

## Chapter One

*All That Glitters Is Not Gold.*

William Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>

### **John BRYANT (1800-1849) and Mary WATSON (1803-1843)**

JOHN BRYANT'S PARENTS gave him the kind of education that would open many doors. Being able to read and write gave him an advantage in a vigorously competitive society. However, it was also at home that he learnt the ways of the world, enabling him to unlock doors that should have remained closed.

Mr Frederick Humbert probably took literacy into consideration when he decided to employ John as an errand boy. Mr Humbert was a goldwatch-case-maker, and lived at 21 Hyde Street, Bloomsbury. If John had discharged his duties with diligence and honesty it is most likely that he would have served his apprenticeship and fulfilled his ambition to be a goldsmith.

John's father ran an illegal gaming house, that attracted a circle of disreputable characters. Throughout his childhood John was surrounded by vice and crime. The population of London at this time was expanding rapidly. In spite of the great variety of occupations on offer, many people embraced a life of crime. Some were motivated by necessity, while for others it was a matter of personal choice. Prostitution presented a serious problem, but by its very nature, it was not possible to record the numbers of women and girls involved. Commentators disagree about the estimated numbers.<sup>2</sup>

After John's mother died, the tone of the household declined even further. When his father was sent to prison, John came under pressure to support him with money obtained illegally.

In his father's estimation John seemed to be ideally placed to take advantage of his employer. Somehow or other, John gained possession of a key to Mr Humbert's workshop. He knew that his employer had a habit of saving gold filings and turnings and then recycling them. He would set them aside until he had enough to make it worthwhile melting them down. John developed the habit of waiting for an opportune moment, letting himself into the workshop and stealing small but valuable quantities of gold.

On 27th February 1819 Mr Humbert prepared some gold filings and cuttings for melting down on the Monday morning. When he went into his workshop on the Sunday morning he found that a quantity of gold was missing. He began to suspect that John had stolen it. The next day he reported the matter to the police, and accompanied an officer to John's lodgings. A search revealed the gold hidden in his clothing. Gold wire was found in his breeches pocket, gold filings and cuttings in his jacket pocket and a crucible with gold mixed with pearl ash, ready to be melted, also in his jacket pocket. John admitted his guilt and broke down and cried.

John Bryant's trial took place in the Justice Hall, in the Old Bailey, on Wednesday 21st April, 1819, in the Fourth Session in the Mayoralty of the Right Honourable John Atkins, Lord Mayor of the City of London. John was 18 years of age at the time. He measured 5 feet 2 inches in height, and had brown hair and hazel eyes.<sup>3</sup>

The presiding judge was Sir John Silvester, Bart., D.C.L., Recorder of the City of London.

The jury consisted of the following men: James Rickie, Benjamin Payne, Isaac Hill, James Cowdroy, James McWhinnie, Edward Stringer, William Clunie, Robert Bancks, John Davies, Thomas Thompson, William Moore and Jonathan Fentum.

John was indicted for stealing, on the 27th February, at St. George, Bloomsbury, three ounces of gold filings and cuttings, valued at £5/0/0, and one ounce of gold wire, valued at £2/0/0, the property of Frederick Humbert, in his dwelling house.

Mr Frederick Humbert and Mr John Davis, the arresting officer gave evidence to the Court.<sup>4</sup> The accused submitted the following written statement in his defence:

*"I fully acknowledge my fault, and humbly implore the mercy of the Court. I lost my mother three years ago – my father is since dead. It is with the greatest pain and reluctance I am obliged to stir up the ashes of my deceased parents, and expose their vices, but when I know I can only attribute my present perilous situation to the profligate examples set me in my infancy, I cannot forbear calling their faults in question, as some excuse for my early depravity, which, under any other circumstance, I should blush to mention. My father for several years kept a Little Go, where I had the opportunity of witnessing the worst of vices and characters. At my poor mother's decease, my father introduced a prostitute to his home, who lived in the house until his death. He was in prison for the lottery several times, and suffered great distress during his imprisonment, which excited my affection and pity, and induced me to pilfer my master to supply his wants. This offence was continued at intervals through the bad company my father encouraged me to keep, which has at length brought me to this melancholy situation. This is the naked truth and history of my unfortunate life, and I humbly hope for mercy."*

In handing down the death penalty, the Judge responded to John's plea by strongly recommending mercy.

