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Richard Harford was a fresh-faced seventeen year old when he appeared before court at Wells, Somerset, England in 1847. Charged with larceny he was sentenced to ten years transportation, having a previous conviction. Alongside him in court was George Young, a literate shoemaker, six years his senior. Young Richard was a farm labourer and illiterate. They had spent four years in prison, initially at least, at Wilton Gaol in Taunton, Somerset before both being transported to Western Australia on the *Pyrenees*.ⁱ His father, also a farm labourer, had died the year previous to his arrest and as the eldest of four children no doubt sought to support his mother and young family in difficult circumstances.ⁱⁱ How his mother coped in his absence is not known. The Poor House was their most likely fate. As for Richard he would come to realize that a prisoner of the crown was better fed than the honest poor. But no doubt he grieved the imposed abandonment of his family.

On their arrival at Fremantle on 28th June 1851 the two were granted their tickets-of-leave. The Comptroller General of Convicts, Edmund Henderson, advertised the two associates on a list of Ticket-of-Leave men available from the North Fremantle station for employment.ⁱⁱⁱ They were both granted conditional pardons later in 1853 with George ending up in Perth as a shoemaker, marrying and leading a quiet life with three children. The papers noted that he employed "A dusky son of Crispin*, in the shape of an aboriginal native, is now employed in the service of George Young, shoemaker of this city." The unnamed employee was said to be a very good tradesman who had been trained at Bishop Salvado's mission at New Norcia.^{iv} [*St Crispin was patron saint of cobblers]

Richard was to make his new life by the sea. By 1861 he had established himself in business with an industrious free settler, Charles Howlett, as boatman. Their employment was to lighter cargo from vessels in the harbour to the South Jetty from whence it was transferred overland to the River or North Jetty to be ferried to Perth. When the weather and seas permitted he lightered cargo across the shallow bar at the mouth of the Swan River. Richard was signatory to a delegation to the governor which advised refusal to pay a bond on imports to the colony under an almost universally condemned new Customs Ordinance introduced by Governor Kennedy. It was in effect the first class action against a government ordinance taken in the colony.^v

By 1862 he was master and owner of the coaster *Victoria* with Howlett. This was a two-masted ketch of 12.43 tons with dimensions of 37.4 x 11.8 x 4.6ft. She was built in Perth in 1858 for Alfred Lewis.^{vi} Shipping Arrivals note that "2 Feb 1867 *Victoria* 12 ton, Harford, master, from Lancelin Island. Cargo 4 tons guano."^{vii}

The same year saw Richard married to Harriet Binge on 23 December. Harriet had been previously married in 1851 to John Thomas Alfred Shill and had two daughters from that union.

The wrecking of the American barque *Cochituate* on a voyage from Melbourne to Singapore on 14th June 1861 at the Abrolhos Islands began a series of search and rescue operations. It began with a Dutch crewman from the wreck, near to starvation, almost crawling into Fremantle. That is another epic story. The *Speculator* and *Mystery* were despatched by Mr Wellard who purchased the rights to the wreck. It had been a winter of violent seas and storms and the *Emma*, *Lass of Geraldton* and *Brothers*, small

coasters that serviced the recently settled north-west, had gone missing. When the *Speculator* was overdue the Government sought to charter a vessel to seek its whereabouts and also, if possible, that of the missing coasters. Messrs. Bateman rejected terms offered of £3 per day and Richard Harford was subsequently engaged with his cutter *Victoria* at half this rate at 30 shillings per day.^{viii} This was evident bias that expeerees endured in the colony. His charter was to cruise along the coast as far as the Abrolhos looking for wreckage or any sign of survivors.^{ix} When, adding insult to injury, the *Victoria* became overdue feared wrecked, the governor “at once ordered a boat to be despatched in search immediately. Fortunately the coaster came into harbor an hour or so before the search party intended to start, and the fears of friends and the public were set at rest.”^x Perhaps His Excellency felt a little guilty at the price he had paid for men to risk their lives.

The following subsequent report appeared in the papers:

