

Thomas Rodrigues - Scindian Convict - #24

Thomas Rodrigues was born in Liverpool on 10 March 1823 to a Portuguese father Emanuel (Manuel) Rodrigues and an English mother, Elizabeth Williams. The couple already had three sons, John, Joseph and Francis. Thomas and his older brother John were working as boatmen when they committed a crime together that resulted in Thomas being sentenced on 11 December 1847 to 15 years' transportation for manslaughter.

Thomas had married Ellenor (Ellen) North three years earlier and the pair had a two-year-old son, Joseph, and another child on the way. Their second son, Thomas Emanuel Rodrigues, was born on 18 December 1847 one week after his father was sentenced to be sent to the other side of the world.

An account of the crime and the ensuing trial at the Lancashire Winter Assizes was published in the Liverpool Mercury on 21 December 1847:

"Manslaughter in Wapping

Thomas Rodrigues, 23 and John Rodrigues, 32, two Liverpool boatmen, were indicted for the manslaughter of John Addikin, in Wapping, in this town. Mr Blair and Mr Preston conducted the case for the prosecution, Mr James appeared for the prisoner Thomas and Mr Henry Tindal Atkinson for John. The full particulars of this case transpired at the time of the coroner's inquest.

On the 29th ult. Thos. Rodrigues went in company with an abandoned woman, named Mary Ann Bolling, into the tap-room of the public house of Mr. Coffee, in Wapping, where a quarrel took place between them, and whilst they were so quarrelling, the prisoner John came in and took part in it. The woman Bolling said there would shortly a man come in who would "do" for the pair of them. Soon after this John Addikin, the deceased, who was brother to Bolling, came in, when he was immediately struck by the prisoner John Rodrigues, which led to a fight, during which the prisoner Thomas was out of the house, and shortly afterwards the whole of the parties. The deceased went in the direction of Blundell-street, in company with his sister. Deceased proceeded thence along Chaloner-street. The prisoner J. Rodrigues ran after him, and upon getting up to him he knocked the deceased down. The prisoner Thomas immediately came up and stabbed the deceased with a knife in the lower part of his body, in front.

The deceased was taken to the Southern Hospital, where he shortly afterwards died from the effect of the wound. Mr James addressed the jury at considerable length on behalf of the prisoner Thomas. He contended that the evidence was fraught with discrepancies, and was altogether of such a nature as to leave it very doubtful that Thomas Rodrigues was the man who inflicted the injury upon the deceased. Mr Atkinson addressed the Court for the prisoner John, and at great length contended that the identity of his client was not established. Several influential persons were called, who gave both prisoners most exceptional characters. The Judge having summed up, and instructed the jury in the case, the jury retired from Court, and after an absence of seven minutes, returned a verdict of manslaughter against Thomas Rodrigues, but acquitted John, who was forthwith discharged. Sentence upon Thomas deferred. The hearing of this case occupied the Court very nearly nine hours."

Thomas served the first part of his sentence in Millbank Prison before being transferred to Portland Prison on 20 June 1849 in readiness for his transportation to Western Australia on 28 February 1850 aboard the first convict transport, the *Scindian*. Records indicate that he was visited by his father Manuel on 13 February, just two weeks before his departure.

Thomas wrote to his wife Ellen after his arrival and she responded, writing to Sir George Grey, Secretary of State, to seek support for her and their two sons to be permitted to join Thomas in the Swan River Colony:

"No 41, Simpson Street, Liverpool, June 26th 1851

Sir,

My husband, Thomas Rodrigues, was transported at the Liverpool, December Assizes in 1847, for the term of fifteen years and he is now at the convict depot Fremantle, Western Australia. Since he has been there, I have received two letters from him, which are signed by the official authorities of the Colony, in the letter dated Freemantle, Western Australia, October 30th, 1850, he informs me that he would have his ticket of leave on the 20th April 1851, and he wishes myself and two children to go out to him.

The object of my addressing you is, I have been informed that the Government send out the wives of convicts of good character under peculiar circumstances, as I am very poor and have had nothing to support myself and two children since my husband has been away, but through my own industry and perseverance, should the Government send out the wives of convicts, I humbly crave that indulgence for myself and two children, for should be very happy to go out to him, as my husband wishes me to do so, by the tenor of his letter he intends to stop at the Colony.

I can produce testimonials into my character, who would forward any information that may be required of me, hoping you will pardon this liberty I have taken addressing you, waiting your reply (for which I shall feel truly thankful) and with every dutiful respect.

Your Obedient Servant, Eleanor Rodrigues."

