

CHUMMY – 1886

READERS THEATRE

Students are on the raised platform of the York Courthouse and have their scripts in folders. The students do not need to know their parts but should be well rehearsed in reading them. Even though the parts are read, students should still make eye contact with the audience. The performers do not look at each other. Students may take on different roles.

Suitable Years: 5 to 10

Number Of Students: 8

Cast:

Chummy - *old convict*
Magistrate
Narrator 1
Narrator 2
Clerk 1
Clerk 2
Sergeant Beck
James Craig - *hotel owner*
Workman - *from the hotel*

Venue:

York Courthouse Complex, 1874 Courtroom

Synopsis:

Once the convict era was over, what happened to the ex convicts? Chummy was an old convict who appeared in the York Courthouse again and again. Most of his problems were to do with drinking. He would get drunk, get into fights and then lose his job. The Chummy case was a typical one that might involve the old convicts.

Costume:

Chummy is a very bedraggled but cheeky old convict dressed in raggedy clothes and work boots. He might wear a collarless shirt, a kerchief tied around his neck and baggy trousers with braces. Chummy would have made some effort to be neat for the court. The Magistrate is upright and speaks with authority. He would be dressed in a suit and tie. The clerks are neatly dressed in shirt, trousers and tie. They would have leather shoes or boots.

York Courthouse Complex has some costumes available for student use.

Reference:

Erickson Rica: *The Brand on His Coat: Biographies of some Western Australian Convicts*, University of Western Australia Press, 1983



CHUMMY – 1886

NARRATOR 1 Chummy was an old convict who appeared in the York Courthouse again and again. Most of his problems were to do with drinking. He would get drunk, get into fights and then lose his job.

NARRATOR 2 It was against the law for him to leave his job. This was called absconding.

NARRATOR 1 It was against the law for people to be without a roof over their heads. This was called vagrancy.

NARRATOR 2 Chummy couldn't read or write. When he was sober, he was harmless and friendly but when he was drunk he was soon in trouble.

NARRATOR 1 Chummy would get into drinking bouts and brawls and he always came off second best

CHUMMY I would have a few drinks and then... and then... I don't know how it happened but I always seemed to be the one in trouble.

My real name was William Turner but everyone called me Chummy.

SERGEANT BECK I found Chummy in the Castle Hotel one night. His things were covered in blood and he said that he'd been assaulted. As he was bleeding from a head wound, I took him to the medical officer and waited with him while his wound was dressed. He said that he had no bed. He must have just been sleeping in the hayloft at the hotel. He needed to recover so I let him stay in the station for the night. The next day I took him back to the hospital for more treatment and then set out to find the two freemen who had been tormenting Chummy. They were charged and found guilty and given substantial fines.

CLERK 1 William Turner you are charged with being drunk and disorderly. You are fined fourteen shillings.

MAGISTRATE Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY I was working like a horse all morning Sir. I was looking after the cattle and the stables. The men bought one pint of beer. Suddenly I heard my master call the police. I thought he must be playing a trick on me.



NARRATOR 2 In May 1886 Chummy was back in court. He had run away from a job. It was against the law for servants to leave a job without notice. This was part of the Masters and Servants Act.

NARRATOR 1 It was also against the law for him to be without a roof over his head.

CLERK 2 William Turner, you are charged with absconding from your job as a servant of James Craig at the Castle Hotel.

CLERK 1 And with being a loose, idle, drunken and disorderly person and a vagrant.

MAGISTRATE Sentenced to one month's hard labour in Perth prison. Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY They treated me cruelly Sir, I could not remain there for fear of being beaten.

NARRATOR 2 And again in June 1886

CLERK 2 William Turner, you are charged with vagrancy and sleeping in the open air.

MAGISTRATE Can you not stay out of trouble?

CHUMMY I had nowhere to go Sir.

MAGISTRATE One month's prison.

CHUMMY Thank you Sir.

NARRATOR 1 August 1886 Chummy was out of prison and back in court.

CLERK 1 William Turner you are charged with vagrancy.

MAGISTRATE As this is a repeat offence I sentence you to three months prison.

Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY Thank you Sir. I will try to do better Sir.

NARRATOR 2 Eastern Districts Chronicle, 29 November 1886. William Turner, an old offender known as Chummy, was charged with being drunk and disorderly.

MAGISTRATE What happened this time William?

