

## William Blake

William Blake was baptised in Havant Hampshire 11 September 1813 with parents William and Maria Blake, William being a labourer. He married Susan Sherlock daughter of Joseph and Caroline Sherlock of Westbourne at Havant on 27 July 1841 she is recorded residing on Leigh farm Havant. The witnesses were George and Ann Blake and all signed with X, meaning they were illiterate. It seems both families were agricultural labourers and were some of the millions affected by the Enclosure Acts. Both William and Susan were well into their twenties when they married for in the 1851 census their ages are given as 37 and 35 with four children, the eldest Mary Jane aged 9.

They were still living in Westbourne when William was charged with setting alight hay ricks of Grantham Bowler of Racton, some two miles to the east of Westbourne on 6th November 1855. He was tried at the sessions in Lewes on 13th December and his case took up the whole day.

From the Gazette account of the trial it is evident he had trouble obtaining work. Prosecutor Grantham Bowler: "He worked for me about three or four years ago. He has applied to me for work a long time ago--about three years ; but I did not employ him, as I was not satisfied. I said to him, " I can't set you on, Blake ; you are no good when I do." [West Sussex Gazette 20 December 1855]

This is a trial at the local Sessions and the bench consists of local men with high standing in the Community. Bowler's view of Blake would have been shared with other people of standing in the community.

He was found guilty when Bowler matched footprints near the fire with his boots. That his neighbours testified he was in bed and only arose to go and fight the fire carried little weight. He was sentenced to 15 years transportation and moved to Millbank prison [HO24/7 2092] until February when he was moved to Pentonville [PCom2/66 6437] and was moved to Portsmouth 30 March 1857 [PCom2/107 3836]. This record indicates he was first committed to Chichester, then Petworth for 21 days, Millbank 23 days, Pentonville 13 months and 11 days and Portsmouth 5 months and 10 days. Portsmouth is less than 10 miles from Westbourne and he received three visits from his family, Susan and 6 children. He was visited on 16 July, 27 August and 8 September 1857 the day the Nile departed for WA. The remarkable entry against his name on this latter register is the remark under heading "Information relative to previous convictions". Among the multiple convictions on character for the other names, is NO in inverted commas against his. This unusual comment by the clerk could suggest he reckoned Blake was innocent, or was it so rare that it needed emphasis.

On arrival in WA on 1 January 1858, William was moved before the end of the month to Mount Eliza depot and stayed there until he was returned to the medical unit at Fremantle with rheumatism. He is recorded having a number of daily visits to the sick bay and was granted his ticket-of-leave on 23 July 1859, 2 years earlier than due.

He served his ticket years at Fremantle and was granted his conditional pardon on 1 April 1862.

By this time Susan and the children appeared in the Register of Applications for families to join their husbands in Australia, application 1150 and records there is a letter in CO86/62, probably from the Governor that Blake is aware his family is coming. The register has Susan aged 46 and the children 21 to 7, living at Hermitage Chichester. The 1861 census has her as a charwoman. The register has the family departing on the *Burlington*, without the eldest Mary Jane, on 31 October 1862. Press has it arriving in Fremantle 8 April 1863 which suggests the departure date was later.

Two months later William was convicted and returned to Fremantle prison 4 June 1863 for 6 weeks and released on the 15th July. Record has him arriving at the prison from Fremantle so presumably that is where he and the family were living. He seemingly had another stint in prison in 1865 for he is discharged on 19 January 1866.

Ruth is married in Bunbury to William Smith and according to her obituary: "As a girl of 16 she came to this State with her parents (Mr. and Mrs. Blake), landing at Bunbury, and was shortly afterwards married to the late Mr William Smith, who died in 1893. Some 55 years (1865?) ago Mr. and Mrs. Smith came to Northam and Mrs. Smith had been a resident of the town ever since." [Western Mail 7 March 1919]

Charlotte on the other hand was married in 1865 at Wilberforce a farm between Northam and York to Thomas Stanley. Their first child Thomas William was born in York. Ruth the youngest daughter married Charles Trace Carter in 1874 also at Wilberforce 9 years later.

This would suggest the family moved to the Muresk area in 1864/65 and that is where William worked. Sons Henry and William worked on Chidlow's property at Malabaine in the 1870s and purchased it in 1882. The Eastern District Chronicle comments: "The Bentley Hall farm was bought by the present tenants, the Messrs Balke, who had resided for some years on the farm and considerably improved it. They were therefore the right people to possess the property, and their neighbours are generally of the same opinion. A slight murmur of satisfaction escaped some of the bystanders when the hammer fell." [Eastern District Chronicle 31 March 1882]

It seems after they obtained their title they found 14 acres of it had been fenced off by Moses Beard and their negotiations with him presumably being unsuccessful they took matters into their own hands and broke the fence and let their stock onto Beard's vineyard. Moses Beard took them to court for trespass and damage and won the case, and the Blake's had to pay L100 and costs. It seems when Beard purchased his 40 acre tillage lease he encroached onto Chidlow's land by 14 acres, and after a surveyor informed him, alleges he paid Chidlow for the land. That arrangement seems not to have found its way to the land department and the Blake boys rightfully thought it was theirs. The court decided otherwise. [Western Mail 17 August 1889] Moses Beard is recorded as committing suicide in 1891 using strychnine. The land was soon after sold to Wesley Carter, for Robert Carter is recorded as passing away at Bentley Hall in 1898.

Susan Blake died on 18 January 1885 and William 12 April 1894. They are both buried in the Katrine road cemetery Northam.