

## Alexander Mathieson – Scindian Convict #44

Alexander Mathieson was a 19-year-old nail maker from Glasgow when he was first sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for theft in September 1842. He was imprisoned in the Warrior Hulk at Woolwich from 7 November 1842. Even though he was a young man, Alexander had previous convictions for theft which led to this outcome. In Glasgow in October 1847 Alexander Mathieson was again up to his old tricks.

Nail maker Alexander Mathieson along with Thomas Martin and Jane Christie broke into the workshop of James Younger, joiner and cabinet maker of Union Court, Argyll Street, and stole chisels, a screwdriver and other tools belonging to the workmen employed by Younger. Not satisfied with this haul, the trio climbed through a window and gained access to the roof of another nearby house. The premises of Robert McLeod and James Pollock, jewellers and hardware merchants, were accessed by the removal of roof slates, and the theft of a large number of items of gold and silver-plated jewellery and coins took place. The *Greenock Advertiser* of 28 December 1847 described the theft as follows:

*"...did break into the said house by removing several of the slates from the said roof, and stole therefrom a variety of gold and silver and plated articles, consisting of brooches, rings, neck chains, watch keys, seals, eye glasses, lockets, waist buckles, breast pins, shirt-studs, pocket compasses, steel beads and from 2s. to 3s. in copper money, &c..."*

The trio were apprehended and at trial all pleaded not guilty to the charge of housebreaking. Martin was found not guilty and Christie due to her youth was given a lenient sentence of only three months' imprisonment. Alexander Mathieson, however, received the harshest penalty as a habitual offender and previous transportee and was given the longest sentence of any of the *Scindian* convicts, sentenced to 21 years' transportation. This time he was sent far from home to the Swan River Colony in Western Australia aboard the first shipload of transported convicts in June 1850.

On 1 December 1851 after serving a further 18 months of his sentence Alexander was issued his ticket-of-leave and less than four years later he applied to marry. In 1855 Alexander and Elizabeth 'Eliza' Ward were married in Perth. Records indicate that they had two children, Margaret and Alexander, born in Perth in 1856 and 1859 respectively. Although no birth record can be found, there is a death record for a Charles Henry Mathieson who died aged 1 year in 1859, father listed as Alexander. The next seven years produced four more children, William born in Perth in 1861, John born in Guildford in 1862, Henry Charles born in Guildford in 1864 and finally Sarah Jane born in 1866.

Alexander's term of sentence expired in 1868 and by July 1872 he was given his Certificate of Freedom. After this time, it appears that the family moved to Jarrahdale as in the following years Sarah was married and had children born in this area, and Alexander and his two sons William and John all worked at the Jarrahdale Timber Company and died in that region. Sadly Henry Charles, also working as a timber feller met an early death in March 1904 at Wellington Mill when the tree he was felling hit another tree and caused a branch to break off and strike Henry on the head.

The Bunbury Herald, of Monday 7 March 1904, recorded the tragedy as follows:  
*"FATAL ACCIDENT. Killed by a Falling Limb. The Inquest.*

*At the Wellington Mill on Friday, Mr. H. J. Yelverton, J.P., conducted an inquest concerning the death of a young man, named Henry Mathieson, whose body was discovered under a tree which he had felled. Messrs J. J. Robinson, W. O'Donnel and W. E. Summers were sworn in as jurymen. James Clancy, foreman over the fallers employed at the Wellington Mill, gave evidence that Mathieson had been working under his supervision. At about 3 p.m. on Thursday witness found his body lying alongside the log which he had just cut down. A limb had been broken off an adjoining tree by the falling log, and had struck deceased on the head. Deceased had been dead about ten minutes when witness made the discovery, as the body was still warm. Blood was flowing from the wound in the head. The hat produced was lying near the body and showed a rent caused by the blow. Chas. Johnson, faller, deposed that he had seen Mathieson alive a few minutes before Clancy found the body. Witness heard the fall of the tree when deceased cut it down, and in his opinion, Mathieson was killed by being struck by the falling limb referred to. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death. The deceased was 39 years of age at the time of his death, and was a native of Perth. He leaves a widow, having been married in Perth only twelve months ago."*

Henry had married Annie Davoren in Perth in 1903, the single mother of a daughter, Alice.

There are records for the marriages of both of Alexander's daughters, Margaret and Sarah. Margaret married James John Ardagh, in Perth in 1879, under the name Margaret Mathewson. Their first son James Joseph, was born 29 December 1879, in Perth, and second son Aloysius Henry, was born 29 May 1881 in Fremantle. Shortly after this the family moved to Adelaide where two daughters, Teresa Ann and Mary Agnes were born in 1882 and 1885 respectively. Mary died aged just eight months in December 1885 and sadly, Aloysius also died the following year in July 1886.

Daughter Sarah Jane married John James O'Donoghue in Fremantle in 1887. They had three sons: Michael William born Jarrahdale, 1896 and died 1896 aged 5 months, Patrick William born 1899 in Jarrahdale, and Francis Joseph born in Jarrahdale in 1902. Sarah's husband John O'Donoghue worked as a prison warder on Rottnest Island.

Sarah died 27 June 1937, aged 71 years buried Karrakatta RC, John James died 15 January 1939, aged 73 years, West Perth (buried Karrakatta RC).

Alexander's death in Jarrahdale was recorded in both the West Australian newspaper and the Western Mail on two successive Saturdays on 20 and 27 April 1901. The family notice read:

*"MATHESON. - On the 13th inst., at Jarrahdale Timber Station, Alexander Matheson, one of the oldest of our colonists, aged 87 years; 56 years in the colony."*

Alexander's death registration, BDM WA no. 1301 records his age as 77 years rather than 87. He had actually been in the colony for 51 years. A search of all indexes of colonists in Western Australia reveal that there were no other Alexander Mathieson's in the colony prior to his arrival in 1850.

Alexander's wife, Eliza lived to the ripe old age of 96 years. She died on 22 April 1921 in Perth, her son John having died just ten days earlier. Son William died in 1926 and all three are buried in the same grave in the Roman Catholic portion of the Karrakatta Cemetery (DB 0440). Family notices placed at the time of William's death mention only the two surviving sisters, Margaret and Sarah who died in 1929 and 1937 respectively. It is not known if there were any surviving children of the four sons. It is possible that the second born child, his father's namesake, Alexander died in 1923 in East Coolgardie.

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Sources:

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The British Library Board, *Greenock Advertiser*, 28 December 1847; courtesy Justin Evans.