

## Phil(l)ip Dixon, 313, *Mermaid*

Researched by Marcia Watson

Baptism	~1820
Parents	Richard Dixon
Parent's marriage	
Siblings	
Wife	Elizabeth Dutton
Married	St. Mary on the Hill, Chester, Cheshire
Children	Charles (1839) James (1841) Mary Ann (~1843) Philip (~1845) Hannah (1847) Robert (1849)

Married by banns, Phillip signed, and Elizabeth made her mark. Although both said they were of full age, both were about 18 years old, from other records.

Phillip Dixon, full age, a labourer from Handbridge, the father is Richard Dixon, a labourer

Elizabeth Dutton, full age, from Handbridge, the father is William Dutton, a labourer

On 17 May 1841, at the Cheshire adjourned quarter sessions, held at Nether Knutsford, Philip Dickson, 21, guilty of stealing two sovereigns, the monies of George Bradshaw, of Tarvin, received one month. When the 1841 census was taken in June, Philip Dickson was in the House of Correction, Knutsford, Cheshire. His wife Elizabeth Dixon 20, Charles 1 and James, 3 (*sic*) are living with James Dutton 49, ag lab, Elizabeth 54, Hannah 15 and William 13 at Boughton, Cheshire.

In opening the General Quarter Session at Chester on 11 January 1847, the Recorder said the case against Philip Dixon, Henry Conley and Elizabeth Dixon was a very serious one so far as the amount of property was concerned.

With respect to Elizabeth Dixon, if it should appear that she is the wife of the prisoner Philip Dixon, then even if she was present at the commission of a felony, or had afterwards received the property from her husband, she would not be punishable by law; because a wife committing a felony in the presence of her husband, or receiving stolen property from him, was in law presumed to be acting under his influence, and, therefore, was not subject to punishment.

Philip Dixon, 25, Henry Conley, 18, and Elizabeth Dixon, 24, were indicted for breaking into the house of Mrs Sarah Rutter and stealing 50 guineas, three-seven shilling pieces, silver coins to the amount of £7 10s and a quantity of silver plate, jewellery, and other articles. Philip pleaded guilty, and Elizabeth and Conley pleaded not guilty.

The Recorder said, you are charged, Dixon, with having committed this offence after having been convicted of felony. I wish you to understand that you are liable on this indictment to be transported for life; and I caution you that your pleading guilty will make no difference in the sentence that may be awarded to you. Now, understanding that, do you persist in you plea of guilty?

Dixon replied, 'it is no use Sir, telling a lie about it: I am guilty'.

The newspaper went on to report: While this conversation took place between the Recorder and the prisoner, Dixon stood up, resting his elbow on the front of the dock, and apparently adjusting his neckerchief. He then laid his head on the partition, and in the course of a moment or two, fell backwards into the dock. It was first supposed that he had fainted, but his wife and other females who m were in the dock uttering a frightful scream, it was immediately ascertained that the prisoner had drawn a razor across his throat, and attempted to commit suicide. The Mayor, Dr Phillips Jones was in an adjacent court and came forth to render assistance.

After binding the wound, he told the Recorder the wound was not life threatening. It was a flesh wound, just over the larynx, and had not penetrated to any depth. Philip was removed from the dock and said he

was sorry he had not killed himself, and would remedy that at the first opportunity. The Mayor gave instructions for him to be pinioned and closely watched to prevent him from carrying out his threat.

The Recorder enquired how Philip could have a razor in his possession when brought into court. When Philip was questioned he said he had secreted the razor up his sleeve after shaving himself in the morning. Philip was searched at the gaol on the morning of his trial. The Recorder commented that the search must have been very careless.

According to the newspaper, Philip was a most violent fellow, and since his commitment in December, Philip had tried to escape. When being moved from the day room to the sleeping cells, Philip had slipped into an unoccupied cell in another part of the gaol. The officer, supposing he was safely lodged, locked and bolted the door as usual. On passing the cell where Philip had hidden, the officer thought he heard footsteps. He opened the door and found Philip hiding under the bed. As a result, Philip was heavily ironed. It did not stop him from trying to force the iron bars across the window and escaping.

When the trial later resumed on Tuesday, Philip said he still intended to plead guilty, and appeared to be suffering severely from the wound he had inflicted upon himself. On 7 December, the goods were stolen from the house of Mrs Sarah Rutter.

