

# Welcome to the Convicts and Colonials trail

Although the Swan River Colony was established as a free settlement in 1829, convict transportation was introduced in 1850 to answer the demand for a plentiful supply of cheap labour for the small population. Nearly 10,000 male convicts were transported until 1868. The introduction of these reluctant immigrants caused much debate and controversy amongst the residents, who feared that their free colony would be forever tainted by the convict class.

Whilst convict transport lasted only 18 years, the legacy of the short penal period is embedded in the streets of Perth and the folklore of the State.

## 1 Perth Town Hall Corner Hay and Barrack Streets.

Many convicts were specially selected to come to Western Australia because of their artisan skills and with good behaviour and backbreaking labour, they could receive their ticket-of-leave



and eventually a conditional release. The Perth Town Hall was built by these men between 1867 and 1870, to a design by Richard Roach Jewell and James Manning. It is estimated that a team of 15 convicts worked every day for three years to complete the building. As the only convict built town hall in Australia, stories abound about the special messages encoded in the building's design. The small windows of the tower are said to resemble the broad arrows emblazoned on the convicts' uniforms and a hangman's rope design surrounds the Hall's clock faces. Officially these convict symbols are a hoax, but the tales are still told.

Guided tours of the Perth Town Hall are conducted by the i-City Volunteer Hosts. Telephone 9461 3444 for information.

*A ticket-of-leave was granted to a convict after a specified period, depending on his behaviour. Ticket-of-leave men could travel to the district of their choice, but had to report to the town magistrate on arrival and twice a year thereafter, as well as carrying a pass from the magistrate to leave the district. Although able*



# Convicts & Colonials

In 1850, the sleepy Swan River Colony received its first shipload of convicts. Life would never be the same again!



CITY OF PERTH

This self-guided trail will take up to two hours. You can join in or depart from the trail anywhere along the way.

The trail intercepts with the city's free CAT bus service accessing the foreshore, East Perth, Northbridge and West Perth (excluding public holidays).

## Other City Walking Trails:

- Boom or Bust
- Icons of Influence
- The Secret of Point Zero children's trail
- Art City
- City Parks & Gardens

i-City Information and Police Kiosk  
Murray Street Mall near Forrest Place, Perth 6000

City of Perth  
Council House, 27 St Georges Terrace,  
Perth WA 6000

Trail prepared by Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, Curtin University and the City of Perth. Thank you to the Western Australian Museum for their assistance.

This information is available in alternative formats.

[www.perth.wa.gov.au](http://www.perth.wa.gov.au)

*to work for themselves and others, own land and property and marry, they had to be indoors after 10pm and carry their ticket at all times. A conditional pardon could be granted after half the original sentence was served, allowing the former convicts to leave the colony if they wished. A certificate of freedom at the end of the full sentence ensured the former convicts could live as free men.*

Enter Cathedral Avenue via the laneway from Hay Street and walk past St George's Cathedral to St Georges Terrace.

### 2 The Deanery

Corner St Georges Terrace and Pier Street

In the 1830s the Government installed a public whipping post and stocks on this site for criminals to be exposed to mockery, with the aim of reducing crime through public humiliation. Punishment was handed out for the most trivial offences. In 1833 two children who had been caught stealing fruit from the Government gardens were placed in the stocks and their parents were ordered to flog them publicly. It was also briefly the



location of Perth's first gaol, a temporary lock-up, prior to the completion of Perth Gaol on the corner of Beaufort and Francis Streets in 1856. The lock-up was the source of much ridicule, as the inmates escaped so easily from the mud-walled structure. The romantic style gothic house now seen here was built in 1859 by ticket-of-leave men and housed the Anglican Deans of Perth until 1953.

*Many convicts had elaborate tattoos, some details of which have been preserved along with their physical features, sentence dates and other particulars. John Butcher, a convict who arrived on the Pyrenees in 1851, had a raft of body art including a soldier; a woman; a bracelet on his right arm; a crucifix; a mermaid; two hearts; a rose; a thistle; an olive and a reed. The crucifix was a popular tattoo for convicts to have on their backs, for if they were flogged it gave the appearance that Christ himself was being punished.*

Cross St Georges Terrace at the Pier Street lights to view Government House. Please note there is no public access.

