

**TRANSPORTATION FOR LIFE -
HITCHCOCK, BRANSTON & BULL-
FOR CRIMES COMMITTED**



Black-eyed Sue and Sweet Poll of Plymouth taking leave of their lovers who are going to Botany Bay. By Robert Sayer 1792

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JUNE 2020

The author recommends reading a similar publication entitled “Death by Public Hanging of a Local Man for Horse Stealing” which is free to download and read on his website.

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Northampton Mercury – January 28th 1832 (article repeated from the Leicester Herald).

Apprehension of Hitchcock a notorious horse-dealer

It will be in the recollection of our readers, that about two years ago this month, three individuals made their escape from the "Borough Gaol" of this town (Leicester), named Bull, Branston and Hitchcock. – The two former charged with house breaking and the latter with horse stealing and returning from transportation. Bull and Branston were soon after apprehended, and being found guilty were sentenced to be transported for life.



**The Borough Gaol (centre), on Highcross Street, Leicester
Drawn by local artist John Flower in 1830. Note the High Cross.**

John Flower (14 Oct 1793 – 29 Nov 1861) was an English landscape and architectural artist known to locals as "the Leicester artist". Flower was born in Leicester, the son of John Flower, a wool comber, and his wife Mary, whose family had for generations owned the Castle Mill on the River Soar

A Borough Gaol had apparently existed in the area of High Cross Street from 1297 but the latest building was constructed and opened in 1792/3. Although the new Welford Road Gaol was built in 1828 the Borough Gaol continued to be used with the addition of a Bridewell (Reform School) and in 1829, following purchase by the Borough magistrates, a house of correction was added to the prisoner's exercise yard. The Gaol gradually fell into disrepair and was finally demolished in 1897.

Hitchcock was not taken till Friday week at Coleorton under the following circumstances. – Mr. John Ayres, son of Mr. Thomas Ayres, farmer residing at Coleorton, was at Ashby de la Zouch on the above day, and in company with a person named Kidger, constable of Coleorton, when they met at the Queen's Head in that town, the prisoner Hitchcock. In the course of conversation, the prisoner said he was going to Loughborough, to attend as arbitrator in a case, in which two boatmen of that town were concerned.- Soon after the prisoner left.

On their returning home to Coleorton, Ayres and Kidger overtook the prisoner on the road, and from the tardy manner of walking, suspected him to be upon no good. – Soon after reaching

home, young Ayres, having occasion to walk round the farmyard, saw the shadow of a man, and presently after, it being a moonlight night, clearly distinguished Hitchcock as being the same individual he had seen at Ashby. – Determined to watch him, he followed him into a field adjoining, in which were three valuable horses, and very soon saw him get into a ditch, where he remained sometime.

Mr. Ayres then went for his father, and both succeeded in bringing Hitchcock into the house. Mr. Ayres senior then left him in charge of his son, while he procured the assistance of Kidger, and when gone, Hitchcock made a desperate attempt to escape. He seized young Ayres and struck him a violent blow upon his head, and fancying nobody was in the house besides his opponent, attempted to grasp a cavalry sword which hung in the room. – Fortunately, Mrs. and Miss. Ayres hearing a scuffle went into the room, and thus timely assisted in securing him.

Kidger soon after arrived, and recognising Hitchcock as the same person who was transported from Nottingham a few years ago, took him into custody. – A chaise from Ashby (*a horse-drawn carriage for one or two people, typically one with an open top and two wheels*), and being handcuffed, was safely lodged in his old quarters at the Borough Gaol of this town (*Leicester*). For many years the prisoner has been a terror to that part of the neighbourhood, being perhaps, one of the most expert horse stealers in the country. – The same individual succeeded sometime since, in taking three valuable horses out of the stable of Sir George Howland Beaumont of Coleorton Hall, but luckily none of them had shoes on at the time, and the next morning were found in a close about a mile from the hall.

