

Baptism	9 April 1820, Great Hallingbury, Essex, England
Parents	James Dennis and Phoebe Judd
Parent's marriage	25 December 1819, Great Hallingbury, Essex, England
Siblings	William (1822), George (1823), Thomas (1826), Marianne (1829), Elizabeth (1832)
Wife	
Married	
Children	

1841 census, Forest, Hatfield Broad Oak, Dunmow, Essex, England, p15. ¹
 James Dennis 35, Ag lab; Phebe 35, Thomas 13, Marianne 12, Elizabeth 8.
 A note at the end of the census says John Dennis 22 was missed from page 15.

At the Essex County Sessions, on 14 October 1845:

John Taylor, 20, a labourer, was charged with uttering to Sarah Hume a counterfeit coin resembling a shilling and with having in his possession other pieces of the counterfeit coin; John Dennis, 24, a labourer, was indicted for having uttered to Emma Anthony a counterfeit coin resembling a half-crown, at Tollesbury.

Mrs Hume deposed that on 17 September, the prisoner Taylor came to her shop for a quarter of a pound of cheese and tendered in payment a coin resembling a shilling. The prisoner received change, and it was ultimately discovered that the coin was counterfeit; a mark was put upon it and handed over to police constable Arthur Bull. Afterwards, she saw the prisoner in custody at the Plough and Sail public house and accused him of uttering counterfeit coins when he admitted he had done so.

Police constable Bull stated that while searching the prisoner, he found a coin resembling a half-crown wrapped in a piece of brown paper and concealed in the lining of his waistcoat jacket. Another counterfeit shilling was also found in the prisoner's possession. The prisoner's defence was that Dennis gave him the shilling to pay for the cheese.

The evidence against Dennis was that at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the same day, the prisoner went to the shop of the prosecutrix to purchase a half-quartern loaf, in payment for which he tendered a coin resembling a half-crown and received 2s 2¼d change. The coin was ultimately found to be counterfeit.

William Anthony stated that he saw the prisoner come from his shop with a loaf of bread under his arm and suspected him, from his appearance, to be a "loose sort of a fish" he went to the till and took the half-crown. He tendered in payment for the bread. The prisoner was apprehended at the Plough and Sail; he was drinking with Taylor.

The jury found both guilty, and they were sentenced to 12 months imprisonment with hard labour.²

¹ TNA UK, HO107/330/4

² Essex Herald, 21 October 1845, p2

John was before the Court again at the Essex Easter Session on 4 July 1848

Charles Lee, 23, John Dennis, 28, and James Sapsford, 21, labourers, were indicted for stealing a duck and a drake from John Brown at Little Hallingbury.

It appeared that on Sunday morning, the ducks were counted Susan Lee and found to be safe; in the evening, however, a duck and a drake, marked in a peculiar way with ink, were missed and subsequently traced the house of George Sapsford, father of the prisoner, by Inspector Dunn. The prisoners were seen together near the prosecutor's premises. In the afternoon, they were all found at Sapsford's house and upon examination, several spots of blood were found on their clothes and hands. — Guilty — Each sentenced to two months' hard labour.³

Then, at the General Quarter Sessions, 15 October 1850, at Chelmsford, Essex: John Dennis, 32, Benjamin Sapsford, 34, and George Sapsford, 20, labourers, were indicted for stealing four bushels of wheat, the property of William Whitehead at great Hallingbury.

The prosecutor proved to have seen some wheat at Mr Twyford's mill and recognised it as a portion on the previous day.

William Eldred said he was employed by Mr Whitehead in threshing wheat; on the following day, he discovered some of it had been removed.

