

# Basic Detail Report

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**00004532**

**Title**

Prison hulk YORK

**Date**

1987

**Primary Maker**

Peter Heriz-Smith

**Medium**

Timber, metal

**Dimensions**

Overall: 606 x 1234 x 460 mm

**Name**

Model

**History**

After the American War of Independence in 1776 the British government was no longer able to transport prisoners to the colonies in America. In an attempt to ease crowding in their overstretched prison system the government began converting old commercial and naval ships into floating prisons. These ships were known as hulks and were commissioned from unseaworthy vessels, with their steering apparatus removed. During the 18th century prison hulks could be seen moored along the River Thames, on Irish rivers and in colonial harbours such as Bermuda. Conditions on board were cramped and unhygienic, with prisoners forced to undertake manual labour on shore during the day. The pressure on the English prison system was only relieved after 1788 when convicts began to be transported to the Australia colonies, with prison hulks still being used up until the late 19th century. The YORK was built and launched from Rotherhithe yards, England in July 1807 and sailed to the West Indies with Hood's squadron under Captain Robert Burton. The 74-gun third-rate ship had an eventful naval career including action in the Napoleonic Wars. In 1817, YORK returned to Portsmouth and was paid off, decommissioned and converted into a prison hulk in 1820. Up to 500 convicts and their guards lived, ate and slept in the ship's extremely cramped conditions. Serious overcrowding and a backlog of prisoners bound for Australia led to a rebellion aboard the YORK in 1848. The ship was finally taken out of service and ironically, broken up by convict labour in 1854.