

HENRY WILDMAN (c1837- ?) (Convict Reg. No. 7579)

By Irma Walter, August 2023

The invention of photography in the 19th century proved to be of value to police and prison staff in identifying repeat offenders, who up until that time frequently adopted aliases as a means of avoiding long prison terms. Such was the case with Henry Wildman, following his arrest for burglary in 1862 at the age of 23 years. He and two others, John Riley and John Taylor, were found guilty of breaking and entering a large house known as Heanor Hall, a property in a small town of that name in Derbyshire, owned by an elderly gentleman named John Ray. The trio stole jewellery from the premises to the value of £300, as well as other items of silver. Soon afterwards, Wildman was arrested when attempting to sell the goods. Evidence was given by various individuals which confirmed their guilt.¹

Following the circulation of his image to neighbouring prisons, Wildman was recognised by police and prison guards at Liverpool and Birmingham as having a lengthy criminal record under various aliases, using the names Scofield, Coffield, Reynolds, Cross and Jones. Nine of his sentences were summary convictions as a reputed thief, with relatively short terms of imprisonment.² A more serious case occurred on 7 February 1853, when as Henry Coffield, aged 16, for the crime of larceny from the person (pick-pocketing), he was sentenced to six months' gaol and whipped.³ According to a local newspaper, following the distribution of the portraits in Leeds, word came back that Henry Wildman was identified as a man who went under the name of Henry Scofield, twice convicted in 1853, four times in 1854, three times in 1855, once in 1856 and once in 1857, and once in 1861, sentenced to terms of imprisonment mostly of three to six months' duration. The same prisoner was also identified as Henry Clifford at Birmingham, having served nine months' imprisonment and four years' penal servitude there.⁴

At their trial at the Derby Assizes on 18 March 1862, Henry Wildman was said to be well-known to Derby police as a felon who kept bad company, and as a result of his long record of convictions he was declared a perpetual criminal and received a heavy sentence of 18 years' transportation. His co-offender John Riley, who also had previous convictions, was sentenced to 15 years, while John Taylor (alias Michael Norton), as an accessory before the fact, received a lesser term of 18 months in prison.⁵

Further investigation led to the arrest of a fourth man, John Atherton, a cutler, on 27 June 1862. He was charged with having been involved in the robbery and on 2 August 1862 he was sentenced to 14 years' transportation. He arrived in Western Australia onboard the *Clara* on 13 April 1864.

Following Wildman's conviction at Derby Assizes, he was taken to Leicester County Gaol on 29 August 1862. He spent 5 months and 10 days in the Derby Gaol, where his conduct was recorded as Good and Very Good. From there he was transferred to Portland Prison on 19 May 1863 where he spent 8 months and 20 days. His conduct there was mostly good.

¹ *Derbyshire Courier*, 9 August 1862.

² Register of Prisoners in Leicester County Prisons, Series HO23, Piece No. 6.

³ Home Office, Criminal Registers, Series HO27, Piece No 104.

⁴ *Derby Mercury*, 12 February 1862.

⁵ *Derby Mercury*, 12 February 1862.

However on 8 June 1863 he was found guilty of insubordinate conduct, making use of threatening language while on Public Works. As a result he was demoted to Class 3 and spent three days on bread and water, forfeiting 56 days.⁶ His next of kin was named as his uncle, Walter Coffield, of No.3 Court, Ben Johnson Street, Liverpool.⁷ From a prison hulk, Wildman was taken onboard the convict ship *Lord Dalhousie*, leaving on 17 September 1863, bound for Western Australia.⁸ His co-offender, John Riley, with a term of 15 years, was also on the ship, listed as Reg. No. 7523. The ship arrived at Fremantle on 28 December 1863.