On 8 December, a police sergeant and three officers, went to a house in Garden lane and knocked on the door three times. They broke down the door after giving a warning and saw Elizabeth Dixon who declared she had nothing to do with the robbery. They found the silver wear under a grate and on going upstairs found Philip and Conley. The skylight was broken when they tried to escape. Philip said his wife had nothing to do with the robbery.

The Governor of the gaol said he had seen the marriage certificate of Philip and Elizabeth, and she was acquitted. As she was removed from the dock she cried out for mercy for her husband. In his defence, Conley said he had gone to the house to make enquiries about leasing it, on a request from his brother in law. He found it occupied by Philip who told him he was not going to remain there long. He obtained permission to inspect upstairs, and this was when the constable took him into custody. Evidence was given that Philip and Conley had been associated for two to three months, and Philip had visited him regularly.

Philip was sentenced to 15 years transportation and Conley to 10 years transportation. During the address from the Recorder, Philip expressed two or three times his determination not to leave the gaol alive.<sup>1</sup>

Philip was sent to Millbank Prison on 25 March 1847. The register notes he had been in prison several times. On 22 May 1847, he was transferred to the *York* hulk at Gosport.

Philip Dixon, 25, convicted of housebreaking after a previous conviction, 15 years, dark brown hair, dark hazel eyes, Pr nose (proportional?), swarthy complexion, round face, slight build, 5'8", imperfect read and write, a hawker, hairy on breast, scar of knuckle of 4<sup>th</sup> finger right hand, scars on knuckles of 4<sup>th</sup> and little fingers left hand, married with four children. His wife Elizabeth Dixon lives in Chester. Philip had three good, one bad and one very bad report on the five quarterly returns, before he escaped 25 October 1848.<sup>2</sup>

April 1849. A returned convict – The notorious Philip Dickson (sic) has been apprehended at Bala, on a charge of disorderly conduct, and gave the name of Job Edwards. He was afterwards identified, which he requested pen, ink, and paper, and wrote to Mr Hills, Superintendent of Police at Chester, stating that he was sorry to inform him he had got fast there. Mr Hill immediately went to Bala and brought him to Chester on Wednesday, the magistrate there having declined to commit him. He was brought up Thursday, before Major French, Dr R Philips Jones and George Harrison Esq at the Chester Police Court.<sup>3</sup>

A well known burglar, named Philip Dixon, now lies in Chester Castle awaiting his removal to a penal settlement. He was convicted at the last assizes of having returned from transportation before the period of his sentence had expired. He has written the following account of his escape from the hulks:-

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<sup>1</sup> Chester Chronicle, 15 January 1847, p4

