

## PAINTING CONVICT HISTORY

HASS, The Arts

What was the Convict Hiring Depot, and what do we know about people who lived there?

Students will:

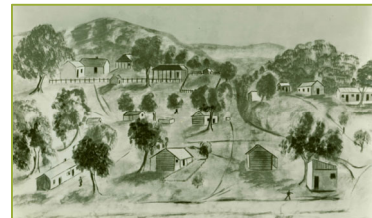
- Examine a painting and consider its value as a source of information about the past.
- Understand that places, and the use of places, changes.
- Appreciate the contribution of the Pensioner Guards and other military personnel to the development of Toodyay.
- Develop a sense of empathy for artists from the past by drawing in the outdoors.

### ENGAGE

Show students the picture of Toodyay Convict Hiring Depot.

- What natural features can you see?
- What built features can you see?
- What do you think the buildings were used for?
- Why do you think this was painted?

Explain that the picture was most likely painted in 1854 by a soldier in charge of building the Toodyay Convict Hiring Depot, Lt. Edmund du Cane.



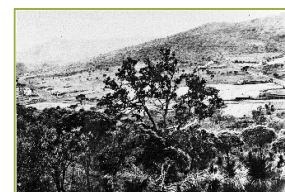
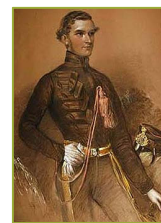
### EXPLORE

Read the *First Ticket of Leave men at the Toodyay Convict Depot* fact sheet on the [Shire of Toodyay website](#). Use the dates mentioned in the fact sheet to [create a timeline](#).

- What are some things that the convicts might have been thinking about, or been worried about, during the timespan of your timeline?
- What are some things that the people guarding the convicts might have been thinking about, or been worried about?
- Is the picture we looked at the first Convict Depot (in West Toodyay) or the second, relocated Convict Depot?

### EXPLAIN

- The Convict Depot was the place from which convicts could be hired out to do work for local settlers. It comprised accommodation, offices, stables, a storeroom, carpentry and blacksmith shops – all of which were built by the convicts.
- Du Cane's picture is of the second Convict Depot, the central area of which was situated where the present day Shire of Toodyay offices are (the first Depot was in what is now West Toodyay). The Depot no longer exists. The building in the top right hand corner of the picture was the Warder's Quarters, and the building at the top left was the commissariat, or store (show pictures).
- During most of the transportation era, the convict system was managed by staff from the Corps of Royal Engineers – a division of the British Army which provided military expertise (for things like breaching fortifications, building bridges, repairing roads etc). These soldiers were 'Sappers and Miners', and had added training such as bricklaying, carpentry and blacksmithing. These skills make them the perfect candidates for supervising convicts and their labour. These soldiers were not settlers – they were sent to the Colony as an assignment.
- Edmund du Cane was one of those Sappers. He was in charge of setting up the Convict Hiring Depots in Guilford, York and Toodyay, as well as for



organising the road works in the district. Later, he took on the role of Visiting Magistrate. He was recalled back to Britain early in 1856 and went on to have a successful career in prison administration.

- Another group of people who guarded convicts were Pensioner Guards. These were soldiers who retired from active war duty in Britain and overseas. After serving as convicts guards or undertaking other general peacekeeping duties in the Colony, they were eligible for a free land grant.
- Pensioner Guards and their families were willing settlers. The Pensioner Village of allotments and houses remained after the Depot closed in 1872, and became the nucleus of a new community of Newcastle (renamed Toodyay in 1910).
- After its final closure in 1872, the Toodyay Convict Depot buildings were adapted for other purposes. Many came to be occupied by the Police, who took over the supervision of remaining Ticket of Leave men and other convicts. Others became a hospital, a school, a courtroom and a magistrate's office.
- Remnants of some Pensioners' houses can still be seen today – show students a photo of Hackett's Cottage.



#### EXTEND

Use Google Maps to find the Shire of Toodyay offices. What other buildings are in the area today?

Put yourself in the shoes of the painter, and have a go at sketching and/or water painting outside. You can try to capture a scene from around the school, or go on an excursion to draw the town streets and buildings. Students can take a photo of the scene they are drawing, too. Discuss:

- What were some challenges you faced while creating the artwork?
- How does the photograph of your scene compare to your drawing/ painting?
- Are there any advantages of drawing instead of taking a photo?
- How could we take care of this artwork to ensure it survives for a long time into the future?

