

Dallington's Transported Convicts



Late 18th century engraving of convicts arriving in Botany Bay by George Barrington.
[Source www.dur.ac.uk Durham University Library ref: 994.02 B2 BAR]

Compiled by Roy Iremonger

The Lewes Records Office contains the details of all the prisoners from East Sussex who were sentenced at the Lewes Quarter Sessions to be transported to the colonies during the period from 1790 to 1850.

During this period there were eight hundred and ten people to receive this form of punishment. In the majority of cases they were to receive the shorter sentence of seven years whilst others were transported for ten years or for life.

Initially, this form of punishment was seen by the courts as being less harsh than hanging, but more severe than a fine which the poorer defendants would not be able to pay anyway.

Transportation was initially used as an alternative punishment for serious crimes such as murder, arson or highway robbery. Murderers reprieved from hanging were also transported but gradually the courts were to use it for a wider range of minor offences.

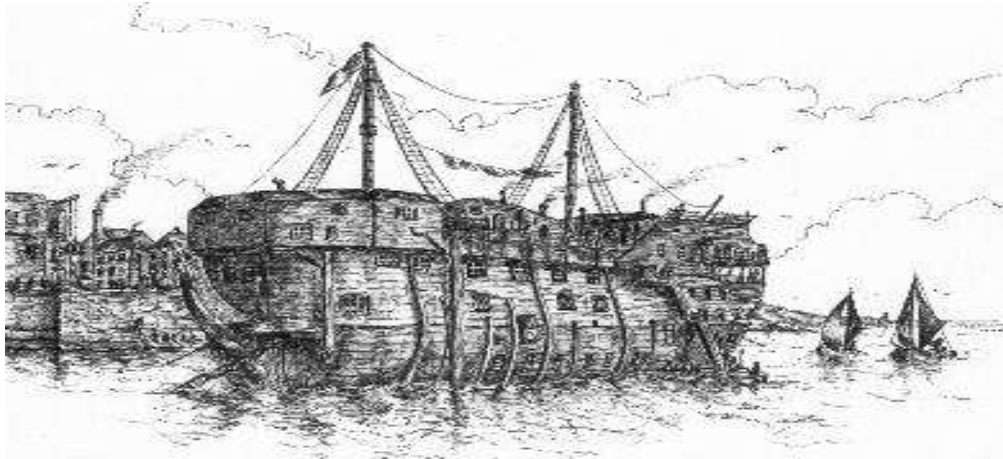
The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of great hardship for the working classes with the rural areas suffering from low wages and poor working conditions. The Government had only recently witnessed European revolutions and was under political pressure from such political agitators as the Luddites, Chartists, Tolpuddle Martyrs and Irish nationalists.

The problem was compounded by the country's lack of prison accommodation to meet the growing number of convicts. The British colonies were desperately short of cheap labour, especially after the abolition of slavery so it was deemed to be the perfect solution to the shortage of prison space as well as ridding the country of troublemakers and numerous petty criminals. Sadly, a number of villagers from Dallington were to fall in this last category and were sentenced to be transported.

Prisoners under sentence to transportation were usually returned to the prison where they had been awaiting trial. At Lewes this would have been the Lewes House of Correction. From here they would be sent to prison hulks in the Thames or south coast ports that were used as floating prisons to accommodate the growing number of prisoners. Many convicts were to wait of some months, and in some cases years, in these appalling conditions, before beginning their long voyages to the uncertainties of the New World.

When the prisoners arrived they were placed in barracks and were made to work building roads, bridges, farms or quarries.

Sentences could be reduced for good behaviour though the majority chose to remain in the colonies at the end of their sentences, appreciating that life in the new world was better than the poverty that would most likely face them in Britain.



A prison hulk (source unknown)

1821 Robert Everitt, Rebecca Lambert and John Mills

The first case involving villagers from Dallington was heard at Lewes Quarter Session in January 1821 and included the rare incident of a female being transported.

Little is known of these three people apart that they were each convicted of stealing “*two fowls*” the property of Thomas Noakes and were subsequently sentenced to be transported for a period of seven years. The court records for this particular case are missing the witness statements, making it difficult to make further comment, but one can only imagine the impact this would have had on such a small community as Dallington. It may well be that the village was pleased to be rid of them.

Nothing else has been traced about Robert Everitt and John Mills though it has been possible to find out a little more about Rebecca Lambert when in Easter 1817 she, along with Mary Bones, was charged with being a

“Vagabond, wondering about from place to place, lodging in out-houses and not being able to give a good account of themselves”.

The court at that time ordered that both should be recommitted to prison until they could be “*passed home*”.

Rebecca Lambert was among the one hundred and three females transported to New South Wales, sailing from England on Providence II on 13th June 1821. Fifty females disembarked at Hobart and fifty-three, including Rebecca Lambert arriving in Sydney on 7th January 1822.

