

William Bransby, Convict # 3037 – by Joanne Hyland

Thanks to the painstaking research of John and June Hocking and their family story in *Westward-Bound: Our Families Entwined*, I am able to trace the story of William Bransby, another of the convicts in my own family tree. My great-aunt Rosa Gordon married Clarence 'Bob' Bransby, a grandson of William Bransby and his wife Mary Ann Atkins who had arrived as an indentured servant on the notorious bride-ship *Emma Eugenia* in 1858.

William was convict no. 3037 to be transported to Western Australia. Along with two accomplices, also named William, 18 year-old William Bransby was tried and convicted for armed or 'Felony' burglary at the York assizes, Yorkshire on 1 March 1849. All three pleaded guilty to the charge of house robbery and two days later were each sentenced to 10 years transportation to Australia.

Together with William Beaver and William Campion, William Bransby stole coins and tobacco belonging to Thomas Gill of Easingwold, North Yorkshire (The village is located twelve miles north of York). Their hoard contained one hundred copper half-pennies, twenty copper pennies, one hundred cigars worth five shillings and two pounds of tobacco valued at six shillings.

After conviction, the three were briefly held in York City gaol before being sent to the Millbank Prison, near the Thames River in London. During his several months' stay in Millbank, William Bransby was sent out daily to work on various public works throughout the city. He would have worn the distinctive 'P.O.M' prison uniform – standing for Prisoner of Millbank. In March 1851, twelve months into his ten year sentence he was shipped to Gibraltar.

Here he was housed in a prison-hulk, the *Owen Glendower*. The old warships used for hulks were stripped of their original fittings and remodelled to contain holding cells designed to house many hundreds of convicts. In the heat of the Mediterranean conditions below deck were foul-smelling with the odour of unwashed bodies. The men were

taken ashore to work in gangs, all wearing leg-irons to stop them being able to escape.

Detailed in the prison hulk records for hulk no. 1481, the *Owen Glendower*, William Bransby came aboard with about 300 other new prisoners direct from England in the three month period to the end of March 1851. He was recorded to be in good health and apart from an initial period of bad behaviour was reported to have good conduct for the three years he spent there.



Image
sourced at:

Owen Glendower as a prison at Gibraltar

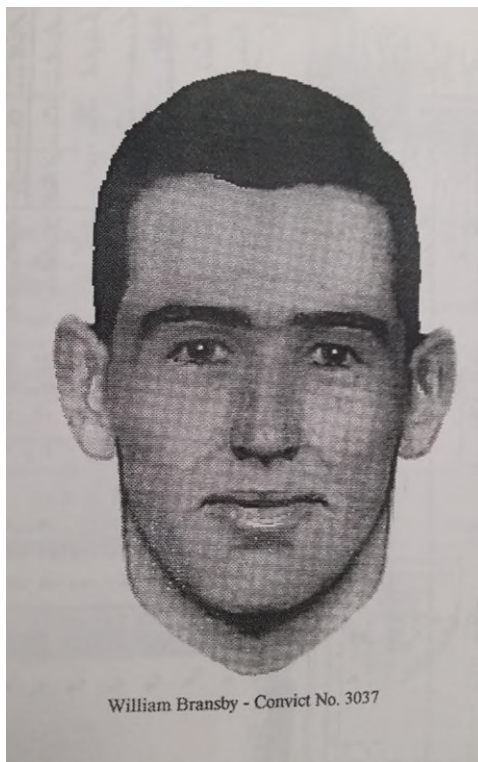
<http://www.ixworthvillagehall.co.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/the-ixworth-gang-owen-glendower-prison-gibraltar.jpg>

On 17 May 1854, William, among 125 longer term prisoners, was removed from the hulk joining 160 or so other convicts on the transport *Ramillies*, heading for Australia. The clothing issued to the convicts before boarding consisted of “a coarse brown serge jacket, waistcoat, breeches, stockings, highlows (above ankle boots) and a small skull-cap”. They were hand-cuffed together and joined in groups of a dozen

by a heavy iron chain being passed through the ring of the handcuffs. William was just 23 years of age.

After a 79 day journey the *Ramillies* arrived at Fremantle on 7 August 1854. The ship's manifest dated 7.8.1854 bears the following description of William Bransby, convict no 3037: "Hair Brown; Eyes Blue; Face Long; Complexion Sallow; Build Slight; Distinguishing features, Part of a Cross and five dots on left arm; Profession servant; Marital Status Single; Age 23 years; Height 5 feet six and a half inches."

Below: an identikit picture of what William may have looked like.



Three weeks after his arrival, on 29 August, William received his Ticket-of-Leave. He worked around Perth and Fremantle until he was engaged to work for John Stokes at Champion Bay (Geraldton) on 23 April 1855. He was granted his Conditional Pardon on 26 April 1856, 7 years and 56 days from the date he committed the burglary. After this time William moved to York.

It was while William was working in York that he met his future wife, Mary Ann Atkins. Mary had had a rough start in life and was born in 1841 in a workhouse in St Giles in the Field parish, a slum-area of London. Her mother died in the workhouse when Mary was just ten years old and shortly after this Mary was sent out to work. She finally got to leave the workhouse when she was forcibly removed and transported to Western Australia as an indentured servant. The family story went that she was fresh off the ship when she married William, however, William met her in York where she had been

taken for employment directly after the bride-ship the *Emma Eugenia* arrived in June 1858.

This particular ship, of all the bride-ships that made their way to Western Australia, was arguably the most infamous. The female emigrants aboard were said to be the worst of the worst from the slums and workhouses of London. One of 117 single females aboard this emigrant ship, Mary Ann was lucky not to be branded as 'depraved' like many of the others. The newspapers in Perth at that time spoke of the ship carrying "a greater number of depraved women..." than on any previous emigrant transport. A panic among prospective employers ensued and many of the women remained in the Migrant Home much longer than usual.



The infamous immigrant 'Bride-ship' in 1858, the Emma Eugenia

Mary Ann however had been selected by an employer and had made her way to York to work as a servant. William was also working as a servant in York at this time. Mary Ann completed her period of indentured service before moving to Perth with William where they married on 31 October 1861.

William had several occupations. He worked as a labourer, a farm-hand and a bricklayer initially in Perth and Fremantle, had his own butcher shop (said to have been next to Foy and Gibson's just past the Wesley

church on the corner of Hay and William Streets, in Perth) and also operated a hay and feed store in Bayswater. From the mid-1860s William had a small timber-milling operation at Wellington (just outside of Bunbury) where he employed 6-8 ticket of leave men as sawyers and labourers.

William and Mary Ann had thirteen children between 1860 and 1882. Anna Maria, their first child, was born in York in 1860 before their marriage, as was their son Joseph who was born in July 1861. They were followed by George, William, Henry, Eliza, Benjamin, Jane, Charlotte, Robert, Edward, Richard and Rebecca. Their daughters Jane and Rebecca married two brothers, sons of convict William Rowe, no 991, transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1832 for his part in theft of clothing in Liverpool. The Bransby and Rowe families met at Bunbury (Wellington) where both were involved in timber milling and carting. Bransby Street in Bayswater is named after James Bransby, the grandson of William and Mary Ann, who died at the Gallipoli landing in WWI.

It is to William and Mary Ann's son Edward that my family is connected via his son Clarence Robert, 'Bob', Bransby born in 1906. William lived to the ripe old age of 87, dying in Maylands in 1919. Mary Ann survived until 1926 dying at the age of 85. Their lasting legacy is their large family which today is spread throughout Western Australia and beyond.

First published in June 2017 Convict Links