

# ELIZABETH DUESNAP

(*Maria* to NSW, 1818; *Elizabeth Henrietta* to VDL, 1818)

by

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Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind when one looks at the life story of Elizabeth DUESNAP is the difficulty that people have had with her surname. She was Elizabeth DEWSNAP when convicted in England in 1818 but in the colony her surname appears in documents and newspapers as DUESNAP, DEWSNIP and DUSLOP. To add to the difficulty, she was convicted again in Van Diemens Land (VDL) in 1833 under her married name of Elizabeth LIVERMORE, and re-married twice and so was known also as Elizabeth DAVEY and Elizabeth McCOMBE and McCOMB.

Born at Sheffield, Yorkshire, England, around 1797, Elizabeth led a long, difficult - and, at times, sad - life but was in her late eighties when she passed away at Longford, Tasmania, in 1883.<sup>1</sup>

Her story is a fascinating one!

Elizabeth was twenty years old when, on 20 January 1818, she was convicted at the Lancaster Quarter Sessions of stealing money and sentenced to transportation for seven years.<sup>2</sup> With 125 other female prisoners, she was put aboard the vessel *Maria I* (1) which sailed from Deal, Kent, England, on 15 May 1818 and reached Sydney on 17 September that year. Although two women had died on the way, the voyage was a relatively uneventful one.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that Elizabeth had been embarked on *Maria* as early as mid-March 1818 and had had to wait some weeks on the vessel before it was able to depart. Thomas PROSSER, the surgeon-superintendent who accompanied the women to Sydney, noted in his medical journal that, on 18 March 1818, he had treated Elizabeth (referred to as DEWSNIP) for gonorrhoea, a nasty disease that is usually sexually transmitted. Her eyes had been 'very much inflamed' and she had told him that she had contracted the disease six weeks before coming on board. Fortunately, the treatment given to her on that occasion seems to have been successful. There is no mention in the

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<sup>1</sup> Birth year calculated from convict records; death (as Elizabeth McCOMB, RGD35/1/52, No 441, Longford, via Tasmanian Names Index, Libraries Tasmania.)

<sup>2</sup> Conduct record (as Elizabeth DUESNAP), CON40-1-3, page 30.

<sup>3</sup> Convict Ships to NSW: <http://members.iinet.net.au/~perthdps/convicts/shipNSW2.html>; the port of Deal lies on the border of the North Sea and the English Channel, eight miles north-east of Dover.

journal of treatment at other times – and there is no indication that the disease troubled her after her arrival in the colonies.<sup>4</sup>

Within a few weeks of the arrival of *Maria* at Sydney, Elizabeth was transferred to *Elizabeth Henrietta* which sailed for Hobart on 26 September.<sup>5</sup> Upon arrival, on 11 October 1818, Elizabeth was described as being four feet eleven and a half inches (about 152 cms) tall, with a fresh complexion, brown hair and hazel eyes. She had a scar over her right eye and a ‘crippled’ middle finger on her left hand. She was twenty-one years old, single and a servant by trade. She might have been able to read but she could not write. Her surname was recorded on her convict documents as ‘DUESNAP’ and she was allocated Police Number 47.<sup>6</sup>

In her first fifteen years in VDL, Elizabeth was able to avoid further trouble with the law. No offences of any kind are recorded against her in that time. Although the details are vague and uncertain, it is believed that she was assigned as a servant shortly after her arrival to a land holder in the northern part of the colony. There, in the Port Dalrymple area, were a number of ebullient characters, prominent among whom was James DAVEY, a former convict - and the man she was to take as her *second* husband many years later! (More about him later in this story!) Also in the area was Thomas LIVERMORE, another former convict and a close associate of Davey. Livermore was to become Elizabeth’s *first* husband. Both men had interesting pasts.