When the female convicts arrived in New South Wales they were lined up at the gates of the female factory at Parramatta and inspected by the local men for suitability as wives who would then drop a scarf or a handkerchief at the feet of the women of their choice. If she picked it up the marriage was immediate.

Many women had to turn to prostitution to survive whilst others who were pretty were selected by the gentry as servants.

The remaining women convicts were sent to the female factory that comprised a three storey barrack with very basic accommodation with inmates sleeping on piles of

wool. The work they were given was to make rope or spin wool, though rock breaking was used for incidents of bad behaviour.

The New South Wales records show that Rebecca Lambert was granted a Certificate of Freedom on 22nd April 1828, at the end of her sentence. However, records show that she was again granted her freedom nine years later on 25th September 1837. These archives also show that an application of marriage was submitted in 1849 between Rebecca Lambert “free” and Richard Connery “convict”. Sadly the record does not show whether the application was successful.



Parramatta Female Factory by Augustus Earle (1793-1838) National Library of Australia.
(Source: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jray/gordon/index.htm>)

Parramatta Female Factory

The first Female Factory was built at Parramatta in 1804 and initially consisted of a single room with a fireplace at one end for the women to cook on.

A three-storey barracks and female factory was built in 1821 and was mainly used to house women who had committed local offences, convict women with children and convict girls who were unsuitable for work with settlers.

Originally designed to accommodate 300 the factory's resident population peaked at 1203 women and 263 children in 1842. There were to be many riots occurring between 1827 and 1843 and were usually the result of overcrowding. In 1846 the Parramatta Female Factory became a Lunatic Asylum for invalid convicts.

1824

Levi Stonestreet, Moses Stonestreet and William Stonestreet.

These three brothers lived with their parents, Henry Stonestreet and Sarah Waters at Cackle Street, Brightling and I have included them because the crime they committed took place on their journey to Brightling, from Dallington where they had been visiting their relatives.

Precise details of their crime have been difficult to trace apart from that they were found guilty of stealing a wagon of wheat on the Brightling road, found guilty at a Sussex Special Session and sentenced to be transported for a period of 7 years, and departed with 190 fellow convicts for New South Wales in July 1824 on the convict ship Mangles.



Convict ship "Mangles" [source unknown]

On arrival in Parramatta New South Wales on October 30th 1824 we do know that Moses was forwarded to the employ of James Hassall at Bathurst.

The next reference to the three brothers appears in the New South Wales Index of Certificates of Freedom showing that William was granted his freedom on 17th March 1838, Moses on the 3rd August 1839 and Levi on the 13th August 1839.

It is my understanding that they all remained in Australia and Levi was to marry Ann West in Bathurst in 1834 whilst still a convict. He died in 1874 at Colville Hillside near Blayney. Descendants of Levi Stonestreet are still living in Australia

Whilst researching the Stonestreet family I came across this in the National Archives dated July 1812

“Request from East Guildeford to five neighbouring parishes for help with legal expenses incurred in on the prosecution of Moses Stonestreet and Nicholas Waters, members of a gang which has infested the county apprehended for stealing fowls from Read, Fuller and Edward Tucker”.

No other information has been found at this time.

1828

Thomas Johnson and Richard Thomas

The second case involving Dallington villagers was heard at the Lewes Quarter Session in January 1828 and involved Thomas Johnson age 26 and Richard Thomas age 21 charged with the theft of a donkey, the property of Robert Cook. They had been committed to Lewes by W.C.Mabbott Esq. on the 22nd December 1827

“Charged on the oath of Robert Cook and another, on the suspicion of stealing a gelding ass, the property of the said Robert Cook”.

Fortunately the witness statements for this case still survive.

“Robert Cook of Dallington in the said county, labourer, on his oath, saith that on Friday morning, the 21st December 1827 he sent his son to the hovel in which the donkey (a gelding ass), was usually left of nights, about half an hour after his son came to him, I asked him if he had turned the donkey out, the deponent answered that he had not seen him that morning. He then went to the hovel and found the donkey and the halter with which he was tied up, both gone, he then traced the donkey from the hovel in the Parish of Dallington, to the Parish of Rotherfield in the said County, whence he found his donkey tethered where the prisoners were sitting near a fence under a hedge, he then took the donkey, saying to the prisoners that it belonged to him, on which the prisoners said that they knew nothing about it” Robert Cook

This was followed by a statement from another witness.

