

The Lopham Project
Criminals and Miscreants



Jonas KEEBLE

(1790 – 1871)

**Nick Woods,
with credit to Ken Edwards
and Mark Conrad Reeve.**

This story is part of the Diss Family History Group's project looking at the history of the villages of North and South Lopham.

Many thanks go to Nick and the other contributors for sharing this story.

More information on the project can be found on the D.F.H.G.'s [webpages](#).

The cover picture is of the ship 'Eden' upon which Jonas was transported to Australia in 1836

Jonas KEEBLE was born in North Lopham in 1790 and was probably the illegitimate son of Hannah KEEBLE (sic). He was noted as being 5' 4" tall and of sallow complexion.

By 1824 he had met Henrietta GIRLING, b. 1805, from Thorpe Abbots, getting married in the village church on the 19th May 1825. However, Jonas, being a victim of circumstance often found himself in trouble with the law. In 1828, now with a small child to support as well as a wife, he found himself before the bench at the Lent Sessions of Norfolk County Court, charged with breaking into an outhouse with intent to steal. As this was his first offence he was not prosecuted just warned about his future behaviour. It seems he didn't learn from this, as later in the same year at the October Sessions he was again charged, for stealing some straw. This time he was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment at Norwich Gaol.

This short term of imprisonment seems to have worked, because for the next five years he leads a quiet life and his family grows. Around 1832 the couple now with two children move back to North Lopham, but in January 1833 Jonas is again before the bench for larceny and again receives a sentence of 6 months in gaol. Three years later on the 6th January 1836 and with three more children, his criminal behaviour lands him in serious trouble, as he is accused of stealing two deal boards of scotch fir and some hemp sacking the property of Mr WOMACK of North Lopham.

This time his offence and his past criminal record condemns him for much harsher punishment and he is sentenced to seven years transportation. A month after being convicted Jonas KEEBLE was taken to Portsmouth and imprisoned in the Hulk "Leviathan" arriving there on the 9th February 1836. He was to remain in the hulk until August, at which time he was transferred to the convict transport ship 'Eden'. The ship left England in September 1836.

The Eden reached Hobart in Tasmania - known then as Van Dieman's Land on the 22nd December 1836, having taken 113 days on the voyage.

The Eden disembarked some of its passengers, aka convicts, at Hobart, 46 year old Jonas KEEBLE amongst them and they were initially housed in the cellblock at Port Arthur. The ship then proceeded to New South Wales where the rest of the convicts were destined to disembark. Jonas KEEBLE after acclimatisation at Port Arthur was sent to the north of the island to the police district of Launceston, under the supervision of Mr Richard White. Jonas' duties were said to be to 'plough, reap and mow', all occupations he was very familiar with and could be expected to carry them out with little or no supervision. Jonas along with all other convicts in the colony would receive no pay but would have their keep and shelter accommodated for. This lifestyle was to continue for some four years under the police and overseers of the Launceston district.

On the 12th January 1841 after some four years of such work and five years after sentencing in Norwich, Jonas received his 'Ticket of Leave'. This now meant that he could seek paid work in the district. Ticket of Leave men were not allowed to leave the district, but could now marry and if they so desired could bring their families out from England to join them, they of course had to pay for the passages. Other restrictions levied on Ticket of Leave men, were that no prisoner could carry a firearm, nor could they board any ship. Jonas KEEBLE could now start to save a little money in preparation to pay for his passage home to England.

On the 6th January 1843, seven years after his conviction, Jonas KEEBLE formal period of transportation expired and he could receive his 'Certificate of Freedom' and was finally deemed to be a free man. He apparently spent the next three and a half years in Tasmania, no doubt striving to earn sufficient money to pay his package home. In September 1846 Jonas uses some of his savings to purchase a passage in the Brig 'Union' from Launceston to Adelaide in Australia, the brig left Launceston on the 26th September 1846 arriving in Adelaide on the 11th October 1846.

Meanwhile back in North Lopham, his wife Henrietta KEEBLE was finding life very hard bringing up the children. Seeking assistance and comfort wherever she could, she became pregnant in 1839, giving birth in May 1840 to a boy she

baptised as Lewis. The vicar made note of Henrietta's lapse at the baptism when he stated that her husband had been transported 4 years since.

