
SAVING BABY HENRY

John Simpson's Amazing Story



DR CHARLES MARGERISON

Dedication

This is an amazing story based on the lives of real people. I discovered it during a discussion with Dr Jim Kable, a good friend in Australia. We met regularly at professional meetings.

After one of them, we were talking about our family histories. To my surprise, Jim said, 'I come from a convict family.' By that, he meant his ancestors had been sent as convicts from England to New South Wales, Australia, in 1788.

I asked him what information he had been able to discover. He referred to specific documents and dates in official Government records. He mentioned that his great grandparents, three times removed, Henry Kable and Susannah Holmes had a child while in an English prison. When the transportation was taking place, the unmarried mother, Susannah Holmes, was told by the captain she could not take the baby on board the ship with her.

This story tells how the baby's life was saved by John Simpson, a jailer, who had transported Susannah to the port. Against all the odds, he overturned the decision by gaining permission from Lord Sydney, after whom the city of Sydney is named.

To verify the details, I visited Norwich Castle Prison in England, where the story began. I also visited the village of Surlingham, where Susannah was born, and Thetford, where she was tried and convicted. In Australia, I visited the places where the Kable family lived in Sydney and Windsor. In addition, I researched the records and discovered the letters and documents which are included in this book.

However, I could not find any public recognition or monument to John Simpson. He changed history both in England and Australia. I have, therefore, told his remarkable story as if I had interviewed him. The facts are based on the records. I have linked these in a novel form, as I imagine the events could have unfolded.

I hope you find this story of character, reflecting bravery, courage and determination, as fascinating as I have. The lessons of what one person can do to help others in need can inspire students as well as adults. John Simpson's achievements deserve to be reflected in a film.

For reference, the Kable family name was spelled in different ways in various documents. I have used the spelling that the family adopted in New South Wales.

I dedicate this book to my friend Jim Kable.

Charles Margerison

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1. The Assignment

Early October 1786

As soon as my boss, the Governor of Norwich Castle Prison, told me to take three women prisoners to Plymouth, I knew there would be trouble. But what could I say? If I refused, I would probably lose my job as a jailer.

Having an injury to my back from a previous job on a farm meant that I needed work that did not involve hard manual labour. As I did not have special skills and qualifications, it was difficult to find such work. Most importantly, I needed a regular income to pay my bills.

Therefore, I did not argue when the prison Governor gave me the assignment. However, what was about to happen would change the course of history in two lands. What I have to say may shock and surprise you, even though the events happened a long time ago. The effects in England and New South Wales, Australia still continue.

I am John Simpson and the facts that I relate are correct. They are based on Court documents and the sentences given to those found guilty. The words in italics in the letters that I display are those written by those originally involved. The dates of the key events are accurate.

In short, what I describe here did happen, albeit I have changed the names of people who helped me for the sake of privacy.

Why should you be interested in this story? The answer is that one day, you may have to make similar life-or-death decisions. If so, you can learn from my efforts to reunite a baby with his parents.

If that is of interest, please join the journey that changed many lives. These are my memories of baby Henry and those who helped us.

On the day of departure, I was worried. It was a cold October morning in 1786. An easterly wind cut across the open ground as I walked to the prison. Taking three women prisoners from Norwich in the east of England to Plymouth in the far southwest was going to be a major challenge. It became more complicated when I discovered, shortly before departure, that one of the women had an eight-month-old son with her.

As I entered the prison, I saw the horse and cart being prepared for the journey. Previously, I had used it only for local jobs. In wintry weather, the journey of over 300 miles would take at least a week if all went well.

Each evening, I would have to find an inn that would provide a place for us to sleep and a stable for the horse. The rain was turning to sleet.

Should I tell the Governor my job was a jailer, not travel service?

No, he would just say do it or tell me to hand in my keys. The Governor was standing at the door of his office with papers in his hand.

'Here is the letter from Lord Sydney's office in London, which will serve as your letter of authority. Also, here is a list of the prisoners with a record of their sentences from the Court. You need to give these documents to Captain Bradley of the Dunkirk ship in Plymouth,' he said.

I looked at the main document which read:

I am commanded to signify to you His Majesty's Pleasure that you receive on board the ship Dunkirk three female convicts which will be sent to you from the gaol at Norwich.

Lord Sydney.

'Also, here is enough money to pay for food and shelter. Bring back the change,' he said sternly.

'You have been chosen for this assignment for two reasons. First, you are not married and free to travel. Secondly, it is a test of your abilities, as you have the potential for promotion.' He turned and went back into his office.

I looked at the names.

Elizabeth Pulley was a known troublemaker, as she had previously been in prison for theft. This time, she was serving a seven-year sentence.

Anne Turner was also a thief with a long list of offences against her name. She was sentenced to seven years in jail.

The third name, Susannah Holmes, surprised me. She had been in Norwich Castle Prison over the last three years since her arrest in 1783 when she was 19. She was now about 22 years old.

On the 19th of March 1784, at the Thetford Court, Judge Nares found her guilty of stealing. Death by hanging was the sentence he pronounced. Because she was under 20 years of age at that time, he commuted the sentence to 14 years in jail. Early in 1786, Susannah gave birth to a son in prison. Why were Lord Sydney and his officials deporting a mother and her baby who was less than a year old?

Maybe the officials in London did not know that she had a child!

On entering the prison, the smell hit me stronger than the biting wind outside. I shouted the names of the women. Out of the gloom, they slowly appeared.

Of course, they protested loudly when I told them they were going to a prison boat at Plymouth. But, like me, they had no choice. One of the other jailers ensured they had leg irons that enabled them to walk, but they were too short for them to run.

However, I felt sorry for Susannah Holmes as she clutched her baby.

A young man came forward dressed in ragged clothes. 'I am Henry Kable, the father of the baby,' he said.

'I want to go with Susannah and my son,' he stated in a determined voice.

'You are not on the list,' I told him.

'Put me on the list,' he insisted.

'I do not have the authority to do so. You need to ask the Governor to send a request to Lord Sydney in London. He makes those decisions,' I advised.

Susannah was holding Henry's hand tight, with her baby in the other arm. She was crying profusely. The atmosphere was tense. What should I do?

'Look, I have to leave in fifteen minutes,' I stressed. 'Although it is against my orders, I will leave you to have some time together.'

I turned and walked to the door of the prison. It gave me time to check that the horse and cart were ready. 'Take those two convict women and chain them to the cart,' I told the other jailer.

The women shouted out that they wanted to see their family members to say goodbye. It was all a waste of time. A few days before, the Governor had told me he had instructions to keep the matter quiet.

I returned inside the jail. Susannah and Kable were in a corner, embracing each other. Surely, in the name of mercy, the officials in London could keep the parents and child together.

'Time to go,' I said, hoping that there would be no resistance.

Kable came forward. 'Mr Simpson, I have something important to tell you. Susannah and I have had a talk. I have asked her to marry me, and she has agreed. I know that convicts, under English law, are not allowed to marry. But we want you to know that we consider ourselves married.'

'I understand what you say,' I replied, although I knew it would make no difference.

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'Please let me know, on your return, where you have taken Susannah,' he said. 'I will not rest until I find her. I ask that you treat her kindly and do your very best to protect her and my son.'

I was taken aback by his calmness, clarity and determination.

'I give you my word of honour that I will do my very best,' I replied.

'Thank you,' said Kable, and he kissed Susannah once more. He took his son and carried the baby to the door as Susannah, still crying, picked up her few belongings.

The Governor was waiting to supervise the departure. I had always found him to be a man who followed the rules but in a fair way. He handed me a rough map.

'You can go due south to London and then westwards or go across country via Oxford and Cambridge. I suggest the latter. Either way, the distance is over 300 miles. If you can travel 30 miles a day, it will take about ten days. In case you have problems and need to change the horse on the way, here is some extra money.' He passed me a leather pouch.

As he was doing so, Kable was handing his son to Susannah. He turned to the Governor.

'Sir, this is my son Henry. Wherever you are sending him and Susannah, please arrange to send me. We are a family, and it is my responsibility to protect and care for them.'

The Governor did not reply, but I could see he had understood. However, would he bother to make an application to Lord Sydney?

The two women prisoners helped Susannah onto the cart and, at the same time, shouted abuse at the Governor.

'A curse be upon you,' yelled Anne Turner.

'You should be ashamed to send this poor child into the wilderness,' scolded Elizabeth Pulley.

The Governor turned and walked away. He had done his duty. Now, it was my job to carry out his orders.

2. The Journey

October 1786

The prisoners had leg irons around their ankles. They were chained to the cart to stop them from jumping off.

I let the horse know it was time to go. He snorted as we set forth into the morning rain and intermittent sleet. The cart had a makeshift cover, but it did not stop everyone from getting wet.

We made good progress during the morning. After about three hours, I stopped at a tavern to get some food and drink for us all. The horse needed a rest and enjoyed a drink from the river.

After about an hour, we continued on. The road had been widened and developed to support the stagecoach service between the major towns. However, there were many potholes. I did my best to avoid them, but it was still a bumpy ride.

The clouds swept by at a fast pace as the wind from the east increased. The last leaves of autumn ran alongside us on both sides of the road as if in a race. Beyond were hedgerows and fields.

Every couple of miles, we passed a hamlet where farm workers lived in small cottages. An advantage of being on a road for stagecoaches was that we could stop at coaching inns to get some soup and use their rather basic toilets.

However, I realised we could not stay the night, as passengers on the stagecoaches had booked their rooms in advance. Also, the landlords did not want convicts in chains and filthy clothes on their premises.

The rain had cleared away as we arrived near Thetford, a small village. I went to a farm and asked the farmer if we could stay overnight in his barn. As soon as I said he would be paid, he agreed. He also produced some vegetable soup, which warmed us up.

The next morning, the farmer brought us some drinks and bread. I paid him, and we set off. The sun came out about noon, but the east wind meant the temperature was close to freezing. By four o'clock, we arrived near Cambridge. It was getting dark, so I went to a local inn to find somewhere to stay. 'Can you provide me with a place for three women prisoners and a small baby?' I asked.

'We are a pub with a couple of rooms, not a jail,' replied the innkeeper.

'I am on Government business and can pay you well,' I replied.

That changed his attitude. Within half an hour, he provided three rough mattresses and covers which were placed in the stables. The three women were pleased to get undercover. It had been a hard day, travelling over rough roads.

I put the horse at one end with some hay and water.

The steam from his body gave the cold stable a little warmth. Next, I asked the innkeeper, who said his name was Sam Lomas, to provide the women with some ale and food.

I then went to my small room at the rear of the inn. It had a creaky bed and an old chair on which I tried to dry off my clothes. After a couple of ales and a cold pie for dinner, I went to sleep.

Early the next morning, on entering the stable, I expected the women to abuse me for leaving them in there overnight. Instead, I found them helping Susannah look after her son.

Sam, the innkeeper, also came in. 'Should I prepare breakfast just for you, or for the women as well?' he asked.

'We all need the best breakfast you can provide,' I said with a smile. 'Can you ensure there is an egg for everyone, plus bread and ale? We have a long journey ahead,' I added.

I asked Elizabeth Pulley to help him carry it, and soon, we had our breakfast on a makeshift table made from a leftover crate. No one said much, as we all knew the difficult situation facing us.

Sam showed the women a ramshackle toilet behind the stable and then returned to the inn. A few minutes later, he appeared with a sack.

'I know it will be hard to find food on your journey as it is Sunday. I have put a few potatoes, carrots and some berries in the sack. It is the best I can do.'

I thanked him. Elizabeth picked up the sack and gave him a kiss. 'You are a gentleman!' she declared, and the two other women clapped. We all appreciated his kindness.

Sam suggested that I travel on the old coach road from Cambridge to Oxford. 'It is a journey of about 70 miles. When you get there, ask for The Partridge. It is a pub not far from the centre. My cousin Ben Lomas is in charge. Tell him that Sam sends his best wishes, and say that I would like him to find you a place to stay.'

I paid what he asked and thanked him for his help.

Then, we were on our way. The road was better than the one from Norwich. As it was Sunday, there were few travellers. We passed many villages and, after about three hours, arrived at a place called Flitwick. We all needed time to rest. I took the horse for a drink at a small river.

When I returned, Susannah was breastfeeding her son. The other two women had made lunch from the food Sam had provided. We sat under a tree and shared what we had equally.

‘Why did you become a jailer?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘I used to work on a farm,’ I replied. ‘However, I injured my back and was not able to do the heavy lifting and digging. One of my relatives, who worked at the prison, put in a good word for me. I went to see the Governor, and he gave me the job.’

‘How long have you worked there?’ asked Anne.

‘This is my fifth year, but it is the first time I have ever been asked to transport prisoners on a long journey like this,’ I noted.

‘I bet you are glad that you have well-behaved girls like us,’ cackled Elizabeth. We all laughed.

Although they were friendly, I knew that if they did not have their leg irons, which were ankle chains, they would escape at the first opportunity.

The afternoon was bright, although cool. As the light began to fade, I looked for another farm near Luton. Again, the farmer let us stay in his barn and provided us with food once I told him he would be paid. We all slept very well after a tiring day.

The next morning, it began to rain as we started on our journey once again. After a couple of hours, we stopped to rest before continuing on.

Eventually, I could see some buildings in the distance. Oxford University colleges, I assumed. We pressed on before it became too dark. After talking to a couple of people in the city, I soon found The Partridge.

It was a larger pub than the other one. I went inside and asked for Ben Lomas.

‘You are talking to him,’ said the tall man behind the bar. I introduced myself and passed on the message from his cousin Sam.

‘Well, that is the first time I’ve heard from him in over a year. We last met at my daughter’s wedding.’

He offered me a glass of ale. Before drinking it, I asked if he could provide us with accommodation in the stables or inside the pub. 'I have three convict women and a baby on the cart,' I explained.

'As it is Tuesday night, we are not busy,' said Ben. 'If you can assure me the convicts will not cause trouble, I could make a room available for them. It will be crowded, but better than the stable. They can also get washed.'

I told him there would be no trouble and rushed out to tell the women. They were delighted to be undercover for the night. Ben arranged for food and ale.

He also brought some dry clothes for the prisoners. 'These were brought in for a charity sale, so best that we make good use of them,' he said.

I thanked him profusely, as I was concerned the women in damp clothes could become ill. That would make my task even more difficult. I had to deliver three convicts without any excuses to Plymouth, otherwise I would be in trouble.

I slept in the room next to the women. The only sound I heard was Henry's crying while waiting to be fed by his mother. If only he understood what was happening in his young life.

The following day, I entered the bar, and a lady was cleaning.

'Hello, I'm Alice,' she announced. 'I am Ben's wife. He has asked me to give you a good breakfast.'

I told the three women to prepare a space in their room for a meal. A few minutes later, they were amazed to each receive porridge, sausages and eggs.

'This is better than being in prison,' said Susannah, and everyone laughed. But that was the last meal we had for the day. The weather was cold, the sky was dark, and a nasty wind cut through our flimsy clothing. Sam had told me, 'Keep on the road to Bath. It is an old Roman city. There will be a number of places you can stay.'

However, the road was hilly, and I could see our horse was tiring. Therefore, I stopped at another farm and was pleased to get a warm welcome.

'It is hard to make a living during the winter, so we are pleased to help you,' said Ben Barnes, the farmer. I paid him, and he brought us bowls of hot soup.

The next day, thanks to our horse, who I called Ned, we made good time and arrived in Bath. It was certainly an impressive place, with many grand buildings. But I found it hard to find any innkeeper who would let us stay. No one wanted prisoners mixing with their high-paying guests.

One of them suggested that I go to a church and see if a priest would help. Easier said than done, as there was no one at the first three churches. Eventually, I went to a building that had a sign outside that read: *Society of Friends*. I had heard they were a religious sect renowned for their charity.

I knocked on the door, and a man opened it. 'Hello, I am John Simpson. I wonder if you can help me. I need a place where I and my three passengers can stay for the night. They are all prisoners from Norwich Castle Prison, and the Governor has told me to take them to Plymouth. None of the local innkeepers will allow us to stay.'

I could see the look of surprise on his face. 'Come in, I am George Hain,' he said. 'This is most unusual. Do you have any documents to confirm what you say?'

I showed him the letter with Lord Sydney's name on it. 'Well, you have been given a major responsibility from the highest level in the land,' he said, stroking his chin as if in deep thought.

'Yes,' I replied, 'but I am worried the women will die if left outside in the freezing night cold.'

George looked at me and said, 'Maybe one of the friends in our Society can help. We are called Quakers and try to help those in need.'

My spirits rose. I was aware the women were shivering outside, and I hoped I could find somewhere to stay.

'I have a wealthy friend, a banker, who may provide you with shelter for the night,' he said optimistically. 'I will get my horse. Follow me, it is about fifteen minutes from here.'

As it was getting dark, we arrived at a large mansion house on an estate. A servant appeared and took the horses to the stables. Another servant took us to the rear of the house, where there were a couple of cottages. George went inside the mansion and returned a few minutes later.

'The master says you can stay here overnight,' said George. 'The servants will bring you some food and clothes.'

It all seemed like a beautiful dream. Who was the master? Why was he being so kind to strangers?

After a substantial meal that included fresh meat, a luxury not seen in prison, everyone slept soundly.

The next morning, a servant knocked on the door of my comfortable cottage. 'The master wants to meet you,' she said.

I followed her into the mansion and was greeted by a tall, well-dressed gentleman.

'Hello, I am Sir Richard Markham, the owner of this estate. George has told me that you are on Government business and have orders from Lord Sydney. He is a friend of mine. Also, I welcome you on behalf of our Society of Friends. We are known as the Quakers.'

'Thank you for your kind hospitality, sir,' I replied. 'It is much appreciated, as I was having difficulty finding accommodation for the women.'

Although he had not asked for it, I handed him my letter of authority, given to me by the Norwich Castle Prison Governor, and the letter from Lord Sydney.

'One of the prisoners has her young son with her. She has been forcibly separated from the father, who is another prisoner at Norwich.'

'That is distressing,' commented Sir Richard. To my surprise, he said, 'I want to meet the mother and the other prisoners.'

We returned to the cottages, and the three women appeared in clean clothes supplied by the servants. I could see they were nervous, wondering what would happen. Sir Richard broke the ice and spoke in a friendly way.

'I am Sir Richard Markham. I am pleased to welcome you to my home and trust that my servants have treated you well. I understand from Mr Simpson that you have all been convicted of crimes. As a Quaker, I believe that we can all change and live a good, honest life once we come to know the Almighty. I pray that you will do so.'

Susannah stepped forward and said, 'Thank you, sir, for your kindness. My child, Henry, is innocent. I would be grateful if you would bestow a blessing upon him.'

Sir Richard asked a servant to bring the baby to him and then offered a prayer.

'I wish you all well, wherever you may go, and remember to pray,' he concluded.

As I walked back to the big house with Sir Richard, he asked why the baby was being sent to the prison hulk in Plymouth.

'I do not know, Sir. My guess is that Lord Sydney and his officials had no knowledge that Susannah had given birth while in prison.'

Sir Richard called a servant and asked her to bring him a quill and paper. 'What is the name of the father and mother?' he asked.

'Henry Kable and Susannah Holmes,' I told him.

He wrote a note, and then signed and sealed it. On the front, he had written: *For the attention of Lord Sydney.*

‘Please give this to your Governor or his superior. It can be sent to Lord Sydney. If it arrives in time, it may help the child to see his father again.’

I put the note in my pocket. Once again, we were on our way into the unknown. Thanks to Sir Richard, we had food for the journey and also a better cover for the women on the cart.

The journey to Exeter, our next stop, was through beautiful, rugged countryside. We passed small villages on the way, where we stopped to rest the horse.

However, it was a long and winding road. As darkness closed in, I had to make a decision. We needed somewhere to stay for the night, but there were no pubs or inns nearby.

In the distance, I noticed a small church on a hill and hoped the priest, or parson, would let us stay there. A few minutes later, we arrived. I went to the entrance and found the door was unlocked. There was no one inside.

Should I make this our home for the night? After all, a church is a sanctuary. Although not a religious man, I felt that God would want to provide shelter to those in need, even for convicts. So, I told the women to go inside the church and select an area where we could sleep. I tethered the horse near a stream so it could have a drink and chew the grass. As I entered the church, I noticed Susannah and her baby at the altar, where she was in prayer.

The women had made rough beds on the stone floor, and there was one for me also. ‘I hope you do not snore in your sleep, Mr Simpson,’ shouted Elizabeth Pulley and her laugh echoed all around.

Before the light faded, we had a meal from the food given to us by Sir Richard. We talked about the previous evening. Anne Turner said, ‘Although I’m not religious, if I ever get converted, I’ll become a Quaker.’

Elizabeth Pulley leant forward and asked quietly, ‘Are you married, Mr Simpson?’

‘No, I’m not,’ I replied, feeling uneasy as I did so.

‘Why?’ asked Susannah, ‘You’re a kind and caring man.’

‘I was engaged to be married about five years ago, but my girlfriend took very ill and died,’ I replied, as I remembered the dreadful days.

'Oh, I am sorry. I should not have asked about your personal life,' said Elizabeth. Susannah put her hand on my shoulder to show her support.

'So, will you never marry, Mr Simpson?' asked Anne Turner.

'I don't know,' I reflected. 'Losing someone precious in my life has made me reluctant to have another close relationship.'

'I know what you mean after what happened at the jail,' added Susannah, and she started to cry.

Soon, it was pitch black. The women seemed to sleep well, but I did not. I tossed and turned on the stone floor, many thoughts going through my mind. I was now thirty years old. What was I doing with my life?

The questions the women had asked me about why I had taken a job as a jailer and about my personal life worried me. Should I be following other people's orders? Or should I follow the will of the Almighty?

I woke up sweating in the middle of the night, even though it was cold outside. The wind was the only sound, yet in my head, a voice was speaking to me. 'Do what is right!'

The kindness of George Hain and Sir Richard Markham, plus the help I had received from the two innkeepers and the farmers, played on my mind. They had done what was right.

I also realised that I had established a bond of sorts with the women. They were my companions on a risky journey that had been dictated by others. I was their leader and protector. We were all people thrown together, trying to make the best of stupid decisions made by those we did not know.

I fell back to sleep and only woke up when I heard young Henry crying for his morning feed. It made me realise our food supplies would again run low. We had a few pieces of bread and some cheese left for breakfast.

So, I got up and went outside in the early morning light and walked around the church. I noticed there was a well. Turning the wheel, I was delighted to find it worked. I brought a bucket full of water to the surface, fresh enough to drink.

As I walked back into the church, the women were preparing our breakfast. 'I have found some water for us to drink,' I said proudly. Suddenly, our morning meal felt better.

Before leaving, Susannah went to the church altar again and knelt in prayer. Something inside told me to join her. I did so, and as I knelt, I heard the words, 'Do what is right.'

Within the hour, we were moving towards Exeter. The rain had stopped. The clip-clop of the horse measured out the miles as we passed villages on our way.

It was market day in the town, so I stopped at a field near the centre. It was a good chance to buy some food. I unchained Susannah's leg irons and asked her if she and Henry would join me. It was a risk, but I felt it was the right thing to do. The other two women were left chained to guard the cart. As we walked around the market, Susannah noticed a trader selling soap and suggested that I buy some to help her wash the baby. 'Good thinking,' I said.

'It would be helpful to buy some ointment, made from wild berries and plants, to help heal the sores created by the leg irons,' she added.

Her advice was proving most useful, and I bought a good quantity. We also bought as many vegetables, potatoes and loaves of bread as we could carry. Before returning, we also had a drink of local ale from a trader, who said he had brewed it himself.

The other women were pleased to see us and soon prepared our lunch. They put the ointment on their legs, and Susannah washed Henry at a local fountain. Then, we were on our way towards Plymouth. The road became worse as we passed the rugged beauty of Dartmoor.

As it was getting dark, I decided we would look for another church. Fortunately, we found one in a village a few miles from Plymouth. Again, the door was unlocked, and we settled in for the night.

I slept better, as I kept repeating to myself, 'Do what is right.'

In the morning, I noticed all three women went to the altar and knelt in prayer. As they finished, Anne Turner said to me, 'I still don't believe in religion, but I prayed for the baby. He does not deserve to be punished like us.'

Elizabeth Pulley added, 'You are right, Anne. It is wicked to treat a child like a convict.' Then, she turned to me and said, 'Mr Simpson, do your best to help Susannah and her baby.'

3. The Decisions

17th October 1786

As we left the church, rain started to fall. A cold wind came from the direction of the Tamar River. That was where I had been told to take the women. Two hours later, we arrived. The port at Plymouth was busy. I went to the dock office and asked to speak to the captain of the Dunkirk.

‘That is the hulk for women convicts,’ replied the clerk. ‘Captain Bradley is in charge, and he will visit the office later this morning to take charge of new prisoners.’

An hour later, a large, burly man with a big beard arrived and came over to talk with me. ‘I am Captain Bradley. How many convicts do you have?’ he asked gruffly.

‘Three women from Norwich Castle Prison, sir. Here are the papers,’ I added.

As he read the names and their convictions, I said, ‘The convict Holmes has her baby son, Henry, with her.’

Bradley’s face went from a frown to red anger. ‘There is no mention of a child in these papers. I am the captain of a prison ship, not a nursery for children. There is no way that I can take a child on board the Dunkirk. It is a hell hole for convicts.’

He turned to the dock clerk. ‘I am signing the papers to say I have taken control of three women from Norwich. Bring them here so I can have them rowed out to the Dunkirk hulk.’

I went with the dock clerk to collect the women. As they left the cart, I said to Susannah, ‘The captain is refusing to take your son on board the boat.’

She burst out crying and said, ‘I am not going without him. He is all I have left.’

The other two prisoners heard us. They immediately started shouting and swearing at Captain Bradley, who had come over to investigate the noise.

‘Convicts have no rights,’ he shouted. ‘I am the captain of the vessel on which you will be imprisoned. I am only authorised to take convicts onboard. This baby is not a convict.’

Susannah fell to the floor in a faint. I rushed forward to take hold of young Henry. As I did so, Captain Bradley ordered his men to handcuff the women and march them to the quayside, where sailors waited to row the women out to the decaying Dunkirk boat lying at anchor in the harbour.

He turned to me and shouted, 'Tell the Governor of your prison not to send any more bastard children.' He strode away after his crew, who were forcing the women to board.

Henry, hearing the commotion, began to cry. I walked to the dock gate, aghast at the cruelty that I had just witnessed.

However, I now had a big problem. I was literally left holding someone else's baby. As the icy cold air hit me, I felt numb and wondered what to do. At the same time, a voice in my head said, 'Do what is right.'

I needed to get away from the port. It was a scene of human misery. Women were chained up on a decommissioned boat with limited space, food, exercise and toilet facilities. I knew the Norwich Castle Prison was bad, but this was worse.

Although the three women had committed crimes, I had come to know them as human beings. The prison system was harsh. So was the journey we had made together.

We had shared common experiences, except they were in chains, and I was not.

The women had been my companions in difficult situations. We had survived against the odds and shared our feelings about the ups and downs on our way. Now, they were locked below decks on a boat, from which there was no escape.

At least I was free, albeit with someone else's baby. I needed to find a place to stay. A place where I could work out what to do next.

I took baby Henry and placed him on my lap as the horse clip-clopped towards the city. I found a tavern and went inside. It was lunchtime, and locals had come in for a drink and some food. A middle-aged woman came over.

'I see you are getting your son used to the pub early in his life,' she said with a laugh.

'He's not my son,' I replied, even though I felt ownership.

'Are you baby minding or what?' asked a lady, who clearly began to have suspicions. I explained the story of my journey from Norwich and the horrendous events at the port. The lady sat down beside me and asked to hold young Henry.

'I'm shocked,' she said. 'This young lad has been made an orphan. It is cruel.'

'I'm not sure what to do for the best,' I reflected. 'It is 300 miles back to Norwich. Even if I make it, what future is there for the boy without his mother?'

Henry started to cry, almost as if he knew what I had said. The lady held him close and comforted him.

‘My name is Mary,’ she said. ‘My husband is in charge of the inn. I will ask him to find you a room for the night while we think over what to do.’ She handed Henry back to me. I sipped my ale as he went to sleep. My mind was full of worry. I had not bargained for this.

A few minutes later, a woman in her late twenties came over. ‘Hello, I am Susan, Mary’s daughter. Is there anything I can do to help?’

‘Good to meet you, and thanks,’ I replied. ‘Henry has not been fed since his mother breastfed him this morning. Also, he is starting to smell and needs to be cleaned up.’

‘Feeding him could be a problem,’ she said with a frown. ‘When was he born?’ she asked.

‘I do not have any birth records, but I think it was probably sometime in February,’ I estimated.

‘As we are now in October, that means Henry could be eight months old,’ she summarised. ‘Therefore, we could wean him on to solid food. I have two of my own children, and that is about the age when they made the change,’ she added.

‘Given that his mother will no longer be able to feed him, I would appreciate it if you could try,’ I replied, feeling relieved with her practical support. Susan took baby Henry and went to a room at the rear of the tavern.

Her mother returned a few minutes later.

‘I have spoken with my daughter, and she will see if Henry can swallow some bread soaked in milk. It will take a couple of days to see if that works. So, I have asked my husband to book you a room for two nights if you wish,’ she declared, as one accustomed to taking charge of family matters.

‘Thank you. That is very kind,’ I said, as a tear appeared in my eye. The stress of everything that had happened was beginning to tell.

‘Best if you go to your room and have a rest,’ suggested Mary. ‘Here is the key. We’ll take good care of young Henry.’

I opened the door of a comfortable room, lay on the bed and quickly fell asleep. When I woke up, darkness had descended. I went into the bar, which was lit by candles, and asked for an ale.

‘Hello, I am Jack Gale, the tavern owner and Mary’s husband,’ announced the man behind the bar. ‘You have certainly caused a stir. My wife and daughter were having arguments until you arrived.’

Now, they are too busy looking after little Henry, and they are all getting along well,' he laughed heartedly.

'My name is John Simpson,' I told him. 'Until a few days ago, I was a turnkey jailer at Norwich Castle Prison. Now, I find myself in a difficult situation,' I added. As there were few clients in the tavern, we talked.

He asked me about my work in the prison. Suddenly, he asked, 'What will you do with young Henry?'

It is when you are posed with a difficult question, that you need to think quickly and clearly. I could have said that I did not know, but that was no answer. A decision had to be made.

'As I see it, there are two choices,' I reflected. 'I can return the child to Norwich, to see if any relatives will take him in. His father is a prisoner in the jail and can let me know who to contact. The second option is to get official papers so that young Henry can travel with his mother.'

'How would you do that?' asked Jack.

'The only people who can authorise travel papers are the Government officials in London,' I indicated.

'That would be a bold move,' responded Jack. 'Those upper-class bigwigs don't talk to working-class people like you and me. Do you honestly think they would give you even five minutes of their time?' he asked with doubt.

'If you never ask, you never get,' I replied. As I said that, I knew I had made up my mind.

I remembered that baby Henry's father had told me he already considered himself married to Susannah, and he would find her when he was released. He had five years of his sentence to complete and anything could happen in that time. Why not try to speed up the process and have them reunited? That was the right thing to do.

'I am going to London to talk with those big wigs,' I said to Jack. 'For the child's sake, I will try and have him reunited with his parents.'

'Best of luck,' replied Jack as he raised his eyes upward. He clearly did not think the plan would work.

After having a nice dinner cooked by Mary, I asked if young Henry had eaten any food.

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'He has made a good effort,' she replied. 'I suggest you leave him with me and Susan for the night. We will take turns to feed him.'

I thanked her and expressed my relief, as I had no experience of weaning a child onto solid food.

4. Tavern Friends

October 1786

I woke up early and went for a walk around Plymouth. When I returned, Mary was busy cooking breakfast. Susan was holding Henry, feeding him some bread dipped in milk. 'Give him a couple of days, and he will be able to take soup and other easy-to-eat foods,' she summarised.

'That is good to know,' I responded, 'and thanks for helping him.'

Jack walked in and came over to the table where I was sitting.

'Good morning. I can see little Henry, the new addition to our family, is enjoying himself.' He laughed, as he had done the previous evening, seeing the humour in a difficult situation. 'What about yourself, John? Have you thought more about your plans?'

'Yes, I will definitely go to London. The question is how? It will be difficult to drive the horse and cart and look after the boy at the same time,' I reflected.

'No, I would not advise that,' replied Jack quickly. 'Why not go in style on the stagecoach? You will then be assured of overnight accommodation at inns along the way.'

I thought it over. Would I have enough money?

Jack continued, 'You could sell that horse and cart to pay for the journey. After all, if the horse goes lame or takes ill, or the cart breaks down, they will be expensive to replace.'

'You're right, Jack. The risk of going alone is too high. But, how can I sell the horse and cart?'

'There are a lot of people who come into the tavern asking for one. Give me ten percent, and I will sell it for you,' he offered.

Jack was a man with a good heart but still a businessman. 'Providing the cost for the journey to London, and then to Norwich is covered, it's a deal,' I replied, and we shook hands.

'I could always tell the Prison Governor that the horse became lame, and I had to sell the cart,' I added with a grin.

Susan came over and said, 'Henry has done well, so I will feed him again at lunchtime. I will look after him for you until it is time for you to leave.'

'Thanks,' I replied, 'as I need to go and buy a ticket for us on the stagecoach to London.'

As I walked into the centre of Plymouth, I reflected on the people that I had met. I was seeing the worst and best of human behaviour.

Yes, the women had broken the law, but I had seen a better side of their nature on our journey. I had met strangers at the inns, farms and taverns who had gone out their way to help me. I had also met a rich man who provided us with shelter.

But, I had also seen the worst of human nature.

Indeed, I realised that by taking a job in a prison, I was now part of the penal system that ripped a baby from his mother.

However, I had not yet met the people responsible for the transportation system, who were creating all the misery. I was determined to do so and to right some wrongs.

By this time, I had arrived at the ticket office.

'The stagecoach is a local service from here to Exeter every two days, Monday, Wednesday and Friday,' said the clerk. 'Once you get to Exeter, there is a daily service to London. The journey takes three days in good weather. You can book the ticket to London from there.'

'I will probably leave later in the week,' I replied.

'Do you want an inside or outside berth from here to Exeter?' asked the clerk.

'I have an infant, so it is best to be inside,' I replied.

'We do not charge for children who sit on your lap,' said the clerk.

'Please book me on the stagecoach that leaves at 9.00am in three days' time,' I said and paid for the ticket.

I was still wearing the clothes that I had when working in the prison. As I had bought a ticket on the inside of the stagecoach, I needed some clothes that would be more appropriate. I went to the local market and found a tailor.

'I do not have enough money for a new set of clothes,' I indicated. 'What have you got so that I can travel to London on the stagecoach?'

His experienced eye looked me up and down. 'Mix and match,' he replied.

'What does that mean?' I asked.

'I can find clothes that will do the job, but they will be from different boxes with various colours,' he responded.

He invited me to try some on in his fitting area at the rear of the stall. Fifteen minutes later, I paid him and put my old work clothes into the bag he gave me. I felt like a new man!

On my way back to the tavern, I bought a travel bag for Henry, as he would need a change of clothes. I also invested in a large purse, with a bracelet that would go over my arm for security. After all, I was about to receive money for the horse and cart. I also needed a safe place to put my tickets and the document from Sir Richard Markham.

A weak autumn sun appeared between the scudding clouds. I wondered what lay ahead on the next stage of my journey. Would it be more days with clouds of sadness or sunny days of happiness? By doing what I felt was right, rather than following rules made by fools, I felt life would be better.

When I arrived back at the tavern, Jack and Mary were surprised to see me in new clothes. 'You look smart,' said Susan as she joined us.

Jack was at the bar, and I ordered an ale. 'Some good news,' he said. 'One of my friends has told me there is a farmer's market tomorrow at a field just down the road. I suggest we sell the horse and cart there.'

'Good idea,' I said, 'but I've no idea what price to ask.'

'No need to worry, it is an auction,' he replied with a big smile. 'My mate Dan will brief the auctioneer, and I will give him a few free beers for his efforts.'

Susan walked in, holding Henry. 'How is he doing with the weaning?' I asked.

'I think he will be alright when he gets used to it,' noted Susan in a matter-of-fact way. 'It will take a couple of days to be sure.'

'I have booked the stagecoach three days from now, so let me know in case I need to change the date,' I responded.

I continued to talk with Jack and let him know how much I appreciated the way he and his family had made me and young Henry welcome. 'It is a pleasure to help, as we can see you have been dropped in the proverbial,' he said with his customary laugh. I liked Jack and his easy-going way.

'I'm going out for a walk,' he added. 'Would you like to join me? I can show you how Sir Francis Drake beat the Spanish Armada near here in 1588.'

'Yes, it would be good to know more about Plymouth,' I responded enthusiastically.

We walked at a brisk pace towards the sea. Instead of going downhill towards the port, Jack led me on an upwards climb past small, brightly painted wooden houses.

'This is Plymouth Hoe,' he proclaimed, somewhat out of breath. 'The story is that, in 1588, Sir Frances Drake was playing bowls here when the Spanish Armada was sighted. According to legend, he insisted on finishing the game before setting sail, as second in command of the navy, to win the famous battle.'

'If that is true, then it is most impressive,' I replied with a smile. 'I need that kind of confidence.'

We could see the port and an old boat at anchor offshore as we walked along. 'That is the Dunkirk vessel, now used as a floating prison for females,' noted Jack. 'The three women you brought here will be below decks in horrendous conditions. As you can guess, it is no place for a baby.'

I nodded in understanding. Jack indicated some landmarks and was full of information about Plymouth.

'Many famous people have sailed in and out of this port,' he noted. We walked on at a brisk pace. Jack pointed to the old dock area.

'Colonists set sail for America in the early 1600s from here,' he explained.

The sun was low in the sky, and a cold wind was blowing from the north. So, we turned and walked quickly downhill toward the town. It was good to see a fire burning in the hearth as we entered the tavern, and the candles were flickering brightly.

Jack took over at the bar from Mary, who said she was off to cook dinner. I decided to have a lie-down. It all seemed very homely, yet I knew the hideous reality of the Dunkirk, and also Norwich Castle Prison, were not that far away.

What lay in store for the next part of the journey?

Jack and Mary invited me to have dinner with them in their dining room. Susan was next door helping Henry get used to solid food. It was clear they had access to good supplies from the local market, and also clients at the bar who brought in samples from their own gardens. Mary was an excellent cook, and I enjoyed a meal of lamb, carrots, peas and potatoes.

Jack was a genial host. We had enjoyed each other's company and conversation on our afternoon walk, and it continued over the dinner. 'John, I have had a discussion with Mary about your journey

to London with baby Henry. Even on the stagecoach, it will be difficult, and you will have to feed him as best you can. Therefore, we suggest Mary goes with you.'

I was unsure what to say, but Mary joined in.

'I have a sister who lives in Hounslow, near London,' Mary stated. 'She has not been well. I wrote to her recently saying I would visit as soon as possible. Therefore, I could make the journey on the same stagecoach as you.'

'Well, if you can do that, I certainly would appreciate it,' I replied.

'We want to help you because you are doing what is right,' said Jack. 'After what happened with Captain Bradley, we know you could have just walked away and left the baby at some church or, maybe, at an inn. But, to your credit, you have taken on the huge responsibility of trying to reunite Henry with his parents. We support that, and we want to help in any way we can.'

At that moment, Susan walked in carrying Henry. 'Success,' she declared. 'I have just given him some bread dipped in broth, and he has eaten it all.'

'Well done,' said Mary. 'That means I will be able to feed him at the inns on our stagecoach journey.'

Jack went to the bar and returned with a bottle of red wine. 'Let's celebrate,' he declared with a big smile.

After a few glasses, I slept well.

The next morning, another good breakfast was served. Jack brought Ned, the horse, to the front of the tavern. Ned had faithfully carried me and the women prisoners from Norwich to Plymouth. He looked better after resting for a couple of days. We linked him to the cart and set off for the market.

Jack went in search of his mate Dan. I brushed down Ned, so he was ready for the auction. Many other farmers and their labourers arrived. It reminded me of my days when I worked on a farm.

Jack soon returned with an older man who was carrying a shepherd's crook. 'Dan, this is John who has a horse and cart for sale,' said Jack.

Dan nodded to me but did not say a word. Instead, he walked around the cart and studied the wheels and the tray. He then studied the horse and gave Ned a pat on the neck.

‘He’s in good shape considering the long journey,’ noted Dan. ‘The cart is a bit old but will be useful on a farm. I think we can sell both. I can put them into the auction as two single items or as a complete unit.’

He looked at me for my views. ‘Thanks,’ I replied. ‘I need to sell both today, so please do what you think will be best.’

He asked me to sign an auction form, and then he took Ned and the cart to the auction ring.

I turned to Jack and said, ‘Let me buy you an ale.’

Soon, the auction was in full flow. I had never been to one before, so it was as much entertainment as it was business. When Ned and the cart came up for sale, the auctioneer said he would take bids for both or as single items. Eventually, one farmer bought Ned, and another bought the cart.

Dan came over and handed me the money. ‘We got a good price for both,’ he said. I decided to give him five percent for his effort. Ten percent, as agreed, went to Jack. I hoped that would give me enough to cover my costs in London, plus the stagecoach. Jack and I had a few more ales and returned to the tavern in a merry mood.

‘I trust you have not drunk all the profit from the sale,’ shouted Mary, who was serving at the bar.

The next day, I went for a long walk. It helped me clarify what was required. In London, I must arrange for Lord Sydney to sign papers to allow both baby Henry and his father to go with Susannah. It was as simple and as difficult as that.

On my return, Mary had cooked a nourishing meal and we had another bottle of wine. ‘The horse and cart have paid for this,’ exclaimed Jack as he proposed a toast. ‘Best wishes to young Henry and his parents,’ he proclaimed.

‘May they be reunited,’ added Mary.

Susan joined us in the celebrations as young Henry, having just been fed, smiled. ‘Tomorrow, we will go to London,’ said Mary. ‘Let us all get some sleep.’

5. Plymouth to London

20th October 1786

The next morning, I packed my old bag and my new one, which held clothes for Henry. I paid Jack and thanked him profusely. I then went to see Susan and gave her a small present that I had bought at the market.

'Thank you for helping Henry and me,' I said with a tear in my eye. She handed him to me and said, 'It is the least that I can do to help you reunite Henry with his parents. My prayers go with you.'

Mary was ready with her case, and Jack accompanied us to the stagecoach. He waved us goodbye as we rolled forward.

There was a nasty cold wind blowing from the east. 'I am pleased we are on the inside,' I said to Mary.

'Yes,' she replied, 'we must keep Henry warm,' and she wrapped him in her shawl.

Although we were in a carriage, it was still a bumpy journey that took just over five hours. We had booked two rooms at the local inn where the stagecoach stopped. Mary immediately went to change Henry's clothes and feed him. I bought her an ale and dinner. 'I will look after Henry during the night,' she said with a smile.

'Thanks,' I replied, 'I hope he does not wake you up.'

The next morning, I was up early to ensure we had seats on the stagecoach from Exeter to Yeovil. However, I need not have worried. 'We are not busy today,' said the clerk, 'but try to book ahead next time.'

I walked around the city centre, which was quite small. The beautiful cathedral dominated the landscape. To me, it sent out a message of where wealth and power resided. Imagine if the money invested in the cathedral had been used to build schools, homes and hospitals. Surely, that would have made life better for the people of Exeter.

I was also impressed by the architecture left behind by the Romans during their occupation. Their walls, no doubt built by slave prisoners, remained though the Romans returned to their homeland over thirteen hundred years ago.

When I went back to the inn, I could see Mary was worried. 'I thought you had run away,' she said.

‘No, I went to get our tickets and have a walk. It helps me think,’ I replied.

‘Plenty of time for that on our journey,’ she noted as the stagecoach arrived.

We took turns to nurse young Henry, as the horses kept a steady pace through the rain and wind. As the weather got worse, I realised it would have been too difficult to have done the journey with Ned and the cart. I turned to Mary and said, ‘I’m glad that Jack suggested the stagecoach, and even more so that you decided to travel with me and Henry.’

Our overnight stay at Yeovil was like the previous evening, with just enough time to get Henry cleaned and fed, before our evening meal and then early to bed.

Clouds scudded across the sky as I looked outside after sleeping well. Mary arrived with baby Henry, and we shared a breakfast of bread and butter, with jam from the local area.

Mary looked tired. ‘Henry did not sleep well and kept me up most of the night,’ she explained.

‘Pass him to me,’ I indicated. ‘Maybe you can get some sleep on the journey. It is about 80 miles to Basingstoke where we will stay tonight.’

The weather improved a bit, but I felt sorry for the coachman. Up front, he had to keep awake despite the cold wind coming straight into his face from the east. We had a few stops on the way, with one at Salisbury, where we had a drink and some bread and cheese at the inn. We used their very basic toilet facilities, but I am sure the Romans built better ones.

It was dusk as we arrived at the coach inn at Basingstoke, a small market town. Candles were already burning as we checked in, and I booked our seats for the next morning. Mary and I were both very tired after a long and bumpy journey. We had a quick meal and retired to our rooms. I offered to take Henry, but Mary insisted, saying she would feed him during the night.

Frost glistened on the ground the next morning, but the sun was shining as we boarded the stagecoach. It took us to Hounslow, where Mary was going to stay with her sister. No doubt she was going to be surprised, as there was no way of letting her know in advance.

As we rumbled along, Mary gave me detailed instructions on how to feed Henry. Then, she repeated the instructions a couple of more times to make sure I had got the message. I think she was nervous about me taking over responsibility, as he was only eight months old at the most.

‘Thank you for all that you, Jack and Susan have done. When I met you, I was at the lowest point I have ever been,’ I told her. ‘Now, I have the energy and confidence to do what is right.’

Mary started to cry, and I put my arm around her for comfort. She handed Henry to me, and he started to cry also.

The stagecoach had arrived at Hounslow. We went to the inn while the horses were being changed over, and I bought her a drink. 'Write and tell us how you go,' she said. 'You deserve to succeed, though I know it will not be easy.'

It was time to leave. Mary gave Henry one last cuddle, before handing him back to me. We both had tears in our eyes, as I waved her goodbye.

I returned to the stagecoach and took my seat. A well-dressed lady came on board.

'Is this seat free for me to use?' she asked in a rather refined accent.

'Yes,' I replied, 'providing you don't mind baby Henry making a few noises on the journey.'

She smiled and sat down. 'How old is your son?' she enquired.

'He is not my son,' I replied and realised this conversation was going to be difficult.

Why was I on a stagecoach with a child if I was not his father? During the next ten minutes, I recounted the job I had been given by the Governor of Norwich Castle Prison to take three women prisoners to Plymouth. As I told the story, it seemed as if I must be inventing the events. When I told the lady about Susannah having the baby forcibly taken from her at Plymouth, I knew it sounded like a horror story. Surely, no one would be so cruel as to tell a mother she could not keep her baby!

'So, who was the lady that was holding the baby at Hounslow?' she asked, with, I felt, some suspicion. I explained how Mary and her family had helped me care for Henry.

'Ah, I understand,' she exclaimed, 'but why are you going on to London with Henry?'

'My aim is to reunite him with his parents. To do that, I need a document of authorisation from Lord Sydney, Home Secretary of the British Government.'

'You have a good heart and intention, but it will not be possible unless you have an appointment,' she commented.

We continued to discuss the issue, and she asked, 'Where are you going to stay in London?'

'I do not know anyone in the city, so I will find a lodging house, if possible,' I replied. 'Then, I will go to the office of Lord Sydney.'

But, who was this lady asking all the questions?

SAVING BABY HENRY

Why was she interested in the story of a jailer and someone else's baby?

She must have read my mind. 'Let me introduce myself,' she said in a very confident manner. 'I am Mrs Jackson. My husband and I have a house in central London. As you have nowhere to stay, I would like you and Henry to be our guests until you can make other arrangements.'

'That is kind of you,' I responded. 'My name is John Simpson. It is very generous of you to offer the baby and myself a place to stay, as this is a most difficult situation in which I find myself.'

'Yes, I can see that, Mr Simpson,' she replied. At that point, the stagecoach came to a stop. We had arrived in London.

