Jane Allen:
destitute teenager who made good

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JILL SANGUINETTI

SHE WAS TINY and she was tough – that much we know. And that she was among the 72,000 convict souls shipped to Hobart between 1803 and 1853: human flotsam and jetsam from Britain thrown up by the enclosures, the industrial revolution and the New Poor Law of 1834. My great-great-grandmother, named Jane Allen on her convict record, was born in Liverpool in 1832 as Mary Wilson, lived to a ripe old age, and died in Hobart in 1911 surrounded by her children and grandchildren.

Her life on the other side of the law began and finished when she was a teenager. At the time of her arrest near Hereford she was eighteen, had left home, partnered, changed her name from Mary Wilson to Jane Allen and put her age up to 25. Her husband, to whom she may or may not have been legally married, was Thomas Allen, aged 27. The young couple had teamed up with Thomas Carter, a mattress-maker, and his wife who was also called Jane. It appears that the four were homeless and on the road together: a witness at their court case said that he had seen them 'tramping about the neighbourhood for three or four months'.

The two Thomases and the two Janes were arrested on 2 May 1850 for breaking into a home in the parish of Bailey, stealing 'one tea kettle and three other kettles', a bonnet, and several pairs of boots. Their case was brought to the Court of Assizes in Hereford,

about 140 km south of Liverpool, where they were charged on 7 May with 'burgulariously and feloniously' breaking into the home of Mrs Martha Taylor, a widow.

Martha and her daughter-in-law Susan were the only people in the house that night. Susan said in court that she was disturbed at about three in the morning by the sound of someone trying to open the front door. She heard people whispering but did not go down. Next morning Martha Baird, a servant, saw that panes had been taken out of the scullery kitchen, lead had been cut off, and a bar fastening the window had been wrenched out. Susan had seen Jane Allen at the house the day before when she came to the door, begged for something to drink and was given a glass of cider.

The missing boots were found in the bundles belonging to each of the women and one pair was found on the feet of Thomas Allen. Several witnesses, including the shoemakers, said under oath that they recognised the boots although 'the fronts had been cut with a knife since they were stolen'. Martha Baird identified the bonnet that was found with the prisoners and told the court that 'it was in a much worse state than when it was lost as the ribbons had been taken off'.

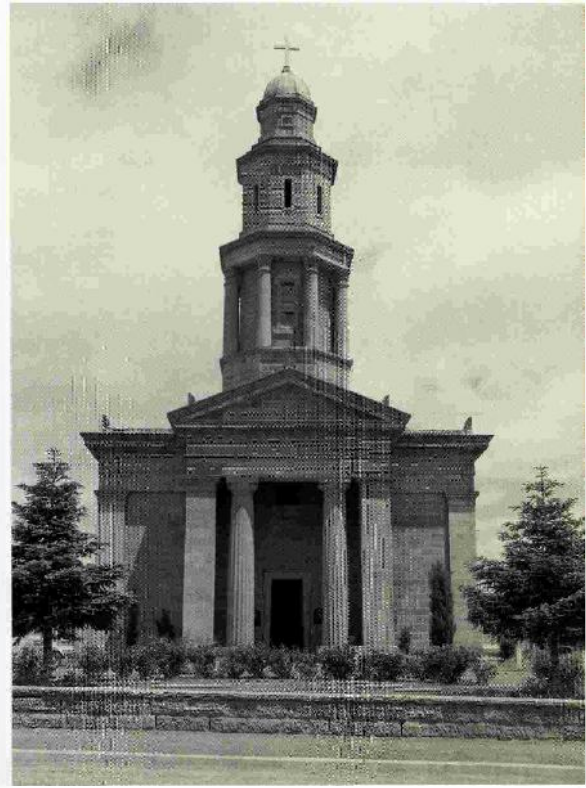
All four pleaded not guilty and insisted that they had bought the boots. A witness swore he had seen Thomas Carter buying his boots from a man on the road to Hay. The prosecutor, however, accused him of perjury and said that it had been shown conclusively that the four were in company and that 'stolen property in the possession of one was in the possession of them all'. The jury returned a verdict of guilty, and they were all sentenced to ten years' transportation.

Jane Allen and Jane Carter had their sentences commuted to seven years and set sail for Van Diemen's Land on the *Emma Eugenia*, arriving on 7 May 1851. Their husbands served their sentences in Pentonville prison and we have no record of what happened to them.

