

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

The Convict Records of Australia

REF N° 2006-24

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

The forced emigration to the continent of Australia of some 165,000 people in the 180 years between 1788-1868 represents the beginning of the modern age of globalisation by government agency. Selected by the judicial apparatus of industrialising Britain, the convicts were sentenced to the punishment of exile, yet their forced labour ultimately resulted in the establishment of viable colonies, which became assets to the mother-country. In 1901 these colonies peacefully became an independent federation of states – the Commonwealth of Australia – just over a hundred years after the first convicts landed at Sydney Cove in 1788.

Transportation transformed forever the lives of these mostly British and Irish convicts, and in turn largely destroyed the way of life of Australia's Indigenous people. The convicts' lives were minutely documented by a dedicated bureaucracy, generating a rare body of records of 19th century working class people, from their British roots to their Australian fates. These records contain information relating to all aspects of convicts' lives, including physical appearance, literacy level, trade or calling, crime and sentence, behaviour in incarceration, further punishment, pardon, ticket of leave and marriage. The forensic details about individual convicts have enabled historians to build a picture of the human capital which shaped the economy, demography and culture of early colonial Australia.

Nowhere else in the world do the complete records of the inner workings of an 18th-19th century penal system exist over such an extended period (eg, in Britain, only trial records exist for convicts transported to North America and the West Indies, 1615-1776). The stresses of extremely distant exile induced occasional experiments in penal management as a resource in developing societies, with significant legal consequences for the freedom of all citizens. Yet the goal of rehabilitation was paralleled by retributive justice, which created regimes of appalling cruelty alternating with more or less enlightened practices. Both these approaches to crime and punishment are documented scrupulously in the convict records.

Ultimately, the Australian convict records contribute to our understanding of the larger question: what will men and women make of their lives if they are given the opportunity to grow and change, away from the poor conditions that in many cases had spawned their fates? Most of the convicts were young. Some had committed political offences, some were murderers, and many were convicted of crimes born of desperation in the social upheaval created by the emergence of capitalist industrial society in Britain. The brutality of life in the late 18th-early 19th centuries, and the records of the outcomes of the penal experiment of establishing new societies in new places provide the source material for a profound debate about the nature of humanity.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

- Tony Caravalla, State Record Office of Western Australia
- Ian Pearce, Archives Office of Tasmania
- Joanna Sassoon, Edith Cowan University, Perth
- Alan Ventress, State Records Authority of New South Wales
- Linda Young, Deakin University, Melbourne

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Custodians for the state governments of New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia and scholars of Australian cultural heritage.

2.3 Contact person (s)

- State Records Authority of New South Wales: Alan Ventress, Associate Director, City.
- Archives Office of Tasmania: Ian Pearce, State Archivist.
- State Records Office of Western Australia: Tony Caravalla, Director

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

State Records Authority of New South Wales: PO Box 516, Kingswood NSW 2747

Tel: 61+2-8247 8653 ; Fax: 61+2-8247 8628

adcity@records.nsw.gov.au

Archives Office of Tasmania: 77 Murray Street, Hobart, Tasmania 7000

61+3-6233 7477; Fax: 61+36233 7471

ian.pearce@education.tas.gov.au

State Records Office of Western Australia: Alexander Library Building, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth, WA 6000

Tel: 61+8-9427 3700; Fax: 61+8-9427 3256

tony.caravalla@sro.wa.gov.au

Dr Joanna Sassoon: School of Computer and Information Sciences, Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley, WA 6050

Tel: 61+8-9370 6296; Fax: 61+3-9370 6100

jsassoon@graduate.uwa.edu.au

Dr Linda Young: Cultural Heritage & Museum Studies, Deakin University, Burwood, Vic, 3125

Tel: 61+3-9251 7158; Fax: 61+3-9251 7158

linda.young@deakin.edu.au

3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

New South Wales

Listed below are the major series of archives relating to transportation to New South Wales. Full further details are contained in the *Convict Guide*, State Records Authority of New South Wales, Sydney, 2005.

