

George Richards, 1245, *Marion*

Researched by Marcia Watson

Real name: George William Curtis

Baptism	18 May 1828 at St Matthew – Brixton, Surrey
Parents	Thomas Curtis and Mary Ann
Parent's marriage	
Siblings	Mary (1817), William Charles (1818), Thomas (1820), Alfred (1822), Emma (1824), Frederick Hudd or Studd (twin 1828), Harriet (1832-1839), Louisa (1834)
Wife	
Married	
Children	

The Curtis family moved around the Lambeth and Southwark boroughs. Thomas Curtis was initially a butcher; by the time twins George and Frederick were born, he was an ostler and a labourer when his last two children were born. The family lived at Stockwell, Lambeth, when George and Frederick were baptised.¹

The family fortune slowly worsened, and on 10 May 1837, Alfred Curtis, from St George the Martyr parish, was destitute and entered the Christ Church Workhouse. His father had died, leaving a large family. Alfred was discharged on 12 July 1837 after nine weeks. The following year, Frederick and Harriet Curtis entered the workhouse in May 1838 because their mother, a staymaker, was in Brixton for 14 days. The younger children, George, Frederick and Harriet, were placed in the Infant Poor House belonging to the Parish of St George, Southwark, in the Parish of Lewisham.²

At the end of 1838, George and Frederick were admitted to the workhouse due to destitution and returned to Lewisham the next day. Their mother was still a staymaker. Frederick escaped from Lewisham several times over the next few years, ending up in the workhouse and then being returned to Lewisham.

George was in the Infant Poor House when the 1841 census was taken; however, he ended up in the workhouse in May 1842, July 1843 and October 1843 after escaping from Lewisham or being returned from his placement.³ In January 1844, he was discharged after 16 weeks on liking – the initial step towards apprenticeship. It does not seem to have worked out as George was back in the workhouse twice towards the end of 1846; his occupation was a labourer or hawker.

On 12 March 1847, George became an apprentice as a Merchant Seaman.⁴ When not employed, he resided in Southwark. A year later, George, a sailor, was temporarily disabled and destitute and was admitted to the workhouse. He was in and out of the workhouse several times for destitution before being discharged to prison on 14 June 1848. George Curtis, 19, was committed 14 June 1848 by J Cottingham Esq charged on the oaths of Richard Robinson and others, with having unlawfully assaulted and beaten him, and threatened to do for him, at St George-the-Martyr, Southwark. He was sentenced on 3 July to 4 months in the County Gaol for want of sureties.

In January 1849, the newspaper reported: Southwark Police Court, Saturday. George and Alfred Curtis, brothers, charged with burglary at the Infant School at Lewisham – they had been brought up

¹ London Metropolitan Archive, London Church of England Parish Registers; Reference Number: P85/Mtw1/001

² London Metropolitan Archive, Christ Church Workhouse Registers

³ TNA UK, HO107/484/10

⁴ TNA UK, BT113, Merchant Seamen

in school and subsequently became inmates in St George's Workhouse, whence they absconded on 23rd and on the 26th broke into the school and carried off a quantity of wearing apparel which was found on them when apprehended. They were committed to trial.⁵

At the Old Bailey, 1 January 1849.

Alfred Curtis and George Curtis were charged with stealing two saws, value 10s; the goods of the Guardians of the Poor of the parish of St. George-the-Martyr, Southwark.

Richard Robinson. I am master of St. George-the-Martyr, Southwark. I know the prisoners well, they occasionally worked in the yard, they worked on 2 November; I can not be positive whether they worked on the 7th. On the morning of the 7th, I missed saws, and the prisoner had access to the saw-house; other men worked there.

Thomas Harris said, I am assistant to a pawnbroker in St. George's-circus, Blackfriars road. I have two saws pawned on the 4th and 7th of November by two persons; Alfred Curtis is one of them.

John Wright (policeman M 63). I took the prisoners into custody on 12 December

Alfred Curtis— Guilty. Aged 28.— Confined Twelve Months.

George Curtis— Not Guilty.

Alfred Curtis was again indicted for stealing two waistcoats and other articles; the goods of James Menzies; and eight pairs of scissors, value of 3s; the goods of the Guardians of the Poor of St. George-the-Martyr, Southwark. He was found not guilty.

