

Robert Truss, 256, *Mermaid*

Researched by Marcia Watson

Baptism	4 April 1819, Passenham, Northamptonshire
Parents	Edward Truss and Hannah Coles
Parent's marriage	22 August 1816, Whittlebury, Northamptonshire
Siblings	Alice (1816), Ann (1821-1821), Jonathan (1822), Henry (1825), Joseph Coles (1832)
Wife	
Married	
Children	

His father, Edward Truss, a labourer, married the widow Catherine Knight at Passenham on 27 June 1811. Catherine died shortly after on 4 October 1811, aged 31.

Edward then married Hannah Henson at Potters Pury on 5 January 1814. She died 6 months later, at 27, and was buried on 30 June 1814 at Potter's Pury.

Edward then married, for a third time, to Hannah Coles in 1816.

When Robert Truss was born, the family lived at Old Stratford, about 3km from Passenham, where he was baptised. Later, they lived at Denshanger.¹

By the time Robert was transported to Western Australia, the prison registers records that he had been sentenced 8 times summarily. Some of his convictions were in the newspapers.

March 1839: To the House of Correction. Robert Truss, for three months under the Game Laws.²

On the 1841 Census, the family lived at Little Lowden, Passenham.

Edward Truss, 63; Hannah, 53; Alice 24; Robert 22, Ag Lab; Jonathan 19, Ag Lab; Henry 15, Ag Lab and Joseph 9.

February 1842: Committed to county gaol. Robert Truss, aged 21, of Denshanger, labourer, charged with burglariously breaking into the house of John Travel, sen., at Denshanger, and stealing from there several fitches of bacon, five hams, round of beef, four cheeses, a quantity of tobacco, and divers other articles, of the value of £20 and upwards.³

He was delivered by Proclamation. This means he was released without trial or verdict, although he could be recalled later to face the charges again. Usually, this was because no evidence was presented against the accused or no witnesses were able to testify against the accused.

February 1844: Stony Stratford Petty Sessions, 23 February. Wilful Damage – Robert Truss, of Denshanger, was convicted of damaging a live fence belonging to Mr Abraham Barrett of Wicken. He was committed to the House of Correction for fourteen days with hard labour In default of payment of penalty and expenses of £1. 9d.,⁴

May 1844: Committed to the County Gaol and House of Correction. Robert Truss and Jabez Anderson, for two months each, with hard labour, unless £3. 6s. 6d. is paid for trespassing after game at Passenham.⁵

¹ Passenham, Potter's Pury, Denshanger, Whittlebury, Stony Stratford and Wicken are all within a few km of each other.

² Northampton Mercury, 16 March 1839, p3

³ Northampton Mercury, 26 February 1842, p3; Northampton Mercury, 05 March 1842, p2

⁴ Northampton Herald, 02 March 1844, p4

⁵ Northampton Herald, 25 May 1844, p3

November 1844: Stony Stratford Petty Sessions, 1 November. Robert Truss, of Denshanger, labourer, was convicted in the penalty and costs of £3. 3s for using snares on 31 October in the parish of Passenham, and in default of payment, he was committed to the House of Correction at Northampton for two months. ⁶

April 1849: Calendar of prisoners for Northamptonshire Quarter Sessions on 4 April 1849: Wicken. Frederick Andrews and Robert Truss were charged with stealing an ewe sheep, John Bird's property. They were convicted of stealing a ewe sheep and sentenced to 15 years transportation. ⁷

Robert was sent to Wakefield Prison from Northampton Prison, then transferred to Portland Prison on 3 May 1850. He boarded the *Mermaid* on 28 December 1850 for Western Australia. Behaviour during the quarter was very good.

According to the Surgeon Superintendent, the Convicts were embarked in a healthy state and continued so during the voyage, although at first there were a great many slight cases of diarrhoea, which were generally cured by a dose of chalk mixture, and these not put on the sick list.

On arrival, a description of each convict was recorded:

256. Robert Truss, 32, 5'2½", light grey hair, blue eyes, long face, fresh complexion, cut on the left side of the nose, single and a quarryman. On the voyage out, his reading was improving, but he could not write and was learning his numbers.

Robert received his Ticket of leave on 2 November 1852, left Fremantle Prison and proceeded to the Perth station. ⁸ His accomplice, Frederick Andrews, was released the same day and went to Mt Eliza station.

Robert appears to have taken the opportunity to turn his life around. The only misdemeanour found was when he fronted the City Police Court in September 1887. Robert Truss was charged with drunkenness and ordered to go away as it was his first offence. ⁹

At some stage, he was no longer able to support himself and entered the Old Men's Home. Robert Truss, aged 77, was a labourer and died on 4 October 1897 at Mt Eliza depot. He was buried the following day at the East Perth cemetery in the Wesleyan section.

⁶ Northampton Mercury, 09 November 1844, p3; Northampton Herald, 09 November 1844, p4

⁷ Northampton Mercury, 7 April 1849, p2; Northampton Mercury, 31 March 1849, p3

⁸ SROWA, Superintendent Orders, 1850 - 1854 (So1 - So3) [image 262 on Ancestry.com]

⁹ The Inquirer and Commercial News, 14 Sep 1887, p10