

## Thomas Ashbee, 333, *Mermaid*

Marcia Watson

Name variation: Ashby

Baptism	1828 No baptism found. The records point to Thomas being born in this year at Boughton under Blean, Kent.
Parents	Edwin Ashbee and Elizabeth Frost
Parent's marriage	20 November 1812, Boughton under Blean, Kent
Siblings	William 1813 - 1815 Buried same day at his brother Edwin Edwin 1814 - 1815 William Henry 1816 Alfred Joseph 1820 Thomas 1822 - 1827 Twin John 1822 - 1824 Twin Ann King 1827 - 1857 (died in Boughton workhouse) Walter 1833 - 1864 (died in Boughton workhouse)
Wife	Bridget Conway
Married	1868, Bunbury, Western Australia
Children	

### His Parents:

Edwin Ashbee, son of William Jnr and Sarah, was baptised on 18 March 1792 at Herne, Kent. He was apprenticed as a carpenter to John Vinson at Herne on 29 January 1807. The apprenticeship was to run from 1 June 1806 for seven years and cost £10.<sup>1</sup> Edwin married Elizabeth Frost on 20 November 1812 at Boughton under Blean, Kent. They were both minors, and their fathers permitted the couple to marry. The marriage was announced in the newspaper: *20 November, Mr Edward Ashbee, of Herne, to Miss Frost, of Boughton under Blean.*<sup>2</sup> Edwin's wife, Elizabeth Frost, the eldest child of Thomas and Anne Frost, was baptised on 22 October 1792 at Boughton under Blean, Kent.<sup>3</sup>

All their children were baptised at Boughton under Blean apart from the Eldest, William, who was baptised at Hernhill, Kent.

When Thomas was about five years old, his mother Elizabeth Ashbee, was buried 14 February 1833, aged 44, at Boughton under Blean.

Then, on 4 August 1835, the three youngest children, Ann Ashbee 9, Thomas Ashbee 8, and Walter Ashbee 3 were admitted to the Boughton Workhouse. The children were admitted again on 18 October 1837 because they had been deserted by their father; they were discharged on 18 September 1837.

The following year in November 1838, the newspaper reported: Mr B. A. Chambers proceeded by order of the Board Guardians of Faversham Union to Sheerness, where he apprehended Edwin Ashbee, an artisan (*sic*) in the Sheerness Dockyard. Though earning a guinea week, the latter allowed his three children to remain in the Faversham Union Workhouse. On

<sup>1</sup> The National Archives reference (IR 1 series) 72 f 101

<sup>2</sup> Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal, 24 Nov 1812, p4

<sup>3</sup> Canterbury Cathedral Archives, U3/221/1/4

Saturday was brought before Lieut.-General Gosselin, who committed him to the treadmill for three months. <sup>4</sup>

On release from prison, Edwin Ashbee, born 1793, widower, able, was admitted to the Boughton workhouse on 16 March 1839 because he did not have work. Admitted with him were his children, Ann, born in 1830 and Walter, born in 1834. Edwin and the children were discharged, with 3 hours' notice, on 13 April 1839. The two children were deserted again by their father and appear to have been placed back in the workhouse. Ann was discharged on 24 August 1839 to service. Walter was discharged, with three house notice, on 12 November 1841.

Thomas's grandfather and Edwin's father, William Ashbee, died in 1840. He left to his wife Sarah, for and during her natural life, the interest and dividends on £500 in the Bank of England, invested at 3½%. On her death, the money was to be divided between his children and two grandchildren: Sarah, spinster, £190; Edwin £30, Joseph £40, Gilbert £50, grandchildren Eliza and Edward Edwards £95 each when they reached 21 years of age. William's house at Whitstable, now in the occupation of Mr Baker, was to be inherited by Edwin. The residue of the estate is to be equally divided between the above legatees. <sup>5</sup> Wife Sarah died in 1847 at Herne, Kent

What did Edwin do with his new-found wealth? He has not been located on the 1841 or 1851 census; however, the three youngest children were all in Faversham in 1841. <sup>6</sup>

Thomas Ashbee, 12, living with a chimney sweeper at Tanner Street, West Side, Faversham, Kent.

Walter Ashbee, 9, was in the workhouse

Ann Ashbee, 14, was a servant to Edward Sparks, a farmer

His son, Alfred Ashby, 20, ag lab, was in Boughton under Blean.

