

# THOMAS GILHAM

## DARING SMUGGLER

**T**homas Gilham is an important player in the life of his step-daughter Delia Gillam.<sup>1</sup> As a convicted smuggler he was to play his part in gaining the indulgence of bringing his destitute family to the colony.

A native of Kent, he is probably the illegitimate child of Elizabeth Gilham baptised in Aldington church on 10 April 1803.

In May 1823 Thomas was considering marriage—or having it thrust upon him. Marriage banns were published at the Bilsington parish church on 4, 11, and 18 May 1823. However it wasn't until 13 September that Thomas Gillam married Frances Furner in the little village standing on the side of a hill that slopes down to the Romney Marsh proper,<sup>2</sup> and became stepfather to her three children, Delia, James, and William.

Even with these three young children tugging at her skirts, Mistress Furner (as she was then) must have been most alluring in her manner and disposition. Having shown a certain disregard for decorous behaviour in the past, by living in a common-law relationship on perhaps more than one occasion, the knowledge that her intended belonged to *The Blues* would not have deterred her in the least.

Was it second thoughts or smuggling business that kept the young man away from the church door and the altar rail? A little 'finger arithmetic' will show that Frances was pregnant at the time.

Thomas gave his occupation as 'labourer' when their children Louisa and Thomas were baptised at Aldington in 1824 and 1826.<sup>3</sup>

Smuggling was rife along the Kent coast and the gangs were armed and dangerous!

On 1 August 1826 a reward was posted for the apprehension of the person or persons involved in the death of Quarter-Master Richard Morgan at Dover on 30 July. The Quarter-Master had met his death in the service of the Coast Blockade for the Prevention of Smuggling.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of Gilham soon became established as 'Gillam' and the latter spelling has been used throughout most of the story.

<sup>2</sup> Bignell, Alan (1975) *Kent Villages*, Robert Hale & Company.

<sup>3</sup> Research by Centre for Kentish Studies in 2000 quotes Teignmouth, Lord and Harper, Charles G. (1923) *The Smugglers* Volume II quoting reminiscences of an unnamed old man, native of Aldington, and probably James Slingsby, stating Thomas Gillam whom he called Gillian, as being at Aldington Frith.

<sup>4</sup> Finn, R. (1971) *The Kent Coast Blockade*, W.E. White.

Acting on information received the authorities sent a force of one hundred and twenty well-armed Preventive Service Men and two Bow Street Runners to Aldington, a village on the fringe of the Romney Marsh.

Early on Tuesday morning, 23 October 1826, George Ransley alias *Captain Bats*, leader of the gang known as *The Blues* was taken into custody together with Gilham, Giles, two men named Bailey, and two men named Wyor. The seven men were marched, hand-cuffed together, to Fort Moncrief where they were embarked on a naval vessel to Deptford and then to London. All except Giles were charged with the murder of Morgan. Other men to be arrested later included Richard Higgins, Paul Pierce, and John Bailey.<sup>5</sup>

From their appearance before the magistrates it would appear that the gang was quite large—on occasions between 80 and 100 men would take part in landing and running uncustomed goods. They always had an armed party to protect them from the law and Thomas Gillam was one of those armed men.<sup>6</sup> Many men from both sides were shot and suffered serious injuries.

On 6 January 1827 the Kent Winter Assize Court at Maidstone was filled with the prisoners, 'looking more like farm labourers than daring smugglers', and indeed they were mainly farm labourers and ploughmen. Thomas Gilham otherwise known as Carpenter, and alias *Datchet Grey*, and aged 24 years, and the other men so charged pleaded guilty to a charge of having:

*assembled with other persons not in custody, on March 16th 1826, in the parish of New Romney and carrying firearms, for the purpose of illegally assisting in the landing and removal of a quantity of uncustomed spirits, together with another half dozen or so similar counts against the Revenue laws.*<sup>7</sup>

As the men were already in grave peril of losing their lives because of the crimes to which they had pleaded guilty the Crown did not propose to offer any evidence on the murder charge, to which they had pleaded “not guilty”! Possibly they did not have sufficient evidence to gain a conviction on this count. With only starlight to see by it would have been difficult to apportion blame to one armed man out of many.

