

# Diary of a convict

17<sup>th</sup> July 1819

Recount - diary

Dear Diary,

Since my transportation to Australia, I have felt extreme exhaustion. One day melts into the next with little change to mark the passing of time. It feels as though every day I am punished by a strict routine of hard labour. I am overworked and tired. I am treated as a criminal, but deep in my heart I don't see myself as one. I was only transported here because I committed a petty crime. I was starving, broke and desperate to eat, so I did what anyone would do – I stole some food to survive! Because of this my fate has been sealed.

Lodging at the Hyde Park Barracks has been extremely regimented. Although I feel my seven-year sentence will never come to an end, I am trying my best to remain positive, work hard and stay out of trouble. I do this in the hopes of earning my ticket of leave so I can be free at last and rid of this torturous life. This can be challenging as I am surrounded by a motley crew of 'criminals' and it can be easy to get swept up in their schemes.

This morning I woke at sunrise with the ringing of the yard bell. I mustered up every ounce of energy I had to get out of my hammock and attend the roll call. It was difficult to get a decent sleep in this place. During the night, I could hear the desperate whimpers of the other convicts echo through the room. It was hard to ignore their cries because the rough canvas hammocks are strung so close together. So, for most of the long night, I lay awake in the dark with my anxious thoughts.

Once roll call had ended, breakfast was served in the mess hall. Every day we are given the same meal – a dish of dreaded hominy which is like porridge made from maize. It was not at all appetising, however, I ate it because I needed energy to be able to get on with the day's work. After breakfast, we assembled into our work gang in the yard and then we filed out through the gates to work sites across Sydney. My group was given the back-breaking task of working in the brickyards. We were chosen for this task as we had the necessary skills. Work today was tough, sweaty and overall strenuous and by the time it had ended I was absolutely starving.

At dusk, we returned to the barracks. When we arrived at the gate, we were searched for liquor and other contraband. John was caught with several items he shouldn't have had, so he will have to endure the dreadful treadmill punishment. Later, I was lucky enough to get a meal for dinner. I ate a very simple stew made of mutton and I was given a ration of bread. The bread was so hard, stale, and impossible to chew that I put it in my stew to make it somewhat edible. Following a muster, I was able to catch up with some of the friends I've made in this place. We huddled around the warm fire in the yard and smoked a pipe to pass the time. Soon after, at around 8pm, the yard bell rang, and we were sent to our wards for the night.

I am desperate for a good night's sleep. I will write again tomorrow.

*William*