

William Wickstead, 5287, Edwin Fox

Researched by Marcia Watson

Alias: William Clarke, Bill Clarke

Baptism	4 February 1829, St Peter, Liverpool
Parents	Thomas Wickstead and June Allison
Parent's marriage	14 April 1828, St James, Toxeth, Liverpool
Siblings	Thomas (1829), Elizabeth (1830), Isaac (1834), Jane (1834-1835), Henry (1838), Isabella (1839-1841)
Wife	
Married	
Children	

Thomas Wickstead, a coachman, married June Allison by licence on 14 April 1828; both signed the register and resided at Walton on the Hill.

When sons Thomas and William were baptised, their father was a publican/victualer and lived at 88 Gerard St, Liverpool. He later was a brush maker, labourer and finally a porter.

The 1841 census, Silver Street, Liverpool ¹:

Thomas Wickstead, 35, Porter, not born in the county; Jane, 40; Thomas, 12; Elizabeth, 11; William, 10; Isaac, 6; Henry, 3; Isabella, 1.

Ten years later, on the 1851 census, Silver Street, Liverpool.²

Thomas Wickstead, 47, porter, born Chester, Cheshire; Jane, 53, born Workington, Cumberland; Thomas, 22, coach trimmer; Elizabeth, 21, dressmaker; William, 19, moulder; Isaac, 18, watch finisher; Henry, 10, scholar.

Jane Wickstead died in 1851, aged 54. In 1861, Thomas Wickstead was a dock porter. He died in 1867 or 1868.

William's first conviction was in 1855.

14 May 1855, Quarter Sessions, Liverpool. William Wickstead, 23, moulder, read and write imperfectly, convicted on 20 April 1855 of stealing two cases, 50 handkerchiefs, 20 scarfs and other property, the goods of and chattels of John Parry and another. He was found guilty of receiving stolen property and sentenced to 9 calendar months hard labour. Also tried were Esther Cavanagh, 25 and Ann Baines, 32, who both received four calendar months for receiving; and William McInnes, 28, painter, was found guilty of stealing the property valued at under £5. He received 14 years and arrived in Western Australia per *Clara*, convict 4249.³

William was in trouble again in 1857.

Garotte Robbery in the Streets of Liverpool.

Two determined-looking fellows, respectably dressed, named William Wickstead, 25, an iron moulder, and James Hanley, a confectioner, were indicted for having at Liverpool on 3 March feloniously assaulted Alexander McFarlane and stealing from his person a £10 note and other monies, a watch and a pocketbook. The prosecutor, who lives in Belfast, met the two prisoners in a booth at Aintree, where he went to see the steeple chase and drank with them. At the end of the races, he went to Liverpool in a cart with them and then accompanied them to a den of iniquity abound in the small streets of Williamson Square. About 10 pm or 11 pm, they proceeded to a beer house, and in passing through Charles Street, Wickstead suddenly seized him by the throat and

¹ TNA, HO107/558/10

² TNA, HO107/2184

³ TNA, PCOM2/331; HO27/111

choked him until blood flew from his nose while Hanley emptied his pockets. The prisoners then made their escape, leaving the prosecutor senseless. On recovering, he went to the police office, and from his description of the assailants, the police apprehended Wickstead the same night and Hanley the next morning.

The defence endeavoured to establish that the prosecutor was drunk at the races and playing at 'thimble rig' and other classical race course games by which he lost all his money. Several witnesses were called to show the prosecutor was very drunk on the race course, and amongst them, a beerhouse keeper who said the prosecutor gave him the watch to take care of. Other witnesses swore that Hanley was in another part of the town during the robbery, and the prosecutor was mistaken. The Magistrate said people of the night were unsafe in Manchester or Liverpool from these garotte robbers. They were a perfect terror, and he had determined that he should pass a sentence of six years penal servitude whenever a person was convicted of that offence before him. The prisoner (Wickstead) then received this sentence and left the dock laughing. Hanley was found not guilty.⁴

William Wickstead, 25, read and wrote imperfectly, iron moulder, convicted 21 March 1857 at Liverpool Assizes of robbery with one previous conviction, and sentenced to six years. He was received at Wakefield Prison, from Kirkdale Gaol, on 21 April 1857. On 18 January 1858, he was transferred to Portland Prison as a class 1 prisoner. His father was Thomas Wickstead of 49 Mansfield Street, Liverpool. William boarded the *Edwin Fox* on 18 August 1858 for the voyage to Western Australia.⁵

Initially, William worked as a blacksmith in the prison. In November 1859, he was sent to Fresh Water Bay but was back in prison a few weeks later with various sick complaints. William received a Conditional Pardon on 29 January 1862.