John was then taken to Newgate Prison, which had been built in 1769. The Newgate Calendar for June 1819 lists him amongst 23 men and 4 women awaiting execution. Two of the men were only 15, the eldest was 39 and the average age was 23. The youngest woman was 19 and the eldest was 44. The average age was 30.<sup>5</sup> No record can be found of the process by which the death sentence was commuted to transportation for life, but it seems as if the plea for mercy and the strong recommendation of the judge had been treated favourably.

In the last days of August 1819, John Bryant was removed from prison and taken to a wharf on the Thames. It is likely that he would have been escorted with a number of other prisoners. They would have been wearing leg-irons. One can only imagine the thoughts that must have been going through his head. After five months spent in prison in the heat of summer, it must have been refreshing to be out in the open air. After coming so close to death it must have felt good to be alive. As he walked through the familiar streets he knew that he was seeing them for the last time. There would have been mixed feelings about the long voyage ahead. As he contemplated his future in a distant unknown land hope must have alternated with anxiety.

The *Prince Regent* was ready and waiting to receive the prisoners on board. She was a relatively new ship having been built at Shields in 1810, and displacing 527 tons. For this voyage she was under the command of William Anderson and James Hunter was the surgeon. She had been fitted out and provisioned for the transportation of 160 male prisoners to New South Wales. The guard had joined the ship. She sailed on 1st September 1819.<sup>6</sup>

The *Prince Regent* arrived in Port Jackson on 27th January 1820. All the prisoners survived the five long months at sea, which suggests that proper provision was made for exercise and a sound diet, as well as an insistence on a high standard of hygiene.

The arrival of the *Prince Regent* coincided with the arrival of the *Castle Forbes* with a complement of prisoners from Ireland. The *Castle Forbes* had been launched at Aberdeen in 1818. The Governor chartered the *Castle Forbes* to take her prisoners on to Van Diemen's Land. Four aged men were landed at Port Jackson and replaced by four prisoners from the *Prince Regent*. John Bryant was one of the four prisoners transferred from one ship to the other. Another group of forty were also sent on to Hobart Town.<sup>7</sup>

James Scott was the surgeon on board the *Castle Forbes*. He kept a diary of occurrences between the 6th day of July 1819 and the 3rd day of March 1820. An entry for 16th February reads as follows:

*“Received 40 prisoners from the Prince Regent Convict Ship with several government passengers making in all with the original prisoners two hundred and four persons and by desire of His Excellency Governor Macquarie, I continued to perform my duty as Surgeon and Superintendent till arrival at Hobart*

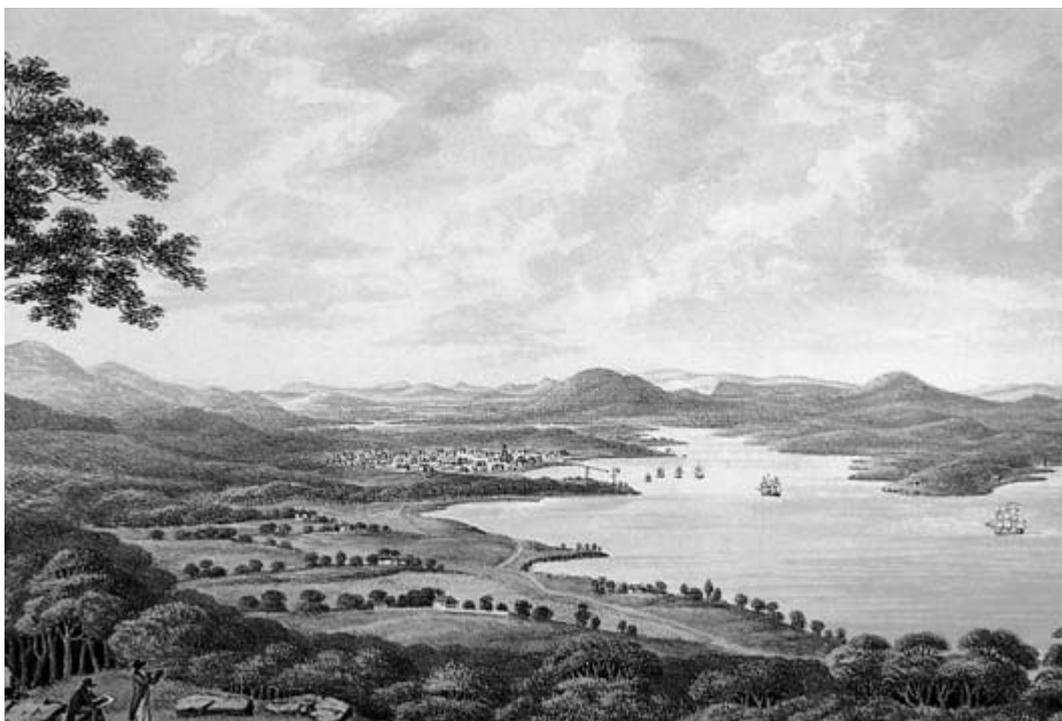
*Town in Van Diemen's Land where they were delivered over to the Lieutenant Governor on the 3rd March.*"<sup>8</sup>

An earlier entry describes how life was organised on the high seas:

*"The prisoners were on deck in rotation during the voyage every two hours in general from the sun rising until sun setting and none were allowed to remain below, but those confined from sickness.*

*The bedding was lashed up every morning at 6 and none were permitted to lie in bed in the prison during the day under any pretence. None of the prisoners were allowed to have their irons off unless those who contributed, by their exertions to the benefit and convenience of the whole, or on account of sickness. No communication was allowed between prisoners and guard or crew. Three hours of school were provided, in which they were taught the alphabet and instructed in the Catechism."*

Mondays and Fridays were occupied with washing clothes,



*View from the top of Mt Nelson with Hobart Town, and circumjacent country.  
Van Dieman's Land, circa 1823, by Joseph Lycett.  
Courtesy Allport Museum and Library of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania.*

Tuesdays and Saturdays were for airing the bedding, Wednesdays were given over to shaving.

On Sundays there was a church muster.

John Bryant must have fitted into this routine on the voyage from Port Jackson to the Derwent. In his wildest dreams he could not have imagined that over a century later the course he was following would be that set for an international yacht race.

The arrival of a convict transport in the estuary must have been very different from that of a modern cruise ship. The modern tourist

stands on deck and takes in the spectacle of a magnificent harbour dominated by Mount Wellington. By contrast, the prisoners were kept below until the formalities had been completed and they were escorted to the prisoners barracks.<sup>9</sup>

Life in the colony differed greatly from that in England at the time. In 1820 the total white population of all the Australian colonies was estimated to be 29,407.<sup>10</sup> Lachlan Macquarie was coming to the end of his term as Governor of New South Wales. He had begun his duties on 1st January 1810 and would step down on 1st December 1821.

