

## Williscroft Parkhurst Boys

*Joseph Williscroft 14, shoemaker, Henry Williscroft 13, nail cutter, and Frederick Williscroft 12, labourer, three destitute brothers, natives of this metropolis but who have for some time past been "living by their wits," were convicted on a charge of stealing two tame rabbits, the property of one Joseph Millerchip, at Dudley, on the 20th instant, and were sentenced to a weeks imprisonment. A second charge for stealing boots, the property of Joseph Harper, the same place, was proved against them, and the Court taking into consideration their destitute condition, sentenced them to seven years transportation, with a view of making future provision for them.*

*Berrow's Worcester Journal (Worcester, England)  
February 29, 1844*

On the 27th February 1844 three brothers, Joseph, Henry and Frederick Williscroft appeared in court on two charges. The first charge was that on the 20 February at Dudley, they had feloniously stolen two tame rabbits , the property of Joseph Millinchip. All pleaded guilty and were imprisoned and kept to hard labour for one week. Secondly they were charged with having, on the 20 February, at Dudley, feloniously stolen one pair of boots, the property of Joseph Harper. The boys pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 7 years transportation.

The newspaper article states that the magistrates took this decision to transport the boys because of their 'destitute state', with the purpose of making future provision for them. The boys were sent to Parkhurst Prison to be trained in a "useful trade". The scheme for retraining juvenile prisoners had been set up in 1839. They would be transported but instead of being placed in a convict jail they would be usefully employed. The boys were pardoned on the conditions

*The Illustrated London News stated that each "Prisoner wears a leather cap (made in the Shoemaker's shop) and bearing on its front the Boy's No. in brass figures; the trousers and jacket are of grey cloth; on the left breast of the latter are sewn P.P. and the No.; and P.P. on the left thigh. The rest of the clothing is striped shirt, leather stock, waistcoat for winter wear, worsted stockings and boots, all of which are made in the Prison. On the right breast is worn a brass medal with No. The Penal Class is denoted by yellow collars and cuffs, and letters of the same colour."*

*Quote from transcription of the original document by [Ken Scott](#)*



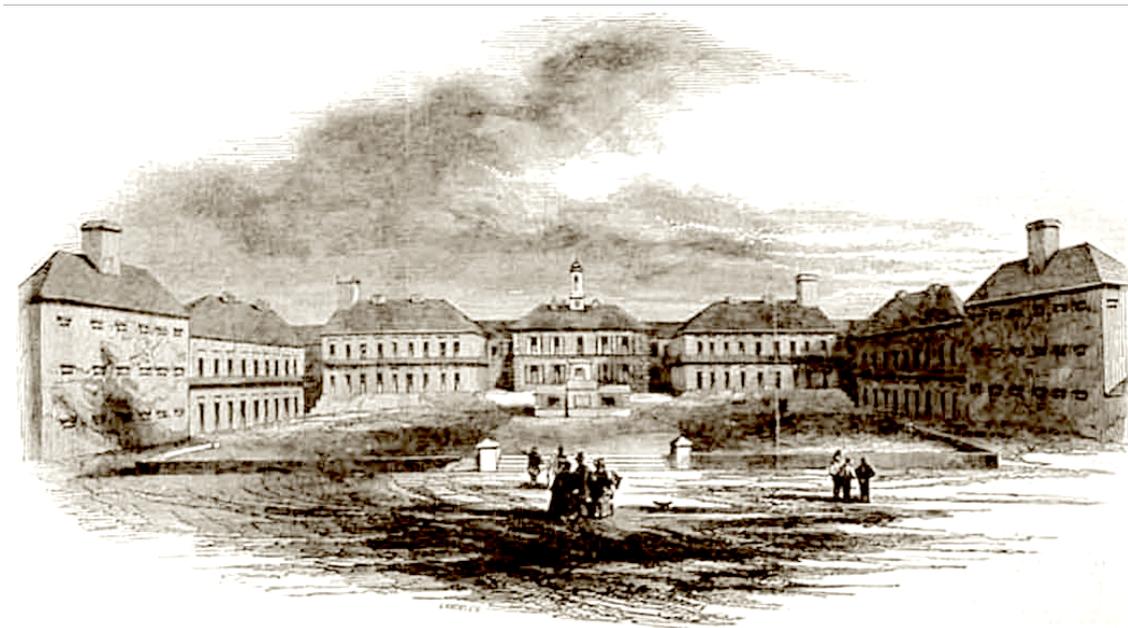
*Dresses of the Officers and Prisoners  
The Illustrated London News, 13 March 1847 p164*

that they be "apprenticed" to local employers, and that they did not return to England during the term of their sentence. By present day standards the regime at Parkhurst

may seem harsh. However, the prisoners had regular meals, good clothing and somewhere safe to sleep. This must have been an improvement on Joseph, Henry and Frederick's destitute state.

In theory all three boys should have received their 'freedom' in February 1851 as they would have served their 7 year sentence. This did not happen to Frederick who's sentence was extended after a pick pocketing offence in Holbart, Tasmania in November 1851. He received his freedom in 1857. The evidence suggests that Frederick is the same Frederick who was living in Sydney, NSW at the time of his death in 1899. His death certificate states he was from Dale End in Birmingham, Warwickshire, the son of Joseph and Mary Ann Williscroft.

If the newspaper article is correct then it follows that Henry and Joseph are also the children of Joseph and Mary Ann. However, after a search of the 1841 census returns for both Birmingham, Warwickshire and Dudley, Worcestershire I have not been able to find the boys or Joseph and Mary Ann Williscroft. Neither have I found them after searching available indexes for the 1841 census in England and Wales. However, Frederick did appear before the Magistrates at Birmingham, Warwickshire in 1843 and received a three month prison sentence for larceny. His age was given as 10 years.



The entrance to Parkhurst Prison  
The Illustrated London News, 13 March 1847 p164