

## Mary Prior (1813-1863)

Mary PRIOR was born c1813 in Heligoland.<sup>1</sup>

Heligoland consists of two islands off the German coastline in the North Sea. In 1813 it was under the control of Denmark. In 1814 Denmark formally ceded Heligoland to the United Kingdom by the Treaty of Kiel (14 January 1814). It is not known when the family left Heligoland.

On the 22 October 1833 Mary married Edmund HUNT at St. Swithin's Church, Walcot, Somerset, England.<sup>2</sup> Edmund, the son of Charles and Martha Hunt was born 1813 in Bathwick, Somerset, England.<sup>3</sup>

Mary and Edmund had 8 children: Sarah (1835), Mary Ann (1835), Edmund (1837), Charles (1840), William Henry (1842), George (1844), Sarah (1846) and Mary Ann (1846).

Mary and Edmund moved into a house in Cornwell-terrace, Walcot, Somerset and appear to have had a settled married life as Edmund had continued employment as a plasterer with the same employer since 1830c.

By 1838 however life began to take a turn for the worse.

In October Mary was indicted for stealing a black silk neckerchief the property of G. Reynolds. She was found guilty and sentenced to six weeks' hard labour at the Bath Gaol.<sup>4</sup>

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 11 October 1838

### BATH MICHAELMAS QUARTER SESSIONS

Mary Hunt, a married woman, having an infant with her at the bar, was indicted for stealing a black silk neckerchief, the property of G. Reynolds. Guilty. Six weeks' hard labour at the Bath Gaol.

In 1838 their twin daughter Sarah died aged 4 years.<sup>5</sup>

In 1843 their other twin daughter Mary Ann died aged 8 years.<sup>6</sup>

In 1844 their son William Henry died aged 2 years.<sup>7</sup>

In May 1849 Mary was charged with stealing a silk dress in the shop of Mrs. Hornby and Mr. Tucker.

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<sup>1</sup> Conduct Record CON41/1/29

<sup>2</sup> Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914. St Swithin, Walcot, Somerset 1833

<sup>3</sup> ditto St. Mary, Bathwick, Somerset 1813

<sup>4</sup> Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette. 11 October 1838

<sup>5</sup> Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914

<sup>6</sup> Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914. Walcot St. Swithin, Somerset No. 2265

<sup>7</sup> Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914. 1844. Burial Place: Walcot St Swithin, Somerset, England

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette

No.: 4752 Thursday 17 May 1849

CHARGE OF SHOPLIFTING.- Mary Hunt, a stout full-face woman, with a florid countenance, and respectably attired, was charged with stealing a silk dress in the shop of Mrs. Hornby and Mr. Tucker. A young woman, who went to the shop on Saturday evening to make a purchase, stated that she observed the prisoner, while the shopmen were busy, draw out from a pile of dresses a silk dress, which fell on the floor, and presently afterwards she saw her pick it up, and as witness was going out prisoner went out at the same time, carrying off the dress. Witness watched her across the street to Northumberland Place, and having informed her mistress (Mrs. Sainsbury, on the Borough Walls) of the fact, the latter desired her to follow the prisoner, which she did, and saw her enter a pawnbroker's shop. Witness sent a boy to give information to the prosecutors' shop assistants, and the prisoner was taken into custody. She was remanded till Wednesday.

On 26 Oct 1849 a warrant was issued for the arrest of Mary and she was admitted to Shepton Mallet Gaol, Somerset, England.<sup>8</sup>

Mary gave birth to a daughter Mary Ann in October 1849 whilst on remand.<sup>9</sup>

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 1 November 1849

#### BATH QUARTER SESSIONS

Mary Hunt, committed today, was indicted for stealing a piece of silk, value £3 : 18s., the property of Messrs. Reynolds and Holman. The prisoner, who is the wife of a respectable man living in Walcot Street, went to the shop of the prosecutors about three weeks since, and whilst making some small purchase contrived to conceal the silk under her cloak. She had before been suspected, and a watch was set upon her on this occasion, by which means the robbery was detected. The prisoner since her apprehension has been delivered of a child in the gaol, which fact prevented her being brought before the magistrates until this day. She was found guilty and sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour.

Although Mary was taken into custody on 26 October 1849 she was not released until 25 November 1849.<sup>10</sup>

Mary had only been home for 2 months when on the 2nd February she was charged with having stolen, on the 26th of January, three silk handkerchiefs, the property of Messrs. Churchill and Smith ; and, on the 2nd of February, six silk handkerchiefs, belonging to Mr. Thomas Tilley.

