

Convicts in Australia

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Convicts in [New Holland](#), 1793, by [Juan Ravenet](#).

Between 1788 and 1868, about 162,000 [convicts were transported](#) from Britain to various [penal colonies in Australia](#).^[1]

The British Government began transporting convicts overseas to [American colonies](#) in the early 17th century. When transportation ended with the start of the [American Revolution](#), an alternative site was needed to relieve further overcrowding of British prisons and [hulks](#). Earlier in 1770, [James Cook](#) charted and claimed possession of the east coast of Australia for Britain. Seeking to pre-empt the [French colonial empire](#) from expanding into the region, Britain chose Australia as the site of a penal colony, and in 1787, the [First Fleet](#) of eleven convict ships set sail for [Botany Bay](#), arriving on 20 January 1788 to found [Sydney, New South Wales](#), the first European settlement on the continent. Other penal colonies were later established in [Van Diemen's Land \(Tasmania\)](#) in 1803 and [Queensland](#) in 1824, while [Western Australia](#), founded in 1829 as a free colony, received convicts from 1850. [South Australia](#) and [Victoria](#), established in 1836 and 1850 respectively, remained free colonies. Penal transportation to Australia peaked in the 1830s and dropped off significantly the following decade as [protests against the convict](#)

[system](#) intensified throughout the colonies. In 1868, almost two decades after transportation to the eastern colonies had ceased, the last convict ship arrived in Western Australia.

The majority of convicts were transported for [petty crimes](#). More serious crimes, such as rape and murder, became transportable offences in the 1830s, but since they were also punishable by death, comparatively few convicts were transported for such crimes.^[2] Approximately 1 in 7 convicts were women, while [political prisoners](#), another minority group, comprise many of the [best-known convicts](#). Once [emancipated](#), most ex-convicts stayed in Australia and joined the free settlers, with some rising to prominent positions in Australian society. However, convictism carried a social stigma, and for some later Australians, the nation's convict origins instilled a sense of shame and [cultural cringe](#). Attitudes became more accepting in the 20th century and it is now considered by many Australians to be a cause for celebration to have a convict in one's lineage. Around 20% of modern Australians, in addition to 2 million Britons, are descended from transported convicts.^[3] The convict era has inspired famous novels, films, and other cultural works, and the extent to which it has shaped Australia's national character has been studied by many writers and historians.^[4]

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[Reasons for transportation](#)[\[edit\]](#)

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[William Hogarth's *Gin Lane*, 1751.](#)

According to [Robert Hughes](#) in [The Fatal Shore](#), the population of England and Wales, which had remained steady at 6 million from 1700 to 1740, began rising considerably after 1740. By the time of the [American Revolution](#), London was overcrowded, filled with the unemployed, and flooded with cheap gin.^[5] [Poverty](#), [social injustice](#), [child labour](#), harsh and dirty living conditions and long working hours were prevalent in [19th-century Britain](#). [Dickens](#)'s novels perhaps best illustrate this; even some government officials were horrified by what they saw. Only in 1833 and 1844 were the first general laws against child labour (the [Factory Acts](#)) passed in the United Kingdom.^[6] Crime had become a major problem and, in 1784, a French observer noted that "from sunset to dawn the environs of London became the patrimony of brigands for twenty miles around."^[7]



Prison hulks in the [River Thames](#)

Each parish had a watchman, but British cities did not have [police forces](#) in the modern sense. [Jeremy Bentham](#) avidly promoted the idea of a [circular prison](#), but the [penitentiary](#) was seen by many government officials as a peculiar American concept. Virtually all malefactors were caught by informers or denounced to the local court by their victims.^[citation needed] Pursuant

to the so-called "[Bloody Code](#)", by the 1770s there were 222 crimes in Britain which carried the [death penalty](#),^[8] almost all of which were crimes against property. These included such offences as the stealing of goods worth over 5 shillings, the cutting down of a tree, the theft of an animal, even the theft of a rabbit from a [warren](#).