“John Dadwell of Rotherfield, labourer, being sworn on oath that on yesterday morning the 21st day of December 1827, he was at work near the highway in the said Parish of Rotherfield and saw Thomas Johnson and Richard Thomas drive the donkey (now claimed to be the property of the aforesaid deponent) passed him and that the said donkey was loaded with two hampers. About one hour and a half after the prisoners had passed him the deponent, Robert Cook came and asked him if he seen a donkey, the deponent said that he had and went on with Robert Cook in search of it, about half a mile further he saw the prisoners under a hedge to which the said donkey was tethered, he went for a constable. The prisoners were brought forward to Rotherfield and delivered to the constable”.

John Dadwell

Both men were found guilty and sentenced to be transported for a period of seven years.

I have not been able to trace Richard Thomas beyond this time but it is possible that Thomas Johnson is the same convict who left the Port of London on the 27th March 1828 on the convict ship Bussorah Merchant 1 among 170 male convicts, arriving in New South Wales 121 days later. He was pardoned in 1842.



Bussorah Merchant 1

1832

Benjamin Durrant.

Benjamin Durrant appears to have had a chequered life before being brought before the court in 1832. He is believed to have been born in Burwash and was christened there in 1782 and subsequently married Lydia Harmer at East Blachington in 1807. We know that he was a Private in the Corps of Royal Artillery in 1809 as there is a record of an attempted removal order on his wife and daughter, Sarah Ann from Uckfield under the Poor Law Act. We also know that at the time of this court appearance he had 3 children.

Benjamin Durrant, now a tailor by trade age 49 of the Parish of Dallington appeared at the Lewes Quarter Sessions on the 2nd March charged with the theft of-

“One pair of half boots the value of five shillings and one round frock coat the value of one shilling being the property of John Elliot”.

Benjamin Durrant was lodging at John Elliot’s house at the time of the theft. John Elliot discovered the boots, half boots and a smock missing from his kitchen and was informed that James Smith was now wearing them.

James Smith stated that he bought the half-boots from Benjamin Durrant for two shillings. In his defence Durrant claimed that-

“Mr Elliot lent me the frock coat and I had it until Friday when I started and left my old frock in the room”.

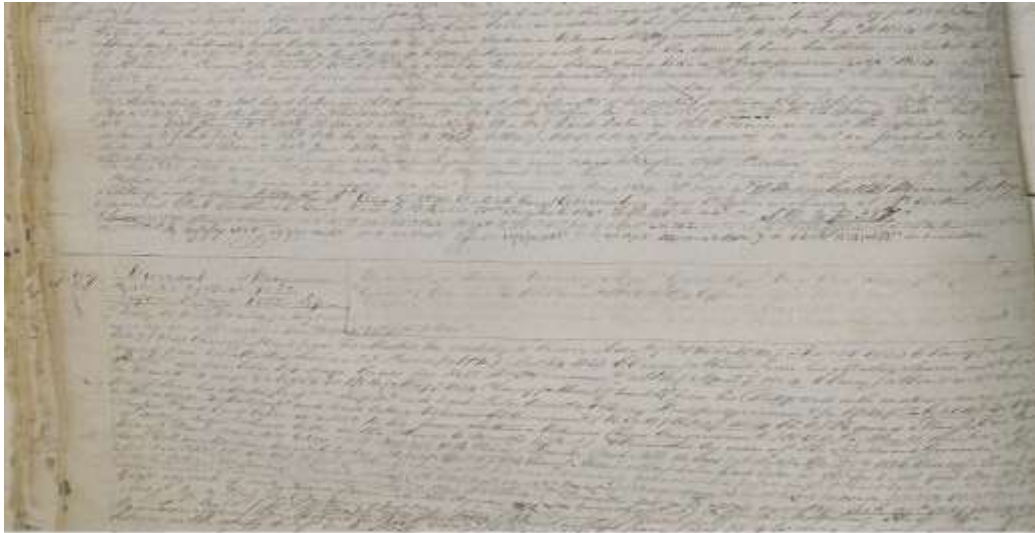
Having been found guilty the Judge announced the following verdict-

“Convicted of felony, having before been convicted of felony, let him be transported to such parts beyond the seas as his Majesty by and with the advice of the Privy Council shall think fit and direct for the term of his natural life”.

For the next six months Durrant was most likely imprisoned on a hulk in Plymouth Harbour as he was to eventually set sail from this port with 200 fellow convicts on the **York II** on September 1st 1832 arriving in Tasmania on December 29th 1832.



Convict Ship York



Original Transcript of Benjamin Durant's Tasmanian Criminal Record

We are fortunate that the Tasmanian Archives have a good deal of information about Benjamin Durrant including the record that he had previously been transported in 1825 for stealing clothes and had served four years and three months. The Surgeon Superintendent's Report states that he was a **“worthless fellow”**.

