

Robert Holder – Scindian Convict #40

Robert was born 7 November 1824, the son of wealthy pawnbroker Samuel Holder and his second wife, Dinah, and baptised at St. Mary's Church, Portsea Island, Hampshire. Samuel had two children with his first wife Maria, Samuel Jnr born in 1798 and Charlotte born in 1802. Samuel had married Dinah Cordery on 17 December 1818 at St Mary's Church in Portsea. The pair had two illegitimate children together born before their marriage, George and Ann Elizabeth, with further sons John and Robert born after their marriage.

As a single man, a painter by trade, aged 22 years, Robert Holder stole a cash-box and two pistols from a Samuel Holder at Southsea (his half-brother). The crime was committed on 14 December 1846 with a George Holder and a Thomas George Holder, although Thomas George Holder, the son of the prosecutor, turned evidence for the Crown and avoided conviction. Robert had been indicted twice previously, the first at the age of 17, in October 1840 for stealing from the master to whom he was apprenticed, of which he was acquitted, and then at the July Quarter Sessions in 1844, for house breaking, for which he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. At the second trial he begged for a statement to be read explaining his extenuating circumstances. Although he was convicted, he was treated leniently in the hope that as a young man he could still potentially be reformed, and he was placed in the Borough Gaol to serve his sentence avoiding the heavier punishment of transportation.

The extenuating circumstances may have had something to do with the fact that his mother Dinah had died in August 1842, her death notice stating she was a widow, and her husband Samuel, a pawnbroker by trade, having died seven years earlier in 1835 when Robert would have been almost eleven years of age. His father's will, proved on 30 January 1836, at five pages long, was extensive and allowed for his present wife Dinah, his older children from a previous marriage, Samuel Jnr and Charlotte; Dinah and his two natural (illegitimate) children George and Ann Elizabeth and then the two sons of his marriage with Dinah, Robert and John, to all benefit from his estate. Sadly for Robert – it appears that Samuel Jnr, his father's eldest son from the earlier marriage and heir to the family home in Gold-Street, Portsea, may have managed to claim the lion's share of their father's wealth.

Although Dinah was still living in her deceased husband's other house in Union Place, Portsea, with her two sons at the time of the 1841 England Census, just 6 years after the death of their father, Robert and John were listed as being a painter and a mason. Dinah died the following year aged 56 years and, on her death, according to Samuel's will, the house and any residual personal effects were meant to be equally shared between Robert and his brother John. It seems unlikely this happened. It was for the attempt to rob his half-brother Samuel Holder's house of a cash-box and two pistols that Robert was convicted and subsequently transported. The prosecutor Samuel's son, 17-year-old Thomas George Holder, who had also participated in the crime and was reprieved after turning Crown's evidence, was Robert's nephew.

Robert was not long out of prison and his co-convicted in this further crime, 36-year-old George Holder, had also been previously convicted and had been out of the prison hulk Stirling Castle in the Portsmouth harbour, for about twelve months. George is likely to have been the illegitimate child of Dinah and Samuel Holder, another half-brother to Robert. Both having

previous convictions, they were each sentenced to 15 years' transportation. Apparently, Thomas George Holder did not learn from his lucky escape, as in March 1851 he was convicted for two attempts at armed robbery at Southsea, given a life sentence and subsequently transported to Western Australia as convict #1366 aboard the *William Jardine* in 1852 (name erroneously recorded as Holden).

Robert was placed in Millbank Prison on 17 September 1847 and then transferred to Portland Prison on 13 December 1848. It was from here that he was collected for transportation aboard the *Scindian* which departed for Western Australia in February 1850. He received his ticket-of-leave just 5 months after arriving in the Swan River Colony, and was first employed by the Convict Establishment. Four years later, having completed half of his sentence, he received his Conditional Pardon.

Robert had a couple of minor run-ins with the law whilst on his ticket-of-leave. On 20 February 1852 he was charged with being drunk and disorderly in Fremantle while on ticket-of-leave and was fined 5s and expenses. *The Inquirer* reported a further incident 5 months later on 28 July 1852:

James Stark, imprisoned for one day, for threatening to strike ticket-of-leave holder, Robert Holder, in the presence of the Bench of Magistrates. 19— Robert Holder, ticket-of-leave holder, charged with robbing James Stark on the previous day of £1, in silver. On examination, it turned out that three or four men were present in a room when Stark was robbed, and that it was doubtful who took the money; case dismissed.

It was during Robert's period as a ticket-of-leave man that his future wife Ellen Sullivan arrived in the colony aboard the *Travancore* on 13 January 1852. The pair were married in 1855 and the union produced four daughters, Jane, Elizabeth 'Betty', Dinah and Martha, born between March 1854 and August 1860.

In 1859 he was working as a carter, evident from his accepted government tender listed in the Government Gazette and reported in the *Inquirer* on 5 October:

"Robert Holder – to cart 400 cubic yards of stone on Guildford Road at 1s 6d per cubic yard."

