

## INDICTMENT TO NORTHUMBERLAND QUARTER SESSIONS – JOHN JARREEL, 1771

REFERENCE: Q/S/1340/1 | SUGGESTED AGE GROUPS: KS2, KS3, KS4,  
LIFELONG LEARNERS | TOPIC AREAS: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, COURT  
PROCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

### THE COURTS

Northumberland Quarter Sessions court was held in the county from 1388 until 1972. It was a Royal Court of Justice that was held four times a year. There were sessions at Morpeth, Hexham and Alnwick. It was not unusual for large counties to hold sessions at different towns so that justice could be done for the whole of the county.

Assizes courts tried more serious crime such as murder, rape and highway robbery and were held twice a year. In the 1730s petty sessions courts were introduced to try minor (or petty) crimes.

### INDICTMENTS

Indictment was the most common way of an alleged criminal being brought to court. Anyone could “bring” an indictment as long as they had “probable cause” and as long as they weren’t being malicious; they had to have proof and they couldn’t make an accusation because of a grudge.

The name of the accused (could be one or more people) and their alleged crimes were written on a piece of parchment and given to the Grand Jury (between thirteen and twenty-three male householders aged 21–60). The Grand Jury considered the indictment and decided on the verdict under the direction of the judge.

Not all of the indictments were on a printed form like the ones here. The fact that there were pre-printed forms for the crime of larceny (stealing), probably shows how common it was.

The indictments here also have the verdict and sentence noted on them.

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## PARCHMENT

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Indictments were written on pieces of parchment, which is made from animal skins. The skins are cured and scraped so that they are very thin. The best quality parchment is called vellum and is made from calfskin. Parchment is very durable; if it is kept in the right conditions it can last for centuries. The oldest parchment document dates from 2000 BC.

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## JOHN JARREEL

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In 1771 John Jarreel of Morpeth was indicted for larceny. He was accused of stealing the following from Thomas Walker:

five shirts

one pair of buckskin leather breeches

one blue double breasted cloth coat

one black waistcoat

one red and white spotted "hankerchief"

one pair of dark grey coloured yarn stocking

one pair of blue and white yarn stockings

At the bottom of the document are some handwritten notes which show that his plea was guilty – he admitted to stealing. The notes also record his sentence: to be transported to one His Majesty's plantations in America for 7 years.

Before 1775, criminals were sent to Britain's colonies in America to work on plantations there. American independence meant that Britain had to find somewhere else to ship its criminals.

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## OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

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### INDICTMENTS

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Our Criminal Ancestors website (University of Hull), page for Quarter Sessions: <https://ourcriminalancestors.org/quarter-sessions/>

Our Criminal Ancestors website (University of Hull), page for Assizes: <https://ourcriminalancestors.org/assizes/>

Our Criminal Ancestors website (University of Hull), page for timelines <https://ourcriminalancestors.org/category/timelines/>

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#### PARCHMENT

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BBC news website, story about vellum used to print laws: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35569281>

History Today website, page about parchment:

[https://www.historytoday.com/archive/parchment#:~:text=From%20remote%20times%20skins%20were,2000%20B.C.\)%20kept%20in%20Berlin](https://www.historytoday.com/archive/parchment#:~:text=From%20remote%20times%20skins%20were,2000%20B.C.)%20kept%20in%20Berlin)

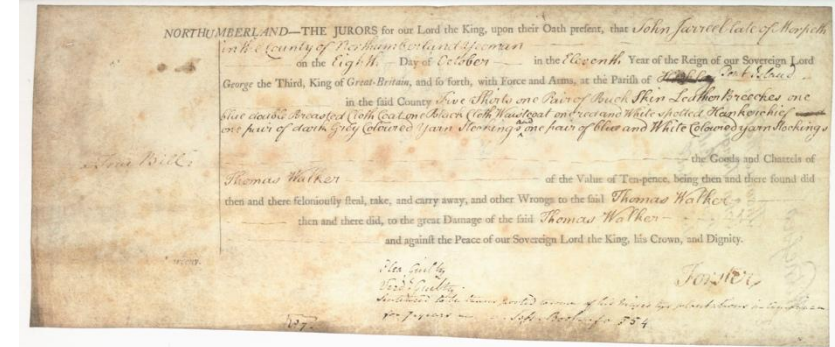
YouTube website, BBC film about making parchment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-SpLPFaRd0>

Cornell University blog, page about process of making parchment: <https://blogs.cornell.edu/culconservation/2015/04/03/parchment-making/>



