

9. TRANSPORTATION

FISHERTON GAOL

After his arrest **Samuel** was taken to Devizes New Prison. During his trial, and until 19 January 1831, **Samuel** was at Fisherton Gaol. This was a new prison, built between 1818 and 1822 on the east side of the Devizes Road, just beyond its junction with the Wilton Road in Salisbury.

No.	Name	Age	Offence	Where & when convicted	Sentence	How long beyond of
	Fisherton					
126	Ch. Bernard Junr.	22	Machinebreaking	New Sarum. 27 Dec 1830	7 yrs	1840 Feb 31
127	Wm. Siscook	22				1845 20 Jan 31
128	Th. Burt	26				
129	Wm. Bartlett	30				
129	Wm. Munday	38				
129	Geo. Beaumister	26				
124	Geo. House	25				
125	Sam. Harford	22				
126	Geo. Hunt	20				
127	Mr. Potticary	30				
128	Geo. Wheeler	25				
129	Wm. Smith	33				

Record Fisherton Gaol

This gaol was closed in 1870, and demolished in 1875. The central block was left standing, and was acquired by Dr William Corbin Finch, the proprietor of the Fisherton House Lunatic Asylum and named Radnor House. In 1901 he leased this property to the War Department, which bought it outright together with two other of the prison buildings in 1922. From 1901 to 1939 Radnor House was the headquarters of the Second Army Corps, later the Southern Command.

The Infirmary (to which the Pyt House rioters had been taken) had taken over the old gaol buildings adjacent to the River Avon, purchasing them for £1,750 in 1822. The old prison chapel and governor's house were converted to wards.

The last vestige of the gaol remains as the plinth on which Dr Roberts's clock by the bridge was built in 1892. A low relief cartouche on the west face, showing shackles and chains, indicates the building's original purpose. There are still remains of the nineteenth-century County Gaol, to be seen up an alleyway off the east side of Devizes Road, between York Road and Gas Lane.



Present day site of Gaol



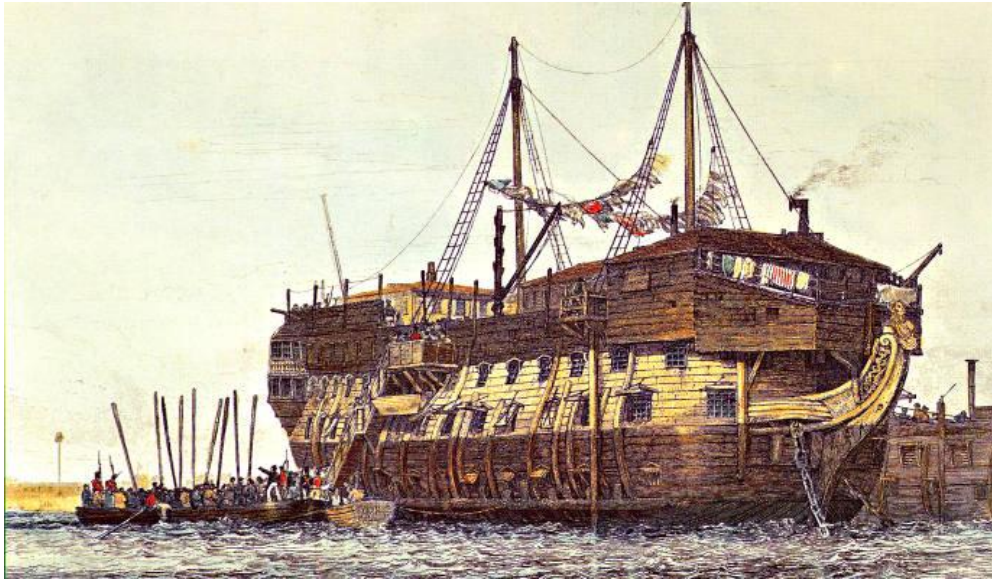
Cartouche at base of Clock Plinth

THE PRISON HULK *YORK*¹

Samuel was transferred from Fisherton Gaol to the Prison ship (hulk) *York* at Portsmouth on 19 January 1831

