

Would the real convict in the family please stand up!

by Joanne Hyland

My interest in Western Australian convicts began in the 1990s when I found out that one of my ancestors, William Dickson (aka Dixon), was transported to the colony in 1853 on the second voyage of the *Pyrenees*. After years of trying to research William Dickson and beginning to write up some of the family history, I made a breakthrough. I found William on an 1851 census record as an inmate of Portland prison. I had read through the trial transcript purchased by my aunt and had finally located the small village Dickson was born in, Fawley, near Southampton. In preparation for a visit to the village of Fawley in 2011, I ordered the marriage and death certificates for William Dickson (something I should have done much sooner!). The certificates delivered an unexpected surprise. My William Dickson was NOT a convict! He had been born in Scotland, not England, he was a different age to the convict and his parents were named Thomas and Janet, not John and Mary.

I was somewhat disappointed to find that the man that everyone in the family believed to be a convict was not one. The great-great-grandmother (Jane Dickson) in my great-grandfather's wedding photo on my piano was not 'the convict's daughter' as I had always identified her. However she did lead me to the one convict I can truthfully claim to be in my branch of the Gordon family. Her husband, Richard Bettles.

Richard Bettles

Recorded as William Richard Bettles in convict documentation he was otherwise known as Richard Bettles throughout his life.

Richard Bettles was born in the town of Market Deepings, Lincolnshire in northern England in 1833. His parents were John Reed Bettles born in Northamptonshire around 1789 and Elizabeth born around 1795. John worked as a market gardener. Richard had an older brother and sister, Thomas and Ann, and a younger brother, Stephen. In the mid-1830s the ancient market town's population was between 1100 and 1200 people. The Saxon name 'deepings' refers to a deep or low spot

in the landscape. The deep meadows where the town was located were flat fenland often subject to flooding and in Richard's time the town was little more than one main road running along the north bank of the River Welland. The local St. Guthlac's church would have dominated the landscape and during Richard's childhood much building activity was taking place such as the Town Hall erected in 1839 and a lovely three arch stone bridge completed in 1842. This reflected the prosperity of the market town whose market on Wednesday and annual fairs for cattle and wood were famous.

Richard was a 20-year-old agricultural labourer when he committed the crime of arson in Lincolnshire, England. He was found guilty of setting fire to two stacks of wheat, the property of William Goodall, possibly his employer. He was sentenced at the Lincoln Assizes on 4th March 1854 to 15 years imprisonment, which was commuted to transportation. Crimes against property were considered among the most heinous in Britain at that time, hence the harsh sentence.

By 18 July 1855, the convict transport ship *Adelaide*, upon which Richard was brought to Western Australia had arrived in the small western colony at Swan River. He was listed as a groom on his convict records and was semi-literate and Protestant in religion. Richard had his ticket of leave 3 years later on 13 July 1858. As a ticket of leave man he was permitted to seek employment in an assigned district but was not allowed to leave that district without the permission of the resident magistrate of the area. Richard received his conditional pardon on 28 January 1861.

Not much is known about how Richard made his living once he was pardoned. He was a free man and now permitted to marry. There are two marriage records for a Richard Bettles in the decade after his pardon. A Richard Bettles married an Ellen Hennessy in 1862 in Perth. Then in 1872 a Richard Bettles married Caroline Coleman, also in Perth. An Ellen Bettles died in 1863 aged 20 years and a Caroline Bettles died in 1889 aged 55 years. These dates would fit with this being the same man. No children were known to be born from either of these marriages.

A further marriage for Richard Bettles that more is known about dates from 1891 when he married Jane Dickson, a 29-year-old unmarried mother of three children, Catherine, James and David. Richard (58yrs) and Jane married in 1891 when David was just two years old. They had a property named "Carine" in Wanneroo and had four more children of their own. These included: Lillian 'Annie' born in 1892, Helena (Elena) born in 1894, Richard William 'Dick' Bettles born in 1897, and William 'Bill' Bettles born in 1899, after Richard's death. There was also a stillborn son born in 1896.

Sadly for the family, Richard Bettles died on 30 October 1898 in unusual circumstances. Richard had been ill for approximately 7 months with heart problems and had just been released from a month's stay in the Perth Colonial Hospital (Oct 1-28). During the early hours of the morning on the day after he arrived home he awoke early at about 2-3am and at 4am was heard leaving the house. After a search of the property by family and neighbours, Richard's body was found by his 13 year-old step-son James. He had drowned in an open drain that had running water about 200 yards from the house. The death was reported to police by neighbour Alfred W. Okely the same day, stating that he had been found in a waterhole near his residence. A coronial inquest found that it was most likely an accidental death.

The family continued to reside at Carine after Richard's death and the boys, David, Dick and Bill all worked on the neighbouring property at Okely's dairy farm.



Okely Road. Dave Gordon, Bill Bettles (on crutches)

Photo supplied by L. Hall.

Photograph at Okely Dairy (approx. 1906) with David Gordon (on far left) and Bill Bettles his half-brother (on crutches). Dave would have been about 17yrs and Bill 7yrs. David Gordon, step-son of Richard Bettles and son of Jane Bettles (nee Dickson) was the great-grandfather of Joanne Hyland (nee Gordon).

Richard's step-son James, who had found Richard drowned in the drain, later served in the Australian Imperial Forces during World War One and died on the Western Front in Belgium on 20 September 1917. He had married in 1912 and left behind a wife and three young children. Dick also served during World War One and was taken prisoner of war at Bullecourt in France on 11 April 1917. He survived the war and returned home. He married in 1926 and had three children. David took up market gardening on his own property at Lake Gwelup, Perth, and with his wife Martha had a large family of twelve children. As a primary producer he was considered essential services and not allowed to enlist for war as his two brothers had done. Bill Bettles may have been too young to serve in World War One. It is not known whether he married and he died in Perth in 1970 aged 70 years.

Richard and Jane's daughter Annie married twice having two children from her first marriage. Their youngest daughter Elena sadly died aged seventeen years in 1912 and was deeply mourned by her family. Jane remarried in 1905 to Stephen Redmond and lived a long and happy life

surrounded by her children in her Mount Lawley home in Perth. She died in 1951 in her 88th year only ten days after her husband Stephen died in Hollywood Hospital, aged 80 years. Richard Bettles' legacy continues to live on in Western Australia and today almost all the Bettles family members who reside in the greater Perth region are descendants of Richard Bettles, the convict from Market Deeping who was transported for his crimes to the newly formed Swan River Colony in 1855.

First published in March 2017 Convict Links