

FREEMAN Family

– from "Macclesfield Jubilee 1840-1990, Families Old and New", compiled by the Macclesfield Community Newsletter Committee – in Macclesfield Community History website

One of the most colourful personalities to have lived at Macclesfield was William (Billy) FREEMAN.

Billy was respected by all, and feared by some, partly because of his shocking temper and partly because it was whispered, among the older generation, that he had been 'transported' to Australia. Most felt that this could be true and if so it must have been for some very violent crime.

However, if people of his generation did tend to recall him only because of a very bad and ungovernable temper an examination of his life reveals Bill to have been a real pioneer, hard working and honest in all of his dealings.

Now it is true that Billy was a convict but this record of his 'crime and punishment' taken from the New South Wales Archives explains why he was transported: -

No 1292 - 166, William FREEMAN, Factory Boy, Age 16
Tried: Salisbury Assizes, April 20, 1830
Single, Education R and W, Native Place, Somersetshire
Offence: Stealing cheese
Sentence: 7 years transportation

It seems likely that his age was falsified to allow for the penalty of transportation for he was only twelve and a half years old at the time of the trial, and fourteen and a half years when he arrived at Sydney Cove. Yet on both occasions his age was given as sixteen. (Had Billy taken some bread to go with the cheese his punishment would probably have been even more severe!)

On June 8, 1832 the convict ship *John* arrived at Sydney Cove with Billy and two hundred other convicts aboard. Having travelled overland from New South Wales he arrived in South Australia in 1840.

On September 15, 1840, Billy married Sarah STACEY at Trinity Church, Adelaide. Sarah was the daughter of James and Mary STACEY and she and her family had only arrived in South Australia on June 20 of the same year. As the STACEY's came from Stogursey in Somerset and Billy from Freshford, Somerset, all were from the same county in England.

Billy and Sarah first lived and farmed near Belvedere and later came to Doctor's Creek near Macclesfield. Billy and his bride went to Sandegrove(sp?) to farm and he was assisted at one time with a loan from Edward STIRLING, MLC, who said of Billy "I have known him for twenty-three years as an honest man of good character."

Billy and Sarah had ten children who lived beyond childhood and all contributed something to the well-being of Macclesfield at some time or another. During his lifetime Billy was a dairy and wheat farmer, a builder, a butcher, mail coach driver and a mail cart driver. He is said to have driven the first mail coach from Strathalbyn to Adelaide, described as "a three horse coach". He certainly drove the mail coach from Strathalbyn to Yankalilla, a spring dray type of vehicle.

He conducted a butcher's shop for some time in premises just north of the Macclesfield Post Office - the building is still in use. He also did a lot of work for the Macclesfield District Council but in 1883 declined a contract to clean up the Macclesfield General Cemetery because the price was too low.

Billy was a very good runner and won many events at local shows and picnics. For the greater part of his life he wore the 'old English' style of smock: a loose garment worn over one's working clothes. It is said that he was one of only two or three people in Macclesfield to do so.

There seems no doubt that Billy must have been very tough as the Southern Argus reports September 14, 1882, that "...he fell from his cart and a wheel passed over his head but he sustained no injury".

Sarah, aged seventy-three, died March 6, 1896, leaving Billy, three sons, three daughters, forty grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren. One daughter, Rebecca, married into the WIRTH family who later ran the famous circus.

Billy, at the age of eighty-two, died on April 16, 1899, in the old Marra house on Cunliffe Street, then the home of his daughter Emma. He, Sarah and one son, John Henry, are buried just inside the main gate of the old Church of England Cemetery in Luck Street.

Billy was the great-grandfather of Len CHESSER who says of him that he was "...a real man, I wish I had known him."

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