

ANN PICKETT

[*Cadet* (3), 1849]

by

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Ann PICKETT arrived in Van Diemens Land (VDL) on the convict ship *Cadet* on 12 April 1849. She was twenty-five years old. On 21 August 1848, she had been found guilty at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey), London, of stealing a watch-chain, a key and a seal from a man that she and two others had accosted on a dark street late at night. She had been sentenced to transportation for ten years.¹

In the colony, she was a troubled and troublesome prisoner who re-offended many times. Although she seems not to have been a particularly likeable person - and to have brought a lot of her problems on herself - it is difficult not to feel some sympathy for her. These were not easy times to be a woman, especially one who was single and alone in a male-dominated penal colony. Because of the numerical dominance of male convicts, there was an average of thirty-nine adult women to every one hundred men in VDL until well into the 1850s.²

This is Ann's story ...

Ann was born at Chelsea, Middlesex, England, about 1823, the second of seven children of Edward and Mary (nee CARROLL) PICKETT.³ Little is known about her life before the crime for which she was transported – except that it was not her first. She had already served two terms of imprisonment in England, one of three months in 1842 and another of six months in 1847, for similar offences.⁴ Upon arrival in VDL, she admitted that she had been ‘on the town’ – that is, a prostitute – for eight or nine years.⁵

At Hobart, Ann was described as being twenty-five years old, five feet and three inches (about 165.5 cms) tall and of a fresh complexion with black hair and hazel eyes. On her left shoulder were the marks ‘H’, ‘B’, ‘J’, ‘C’, ‘H’ and ‘P’ and a cross; on her right shoulder the letters ‘J’ and ‘C’. She stated that she was single, a Catholic and a house servant by trade. She could read and write. She was allocated Police Number 393.⁶

¹ Old Bailey online: <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org> - Ref: t18480821-1935.

² Gender imbalance: see https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/G/Gender.htm

³ 1841 UK Census via FCRC website.

⁴ Pre-transportation research via FCRC website.

⁵ CON41-1-21, Image 102; Description List: CON19-1-7, Image 115; Indent CON15-1-5, Image 173.

⁶ Description List: CON19-1-7, Image 115

It is probable that Ann spent the first six months of her life in VDL on the hulk *Anson*, an old British warship which, in 1844, had been refitted as a probation station. Moored on the Derwent at Risdon, near Hobart, it was used to house female convicts in order to alleviate the overcrowding which had occurred at the Cascades Female Factory as more and more convict ships had arrived. After a probation period of six months there, the women could become eligible for assignment as servants to free settlers.⁷

Although use of the *Anson* as a probation station was abandoned in 1849, it was there that Ann was punished for her first offence in the colony. On 1 August 1849 – just five months after her arrival in VDL – she was charged with ‘insolence’ and ordered to serve six months imprisonment with hard labour at the Cascades. That punishment, however, was not enough to deter her from further misdemeanours and, almost immediately after her release, she offended again. On 22 February 1850, assigned to the WILLIAMSON household, she was charged with ‘refusing to work and insolence’ and sentenced to another fourteen days in the cells at the Cascades.⁸

The following year – 1850 – was no more pleasant for Ann than the previous year had been. On 25 May, assigned to Mrs. DRURY of Melville St., Hobart, she was charged with being absent from her service and sentenced to two months’ imprisonment with hard labour at the Cascades Female Factory. And then, on 24 August, while in the service of Mr. ROSE, she absconded and, when apprehended, was ordered to spend another nine months in gaol, again with hard labour.⁹

Even while imprisoned at the Cascades, Ann was a nuisance to the authorities. On 7 April 1851, while working in the cook-house, she was charged with stealing bread and put to work elsewhere within the gaol. Five days later, she was ordered to spend fourteen days in solitary confinement for disorderly conduct in the dormitory, and on 22 April 1851 she was given a similar punishment for disorderly conduct in the prison yard.¹⁰

Shortly after the completion of her term of imprisonment at the Cascades, Ann committed what was, perhaps, her most outrageous offence. At that time, she was assigned to a Mrs. MUMMERY of Macquarie Street, Hobart, but remained in service there for only one week before absconding again. Apprehended five weeks later by William HASSELL, a sharp-eyed constable, she feigned outrage at being arrested and insisted that her name was Sarah HOLLEY. She told the constable that she had arrived in VDL as a convict per *Majestic* in January 1839 but had served her ten-year term of transportation and was now free by servitude.¹¹ Hassell did not

⁷<http://www.tasfamily.net.au/~schafferi/index.php?file=kop27.php> and <https://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/convict-institutions/probation-stations/anson>

⁸ CON41-1-21, Image 102.

