

The Tragedy of John Pridmore

On the 18th July 1830, Henry Pridmore was born in Bourne, Lincolnshire. He was the son of James Pridmore and Elizabeth Ward and the grandson of John Pridmore and Ann Durham.

Henry grew up into what seems to have been the family profession of rope making and harness making around the local area and presumably further afield when taken on at the hiring fairs.

Henry met and married Harriette York(e) in 1850. Harriette originated in Stoke Dial in Northamptonshire and the pair proceeded to raise a total of 13 children both in Bourne and in Australia:-



Name	Born
William	Bourne
John	Bourne
Henry	Bourne
Daniel	Bourne
Sarah Anne	Bourne
Henry	Bourne
William	Brunswick
Thomas	Brunswick
Joseph	Brunswick
James	Brunswick
Alfred	Brunswick
Arthur	Brunswick
William	Brunswick

At some point after 1860, (Henry's birth year), the family emigrated to Australia. Second born son, John, would have been between 9 and 13 years of age when he started his new life down under. I have not as yet found their exact date of passage but am convinced it was not via a convict ship or the rest of the family would have stayed at home in all probability.

John met and married Annie Jane Griffiths (b 1852) on December 26th 1873. John was a sheep shearer and Annie was the daughter of Samuel and Bridget Griffiths (nee Ruddy), both of whom had found their way to Australia due to their criminal records.

Samuel had been a miner by trade in his native Staffordshire but had been in trouble with the law on several occasions. On the 3rd January 1843, he was sentenced to 7 years transportation with 18 months hard labour for stealing 12 lbs of cheese and some potatoes. His ship sailed on June 22nd 1843 and arrived on October 15th that year.

He was described as 5 feet 3 ½, aged 22, ruddy complexion, brown hair and brown eyes, tattoos on his right hand and left arm. He was sullen and of bad character whilst on ship and was placed in irons for assault on board. He was apparently no better after he had arrived in Australia, committing numerous offences after he was granted probation in April 1845, ranging from assault, theft and drunken disorderliness. He was then sentenced to spend time at Port Arthur in chains and hard labour.

This continued for many years, long past his original sentence, which should have ended by 1854. His final ticket of leave was not issued until 5 years later in December 1859.

Bridget Ruddy was also transported from Louth in Ireland in 1852 for 5 offences of theft involving 2 fowls and a number of potatoes. It appears that she married Patrick Nowland in 1854, received a pardon in 1855 and then married Samuel Griffiths in 1856 while he was on a ticket of leave.

John and Annie had 7 children between 1874 and 1886 and John continued to be a sheep shearer. The story goes that John spent a lot of time working away from home leaving Annie with the children. Annie had been befriended by a well off family in the town and regularly received cast off clothing from them but there was also a woman who had her eyes on John and in order to cause unrest between John and Annie, she told John that Annie was seeing other men and receiving new clothes as a result. When John walked in and found her trying on a dress on July 16th 1901, his rage enveloped him and he drew a gun and shot her dead.

There are a number of press cuttings in relation to the tragedy that add other details and lead to other interpretations of the events but suffice it say that John was tried for the murder and found guilty and sentenced to death. It appears that this sentence was commuted to a jail term and he returned home over twenty years later.

Reading into the reports, Annie and John must have been going through a rocky period of their marriage as Annie had obtained a protection order against John at some point.

Barrier Miner (Broken Hill, NSW : 1888-1954), Tuesday 17 July 1900, page 2 National Library of Australia <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article44260515>

THE BRUNSWICK TRAGEDY.

Pridmore still Alive.

John Pridmore, who killed his wife at Brunswick yesterday and then shot himself, is still alive, but is in a critical state. One of the bullets has broken in his head. It is stated by the solicitor who acted for Pridmore in the recent court case brought, by his wife that if Mrs. Pridmore had not obtained the protection order there would have been no murder.

Here John is in hospital after turning his gun on himself after shooting Annie

The Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848-1954), Wednesday 18 July 1900, page 9

THE BRUNSWICK TRAGEDY.

PRIDMORE IMPROVING.

