

Basic Detail Report



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Title

A View near Woolwich in Kent Shewing the Employment of the Convicts from the Hulks

Date

1790-1800

Medium

Ink on paper

Dimensions

Overall: 527 x 632 x 22 mm

Name

Engraving

History

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. 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 (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. Under the Transportation and Penitentiaries Act of 1784, felons and other offenders in the hulks could be exiled to colonies overseas which included 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 - 1. Private Enterprise (1776 - 1802): When the hulks were controlled and operated by private contractors such as Duncan Campbell and Henry Bradley. 2. 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 Government-appointed Inspector of Hulks and The Navy Board. 3. The

Superintendent of Prisons and Hulks Establishment (1815 - 1847): Decline of private operators, increasing number of Government operated hulks with professional crew and guards all supervised by The Home Office. 4. The Prison and Hulks Managerial Committee (1847 -): All hulks and prisons come under direct government control. Although used as places of incarceration and punishment, hulks were also used to hold male convicts waiting transportation to overseas colonies and as places of reformation and education. 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. Britain's last prison hulk, HMP WEARE in Portland Harbour, Dorset, was closed in May 2005.