⁹ CON41-1-21, Image 102.

¹⁰ Cascades Punishment Book, CON138/l, pp.179-180, p.185, p.189 (via FCRC website).

¹¹ Convict Sarah Holley (*Majestic*, 1839), see CON41-1-6, Image 25.

believe her. On 9 July 1851, Ann was taken before a magistrate to answer the absconding charge. In court, she continued to maintain that she *was* Sarah Holley - but a number of witnesses called to give testimony positively identified her as Ann Pickett. One of those witnesses was a female overseer from the Cascades who had examined her and had recognized the marks on her shoulders. Ann was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment with hard labour.¹²

At the Cascades ten days later, Ann was charged with 'talking in chapel'. For this offence, she was confined to a cell for three days and fed only on bread and water. Not deterred, she spent another fourteen days in the cells when, on 10 November 1851, she was caught attempting to remove a bar from the door or window of her room. Still at the Cascades in March 1852, she was charged with 'disrespectful conduct' and ordered to the cells for another fourteen days.¹³

Ann was no sooner released from the Cascades and assigned to the service of a Mrs. HAYNES at Battery Point, Hobart, than she absconded once more. This time the authorities obviously thought that they had had enough of her antics. Charged with the offence on 18 October 1852, she was punished by having her existing sentence of transportation extended by eighteen months.¹⁴

Ann's conduct record for the years 1853 and 1854 is quite difficult to understand, especially in regard to the exact number of times she absconded and where and how she was apprehended on each occasion. It is clear, however, that she spent at least a large part of those years imprisoned at the Ross Female Factory.

When assigned again to the service of free settlers in early 1855, she was constantly in trouble. During 1855, she was charged by her masters and/or mistresses five times – with offences that included 'wilfully destroying her master's property', 'making a false charge against her mistress', and 'refusing to attend divine service'. There is also evidence that she absconded once again and was ordered to gaol to spend twelve months there with hard labour. Later that same year, obviously while in prison, she spent ten days in solitary confinement for making a false charge against an overseer.¹⁵

Surprisingly, Ann's record shows that she did not commit a single offence in 1856 – but the reason for that soon becomes apparent. On 19 April of that year she gave birth to a son whom she named Robert Edward PICKETT. The birth was registered at Hobart. The name of the father was not recorded.¹⁶

¹² *Hobarton Guardian, or, True Friend of Tasmania* (Hobart), 12 July 1851, p.3.

¹³ Cascades Punishment Book, CON138/l, pp.181-182; CON41-1-21, Image 102..

¹⁴ CON41-1-21, Image 102.

¹⁵ CON41-1-21, Image 102.

¹⁶ RGD33/1252/1856, Hobart;

On 28 July 1857, Ann was granted a ticket of leave and on 21 August 1857, she was free by servitude. On 12 April 1859, a certificate of freedom was issued to her. She was, at last, a free woman again.¹⁷

Records show that, on 3 May 1860, Ann gave birth to another son at Hobart. She was still unmarried and the father's name is not recorded. Nor was the child's name recorded and, as Ann is believed to have had only one son with her during the following years, it is possible that the child died at birth or shortly afterwards.¹⁸

Although it could be said that the fact that she now had a child (or children) did little to curb Ann's ill-disciplined behavior, it could just as well have been the case that economic necessity impelled her to rebellion and crime. Without a husband to provide for her, she had to earn her living in any way she could. Not surprisingly, the next time Ann was in trouble with the law her offence was more serious than any of her previous ones.

On 7 October 1862, this report was published in *The Mercury*, Hobart:

POLICE COURT. MONDAY, OCTOBER 6TH, 1862.

BEFORE the Right Worshipful the Mayor and H. BILTON, Esq.

OBSCENE LANGUAGE: McConnell v. Pickett

In this case Ann Pickett, Bathurst Street, was charged with using obscene language on her own premises on the 28th ultimo. The defendant pleaded guilty, when Sub-Inspector McConnell informed the Bench that the language used was of the most disgraceful description. The defendant was a most abandoned woman, and kept a house of ill-fame in Bathurst-street, where she had living with her at the present moment two young girls not more than 13 years of age. She had been brought before the Bench for indecent conduct, but on promising to reform her mode of living she was discharged, but she had gone on worse than before, and had in some way or other contrived to evade the police. The Mayor observed that if the woman kept a house of the description mentioned by the Sub-Inspector, an information ought to be laid against her. She was fined 40s. or in default of payment sentenced to one month's imprisonment.¹⁹

It is not known which of the punishment options Ann took – but, whatever the case, the punishment had little effect. It was not long before she was in trouble again.

