

Females Strip-searched by Female Searchers

Terry Newman (2020)

When convicts of both genders arrived in Tasmania they were effectively strip-searched to record their physical description. This initial frisking would take place onboard ship upon its arrival in Hobart, and similar searches might reoccur at a gaol, house of correction, or police watchhouse. These latter watchhouse venues will also be explored here because they cannot be disconnected from the presence within them of female searchers who undertook strip-searches of members of their own gender - making this paper somewhat bi-focused. ¹

Nevertheless, upon arrival in port male or female prisoners were mustered on or below deck, and part of the procedure was for a clerk – often a literate convict – to match each individual with the ship’s indent. The clerk would begin by writing down the convict’s ‘statement’ of their crime(s) to compare their declaration with with official information to hand, noting where the convict was tried, length of sentence, martial status and religion. Also noted were reports of the prisoner’s behaviour in gaol, on a hulk and during the voyage; eg, ‘unruly’.

[Libraries Tasmania, Names Index - random entry]

This image of a blank convict record from the 1840s probation era indicates the extent of information gathered during the initial strip search and interrogation. The ship’s name, and voyage number if applicable [*Clyde* (4)] would be entered in the space at the top left. The clerk recorded the convict’s ‘native’ place of birth, their trade or occupation and their standard of literacy. This was shown using both letters ‘R & W’, for the ability to read and write – or one letter, or neither. Of interest, many of the convicts may well have only become literate during the voyage, because educational classes were often held along with compulsory religious attendance. Finally, while the fourteen boxes on the form appear self-explanatory, the information recorded might resemble this hypothetical extract:

Complexion	Head	Visage	Nose	Mouth	Chin
Pock-marked	Large	Long	Thin	Full	Dimpled

Strip searches were also used to record any uniquely individual markings, particularly scars and tattoos; hence the extra space given on the form to 'marks'. Fundamentally, before the advent of photography, this detailed information was used, for example, to identify absconding convicts. In addition, when matched with the name of their transportation ship, these details were valuable in an era when middle names were rare. Detailed information was a means of confirming which convict bearing identical first and family names [eg; 41 Ann Brown's and 270 John Brown's in Tasmania alone!] was entitled to indulgences such as tickets-of-leave, conditional pardons or free certificates either during or upon the expiration of their sentence.²

Naturally, strip searches occurred for other reasons. Apprehended prisoners recaptured after absconding were searched for stolen items and to remove objects they might use to harm themselves or others. But at a time when practically all officials, especially the police were males, who searched females? At times, of course, a male constable searched a female. For example, after a male and female couple visited a public house, and the male distracted the owner, a constable - who lived on the premises! - searched Eleanor Boyd and found a man's shirt hidden in her 'stays' [a boned bodice/corset]. On the other hand, not all male doctors were inclined to search females. In 1859 a Dr Blythe refused to perform a female search; 'coolly ... (saying) get some constable's wife to do it'.³

Of course, in Female Factories, other women, such as the Matron, were available to, at least, be present when females were being processed. That is, if they actually understood the task, which, in 1829, was reported to be 'carelessly performed' with regard to smuggling money into the Cascade Female Factory:

It is the duty of the Matron, or of her assistant, to search, closely and most minutely, each prisoner as she comes into the Factory, and it is her duty, also, to take charge, not only of any money she may find, but, also, of any article of finery or luxury, the prisoner may possess. Is this done? We know it is not...⁴

But what happened before females were transferred to the female factory from a town or country watchhouse or gaol? What follows explores these and other questions, and highlights contemporary concerns expressed in the Tasmanian press that relate to the type of watchhouse keeper employed, and presents some personal background on some of these male 'keepers'. Lastly, biographical information on certain convicts and female searchers appears, where detected.

Indicating local interest in policing methods used 'at home', in November 1817 the *Hobart Town Gazette* reprinted an item detailing the latest revision of the nightwatch into an over four hundred-strong 'City Patrol'.⁵ Nevertheless, the use of 'nightwatch' patrols during Hobart's early years was not universally appreciated. In part, because police personnel were negatively described as of 'all sorts'; including convicts holding tickets-of-leave or conditional pardons.⁶ For example, one constable was dismissed in 1827 after a 'most scandalous transaction':

A respectable female, Mrs. Jarvis, of the *Union Tavern*, Campbell-street'... was going to Dr. Scott, to call his assistance to a poor woman, then labouring under accumulated [labour] pangs... she was met by Constable Dutton, who was in a state of intoxication, and [was] by him, knocked down several times, her clothes torn, and, otherwise inhumanly maltreated after which she was shamefully dragged to a common watchhouse'.⁷

For this assault Constable William Dutton was dismissed, and his police salary forfeited. Originally from Hargrave, Cheshire, he certainly fits the 'all sorts' mould having at age 23 years been transported for stealing. He arrived in Hobart in 1823 on the *Commodore Hayes*, upon which he had been

'orderly'. He had been sentenced to serve seven years transportation, yet by 1826 he was made a constable, despite being a butcher by trade. However, in June 1827 he was found guilty of harbouring a female convict, and had to serve eighteen months on the chain gang. Moreover, his convict record is littered with other crimes. Including being dismissed in 1832 as Hobart's pound keeper for 'making away' with four goats and extorting money for their return; likewise with some cows! In 1833 he was sentenced to seven years at Port Arthur for stealing eleven fowls. In 1838, after he had obtained his ticket-of-leave, he even broke into the Richmond Police Station, for which he served time on the road gang. Dutton finally gained his free certificate in 1840, yet faced trial again in 1844, but was discharged.⁸

Dutton's career makes clear that while many watchhouse constables were free men or ex-soldiers, it was equally common to employ ex-convicts or even convicts still serving their sentence. The latter may have obtained their ticket-of-leave or conditional pardon, which granted them limited freedom. Alternatively, some convicts gained positions as constables as a reward for helping to capture escaped convicts. However, while convicts might work as constables at watchhouses after obtaining these limited indulgences their status could be suspended or revoked for bad behaviour. Such as 'neglecting to closely confine a female' in the watchhouse – for which the relevant constable received 48 hours on the treadmill.⁹

As might be expected, complaints were made to the local press critical of the personnel involved with Tasmanian nightwatch patrols.¹⁰ One letter writer felt that 'the great folks' monopolised the protection of the police, leaving other parts of Hobart unguarded. The other letter added that 'respectable' males did not welcome being accosted by such unsavoury constables. This press report appeared in November 1828, and reported a robbery which even then suggested the need for a female searcher at the watchhouse to help control other females. After learning of the robbery, the journalist wrote that;

A constable was despatched to the house behind the Military Barracks, and the (convict) servants were suspected; In bringing the female servant to the watchhouse, the constable found out she had some connection with one of Mr. Knopwood's servant named Simpson... Simpson has been sentenced to 6 months in the chain gang; and the girl, whose name is Simmons, and whose violence in the [police] office had nearly defeated the whole of the constabulary, was sentenced to 14 days on bread and water, and one year in the crime class, which latter part of her sentence was doubled in consequence of her subsequent disgraceful conduct.¹¹

Sarah Simmons' behaviour – see brief biography below – confirms, not least, that apprehended females were kept in male-dominated watchhouses. The year that she was sentenced to spend in the 'crime class' would have been at the Cascade Female Factory, where work was extracted from the prisoners, many of whom had merely become pregnant. At these 'factories' a three-tier ranking system applied, with each level altering the harshness of work assignment undertaken. The first class were those with good behaviour and who might work as cooks, etc, or find external employment. The Second class, which performed such tasks as sewing, were those who had committed minor offences or their behaviour had improved enough to be taken out of the Third or 'crime class'. This was to be Sarah's class, and so she would have performed one of the harshest tasks labouring at the washtub in the laundry.¹²

Meantime, regarding the robbery involving Sarah Simmons, perhaps she might have responded less violently if a female had been present? Perhaps not; because we can read her convict record, which suggests that she had a temper. And, in common with countless convicts, she undoubtedly craved her freedom. That is, she absconded at least five times; even once from a watchhouse in 1833, as described below.¹³ But who was Sarah Simmons?

