

CONVICT ELIZABETH JENNINGS

(*Lord Sidmouth/Lusitania*, 1823)

by

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On 28 June 1820, Elizabeth Jennings, twenty-two years old and single, was convicted of larceny at the Old Bailey, London. A man had accused her of stealing five shillings (about \$1) from him. He testified that she had ran ‘smack up’ against him on a street at Hoxton in inner London at about midnight on 16 June. Putting her arms around him, she had begun to rummage through the pockets of his breeches. He had seized her hand and, opening it, found four shillings (80 cents) there. He had called the watchman immediately and the woman had been taken to the watchhouse. There, another shilling (20 cents) had dropped from within her clothing.¹

Sentenced to transportation for life, she had spent almost two years in an English gaol before being put aboard *Lord Sidmouth* in late 1822².

On 11 September 1822, *Lord Sidmouth* sailed from Woolwich with 97 female convicts. It was under the command of Captain James FERRIER whose orders were to disembark fifty of the prisoners at Hobart and then sail on to Sydney to deliver the remainder.³

On 10 February 1823, after off-loading the women who were to serve out their sentences in Van Diemens Land (VDL), *Lord Sidmouth* went on to Port Jackson where, on 27 February, the remainder of the women were disembarked. (There were now only 46; one had died along the way.)⁴

A list of the 97 female convicts aboard the vessel when it sailed from England is easy to find and there is no dispute about it.⁵ However, identifying the fifty women who were disembarked at Hobart on 10 February 1823 is more difficult because there is conflicting evidence. About one of the women in particular, Elizabeth JENNINGS, there is considerable confusion.

Was Jennings disembarked at Hobart on 10 February 1823 or at Sydney on 27 February?

Those who believe that Jennings was disembarked at Hobart rely on two main arguments: first, that her name is on a list, held by the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (TAHO), of those

¹ Old Bailey trial: www.oldbaileyonline.org – reference: t18200628-128.

² CON40/1/5, Image 169.

³ Convict Ships to NSW: www.members.iinet.net.au/~perthdps/convicts/shipNSW2.html

⁴ <http://portal.archives.tas.gov.au/menu.aspx?search=11>

⁵ Full list of 97 convicts: <http://www.historyaustralia.org.au/twconvic/Lord+Sidmouth+1823>

who were put ashore there; and, second, that this is supported by correspondence in the files of the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) in New South Wales.

Now, taking these arguments in turn:

First, the matter of the TAHO list: Some researchers believe that the accuracy of this list can be disputed. To begin with, it contains fifty-eight names rather than fifty - and that in itself casts doubt on its reliability. Moreover, it is not an original, hand-written document compiled in England prior to *Lord Sidmouth*'s departure or at the time of disembarkation at Hobart. Rather, it appears to be a list that has been compiled from other records at some later time.⁶

Second, the matter of the CSO correspondence: On 15 July 1823, more than five months after *Lord Sidmouth* had unloaded the remainder of its cargo of convicts at Sydney and set sail again for England, Dr. Donald MACLEOD, the Police Magistrate at Parramatta (Sydney), wrote to Frederick GOULBURN, the Colonial Secretary for New South Wales:

*Sir, Miss BROMLEY, having made application to me for Elizabeth JENNINGS, a female convict per Ship 'Lord Sidmouth', at present at the Factory to proceed with her to Van Diemen's Land, I have the honour to request you will be pleased to acquiesce with the same. I have the Honor to be, Sir, your most humble servant, Donald Macleod.*⁷

The 'Miss Bromley' to whom Macleod was referring was a daughter of Dr. Edward Foord BROMLEY, then a high-ranking and well-respected government official at Hobart. Formerly a Royal Navy surgeon, he had been appointed to the position of 'Naval Officer, Hobart Town', in early 1820. As such, he was responsible for the collection of all harbour and shipping fees and also for the duty payable on the importation of restricted goods such as liquor and tobacco. In that important role he was, in effect, the Colonial Treasurer.⁸

Shortly after he had taken up his appointment at Hobart, his two adult daughters, Julia, 23, and Eliza, 17, both still single, came out from England to join him. They were excited to be in the colony where their father was much-admired. He was a fun-loving, jovial and popular man. He had been given a fine house to live in and enough convict servants to help him feel comfortable in it. He was well-paid and could afford to be indulgent towards his daughters.⁹

⁶ List: <http://portal.archives.tas.gov.au/menu.aspx?search=11>

⁷ Correspondence: Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1825, via 'Ancestry.com'; Item 4/3508, Page 671 and Item4/1768, page 168.

⁸ Dr. E.F. BROMLEY in *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online* at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/>

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After spending a little more than a year with her father at Hobart, one or other of the Bromley sisters (it has never been established whether it was Julia or Eliza) decided to travel to Sydney, presumably to visit some of the very good friends her much-travelled father had there.¹⁰

A week after receiving Macleod's request, Colonial Secretary Goulburn responded by writing to William SORELL who, as lieutenant-governor of Van Diemen's Land, was ultimately responsible for knowing how many convicts were in that colony and the whereabouts of all of them at any given time.

Goulburn's letter, dated 23 July 1823, reads:

*Sir, Elizabeth JENNINGS who came to Sydney some short time since with Miss Bromley, returns by the same present opportunity to Hobart Town in the service of the same Mistress. I have the Honor to be, &c, &c., F. Goulburn.*¹¹

On the surface, nothing could be plainer! Here, Goulburn clearly states that Jennings, '*who came to Sydney some short time since with her mistress*', was now returning with her to Hobart.

