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Who was Thomas Kidner?

Thomas Kidner was born in 1765 and baptised on 16\textsuperscript{th} November at St. Mary’s Church, North Petherton in Somerset.

His father James, was a farm laborer and his mother’s name was Mary (nee Ridon)

The Kidner family name is derived from the French name de Ketenore.

Thomas Kidner’s ancestors lived in this region of Somerset for about 700 years and can be traced back to about the time of the Norman conquest.

\url{http://chetenore.com}
At 18 years of age, Thomas Kidner along with four accomplices, was accused of stealing four pieces of Irish linen, valued at £6, from William Iverend, a resident of the parish of St. John in Bristol.

The trial was held on 30th October, 1782 and Thomas was sentenced to Transportation for 7 years. Of his co-accused, W. Northcote was found not guilty, J. Barry, W. Bendall and T. Webber were publicly whipped. Elizabeth Pollard was found guilty of receiving stolen goods.

Transportation to America had ceased due to the War of Independence and the gaols were overflowing.

Thomas was held in a Bristol gaol until early 1786 when he was transferred to the ‘hulk’ Censor moored at Woolwich in the Thames.

**Overcrowding**

As convict numbers increased, so did the number of hulks. The first two vessels, the Justitia and the Censor, housed 125 and 183 prisoners respectively. The number of convicts held on other vessels varied with their size, but averaged 275-300. Also, each ship would have about 20 officers. On a still, warm day the smell of the prisoners would pollute the river from bank to bank.
Transportation – 7 years

Thomas had served more than four years of his sentence when he was transferred to the ‘Alexander’ on 6th January, 1787.

The Alexander was the first ship in the eventual fleet of eleven vessels to receive its ‘cargo’.

Along with Thomas, the Alexander carried 194 male convicts and was the largest ship to join the First Fleet to sail to Botany Bay in New Holland.

Prior to departure 11 prisoners died. On 22nd March, the prisoners on Alexander were taken off again while she was whitewashed all day. This failed to wipe out the virulent virus.

On 29th March, Alexander was again smoked and washed as the medical men conducted their running battle against a situation beyond their medical capability.

Early in April the lighters were taken away from the much-fumigated Alexander and the prisoners re-boarded. Newly-sentenced prisoners still arrived.

On 6th May, as the last full return was made of convicts about to be transported, three men died on Alexander.
The First Fleet

The eleven ships of the fleet under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip RN took their leave from Portsmouth, England early on Sunday 13th May, 1787. The Fleet consisted of six convict ships, three store ships, two men-o-war ships with a total of 756 convicts (564 male, 192 female), 550 officers/marines/ship crew and their families.

The six convict ships were:
The Alexander
The Charlotte
The Lady Penrhyn
The Friendship
The Prince of Wales
The Scarborough

Other ships of the Fleet were:
H.M.S. Sirius
H.M.S. Supply
The Fishburn
The Borrowdale
The Golden Grove

Setting Sail

"...AT 4 AM FIRED GUN AND MADE THE SIGNAL TO WEIGH, WEIGH'D AND MADE SAIL, IN COMPANY WITH THE HYAENA FRIGATE, SUPPLY ARMED TENDER, SIX TRANSPORTS AND THREE STORE SHIPS. AT 9 FIRED A GUN AND MADE THE SIGNAL FOR THE CONVOY TO MAKE MORE SAIL."

Captain Arthur Phillip RN
The Voyage

On June 3rd 1787 the fleet anchored at Santa Cruz at Tenerife. Here fresh water, vegetables and meat were taken on board. Phillip and the chief officers were entertained by the local governor, while one convict tried unsuccessfully to escape.

On 10th June they set sail to cross the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro, taking advantage of favourable trade winds and ocean currents.

On Alexander a number of convicts fell sick and died. Tropical rainstorms meant that the convicts could not exercise on deck, and were kept below in the foul, cramped holds.

The fleet reached Rio de Janeiro on 5th August and stayed a month. The ships were cleaned and water taken on board, repairs were made, and Phillip ordered large quantities of food for the fleet.