The judge advised them to prepare to meet their God on Monday 5 February in case a reprieve was not granted them. Formal sentence of death was then passed and the prisoners removed to safe custody to Maidstone Gaol.

On the day the smugglers were to meet their end on Penenden Heath near Maidstone a large crowd had assembled. But they were to be disappointed on learning that the men had been reprieved and sent to the York hulk at Gosport, where they were to be transported to Van Diemen's Land aboard the ship *Governor Ready*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Transcript by Mark Hawes of article published in the Kentish Chronicle 31 October 1826.

<sup>7</sup> Finn, R.(1971) *The Kent Coast Blockade*.

<sup>8</sup> Douch, John (1985). *Rough Rude Men A History of Old-Time Kentish Smuggling*. Dover: Crabwell Publications

With the passage of time the smuggler (like the bushranger) has become a folk hero. He was really only a respectable villager who sold his illicit goods to anyone who could afford the price, wasn't he! Squire and parson were not above dealing with his kind so it must have been all right! It was fine sport to evade the Preventative Men and rob His or Her Majesty's Government of revenue! But stripped of its misty sentiment and romanticism what is left is violent organised crime.

On arrival at Hobart Town he coyly confessed to 'aiding and abetting smugglers', and claimed he had a wife and six [sic] children at Allington<sup>9</sup> [sic] where he had worked for a Mr Bolding. He was 5' 7½" tall, had brown hair, and hazel eyes, and had a scar on the outside of his left arm, a mole in the front of his neck, and a mole on his shoulder. He described himself as a farmer and ploughman, and gave his native place as Allington.<sup>10</sup>

He conducted himself well following his arrival in the colony and in April 1828 his Master, William Lyttleton of Norfolk Plains, wrote to the Colonial Secretary requesting that his wife and family be allowed to join Thomas. Lyttleton wrote:

*Thomas Gilham (per Governor Ready) my assigned Servant, having left a large Family totally unprovided for in England, and being very desirous that they should be enabled to proceed to this colony to join him, I request you will be pleased to obtain for him the recommendation of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor to that effect – I beg leave to add that Thomas Gilham is an industrious and well conducted man, and his Family are in every respect deserving of this indulgence I have presumed to recommend, and should his Excellency be pleased to afford his sanction to my request, I shall be ready to enter into a bond for any amount required for their maintenance and support on their arrival in the Colony.<sup>11</sup>*

The listed children were Delia, James, William, Louisa, and Thomas.

On 13 September 1828 the 333 ton American-built ship *Harmony* (Master, Bennett Ireland) sailed from Gravesend for Port Jackson and Hobart Town with a crew of twenty six, thirteen cabin passengers, nine women passengers and thirty-three children travelling steerage, and one hundred female prisoners.<sup>12</sup> (The ship's surgeon, William Clifford, recorded one hundred female convicts and eighty-seven free women passengers and children.)

Surgeon Clifford reported the rapid rise of the thermometer to 80° – 84° as the ship entered the tropics. He felt the excessive numbers on board contributed to the increased temperature and an outbreak of inflammatory fever but the 'free and active use of the lancet Repeated Purgatives Saline Diaphoretics cold andulated drinks...and free ventilation' brought the fever to heel. There were some cases of cholera which were controlled by the lancet again, and 'warm baths and large doses of colomel<sup>13</sup> combined with opium.'

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<sup>9</sup> Aldington is sometimes pronounced Allington, however there are also two villages of that name in Kent.

<sup>10</sup> CON 84/1 Alphabetical List of the Appropriation of convicts in the North, 1833-ca 1835 pp 226-7.

<sup>11</sup> TAHO: CSO 1/269/6482 p118.

<sup>12</sup> TAHO: CSO 1/368/8375 p154.

