

HO 17: criminal petitions for clemency 1819 - 1839

About the project

The records in HO 17 are original petitions and letters to the monarch from convicts, their friends or family, requesting a reduction in their sentence. Petitioners wanted to prove that they were worthy of mercy, so they often included a lot of information designed to establish how respectable they were, including details of their personal circumstances and family background. They therefore provide an exciting resource for genealogists as well as criminal, social and local historians.

Unfortunately at the moment HO 17 is a much underused resource as the records are not easy to find. Researchers need to use indexes in another series, HO 19, to find a bundle code and reference number relating to the convict in which they are interested.

Volunteers working on this project create much more detailed item level descriptions, capturing information regarding the convict, their crime, punishment and any personal circumstances mentioned in the petitions or letters. This work is enabling users to search for people, places and types of cases using the online catalogue, helping them find records that may have gone unnoticed before. HO 17/39/73 has already been catalogued and now, were you a genealogist looking for Edward Hart, George Smith or Richard Adams, a local historian looking for the town of Thornham, or a criminal historian interested in crimes in Kent, it is much easier for you to find this record:

Item details HO 17/39/73

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Context

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[HO](#) Records created or inherited by the Home Office, Ministry of Home Security, and related bodies
[Division within HO](#) Criminal Department
[HO 17](#) Home Office: Criminal Petitions, Series I
[HO 17/39](#) Fh-Fm

Record Summary

Scope and content	1 collective petition (the prisoners) from Edward Hart and George Smith of Thornham, Kent imprisoned in Kent Gaol for destroying rabbits belonging to Richard Adams, farmer in August [1823?]. Grounds for release: the prisoners have compensated the prosecutor who agreed to discharge the warrant but forgot to do so, leading to the prisoners' arrest. Annotated: 'Have they been tried'. Fk23
Covering dates	1824
Availability	Open Document, Open Description, Normal Closure before FOI Act: 30 years
Held by	The National Archives, Kew

This is only possible thanks to the work of our volunteers. We have made a good start in getting the cataloguing of HO 17 under way, but we still have a lot of work to do, and there are a number of ways in which volunteers can help.

Roles for volunteers

There are a number of roles for volunteers working on this project.

1. Cataloguing

Volunteers working in this role work from the original documents, sorting entries, reading the documents and filling out paper forms designed to help them capture key information from the petitions.

Skills required:

- Palaeography 19th Century - reading the handwriting, this is usually clear and easy to read.
- A methodical approach to sorting and recording documents.
- The ability to review and analyse the document in order to pull out key information.
- Clear handwriting. This is particularly vital if you will not be typing up your own work.
- Manual dexterity - placing of documents in envelopes and boxes.
- This is a seated task - some light lifting required but of small easily managed boxes.

2. Creating electronic catalogue entries.

Using the completed forms, these volunteers work to electronic templates, setting out a catalogue description for each piece. These descriptions need to present the information in a clear and concise manner that will make searching for records fast and easy.

Skills required:

- Basic keyboard skills.
- Some experience of Microsoft Word would be advantage but training is offered by The National Archives if required.
- Some understanding of cataloguing practice and experience of using online catalogues would be helpful.

3. Editing electronic entries.

The next step is to check the electronic entries for accuracy. This involves checking the files against a range of standard mistakes and against the document so that we are happy for an entry to go on the online catalogue.

Skills required:

- A keen eye for detail.
- Basic keyboard skills.

- Experience of Microsoft Word (additional training is offered by The National Archives if required.)
- Some understanding of cataloguing practice and experience of using online catalogues would be helpful.

A number of our volunteers work in all these roles at different times, or just concentrate on one aspect depending on their interests and the time they can devote to the project. Commonly those who catalogue to paper forms type up their entries as well, but if a volunteer is not familiar with using computers they can just concentrate on the first role.

In all aspects of the work we need volunteers to have a keen eye for detail, to have some palaeography skills and to have an interest in this aspect of nineteenth-century history.

In return for our volunteers' hard work we try to provide as much on-site assistance as we can, as well as organising regular meetings and social events for the whole group, so we can get together, discuss the work and compare notes. This is a very interesting series to work on and we try to publicise it in internal and external press and a number of our volunteers give talks to local history societies about the work they do.

Records specialist: Chris Heather

Volunteer Team contact: Briony Kay

Location: Task is to be carried out within the Volunteers Room at The National Archives.

Compulsory Training.

Introduction to the project - a basic run through of what the records are and why they need to be catalogued. Includes some background to the collection.

Document handling procedures. This is a 1/2 day course and is conducted by the Collection Care team within The National Archives.

Duration of the project:

This is a long-term project though in the first instance we would ask that a volunteer fully completes 1 box (roughly 50 items).