

THE CAREER OF JOHN GIBBINS

Ada Gibbins was the youngest child of Frederick Gibbins, born at Mullet Creek in 1841 - the only son of Ann Meredith and John Gibbins.

Ada's grandmother, Ann Meredith was born in the colony but one of the greatest convict success stories is that of her grandfather - the 'Butcher's Boy', John Gibbins.

Transported on the Claudine (2) in 1829, he had received a sentence of 14 years for

being a "pickpockets". he was tried in either London or Middlesex (depending on which record you look at) and was reputedly "5' 2' in height and had a "ruddy pale" complexion which was "much pitted". His hair was dark brown and he "hazel eyes". On arrival in New South Wales he was disposed of to the "Department of Public Works". John Gibbins was listed as "aged 18 years".

By the time of the 1837 "Returns of Convicts" Gibbins was "aged 29" and his master was "G. Blackett" of Liverpool. He received a Ticket of Leave in 1838 with the proviso that he remain in the Liverpool district but this was "lost" (probably conveniently) and its replacement, issued on November 22, 1829 allowed him to remain in Illawarra. When banns were posted for John's marriage to the free-born Ann Meredith, Ann's father (then the Chief Constable at Liverpool) guaranteed to keep the couple in his service until John could obtain his Ticket of Leave - something which the official records indicate he already had. Why he didn't want his father-in-law, Frederick Meredith (born in the colony in 1800) to know this (or at least to pretend that he didn't know) is an interesting question.

In the 1841 Census (Return No. 347) John's place of residence was described as "Mullet Creek, Illawarra. The person in charge of the household of two was "John Gibbons" and the owner of the house was listed as the "Government Stockade". In this household of two there was one "free person" (presumably Ann Meredith born c. 1823) and John was listed in a column indicating he was either a "shopkeeper" or undertaking "other retail duties". According to the census, Ann had no duties of any kind - which is highly unlikely as living as the wife of a butcher in a Government Stockade probably meant spending a lot of time dodging convicts, being a wife and mother and possibly even acting as a butcher's assistant.

The various Government Stockades used to domicile convicts engaged in road building in Illawarra appear to have begun at the bottom of Mount Keira Road and moved on to various locations to the south as the road was being constructed. By 1841 the road was obviously being built in the vicinity of the present Dapto area.

The butcher's boy turned pickpockets had graduated in the space of less than a decade to being the butcher who supplied the meat to the Government Stockade at Mullet Creek in Illawarra.

From such a relatively humble start in the Government Stockade at Dapto, John Gibbons

and Ann Meredith's retail activities had prospered sufficiently to give their son, Frederick Gibbons (named after his maternal grandfather), sufficient start in life to enable him to go on to build a sprawling Victorian mansion called "Dapetto".

As the accompanying photo shows it was a splendid residence.



DAPPETO