



Press Release: For Immediate Release

Researchers at TheGenealogist have discovered the real story of BBC TV's *Banished* character James Freeman.

- Sentenced to death for the highway robbery of 12 shillings, his punishment was commuted to transportation
- Convicts transportation records on TheGenealogist reveal that Freeman was one of the first convicts to be sent to Australia
- Facing starvation in the penal colony he was once again to face execution for stealing food
- Standing under the gallows tree he was then given an offer that he just couldn't refuse

The Jimmy McGovern penned drama contains some characters that are based on actual convicts transported to Australia in the First Fleet including James Freeman, as played by Russell Tovey in the series. Freeman's real story, as discovered by the family history research website, was a fascinating one, if a bit gruesome.



On arrival in New South Wales the convicts had been made to work hard, but food supplies were limited and they were starving. On the 29th February 1788 Freeman and another prisoner were caught stealing flour and faced the fledgling colony's criminal court of military officers. Both men were found guilty as charged and were then sentenced to be executed for their crime.

With no public hangman, however, the day before the new colony botched the very first execution it had ever carried out. In a bizarre twist, as Freeman was beneath the tree that was to be used to end his life with the Royal Marines mustered and the other convicts on parade to witness the sentence being carried out, he was given a proposal: Hang or be hanged!

To read the full story go to <http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/banished>

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