



## Jane Brown

Date of Trial:	18 September 1816
Where Tried:	Middlesex Gaol Delivery
Crime:	Having in possession forged bank notes
Sentence:	14 years
Est YOB:	1795
Native Place:	
Occupation:	
Alias/AKA:	
Surgeon's Remarks:	<i>A most insolent and mutinous prostitute. "Drowned"</i>

Nothing in the trial and transportation documentation gives any clues as to this woman's provenance, and with the name 'Jane Brown' it is virtually impossible to ascertain such details. However we do know that when she was committed she was twenty one, as recorded in the Newgate Prison Calendar.

43. *Jane Brown*, 21, committed by R. Baker Esq. charged on oath, with uttering and putting away in payment to William Haskins, a forged and counterfeited note, purporting to be a note of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, for payment of £1 with intent to defraud the said Governor and Company. Dated 31 July, 1816.<sup>1</sup>

The Old Bailey records show that Jane Brown was tried on 18 September 1816, before Mr. Recorder.<sup>2</sup> As noted by the *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, she was one of a number of prisoners indicted for the same offence who all pleaded guilty to a lesser offence in the way of a plea bargain. The people referred to:

... pleaded severally guilty to the lesser offence of having forged Bank of England notes in their possession, which subjects them to the punishment of transportation for 14 years each. The Bank declining to prosecute them capitally, for forging the notes, they were acquitted of that offence.<sup>3</sup>

While awaiting transportation Jane Brown sent three petitions to the Bank of England in her own right and, shortly before boarding the *Friendship*, two jointly with Grace Blaker, who with her husband George Blaker had also been tried in September 1816 on forgery charges and sentenced to fourteen years transportation.<sup>4</sup> The first four petitions describe her distressed situation – having contracted debts, and having nobody to call upon to help her out of her predicament. A notation to the fourth shows that some relief was provided, but the fifth petition claims that no relief up to then had been forthcoming, except the £5 which was not enough to redeem their pledged clothing and also to repay other debts. The original spelling is retained in the following transcripts.<sup>5</sup>

218. [F25/3/90] *Jane Brown, Newgate, 4 November 1816*

Sir nothing but reall distress Could have induced me to trouble you but as I have no Friend to Assist me hope you will not Withold your late Bounty from me as relying on your Well Known have Contracted a Small debt for Tea and Sugar and Cannot get any more till that is Paid hope you will pardon this liberty which nothing but reall want Could have made me trouble you I am Sir Your much obliged and humble Petitioner Jane Brown

219. [F25/3/92] *Jane Brown, Newgate, March 1817*

Sir With humble Submission I Most humbly Beg your pardon for presuming to solicit your Extenseve Goodness and Charity to Me I have Contracted a few Little Depts in prison and am Not abel to pay it Without youre Continued Goodness as I have Not a friend to Render me the Least Assistance Nor have Not Sence I have Been Confined here Sir I am quit Distrest that only has Induced me to Troubell you I shall Be in Duty Bound to pray for your Goodness in hopes to Make Amends for My future Conduct Sir With the Greatest respect and humbell Submicone I am your Humbell Petitioner Jane Brown

220. [F25/3/91] *Jane Brown, Newgate, 11 April 1817*

Sir I hope you will pardon the Liberty I take in Presuming to rite but being in great Distress and have not a friend to give me Any Assistance to support [*illegible word*] only my Goal allowance Sir I hope you will take my Distress into Consideration and bestow a litle of your benevolent charity on me and I will be ever bound to pray, with Submission I Remain your humble Petitioner Jane Brown

**263.** [F25/4/36] *Grace Blaker and Jane Brown, Newgate, 29 May 1817*

Sir I hope your goodness will pardon the liberty I take in writing to you but we have had orders this morning for the Ship & we are going on Saturday Morning and humbly Begg you will please to Consider My Present Distress as I have Contracted A few Trifling Debts in the Goal and I have A Desire to pay what I owe as I Dont wish to Go away in Debt to any person and By so Doing you will very much Oblige your most obedt humble servts And Humble petitioners Grace Blaker & Jane Brown

*Annotated: £5 has been ordered to be paid to Grace Blaker. 5/- a week has been paid to Jane Brown, Convict £5*

**264.** [F25/4/37] *Grace Blaker and Jane Brown, Newgate, 31 May 1817*

Sir I hope your Goodness will please to Excuse my troubling you but there is a Mistake in our payments as we have not Recd any money for this 7 weeks and we Have found the 5£ Pound we Recd little Enough to Redeem our Clothes out of pawn And pay our Debts in the prison and I hope Sir you will have the Goodness to let us Have the Remainder as we want to get Necessarys to take on Board with us and Sir you will Greatly oblige your humble Petitioners Grace Blaker and Jane Brown

If we know virtually nothing about Jane Brown prior to her trial, her unfortunate on-board experience ensures at least that we have an account of the death of the prisoner who caused the Surgeon such anguish. Widely reported in newspapers ‘back home’, readers were told that ‘from a sudden irritability of temper’ she threw herself overboard, and was drowned.<sup>6</sup>

A more sympathetic explanation was provided by missionary John Gyles, one of the free passengers on board the *Friendship*. Shortly after the vessel’s arrival at Port Jackson he prepared a report – “Observations on the under-mentioned Female Convicts, sent from Newgate, and arrived per ship Friendship, for the information of the Committee of Ladies”. With respect to Jane Brown he stated:

This unfortunate woman met an untimely death by the ill-timed severity of the captain; she had a quarrel with another convict woman, and was selected by the captain for punishment; the other was not punished. She told the captain and surgeon that if she was punished above, that she would throw herself into the sea. A wooden collar was put about her neck, which she wore the whole of that day; in the night, she got her collar off; the captain observed it the next day; after tearing her bonnet and shawl off, with many oaths said he would put another collar on; she repeated, that she would throw herself overboard if he did. He ordered the collar, and advanced toward her, when she threw herself overboard, and was drowned; this happened off the Cape of Good Hope. She was a decent well behaved young woman.<sup>7</sup>



Sample of Wooden Collar

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 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Findmypast (FMP), England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935, Newgate Prison Calendar, HO 77.



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<sup>2</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 23 March 2019), September 1816, trial of JANE BROWN (t18160918-30).

<sup>3</sup> *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 21 Sep 1816, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> An account of the colonial life of Grace Blaker is found in *Bond of Friendship*, New South Wales Contingent.

<sup>5</sup> "Letters, nos 201-300." *Prisoners' Letters to the Bank of England, 1781-1827*. Ed. Deirdre Palk. London: London Record Society, 2007. 65-92. *British History Online*. Web. 12 September 2017. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol42/pp65-92>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, *Evening Mail*, 27 Nov 1818, p.4. Note how long it took for the news to reach England.

<sup>7</sup> *Selection of Reports and Papers of the House of Commons*, Vol. 51, Prisons, 1836, p.100, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=ZCRDAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PP7>



## **SELECTED SOURCES**

### **Genealogy Websites**

Findmypast

England and Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935

### **Other Websites**

Free Settler or Felon? <https://www.jenwilletts.com/>

Google Books, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=ZCRDAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PP7>

Old Bailey Proceedings Online, [www.oldbaileyonline.org/](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/)

Prisoners' Letters to the Bank of England, 1781-1827. Ed. Deirdre Palk. London: London Record Society, 2007. British

History Online, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol42>

### **Online Newspapers**

British Newspapers (Findmypast)

Evening Mail

Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser

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