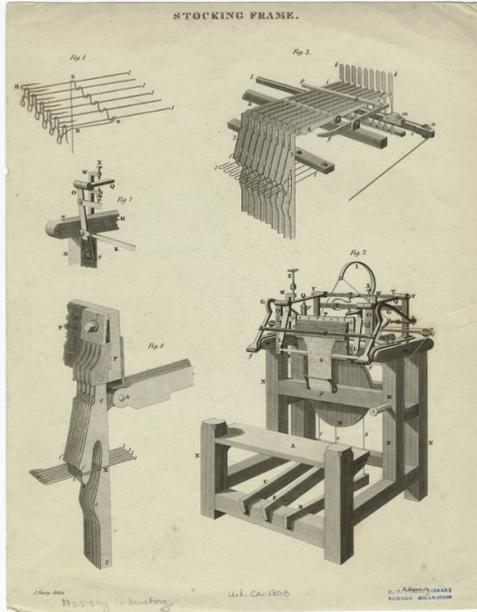


# Jane's Story



There were thousands of people like Jane who were engaged in the stocking industry in Leicestershire, producing stockings mainly made from wool. They worked for hosiers who were the merchants living in the city. The merchants sold the stockings in the cities throughout the country, wherever there was demand. They had the stockings made in cottages or small enterprises throughout the neighbouring villages.

Men and women worked at the stocking frame at home. Sometimes the cottage was adapted with larger windows so as to let in more light for the workers to see. Sometimes there were several frames in one small room and the work was hard. Men, women and children would be working four over seventy hours a week to scrape a very poor living. They were paid a

piece rate, that is they were paid according to how many garments they had made. But the hosiers were very bad employers. Almost invariably they owned the frames, and the stockingers would have a sum of money deducted from what they were owed in lieu of rent for the frame. It was always a hand to mouth existence, and Jane was part of this scene.

We cannot be certain about any of Jane's childhood; we can only guess. We can be certain that sometime in 1821 she was in a relationship with a man who fathered her child, who was born on 15 December in Birstall. Jane registered this baby boy as was required of her with the Vicar in the village, and she called him Richard. The entry in the register is worthy of a comment. The handwriting is appalling, but it is possible to discern that Jane calls herself a stocking maker. It is impossible not to notice that the vicar has written illegitimate in capital letters - a parson who is not exactly brimming over with the milk of human kindness.

Jane must bear her disgrace alone with her newborn baby in the depths of a cold dark winter. She must have had the support of her family for she would not have been able to put in the hours on the knitting frames to make a living for herself and her baby. So her family was supportive even if the Church of England was not.

However her circumstances change when on 12 October 1827, when she was 27, she married a man from her village of Birstall. He is called John Kilby, a contemporary of Jane, a neighbour and also a stocking maker. They marry and set up home together -not in Birstall, but about a mile away in Belgrave, closer to the centre of Leicester.

And so Richard Sanders now has a stepfather, and in the nature of things brothers and sisters arrive; in 1829 a stepbrother Charles, in 1831 a step sister Mary, in 1833 a stepsister Emma, and in 1841 another stepbrother Thomas. Actually Richard was not living with his mother and family when Thomas was born. The 1841 census shows that he had left home by then - perhaps to serve his time as an apprentice.

But Jane's story is worthy of seeing through to its end.

Life for the stocking makers continued to be tough. The whole industry was in a very bad condition. Most of the cottagers were using old frames that only produced one stocking at a time. At the same time the wages were getting lower and lower. In 1815 they were being paid 15 shillings a dozen for one kind of stocking, and in 1841, the year that Thomas was born, John Kilby would be paid seven shillings and three pence a dozen. A case published by the board of guardians in 1847, showed that 500 framework knitters earned in one week £194. Out of this they had to pay £77 deducted for the hire of the frames, leaving them an average 4s 8d weekly earnings for each man. Meanwhile the hosiers employed middlemen to manage the renting of the frames and payment to the workers. There was rampant racketeering and cheating of the workers who were desperate. They had petitioned Parliament earlier. In 1831 the Truck Act was to ensure that all workers in what ever trade were entitled to be paid in full in the 'coin of the realm'. The hosiers was not supposed to deduct the rent of the frames and yet the middlemen we're still making a fortune from this racket.



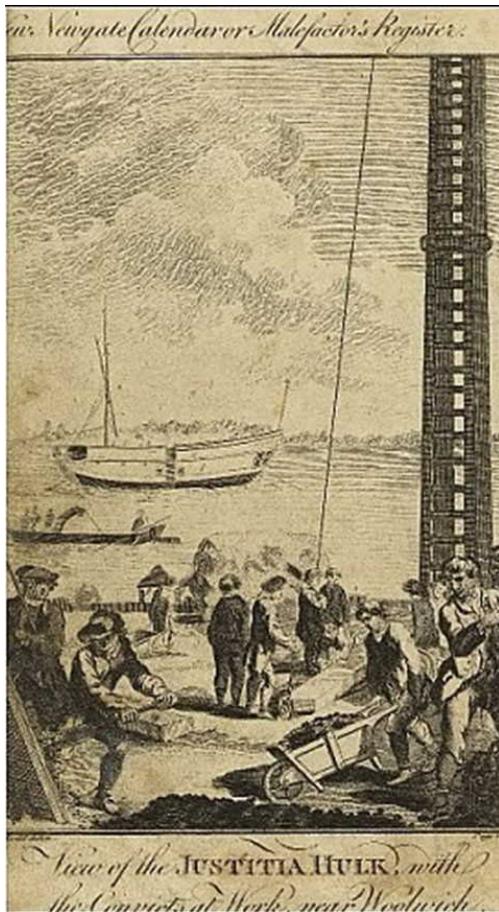
By 1848 it was said,

'Provisions there are exceedingly dear, work was scarce, and wages so low that it hardly paid to be at work at all. Misery and want were stamped on all their care worn and anxious features, and the wretchedness was too severe to be portrayed, and to extensive to be relieved; there never was any previous distress like it. Thousands were starving and hundreds worked at stone breaking for 4d and a loaf day, and it was no uncommon occurrence for a number of stockingers to act the part of a team of horses, and draw a load of coal from the colliery pits'.

