

## John Goodenough – a potted history

Marcia Watson

John was baptised on 5 April 1829 at Thorpe in Surrey, the son of John and Harriet Goodenough. His father, a licensed hawker, held three copyhold properties and a freehold property at Thorpe. John, who was also a hawker, took a different path in life. He regularly appeared in court proceedings.

**23 March 1846**, Surrey adjourned sessions –the Grand Jury ignored the bills against three prisoners, including one against John Goodenough for stealing a purse with money, at Thorpe.

**27 October 1851**, Old Bailey – known to associate with bad company, John was convicted of stealing a tobacco-tin containing three sovereigns from a trouser pocket. Guilty and confined for 12 months.

**24 March 1854**, Berkshire – taken into custody for two burglaries near Hurst. John, found by a gamekeeper, was escorted to the local public house where he feigned sickness and went to the spittoon. After the police took him away, the dice-box, a watch case and 6d were found buried in the spittoon sawdust. He was committed to stand trial at the next assizes.

**10 July 1854**, Berkshire Assizes – charged with stealing a dice-box and other articles at Waltham St Lawrence. John asked multiple questions of the witnesses, trying to show the prosecutor held a gambling party at his house on the night of the robbery. He said it was hard for him to be accused of something others had done. The jury was convinced and acquitted him.

On the second charge of stealing a pair of boots at Hurst, he could not claim innocence as he was wearing the boots. The judge sentenced him to 9 months. John said, *"I beg your lordship's pardon, but I have been in prison four months already."* The judge reduced his sentence to 8 months.

**March 1855** – John was released from Reading Gaol and was back to his old habits within days. He was captured at Guildford in April with several items from recent burglaries in his possession. John, a shortish powerfully built man, tried to escape when apprehended. He also tried to escape from gaol by forcing one door open but could not open the outer door. At the Hampshire Assizes at Winchester in July, miraculously, he was found not guilty. His co-offender received 20 years' transportation.

**November 1855** – John was in Horsemonger Lane Gaol in London awaiting trial for a burglary in Surrey. A writ of *habeas corpus* was granted to take him to Hertford Gaol where he was charged with stealing money, jewellery and a quantity of wearing apparel. Also charged were Richard King with stealing, and two females with receiving. They were believed to be part of a London based gang who stole items in the country and took them to London for disposal. John's lawyer argued there was insufficient evidence to convict John. Found guilty, and with two previous convictions for felony, he received 15 years' transportation. The other three received six years each. According to one newspaper - *When the sentence was pronounced the prisoner Goodenough, who had conducted himself with great effrontery during the proceedings, exclaimed that he was innocent and that the case had been got up by Beddelcomb, the inspector of the Surrey police because he had told him that he should like to have his neck stretched for him. As he was leaving the dock, he shook his fist at that officer, and in a most threatening tone said, "I only wish I may live to come back for your sake."*

**January 1856** – At Hertford Gaol, John removed the window sash and was endeavouring to loosen the bars, when discovered by the warder. A newspaper reported, John, who was in irons, was like a raging bull and threatened to destroy himself. He refused food for 60 hours. When the order came for his removal to Millbank Prison, he finally accepted food.

**3 July 1857** – John arrived on the *Clara 1* at Fremantle.

**29 October 1862** – escaped from Fremantle Prison, committed a robbery at the Prison Superintendent's residence and stole Dr Attfield's horse. John was found a few days later at the Murray River, making a pair of trousers out of a blanket. After a scuffle in the river with a native police constable, he escaped on foot with the constable's revolver, although probably of little use as it had been in the water. He was later seen near Pinjarra without any trousers. John made his way to Vasse, where he escaped on an American whaler. Hopefully, he acquired some trousers along the way!

**1863** – he was back in England, thieving again. John met up with his sister Harriet at Portsmouth in December. She helped him dispose of some of the items he had stolen in a crime spree between Gloucestershire and Hampshire. He was known as "Captain Smith" at his lodgings at Bristol.

