A COMMONWEALTH OF THIEVES:
AUSTRALIA AS CONVICT COLONY

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I. AUSTRALIA’S CONVICT WOMEN
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THE FATAL SHORE

‘An extraordinary, vivid yet authentic account of the birthpangs of a nation. A work of real distinction’ Philip Ziegler
The ruins of the penitentiary at Port Arthur in Tasmania
Transportation As Criminal Punishment

- Its formal origins as a system began with the 1597 “Acte for Punyshment of Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars.”
- From 1618, felons were transported to the Thirteen Colonies.
- An act of 1717 authorized the transportation of minor offenders to 7 years in America and those with commuted death sentences to 14 years.
- In the next six decades, 40,000 would be transported to the Thirteen Colonies.
- The outbreak of the American Revolution ended the flow.
Convicts employed from the hulks on the Thames in 1777
A 1779 Parliamentary committee was set up to determine where transportees might be sent.

Joseph Banks spoke in glowing terms of Botany Bay as a possibility.

The first proposal considered was Leman, an island 400 miles up the Gambia River in West Africa.

The vote went to Das Voltas Bay on the southwest coast of Africa, before surveyors who were sent in 1785 returned with negative judgments about the climate and geography.
Captain Arthur Phillip – The commander of the First Fleet and the first governor of New South Wales
Thomas Rowlandson,

“Convicts Embarking For Botany Bay”
THE FIRST FLEET IN SYDNEY COVE, JANUARY 26, 1788
Death on the convict ship “Justitia” in the 1830s
The First Fleet enters into Port Jackson on January 26, 1788
The Early Years (1789-1815)

- The vast majority of 187,000 convicts who were sent to Australia arrived after 1815.

- The long Anglo-French Wars between 1788 and 1815 delayed a full commitment to transportation as a penal strategy.

- By the end of 1800, only 42 ships had gone to Australia.

- The peace in 1815 would lead to a dramatic increase – the annual outflow rose to 2,000-3,000 in the years after the Congress of Vienna, and then peaked in the 1830s at around 5,000 convicts per year.
A British cartoon mocking the first convict settlers
Australia After The Phillip Years

• When Arthur Phillip returned to England in 1792, the colony temporarily was in the hands of the military officers of the New South Wales Corps.

• The officers redirected the convicts to private farms.

• The economy improved significantly, with many convicts and ex-convicts involved in the new trading activities.
Edward Charles Close’s representation of early Australians (c. 1817)
Governor
Philip King
(1800-1806)

He introduced the ticket-of-leave system to Australia, the forerunner of parole.
An 1872 representation of the Cook expedition landing at Botany Bay
Aboriginal-Settler Relations In New South Wales

• When the First Fleet arrived, there were perhaps 500,000 Aborigines in Australia, though the estimates vary widely.

• The density of local populations was higher on the coast.

• There were perhaps 500 tribes at the time of the European invasion, each linked together by common religion, by language and by an intricate web of family relations.

• Smallpox and other epidemic diseases broke out soon after the British arrived.
The Sydney Opera House is on the site of the old homestead of Bennelong.
Bennelong accompanied Phillip back to England and spent 2 ½ years there. He would die in 1813 a broken man back in Sydney about the age of 50.
Tasmanian Aborigines portrayed in 1827
A notice-board from Governor George Arthur promising equal justice to blacks and whites alike, addressed to Aborigines (c. 1828).
Benjamin Duterrau, “The Conciliation,” (1840)

The artist presents George Augustus Robinson as a benevolent figure.
Robinson would be the key figure in relocating the remaining Tasmanian Aborigines to Flinders Island.
These four Tasmanians photographed in the 1860s were described by whites as the last four remaining.
Queen Trucanini

Last Aboriginal of Tasmania

H. H. Baily

HOBART

1868 YR
The skeleton of Trucanini on display in 1905 in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
Sotheby’s withdrew busts of Trucanini and her husband Woureddy from a scheduled auction in 2009.
Bolters And Bushrangers

• In Australia, it was relatively easy to escape but very difficult to survive.

• In the early years, most of the runaways or “bolters” went inland.

