

BANISHMENT

The time taken for the dreadful voyage to the Australian colonies varied quite dramatically. In the early years of transportation it could take from seven to twelve months but this voyage took a much shorter time of 121 days.

If the few cabin passengers on these voyages suffered from the various close smells of the ship; the oppressive heat of their cabins in the still of the night; seasickness; and lack of variety in their food, think how the convicts fared below decks in their cramped quarters! With the air fetid and humid as the ship passed through the tropics; later, cold and continually wet as the ship was lashed by storms in the southerly latitudes; it would not have been a pleasant experience.

Consider the following: the noisome smells of vomit, and unwashed bodies; unsanitary conditions; the dreary repetition of their daily life; the monotony of eating a diet of salt beef, pork, sugar, pease, bread, and hard biscuits, suet, raisins, and oatmeal butter, which although adequate was often reduced by the pilfering of the officers and crew. Fresh vegetables were almost non-existent and the convicts suffered accordingly. Consider too the harshness of the regulations which forced them below decks for much of the voyage and the savagery of the punishments meted out.

The arrival of the *Dromedary* was noted in the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 15 January 1820 as follows:

On Monday last arrived from England, His Majesty's store ship Dromedary, Captain Skinner, with three hundred and sixty nine male prisoners. She left England in September, and came direct without touching anywhere on her voyage...

The first few days in the new colony were taken up with matching the prisoners to the indents: close questioning as to date of trial, age, sentence, native place, marital status, etc; measuring and checking for identifying marks such as tattoos and scars. New clothing had to be allocated and the prisoner was then ready for disembarkation and assignment to a master or the government gangs.

George was assigned to the northern settlement, and his conduct whilst a convict there was not entirely free from blemish. His crimes are mostly, I'm sorry to say, drunkenness and cruelty to his working beasts. Four such charges were made. The first was for cruelty to his working bullocks, on 29 September 1821. For this breach he forfeited his ticket-of-leave which had come to him exceptionally swiftly.¹

In 1822 and 1823 George was a constable at George Town, well-known for its debauched inhabitants, so it is little wonder that he was charged with drunkenness and neglect of duty (14 August 1823). He was still listed as a constable in the *Annual Returns* of 1826.²

The Returns for 1830, 1832, and 1833 record that he had again been granted a Ticket-of-Leave, enabling him to work for himself.

On 10 January 1831 George applied for an allotment of land in Longford on which he would 'engage to erect a Weather Boarded dwelling house of thirty feet front and sixteen feet deep' to be fenced with a good paling fence. In the application he stated he had held a Ticket of Leave for two years, had arrived in the colony in the *Dromedary* in 1820, and, oddly enough, that he was a married man which was not correct.

The Governor approved the application on 29 April 1831, stating it was 'to be confirmed as a grant when he should obtain his Emancipation'.³

¹ AOT: CON 31/9 No. 130.

² AOT: CSO 87 Port Dalrymple (1822); AJCP: HO 10/43 Reel 47 & HO 10/46 Reel 78 (1826).

³ AOT: LSD 1/8 p143-153.

His application for permission to marry made on 20 January 1831 (ten days after his application for the allotment) was successful and resulted in his marriage at Norfolk Plains on 24 February 1831.⁴

His youthful bride (she would have been about sixteen) was Delia Gillam, a free woman.

They were married in the parish church—not the present day Christ Church—but St Augustine's which was built in 1830 and demolished in 1842 due to faulty foundations.⁵

Not content to wait for his grant George purchased a small town block in Longford, in Lyttleton Street, in 1832. It cost him £18 but in June 1833 he and Delia sold portion of this land or an adjoining piece for the sum of £25. The balance of the land was sold to Joseph Solomon for £90 in August 1834.

On 14 July 1832 he came under notice of the magistrates again, being fined ten shillings for 'cruelly beating and ill treating a bullock his own property on the 11th instant'.⁶

The fourth misconduct charge was for being drunk and disorderly for which he was fined five shillings on 19 May 1834. A fifth and more serious crime will be related anon.⁷

Until early in 1836 he described himself as a cordwainer and may possibly have conducted his business on this township allotment in Lyttleton Street.⁸

Later in that same year, however, he is listed as a farmer. It was also in 1836 that he was granted a Conditional Pardon, having previously applied for it as long ago as 29 April 1831.⁹

On 20 December 1834 he was fined £2 for driving a cart without having a name and place of residence thereon. He illegally parked the said cart in Patterson Street on the same day and was fined 10s. At this time he was described as free by servitude.¹⁰

George wrote to the Surveyor-General on 14 July 1837 to advise that he had now obtained his emancipation and had the means of fulfilling the conditions of his application of 1831. On receiving a positive reply he wrote again (16 September 1837) advising of his choice of land (Lot 5 Section U) on the north-east corner of High and Marlborough Streets, opposite the Wesleyan Mission, and stating that he had made arrangements for making and curing 30,000 bricks for building a house on the land.¹¹

If he had already taken up farming at the time of this second application what was his purpose in building on this town block, apart from meeting the government's regulations? Was it to provide an income from renting out the property while establishing himself on his farm?