The [Industrial Revolution](#) led to an increase in petty crime because of the economic displacement of much of the population, building pressure on the government to find an alternative to confinement in [overcrowded gaols](#). The situation was so dire that [hulks](#) left over from the [Seven Years' War](#) were used as makeshift [floating prisons](#).^[9] four out of five prisoners were in jail for theft. The Bloody Code was gradually rescinded in the 1800s because judges and juries considered its punishments too harsh. Since lawmakers still wanted punishments to deter potential criminals, they increasingly applied transportation as a more humane alternative to [execution](#).^[10] Transportation had been employed as a punishment for both major and petty crimes since the seventeenth century. Around 60,000 convicts were transported to the British colonies in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Transportation to the Americas ceased following Britain's defeat in the [American Revolutionary War](#). The number of convicts transported to North America is not verified although it has been estimated to be 50,000 by [John Dunmore Lang](#) and 120,000 by [Thomas Keneally](#). The British American colony of [Maryland](#) received a larger felon quota than any other province.^[11]

Penal settlements^[edit]

New South Wales^[edit]

Main article: [History of New South Wales](#)



The [First Fleet](#) arrives in [Botany Bay](#), 21 January 1788, by [William Bradley \(1802\)](#).



Convicts at Botany Bay from Captain [Watkin Tench's Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay](#). First published in 1789.



The Costumes of the Australasians: watercolour by [Edward Charles Close](#) shows the co-existence of convicts, their military gaolers, and free settlers.

Alternatives to the American colonies were investigated and the newly discovered and mapped East Coast of [New Holland](#) was proposed. The details provided by [James Cook](#) during his expedition to the South Pacific in 1770 made it the most suitable.

On 18 August 1786 the decision was made to send a [colonisation](#) party of convicts, military, and civilian personnel to [Botany Bay](#) under the command of [Admiral Arthur Phillip](#) who was to be the [Governor](#) of the new colony. There were 775 convicts on board six transport ships. They were accompanied by officials, members of the crew, marines, the families thereof and their own children who together totaled 645. In all, eleven ships were sent in what became known as the [First Fleet](#). Other than the convict transports, there were two naval escorts and three storeships. The fleet assembled in [Portsmouth](#) and set sail on 13 May 1787.^[12]

The fleet arrived at Botany Bay on 20 January 1788. It soon became clear that it would not be suitable for the establishment of a colony due to "the openness of this bay, and the dampness of the soil, by which the people would probably be rendered unhealthy" and Phillip decided to examine Port Jackson, a bay mentioned by Captain Cook, about three [leagues](#) to the north. On 22 January a small expedition led by Phillips sailed to Port Jackson, arriving in the early afternoon:^[12]

Here all regret arising from the former disappointments was at once obliterated; and Governor Phillip had the satisfaction to find one of the finest harbours in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line might ride in perfect security. The different coves of this harbour were examined with all possible expedition, and the preference was given to one which had the finest spring of water, and in which ships can anchor so close to the shore, that at a very small expence quays may be constructed at which the largest vessels may unload. This cove is about half a mile in length, and a quarter of a mile across at the entrance. In honour of Lord Sydney, the Governor distinguished it by the name of Sydney Cove.^[12]

There they established the first permanent European colony on the Australian continent, [New South Wales](#), on 26 January. The area has since developed into the city of [Sydney](#). This date is still celebrated as [Australia Day](#).

There was initially a high [mortality rate](#) amongst the members of the first fleet due mainly to shortages of food. The ships carried only enough food to provide for the [settlers](#) until they could establish agriculture in the region. Unfortunately, there were an insufficient number of skilled farmers and domesticated livestock to do this, and the colony waited for the arrival of the [Second Fleet](#). The "Memorandums" by [James Martin \(convict\)](#) provide a contemporary account of the events as seen by a convict on the first fleet.^[13] The second fleet was an unprecedented disaster that provided little in the way of help and upon its delivery in June 1790 of still more sick and dying convicts, which actually worsened the situation in Port Jackson.

[Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Bourke](#) was the ninth [Governor](#) of the Colony of New South Wales between 1831 and 1837. Appalled by the excessive punishments doled out to convicts, Bourke passed 'The Magistrates Act', which limited the sentence a magistrate could pass to fifty lashes (previously there was no such limit). Bourke's administration was controversial, and furious magistrates and employers petitioned the crown against this interference with their legal rights, fearing that a reduction in punishments would cease to provide enough deterrence to the convicts.

Bourke, however, was not dissuaded from his reforms and continued to create controversy within the colony by combating the inhumane treatment handed out to convicts, including limiting the number of convicts each employer was allowed to seventy, as well as granting rights to freed convicts, such as allowing the acquisition of property and service on juries. It has been argued that the suspension of convict transportation to New South Wales in 1840^[14] can be attributed to the actions of Bourke and other men like Australian-born lawyer [William Charles Wentworth](#). It took another 10 years, but transportation to the colony of New South Wales was finally officially abolished on 1 October 1850.^[15]

If a convict was well behaved, the convict could be given a [ticket of leave](#), granting some freedom. At the end of the convict's sentence, seven years in most cases, the convict was issued with a [Certificate of Freedom](#). He was then free to become a settler or to return to England. Convicts who misbehaved, however, were often sent to a place of secondary punishment like [Port Arthur, Tasmania](#) or [Norfolk Island](#), where they would suffer additional punishment and [solitary confinement](#).