• The fantasy of escape to China was a feature of the first decade or two of transportation.

• The first large group of “Chinese travelers” took off from Rose Hill in November 1791.

• In 1803, 15 Irish made a run for China from Castle Hill.

• In time, the bolters would become transformed into an Australian icon – the Bushranger.
The Incredible Journey Of
MARY BRYANT

Romola Garai  Jack Davenport  Alex O'Loughlin  and  Sam Neill

Crime  Punishment  Redemption  Heroism

The Complete 2-Part Miniseries

DVD
Van Diemen's Land

Hunger is a strange silence

“Compelling and poetic, it takes Australian cinema into new territory”

RICHARD FLANAGAN
The death portrait of Alexander Pearce
The skull of Alexander Pearce in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia
Tasmanian Bushrangers

- It was in Van Diemen’s Land that the legend of the bushranger first began to develop.

- Many Tasmanian bushrangers began as kangaroo hunters who formed gangs in the bush.

- Some settlers had a vested interest in protecting them and supported the rustling of sheep from wealthier farmers.

- Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey responded by proclaiming martial law and hanging executed thieves in chains on a small island off the Hobart docks.
Matthew Brady (1799-1826)
A notorious Van Diemen’s Land Bushranger
Brady’s Lookout in the Western Tiers of today’s Tasmania
A representation of Bushrangers on the Mainland
Mounted police chasing suspected Bushrangers
BOLD JACK DONAHUE

There was a valiant highwayman of courage and renown who scorned to live in slavery or humble to the Crown;
In Dublin city fair and free where first his breath he drew "twas there they christened him the brave and bold Jack Donahue.

CHORUS
Come, all my hearties, we'll range the mountain side; together we will plunder, together we will ride.
We'll scour along the valleys and gallop o'er the plain, we scorn to live in slavery bowed down with iron chains.

He scarce had been transported onto the Australian shore when he took to the highway as he had done before;
And every week in the newspapers was published something new concerning all the valiant deeds of bold Jack Donahue.

CHORUS
At Donahue was cruising one summer afternoon little was his notion that his death would be so soon,
When to his surprise the horse-policeman appeared in his view and in quick time they did advance upon Jack Donahue.

CHORUS
The sergeant of the horse-policeman discharged his carbine and called aloud on Donahue to fight or to resign,
"I'd rather range these hills around like wolf or Kangaroo than work one hour for the government," cried bold Jack Donahue.

CHORUS
Six rounds he fought the horse-policeman with the fatal ball which pierced his heart with cruel smart caused Donahue to fall.
The sergeant and the corporal and all their cowardly crew, it took them all their time to fell the bold Jack Donahue.

CHORUS
There were Freiinc, Grant, bold Robin Hood, & Brennan & O'Hare, with Donahue the bushranger none of them could compare.
And now he's gone to heaven I hope with the saints and angels too, may the Lord have mercy on the soul of bold Jack Donahue.
Jeremy Bentham As A Critic Of Transportation

• Bentham developed his version of the Penitentiary (the Panopticon) just as the plan to send convicts to New South Wales was being adopted.

• In 1802, he would write a pamphlet, “Panopticon Versus New South Wales.”

• He criticized transportation as expensive; as unpredictable in the punishment administered; as corrupted by the profit principle; and as too far removed from central control.
John Thomas Bigge

His 1819 report insisted transportation must become a fate to dread. He advocated drawing much sharper social and economic distinctions between convicts/ex-convicts and free emigrants through such reforms as keeping convicts out of towns; assigning them to hard labor under the more prosperous free emigrants; ending the practice of paying wages to convicts and of giving ex-convicts land at the end of their terms of service; and centralizing record-keeping.
Thomas Bribane
Governor of New South Wales
(1821-1825)
Ralph Darling
Governor of New South Wales (1826-1831)
Reforms Of Governor Darling

• Beginning in 1827, each convict was given an identification number.

• He eliminated convict clerks in sensitive government offices and regularized ticket-of-leave practices.

• The Office of the Principal Superintendent of Convicts was established to process and record all convict matters.