Why take up farming when he already had a trade that appears to have been capable of maintaining him and his growing family?

In 1842 he sold his 'original location' to Charles Reid for £80.¹²

Van Diemen's Land was fast being plunged into a depression which lasted for most of the decade and almost bankrupted the colony, and caused even the most provident of men great hardship.

⁴ AOT: CON 45/1 p42.

⁵ Hudson, G.W. 1976, *Old Longford*.

⁶ AOT: CON 31/9 No. 130.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ A cordwainer was a shoemaker or worker in leather.

⁹ AOT: CON 31/9 No. 130 Conditional Pardon No. 1062.

¹⁰ AOT: CON 78/1.

¹¹ On modern maps this is Section S Lot 1.

¹² LSD: 1/3384 (1832); 1/3385 (1833); 2/5307 (1842).

A COLONIAL CRIME

Intending to leave the colony, Mr Henry Clayton advertised his estate of *Wickford*, Norfolk Plains for lease in the *Launceston Advertiser* of 23 January 1840.

The property was comprised of about nine hundred acres of 'excellent land, arable and pasture, divided into 14 paddocks'.

The residence, *Wickford House* then newly erected was set in a large and well laid out garden and consisted of 'elegant and spacious dining and drawing rooms, breakfast parlour, library, entrance hall and butler's parlour on the ground floor'. There were four 'very large best bed rooms, with dressing room' on the first floor, and four attic rooms. I doubt if George ever entered this beautiful colonial house but he would certainly have been aware of its existence.

A two-story brick wheat store capable of containing 5,000 bushels of grain, overseer's house, blacksmith's shop, shoe-makers and men's apartments, stable, piggeries, sheds, yard and meat store—were all detached from the house.



Pen and ink drawing of Wickford Homestead, by Nerida de Jong.
Author's collection.

By the time that George became a tenant of Henry Clayton on the *Wickford* estate (around 1838) he and Delia had a family of four: two sons and two daughters (George, Hannah, Elizabeth, and William). Three more girls and a boy had been added by 1847 (Harriet, Thomas, Frances, and Maria who was born at *Illawarra*).

George and Delia resided on a farm of which, in the previous year, ninety acres was growing wheat. Their cottage was situated two hundred and sixty yards from Mr Clayton's mill.¹³ It was this mill that was to be George's undoing!

On 2 October 1847 George, together with his servant Walter Brady, and with Henry Wright, Francis Mann, Benjamin Rushforth, and Benjamin Kennedy, was brought up on a charge of receiving 100 bushels of wheat stolen from Henry Clayton's mill at *Wickford* on 26 September 1847.¹⁴

According to the newspaper report, after following George's wagon to Longford and examining the wheat he had sold to Mr [Charles] Reid, Mr Clayton had had him arrested. His premises were searched and wheat corresponding with Mr Clayton's sample was found.

¹³ Cornwall Chronicle: 13 October 1847.

¹⁴ Cornwall Chronicle: 13 October 1847 and Examiner: 9 October 1847 p652 c2; AOT: SC 41/5 No. 12.

A trail of wheat between the mill and George's house was also found together with other damning evidence. On 9 October, he was placed at the bar, charged with receiving one hundred bushels of wheat. He pleaded 'not guilty'.

Witnesses were called who spoke highly of his character, referring to him as a hard working, sober, and industrious man, of whom 'until now, not the slightest doubt had existed as to his honesty'. A somewhat ironical statement when you remember why he was transported!

A verdict of 'guilty of receiving stolen property' was brought forth by the jury but this was tempered with a plea for mercy 'on account of his good character...'

Judge Montague considered a 'receiver...worse than a thief but a character of twenty six years standing deserved consideration', and duly sentenced George to fourteen years transportation, with two years to be served at the Port Arthur penal settlement.

At the age of 45 years George had changed little. His complexion is described as fresh but his hair has turned grey. He had 'marks of bleeding right arm' and a 'vacination [sic] mark left arm and scar middle of left arm,' and a hairy chest. He could read and write and gave his native place as Malmsbury.¹⁵

Delia submitted three petitions to have his sentence remitted but these were refused, as was a petition to have him assigned to her as a Pass Holder servant.¹⁶ He was, however, returned to the Norfolk Plains district, being assigned to Joseph Pearson at Longford in September 1849. With George a prisoner of the Crown, how did Delia care for herself and her children? Did she keep on the tenancy at *Wickford* or were the terms such that they could be evicted? How could she manage the farm even if allowed to stay? At this time (1847) she had four children under eight years of age, but at least one daughter, Hannah, was old enough to help with the care of her younger siblings. Her eldest, George, would have been 15 but he may have already been apprenticed to a wheelwright.

