

Baptism	29 September 1828, St Michael, Coventry, Warwickshire
Parents	Charles Thompson and Ann
Parent's marriage	
Siblings	Charles (1826), Ann (~1831), William (~1833), Joseph Bowers (1835), Sarah (1838)
Wife	Margaret Donnell
Married	15 December 1853, Wesleyan Chapel, Perth
Children	

When James Thompson was baptised, his father was a labourer.

He was living with his parents at Cow Lane, St Michael, Coventry, Warwickshire: Charles Thompson, 50, hawker, born Ireland; Ann, 40, weaver; James, 12; Ann, 10; William, 8; Joseph, 5; Sarah, 3. Ann and the children were born in the county.<sup>1</sup>

In 1846, James appeared in the newspaper:

*James Thompson, aged 16, committed 12 June last, charged by Joseph Adams and others, with feloniously breaking into the warehouse of the said Joseph Adams, at the parish of St Michael, Coventry, and stealing therefrom 190 gross of gimp, value £5, the property of the said Joseph Adams.*

*It appeared from the evidence that the window had been taken out of the factory, and when the witness, Thomas Stowe, went in the morning, he found the gimp, charged in the indictment, stolen.*

*Mr Adams said, that in consequence of what he heard, he went to the factory, and found Holmes, the Constable, there with the prisoner in custody; there are gardens near the factory, and several footmarks were found, which corresponded with the prisoner's boots; there was also a wall with mortar and broken bottles on, which the prisoner had got over, and there was mortar upon his boots, and his hand had been recently cut as with glass.*

*The prisoner was apprehended by Holmes, who corroborated the testimony.*

*The Jury returned a verdict of Guilty, and the Court sentenced him to twelve months of hard labour, to be once privately whipped.*<sup>2</sup>

The Criminal register notes:

James Thompson, 16, cannot R&W, convicted Warwickshire County Sessions on 1 July 1846, shop breaking, one year and whipped.<sup>3</sup>

About nine months after he was released from prison, James was in trouble again and on 13 March 1848, he appeared at the Petty Sessions, Coventry. He and Thomas Price were charged with having in their possession a large quantity of silk, the proceeds of a burglary committed at the premises of Mr Smith, trimming manufacturer, Much Part-street, on Saturday night. They were remanded for further examination.<sup>4</sup>

At his trial, at the Coventry Assizes on 24 March 1848, the newspapers reported:

*James Thompson, aged 18, and Thomas Price, aged 20, committed 16 March on a charge of burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling house of Thomas Smith, of Much Park-street, Coventry, during the night of 12 March, and stealing therefrom twenty bundles of silk, value £30, together with several bottles containing wine, silver spoons, a pair of spectacles, a knife, and other articles.*

*The evidence in this case having been given at length the week before last, in our police report of what transpired before the magistrates, renders it unnecessary to repeat it here. It will be remembered that the attention of Illiff, the Policeman on duty, having been called by a rustling noise towards the prosecutor's premises, went there, and found some of the bundles of silk lying in the archway passage of Providence-place, and the prisoner Thompson at a short distance from it; this was between three and four o'clock in the morning; the premises had been entered by the cellar grating, and on examining the house and warehouse, the property described was missed. The evidence against the prisoner Price was more slightly circumstantial, consisting chiefly of his being tracked by footmarks, and marks on his clothes, occasioned by traversing the prosecutor's outer premises, and the garden adjoining. Both prisoners were proved in company together at a public house in Much Park-street, about midnight, before the robbery was discovered, and Price, when apprehended the next morning, was shown to have given a false account of the way he had been occupied at the time. On the person Thompson, when searched, was found a pocket knife belonging to a person living in the prosecutor's house, and which had been left there on the night of the burglary being committed. A bunch of keys was found upon Price, one of which fitted and unlocked the cupboard door from which a part of the property was abstracted.*

*The prosecution was conducted by Mr Heyes. Prisoner Thompson was defended by Mr Miller, and Price by Mr Flood, both of whom addressed the Jury for their respective clients. John Butler and Benjamin Oldfield were called as witnesses in favour of Price's character, but had known little of him for the last two years.*

*The Judge summed up, directing the Jury to consider the cases against each prisoner separately, on the merits of the evidence respectively applicable.*

*Verdict, Thompson, Guilty. Price, Not Guilty. A former conviction was proved against Thompson. Sentence, ten years transportation.* <sup>5</sup>

The Criminal Register records that James, now 18 years old, could read and write; skills he learned in prison.<sup>6</sup>

James remained in Coventry Prison for almost a year before he was transferred to Millbank Prison in London on 5 May 1849. The Prison Register reads:  
17464. James Thompson, 18, single, can read and write, labourer, convicted 11 March 1848 of burglary, sentenced to 10 years, received from Coventry Prison, once previously convicted, sent to *Stirling Castle* hulk on 15 February 1850. The Prison Commission Register notes James was a Gyp maker. Note: The trial date is incorrect. <sup>7</sup>