### 3 Government House St Georges Terrace

Government House is the only vice-regal residence in Australia built in the style known as Jacobean after King James I of England. Its design echoes the Tower of London and Hampton Court Palace, although convicts built it in 1863. The grounds of Government House are renowned for their beauty and much of the original layout from the 1850s and 1860s has been preserved. The gardens are open to the public most Tuesdays from 12-2pm. Tel: 9429 9199 for information.

*In 1923 Audrey Jacob met Cyril Gidley on a ship bound for Western Australia. He was a debonair young engineer and they became engaged*



*upon arriving in Perth. In 1925, while in Singapore on business, Cyril overheard a man using Audrey's name in "bar conversation". He promptly broke off their engagement despite Audrey's distress. When Audrey saw Cyril at a Government House dance a number of months later, he rejected her attempt to speak to him on the dance floor. Publicly humiliated, Audrey pulled from her purse a gun her mother had sent from England and shot him point blank. Despite dozens of witnesses, the shooting was presented as an accident and Audrey was not charged with murder. Cyril was found to have been a schemer with a stock of engagement rings from previous affairs. Audrey went on to wed a wealthy American in Melbourne.*



*Enoch Pearson Barrett was transported to Western Australia in 1852 for stealing from trains while working as a switchman in England. Freed in 1858, he became a gardener and the colony's first commercial nurseryman. In 1868 he was appointed as Government House Gardener, and by the late 1870s had been promoted to Head Gardener of the Public Garden and Public Reserves in Perth. He lived until the ripe age of 83.*

Enter Stirling Gardens at the path before the brass Kangaroos. Follow the pathway south to the Francis Burt Law Education Centre.

## 4 Francis Burt Law Education Centre Stirling Gardens

Almost hidden behind the exotic trees of Stirling Gardens is the original Court House (1836), the oldest surviving building in central Perth. The first European executed in the colony, John Gavin, was sentenced to death here in 1844 and hanged publicly in front of the Round House, Fremantle. The old Court House is now the Francis Burt Law Education Centre which houses a small museum open from 10am to 2.30pm on weekdays (except Thursday).

*John Gavin was a 15 year old "Parkhurst boy" convicted of the murder of his employer's 15 year old son. The Swan River Colony received 234 juvenile male convicts from the Isle of Wight's Parkhurst Prison between 1842 and 1849. Once in the colony the boys were pardoned on two conditions: they were apprenticed to local employers, and were unable to return to the country in which they were convicted during the term of their sentence. Many historians view the transport of these boys as a form of de facto convictism.*

As you walk towards the Supreme Court, look closely at the garden next to the old Court House. You will see the remains of a limestone wall. This is the point where convicts were unloaded off the barges to commence their work in the city. Yes, that's right - the water's edge once came this close to St Georges Terrace, before the river was filled in to create the Esplanade and Langley Park!

## 5 Supreme Court

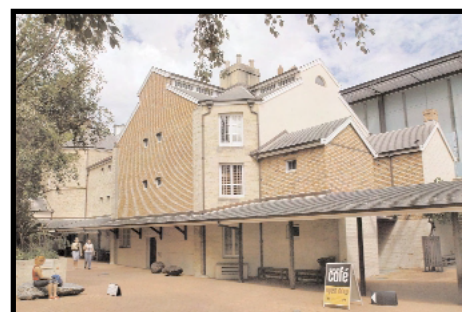
The presence of convicts and ex-convicts who had served their terms may have been one reason for an increase in crime in Western Australia in the late nineteenth century. The Supreme Court building was opened in 1903 and the first case heard there resulted in Robert Palin, an ex-convict, being sentenced to death for robbery with violence. Eric Edgar Cooke, the last person hanged in WA, was tried and convicted for murder at the Supreme Court in 1964. The elaborately decorated foyer and some courtrooms are open to the public.

*Convicts transported to Western Australia were more likely to be guilty of crimes against other persons than transportees to other Australian colonies. They were also more likely to have come from an urban background, be artisans and literate. The percentage of those transported for committing violent crimes increased over time, as Britain started retaining its less violent criminals at home.*

Cross St Georges Terrace at the Barrack Street intersection and continue north until Barrack Street becomes Beaufort Street. Turn left to enter the Cultural Centre after crossing Roe Street. Alternatively, take the Blue CAT from stop 4 to stop 7.

