

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4436

Bryant, Mary

(1765 -)

Born 1 January, 1765, England

Occupation Convict

Summary

Mary Bryant was a Cornish-born daughter of a fisherman who became involved in petty theft after moving to Plymouth. In 1787 she was convicted for stealing a silk bonnet, jewellery, and a few coins and sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia. In May 1787 she was sent as a prisoner with the First Fleet aboard the ship *Charlotte*.

In transit, Mary became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter whom she named Charlotte, after the ship they sailed on. She met convict William Bryant on the way to Australia, and the two were married on 10 February 1788, just after arrival in the colony. They later had a son together, Emmanuel.

It was only a matter of months before Mary, William and several other men decided to attempt an escape. Conditions were harsh and desperate measures were taken. On 28 March 1791, they stole a boat from the Governor and set out for Timor, north of Australia, where there were many Dutch colonial settlements were.

In an extraordinary tale of survival, all the escapees (including Mary's two small children) made it to Coupang on Timor Island, arriving there on June 5, 1791, a distance of over 5000 difficult and dangerous kilometres.

For a short while, the group was able to convince the Dutch authorities that they were survivors from a shipwreck, but once the truth was known they were locked up and sent to Batavia (current day Jakarta). Emmanuel and William died after contracting a disease, along with three other escapees. Mary and her daughter Charlotte were sent back to England, but Charlotte died on the long voyage.

After arriving back in England in June 1792, Mary was sent to Newgate Prison to await trial for her crimes. She expected that she would be sentenced to death, but instead, Mary's story captured the attention of the media of the time. She became a celebrity and was officially pardoned and discharged in May 1793. She then returned to her family in Cornwall.

Published resources

Resource Section

Bryant, Mary (b.1765), Currey, C. H., 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010157b.htm>

Book

The Transportation, Escape and Pardoning of Mary Bryant, Currey, C.H., 1963

Boswell and the girl from Botany Bay, Pottle, Frederick A, 1938

Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia, Summers, Anne, 1975

Resource

First Fleet Online, Wills, Sandra and Bunnett, Adair, 1999,
<http://firstfleet.uow.edu.au/index.html>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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