

CONVICT CAPERS IN YORK.

© Pauline Millar

If your convict ancestor spent time in York around 1864, I can recommend the Police Occurrence Books as a source of information. The call number is Accession 1141/4, and though not yet filmed, the original book can be requested at the Records Office on the ground floor.

I don't think the local constabulary would have complained of boredom, as a constant stream of offenders passed through their doors, most of them T.O.L. men. As always, the demon drink seems to be at the bottom of the trouble, either 'men behaving badly' after consuming it or actually making the stuff. One likely lad, Thomas Walker, (6778), was fined £100 for operating a still - a lot of money in those days.

Stealing was the other major crime, sometimes smaller items of clothing or goods etc, sometimes wheat and barley, the latter used in the stills I suppose. On another occasion Henry Shufflebottom (4499) and Henry Beard (4494) were charged with stealing 30 sheep - that must have been some BBQ they were planning! Of course these days, Mr Shufflebottom would have been found not guilty on account of the fact that he had been unmercifully teased by his school mates about his unfortunate surname.

I started off jotting down names and numbers of offenders but in view of the abundance of records, soon gave it away. However here's a few examples: Michael Nolan (2984), Edward Connor (5052), Patrick Buxton (2156), Alexander McRae (6941). These all occurred early March 1864.

Three men who tasted freedom for nearly a month (15th Feb-9th Mar) were James Johnson (2210 -Johnston), William Rose (3577) and Peter McKean (4160). The last two absconded from a road party and abducted an aboriginal girl. Three extra police officers were sent from Guildford to help in the search. When caught they had accumulated a large quantity of stolen property, including 3 dogs. It was quite a shock to realise that men being taken to prison in Guildford/ Perth were required to walk there - you would have thought that would have kept them on the straight and narrow.

A more serious crime and misdemeanour was committed by William Graham (5244) on the 4th March 1864. When Mr Elijah Quartermaine arrived home unexpectedly from Perth, late at night, he found William Graham in bed with Mrs Quartermaine . To add to Mr Q's chagrin, Graham shot him (he survived) and fled to the bush. He was seen in various places and stole from many properties while on the run. At one point, Amdon Rendall (5191) was convicted of aiding Graham and giving him a rifle. The bad news is that I didn't have time to read on and find the denouement - sorry!!

References and Notes:

Records are held at the State Records Office, Alexander Library Building, James St, Perth.

First Printed in *Convict Links*, Vol. 15, No. 3, July 2001 - Newsletter of the Convict Special Interest Group, Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc.