

From Fingertinker to the First Woman Horse Trainer in Van Diemen's Land.1805-1849.

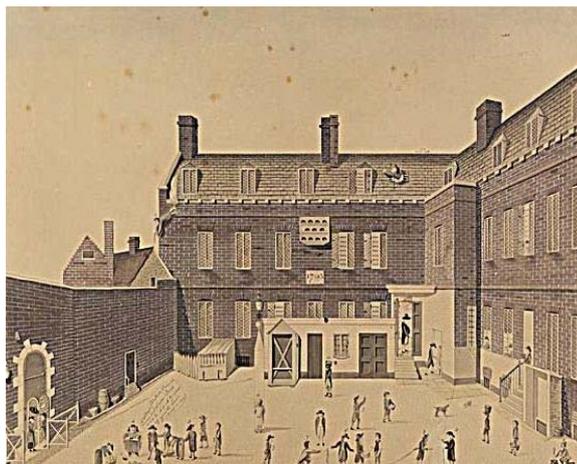
Mary Bowater Convict & Landholder

From my research on convict women over the years I have found all were very different and came from all types of backgrounds. Mary Bagley came from Dudley in Worcestershire and belonged to a long line of working class people, who trades were mostly nailmaker. Mary was born in 1771 and baptized at St. Thomas in Dudley. She married George Bowater on 13 June 1791. George was also baptized at the same church.

George's background was slightly different as I believe he may have been a gipsy, as Bowater was a common gipsy name in Worcestershire. Both the names Bagley and Bowater were known in Worcestershire as early as the 17th Century.



St Thomas Church Dudley



Shrewsbury Goal

Mary Bowater and her husband George were tinkers by trade. Mary was tried with her husband at Shrewsbury goal on 20 March 1802 for stealing an overcoat and hiding in amongst her pots. George was acquitted but Mary was sentenced to seven years transportation to New South Wales. Mary's age was not given but she appears to have been about thirty-one years old and the mother of at least two sons and she could read and write.¹

Arriving in Sydney on the *Experiment* in June 1804, Mary later sailed to VDL on board the *Buffalo*, arriving at Port Dalrymple in 1805, only a few months after Lt. Col. Paterson arrived there to establish the new settlement.

¹ Schaffer, I. *Land Musters and Stock Lists 1803-1822* p 74; Tardiff, Phillip. *Notorious Strumpets and Dangerous Girls* pp 66-7

The *Buffalo* left Sydney on 24 March 1805 with passengers, stores and animals. Lt. Col. Paterson's wife was one of the passengers. It is most likely that the wives and children of the military and officials and their wives and children were also on board, plus 50 male convicts, 3 female convicts and 5 settlers from Norfolk Island.²

From 1804-1805 only a small amount of convict women had arrive in Port Dalrymple. It is not know where these women were situated as it was too early for there to have been a gaol at York Town. Convicts were likely to have been employed as servants for the officials or high ranking officers. There is no record of Mary until she appears in the 1811 Muster, the same year she married Thomas Smith.

This first settlement in the north of VDL struggled to get a foothold in this new land and times were hard. There were only 181 persons at the settlement of Port Dalrymple in 1805, civil officials, officers and men, of the 73rd Regiment and their wives and children, plus the handful of women convicts.

This was a man's world as most new settlements were in those early times when the men owned the land, ships and the pubs and ran the country, but Mary acquired land, cattle and sheep within the first few years of her arrival in Van Diemen's Land. She had her own horses, which she rode throughout the Morven district.

Mary, now known as Mrs. Smith acquired land, in her husband's name as he gained his freedom before her, and she began to buy up land along the South Esk River.



South Esk River near Longford

Until his death, the land was in her husband's name, The original land granted to Thomas was on the North Esk River.

In 1819 they owned three horses. This number of horses was usually as there were very few horses in VDL, and in the north were owned by men like Reibey and Dry,

² Ranson, Alma. & Dent, John. *People Arriving at Port Dalrymple November 1804 to August 1806- Tasmanian Ancestry Dec. 2003* pp 145-158; Schaffer. I, *Land Muster's Stock Lists 1803-1822*, list of people who arrived at Port Dalrymple in March 1805 p35. At the time of the publication of the Land Musters it was thought by the author that the ship was the *Lady Nelson*, but at a later date the list was found in the *Buffalo's* log while the *Lady Nelson* was under her sailing orders, two other list for the *Lady Nelson* also appeared on the *Buffalo's* log

who by then had large properties. Mary loved to ride and did so until she was in her seventies.

Thomas was drowned while crossing the river near his home in 1823. He was 47 years old.

Mary Smith, now a widow, took over the complete running of the land. She appears to have 600 acres and a numbers of sheep that were branded with her name as early as 1823.³ She was also free by servitude by that date.

During this time she was well acquainted business wise, with many gentleman of the north, including William Field, David and Alexander Rose, Richard Dry and James Brumby, dealing mainly with race horses, such as Little John, Sparkle, Buzzard and Widow's Pet. She had her own training track on her property and from her lookout on the central hilltop she had an uninterrupted view of the track.⁴ When she died the auctioneers said her horses needed no comment, as they were the best in the Colony.

In 1827 Mary complained on oath that two men came into her house and broke down her bedroom door and stole a box belonging to her. Mary in a passion defender herself with a pair of sheep shears slashing the man called Jones with it.

The theft was bad enough but she had another reason for attacking him, he had been living with her for the past two months. The box contained deeds that belonged to over ten landholders in the district. Money was also stolen.⁵

Lieutenant-Governor Arthur appointed three commissioners, George Frankland, Peter Murdock and Roderic O'Connor, to travel the island and report back regarding the types of land etc. in 1826-28. The following was recorded in Journals of the Land Commissioners.⁶

Mary Smith (formally Mary Bowater) Mrs. Thomas Smith (1767-1849). Arrived c1805 Bowthorpe Norfolk Plains. St Paul's River.

