

## THE LIFE OF GEORGE CRIBB IN THE YEARS 1807-1828

George Cribb was probably born about 1788.

He is convicted (along with a woman named "Ann Cribb alias Fanny Barnett" for "uttering false notes" (i.e. forgery) and both are arraigned at the Wiltshire Assizes ("No. 6") for having forged notes in their possession.

George is described as being aged 30, Fanny (a slip of a young thing) 28 years.

George Cribb arrives per the "Admiral Gambier" [1] on 20 December 1808 (Master : Ed Harrison) [AONSW: Bound 4/4004 Muster & papers: 2/8240 p.95 Reel: 2417] and Fanny arrives per the "Speke" on 16 November, 1808.

On 18 April 1811 George Cribb, bachelor, was married by license to Fanny Barnett, Spinster, in the Church of England, Phillip Street, Sydney. Cribb signed his name but Fanny used a cross. The witnesses were Samuel and Agnes Thorley.

The bachelor Gorge Cribb, however, had a wife back in England whose name was "Mary Cribb". George must have absentmindedly let her slip his mind but, fortunately, she is not totally forgotten to Australian history as we shall see a little later.

The 1814 Muster describes George ( arrived Admiral Gambier) as being "free", "off stores" and a "Landholder". In the register of Conditional Pardons he is listed as the following:

“George Cribb arrived Admiral Gambier 1809 [sic – actually 1808]

Native Place: Somerset

Occupation: Butcher

Tried Wiltshire 7 March 1807

Sentence: 14 years

Height: 5' 9"

Complexion: fair ruddy

Hair: light

Eyes: hazel

On the 1 June 1814 George Cribb received his Conditional Pardon.

On the 20 April 1816, our “Butcher Boy”, however, is “Fined for baking and selling light bread and using illegal weights.”

So Cribb was clearly engaged in multi-skilling and may have been a baker and shopkeeper as well as a chopper of meat. He is then said to be living in Cambridge Street, Sydney.

One month later, Lieutenant Parker makes mention of “a Bullock belonging to Mr Cribb” at the Five Islands.

In the meantime, Ann Cribb (alias Fanny Barnett) had received her Ticket of Leave on the 1 February 1811 and a full free pardon on 31 January 1815. It was clearly just what she wanted for a Free Pardon entitled the holder to leave the colony if he or she wished. An announcement in the Sydney Gazette Supplement April 22, 1815 duly declares that “Fanny Cribb” is “leaving the colony”.

As further events would show, George was a little bit unlucky in love. But Fanny probably wasn't leaving George because he was broke. For the same Sydney Gazette announces in its supplement that on 25 January 25 1815 George Cribb received payment for cattle and could afford to donate to the Orphan Fund.

But George was a little careless for he later issues a notice about his “lost pocket book” on December 9 1815 – the same day that Joseph Wild becomes Constable of the Five Islands.

Earlier that year (25 March 1815), George is supplying meat for the Government stores and does so again on June 14 1817, 9 August 1817, 18 October 1817,

June 27 & Oct 24 1818 and on 24 April and 7 August 1819. There is an interesting gap between April 1815 (when Fanny leaves) and June 1817.

The records of George's existence for this period are a little thin. On 27 January 1816 there is a notice in the Sydney Gazette about "stolen notes" and George Cribb. On 13 April 1816, George subscribes to the "Waterloo Fund but then on 15 June 1816, George makes an announcement about his request for a "settlement of accounts". This may have been a precursor to his possible attempt to make a prolonged stay in Illawarra, for it is later announced on 7 May and 3 August 1817 (again in the Sydney Gazette) that letters are waiting for "George Cribb and G. Cribb.

If George was resident in Illawarra during this period, how did he get here?

As a reader of the Sydney Gazette, he would no doubt have read the 18 March 1815 announcement of a party successful moving cattle to the "fine grazing land" at Five Islands. But then, there is also the possibility (particularly given his later association with the name of Dr Charles Thorsby that George Cribb was one of the two unnamed white men with Dr Thorsby's expedition that made its way into Illawarra in 1815.

By late in 1817 George has reopened his butcher shops in Cambridge and Pitt Streets Sydney. No linking of George Cribb with Illawarra seems to exist apart from Lieutenant Parker's 8 May 1816 reference. Presumably, Charcoal Will (who was Cribb's stockmen according to Thorsby Smith) stays on in Illawarra until at least 1818 when he makes his affidavit in the court case.

By 1818, however, George Cribb has struck it very lucky indeed. After a minor set back at being cautioned for trespass on 2 May 1818, George achieves the great Australian dream – to marry a woman who owns several pubs.

In 1818 George Cribb, already married twice to women still very much alive, marries Sophia Blondell (Per "Experiment", 1804), the widow of Stafford Lett.

