

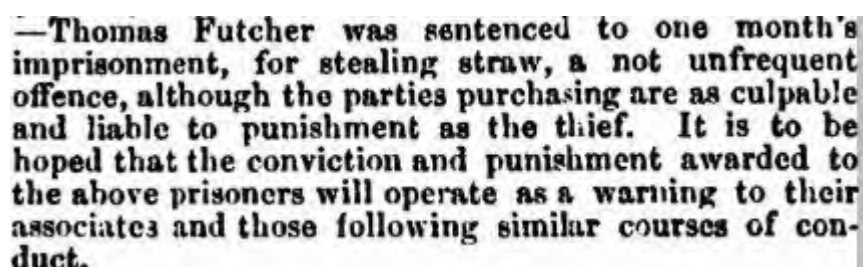
THOMAS FUTCHER, (c1826- 1977)

(Convict Reg. No. 1271)

By Irma Walter, 2023.

Records show that Thomas Futcher was born in 1826, but it appears possible that he was born on 14 January 1823 at Andover, Hampshire, to parents James and Esther Futcher.¹ The 1841 Census for that town shows James, a tailor, aged 60, his wife Esther, (50), and sons Thomas (18), Charles (10), and Joseph (8).

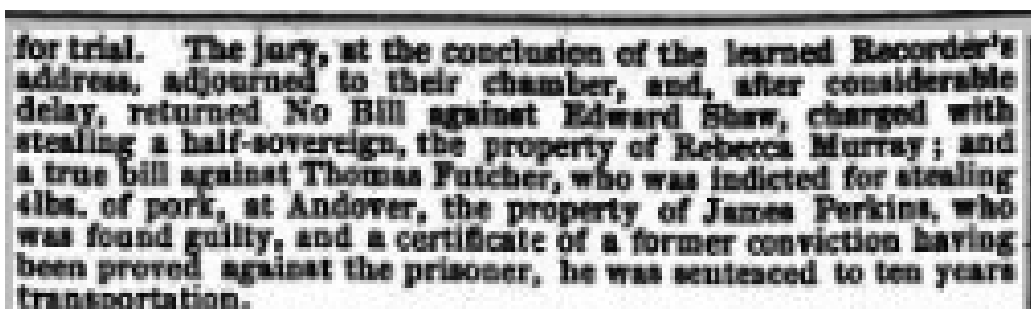
In 1849 Thomas was convicted of larceny, a case of stealing straw, with a prison term of one month –



—Thomas Futcher was sentenced to one month's imprisonment, for stealing straw, a not unfrequent offence, although the parties purchasing are as culpable and liable to punishment as the thief. It is to be hoped that the conviction and punishment awarded to the above prisoners will operate as a warning to their associates and those following similar courses of conduct.

(*Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 21 April 1849)

On 9 April 1851, Thomas was again convicted of larceny at the Andover Quarter Sessions, and due to his previous conviction, he was sentenced to 10 years' transportation, a particularly harsh penalty for the crime of stealing 4lbs of pork -



for trial. The jury, at the conclusion of the learned Recorder's address, adjourned to their chamber, and, after considerable delay, returned No Bill against Edward Shaw, charged with stealing a half-sovereign, the property of Rebecca Murray; and a true bill against Thomas Futcher, who was indicted for stealing 4lbs. of pork, at Andover, the property of James Perkins, who was found guilty, and a certificate of a former conviction having been proved against the prisoner, he was sentenced to ten years transportation.

(*Hampshire Advertiser*, 12 April 1851.)

Following his conviction Thomas served five months eight weeks at Hants Prison, followed by one month eight weeks at Millbank Prison, before being transferred to Pentonville Prison, where he was described as a general labourer, aged 25, weight 9' 13", height 5' 5", with light brown hair, grey eyes, a long face, fresh complexion, single, C. of E, unable to read and write. On 17 April 1852 he was taken from Pentonville Prison to the convict ship *William Jardine*.² The ship left Plymouth on 3 May 1852, carrying 212 convict passengers bound for the Swan River Colony, arriving at Fremantle on 1 August 1852.

¹ *Church of England Baptism Register, Andover, Southampton.*

² Pentonville Prison, Register of Prisoners, Series PCOM2, Piece No. 64.

