

George Watkins was a 29-year-old single farm labourer at the time of his conviction on 28 February, 1848 at the Durham Sessions for "stealing wearing apparel". His parents were possibly James and Elizabeth Watkins in Wensley in North Yorkshire where he was christened on 13 August 1820. The chaplain's register at Fremantle records that his mother was living at Richmond, 10 miles north-east of Wensley and Darlington, the scene of his crime, 23 miles from Wensley. He had three previous indictments for larceny.

The Newcastle Courant of 3 March 1848 reported on his trial under the heading Adjourned Sessions, "held with a view of lessening the criminal business at the Assizes [Durham] which are to be held this week...George Watkins (29) pleaded guilty to the charge of having, at the township of Middleton St George, on the 9th January, stolen a cape and other articles, the property of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company. Previous convictions having been proved against the prisoner, he was sentenced to 14 years transportation."

Watkins spent a month in Durham Gaol before being transferred to the notorious Millbank Prison in London. He was then moved back north to Wakefield Prison in West Yorkshire on 30 November 1848 and lastly to Portland Prison on 2 June 1849. He remained at Portland Prison until collected on 28 February 1850 for transportation aboard the Scindian, the first convict ship to Western Australia.

On arrival in Fremantle on 1 June 1850 Watkins was held in custody until receiving his ticket-of-leave on 29 April 1851. His ticket was withdrawn 18 months later when he was convicted of stealing a watch and "sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment with hard labour, in irons, in the Convict Establishment". It seems that prison time had not yet fully eradicated his bad habits. However, as soon as his time as a reconvicted prisoner was served, his ticket-of-leave was restored, and on 1 March 1853 he was able to return to working in the community. He received a Certificate of Freedom on 7 October 1862.

When he moved to the Eastern Districts is not clear. An 1878 news article in the West Australian reports a Mr George Watkins of Glen Avon having recently been licensed as an auctioneer in the Toodyay district. Sewell's History of Goomalling records: "On the north side of the road leading from Wongamine to Goomalling, George Watkins, thought to have been among the earliest convicts to arrive, took up considerable land commencing with a SOL in 1876. Watkins, who had previously been a tenant on "Glen Avon", named his farm "Springville". He subsequently purchased Avon Location 1548 from G.N. Morse. In 1897 Watkins built a commodious eight bedroomed home for his retirement. The farm of 550 acres freehold and 2,400 acres leasehold, which ran sheep, pigs and horses, was soon after offered for sale."

In 1868 Watkins married Bridget Lawler, the mother of six children and widow of Michael Lawler who had died three years previously. Lawler had arrived on the Robert Small and she on the Sabrina in 1853 as Biddy Cushion. Sadly, Bridget's health started failing not long after her marriage to Watkins and her last illness was described as being long and painful and Watkins as being "indefatigable in his nursing of his wife throughout her illness". She died, aged 65 years, in Northam hospital on 5 September 1898. Her death seemed to have upset George for the following year he took his lessees Patrick and William Murphy to court to stop them removing any produce from the farm. Watkins died before the years' end, at the age of 78 years. His considerable estate was left to his stepson Patrick Lawler whose name appears in letters large on Watkins' headstone in the Northam cemetery. Following his death on 19 November 1899, the WA Record described George Watkins as an "old identity" in the Eastern districts and "... the "poor man's solicitor," (who) had followed the occupation as a small farmer in Wongamine for many years. He was a local celebrity, figuring in politics and matters for the public weal. In the far-away-past Mr Watkins had some reputation as a painter, and even an artist. He was also conspicuous as an orator, and even as a poet."

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Also look at pg 59 on Goomalling A Backward Glance