

Richard Roper, 4415, Clara

Researched by Marcia Watson

Baptism	27 August 1832, Kegworth, Leicester
Parents	Thomas Roper and Hannah Parkinson
Parent's marriage	7 May 1826, Sawley, Derbyshire
Siblings	Thomas Richard (1827), <i>Thomas (~1831)</i> , John (1834), Hannah (1837-1843)

Richard Roper was baptised on 27 August 1832 in the parish of Kegworth, county of Leicester. The family was living at Sutton at the time, about 4km away. It appears the family moved around the area of Sawley, Kegworth and Sutton for work, with the father, Thomas, being an agricultural labourer.

On the 1841 census, Nottingham and Birmingham Road, South, Sawley, Derbyshire. ¹

Thomas Roper, 35, Ag lab, not born in the County

Hannah, 40, born in the County

Thomas, 8, was not born in the County

Richard, 8, not born in the County

John, 6, born in the County

Hannah, 3, was born in the county.

The 1851 census, Church Street, Sawley. ²

Thomas Roper, married, 50, Ag lab, born Kegworth, Leicester

Hannah, wife, 53, Charwoman, born Sawley, Derby

Richard, son, 18, Ag lab, born Sutton Bonington, Leicester

John, son, 16, Ag lab, born Sawley, Derby

Richard, although originally an agricultural labourer, appears to have become a boatman, probably working on the nearby Trent Canal.

In May 1855, at the Derbyshire Summer Assizes.:

Rape at Sawley

Richard Roper, 19, boatman, was charged with assaulting and ravishing Sarah Fallows on 26 May at Sawley. Mr Boden prosecuted, and Mr Bell defended.

Prosecutrix, aged 15, said: "I am the daughter of James and Margaret Wall; my father keeps the public house at Trent Lock, Sawley." I was at my father's house on Saturday on 26 May; I saw prisoner in my father's house about half past two in the afternoon of that day; he was drinking in the bar; I did not speak to him; about half past four o'clock the same afternoon I left my father's house, in company with my little brother, Samuel Wall, to go to Shardlow, a distance of three miles off; I went along the foot road leading through the fields; when I had got some distance along the foot road I saw the prisoner coming in the same direction; when the prisoner got up to me, he asked me where I was going to, and I replied "Shardlow"; he then asked me when I should come back again, and I told him that I did not know; I then saw a boat going along the canal some fields off, and I started towards it with the intention of riding to Shardlow, but the prisoner laid hold of me and threw me down. Witness here described the assault, which left no doubt that the capital offence was committed]. I screamed out "Murder", and told my brother to fetch help; shortly afterwards, someone called to the prisoner, and he got up and went over the stile. A man named Thomas Poxon then came up to me.

Mr Bell cross-examined the witness but did not shake her testimony in the least.

¹ The National Archive (TNA) UK, HO 107/190/9

² TNA, HO 107/2141

Samuel Wall, a little boy, corroborated and said his sister called out "murder" and he went and told Poxon, who was working in a field a short distance off; after telling him, he went forward for further help.

Thomas Poxon, a lad, deposed that the last witness came to him; he had previously heard a scream of "murder". From what Wall told him, he went to the field and found Sarah Fallows; on seeing the witness, Roper got up and went away; Fallows was much disordered.

John Blood, who lives in Sawley, heard the scream, and went in the direction of the field; he met Roper who was getting over the stile; saw Sarah Fallows in the field; she was crying and appeared exhausted and hurt; he asked prisoner what he had been doing; there was another person with witness; prisoner tried to strike the other man, and laid hold of the witness's arm by the shirt sleeve; the other young man seized hold of the prisoner, and witness went and informed prosecutrix's parents.

Mrs Wall, having given evidence as to the state in which her daughter came home, Mr Bradshaw, constable, Sawley, said he apprehended the prisoner on 26 May at Trent Lock; he said he was innocent.

Mr Eaton, Surgeon, Shardlow, gave medical testimony.