Thomas Ashbee appeared at the Faversham Borough Sessions on 29 December 1845: Robert Wood and Thomas Ashbee pleaded guilty to an indictment charging them with stealing a number of rabbits belonging to Mr Thomas Warre. Wood was sentenced to two months imprisonment, and Ashbee, who received a good character previously to this transaction, and in whose case it seemed misfortune and bad company had led him to this crime, was sentenced to be kept in gaol one day and discharged. <sup>7</sup>

Then, in October 1848, Thomas was apprehended:

Early on Thursday morning week, Morris, the high-constable of Ash, being on duty, in consequence of the numerous burglaries recently committed in that neighbourhood, met a man on the road from Sandwich, whose appearance created suspicion in his (Morris's) mind, that he had more property about him than could fairly be called his own; in consequence of which he stopped him, and enquired as to whence he came and whither he was going when the stranger's replies were of that evasive character that induced Morris to take him into custody. Having conveyed him to his own residence at Ash, he searched the prisoner and found on and about his person a telescope, a cup, a silk handkerchief, an umbrella, a stone bottle containing about two

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<sup>4</sup> Kentish Gazette, 13 Nov 1838, p4

<sup>5</sup> PROB 11; Piece: 1930

<sup>6</sup> HO107/472/19, p18; HO107/472/21, p21; HO107/472/20, p30

<sup>7</sup> South Eastern Gazette, 06 Jan 1846, p5

quarts of gin, and two frock coats, in the pocket of one of which he also found several letters, addressed to Mr Drayson, coal merchant, of Sandwich, to which place Morris immediately conveyed his prisoner, and found that the counting-house of Mr Drayson had been broken open during the night; and the above articles fully identified as having been stolen therefrom. A large knife was found in the counting-house, which had been left there by the party committing the robbery.

The prisoner, who gave his name as Thomas Ashbee, chimney-sweeper of Faversham, was taken before the Mayor and Magistrates of Sandwich and fully committed to take his trial at the next sessions. The Mayor highly complimented Morris for his vigilance in the affair; and, probably, this apprehension will lead to further discoveries as to the parties who have been for some time past engaged in the numerous burglaries committed in this part of the county while it demonstrates the advantage in employing officers connected with localities, and possessing a general knowledge of the neighbourhood and the residents therein, in preference to those who are strangers as the fact of Ashbee not being known to Morris as a resident in that part of the county first created a suspicion on the constable's mind that he was not on the road at so unreasonable an hour, one o'clock in the morning, for a lawful purpose.<sup>8</sup>

At the Sandwich Borough Sessions on 28 December 1848:

Thomas Ashbee, 21, chimney sweeper, was charged with breaking and entering the counting-house of John Drayson, on the 18 October, at the parish of St. Mary the Virgin, and stealing therefrom one telescope, value 20s., and one umbrella, value 1s., the property of the said John Drayson.

There was another indictment against the prisoner for stealing two frock coats and other articles belonging to Mr Drayson. Fifteen years' transportation on the first indictment and two months of hard labour on the second indictment.<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Ashbee was in Sandwich Gaol from the time of his conviction on 28 December 1848 until 15 October 1849, when he was transferred to Millbank Prison. When at Millbank, he weighed 11 stone 12 lbs; he said his sister Ann lived at Preston near Faversham, Kent. Presumably, Ann was the closest relative with whom he was in contact.

When Thomas Ashbee was in Millbank Prison, the two registers noted:

1. Three convictions for felony
2. Once convicted of a felony, twice summarily.

After just over two months at Millbank, Thomas was transferred to Pentonville Prison on 22 December 1849; and then to Portland Prison on 12 September 1850. Thomas boarded the *Mermaid* on 28 December 1850 for the voyage to Western Australia.<sup>10</sup>

The *Mermaid* arrived at Fremantle, Western Australia, on 15 May 1851. A description was taken of each convict:

333. Thomas Ashbee, 20, 5'5½", light hair, hazel eyes, round face, fresh complexion, had T.A. on left arm, was single and a brick maker.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser, 28 Oct 1848, p1

<sup>9</sup> Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser, 06 Jan 1849, p8

<sup>10</sup> HO24/4; HO24/16; PCOM263, p31

He received a Ticket of Leave on 8 October 1852; and a Conditional Pardon on 15 February 1860.

By 1864, Thomas lived in the Blackwood River area, south of Perth. He was a witness in the trial of a native from the Blackwood, Darby who was charged with the murder of Charley, another native, sometime in February last year.