At least one internet website claims that Elizabeth gave birth to a child – Sarah Elizabeth DAVEY - by James Davey in 1827 – but, as no birth record has yet been located, that cannot be verified! It does not seem likely!<sup>7</sup>

Birth records do reveal, however, that Elizabeth gave birth to a son, William LIVERMORE, who was baptized at Launceston on 29 November 1826. The father of the child was Thomas Livermore.<sup>8</sup>

In 1810, Livermore had been convicted in England of the attempted murder of his wife and sentenced to transportation for life. He had arrived at Sydney per *Guildford* in early 1812 but, by 4 July of that year, he had been transferred to VDL when James COX, an affluent and influential free settler, who had been granted large acreages throughout the colony, had requested convict labourers from Sydney to work for him. Livermore and two others had been sent to him per the schooner *Unity*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ADM 101/49/1: Diary of the convict ship *Maria* for 7 March 1818 to 26 September 1819 by Thomas Prosser.

<sup>5</sup> CON40-1-3, page 30.

<sup>6</sup> CON40-1-3, page 30;

<sup>7</sup> See Sarah Elizabeth Davey, born Launceston, 1827 at <http://www.chestnut-blue.com/Chestnut%20Blue-o/p1576.htm>; BDM records were not compulsory in VDL until 1838.

<sup>8</sup> Birth, William Livermore: RGD32/2485/1827, Launceston.

<sup>9</sup> See James Cox in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* at

There, as Cox's labourer, Livermore had done well. By 1823, he had his own land near Launceston.<sup>10</sup> The muster records of that year show that Elizabeth Duesnap had been assigned to him as a servant.<sup>11</sup>

Elizabeth and Thomas Livermore were married at St John's Church of England, Launceston, on 10 September 1827. Elizabeth's surname is shown as DUSLOP on the marriage entry.<sup>12</sup> However, the marriage was to end in tragedy less than a fortnight later. On 23 September 1827, the *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser* reported that Livermore had been drowned accidentally while crossing the South Esk river at Norfolk Plains.<sup>13</sup>

Nothing more is known about Elizabeth for the next few years but left a widow with a baby not yet twelve months old, her life was probably difficult. A year or two before her marriage to Livermore, she had been granted her certificate of freedom and was therefore able to remain in the Norfolk Plains area. Was she able to maintain herself and her son on the land that Livermore had acquired? Perhaps James Davey and his friends were able to assist her when necessary.

However, more trouble for Elizabeth was just around the corner.

On 29 April 1833, she was convicted in the Supreme Court of receiving four sheep which a man by the name of Thomas MERRITT (or MERRETT) had stolen from Henry CLAYTON, a neighbor. Elizabeth and Merritt were both found guilty. A sentence of death was recorded against Merritt, while Elizabeth was sentenced to transportation for fourteen years.<sup>14</sup>

At this time, Elizabeth was only about thirty-six years old but, strangely, in passing down her sentence, the judge, Mr. Justice MONTAGU, described her as 'a very bad old woman' and told her that she was:

*... far more deserving of punishment than was the thief, whom she had tempted into the commission of a capital offense against the laws of his country ... The sentence of this court is, that you, Elizabeth Livermore, be transported for the term of fourteen years, which in the usual course of nature is a term that judging from your now advanced age, will bear you to the grave.*<sup>15</sup>

This time, Elizabeth's sentence of transportation did not mean 'transportation across the seas' but merely her removal from the north of the colony to the south where she probably spent only a very short time at the Cascades Female Factory before being assigned again.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, she

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<sup>10</sup> <https://lynnesfamilies.wordpress.com/2016/09/11/norfolk-plains/>

<sup>11</sup> Muster records via FCRC website.

<sup>12</sup> RGD36/1066/1827, Launceston.

<sup>13</sup> *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*, 21 September 1827, p.2; death: RGD34/1601/1827, Launceston.

<sup>14</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 2 May 1833, p.3; CON40-1-5, Image 341, p.61

<sup>15</sup> *The Independent* (Launceston), 4 May 1833, p.2; Merrett's death penalty was not carried out - see his conduct record, as MERRETT, CON31-1-30, Image 86.

<sup>16</sup> See Elizabeth's conduct record (as LIVERMORE), CON40-1-5, Image 341.

was a convict again and, in her second term, she was not the well-behaved person she had been fifteen years earlier.

