

Convict archaeology in New South Wales: An overview of the investigation, analysis and conservation of convict heritage sites

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New South Wales was a convict society for fully half its first century. Its archaeology reflects the evolution of penal systems and the practices of convictism. The archaeology also shows that convicts were closely integrated into the structure of society and were critical to its economic performance and social composition. Archaeological investigation in the areas of convict life, penal institutions and convict landscapes have focussed on selected parts of the whole and provide a partial view of the entire spectrum of convict life experience. This paper reviews the work carried out to date in New South Wales and notes areas that have received relatively little attention but which have the prospect of providing useful information in understanding convict society.

INTRODUCTION

New South Wales was a major destination for the transportation of British convicts from 1788 to the end of the 1830s. Convicts and ex-convicts formed a significant proportion of the population until immigration resulting from the gold rushes began to have a demographic impact in the late 1850s. In practical terms, as much as through government policy, the colony was established and maintained through convict labour in its first fifty years. Therefore, limiting our focus to places of punishment and convict-built public works as is often done, grossly misrepresents the convict legacy in New South Wales and the potential for archaeological investigation.

This overview places what we know about the archaeology of the convict period into a structure that emphasises the gaps that still remain. Filling these is critical to gaining an understanding about convict society and the foundation of modern Australia. The paper covers the period from 1788 to 1840, when transportation effectively ceased. As the modern boundaries of New South Wales have been reduced since the convict period, a number of sites are excluded in this study. This paper will not discuss the two penal settlements on Norfolk Island, which were nonetheless an integral part of the New South Wales penal system, and which have generated a substantial archaeological literature of their own; nor will it cover the outlying Moreton Bay penal colony, which is now within Queensland (Fig. 1). The range of convict heritage to be included has to be broader than convict huts, prisons and public works. As the assignment and work-gang system spread them across the colony, convicts were integrated closely with urban and rural industry and landscapes. Generally the male domain was in manual outdoors work ranging from skilled to unskilled, and women were predominantly employed in domestic situations; although these roles were never rigid. Given this situation, almost any site from the period will be a convict site, through their involvement in its construction or use.

There are three aspects of convict archaeology that I want to discuss in this paper. The first is the convict experience itself. There is a good historical understanding of the processes by which men and women became convicts, who they were and what happened to them once they were sent out to New South Wales. The diversity of origins and destinies is apparent. Much work has been carried out on the demography of the convicts and what their county, class and trade backgrounds were and the nature of the crimes they committed. Similarly a lot of information is available on what happened to them following transportation and after the serving of their sentence.

This information includes major cross-sectional studies of transported convicts as well as individual biographies (e.g. Robson 1965; Shaw 1966; Robinson 1988; *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vols 1–6).

The living conditions of convicts have been explored in site-specific studies and backed up by documentary research. Archaeology has considerably extended our picture of the detail of convict life throughout the period under review. It has provided significant raw material for understanding consumption power, the structure of households, the place of convicts relative to other sectors of society and the patterns of daily life (see for example Higginbotham 1987; Karskens 1999, in press; Connah 2001).

The second studied aspect of convict society has been the archaeology of punishment and penal institutions. The infrastructure of a convict state included, at different times, prisons, work houses, stockades, penitentiaries of a variety of designs and barracks, all reflecting changing philosophies of punishment and social planning. These have generally been a focus for attention and individually and collectively recorded and studied in great detail by heritage practitioners such as James Kerr. Included in this broad category are the various work and trade establishments that were a major user of convict labour.

The third aspect, which has been the least studied by archaeologists, is that of the nature of convict society—not just convicts within a social system, but a society which is underpinned both socially and economically by a reliance upon convict transportation and the availability of this labour source. Economic historians have put the transportation of convicts to penal settlements within a global pattern of forced migration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g. Duffield and Bradley 1997). This framework has not been adopted by Australian archaeologists to any extent but represents a potentially important basis for comparative analysis and interpretation.

Explaining convict society to modern society is a difficult task, made harder by the continued loss of a tangible heritage, and the complexity of the subject matter. The paper examines some of the issues relevant to the interpretation of convict heritage to the modern public. In particular there is a disjunction between how archaeologists value the archaeology, and society's own estimation of that heritage. This includes a strong social desire to create a heritage in the absence of a real past, a process that leaves archaeologists potentially cast as villains or supporters of destruction. Archaeologists in the past have not been able to direct public enthusiasm towards wholesale conservation of convict heritage, leaving the potential resource already depleted.

Places mentioned in the text

1. Moreton Bay
2. Port Macquarie / Lake Innes
3. Australian Agricultural Co.
4. Newcastle
5. Tocal
6. Wisemans Ferry
7. Wellington
8. Bathurst
9. Hartley
10. Strathallen

