

Note that this pedigree chart was drawn up when it was believed that Frances Furner was born in 1791.

# GEORGE McDONALD THE ELDER

## A SAD END

**M**y Great Great Great grandfather, George McDonald, 'not being of sound mind memory and understanding, but lunatic and distracted', took his own life at New Ground on 29 June 1878 at the supposed age of 70 years.<sup>1</sup> He had been living with his daughter Harriet and son-in-law George Turnbull at the time, and for several years prior to this. I wonder if this indicated a parting of the ways had taken place between him and his wife Delia, as she is not mentioned during the inquest proceedings.

George Turnbull gave evidence at the inquest that six or eight months before, his father-in-law had said he would shoot himself. George believed 'he was not right in his mind, as he was very strange in manner at times'. No evidence of ill health was given.

The verdict of the coroner's inquest published in the *Devon Herald* on 3 July, was 'death by suicide whilst in a state of temporary insanity'. *The Examiner* recorded his death as 'death by a gun-shot wound, which, whether self-inflicted or accidental cannot be determined'.<sup>2</sup>

On 2 July his remains were conveyed to the Leven where they were interred in the Church of England burial ground. E.B.E. Walker, Esq. conducted the service, and a few friends assembled to pay their last tribute:

*The deceased was of a kindly disposition, and, speaking from personal experience, was as genial a neighbour as one might desire. He had attained the ripe age of 76 [sic], and leaves a large circle of friends to mourn their loss.*

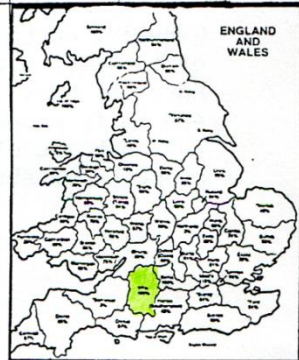
For the most part George seems to have made the best of the circumstances that led to his exile in Van Diemen's Land. But the effects of being forced from his native country to a distant, soul-destroying penal settlement, peopled by, in many instances, the basest criminal elements, must have worked long at undermining his physical and mental strength. It was a melancholy end to a sad life.



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<sup>1</sup> AOT: Inquest SC 195/59 No. 7982.

<sup>2</sup> Examiner: 5 July 1878 pg 2; Tasmanian Mail: 13 July 1878 pg 14.



## A CRIME SPREE IN WILTSHIRE, ENGLAND

**G**eorge McDonald would have been a boy of thirteen or fourteen towards the end of the Napoleonic wars: far enough away from the action to be excited by the exploits of the heroes of Trafalgar and Waterloo; and possibly a victim of the consequences of this war; possibly even a conscript in that army.

The years after the end of the 1812–1814 wars against Napoleon were to be a time of desperate discontent and turmoil at home. Soldiers returning to England after the rapid demobilisation added to the numbers of unemployed.

For the farmer and the manufacturer the war had meant high prices for their commodities. The immediate economic consequences of peace were disastrous for them both, although the manufacturers entered into a boom in 1815 due to the renewal of trade with the Continent and America. But markets became glutted, prices dropped, and the importing countries threw up trade tariffs to protect their own industries.

High prices and low wages led to unrest. Machine breaking became rife and the landowners and mill-owners, fearful of revolution, closed ranks and the landless labouring class was viciously suppressed by the government.

Perhaps he was untouched by the war and was led into crime by his own temperament, for it will be seen that he was a convicted thief, plain and simple. Whether he practised this profession from necessity or simply from a dislike of earning an honest living may never be known as he has left no written word in his own defence.

Few men of his class would have passed through this turmoil untouched, so for whatever the reason, for a couple of weeks in February 1819, he went on a spree that was to change the course of his life.

On 3 February, George, then described as a labourer from the parish of Malmsbury, stole twenty pieces of brass (valued at £2) and forty pound weight of brass which was also valued at £2. His accomplice was a man named William Adye (or Adey). These goods and chattels were the property of Francis Hill. The pair also stole a net (value 10s) the property of Abraham George Young.<sup>3</sup>

Further unlawful activities continued throughout the month. On 6 February he stole some spoons. A house in Cliffe Pysard [sic], occupied by Grace Gale, was burgled on 12 February and a hat and an iron spoon were stolen. The next day (13 February) he stole a mare from Thomas and Robert Large of Lyneham, and then on 17 February he stole some cheeses.<sup>4</sup> He did not remain at large for long, as, on 1 March 1819 the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* reported that:

*George Macdonald and William Adye both of Malmsbury were fully committed for trial for breaking into the house of Grace Gale of Cliffe Pypard with intent to steal in the night of 12th ult. but being disturbed, they mounted two horses which appeared to be left at a short distance and made a precipitate retreat leaving behind them their implements for house breaking, and two sacks which by the marks on them led to the suspicion of the offenders and on Saturday the same men were committed for trial for stealing [on 13 February] a mare from Messrs Thomas & Robert Large of Lyneham.*

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<sup>3</sup> PRO, London: ASSI 25/15/12 Western Circuit Indictments.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The unlucky, careless pair were taken to Salisbury where they were tried at the Lent Assizes which opened on 6 March 1819, and on 10 March the indictment brought against them was that:

*About the hour of one in the night of the same day with force and arms at the parish aforesaid [Cliffe Pypard] in the county aforesaid [Wiltshire], the dwelling house of Grace Gale there situate, feloniously and burglariously did break and enter with intent the goods and chattles of the said Grace Gale in the said dwelling house then and there did steal, take and carry away one hat of the value of one shilling and one iron spoon of the value of one penny of Laban Gale...*<sup>5</sup>

For stealing 'a hat of the value of one shilling and one iron spoon of the value of one penny' both men were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. They were reprieved and sentenced to transportation to the coast of NSW or "someone or other of the Islands adjacent" for and during the term of their natural lives. Because of having been capitally convicted for the burglary the crimes of 3 February (stealing brass) and 13 February (stealing a horse) were not dealt with, and he was found not guilty of stealing the spoons and cheeses.

The year before, on 29 October 1818, George and his confrere Samuel Grey, had been accused of the crime of stealing two bridles and a saddle from Thomas Cave at Newton [sic]. Both were found not guilty.<sup>6</sup> Presumably there must have been records of other convictions, as it seems unusual for someone to be condemned for such a minor crime.

Although recorded in the convict records as a native of Wiltshire it is difficult to know where he really comes from. For each indictment brought against him at the Assizes a different parish is listed: Long Newnton (in Gloucestershire, but close to the border with Wiltshire), Malmesbury, Cliffe Pypard, Lyneham (all in northern Wiltshire). Was he born in Wiltshire at all? Was he Scottish, as his grandchildren seem to have believed?

Described as a 'servant man' in the Van Diemen's Land convict records this 18 year old was 5 feet 5¼ inches tall, had light brown hair, light grey eyes, and a light complexion.<sup>7</sup> He was held on the prison hulk *Leviathan* (where he would have laboured in the Portsmouth dockyards during the day) from 26 May 1819 until 25 August 1819.<sup>8</sup> From the *Leviathan* he was transferred to the storeship *Dromedary* to begin his journey to Van Diemen's Land.



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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> AOT: CSO 1/403/9098.

<sup>8</sup> AOT: AJCP: HO/9/8 Reel 4881 p191 *Registers of Convicts on Hulks in Woolwich and Portsmouth*.