From Somerset in Dorset, Sarah Simmons arrived on the *Sovereign* in April 1827, along with 80 other convicts. She was to serve a seven year sentence for stealing a £2 note, and some coins, from her fellow lodger.¹⁴ Indicating her intentions, she absconded in December just eight months after her arrival in Tasmania. Regarding the supposed barracks robbery charges, the magistrate punished Sarah for her behaviour at the watchhouse and added an additional year to her original sentence for 'gross violence'; this for 'striking a witness' who gave evidence against her!

Over time Sarah's life course did not change much. She repeatedly absconded and served more time in the punishment cells on bread and water. She was found intoxicated twice, and in October 1833 she received two months in solitary and hard labour for 'forcibly breaking out of the lock-up at the police office'. Finally, in March 1834 Sarah was found drunk again and was to be 'detained in the Factory until the 5 April next when she becomes free'. After this nine month sentence Sarah's record remains blank; her free certificate, although mentioned in the press on 8 April 1834 is not shown on her convict record.¹⁵

Turning to the buildings known as watchhouses, evidence exists of the state of accommodation and method of control used at them. For example, a 'log building', designed by John Lee Archer, was erected as a watchhouse at Carlton, and in Hobart two watchhouses were designed by architect, James Blackburn, himself an ex-convict. Using convict labour Blackburn was responsible for the two buildings that still stand today. They were both built to at the head of what is St John's Avenue, Hobart. Although now modified, one of the cottages was intended for constables, and - showing a degree of concern - the other contained two separate rooms, one each for male and female prisoners.¹⁶

However, a critical description of watchhouses generally, which mentions females, appeared in June 1836. Admittedly, it is from *Bent's News*, a newspaper opposed to Governor Arthur's regime;

We have been requested by several persons to call the attention of the authorities to the very shameful state of the Watch-houses. It appears, that all persons, who are taken up during the Saturday night, and are locked up in these dungeons, are confined therein from that period, until Monday morning, so that they have to undergo all the unspeakable privations of two whole nights—long, cold, and frosty as they are, before they are released. Such human beings are thus treated far worse than the very brute creation! Even horses have a warm stable, and straw for their bed. But these wretched fellow creatures have neither a warm habitation nor fire, much less straw or any other beds to repose on during these long nights, but the cold damp boards or ground to lie down upon, with the piercing cold winds blowing through them in this miserable state, really, such things are a disgrace to any country, much less to a free, British Colony.

... To witness the squalid and trembling appearance of these unfortunate people, after they are released, and for many days subsequently, beggars all description—enough to cause sympathy in the most iron-hearted. Many of the inmates of these watchhouses are confined in a state of intoxication, with others of more sober habits, for more trifling offences, but who are all hurled together in one common dungeon. The watchhouse keeper is comfortable, with his great coat and at his fire-side, hearing the miserable groans of his inmates, cooped and locked up in a place not fit for wild beasts. The whole system of watchhouse keeping is radically bad. What protection is there to any respectable man, who may be dragged through the streets, right or wrong, by some ignorant or vindictive constable, or to an unfortunate female placed therein?¹⁷

At least, females rated a passing references, but while the state of such buildings drew criticism, who had control over them was also debated. That is, not only were the watchhouses criticised for their poor accommodation, the use of single males as opposed to married men as watchhouse keepers came in for support or complaint. Here are two examples, albeit by persons who used pseudonyms rather than their real names. The first from '*Emigrant*' wrote about a country watchhouse:

Longford for years has single men... such a case where a woman is brought to the watchhouse to be stripped and searched for stolen property, does not occur once in the seven years ... [Don't] say that women are stripped and searched by the single watch-house keeper, it's not true, it's never done. When there is a single watch house keeper, and a woman is brought on such a charge, there is at least two, if not more Constables are present, and if the Superintendent is to be had, he is send for; then there is a woman brought in who strips her out of [sight] the Constables and who hands her clothes to the police to be searched.

Emigrant then goes on to give an almost Hogarthian description of the female convicts and perhaps fails to notice that he undermines his claim of 'seven years' between such searches. He does so in answer to his own question: 'who are the women brought to the watchhouse for drunkenness?'

They are those who for years are frequenters of all the watchhouses in the colony, whose faces are seamed with cuts and burns, their noses distorted, and teeth knocked out, from the continued dissipation and inveterate tobacco smoking. These are the objects of disgust who exercise power over the single watchhouse keeper of the present day.

The other pseudonymous letter writer styled himself '*Nemo*'. Writing regarding Westbury watchhouse, it must be admitted that *Nemo* was also not greatly concerned with the female convicts. He was, nevertheless, not in favour of single males as constables:

It is quite possible some respectable female servant may be made the victim of some petty tyranny, and be incarcerated in this watchhouse. Picture to yourself Mr. Editor, the feelings of that person on finding herself walled in from the outer world, and left to the mercy of a single man, without one of her own sex near her, to offer her any consolation, or share her own comforts and apartments...¹⁸

Apparently, Oatlands also only had a single man as its constable – so there too, at least in 1878, a 'respectable woman' had to be called in if a female needed to be searched. And in 1885 a constable was appointed as watchhouse keeper in Oatlands, with his mother to act as female searcher.¹⁹

In October 1844 the government received a report from the visiting magistrates on the state of prison administration at the Cascade Female Factory and at Brickfields. Basically, the facilities were found to be 'dilapidated' and 'incommodious', and amongst other critical comments – particularly railing against females freely smoking! The magistrates also wrote:

they now communicate with regret, the fact of there being no female officer attached to the prison to receive or attend to the female prisoners, consequently the gaol regulation, which orders prisoners committed under certain circumstances to be searched, must be altogether disobeyed, or the duly performed by males; so also in the event of sudden illness or other emergency the female prisoners can only, under the present organisation of the prison rules, have the assistance of, or be attended by, persons of the opposite sex. There has not been, so far as the information of the Visiting Magistrates goes, attached at any time to the gaol a female officer. There are at present in the Gaol three female prisoners.²⁰

Before detailing information on particular individuals, some stories relating to female searchers can be presented; eg; dealing with domestic violence, another an attempted suicide, and another regarding a child. Such stories expand the role, duties and performance of the female searchers, and mention some female convicts.

It seems that the performance of the male constables was not always according to best practice, to say the least. This brief mention of a strip search in the *Colonial Times* does not include names, however, the journalist wrote:

We call the special attention of our readers to the account given ... of the treatment to which a respectable young woman has been subjected in this city. On enquiry we find that she had been lately married to a prisoner, and was proceeding [from Launceston] with her husband in a vessel to Victoria. While sailing down the bay, the ship is boarded by convict constables, she is charged with being a transported offender illegally at large. Her denial is of no avail. She is dragged on shore, and stripped naked by a female searcher. After much entreaty on her part, a respectable trades-man is sent for, who testifies to her character, and at last she is released by order of the Police Magistrate - but redress there is none. ²¹

In 1855 the incumbent Cascade Female Factory female searcher, [given as] Margaret Witherington, was involved in an inquest.²² A prisoner named Elizabeth Lettuce, or Lettice, aged 49 years old, died there overnight on the 24 October, having been admitted five days earlier, albeit not for the first time. Described as a 'servant', Elizabeth had been charged with 'vagrancy in Murray Street, Hobart', and she received two months hard labour, which would have meant at the washtub doing laundry for the Factory's linen and for external clients. She had also been at the Factory previously for drunkenness, and, of interest, at the hospital for a 'running sore' on her neck.

