



Sarah Randall

Date of Trial:	5 August 1816
Where Tried:	Kent Assizes
Sentence:	14 years
Est YOB:	1791
Stated Age on Arrival:	27
Native Place:	
Occupation:	Country Servant
Alias/AKA:	Sarah Randell, Sarah Armstrong (m)
Marital Status (UK):	
Children on Board:	
Surgeon's Remarks:	Prostitute regardless of remonstrances
Assigned NSW or VDL	VDL

On the arrival of the convict ship *Friendship* at Port Jackson on 14 January 1818 Surgeon Cosgreave sent a letter to Governor Macquarie in which he reported on the prostitution of the female convicts, and the 'total failure of his Orders in this matter'. An official inquiry was instigated to which Peter Cosgreave submitted a sworn deposition which he concluded with the following statement.

George Brown had a severe attack of a Pulmonary affection, which was materially aggravated by his continued intercourse with a female named Sarah Randall.¹

No wonder he had denounced her as a 'Prostitute regardless of remonstrances'. So who was this woman who had almost been the death of crewman George Brown?

Sarah Randall, having been committed to the Maidstone County Gaol in May for passing a forged note to Mr. Edward Tooth, was one of six people tried at the Kent Assizes on 5 August 1816 charged with having forged bank notes in their possession.² The *Kentish Gazette* reported on their day in court.

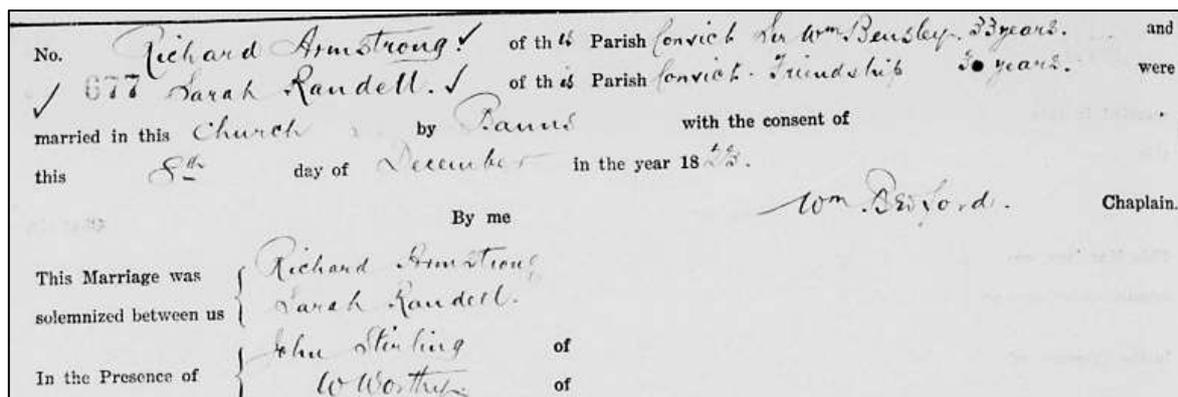
Sarah Randall, an interesting young woman, was capitally indicted for disposing of and putting away a forged and counterfeit bank note, of the value of five pounds, well knowing the same to be forged, with intent to defraud the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, and Edward Tooth.

There was another indictment, charging the prisoner with the lesser crime of having the said forgery in her possession, to which she pleaded *Guilty*.

[The five others also pleaded Guilty to the minor charge]

Mr. Justice Burrough then proceeded to pass the sentence on them, which their plea of guilt had incurred. He observed that the prisoners had acted wisely in admitting their culpability upon the minor charge against them, as had they ventured to put themselves upon the justice of the country for the greater offence and were found guilty, they would assuredly exposed [sic] their lives to forfeiture. They were much indebted therefore to the clemency of the Bank of England and those who directed their prosecutions in not pressing against them a prosecution upon the capital indictment. He therefore trusted that their several cases would operate as an example to others as well as to themselves. His Lordship then sentenced them each to *transportation for 14 years*.³

