

# Don't Believe All You Read in the Newspapers!

by Diane Oldman

~ Part 1 ~

A few years ago I did a trawl of Trove - that wonderful FREE resource provided by the National Library of Australia. It has digitised newspapers from all over Australia, but I was only interested in the WA selection – back then twenty eight newspapers in all (now 110), starting with the Perth Gazette in 1833 right up to the West Australian of 1954 and many of the 'regionals' as well. I was looking for articles, obituaries, photographs, family notices etc. for my Crimean War Veterans project. I was certainly able to find some interesting material.

One notice in the West Australian dated 11 January 1909 that caught my eye was a report on the death [see p13] of a James Whiteside (ref."JW"). Apparently he died in the Old Men's Home in Claremont aged 103. He was reported as serving in the 14th Regiment during the Crimean War. He arrived on a convict ship having been sentenced to seven years for striking a sergeant. He was 'with the colours' for 19½ years but lost his pension and his medals for his crime. I was quite excited about this - I already had several convicts who were veterans of the Crimean War, easily found when they were court martialled in places like Sevastopol or Scutari; their crimes and sentences can be checked in the AJCP microfilm of WO90 General Courts Martial Registers Abroad. Records of soldiers going to trial in England are also easy to spot because their sentences relate to Army disciplinary matters. However, they do not have a regiment number recorded which makes them difficult to identify in other records. Findmypast has indexed and provided images for WO97 Chelsea Pension records of soldiers discharged to pension for service or injury; there are no records for convicts who lose their entitlement to an Army pension - unless they were discharged prior to a civil offence.

I decided to check out this newspaper report and the man behind it. I first checked the death date of a James Whiteside in the WA Death Indexes online. Sure enough, there was just one James Whiteside who died in 1909, but no age at death recorded. I then moved on to the ships' lists of convicts on the DPS (Dead Persons Society) website.

There was only one James Whiteside who arrived on the *Lord Raglan* 1 June 1858. He was a 33-year old unmarried tailor who had gone to trial in Liverpool in 1856 for burglary and was sentenced to eight years with transportation. This would have made him 84 when he died; a good age but far short of 103. I was even able to get a physical description of him from DPS - 5' 7¼" tall, dark brown hair, light hazel eyes, full pockmarked face with sallow complexion, middling stout build. Surely the newspaper couldn't have got it that wrong - there must be another James Whiteside somewhere.

I then checked the Rica Erickson/Gillian O'Mara book *Convicts in Western Australia 1850-1887*; it's in our Rockingham Family History Society Library. It didn't offer me another James Whiteside, but it did add to the information about the Whiteside on DPS. He was an illiterate Protestant with previous convictions and the entry gave details of his ticket of leave (1861) and pardon (1863). I even checked the WA Passenger Arrivals 1839-1890 in case another "JW" had sneaked into the Colony; same story - only the one convict.

Next I checked out the claim that "JW" was a Crimean War veteran. The first thing I checked was whether or not the 14th Regiment was engaged in the war - it was. I assumed there would be no pension documents for him on FindmyPast (FMP), but I checked anyway. Then I checked the 14th Regiment medal rolls on ancestry.co.uk. No mention of a James Whiteside in the 14th Regiment - and every man received at least the Crimean War Medal (275,000 of them were issued). Ancestry sometimes makes mistakes in its transcriptions, so I double checked against the CD-ROM of the medal rolls - nothing there either. I might have considered that a "JW" was sent to another colony as a convict and came to

WA later, but all other colonies had stopped transportation before the Crimean War started. By now the newspaper story about Mr Whiteside is looking exceedingly dodgy. Time to call in the big guns.

Bevan Carter (former WAGS President) has scanned copies of all kinds of prison records and is very amenable to sharing them. He found James Whiteside's record in Wakefield Prison [HO 23-15]. Prisoner #1521, aged 19, single, unable to read or write a tailor convicted on 3 July 1850 at Preston Sessions for stealing a pair of shoes. He was sentenced to seven years at Salford on 19 August 1850. Information was given that "JW" had prior convictions in October 1845 where he was put into solitary and whipped, and again in September 1848 and April 1849. He was described as '*extremely ignorant and depraved*'. He was removed to Shorncliffe Prison on 10 July 1851.

Huh, I thought, if he did a seven-year stretch then he was banged up in prison for the entire period of the Crimean War. And it seems probable that he wasn't in the Army at all! I wondered who had given this information to the West Australian newspaper. Some grandchild perhaps who did not know that "JW" had come to Western Australia as a convict and had listened to his tall tales.

I can't really blame him for wanting to reinvent his convict past. But it surely leads family history researchers down the garden path.

*(to be continued in the June edition of the Convict Links)*

**Death of an Old Veteran.—The death occurred on Saturday, at the Old Men's Home, Claremont, of James Whiteside, who had attained to the abnormal age of 103 years. The deceased, who had been in the institution for seven years, had formerly been in the 14th Regiment (now the Prince of Wales' Own Yorkshire Regiment), and had served throughout the Crimean war. It is a striking illustration of the rigour of military punishment that this old soldier should, after 19½ years with the colours, have been sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment, transportation, and the loss of all medals and pension rights for no more heinous crime than that of striking a sergeant.**

*Death Notice of James Whiteside  
West Australian Newspaper 11 January 1909 (Trove)*

*Convict details:*

WHITESIDE James, 1825 - Unm, tailor, illit. Prot. conv. Liverpool 1856, burglary, prev. conv., 8 yrs; arr. "Lord Raglan" 1.6.1858 (4911) TL 2.4.1861 Guildford, CP 24.12.1863, CF 21.6.1866 Perth, sawyer.

