

Sarah Griffin

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Date of Trial: | 18 April 1817 |
| Where Tried: | Nottingham Town Quarter Session |
| Crime: | Larceny |
| Sentence: | 7 years |
| Est YOB: | 1798 |
| Stated Age on Arrival: | 20 |
| Native Place: | Nottingham? |
| Occupation: | Country Servant |
| Alias/AKA: | Sarah Griff(e)ins/Gritten, Sarah Silister/Sillitoe (m) |
| Marital Status (UK): | Married – Thomas Griffin |
| Children on Board: | |
| Surgeon's Remarks: | Prostitute, filthy, lazy |
| Assigned NSW or VDL | VDL |

Sarah Griffin had been married for just over a year when she was convicted at the April 1817 Nottingham Town Quarter Session and sentenced to seven years transportation. As Sarah Towle she and Thomas Griffin had been married on 19 February 1816 by banns at the parish church of St Mary, Nottingham, witnessed by John Rainbow and Elizabeth Woolems.¹

Sarah had actually been tried twice in 1817, the first time at the Lent Assizes for the town of Nottingham, when she had appeared before the court, together with a Thomas Towle (possibly her brother), both charged with being accessories in a highway robbery, and both acquitted. A third party in this case was Ann Wheldon, who was found guilty of the highway robbery, and who was transported with Sarah Griffin.² Subsequently, the wife of T. Griffin, labourer, late of St. Mary's parish, was charged with stealing one £1 bank note, the property of John Hempseed.³ In May, she was removed from the Town Jail to the receiving ship at Deptford.⁴ She was one of the four women from Nottinghamshire who boarded the convict vessel *Friendship* bound for New South Wales. What was in store for this illiterate 20 year old married woman, a country servant by calling, and whose behaviour on board – 'Prostitute, filthy, lazy' – did not impress Surgeon Cosgreave?

On arrival at Port Jackson in January 1818, Sarah, along with the other three Nottinghamshire convicts, was sent on to the Derwent per the *Duke of Wellington*. Wasting no time, and apparently without a thought for Thomas, Sarah married William Wordey Silister at Hobart on 28 August 1818.⁵ Her husband, whose name was in fact [William] Warley Sillitoe, was a free man and nearly ten years her senior. However, it is likely that he was older than the stated 31 – see below. One of the witnesses was Samuel Cash, who was subsequently to marry Amelia Lightharness, another of the *Friendship* women.

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------|------------|----------|-------------------------|-------|-----|
| William Wordey Silister ✓ | Free | Friendship | 31 years | 28 th August | Banns | 284 |
| Sarah m. Griffins ✓ | convict | | 22 years | | | |
| Witnesses | | | | | | |
| Samuel Cash | | | | | | |
| David W. Bush | | | | | | |

William Sillitoe (alias John Smith) had been committed to the Staffordshire County Gaol in February 1808, charged with having obtained four guineas by false pretences from Charles Watkins, Esq., Lieut in HM's 3rd Regiment of Dragoon Guards, with intent to defraud him of the same.⁶ He was found guilty and sentenced to seven years' transportation. Following his conviction he was received at Birmingham Gaol on 7 April where he was recorded as being 27 years of age, a man who 'has been at Sea', and a 'disorderly' prisoner.⁷ He was subsequently delivered to the hulks at Portsmouth on 12 September 1808.⁸ He was held on the *Captivity* for nearly two years before being taken on board the convict ship *Indian* which departed from Spithead on 18 July 1810 and arrived at Port Jackson on 16 December 1810 with 192 of the original 200 convict payload.⁹ Governor Macquarie, in a

dispatch to Lord Liverpool, was able to advise that the male convicts who had arrived per Indian proved to be:

... a very seasonable and acceptable supply for the colony, the settlers in general having been in great want of labourers to carry on their agricultural and grazing concerns.¹⁰

At some stage Warley Sillitoe was assigned to Walter Lang, a successful merchant who had arrived free at Sydney per *Minstrel* in 1812. Initially settled at Parramatta, in 1813 Lang decided to move to Port Dalrymple and requested that he be allowed to take with him three men convicts who had formerly been assigned to him. As it happened Mr. Lang was only able to muster two of the men, one of whom was:

Warley Sillitoe [sic] convict per Ship Indian in 1810. Tried at Stafford 30th March 1808. Sentence 7 years Transportation. An Englishman, age 31 years, a labourer – 5 feet 6 Inches high, fair complexion, Brown Hair and Grey Eyes.¹¹

In 1814 Warley was mustered as a prisoner on stores at Hobart.¹² Convicted in 1808, shortly after this he would have served out his sentence and confirmation that he was a free man when he married is his listing, as Warley Sittetto, in the 1818 General Muster of free men in Hobart Town.¹³

