

**THE HISTORY OF THE CONVICT  
HULK "SUCCESS" AND  
"SUCCESS" PRISONERS: A VIVID  
FRAGMENT OF COLONIAL  
HISTORY**

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The History of the Convict Hulk "Success" and "Success" Prisoners: A Vivid Fragment of Colonial History by Joseph C. Harvie

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**JOSEPH C. HARVIE**

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*Liverpool, Sept. 12, 1896*

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A Vivid Fragment of Colonial History

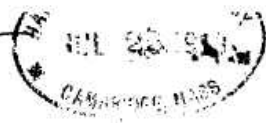


BY  
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## PREFACE.

**T**HE following series of incidents in connection with the Convict Hulk "Success," has been compiled specially for the information of those visitors to the vessel, who may desire to learn fuller particulars concerning her history and the lives of those who at one time filled her cells, than can be gleaned in the space of a short visit.

To make the description as complete as possible, much that may be regarded by some as personal matter has had to be related when referring to the officials who were stationed on board the vessel in its early convict days. Care has, however, been taken, in reviewing the facts, to present them in a fair and impartial light.

The differences of opinion expressed at the Government Enquiry and in the newspapers of the time have been quoted at length, in order that the reader may be in a position to form a judgment as to the treatment that was meted out to the convicts.

The short sketches given of some of the most notorious bush-rangers may help visitors to the "Success," who are accustomed only to civilised London and other old-world centres, to realize the wild life of Australia in the early days of colonization—its vast solitudes of bush and lonely mountain fastnesses, amidst which the settler and the outlaw pitched their primitive camps, and seldom heard the sound of a human voice.

For some of the information contained in the following pages, I have been indebted to the officials in charge of the early records of the Melbourne Penal Department, to whom I hereby tender my best thanks. The other sources from which I have quoted, I have endeavoured to acknowledge in their right places.

I am firmly of opinion that the intrinsic value of this historic ship as an object-lesson to prison reformers, will assure for it a continuance of its prosperous career, proving, as it does, that excessive punishment, with physical torture, brutalises the offender, and destroys all hope of reformation.

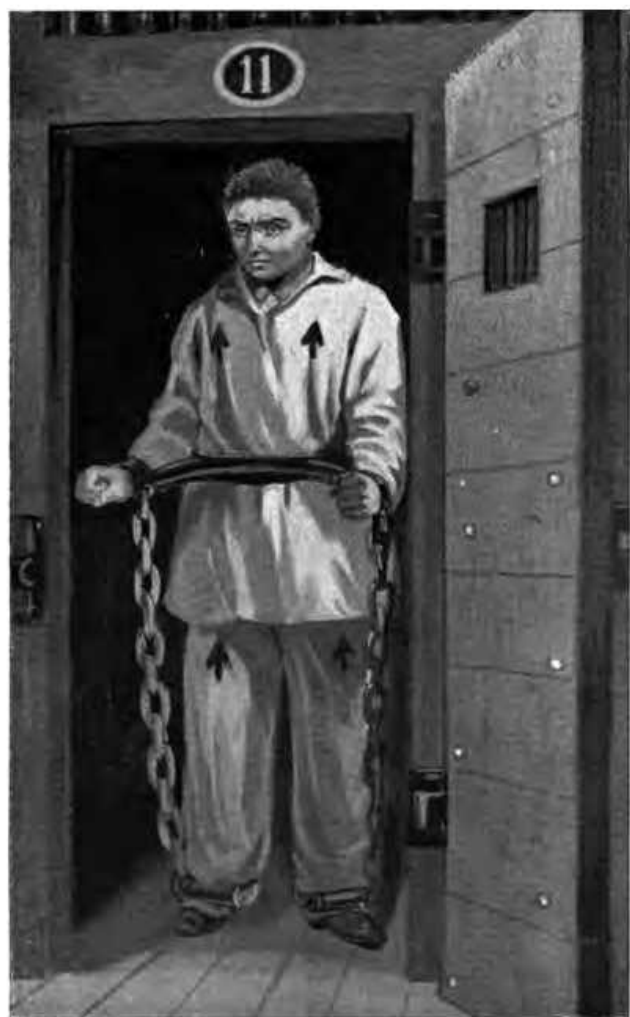
It is a striking and encouraging sign of the progress made in the humane and rational treatment of prisoners, that a vessel which, less than fifty years ago, formed one of a felon fleet, should now be on exhibition as a curiosity,—the last remnant of a happily exploded system.

Melbourne, 1895.

J. C. H.







The "Punishment Band."

# THE CONVICT HULK "SUCCESS."

## CHAPTER I.

"Yes, shackle my limbs and bind me fast,  
Through the hooting crowd to press;  
Away to the judgment hall, at last  
The doom of my life, I guess.  
Think not the spasm that shoots through my frame,  
Is the quiver of wounded pride,  
What has the felon to do with shame?  
Or the pangs unto shame allied?"