• More oversight was instituted in regards to overseeing masters and refusing convicts to abusive or lax masters.
An early print of Macquarie Harbor, founded as a penal settlement in 1821.
Frenchman’s Cap in Macquarie Harbor
Grummet Island (c. 1824)
Van Diemen’s Land Under Arthur (1824-1836)

- Described by Robert Hughes as a “God-bothering, blue-nosed wowser.”
- He thought of Van Diemen’s Land as a jail and thought any free people who lived there must put up with the inconveniences of a penal society – police, spies, travel passes, trade restrictions and a restricted press.
- He divided Van Diemen’s Land into 9 police districts and gave his magistrates considerable power under his control.
- Convict assignments were heavily regulated.
- By 1830, his Black Books offered Arthur thorough files on all inhabitants, convict and free.
- He established 7 levels of punishment.
SUPPLEMENT.

GOVERNOR GEO. ARTHUR

Is Ordered Home!

LORD GLENELG closes his Despatch as follows:—“I have felt it my duty, to advise his Majesty, that you should be IMMEDIATELY RECALLED; and I have to convey to you, his Majesty’s commands, that, on receipt of this Despatch, you will, with as little delay as possible, repair to this Office.

(“Signed”) GLENELG.

To-morrow ought to be a Day of General Thanksgiving!

For the deliverance from the iron-hand of Governor Arthur. We have now a prospect of breathing. The accursed gang of blood-stickers will be destroyed, Boys will be seen no more upon Police Benches, to insult Respectable Men. Perjury will cease to be countenanced, and a gang of Felons will be no longer permitted to violate the Laws of Civilized Society.

Colonists,

The dismissal of Arthur from the Government of unhappy Tasmania, is a Blessing, that will be felt by the worthy, and be duly appreciated. The Impending Law, which was made to benefit the great Members of Council, will be abolished. The Turkery and Persian Act will meet with the same fate; and the Acts of abomination practised by the brethren, and secret emissaries of the Government, upon the People, will no longer be countenanced.

{Rejoice!}

For the Day of Retribution Has Arrived.
Port Arthur (pictured here in 1854)
Charles O’Hara Booth arrived at Port Arthur in 1833
Eaglehawk Neck as photographed in 1939
Bloodhounds on Eaglehawk Neck
To prevent the escape of convicts
Part of Booth’s signal system at Mt. Nelson
The remains of the coal operations at Port Arthur
The beginnings of the convict tramway at Port Arthur
Point Puer
Places Of Dread In New South Wales

• New South Wales had its own penal settlements, at New Castle, Port Macquarie, Moreton, and Norfolk Island.

• As part of Governor Darling’s reforms, he struggled to make these places more terrible and prison-like to deter convicts from further crime, just as the British government wanted New South Wales to be a fearful place that would help to keep its own population in order.

• He tried to stamp out private enterprise at the settlements.

• He created two categories of convicts and restricted the more desirable jobs to the members of the first class.
Convicts breaking stones during road-building (1826)
Building a road through the Blue Mountains (1833)
Richard Bourke

Governor of New South Wales

(1831-1837)
Newcastle as represented by Joseph Lycett (c. 1818)
A very early print of Port Macquarie (1825)
Captain Patrick Logan

The notorious commandant at Moreton Bay (1826-1830)
CAPTAIN PATRICK LOGAN
COMMANDANT OF
MORETON BAY PENAL SETTLEMENT
1826 — 1830
WHILE EXPLORING THE LOGAN VALLEY,
HE CROSSED THE RIVER (WHICH BEARS
HIS NAME) DUE WEST OF THIS POINT
ON JULY 28, 1828
ON THE 3RD AUGUST 1828, HE WAS THE
FIRST MAN TO CLIMB MT. BARNEY (THE
SOURCE OF THIS RIVER).
ERECTED BY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BEAUDESERT INC. 1991.
Moreton Bay as represented by Henry S. Boucher Bowerman (c. 1835)
South Brisbane from the north shore of Moreton Bay (1868)
The Old Windmill in downtown Brisbane today
A View of Sydney on Norfolk Island.