“We have been favoured with a perusal of the official report made by Mr. Harford, the master of the cutter *Victoria*, which vessel it will be remembered, was despatched early in August last for the purpose of searching the coast, northwards as far as Champion-Bay, and examining the Abrolhos for traces of shipwrecks or shipwrecked persons; the impression that such existed in that neighbourhood having arisen from the discovery, just previously, by police constable Watson, of large quantities of broken ship’s stores, &c., on the beach near the Irwin River. There is little interest in the report beyond observations made by Mr. Harford of evidences of a shipwreck having recently taken, place on our North Coast. The diary commences on the 7th August, on which day the vessel, left Fremantle. Coasting along with an adverse wind, she anchored on the 14th under Lancelin Island about 65 miles from Fremantle, having observed nothing to induce the master to land Mr. Harford says “while we lay at anchor at Lancelin Island, I went ashore and walked along the beach some distance, when I saw some choppings of a spar; they seemed like the splinters of a large mast.” Having failed to notice any traces of wrecks on the mainland, the Vessel proceeded to the Abrolhos, visiting first the South or Pelsart group, where she arrived on the 27th, and where several broken spars were observed washed on shore. On the 28th the vessel was worked along the islands for about ten miles, and anchored in the afternoon at Long Island, where, on going ashore a chopped spar and a portion of small broken yard, were found, which bore evidences of having been very recently cut. At Middle Island, a short distance off nothing of interest is recorded as having been noticed, beyond a gravestone inscribed to the memory of John Williams, and the frame of an old wooden house; a good well of fresh water was also discovered there. Mr. Harford mentions, in reference to the supposed heap of stones seen by the master of the *Albert*, “I passed by the island where the heap of stones is, and made it out to be Hummock Island where I had long before observed the stones piled up.” In following up the search, he further observes- “We coasted down to an island further to the east in the same group, and having anchored the cutter, we proceeded to examine the shore in a dinghy, when we found a ship's boom, about 45 feet long, fresh from the water; a water cask evidently just come ashore; a lot of cabin fittings of a ship perhaps of 300 tons burthen, fresh broken away, and an oak plank, about 14 or 15 feet long, by about 3½ inches thick and 14 inches wide, which we brought on board, as also some of the bolts and a block, not at all corroded, which we had contrived to cut from the spar.” The whole of the Abrolhos was examined by Mr. Harford as far as practicable, having visited most of the islands from the southern part of the Pelsart group to North Island, after which he assisted in floating off the *Albert*, and started for Fremantle on the 16th Sept, which he reached on the 22nd Sept., having encountered nothing but boisterous weather the whole passage. Mr. Harford is of opinion, since it is proved that no wreck exists between Fremantle and Champion Bay, that a ship, probably an American whaler, is wrecked and has sunk between the Beagle's

Islands, which lie off the coast to the southward of the Irwin River and the southern part of the Abrolhos, from the fact that the spar and other parts of a ship he found had drifted there by south-east winds, and from no great distance. Whether there is any connection with these discoveries and the portions of wreck found by Constable Watson near the Irwin, it matters little; but certain it is, we think, that a large vessel has short time since been wrecked on our coast, the circumstances attending which will, in probability, remain a mystery.”^{xi}

The seamanship acquired as an adult by Richard is quite remarkable given his background as a poor, illiterate country lad. Over the centuries the coast to the north of Fremantle where he ventured has gathered a litany of shipwrecks – *Batavia*, *Zeewyck*, *Ocean Queen*, *Ben Ledi*, *Marten*, *Windsor* and *Cochituate* among them.

Regrettably this was not the last search for a missing wreck involving Richard. But more of that later.

In the meantime his successful partnership with Charles Howlett was wound up on 25th June of the previous year. Richard’s capital and effort were channeled into a general store in Essex St, Fremantle. He traded as a grocer, baker and confectioner,^{xii} no doubt creating employment for his wife and her two growing daughters.

His dream was, however, to have his own schooner built. Robert Wrightson of Fremantle was commissioned to build the *Emily*, a two-masted schooner of 40.13 tons burthen. Her dimensions were 60.35 x 16.17 x 6.89 feet. Two Fremantle merchants, Edward Newman and William Barham were co-owners.^{xiii} To fund his new venture he sold by auction all his stock, equipment and some of his household furniture.^{xiv}

For seamen, known for their superstitions, *Emily* had a rather inauspicious launching. The daughter of successful fellow expirée, William Leach, performed the honours.

“ON Saturday the 25th inst., the smart little schooner belonging to Mr. Harford was launched from her berth behind the Jail Hill. The day was fine, and a large concourse of spectators was assembled to witness the interesting event. The vessel was gaily decorated from stem to stern with flags, and everything wore quite a holiday appearance. Precisely at 1 p.m., Miss Leach, (daughter of Mr. W. Leach of this town), with the customary formalities, and amid the cheering of the bystanders, gracefully performed the ceremony of naming the vessel. The shores were then knocked away, and the pretty craft moved forwards towards her proper element. When near the end of the ways however, she stuck fast, and it was not until Sunday morning that she was got fairly afloat. She was named the *Emily*, and is one of the smartest of our coasting fleet. We wish her a long and successful career.”^{xv}

The newspapers advertised that the *Emily* would run regularly between Fremantle and the Irwin.^{xvi} The port at the latter place (now Dongara and Port Denison) serviced the Greenough Flats. Prior to the visitation of red rust in the crops, Greenough had been regarded as “the granary of the colony.”^{xvii}