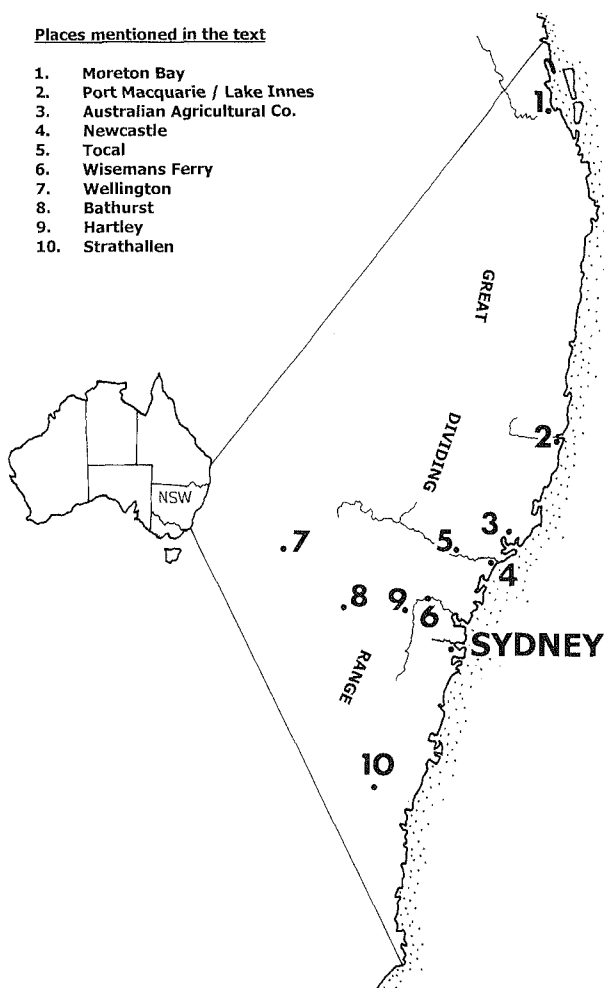


Figure 1. Locations mentioned in the text.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES CONVICT SYSTEM

The New South Wales convict system changed a number of times in the 50 or so years of its operation. There are a number of excellent overviews that can be referred to for a detailed understanding of the nature of the system, its political, social and economic objectives, and the numbers of people involved (e.g. Robson 1965; Hirst 1983; Hughes 1987; Bogle 1999).

The constant core of the convict system in New South Wales was that convicts were tried for crimes in Great Britain and transported to the colony for a set term. The deprivation of their liberty and the uncertain future on the other side of the planet was the intended punishment, although the evident good fortune enjoyed by many convicts made this less of a threat. Because confinement was never a dominant method of control, the convict system was much broader than a penal system. A range of schemes operated to place incoming convicts with employers of their labour, including the government as a major user of skilled and unskilled tradesmen. A convict could gain his or her freedom by completing their sentence, being pardoned or receiving a ticket-of-leave which was a form of parole that allowed limited civil rights and freedoms. From Macquarie (who governed from 1809 to 1821) onward, various governors either encouraged or discouraged the inclusion of former convicts in the operation of government and society. This was closely tied to an individual governor's sympathy with the competing ideologies of conservatism and liberalism and the legitimacy of new money versus old (Roe 1965). Neither

stance was able to hinder the increasing economic power of ex-convicts who invested in the economy and became as successful as their social enemies.

For those who committed further crimes while they were convicts, there were sentences ranging from fines and floggings to imprisonment in places of secondary punishment or with hard labour in road gangs. These included penal stations at various locations such as Wellington and Norfolk Island. Most of our popular images about convicts relate back to the secondary punishment system, not the more humdrum lives led by the majority of convicts.

Information about convicts comes from a range of documentary sources, which have been exploited by historians and genealogists, to provide both individual detail and overall characterisation of convict communities in New South Wales (e.g. Butlin et al. 1987; Oxley 1996).

CONVICT LIFESTYLES

There has been an emphasis on the material culture of urban convicts in the first half of the transportation period, with considerably less attention being paid to later periods and other contexts. Key sites for studying convict life are in The Rocks in central Sydney. Both the Cumberland Street and Lilyvale sites provided detailed archaeological evidence, well supported by documentary evidence (Thorp 1994; Godden Mackay Logan 1999). Prior to the establishment of barracks to manage their large numbers, convicts were placed more generally in the community, further blurring the distinction between convict and free. Karskens' work provides a strong contextual base for understanding how convicts lived in this period (Karskens 1997, 1999). While there is a great richness in Karskens' descriptions and the excavation team's analyses of the convict and ex-convict material culture, what is perhaps missing is a strong comparison to what was happening in the middling and upper classes at the same time. Also significant is that the post-1788 period is almost unreported archaeologically in Britain, although Pearce (2000) has recently published a significant clearance assemblage and reviewed other similar assemblages from this period. The lack of comparative material prohibits us from establishing whether the archaeological evidence of convict and ex-convict lifestyles found at The Rocks is, as Karskens argues, qualitatively different in patterns of consumption and quality of life from the British urban norm or even from the emerging middle class in Australia. Karskens notes that meat, a rarity in the British lower-class diet, was common, and that possession of selected items of quality tableware (ceramic not glass) was characteristic of the Rocks occupants (Karskens in press). The patterns however do not tell us whether we are looking at a culture that was in any way distinctly convict, reflected class, status or wealth based on differential access to goods and economic power, or merely reflected different things in the shops. It is a significant question and one that requires much further detailed attention and quantification.

Analysing the convict material world calls into question the issue of social structure. Were the convicts a class within society, a caste, status group or something else? The distinction is important in trying to understand how the relations between convicts and other parts of society may mirror those of other societies, such as North American slave-based economies (Orser 1988). That it has not been discussed at all by Australian archaeologists reflects their general discomfort with matters of theory. At its simplest the question needs asking to put meaning to any observed similarities or differences in material assemblages. The apparent ability to purchase high-quality and costly goods means that demarcation of convicts from the rest of society could not be done by possessions alone, and prompts further enquiry into

how segments of the community marked themselves.