John Pridmore, the man who shot his wife and attempted to commit suicide on Monday morning, was much better yesterday, and there is a possibility of his recovery. It has not been definitely ascertained whether either of the bullets lodged in the brain, and in his present condition it is not deemed advisable to probe the wounds. A constable has been placed on duty in the ward, but Pridmore has not shown any inclination to talk, and avoids any mention of the tragedy. He complains of severe pains in the neck, although the wounds in the head appear to cause him no anxiety. The patient is under the care of Dr. Moore, and unless septic poisoning sets in has, in that gentleman's opinion, a fair chance of recovery.

The inquest on the body of Mrs. Pridmore will be opened this morning at the Morgue before Mr. Morrison, district coroner, and an adjournment will be applied for until the husband's condition is definitely ascertained. A post-mortem examination by Dr. Neild yesterday showed that death was due to a bullet wound in the heart, although a quantity of blood in the head made it at first appear that a bullet had penetrated the brain.

The West Australian (Perth, WA : 1879-1954), Friday 20 July 1900, page 5

THE BRUNSWICK TRAGEDY.

PRIDMORE'S CONDITION.

Melbourne, July 19.

A sketch taken of the head of John Pridmore, the author of the Brunswick tragedy, shows the bullet embedded in the base of the skull. The medical attendants do not think it expedient to hold an operation.

By September 4th it would appear that John Pridmore had recovered sufficiently to be brought to trial for his crime.

Interestingly, his occupation was given as wood-splitter and the earlier suspicion of John that his wife was having affairs is born out in the testimony of his son, who confirmed that they had lived apart for some time.

THE BRUNSWICK TRAGEDY.

PRIDMORE COMMITTED FOR MURDER.

The domestic tragedy which occurred at Brunswick on July 16, when John Pridmore, a wood-splitter, shot his wife dead at her residence, and afterwards attempted to take his own life, was the subject of an inquest at the Morgue yesterday, before the coroner for Bourke, Mr. Morrison, P.M. Sub-inspector Graves appeared for the police, Mr. F. Hickford for Pridmore, who was present in custody, and Mr. J. Shannon for his children.

The evidence of the Pridmore family, the youngest of whom is 18 years of age, showed that the father and mother had lived apart for some time, owing to Pridmore having had some idea that his wife was unfaithful—an idea which the witnesses held was quite without foundation. Mrs. Pridmore had obtained a protection order against her husband, and the disputed ownership of certain furniture had led to legal proceedings between Pridmore and his eldest son Arthur. During the examination of Arthur Pridmore Mr. Hickford asked what Mr. Shannon had to do with the investigation.

Mr. Shannon explained that the children desired to protect the name of their mother if any attempt were made to throw discredit upon it.

The Coroner said that the fact that the woman obtained a protection order might be taken as a proof that she deserved it.

The story of the tragedy itself was told by John Thomas Pridmore, a son of the deceased. At a quarter to 10 o'clock on the morning of the tragedy he heard his father's voice in the kitchen, and immediately afterwards the report of a firearm. Rushing into the kitchen, he found his mother dead on the floor, and his father with a revolver pointed at his own head. The son fought for the weapon, but Pridmore dragged himself free, and fired a bullet into his brain. Subsequently in the Melbourne Hospital he expressed sorrow that he had not killed himself. Pridmore had told witness that he had engaged a female detective to watch the deceased. He always carried a revolver to protect himself in the bush, and used to practise firing at a kerosene-tin.

Corroborative evidence was given by Henry Pridmore, another of the family, and Constables Mannion and Barelay.

Anna Sudholz, private inquiry agent, stated she was instructed by Pridmore to make inquiries regarding his wife. Her instructions were confidential.

The Coroner.—You cannot claim privilege, and must, therefore, give evidence. You need not mention names.

Witness said that Pridmore had given instructions to her to watch his wife, and ascertain whether she was faithful. She had not time to obey his instructions, and made no report to him. He had instructed her on July 2, but had said there was no hurry. He had paid witness £8, and she was to get £2 more when she got some information.

Mr. Shannon.—You have done nothing for the money, and you advertise advice free. Do I understand you made no effort to find out anything?—I found out nothing. I thought out my arrangements.

Witness continued that this was her usual contract with clients. She had not employed anybody, but had written a letter.

Mr. Shannon.—Do you think you are entitled to hold £8 for which you have done nothing?—That is not for you to ask. That is a matter between Mr. Pridmore and myself.

