

Edward Risby 1755-1823

Present day descendants have been able to trace Edward Risby's family back into history and, though it cannot be officially confirmed, from what information has come to light it is probable that his ancestors originated in Norway and as Vikings probably settled in England in the 10th century. The town of Risby in Suffolk celebrated its 1000 year anniversary in 1975.

Edward Risby was born in 1755 into a family who had lived in Uley in the Cotwolds area of Gloucestershire for at least 30 years, an important town with Cottage Industry, weaving, as its main industry.

Edward married Hannah Manning in 1777 and they had 3 children, Ephriam, James and Hannah. This was at the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain when machines powered by steam replaced the Cottage Industries in the weaving of cotton and wool. Edward was arrested in 1780 for "stealing and carrying away by force of arms, three yards of broadcloth valued at 30 shillings". He was arrested again in 1783 and at his trial in 1784 was sentenced to seven years with transportation to Australia. Perhaps these misdemeanours were a result of his family being robbed of its source of income. He did not see his wife Hannah and his children again.

He was imprisoned in the hulk "*Censor*" on the Thames and deported in 1788 to complete his sentence in 1791. He survived the First Fleet voyage on the convict transport "*Alexander*", the largest and unhealthiest ship in the Fleet. 11 convicts died of scurvy in the first stage of the voyage from the Thames to Portsmouth. The ship had to be cleaned, limed and creosoted before continuing the voyage.

From Tenerife to Rio de Janeiro a further 16 convicts died, including 11 on the "*Alexander*". The ship was inspected and the Master was replaced because the bilges had been pumped only once a week instead of daily and the stench was almost unbearable even on the deck.

He had also survived two mutinies; the first, by the crew on the day they sailed from England, then a second, by some of the convicts before the ship reached Cape Town. The leader of this mutiny was hanged when the Fleet reached Port Jackson.

Alexander – 452 tons
Largest Convict Transport

Arrived with
117 male convicts,
41 marines and 30 crew.



In Port Jackson, Edward worked as a sawyer on the "*Sirius*" until he was among the first group of convicts sent to Norfolk Island. He became a free man in 1791 and was granted 12 acres of land to grow maize, wheat and raise pigs. He married Ann Gibson, a second fleet convict. They had 5 children [1 stillborn] and developed their farm to the extent they could exist without Government "stores". The surviving children were Thomas, Susannah, Joseph and Benjamin.

In Colleen McCullough's book "*Morgan's Run*" Ed Risby was mentioned as a friend of Richard Morgan, also a survivor of the "*Alexander*" problems.

When the British Government decided that Norfolk Island would be closed the family was resettled in Van Diemen's Land where they were given 30 acres of land for farming. They built their new home and developed their land grant to grow beans, 2 acres of potatoes, had pigs and a small flock of sheep and again became self sufficient, as they has been on Norfolk Island.

Edward's eldest son Thomas married in 1815 and had 2 children before Edward died in 1823. Edward was in poor health for a few years before his death and the property was worked by Thomas' brothers Benjamin and Joseph.

Edward had lived a life of misery, survived a terrible sea voyage between decks on the very unhealthy ship "*Alexander*", also a lot of very hard work, and to live to an age of 67 was almost unbelievable. Unfortunately he did not live long enough to see the beginning of the very outstanding Tasmanian Company, Risby Timber Industries. The history of this great Company in Tasmania is documented fully in the Limited Edition Book "Above The Odds".

Joseph, Edward's second eldest son moved away from Tasmania when the "farm" was sold and settled in Maitland in 1826. He built a small brick-making plant and built a two storey home in Sempill Street near the Hunter River which he called the "The Falls" which later became the first hotel in Maitland and continued to operate as a hotel until 1923. Joseph married Mary Robson in 1838. They had 11 children [3 died in infancy]. This branch of the family has lived in Maitland and Newcastle ever since.

Mary made a christening robe for her children. The robe has been used over the generations for many Risby children up to the present day. The robe is still in excellent condition and will be used in the future.

It was only very recently that a kind relative returned two very old photos of Risby ancestors, Mary and Joseph Risby taken probably in about 1860.