

## Cutting Out and Taking Liberties: Australia's Convict Pirates, 1790–1829

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ABSTRACT: The 104 identified piratical incidents in Australian waters between 1790 and 1829 indicate a neglected but substantial and historically significant resistance practice, not a scattering of unrelated spontaneous bolts by ships of fools. The pirates' ideologies, cultural baggage, techniques, and motivations are identified, interrogated, and interpreted. So are the connections between convict piracy and bushranging; how piracy affected colonial state power and private interests; and piracy's relationship to "age of revolution" ultra-radicalism elsewhere.

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### HIDDEN HISTORY

Transported convicts piratically seized at least eighty-two ships, vessels, and boats in Australian waters between 1790 and 1829. Unsuccessful piratical ventures involved at least twenty-two more. Somewhat more episodes occurred from 1830 to 1859,<sup>1</sup> but until the 2000s this extensive phenomenon remained unrecognized among academic Australianists<sup>2</sup> and

1. See Tables 1–7. Their data are drawn from my research, identifying 172 incidents, 1790–1859. Graeme Broxam has generously given me a draft of his forthcoming book on convict piracies. It identifies 39 incidents previously unknown to me – hence a current 1790–1859 total of 211. I do not discuss the incidents I know of only through Broxam.

2. For the exclusion of convict pirates, see Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, I and II (Oxford [etc.], 1997, 2004); Manning Clark, *A History of Australia*, I and II (Carlton, 1962, 1968); Grace Karskens, *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney* (Carlton, 1997). On convict piracy's absence from academic Australian history, see *idem*, "This Spirit of Emigration: The Nature and Meanings of Escape in Early New South Wales", in David Roberts (ed.), *Escape: Essays on Convict Australia*, special issue, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 7 (2005), pp. 1–34, 1–5. Other relevant post-2000 academic studies include James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land* (Melbourne, 2008), pp. 15–19, and *idem*, 1835: *The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia* (Collingwood, 2011), ch. 2; Ian Duffield, "Haul Away the Anchor Girls"; Charlotte Badger, Tall Stories and the Pirates of the 'Bad Ship *Venus*'", in Roberts, *Escape*, pp. 35–64; and Ian Duffield, "Identity Fraud: Interrogating the Impostures of 'Robert de Bruce Keith Stewart'"

maritime historians globally. Freelance Australianists' lively narratives lack convincing interpretation and fail to grasp the sheer extent of convict piracy.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Robert Hughes's bestseller *The Fatal Shore* mentions fewer than twenty incidents, collectively represented as random frantic bolting from Britain's horrendous gulag but never as a fraction of something far larger.<sup>4</sup> To me, Hughes's pain-reflex piracies<sup>5</sup> resemble "running amok" on the supposed Malay model. Convict pirates, however, were not "running amok", and this point is not ethnological. Within colonialist culture, that phrase denied rational meaning to Malay peoples' sudden uprisings in colonial south-east Asia. Hughes imposes much the same on convict piracy. In the present volume, Matthias van Rossum historicizes and deconstructs notions of amok as a ferociously irrational Malay psychological trait. Rather, his 1782 mutiny of Balinese slave marines aboard the *Mercuur*, and similar contemporary events, were "collective and rational" acts.<sup>6</sup> I interpret Australia's convict piracies similarly.

It seems probable that convicts' old-world cultural baggage influenced their piracies. These did not simply mimic Kidd- and Blackbeard-era piracy, as represented in British popular culture. The convict pirates lacked Jolly Rogers, but aboard a newly pirated vessel they enacted liberty by literally and symbolically deciding their course and destination. That, plus collectively devising shipboard regulations and electing leaders, capsized their penal bondage. Similar acts also occurred during the "Golden Age of Piracy"<sup>7</sup> and aboard ships seized by mutineers elsewhere in the age of revolution.<sup>8</sup> Escape from transportation was a capital offence.

in Early Nineteenth-Century Penang and Calcutta", in Clare Anderson (ed.), *The Indian Ocean*, special issue, *Journal of Social History: Societies & Cultures*, 45 (2011), pp. 390–415; Erin Ihde, "Pirates of the Pacific: The Convict Seizure of the *Wellington*", *The Great Circle*, 30 (2008), pp. 3–17.

3. See, for instance, Thomas Dunbabin, *Sailing the World's Edge: Sea Stories from Old Sydney* (London, 1931), pp. 157–177; Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (London, 1987), ch. 7; Geoffrey C. Ingleton, *True Patriots All* (Sydney, 1952); Marjorie Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* (Ringwood, 1988), ch. 25; Warwick Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes in Colonial Australia* (East Roseville, rev. 2nd edn, 2003); *idem*, *The Man Who Stole the Cyprus* (Dural, 2008).

4. Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, ch. 7, entitled "Bolters and Bushrangers".

5. My critique of Hughes here broadly coincides with Karskens, "This Spirit of Emigration", p. 2, on such aspects of *The Fatal Shore*.

6. Matthias van Rossum, "'Amok!': Mutinies and Slaves on Dutch East Indiamen in the 1780s", in the present volume.

7. See Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston, MA, 2004), ch. 4; David Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates* (New York, 1995), pp. 12–14.

8. See in the present volume Anita Rupprecht, "'All We Have Done, We Have Done for Freedom': The *Creole* Slave-Ship Revolt (1841) and the Revolutionary Atlantic";

Escape by piracy – also a capital offence – inherently proclaimed “liberty or death”, a widespread age of revolution slogan.

Here, a convict ballad (sometimes attributed to Francis MacNamara),<sup>9</sup> on the 1829 seizure of the *Cyprus*, is illustrative. The ballad's opening<sup>10</sup> rallies convict audiences to liberty's cause: “Come all you sons of Freedom, a chorus join with me, / I'll sing a song of heroes and glorious liberty.” This suggests not mere flight but “liberty or death” confrontation with tyranny: “By tyranny we've been oppressed, by your Colonial laws, / But we'll bid adieu to slavery, or die in freedom's cause.” The collective selects an appropriate commander: “We elected William Swallow, and obey'd our Captain's word [...]. For navigating smartly Bill Swallow was the man.” The ballad is neither strictly factual nor sheer fiction but a manifesto created and circulated within convict society, expressing “a whole epistemological ‘otherness’ – ways of knowing set implacably against authority and empire”.<sup>11</sup> It extols the piracy as anti-tyranny and pro an egalitarian and libertarian order, with its own “outlaw heroes” (here, Swallow),<sup>12</sup> and concludes with defiant celebration:

Then sound your golden trumpets boys, play on your tuneful notes,  
The Cyprus Brig is sailing, how proudly now she floats.  
May fortune help th' Noble lads, and keep them ever free  
From Gags, and Cats, and Chains, and Traps, and Cruel Tyranny.

The eminent historian Alan Atkinson wrongly asserted that European pirates never troubled early colonial Australia, but he admits their presence in disembarking convicts' mental cultural baggage.<sup>13</sup> Pirates strongly featured in Britain's Georgian print culture. Ballads were transmitted orally and through print. Illiterates accessed print media through vocal readings by literate kinsfolk, neighbours, or workmates. Piracy also provided a popular theme for Georgian popular theatre. A notable example was John Gay's operetta *Polly* (1729). It was immediately banned

Marcus Rediker, “The African Origins of the *Amistad* Rebellion, 1839”; and Aaron Jaffer, “‘Lord of the Forecastle’: *Serangs, Tindals*, and Lascar Mutiny, c.1780–1860”. See also Clare Anderson, “‘The Feringees are Flying – The Ship is Ours!’ The Convict Middle Passage in Colonial South and Southeast Asia, 1790–1860”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 41:2 (2005), pp. 43–86.

9. See, for example, Ingleton, *True Patriots All*, p. 269, n. 93. Not so Bob Reece – see his “Frank the Poet”, in *idem* (ed.), *Exiles from Erin: Convict Lives in Ireland and Australia* (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 151–183.

10. Version quoted is in Ingleton, *True Patriots All*, p. 129.

11. Karskens, “‘This Spirit of Emigration’”, p. 3 and n. 13, citing Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (London, 1987), pp. 295, 300ff, 301.

12. For an evidence-based account, see Hirst, *The Man Who Stole the Cyprus*, pp. 48–53, 60–67. My analysis follows Graham Seal, *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia* (Cambridge, 1996).

13. Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia*, I, p. 36.

from performance, Gay's preceding smash hit *The Beggars' Opera* having satirically subverted Walpole's corrupt Whig government. However, *Polly* proved a lucrative multi-edition publication. Once unbanned in 1772, *Polly* flourished long-term in Britain's theatrical repertoire.<sup>14</sup> Such works delighted plebeian theatregoers, including thieves, fraudsters, prostitutes, and pickpockets.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, British popular representations of pirates cannot be linked directly with specific piracies in Australia.

James C. Scott's "hidden transcripts" concept helps here. Historically, Scott argues, clandestine subversive cultural forms were crucial to underlings' "arts of resistance", providing a template, under favourable circumstances, for overt challenges to existing power relations. Sudden militant confrontation by hitherto docile-seeming subalterns baffled dominant circles that were unaware of "hidden transcripts".<sup>16</sup> In Australia, officialdom regularly denounced piratical escapes as witless folly, inviting shipwreck, drowning, or murder by "savages".<sup>17</sup> This line absolved government from admitting – even perceiving – the pirates' rationality. Piracies sometimes precipitated tighter port security measures intended to prevent their recurrence.

Even before the "age of revolution", miniature "worlds turned upside down" existed aboard Atlantic pirate ships.<sup>18</sup> From the late seventeenth century Atlantic seamen faced increasingly severe shipboard discipline, intensification of the arbitrary authority of officers – especially captains – and deteriorating employment terms. In riposte, many seamen turned pirate.<sup>19</sup> Convicts transported to Australia experienced a similar jeopardy. There, arbitrary magistrates' courts could severely punish breaches of convict regulations as well as crimes by floggings, hard labour in irons, extensions of existing sentences of up to three years, and relocation to remote, harsh-regime penal stations.<sup>20</sup>

14. Duffield, "Haul Away the Anchor Girls", pp. 43–48; Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* (New York [etc.], 1999), ch. 5.