The 30 March 1851 England Census indicates that Ellen was then working as a shopkeeper to support herself and her two sons. Sadly, eight months later, their six-year-old son Joseph died and was buried on 16 November 1851 at St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Liverpool. To compound her misery the grieving Ellen then received a devastating response to her request, dated 4 November 1851 -

"Eleanor Rodrigues,

In answer to your letter dated the 26th of June last, addressed to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, I am directed by Earl Grey to inform you that no recommendation of your husband for the indulgence of having assistance granted to his wife and family to join him has been received from the Governor of Western Australia. I am therefore to express his Lordship's regret that, in the absence of such a recommendation it is not in his power to order you to be sent out to your husband.

I am....."

Thomas received his ticket-of-leave on 20 April 1851 and was working as a boatman, unaware that his fortunes were about to change. On 3 September 1852 the barque *Eglinton* on its

maiden voyage and keenly awaited from England, struck a series of reefs and sank off the coast 50km north of Perth near what is today Wanneroo. The vessel was carrying mail, cargo, gunpowder and £15,000 of coin which the Government was keen to recover. Boatman Rodrigues took on the risky endeavour of diving on the wreck and on 10 September he recovered the damaged mail, the gunpowder and the 'specie' earning him a monetary reward and a few months later, a free pardon.

The *Inquirer* dated 15 September 1852 recorded the momentous event:

"THE EGLINTON.

SINCE our last, the specie has been recovered by the exertions of a diver, a ticket of leave holder, named Rodriguez, under the superintendence of Lieut. Wray, R.E. The treasure was conveyed to Perth under military escort, and lodged in the commissariat strong room on Thursday last. We are glad to find that much of the cargo has been saved and conveyed to Fremantle, where the greater part will be sold by auction for the benefit of the underwriters. A survey was held, on Tuesday, when the ship and cargo were condemned. It was also agreed that the boatmen should claim a salvage of one-third upon all cargo saved by them, an exception being made in favour of the specie which would be removed from the ship by the government. A small party of soldiers under Ensign Wellman, started for the beach on Wednesday, to protect properly. It appears that during the night of Friday, after the ship struck, guns of distress were fired, but the distance from Perth (28 miles) prevented their being heard. The mail has been recovered, but many of the letters and newspapers were destroyed by the wet. The passengers and the crew are in Perth or Fremantle. The recent somewhat rough weather has not affected the vessel and it is considered not improbable but that she will last for some time."

A year later on 24 August 1853 the *Inquirer* reported on Rodrigues' good fortune:

"Rodriguez, the ticket of-leave holder who saved the treasure from the Eglinton, has received a free pardon from her Majesty, for his services on that occasion. It appears that when the man received the fifty pounds gratuity from the Local Government, he stated that he should be glad to surrender any pecuniary compensation, provided he could obtain a conditional pardon. The case was afterwards brought before the notice of the Secretary of State, and the result has been this free pardon. The despatch enclosing the pardon observes that there is no occasion for withholding the pecuniary remuneration, because Her Majesty had been pleased to grant the man a free pardon. Rodriguez has therefore his liberty, and the two hundred pounds given to him by the Imperial Government: so, if his risks were great, and his services valuable, he has certainly been most liberally rewarded."

Rodrigues was issued with his free pardon on 30 September 1853 and from that time could do as he pleased. He did not, however, return to his wife and son in England, electing instead to leave Western Australia for Victoria, possibly following the lure of gold. Rodrigues met Jane Duffy, a 24-year-old single Irish emigrant who had arrived in Australia aboard the *Telegraph* immigrant ship on 18 September 1853. Duffy's death certificate states that the couple were married in Perth, Western Australia however they did not in fact marry until many years later. Between 1854 and 1860, the pair had five children born in Geelong, Victoria, recorded under the name Roderique. Their remaining six children were born in New Zealand, daughter Elizabeth born in Port Chalmers, Otago in 1862 and the rest in Riverton, east of Invercargill,

Southland, New Zealand. Rodrigues made the relationship with Jane Duffy official after the birth of their eleventh child when they married on 12 April 1878 in Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand.

With Thomas's background as a boatman and their hometown being on the south coast of New Zealand, it is not surprising that his sons became mariners and fish merchants. Oldest son Joseph was a Captain and well-regarded mariner and Edward was in the oyster business. The sons were all reportedly good athletes, excelling at football, rowing and sailing. In November 1887 Thomas Roderique's home in South Riverton was used as a polling place for council elections for Orepuki Riding, County of Wallace.

Thomas lived to the age of 82 years, dying on 5 September 1905 in Invercargill, and was buried under the name of Roderique in Catholic Block 7, Plot 45, Eastern Invercargill cemetery, New Zealand. Jane survived him by 7 years, dying at the home of their daughter Catherine Mary Harrington on 28 December 1912. She was survived by three sons, three daughters and many grandchildren.

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