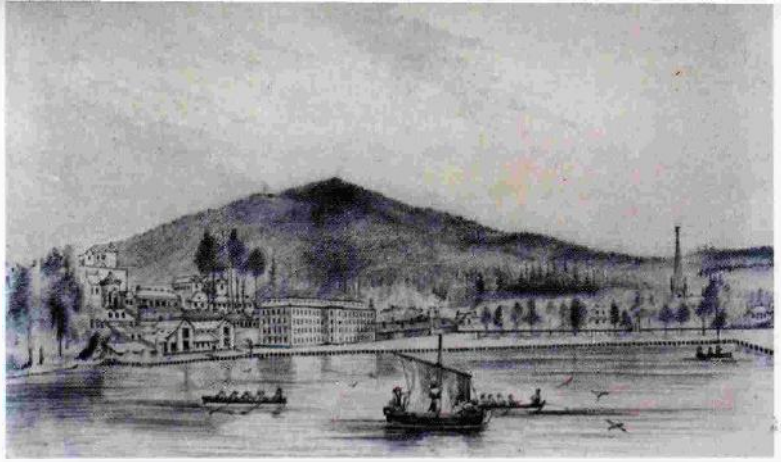
Jane Allen's convict record described her as being 25 years old (in fact she was 19), able to read and write, and available for assignment as a tailoress and nursemaid. She was 5 feet (152 cm) tall with brown hair, hazel eyes, and a scar on the right side of her forehead. Jane Carter was described as merely a 'country servant' and the mother of two children. Both Janes were described by the ship's surgeon as 'bad', perhaps because they were terrified, traumatised, angry and defiant towards their guards and captors. We know little of Jane Carter's fortunes except that she married in 1852, committed no further offences, and was granted a conditional pardon in 1857.

On her arrival in Hobart, Jane Allen was assigned to work as a nursemaid. A month later, she was convicted of being 'Absent w[ithout]t leave, taking her master's child with her & being found in a Public house'. She was punished for this serious offence with two months' hard labour in the Cascades Female Factory in the cold of the late autumn. Hard labour usually meant working the washtubs in the infamous laundry. The following year Jane was reprimanded for being absent without leave from her assigned employment. No further offences were recorded and she was awarded a ticket of leave in July 1854, just over three years since she arrived in Hobart. She found a partner in Lewis Williams, another ticket of leaver. A baby girl was born to them in October 1854, but died in infancy. Jane was lucky not to be punished with a term of hard labour for becoming pregnant before receiving her ticket of leave. The couple married in February 1855 at St George's Church of England.

Lewis had been transported in 1835 at the age of 21, for stealing a piece of leaden pipe, having been previously gaoled for poaching and trespassing.



St George's church, Battery Point, where Jane and Lewis were married in 1855 (TAHO, AB713/1/6075)



The penal station of Port Arthur, where Lewis Williams was sentenced to four years (TAHO, AUTAS001125294264w800)

His sentence was seven years. He came from Shirenewton in Wales, and was listed as 'Plasterer not complete [not fully trained], plough – reap – mow': a useful man. He was 5' 6" tall (168 cm), with dark brown hair and red whiskers. His tattoos included a mermaid, a fish, a heart, darts and a sun, as well as the initials of family members. The surgeon described him as 'In general well behaved, dirty'.

In Van Diemen's Land Lewis worked as a shepherd, living alone in a hut in the bush. He committed several further offences: 'absent without leave & having a bottle rum', neglect of duty, and 'gross misconduct in rep[resentin]g a prisoner of the Crown to be free and impeding the Constable in the execution of his duty'. In 1842 he received a free certificate, but the one-time poacher continued to commit offences. Found in 1845 with a dressed lamb carcass in his shepherd's hut, he was charged with killing a lamb and was sent to Port Arthur for four years. His offences there, which included 'smoking & having tobacco', petty theft, idleness and refusal to work, suggest that his defiant spirit was never crushed despite punishments of hard labour in chains. After having his probation twice deferred, he was released after three years, receiving his ticket of leave in 1848. Permission to marry Jane was obtained in November 1854.

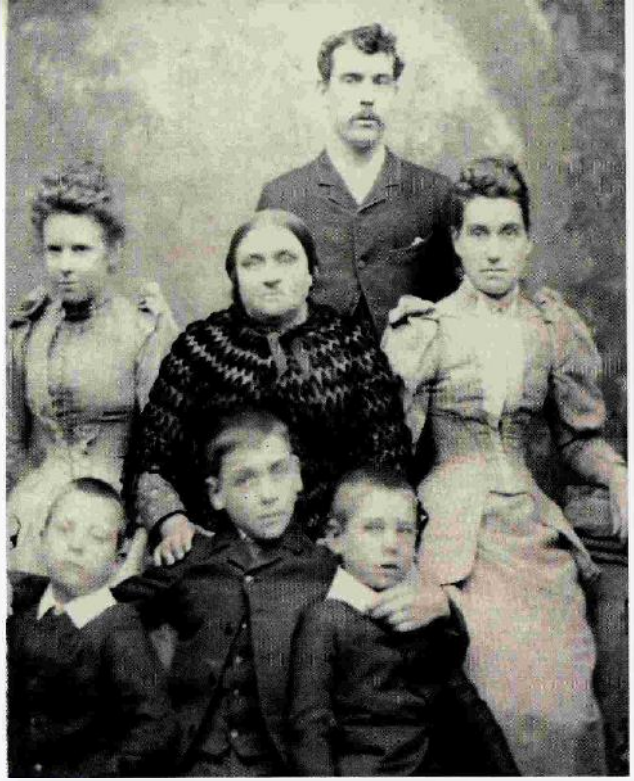
Lewis was 34 when he married Jane, and she was 22. He found work as a plasterer and they had four more children: Louis (1859),