6. The Jackson Family

Mrs Jackson was met by a tall, well-dressed gentleman. She went over and talked to him and then returned. 'John, this is Alexander, my husband.'

He shook my hand and said, 'Welcome to London. My wife has told me about your visit. We look forward to you staying at our home.'

He had his personal carriage waiting nearby and escorted us to it. Within a few minutes, we arrived at a large house surrounded by a garden enclosed by an ornate iron fence. A young man rushed out to pick up Mrs Jackson's case. Two teenage girls also came running out and kissed Mrs Jackson.

'Mr Simpson, these are my two beautiful daughters, Ellen and Rachel,' she announced.

They both turned and curtsied in a polite way.

'Ellen, Mr Simpson has brought a baby called Henry with him. Please take the little boy inside. Rachel, please ask one of the servant girls to prepare a cot for Henry and to look after him,' said Mrs Jackson, taking charge of arrangements.

As we walked inside the house, Alexander said, 'Let us go to my study, and I can make you a drink while my wife and daughters get baby Henry organised.'

During the next hour, he asked me many questions.

Why had a baby been sent to a prison ship? Why had the captain separated the baby from Susannah? Who were the prisoners? Why did I work as a jailer?

In return, I asked him what kind of work he did. 'I am in the banking and finance industry,' he declared. 'A lot of my work is to raise money both for companies and the Government and to negotiate the best rates of interest. I suspect they spend a lot of it on prisons!' he declared and opened his arms as if to indicate more would be welcome.

'Sadly, there are more and more prisoners being sent to our jails, and we are badly overcrowded,' I observed.

'That is why they are sending convicts to the colonies,' he responded. 'However, as we lost the so-called American War of Independence, they can no longer send convicts across the Atlantic Ocean,' expressed Alexander, with a look of despair.

'They have chosen a new place, discovered by Captain Cook, in what they call the Great Southern Land. Cook called it New South Wales in the documents I have seen,' he added.

'Is that where Susannah and the other women will be sent?' I enquired.

'Yes, but not until next year. The officials are currently assembling eleven ships for the voyage, to be led by Captain Arthur Philip. I am involved in raising the money to pay for all the food and supplies,' he noted.

Suddenly, I began to understand the wider issues involved. I was just a small player in a very big plan to set up a new colony at the other end of the world. In contrast, Alexander was making a very good living as a financial middleman in the whole process.

'Do you know Sir Richard Markham?' I asked. 'We met last week when I was in Bath, and he mentioned he was involved in finance.'

'Yes, he comes up to London from time to time. We have met at a professional meeting in one of the London clubs. The finance industry is a club in itself,' he replied with a laugh.

A knock on the door interrupted our discussion. A servant announced that dinner was being served. I followed Alexander down a hallway lined with paintings, which I presumed were pictures of family members.

Inside the dining room, there were more paintings on either side of the long dining table. Mrs Jackson and her two daughters were already seated, with candles lighting the room.

Alexander went to the head of the table and gestured for me to sit at the other end. As soon as we had sat down, two servants brought in a tureen of soup and ladled out large quantities for all of us.

'This will warm us up on a cold and wintry evening,' said Alexander.

They all seemed very accepting of me, but I felt uneasy. This was all above my station in life. I was in my travelling clothes, and they were dressed for dinner. I was working class, and they were definitely upper class!

'First, an update on young Henry,' announced Mrs Jackson. 'He is sleeping well after being fed and changed. The servants are looking after him.'

'Thank you,' I replied. 'I appreciate the way you have made baby Henry and myself welcome in your beautiful home.'

'We hope you will be comfortable here during your stay. I also hope my daughters can help look after Henry. After all, one day, we trust they will have children of their own to continue our family line. Helping feed and change Henry will give them some training in advance,' she added with a smile.

Ellen said, 'We will take good care of Henry.'

A substantial dinner was served. Compared to my usual evening meal, it was a feast. First, the servants brought in a vegetable soup. Next came the main course, which was a selection of cold meats with potato. Wine was served for the adults. I was used to drinking beer, so I found the wine too sweet for my taste.

After the servants had cleared the dinner plates, they brought in a selection of cheese.

'Thank you for an excellent meal,' I commented as tea was served.

'Mr Simpson, what is your job in the prison?' asked Ellen.

'I guard the convicts,' I replied. 'Some days, I take them to and from court if required and make sure they do not escape.'

'Prisons are there to punish convicts, not reform them,' added Mrs Jackson with a sigh.

'You have to be strong to survive in prison. Food is scarce, and this weakens prisoners both physically and mentally,' I responded.

Should I tell them of the horrendous conditions I had seen, that led to typhus and other dreadful diseases? With the daughters present, I decided to spare them the details of the dirty and damp conditions that led to illness and misery. It all seemed millions of miles away, but I knew that I would have to return to it soon.

As we left the table, Alexander said to me, 'Let us go to my study.'

It was a room with a writing table and, on either side, there were shelves filled with books. He went to a drinks cabinet and poured two whiskys. I was not used to such a strong drink and coughed as the spirit hit the back of my throat.

'This is where I come to think and write to my friends, as well as business contacts,' he noted. 'I have been thinking about your bold plan to meet Lord Sydney. How do you intend to proceed?' he asked.

'I know it will be difficult, but I hope that the letter Sir Richard Markham gave me will help,' I responded.

'Oh, you have a letter of introduction,' he said with surprise. 'Yes, that could help,' he mused as he took another sip of whisky.

'I would like to offer support, but I don't wish to offend you,' he reflected.

'Not at all, sir. Any advice is welcome,' I responded.

'Well, for meetings with the Home Office Minister, one usually dresses in formal business clothes. It is just part of the protocol. Do you have a business suit?'

'No, sir,' I replied, feeling conscious that I didn't fit in.

'As we are about the same height, I could lend you one of my suits,' he offered.

'That would be much appreciated, as I only have the clothes I am wearing and my work clothes from the prison,' I replied.

He rang the bell on his desk, and a servant appeared.

'Please bring me the suit that I wore last year to professional meetings,' he commanded.

A few minutes later, the servant returned with well-made, expensive garments and a pair of shoes.

'Go into the side room and try them on,' said Alexander. I was amazed that they fitted almost perfectly.

'What do you think?' I asked Alexander.

'It will do very well. Take it to your room and wear it tomorrow.' I thanked him and went to bed.

After I had a good night's sleep, Mrs Jackson greeted me in the morning with the news that Henry had also slept well and had been fed. She took me to the room where he was lying in a cot draped with linen sheets. Her two daughters were there and seemed to enjoy taking turns holding the baby.

After breakfast, Mrs Jackson gave me a rough drawn map of London.

'The Government offices are near the River Thames, close to the Houses of Parliament,' she explained. 'Lord Sydney is at the Home Office, so go there and ask for an appointment. If you get lost, here is a note with our address.'

It read:

The Jackson Residence, Somerset Street, Portman Square, London.

Mrs Jackson indicated the Home Office was about a 30-minute walk southwards towards the River Thames. I followed the map through the busy streets, most of which were muddy due to the rain that had fallen during the night.

When I arrived at the river, I was impressed to see Parliament and also the magnificent Westminster Abbey on the other side of the road. Rather than sightseeing, I had to keep focused. I asked a trader where the Home Office was located, and he pointed to a large building.

I felt nervous as I walked up the steps. At the entrance, I could see a painting, which I presumed was King George III, our monarch, as he was wearing a crown. There were other paintings with the names of politicians, which had the letters MP, signifying Members of Parliament, after their names. A clerk was sitting at a desk in the middle of the foyer.

‘What is the purpose of your business here today?’ he asked.

‘To request a meeting with Lord Sydney,’ I replied.

‘On what subject?’ he enquired curtly.

‘To discuss the transportation of a convict by the name of Susannah Holmes. I want to request permission for her baby son to go with her wherever she is being sent,’ I stated with as much confidence as I could muster.

‘Lord Sydney does not discuss individual cases. He is a very busy man,’ replied the official in a cold way.

To show that Lord Sydney was involved, I replied, ‘This is an important matter, and Lord Sydney needs to know the details, as he has personally signed the letter of transportation.’

The clerk looked at the letter and then handed it back to me. ‘If you wish to take the matter further, you will need to write and ask for an appointment, with supporting statements from a judge involved in the case,’ stated the clerk.

He indicated the discussion was closed by inviting the next person in the queue to come forward.

I walked out of the building with a heavy heart. Dark clouds above reflected my mood. The clerk was there to follow the rules. He was doing what he had been told to do, not what was right.

I walked along the pathway next to the River Thames. The dark clouds turned to icy rain, so I went to a nearby pub called The Strand Tavern. It was bustling with people having their lunch break. I ordered an ale and sat down.

‘Miserable day!’ said the man sitting next to me.

‘Yes, in more senses than one,’ I replied.

‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

I recounted my disappointing meeting at the Home Office.

‘What did you expect?’ he asked. ‘The bloke on the front desk is a guard. His job is to turn away anyone who is likely to cause trouble. You are an unknown, uninvited intruder trying to burst your way into the cosy world of the upper-class politicians.’

I nodded as he had summed it up concisely. But what should I do, as I was determined not to give up?

‘Any advice?’ I asked, hoping my contact knew the way past the guard.

‘I am Andrew Rix, and I work in that building as a clerk. I know Lord Sydney leaves most days at just about 3pm. One option is to be there and see if he will stop and talk with you.’

My spirits rose, albeit I knew it would not be easy. I walked back to the home of Mr and Mrs Jackson rehearsing what I would say if Lord Sydney stopped to listen.

I was pleased to hear from Ellen and Rachel that they had kept baby Henry entertained. I smiled and said that I was not sure who was learning the most from their encounters.

Alexander came over and asked how my meeting had gone. I told him of the problems. He said that it was to be expected that a clerk would not have the authority to arrange an interview. He suggested that I talk to one of the London newspapers to see if they would publish a story on the issues. Easier said than done, as I had no contacts.

Mrs Jackson arrived home during our conversation, and I summarised the situation. She was in a buoyant mood. ‘I will tell you more during dinner,’ she said and went upstairs to get ready.

Alexander offered me a drink and started to talk about events in France. ‘I fear there could be a revolution and coup d’état there. The monarchy will fall,’ he predicted.

‘How will that affect us here?’ I asked.

‘If the mob kill the King in France, I believe heads will roll in this country also,’ he replied with a furrowed brow. ‘The mob, once unleashed, has no mercy and politicians, judges, the rich and those in charge of prisons will all be in mortal danger. Beware, as there could be violence, particularly when prisoners are let out by the mob!’ he concluded.

A servant knocked on the door to announce dinner was ready. Mrs Jackson was at the table with her daughters. As the meal was served, she talked about her meeting.

'I went to see Lady Cadogan today,' she commenced. 'She is a long-time friend of mine and very concerned about children in poverty. I mentioned you to her, John. She was most impressed with your efforts to reunite baby Henry with his parents. She raises money for charity and has agreed to invite contributions to help young Henry.'

'That is very good news,' I said, 'Henry will need funds, as his parents are convicts and can't earn anything.'

She asked about my day. I said the official wanted information from a judge, but that was not possible before I returned to Norwich.

'What will you do next?' asked Ellen.

'I will return tomorrow and have another go, with advice from a person who works in the building.'

Surprisingly, I slept well and felt energised. The next morning, I looked in on Henry, who was being fed by Rachel. 'I am learning a lot from this little bundle of energy,' she observed. 'He certainly has a good appetite.'

Ellen walked in while we were talking. 'We will take him to the local park later on. It will help get some fresh air into his lungs.'

I thanked them, and one of the servants brought in breakfast for the three of us. It was a good start to the day.

7. The Transportation Order

I decided to return to The Strand Tavern and see if I could get further information.

There were only a few people in the tavern as it had just opened. They were all at the bar, where a young man with long hair and an Irish accent was asking the innkeeper questions about a robbery. After he had finished, he turned and looked at me.

‘Were you in here last night when the robbery took place?’ he asked.

‘No, what happened?’ I enquired.

‘Just about closing time, the boss was cashing up the takings for the day when two blokes came in with knives, stabbed one of the staff, and stole the money.’

‘If they are caught, they will be hanged,’ I replied. ‘I’m John Simpson, and I work in a jail. Most older burglars go to the gallows. We guard the young ones, who receive either seven- or fourteen-year jail sentences.’

‘What’s it like working in a jail?’ he asked curiously.

I told him the truth about the harsh conditions and the cruelties. He seemed interested, so I explained my journey from Norwich to Plymouth with the three women convicts and young Henry. He was amazed when he heard Captain Bradley had refused to let Susannah take her baby on board.

‘I am here to get Lord Sydney to change the decision,’ I declared.

‘The whole system is wicked,’ he said. ‘My name is Patrick Nolan. I write stories for a newspaper called The London Chronicle. Do you mind if I write about what you are doing to help the mother and baby?’

‘I would welcome any support you can offer,’ I replied. ‘If you want, please join me this afternoon when I plan to talk with Lord Sydney.’

As we continued, my contact from yesterday came over to order a drink at the bar. Patrick immediately recognised him and shouted, ‘Andrew, come and join us. I would like your advice.’

Andrew and I shook hands as if we were long-time friends.

‘You work in the Home Office,’ noted Patrick. ‘How can John Simpson get a conversation with Lord Sydney?’

‘Well, the first thing to know is that he is in the building today, as I saw him on the way to a meeting. Normally, he finishes by 3pm and goes to the Parliament building. He usually leaves by a small side door to avoid any protests or problems. I can show you where that is,’ he concluded.

We had our lunch and then walked with Andrew to the Home Office. He took Patrick and me around the building till we arrived at a small doorway. ‘This is it,’ said Andrew. ‘Be here early, and don’t say I told you anything.’

‘How will I know it is Lord Sydney?’ I asked.

‘He is about 55 years of age and about the same height as me,’ he replied. ‘He has grey hair and usually has a walking stick. One other point, make sure you have some paper and something with which he can write, as you need confirmation of any decision.’ With that advice, he waved and went back to work.

Patrick said he was going to write his story about the robbery, and he would return to meet me just before 3pm.

Could the plan work? I decided to go for a walk along the river to decide what I would say. I knew that the first minute would be make or break. Also, I needed to have the documents ready to present. I checked that they were in my wallet.

As I returned towards Parliament, the sun came out, and the rain ceased. That would help, as no one wants to stop when it is raining. Also, I could look at one of the sundials and check on the time. I presumed Lord Sydney would have one of the new chronometers that Alexander told me had been invented by John Harrison, which were used by the navy and army.

As I arrived at the Home Office, I saw Patrick, my new journalist friend. ‘Let’s go round to the side door,’ he said. It sounded as if he was ready for an ambush!

While we waited, Patrick told me his boss was very keen to publish the story of Susannah and baby Henry. ‘He wants human interest stories to engage our readers in supporting better conditions for working-class people and those in need,’ he added.

As we talked, I noticed the side door open. Out stepped a man, aged about 35. He was carrying an umbrella and, no doubt, was surprised to see the sunshine. He stood just outside the door.

Was this Lord Sydney? He seemed too young, based on the description from Andrew. I looked at Patrick. ‘Wait,’ he whispered.

A minute later, an older man with grey hair appeared. He said something to the younger man. They started walking towards Parliament, talking as they went.

'Go,' said Patrick.

I ran after the two men. 'Lord Sydney,' I cried. 'Can I speak to you for a moment?'

The younger man turned around and said, 'You are very rude to interrupt us,' and waved his umbrella in a threatening way.

Not deterred, I shouted again, 'Lord Sydney, I want to discuss a female prisoner that you have sent to the Dunkirk hulk at Plymouth. The captain refuses to take her baby on board.'

Lord Sydney did not stop, and the other man shouted, 'Go away. Lord Sydney does not deal with individual cases.'

I kept chasing after them and noticed a small crowd of people looking at us, as they heard the shouting.

I tried again. 'Lord Sydney, this is a matter of life and death. Please, in all humanity, help a mother be reunited with her son.'

He kept walking at what seemed a faster pace, but there were more people in front of him. So, he had to slow down. By this time, I was alongside him and his companion, who was between us.

'Lord Sydney, please help. I have a letter from Sir Richard Markham asking for your support,' I shouted loudly.

On hearing Sir Richard's name, Lord Sydney stopped and turned towards me. 'Are you referring to Sir Richard Markham from the city of Bath?' he asked.

'Yes, sir. He has given me a letter addressed for your personal attention.' I handed him the sealed document.

By now, the crowd had grown larger, and I could hear Patrick telling them about Susannah and baby Henry. A man in the crowd shouted, 'Don't be cruel. Help the mother and the baby!'

Other people supported his cry and soon there was a chant of, 'Let the mother have her baby. Let the mother have her baby.'

As this was going on, Lord Sydney opened the letter and read it. He paused and turned to the man with whom he had been talking. 'This needs a decision. Let us go into the main entrance of the Home Office so I can deal with it.'

We climbed the steps to the front door. Lord Sydney spoke to his colleague, 'Please bring me some official headed paper.' The man did as he was requested.

While we waited in the foyer of the Home Office, Lord Sydney turned to me. 'Who are you, and how do you know Sir Richard?'

'I am John Simpson, sir, a jailer at Norwich Castle Prison. Based on your instructions, I was given the job of taking Susannah Holmes, her baby and two other women from Norwich to Plymouth. I met Sir Richard on the journey, and he asked me to pass on his letter to you.'

'It is a most unusual request that you have brought me. Given that it has the support of Sir Richard, I will give you two letters of instruction. One is to the Governor of Norwich Castle Prison. The other is to Captain Bradley. I will also write to Sir Richard tomorrow.'

At that moment, the man arrived with the paper Lord Sydney had requested. He also gave him a quill and ink.

'What is the name of the baby's father?' asked Lord Sydney.

'Henry Kable, sir, another prisoner at the Norwich Castle Prison,' I replied.

He started writing. As he did so, I felt a huge sense of relief, even though I could not see the words.

After a few minutes, Lord Sydney handed a document to his colleague and said, 'Seal this one. Address it to the Governor, Norwich Castle Prison.'

He then wrote another short letter and passed that to his colleague. 'Seal this and address it to Captain Bradley, Dunkirk Ship, Plymouth,' he commanded in a low voice.

He turned to me. 'I have instructed the prison Governor to send the convict Kable with his son, under your control, to the same vessel on which the mother is located.'

'Thank you, sir,' I blurted out.

'The other document, which I want you to deliver personally, is to Captain Bradley. It authorises him to receive Kable and his son.'

'I will write to Sir Richard and thank him for bringing this matter to my attention. I trust that you will have a safe journey and deliver my documents.'

He took the sealed letters from his colleagues and handed them to me. 'Guard them carefully,' he instructed.

He turned and said to his colleague, 'Let's go.'

I put the letters in my wallet. Patrick raced up and said, 'Well done. Let me buy you a drink at the Strand Tavern.'

As people were finishing work for the day, the bar was very busy. We took our drinks into a corner. Patrick raised his glass to mine.

'Let's drink to Susannah, baby Henry and his father. May they, as a result of your brave efforts, be reunited and have a happy life.'

We soon drained our glasses, and I ordered two more. While I was doing so, I saw Patrick making some notes.

'My editor is going to be delighted when he reads this story,' he said. 'I have just been noting some of the things you said to Lord Sydney, and also how the crowd supported you.'

'All thanks to you, Patrick. You were conducting them like a choir,' I added.

'But that was not what changed his mind,' commented Patrick. 'It was when you mentioned Sir Richard Markham that he stopped and listened.'

'Yes, I wonder why?' I pondered.

'My journalistic instinct tells me there is a juicy mystery story there,' reflected Patrick, as he stroked his chin thoughtfully. 'Did Sir Richard give you any clues?'

'He just said Lord Sydney was a friend,' I replied.

'My guess is that Lord Sydney owes Sir Richard in a big way,' surmised Patrick. 'Maybe he owes him money, or perhaps it is a political or family debt.'

'I'll leave you to follow the trail on that,' I responded. 'I need to return and see how baby Henry is going, and to give my hosts the good news.'

8. The Attack

I had only walked about a hundred yards when I heard a noise to my right. As I turned, I was tripped by a long piece of wood held by a man in a doorway. I fell heavily, landing on my shoulder. As I tried to get up, another person came running from the shadows and tried to kick my head. I managed to catch his boot with my hand, and he fell over.

As that was happening, the man in the doorway jumped out. He grabbed my wallet, which contained the documents from Lord Sydney and my money. He ran down the street. I picked myself up and gave chase. I kept saying to myself, 'You must get the wallet with the letters.' Gradually, I reduced the distance. I could see he was tiring.

Having been trained at the jail to tackle prisoners low down below the knees, I made a dive at his ankles from behind and hit him hard. He crashed and his head hit the road. We were both on the ground, but I was first to my feet. As instructed in my prisoner restraint training, I lashed out at his testicles with my strong right foot, and he fell back on the ground.

The wallet had spilled out of his hand into the mud. I quickly picked it up. As I was doing so, the other person came after me. He was much smaller.

He had picked up the piece of wood, which he swung at me. I ducked just in time, and he lost control of it. It was now a fistfight. That suited me as that was part of my training. I soon put him on his back with a punch to the head. As he staggered to his feet, I had him in an arm lock, as I had done many times before with unruly prisoners.

'If you try to escape, I will break your arm,' I shouted as I marched him back down the road to the pub. If the other man recovered and returned, I had a hostage.

I forced the thief into the Strand Tavern. The crowd parted, as I pushed him to the bar where the owner was serving drinks. 'Is this the person who robbed you last night?' I asked in a loud voice.

'Yes,' said the publican. 'It was him and another older man.'

'Call a constable,' I instructed. 'He has just attacked and robbed me also.'

Patrick, who was still in the pub, told a couple of his friends to hold the robber while he went outside to find a night watchman. He returned after what seemed a long ten minutes with what they locally called a 'Bow Street Runner'. Patrick told him what had happened, and the constable arrested the man.

While this was happening, the publican poured a pint of ale. 'This is for your brave efforts,' he said with a smile. 'Thanks for your help.'

'It was more self-defence,' I replied, still breathing hard with my pulse racing. Patrick came over and said, 'Are you alright? Any injuries?'

'Just a bit sore where I was tripped. It is more the shock of being attacked, even though we train for it at the prison,' I explained, as I brushed mud from the clothes that had been lent to me.

'I should have mentioned this is a dangerous area,' reflected Patrick. 'There are a lot of thieves about. You can't afford to lose that document. Don't walk to your lodging. I will help you find a carriage.'

A few minutes later, we shook hands. I thanked him for his advice and climbed into a hire carriage that he flagged down. Within twenty minutes, I arrived at the home of the Jackson's.

'Good to see you,' said Mrs Jackson. 'We were worried about you. As it is dark, we thought you may have been attacked.'

She looked at my muddy clothes, as I walked under the candlelight in the hallway.

'Oh dear, you have been attacked. Come in and sit down.'

I assured her that I was not seriously injured. 'I just need to have a wash and change my clothes.'

Alexander came over as we were talking. 'I'll have to find some more clothes for you to wear for dinner from my wardrobe,' he offered.

Within a few minutes, the servants had made a bathtub of hot water, which they placed in my room. The senior servant asked me to leave my muddy clothes outside my room for cleaning. About an hour later, I felt like a new man.

Alexander invited me into his study. 'The new clothes also fit you perfectly,' he observed. 'And, as a mark of respect for your efforts and bravery, please keep the clothes.'

What should I say? Before I could reply, Alexander held out a glass. 'Let's celebrate with another whisky,' he declared. 'It will help steady your nerves after the trouble you have had,' he advised.

Once again, the whisky burned the back of my throat. Coughing, I spluttered, 'Thank you!'

He pressed a bell, and a servant entered. 'Please ask Mrs Jackson to join us,' he instructed.

'It is best if you tell us what happened before we go into dinner, as I don't want to upset my daughters.'

Mrs Jackson soon appeared, and I summarised what had been a hectic day. First, I described the meeting at the Strand Tavern with the publican and Patrick. Then, I told them about the successful meeting with Lord Sydney and his assistant. Thirdly, I outlined the way I was attacked and robbed.

'All's well that ends well, as Shakespeare wrote,' reflected Alexander, opening his hands as if acknowledging a blessing.

'It certainly has been a day to remember, in more senses than one,' noted Mrs Jackson. 'Let us have dinner with our daughters and focus on the good points.'

Ellen and Rachel were bursting to tell me about the way they had entertained Henry. Or was it the way he had entertained them, I thought?

'Our walk in the park was fun,' said Ellen.

'The fresh air was good for all of us, especially baby Henry,' added Rachel. 'Henry is now eating well and putting on weight,' she noted.

After that, Alexander asked me to outline the meeting with Lord Sydney. I decided to keep the description to the main point of the discussion with Lord Sydney, and the documents he had given me.

'I am impressed with your determination and bravery,' commented Mrs Jackson. 'In my discussion with Lady Cadogan today, I told her that you deserved to succeed. She is coming here tomorrow and wants to meet you.'

'I look forward to meeting Lady Cadogan,' I replied, albeit I wondered why she wanted to meet a humble jailer from Norwich.

'How do you feel after being attacked? Are you sore?' asked Ellen.

'Once I have had a good night's sleep, I will be alright,' I replied. 'Tomorrow, I must arrange my journey to deliver the letter Lord Sydney has given me to my boss at Norwich.'

'Then, it is time for bed,' declared Mrs Jackson as she started to blow out the candles.

9. Important Links

As I drifted off to sleep, I wondered whether my life had become a dream. Was I imagining this fast moving, high flying, existence? Today, I had met Lord Sydney, probably the second most powerful politician in the land after William Pitt our Prime Minister. Tomorrow, I would meet Lady Cadogan, married to one of the richest men in England, and the daughter of the powerful Charles Churchill.

Where would this lead?

Surprisingly, after the fight and the events of the previous day, I slept well. The next morning, I dressed in the new clothes Alexander had given me. I went to see baby Henry, who was being cared for by servants. The senior servant then served me a hot breakfast of porridge, followed by bacon, sausage, egg, and a drink of tea.

Mrs Jackson said that Lady Cadogan was arriving at 11.30am. That gave me enough time to go for a walk.

On my return, I noticed a trader selling fruits covered with sugar candy. I bought some for Ellen and Rachel, as a present for looking after Henry.

As I returned to the Jackson residences in Portman Square, I could see a private carriage outside the front door. A man was standing by the horse. 'Good morning,' I said.

'Same to you, sir. I'm the coachman for Lady Cadogan.'

'I am John Simpson and I am going to a meeting with her Ladyship,' I said, as a servant opened the door.

Mrs Jackson came to greet me. 'Come with me to our Great Room,' she indicated, and I followed her.

It was clearly a special room, reserved for guests, with large paintings hanging on the walls and covered seats all around. A wintry sun shone through the window that led to the garden.

'Lady Cadogan, this is Mr John Simpson from Norwich,' announced Mrs Jackson, in a proud voice.

I walked forward, not knowing exactly how to act. Should I bow, wait for an instruction, or just sit down?

Lady Cadogan stood up, walked across the room and offered to shake my hand. She was elegantly dressed, and I guessed about 35 years of age.

‘It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr Simpson,’ she began. ‘I have heard so much about your work from Mrs Jackson. Also, Ellen and Rachel took me to meet little Henry, and I am pleased to see him doing so well. I understand that you are trying to reunite him with his parents.’

‘Yes, I decided to do that when Captain Bradley cruelly refused to allow his mother, Susannah, to take her son on board the Dunkirk prison boat. At that moment, I had the responsibility for someone else’s child. I was literally left with baby Henry in my arms.’

‘What happened after that?’ asked Lady Cadogan.

‘He is only alive today because Mr and Mrs Gage, in Plymouth, fed him and helped me. Now, Mr and Mrs Jackson are doing the same, and I thank them.’

‘Well, we should thank you for saving Henry’s life and try to help in a practical way,’ responded Lady Cadogan.

‘I understand you have, against the odds, gained authority from Lord Sydney to have the family reunited. That is a remarkable achievement.’

‘Yes, I have to return to Norwich and take Henry’s father to Plymouth,’ I responded.

‘Well, in the next phase of Henry’s life, he and his parents will need financial support wherever they are sent. Therefore, I will try to raise money for them from my friends and contacts,’ promised Lady Cadogan.

‘I appreciate that,’ I replied. ‘However, as I found out last night, there are many thieves about, even amongst officials in the prison system. Make sure any money you collect is received by Susannah and her baby.’

Lady Cadogan nodded as Mrs Jackson rose from her chair. ‘We are now going to a lunch in the city, Mr Simpson, and I know you must prepare for your long journey to Norwich.’

I stood up and said goodbye to Lady Cadogan. ‘I have found our meeting most helpful,’ she said. ‘Best wishes to you.’

As I walked back to my room, I wondered what Lady Cadogan would do. Was she just offering nice words of moral support, or would it be practical help that could change the lives of Susannah and Henry?

I had heard from Mrs Jackson that Lady Cadogan’s husband was a rich, high-ranking Member of Parliament. She said that he had recently sold many acres of land in central London so that property developers could build new homes.

As I went to buy my ticket on the stagecoach to Norwich, I knew that I had an opportunity to do something important. It required determination and effort, and only a small amount of money to cover the travel costs.

But, for the longer term, I wondered what could be done if Lady Cadogan and her friends could collect funds to help baby Henry and his parents. For the child to gain an education and for his parents to escape grinding poverty, they would need support.

That evening, Alexander was out at a meeting, and Mrs Jackson had not returned from her meeting with Lady Cadogan. The servants made me a meal, and I went to bed early so I would be ready for my journey to Norwich. I asked the servant who was looking after Henry to give me an early morning call. The next morning, I awoke early, knowing that I could not afford to be late. I dressed quickly and went to the servant's quarters. They were feeding young Henry. There was a substantial breakfast on the table.

'My name is John,' I said while tucking into the eggs and bacon. 'Thank you for everything you have done for Henry. I can see he has enjoyed your care and attention. What are your names?'

'I am Rose,' replied the older girl. 'It has been a pleasure to care for Henry. He is just like my sister's little boy, who I nursed when she was ill.'

'I am Nell,' said the younger girl. 'Where is Henry's mother?'

I realised then that the girls had not been told why Henry had come into their lives. As time was short, I made a quick summary of the journey from Norwich to Plymouth and to London.

'Today, I am returning to Norwich, where Henry's father is in prison. If all goes well, I will take him and his son back to Plymouth and reunite them with Susannah, who is Henry's mother.'

'John, you are a good man,' said Rose.

'Yes,' added Nell, 'I hope everything goes well. As a small present, we have knitted a vest for Henry to keep him warm.'

'That is very kind,' I replied and put the present in my case. As I was doing so, Mrs Jackson came in with Ellen and Rachel.

'Good morning. Are you and Henry ready for the journey?' she asked.

'Yes, I have thanked your servants, Rose and Nell, for their help.'

‘Ellen, please bring baby Henry to the carriage,’ instructed Mrs Jackson. ‘Rachel, get the crib basket that we have made for the baby,’ she added.

At the front door, Alexander was waiting. ‘I have arranged for my coachman to take you and Henry. My wife and daughters will accompany you to the stagecoach. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to meet you. Mrs Jackson and I want you to accept this sum of money to help reunite Henry with his parents.’ He handed me a pouch full of coins.

‘Please use it as you feel necessary. If there is any left over at the end it is yours to keep, as a reward for your admirable efforts. Best wishes on your journey,’ he said with a smile.

‘Thank you on behalf of Henry and his family. Also, I appreciate your kind hospitality and help,’ I replied, as we shook hands.

The girls put Henry into the crib, and we all climbed into the spacious carriage. I waved to Alexander and the servants, Rose and Nell, as we left. The sun was disappearing behind a threatening, dark, wintry cloud.

I checked my ticket for the journey and made sure I had the letters safely in my wallet. Even though London streets were better than country roads, it was still a bumpy journey. We headed eastwards to Ludgate Hill, where St Paul’s Church dominated the landscape. There was no time for a visit, as we arrived a few minutes before the departure of the Norwich stagecoach.

As Ellen and Rachel handed me the crib, I gave them the presents I had bought. ‘Share these with your parents and the servants,’ I said. Once inside the stagecoach, I waved and shouted my thanks. Without the support of the Jackson family, I knew I would not have succeeded.

10. Meeting Emily

October 1786

The four stagecoach horses snorted, almost in unison, as the coachman drove them forward. We had 120 miles to go. I estimated that at six miles an hour, plus stops to gain new horses, it would take us two days. We headed east through villages like Stratford and Ilford and stopped at a small market town called Rumford.

I took Henry into the tavern, where I bought an ale, and asked the barmaid if she could get me some bread for Henry. I dunked the bread in the ale to soften it before feeding him.

An attractive young lady, who was a passenger on the coach, came over and smiled at Henry. 'He seems to be happier now he has had something to eat,' she said.

'Yes, he is only eight months old, so he needs feeding at every stop,' I replied.

'Where is his mother?' she enquired.

'His mother is on a convict ship in Plymouth.'

I quickly explained the events that had occurred.

'Oh dear, that is dreadful,' she said, and I could see a tear in her eye.

I asked her to hold the bag that I was carrying while I went to change Henry in the toilet area.

On my return, the passengers were getting on the coach. The young lady handed me my bag, and we boarded the stagecoach together and sat next to each other.

Five minutes later, the stagecoach horses took us northeast towards Chelmsford. There was not much discussion amongst the travellers until I asked the attractive young lady with long blonde hair, who had helped me, 'Do you know why all of the places where we stop have the word "ford" at the end of their name?'

'That is because there is usually a river or stream nearby and, to get to the other side, people have to ford across the water,' she replied with an engaging smile.

We continued to chat about the weather and journey. 'I am on my way to Norwich,' I said.

'I am going to visit my parents, who live in a village near the city. I have been working in London for the last two years,' she noted.

'What kind of work have you been doing?' I asked.

'I started in service,' she replied. 'I cooked and cleaned for a rich family. But the pay was very poor. I then applied for a job as a chambermaid in one of the London inns. However, the person in charge of paying the wages and getting people to pay for their rooms took ill and left. As I could read, write and add up, I was asked to take over. It has been a great experience, and I earn more money,' she added.

'My name is John Simpson,' I said.

'Mine is Emily Bronsworth,' she replied with a smile.

We continued to talk, and time passed quickly. The horses started to slow. They turned left and stopped.

'This is The Great Black Boy Inn, Chelmsford,' announced the coachman. 'We are staying here for the night.'

I took Henry, who had been very quiet in his crib and got out of the carriage. I turned and helped Emily down the steps. We walked into the building and were given our room keys.

Emily turned to me and said, 'If you want, I can help look after Henry.'

'That would be most appreciated,' I replied.

'Give me a couple of minutes to unpack my case, and I will meet you in the reception area,' she said.

I put my case in the bedroom and took Henry to the bar, where I ordered an ale.

A few minutes later, Emily appeared in the reception area. 'Let us go into the saloon,' I suggested, knowing that it was not the custom for women to go in the public bar. In effect, there was not much difference, as the bar itself was the centre point of the two rooms.

'We can have dinner here,' I said and passed the menu to Emily.

'It might be expensive,' she replied hesitantly.

'I am on Government business, so if you are helping me with Henry, you can be the guest of His Majesty George III,' I replied with a smile.

She laughed and leant across to give Henry a tickle.

'It is about time I got something free from the Government,' she responded. 'Before we eat, I think Henry needs a change,' she added. 'Have you got some other clothes for him?' she enquired. 'If so, I will clean him up.'

'Thanks, there are some at the bottom of the crib,' I responded. Emily took Henry to her room with a jug of water from the bar.

While she was away, I ordered two meat pies with vegetables and potatoes from the set menu.

I really liked the way Emily noticed what was needed and took action. On her return, she said, 'I've washed his clothes, but I'm not sure they will have dried overnight.'

'The important thing is that you have made him comfortable,' I replied. During our meal, we discussed Norwich and where we lived.

'My family live in Thorpe Hamlet,' noted Emily. 'It is a village with a few farms, a church, a tavern and just a couple of shops. It was too quiet for me. That is why I decided to go and live in London,' she added.

'It is a wonder that we have not met before,' I replied. 'I am from Trowse Newton, which is a village just over a mile to the south.'

'Where do you live now?' she asked.

'I share a place with my brother in Norwich when I am working. At weekends, I live with my father in the village, as he is alone. My mother died when I was about twelve years of age.'

We continued to share stories about our families and work until the candles in the room had burned low.

'I look forward to seeing you on the journey tomorrow,' I said as we departed. Emily smiled as she went to her room.

Although I was tired, I found it difficult to sleep as I kept thinking about Emily. In contrast, Henry slept well after I fed him.

The next thing I remember was a person banging on my door. I went to open it. Emily was there.

'John, you have overslept,' she stated. 'The stagecoach is leaving in 30 minutes. Let me feed Henry, and you get ready.'

'Thanks,' I said and handed her the crib with Henry in it. I quickly packed my case and raced to get a roll of bread for breakfast.

I could see the passengers getting on the stagecoach. Emily was in the queue with Henry. I rushed over and, out of breath, said, 'Well done. I can take the crib, as it is heavy.'

'Have you got your wallet?' she asked. I looked in my pocket and in the case. It was not there.

I felt a cold sweat coming over me. I had lost the letters from Lord Sydney.

‘Quick,’ she said, ‘go back to your room and see if it is on the floor. I will tell the coachman to wait.’

Emily took my case, and I raced into reception. ‘I have left something valuable behind,’ I shouted.

On arriving at the room, I could not see the wallet.

Panic was rising. I looked around for a second time. It must be here, I thought. As a last resort, I pushed the bed to the side. There was the wallet. In my rush to get ready, I must have knocked it under the bed. I picked up the wallet with the precious letters and ran to the stagecoach. My heart was beating fast. My lungs were gasping for air.

Emily was already sitting comfortably, rocking young Henry in his crib. After I had recovered, I said, ‘Emily, you’ve saved me twice this morning. Where would I be without you?’

‘Still in bed, asleep!’ she replied with a mischievous laugh.

I felt like giving her a kiss but, as there were other people in the carriage, I just took her hand and gave it a squeeze. I felt her squeeze my hand in return. Outside, the morning fog and mist gave way to a cold cloudy day. We made good progress, as the road was well constructed.

‘We have the Romans to thank for this,’ noted Emily. ‘When they were here, nearly 1,800 years ago, they built a main road from London to Colchester, which was one of their regional headquarters.’

As I talked to Emily, the time seemed to pass more quickly than on previous journeys. After about four hours, we arrived at Colchester. It looked like an impressive town, with the ruins of old Roman buildings still evident.

Emily took Henry to the inn and washed him, as he was beginning to upset fellow travellers with his natural waste smell. She also managed to feed him, with some food that we had bought at the previous stop. We had a quick drink and used the basic toilet.

On the way back to the coach, I managed to buy some bread and cheese for us from a local tradesman. The new set of horses was ready to take us onward.

We made good progress and arrived at Ipswich for another quick change of horses. It was still very cold. I was glad we were on the inside. Indeed, I reflected that I had met both Mrs Jackson and Emily by being on the inside of the carriage. That was worth the extra money in itself. It all contrasted with the very tough and rough journey to Plymouth on the horse and cart.

11. Friends and Enemies

November 1786

A couple more stagecoach stops to change horses took us closer to Norwich, where we arrived as darkness fell. Emily carried baby Henry down from the coach while I picked up our cases.

‘What are you going to do now?’ asked Emily.

Memories of being robbed in London flashed into my mind.

‘I am going to book rooms at the inn for us,’ I said firmly. ‘We need a good night’s rest before continuing our journey.’

‘I am not sure I have enough money for that,’ replied Emily in a worried voice.

‘You don’t need any,’ I said with confidence. ‘I have been given an important job by Lord Sydney, and I want you on my team. I can pay for our lodgings.’

She smiled. ‘Well, as I don’t have a job at present, I am pleased to join your team. Otherwise, it would be a long walk home tonight.’

I asked the innkeeper for two rooms and booked us in for dinner and breakfast. While I was doing this, Emily went to the saloon and started to feed Henry.

I put our cases in each of the rooms, which were conveniently next to each other. During dinner, Emily said, ‘Leave Henry with me tonight. I will get up and feed him if he cries.’

I was about to say he was my responsibility, but then I realised Emily really wanted to be an even more active member of our newly formed team. I leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

I slept well and did not hear any noises from the next room until early in the morning. I knocked on Emily’s door. ‘Just checking that you are not oversleeping!’ I joked. She laughed and asked if I had my wallet.

Although the prison was within walking distance, I decided on a different plan. During breakfast, I said to Emily, ‘I have not seen my father for a few weeks. I am going to hire a carriage and take baby Henry to see him. I can then ask the coachman to take you to your village if you wish.’

‘That would save me a long walk with my heavy case,’ she replied with a smile.

After a good breakfast, we set off as an east wind swept in from the sea. Within an hour, we arrived at my father's house. When he opened the door and saw me standing with a baby and a young lady by my side, he almost fainted. He leaned against the wall and said, 'This is a bit of a surprise.'

I introduced him to Emily and Henry. Then, I explained the situation. We went into the house which was in a mess. My dad was used to living by himself and only cleaned up when he knew visitors were arriving. Emily took it all in her stride, as she tended to baby Henry.

I told him that the prison Governor had sent me to Plymouth to deliver three prisoners for transportation. He was amazed when I told him that Captain Bradley had refused to allow Susannah Holmes to take her baby on board. He was even more amazed to hear of the support that I gained from Jack and Mary in Plymouth, plus the help of their daughter. When he heard that I had spoken to Lord Sydney, he looked downwards.

'I hope you haven't got us all in trouble by upsetting and annoying those high-ups in Government,' he said.

'Not at all,' I assured him. 'Lord Sydney gave me two letters and his best wishes,' I replied.

'So, how did you meet Emily?' he asked.

'We were sitting next to each other on the stagecoach from London,' she responded. 'I offered to help with the care of baby Henry on our journey. My family live in Thorpe Hamlet,' she added.

'That is where we are going next,' I indicated. 'After that, I will have to return baby Henry to his father in Norwich Castle Prison. My guess is that I will be away for another couple of weeks. I will have to take the baby and his father to Plymouth to reunite the family. I will see you when I see you,' I concluded, so my father understood the situation.

We walked to the door. 'Do what is best for the baby. That is what your mother would say,' he said. 'Do what is right.' There was a tear in his eye as we turned and got into the carriage.

As we arrived close to the village where Emily lived, she said, 'It is best to leave the carriage at the end of the road. I noticed how your father was shocked when we all arrived at his house. I will go by myself and let my parents know so they can prepare.'

She took her case and walked down the village street. Henry was asleep in his crib, so I got out of the carriage and talked to the coachman. 'What is the local news over the last couple of weeks while I have been away?' I enquired.

'Not much has changed. Winter weather means a lot of people have coughs and colds. In particular, I heard that people up at the prison have been off ill,' he noted.

'I work there, so thanks for letting me know,' I replied.

'I have thought of applying for a job there,' he indicated. 'It is difficult to make a living as a coachman. I need a good regular wage to feed my family, even if prison work is probably boring.'

'Normally, that is the case, but occasionally, you get an interesting task.' I briefly described my journey over the last two weeks.

As we were talking, Emily returned. 'I've told my parents, and they would like to meet you and Henry,' she declared.

People in the village had come out to see the carriage, which was an unusual sight. They shouted words of welcome to Emily. She waved to them, as we walked with Henry to her house.

'Everyone in the village will think you have married and are returning with your first child,' I whispered to her.

'That is why I went ahead to let my parents know the real situation,' she replied with a smile.

Her parents were standing at the front door of a terraced house. 'This is John and baby Henry,' announced Emily, presenting us like royalty to her parents.

'Welcome and come in out of the cold. I am Doris,' said her mother.

Her father shook my hand. 'Pleased to meet you,' he said. 'My name is Alf.'

We went into a small room and sat down on the couch. There was a fire burning in the corner. 'We were not expecting visitors,' said Doris, 'so take us as you find us!'

We soon found that we had a lot in common, not least our accents. Doris and Alf had relatives who lived in Norwich, near my brother's place. Emily went into the kitchen with her mother to make some food for Henry while her father boiled some water in a pot on a brazier at the fire. He gave us all a drink and then went outside to give one to the coachman.

As we talked, I felt very much at home. It reminded me of the days when my mother was alive. I could also see why Emily had decided to work in London.

After about an hour, Henry started to cry. Emily picked him up, as I indicated that I had to get to the prison.

'What will you do with the baby?' she asked.

The coachman's warning about people being ill at the prison made me realise it was not the place to take Henry, and I mentioned our conversation to her.

'Best if I come with you. I can look after him at my aunt's house while you go to see the prison officials,' she said proactively.

'I haven't seen my sister Florence for a long time, so I would like to come also,' added Doris.

Soon, we were ready, and with the women, children and elderly members of the village cheering us on, we set off for Norwich.

Doris said, 'I've always wanted to ride like an upper-class lady in a carriage.' Then, she laughed loudly.

Our first stop was at her sister's house. She went in to see if Florence was at home. A few minutes later, she returned with a wave, indicating all was well. I handed the crib to Emily and said I would return later.

Next, I told the coachman the address of my brother's house. We stopped there to let Len know that I had just returned after the long journey to Plymouth. As time was pressing, I told him we could chat about my travels after I had finished work.

The patient coachman was sitting inside the carriage as it was raining hard. 'Take me to Norwich Castle Prison,' I instructed. The grey and gruesome building came into view a couple of minutes later. At the main gate, I paid the carriage driver what he asked, even though it was probably over the normal price.

The guard on duty recognised me. 'Welcome back,' he said as he opened the large door to let me in. I walked towards the Governor's office and asked his assistant, in effect his deputy, if the boss was free to meet. 'I will find him,' he said without any trace of welcome. 'I know he wants to hear from you.'

I sat down and removed the cape that I had borrowed from my brother to keep the rain off. A few minutes later, I heard footsteps in the corridor, and the Governor appeared.

'Come to my office, and we can talk in private there,' he instructed as he walked ahead. 'Good to see you,' he said, in a less formal way than previously. He did not invite me to sit, so I stood in front of his desk.

'Did you manage to deliver the prisoners to the Dunkirk prison ship?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'but complications arose because Captain Bradley refused to allow Susannah Holmes to take baby Henry on board. He said he was only authorised to take convicts.'

I could see a frown appearing on the Governor's face. 'So what did you do?' he enquired looking concerned.

'I have brought the baby back with me,' I replied as calmly as I could.

He looked at me in disbelief and exclaimed, 'You've brought the baby back!'

'Yes,' I said.

He put his head in his hands. Then he stood up and shouted, 'What in God's name are we going to do with a young child when there is no mother to care for it?'

'In the short term, I have solved that problem by asking one of my friends and her family to care for the child,' I told him.

'And, in the medium and longer term, who is going to take on the responsibility?' he demanded. 'We are a prison. Our job is to keep convicts off the streets. We are not a home for illegitimate children,' he spluttered with annoyance.

'As I see it, my responsibility is to reunite the boy with his parents,' I stated.

'So long as you are paid to work here, your responsibility is to guard prisoners, not to look after an infant,' he retorted.

'Also, why has it taken you so long to return? I gave you a lot of money to cover the costs. Have you got any of it left?'

'No, sir, it has all been spent,' I replied.

'Well, I can see that you are wearing a new fancy suit, and the Assistant Governor told me you arrived in a carriage. So, is that how you spent the Government money I gave you?' he asked cynically.

'No, sir. A friend of mine gave me the suit, as my other clothes were ruined when I was robbed on the journey,' I explained. 'As for the carriage, that was paid for by friends who wanted baby Henry to have a safe journey.'

'Where is the horse and cart belonging to the prison that you took to Plymouth?' he enquired.

'The horse was no longer fit, and I had to sell him and the cart to pay for the return journey,' I told him.

'You are not a horse trader and had no authority to sell Government property,' he exploded.

Although I was doing my best to keep calm, it was clear the discussion was getting out of control. What should I do?

I decided to take control of the agenda. Rather than respond reactively to questions based on suspicions, I could change the conversation to facts.

'Sir, I have some important information for you,' I stated.

