



A British Penal Colony

The arrival of the British in Australia.



The Arrival of the British at Botany Bay

When Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet arrived at Botany Bay, they realised it was not how Joseph Banks had described it. They soon became faced with many problems. Some of these problems were:

- an unprotected bay with shallow water where ships were unable to anchor
- poor soil that was not suitable for growing crops
- a lack of fresh water
- strong trees that broke tools when trying to clear the land
- rainstorms that caused huts to collapse.



Searching for a More Suitable Location

As Botany Bay was not a suitable location to establish a colony, Phillip and some other officers left Botany Bay in three small boats to find a more suitable location.

Eventually, Arthur Phillip and his men discovered Port Jackson, about 12 km north of Botany Bay. Here they found:

- a secure harbour with deep water
- plenty of shelter
- small streams of fresh water
- fertile soil.



The Beginning of the First British Settlement

- On January 26, 1788, a site was selected to establish the first British settlement in Australia. Phillip named this location 'Sydney Cove' after Lord Sydney, the British Home Secretary. As a sign to other people that formal possession had been taken, Phillip planted a British flag in the soil.
- January 26, is the day to reflect on what it means to be Australian, to celebrate contemporary Australia and to acknowledge our history.



First Contact with the Local People

- The local Cadigal people of the Botany Bay area witnessed the First Fleet arrive. However; it was not until the British invaded Sydney Cove that they made contact with the Aboriginal people.
- The first contact between the British and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was with the Eora people and the Bidjigal clan. They expressed curiosity and suspicion towards the British.
- Although Arthur Phillip ordered that the first inhabitants be treated well by the British, it was not long before conflict was encountered. The Aboriginal people did not understand the British practices of farming and land ownership; the British did not understand Aboriginal society and their relationship with the land.



Bennelong and Pemulwuy

- Bennelong and Pemulwuy were Aboriginal men of the Eora people, living in the Port Jackson area when the First Fleet arrived in Australia in 1788.
- In 1789, Bennelong was taken by British soldiers and kept as a prisoner in the governor's house. He wore European clothes, ate European food, learned how to speak English and became a friend of Arthur Phillip. Soon, he escaped and returned to his clan. While visiting Bennelong, Phillip was speared. Concerned for Phillip's health, Bennelong returned to the settlement. In 1790, Phillip built Bennelong a home on the edge of the harbour, now known as Bennelong Point.
- Pemulwuy was not as friendly towards the settlers as Bennelong. He showed great resistance and, in 1790, he led some of his people in a series of attacks against the invaders. This eventually turned into a twelve-year guerrilla war, ending with Pemulwuy's death at the hands of a British sailor in 1802.



British Arrival

As a class, break into two groups. One group must take on the role of Arthur Phillip and his men on board the *Supply*. The other group must take on the role of the Bidjigal clan of the Eora people.

From the perspective of each group, role play the arrival of the First Fleet into Sydney Cove.



British Arrival - Independent Activity

When the British arrived into Sydney Cove, the Aboriginal people and the convicts had many questions about what might happen next.

Use the [Thinking Through the Alphabet Worksheet](#) to make a list of questions that the Aboriginal people or convicts might have had on the day of January 26, 1788.



The Life of a Convict in Australia

WORK

Arthur Philip created a labour system which assigned employment according to skills. Some of these included brick maker, carpenter, nurse, servant, cattleman, shepherd or farmer. Well educated convicts were used for record keeping and administration work. The colony's infrastructure, such as roads, courthouses and hospitals, was built by convict labour.

CONDITIONS

Convicts worked up to 18 hours a day attached to leg-irons. At night, they were either locked up behind stockades or lived in barracks.

PUNISHMENT

Discipline was harsh. If punished, convicts were either whipped with a cat o' nine tails, given lashes or sent to a more distant penal colony.

FOOD

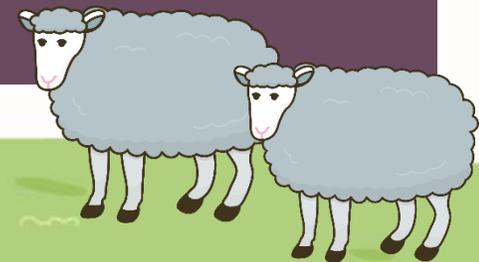
Each week, convicts were given 3 kg of beef, 1.3 kg of maize and 0.9 kg of sugar.

CLOTHING

The government handed out clothes to the convicts which they called 'slops'. When more free settlers arrived, a convict uniform was created. They wore a woollen jacket, a yellow and grey waistcoat, a pair of trousers with long socks, a linen shirt, a neckerchief and a leather hat.

TICKET OF LEAVE

If they showed good behaviour, convicts were able to apply for a Ticket of Leave or a Certificate of Freedom. This gave them the opportunity to live independently and earn their own money.



Profile of a Convict

As a class, use the information from the excerpt below about the convict, Robert Bails. Create a profile identification card for him on the following page.

He was tried at Reading, Berkshire on 28 February 1785 for assault and highway robbery with a value of 2 shillings. He was sentenced to transportation for 14 years having been originally sentenced to death, and left England on the *Alexander* aged about 21 at that time (May 1787). His occupation was listed as labourer and former soldier. Described as “near six feet high, wears his own lank hair, pitted with the smallpox, thick lips and stout made”, he had been a soldier. In October 1788 he received 25 lashes for insolence. In 1806 he was listed as a schoolmaster.

