



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

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Mary Reibey. The history of Mary Reibey for presentation to the Masonic Historical Society

Mary Reibey was born in Bury, Lancashire, England on 12th May 1777. She was christened Mary Haydock (Molly) at the local church.

James Haydock and Jane Law, her parents, were sound uncomplicated Yeoman stock, living in a small village which dated back to roving Norman times. Her father died in 1779 with her mother shortly following him. She was reared by a maternal grandmother in the nearby village of Blackburn. Her local education was up to grammar school standard, judging by her later diary entries which contained both literary and historical references. Being an intelligent girl she would have been familiar with the surrounding countryside of her day, the conditions in the cities of Manchester and Liverpool and the slavery prison hulks together with the activities of highwaymen.

Possibly, after the death of her grandmother in 1791, she was placed in service at the age of thirteen. Apparently she was not happy with this situation so she fled, disguising herself as a boy, taking the name of James Barrow who had died recently and who was a couple of months her senior.

She acquired a horse which she was subsequently trying to sell at the horse market in Chester when she was arrested . She was even trying to sell the bridle and saddle separately! Horse stealing was a capital offence so Mary, under the disguise of James Barrow, was sentenced to death at the Stafford Assizes in 1791. Her story was that she had met a man with two horses, one of which he persuaded her to ride, then abandoning her/him. This was the story which was later used in a petition for her release.

She maintained her disguise until November 1791. In prison this was easy as sanitation was not segregated and she had a small flat boyish figure.

Because of her extreme youth the sentence was commuted to transportation to Botany Bay for seven years. This sentence required a medical examination which uncovered her masquerade.