<sup>13</sup> Calomel is a laxative and once was a common medicine, especially on the American frontier. It fell out of use at the end of the 19th century due to its toxicity. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calomel>]

Nourishing soup and a proportion of wine helped those suffering from debility. Surgeon Clifford believed his charges experienced much good from the daily general personal examination that enabled him to:

*detect and arrest disease in the early stages and allowing them as much time on deck comtable [sic] with the Service as possible – Regularity of Meals [&] having the Hospital and Prison and all Parts of the Ship Kept extremely clean and Well Ventilated I may attribute my being able to land them in general good health.*<sup>14</sup>

After 123 days at sea, the *Harmony* slipped into Hobart Town on 14 January 1829. Amongst the steerage passengers were Frances Gilham [sic] and her children Delia (14), James (11), William (9), Louisa (5), Thomas (3), and Frances (1).<sup>15</sup>

The four oldest of Frances's children received tuition from a Mrs Bromley on board ship during the voyage.

Also travelling aboard the *Harmony*, under similar circumstances, were Rhoda Higgins (2 children), Mary Giles (3 children), Cath Bailey (6 children), Sarah Pierce (5 children), and Elizabeth Ransley (9 children. They were the wives and children of that same gang of Kent smugglers, apprehended and transported for life to Van Diemen's Land in 1827.

The indulgence having been granted, and having been 'sent on board at Woolwich by the Home Government', Frances Gillam arrived in Van Diemen's Land on 14 January 1829 (as stated). She and the children remained on board the *Harmony* while officials attempted to locate her husband, who, as we know, was in the service of William Lyttleton Esq., at Norfolk Plains. The departure of the *Harmony* was held up until 7 February, owing to Thomas 'not having arrived from the Interior', and an inability to procure a conveyance for them to his master's place of residence. An aggrieved official declared that they should have been landed "and sent to the Factory."<sup>16</sup>

In July 1831 Thomas was assigned to his wife and apart from missing church muster and being drunk and disorderly on several occasions, lived a quiet life as a farmer. A far cry from those savage days when the coast of Kent 'from Sheerness to Pevensey and beyond echoed and re-echoed to the clash of cutlass, the rattle of musketry...the howls of the wounded, the groans of the dying'.<sup>17</sup>

He received his Ticket of Leave on 19 June 1833,<sup>18</sup> and received a Conditional Pardon on 28 January 1839 which was extended 10 February 1846.<sup>19</sup> At the time of the 1848 Census Thomas and Frances were living at *Glenore*, Hagley, tenants of William Bryan.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> TAHO: AJCP: ADM 101/32 Reel 3197 Surgeon's Journals 1818-1850: *Harmony*.

<sup>15</sup> TAHO: CSO 1/368/8375 p154+. Ages have been adjusted to what they would have been on arrival.

<sup>16</sup> TAHO: CSO 1/368/8375 p154+.

<sup>17</sup> Douch, John (1985). *Rough Rude Men A History of Old-Time Kentish Smuggling*. Dover: Crabwell Publications

<sup>18</sup> HTG: 24 June 1833.

<sup>19</sup> TAHO: CON 23/3.

<sup>20</sup> TAHO: CEN 1/104 No. 154.

In the *Return of Tenant Farmers Westbury*, taken in 1851, there are two listings for Thomas Gillam possibly father and son: one is for 183 acres of cleared and fenced land with buildings, at Hagley; the other 483 acres all cleared and fenced, also at Hagley. The rent was 12s 6d per acre, the landlord William Bryan.

Thomas bought and sold land; was for a time landlord of *The Jolly Farmer Inn*; and generally accumulated wealth.

Thomas's benevolence in bringing out his step-children did not extend to including them in his will—Louisa being the only one of the *Harmony* children to inherit—his beloved Thomas having died in 1854. Frances was to receive the benefit of his estate for her lifetime, and then it was to be sold and divided between his six surviving children and the children of Louisa Snooks. The gross value of the estate was sworn at under £600.

After the death of her husband in 1865, Frances carefully set aside money of her own for all of her children to inherit, each child being individually named in her will, thus identifying her eldest child, Delia, as her own and not Thomas Gilham's.<sup>21</sup> The gross value of her estate was sworn at under £700. She died at Westbury 20 September 1869 from 'natural decay', a widow, aged 78 [sic] years.

