

7 September 2010

## SALTY STEW, LEG IRONS AND A FLOGGING TRIANGLE: SYDNEY'S CONVICT STORIES REVEALED IN NEW EXHIBITION

Fancy submitting to the flogging triangle or some leg irons, maybe some salty convict stew? A new exhibition at the Hyde Park Barracks Museum brings the Sydney convict experience to life, revealing the enormous contribution convicts made to building Sydney.

*Convict Sydney* tells some of the remarkable stories of the 160,000 convicts shipped to Australia between 1787 and 1868, in what was then the world's largest social experiment to build a new society out of convict labour.

For many people, these stories have extra meaning, because one in ten Australians has convict ancestry.

Fifty thousand convict men women and children passed through the doors of Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks between 1819 and 1848, among them were Henry Herring, the convict with a wooden nose who escaped back to England three times only to be re-transported to the colony each time.

Another convict to have his story finally told is John Dwyer, who was sentenced to 7 years for sealing a watch, at the tender age of just 9. One convict he probably had little in common with was Patrick McManamy, who at 75 years of age, was shipped to Australia with a life sentence. He would ultimately gain his ticket of leave at the age of 86 and went on to reach his century.

*Convict Sydney* lifts the lid on a series of remarkable stories that lie just beneath the surface of almost every place in Sydney.

The site of The Establishment Hotel today was once Sydney's lumberyard — a busy convict worksite backing onto the Tank Stream, where hundreds of convicts worked in gangs plying 38 different skilled trades — from carpentry and stonemasonry to coach building, coopering, blacksmithing and cobbling.

Wynyard Park was the red coated soldiers' parade ground, Town Hall was the colony's cemetery and in Hyde Park convict and free citizens frequented horse races, cricket matches, cock-fights and bare-knuckle prize fights before the trees were planted decades later.

A 'House of Correction' once stood where Central Railway Station is today, with two punishment treadmills marched by 60 prisoners turning powerful grain grinding wheels and where convicts cared for the government teams of horses and bullocks.

As the exhibition shows, the convict lot was not all floggings and leg-irons, but there were severe punishments for those who didn't tow the line like the treadmill or solitary confinement and women could have their heads shaved or be sent to 3<sup>rd</sup> class punishment level at the Female Factory in Parramatta.

Convicts had many opportunities to get ahead and forge a new life for themselves in the colony and in fact, many people at the time argued the penal colony was too much of a 'paradise' for convicts, not tough enough to deter further crime in Britain.

Convicts wrote home with glowing reports about their lives here and encouraged family to 'earn a trip to Botany Bay'. This 'chain migration' was typified by the four Reilly brothers transported in turn from their native Ireland for various minor thefts.

Wander the streets of 1820s Sydney on the exhibition's giant floor map, lie in a convict hammock or try on a set of leg irons as you explore Australia's fascinating convict history at the World Heritage listed Barracks.

***Convict Sydney* opens 11 September 2010, at the World Heritage Listed Hyde Park Barracks Museum, Queens Square, Macquarie St, Sydney. Daily 9.30am – 5pm T 02 8239 2311 [www.hht.net.au](http://www.hht.net.au) Adult \$10 Conc \$5 Family \$20**

Sponsor



**MEDIA INQUIRIES:** Ruth Bath T 8239 2326 E [ruthb@hht.net.au](mailto:ruthb@hht.net.au) or Arianne Martin T 02 8239 2318 E [ariannem@hht.net.au](mailto:ariannem@hht.net.au)