

## George Barker – Scindian Convict #39

George Barker was just 18-years-old when he and fellow *Scindian* convict Thomas Routledge Raine committed an opportunistic crime of assault and theft that ultimately led to murder in Barnard castle, Durham on 9 August 1845. The theft was premeditated and the circumstances unfortunately led to the death of a young man, their prey, Joseph Yates, whom they had beaten, strangled and then thrown into the river, and also the woman accompanying Joseph, Catherine Raine. A third man was convicted with them, John Breckon, who was older than them by several years with several previous criminal convictions and possibly the instigator of the criminal attack. Another party, a young woman who witnessed the murders, Anne Humphreys, was threatened to keep her mouth shut. Seeing what had happened to Catherine she was terrified into withholding evidence against the men. A year later she came forward and testified, however, the men had gotten away with the murderous crimes.

It being very obvious to police that the men had committed the barbarous crimes, they persisted in pursuing the case, bringing them to court again for the lesser crimes of assault and theft. On the jury finding them guilty, the impassioned judge, appalled with the men, sentenced them to the harshest sentence within his power, 15 years' transportation.

*The York Herald, and General Advertiser* of Saturday, March 20, 1847, reported the following on the Judge, Mr Baron Rolfe's summation at the end of the trial:

*"Under these circumstances, I confess I feel somewhat ashamed that the law is not able to reach you further than it does. But this I will say – although I will not use the expression I have the satisfaction of knowing – (for I will not harbour so barbarous a sentiment) that whether your lives shall, by the pleasure of God, be terminated early or protracted late, you will live the objects of abhorrence and detestation even among the guilty associates with whom you will be placed, and who will be ashamed and contaminated at being with you. I hope you will devote every instant of your lives (if you have any wisdom or prudence) to endeavour to atone and expiate, as far as you can, by innocence of life, that horrible crime which you have committed. The severest sentence I am able I shall pass upon you; that is, that you be severally transported beyond the seas to such place as her Majesty, by the advice of her Privy Council, shall direct for the space of Fifteen Years."*

Barker was transported to the Swan River Colony along with one of his partners in crime, Thomas Routledge Raine, amongst the first shipload of convicted men, aboard the *Scindian*, arriving on 1 June 1850. The Convict Establishment records provide a description of him shortly after his arrival: height 5', 9", brown hair, grey eyes, oval visage, dark complexion, smart built appearance. Within 6 months of his arrival he was working as a mason in his assigned district of Fremantle for 'Emerald Isle' publican Patrick Marmion, earning wages at the rate of 40 shillings per month.

Barker had been in the colony for just under two years when he was permitted to marry Ellen McInerny in Fremantle in 1852. The couple had two sons, George, in 1854 and John Thomas in 1857, both born in Fremantle where Barker was conducting business as a firewood contractor. The children were still young when Ellen died, aged 32 years, in 1865. After this time Barker took up with Eliza McTaggart. There is no record of them getting married, however

the couple had a daughter together, Mary Jane Barker, who was born in Fremantle on 29 August 1868. Sadly, for Mary Jane, eleven months later, her father George died and his death was followed two years later by her mother Eliza.

George Barker died aged 42 years in Fremantle on 27 July 1869. His Will provides clues into some aspects of his life. The Last Will and Testament of George Barker, contractor of Fremantle, was dated 21 July 1869. His executors were George Randell of Perth, boatowner and James Herbert of Fremantle, publican; and his beneficiaries included a loyal employee and the Barker family. James Wallace Holditch was bequeathed a horse and cart (Holditch was also an ex-convict having been transported aboard the *Hashemy* in October 1850: # 146 James Wallace Holditch). Barker's de facto wife Elizabeth and his children, Mary Jane Taggart, George Barker and John Thomas Barker, were detailed to receive an equal share of their father's wealth. Barker died 6 days after dating and signing his will.

Barker had built some success for himself in business. Advertisements by his executors selling off his property and possessions after his death indicate the extent of his wealth:

*"TO LET,*

*THE Shop and Premises lately in the occupation of Mr. Geo. Barker, deceased, Essex-street, Fremantle. As a private dwelling, the accommodation is replete with every convenience. Attached thereto is permanent stabling for 10 horses, and a first-class bake-house, the oven of which is considered one of the best in the town. As a private residence or business premises, the property stands unequalled. Apply to J. HERBERT, Sen., Fremantle, Or G. RANDALL, Perth, Executors to the Estate of the late Mr. G. Barker. Fremantle, Sept. 9, 1869."* *The Inquirer and Commercial News, 29 Sept 1869, p 1.*

*"SALE OF A 10-TON FLAT. MR. THOMAS SMITH*

*Has received instructions from the executors of the Estate of the late Mr. Geo. Barker to sell by public auction at the Town Jetty, Perth, on WEDNESDAY 13th October— THE fine Flat "GIPSY," with masts, anchors, and chains. She is in good repair, having been recently re-nailed and corked. Terms at Sale. Sale at eleven."* *The Inquirer and Commercial News, 13 Oct 1869, p 2.*

Jimmy Holditch, the only beneficiary of Barker's will other than family members, had worked as a clerk/foreman to George Barker for many years while Barker worked as firewood contractor. A newspaper article in the *Herald* on 11 March 1871, described Jimmy's sad demise less than two years after Barker's death. Jimmy – known as "Old Jemmy", died from having been beaten about the head, dragged along the ground, stripped of his clothing and dumped in the shallows of the Swan River half a mile upwards of the Fremantle bridge on around 4 March 1871. William Davis and Margaret Coady were subsequently charged with murder. Davis had previously worked alongside Holditch in the employ of Barker and had lived with Mrs Coady for six years. Davis had apparently been dismissed by Barker after some of Barker's horses died from poisoning and it seems likely Davis may have harboured a grudge against poor Old Jemmy. Davis and Coady were found guilty of the murder and sentenced to death. They were executed by hanging at Perth Prison on Saturday 15 July 1871. James Holditch was buried in the Alma Road and Skinner Street Cemetery in Fremantle.

It is not known what happened to the children after George and Eliza died. No record has yet been found for the whereabouts of George and John Thomas Barker however information has been located for Mary Jane Barker. Mary Jane married George Reeves in Albany on 13 December 1891. The couple moved soon after back to Fremantle where their son George Thomas was born in 1892. They ultimately had nine children, seven sons and two daughters born between 1892 and 1911. George Reeves worked for the Fremantle Harbour Works. In a family notice placed by his sister Lidia after George had passed away on 29 January 1949, he was described as "a labouring soul". Mary Jane, was aged 92 years, when she died at their family home, 12 Hevron Street in North Fremantle, on 18 August 1961. Both were buried in the Fremantle Cemetery.

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### Sources:

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*The West Australian*, 31 January 1949, p 1;

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*The York Herald, and General Advertiser* (York, England), Saturday, March 20, 1847; pg. 6; Issue 3884. *British Library Newspapers, Part II: 1800-1900*;

State Records Office of Western Australia, Convict Registers: Acc 1156 C\_19, p 366, Cons 1156 R17, R21A, R21B, Acc 128/40-43; Cons 3403 (Will of George Barker).