

# Son of Norfolk: Transported to Van Diemen's Land

How an arrest at a horse fair in 1834 changed the life of a Norwich man. By Christine Leonard

I am a fifth-generation descendant of William WALL, Wall being the surname my paternal ancestors have used up to the present day. My two-times great-grandfather was 17 when he was arrested in Horncastle, Lincolnshire. Charged with a felony, William was transported to the colony of Van Diemen's Land, leaving behind his family, a lost youth and a future working with horses, but he was adventurous and headstrong, and above all a survivor.

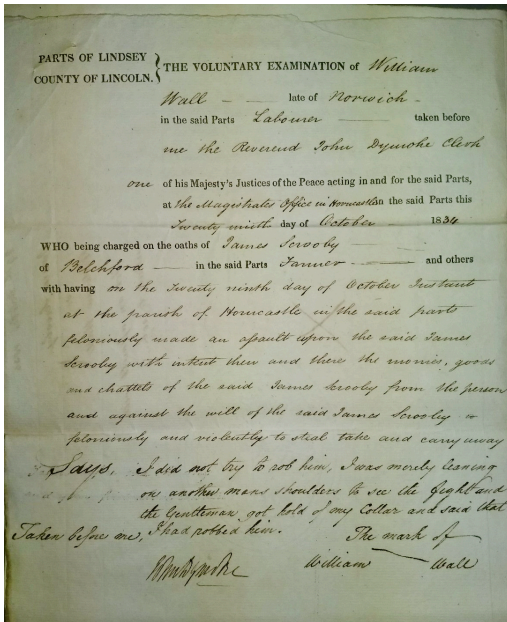
William's father, also called William, was a lace weaver and a son of Norfolk through his parents William LAMB and Ann TRULL. Three generations of William Lambs gets confusing, but my William's father, who I refer to as William Lamb snr, was born 31 January 1781 in Norwich. The Lambs and Trulls

were Norfolk people since the mid-1500s at least, largely settling in Norwich. William Lamb senior married Martha Whall in St Martins-At-Palace, Norwich, (Church of England) on 25 December 1804. William jnr, born 10 May 1817, was their fifth child with two more brothers following.

Horncastle was a old Roman town but evidence of earlier settlements dates back to the Bronze Age. By at least 1306, according to the Horncastle History and Heritage Society, Lincolnshire 'was the leading horse breeding district in the county and almost every farmer bred horses to sell at the Horncastle Fair.' It is likely that it was William's job as a groomsmen that took him to Horncastle in October 1834, where horse trading and all the associated activities of the fair saw lots of cash passed around.

Perhaps the fair was moved to later in the year, as records state that it was during the annual horse fair, 29 October 1834, that the 17-year-old groomsmen-come-labourer, of Norwich, Norfolk, was arrested. The name he gave to the arresting constable was William Wall—not Lamb. Whall, oftentimes spelt Wall, was his mother Martha's maiden name. Why did my

ancestor identify himself by his mother's name when his siblings used Lamb?

