What follows is a true and unvarnished story of convict life and personal reminiscences of William Archer. He has himself undergone the terrible ordeal, which the writer will try to recount in plain yet graphic language.

Nothing will appear in the following chapters but plain irrefutable facts. There might be some trivial errors on dates since incidents were told from memory alone. Archer possesses a marvellously retentive memory but he would need supernatural powers to recall all dates.

To spare the feelings of the descendants, relatives and friends of those who have been actors in the blood-curdling dramas which I must narrate, fictitious names will be used. For others whose actions can be told with feelings of pride, even by those near and dear to them, will have their names handed down to posterity, correctly as they deserve. I will not spare bitter censure where deserved, or withhold lavish praise where it is merited.

Though I meant to give an account of convict life on Norfolk Island, it is necessary to digress in the early chapters to introduce the narrator and principal actors. I will then follow through all the ups and downs of convict life from the time of Archer’s conviction in New South Wales till his return from Norfolk Island, with an honorably and heroically earned pardon. From there, he would lead an exemplary and upright life among the early pioneers of the colony where he was eventually elected by his fellow citizens in the highest position, viz., the honoured mayor and chief magistrate of Grafton, the premier city of the north coast districts of New South Wales.

At the time in which this narrative begins, Archer was serving a sentence of transportation. The reader should keep in mind that these are the years preceding 1831. What is now considered a trivial offence and typically punishable by a small fine or a few hours’ imprisonment was then deemed sufficient to justify a man’s transportation to Botany bay. This is not written as a justification of Archer’s early life in the old country, for that will not be touched upon in any way, but merely that his position may be more easily understood.