

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Chris Johnson, Bound for Van Diemen's Land – The tragic story of Alfred Talent of Hoxne

The speaker at the March meeting of the Heritage Circle was Chris Johnson. His talk was entitled Bound for Van Diemen's Land, and he told the story of Alfred Talent of Hoxne.

Talent was born in Dickleburgh in 1795. In 1821 he had a grocery and drapers shop in Hoxne which he had inherited from his father, but he then went bankrupt. He was known to be a liar and fraudster, and in 1838 he was arrested for fraudulently obtaining goods from London on credit. He was tried at Ipswich court and sentenced to 7 years transportation. This consisted of 3 years on a prison hulk in Portsmouth dock, conditions were terrible with prisoners chained and kept in metal cages.

Talent's wife wrote to Lord Normanby pleading for his release. He was pardoned and released. He then purchased, with his brother, a shop in Ipswich. Again he was arrested for fraudulently obtaining goods. He was tried in 1845 and sentenced to transportation. Prior to this he spent 3 months enduring horrendous conditions in Millbank Prison.

Talent was shipped out to Norfolk Island on the ship 'China' along with 199 other prisoners. Conditions on Norfolk Island prior to Tallent's arrival had been horrendous, but a new governor had been appointed and conditions had improved. Tallent worked in the vegetable garden and also smashed coral, which was used to make cement. Whilst he was there he was sentenced to 6 months in chains day and night for insubordination to an officer.

In 1849 all the remaining prisoners on Norfolk Island were sent to Tasmania (Van Diemen's land). He worked to get a ticket of leave, and became a publican, but again he fell foul of the law for fraud, and was sentenced to work on a road gang. In 1859 he was pardoned and could have returned to England. The rest of Talent's life are difficult to trace, but it is believed he possibly remained in Tasmania.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be on Wednesday 27 April at Rickinghall Village Hall when Martyn Taylor will give a talk entitled *Ghostly and Macabre – Chilling tales of Bury St Edmunds' supernatural past*. New members and visitors are very welcome. Further information is available at www.heritagecircle.onsuffolk.net.

Angela Bigley.