Mr Bell addressed the jury for the prisoner and called two females, who spoke of the prisoner's good character.

The jury found him guilty of the capital offence.

His Lordship, after alluding to the nature of the crime in a feeling address, sentenced the prisoner to transportation for life. The prisoner left the dock smiling.³

The Prison Registers show that Richard Roper, 19, single, can't read or write, a boatman, Protestant, was convicted on 25 July 1855 at Derby for assaulting and ravishing Sarah Fallows on 26 May 1855 at Sawley. He received a sentence of transportation for life. After a month at Derby Gaol, Richard was transferred to Preston Gaol on 25 August 1855, where he spent 8 months and 21 days. He was then removed to Portsmouth Prison on 14 May 1856. While in prison, Richard was well-behaved and in good health. His father is named Thomas Roper, of Sawley, Derby. Richard boarded the *Clara* on 4 March 1857 for the voyage to Western Australia, where he was to labour on public works.⁴

On arrival at Fremantle, Western Australia, on 3 July 1857, he was assigned number 4415, and a physical description was recorded.

4415, Richard Roper, 21, 5'8¾", dark brown hair, grey eyes, thin face, florid complexion, slight stature, scar on right leg, boatman and single.⁵

According to the Character Book, "For his class, a very superior Young Man and well worthy the consideration of Government". He was to receive a Ticket of Leave on 25 January 1862.⁶

Forty of the Prisoners were landed on 7 July; two hundred and ten on 8 July, including Richard Roper; and two on 11 July, making up the full complement.

Richard was not well. The Medical Register notes:

8 July 1857. Richard Roper, 4415, arrived at the hospital from the Convict Ship *Clara* at 13.10 pm.

Under observation for the day and night, admitted on strength to the hospital the following morning by order of the Surgeon.

18 July 1857. Richard Roper died in the hospital at 6.50 am. A Coroner's Jury paid a visit to the body of P.P. 4415 Richard Roper, who died this morning.⁷

³ Derby Mercury, 01 August 1855, p6

⁴ TNA, HO 23/11, PCOM2/107, HO8/131

⁵ State Records Office WA (SROWA), Acc 128/32

⁶ SROWA, Acc 1156/R19

⁷ SROWA, Acc 1156/M2. P.P. is probation prisoner.

In a letter from the Superintendent of Fremantle Prison to the Comptroller-General, dated 20 July 1857.

Sir,

I have the honor to notify the decease in Hospital on Saturday, the 18th instant of P.P. 4418 Richard Roper. An Inquest was duly held on the body of Roper on the day of his decease. The verdict returned was to the effect that death had supervened from "Natural Causes" - the cause being chronic disease of the chest.

Roper had been only ten days in the Colony, having been landed from a H.M.C.S Clara on the 8th instant, and had been at once admitted to hospital.

The Medical officer in his evidence at the Inquest stated, "I observed that this man on being landed was in a very dangerous state, and I called in the Assistant Colonial Surgeon and the Principal Medical Officer. The man had evidently been in a dying state before landing. I know nothing of the treatment received on board the ship. The man complained to me that he had not received any Hospital treatment on board".

Testimony was also given to the effect that the deceased had been heard to groan very much, and to complain of not having received any Medical treatment on board ship. The witness in this instance was the hospital orderly.

It appears from Roper's Caption that he was convicted of Rape at Derby Assizes, 25 July 1855, and sentenced to Transportation for Life, being at that time about 19 years of age.

P.S. It may be as well to state here that the Visiting Magistrates, when going round the hospital on the 10th instant, asked Roper whether he had to complain of anything with respect to his treatment on board ship, and his reply was 'no'. This was in my hearing. T.H. Dixon. ⁸

The Surgeon on the voyage, Joseph Caldwell R.N., would have kept a diary; unfortunately, it has not survived. So whether Richard Roper received any treatment cannot be clarified.

⁸ SROWA, Cons 1156 C5, Superintendent of Fremantle Prison to Comptroller-General 1855-1857, Letter A3 905, 906,