

# AUSTRALIA TASMANIA

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PORT ARTHUR 1830-1877

PORT ARTHUR is located on the Tasmanian Peninsula south of Hobart, Australia. The history of Port Arthur explains not only of the importance of the Port Arthur Settlement in terms of Australian pioneering history, but also it serves as a monument to the existence at an earlier era, of one of the most significant British Imperial prisons ever constructed outside the British Isles.

It is regrettable that in our busy lives we do not take time to read more and reflect on the lessons of history, since human nature has changed very little over the centuries.

Port Arthur is not just a monument to an ambitious but deeply flawed experiment that took place a long time ago. It has lessons for us today as we continue to wrestle with the need for punishment and reform within our criminal justice system.

The English prison reformer it is described as "a machine for grinding rogues honest";

This was the model for Port Arthur. The cogs of this machine were discipline and punishment, religious and moral instruction, classification and separation, training and education.

Port Arthur as a place of correction for offenders falls into several phases. In 1830 it started as a Penal Settlement, for the "incorrigibles"; and then it grew in stature to serve at the leading edge in reformist philosophy.

One pioneering feature was in the segregation of the young boys from adult offenders.

This decision helped to train new and young convicts according to the Tasmania industry needs. Religious, moral instruction and education was considered as important as the training they received to develop their skills to work in the Tasmanian Industry.

Another feature was the construction of the model separate prison. This period is known as a "Period of Shame"; Lunatics and people mentally ill were generated under this system which consisted in keeping them in absolute silence places, where darkness was ensured and diet was about bread and water.

The Model Prison at Port Arthur therefore serves as a tangible reminder in stark terms, as to the power and devastation an unsound theoretical idea can have on society if translated into practice, then allowed to continue unchecked and unquestioned.

It was an ambitious experiment. Its methods seem cruel today. Some men were broken. Some were absorbed into other experiments, the beginnings of the modern welfare system or the modern asylum.

In stark contrast to the convict experience, a community of military men and free officers with wives and families tried to make a normal life. TRANSPORTATION

The first major experiment of using transportation as a means of dealing with persons considered to be "undesirables"; (be the criminals or religious heretics).

Law and order became a major issue in British society, and one way of avoiding the rigors of Capital punishment by an act of mercy (in some cases where the conviction related to comparatively minor breaches such as petty theft) to that banishment — transportation-. For the convicts this sentence was seen as "a fate worse than death";

To the British court the "undesirables";, drawn principally from the starving and unemployed segment of the lower working class the sentence transportation was seen as a brutal form of punishment.

Until 1776 USA was still the major destination for those exiled from Great Britain under the Transportation system. After

the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain by the American States occurred, and a new remote destination to which convicted felons could be sent, had to be found. After 10 years of looking for it Australia was selected as the off shore prison for British felons. FLEETS ARRIVING IN AUSTRALIA

In 1788 the first fleet with convicts arrives at Sydney.

5 years later arrived the first immigrants from Grand Britain.

Later concerns as to the ease of escape to the hinterlands of New South Wales from Sydney town combined with a clear understanding that there were emerging two types of convicts. (Those that were amenable and those that were not), seeded the idea in the minds of the colonial establishment in Australia, that the setting up of secondary type of penal settlement occurs.

It was proposed, that the secondary settlement for the "hard cases" should be more remote and located in inhospitable terrain; so that the "incorrigibles" might not dampen the "social air" and well being of the residents of Sydney Town, so they were routed to Port Arthur.

## EVOLUTION

Increasing numbers of convicts were now to come to Port Arthur from a variety of backgrounds not simply "lifers"; serving long sentences or incorrigible second offenders, but tradesmen, architects, professionals, political activist and a new wave of convicts subsequently referred to in the Justice system, as juvenile offenders.

The industry was more consolidated by this time. With more and more convicts arriving with related skills and surrounded by quantities of raw materials, the humble of boat-repair facility turned into a major ship-building concern where the heaviest ships in Australia were manufactured here.

The convicts also used to work in the mining of coals, which was extracted manually by the convicts.

Agriculture was also flourishing what made the peninsula self sufficient in food.

Clothing and furniture's was also made by the convicts.

A combination of factors occurred and led to the end of Port Arthur as a major industrial base for this colony such as "closed down of the boat building", "the effect of the Victorian Gold Rush which made a mass exodus of ex convicts out of Tasmania". Besides, by 1850 transportation of convicts from England to Tasmania was abolished.