

William Woodhouse Kett

William Woodhouse Kett was born in 1833 and was a warehouse clerk.

Kett “was in the fore-most rank of drapers, and was considered to be the best-dressed man in Regent Street.”¹

He was convicted of larceny as a servant for stealing silks and other clothes, and was sentenced to 10 years, and transportation to Western Australia, where he arrived in 1862.² He gained his ticket of leave on 23 September 1863, was working for himself from 1865 and gained a conditional pardon on 5 February 1868.

He was protestant but and married Irish Catholic Ann Connel in 1865. He must have been educated as he was employed variously as a clerk, schoolmaster and tutor.³

In 1865 he was a pork butcher, then from 1865 a greengrocer in High Street Fremantle. He had a general store in Fremantle from 1867⁴.

In April 1873, William Kett was awarded the contract to construct the new telegraph office in York for 370 pounds. The Clerk of Works was dissatisfied with the standard of work, the carpentry being considered inferior with doors ill fitting. Construction was also months behind schedule. Kett was fined 20 pounds and one pound for every day the completion of the building was late.⁵ Not surprisingly, William Kett became bankrupt, Joseph Monger being appointed to look after his bankrupt estate.⁶ He was discharged from bankruptcy in 1876⁷.

In 1877, he purchased Town Lot 4, the property on which Solomon Cook’s mill was constructed.⁸

In 1878 he was charged in York with wilfully and negligently injuring the telegraph wire, causing damage in the sum of one pound 5 shillings. The case was settled with Kett paying damages and costs.

By 1878, he had purchased and was trading in a store in York on the site of the later Westralian Bank.⁹ On that property “he stacked from time to time hundreds of tons of sandalwood, chaff, wheat, gum and other produce that his teams conveyed to Perth and Fremantle to the order of Messrs. J. G. C. Carr, Henry Saw, George Shenton, Padbury, Loton and Co., J. and W. Bateman, and T. H. Carter and Co., and others for shipment to London and the Straits Settlements.”¹⁰

¹ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 24 June 1921 p.3.

² WA Convict Records website

³ Dictionary of Western Australians, Convicts.

⁴ Rica Erickson, Dictionary of Western Australians.

⁵ Rodger Jennings: Over the Hills, a history of York 1834-1880, pp288 and 289 and footnotes referred to therein.

⁶ Herald, 13 February 1875, p.3.

⁷ Herald, 14 October 1876, p.2.

⁸ Landgate Deeds VIII/22/84.

⁹ Town Lot 16.

¹⁰ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 24 June 1921 p.3.

John Vernon Warren made the mistake of renting the house at the front of Lot 3 to Kett¹¹ (where Kett lived).¹² Behind his yard on Lot 3 was a fence and behind that was a house with thatched buildings on it, rented to the blacksmith Henry Stevens by John Vernon Warren (who had married Thomas Mead's widow, Mary Ann). Stevens sub-rented the house to one of his workers. The only access to this house was via Kett's yard as there were fences on either side and at the rear.¹³

Kett became difficult about giving access and when Henry Stevens sent a man to collect a bag of flour from the house at the back, Kett threatened him with a log of sandalwood. When Henry Stevens himself went there, Kett pushed him to the ground and threatened him and warned him not to try and cross his land again.¹⁴ Stevens had to negotiate access via the Meares property to the north, or by breaking through the fence at the back.

Warren took possession and started living in the thatched house and then sued Stevens for outstanding rent. The magistrate found that by Warren giving a lease to Kett, he had blocked Stevens' access to the house and no order for payment of the rent was made.

Kett advertised his store once only, in January 1880. He was selling wheat sacks, potatoes, sugar, butter and other dairy products. He also said he would buy sandalwood roots, 10 tons of gum, and wool and skins in any quantity.¹⁵

In February 1884, Kett applied for a hawker's and pedlar's licence authorising him to carry goods, wares and merchandise for the purpose of sale, by cart.¹⁶

Two incidents happened in the town which involved Kett:

In March 1885, William Kett was chatting to Mr Warwick near the railway line when he saw Richard Newport come down the hill on horseback and stopped to chat to Kett. They commenced conversation about business and certain wheat and barley that Kett had bought of Newport. And also about a cow. They were walking together and were almost opposite Monger's store when Newport suddenly gave "a spasmodic jerk" and instantly fell from his horse dead.¹⁷

In December 1886, a young man was swimming in the Mile Pool and disappeared into the water. William Kett and three others continued to dive into the water from some time to try and find him, without success. He was eventually found drowned.¹⁸

William Kett suffered from consumption and eventually died from this in January 1888.¹⁹ The contents of his store were sold at auction by Joseph Pyke including rope, clothing, tinware, boots,

¹¹ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 13 July 1878, p.2.

¹² Rica Erickson, Dictionary of Western Australians.

¹³ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 13 July 1878, p.2.

¹⁴ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 13 July 1878, p.2.

¹⁵ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 16 January 1880, p.2.

¹⁶ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 29 February 1884, p.4.

¹⁷ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 28 March 1885, p.2.

¹⁸ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 11 December 1886, p.4.

¹⁹ Inquirer and Commercial News, 11 January 1888, p.5.

men's and boys' clothing, drapery, fancy goods and crockery ware and lots of other articles.²⁰
Joseph Pyke also sold his horses which brought in 270 pounds.²¹

Unfortunately, he was still alive when his son Henry Kett was charged with four others in January 1886 of disorderly conduct relating to Mary Ann Clarke one night on the other side of Monger's Bridge.²²

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²⁰ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 7 April 1888, p.6.

²¹ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 23 June 1888, p.5.

²² Eastern Districts Chronicle, 23 January 1886, p.3.