Other excavations provide some evidence of changing responses to wealth on some convict and ex-convict sites. The house of an ex-convict at the Pitt Street School of Arts site in central Sydney for example shows progressive improvement in the house and lot, paralleling and perhaps indicating the gradual rise in the family's status and personal fortunes through time (Mider 1999). Even the recovery of artefacts from convict hut sites indicates that, as far as the material evidence can be pushed, the urban convicts were not being punished by an impoverished lifestyle (Higginbotham 1987, 1989, 1993). Nonetheless this is a predominantly urban view, and the experience of rural assigned convict workers in all periods was very different.

There has been little work done on the archaeology of assigned convicts in rural New South Wales, despite their numbers and economic importance (Connah [1997, 2001] being the main exception). Accounts written by convicts generally portray a life of hardship and often boredom and isolation, one typical example being of shepherds on the extensive unfenced runs:

...beguiling their time in making straw hats, which they sell to the neighbouring inhabitants, and thence derive some comfort, whilst others drowned and torpidified by such a condition, pass their days in a brutal apathy, and drag on a wretched existence in rags and misery'. (Lhotsky in Andrews 1979: 115–116)

The control of masters over assignees was more absolute in the absence of external authority and more idiosyncratic, leading to organised rebellion against individual landowners (McCabe 1999).

General artefact studies provide some insight into the economic life of convicts as part of a gradually industrialising society, both as consumers and producers of commodities (e.g. utilitarian earthenwares [Casey 1999], clay tobacco pipes [Gojak & Stuart 1999] and bricks [Gibbons 1980]). Again, these are largely dominated by the much better documented urban experience. Accounts of convict life in the bush such as Joseph Mason's (Kent & Townsend 1996) make it clear that there was often minimal provision for furnishing the convicts' surroundings or equipping them with necessities or consumables:

...[T]he furniture or rather utensils consists of an Iron pot and Frying pan for general use with an axe to cut wood and a quart tin to each Individual to boil tea in and sometimes a pint pannican [*sic*] to drink it out of. A peice [*sic*] of coarse stuff which they call Ossenburgh is served out to each man who is a prisoner for a bed tick which he has to sew up himself and stuff with straw... (Kent & Townsend 1996: 43–44)

Many items would have been fashioned from scratch, and replaced with consumer durables as opportunity arose, often only once the largesse of employers was exercised.

There are no New South Wales counterparts to Casella's work on the Tasmanian female factories and the internal structure of convict life in confinement. Casella identified objects that had been exchanged and valued differently to those outside the factory', and also recovered evidence of active resistance being shown through acts of vandalism and opposition to control (Casella 1997). Love tokens, produced by convicts who abraded circulating coins into blanks that were then inscribed with personal messages as mementos for loved ones, are a distinctive category of convict material culture. Unknown archaeologically, they are nonetheless an important representation of how convicts thought about themselves in relation to others and their captivity and

banishment (Field & Millett 1998). Even in places where assigned and ticket-of-leave convicts were housed there is likely to be similar evidence of separate systems of value given to goods for trade or accumulation of wealth and power (McDonald 1993).

Another aspect of different values being applied by convicts and free society to the same material object is the consideration of convict tattoos. Work by Bradley and Maxwell-Stewart (1997) provides an indication that body decoration played an important role in confirming self-identity and expressing a degree of resistance to the convicts' immediate circumstances. The best records are those made upon disembarkation in the Australian colonies to identify individuals and establish control, although it may be possible to match these against later records to establish what additional tattoos were added once in Australia. Although these are material only as drawings, the subject of tattoos can indicate systems of identification such as religion, trade or career, transport ship, loved ones and a complexity of symbols aimed at provoking a reaction from viewers. A question that archaeologists should ask in the future is whether other patterning of material culture, decoration on household items or conventions of behaviour also reflect similar patterns or iconography to those revealed by the tattoos. As Casella's work also indicates, identifying patterns of value that are meaningful in penal situations relies on a particularly careful reading of objects and texts. Maxwell-Stewart and Bradley (1998) provide some promising initial research.

Convict housing is reasonably well known in archaeological reports and pictorial and descriptive sources. Generally it was of cheap, locally available and perishable materials. Construction techniques show the use of earth-fast posts, slabs, wattle and daub and other expedient construction (Atkinson 1988; Higginbotham 1987; McCormick 1987). Occupant numbers could range from one to eight (e.g. Kent & Townsend 1996: 43–44). Most household activities would have taken place outside, and some excavations have explored front- and back-yard activity areas to gain better insight into the household economy of convicts (Higginbotham 1987; Godden Mackay Logan 1999). There is probably sufficient material excavated or known from the documents to begin the task of understanding the sources of variation, within the archaeological record, in the way that slab huts were built and sites were used.

Taken as a whole the gaps in our knowledge of convict lifestyles remain substantial. Some of the promising areas for research, where there is likely to be good archaeological evidence and documentation available are summarised below.

