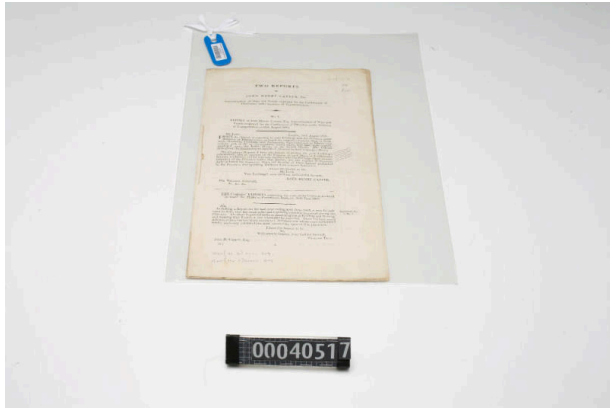


# Basic Detail Report

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**00040517**

**Title**

Two Reports of John Henry Capper, Esq. Superintendent of Ships and Vessels employed for the confinement of offenders under sentence of transportation, 20 August 1821.

**Date**

1821

**Primary Maker**

John Henry Capper

**Medium**

Paper, ink, string

**Dimensions**

350 x 215 mm

**Name**

Report

**History**

Until the early 19th century, except for the King's Bench, Marshalsea, Fleet Prisons and Newgate Gaol which were all Crown prisons attached to the central courts, prisons were administered locally and were not the responsibility or property of central government. They were used for the correction of vagrants and those convicted of lesser offences, for the coercion of debtors and for the custody of those awaiting trial or the execution of sentence. For nearly all other crimes the punishments consisted of a fine, capital punishment or transportation overseas. 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 the British colonies in 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 the hulks (privately owned decommissioned naval ships) on the River Thames and at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Cork (Ireland) where they were employed on river cleaning, stone collecting, timber cutting and dockyard work whilst serving out their sentence. In 1784, under the Transportation and Penitentiaries Act, felons and other offenders in the hulks could be exiled to colonies overseas including Gibraltar, Bermuda and in 1788, the Colony of NSW. (Frost, 1995) The establishment of the hulks moored at Plymouth, Portsmouth, in the Thames and elsewhere, marked the first involvement of central government in the ownership and administration of prisons. In England there

were four distinct phases of hulk administration. Private Enterprise (1776 - 1802): when the hulks were controlled and operated by private contractors such as Duncan Campbell and Henry Bradley. The First Government Inspectorate (1802 - 1815): hulks still operated by private contractors such as Stewart Erskine, James Bradley and Andrew Hawes Dyne but under the direct supervision of Aaron Graham, the first Government appointed Inspector of Hulks, and The Navy Board. The Superintendent of Prisons and Hulks Establishment (1815 - 1847): which featured the decline of private operators and an increasing number of Government-operated hulks with professional crew and guards supervised by The Home Office. And The Prison and Hulks Managerial Committee (1847 - : when all hulks and prisons come under direct government control. Although used as places of incarceration and punishment, hulks were also used to hold male and female convicts waiting transportation to overseas colonies and as places of reformation and education - where inmates could be taught a trade and if well behaved could be rewarded with early release and a Ticket of Leave. Between 1800 and 2005 the British Government converted more than 150 ships into guard, prison, convict, accommodation, receiving, hospital, and school hulks. Great Britain's last prison hulk, HM Prison Ship WEARE in Portland Harbour, Dorset, was closed in May 2005. Following a Parliamentary review of the British Hulk System in 1811 a number of recommendations were made to the Home Office regarding the staffing and operation of the convict hulks. One of those recommendations was the appointment of a Government Overseer or Supervisor who would inspect them on a regular basis and submit six-monthly reports to The House of Commons on their operations, the use of convict labour and on the health of the convicts. John Henry Capper was appointed as Superintendent of Ships and Vessels Employed for the Confinement of Offenders under Sentence of Transportation by the British Government in 1814 and held that position until 1847, when all hulks and prisons came under direct government control. Capper had a long career in prisoner management, and is often cited regarding issues of convict hulk management. (Capper, John, Henry, 1822, 1823, Branch-Johnson, 1956,)