Thomas Ashbee proved that in February 1864, the natives were burning the country near Allnutt's on the Blackwood, and the witness and deceased went to kill a kangaroo and fell in with another native named Charlie, and the prisoner. This Charlie went with the deceased and the prisoner in search of a kangaroo, which the dogs had killed, but which they would not shew. Ashbee went on and killed a kangaroo, which he took with him, but the deceased did not return. Some 3 or 4 weeks after this, Ashbee saw policeman Moulton, who brought the other Charlie with him to Mr Allnutt's. Charlie took them to where the body of Charley lay, unburied, with four wounds one on the right side, one in the right arm, and two in the abdomen. They seemed to be spear wounds. By the Court-The wounds in the body appeared to be such as would cause death. The prisoner and other natives had spears with them when they left Ashbee; the deceased boy Charlie also had a plain spear.

Verdict—Guilty, but strongly recommended to mercy. Sentence—Death recorded<sup>12</sup>

Thomas Ashby married Bridget Conway in 1868 at Bunbury.

Bridget Conway arrived as a 22-year-old servant from Limerick on 26 December 1860 from Plymouth per *Escort*. They lived in Bridgetown, where they were active members of the community. In June 1877, a meeting was held to elect a building committee for a Mechanic's Institute at Bridgetown. Thomas was on the committee.<sup>13</sup> In 1879, Thomas was one of six gentlemen appointed to constitute Boards for the management of the Dardanup, Bridgetown, and Irwin Commonages.<sup>14</sup> When the Bridgetown Roman Catholic Building Committee was formed in April 1897, Thomas was on the committee.<sup>15</sup> Bridget was also active in the community. In 1889, Father Lecaille acknowledged with thanks the following donations, collected by Mrs Ashbee towards the purchase of a chalice for Bridgetown - Thomas Ashbee 10s. Mrs O'Toole collected money towards Bridgetown Church Building Fund - Thomas Ashbee £5.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas received contracts from the Blackwood Road Board in the area. In 1872, he and Edward McGrath, who arrived on the *Mermaid*, had their contract accepted to erect a stable at Bridgetown Police Station for £59 10s accepted<sup>17</sup>

Work carried out for the Blackwood Road Board

1874: Blackwood Road – By cash to Thos. Ashby for throwing up and forming 74 chains at 4s 10d clearing out trees and erecting 6 culverts at 20s each £24 15 8<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> SROWA, Acc 128/1-32

<sup>12</sup> The West Australian Times (Perth, WA: 1863 - 1864), 14 Jul 1864, p3; The Perth Gazette and West Australian Times (WA: 1864 – 1874, 14 Apr 1865, p3

<sup>13</sup> The Herald (Fremantle, WA : 1867 - 1886), 23 Jun 1877, p3

<sup>14</sup> The Herald (Fremantle, WA: 1867 - 1886), 26 Jul 1879, p2

<sup>15</sup> The W.A. Record (Perth, WA : 1888 - 1922), 19 Jun 1897, p9

<sup>16</sup> The W.A. Record (Perth, WA : 1888 - 1922), 7 Feb 1889, p6

<sup>17</sup> The Herald (Fremantle, WA: 1867 - 1886), 8 Jun 1872, p2

1876: Thos. Ashbee was paid £7 for building a large culvert in Bridgetown, 25ft. wide, and making approaches thereto.<sup>19</sup>

1877: Ashbee, for throwing and forming 30 chains in Bridgetown at 8s per chain	£12 0 0
Ashbee, for building 3 culverts at 30 each	£4 10 0
Ashbee, for erecting one large culvert, 80s, and gravelling &c, 60s	£7 0 0 <sup>20</sup>
T Ashbee making culvert, Wilgarup road &c	£6 10 0
T Ashbee, on account contracts, gravelling	£18 0 0 <sup>21</sup>

Thomas, now aged about 51, decided to branch out into another profession. On 5 November 1879, he placed an advertisement in the newspaper announcing:

I, Thomas Ashbee, now residing at Bridgetown, in the district of Wellington, do hereby give notice that it is my intention to apply at the next Licensing Meeting to be holden for this district for a Publican's General License for the sale of fermented and spirituous liquors in the house and appurtenances thereunto belonging, situate at Bridgetown, on Bridgetown Town Lot No 40, containing two sitting rooms and three bedrooms, to be named the "Emerald Isle", and owned by me, and which I intend to keep as an Inn or Public house. I have never before held a license.<sup>22</sup>