Regarding the searcher's role at the Factory, it was noted at the inquest that when each prisoner was received she was 'undressed, and goes into a bath in the dressing room, where she puts on clean clothes.' And Margaret Witherington also explained that that 'all prisoners passed through her hands', but added that she had no recollection of Elizabeth's medical condition. In her cell Elizabeth apparently performed her required labour of six hours' of needlework, and ate her rations of bread and gruel without complaint.

On the night of the 23rd October, the male Factory guard explained that he was required to regularly patrolled the prison, but was not authorised to 'unlock a female ward' unless unaccompanied by a female. He also reported that, on his rounds, Elizabeth had responded with her name and ship [untraced], so he had called out his 'All's well' every fifteen minutes. Also other occupants of neighbouring cells reported only hearing slight groaning from Elizabeth, or nothing at all. However, on the morning of 24th Elizabeth was found to have died in her sleep, with a handkerchief over her face - apparently not from her neck ailment. After an autopsy the visiting doctor declared that the sore on her neck was not sufficient to cause death, but that she had 'congestion of the brain', causing 'serious apoplexy' and a 'visitation from God'.

Amongst many such sad stories of the females arrested and searched this brief item has a happier ending – although one wonders if the maid’s job awaited her after this incident. Mary Delaney, - then a mother of seven children, three living with her - worked as a chambermaid at the *Launceston Hotel* [Mr & Mrs Carpenter licensees]. In April 1859 she was accused of stealing two £50 notes from their bedroom, which she denied and was discharged. But after this legal victory she brought an action against her employer for ‘false imprisonment’. During the detailed newspaper reporting of the case Mary declared that, as a maid, she did indeed enter the bedroom, but added that when accused of the theft:

they took me to my house, and searched it; they then took me to the watch-house on the Tread-mill Green; I lived near the Catholic Church, at the other side of the town; after being booked at the watch house I was taken into a cell, stripped, and searched by the female searcher; I remained in the cell all that day and that night; on the Saturday morning I was taken, with more prisoners, through the streets to the police office; ... [there] the Magistrate, Mr Dowling, told me I was remanded [seven days] until Mrs Carpenter came home [from Ross]; I was then taken to the female factory and I was searched again.²³

The time spent in goal was the crux of Mary’s complaint. And when cross-examined Grace Carpenter admitted that she had, in fact, taken the two £50 notes with her to Ross to keep them safe, but had failed to tell her husband about her plan. However, even after hearing this, the jury bogged down over Mary’s supposed ‘trespass’ into the Carpenters’ bedroom, and failed to agree. So the judge sent them back to deliberate further and after another hour, they returned their verdict in Mary’s favour to the value of £10 compensation. At least she received some redress for having been strip-searched twice!

In May 1863 a Hobart-based constable was stopped in the street by a woman:

saying that her husband had beaten her severely, and asked him to lock her up. He recommended her to go home, but she refused to do so and said that she would follow him wherever he went. She did follow him for more than an hour and he then locked her up. [The court was told] that the woman’s husband was a very bad character and in the habit of beating her severely. [The constable] understood from the female searcher at the watch house that the woman's body and limbs were covered with bruises.²⁴

One wonders what the searcher thought, but because the woman eventually pleaded guilty to ‘disturbing the peace’, [annoying the constable?] the ‘Bench had no option but to impose a penalty’. The Magistrate, at least, said that he would ‘fix it at the lowest amount’, and so ordered the woman to ‘pay a fine of 5 shillings or, in default, be imprisoned for 12 hours.’ Hopefully, she was able to pay the fine; and [as an aside] two months later better legal protection was enacted, making it illegal to commit aggravated assault on a woman.²⁵

Another story connected to a female searcher concerned an attempted suicide. In February 1877 the *Tasmanian*, a Launceston-based newspaper, wrote that:

A woman named Eliza Burke, aged about 50 years, jumped into the [Tamar] river opposite the Marine Hotel, but she wisely caught hold of the painter of a boat, and held on until two men ... went to her assistance and pulled her into a boat. There they detained her, sending a messenger to the Police Station to state what was the matter. Sub-Inspector Sullivan made arrangements for her conveyance to the Police Station in a very roomy vehicle, Woollens' float. On arrival at the Station the female searcher undressed Mrs Burke, wrapped her in blankets and gave her a good supply of tea and bread. As the woman seems to be a stranger in town, and has been knocking about drinking for two or

three weeks, it is fortunate for her she has got into such good quarters. Her bath is not likely to do her any harm.

While the tone is mocking, at least the female searcher provided some tea and sympathy, as this next story attests, albeit relating to a child. In 1881 the *Mercury* adds another dimension to the role of a female searcher:

A bright, smiling, innocent babe, the infant boy of Alfred Woods, carriage springmaker, and Catherine Woods, his wife, has in its first five weeks of existence experienced desertion from its mother and drunken oblivion from its father. Yesterday afternoon a woman ... brought an infant to the police station, stating that the mother had placed it in her arms at a public house, left her on some excuse, and had never returned. ... the little creature's parents lived in Macquarie-street, at the back of the Denison Hotel, [where] the mother was absent, the father drunk, and no person in the house capable of taking care of the child. And so it was taken back to the police station, and placed in the kindly charge of the female searcher at the gaol. In the mean-time its mother, Catherine Woods, had been brought to the station far gone in liquor, and locked up on a charge of being drunk and disorderly.²⁶

One last story suggests that this particular female convict was searched multiple times, with at least some mention the strip-search by the female searcher.²⁷ As background, in 1852 Ann Donovan, aged 24, an illiterate laundress and housemaid from Cork, Ireland was sentenced for stealing to seven years transportation. She arrived in Tasmania on the *Midlothian* in February 1853, and her convict record shows several instances of absconding, with various periods of imprisonment and hard labour. Nevertheless, her sentence expired and so she obtained her free certificate in May 1859; but her interaction with the law was not over.

She was sentenced several times for repeated assaults and is reported to have become a 'notorious pickpocket'. In addition, she was found guilty of not paying child maintenance – to her Aunt who cared for Ann's child - from whom Ann stole a 'print dress' after visiting the family!²⁸ But these, and other instances aside, the explicit reference to female search came in January 1868. Ann was charged with stealing 'less than £5' from a purse after meeting a man in public house. And so she was searched by Harriet McKenzie, who discovered 16s 2½d on her person, which Ann claimed as her own. However, she received two months imprisonment for this charge. After which she was found - in April - to be 'idle and disorderly', and pick-pocketing again, which earned her six months imprisonment. Shortly after which she was guilty of being drunk and using bad language, and fined £2 or face two months in prison – a judgement, no doubt, which she could not pay, perhaps a common reason for females to enter the Factory. Nonetheless, a final case of pick-pocketing can be note; in November 1872, Ann stole a wallet containing two sovereigns, but when searched only had 14s 6d left and spent two months in prison.

Searchers at Watchhouses

Turning now to locating information on particular 'female searchers', where possible. This is made difficult because the generic term 'searcher' was often used instead of a given name. Even if a name was mentioned the female concerned was [all too frequently] only tagged with her husband's family name as 'Mrs X or Y', without first names. Similarly, constables were often only identified by their family name, which made searching for, say, their marriage, if any, difficult. Either way, in watchhouse locations with married constables the spouse was generally designated to perform the strip searches - often without pay.

RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF NEW
NORFOLK.

WANTED a CONSTABLE, a Married Man without encumbrance, to act as Watchhouse Keeper, and take charge, and keep clean, the Office, Watchhouse, and Municipal Buildings. Wife to act as female searcher, and attend to female prisoners. Pay, 5s. per day and allowance for clothing, with quarters, fuel, and light.