- The life of rural convicts, both male and female farm labourers and domestic servants.
- How convicts and free persons demarcated themselves as distinct parts of society and how these differences are marked materially.
- Intensive studies of individual properties where provenanced material from the landowner or squatter, station manager, convict workers and perhaps Aboriginal people can be compared and contrasted; many properties have excellent documentary records that can add to the detail of convict life and Aboriginal contact (Wolski & Loy 1999).
- Re-examination of existing excavated collections, of which there are a number that offer considerable prospect. The Historic Houses Trust of NSW is strongly promoting this opportunity with its collections from the First Government House site and Hyde Park Barracks, both in Sydney.

- Systematic bio-anthropological study of convict human remains, which may contribute to the discussion on whether transportation to Australia was a ticket to a healthier lifestyle for the urban and rural workers of England as was often claimed (Gandevia 1971).

A final, important point is that most convicts finished their sentences by being pardoned, being freed by servitude or were given tickets-of-leave. Even when it was not encouraged by direct government policy, betterment and success in business and society was always an opportunity (e.g. the merchant Simeon Lord, see Hainsworth 1981). Similarly others lapsed into recidivism or remained in the urban and rural poor. We do not know whether being a convict had a long-term impact on an individual's future behaviour. The strength of the 'emancipist faction' in New South Wales society in the first half of the nineteenth century suggests that for many it was probably put down as being character-building and potentially not a bad career move, although the forces of conservatism were ranged against them.

PENAL INSTITUTIONS

When it comes to detailed study, penal institutions have been better served than any other category of convict site. This includes both formal places of primary and secondary punishment and establishments such as stockades and work camps. Notable among the latter are the Newcastle Convict Lumberyard (Bairstow 1989a; Bairstow & Turner 1987) and the Great North Road and its associated stockades (Thorp 1987; Lavelle et al. 1998; NPWS 1999; Austral Archaeology 2000; Webb 2000). Other stockade sites have also been investigated including one west of the Blue Mountains (Sue Rosen Pty Ltd 1997). Several have been picked over by metal detector enthusiasts, who have kindly published their work to show archaeologists what they will never recover (Leckbandt 1997, 1998).

Kerr's systematic work on penal institutions is the best known (e.g. Kerr 1984a, 1984b, 1988). This has been supplemented by a large amount of work on prisons—some still in operation—in conservation management plans. This material is readily accessible and generally detailed and its historical context well-founded. While architectural in focus, the works have identified evidence of convict use such as graffiti and wear and tear, and have sought to protect these. There is a good understanding of the inter-relationship between prison design and the prevailing philosophy of how incarceration was supposed to deal with institutional problems. The prison environment, however, is not generally conducive to the retention of unauthorised archaeological evidence that may reveal more about the lives of the convicts and how they coped. Artefacts with ambiguous provenance retain only so much contextual information, with a heavy overlay of unsubstantiated, perhaps wishful interpretation. Curators of convict collections such as at the Hyde Park Barrack have to deal with the quandary of the evocative artefact with the potentially much more mundane origin.

There are a few rare exceptions, such as Casella's female factory at Ross, Tasmania, discussed above. Hartley Courthouse, at the western end of the journey over the Blue Mountains, preserves wooden cells inside, as well as a ruined cellblock adjacent to the building. The wooden cell walls are covered with graffiti from their occupants, much dating back to the convict period (Fig. 2). Where the individual inscriptions are dateable they form a valuable additional insight into the life of convicts in gaol (Negerevich 1978).

Barracks were important throughout the convict period for marshalling larger numbers of convicts into readily controllable situations. The prime example still extant, and the subject of significant archaeological work, is the Hyde Park



Figure 2. Ship and names inscribed into the wooden cell walls at Hartley Courthouse (D. Gojak).

Barracks in central Sydney (Burritt 1981; Thorp & Campbell Conservation 1994). The archaeological work importantly placed equal emphasis on the interpretation of the standing building fabric as it did the below surface archaeology. The work was carried out primarily in several seasons in 1980–1982, using the first large-scale team of archaeologists engaged on a public archaeology project in Australia. The broader objective of the work was to remove the warren of ad hoc building additions that smothered the original Barracks, and the adjacent Royal Mint, leaving them as exemplar early colonial buildings to be used as museums.

The Hyde Park Barracks archaeological work was innovative for its time in Australia, but the relative inexperience of the team and the pressures they operated under—in what was essentially an extended salvage operation—resulted in a significant archaeological resource being excavated, without realising its full potential. The more celebrated finds such as a convict shirt came from contexts where their exact provenance could never be ascertained. The collection remains open to study, but it is difficult to believe that there will ever be a highly precise archaeology of the convict period of the Barracks produced. Conversely the Barracks itself has undergone a number of changes in interpretation, all of which have emphasised the convict presence as part of the building's significance. These have quarried the archaeological material for evocative artefacts, often providing highly charged or confrontational interpretations designed to make the viewer think and contemplate the historical and social meanings of the place and times such as in their recent Convicts exhibition (Bogle 1999).