¹⁷ CON41-1-21, Image 102.

¹⁸ 33/3391/1860, Hobart.

¹⁹ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 7 October 1862, p.4.

On 28 March 1863, Ann was charged with disturbing the peace. Under the heading ‘Police Court’, the report in *The Mercury* of 28 March read: ‘Ann Pickett, described as a very bad character, was fined £1 for disturbing the peace, or in default of payment to be imprisoned for one month ...’²⁰.

It was to be another two years before Ann appeared before a magistrate again. On 22 April 1865, she was back in the Police Court at Hobart again, this time charged by the landlord of the New Market Inn with ‘wilfull damage’. He told the court that Ann had broken three panes of glass in the window of his establishment and was supported in his claim by a local constable who had attended the scene. In her defence, Ann argued that she had not broken the window but that she knew who had. Ann maintained that she had given the name of the woman responsible for the damage to the police constable but that he had not believed her. In fact, he had threatened to charge her with perjury if she repeated that claim in court. As it happens, the magistrate did not believe Ann’s story either and fined her twenty shillings. She was also ordered to pay damages and court costs to the publican.²¹

Incensed at the way she had been treated by the magistrate and the constable in court that day, Ann brought a charge in the days which followed against the woman whom she claimed *had* broken the windows. This time she named the woman as Elizabeth THOMPSON, a woman who happened to reside at the New Market Inn. Ann told the court that she had seen cuts on Thompson’s hands the day after the windows had been broken. Again, however, the magistrate did not believe Ann and dismissed the case against Thompson for lack of evidence.²²

By this time, Ann was very obviously struggling financially. She was now in her forties and had had a great deal of strife in her time. It comes as no surprise to know then, that on 4 August 1866, she applied to have her son, Robert Edward Pickett, admitted to the Queen’s Orphan School (QOS), Hobart. He was now ten years old. At her meeting with the QOS authorities, Ann revealed that the father of the boy was a man by the name of Joseph BLACKSTON, that he was a former convict and that he had deserted her. Nothing more is known of him.²³ It is not clear whether Ann’s application to have Robert admitted to the QOS was successful but it seems probable that it was not. There is also a suggestion in the record that the application was withdrawn. Little is known about Robert after that. It is believed that he died in Hobart in 1925 but that has not been verified.²⁴

²⁰ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 28 March 1863, p.2.

²¹ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 22 April 1865, p.3.

²² *The Mercury* (Hobart), 22 April 1865, p.3.

²³ <http://www.orphanschool.org.au/searchorphans.php>; according to the QOS record, Blackston arrived in VDL on *Lord Rodney* but it seems that that might be incorrect. It is more likely that he had arrived on *Cadet (2)* in 1848 but that has still to be verified.

²⁴ See www.femaleconvicts.org - ‘Mothers and children of the Cadet (1848 & 1849)’, Maureen Mann, October 2018.

On 6 January 1870, Ann married Benjamin Buckner WEBB at Holy Trinity Church, Hobart. As far is known, this was her first marriage. She was 47; Webb, a mariner, was 57. However, it was to be a relatively short-lived marriage. Webb passed away at Hobart five years later.²⁵ But it seems that the stability and security that the marriage had provided had been good for Ann. They were five years in which she was totally free of offences.

Very soon after Webb died, Ann married again. Her second husband was William MUNDAY. The marriage entry describes Ann (with surname WEBB) as a laundress; William was a labourer. Again, Ann seems to have been contented in this marriage and she managed to remain free of trouble for the rest of her days.²⁶

Ann (Pickett/Webb) MUNDAY died in the General Hospital, Hobart, on 4 December 1885. The cause of death was acute pneumonia. She was sixty-two years old.²⁷

²⁵ Marriage: Pickett/Webb, RGD37/146/1870, Hobart; death: Webb, RGD35/2409/1875, Hobart.

²⁶ Marriage: Pickett/Munday, RGD37/201/1875, Hobart.

²⁷ Death: RGD352824/1885, Hobart.