

Jane Elizabeth Green

Jane Elizabeth (Green) Bell (1823-1887), was born in 1823 in Salisbury, Wiltshire, England.¹

She arrived on the *Eleanor* in 1837², being one of the children sent by the Children's Friend Society³, also called the Society of Juvenile Emigrants.⁴

She was indentured to Captain Whitfield, the Government Resident of Toodyay to be a servant in the household, and began working for the Whitfield family in July 1839.⁵

In the night of 14 July 1840, she asked for some whiskey and said she was not feeling well. Mrs Whitfield later found her in her bedroom covered in blood. She had given birth to a child and the child was found dead. Jane had cut the throat of the baby.

Government Resident of York, Revett Henry Bland travelled from York to question her and other witnesses and transmitted the depositions to the Advocate-General. Jane was then committed to trial for murder.

The Children's Friend Society called for public subscriptions to assist her by paying for her lawyers.⁶ The Society published an announcement:

"The many rumours afloat connected with this affair, have excited a lively interest in the public mind with regard to this girl, and subscriptions have been made to obtain the best legal advice in the Colony, in order that such points may be elicited and advanced as her critical position require. The clear and discriminating mind of our talented Chairman of the Quarter Sessions might have been a sufficient assurance for the development of all the facts connected with this case; it is, however to be desired, that the defence should be conducted ably, for such deeds of darkness are seldom accompanied with sneaking villainy and base seduction."

Who was rumoured to be the seducer is apparent from the diary of Samuel Viveash who mentions the affair in his diary entry of 16 July 1840, in which he says: "I hope Captain Whitfield is not papa."

The trial took place before a Jury on 1 October 1840. Barrister Mr Richard West Nash, who had not acted in the Colony as a barrister before, defended Jane "without the slightest fee or reward".⁷

Mrs Whitfield said during the trial that

¹ Adams, Chamberlain and associated families in Australia, 1830-2021.

² Rica Erikson, Dictionary of Western Australians, p.1262.

³ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 3 October 1840, p.2.

⁴ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 3 October 1840, p.2.

⁵ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 3 October 1840, p.2.

⁶ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 8 August 1840, p.2

⁷ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 3 October 1840, p.2.

“some slight suspicions did certainly at one time cross [her] mind as to the propriety and morality of her conduct ... but the denials were so solemn – her protestations were so vehement and confident and so artful was she in framing excuses for any apparent failment, and so skilful in concealing any unusual appearances, as completely to succeed in lulling any suspicions on [her] part and preventing any further inquiries.”⁸

Five minutes after the jury retired to consider their verdict, one of their number fell down the stairs in a fit but recovered. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty of murder but guilty of endeavouring to conceal the birth of the child. Jane was sentenced to two years imprisonment, with labour suited to her years and sex.

Of the amount of £12 and 11 shillings raised from public subscriptions, 12 shillings and sixpence was given to Jane for a petticoat and stockings⁹.

Jane married James Bell in 1847 and had two daughters.¹⁰ She died in 1909, aged 86.¹¹

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⁸ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal 3 October 1840, p.2.

⁹ Inquirer 24 February 1841, p.4.

¹⁰ Adams, Chamberlain and associated families in Australia, 1830-2021.

¹¹ West Australian 10 December 1909, p.7.