



Catherine Osborne

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| Date of Trial: | 1 April 1817 |
| Where Tried: | Warwick Assizes |
| Crime: | Burglary |
| Sentence: | 7 years |
| Est YOB: | 1796 |
| Stated Age on Arrival: | 22 |
| Native Place: | St Martin, Birmingham |
| Occupation: | Wire Worker |
| Alias/AKA: | Charlotte Osborne |
| Marital Status (UK): | |
| Children on Board: | |
| Surgeon's Remarks: | Prostitute |
| Assigned NSW or VDL | VDL |

Four of the Warwickshire *Friendship* women were tried in August 1816 and the other three in April 1817, with the latter session being a particularly busy, as noted in the press.

Warwick Assizes – The business of these Assizes commenced, at the Crown bar, on Monday se'nnight. The calendar, unprecedented in the point of number, exhibited a disgusting and dreadful catalogue of crimes. The preliminary forms having been gone through ... [the] business continued without interruption until Saturday afternoon, when the whole of the trials having been concluded, his Lordship, and Mr. Clarke, King's Counsel, who presided at the second bar, proceeded to pass sentence upon the numerous prisoners found guilty. Subjoined will be found the names and offences of those criminals who were either capitally convicted or sentenced to transportation.¹

Catherine [reported as 'Charlotte'] Osborne was one of those tried in April 1817 where she was found guilty of burglary in the house of William White of Warwick and sentenced to death.² A directive from Whitehall, dated 30 April 1817, and addressed to the Justice of Assizes for the Midland Circuit, advised that a number of the capitally convicted were, as 'fit objects of the Royal Mercy', to have their sentences commuted. In Catherine's case she was to serve seven years transportation beyond the Seas.³

It has been suggested that Catherine was the daughter of Henry and Elizabeth Osborn.⁴ If this is correct, a baptism record has been located which might be for 'our' *Friendship* woman. One Catherine Osborn was baptised on 9 January 1797 at Saint Martin, Birmingham. Speculating further, she may have had a brother John, who had been born to Henry and Elizabeth Osborn on 15 November 1798, and baptised nearly one year later at Birmingham, St Martin, on 30 September 1799.⁵

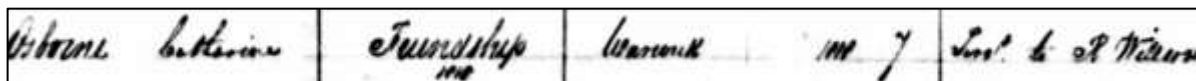
Catherine spent only a month or so imprisoned at Warwick Gaol before being transferred to Deptford for embarkation on the convict vessel *Friendship* which arrived at Port Jackson on 14 January 1818. But Catherine had further to go. She was one of the fifty-three *Friendship* women on-forwarded to Van Diemen's Land on the *Duke of Wellington*, reaching Hobart Town 30 January, from where she set off for the final leg of her journey to Port Dalrymple.

Surgeon Cosgreave dismissed and branded Catherine with one word – 'prostitute', a cachet she would have carried with her on disembarkation with the concomitant description of having 'been on the town'.⁶ She was one of the youngest of the *Friendship* women, being only 22 on arrival. We do not know if she could read and write, but she did have a trade – wireworker. Perhaps prior to her conviction Catherine had been employed by one of the Birmingham wire-drawing and wire-working manufactories such as that established by Mr. William Fox and, by 1830, described as 'the largest of the description in the kingdom; upwards of 250 pair of hands are employed in drawing and forming wire into a variety of articles, for useful and ornamental purposes'.⁷

There was certainly a colonial market for wirework, with some Hobart traders, such as Godwin and McDougall,

manufacturing and selling a variety of utilitarian wire-worked goods such as meat safes, ladders, aviaries, windows, fire guards and fenders. Another was G. Coulton of Elizabeth Street who wove his wire on the first loom put up in Van Diemen's Land, and who, as well as domestic items, was able to supply winnowing machines and wheat screens. Further catering to the agriculturists, for £6 they could purchase one of his newly-invented Simple Acting Machines, made in England, which stripped the wheat from the heads and the grass-seeds from the wheat. However, at this stage in Hobart's development there did not seem to be much call for the frippery of fancy decorative wire-work articles.⁸

But whether or not Catherine was able to utilise her wire-working skills is not known. She was mustered at Port Dalrymple in 1820 and 1821, and at Hobart for the 1823 muster, as servant to R. Willson.⁹



A Government Public Notice, dated 1 April 1824, and published the next day advised that Catherine, together with *Friendship* women Elizabeth Leggett and Ann Horton, had obtained her certificate of freedom.¹⁰

From this point the Van Diemen's Land trail of Catherine Osborne, now a free woman, peters out. No record has been found to confirm or otherwise whether she married and/or had children. Nothing can be gleaned from her conduct record, which is free from any blemish.¹¹



If she left Hobart for Sydney, she does not appear in the New South Wales 1828 census. One possible clue is found in a newspaper notice of 8 July 1825.¹²

WANTS a Situation, a Free Young Woman, who would be happy to attend on a Lady or any Family returning to England. She understands the Care of Children, and would make herself useful in every respect. —Address to CATHERINE OSBORNE, Noah's Ark, Bathurst-street.

In 1824 Daniel Kelly, husband of *Friendship* woman Margaret Yates, had been granted a licence to sell beer at the "Noah's Ark", and he was still the licensee when Catherine Osborne placed her notice.¹³ Did someone respond to the notice and engage Catherine as child nurse and otherwise useful person in return for a passage back to England?

NOTES

¹ *Northampton Mercury*, 19 Apr 1817, p3.

² Ancestry, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892, England, Warwickshire, 1817.

³ Findmypast (FMP), England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment 1770-1935, Correspondence And Warrants.

⁴ Females Convicts Research Centre (FCRC), Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land database, Convict ID: 3610.

⁵ FMP, England, Births & Baptisms 1538-1975. Ancestry, Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1812.

⁶ FCRC, Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land database.

⁷ Wm. West, *The History, Topography and Directory of Warwickshire*, R. Wrightson, London, 1830.

⁸ *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 20 Jul 1822, p.1. *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 23 Nov 1822, p.2.



⁹ FCRC, Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land database. Ancestry, New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convicts Musters, 1806-1849.

¹⁰ *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 2 Apr 1824, p.1.

¹¹ TAHO, Conduct Register, CON40/1/7 p.1.

¹² *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 8 Jul 1825, p.1.

¹³ *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 16 Jan 1824, p.2.



SOURCES

Genealogy Websites

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Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1812

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Other Websites

Female Convicts Research Centre, <https://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/>

LINC Tasmania, <https://www.linc.tas.gov.au/>

Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, <https://www.libraries.tas.gov.au/archive-heritage/>

Online Newspapers

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The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser

Publications

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