Norfolk Island[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [History of Norfolk Island](#)





Norfolk Island military barracks.

Within a month of the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove, a group of convicts and free settlers were sent to take control of [Norfolk Island](#), a small island 1,412 kilometres (877 mi) east of the coast of New South Wales. More convicts were sent, and many of them proved to be unruly; early 1789 saw a failed attempt to overthrow Lieutenant [Philip Gidley King](#), the island's commandant. This was followed by the wreck of [HMS Sirius](#) on one of the island's reefs while attempting to land stores.

Tasmania[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [History of Tasmania](#)



Penitentiary at the [Port Arthur](#) convict settlement, Tasmania

In 1803, a British expedition was sent from Sydney to [Tasmania](#) (then known as [Van Diemen's Land](#)) to establish a new penal colony there. The small party, led by Lt. John Bowen, established a settlement at Risdon Cove, on the eastern side of the Derwent River. Originally sent to Port Philip, but abandoned within weeks, another expedition led by Lieutenant-Colonel David Collins arrived soon after. Collins considered the Risdon Cove site inadequate, and in 1804 he established an alternative settlement on the western side of the river at [Sullivan's Cove, Tasmania](#). This later became known as [Hobart](#), and the original settlement at Risdon Cove was deserted. Collins became the first Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land.

When the convict station on Norfolk Island was abandoned in 1807-1808, the remaining convicts and free settlers were transported to Hobart and allocated land for re-settlement. However, as the existing small population was already experiencing difficulties producing enough food, the sudden doubling of the population was almost catastrophic.

Starting in 1816, more free settlers began arriving from Great Britain. On 3 December 1825 Tasmania was declared a colony separate from [New South Wales](#), with a separate administration.



Macquarie Harbour Penal Station, depicted by convict artist [William Buelow Gould](#), 1833

The [Macquarie Harbour](#) penal colony on the West Coast of Tasmania was established in 1820 to exploit the valuable timber [Huon Pine](#) growing there for furniture making and shipbuilding. Macquarie Harbour had the added advantage of being almost impossible to escape from, most attempts ending with the convicts either drowning, dying of starvation in the bush, or (on at least two occasions) turning cannibal. Convicts sent to this settlement had usually re-offended during their [sentence](#) of transportation, and were treated very harshly, labouring in cold and wet weather, and subjected to severe [corporal punishment](#) for minor infractions.

In 1830, the [Port Arthur](#) penal settlement was established to replace Macquarie Harbour, as it was easier to maintain regular communications by sea. Although known in popular history as a particularly harsh prison, in reality its management was far more humane than Macquarie Harbour or the outlying stations of New South Wales. Experimentation with the so-called model prison system took place in Port Arthur. Solitary confinement was the preferred method of punishment.

Many changes were made to the manner in which convicts were handled in the general population, largely responsive to British public opinion on the harshness of their treatment. Until the late 1830s most convicts were either retained by Government for public works or assigned to private individuals as a form of indentured labour. From the early 1840s the Probation System was employed, where convicts spent an initial period, usually two years, in public works gangs on stations outside of the main settlements, then were freed to work for wages within a set district.

Transportation to Tasmania ended in 1853 (see section below on [Cessation of Transportation](#)).

Victoria [\[edit\]](#)



[William Buckley](#)'s transportation and escape to live with the [Wathaurong](#) in 1803, as depicted by 19th-century Aboriginal artist [Tommy McRae](#).

In 1803 two ships arrived in [Port Phillip](#), which [Lt. John Murray](#) in the [Lady Nelson](#) had discovered and named the previous year. The [Calcutta](#) under the command of [Lieutenant-Colonel Collins](#) transported 300 convicts, accompanied by the supply ship [Ocean](#). Collins had previously been Judge Advocate with the First Fleet in 1788. He chose Sullivan Bay near the present-day [Sorrento, Victoria](#) for the first settlement - some 90 km south of present-day [Melbourne](#). About two months later the settlement was abandoned due to poor soil and water shortages and Collins moved the convicts to Hobart. Several convicts had escaped into the bush and were left behind to unknown fates with the local aboriginal people. One such convict, the subsequently celebrated [William Buckley](#), lived in the western side of Port Phillip for the next 32 years before approaching the new settlers and assisting as an interpreter for the indigenous peoples.

