

A newspaper article reported on some inmates in the Destitute Asylum in Adelaide. Convictism to the Salvation Army.

Our next entertainer was the anecdotal James B_. He, too, was sightless. His connection with South Australia dates back to 1851(sic). Previous to that; however, he served in the English prisons, afterwards in Bermuda, and later still in Western Australia. He lived as a prisoner for thirty-five years. "I was born", said the inmate, "so I am told, on 28 March 1816, in the West of England, and was first transported to Bermuda".

"What for?" we asked.

The broad and comprehensive explanation was, "for breaking the laws in my country. I served ten years in Bermuda, where we were engaged in quarrying and making roads. When I got back to England, it was not long before I was in trouble again. Then they sent me for another ten years, this time to Western Australia. I got out on a ticket-of-leave there and worked for people. Then I left on a ship for Sydney but stopped at Port Adelaide. For years I sawed timber near Angaston".

"How long have you been blind?"

"Twelve years", he replied, and later, he explained that "drink did it". He continued in a reflective manner, "I earned a lot of money, but it was no good to me. It all went on drink".

"Could you not keep from the drink if you tried?"

"No, I tried very hard". However, I joined the Salvation Army, and God Almighty gave me power to knock it off, so I have not touched a drop in eight years".¹

James B_ is James Bollens, who arrived on the *Dudbrook* in 1853. His real surname is Bolwell.

Probable early offences in Bath:

James Bolwell, 10, labourer, committed 5 December 1829, stealing a pair of spectacles off Sarah U, not guilty, discharged.²

James Bolwell, 10, labourer, committed 11 December 1830, stealing two cushions of Henry Pitcher and Thomas Jones, guilty, one month hard labour and whipped, sent to Shepton Gaol. James was 4'2", stout, fresh complexion, round face, brown hair, hazel eyes, pockmarked and marked with ink on both arms, born in Bath, lives in Bath and can read.³

James Bolwell (a juvenile thief who has been committed to Shepton House of Correction eight different times for petty thieving and once convicted of a felony), was charged with stealing a ham on 16 May from the shop of Mr Lindley, Kingsmead-street.⁴

Another record said: James Bolwell, 17, labourer, committed 10 June 1835, stealing 8 pounds of Ham from Mary Ann Linley, tried 29 June 1835, not guilty, previously convicted of felony Epiph^y Sess 1831, imprisoned for one month, and whipped.⁵

James Bolwell was convicted at Bath City Sessions on 9 October 1838 of stealing a coat valued at £3 from a shop and sentenced to 6 months; he was 21 and could not read and write.⁶

¹ Evening Journal (Adelaide, SA : 1869 - 1912), 23 January 1892, p3

² South West Heritage Trust, Taunton, Somerset, Reference Number: Q/AGI/14/4

³ South West Heritage Trust, Taunton, Somerset, Reference Number: Q/AGI/15/3

⁴ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 18 June 1835, p3

⁵ South West Heritage Trust, Taunton, Somerset, Reference Number: Q/AGI/14/5

Then in 1840, James Ballwell, 22, could not read and write, was convicted at the Portsmouth Borough Sessions, Hampshire, on 2 April of stealing silver spoons and forks from a dwelling house and sentenced to 10 years. James McKenzie, 20, received the same sentence for the same offence.⁷

James Ballwell was briefly on the *York* hulk (number 9180) at Gosport before being sent on 25 July to Bermuda, per *Horatio*. Here, he became convict number 1311 on the *Coromandel* hulk. After 22 quarters in Bermuda, James was sent back to England on 20 June 1846 per *Scotia* to Woolwich and placed on the *Warrior* hulk (number 3820). James was pardoned on 23 October 1846.⁸

It was not long before he was in trouble again. On Friday afternoon, 14 May 1847, several drunk men created a disturbance in Avon Street, Bath. P.C. Brooks happened to be there and endeavoured to quell the affair, but finding his efforts ineffectual, he went to the station-house to procure aid. On the arrival of the police in the street, one of the men, named James Bollen, who had a knife in his hand, stabbed Brooks severely in the arm. Brooks was immediately taken to the Hospital and had his wound dressed.

Bollen escaped down Avon Street and eventually jumped into the water and swam to the opposite side. Finding that he was pursued, he plunged into the water again and swam up a common sewer which debouched near the Quay, where he remained for some time.

A lad named Michael Greenman, tempted by a gratuity that was offered him, swam up the sewer in order to bring the man down. Bollen was nearly lifeless when he emerged from the sewer. He was conveyed into a boat that some police officers were in and taken by them into the Duke of York public-house on the Quay. He was then taken to the United Hospital, where he was immediately bled, and other means were taken for his recovery.

