

James Morris – Scindian Convict #49

James Morris was a seasoned counterfeiter and was tried at the Old Bailey on 4 January 1847 for two offences regarding counterfeiting that occurred in April and December 1846. Almost caught the first time as he ran from his room in Duck Lane, Westminster, he was not so lucky the second time, caught running from different premises in Henry Street, Borough, London. The 36-year-old married man with five children ranging in age from 13 months to eleven years was found guilty of having a mould and making counterfeit half-crowns and was sentenced to 15 years' transportation.

Trying to evade capture on 16 December, Morris jumped from the window of his first-floor room, however, he was chased and caught by policemen waiting in the street below. Police Inspector William Penny testified as to what he found upon returning to Morris' room after the prisoner had been caught:

"I returned to the lodging with Brannan, and found on the hob of the grate this piece of line rag, containing twenty-two counterfeit half-crowns and fifty counterfeit shillings, all quite hot, and all in an unfinished state—while I was searching the room the landlord of the house came in—in consequence of what he told me, part of a double mould for casting half-crowns was given me by Martin, in the presence of his wife, who had picked it up—that was a quarter of an hour after the prisoner had jumped out of the window—I received from Mr. Martin a piece of a mould with the tail side of a half-crown upon it."

It seems that the policemen had been instructed to go to Morris' rooms by officers from His Majesty's Mint and that perhaps someone had been spying on various people producing counterfeit coins. One way or another Morris was going to be caught for his ongoing illegal activity.

Initially held in Newgate Prison attached to the Old Bailey court rooms in London where he had been tried, Morris was moved on 25 March 1847 to Millbank Prison on the banks of the Thames. Three months into his time at Millbank he was visited by his wife, mother and children as per Inspector's orders. He was also visited by a Mr Walker in July 1847 before being moved to the Wakefield House of Corrections in West Yorkshire in September 1847. He was transferred for a final time on 22 December 1848 to Portland Prison there to await transportation to Western Australia aboard the first convict transport the *Scindian*. He along with many other prisoners were collected on 28 February 1850 and the ship arrived on Western Australian shores on 1 June 1850.

On arrival Morris was described in the convict registers as being 5' 4" in height with brown hair, hazel eyes, a long face and a dark complexion, with an upright proportionate appearance. Within five months of arrival in the new colony Morris was issued with his ticket of leave and assigned to the Toodyay district where he worked for George Syred as a labourer being paid 20 shillings per month. Syred is known for having constructed a bridge at Jumperting Brook in Toodyay and also had leases for cutting sandalwood at nearby Bolgart.

Morris applied for his family to join him and they duly arrived on 13 January 1853 aboard the emigrant ship *Travancore* having departed from Plymouth on 30 September 1852. A Mr Walker, from the school, possibly the man who had visited Morris in Millbank Prison, was listed

as a referee. The documentation notes that the cost of passage for the five family members cost £20 in addition to £2 10 shillings already paid by Morris in the colony. His wife Sarah, 28 years, and four children; Caroline, 12, Elizabeth, 10, John, 8, and Emma, 6, all made the journey. Sadly, the application register notes that his eldest child, son Charles, had been sent to Parkhurst Prison from the Ragged School.

After his family's arrival however, James continued to find himself in trouble with the law. A discharge record indicates that he was released from Fremantle Prison on 27 December 1856. He was also imprisoned after this as in the official records, letter 779 dated 21 August 1857 states:

"49 Jas Morris

As you have been reconvicted from the Fremantle district your application for a transfer to enable you to proceed to Cockburn Sound Lake cannot be granted. J. E. H. Bunbury"

No further information on the reconviction can be found.

The family appear to have stayed around the Fremantle area as the marriage records indicate that his eldest child, daughter Caroline married Robert Gardner in Fremantle in 1860. James however had made his way to the Esperance area where he was working on a whaling boat. He drowned at a location near Doubtful Island in this area on 2 March 1861.

No further information has been found on the remaining Morris family members.

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Sources:

Australian Joint Copying Project - Reel 448 CO18_58, p 264; Reel 451CO18_62, p 299; Reel 987, CO386_154;

Births, Deaths and Marriages, Western Australia;

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Fremantle Prison Convict Database;

Millbank Prison Register, PCom2_26, p 1164;

Old Bailey Online: <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?name=18470104>, accessed online 27 August 2018;

Portland Prison Register PCom2_383, courtesy Bevan Carter;

State Records Office of Western Australia, Convict registers: Cons1156, C11 page 268, letter 779, RD1-RD2, R17, R21A, R21B;

Wakefield Prison Register HO24_13, courtesy Bevan Carter.