A second settlement was established at [Westernport Bay](#), on the site of present-day [Corinella](#), in November 1826. It comprised an initial 20 soldiers and 22 convicts, with another 12 convicts arriving subsequently. This settlement was abandoned in February 1828, and all convicts returned to Sydney.^[16]

The [Port Phillip](#) District was officially sanctioned in 1837 following the landing of the [Henty brothers](#) in Portland Bay in 1834, and [John Batman](#) settled on the site of [Melbourne](#).

Between 1844 and 1849 about 1,750 convicts arrived there from England. They were referred to either as "Exiles" or the "Pentonvillians" because most of them came from [Pentonville](#) Probationary Prison. Unlike earlier convicts who were required to work for the government or on hire from penal depots, the Exiles were free to work for pay, but could not leave the district to which they were assigned. The Port Phillip District was still part of New South Wales at this stage. [Victoria](#) separated from New South Wales and became an independent colony in 1851.

Queensland[edit]

Main article: [History of Queensland](#)

In 1823 [John Oxley](#) sailed north from Sydney to inspect [Port Curtis](#) and [Moreton Bay](#) as possible sites for a penal colony. At Moreton Bay he found the [Brisbane River](#), which Cook had guessed would exist, and explored the lower part of it. In September 1824, he returned with soldiers and established a temporary settlement at [Redcliffe](#). On 2 December 1824, the settlement was transferred to where the [Central Business District](#) (CBD) of [Brisbane](#) now stands. The settlement was at first called [Edenglassie](#). In 1839 transportation of convicts to Moreton Bay ceased and the Brisbane penal settlement was closed. In 1842 free settlement was permitted and people began to colonize the area voluntarily. On 6 June 1859 Queensland became a colony separate from [New South Wales](#).

Western Australia[edit]

Main article: [Convict era of Western Australia](#)



[Fremantle Prison](#) gatehouse. The prison was built using convict labour in the 1850s.

Although a convict-supported settlement was established in Western Australia from 1826 to 1831, direct transportation of convicts did not begin until 1850. It continued until 1868. During that period, 9,668 convicts were transported on 43 [convict ships](#). The first convicts to arrive were transported to [New South Wales](#), and sent by that colony to [King George Sound](#) (Albany) in 1826 to help establish a settlement there. At that time the western third of Australia was unclaimed land known as [New Holland](#). Fears that France would lay claim to the land prompted the [Governor of New South Wales, Ralph Darling](#), to send [Major Edmund Lockyer](#), with troops and 23 convicts, to establish a settlement at King George Sound. Lockyer's party arrived on Christmas Day, 1826. A convict presence was maintained at the settlement for over four years. On 7 March 1831 control of the settlement was transferred to the [Swan River](#) Colony, and the troops and convicts were withdrawn.^[17]

In April 1848, [Charles Fitzgerald](#), [Governor of Western Australia](#), petitioned Britain to send convicts to his state because of labor shortages. Britain rejected sending fixed term convicts, but offered to send first offenders in the final years of their terms.

Most convicts in Western Australia spent very little time in prison. Those who were stationed at [Fremantle](#) were housed in the [Convict Establishment](#), the colony's convict prison, and

misbehaviour was punished by stints there. The majority, however, were stationed in other parts of the colony. Although there was no convict assignment in Western Australia, there was a great demand for public [infrastructure](#) throughout the colony, so that many convicts were stationed in remote areas. Initially, most offenders were set to work creating infrastructure for the convict system, including the construction of the Convict Establishment itself.

In 1852 a Convict Depot was built at Albany, but closed 3 years later. When shipping increased the Depot was re-opened. Most of the convicts had their Ticket-of-Leave and were hired to work by the free settlers. Convicts also manned the pilot boat, rebuilt York Street and Stirling Terrace; and the track from Albany to Perth was made into a good road. An Albany newspaper noted their commendable behaviour and wrote, "There were instances in which our free settlers might take an example".

Western Australia's convict era came to an end with the cessation of penal transportation by Britain. In May 1865, the colony was advised of the change in British policy, and told that Britain would send one [convict ship](#) in each of the years 1865, 1866 and 1867, after which transportation would cease. In accordance with this, the last convict ship to Western Australia, the [Hougoumont](#), left Britain in 1867 and arrived in Western Australia on 10 January 1868.