Applications will be received up to TUESDAY, the 23rd day of March instant. Personal attendance necessary.

Dated at New Norfolk this 12th of March, 1880.

W. A. B. JAMIESON.
Warden.

2672

Mercury, 15 March 1880, p.1

Appearing as it did on the Ides of March perhaps this advertisement for a Watchhouse Keeper was something for wives and women generally to be wary of. That is, the text reads that the ‘constable, a married man without encumbrances’ [children?] was to ‘take charge, and keep clean, the office, watchhouse and municipal buildings’. However, the advertisement goes on to state: ‘Wife to act as female searcher and attend to the female prisoners.’ And one suspects that the ‘keep clean’ duties would probably fall upon the wife! True, the ‘perks’ of the job included clothing - but probably only for the male - and other benefits including some form of accommodation [‘quarters’], fuel, for cooking and heating, and light, probably using whale oil. Another case, was Sophia Cole, at the Oatlands watchhouse, who was expected to ‘cook for the inmates’ – see table.

Despite the lack of first names, it has been possible to gather some names of the women who strip searched other women. But because there are numerous vague mentions in the press – without any names attached - several female tragedies such as suicides and infanticides were often given only cursory treatment by the press and regrettably cannot be fully detailed here. Although, one case is included because it received some attention because it refers to the use of single men as constables and of a still birth in custody.

This largely chronological table records the full names of female searchers and their spouse, where information was discovered. While often vague and incomplete, deeper personal research of these women was not the intention here. Perhaps others can provide additional material?

Female searchers and spouses [= uncertain]

Searcher & Spouse	Location and condensed remarks
Rebecca Donovan	Launceston(?): Appointed; <i>Cornwall Chronicle</i> , 23/5/1853, p.2.
Caroline McGuire [Constable or Detective John McGuire]	Hobart: [see text] <i>Mercury</i> , 18/10/1854, p.2, 7/1/1862, p.3 [Salary increased to £35, but on 6/5/1862, p.2 reduced to £20 and replaced by Harriet McKenzie] [also appointment to Cascade Female Factory; <i>Courier</i> 17/9/1856 p.2]
Mrs McGuinness	Hobart; [<i>Tas. Daily News</i> , 31/8/1855, p.3.] - assaulted when searching another female at Macquarie Street watch-house].
Margaret Witterington [perhaps one ‘t’ or ‘h’ ?]	Hobart: [Cascade Female Factory; <i>Colonial Times</i> , 29 /10/1855 p.3, where she had searched a prisoner who died overnight]

Mrs Lyall	Bridgewater; [<i>Tas. Daily News</i> , 5/8/1857, p.2.] - found money hidden in a female's 'arm pit' [<i>Mercury</i> , 5/8/1857, p.3].
Mrs Sullivan [Mrs McAnley]	Launceston: Wife of police sub-inspector McAnley to be female searcher after Mrs Sullivan resigned. [<i>Cornwall Chronicle</i> , 21/11/1860.p.3.] - [£35pa <i>Examiner</i> , 29/4/1858, p.3.
Mrs Warman [Mary Warman, wife of Constable George Warman; perhaps ex-convict Worman? ²⁹ <i>Mercury</i> , 29/7/1863.p.3; CON 33/1/39]	Bellerive: Council voted £5 gratuity as searcher, 'laundress and caretaker' of Council Chambers [<i>Mercury</i> , 30/11/1863 p.3] [<i>Mercury</i> ,1/1/1865, p.2 – paid £5 from police reward and superannuation fund]
Mrs McAuliffe [NB: birth notice showing Joanna McAuliffe, wife of Constable Denis McAuliffe, [RGD 33/1/39. No. 319]	Launceston: [<i>Cornwall Chronicle</i> , 4/7/1863, p.5.] Council criticises 'preposterous' female searcher payment - see text.
Mrs Sophia Cole; Constable Edward or Edmund Cole, Sub-inspector Oatlands	Oatlands: [<i>Mercury</i> , 16/1/1864 p.2, 1/6/1864, p.2] [Because her 'duty was one of an unpleasant nature', Sophia sought 'compensation for the time past, and also a small salary for the time to come.']. Granted £15pa for also 'having to cook for inmates'. [<i>Mercury</i> , 4/2/1864, p.2].
Mrs Edwards	Chudleigh: <i>Examiner</i> , 8/10/1864, p.3 [Searcher finds stolen cheques hidden in female's bosom]
Elizabeth White [Constable John Ephraim White]	Hamilton/Oatlands: <i>Mercury</i> , 31/8/1864, p.2 [locate a stolen 'mantle cloak' under the prisoner's stays - boned bodice]. [<i>Mercury</i> , 7/12/83, p.3; searcher's post vacant; Constable White's wife had died; Miss Alice White replaced her [<i>Mercury</i> , 10/1/1884, p.3. - a sister or daughter?]
Mrs Newitt, wife of Constable Newitt, Rokeby. Harriet McKenzie	Clarence: [<i>Tasmanian News</i> , 28/1/1866,p.2, paid £6pa <i>Mercury</i> , 31/12/1886 p.2. <i>Mercury</i> , 28/8/1899 p.3] Hobart: [<i>Mercury</i> , 2/5/1866 p.2] <i>Mercury</i> , 4/2/1868, £20 salary passed by City Council] [<i>Mercury</i> , 15/11/1873, p.3],[<i>Mercury</i> , 9/5/1876,p.2] despite pleading an 'impoverished position' she failed to gain a gratuity after her dismissal.
Mrs Whitefield	Campbell Town: [<i>Mercury</i> ,1/6/1867,p.2] [nb; a male Constable also searched the female for matches after she set fire to a fowl house]
Mrs Elizabeth Eddie	Location uncertain: [<i>Examiner</i> , 26/6/1869, p.3, <i>Weekly Examiner</i> , 25/3/1876 p.14, 24 June 1869, p.3 [Found money concealed in boots of one suspect and another wearing a dress purchased with stolen money, she had a stolen knife]
Mrs Newall Mrs Day [wife, Sergeant Day] Mrs Syme	Bothwell: paid £2 as searcher [<i>Mercury</i> , 12/12/1870 p.2] Clarence: Mrs Day to replace Mrs Syme resigned. [<i>Mercury</i> , 29/5/1871, p.3.]
Isabella Vickers [Constable John Vickers?] Mrs Hickson [NB: Sub-Inspector, Buckland, Richard Hickson died [<i>Mercury</i> ,28/7/1890, p.1]	Hobart: [<i>Weekly Examiner</i> , 25/3/1876, p.2 – selected from seven applicants] [also <i>Mercury</i> , 12/7/1876, p.2.] Spring Bay: Wife of Buckland police sub-inspector sought £10 for 'ten years' allowance'; Councillors queried why she had not claimed 'before this', claim lapsed; [<i>Mercury</i> , 19/7/1877, p.2]; Searcher 'dispensed with ... inconsequence