Sarah was returned to the County Gaol – the old building, not the new one completed in 1819 – where she was held until making the short journey to Deptford to join the other 100 women taken on board the convict vessel *Friendship* in readiness for the 3 July departure.⁴ On arrival at Port Jackson on 14 January 1818, and no doubt with her reputation preceding her, 27 year old servant girl Sarah Randall was mustered and then sent on to Hobart on the *Duke of Wellington*, arriving there on 20 February 1818.⁵ She was a single woman who could both read and write. Her official trade was given as servant, but she had also been 'on the town'. By the 1820 muster Sarah had obtained a ticket-of-leave and she was mustered at Hobart for the 1821 and 1822 musters. The 1823 muster found her at the Female Factory, but in what capacity is not stated.⁶ It was in December 1823 that Sarah married, her husband being Richard Armstrong.⁷

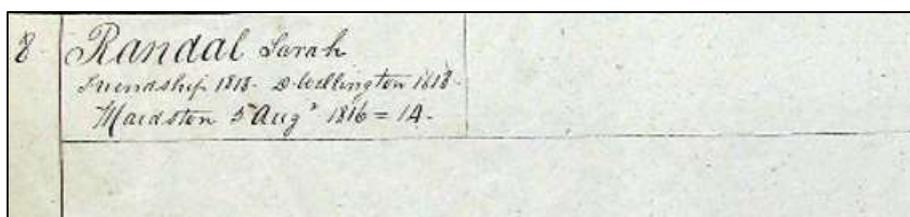


The marriage took place on 8 December at Hobart. Both parties were still under sentence and, unusually, both were apparently able to sign their names.

A few years older than his bride, Richard Armstrong (alias Arch) had also been tried at Maidstone in 1816, but at the Lent Assizes. And like Sarah, he too was found guilty of 'possession' - having 'forged divers Bank of England notes, at Margate' and sentenced to fourteen years transportation.⁸ Early one May morning, along with eleven other men tried at the Kent Lent Assizes, and under a strong guard from his Majesty's Maidstone gaol, Richard Armstrong, then aged 24, was transferred to the hulk *Retribution* on 18 May 1816 to await his transportation 'beyond ye seas'.⁹ He was on the hulk for almost a year before being taken off and embarked on the *Sir William Bensley* which sailed from England on 9 October 1816 with 200 convicts on board and arrived at Port Jackson on 10 March 1817.¹⁰ Richard Armstrong's name was at the top of the list of the sixty-three *Sir William Bensley* convicts who continued their journey to Van Diemen's Land on the *Elizabeth Henrietta*.¹¹

On inspecting the convicts Governor Macquarie had commented that there were 'a great many sawyers, but few other useful mechanics'.¹² From the bound indentures we learn that Richard was not one of the many sawyers but was a groom by calling. He was a native of London, stood at 5ft 3¾, had a ruddy complexion, brown hair and brown eyes.¹³ The musters for 1820 and 1821 list him respectively as a Groom at Government House, and in Govt employ.¹⁴

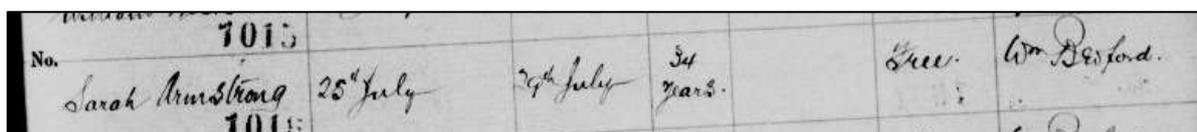
Prior to her arrival in the colony Sarah Randall had attracted a deal of attention to herself. In contrast, however, once she had arrived she maintained a very low-key profile, exhibiting none of the 'femme fatale' characteristics that had so disturbed Surgeon Cosgreave. She was one of the few convicts who could boast a clean conduct record.¹⁵



Indeed, the only reference to her reveals a very different side to her character. She was listed in the payments column of the Statement of the Police Fund for the quarter ending 30 June 1821.

