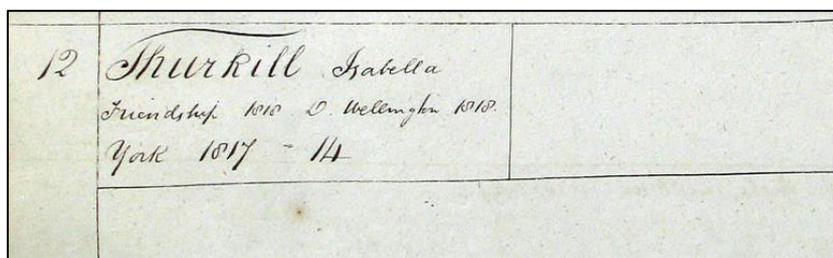




Isabella Thirkill

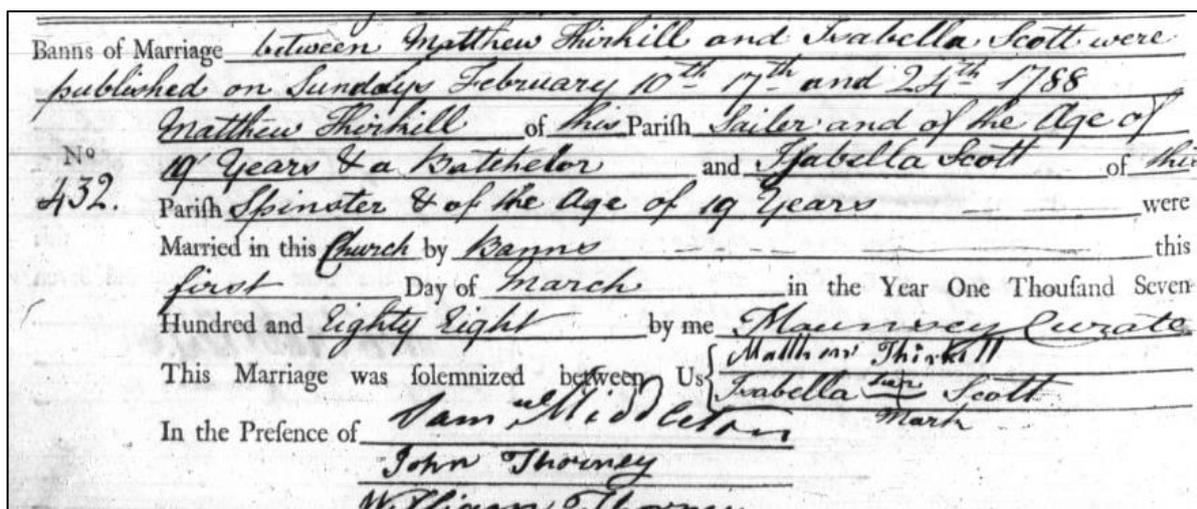
Date of Trial:	8 March 1817
Where Tried:	York City Assizes
Crime:	Receiving stolen goods
Sentence:	14 years
Est YOB:	1769
Stated Age on Arrival:	49
Native Place:	York
Occupation:	Washerwoman
Alias/AKA:	Isabella Thurkill, Isabella Holdsworth (m)
Marital Status (UK):	
Children on Board:	
Surgeon's Remarks:	An indolent, inoffensive woman
Assigned NSW or VDL	VDL

When she arrived at Port Jackson, and was subsequently forwarded to Van Diemen's Land, Isabella Thirkill was one of those female convicts who could boast a clean conduct sheet during her short time at Hobart Town.¹



This is in contrast to her pre-transportation 'career', if she was the incorrigible Yorkshire lass identified in the following account.

The records show that Isabella Thirkill was one of the older cohort of females who embarked on the convict ship *Friendship* in July 1817, her year of birth being stated as c1769.² She may have been the Isabella Scott who, on 1 March 1788, married Matthew Thirkill at Selby, Yorkshire.³



This couple may have been the parents (although there is quite a time lapse between this event and the marriage date) of a son named Thomas, baptised on September 1801 at St. Mary's, Castlegate, York, and who was buried the following year.⁴

17 Thomas s Matthew Thirkill Mar, Middle Water Lane, s
Matthew Thirkill Tailor, late of Coney street & Isabella
d Robert Scott, Middle Water Lane b Sept 16

Nov 18 Thomas Thirkill s Matthew Thirkill Mar, Middle Water
Lane, by Isabella his wf, died Nov 16 & bur in the ch yd,
age 1 yr, Smallpox

Their address, Middle Water Lane, was hardly a salubrious district of the city of York. The three Water Lanes that ran from Castlegate, near St. Mary's Church down to the river, were notorious for their 'low-class nightlife', and associated crimes such as theft, drunkenness and assault. Of the three, Middle Water Lane was undoubtedly the worst.