In September 1852, while in Fremantle Prison, Thomas sent a letter to a James Futcher³ of Andover, requesting assistance in paying the £10 debt owed to the British Government to cover the cost of his transportation to Western Australia. Whether his appeal to family members for assistance in paying his transportation debt was successful is not known. Since he was said to be illiterate, it appears likely that Thomas had obtained help from another party in constructing the letter. (See copy in Appendix.)

Little information has been found so far of his employment after his release on Ticket of Leave on 1 December 1853. In January 1856 he received his Conditional Pardon.

There is no record of Thomas marrying in WA. He appears to have been employed in the South-West. In 1864 he was in Mr C. Properjohn's employ at Capel when he gave evidence at the trial of James White, under arrest for the stabbing of John Lynn, also employed at Properjohn's farm.⁴

On 18 April 1865 Bunbury Resident Magistrate George Eliot convicted Thomas Futcher, expiree, aged 38, unable to read or write, of being drunk and disorderly, for which crime he served 21 days.⁵

Under Colonial Convict No.4867, Thomas Futcher, aged 50, was charged on 3 September 1874 in Bunbury with being drunk and incapable and was sentenced to prison for 14 days, or a 10/- fine.⁶

Thomas Futcher died at the Bunbury Hospital on 23 April 1877.

[Note: A man named George Futcher, born in Adelaide, later came to Bunbury and operated a menswear shop in Victoria Street. There does not appear to be any family connection between the two men.]

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³ Note: Possibly a relative. At the time a James Futcher was a prominent sheep breeder at Andover.

⁴ *Inquirer*, 13 January 1864.

⁵ Convict Establishment, Miscellaneous, Local Prisoners Register (V16)

⁶ Fremantle Prison Correspondence Registers, Register of Local Prisoners (F2a)

Appendix -

Letter with envelope from convict Thomas Futchter, addressed to James Futchter, Portland Place, Handover (Andover) , Hampshire, England, 1852.⁷

Thomas Futchter

Reg No 1271

Convict Depot

Fremantle

Western Australia

Sept 3/52

Dear Sir

It is long since I had this pleasure and now that my good name is sullied by being enrolled amongst England's unfortunates, I sincerely trust you will not be carried away by any false impressions, but remain as warm in your parental affection towards me, as you did when the clouds of Fate obumbrated⁸ my happiness. I hope to be enabled before long of satisfying you beyond doubts of my innocence of the charges attributed to me. But I have no cause to repine⁹ at the fate that has befallen me – though innocent of the cause that has been the means of transporting me from home and friends. I look upon my fate as a chastisement of the Almighty, not of man, for any undutiful and wayward conduct towards Him. At His hands have I received my doom and to Him will I look up to for patience and strength to endure the load that He has seen cause to lay upon my shoulders.

About a month or five weeks ago we dropped anchor at Fremantle, after a short, and comparatively speaking, pleasant voyage, but I am sorry to state that the bombastic accounts of this country are good only in name – I will give you some accounts of it hereafter –

In the course of a year or so, if my conduct meets with approbation, I will become entitled to what is known as Ticket of Leave, which will enable me to remain in a certain district of the Colony either to work on my own account or serve a master if one can be obtained. – Should I not enter service or work for myself there are stations appointed by Government where Ticket of Leave men are supplied with food, lodgings & work, with wages in proportion – After I have done about two years on Ticket of Leave I will then get a Conditional Pardon. – But before I can obtain a Conditional Pardon I have to pay Government £10 for my passage to this Colony. As the privileges are infinitely greater after this amount is paid, and great difficulty is found in acquiring such a sum here, I would like it as an Everlasting favour if you would transmit me what means you conveniently can spare so that I may the sooner be free from this debt. I will be very anxious until I hear from you, which I trust will not be long. Be pleased when you write to state where James Chalmers is living and how my parents are.

I am quite well and happy. If I may use the expression, I trust this will find you well, likewise your family. Remember me kindly to them all and Mr Burns and Mr Blandon.

⁷ Source: State Library Western Australia, slwa_b3003794_204, ACC.7640A/36, 1852, Thomas Futchter to James Futchter, Andover, UK, Cecil Walkley, postal history of Western Australia collection, slwa_b3003794_205.

⁸ Meaning – obumbrate, to darken or overshadow (Source: Dictionary.net)

⁹ Meaning – repine, to repent, grieve, agonize (Source: www.dictionary.com)

Give my kindest regards to my parents and all my friends and with best regards to you.

I remain

Yours very faithfully

Thos. Futchner

I ought to have addressed this to my parents, but I hope after perusing it you will forward it to them and they will send me the needful.

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