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<sup>21</sup> Tasmanian Probate Registry: Will 1378 Book 7A p113 dated 18 Saturday September 1869.

# FRANCES FURNER AND DELIA GILLAM

For many years the identity of Frances Gillam and her daughter Delia McDonald had been a mystery. A number of descendants of Frances and Thomas Gillam have proposed theories regarding the ancestry of Frances Gillam, and for quite some time were unwilling to accept the fact that Frances gave her maiden name as Furner when her youngest child, Elizabeth, was born in Tasmania in 1843.

Her marriage to Thomas Gilham [sic] at Bilsington in Kent in 1823 confirms Furner as her name at the time of her marriage but the marriage register entry is silent on the matter of her

MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of <u>Bilsington</u>	
in the County of <u>Kent</u>	in the Year 18 <u>23</u>
<u>Thomas Gilham</u>	of <u>his</u> Parish
and <u>Frances Furner</u>	or <u>his</u> Parish
were married in this <u>Church</u> by <u>Banns</u> with Consent of	
this _____ Day of	
<u>Sept the 13</u>	in the Year One thousand eight hundred and <u>twentysix</u>
By me <u>J. Bond Curate</u>	
This Marriage was solemnized between us { <u>the X Mark of Thomas Gilham</u>	
{ <u>the X Mark of Frances Furner</u>	
In the Presence of { <u>John Bond</u>	
{ <u>J. Flint</u>	
No. 34. <u>John Chapman</u>	

**Marriage entry in the Bilsington Parish Register, for Thomas Gilham and Frances Furner.**

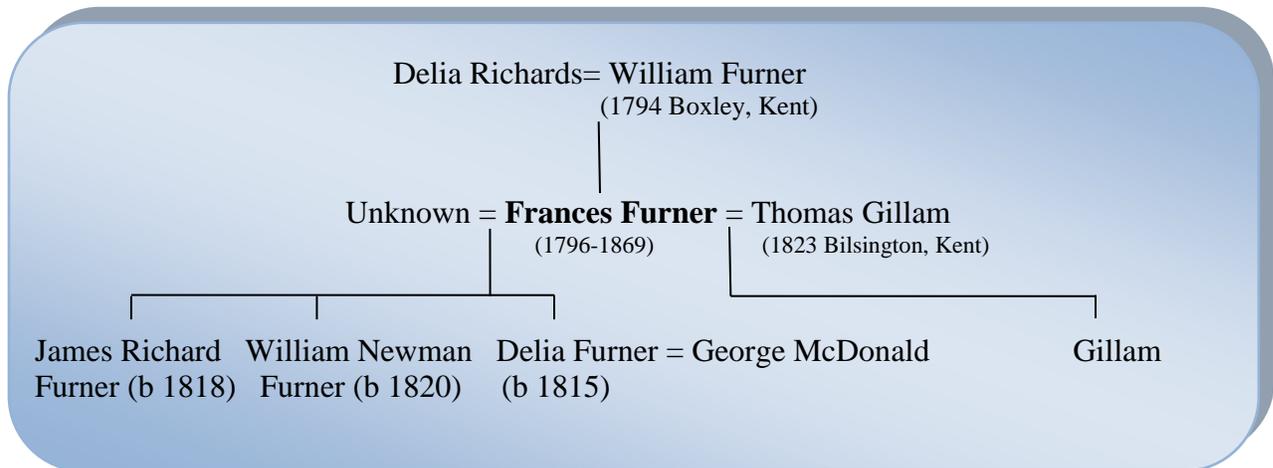
*Courtesy County Record Office, Kent, England.*

marital status: was she a spinster or a widow? Because Frances gave her maiden name as Furner when Elizabeth was born I have always assumed that she was a spinster when she married Thomas Gillam in 1823. At this stage there was no discrepancy with the known facts until Edwy Finch's letter raised the question of a possible marriage to a man named Preston! Edwy Finch, a great grandson of Delia, stated in a letter to me, that his great-grandmother Delia had only one full-brother, the rest being half-brothers and sisters, and also stated Delia's name to be Cordelia Preston.