On 30 November 1833, Elizabeth was charged with absenting herself from the service of a Mr. FLEMING to whom she was then assigned. It appears that Fleming had ‘illegally and unlawfully allowed her to enter the service of another without government sanction’. She was removed from his service and sent back to the Female Factory for re-assignment. And then, on 30 June 1834, she was charged with ‘drunkenness and prostitution’, although her conduct record seems to show that the word ‘prostitution’ has been crossed out. She was punished by being ordered to spend six months in the notorious ‘C’ Class – Crime Class – at the Cascades Female Factory, the section of that prison reserved for the worst of the worst offenders.<sup>17</sup>

Birth records in VDL show that, in the following year, a baby girl, not yet a year old, was buried at Hobart. The child’s name is shown as Frances LIVERMORE. Was this Elizabeth’s daughter? The names of the parents are not given in the burial record. Obviously the father of the child was not Thomas Livermore who had been dead for some years. But was Elizabeth the mother? That seems probable.<sup>18</sup>

It might have been the death of the baby that was the cause of the problem with alcohol that Elizabeth seemed to have in the next few years. Between June 1836 and January 1839, she was charged ten times for offences such as drunkenness, misconduct in overstaying her pass at night and absenting herself from her place of service without leave’. On one occasion, she was simply admonished for her offence but in all other cases she was punished by being sent to the Cascades Female Factory, often to be locked in cell there for seven or ten days and to be fed only on bread and water. For one offence, she was ordered to serve her time with hard labour at the washtubs. For another, she received a nine-month sentence to be served in the dreaded ‘C’ Class section of the Cascades.<sup>19</sup>

In June 1840, after having served seven of the fourteen-year sentence Elizabeth had been given for receiving the stolen sheep, she was granted a ticket of leave and so was now free to find her own employment. She was about forty-three years old.<sup>20</sup>

And then, on 3 May 1841 - in what seems at first to be a strange decision – Elizabeth applied for permission to marry her old acquaintance, James Davey, whom she had known since her early days in the colony. Davey was a widower. In 1819, he had married sixteen-year-old Catherine JORDAN who had borne him ten or eleven children before her death in 1839.<sup>21</sup> However, with

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<sup>17</sup> CON40-1-5, Image 341, p.61.

<sup>18</sup> See TPI Digger - Frances Livermore, burial: RGD34/3976/1835, Hobart.

<sup>19</sup> CON40-1-5, Image 341, p.61.

<sup>20</sup> ToL: *The Hobart Town Courier and Van Diemen's Land Gazette*, 12 June 1840, p.4

<sup>21</sup> Davey/Jordan: No marriage located; Catherine Davey, death: RGD35/225/1839, Launceston.

approval given, Elizabeth and James were married at the Church of England, Longford, on 27 July 1841. The marriage entry shows Davey's age as fifty. Elizabeth's age is shown as forty-one but she was probably forty-four or forty-five.<sup>22</sup>

Elizabeth's decision to marry Davey was probably not as strange as it would seem to be at first. As a widow in a colony where the male population still greatly outnumbered the female, she might have felt the need to have a strong man to protect her - and, if so, Davey was well-qualified.

On 28 July 1802, at the age of twenty-one, Davey had been convicted of shop-breaking and stealing at the Essex Quarter Sessions, Chelmsford, England, and sentenced to transportation for seven years.<sup>23</sup> Shortly afterwards, he was put aboard *HMS Calcutta* which, with about three hundred other male convicts, a number of free settlers and a small detachment of Royal Marines, sailed to Port Philip on the southern shore of the colony of New South Wales where, Captain David COLLINS, the commander of the expedition, had been ordered to establish a settlement in the hope of warding off any attempt by the French to take possession of the territory. By 9 October 1803, *HMS Calcutta* was at anchor at Sullivan's Bay, just inside the heads of Port Philip, near present day Sorrento. This was where Collins had decided to base the new settlement. However, the decision was not a good one. In a few months, Collins had discovered that the soil in the area was too poor to support good crops and that there was a serious lack of fresh water – and so, having obtained permission from Sydney, he took his convicts and settlers across Bass Strait to Van Diemen's Land, where he settled on the Derwent at a site which is now Hobart. There, Davey had stayed, working as a convict, for about two years. In 1805, he had requested to be transferred to Norfolk Island where he thought his life might be easier. He had remained there – and had become a successful small farmer – for the next six years. But, in 1811, when the British authorities had decided to close the Norfolk Island settlement, he had returned to Van Diemen's Land, settling at Port Dalrymple where, before long, he had been given a grant of land and was again doing well. It was there, not long after 1818 when Elizabeth had arrived in the colony, that she had first met him.<sup>24</sup>

