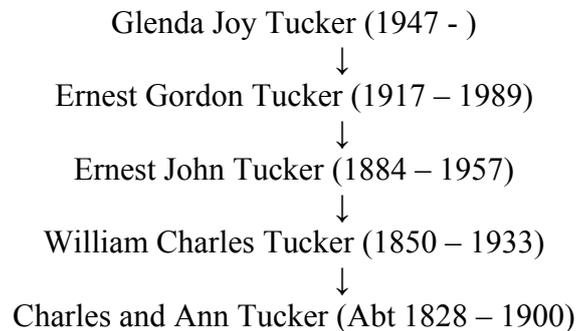


Ann's Story

The Tucker branch of the family tree



My great great grandmother was Ann Tucker. While researching her history, it became increasingly obvious that given her family, time and circumstances, it was almost inevitable that in 1851 she would be on a convict ship bound for Van Dieman's Land (VDL) with her infant son, never to see her homeland or her three older children again. Ann began life as Ann Dimmock, then through marriage, Ann Tucker, and again through marriage, Ann Sonners. Here is her story.

Ann Dimmock

Ann was the eldest child of seven children born to Samuel and Mary Ann Dimmock about 1828 in Dudley, Worcestershire. Her exact birth date has never been established, possibly either because her birth was never registered or because of confusion with names. It could be that she was christened Mary Ann, but certainly during her lifetime she was known as Ann, Nancy, or Annie.

The Dimmocks were coal miners in Dudley, Worcestershire, but during the 1840's, they appeared increasingly in the Worcestershire County Assizes and Sessions charged with petty crimes. It is interesting that Samuel Dimmock appeared to be quite an 'artful dodger'. He was found 'Not Guilty' for most of the charges, although in 1842 he was sentenced to 6 months with his brother, Benjamin Dimmock, for 'Uttering Counterfeit Coin'. This was an interesting and common crime at the time, whereby ordinary coin was gilded or rendered to look like gold coin and then passed off as gold guineas.

Ann and her siblings do not appear in any court records at this stage, but then in September 1844, her younger brother, Samuel Dimmock, 11, labourer, pleaded guilty to the charge of stealing a duck. He was sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment, and to be once whipped.

So, Ann grew up in a family and environment in northern England where petty crime ran parallel with the hard labour of coal mining.

Ann Tucker

On 6 September 1846, Ann Dimmock married Charles Tucker at St Thomas' Church of England in Dudley, Worcestershire. Ann was 18 and Charles was 26 and a Miner and both signed the marriage certificate with X (their marks).

Family life happened quickly for Charles and Ann, with the birth of their first son, Albert, on 8 September 1846 (two days after their marriage). Other children followed regularly, Rachael in 1848, Richard in 1849 and finally, William Charles in 1850.

At this point, things went horribly wrong. A newspaper article from the Worcestershire Chronicle dated 14 May 1851 reported the crime:

“Shop Robberies – Sam. Dimmack and Mary Ann, his wife, and Ann Tucker, daughter, wife of Charles Tucker, were on Friday charged before I Badger and T Fereday, Esqrs., with stealing a piece of print, measuring from twenty to twenty-five yards, from the door-way of the shop of Mr C Musselwhite, draper, High Street, on the night of the 3rd inst. The prisoners were fully committed to take their trial at the next Worcester Sessions. The prisoners, who are bad characters, and well known to the police, having repeatedly been in prison on charges of felony, were then charged with stealing thirty-eight yards of bed ticking from the shop of Messrs. Smith, drapers, High Street. The property was last seen on the 1st instant, and was missed on the 5th. The evidence was very lengthy and conclusive against the prisoners. About nineteen yards of the property, which had been cut into two pieces, were found at each of the prisoner's houses, on the occasion of searching them in the other case. The bench committed Samuel Dimmack and Ann Tucker for trial on this charge also. Mary Ann Dimmack was discharged, being a married woman, and supposed to have acted in concert with her husband.”

It is uncertain whether Samuel Dimmock escaped transportation, but certainly Ann was tried in the Worcester Quarter Sessions on 30 June 1851 for stealing velvet (prosecutor unknown) and was convicted and sentenced to 7 years transportation. As she had been previously found guilty of stealing bacon and sentenced to 4 months, her transportation sentence for the second crime was almost automatic. She left her three elder children in Dudley, but William Charles who was 18 months old at this stage stayed with his mother. Also convicted and sentenced to 7 years transportation in the Worcester Quarter Sessions on 30 June 1851 was Ann's mother, Mary Dimmock, for stealing print from Mr Musselwhite. Her previous crime had been 12 months for shoplifting cheese.

They were sent to Millbank prison on the banks of the Thames in London, where they were incarcerated for three months, awaiting transportation. On 30 September and 1 October 1851, 200 female convicts and 46 children were loaded onto the *Anna Maria* convict ship and their journey to Van Dieman's Land began. The Surgeon's Report stated that the convicts were in a clean and healthy condition, but the children generally bore marks of deficient nutrition.

However, Ann, Mary and little William fared quite well on the journey as they do not appear on the Surgeon's sick list, although dysentery was rife on board.