'What is it, and from whom did you get the information?' he enquired, as if he was not really interested.

'It is from Lord Sydney, sir,' I replied.

'Lord Sydney at the Home Office in London?' he responded with a voice indicating a very high level of interest.

'Yes, sir, I met him at the Home Office, and he gave me two letters.'

'Are you saying that, instead of returning directly from Plymouth to Norwich, you failed to follow my instructions and went to London?' he asked.

'Yes, sir, my aim was to talk with Lord Sydney personally,' I replied.

'You had no authority to go to London,' he shouted. 'Also, it is my job, not yours, to communicate with Lord Sydney on any matters affecting prisoners.'

'I was not there to talk to him about prisoners, sir,' I replied.

'Well, for heaven's sake, what were you there to talk about,' he demanded angrily.

'I went to talk to him about baby Henry,' I said factually.

'It is clear that you have been acting outside of your role as a jailer. Have you been stirring up trouble with Lord Sydney for this prison and my role as the Governor?' he thundered.

Again, emotion was overtaking reason. I had to get him to focus on the facts. 'That is not the case, sir. My understanding is that Lord Sydney is supportive of the transportation process and wants you to give me another task. He has written a personal letter to you.'

'Where is this letter?' asked the Governor, showing his exasperation.

I opened the wallet and pulled out the sealed document addressed to the Governor. He broke the seal and read it without saying a word.

Then, he studied it again.

'Do you know what this letter says?' he enquired.

'Not the specific words,' I replied, 'but Lord Sydney said that my request would be authorised.'

'So, you had the temerity to tell Lord Sydney what to do!' he cried.

'No, sir. As you know, that is not possible. I made a request, and he agreed to support it,' I said.

'Well, it says in this letter that I have to authorise you to take the prisoner Henry Kable, together with his son, to the Dunkirk boat in Plymouth. It says they are to be reunited with the convict Susannah Holmes.' He spoke as if in total disbelief.

'That is what I requested, sir,' I confirmed.

'It seems, Simpson, that you have, by some mystical means, the power to get the man who controls the whole prison system in Britain to do what you want him to do!' stated the Governor with amazement.

He rang the bell on his desk, and the assistant came in. He had no doubt heard most of what was said.

'You rang, sir,' he said, waiting for his orders.

'Here is a letter from Lord Sydney. It authorises the removal of the prisoner Henry Kable from this prison. He is to be put under the control of Mr Simpson for transport to the Dunkirk prison boat in Plymouth. Please make the arrangements.'

'I will need a couple of days to prepare for the long journey, sir,' I indicated.

The Governor turned to his assistant. 'Please agree the date of departure with Mr Simpson, and let me know,' he declared as he stood up.

'Thank you, sir,' I replied and left the room.

His assistant, a man called Tom Anson, had worked in the prison service all of his life. Although he had the title Assistant Governor, he was, in effect, the man who guarded entry to the Governor's office. If he did not like you, he refused to make appointments with the Governor. Indeed, he was known throughout the prison for not making decisions. He just followed the rules.

Until this point, there had been little direct contact between us. I was just a front-line jailer, responsible for keeping order amongst the prisoners and transporting them to and from the courts.

He was the Governor's voice in the prison and, therefore, had a lot of power in the way he interpreted the decisions of the boss. So, how would he respond to what I was about to say?

'Let us go to my office to make the arrangements,' he said as we walked down the corridor.

Once inside, I took the initiative.

'The first thing is that I need a meeting with the prisoner Henry Kable,' I indicated.

'What for?' he enquired. 'There is no need for that. I will just tell the prisoner to be ready on the date for transportation,' he responded.

'I have a message for Kable from Lord Sydney,' I declared.

'What is the message?' he enquired.

'It concerns his son, and is private,' I responded, knowing this could be difficult.

'Since when has Lord Sydney been giving private messages to prisoners?' asked the assistant with a smirk on his face.

'As the Governor mentioned, he has a letter from the Home Secretary that authorises me to take charge of the prisoner for transportation. That includes giving him the message,' I replied firmly.

The assistant looked at the letter that the Governor had passed to him and read it. I could see he was annoyed.

'It seems that Lord Sydney has given you special authority in this matter,' he noted, as a man that followed instructions from on high.

'I need to see Henry Kable now, in a private room,' I said.

The assistant stood up. 'This is against normal procedure, but it seems this is not a normal case. I will ask the guard to bring Kable to the interview room.'

I waited in the corridor until the guard appeared with Kable, who was shackled. 'Take him to the interview room,' I told the guard.

Once inside, I asked Kable to sit down, and I took the other chair. He looked surprised to see me.

'We do not have a lot of time, so please listen carefully to what I have to say. Before I left, you asked me to reunite you with Susannah. This meeting is to let you know that I have gained the official documents to achieve that. I showed him the letter addressed to Captain Bradley. I will let you know the details later,' I explained.

He beamed through his unshaven and sallow face, which had not seen any sun for many months.

'You're a good man,' Mr Simpson. 'Thank you for everything you are doing to help us. We need to be together as a family.' He looked relieved.

'The important thing is for you to be ready, in a couple of days' time, for transportation to Plymouth. I know you are not a troublemaker, but be sure you do not get into any fights or difficulties during the next few days. Also, keep away from anyone who is ill. You must be fit and well. Get as much sleep as you can, as it is a long, difficult journey. I need you to be ready.'

His face lit up with a smile. 'You have my word on it,' he replied. 'Are Susannah and Henry well?'

I decided it was best not to mention that his son was not with his mother. 'As well as can be expected,' I noted, trying to avoid raising his anxiety. 'One final point - if anyone asks you about this meeting, just say that Lord Sydney has listed you for transportation.'

'Yes, I understand,' he replied.

'One question before I go: How tall are you?'

'When I came in here, they measured me and said I was six foot tall,' he replied.

I called the guard and said, 'Take prisoner Kable back to the prison and make sure he is ready for transportation in two days.'

I then returned to the assistant's office. 'I have told prisoner Kable that he will be taken to Plymouth, and he needs to be ready in two days. It is important that he is in good health, so please ensure he has extra rations before he leaves. Lord Sydney has asked me to report back to him when this matter is properly concluded.'

'Understood,' said the assistant in a reluctant voice as I left.

12. Preparations

November 1786

It was threatening to rain, so I walked as quickly as possible to my brother Len's house, which was a few minutes from the prison. 'Let's go to the pub, and I will buy you an ale,' I offered.

'Not in those fancy clothes,' he said, laughing. 'They will throw us out.'

I quickly changed into my normal clothes. On the way to the pub, I explained how the suit was acquired. By the time we had completed two rounds, I had summarised my adventures.

'You've been getting above your station and mixing with the upper classes,' Len reflected as he scratched his head in amazement.

'It has certainly been a learning experience in more ways than one,' I responded. 'However, it has not finished yet. I have to take the father of the child to Plymouth. That is where I need your help.'

'In what way?' he asked.

'The prison will provide a horse and cart for the journey, like they did last time. The journey to Plymouth, in this bad weather, will be difficult and dangerous. Therefore, I plan to go via the stagecoach instead. If I bring the prison horse and cart to your place, can you drive it over to our dad's house? Ask him to look after it till I return,' I indicated.

'Yes, I can do that. It will be good to see Dad, as I have not been there for a while,' he replied.

We walked back to Len's house. 'I will stay the night, but I have one other job to do. I will see you in a couple of hours.'

I walked across the city to where I had left Emily, Henry and her mother. I knocked on the door. Emily's aunt opened it, and I introduced myself. 'Good to meet you, John. I have been hearing about your adventures,' she said. 'Also, baby Henry has entertained us.'

Soon, the women were in the kitchen cutting bread while putting cheese and cold meat between two slices. 'We call this a sandwich in London,' declared Emily.

I sat in the front room with baby Henry until the food was served. As we ate, I indicated that arrangements had been made for me to return to Plymouth in two days' time.

'It would be good if we could meet tomorrow,' I said to Emily. 'I would like you to help me prepare for the journey.'

Her mother said, 'Leave Henry with us, and we will look after him.'

After we had finished the meal, I walked back to my brother's house and slept soundly.

The next morning, I was up early and went to see Emily. I was looking forward to the day, as I really enjoyed her company.

The family were having eggs for breakfast. 'These are from our own hens,' said Emily's aunt proudly, and she put one on the table for me. 'Henry has also shown us he likes eating the yoke of an egg,' she added.

About half an hour later, Emily and I walked into the city. There was a cold wind from the east. 'Let's go to a coffee house and get warm,' I suggested. 'There are a few things I want to discuss.'

'There is one over there,' she replied.

I ordered the drinks, and we went to a corner where there was a fire burning. 'This looks like a nice place,' reflected Emily.

'Yes, I would like to bring you here again more often, but I must take Henry Kable, the father of baby Henry, to Plymouth. It will be a difficult journey.'

'We can meet here again when you return,' she replied.

'That would be good, as I have enjoyed our time together. However, today, I would like you to help me prepare. I need to buy clothes for Henry senior, so that we can travel on the stagecoach.'

'Let's go to the market, and we can find something suitable,' she replied.

Soon, we were looking at the stalls in the middle of the crowded market. I told Emily that Henry senior was about six feet tall but quite thin, as for the last three years he had lived on minimal prison rations. After we found a shirt, and other clothes, I paid for them from the money given to me by Alexander Jackson.

'He will also need a bag in which to keep his prison clothes until we get to Plymouth,' I added.

Emily looked at the stall, which was selling used second-hand items. 'This one is in good condition, and it is quite large,' said the trader. She haggled on the price and got twenty percent off. I paid for it and gave her a pat on the back.

'Well negotiated,' I beamed. 'We also need some herbal ointment, as he will have sores from the leg irons,' I added.

SAVING BABY HENRY

Emily found a trader with a small stall. He advised that his own potion, of mixed herbs, would cure any wound. We bought it more in hope than expectation of success.

‘Emily, I want to write some letters that I will deliver to friends on the journey. Let us find a quill, ink and paper.’

That proved harder than I thought, clearly indicating that there was not a big demand. The majority of people had not been educated. I was fortunate to have attended a village school for a few years, and also Sunday School, where they taught me how to read and write.

‘Emily, did you go to school?’ I enquired.

‘Yes, but only until I was 12 years of age and then I started working as a milkmaid,’ she responded.

Before leaving the market, I said, ‘Let us buy food for this evening, as your family have been kind.’

We bought some eggs and meat, plus bread. Next, we went to the stagecoach office.

‘I want two tickets from Norwich to Plymouth,’ I stated.

‘You can go on the inside or outside via London, as we have a regular service. You can also go via Cambridge, Oxford and the cross-country route, which takes longer,’ said the clerk.

‘I will go via the country route on the inside of the stagecoach,’ I replied, and bought two tickets.

I turned to Emily and said, ‘I chose the country route so that I can let the people who helped me last time know that baby Henry has been reunited with his father.’

We returned to the coffee shop and had something to eat. ‘Emily, will you help me write some letters,’ I asked.

‘Of course, what do you wish to say?’ she asked.

‘It can be the same letter with copies to different people,’ I proposed. As I spoke, Emily wrote the words.

From John Simpson.

Subject - News about ‘Baby Henry’.

I am pleased to inform you that, as a result of my meeting with Lord Sydney in London, he has given me a letter of authority to take the father of baby Henry to Plymouth. In that city, he and his son can be reunited with the boy’s mother, Susannah Holmes.

I thank you for your support in helping me achieve this and pass on the appreciation of baby Henry and his parents to you.

Best wishes, John Simpson.

'How many copies do you need?' asked Emily.

'It is best to have four copies,' I replied, 'if you do not mind?' She smiled and started writing.

I went to the bar and ordered drinks while Emily made the copies. She soon finished and handed them to me, which I put in my wallet. I raised my glass to Emily. 'Special thanks to you for your help. Also, you have raised my spirits and given me the confidence to keep going. I really enjoy being with you. If possible, can we keep in touch?' I asked.

'Yes, that would be nice,' she replied. 'The problem is it will be necessary for me to go back to London. There are more opportunities for work in the city. So, could we meet there?'

'Once I have finished in Plymouth, I will book my return journey via London,' I replied, with my voice no doubt indicating excitement.

Emily leaned over and kissed me on the cheek, and smiled. 'I do like the positive approach you have.'

Taking one of the sheets of paper, she started to write.

Emily Bronsworth, Mayfair Inn, London.

'That is where I have been working. I will see if I can get a job there on my return. If not, I will go to the inn two weeks from now and see if there is a message from you,' she added.

'There is one other thing we can do,' I said. 'If all else fails, go to Portman Square and ask for the home of Mr and Mrs Jackson. They are friends who helped me last time. Please take this note of introduction with you,' as I asked Emily to write.

To Mr and Mrs Jackson.

I am sending this letter to you in the hand of my friend Emily Bronsworth, who is from Norwich, now living in London. She will let you know where she is working, so that we can keep in contact.

I also write to thank you for helping baby Henry and me while we were in London. I am now taking his father to Plymouth so they can be reunited with the mother of the child.

After that, I plan to visit London on my return to Norwich. If convenient, I hope that we can meet.

Best wishes, John Simpson.

'Let us have dinner here,' I suggested, 'as it will be a couple of weeks before we can do it again.'

We both chose the 'Homemade Stew' special of the day.

While we waited to be served, Emily asked, 'Are there any other points we should think about?'

'I have arranged for my brother to have a horse and cart tomorrow so he can take you and your mother home,' I offered.

We walked hand-in-hand slowly to Emily's aunt's house.

I gave her a kiss and said, 'I will see you tomorrow when I bring young Henry's father to pick up his son. Thanks for looking after him.'

With that, I returned to my brother's house. He was out, so I went to bed and soon fell asleep.

Tomorrow, I reflected, would be a big day.

13. Reuniting Henry and his Son

I woke early with the call of nature, as it is often called. There was a makeshift toilet behind my brother's house. However, the freezing cold made me think twice before going outside. When I opened the door, the November icy air certainly woke me up.

There was no point in going back to bed, so I got dressed in my prison work clothes. I took some of the food we had bought the previous day at the market and had a quick breakfast.

Normally, I would start the morning prison shift at 8.00am. The tasks were all set out by procedures established over many years. After signing in, I always looked to see how many prisoners were listed for their appearance in Court. I was one of the jail guards sent with them to make sure they did not escape. I noted when they needed to be there so I could be on time.

Next, I would go to see the turnkey, as we were known, who was in charge of the night shift. He would inform me of any new arrivals and any problems that needed attention. He would then sign out, and I would be responsible for guarding the prisoners.

Today, it would be different. So, when I arrived at just after 7.00am, the prisoners were still being given their breakfast, or what passed for it by that name. Food was scarce and a major cause of fights in prison. Ten years earlier, a man by the name of John Howard had written a book called *The State of Prisons in England and Wales*. He described the shocking conditions in which prisoners were kept and put forward proposals for reform. One of them was to have better food for prisoners.

Maybe the quantity had improved a bit, but the quality was still poor. Gruel was a regular breakfast. It was a mixture of oatmeal, flour and water, which meant prisoners were normally hungry. There was often chaos, and the last to arrive at the serving hatch took what little remained.

Some fortunate prisoners had family members who would come and leave food. However, for most prisoners, the food just about kept them alive in order to serve out their sentences.

Also, early in the morning, the prison was supposed to be cleaned. However, it was mainly moving the mess from one part of the prison to another. In the crowded conditions, there was a high danger that illness spread rapidly. Coughs and colds could soon develop into more serious life-threatening conditions like typhus and other undefined fevers. It was then that the Governor would put pressure on them to clean the prison, but after a few days, the old habits returned.

Today, I would not need to worry about the bad conditions, the prisoner complaints, the fights, and the demand for better food. Nor would I have to escort prisoners who kicked and screamed on their way to and from Court.

Instead, I walked to the Assistant Governor's office. Tom Anson was already at his desk.

'Hello, so this is the day you take convict Kable to Plymouth,' he stated.

'Yes, I've come in early to ensure everything is ready. Has the horse and cart been ordered?' I asked.

'Yes, it will be here soon,' he replied.

At that moment, there was the sound of footsteps coming down the corridor, and the Governor walked in.

'Good morning,' he said to both of us. 'I trust everything is working normally.'

'We had two drunk and disorderly troublemakers brought in last night,' replied the assistant. 'Also, we had one who was seriously ill. He was taken to hospital. There was also one death.'

'Sounds like the average for this time of year,' summed up the Governor, not showing any special concern.

'The first item on today's agenda is to ensure Mr Simpson does what Lord Sydney has demanded and takes prisoner Kable to Plymouth,' he said firmly. 'Could you both come into my room, as I want to get the procedures correct.' The assistant and I followed him and stood in front of his desk.

'I have read Lord Sydney's message again, and it is vital that everything goes exactly right this time,' he stated. 'To make it clear, I am sending a letter to Captain Bradley, which you will deliver to him, in addition to the orders of Lord Sydney,' he stated, looking directly at me. He opened his desk and took out a letter, and read it out loud.

To: Captain Bradley.

From: The Governor, Norwich Castle Prison.

I am sending you, under the supervision of Mr Simpson, a jailer at my prison, two people.

Henry Kable is a prisoner who is serving seven years for theft. He is now being assigned under your guard until he is sent to the new colony.

Henry Kable junior is his son, who Lord Sydney has ordered must accompany his father, wherever he is being sent.

The child is also the son of Susannah Holmes, a prisoner who served time in my jail and is now imprisoned in a vessel under your control.

Given the special interest that Lord Sydney has shown in this case, I ask that Kable and Holmes and their child are treated in a way that ensures they survive under your supervision as well as they have done under mine. It is best for all of us that Lord Sydney does not raise any further questions on this matter.

The Governor, Norwich Castle Prison.

He sealed the letter and handed it to me. 'I hope this helps, as I expect it will be a difficult meeting with Captain Bradley. His original decision, as the captain, has been overturned by your direct intervention with Lord Sydney.'

'Yes sir, I understand what you say. I appreciate you giving me this letter,' I replied.

He got up from his chair and said to his assistant, 'Arrange for prisoner Kable to be brought from the cells and for all the paperwork to be completed.'

Tom Anson nodded and said, 'Yes sir, I will make the arrangements.'

As he left, I said to the Governor, 'I will be away for at least two weeks. Last time I was short of money. I need my wages in advance.'

He winced and said, 'I gave you money to cover the lodgings and food.'

'But I had to wait for my pay, and I ran out of personal money,' I explained.

He went to his desk and pulled out a small wallet, 'Here is the money to pay bills on your way. I will arrange to have your wages paid before you leave,' he advised.

I went outside to see if the horse and cart were ready. An ostler was busy at work.

'What kind of horse is he?' I enquired.

'Can be a bit temperamental until he gets to know you,' he replied.

The winter wind was again making life uncomfortable, so I returned inside and went to the assembly area. That is where prisoners were put while waiting for their transfer to the courts. After a couple of minutes, the duty jailer arrived with Henry Kable, followed by Tom Anson. He had various papers in his hands and asked me to sign the one that was headed *Prisoner Transport*. It indicated I was taking charge of the named prisoner, and where I was taking him.

As usual, the prisoner was chained in leg irons. 'Can I have the key to the prisoner's leg irons?' I asked.

'You won't need that,' stated Anson. 'He is going directly to a prison boat.'

'I have just signed to say the prisoner is under my control, so I need the key,' I replied.

'No, you don't! Your job is to deliver the convict as he is,' reaffirmed Anson.

'I am not transporting him without the key,' I said firmly. 'I am responsible for his life while under my control.'

At that moment, the Governor walked in. 'What is the problem?' he enquired.

'Sir, I have requested the leg irons key for the prisoner. I have not received it.'

The Governor looked at Anson and said, in a sarcastic voice, 'We don't want to upset Lord Sydney. Give him the key.' He turned to me and said, 'Here are your wages in advance.'

Within a few minutes, we were outside and ready to go. The prisoner was locked onto the side railings of the cart so he could not escape.

There was no one present for any farewells as the horse clip-clopped over the prison courtyard.

My plan was to go out towards the main road leading to Cambridge and then stop at a place where I could talk to Henry Kable. After we had travelled about a mile, I saw an area where I could pull off the road. I tied the horse to a tree, and he was happy enough to chew the grass.

I went to the cart and spoke to the prisoner. There was still a cold wind, but the sun had come out.

'Now we are away from the prison, I want to tell you some important information,' I stated.

He sat up against the cart railings.

'Are Susannah and my son, baby Henry, alive and well?' he asked, eager to find out.

'Your son is very well,' I responded with a smile. 'He is here in Norwich and under the care of family friends.'

'Here in Norwich?' he repeated with great surprise.

I explained what had happened in Plymouth and how I had to decide, on the spot, what to do.

'Wow! So, you saved my son's life!' he exclaimed.

‘With help from a number of kind-hearted people,’ I added.

‘But, without you taking the responsibility, it would not have happened,’ he noted.

‘My main purpose has been to help you be reunited with Susannah and your son,’ I replied. ‘Therefore, I went to see Lord Sydney. As a result, I have the document that is needed.’

‘Incredible,’ he exclaimed.

‘I can explain the details later. For now, you just need to understand the plan,’ I indicated. ‘I hope that you will play your part and not try to escape.’

‘You have my word,’ he replied.

‘For communication purposes, when we are travelling, please call me by my first name, which is John. I will call you Henry. It is important people see us as two men on business, not as a jailer and prisoner.’

‘I understand,’ he replied.

‘First, we are going to my brother’s house. He works on roads and government building sites as a general labourer,’ I continued. ‘At his place, you will change into a suit that I have bought for you. We will then go and collect your son from my friend’s house. After that, we will travel by stagecoach to Plymouth. My brother will look after the horse and cart.’

‘You have been doing a lot of thinking to come up with a plan like that, Mr Simpson, sorry, John,’ he commented.

‘Yes, and wherever you go with your family, you must do the same. Be proactive. What I mean is that you must take control of the situation, however difficult, and do your best to improve the conditions.’

‘I give you my promise that I will do so,’ he stated. He shook my hand as if sealing a deal.

‘I will now unlock your leg irons,’ I declared. As I did so, I could see the sores had been created on his skin. ‘Here is some herbal cream to put on your legs,’ I said, handing him the jar.

‘Thanks,’ he replied, ‘that is very thoughtful of you.’

I returned to my coachman’s seat and drove the horse and cart to my brother’s house. It was best to leave the horse behind the house to avoid prying eyes and questions. As Henry got down from the cart, I told him to make sure he took the leg irons with him. ‘You will need those when we meet Captain Bradley,’ I stated.

Len was waiting for us, as agreed. I introduced Henry, and they shook hands. 'Go into the bedroom, and you will find a shirt and suit on the chair,' Len told him. 'You can get a wash before trying on the new clothes. I have left a tub of water and some soap. That will help you smell nice,' he added with a laugh. 'You can carry your prison clothes in the case that is next to the chair. I hope the clothes fit, and best wishes.'

Henry went to get changed.

'Thanks for your help with this. Hope you don't mind,' I said apologetically to Len.

'Not at all,' he responded with a smile. 'It provides me with something interesting to do. It breaks up the monotony of the normal routine,' he added.

'Although I will be away for about two weeks, I want to pay my rent in advance so that you have some cash,' I explained.

'That is appreciated,' replied Len. 'I have not had much work or pay recently due to the bad winter weather.'

'One point,' I stressed as Len turned to go. 'If anyone asks questions about the horse and cart, just say you are looking after it for me until I return.'

'Understood,' he replied, patting me on the back, 'and best wishes on your travels with Henry and his son.'

A few minutes later, a six-foot young man appeared dressed as if ready for a business meeting.

'Well, you look smart,' I declared.

'Thanks to you,' he smiled. 'Do the clothes fit?' He turned around.

'Almost, but the trousers are a bit long. I will borrow a belt from Len,' I soon found one, and Henry hitched up his trousers.

'I also bought you a cape,' I indicated. 'It will keep the rain off during the journey.'

'Thanks for everything,' replied Henry in appreciation.

A few minutes later, we were outside the home of Emily's aunt. I knocked, and she came to the door.

'Come in, come in,' she said with excitement.

'This is Henry,' I declared, as her sister joined us. Emily was sitting near the fire, holding the baby.

She stood up and came over.

‘Henry, I am Emily. I met John on the way from London to Norwich. Since then, it has been a privilege to care for your child.’ She handed over the baby to Henry. They both had tears in their eyes.

There was a moment of silence as Henry cradled his son carefully in his arms. ‘Thank you,’ he said with a crack in his voice. ‘This feels like a dream come true. It is good to meet you all.’

‘Let us have something to eat and drink before you have to go,’ proposed Florence. They had prepared a nice meal of bread with cheese and eggs.

‘What do you think of Henry’s clothes?’ I asked Emily.

‘Not bad, considering we made a guess, but he needs some shoes, as those clogs he has on need replacing,’ she replied.

Florence came over. ‘Are you talking about shoes?’ she asked with a wink.

‘My son left a pair behind when he moved out, plus some socks. I will get them.’

While she was doing so, Emily took the baby and changed him, and then put him in his crib.

Florence returned with the shoes, and Henry tried them on. ‘They are a bit large for me, but I’m not complaining. It is better than being too small,’ he commented.

‘We need to get going, as we are booked on the afternoon stagecoach,’ I indicated to Emily.

‘Let me get my coat, and I will walk with you,’ she volunteered as we said goodbye to her mother and aunt.

The walk took ten minutes. Henry carried his son in the crib. As we got near to the inn, where the stagecoach was waiting, I turned to Emily.

‘Thanks for everything you have done. You are a blessing in my life, and I want to see you again in London. I know you do not have a lot of money, so please pay for your ticket on the inside of the stagecoach with this.’

I handed her a pouch that I had bought, with enough money in it for the journey and two weeks’ rent.

Emily was reluctant to take the money, but I insisted. She kissed me on the cheek and said, ‘I will see you in a couple of weeks.’

SAVING BABY HENRY

With a wave, she returned to her aunt's house. The two Henrys and I boarded the stagecoach, and away we went towards Cambridge.

14. The Cambridge Connection

November 1786

To my surprise, we were the only people on the inside of the stagecoach. No doubt, the people travelling on business had taken the early morning time slot. Therefore, Henry and I were able to talk freely.

'I find it hard to believe that about six hours ago, I was a prisoner locked up in Norwich Castle Prison. Now I have my son in a crib on a stagecoach, dressed as if going to a business meeting,' he stated with a laugh. 'Is this real?' At that moment, young Henry let out a noise that was quickly followed by a foul smell.

'Well, that should tell you what is real,' I replied with my hand over my nose.

The stagecoach stopped at an inn to change horses, and we got some water to clean the baby.

'Tell me, what happened that has led to me being sent to Plymouth,' he asked. I recounted the difficult journey and the help we received on the way.

'I hope you can meet some of these people as I know they will want to see how young Henry is progressing,' I indicated.

'Yes, I want to thank everyone who has helped,' replied Henry.

'The major problem arose when Captain Bradley at Plymouth refused to have your son on board the Dunkirk. As you can imagine, Susannah was distraught. I was left standing on the quayside, holding the baby. What should I do? Indeed, you may ask what you would have done if placed in my situation?' I reflected.

'I can see that you had been put in a very difficult situation,' noted Henry. 'Instead of being the jailer in charge of three women prisoners, you were given the responsibility of caring for someone else's baby. What did you do?' enquired Henry.

'I went to a local inn owned by Mr and Mrs Gage. They and their daughter, Susan, helped me in many ways. It was at that time I decided to take your son to London,' I noted.

'That was a brave decision,' reflected Henry.

'I remember you saying that you regarded yourself and Susannah as being married. Therefore, I wanted to get a document from Lord Sydney to help you be reunited as a family.'

'I thank you for helping us,' Henry observed.

'To me, it was the right thing to do,' I added.

'It is amazing that you were able to speak to Lord Sydney and get him to agree with you,' commented Henry.

'Again, I had help from Mrs Jackson, who I met on the stagecoach. Also, her husband provided me with clothes and advice. So, by that time, I was determined to succeed. Having kept your son alive for a week, I was going to do whatever was necessary,' I added as I remembered the events.

There was silence, apart from the noise of the horses clip-clopping along. I turned and noticed that Henry was crying.

'I am sorry I have caused you so much trouble and anguish,' he sobbed.

I put my hand on his arm. 'Do not be upset,' I replied. 'Helping save baby Henry has been important in my life. Until this happened, I was just drifting along, following the rules set by others. Meeting you, Susannah, and baby Henry, has given me a purpose,' I indicated.

The stagecoach was slowing down. We had arrived at Cambridge. The coachman opened the carriage door. I picked up our cases and took them to the inn. Henry carried his son in the crib.

'Wait here for a few minutes,' I told him. 'I will be back soon with some information.'

I quickly ran up the road to the inn where I had stayed on my previous visit. I went inside, and there was Sam Lomas at the bar. He beamed and shouted, 'Good to see you again.'

'Have you got two rooms available?' I asked, getting straight to the point. 'Yes, I have,' he replied.

'Book me in and I will bring someone else also for the other room,' I requested. Then, I ran back to where I had left Henry and his son.

'Follow me; I have got us rooms at a small inn up the road,' I informed him. I picked up the cases, and we were soon there.

'Sam,' I shouted as we entered, 'this is Henry and his son.'

He came from behind the bar carrying two pints of ale. 'This calls for a celebration,' he said.

'My wife, Jane, will look after the baby. I will ask her to heat some water to give him a warm bath,' he added.

I told Sam that I had visited his cousin Ben at The Partridge in Oxford and passed on his best wishes. 'He and his wife were very helpful,' I said.

Sam's wife appeared at the door. 'Well, baby Henry has certainly grown since he was last here,' she declared.

I explained that we were returning to Plymouth to reunite the two Henrys with Susannah.

'I hope you get a better reception this time,' noted Jane as she put out her hands to receive the baby.

After we had downed our ales, Sam took us to our rooms. 'We are having stew for dinner if you would like to join us.'

'It will be very welcome,' I replied.

It proved to be a most enjoyable evening. The locals started to arrive and, of course, asked who the two new men at the bar were.

Sam asked me, 'Is it alright if I tell them who you are?'

I looked at Henry, and he said, 'Yes, it's fine by me.'

Sam clinked on a glass of ale with a coin to make a bell sound. Suddenly, there was silence around the room. 'Speech, speech,' cried one of the regulars.

'I thought you would never ask,' declared Sam and everyone laughed. Clearly, this was not the first time Sam had regaled his regulars.

'It is my pleasure to introduce John and Henry. A couple of weeks ago, John visited and brought with him three women.'

Suddenly, the room erupted with a wave of noise and cheering. 'How many?' asked one of the regulars in a long-drawn-out voice of curiosity. Everyone joined in by repeating, 'How many?'

Sam continued. 'These three women were prisoners of our King, George III, being transported on the orders of the big wig Lord Sydney to a prison ship at Plymouth.'

There were cries of 'shame on the King and Lord Sydney' from the floor. It was clear there were no warm feelings towards the upper class in this pub.

Sam continued, 'One of the women, Susannah, had her young child with her. John tells me that when he took her to Plymouth, the captain of the prison ship cruelly refused to have the baby on board.'

Cries of 'shame' and 'disgraceful' rang round the bar.

'John Simpson, my friends, is a hero,' stated Sam, continuing his speech. 'He saved the baby's life. He has cared for him and reunited young Henry with his father,' he declared, raising his glass to me.

Cheers and clapping echoed around the room.

'Also,' continued Sam, 'it is my pleasure to introduce you to the baby's father, who is now taking his child to be reunited with Susannah. To help them on their way, wherever they may go, I say let's all raise a penny for the baby.'

Shouts of 'well done' and 'good idea' echoed around the room.

Sam picked up an ale glass and handed it to the man next to him. He put in a coin and passed it on round the room. Within a few minutes the glass was full of coins, and it was handed to Henry.

He stood up and said, 'Sam, thanks on behalf of my son, Susannah and me for your kind words and hospitality. To everyone here tonight, I appreciate your kindness and support. I will ensure this money is used well to help my son, and I will remember this night forever.'

Everyone stood up and clapped. So many people wanted to shake my hand. Henry was also besieged by well-wishers. Of course, ales were ordered, and we finished the evening in a jolly mood. I slept very well after that.

15. Friends and Supporters

November 1786

Jane had dressed baby Henry, ready for the day. 'We receive clothes for charity, so I have put some in a bag to take with you,' she advised his father.

After a good breakfast, we waved goodbye to Sam and his wife. 'I will try to see your cousin Ben in Oxford,' I said.

'Tell him that we raised money for the baby and see what he can do,' suggested Sam. 'All the best.'

'Thanks for everything,' Henry responded.

With that, we set off. The road was less bumpy. Once again, we were the only two passengers on the inside, so we were able to talk more freely. I had worked hard to help Henry and his son, but did not know much about him. So, I asked some questions.

'Did you know Susannah before you met in prison?' I enquired.

'No, she was from the village of Surlingham in Norfolk. I was born in Laxfield, another village over 30 miles away,' he summarised.

'What offence did you commit to be jailed?' I enquired.

'We were a poor family, like many in the area. My dad and his uncle could not get regular work. They decided to rob the houses of rich people and invited me to join them. As they were family members, it was difficult to say no. I wasn't keen, but I went along. We all got caught. The judge gave us death sentences, but I was spared because of my young age,' he explained in a low voice.

'Was Susannah in a gang also?' I enquired.

'She did not talk about it much. She found it too depressing. As far as I know, she worked at a big country mansion for upper-class people. Her own family were poor and in need of food. I don't know what happened, but she was condemned to death for stealing in March 1784. Because she was young, the judge declared he would show mercy and changed the sentence to fourteen years in prison,' he said, with a crack in his voice.

'So, you have already served more than two years in prison, and Susannah has served about three years,' I noted.

'There seemed no end to it,' he commented. 'We only had each other and our son to keep us going.'

We continued to talk, and I began to see Henry as a man searching for a better life, rather than just another prisoner.

Clouds scudded across the sky. The horses were changed every fifteen miles, and we made good progress.

The college buildings of Oxford came into sight. As we arrived, I said to Henry, 'Let's go to The Partridge Inn. That is where I stayed a couple of weeks ago on the journey to Plymouth. It is run by Ben Lomas.'

There was a nasty cold wind whistling through the narrow street as we approached. Candles burning brightly in The Partridge windows gave me a warm feeling of welcome.

I went into the reception and asked the lady if they had two rooms for the night. 'Sorry, but we have had a lot of people book in,' she explained.

'Looks as if we are out of luck,' commented Henry.

'Let us go into the bar,' I replied. As we did so, Ben Lomas was in the middle of the room talking to customers. He looked up and came over.

'John, good to see you again. I've been wondering how things worked out for you.'

'Good to see you also, Ben. Let me introduce Henry Kable, the father of baby Henry.'

They shook hands, and Ben gave the baby a rub on his forehead. 'Your dad already looks like you,' he joked and laughed.

'We were hoping to book in, but I hear all the rooms are taken tonight,' I said.

'Yes, all the singles are taken, but I have a family room with two beds in it if you want that?' he offered.

'Yes, that will do,' I replied quickly.

Soon, we had unpacked and cleaned up young Henry. We took him into the bar and ordered a couple of ales.

Ben called to his wife, Alice, who said she would look after the baby and feed him. She also showed us the dinner menu. I ordered the fish pie, and Henry chose the homemade stew. Suddenly, the world seemed a better place.

I told Ben about the journey and events after we had left two weeks earlier. I also mentioned how much I appreciated the help that he and others had provided. 'Last night, for example, at Sam's pub, he raised some money for baby Henry from people in the bar.'

'Good idea,' replied Ben. 'Let's do a raffle tonight. I will offer free meals for two people as the prize.'

An hour later, when more locals had crowded into the bar, Ben called for order. Like his cousin Sam, he spoke with an easy manner when talking to an audience.

'Friends,' he began, 'about two weeks ago, on a Sunday night, when you were all no doubt at church,' he paused, as laughter rang round the room ... 'I had a visit from three young ladies'... more laughter.

'They were all convicts on their way to a prison boat in Plymouth, under the control of a young man called John Simpson.' He asked me to stand up, and the crowd cheered.

'One of the ladies, called Susannah, had a young baby by the name of Henry. The child should now be with his mother. However, he is with us tonight because the ship's captain at Plymouth refused to let her take the child on board.'

Cries of 'wicked' and 'shame' echoed around the room.

'In that moment of crisis, John Simpson saved the baby's life by caring for him,' shouted out Ben.

'Well done' and 'good for you' came voices from the crowd.

'John Simpson is leading the campaign to reunite young Henry with his family. The baby's father, also called Henry, is with us tonight.' People in the bar started clapping.

'To help them, we are having a raffle to raise money for the baby. I am donating a prize of an evening meal for two. So, please support generously. Everyone will get a numbered ticket, and Henry will draw the winning number in a few minutes,' he concluded.

There was a hubbub of noise as a hat was passed around for the collection along with the tickets.

A substantial sum was generated, and Ben handed it to Henry, who held the hat high above his head.

'Thank you for your generous support for my son and his mother. When he is old enough to understand, I will tell him about this evening. All of us in this room tonight know how hard it is to make a living. I will ask my son to help those in need, as you have done tonight,' said Henry.

People cheered and clapped. Henry went to the bowl where the ticket numbers had been placed. 'The winning number is 22.' More cheers echoed round the room.

'That brought the place to life,' noted Ben as he poured drinks for the winner, Henry and me. We continued talking late into the night, while baby Henry was being fed and cared for by Ben's wife.

We went to our shared room, and soon, I could hear the two Henrys snoring. Despite that, I slept well.

The next morning, after a good breakfast, we said our farewells and went to the stagecoach. It was another drizzle-laden day, but I felt in a good mood. We were getting nearer to Plymouth. We could then deliver the good news to Susannah, who I felt would be suffering badly not knowing what I had been able to achieve.

The horses ploughed on as the rain got heavier and the going underfoot tougher. We stopped at stagecoach inns on the route to gain a new set of horses. Our journey took us through small market towns, such as Faringdon, Swindon and Cheltenham.

Despite the cold and damp, this journey was a thousand times more comfortable than the one I had done with the women prisoners a couple of weeks earlier.

It was getting dark when we arrived at Bath. The baby definitely needed a change and some food. I booked us two rooms at The Westgate Inn. After having a meal, we retired for the night.

The next morning, I walked to the Society of Friends Meeting House. I knocked on the door, and a lady opened it. 'I am looking for Mr George Hain,' I explained.

'He is not here,' she replied. 'I am the cleaner. There are no meetings today.'

'Do you know where Mr Hain lives?' I asked hopefully.

'Don't know. But there are names and addresses on the board in the hallway if you want to have a look. I can't read or write, so I'm not sure what the details are,' she indicated.

I went in and she showed me the list. Halfway down, in alphabetical order, I noticed the names of Hain, and also Markham. I did not have anything with which to write, so I memorised the addresses. I thanked the lady.

'Where is Pulteney Bridge?' I enquired. 'That is the address of Mr Hain,' I added. She pointed me in the direction of the river. I soon found it and admired the elegance of its design. Although it was a road bridge, there were shops on it. I went to number 9 and walked in. 'I am looking for Mr George Hain,' I stated.

'Give me one minute, and I will find him,' said the young person behind the counter. 'What is your name?'

'John Simpson,' I replied.

A couple of minutes later, George appeared. 'Well, it is you again,' he exclaimed. 'Delighted to see you. How did your journey go after leaving Sir Richard's place?' he enquired.

I quickly explained the disastrous events at Plymouth, and I could see he was shocked.

'However, the reason I have come to see you is to say that the introduction letter Sir Richard gave me to Lord Sydney enabled me to gain his agreement to reunite the family.'

'Great news,' exclaimed George. 'Is there anything else I can do to help?'

'Before I continue with my journey, I would be grateful if you would deliver a message to Sir Richard.'

'Yes, I will. Would you like to write it on this paper here,' he suggested. I quickly wrote a note of appreciation.

From- John Simpson- Norwich Castle Prison, Norfolk.

To - Sir Richard Markham.

I write to thank you for your hospitality on my visit to Bath, and your letter of introduction to Lord Sydney. I was fortunate to meet him London, and I gave him your letter.

It proved particularly important, as Captain Bradley of the Dunkirk prison boat refused to allow Susannah Holmes to take her baby on board.

I, therefore, had the responsibility of looking after the child and took him to London.

I am pleased to let you know, as a result of your letter and my pleading the case, that Lord Sydney has agreed to the request. He has done so by authorising that Henry Kable, the father of the child, be transported and, therefore, his son must accompany him.

I am now once again in the city of Bath with both the father and the son, on the way to Plymouth, where I hope to reunite both the parents and their child.

I have explained the situation to George Hain, and he has kindly agreed to pass on my letter.

Regards,

John Simpson.

I gave the letter to George, and he promised to deliver it on Sunday. He said he would meet Sir Richard at the Society of Friends.

As I was about to leave, I remembered the discussion with Patrick, the journalist, and his question about links. So, I casually said, 'It was clear Lord Sydney had a high regard for Sir Richard's views. How do they know each other?'

'Not sure,' replied George. 'Maybe they went to school together and continue to communicate,' he speculated.

We shook hands, and I returned to the inn.

'Wondered where you had gone to!' Henry commented with an anxious look.

I explained that Sir Richard had provided practical help on the first journey, and I wanted to send him a letter of thanks.

'Hope we have better luck this time when we get to Plymouth,' said Henry.

'If not, I will be knocking on the door of Sir Richard and Lord Sydney again,' I retorted with a laugh.

The next phase of our journey was to Exeter. Although it was a well-established stagecoach route, the road was rough. It was hard work, and we stopped at four inns to get fresh horses. The journey of about 70 miles took about 10 hours. We were tired after a long day and slept well at the inn.

The following day was easier, as we had only 34 miles to travel before arriving in Plymouth.

On arrival, I told Henry to wait at the stagecoach while I ran to the inn owned by Mary and Jack Gage. They were delighted to see me, and I booked two rooms. Jack came with me to collect baby Henry and his father.

Mary and Susan welcomed Henry and were in their element as they cared for the baby. We celebrated with a couple of ales over a good dinner, and I slept soundly.

16. Plymouth Port Meeting

November 1786

When I woke up, I could see a weak winter sun. For a November morning, it was as good as it gets. At least we would not get wet.

I dressed in the 'mix and match' clothes I had bought and put on my shoes. In contrast, Henry appeared in the rough prison garb that he was wearing when in Norwich Castle Prison.

We went to the saloon bar, and Mary and Susan brought us a cooked breakfast of porridge, followed by eggs, sausage and potatoes.

'The food on board that prison hulk will be poor, so best eat up now,' said Mary. 'I am also going to give you some vegetables to put in your bag for Susannah,' she added.

'Mary, do you have some clothes that I can buy from you to help keep Susannah warm?' I asked.

'Yes, I have already packed some for her, including a cape to protect against the rain. But there is no need to pay for them. They are a present from me,' Mary said with a smile.

'That is very kind of you,' said Henry as he put his son in the crib.

Jack came in, carrying a large case. 'You have so much to carry; it is best if you use this one,' he declared. 'Also, after you two went to bed last night, I told people in the bar about Susannah and the baby. Instead of buying more drinks, they put the money in a hat for young Henry. Here it is, in a pouch for safekeeping,' he said, giving it to Henry.

I could see that he was very touched by the goodwill and generosity of strangers. 'One day, we will be free, and I will use this money to help my son have a better start to his life than we had,' he said.

By the time we had packed and repacked to get everything into the cases, we needed to leave. There was a tearful farewell, with Mary and Susan having their last cuddles and kisses with baby Henry.

'Jack, I would appreciate it if you would come with us to the port and be a witness in case there is trouble,' I requested.

'Only too pleased to help,' replied Jack.

Mary and Susan waved as we left.

Jack had arranged with a friend of his, who had a horse and small carriage, to take us to the port. I asked him to stop at the port gates and said we would walk from there.

‘Before going to the port office, you will need to put on your leg irons,’ I told Henry, ‘I will give you the key so you can unlock them when there are no guards around.’

We arrived just before midday. I showed the person at the dock gate my letter from Lord Sydney, and he waved us through. We walked to the port office. I showed my letter of authority to the clerk and asked for Captain Bradley.

‘He normally calls in after his lunch,’ replied the clerk. We waited for about an hour before I saw Captain Bradley walking to the port office with two others dressed in naval uniforms.

As he came in, the clerk said, ‘Sir, there is a delivery of a new prisoner for the Dunkirk.’

‘Where are the papers?’ asked Bradley.

‘They are here, sir,’ I said, stepping forward.

He turned around and looked at me, it seemed with amazement. ‘Not you again!’ he declared as if seeing an apparition.

‘Yes sir, the last time I brought three women prisoners. Today, I have one male prisoner and his son,’ I indicated.

I could see Bradley’s facial muscles tighten.

Before he could say anything, I said, ‘Sir, here is a letter of explanation.’

He snatched my letter and read it. Then, he seemed to read it again in order to take in the details.

‘This letter is from you!’ he said as if it was both a statement and a question.

Without waiting for me to reply, he rasped in a loud voice, ‘Where is your letter of authority?’

I handed him the letter written in Lord Sydney’s own hand. He turned and walked to the window, where there was more light. He read it again. The atmosphere was tense as his officers looked on. We stood in line waiting. He said nothing.

So, I broke the silence by saying. ‘There is another letter, sir.’

‘Another one!’ he exclaimed, showing his temper, as he grabbed the letter from the Norwich Prison Governor, which I held at arm’s length. He read it and then turned from the window. He walked towards me.

'It seems Simpson that, for an ordinary turnkey, you have powerful contacts in high places.'

'Yes sir,' I replied.

'It also seems, from the personal letter you have given me, that you have an educated hand and understanding of political processes,' he added.

I decided it was best to stay silent.

'This is most unusual. Maybe you are not who you say you are!' he mused, stroking his chin. 'I have heard about Government agents who are sent to spy on us.'

He looked me sternly in the eye, waiting for me to make the next move. I stayed silent, letting him come to his own suspicious conclusions. He broke the silence by saying, 'I understand that you have the ear and attention of Lord Sydney, and it is in both our interests not to offend him.'

'Yes sir, that is true,' I replied, recognising he respected authority if only to protect his own position. We both knew he had got the messenger's message.

'What will satisfy Lord Sydney in this matter?' he enquired.

'I would ask that you send one of your men to bring Susannah Holmes to this office, or a place of your choosing. Mr Gale and I can then witness to Lord Sydney that she has been reunited with her baby and also Henry Kable, who is the father of her child,' I replied.

Bradley turned and walked over to his colleagues. He spoke to them quietly so that I could not hear what he said.

He then returned. 'In accordance with Lord Sydney's wishes, I have asked my men to bring the convict Holmes here. They have to row out to the Dunkirk hulk. It will take at least an hour.'

'I understand, sir. We will, therefore, go across the road to the tavern and get some lunch while we wait. I will then transfer the prisoner, Kable, to your charge.'

He turned and walked outside in the direction of the quayside. We left the office and turned in the opposite direction, toward the dock gates and the tavern.

17. The Reunion

16th November 1786

No one spoke until we were outside the port. I removed Henry's leg irons before we went inside the tavern.

'Well done,' said Jack.

'I can't believe it,' exclaimed Henry.

'We are not there yet,' I cautioned.

Baby Henry, who had remained quiet during the proceedings, suddenly woke up and started crying.

'Let's feed him first,' I indicated.

As soon as the baby had some bread dipped in milk, he settled down. Henry then went to get some water and changed him with the extra clothes we had brought.

'You did very well to hold your nerve in front of Captain Bradley,' said Jack.

'Yes, he thinks you are a spy working for Lord Sydney,' added Henry.

'Long may he continue to do so,' I responded and laughed at the thought of it.

I ordered a lunch with ale for everyone. Henry said, 'I am going to put mine in the case to give to Susannah.'

'No, eat that one,' I replied. 'I will order three more, as presents for Susannah and Elizabeth and Anne. After all, it is about time they got something free from the Government!' Everyone laughed.

It was time to return, and once again, I presented the official documents to gain entry at the port gate.

As we walked to the office, it began to rain, and an icy wind was blowing in from the sea.

