

CONVICTS COME TO TOWN

HASS, English

How did convicts shape the story of Toodyay?

Students will:

- Discuss incarceration and consider work obligations of prisoners.
- Understand the reasons for arrival of convicts, the different types of convicts and their contribution to the development of Toodyay.
- Read and reflect on information texts, and use them to create texts of a different genre.

ENGAGE

Show students convict leg irons.

- What is this object?
- Is it new or old? How can you tell?
- What sort of person might have used this and why?



EXPLORE

Discuss:

- Why do people go to prison?
- What do you think prisoners do while in prison?
- What costs might be associated with keeping people in prison?
- Which do you think is better, and why: prisoners are forced to carry out some sort of work for the community or prisoners are forced to stay in their cells (with no work or entertainment) and reflect on their crimes?
- What sort of work do you think prisoners could/should do?
- Do you think some prisoners should be allowed/made to work for the community, outside of prison cells?
- What might/should happen to prisoners when they leave jail?
- How would you feel about having a large proportion of prisoners or ex-prisoners working and living in your community?

EXPLAIN

- The first European arrivals to WA were free settlers, not convicts. However, severe labour shortages led to the Colony being declared as a penal settlement in 1849. Between 1850 and 1868 about 9,720 convicts were sent from England to WA on 40 transport ships.
- Discuss different types of convicts:
 - *Convicts*. Newly arrived convicts were usually held under close supervision, their behaviour recorded. Suitably behaved men could be sent out to labour under guard on public works.
 - *Ticket-of-leave holders* were well behaved convicts who could work for wages. They were sent to a hiring depot – such as one which was established in Toodyay in 1851 – to find employment in the surrounding district. Ticket-of-leave holders were not allowed to leave the area without special permission and had to report regularly to the local magistrate. However, they had some control about whom they worked for and did receive a small wage.
 - *Conditional Pardon*. Men who had received their conditional pardon were those who demonstrated further good behaviour. They were given their freedom, but could not return to England.
 - *Expirees* were men who had served out the full term of their sentence.
- In the early years, the convicts sent to WA had committed less serious crimes. Some received their ticket-of-leave upon arrival in the colony. Over time, the British penal system was gradually being reformed and it began to deal with more of its minor offenders at home. As a result, a higher proportion of serious offenders were sent to WA. The number of convicts arriving in WA increased.

- One of the first tasks for the ticket-of-leave holders who came to Toodyay was the building of the Toodyay Convict Depot which also included accommodation for the guards and their families. The depot was initially located in what is now West Toodyay, but was soon moved to a larger site upstream where the township of Toodyay is today. Afterwards, ticket-of-leave holders took on whatever tasks were required by the settlers. In contrast, the convicts, who required supervision, were mainly employed on roads and bridges, and erecting buildings.
- Most ticket-of-leave holders had to settle for seasonal farming or unskilled work and led a nomadic life on the fringes of respectable society. Very few were re-united with their families in Britain. Around 90% remained single for the rest of their lives.
- Look at some examples of convict stories using the images included in this resource, and also by going online to view the [Toodyay convict profiles](#) on the Shire of Toodyay website.

EXTEND

Read one or more of the [convict information sheets on the Shire of Toodyay website](#) and complete the following activities:

- *First Ticket of Leave men at the Toodyay Convict Depot*: [Create a comic](#) which is either directly based on, or inspired by this text.
- *The MacPherson Murders*: Turn this text into a [newspaper article](#). You can show students an example of the [1889 newspaper article about the murders](#).
- *The Cooper Brothers*: Prepare a dramatic role play based on this text. Consider the different ways you could dramatise the text, eg. Present it as a news report, as if it was a tale told by someone by a campfire, as a 'real time' action play, as if told from the perspective of one of the brothers, as a ghost story etc.

EVALUATE AND REFLECT

To what extent is it true to say that 'once a person is bad, they are always bad'?

WANT TO DO MORE?

Create a Snakes and Ladders or a Monopoly style game with a convict theme. What events might move you up or down the board?



Shire of Toodyay local history collection 2001.645

Two examples of buildings built by convicts



Newcastle Gaol 1864 - 1909, held convicts, ticket-of-leave holders and other civil offenders.

Margie Eberle



Warders' Quarters, c. 1930. The building was part of the Toodyay Convict Hiring Depot but is now demolished.

Shire of Toodyay local history collection 2001.1199



Remains of a retaining wall, made out of stones shaped and carried by convicts. Possibly these were part of the Toodyay-Guildford Road out-station

Shire of Toodyay local history collection 2001-1528



John Acton Wroth

Shire of Toodyay local history collection 2001.1289Z

CONVICT STORY 1

John Acton Wroth was transported to WA in 1851 for forgery. He was 20 years old and educated. Wroth was sent to the York Convict Hiring Depot to work as a clerk.

In 1853 he received his conditional pardon. The following year, he moved to Toodyay where he was appointed as a clerk of courts.

To supplement his income, Wroth took on extra work as a postmaster and a teacher. He became a highly regarded member of the Toodyay community.

CONVICT STORY 2



Heart leaf poison bush (*gastrolobium grandiflorum*)
Wikimedia Commons, Mark Marathon

William Sykes was transported to WA in 1867 for manslaughter. He spent time in Bunbury, working on roads and arrived to Newcastle (now Toodyay) around 1875.

After he gained his Ticket of Leave he worked as a servant to the local Medical Officer, then undertook labouring jobs in the district. These jobs included woodcutting, fencing, well sinking and ‘grubbing’ – pulling out weeds, including the native pea plants (pictured) which were poisonous to livestock. The latter years of his life were spent working on the railway line.

Sykes was often fined for drunkenness.



Connor's Mill
Margie Eberle

CONVICT STORY 3

Daniel Connor was sentenced to seven years and transportation for sheep stealing. He arrived in WA in 1853 and obtained his Ticket of Leave the following year.

He was very entrepreneurial, and worked as a hawker (selling sewing equipment and other small articles) and a stock dealer. He made enough money to open up a store, and began acquiring other property, both in Perth (eg. The Shamrock Hotel) and around Toodyay (eg. the Freemason's Hotel). He also owned Connor's Mill, which now stands as Connor's Mill Museum.

He became not only wealthy, but also influential. He was a member of the Toodyay Board of Education and the Toodyay Road Board.

The priest conducting his funeral reportedly said “Be to his faults a trifle blind and to his virtues ever kind”.