

Basic Detail Report



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Title

The CHARLOTTE at anchor in Botany Bay 20th January 1788

Date

1788

Primary Maker

Thomas Barrett

Medium

Silver

Dimensions

Overall: 74 x 1 mm, 37.58 g

Name

Medallion

History

Since the early 1600s European societies used the transportation of criminals overseas as a form of punishment. When in the 18th century, the death penalty came to be regarded as too severe for certain capital offences, such as theft and larceny, transportation to North America became a popular form of sentence. The American War of Independence (1776-1781) put an end to the mass export of British and Irish convicts to America and many of the convicts in Great Britain's jails were instead sent to hulks (decommissioned naval vessels) on the River Thames and at Portsmouth, Plymouth, Cork and Dublin. In 1784, under the Transportation and Penitentiaries Act convicts could be exiled to colonies overseas. Between 1788 and 1868 over 168,000 men, women and children were transported from Britain to Australia as convicts on board more than 1,000 modified merchant ships which had been converted into convict transports. The first fleet of convict transports bound for the east coast of Australia set sail from Spithead on 13 May 1787 and was comprised of two warships HMS SIRIUS and HMS SUPPLY, three store ships BORROWDALE, FISHBURN, and GOLDEN GROVE and six convict transports, ALEXANDER, FRIENDSHIP, LADY PENRHYN, SCARBOROUGH, PRINCE OF WALES, and CHARLOTTE. The British Government did not build specialised convict transports but instead chartered suitable ships from private ship owners. The three-masted, two-decked, wooden ship, CHARLOTTE was built on the Thames in 1784. It had a length of 105 feet, breadth of 28 feet 2½ inches, and it had a registered tonnage of 338 tons. The CHARLOTTE, along with other ships destined to become First Fleet transports, was chartered by the Admiralty late in 1786 from its owner, Mr Matthews. It was fitted out at Deptford and in January 1787, after sailing to Plymouth, embarked with its complement of crew, marines (one captain, two lieutenants, two sergeants, three

corporals, one drummer and 35 privates) and convicts (89 male and 20 female). Among the people on board were Surgeon John White, the Principle Surgeon of the First Fleet and the convicted forger and thief Thomas Barrett. Surgeon John White joined the Navy in 1780 and in 1786 was surgeon on board HMS IRRESISTIBLE which was one of Sir Andrew Snape Hamond's many commands. Hamond had political connections. He had been Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia for three years, was a friend of William Pitt and Horatio Nelson and had won the king's favour on account of his "many creditable exploits" in the American War of Independence. It is believed to have been Hamond's influence that saw White's appointment as Surgeon-General to the First Fleet. Upon White's arrival he was appointed First Surgeon-General of New South Wales by Governor Phillip and remained in that position until he returned to England in 1794. Whilst in Sydney he collected flora and fauna and in 1790 published 'Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales' containing 65 engravings of plants, birds and animals - one of the earliest detailed accounts of the voyage of the First Fleet and the natural environment of Port Jackson. Thomas Barrett was tried by the second Middlesex Jury before Mr Justice Ashhurst at Justice Hall in the Old Bailey on 11 September 1782 for stealing one silver watch (value 3 pounds), a steel chain, one watch key, one hook, two shirts and one shift from Ann Milton on 20 July 1782. He was found guilty of theft and sentenced to death but was granted a King's pardon on condition of Transportation. The following year Barrett again appeared before the Old Bailey on the charge of being criminally at large in England. This time he was held successfully in one of the hulks before being sent on board the transport CHARLOTTE. After an arduous voyage of between 250 and 252 days, 68 days of which were spent at Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro (whilst at Rio De Janeiro Barrett was involved in the making and passing of forged quarter dollars) and Cape Town resupplying the Fleet and resting the crew, HMS SUPPLY arrived at Botany Bay on 18 January 1788 and Captain Arthur Phillip and a party of men came ashore at Yarra Bay at 3 pm that afternoon. The other ships arrived over the following two days with the CHARLOTTE arriving on the 20th. It appears that during the six days that the CHARLOTTE was in Botany Bay Surgeon White commissioned Barrett to make for him a memento of the arrival of the First Fleet at Botany Bay. The First Fleet, other than HMS SUPPLY, remained in Botany Bay until 26 January when Phillip, unimpressed with the suitability of Botany Bay as a settlement, moved the Fleet to Sydney Cove in Port Jackson. On 27 February 1788, only one month after arriving at Port Jackson, Thomas Barrett was convicted along with Henry Lovell, Joseph Hall and Ryan Clark of stealing butter, pease and pork from the common store. Three of the four convicts (including Barrett) were sentenced to death. While two of the convicts had their sentences changed to public floggings, Barrett's sentence was unchanged and he has the dubious honour of being the first European hanged on the east coast of Australia. A plaque commemorating his death and execution is on the corner of Harrington and Essex Streets in Sydney.