The female-factory system was also set up in New South Wales. Seven institutions—two each at Parramatta and Moreton Bay, and others at Bathurst, Port Macquarie and Newcastle—attempted an unhappy compromise between achieving productivity, punishment, social control and public morality. Archaeological interpretation of these complex and evolving environments holds considerable promise. A particular question that could be asked is why inmates of the Parramatta female factories staged three major riots, when convicts were on the whole extremely peaceable in New South Wales (Bogle 1999: 65–66). In fact the effectiveness of the penal system in controlling the level of major revolt and insurrection has to be noted. This may contrast with signs of



Figure 3. Convict accommodation structure, possibly a fireplace, at the presumed earlier stockade on the descent to Wisemans Ferry (D. Gojak).

individual rebellion and subversion that could survive the archaeological record.

Smaller convict barracks, either single- or double-storey, were not uncommon on the larger pastoral estates, but very few are left intact or even visible as archaeology. Like other farm buildings they would have undergone later reuse that may have compromised their archaeological integrity, but little has been done to test this. Being privately built, there are few records to confirm their use when they do survive. The prospect for archaeological interpretation in barrack situations is high. They represent a middle ground between the more rigorous environment of the government work gang stockades and compounds, and the individual habitations of more successful or integrated convicts. The environment would still be essentially the convict stereotype—a large group of men, hierarchies developed and maintained without recourse to external authority, with unskilled and semi-skilled work as the primary occupation.

Wendy Thorp undertook a survey of convict stockades in New South Wales for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Thorp 1987). Other stockade site studies include documentation of two adjacent stockades near Wisemans Ferry, which Karskens argues demonstrate the changing philosophies pertaining to penal control (Karskens 1984, 1986). More recent recording (Austral Archaeology 2000) shows that the remains can be interpreted to fit a range of possible layouts, and Karskens' interpretation may not be so readily applied (Fig. 3).

Apart from Lake Innes House, which is discussed below, the only farm barracks where excavations have taken place is at Tocal in the Hunter Valley. A barracks was constructed for ticket-of-leave convicts in 1820. The barracks was two-storey, comprising four separate quarters, each with two rooms on the lower floor and a single room above. An excavation of the earthen floors exercising basic spatial control produced numerous artefacts (Aartsen 1995). Those that can be dated generally fit in the period 1870 to 1940. Disturbance or loss of archaeological evidence through later use will always be a problem, making the remains of demolished barracks perhaps more attractive for detailed analysis, than those standing.

The record of what remains in rural New South Wales is obscured by the problem of the creation of local convict legends. Kirsty Altenburg investigated a site with a substantial

stone building and adjacent ruins at Strathallan, near Braidwood on the New South Wales south coast (Altenburg 1988). The standing building had been confidently identified for the better part of a century as the convict barracks and particular features of the building were cited to support this—there were voids where iron rings for chaining up convicts were perhaps once located and so on. By undertaking careful archaeological investigation of the standing structure, she was able to get a better understanding of the building and its original form. It is unlikely to have been a barracks. Altenburg also wrote to many historical societies asking if they knew of similar types of site. Of those reported, a few were likely to have been barracks, but there were also others that had been given the dubious honour of becoming a convict barracks or other form of penal building in local lore.

The process of work is an important consideration in discussion of convict labour. The general argument for the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been that there has been an increasing commodification of work, its separation from domestic life both physically and emotionally and an increasing regimentation and compartmentalisation, manifested ultimately in the image of the assembly line. The convict work system provides an important case study through time on how such a transition took place. Typically a work establishment gained a mix of skilled and unskilled convicts. Much of the raw-material procurement and initial processing was centralised and even secondary production undertaken at the same location. Work would be broken into both function and trade-specific segments. Nicholas (1988) argues that the convict and free work-place arrangements in this period were comparable, meaning that both should reflect changes in industrial processes and the pattern of work.

The most intensively studied convict public work is the Great North Road (Fig. 4). The road has spawned a range of studies that are notable for their breadth and also because they are largely generated by the Convict Trail Project community group. This innovative, and so far unique, community activity has shown that popular interest in convict heritage can be channelled into positive, high-quality research work on convict works, convict life, sites and general heritage outreach. The group has achieved a major success in helping to meld the management actions of a dozen local councils, government departments and community groups towards a clear focus.