Despite many in the colony believing the convict class best served as “hewers of wood and carters of water,” Richard was a popular and successful member of the community. He sportingly entered his new vessel in the Foundation Day Regatta off Fremantle even though she was partly laden and some of the

rigging not sorted. "Great credit is due to Mr Harford for his spirit and pluck in entering his vessel under such disadvantages," said the Fremantle paper.^{xviii}

The author's great grandfather George Andrew Duncan Forsyth had resigned in June from the Water Police to take command of the *Emily*. After coming to the colony a few years earlier he had crewed on the topsail schooner *Favourite* before joining the land based force. He was no doubt well acquainted with Richard in the small seafaring community at the port. Perhaps he crewed on the *Emily* in the regatta to become acquainted with her handling. Richard, however, took the schooner on her maiden voyage leaving Fremantle early in June. Laden with flour from the mills at Greenough he left Port Irwin on the 13th of the month. By the beginning of July, however, apprehensions were felt for the safety of the vessel. The papers spoke of "the furious gales and heavy seas" of the past month. The *Sea Bird*, *Twinkling Star*, *Albert*, *Sea Spray* had all run aground and *Sea Nymph* condemned.^{xix}

For my great grandfather anticipation dwindled to disappointment when portions of wreck found at and near Fremantle were identified as belonging to the *Emily* by her builder. A search found the body of crewman William Bailey, several bags of flour, a small boat and pieces of wreckage near Eglinton Rocks on the beach between Waneroo and Moore River about 50 miles north of Perth. Driven ashore by gale force winds the crew had apparently, in a desperate last-ditch effort to save the ship, tried to anchor only to see the hawse torn out. All lives were lost.

When George read the papers he would have had conflicting feelings when he considered his altered fortunes and those of the man he was to take over from and work for. The paper stated:

"Mr. Harford, the owner and master of the *Emily*, was known as an honest, steady, sober and industrious man; he had just accomplished the dearest wish of his heart, the possession of a smart coaster. He had toiled years to gain it, and she represented the entire earnings of half a life time of labor. He leaves a widow, and two young daughters to mourn his loss. The vessel was we believe uninsured, so that the loss is total ruin to his family."^{xx}

For Richard's wife, Harriet and her daughters, they had lost their breadwinner.

"Messrs. Newman and Moore lost no time in sending off a vessel to search the coast and adjacent islands, in the hope that the crew might possibly be thereon. Everything necessary for them in such case has been provided, but no news has yet arrived. All that man can do has been done; the Omnipotent Ruler of land and sea alone can save them now, and bring comfort to the desolate homes of Harford and his crew, three of whom are married men."^{xxi}

So the final maritime search to involve Richard failed to find his body and the colony had lost a member of the "class" who had put a grim past behind him and become a faithful servant in his new land. He was just 38 years of age.

George Forsyth went on to become port pilot and then harbour master at Fremantle.

Harriet, a resourceful lady, quickly sought to re-establish her and her daughters' lot and the following notice appeared in the paper in August:

NOTICE.

MRS. HARFORD,

WIDOW of the late Master of
the Wrecked Schooner *Emily*,
begs to inform her friends and the public
generally that she has opened

An Eating and Boarding House
in High Street, Fremantle,

and hopes by strict attention to the
wants and comfort of her customers to
merit and secure the patronage and sup-
port of the public.

Fremantle, August 12, 1868.

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In September of 1872 Harriet and her two daughters left by the *Twinkling Star* for Melbourne. She passed away at South Yarra 21 May 1880 aged just 48.

ⁱ Fremantle Prison Convict database.

ⁱⁱ England and Wales Census, 1841.

ⁱⁱⁱ Perth Gazette 25 July 1851.

^{iv} West Australian Times, 22 Jun 1875.

^v Inquirer 26 Jun 1861.

^{vi} Ships Registered in Western Australia From 1856 to 1869, Dixon.

^{vii} Perth Gazette 8 Feb 1867.

^{viii} Herald 10 Aug 1861.

^{ix} Inquirer 14 Aug 1867

^x Herald 23 Nov 1867.

^{xi} Inquirer and Commercial News 9 October 1867, page 2.

^{xii} Herald 5 Oct 1867.

^{xiii} Ships Registered in Western Australia From 1856 to 1869, Dixon.

^{xiv} Herald 5 Oct 1867.

^{xv} Herald 2 May 1868.

^{xvi} Perth Gazette 8 May 1868.

^{xvii} Inquirer 4 Dec 1872.

^{xviii} Herald 6 Jun 1868.

^{xix} Perth Gazette 3 July 1868.

^{xx} *Herald* July 4, 1868.

^{xxi} Inquirer 8 July 1868.

^{xxii} Herald 15 Aug 1868.