15. Robert Jordan, *Convict Theatres of Early Australia* (Hatfield, 2002), pp. 16–21; Suzanne Rickard, *George Barrington's Voyage to Botany Bay* (London [etc.], 2001), pp. 3–17.

16. This summarizes key points in James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1990).

17. See also Karskens, "This Spirit of Emigration?", pp. 11–15.

18. See, for example, Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, pp. 38–42; *ibid.*, ch. 4, *passim*; *idem*, "Hydrarchy and Libertalia: The Utopian Dimensions of Atlantic Piracy in the Early Eighteenth Century", in David. J. Starkey, Els van Eyck van Heslinga, and J.A. de Moor (eds), *Pirates and Privateers: New Perspectives on the War on Trade in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Exeter, 1997), pp. 29–46, 31–36.

19. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987), ch. 5 *passim*.

20. See Raymond Evans and William Thorpe, "Power, Punishment and Penal Labour: Convict Workers and Moreton Bay", *Australian Historical Studies*, 25:98 (1992), pp. 90–111; Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Convict Workers, 'Penal Labour' and Sarah Island: Life at Macquarie

Can Australia's convict pirates be directly linked to age of revolution politics? Until their prosopography is better known, that remains problematic – excepting United Irishmen connections. Originally the United Irishmen were a Protestant middle-class constitutional movement seeking Ireland's autonomy, albeit under the British Crown, and an end to the Anglican-ascendancy monopoly of Ireland's electoral franchise, elected public posts, and remunerated Crown offices. Catholics especially, but also Presbyterians and Dissenters, were excluded from full civil and political rights. The French Revolution's republican turn inspired the United Irishmen, especially when persecuted following France's 1793 declaration of war on Britain, to become pro-French, secular republican revolutionaries. Prospective French military intervention, though never effectively realized, panicked Ireland's established order into extreme repression. Through the 1790s, the United Irishmen infiltrated their ideology and practices into hitherto localized Catholic agrarian "Defender" secret societies, thus gaining nearly 300,000 sworn members by 1797. They provided a rank and file for armed uprisings in 1798 and 1803–1804.<sup>21</sup>

Irish political radicals transported in the 1790s and early 1800s proved dangerous ship's cargo. In 1793 mutiny scares occurred on the *Sugar Cane* and *Boddington* convict transports from Ireland. At Sydney, some *Boddington* convicts declared they had intended killing every officer on taking the ship, except the first mate and agent. They were to die after navigating the mutineers close to their chosen destination. In 1796, Irish prisoners aboard the *Marquis Cornwallis* (allegedly plus the boatswain's mate and some soldiers) plotted to kill the officers, and then sail to the USA.<sup>22</sup> On 29 December 1801, thirteen prisoners on the *Hercules* were killed before a mutiny was suppressed.<sup>23</sup>

The United Irishmen's engagement with revolutionary republicanism internationalized their outlook and connections.<sup>24</sup> Considerable education and an enlightenment outlook gave some United Irishmen the confidence to seek escape from Australia by piracy. In February 1800, around forty United Irishmen, from a much larger group recently arrived in Sydney on

Harbour, 1822–1834", in Ian Duffield and James Bradley (eds), *Representing Convicts: New Perspectives on Convict Forced Labour Migration* (London, 1997), pp. 142–163.

21. Kevin Whelan, "The United Irishmen, the Enlightenment and Popular Culture", in David Dickson, Daire Keogh, and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 269–296, 281–283, 288–294.

22. Con Costello, *Botany Bay* (Dublin [etc.], 1987), pp. 20–21; Emma Christopher, "'Ten Thousand Times Worse than the Convicts': Rebellious Sailors, Convict Transportation and the Struggle for Freedom, 1787–1800", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 5 (2004), pp. 30–46, 42.

23. Costello, *Botany Bay*, pp. 18–21, 56.

24. See Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, CT, 1982); Whelan, "The United Irishmen"; Paul Weber, *On the Road to Rebellion: The United Irishmen and Hamburg, 1796–1803* (Dublin, 1997).



Figure 1. New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, with the principal locations of convict piratical seizures, 1790–1829. *The author acknowledges Hamish Maxwell-Stewart for the draft of this map.*

the *Minerva*, conspired to take the *Minerva* by night and compel officers and crew to take the ship out to sea. Informers, however, secured the conspirators' last-minute arrest. Nevertheless, officials were horrified: controlling shipping was crucial to convict transportation. Soon after, multiple Sydney Harbour shipping seizures were allegedly intrinsic to an Irish plot to overthrow the colonial government.<sup>25</sup>

As a coda to these troubles, on 1 April 1804 seven Irish convict fugitives from the recently crushed Castle Hill Rebellion were captured on the Hawkesbury River. Allegedly, they had planned "to seize upon the first boat to present itself, and [...] commit themselves to the peril of the sea".<sup>26</sup> Many Castle Hill rebels had participated in Ireland's 1798 and 1803 risings.<sup>27</sup> After 1804, while Irish convicts participated in piracies alongside others,<sup>28</sup> their motivation was not perceived as revolutionary republicanism.

#### COLONIAL NEWSPAPERS AND CONVICT PIRACY

In June 1826 a Sydney *Monitor* correspondent recalled a recent sea passage from Sydney to Newcastle, New South Wales: "This is a pleasant packet, and the Captain a very pleasant gentlemanly fellow. The cabin is [...] ornamented with muskets, pistols and cutlasses, in case of pirates – there are also two cannon [...] on deck."<sup>29</sup> Insouciance notwithstanding, convict piracy evidently threatened shipping that connected the coastal settlements where most colonists, convict or free, dwelt.

Transportation to Australia did not automatically entail incarceration. On arrival, most convicts were assigned to free private employers, a minority being retained for government work. Especially in Sydney and Hobart, convicts could access newspapers in free time permitted, or when illicitly at large after hours – for example in taverns and sly-grog shops – and so read, or hear read, reports of local and world-wide piracies.<sup>30</sup> In the period addressed here, all Australian newspapers were published in port towns, where overseas newspapers too were landed. Shipping arrivals

25. *Historical Records of Australia* [hereafter *HRA*], Series 1, II, pp. 575–580.

26. *Sydney Gazette* [hereafter *SG*], 1 April 1804, p. 2c; Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Kensington, 1987), pp. 37–38; Atkinson, *Europeans in Australia*, I, pp. 251–256.

27. J.E. Gallagher, "The Revolutionary Irish", *Push from the Bush*, 19 (1985), pp. 2–33.

28. See, for example, the *Trial* piracy of 12 September 1816 – of the convicts listed in *SG*, 14 September 1816, p. 2a, as having seized the *Trial*, eleven were Irish, one English, one Spanish, one Portuguese, and yet no press reports called it an Irish event. See *SG*, 14 September 1816, p. 2c; 21 September 1816, p. 2d; 28 September 1816, Supplement, p. 2b; and *Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter* [hereafter *HTG&SR*], 26 October 1816, p. 2a–b; 21 December 1816, p. 1b; 28 December 1816, p. 1b.

29. *Monitor*, Sydney, 9 June 1826, p. 2a.

30. On convict literacy, see Stephen Nicholas and Peter R. Shergold, "Convicts as Workers", and Deborah Oxley, "Females as Convicts", both in Stephen Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 75–78 and 91–94.

guaranteed repeated inflows of oral sea gossip. Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks, completed in 1819, provided accommodation for male convicts in government employ, hitherto privately lodged about the town. Mostly these men were set to public works outside the barracks. Sydney's assigned convicts continued to live at employers' premises or to find private lodgings.<sup>31</sup> In Hobart, where the Convict Barracks was incomplete until 1821, similar arrangements occurred. As in Sydney, convicts had access to printed and oral news stories, but anti-piracy sentiments and measures featured in the colonial press had little if any effect.

Information gleaned by port town convicts circulated further afield, becoming part of convict society's autonomous collective knowledge. My electronic scan of the *Sydney Gazette* from 1 January 1815 to 31 December 1817 reveals frequent local and global piracy reports.<sup>32</sup> The Principal Superintendent of Convicts' press notices of absentees included escapees by piracy. Fellow convicts could therefore track outcomes. Those who pirated the *Speedwell* from Newcastle on 7 April 1814 were gazetted in most subsequent *Sydney Gazettes* to December 1817.<sup>33</sup> As no report of their death or recapture appeared, fellow convicts could celebrate an apparently successful collective self-liberation. On 14, 21, and 28 September 1816, extensive identifying information was published about the men who had recently pirated the *Trial* from off Sydney Harbour's South Head.<sup>34</sup> From 5 October 1816 to beyond 1817, these men were gazetted alongside the *Speedwell* pirates in a section of the Principal Superintendent of Convicts' absentee lists, sub-headed "Pirates".<sup>35</sup> On 29 November 1817 those who had seized the *William Cossar* from Sydney Cove were featured beyond 1817. The last 1817 absentee list added five new pirates.<sup>36</sup>

From the 1803 debut of Australia's first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette*, convict piracies were much reported. Thirteen ironed-gang convicts loading the *Eclipse* cutter at Newcastle on 11 May 1825 suddenly shed their irons – evidently tampered with in preparation – seized the *Eclipse*, and sailed seawards. Five Sydney press reports ensued, two in Hobart.<sup>37</sup>

31. J.B. Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales* (Sydney, 1983), pp. 41–45; Karskens, *The Rocks*, pp. 30–31, 34–35, 167–168, 175.

32. I searched the *Sydney Gazette* using <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>, the National Library of Australia's facilities for searching digitized Australian newspapers. The following search terms were used: piracies, piracy, pirate, pirated, pirates, piratical, piratically, and pirating.

33. *SG*, 7 January 1815, p. 1d; and 27 December 1817, p. 2a. Similar notices appeared between those dates.

34. *SG*, 14 September 1816, p. 2; 21 September 1816, p. 2; 28 September 1816, p. 1.

35. *SG*, 5 October 1816, p. 1.

36. *SG*, 29 November 1817, p. 1, and 27 December 1817, p. 2.