The fleet left Rio on 3rd September to run before the westerlies to the Cape of Good Hope, where they arrived in mid October.

Assisted by the gales of the latitudes below the fortieth parallel, the heavily-laden transports surged through the violent seas. A freak storm struck as they began to head north around Van Diemen's Land, damaging the sails and masts of some of the ships.

The Supply reached Botany Bay on 18th January 1788; the three fastest transports in the advance group, Alexander, Friendship and Scarborough, arrived on 19 January; slower ships, including the Sirius arrived on 20th January.
Port Jackson

This was one of the world’s greatest sea voyages — eleven vessels carrying about 1400 people and stores had travelled for 252 days for more than 15,000 miles (24,000 km) without losing a ship. Forty-eight people had died on the journey, a death rate of just over three per cent.

It was soon realised that Botany Bay did not live up to the glowing account that Captain James Cook had given it in 1770. The bay was open and unprotected, fresh water was scarce, and the soil was poor.

On 21 January, 2 days after he had arrived in Botany Bay, Phillip and a party which included John Hunter, departed the Bay in three small boats to explore other bays to the north. They soon found what they were looking for and the men returned on 23 January with news of a harbour to the north, with sheltered anchorages, fresh water and fertile soil.

On 26 January 1788, the fleet weighed anchor and by evening had entered Port Jackson. The site selected for the anchorage had deep water close to the shore, was sheltered and had a small stream flowing into it. Phillip named it Sydney Cove.
20th July 1789, Thomas was charged with three others, with buying "necessaries" from private marine Mark Hurst. Hurst maintained that Kidner had offered to give him two bottles of liquor in exchange for a white shirt. Thomas gave the shirt to another convict in exchange for two pounds of flour. Hurst said that he had returned the flour to Kidner for baking, but Kidner had swapped the flour for a pair of trousers, which he had returned to Hurst.

Thomas Kidner maintained that Hurst had asked him to sell the shirt for flour. He had given the shirt to Mary Davis in exchange for two pounds of flour, one of which he would give to Hurst.

Hurst had also sold two bottles of liquor to Thomas Bryan for a pair of shoes and a white shirt. Joseph Morley gave fish to Hurst expecting to receive liquor in return, but received white stockings instead. John Hall was to give Hurst some tobacco for a pair of worsted stockings, but received a pair of white stockings that were rotted and full of holes.

For this illegal trading Hurst received 300 lashes, Morley 100 lashes, Hall 50 lashes. Thomas Kidner and Bryan received 150 lashes each.

Flogging
This inhumane, cruel form of punishment, was used widely. It was administered with a cat-o'-nine-tails (a whip made up of nine pieces of knotted cord). Sentences of up to 200 lashes were not uncommon. Some sentences reached 500, and in rare circumstances, 2,000. Fifty lashes took about four minutes to administer. It was called a Botany Bay Dozen.
Exiled Again

Thomas Kidner was sent to Norfolk Island aboard the Supply, 11th November 1789.

On Sunday 6th December Thomas was disembarked from the Supply at Norfolk Island. This was to be his home for the next 18 years.

Norfolk Island was under the control of Lieutenant Governor Philip Gidley King who had been sent to the island in March 1788 to establish a settlement. Convicts were employed building the settlement, tending livestock and crops.

Thomas had now served his 7 year sentence but it is not clear whether he was regarded as a free settler or a convict in his early days on Norfolk Island. The details of convict sentences had apparently been left with the owners of the transport ships that had long returned to England.

Friday 25th December, 1789 - Christmas Day

Transactions on Norfolk Island Wr &c Moderate breezes & pleasant Wr at Sunrise hoisted ye Colours in observance of Christmas Day. at 10 AM performed Divine Service killed 2 Hogs belonging to the Crown Wt 180 lb & issued them 1 lb & 1/2 to each person & as our Crop of Wheat has been a good one gave Them 2 lb of Flour each Man & one pound to the Women —

Journal of Lt.Gov. King

HMAT Supply

His Majesty’s Armed Tender Supply was the smallest of the fleet being only 170 tons and 70 feet long. Carrying 50 people and skippered by Captain Henry Bull, she led the fleet most of the way primarily because of her speed. Little is known of this brig’s early history, but it seems she was built in America in 1759 and was commissioned by the Admiralty in October 1786.
Life on Norfolk Island

Life was very tough for the new settlers on Norfolk Island.