William Sorell had been Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land since 1817 and would continue until 1824. Large scale shipments of beef, grain and vegetables were being made from Van Diemen's Land to New South Wales, and in 1820 Van Diemen's Land became Australia's major wheat producer, and would continue so for the next thirty years. Hobart's first ferry service across the Derwent had begun in 1816, and the road connecting Hobart and Launceston had been completed in 1818. The foundation stone of Saint David's Church, the first permanent church in Hobart, had been laid on 19th February 1817.<sup>11</sup>

It is not possible to say exactly where John would have been housed when he first arrived in Hobart Town. With increasing numbers of transportees arriving there was great pressure on the existing accommodation. The original Hobart Town Gaol on the south-east corner of Murray and Macquarie Streets was only four years old, but was intended to hold people awaiting trial or serving sentences for crimes committed in the colony. The new Penitentiary in Campbell Street would not be built until the following year.<sup>12</sup>

At some time after his arrival in Hobart Town the records show that John was employed as Sexton at Saint David's Church, although it is not possible to say when.<sup>13</sup> His duties as sexton would have included those of general caretaker, as well as digging graves, organising funerals, and supervising burials in Saint David's burial ground. He would also have been responsible for ringing the bell to summon the faithful to worship or to announce the death of a citizen. The bell he rang now rests in St David's Cathedral Museum.

During his early years in Hobart Town John got himself into trouble several times. He appeared in court on 31st December 1821, and was found guilty of neglecting his duties for three days. The Rev'd Robert Knopwood was the magistrate, and he ordered that John receive



*Bell from original St Davids Church, Hobart. As sexton, John Bryant would have rung this bell on many occasions.*

25 lashes.<sup>14</sup> The Chaplain does not mention the case in his diary, but he was probably preoccupied with preparations for the Lieutenant Governor's dinner the next day.<sup>15</sup>

John's next appearance in court occurred on 27th September 1822. He was charged with assaulting and beating Andrew Barry, but was found not guilty. The next offence may have been connected with him being allowed a Ticket of Leave. He came before the court on 22nd December 1827 charged with being out after hours the night before, and being guilty of riotous behaviour. It being his first offence the case was dismissed.<sup>16</sup>

John received a Conditional Pardon (No.310) on 9th February 1832. One year later, on 24th April 1833 he was charged on suspicion of having stolen bricks from a tomb, the property of William Jemott, but the charge was dismissed.<sup>17</sup>

John was granted a Free Pardon (No.237) on 21st November 1836.<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime he had met and married a convict named Mary Watson.<sup>19</sup> Mary was born in East Smithfield, London, in 1803.<sup>20</sup> At the time of her conviction she was described as a servant who could work at her needle, and had some expertise in the laundry. She measured 4 feet 10 and a half inches in height, and had brown hair and dark brown eyes. She could not write. Her marital status was given as single, with the comment – "*on the town*". It seems that this suggestion of loose sexual morality was frequently applied to women of her class. Although L.L.Robson considers that in many cases this description should be taken as nothing more than a subjective judgement made by exasperated officials<sup>21</sup>, the evidence suggests that it may have been appropriate in Mary's case.

Two factors seem to add weight to the possibility that Mary had experimented with prostitution. She was indicted for stealing along with two accomplices. Louisa Hill was 27 years of age, and Ann McKenzie was 23. While little information can be found regarding Louisa Hill, Ann McKenzie was transported to Van Diemen's Land on the same ship as Mary, and her record shows that she admitted to being "*on the town*" at the time of the offence.<sup>22</sup> Mary was able to pay for the cloth she purchased with a five pound note. It is hard to imagine how she had gained possession of such affluence if not by immoral means.<sup>23</sup>

The trial took place in the Old Bailey at the April session of 1825. The three women were indicted for stealing twelve yards of printed cotton, valued at sixteen shillings Mr Isaac Johnson was the chief witness. He told the court:

*"I am a linen-draper, and live in the Minories. On the 21st of February, between eleven and twelve o'clock in the day-time, the prisoners came to the shop in company together, and asked to look at some printed cottons; the first four or five pieces which I shewed them, they would not allow me to open; saying they were not the description of print they wanted; I shewed them others, which I opened over the first; they bought a yard and a*

*half, which Watson paid 2s.3d. for; they all took part in the purchase; they then asked to look at some others, which I shewed them; they did not fix on any – Hill pointed to some on the shelves behind, and said they were more of the sort they wanted; I turned round, stepping a little back, so as to have my eye on them, and saw Watson and McKenzie endeavouring to get something from under the prints which were open; I shewed them several others – they at last bought fourteen yards; but, before that, Hill again pointed to the shelves, and I saw the other two endeavouring to conceal something under their clothes; after buying fourteen yards, they wished to see some more for aprons, and bought a small quantity; they then asked for stockings, which I left them to get; they then asked for Irish – I left them, to get it, and observed them again endeavouring to conceal something under their clothes. Watson handed Hill a 5 pound note to pay me; I had to take 34 s.; I asked the address to put on the note – Hill said, ‘Caroline Brown, Spital-square;’ I put everything out of their way, and then asked them to shew me what they had taken, and not paid for; they all denied having anything that was not paid for; they were altogether in the middle of the shop; I said, I was certain they had something – and Watson dropped behind her a length of printed cotton – I immediately took it up and charged her with taking it; the rest said, they wondered how she could think of making such a mistake as to take what was not paid for. I fetched an officer, who took them; they were then all in the middle of the shop, and Hill threw from her about three yards and a half of print behind her – I took it up and charged her with it; she said, “You thought I threw it away, but you don’t know that I did.”*

Mary spoke in her own defence, saying, “*I was intoxicated; the print must have fallen from the counter.*” Ann McKenzie said, “*I did not know they intended to take any thing.*” They were all found guilty and sentenced to be transported for seven years.<sup>24</sup>

Mary spent the months awaiting her departure in Newgate Prison. Her name appears in the Newgate Gaol Calendars for 1825.<sup>25</sup> According to the record she behaved well while she was there.<sup>26</sup>

Mary Watson and Ann McKenzie both sailed on the “*Providence II*”. This ship was built at Lynn in 1812 and displaced 380 tons. On this voyage she was under the command of John Wauchope and Matthew Burnside was the Surgeon. They sailed from the Downs on 24 December 1825, with 100 female prisoners on board. Their course took them via Tenerife, arriving in Hobart 16 May 1826. They had been at sea for a total of 143 days, and yet only one death occurred on the voyage. Commenting on Mary’s behaviour during those long five months, the Surgeon’s words were: “*has behaved exceedingly well*”.<sup>27</sup> In the light of what happened on arrival in Van Diemen’s Land, the comment may give cause for concern. Phillip Tardif reports on those events:

*“This was the Providence II’s second and final voyage as a convict transport ...*

*Both Wauchope (Master) and Burnside (Surgeon) were refused their gratuities and dismissed from the convict service following an inquiry which revealed certain immoral behaviour by these men toward their charges ...*

*Nevertheless, Burnside seems to have carried out his duties with uncommon care and attention.”<sup>28</sup>*

The Surgeon’s report of Mary’s “*exceedingly good behaviour*”, seems to be consistent with her conduct on arrival. She had no further trouble with the police and was granted her Free Certificate (No.1832) on 7 April 1832, having served her seven years.<sup>29</sup> This makes it look as if any moral lapse that may have occurred at home in England was out of character and should not be held against her.

Mary’s clean record in the colony contrasts with that of her accomplice, Ann McKenzie. Ann is reported to have behaved well in gaol. According to the Ship’s Surgeon her conduct on the voyage was neither good nor bad. On 13 April 1827 she was found guilty of absenting herself from her Master’s premises without permission. She was sentenced to be confined in the factory for 3 weeks. On 16 May 1828 she was found guilty of absenting herself from her service on Wednesday morning and remaining so until apprehended by Constable Brooker the previous day. She was sentenced to be confined to her cell on bread and water for three days and returned to her Master. On 17 November 1828 she married William Harvey at New Norfolk. On 3 January 1829 she appeared before J.P. Consto charged with being disorderly at Norwood Inn on 26 December. She was severely reprimanded. On 13 January 1829 she was charged with illegally retailing wine, but the case was dismissed. On 12 February 1829 she was charged with being drunk and disorderly, and was reprimanded. On 7 April 1832 she was granted her freedom by servitude (Free Certificate 1833). In April 1833 she was convicted of being drunk and disorderly and fined 5 shillings.<sup>30</sup>

Mary arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in 1826. Two years earlier George Arthur had replaced William Sorell as Lieutenant Governor. In the same year that Lt.Gov.Arthur took office, the first recorded request for the separation of Van Diemen’s Land from New South Wales was signed by 103 settlers, and the Bank of Van Diemen’s Land had been established. The Van Diemen’s Land Company had been formed in London on 9 November 1825. Under the management of Edward Curr the company began operations the next year. It was granted 250,000



*Bricks in the convict trail, Campbell Town, Tasmania*

acres at Circular Head. The town of Stanley was established. On 3 December 1825, Van Diemen's Land had been declared a colony independent of New South Wales. Executive authority had been vested in the Lieutenant Governor assisted by nominated Legislative and Executive Councils. The Executive Council had met for the first time on 12 April 1826, just five weeks before Mary's arrival. Workers had been given rights to form unions to improve wages and conditions. The first organ in Australia had been installed in Saint David's Church in Hobart, and John Philip Deane had been appointed organist. Richmond Bridge had been completed. The year of Mary's arrival was also the year that saw 53 persons hanged in Van Diemen's Land – the greatest number recorded in any one year. John Batman captured Matthew Brady the bushranger. John Philip Deane organised the first public concert in Hobart.<sup>31</sup>

John Bryant and Mary Watson were married in Saint David's Church on 4 June 1827, by the Rev'd William Bedford, after banns had been called.<sup>32</sup> The records indicate that they had at least three children, and perhaps several more who died in infancy. A son was born in 1829. They named him John and had him baptised in Hobart on 8 July 1829.<sup>33</sup> Martha was born in Hobart on 21 December 1830 and baptised on 16 January 1831.<sup>34</sup> Mary Anne was baptised on 3 May 1835.<sup>35</sup> The deaths of four infants were registered on 31 March 1827, 20 February 1829, 2 April 1830 and 22 October 1834, but the parents' names were not recorded. This makes it hard to be certain if John and Mary were their parents.<sup>36</sup>

Martha married Henry Wilkinson, and is the subject of Chapter Three.<sup>37</sup> Mary Anne married John Johnson at New Norfolk on 25 October 1852.<sup>38</sup>

Having survived the rigors of the long sea voyage, and the deprivations of life in a penal colony, Mary died of dysentery in Hobart on 13 March 1843. When John informed the authorities of her death he was described as undertaker of Murray Street, Hobart.<sup>39</sup> Her funeral was held in Saint David's Church.<sup>40</sup> Considering her husband's position as sexton and undertaker, it is most likely that she was buried in Saint David's burial ground. The following notice appeared in the Hobart Town Courier of 17 March 1843:

*"DIED. On the 13th instant, Mary, the wife of Mr. J. Bryant, aged 38 years."*

John was still living at the Murray Street address at the time of the 1848 Census. John is described as head of the household. The property was owned by Patrick McCabe. The house was constructed of stone and brick. There were four other people living in the house on the night of the Census. There was a single male aged 60 or more. There were three girls – one was aged between 2 and 7, and the others were between 7 and 14. One of the older girls may have been Mary Anne, who would have been 13. It seems that the son, John, no longer resided with his father. Martha had married Henry Wilkinson on 12 August that year.<sup>41</sup>

John died in Hobart of a liver complaint on 12 December 1849. He was 49 years of age.<sup>42</sup> His funeral was held in Saint David's Church.<sup>43</sup> It

is most likely that John was interred in Saint David's burial ground, although no record has survived. The following notice appeared in the *Hobart Town Courier* on 15 December 1849:

*DIED: On Wednesday, the 12th instant, MR. JOHN BRYANT, many years Sexton of St. David's Church, and a member of the Masonic Order.*

*The funeral will take place this morning, at half past ten o'clock, from his late residence Murray Street. Friends are respectfully requested to attend."*

Apart from my ancestor, Martha, it has not been possible to follow-up the lives of the other children.