37. *The Australian*, 19 May 1825, p. 4c; and 26 May 1825, p. 4c; *SG*, 26 May 1825, p. 2e; 2 June 1825, p. 2c; and 4 August 1825, p. 3d; *Hobart Town Gazette* [hereafter *HTG*], 1 July 1825, p. 4c; 2 July 1825, p. 2c.



On 25 November 1825, five convicts seized the *Maria*, carrying provisions for the Maria Island Penal Station, Van Diemen's Land. Two of these pirates, Henry Leonard and John Bogle, were convict crewmen. Three more lay concealed aboard till called to action. Two press reports ensued.<sup>38</sup> Reporting such events could only, if unintentionally, encourage convict piracy. Employing convict seamen cut shipowners' labour costs but was officially forbidden and inherently unsafe.

Until the 1820s, the only newspapers published in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land were government organs – the *Sydney* and *Hobart Gazettes*. Naturally, they routinely condemned convict piracy as wicked folly – the official line. For instance, in 1807 the *Sydney Gazette* ridiculed six convicts who escaped in a stolen boat as “miserably provided for carrying such a determination into effect with any other prospect than [...] perishing”.<sup>39</sup> Certain early recapture was regularly incanted, as when the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported the midnight seizure of the *Blue-Eyed Maid* by Matthew Brady and his bushranger gang on 3 December 1825.<sup>40</sup> As so often, Brady's gang made a mockery of cocksure recapture predictions. Indeed, the *Gazettes* often slid into sheer absurdity. The *Sydney Gazette* wrote of the *Speedwell* pirates: “they have no boat with them, and consequently can procure no supply of necessaries without the utmost risque [*sic*] to the vessel and their own lives”. Lack of a ship's boat was disadvantageous, but it hardly presaged disaster. Such common exaggerations could only be counterproductive.

Even for the *Gazettes*, let alone competing private-enterprise newspapers emerging from the 1820s, piracies provided irresistible opportunities for colourful copy. That was fine when events delivered the “right” message, as when on 19 June 1818 a pirate boat was repelled in Sydney Cove by a brig's alert armed watch.<sup>41</sup> Altogether different impressions transpired when reports implied pirates had shown skill, resolution, and daring while, in contrast, port security regulations had been neglected and pursuit was tardy, bumbling, and fruitless. An instance is the *Sydney Gazette*'s original reporting of the seizure and ensuing pursuit of the *Harrington* brig in May 1808.<sup>42</sup> A clumsy subsequent attempt to remedy matters by drumming up these pirates' impending nasty fate probably aroused convict derision.<sup>43</sup>

Reporting of successful foreign piracies and mutinies may also have stimulated convict piracy. Though outside the formal chronological limits of this study, it is notable that the Atlantic slave mutinies aboard the

38. *HTG*, 3 December 1825, p. 2d; *The Australian*, 29 December 1825, p. 4b.

39. *SG*, 25 January 1807, p. 1c.

40. *HTG*, 3 December 1825, p. 2d.

41. *SG*, 20 June 1818, p. 2b–c.

42. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1808, p. 2a–b.

43. *Ibid.*, 29 May 1808, p. 2a.

*Amistad* (1839) and *Creole* (1841) were reported in Australia at a time when convict piracy was still endemic.<sup>44</sup> These reports (especially those concerning the *Creole*) sympathized with the slaves. Presumably convicts felt their own piratical escapes were equally justified and their superiors were humbugs to maintain otherwise. Convict culture held that convicts were treated as Hebrew slaves were by the pharaoh, while some prominent officials thought that, properly, convicts *were* virtually slaves.<sup>45</sup>

On occasion, the independent newspapers that appeared in the 1820s were more sympathetic to convict piracy than was possible in the *Gazettes*. Edward Smith Hall, a free immigrant and the Sydney *Monitor's* radical editor-proprietor, sometimes argued that escape from transportation exhibited an essentially English manly love of liberty.<sup>46</sup> His ideal manly Englishman was elastic. Thus, he praised the “frank, open, mild, but enterprising bold vivacious countenance” and “martial spirit” of the Isle-of-Wight born African diaspora convict, John Goff. This was during Goff’s self-defence at his 1827 Sydney trial, for murder while leading an 1826 uprising on Norfolk Island. The *Sydney Gazette's* Goff was a savage monster.<sup>47</sup>

## TWO MODES OF CONVICT PIRACY

Scant evidence suggests that plunder motivated convict pirates who voyaged afar to gain freedom. Others, however, navigated Australia’s coasts, sometimes raiding isolated coastal settlements. Two broad modes of convict piracy thus emerge. Both prioritized taking “liberties” – afloat at sea, then at a distant friendly port, or by establishing master-less “rough crew” enclaves beyond government reach. Unauthorized masculine-libertarian settlements spread from the Bass Strait Islands to the Swan River in Western Australia.<sup>48</sup>

44. The only *Amistad* mutiny report is in the *Colonial Times*, Hobart, 2 March 1841, p. 2d. The *Creole* mutiny was repeatedly reported, for instance, in the New South Wales press, *Sydney Herald* [hereafter *SH*], 10 May 1841, p. 2b–c; 26 June 1841, p. 1d; and Supplement, 27 June 1841, p. 2d; *The Australian*, 26 August 1842, p. 2; 4 July 1842, p. 4; *SG*, 28 June 1842, p. 2. The *Creole* affair reports in Van Diemen’s Land include: the *Launceston Examiner*, 28 May 1842, morning, p. 7b–c, evening, p. 7b–c; *The Courier*, Hobart, 4 November 1842, p. 4c; 9 December 1842, p. 4b; 13 January 1843, p. 3b; *Launceston Examiner*, 21 January 1843, p. 6d. For new interpretations of these mutinies see Rupprecht, “All We Have Done, We Have Done for Freedom”, and Rediker, “African Origins of the *Amistad* Rebellion”, in the present volume.

45. See “A Convict’s Lament”, verse 4, in Ingleton, *True Patriots All*, p. 121; Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, *Closing Hell’s Gates: The Death of a Convict Station* (Crow’s Nest, 2008), p. 155.

46. Erin Ihde, “Bold, Manly-Minded Men’ and ‘Sly Cunning Base Convicts’: The Double Standard of Escape”, in Roberts, *Escape*, pp. 123–138, 127–131; and Erin Ihde, *Edward Smith Hall and the Sydney Monitor: 1826–1840* (Melbourne, 2004), ch. 5. For Hall on Goff, see *Monitor*, 24 September 1827, pp. 6b–c and 7a.

47. *Monitor*, 24 September 1827, p. 6c; *SG*, 24 September 1827, pp. 2f and 3a.

48. Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, ch. 1, and *idem*, 1835: *The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia*, ch. 2; Thomas Gunn, “Out from ‘Under the Cloak of Nefarious

Unlike some eighteenth-century pirate settlements,<sup>49</sup> there is no case that these were utopian. Commonly, coerced Aboriginal women provided sexual, domestic, and general labour for a melange of pirates, other convict runaways, freelance sealers, ships' deserters, and castaways. Such autonomous, fluid, armed, and mobile combinations jangled official nerves.<sup>50</sup> However, coercive exploitation of Aborigines was not invariable. Five convicts escaped from Sydney on 26 September 1790 in a small stolen boat. The authorities deemed them foolish ignoramuses, throwing their lives away. In 1795 four survivors were found living, tranquilly assimilated, among Aborigines at Port Stephens (180 kilometres from European settlements). They were "rescued", that is removed from Aboriginal wives and society and returned to Sydney.<sup>51</sup>

Atkinson's dismissal of convict piracy predated revisionist revelations.<sup>52</sup> Such mitigation is unavailable to Ian Hoskins's *Sydney Harbour* (2009). It mentions only the (discursively) hackneyed Mary Bryant episode of 1791 – worth briefly reprising here as the first convict piratical seizure motivated by dreams of faraway liberty. Bryant, her children, husband, and seven other male convicts departed Sydney Harbour in Governor Phillip's little cutter, eventually reaching Dutch Timor, where, briefly, they passed as shipwreck survivors.<sup>53</sup> Mary Bryant subsequently survived, became celebrated, and received a pardon. Colonial contemporaries, however, noticed better-founded long-distance piratical escapes from Sydney Harbour (see Tables 1–3). After dark, on 16 May 1808, 30 to 50 armed convicts stealthily boarded the 13-gun, 182-ton *Harrington* from stolen boats. This and the *Harrington's* cutting out were undertaken with naval efficiency. The *Harrington's* disappearance remained undetected till after sunrise. The pirates sailed 5,000 kilometres to Manila Bay, flying United States colours, and carrying forged ship's papers. When seized, the *Harrington* was moored in Farm Cove, not Sydney Cove, and lacked a

Practices' – Four Men in a Boat and Escape from Flinders Island 1836", in George Town Historical Society (ed.), *Crime on the High Seas* (George Town, 2007), pp. 30–37; Dunbabin, *Sailing the World's Edge*, pp. 157–177.

49. Rediker, "Hydrarchy and Libertalia", pp. 31–36.

50. See, for example, *HTG*, 10 June 1826, p. 4b–d.

51. David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales [...]*, Brian Fletcher (ed.) (Sydney, 1975; 1st edn, London, 1802), I, pp. 126, 128–130, 131, 222; Michael Flynn, *The Second Fleet: Britain's Grim Convict Armada of 1790* (North Sydney, 1993), pp. 400–401, 559, 582–583, 589–589; Hunter to Portland, 10 January 1798, *HRA*, Series 1, II, p. 116.

52. Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes*, is empirically revisionist. For analytical revision see Christopher, "Ten Thousand Times Worse than the Convicts"; Duffield, "Haul Away the Anchor Girls"; Karskens, "This Spirit of Emigration"; Ihde, "Pirates of the Pacific". Earlier freelancers discussed convict pirates piecemeal. See, for example, Dunbabin, *Sailing the World's Edge*; Ingleton, *True Patriots All*.

