

William Cleveland is like many convicts; their origins are unknown. He was, however, a good actor and storyteller.

On 2 March 1850, at the Derby Police Office, William Cleveland was charged with wandering abroad and endeavouring to collect charitable contributions by false and fraudulent pretences; he was committed to the house of correction for three calendar months as a rogue and vagabond.¹

Lloyd's Weekly newspaper gave a complete account of the incident:

On Thursday last, says the "Derby Reporter," the attention of a number of persons was attracted by a man who had fallen, apparently in a fit, on the Osmaston- road. On returning to consciousness, the man appeared distressed at being surrounded by so many people and informed Mr Webster (the governor of the workhouse, who was present) that if he would take him to a private room he would make known to him his name and circumstances. The case seemed to be so distressing that the sympathy of Mr Webster was excited, and he had the man conveyed to the porter's lodge, where every attention was shown him. He then stated that his name was William Cleveland and that he was a master builder at Whitby, in Yorkshire. He had been walking day and night since Sunday, was in great distress of mind, and had not a farthing in his pocket to purchase an ounce of sustenance or to get back to his home.

He further stated that he had lost his wife, and having no children, he intended to adopt a nephew, who, however, eloped with a man's wife last July and was the cause of all his misery. When he discovered the conduct of his "dear nephew," he made up his mind to follow him in the hope that he might succeed in reclaiming him from his evil courses and restore him to his proper position as a respectable member of society. When he left home in search of his nephew, he took £180, a gold watch, and the necessary supply of clothing. He followed the unhappy couple to America and Egypt, and we do not know how many other countries, frequently being close upon the heels of the fugitives, who, however, contrived to elude his grasp. At length, broken down in health, spirits and pocket, he returned to England, was obliged to sell his watch and nearly the whole of his linen and other apparel, and was now wending his way homewards, penniless and heartbroken. Big drops rolled down his pallid cheeks as he recounted his long catalogue of woes, and the heart of his hearer yearned with compassion. If he could but get home, -oh, he would give *pounds* for *shillings* to any good Samaritan who would thus heal his bleeding heart and send him to his cherished birthplace.

At this juncture, a gentleman from Belper happened to call upon Mr Webster and, on hearing the particulars we have related, said it so happened that two gentlemen from Whitby were then on a visit at his house. If the unfortunate man would accompany him to Belper, and his statement should prove correct, he would supply him with the necessary amount of cash to enable him to reach Whitby. He appeared grateful but excused himself from going to Belper that evening on the ground of his being very ill and required a night's rest. If he could obtain the means of remaining in Derby all night, he would proceed to Belper on the following morning. It was then arranged that he should sleep at the Nag's Head and proceed to Belper by train the next day, the gentleman promising to meet him at the station. Mr Webster gave the man 5s. 6d., some bread and butter and gin and water, and then sent a boy to show him the way to the Nag's Head, where Mr Webster was to see him in the morning and start him by train.

Again tears of gratitude flowed, and the unfortunate innocent was in the act of leaving the workhouse in company with the boy when he said, with great simplicity, "Pray, sir, may I ask where am I?" "You are at the Derby Union Porter's lodge?" was the reply. "Good gracious!. Why I am a member of the Whitby board of guardians; what a laugh it will occasion my colleagues when they find that I have been relieved at the

¹ Derby Mercury, 06 March 1850, p3

Derby Union!" The notion seemed to tickle his fancy for the moment; and the kind-hearted, confiding governor no doubt thought it was a "curious coincidence." However, with the easy confidence of an unsuspecting man, the governor sent a boy with the "large builder from Whitby" to lead him to the Nag's Head, there to refresh tired nature with balmy sleep. But alas, the ingrate turned upon his benefactor. No sooner had the man of many sorrows gone a convenient distance from the workhouse than he changed his tone and ordered the boy to leave him. Bent, however, upon a faithful discharge of his duties, the boy persisted in "showing him the way" to comfortable lodgings; whereupon he and his master were assailed with threats and epithets which cannot be repeated to ears polite, and the boy returned to the union to astonish his master with the tidings.

