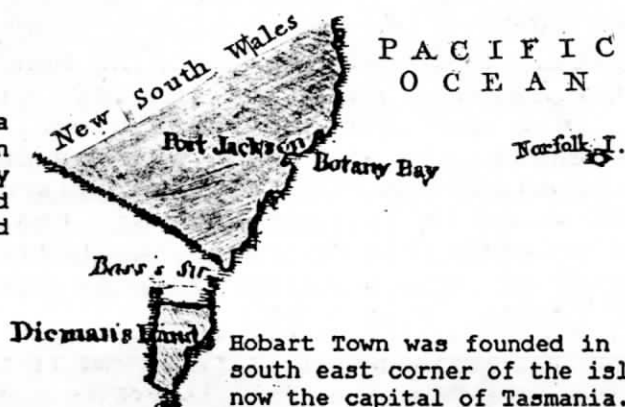


In 1798 surgeon George Bass was given permission to explore the coast south of Sydney Cove, and he discovered that Van Diemen's Land was really an island (Tasmania) and that there was no need to sail right round it on the voyage from Cape Town.

Elizabeth's third partner was James Waterson, a sawyer by trade and said to be a quiet character. He had been convicted at Norwich and sentenced to life. He had arrived at Sydney Cove in October 1791 (probably on the Third Fleet) and was transferred to Norfolk Island on 24th May 1792. Elizabeth had four more children between 1797 and 1802 and seems to have had success with her plot of land. A list dated 2nd December 1804 shows that she was the only woman amongst the 60 land-owners on Norfolk Island. She had 16 acres, with a thatched, boarded and floored house 18 feet x 10 feet and was prepared to accept an offer to move to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), which was just being settled and given its own Governor. The couple and the five children left in May 1808 and arrived in Hobart Town on 5th June. They were given 36 acres of land, and for the first 12 months, offered free supplies of food etc from Government Stores and the services of two convicts! Incidentally, the Governor of "New South Wales" and Norfolk Island at the time was the notorious William Bligh whose crew had mutinied some 20 years earlier when he was captain of the "Bounty".

A map from Hall's Encyclopaedia (published about 1800) drawn after George Bass's discovery in 1798 that Van Diemen's Land was an island. (now called Tasmania)



Elizabeth married James Waterson on 30th April 1812. Her first husband, William Connolly, had recently died but the main reason for the delayed contract was that a court had ruled that an unmarried consort had no legal right to the family property. Tasmania's 1819 Land and Stock Muster shows that the family were prospering. In total, James Waterson and son William were growing 46 acres of wheat, 3 acres of potatoes and one acre each of barley and beans. Son James aged 17 had 2 cattle and 150 sheep. The Hobart Town Gazette, 1816-1822, shows James and William selling meat to the Government. A "History of Tasmania" (1835) states that William had had 500 sheep stolen. Elizabeth died in 1835 aged 68, and earlier this year Joe Harvey and other descendants fixed a "First Fleet" plaque to her gravestone. Her husband, James Waterson, lived on till 1858, aged 91.

By 1868, 175,000 convicts had been sent to Australia and had experienced famine and all manner of degradation and hardship, and for many, serious cruelty. Elizabeth Thomas may have fared better than most. How did she get into a life of petty crime? When she was sentenced to transportation she was said to be "late of Chipping". At the previous trial at Wigan she was said to be "late of Formby", but it seems very unlikely that she was ever a resident of either of these villages. The huge index which the Lancs Record Office has compiled of persons mentioned in Quarter Sessions has a clue, but of course it may be a false one. In 1777, Jane Thomas, wife of Robert, and her four children were on poor relief in Liverpool, and were ordered back to their home parish of Bala in the county of Merioneth. The children were John(9), Elizabeth(7), Robert(5) and Mary(2).

At the end of such an eventful life one wonders how much Elizabeth remembered of Chipping. But our postmaster remembers her. He was the first to be approached by Joe Harvey and was interested in his story. So when, this summer, Roger Hand from New South Wales called at the Post Office and said that his ancestor had been arrested in this area, Jeff was able to say "Ah, yes, that would be Elizabeth Thomas"!