The Prison ship was formerly the 74 gun third rate *HMS York* (1743 tons) which was launched in 1807. She was posted to the West Indies and was involved in the capture of the island stronghold of Martinique. "*York*" then served with the Mediterranean Squadron off Toulon and had an eventful naval career in the Napoleonic Wars. In 1819 she returned to Portsmouth and was decommissioned and converted into a prison hulk. Up to 500 convicts and their guards lived, ate and slept in these extremely cramped conditions. Serious overcrowding and a backlog of prisoners bound for Australia led to a rebellion aboard the *York* in 1848. The *York* was finally taken out of service and, ironically, broken up by convict labour in 1854.

¹ Port Cities London www.portcities.org.uk



Prison Hulk "York" Portsmouth Harbour

In general, conditions on board the floating gaols were appalling. The standards of hygiene were so poor that disease spread quickly. The sick were given little medical attention and were not separated from the healthy.

Many of the convicts sent to New South Wales in the early years were already disease ridden when they left the hulks. As a result, there were serious typhoid and cholera epidemics on many of the vessels heading for Australia.

James Hardy Vaux described the conditions on the hulk *Retribution* :

There were confined in this floating dungeon nearly 600 men, most of them double ironed; and the reader may conceive the horrible effects arising from the continual rattling of chains, the filth and vermin naturally produced by such a crowd of miserable inhabitants, the oaths and execrations constantly heard amongst them....

On arriving on board, we were all immediately stripped and washed in two large tubs of water, then, after putting on each a suit of coarse slop clothing, we were ironed and sent below; our own clothes being taken from us....

I soon met many of my old Botany Bay acquaintances, who were all eager to offer me their friendship and services, that is, with a view to rob me of what little I had; for in this place there is no other motive or subject for ingenuity. All former friendships are dissolved, and a man here will rob his best benefactor, or even messmate, of an article worth one halfpenny

The living quarters were very bad. The hulks were cramped and the prisoners slept in chains. The prisoners had to live on one deck that was barely high enough to let a man stand up. The officers lived in cabins in the stern.

The conditions on board were often worse than places like Newgate Prison. Attempts by any prisoners to file away or knock off the chains around their waists and ankles led to frequent floggings, extra irons and solitary confinement in tiny cells with names like the 'Black Hole'.

The men were poorly dressed as well as unhealthy. The authorities were always keen to keep down the cost of the prisons. They wanted to avoid giving prisoners a better life than the poor had outside the hulks. The quality of the prisoners' food was therefore kept as low as possible. The monotonous daily meals consisted chiefly of ox-cheek, either boiled or made into soup, pease (dried peas), bread or biscuit.

The biscuits were often mouldy and green on both sides! On two days a week the meat was replaced by oatmeal and cheese. Each prisoner had two pints of beer four days a week, and badly filtered water, drawn from the river, on the others.

Fortunately for **Samuel** and his fellow convicts the mood of the government was to transport these particular convicts from England as quickly as possible. This was quite unusual as the norm was to await transportation for quite a lengthy period. This quick action reflected the political nature of their crimes and the fear that the rising of 1830 could lead to further actions of a revolutionary nature. Moving them quickly from the country was seen as reducing any influence their actions may have had.

The record from the Hulk *York* indicates that **Samuel** was there only one night showing he arrived on 19 January and was disposed of on the 20 January 1831. However, his ship the *Eliza* sailed on 6 February 1831 and it would seem more likely that the convicts would have been moved onto the ship a day or so prior to sailing. This would have given **Samuel** about two weeks aboard the *York*. In any event this period would have been very short compared with the norm.

TRANSPORTATION ON THE ELIZA²

During the next two years or so the Swing rioters sentenced to transportation sailed to the Australian colonies. Six ships brought 144 men to New South Wales and ten brought 330 men and two women to Van Diemen's Land. The bulk of the Sydney prisoners (133 men) sailed together on the convict ship *Eleanor*, which docked in Port Jackson on 26 June 1831 after a voyage of 126 days. The rest followed in the *Camden*, the *Surrey*, the *Portland*, the *Isabella*, and the *Captain Cook*, the last of which arrived in Sydney on 6 May 1833.