As Delia is known only as Delia Gillam in the Tasmanian records this information, or that upon which it is based, must surely have been passed down through the family by Delia herself. But how accurate is it? Did she really know her true origins?

I suppose the inference Edwy Finch was making was that his great-great-grandmother Frances Gillam had been married twice and was a widow when she married Thomas and this would account for and legitimise the other half-siblings. The fact that Frances Gillam had children from another relationship became known when she brought those children (all referred to as Gillam) to Tasmania in 1829 and was confirmed when she included them in her Will. It was only when the entries for the baptisms of Frances's three children from another relationship, Delia, William, and James, were located that a problem arose as to her status when she married Thomas. Widows usually, but not always, married under their married names so even though her marriage certificate doesn't state her marital status at all I have always presumed that Frances was a spinster and that her three eldest children were 'base born'. My presumption is not necessarily correct.

If Delia Gillam wasn't a Gillam, then who was she? The Baptism Registers for the church of Saints Peter & Paul in the parish of Bilsington in Kent tell a slightly different story to that passed down to Edwy Finch. The baptism of Delia is recorded on 8 October 1815. She is recorded as the daughter of William and Frances Furner whose abode was Bilsington. So much for being Cordelia Preston! This however is the only mention of William Furner as the husband of Frances.



No record appears of his burial in the parish and it is not known what happened to him. Nor is it known yet if Frances was actually married to him. If she was then the entry in the Tasmanian records which gives her maiden name as Furner is incorrect. Perhaps it is more probable that the Bilsington baptism entry is an error made by the clergyman when writing the event into the register and William Furner is Delia's grandfather and not her father! Sadly, Church Registers are not immune to error, accidental or otherwise, but we will probably never know for sure. Delia's younger brothers, James Richard Furner and William Newman Furner, were baptised in the same parish church as their sister, neither has a father recorded. I wonder if they all even have the same father?

As more information has become available on the Internet it has been possible to unravel some of the mysteries. The next clue came when the marriage was found of a young woman named Delia Richards to a William Furner at Boxley in Kent on 19 December 1794.

Was it possible that they were the parents of Frances Furner? Having the uncommon name of Delia, I thought that this was possible, but there were no records of the birth or baptism of a daughter Frances at that place ca 1791 (which was presumed to have been her birth year as her age was given as 78 when she died).

Delia Richards and William Furner are known to have had four children, one of whom was a Frances, born on 20 April 1796 and baptised at All Saints Church, Maidstone, Kent on 22 May 1796. She would therefore, have been 73 years of age at the time of her death in 1869.

As we have seen Delia had three siblings whose parentage is only partly known and eight half-siblings of whom Thomas Gillam is the father. As all of the children are of Frances' blood, and some married into other related families, brief biographies are included in the following two chapters and are followed by the stories of George and Delia's children.

Delia used the name Newman for one of her sons. It was also given to one of her grandsons. At first this seemed to suggest that this may have been the surname of the father of Frances's children. However, it is also the maiden name of Delia's great grandmother, Mary Newman the wife of William Furner.

And so it came to pass that Delia Gillam came to the colony of Van Diemen's Land and two years after her arrival was the wife of George McDonald.

Delia survived her husband by 22 years and she and her son Joseph lived separately on the same farm at Castra Road (Sprent).<sup>22</sup> Was she content to live the life of a widow?

In a letter to one of her aunts, Maria Howman asks how granny is keeping, and her husband, Harry, wants to know if 'granny and old Haydon is married yet'.<sup>23</sup> I suspect that this is Thomas Haydon, a widower, whose family lived on the Castra Road and were known to Delia and her half-sister Frances Hogben. He was definitely 'old Haydon' as he would have been in his nineties about this time. Nothing came of this.

Delia died at Sprent on 11 August 1900, aged 85 years, and is buried in the Ulverstone Church of England Cemetery.

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<sup>22</sup> North West Post: Affiliation Case, Thursday 17 October 1895 pg 3.

<sup>23</sup> Undated letter written by Maria Howman, circa early 1890s.