According to a newspaper report, William arrived in Sydney - "Bill Clarke is a Liverpoolian by birth, and arrived in Sydney the day before the fight between White and Sullivan, in August last". The fight was held on 5 August 1862. The only ship from Fremantle was the *Kestral*, which left Fremantle on 14 July and arrived at Sydney on 2 August.

William was in Victoria before October 1862, when a prize fight was reported on in the newspaper:

Bill Clarke's Benefit.— Bill Clarke's benefit last Monday, at the rear of the Glasgow Arms, was well attended, and the sparring generally much better than has been seen for some time past. Charley Brock put on the gloves with his old opponent George Brusher and, greatly to the delight of the audience, had a regular mill. The wind-up was between Bill Clarke and Harry Sallars, in which the beneficiary, though opposed to a bigger and more lengthy man, showed some remarkably good points, more particularly at in-fighting. Having returned thanks, he renewed his challenge to fight any man of his weight, 10st 8lb. This was responded to by Jack Robson of Ballarat, who stated he was prepared to make a match at catch weights. Clarke, in reply, offered to give Jack half a stone and fight him for a century. It was afterwards agreed to meet the following day at the Glasgow Arms.

Robson, however, failed to put in an appearance at the appointed time, has since called at our office, and states that there was a mistake as to the time of meeting Clarke at the Glasgow Arms last Tuesday. He was then, and is still, prepared to make a match for a hundred a side. If Clarke means business, he has only to meet Robson on Monday evening next, at nine o'clock, at the Olympic Hotel, Lonsdale Street, when the preliminaries can be amicably adjusted.

We have received a letter from Bill Clarke, agreeing to terms and stating that a match can be made at any time at Mr John Glavin's Exploration Hotel, Little Lonsdale Street East.⁶

⁴ Northern Daily Times, 31 March 1857, p6

⁵ TNA, PCOM2/286

⁶ Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle (Melbourne, Vic. : 1857 - 1868), 11 Oct 1862, p4

In October 1862, the fight was re-advertised:

Fight to Come, 25 November, Bill Clarke and Jck Robson for £200 in the metropolitan district.⁷

The fight between Jack Robson and Bill Clarke of Liverpool, for £200, fought for 37 rounds in 100 minutes, a gallant mill before the police entered the ring and stopped the contest. Both were subsequently bound over at the Williamstown Bench to keep the peace in £50 each and two sureties of £25. The backers of Robson were so satisfied with his conduct that they paid him a portion of the battle money. Clarke was anxious to renew the mill and proposed to increase the stake to £200 or £300 a side and to fight in the Sydney district within six weeks, allowing Robson 25 for expenses. The proposal came to nothing.⁸

In February 1863, in answer to Clarke, Robson said that he had returned to his work, and as his backers had presented him with the greater part of the stake for which he fought Clarke in the first instance, he did not intend to fight for it again. If any of his friends will increase the battle money to £150 or £200 a side, he is willing to go into training and meet his old opponent whenever he likes.⁹

T H E R I N G.—The late Fight between BILL CLARKE and JACK ROBSON. BILL CLARKE, wishing to meet a few of his old Sydney friends previous to going into training for a renewal of the fight with JACK ROBSON, intends to give a BENEFIT on SATURDAY evening, at the rear of the Sportsman's Arms (Johnny Sullivan's), Pitt-street. BILL CLARKE having been induced to do so by a few kind friends, who, admiring his indomitable pluck in his late manly encounter, determine to assist in giving him a "bumper." All the "Fancy" will attend on this occasion. 336 10

In June, a prize fight between Clarke and Robson took place down the bay from Melbourne, beginning at 3 pm. They fought for 75 rounds over 151 minutes before being stopped because the referee said it was too dark for him to see their hand. A blow-by-blow description of each round was reported in the newspaper. After the fight, with no decisive result, both men were so punished that they could hardly get on the steamer to return to Melbourne.¹¹

Set to fight again on 25 August 1863 for £200 at Little River. It did not take place, even though both were present, and the stakeholder decided in favour of Robson. William took the editor of Bell's Life to Court over the decision.