Mrs Green (and Mother Green) NB: perhaps not same as 1891]	of the withdrawal of the police subsidy' <i>Tasmanian</i> , 2/3/1889. p.2] Location uncertain: Constable Green's wife 'appointed female searcher, for the performance of which duty she be allowed one fire and one gaslight.' [Tas. Evening News, 22/8/1878 p.2]
Mrs Pyke [Constable John Pyke]	Swansea: <i>Mercury</i> , 5/6/1880 p.3, Council advertises salary of £5pa, <i>Mercury</i> , 11/1/1888, p.3 - Constable & Mrs Pyke of watchhouse at Kearneys Bogs, Lake Leake, resign; police 'sub-inspector' to replace him; whose wife becomes female searcher]
[Unnamed]	Swansea: <i>Mercury</i> , 5/6/1880, p.3 [Advertise to pay £5pa to wife of next watchhouse keeper]
Mrs Beard	Spring Bay: [Mercury, 8/7/1883 p.4, wife of Constable J. W. Beard] [Dispensed with due to withdrawal of government police subsidy <i>Tasmanian</i> , 2 March 1889, p.20]
Mrs Ann Mitchell	Midlands: [Tasmanian, 7/3/1885, p.4. [After 20 applications Robert Mitchell 's wife new searcher; also <i>Mercury</i> , 11/6/1885 p.3] Given as Oatlands [<i>Tas News</i> ,16/6/1885, p.2]
Mrs Rainsford [Constable Henry or Edward Rainsford]	Tunnack: [<i>Mercury</i> , 11 April 1885 p.4] [Buckland Constable Rainsford resigns as does his wife as searcher]
Mrs Murray [E. Mayhew] [Constable George Mayhew]	Clarence: Murray six month appointment; <i>People's Advocate</i> , 6/8/1885, p.2; Mrs E. Mayhew submitted an account for previous six months; because husband relocated to Rokeby [<i>Mercury</i> , 1/6/1885 p.3, 31/7/1885 p.2.]
Mrs Cleary	West Coast: <i>Daily Telegraph</i> , 8/11/1895, p.3 [Mrs Cleary resigns as searcher]
Mrs Sarah Webster	Hobart: [<i>Tas. News</i> , 27/1/1885, p.2, <i>Mercury</i> , 17/12/1895, p.5] [£10 voted upon her retirement due to 'new arrangement at the watchhouse' upon the death of her husband]
Mrs Gavitt [Detective Gavitt]	Hobart: [<i>Mercury</i> , 11 January 1898, p.4. [unpaid for two years, then paid £16 -see text] Gavitt couple replaced by Mr & Mrs Pope.
Sarah Ann Green [NB: perhaps not same as 1878]	Launceston: Appointed <i>Examiner</i> , 18/2/1891, p.2 ['Sarah Green, searched two prisoners ... the elder prisoner had a sovereign in her mouth.' [<i>Examiner</i> , 26/9/1891, p.4]
Annie Isabel Beavis [Mrs J. R. Smith]	Location Uncertain: [<i>North East Advertiser</i> , 25/7/1905, p.3] Beavis appointed 'officer cleaner and female searcher; replaced Mrs J. R. Smith resigned] [Annie I. Beavis, died aged 56, <i>Mercury</i> , 5/6/1922 p.1]

As mentioned, this table may be sketchy, but what follows at least gives some additional information about the biographies of female searchers.

Caroline Rudman-Watkins-McGuire, is the name of a frequently female searcher. A relative who has written about her has it that Caroline Rudman [identified as his 'grandmother'], arrived in Hobart in 1832 and died in 1860 'possibly 45 years'; elsewhere her death is given as 6 March 1864.³⁰ This would put her birth as 1811 or 1815: For example, she was certainly employed as a female searcher

from 1841. If born in 1811 this would make her between 26-30 years old. Nonetheless, Caroline she was married two years after her arrival to William Lewin Watkins in September 1834.

Caroline's link to the frisking of females probably started because William Watkins is shown on the marriage register as a constable.³¹ Of interest, William was himself an ex-convict. He was tried in 1830 at Worcester, aged 28, and transported for life for forgery on the *David Lyon*. Perhaps because his hulk report was 'good' and his ship's surgeon wrote that he was 'well behaved onboard', this helped him gain his position in the police. Yet of some concern for his subsequent marriage, he stated on arrival in Tasmania that he was married with three children; only to be declared a 'widower' when he married Caroline in 1834. This was four years before he obtained his conditional pardon in August 1838 and a free pardon in July 1840. However, he died of a liver complaint in September 1850.

Caroline Rudman-Watkins obviously remarried to a man named McGuire. Their marriage is recorded in August 1852 between constable John Macguire (sic) and Caroline Watkins, but their ages are shown as 'about 21', which is problematic.³² It is under this name that Caroline is recorded most often in the press as Mrs McGuire, female searcher, from 1841, and she also appears in the employment list of the Female Factory at Cascade in June 1843.

An example of a female searcher's thoroughness occurred in June 1855.³³ Caroline McGuire was called to a public house where a pair of convicts were suspected of stealing a double-barrelled pistol, worth 10 shillings, from a shoemaker in Macquarie Street. Both women had entered the shoemaker's house and one asked him to light a fire, but he refused. A struggle with her ensued and she 'threw me on the floor', the shoemaker explained. The two women then left the kitchen, which was when he noticed that the pistol was missing from the mantelpiece and called the police. The constable arrested both convicts and Mrs McGuire gave her evidence at court:

I am female searcher at the police station house; I searched the prisoner ... and found concealed in her bosom the double barrelled pistol now produced; when found the prisoner said it was given to her by the other prisoner.

This weapon must have been quite small, a double-barrelled derringer perhaps?

The role of female searcher saw them involved with some sad situations. In 1854 Caroline McGuire was involved in a court case. A female convict named Bridget Kenny, aged 20 when transported for seven years in 1850, gave birth in 1854. Even before this she was found 'wandering with men' and bore an earlier child in 1852 at Cascade Female Factory. However, the second child was found on a 'dung heap' behind an hotel. Bridget was later seen carrying a bundle and attempting to hide behind a fence with it. When arrested she was taken to the watchhouse where, in her evidence, Mrs McGuire stated that she searched Bridget and noted that she had recently given birth. And that the 'bundle' carried clothes, wet from attempting to clean blood from them.

A doctor confirmed a recent birth and that the child had died of suffocation. But after hearing all the evidence, including Bridget's claim that someone had taken to baby from her, the jury decided that Kenny was only guilty of 'concealing' the birth, not of murder. In sentencing the judge said that he 'never in his life saw so narrow an escape. If the jury had found her guilty she would have been hanged.' Instead Bridget was sentenced to two years hard labour. After which she was 'despatched to domestic service', but also spent more time at Brickfields and Cascade before gaining her condition pardon in 1847 – only to faced several more legal trials, plus more at time as Cascade [ending in 1860].³⁴

In September 1855 Caroline McGuire was 'assaulted' at the watchhouse. The perpetrator was 29-year old Scottish-lass, Mary McQueen, also known as Tait, after her husband James Tait, whom she

married in Edinburgh in 1850. Transported for stealing a blanket Mary arrived in Hobart, with two children, on the *Anna Maria* in 1852. Her convict record shows that Mary was repeatedly drunk and gave birth to twins in 1853 – only one survived. She obtained a ticket-of-leave in May 1855, only to be arrested for ‘exposing her person’ in August. For which she received 14 days solitary. Then she is recorded as drunk in September 1855, when her clash with the female searcher took place. Apparently Mary refused to be undressed by Caroline and threw a water jug at her head causing Caroline to fall and hurt her hand. For this assault, which Mary argued was an accident, the sentence was three months hard labour at the Cascades Female Factory. Thereafter, Mary suffered several more bouts of drunkenness, resulting in periods of hard labour. She also gave birth to another child at Brickfields in 1857, shortly after which she gained her certificate of freedom in 1858. She died a pauper at Cascade Factory in 1873.³⁵

Caroline was, on behalf of her own family, at least once on the other side of the court. In January 1857 Caroline was involved in an incident with her daughter’s husband named only as Popham – who was described as ‘once a Port Arthur constable’ - making this association with police constables like mother and daughter. Nonetheless, the *Courier* reported that:

From the evidence of a man named Taylor, servant to Popham, a squabble ensued on the evening of the 9th of the present month, when, from all that could be gathered, defendant struck plaintiff with a piece of wood. Defendant [Caroline] then entered into a long; defence, enumerating many of the acts of violence committed by plaintiff,- threatening to shoot his wife, gambling, stopping out all night, and other irregularities, including excessive drinking, and abuse of his wife, her daughter. The bench appeared to regret the introduction of this family affair, but eventually ordered Mrs. Maguire to give surety in a personal bond of ten pounds to keep the peace for three months towards complainant,³⁶

Obviously, this ‘regret’ from the bench was a sad reflection of the contemporary assessment of domestic violence. Another reflection on the ‘feminine’ role [supposedly not suited to males] can be briefly interspersed. In June 1864 the *Mercury* inserted an item about a lost 5 year old girl ‘picked up by the constable on duty in Warwick-street. The little girl had evidently strayed from her home and was too frightened when brought to the watchhouse, to tell the name of her parents. She was taken charge of by the female searcher.’³⁷ Unfortunately, no follow up story appeared.