As a direct descendant of these two early settlers, I feel some affinity with both of them. The story of their lives has become part of my story. Australia's colonial history has taken on a more personal meaning. While I have always been critical of a society that thought transportation to the other side of the world was a suitable response to crime, I now feel a sense of outrage. And yet, if they had remained in England, John would have been hanged, and Mary may have had no option but to resort to prostitution. As things turned out, they made new lives for themselves in this new land

**GENEALOGICAL CHART**  
**JOHN BRYANT/MARY WATSON**

**HUSBAND: John Bryant**

occupation		Goldsmith's Errand Boy Sexton Undertaker	
bir	c.1798	London ENG	1.
tri	21 Apr 1819	Old Bailey London ENG	2.
arr	27 Jan 1820	<i>Prince Regent</i> at Port Jackson NSW	3.
arr	3 Mar 1820	<i>Castle Forbes</i> at Hobart Town VDL	4.
mar	4 Jun 1827	Hobart Town TAS	5.
par	9 Feb 1832	Conditional Pardon 310	6.
par	21Nov 1836	Free Pardon 237	7.
dea	12Dec 1849	Hobart Town TAS	8.
bur		St David's nuriial ground, Hobart TAS	9.

**WIFE: Mary Watson**

occupation		Servant	
bir	c.1802	East Smithfield London ENG	10.
tri	7 Apr 1825	Old Bailey London ENG	11.
arr	16 May 1826	<i>Providence II</i> Hobart Town TAS	12.
mar	4 Jun 1827	Hobart Town TAS	13.
par	7 Apr 1832	Hobart Town TAS	14.
dea	13 Mar 1843	Hobart Town TAS	15.
bur		St David's burial ground, Hobart TAS	16.

**CHILDREN**

1	Name: <b>John Bryant</b>		
M	bir	Jul 1829	Hobart Town TAS 17.
	bap	8 Jul 1829	Hobart Town TAS 18.
2	Name: <b>Martha Sarah Bryant</b>		
F	bir	21 Dec 1830	Hobart Town TAS 19.
	bap	16 Jan 1831	Hobart Town TAS 20.
	mar	12 Aug 1848	Holy Tinity Church Hobart Town TAS 21.
	to: Henry Wilkinson		
	dea	16 Jun 1861	Hobart Town TAS 22.
3	Name: <b>Mary Anne Bryant</b>		
F	bir	1835	Hobart Town TAS 23.
	bap	3 May 1835	Hobart Town TAS 24.
	mar	25 Oct 1852	New Norfolk TAS 25.
	to	<b>John Johnson</b>	

**NOTES ON CHART**

1. AOT, CON 23/1
2. PRO, Richmond, England, Old Bailey Session Papers
3. Bateson, *The Convict Ships 1787-1868*, 212.
4. SLV, "A diary of occurrences of the Castle Forbes, Convict Ship between the 6th day of July 1819 and the 3rd day of March 1820 by James Scott, Surgeon." AJCP Reel 3191.
5. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1827/1002.
6. AOT, CON 23/1
7. Ibid.
8. BDM, Hobart, Reg.No.1849/2742.
9. AOT, Burial Registers, St.David's Church, Hobart.
10. AOT, MM 33/1 & CON 40/9
11. PRO, Richmond, England, P COM 1/2.
12. Tardif, *Notorious Strumpets and Dangerous Girls, Convict Women in Van Diemen's Land 1803-1829*, 844.
13. BDM, Hobart, Reg.No.1827/1002.
14. AOT, CON 40/9.
15. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1843/1470.
16. Ibid
17. BDM,Hobart, Reg.No.1829/3019.
18. Ibid.
19. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1830/3764.
20. Ibid.
21. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1848/1570.
22. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1861/2817.
23. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1835/6047.
24. Ibid.
25. BDM,Hobart,Reg.No.1852/1181.