Norfolk Island, 1805
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL
James Thomas Morisset

PENAL Commandant
of NORFOLK ISLAND
1829 - 1834

Norfolk Island
The ruins of the jail on Norfolk Island
The ruins of the Gallows Gate at Norfolk Island (photographed 1946)
THE
FELL TYRANT,
OR THE
SUFFERING CONVICT,
SHOWING THE HORRID AND DREADFUL SUFFERING OF
THE CONVICTS OF NORFOLK ISLAND, AND MORE-
TON BAY, OUR TWO PENAL SETTLEMENTS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES.
WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,
WILLIAM R——S.

LONDON:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED
BY J. WARD, 167, HIGH HOLBORN,
AND TO BE HAD OF ALL BOOKSELLERS
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.
1836.
(Price Sixpence.)
William Molesworth

An outspoken Parliamentary critic of transportation, he chaired a 1837-38 committee to examine the practice.
Alexander Macanochie

Private secretary to Governor John Franklin and Australian penal reformer
Maconochie's Gentlemen

The Story of Norfolk Island and the Roots of Modern Prison Reform

Norval Morris
A Norfolk Island work gang pictured three years after Maconochie’s departure in 1844
The principles of punishment: on which the mark system of prison discipline is advocated.

Alexander Maconochie
The Final Days

• The last convict transport in New South Wales dropped its 269 male passengers at Sydney Cove on November 18, 1840.

• In the 1840s, all transported convicts went to Van Diemen’s Land.

• 26,000 convicts arrived in Van Diemen’s Land between 1841 and 1850.

• A vocal anti-transportation lobby in New South Wales resisted the reopening of that land to convicts.

• Transportation to Van Diemen’s Land was abandoned in 1852.
Convict
John
Fitzpatrick
Photographed
at Port Arthur
in 1874
An elderly Tasmanian convict as curiosity.
A 1940s-era Melbourne billboard advertising an audio edition of Clarke’s *His Natural Life*
Clarke’s novel features the double suicides of the Point Puer boys Tommy and Billy.
The officers’ quarters and guard centre at Fremantle (1859)
The French And Transportation

• Just as the British were abandoning transportation, the French started it.

• Emperor Louis-Napoleon supported the sending of convicts to Guyana beginning in 1852 and to New Caledonia from 1865.

• Neither of these French colonies prospered in anything like the way that New South Wales had.
Leaving the ships at Sydney Harbor
The execution of Charles Maher, Thursday April 11 I well remember the date. Began the most stormy weather on record here. The casque was partly destroyed. The flogging of Charles Maher almost through about a mutiny. His back was quite bare of skin and flesh. Poor wretch he received 250 lashes and upon receiving 200 he faintly refused to count meaning thereby that his punishment was enough.
The Transportees To Australia

• Eight in ten were thieves.
• Most were urban dwellers rather than yeoman peasants.
• The average age was 26.
• After 1815, transportation was reserved for less trivial crimes.
• Seven in ten came from England; one in five from Ireland.
• Men outnumbered women six-to-one.
The Martyrs Monument in Edinburgh commemorates the exiles shipped to Australia in 1794.
Thomas Muir

The most prominent of the “Scottish Martyrs” of 1794
A cartoon associated with the 1798 Irish rebellion and consequent mass deportation to Australia.
The Castle Hill Uprising of 1804 was one of a very few significant convict rebellions in the history of colonial Australia
Other Political Exiles

- The Luddites of 1812-1813; food rioters from East Anglia in 1816; radical weavers from Scotland in 1820 and from Yorkshire in 1821; Swing rioters and machine-breakers in the early 1830s; the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834; more than 100 Chartists between 1839 and 1848.

- Political activists from the colonies were also sent to Australia.

- From 1828 to 1838, the Supreme Court at the Cape transported 30-40 South African political activists annually.

- In 1838, 153 Canadians who had been involved in the rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada were transported.
BLACK-EYED SUE, and SWEET POLL of PLYMOUTH,
Taking leave of their lovers who are going to Botany Bay.

Published 22 June 1793 by Robt. Sayer & C, Fleet Street, London.
Perhaps the most influential of the churchmen who attempted to combat perceived immorality in New South Wales
The Female Factory at Parramatta in 1826