Caroline McGuire was also associated with children, but certainly not with a happy ending. In March 1862 she has her part in separating a mother from her husband and at least one child. The *Mercury* reported the incident under the heading ‘Begging Alms’:

Ellen Carrington was charged with vagrancy, and with begging alms in Liverpool-street. The defendant pleaded not guilty, when Detective Morley proved the case, and stated that the female searcher had found nine pence in coppers in the possession of the defendant's child. The defendant got her living by begging, and was a married woman. She was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour.³⁸

Also in 1862 Caroline was ‘dismissed’ from her work at the police watchhouse by the Hobart Council, because in that era local municipalities controlled local police. However, the reason for her dismissal are unknown, even to her, and so Caroline lodged a petition for reinstatement:

Alderman Cook presented a petition from Mrs. McGuire the female searcher setting forth that she had fulfilled the duties of the office since 1841 up to the present time, and she believed with satisfaction and she therefore respectfully requested to be reinstated in the office at the salary proposed to be given to her successor.

The petition was accompanied with certificates of character from His Honor the Chief Justice, the Attorney General, Mr. Knight, Q. C. and others.

Alderman Seabrook after remarking on the respectability of Mrs. McGuire and the satisfactory manner in which she had fulfilled her duties, moved that the petition be referred to the Police Committee. Alderman Pearce seconded the motion which was put and passed.

Caroline McGuire, she did gain some support from the Hobart Council's Police Committee. Although 'they could not recommend the [reinstatement] application... they thought Mrs. McGuire should have eight weeks' pay.' While granting this small redundancy, they apparently also judged her in relation to her husband's position. That is; 'Mr McGuire had a situation in the Rural Police, and... he had an excellent house to live in, he did not like to part man and wife, and he did not see that he should live solitarily in his house and his wife remain at the watchhouse.'³⁹ Therefore, despite having such high-powered supporters Caroline was unsuccessful, [as can be seen in the table above] and Harriet McKenzie took over as female searcher. Who, on one occasion, found, for example, a ticket to Sydney for another person hidden in a female convict's clothing. But by December 1876 Harriet, shown as 'constable's wife' was dead.⁴⁰

Other examples confirm the problem of identification for female searchers. In 1859 the Launceston City Council recorded £25pa for an unnamed female searcher. In February 1863 it seems that the Launceston City Council was disparaging of it's incumbent female searcher, and 'struck out' the salary estimate. That is, they declined to increase Constable McAuliffe's salary and made this comment on his wife.

We do not recommend that the prayer of Constable McAuliffe's petition be granted, because we consider that the quarters, water, etc., provided by the Council for him and his family are a full equivalent for the trifling duty his wife has to perform as female searcher. During the past year she was paid at the rate of fifty shillings for each search, a fee altogether preposterous.⁴¹

In 1896 Constable McAuliffe is given as Sergeant Denis McAuliffe 'retired'.⁴² Unfortunately, no subsequent information appeared in the press. But years later, and at the other end of the state, in 1898 the Hobart City Council felt differently about the work of the local female searcher:

The Police Committee recommended that Mrs. Gavitt, the female searcher at the police station, be paid a salary of £16 per annum. Hitherto she had received no remuneration, though her duties were of an onerous and disagreeable character.

Alderman Bradley moved the adoption of the report, and mentioned that the female searcher had acted for two years without salary.⁴³

This appointment did not last long, however. In December 1899 Detective Gavitt resigned and so Mrs Gavitt went too. Constable Pope was appointed Gavitt's replacement at the City Watchhouse, with Mrs Pope as female searcher.⁴⁴

To coin the biblical phrase, 'there is nothing new under the sun'. Female searchers in the past faced matters now given intense media coverage, whereas this incident gained but one short item:

Alice Digney, apprehended on Sunday for being drunk was so seriously affected with hysteria that the female searcher had to remain with her all day, to prevent her from injuring herself. She had threatened to destroy her four children and had attempted to twist the neck of the youngest and subsequently when [going] on to the watchhouse in a conveyance she attempted to strangle herself with her cloak strings. As she was not sufficiently recovered to walk to the Police Office, [the Magistrate] waited on her at the watchhouse, and authorised her discharge on condition that her husband would take charge of her, and prevent her from injuring either her children or herself. The husband undertook this responsibility with some reluctance.⁴⁵

Adding more background, Alice Digney (nee Sandy)⁴⁶ reappeared in court in 1867, albeit on a charge that was ultimately discharged. The case involved Alice assaulting on another female, while her husband William's 'reluctance' shows, not least, his sad lack of paternal instinct. But Alice's affairs worsened in November 1870, when she had William arrested for 'leaving her and his ten children without making provision for their support'! However, William was 'discharged on condition, of his immediately taking his wife and children down the Tamar [River] to the place where he is earning wages as a shipwright.'⁴⁷

However, seven years later, William was admitted to the mental facility at New Norfolk in January 1877 suffering delusions and was declared 'hopelessly insane'. He died in February 1878, leaving behind Alice and his ten children, and his death notice appeared from his 'beloved wife and children', who recorded that his passing would be 'deeply regretted by them'. Nevertheless, events in Alice's life were not always rosy; while two daughters subsequently married (1882 and 1884), two others died in tragic circumstances (1884 and 1908).⁴⁸

We can now turn to another female searched named Johanna Aherne [or Ahern]. She was a 'free woman' and was involved with a watchhouse and its lack of a female searcher. Mention is also made of a tragedy because Johanna was pregnant when arrested on 11 July 1848, but gave birth to a still-born female child. The press reports of her case began on 12 August when 'A. B. Jones, Esq., coroner, and a jury of respectable persons, convened at the *Victoria Tavern*,', Murray Street'. They then went and viewed the child's' body, noting the severe contusion and fracture on the head'. The next day they visited Johanna, 'still in a state of debility' at the jail. Where she gave her deposition, which was, in part;

My name is Johanna Aherne, I am a free woman, ... On the 11th July I resided in Watchorn Street. I had been drinking that afternoon, about 10 o'clock, a man named William Taylor, and a woman I knew to be a bolter, came to my house and wanted to stop all night. Having refused to let them sleep there, Taylor struck me on the head, and on the back, he knocked me down ... [He] Did not strike or kick me on the belly, he kicked me on the hip. After this I was making a noise at my own door, I was tipsy, when a constable took me in charge, that constable did not ill use me.

Johanna next identified John Thomas, of the Bathurst-street watch-house.

I was making a noise in the cell. A constable threatened to put a gag in my mouth. I asked him for my boots, and called out for him to give me a drink of water. He partly opened the

cell door, and gave me two kicks in the belly, one on the navel, one on the groin. He then threw a quantity of cold water upon me and said, "that will cool your courage." I was taken before the police magistrate next morning. While I was at the Police office I became very ill and asked for a doctor. A doctor was not brought to me. The woman who searches females felt my clothes, which were still wet, and said I had been very badly used. I was too hoarse and weak and faint, to make any complaint to the magistrate. I could hardly speak after lying in my wet clothes in the cold cell in my condition. I was more than six months gone with child at the time.