## 6 Western Australian Museum Perth Cultural Centre, James Street

Perth is the only Australian capital city with a cultural centre developed around an old prison. At the very core of the Western Australian Museum is the



gaol built by convicts in 1853-54, where hangings were first held in 1855 in an execution yard on the south side. Hangings were public exhibitions with an audience of all ages and sexes until 1884, when the front and sides of the scaffold were boarded in due to



complaints. Today, museum exhibitions tell of Perth's social, political and natural history. The museum is open most days of the year. Telephone 9427 2700.

*John Wiffen was one convict sent to the Swan River Colony who had reason to be wary of the gaol. He was convicted of burglary in England and sentenced to 15 years transportation in 1865. Obtaining his ticket-of-leave in 1872, John married in 1873 and became a shoemaker in Perth. However, in 1889 he was caught stealing household items and food from a dwelling in Palmerston Street and sentenced in the Supreme Court to 10 years gaol. Wiffen probably spent this period of imprisonment in Fremantle Prison, which became the Colony's primary place of incarceration in 1886.*

### 7 **Art Gallery of Western Australia** [Perth Cultural Centre, James Street](#)

The Art Gallery of Western Australia's long low administration block, directly facing the WA Museum, was built between 1904 and 1905 by architect Hillson Beasley as a barracks for unmarried constables. It



later housed police divisions including the Special Branch, which was set up to investigate "possible subversive activities by suspected Communists and others". The

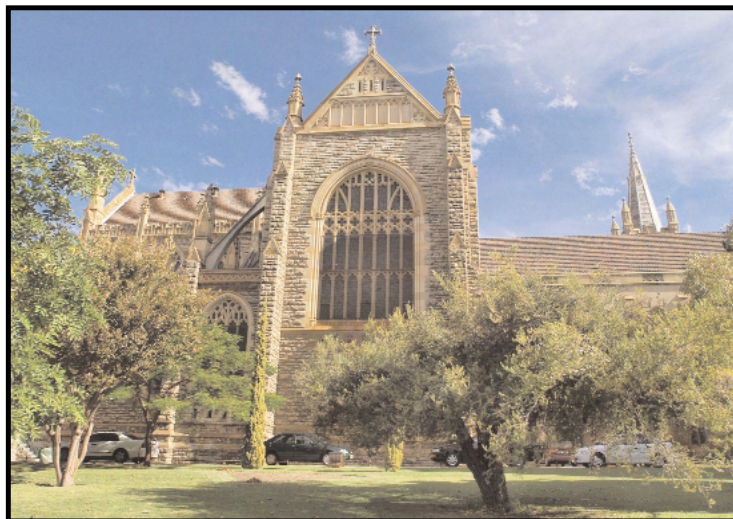
elegant French-style courthouse next door, designed by Beasley and George Temple Poole, once hosted a daily parade of drunks and trouble-makers. The former courthouse is now the Centenary Gallery with a display of colonial-era arts and crafts. The cells and dock remain intact. The Art Gallery of Western Australia is open most days of the year. Telephone 9492 6622.

*At this courthouse in 1907, a disgruntled former constable shot at Fred Hare, the Commissioner of Police. The bullet was deflected by Hare's clothing so he was unharmed but he took the rest of the day off and went home alone by train.*

*Retrace your steps southwards along Barrack Street and turn left into Murray Street. Walk eastwards to Victoria Square. Alternatively take the Red CAT from stop 31 to stop 2.*

### 8 **St Mary's Cathedral** [41 Victoria Square](#) and **Pro-Cathedral of St John the Evangelist** [18 Victoria Avenue](#)

By 1854 Catholics comprised 18 per cent of the colony's population, partly due to the number of Irish



convicts sent to Western Australia. The oldest Catholic church in Western Australia, the Pro-Cathedral of St John the Evangelist, was built in 1846 and was where the Sisters of Mercy started Mercedes College, the oldest existing girls' school in Australia. The Pro-Cathedral was soon felt to be too modest for the growing Catholic population, and in 1863 work commenced on St Mary's Cathedral at Victoria Square, which was constructed in the Gothic style. Substantial additions were made to the cathedral in the 1920s, however it was never fully completed to the original plans due to a lack of funds.