For the 1820, 1821 and 1823 musters Sarah Griffin was listed as 'wife of William Sillitoe'.¹⁴ Officially she was still William's wife, but in fact they were probably no longer living together, and definitely not by July 1819 when Warley placed the following notice in the local newspaper.¹⁵

CAUTION.—The Public are hereby cautioned against giving Credit to my Wife, Sarah Sillitoe, as I will not pay any Debts she may contract.—All Persons are likewise cautioned not to harbour, conceal, or maintain the said Sarah, on Pain of being prosecuted; she having eloped from me :—And all Ferry men are requested not to take her across the Derwent, as I hear she is taken with one Hobfel who resides over the water. **WARLEY SILLITOE.**

At the age of just 15 William Hopsall had been convicted at Nottinghamshire in March 1811 for 'Stealing above 40/- in a dwelling house' and sentenced to death.¹⁶ His sentence was commuted to transportation for life and, after a spell on the hulk *Laurel* at Portsmouth, he was mustered onto the convict ship *Indefatigable* which left England on 9 May 1812 and arrived at Van Diemen's Land on 19 October 1812.¹⁷ By 1819 he was a ticket-of-leave man, single and resident at Hobart. If Sarah had taken 'refuge' with William 'Hobsell', it was probably a short-lived arrangement as 22 year old William Hobson [sic] married 14 year old Frances Guy on 27 January 1820 at Hobart.¹⁸

Turning now to Sarah Griffin's conduct record.¹⁹ On arrival at Hobart she was assigned to a Mr. Fitzgerald – possibly Thomas Fitzgerald, schoolmaster – a situation which was not satisfactory to either party. On 31 March 1818 she was charged with neglecting her master's duties and placed in the solitary cell on bread and water for a week. She had not learnt her lesson as Mr. Fitzgerald had her up on a second charge on 17 July 1818 of absconding from his house and remaining absent for which she was sentenced to a month in the Gaol on hard labor. She may have absconded to Warley Sillitoe as they were married very shortly after her release in August. It was as the wife of Sillitoe that in June 1820 she was charged with being repeatedly drunk and disorderly – another month in Gaol with hard labor – and again in July 1821 she faced a charge of drunk and disorderly, but this time got away with a reprimand.

We next find Sarah on Macquarie Island where she was mustered for 1822, thus filling in the gap between the 1821 and 1823 musters.²⁰ How she 'qualified' for removal to Macquarie Harbour had not been established, but she was one of ten female convicts mustered there in 1822, and probably one of those who accompanied the party sent in December 1821 to establish the new penal settlement at Macquarie Harbour.

On Tuesday last the detachment of troops, with the stores, artificers and convicts, destined to form the new establishment at Macquarie Harbour, were embarked on board His Majesty's colonial brig Prince Leopold, and

In 1828 Sarah faced three charges relating to her unsociable conduct. She was fined 5/- in February for being drunk and disorderly; discharged in June on the charge of disorderly conduct in the streets of Hobart; and in September, for being drunk and disorderly, was ordered to find sureties for her appearance at the Quarter Sessions. There was only one entry for 1829, another case of stealing, this time a watch belonging to William Margill. Once again the case was dropped for lack of a prosecutor and/or proof. The last two items on Sarah's conduct sheet were for 1830. On 24 May she was charged with 'feloniously assaulting and beating Jane Walker on the 17th inst. in the dwelling house of George G. Watkins in Hobart Town and taking from her person a pocket, 17 shillings in monies and an apron value 1/- the property of the said Jane Walker'. The charge of felony was dropped, but Sarah was bound over to find sureties of the peace for three months. Interestingly, according to his conduct record, another person was implicated with Sarah in the cases of William Magill and Jane Walker – one George Gwatkins. George had also served time at Macquarie Harbour.²⁷ Finally - the recurrent offence - Sarah was charged in September for being drunk the night before and was dealt the standard fine of 5/-.

A death record has been located for a Sarah Sillitoe, a labouring woman, who was buried on 17 March 1832 at Hobart. This woman was 34 when she died and is our Sarah Griffin. Constantly in trouble, estranged from her husband, and childless, Sarah would have found little joy in her life in the colony.²⁸

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| No. 1069. | Sarah Sillitoe | Hobart Town | 17 th March | 34 years. | Labouring Woman | Wm Bedford. |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|

One year earlier the death on 25 April 1831 of Joseph Sillitox, at the age of 88, was registered at Hobart.²⁹

| | | | | | | |
|----------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------|
| No. 909. | Joseph Sillitox or Sillitoe | Hobart Town | 25 th April | 88 years | Superintendent Constable | Wm Bedford. |
|----------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------|

The correct spelling of the deceased's name was Joseph Sillitoe, and he had been Sarah's father-in-law. Briefly, he had been convicted at Lancaster in September 1791 for a felony, sentenced to transportation for fourteen years, and arrived at Sydney in October 1792 per *Royal Admiral* and then sent on to Norfolk Island, before relocating to Van Diemen's Land in 1808 where, in 1809, he was listed as a Settler holding 30 acres at New Town.³⁰ He had held the position of Constable at some stage, but according to a notice regarding his estate, published in 1832, he was a carpenter and sawyer.

In the administration of Joseph Sillitoe, late of Murray-street, Hobart town, in Van Diemen's Land, carpenter and sawyer, deceased, to the next of kin of the said Joseph Sillitoe, and all Christian people.³¹

The notice was placed by 'Thomas Wood Rowlands, proctor for William Worley Sillitoe'. The last reference to date found for Sarah Griffin's husband is the following notice.

WHEREAS, I William Sillitoe, son of Joseph Sillitoe, deceased, have lately sold to Mr. Hugh Currey of Hobart Town, the whole of my right, title, and interest of and in and to a grant of land, containing 30 acres, more or less, originally granted to my father Joseph Sillitoe, aforesaid, bounded on one side by Mr. Barne's formerly the land of Mr. Moreton, on one side by unlocated [sic] land, and fronted by Humphrey's Rivulet. Dated this 1st day of July, 1834.

WILLIAM SILLITOE

Witness, Charles Thorpe³²

Noting the inconsistency in recorded ages, in 1834 William Warley Sillitoe would have been somewhere between his late 40s and early 50s. Where did he go? Did he remarry? And where and when did he die?



NOTES

- ¹ Findmypast (FMP), Nottinghamshire marriages index 1528-1929. At this time the name Towle had gained some notoriety and was splashed across the newspapers of the day. James Towle, native of Basford, Nottinghamshire had also appeared before the courts, charged with, and convicted of being the ringleader of a Luddite gang which, in June 1816, had carried out an attack on a lace mill at Loughborough. He was sentenced to death and publicly hanged at Leicester on 20 November 1816. The following year a further six members of the gang were hanged, including a William Towle. Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham, [https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/learning/biographies/jamestowle\(d1816\).aspx](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/learning/biographies/jamestowle(d1816).aspx).
- ² Ancestry, England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892, England, Nottinghamshire, 1817. Refer to the Bond of Friendship account of Ann Wheldon.
- ³ *Nottingham Journal*, 22 Mar 1817, p.3b. *Nottingham Review*, 25 Apr 1817.
- ⁴ *Nottingham Review*, May 1817.
- ⁵ TAHO, Hobart marriages 1818, RGD36/1/1 no 284.
- ⁶ *Derby Mercury*, 4 Feb 1808, p.3.
- ⁷ Note – this age is in conflict with the age given in 1818.
- ⁸ FMP, England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935, Prison Registers.
- ⁹ Ancestry, UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849, Captivity, Index, 1801-1836. Free Settler or Felon? Convict Ship Indian, https://www.jenwilletts.com/convict_ship_indian_1810.htm.
- ¹⁰ The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, Historical Records of Australia (HRA), Series I, Vol VII, 1916, p.388, Dispatches, October 1811.
- ¹¹ Ancestry, New South Wales, Australia, Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1856. Walter Lang died in Sydney in February 1816. Note – here again there is an inconsistency with the age given in 1818.
- ¹² Biographical Database of Australia (BDA), Biographical report for Warley Sillitoe.
- ¹³ Irene Schaffer, Land Musters, Stock Returns and Lists Van Diemen's Land 1803-1822, St. David's Park Publishing, Hobart, 1991, List 8:3a General Muster of Free Men, Hobart Town, 7 Sep to 2 Oct 1818.
- ¹⁴ Female Convicts Research Centre (FCRC), Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land database, Convict ID : 3591.
- ¹⁵ The Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter, 3 July 1819, p.2.
- ¹⁶ FMP, England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, Prison Registers.
- ¹⁷ Ancestry, UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849, Laurel, Register 1805-1836. Free Settler or Felon? Convict Ship Indefatigable, https://jenwilletts.com/convict_ship_indefatigable_1812.htm.
- ¹⁸ TAHO, Marriages 1820, RGD36/1/1 no 367. By 1822 William had been granted a Conditional Pardon, and was included in the 1822 Tasmanian Muster as a free man at Hobart Town. Subsequently, in May 1830, he was convicted of receiving stolen goods and sentenced to transportation for fourteen years to be served at Macquarie Island. He made his escape and, according to a report in the *Colonial Times* of March 1831, 'It is now known that he was furnished with the means of proceeding to Bass's Straits, from whence he will no doubt take the first opportunity of leaving this part of the world'. Of note is that the last child of William and Frances, Elizabeth Louisa Hobson [sic], was born on 4 February 1833 at New Norfolk (where Frances' extended family were living since relocating from Norfolk Island- BDA, Biographical report for William Hopsall; *The Hobart Town Courier*, 8 May 1830, p.3; TAHO, New Norfolk births 1833, RGD32/1/2 No 5145. William's surname has been variously given as Hobseill, Hopsall, Hopson, Hobson, Hobsell. It was under the name Fanny Hopsal that Frances applied to marry William Langridge, and as Frances Gay that she married him on 15 August 1836 – TAHO, Marriage Permissions, CON52/1/1 p 105, TAHO, Hobart marriages 1836, RGD36/1/3 no 3187. Nothing further has been located for William Hopsell.
- ¹⁹ TAHO, Conduct Register, CON40/1/3 p.13.
- ²⁰ Ancestry, New South Wales Australia Settler and Convicts Lists, 1787-1834, 1822.
- ²¹ *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 15 Dec 1821, p.2. The ten women mustered at Macquarie Island for 1822 were Sarah Griffin, *Friendship*; Mary O'Hara and Margaret Morgan, *Elizabeth*; Margaret Keefe, *Lord Wellington*; Mary Ann Furze, *Janus*; Margaret Graham, *Morley*; Mary Revett, Elizabeth Slater, Sarah Hammon and Isabella Gould, *Providence* - The Forgotten Women Convicts, Macquarie Harbour, 1821-1826, Irene Chaffer's Website, <http://www.tasfamily.net.au/~schaffer/index.php?file=kop28.php>.
- ²² Irene Schaffer, *The Forgotten Women Convicts of Macquarie Harbour 1821*, Genealogical Society of Tasmania Inc., Tasmanian Ancestry, Vol 18, Number 2 – September 1997, pp.94-98.
- ²³ John Barnes to Select Committee, 1837-38 (ii), Minutes, p.45, cited in Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Pan Books, London, 1988, p.378.
- ²⁴ Initially the hospital was situated on Grummet (Small) Island which, apart from separating male and female convicts, ensured isolation of the sick and diseased from the rest of the settlement. However, due to its very remoteness and