Constable Seddon, of Brunswick, who had visited Pridmore in the Melbourne

Constable Seddon, of Brunswick, who had visited Pridmore in the Melbourne Hospital and the Gaol Hospital, said that the accused had told him his wife had not answered two or three letters he wrote from New South Wales concerning an accident to his son. He had also said that he went to her house on the morning of the tragedy with no intention of harming her, and that he remembered nothing of the circumstances. Witness had known Pridmore as a sober and industrious man for 14 years.

The accused reserved his defence, and after a brief summing-up by the coroner the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder. Pridmore was then formally committed for trial at the Criminal Court on the 17th inst.

The next report is from the criminal court where John is sentenced to death.

THE BRUNSWICK TRAGEDY.

PRIDMORE GUILTY OF MURDER.

SENTENCED TO DEATH.

In the Criminal Court yesterday, before Mr. Justice Hodges and a jury of 12, John Pridmore was charged with murdering his wife, Annie Jane Pridmore, at Davis-street, Brunswick, on July 16.

Mr. Finlayson, Q.C., prosecuted for the Crown. Mr. Maxwell (instructed by Messrs. Hickford and Balmer) appeared for the accused.

The principal witnesses for the Crown were Dr. Neild, accused's two sons (John Thomas and Henry), and a neighbour, Mrs. Hunt.

The defence sought to show that the state of mind of the accused was such at the time of the occurrence that he was not responsible for his actions. His niece, Ruth Ann Craig, produced a copy of a letter which he sent to his wife in May last, in which the following words occurred:

"... I beg of you to return home, for you don't know how miserable I am. It makes me feel like a lonely outcast. Surely you have not lost all your love for me, after so many years together. Think of our dear little daughter. If you stay away from home it may be the means of doing some harm in years to come to her. I cannot believe that your heart is hardened against me, for my love is as fresh for you as it ever was. I hope you will give these words full consideration, for our family's sake. I promise you that I will never mention these unkindly lines to you in the future. ... If you would only meet me, and talk the matter over, we might soon come to a better and happier understanding. Send me an answer to this, and save me some of my pain."

Mr. Godfrey, Government medical officer at the Melbourne Gaol, said accused complained of sleeplessness and pains in the head. There was no evidence of mental disturbance, except depression. If accused had suffered from insomnia and pains in the head for some weeks, and was worried over family matters, it was possible for him to shoot his wife and himself without knowing what he was doing.

Mr. Justice Hodges, in summing up, said that apart from the question of the state of the accused's mind there was abundant evidence of malice. If the jury believed that he was in such a state of mind when he did the deed that he did not know what he was doing, it would be their duty to find him not guilty on the ground of insanity. According to his children he was a good husband and fond father. The jury would have to determine whether the letter put it was genuine. If it had been manufactured for the purpose of making evidence it would indicate a diabolical, deliberate murder, but if it was a true expression of the man's feelings at the time, it would show that he would not then harbour any thought of doing harm to a woman he loved and cherished. The words attributed by his son, John, to the accused just after the deceased woman was shot—"My God! I've done it! She has wronged me these three years"—were most important, for they showed he remembered them what had provoked him to the deed. They seemed to show, to a certain extent, that his mind was there, but they might also have been the outcome of a frenzy.

The jury returned a verdict of guilty of murder.

Pridmore, when asked if he had anything to say, replied in even tones, "No; only my son John's evidence in some respects did not correspond at all with what he gave at the inquest."

Mr. Justice Hodges said it was not his duty to make any suggestions as to what the Government might possibly do in this case. The jury, after having carefully considered the evidence, had found the prisoner guilty. He did not feel the slightest

sidered the evidence, had found the prisoner guilty. He did not feel the slightest doubt, from the prisoner's manner and his whole conduct, that the prisoner regretted beyond expression what he had done. But it was his duty, which he could not escape, to pass now upon him the sentence of death.

THE PRIDMORE TRAGEDY.

A petition is being signed at Brunswick for presentation to the Executive Council praying for the commutation of the sentence of death passed upon John Pridmore on Monday last for the murder of his wife, Jane Pridmore, at Davis-street, Brunswick, on July 16 last.

No further press cuttings have been found but Vicki Jensen states that John returned to live with his granddaughter until his death.