Women[[edit](#)]

Main article: [Convict Women in Australia](#)

Between 1788 and 1852, about 24,000 transportees were women, one in seven. 80% of women had been convicted of theft, usually petty. For protection, many quickly attached themselves to male officers or convicts. Although they were routinely referred to as [courtesans](#), no women were transported for prostitution, as it was not a transportable offence.^[18]

Political prisoners[[edit](#)]



Painting of the 1804 [Castle Hill convict rebellion](#)



[Fenian](#) convicts escape from Fremantle in the 1876 [Catalpa rescue](#).

Political prisoners made up a small proportion of convicts. They arrived in waves corresponding to political unrest in Britain and Ireland. They included the [First Scottish Martyrs](#) in 1794; [British Naval Mutineers \(from the Nore Mutiny\)](#) in 1797 and 1801; Irish rebels in [1798](#), [1803](#), [1848](#) and [1868](#); Scots Rebels (1820); [Yorkshire Rebels](#) (1820 and 1822); leaders of the [Merthyr Tydfil rising of 1831](#); the [Tolpuddle Martyrs](#) (1834); [Swing Rioters](#) and [Luddites](#)(1828–1833); American and French-Canadian prisoners from the [Upper Canada rebellion](#) and [Lower Canada Rebellion](#) (1839), and [Chartists](#) (1842).^[19]

Cessation of transportation[[edit](#)]

With increasing numbers of free settlers entering New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) by the mid-1830s, opposition to the transportation of felons into the colonies grew. The most influential spokesmen were newspaper proprietors who were also members of the Independent Congregation Church such as [John Fairfax](#) in Sydney and the [Reverend John West](#) in Launceston, who argued against convicts both as competition to honest free labourers and as the source of crime and vice within the colony. [Bishop Bernard Ullathorne](#), a Catholic prelate who had been in Australia since 1832 returned for a visit to England in 1835. While there he was called upon by the government to give evidence before a Parliamentary Commission on the evils of transportation, and at their request wrote and submitted a tract on the subject. His views in conjunction with others in the end prevailed. The anti-transportation movement was seldom concerned with the inhumanity of the system, but rather the *hated stain* it was believed to inflict on the free (non-[emancipist](#)) middle classes.

Transportation to New South Wales ended in 1840, by which time some 150,000 convicts had been sent to the colonies. The sending of convicts to Brisbane in its Moreton Bay district had ceased the previous year, and administration of [Norfolk Island](#) was later transferred to Van Diemen's Land.

Opposition to transportation was not unanimous; wealthy landowner, [Benjamin Boyd](#), for reasons of economic self-interest, wanted to use transported convicts from Van Diemen's Land as a source of free or low-cost labour in New South Wales, particularly as shepherds.^{[20][21]}

The continuation of transportation to Van Diemen's Land saw the rise of a well-coordinated anti-transportation movement, especially following a severe economic depression in the early 1840s. Transportation was temporarily suspended in 1846 but soon revived with overcrowding

of British goals and clamour for the availability of transportation as a deterrent. By the late 1840s most convicts being sent to Van Diemen's Land (plus those to [Victoria](#)) were designated as "exiles" and were free to work for pay while under sentence. In 1850 the [Australasian Anti-Transportation League](#) was formed to lobby for the permanent cessation of transportation, its aims being furthered by the commencement of the [Australian gold rushes](#) the following year. The last convict ship to be sent from England, the *St. Vincent*, arrived in 1853, and on 10 August Jubilee festivals in [Hobart](#) and [Launceston](#) celebrated 50 years of European settlement with the official end of transportation.

Transportation continued in small numbers to Western Australia. The last convict ship, the *Hougoumont*, left Britain in 1867 and arrived in Western Australia on 10 January 1868. In all, about 164,000 convicts were transported to the Australian colonies between 1788 and 1868 on board 806 ships. Convicts were made up of English and Welsh (70%), Irish (24%), Scottish (5%) and the remaining 1% from the British outposts in India and Canada, Maoris from New Zealand, Chinese from Hong Kong and slaves from the Caribbean.

Only [South Australia](#) and the [Northern Territory](#) had never accepted convicts directly from England but they still accepted ex-convicts from the other states. Many convicts were allowed to travel as far as New Zealand to make a new life after being given limited freedom. At this time the Australian population was approximately 1 million and the colonies could now sustain themselves without the need for convict labour.^[22]

Legacy[[edit](#)]



[Hyde Park Barracks](#), designed by convict [Francis Greenway](#) and constructed by convicts in the 1810s, is one of eleven World Heritage-listed [Australian Convict Sites](#).