53. Ian Hoskins, *Sydney Harbour: A History* (Sydney, 2009), pp. 50–51, 53–55.

Table 1. *Vessels and ships seized by convict pirates, 1790–1829.*

No.	Name	Type	Tonnage	Owner(s)	Where seized	When seized
1	<i>Cumberland</i>	Schooner	28	NSW Government	NSW Broken Bay	5.9.1797
2	<i>Norfolk</i>	Sloop	25	NSW Government	NSW between Broken Bay & Sydney Harbour	October 1800
3	—	Small vessel	?	Private owner	NSW Hunter Estuary	Late 1800
4	<i>Flinders</i>	Pilot cutter	?	VDL Government	VDL Sullivan Cove	February 1806
5	<i>Venus</i>	Brig	45	Robert Campbell, Sydney	VDL Port Dalrymple	17.6.1806
6	<i>Marcia</i>	Schooner	26	Kable & Underwood, Sydney	Bass Strait	post 21.1.1806, prior to 1808
7	<i>Harrington</i>	Brig	182	William Campbell, Sydney	NSW Farm Cove	16.5.1808
8	<i>Unity</i>	Schooner	35	W.H. Mansel, Hobart	VDL Hobart	23.4.1813
9	<i>Speedwell</i>	Schooner or sloop	21	M'Kellop & Brown, Sydney	NSW Newcastle	7.4.1814
10	<i>Argo</i>	Ship	150	Payne & Tyrce, Calcutta	VDL Derwent Estuary	12.6.1814
11	<i>Trial</i>	Brig	20	Simeon Lord, Sydney	NSW inside Heads, Sydney Harbour	12.9.1816
12	<i>William Cossar</i>	Vessel	20	NSW Government after seizure	NSW Sydney Cove	7.7.1817
13	—	Bushranger-built vessel	?	Appropriated by VDL Government	VDL Hobart	11.4.1818
14	<i>Young Lachlan</i>	Schooner	44	J. Thomson, Hobart?	VDL Derwent Estuary	27.1.1819
15	—	Schooner	?	A.F. Kemp, Hobart	VDL Derwent Estuary	Post 23.10.1821, prior to 24.6.822
16	<i>Seaflower</i>	Schooner	Small	? – hired by George Meredith	VDL Pirates Bay	Shortly prior to 2.2.1822
17	<i>Angelina</i>	Sloop	16	?	NSW Broken Bay	30.10.1824
18	<i>Isabella</i>	Small craft	37	Richard Kelly, Hawkesbury	NSW Port Macquarie	Prior to 12.10.1824
19	<i>Eclipse</i>	Cutter	45	Reibey & Atkinson, Sydney	NSW Newcastle	11.5.1825
20	<i>Maria</i>	Cutter	?	VDL Government	VDL near Hobart	25.11.1825

Table 1. (continued)

No.	Name	Type	Tonnage	Owner(s)	Where seized	When seized
21	<i>Glutton</i>	Sloop	?	Mr Campbell, VDL	VDL Schouten Island	2.12.1825
22	<i>Garnet/Gurnet</i>	Brig or schooner	20	?	NSW Newcastle	8.4.1826
23	<i>Wellington</i>	Brig	182	Chartered to NSW Government	250 miles from Norfolk Island	21.12.1826
24	<i>Ellen</i>	Sloop or cutter	22	M. Purdon	VDL Cape Roule	15.1.1827
25	<i>Phoebe</i>	Brig	24	Berry & Wollstonecraft, Sydney	NSW Shoalhaven River	14.12.1827
26	<i>Mary</i>	Vessel	Small	Williams (a baker), Sydney	NSW Darling Harbour	18.3.1828
27	<i>Cyprus</i>	Brig	108	VDL Government	VDL Recherche Bay	16.8.1829

NSW = New South Wales; VDL = Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania).

Sources: Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

Table 2. *Vessels and ships unsuccessfully targeted by convict pirates, 1790–1829.*

No.	Name	Type	Tonnage	Owner(s)	Where, how, and by whom targeted	When attempted/ planned
1	<i>Minerva</i>	Convict ship	578	Robert Larnock, London	NSW Sydney Cove: c.40 Irishmen recently arrived on the <i>Minerva</i>	Early February 1800
2	<i>Buffalo</i>	Naval store ship	462	Royal Navy	NSW Sydney Harbour: Irishmen	Between February & September 1800
3	<i>Governor Hunter</i>	Schooner	35	J. Nichols, Sydney	VDL at sea between Hobart & Oyster Bay: Robert Stewart & party	26.6.1805
4	<i>Flinders</i>	Pilot cutter	?	H. Hacking, Sullivan Cove	VDL: Stewart & party, to board the <i>Estramina</i>	February 1806
5	<i>Estramina</i>	Schooner	102	NSW Government	VDL south coast: Stewart & party	February 1806
6	<i>Governor Hunter</i>	Schooner	35	J. Nichols, Sydney	VDL Port Dalrymple: 4 convicts aboard	Late June–early July 1806
7	<i>Topaz</i>	Whaler	?	Mayhew, Boston	VDL Storm Bay Passage (a): convicts from boat	October 1807
8	<i>Aurora</i>	Brig	180	Thomas Wolden etc., New York	NSW at/near Sydney: convict conspiracy	Between 19.7.1810 & 18.9.1810
9	—	Vessel	?	—	NSW Sydney: convict conspiracy	Early May 1815
10	<i>Harriet</i>	Ship	450	Sold to Sydney merchants for 6,000 guineas 1817 (b)	On Hobart–Cape Town passage: 16 male, 5 female convict stowaways, some crew	Late 1817–early 1818
11	<i>Sophia</i>	Brig	60	T.W. Birch, Hobart	NSW Sydney: boatload of convicts	19.6.1818

Table 2. (continued)

No.	Name	Type	Tonnage	Owner(s)	Where, how, and by whom targeted	When attempted/ planned
12	<i>Castle Forbes</i>	Convict ship	459	Unknown	VDL Huon Estuary: 28 convicts	Mid-March 1820
13	<i>Hope</i>	Brig	226	Birnie & Co., Sydney	NSW Sydney: 16 convicts, leader M. Coogan	18.11.1820
14	<i>Sinbad</i>	Schooner	?	Robert Campbell, Sydney	NSW Government wharf, Windsor: 25 convicts arrested	Prior to 30.11.1820
15	<i>Prince Leopold</i>	Brig	92	VDL Government	VDL George Town: several convicts already aboard	2.3.1826
16	<i>Liberty</i>	Schooner	45	Unknown	NSW Sydney Harbour: 13 convicts with boat, leader Coogan	Early hours of 31.3.1827
17	<i>Emma Kemp</i>	Cutter	36	Richard Kemp, Hobart	VDL Derwent Estuary: 9–10 convicts from boat	14.12.1827

NSW = New South Wales; VDL = Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania)

(a) Now D'Entrecasteaux Channel.

(b) *SG*, 7 June 1817, p. 3b.

*Sources:* Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

Table 3. *Seizures and attempted seizures of boats by convicts, 1790–1829.*

No.	Type	Owner(s)	Where seizure attempted	When attempted	Success or failure?
1–2	Punt, small rigged boat	?	NSW Rose Hill: Sydney Harbour Heads	26.9.1790	Success
3	6-oar cutter	Governor's boat	NSW Sydney Cove	28.3.1791	Success
4	Boat	?	NSW	Early September 1797	Success
5	Boat	?	NSW Parramatta	2.10.1797	Success
6	Boat	?	NSW Parramatta	November 1797	Failure
7	Boat	Owen Cavanagh	NSW Broken Bay	10.1.1798	Success
8	Boat	Richard Hawke	NSW Kissing Point	15 or 16.6.1803	Success
9	Boat	J. Mountgarret	VDL Risdon Cove	c.8.10.1803	Success
10	Boat	Sergeant Day	NSW Parramatta	Prior to 3.3.1804	Success
11	Boat	Revd Knopwood	VDL Sullivan Cove	24.7.1805	Success
12	Boat	?	VDL Derwent Estuary	February 1806	Success
13	Boat	NSW Government?	NSW Newcastle PS	1.4.1806	Success
14	Boat	E. Willis, Sydney	NSW Sydney Harbour	19.1.1807	Success
15	Small boat	?	VDL Derwent Estuary	October 1807	Success
16–17	Boats: at least 2	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	16.5.1808	Success
18	Boat	?	NSW Hawkesbury River	Late 1813/early 1814	Failure
19	Pilot boat	VDL Government	VDL George Town	1.4.1814	Success
20	Pilot boat	VDL Government	VDL George Town	5.10.1814	Success
21	Boat	?	VDL	By July 1814	Success
22	Boat	?	NSW Sydney Harbour Heads	12.9.1816	Success
23	Whaleboat	NSW Government	NSW Newcastle PS	Shortly prior to 30.11.1816	Success
24–25	2 boats	VDL Government	VDL George Town	10.6.1817	Success
26	Longboat	VDL Government	VDL Port Dalrymple	Mid-June 1817	Success
27	Boat	William Thomas	NSW Rushcutters Bay	9.10.1817	Success
28–29	2 boats	VDL Government	VDL Sullivan Cove	8.4.1818	Success
30	Boat	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	On or prior to 19.6.1818	Failure
31	Boat	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	By 19.6.1818	Success
32	Boat	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	By 19.6.1818	Success



Table 3. (continued)

No.	Type	Owner(s)	Where seizure attempted	When attempted	Success or failure?
33–35	Boats: at least 3	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	Late July/early August 1818	Success
36	Boat	?	VDL Derwent Estuary	27.1.1819	Success
37	Boat	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	Mid-March 1819	Success
38	Whaleboat	Owners, whaler <i>Regalia</i>	VDL Hobart	Prior to May 1820	Success
39	Pilot boat	NSW Government	NSW Newcastle PS	June 1820	Success
40	Boat	?	VDL New Norfolk	c.28.11.1820	Success
41	Whaleboat	?	NSW Cockle Bay	25–26/12/1820	Success
42	Pilot boat	VDL Government	VDL Derwent Estuary	Between 23.10.1821 & 24.6.1822	Success
43–44	Boat: whaleboat	VDL Government	VDL Macquarie Harbour PS	7.6.1824	Success
45	Gig-boat	Commandant's boat	NSW Newcastle PS	Shortly prior to 11.5.1825	Success
46	Whaleboat	?	VDL Derwent Estuary	May 1825	Success
47	Boat	Major Honner	VDL Derwent Estuary	9.9.1825	Success
48	Boat	Mr Pechey	VDL Huon River Estuary	c.September 1825	Success
49	Whaleboat	George Meredith Esq.	VDL near Great Swan Port	8.10.1825	Success
50	Whaleboat	VDL Government	VDL Spring Bay	2.12.1825	Success
51–53	3 boats	NSW Government	NSW Norfolk Island PS	25.9.1826	Success
54	Boat	?	VDL Hobart	13.1.1827	Success
55	Boat	?	NSW Sydney Harbour	By 31.3.1827	Success
56	Boat	Mr Young	VDL Hobart	13.12.1827	Success
57–58	2 boats	T. Hyde, Sydney: one unknown	NSW Sydney Harbour	30.4.1828	Failure
59	Whaleboat, rigged	VDL Government	VDL Macquarie Harbour PS	December 1828	Success
60	Boat 3.5 tons	Dr Halloran, Parramatta	NSW Parramatta	16.8.1829	Success

VDL = Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania); NSW = New South Wales; PS = Penal Station

Sources: Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

night watch – both against port regulations. Everything needful for a long trading voyage to Fiji was aboard.<sup>54</sup> Selecting such inviting prey implies these pirates operated effective prior surveillance and planning.