The three elder sons, James, George and Walter KEEBLE were sent out to work on the land as soon as they were old enough and daughters Charlotte and Emma KEEBLE were likely working in service as teenagers. Gradually with the children's wages coming in, things became a little easier.

However daughter Charlotte KEEBLE died suddenly in 1847 aged 21, (some records suggest in childbirth), brother James KEEBLE got married in 1849 to North Lopham girl Jane LONG, but sadly she died the next year from TB and soon after he returned to live back in the family home.

Wife Henrietta KEEBLE no doubt with the family still living on the breadline, committed a criminal act in October 1850 and was convicted of stealing eight pairs of worsted stockings, two knives and one fork the property of the Guardians of the Guiltcross. The Guiltcross was the Poor Law Institute and it would seem that Henrietta was at the time of the crime an inmate. The Norfolk assizes sentenced her to one month in the Bridewell, this was the women and beggars prison. In somewhat in a family tradition, son James KEEBLE also acquires a criminal record because in July 1852 he along with another man was accused of larceny and he was sentenced to two months in gaol. By the early 1850's, Henrietta KEEBLE after 15 years with no news of her husband's whereabouts or condition decided to describe herself as a widow, this she duly does in the 1851 census return. To help with the family finances Henrietta KEEBLE also took in lodgers usually three at a time. In the 1841 census return she boarded William MASON 25, Ann MASON 25 (nee KEEBLE?) and their 2 mth. old son James and in 1851 census lodgers Ann MASON 37, Frances KEEBLE 13 and James MASON 10. It is assumed these were relatives of her husband.

When Jonas KEEBLE eventually finds his way back home to Norfolk, sometime later in the 1850's, he discovered somewhat different circumstances than those he had left behind some 20 years before.

Mystery Years in Australia - Jonas KEEBLE had arrived in Adelaide in 1846 as a free man and it seems that he spent time in the colony finding employment to earn more money to pay for his passage back home to England. Maybe he contemplated staying in Australia and making a new life for himself? One wonders what he was doing or even where he was during those missing 10 years.

However back in North Lopham around 1855, he rejoins his wife Henrietta. Of their thirty or so years of married life, they had been together less than half of it. He learnt with sorrow that his eldest daughter Charlotte KEEBLE a single woman, had died and his other daughter Emma KEEBLE had married and the 4 'sons' had all moved up north, or to the other side of the world.

Note – Emma's husband was a son of erstwhile George FORTIS another local man who was executed in 1822 - see story.

Ironically two of Jonas KEEBLE sons emigrated, one to Australia and the other to Tasmania. James KEEBLE the young widower above, married again at East Harling (his father Jonas noted as the grooms father on the registration, maybe he attended?) in October 1856 to Sarah AYRES a local girl and they left for Tasmania on the ship "Monsoon" sailing from Liverpool on the 16th December 1856 bound for Adelaide where they arrived on the 17th March 1857, they paid £2 each for their passage. Several of Sarah's brothers also went to Tasmania too. James KEEBLE remarried again in 1900 at the age of 71 after his wife's death and passed away in 1919.

Of the remaining sons - George and Walter KEEBLE left Norfolk around 1854, travelling to Yorkshire to obtain work in the coal mining industry. Lewis KEEBLE sometime later also moved to Yorkshire working as a carter and married Jane BOOTH a Derbyshire girl in 1865. He stayed in the area until returning to North Lopham in the 1890's as a widower where he remained until his death. Walter KEEBLE above married Martha Anne HARRISON a Barnsley girl in 1858 and moved first to Derbyshire and later to Staffordshire continuing to work in the coalmines. George KEEBLE still a single man lived for a time in Yorkshire and worked in the coalmines too, but in August 1856 he took a £1 assisted passage

to Australia in the ship “Herald”, still believing that his father was dead, and in 1857 after arriving in Sydney he gets married to Margaret FRASER a free-settler Scottish lady. The two boys had 14 children between them and the KEEBLE name promulgated ‘down under’.

Jonas and Henrietta KEEBLE now very much on their own, lived out their remaining lives in Great Common, North Lopham until their deaths, Henrietta in 1871 and Jonas in 1881, both living very interesting lives.

Nick Woods

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