

James Chivers - Tailor, Marine and Convict

James Chivers was born at High Littleton on 16th May 1792, the son of Samuel Chivers and his wife Rachel Stickland. When he was 12, his father bound him apprentice for 7 years to John Holbrook, a tailor of Paulton. No premium was paid and James was to receive nothing for the first 2 years, 3/- p.w. for the next 2 years and a rise of 1/- p.w. in each year during the remainder of the term. James lived at home, walking to work from High Littleton to Paulton each day and occasionally slept at his master's house if the weather was wet. After 8 or 9 months John Holbrook moved to Farmborough, where James continued his apprenticeship for another 3 years. James slept at the family home in High Littleton in a room next to his parents; his mother made his bed and gave him breakfast each morning before he set off for tailor Holbrook's, which was nearly a mile away.

James was not always a model apprentice and on one occasion he was committed to gaol for 1 month by the justices, for misconduct. On another occasion, about 4 years in to his apprenticeship, Holbrook beat James – probably not for the first time - which caused James to run away. He stayed home from work all week and on Saturday morning went to Bath, where he spent the night. Whilst James was away in Bath, Holbrook called round to his father's house for him. The next day James returned home and stayed for a week before going back to work. It was not long after this, in May 1809, that Samuel Chivers, James's father, drowned in the brook.

James continued working for Holbrook for another 5 or 6 months. 23rd Oct 1809 was celebrated all over the country as jubilee day, being the first day of the 50th year of the reign of King George III. James took the day off without his master's permission and went to Bath to see the illuminations. Amidst all the excitement he succumbed to a smooth talking Marine recruiting sergeant. After Sergeant Edwards had given him a guinea for his indentures, 17 year old James enlisted there and then, never to return to Holbrook's employment. For the next few years - 6 years, 6 months and 21 days according to his widowed mother - James served in the Marines. He was eventually discharged and returned to High Littleton, where he was able to earn a living as a journeyman tailor. On 2nd Sep 1816, just over 3 months after his return, James married Ann Carter, originally from Paulton, at High Littleton Church and over the next 18 years they had 8 children. James and Ann lived in a rented cottage on the north-west corner of the High Street and Rotcombe Lane for much of their married life but around 1840 they moved to Scumbrum Lane near James' mother.

It must have been difficult to make ends meet and James occasionally received financial assistance from the parish, including the cost of burying his 10 year old son in 1829. He was also given blankets and other items from Mary Jones' Charity on several occasions during the 1830s. In 1842 James Chivers, Abraham Quarman sen'r, aged 80 and Abraham Quarman jun'r, 26, were committed to Shepton Gaol by the Rev. J. Phillott, charged with stealing a ewe sheep belonging to James Boulter. At the Wells adjourned Midsummer Sessions on 4th July the older Quarman was acquitted but James Chivers and the younger Quarman were found guilty and sentenced to be transported to Australia for 10 years. James was first taken to Ilchester Gaol, where the Description Book records him as aged 48 (he was actually 50), 5 ft. 5½ in. tall, stout, dark complexion, round face, grey hair and eyes, mermaid on left arm, reads and writes imperfectly, born High Littleton, last abode Farmborough (Scumbrum at that time was in Farmborough parish), married with 7 children, tailor by trade. James was subsequently removed to the prison hulk Stirling Castle at Devonport on 4th August and held there until embarking on the voyage to Australia.

Meanwhile poor Ann Chivers, left with 2 dependent children aged 6 and 8, was forced to seek relief from Clutton Union and duly received 3/3¼d. p.w., charged to the account of Farmborough parish. After 9 weeks the overseers of the latter parish, one of whom was farmer James Boulter, owner of the stolen sheep, obtained an order to have Ann and her children removed to High Littleton, her husband's legal parish of settlement. By 1851 Ann was living with her daughter Jemima Banfield and family in Hallatrow. Ten years later, described as an almswoman, she was living on her own in High Littleton and died there in 1864, aged 75. What became of James I do not know.

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UPDATE 12/04/06 supplied by Russell Thompson (relative of James Chivers):

James Chivers was transported to Tasmania in the ship Cressy arriving in Launceston Tasmania 20th August 1843 (source: The Archives Office of Tasmania). On completion of his sentence he continued to live in Tasmania where he lived as an inmate at the Launceston Invalid Depot, a poorhouse for old men with no money or family to support them. He appears to have died in 1875.