Great praise is due to Mr. Ayres and family for the courage they evinced in securing the offender, and to mark the conduct of his son, Sir G. H. Beaumont very handsomely presented him with a five-pound note for his trouble. In addition to which, a reward of £20 was sometime since offered by C. G. Mundy Esq., for the apprehension of the prisoner, besides £10 from the keeper of the Borough Gaol, which we understand Mr. Ayres will also receive. Hitchcock had upwards of £4 in his pocket when taken.

Supplementary information – Thomas Ayre's farm, rented from Sir George Beaumont, was known as West Farm and consisted of upwards of 200 acres. It was situated in what is now known as Farm Town.

Before the middle of the 19th century, long prison sentences were not often used as a punishment. In fact, it was rare for anyone to be imprisoned for more than two years, except for debt. Instead, people found guilty of minor offences were fined or sentenced to some physical punishment, such as being put in the pillory, whipped or branded. Later in the Victorian Period this was replaced with **Penal Servitude**. Those who had committed more serious crimes were sentenced to transportation or death. Any criminal with a sentence of 7 years or longer could be transported

The death sentence was often commuted to the lesser punishment of transportation for life. Those who were transported might decide to return on the expiration of their sentence, although they had to pay for, or arrange their own passage back after receiving a certificate of freedom or ticket of leave. Very few, once free, returned to England and most wanted to stay, build a new life, marry and become respected citizens of Australia.

Sometimes, transported convicts managed to escape before their sentence was completed. If they were then recaptured, they were hanged. **Interestingly, the records show that Robert Hitchcock received a second life transportation sentence and was not hanged.**

John Bull – Sentence and Transportation Report

Date of Death	1839
Crime	House Breaking
Convicted At	Leicester Borough Assizes
Sentence Term	Life
Transport Ship	Elizabeth
Departure Date	3rd October 1831
Arrival Date	14th February 1832
Place of Arrival	Van Diemen's Land (became Tasmania)
Passenger Manifest	Travelled with 220 other convicts

Thomas Branston – Sentence and Transportation Report

Date of Death	-
Crime	House Breaking
Convicted At	Leicester Borough Assizes
Sentence Term	Life
Transport Ship	Florentia
Departure Date	11th August 1830
Arrival Date	12th December 1830
Place of Arrival	New South Wales
Passenger Manifest	Travelled with 200 other convicts

**Robert Hitchcock –
First Sentence and Transportation Report**

Date of Death	-
Crime	Horse Theft
Convicted At	Nottingham Assizes
Sentence Term	Life
Transport Ship	Albion
Departure Date	21 st September 1826
Arrival Date	14 th February 1827
Place of Arrival	New South Wales
Passenger Manifest	Travelled with 191 other convicts

**Robert Hitchcock –
Second Sentence and Transportation Report**

Date of Death	-
Crime	Horse Stealing & Escape from Transportation
Convicted At	Nottingham Assizes
Sentence Term	Life
Transport Ship	England
Departure Date	31 st March 1832
Arrival Date	18 th July 1832
Place of Arrival	Van Diemen's Land (Became Tasmania)
Passenger Manifest	Travelled with 199 other convicts

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Transportation was an alternative punishment to hanging. Convicted criminals were transported to the colonies to serve their prison sentences. It had the advantages of removing the criminal from society and being quite cheap - the state only had to pay the cost of the journey.

In 1787, transportation started to the first penal colonies in Australia, Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Over the years, about 160,000 people were sent there: men, women and children, sometimes as young as nine years old.

From Sentencing to Departure - Prison Hulks & Convict Gaols



The sentence of transportation was usually carried out in three parts. Prisoners started their sentence in the local gaol, followed by a period in a convict gaol or on the prison hulks before finally being transported.

After Sentencing

Prisoners arrived at the convict facility with their 'caption papers' (Which stated the offence, the date of conviction and length of sentence). In the early 19th century, most prisoners awaiting transportation were sent to the ' hulks' in London before being assigned to a convict ship and leaving England.