**April 1864** – John continued stealing, but the police were closing in. A keeper at Windsor Deer Park was tending the deer when his dog discovered a bundle tied up in a handkerchief, concealed in a deer pen. On opening the bundle, he found watches, teaspoons, jewellery and a screwdriver. He took it to the police, who asked him to return it to the deer pen. They would stake out the area with police in plain clothes. By the time the police organised the stakeout, a crowd had gathered. One bystander told them she had seen the two men putting the item in the deer pen and described them. The descriptions closely matched the Police Gazette descriptions of John and his accomplice, wanted in several counties. A short time later, they were reported to be at Thorpe in Surrey, John's native place. The police hastened to Thorpe and confronted the pair at a public house. A desperate and violent struggle ensued, and John managed to escape.

**May 1864** – a month later he was arrested at Bristol in another violent struggle, taken Gosport Gaol in Hampshire, and committed to stand trial at the next Assizes. He claimed he was not English, was never in England until after last Christmas and Custom-house records would prove this.

**9 July 1864**, Hampshire Assizes – John Goodenough was charged with five indictments of burglaries. He refused to plead, on the ground that his name was not Goodenough. When asked what his name was, he said it was Smith and pleaded not guilty in that name. The jury was called, and the judge allowed John to challenge 20 jurors, but after that must make specific objections. John said he objected entirely to being tried as there was a substantial prejudice against him in the county. He claimed he was innocent and could provide witnesses to prove it. John then had a hissy fit and lay on the courtroom floor. A jury of bystanders was sworn in after the panel of jurors was exhausted by John's objections.

One of the witnesses called was his sister Harriet, who earlier received one-month hard labour on receiving charges. A letter found in her room addressed to Miss Harriet Goodenough, 32 Staunton Street, Landport, Portsmouth was read to the court. The envelope bore the postmark of 2 January and appeared to come from Thorpe in Surrey. Purported to be from Hannah Goodenough, her sister, it commenced with 'my dearest sister and brother'. It stated they had spent a happy Christmas, but the police had

been there looking about Thorpe and advised them to alter their names to Fanny Smedley and Edward Smedley.

Found guilty as John Goodenough he received 14 years' transportation.

**4 July 1866** – John arrived back in Western Australia on the *Belgravia*, sentenced to an additional 12 months in irons and 100 lashes. However, the 100 lashes were not approved. John's bad behaviour earnt him three sentences of bread and water, totalling 34 days, over the next few months.

**8 August 1867**, Fremantle Prison - *About 5:30 pm, after the prisoners had returned from work and the sentries had left the prison walls, a person dressed in a Warden's uniform passed out of a division in charge of eight men and unlocked the gates of the inner yard. He then halted his men, and in an authoritative tone of an officer, told the men not to be in such a hurry. The warder turned and locked the gate, then gave a command to his men to march into the workshop. A sentry noticed them, but the uniform deceived him, and they passed unchallenged. Once inside, they barricaded the gates, got the two ladders that had been concealed in the workshop and scaled the prison wall. A rope was attached to the top rung to allow them to drop over the wall. A prison warder's wife observed them and told her husband who was at home. He fired his pistol with little effect, and the prisoners escaped. The 'warder' was John.*

He was in familiar territory, and once again he made his way south to the Murray River. Unfortunately, John's luck finally ran out.

*The body of the escaped convict has been discovered in the Murray River. It was observed floating in the stream by a native and afterwards identified by a gold ring on the small finger of the left hand. Said to have been a good swimmer, and, no doubt, would have succeeded in crossing the river but for the encumbrance of his clothes, which were found strapped on his head.*

He died 14 August 1867, aged 38.

John Goodenough, as such, does not appear in *Convicts of Western Australia 1850-1887*.

He came on the *Clara 1* as John Williams 4302, the *alias* he commonly used England. He returned as John Smith 8998 on the *Belgravia* although convicted as John Goodenough.