Van Diemen's Land experienced many boat seizures, and often its bushrangers were also boat and small vessel pirates. On 10 June 1817, bushrangers looted George Town's commissary store, escaping in two stolen boats with five convict recruits.<sup>55</sup> Around midnight on 3 December 1825, Matthew Brady and thirteen of his gang seized Maria Island's ferryboat, *Blue-Eyed Maid*.<sup>56</sup> Later that day, Brady and his men used this boat to take a sloop off nearby Schouten Island. Rising winds persuaded them to return, sink the sloop, and head for the Van Diemen's Land's interior.<sup>57</sup> The Brady Gang had commenced bushranging with a boat escape from the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station.<sup>58</sup> They and others became as much sea rangers as bushrangers. Bushrangers stole boats to access remote coastal and insular hideaways and to raid isolated coastal settlements, destabilizing existing power relations. Lieutenant-Governor Arthur – who rarely admitted failures – conceded “the skill and conduct of this extraordinary Man [Brady] [...] baffled the united efforts of the Civil and Military power”.<sup>59</sup>

Three spectacular Tasman Sea incidents occurred between 1826 and 1827. On 25 September 1826, fifty-seven convicts fled in seized government boats from the Norfolk Island Penal Station, a general uprising having failed. John Goff led the evacuation under fire from troops. Often flogged, condemned at differing times to every other contemporaneous penal station, he escaped from them all. At Pieman's River, Van Diemen's Land, and on the Hastings River, New South Wales, he had stood alongside fellow runaways in firefights with troops.<sup>60</sup> After landing at nearby Philip Island, the 1826 Norfolk Island escapers contested the landing of a military pursuit party that took some captives and the runaways' boats. Subsequent seaborne infantry sorties recaptured piecemeal the marooned remnant, including Goff. He and two comrades were hanged in 1827 after a Sydney Supreme Court show trial.<sup>61</sup>

54. Duffield, “Identity Fraud”, pp. 390–415; *SG*, 22 May 1808, p. 2a–b.

55. *HTG*, 5 July 1817, p. 1a; *SG*, 4 October 1817, p. 3a–b.

56. *HTG*, 3 December 1825, p. 2d.

57. *Ibid*; I.H. Nicholson, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures Tasmania, 1, 1803–1833* (Canberra, 1983), Pt I, p. 110.

58. Maxwell-Stewart, *Closing Hell's Gates*, pp. 183–186.

59. Arthur to Bathurst, 11 April 1826, in E. FitzSymonds (ed.), *Brady [...] and Associates* (Adelaide, 1979), pp. 151–152.

60. Maxwell-Stewart, *Closing Hell's Gates*, p. 176; Jack Bushman, “Passages from the Life of a ‘Lifer’”, ch. 2, *Moreton Bay Courier*, 9 April 1859, p. 4c.

61. Ian Duffield, “The Life and Death of ‘Black’ John Goff: Aspects of the Black Convict Contribution to Resistance Patterns During the Transportation Era in Eastern Australia”,

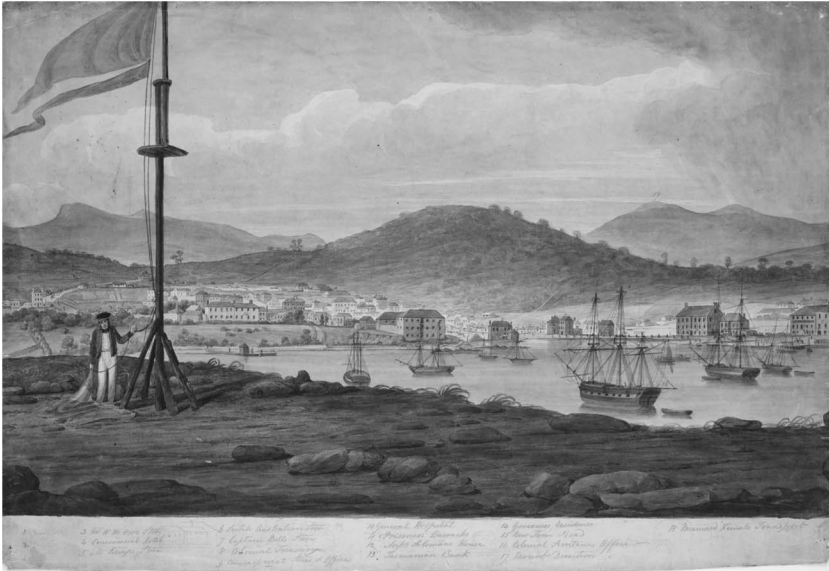


Figure 2. Item 3 from *Panorama of Hobart*, 1825, watercolour, by Augustus Earle. The Van Diemen's Land government brig *Cyprus*, piratically seized by convicts in 1829, is the two-masted vessel second from the left. *Dixson Gallery, State Library of New South Wales. Used with permission.*

On 21 December 1826, over forty out of sixty-six convicts bound from Sydney to Norfolk Island seized the government brig *Wellington*. The pirates chose an ex-army officer, John Walton, to command and (like “Golden Age” pirates) elected a council. A log was kept, offenders against collectively agreed articles were disciplined, and imprisoned opponents treated decently. Advised by the *Wellington*'s lawful commander, they called at New Zealand's Bay of Islands for water, preparatory to sailing for South America. Two British whaler captains, encouraged by the Revd Henry Williams, a resident Bay of Islands missionary and former naval officer, became suspicious. After a cannonade from the whalers, Walton surrendered, never having returned fire.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, similar ventures recurred. On 4 August 1827, eighteen out of twenty-one convicts bound from Hobart to Macquarie Harbour seized the *Cyprus* when it was storm-bound in Recherche Bay. Their elected commander, William Swallow,

*Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 33 (1987), pp. 30–44; Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, “The Search for the Invisible Man”, in Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *Chain Letters: Narrating Convict Lives* (Carlton South, 2001), pp. 53–54; Maxwell-Stewart, *Closing Hell's Gates*, p. 176.

62. Ihde, “Pirates of the Pacific”; Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes*, ch. 5.

navigated the *Cyprus* via Japan to near Canton. Then, they scuttled the *Cyprus* and tried – but failed – to pass as castaways, recalling the Bryant episode. Two of them became the last pirates hanged at Wapping’s Execution Dock.<sup>63</sup>

#### VICTIMS, LOSSES, LASCARS, AND THE COLONIAL STATE’S INCAPACITY

Given the many convict piracies and the analytical deficit in popular studies of them, it is necessary to identify and interrogate salient themes from my reading of the sources that constitute my convict pirate archive. The generic “who whom” problematics of archives preclude regarding this archive as a neutral objective record. Therefore, I interrogate it to unpackage state incapacity to curb convict piracy, reveal the range and identify the victims of material losses inflicted, and air an unresolved puzzle concerning alleged lascar connections.

Official reactions calibrate the piracies’ effects, as do losses inflicted. Both piratical incidents and fears about consequent convict responses intensified endemic official and free settler anxieties about imagined insurrectionary conspiracies.<sup>64</sup> Free colonists sometimes requested countermeasures. At Windsor, New South Wales, a November 1824 Grand Jury fruitlessly requested a police boat based at the Hawkesbury River’s mouth “to prevent piratical seizures”.<sup>65</sup> Even Sydney Harbour had only a regular Row Guard from 5 February 1820. Two masters, two boatswains, and six sailors were to provide two crews, one for day and one for night service.<sup>66</sup> Convicts served in this Lilliputian outfit, as in the police ashore. Foreseeable problems ensued. For example, on 2 September 1820 convict Row Guard sailor William Jones absconded. Coxswain Bernard Williams reputedly flourished by smuggling spirits.<sup>67</sup> The original Row Guard supposedly policed Sydney Harbour’s labyrinthine waterways, with their 317 kilometres of shoreline. Unsurprisingly, the authorities had to expand the force rapidly, despite cost implications, to 36 boats and 140 men by 1822.<sup>68</sup>

63. On the London trial and execution of *Cyprus* pirates, see Hirst, *The Man Who Stole the Cyprus*, pp. 148–176.

64. Paula Jane Byrne, *Criminal Law and Colonial Subject: New South Wales, 1810–1830* (Cambridge, 1993), ch. 5; Michael Sturma, *Vice in a Vicious Society: Crime and Convicts in Mid Nineteenth-Century New South Wales* (St Lucia, 1983); Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, ch. 8.

65. *SG*, 2 December 1824, p. 3b.

66. *SG*, 5 February 1818, p. 1a–b; State Records of New South Wales [hereafter SRNSW], Colonial Secretary’s Records [hereafter CSR], 5 February 1820, reel 6049, 4/1744, pp. 168–175; reel 6039, SZ756, pp. 53–55; 8 February 1820, reel 6007, 4/3501, pp. 237–238.