**I**N writing the history of the "Success," it may prove interesting to cast a retrospective glance at the port and its surroundings, off which for so many years the old vessel was moored, blistering in the torrid heat that added a touch of the infernal to the torture of those who were incarcerated in her black and suffocating cells.

Port Williamstown, which was named by Bourke after King William the Fourth, and is nine miles distant by coast from Melbourne, was at the time of which we write a little fishing village, the sparse inhabitants of which led the most primitive of lives. The old square tower, built in 1846, was originally used as a lighthouse, to warn the few trading vessels that visited the port, of the dangerous Bird Rocks, standing out a little distance to seaward. Before the introduction of the electric telegraph in Australia, the arrival of ships was signalled from this tower, to a vessel called the "Sir Harry Smith," which was moored at the mouth of the Yarra-Yarra River. From thence the signal was transmitted to the station at Melbourne, then located at old Flagstaff Hill.

The chief communication between Williamstown and Melbourne in the early days was across the Bay for the most part, and in order to attract the attention of the ferryman on the opposite side, the residents were requested (according to the advertisements in the one Melbourne paper) to "raise a smoke" on the shore, which was effected by burning large quantities of brushwood and dry seaweed. Between "The Point" and the nearest dwelling-houses in Williamstown there was a long stretch of ground, where the little community of fishermen and Government officials, after the labours of the day were over, would discuss the ever-important subject of probable retrenchment, or the chances of a good "haul" on the following morning. Their children might be seen at play on the green-sward, embowered with ti-tree, or gathering shells and seaweed among the rocks that fringed the shore.

It was a peaceful life, of Arcadian simplicity; but, alas! it was soon to be rudely broken in upon by the mad rush in search of wealth that followed the discovery of the goldfields in 1851. The beacon-light then shed its brilliant ray on ships entering the harbour for the first time, laden with hopeful immigrants eager to set foot in the land of newly-found gold. These vessels came from all parts of the world, and included almost every kind of craft. There were paddle-steamers, with beam-

engines from America, Dutch galiots from the East Indies—even a Falmouth fishing-boat braved the dangers of the long voyage, and came sailing safely into Hobson's Bay.<sup>1</sup>

Then, one day, looming above them all, came a quaint old full-rigged ship, with apple sides, broad bulging bows, standing very high out of the water, and the name "Success" displayed the full width of her square-cut stern, over the windows and below the taffrail. She proved to be a "country-built" East Indiaman, one of the "old Moulmein pagodas looking eastwards to the sea." She dropped her anchor right amidst the army of white wings which then dotted the harbour, where, but a year or two before, scarcely a sail was to be seen.

In the confusion and excitement that resulted from this sudden influx of immigration by land and sea, murder, profligacy and crime ran riot. Doubly and trebly convicted felons found their way over from the old convict centres of Botany Bay and Hobart Town. Bush-rangers and incendiaries—nine thousand felons in one year—joined the promiscuous stream of immigrants that flowed towards the "diggings." One day, in the year 1852, the *Argus* contained no less than *twelve columns* of horses stolen! Teamsters demanded one hundred pounds per ton for the conveyance of goods into the interior, and then the owners had to incur the grave risk of losing their property at the hands of free-booters, who made travelling extremely dangerous. The diggers also frequently fell a prey to these desperate ruffians, who concealed themselves in ambush, and waylaid anyone whom they suspected of having made a haul at the goldfields. The troopers that patrolled the highways in the interests of safety, were often found murdered by the roadside; brigandage flourished in the "bush"; and even ships were boldly boarded in the Bay.

When at last the discovery was made that quantities of gold glistened in the gravel of almost every mountain stream, and in boulders of which it is hardly an exaggeration to say the precious metal formed the greater part, the mad rush of reckless adventurers was indescribable. Men became millionaires, or at least rich beyond their wildest dreams, at a single blow of the prospector's pick. One lucky digger's horse was actually shod with shoes of gold. Actresses, in the canvas theatres, were pelted with nuggets in place of flowers, as a token of appreciation;—in short, the diggers, whether of the respectable or the convict class, indulged in a profligacy and riotous excess that have never been equalled in the history of gold-mining. The embryo township of Melbourne rose rapidly into importance; three-fourths of the population having to live under canvas tents that sprang into existence like mushrooms around the few houses forming the settlement.

As an example of the lawlessness of the times, and of the boldness with which robberies were perpetrated, we may mention that on April 2nd, 1852, gold weighing 8,153 ozs., valued at £24,000, was stolen from the gold-ship *Nelson* which stood out in the stream off Sandridge, now better known as Port Melbourne, the suburb of Melbourne. The captain and most of his crew had been carousing on shore, and no anchor-watch was apparently kept. At night twenty determined convicts, wearing crape masks, put off from the rickety structure then dignified by the name

<sup>1</sup> This small craft was named *The Mystery*, and was sailed by its owners, two brothers named Barnett. They were allowed to come in free from harbour dues as a reward for their bravery in making the journey under such trying conditions. For many years the brothers were the boatmen of the hulk "Success," and rowed the storekeeper and others to and from the shore.