difficulty of access, the hospital was relocated to Settlement (Sarah) Island, on the desolate, exposed western side, co-sited only with the Penitentiary.

²⁵ The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser, 23 Apr 1824, p.1.

²⁶ *The Tasmanian*, 25 Oct 1827, p.3. See later notes on Joseph Sillitoe, her father-in-law, who lived in Murray Street.

²⁷ TAHO, Conduct Register, CON31/1/15 p.48.

²⁸ TAHO, Hobart deaths 1832, RGD34/1/1 no 2739.

²⁹ TAHO, Hobart Deaths 1831, RGD34/1/1 no 2423.

³⁰ BDA, Biographical report for Joseph Sellitoe [sic]. Irene Schaffer, Land Musters, Stock Returns and Lists 1803-1822, List 5:1 – Returns of a General Muster, 1809, Derwent River, Van Diemen's Land.

³¹ The Hobart Town Courier, 17 Mar 1832, p.3.

³² *Trumpeter General*, 4 Jul 1834, p.3.



SOURCES

Genealogy Websites

Ancestry

England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892
New South Wales, Australia, Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1856
New South Wales, Australia, Settler and Convict Lists, 1787-1834
UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849

Findmypast

England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935
Nottinghamshire marriages index 1528-1929

Other Websites

Biographical Database of Australia (BDA), <http://www.bda-online.org.au/>
Female Convicts Research Centre, <https://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/>
Free Settler or Felon? <https://www.jenwillelts.com/>
Irene Chaffer's Website, <http://www.tasfamily.net.au/~schaffer/>
LINC Tasmania, <https://www.linc.tas.gov.au/>
Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham,
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/>
Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, <https://www.libraries.tas.gov.au/archive-heritage/>

Online Newspapers

British Newspapers (Findmypast)

Derby Mercury
Nottingham Journal
Nottingham Review

TROVE

Colonial Times
The Hobart Town Courier
The Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter
The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser
The Tasmanian
Trumpeter General

Publications

Hughes, Robert, The Fatal Shore, Pan Books, London 1988
Schaffer, Irene, "The Forgotten Women Convicts of Macquarie Harbour 1821", Tasmanian Ancestry, Vol 18, Number 2 – September 1987, Genealogical Society of Tasmania Inc.
Schaffer, Irene, Land Musters, Stock Returns and Lists Van Diemen's Land 1803-1822, St. David's Park Publishing, Hobart, 1991
The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, Historical Records of Australia

© Leonie Fretwell, 2019