... being the narrowest and the one containing a number of warren-like courts, yards and alleys, and into whose dim and foul recesses respectable people, and even the police were reluctant to venture.⁵



It was in 1804 that Isabella Thirkill was charged with an offence which resulted in her being listed in the Crown Calendar for the Yorkshire Lent Assizes, held at the Castle of York on 13 March 1804.

(Aged 32) *ISABELLA THIRKELL*, the wife of Matthew Thirkell, committed the 3^d of March, 1804, charged upon oath by Thomas Bell of Aldborough, in the west-riding, butcher, with being a common utterer of false, base and counterfeit money; and that she did, on the same 3^d of March, utter and pay unto him the said Thomas Bell, a certain false, base, and counterfeit half guinea, purporting to be the current coin of the realm, and having in her custody and possession several other pieces of false, base, and counterfeit money, resembling the current coin of this realm.⁷

One John Hall was charged with the same offence. Both he and Isabella were found not guilty and discharged. This would seem to be a lucky let-off for Isabella as she was soon up to the same tricks. At the York Quarter Sessions of January 1807-

Isabella Thirkill, convicted of uttering counterfeit money, to be imprisoned in the house of Correction for six months, and to find sureties for her good behaviour for six months longer.⁸

The County of York Prison Register lists three people by the name of Thirkell who had all been tried at the York Session of April 1815. We find Benjamin, James and Isabella – all charged with 'uttering Bad Money'. The verdict in the case of the two men was 'Not Guilty'. However, Isabella Thirkell was sentenced to six months imprisonment.⁹ It seems that in addition to her time in jail, she was obliged to find sureties for good behaviour. A notice placed in

the *York Herald* by the Common Clerk of the City, advised that all Jurors, Suitors, and the persons listed (standing on their recognizances) were to attend the York Michaelmas Quarter Sessions, scheduled for 20 October 1815. One of those listed was 'Isabella Thirkill of York, widow, in £40'.¹⁰ I do not know whether she was actually a widow, or had adopted the status for 'convenience'. I have not found any death record for her husband Matthew.

Less than two years later Isabella was back in court, this time charged with the crime for which she was transported. The number of prisoners brought before the March 1817 York Assizes was much greater than usual, and Mr. Justice Bayly had his work cut out to handle the heavy workload of 81 cases. One of the cases in the calendar for 8 March was Isabella Thirkill who, on this occasion, had changed her *modus operandi*. No longer dealing in 'bad money', she was charged and found guilty of stealing in a shop, recorded in the Prison Register as 'receiving stolen goods'. Coincidentally, a James Thirkill had been tried at the same time, and found guilty of larceny, and jailed for six months. Isabella's sentence of transportation for fourteen years guaranteed that she would never appear before the York assizes again!¹¹

She did not have long to dwell on her predicament. On 22 May she was removed from the City Gaol, together with Hannah Hammond Crampton and Mary Buxton from the Castle, and left York 'in order to be delivered on board the Friendship transport vessel, lying below Deptford, bound to New South Wales'.¹²

On being mustered on arrival at Port Jackson Isabella Thirkell was designated as a washerwoman.¹³ How she was deployed for her first few years is uncertain, but she was mustered at Pittwater in 1820 and 1821, with a ticket of leave, and in 1823 she was listed as 'Wife of J. Holdsworth'.¹⁴ By this time she and John Holdsworth had been married for nearly five years. The happy event, registered at Hobart, took place on 9 September 1818. The groom, also a convict, was 50 years old; the bride, at 39, had 'shed' ten years.¹⁵

John Holdsworth	Convict	Indefatigable	Servant.	9 September	Dumb.	
Isabella Thirkill	Convict	Friendship	24 years.			255
Witnesses						
John	Speak					
Sarah W	Bush					

