

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020**

## **2011 The Tailor from Printing Office Street**

**by Judith Neville**

## The Tailor from Printing Office Street

On 11 March 1859, George Plant stood in the dock of the courtroom of the York Assizes awaiting the verdict of the jury. After the presentation of the evidence from the witnesses and George's own testimony, Justice Byles turned to the jury summing up the evidence remarking the life of the prisoner was in their hands, and if they found him guilty he would very likely be executed.<sup>i</sup> Five weeks earlier following a drunken affray, George had been charged with the wilful murder of William Wilson in Sheffield.<sup>i</sup>

It took the jury only fifteen minutes to return a verdict guilty of manslaughter. The judge turned to George stating he sentenced him to remaining in penal servitude for the term of his natural life.<sup>i</sup>

George was transported on the ship *Palmerston*<sup>ii</sup> sailing into Fremantle, Western Australia, in February 1861.<sup>iii</sup> As they disembarked from the ship, one guard arranged the convicts in two lines before marching them to Fremantle Prison.<sup>iii</sup> This imposing building shone brightly from the sun reflecting off the limestone walls, hence its nickname "Limestone Lodge".<sup>iv</sup> Once inside the main courtyard of the prison, the convicts were paraded past a guard who recorded their details for the convict register.

George Plant, convict number 5721<sup>v</sup>, stood in line until his turn arrived. When the guard examined George, he saw a stout man who stood only 5 foot 3 inches tall with dark brown hair, oval face, fair skin and deep blue eyes staring back at him. He noted pock marks dotted from the corner of his right eye towards his ear.<sup>v</sup> He also had slight tattoo marks on his right forearm.<sup>v</sup>

George was allocated to the Mt Eliza Convict Depot which was located on the Swan River at the base of Mount Eliza.<sup>vi</sup> During his first few nights lying in a hot humid hut, George would think about home and what he left behind. He was born in October 1827 to Henry and Susanna Plant, third child of 15 children, of whom only two boys and one girl survived.<sup>vii</sup> He lived with his parents in Printing Office Street, Doncaster, working as a tailor<sup>viii</sup> until his wedding. George, aged 26, married Maria Kalishoek, aged 33, in April 1853 but they did not have any children.<sup>ix</sup>

Following receiving his ticket of leave in 1864, George utilised his training as a tailor to work for himself.<sup>v</sup>

During this time, George married Mary Ann Leonard<sup>x</sup> who arrived in the colony in August 1863 at the age of 19 as an assisted immigrant.<sup>xi</sup> Although not divorced from his first wife, it was very common for convicts to marry again as they would never be allowed to return to England after their conditional pardon. George registered on the marriage certificate he was a bachelor.<sup>x</sup> In the next few years, George was delighted with the birth of his daughter, Alice Ann<sup>xii</sup> and son, George John.<sup>xiii</sup> Sadness came when their son died at two days old.<sup>xiv</sup>

A few years later, George was transferred to the Convict Depot at Bunbury, 175 kilometres south, after being charged with "keeping a house of ill-fame".<sup>v</sup> This probably involved Mary Ann as she was also in trouble with the law.<sup>xv</sup> He never saw his wife and daughter again. Despite a few charges of drunkenness,<sup>v</sup> George finally received his conditional pardon in April 1872.<sup>v</sup> With no relationship with his family, later that year he boarded a ship bound for New South Wales to start a new life.<sup>v</sup>

Four years after arriving in Sydney, George married for a third time to Mabel Richardson, 19 years old, again registering as a bachelor.<sup>xvi</sup> As he grew older, his wives became younger each time he married.

The next year they had their first child, Beatrice Josephine Hill,<sup>xvii</sup> and the second child, Albert Edward two years later.<sup>xviii</sup> The family lived in Nithsdale Street, off Goulburn Street,<sup>xviii</sup> and every morning, George would walk to his tailor shop in College Street,<sup>xix</sup> not too far away. He died from kidney disease in 1884 at the age of 58.<sup>xx</sup>

Regrettably, both Beatrice and Albert, changed their names<sup>xxi</sup> and created new names for their parents<sup>xxii</sup> to hide their father's background. I only discovered the most elusive George Plant by following leads from the earliest and only document where Albert revealed his mother's true name.<sup>xxiii</sup>

George Plant's existence was hidden by the deception of his children. I can now acknowledge George Plant, the tailor from Printing Office Street, as my great grandfather.

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<sup>i</sup> Leeds Mercury, Saturday 12 March 1859

<sup>ii</sup> Portland Prison, Dorset: General Record of Prisoners, vol. 8, National Archives, PCOM 2/388.

<sup>iii</sup> Journal of William Irwin, Religious Instructor - Palmerston 1861, 365 34IRW, Mitchell Library, CY Reel 1264.

<sup>iv</sup> Fremantle prison – The Limestone Lodge, The Paranormal Guide,

<http://www.theparanormalguide.com/blog/fremantle-prison-the-limestone-lodge>

<sup>v</sup> Western Australia Convict Records 1846 -1930, Convict Department Registers, Reference Number ACC 1156/R3-R4.

<sup>vi</sup> Royal Sappers and Miners in Western Australia

<https://sappers-minerswa.com/of-interest/convict-hiring-depots/mt-eliza-convict-depot/>

<sup>vii</sup> Family History Report, Kerrywood Research, Judy Lester, 2013.

<sup>viii</sup> 1851 England Census, Doncaster Borough, County Yorkshire Sub-registration district Doncaster, ED institution or vessel 12, Household schedule number 136, Piece 2347, Folio 23, Page number 35.

<sup>ix</sup> England, Select Marriages, 1538 – 1973, Marriage Place Hull, York, England, 11 April 1853, FHL Film Number 1657087, Reference ID #1657087, P 42.

<sup>x</sup> Western Australia Marriage Certificate Reference Number 1864/2218.

<sup>xi</sup> Western Australia Passenger Lists of Assisted Passengers 1851 – 1930, Reel Number: 8309, Reference Number: ACC 115.

<sup>xii</sup> Western Australia Birth Certificate Reference Number 1865/8297.

<sup>xiii</sup> Western Australia Birth Certificate Reference Number 1866/9011.

<sup>xiv</sup> Western Australia Death Certificate Reference Number 1866/3086.

<sup>xv</sup> The Perth Gazette and West Australian Times (WA: 1864 – 1874), Friday 29 December 1871, page 2.

<sup>xvi</sup> New South Wales Marriage Certificate Registration Number 1876/91.

<sup>xvii</sup> New South Wales Birth Certificate Registration Number 1877/400.

<sup>xviii</sup> New South Wales Birth Certificate Registration Number 1879/2311.

<sup>xix</sup> Sydney and New South Wales, Sand Street Index, 1861 – 1930, 1879 &1880, Ancestry.com

<http://www.ancestry.com.au>

<sup>xx</sup> New South Wales Death Certificate Registration Number 1884/2324.

<sup>xxi</sup> New South Wales Marriage Certificate Registration Number 1921/9822.

<sup>xxii</sup> New South Wales Marriage Certificate Registration Number 1922/8977.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Record of Service for Albert Neville, Rimington's Corps of Guides, signed 20<sup>th</sup> October 1899.