In 2010, [UNESCO](#) inscribed 11 [Australian Convict Sites](#) on its [World Heritage List](#). The listing recognises the sites as "the best surviving examples of large-scale convict transportation and the colonial expansion of European powers through the presence and labour of convicts."^[23]

Cultural depictions[[edit](#)]



[Marcus Clarke](#) (c. 1866), author of *[For the Term of His Natural Life](#)*, Australia's most famous convict novel



Convict [Alexander Pearce](#) has inspired three feature films (drawings by convict [Thomas Bock](#), 1824).

Convict [George Barrington](#) is (perhaps apocryphally) recorded as having written the prologue for the first theatrical play performed by convicts in Australia, one year after the First Fleet's arrival. It is known as "Our Country's Good", based on the now-famous closing stanza:

From distant climes, o'er wide-spread seas, we come,
Though not with much éclat or beat of drum,
True patriots all: for, be it understood:
We left our country for our country's good.

The poems of [Frank the Poet](#) are among the few surviving literary works done by a convict while still incarcerated. His best-known work is "A Convict's Tour of Hell". A version of the convict ballad "[Moreton Bay](#)", detailing the brutal punishments meted out by commandment [Patrick Logan](#) and his death at the hands of Aborigines, is also attributed to Frank. Other convict ballads include "[Jim Jones at Botany Bay](#)". The ballad "[Botany Bay](#)", which describes the sadness felt by convicts forced to leave their loved ones in England, was written at least 40 years after the end of transportation.

Perhaps the most famous convict in all of fiction is [Abel Magwitch](#), a main character of [Charles Dickens'](#) 1861 novel *Great Expectations*. The most famous convict novel is [Marcus Clarke's](#) *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), followed by [John Boyle O'Reilly's](#) *Moondyne* (1879). *The Broad Arrow* by [Caroline Woolmer Leakey](#) was one of the first novels to depict the convict experience, and one of the only to feature a [female convict](#) as its protagonist (Marcus Clarke drew on Leakey's book in writing *For the Term of His Natural Life*).^[24] [Thomas Keneally](#) explores the convict era in his novels *Bring Larks and Heroes* (1967) and *The Playmaker* (1987). Convicts feature heavily in [Patrick White's](#) take on the [Eliza Fraser](#) story, the 1976 novel *A Fringe of Leaves*. Convictism is canvassed in [Bryce Courtenay's](#) "Australian trilogy": *The Potato Factory* (1995), *Tommo & Hawk* (1997) and *Solomon's Song* (1999). The title character of [Peter Carey's](#) 1997 novel *Jack Maggs* is a reworking of Dickens' Magwitch character. Many modern works of [Tasmanian Gothic](#) focus on the state's convict past, including *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001) by [Richard Flanagan](#), a fictionalised account of convict artist [William Buelow Gould's](#) imprisonment at Macquarie Harbour. [Kate Grenville](#) based the novel *The Secret River* (2005) on the life of her convict ancestor [Solomon Wiseman](#).

Along with [bushrangers](#) and other [stock characters](#) of colonial life, convicts were a popular subject during Australia's [silent film](#) era. The first [convict film](#) was a [1908 adaptation](#) of Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, shot on location at Port Arthur with an unheard-of budget of £7000.^[25] This was followed by two more films inspired by Clarke's novel: *The Life of Rufus Dawes* (1911), which draws on [Alfred Dampier's](#) stage production of *His Natural Life*, and the landmark *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927), one of the most expensive silent films ever made.^[25] [W. J. Lincoln](#) directed many convict melodramas including *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1911), an adaptation of [Charles Reade's](#) [1856 novel](#) about cruelties of the convict system; *Moodyne* (1913), based on John Boyle O'Reilly's novel; and *Transported* (1913). Other early titles include *Sentenced for Life*, *The Mark of the Lash*, *One Hundred Years Ago*, *The Lady Outlaw* and *The Assigned Servant*, all released in 1911. Few convict films were made after 1930; even the [Australian New Wave](#) of the 1970s,

with its emphasis on Australia's colonial past, largely avoided the convict era in favour of nostalgic [period pieces](#) set in [the bush](#) around the time of [Federation](#). One exception is [Journey Among Women](#) (1977), a [feminist](#) imagining of what life was like for convict women.^[25] [Alexander Pearce](#), the infamous Tasmanian convict and cannibal, is the inspiration for [The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce](#) (2008), [Dying Breed](#) (2008) and [Van Diemen's Land](#) (2009). The British film [Comrades](#) (1986) deals with the transportation of the [Tolpuddle Martyrs](#) to Australia.