We were all rather anxious, and it showed in our discussion. After about half an hour, Jack and I went outside for some fresh air. The rain had stopped. We walked to the quayside and looked out to the forbidding Dunkirk prison hulk. A rowing boat was halfway between it and the shore.

'Can you see if Susannah is onboard?' I asked Jack.

'Give it a minute to come closer,' he responded.

As we waited, I noticed Captain Bradley emerging from one of the port buildings accompanied by another officer.

Jack was leaning over the rails to get a better view of the rowing boat. 'Yes, I can see her now,' exclaimed Jack in an excited voice.

We walked back to the port office, and I told Henry, who had been looking after his son.

A few minutes later, the door opened, and Captain Bradley walked in. 'My men are bringing convict Holmes from the Dunkirk. Before they arrive, we will check in convict Kable,' he stated in a gruff voice.

'You already have the official letter of transportation that I gave you from Lord Sydney,' I declared.

Captain Bradley pulled it from his pocket and handed it to his officer. 'Check his bag,' he instructed.

Henry opened it. The officer took out the contents to look for possible weapons. Instead, he found Henry's clothes and those for the baby. In addition, he pulled out the cape for Susannah and the food. He then found the pouch with the money that had been collected for the baby. He handed that to Captain Bradley.

'I will keep this money under guard until the prisoner is free to spend it,' he pronounced.

I could see what would happen. Bradley would conveniently say it was lost in transit, no doubt, while he was out drinking in the port taverns. 'That money was collected for the baby,' I declared. 'I will hold it on his behalf and ask Lord Sydney's advice on the matter.'

Bradley's face showed his annoyance. He reluctantly handed me the money. As he did so, the door swung open. Two sailors escorted Susannah, who looked thin and very frail, into the port office. She was in leg irons and only had a flimsy dress on. Shivering from the cold, she looked with amazement at Henry, who was holding their baby.

It seemed as if she was about to faint at the surprise, and the two sailors had to hold her up.

I walked over to Captain Bradley and spoke quietly.

'Sir, in the spirit of Lord Sydney's instructions to have the baby reunited with his parents, I suggest we allow them a few minutes together for that.'

He nodded and motioned to his men to take Susannah to a seat. I walked over to the corner of the port office where Susannah was sobbing.

I motioned to Henry to join us. He took baby Henry and put him in Susannah's lap. Suddenly, she stopped sobbing and smiled. Henry kissed her on her right cheek. She put her hand on his arm and gave it a squeeze. Young Henry, who had been asleep, woke up and looked at Susannah.

I went over to where Captain Bradley was standing. I wanted to engage him in conversation, so Henry and Susannah had enough time to be reunited. 'What arrangements do you have on board for prisoners?' I asked.

He was in no mood for discussion and curt in his reply. 'It is crowded already. I do not have nursery facilities for a child. The Dunkirk is a hulk primarily for women convicts. We have only a few males onboard,' he stated.

'I understand what you say,' I replied. 'I can let Lord Sydney know. It would be useful if you could give me a short note saying you have received Kable and his son.'

He looked at me and shook his head, I felt with a sense of bewilderment. My words seemed to convince him that I had a special relationship with Lord Sydney. How else could I have gained his permission to reunite Susannah, Henry and their child?

He asked the port office clerk for a quill, ink and paper and started writing.

Plymouth November 16th, 1786

Sir,

I beg leave to acquaint you that I received on board his Majesty's ship Dunkirk in obedience to Lord Sydney's commands a male child said to be the son of Susannah Holmes, a woman under my custody, and at the same time Henry Kable, a convict from the gaol at Norwich, was delivered to me.

I am, respectively, Sir, Your Most obedient and most Humble Servant, Henry Bradley.

'I will deliver this on my return to London,' I declared. 'I trust you will do whatever is within your power to ensure that Susannah and her baby, plus Henry Kable, are treated properly until they are sent wherever Lord Sydney decides,' I added.

Captain Bradley nodded. 'However, ten percent of all prisoners die in custody from boat fever and nasty illnesses,' he commented, with an air of resignation.

He looked across the room. Susannah was feeding her son. Henry had draped the cape around her shoulders to give some warmth. He was on his knees, putting the cream I had given him on her leg sores created by the leg irons.

‘It is time to take the prisoners onboard,’ noted the captain.

We both walked over, and Jack joined us. He helped pack the bags. As he did so, he took a couple carrots from his pocket.

He said to Susannah, ‘These are from my wife Mary to help baby Henry when he is teething. He will always be in our hearts. Together with our daughter Susan, our best wishes go with you.’

Susannah stood up. ‘Please say thanks to your wife and daughter for their help with my son.’

Henry took the baby from her and placed him in the crib. He and Susannah then came across to where I was standing.

‘You have given Susannah, my son and me something that money cannot buy,’ declared Henry. ‘You have reunited us. Probably, we will never meet again, but you will travel in our hearts wherever we go. Thank you.’

Susannah and I had tears in our eyes as she spoke to me, ‘Mr Simpson, I am not sure if I am dreaming. I thought my life was over. Instead, you have given me back my baby and Henry. I want to let you know that you will always be a member of our family. Many thanks. You are a good man.’

She shook my hand and then said, ‘This is from my son Henry,’ as she patted me on the back.

I turned to Captain Bradley. ‘I hope that I do not have to bring you any more prisoners,’ I said.

He nodded, and maybe there was just a tinge of a smile.

Jack and I waved to Henry and Susannah as we left the port office. ‘What a day this has been!’ reflected Jack as we walked to the main gates.

‘I still fear for them,’ I replied. ‘The Dunkirk hulk will be full of dirt and disease. We have reunited them, but they have more battles ahead that could divide them.’

About thirty minutes later, we arrived at Jack’s place. We went into the bar, where Mary was serving the thirsty customers. ‘How did it go?’ she enquired.

Jack gave her a kiss and said, ‘Susannah sends her thanks for the presents.’

‘You should both be proud of how you helped,’ I added. ‘Without you, I would not have had the confidence to take baby Henry to London.’

'Drinks all round,' shouted Jack. It proved the start of a lively evening. However, as I went to my bed, in the warmth and friendship of the inn, I wondered what life would be like on the Dunkirk prison hulk.

The next morning, I had breakfast with Jack and Mary. They asked me what I would do next.

'I will go to London and deliver the letter from Captain Bradley to the Home Office. Next, I will visit a few friends and let them know that we succeeded in reuniting Susannah, Henry and their baby. After that, I will return to work,' I concluded.

'Will you return to your job as a jailer?' asked Mary.

'At the moment, it is the only job I have got,' I noted.

'Based on what you have achieved in the last few weeks, I believe you could take on other challenging roles,' reflected Jack.

'Thanks for your vote of confidence,' I replied. 'I will see what emerges, but before leaving, I must write a letter to someone else who helped me.' I found some paper, ink and a quill.

To Sir Richard Markham, Friends Meeting House, Bath.

Dear Sir,

It is with the utmost pleasure that I inform you of the safe arrival with my little charge (Henry Jnr) at Plymouth. But it would take an abler pen than mine to describe the joy with which the mother received her infant and her intended husband. Suffice it to say that...the tears which flowed from their eyes with the innocent smile of the babe on sight of the mother who had saved her milk for it drew tears from my eyes. It was with the utmost regret that I parted with the child after having travelled with it on my lap upwards of 700 miles backwards and forwards. But the blessings I received at the different inns on the road have amply paid me.

I am with great respect your Humble Servant.

John Simpson.

I handed the letter to Jack and said, 'I would be grateful if you could post this to Sir Richard. He will be pleased to hear the news.'

'Yes, I will send it on the stagecoach mail today,' he replied.

I said my goodbyes to Mary and Susan. We all had tears in our eyes. I felt it was as if I was leaving my own family.

SAVING BABY HENRY

Jack walked with me to the stagecoach and helped me put my cases on board. He took his hat off and waved as the horses started the long journey to London. Would I ever see him and his family again?

18. Connections in London

21st November 1786

The nervous energy used in the last few days had, no doubt, taken a lot out of me. I slept for a large part of the journey to the capital. Also, I slept well at the inns where we stopped overnight. It was so different than the last time. I reflected on the journey I had taken from Plymouth to Hounslow with Mary. She had provided the company and help with baby Henry that I needed.

As the stagecoach got near to London, I remembered my meeting with Mrs Jackson and her husband, Alexander. They had provided me with both the practical help and support I needed. Also, they had invited me to visit them again. I had added reason to do so, as I wondered if Emily had left a message with them.

It was dark and wet when the stagecoach arrived in London. I decided to book a room at the local inn, have dinner and rest.

The next morning, I had more energy. After breakfast, I went for a walk to clarify my mind. I had reunited Susannah with her two Henrys. What should I do now? By the time I returned to the inn, it was clear in my mind.

I told the inn keeper that I would stay another night and left my case in the room. Next, I hired a carriage and told the coachman to go to Somerset Street, Portman Square. On arrival, I directed him to the Jackson residence, and asked him to wait. I rang the bell, and Nell, one of the servants who had looked after young Henry, answered.

‘Hello, it is good to see you again,’ she said with a cheery smile.

‘Is Mrs or Mr Jackson at home?’ I enquired.

‘No, they are not here. They left early to attend meetings. Shall I give them a message when they return?’ she asked.

‘Yes, please say that John Simpson is in London, and he has some good news,’ I replied as I gave her one of the notes I had written.

I returned to the carriage and asked the driver to take me to The Strand Tavern. As the horse clip-clopped along, it was good to see the sights and sounds of London again. People were out and about, working hard to survive. I reflected that on my journeys over the last few weeks, I had met those from all classes of society: the poor, the rich, the weak, the powerful, the bad and the good.

The assignment to take three female prisoners from Norwich to Plymouth had given me an education on people, places, power and politics. Most of all, it had helped me develop my abilities and understand myself.

On arriving at the pub, I could see it was already busy, even though it was still not midday. I bought an ale, and the proprietor recognised me.

‘Great to see you again,’ he said. ‘Thanks for catching that thief when you were last here.’

‘What happened to him?’ I enquired.

‘He is in the local gaol and will be sentenced at the next assizes. Think he will get the death sentence,’ he said with a dark laugh.

I went cold and felt faint. Although I had done what was right by catching the offender, he could now die as a result.

‘As he was a young lad, they may have mercy and send him to one of those godforsaken lands in the middle of nowhere,’ surmised the landlord.

‘Either way, the punishment will be severe,’ I commented.

‘Yes, he will not be thieving from this pub again,’ retorted the owner with relish. I took another sip of my ale.

‘By the way, your mate, the journalist who helped hold the thief that night, wrote a story about it in the local paper. He is likely to be in here for lunch. Ask him for a copy,’ he suggested.

About half an hour later, I noticed Patrick, the journalist, standing at the bar talking to the owner. He turned, and I gave him a wave.

He walked over and gave me a friendly slap on the shoulder. ‘Good to see you again,’ he said enthusiastically.

‘And it is good to see you also,’ I replied.

Immediately, he wanted to know the details of my return journey to Norwich and what happened at the port in Plymouth.

Upon hearing of the success, he exclaimed, ‘Well done, let’s celebrate with a couple of drinks!’

‘There is still a bit to do,’ I explained as he proposed a toast to young Henry and his parents. ‘I have a letter to deliver to Lord Sydney. Also, there are two ladies collecting money for the boy.’

'That sounds like a good story for the newspaper. Can you introduce them to me?' asked Patrick.

'Yes, I will ask them when we meet,' I indicated.

'In the meantime, my boss would like to meet you,' he mentioned. 'Let us go to the office.'

It was an opportunity to see the world of newspaper publishing. But, why were Patrick and his colleagues interested in my work as a jailer?

I thought a newspaper office would be rather grand, but it was in a rambling old Fleet Street building.

'This is John Simpson, the man from Norwich that I met in The Strand Tavern,' he said as an introduction.

His colleague was a well-built man, aged about 45 years of age, with a bushy beard, who was standing in the room where compositors were making up the next edition.

'Hello, I am Damien,' he responded. 'Let us go into my office,' he suggested. The three chairs there were like small islands amongst a sea of paper. Another man was working in the right-hand corner. 'Lachlan, this is John Simpson who Patrick has introduced,' he shouted.

Lachlan came over and shook my hand. 'We heard from Patrick that in between tackling thieves, you have also been tackling the Home Secretary and changing his mind,' he said with a smile.

'We like that kind of activity,' interjected Damien. 'Human stories help sell newspapers. We want to educate the people, as the present system makes rich people richer by exploiting poor people.'

Lachlan added to these comments with his strong, distinctive Scottish accent. 'We want to see the current system changed through education and opportunities for all before it is destroyed by revolution, as will happen soon in France,' he predicted.

'What are conditions like in the prisons?' asked Damien.

'They are places of boring confinement that often kill the prisoners because they get little food. In the dirty conditions, they become weak and ill,' I replied.

'The Government realises prisons are full to capacity. That is why they are sending about 750 convicts to the Great Southern Land, as it is called, which was discovered by Captain Cook in 1770,' noted Lachlan.

'No one has been there for the last 16 years, so who knows what the settlers will find,' said Damien. 'It is a high-risk decision, based more on hope than evidence.'

‘Lord Sydney and his cronies just want to grab more land. They are gambling on starting a new colony 10,000 miles away to replace the American colonies,’ Lachlan rasped in disdain.

‘The so-called Lord and his mates are the biggest criminals. They are exporting convicts and getting them to work for free. That will make the upper class richer,’ added Damien, as his fist thumped the table.

I was surprised and stunned by the clarity and strength of their views. They saw it as a big chess game, where people, like pawns, could be sacrificed to gain a better position.

‘As a turnkey in a local jail, I am not aware of the wider politics,’ I told them.

‘No, the Government ministers are not going to tell the workers like you what the real game is. It is not just punishment for convicts. They aim to make money from them in the new colony,’ expressed Lachlan forcibly.

‘Here is a document we have developed,’ said Damien. ‘It explains our thinking. Have a read and give us your views. In the meantime, please let Patrick know if you have more human-interest stories.’

As I left the building with Patrick and walked towards the Home Office, I said, ‘That was an eye-opening discussion. Your colleagues have strong opinions. They want to change the system, not just be journalists who report on it,’ I suggested.

‘Yes, we are part of a group called *Real Democrats*. They want everyone to have a vote and equality of opportunity, with more money spent on schools, hospitals and prisons.’

‘That is what we need,’ I replied. ‘Will you also try to stop the transportations?’

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘This is only the beginning of what my friends and I call trading of human beings. It has been going on for a long time in Africa, where people are caught and then forced onto crowded boats. They are then shipped, like products for sale, as slaves to America,’ he noted with anger.

‘So, you see convict transportation as just another form of slave transport?’ I asked, as what he was saying worried me.

‘Well, this time, they are exporting people of our blood and race rather than those from the tribes of Africa,’ he responded. ‘It is cheaper, as they do not have to go to Africa. The people are already in prison here.’

‘What you say disturbs me because, through my work as a jailer, I am actively supporting this terrible trade,’ I reflected.

'John, I know you are a good man, so I am not personally blaming you,' he responded with a smile. 'The system is like a spider's web. It catches unsuspecting people.'

'I am beginning to understand,' I responded.

'John, there are four kinds of people in this game. The offenders, the prosecutors, the controllers and the rescuers. Offenders commit crimes for various reasons. Prosecutors want retribution and punishment disguised as justice. Victims lie in prisons run by controllers. Rescuers are those trying to help them, and you are one of them,' he said.

'I have never seen myself as a rescuer. I was just doing what I felt was right, but I can see what you mean. How do you see yourself in all of this?' I asked.

'I am a rescuer, but in a different way. Together with my friends, we feel we can help the ordinary people by changing the system. Some people would call us revolutionaries, like those people in France who want to release prisoners from jails,' he noted.

'But, you want a different approach?' I noted.

'If possible, yes. We want everyone over 21 to have a vote. We see that this would enable the ordinary man and woman to choose the Government. We hope they would eventually abolish the monarchy, as the Americans are doing now in favour of a presidential system.'

'I like those ideas,' I replied.

'Would you like to join our group?' asked Patrick.

I told him I would think about it.

'What is your view of the social situation?' I asked.

'It is dangerous,' he replied. 'Look, we have a monarch whose family are not English, or even British. They came from Hanover, in the middle of Europe. The current one is George III. He is ill and never seen in public. His son is a guzzling wastrel, and spends money earned by the working class on parties for his rich mates. Why do we need a monarchy?'

'I did not know that,' I admitted, as such news did not circulate in Norwich.

'To make matters worse, we have a Prime Minister who is only 27 years old and would not know the price of a pint of ale,' added Patrick in a dismissive tone.

'He is even younger than me,' I commented with surprise.

‘Add to that, we have a so-called Parliament made up of landowners, but they do not represent the ordinary working people,’ spat out Patrick with strong feelings.

‘I see what you mean,’ I responded, hearing the words but not fully understanding the meaning.

Patrick was now in full flow. He spoke like an evangelical preacher. ‘So, Lord Sydney and his mates are part of a wicked plot to keep the ruling class in power,’ he added. ‘They give themselves big titles like Dukes, Earls, Viscounts, Barons and Lords to form a privileged upper class. Anyone who challenges them by taking their property is hanged from the neck till they die. Younger ones are punished severely, with seven- or fourteen-year sentences designed to deter others.’

He turned and looked at me, his eyes blazing. ‘As a jailer, they pay you to impose their control system,’ he summarised.

‘I had never seen it that way before,’ I reflected.

‘So, why do you think Lord Sydney gave me a letter to overturn the decision of Captain Bradley?’ I asked.

‘You caught him at a moment when he was in an exposed position, not protected as usual in his office. He could see that people in the street were supporting you, and he was worried they may attack. Also, you surprised him with your letter from Sir Richard, who clearly is a man of influence,’ noted Patrick.

The meeting came flooding back in my memory.

‘Yes, Patrick, I can see now that he felt obliged to do something. Rather than release Susannah, he just decided to add Henry to the list as an easier option. That meant that young Henry had to go with his father.’

‘Exactly,’ responded Patrick. ‘He was not showing mercy or changing the system. He was just extending it so that he could get rid of another person clogging up the jail system.’

We were approaching the Home Office. ‘What is your plan?’ asked Patrick.

‘Today, I am like a postman delivering a few letters,’ I told him. ‘Based on what you have said, I am confirming to Lord Sydney his grand plan or plot is working as he intended.’

‘Yes,’ replied Patrick. ‘He will feel pleased that you have carried out his orders.’ We entered the Home Office and went to the clerk at the main desk.

‘I have some letters for Lord Sydney,’ I declared.

SAVING BABY HENRY

'He is away at present, and I do not have a date of return,' replied the clerk.

'Who is dealing with his work during his absence?' I asked.

'Mr Nepean is the Under Secretary of State.' noted the clerk without looking up.

I produced the letter from Captain Bradley, and the one I had written. 'Please ask Mr Nepean to accept these letters for delivery to Lord Sydney on his return,' I requested.

With that done, Patrick and I returned to The Strand Tavern, where he continued to enlighten me about the politics of prisons and transportations.

19. Memories and Worries

Having been attacked once, I thought it wiser to be safe than sorry. So, I looked for a carriage. I needed to visit the Jackson residence. My mind was trying to sort out truth from fiction.

The discussions with Patrick and his colleagues had given me insights that I had not previously considered.

Was he correct? Could there be a revolution in England?

I needed time to think about their ideas. I also wanted to talk them over with Emily. But, where was she?

After about twenty minutes, the carriage arrived at the Jackson's residence, I felt my heart beating quicker than normal. I rang the bell and Rose, one of the servants who had cared for baby Henry, opened the door. 'Oh, good to see you Mr Simpson,' she exclaimed. 'Come in. Let me tell Mrs Jackson you have returned.'

I paid for the carriage and went inside. A few minutes later, Mrs Jackson appeared with her two daughters.

'Delighted to see you again, John,' she enthused.

'It is good to see you are all well,' I responded with a smile.

'Alexander will be home shortly. He will be most interested in what you have to say. Would you like to join us for dinner?' asked Mrs Jackson.

'I would appreciate that, as I did not have much for lunch,' I replied, delighted to have been invited.

'Rachel, please let the cook know,' she instructed. 'Ellen, please ask the servants to lay an extra place at the table and inform them that Mr Simpson will be staying with us tonight.'

I wanted to ask if Emily had left a message, but Mrs Jackson wanted to know about baby Henry.

'Were you able to reunite the mother, father and child?' she asked.

'Yes, thanks to your help, and friends on the way. I took the baby with his father to Plymouth.'

'Excellent,' she declared. 'Please tell us the details at dinner. I also have some good news to share.'

There was a noise in the corridor, and Alexander walked in. I stood up from my chair, and he shook my hand warmly. 'Very good to see you again, John.'

'It is good to be here in your home again,' I replied.

'Do you bring good news?' he asked.

'He does indeed,' said Mrs Jackson, taking charge of proceedings. 'We are going to discuss it at dinner. Let us go to the dining room.'

As soon as we were seated, the questions began. It was like a series of interviews. Alexander wanted to know how the Governor had reacted. Ellen and Rachel asked about baby Henry and his father. Mrs Jackson wanted to know about Susannah and how she responded to being reunited with her baby.

In between, the servants continued serving. They poured fruit juice for the daughters, and wine for us as we enjoyed a three-course meal with a choice of cold meat that was fit for a king.

Towards the end of the main course, Alexander looked at me. 'John, it says in the Talmud book of Jewish scripture that if you save one life, you save the whole world. Through your efforts, you have saved the life of baby Henry.'

Mrs Jackson leant across the table and said, 'Well done.' Rachel and Ellen clapped their hands.

Alexander stood up, raised his glass and said, 'Let us raise a toast to baby Henry and his family.'

'I mentioned that I also have some good news,' indicated Mrs Jackson. 'Today, I met with Lady Cadogan and other friends. They were all impressed with your efforts to reunite baby Henry with his parents. As a result, they have collected money, clothes, and even some educational books for the baby to the value of about 20 pounds.'

'That is very good to hear,' I replied.

'Lady Cadogan is going to ask Lord Sydney, who she knows, the best way to ensure the gifts are given to the parents,' she added.

'That is very wise. I was told by Captain Bradley at Plymouth that convicts are not allowed to have money. He wanted to take some money that my friends gave me for the baby, but I refused to hand it over. We need an official record so nothing is stolen,' I declared.

'Yes, any transaction of funds needs to be done with a document that makes it clear who is the owner,' declared Alexander. 'I have to deal with these issues every day.'

'I would be grateful if you could take the money I have collected and register it in a proper way, and add it to the money raised by Lady Cadogan and her friends,' I proposed.

When we had completed dinner, Alexander said, 'Let us go to my study, and we will do that now.'

Once inside his room, he offered me a whisky. This time, I knew what to expect and did not cough. I was learning social skills of a different order.

I took out my wallet and gave the money to Alexander. He handed me a receipt and wrote a letter to Lady Cadogan, which he asked me to sign.

As I sipped the whisky, I casually asked, 'Has anyone left a message at your home for me?'

'Not to my knowledge,' he replied. 'Were you expecting one?'

'Yes, one of my friends from Norwich lives in London,' I noted.

He rang the bell on his desk, and a servant came in. 'Please check to see if a message has been left for Mr Simpson,' he indicated.

A few minutes later, the servant returned. 'I'm afraid there is nothing for Mr Simpson,' she said.

My spirits sank despite the wine and whisky putting me in a good mood.

'I will ask my wife, as she may know, and will tell you in the morning,' noted Alexander. 'For now, let's call it a day.'

When I awoke, I could hear the servants cleaning and I realised I had overslept. However, breakfast was still on the table when I went downstairs.

'Good morning, John. It seems you have slept well,' Mrs Jackson observed, as she entered the room.

'Yes, thank you. I had a busy day yesterday,' I noted, as an excuse for being late.

'Never mind, it is likely to be another busy day today,' replied Mrs Jackson.

'Alexander mentioned that you were expecting a message.' She passed me a note. 'I meant to give it to you yesterday.'

'A young lady came to our house a few days ago and left it for your attention,' she said, with what I discerned as a knowing look.

'Oh, thank you,' I replied as casually as I could. 'It is probably from a Norwich friend of mine, who is now working in London.'

'What work does she do?' asked Mrs Jackson, who knew it was unusual for women to have professional roles.

'I am not sure of the details, but I think she does the administrative work at an inn, such as paying bills and dealing with clients,' I replied.

'She seemed a very personable young lady,' responded Mrs Jackson. 'I hope your meeting with her goes well.'

She went off to talk with her daughters, which gave me time to open the note. It read:

John,

I have returned to London and working at the Crown and Anchor, Arundel Street, near The Strand. If you receive this, I look forward to meeting you again.

Emily.

My spirits rose as I put the note carefully in my wallet.

As I was doing so, Mrs Jackson returned. 'John, while you are in London, it would be good if you could talk to Lady Cadogan about baby Henry.'

'Yes, I would like to do that. Can arrange a time?' I asked.

'I am meeting her tomorrow. So, please stay here overnight if you wish,' she offered.

'Thank you, that is very kind,' I replied. 'I will now go and collect my case from the inn where I left it.'

'I hope you find your friend also,' added Mrs Jackson, with a knowing smile.

Within a few minutes, I found a carriage and told the man to take me to the inn where I had stayed. The proprietor looked worried. 'You left your case, and I thought you may have had an accident.'

I explained that friends had invited me to stay at their house. I paid for the room, even though I had not used it. Then, I told the carriage man the next address was the Crown and Anchor.

20. Finding Emily

It was mid-morning, and the London streets were busy with wagons carrying food and products in and out of the city.

The late November day had started cold and bright, but clouds were now scudding across the sky, threatening rain. I just got into the Crown and Anchor before it started raining hard.

I went to the bar and ordered an ale. As the barman was pouring it, I showed him the note from Emily. 'Do you know her?' I asked.

'Oh yes,' he replied. 'She started working here as a chambermaid about a week ago. But, she has not been in the last couple of days. Don't know where she is.'

My pulse started racing with anxiety. 'Do you know where she lives?' I asked.

'Not sure,' replied the barman. 'The boss might know, but he won't be here till midday.'

I sat in the bar worrying. Where was Emily? Why had she not turned up for work? Was she ill?

To pass the time, I went for a walk but only became more worried. When I returned to the Crown and Anchor, there were two men behind the bar.

'This is the boss,' the barman announced.

'Hello, I am John Simpson from Norwich. My friend Emily gave me this note.' I showed it to the boss, 'Do you know where she is living?'

'I don't have an address,' he replied. 'When I gave her the job, she asked if there were places to rent nearby. I suggested that she look for a room in the Archway building up the road. If you find her, can you let me know if she is coming back to work, as we have a lot of people who are off ill,' he asked.

'Yes, I will see you later,' and I rushed out of the door.

As I ran quickly up the road, I saw an old, dilapidated building. I stopped and asked the person who was coming out, 'Is this the Archway Building?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'but be careful as it is dark inside.'

He was right. Also, the staircase was falling apart. I asked a man on the first floor if he knew a lady by the name of Emily.

'No,' he said. 'How old is she?'

'About 25 years of age,' I told him.

'A new woman came into the building a few days ago. She did not look well. Haven't seen her since,' he stated.

'Where does she live?' I asked him urgently.

'Don't know the room, but it's on that landing,' and he pointed to a dark, dank, dismal corridor.

I stumbled forward in the dark, shouting, 'Emily, Emily.'

The building reminded me of Norwich Castle Prison. It was old and water was trickling down the wall from a leak in the ceiling. There was a putrid smell of decaying waste that made me feel ill.

I hated the place. Suddenly, I tripped. There was a wooden object on the floor, which I did not see in the darkness. I fell, hitting my knee. I got up slowly, hoping nothing was broken.

I shouted Emily's name again. An old lady opened a door. 'Who are you looking for?' she croaked.

'I am looking for my friend Emily. She may be ill,' I cried out.

'There is someone in the room next to me who has been up during the night coughing,' she replied.

The old lady went ahead and knocked on the door.

There was no reply. She knocked again and then pushed the door. As it opened, in the darkness, I could see a figure trying to get out of a rough bed and falling to the floor.

I rushed forward. It was Emily. She said, 'Oh John, help me,' and then fainted. I picked her up from the floor and put her on the bed, which was damp.

'She needs something to eat and drink,' said the old lady.

'Will you stay here and look after her while I get something?' I asked.

'Yes,' she replied, 'I'll do my best.'

I rushed out of the building, wondering what to do. Best to ask the boss at the Crown and Anchor, so I returned there.

'Emily is very ill,' I told him. 'She tried to get out of bed and fainted.'

'Could be she has eaten or drunk something that has upset her,' he indicated.

'What do you suggest?' I asked.

'She needs something that is relatively safe to drink. Ale is better than water. Dip it in some bread and see if she will eat it to get some energy back in her body,' he advised.

I bought two bottles of ale and some bread. On my way back to the Archway building, I saw a trader selling coats. I bought one. I also saw a man with a horse and carriage and asked him to wait outside the Archway building. Racing back to the room where Emily was, I made sure not to fall over the wood in the corridor.

Emily had regained consciousness, and the old lady was holding her hand. 'Thank you for coming to see me,' Emily cried.

'See if you can sip this ale and eat the bread,' I urged. She did so with the old lady's help.

'I am going to take you to a better place,' I told her.

I asked the old lady to help her get dressed, while I went downstairs to tell the coachman it would be another fifteen minutes wait.

On my return, Emily was sitting on the edge of the bed. I put the coat that I had bought around her. Together with the help of the old lady, we managed to get Emily to the carriage with great difficulty. She kept fainting, and I had to carry her.

I gave the old lady some money and asked if she could guard Emily's belongings.

'Where should we go to?' asked the coachman. 'Do you want me to take the lady to a hospital?'

'No,' I said firmly, knowing that hospitals had bad reputations. 'Go to Somerset Street, Portman Square,' I told him.

We arrived about twenty minutes later. I knocked on the Jackson's door, and a servant answered.

'Mrs Jackson is out, but Mr Jackson is here,' she said. Alexander arrived, and I quickly explained the situation.

'Bring her into the house,' he said immediately, and asked two of the servants to help.

They carried Emily to a room and put her in bed, where she fell asleep.

'Thanks for your help,' I said to Alexander. 'It seems you are always coming to my aid.'

'I think it is the other way round,' he replied. 'You are always helping others, and we support your efforts,' he said with a smile.

As we were discussing what could have caused Emily to become so ill, Mrs Jackson returned. I explained what had happened.

'I will go and see her,' and she rushed to the room.

A few minutes later, she returned. 'It is no use us guessing what has caused the illness. I have sent one of the servants to ask Dr Bates, who lives nearby, if he can come over to give a medical assessment,' she indicated.

As ever, Mrs Jackson was taking charge of the situation in a proper way by gaining a professional opinion.

While we were waiting, she went to the kitchen and told the cook to prepare some soup for Emily. She also asked one of the servants to prepare a bathtub of warm water.

Dr Bates soon arrived, carrying a small bag. He was small, about fifty years of age and rather overweight.

Alexander welcomed him, and Mrs Jackson took him to see Emily.

I waited and worried. Was it a dreadful illness like typhus or some other fatal disease? My mind, of course, feared the worst.

After about fifteen minutes, Dr Bates and Mrs Jackson came into the room where Alexander and I were waiting.

'This is John Simpson, a friend, who brought Emily here,' said Mrs Jackson, by way of introduction.

'Pleased to meet you, Dr Bates. What is your assessment of Emily's condition?' I asked.

'She has been very ill and is still extremely weak. The sudden onset of the illness leads me to believe the cause is either food poisoning or she has drunk something noxious,' he declared.

'What do you recommend?' enquired Alexander.

'The body can often recover with rest,' he noted. 'We will see if this happens in the next couple of days. If not, we need a longer-term assessment,' he observed in a sombre tone.

'What should we do?' enquired Mrs Jackson.

'If she has a fever, have cold towels available to put on her forehead to keep her as cool as possible,' he suggested.

'If she wants food, try some broth with bread. She must take in fluids, so try to get her to sip boiled water after it has cooled. If she continues to have sickness, please arrange for bowls to be available. Wash and change her clothes,' he concluded.

'Is there anything else we can do?' asked Mrs Jackson, her voice indicating concern.

'Have someone available through the night who checks on the young lady every hour. I will return tomorrow to assess progress. If things get worse, and it is urgent, please call me,' he advised.

I thanked him, and he picked up his bag.

'You did the right thing,' he commented. 'If she had been left in a damp room by herself, without help, I fear for what would have happened.'

Mrs Jackson went to see the servants and told them what to do, based on the advice from Dr Bates.

The evening meal was more subdued than previous ones. Nevertheless, both Mr and Mrs Jackson wanted to discuss important issues.

'I met with Lady Cadogan today. She was delighted to receive the cash collections that you made, John. She has added that to the sum she and her friends have raised. It is likely to be between fifteen and twenty pounds in total. She will make sure the money, clothes and books for baby Henry are sent to the boat.'

'That is good to know,' I responded.

While we were talking, Rachael and Ellen asked if they could see Emily. 'Yes, but do not get too close. Also, don't stay too long, as Emily needs to rest,' answered Mrs Jackson.

'It is important our girls understand the real world,' commented Alexander. 'They have had a privileged life. They need to know how to cope with illness.'

A few minutes later, the girls returned to say Emily had sipped some of the water, which had earlier been boiled, and confirmed Nell, the servant, was with her.

After dinner, as before, Alexander invited me to his study and poured two whiskys. 'I like to enjoy a dram before going to bed,' he declared. 'While you were travelling to Plymouth, I went to a meeting here in London. The speaker was a man called John Howard. He gave the members a talk on the need to improve prisons.'

'I understand he did a report on conditions in prisons about ten years ago,' I commented.

'Yes, he focused on that. He asked for support to make improvements and suggested better facilities, food, training projects and employment opportunities. I was impressed with the areas of action that we could focus upon,' he summarised.

'Sir Richard Markham was also there,' he added. 'We had a talk after the dinner, and I mentioned your name. He passed on his best wishes and appreciation of the work you have done to reunite baby Henry with his parents.'

'That is good to know,' I reflected. 'When I was in Bath, I sent him a note.'

'We agreed to meet again and discuss ways and means of implementing Mr Howard's ideas,' responded Alexander.

'I look forward to hearing about those plans,' I replied.

'As you know more about prisons than Sir Richard and myself, I wondered if you would be interested in being involved?' he asked.

'In what way do you think I could contribute?' I enquired.

'You have knowledge and experience of what prisons are like from the inside. You see the daily problems and challenges,' he noted. 'To develop a plan for real change, we need someone who can advise us.'

'How could I do that while also being a jailer operating in the existing system?' I queried.

'Good question,' reflected Alexander. 'We would have to put in place a small organisation, where you have a different role to your current one. Instead of being a jailer, you would become an adviser to our group, plus Mr Howard and Lord Sydney,' he mused while twirling his glass of whisky.

'What would that mean in terms of the work I would do?' I enquired. At the same time, I could see an image in my mind of Captain Bradley suggesting I was not a jailer, but a government spy. Did Alexander want to make that a reality?

'The way these things work depends on who provides the money,' he replied. 'If the Home Secretary allocates the funds, then it is an official Government activity. You would be employed as a public servant. In contrast, if the money is provided by people like Sir Richard and myself, then it is a private project.'

'I would like to see improvements in the way prisoners are treated,' I replied. 'It seems to me the Government needs to go beyond incarceration as a punishment. They need to put money into helping prisoners prepare to live better lives when they are released.'

'I like that,' observed Alexander as he drained his glass. 'Let me think over how we can move these ideas forward.'

We left his study and walked towards the room where Emily was being attended by Nell. She was outside the room laying out some towels. 'I put these in the garden. It is very icy out there. So, the towels are now cold,' she said. 'I can use them to cool Emily down if she has a fever.'

'Well thought out,' replied Alexander.

'How is Emily?' I asked.

'I will go in and let you know,' replied Nell.

She took the cold towels into the bedroom and, two minutes later, returned. 'Emily does not have a fever. I gave her a drink of water. She is very tired and has gone to sleep again,' summarised Nell.

'Thank you,' I replied. 'Please contact me during the night if you need to.' I said goodnight and went to bed. As I drifted off to sleep, I was worried about Emily but felt excited by what Alexander had suggested.

21. Views and Opinions

I awoke early and went to the servants' area. Nell was there, having a drink and looking tired. She smiled as I entered.

'Any news about Emily?' I asked.

'She has had a restless night, with more sickness and only taking a few sips of water. However, there is no fever,' she summed up.

'Pleased to hear she is no worse,' I replied.

'Rose, one of the other servants, is looking after her now. I am going to have a sleep,' she added.

'Thanks for all you have done,' I replied.

A few minutes later, Mrs Jackson arrived. 'From what I have seen and heard, Emily has some form of poison in her body. We will ask Dr Bates to return later this morning,' she announced.

'At least she does not have a fever,' I commented.

'Yes, we must avoid that, as we know that could indicate nasty diseases such as smallpox, typhus and other contagions. So, best to keep her isolated for a while,' she advised.

Those comments worried me.

We went to the breakfast room, where the cook had put out many tasty options. But, given the situation, I did not feel like eating.

Alexander came in, and his wife updated him. 'Good to hear there is no fever,' he commented.

He then invited me to his study, and I wondered what was on his mind.

'I sent Sir Richard a message late yesterday, delivered by one of my servants, to say that you have returned and had good news. In reply, I have received a note from him and has invited both of us to his London club for lunch today, if you are available.'

'Yes, indeed, I would like to meet Sir Richard again,' I replied.

'We are meeting at Brooks' Club, St James' Street, at noon. Suggest you find a carriage and arrive a few minutes later. I am going to my office now,' he concluded.

As I had about three hours to spare, I decided to go for a walk. Before doing so, I went to see Emily. I noticed Rose was taking in some fresh linen, and I joined her. Emily smiled as we went in.

'Pleased to see you looking stronger,' I commented, trying to lift her spirits.

'Yes, I slept quite well,' she replied.

'I am going to a meeting with Mr Jackson, so keep resting, and I will see you tonight,' I said.

Rose was ready to change the bedclothes, so I waved and left.

It was a cold, crisp and sunny day. I asked Mrs Jackson the route to Buckingham House, as I had heard that was where the King and Queen lived. She gave me a small guidebook and told me the direction to follow.

As I walked southwards, I enjoyed the sights and sounds. It was proving to be an education through experience. I reflected on the change in my life.

Instead of the same routine day after day, it was interesting to meet people who, in various ways, were plotting and planning. Lord Sydney was at the top of the tree, but there were people like Patrick and his mates who were shaking it. Would Alexander and Sir Richard be supporting, or shaking the political tree of prisons?

I made sure that I arrived in central London long before noon. I wanted to be in good time, but also to see historic places.

After about twenty minutes, I arrived at a large building. I was told the locals called it the Queen's House. It was very grand, surrounded by acres of woodland, fields and gardens. My little book said it was acquired by King George III from the Duke of Buckingham and Normandy for his wife, Queen Charlotte, in 1761. Fourteen of her fifteen children were born there. Maybe the King and Queen were trying to fill all the rooms with their own family.

There was a light breeze blowing as I walked eastwards through the parkland to St James' Palace. My book said that was where the King conducted business. The impressive building had been built on the orders of King Henry VIII in 1530.

I could see that in both buildings there was no expense spared. Indeed, I wondered why there were so many poor people, and prisons in dreadful condition, when the rich could afford grand palaces. I also could see the vast amount of money invested in churches.

I noted the large houses and mansions. What kind of business generated the wealth required to buy one, I wondered. Nearby, there were shops selling a range of household products, herbal remedies, jewellery and food.

What could I buy Emily?

I saw a small bookshop and went in. I looked on the shelves labelled 'Books for Ladies.' There was one titled 'Evelina' by Fanny Burney, published in 1778. The bookseller said many ladies had given it a good review. So, I bought it.

Continuing on, I came to an area where the signpost read '*St James' Park*'. It was an open area of pleasant parkland surrounded by more grand houses, and also some buildings used for business. Again, this showed substantial wealth. No doubt, it would attract not just rich people, but those in need, like Susannah Holmes and Henry Kable, who could be tempted to find a quick, but illegal, way out of poverty.

Nearby was St James' Street, where Alexander had indicated I should go. On the corner was a large building. There was a well-dressed man outside, helping people in and out of their horse-drawn carriages. I asked if this was the Brooks' Gentlemen's Club, and he confirmed it was.

What lay behind the grand doors, I wondered?

Before entering, I noticed it was like going into a prison. There was a guard at the door. 'Can I help you, sir?' he enquired in a formal way.

'I have an appointment with Sir Richard Markham,' I replied, in a voice that I hoped was convincing.

He looked at the list in front of him. 'Your name, sir?'

'John Simpson,' I told him.

'Please wait here, and we will let Sir Richard know that you have arrived,' he said, and pointed to a chair. I sat down with relief. I had passed the entrance test.

A couple of minutes later, I could see Sir Richard coming down the corridor. 'Very good to see you again, John. Welcome to my club. I trust you are well after your travels?'

'I am, thanks to your help,' I replied.

'How did your journey go after you left Bath?'

'I was able to transport the three women to Plymouth. However, as you may have heard, Captain Bradley refused to allow baby Henry on board,' I indicated.

'I understand that you brought the child to London, and that is how you met Mr and Mrs Jackson,' he noted.

'Yes, they helped look after the baby while I took your letter to Lord Sydney. As a result, he authorised the baby's father, Henry Kable, to be transported and to take the child with him. So, I collected Kable and reunited the family at Plymouth.'

'You have done very well, John. Congratulations on an amazing achievement,' he beamed. 'Come with me to the dining room,' he indicated.

Alexander was already there and welcomed me as if it had been a long time since we met. As I sat down, I noticed portraits on the walls.

'Those are paintings of our founders,' announced Sir Richard. This gentlemen's club was founded in 1764 by twenty-seven Whig politicians. The building was built about 1778, so everything is relatively new.'

'It certainly looks modern,' commented Alexander.

Dining in a London professional club was way beyond my experience. I was a bit anxious. Many questions ran through my mind. Why had I been invited? Would I be able to converse with these well-educated people?

The waiter brought us the menu. I decided to wait and see what my host ordered, but Sir Richard asked his guests to choose. Alexander soon made his choices. 'I will have the same, thank you,' I told the waiter.

'I will have my usual,' declared Sir Richard. As he did so, I could see his eyes were focused on three men coming towards us. One of them I thought I recognised.

Sir Richard stood up and said, 'Hello, Thomas, it is good to see you again.'

He then walked with the gentleman to their table. A couple of minutes later, he returned.

'Sorry about that,' he said, 'but Thomas Townshend was my best friend at university, and we have not seen each other for a long time. He is now a Government minister.

'What is his area of responsibility?' enquired Alexander.

'He is the Minister at the Home Office. He now has the title of Lord Sydney, since the King elevated him to the House of Lords three years ago,' added Sir Richard.

What a coincidence, and I wondered if Lord Sydney remembered our meeting a couple of weeks ago, I reflected to myself.

'Who were the other two?' asked Alexander.

'One was John Howard, who wrote the report on prison reform. The other man, I do not know. Thomas introduced him as a naval captain, but I did not get his full name,' responded Sir Richard.

The food arrived, and we commenced our meal. Sir Richard turned towards me.

'John, given your successful efforts to reunite baby Henry with his parents, we feel it is important to keep up the momentum,' he stated. 'We want to ensure that all prisoners are treated with respect, particularly women with children.'

'As Quakers, we have a social responsibility,' added Alexander. 'While we have been talking about doing something, you have taken action.'

'Thanks to the support that you have both given me,' I noted.

'The question is, what can we do next?' posed Sir Richard, looking at me.

It seemed both these well-educated members of the aristocracy were asking me, a turnkey jailer from Norwich, to propose a path of action. Once again, I heard the phrase in my head say, 'Do what is right.'

'We all know that it is difficult to change the existing system,' I began. 'People who are poor and hungry will be tempted to steal. Judges will apply the law and hang the adult offenders. They will send the younger people to dirty, infested prisons and forget about them. Prisoners will try to escape, and people like me are paid to stop them. It is a vicious circle.'

'You are correct in your analysis,' noted Sir Richard. 'What can we do to improve the situation?'

'Maybe we have to start in a new place,' I replied. 'Susannah Holmes, Henry Kable and their son are being sent to a new land. Let that be the place where convicts are given the opportunity to reform and become useful citizens. To do so, it is important they are provided with training and opportunities to make a better life.'

Sir Richard looked at Alexander with a smile on his face. 'That seems an eminently sensible approach to me,' he declared.

'I agree,' responded Alexander, 'providing we continue to press for better conditions in the prisons here at the same time.'

'The man who can influence both is sitting at the table over there,' I observed. 'Can you have a word with your old university friend?' I asked.

What would Sir Richard do?

‘Let me see if Lord Sydney has time to meet us after he has finished lunch,’ he stated and walked over to the other table.

Whilst he was doing that, Alexander indicated that I would need to be actively involved. ‘If the plan is to succeed, you would need to work with those who will have to implement it.’

After a couple of minutes, Sir Richard returned. ‘I mentioned our conversation and asked if Lord Sydney would like to discuss it. He suggested that we go to the club boardroom with his guests, as they were talking about the same problem.’

Thirty minutes later, the six of us were sitting around a table with introductions being made. Sir Richard introduced Alexander and myself. Lord Sydney did likewise for his guests.

‘It is my pleasure,’ he said, ‘to introduce Mr John Howard, who has written the documents on The State of Prisons in England and Wales. Also, I am delighted to introduce Captain Arthur Phillip, who has been appointed as the Commodore of the eleven ships that will set sail for New South Wales next year.’

As was the custom, we all shook hands. Lord Sydney then invited Sir Richard to start the discussion.

He said that, on a personal level, he was concerned about the state of prisons, and thanked John Howard for his research and reports. He also referred, with appreciation, to my efforts in reuniting baby Henry with his family and thanked Lord Sydney for supporting that.

‘Ah, Mr Simpson, now I remember our meeting at the Home Office a couple of weeks ago when you gave me the letter from Sir Richard.’

I smiled and said, ‘I am pleased to let you know, Lord Sydney, that I have completed the task you gave me.’

‘The issue we face is what to do next in order to improve the situation?’ Sir Richard continued. ‘We all have an interest in making the system work better.’

‘What do you propose?’ asked Lord Sydney.

‘There are two main ways,’ suggested Sir Richard in an authoritative way. ‘We need to put further effort into implementing Mr Howard’s proposals here in Britain. The other approach is to have a group to advise Captain Phillip on policies for the penal colony to be established in New South Wales.’

Captain Phillip leant forward. ‘That was a key topic of our discussion at lunch. I would welcome positive proposals from those with experience and ideas.’

John Howard added his view. 'Changes in the prison system are very slow. I would support a new approach in a new land, so that we can learn how to improve the system here at home, providing we also start to implement plans here at the same time.'

'We have about six months before the First Fleet, as we are calling it, sets sail,' noted Lord Sydney. 'Who will lead this so-called new approach and how?'

'It needs to be a group with sufficient powers and funds to get a report to you, Thomas, before the fleet leaves for New South Wales,' proposed Sir Richard. 'I am willing to chair it pro bono. I suggest that Mr John Howard be appointed, with other nominees, to be agreed. It would be good if you could identify the questions the group should address,' he said, looking at Captain Phillip.

'Yes, I can do that,' replied the Captain.

'Given the considerable experience of Mr John Simpson, I suggest he be employed to gather information and ideas from those in the prisons,' added Sir Richard.

Lord Sydney looked across the table. 'Well, Richard, it looks as if you have another job to add to the many that you already have on your plate,' he responded with a smile. 'I know from our many years of friendship that you will bring your great abilities to the assignment. Please send me a note on the arrangements.'

We all stood and shook hands. It seemed to me that everyone in the room knew urgent action was required. In a short time, they had seized on the idea that I had suggested, which Sir Richard presented in a politically acceptable way. I wondered what would happen next.

As we walked out of the club, Sir Richard turned to Alexander and said, 'Can we meet at my office tomorrow at noon to plan the details?'

'Yes, let's do that,' replied Alexander, as he hailed a carriage for us.

