

## Even WA Records Get It Wrong! – James Richardson #538

Christine Anderson via Gillian O'Mara

No not the researcher but the government records. A long-time member of WAGS, Christine Anderson, repeated this story to Gillian O'Mara in January of this year.

Christine asked this year in her letter:

Greetings from a very hot Western Australia,

I am hoping that you might be able to help me I have the following entry from Convict records for those who were sent to Western Australia 1850-1868.

James RICHARDSON convict no. 538, b. 1824 – Unmarried Miller, convicted Canterbury 4 Jan 1849, Curtledge Breaking, 7 yrs, arrived per "Pyrenees", 28 June 1851.

Male only convicts were sent to the Swan River Colony and they numbered some 9,400. The proportion of men to women at this stage was 3 men to 1 woman. James did find a wife and raised two sons and a daughter. He built and operated the first mill in the locality of Busselton here in Western Australia. From an obituary for him he was well-respected and was mentioned as being associated with several notable citizens.

James died on 25 Aug 1916 where he is listed as being in his 98th year. So this conflicts with his age on the convict records.

What I would really appreciate is the trial transcripts for him. Is there any chance that this may be within your powers and would you be willing to do this? Please note this convict number was given here in Australia and would not be of any help in English records.

I have been a member of the Western Australian Genealogical Society for some 30 or more years and I understand the frustration when records you want seem unattainable.

Yours with hope, Christine Anderson

***The response to Christine was remarkable:***

Dear Christine,

Thank you for your email about the possibility of trial records for James Richardson.

When I looked into these, it seems the Australian record that states he was tried in Canterbury is in error; James was tried at the West Kent Quarter Sessions at Maidstone on Thursday 4th January 1849, under the chairmanship of the Earl of Romney, one of 88 people tried that day. It is salutary to read that only two of the defendants could read and write well, 56 could do so imperfectly, and 30 could neither read nor write. The page from the criminal register on Ancestry that lists James has two entries at the top of the page for Canterbury county sessions, so perhaps all the Maidstone entries on the page have been subsequently indexed as Canterbury.

I have attached a page from the 'Kentish Independent' of the 13th January 1849, giving some basic details; in short, as follows:

'James Richardson, 24, breaking a building, within the curtilage (sic) [the grounds] of a dwelling house, and stealing four bushels of oats and two bushels of beans, value 16 shillings the property of William Simmons, at Wrotham. Seven years transportation'.

There may be more details relating to the trial, as 'England, Kent, Quarter Sessions and Court Files, 1558-1899' are available via FamilySearch, but to view the images you will need to see them at a Latter-Day Saints research centre - hopefully the Mormons have a church with this facility near to your home.

As an aside, the medical journal relating to the voyage of the Pyrenees in 1851 is held at the National Archives at Kew (ADM 101/62/7); I have looked at a similar journal there for the ship my own 3x great-uncle was transported in back in 1839, and if your relative needed medical treatment, the physician gives great detail on the symptoms - perhaps more than you would want to know about said relative's err, habits! (my relative seems to have kept well, as he did not appear).

It is, of course, very difficult to put any details as to James Richardson's origins, though on Kent Baptisms on Find My Past there is a listing for a James Richardson being christened on the 11th June 1824 at St George's, Wrotham, the son of James, a labourer, and his wife Mary, living at Little Wrotham. James senior married Mary Chapman at the same church on the 16th June 1822, both of this parish, and witnessed by Samuel Stigger and Sarah Bauckham. This, of course, is assuming James had local connections to Wrotham prior to committing the offence.

The 1841 Census gives a possible sighting of the above family at Edenbridge, a few miles from Wrotham on the Kent/Sussex border:

HO 107/482/7/6 Marsh Green Farm, Edenbridge

James Richardson, 50, Farmers Bailiff, not born in Kent.

Mary Richardson, 50, not born in Kent

James, 18, male servant, born in Kent

Caroline, 20, born in Kent

Elizabeth, 12, born in Kent

Sarah, 9, born in Kent

I have not found baptisms for the other children. I hope this has proved to be of some use, and please don't hesitate to ask if you have any further questions.

Best Wishes, from a cool, dull, Kent, David

***From Gillian - What a wonderful response – from someone who did the research at no cost and sent the details in an attachment.***

First Printed in Convict Links, Vol. 31, No. 2, June 2017 - Newsletter of the Convict Special Interest Group, Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc. (Family History WA). © Christine Anderson/Gillian O'Mara