

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2023

2321 The Finest Judges in England

by Colin Kilduff

The Finest Judges in England

Dad passed on the family story that his ancestors were transported by the finest judges in England, as if it was a badge of honour. At the time I did not care but as the years passed our family's history began to intrigue me.

Using genealogy, I could trace most of Dad's ancestors back to the first arrivals in this country.¹ As he had claimed, several were convicts but the records established that the trials of some of them took place in Ireland. English judges, possibly, but not in England.² Of the others, George Seymour, an Englishman tried at the Old Bailey, could be an ancestor of interest.

His Christian name is common in our family and Seymour has been used as a second name. George grew up in the Berkshire town of Reading during the Napoleonic wars. He served his apprenticeship as a harness maker and his signature on later documents indicate that he could read and write.³

The end of the Napoleonic wars ushered in a period of recession and George moved to London in hope of better work. It also brought him into contact with what he would later call unworthy fellows.⁴ Knowingly or otherwise, he accumulated several bank notes that Bank of England authorities determined were forgeries. They prosecuted him for possession and uttering of the notes. If convicted, the penalty for the latter could be execution.

On advice from the family of one of his co-accused all pleaded guilty to possession. Their sentence was transportation for fourteen years. The prosecutor then declined to present evidence on the more serious charge.⁵ George arrived in the colony in December 1820.

He married in Sydney in 1822⁶ and with his wife, Mary, a free woman, moved to Windsor. He began his business career ten years before his sentence expired, tendering to deliver supplies of salt pork for the government. The tender was in the names M and G Seymour at Windsor.⁷

In the 1828 Census his occupation was baker.⁸ He operated his bakery for several years.⁹

After the expiry of his sentence in 1834 and shortly before he received his Certificate of Freedom,¹⁰ George advertised a new coach service between Windsor, Parramatta and Sydney.¹¹ Over the next several years he entered into partnerships with various prominent businessmen as co-proprietors.¹²

The year after he received the Certificate of Freedom his marriage broke down and George advertised to repudiate credit issued in his wife's name.¹³ George then began a long *de facto* relationship with Elizabeth Reynolds, the wife of Richard. She birthed another four children, in addition to the two sons she had had with Reynolds.

By 1838, George was advertising for two butchers, so he had expanded his trades.¹⁴ It appears that at the time he was still involved in the coach business.¹⁵

Although only the household returns survive from the 1841 Census, his household was a large one. His now former wife Mary lived in an adjacent street. Analysis of the genders and age ranges of the children indicate that all the surviving children of both Mary and Elizabeth were in George's household.¹⁶

Next, George took on the profession of auctioneer.¹⁷ He continued in that role for many years while also carrying on his businesses as a butcher.

In the last year of his life George became unwell, probably with a brain tumour.¹⁸ He signed his will a few months before he died but a codicil was signed with his mark. In the will, George left legacies for all his surviving children, both legitimate and illegitimate, with a special provision for his son by Elizabeth, John.¹⁹ The informant for the death certificate was his daughter with Elizabeth.

The headstone on his grave at Windsor reads that it was erected by his daughter Kezia (his daughter with Mary).²⁰

At George's trial the judges were the Recorder of London, the senior circuit judge at the Central Criminal Court, and Baron Garrow.²¹ Dad was right. His ancestor George was transported by two of the finest judges in England.

George began as a harness-maker but after arriving in the colony as a convict he made his living as baker, butcher, auctioneer, businessman and entrepreneur. The notice of his death described him as, "An old and respected colonist."²²

¹ Family history certificates from NSW Registry of births, deaths and marriages.

² Convict indents, State Archives Recourses Kit (ARK), also Sainty and Johnston, *The Census of NSW 1828*, North Sydney: Library of Australian History (1980).

³ For example, his signature on his marriage records on microfilm as part of the ARK, also George's will, see below.

⁴ In the papers recorded in the digital panopticon associated with George in the Old Bailey report below.

⁵ The "Old Bailey" on line, for George Seymour and others: Reference number t18200517-43.

⁶ NSW marriage V1822244 8 on microfilm, the ARK.

⁷ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 4 December 1823, p. 3, DELIVERABLE AT SYDNEY.

⁸ 1828, Sainty and Johnson, as above.

⁹ Stories in the press, example *The Sydney Herald* 12 November 1841 p.3. Advertising.

¹⁰ Certificate of Freedom 34/0680 dated 31 May 1834.

¹¹ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 13 May 1834 p. 3 Classified Advertising.

¹² For example, *The Sydney Monitor*, 10 November 1837, p. 3 Advertising; *The Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser*, 10 October 1838 (MORNING) p. 3 Advertising.

¹³ *The Sydney Herald* 5 March 1835, p. 1 Advertising.

¹⁴ *Commercial Journal and Advertiser*, 30 June 1838 p. 1 Advertising

¹⁵ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 19 July 1838, p. 3 Classified Advertising.

¹⁶ Microfilms of the Census returns read at State Records and Archives, Kingswood.

¹⁷ *The Sydney Herald* 12 January 1842 p. 1 Advertising.

¹⁸ NSW BDM record 5161/1861, (transcription) gives the cause of death as "tumour in the head."

¹⁹ State Records Authority of New South Wales, Kingswood. Probate packets Series 1 No. 5183.

²⁰ Noted by the author.

²¹ The definition of the Recorder and biography of Baron Garrow, most conveniently Wikipedia. Presiding judges for George's trial.

²² *The Sydney Morning Herald* 18 July 1861, p. 1, Family Notices.