Among the vast body of manuscripts composed and collected by the philosopher and reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), held by UCL Library’s Special Collections, is a hugely important document in the histories of European Australia and of convict transportation. The Memorandoms by James Martin is the only known extant narrative written by members of the first cohort of prisoners transported to Australia, is the first Australian convict narrative, and is the only first-hand account of the best-known Australian convict escape. On the night of 28 March 1791, James Martin, William Bryant, his wife Mary and their two children, and six other male convicts, stole a six-oared cutter and sailed out of Sydney Harbour, up and along the eastern and northern coasts of the Australian continent, reaching West Timor on 5 June. Although they successfully (for a while, at least) posed as the survivors of a shipwreck and enjoyed the hospitality of their Dutch hosts, they were eventually ordered to be returned to England and the survivors were incarcerated in Newgate Gaol.

This new edition of the Memorandoms reproduces the original manuscript alongside an annotated transcript, and features a scholarly introduction and commentary describing the events and key characters, and the contesting interpretations of this famous escape.

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