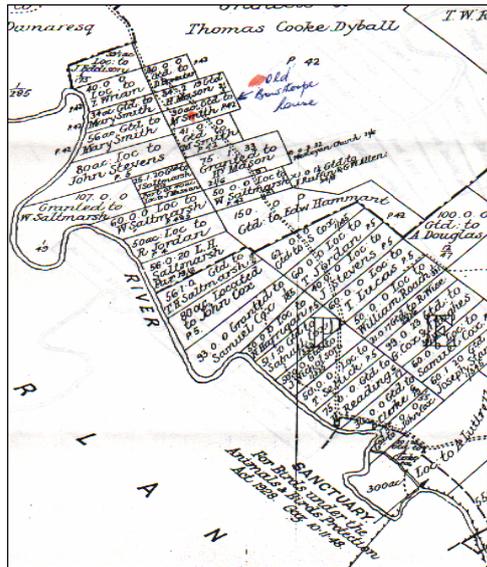
'Proceeded to Mrs. Smith's hut up the St. Paul's River about 10 miles from Mr. Knopwoods. After crossing the creek that flows from the Blackman's Corner the land becomes of an inferior quality..... Value from river to the Tiers at 4/- an acre. Mrs Smith had this farm from Mr Towers the distiller from Launceston. She had a large stock of sheep and cattle. They thrive well here in the summer, but the land is too cold and wet in the wintertime. South Esk River Nile'

³ Branded 200TS and 170OTS

⁴ Mead. Papers and Proceedings THRA November 1964.

⁵ Information received from Julie Gough.

⁶ Tasmaniana, State Library, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land 1826-28*. (ed) Anne McKay



Land Grants, Longford district.

Bowthorpe Homestead Patenna Rd.
Land once belonged to Mary Smith.

In 1829 Mary purchased 200 acres of land. She later sold this and took out a mortgage in 1830 to secure payment to the sum of £597/9/6, paying £25 interest per annum. This mortgage was to buy 1,000 acres from the well-known William Field, a gentleman, from Norfolk Plains.⁷

In the early 1830s a blind man by the name of James Holman, who was travelling around the world, arrived in Tasmania and conducted a tour from Hobart to Launceston. He records meeting Mary Smith on his journey to Launceston.⁸

⁷ Later known as Longford

⁸ Tasmaniana, State Library, James Holman, *Voyage Around the World* Vol, 2, pp 417, 432, 1835

As they passed through the Norfolk Plains district, they met the celebrated Moll Smith on horseback, who stopped to talk to Mr. Dutton.

According to Holman,

'The names assigned to places of the island are no particularly remarkable for elegance....a little further on, some rich meadow land, known by the name "Moll Smith's Bottom" having belonged to a woman who had been a convict, and had come from Sydney, with Col. Paterson in 1804.'

*'early colonial horse racing, like its English model, was such a cubby, male affair that there was no room for women only as accompaniments. The presence of the fair sex was regularly commented on in the press as an item of decoration, imparting respectability to the scene. But Mary Smith has age on her side, and a colourful past showed she was little worried by convention. She stands out in racing history as the only woman in her time to race horses in her own name. It was for Mrs. Smith that Little John won the 1844 Hobart Plate.'*⁹

Horse racing at that time was very popular in Norfolk Plains,¹⁰ and the name Mary Smith was well known for her fine horses.

Alexander Rose of Corra Lynn, a very prominent gentleman, sued Mary Smith in 1837 for libel, but lost the case. This case involved some of Mary Smith's properties at Norfolk Plains, Anthill Ponds and Campbell Town that she intended to leave to Alexander Rose's wife Isabella, who was the daughter of Elizabeth Riches a convict, who had arrived on the *Lady Nelson* in 1812, and who Mary Smith had befriended. Alexander Rose attempted to take over the properties before Mary died.¹¹ This was Mary's first encounter with the courts in Van Diemen's Land, and for her to have won the case revealed the strength of this woman.¹²

Mary Smith died on 22 April 1849, aged 80. From the time she arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1805 until her death, she corresponded with her family back in Warwickshire England. The Probate for her will showed that she knew the names, trades and where members of her family lived up to 1849. She left 400 pounds to members of her Bagley family.

Another interesting piece of information that came from the research I carry out was that there were five convict men by the name of Bowater who arrived in Van Diemen's Land between 1819 and 1838. Some of these men were found to have connections with Mary. She sold property to one, another was living with her when she was robbed, and one was an informant in her probate and a third one was living with her when she died.

⁹ Holman 1830

¹⁰ Schaffer, Irene. *James Jordan's Last Journey. Norfolk Island to Norfolk Plains 1813* p27

¹¹ SC 4 October 1837. Rose V Smith.

¹² Schaffer. I, A Most Remarkable Woman (Full court case pages 5-6)

Many stories have surfaced over the years about both men and women convicts who may have committed crimes in order to be sent to the Colony, and it would seem that Mary somehow informed members of, not her family, but those of her former husband, that if they came out to Van Diemen's Land she would see them, in some cases, set up and have a new life.¹³ There were no Bowaters' named in Mary's will.

Mary (Bowater) Smith had no family in Tasmania, but since writing her story I have been contacted by many of her descendants back in Warwickshire after they had read about her on my website. From these contacts I have gained a great deal more about the history of Mary and her family back in England.

Irene Schaffer 2012

¹³ Schaffer. I, A Most Remarkable Woman, Mary Bowater. Convict and Land Holder 1765-1849.