*Dictionary of Western Australians: Vol 2 Bond (book) 1850-1868, by Rica Erickson.*

*Part One - First published Convict Links March 2016*

~ Part 2 ~

Satisfied that the newspaper death notice was rubbish, I recorded JW as one of my growing list of 'false claims' to involvement in the Crimean War. Weeks went by, and then I received an email from a Peter Lutley of the SAS Historical Research Centre. He had been researching Colonel Joseph Alexander Campbell for whom the Campbell Barracks, HQ of the SAS in Swanbourne, had been named. Peter

came across a file in the State Records Office [Cons 752] which he thought would be of interest to me. Apparently in 1906, HM Indian Government offered pensions to any survivors of the Indian Mutiny who were in old people's homes and asylums in the care of the WA Colonial Government. How Campbell became involved in this isn't clear, but word went out and lists of veterans in care were sent to the Colonial Secretary's Department. How and why these lists ultimately included veterans of not only the Indian Mutiny but the Crimean, Maori, China, Egypt and even Boer wars is also a mystery; perhaps never miss an opportunity to reimburse the government's coffers. From my point of view it added ten more people (most of them convicts) to my Crimean War Veterans' database. But what caused me great consternation was the name of James Whiteside. You can see from this extract of the list that he is recorded with much the same detail as the death notice.

Exaggerated claims in the newspapers are one thing, but in official government records too? I noticed that the aka of Harding appeared on his record (third down) and that the record did not include his regimental number (most did), nor did it include a date of joining or leaving the service. However, it did confirm the newspaper report of 19½ years' service, his crime of striking a sergeant and that he served 'all through the Crimean War'.

I sent the information to Bevan and in response received even more prison records for this man. He was moved from Wakefield (1850), to Shorncliffe (1851) to Stirling Castle (1852) to York (1852) and finally to Dartmoor in October 1852. And we think the criminal justice system is costly today! The return of prisoners confined in Dartmoor as at 31 March 1856 definitely includes Whiteside but with a note in the remarks column 'License 4 March '56'. Bevan tells me that this means he was out on parole.

Slow learner that he was, James Whiteside was back on his home patch when he was convicted for the fifth time. In the early hours of 8 September 1856, he broke into the premises of his employer, James Miller, Adelphi Street, Preston. He stole a pair of trousers, four black cloth waistcoats and thirty five yards of moleskin, some black cloth and a quantity of wearing apparel. Whiteside, two females and a Thomas Emery left for Liverpool the morning after the robbery - and eventually were arrested. Both men appeared before the Liverpool Winter Assizes on 6th December - Whiteside for burglary and Emery for receiving stolen goods. Both had previous convictions and were sentenced to penal servitude for eight years. I found reports of the trial in several newspapers: the Liverpool Weekly Mercury, the Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser and the Blackburn Standard [FMP British Newspaper Archives]. Whiteside went back into Wakefield Prison and was transferred to Chatham Prison in November 1857.

He boarded the Lord Raglan at Chatham on 19 February 1858. His partner-in-crime, Thomas Emery, arrived in Western Australia on the Sultana in 1859.

I found Whiteside in Wakefield Prison in the 1851 Census where his occupation was described as a journeyman tailor. It seems a pity that this young man who, at the age of 11 was working in a cotton factory (1841 Census) and managed to get through an apprenticeship to become an artisan, should have found it necessary to get on the wrong side of the law so frequently.

The lesson here, of course, is that we shouldn't believe everything we read in the newspapers, or even what we find in government records!

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Name	Age.	Regiment.	Medals.	Date of Joining Service	Date of leaving Service	Reason of leaving Service.	Particulars of Service.
King, John.	70	Royal Marines.	Medal 2 clasps.	1856	1862	Discharged with a B character	China War. At the taking of the city of Canton, and the P O Forts.
Lynch, Thos.	71 X	20th. Regt. Reg.No. 90.		1858	1863	Struck an officer. Got ten years.	Indian Mutiny. 2 engagements, 12th. and 13th. April 1859.
Harding, James. alias Whiteside, James.	99 X	14th. Regt.		Not known.	When peace was declared. Served 19½ yrs.	Got drunk struck a Sergt. Got 7 yrs. sent to W. A..	All through the Crimean War.
Buchanan, George.	71	Von Temsky's Rangers, Volunteers.	Medal	1863	1865	Peace declared.	Maori War.
Doran, Wm.	70 X	62nd. Regt. Reg.No. 4103.	Medal and 1 bar.	1854	1859	Deserted, Got 8 yrs. sent to W. Australia.	Crimean War, at the taking of Sebastopol.
Townsend, John.	70 X	23rd. Royal Welsh Fusiliers.	2 Medals, and 1 clasp.	1854	1859	Tried for rape, Got 20 years, sent to W. Australia.	Crimean War. At the taking of Sebastopol, Resan, etc..
McCarthy, Thos.	69	Navy, Ship Archer.	Medal	1852	1861	Absented himself & never returned.	Blockade in the Gulf of Riga, China War, Maori War, Taking of Canton and Boge, etc..

Ref: State Records Office [Cons 752] – James Whiteside

Part Two of this story first published Convict Links June 2016