

Hashemy Convict # 98 JOHN LUFF

by Roland Rayfield

John Luff arrived in Fremantle 25 October 1850 as convict # 98 aboard the ship *Hashemy* leaving behind his wife Mary Ann and their three children; Elizabeth, born 1844, John, born 1848 and Mary Charlotte, born 1849 (whilst John was in prison). John had been convicted in Huntingdon (near Cambridge, England) in 1848 for stealing horses and sentenced to 15 years' transportation.

As a prisoner of the Convict Establishment in the Swan River Colony, John worked for two years, receiving his ticket-of-leave on 26 January 1852 around which time he made application for his family to migrate to Western Australia to join him. John Luff was more fortunate than some convicts, as his wife remained loyal to him and she and the children followed him to Fremantle aboard the *Anne MacLean*, arriving on 6 November 1852. The Luff family were able to resume a fairly normal life. In Fremantle Mary and John had another three children; Thomas born 1854, Harriet Mary born 6 November 1855 and Peter born 23 October 1857. John received his Conditional Pardon on 13 September 1856.

It appeared on the surface that John and Mary Ann Luff had come through the worst period of their lives, however, Mary Ann had a fatal illness, tuberculosis, and then an unexpected disaster struck the family on 22 March 1860. John was killed while digging a well on a property close to his home in Bicton.

John had taken a lease for a vineyard on the property of settler John Duffield in Bicton only about six months earlier. He had been digging a well with James Duffield on the property of Mr. Walter Easton. Both men were working at the bottom of the shaft when the loose earth caved in and smothered them. Mary Ann was left with 3 girls and 3 boys to support, their ages ranging from 3 years to 16 years. On top of her terrible illness, the burden must have been too much for poor Mary Ann, and within 3 months of John's death, she too had passed away. She died of 'Consumption' on 10 June 1860 at the age of 41.

According to an article in the *Inquirer and Commercial* newspaper, Mr. Claudius Smith of Fremantle gave a home to one child, Mr. Fordham another and "in a letter from the godfather of another, Mr. Ainsworth of Newcastle, who feels impelled by this voluntary tie to be a father to the child in a temporal sense also".

Following is a report on the Inquest into the deaths of John Luff and James Duffield as published in 'The Independent Journal' dated 30 March 1860:

Fatal Accident.

A lamentable accident occurred on Thursday last, 22 March 1860, at Bicton, near Fremantle, by which Mr. James Duffield and John Luff, a hard working labourer, both lost their lives by the falling in upon them of a well they were engaged in sinking. The accident occurred about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and as soon as information reached Fremantle large numbers of persons hastened to Bicton to assist in getting the bodies out, which owing to the loose nature of the soil was not accomplished until near ten at night. The particulars attending this unfortunate occurrence were very distressing, and have created a general feeling of sympathy for the friends of the sufferers. Luff has, we regret to hear, left a wife and family of eight children

(In fact six). At the Inquest held on the bodies on Friday, before a Jury composed of Messrs. A. Francisco, O. Lodge, J. Harwood, and J. Bobin, the following evidence was given:-

Narley, an Aboriginal - "I was helping to sink a well, when the accident happened to J. H. Duffield and John Luff. James Duffield was at the bottom of the well, and Luff and I were drawing up the sand; about 3 o'clock some of the sand from the sides of the well fell in upon Duffield; Luff went down the well and tried to take the sand from him, when more sand fell down and covered him also up to the middle; J. Duffield asked me to send for Humphries; I did so. I pulled up buckets of sand which Luff filled. Humphries and three others came. J. Duffield said he was all right, and told Luff to come down and help him; the sand kept falling in and covering them."

Joseph Humphries - "I was called about 2 or 3 o'clock to assist J. Duffield, who was down the well, up to the middle in sand. I went, and found Duffield completely covered with sand, but I heard his voice calling out for me; a small cask was at that time over his head, which was also covered with sand. Luff at this time was not in the well; he was on the top along with three natives. James Duffield called out for someone to "come down and take away the sand from his mouth." Luff went down, and three men helped me to draw up the sand which Luff put into a bucket. Duffield could speak and was well, and helped to fill the buckets; in half a minute, a large quantity of sand gave way, and covered him about 5 feet over his head, and covering Luff up to the middle. Chambers then went down with a rope to help Luff; more sand fell in and covered Luff up to the neck. I went to Luff's house to get some casks; when I returned Luff was covered over with sand. I sent for assistance which arrived, and we then dug both bodies out."

James Chambers, corroborated the statement of the foregoing witness. Henry Albert - "I assisted with others last night in digging the bodies of Duffield and Luff out of the well; they were both quite dead, and found as described by previous witnesses. Luff must have been dead about two hours and Duffield three or four hours before we found them."

Verdict - The Jury are of opinion that the deaths were accidental - caused by the falling in of the well; the Jury also considered that the conduct of James Chambers, was highly praiseworthy, for the efforts he made to save his fellow creatures, at the eminent peril of his own life."

Letter to the Editor, Perth Gazette & Independent Journal of Politics & News, Friday 4 May 1860 p. 2:

"SIR, I avail myself of your kindness to make known, through the medium of your Journal, that there is now lying in the Mechanics' Hall a Subscription List on behalf of the widow and children of the late John Luff, whose death, it will be remembered, was caused some time since under most melancholy circumstances. The Widow and orphans of a brave and generous man who nobly sacrificed his own life in his efforts to save that of a fellow creature, does not I feel, require any recommendation from me to the public - this fact alone plead for them - will ensure them the sympathies of all classes, and I doubt not the charitable assistance of the public of Western Australia."

Notwithstanding the tragic early deaths of John and Mary Luff their children had in turn 61 children of their own – Elizabeth, 10; John, 8; Mary Charlotte, 14, Thomas, 11 and Harriet Mary, 5. Sadly, John's namesakes, his son John (Jack) and grandson John Stannan both also died young. Jack, a dairyman who shared his father's passion for horses, developed pneumonia in 1904 after being caught in a storm while out searching for wild horses and subsequently died aged 56 years and his son John Stannan was killed in action on 7 June 1917 during the first day of the Battle of Messines, World War I, aged 30 years.

By Roland Rayfield (descendant of Hashemy convicts John Luff and John Henry Beeson)

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