67. *SG*, 2 September 1818, p. 2a; Karskens, *The Rocks*, p. 185.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

That had limited effects. There were only four Sydney Harbour/Parramatta River incidents from 1821 to 1829. The small vessel *Mary* (1828) and two boats (1827 and 1829) were taken. The 1827 attempt on the schooner *Liberty* failed, but without Row Guard intervention.<sup>69</sup> However, this paucity of Sydney Harbour incidents during that period may indicate Row Guard deterrence. This is offset by the fact that most New South Wales convict piracies between 1821 and 1829 were at smaller ports or (once) on the high seas. There were seven such incidents, only one unsuccessful, involving vessels or ships and three, all successful, involving boats (see the data in Tables 1–3).

In June 1826, the *Hobart Town Gazette* bewailed Hobart's lack of "a well regulated excise or guard" for twenty-four-hour harbour and Derwent Estuary surveillance.<sup>70</sup> Eight months on, this official medium requested "a small Colonial armed vessel" to prevent piracy and smuggling in the Derwent and "round the coast". It added: "The Guard Boat, a most necessary establishment which rows round the vessels in the Harbour at night", should be of "the lightest and swiftest construction" and employ only "upright characters".<sup>71</sup> Implicitly, one lumbering guard boat and nefarious crew now existed, but only undertaking night duty in Sullivan Cove, Hobart's harbour. However, when a boat approached the cutter *Emma Kemp*, moored in the Derwent, at night on 28 June 1827, escaped prisoners replied "guard-boat" when challenged by the cutter's watch but sheered off when further questioned.<sup>72</sup> Port regulations threatened stiff fines on shipping without armed night watches, but, this incident notwithstanding, compliance remained patchy.

British naval units only intermittently visited New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, while each operated just a few small, lightly armed government vessels. In May 1827, three small brigs comprised Sydney-based New South Wales sea power. A schooner was "permanently attached" to Melville Island and another designated for Port Essington,<sup>73</sup> outposts vastly nearer Timor than Sydney. In 1825, Governor Brisbane implored London to provide two modest-sized armed schooners for Sydney and a smaller one for Hobart, with costs falling on Britain's Treasury. A caustic refusal ensued.<sup>74</sup> In similar stingy vein, the New South Wales Police Fund – a multi-purpose government cash tank – swallowed

69. *Monitor*, 6 April 1827, p. 2b–c.

70. *HTG*, 10 June 1826, p. 4b.

71. *HTG*, 10 February 1827, p. 4a.

72. *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser* [hereafter *CT&TA*], 29 June 1827, p. 2a; *The Australian*, 18 July 1826, p. 4a.

73. Darling to Hay, 14 May 1827, *HRA*, Series 1, XIII, p. 304.

74. Brisbane to Bathurst, 8 July 1824, *HRA*, Series 1, XI, p. 303; Bathurst to Brisbane, 7 January 1825, *ibid.*, p. 469.

two-thirds of the revenue raised by selling Sydney Row Guard prizes. The remainder was distributed among Guard personnel: predominantly to masters, secondarily to boatswains, the residuum to sailors.<sup>75</sup> As seen, armed shipboard night watches could deter pirates. When a pirate boat attempted night seizure of the *Sophia* in Sydney Cove on 19 June 1818, James Kelly, the brig's master, led the vessel's armed watch in driving the pirates away with musketry.<sup>76</sup> Despite Kelly's resultant acclaim, port security regulation observance remained lax and pirates confident. Soon after, convicts seized several boats around Sydney Harbour – in order, officials worried, to seize a seagoing vessel.

A fourteen-strong escaped convict gang triggered the request for a Hawkesbury police boat. Led by William Skivener, on 30 October 1824 the gang seized the sloop *Angelina* in the Hawkesbury, after taking a boat carrying “wine, porter, sugar, tea, etc.”, thus enhancing stolen basic provisions already cached at their Mullet Island rendezvous. The gang also possessed stolen charts, a sextant, quadrants, a compass, and a gold-cased chronometer – all useful for navigating a blue-water getaway. Among the gang were men with navigation skills. Skivener – no navigator but elected commander for his leadership talents – and five others embarked on the *Angelina*. Their comrades confidently expected “to take another vessel”.<sup>77</sup> Small farmers (often time-served convicts) dominated Hawkesbury settler demography. The pirates' loot, if modest compared to that of contemporaneous Sulu and South China Sea pirates,<sup>78</sup> would have hurt many Hawkesbury households. Humbler members of colonial society, not just substantial merchants and ship-owners, suffered losses from convict piracy.

On the Hawkesbury Estuary and its Broken Bay extension, piracy began early. On 5 September 1797 fifteen convicts (some crewmen, some boarding from a boat) seized the government schooner *Cumberland*, laden with stores for the new Hawkesbury settlements. The pirates included the 1790 piratical escapers, George Lee and John Turwood.<sup>79</sup> The *Cumberland*, according to Governor Hunter, was the best vessel in the colony and sorely missed.<sup>80</sup> A replacement *Cumberland*, for pursuing absconded convicts “who were [...] in the practice of carrying off boats”

75. SG, 5 February 1818, p. 1a–b.

76. SG, 20 June 1818, p. 2b–c.

77. *The Australian*, 11 November 1824, p. 3b.

78. Robert J. Anthony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley, CA, 2003); Dian H. Murray, *Pirates of the South China Coast, 1790–1810* (Stanford, CA, 1987); James Francis Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi: Globalization, Maritime Raiding, and the Birth of Ethnicity* (Quezon City, 2001).

79. Flynn, *The Second Fleet*, pp. 400–401, 572–573.

80. Collins, *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, II, p. 38; Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes*, p. 32; Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, p. 213.

was nearing launch in July 1800.<sup>81</sup> That month, the government sloop *Norfolk*, laden with wheat for Sydney, was taken in the Hawkesbury and then shipwrecked.<sup>82</sup> Such events taxed the infant colony's fiscal resources.

As an indication of the value of small colonial craft, in March 1824 the new 33-ton schooner *Governor Sorell* was auctioned at Hobart for £380. Its small boat fetched £10.<sup>83</sup> A loss of around £10 would hurt petty proprietors; £380 might bankrupt modestly prosperous ones. In 1828 a man in a boat raided Johnson's Bay, on the Parramatta River, stealing a mast and sails belonging to Dr Laurence Hynes Halloran, a prominent but hard-up emancipist. After vigorous pursuit, Halloran and two of his sons recovered their property, the thief's boat, and a boat in tow. Both boats proved stolen.<sup>84</sup> Halloran was targeted again on the night of 16 August 1829: his 3.25-ton boat, used for commercial wood carrying, was taken. A handsome \$20 reward (probably 20 Spanish dollars, then worth £4) was offered for its return.<sup>85</sup> Halloran declared the boat "the principal support of a large Family".<sup>86</sup> Though proliferating boat thefts were hard on victims, they could not unite the colonial poor, a fluctuating, heterogeneous element, in self-defence. Boat ownership offered small proprietors a chance to better themselves materially as self-employed watermen, but other poorer Sydneysiders were constantly making off with boats, to grab a free harbour crossing, escape justice, or undertake criminal enterprises.<sup>87</sup>

Concerning larger losses, information collected by J.T. Bigge, ahead of his Parliamentary Reports on New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, is revealing. Robert Campbell, formerly Sydney's leading merchant, wrote to Bigge on 30 June 1820 fretting that the pirating of his brig the *Venus* in 1806, when under government hire, remained uncompensated. He estimated his loss at a painful £3,200.<sup>88</sup> What further galled him was that London had ordered large grants of New South Wales land and government livestock to William Campbell. In effect, if not formally, that settled his £4,000 1812

81. *HRA*, Series 1, II, p. 619.

82. SRNSW, CSR, 4/1719, microfilm reel 6041, pp. 109–112; Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes*, p. 33.

83. *SG*, 8 April 1824, p. 2c; Nicholson, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures Tasmania*, Pt 1, p. 95. This study's 2010 sterling values were calculated in comparative retail price index terms using [www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppoweruk/](http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppoweruk/); £380 and £10 (1824) = £27,100 and £686 (2010).

84. *Monitor*, 3 May 1828, p. 8b.

85. *The Australian*, 19 August 1829, p. 4e. For converting Spanish dollars into sterling, see R.B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Independent Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999), p. xvii.

86. *The Australian*, 19 August 1829, p. 4e; £4 (1829) = £275 (2010).

87. Karskens, *The Rocks*, pp. 183–184, 186.

88. Campbell to J.T. Bigge, 30 June 1820, Mitchell Library, Sydney, Bonwick Transcripts, Box 25, microfilm reel CY 1506 – Bigge, J.T. – Report, Appendix, p. 4568; Margaret Steven, *Merchant Campbell 1769–1846: A Study of Colonial Trade* (Melbourne, 1965), chs 7–10, p. 137; £3,200 (1806) = £202,000 (2010).

claim for compensation for the *Harrington* piracy.<sup>89</sup> Yet, when seized, the *Harrington* was not chartered to the government and was breaching port regulations. When, occasionally, compensation was awarded, patronage rather than merit seemingly triumphed.

Bigge's antidote to disorder in Sydney, Hobart, and other coastal settlements – move all convicts well inland – was unworkable. Large piracy losses continued after his reports. The 1825 *Eclipse* piracy lost the owners £1,000.<sup>90</sup> Bigge commented tartly on “the frequency of piratical seizures [...] by the convicts of Sydney Cove” during Macquarie's governorship.<sup>91</sup> At least sixteen Sydney Harbour craft were targeted in that period, the pirates succeeding on eleven occasions (see Tables 1–3). However, only two successful incidents involved ships or vessels, against four failures (see Tables 1–2).