<sup>2</sup> PCOM2/136, PCOM2/383, HO8/92-98

<sup>3</sup> North Wales Chronicle, 17 April 1849, p1

I was removed with nine more, out of about 1400 prisoners to Portsmouth, to the York hulk. Here I remained for nearly 20 months; during this time I saw 14 convicts so severely flogged that the flesh came from the back-bone, and were immediately sent out to work again with the rest of the convicts, all for bad behaviour. On one occasion I was present when a convict of the name of Hatter murdered our guard, James Connor. For this, Hatter was tried at Winchester assizes, condemned and hung. I was, in the day time, working on the gun-wharf, and there I picked up a file. I concealed it under my sleeve. The following night, I began filing the bars of the port window of the ship, but dare not do too much at a time, lest I should be heard. The next night I did the same. I generally embraced the opportunity of working at this when the tide might be coming in and the wind made a noise, so that the guard should not hear me from the quarter deck. When I finished a certain portion of my filing I filled it up with brown soap which was the colour of the paint on the bars. I had them all finished on the 9th night; I got up about 12 o'clock, to get through the window and jumped into the sea, but the tide was so very high that I was obliged to give up for the night. I was, as I suppose, seen by some of the prisoners putting in the soap the next morning, as I came up on deck I was stopped by one of the officers; one of them went down into my ward, and found the iron bars had been out; they brought me before the captain; they put a pair of cross-irons upon me; I worked in them and slept in them for three months. They then shifted me into the dockyard, where they thought I should be more secure; but I knew better. I was determined to get some clothing out of some of the men-of-war ships in the dockyard. In this I succeeded, and got a shirt, a cap, a handkerchief, and pair of old trousers. I concealed them in my own cell, one by one, at different times, and kept them in my hammock until I could find an opportunity of making my escape. I got up one morning about three o'clock, and dressed myself with the clothes I had stolen, and put my convict dress over them. At the time we mustered which was always about seven in the morning during winter, the guard searched me and I passed. I got into the boat, and was again detected; and was called on the quarter deck and stripped naked. I was again ironed, and put into the black-hole, and was kept there 14 days and nights, upon a pound of bread a day and plenty of water. After the expiration of these 14 days I was brought out of the black-hole, and when I got on deck I (for the first time in my life) fainted. The irons were kept on me. I was then under the doctor's care for about three weeks. After this I went to work as usual, with about 20 lbs weight of iron upon me for a full three months. During this time my wife came to see me. I was cut to my heart on account of her great distress of mind. She wept bitterly when she saw the heavy irons upon me, and told me that both her and her children were almost in a state of starvation as the parish would not allow then sufficient to support them. I became more determined and desperate than ever. I was again set to work in the dockyard, with light irons. On the following night, when we had left our work to go into the small boat, which took us from our work to the ship, the York, I ran up the piles under the jetty, up to my middle in water, where I remained for about an hour and a half. When the boat was pushed off, I heard the guard say, "Where is Dixon?" I heard one of them say, "He had done us at last, for he is not here". When they came on shore they were over my head, and again exclaimed "He has done us". They asked one of the soldiers whether he had seen one of the men, and he answered "No". All this time I was in the water; I was afraid to use my file to take off my irons, lest the soldier above me should hear me; presently, the drum on board the Victory was beaten as usual. I then began to use my file, and got my irons off. As soon as it became dusk (it was very foggy) I began to strip. I uttered a few words in prayer, and cast myself into the water. The tide was coming in very strongly; I went at a rapid rate and had to pass by a guard on board the Illustrious and several other guards higher up the harbour. After I had been in the water about a quarter of an hour, I heard a gunshot, after this several more; I thought they were all coming to me; but I believe the firing was only in consequence of the Queen having visited Portsmouth that day, and they taking down the standard. I was so much terrified with the shooting, that when I passed by the King George's yacht, I fastened myself to one of the buoys; it was however, so very cold that I was obliged to let go, and plunge again into the great deep. I ultimately landed at Polchester Castle, a distance of about five miles from the dockyard. When I got out of the water I was almost exhausted, and was forced to lie down for a considerable time, as I nearly lost the use of both my arms. I then started off, naked; I think it must have been about nine o'clock p.m. and travelled on some distance when I heard footsteps, and it struck me it was one of the guards on the Portdown Bridge, where a file of soldiers were always kept. I returned back again, and went over a small hill, at the bottom of a small river. I swam across this river, which I found much more cold than the sea. I went over hedges and ditches, quite naked, until daylight; I then got into a pig-sty, and covered myself with straw, and remained there until night, without food or drink, and several thorns in my feet. I then started