Convict indents, 1788-1842

Lists of tickets of leave issued, 1810-14

Tickets of leave, 1827-75

Registers of convicts' applications to marry, Dec 1825-Feb 1851

Register of certificates of freedom, 1810-14

Registers of conditional pardons, 1791-1825

Registers of absolute pardons, 1791-1843

Convict death register, 1828-79

Lists of exiles, 1844-45

Three items are illustrated in the Reading Room.

Tasmania

Listed below are the major series of the records of the Convict Department that document the lives of the convicts sent to Tasmania. A list and full description of the series of records of the Convict Department can be found in P.R. Eldershaw, *Guide to the Public Records of Tasmania*, Section 3, Hobart, Archives Office of Tasmania, 1965 (rev. 2003).

Assignment lists and associated papers, 1810 – 1859
Indents of male convicts, 1827 –1853
Indents of female convicts , 1839 –1853
Indents of convicts locally convicted or transported from other colonies, 1835 –1853
Indents of male convicts arriving from Norfolk Island, 1844 –1852
Description list of male convicts, 1828 – 1853
Description list of female convicts, 1828 – 1853
Description list of convicts arriving from Norfolk Island , 1845 – 1851
Comprehensive registers of convicts, 1804 – 1853
Conduct record of male convicts arriving in the period of the assignment system, 1803 – 1843
Supplementary conduct registers, 1828 – 1843
Conduct record of male convicts arriving in the period of the probation system, 1840 – 1853
Conduct records of male convicts arriving still on strength in November 1844
Conduct registers of male convicts arriving on non-convict ships and on strength in Nov 1844
Conduct registers of male convicts arriving on non-convicts ships or locally convicted, 1840 – 1893
Conduct registers of male convicts transferred from the probation series, 1840 – 1846
Conduct registers of female convicts arriving 1803 – 1843
Conduct records of female convicts arriving in the period of the probation, 1844 –1853
Conduct register of female convicts reconvicted in the colony, 1854 – 1892

Western Australia

Listed below are the major series of the records of the various departments involved in the documenting and managing the lives of the convicts sent to Western Australia.

For further details and descriptions of the full series of records, see G. O'Meara, *Convict Records of Western Australia: A Research Guide*, Perth, Friends of Battye Library Occasional Paper No 1, 1990; A. and B. Buchanan, *Index to the records of the Convict Establishment*, 2005; and A. and B. Buchanan, *Index to series of convict related letters in the correspondence of the Governor of Western Australia, 1851-1868*, SROWA, Consignment 488, items 30-34.

Convict Establishment

Correspondence, 15 Aug 1853 - 16 Nov 1859
Registers: correspondence, 1 Jan 1853 - 31 Dec 1889
Letterbooks: Comptroller General of Prisons, 1 Jan 1850 - 31 Dec 1889
Despatch books – Comptroller General of Prisons, 1 Jan 1858 - 31 Dec 1889
Convict ships: register number, names, date of arrival
Convict registers: number order 1-9925, 1850-1868
Ticket of leave: register of due dates, number order 1-8757
Ticket of leave and conditional pardons: reconvictions record book and expenses incurred, 1851-20 Nov 1855
Ticket of leave register, undated [c. 1856-1861]
Administration letters to ticket of leave, 1857-1882
Reconviction register, 1856-1859
Register: expeirees and conditional pardons, 1863-1894
Certificates: conditional pardon, tickets of leave
Superintendent's order books, 1850-1885
Officers misconduct register, 1850-1864
Appointment of officers, 1 Jul 1851-14 Jan 1883

General duties, 1853-1877
Casual sick: register, 1850-1905
Hospital admissions book, 1853-1886
Patient records, 1854-1865
Hospital patient records, 1854-1885
Hospital: admissions, discharges and occurrences, 1855-1886
Medical journals, 1853-1910

Convict Finance Board

Convict Finance Board: minutes, 1851-1872
Convict Finance Board: correspondence, 1851-1872

Official despatches relating to convicts

Governors despatches relating to convicts, 1855-1865
Despatches from the Secretary of State relating to convicts, 1855-1864

Colonial Secretary's Office

Home Office, Parkhurst Prison register, 1838-1863

3.2 Description

The records nominated are those of the convict authorities in each of the three colonies (now States) which are now held in the three nominating institutions. They document the policy framework and administrative operations of the convict transportation system and the convicts themselves.