The *Anna Maria* sailed on her second convict voyage to VDL on 13 October 1851 from Woolwich, England and arrived at Sullivan's Cove, Hobart Town on 26 January 1852.

Ann's convict record described her as 25 years old on arrival, Protestant, able to read but not write. She was 5' 3 ¼" with brown hair and hazel eyes with no distinguishing marks. Her trade was – *Housemaid - can wash*.

From the ship, Ann would have been marched to the Cascades Female Factory for assignment and little William Charles sent to the Queen's Orphan Schools at New Town. He was only in the orphanage for a short time when he was discharged back to the Cascades Female Factory.

Ann was assigned over a period of 12 months to various locations: a Mr Richard Chilton of High Plains; Mrs Hoskin, Elizabeth Street; W R Stewart, New Town Road, then two days in October 1852 to a House of Correction and finally to T Jones, Liverpool Street.

It is unclear where William Charles was during this period, but presumably he was in the Cascades Female Factory, where he was lucky to survive, given that 3 out of 4 infants in that establishment died.

Ann Sonners

On 9 March 1853 Ann's life changed again when she married William Sonners at the Independent Chapel, Brisbane Street, Hobart Town. The witnesses were Mary Dimmock and Joseph Dykes (whom Mary married shortly afterwards). Ann, William and Mary all signed with X (their mark). William Sonners may have been William Summers, a convict who had arrived earlier, but who had changed his name to escape the convict taint.

It is also unknown whether Ann's husband, Charles, was still alive in England, however, at that time, a legal blind eye was turned to marriages where one or both parties were already married in England, as women were desperately needed as wives in the male-dominated VDL. The reality was that convicts were never able to return to their previous lives. Normally, a Permission to Marry was required for a convict to marry, but one was never recorded for either Ann or William.

Once Ann was married she was eligible to be assigned to her husband and at that stage, she would have been able to reclaim little William who would have been three years old. The Sonners settled in the Hamilton area, which was fertile farming land and where convicts were required as farm labourers. It is likely William was

employed at the Glenelg estate, because this was where all four of their sons were born in 1855, 1857, 1859 and 1860. When the first child was born, William described himself as Labourer, but at the birth of the fourth child he described himself as Fencer. So his situation had improved somewhat.

Ann was granted a Ticket of Leave on 1 August 1854 and was recommended for a Conditional Pardon on 24 October 1854. On 24 April 1855 her Ticket of Leave was revoked as she was absent from the Convict Muster, but was restored when her absence was accounted for (probably because she was pregnant or in childbirth with their first child, Thomas Sonners).

Finally, on 22 April 1856 Ann was granted a Conditional Pardon. This meant that she was free, but with various conditions, one of which was that she could not leave Australia.

The Sonners family settled on farming land on Hamilton Plains Road on the Hamilton Plains where their descendants still own and farm land. They were labourers and contractors. A photo of Ann and William in their later years, show that they had prospered to a certain degree, they were dressed in their Sunday best and Ann sat side saddle on a handsome horse.



However, the stone cottage and slab hut, in which they lived and which still stands, would have provided little respite from the harsh conditions.



Stone cottage on Hamilton Plains Road 1



Slab hut on Hamilton Plains Road 1

Ann Sonners died on 15 March 1900 of Chronic Bronchitis and Cardiac Failure, just two weeks after her husband. They are buried together in St Peters Anglican cemetery, Hamilton, which is one of the oldest churches in Australia. It is unusual in having a single door, which was to keep control of the convicts who comprised 50% of the congregation.



William and Ann Sonners' tombstone in St Peters Cemetery, Hamilton

A note on William Charles Tucker

Little is known of William Charles' early life following his admittance to the Cascades Female Factory. However, it is almost certain that he was discharged to his mother's care and stayed close by her in the Hamilton area, because he was married to Elizabeth Ellen Donaldson at St Peters Anglican Church, Hamilton on 7 March 1871 at the age of 21, when he was described as a labourer. He must have been on good terms with his stepfamily, because his marriage was witnessed by Thomas Sonners, his stepbrother.

He became a carpenter and joiner and established W C Tucker & Sons in Warwick Street, Hobart. The Tucker family lived in Church Street, Hobart and then Princes Street, Sandy Bay and took up land in Kent's Paddock, Cedric Street, where they built houses. William and Elizabeth had a large family of ten children and all the sons were carpenters and joiners and worked for the family company. About 1908 the business was wound up because of lack of work and William and Elizabeth moved to NSW with the three youngest children, one of whom was my grandfather, Ernest John Tucker.

In the midst of this busy family life, William Charles never forgot his siblings left behind in England, because he named two of his children, Rachel and Albert.

On reflection

On reflection, it is perhaps ironic that the English authorities did Ann and little William a favour when they banished them to the Antipodes. While Ann lived a hard life, she did become free (with conditions) and raised a large family. In England, she would probably never have escaped the prison system. While William's early life was probably quite horrific, as an adult he prospered and ran his own business. In England, he would have been down the mine as a child labourer and resorted to a life of petty crime in order to eke out an existence.

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