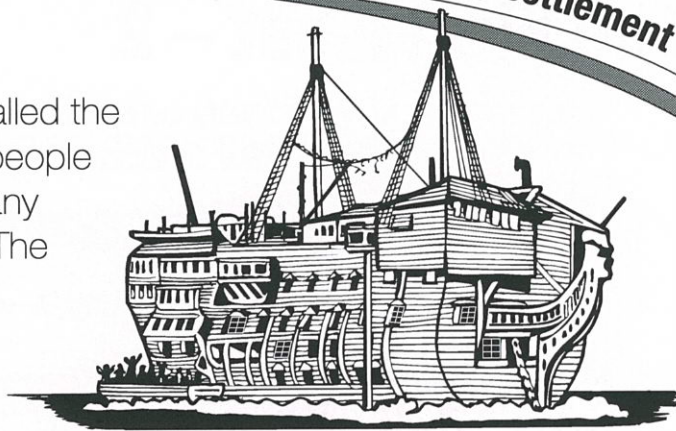


The First Fleet – 1

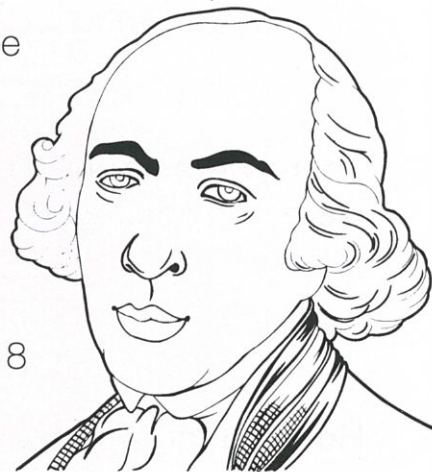
In the mid-eighteenth century (sometimes called the 1700s), there were many poor and hungry people living in the cities of Britain. The only way many of these people could survive was to steal. The government tried to stop people committing crimes by sentencing criminals to jail for many years for simple things, such as stealing a handkerchief, or even to death.



The jails became overcrowded, but it was too expensive to build more jails. The best idea to solve this problem seemed to be to send the prisoners, or convicts, to another country under British rule, and leave them there. This was called transportation.

At first convicts were transported to America. However, after a war with America the British could no longer send convicts there, and they needed to find somewhere else to put the convicts. For a while they put convicts in old ships called 'hulks', but these, too, soon became overcrowded and the conditions were very bad. The British needed another plan.

When Captain James Cook discovered 'New South Wales' (Australia) in 1770, he told the British government it would be a good place for a settlement. So it was decided to send convicts there, to solve the problem of overcrowding and to start a new colony for Britain. Captain Arthur Phillip was put in charge taking 736 convicts to 'New South Wales' and starting the new colony there. In all, two warships, six convict transports and three supply ships left England in May 1787, and arrived at Botany Bay between 18 and 20 January 1788. This fleet of ships is called the First Fleet.



Soon after arriving in Botany Bay, Captain Phillip decided it wasn't a good place for a settlement. There was a lack of fresh water, the bay was unsafe for the ships and the soil was poor for crop growing. So they sailed north, arriving at Port Jackson on 26 January 1788. This day is celebrated every year as Australia Day.

The British thought the land belonged to no-one. They didn't understand that the land already belonged to the Aboriginal Australians, who had been living there for over 40 000 years. The Aboriginal Australian people were at first willing to share food and knowledge about the land with the British settlers. Soon, though, they began to see them as invaders, who were robbing them of their hunting and fishing grounds and some Aboriginal Australians began to fight to resist the British invasion.