Being a free woman may have helped but Delia must have been able to command enough respect and enough money to tide her over the years of George's absence. If she was capable of running the farm, and there is no reason to suspect her of being incapable, she was still a woman and as such had very few rights. Was she able to obtain convict labour to help with the running of the farm?

From the time of his brush with the law at *Wickford*, and presumably before this, and the catastrophic conditions of his 1855 conditional pardon, George was consistently described as hard working, sober, industrious, a reformed person, and respectable. Presumably a man and wife with a strong work ethic, approved of by the local landowners and clergy.

A two hundred acre farm, taken for seven years from 1849 is listed in a return entitled: *Small farms Westbury District underlet to tenants by large landed proprietors 1850*.

The tenant is recorded as 'McDonald' so it is uncertain as to which member of the family is involved—wife, husband, or son.¹⁷

However in *A Return of Tenant Farmers, Westbury September 1851* Delia is listed as a tenant of W. Field at Marsh Paddocks.¹⁸ The farm, of two hundred and thirty acres, was taken for eight years from 1851.

The first year was rent-free with subsequent yearly rent being paid in wheat. Forty acres of land had been cleared.

By December 1851 George was back at Westbury but had obviously managed to slip over to see Delia (or she visited him) on one or two occasions.

He received a ticket-of-leave in December 1853 and a conditional pardon in July 1855.

¹⁵ AOT: CON 37/4 No. 1008.

¹⁶ AOT: CON 37/4 No. 1008.

¹⁷ AOT: CSO 24/132 File 4400.

¹⁸ AOT: CSO 24/286 File 6386.

This second conditional pardon caused George a great deal of anxiety as it “was not made available in Van Diemen's Land.”¹⁹

He petitioned the Governor for the “indulgence of falling back upon his first conditional pardon.” He stated he had a large family of ten children, “some of which are not able to support themselves (sic).” He also stated he had a large farm under cultivation and that it would be a great hardship should he be forced to leave the colony and his family.

Character references were sent with his petition: Henry Clayton of *Wickford* informed the Governor that he (George) had conducted himself in “a most exemplary manner for the last eight years [since his return from Port Arthur] and believed him to be “quite a reformed person.” Thomas William Field recommended him, speaking of his wife and family in the highest terms. The Revd Mr Williams, who had known the petitioner for several years, found him a steady, industrious man who had brought up his family respectably.

Other referees were E. Martin, John Peyton Jones, and A.F. Rooke.

The Governor saw fit to grant George “a free pardon as regards his colonial sentence” and this is the last entry on his conduct record: “Free Pardon 3 March 1857.”

With the return of George from Port Arthur a daughter, Catherine, was born at the Marsh Paddocks on 2 January 1851.²⁰ Two more daughters, Delia and Emily, were born in the Westbury area and their second son, William Newman McDonald, died there from inflammation on 20 July 1854, aged 15 years.

George managed to keep out of the public eye for the remainder of his life. He leased a farm from the Reverend Samuel Martin at the Marsh Paddocks and even qualified to become an elector by 1856.²¹

In that same year he purchased one hundred and twenty eight acres of agricultural land from his eldest son at River Leven.²² This land was densely forested bushland and the next eighteen or so years were spent clearing the timber and establishing a farm.

Two more sons completed the family: Joseph, born at River Leven in 1858, and Arthur James, born in 1862.

In 1861 three of the McDonald children were married: Frances at Quamby Bend, and Thomas and Maria at their father's house, *Greenhills*, Leven.

Why did he leave Marsh Paddock? Surely it would have been an easier life to that which he would be subjected at the Leven, still in a state of nature!

Who knows what ambitions he may have had for himself and his family? Perhaps society at the Leven would care little about his past and judge him on his deeds in this new untamed district.

To be a freeholder rather than a tenant could have been worth the hard and sometimes dangerous work. To take on such a task with only a 13-year-old son to help would make one believe he had a strong constitution and belief in himself. His eldest son George was his own man by this time and William had died several years before and the youngest sons, Joseph and Arthur, were yet to be born. He would have been about 55 years of age when he made the move and Delia was 41.

Cash would have been a much-needed commodity. How long would it take to clear enough land to plant and harvest a cash crop; establish pasture for a house cow; build a house of any kind; plant a garden and orchard to feed himself and his family?