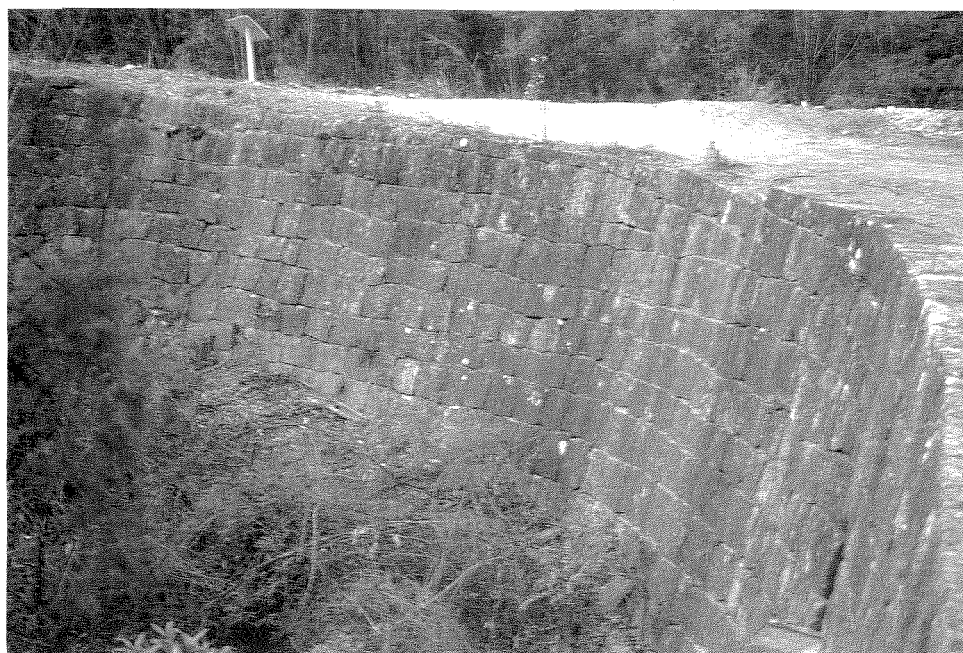


Figure 4. Road formation on the Devine's Hill ascent section of the Old Great North Road within Dharug National Park (D. Gojak).

Specific results of the work on the Great North Road have included a web-site (www.convicttrail.org), the *Road Works in Progress* newsletter, an overall conservation plan for the road itself (Lavelle et al. 1998), annual symposia, publications, obtaining grants for conservation works and studies of convicts involved with the road.

Apart from the convict-built roads, there are few detailed studies of work places for convicts. The best is a detailed study of the convict timber-getting establishment at Pennant Hills, which was responsible for a major part of early Sydney's timber supply (Hawkins 1994). The work by Ralph Hawkins is both historical and genealogical. There is little, if any, archaeological evidence left, with the possible exception of two saw pits and tree stumps in several reserves. Hawkins relies heavily on his knowledge of the natural resources of the area and work processes to interpret the documentary evidence.

Graham Connah's work at Lake Innes House is essentially the archaeology of a convict landscape, although Connah does not himself describe it in those terms (Connah 1997, 1998, 2001). The labour to create and maintain the estate came from the Port Macquarie penal establishment, where Innes was Superintendent. The remains of brick clamps, gardens and other constructions were evidence of assigned-convict tasks. A contemporary diarist at Lake Innes House, Innes' niece Annabella Boswell, focussed on the more mannered and genteel environment of the house, which Connah contrasts with the reminiscences of a convict who had a very different perception of the same landscape (Connah 1998).

Excavations and recording at Lake Innes over a number of years have provided the most detailed archaeological record of a substantial convict-period estate. The sampling of different sectors of the main house complex and satellite settlements within the estate has confirmed that the social hierarchy is mirrored by the occupants' material culture, evident in types of building material, amenities and artefacts that entered the archaeological record (Connah 1997, 1998, 2001). Connah notes the difficulty in identifying the presence of assigned convicts with any certainty, as Innes' estate operated over the period that convict assignment ceased, and would have relied upon wage labour, including that of ex-convicts. There is a more general problem with distinguishing between convict, indentured and free workers, as an individual may have fitted all three descriptions at different times, with effectively little to differentiate the roles beyond their legal relationship to their

master (Nicholas 1988).

Archaeologically some sites such as the Newcastle Convict Lumberyard and Lake Innes may preserve enough information to allow us to understand how tasks were split up, how they meshed together into a production system and how convicts were used. This is a necessary prerequisite for more detailed investigations on questions of systematic or *ad hoc* resistance, patterns of work intensification and compartmentalisation. Do they reflect a 'new' organisation of work specifically taking up the cheap labour offered by convicts or are they essentially a transplanting of patterns of work and power being developed in Britain as a consequence of industrialisation (Johnson 1996; Nicholas 1988)?

One of the major omissions in surviving physical evidence is that of assigned servants on farms and pastoral properties. Given that this was one of the main modes of employment for convicts, its absence in the physical record reveals the relative treatment of farm labourers. This absence is also closely reflected in the archaeological investigations of such labour, and its housing, including domestic servants' quarters inside the main house (Bickford 1981). Even more problematic is the failure to extend the picture of convicts beyond what they built in urban areas. In Parramatta there have been a number of studies that have focussed upon or encountered the convict drain system (Bairstow 1989b; Higginbotham 1983). Such studies can seldom reach beyond the physical description of the things that the convicts built to a more insightful description of the convict experience.

Very few pre-1840 farm groups remain intact in New South Wales. Generally what survives is either the original homestead, often as the completely surrounded core of a larger house, or a substantial outbuilding that has undergone a variety of uses. At Belgenny Farm, noted as one of the most intact early farms remaining in Australia, the oldest buildings date to c.1820 and include the first residence and two stables. Missing are the barracks and a range of subsidiary buildings that directly relate to convict work (Betteridge & Betteridge 1996).

Other farming landscapes are also vulnerable. A group of ruins such as Cattai, on the Hawkesbury, with a windmill (Fig. 5), granary and section of road, all likely to have been convict-built, exists within a setting that is largely unmodified from its early nineteenth-century form (Gojak 1996). Elsewhere, the farm practices starting in the later nineteenth century, such as



Figure 5. The remains of the convict-built windmill at Thomas Arndell's farm, now within Cattai National Park (D. Gojak).

pasture and stock improvement, fencing and mechanisation have totally transformed the landscapes that remain.

Large-scale settlement experiments, such as the Australian Agricultural Company's north-coast venture, provide an opportunity to examine specific forms of convict work, where there are good records and a range of privately funded institutional accommodation (Bairstow 1988). The similarities and differences between convicts, indentured immigrant labour and free, small holders or share farmers can be instructive in determining what differences were based upon status or caste and what conditions were applied generally.