off again, and travelled all night, until I got to a farmhouse, and made my way into stables, where I found an old smock frock, which I gladly put on me. Here I remained all day. This was the third day I had no food. Going over Epsom Race course I saw a policeman; I turned down a lane before he could see me, and got into a cottage where I found an old woman; I begged for mercy and pardon; she took me to the fire, and gave me a pair of stockings, a cap and a pair of old shoes. I travelled on, but was so much fatigued that I was obliged to go to a house and beg for a bit of bread; I got some with some cheese. On my way onwards I saw a man and some cattle going to London; I helped him to drive the cattle, and he gave me 4½d being all he had. I wanted a night's rest, and went to a lodging house on the road; I asked the woman how much my lodging would be; she said 4d. I had only then one halfpenny left; with this I bought some apples. I went to bed and had a good night's rest, and started off early next morning for London. When within a mile of the town I stopped at some common, and there was a load of coal brought to a house; I got the coals in for them and received sixpence and something to eat. I then went into London and found out a man whose brother was a convict, and who had told me where he lived. He gave me clothing, plenty to eat, and 10s to start me off. I started off the day after, and went by way of the canal until I reached Oxford. I stayed one night on the road. I travelled to Banbury, and from there I went to Warwick. Here I got 2s for taking charge of some cattle into the fair. Next day I got 3s 6d to take some cattle to Birmingham. I now had 7s 6d, and laid it all out in steel pens. I then wrote to my wife, and informed her where I was; and I went out hawking my pens, and cleared 2s the first day. I travelled on towards Wolverhampton, and earned about 4s more, and got rid of all my pens I wrote to my wife to meet me at Wolverhampton. In the meantime, I bought three umbrellas; I sold them, and was able to purchase five more the next day. At night, my wife not having arrived, I became very unhappy, and almost mad, as I found I was as badly off as ever. The following day I went out again on the turnpike-road, and there met my wife coming to meet from Chester; I was, indeed a happy meeting. We travelled together to Newport, where I carried on my umbrella hawking. My wife soon returned to Chester. She endeavoured to get my children sent off by the parish of Boughton, but did not succeed. Eager to get my poor children, I got nearer and nearer to Chester, within 20 miles, at Whitchurch where I again met my wife. Soon after we had got our supper, the policemen came into the house, one through the front door and one through the back. I saw them both. They took hold of my wife. I heard her shout out, "Let me alone; what have I done?" At this I leapt over the garden wall and went off to Wem. Here I remained for about a week, and made my way to Shrewsbury, from thence to Welshpool. It being market day, I was in the market place, when one of the police of the town came and asked me whether I knew P Dixon, as he heard he was in town. I referred him to a man at the orange stand, and told him that he came from Chester, and no doubt would tell him about me. I then made off again and went to Newtown; here I remained for a few days hawking umbrellas and found that I was known by some person and went to Machynlleth. Shortly after breakfast I saw two policemen, one from Newtown. I was afraid they were after me. I went out and shook hands with the Newtown policeman. He spoke to me and seemed very much afraid of me. I got into the back yard and started off to Aberystwyth. I afterwards that five officers came down and took another man by mistake for me. At night I arrived at a house on the road where none of the family could speak English. I had to show them my money, and put my hand to my mouth to say I wanted something to eat. Next morning, I arrived at Aberystwyth; I went to the ironworks at Merthyr, where I got work at a Mr Crawshay's and earned 15s a week. I remained here two weeks, and got leave to go and get my wife and children. I started off, and on my way met a man who hawked me cloth; with him I went to Bala, on my way towards my wife; I happened to go with this man to an ale house, where we met a man that had robbed this hawker that I was with of £5; I struck him for doing this; he said "Very well, Dixon, you will remember this". I was shortly after this followed by about 200 men, and was taken into custody, and was ill-treated and beaten. Next morning I was brought before the magistrate, and this man I had beaten was there, and he told them who and what I was. When I heard I fainted, as I had not been able to see my poor children; all my anxiety was with them. I was immediately put into heavy irons; Mr Hill was sent for, and I was brought to Chester. I did not rob Sir Edward Walker, but I think I know who did. I may tell some day, but not now,

Philip Dixon.

Signed in my presence this 11th day of August 1849. H.S. Joseph, Chaplain, Chester Castle.

Chester Courant, 29 August 1849, p4

On 25 October 1849, Philip Dixon was received at Pentonville Prison from Knutsford Gaol. Philip, 29, weighed 11 stone 3 pounds, was married with six children, could read and write, was of good character and a hair dresser. Other records usually say he was a hawker. His wife Elizabeth, 29, lived at Boughton, City of Chester. Philip was convicted on 4 August 1849 at Chester of returning from transportation before the expiration of his sentence. He had three previous convictions for assault and robbery. He spent two months at Knutsford Gaol in solitary confinement. He was transferred to Portland Prison on 10 August 1850.<sup>4</sup>

Philip boarded the Mermaid on 28 December 1850 for the voyage to Western Australia.<sup>5</sup> His description was similar to one recorded in England:

313. Philip Dixon, 29, 5'8", dark hair, hazel eyes, long face, fresh complexion, sandy whiskers, cut on knuckle of 3<sup>rd</sup> finger, right hand, one on little finger, cut over left eye, a groom, married with six children.

In 1851, living in the House of Industry, Holy Trinity, Chester, were:

Elizabeth Dixon 28, married, Charles 11, scholar, James 10, scholar, Mary 8, scholar, Philip 6, scholar, Hannah 4, scholar and Robert, 18 months. All were born in Chester.

**1852.** Phil Dixon on Australia (spelling not corrected)

Most of our readers will remember the noted Phil. Dixon whose celebrity as a robber almost equalled that of Dick Turpin himself. During the last week, the following letter has been received from him by the Rev H.S. Joseph, chaplain of Chester Castle; and while we do not venture to endorse the advice Phil gives to our fellow citizens, with respect to emigration, we publish the document to show the opinion of the writer as to the prospects of the emigrant, and as a hopeful indication that there has been a change for the better in his own mental, if not physical condition:-

Convict Depot, Fremantle, Western Australia, 17 January 1852.

