

LIFE ONBOARD THE HULK RETRIBUTION 1809 TO 1810

Two lives ... two fates.

William

Our William French was incarcerated on the Retribution on the Thames at Woolwich on 6-Sep-1808 while awaiting to be transported to Australia for 7 years for stealing 8 turkeys and 6 ducks. Taken ill he was transferred to the Savage hospital ship and died there on 22-Aug-1810 aged 27. We originally thought this would have been on Plumstead Marshes on the ridge near the Tripcock Trees close to the River Thames, but it now seems that this was later practice and in 1810 he would have been buried within the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich in the east part of the Warren. The cemeteries were visible as rows of hillocks with no defined boundaries. Bones were found during building work in 1859 and 1912. William was a poor and illiterate ag lab, and following his conviction, his destitute wife with a babe in arms and child aged 18 months was removed from her parish under the Poor Law.

James

James Hardy Vaux was a fellow convict who, while then the same age as William, was well-educated with middle-class connections and was often not short of a few bob, usually not his own. In contrast to William's, James's wife was also fairly comfortable off and on hand to help at this time. James's criminal career spans 40 years. He was put onboard The Retribution on 21-Jun-1809 awaiting the second of three transportations to Australia, where he embarked for on 15-Jun-1810. According to Noel McLachlan, James Hardy Vaux lived for at least 59 years..

The Memoirs

The full text of James Hardy Vaux's Memoirs is available via Google Books. James doesn't do paragraphs, but his volumes were also re-published by Heinemann in an edited version with notes (*and paragraphs*) by Noel McLachlan in 1964.

The following transcription is from pages 108-112 of Chapter 10 of Volume 2 of the

MEMOIRS
OF
JAMES HARDY VAUX
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.
IN TWO VOLUMES.
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... ship for this colony, as I was not in circumstances to subsist for any length of time in a prison; and I wished, in

to do on my first transportation. My wife, also, who had paid me the most dutiful attention since my confinement, was earnestly desirous to accompany me in my exile: and, with that view, she waited on a gentleman to whom I referred her, soliciting his interest to obtain that favour; but, although he used every effort, the application was refused, she having no family, and the secretary of state having set his face against such an indulgence, on account of the bad reports received of those women

would earn in London. They invariably carry a large and ponderous stick, with which, without the smallest provocation, they will fell an unfortunate convict to the ground, and frequently repeat their blows long after the poor sufferer insensible. At noon the working party return on board to dinner, and at one again go on shore, where they labour till near sun-set. On returning on board in the evening, all hands are mustered by a roll, and the whole being turned down- below; the hatches are put over them, and secured for the night. As to the food, the stipulated ration is very scanty, but of even part of that they are defrauded. Their provisions being supplied by contractors, and not by Government, are of the worst kind, such as would not be considered eatable or wholesome elsewhere; and both the weight and measure are always deficient. The allowance of bread is said to be about twenty ounces per day. Three days in the week they have about four ounces of cheese for dinner, and the other four days a pound of beef. The breakfast is invariably boiled barley, of the coarsest kind imaginable; and of this the pigs of the hulk come in for a third part, because it is so nauseous that nothing but downright hunger will enable a man to eat it. For supper, they have, an banyan days, burgoo, of as good a quality as the barley, and which is similarly disposed of; and on meat days, the water in which the beef was boiled, is thickened with barley, and forms a mess called "Smiggins", of a more detestable nature than either of the two former! The reader may conceive that I do not exaggerate, when I state, that among the convicts the common price of these several eatables, is, — for a day's allowance of beef, one halfpenny; — ditto, of cheese, one halfpenny; — ditto,