Sophia already has 5 kids and plenty of "spirit licences". George Cribb himself is quickly on the list in 1818 ( Feb 16) of applicants for spirit licenses in Sydney. (AONSW Reel 6006; 4/3498 p.62)

George continues to prove to a very naughty boy and gets heavily into cattle rustling, hawking, bribing witnesses, getting a number of land grants (including one near

Dr Throsby's Glenfield property), a rather nasty incident involving the 'framing' of others and even scores a mention (on 10 August 1821) by Charles Throsby in his account of a dispute with Edward Smith Hall (AONSWReel 6016; 4/5781 p.33)

But George's Illawarra days (extending – if they did indeed occur – for little more than a year straddling the winters of 1816 and 1817) had clearly come to an end.

But despite his undoubted status as a man of wealth with convicts of his own, George continues to be a little unlucky in love.

In 1823 (on March 3 in the Sydney Gazette) he issues a "caution against giving credit to his wife". What could Sophia have possibly done to deserve this public humiliation?

Who knows? But perhaps Fanny Barnett had been right to try to get well away from George and back to England. Sadly, she died in the attempt – at Batavia:

"October 15th 1815 Batavia (**Indefatigable**).

A fellow passenger, called Mrs Cribb, formerly a convict and wife or mistress to a butcher in Sydney, was taken ill yesterday or the day before on the common fever of the Country and dies this morning. It is remarkable that in the ship I sailed from England there was a Mrs Cribb going out to join her husband at Sydney from whom she has been absent 5 or 6 years and it appears that the same man is husband to both women."

These words come from the journal of Dr Joseph Arnold who also remarks:

"July 13th 1815

Marriage is recommended however, but as if without regard to propriety persons who have left wives in England, Women who have left husbands in England, marry again. Several of the women we brought out to join their husbands found them married here & in one case what is very extraordinary a Mrs Cribb came out with me to join her husband (in the **Northampton**) and another Mrs Cribb (wife of the same man) is going home with me in the **Indefatigable**.

If George Cribb was resident in Illawarra between mid 1816 and mid 1817, it was perhaps one of the few periods of his adult life when he was 'between wives'.

Mary Cribb, however, had the good sense to jump ship in Rio and apparently set herself up as a successful shopkeeper there. At the State Records Office (formerly AONSW) is a document concerning a Mrs Mary Cribb absconding from the **Northampton** when it arrived at Rio de Janeiro. She did so along with three other

women who were coming out to join their husbands in the colony. The Captain could not get them back on to the **Northampton**. (AONSW Reel 6045; 4/1732 p.168)

And a good thing it appears to have been for all concerned.

George Cribb vanishes from Colonial records after 1827.

He may have been many things in his life but he was certainly not boring – at least that is if you didn't happen to be married to him.

Joseph Davis

ENDNOTES:

[1] *Frank McCaffrey, The History of Illawarra and its Pioneers, self published, 142 Barton Avenue Haberfield, 1922*; *Jim Derbyshire and Dianne Allen, Land Between Two Rivers: a historical and pictorial survey of Shellharbour Municipality, Shellharbour Municipal Council, hardcover reprint, 1987.*

[2] *Land Between Two Rivers: a historical and pictorial survey of Shellharbour Municipality, Shellharbour Municipal Council, hardcover reprint, 1987, p.28.*

[3] *W.G. McDonald, Nineteenth Century Dapto, Illawarra Historical Society, 1976, p.1.*

[4] *Banks Papers Mitchell Library, 14 April, 1808; cited by Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines, Aboriginal Education Unit, Wollongong University, 1990, p.32.*

[5] *Benjamin Lindsay, Land Settlement in Illawarra 1804-'61, Illawarra Historical Publications, 1994 p 5.*

[6] *Frank McCaffrey, The History of Illawarra and its Pioneers, op.cit., 1922, p.5.*

[7] *Governor Macquarie, "Journal of a Tour to the Cow Pastures and Illawarra", January 1822, Mitchell Library MS No A786; also much reprinted as in McDonald, Earliest Illawarra, 1966, p.37; David Smythe's cedar-cutting reminiscences are recorded in Alfred McFarland (Judge of the Southern District Court), A History of Illawarra and Manaro: Districts of NSW, William Maddock, 1872, p. 11.*

[8] *See Alexander Harris, The Secrets of Alexander Harris (as edited from Religio Christi 1858 describing events in Illawarra about 1828), Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1961, pp. 152-153*

[9] *Report of Lieutenant Parker, 8 May 1816, Archives Office of NSW, Reel 6045, 4/1735, p. 61.*

[10] *See Surveyor Meehan's Field Book 119, Mitchell Library.*

[11] *I am indebted to Frank Osborne, Surveyors, Settlers and Land Grants in Illawarra 1815-1817, Illawarra Historical Society, 2001, p. 11, for this reading of Meehan's notes.*