

THOMAS BROOK(E)S

Thomas Brookes was born in 1841 and was baptised in the Protestant parish of Tarvin, Cheshire on 3rd October that year, the son of Thomas and Mary Brookes (nee Lockley). Mary was widowed at a young age and remarried in 1844 to Samuel Gresty, who took in Thomas junior and his sister, Ellen. Children were also born into the second marriage.¹ The 1851 census records Thomas and Ellen as 'scholar(s) at home.'²

The census of a decade later records Thomas, an agricultural labourer, as living in Clotton Hoofield, Cheshire with his wife, Margaret, a dressmaker.³

Thomas Brookes was working as an agricultural labourer at Speke, near Liverpool, when he was charged with rape in June 1865. At the time he was married with 2 children, Margaret 5 years and Thomas, 3 years. He was convicted at the Crown Court, Assizes Liverpool, on 15.8.1865 and sentenced to 8 years' penal servitude imprisonment,⁴ arriving in WA aboard the 'Corona' on 22/12/1866 as Convict 9092.

Brookes was described as being 5'7" tall with dark brown hair, hazel coloured eyes, round faced with a florid complexion. He was stout in appearance and was recorded as having good character.⁵

He received his ticket of leave in March 1870 and Conditional Release the following year. Late in 1873 Thomas Brookes was given his Conditional Freedom. He worked in the Newcastle, Toodyay and Northam area as a general servant, labourer, ploughman, shepherd, and at grubbing.

For 3 years from 1867 he was a gang labourer. In June of that year he stole a flannel shirt at Toodyay and was assigned three months' hard labour with no pay and was ordered to pay for the shirt.

More than a year later he was caught using threatening language and punished with seven days' bread and water.

Early in February 1869 he left his working party at Toodyay to go into the Depot. A few months later he had prohibited articles in his possession for the purpose of trafficking and served another 7 days' on bread and water.

Later during the same year he was assigned to 4 weeks' labour on the Salt River Bridge.

In 1870 after obtaining his ticket of leave, Thomas Brookes worked for various settlers in the Goomalling district including Joseph Lockyer, James McManus, George Slater and Dennis Bresnahan. Whilst working on numerous occasions for Bresnahan on his 'Greenfields' farm at Irishtown he captured the attention of one of his daughters whom he later married.

Early in 1872 Thomas Brookes was again in trouble being fined 5/- by the Toodyay Resident Magistrate for assaulting George Watkins. A year later he was given 3 months' hard labour on full pay for neglecting his master's work. Records have him as being in the employ of George Slater at the time.⁶

Thomas Brookes took up land at Jurokine on the Cockerding Brook west of Goomalling which he named "Hoofield", after the small town of Clotton-Hoofield in Cheshire, England where he was born. Keen to provide for his sons, he eventually amassed considerable property on Conditional Purchase, as well as acquiring 'Outback' Farm which formed part of a poison lease of 1000 acres adjoining Edward Hamersley which he transferred to his son, William in 1897.⁷

Thomas Brookes married Mary Ann (1856-1927) eldest daughter of Dennis Bresnahan and his wife Brigid (nee Toohey) at Toodyay in 1877. The Bresnahans had migrated from County Clare, Ireland with their family and settled as pioneer small farmers at Irishtown.

Thomas and Mary Ann had a family of 12 children, 6 sons and 6 daughters 11 of whom survived.⁸

Their sons initially farmed in the Jurokine area until two relocated further afield, one to Koorda and another to Pantapin.

Thomas earned a reputation as a gruff and direct man who was sometimes at variance with his neighbours in the district, although Surveyor Dreyer of Northam described him as 'one of the very best settlers'.⁹

He was a hardworking community minded man. During the boom years of the 1890s he carted goods to the Coolgardie goldfields to aid in the development of his farm. He served on the Goomalling Road Board 1896-1904 agitating strongly in favour of a public hall being built at Jurokine rather than Mumberkine. Ultimately the settlers at Mumberkine gained the majority support.¹⁰

About 1911 (1913?) Thomas Brookes sold his property to 3 of his sons –William, Jim and Henry for £6000 and provided Mary Ann with an annuity of £100 while he returned to England to live out the remainder of his life and possibly to reconcile and reunite with his first born children Margaret and Thomas. Mary Ann lived for a time in a cottage belonging to St Isadore's RC Church at Jennacubbine until spending the final years of her life residing with her eldest daughter Mollie in Fremantle.

Numerous descendants of Thomas Brookes continue to live in the Goomalling and Dowerin districts today.

Written by Barbara Sewell 2022 with partial research acknowledgements to Adam O'Neill

¹ Various – Tarvin Parish, Cheshire baptism records,
Ancestry .com
FamilySearch

² England Census 1851

³ England Census 1861

⁴ Liverpool Mercury 16.8.1865

⁵ Convict List for the 'Corona' 1866 – SROWA Consignment 128

⁶ State Records Office of WA (SROWA) 1156/R15 General Register

⁷ WAA 541, AN 3/3, Item 3809, 1894

⁸ Dictionary of Western Australians Vol 3, Free

⁹ Sewell, Barbara; Goomalling, A Backward Glance, A History of the District 1998, pp68-69

¹⁰ Ibid pp81-82