During the ride to Portman Place, we discussed the meeting. 'I can see that Sir Richard has the confidence of Lord Sydney,' I reflected.

'Yes, that is the key political link that we need to build upon,' noted Alexander.

On arrival at the Jackson's, I went to see Emily. I knocked on the door. Rose was on duty and opened it. 'Come in,' she said.

'How are you feeling?' I asked Emily, who was sitting up with a pillow behind her.

'Thanks to Rose and Nell, who have been giving me regular drinks and some food, I am feeling a bit better,' she replied.

'That is good to know,' I responded.

'Did you have a good day?' Emily enquired.

'Yes, I went for an enjoyable walk in the centre. While there, I bought you a present.'

I gave her the book. She smiled and said, 'Thank you. That is very thoughtful.'

'I hope that you enjoy it.'

'If I feel stronger tomorrow, I will start reading it,' she replied. I could see Emily needed to rest, so I left.

Dinner with the Jackson family was always interesting. However, after the day's events, it was even more so, as Alexander summarised the discussions. Mrs Jackson was quick to add her views.

'When Lord Sydney appoints this group, it will be useful to gain the views of women. The new colony will have a number of female prisoners. But, as usual, men will be making all the decisions,' she declared in a tone that showed her disapproval.

'I agree that is important. What do you suggest?' asked Alexander.

'Lady Cadogan should be invited to be a member of the group, or at least a key advisor, as she raises so much money for charity,' responded Mrs Jackson.

'I will ask Sir Richard to include her,' noted Alexander.

After a long day, I was feeling tired, but Alexander invited me to his study. As he poured out two whiskys, he said, 'John, you have met some people with power and influence today., Let us meet tomorrow morning to develop a proposal to discuss with Sir Richard. It will be a meeting that could provide you with new opportunities.'

I went to bed wondering what I would say at the meeting with Sir Richard.

22. The Plan

I slept soundly and only awoke when I heard the servants cleaning. After a quick breakfast, I went to see Emily.

She was sitting on the side of the bed. Nell was with her.

‘Good to see you, John,’ she said. ‘I tried to get out of bed, but I have had a couple of dizzy spells when I try to stand up.’

‘That is to be expected, as you need time to get the strength back in your legs,’ I responded. ‘Don’t rush it.’

‘What are you doing today?’ she asked.

‘I am going with Mr Jackson to a meeting in London. We will discuss ways to improve prisons,’ I replied.

‘Let me know how it goes,’ she said.

I was pleased to see from the discussion that Emily was improving. I touched her hand, as I left to meet Alexander.

‘Let us go to my study and make a plan,’ he said in a positive way.

‘Your idea of using the new colony to develop a better prison system struck a chord yesterday,’ he reflected. ‘Can you give some examples of how that could be done?’

‘At present, prisoners are just locked up. There is no effort to train them or improve their education,’ I said. ‘In a new place, you can start with a planned programme of activities.’

We talked about the useful things prisoners could do if the role of jail staff was to educate rather than just guard.

We set off in a carriage to Sir Richard’s office, which was in the Mayfair area. The building and location had a feeling of wealth attached to it. We rang the doorbell, and a servant answered. He invited us in. It felt as if we were in a rich private house rather than a place of business.

While the servant went to tell Sir Richard, I admired the works of art on display. There were many pictures on the walls, and the room had ornate furniture. It was all very quiet and did not seem like a workplace.

The clerk returned and took us upstairs into a large room, which had a view of fields and gardens. On the walls, there were many paintings. Sir Richard stood up from his desk as we entered.

‘Welcome to my London office,’ he said with a smile. ‘This is where I coordinate our work. We act as a private bank for commercial and industrial businesses, inclusive of making their shares available for trading. I also provide such services in Bath, Bristol, Birmingham and Oxford.’

‘Thank you for inviting us, and also we enjoyed the visit to your London club yesterday,’ responded Alexander.

‘It was a most enjoyable lunch,’ I added.

‘The meeting afterwards with Lord Sydney and his guests proved to be most interesting,’ noted Sir Richard. ‘He has sent me a handwritten note this morning. Let me read it to you.’

To Sir Richard Markham.

From Lord Sydney.

It was good to see you yesterday. I am writing to confirm that, as a result of our discussion, I would like you to select and chair a group of people to advise me and His Majesty’s Government on the future of prisons, especially in New South Wales and other colonies. It is planned that Captain Arthur Phillip, who you met yesterday, will depart with about 750 convicts in May 1787. I will, therefore, need your recommendations at least one month prior.

For the purpose of clarity and formal agreement, please send me a statement of likely costs. This can be for a 12-month period, as it will be useful to apply the proposals to prisons in the United Kingdom.

‘The note from Lord Sydney provides us with an important agenda for discussion,’ commented Sir Richard.

‘Indeed, it does,’ replied Alexander. ‘He has been quick to act, so we need to respond with a plan.’

During the next hour, the discussion focused on the issues to be addressed and who would be involved.

‘Our mission is to gather the views of those with knowledge and experience, plus people who represent those involved. John, you know how the prison system works, so would you join the group?’ asked Sir Richard.

'Yes, I would like to contribute, but arrangements will need to be made with the Governor of Norwich Castle Prison, as he is expecting that I will return to work there,' I explained.

'I will ask Lord Sydney to communicate with him,' noted Sir Richard.

The discussion continued about the strategy and operational issues. I listened with great interest.

In my life, I had always been on the receiving end of policies and instructions. Only since I challenged the decision of Captain Bradley in Plymouth had it become clear to me that I did not have to follow other people's rules. Now, for the first time, I was on the inside with those who made the decisions and was being invited to make better arrangements.

'We need to make a list of the important issues that can be addressed in the next four months, as we need to deliver our report by April 1787,' I summarised.

Alexander leant forward and said, 'Yes, we need to focus. One important issue concerns women convicts. The needs of female prisoners should be represented. My wife has proposed that Lady Cadogan be invited to contribute, as she does a lot of charity work,' he commented.

'As you know, it would be most unusual to have a woman on such a group, but we can certainly put that forward to Lord Sydney,' noted Sir Richard.

After about ninety minutes, Sir Richard called a clerk into his office. 'Can you write down what I am about to say?' The clerk wrote quickly.

To Lord Sydney.

From Sir Richard Markham.

Thank you for your note regarding the future of prisons. I am pleased to accept your invitation to chair a group, pro bono, on the organisation of prisons, with particular regard to those in the colonies.

I propose that we name it 'The Future Prisons Advisory Group', with the following members.

Chairman - Sir Richard Markham.

Members:

- Lady Cadogan, to represent charities.

- Captain Arthur Phillip - to represent officers of the First Fleet, or his nominee.

- Mr John Howard, to represent those who support reform of prisons and prisoners.

- Clerk - Mr John Simpson.

- Secretary - To be nominated.

The remit of the group will be to advise on the following issues relating to convicts -

- Accommodation.*
- Nutrition.*
- Fitness training.*
- Health facilities.*
- Religious rights and considerations.*
- Marital rights and issues.*
- Ownership and property rights.*
- Remission for good behaviour.*
- Education and training provisions.*
- Legal rights of convicts in custody.*
- Children of convicts and their rights.*
- Special needs of female convicts.*
- Other factors that may arise.*

For reference, Mr Simpson is currently employed at Norwich Castle Prison. In order to focus on the above work, he will need a letter on your authority to move from his current role to work for the Advisory Group in London. I would be grateful if you could confirm that and the payment at the requisite rate.

I look forward to your instructions.

'That should get the process underway,' said Sir Richard as he signed the note. 'I will have it delivered this afternoon.'

We shook hands and departed. Alexander said he would walk to his office, which was nearby. I decided to contact my journalist friends.

I went first to The Strand Tavern and ordered a late lunch. It was a stark contrast to the previous day at the club, but I enjoyed it just as much. Patrick was not there, but Damien was in discussion. After about ten minutes, he stood up and came over.

'John, good to see you again,' he said in a merry mood, as he sat down.

'Have you been saving more babies or damsels in distress?' he asked with a hearty laugh.

I told him about how I had found Emily, dangerously ill, in a dilapidated building. I explained how an old lady had helped.

'Emily is now with the Jackson family, and they are caring for her,' I mentioned.

'It is good to know some of those rich people do the right thing,' he declared.

'She is only alive because an old lady showed me where Emily was living,' I added.

'I would like to interview that old lady. Where does she live?' he asked.

'Near the Crown and Anchor. I can take you there if you want,' I said, although not keen to return.

'Let's do it,' and he slapped the table, as if to seal the deal.

As we walked along, I told him about the meeting with Lord Sydney at Brooks' Club.

'You certainly are mixing with high society,' he replied with amazement. 'Let me know what happens and whether we can write an article,' he added.

A few minutes later, we arrived at the Archway building. There was a horse and cart outside, and three men were loading a rough wooden coffin.

'Sad to see,' I commented.

'Yes, it was an old lady from the second floor. It seems that she starved to death because it was too cold to go out and get food,' said the man.

A shiver went down my spine. 'Wait here till I return,' I told him.

I signalled to Damien, and we went into the dark, dismal building. On reaching the floor where I had found Emily, I went to the old lady's room and knocked. There was no answer, so I opened the door. She was not there.

I looked around to see just an old bed and a chair with a small table next to it. Lying on the table was the exact amount of money that I had given to the lady when I was last there. I picked it up.

'This is a terrible place,' said Damien, holding his nose against the putrid smell. 'Let's go,' he proposed.

Before doing so, I went next door and collected Emily's belongings.

As we left the building, the men were ready to leave. 'Where are you taking this lady?' I asked.

'Paupers' graveyard,' answered the senior man.

I handed the money that I had originally given the lady to the man. 'Please take her to that church over there,' I indicated, 'and pay for a proper burial.'

'Yes sir,' he replied, and the cart, acting as a hearse, moved forward.

Damien and I went to the Crown and Anchor. 'That lady saved the life of Emily,' I told him.

'She showed you where to go, but you rescued Emily and took her to the Jackson family,' he said, putting his hand on my arm. 'That is why we have to improve conditions for everyone,' added Damien.

He ordered two ales. We talked about ways to make changes so people could lead healthier lives.

'I have an opportunity to influence how prisons will be organised in the colonies. I have been asked to be part of a group who will report to and advise Lord Sydney,' I told Damien.

'You certainly have the experience to do so. Most of those Government investigations are done by people who are not in touch with the real world,' he commented. 'I hope they listen to you.'

It was time to return. 'Give my best wishes to Patrick and Lachlan and keep up the efforts to improve the living conditions of people,' I shouted as I left.

It was good to see Emily sitting in a chair, next to a fire, when I returned. She had a shawl around her shoulders and smiled as I entered the room.

'Pleased to see you are up and able to walk,' I said.

'Thanks to Nell and Rose, I am feeling stronger,' she replied. 'Did you have a good day?' she asked.

'Yes, I went to an important meeting. I was asked to join a group to put forward plans for improving prisons,' I indicated.

'It must have been a long one,' and she laughed.

I felt it better not to say that I had been to where she used to live, or mention that the old lady had died.

'I am going to rest again now,' added Emily, 'so I will see you tomorrow.'

I went to get ready for dinner and thought about what to do next. That was also on the minds of my hosts, as we commenced our conversation during dinner.

'The meeting with Sir Richard was very positive,' stated Alexander, as he brought his wife and daughters up to date. 'He is a man who grasps the issues quickly and is then proactive to make things happen. He has written to Lord Sydney recommending that Lady Cadogan join the action group.'

'I am pleased to hear that,' responded Mrs Jackson. 'It is about time a woman was involved. It is also important that John has been invited to serve as he has personal experience of the prison system.'

'The other members will be Mr John Howard and Captain Arthur Phillip, who will become the Governor of the New South Wales Colony,' added Alexander.

Mrs Jackson turned towards me and asked, 'What was your impression, John?'

'Sir Richard is committed but realises that he needs to gain the support of politicians,' I replied.

'Agreed,' added Alexander, 'and he particularly needs your knowledge and experience. He asked you to do the practical groundwork. So, what are your plans?'

'Firstly, I will have to see the Governor of Norwich Castle Prison. He probably is already annoyed that I have not returned. He will be more irritable when I tell him that I will be leaving, as I presume it will mean me returning to London.'

'Yes, you will need to live in the city for at least a year,' noted Alexander.

'Tomorrow, I will leave for Norwich,' I declared. 'My concern is that Emily is still not well, and has nowhere to live,' I expressed.

'Do not worry about that,' replied Mrs Jackson. 'We will look after Emily until she feels strong enough to find a job and a place to live.'

'That is good to know,' I responded.

As we finished the dinner, Alexander invited me to his study once again. He poured me a dram of whisky and one for himself.

'You did very well to suggest that the new colony could be a place where different approaches to imprisonment can be tested.'

'I hope it benefits Susannah Holmes and Henry Kable,' I replied, 'so they can give baby Henry a better life.'

'Yes, after all your efforts to reunite them, it is vital they have a good start in the colony. Maybe, in an ironic way, it could be a blessing,' he mused.

'In what way?' I enquired.

SAVING BABY HENRY

'Rather than being locked up in a Norwich dungeon, they will be in the open air. Once they are free, many opportunities will open up,' he suggested optimistically.

We finished our drinks, and I slept well, considering that I was about to enter the unknown world of prison policies and politics.

23. Changing Direction

The next morning, I went to the breakfast room, where I found Emily sitting at the table.

'How are you?' I asked.

'Feeling much better, thanks to everyone who has helped me,' she replied. 'But, I am not sure what to do, or where to go?'

'No need to worry,' I told her. 'Mr and Mrs Jackson have said you can stay here until you are able to find a job and a place to live.'

'That is good to know and a big relief,' replied Emily with a smile. 'And, what about you, John? What will you do?' she asked in a quiet voice.

'Today, I will buy a ticket and return to Norwich,' I told her. Emily's eyes looked downwards.

'Will you return to work at the prison?' she enquired.

'No, I will tell the Governor that I will leave my job and move to London,' I stated.

Her eyes once again looked at me. 'What will you do here?' she asked.

'Sir Richard Markham has asked me to work with him, and a group of people to be appointed by Lord Sydney, to develop new plans for prisons,' I explained.

'It sounds like you have supporters in high places,' noted Emily.

'Better than having enemies in low places,' I replied with a smile.

She laughed and asked, 'When will you return to do this work?'

'If all goes well, I will come back a week from now,' I indicated.

'I look forward to that,' she said. 'While you are in Norwich, can you please tell my parents that I am alright? I do not want them to worry.'

'Yes, I will visit them and bring you any news. I will also meet my father and brother.'

'What else will you do while you are away?' asked Emily.

'I will go to the village of Surlingham, where Susannah Holmes was born, to give her family the news that Susannah has a child. It could be a difficult meeting, as I need to let them know she is going, with the father of her baby, to a colony in New South Wales.'

'That is very considerate of you, as I am sure her family must be worried,' reflected Emily.

As we were talking, Rose came in and asked what we wanted for breakfast.

'Just some warm bread with porridge, thank you,' said Emily.

'Same for me,' I added, 'with an egg, if you have one, please.'

'I will book a ticket on the afternoon stagecoach to Norwich and arrive there sometime tomorrow.'

'I will miss you,' whispered Emily.

'Time will soon pass,' I said, trying to raise her spirits. Holding her right hand, I whispered, 'I look forward to seeing you fit and strong again when I return.'

Emily squeezed my hand and smiled as I kissed her cheek.

It was time for me to pack up and start the long journey. Before doing so, I went to say thank you to my hosts.

Alexander was in his study talking to his wife. 'John, I see you have your case with you,' he observed.

'Are you going to Norwich?' asked Mrs Jackson.

'Yes, I need to tell the Governor of the prison that I have completed the job he gave me. I will also tell him of the meeting that we had yesterday and seek leave of absence from my work.'

Alexander stood up and walked over to me. 'John, I realise this travel will all cost a lot of money. Here is enough to cover the stagecoach fare and your overnight accommodation.'

'That is very kind of you,' I replied, 'as I was worried about the cost.'

He shook me by the hand. 'You are about to do very important Government work, and I know Sir Richard will want you to have the funds to return safely.' He and Mrs Jackson waved as their coachman took me to the stagecoach inn. A new phase of my life was about to begin.

Having made the journey before, I knew what to expect. This time, however, I did not have to worry about caring for a baby. No one would ask me awkward questions.

Indeed, that is what happened. No doubt, my fellow passengers assumed that I was a businessman. Therefore, they did not want to pry into private issues.

Previously, they had seen me as a man caring for a baby. So, that helped start conversation. This time, I looked outwards to the fields, and saw the villages and towns pass by. The winter wind shook the trees, as the rain turned to sleet and snow. At the overnight stop, I booked a room at the inn.

To stretch my legs, I went for a brief walk. By the time I returned, dinner was being served for the stagecoach travellers. The man opposite me introduced himself as Gerald Kent. We talked about the journey and the cold weather for a while. He then asked, 'What is your job?'

Good question, I thought, as I was about to resign from Norwich Castle Prison. What should I say?

'I work in the prison service,' I replied. 'I focus on the education of prisoners.'

'About time,' he replied. 'We need people to learn new skills and live honest lives when they are set free,' he declared. 'I own a company that produces building materials. With more people crowding into the cities, we need trained workers.'

We went to the bar and continued our conversation on the ways schools and prisons could better prepare people for work. It was an important discussion, and one that I could mention to Sir Richard.

After sleeping well, I was up early. It was a long journey in the draughty stagecoach, via Ipswich. We stopped about every fifteen miles to change the horses. It was a well-organised system, which enabled us to make steady progress. We arrived in Norwich just before dinner time.

I walked to my brother's house and knocked on the door.

'Good to see you,' he said. 'I thought you had decided to stay in London with your girlfriend,' and he laughed.

'Let's go to the pub,' I said, ignoring his comment about Emily. He put on his coat, and we walked through the windy streets. Over our pints of ale, I told him of the journey to Plymouth with Henry and his son, and also about what had happened in London.

'It sounds like an exciting life you have been leading compared to my old boring routine here,' he replied.

'I am going to return to London in a few days' time. If you want, I can try to find you a job there,' I offered.

We had a meal and then returned to Len's place. 'I need to get the horse and cart back tomorrow,' I said.

'You will find the horse in the field behind our dad's house,' he indicated.

I slept well and woke up to a pleasant morning. As it was fine, I walked to the village. My father was pleased to see me. He boiled a can of water on the fire to make me a warm drink. We discussed local news. Then, he helped me harness the horse to the cart. As we did so, I told him about my journey.

'Good to hear you reunited baby Henry with his parents. You have done well,' he stated, and patted me on the back.

'I am now going to Surlingham, the village where Susannah Holmes lived, to let her family know what has happened,' I indicated.

'If it is alright, I will come with you. I have a friend called Reg who lives there,' my dad suggested.

'Yes, let's go,' I replied, pleased to have the company on a cold day.

Within half an hour, we arrived. 'Can you ask your friend, if he knows where the Holmes family live?' I asked, as we entered the village.

Within a couple of minutes, he returned with Reg.

'Good to meet you,' he said. 'Understand you want to visit Mr and Mrs Holmes. There are only a couple of hundred people in the village. We all know each other well. I will take you to their house.'

I tethered the horse, and we walked across the village green to what looked like a farmworker's cottage. Reg knocked, and a middle-aged man came to the door.

'Hello, Bert,' he said. 'I have a friend here who has news about your daughter Susannah,' he indicated, pointing towards me.

'Come in,' said Bert. 'This is my wife, Agnes.'

It was only a small room, so we stood while I introduced myself as a jailer from Norwich Castle Prison. I asked Mr and Mrs Holmes how long it had been since they had seen Susannah.

'Only once, when she was taken to jail about three years ago,' replied Bert.

'How is she?' asked Agnes, who looked thin and old beyond her years.

What should I say? I felt it best not to raise anxieties, so I gave her and Bert the facts. 'Did you know she has had a baby named Henry?' I asked.

'Oh my goodness!' exclaimed Agnes as she went to sit down, looking rather faint.

'Has she married?' asked Bert, looking surprised.

'Not yet,' I replied, 'but the father, Henry Kable, has told me they plan to do so as soon as possible.'

'That is good to know, as she is already in enough trouble,' commented Agnes. 'We should go and see her and our grandson,' suggested Bert.

It was then that I had to tell them it would not be possible. I tried to do it in a kind way.

'They have already been moved to a new place,' I told them. 'They have been chosen to be part of a new prison, somewhere overseas, where there will be more opportunities.'

'You mean that Susannah will be sent away from England?' enquired Bert.

'Yes,' I replied, wondering whether I should have made the visit.

Agnes started to cry. 'We will never see her again,' she wailed as Bert went over to comfort her.

'Where is she being sent?' he asked.

'It is called New South Wales, but I'm not sure where that is,' I replied.

'She has about eleven years before her prison sentence is completed,' noted Bert. 'So it is unlikely we will be alive when she is released,' he added with a sigh.

Agnes was slumped in the chair. She looked up at me and said, 'Please tell Susannah we pray for her, and that we love her. She was caught trying to get some money for us, because Bert was not able to work due to an injury.'

As we walked to the door, I let Bert and Agnes know that a considerable sum of money had been collected for baby Henry.

'I hope that will help him get an education,' said Bert.

'Yes, then he can get a well-paid job,' added Agnes. They smiled and waved us goodbye.

I went with my dad and his friend to the local pub for a drink. 'That was sad to hear about Susannah,' said Reg. 'I hope she has a better life where they are going.'

After about an hour, we started the return journey. I took my dad home and stayed the night there.

24. Beyond Prison Gates

The next morning, I returned the horse and cart to Norwich Castle Prison. I made sure the horse could not trot off by tying him to a post.

The guard on duty recognised me and stood back as I walked the familiar route to the Governor's office. I knocked on his door.

'Come in!' he shouted. The Governor was writing a note at his desk. I entered and stood in front of him.

'Ah,' he said, 'At last, you've returned. Have you brought the horse and cart back this time?'

'Yes, sir. It is outside, ready for any transportations to and from the Court,' I replied.

'Did you complete the assignment as directed?' he continued in what I felt was an aggressive tone.

'Yes, sir, I delivered convict Kable and his son to Plymouth. Captain Bradley has signed a letter to Lord Sydney confirming the fact.'

'Why has it taken you so long to return to your duties here?' he demanded in a loud voice.

'I had to deliver the letter to Lord Sydney in London,' I indicated.

'And what did you tell Lord Sydney to do next?' he asked sarcastically.

Clearly, the Governor was still very annoyed about our previous meeting. I felt he was going to make it difficult for me.

'You will never be assigned to transport duties again,' he said forcibly. 'Instead, you will have to work extra shifts to compensate for the ones you have missed. I am also going to assign you to guard the high-risk violent prisoners.'

What should I say? The Governor was in a furious mood. He stood up and walked to the window.

'You have disobeyed my orders,' he bellowed. 'From now on, you will do what I say. If you do not, then you will be dismissed.'

He turned towards me. I could see his face was red with anger. He walked to his desk and kicked a leg of the chair.

'You will now go to the area where the violent prisoners are kept. You will be doing twelve-hour shifts until further notice.'

He wanted to show that he was in control. Before he could say any more, there was a knock on the door. Tom Anson, the assistant, came in.

'What is it?' snarled the Governor.

'Special delivery for you, sir. It has just arrived on the stagecoach mail,' said Anson. 'I thought you would wish to receive it immediately, as it indicates the sender is from the Home Office.'

He handed the letter to the Governor, who opened and read it. The brow of his head furrowed, and his face became flushed, as he concentrated.

The Governor looked at me. 'Do you know what this letter says?' he asked in a tone of disbelief.

'No sir. Is it from Lord Sydney?' I enquired.

'Yes, it is!' he rasped. 'You seem to have considerable influence with the Government minister in charge of prisons, which is far above your station in life. Does he not realise you are just an ordinary turnkey?' screamed the Governor, who clearly felt I had undermined his authority again.

The Governor took the letter he was holding and smashed it on the top of his desk.

'This document instructs me to release you from your duties in this prison, until such time as Lord Sydney decides otherwise,' he exclaimed with anger. 'He wants you to be in London to work on an important assignment,' he fumed, with a look of resignation.

'Yes, sir. That was my understanding of the discussion I had with Lord Sydney,' I replied, in such a way that the Governor could come to his own conclusions.

'As you will no longer be working here, this meeting is a waste of time,' he shouted.

'Yes, I will return to London this week to take up my new duties. If you wish, I can take your letter of confirmation to Lord Sydney,' I added.

The Governor took a piece of paper and wrote a short note. He signed and sealed it, then handed it to me. 'Please give this to Lord Sydney,' he said angrily.

I turned and left without any further discussion.

As I walked away from the prison, I felt a sense of release, as if my sentence was over.

No longer would I have to go into the dark, gloomy and smelly world of Norwich Castle Prison each day. No longer would I have to take the orders of the Governor. No longer would I have to follow the daily rules and restrictions. The cold morning air filled my lungs, giving me a sense of freedom.

I returned to my brother's house. 'How did the meeting go?' he asked.

'I am no longer working there,' I replied. 'Tomorrow, I will take the stagecoach to London. It will be the start of a new life.'

'Best of luck,' he replied. 'I hope you enjoy your new job.'

I told him that I needed to pass on some messages for Emily and get ready to leave.

A few minutes later, I knocked on the door of her Aunt Florence. To my surprise, Emily's mother opened it.

'Hello, John, good to see you again. Come in.' She explained that her sister was in bed, ill with a nasty cough and winter cold. 'I am here for a few days to look after her,' she added.

'I came to say that I am on my way to London and will be working there for about a year,' I indicated.

'Good to hear. Will you see Emily again?' she asked, with what I thought was a twinkle in her eye. 'I have a couple of small things for her.'

'Yes, we have agreed to meet.' I felt it best not to mention that Emily had been ill. It would only raise unnecessary anxiety. She passed me a couple of small mementos.

'Give my love to Emily,' she cried as I waved goodbye. I returned to my brother's and slept well.

The next day, he walked with me to the stagecoach and said goodbye.

Because Norwich was one of the largest cities in Britain, there were regular stagecoach services to London. However, the roads were in poor condition.

After about twenty miles, one of the wheels on the coach broke. We had to wait while the coachman went to the next stagecoach inn to get a replacement.

A cold wind was blowing from the east. Rather than sit in the stagecoach, I went for a walk. I knew it would be at least two hours before the wheel could be replaced or another stagecoach arrive.

There was a small village nearby, and I decided to visit the local pub. The thought of a good lunch, with an ale, made me walk quicker.

The publican was surprised to see a stranger walk through the door. 'How far have you travelled?' he asked. I explained the situation.

'So, you are going up to London to seek fame and fortune,' he said with a deep laugh.

'Not really,' I replied. 'My job will be to provide advice to the Government on a new prison they are setting up in a colony called New South Wales.'

'I have been there,' said the publican.

Surprised, I almost dropped the ale that he had just poured for me. 'How did you manage that?' I asked, thinking he may have been joking.

'It was about sixteen years ago,' he replied, leaning across the bar, as if he was about to tell me some secrets.

'I was a sailor on a boat called HMS Endeavour. We set sail from Plymouth in 1768 under the leadership of Captain James Cook. It was a wild adventure out into the Atlantic Ocean, and then southwards till we rounded Cape Horn. From there, we sailed to Tahiti, an island in the Pacific Ocean, where we had a good time.'

'What was it like in New South Wales?' I enquired, eager to find out about the conditions.

'Well, we had been sailing for over two years, so it was good to go ashore at what the captain called Botany Bay. It was very hot, and I remember we saw unusual animals hopping around. We were a bit worried in case the local tribes attacked us, so we only stayed for a week.'

'Do you think it was a place where about 1500 people could live?' I enquired, estimating the number who would be going on the voyage.

'No, I don't think the land would be suitable for settlement. The ground was better about 500 miles north. We had to stay there for about seven weeks to mend our boat after it was badly damaged on the coral reef rocks.'

'You certainly had an amazing voyage,' I reflected.

'Yes, but it is the life for a young person,' he noted. 'That is why I left and decided to run a village pub.'

My mind turned to Susannah and Henry. They were in their early twenties, and their son was under one year of age. They were currently locked up on a dreadful prison ship in Plymouth, which was not even leaving port.

'How long will it take to sail to New South Wales?' I asked the publican.

'If you have favourable winds behind you and a good captain, it will take about nine months,' he replied.

I shook my head in disbelief. The voyage to a new life was going to be very difficult for baby Henry and his parents. In addition, how would 1500 people be fed and cared for? I wondered if Lord Sydney and his mates understood the issues.

I finished my lunch, thanked the publican and walked back to the stagecoach. About an hour later, when the wheel had been mended, we continued on our way.

The rest of the journey went as planned. After an overnight stop, I arrived in London the following day. It was dark by the time I knocked on the door of the Jackson's home, where Nell answered.

'Oh, nice to see you again, Mr Simpson,' she said. 'The family are just about to start dinner. I will tell Mrs Jackson and lay a place for you at the table.'

As I entered, Alexander came out of his study and shook me by the hand. 'Welcome back, John. Let us go into dinner, and you can tell us about your latest journey,' he suggested.

Mrs Jackson was talking with her daughters and Emily, who were all seated at the table.

'It is good to see you again,' she noted.

'I am delighted to be with you,' I replied. 'Emily, I bring you greetings from your mother, and I'm pleased to see you are recovering.'

Emily smiled and said, 'Thanks to Mrs and Mr Jackson, their family, and servants, I am feeling much better.'

They asked about my visit to Norwich. I told them about my meeting with the Governor. 'You are now talking with a man who is officially unemployed,' I said with a laugh.

'Not for long,' replied Alexander, 'as Sir Richard is waiting upon your return.'

'I also need to find somewhere to stay,' I declared.

'There is no rush,' stated Mrs Jackson. 'Wait until you meet Sir Richard and also Lady Cadogan.'

'Thank you,' I replied, 'and also for an excellent dinner.' The conversation continued about dress fashions. I was feeling tired. 'As I have had a long journey, I will now retire to get some sleep,' I declared.

25. Walks and Talks

December 1786

I slept soundly and woke to hear the servants cleaning the corridor outside my room. I quickly got dressed and went to the breakfast room. Emily was there.

'How are you?' I asked.

'Almost fully recovered,' she replied. 'I just need to get some fresh air in my lungs.'

I looked outside. It was a sunny, although cold, morning. 'Let us go for a walk in the park,' I suggested.

'Good idea,' responded Emily, and a few minutes later, we set off.

'How was life in Norwich?' she asked.

'It was only when I returned this time that I realised how routine and boring it was. I can see why you came to London,' I replied.

'It is expensive to live here,' she noted. 'That is why I was living in the dreadful Archway building. It was the only place I could afford to rent a room.'

'Yes, that is a worry, as I do not yet have a job,' I commented.

'Neither do I,' she replied. 'My old job at the inn had been given to someone else while I was away. Also, the one at the Crown and Anchor will now have been filled.'

'London is a big place,' I noted. 'We can help each other find jobs.'

Emily held my hand, 'I like the way you always look on the bright side,' she said.

'Well, I am going to see Sir Richard later today. I hope he has good news,' I mentioned as we returned to the Jackson's mansion.

Alexander was coming out of his study with some notes. 'I am going to my office. Do you want to join me in the carriage? I can stop at Sir Richard's office,' he suggested.

'Thank you,' I replied, 'that will be a big help.'

On the way, Alexander gave me a note with his office address on it.

'Let me know how the meeting goes,' he requested, with a knowing smile as we arrived.

I rang the doorbell, and a servant answered.

'Please let Sir Richard know that John Simpson has returned from Norwich,' I stated.

Within a few minutes, the servant returned, and took me to a room on the first floor. It looked elegant, with hand crafted furniture. There was a colourful carpet, which was rare as most other places had stone or wooden floors.

After about five minutes, Sir Richard came in. 'John, sorry to keep you waiting, I was in a meeting.' he stated. 'I am pleased that you have returned, as we can now proceed with the plan. I have had correspondence with Lord Sydney, and he has authorised the arrangements.'

He asked me about my visit to Norwich. I mentioned that the Governor of the prison was annoyed when he received the letter about my new job.

'That is to be expected, but do not worry about it. There is more important and interesting work for you to do here in London,' he declared with a smile.

He produced a letter and passed it to me. It was signed by Lord Sydney. 'It says that you will be employed on a contract for one year,' noted Sir Richard.

I read the details.

From Lord Sydney.

To Sir Richard Markham.

Future of Prisons – Plans.

The task is to advise on the prison arrangements in the planned New South Wales Colony, and also to support the improvement of prisoner preparation for re-entry to the community both there and in England.

I looked further down the letter and was astounded to see a note on the pay that was listed. Was it correct, or was it a misprint? I did a quick calculation. My estimate was that I would receive over seven times the pay I was taking home for being a jailer in Norwich. In addition, there would be an allowance for travel and administrative support.

Trying to avoid showing my surprise, I asked, 'Where will I be located for doing the work?'

'You will have a room here in my office,' responded Sir Richard with a smile. 'Though I will give my time free to the project, the Government will pay for the use of my office. That is how the system works,' he added.

It seemed Sir Richard had thought out the arrangements very well.

'I will need to find a place to live within walking distance. Do you know an area that is affordable for me and the lady I plan to marry?' I asked, recognising I had just made up my mind.

'As the employer, I can provide you with accommodation here. There is an apartment in the basement,' he stated. 'Once again, I will charge that to the Government, so it is no cost to you,' he replied.

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. I was being paid a much higher rate and allocated free lodgings.

'We can start work as soon as you move in,' added Sir Richard.

'Thank you for making the arrangements,' I spluttered. 'I will tell Mr and Mrs Jackson, with whom I am staying, and join you tomorrow.'

We shook hands. The cold air hit me in the face as I went outside. I pinched myself to make sure I was not dreaming. Nevertheless, I walked to Portman Square in a bit of a daze.

Only Emily was in the house. I suggested that we go for another walk in the park, as the sun was shining.

'Good idea,' she said, and went to put on the coat that I had bought for her.

As we walked around the park, I told her about the job, the pay, and the office.

'That is good to hear, John. I am pleased it is working out well. You deserve it after saving baby Henry,' she reflected. 'When do you start?'

'Tomorrow! So, I will tell Mr and Mrs Jackson this evening that I will be moving out,' I replied.

'I will have to do the same, but I have nowhere to go and no job or money,' reflected Emily with a worried look. 'I will have to go to some of the inns and apply for a job as a bedchamber maid.'

'Even if you get a job like that, the pay will be low. It would mean having to live in another miserable building like the Archway,' I commented.

'I know,' Emily responded, 'and that scares me a bit after what happened. The only other option is that I return to Norwich. I could live with my parents, but there is no future in that.'

What should I say? My fortunes in life seemed to be on the rise. Emily's situation looked bleak. However, I did not want to lose contact with her. On the other hand, I did not want her to reject me for being too bold. It was time to say what I felt.

'Emily, I have really enjoyed your company,' I began. 'If you want to continue meeting, let us work out how to do it.'

'I would like that, John, but how?'

'I know it sounds against tradition, as we are not married, but would you consider coming to live with me at my new place? That will give you time to find a job and decide what you want to do.'

She leant across and kissed me on the cheek. 'Let us give it a try. Who knows where it will lead?' she said with a cheeky grin. 'Will Sir Richard agree?'

'Well, I hope you don't mind, as we have not known each other long, but I told him we are planning to marry,' I whispered, wondering if she would be upset.

'John, is that true, or are you just making it up?' she asked with a giggle.

'Emily, it is true. I would like to marry you. So, let me get down on my knee, in the old traditional way,' and I knelt in front of her.

'Emily, I would like to marry you. Would you like to marry me?' I asked.

'John, I would love to marry you,' said Emily as she kissed me.

We embraced, and danced hand in hand all the way back to the Jackson's house.

As we arrived, I turned to Emily and said, 'Let us tell our hosts at dinner this evening that we are going to marry.'

'Yes, I will go and put on my best dress,' she declared.

As she ran along the corridor, Alexander arrived home. He invited me into his study.

As we sat down, he asked, 'Did your meeting with Sir Richard go well?'

'Yes, it went even better than I expected,' I replied.

'What has he asked you to do?' enquired Alexander.

I explained that he wanted me to work with him in the role of a clerk and advisor on the prison reform plans, and offered me employment for a year. I also mentioned that he had provided me with a place to work and live in his office building.

'That is good news,' replied Alexander. 'It will give you an opportunity to make a name for yourself,' he declared with a smile. 'Let us go into dinner.'

The candles were burning brightly on the table and around the room as the ladies joined us.

Alexander started the conversation by saying that Sir Richard had offered me an important role on the prison reform group. 'Let us start by having a toast to John, with our best wishes for his new work,' he said. Everyone clinked their glasses.

'Well done,' declared Mrs Jackson. 'You deserve it for all the good things you have done to help baby Henry and his family.'

'Thank you,' I replied, 'and I appreciate the way in which your family has helped me, as well as Emily. In fact, we have some good news we want to share with you, even before we tell our own families. I have asked Emily if she will marry me, and she has agreed.'

'Congratulations,' exclaimed Mrs Jackson, as she went over to Emily and embraced her.

Alexander stood up and walked around the table to shake my hand. 'Well done, John,' he declared. He then went to Emily, patted her on the back and shook her hand.

Ellen and Rachel joined in as the room was filled with excitement and good wishes.

'Another toast is in order,' cried out Alexander. 'Let us raise our glasses to John and Emily. Our best wishes and all happiness to you.'

The Jackson family all clapped, and the servants joined in. 'This is a dinner to remember,' said Ellen.

'I will never forget it, but I'm sorry you will be leaving us,' replied Rachel.

'We will be living close by, so we can keep in touch,' I replied.

As we finished the dinner, and the ladies were in discussion, Alexander suggested we go to his study. As usual, he poured two whiskys.

'John, I have enjoyed our discussions,' he began. 'Since you arrived with baby Henry, we have a new purpose in our lives.'

'That is good to know,' I said, 'as I thought my arrival had created difficult problems. Likewise, I felt the same when I brought Emily.'

'Both of those problems have helped me and my family to think outside of our own comfortable existence,' he replied. 'Now, I want to help you with the challenges ahead. Although I am not officially involved with Sir Richard Markham's group, please contact me if you need any support.'

'I appreciate that, as I am new to this level of society and work,' I responded. 'I am sure your advice will be invaluable.'

He rose from his chair and shook my hand. 'Best wishes both in your new role and your new life with Emily,' he said with a smile.

26. New Life

December in England can bring grey skies and damp days, or those which are crystal cold with weak sunshine. When I awoke, it was good to see the sun shining through the window. That augured well, for it was going to be a special day.

In preparation for leaving the home of Mr and Mrs Jackson, I packed my case and looked nostalgically around the room. To think, I had arrived here originally with someone else's baby, and now I am leaving with my girlfriend who had agreed to be my wife. Once again, I pinched myself to be sure I was not dreaming.

To be ready for the day, I decided to go for a quick walk around Portman Square. As I went toward the front door, I could see Emily. 'Do you want to come with me to get some air?' I asked.

'Yes, let me put on the coat you bought for me,' she replied. Two minutes later, our breath was turning to white particles as it met the cold air. We walked hand in hand, at a fast pace to keep warm.

'This will be a big day for both of us,' I reflected.

'Yes, I could hardly sleep last night,' replied Emily.

'Are you worried?' I asked. 'You can change your mind if you want.'

'No, I am excited, not worried,' she stated, squeezing my hand. 'We are about to start a new life together, and I am looking forward to it.'

'Good to hear. Let us go and say thank you to everyone who has helped us,' I responded.

A few minutes later, we returned and were presented with a warm breakfast. Mr and Mrs Jackson, Ellen, and Rachel, together with the servants Nell and Rose, came into the breakfast room.

'After hearing your good news last night, we want to celebrate with an engagement breakfast party,' said Mrs Jackson. 'We have made a card, and all of us have signed it.'

'That is very kind of you,' replied Emily. 'Thanks to you, I am now feeling well again and able to restart my life. I appreciate everything you have done.'

'Yes, you have brought Emily and me together,' I added. 'We will always remember that our engagement to be married started here, thanks to your care and hospitality. Today, we will leave, but you will be in our hearts forever.'

As we finished our engagement party, Alexander said, 'John, I have arranged for my coachman to take you and Emily to Sir Richard's office.'

I thanked him and went to pick up my case and collected Emily's also. Everyone came to the front door, and waved, as we departed in style.

I could see tears on Emily's cheeks. I put my arm around her. 'I arrived at the lowest point of my life, and I am leaving at the highest point. Without you and the Jackson family, who knows what would have happened to me,' she sobbed.

'Let us look forward,' I replied. 'Today is the start of a new adventure.'

We soon arrived, and I rang the bell outside Sir Richard's building. The same servant as last time appeared.

'Good morning, Mr Simpson,' he said with a cheery smile.

'Sir Richard is away at a meeting, but he has asked me to show you to your apartment and office. Please leave your cases, and I will bring them to you in a few minutes.'

Emily and I followed him downstairs to the basement.

He opened the door to a large room that looked out onto a beautiful garden at the rear of the building. On the walls, there were paintings of the countryside. The furniture looked to have been specially designed to fit the available space. There were two chairs on either side of a settee that faced an ornate fireplace. A built-in bookcase was well-filled.

'My name is Ralph. If you come this way, I can show you the kitchen, dining room and the bedrooms.'

I looked at Emily, and I could see her eyebrows raised in surprise. The dining room was also beautifully furnished. There was a round table in the middle of the room, and another well designed fireplace.

We continued the tour to the kitchen, which seemed equipped with every appliance that was necessary to produce a banquet.

Ralph then said, 'Let me show you the rest of the apartment.'

Emily looked at me, with her eyes open wide and a look of amazement. Opposite the lounge there were two bedrooms, with an adjoining door. Both were designed in the same style and looked

out on to another part of the garden. Each had a large bed, and a wardrobe. There was also a small side room, which was a bathroom with a toilet facility linked to outside drainage.

We returned to the lounge area. 'I will now bring your cases,' said Ralph. 'If there is anything that you need, please ring the bell. The cleaning and catering staff will come in each day. If you wish, they will cook breakfast, lunch and dinner. Just let them know your requirements.'

As he left, Emily and I stood there, not saying a word.

She came over to where I was standing and put her arms around me. 'John,' she whispered, 'it looks as if we are going to live in luxury. Is this real?'

'Yes, this is the same style and standard of living that I saw at Sir Richard's country mansion in the city of Bath,' I responded. 'At that time, I was transporting the three women convicts, and baby Henry, with the horse and cart.'

'It seems like a different world,' Emily replied.

'Yes, but not for them,' I reflected. 'I wonder how they are surviving the damp and cold weather on the Dunkirk prison ship at Plymouth?'

Emily closed her eyes and shuddered at the thought of it. 'You did your best to help them,' she said. 'But the gap between their pitiful existence and our palatial surroundings is hard to believe.'

'Yes, I agree. It is the world of those who are rich and those who are poor. Sir Richard showed me his heart was in the right place by helping me when I was in Bath, and he is enabling us to live in a grand style here. But what will happen next as we are just part of a much larger set of events?'

A couple of minutes later, Ralph arrived and left the cases outside the bedrooms. Clearly, he was being discreet.

'I can now show you to your office, Mr Simpson, if you follow me upstairs,' he said. Emily and I climbed the staircase, with more pictures hanging on the adjacent walls.

At the top, we turned left onto a corridor with several doors. Ralph opened the first one. We walked in to see an elegant room facing the roadway and gardens. In front of the window was a large desk and a comfortable chair.

'Sir Richard has left you a note of welcome,' stated Ralph as he handed me a document lying on the desk. 'He will be here tomorrow. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy living and working here. I will leave you now to settle in.'

He turned and closed the door as I opened the note.

From Sir Richard Markham.

To John Simpson.

Welcome.

I have asked Ralph, my senior servant, to show you around the apartment and the office. I trust you will be comfortable, and also find it a place where you can work well.

I will be in my office tomorrow. I suggest we meet at 10am to discuss ways and means of achieving the task set by Lord Sydney.

I also look forward to meeting your wife-to-be. I would like to know if she has an interest in the work we will be doing. We will need her help to support the issues Lady Cadogan wishes to raise. Please make yourself at home.

I read the note to Emily. 'That is a nice welcome,' she noted. 'I wonder what he has in mind?'

'Let us go for a walk and talk it over,' I suggested.

It was a bright but cold day. We walked quickly to keep warm. 'We need to buy some food,' said Emily. 'I can then cook you a meal in that fantastic kitchen.'

'Let us first go to the Strand Tavern Inn. That is where I met the people who helped me talk to Lord Sydney,' I indicated. 'We can have lunch there, and then we can go to the market,' I suggested.

The walk gave us the opportunity to see many aspects of London life. Expensive houses were being built in the St James' area, but further on, we saw old tenement buildings similar to the Archway, where I had found Emily.

We passed one which had a sign saying, 'St Martin's Workhouse.' Poor people were queuing outside, desperate as they had no work or money. They were hoping to get food, and a place to survive the cold winter, in return for hard menial work.

Emily turned to me and said, 'I could have been one of those people. I had no job, no money, and was desperately ill when you found me.' She began to cry, and I put my arm around her.

'When I was in the bookshop, buying your present, I read a document called Account of the Workhouses in Great Britain. It said there are about 2000 of these places in total, and 100 of them are in London,' I told her.

'With no work and no money, that is why so many people, like the female convicts you took to Plymouth, are becoming thieves,' she replied. 'That is also why Lord Sydney and his cronies are sending offenders thousands of miles away. It reduces the number in prisons and those in the workhouses.'

'I am hoping that by working with Sir Richard, we can do something to improve the lives of those in prisons, and create work to reduce poverty,' I said, trying to raise her spirits.

We continued on into Whitehall, a road that led to Parliament. In addition to the shops and street traders, there were many Government offices. Nearby was The Strand Tavern. It was full of noise, with people having their lunch. I ordered lunches for Emily and myself. We found a couple of seats in a corner and enjoyed our food.

'I feel a bit like a fish out of water here,' noted Emily. 'The only other woman is serving at the bar.'

I looked across and saw Patrick and Andrew in discussion. They noticed me and came over.

'Good to see you, John, and your lady,' said Patrick.

'Great to see both of you looking well. I am pleased to introduce Emily, my fiancée,' I said.

'Pleased to make your acquaintance,' said Andrew, in a formal way befitting a public servant.

I turned to Emily and said, 'Thanks to Andrew, I was able to contact Lord Sydney and gain the document to reunite baby Henry with his parents.'

'I only gave you a little bit of advice,' Andrew responded with a wry smile.

'Patrick came with me and was a major help as he stirred up the crowd,' I added.

'I want to do more of that in our newspaper, to get better conditions for poor people,' Patrick stated forcibly.

'Yes, we have just seen the St Martin's Workhouse with paupers queuing outside the doors,' responded Emily, 'And there are hundreds more in the country.'

'The problem is getting worse because people are leaving the farm work in villages to look for jobs in the cities. There are now about a million people in London,' indicated Andrew.

'Yes, with more people arriving, the cost of getting a place to live, and the price of food, are going up,' noted Patrick.

'Emily and I are two of these new arrivals. Maybe we should return to Norwich,' I added with a laugh.

‘No, don’t do that! We need you here to help change the system,’ exclaimed Patrick, as he went to the bar to talk with his colleague Damien, who had just arrived. A couple of minutes later, he returned with ales for Andrew and me. Damien brought a fruit juice for Emily and said how pleased he was to meet her.

‘I hear you have been discussing the problems of poverty and prisons,’ he said. ‘To do that, you need to know how the power and control works.’

Damien sat down and leant forward as if delivering a secret. ‘Let me explain the history. In 1640, King Charles believed he had a Divine Right from the Almighty to be a dictator and make whatever laws he wanted. A people’s revolt occurred. Oliver Cromwell and his supporters wanted a parliamentary republic. He opposed the King and led his troops to victory in the English Civil War.’

Damien took a drink of his ale before continuing. ‘King Charles was beheaded in 1649. Cromwell tried to introduce changes based on his Puritan religious beliefs. When he died, the son of King Charles was allowed to be the monarch, provided he accepted Parliament as the ruling body. However, it was the rich landowners who had the money to get elected.’