All but a handful of the Tasmanian prisoners sailed on two ships, the *Eliza* (which was the first ship of all to sail), which brought 224 men to Hobart on 25 May 1831, and the *Proteus*, which carried 98 "Swing" rioters and four other convicts to Hobart on 4 August of the same year. Eight men followed aboard the *Larkins*, *Lord Lyndoch*, *England*, *Lord William Bendenck* and *Lotus*. The *Lotus* was the last ship to arrive on 16 May 1833 and it travelled by way of Rio instead of the Cape and took 154 days instead of the usual 120 days. The two women arrived on two separate ships the *Mary* on 19 October 1831 and the *Francis Charlotte* on 10 January 1833.

Samuel Harford sailed from Portsmouth aboard the convict ship *Eliza* on 6 February 1831. The *Eliza* was a six guns 538 ton ship that was built in India in 1806. She had made a previous trip to Hobart in 1830 carrying female convicts and was to make a third voyage with more convicts in 1849.

The Master of the ship was John S. Groves and William Anderson was the Surgeon Superintendent. All convicts survived the voyage. The ship had a substantial Royal Marine Guard under the leadership of Captain Moore, with Lieutenant Lewin, two Sergeants, 2 Corporals and 35 privates. Unfortunately, the Surgeon Superintendent's Report of the voyage has not survived.

There were a total of 224 convicts on board all of them convicted for their participation in the Swing Riots. Of this total 99, or nearly 45%, were tried and convicted in the Wiltshire Special Commission at Salisbury in January 1831. Given the size of the escort contingent, it is clear the government was taking no chances with the possibility of riotous behavior on the journey to Hobart.

² Captain Swing EJ Hobsbawn & George Rude Chapter 14

On boarding the transports, the male prisoners were washed and issued with regulation dress of jackets and waistcoats of blue cloth or jersey, duck trousers, check or coarse linen shirts, yarn stockings, and woolen caps. Any women wore their own clothing but before they disembarked in Australia, each was given a brown serge jacket and petticoat, a couple of linen shifts, a linen cap, a neckerchief, a pair of worsted stockings, and a pair of shoes.

Food was generally considered to be adequate and of better quality than that served in the army or the navy, although prisoners were easily exposed to being cheated of their rations by unscrupulous masters or stewards. *"The rations are good and abundant"* wrote a ship's surgeon of the convict ships of the 1820's, *"three quarters of a pound of biscuit being the daily allowance of bread, while each day the convict sits down to dinner of either beef, pork, or plum pudding having pea soup four times a week and a pot of hot gruel every morning, with sugar or butter in it. Vinegar is issued to the messes weekly, and as soon as the ship has been three weeks at sea each man is served with an ounce of lime juice and the same of sugar, to avoid scurvy, while two gallons of good Spanish red wine and 140 gallons of water are put on board for issuing to each likewise- three gills of wine weekly and three quarts of water daily being the general allowance."*

The prisoner's quarters lay between-decks and consisted of two rows of sleeping berths, one above the other, each 6 feet square and made to hold four convicts, so that each man had 18 inches of space to sleep in. The quarters were dark and gloomy and the ventilation was invariably bad and never so bad as when a ship was becalmed in the tropics or when, in stormy weather, the hatches were battened down and the prisoners, instead of taking their daily exercise on deck, were compelled to endure the foul atmosphere of the hold for hours and even days on end.

While exercising, the convicts were handcuffed together and secured by leg-irons. "Ironing" was also, next to flogging, the most common form of punishment for male prisoners. Women were also occasionally flogged, but more commonly their heads were shaved, or they were placed in a scold's bridle or in the coal-hole, or made to parade the deck in a tub. At other times, prisoners were put to pick oakum, or the more favoured might be allowed to assist in navigation or be selected as schoolmasters to teach their illiterates to read or write.

Generally the voyage was long and tedious unless there was some form of disaster or illness. Some of the *Eliza* men caught a chill while crossing the line as a result of which (it was believed) two young labourers died of consumption shortly after their arrival in Tasmania.