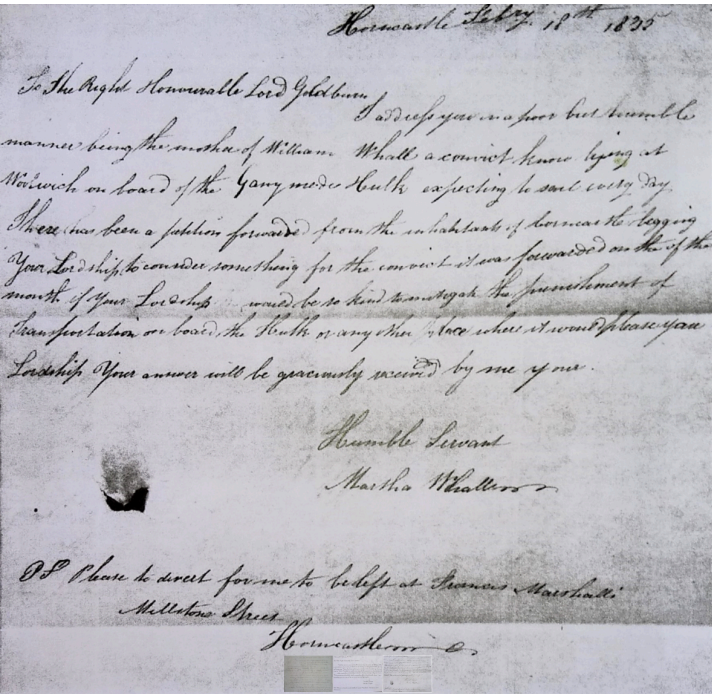


The arrest report (pictured above) stated that whilst in a crowd watching a fight in the back of the Vine Beer House in Horncastle, William attempted to assault and rob a gentleman farmer from Belchford, Mr James Scrooby, of £60. This extraordinary amount of cash leads me to think that Squire Scrooby had done very well that day. William denied the charges, asserting he was leaning over the man's shoulders to watch the fight in the beer house, when a gentleman grabbed him by the collar, accusing him of trying to rob him.

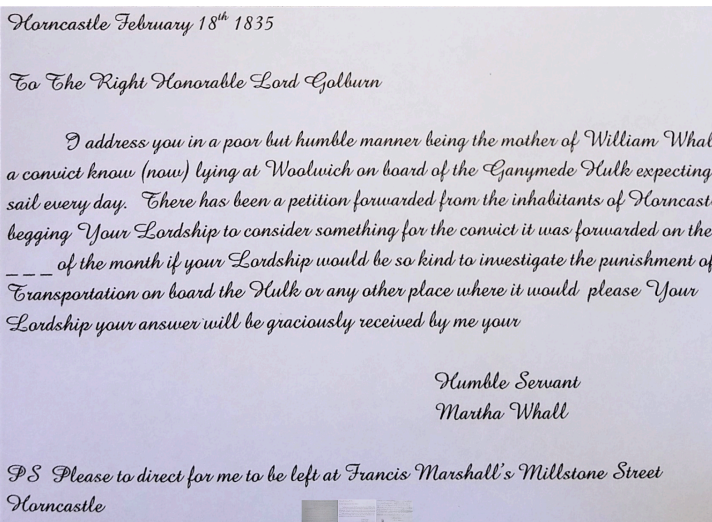
Sometime later in 1834 or early 1835, Martha travelled alone to Horncastle, not as Mrs Lamb, but under her father's name, as Martha Whall. Once settled at Francis and Ann MARSHALL's guest house on Millstone Street, Martha put together a petition with 33 signatures, seeking clemency for her son on the grounds of mistaken identity and the witness for the prosecution being intoxicated. William's trial was scheduled for the General Quarter Sessions in January 1835 in Spilsby. With the prosecution witness being a police constable, William's case was weak, and Martha's efforts did not prevail.

I can't help wonder about the relationship between William jnr and his father. Why did William Lamb snr let his wife go unaccompanied to Lincolnshire? And why did neither use the name Lamb?

William was held for seven months on the prison hulk HMS *Ganymede* in the river Thames at Woolwich. Prior to British capture in February 1809, the *Ganymede* was a French frigate called *Hébé*. In 1819, the *Ganymede* was decommissioned and converted to a prison hulk before eventually being broken up in 1838 (Wikipedia: 2020). Due to the excessive number of prisoners being incarcerated, decommissioned ships were re-assigned to house prisoners, and



Martha Wall's petition on behalf of her son William, with transcription below



between 1776 and 1795 more than one third of the 5,722 prisoners died in prison hulks.

By 1830, 10 prison hulks housed 4,400 prisoners of which 64 per cent were transported or were a waiting transportation to Australia. Britain was transporting convicts to its American colonies from 1654, but with the outbreak of the American wars of independence in 1775, the system was abruptly curtailed until the First Fleet to Australia set sail in 1788 (Convicts of Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire Archives). From the start of the nineteenth century, Britain had the harshest penal code in Europe and even as late as 1837, there were 200 crimes punishable by transportation (McKay, 1958 p.13).

On 13 January 1835, William, now 18 years old, was sentenced to seven years with transportation to Van Diemen's Land. As one of 269 male only convicts, William jnr was transferred to the *Layton* which departed from Sheerness on 26 August 1835. The 510 tonne three-masted barque had a crew of 40, accompanied by a guard of 30 rank and file drawn largely from the 28th Foot Regiment. During the voyage William was appointed boatswain but subsequently demoted due to bad behaviour. After 103 days at sea, the *Layton* arrived in Hobart Town on 10 December 1835.