Notable convicts transported to Australia [\[edit\]](#)

See also: [List of convicts transported to Australia](#)



[George Barrington](#)



[Billy Blue](#)



[Jørgen Jørgensen](#)

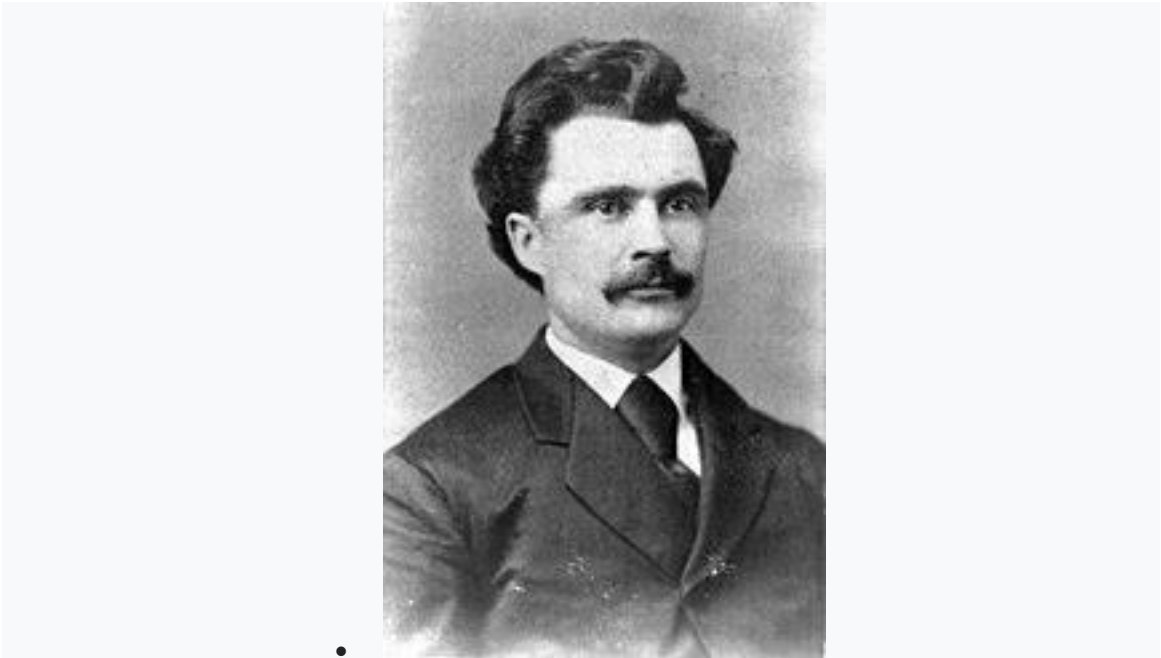


[Moodyne Joe](#)

- [Esther Abrahams](#) – [British Jew](#), who was one of the Jewish convicts (about 1,000 in all) and common law wife of a leader of the [Rum Rebellion](#).
- [George Barrington](#) - pickpocket, superintendant of convicts and high constable of [Parramatta](#)

