

## Convicts came after June 1850? Think again – By Bevan Carter

While researching the lives of the criminals on the *Minden* I came across one Edward George Barrington, age 36, who had been convicted at the Old Bailey 16 September 1850 for “being at large ... before the expiration” of his sentence.

A newspaper report of the trial records that on the sentence of seven years transportation being announced,

‘[T]he prisoner who was dreadfully agitated, no sooner heard the sentence than he ... said he would sooner be dead than again transported; and drawing a pen knife he had secreted, made an attempt to cut his throat. ...The excitement was much heightened by the frantic screams of a woman in the gallery, said to be his wife, who could scarcely be restrained from throwing herself over into the dock.’ [Colonial Times 28 March 1851]:

Assuming he had returned from Tasmania I was surprised to read in the Court transcript that “it was for running away from Western Australia” so then thought he must have been a Parkhurst boy. Wrong again! He came out to Western Australia on the *Cumberland* in 1846 from Pentonville prison after being sentenced at the Old Bailey 10 June 1844 to 10 years transportation for stealing about £40 from his landlady in London. Three other adult men from Pentonville, with 12 juveniles from Parkhurst and 4 juveniles from Millbank, were also transported on the same Emigration ship. Also on the *Cumberland* was the new Governor Andrew Clarke. While the juveniles had been pardoned on condition they agreed to be indentured to employers in WA for the duration of their sentences, the four adults were granted pardons on condition ‘that they be conveyed to our territory of West Aust & that they do remain & continue within our Australian colonies for & during the remaining term of their respective sentences.’ [Correspondence register HO13/87/52]

When NSW refused to accept convicts from England in 1842, the Crown continued sending convicted men to the outlying regions of the State; some ten ships were sent to Victoria and two to Moreton Bay with pardoned criminals like Barrington. Correspondence indicating WA was expecting Barrington, Paton, Weedon and Swinburne in 1846 has yet to be found.

The following edited extract from one of Barrington’s four petitions requesting mercy describes his time in WA and his return to England:

‘The distress of my poor dear wife and children compels me to trouble you with this my humble petition.

In my petition in November 1850, I stated the particulars of the 2 years solitary confinement I served in Millbank and Pentonville prisons. My conduct while at those prisons and the former good character I bore from my birth procured me a ticket of leave on conditional pardon on leaving England which took place in the latter part of the year 1845. When I arrived at the above place Swan River the Governor inform us we were freemen and to be careful not to relate our former circumstances on any account to any one who or what we were. We were landed immediately on arrival at the Port of Fremantle without a penny in my pocket or food for my next meal. I stood on the beach of a foreign land nor anywhere to lay my head. What little money I had before I left England was going in charge of one Doctor Snape who was acting as Ships Doctor and it was to be given me on arrival in Port, but on the morning he appointed me to meet him at the Hotel, he left

the evening before and gone 60 miles up the country so that I never had my money or seen him since. When I found what distress I was in I applied to Governor Clarke who said that he had nothing to do with us, and that we must get work and do as best we could but after a little while considering the awkward position we were in he very kindly gave us an order to go to an officer at the custom house to procure us a weeks board and lodging but before the time expired I succeeded in getting a situation on a farm as carpenter at 30/- per month which was very low wages. The colony was in a distressed state for the farmers were discharging their servants and doing with less and lowering the wages of those they kept. Every person who could leave the colony did. Myself I applied to the governor who told me I was free to leave when I thought proper.

An opportunity offer in June 1847 for me to join a small schooner the Emu belonging Swan River which I embraced with a view in obtaining my living on the ocean. We sailed for Singapore East Indies lading with sandalwood, at which place we arrived after seven weeks.

When we found the owner was trying to sell the vessel privately and leave the whole of us destitute in the country, we applied to Capt Ross, marine magistrate of Singapore who issued a warrant for him and arrested him for our wages. After a certain number of days she was publicly sold by order of the Magistrate to pay the wages and the enormous debts the owner had contracted.

While at Singapore I tried to get a situation but unfortunately I could not succeed. At last I resolved to join Her Majesty's brig *Columbine* then commanded by Capt Charles Conrad Grey, who was succeeded by Capt John Dalrymple Hay, under whose command I had the pleasure in rendering myself serviceable to my Queen and Country on the glorious 29<sup>th</sup> September 1849 which will be ever imprinted on the heart of every one of the *Columbine's* crew at the slaughter they made and witness that in the attack we made most daring on 15 Pirate war Junks, myself my Noble Baronet was wounded in the thigh with a boarding pike on boarding the largest Junk and when in the act of dismounting her guns I was thrown overboard by the exploding of the Magazine in which case several of my poor shipmates lost their lives but Thank God I was miraculously safe my own live in having just sufficient strength to reach our Gun Boat. On the 15 April 1850 I was discharge at Chatham with character good. I made every possible haste to my poor distressed wife and children with my hard earned wages little thinking but I was a freeman once more in dear England.

I immediately set about to procure a little business to maintain my wife & family in an honest and industrious way with sacrificing part of my prize money and what money I had I procured a very respectable Beer House situated in the Parish of Shoreditch, where everything seem to go smoothly comfortably with me until one who was lodging in my house and had been my shipmate and knew the whole of my affairs had run in my debt nearly £20 for lodging boarding washing and money borrowed, did me this severe injury with view of getting a handsome reward and getting clear of my debt.'[HO13/87/52]

His appeals failed and Barrington sailed for Fremantle on the *Minden* July 1852.

In 1864 Edward George (now Edwin Lord) Barrington married Ann Elizabeth Dewis, the eldest of five daughters of Josiah and Mary Dewis who had arrived two years prior on the *Mary Harrison*. Josiah and Mary were later to be Master and Matron of the Mount Eliza Depot.

Barrington and Ann lived in Murray Street and he worked as a millwright and blacksmith. They had seven children before Ann died of fever (possibly Puerperal) after giving birth to Rufus in 1879 and her name is on the Dewis family headstone in East Perth cemetery. Rufus died a month later

Barrington was an early member of the Perth Working Men's Club, was President in 1890 when he died, and also for a time secretary of the Working Men's Benefit Society. [*Inquirer* 16 April 1890]

An insight into Barrington's character is revealed in an account of a speech he made in 1885 on defending Western Australia:

'Mr Lord Barrington attempted to address the meeting from the floor, when he was assailed with cries of "Get up on the platform! Git up, git up!" etc, and having complied, the speaker who is a very lively excitable old gentleman, proceeded to ask what is the good of ammunition without instruments he should like to know? ...old as he was [he] would cheerfully go and fight his best for his country. He was an old man-of-war man, and it was now thirty years since he left his ship but give him a 16-ton gun all to himself on the Fremantle Hills and he'd blow every Russian corvette right up to heaven.' [*West Australian* 6 May 1885 see Trove for whole report.]

Barrington's story requires us to look again at the convict history of WA. Men in WA were given pardons on condition they not return to England and here we have men in England pardoned on condition they take ship to Australia. Are there any more convicted men, or even women, who came to WA on Emigration Commission ships?



Barrington on the left. Photo probably taken circa 1880. Prison records have him as 5ft 3 inches.[Battye collection BA 2304]



The Institute was at the north end of Barrack street. It was demolished in 1917 to make way for the Beaufort Street railway bridge. The railway would have run on the southern side of the Institute. In the top left hand corner is the Perth prison, remnants of which are within the new museum. [Battye collection BA 255062]