Source: [First Fleet Database, University of Wollongong.](#)



Robert Bails Identification Card

Name:

Year of Birth:

Date and Place of Conviction:

Sentence:

Ship:

Crime:

Other Interesting Facts:



Robert Bails Identification Card - Answers

Name: Robert Bails

Year of Birth: 1766

Date and Place of Conviction: 1785 in Reading, Berkshire

Sentence: 14 years transportation

Ship: *Alexander*

Crime: Assault and highway robbery.

Other Interesting Facts: Robert was originally sentenced to death. His punishment was changed to 14 years transportation. In 1806, he became a schoolmaster.



Profile of a Convict - Independent Activity

Use the [First Fleet Data Base from the University of Wollongong](#) to research your own convict, then create a [Convict Identification Card](#).

Remember to include:

- an illustration of what you think your convict might have looked like
- name and date of birth
- date and place of conviction
- sentence
- ship
- crime
- other interesting facts.



Early Struggles in the New Colony

The early colonists were confronted with some of the following problems...

Shelter

The colonists had limited building materials and tools to construct buildings and houses. The tools they were provided with by the government, were bad quality and soon were blunt or broken.



Food

Very few convicts or colonists knew how to farm and failed to manage the land effectively. The settlers struggled with the hot, dry conditions and were unable to grow crops or keep cattle. Everyone, from the convicts to Captain Phillip, were on rationed food.



Discipline

The colonial forces were plagued by problems of discipline, a lack of purpose, poor training and minimal command and control.



Supplies

Basics supplies like clothing were in short supply and by the time the Second Fleet arrived, convicts and marines were dressed in raggedy, threadbare clothing.



Isolation

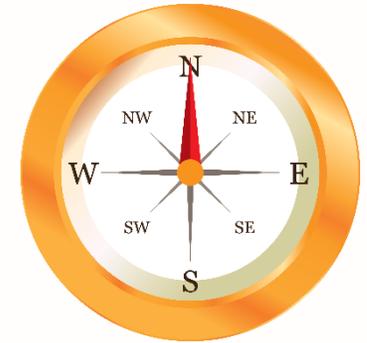
The new colony at Sydney Cove was very isolated. It could take up to 18 months to get news to Britain and back.



Early Expansion of the Colony

Although there were signs of early struggles in the new colony, the Governor of New South Wales fought through these struggles and began looking at other places to expand the colony. The early expansion included new establishments, including:

- a farm on Norfolk Island to provide crops
- the town of Parramatta, west of Sydney, in 1790
- the town of Windsor, north-west of Sydney on the Hawkesbury River, in 1789
- a crop farm in Rose Hill, close to Parramatta, in 1792.



An Expanding Colony

As a class, discuss why expansion of the colony was a priority during a time of struggle.

Discuss the effects this expansion might have had on Australia and its people.



An Expanding Colony - Independent Activity

Many struggles in the new colony came about due to the Europeans not having an understanding and connection with the land. As they expanded the colony, the new settlers adopted similar cultures to those in England. At times, these did not work in Australia.

In small groups, suggest how the colonists could have worked with the first inhabitants to eliminate struggles and expand the colony with greater success.



Forced Change

Before the British arrived in Australia, Indigenous Australians had a well established and stable economic, social and spiritual lifestyle. With the introduction of a new colony, the Indigenous Australians' way of life was forced to change as it had come under threat.

The invaders began claiming the land and clearing it for farms, towns and roads. Not understanding each others' way of life, clashes soon occurred between the two cultures. Some Indigenous Australians began taking tools and cattle from the farms for their own use. In response, the colonialists tried to stop them with the use of weapons.



Lifestyle Changes

Often Indigenous Australians began working in the new settlements and on the farms. They were usually paid in flour, tea, sugar and tobacco. Newly introduced to these unhealthy foods, and without a balanced and natural diet, along with diseases brought to Australia by the colonialists, many Indigenous Australians became very sick.

Prior to the invasion of Europeans, alcohol consumption amongst Indigenous Australians was strictly controlled amongst elders. The opening of pubs and introduction of storage vessels for alcohol led to trading of alcohol amongst Indigenous Australians which led to disastrous results.



Native Protection Acts

As the colony grew, the number of Indigenous Australians began to decline. In the 1880s - almost 100 years after the First Fleet - Native Protection Acts were introduced. These policies caused widespread displacement and many lives suffered due to disease, dispossession and regular racially motivated attacks. Curfews were imposed on Indigenous Australians and many were forced to live and work on designated reserves or missions.

The Native Protection Acts are now widely recognised as being a massive failure and were largely repealed in the 1960s and 1970s. Their legacy lives on today as a black mark in Australian history.



The Impact on Indigenous Australians

As a result of colonisation, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia were faced with the following issues:

- disease
- dispossession
- conflict
- loss of native resources
- loss of cultural identity.

As a class, discuss what might have caused each of these impacts.



The Impact on Indigenous Australians - Independent Activity

In small groups, use the [*Impact of Colonisation on Indigenous Australians Posters*](#) to create expert groups for each impact. In your groups:

- study the impact
- make a poster with the main points
- report your findings back to the class.