He looked around as if he may be arrested and took another sip of ale.

‘So, today, we have a monarchy without much power, and a democracy without much representation of the ordinary people. That is why we need a revolution, so the poor can get equal rights,’ he concluded in a low voice.

There was a silence until Patrick spoke. ‘What Damien says is right. Are we going to just patch up the existing system, or change it?’

Andrew responded by saying, ‘I am a clerk supporting those in power. I don’t like the system, but I need a job. I can help you by passing on information that may help.’

I leant forward, feeling under pressure to give a view. ‘Up till now, I have been a clerk of a different kind, guarding prisoners. I now realise it is necessary to provide opportunities for poor people and convicts to gain work, so they do not have to steal. I will be working to achieve that, and then there should be no need for a revolution,’ I stated.

It was time to leave. ‘Let me know how your new job goes,’ said Patrick, as we all shook hands and departed.

It was raining, with a cold wind coming from the east. There was a market nearby, and we bought some vegetables and bread. After that, I found one of the carriages to take us home.

'That was a fascinating discussion,' said Emily, as the horse clip-clopped along. 'I can see that you are mixing with people who have strong opinions on both sides of the political fence,' she reflected.

'Yes, and it is all new to me. I think we should see all, hear all and listen, rather than rush in,' I replied.

'My thoughts exactly,' responded Emily.

We soon arrived at our new abode, and Ralph was there to welcome us. 'Will you require us to cook dinner, sir?' he enquired.

'Not this evening, thank you,' I replied. 'We are going to make some soup, if we have some wood to get a fire going.'

'I will show you where it is stored and make the fire for you, sir,' he stated, and he lit the candles.

Emily soon got to work and put out two steaming bowls of soup containing carrots, beetroot, turnip and potatoes, with the bread we had bought. She also boiled some water to drink, as she did not want to tempt fate again with noxious water.

'That was a fantastic meal,' I said and gave her a kiss.

'Your turn next time,' she said with a laugh.

'Now for the big decision,' I said. 'Is it two bedrooms or one?'

'Let us start as we mean to go on,' responded Emily, with a smile.

So, we kept each other warm, on a night when the snow fell, and the ground froze.

27. New Roles

During the weekend, despite it being cold, we went for long walks. On both days, we stopped at a small tavern where we had lunch. Afterwards, we strolled back to our new home and rested. I took a couple of the books from the shelves and read about the history of London.

On the Monday morning, I felt like staying in bed with Emily who was sound asleep. However, I wanted to do some preparation before meeting Sir Richard.

It was icy cold, as I washed and dressed. Looking through the windows, I could see icicles were hanging from the trees. The snow looked to be six inches deep.

My mind went to the Dunkirk prison hulk in Plymouth. How were baby Henry and his parents? Would they survive the wicked cold days of winter?

I also thought about the prisoners in Norwich Castle Prison. I knew that the prison was dark and miserable at the best of times, but in winter it was far worse. The limited food that was available froze. So did the water.

People who were weakened by hunger succumbed to illnesses. It was inevitable that many would die.

In contrast, I was now in London. Instead of sharing a couple of small rooms with my brother, I was living in a mansion supported by servants. Above all else, I was enjoying the best time of my life with Emily.

As it was so cold, I decided to light a fire in the lounge area. To my surprise, as I opened the door, I saw flames dancing merrily in the hearth. Ralph, or one of the other servants, had been in early. On the table, there was a note asking me to ring the bell if I needed any assistance.

I boiled some water so that Emily could have a drink. While that was happening, I went to the desk in the corner of the room, where there was a quill and some paper. I wrote some questions that I wanted to ask Sir Richard, to gain clarification about my new job.

Emily was sitting up in bed when I arrived with a cup of warm water. 'I thought it best to start as we mean to go on,' I said with a laugh, as I handed her the drink.

'Thank you. In return, I will cook you breakfast,' she replied, 'so you will be ready to meet Sir Richard!'

After we had eaten, there was a knock on the lounge door. I opened it, and Ralph was there.

'Sir Richard is ready to meet you now,' he said.

I picked up my notes and followed him upstairs. 'Thank you for lighting the fire,' I stated.

'That was done by Beth, one of the staff,' he declared.

'She will clean your rooms and also wash your clothes. She will also do your shopping if you give her a list,' he declared.

I knocked on Sir Richard's door. As I entered, he stood up and came round his desk to shake my hand.

'John, I trust that you and your wife-to-be find the accommodation satisfactory?' he enquired.

'Indeed, it is Sir Richard,' I replied. 'We have settled in well. Thank you for making us so welcome. Ralph has made us feel at home. I really appreciate everything you are doing.'

'Well, it is a two-way street, John,' he commented. 'You will be helping me, my friends and Lord Sydney do what we feel is important. That is what I want to discuss with you this morning.'

'What do you have in mind?' I asked.

'It is now December, and the Christmas holiday and New Year period will soon be upon us,' he stated. 'So, there is limited time to gather the information for Lord Sydney. We have just over three months, and, as you can see by looking outside, travelling in winter will be difficult.'

'What do you suggest we do first?' I asked.

'Last week, I met with Lady Cadogan and Captain Phillip. They put forward suggestions that I would like you to work on,' he continued.

'First of all, it is recognised that guarding prisoners on a nine-month voyage to New South Wales will be a major challenge, particularly as the sailors and marine forces are not trained in such work. Secondly, we do not know what skills, if any, the convicts can contribute to establishing a new colony. Thirdly, we discussed the needs of women convicts, particularly those, like Susannah Holmes, who have children.'

'I can see those are all major issues,' I replied, trying to comprehend what I could do on each one in the time available.

Sir Richard clarified the situation. 'Today, we will go to the Home Office and meet Mr Evan Nepean, who is a powerful civil servant. I have met him once before. He has been nominated by Lord

Sydney to support our efforts,' noted Sir Richard. 'He will arrange for you to gain information from people involved with the First Fleet.'

Two hours later, we were in a carriage on our way through the snow, which covered the London buildings with a fairy tale look.

I remembered my previous visits to the Home Office. On each occasion, the clerk was there as a guard to bar my entry. This time, it was different.

Sir Richard presented a document, and the clerk immediately took us along a corridor to a room. 'Mr Nepean will be with you in a few minutes,' he declared.

As we waited, I told Sir Richard about my previous visits and the problems. He complimented me on my determination and persistence.

Suddenly, the door opened, and two men entered.

Immediately, and to my surprise, I recognised Andrew from the meetings at The Strand Tavern. The other man was about my age and well-dressed.

'Hello, Sir Richard. Good to see you again. Lord Sydney sends his best wishes and has asked me to assist with your prison task,' he stated.

Sir Richard introduced me, and Mr Nepean did the same for Andrew, but we did not give any indication we knew each other.

'My colleague Andrew has been promoted to join this assignment and will make arrangements for Mr Simpson. So, what do you require?' he asked in a pointed way.

'We have been tasked to provide Lord Sydney advice with regard to managing prisoners on the voyage to New South Wales, and also the arrangements in the new colony,' summarised Sir Richard. 'John Simpson is experienced in prison management, and he needs to talk with the key people involved.'

'On the instructions of Lord Sydney, I have prepared a list of people who will have important roles in what we have named as the First Fleet to New South Wales,' said Nepean. 'This includes the names of the captains on the eleven ships, the chaplain, the surgeon, the officer in charge of the marines and the judge advocate. The documents indicate there will be six ships carrying convicts, three supply ships, and two naval vessels with marines to guard the colony. In all, it is estimated these ships will transport about 1500 people, of which there will be about 750 convicts,' he concluded.

As he spoke, I began to realise how vast the plan for The First Fleet was. Feeding 1500 people for about nine months would be a huge challenge, as they searched for a pinpoint of land in distant oceans many thousands of miles away.

Would they survive such a long journey, cooped up in poor conditions, through dangerous waters? Even if they arrived at their destination, would they be able to establish a colony? It seemed to me the odds of success were low.

Sir Richard thanked Mr Nepean for the documents and suggested that Andrew and I have a separate meeting to discuss the requirements. They left, and Andrew came over and shook my hand.

‘Well, John, we meet again,’ he said with a laugh. ‘After our last meeting, I was called in by Nepean and told that I was to be promoted to work on a prison project. It seems that, thanks to you stirring everyone up, I am now getting more money.’

‘Good to hear, and I look forward to you buying me a drink at The Strand Tavern,’ I joked.

‘What do we need to do?’ asked Andrew.

‘Could you arrange meetings for me with the key people on the list that Mr Nepean provided,’ I enquired, ‘and also attend to keep a record for Lord Sydney.’

‘Yes, it should be interesting to hear what the high-ups are planning to do,’ replied Andrew.

We drafted some notes and questions for discussion at the meetings. As we were finishing, Sir Richard returned.

‘We have a plan, and Andrew will contact the people,’ I stated. ‘My aim will be to discuss with them a coordinated approach to managing the convicts on the voyage and beyond,’ I summarised.

As we returned in the carriage, Sir Richard said, ‘I managed to see Lord Sydney while I was at the Home Office. I told him Captain Phillip and Lady Cadogan want a woman to gather views on how female convicts should be managed during the long voyage. He agreed, and I wonder if Emily would be interested in participating?’

I was surprised and said, ‘Let us ask her.’

As soon as we arrived, I outlined to Emily the idea. ‘It would mean that you talk with female convicts, and let Captain Phillip know the main points,’ I reported.

‘It sounds more interesting than my previous job,’ she replied. We went to Sir Richard’s room and told him.

‘Good news, as this means we can now advise on the needs of women prisoners,’ and he produced a contract similar to the one I had signed. ‘This enables you to be paid,’ he stated with a smile.

Emily signed it, and we left Sir Richard’s office, having agreed to develop key questions for the project.

When we arrived in the basement lounge, Emily put her arms around me. ‘John, thanks for helping me get a job. The document I have just signed says my pay is three times more than I have received in any previous employment.’

‘I always hoped that I would marry a rich woman,’ I replied with a laugh.

‘But when?’ she asked.

‘As soon as we have completed the tasks that we have been given,’ I replied.

‘We need dinner first,’ Emily said, and went to the kitchen to prepare it. I joined her to discuss our future.

‘I suggest we go to Norwich at Christmas. We can tell our parents that we are engaged and will be working in London for at least a year,’ I suggested. ‘We will then return, this time next year, to be married.’

‘That sounds like a good timetable, as it gives us plenty of time to get to know each other and make the wedding arrangements,’ responded Emily. ‘However, I need to get some advice from Dr Bates, as it would not look good if I were to turn up pregnant at the wedding,’ she said, laughing.

We enjoyed another good meal, before sleeping soundly.

The next day, I made notes so that I had a personal record. After that, I went to the Strand Tavern for lunch. Patrick was there and bought me an ale.

‘Are you making progress?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I am going to see Andrew this afternoon. He is arranging meetings with officers and leaders of the First Fleet,’ I indicated.

‘Let me know what they say,’ he stated, as I finished my ale.

Arriving at the Home Office, I asked for Andrew Rix, and the clerk sent a messenger to let him know.

About fifteen minutes later, Andrew came bustling into the foyer and took me to a private room.

'Good news,' he said with a smile. 'We have two days of meetings arranged, as the key people have replied quickly to Lord Sydney's instructions. We will start tomorrow morning at 9.30am.'

'I will be here and keen to hear the views of the officers in charge,' I replied.

On my return, I let Emily know the plan.

'It seems you are becoming the eyes and ears for Lord Sydney,' she said.

'Just like Captain Bradley thought,' I replied.

28. Discussions and Differences

After a good night's sleep, I set off early, as I did not want to be late.

Andrew had organised a series of meetings at the Home Office. He had given me a personal pass, which I presented to the clerk each day. In contrast to the rejections I received on my first visits, I was immediately given entry.

'All the interviews will be here,' said Andrew as we walked along a corridor to a spacious room with three chairs and a table. 'People will know the meetings are authorised by Lord Sydney if they are held in this building.'

Our first discussion was with the Reverend Richard Johnson, who was about 30 years of age. He arrived on time. We made the introductions. I indicated that we were interested in gaining his views on ways of helping prisoners develop better lives in the colony of New South Wales.

'I am keen to do that,' he indicated. 'My contacts in the Eclectic Society, who have backed my appointment, want to see reform rather than just punishment of prisoners.'

We discussed how that could be accomplished in a new land. The Reverend expressed his hope that, in an open-air prison, convicts would have more opportunities to learn new skills and become useful members of society.

I raised the issue of marriage between convicts, as Henry Kable had indicated he wanted to marry Susannah.

'It is difficult because English law forbids convicts to marry,' he noted. 'However, in a new colony, I will ask the Governor to follow God's law and allow those who wish to marry to do so,' he replied firmly.

We continued to discuss the ways that he envisaged helping convicts and their children.

'Beyond prayer, we need practical ways of providing guidance,' he replied. 'It is my intention to build a church and for that to become a place of both worship and moral education.'

After we had finished, Andrew needed time to edit the notes he had taken. 'I think the Reverend will do his best to give convicts a chance to reform,' I reflected, 'but he will have many barriers in his way. If he can convert 75 out of the 750 prisoners to his way of thought, he will do well.'

After the lunch break at The Strand Tavern, the next meeting was with Major Robert Ross. At the age of 48, he had served in many battles. He was the designated commander of marine forces going

to New South Wales. He also had the role of Lieutenant Governor of the new colony. This turned out to be a very different meeting from the previous one.

I facilitated the introductions and said that I represented the prison service. From the outset, it was clear Major Ross had no interest in the topic of prisoner reform. He sat upright. Dressed in his military uniform, he wanted to show his power.

‘I am very busy making preparations,’ he declared. ‘How long will this meeting take? What do you need to know?’

‘What is your role in the new colony?’ I asked.

‘My job is to lead our military forces, who have volunteered for the assignment,’ he said in a loud voice. ‘We will defend the colony from external, or internal, attack. I will ensure that any territory claimed by our Government is protected. In particular, we need to protect families, as twenty-three of my men are taking their wives and children with them, inclusive of my family.’

‘What is your role with regard to the control of convicts?’ I enquired.

‘Convicts are not my responsibility. My men are not jailers sent to guard prisoners,’ stated the Major in strong terms. ‘Nor is it our job to supervise convicts when they are working. We are not a police service.’

We discussed what orders he would give if there was a convict revolt in the colony.

‘That would be an illegal act,’ he replied curtly. ‘I will instruct my troops to fire upon revolutionaries.’

The meeting soon came to a conclusion, as I could see the Major was impatient to leave.

As Andrew edited his notes, I asked him, ‘Do you think Major Ross has told Lord Sydney and Captain Phillip his views?’

‘I doubt it,’ replied Andrew as we closed the door.

Although it had stopped snowing, it proved difficult to find a carriage as they were in high demand. Eventually, I found one and arrived at my new abode. Emily was in the kitchen preparing our evening meal.

‘I called in to see Mrs Jackson today, and she has arranged for me to meet Lady Cadogan. Also, a servant was sent to the home of Dr Bates to arrange an appointment for me,’ said Emily.

‘It looks as if you are going to be busy,’ I noted.

'I prefer that, rather than letting time fly by,' she replied.

Over dinner, I told her about the meetings at the Home Office. 'Tomorrow, I am seeing the senior medical man in the new colony and, in the afternoon, the head of the legal service.'

'John, you are certainly mixing with people who have positions of influence,' noted Emily.

'Yes, I am becoming an insider, with the right to ask questions,' I indicated. 'Only a few weeks ago, as a jailer in the Norwich Castle Prison, these people would not have even taken the time to say hello,' I replied.

We both laughed and enjoyed our dinner. After cleaning the dishes, we blew out the candles and slept soundly.

The next day was a bit warmer. Snow was turning to slush as I kissed Emily and left for the Home Office. The clerk recognised me, and said Andrew was in the meeting room.

'Pleased you have arrived in time. I thought you may have had difficulty given the weather conditions,' he stated. 'Our first meeting is with Dr John White, who will be the Chief Surgeon in the colony.'

Ten minutes later, the doctor arrived. I had expected an older man, but he was in his thirties. After a few words about the weather, I explained my role in the prison service, and the project for Lord Sydney.

'What do you see as the major medical challenges?' I asked.

'There are two different situations in front of us,' he stated.

'Firstly, we have about eight to nine months at sea. There are eleven ships. I only have eight colleagues to assist me. With over fifteen hundred people on the voyage, there will be many who require treatment at the same time. That will create many medical challenges. I am consulting with other doctors who have served in the Navy on long voyages to gain their advice.'

'Secondly, we will have major issues when we reach New South Wales. We will have to build a hospital and deal with illnesses that are endemic to the area. Also, there will be the infections people contract on board the ships.'

'I can see that both of those situations will require all your skills,' I reflected. 'Given that there will be 750 convicts, how do you plan to meet their needs?' I asked.

'The voyage will be a time of high risk,' noted the doctor. Convicts will be locked below decks for long periods. There will be a danger of typhus, scurvy and other nasty diseases, not to mention the usual coughs and influenza. We have to try and prevent any epidemics. When we arrive, I hope the outdoor prison situation, where convicts will get fresh air and exercise, will improve their health.'

We talked about the medical issues and the resources available. 'We have about 180 women convicts. I am told some of them have children, and some are pregnant.' They will need special attention. The problem is that we have few antidotes, as our herbal remedies are limited. I am hoping we find more effective cures on our voyage,' noted Dr White in an optimistic tone.

After he left, I looked at Andrew and said, 'I fear that many of the 1500 people will not survive the voyage.' We walked over to The Strand Tavern for lunch. Patrick was there, and asked if we had any good stories for the newspaper.

'All top secret,' replied Andrew, as he gave a knowing look.

'We are meeting with leaders of the First Fleet who are going to New South Wales,' I stated. 'I will let you know the key points later,' I added.

We finished our lunch and walked back to the Home Office. 'This afternoon, we are meeting Captain David Collins, the Judge Advocate for the colony,' noted Andrew.

He arrived on time. He was another man who had long served in the Navy, though still in his early thirties. I told him we were preparing a report on the plans for the prison in New South Wales.

'Will the application of law in the new colony be the same as it is here in England?' I asked.

'As it is a colony of Great Britain, then the laws of our country will apply,' he replied. 'However, I am a naval officer, not a trained lawyer. My job will be that of the administrator who establishes both the criminal and the civil courts. To my knowledge, there is no barrister, or high judicial officer, going to the colony.'

'How will justice be administered?' I enquired.

Captain Collins held his hands wide, as if to say there was confusion. 'We will have the jury system, and I will have to discuss the judgments and sentences with the Governor,' he noted.

'How will you deal with prisoners who have served their sentences?' I asked, thinking of Susannah Holmes and Henry Kable.

'We will take the records of their sentences, and, if they do not offend again, we will release them to live in the colony. They will then decide if they wish to stay or return to England, providing

they can gain a berth on a ship. My role is purely administrative. I am not there to train convicts, or to find them work,' he replied.

I expressed the hope that convicts would learn new skills in an open-air prison, by working on farms, and constructing new buildings.

'The first priority is to establish the penal colony as a place where prisoners serve their sentences, not an easy option for offenders,' he stated before leaving.

Andrew took time to edit his notes. 'I think the colony has some very difficult problems, even before it is operational,' he reflected.

He outlined the meetings that were organised for the next few days. The people on the list were those providing provisions and making the arrangements for the ships to be ready.

On Saturday and Sunday, I had time to think, and enjoy walks around London with Emily. She told me that Lady Cadogan had invited her to join the afternoon tea meetings to raise money for charity.

'No doubt you will meet many women whose husbands and lovers are influential,' I reflected.

As we walked around Hyde Park, Emily said, 'Let us plan the visits to see our families.'

'I will have finished my meetings by Thursday, 21st December, so we could leave on the Friday and arrive on the Saturday.' I indicated. 'We can stay for two weeks over the Christmas and the New Year celebrations.'

'I will book the stagecoach tickets,' replied Emily. 'Best if we stay with our respective parents so as not to upset anyone.'

'We can say we are engaged and plan to get married in a year from now,' I indicated. 'I will write to my brother, and he can pass on a message of our arrival to your aunt.'

'Yes, let us keep our London and Norwich lives separate,' stated Emily.

As always, Emily had a sensible approach, even though we were living in the fast lane. So it proved during the next week.

Andrew organised meetings each day. Some of these were with administrators in the Home Office, who briefed me on the preparations.

He also arranged for me to visit one of the ships that would carry the convicts to the Great Southern Land. I was surprised by how small the vessel was for such a large number of people. In addition, Andrew gave me many documents to read.

SAVING BABY HENRY

'You will need to learn the plans so you can write your report,' he stated.

By the end of the week, I was quite tired and said to Emily that we should spend the weekend relaxing and enjoying a few country walks. We went to Hyde Park on the Saturday. I reflected on how quickly my fortunes had changed. 'I think I could get used to this style of life,' I said to Emily, and she gave me a kiss.

29. Celebrations

As we were finishing breakfast on Monday, 18th December, there was a knock on the door. I opened it. Ralph was there and indicated Sir Richard would like to see me. I followed him up the stairs, and Ralph opened the door to let me in.

‘Good to see you, John,’ said Sir Richard. ‘Before I return to Bath for the Christmas and New Year celebrations, I want to make sure you receive your salary.’ He handed me an envelope.

‘Thank you,’ I replied.

‘As I manage a bank, I can arrange for any surplus funds you may wish to keep in a safe place. In due course, you may wish to take out a loan to buy a house. When you return, let me know, and I will arrange it,’ he stated.

‘I appreciate that,’ I replied, wondering what it meant, as I had never had a bank account.

‘Before I leave, it would be useful to gain an update on the meetings you have had,’ requested Sir Richard.

‘The process is working well,’ I indicated. ‘I have met with key officers in control of the colony’s military, legal, medical and religious organisations. We have discussed how they see their role in the New South Wales Colony. I have also met with administrators at the Home Office who are organising materials for the First Fleet.’

‘Were you impressed with their plans?’ asked Sir Richard.

‘To be frank, no,’ I stated. ‘I am not convinced there is common agreement on the way to improve conditions and opportunities for prisoners.’

He asked me to elaborate, and I summed up the views from the first four meetings.

‘Reverend Johnson is an evangelical Church of England chaplain. He has high ideals, but he has no experience with convicts, tough sailors and battle-hard military men. They all speak a very different language to that in the Bible. The government feels the new colony should be run under the ten commandments, but the reverend does not seem to have much authority. He does not have the resources to build a church. Nor does he have permission to conduct marriages between convicts.’

‘Major Ross will be second-in-command of the new colony. However, I wonder if he will work cooperatively with the governor on issues of law and order. He says his troops are not a police force

and will not supervise convicts. He stressed his men are there to fight enemy forces and that the prisoners are not his responsibility.'

'Dr White is about 30 years of age and fears he does not have enough medical resources.

'David Collins is not a lawyer, but will be in charge of legal issues.'

'When we return from the holiday break, we should let Lord Sydney and Captain Phillip know about these important points,' he indicated.

'The civil servant, Andrew, with whom I am working, has kept records of the meetings and views expressed,' I replied.

'Are you going away for a holiday?' he asked.

'Yes sir, we are returning to Norwich to see our families and plan our wedding,' I replied.

'My best wishes go with you. Just let Ralph know the dates you will leave and return, so he can make plans. I will return in the middle of January, and look forward to seeing you then,' he proposed.

'Emily and I thank you for your hospitality, and trust that you have an enjoyable time in Bath,' I replied as we shook hands.

On my way downstairs, I told Ralph when we would leave for Christmas and the date of our return two weeks later.

I then went to see Andrew at the Home Office. He was in good spirits when I arrived. We discussed how convicts could be trained to learn new skills.

'We will arrange the next series of meetings when everyone returns in the New Year,' he stated. 'Let us go to The Strand Tavern for a pre-Christmas drink,' he proposed with a laugh.

As we entered, our three newspaper friends were in deep discussion at the bar. Damien shouted to us, 'Let me buy you a drink to celebrate the festive season.'

We were soon involved in a discussion of politics, philosophy and religion. 'Do you believe in Christmas?' asked Patrick?

'So, long as I get presents,' I said with a laugh.

'That is the problem,' stated Lachlan. 'It is just becoming a commercial event.'

'All the good tidings and the scriptures about moral behaviour to save your soul for the next life are an opportunity for the people who want make money,' declared Patrick.

I began to think he may be right. But in prisons, as well as churches, parsons and priests would be giving sermons on the meaning of Christ's birth. In my experience, the ten commandments were more seen in their neglect.

'Will they be taking religion to the new colony?' asked Lachlan.

'Oh yes,' Andrew replied. 'We have interviewed the chaplain who will try to reform the convicts in New South Wales.'

'Good luck to him,' cried Patrick.

'It is better that we have the Christian religion there, rather than any of those other heathen versions,' proclaimed Andrew.

I thought about Susannah and Henry, with their son, on the Dunkirk prison ship. What a miserable place to spend Christmas! Even if they repented, they would still have to serve their long penal sentences.

The conversation continued in a merry way, though I knew many people who would not be rejoicing. Those in the workhouses, prisons and tenements had little to be joyful about. Nevertheless, after a few drinks, I left in high spirits and took a carriage to my new home. Emily was in the kitchen, and once again dished up a feast from very few ingredients.

'I met Mrs Jackson at the ladies' afternoon tea meeting today. She has invited us to a pre-Christmas dinner.'

'That will be good fun,' I replied.

The next day, Emily and I went Christmas shopping.

We visited the bookshop that I had explored previously. We shared views and bought books for each member of the Jackson family. At the next shop, Emily bought a couple of dresses for the holiday parties.

On our return, Ralph gave me a note. It read:

From: Mr and Mrs Jackson.

To: John and Emily.

Festive Dinner.

We look forward to welcoming you.

Our carriage will be outside your residence at 6.30pm, and dinner will be served at 7.00pm.

We quickly changed into our best clothes. 'I can wear the new dress I bought,' noted Emily, and appeared five minutes later looking radiant.

The dinner at the Jackson's was more like a banquet.

We were welcomed in royal style, with Alexander popping the cork on a bottle of champagne. He handed the bottle to Rose, the servant, who filled everyone's glass.

'Here is a toast to all those who have brought us together,' he declared as I thought of the day I arrived with baby Henry.

'It is so good to see you again,' beamed Mrs Jackson.

'Yes, our discussions at dinner have been very quiet since you left,' commented Rachel.

'Well, we have some small presents in appreciation of your kindness,' I said.

Emily opened the bag she had brought and handed out the books.

'These look beautiful,' said Ellen.

The titles of the books provided a lively discussion during dinner. We also shared an update on our work.

'I am pleased to hear you are making progress,' noted Alexander as we came to the end of a memorable evening.

'Let us have a New Year's Party when you return,' added Mrs Jackson. After farewells, we took a carriage to our new home and slept soundly.

Before leaving, I wrote a note to my friends in Plymouth to update them and send our Christmas greetings. When we had packed up, Ralph arranged our transport across London to the stagecoach. It was full, and I was glad Emily had booked us a place on the inside. I reflected that we had met on a similar journey just over a month ago. Time, I felt, was flying by fast.

Indeed, the journey seemed to go more quickly than before, because we were together. We enjoyed our evening at the coaching inn, and the following day arrived in Norwich. It was getting dark, and I wondered if my brother had received the note that I had sent. I asked a carriage owner to take us to his house and knocked at the door.

Len answered and was delighted to see us. 'Come in,' he said. 'Dad is also here, as I brought him over when I got your note. I also arranged for Emily's mum to visit her sister.'

So, we had two welcome parties, and finished at the local tavern for dinner. It was a most enjoyable evening. The men escorted the women home, before we returned to Len's place.

The next few days, we continued to have family gatherings in between shopping expeditions.

My father was pleased to hear that I had settled well into London life. I told him about being engaged to Emily, when we were in the pub with Len.

'Well done,' he said. 'I think Emily is a gem of a girl.'

'Good news,' beamed Len as he gave Emily a hug. 'It is about time that I had a sister-in-law. When is the wedding?'

'We need to save up, so about this time next year,' I indicated.

The next day, I hired a carriage and took Emily and her mother home to their house. Her father was pleased to see us, as he had been living by himself for a few days.

After having a warm drink, I decided it was time to raise the big question.

'Emily and I have had a discussion,' I said. 'If it is alright with you, we would like to marry.'

Her mother started to cry, and I was not sure what it meant. In contrast, her father came over and shook my hand, and kissed Emily. Her mother recovered and gave her a hug and kissed me.

'Wonderful,' she said.

We told them the wedding would be about a year away. 'Let us go to the local pub and celebrate,' said her father.

It proved to be a great night. As it was late when we finished, they made a bed for me in the front room, and I slept soundly.

The next week went both quickly and slowly. There was the excitement of exchanging presents, and then the quiet days leading to the New Year festivities. Emily and I used the days in between to go for long walks. I took her to the village of Surlingham, where Susannah Holmes was baptised. We explored the round church and surrounding area.

I also decided to visit Laxfield, the village where Henry Kable was born. It was about thirty miles away. We used the local carriage services between the villages where possible, and hired two horses to complete the journey. It was a rough ride over country roads.

To my surprise, it was a thriving farming community, with a busy market next to the church called All Saints.

No doubt, Henry Kable would have been baptised there.

I looked in the records and found his family was well-established in the area. His great-grandfather had written a document, which was still there. So, I presumed Henry came from an educated family. Certainly, in his discussions with me during our long journey, that was evident.

Emily and I admired the Guildhall, where skilled tradesmen met and made business arrangements. As it was getting late, I booked us into the Royal Oak, which proved to be a comfortable inn.

At the bar, the publican welcomed me and asked why I was visiting Laxfield. I wanted to be discreet, so said I was on a tour and would like to meet any members of the Kable family.

‘That man over there is Walter Kable,’ he said.

A couple of minutes later, he introduced me. What should I say?

Walter looked to be about 50 years of age, with grey hair that was thinning on top. ‘Good to meet you,’ he said with a smile. ‘Where do you come from?’

‘I am John Simpson, and I was born in Norwich,’ I replied.

‘What’s your job?’ he enquired.

‘I work in the prison service,’ I indicated.

One of my brother’s boys, by the name of Henry Kable, was sent to prison in Norwich,’ he commented, ‘but I’ve never seen him since.’

‘I know him,’ I replied.

Walter almost dropped his ale in surprise and asked if Henry was well.

‘When I last saw him, about a month ago, he was in good health,’ I replied, trying not to raise any anxieties.

‘It would be good if you could meet his mother. She would like to hear any news of her son. I can arrange for her to come here tomorrow if you are willing to talk to her?’

Although I thought it could be a difficult meeting, I agreed. Walter suggested 10.00am and went to inform Mrs Kable.

I returned to our room, where Emily was sitting next to a candle, reading the book I had given her.

'Sorry to keep you up, but I met an uncle of Henry Kable,' I noted. 'Tomorrow, he will bring Mrs Kable to see me. Will you join the meeting, as it could be stressful for her, as well as myself?'

'Yes, I understand,' replied Emily, as we kissed and kept each other warm on an icy cold night.

The next morning, after breakfast, we went for a quick walk around Laxfield. Although the village was small, the community was well spread out, with many small farms on the country roads. As we returned to the Royal Oak, I saw Walter with a middle-aged lady coming from the other direction. She was small and dressed in a large coat to keep out the cold wind.

'Hello, this is Mrs Dinah Kable,' he announced.

'Good to meet you,' I replied. 'My name is John Simpson, and this is Emily. We are engaged to be married, and visiting the area for a holiday,' I noted by way of introduction.

We went into the saloon bar, and I ordered drinks for everyone. As soon as I sat down, Mrs Kable asked, 'How is Henry?'

'When I last saw him, about a month ago, he was well,' I assured her.

'Oh, that is good to know, as I have not been able to visit him in Norwich due to the cost. I no longer have a husband, as he was put to death, alongside his brother, for committing a robbery,' she stated.

'I am sorry to hear that,' I responded. 'However, I can give you some good news. Henry has met a girl called Susannah Holmes, from the village of Surlingham, while in prison. They now have a son named after his father.'

Mrs Kable was speechless and looked at me in disbelief. She started to cry. Emily went over and put her arm around her.

'Are they married?' asked Mrs Kable, with tears still falling on her cheeks. 'Not yet, but they are planning to do so,' I replied.

'Oh, I must go to the wedding,' she exclaimed. This is where I knew it would be difficult.

'They have not set a date. In fact, they will not marry in Norwich, as they have been chosen to be part of a new prison overseas,' I told her.

'You mean they are leaving this country, and I will never see my grandson?' she enquired in a low voice as she started to cry again.

'They can return after their prison sentences are completed,' I replied optimistically. Emily sat down beside Mrs Kable and held her hand.

'Can you pass on a message to my son?' she asked.

'Yes, I will do my best to contact him,' I replied.

'Let him know that I am well and send my love to him, my grandson, and Susannah, his wife-to-be,' she stated. 'Also, tell him to make sure he keeps his family together and works hard to give them an education.'

Walter helped Mrs Kable to her feet and gave his arm for her to lean on as they walked to the door.

'Thank you for coming to Laxfield and letting us know,' said Walter, as they departed.

Emily and I waved them goodbye, and then picked up our bags for the return journey to Norwich.

'Thanks for your help,' I said to Emily.

'It was important that we came and let Mrs Kable know about her son,' she replied.

The next few days were more relaxing, as we went for walks, and visited other relatives in the area. We celebrated New Year's Eve with our parents and Len at the local pub. Everyone in the pub cheered as the publican shouted, 'Welcome to the year 1787.'

After a couple more days, we bought our stagecoach tickets to London, and waved goodbye to our families.

'I wonder what this year will bring us?' I mused as we had dinner at an overnight stop.

'Even better things than last year,' whispered Emily.

We arrived at Sir Richard's building in London late the next day. Ralph was there to greet us.

'Happy New Year,' he said cheerily.

'The same to you,' I replied as we settled in for what I knew would be an exciting time.

30. Resolutions and Realities

January and February 1787

The start of a new year usually comes with resolutions for improvement and optimism. I wondered, however, what Susannah and Henry were thinking.

Were they in good spirits, or depressed? Being locked up on a decommissioned, creaking old boat was not good for their health or that of baby Henry. I had reunited them, but what future did they have?

I decided it was important to meet them again before they were sent to New South Wales. I could at least tell them that I had let their parents know they had a grandson. I could also pass on the messages from their families.

However, I was not sure how to achieve the objective. They would be under guard twenty-four hours a day. Even getting on to the prison ship would be difficult.

So, I shared the problem with Emily during dinner. I had found in our other discussions Emily came forward with positive ideas.

'You need a reason that will persuade those in charge to allow you access,' she stated. 'At present, you have the agreement of Lord Sydney to meet senior officers. Could you extend that to meeting convicts?' she asked.

'Good thinking,' I replied. 'Indeed, you have been specifically asked to report on the needs of female convicts. Therefore, you could interview the three women that I took to Plymouth,' I suggested.

Before we finished our meal, I knew what to do and fell asleep working out the details. The next morning, I wrote two notes before leaving for work.

On arrival at the Home Office, I gave the clerk one of the notes, which he forwarded to Andrew. About ten minutes later, he arrived, rather out of breath as he was a bit overweight.

'I was not expecting you. Thought you were still in Norwich,' he spluttered. 'Come to the meeting room where we can discuss in private.'

We went to the same room as before. I explained that in order to advise Lord Sydney, I needed to get the views of convicts as well as officers.

'Why?' he asked, as if bemused. 'Convicts have no rights. They lost any right to have their views considered when they were sentenced. Surely, as a prison jailer, you know that convicts must do as they are told.' He looked at me as if I had gone beyond what was expected or required.

'You are correct, Andrew,' I replied. 'Under the law of England, the convicts have no legal rights. However, I have been asked to advise with regard to improvements that could be made in the new colony.'

He said nothing but was clearly unconvinced.

'We have already heard from Major Ross that he will not allow his troops to guard the convicts. Therefore, it is important that I advise Captain Phillip on the important convict issues. After all, there will be about 750 of them. They could unite and revolt. If so, it will be a battle between marines and convicts, and many will die,' I concluded.

Andrew sat down and looked at the ceiling. 'I see what you mean, but how will interviews with convicts prevent that?' he asked.

'It will not solve the problem, but it could provide vital information to Captain Phillip to help him prepare,' I responded.

'What do you want me to do?' Andrew asked.

'Let Mr Nepean know I need to interview convicts on the Dunkirk Prison Ship at Plymouth,' I replied.

I handed him the second note.

To: Mr Evan Nepean.

From: Mr John Simpson.

I have made good progress on the assignment given to me by Lord Sydney. I have had useful meetings with officers designated to hold senior positions in the colony.

To fulfil the task, and produce the report for Lord Sydney, I now need to gain views from convicts, particularly females, on issues of importance.

The best way to do that is for me to visit the Dunkirk Prison Ship at Plymouth, as I can gain views from convicts who I previously escorted there.

I would be grateful if you could forward me a letter of authority to Captain Bradley, of the Dunkirk Prison Ship.

Andrew shrugged his shoulders and said, 'You may ask, but you may not receive.'

'Let us meet this afternoon, after you have had time to talk to Nepean,' I responded. 'If possible, can you get me a copy of the plan to set up a colony in New South Wales?'

I decided to go for a walk, across Westminster Bridge, to the south side of London. It was grey day, with dark clouds that were threatening rain as they swept across the sky. The narrow streets of Lambeth were full of people trying to earn enough to survive. The decaying tenement buildings reminded me of the Archway, where I had found Emily.

I went into a pub, and ordered some bread and cheese, with an ale. The more I thought about the plans to set up a colony at the other end of the Earth, the more bizarre it became. If Lord Sydney and his mates just wanted a secure open-air prison, they could have found an island close to England. For example, the Isle of Wight is about fifteen miles from Portsmouth.

After lunch, I returned to the Home Office. This time, the clerk did not even ask for my papers. He just waved me to the meeting room. Andrew arrived about 15 minutes later with a smile on his face.

'John Simpson, for a good man, you have the luck of the devil!' he declared.

'Why do you say that?' I enquired.

'When I went to see Mr Nepean, he was on his way to a meeting with Lord Sydney. He asked me to join him. His Lordship was with Captain Phillip, the Commander of The First Fleet, and asked me how your discussions were going,' commented Andrew.

'What did you say?' I enquired.

'I told him that you had met with senior officers but needed to gain views from the convicts who were going to the new colony. To my surprise, both he and Captain Phillip agreed. So, I mentioned your suggestion of asking Captain Bradley of the Dunkirk ship in Plymouth to let you meet the convicts you took there.'

'What did he say? I asked.

'He didn't. Instead, he wrote this note on official Home Office parchment,' stated Andrew, as he handed me the document.

To: Captain Bradley.

From: Lord Sydney.

I have asked Mr John Simpson, the bearer of this document, to provide me with information. To do so, please make available to him, in a secure place, the convicts who he transported from Norwich Castle Prison to the Dunkirk.

To secure the information required, the meeting with the convicts should be held in privacy, with only Mr Simpson and any of his staff present.

'Is that what you wanted?' asked Andrew.

'Yes. It will no doubt upset Captain Bradley, but it will enable me to do what is required,' I replied.

'Incidentally, Captain Phillip said he will join us after he has finished his meeting with Lord Sydney,' mentioned Andrew.

A couple of minutes later, there was a knock on the door, and a clerk announced Captain Phillip had arrived.

'Good to hear of your progress, Mr Simpson,' he said, 'and thanks for the work you are doing. I am a naval man by training. I don't know much about prisons, so I welcome your professional views as a prison officer. When do you think I can have your report?'

'After I have been to Plymouth, sir,' I replied.

'I look forward to seeing you when you have completed your work,' commented the captain as he left.

Andrew and I continued our discussion, and he told me some interesting information.

'In the meeting with Mr Nepean, I asked why New South Wales had been chosen,' Andrew indicated. 'He said it had been recommended by two people who sailed with Captain Cook. One of them is the botanist Sir Joseph Banks. The other was a crew member, James Mario Matra, who wrote a report for the Government on a possible location for a penal colony.'

I wondered whether Captain Phillip had met either of these men. If so, had he gained the sort of information that I had acquired from the publican in the village on the road from Norwich to London?

I thanked Andrew for his help and asked him to ensure Captain Bradley received a note in advance to let him know of my visit.

On returning to my new home, I began to feel hot and at the same time started to shiver. I said to Emily 'I don't feel very well. I am starting to sweat, even though the weather is cold.'

'You need to be in bed,' replied Emily.

The next few days became a blur as I lapsed in and out of consciousness. Emily was there whenever I awoke. Also, she arranged for Dr Bates to attend, but he had no antidote. Eventually, the fever reached its peak. I stopped sweating but felt cold.

I was in bed for nearly a week and had little strength when I eventually was able to stand. Emily gradually nursed me back to normality, keeping me company and giving me warm drinks and soup. After about ten days, we went for a short walk to get some fresh air.

'I was very worried during your illness,' said Emily. 'At times, you were delirious, and talking about things which I could not understand,' she stated.

'I don't remember much about it, but thanks to you, I survived,' I commented.

'You did the same for me when I was ill,' she replied.

It took a while for my body to recover, and I spent a lot of time reading the books in Sir Richard's library. As a result, I learned a lot about history, geography, philosophy and politics. That was helpful, as I always felt the people with whom I was meeting had the advantage of a good education.

To regain my strength, I went for daily walks, but it was early February before I felt able to continue working. My first visit was to see Andrew.

'You look a bit thinner than when I saw you last,' he commented.

'Yes, I have been quite ill, but I am now recovering. I thought I would call in to see if there is any news.'

'The date for the First Fleet departure has been set as the 13th of May 1788, so everyone is working hard to get the supplies on board,' he replied.

'I need to visit Plymouth as soon as possible,' I replied.

'We can book the stagecoach for you,' offered Andrew.

'Make it two on the inside, as Emily is travelling with me to gain the views of the women convicts. We will leave next Monday,' I indicated.

'I will send the tickets to Sir Richard's office,' said Andrew.

On my return, I let Emily know we needed to pack for our journey to Plymouth. I wrote to Sir Richard and also the Jackson family to let them know we would be away for over two weeks.

A few days later, we were on the stagecoach heading westwards. Emily brought two blankets to cover our legs, as the notoriously cold winter days of February were living up to their reputation.

Because of my recent illness, we decided to rest for a day in between various stages. The first night, we stayed at The Golden Farmer Inn in Bagshot, about thirty miles from London. The publican told us the inn was named after William Davis, a farmer who became a highwayman about 1685, and paid his bills in gold coins.

The next day, we went for a walk to the local market. Emily found a stall selling cuddly animal presents made of wool. We bought three of them for baby Henry.

Andover was our next overnight stop, and we had a merry evening listening to local people in the bar tell us about the town. Thirty stagecoaches arrived a day, they said, as it was a main link on the road to and from London. The next morning, we could see many new Georgian-style buildings under construction in this bustling town.

Moving on, we enjoyed a short visit to Shaftesbury, where we tasted the ale from local breweries. It was a quaint place where many local people made a living producing 'Swanskin,' a coarse woollen cloth that was hard-wearing for those working in agriculture and fishing. We bought two garments for Susannah and Henry.

As we arrived in Yeovil, I remembered the previous visit when I had baby Henry with me. So much had changed in my life since then.

The stagecoach stopped to change horses about every fifteen miles at small communities like Crewkerne and Chard, where we stayed overnight.

The next day, we passed through Honiton, and arrived at Exeter. Our journey was becoming like an engagement holiday, and we enjoyed discussing the places we visited.

However, we had a major task in front of us as we arrived in Plymouth.

'My first call is to see Mary and Jack Gale at their inn,' I told Emily. That is where I went with baby Henry on that dark day when Captain Bradley refused to let Susannah take her son on board the Dunkirk hulk.

Susan, their daughter, who had helped me in so many ways, was at the reception desk.

'John, it is good to see you again. Come into the saloon. Let me tell my parents that you have returned,' she exclaimed excitedly.

Two minutes later, Mary and Jack came in smiling with delight. 'Well, I never thought we would see you again,' exclaimed Mary, as she raced forward and kissed me. Jack shook my hand and patted me on the back.

'It is good to see you all again. I want you to meet Emily. Since I last was here, we have met and are engaged to be married,' I explained.

Mary rushed over to Emily, embraced her, and said, 'Welcome and congratulations.'

Susan came over and gave Emily a hug. Jack stepped forward and shook her hand.

'Thank you for your warm welcome,' replied Emily.

'John, you are always full of surprises, but this is the best of all,' declared Mary.

'Do you have a room for us?' I asked. 'We always have a room for royal visitors,' said Jack with a big laugh, as he picked up our bags and escorted us to the same room that I had on my previous visit.

As we unpacked and got ready for dinner, Emily said, 'You have good friends here.'

'Yes,' I replied, 'they helped me save the life of baby Henry.'

Dinner was a jolly affair. Afterwards, we went to the public bar, where Jack clinked his glass and spoke to the crowded room.

'Friends, about three months ago, an unmarried man arrived here with a baby,' he declared.

Cries of 'tell us more', echoed around the room. The locals put down their ale glasses in anticipation.

'His name was John Simpson, and he is here tonight,' he shouted, pointing to me.

'You may remember we had a collection for the baby. You will also remember John returned with the father, Henry Kable, about a month later as he reunited the family. 'Well, tonight, he is here with Emily, his beautiful fiancée,' he declared. 'Therefore, please raise your glasses for a long life and happiness toast to John and Emily.'

Cheers and clapping rang around the room. Locals came up to shake my hand and gave Emily and me their best wishes. After a few more drinks, we went to bed quite merry and slept well.

31. Convict Views

Emily woke early. I therefore decided that it was best to get up and prepare for an important day.

‘Let us go for a walk,’ I suggested, and we set off towards the port. Although the sun was shining, there was a cold wind sweeping in from the east.

I pointed out to Emily the Dunkirk prison hulk, lying at anchor in the River Tamar.

‘It looks like a floating tenement building; only the people on board have no escape,’ she commented.

‘Yes, some people have been imprisoned there for more than three years,’ I responded. ‘I wonder what effect it is having on their health?’

‘We will find out later today when we meet those you escorted here from Norwich,’ noted Emily.

We continued at a brisk pace and returned to the inn. Susan took us to the saloon and served us breakfast.

Jack was cleaning up from the previous evening, and came over to where we were eating.

‘What is your plan?’ he asked.

‘It should be easier than last time, as I have a letter that gives me authority to meet the convicts. If you are willing, I would like you to be a witness,’ I indicated.

‘Of course, I will,’ replied Jack enthusiastically. ‘Also, we have some clothes which people have given us for charity. So, I will bring some along and give them to Susannah, Anne and Elizabeth.’

‘Well done! They will be appreciated,’ I told him. ‘The new clothes will keep them warm and give them self-respect.’

About an hour later, we set off for the port. At the gate, I showed my letter of authority, and the guard let us in. We went to the office, and I asked the clerk to contact Captain Bradley.

‘Please say that Mr John Simpson has a letter for him from Lord Sydney,’ I indicated.

‘He is usually here at 11.00am, but today he has a visitor. He said he will be here an hour later, at noon,’ replied the clerk.

We had about an hour and a half to wait. I suggested we visit the local tavern. Time passed quickly, as Jack was in good form, telling us funny stories about the people who were regulars at his inn.

As we returned to the port office, just before noon, I could see Captain Bradley coming from the opposite direction. He was accompanied by another man in naval uniform. Behind them, there were two large men dressed in marine uniforms.

As we got closer, to my surprise, I recognised the other officer was Captain Phillip, in earnest discussion.

I let Emily and Jack know that we should wait at the doorway to the port office.

Captain Bradley was looking ahead and noticed the three of us. He seemed to falter as he realised I had arrived, once more, on what he regarded as his territory.

I decided to take the initiative, as I did not want him to show his anger again, or say he was too busy to talk with us. I knew Bradley would see that Captain Phillip was of higher rank to himself. So, I decided it was best to show my high-level links.

‘Hello, Captain Phillip,’ I said. ‘Good to see you again. What a coincidence that we are here on the same day.’

Captain Bradley seemed dumbfounded. Captain Phillip looked across to see who was addressing him.

‘Hello, Mr Simpson,’ he replied with a smile. ‘I presume you have come to Plymouth to follow up on the plans we agreed in London.’

He turned to Captain Bradley. ‘This is an assignment that Lord Sydney and I asked Mr Simpson to undertake when we met a couple of weeks ago,’ he stated.

‘Yes, sir, and I am pleased to introduce my fiancée, Emily. Also, this is my friend Mr Jack Gale.’

Emily curtsied, and Jack bowed.

‘Let us go inside out of the cold,’ said Captain Bradley, trying to regain some control over the proceedings.

Once in the port office, Captain Phillip mentioned to Bradley that I had already met senior officers of the First Fleet, and was also authorised to talk with selected convicts.

'I will leave Captain Bradley to arrange that, as I am booked on the next stagecoach to London,' he stated. He thanked Bradley for hosting his visit to the Dunkirk hulk.

He then turned to me. 'Mr Simpson, I look forward to your report on the issues that you will discuss with the convicts.'

He turned towards the door with his marine escort. Captain Bradley saluted and wished him a safe journey.

Bradley returned and walked over towards me. I handed him my letter of authority.

'There is no need for that after what Captain Phillip has said,' he declared with a scowl.

I put the paper into my wallet, waiting for Captain Bradley to instruct his men. Instead, he looked at me with glaring eyes and said, 'I knew from the first time we met that you were not an ordinary turnkey jailer. You know too many people in high places. I had heard that the Government spies on our operations, and this proves it,' he stated with anger.

I stayed silent, as there was no point in trying to change his perceptions. 'Who do you want to see?' he asked in a resigned tone.

'The three women that I brought on my first visit. They are Elizabeth Pulley, Anne Turner and Susannah Holmes, plus Henry Kable and his child,' I replied.

'As before, it will take an hour to bring them to this office,' he responded. I nodded, and he left.

'Let us return to the tavern and have lunch,' I suggested. We were soon enjoying a good meal with ale.

'That meeting was a bit tense, but it all went well,' said Emily.

'We still have the most difficult bit to do,' I replied. 'Captain Bradley is very annoyed, and he will want to control the next meeting.'

About an hour later, we returned. As we entered the port office, I could see a small boat was halfway between the Dunkirk hulk and the dock.

A few minutes later, Captain Bradley and two marine guards led in the three women and Henry Kable, holding his son.

Susannah, looking rather thin with a shawl around her dress, gave me a smile, as she entered. Elizabeth and Anne looked gaunt and surprised, as they put their hands to their faces. Henry held his son up high. They were all in leg irons and shuffled forward.

Captain Bradley came over to where I was standing. 'One of my men will stay with the female convicts and one with the male convicts to ensure there are no problems,' he stated.

'My instructions are that the meetings must be held in private,' I said, pointing to Lord Sydney's letter, which I had shown him.

Captain Bradley looked annoyed. 'The other point is that civilians should not be here asking the convicts questions,' he said.

'These people are members of my staff, and Lord Sydney has given them authority to ask any questions relevant to the assignment,' I replied.

Bradley took a deep breath and clenched his teeth.

'It is best if you leave us to complete the task, and I will let you know when it is finished,' I stated firmly.

Captain Bradley gave a thunderous look, turned and told the guards to follow. As soon as they had departed, I brought up some chairs so we could all sit down.

'Good to see you again,' I said. 'This is Emily, my wife-to-be, and my friend Mr Jack Gale.'

Everyone shook hands, and Henry gave me a pat on the back. 'Pleased to meet you, Emily. You have chosen a good man. He has reunited our family.'

'Yes, when we first met him, we prayed that he would meet a special person like you,' added Anne.

'Mr Simpson saved the life of baby Henry, so I know he is a good man. I hope you will have a happy life together,' expressed Elizabeth Pulley.

'Thank you,' replied Emily with a smile. 'I met John on a stagecoach on the way from London to Norwich. It was baby Henry who brought us together.'

At that point, the baby started to cry. Susannah took him in her arms, and he calmed down.

'We are here at the request of Lord Sydney and Captain Phillip,' I indicated, 'to get your views on what life is like on the Dunkirk hulk. Also, they would like ideas on how things could be improved, as on May 13th, your voyage to the new colony will commence.'

'Where are they sending us?' asked Henry.

'The place is called New South Wales. It will be an open-air prison, so you will have plenty of fresh air,' I indicated optimistically.

'Is it near Cardiff, or somewhere else in Wales?' asked Anne Turner.

'No, it is not in Wales at all. It is a place on what they call The Great Southern Land. To get there, you will have to be on a ship for about eight or nine months,' I informed them.

'Oh dear, that means it is thousands of miles away. We will never see our families again. They are getting rid of us forever!' cried Anne.

'They can't send us away from England!' shouted Elizabeth.

'Sadly, they can and will do so because we don't have any legal rights,' responded Henry, 'As far as the people in Government are concerned, convicts are legally dead. It is only thanks to John that we have any opportunity to be heard.'

'That is why we need to talk with you, so I can try and suggest improvements be made,' I indicated. 'To start the discussion, Emily will talk with the ladies, and Jack and I will talk with Henry.'

We moved our chairs and formed two groups.

I asked Henry to outline the conditions on the Dunkirk hulk.

'It is crowded and cold. There are more women than men, and they are kept in a different area. The food is just about enough to keep us alive. Boredom is a major problem, as there is little to do. Everyone knows it is just a temporary prison, but until today, we did not know where they are going to send us,' he summarised.

'As you have been on board for over two months, what could be done to make improvements?' I asked.

'There are a lot of people who are ill. They need better food and treatment to give them strength. I think about one in three have died,' he noted grimly.

'What else would help?' asked Jack.

'The berths need to be swabbed clean daily, and dry bedding provided, as everything is damp. Also, we need more time above decks for exercise,' suggested Henry.

'It seems they don't care,' reflected Jack.

'The people in charge are naval officers, not jailers. They signed up to sail the seas, not to guard convicts,' commented Henry. 'You need people who are trained and interested in helping us create a better life if the new colony is to be successful.'

'Do you see your son regularly?' I asked.

'There is a religious service every Sunday, and Susannah brings my son to that. It is the only time we are allowed to meet,' he stated, looking downwards.

He seemed depressed and in despair.

'I have some good news for you,' I said, trying to raise his spirits. 'I went to your home village of Laxfield and met your mother.'

Henry looked up. 'How is she?' he asked with a worried look.

'She is well, and sends her love,' I said.

'I am pleased to hear that, as she will have a hard life living alone,' Henry replied.

'I told her that you and Susannah have a son and want to marry. She was delighted to hear that, and sends her blessing to her grandson,' I added.

Henry looked up and was very emotional. 'Thank you for taking the time and making the long journey to see her. It is a relief to know she is well, but I feel that I should be there to look after her.'

'Your uncle Walter was with her, and said he will help,' I indicated. 'Also, Jack has some good news for you and Susannah,' I mentioned. Henry turned and looked at Jack.

'As you know, I am a publican and innkeeper here in Plymouth,' said Jack. 'When you stayed with us, we raised some money for baby Henry. Now, we have raised some more money. We also have some clothes for all of you, plus some soothing cream for your legs and food that my wife Mary has provided.'

He opened the case and pulled out the garments. 'These will keep you all a bit warmer,' he said.

'Oh, you are so kind,' exclaimed Henry, trying not to cry.

'As before, I will hold the money until you leave,' I told him. 'Also, a lady called Mrs Jackson and her friend Lady Cadogan, who live in London, are collecting money and presents for your baby.'

'Please tell everyone that Susannah and I really appreciate everything that they are doing to help us,' he replied, as he wiped tears from his eyes. 'We will use the money, as best we can, to help our son have a better life than ourselves.'

In the other corner of the room, I could see the women in deep conversation. I went across and asked how they were going.

'This is the first time anyone has taken an interest in our views about being cooped up like chickens every day,' stated Anne Turner. 'So, I have told Emily that we should be treated as human beings, even if we are convicts.'

'I have been in prison for more than three years,' noted Elizabeth Pulley. 'No one has previously listened or tried to improve the situation. So, I want to say thank you to Emily and yourself. I hope what we have said will make things a bit better.'

'We will pass on your views and do our best to help,' Emily responded. 'Our discussion has opened my eyes to the problems you face.'

As the women finished off their discussion, I let Susannah know that I had visited her parents and told them about Henry and her baby.

'Are they well?' she asked.

'Yes, they are delighted to have a new grandson, and they send their love and blessings,' I indicated.

'Thanks for visiting and letting them know about baby Henry,' she responded with tears in her eyes.

Emily opened her bag and pulled out the presents we had bought. 'I hope he enjoys these,' she said.

Henry and Jack came over to join us. We talked about how they all needed to stick together and help each other.

'The only way to stay alive is to have good friends,' said Jack.

It was time to leave. I asked the port office clerk to inform Captain Bradley. While waiting, we gave each other hugs.

Bradley arrived five minutes later with two of his men.

'Thank you for making the arrangements,' I told him. 'I will let Lord Sydney know the assignment has been completed. I will also let Captain Phillip know the key points.'

I could see Captain Bradley was impatient to leave. I felt it was important to let him know there should be no retribution.

'I trust that convicts will be kept safe and sound in your custody until I meet them again, prior to the departure of the First Fleet,' I indicated.

SAVING BABY HENRY

'It will not be for long, I am pleased to say!' replied Bradley. 'I was told by Captain Phillip these convicts, and about eighty others, will be moved on March 11th to Portsmouth.'

With that said, Emily, Jack and I left. We waved goodbye to Henry and the women as we heard baby Henry crying, no doubt wanting to be fed.

On our return to the inn, we had an excellent meal cooked by Mary and Susan and told them about the meetings.

'I hope they all survive this terrible weather,' noted Mary.

'I trust the place they are going to is warmer than it is here,' said Susan.

It had been a long day. We thanked our hosts and decided sleep was the priority, so that we could be ready for the return journey to London.

32. Visits and Victims

March 1787

Before leaving for London, Emily and I decided we should make notes from yesterday's discussions. Neither of us had experience of being journalists, or report writers. Therefore, we agreed it was best to share our memories of the key points and write them up as they emerged. It proved to be an enjoyable way of doing it.

'Let us start by capturing the points you discussed with the ladies,' I suggested to Emily. 'I will write as you tell me what they said. We can provide it as a document to Andrew for his records.'

Within a few minutes, I had captured important points. These included the need for -

- Privacy from male guards for women when dressing, or breastfeeding their children.
- Improved personal washing facilities.
- Better toilets.
- Meals with more variety and substance.
- More opportunities for exercise.
- Medical care for those who are ill.
- Repair holes where water comes in.
- More space between sleeping berths.
- Access to fresh rainwater for drinking.

Next, Emily wrote the points that I summarised arising from the meeting with Henry.

'It is good that we have written down our notes while they are fresh in our memories,' commented Emily.

It was time to say goodbye again to Mary, Jack and Susan.

'Let us know when and where you are getting married. You may have some surprise guests,' he shouted with his customary laugh. Mary and Susan hugged Emily and gave us their good wishes.

Jack helped us with our luggage, and we went to catch the afternoon stagecoach. 'Thanks for your support yesterday and for making us feel at home,' I told him.

With that, the stagecoach door closed, and we were on our way. Again, we decided to rest between the various cities and towns. That gave us time to explore the local markets in the morning, and travel in the afternoons.

About a week later, we arrived in London, and took a carriage to our apartment in Sir Richard's building.

Ralph was there to welcome us.

'Did you have a successful visit?' he asked.

'Yes, we did. Please let Sir Richard know that I would like to see him, when it is convenient,' I replied.

It was cold and getting dark. Ralph asked one of the staff to light the fire in our lounge.

'What would you like for dinner?' he asked.

'Something warm and filling,' I replied.

About an hour later, the fire was warming the room and we were served hot vegetable soup, followed by a chicken pie with wine.

'What a wonderful reception after a long journey,' said Emily, as she thanked Ralph.

We talked about what we needed to do next, and then slept well.

Next morning, we found breakfast had been put on the dining room table. The fire was burning brightly to warm the room. Ralph and the servants had been up early.

'It looks very cold outside,' noted Emily.

'Yes, I wonder how Susannah, Henry and their baby are coping on the Dunkirk hulk?' I mused.

'With great difficulty,' replied Emily. 'It seems we are living on two different planets. We all come from similar villages, but our lives are so different.'

As we finished, Ralph arrived to say Sir Richard would like to see us in half an hour. I collected our notes and made a list of the action points for discussion. Emily went to the bedroom and put on one of her best dresses.

'How did your visit to Plymouth go?' asked Sir Richard, as he came round his desk to welcome us. We sat in comfortable chairs near the fire.

During the next hour, we outlined the discussions. I indicated that our chance meeting with Captain Phillip had helped. Emily summed up her meeting with the women, and I shared my notes.

'What is needed now?' asked Sir Richard.

'A meeting with Captain Phillip and Mr Evan Nepean would be useful to share the points arising, as they can advise Lord Sydney on the action required,' I suggested.

'As I am the appointed chairman, I will convene a lunch meeting at my club,' stated Sir Richard. 'That will give us time to consider the issues in depth. I will send a note to Lord Sydney to confirm.'

'In the meantime, I will follow up with Andrew at the Home Office, and Emily can see what progress Mrs Jackson and Lady Cadogan have made,' I added.

It was the start of what would become a busy week. Emily and I walked to the Jackson's mansion in Portman Square. Nell answered the door. 'Good to see you,' she said enthusiastically, and took us to a small room.

Mrs Jackson soon arrived. 'Hello, how are you?' she asked.

I told her that the reason we had not visited was I had been very ill on returning from Norwich and, after recovering, had been to Plymouth on business.

Mrs Jackson said that the charity group with Lady Cadogan was holding a meeting in two days' time. She asked Emily to attend and talk about the meeting in Plymouth. She also invited us to dinner at the end of the week.

After leaving, Emily and I went to Hyde Park and enjoyed talking as we walked in the weak spring sunshine.

'Now we know the departure date for the First Fleet is May 13th, we need to complete the interviews with those involved,' I noted.

'To advise on improving conditions for women prisoners, it will be useful if I can meet some of them in London prisons,' suggested Emily.

'Let us find a carriage and go to The Strand Tavern for lunch. If Andrew is there, we can ask his advice,' I suggested.

About an hour later, we arrived. During our lunch, Andrew walked in. I went over and bought him an ale.

'Good to see you again. Thought you had disappeared,' he said.

I told him I had been ill, and then had made the long journey to and from Plymouth. As he sat down, Emily told him about meeting the three women.

'How can I gain views from those in London prisons?' she asked.

‘Well, as John can tell you, the prisons are rough, tough and nasty places,’ he stated. ‘The convicts are treated badly. They will be angry and abusive,’ he replied. ‘Do you really want to visit? What good can you do?’

‘I want to provide Lady Cadogan and her charity group with practical ways they can help convict women,’ she replied.

‘I can arrange a visit to Newgate Prison. Best if John goes with you. You will be able to see how it works, but I doubt if they will let you meet the convicts,’ he replied.

I mentioned to Andrew that Sir Richard was inviting Mr Nepean and Captain Phillip to his club for a business meeting.

‘I think Lord Middleton, the Comptroller of the Navy, should also be there. He has commissioned the eleven ships of the First Fleet, and controls the finances of the Navy, as well as being a Member of Parliament,’ indicated Andrew.

‘He is a man of influence,’ I noted. ‘Who else should be consulted?’ I asked, realising that Andrew knew the names of the bigwigs with power.

‘William Richards is providing the materials and food for the voyage. He is in the Home Office regularly, so you can meet him there. He will determine how many live and die, with the quality and quantity of food he provides,’ noted Andrew with a dark look.

‘Yes, he is an important person who will determine the lives of everyone on the voyage. Is there anyone else I should meet?’ I enquired.

‘Captain Hunter is the deputy to Captain Phillip, so it would be best to talk to him on a different day when they are together,’ he added.

As we returned to our new home, Emily said, ‘It looks as if you are going to be even busier meeting these officials who have a lot of power.’

It proved correct, as the next few days were filled with meetings. I reported Andrew’s views to Sir Richard, and he sent an invitation to Lord Middleton.

The next day, I went to the Home Office. Andrew introduced me to Mr William Richards. He was about 60 years of age, going bald on top, and dressed very smartly, reflecting his success in business. I asked him about his role.

'An expedition to set up a colony of this size has never been attempted before,' he declared. 'With 1500 people, they need a tremendous amount of food, and at least a year's worth of supplies for when they arrive. My job is providing what they need.'

'Do you think they have ordered enough?' I enquired. 'Will they have enough food and drink?'

'Not sure, as so many things can go wrong on the voyage. Even if they get there, no one knows if they will be able to grow enough food to keep 1500 people alive. In my view, it is an enormous risk to all involved, most of whom are being forced to go against their will,' he observed grimly.

'You don't seem very hopeful of a successful outcome,' I reflected.

'I have done my best to provide good quality with the money available. I pray for all those who will sail on this voyage to an island in the middle of nowhere. My personal Christian beliefs tell me anyone who has sinned can be saved, but that could have been done on an island nearer home!' he replied firmly.

As we continued our discussion, he made it clear that the new colony could only succeed if the settlers and convicts adhered to moral principles. I wondered to what extent the leaders of the First Fleet shared his view of New South Wales as a Christian community, rather than a penal settlement.

After the meeting, Andrew gave me a note which said the Governor of Newgate Prison had agreed to a visit from Lady Cadogan and two others on Friday.

On my return, I passed it to Emily.

Sir Richard had also left me a note saying Friday was the day for the lunch at this club. I hoped Andrew could make the introductions for the ladies at Newgate Prison, as I could not be in two places at once.

Given that it was only six months ago that Lord Sydney had issued the decree for the new colony, there had been quick and determined action. There was also much still to do and, and not much time left.

The next day, I went to see Andrew, who gave me the list of the ships that were assembling in the harbour at Portsmouth.

'There are eleven in total,' he noted. 'Two of them will be Royal Navy escort vessels, HMS Sirius and HMS Supply. There will be three supply ships for materials and food. These will be named The Golden Grove, Borrowdale and Fishburn. That leaves six ships to carry the professional administrative

staff and the convicts. I will have the names of those ships, and the people sailing on each one, in about a week from now.'

At lunchtime, we walked to The Strand Tavern. As usual, Patrick was there on the lookout for a good newspaper story. He ordered ales for us. 'You two look as if you've been plotting and planning,' he said with a wry grin.

'We have, but it is top secret,' declared Andrew in a low voice, as he sipped his ale.

'Well, I will have to buy you a few more pints to get the secrets out of you,' responded Patrick, laughing.

He asked about my visit to Plymouth. I told him that 80 convicts were being transferred to Portsmouth. 'If you want the biggest story in the land, you should go there and find out what is happening,' I advised.

Andrew put down his ale. 'In addition, there will be more than 500 convicts arriving from other parts of the country,' he noted.

'So, Lord Sydney and his mates are getting rid of citizens who are being deprived of their right to live in the country of their birth,' observed Patrick.

'That is only the start,' declared Andrew, as his voice rose to emphasise the point. 'They are planning to get rid of thousands!'

'This is no different than the slave trade,' responded Patrick. 'I am going to write that as the main story in our newspaper.'

'You can give the title as "British Convict Slaves",' I suggested.

He left, and Andrew and I walked back to the Home Office. 'Even if he lets the public know, it will not change the decision. We have the dictatorship of the few, not the democracy of all,' concluded Andrew.

During the afternoon, we discussed the report and made plans. Despite our personal concerns, both Andrew and I knew we were part of the Government's system for transporting people on a high-risk voyage to an unexplored, isolated island.

As I returned home, I reflected that it was all a big political spider's web. Before, I was just a local turnkey jailer unaware of the wider issues. Now, I could see how the web was catching more and more people, and I was increasingly near the centre. If the journalists and Andrew could not change anything, was there any chance I could do so?

During dinner, which Emily cooked, she told me of her meeting with Lady Cadogan and Mrs Jackson. 'They are keen to visit Newgate Prison with me on Friday,' she announced.

'Please tell them it is best not to dress up. The place will be dirty. The women prisoners will be in poor clothes,' I replied.

On Friday morning, I took Emily to Mrs Jackson's house and gave her a kiss. 'Be prepared to be shocked at the prison conditions,' I told her.

Sir Richard came into the room and said his carriage was ready to take us to Brooks' Club. On the way, Sir Richard asked me about the main points in the report.

'You have done well to interview so many people,' he stated. 'Until now, those in charge have only looked at the number of ships required and what is required for the voyage. They have not thought about the people. Tell those we meet that it is essential to ensure the survival of both the convicts, the crew and everyone else on the voyage.'

On arrival at the club, we were greeted by Alexander, who took us to a private room where he had reserved a table.

Mr Nepean was the first to arrive. Next, Captain Phillip came in, complaining about the rain. Five minutes later, Lord Middleton, who looked to be in his mid-sixties and rather overweight, rolled from side to side as he approached.

'Good to meet you,' he said in a deep, resonant Scottish accent, which had an air of authority about it.

We went to the lunch table. Sir Richard, as the host, took charge of proceedings. After introductions, Sir Richard said, 'Welcome. As we are all busy, let us quickly order lunch and we can commence discussions.' He started by asking Lord Middleton and Mr Nepean to give their views on how the voyage plans were progressing.

'It was only last August, that I was given the task to organise Royal Navy resources for this enormous colonial expedition,' stated Lord Middleton. 'I was surprised by the size and scope. Sending 1500 people in 11 ships to the other side of the world requires a lot of planning. Thanks to my colleagues, we will have everything ready, even though the official Order-in-Council giving me the go-ahead was only passed by the Government on December 6th.'

'It seems that this is all being rushed through at great speed,' noted Sir Richard. 'Vast amounts of money have been spent even before the official order. I also note it has been done without a specific Act of Parliament.'

Mr Evan Nepean, who was about half the age of his lordship, added his views. 'This is a complex assignment. Although we are establishing a penal colony, the wider objective is to extend our empire. We have lost vast lands as a result of our colonists in America declaring independence. We are sending our military to claim this new land as a strategic location.'

'What is your view, Captain Philip?' asked Sir Richard.

'I agree there are at least two main objectives. At one level, it is an experiment to solve the problem of overcrowding in prisons. At the other level, we will plant the British flag on a new land for trade and the expansion of our empire. I have met with the captains of our fleet, and we will be ready to sail on the nominated date.'

Sir Richard turned to me. 'John, you have been asked by Lord Sydney to advise on the issues relating to convicts. What are your views?'

What should I say? I knew there were major differences of priority between the colonial military objectives and the penal colony plans. I could see the transportation was being driven forward at the highest level despite the cost and risks.

'Success of the mission will depend on the colony being self-sustaining. If it is just a military base and an open-air convict prison, with lots of men and few women, it will fail. It needs a community of citizens who can build a thriving society, where they can develop family life, have schools, and gain employment,' I proposed. 'To do that, there needs to be a positive approach to reforming convicts, rather than just sending them to a faraway island.'

I could see the eyes of the members of the aristocracy trained on me. Would they see me as a revolutionary, upsetting their plans?

Lord Middleton broke the silence. 'I agree with Mr Simpson. New South Wales must not be a dumping ground for the unwanted. It needs to be based on Christian values and family life.'

Captain Phillip leant forward and spoke. 'I can assure you that, so long as I am Governor of New South Wales, there will be no slavery. I will do my best to reform the convicts to be honest and hardworking members of society, and also to establish good relationships with the native people.'

The conversation continued, and I indicated to Captain Phillip the issues raised in my discussions at Plymouth. He agreed to talk with the captains of ships and ensure the conditions for the convicts would be kept to proper standards.

Sir Richard thanked everyone for attending and said he would communicate the main points to Lord Sydney.

The rain had cleared as we left the building, but an icy wind was blowing. I wondered how the visit of Emily and the ladies at Newgate Prison had gone.

On my return, Emily was in the kitchen cooking dinner. I could see that she looked distressed and had been crying. I put my arm around her. 'Your visit to Newgate shocked you, I assume?'

'John, it was awful. Even before we started, the smell from the prison was dreadful. The prisoners were caged like animals. It was cold and dark inside. The women needed warmer clothes. They shouted at us. Some seemed deranged and out of their minds.'

Emily paused, trying to compose herself. 'The food served was more like slops than a meal. There were no proper toilet facilities. We were there for about thirty minutes, but it seemed much longer. It was like Hell on Earth.'

'I understand, as I've spent a number of years being a jailer,' I replied. 'The prison you went to is notorious. Tyburn is where they hang offenders outside. The jail was designed to put fear into would-be offenders.'

'Afterwards, Lady Cadogan, Mrs Jackson and I decided to establish a group called The Women Convict's Charity. We plan to raise money to improve conditions,' Emily indicated.

I told her about the meeting at the Brooks' Club. 'It seems that since last August, when the decision on the New South Wales Colony was announced, hundreds of people have been employed to make it work. To me, it is a giant plot to get rid of people, so they are no longer seen and then forgotten.'

We were both tired and went to bed. Emily found it hard to sleep as she tossed and turned, no doubt with dark memories and nightmares of Newgate Prison.

33. Portsmouth Visit

March/April 1787

It was good to see the light lasting longer, as Spring was arriving. Instead of darkness descending about 4.00pm, as it had done a few weeks ago, we could go for an evening walk. The wind was still strong at times, but the temperature was gradually rising.

Emily and I had settled into an aristocratic style of life, inclusive of servants and carriages, thanks to Sir Richard providing us with high class accommodation and well-paid jobs. We accepted his offer of banking facilities and put our surplus money on deposit. Until that point, I had kept any cash I had in a jar or hidden it in my room. For the first time in my life, I began to feel financially secure. Having money made a big difference, as I could see from my new wealthy contacts.

I could not help contrasting our situation with that of Henry Kable and Susannah Holmes. They were locked up on a prison ship, with no job or money, an uncertain future, and no doubt worrying about their son.

However, I realised the irony of the fact that the improvement in my life was a result of their troubled situation. My decision to take baby Henry at Plymouth, rather than hand him into a church, had enabled me to meet amazing people. Through the kindness of Mr and Mrs Jackson and Sir Richard, I was introduced to those with influence and power at the highest levels of society. In particular, my life was transformed for the better when I met Emily.

It was only four months ago that I was a low-paid jailer. Now, I was an adviser to Lord Sydney, Minister at the Home Office, and Captain Phillip, the Commodore of the First Fleet, about to sail for New South Wales.

So much in my life had changed. I was having to adapt and learn fast each day. Although I had little formal education, I was learning from experience. It was the judgements I made that kept me upright on what I felt was a fast and slippery political road.

I recognised that those who supported me had their own reasons. For Sir Richard, Mr and Mrs Jackson and Lady Cadogan, I helped facilitate some of their humanitarian ideals. For Lord Sydney, I was politically useful, in a small way, by being a conduit to the prison system and convicts he had never met, but was sending to the other end of the Earth. For my journalist friends at The Strand Tavern, I was useful as a source of information that could support their own political and career ambitions.

I was, in effect, the man of the moment, but would be easily dispensable if other priorities in their lives arose. Therefore, I had to think ahead. Once baby Henry and his parents were out of sight on the high seas, my value may disappear with them.

I shared my thoughts with Emily on one of our walks. 'The only thing we can be certain of is that there are no certainties,' she commented, with a laugh.

'We should develop a plan for when this assignment finishes at the end of this year,' I replied. 'That will be the start of our marriage and a new chapter in our lives.'

When we returned to our palatial home, Emily went to the kitchen and started to cook dinner. I sat in the lounge and made some notes, which I called *Plans for 1787 and 1788*. By the time Emily had prepared the meal, I had a list of things to do and things to avoid.

- Do not return to being a turnkey jailer.
- Do not return to live in Norwich.
- Buy a new set of clothes for Emily and myself to fit our new roles.
- Visit Portsmouth and complete the assignment for Lord Sydney.
- Discuss and agree our wedding arrangements with Emily.
- Develop a list of costs to ensure I can pay for the wedding.
- Ask Sir Richard's advice about gaining a job in London.
- Continue our links with the Jackson family and ask their advice.
- Improve my education by reading and attending courses.

The next day, Sir Richard invited me to his office. 'The meeting at my club the other day was important. Your comments about developing a sustainable community of citizens captured what we need to focus upon.'

'How do you feel we can support that?' I asked.

'Captain Phillip will need all the help he can get,' he responded. 'In particular, he will need convicts who want to reform and become leaders in the new community of New South Wales. There could be an opportunity for Henry Kable in that process, if he is willing.'

Sir Richard was also thinking ahead.

'I understand Lady Cadogan, and her friends, have raised a reasonable sum of money for baby Henry,' he continued.

'We need to ensure that it is delivered and protected. If a convict is allowed to have money in the new colony, he will be in a powerful position to provide for his family and have influence,' he observed, with his fingers intertwined and pointing upwards.

'Yes, I see what you mean,' Sir Richard, I replied. 'I think it would be useful if we discussed this with Captain Phillip.'

Sir Richard scribbled a note and gave it to me. It read:

To Captain Phillip.

From Sir Richard Markham.

In my role as chairman of the group established by Lord Sydney, I have gained the views of various people involved with the proposed New South Wales Colony.

Prior to concluding the assignment, and delivering a report to Lord Sydney, it would be helpful if I could meet you and Mr John Simpson to discuss points arising.

Could you let me know if it is convenient?

The next day, I took the note to my meeting with Andrew.

'Could you pass this to Captain Phillip, or ask Mr Nepean to do so?' I asked.

'He is in the building today,' replied Andrew. 'Let me give him the note now.'

Five minutes later, he returned. 'Captain Phillip said that he will be based with the First Fleet in Portsmouth from March 8th. He suggested a meeting at the port the following week.'

'Good news. I will confirm with Sir Richard,' I replied.

It seemed that once people at high levels of society knew you, they made time to meet.

On my return, I let Sir Richard know, and asked if he wished to travel.

'Yes, it will be good to get out of London, and see what is happening,' he declared. 'After I have finished at Portsmouth, I will travel on to my home in Bath for a few days. I will ask Ralph to book the tickets and arrange accommodation. I presume Emily will join us?' he asked.

'Yes, she can follow up the discussions with the female convicts,' I replied.

Prior to leaving, we went to the Jackson's home and let them know the travel plan. 'We have the money and presents for baby Henry,' said Mrs Jackson. 'I collected the last amount raised by Lady Cadogan this morning.'

They asked us to stay for dinner, and we enjoyed a convivial evening. As we were about to leave, Alexander invited me to his study. 'Here are the gifts for baby Henry and the cash,' he announced as he handed me a well-wrapped parcel.

'To make sure this is done properly, can you sign this document confirming receipt?' he asked. I took his quill and signed.

'Here is another document to present when you go to Portsmouth,' he indicated. 'This should be signed by the senior officer who takes possession of the presents.'

The document said:

This is to warrant that money and presents to the estimated value of twenty pounds have been collected for the benefit of baby Henry Kable. The money and presents must be released in full on arrival in New South Wales to Henry Kable, the father, and or Susannah Holmes, the mother.

'I have also provided you with a copy, which you should also get signed and keep as a record.'

'Thank you for providing those documents,' I said.

'When there is money involved, you need to be careful, as there could be potential convicts amongst the crew,' noted Alexander, with a look of concern.

We waved goodbye and returned to our luxurious apartment. After a busy day, we slept well.

The next few days were more relaxed. We enjoyed our daily walks. We also went to the market to buy vegetables for our evening meals, as Emily enjoyed cooking. While there, we looked for things we could take for baby Henry and his parents. We bought a teething ring, some clothes, and a wooden game where the colours had to be matched.

We packed on the assumption it would be at least a week before we returned. Sir Richard said he was travelling light because he had clean clothes ready at his home in Bath.

The stagecoach from London to Portsmouth departed at 11.00am. We made good progress and stayed overnight in the Guildford stagecoach inn.

During dinner, I asked Sir Richard what he would do when he returned home. 'It will be good to see my wife. She does not like living in London. So, I normally spend two weeks at home and then return to London for business.'

I wondered if he had children, but I did not like to pry. However, there was no need.

'We have two daughters who are married and live nearby in Bath, so they keep my wife company while I am away. We also had two sons, but one was killed in battle, and the other died from typhus,' he added in a low voice.

'Oh, I am so sorry to hear that,' expressed Emily.

'You never know what difficulties will occur in life. We must make the best of what we have and help others who are less fortunate. That is why I tried to help you, John, and those you were trying to protect when we first met.'

'You certainly rescued me from a very difficult situation, Sir Richard,' I responded. 'I feared that some of the women would have frozen to death that night if we were not under cover.'

'Yes, I realised that, and was only too pleased to help,' he replied.

It was getting late, and we went to our rooms.

The next morning, Emily and I awoke early and went for a walk around Guildford to get some exercise. The castle, which a local person told us dated from the time of William the Conqueror 700 years earlier, dominated the skyline. We returned via the marketplace, and noticed the stallholders were already busy. We bought some more ointment to soothe the legs of the prisoners.

The stagecoach was full. Little was said as the horses took us to Portsmouth. It was mid-afternoon when we arrived at the Landport gate, which was an impressive entrance. It had been a bumpy ride, and we all needed to recover. After a good dinner, we slept well.

At breakfast the next morning, Sir Richard said, 'This is the first time I have been to Portsmouth. Would you like to join me on a walk?'

A few minutes later, the three of us were bracing the cold wind as we went towards the port. It was a hive of activity. The dockyard was full of vessels, both those in for repair and those under construction.

We continued our walk along the sea wall and could see the expanse of water known as The Solent. The fleet of ships would sail across this on the long journey to New South Wales in The Great Southern Land.

We looked out on Portsmouth Harbour, where many of the ships already lay at anchor. I could see why they had chosen this as the starting point of an epic voyage. The harbour was well protected via a narrow entrance, and it had all the facilities of the Royal Naval Dockyard close by.

We went to the port office and asked the clerk if he would transfer a message to Captain Phillip. 'Yes sir,' he replied. 'He is on HMS Sirius.'

Sir Richard wrote a note with the address of our inn, which he showed me.

To Captain Phillip.

From Sir Richard Markham.

I am pleased to let you know that, together with John Simpson and Emily, his fiancée, I have arrived in Portsmouth.

It would be good if we can share with you the points arising from our assignment, prior to forwarding our report to Lord Sydney.

Sir Richard turned to the clerk. 'We will return at noon to see if Captain Phillip can meet us then, or at another time of his choosing.'

We left the port and went to a local tavern. As we entered, a squall of rain, driven by a strong wind, fell upon us. We ordered two ales and a glass of wine for Emily.

Sir Richard proposed a toast to our engagement and marriage. 'What do you propose to do once the fleet sails, and the current assignment you are working on comes to an end?' asked Sir Richard.

'I have learned a lot during the last four months,' I replied, 'but I have not discovered a clear direction for the future. My recent work has been based more on responding to urgent life or death issues, rather than planning ahead.'

'You have certainly excelled at that,' commented Sir Richard. 'Your kindness, compassion and practical help to those in need shows through. Of all the people I know, you have the best ability to communicate with both rich and poor, the powerful and the weak. I have seen you raise the spirits of those who have hit rock bottom in their lives, and also work easily with the top echelons of Government who have political power.'

'I appreciate what you say,' I replied. 'I am only doing what I feel is right for all. Without your support, and the others involved, I could not have reunited baby Henry with his parents.'

'Don't underestimate your abilities,' noted Sir Richard. 'What you have achieved, overcoming so many barriers in the process, is remarkable. That is why I asked what kind of work you plan to do next. When we have more time, I would like to share some ideas,' he suggested.

It was almost noon, and we walked back to the port office. The clerk said that Captain Phillip had sent a message to say he would take us to lunch in the town.

A few minutes later, he arrived with another man dressed in naval uniform, about 50 years of age.

'Hello, good to see you again. It is my pleasure to introduce you to my colleague, Captain John Hunter, who is Master of HMS Sirius.'

Sir Richard, in return, introduced Emily and me. 'We normally go for lunch once or twice a week to a restaurant in the town,' said Captain Hunter, in a soft Scottish accent that conveyed assurance and authority. 'It serves excellent seafood,' he added.

It took about five minutes to get there. The big sign outside read 'Sailor's Choice.' A menu, written in chalk on a board, was passed around. Emily and I chose the 'Cook's Special'.

'I suppose that is a reference to Captain Cook,' I mentioned to get the conversation going.

'Yes, he anchored HMS Resolution in Portsmouth Harbour on the 30th of July 1775, after his second voyage,' noted Captain Hunter. 'However, we are going to Botany Bay, which he discovered in late April 1770 on his first voyage. He never returned there. So, we do not know if anyone else has taken possession of it.'

'Are you concerned that after a long voyage, you may find the land has been claimed by the French, Spanish or Dutch?' asked Emily.

'It is possible,' responded Captain Phillip, 'but we have over 200 marines to deal with such problems.'

'If you cannot land, do you have an alternative plan?' I asked, half out of curiosity and half out of disbelief.

'The Great Southern Land is very large, so we will find a harbour somewhere. If not, we could sail to the islands referred to as New Zealand by Captain Cook,' added Hunter.

Our discussion turned to the transport of the convicts. 'We have six ships with convicts on board. The largest is HMS Alexander, with Captain Sinclair in charge of over 190 prisoners,' noted Captain Phillip.

'The others carrying convicts are called Charlotte, Friendship, Lady Penrhyn, Prince of Wales and Scarborough,' added Captain Hunter. 'Each day, we are receiving more convicts, mainly from England, but some from Wales, Ireland and Scotland. I am told there are even a couple who were born in France

and America! Maybe they were already deported by their own country, and reoffended here,' he declared with a laugh.

It was clear he would take anyone who was on the list, sent from the Home Office signed by Lord Sydney. He was just the transporter taking, without question, those nominated to develop a new colony. But, did these people on the list have the skills to build a community? Their selection was based on criminal activity, not on their knowledge of farming or building homes, which would be essential in the 'parts beyond the seas' to which they had been assigned.

Both the captains were obviously men of intelligence and proven competence. Nor were they heartless. Both had a sense of humour. Their conversation indicated their understanding of the task and complexities facing them. But, as military men, they were obeying orders even if they had personal doubts and concerns.

I therefore decided it was time to raise with them the issue of convicts' rights. After all, once they left the shores of England, these men were senior officers in charge of law and order.

'Captain Phillip, our last meeting was in Plymouth,' I began. 'I was there to talk with some convicts under the project given to me by Lord Sydney. The meeting proved useful in gaining an insight into the conditions under which they were imprisoned. As a result, I am preparing a report.'

'Yes, I look forward to reading that,' replied Captain Phillip. 'I am trying to ensure that conditions on board the ships, while being secure, are also sensible to the health of the convicts,' he stated sternly. 'We must not have a repetition of the mass deaths that I understand have taken place on slave ships going from Africa to America.'

'Indeed, we must all learn from those tragic voyages,' added Sir Richard. 'What are the plans to ensure the convicts arrive in good health?'

'There will be nine surgeons with the fleet, and we will have one on each of the ships carrying convicts,' replied Captain Phillip. 'I will talk with them and the captains to develop ways of minimising the spread of disease, and maximising the health of the crew, the marines, settlers and convicts.'

'It would be useful if I could have a follow-up meeting with the convicts I met at Plymouth to gain their views on the current situation,' I suggested.

'I can arrange that for tomorrow,' replied Captain Phillip.

'I have some money and presents for baby Henry, collected by Lady Cadogan and her friends,' I added.

SAVING BABY HENRY

'Convicts are not allowed to have money during the voyage, as it could create even more thieving amongst thieves, if you understand what I mean,' declared Captain Hunter. 'I will arrange for the presents to be carried by one of our captains, and the parents of the baby can then retrieve it in New South Wales,' he added.

Captain Phillip called the waiter over and paid the bill. 'I suggest you meet the convicts at the dock office tomorrow at 11.00am,' he said.

As we were near the stagecoach inn, we bade the captains farewell, and they returned to the port.

34. The Departure

March 1787

On arriving at the inn, Sir Richard said he had business letters to write and suggested meeting at dinner.

Emily and I decided to visit the local market. It was humming with activity. With so many fishing boats located at the port, the fish traders had a top selection.

We bought some more herbal cream for those imprisoned. It was likely they would be chained in leg irons for long periods, which causes chafing and leg sores. To support their diet, we bought some vegetables.

There was a stall that sold clothes for infants, and we bought some for baby Henry. Just before leaving, Emily noticed a trader selling games made of wood. He had a small chess set, which we bought. 'It will help the adults pass some of the boring hours on the voyage, providing someone knows the rules,' Emily stated.

At dinner, we told Sir Richard about our purchases. 'I would like to support your efforts,' he indicated. 'What do you think would be suitable?'

'Some warm clothes for the women would be appreciated,' replied Emily. 'When we saw them at Plymouth, they were shivering. As they will be at sea for a long time, it will help if we can find some waterproof capes.'

'It is a long time since I have been to a street market, as these days I spend my time dealing with the financial market,' commented Sir Richard with a smile.

We agreed to go with him when the market opened the next day. A waiter arrived with the menu. We all agreed the seafood platter looked inviting and ordered it.

While waiting for the food to be prepared, Sir Richard bought us drinks and said, 'Since we met, I have become most interested in the problems related to prisons and convicts,' he stated. 'I can see there are major social challenges, and that is why the Government are transporting hundreds of them across the oceans. But, it seems an expensive option. Why can't we find a cheaper solution here in our own country?' he asked.

'The money goes on catching offenders and locking them up, not on training them to get a job and become useful citizens,' I replied.

'Do you think it would make a difference if we provided money to train people while in prison?' he asked.

'For the men, it would be useful, providing there were jobs available when they left prison,' I responded.

'What about the women?' challenged Emily.

'Well, as you know, there are not many jobs open to women,' I indicated. 'But, they could be trained in sewing and making food, as most will marry and have to look after their children.'

'They should be taught how to read, write and count, at the very least,' declared Emily, as her voice got louder and more emotional than I ever heard.

'I agree with both of you,' responded Sir Richard, 'and I would like to develop a way of doing it. To do so requires money and personal commitment.'

'What do you have in mind?' I asked.

'I can arrange for an Employment Training Trust to be established and ask my banking contacts to donate capital. That can then be invested to provide the funds for operational costs.

'If that is done, we will need a person with experience to lead the work of the organisation. John, what is your plan after the current task is completed? Would you be interested?'

'What would the job involve?' I asked, surprised by his proposal.

'The main focus would be coordinating practical ways to train convicts on how to be good farmers, or build houses, or develop new businesses. Also, as Emily mentioned, all convicts must be taught how to read, write and count,' replied Sir Richard.

'It sounds like an important and exciting challenge,' I responded in a way that indicated some concern. 'I need time to think through how I would be able to do the job, as I am not well educated in such matters,' I replied.

'Of course, you must consider and take time to talk it over with Emily. However, rest assured, I have the knowledge and skill to help you learn the business aspects,' responded Sir Richard confidently as we finished for the evening.

The next morning, it felt as if Spring had arrived. The sun was shining as we walked to the market. Traders had arrived early, and so had we. That meant we had the best choice of the products before the main crowd, who would arrive in about two hours' time.

'I like markets,' said Sir Richard. 'They are the heart of commerce, where people can see what the competitors have, and haggle with each one to get the best deal.'

We started at the clothes stalls. Sir Richard asked Emily's advice on clothes for baby Henry, and also warm garments for the women. We found it hard to buy capes and had to visit different stalls to get four of them. We then had to buy a couple of bags for all the purchases.

As we were about to leave, we noticed a clog maker selling wooden shoes. We asked his advice because we did not know what size would be required. 'We have one size for ladies. There are two sizes for men, small or large,' he said in a matter-of-fact tone. He indicated the prices.

Sir Richard quickly asked, 'What is the price for two pairs of ladies' clogs?' The trader gave him a ten percent discount. 'What price can you offer if I take three pairs?'

The trader suddenly started to show more interest. 'How many do you want in total, and I will give you a good price,' he said.

Sir Richard told him he wanted three pairs for the ladies, and one large size for a man.

'You can have all of those for fifteen percent off the normal price,' replied the trader.

'How about an extra pair of the women's version for twenty percent off the total?' proposed Sir Richard.

'Agreed,' shouted the trader.

'Put them in a bag for me, and you have a deal,' said Sir Richard. The trader soon found a container, as he received the cash.

'I love negotiating and doing deals,' said Sir Richard, who had clearly enjoyed himself.

We returned to the inn and collected all the other presents before going to the port. We showed our letter of authority and walked to the office. To our surprise, Susannah Holmes with baby Henry, Anne Turner and Elizabeth Pulley were in a corner of the room. A marine guard was standing just inside the doorway.

We presented our letter of authority to him and also the clerk. We walked over to the ladies, who still looked thin and gaunt. However, they were better dressed than last time.

'Good to see you again,' Emily said, as she went over to Susannah to give her and baby Henry a hug.

I introduced Sir Richard. 'You will remember that very cold night when we were in the city of Bath. It was Sir Richard who let us stay in his cottages.'

'That was very good of you,' expressed Elizabeth. 'I think we would have frozen to death without your kindness.'

'It was the least I could do to help John and yourselves in your time of need,' replied Sir Richard. 'I am pleased to see that you are here after the difficult journey and time on the Dunkirk ship.'

'That was a dreadful place,' declared Anne. 'No human being should be caged up like that, especially a baby.'

Emily and I brought over some seats, and everyone sat down. 'Where is Henry?' I asked Susannah.

'The men are kept in a different area, so I have not seen him since we had the church service on Sunday,' she replied.

'How are the conditions on this ship compared to the other one?' asked Sir Richard.

'Much better, sir,' replied Elizabeth. 'There is more space, it is cleaner, and we have improved food.'

'We are also treated better,' added Anne. 'The crew are kept more under control.'

'We have only been here a few days,' noted Susannah. 'It is still very difficult for me to care for baby Henry. But Anne and Elizabeth have helped me a lot, and I really thank them for that,' she said, and started to cry.

Suddenly, the door burst open, and a marine guard came in with Henry Kable. Unlike the women, he had chains attached to his ankles.

I went over and indicated to the guard that I would take him to the chair that I had just vacated. The guard was going to object when Sir Richard walked over.

'I am Sir Richard Markham,' he said, in an authoritative tone while showing him the letter. 'Please inform Captain Phillip immediately that I have arrived.'

The guard replied, 'Yes, sir,' and left the building.

When we returned to our seats, Emily was telling the women and Henry that we had brought some presents for their voyage. We opened the case and the bags.

'With these new clothes, it feels as if I am going on holiday, rather than being sent overseas,' exclaimed Anne, with a laugh.

'This cape will be really useful against the rain and cold wind,' said Elizabeth.

'Thanks for thinking of baby Henry,' commented Susannah. 'He is growing fast, and these new clothes are just what he needs for the long voyage.'

'We have also brought you something to wear on your feet,' stated Sir Richard, as he pulled out the clogs. 'I hope they fit you.'

It was great fun watching them try on their new footwear, as they stood up and stumbled around the room.

Emily handed them the herbal cream and went round to put some on their sores. I picked up the food that we had bought and handed it out.

'This feels like Christmas!' exclaimed Elizabeth.

'It's my birthday next week,' noted Anne. 'Thanks for the birthday presents.'

'I appreciate all your kindness,' said Henry. 'You are good people. Thank you for the help you have given us,' he declared.

We all went around giving each other a hug, as if it was a family gathering and Sir Richard joined in.

As this was happening, the door opened, and the marine guard escorted Captain Phillip and another naval man, who was a bit taller, into the room.

Sir Richard went across to meet them.

'Good to see you again, Captain Phillip,' he began. 'Thank you for arranging the meeting with the convicts. We have brought them some clothes and food to help them on their voyage.'

'Sir Richard, it is my pleasure to introduce you to Captain Francis Walton. He is Master of HMS Friendship, on which the convicts here in this room will sail,' stated Captain Phillip. 'I have explained to him the unusual background to this visit. As you appreciate, we do not normally allow convicts in our charge to leave the ship. However, in this case, I will leave you to discuss the issues, as I need to attend another meeting.' He turned and departed.