Emily Purthynia (1862), Letitia (1869) and Henry (1875). Lewis died of bronchial pneumonia in 1874 aged 60, eight months before Henry was born. Jane brought up her four young children at her home in Argyle Street, Hobart.

When she was 45, in 1877, Jane married Arthur Pears, a widower, who had been transported at the age of fifteen. On the marriage certificate she is called 'Mary Helen Williams'. (The notary responsible for documenting the marriage must have mis-heard her name and written 'Helen' instead of 'Ellen', as the name 'Helen' does not appear in any other documentation.) At the age of 47 Jane bore Arthur a son, George.

In 1883, her daughter Purthynia married John Sanguinetti, son of Giovanni Sanguinetti from Rapallo, near Genoa in Italy, and his English wife Harriet. Giovanni arrived in Melbourne in 1857 and set up business as a tailor. His son John was also a tailor and probably went to Hobart to establish a business. Purthynia and John lived in

Mary Jane Ellen Wilson Allen Williams Pears, probably at the time of her second marriage in 1879 (Jill Sanguinetti)



Jane's family, photographed in about 1891
Back: Letitia Williams, Mary Jane Pears, John Francis Sanguinetti, Purthynia Sanguinetti
Front: Frank Sanguinetti, George Storer Pears, Arthur Sanguinetti
(Jill Sanguinetti)

Hobart and had three sons. The only one to live to adulthood was Frank, 'Pop' Sanguinetti, my grandfather. Purthynia died aged forty, when Pop was just sixteen. He was devastated by his mother's loss, and I have a faint memory of him telling us about his long-dead mother with tears in his eyes.

Pop remained close to his grandmother and visited her from Melbourne. He respectfully referred to her as 'Mrs Pears', and never told his children or anyone else in the family of his grandparents' convict background. It's possible he knew nothing of it. Jane, who was known as Mary Ellen Pears, died in 1911, aged 81, two years before my father was born.

We have two photos of Jane. In the first, quite likely taken at the time of her second marriage in 1879, she looks to be in her

mid-forties. She is dressed in a plush Victorian gown with her hair drawn back severely and wearing a blank expression, typical of photos of the day when poses had to be held for several seconds. The second photo would have been taken around 1891, judging by the apparent ages of the seven family members. Jane, wearing a crocheted shawl and seated in the middle, is perhaps sixty, looking tired and somewhat melancholy. Her two attractive daughters are on either side: younger daughter Letitia, 22, on her left and Purthynia, 30, on her right with an upright pose and aristocratic air. Son-in-law John, also thirty, is standing behind, looking handsomely Italian. There are three young boys in the front. Her son George, in the centre, has his arms draped over the shoulders of two younger boys who would be Purthynia and John's two sons, Frank, five (my grandfather), and Arthur, seven. The second photo brings her into living memory and suggests she had a close family life.

Like other convicts, Mary (for that was what she called herself throughout most of her life) endured great hardship – poverty, homelessness, the disgrace of criminal condemnation and lifetime separation from family and friends in Britain. She would have felt the indignity of incarceration and being a bonded servant in her early years in Hobart. But once freed, she had fifty or more stable, law-abiding years as wife, mother and grandmother.

Jane, Lewis and Arthur belonged to that large cohort who survived convict servitude, held on to life and made good. I admire them for their resilience and for their ability to re-make themselves once they had the basic conditions for shelter and sustenance. Defiance, resilience and family love: I like to think that Jane and her peers passed on these qualities as part of the legacy of convict Australia.

SOURCES

TAHO, CON41/1/29, image 15, police no. 268; CON19/1/9, image 60; CON15/1/6, image 290; RGD37/1/14 no. 225; RGD/37/1/36 no. 326, RGD33/1/12 no. 1041, RGD33/1/8 no. 5057, RGD33/1/10 no. 314; CON31/1/47 image 27, police no. 1996

CON18/1/4 p. 157, image 81; CON27/1/2, image 18; CON41/1/29, image 44, police no. 1132.

Mercury, 26 June 1874, 24 November 1911.