JOHN ALGER OF CHARCOAL

John Alger was born in Suffolk in 1810, the son of John Alger and Rebecca Thain who had married in the parish of Wortham in Suffolk on 2 October 1804. The two eldest children were christened at Wortham—Robert (29/12/1805) and Jane (12/2/1809)—and John senior was still alive when Rebecca died at Wortham on 15 October 1849, aged 82. The name of Alger (often spelt Algar) is a very old one in northern Suffolk.

In 1831 John was living in the parish of Rickinghall Superior about two miles from Wortham when he had a run-in with the Law and found himself exiled to Australia. Under the heading 'Calendar of Prisoners for Trial at Suffolk Lent Assizes at Bury St. Edmunds commencing Saturday 19 March 1831' appears the following indictment:

"Ipswich Gaol—John Alger, 21, and James Walker, 24. Committed December 10th, by the Rev. John Chevallier and John Ward, charged with having broken into the warehouse of Mary and Susan Jolly of Rickingham on the night of the 4th, 5th or 6th of the same month, and stolen divers articles, their property."

The case was tried before Sir Stephen Gazelee of the King's Bench on 22 March 1831. The judgment reads:

"THE JURORS for our Lord the King upon their Oath present that John Alger late of the parish of Rickinghall Superior in the County of Suffolk, Labourer, and James Walker, late of the same place, Labourer, on the sixth day of December in the first year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord William the Fourth by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland King Defender of the Faith, with force and arms at the parish aforesaid in the County aforesaid the Warehouse of Mary Jolly and Susannah Jolly there situate did then and there feloniously break and enter and one Half-firkin of the value of sixpence, twenty-eight pounds weight of butter of the value of twenty-eight Shillings, two pounds weight of currants of the value of one Shilling and one broom of the value of two pence of the goods and chattels of the said Mary Jolly and Susannah Jolly in the same Warehouse then and there being found and there feloniously did steal take and carry away against the peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity."

Above Alger's name is written "Found Guilty, Trans. 7 Years."

The "Bury and Suffolk Herald" stated in its report that "Two witnesses deposed to the prisoner Alger bringing to them early on the morning of the 7th December some of the articles mentioned." The omens had not been favourable for "On Sunday morning their Lordships heard divine service at St. Mary's Church where a very able and impressive discourse was delivered ... from the 58th of Isiah, part of the 1st verse, 'And thou shalt shew my people their transgressions'."

Alger spent nearly four months on one of the hulks "Leviathan" or "York" before being embarked on 11 July 1831 onto the "Surrey I." A ship of 461 tons built in 1811, it was one of the best-known
transports as it made the record number of ten visits between 1814 and 1840. Fully square-rigged, it had three decks, was 117'6" long and 29'6" in breadth.

It left Portsmouth on 17 July 1831, stopped at Rio de Janeiro on 9 August and arrived in Sydney on 26 November after a voyage of 132 days.

The Indents state that he was 5'6½" in height with a sallow and freckled appearance, scars on his nose and right thumb, brown hair, hazel eyes, a Protestant, able to read but not write, and "ploughs, reaps, sows and milks." The Medical and Surgical Journal of the "Surrey" reveals that Alger was treated on 26 July for a contused hand, from 18 to 21 September for vertigo and on 17 October for colic.

On arrival he was assigned to Mrs. Jemima Jenkins on her Berkeley Estate and on 7 March 1836 he was granted a Ticket of Leave on the grounds that he had served the one master for more than four years. On this he took up a clearing-lease at Spring Hill at West Wollongong on a property of about 500 acres owned by Charles C. Innes.

On 10 July 1837, with the formal consent of the Governor, he married Margaret Whitehill, the daughter of William and Julia Whitehill (q.v.) in the Old Schoolhouse at Wollongong, the Revd. Matthew Devenish-Meares officiating.

In 1844 the Algers took up a tenancy at Charcoal, a small village of 280 acres in the north-west corner of the Berkeley Estate, and kept it for more than 30 years. John interrupted his farming for several years in the late 1850s to go searching for gold but he had indifferent success.