Food was short and crops were destroyed by pests, the weather was sometimes very bad and shelter was rudimentary.

Sydney Town was desperately short of food and the governor continued to send more people to Norfolk Island

March 20th 1790 brought disaster to the settlement (and to Sydney town) with the loss of HMS Sirius at Sydney Bay.

An later account of the situation on Norfolk Island from the diary of Lieutenant Ball:

“The wreck of the Sirius went to pieces on the 1st of January, 1792, and every thing possible was saved out of her. The same day, every person on the island went to a reduced allowance of provisions, but the fish daily caught was sufficient to serve all the inhabitants three times over.

Some of the settlers were permitted to employ the convicts as their servants, on condition of maintaining them without the aid of the public store; and some of the convicts were allowed to work for themselves, on the same condition. It will be absolutely necessary to establish a court of justice, as corporal punishments have but little effect; although robberies were confined only to a particular class of convicts, and were by no means general.”
The Second Fleet

Unknown to the first European arrivals, it was to be almost two and a half years before other ships arrived with their cargo of new convicts and provisions.

These were Lady Juliana, shortly followed by the store-ship Justinian and the three ships of the infamous Second Fleet.

The Lady Juliana was the first convict ship to arrive at Port Jackson in New South Wales after the First Fleet.

A ship of 401 tons, her master was Thomas Edgar who had sailed with James Cook on his last voyage. The surgeon was Richard Alley.

Aboard Lady Juliana was a young girl, just turned 14, who had been sentenced to Transportation for Life. Her name: Jane Whiting
Little is known of the early life of Jane Whiting. She was born in early 1775.

Late in 1788, at age 13, it is known that she lived with her mother in Peter Street, Westminster.

On 5th October 1788, Jane, in the company of a 10 year old girl named Mary Wade, had been begging in the area of the Treasury building on Whitehall. They coerced an 8 year old girl named Mary Phillips to take off her dress, cap and tippet. Later they pawned the dress for 18d.

For this offence, Jane and Mary were tried at the Old Bailey on the 14th January 1789. The crime was “theft with violence: Highway robbery”. The verdict – Guilty. The penalty – Death.

Jane was taken to Newgate Prison. For the next ninety-three days she awaited the gallows.

However, on 17 April 1789, King George reprieved her from the hangman's noose and ordered her transported for the term of her natural life.
Jane was transferred to the *Lady Juliana* which had gradually been filling with female convicts from about the time of her trial.

After a delay of six months the *Lady Juliana* left Plymouth on 29 July 1789 with 226 female convicts, and took 309 days to reach Port Jackson, one of the slowest journeys made by a convict ship.

She called at Tenerife and , and spent forty five days at Rio de Janeiro, and nineteen days at the Cape of Good Hope.

The *Lady Juliana* is sometimes referred to as the “floating brothel” and life on board must have been harsh indeed for someone so young.

The *Lady Juliana* arrived in Port Jackson 3rd June 1790 and was the first ship to arrive since the First fleet in January of 1788.

The supply ship *Guardian* which had left England about the same time as the *Lady Juliana* had struck an iceberg and was lost.

The *Lady Juliana* had collected some of the survivors and supplies from Table Bay but the colony in New South Wales was in desperate need of more.

The remaining ships of the Second Fleet, *Neptune, Surprize*, and *Scarborough* transports arrived at Port Jackson the latter end of June, 1790 bring much relief to the colony.

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**HMS Guardian**

The voyage of HMS *Guardian* is unique in naval history. She sailed from Spithead in September 1789 with stores for Britain's new colony in New South Wales. Thirteen days out from the Cape of Good Hope she struck an iceberg that tore away her rudder and most of her keel. Half the ship's company took to the boats, only one of which survived the stormy 1300-mile voyage back to the Cape. A month later, through exemplary courage and seamanship and against all probabilities, the crippled *Guardian* herself sailed into Table Bay.

