilling, a purse and a key, his property.

Mr Neale appeared for the prosecution: the prisoners were undefended.

William Hands, one of the turnkeys from Shrewsbury Gaol, was called to prove that Dobson had previously been convicted of felony at Oswestry Sessions, and sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment.

The Court sentenced the prisoner Dobson to 14 years' transportation, and Carty to 12 months' imprisonment.

Dobson was possibly hard done by with the length of sentencing because a search of his prison records on Ancestry.com reveals only one former arrest, also for larceny, appearing at the Staffordshire Assizes on 3 July 1846. He was acquitted and not convicted. No record could be found for him serving a prior 12-month imprisonment. That aside, there was clearly a pattern of him being a repeat offender.

Dobson was moved from the Stafford County Gaol on 14 April 1847 to the Millbank Prison where he spent 18 months before again being moved to Yorkshire and the Wakefield House of Corrections. His final move was to Portland Prison on 13 December 1848 where he remained until 28 February 1850, being collected for transportation aboard the *Scindian* to his ultimate destination, Western Australia. On arrival in June 1850 Dobson was described as being: 5' 8" tall, with dark brown hair, blue eyes, an oval face, a dark complexion, and being of stout appearance; with a scar over his right eye; aged 31 years.

Within four months of arrival Dobson was provided with his Ticket of Leave and was employed immediately by Henry Laroche Cole as a brickmaker. Cole was the Chairman of the Perth Town Trust, a group formed shortly after Perth's settlement in 1829 and involved in developing the town, providing and upgrading roads and building required infrastructure. Cole was given the name "King" Cole for his influence in such matters. Barrack Street Jetty was initially named "King Cole's Jetty" and the Perth Town Trust later developed into the Perth City Council.

AJCP – CO18_58_264 AJCP reel 448

Return of Prisoners, who have obtained Tickets of Leave from 1st June to 31st December 1850, Shewing the Districts assigned to each, Name of Employer, Rate of Wages, &c. &c.

John Dobson – District Assigned – District of Perth; Trade – Brickmaker; Name of Employer – H.L. Cole; Rate of Wages – 50/ per month; Date of Ticket of Leave – 2nd Oct 1850.

Superintendents Orders, SROWA Acc 1156 SO1; Entry for 1 October 1850, p5v:

The Steward will have the goodness to see that John Dobson Reg No 36 has the following clothing supplied to him from the Establishment, and that he is prepared to leave (on a Ticket of Leave) tomorrow Oct 2nd.

1 Liberty Suit, 1 blue cloth cap, 1 pair boots, 2 shirts, 2 pair stockings, 2 neck handkerchiefs, 2 F. waistcoats, 1 serge blouse flannel, 1 leather Belt & buckle, 1 pair braces, 1 bed and 1 pair blankets.

Reg No 36 John Dobson to be allowed to pass through the Gates, having received his Ticket of Leave.

Dobson continued to work for himself as a brickmaker and in 1851 he married Angelina Crette, (she was later known as Ann Dobson). The couple had a son named Richard Edward Dobson who sadly died aged 9 months on 26 December 1852. A second son, named John was born in 1853. Doing well for himself, Dobson received his Conditional Pardon on 27 January 1854 having served just half of his original 14-year sentence. Around this time the couple are thought to have welcomed a third child, Frederick, whose birth was not recorded, however his name was listed on the shipping register when they departed for South Australia aboard the *Lochinvar* on 2 July 1857.

Between 1858 and 1865, the couple had three more sons, Julius, George and Thomas and their only daughter Emily was born in 1862 in Geelong, Victoria. (Emily's five brothers names were listed on her birth certificate). A sixth son Edward was born at Ballarat West on 1 November 1866, however he died in 1869. Edward's birth certificate listed all of his siblings including the deceased first-born Richard, however his sister's name was mistakenly recorded as Charlotte.

The railway line between Geelong and Ballarat opened up in 1862 and it is possibly how the family relocated to Ballarat before youngest son, Edward's birth in 1866. Once they were in Ballarat the relationship between John and his wife Ann appears to have deteriorated and the following was reported in the *Ballarat Star* on Wednesday 6 Feb 1867:

POLICE. DISTRICT COURT. Tuesday, 5th February. (Before the Police Magistrate.)

WIFE ASSAULT.-John Dobson was charged with having assaulted Ann Dobson, his wife, on the

morning of the 3rd inst. The prosecutrix stated that the accused had been drinking for some time past, and had treated her badly for nearly two years. On Sunday morning she went to a hotel where he was drinking to tell him that a kiln of bricks-he was making was burning to waste, and on seeing her he took her by the hair of the head and had it not been for some

neighbors would have used her very roughly. As it was she was grossly maltreated. The accused was ordered to find one surety to keep the peace.