CONVICT SOCIETY, LANDSCAPES AND INTERPRETATION

The development of societies and economic systems based upon cheap labour, often derived from forced migration and settlement, was common in the nineteenth century (Duffield and Bradley 1997). While this is perhaps an orthodox view among historians it has had very little impact among historical archaeologists. Slavery in North America is generally investigated by United States archaeologists as a specific phenomenon and is not usually compared to other forms of forced migration elsewhere (Singleton 1995). Similarly, in the half century to 1840, New South Wales was reliant upon forcibly displaced convicts as an integral part of the social and economic fabric of society (Nicholas 1988). Connah (1998) identifies this as a significant issue in his analysis of Lake Innes House, but it is one that is rarely encountered in Australian archaeological literature.

One of the only instances where the global perspective has been used as the basis for comparing forced migration is in the

preparatory documents for the Australian World Heritage nomination of convict sites (Pearson and Marshall 1996). The argument for world heritage status rests upon the argument that our particular forms of forced migration reflect a broader pattern that shaped entire continents and resulted in the creation of nations. So far the nomination has not been submitted to UNESCO.

In this final section I will briefly discuss the urban convict landscape as it survives in Australia, as a demonstration of what can constitute a broader archaeology of convict society. Urban convict landscapes may seem to be rare, and there are very few places in New South Wales where it is possible to stand in the middle of a town and understand how the townscape was arranged. In Sydney, The Rocks preserves some sense of its earlier historic character, but most of the surviving structures date to the second half of the nineteenth century when occupation was even more dense. Most importantly perhaps, the materials are stone and brick, omitting the repertoire of more perishable materials that were characteristic of the earlier period (Karskens 1997).

Individual buildings do not really evoke much sense of their former setting. Cadmans Cottage, the last building in Sydney Cove to respect the original shoreline, cannot maintain the illusion in the face of its neighbours and surrounds. Small complexes of convict-period buildings at Goat Island and Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour preserve the illusion of a preserved setting, if you face away from the modern city. The Museum of Sydney on the site of the First Government House, reveals archaeological remains in situ through viewing windows in the floor and attempts to interpret them in a museum environment that provides much additional context and colour. Such exercises may be possible on some sites, but without such intensive interpretation, in situ archaeology generally remains cryptic, underwhelming and unappreciated.

Many convict-period town centres have been completely rearranged by later planning—Port Macquarie perhaps being the most extreme, retaining only three original convict structures intact and reorienting the street grid (Rogers 1982). Other towns such as Windsor, Campbelltown, Penrith and Camden retain substantial buildings of the period, as do their hinterland, with farms often having a stock of early—mid nineteenth century buildings (Jack 1986). These four towns, once villages outside Sydney, and others on the fringes of the Cumberland Plain, are now firmly within the urban frontier and whatever spatial relationship their town centres had with the surrounding land is being rapidly developed away. Individual farm properties dating to the convict period are also increasingly under threat from development and loss of curtilage (Morris & Britton 2000).

Parramatta retains the best sense of a convict townscape that has not quite submerged, but is still visible upon close inspection. Originally the subject of an archaeological zoning plan (AZP) in 1988–1989, a new archaeological management plan, the Parramatta Historical Archaeological Landscape Management Study has recently been prepared (Godden Mackay Logan 2000). The PHALM Study is a landmark document in providing a new way of integrating archaeological and land use planning controls. One of its strengths is the ability to develop research themes and identify standing research questions that will allow for a level of consistent investigation of sites and themes. Although the first AZP (Higginbotham 1991) restricted itself to matters before 1844 exclusively, the current study has no chronological constraints. It nonetheless places heavy emphasis upon the *prima facie* significance of the convict past.

The study notes that there already has been sustained attention given to convict sites in advance of development,

largely because of the first AZP's focus on the convict period. Now the sample of excavated material is probably reaching a threshold of useful redundancy, with enough dug up to sort the typical and representative from the unusual and idiosyncratic. Unfortunately the level of analysis has seldom been of sufficient detail to say anything substantive about the lifestyles of the convicts, beyond commenting on their expensive taste in crockery and the meagreness of their huts (Higginbotham 1987).

The archaeological landscape is broadly defined, and includes the spatial patterning of street frontages, areas of use and toponyms that directly hark back to the convict period. Specifically identified as being represented in Parramatta's surviving cityscape are the landscapes of contact, convictism, control, production and consumption. The various sites that make up these landscapes can be displayed on a series of GIS-derived layers showing how the townscape reflects past patterns of use and formation (Godden Mackay Logan 2000). The interrelationship between the convict, power and production landscapes can then be clearly understood, and heritage management provisions used to ensure that these are retained and enhanced.

The study moves away from restricting convict research to happening on convict sites, like the small huts that lined the main streets, to seeing how convicts contributed to the overall social patterns, economic base, areas where they were included and excluded and other patterns. This forms a very powerful tool to investigate a whole town and social system that is ultimately based on convict labour, but where the convict sites (in the strict sense) are only a small proportion of the total extant.