In Van Diemen's Land, Bigge's key informant was James Kelly,<sup>92</sup> a Derwent pilot and from 1819 Hobart's Harbour Master.<sup>93</sup> Following his *Sophia* triumph, Kelly had twice pursued Derwent pirates – unsuccessfully.<sup>94</sup> Oddly, Kelly informed Bigge, “Vessels that are most in danger are the Brigs from India manned by Lascars”.<sup>95</sup> Frustratingly, this alleged “lascar connection” to convict piracy remains enigmatic, for lascars in early colonial Australia await serious scholarly attention and no “lascar connection” emerges from this study's many other sources. Kelly's own narrow escape from Otago Harbour in 1818, when Maori killed some of his crew, perhaps prejudiced his mind. He believed a Maori- and English-speaking lascar resident there, who managed the relevant Otago ruler's dealings with foreigners, had ensnared the *Sophia*'s shore party.<sup>96</sup> Bigge learned from Kelly about several Derwent piracies: *Unity* (23 April 1814); *Argo* (12 June 1814); an odd bushranger-built craft (11 April 1818); and *Young Lachlan* (27 February 1819).<sup>97</sup> The Calcutta-owned *Argo* presumably had lascar crew, but no known evidence suggests they abetted piracy.

89. Mitchell Library, Sydney, Bonwick Transcripts, Box 25, microfilm reel CY 1506 – Bigge, J.T. – Report, Appendix, p. 4584; *HRA*, Series 1, VII, pp. 518–520, 756–759. William Campbell's 1812 £4,000 compensation claim = £208,000 (2010).

90. *SG*, 26 May 1825, p. 2e; £1,000 (1825) = £64,000 (2010).

91. *Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry on the Judicial Establishments of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, Parliamentary Papers 1823 (33) x 515, p. 81.

92. *HRA*, Series 3, III, pp. 458–466.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 458; Sorell to Macquarie, 6 April 1819, *HRA*, Series 3, II, p. 389.

94. *HTG&SA*, 25 April 1818, pp. 1a–b and 2a; K.M. Bowden, *Captain James Kelly of Hobart Town* (Parkville, 1964), pp. 51–52.

95. *HRA*, Series 3, III, p. 458.

96. Bowden, *Captain James Kelly*, pp. 47–48. For New Zealand's lascar presence, see Anne Salmond, *Between Worlds: Early Exchanges Between Maori and Europeans, 1773–1815* (Auckland, 1997), pp. 235, 290, 312.

97. *HTG*, 6 March 1819, p. 1a–b; 13 March 1819, pp. 1a–c and 2c; 27 March 1819, p. 2a–b; *SG*, 27 March 1819, p. 3a–b; 24 April 1819, p. 3a; Sorell to Macquarie, 26 March 1819, *HRA*, Series 3, II, pp. 386–387; Macquarie to Sorell, 15 June 1819, *ibid.*, p. 393; Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes*, p. 41.



The *Young Lachlan* seizure further illustrates the perils of neglecting port security regulations. Moored at owner Captain Howard's desire off his Macquarie Point store, when regulations stipulated Sullivan Cove, *Young Lachlan's* sails, rudder, and the rudder's securing bolt remained on deck too. Regulations required their lock-up ashore. Some of the sails were already bent. These infractions facilitated a quick departure. There was neither night watch kept nor ammunition on board. The master having departed up-country, the four seamen on the *Young Lachlan* neglected all duty.<sup>98</sup> These unconcealed follies invited piracy. To cap it all, Lieutenant-Governor Sorell had condoned the *Young Lachlan's* irregular mooring – though not the other security breaches.<sup>99</sup>

Because taken on a dark night, the *Young Lachlan* sailed invisible to Hobart's gunners at The Battery.<sup>100</sup> Sorell was informed of the seizure just after 5 a.m. on 28 February 1819. Beyond oared boats, only Thomas Birch's *Sophia* brig and twenty-ton sailing boat were in harbour.<sup>101</sup> The pirates' course at sea was sheer guesswork to their pursuers. Kelly accepted command of Birch's sailing boat. It was unready to sail till noon. Soldiers plus sea captains Howard and Bunster accompanied Kelly – two captains too many for one command? The pursuit merely rescued *Young Lachlan's* crew, dumped by the pirates on Bruny Island. Nevertheless, Birch would have been recompensed. For a previous similar service, he was exempt customs duty on a substantial quantity of imported spirits.<sup>102</sup> Whenever a private craft was hired to pursue convict pirates, the owners were paid regardless of the outcome, making dead loss for some good business for others.

When taken, the *Young Lachlan* carried no water and few water casks, allowing assertions that it could not sail far. New standing orders obliged Hobart's gunners to keep their artillery loaded and "fire upon any Vessel [...] moving out of the Port past the Point, or down the River, during the night". It was reiterated that colonial and small vessels must moor close in at Sullivan Cove. Delinquents whose rudders and sails were not "landed and lodged in a Place of Security" faced embargo from trading till they complied.<sup>103</sup> Such papery severity lacked deterrent force, while the *Young Lachlan's* pirates certainly obtained water somewhere, for they reached Java.<sup>104</sup> Self-interest ensured neglect of port regulations when conducting

98. *HTG*, 6 March 1819, p. 1a–b, and 13 March 1819, pp. 1a–c and 2c.

99. Sorell to Macquarie, 26 March 1819, *HRA*, Series 3, II, pp. 386–387.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

102. Sorell to Macquarie, 23 May 1818, and Macquarie to Sorell, 3 June 1818, in *HRA*, Series 3, II, pp. 321, 327.

103. *HTG*, 13 March 1819, pp. 1a–b and 2c; *SG*, 27 March 1819, p. 3a–b, and 24 April 1819, p. 3a.

104. Hirst, *Great Convict Escapes*, p. 41.

legitimate trade, let alone smuggling (then rife). In 1817, Sorell fruitlessly requested Macquarie's permission to construct a government cutter, to prevent "improper proceedings" in the Derwent.<sup>105</sup> However, on 1 December 1818 Macquarie undertook to send Sorell the 92-ton brig *Prince Leopold* – purchased in Sydney for £1,200. That plus £167 18s towards refitting was charged to the Van Diemen's Land's Police Fund. The New South Wales government itself spent £562 2s 8d on refitting.<sup>106</sup> In Van Diemen's Land service, the *Prince Leopold* flopped – its draught was too deep for some Van Diemen's Land ports.<sup>107</sup> Meagre colonial fiscal resources had been wasted. The period 1820 to 1825 brought at least fourteen more Van Diemen's Land piratical incidents, and 1826 saw an attempt on the *Prince Leopold* itself.

#### THE GROUNDS OF PIRATE SUCCESS OR FAILURE

What constituted "successful" seizure? Here, success is not understood in absolute terms but as taking a prize and escaping – at least for a while. Successful seizures predominated. That required trustworthy, motivated confederates who would not blab indiscreetly or inform for reward. Also needed were: relevant skills among the gang; good intelligence gathering; acquisition of necessary implements (weapons, for example); and well-planned and executed tactics. Often, convict pirates stole a boat or boats for approaching, boarding, and cutting out a moored target – operations requiring skill and resolution.

An instance is the *Speedwell* piracy, committed by four runaways from the Newcastle Penal Station. John Pearce, Edward Scarr, and Herbert Stiles were capital respites on life sentences; Joseph Burridge was serving a fourteen-year sentence.<sup>108</sup> Such sentences served at a harsh penal station provided obvious motives for escape. Stiles had been convicted of piracy and sentenced at Calcutta, 4 December 1809.<sup>109</sup> After arrival at Sydney in 1811, he was forwarded to Newcastle and soon rumoured to be planning a piratical escape.<sup>110</sup> In April 1813 he escaped into the bush, but returned, injured by Aborigines.<sup>111</sup> His subsequent gang boarded the *Speedwell* in rain at night on 7 April 1814, from a boat stolen from a government

105. Sorell to Macquarie, 26 June 1817, *HRA*, Series 3, II, p. 234.

106. The two 1818 charges to the Van Diemen's Land government for this vessel amounted to £80,640 (2010 prices). Refitting costs met by the New South Wales government were £33,300 (2010 prices).

107. Macquarie to Sorell, 1 December 1819, *HRA*, Series 3, II, pp. 369–370; Macquarie to Bigge, 22 January 1821, *HRA*, Series 1, X, p. 401.

108. Macquarie to Bathurst, 7 May 1814, *HRA*, Series 1, VIII, p. 251.

109. *Ibid.*

110. SRNSW, CSR, 10 October 1811, reel 6003, 4/3492, p. 74.

111. *Ibid.*, 2 October 1813, reel 6003, 4/3492, p. 215.

schooner aground nearby. Aboard the *Speedwell*, in the name of Newcastle's Commandant, they successfully requested the loan of a grapnel. With it, they promptly felled the *Speedwell's* master, secured his wife and a seaman (the only others present), and sailed off.<sup>112</sup>

The *Sydney Gazette* stated that with scant water and provisions and no boat to put ashore for water, the seizure was doomed. Gazetting these pirates ceased after eleven months – tacit acknowledgement of a sustained escape. In fact, when seized the *Speedwell* carried one month's provisions and 60 gallons of water:<sup>113</sup> sufficient to reach New Zealand. A makeshift raft would assist conveying fresh water and food from landfalls. If necessary, drag anchors could be devised from rocks and cables. Island-hopping enabled a small vessel to cross the South Pacific. In 1806–1807, the pirated 45-ton brig *Venus* island hopped from New Zealand to Chile.<sup>114</sup> From 1790 to 1829, out of 60 identified boat incidents only 5 failed (see Tables 6 and 7). Seizing a vessel or ship was trickier: of 44 known incidents 17 failed.

Tables 4 and 5 show an inverse ratio between the size of ships and vessels and success. As much as 63 per cent of successes involved vessels of 50 tons or less. No attempt on craft of 200 tons or more succeeded (see Tables 4 and 5). Larger craft, like the 578-ton *Minerva* and the 459-ton *Castle Forbes*, were targeted by larger escape parties – potentially less cohesive than smaller parties. Colonial police shone at recruiting informers – this secured the *Castle Forbes*<sup>115</sup> and the *Minerva* from seizure. The known seizures and attempts from 1790 to 1829 directly involved around 900 men<sup>116</sup> and 8 women. Of all known ship or vessel incidents, 61.4% were successful, as were 91.7% of boat incidents (see Tables 6 and 7). Hughesian bolting or sheer luck could hardly achieve those success rates; rather, a predominance of well-planned and executed incidents is implied.