On 20 January 1881, James Lambe announced he intended to apply for the licence of the Emerald Isle. He currently holds a license transferred from Thomas Ashbee. The hotel now consisted of 8 rooms - 3 sitting rooms and 5 bedrooms.<sup>23</sup>

The Bridgetown Heritage Walk brochure – No 9 Bridgetown Hotel, 157 Hampton street:

The first hotel on this site, converted from a store formerly owned by Abraham Moulton, was The Emerald Isle in 1879, owned by former convict Thomas Ashbee. Joseph Daw became the new owner in 1895 and renamed it the Bridgetown Hotel. When the Hampton Street road level was raised in the early 1900s, entry into the bar was down some steps. The hotel was demolished in 1911 under new owner Frank Willmott (later an M.P. and leader of the Country Party) and rebuilt, with additions in 1939 and a major renovation in 2004

In 1885 and 1886, Thomas was awarded several contracts by the Blackwood Road Board:

Thos. Ashbee, clearing and throwing up and forming Steere Street                   £43 17 0<sup>24</sup>

*John May recalled, in 1934, just about 48 years ago, I took the contract to clear Steere Street and with Tom Asphy carried out the work as far as the water trough; it was only a bridle track then. Tom Asphy and I also cleared the old showground that has since been built on.*<sup>25</sup>

Thomas Ashbee, new culvert in the main street, Bridgetown                   £4 10 0

Thos. Ashbee, bye-road to Nelson Grange.   £4 0 0<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The Herald (Fremantle, WA : 1867 - 1886), 10 Jan 1874, p2

<sup>19</sup> The Herald (Fremantle, WA : 1867 - 1886), 29 Jul 1876, p3

<sup>20</sup> The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA : 1855 - 1901), 11 Apr 1877, p2

<sup>21</sup> The Herald (Fremantle, WA : 1867 - 1886), 5 Oct 1878, p2

<sup>22</sup> The Western Australian Times (Perth, WA: 1874 - 1879), 14 Nov 1879, p3

<sup>23</sup> The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA: 1855 - 1901), 26 Jan 1881, p3

<sup>24</sup> Western Mail (Perth, WA: 1885 - 1954), 15 May 1886, p29

<sup>25</sup> South Western Times (Bunbury, WA : 1932 - 1954), 24 Mar 1934, p8

<sup>26</sup> Western Mail (Perth, WA: 1885 - 1954), 30 Apr 1887, p3

In 1890, at Fremantle, a Thomas Ashbee pleaded guilty to having been drunk on the previous evening. However, though Corporal O'Connor stated that it was the accused's first appearance in that court, his Worship imposed a fine of 10s.<sup>27</sup>

The generosity and community spirit of Thomas and his wife are illustrated by: After an illness of two months' duration Mr Ed. McGrath died at the residence of Mr Thos. Ashbee on 9 July 1897. McGrath was buried on the following day in the Roman Catholic Cemetery. The prayers for the dead were read by Mr D'Arcy O'Toole as there was no priest. A large cortege followed the remains, and many handsome wreaths were laid on the bier. Mr McGrath was greatly respected, having resided in the town for over thirty years. Too much praise cannot be given to Mr and Mrs Ashbee for the manner in which they attended to Mr McGrath throughout his illness.<sup>28</sup>

A Flower Gardens Competition run by the Nelson Agricultural Society, Bridgetown, in 1904 announced:

Sir,—In accordance with the request of the council of your society, I beg to report that I have visited the six (6) flower gardens entered for competition this year and have decided to place them in the following order of merit:—

Miss E. Bracken (first), Mrs Dean (second), Mr Osmer, Mrs Allnutt, Mrs A. Doust, Mrs Ashbee.

*of Mrs Ashbee's flower plot, I can only say it is very creditable considering the disadvantages the owner has laboured under this season*<sup>29</sup>

The newspapers have a few other articles about Mrs Ashbee winning prizes in the show; also attending a wedding and funeral in the period 1900-1910.

Thomas Ashbee died on 14 September 1911 and was buried in the Bridgetown Pioneer Cemetery.

The inscription reads, "Aged 83 years." The death is registered in the district of Blackwood.

His wife, Bridget Ashbee, died in 1916, registered in the Wellington district.

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<sup>27</sup> The Daily News (Perth, WA: 1882 - 1950), 3 Jun 1890, p3

<sup>28</sup> The W.A. Record (Perth, WA : 1888 - 1922), 17 Jul 1897, p9

<sup>29</sup> Blackwood Chronicle and South-West Mining News (WA: 1904 - 1907), 31 Dec 1904, p4