

Female convicts strip-searched by female searchers

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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 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 any 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 thief had 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 female convicts and female searchers appears, where detected.

Many watchhouse constables were free men or ex-soldiers, but it was equally common to employ ex-convicts or even convicts still serving their sentence. 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.⁵

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 a female convict. 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 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.⁶

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 Simmons' class, and so she would have performed one of the harshest tasks labouring at the washtub in the laundry.⁷

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. Even so, 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.⁸ 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.⁹ Indicating her intentions, she absconded in December just eight months after her arrival in Tasmania. Regarding the supposed military 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 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. Although her free certificate appeared in the press on 8 April 1834 it is not shown on her convict record.¹⁰

Turning to the buildings known as watchhouses. There is a critical description of them, which mentions females, which appeared in June 1836. Admittedly, it is from *Bent's News*, a newspaper opposed to Governor Arthur's regime, but after describing deplorable conditions it went on:

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 hurdled 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?¹¹

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. With reference to females being searched, here are two examples, albeit by writers who used pseudonyms. The first is from '*Emigrant*', who in 1866 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 of 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.¹²

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. While it mentioned female convicts, the facilities were also found to be 'dilapidated' and 'incommodious', and other critical comments – particularly railing against female convicts freely smoking! The magistrates 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.¹³

In 1855 the incumbent Cascade Female Factory female searcher, [given as] Margaret Witherington, was involved in an inquest.¹⁴ 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. 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 '2nd Class' 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, who explained that he was required to regularly patrol 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'.

One last story suggests that another female convict was searched multiple times, with at least some mention the strip-search by the female searcher.¹⁵ 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!¹⁶ 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 entering 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 for her trouble.

Searchers at Watchhouses

Turning now to locating information on particular 'female searchers' of female convicts, 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 similar 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, including female convicts. 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 attempts to record the 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, 1853-1870 [?= 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; - assaulted when searching another female at Macquarie Street watch-house. [<i>Tas. Daily News</i> , 31/8/1855, p.3.]
Margaret Witterington [perhaps one ‘t’ or ‘h’ ?]	Hobart: [Cascade Female Factory; Margaret searched a prisoner who died overnight – see text [<i>Colonial Times</i> , 29 /10/1855 p.3]
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? ¹⁷	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]
<i>Mercury</i> , 29/7/1863.p.3; CON 33/1/39]	
Mrs McAuliffe	Launceston: [<i>Cornwall Chronicle</i> , 4/7/1863, p.5.] Council

<p>[NB: birth notice showing Joanna McAuliffe, wife of Constable Denis McAuliffe, [RGD 33/1/39. No. 319] Mrs Sophia Cole; Constable Edward or Edmund Cole, Sub-inspector Oatlands</p>	<p>criticises ‘preposterous’ female searcher payment - see text. 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’.</p>
<p>Mrs Edwards</p>	<p>[<i>Mercury</i>, 4/2/1864, p.2]. Chudleigh: <i>Examiner</i>, 8/10/1864, p.3 [Searcher finds stolen cheques hidden in female’s bosom]</p>
<p>Elizabeth White [Constable John Ephraim White]</p>	<p>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?]</p>
<p>Mrs Newitt, wife of Constable Newitt, Rokeby. Harriet McKenzie</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Mrs Whitefield</p>	<p>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]</p>
<p>Mrs Elizabeth Eddie</p>	<p>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]</p>
<p>Mrs Newall</p>	<p>Bothwell: paid £2 as searcher [<i>Mercury</i>, 12/12/1870 p.2]</p>

As mentioned, this is incomplete tabulation, but what follows gives some additional information about the biographies of a few female searchers in connection with female convicts.

Caroline Rudman-Watkins-McGuire, frequently appears as the name of a 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 1864.¹⁸ This would put her birth as 1811 or 1815, but 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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 1855.²¹ Caroline McGuire was called to a public house where a pair of convicts [Ann Stevens and Margaret Hughes, alias Stewart] 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 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.²²

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].²³

In September 1855 Caroline McGuire was 'assaulted' at the watchhouse. The perpetrator was a Scottish-born female convict, Mary McQueen, aged 29, 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 1873.²⁴

In 1848 the *Hobart Guardian* [using capital letters] reported a case, at length, with this heading:

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 detestible. 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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.

This paper has concerned female searchers, and the connected history of watchhouses, with their male constables and the female convicts who were searched by them. To conclude; 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.'²⁷ While this merely 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 often used to strip search arrested females to discover any stolen items, or potentially harmfully or lethal items they could use on themselves or others.

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

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

6

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

7

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

8

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

9

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

10

Colonial Times, 8 April 1834, p.3.

11

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

12

Cornwall Chronicle, 29 December 1866, p.7.

13

Courier, 8 October 1844, p.2.

14

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

15

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,

16

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

17

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

18

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>

19

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

20

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.

21

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

22

These two female convicts involved in three simultaneous cases: *Mercury*, 11 June 1855, p.3, 4 July 1855, p.3, *Tasmanian Daily News*, 9 June 1855, p.3, 3 July 1855, p.3.

23

CON 41-1-28 Image 110, *Courier*, 21 September 1854, p.2, *Colonial Times*, 18 October 1854, p.3.

24

Mercury, 17 September 1855, p.2, CON 41-132, Image 136, RGD 24-4-73 no.1444.

25

Hobart Guardian, 26 August 1848, p.2.

26

Hobart Guardian, 19 August 1848, p.3; and *Hobart Guardian*, 6 September 1848, p.2..

27