

David Evans

David Evans was a convict who was transported with a 10 year sentence for sheep stealing. He arrived in the colony 1861 at the age of 29 and came to York. He was a widower.

He was employed cutting sandalwood. Even though on ticket of leave, he donated 2 shillings to a relief fund for those suffering from the Lancashire Cotton Famine in 1863,¹ a depression in the textile industry of North West England, brought about by overproduction.

In 1866, he gave evidence in a case involving the theft of sandalwood by others.²

In 1869, when he was 37, he married Mary Fleming who was only 16 and had emigrated from Ireland with her parents when she was one. Later there were problems as David had to advertise in 1878 that he was no longer responsible for her debts.³ Shortly before this, Mary had complained to the police that David Evans had threatened to take her life.⁴ The Evans family lived on a farm near the 19 mile inn on the York Road. Evans made extra money by tendering to keep the York Road clear of fallen trees and repairing bridges.⁵

In 1890, both daughters of the Evans family, aged 9 and 13, were sitting in one of the rooms of the family house.

One of them turned the wick of a lamp down but it fell into the kerosene and the lamp exploded.

The dresses worn by the two girls caught fire and they rushed out into the open air calling for help. That was the worst thing they could do because there was a strong wind outside which fanned the flames. Their mother tried to put out the flames and got burnt herself. Both girls were severely burned and were in dreadful pain. Dr McWilliam came from York and arrived about 10 minutes before the eldest daughter, Elisabeth, died. The other also succumbed.⁶ The house was also damaged. A public appeal was launched for David Evans and 82 donations were received totalling 22 pounds.

David Evans was so touched at the public support he published his "sincere and heartfelt thanks". He said "I cannot recognise in a lifetime spent in the district one single act of mine which should have merited or demanded such noble generosity."

David Evans lost another child three years later at the 54 mile tank on the Eastern Railway, in 1893, presumably the child wandered away.⁷ David Evans died the following year aged 61.⁸ His wife was not with him but she died the next day at Mt Barker while travelling on a train.⁹

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¹ Inquirer and Commercial News, 11 March 1863, p.4.

² Inquirer and Commercial News, 11 April 1863, p.3.

³ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 2 March 1878, p.4.

⁴ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 23 February 1878, p.2.

⁵ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 12 May 1888, p.5; 9 June 1888, p.5; 16 February 1889, p.5; 13 April 1889, p.7; 8 June 1889, p.5; 13 July 1889, p.3.

⁶ West Australian, 1 January 1890, p.3; Eastern Districts Chronicle 4 January 1890, p.4, 9 January 1890, p.8, 18 January 1890, p.4; WA Record 23 January 1890, p.8, 30 January 1890, p.7; Eastern Districts Chronicle 1 February 1890, p.4.

⁷ Inquirer and Commercial News 15 December 1893, p.17.

⁸ Central Districts Advertiser and Agriculture and Mining Journal, 22 September 1894, p.2.

⁹ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 22 September 1894, p.4.