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Authenticity

There is no doubt about the authenticity of the records. In each colony/State the records survived despite active hostility, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the 'convict stain' was seen as a shameful cross to bear for those with convict ancestors. Many people objected to any records relating to convicts being housed in public collections because of the collective distaste surrounding anything to do with the convict period of Australian history. The records remained restricted until shame subsided in the 1970s, when it became acceptable and even popular to have a convict ancestor, as a marker of 'true' Australian character.

4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability

- The Australian convict records are of world significance in documenting a period of trans-global forced migration, initiated and managed by the state apparatus of British imperialism.
- They constitute a unique body of documentation of a mass of 19th century working class people at a level of detail rarely undertaken for other groups.
- They comprise the most detailed records extant of the legal, philosophical, strategic and operational aspects of an 18th-19th century penal system and its consequences for human rights.
- They open up universally relevant questions of inequality and justice, crime and punishment, individual and social development, in colonial and post-colonial societies.
- In that the convicts became the ancestors of perhaps one third of modern Australia's population, their records are of irreplaceable social significance.

4.3 Criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style

People:

The Australian convict records are rare evidence of a mass of 19th century individuals. They are acutely personal, even though created with bureaucratic impersonality. They enable access to the life experience of transported men and women by modern historians and family descendants, in ways unparalleled in other mass migrations. These rare personal records of the ordinary folk who populated early colonial Australia constitute data that shaped Australian national consciousness and continue to enable vigorous connections via popular genealogical research. The documents are touchstones of the contemporary sense of 'Australian-ness'. The richness and detail of the physical descriptions of such a large sample of people provide a rare view of a large segment of the British 19th century population and is an invaluable resource for a wide range of demographic, medical, and other research.

Subject and theme:

The Australian convict records represent a unique intersection of the records of punishment disciplines in the 18th-19th century and the nascent globalising enterprise of British bureaucratic imperialism. Together they evidence the growing power of state apparatus to control the lives of subjects, but also demonstrate that the consequences of government acts could result in unanticipated social formations, ultimately an independent, peaceful and democratic state.

4.4 Issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management

This joint nomination brings together the records of what were once the three Australian colonies to which British convicts were transported: New South Wales, Van Diemens Land (now Tasmania), and Western Australia. The integrity of this body of material is outstanding and comprehensive. The meticulous record keeping that is apparent in Australia was essentially because a whole system of people management had to be established by the colonial administration to track each individual as his/her sentence was served. This system developed and improved over the years in response to immediate practicalities rather than theoretical penological constructs. Essentially the British responsibility for convicts ended once the ships had been loaded with their human cargo and the imperative for accounting for them ended with each ship's indent of convicts.

5 LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

State Records Office of New South Wales: PO Box 516, Kingswood, NSW, 2747.

Archives Office of Tasmania: 77 Murray Street, Hobart, Tasmania 7000

State Records Office of Western Australia: Alexander Library Building, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth, WA 6000

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

As above.

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

Full legal title.

(b) Accessibility

Publicly accessible.

(c) Copyright status

With permission of each of the owning agencies which administer Crown copyright in their relevant jurisdictions.

(d) Responsible administration

Established.

(e) Other factors

None.

6 *MANAGEMENT PLAN*

6.1 No separate management plans exist for these bodies of records; however, all are held within the responsible state archives agency according to high professional archival standards.

7 *CONSULTATION*

7.1 **Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee**

All agencies were involved in preparing this nomination, as were members of the Australian National Committee for the *Memory of the World*.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 *ASSESSMENT OF RISK*

8.1 No unusual risks pertain to this material. Disaster management plans are in place for all three collections.

9 *ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION*

9.1 **Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage**

All the material has undergone preservation assessment and appropriate action been taken. All the material is in secure, environmentally controlled storage. Reformatting programs are in progress, with much already copied onto microfilm and digital formats.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

Dr Linda Young

(Signature)..... (Date) 23 March 2006