Mick Davis. *The English Convict Hulks, 1600s-1868: Transporting Criminals to Australia.* Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen & Sword History, www.pen-and-sword.com, 2024. 224 pp., illustrations, etc. UK £25.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39905-449-2. (E-book available.)

During the Revolutionary War Philip Freneau, the editor of Philadelphia's *National Gazette* and Literary Register during the 1790s, endured six weeks of captivity on board two British hulks stationed in New York's harbor. The conditions within the rotting prison ships he experienced inspired a 1781 poem titled "The British Prison Ship." Although it is not referenced in Mick Davis's book *The English Convict Hulks*, in the poem Freneau poignantly captured the essence of Davis's treatise.

These Prison Ships where pain and horror dwell
Where death in tenfold vengeance holds his reign,
And injur'd ghosts, yet unaveng'd complain;
This be my tale-ungenerous Britons, you
Conspire to murder those you can't subdue—

In the seventeen through the nineteenth centuries, most British convicts were from the working class and were sentenced by middle- and upper-class judges who largely held this segment of society in contempt. Besides imprisonment, the common sentences of the day were the hangman's noose, public whipping, time in the stocks, fines, and branding irons. Incarceration was not a frequent option because the number of prisons was few as they were expensive to build and maintain. Hardly anyone wanted one nearby. Public executions, however, were gruesomely popular. Ironically, at such events pickpockets and thieves turned up in droves. The public deaths were intended to be a deterrent, but, on a few occasions, felons approached their executions as "moments of triumph," fleeting instants of notoriety in their shrouded low-class society. Some in the judiciary therefore advocated making executions private.

The British possessed the world's largest navy and some vessels were converted to floating prisons known as "hulks," a Royal Navy term meaning a vessel incapable of full service through damage or from non-completion. By discarding their masts and rigging and reconfiguring their internal decks into prison-like compartments with iron bars over the portholes and bolted hatches, these hulks became crude penal institutions. This was an economical way of repurposing existing government property that could be moved just offshore and away from population centers. In addition, the inmates could be employed as virtual slave laborers. Davis graphically describes the horrible life these prisoners endured. Prisoners slept in groups in tiered bunks, each only 18 inches wide. They subsisted upon meagre rations. None of the vessels had

adequate quarantine facilities. There was an ever-present risk of contamination from the flow of excrement from the sick bays. These deprivations fostered a variety of diseases, many of which were deadly. These passages are disturbing to read but necessary to show the evolution of this cruel form of incarceration and the exploitation of the prisoners.

At that time, Britain was a major colonial power and its colonies needed workers to clear the land, produce marketable commodities, and generally populate these far-away outposts. This led to an alternative form of punishment: transporting and exiling convicted criminals, both male and female. Some portions of America, particularly Georgia and South Carolina, the eastern provinces of Canada, Bermuda, and Jamaica, became destinations for "transportation" of this less desirable population. After Britain was defeated in the "American War," Australia became a favorite dumping ground, the center for transportation from the 1780s through the 1860s. Unfortunately, many lives were lost or disabled in the process.

The book's story is basically presented chronologically. The first two chapters set the scene for the use of the hulks as floating prisons and then delve onto a series of personal stories, details of hardships of life onboard these miserable rotting ships and the seemingly endless work of the convicts. The book ends with the description of the sailing of the first of many fleets to the new continent of Australia and finally the end of the "hulks and transportation." Few maritime histories on transportation to the colonies mention their relationship to the hulks. Those who were transported were largely illiterate and lacked the ability to record their experiences. The vessels' masters had very little interest in recording shipboard activities as they largely wished to keep their ugly enterprise out of the public eye. For many incarcerated in hulks, transportation may have been a welcome release from the horror of the hulks. For those transportees who survived the arduous journey and tolerated their initial period of punishment under new controllers after disembarking, there was an opportunity for redemption, freedom and unexpected prosperity in the colonies.

A major part of Davis's book consists of biographies of various men who were administrators of these floating prisons and controlled operations throughout the penal law's formative and middle years such as Duncan Campbell, George Barrington, Aaron Graham, and the Capper family. Even Captain William Bligh makes a few cameo appearances in the saga. These stories, plus the Transportation Act and Hulk Parliamentary Acts that appear as Appendices in the latter part of the book, are enlightening but tedious.

American readers may be disappointed that the infamous hulk *Jersey* is barely mentioned with no allusions to the incarcerated Revolutionary War notables. Also, there is no reference to the other fifteen hulks, some serving

as hospital ships, that were anchored off the American coast. A few of these vessels were famous in their day before being converted, such HMS *Bellerophon,* the ship upon which Napoleon surrendered, and the USS *Essex,* a famous veteran of the Barbary Pirates War.

The English Convict Hulks is not "a page turner," but a scholarly work focused on a rarely discussed and unpleasant period of British maritime history, an awkward time when British citizens displayed cold-heartedness to their fellow humans and disposed of them in disparate places.

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Gerard de Lisle. *The Nile Campaign 1884-1885: The Letters and Sketches of Rudolph de Lisle RN.* Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword Books Limited, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2024. 166 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. UK £35.00 US $70.00, hardback; ISBN 978-1-39905-836-0.

Following an earlier volume focused on the Peruvian-Chilean War, this work is a compilation of research, transcriptions, and reproductions of original artworks that document the service of Royal Navy Lieutenant Rudolph de Lisle throughout the Nile Campaign's effort to rescue General Charles Gordon in Khartoum.

Offering a first-person insight into the riverine expedition of Sir Garnet Wolseley prior to the Battle of Abu Klea in January 1885, *The Nile Campaign* additionally provides the context of de Lisle's life and of contemporary remembrances held after his death in combat, offering an additional perspective on the effect of the war against the Mahdi from the perspective of one family. An initial section of more modern scholarship on de Lisle is followed by his eighteen Nile Campaign letters, with his sketches and some of the resulting *Illustrated London News* renderings interspersed. Additional letters and funerary materials are then covered, along with five appendices of sources from the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries related to de Lisle's life and service, followed by a brief biography and index.

As noted, the first half of the text compiles secondary source research on de Lisle's life and experiences, leading in with a 2016 biographical examination by retired police officer David Howell and followed by brief biographical entries on de Lisle's relatives and maps of both Egypt and Sudan. Howell's section is essentially self-contained, featuring its own independent footnotes, source list, and author biography, whereas the "Who's Who" and map sections are more linked to the provided sketch list and explanation of Gerard de Lisle's Principles of Inclusion. De Lisle's service history is rendered in this section as