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Banishment, transportation and a penal settlement

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Banishment, transportation and a penal settlement

Abstract
On January 26, 1788 a group of sailing ships unloaded their human flotsam and jetsam in Sydney Cove. Amongst those who were landed were souls who were part of the dark story of banishment and exile that dates back to Roman times. The foundation of the Australian nation was just one part of a global story of forced human suffering that is still going on today.

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Convicts were put to work on a variety of goods in Diemen’s Land, Queensland and Norfolk Island. Dreadfuls'. Lawlessness was part of the popular imagination. Exiling criminals on the other side of the world helped to stop all that in the 1780s.

Exemplary punishments were meted out in the form of hard labour, punishment and death. Forced labour was normal, meals were haphazard and colonies were completely dominated by men. Local populations were ignored or rounded up as enforcers of order.

Once European powers started their rise to freedom to do as they wished including return to Britain. Before convicts were dumped in New South Wales the British sent around 50,000 convicts to Wales the British sent around 50,000 convicts to land. Punishments were dished out in the form of assignment; government determined convicts could be classified as domestic servants, while trades dominating over rural workers. Convicts were upended in a number of ways by the colonial authorities: assignment; government work gang; Tickets of Leave; Conditional Pardon; and an Absolute Pardon with full freedom to do as they wished including return to Britain.

Once landed the convicts were guarded by military personnel who were given grants, livestock and other stores. Many officers and enlisted men conducted businesses, and some were quite successful. Michael Bogle maintains that some of the female factories were “Australia’s first manufacturing concerns” working in a piecework system.

Women convicts who did not cooperate were subject to solitary confinement, sexual domination and food, breaking rocks and ‘hair-cropping’, which apparently was “the most resented punishment”. There were female factories at a variety of locations, including Parramatta, Newcastle, Moreton Bay, Port Macquarie, Barrington Tops and Hobart and Ross.

There is a general myth that has lasted for decades that convicts were illiterate and had few skills. There has been research in recent decades of British embarkation and colonial debarkation records in works like Stephen Nichols’s ‘Convicts and Debtor Oatley’s Convict Made’. This has shown that the literacy rates and skills of convicts were the same or better than English and Irish working classes.

Generally speaking most convict women could be classified as domestics, while male convicts had a host of skills with town trades dominating over rural workers.

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On January 26, 1788 a group of sailing ships unloaded their human flotsam and jetsam in Sydney Cove. Amongst those who were land-ed were souls who were part of the dark story of banishment and exile that dates back to Roman times. The foundation of the Australian nation was just one part of a global story of forced human suffering that is still going on today.

Penal colonies, which are settlements where prisoners are sent in a region or location from the general population, are hundreds of years old. Historically they have been used in under-developed colonial territories and are little more than slavery. Sometimes these settlements are run under the guise of indentured labour.

After the loss of the American colonies the British sent around 160,000 had been exiled from England, Ireland and the British colonies.

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Once landed the convicts were guarded by military personnel, which provided security within the colonies and against outside threats. Many discharged soldiers settled in the colonies and raised their families, who sometimes accompanied them. Some military personnel were given grants, livestock and other stores. Many officers and enlisted men conducted businesses, and some were quite successful. Michael Bogle makes the point that the army had a central role in designing and constructing the town centres, which influenced their long term success. Incidents or revolts were common and stressed the importance of the presence of the military to maintain order.

Amongst the convicts there was a large imbalance between men and women. Convicts were encouraged to marry and the colonial authorities offered basic schooling for orphans. The life of one female convict has been documented in Babette Smith’s 'A Cargo of Women: Susannah Watson and the Convicts of the Princess Royal', The Hyde Park Barracks Museum has tracked the story of three convict families in its 1999 exhibition 'Convicts'.

Food rations issued to convicts were a contentious issue. They could be abused by cooks or stores supervisors and this led to disputes. Salted beef was preferred to fresh kangaroo. The issue of rations could include salted beef or pork, flour, maize as well as sugar and salt. Stealing food was looked on dimly and could be punished by loss privileges, flogging or a stint on the treadmill. Food rations were so critical to the First Fleet that within the first month of the settlement convict Thomas Barrett was hanged for stealing from the stores. A year later six Royal Marines were hanged for raiding the Commissariat stores.

Convict transportation to New South Wales was suspended in 1840. Attempts by the British Government to lead to murmur and the colonial authorities offered basic schooling for orphans. The life of one female convict has been documented in Babette Smith’s 'A Cargo of Women: Susannah Watson and the Convicts of the Princess Royal', The Hyde Park Barracks Museum has tracked the story of three convict families in its 1999 exhibition 'Convicts'.

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