CHUMMY I had only just come out of the lockup Sir and only drank three glasses of sugar beer. Let me off this time Sir.

CHUMMY



NATIONAL TRUST

MAGISTRATE Three weeks.

NARRATOR 1 Chummy got a job as a yardman in a hotel. His job was to look after the horses and do general cleaning and carrying. But, by August 1887, he was in trouble again.

MAGISTRATE Three months in prison for stealing from James Craig, your employer.

JAMES CRAIG He was never a reliable employee. He was a shiftless thieving character!

MAGISTRATE Why would Mr Craig charge you with stealing?

CHUMMY I don't think he likes me Sir.

NARRATOR 2 After three months in prison, Chummy was soon back in court.

CLERK 1 William Turner, you are charged with being drunk and disorderly.

MAGISTRATE Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY I was proceeding quietly on my way, minding my own business Sir when I was accosted by a group of youths. They spoke cruelly to me Sir and shouted abuse at me exciting me into a great passion Sir. They did all they could to impede my progress Sir.

MAGISTRATE You are fined five shillings.

NARRATOR 1 And again.

CLERK William Turner. You have been arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct.

MAGISTRATE Do you have anything to say in your defence?

CHUMMY I hadn't touched a drop in two months. Then last week, when I returned from the bush, I partook of just one glass of beer. It had such an overpowering effect on me Sir that it completely knocked me over.

MAGISTRATE Hmm. I trust that you will not be remaining in York?

CHUMMY No Sir. I promise to clear out of town at once Sir.

MAGISTRATE You are fined one shilling.

NARRATOR 1 October 1887.



CLERK 2 You are charged with stealing a pair of trousers and a handkerchief.

MAGISTRATE Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY No Sir.

MAGISTRATE Six months imprisonment with hard labour!

NARRATOR 2 June 1888. Chummy set fire to the roof of the Settler's Arms Hotel.

CLERK 1 William Turner, you are charged with arson.

MAGISTRATE Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY I was making smoked hams and bacon but it was taking a long time. I thought to speed up the process so I built up a great fire. Then I thought of placing a wool bale over the chimney to make it even hotter and prevent the smoke from escaping. The fire must have been very hot; the wool caught fire. Then the roof caught fire.

WORKMAN We were in the yard when we saw the flames coming out of the roof. Luckily it didn't take long to put out the fire.

MAGISTRATE I don't think you wanted to do any harm. I'll let you off this one.

NARRATOR 1 November 30, 1889. Chummy was drunk and in trouble again.

CLERK 2 William Turner alias Chummy you are charged with disorderly conduct at the Imperial Hotel.

MAGISTRATE This is the forty-first time you have been before this court. You were so drunk last night that you had to be strapped to a stretcher. Your face is bruised all over and you have two black eyes. You must keep out of trouble and stop drinking.

CHUMMY Please give me another chance Sir!

NARRATOR 2 But Chummy appeared in court again and again. June 1892.

CLERK 1 William Turner. You are charged with disorderly conduct.

MAGISTRATE You have been before this court fifty-eight times and here you are again for. On some occasions I have been lenient with you.

What do you say?

CHUMMY I don't know how it happened Sir. I was working like a horse all morning. I was attending to the cattle and cleaning the stables. I bought one pint of beer. Next thing I hear the master call to the police. I thought he must have been playing a trick on me.

MAGISTRATE I sentence you to three months imprisonment.

CHUMMY No. Oh no. No Sir no! No! No! (*Sobs*) No Sir. Don't say that Sir.

NARRATOR 1 1894.

CLERK 2 William Turner. Chummy. You are charged with drunkenness and disorderly conduct.

MAGISTRATE This is your eightieth time before this court. You are fined five shillings.

Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY (*shakes his head*)

NARRATOR 2 May 1895.

CLERK 1 William Turner you are charged with stealing a silver brooch.

MAGISTRATE Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHUMMY Let me speak. It's all nonsense Sir. Let me speak.

You treat me like a dog. (*Mutters to himself*)

NARRATOR 1 On the ninth of August 1895 the Resident Magistrate wrote to the Superintendent of the Poor House.

MAGISTRATE William Turner expiree 4424 applies for admission to the Depot, as he is totally unfit for work. I recommend his admission or the granting of outdoor relief until there is a vacancy.

NARRATOR 2 Chummy left the Poor House a number of times and made his way back to York District but each time he was sent straight back again.