It was at this time that tragedy really struck the family.

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<sup>8</sup> Somerset Gaol Registers and Description Books. Somerset Archives & Local Studies, South West Heritage Trust, Taunton, Somerset, England

<sup>9</sup> England and Wales FreeBMD Birth Index 1837-1915. District: BATH. County: Somerset, England Vol 11 ; p43.

<sup>10</sup> Somerset, England, Gaol Registers, 1807-1879. Shepton Mallet Gaol Register of Prisoners Before and After Trial (Bath Only) 1842 - 1871

Her husband Edmund was very hurt at the disgrace put on him by his wife's conduct and after her last arrest he had been heard to say that if she ever committed another crime he would put an end to his existence.<sup>11</sup>

On the night of February 2 he returned home and was told by a neighbour that his wife had been arrested again. He became very agitated and went into his house and told his son to get his three year old daughter Sarah from her bed. He sent the boy back to bed and the house heading towards the river Avon which ran behind the house.

The next morning the alarm was given the river was searched and his body was discovered 50 yards below his own house and his daughter's body was found 18 miles below the spot where the catastrophe happened.<sup>12</sup>

The case created much interest around the country with headlines like :  
MELANCHOLY SUICIDE AND INFANTICIDE (Inverness Courier.14 Feb 1850) and  
DISTRESSING SUICIDE AND MURDER (Sussex Advertiser 12 Feb 1850).

Edmund was described "as a plasterer by trade and an honest and industrious man, having worked for one master upwards of twenty years. His wife, however, had a great predilection for stealing, and has several times been apprehended on charges of shoplifting. The poor fellow seems to have experienced great anxiety and sorrow on account of his wife's conduct, and upon the last occasion of her apprehension, three or four months ago, he declared that if she again brought him into similar disgrace, he would do away with himself."<sup>13</sup>

Mary appeared before the Bath Sessions on 8 April 1850 and was found guilty. She was sentenced to ten years' transportation.

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 11 April 1850

No. 4799

Thursday April 1, 1850 Bath Sessions

Mary Hunt, 35, widow, was then charged with having stolen, on the 26th of January, three silk handkerchiefs, the property of Messrs. Churchill and Smith ; and, on the 2nd of February, six silk handkerchiefs, belonging to Mr. Thomas Tilley. This was a case of shoplifting, also fully reported by us at the time it was heard before the Magistrates, in which it was proved that the prisoner went into the drapery establishments of the parties above referred to, and asked to look at some silk handkerchiefs, some of which she contrived to convey away from each place. They were afterwards pawned by her, which led to her apprehension and identity. The Jury found her guilty, and the Recorder, in passing sentence, observed that he had never known a more disgraceful or distressing case than this. the prisoner had not committed the theft from want, and he found that she had been committed

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<sup>11</sup> Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette. No. 4790. Thursday 7 February 1850

<sup>12</sup> The North Wales Chronicle, Tues., Feb. 12, 1850 p.2

<sup>13</sup> Sussex Advertiser - Lewes 12 Feb 1850

before on a similar charge, and had no sooner been released from imprisonment than she repeated the offence, the result of which had been very lamentable. He sentenced her to ten years' transportation. [This woman, who had an infant at her breast, was the wife of the unfortunate man Hunt, who drowned himself and child, early in February last, in consequence of the bad conduct of his wife.]

The North Wales Chronicle, Tuesday, February 12, 1850 p.2

SUICIDE AND INFANTICIDE. - Great excitement has been created at Bath by the death of a man named Edmund Francis Hunt, who destroyed his own life and that of his child, a little girl two years and a half old. The unfortunate man was a plasterer, about thirty-seven years of age, living in Cornwall-terrace, walcot-street, and his house abuts upon the river Avon. He was a steady, industrious man, and had been in the service of his master upwards of twenty years. His wife, however, has several times been convicted of shoplifting, and the poor fellow in consequence has undergone much mental suffering. Upon the last occasion of his wife's delinquency becoming known, three or four months ago, he declared that if ever she so disgraced him again he should be induced to destroy himself. On Saturday night last, as the deceased was returning home, he was informed by a neighbour that his wife was again apprehended for shoplifting. He hastened home, took his favourite child out of bed, and was seen no more alive. On the Sunday morning the river was dragged, and the body of the unfortunate man was pulled up about fifty yards below his own house. His arms were folded over his chest as if embracing something. The water was very flush at the time, and the child must have been swilled out of her father's arms, the body being on Monday discovered in the river eighteen miles below the spot where the sad catastrophe happened. The jury returned a verdict, "That the deceased drowned himself whilst labouring under temporary insanity." The wife has been committed on the charge of shoplifting.