Johanna then described her treatment at the Hobart Gaol, which included not being examined by a doctor for three days;

When I got to the gaol I complained to the women that the child was dead in me, and showed them the bruises upon my belly. The child was alive before but never moved again after the kicks the constable gave me in Bathurst-street watch-house.

After only an hour's labour Johanna gave birth on 8th August, and when she saw the baby she cried out that it was 'murdered in the head!'

During the court proceedings Johanna was asked if Sergeant John Thomas was the man who kicked her. Although she was uncertain it was confirmed that there was only one constable on duty at the Bathurst-street watch-house that night - Thomas. Johanna then added that 'she could see constable Thomas through a hole in the cell door, lying on a form before the fire.' And that he threatened to get her three months [imprisonment]'. As an aside, during the hearing Thomas objected to the presence of a reporter because he 'had an antipathy towards me'; the reporter was allowed to stay.

Unluckily for Johanna, other witnesses were heard testifying to her frequent drunkenness and her landlady spoke of her 'bad character'.⁴⁹ Which caused the coroner, in summing up, to 'express his opinion, that constables ought to be protected, they had disagreeable duties to perform, and there was an ill feeling prevalent against them, among the class to which the woman Aherne belonged.' However, after an hour's deliberation the jury found that Thomas was guilty of inflicted the death of the child.

The *Hobart Guardian* [using capital letters] linked this case to the subject considered here:

WATCH-HOUSE KEEPERS.

...a matter came out, in the evidence - of the man [William] Taylor, who had been apprehended, and was in the watchhouse at the same time with Johanna Aherne, ... [stated something] calling for the severest censure, by every member of the community gifted with the slightest decency or delicacy, due even to the most abandoned of the female sex. We allude to the statement made by the witness that while one constable searched him, the other searched the woman. We ask the authorities, we ask every man possessed of a single spark of right feeling, is not this odious, horrible, disgusting and detestable. Constables, MEN ! to search every FEMALE, who may be consigned to the watchhouse on suspicion, or what not—the thing is preposterous, and one, it would be imagined, hardly credible. It is true nevertheless, and necessarily so, while single constables have charge— which we can prove. A woman locked up in a cell, under the excitement of drink, would be very likely to commit self-destruction, if every means by which such an object could be effected, were not taken from her. Single constables in charge, are therefore obliged to search them narrowly. But does not this point to the

authorities ... [and] show the Government the imperative necessity of having married watchhouse keepers, and in all places where women are confined persons of their own sex to attend upon them. We would ask those dignitaries who have published their opinions and have declared the incorrigible badness of convict women - what other result can possibly be expected from the way in which they are treated? You degrade them as females, destroy every remnant of delicacy left to them as women, by forcing them to be attended upon by men in places of confinement, and then you wonder that their conduct is vicious and bad —no other consequence could reasonably be expected. There is a gaol not a hundred miles from the centre of the island where there is not a single female employed within the walls, neither matron nor any one else, javelin men [guards] attending the women in the cells, sick or well, and under all circumstances. Is not this disgusting ? It would not be credited in England.⁵⁰

The *Hobart Guardian* also made another a pertinent statement on this sad case under the headline – [again in capitals]: ‘CONSTABLES BEING PRISONERS OF THE CROWN, IN CHARGE OF WATCH HOUSES.’ That is, the newspaper noted the ‘evil which must arise from entrusting watchhouses to single men, particularly of that class who still are amenable to the law as prisoners of the crown’ - namely, convicts with tickets-of-leave. The newspaper also referred to the fact that, in his decision on Johanna’s case, the coroner (Jones) ‘found that according to law, as the child did not come into the world alive, it could not be the subject of murder, or manslaughter.’ Therefore, in a separate Police Court hearing in early September John Thomas was discharged, and resumed his duties. For the record; Thomas’ common name makes it difficult to determine if he was a convict constable or a free man – which label could also apply to a convict after completion of their servitude. Except that the press claimed that he had a ticket of leave.⁵¹ This was, of course, not a satisfactory outcome for Johanna, who was sentenced to three months gaol because she was unable to pay her fine for drunkenness! Sadly, little else is known about her.

In 1854 an incident occurred that concerned the police acting without the aid of a female searcher. On the 3 April the court considered a case of a stolen gold watch worth £14. The accused, Joseph Winter, pleaded not guilty, but when the constable went to his home he ‘found the watch on his wife’s person’, when they went upstairs, while Joseph remained downstairs. When the constable was cross-examined by Joseph’s lawyer he ‘commented severely on the conduct of the constables in conducting the search warrant, and putting their hands into Mrs [Margaret] Winter’s bosom, instead of taking her to the station to be searched by the female searcher; according to police regulations’. Generating laughter, the lawyer added that it was ‘an every day occurrence for a person coming from the diggings to buy a gold watch for himself and another for his lady.’⁵² The jury dismissed the case; but two weeks later Margaret was charged with ‘feloniously receiving’ the gold watch, and two brooches, worth £4. She also pleaded not guilty, although the constable repeated his discovery of the watch in her bosom! There was no mention of where the brooches were found... However, Margaret’s lawyer - who had won her husband’s case - argued that ‘although the prisoner received the watch (about which there could be no doubt) it was not received with a guilty knowledge.’ The new jury found her not guilty.⁵³

This paper has concerned female searchers, and the connected history of watchhouses, with their male constables and the female convicts who were searched. Regarding funding, in 1877 the Hobart City Council still budgeted for just '1 female searcher' at £20pa., and in 1893, the estimates for Oatlands Council also display only 'one female researcher'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, for the record, Governor Arthur had established a centralised Field Police in 1826, and designated police districts in 1828.⁵⁵ But even then many constables were still ex-convicts or convicts given employment as constables as rewards. The Field Police was eventually replaced by the local government controlled Municipal Police in 1857, and it was not until 1899 that a single state-wide professional Tasmania Police Force was inaugurated.

Even so, Tasmania's Police Force did not employ its first female police officer until October 1917. This initial gender correction was the result of a campaign by the Tasmanian National Council of Women in recognition of the principle that 'women should deal with women and children.' While this echoes the 18th century sentiments of those worried about male watchhouse keepers searching females, it was, nevertheless, a significant step. At least married women were used to strip search arrested females to discover any stolen items, or potentially harmfully or lethal items they could use on themselves or others.⁵⁶

In 1932 the state-wide Police Force listed one female searcher, and over time the employment of non-police females strip search other women declined.⁵⁷ This was perhaps because more females became police officers – although even today only 35% of Tasmanian Police Force are female. Either way, the decline in numbers of female searchers became earlier than the gender re-balance in the police force. The advertisement used above appeared as late as 1880; and for instance, the Clarence Council decided to dispense with their female searcher in February 1889.

In June 1910 the newly formed Commonwealth Statistician issued a report that listed all the States' police forces, which included just nine female searchers, nationally. As late as the Tasmanian Police Department's 1930 budget it included salaries for 'superintendents, inspectors, sergeants, constables, special constables, medical officer, and female searchers'; but the number of searchers was not given.⁵⁸ At least medical officers slowly became less male-dominated.

In 1939 the Tasmanian Police Regulations Act of 1898 was updated, albeit retaining much archaic language, such as the use of only the masculine gender. Also contemporary attitudes appear, including the fact that a female police officer had to resign if intending to marry! This aside, performing legal searches were detailed, and female searchers were mentioned under the sub-heading 'Watch-house Keepers', with even the lighting conditions specified!

