

Charles Pye – Scindian Convict #59

Charles Pye was 25 years old when he committed the crime of breaking and entering and burglarising the home of Mr James Attridge Brown of Hockley, Essex, about an hour's walk from where Pye lived in Rayleigh. He had been out drinking all evening with Charles Britton, who was known to Mr Brown, and after the public house closed, they headed to the Brown house. They terrorised Mr Brown and his wife and stole from them a silver spoon, a watch and about 5 shillings worth of coin. Pye was seen and later identified whereas Britton's face had not been seen. Pye also had several previous convictions. When found guilty of the crime he was sentenced to 14 years' transportation. Britton was acquitted of the crime.

Pye was taken to the local Springfield gaol and managed to escape once before being returned and then moved to Millbank Prison in London on 29 March 1847. His mother visited him on 20 June and then three months later he was moved to the Wakefield House of Corrections in West Yorkshire. He spent 14 months in Wakefield before being removed once more to Portland Prison on 15 December 1848, there to await transportation to the Swan River Colony in Western Australia aboard the first convict transport to the colony, the *Scindian*.

The convict registers provide a physical description of Pye not long after he arrived in the colony. He was 5' 5" in height with brown hair, light hazel eyes, a sharp appearance to his face, with a dark complexion, and was stout in stature. He was not to wait long for employment, receiving his ticket-of-leave on 4 December 1850 and being assigned to the Toodyay District working for William Chidlow. Chidlow had a farm, coincidentally called Springfield, and had several pastoral leases covering 24,000 acres. Pye was employed by Chidlow as a mason for the wage of 30 shillings per month. Chidlow had come out to Western Australia in March 1831 as a servant aboard the ship *Eliza* from Capetown in South Africa, after the original ship he had been travelling on, the *Rambler* from England, had been shipwrecked. Pye could see for himself that a man of working-class status could achieve land ownership and make something of himself and he followed Chidlow's lead.

Pye remained in the Toodyay area for the next ten years. During this time, he applied for and was granted permission to marry Catherine Buckley, a 22-year-old domestic servant from Dublin, who had arrived in the colony aboard the *Sabrina* in June 1853. The couple married in Toodyay and went on to have four children there, Mary Anne (1854), Elizabeth (1856), William (1858) and Marianne (1860). Pye purchased ten acres of land in 1853 and a further ten acres in 1858 and employed five ticket-of-leave men between 1851-1859. He grew grapevines and ran sheep on his properties and he began to gain in prosperity.

The correspondence of the Governor foreshadowed the issue of his conditional pardon on 29 January 1859.

1067 - 16 November 1858 - Toodyay

59 Charles Pye

His Excellency has been pleased to sanction the remission of the balance due by you on account of passage money. Our receipt of the necessary certificates as to your character and health your conditional pardon will be submitted for the signature of H. E.

E. Y. W. H (Henderson)

Pye moved to the mid-west town of Northampton around 1860 and was working as a farmer and a butcher near the Waneranooka and Wheal Fortune copper and lead mines and employed four more ticket-of-leave men. He purchased 40 acres of land in 1863. His next three daughters were born there, Ellen in 1862 and Honora in 1864 and Louisa Elizabeth in 1865. Evidence of Pye being at Wheal Fortune mine can be referenced to an incident where convict Theodore Krakouer was accused of stealing a horse-bell from Pye late in 1864. By 1866 Pye had sold his farming interests in Toodyay and became a storekeeper in Northampton. Twins(?) John and Alice were born in Fremantle that year, possibly just before the family departed for South Australia aboard the *Emily Smith* in April 1866.

The family can be further traced to Dunedin in New Zealand where Charles and his wife Catherine are thought to have lived out their final days. Charles died in 1887 and Catherine in 1888. Their daughter Ellen had married John Fraser in Dunedin in 1886 but died there just 9 years later at the age of 35. Louisa Elizabeth Pye had married John Ryan also in 1886 and died 22 October 1909 in Ashburton, New Zealand.

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Wakefield Prison Register, HO24_13; courtesy of Bevan Carter.