*In contrast to many other buildings on this trail, Benedictine monks provided the main labour for St Mary's Cathedral. Like the convicts, they were a cheap source of labour, walking six miles a day between their quarters in Subiaco and the building site, and working every minute while there was light to see. However, the monks were far more skilled than the convict labour available, with a great deal of masonry experience. The new cathedral was the envy of the strong Anglican population.*

*Walk along Murray and Wellington Streets, to Waterloo Crescent or take the Yellow CAT from stop 5 to stop 10.*

### 9 **The East Perth Cemetery** [Waterloo Crescent](#)

Saints or sinners, death gets us all in the end. The East Perth Cemetery is the final resting place of a cross-section of society including judges, lawyers, criminals and ex-convicts. Up to 10,000 people may have been buried here but only about 800 identified graves remain. Some of the graves were disrupted when the former Perth Girls' School encroached on the grounds. Criminals were originally buried in the Church of England section and in 1867 there was an unsuccessful proposal for a separate cemetery for "felons and the promiscuous". Later, some criminals were buried near the former Chief Justice Sir Archibald Burt. The East Perth Cemetery is open from 2-4pm Sundays. Telephone 9381 8838.

One of the finest headstones in the Roman Catholic section is for the Irish ex-convict Daniel Connors who died one of the wealthiest landowners in Perth. Convicted in 1853 for sheep-stealing, he started his lawful career as a hawker and stockbroker. Although he became a rich man with a private residence in Irwin Street, he remained humble and unpretending. The bishop's funeral oration for Connors stated "be to his faults a trifle blind as his virtues ever kind".

George William Steel was born in 1825 in England and lived in a notorious slum area in London known as "Devils Acre", working as a whitesmith (tinsmith). He was convicted of assaulting and robbing a man in a drinking house and was sentenced to 20 years transportation, arriving in Perth in 1851. George was granted his ticket-of-leave within two years of arriving and in 1854 married Anne Lowham in the Wesley Chapel, Perth. He continued to work at his trade of whitesmith in Perth and was granted a conditional pardon in 1858. He died on 11th November 1865 of a diseased heart and is buried in the East Perth Cemetery.

**In the late 1860s the British Government reviewed its policy of transportation and the last convict ship, the Hougoumont, arrived in the Swan River Colony on 10th January 1868 with 229 convicts aboard. Convict labour continued to be used for some time in Western Australia, relying on local prisoners and convicts yet to serve the remainder of their sentences. About a third of the convicts left the Swan River Colony after serving their time but others settled down to make a life for themselves in the Colony. Their descendants can proudly point out the important work of these men in the buildings that still stand today.**

Joseph Bolitho Johns, better known in Western Australian folklore as Moondyne Joe, arrived aboard the convict transport Pyrenees in April 1853. In 1861, on his ticket-of-leave, Joe stole a horse and added insult to injury by using the local magistrate's brand new saddle and bridle to ride it. He continued a colourful career of crime and escape that saw him spend time in the Mount Eliza Convict Depot as well as in lawful work assisting a carpenter in Perth and Fremantle. When well into his seventies, having been granted his freedom years before, Joe was found wandering the streets of South Perth and taken into custody "being of unsound mind". He was ordered to the Mount Eliza Invalid Depot for medical attention but escaped, possibly not realising in his confusion that the site was no longer a place of detention. He died in August of that year at Fremantle Lunatic Asylum, but is remembered in the following poem.



**Excerpt from "The Ballad of Moondyne Joe"**

*In the Darling Ranges, many years ago,  
There lived a daring outlaw, by the name of 'Moondyne Joe'.  
He stole the squatter's horses, and a sheep or two or three,  
He loved to roam the countryside, and swore he would be free.  
The troopers said we'll catch him, but we know it's all in vain,  
Every time we lock him up he breaks right out again.  
'Cause in he goes, and out he goes, and off again he'll go,  
There's not a gaol in W.A. can keep in 'Moondyne Joe'.*

