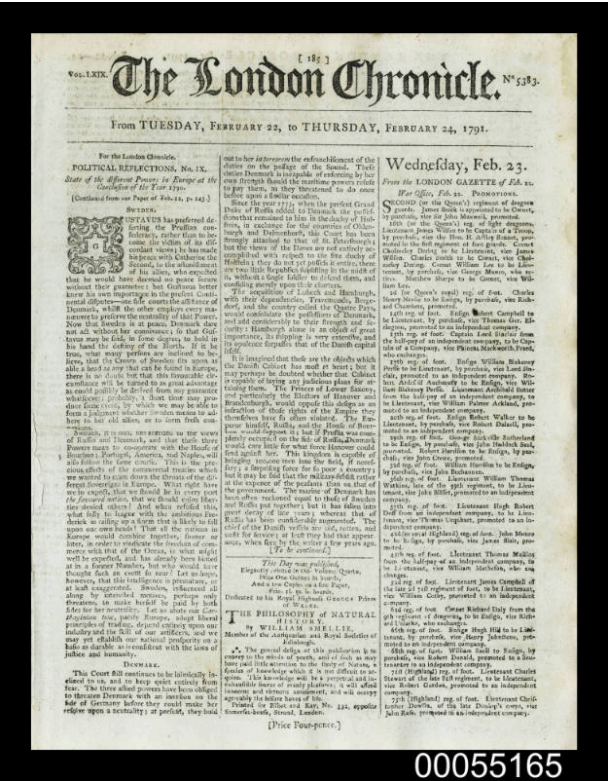


Basic Detail Report



00055165

Title
London Chronicle 'The tragic impact of small pox on the
Aborigines'

Date
1791

Medium
Ink on paper

Dimensions
Overall: 291 x 221 x 1 mm

Name
Newspaper

History
Extreme poverty was a fact of life for many in 18th and

19th century English society. In desperation, many resorted to crimes such as theft, prostitution, robbery with violence and forging coins as the means to survive in a society without any social welfare system or safety net. This was countered by the development of a complicated criminal and punishment code aimed at protecting private property. Punishment was harsh with even minor crimes, such as stealing goods worth more than one shilling, cutting down a tree in an orchard, stealing livestock or forming a workers union, attracting the extreme penalty of 'death by hanging'. Until the early nineteenth century prisons were administered locally and were not the responsibility or property of central government, with the exception of the King's Bench, Marshalsea, Fleet Prisons and Newgate Gaol, which were all Crown prisons attached to the central courts. 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. When in the 18th century, the death penalty came to be regarded as too severe for certain capital offences, such as theft and larceny The British Transportation Act of 1718 effectively established transportation to the American colonies as a punishment for crime. British courts sentenced criminals on conditional pardons or those on reprieved death sentences to transportation. Prisoners were committed under bond to ship masters who were responsible for the convict's passage overseas in exchange for selling their convict labour in the distant colony. This solution helped solve the overcrowding in British prisons and provided much needed labour for the American colonies of Virginia and Maryland. The American War of Independence (1776-1781) effectively stopped transportation to the Americas leading to the introduction of prison hulks in England and Ireland as temporary prisons until a solution could be found. Convict transportation to Australia began in 1787 (New South Wales) reached its peak in the 1830s (New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land) and continued until 1868 (Western Australia) by which time

prison reform, relaxation of penalties in the criminal code, the construction of purpose built prisons in Britain and Ireland and growing disenchantment with the convict transportation system saw the cessation of transportation to the Australian Colonies. Between 1788 and 1868 over 168,000 men, women and children had been transported to Australia from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Canada, India, Bermuda and South Africa as convicts on board more than 1,000 modified merchant ships which had been converted into convict transports. Although many of the convicted prisoners were habitual or professional criminals with multiple offences recorded against them, a small number were political prisoners, social reformers, or one-off offenders.

THE TRAGIC IMPACT OF SMALL POX ON THE ABORIGINES: THE LONDON CHRONICLE February 22-24, 1791: An edition carrying good and bad news; the first being a report on the exemplary behaviour of two convicts, Richard Pugh and Elizabeth Morgan, who "...are stationed at Norfolk Island....Pugh has discovered great ingenuity in covering houses with shingles, and turns out to be a valuable member of the colony." The very bad news is introduced by the following statement: "The native inhabitants of the country have caught the small-pox from the English, and died in great numbers: a little girl named Abaroo, almost 11 years of age, was brought into the colony with several others, who were in a terrible state from this disorder. They all died except this girl, and a boy who was under the care of the Surgeon-general."