The following year Robert was working for George Shenton in his flourishing Perth business. Shenton had been articled to a druggist in Portsmouth between 1826 and 1832 before emigrating to the Swan River Colony, arriving in January 1833. He commenced work as a druggist and had rapid success allowing him to open his merchandising premises on Hay Street in 1838. Perhaps it was their common origins in Portsmouth that lead to Holder working for Shenton. Sadly for the young family, Robert died following an accident while working at the river's edge warehouse, located behind Shenton's St. George's Terrace home, Rose Hall. Details of the accident were reported in the *Inquirer* on Wednesday 12 December 1860:

"Mr Holder, of Perth, was seriously injured on Monday by a bale of wool falling upon his back from Mr Shenton's upper warehouse by the waterside. Some injury of the spine has taken place which, it is hoped, will be removable by medical treatment. At present Mr Holder is in a precarious situation."

He died the following day on 13 December 1860, aged just 36 years. Eight days later the *Perth Gazette* reported that:

At the Inquest held on the body of Holder, the Jury returned a verdict that death was caused by culpable negligence.

A few weeks later, two public notices indicated that the estate of Robert Holder was being finalised in favour of his widow Ellen Holder.

After her husband's death, and with four young daughters to support, Ellen remarried in 1862 to another ticket-of-leave convict, Henry Edwin Eyles, convict # 2867, who had arrived on the *Sea Park* in May 1854. Henry's convict records indicate that he was married and working as a coach plater when he was convicted of shop breaking and robbery and sentenced to 10 years' transportation. He received his conditional pardon 18 months' after arriving in the colony. Ellen had four more daughters with Henry Eyles, Emma, Ellen 'Nellie', Ann 'Annie' Maria and Laura. Ellen Sullivan died 5 February 1887, aged 54 years while her second husband, Henry Edwin Eyles, survived her by fifteen years. He died 4 July 1902 in the Old Men's Home in Perth, aged 80 years.

The four daughters of Robert and Ellen Holder all went on to marry and have children of their own. Jane married William Meaden in 1879 in Perth and they had five children, born between 1880 and 1896: Sarah Ellen, Edward James, William Henry, Frederic Augustus and Grace. Jane's long life was celebrated in the following article in the *West Australian*, on Saturday 9 March 1940:

AN OLD COLONIST.

"LAST Sunday Mrs. Jane Meaden, of Bellevue, celebrated her 87th birthday. Mrs. Meaden may truly be termed an "old colonist," for she was born in this State, in a house on a site in Murray-street, west of King-street. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Holder, came from England to Western Australia in the fifties and in the early days her late husband, Mr. William Meaden, was employed in the timber industry at Sawyer's Valley and Lion Mill. Mrs. Meaden has four daughters, one son, 20 grandchildren and four great grandchildren living. One son was killed in the Great War."

Elizabeth 'Betty' Holder married George Bandy in 1875 in Perth and they had ten children born between 1876 and 1903. While three of the children died young, several of them lived into their 80s and 90s. Their son Ernest Samuel born 1888 in Perth, was an exception. Married and with his wife Evelyn expecting their second child, Ernest was tragically killed in a railway shunting accident in the Geraldton Railway yard, on 18 March 1914, when he was just 28 years of age. His son Ernest was born 6 July 1914. Elizabeth 'Betty' Holder Bandy died 19 September 1935, aged 79 and her husband George died 27 May 1924.

Dinah Holder, born 24 July 1857, married Frederic Litchfield Glaskin in Perth in 1885. They had eight children, 5 sons and 3 daughters born between 1876 and 1895, sadly the youngest two, both daughters, died shortly after birth. Dinah died in West Leederville on 28 January 1927 aged 69 years and Frederic Litchfield died 14 November 1920 aged 73 years.

Martha Holder born 3 August 1860, married Charles Djusung, a man of Chinese descent, in Perth in 1881. The couple are thought to have had four children. The oldest son William, born in 1881, died tragically on December 30, 1916 at the age of 35 years while among others, all trying to save a young girl who had been caught in a rip and swept out to sea at Scarborough Beach. The girl drowned and sadly so did five of the men who went to her rescue. Vandalised and shortened surf-lifesaving lifeline ropes were found to have been a contributing factor in all of their deaths.

Born the son of a wealthy man, Robert Holder had an unfortunate young life after the death of his parents and met his fate of transportation likely through family differences over inheritance. Then, as a young husband and father, seeming to have finally found a stable family life and good employment, Robert was visited with further tragedy when he died in a work accident aged just 36 years. His sorrowful demise was echoed over fifty years later when two of his grandsons, Ernest Bandy and William Djusung, also died tragically young in preventable accidents.

N.B. Two other Western Australian convicts: George Holder, Mermaid convict # 264, and John Holder, William Jardine convict #1445, are thought likely to have been Robert's brothers. Thomas George Holder #1366, likely his nephew, was also transported to WA per William Jardine in August 1852.

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NB: The story of Scindian convict # 40, Robert Holder, was first examined in a tale by WAGS and Convict SIG member Beryl Tyler in the September 2008 Convict Links. Beryl was a descendant of Ellen Sullivan, the Irish emigrant who had married Robert Holder in 1855 and who then re-married to convict Henry Eyles after Robert's unfortunate death in 1860. Beryl knew of Robert Holder as her great-grandmother's first husband who died tragically young. Further examination of Robert Holder's story as part of the WA Convict Publication Project throws new light on his origins, crime and subsequent life in Western Australia.