



Australian convicts

January 26, 1788

Philip Wilson aboard the transport ship Alexander arrives in New South Wales with the first shipment of convicts under this government's new policy.

After eight incredible months, we on board the Alexander have finally reached our destination. As I write this, the ship is moored in Sydney Cove, Port Jackson. Our original destination of Botany Bay, discovered by Captain Cook in Endeavour in April, 1770, was judged unsuitable by the commander of this fleet, Captain Arthur Phillip RN. So, with that, we headed another few days north and now, the fleet is unloading its 750 convicts, male and female, for what promises to be a strange and unknown new life.

Long Haul

It has indeed been a long haul to get to New South Wales. We left Portsmouth, England early on Sunday 13 May last year. A place and a time that seem literally half a world away to us now as I stare up at strange new constellations I have never seen before.

After docking for a few days in Tenerife at the beginning of June last year, we spent most of August in Rio de Janeiro and then, after crossing the Atlantic, from mid-October to mid-November at the Cape of Good Hope. We arrived in Botany Bay on January 19 after eight weeks being battered by the southern oceans. It is an experience I won't forget for a long time.

Now we are finally here and the government's policy of convict transportation has become a reality. It is the responsibility of these 750 convicts and the ships' crew and accompanying marines to forge a new existence out of this seemingly barren place. We have enough supplies with us to suffice until the second fleet arrives in about two years time. Until then, we are on our own!

Mixed Bunch

I have got to know some of the characters on Alexander over these months and some have tragic stories indeed. They are a mixed bunch. Some have been sentenced to life for murder - others for just a few years for seemingly very petty crimes indeed.

One man John Randall spoke to me recently on the Alexander. He was sentenced to seven years transportation to New South Wales. What had he done to deserve such a fate? "I stole a silver watch chain - that was three years ago. I did some time on the hulks in the Thames and then got sent to the Alexander."

Make no mistake. There are some very nasty characters on this ship but it does break your heart to hear some of the tales told by both the men and the women (nearly 200 in all in the fleet) now preparing to start anew here in New Holland.

James Freeman considers himself a little fortunate, though. "I was sentenced to death nearly four years ago for highway robbery and that got changed to 7 years transportation, so here I am. They say seven years, but we all know that means life. How would I return to England?"

It is to the new colony's enormous benefit that many of these criminals have the talents and

knowledge to make this new endeavour work successfully. Within a few days, we will have landed and set about organising ourselves to begin farming the land here.

Old Policy

For those currently criticising the government's transportation policy, it should be remembered that this policy is not new. The initial Transportation Act of 1717 allowed for the transportation of criminal classes to America but this ceased to be possible after 1776 when the American colonies became independent. The American colonies have now set about importing slave labour from Africa to replace the labourers England sent them for over fifty years.

We were then left with the enormously unpopular hulk prisons on the Thames in London to take excess criminals. These floating prisons quickly became overcrowded and finally, in August two years ago, Lord Sydney announced the government's new policy of transportation to New South Wales. It should be remembered that, at this point, only Cook had ever seen Botany Bay and was not too complimentary about it either.

There are too many plus points to the whole transportation argument, though, for it not to be carried out. England, by doing this, will be ridding itself not only of the cost of imprisonment but also ridding itself of the hated, inhumane hulk prisons and a large criminal class at a time when events in America and France are making the government nervous about having too many disruptive elements present.

The people aboard this first fleet have the chance now to build a new life, a new colony and be remembered years from now as pioneers. I will be going back to England as soon as possible on the first ship to leave these shores. But my thoughts will always be with these I leave here in Sydney Cove. With those who seek now to turn over a new leaf.

By Neil Coghlan
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Translate the following words

- Convicts _____
- Long haul _____
- Battered _____
- Barren place _____
- Petty crimes _____
- Start anew _____
- Benefit _____

Answer the questions

1. Er zat 8 jaar tussen de eerste keer dat kapitein Cook Australië aandeed en het arriveren van de eerste scheepslading gevangenen vanuit Engeland.
 - A. Waar.
 - B. Niet waar.

2. De 'Alexander' ging ...
 - A. Van Portsmouth naar Tenerife vervolgens naar Rio de Janeiro, van daar naar Kaap de Goede Hoop om zo 8 maanden later in Botany Bay aan te komen.
 - B. van Southampton naar Tenerife, vervolgens naar Rio de Janeiro, van daar naar Kaap de Goede Hoop en kwam 8 maanden na de eerste afvaart in Botany Bay aan.
 - C. van Portsmouth naar Tenerife, vervolgens naar Rio de Janeiro, vertrok naar Kaap de Goede Hoop en kwam 8 maanden later aan in Sydney Cove, Port Jackson.
3. De 'Alexander' heeft een voorraad voor 2 jaar.
 - A. Waar.
 - B. Niet waar.
4. Werden alleen de zwaargestraften getransporteerd naar Australië?
 - A. Ja, alleen degenen die ter dood veroordeeld waren.
 - B. Nee, alleen degenen die veroordeeld waren voor moord.
 - C. Nee, het was een gemengde groep.
5. Waren er alleen manlijke veroordeelden?
 - A. Ja.
 - B. Nee, er waren 550 veroordeelde mannen en 200 veroordeelde vrouwen.
 - C. Nee, er waren ongeveer 550 veroordeelde mannen en bijna 200 veroordeelde vrouwen.
6. Waar werden criminelen volgens de Transportation Act van 1717 naar toe gestuurd
 - A. Naar Afrika.
 - B. Naar Australië.
 - C. Naar Amerika.
7. Waarom werd tot transportatie besloten?
 - A. Ze wilden in Engeland van de moordenaars af.
 - B. De gevangenen in Londen raakten overvol.
 - C. Ze vonden de gevangenen te duur.
8. Volgens de schrijver zal in Sydney Cove een nieuwe kolonie ontstaan.
 - A. Waar.
 - B. Niet waar.

Imagine

Imagine yourself on the ship, write a page from your diary about the conditions on board and in Australia. Give as many details as possible. Write it on a separate piece of paper and use a minimum of 100 words.

Summary

Write a summary of the text where you include the most important details. Someone who hasn't read the text should be able to understand it. Write it on a separate piece of paper and use a minimum of 150 words.