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**Lt. King...** “By the unfortunate loss of the Guardian the colony was deprived of those liberal supplies, which had been sent from England, the want of which threw the settlement back so much, that it will require a length of time to put it in the situation it would have been in, had the Guardian arrived before Governor Phillip was obliged to send away the Sirius, to give up labour, and to destroy the greatest part of the live stock.”
Poor Creatures

The Scarborough and the Neptune arrived on 28th June, 1790, two days after the Surprize.

The voyage had been a nightmare for the convicts, although the Scarborough was nowhere as bad as the Neptune.

A letter, published in the London Morning Chronicle on 4 August 1791, written by a female convict at Sydney Cove on 24 July 1790 says:

“Oh! If you had but seen the shocking sight of the poor creatures that came out in the three ships it would make your heart bleed. They were almost dead, very few could stand, and they were obliged to fling them as you would goods, and hoist them out of the ships, they were so feeble; and they died ten or twelve a day when they first landed, but some of them are getting better...... They were not so long as we were in coming here, but they were confined and had bad victuals and stinking water. The Governor was very angry, and scolded the captains a great deal, and, I heard, intended to write to London about it, for I heard him say it was murdering them. It, to be sure, was a melancholy sight.

It took a week to unload the ships of convicts and set up tents for them on land. Many were unable to walk, and crept about on hands and knees, still suffering the effects of scurvy, dysentery and typhoid.

The population of the colony had jumped from 591 to 1,715 with the arrival of the Second Fleet.
Six weeks after arriving at Port Jackson Jane was placed aboard the recently arrived *Surprise*, along with 37 male and another 156 female convicts, for transfer to Norfolk Island.

7th August 1790, The *Justinian* and the *Surprise* arrive at Norfolk Island from Port Jackson, with desperately needed supplies.

Jane was now approaching her 15th birthday.

Thomas, meanwhile, was laboring for the colony.

By July 1791 he was subsisting on a lot at Sydney Bay. He had cleared 50 rods and felled 30 rods of timber.

He shared a sow with Robert Nunn and Mary Carter. The sow had a litter of 4 on 25th March 1792, enabling him to go ‘off-stores’ for meat.

By mid-1792 he had his own allotment (No.14) of 15 acres overlooking Ball’s Bay and by October 1793 he had four acres cultivated.

Thomas was employed as a stone-cutter and Jane was now living with him.

Governor Phillip did not reckon on the little labour which may be got from the women, though some were employed in the fields; as the greatest part would always find employment in making their own, and the men's cloathing, and in the necessary attention to their children.
Thomas Junior

By late 1794 Thomas, approaching 30 and Jane nearing 20 were expecting a child. The Reverend Samuel Marsden had been sent to Norfolk Island in 1795. No records of marriages on Norfolk Island remain but it is believed, and highly probable, that Thomas and Jane were married by Rev. Marsden early in 1795.

On 30th May, 1795 Jane gave birth to a son that they named Thomas. In October, 1798 Thomas and Jane had a daughter that they named Ann.

Thomas and Jane continued working their land and trying manage on this island where the population had reached about 1100.
Abandoned

Norfolk Island was isolated, shipping was irregular and the population was unable to achieve self-sufficiency despite the efforts of the government and settlers alike.

There were several periods where crops failed due to weather or pests and the people of the island were saved from near starvation by the annual ‘mutton bird’ migrations.

The population had grown and the number of free or ‘emancipated’ former convicts that had settled on the island meant that the prospect for housing more convicts was limited.

By 1803, the Secretary of State, Lord Hobart, called for the removal of part of the Norfolk Island military establishment, settlers and convicts to Van Diemen's Land.

This was achieved more slowly than anticipated, due to reluctance of settlers to uproot themselves from the land they had struggled to tame, and compensation claims for loss of stock.

It was also delayed by King's insistence on its value for providing refreshment to the whalers.

The first group of 159 left in February 1805 and comprised mainly convicts and their families and military personnel, only four settlers departing.
Van Diemen’s Land

On 15th October 1805 Thomas, Jane, Thomas Jnr. and Ann left Norfolk Island on the Buffalo and disembarked at Port Jackson.

The purpose of this trip is unclear but may have related to Jane’s status (convict with a life sentence) and attempts to petition the authorities for a ticket of leave or a pardon.

The Sydney Gazette of 25th May 1806 reported that Thomas had been granted a permit to leave the colony.

Thomas and his son, by then aged 11, apparently returned to Norfolk island, probably with the intention to gather their meagre belongings and make their way to Van Diemen’s Land.

It appears that Jane may have stayed in Sydney and eventually made her way directly to VDL on the King George.

Thomas and his son finally embarked on the Lady Nelson arriving in Hobart on 28th November, 1807, the first of many voyages bringing the people of Norfolk Island to VDL.
Queenborough land

The government of Van Diemen’s Land was expecting a number of new settlers from the abandoned settlement of Norfolk Island but not almost the entire population.

Between 1897 and 1814, 900 Norfolk Islanders arrived in Hobart. Many were billeted with existing families whilst the authorities decided what to do with them.

The population of the colony had grown by about 25% in a couple of years and resources were stretched. Many of the settlers were no longer young people and declared themselves “too old and too tired to start pioneering”. Thomas himself was 42 when he arrived.

Governor Bligh was generous towards the Norfolk Island re-settlers and as an inducement, announced that they should have 4 acres of cleared land for every acre of cleared land plus two acres per acre of uncultivated land.

Land grants were made to many of the settlers in the areas of Clarence Plains, Sandy Bay, Glenorchy and eventually New Norfolk.

By 30th April 1809, Thomas had 22 acres at Brown’s river and was later granted 30 acres at Sandy Bay and was living on this plot by 1810 despite the grant not being official until 20th September 1813.
Witness

Meanwhile, Jane and Ann had arrived in the colony aboard the King George and joined the two Thomas's.

Jane was granted a full pardon on 9th June 1810 and it appears that she was ‘assigned’ to a George Clark of Collins Street Hobart as a housekeeper.

Thomas was ‘involved’ in an incident on his Queenborough property when two convicts absconded from a road gang and, in the area near Thomas’ home, got into an argument which resulted in one shooting the other. Thomas and four other witnesses were required to go to Sydney for the trial of Terrence Flynn who was subsequently hung at the site of the crime.

Thomas also held 60 acres of land at Sussex.

The trial was held in Sydney on Thursday, 31st May 1810. Thomas Kidner, ex-convict and dweller of the Queenborough district of Hobart Town, was sent to Sydney to give evidence.

Tuesday. 19th. June 1810

The Ship Ann Capt. Clarke sailed this morning for Bengal. — The Colonial Ship King George with Capt. Murray & his Compy. for Hobart Town, sailed out of the Cove for the Derwent in Van Diemen's Land. — The Prisoners Terrence Flynn and Job Stokes — both under sentence of Death, the former for Murder the latter for Burglary at the Derwent, were sent thither in the King George to be executed. —

Jnl. of lachlan Macquarie
Thomas Kidner’s legacy

We don’t know what ‘ventures’ Thomas undertook during those few years that he spent in Hobart or indeed, the exact circumstances of his passing.

There is some evidence to suggest that Thomas was lost at sea whilst on a whaling or sealing trip in 1813.

In 1817, Jane was subsequently given a house and land by George Clark in consideration of her services. She transferred half the land to her son, Thomas Jnr.

Ann Kidner married Richard Larsom on 24th February 1812 and Thomas Jnr. married Elizabeth Burkett on 7th January 1822 in Hobart.

Jane Kidner died in Hobart on 14th September, 1826 and is buried in St. Davids Cemetery.

In 1827 Thomas Jnr. sold the Queenborough property to a Mr. James Moody.
Our Links with the Kidners

Thomas Kidner Jnr. and Elizabeth Burkett had a daughter, Frances born 28th April 1827.

On 16th February 1852, Frances married Matthew Quinn, a former convict who had arrived from Ireland in 1845 on the Ratcliffe.

Matthew and Frances were my Great, Great, Grandparents.

This story is unfinished. Much remains to be discovered about these intrepid people.

Steven Quinn, 2008
References