Three months later, George was detained and charged on the oaths of John Palmer Summers and others with feloniously stealing, at Camberwell, 50 pounds weight of lead and other articles, the property of John George Weller. After investigation, he was committed to trial on 28 March 1849, charged on the oaths of John Palmer Summers and others, with feloniously stealing, at Camberwell, 90 pounds weight of lead and other articles, the property of Miles Stringer. George was convicted on 9 April 1849 at the Newington Adjourned Sessions and sentenced to 7 years transportation as George Richards, otherwise Curtis.⁶

George petitioned for a mitigation of sentence, Reg No 2451. Received on 9 October 1849.
Honorable Sir,

The humble petition of George Richards who was convicted on the 9 Day of April 1849 for the crime of felony and was transported for the term of 7 years. Your humble Petitioner begs most earnestly and respectfully that your Honourable Sir will take my case into consideration as i was much distressed at the time that it drove me to commit such a crime of which I am now suffering for rather then i would go to the workhouse for relief as i have got my helth and strength Honourable Sir your humble Petitioner use to work a long with his brother at the shoemaking but your honour trade being verry slack at that time and my brother had so little for himself to do that your honour i was oblige to go and seek employment to do for my self as he could not keep me as he as got 5 children and his wife besides an Aged mother to provide for i went to seek work to do but could not get no work and being so much distressed that i was drove to commit such a crime your humble Petitioner hopes that your Honourable Sir will consider my case and if i am so fortunate enough that your Honourable Sir will meidagate my sentence of imprisonment as i am heartly sorry for what is past and am verry willingly to go on board one of Her Most Gracious Majesty's Ships of War for the term of 20 years than to suffer imprisonment Your humble Petitioner as been to Sea but being ill used at sea after serving 3 years and a half was oblige to leave on account of the Captain knocking my arm out of joint and ever since then which is about 4 years i have been liveing a long with my brother

⁵ Oxford Journal, 06 January 1849, p4

⁶ Australian Joint Copying Project Reel M1834

untill work was verry slack Your Honourable Sir i am now laying at your Honourable Sir Mercy and i beg most earnestly and respectfully that Your Honourable Sir will meidagate my sentence of imprisonment Honourable Sir your humble Petitioner wishes that when he as served his term of imprisonment to go on board a man of war so that i may get a honest living and be i hope and trust in God to be a bright member of society Honourable Sir Your humble Petitioner as been in Prison before but your Honour not for felony Your humble petitioner humbly begs that Your Honourable Sir will look into my case.

Your humble petitioner,

George Richards now laying at the Pentonville Prison.

Gaol Report - 4 times before in prison. Result: Nil.⁷

The brother mentioned in the petition is William Charles Curtis, whose shoemaking business suffered because, at the Old Bailey on 16 August 1847, he was sentenced to 6 months for burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling-house of Frederick Watts on 17 August at Lambeth and stealing wearing apparel.

Prison registers show that George Richards was received at Pentonville Prison on 24 August 1849 from Horsemonger Lane gaol. Aged 20, he had been convicted of a felony at Newington Sessions on 9 April 1849 and sentenced to 7 years. He was born Stockwell, had light brown hair, blue eyes, an oval face, pale complexion, Protestant, single, 5'2¼", read and write, sailor and shoemaker, with GPJP on the left arm and mole on the right arm, and his mother Mary Ann Curtis lived at Stockwell. The Gaoler's report of character said he was very indifferent. On 27 June 1850, he was removed to the *York* hulk at Gosport and boarded the *Marion* for Western Australia on 27 October 1851.⁸

His brother Alfred Curtis was convicted at the Old Bailey in January 1850 and sentenced to 7 years transportation. In a Petition by his wife, Sarah Curtis, in March 1852, the transportation of her husband left herself and two children destitute. She accuses his brother of stealing the silver sugar bowl and giving it to Alfred to sell. Alfred was transported to Tasmania per *Oriental Queen*. When Alfred arrived in Tasmania, he said his wife Sarah, brothers William and Frederick, and sisters Mary and Emma lived in his native place.⁹

George Richards received his Ticket of Leave on arrival in Western Australia on 31 January 1852 and a Conditional Pardon on 6 August 1853.

What happened to George is unknown, or if he reverted to his real name, George Curtis. Having some sailing experience, he would have had no trouble gaining employment on a ship leaving Western Australia.

⁷ TNA UK, HO18/260

⁸ TNA UK, PCOM2/136; HO24/16

⁹ TAO, CON14/1/47, p24-25