Jane and John Kilby would have been desperate. John came up before the magistrate for trespass (almost certainly for poaching), for stealing a goose, a hen and a sovereign. And in the spring of 1842, he is arrested, with two others, charged, and sentenced after Leicester assizes on March 2nd for 'feloniously killing a sheep with intent to steal.' John Kilby has a record and he is inevitably sentenced to 15 years transportation to Van Dieman's land in Tasmania.

From Leicester John Kilby was moved to London to be detained as a convict awaiting transportation. He was taken presumably in a horse drawn prison vehicle to the hulk ship *Justitia*, moored in the middle of the Thames at Woolwich

A contemporary gives this account of his introduction to the prison hulk.

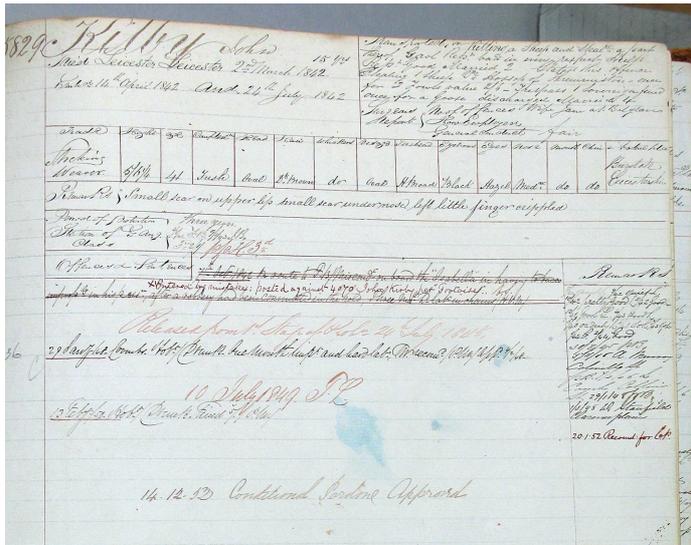


*Quarters were assigned me on board the Justitia Hulk. Before going on board we were stripped to the skin and scrubbed with a hard scrubbing brush, something like a stiff birch broom, and plenty of soft soap, while the hair was clipped from our heads as close as scissors could go. This scrubbing we endured until we looked like boiled lobsters, and the blood was drawn in many places. We were then supplied with new magpie suits - one side black or blue and the other side yellow. Our next experience was being marched off to the blacksmith who riveted on our ankles rings of iron connected by eight links to a ring in the centre, to which was fastened an up-and-down strap or cord reaching to the waist belt.*

Life on the hulk ship was indescribably dreadful. More than two hundred men were confined in chains in very close quarters with no sanitation and a very poor diet. Disease was rife, but John Kilby managed to survive for several weeks. His conduct record for the period aboard the prison ship is short and to the point; 'Bad in every respect'. No doubt he had much to be angry about.

After five weeks he is taken in another horse drawn convict wagon the 250 miles from Woolwich to the Barbican in Plymouth, and made to board the convict ship 'Susan'. This set sail for Australia on April 21.

John Kilby remained on board the 'Susan' for a journey of three months and he landed in Van Dieman's Land in Tasmania on July 24. Records of the journey show that there had been 300 prisoners on board at Plymouth, all in irons in the hold of the ship. Three prisoners died in transit.



From here we can trace John Kilby through his conduct record in Tasmania. He was first unfettered and examined by the doctor. Every part of John is examined and recorded, to assist in identification should he ever try to escape. We may not have a photograph but we know he was 5 feet 6 1/4 inches tall, he had a fresh complexion, an oval head, dark brown hair and whiskers. His eyes were hazel and his nose, mouth and chin were medium. He also has a small scar on his upper lip and another under his little finger.

He served a period of probation until July 1845, and his conduct for most years is described as 'good' save for two excursions into Hobart, where he gets drunk and has to do yet more hard labour. After eleven years he was first recommended for a conditional pardon 20th January 1852, which was finally granted on 14th December of that year.

He then began the task of getting back to Leicester and Jane. Did he work his passage? Had he earned some money while serving his sentence? When did he get back to England? We do not know how long his journey took to get back to England, nor do we know how he funded it.

We do know that in 1851 Jane is head of the household living in Belgrave, Leicester. Now she is fifty two. All the family are at home except for Richard. Jane is a stocking seamer, as also are her two daughters. Her elder son by John Kilby is working as a gardener, and the younger son is at school.. There is a lodger living with the family, to help with the budget; and another daughter who is still at school. The circumstances for stocking makers in Leicestershire have not improved by 1851.

We know from the death registers that Jane died in the last quarter of 1857, aged 57. It must have been a love for Jane and his family that made John return to Belgrave after twelve or thirteen years of penal servitude, and we would like to believe that he and Jane were reunited.

We know that John Kilby did come back to Belgrave, for in 1861 he was living alone in a cottage according to the Census record of that year. He is in Abbey Street, and working as an agricultural labourer. His son Charles is married and living three doors away in the same street. John Kilby died in December 1962, aged 62. There is no record of an estate or probate for John or Jane Kilby.