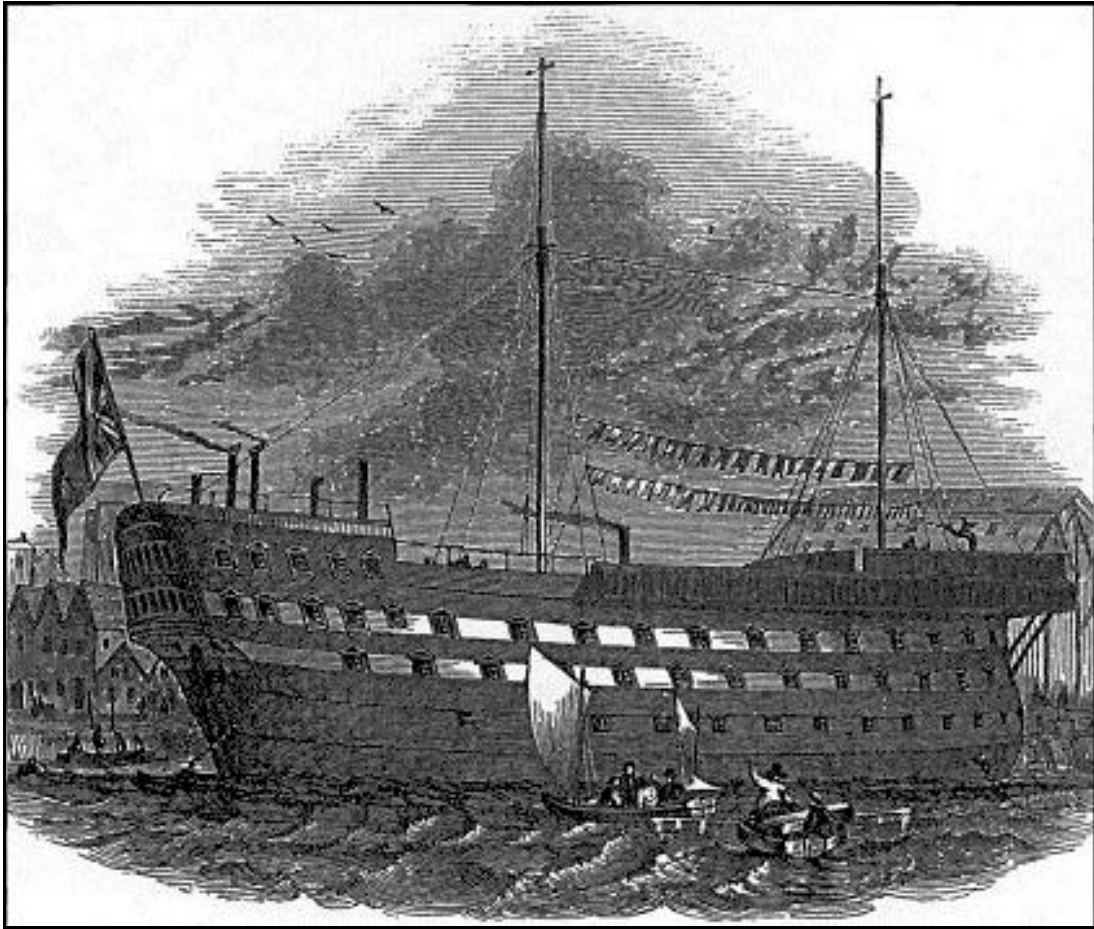
The Hulks

The hulks were old navy ships that has had their masts removed and were anchored along the banks of the Thames and at ports such as Portsmouth and Plymouth. As the prison population increased, it was decided to use them as gaols. Parliament authorised their use for a two year period in 1776; **they continued to house prisoners for 82 years!**

The conditions on the ships were terrible, especially in the early days, and far worse than in the prisons. The standards of hygiene were so poor that outbreaks of disease spread quickly. Typhoid and cholera were common and there was a high death rate amongst the prisoners.

In the day time the Convicts were put to hard labour on the docks or dredging the Thames. At night the prisoners were chained to their bunks to prevent them escaping ashore. Convicts could be punished for crimes on board by being placed in heavy irons or flogged.

Even though conditions slowly improved, they were still worse than in the prisons. In later years some prisoners carried out their whole sentences on the hulks in England, instead of being transported.



An old engraving of a typical Hulk