'It is an honour to meet you, Captain Walton,' said Sir Richard. 'Let me introduce Mr John Simpson, a colleague with whom I work closely.'

'Pleased to meet you,' said the captain in a formal way, befitting his naval role.

'I understand that Lord Sydney has asked you to meet with these convicts,' he declared in a way that implied he was not in favour of it.

'Yes sir,' I responded. 'I was in charge of the convicts and escorted them from Norwich to Plymouth, but the baby was not allowed on the Dunkirk hulk. At a later date, I met Lord Sydney in London when he gave me the authority to reunite Henry Kable and Susannah Holmes with their baby.'

'How did you come to be involved in all of this, Sir Richard?' asked the Captain in what seemed a suspicious tone.

'Lord Sydney is a friend of mine,' stated Sir Richard. 'He asked me to chair a group of people to advise on the role of convicts in developing a sustainable society in New South Wales once their sentences have been completed. We both feel it is important to encourage family life in the new colony so that it has a future beyond just being a penal settlement,' he explained.

I could see Captain Walton was listening intently. 'It seems Lord Sydney has a long-term plan. I did not realise the Government is planning to use the penal colony to extend the British Empire,' he noted. 'I can see now that the children on board will be the new generation of permanent settlers.'

At that moment, baby Henry started to cry. Susannah stood up and walked around, trying to comfort him. His father went over to provide support as Captain Walton continued.

'Transporting convicts is difficult. We have 80 male convicts and 21 females on my vessel. They have to be separated for obvious reasons. However, the fact that we have six male and seven female children belonging to the convicts, makes matters more complex,' he added with an air of resignation.

'I can see that creates many challenges,' reflected Sir Richard.

'There are also 45 military men on board. I am told that 28 of them will bring their wives, plus six male and eight female children,' noted the Captain. 'In addition to the convicts, I have a crew of 17 sailors.'

Sir Richard raised his eyebrows. 'I can understand that accommodating the needs of everyone will not be easy,' he commented.

'Yes, I entered the navy to protect our country in wars against France, Spain and the Dutch. Now, my job is to captain a transport ship for those who have broken the law,' he commented with an air of disdain.

'I appreciate what you say, Captain Walton,' I commented. 'I realise this voyage is different to your normal work.'

'Indeed, it is, and I thank you for letting me know the wider objectives,' replied Captain Walton. 'I can now see, with this voyage, that I am helping our country strengthen our interests in a new place.'

'Yes, you and your colleagues have very important roles in the future of our nation,' stated Sir Richard. 'The colony will only become a community if families can grow and prosper. I trust, therefore, that you will do all in your power during the voyage to ensure the parents and children are safe. They can then start a family life in the new colony, as Lord Sydney has proposed.'

Captain Walton nodded to show he had understood. 'Are there any other matters to resolve?' he asked.

'Just one important issue,' I stated. 'Lady Cadogan, and other kind people, have raised money and presents for baby Henry, to the value of twenty pounds. I have been told convicts cannot have money during the voyage. As this money is the property of the baby, I would ask that you guard it until your arrival in New South Wales.'

'This is unusual. You say this property belongs to the baby, who is clearly not a convict,' noted Captain Walton. 'I will arrange to store it, with other private possessions, on HMS Alexander, which is under the command of Captain Sinclair.'

Sir Richard stepped forward. 'Here is the parcel and the money. To show receipt, as we need to do in law, can you sign this document?'

Once the Captain had signed, we rejoined the women and Henry. It was an emotional experience as we said farewell.

We were individuals thrown together by chance. Through very tough experiences, we had developed positive feelings between us. We gave each other hugs and cried.

Susannah stood up and asked me to hold baby Henry. 'You have saved my son's life,' she said as her tears flowed.

I took baby Henry in my arms, kissed his forehead, and whispered a blessing. Henry Kable came over and put his hand on my shoulder.

'John, we would like our son to be baptised whenever that is possible, in this country or the new colony. Susannah and I have had a discussion, and we would like you to be our son's godfather.'

Before I could reply, Susannah took hold of my left hand and held it tight. 'We want our son to know that he owes his life to you. Also, we want him to know that we are reunited because of your brave determination to change the cruel decisions that separated us.'

Tears again came to her eyes.

'John, we realise you could have left our son and returned to Norwich,' added Henry. 'You are a true saint,' and there was a crack of emotion in his voice. 'No one else would have lifted a finger to help us without your incredible efforts.'

Susannah wiped the tears from her eyes. 'We give thanks to you every day,' she indicated. 'You will be a member of our family forever, and that is why we want you to be the godfather to our son.'

Baby Henry looked at me and smiled, as if he knew what his parents had said.

'Thank you for your heartfelt words of appreciation,' I replied. 'My life has changed for the better as a result of meeting you. I am delighted to have returned your son, and reunited you. It is an honour to be baby Henry's godfather. I would like to ask Sir Richard Markham and Captain Walton to witness the agreement and support the religious ceremony.'

Captain Walton was clearly surprised, and looked across to Sir Richard Markham, who came forward and said, 'I am pleased to witness the decision taken, and I ask Captain Walton to convey the agreement made here to both Captain Phillip and the Reverend Johnson.'

'I give my word of honour to convey the request,' replied the Captain.

As I handed Susannah her baby, she kissed me on the cheek. 'A thousand and more thanks,' she whispered. 'You are a hero in our lives.'

I nodded to Captain Walton. Then I helped Susannah walk towards the door, where the marine guards stood. Elizabeth and Anne were helped by Sir Richard and Henry.

We said our last tearful goodbyes at the doorway as a cold blast of air blew in from the east. I knew it would be the last time that I would see the people who had changed my life.

It was the start of a new era for all of us.

35. New Opportunities

As we walked back to the inn, the dark clouds reflected our mood. There was no conversation. None of us wanted to talk. Even though we had done what we had set out to do, it did not seem like a victory. If anything, it was a win for the system ordained by Lord Sydney and the British Government.

The women, Henry and his son, had been successfully transferred from one prison ship in Plymouth, to another one in Portsmouth. Maybe their conditions were a bit better, but they now faced about three-quarters of a year being sent to a foreign land with no organised facilities. It was in the lap of whichever gods one supported if they would find enough food and water to survive.

The British Government were gambling with people's lives - not only those of convicts, but also the marines, settlers and sailors. Yet, there were no visible protests.

The orders had been given. The captains, marines and administrators were doing as they were told. In many ways, they were just as much victims of the system as the convicts. They were being consigned with the fleet on a high-risk venture to the other end of the Earth.

In just a few weeks, eleven ships would carry about 1500 people across dangerous oceans to what?

Captain Cook could not give an answer, as he had been killed nearly ten years ago on an island in the Pacific Ocean.

Lord Sydney had never been to sea, so he had no answers.

Captain Phillip had been given destination coordinates on a rough map, but he had no answers on what New South Wales could, or could not, provide.

Therefore, we were in a sombre mood. We had a very quiet evening and retired early to our beds.

We were pleased to see the sun shining the next morning. Emily and I decided to go for a walk around Portsmouth, prior to our meeting with Captain Phillip, which was arranged for lunchtime. We asked Sir Richard if he wanted to join us on the walk, but he had work to do.

In the distance, we could see a tower at the end of the sea wall. 'That building must have a tale to tell. Let's go and find out,' I suggested to Emily.

Our breath turned to steam in the cold morning air as we strode forward. In the harbour, we counted not only eleven ships of the New South Wales bound fleet, but many others.

'This is a busy place,' commented Emily, as we reached the parapet leading to the tower. The closer we got the more impressive it became. We could see it required great skill to design and build a circular construction.

'I wonder if they have anyone who is going to New South Wales who has the architectural skill and the knowledge of how to construct buildings?' was a question raised by Emily.

'It is a point outside the task we have been given,' I responded, 'but we should ask Captain Phillip.'

We stopped to admire the tower. A few other people were there. I asked one gentleman, who looked about ten years older than me, 'Do you know why this tower was built?'

'Yes, I live in Portsmouth and went to school in the town,' he replied. 'My teacher told me the Round Tower, as it is known, was built between 1418 and 1426, under the orders of King Henry V. The war with France was raging at the time. So, this was part of our defence system, together with the Square Tower over there,' he stated, pointing to another impressive structure.

We thanked the gentleman and continued our walk. 'This place has been the centre for many important events in history,' noted Emily, 'Those ships in the harbour will start a new era. Will it lead to peace and prosperity, or more disasters?' she reflected.

On our return, Sir Richard had completed his work.

'The aim of our meeting with Captain Phillip today is to give him an outline of the main points arising from our discussions, and to gain his views, before we send our report to Lord Sydney,' he noted.

We walked to the same restaurant, where we had met a couple of days earlier. Captain Phillip was already there with another man, who was not in naval uniform. As we approached, I could see it was the Reverend Richard Johnson, who I had met at the Home Office.

Captain Phillip made the introductions. We sat at a large round table and placed our orders. I chose a mixed selection of fish called 'The Sailor's Plate'.

'I have invited Reverend Johnson to discuss how we can develop the colony as a place that reflects our Christian principles and religion,' he stated.

'That is good to hear,' responded Sir Richard. 'When Lord Sydney asked me to chair the advisory group, he indicated that New South Wales should be more than a penal colony. As you know, John Simpson gained the views of politicians, naval officers, administrators and also some convicts. It would be useful, John, if you could give us an overview to start our discussion.'

I took a deep breath as I realised that it was important to give a balanced view rather than just my own opinion. After all, I was talking to Captain Phillip, who would become the Governor of New South Wales. In effect, as the King's nominated leader, he would have enormous power. In the colony, he would be the equivalent of both King and Prime Minister. He would have the powers of an emperor.

'It has been a privilege and honour to be involved in this assignment, and I thank you, Captain Phillip, for your support. The aim has been to consider how New South Wales can be more than just a penal colony,' I stated.

'Has there been an agreed common view on what is required?' asked Reverend Johnson.

'There are many views on what the objectives and priorities should be, as there are different interests and roles,' I responded.

I could see Captain Phillip looked concerned. 'What are the main differences?' he asked.

'The view of Lieutenant Ross is that the priority of his military force will be to protect the colony from attack. He does not envisage his troops will be there to guard convicts. That raises a major question. Who will be in charge of the convicts? So far, I have not seen anyone who has substantial experience of managing prisons who is going on the voyage,' I noted.

'I understand what you say, Mr Simpson. I have not personally spent any time in prisons, I am pleased to say,' replied Captain Phillip with a frown. 'I will follow up on that as I take your point that a penal colony will require people to manage the prisoners.'

'The second issue is how the colony can become a sustainable community rather than just a place of confinement,' I said. 'There needs to be more tradespeople with experience in agriculture, architecture, building and commerce. If the convicts are expected to do such work, who are the people who can train and supervise them?' I enquired.

'At this point, I do not know what skills the convicts have, apart from thieving, which seems to be the main reason most of them are in prison!' responded Captain Phillip. 'I agree with you. We will have to train convicts, so they can be usefully employed in developing the colony.'

I nodded, realising my points were causing concern.

'The next topic is one that I have already mentioned to Reverend Johnson,' I continued. 'The question is whether convicts who have children will be allowed to marry. At present, this is forbidden under English law. If that continues in New South Wales, you will have a colony of bastards,' I declared, looking across the table for an answer.

'I understand it is your efforts to save baby Henry Kable and reunite the family that led Lord Sydney to ask you to advise on these matters,' noted Reverend Johnson. 'I will need to discuss with Captain Phillip, when he becomes the Governor, how we will apply the law in New South Wales. What I can say is that I will provide pastoral care for all, and offer classes in reading, writing and counting for children and all adults.'

Captain Phillip nodded in agreement. 'I will discuss marital law issues with Lord Sydney, Judge Advocate Collins and Reverend Johnson. The decision on that will be central to whether New South Wales is just a penal colony with lots of illegitimate children, or a community of citizens. Are there any other points?' he asked, clearly concerned.

'There is one issue that is especially important,' I replied. 'At present, convicts are legally dead in law. They have no rights to prosecute, nor defend, a case relating to their property or person. Will there be equal rights before the law in New South Wales?' I asked.

'You are asking some difficult and controversial questions, Mr Simpson,' noted Captain Phillip, with a wry smile. 'I knew my role as Commodore of the Fleet would be difficult, but it seems my job as Governor of New South Wales will require wisdom beyond my experience. I am a sea captain by profession, not a politician,' he observed, stroking his chin.

'It was not my intention, Captain Phillip, to add more burdens on your shoulders than you already have,' I responded.

'I understand that, and I take your comments in the positive spirit in which you have offered them,' he replied. 'To build a society, rather than just a penal colony, we will need a system of education, employment and justice that is seen to be fair by all. I will certainly do my best to ensure there is opportunity for law-abiding people,' he concluded.

Sir Richard leant forward. 'When I took on the role to chair this assignment, I did not realise that setting up a new colony is like establishing a new country,' he noted. 'My professional expertise is in commerce. The colony will only survive if there is a market, where people can buy and sell what they produce. I hope you have someone who can organise that.'

'I will put that on my long list of action points,' replied Captain Phillip.

Sir Richard stood up, holding his drink high. 'Captain Phillip, Commodore of the Fleet and Governor designate of New South Wales, I propose a toast to you and all who sail on the voyage. Our best wishes go with you.'

We all stood and clinked our glasses, then had a pleasant lunch before going our respective ways.

As we returned to the inn, Emily said, 'Captain Phillip has been given a big job, but does he have the people with the necessary skills and abilities?'

'From what we have heard, I fear the answer is no,' responded Sir Richard. 'The marines see their job as a defence force. The administrators will focus on systems. The convicts do not have the skills to earn a living by farming or building. Once the food supplies they take with them to the colony are exhausted, there is a high danger that they will starve to death.'

'That sounds terrible,' said Emily as she held her hands to her face.

'In the report to Lord Sydney, we need to say that a new fleet must be sent quickly with people who have trade and commercial skills to develop a sustainable society,' I reflected.

'Let us do that,' agreed Sir Richard. 'This afternoon, I need to write some business letters. We can discuss our action plan at dinner.'

Emily and I went for a walk. We passed the large naval dockyard, where we could see many skilled men employed repairing ships. 'They will not be able to work like this in New South Wales,' I reflected. 'What will they do if the ships need repair?'

It was getting dark by the time we returned, and we decided to rest for an hour.

At dinner, Sir Richard said he was going to his home in Bath the next day and would be there for two weeks.

'Tonight, I would like to follow up the question that I raised with you, John, about what happens when this assignment is complete. I mentioned that my involvement in the convict issues has made me aware that action is required here in our own country.'

'What do you have in mind?' I enquired.

'I am willing to establish an Employment Training Trust to implement the proposals that Mr Howard outlined in his report on prisons. We can include the issues you have raised as a result of your experience. The Trust would help train convicts with skills, so they can get jobs when they leave prison. Would you be interested in leading the organisation?' asked Sir Richard.

'I appreciate the confidence you have in me,' I replied. 'With your advice, I would like to accept the challenge. Will I have a group of people to support me?' I asked.

'You will have a group of influential people as trustees. I plan to invite Mr Howard, Mr and Mrs Alexander Jackson, Lady Cadogan, and also to gain a nominee from Lord Sydney to join me on the advisory board.'

'How will the work be funded?' I enquired.

'I will raise a substantial sum of money from my contacts in the finance and banking industry. Also, I will ask Lord Sydney to provide Government funds. That will enable you to employ skilled people to assist with the training and administrative work,' he explained.

'It sounds an exciting and demanding job,' I commented.

'It will be, and I am confident you will do it well,' he responded with a smile. 'When I return to London, we will discuss the details.'

We continued talking during the dinner, and then retired for the night. It was a day that I would remember for many reasons.

As we walked to our room, Emily smiled and said, 'It is nice to know that the man I am marrying has a new job.'

'Yes, I was a bit worried about having to be a jailer again,' I replied.

We both slept soundly, knowing that with my job secured, we could plan our marriage.

The next morning, we went with Sir Richard to the stagecoach and waved as he returned home to Bath.

We booked our tickets to London. The next chapter of our life journey was about to begin.

On the way, we discussed what life would be like for Henry, Susannah and their son. They were setting off on a long journey of a very different kind. If they survived the voyage, what would life be like in the New South Wales colony?

'One thing is for certain; they will have to do a lot of work as there are no homes there. My contact, who had visited with Captain Cook in 1770, said it was a place without buildings,' I told Emily. 'The settlers will have to live in the open air with only tents to cover them.'

'Will there be enough fresh water for 1500 people?' Emily asked.

'No one knows,' I replied.

Would the local tribes be friendly or attack them? There were so many big questions and very few answers.

'They will have to live with the food they take with them on the boats,' I noted. 'Those supplies will only last a short time. Will they be able to grow crops quickly enough to feed themselves?' I reflected.

SAVING BABY HENRY

Despite all of the problems and uncertainties, Lord Sydney had sent orders for the First Fleet to depart on May 13th, 1787. It would be a voyage of extreme danger for all involved.

Baby Henry had been saved through the help of many people and united with his parents. However, would he and his parents survive and succeed in the new colony?

Timetable

August 21st, 1786 - Lord Sydney signed a document decreeing New South Wales would become a penal colony.

October 1786 - John Simpson, a jailer at Norwich Castle Prison, is instructed to take three female convicts, one of whom, Susannah Holmes has a baby boy, to the Dunkirk prison ship at Plymouth. Captain Bradley refuses to accept the baby on board.

October 1786 - John Simpson goes from Plymouth to London with the baby, and gains permission from Lord Sydney for the child to travel with his mother and father on the voyage.

November 1786 - John Simpson returns to Norwich to collect Henry Kable, the father of the baby. He escorts him to Plymouth with the child to reunite the family.

November 16th, 1786 – John Simpson delivers Henry Kable to Plymouth and reunites Susannah Holmes with him and their baby.

December 1786 - Order-in-Council provides authorisation of First Fleet.

November 1786 to April 1786 - John Simpson gains the support of people in London, who provide money and presents for the baby, which are delivered to the parents who are passengers on HMS Friendship at Portsmouth.

May 13th, 1787 - First Fleet of 11 ships, under the command of Commodore Arthur Phillip, set sail from Portsmouth with an estimated 566 male convicts, 192 female convicts, 213 marines, wives and children, plus sailors and professional administrative staff.

June 3rd - 10th - 1787 - Fleet at Santa Cruz, Tenerife.

August 5th to September 3rd - Fleet at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

October 13th - 11th November- 1787 - Fleet at Cape Town, South Africa.

January 18th, 1788 - Captain Phillip arrives in Botany Bay, New South Wales, and the other ten ships arrive within two days. Voyage of over 16,000 miles had lasted 252 days.

January 26th, 1788 - Settlement at what becomes known as Sydney Harbour.

February 10th, 1788 - Susannah and Henry Kable married by Reverend Richard Johnson in an open-air ceremony at Sydney Cove, New South Wales.

SAVING BABY HENRY

July 7th, 1788 – Kable sues Captain Sinclair to reclaim the money raised for baby Henry and is awarded £15 by the first Civil Court in New South Wales.

In the year of 1791 - Kable is appointed as an overseer of convicts.

In the year of 1797 - Kable is appointed Chief Constable of Sydney until 1802.

In the year of 1798 - Kable buys a restaurant in Sydney.

From the year 1802 - Kable becomes the owner of a boat building company.

By the year 1807 - Kable owned at least 10 farms.

1825 - Susannah Kable dies.

1846 - Henry Kable Senior dies.

Biographies

Susannah Holmes (1764 - 1825)

She was convicted of theft in 1783 and sent to Norwich Castle Prison. Her sentence was 14 years in prison, after she had received clemency from the original death penalty given to her.

She was listed for transportation to New South Wales and John Simpson took her to Plymouth. She eventually sailed on the HMS Friendship in May 1787. In February 1788, she married Henry Kable and became a founding mother of the New South Wales colony. In addition to her son Henry, who was known as Harry, she had ten other children.

They were:

Henry (17th February 1786, Norwich Castle Prison, England. Died in 1852, Picton, New South Wales)

Dianna (5th December 1788, Sydney. Died – 11th March 1854, Macquarie St, Windsor)

Enoch (24th April 1791, Sydney. Died – 27th February 1793, Sydney)

James (19th August 1793, Sydney. Died – 30th September 1809, At Sea, off the straits, Malacca)

Susannah (23rd October 1796, Sydney. Died – 20th June 1885, 'Vanderville,' The Oaks)

George Esto (28th September 1797, Sydney. Died - 1853, Bathurst)

Eunice (30th May 1799, Sydney. Died – 21st December 1867, Windsor)

William Nathaniel (22nd March 1801, Sydney. Died – 16th November 1837, Bathurst)

John (12th November 1802, Sydney. Died- 30th May 1859, Bairaba Hotel, Windsor)

Charles Dickenson (5th October 1804, Sydney. Date and place of death unknown)

Edgar James (14th August 1806, Sydney. Died – 28th April 1849, Windsor)

Susannah therefore had a very busy family life caring for her children, plus supporting her husband's business initiatives.

A web link to the descendants from the family is at - <https://henrykable-susannah-holmes.com/the-11-children-of-henry-and-susannah/>

Henry Kable Senior (1764 - 1846)

Henry Kable was convicted of burglary in March 1784, and served five of his seven-year sentence. Three of those years were in Norwich, one year on ships and the rest in the colony.

In New South Wales, Governor Phillip recognised his leadership abilities, and made him an overseer of other convicts. It would have been a difficult job for an ex-convict. He was promoted after three years to the role of Constable. Three years later, he was promoted again to be the Chief Constable of Sydney Town.

He was, therefore, an example to other convicts of how to reform. After that, Henry became an entrepreneur, and developed a successful business career. He bought ships for trading and became a merchant, buying and selling commodities. He also became a substantial landowner and, in 1798, he bought a stagecoach inn called The Ramping Horse.

He was involved with others in the seal trade industry, and also shipbuilding. The records show that, by 1807, he owned four farms, and five more were added by 1809. He focused on business and did not have major roles in political life.

A dispute with a business partner led to a Court case about 1810. Henry was then aged about 46, and he retired from managing the business. In February 1810, he handed over the day-to-day control to his son, young Henry, known as Harry, who was then 26 years of age.

In 1811, he moved the family to Windsor, a small agricultural settlement on the Hawkesbury River, about 30 miles northwest of Sydney. There, he was involved in farming, and is recorded as sending wheat to a company in Sydney. He also owned a store, and a brewery in Windsor.

It can be said Henry Kable was Australia's first major entrepreneur, and the equivalent of a modern millionaire.

He had eleven children with Susannah.

He died on 16th March 1846 at the age of 84 years.

Henry (Harry) Kable Jr (1786 - 1852)

Born in Norwich Castle Prison on Friday 17th February, on a cold wintry day, and he was fortunate to survive.

There were few facilities to support him and his mother Susannah Holmes. In October of that year, she was designated for transportation by John Simpson, a jailer, to the Dunkirk prison ship at Plymouth.

The captain refused to accept the baby on board, as he was only authorised to take convicts. John Simpson took responsibility for the child. He decided to reunite the baby with both parents, and that is the subject of this book.

When they arrived in New South Wales, his parents gave their baby the name of Harry.

The penal colony at what was called Sydney Cove was an open-air prison. So, in his early years, Harry had an outdoor life. The Reverend Richard Johnson organised lessons for the children, and it is likely Harry gained the ability to read, write and count.

At about the age of 12, it seems he was at sea, catching seals, as part of his father's business. By the age of 15, he worked on one his father's trading vessels as the master's mate. It is likely he would have visited the islands in the Pacific Ocean and Southeast Asia over a period of four years while they were at sea.

In 1803, during the launch of a large ship, named 'Governor King', Harry's right arm was severely damaged.

On his recovery, he returned to working at sea. In 1807, he was the master of the brig 'Hannah', and another called 'Sally'. The next year he became the master of a larger vessel called 'Trial', owned by his father and Simeon Lord.

In 1810, he bought a vessel called 'Geordi'. He had business ventures with his brother-in-law, who traded pork from Tahiti. About this time, his father retired, and Harry took over the management of the family business.

However, he must have delegated the onshore work, as he returned to sea. The Sydney Gazette paper shows he advertised for muskets. He sailed to Tahiti where he sold the weapons and took on sandalwood. With that cargo, he sailed to India. He then bought rum and took it to New South Wales to be sold at a major profit.

In 1813, there is evidence his ship called 'The Endeavour' was wrecked in the Shoalhaven River. He was also charged for trafficking three women from Bora Bora in the Society Islands. In the same year, he was charged, together with his brother, of assaulting a constable in Windsor, and ordered to pay ten pounds.

Harry clearly had a life where he took many risks, both personally and in business. He travelled vast distances to find seals, sandalwood, rum and other commodities. He developed many skills as a seaman, navigator and ship's master, as well as his business skills.

He retired from his work at sea in 1822, when he was 36 years of age. In the census of 1828, he was living with his father at Pitt Town. He lived on an estate of 2000 acres, called Vanderbilt, where he was involved in farming.

There is no evidence to say that he married in New South Wales, though he may have done so while on his many voyages to various countries.

He died in 1852 at the age of 66.

Lord Sydney (1733 - 1800)

His birth name was Thomas Townshend. He was born at Raynham, Norfolk. His father, who owned substantial land, was a politician and Member of Parliament. Thomas followed in his footsteps. He was elected to Parliament in 1754, at the age of 21. After serving in various roles, over nearly 30 years, he was elected to a peerage in 1783, and in 1789 became a Viscount.

In 1786, he held a role as the British Government's Home Secretary. One of the tasks he had was responsibility for developing a new penal colony and implementing the transportation policies and plans. His view was that convicts should have the opportunity to redeem their life of crime through hard work in a penal colony, and then become employed as citizens of the new community. His decisions by modern standards can be seen as harsh, but he was forward thinking in various respects. Indeed, the country of Australia is the result of his determination to establish a new colony.

Anne Turner (c1762 - 1820)

She was imprisoned in Norwich Castle Prison from 1783 until October 1786. John Simpson transported her to the Dunkirk, a prison ship, in Portsmouth. She was deported to New South Wales in HMS Friendship on May 13th, 1788. No evidence of her life in the New South Wales Colony could be found.

Elizabeth Pulley (c1762 - 1830)

She became an orphan at the age of six. Convicted of theft in 1783, she was imprisoned in Norwich Castle Prison until October 1786. She was then transported by John Simpson to the Dunkirk, a prison ship at Plymouth. About March 11th in 1787, she was transferred to HMS Friendship, and departed for New South Wales on 13th May 1788. She later sailed on the HMS Prince of Wales and disembarked at Sydney in 1788. She met Anthony Rope and married on 19th May of the same year.

They were allowed to work and developed land in the Paramatta area. They had eight children.

The women mentioned above had all served about three years of their sentences at Norwich Castle Prison, and about fifteen months on the various ships before arriving in New South Wales.

John Simpson (c1756 - c1820)

He was a jailer at the Norwich Castle Prison. In October 1786, he was given the task of transporting three women and a baby from Norwich to Plymouth. The captain of the Dunkirk Prison Ship refused to take the baby on board.

John Simpson took the baby to London and gained the papers to reunite him with his father Henry Kable. He then took both of them to Plymouth.

During his stay in London, he met Mrs Jackson who raised about twenty pounds for baby Henry in cooperation with Lady Cadogan the wife of a rich landowner.

This book outlines ways in which he could have succeeded in reuniting the Kable family. Little is known about his life after that point.

John Howard (1726 - 1790)

Born in London, his mother died when he was five years age. He was 16 years old when his father died. He gained a substantial inheritance and was free to choose his career. To start, he made a grand tour of Europe.

On his return, he spent time managing a large country estate, and paid for local children to be educated. That reflected his Calvinist religious beliefs. In 1773, he became High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, and decided to visit the local prisons. He was shocked by the dirty and distressing conditions. He let politicians know and was asked to give evidence to a committee of Parliament.

In 1778, he wrote a report called *The State of the Prisons in England*. This document stirred up public debate, though few changes were made at the time. A decade later, after the First Fleet had set sail, he wrote another report, and gained the support of forward-thinking politicians.

John Howard was a humanitarian. Today, the Howard League for Penal Reform exists in the UK, and other versions in Canada and New Zealand.

Evan Nepean (1751 – 1822)

He was a naval officer who served mainly in administrative roles. On retiring from the navy, he became a public servant. He was appointed Under Secretary of State at the Home Office and reported to Lord Sydney during the period of the First Fleet's preparation and departure. He later served in senior Government and colonial administrator roles.

Governor Arthur Phillip (1738 – 1814)

He rose from the lowest to the highest position in the Royal Navy, albeit he had a difficult life. His father died one year after he was born, and his mother brought him up in poor circumstances. As his father had been in the British Navy, he was given entry into the Greenwich Hospital School for about two and half years.

He was just 15 years of age when he became an apprentice on a ship that was involved in whale hunting with voyages to the cold Arctic seas. About 1756, he enlisted in the British Royal Navy to fight, in what became known as the Seven Years War. He served on three ships, including service in the Caribbean, before being promoted to Lieutenant on 7th July 1761. When hostilities ceased, in April 1764, he was put on half pay.

Here his life changed. On July 19th, 1763, he married a rich widow who was 17 years older. They lived at Lyndhurst in Kent, where he became involved with farming. On May 8th, 1769, he was legally separated, but the marriage continued for another 24 years until his wife died.

In 1774, Arthur Phillip continued his naval career when he was seconded by the British Government to the Portuguese Navy. His role was to advise and support their war with Spain. During this time, he learned to communicate in Portuguese. His voyages to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, gave him experience that he would later use when arriving there with the First Fleet.

He returned to England four years later, and his experience was noted at high levels of the Government. He was given assignments to advise on French military strength in Europe.

In 1786, he was appointed by Lord Sydney to lead the First Fleet to New South Wales. There were those who questioned his credentials, as he had not served in senior roles within other British colonies.

On arrival in New South Wales, in his fiftieth year, he became the Governor. He served in that role until December 1792. He held the colony together during difficult times. For example, the next ship with supplies did not arrive until 3rd June 1790, two and half years later. In December 1792, he returned to London in poor health.

With rest, his health improved. He remarried in May 1794, at the age of 58. He recommenced active service in the Royal Navy. He was appointed the commander of HMS Alexander a 74-gun ship, and later took command of HMS Swiftsure. After that, he was given command of the 90-gun HMS Blenheim.

To protect southern areas against the French Navy, Arthur Phillip was put in charge of the Hampshire Sea Fencibles. In 1801, reflecting his wide service, he was promoted to Rear Admiral, and

further promoted to Vice Admiral on the 13th of December, 1806, although he had formally retired the previous year.

He suffered a stroke in 1808, at the age 70. That left him partially paralysed. He died on August 31st, 1814, aged 76.

For a man with limited formal education, he learned through action and adapted to the demands of his work.

He was accorded by his peers many roles of high responsibility. Of those, none matched his role in guiding nearly 1500 people to New South Wales and leading a new colony that became the Australian nation.

Lady Mary Cadogan

She was the second wife of Charles Churchill, known as Lord Cadogan. He was a Member of Parliament, and rich member of the aristocracy. Lady Cadogan was a society lady, who supported charities.

Mrs Jackson

A lady of influence in London society. Some people say was connected with the theatre as an actress. She supported John Simpson, as indicated in a London newspaper article. For the purposes of this story, it is assumed she and her husband, Alexander, provided shelter for those involved.

Fictional Characters

Emily Bronsworth

It is assumed that John Simpson had assistance from people on his journeys. Emily is a fictional character in this story who becomes John's fiancée.

Alexander Jackson

The assumed name of Mrs Jackson's husband, who supported John Simpson.

Andrew Rix

During his visit to London, John Simpson met various people who gave him advice on how to contact Lord Sydney. One of those people may have worked at the Home Office. In the novel, this fictional character is known as Andrew Rix.

Journalists

It is known journalists from the London Chronicle newspaper took an interest in John Simpson's efforts to reunite the family. They printed both letters and stories. In this novel, the journalists are referred to as Patrick, Damien and Lachlan.

Sir Richard Markham

This is the fictional name of the person, in the city of Bath, to whom John Simpson sent a letter. It is assumed he helped John Simpson during the transportation of the convicts from Norwich to Plymouth, and afterwards in his communications with Lord Sydney.

Inn Keepers

It is presumed that John Simpson would have stayed at various inns between Norwich, Plymouth and London. No doubt they would have provided advice, as well as a room for the night. Those mentioned in this story are fictional characters, as no written reference to their names has survived.

Letters

Following are a selection of letters published in the press.

5th December 1786

Mr Simpson,

The sweet story of your tenderness and humanity to the unhappy mother and infant of whose life and happiness you were so careful... has so interested myself and many others in the fate of these now comparatively happy people that we wish to know in what manner it will be to their future advantage to dispose of as little money as we have collected for that purpose.

I thought there was no person so proper to be consulted on this occasion as yourself who has given such striking proof of your heart and earnestness in their cause.

....I cannot conclude this without informing you that your humanity has so deeply impressed the minds of all gentlemen at Lord Sydney's Office that every eye glistened.

I am your sincere well wisher,

Mrs Jackson.

Somerset Street, Portman Square, London.

In July 1788, a letter to a contact in England arrived from the Reverend R Johnson which is published below.

July 12th, 1788

Hon. Sir,

Though I have nothing particular to mention to you, I cannot think of letting the fleet return to England without dropping you a single line to inform you of my health and welfare.

It would be unnecessary for me, Sir, to give you an account of the various circumstances or incidents respecting the fleet, during our late passage from England to this distant part of the globe: as no doubt you will receive ample information respecting these matters, together with a description of this country, as to climate, natives, etc, from his Excellency Arthur Phillip Esq., our governor, and others.

Everything here is as yet (as you may easily suppose) very unsettled, but in time our situation will be rendered more comfortable, and even now, all things considered, thank God! I have no reason to complain.

You may remember Sir a circumstance which greatly interested the public a little before our leaving England. This was respecting the Norwich gaoler and two convicts, Cabel (Kable) and Holmes, which with a child, were removed from the Norwich gaol to Plymouth, in order to be embarked on board one of the transports then bound for New South Wales. These two persons I married soon after our arrival here. Some persons made charitable contributions for these two persons--- collected the sum of twenty pounds and laid this out on various articles, at the same time requesting that I would see these delivered to them on our arrival here.

Unfortunately, these have not been found. This circumstance has been brought before the Civil Court here, when a verdict was found in their favour against the Captain of the Alexander, (Duncan Sinclair --see Cable v Sinclair on the internet) I am sorry this charitable intention and action had been brought to this disagreeable issue, the more so because the public seemed to be so interested in their welfare. The child is still living, of a weakly constitution, but a fine boy.

I hope, Sir, you will excuse my freedom in directing these few lines to you. my chief intention, as I have already mentioned, being to inform you of my health and welfare and that I may have the honour of once more subscribing myself,

Your most Obedient and Humble Servant, Rev. Richard Johnson.

A letter was published in the London Chronicle.

July 23rd, 1789.

I cannot say much about this country as yet, I mean what it will produce, there being only a few gardens in any prosperous condition: corn and other seeds seem to have little prospect of this place being fertile or in any degree able to support the few inhabitants on it: this country is the most barren that I have heard of, producing nothing but a leaf called sweet tea, a sort of cabbage which grows on trees, and a sweet red berry; as for any other sort of fruit, it is scarce as on the barren hills of Wales.

There is an animal called a cancaro (kangaroo) likewise an opossum and a flying squirrel, which together with species of rats called cancaro rats, because of their likeness to that animal, are all this country is stocked with: paroquets are very plenty; some few pigeons, and a few parrots; plenty of different sorts of fish. Our governor has drafted a great many of our people and made two other

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settlements, one called New Norfolk the other Orange Bay; the former is in a fine flourishing condition, about seven days hence, the latter but just inhabited about twelve or fourteen miles.

We have an extreme good and healthy climate very heavy rains, and prodigious heavy claps of thunder; here the sun goes to the left from the eastwards, our summer is very hot; our winter, which commences in May, is not altogether very cold, but very sharp.

We have a little garden, which supplies us with cabbage and turnips in plenty; very easily situated, never work one day since I have been here; some officers are so pleased with my conduct that they continue me in the office of the overseer of the women, there being several overseers of the men. Our little boy Harry is a promising little fellow and goes to school. The girl that was with us, Elizabeth Pulley is married and has a fine little boy. It is day here when it is night with you.

Henry Kable

Court Case

New South Wales Civil Court Case

This is a record of the first known legal case in Australia. It took place six months after the settlement. It is based on a complaint and request for justice by Henry Cable, who later changed the spelling of his name to Kable, against Captain Sinclair. He was alleged to have mislaid and or stolen the funds raised for baby Henry Kable, the son of Henry and Susannah.

At that time, convicts had no rights in law, and declared legally dead. Therefore, other convicts told Henry Kable he had no chance of winning the case. Captain Sinclair knew the law and assumed he would not be charged or found guilty.

Here is a record of the case, as written at the time. For clarity, I have included the later spelling of the Kable name.

It is my view that this legal case is the basis for the phrase 'fair go.' This term is widely used in Australia today to signify that everyone has equal rights before the law, and the opportunity to be heard. It is a founding value upon which Australian democracy, justice and social stability is based.

Cable (Kable) v. Sinclair [1788] NSWKR 7; [1788] NSWSupC 7 detinue - felony attaint

Court of Civil Jurisdiction Collins J.A., July 1788

Source: Court of Civil Jurisdiction Proceedings, 1788-1814, State Records of New South Wales, 2/8147[1]

Original manuscript

[1] Sydney Cove County of Cumberland to wit.

To David Collins esq., Judge Advocate in and for the territory of New South Wales etc. etc. etc.

Whereas Henry Cable and his wife, new settlers of this place, had before they left England a certain parcel shipped on board the Alexander transport Duncan Sinclair Master, consisting of clothes and several other articles suitable for their present situation, which were collected and bought at the expense of many charitable disposed persons for the use of the said Henry Cable, his wife and child. Several applications has been made for the express purpose of obtaining the said parcel from the Master of the Alexander now lying at this port, and that without effect (save and except) a small part of the said parcel containing a few books, the residue and remainder, which is of a more considerable

value still remains on board the said ship Alexander, the Master of which, seems to be very neglectful in not causing the same to be delivered, to its respective owners as aforesaid. Henry Cable (Kable) and Susannah Cable (Kable) his wife most humbly prays you will be pleased forthwith to cause the said Duncan Sinclair, Master of the Alexander aforesaid, to appear before you to shew cause why the remaining parcel is not duly and truly delivered in that ample and beneficial a manner as is customary [2] in the delivering of goods. And also humbly prays you will on default of the parcel not being forthcoming take and use such lawful and legal means for the recover or value thereof, as your honour shall think most expedient.

Signed by the hands of the said Henry Cable (Kable) and Susannah Cable (Kable) his wife this the First day of July in the year of our Lord 1788.

His mark

her mark

Henry X Cable (Kable)

Susannah X Cable (Kable)

[2]Sydney Cove Cumberland to wit. At a Civil Court of Jurisdiction held by order of his Excellency the Governor 1st July, 1788.

Present the Judge Advocate, the Rev. Mr Richard Johnson, John White esq.

His Majesty's Patent for establishing the Court of Civil Jurisdiction was read. His Excellency's order for its assembling and appointment of the members, were also read.

Henry Cable (Kable), labourer came before the said Court of Civil Jurisdiction, with complaint against Duncan Sinclair, Master of the Alexander transport, stating that a parcel consisting of clothes and several other articles were shipped for the use of him, his wife and child, on board the said ship, before they left England. And that several applications had been made by him for obtaining the said parcel from the said Duncan Sinclair but without effect to the great detriment of himself, his wife and child praying that the said Duncan Sinclair may be summoned to appear to shew cause why the said parcel is not forthcoming; or to make restitution of the value thereof, which the said Henry Cable made affidavit was to the amount of 15 pounds, or thereabouts.

The court issued a warrant under the hand and seal of the Judge Advocate, to the Provost Marshal, commanding him to bring the said Duncan Sinclair

before the said court, at five of the clock on the evening of the 2nd of July, to answer to the said complaint.

[3]And the court adjourned until tomorrow, four of the clock in the afternoon.

2nd July 1788.

The court met according to the adjournment and adjourned over again to four of the clock on Saturday the fifth instant.

5th July, 1788.

The court again met according to adjournment.

The Provost Marshal at 4 o'clock, came before the court with the writ and Duncan Sinclair, Master of the Alexander transport.

The complaint of Henry Cable (Kable!) was read to the said Duncan Sinclair, who joined issue on the business.

[4] Cumberland to wit. 1st July, 1788.

I Henry Cable (Kable) do make oath that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the value of the clothes and other articles contained in the parcel directed for me, and shipped for my use on board the Alexander transport, Duncan Sinclair Master lying in the River Thames in December, 1786, was 15 pounds or thereabouts.

Sworn before me One of his Majesty's Justices. The mark

David Collins J.A. of X Henry Cable.(Kable)

[5] Cumberland to wit. 1st July, 1788.

Whereas information and complaint hath been made to the Court of Civil Jurisdiction for the territory of New South Wales, assembled in Sydney Cove, in the County of Cumberland, in the territory aforesaid, by Henry Cable, labourer, of the county aforesaid, stating, that a parcel consisting of clothes and other articles, to the value of 15 pounds, or thereabouts, (of which the said Henry Cable (Kable) hath made oath before the Judge Advocate of the territory aforesaid) was shipped for the use of him, his wife, and child, on board the ship Alexander, Duncan Sinclair, Master, in December, 1786; the said ship then lying in the River Thames, in the county of Middlesex, in the Kingdom of England; and that several applications had been made for obtaining the said parcel from the said Duncan Sinclair, but without effect, and praying the restitution of the said parcel, or the value thereof, might be made by the said Duncan Sinclair. These are therefore to require you to bring the said Duncan Sinclair, before the said Court of Civil Jurisdiction, at four of the clock in the afternoon of the second of July to answer to the said information and complaint, and to be further dealt with [6] according to law. And be you then there, to satisfy what you shall have done with the provisions. Herein fail you not.

Given under my hand and seal at Sydney Cove in the county of Cumberland, this first day of July, in the year of our Lord, one thousand, seven hundred, and eighty-eight and in the twenty eighth of his Majesty's reign.

David Collins, Judge-Advocate.

To the acting Provost Marshal of the territory of New South Wales.

[6] The deposition of William Aston Long - First Mate of the Alexander transport, Duncan Sinclair, Master.

William Aston Long, deposes that on the 25th of December 1786, a parcel came on board the Alexander transport, directed to Susannah Holmes, or otherwise Cable (Kable). That the parcel was sewed up in hessian matting. That the whole might weigh about twenty-five pounds; that on receiving it, he sent it down in the gunroom. That the receipt of the parcel was known to several people in the ship. That Duncan Sinclair was the Master of the ship, but at that time in London. That before the ship left England, he made enquiry on board the Lady Penrhyn, if the person to whom the parcel was addressed, was in that ship. That he was answered in the negative. That at the Cape of Good Hope on the Master's enquiry for the parcel, it was looked for and said to be found. That the delivery of it was countermanded then, and put off until the arrival of the expedition at New South Wales. That on her arrival there, the owner of the parcel, as well as several others, applied for the delivery of the parcel, but it never could be found. This deponent further deposes that in the passage of the ship from the Downs to Portsmouth, a number of books had fallen from the parcel, the matting haven broken. That he took them up, and [8] made a separate parcel of them. That he took them into his cabin, where they remained for some time, until the cabin being locked, and having no dry place to put them in, he sent them down below into the gun room, and that on enquiry at New South Wales for the parcel, that of the books only could be found.

[8] The Deposition of Thomas Trimmings, Steward of the Alexander transport.

Thomas Trimmings, being duly sworn, deposes that he remembers being directed by the Mate of the Ship to look for the parcel directed for Susannah Holmes, otherwise Cable. (Kable) That he remembers also that at Sea, betwixt Teneriffe and the Rio de Janeiro, he saw the parcel. That he then put it, with several other parcels belonging to the convicts, down the scuttle into the after hold of the

ship. That the ship's company were allowed to have access to the after hold. That some of the convicts sometimes were allowed to go backwards and forwards into the gunroom. That at Botany Bay, he delivered out the greater part of the parcels he put into the gun room, but did not see anything of that containing the clothes. He saw only the books. That at the Cape of Good Hope he was desired to look for the parcel, but could not find it.

The mark of X Thomas Trimmings.

The deposition of John Hunter esq., Captain of his Majesty's Ship the Sirius.

John Hunter esq. being sworn, deposes that at the Cape of Good Hope, application was made to him by his Excellency Governor Phillip to cause inquiry to be made for the parcel on board the Alexander. That he immediately applied to Duncan Sinclair, desiring him to search for the article. That the said D. Sinclair, said he would cause search to be forthwith made. That some after time the Master D. Sinclair acquainted him that one of the parcels was found, and he did not doubt but the other would be found, but that the after hold was in such a disturbed state, it was almost impossible to look for it. That this deponent told Captain Sinclair, that as long as the parcel was safe it was very well, and to deliver it at Botany Bay.

John Hunter

Verdict

The court found a verdict for the plaintiff, to the value stated by him in the complaint.

David Collins, Judge Advocate.[2]

Notes

This was the first civil action in Australian legal history. In it, two convicts successfully sued the master of one of the First Fleet ships for the loss of their baggage on the voyage. In doing so, commentators argue, the colony began with the rule of law rather than the rule of the lash.

However, it was not necessarily the rule of English law. In reaching this decision, the Judge Advocate, David Collins, ignored the English common law rule of felony attain. Under that rule, those who had been sentenced to death for felony were unable to hold property, give evidence or sue in the court. Henry and Susannah had been sentenced to death, and their attain should have followed them for the full period of their transportation (which was granted to them as a concession). Thus, the ambivalent relationship between Australian and English common law commenced in the very first case.

Cable is usually spelt Kable, and he became a leading merchant in the colony as he used the money awarded in the legal case for investment in business ventures.

Therefore, the funds raised in England for baby Henry became the foundation for the first civil law case in New South Wales. As a result of the court's verdict, Henry Kable and his wife used the funds to build a new career which included the ownership of ships, land, retail shops, stagecoach facilities, boat building, international trading and agricultural business operations.

It is a remarkable story of success, only possible because of John Simpson's bravery and determination to reunite baby Henry with his parents.

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Author Bio

Amazing People Worldwide (APWW) - I founded this publishing organisation in 2006 and it is home to the world's largest collection of inspirational life stories, articles, and news about achievement and amazing people. Here, people can be inspired to discover their purpose and reach their full potential. You can read more on my research at www.amazingpeopleworldwide.com .

Amazing People Schools (APS) - I am very involved in character education through this online resource, which I have originated and funded. I have also developed an international team to share the resources with educators. This was initiated four decades after I started my original research. The website at www.amazingpeopleschools.com shows the applications from my doctoral research is ongoing, to support students in their learning about the way society works.

Can Do Kids Band (CDKB) - I have originated an innovative approach to support intercultural education, via a virtual travel website at www.candokidsband.com . This online resource which has the motto 'follow the music and learn about people and places' helps students understand different countries, their cultures and community activities. Again, this is a continuation of the issues involved in my doctoral research.

Explore Imagineland (EI) - For early learners, I have developed this resource to support parents and carers, as well as educators. It helps young students with important issues like fairness, creativity, inclusiveness, happiness and other topics – see www.exploreimagineland.com . Imagineland is very similar to the deserted island idea that was the start of the discussions on democracy at Baildon Primary School.

Author Note



*Dr Charles Margerison, President and founder of Amazing People Worldwide, is a psychologist. He is also President of Amazing People Schools. Dr Margerison has consulted widely for major organisations in the fields of organisational and educational psychology. He was previously Professor of Management at Cranfield University, UK, and the University of Queensland, Australia. He founded **Amazing People Worldwide** in 2006 and is supported by a dedicated global team. He previously co-founded **Emerald Publications**, and **Team Management Systems** and has authored more than 30 books. Dr Charles is also the creator of **Can Do Kids Band**, a virtual music group that helps students to learn about countries and cultures through music. He has also developed **Imagineland**, for early learners.*