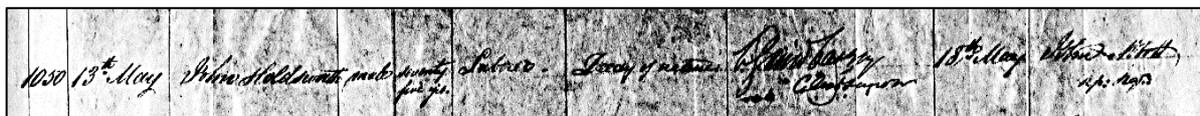
John Holdsworth (with accomplice John Firth) had been tried at the Chelmsford Assizes, Essex, on 7 August 1811, and pleaded guilty to the indictment of 'knowingly uttering a Bank of England note, which had been altered from one to ten pounds', and was sentenced to fourteen years transportation.¹⁶ Perhaps John and Isabella were able to compare notes! Having spent time on the hulk *Retribution* at Woolwich, John Holdsworth was one of 200 convicts who, embarked on the *Indefatigable*, which sailed from England on 4 June 1812 and arrived in Hobart on 19 October. The *Indefatigable* was the first convict ship to come directly to Hobart Town.¹⁷

Prior to his marriage John Holdsworth committed one offence – on 27 June 1818, as a ticket-of-leave man he was found guilty of 'stealing and driving away a number of horned cattle and feloniously robbing Henry Rice of a musket, for which he both forfeited his ticket and was sentenced to twelve months in the Gaol Gang. It was some years later that another misdemeanour was entered on his conduct sheet – drunk and disorderly on 12 June 1831.¹⁸

39 Holdsworth J. M.	June 27 1818 J. L. / Steal'd & driving away a number of Horned Cattle & feloniously robbing Hen ^r Rice of a Musket - to forfeit his Ticket & 12 Mos. Imprisonment (12 th day - arrived 18 th)
Indefatigable	June 13 1831 J. S. / Drunk & last night fined 5/- C. P. M.
Aug 7. 1811 - 14	
Conditional pardon 14 th 3. 7 th August 1821.	

There is nothing further of note to add to the story of the Holdsworth couple who seem to have led a very quiet life in Van Diemen's Land. Isabella died on 13 June 1825 and was buried two days later. Her status in the death register was 'Free' (although she was in fact still under sentence) but her age at death, more accurately, was given as 54.¹⁹ John Holdsworth gained his certificate of freedom on 11 August 1825, two months after the death

of his wife.²⁰ He was admitted into the New Norfolk Colonial Hospital on 8 February 1842 and it was there that he, a labourer aged 75, died on 13 May 1842, the cause of death being 'decay of nature'.²¹



NOTES

- ¹ Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO), Conduct Record, CON40/1/9, p.154.
- ² Biographical Database of Australia (BDA), Biographical report for Isabella Thirkill.
- ³ Ancestry, England Select Marriages, 1538-1973. Findmypast (FMP), Yorkshire Banns.
- ⁴ Ancestry, Yorkshire, England: Church of England Parish Records, 1538-1837, Register of St. Mary, Castlegate, York.
- ⁵ Frances Finnegan, Poverty and prostitution, A study of Victorian prostitutes in York, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p.36.
- ⁶ Map of York, 1852, <https://yorkmaps.net/1852/#16.81/53.956973/-1.080488>.
- ⁷ FMP, City of York Calendars of Prisoners 1739-1935, York Castle, Yorkshire, England.
- ⁸ *York Herald*, 24 Jan 1807, p.2.
- ⁹ Ancestry, England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892, England, Yorkshire-East Riding, 1815. It is likely that all three were related, but if so, and how, is not known.
- ¹⁰ *York Herald*, 14 Oct 1815, p.4.
- ¹¹ *Hull Packet*, 25 Mar 1817, p.3. Ancestry, England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892, Yorkshire-North Riding, 1817.
- ¹² *York Herald*, 24 May 1817, p.3.
- ¹³ Ancestry, All New South Wales, Australia, Convict Records, 1810-1891.
- ¹⁴ Female Convicts Research Centre (FCRC), Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land Database, Convict ID: 3625. Ancestry, New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convict Musters, 1806-1849, Tasmania 1820, 1821, 1823.
- ¹⁵ TAHO, Hobart marriages 1818, RGD36/1/1 no 85.
- ¹⁶ *The Ipswich Journal*, 10 Aug 1811, p.3.
- ¹⁷ Ancestry, UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849. Indefatigable 1812, <http://www.historyaustralia.org.au/twconvic/Indefatigable+1812>.
- ¹⁸ TAHO, Conduct Record, CON31/1/18, p.13.
- ¹⁹ TAHO, Hobart deaths 1825, RGD/34/1/1 no 1000.
- ²⁰ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 13 Aug 1825, p.3.
- ²¹ TAHO, Health & Welfare, HSD104/1/1. TAHO, Hobart deaths 1842, RGD35/1/1 no 1050.



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