Henry Wildman's Record in WA

On arrival in Western Australia Wildman was described as aged 25, a labourer, 5'5¾", with light brown hair, blue eyes, a round face, sallow complexion, stout build, left arm bent, single with no children.⁹

Henry wasn't long in Fremantle Prison when his wily nature came to the fore. An unusual reference to him appeared in a Perth newspaper in January 1864, a few months after his arrival at Fremantle on the *Lord Dalhousie* –

*The Government has offered to assist the Camden Harbour party by the loan of such arms and equipments, &c., as can be spared from the public stores. The prisoner Wildman will be permitted to go in the capacity of servant to Mr Panter, and under that gentleman's charge. Mr Panter will lead the party. A PETITION to the Governor in Executive Council is in course of signature, praying that advantage may be taken of the expedition to Camden Harbour to have the north-west coast line properly surveyed.*¹⁰

A day later, the same paper gave further details of the proposed trip north –

*... An expedition is also in course of formation, to sail from Fremantle for the same locality some time next month. This trip is undertaken for the ostensible purpose of verifying the statement of a prisoner in the Establishment, who declared that in 1856, while mate of a Dutch ship lying at Camden Harbour, he landed, and in the space of 2½ hours collected 8 lbs of gold nuggets, which he afterwards sold to a bullion-dealer in Liverpool for £416. The man's name, or alias, is Wildman; he is a foreigner, and his tale is credited by those who have interrogated him on the subject. It is, however, not generally accepted as true, nor does it appear probable that he would for so long a period have maintained secrecy, when it is considered that Camden Harbour is an unsettled place, was merely visited on this occasion to repair damages, and was not likely to be visited for any other purpose. The only prospect he had of again returning to the spot was by confiding the secret to those who would have assisted by sending a vessel to Camden Harbour, either for the sole purpose of securing the metal, or on the passage to or from other ports. He says that the crime for which he was convicted — forgery — was committed in order to raise funds to charter a vessel; but even had he been successful, he could not have concealed the object of his voyage from the crew — sooner or later they must have known it...*¹¹

In an earlier journal entry Frederic Kennedy Panter recorded that on 23 March, Wildman suffered an epileptic fit during the voyage.¹² By the time that the ship reached the Camden

⁶ Portland Prison, General Record of Prisoners, Series PCOM2, Piece No. 378.

⁷ Register of Prisoners, Leicester County Prisons, Series HO23, Piece No.6

⁸ Quarterly Returns, Prison Hulks, Series HO8, Piece No. 157.

⁹ Convict Department Estimates and Convict Lists (128/1-32)

¹⁰ *Inquirer*, 27 January 1864.

¹¹ *Inquirer*, 27 January 1864.

¹² *Inquirer*, 29 June 1864.

Harbour area, Wildman's true character became apparent. Panter's journal reveals that as a consequence of the convict Wildman's gross misconduct, they had placed him in irons and chained him to a tree –

...On the return to Roebuck Bay (May 22) they found that the convict, Wildman, had made his escape from the ship on the 13th, but was recaptured the day following. He got ashore in the dingy, having cut the long-boat adrift. As he was subsequently very impertinent, he was regaled for seven days on bread and water.¹³

As a result of Wildman's refusal to reveal any clues as to the locality of the gold, the main purpose for the trip proved fruitless. It did, however, provide evidence of some good grazing country in the North.

[Poor Panter, aged just 28, along with two others, James Harding and William Goldwyer, returned to the North-West in November that year and were murdered by Aborigines.¹⁴]

Following the failed expedition, Wildman is known to have completed his prison sentence. There is no mention in Wildman's prison record of him being removed from Fremantle Prison in January 1864 to join the expedition to the North-West, or being returned there to complete his sentence on the return of the *New Perseverance* from its voyage in June, doubtless with some red-faced investors onboard, embarrassed at having been taken in by Wildman's story.

There is no mention either, apart from newspaper reports, of Wildman's attempt to escape from the North Fremantle Bridge party in 1865 –

FREMANTLE. (From our own Correspondent.) There is very little to record in the shape of news during the past week, the town having been unusually quiet. Three prisoners escaped between 4 and 5 o'clock on the evening of Friday last from the North Fremantle Bridge party, whilst the men were collecting to be marched in. The chain-gang had already gone. The signalman on the hill, on hearing of the prisoners' escape, hoisted the red flag, which was soon observed by P.C. Armstrong, who was soon mounted and after them. He recaptured them in the course of half an hour, and brought them safely to their lodgings within the walls of the Chief Establishment. The prisoners causing this temporary excitement are Burnsides, Bennett, and the gold-seeker Wildman the latter having accompanied the late lamented Mr Panter to the N.W. Coast in the New Perseverance. They no doubt will be liberally rewarded for their attempt to escape.¹⁵

Henry Wildman's Record in WA

8/2/64 – Discharged from Fremantle Prison to Guildford.¹⁶

22/11/64 – Making frivolous complaint about rations, and insolence – Fined.

