

Platt to Colonial Secretary, 28th January 1835, Colonial Secretary Letters Received. AO 4/2291.3, Letter 35/905.

Ironbark Hill near Newcastle
28th January 1835

Sir,

I have the honor to lay before you the following statement of a case of peculiar hardship in hope of obtaining redress and a revocation of your Order to the Board of Assignment that I am to have no more Convict Servants.

In February last owing to several of my men having obtained tickets of leave and the applications of others being sent in I apply'd to the board of Assignment for six Convict Labourers, the application was some time after returned with this remark:

“J Platt is informed he is prohibited from having any more Convict Servants assigned to him by Col. Sec. Letter 2nd May 1832 Signed for the board C D Riddel.”

I have been now thirteen years on this farm during which period not a man has taken the bush and not one solitary complaint has been made to the Magistrates of bad or short rations deficiency of slop clothing and bedding or ill treatment. And for upward of four years one man only has been taken to the Officer, the Magistrate I am confident would give me the credit of having given them less trouble than any person in this district. It was therefore at a total loss how to conceive the cause of your order. W. Nowlan at last solv'd it by writing me “after repeated calls at the Col Office I succeeded in finding out the cause of your application being stopp'd – John Lewis, Marquis of Hastings illegally at large proceedings before the Newcastle Bench 28th January 1832”

I will now explain to the best of my recollection the cause of this mans being at large. I had some heavy mill work repair'd and [allied] in the Compy Smithy Newcastle for which I consider'd myself under heavy obligation, in Dec 1831 Mr Henderson the Mining Engineer stated their works were standing still for want of lime the man who had contracted having failed in his supply for want of assistance, I readily gave him the loan of a man to assist in having one thousand bushels of lime on the shell bank close to my house at the same time charging him not to absent himself and on no terms go near Newcastle before his job was finish'd on the 20th Dec., two of my boys one thirteen the other five years of age were destroyed by a bush fire and after a painful search of many hours with the assistance of the Newcastle Police their bodies were found but in such a mutilated state that on the first impression my intention was to inter them on the spot which was overul'd by the Chief Constable, observing an inquest must be held over them, I broke the sad intelligence to their mother who insisted on their being brought home which certainly ought not to have been, it was consequently [attended] by the delirium of my eldest daughter and Mrs Platt which continued for months. I was compelled to turn over all my out door concerns to a worthless overseer, the man took advantage of my

being confin'd to the house three of them committed a robbery on New Years day at Newcastle which Dr Brooks with his usual sympathy in affliction only punish'd with the cells which at another time would have met with an Iron Gang in penal settlement and many other irregularities were committed, the man lent for burning lime was permitted to remain and not put to his customary work of fencing, the female servant took advantage of our stupor also to rob us and was punish'd by being sent to the factory, thus I became the sole attendant of my wretched family and quite unable even to make inquiry what the men were doing, as I consider'd it at the time a very secondary object, on or about the 29th Jany I was informed by accident that one of my men was sentenc'd to a road party I repair'd to Newcastle and on remonstrating with Mr Reid he inform'd me that as the decision had taken place it could not be revoked, the man's ticket had been forwarded some time and the only loss I suppos'd at the time I should sustain was the loss of his labour for a few days or months not for a moment could I suppose it would be attended with such bad consequences or I should have demanded a hearing and not have permitted the mans statement to be set down as he pleas'd to utter it in the Newcastle Police books, in short I have been condemn'd which no notice was even sent to confront my assigned servant who had two objects to gain the evasion of punishment for absenting himself without a pass and to prevent his ticket of leave being set aside. I never heard what defence he made but from his well known ingenuity and cunning it must have been a good one, at all events the servant escapes and the master is punish'd without a chance been given of defending myself from any charge the man might think proper to make if he did make any.

I have only to add that there is no person far or near of common feeling who knew our situation at the time that could for a moment suppose I could either [keep] in subordination or be answerable for the acts and illegal conduct of a number of assigned convict servants I was suffering as I always do in the hot months most severely from the Asthma and had the sole charge of rousing and keeping up the spirits of a [?] family cut off by previous misfortunes from all society and only visited occasionally by Dr Brooks and Mr [Dean] who did all in their power to cheer up the female part of my family, under their circumstances I hope you will be pleas'd to give an order to the board of assignment that my applications may be received as usual, I beg leave to apologize for this lengthy detail.

I have the honor to be
Your most Obed.
And Hble Serv.

J L. Platt.

Transcribed by Gionni Di Gravio 27th June 2006
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