James was sent to the Convict Station at Shorncliffe on 6 November 1849. His number has not changed, and the depot appears to be part of the Millbank Prison system. Two Quarterly Prison Returns for Shorncliffe read:  
17464. James Thompson, 18, felony, convicted Coventry on 11 March 1848, sentenced to 10 years, health and conduct were good, sent to *Stirling Castle* hulk on 15 February 1850. <sup>8</sup>

It is not until James is on the *Stirling Castle* hulk that his trial date is corrected.  
2945. Jas. Thompson, 18, felony, convicted on 24 March 1848 at Coventry, 10 years after being previously convicted. He was described as 5'4½", with dark hair, blue eyes, dark eyebrows and lashed, flat nose, compact mouth, fresh complexion, round face, stout made, single, can read and write, gyp maker, and a cast on the right eye, little finger on right hand crooked. His mother and father live in Coventry. James boarded *Marion* on 28 October 1851 for the voyage to Western Australia. <sup>9</sup>

On arrival at Fremantle, Western Australia, the recorded description differs slightly from the description taken on the hulk.

1185. James Thompson, 22 years old, 5ft 4ins, dark brown hair, brown eyes, oval visage, fair complexion, stout appearance, no marks, single and a labourer.

After receiving his Ticket of Leave in January 1852, he worked for:

1. James Dyson of Perth from 30 August 1852. Dyson was initially a pit sawyer and later a timber merchant.
2. Joseph Freeman, a baker and confectioner of Dalton's Terrace <sup>10</sup>, Perth, from 4 November 1852 until 1854. Joseph Freeman, convict 480, arrived on the *Pyrenees* in 1851. He was from Coventry and was on the *Stirling Castle* hulk from 5 August 1848 to 10 March 1851, overlapping with the time James was on the hulk. <sup>11</sup> Freeman employed 10 Ticket of Leave men, many of them bakers, between 1852 and 1854 when he appears to have left the colony, possibly for Victoria.

James married on 15 December 1853, at the Wesleyan Chapel, Perth.

James Thompson, 22, bachelor, baker, residing at Perth, father was Charles Thompson, a druggist. Margaret Donnell, 22, spinster, residing at Perth, father was John Donnell, a bricklayer.

James signed the register and Margaret made her mark. Witnesses were Margaret Kavanagh and Thomas Jno Hines(?), both signed their names.

James and Margaret left Western Australia for Adelaide on the *Eblana* on 2 February 1856. <sup>12</sup> On board were at least five other ex-convicts among the four cabin and 52 steerage passengers listed. The ship arrived on 28 February, and in April, the following appeared in a newspaper:

Swan River Convicts.

*The immediate occasion of these remarks may be found in a case heard on Tuesday last before the Police Magistrate of this city. It appears that a conditional-pardon man named **James Thompson** was found by Sergeant Badman wandering about Light-square at 1 o'clock in the morning without any satisfactory reason being assignable for his presence there. The police officer deposed that Thompson had arrived here about **seven weeks ago from Swan River** and had since been seen under suspicious circumstances several times. On being searched, a conditional pardon was found on his person. The Policeman further deposed that there were no fewer than twenty to thirty similar characters about the streets of Adelaide, none of whom, as far as could be ascertained, were following any lawful occupation. **The prisoner's wife said they had brought a good deal of money with them, that she had taken in washing, and that her husband was going to work that morning.** The Magistrate, however, felt it to be his duty to commit the man for a week. <sup>13</sup>*

The South Australia Prison Register reads:

James Thompson, convicted on 22 April 1856 for being a reputed thief and found frequenting the streets with intent to commit a felony on 21 April, was sentenced to seven days of hard labour. James was 24, could read and write, was married, was Church of England, a baker, and arrived in South Australia from Western Australia in 1856. He was discharged from gaol on 28 April 1856. <sup>14</sup>

No further information has been found on James and his wife, Margaret.

According to Convicts in Western Australia <sup>15</sup>, James died in 1864. The Mid West Convict database <sup>16</sup>, says he died on 17 October 1864 at Dongara from "a visitation from God". It seems unlikely that James would have returned from South Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> HO107/1152/7/14, p21

<sup>2</sup> Coventry Herald, 3 July 1846, p4

<sup>3</sup> HO27/80, p265

<sup>4</sup> Coventry Herald, 17 March 1848, p3

<sup>5</sup> Coventry Herald, 31 March 1848, p2; Coventry Standard, 31 March 1848, p2

<sup>6</sup> HO27/86, p321

<sup>7</sup> HO24/4; PCOM2/30, p66

<sup>8</sup> HO8/102, 103

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<sup>9</sup> PCOM2/134, p149

<sup>10</sup> Near the corner of King and Hay streets, Perth

<sup>11</sup> HO8/107

<sup>12</sup> The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA : 1855 - 1901), 6 Feb 1856, p2

<sup>13</sup> South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA: 1839 - 1900), 24 Apr 1856, p2

<sup>14</sup> Family Search film 107261842, image 160.

<sup>15</sup> Erickson and O'Mara, Convicts in Western Australia 1850-1887, Dictionary of Western Australiana Volume IX, 1994

<sup>16</sup> <https://midwestwaheritage.com/resultmcr/?id=2107>