Rev Sir, I am happy to inform you that I am in a good health at present, thank God for his mercies to me. You told me that arrangements were made to send my wife and family after me, and I hope that those arrangements will be executed with much expedition as possible. I wish to tell you that if they are not on the passage to retain them in England, as I should like them to be here when I obtain my ticket of leave. Again you receive this letter, and the wife and children comes out here, it will take twelve months as I get my ticket on the 12 February 1853 and I should like them to be here then if possible, as it would be the means of making me the most reconciled in my mind, for where my wife and children are there my heart is also; for I am thinking of then day and night. There is every likelihood of the colony to be a flourishing place, and by the blessing of God I shall be able to bring up my children in the love and fear of the Lord. This climate is much the same as that of England. There is an abundance of good water; it's a very fertile and beautiful country. I highly recommend to you to advise some of the Cityzens of Chester to come out here, if they wish to increse their capitol. Horses and carts employed for the Government is getting £1 2s 6d per day, masons 8s per day, labourers 5s per day, and plenty of work for tradesmen of all descriptions, and will be for years to come. I highly recommend yourself to come out here; there is people who come to this colony pennyles who are now gentlemen an worth thousands. I wonder at people stopping in Chester decreasing their property away, when if they were to come here, they would soon rise themselves to independency. There is both copper and lead mines, and also coals, to be worked, so that I know if some of the cityzens was to come out they would better their condition, as there is ships coming constant here every month. I wish you to publish this letter in a Chester paper, to let the public now as it is a correct statement. I send my love to my wife and family, and wishes to see them here ere long. Give my best respects to all enquiring friends. I wish you to answer this letter as quick as possible – direct overland. I send my best respects to Mr Hill, Mrs Haswell, Mrs Thomas Griffiths, Robert Baxter Esq. No more at present from, Your obedient servant, Philip Dixon.<sup>6</sup>

His family did not come to Western Australia.

Philip was regularly mentioned in local newspapers over the next few years.

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<sup>4</sup> PCOM2/63; HO24/16

<sup>5</sup> HO8/106

<sup>6</sup> Chester Courant, 07 July 1852, p6

An enquiry was instituted at Rottnest relative to the late escape of the prisoners, and subsequent conflagration on that island. It was discovered that Philip Dixon had been instrumental in creating disaffection among the native convicts, and aided them in escaping. This notorious character has, at last, obtained some punishment for his many offences, having been sentenced to three years' imprisonment with irons. The fire was caused by one of the warders on the island, who attempted to dislodge the runaways by burning the bush.<sup>7</sup>

Philip was received back at Fremantle Prison on 12 February 1856. He was working in the quarry. He appears regularly on the sick list during 1856 and 1857 with worms, constipation, and other complaints. The last time he was recorded on the sick list was 2 May 1858.

On 14 August 1858 at Adelaide, John Smith *alias* Philip Dixon Adelaide, was brought to gaol 23 July and charged the same day with unlawfully obtaining by false pretences, from George Gizzard, Edward Martin and Theodore Engelbrecht, goods values at £5, £12 and £27 respectively with intent to defraud. The supposed crime took place at Gawler in July.<sup>8</sup>

He had been detained earlier on suspected of being an escaped convict.

SUSPECTED ESCAPE.-Philip Dixon was charged with escaping from custody at Fremantle, Western Australia. Sergeant Badman applied for a remand. The Bench declined to entertain the application without some evidence being adduced by Sergeant Badman, who then deposed that he arrested the prisoner that morning on his discharge from the Supreme Court. When arrested he said "I can clear myself if the captain of the Firefly was here. I came on board her. I was put on board by the police. The Governor paid my passage and gave me a free pardon." Adjourned until Wednesday- next, for further evidence; bail taken in two sureties of 20s each.<sup>9</sup>

Philip was released on 9 September 1858.

Philip Dixon seems to have disappeared from Australia. Did he make his way back to England?

His family have also been elusive in the records. The only records around 1850-1870 found are: Mary Ann Dixon married George healing in 1860 at Chester. Witnesses were Sarah Dutton and George Dutton, presumably relatives on her mother's side.

On the 1861 census, Robert Dixon 11, was living with William Dutton 32, a butcher, in Chester.

Philip Dixon was convicted of larceny in 1866 and spent 12 months in gaol. The newspapers reported he was the son of the notorious Phil Dixon. Philip married Catherine Kearns in 1879 at Witton, Cheshire. The witnesses were Robert Dixon and Elizabeth Dixon, who made her mark.

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<sup>7</sup> The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA : 1855 - 1901), 20 February 1856, p2

<sup>8</sup> Criminal record books - Supreme Court of South Australia 1845-1910; Reference: GRS 12820

<sup>9</sup> The South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), 10 August 1858, p3