The convict assignment system in Van Diemen's Land commenced in 1803 and continued through to 1839, where private settlers and landholders took on a convict becoming responsible for their food, clothing and lodging (Libraries Tasmania). In September 1803, the first British settlement was established at Risdon Cove, north of what became Hobart Town and armed hostilities, commonly termed as the Black Wars, with the colony's Aborigines commenced in earnest in 1804.

The Black Wars that raged until 1831 were largely a result of

Aboriginal alienation from their lands; however, the increased violence and kidnapping of Aboriginal women and children triggered retaliatory attacks on white settlements and isolated individuals. There were purportedly 'six times as many white men in the Colony as there were women, and almost none of the later men were available to frontiersmen' (Clements: 2014). By 1835 most of the indigenous population was forcibly removed to Flinders Island in Bass Strait.

The colonies in Australia were a solution to Britain's overcrowded jails and prison hulks, and convict labour was crucial for infrastructure development and a general workforce. As the colonies and settlements expanded with free settlers emigrating out, colonial governments faced the growing tensions between running a self-sufficient penal colony, whilst governing for and meeting the expectations of an expanding emigrant free settler community. (McKay: p.15, 1958).

Charles McLACHLAN Esquire had made a fortune running a shipping service between Scotland and Australia under the auspices of the Australian Company, bringing many of the

early free Scottish settlers to the colony. He was involved in whaling, banking, and politics, but McLachlan was lucky to get William, as nothing moved in the colony without horses, and his newly assigned servant would prove his worth across the squire's various enterprises.

Later in 1837, William was re-assigned to Mr. O'MEARA, before finally working for the retired and widowed Captain Robert Petty STEWART, who lived near Launceston. With six children to care for following the death of his wife, Captain Stewart was assigned several female convicts who helped care for his growing family and manage the household. He also had numerous male convicts working on his property. William landed himself in trouble with Stewart on 7 March 1839, having been 'found at 11 o'clock at night in the bedroom of his master's servant-maid'. He received 36 lashes and was returned post-haste to the government depot, 'services no longer required'.

On 28 May 1840, William was granted his Ticket of Leave. You would think he might keep his head down, but a few days later he was charged with insolence. Luck was on his side however, as charges were dropped. A notice listing all the names receiving full

pardons appeared in The Hobart Town Courier and Van Diemen's Land Gazette on 5 June 1840, and William Wall was on the list.

Being a ticket-of leave man, William needed permission to marry, a request that was approved, and on 23 June 1841, William and Mary LONG, a free woman, were married in Launceston's St. John's (Church of England). Seven months later, on 8 January 1842, William received that vital piece of paper, his Certificate of Freedom. Soon after, the Walls leased 80 acres at 2s per acre with the view to purchase, at Circular Head in Emu Bay, from the Van Diemen's Land Company. The time had finally come to shake off the yoke of servitude. ■

### **Christine Leonard née Wall**

Christine wrote about William Wall in 2021. The Wall Family: weaving the threads of memories can be purchased as an E-book from Ratuken Kobo in the UK. Available online at <https://www.kobo.com/gb/en/search?query=the+wall+family+weaving+the+threads+of+memories>

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## Norfolk Nuggets #1

From page 2 of The Norfolk Chronicle, Saturday 8 August 1812, and a fore-runner to today's Lonely Hearts advertisements. We can but wonder if the lady was able to fulfil her very specific requirements... ■

**MATRIMONY.**

**A** Respectable middle-aged Woman, without a family or incumbrance, wishing to enter into the Matrimonial State, and who possesses property not less than a Thousand Pounds, may meet with an agreeable Partner of undeniable character who has an income of Thirty Pounds per annum.—Letters, post paid, addressed to A. B, and left at the Printing Office, will meet with immediate attention.

innkeeper of the Angel Hotel, Great Yarmouth from 1802-1822; a Frances Brown, daughter of Charles Brown and Martha née PHILLIPS, is baptised at Great Yarmouth on 2 September 1800 and Charles Browne aged 72 is buried there on 10 May 1826. A Charles Browne and Martha Philips had been married at St Peter Mancroft, Norwich, on 15 January 1797, so - while speculative - if Martha is 'Mrs Brown(e) née

Philips' then she may have been aged in her early 50s in 1827. ■

Sources include:

Norfolk Chronicle, Saturday 21 October 1826

Norfolk Chronicle, Saturday 14 April 1827

Stamford Mercury, Friday 15 June 1827

[www.norfolkpubs.co.uk](http://www.norfolkpubs.co.uk)

**Alan Harper, Editor**

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