Give your drawings a title and a descriptive label, then curate your own art exhibition.

#### EVALUATE AND REFLECT

- How important and useful are drawings or paintings as historical sources?
- Why do people knock down old buildings? Should we knock them down and build new ones that need less maintenance, or restore and keep them?
- What might have attracted retired military men to leave England and settle in the Avon Valley during the difficult Colonial period?

#### WANT TO DO MORE?

Use [Toodaypedia](#) to conduct research into old buildings around Toodyay.



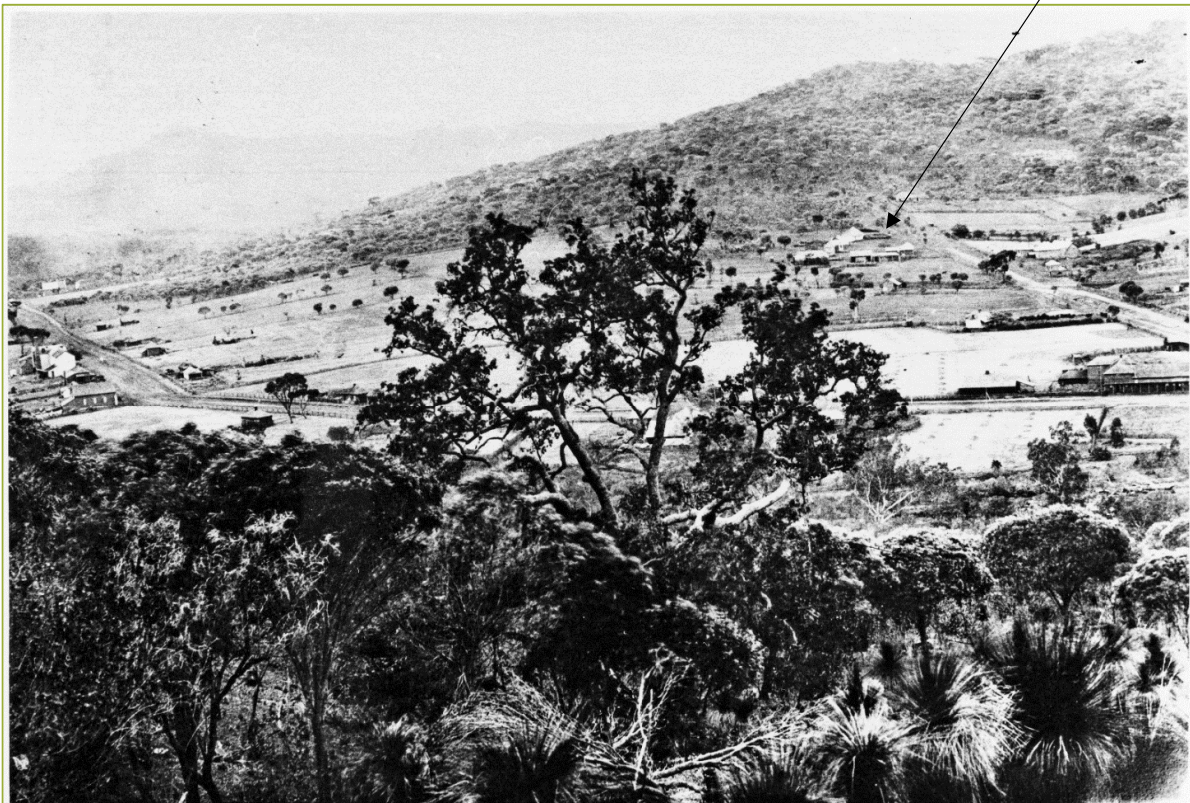
Toodyay Convict Hiring Depot, 1854. Probably painted by Lt. Edmund Du Cane.

Royal Western Australian Historical Society



Edmund Du Cane  
Royal Sappers and Miners in Western Australia

Commissariat area, Convict Hiring Depot.



Newcastle (now Toodyay) in the 1880s.  
State Library of Western Australia collection 5002B\_22



Warders' Quarters, c. 1930. The building was part of the Convict Hiring Depot but is now demolished.  
[Shire of Toodyay local history collection 2001.1199](#)



Cottage built for pensioner guard Owen Hackett. It originally had two rooms with a shingle roof that is still intact under the newer corrugated iron roofing.

[Kimba SOT, Wikimedia Commons](#)