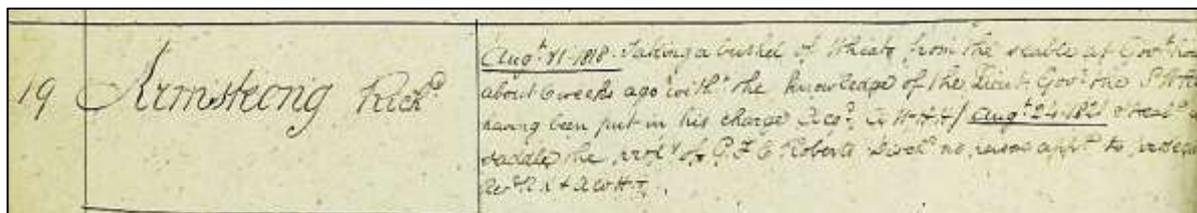
Sarah Randall, for Clothing, Lodging and taking Care of a Native Boy £2 10 0¹⁶

The death of Sarah Armstrong, possibly in childbirth, on 25 July 1825 at the age of 34 was registered at Hobart and she was buried four days later at St. David's churchyard.¹⁷



By my calculations she died about five years shy of being affirmed as free by servitude, but interestingly, and with nothing found to substantiate this, the death registration shows her status as 'Free'. Would she have been able to maintain her apparently impeccable conduct record if she had lived longer?

Richard Armstrong had two entries in his conduct record, but in both cases he was acquitted of any offence. In August 1818 he was charged with having, six weeks earlier, taken a bushel of wheat from the stable at Government House without knowledge of the Lieutenant Governor. On 24 August 1821 he was accused of stealing a saddle, the property of G.F.C. Roberts. This case was thrown out for want of a prosecutor.¹⁸



Only one newspaper reference has been located for Richard Armstrong. It appears in the payments column of the Statement of the Police Fund as at 31 March 1821.

R. Armstrong, extra Services breaking-in Govt. Horses £2 0 0¹⁹

Widowed just eighteen months after his marriage to Sarah, Richard Armstrong outlived his wife by nearly ten years. He died on 7 October 1834. He was by then free by servitude and living in Liverpool Street. He was described as a servant and a horse breaker by trade²⁰



As far as is known, Richard did not remarry after Sarah's death and there were no children born to Sarah and Richard Armstrong.

NOTES

- 1 Historical Records of Australia (HRA), The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914, Series I, Volume IX, p.755.
- 2 *Kentish Gazette*, 31 May 1816, p.4. *Morning Chronicle*, 9 Aug 1816, p.3.
- 3 *Kentish Gazette*, 9 Aug 1816, p.3.
- 4 Findmypast (FMP), England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935, Prison Registers.
- 5 Ancestry, New South Wales, Australia, Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1849, Copies of Letters Sent Within the Colony, 1814-1827.
- 6 Ancestry, New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convict Musters, 1820, 1822, 1823. Female Convicts Research Centre (FCRC) Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land database, Convict ID: 3615.
- 7 Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (TAHO), Hobart marriages 1823, RGD36/1/1 no 677.
- 8 *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal*, 26 Mar 1816, p.3.
- 9 *Kentish Gazette*, 24 May 1816, p.4. Ancestry, UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849, Retribution, Register, 1802-1834.
- 10 Free Settler or Felon? Convict Ship Sir William Bensley, https://www.jenwillets.com/convict_ship_sir_william_bensley.htm.
- 11 TAHO, Assignment List, CON13/1/1 p.73.
- 12 Ancestry, New South Wales, Australia, Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1856.
- 13 Ancestry, New South Wales, Australia, Convict Indents, 1788-1842, Bound Indentures, 1814-1818.
- 14 Ancestry, New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convict Musters, 1820, 1821.
- 15 TAHO, Conduct Register, CON40/1/7 p.4.
- 16 *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 6 Oct 1821, p.1.
- 17 TAHO, Hobart deaths 1825, RGD34/1/1 no 1016.
- 18 TAHO, Conduct Register, CON31/1/5 p.5. The full name of Roberts was George Frederick Charles Roberts.
- 19 *The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 9 May 1821, p.2.
- 20 TAHO, Hobart deaths 1834, RGD/34/1/1 no 3571.



SOURCES

Genealogy Websites

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New South Wales and Tasmania, Australian Convict Musters, 1806-1849

New South Wales, Australia, Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1856

New South Wales, Australia, Convict Indents, 1788-1842

UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849

FindmyPast

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Other Websites

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

Free Settler or Felon? <https://www.jenwillets.com/>

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

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

Online Newspapers

British Newspapers (FindmyPast)

Kentish Gazette

Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal

TROVE

The Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser

Publications

Historical Records of Australia, The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament

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