In late Georgian Britain, many people, though not oceanic seafarers, were “accustomed to the sea”. Naval manning during the 1793–1815 wars against France required massive resort to the press gang, leading to high desertion rates. After 1815, there were probably more transported convicts “accustomed to the sea”, or who concealed wartime naval service because of desertion, than the authorities reckoned. For self-advantage, in Australia the convict pirates Robert Stewart and John William Lancashire

112. Macquarie to Bathurst, 7 May 1814, *HRA*, Series 1, VIII, p. 250; *SG*, 23 April 1814, p. 2c.

113. *SG*, 23 April 1814, p. 2c.

114. Eugenio Pereira Salas, “Las primeras relaciones entre Chile y Australia”, *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia*, 53 (1955), pp. 22–24; C.W. Vennell, *The Brown Frontier: New Zealand 1806–1877* (Wellington, 1967), ch. 1. Unaware of these works when writing “Haul Away the Anchor Girls”, I recycled a chain of errors about the *Venus* piracy's end.

115. *HRA*, Series 3, III, p. 460.

116. Some engaged in multiple incidents – including George Lee, John Turwood, and Robert Stewart.

Table 4. *Tonnage, 27 ships and vessels seized by transported convicts, 1790–1829.*

16–50 tons	51–100 tons	101–200 tons	Tonnage unknown
17	—	4	6

*Sources:* Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

Table 5. *Tonnage, 17 failed ships and vessel seizures by transported convicts, 1790–1829.*

35–50 tons	51–100 tons	101–200 tons	201–300 tons	301–400 tons	401–500 tons	501–600 tons	Tonnage unknown
4	2	2	1	—	3	1	4

*Sources:* Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

concealed wartime naval desertions.<sup>117</sup> Among convict pirates a minority had significant seafaring skills. William Wales, a fine mathematician and notable scientific and practical navigator, taught Stewart astral navigation at the Royal Institute of Mathematics, London. In the navy, Stewart rose to sailing master's mate. Sailing masters were warrant officers in charge of the practical sailing of a warship. Necessarily, they and their mates understood astral navigation. Stewart certainly could have navigated the *Harrington*.

The twelve absconders from Hobart Prisoners' Barracks who seized the cutter *Ellen* off Cape Pilar on 16 January 1827 further reveal how and why convicts came together to seize a vessel. Among them, Alexander Stirling was a former collier's mate, John Clarke a mariner, and James Nelson a seaman. James Thompson (tried at Aberdeen, on the same date as Stirling)<sup>118</sup> was a rope maker, Henry Alderson a cooper, and William Ironmonger a carpenter – useful skills at sea. Five *Ellen* pirates arrived in Australia on the *Medway 2*, two on the *Medina*. Convict transport shipmates often sustained ongoing mutual loyalties. Alderson, Thompson, and Stirling were *Medway 2* men. Stirling's sea officer experience probably swayed his fellow pirates to elect him their commander.<sup>119</sup>

117. Duffield, "Identity Fraud", p. 390; Jordan, *Convict Theatres*, pp. 227–231.

118. National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh: AD 14/25/102, JC 26/1825/29, AD 14/25/73, JC 26/1825/34.

119. Other sources for this paragraph: *HTG*, 19 January 1827, p. 4a; 20 January 1827, p. 2b; 27 January 1827, pp. 2b and 3a–b; and 3 February 1827, pp. 2a and 4a; *CT&T*, 2 February 1827, p. 3d; *Monitor*, 3 February 1827, p. 5b.

Table 6. *Successful transported convict piratical seizures, 1790–1829.*

1790–1799		1800–1809		1810–1819		1820–1829	
Boats	Ships or vessels	Boats	Ships or vessels	Boats	Ships or vessels	Boats	Ships or vessels
6	1	10	6	18	7	21	13

82 craft seized: 55 boats; 27 ships or vessels

Sources: Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

Table 7. *Failed transported convict piratical seizures, 1790–1829.*

1790–1799		1800–1809		1810–1819		1820–1829	
Boats	Ships or vessels	Boats	Ships or vessels	Boats	Ships or vessels	Boats	Ships or vessels
1	—	—	7	2	4	2	6

22 craft, seizure failed: 5 boats; 17 ships or vessels

Sources: Too numerous to list here, but especially *HRA* and contemporaneous colonial newspapers.

Remember here that Herbert Stiles, leader of the *Speedwell* pirates, had prior sea experience *as a pirate*, a circumstance paralleled in Clare Anderson's study in the present volume.<sup>120</sup>

Few convict pirates underwent Supreme Court trials. Some were charged with other offences promising easier convictions. Magistrates summarily convicted and sentenced many pirates. Almost all penal stations had maritime locations necessitating boat and shipping services – and inviting inmate piracy. In the period 1806–1829 at least seven boats and four vessels were seized from penal stations, and two vessels were seized when bound for penal stations (see Tables 1 and 3).

Many more convict men and women escaped by stowing away on departing shipping or striking deals with short-handed ships' masters than by piracy, despite official countermeasures. The colonial authorities particularly hated United States ships' captains cutting deals with convict escapers, perhaps because their defiance of British authority revived painful memories of the American Revolution. However, some British captains behaved similarly, including a naval commander.<sup>121</sup> Other convicts

120. Clare Anderson, "The Age of Revolution in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and South China Sea: A Maritime Perspective", in the present volume.

121. He was William Chase, HMS *Samarang*. See Macquarie to Croker, 3 August 1813, *HRA*, Series 1, VIII, p. 32.

achieved sea escape through shady deals with free settlers. In 1814 the Calcutta-owned *Argo* left the Derwent without clearance – a serious breach of port regulations. The *Argo*'s master Captain Dixon, apparently in league with two Hobart merchants, Loane and Carr, received piratical assistance from twelve convict escapers.<sup>122</sup> This looks like a deal between big smugglers and their convict agents. Governor Macquarie wanted Dixon tried for piracy if caught, and regretted that inadequate evidence precluded Loane's or Carr's prosecution.<sup>123</sup> Dixon had been heavily fined on 15 May 1814 for assaulting and slandering Hobart's Naval Officer, James Gordon.<sup>124</sup> Collecting customs revenues and preventing smuggling were prominent among Gordon's duties. Convicts, it seems, might sometimes consort with their "betters" in smuggling and piracy.

An 1818 episode connected stowing away and piratical escape. Voyaging from Sydney via Cape Town to London in 1818, the 450-ton merchantman *Harriet* called unscheduled at Hobart for repairs and to land several convict stowaways.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, twenty-one convicts – fifteen men, five women, and one boy – left Hobart secreted on board the *Harriet*. An informer betrayed them before the *Harriet* reached Cape Town, alleging these stowaways, crewmen, and unspecified others planned "to take the vessel, after the cargo had been received on board at the Cape, and carry her into South America". Officers, passengers, and a military contingent (mostly invalids) kept constant guard till the vessel had anchored in Table Bay.<sup>126</sup> The male stowaways were returned to Sydney,<sup>127</sup> but not the women. Possibly the Cape Town authorities found their disposal too problematic for decisive action. Historically, many "successful" pirates eventually suffered sticky ends. Once taken by the Dutch, the *Young Lachlan*'s pirates mostly died in Batavia's noisome gaol. Five were repatriated to Hobart. Malcolm Campbell, the youngest, saved himself and ensured his comrades' execution by turning approver.<sup>128</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: CONVICT PIRACIES AND GEOGRAPHIES OF DISCONTENT

That convict pirates confidently put to sea hints at significant geographical knowledge among them. However, landfall experiences varied.

122. SG, 16 July 1814, p. 2a.

123. Macquarie to Davey, 27 May 1814, HRA, Series 3, II, p. 63.

124. SG, 4 June 1814, p. 2a.

125. HTG, 3 January 1818, p. 2b.

126. SG, 27 December 1817, p. 3a; 16 May 1818, p. 3b–c; Macquarie to Bathurst, 16 May 1818, HRA, Series 1, IX, pp. 792–793.

127. SG, 9 May 1818, p. 3b.

128. *Hobart Town Gazette & Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 27 January 1821, Supplement, p. 1b–c.

In a Dutch colony, incarceration in a pestilential gaol, with survivors eventually deported to British territory and the gallows, could ensue. Maori rulers sometimes conferred protection and other benefits. King Kamehameha I of Hawaii conscripted escaped convicts, castaways, and ship's deserters to crew his new navy and valued them.<sup>129</sup> Does the Indian and Pacific Ocean diaspora of convict sea-escapers slot these people into the ranks of those elite elements in the British Empire who wielded to their profit what Alan Lester has called the “new geographies of connection”?<sup>130</sup>

Australia's convict pirates fit awkwardly among Lester's colonial officials, officers, merchants, entrepreneurial missionaries, and commercial land-owners, etc. The convicts utilized geographies of *disconnection* from such superiors. Kerry Ward has shown that forced migrants in the Dutch East India Company's empire – exiles, convicts, and slaves – remained autonomous historical actors.<sup>131</sup> Likewise, historians have recently explored subaltern networks in the Indian Ocean region, through life stories of “soldiers, slaves, convicts, pirates, rebels, traders and travelers”.<sup>132</sup> For Ward, imperial “geographies of connection” faced challenges from subversive counterparts. Convict pirates too were not mere historical flotsam and jetsam but were articulated in surprising if (often) indirect ways to the complex maritime struggles of the age of revolution. Colonial Australia began as a project of the new geographies of connection. How fitting, then, that it should generate a convict piracy antithesis.

129. Salmond, *Between Worlds*, pp. 254, 263–264, 356–359, 466–467; Mary Louise Ormsby, “Charlotte Badger”, in W.H. Oliver (ed.), *A People's History* (Wellington, 1992), pp. 1–2. Isaac Land kindly communicated information on Kamehameha I's naval personnel.

130. Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001).

131. Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge, 2009).

132. For example, throughout Anderson, *The Indian Ocean*. The quote is from Anderson's introduction, p. 335.