29/11/64 – Refusing to return to his party – Six months' hard labour.

25/1/65- Disobedience of orders – Seven days' bread and water.

18/2/65 – Refusing to return to his party – Four days' bread and water.

¹³ *West Australian Times*, 9 June 1864.

¹⁴ East Perth Cemetery records, <https://findagrave.com>

¹⁵ *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 21 June 1865.

¹⁶ Convict Department General Registers (Rd5-Rd7)

21/3/65 – Refusing to work (6th Offence) – Six months’ hard labour, with three to be in irons.¹⁷

19/6/65 – Having part of a sheet in his cell – Three days’ bread and water, and pay for it.¹⁸

11/7/65 – Sent with work party to Bickley’s -----, Canning.

24/5/66 – Disobedience of orders – Three days’ bread and water.

26/10 66 – Insubordinations – Six months.

30/10/66 – Refusing to work – Five days’ bread and water.

5/2/67 – Suspected of being involved in robbery of Government Stores – Twelve months’ hard labour at Fremantle Prison.

8/2/67 – Received at Fremantle Prison from Guildford – Twelve months.¹⁹

25/2/67 – Discharged from Fremantle Prison.²⁰

22/3/67 – Unexpired portion of sentence of 4th February will be cleared for Ticket of Leave (1.1.69 Vide 9483)²¹

10/1/68 – Received at Fremantle Prsion from North Fremantle.²²

1/1/69 – Discharged to Ticket of Leave.²³

4/9/74 – Conditional Pardon sent to R.M. Bunbury. Received 20/11/74.²⁴

Employment

The following schedule of employment was interrupted by frequent periods of sickness in the Bunbury Depot Hospital.

1/1/69 – Received his Ticket of Leave.²⁵

16/1/69 – Labourer, 20/- per month, Murray District, Cornish, Pinjarra.

30/1/69 – Sawing, piece work, W. Chapman, Wonerup.

4/3/69 – From Murray to Bunbury Depot.

1/4/69 – Sawyer, 50/- per month, Wellington District, Geo. Tillett, Bunbury.

2/4/69 – Labourer, ditto, from Bunbury Hospital.

23/6/69 – Labourer, 50/- per month, Thomas Kelly, Collie.

¹⁷ Convict Department General Registers (R27)

¹⁸ Convict Department General Registers (Rd5-Rd7)

¹⁹ Receipts and Discharges (Rd5-Rd7)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Convict Department Registers, General Register (R27)

²² Receipts and Discharges (Rd5-Rd7)

²³ Convict Department General Register (R27)

²⁴ Convict Department Registers, General Register (R21b)

²⁵ Convict records, Fremantle Prison website, <https://fremantle.prison.com.au>

30/6/69 – Ditto.
25/8/69 – Bunbury Depot, sick.
14/12/69 – Sawyer, piece work Jos.(?) Hill, Bunbury.
11/1/70 Labourer, Robert Harvey, Bunbury.
9/4/70 – Sawyer, Geo. Talbott, near Bunbury.
7/10/70 – Labourer, 40/- per month, E. Padbury, Blackwood.
31/12/70 – Ditto.
9/2/71 – In Depot, Bunbury.
8/4/72 – General Servant, 30/- per month, W. Wood, Preston.
1/8/72 – Sawyer, piecework, Sussex, H. Yelverton, Quindalup.
31/12/72 – Labourer, 2/6d per day, John Martin, Bunbury.
3/2/73 – Labourer, 5/- per day, W. F. Stevens, Bunbury.
23/4/73 – Labourer, 30/- per month, J. G. Lee Steere, Jayes.²⁶
4/9/74 – Received his Conditional Pardon.²⁷

Henry Wildman is thought to have left Western Australia, but neither the date nor his destination are known.

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²⁶ Convict Department Registers, General Register (R27)

²⁷ Convict records, Fremantle Prison website, <https://fremantle.prison.com.au>