After their marriage in 1840, all appears to have gone well for Elizabeth and Davey for the next ten years but it was obvious that Elizabeth was still a troubled woman and that things might not have been as good in the marriage as it seemed. She was still a ticket-of-leave holder when, on 17 March 1843, she was fined ten shillings for being 'drunk and disorderly', presumably in a public place. And on 22 April of the same year, she was admonished after being charged with

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<sup>22</sup> Permission to marry: CON52/1/2, p.34; marriage, RGD37/1/2, No. 1183, Longford.

<sup>23</sup> Davey's official conduct record has not yet been located; see his story according to family sources at <https://lynnesfamilies.wordpress.com/2016/09/11/norfolk-plains/>.

<sup>24</sup> Davey on *HMS Calcutta*: <http://www.historyaustralia.org.au/twconvic/HMS+Calcutta+1803>; Expedition to Port Philip: <http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/colonial-melbourne/convicts/settlement-sullivan-bay>.

‘absenting herself from her place of residence’. Had she run away from the marriage home? That seems probable.<sup>25</sup>

On 17 May 1843, Elizabeth was granted a conditional pardon and on 29 April 1847, having now served her fourteen-year term, she was free by servitude – but all was not well in the marriage.<sup>26</sup>

On 23 September 1854, the following notice was published in the *Cornwall Chronicle*:

*Caution to the Public*

*WHEREAS my wife, Elizabeth Davey, but better known in town as Elizabeth Livermore, has left me without any just cause since the 31st of August last, I now caution all persons from trusting and harbouring her after this notice, as I will not be answerable for any debts she may contract, and any person employing her will be prosecuted as the law directs in such cases.*

*James Davey,*

*Sept 23 Longford.<sup>27</sup>*

Whether or not Elizabeth returned to her home with Davey is unclear. Ten years later, however – on 26 June 1865, Davey passed away.<sup>28</sup> He was eighty-eight years old. Elizabeth, now about sixty-nine, was a widow again.

But, Elizabeth was a resilient woman. On 13 December 1871, at the age of 74, she married again. The marriage entry shows her name as Elizabeth Davey. Her third husband was Arthur McCOMBE, a former convict (*Lord Petrie*, 1843), a native of Glasgow, Scotland, and a bachelor. In 1842, he had been convicted of uttering false coins and sentenced to transportation for ten years. He was thirty-four and single when he arrived in the colony. At the time of his marriage, he would have been about sixty-two.<sup>29</sup>

After this marriage, Elizabeth appears to have lived in peace for the remaining years of her life. She was never charged with an offence again. She passed away – as Elizabeth McCOMB - at Longford at the age of eighty-six on 28 February 1883. The cause of her death is shown simply as ‘senility’ – old age!<sup>30</sup>

It is believed that William, the son Elizabeth bore to Thomas Livermore in 1826, died at the age of seventy-seven at Jerilderie, New South Wales, in 1903.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> CON40-1-5, Image 341, p.61.

<sup>26</sup> Conditional pardon: *Cornwall Chronicle*, 27 May 1843, p.4; free by servitude: *Hobart Town Gazette*, 6 April 1847 via FCRC website.

<sup>27</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 23 September 1854, p.7.

<sup>28</sup> Death, Davey: RGD35/293/1865, Longford.

<sup>29</sup> Marriage to McCombe: RGD37/437/1871, Longford; McCombe, indent: CON14-1-24, Image 52.

<sup>30</sup> Death: RGD35/1/52, 441/1883, Longford.

<sup>31</sup> William, death: NSW BDM 6364/1903.