

## **AGRICULTURAL RIOTS – 1830** **And the Transportation of Elizabeth Studham**

by Alfred T. Walker

The agricultural labourers' wages were very low and many were unemployed. There were riots and machinery was broken, especially threshing machines. There were also incendiary fires.

In November 1830 there were fires in Birchington as well as other places in East Kent and threshing machines were broken at Alland Grange Farm. The winter of 1829-30 was a severe one – wages were low and food was expensive. The introduction of threshing machines had caused unemployment among farm workers, because they used so few men to work them. Threshing was the one job that had been done (using flails) during the lean winter months, when no other jobs were available, so was a life saver to the farm labourers.

Hay and corn ricks were burnt in protest. The riots became known as the 'Swing Riots', because a certain Captain 'Swing' was inciting the labourers to riot. His identity was unknown but he could well have been Thomas Courtenay, who eventually died in an affray in Bossenden Woods near Faversham. The rioters were demanding wages of 2s 6d a day, but the high rates and the tithe system made things difficult for the farmers too.

There must have been considerable unemployment in Birchington prior to 1830.

In **1828-29** as there were 5 sesses (or rates) for the poor in 1828 amounting to £998. The Workhouse in Park Lane cost the local community £254 to run that year.

In **1829-30** there were 4 sesses totalling £959 and the number of inmates in Park Lane Workhouse varied between 28 and 37 in a population of only about 500-600. Men were employed at from 1s 2d to 1s 6d a day at the Workhouse, mainly on road maintenance.

In **1830-31** there were 3 sesses totalling £735. One interesting entry reads:

“To Thomas Sidders for a new plough butt in pieces by mischievous persons - as per bill - £3 8s 0d.”

## **ELIZABETH STUDHAM:**

Elizabeth was a Birchington woman. From All Saints Church baptism register we read:

“1811 Studham, Elizabeth, daughter of George and  
Mary Studham April 5<sup>th</sup>”

In 1830, aged 19, she set fire to an East Kent Workhouse (not Park Lane) and was sentenced at Dover Court in late December 1830 to Transportation to Tasmania, then known as Van Diemens' Land. On the outward journey she was “well behaved and orderly”, so the ship's register states, although she was supposed to be of 'loose habits'. There was one other woman on the ship going out to serve her sentence at the same time, but not from Birchington. The ship was call “The May” and docked at Hobart on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1831, having taken almost ten months to make the journey.

During her early years in the colony she was sentenced for 10 offences, mainly for bad language, but in two cases of theft she received two years hard labour. She was eventually given a conditional pardon in 1846 and was then entitled to move freely about the colony. Some of her offspring have been in touch in order to find out more about their ancestor's background before she left for Tasmania.