Did he earn cash by working for others? Was he able to sell the timber cleared to make way for crops? Did he own any draught horses or bullocks? How did they get to this bush block

¹⁹ AOT: CSO 1/127/3516 dated 22 January 1857.

²⁰ The Marsh Paddocks are now present day Exton.

²¹ HTG: Electors, Selby 15 April 1856 p469.

²² LSD: Registry of Deeds: Book 4/4949.

— there was no road until 1864 — how did they get their crop to the port? How did they manage to cart their belongings to the place? Questions that remain unanswered!

As we already know the end was tragic for George. The physical strain on his constitution could have been enough to wear him down and as I have suggested it is possible that there were strains on the marriage too. Was he a kind man or a despot? Was it a happy household to grow up in for the younger children? Was it a generous spirited household? Were they good neighbours? Was Delia happy? Was she faithful? Was she treated badly? More questions, but alas, no answers.

Great Great Great Grandmother Delia survived her husband by 22 years and she and her son Joseph lived separately on the same farm at Castra Road (Sprent).²³



²³ North West Post: 17 October 1895 Affiliation Case.

Family of George & Delia McDonald

(1) GEORGE MCDONALD

Bd. Ca 1801 – dd. 29 Jun 1878, New Ground, Age 77
& DELIA FURNER [Alias GILLAM] (ca 1815 – 1900)
Bd. Ca 1815, Kent, England – dd. 11 Aug 1900, Sprent, Age: 85
m. 24 Feb 1831, Longford, C.E., by banns, with consent of Govt.

(2) GEORGE MCDONALD (1832-1875)

bd. 15 Oct 1832, Norfolk Plains – dd. 3 Oct 1875, Ulverstone, Age: 42
& MARIA EMILY TATLOW (1836-1911)

(2) HANNAH MCDONALD (1834-1925)

bd. 7 Jul 1834, Norfolk Plains - dd. 27 Dec 1925, Latrobe, Age: 91
& JOHN CURRAN (1822-1896)

(2) ELIZABETH [Bessie] MCDONALD (1836 – 1909)

bd. 6 Aug 1836, Norfolk Plains – dd. 20 Jan 1909, Westbury, Age: 72
& JOHN LEITH (1824 – 1894)

(2) WILLIAM NEWMAN MCDONALD (1838 – 1854)

bd. 11 Aug 1838, Longford – dd. 20 Jul 1854, Westbury, Age: 15

(2) HARRIET MCDONALD (1840 – 1929)

bd. 11 Sep 1840, Norfolk Plains – dd. 15 Sep 1929, Moore's Plain Road, Wynyard, Age: 89
& GEORGE TURNBULL (1840 – 1929)

(2) THOMAS MCDONALD (1842 – 1907)

bd. 6 Sep 1842, Exton – dd. 24 Dec 1907, Ulverstone, Age: 65
& PRISCILLA FARMAN (1845 – 1887)
& JANE JORDAN (1871 -)

(2) FRANCES MCDONALD (1844 – 1916)

bd. 29 May 1844, Wickford, Norfolk Plains – dd. 29 Feb 1916, Burnie, Age: 71
& JOHN STURZAKER (1842 – 1928)

(2) MARIA LOUISA MCDONALD (1846 – 1897)

bd. 10 Jun 1846, Illawarra, Norfolk Plains – dd. 14 Mar 1897, Ulverstone, Age: 50
& JAMES ALFRED FOGG I (1835 – 1915)

(2) CATHERINE MCDONALD (1851 – 1931)

bd. 2 Jan 1851, Marsh Paddock – dd. 15 Dec 1931, Residence, Wivenhoe, Age: 80
& WILLIAM WOODHOUSE (1842 – 1932)
& JOHN PARKIN (1868 – 1914?)

(2) DELIA MCDONALD (1853 – 1926)

bd. 27 Apr 1853, Westbury – dd. 12 Feb 1926, New Town Infirmary, Hobart, Age 72
& HENRY WARDEN (1846 – 1900)

(2) EMILY MCDONALD (1855 – 1917)

bd. 28 Jul 1855, Westbury – dd 27 Oct 1917, Coolamon, NSW, Age: 62
& HAROLD WILLIAM BARNARD BUTTON (1855 – 1932)

(2) JOSEPH MCDONALD (1858 – 1939)

bd. 20 Apr 1858, River Leven – dd. 7 Sep 1939, Residence, Castra Road, Ulverstone, Age: 81
& JESSIE JOHNSON ANDERSON (1862 – 1948)

(2) ARTHUR JAMES MCDONALD (1862 -)

bd. 26 Mar 1862, River Leven – dd.
& JEMIMA ANDERSON (1864 – 1942)