

Why my great great-grandmother is my heroine

I wondered what it meant when in *The Preston and Lancashire Chronicle Advertiser*, dated Saturday July 1, 1837, they wrote, "Jane Huntington, age 21, *an interesting looking girl*, pleaded guilty to stealing. To be transported for seven years".

Was there something about her looks or the way she dressed? Or just an attitude she had? Seven years, and transportation? Was this forced migration? The prosecutors were determined to punish her, even if the cost of doing so amounted to being ridiculously higher than the value of the item she had stolen. Why did she steal a cloak? Was it to sell or did she just want it because she liked it? In any case, I have a feeling she was a proud person, and being guilty of having committed the crime, she would rather be transported than stay in the horrible prison in Preston. Seven years, and she would come home again! Coming from a large farming family, and having pleaded guilty, her family must have been devastated, but could do nothing to help her.

The voyage on the *Atwick*, by the sound of it, was not the worse that she could have experienced, and Jane probably learned a great deal of how to survive during the long voyage to Van Diemen's Land. It is clear to me that from her convict record, Jane Huntington (Convict ID number 189933) was a proud person and not someone who could be pushed around. She showed character when she was assigned to Lieutenant Jacob, and shortly after, was charged as being "*useless*" and "*incorrigible*", and was sent back to the Female Factory. She was next sent to Bothwell, and in July 1839, eighteen months after arriving in Van Diemen's Land, she married John Gibb. John, also a convict, had been sentenced in Paisley, Scotland, at age just 16 for stealing, and had received fourteen years transportation in 1830. John was Jane's master, and six months after giving birth to their first child, he charged her with misconduct, and sent her back to the Female Factory where she did seven days solitary confinement. Sadly, but knowing the horrific ways babies of convicts were treated there, it is not surprising to me that her baby died soon after. So what made her stay with him? Could it be that as Jane was still not pardoned, and so she did not have much choice but to stay with John?

Jane had four more children before the family left Van Diemen's Land to settle on land in Colac in western Victoria. Life was tough and they must have worked hard. To make things worse, in 1853, their son, William, age three, died, and the following year they lost another son age 11. No mother would get over such a tragedy, but probably the next worst period for Jane started in 1881, when her 27-year-old son, who is my great-grandmother's twin, died. Eight years later Jane's youngest daughter died from complications after giving birth. Only three months on, after returning home to Colac from Swan Hill, having cared for her daughter, Jane's youngest son also died. He was only 29 years old and it was his brother Thomas not his father who signed his death certificate. I have not found much information about John, except that in the book *Transported Six Times Over*, by Russell Edward Lucas, he tried to have his youngest daughter arrested for running off with the man she loved. So, where was Jane's husband, John Gibb, and what happened to him? Had they separated? Just over a month later, Jane Gibb (nee Huntington) died. I feel that she must have lost the will to live and probably died of a broken heart. Her death certificate was also signed by her son Thomas!

Sadly, Jane never made it back to Garstang, the place of her birth. That she had named most of her children after some of her siblings clearly shows how she missed her family in Lancashire, England.

Knowing a little about my great great-grandmother's life story, and also knowing my grandmother and her sister, I can see that like Jane, they too were proud people, having no patience for nonsense, and would just get on with the jobs they had to do. This, and dressing well, seem to be characteristics that have been passed on by Jane through generations of her descendants. My feeling is that my great great-grandmother was a hard working devoted mother, and I feel very proud of her. I know she lives on through all the people who are her descendants, and she deserves to have her story told.

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