On Saturday morning, he was well enough to be handed over to the police and before the city magistrates on Monday; but Brooks, the policeman who was stabbed, not being able to attend, some formal evidence was taken on the charge, and the prisoner remanded for further examination.⁹

James Bollen was remanded on a charge of stabbing police-constable John Brooks and was brought up for his final examination on 26 May 1847. He declined to make any statement and was committed to take his trial at the assizes.¹⁰

At the Somerset Summer Assizes, Bridgewater, 4 August 1847:
James Bollen, 30 *, reads imperfectly and cannot write, labourer, single, committed 26 May 1847, having on the 14 May feloniously stabbed, cut and wounded John Brooks, a Police Constable, with a knife with intent to do him some grievous bodily harm, two years with hard labour. He was discharged on 3 August 1849.

* could be 39. The Criminal register says he is 34 years old.¹¹

⁶ HO 27/56, p165; Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 06 September 1838, p3

⁷ HO 27/ 62, p93

⁸ HO8/65, 88, 89, 90

⁹ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 20 May 1847, p3

¹⁰ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 27 May 1847, p2

¹¹ HO27/83, p48; South West Heritage Trust, Q/AGS/14/6 – Shepton Mallet Gaol, Register of Prisoners Before and After Trial (Bath Only) 1842 – 1871

Twenty-one months later, James Bollen, 33, read and write imperfectly, a labourer, single, was committed on 17 May 1851 for stealing a boiler, the property of Joseph Mills, the previous day. He was a returned convict, convicted of a felony at Bridgewater Assizes 1847, and summarily convicted at Shepton.¹²

At the Bath Quarter Sessions on 5 July 1851:

James Bollen, 24, was indicted for stealing a copper boiler fixed in a wash house at the back of the Fountain Inn, Avon street, the property of Joseph Willis. Mr Hodges conducted the prosecution. The case principally depended on the evidence given before the magistrates by the late Brunswick Harrison and Mrs Chancellor, who lives in the house. The latter was unable to attend from a recent confinement, which was proved by her medical attendant. In the absence of their parole evidence in the court, their depositions, as provided by law, were read by the Clerk of the Peace and verified on the oath of Mr Oakley. Guilty. Two former convictions were proved against the prisoner, one for stabbing a police constable, and as he was known to be a companion of thieves, he was sentenced to be transported for ten years.¹³

James was received at Millbank Prison on 22 August 1851 and transferred to the *Warrior* hulk at Woolwich on 23 July 1852.¹⁴ The Prison Commission register for Millbank Prison notes "he has been previously transported, imprisoned several times since for violent assault and stabbing, a most desperate character". He has a sister, Sarah Pocock, a pauper in Bath Union. James was Protestant.¹⁵ He boarded *Dudbrook* on 30 October 1852 for the voyage to Western Australia.

On arrival at Fremantle, Western Australia, he was described as:

1546. James Bollens, 36, 5'6", black hair, hazel eyes, an oval face, fresh complexion, stout, mermaid and sailor on breast and letters and figures on each arm, a labourer and single.¹⁶

After receiving a Conditional Pardon in 1861, James went to South Australia, possibly leaving Fremantle on 26 February 1862, per *Kestrel*.

James Bollin, convicted on 9 December 1875, assaulted and beat Thomas Howard Kummer P.S. whilst in the execution of his duty at Angaston on 7 December 1875, fined £1 or 14 days. James was 60, could R&W, single, CofE, a labourer, arrived in colony 1851 (*sic*), from Western Australia, discharged 22 December 1875.¹⁷

1891, Register of Admissions to Destitute Asylum.

176. James Bollin, 75, arrived in South Australia on brig *Kestral* from Western Australia in 1862, 38 years in the colony, last place of residence was Angaston, a sawyer, no relatives in the colony, English, Salvation Army, recommended to the asylum by Police, This old man, who is totally blind, has been in receipt of Government relief at Angaston since 1886 but has now become so helpless that it is not safe for him to be left by himself any longer. He has been a notorious character in his time, being several times convicted of crime, and one time sentenced to a term of 10 years, which

¹² Shepton Mallet Gaol, Register of Prisoners Before and After Trial (Bath Only) 1842 - 1871

¹³ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 10 July 1851, p4

¹⁴ Millbank Register HO24/5. Convict Number 5387 on hulk.

¹⁵ PCOM2/32, p105; HO8/114

¹⁶ SROWA Acc 128/40-43

¹⁷ Familysearch, South Australia, Prison Records, 1838-1912

he served in Bermuda, afterwards serving a sentence of another 10 years in Western Australia; he states voluntarily that he has been thirty-five years a convict, discharged 25 October 1892, to live with friends in Angaston.¹⁸

James Bollen died on 3 March 1903 at Angaston, aged 86.

The Angaston Cemetery record says James Bollen, died on 4 March 1903, aged 87.

¹⁸ State Records of South Australia; Adelaide, South Australia, Australia; Register of Admissions-Destitute Asylum 1870-1911