

John Rason/Raison – Scindian Convict #64

John Rason was born on the 6 January 1826 in Boston, Lincoln in England. He spent his twenty-first birthday in prison and two months later he and two companions, Thomas Trott and Benjamin Barker, were found guilty of assault and robbery in company with others and sentenced to 15 years' transportation. Their crime was described in the *Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury* on Friday March 12, 1847:

“Highway Robbery at Boston

Benj. Barker, 22, John Rason, 20, and Thos. Trott, 24, were charged with having, on the 21st of November, assaulted Wm. Cammack, and stolen from his person, 9l. 10s. Mr Wildman conducted the prosecution, and Mr Denison, the defence. – On the evening named, the prosecutor, on his road from Boston to Tattershall with a cart, called at the Barge inn. After he had left and got about a mile on the road, he perceived Barker and Trott. Barker seized him by the collar, and Trott struck him on the head with a thick hedge-stake. Prosecutor fell upon his knees, and they pulled him down upon his back and kicked him. The third person took out his purse and money and ran away, and the other two followed. The prosecutors had known the prisoners for some time by sight, though he could not distinguish them by name, and from the description he furnished to the police, they were apprehended, the police being well acquainted with them, and knowing them to be part of what is called in Boston “the Sluice Rangers.” It was established in evidence that they were at the Barge inn of the day of the robbery, and that a person in the evening put his head and shoulders into the house and called out Barker and Trott, saying “Come, the cart has gone on.” Part of the hedge-stake, which broke with the force of the blow, was exhibited in court; a person residing near the spot heard Cammack call out “Murder,” and a few moments afterwards this person met the prosecutor bleeding very profusely. – Guilty. In passing sentence, the Judge observed that it was quite clear that the prisoners had been concerting the robbery of the prosecutor, and he was waylaid and attacked with considerable violence. Under these circumstances, he deemed it proper to mark such an act of deliberation and violence with severity. 15 years' transportation each.”

“The Sluice Rangers” was a name for followers or possibly players of the Ferriby Sluice Rangers Football Club, part of the Lincolnshire Football Association. No other reference has been found in the newspapers for Sluice Rangers other than related to this football club. Clearly, Rason, Trott and Barker had some association with the club and were known to police. The crime for which they were convicted was premeditated and violent and quite possibly a regular undertaking for Rason and his cronies. The Wakefield Prison register noted that Rason had been twice previously imprisoned. Rason spent time in Millbank and Wakefield prisons, before being transferred to Portland prison immediately prior to departure for Western Australia. Trott was one of up to 500 convicts at a time incarcerated on the York hulk at Gosford before also being transported to the Swan River Colony (*Scindian* convict #11) and Benjamin Barker was sent to Van Diemen's Land.

When John Rason arrived in Fremantle aboard the *Scindian* on 1 June 1850 he was described in Convict Establishment records as being 5 foot nine and a half inches tall, with dark brown hair, hazel eyes, a round face, fresh complexion and of stout appearance. He and friend Thomas Trott were issued with their tickets-of-leave on the same day just six months after arrival, on 3 December 1850, and put to work in the Fremantle area. John Rason was

employed by a Mr. J. W. Davey as a carpenter. The Superintendent's Orders for 26 September 1850 record that Rason was one of four convicts working in a boat crew that would be starting at 7.30am the following morning who were to be provided with clean clothes and their meat dinner.

A family story from Gillian O'Mara relates that Trott and Rason were working together for Harbourmaster Daniel Scott at Fremantle in October 1850 when Trott "...saw his future wife arrive on the 'Hashemy' and told his mate that he would marry within the year." This prediction came true when Trott married young Irish emigrant Ellen Mary Meade on 25 August 1851.

Rason beat his friend to the punch as he was married ten days earlier in Fremantle on 15 August 1851 to Sophia Swords under the alias of John Raison. Sophia, a 19-year-old servant from the Holborn Union Workhouse in Middlesex, London, had arrived in Western Australia aboard the emigrant ship *Sophia*, arriving on 27 July 1850, just a few weeks after Rason himself had arrived.

The couple stayed in the Fremantle area where their two children were born: John Henry Raison in 1852 and Elizabeth Mary Raison the following year. John was thought to have been working as a bricklayer/mason when he was reconvicted for an unknown crime and spent a month in prison from 17 December 1856 to his release on 17 January 1857. Sadly for the small family Sophia died a short time after during childbirth on 26 February 1857, aged just 24 years. Her occupation listed on the death certificate was "wife of John Raison, mason".

John may not have coped well with the devastating loss of his wife as he was again reconvicted. Convict Registers indicate he was back in prison on 7 December 1859 and released on ticket-of-leave on 8 August 1860. He received his Conditional Pardon on 5 April 1862, however his poor behaviour continued and on 19 August 1862 he was charged with two offences: "Assaulting Mrs Drake and using obscene language" and "Assaulting and threatening to take the life of PC Callaghan". The Convict Register indicates that the sentence for each charge was two months' imprisonment or payment of a fine of £5. He served four months in prison and was released on 18 December 1862.

It is likely his children were being cared for by someone else as the final word on John Rason was that he was working as a pulling hand at the fishery at McKenzie Whaling Station on Doubtful Island, Esperance Bay when he was accidentally killed by the stroke of a whale on 21 July 1866. Mr H. McKenzie of Albany, the agent for the fishery, was the informant of Rason's premature death at 40 years of age.

While John's life story was a sadly short and violent one, his two children John and Elizabeth appear to have fared better. Each married and had several children of their own, continuing John Rason's legacy with many descendants. John Henry Raison married Emily Dobson Pusey on 21 September 1877 in Perth and they had thirteen children between November 1877 and November 1898; three sons and ten daughters. Emily Pusey was the daughter of William Pusey of the 51st Regiment of Foot who had arrived in Western Australia in 1842 and resigned from the regiment in 1847 to pursue farming. Daughter Elizabeth Mary Raison married Charles Nicholas Tondut on 28 November 1870 and according to the Barrons/Daniel Ancestry family tree, Elizabeth and Charles had nine children, seven daughters and two sons. Charles Nicholas Tondut was born in Perth in 1846 to mother Caroline Jackson and father, Charles

Francis Tondut, a Frenchman who had apparently arrived in Western Australia as a 19-year-old in 1835. He was reported to have deserted from a French whaling vessel at Albany. He was one of the first men to settle in South Perth and made a name for himself as a viticulturist. A descendant related that Charles Francois Tondut “was friendly with Governor Fitzgerald, who was one of the few Perth men who could speak French in those days. The Governor would often visit the old home and sample locally-made wine with his grandfather”.

John Henry Raison died 14 January 1914 at his residence 129 Bulwer Street, Perth aged 57 years. His wife Emily died on 16 April 1932 at her home in 32 Gardiner Street, Mt. Lawley aged 73. Elizabeth Mary Tondut (nee Raison) died aged 48 years in June 1901 after having made several appearances in court during the 1890s due to being drunk and disorderly. Her husband Charles Tondut had died 22 December 1889 aged 43 years. Their residence at times of their deaths was Douglas Avenue, South Perth.

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Wakefield Prison register information courtesy of Bevan Carter.