Nothing more was heard of the fellow until Friday afternoon, when a man fell as if dead in front of Mr Hefford's shop in Queen-street. Many good Samaritans were speedily attracted to his assistance. He was in a fit, and many doubted whether he would ever get out of it with life. Mr Webster's boy happened to be a spectator and instantly recognised the Simon Pure. With feet fleet as a galloway, the boy ran to the union with the information, and Mr Webster lost no time in apprising the police. Meanwhile, every attention had been bestowed upon the man, who was kindly conveyed to the house of Mr Evans, surgeon, where, on recovering, he was supplied with coffee, two half-sovereigns, and some silver. We understand the impostor was in the act of relating his eventful history to his kind benefactor when two policemen entered and much to Mr Evans's surprise, "walked him off" to the police office. Only one half-sovereign could, however, be found upon him, and it is supposed, he swallowed the other. On Saturday, the "large master builder from Whitby" was taken before the mayor, and he was very properly consigned to three months' prison fare, with daily exercise on the tread wheel.²

William was just released from gaol and then appears to have been taken to Leicester, where at the County Police Office, on 1 June 1850, he was committed for trial on a charge of obtaining money under false pretences from Mr T. Allen, of Thurmaston on 26 February 1850.³ William was found guilty of obtaining £1 7s by false pretences and, having been previously convicted of a similar offence, was sentenced to seven years transportation. The newspaper reported, "he made a most ingenious defence, something the style of the well-known story of Eugene Aram, and cross-examined the witnesses like a well-practised lawyer".⁴

Seven male convicts and one female were removed from the Leicestershire County Gaol on Monday morning, 12 August 1850, including Wm Cleveland. The male prisoners were chained together and were accompanied by two officials of the prison. The female prisoner, a diminutive woman, was removed in charge of a female attendant. With the exception of Cleveland, all appeared under thirty years of age.⁵

William Cleveland, 53, single, can read and write imperfectly, a gardener, was convicted at the Special Quarter Sessions at the Castle of Leicester on 1 July 1850 of a misdemeanour in obtaining money under false pretences. He had one summary conviction. William was sentenced to 7 years transportation. He was received at Millbank Prison on 12 August 1850 from Leicester Gaol. Eight months later, on 16 April 1851, he was transferred to Dartmoor Prison. His behaviour at Dartmoor was very good. William boarded the *Pyrenees* on 28 January 1853 for the voyage to Western Australia.⁶

On arrival at Fremantle, his description was:

1992. William Cleveland, 41, 5'10½", light brown hair, grey eyes, long face, swarthy complexion, healthy appearance, a scar on the left side of his nose and cheek, a gardener and single.⁷

² Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper, 17 March 1850, p12.

³ Leicestershire Mercury, 08 June 1850, p1

⁴ Leicester Chronicle, 06 July 1850, p1

⁵ Leicester Chronicle, 17 August 1850, p3

⁶ HO27/92, p284; PCOM2/31, p103; HO8/115

⁷ SROWA Acc 128/1-32

In 1877, a newspaper reported:

Information reached us on Friday from the Vasse of an attempt made upon his own life last week by a man named William Cleveland, who was engaged as a labourer on Mr J. Harris' farm. Mrs Savage observed him with a knife in his hand and blood running from his neck; she afterwards saw him fall. A man named Mewitt tried to catch him when he made another attempt and then attempted to jump into the river. He has been sent to the hospital, where he lies in a very precarious state, having an incision three inches deep in his neck and one artery being completely severed. The man had been observed drinking at Mr Gardener's public house during the past week.⁸

His age in English Prison records is 53 (b.1797), but when he arrived at Fremantle, he was 41 (b.1812). William *Cleaveland* died on 24 February 1891 at Bunbury, aged 86, making his year of birth 1805.

⁸ The Herald (Fremantle, WA : 1867 - 1886), 20 August 1877, p1