

John Morris – Scindian Convict #67

The Convict Establishment Chaplain's Register records John Morris as a "Carpenter & Sawyer, age 24 years, November 1850". He could read, but write "badly". His father Robert Morris lived in Goudhurst near Maidstone Kent. The Millbank Prison register records him as a soldier who read and wrote "imperfectly", while Wakefield Prison recorded him as a soldier who could "neither" read nor write. Portland Prison had a varying description recording him as a "Sawyer or Soldier". One thing the records all agree on - his crime was rape.

The *Hampshire Advertiser* of 4 March 1848 reported on the February Winchester Assizes:

John Morris was indicted for a [rape] at Avington, near Winchester, on Martha, the wife of George Gloss. The prisoner met Mrs. Gloss and asked her for a sixpence on the Down, coming within three miles of Winchester; she refused to give anything to him. The prisoner was dressed in regimentals at the time, and she was quite sure of his identity. After prosecutrix refused giving him money, he ill-used her. When prosecutrix got away, she gave an alarm, and went to the Colonel of the 62nd Regiment, who advised her to procure a policeman, which she did.

Richard Gumbleton remembers the day in question, and was at Beanworth on that day, and he saw the prisoner going towards Bishop's Waltham; they went together as far as Millberry's Inn, where they had a pint of fourpenny beer each. The prisoner was not apprehended till the 6th of January, he having deserted from his Regiment.

Guilty – Fifteen years' transportation.

Initially held in Winchester Prison following his trial, Morris was transferred to Millbank Prison on 21 March 1848, the usual practice for all prisoners sentenced to transportation. Eight months later Morris was moved to the north of England in West Yorkshire to the Wakefield House of Corrections on 30 November 1848. His last move happened when he was moved on 31 October 1849 to Portland Prison in readiness for transportation to Western Australia via the *Scindian* on 28 February 1850.

Morris had his physical description recorded shortly after his arrival in the Swan River Penal Colony: height 5' 6 3/4", with dark brown hair appearing black, dark hazel eyes, an oval shaped face, with a dark complexion and being stout in appearance. His name was mentioned in the *Superintendent's Orders (SO1) p4, September 20 1850*:

Extra rations for men employed at sawyers, blacksmiths, mortar mixers and washers on such days as they are fully employed at their respective trades or occupations.

Sawyers - 6oz, bread, 8oz meat, 1 Pt Beer

67 John Morris, 16 Saml Jackson, 60 John Willson, 37 Saml Smith

Morris was one of the last of the *Scindian* convicts to receive his ticket-of-leave on 26 May 1852. He accompanied fellow *Scindian* convict #66, John Bradbury, to Toodyay. The Superintendent's Orders of 17 December 1851 reported that the men "*were forwarded to Toodyay by Glydes boat this day.*" He was returned to the Convict Establishment on 15 March 1852. He was discharged to work in the town of Fremantle on 24 June 1852.

The Marg Terrel Ancestry family trees records *Scindian* convict John Morris as having married Mary Ann Wagstaff (nee Murphy) in January 1853. The couple had at least eight children, the first of whom Ann was born in March 1853. Ann went on to marry William 'Crabby' Davis, convict #7391 who arrived aboard the *Lord Dalhousie* in December 1863. Annie and Crabby Davis had a descendant many decades later named Geoff Gallop who was Premier of Western Australia between 2001 and 2006. The other children of John and Mary Ann Morris include Elizabeth Agnes (1856-1905), Mary (1858-1935), Ellen Mary (1860), Charles (1862-1948), Alfred (1866-1946), Harriet (1864) and Eliza (1868-1940).

In 1871, John Morris was listed as working as a butcher in Perth and by 1881 as a carpenter. Whatever the circumstances, at the end of a convict's life, many of them returned to the Perth Old Men's Home when they became infirm and required care. The *Daily News* recorded Morris' arrival at the Mt Eliza Depot on 20 October 1886 and later reported that he had died "on this day at the age of 68, from the effects of heart disease and dropsy." John Morris was buried in the East Perth cemetery on the day he died, 15 February 1887.

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Sources:

Ancestry.com - Family Tree for Marg Terrell: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/167646669/person/232180538925/facts>

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Millbank Prison Register, PCom_2_28, no. 14382, courtesy of Bevan Carter;

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and p 121, 17 December 1851;

Portland Prison register, PCom_2_383, courtesy of Bevan Carter;

Wakefield HO 24/13, courtesy of Bevan Carter.