They had nine children, who included only one son:

1. JULIA REBECCA
   b. 26/11/1837 at Paulsgrove.
   m. Phineas Beatus (1831-18/2/1913) on 19/1/1857 at Wollongong.
   d. 15/4/1933 at Randwick.

2. JOHN
   b. 23/12/1840 at Spring Hill.
   m. Sarah Bennett (1847-8/8/1918) on 25/7/1865 on Keelogues Estate.
   d. 19/7/1928 at Paddington.

3. SUSAN
   b. 25/7/1843 at Spring Hill.
   m. Emanuel Emanuel (1837-17/5/1904) in 1866 at ?
   d. 25/12/1882 in King Street, Sydney.

4. FEMALE
   d. Before 1865.

5. ELIZA
   b. 12/7/1846 at Charcoal.
   m. John Williams (1844-10/2/1912) on 6/7/1870 at St. James', Sydney.
   d. 24/6/1934 at Waverley.

6. MARGARET
   b. 14/2/1849 at Charcoal.
   m. William Stainton Staff (5/9/1851-7/1/1925) on 14/5/1879 at Dapto.
   d. 12/2/1916 at Wollongong.

7. JANE
   b. 7/5/1851 at Charcoal.
   d. 13/10/1924 in Leichhardt Street, Sydney.
8. ELLEN CHRISTINA
   b. 20/2/1855 at Charcoal.
   m. Edwin Walter (1853-23/3/1924) on 24/10/1878 at Wollongong.
   d. 10/10/1927 at Paddington.

9. ALICE JEMIMA
   b. 17/5/1865 at Charcoal.
   d. 16/5/1878 at Charcoal.

John died at Charcoal on 14 November 1876 and is buried in the small Berkeley Cemetery atop Flagstaff Hill. For years afterwards his wife inserted the following doggerel in the "Illawarra Mercury" on the anniversary of his passing:

"I mourn the loss of him I loved
And did my best to save;
Beloved in life, regretted still,
Remembered in the grave."

After his death, Margaret made her living as an accoucheuse for many years. She continued to live at Charcoal until 1910 when she went to live with her daughter Margaret Staff (the writer's ancestress) at Fig Tree. She died, a great-great grandmother, on 16 June 1915 from bronchitis at the great age of 95 years and 196 days. At the time she was visiting her daughter Ellen at 25 Campbell Street in Paddington. It is unlikely that any other pioneer had experienced the growth of Illawarra for so many of its first 100 years.

A large tombstone, recently fallen, in a corner of the Berkeley Cemetery, has this inscription:

"Erected by/Margaret/To the Memory of/Her Beloved Husband/
JOHN ALGER/Died November 14th. 1876/Aged 67 years/Also/
MARGARET ALGER/Beloved Wife of the above/Died 16th. June
1915/Aged 95 years/At Rest."

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CRYPTIC HISTORY: A PUZZLE

See if you can work this one out. All you need is a basic knowledge of the layout of Wollongong.

In 1889 Wollongong occupied some of the time of Parliament, because in 1886 the honest burghers and civic fathers had erected a Town Hall on some land they did not own. This was at the corner of Crown and Kembla Streets, which the Council Health Department now occupies. (If you want to make sure of the location, go there any evening, say after a concert, and you'll find the biggest, fattest and niftiest cockroaches scurrying around fast enough to beat the nimblest boot. But that is by the way: those pests would thrive on the moon). The site had begun as a burying ground, the repose of the one or two intermentees being perhaps disturbed by police activities. But the 1834 Plan for the Town of Wollongong showed it as the site of the National School. So it remained until towards the mid-1880s, when the Public School took over on the site where it now stands, and in the place of the old School arose that fine Victorian confection, the hideous Town Hall, bearing the proud name "W. Wylie Mayor": "Wylie by name, and wily by nature," as the locals used to say. Apart from excesses of taste, the building had