A lamentable consequence of Mary's actions resulted in her husband and daughter's death, her transportation to Van Diemen's Land for 10 years and the removal of her daughter Mary Ann with her. The death of their father and their mother's conviction left three very young boys unprovided for.

The three boys Edmund (13), Charles (10) and George (6) were sent to the Bath Union Workhouse in 1850. They were recorded as still being there in the 1851 census.<sup>14</sup>

In 1852 Edmund and four other boys absconded from the Bath Union Workhouse with the clothes belonging to the Union. The boys told the police officer that they had run away because the schoolmaster had beaten them severely. Edmund and two older boys were sentenced to 14 days in the Bath Gaol. The others were returned to the Workhouse for punishment.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 1851 Census Registration district:: Lyncombe : Bath Union Workhouse

<sup>15</sup> Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette. 12 Feb 1852

Mary left England on the convict ship *Emma Eugenia* on the 25 October 1850. At the time of Mary's transportation, she was 38 years old, a Protestant and could read. Her occupation was given as upholstress and a good needlewoman. She was 4 feet and 11 ½ inches (151.13 cm) tall, with a fresh complexion and brown sandy hair. According to the ship's surgeon on board the *Emma Eugenia*, Mary's health was 'good'. Her daughter Mary Ann was on board the ship aged 15 months

A week after her arrival in Van Diemen's Land on 7 March 1851, Mary was sent to the Brickfields Hiring depot. Two months later on 10 May 1851, she was sent to the Cascades Female Factory and ten days later she was working for Mrs Jones in Davey Street, Hobart Town.<sup>16</sup> Like many children residing in the Cascade Female Factory, her daughter Mary Ann Hunt succumbed to diarrhoea and died on 18 July 1851 aged twenty months.<sup>17</sup>

Mary married William JARVIS, who was free man, at St George's Church of England, Battery Point on 1 March 1852.<sup>18</sup> William was 46 years of age and a coachman and Mary was 39.

Five weeks later, she was back at Brickfields and immediately hired out to a J. Watkins of New Town Road. Five months later, she was placed with her husband William, who was residing at Liverpool Street, Hobart Town. On 26 October 1852, she was told she must serve five years before she was given her ticket of leave. However, her ticket of leave was granted earlier on 7 September 1853.

Mary and William had a son John William JARVIS<sup>19</sup> born 15 May 1853 in Hobart Town.<sup>20</sup>

On 1 July 1857 Mary's sons Edmund (20) and George (13) HUNT arrived in Hobart Town as bounty immigrants sponsored by their step-father William Jarvis at a cost of £32.0.0.. Edmund was a baker and George an apprentice shoe-maker. It would appear that the Union Workhouse set them up with trades.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately her other son Charles HUNT died and was buried in the Bath Union Workhouse in August 1853 aged 14 years.<sup>22</sup>

William Jarvis died 26 January 1862 aged 62 years.<sup>23</sup>

Mary Hunt died in Hobart on 15 June 1863 after a long and painful illness aged 50 years.<sup>24</sup>

By Diane Munro

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<sup>16</sup> Conduct Record CON41/1/29

<sup>17</sup> Linc. RGD860/1851 Hobart

<sup>18</sup> Australia Marriage Index, 1788-1950. Tas. Hobart. Reg Year: 1852. Reg no. 241

<sup>19</sup> Father name given as John Jarvis on birth certificate

<sup>20</sup> Australia Birth Index 1788-1922. Tasmania ; Reg place: Hobart ; Reg no: 2384

<sup>21</sup> Pearce, Ian & Cowling, Clare, *Guide To The Public Records Of Tasmania, Section Four, Free Immigration*, Archives Office of Tasmania, 1975, p101.

<sup>22</sup> Bath Union Workhouse Cemetery. Plot Ref. C?. Burial Register : 1-607. <https://www.batharchives.co.uk>

<sup>23</sup> The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954). 27 Jan 1862 p2

<sup>24</sup> Launceston Examiner (Tas. : 1842 - 1899). Thurs 18 Jun 1863 p.4