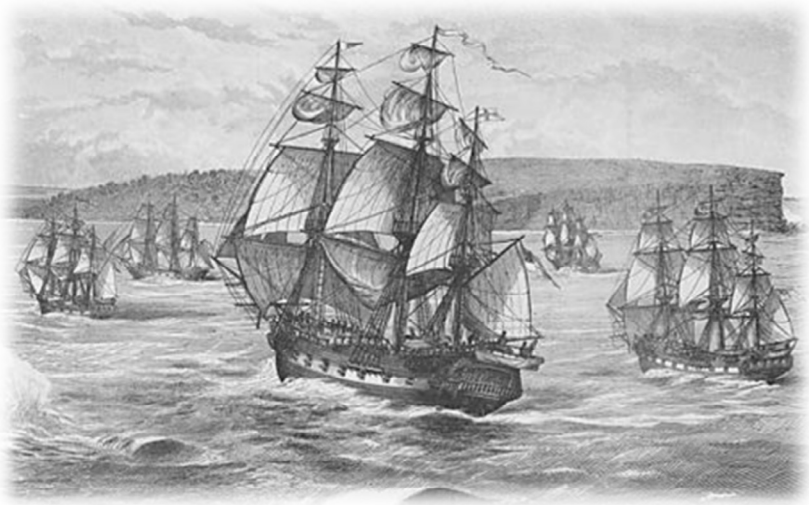


Part 1

Voyage to the end of the world



Chapter 1

1787, Aboard the ship *Friendship* before sailing

Thirteen-year-old John Hudson could not believe his luck. Life had taken a turn for the better. For several days he hadn't been woken before daylight to angry voices bellowing orders. Nor had he been rowed from the prison ship *Dunkirk* to work on the waterfront till his fingers turned blue and his lips cracked and bled from the bitter cold.



Three days ago he'd been taken by wagon to a transport ship where he learnt he was to sail to the 'ends of the earth'. Since arriving aboard *Friendship* he'd received a meal every day and he'd slept in a hammock each night. He couldn't remember a more untroubled time in his life. Sure, the convict quarters were dark and cramped, but he was used to that.

Upon transferring to the transport vessel, his filthy stinking rags had been peeled from him and replaced by government 'slops', doled

out to all the male convicts. To his amazement, this included a woollen jacket, trousers, a pair of woollen stockings, a pair of shoes, two shirts, a neckerchief and hat!

If that was not enough, he realised with relief beyond words that he would never again have to re-live his worst nightmares. With the ships at sea, he would never again be forced to climb a filthy London chimneystack. He would never again be stuck inside a narrow brick flue, scraping its blackened sides of greasy muck. Transportation to the south seas did not seem such a bad thing compared to the life he had known.

John Hudson couldn't remember his mother or father. His earliest memories were of the poorhouse where children like him worked from morning to night in exchange for a ration of food and a place to sleep. But the wardens knew nobody checked on them and the orphans rarely knew a full belly.

Before John was eight years old and still a scrawny lad, he was sold as a 'climbing boy' to a London chimneysweep, a heartless man who drove his boys till they were exhausted. Little John hated the work but he knew it could be worse. He could be in the gutter.

During busy periods he climbed day and night up grime-encrusted chimneys barely wide enough for him. Wedged inside, with his eyes stinging and lungs wheezing, it was difficult to keep a foothold when the sides were caked with fat and soot. But it was the thought of a beating that kept his thin legs lodged in place until the sides were cleared of muck.

Clambering up into the darkness John often scraped his knees,

elbows and forehead on rough, jagged brickwork. But he learnt to ignore the blood trickling down his arms or running into his eyes, just as he learnt to ignore his aching muscles and weepy sores.

He knew if he was injured, burned or blinded, he would be easily replaced. There were always younger, smaller, more nimble boys to take his job. Then he'd be back in the workhouse or out on the streets.



John learnt through necessity how to fend for himself on the streets of London. He mixed with boys in the same circumstance as himself. He learnt how to steal and resell items to stay alive. It was the only way to survive in a large city as an orphan. He knew what to say and do to avoid trouble...that is until the day, at the age of nine years old, he was caught.

John Hudson was arrested for burglary and sent to Newgate Prison. He was accused of stealing a linen shirt, silk stockings and two aprons from a house in the middle of the night. A maid discovered the items were missing the following morning, and sooty little footprints were noticed by a window.

During the court case, a witness reported that John Hudson had brought clothes to his pawnshop to sell them. The boy said his mother had sent him and the clothes belonged to his father. But his grubby appearance raised suspicion.

Another witness said that later on the day of the robbery, a pistol was found inside a stocking with other clothes and John was seen near the stash. He was held till a policeman arrived but questioned in the meantime.

‘Do you know anything about this?’

‘I dunno nuthin’,’ John mumbled. Rough hands shook him.

‘Then we’ll fetch somebody that will make you know!’ John tried to stay unmoved by the threat, but his nerves gave way.

‘There was another boy,’ he blurted. He said the other boy broke the window and got into the house.

‘I ‘ad nuthin to do with it.’

But during the court case, when his bare little foot was compared with the imprint taken at the crime scene, he admitted he’d been in the house too. The judge peered down at him.

‘How old are you?’

‘Goin’ on nine.’ John kept his head down and his answers short.

‘What business were you bred up in?’

‘None, sometimes a chimney sweeper.’

‘Have you any father or mother?’

‘Dead,’ John replied simply.

‘How long ago?’

‘I dunno.’

The judge was clearly moved by the sad little boy hunched before him. He addressed the court.

‘The boy’s confession was made under fear, so I do not think it should be allowed as evidence. At the most, it only proves he was in the house and he might have got in after daybreak...’

He sighed heavily. ‘I think it would be too hard to find a boy of his tender age guilty of the burglary.’

Then speaking to everyone in the courtroom, the judge continued.

‘One would wish to snatch such a boy, if possibly, from destruction for he will only return to the same kind of life and continue to be an instrument in the hands of very bad people, who make use of boys of this sort to rob houses.’

After a pause, the judge gave his verdict¹.

‘John Hudson is found guilty of a felony², but not of the burglary. He is sentenced to transportation for seven years.’

Since his conviction at the age of nine, John had endured years of misery in prison and aboard the hulk, *Dunkirk*. His experience of life on the streets of London had helped him survive that awful period...until he arrived aboard the transport vessel, *Friendship*, at the age of thirteen.

That life, John’s ‘old’ life, was behind him now. As the ships prepared to sail into the vast oceans of the world, he really had no idea where he was heading. A faraway land, somewhere, was all he knew. They were going to start a colony, whatever that meant. It didn’t really matter to young John Hudson. He’d heard that at the place called ‘Botany Bay’ there were no towns, no streets, no buildings...or rooftops with chimneystacks.

¹ decision of a court

² breaking the law, a crime