- Samuel Barsby – one of the first two [coopers](#) in Australia and the first convict to be flogged^[26]
- [Joseph Backler](#) – transported for passing forged cheques, became a colonial painter
- [William Bannon](#) – transported from New Zealand to Van Diemen's Land for army desertion/theft. Escaped Port Arthur through the 'dog line' at EagleHawk Neck.
- [Billy Blue](#) – black man from [Jamaica, New York](#), established a ferry service
- [James Blackburn](#) – Famous for contribution to Australian architecture and civil engineering
- [William Bland](#) – naval surgeon transported for killing a man in a duel; he prospered and was involved in philanthropy, and had a seat in the legislative assembly.^[27]
- [Mary Bryant](#) – famous escapee
- [William Buckley](#) – famously escaped and lived with Aboriginal people for many years
- [John Cadman](#) – had been a publican, as a convict became Superintendent of Boats in Sydney; [Cadmans Cottage](#) is a cottage granted to him.
- [Martin Cash](#) – Famous escapee and bushranger
- [William Chopin](#) – a convict whose work in prison hospitals in Western Australia grounded him in chemistry; on receiving a ticket of leave he was appointed chemist at the Colonial Hospital but preferred to open his own chemist shop. He was later convicted as an abortionist.
- [Daniel Connor](#) – sentenced to seven years transportation for sheep stealing, became successful merchant, by the 1890s one of the largest landowners in central Perth.
- [Daniel Cooper](#) – successful merchant.
- [William Cuffay](#) (convict and tailor) – Black London Chartist leader who became an important workers' rights leader in Hobart.
- [John Davies](#) – co-founded *The Mercury* newspaper.
- [Margaret Dawson](#) – [First Fleeter](#), "founding mother"
- [John Eyre](#) – painter and engraver
- [William Field](#) – notable Tasmanian businessman and landowner
- [Francis Greenway](#) – famous Australian architect
- [William Henry Groom](#) – successful auctioneer and politician, served in the inaugural Australian Parliament.
- [Michael Howe](#) - bushranger, subject of the first work of general literature published in Australia
- [Laurence Hynes Halloran](#) – founded [Sydney Grammar School](#).
- [William Hutchinson](#) – public servant and pastoralist.
- John Irving – doctor transported on First Fleet, was the first convict to receive an absolute pardon.
- [Mark Jeffrey](#) – wrote famous autobiography
- [Jørgen Jørgensen](#) – eccentric Danish adventurer influenced by revolutionary ideas who declared himself ruler of Iceland, later became a spy in Britain.
- [Henry Kable](#) – First Fleet convict, arrived with wife and son (Susannah Holmes, also a convict, and Henry) filed 1st lawsuit in Australia, became wealthy businessman

- [Lawrence Kavenagh](#) – notorious [bushranger](#)
- [John "Red" Kelly](#) – Irish convict and father of bushranger [Ned Kelly](#)
- [Solomon Levey](#) – wealthy merchant, endowed [Sydney Grammar School](#).
- [Simeon Lord](#) – pioneer merchant and magistrate in Australia
- [Nathaniel Lucas](#) – one of the first convicts on [Norfolk Island](#), where he became Master carpenter, later farmed successfully, built windmills, and was Superintendent of carpenters in Sydney.
- [John Mitchel](#) – [Irish nationalist](#)
- [Francis "Frank the Poet" McNamara](#) – composer of various oral convict ballads, including *The Convict's Tour to Hell*



[John Boyle O'Reilly](#)

John Mortlock – former marine

- [Thomas Muir](#) – convicted of sedition for advocating parliamentary reform; escaped from N.S.W and after many vicissitudes made his way to revolutionary France.
- [Isaac Nichols](#) – entrepreneur, first Postmaster
- [Kevin Izod O'Doherty](#) – Medical student, [Young Irelander](#) who was transported for treason.
- [Robert Palin](#) – once in Australia, committed further crimes, and managed to be executed for a non-capital offence
- [Alexander Pearce](#) – cannibal escapee
- [Joseph Potaskie](#) – first [Pole](#) to come to Australia.
- [William Smith O'Brien](#) – famous Irish revolutionary; sent to [Van Diemen's Land](#) in 1849 after leading a rebellion in [Tipperary](#)

- [John Boyle O'Reilly](#) – Famous escapee, poet and writer; author of [Moondyne](#)
- [William Redfern](#) – one of the few surgeon convicts
- [Mary Reibey](#) – businesswoman and shipowner
- [James Ruse](#) – successful farmer
- [Henry Savery](#) – Australia's first novelist; author of [Quintus Servinton](#)
- [Robert Sidaway](#) – opened Australia's first theatre
- [Ikey Solomon](#) – professional thief; inspiration for the character [Fagin](#) in Charles Dickens' novel [Oliver Twist](#)
- [James Squire](#) – English [Romanichal \(Romany\)](#) – First Fleet convict and Australia's first brewer and cultivator of hops.
- Joseph Sullivan – sentenced to fourteen years transportation for stealing, then killed for murdering his master and the other convicts in the area.
- [William Sykes](#) – historically interesting because he left a brief diary and a bundle of letters.
- [John Tawell](#) – served his sentence, became a prosperous chemist, returned to England after 15 years, and after some time murdered a mistress, for which he was hanged.
- [Samuel Terry](#) – wealthy merchant and philanthropist.
- [James Hardy Vaux](#) – author of Australia's first full length autobiography and dictionary.
- [Mary Wade](#) – Youngest female convict transported to Australia (13 years of age) who had 21 children and at the time of her death had over 300 living descendants.
- [William Westwood](#) – bushranger and leader of the 1846 [Cooking Pot Uprising](#)
- [Joseph Wild](#) – explorer
- [Solomon Wiseman](#) – merchant and operated ferry on Hawkesbury River hence town name Wisemans Ferry.