

# Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 14

## Researching Ancestors transported to Australia

### 1. Introduction

Between 1787 and 1868, some 160,000 convicts were transported from the UK to Australia. About 4,000 of these came from Norfolk. The records of the various Norfolk courts that sentenced people to transportation are described in section 4 of this leaflet. Many people are disappointed with the lack of information they find in the court records: ages, places of residence and family details are not often given. Records held in Australia are often more detailed than those in England. For information about these write to The National Library of Australia, Parkes Place, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia, website <[www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)>.

### 2. Convict Transportation Registers

You can search the Australian convict transportation registers, 1787-1868, and the settler and convict lists for New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia, 1787-1834, online at <[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)>. Initial searching is free of charge but will give you limited information from the original entry. You will need to subscribe to Ancestry to download images of original entries. Alternatively, you can access the Ancestry website free of charge *via* computers at the Norfolk Record Office and at Norfolk libraries (including the Norfolk Heritage Centre). The transportation registers give information such as convict's name, date and place of conviction, term of sentence, name of ship on which the convict sailed, departure date and name of colony to which the convict was sent. The settler and convict lists give information such as the convict's or settler's name, age, date of arrival, name of ship arrived in, date and place of trial or conviction, sentence and occupation.

The State Library of Queensland has an index to the British Home Office Criminal Convict Transportation Registers. This index is available online at <<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/info/fh/convicts>> and records 123,000 of the estimated 160,00 convicts transported to Australia. The index gives name, place of trial, term of years, name of ship and date of departure, place of arrival and miscellaneous notes (e.g., died at sea, ticket of leave etc.) The State Library of Queensland's website also includes guidance on other sources available on tracing convict ancestors. The original transportation registers are held at The National Archives in London (see series HO 11) <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>>.

### 3. Local Newspapers

Local newspapers may give more information than the court records. The *Norfolk Chronicle* and *Norwich Mercury* cover the whole period and the *Norfolk News* the period from 1845 onwards. These newspapers are all available on microfilm at the Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norfolk and Norwich

Millennium Library, Millennium Plain, Norwich, NR2 1AW (telephone: 01603 774740 e-mail: [norfolk.studies.lib@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:norfolk.studies.lib@norfolk.gov.uk)).

The Record Office has a list of people transported from Norfolk courts available on the searchroom shelves, compiled from reports in the local newspapers. This has a names index and can be a useful starting point if the date of trial is not known.

## **4. Records of trials**

People from Norfolk might be transported by either the Assize court or by one of five Quarter Sessions courts. In general, the Assize courts tried crimes for which the culprit could be sentenced to death, while the Quarter Sessions courts tried lesser crimes. However, there are a few cases of death sentences being given by the King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth sessions courts in the early nineteenth century.

The surviving records are summarized here:

### **4.1 The Assize Court**

Assize judges came from London to Norfolk twice a year to hold trials in cases of serious crime. The main records are the Indictments which give the crime, plea, verdict and sentence. Sometimes there are Depositions or other supporting papers, but the survival rate of these for the Norfolk circuit is not very good. Assize courts were held at Easter and in July or August: the cases are reported in all the local newspapers listed in section 3. The records of the Assize court are held at The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU, website <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>>.

Some printed Assize calendars (lists) of prisoners, giving brief summaries of the proceedings, are held at the Norfolk Heritage Centre and others are at the Castle Museum in Norwich. The Norfolk Record Office has some calendars of prisoners, as well as microfilm copies of some calendars held elsewhere, 1693-1971 (with many gaps): see lists C/S10 and MC 2118/1, 923X9 and microfilms MF/RO 36/1 and MF/RO 611/4-5.

### **4.2 Norfolk Quarter Sessions Court**

This court had jurisdiction over the county of Norfolk, apart from the boroughs listed below. It met in Norwich and by adjournment in Lynn, Walsingham, Holt and Swaffham. The location of the trial gives some idea of whereabouts in the county the crime took place. If the court papers survive they will give more details on the crime and the evidence of witnesses. For records of this court, see list C/S. These include:

Sessions books, 1786-1868 (on microfilm 1786-1852). These record the proceedings of the court: see list C/S1.

Court papers, 1786-1800 and 1804-8: see C/S3 list (Please note that the court papers 1801-3 and 1809 onwards were destroyed in 1879).

Calendars (lists) of prisoners, 1826-1971. The NRO has microfilm copies of those held at the Norfolk Heritage Centre, 1826-96, as well as original calendars, 1862-1971. See lists C/S10 and MC 2118/1, 923X9 and microfilm MF/RO 611/4-5.

### **4.3 Norwich Quarter Sessions Court**

Sessions books, 1786-1846: see list NCR 20a. On microfilms MF 617-619.

Sessions books, 1839-68: see list N/S 2. The books, 1839-51, are available on microfilm MF 620.

Court papers, 1786-1868: see list NCR 11.

Calendars (lists) of prisoners, 1831, 1879, 1885-1895, on microfilm MF/RO 611/4-5; 1927-1958, see list N/S 4/7; 1963-71 with Norfolk Quarter Sessions records, see list C/S 5/9.

### **4.4 Great Yarmouth Borough Sessions Court**

Sessions books, 1786-1864: see list Y/S 2.

Court papers, 1786-1863: see list Y/S 3.

Calendars (lists) of prisoners, 1888-90, on microfilm MF/RO 611/4-5.

### **4.5 King's Lynn Borough Sessions court**

Surviving records are held at the King's Lynn Borough Archives, but the sessions books are available on microfilm in the Norfolk Record Office.

Sessions books, 1786-1865: see list KL/C21. On microfilm MF 611.

Court papers, 1816-65: see list KL/C22.

### **4.6 Thetford Borough Sessions Court**

Sessions books, 1786-1876: see list T/QS 2-4.

## **5. England and Wales Criminal Registers, 1791-1892**

These are registers of all persons charged with indictable offences in England and Wales. The original registers are held at The National Archives, and can be searched online *via* the Ancestry website <[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)>. The information given in the registers may include the name, age and birthplace of the accused, when and where he or she was tried, the crime and sentence, the date of execution or release, by whom the accused was committed and to whom he or she was delivered. The registers are useful in identifying the court which heard the case, so that you can look for any surviving court records.

## 6. Commutations of Sentence

Some people who were sentenced to death (almost all at the Assizes) later had their sentences commuted to a period of transportation instead. In a very few cases this is noted in local records and their names are included in the draft list of transportations in the Record Office. In most cases, however, their names can only be found through the Commutation records at The National Archives in London.

## 7. Further reading:

R. Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia* (London 1987).

This describes how the system worked, how the convicts were employed, what happened when their sentences expired.

R.J. Ryan, *The First Fleet* (Sydney 1981).

This gives the names of the convicts who were on the first fleet of convict ships which left England in May 1787, reaching Australia in January 1788. This is especially useful as it includes people who had been tried some time before and had been waiting in hulks while their fate was decided.

The National Archives's research guides, *Sources for Convicts and Prisoners 1100-1986* and *Australia, Transportation to, 1787-1868* available online at <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/researchguidesindex.asp?j=1>>



If you need this leaflet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the County Archivist on 01603 222599 and we will do our best to help.

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