In the meantime, in September 1863, at the City Court, Melbourne. Detective Black charged William Clarke, *alias* Wickstead, with being a convict illegally at large from Western Australia. The prisoner was a noted prize-fighter and had been for some time resident in the city. No proof of his real character had been received until lately when information reached the detective office that he was an absconder from Swan River. The prisoner, on being arrested, admitted that he was a convict. The detective applied for his remand to Western Australia. This was opposed by Mr Read, on the ground that there was no proof of the prisoner's identity. His admission, however, to the detective was considered conclusive enough, and the bench ordered him to find sureties that he would leave the colony in seven days. The prisoner intimated that he had an action pending in the Supreme Court

⁷ Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle (Melbourne, Vic. : 1857 - 1868), 13 Dec 1862, p2

⁸ Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle (NSW : 1860 - 1870), 6 Dec 1862, p2

⁹ Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle (Melbourne, Vic. : 1857 - 1868), 28 Feb 1863, p4

¹⁰ Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle (NSW : 1860 - 1870), 4 Apr 1863,p3

¹¹ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/199058266?searchTerm=bill%20clark>

for £200, and he would be willing to leave the colony when it was decided. The bench informed him that if at the expiration of the seven days, he appeared before the court and showed any good reason, the time might be further extended.¹²

At the Supreme Court, Victoria:

The plaintiff was William Clarke, Iron moulder, prize-fighter, and expirree from Western Australia, by way of Sydney. The defendant was William Levey, editor of Bell's Life in Victoria.

The action was brought to recover back £100 deposited by or on behalf of the plaintiff with the defendant to abide the event of a fight; which was to have taken place under an agreement, as follows:

"Articles of agreement entered into the 5th day of August, 1863, between William Clarke [Bill Clarke] and John Robertson [Jack Robson]. n The said William Clarke agrees to fight the said John Robertson a fair stand-up fight, according to the new rules, by which the said William Clarke and John Robertson hereby mutually agree to be bound. The said fight shall be for the sum of £100 a-side; money already staked with the editor of Bell's Life, and shall take place on 25 August, 1863, 'Down the Bay the men to meet at the office of Bell's Life, on Tuesday, 21 August, at twelve o'clock, to toss for the privilege of naming the exact spot. The men or their friends to meet at the Glasgow Arms, Elizabeth-street, at eight o'clock on the evening before the fight, to agree to a referee. The men shall be in the ring between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock, or the man absent to forfeit the battle-money. That in the event of magisterial interference, the umpire's referee, shall decide the next time and place of meeting, if possible on the same day. That the expenses of the ropes and stakes shall be home mutually, share and share alike. The stakes not to be given up, unless by mutual consent, till fairly won or lost by a fight. In pursuance of this agreement we herewith attach our names." Signed by Clarke and Robson, and witnessed.

The fight to which this agreement refers was twice deferred - in one instance the fight was interrupted by magistrates, and in another by night-fall. The third meeting was to have taken place, under the above agreement, at the Little River. However, the terms in the agreement about the appointment of a referee on 24 August could never be carried out, the men or their friends could not agree on a referee. None was appointed, and the after steps of going down to the Little River, we seem to have been taken under a technical view of the agreement on the one side to enable a claim to be made to the stakes and on the other side to prevent a forfeiture of the money deposited. On 20 August, the defendant held a meeting of the men and their friends at Bell's Life office, heard what each had to say, and decided that Robson was entitled to the stakes. On 3 September, in accordance with this decision, the £200 was paid over to Robson.

Clarke protested against the decision and brought this action to recover his half of the stakes.

A long court case was extensively covered in the newspapers, see -

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5738770?searchTerm=fighter%20william%20clark>

and

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/197289620?searchTerm=prize%20fighter%20william%20clarke>

The jury, after some deliberation, returned a verdict for the **plaintiff— damages, £100.**¹³

It is not known if William continued to use the surname Clarke or adopted another name. No further trace of him has been found.

¹² The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954), 15 Sep 1863, p6

¹³ Leader (Melbourne, Vic. : 1862 - 1918, 1935), 14 Nov 1863, p10