Jane Matthews lived with her father, a labourer, at Bishops Stortford; she and her father lodged at Benjamin Sapsford's house; there was no wheat at his house on Friday; on Friday night she was visited by a young man named Gates, and about three o'clock on Saturday morning she heard some voices in the house; she heard them throw something down in the room; on the following morning she saw Benjamin Sapsford dressing some wheat upstairs; Dennis asked her if she would take some wheat to the mill for him, which she did, about two bushels; she went afterwards to Twyford's mill with George Sapsford, who took two bushels and a half; it was sold to Mr Tanner and George Sapsford took the money; on going home she saw Benjamin Sapsford on the road; she passed Mr Jeslin on the road; she afterwards went to Benjamin Sapsford's house, and there the prisoners parted the money; on the Saturday morning John Dennis said to her, "If anybody asks you about the wheat tell them it was your mother's gleaning corn"; but it was not gleaning corn at all.⁴

John Gates and James Matthews confirmed the evidence of Jane Matthews.

Charles Nicholls, miller, employed by Mr E Tanner, said he received wheat from the last witness, and compared the sample with the bulk in Mr Whitehead's barn, and they corresponded.

Edward Tanner recognised the sample of wheat brought to him, which corresponded with that Mr Whitehead had shown him; he felt certain it was not gleaning corn; he had no doubt it was Mr Whitehead's wheat.

Robert Seabrook, employed by William Tanner, proved receiving the wheat from George Sapsford and paid money for it; he could positively say it was not gleaning corn.

Inspector Scott said he went to Benjamin Sapsford on Sunday morning and seeing him, he searched the house and found about half a dozen skeleton keys in his possession; he asked him if he had corn in the house, and he said he had not; witness afterwards unlocked the barn with the keys.

Geo Carter, a police constable, searched the house of Benjamin Sapsford; he found no wheat but some chaff.

³ Essex Herald, 11 April 1848, p4

⁴ Gleaning is the collection of crops from farmers' fields that have already been harvested or fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest.

The prisoners were all found guilty, and with previous convictions for felonies being proved against all of them, they were sentenced to transportation for 10 years. One of the prisoners said, "Thank you, my lord, I hope you will sit there till I come back".⁵

The Prison Registers show John Dennis, 32, single, cannot read or write, a farm labourer, was convicted on 15 October 1850 at Chelmsford of stealing wheat and sentenced to ten years. He had two previous convictions. John was received at Millbank prison on 14 December 1850 from Springfield Gaol and transferred to Pentonville Prison on 24 December. He weighed 11st 9 lbs when he entered Pentonville; his character was described as idle; and said his father, Jas Dennis, lived at Gt Hallingbury. John boarded the *Marion* on 22 October 1851 for the voyage to Western Australia.⁶

For some reason, John was recorded as Joseph on arrival at Western Australia on 30 January 1852, probably a typographical error.⁷ All other Convict records call him John Dennis, including the Superintendent's Orders on arrival.⁸

1036. Joseph Dennis, 35, 5'6", has auburn hair, grey eyes, a round face, a fresh complexion, a healthy statue, and no marks.⁹

He received a Ticket of leave 18 months later, on 27 June 1853. He was working for Mr Viveash in the Toodyay district when he was a witness at an Inquest into the death of Levi Small, ticket-holder, reg. 1844, in the employ of Mr S. Viveash, whose body was found floating in the River Avon on 12 September:—

John Dennis, ticket holder, on oath, said, — I am employed by Mr Viveash. On Sunday, the 4th instant, my fellow servant, Levi Small, left home early in the morning, between 6 and 7 o'clock, on horseback. He said he was going to Northam to buy some tobacco and should be back by dinner time. He did not return, and on Monday morning, Mr Cook's man brought the mare that Small had ridden away on home. My master was absent, and I was alone on the premises. I was afraid Small was drowned; the saddle was quite wet on the mare as if it had been in the water. The body outside is the body of Levi Small.¹⁰

What became of John Dennis after this date is unknown.

⁵ Essex Herald, 22 October 1850, p2

⁶ TNA UK, HO24/5; HO24/16; PCOM2/63; PCOM2/61

⁷ SROWA, Acc 128/1-32; Acc 128/4043

⁸ SROWA, Acc 1156/R17, R20, SO1-SO3.

⁹ SROWA, Acc 128/1-32

¹⁰ Inquirer, 5 Oct 1853, p2.