The troubles between the couple became public when newspaper articles reported on Dobson's activities. On 18 March 1865 Dobson was charged and put in the lockup due to desertion of his wife. An advertisement was placed in the *Ballarat Star* on 21 March stating:

NOTICE.-The Creditors of JOHN DOBSON Brickmaker, Mopoke Gully, are requested to meet at the North Star Hotel, Lydiard street, this day, at eight p.m.

Six months later the family were in trouble for allowing a goat to wander. The family seemed to be in dire financial straits, as the *Ballarat Star* reported on Friday 8 September:

Police v John Dobson, allowing a goat to wander; Mr Paynter for the defendant asked for a nominal penalty as the defendant's wife had tied the goat up as soon as attention was drawn to its vagrancy; the family was very poor, and the goat was kept merely for the purpose of weaning the youngest of seven children under the circumstances, fined only 1s and 5s costs

The problems between husband and wife escalated in following years and, in August 1868, Dobson was in court charged with drunkenness and a month later he was in court again for beating his wife. Dobson was ordered to pay 20 shillings as surety of keeping the peace for twelve months. It appears that when things got difficult for Dobson, he was drinking away his troubles and then going home and beating his wife. By the numbers of men in court for the offence of drunkenness around this time, this was not an uncommon occurrence.

While Ballarat was growing and prosperous at this time, alluvial gold deposits had mostly disappeared and those with the money to do so were investing in deep underground mining. Dobson may have hoped there would be plenty of work as a brickmaker, however, there was also plenty of competition and it is likely that he did not prosper financially as he may have expected to.

A death certificate for 60-year-old brickmaker John Dobson, dated 18 January 1882 in Nathalia, Victoria is thought to be the most likely evidence for the death of this particular John Dobson. The certificate states that he was thought to be married and had lived in Victoria for around 30 years. He died of drink and exposure with no known family with him when he died.

Descendant, Georgina Cotter, informs that there was an inquest into his death which revealed the following particulars:

One witness at the inquest said "he has been known in the district for years and is known as a heavy drinking man." Another witness said he knew he had two sons that lived in Sandhurst (ie Bendigo), and that "he was supposed to be married."

Frederick and Julius Dobson were both living in Bendigo in 1875 as evidenced by a matter before the court reported in the *Bendigo Advertiser* on Friday 12 March:

CITY POLICE COURT - Stealing Iron Wheels.—

Frederick Dobson and Julius Dobson (17 and 19) were charged with stealing four cast iron wheels, value £1, the property of Wm. Manning, at the Back Creek, some time in January last.

Detective Alexander applied for a remand till Monday, to which Mr. Wrixon (for the defence) did not demur. With the consent of the police bail was allowed in one approved surety of £25 in each case.

Frederick made another appearance before the City Police Court in January 1877:

Bendigo Advertiser, 9 January 1877

CITY POLICE COURT – Discharged.

Frederick Dobson and John Killberg were charged with stealing a load of wood each, the property of John Connelly, at Emu Creek, on the 6th inst. The prosecutor stated that he had a 16-acre paddock at Emu Creek, which was fenced in. On Saturday he saw the defendants coming from the direction of his fence with two loads of wood. He saw several portions of his fence pulled down, but he could not swear that the wood the prisoners had was his property. The prisoners were therefore discharged.

The descendants believe that Ann Dobson may have died in Geelong in 1876. This information remains unconfirmed at present. No other information on John and Ann's children has been provided.

John had the opportunity to build a reasonable life for himself and his family having been given immediate employment on his arrival in Western Australian and later in Victoria where he worked as a brickmaker, however, a likely alcohol addiction led to a slow breakdown in his fortunes and relationships and it seems he died alone of exposure and drunkenness. A sad, lonely end.

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Sources:

Australian Joint Copying Project, reel 448 CO18_58, p 264;

Births, Deaths, Marriages, Western Australia;

Erickson, R., and O'Mara, G., *Convicts in Western Australia, 1850-1887. Dictionary of Western Australians Vol. IX*, p 154;

Fremantle Prison Convict Database;

Georgina Cotter, family descendant; birth and death certificates;

National Library of Australia, Trove Digitised Newspapers:

Ballarat Star, Wednesday 6 February 1867, p 4;

Bendigo Advertiser, Tuesday 9 January 1877, p 2;

Millbank Prison register (PCom2_27 11746), courtesy Bevan Carter;

State Library of Western Australia: British Library Newspapers Online:

Staffordshire Advertiser, 9 January 1847;

State Records Office of Western Australia, Convict Registers: Acc 128/7, R17, R21A, R21B; Acc 1156 SO1;

Wakefield Prison register (HO 23_14), courtesy Bevan Carter.