580. When the charge has been ... entered against a prisoner ... it shall be the duty of the arresting constable to carefully and thoroughly search such prisoner in the presence of the watch-house keeper or charge-room officer ...

581. Every care shall be taken when searching a prisoner to see that he does not conceal any loaded arms, knives, razors, or other dangerous weapons or any poisons...

585. A female searcher shall search female prisoners in a well-lighted cell or other suitable place...

599. Male prisoners shall be kept strictly apart from female prisoners. Youths shall not, unless unavoidable, be locked up with adult prisoners.⁵⁹

Finally, although not connected to female searchers at watchhouses, two other references related to searchers at port or customs control can conclude this paper. One example occurred in 1889 when the Launceston Chamber of Commerce learned that 'many complaints have been made with respect to

the manner of inspection of passengers' luggage on intercolonial steamers coming to Launceston, and (so) at the last meeting... it was proposed that a female searcher should be appointed.'⁶⁰ One suspects that the complaints in that era related to the exposure of feminine apparel... Another port-related reference occurred in 1916 under the War Precautions Act. To maintain freight control in Australian ports, and to protect public safety nationally, wartime regulations provided for a 'proper officer to search any male, and, to require any female to submit to a search, by a female searcher'.

1 Elsewhere a statistical study of female interaction with the judicial process has been undertaken; Refer: M. Fraser, 'Criminal women? An exploration of Petty Session Court records in 1860s Hobart', https://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/docs/seminars/CriminalWomen_MelissaFraser.pdf.

2 Strip searching provided comprehensive information; see S Barnard, *Convict tattoos: marked men and women of Australia*, Text Publishing, 2016.

3 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 16 December 1837, p.2; *Hobart Town Daily Mercury*, 13 August 1859, p.3.

4 *Tasmanian*, 19 July 1829, p.4.

5 *Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 November 1817, p.2.

6 *Hobart Town Gazette*, 21 January 1825, p.3.

7 *Colonial Times*, 9 February 1827, p.2.

8 CON 31-1-9 No.311, CON 23-1-1 p.108, SC 32-1-2 Image 89, SC 32-1-5, Image 100.

9 *Courier*, 26 January 1838, p.4. [eg; other male searches: *Colonial Times*, 25 April 1837, 4, *Courier*, 29 March 1839, p.3.

10 *Hobart Town Gazette*, 21 January, 1825, p.3, 1 April 1825, p.3.

11 *Tasmanian*, 28 November 1828, pp.2-3.

12 Cascade Female Factory: femalefactory.org.au, and L. Frost 'Female Factories' in *Companion to Tasmanian History* [ed]. A. Alexander, UTAS, 2005, pp.131-2.

13 This and following: CON 40-1-9 p.58.

14 <http://foundersandsurvivors.org/pubsearch/convict/chain/of6996>.

15 *Colonial Times*, 8 April 1834, p.3.

16 <http://www.orphanschool.org.au/watchhouses.php>

17 *Bent's News*, 16 June 1836, p.2.

18 *Examiner*, 11 May 1872, p.5.

19 *Tasmanian*, 16 March 1878, p.5, *Tribune*, 21 August p.2, *Examiner*, 20 January 1885, p.3: Green and his wife earlier appointed – no further reference to discovered – see table.

20 *Courier*, 8 October 1844, p.2.

21 *Colonial Times*, 18 May 1852, p.2.

22 SC 195/1/37 Inquest 3620, RGD 35/1/5 No 411, *Tasmanian Daily News*, 15 August 1855, p.3, *Colonial Times*, 29 October 1855, p.2

23 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 6 July 1859, p.5.

24 *Mercury*, 13 May 1863, p.2.

25 Concerning domestic violence: https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/D/Domes-tic%20Violence.htm.

26 *Mercury*, 25 October 1881, p.2: Trove portrays Caroline Woods' sad story of drunkenness and gaol.

27 Con 41-1-36, CON 19-1-11; Several mentions in *Mercury*, 28 October 1858, p.3, 5 January 1867, 2, 28 January 1868, p.2, 15 April 1868, 2, 31 October 1870, p.2, 1 November 1872, p.2. And *Tasmanian Daily News*, 26 March 1858, p.3,

28 *Mercury*, 28 October 1863, p.2, 15 April 1867, p.2, 3 November 1870, p.2.

29 Ship *Medway* 1820, *Colonial Times*, 16 January 1838, p.7, *Tasmanian*, 8 March 1939, p.1.

30 Donald Cameron, 'The conundrum of grandmother Watkins' portrait', *Tasmanian Ancestry*, Vol. 32 No.1, June 2011, p.20. Cameron seeks to confirm if a portrait is Caroline McGuire [nee Watkins] maiden name Rudman. Alternative death: <https://www.geni.com/people/Caroline-Watkins/6000000073523877916>

31 What follows: CON 31-1-46, Image 37, CON 18-1-2- Image 91, RGD 36-1-2 No.2512.

32 Mr. McGuire's first name probably John; RGD 37/1/11 No.767 has 'abt 21'. Also a Helen McGuire is mentioned in the *Courier*, 17/9/1856,p.2.

33 *Tasmanian Daily News*, 9 June 1855, p.3.

-
- 34 CON 41-1-28 Image 110, *Courier*, 21 September 1854, p.2, *Colonial Times*, 18 October 1854, p.3.
- 35 *Mercury*, 17 September 1855, p.2, CON 41-132, Image 136, RGD 24-4-73 no.1444.
- 36 *Courier*, 16 January 1857, p. 3.
- 37 *Mercury*, 21 January 1864, p.2.
- 38 *Mercury*, 25 March 1862, p.2.
- 39 *Mercury*, 13 May 1885, p.3, 20 May 1885 p.3.
- 40 *Examiner*, 2 May 1866, p.2, RGD 33/1/9 No. 137.
- 41 *Examiner*, 25 January 1859, p.3, 20 January 1863, p.5, *Cornwall Chronicle*, 4 February 1863, p.5.
- 42 *Examiner*, 27 October 1896, p.5.
- 43 *Mercury*, 11 January 1898, p.4.
- 44 *Tasmanian News*, 29 December 1899, p.2.
- 45 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 12 April 1865, p.3
- 46 *North West Post*, 24 April 1908, p.2.
- 47 *Cornwall Chronicle*, 3 December 1870, p.4.
- 48 *Cornwall Chronicle*: 5 January 1867, p.3, *Examiner*, 29 November 1870, p.3, *Examiner*, 13 January 1877, p.10, 9 February 1878, p.23, 9 December 1882, p.1, 13 October, 1884, *Age*, 6 June 1893, p.1, *North West Post*, 29 April 1908, p.2.
- 49 *Britannia and Trades' Advocate*, 24 August 1848, p.2.
- 50 *Hobart Guardian*, 26 August 1848, p.2.
- 51 *Hobart Guardian*, 19 August 1848, p.3; and *Hobart Guardian*, 6 September 1848, p.2..
- 52 *Colonial Times*, 6 April 1854, p.2.
- 53 *Colonial Times*, 22 April 1854, p.2.
- 54 *Mercury*, 20 February 1877, p.3, *Wellington Times*, 4 September 1893, p.2.
- 55 https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Police.htm
- 56 <https://www.police.tas.gov.au/about-us/100-years-women-policing-tasmania-police/first-women-tasmania-police/>
- 57 *Voice*, 15 October 1932, p.8.
- 58 *Mercury*, 1 February 1889, p.2; 20 November 1930 p.9. 6 June 1910, p.4.
- 59 Tasmanian Police Force Regulations, 1939; Tasmanian Government Gazette 11 October 1939, p.2676.
<https://stors.tas.gov.au/TGG>.
- 60 *Examiner*, 16 October 1889, p.2.