The relationship between the public and convict heritage in New South Wales remains significantly different from that in other former colonies. This is perhaps best documented in Tasmania, where David Young's *Making Crime Pay* (Young 1996) examines the changing attitude of Tasmanians to the material reminders of a past that they generally wished would go away and be forgotten. Unlike Tasmania, and those colonies where convicts were either absent or had a minimal presence, the New South Wales experience has been that there was very little systematic and deliberate demolition or removal of convict infrastructure to conceal the past. There was one main reason for this: the very close integration of the convict system into the fabric of New South Wales society. In New South Wales there was a far more robust mercantile and administrative class that developed out of the emancipist group, and the social changes that transformed New South Wales in the late nineteenth century served to de-emphasise rather than exacerbate knowledge of social origins (Roe 1965).

Related to this is the modern search for, and creation of, convict links where there were none. Any old building associated in some way with convict origins, or remnant traces of convict work are often given a social significance that is at odds with the value placed on the same remains by archaeologists. Altenburg's example of supposed convict remains at Strathallen has been cited above. This issue of the contemporary role of conservation in presenting the convict past is evolving rapidly.

The tension between an archaeological and community view of the same sites is exemplified by the conservation of convict-period site elements around the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the former early nineteenth century government stables building, in the centre of Sydney. The archaeological assessment carried out before development of the Conservatorium site rated them as being of low significance (Casey & Lowe Associates 1998). Exposure of convict drains and road surfaces during the works confirmed

this, as their integrity, condition and research potential were limited. Yet the public outcry against their removal denoted a much deeper attachment to the idea of authenticity of convict relics and their retention. So strong was the public response that enormous additional expenditure to keep the convict drains and road-side guttering in situ was needed. The figure quoted in government sources is AU\$28.8 million (NSW Auditor-General 2000: 94), although this is disputed (C. Allen pers. comm.).

In this instance, the archaeological community did not argue its case at all forcefully in public forums, so taken aback with the ferocity of public infatuation with the archaeological remains. The revelation of the massive cost over-run did not dampen enthusiasm for the preservation of the remains in the development (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2001; O'Brien 2001). This shows clearly that there can be a significant disjunction between the archaeological and social significance of convict remains. Our present methods of assessment favour the former, but will increasingly need to identify and respond to community ownership and fascination with tangible remains of a very romanticised past.

The conservation of convict sites suffers from the same difficulties that encumbers all other public interpretation of archaeology. Seldom does the fabric of penal servitude speak clearly and unambiguously of the convict experience in even a personal form. Even less is it readily intelligible as a commentary on convict society. The Hyde Park Barracks Museum is an exception in bringing together the built fabric, the archaeology and the documentary sources in a critical analytical framework. Most convict sites exist at the other extreme. Under-interpreted sites or fabric permits the visitor to impose a highly personal and often erroneous understanding onto a site, one that may affirm existing misconceptions and factual errors. As was shown clearly at Port Arthur, visitors seldom arrived without an entire socialisation into one or other prevailing convict mythologies (Young 1996) and read the ruins in a way that reinforced their existing prejudices and knowledge of the past.

CONCLUSIONS

In examining the gaps that exist in our knowledge of convict archaeology in New South Wales the following conclusions can be made.

The only aspect of convict life that has been given adequate attention by archaeologists is the penal institutions, especially gaols and other substantial standing buildings. In New South Wales, however, this form of confinement and management of convicts was an exception rather than the rule. The major convict-built public works have also been well investigated.

While there have been excavations on a large number of archaeological sites there has been a strong emphasis on urban Sydney, and a focus on the earlier period of transportation. Little on convict life is available for non-urban New South Wales. One of the key weaknesses is that our discipline tends to focus on 'classic' convicts, who were imprisoned or under control, rather than the reality of convict servitude in New South Wales, with its close integration into the remainder of society.

The lead shown by the Cumberland Street excavations in providing a detailed contextual understanding of discrete households shows the potential that exists to integrate documentary and archaeological sources to a better understanding of convict sites. Much more needs to be done to quantify what similarities and differences exist in the material culture of convict households, and whether these reflect patterned social differences or other factors.



Figure 6. The location of buildings at the Newcastle penal station Lumber yard outlined for public interpretation (C. Allen).

Archaeologists need to incorporate the changing historical understanding of convict transportation into their analyses. When convict transportation is seen as one particular manifestation of forced global migration, comparable to North American and Caribbean slave trading, Russian colonisation of Siberia and other examples, it opens the prospect of a far greater comparative context for understanding the archaeological evidence. It provides the prospect for new means of investigating specific sites in a way that makes their archaeology meaningful to a world context.

The excavated remains of convict and emancipist residences have not been preserved in situ, with the exception of Cumberland Street, The Rocks. The relics of convict labour are better served, with major work sites such as the Old Great North Road, Goat Island, the Newcastle Lumberyard (Fig. 6) and other places of work being preserved and often interpreted to a high standard. The rural convict-labour landscape is perhaps the least well retained and the most threatened through our lack of knowledge.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in this catalogue of work needing to be done is to effectively educate the public about the archaeology of the convict period, so that it avoids a descent into trivialities or abstraction to the point of irrelevance. New South Wales is a society founded as a convict colony and there are opportunities to show the complexity of the evolution of that society through the material remains that have survived. Archaeologists face the challenge of pursuing research that both fills in the gaps and encourages new questions to be asked of the evidence.

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