# LEARNING ACTIVITIES – INDICTMENT TO NORTHUMBERLAND QUARTER SESSIONS – JOHN JARREEL, 1771

TOPIC: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT; COURT PROCESS; TRANSPORTATION  
SUBJECT AREAS: HISTORY, LITERACY, GEOGRAPHY, ART



Background	Activity	Resources
<p>Northumberland Quarter Sessions court was held in the county from 1388 until 1972. It was a Royal Court of Justice that was held four times a year. Indictment was the most common way of an alleged criminal being brought to court. Anyone could “bring” an indictment as long as they had “probable cause”. John Jarreel was indicted for larceny (stealing). He was sentenced to be transported to one His Majesty’s plantations in America for 7 years.</p>	<p><b>See:</b> What was the Northumberland Quarter Session Court?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Which types of crimes did the Assizes Court try?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What is an indictment?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What was John Jarreel indicted for?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Who accused John Jarreel?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What was John Jarreel accused of stealing?</p> <p><b>See:</b> How did John Jarreel plead?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What was John Jarreel’s sentence?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What was transportation?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> When was transportation used?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Why was transportation used?</p>	<p><a href="http://vcp.e2bn.org/justice/section2196-transportation.html">http://vcp.e2bn.org/justice/section2196-transportation.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/candp/punishment/g09/g09cs1.htm">https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/candp/punishment/g09/g09cs1.htm</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z938v9q/revision/4">https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z938v9q/revision/4</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.jenwilletts.com/convict_ship_indispensable_1796.htm">https://www.jenwilletts.com/convict_ship_indispensable_1796.htm</a></p> <p><a href="https://convictrecords.com.au/ships/indispensable/1795">https://convictrecords.com.au/ships/indispensable/1795</a></p>



	<p><b>Think:</b> What crimes was transportation used as a punishment for?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Where were criminals sent and what did they do while they were there?</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Create a map showing the different places that criminals were sent during transportation. Plot routes on the map showing the routes ships took from Britain.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Many convict lives were lost on the long transportation journeys, particularly in the early days of transportation. Research the conditions on transportation ships. Write a diary entry as though you are a convict being transported on a ship with poor conditions. Describe your surroundings and what the journey has been like so far.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Transportation became a controversial form of punishment. It was costly, crime rates did not fall because of it and residents from transportation countries resented having prisoners sent to them. In groups, debate the pros and cons of transportation as a method of punishment.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Research what happened to convicts after their transportation sentence ended.</p>	
<p>Palaeography is the study of old handwriting. Not all of the indictments were on a printed form like the ones here. The fact that there were pre-printed forms for the crime of larceny (stealing), probably shows how common it was. The</p>	<p><b>See:</b> What is palaeography?</p> <p><b>See:</b> How is the indictment of John Jarreel written?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Why are some parts of the indictment printed and some written by hand?</p>	<p><a href="https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/default.htm">https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/default.htm</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.prepressure.com/printing/history/1700-1749">https://www.prepressure.com/printing/history/1700-1749</a></p>



<p>indictments here also have the verdict and sentence noted on them. Indictments were written on pieces of parchment, which is made from animal skins.</p>	<p><b>See:</b> What were indictments written on?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What was parchment made of?</p> <p><b>See:</b> How long does parchment last?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What is the best quality parchment?</p>	<p><a href="https://www.prepressure.com/printing/history/1750-1799">https://www.prepressure.com/printing/history/1750-1799</a></p> <p><a href="https://kinderart.com/category/art-lessons/printmaking/">https://kinderart.com/category/art-lessons/printmaking/</a></p>
	<p><b>Think:</b> Why were a lot of documents written by hand?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Why is it important for historians and archivists to learn palaeography?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What types of printing were used in Britain in the 1700s?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What type of parchment might the indictment have been written on?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> How is parchment made?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Can you describe what it might be like to hold a piece of parchment? What might it smell like? How might it feel?</p>	
	<p><b>Do:</b> Can you transcribe the indictment of John Jarreel?</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Look at John Jarreel's indictment and other examples of old handwriting from the National Archives. Can you recreate the handwriting? Have a go at making an alphabet or writing your name using old-fashioned handwriting. What other types of documents can you make in this style?</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Have a go at making your own paper. You could do this using pulp made from recycled paper or linen rags. Could you make this</p>	



look like a parchment indictment?

**Do:** Create a print, this could be a lithograph, etching, relief print, etc., inspired by something John Jarreel may have seen on his journey to America or while he was serving his sentence.