We left our country for our country's good.
Attributed to George Barrington

The Man Who Invented Australia's Beer

In folklore, the man who invented beer is sometimes known as 'Charlie Mopps', celebrated in a drinking song with the chorus:

He must have been an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we shall always sing,
Look at what he's done to us, filled us up with cheer,
Lord bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer.

The man credited with inventing beer brewing in the colony of New South Wales is still remembered in the name of a popular modern brand of beer. James Squire (Squires) was born in Kingston upon Thames in 1754 or 1755. According to one version of his life, young James was a 'Gypsy' (Romani) who took to the criminal life from an early age. He was arrested for highway robbery in 1774 and sentenced to seven years transportation to the American colonies. As was sometimes the case, he was offered a choice of enlisting in the army rather
than being sold off to the plantation owners of Maryland or Virginia. He took the offer and served some years in the British Army, returning to Kingston to manage a local hotel. The hotel became a notorious rendezvous for thieves and smugglers and James was eventually caught stealing. He received a sentence of seven years transportation, this time to New South Wales aboard the First Fleet.

In Sydney his experience in the hotel trade was put to good use in brewing the colony's first beer, which he sold at 4 pence a quart. He also brewed privately from imported English malt for the Lieutenant-Governor's Grose and Paterson. In 1789 he was flogged for stealing ingredients used in brewing. By 1792, or possibly earlier, he was free and received a grant of 30 acres near modern-day Ryde where he built a tavern known as 'The Malting Shovel'. He also established a brewery and planted hops from 1806. His brewing business expanded rapidly, as did his interests in grazing and land acquisition.

James left a wife and children behind him in England but wasted no time in forming new partnerships, probably beginning aboard the First Fleet. He had more than one long-term relationship, most of which produced offspring. His son Francis (with Mary Spencer) was placed with the New South Wales Corps at an early age. Francis became a drummer boy, on pay, by the age of eight and went with the corps to England where he later served against Napoleon. He was posted back to Launceston base in 1803 then pensioned off at only seventeen years of age. Francis re-enlisted in 1810 and returned to Van Diemen's Land where he grew barley for his father's New South Wales brewery.

When James Squire died in 1822 he was wealthy and respectable. The former highway robber had served as a district constable in the colony, financially assisted other settlers and even befriended Aboriginal people. The Eora elder Bennelong was buried in an orchard on his property. James Squire's funeral was the largest ever in the colony up to that time:

[He was] universally respected and beloved for his amiable and useful qualities as a member of society, and more especially as the friend and protector of the lower class of settlers. Had he been less liberal, he might have died more wealthy; but his assistance always accompanied his advice to the poor and unfortunate, and his name will long be pronounced with veneration by the grateful objects of his liberality.

At least that was how the artist, forger and alcoholic Joseph Lycett recalled James Squire, though there is no doubt that his astute industriousness made him a successful and popular figure. Like many transports he made a worthwhile new life in the penal colony. His grandson, James Squire Farnell, was the first Australian-born premier of New South Wales.

The Real Artful Dodger

Transported to Point Puer on the Tasman Peninsula of Van Diemen's Land at the age of fourteen, Samuel Holmes had already served time for small offences. With no mother and an alcoholic father, Samuel found lodgings in London's crime-ridden East End. He paid the landlord rent each week and sold him whatever he stole. The landlord apparently lodged a number of other children on a similar arrangement. Young Samuel had fallen in with a shady character who may have even been the basis for fictional young thief, the 'Artful Dodger', in Charles Dickens's famous novel Oliver Twist.

Samuel's story certainly reflects elements of the novel: '[I] used to play about in the streets, [my] father tried to keep me at home—has stripped me, taken away my clothes and tied me to a bed post—because the Boys used to come round the House at night and whistle and entice me to go out thieving again with them.'

Two of the boys took Samuel to a house in Stepney: