

JONES, JOHN ('Shoni Sguborfawr'; c.1810 - 1867), Rebecca rioter

Name: John Jones
Pseudonym: Shoni Sguborfawr
Date of birth: c.1810
Date of death: 1867
Gender: Male
Occupation: Rebecca rioter
Area of activity: Anti Establishment; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Williams

'Shoni' was born in 1810 or early in 1811 (his age was given as 33 when he reached Tasmania in July 1844). His place of birth is given in police records as Merthyr Tydfil, but his sobriquet is derived from the farm Sgubor-fawr, in the parish of Penderyn, a few miles away. Different accounts state variously that his father lived at this place, and that 'Shoni' himself was in service there as a farm labourer. At the time of his transportation his only near relative was his brother, Solomon, living in America. He was a moderately tall man, and wore a beard. He could read and write a little; by religious persuasion he was a Baptist.

His early life is obscure. His trade is given in police records as shaft-sinker, but a well-informed writer speaks of him as a brass-fitter. He seems to have left Merthyr for Brecon, for [colonel Thomas Wood](#), M.P. for Brecknock, who later testified in writing on his behalf, swore him in as a special constable at Brecon during an election. He appears to have served for a time in the 98th Foot, during which period he exerted himself in obtaining information for the authorities in suppressing the 'Scotch Cattle' in the Monmouthshire industrial area, and representations were later made on this account, also, to gain some mitigation of his sentence. He became a prize-fighter, and when the Taff Vale Railway was opened to Merthyr in 1840, it was celebrated by a bare-fist encounter between 'Shoni' and John Nash, railman, the champion of Cyfarthfa. It was recalled later that 'Shoni' was a defender of dumb animals, and that he had, on occasion, thrashed hauliers for ill-treating their horses.

In March 1843 he was brought before the Merthyr magistrates on a charge of being drunk and disorderly, but was discharged on promising 'to lead another life.' In the following May he was again brought before the Swansea magistrates on a similar charge. He then went to work in the neighbourhood of Pontyberem, and his services were engaged by the leaders of the Rebecca rioters in their activities. For these services he was paid sums varying from two shillings to five shillings a night. He took part in the destruction of several turnpike gates, and, on 25 August, he ran amok in the village of Pontyberem in a drunken brawl. He terrorized the countryside at this time by extorting money from farmers by the threat of revealing their Rebecca activities. He was arrested at Tumble on 28 September, tried at the Carmarthen assizes, and sentenced (22 December) to transportation for life, on the charge of having, on 25 August, shot at one Walter Rees, at the New Inn, Pontyberem, with intent to cause grievous bodily harm (and not, as is generally supposed, for his share in destroying turnpike gates). He received his sentence with laughter. In prison he revealed to the authorities the names of several of his associates.

'Shoni' was removed from Carmarthen gaol on 5 February 1844 to the Millbank penitentiary, in the company of [David Davies](#) 'Dai'r Cantwr' (1812? - 1874). He was then separated from 'Dai', and embarked on the *Blundell* on 8 March, reaching Norfolk Island, a probationary station for convicts, on 6 July. Here he remained until he was transferred to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) on 8 April 1847. He was then placed in the service of several people, but he was constantly in trouble, for stealing potatoes, for refusing to work 'unless he got extra rations,' and for being drunk and disorderly, and he was sentenced to various periods of hard labour and solitary confinement. He was granted a ticket-of-leave on 19 September 1854, but this was revoked on 8 December of that year, when he was sentenced to eighteen months hard labour for assault. He did not serve the full sentence, but was once more given three months hard labour on 10 March 1856 for drunkenness. He was finally granted a ticket-of-leave on 2 December 1856, and was conditionally pardoned on 20 April 1858. However, he continued to reoffend and to be imprisoned. Eventually he was convicted of having sexual intercourse with a twelve year old girl on 31 March 1863 and was sentenced to Port Arthur, where he died on 24 December 1867. He was adequately described by a contemporary as 'a half-witted and inebriate ruffian.'

Author

Emeritus Professor David Williams, (1900 - 1978)

Sources

Personal research

David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: a Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff 1955)

Additional information from Janine Marshall Wood

Further Reading

Janine Marshall Wood, *No Ordinary Convict: a Welshman called Rebecca* (Tasmania 2021)

Wikipedia Article: [Shoni Sguborfawr](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q7500413](#)

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