If what Goulburn told Sorell is accurate, there can be no doubt whatsoever that Jennings had been disembarked at Hobart on 10 February. But was it accurate? Had he, in fact, misunderstood Macleod? Macleod had *not* said that Jennings had accompanied Miss Bromley to Sydney, or even that Miss Bromley wanted to take her *back* to Hobart. He had said only that Miss Bromley wanted to *take* her to Hobart.

And, besides, why would Jennings have been at the Female Factory at Parramatta if the mistress with whom she had arrived from Hobart only a short time earlier was intending to take her back again? Is it not far more likely that Miss Bromley would have kept her servant with her during the visit?

Those who believe that Jennings was disembarked at Sydney rather than Hobart also point to the fact that, while there are newspaper announcements of Miss Bromley's arrival and departure from New South Wales, only the *departure* notice mentions that she was accompanied by a servant.

On 23 January 1823, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* carried this notice:

On Monday arrived from Hobart Town, the brig 'Beveron', Captain WILSON. She sailed the 13th instant, and brings a cargo of sundries. Passengers, Miss

¹⁰ Although there is some doubt about whether it was Julia BROMLEY or her younger sister, Eliza, who was visiting Sydney at this time, the evidence seems to suggest that it was the younger. See *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 3 July 1823, p.4.

¹¹ Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1825, via 'Ancestry.com': Item 4/3508, page 671.

*Bromley, Mr. and Mrs. GILWARY, Mr. LIVINGSTONE, Mr. READ, Mr. WILSON, and Mr. FERGUSON; together with several other persons.*¹²

There is no mention here that Miss Bromley arrived at Sydney with a servant. While it is very possible that the servants aboard *Beveron* are included among the ‘several other persons’, there is no proof of that.

Compare that notice to the one which appeared in the same paper on 3 July 1823 as Miss Bromley prepared to leave Sydney:

*Miss E. F. BROMLEY, leaving the Colony by an early Opportunity, requests Claims to be presented. Also, Elizabeth JENNINGS, Servant.*¹³

Here, there is no doubt. Miss Bromley was leaving Sydney accompanied by a servant, Elizabeth Jennings.

As it happened, the pair arrived back at Hobart aboard *Lusitania* on 27 July 1823. That event is noted in Jennings’s conduct record.¹⁴

Thus, there can be little doubt about the matter. The TAHO list is incorrect. Colonial Secretary Frederick Goulburn was in error. Convict Elizabeth Jennings did not arrive in Van Diemen’s Land until 27 July 1823.

Why did Miss Bromley choose Jennings as her servant, and what happened to her after her arrival at Hobart? It is tempting to think that, in making preparations to return to Hobart after her visit to Sydney, Miss Bromley might have searched long and hard for a suitable servant to accompany her. It is tempting to think – albeit very romantically – that she had gone to the Female Factory at Parramatta and found there a sweet and lovely young girl (an orphan maid, perhaps!) who had been treated shamefully by a cruel employer in England, tried for a crime she had not committed, and wrongfully convicted. It is tempting to think that a strong bond had been established immediately between the pair, that they had arrived at Hobart already as close as sisters, and that they had remained good friends for ever more.

But, alas, while Jennings was just a few years older than the Bromley sisters, they did not remain good friends for ever more. Very far from it, in fact!

Once they had reached Hobart, Miss Bromley appears to have had no further use for her servant. On 11 August 1823, just two weeks after her arrival on *Lusitania*, Jennings was charged by a Mr.

¹² *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 23 January 1823, p.2.

¹³ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 3 July 1823, p.4.

¹⁴ CON40/1/5, Image 169.

EMMETT, the master to whom she had been assigned, with being drunk and disorderly. She escaped with a reprimand.¹⁵

Two years later, on 14 February 1825, Jennings married a free settler, George PIPER, at Hobart.¹⁶ On 24 July 1829, a son, George Solomon PIPER, was born, but he is believed to have died in infancy.¹⁷

Thereafter, Jennings's life appears to have been a sad one. She was frequently before the courts for drunkenness. On 20 February 1847, a newspaper report of one of her many appearances before a magistrate for this offence read:

Elizabeth PIPER – ‘What, here again, Mrs. PIPER,’ said his Worship to this very old and frequent visitor? ‘Why, yes, unfortunately so, your Worship.’ ‘Guilty or Not Guilty of Constable HAWKE’s charge against you of being drunk?’ ... Elizabeth confessed her sin and produced the five shillings (about \$1.00) required for her free exit.¹⁸

On 3 December 1855, her husband, George Piper, passed away at Hobart.¹⁹ Six months earlier, he had prepared his Last Will and Testament. It reads (in part):

This is the Last Will and Testament of me, George PIPER, of Cimitiere Plains near George Town, farmer. I appoint H[...] LAWTON Esquire of George Town and George M. EDDIE of Launceston, Merchant, to be my Executors and my Trustees and I bequeath to them the whole of my estate and assets whatsoever, whether real or personal, in trust, first to pay to my dear wife Elizabeth who is afflicted in her mind the sum of thirty one shillings (about \$3.20) weekly for the rest of her natural life and second to hold my Estate as aforesaid for the benefit of one or more of the children of either of my brothers ...²⁰

Elizabeth (Jennings) Piper, ‘afflicted in her mind’, lived on until 1876. She died, at the age of 81, at the New Norfolk Asylum on 12 June 1876.²¹

¹⁵ CON40/1/5, Image 169.

¹⁶ Marriage: RGD36/790/1825.

¹⁷ Son: RGD32/4079/1831/32, New Norfolk;

¹⁸ *The Cornwall Chronicle*, 20 February 1847, p.144.

¹⁹ RGD35/1966/1855, Launceston.

²⁰ Will: TAHO AD960/1/4, 1857, Will No. 684, page 47.

²¹ RGD35/448/1876, New Norfolk.