From his landing in Tasmania in 1832 until 1845 he was charged with committing more than twenty offences that ranged from drunkenness, absconding, refusing to work, trafficking with his bread, theft and possessing tobacco. His punishment each time was to more and more severe, ranging from being given the lash, put on the Treadmill, working on the chain gang as well as being imprisoned on at least nine separate occasions.

After 1845 he seems to have learnt the error of his ways as no further charges against him appear on the records. He died at Tasman, Tasmania in 1868, age 90.

The only other Dallington reference to the Durrant family appears in the 1851 census that shows a Thomas Durrant age 23 employed as a draper's assistant at Mr Peter's shop in Dallington Street.



Chain gang : convicts going to work nr. Sidney N.S. Wales 1842
(Source: Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts : [State Library of Tasmania](#))

1849 Samuel Usher

Samuel Usher, labourer of the Parish of Dallington was sent to the Lewes Quarter sessions on the 31st December 1849 having been charged with the theft of -

“Two tame fowls of the value of three shillings on November 11th 1849. The property of Richard Ticehurst”.

He pleaded not guilty but he was subsequently proved guilty and a former conviction was put in and proved. This previous conviction was heard at the Lewes Quarter Sessions on the 31st December 1838 when he was charged with having

“Stole one shirt of the value of two shillings and sixpence of the goods and chattels of the Guardians of the Battle Union Workhouse in the aforesaid Court and was thereupon ordered to be imprisoned in the House of Correction at Lewes in the said county and kept to hard labour for the term of three calendar months”.

On the same date he had also been charged with the theft of two tame rabbits, valued at four shillings and the property of James Bartlett. He was found not guilty of this charge through insufficient evidence.

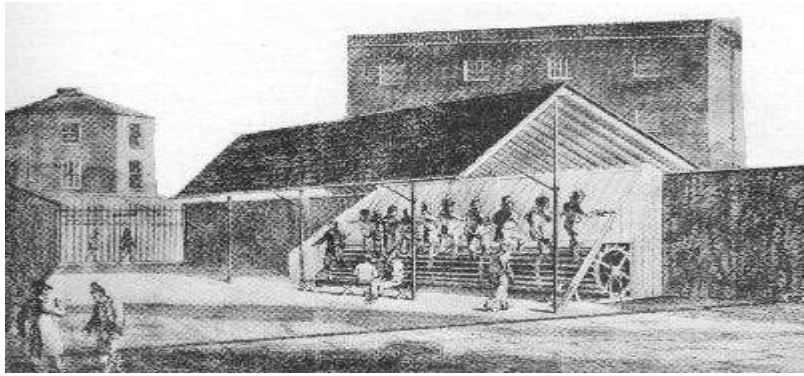


Battle Union Workhouse from the south-east, c.1908.
(Source: www.workhouse.org.uk; © Peter Higginbotham)

Unfortunately for Samuel Usher, his past was to held against him with the court records stating-

“Being found feloniously did steal take and carry away against the Peace of our said Lady the Queen her Crown and Dignity, and the jurors aforesaid upon their oath aforesaid do further present that before the felony aforesaid was done and committed in manner and form aforesaid to wit, at the General Quarter Session of the Peace of our Lady the Queen”. 31st December 1849

Sentence: *“Transported 10 years and committed to Lewes House of Correction in execution of such judgement”.*



A House Of Correction Treadmill (Source: National Archives)

For this Dallington villager fate was much kinder as records show that on the 4th September 1849 Samuel Usher was to receive a freedom by the Sheriff of Sussex.

We do have a few further pieces of information regarding the Usher family in Dallington. His parents were Jessie and Ann and Samuel was christened at St Giles Church, Dallington on the 30th May 1819. In 1848 Samuel, with his wife, Ann were living at Darwell.

The other mention of the Usher family in Dallington is in the 1841 census when Elizabeth Usher age 20 is employed as a servant with the Trill family in Dallington Street.



St Giles Churchyard

By the mid 1850's public opinion was turning against transportation as an appropriate form of punishment. Large numbers of families were beginning move to Australia and resented having to pay their fare when convicts were getting a free passage; the Australians objected to their country being used as criminal dumping ground and it was finally acknowledged that such a punishment had little effect on the crime rate.

Looking back it is all too easy to pass judgement on these former residents of Dallington. From the little evidence I have managed uncover on these villagers it seems that their punishments were exceptionally severe by our current standards especially given that the crimes they committed would not even warrant prison sentences in our courts today. However, certainly with one or two of them Dallington would not have been too unhappy to see them go as they were not merely victims of a harsh society, but were hardened criminals who lived a life of crime.

Hopefully, these researches will encourage others to carry on the investigations and possibly find more villagers who found themselves being torn from their families and sent thousands of miles a way, never to return.

Acknowledgements

Archives Office of Tasmania

Lewes Records Office

National Archives

New South Wales Government Archives

www.stonestreet-heaven.com